

# Circumstantial (Indirect) and Direct Evidence / Dogmatism vs Skepticism

Post by “Kalosyni” of March 6, 2026 at 7:51 AM

I am copying here into the main forum, a few posts which were recently made in reaction to a past Wednesday night Zoom meeting discussion:

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[Godfrey](#) posted (on 03/05/26):

It occurred to me this morning in my fog of awakening that the practice of multiple explanations relates to the issue of skepticism v dogmatism.

It seems to me that multiple explanations are typically used by Epicurus to rule out the supernatural. Another way of looking at this is that they are used as a contrast to one particular theory, and that the explanations tend to be based on inferences from the available evidence.

It also seems that multiple explanations can be used to support a theory by ruling out the competing theories. In this case the "evidence based" explanations would be used to refute the many explanations, leaving one particular theory as the most probable.

I'm curious as to whether this has any relevance to our discussion last night....

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[Cassius](#) posted:

I think so Godfrey. I would say that the point is that is not always possible to be sure which of several explanations might be the right one, so the multiple explanation approach reinforces that we aren't going to be dogmatic on a PARTICULAR solution when the evidence is insufficient. But as to basic issues such as nothing coming or going to nothing, or no supernatural gods, or no life after death, the positive evidence is abundant to RULE OUT those possibilities, so we dogmatically assert their falsity.

The two approaches - dogmatically rejecting that which is NOT possible, and suspending judgment between those which ARE possible - go hand in hand.

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[Cassius](#) posted:

Also Godfrey I'd add that this is exactly what i see is the major reason for the Epicurean criticism of Socrates. if you think that physics can never lead you to any conclusions about the nature of the universe or of gods or the existence of life after death, then there would be no reason to study it.

Some consider it to be a criticism of Epicurus that he didn't seem interested in putting science to "practical" use - he didn't pursue technology - but I'd say he thought he was putting science to its most practical use first - that of establishing whether we are free agents or playthings of the gods or Fate or Fortune. Technology is far secondary to those issues.

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[Martin](#) posted:

The study of physics/nature may give us sufficient confidence about the non-interference of gods and no life after death that we get rid of fears about them. We should not wait until the evidence for this is conclusive because it will never be conclusive.

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of March 6, 2026 at 7:54 AM**

I am curious if there is more to say about the use of indirect evidence which leads to inferred evidence - do we see this in the Letter to Herodotus or in Lucretius?

...especially dealing with the non-intervention of the gods

and also any other aspects.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of March 6, 2026 at 7:56 AM**

I agree with Martin but would add as to this that we must be clear about what "conclusive" means:

Quote



### [Quote from Martin](#)

We should not wait until the evidence for this is conclusive because it will never be conclusive.

In the law we convict people and put them to death on a regular basis by holding to be conclusive the standard of "beyond a reasonable doubt." And we do so even though we do not "see" them commit crimes directly. We accept that circumstantial evidence is amply sufficient to reach reasonable conclusions, just as we conclude that "atoms" (indivisible particles) exist without seeing or touching them directly.

It would not be reasonable or proper to require "omniscience" as some people seem to want to equate to "conclusive." "Conclusive" should be read to mean that we have sufficient evidence - clear direct and/or circumstantial evidence which is not contradicted by other clear direct or circumstantial evidence - to reach a conclusion beyond a reasonable doubt. Otherwise we create ambiguity and doubt where none should exist.

In those cases where the direct and circumstantial evidence is insufficient to support support a clear conclusion, we "wait." In cases where clear evidence supports multiple possibilities, we do not arbitrarily choose among them but hold them all to be possible.

But we never 'wait" on the grounds that we are not omniscient or based purely on speculation that "anything is possible" or "some other undiscovered evidence \*may\* exist." We wait only when we have clear reason to do so, and pure speculation or insistence on "omniscience" is not a clear reason to suspend judgment.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of March 6, 2026 at 8:07 AM**

In the podcast we will eventually address this issue of "when is it appropriate to say that we know something" by covering Philodemus' "On Signs / On Methods of Inference." We've also already covered these issues in past discussions of Lucretius Book 4 as to the possibility of knowledge and in discussions of [Principal Doctrines](#) 23 and 24.

