

# Isaac Asimov's Essay "The Relativity of Wrong" (Including Criticism of Socrates And Considering Proper Standards of Correctness)

**Post by "Cassius" of August 30, 2024 at 8:51 AM**

Today a friend referred me to an essay by Isaac Asimov entitled "The Relativity of Wrong" with which I was not previously familiar. It contains of Socrates which seems right in line with the Epicurean perspective. Even more than that, it contains an analysis of what it means to be "right" or "wrong" that I think is probably also very consistent with Epicurus' perspective. Here's a good summary of the point from [Wikipedia](#) ("In the title essay, Asimov argues that there exist degrees of wrongness, and being wrong in one way is not necessarily as bad as being wrong in another way")

I don't know anything about this website that has a copy other than that it comes up first when one searches for the author and title) but here it is in easy to read form. (Let me expand my caveat - I haven't vetted any of these websites I am linking to - I just see on their face that they address this topic.)

[The Relativity of Wrong by Isaac Asimov](#)

Looks like it can also be read here: <https://skepticalinquirer.org/1989/10/the-relativity-of-wrong/>

There's also a copy on [Archive.org](#)

Some criticism of the article [here](#).

Seems to me to be an enjoyable article and well worth reading.

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**Post by "Eikadistes" of August 30, 2024 at 9:51 AM**

Great essay! I particular appreciated his treatment of the Earth as an "oblate spheroid" and not a perfect sphere, due to rotational momentum leading to an "equatorial bulge". In the teaching of contemporary science, we champion *Heliocentrism* and the *Spherical Earth* theory, but those are incomplete; both theories, though functional, fail to address the nuance of variety.

Even though Epicurus (unlike his opponents) didn't explicitly adopt classical *heliocentrism*, and even though Lucretius **criticized** the *Spherical Earth* theory (though it was functionally demonstrated by Erasthenes centuries earlier), Epicurus' insightful conclusions that "**there can be no center to infinity**" and that "**worlds might be spherical, obloid, or some other shape**" turn out to be **perfectly coherent** with the nuance of contemporary science. Indeed, there can be no perfect, *rotating* spheres in space, only obloids (due to rotational momentum); indeed, the Sun is not the center of the universe (because the universe is infinite).

The Epicurean approach provided the flexibility and insight to accommodate contemporary discoveries; it seems that Asimov mirrors that. He provides other examples that reflect Epicurean observations. In refuting Socrates, Asimov writes "**No one knows nothing. In a matter of days, babies learn to recognize their mothers.**" (36)

I maintain that an example of this insightful flexibility can also be demonstrated in Epicurus' treatment of the size of the Sun. He ultimately concludes that he could not determine, with certainty, the size of the sun. I believe *we take the fact that we know that the Sun is massively-huge for granted*, because we know that it is a G-type yellow, main sequence star. But for all of those millennia, if the Sun were an Earth-sized white-dwarf, we wouldn't have known. If life were sustainable around a neutron star (*I'm not sure if it is, but for the sake of argument, let's say it is*), then some forms of life in the universe orbit around stars that are smaller than New York City. The proposition that "stars are massively large" is incomplete. Our star *happens* to be **much** larger than our world, though we did not appreciate just *how much* larger until relatively recently.

I do have to disagree with Asimov on one point, that "*These are all twentieth-century discoveries, you see.*" He clearly overlooks the insight of Epicurus!

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## Post by "Martin" of August 30, 2024 at 10:52 AM

Some ideas of Epicurus are impressively compatible with, or analogous too, modern knowledge. However, from an experimental perspective, Asimov's statement that "these are all twentieth-century discoveries" is mostly correct.