The Lucretius material is most focused starting around Book 4 line 462 -

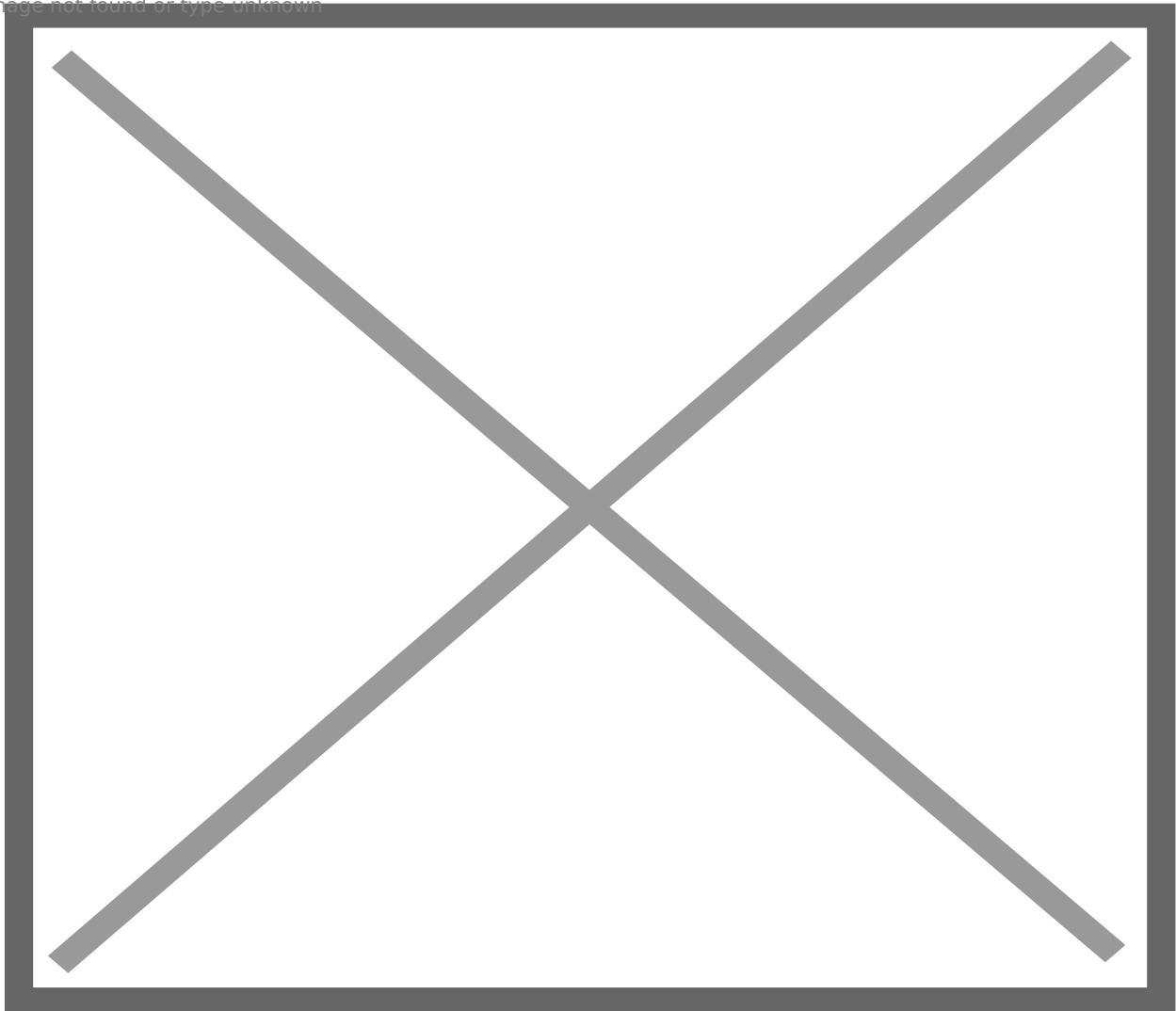
*Again, if any one thinks that nothing is known, he knows not whether that can be known either, since he admits that he knows nothing. Against him then I will refrain from joining issue, who*

*plants himself with his head in the place of his feet. And yet were I to grant that he knows this too, yet I would ask this one question; since he has never before seen any truth in things, whence does he know what is knowing, and not knowing each in turn, what thing has begotten the concept of the true and the false, what thing has proved that the doubtful differs from the certain?*

but for many lines before and after that the topic is the same -- we understand that illusions can occur but nevertheless we learn to use the senses properly and we still reach firm conclusions after we process multiple observations.

The words 'conclusive' and 'conclusion' are key. Socrates alleged that he did not conclude anything except that he could not conclude anything. This conclusion is self-contradictory BS and Epicurus concludes firmly that it must be rejected. In doing so, Epicurus is illustrating that conclusions are possible even though we are not omniscient.

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[EpicureanFriends Side-By-Side Lucretius](#)

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4964-circumstantial-indirect-and-direct-evidence-dogmatism-vs-skepticism/>

Multi-column side-by-side Lucretius text comparison tool featuring Munro, Bailey, Dunster, and Condensed editions.

handbook.epicureanfriends.com

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### **Post by “Cassius” of March 6, 2026 at 8:30 AM**

I modified the title of the thread just slightly to make clear that there are two kinds of evidence that must be considered in evaluating when we can be dogmatic and reach a conclusion and when we cannot.

Direct evidence is direct observation. We determine honey is sweet and snow is white by direct observation through the senses.

Indirect evidence is also called circumstantial evidence. We conclude that atoms (indivisible particles) exist even though we cannot see or touch them directly because the things we do observe directly (the circumstances or indirect observation) are seen to operate consistently with atoms being the cause of the regularity of what we do see. We therefore know atoms exist only circumstantially, but we are nevertheless sure that they do exist. We do not "wait" for more information or hold open the possibility that "maybe rather than atoms there are supernatural forces we have not yet discovered" because to do so would be sheer speculation. The decision to reject sheer speculation is at the heart of what it means to be Epicurean.

You can easily be a Muslim, Christian, or Jew and understand that eating too much ice cream will bring pain that outweighs the immediate pleasure. You cannot easily be a Muslim, Christian, or Jew and reject "faith" - which is regularly understood to be belief without "evidence."

And as Joshua brought up in our recent conversation about reasoning in Lucretius, this issue is why it is important to be able to do more than give a blank stare when the Stoics or Thomas Aquinas or others start insisting that there is a supernatural realm based on "arguments from design" or "ontological arguments" that amount to assertions based purely on speculation or word games. It is essential to have a clear understanding of when it is proper to consider something as "conclusive" and when it is not.

It is sound to conclude that atoms exist. It is not sound to conclude that supernatural forces exist.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of March 6, 2026 at 8:39 AM**

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4964-circumstantial-indirect-and-direct-evidence-dogmatism-vs-skepticism/>

Also don't forget the inherent ridiculousness of trying to reason with someone who rejects evidence-based reasoning. They are speaking nonsense and once they start down that road Lucretius says the ultimate response is not to engage with them further:

*Against him then I will refrain from joining issue, who plants himself with his head in the place of his feet.*

In both the question of knowledge and of determinism you can point out to the other person that their position is self-contradictory, but ultimately in most cases they won't care about self-contradiction since they don't care about evidence.

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## Post by “DaveT” of March 7, 2026 at 2:46 PM

Sorry I missed the Wed. meeting this thread is discussing. With that in mind, knowing I may be addressing something tangential, I note several things in this thread that have made me think more deeply.

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Quoting [Godfrey](#) It seems to me that multiple explanations are typically used by Epicurus to rule out the supernatural....

It also seems that multiple explanations can be used to support a theory by ruling out the competing theories....

It looks to me like [Godfrey](#) was saying there are two reasons a person may use multiple explanations to some topic; to *disprove* a point and to *make* a point.

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Quoting [Cassius](#) "...the point is that is not always possible to be sure which of several explanations might be the right one, ... we aren't going to be dogmatic..." "But as to basic issues such as nothing coming or going to nothing, or no supernatural gods, or no life after death, the positive evidence is abundant to RULE OUT those possibilities, so we dogmatically assert their falsity.

The two approaches - dogmatically rejecting that which is NOT possible, and suspending judgment between those which ARE possible - go hand in hand.

Of course all of the explanations asserted **may all be false**, and therefore fall within the realm of speculation and therefore explaining *nothing* to either prove or to disprove another's speculation. \

But the second part does give me pause;

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Quoting [Cassius](#) "But as to basic issues such as nothing coming or going to nothing, or no supernatural gods, or no life after death, the positive evidence is abundant to RULE OUT those possibilities, so we dogmatically assert their falsity."

I think the danger here in being comfortable with any sort of Epicurean dogma on physics is that while some of Epicurus' physics has proven more likely true than false, one must tread very lightly in attributing to him an omniscience akin to absolute knowledge. I see no evidence that there is life after death, and a great deal of evidence how humans invented numerous types of life after death throughout history to explain the unexplainable. I see no evidence that gods exist for the same reasons of contrary evidence about human nature. Indeed Epicurus believed in gods with no evidence of their existence. Correct?

And to follow up on this point, Epicurean theory about atoms was more a hypothesis, than a theory since he had no direct evidence of the truth of his statements, much of which parenthetically he learned from Democritus. True or false?

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QUOTE from [Martin](#)

"The study of physics/nature may give us sufficient confidence about the non-interference of gods and no life after death that we get rid of fears about them. We should not wait until the evidence for this is conclusive because it will never be conclusive."

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I agree with the focus of [Martin](#) above.

And I see this issue on each side who advocate for either theist v. atheist, atomism v. creationism, divine cause vs. nothing from nothing as never being conclusive by either side, either by direct or indirect (circumstantial) proof. THERE IS NO UNCHANGING TRUTH on these issues, only confidence or lack of confidence based on whatever evidence we've found.

What I mean is, the *Scientific Method* does not demand absolute proof raised to the level of dogma or certainty regardless that people take findings to be absolute. The word *Science* is derived from the Latin "to know" But *scientists*, those who search for knowledge of the natural world, do not claim to know anything *beyond a doubt*. Neither do they claim knowledge that is unchanging forever. They rely on newly discoverable evidence and the testing required to

prove or disprove any particular occurrence in nature in order to arrive at a consensus of opinion. And that opinion only give a high degree of confidence rather than an absolute certainty.

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## **Post by “Cassius” of March 7, 2026 at 5:40 PM**

Dave I would say that you are discussing the topic of the "conflict" between "science" and "philosophy."

Each of us has to decide what we think for ourselves, but from a philosophic perspective philosophy does not yield to anyone or anything to dictate to it how to approach truth.

Religion asserts that a god can be omniscient and know everything. Epicurus rejects the possibility of such an entity so the issue of knowing everything about everything is not on the table.

What is on the table is how we as individuals are going to live and what we individually take to be proven or not proven / certain or not certain.

### [Quote from DaveT](#)

Indeed Epicurus believed in gods with no evidence of their existence. Correct?

I would say that Epicurus would emphatically deny this so I would say this is incorrect. Circumstantial evidence is evidence, and Epicurus held that the circumstances of an infinite and eternal universe, with life throughout it, and with life at varying stages of success (isonomia) all strongly support the conclusion that gods who are deathless and live in a "blessed" way.

### [Quote from DaveT](#)

And to follow up on this point, Epicurean theory about atoms was more a hypothesis, than a theory since he had no direct evidence of the truth of his statements, much of which parenthetically he learned from Democritus. True or false?

Whether one calls it hypothesis or theory or knowledge or whatever, Epicurus held that the circumstantial evidence supports the conclusion that indivisible particles exist and are the explanation for the regularity we see. On certain points he followed Democritus but on major issues (swerve / determinism / skepticism) he departed from Democritus.

### [Quote from DaveT](#)

And that opinion only give a high degree of confidence rather than an absolute certainty.

Certainly it is the skeptical position to set up "absolute certainty" as a knowingly impossible target and thereby argue that nothing can be known for sure through the senses, and thereby assert that only through something equivalent to "ideal forms" can be held to be true. Religions assert that, and whenever someone (particular scientists" or anyone else) they are doing the same thing.

The bottom line is that Epicurus was an opponent of radical skepticism as self-contradictory and self-refuting no matter what label is placed on it. It is totally illogical to assert with certainty that nothing can be known with certainty. Therefore you need another standard of truth, and that's what Epicurus finds in the sensations, anticipations, and feelings.

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## **Post by "DaveT" of March 8, 2026 at 11:03 AM**

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Certainly it is the skeptical position to set up "absolute certainty" as a knowingly impossible target and thereby argue that nothing can be known for sure through the senses, and thereby assert that only through something equivalent to "ideal forms" can be held to be true.

Of course, this is not what I was saying, right?

Yet, what is the problem with the phrase "a high degree of confidence"? Do you think this is radical skepticism in the sense of the Hellenistic era of Greece, or in the modern sense of the word scepticism? Surely Epicurus would be amenable to the modern concept of sceptical reasoning since it would be the basis of rejecting ideal forms. Frankly, I have no problem with either usage of the word scepticism in the modern era in which we find ourselves. Neither one to me rules out believing anything with merely a high degree of confidence rather than absolute certainty.

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## **Post by "Cassius" of March 8, 2026 at 12:22 PM**

### [Quote from DaveT](#)

Yet, what is the problem with the phrase "a high degree of confidence"?

Within philosophy, that's exactly the position Cicero and other skeptics take -- that "probability" is all anyone can ask for, and to ask for anything more than "probability" is improper.

The problem is that most reasonable people are not going to find "it is probable that you aren't going to burn for hell forever" to be a sufficiently satisfying answer.

Same with "I have a high degree of confidence you are not going to burn forever in hell or miss out on eternal heaven."

in philosophy and especially for Epicurus we are focused on normal people who need normal degrees of help, and when life or death decisions have to be made, "probability" as ultimate motivation doesn't cut it rhetorically.

Sure there are some people who find debating probabilities in a technical academic sense to be satisfying. I'd say the texts are very clear that Epicurus was not among them.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of March 8, 2026 at 12:25 PM**

It's probably also a good way of looking at it to compare this to court.

If we're going to reach a conclusion about something, we have to tell the jury the standard of proof.

Telling them to just decide what's "probably" happened or happened "with a high degree of confidence" isn't what we do, especially in important criminal cases.

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of March 8, 2026 at 7:08 PM**

It seems that PD 24 could have some relevance to the discussion here, and there are a number of posts exploring the canon, etc, over in the thread linked below.

[PD24](#) "If you reject any single sensation, and fail to distinguish between the conclusion of opinion, as to the appearance awaiting confirmation, and that which is actually given by the sensation or feeling, or each intuitive apprehension of the mind, you will confound all other sensations, as well, with the same groundless opinion, so that you will reject every standard of judgment. And if among the mental images created by your opinion you affirm both that which awaits confirmation, and that which does not, you will not escape error, since you will have preserved the whole cause of doubt in every judgment between what is right and what is wrong."

Thread

## [PD24 - Commentary and Translation of PD 24](#)

Principal Doctrine 24 (PD 24) is one of the more convoluted doctrines with multiple phrases and conjunctions. I would like to provide some commentary and break the doctrine down into manageable words and phrases for everyone to get a more coherent understanding of what Epicurus was communicating. You may also want to take a look at [this doctrine's page on the Epicurus Wiki](#):

First the original text:

[...]

Now, let's break it down before we put it all back together. I'll provide a (mostly) literal...



Don

September 2, 2020 at 11:56 PM

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## Post by "DaveT" of March 9, 2026 at 4:01 PM

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

And if among the mental images created by your opinion you affirm both that which awaits confirmation, and that which does not, you will not escape error, since you will have preserved the whole cause of doubt in every judgment between what is right and what is wrong."

I appreciate your observations. I do not take issue with your prior thoughts on how different people might not understand consensus. And I find the quote from PD 24 highly appropriate here. An opinion affirmed only in part will not escape error. However, you can affirm all of an opinion by consensus.

I think there is a better way to treat the idea of presenting truth confirmed by consensus than the problems you saw.

Looking at the scientific method, and I hope anyone will correct my knowledge on the scientific method, once certain evidence (by opinion) exists, it must be tested by others, i.e. experts, to see if the evidence can be falsifiable, or disproven. If it can be, it will not be accepted as true. Therefore, we can choose to rely on the scientific method to know the world, and why religions, to my understanding, never try to disprove their “evidence” qua myths and dogmas.

So, my approach is to challenge myself whether there is high confidence via consensus in the evidence supporting any opinion, theory, faith, or belief. To the believer in divine providence, I can challenge their evidence. I can show evidence that nature can come into existence with no divine first cause. Can I prove what occurred before the Big Bang? Personally? No. But cosmologists are uncovering evidence every day, giving them an idea of what existed before then.

My opinion on the creation of everything is based on a consensus of scientists on that topic, that the universe as we understand it came to be without divine providence. And I see no evidence of divine creation. For example, evolution is true and creation in Eden is not. If someone proves some part of evolution is false by a scientific method of consensus, then I have to yield. Another example, Einstein’s theories of relativity are not accepted as 100% true in the face of new discoveries proven by consensus. But until that time (and there have been times) scientists will accept every specific part by consensus as true.

Most of us know that sunrise will occur tomorrow, and I bet every astrophysicist will acknowledge that to be true. But they know there is a possibility, however slight, that something we do not understand might occur and sunrise will not happen.

And this brings me to the words possibility versus probability. If I may for the moment rely on my legal training; a probability of something occurring is that it is more likely to happen than it will not happen. The degree of probability can always be contestable, but we can choose to rely on the probability as a proven fact if it is over 50% probable, but certainly a far higher degree for scientists, unless we see acceptable opposing evidence.

Someone may ask, “Is it possible that Einstein was wrong about (something) and Steven Hawking disproved it?” In that case, scientists will set to work trying to disprove Hawking's new idea. And if after years of testing Hawking’s idea may become so probably correct that by consensus it is accepted as a fact. There is no need to say Hawking is possibly or probably right. It is not false to say to anyone, regardless of their educational level, that Hawking’s idea

is true because it has been "proven".

So, I think knowing that nothing can be 100% proven now and forever is not a barrier to my beliefs. And everyone has their own probability level of belief.

The faithful believer may stay with his faith because there is not sufficient evidence it is false, that even a small proof of the existence of their god(s) is enough to accept it as fact. And just the same, an Epicurean can ignore the possibility that they are wrong about divine providence since they may regard the small probability of error to be enough to disregard it.

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### **Post by "Pacatus" of March 10, 2026 at 9:39 AM**

As I read through this, I had to remind myself that [Cassius](#) is using the word "dogmatic" in the sense that the Hellenistic philosophers such as Epicurus did - not the sense of "characterized by or given to the expression of *opinions* very strongly or positively *as if* they were facts." [Merriam-Webster] I think his comments about contemporary legal standards of proof are illustrative.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of March 10, 2026 at 12:01 PM**

Right. Everyone today is marinated in the negative meaning of "dogmatism" just like they are in the narrow and negative view of "pleasure" as an ethical guide.

I'm by no means proud or happy of every aspect of the legal profession, but there are good analogies between "the law" and what we're doing with philosophy.

In both cases we have only a limited time, and we have to find ways to come to conclusions that we can implement while we are alive. Short of war or trial by violence, the legal system gives us a method where those who can agree to accept the framework resolve disputes among themselves and move on after that.

Something very similar is going on with Epicurus. Once you decide that you can't expect to live on after death, you have to adopt a set of rules for living today and every day you have left. By no means does every question about life have to be answered, but some are so important that by getting out of bed in the morning you are taking a position on certain things being true or false.

I am often seeing comments such as "but the Socratics / Skeptics" weren't nearly as extreme as you portray them! It's always wrong to take a firm position on anything! NEVER SAY NEVER!

Some people aren't bothered by being inconsistent. They think that Emerson was great in saying "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds," but they go even further and abbreviate him to leave out the *foolish* part and they begin to think that consistency is never of value.

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Gosh in looking up that reference it's worse than I remembered. here's what appears to be a more complete version:

#### Quote

"A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Speak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said to-day. — 'Ah, so you shall be sure to be misunderstood.' — Is it so bad, then, to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood."

— **Ralph Waldo Emerson**, [Self-Reliance: An Excerpt from Collected Essays, First Series](#)

That's quite a list of people who Emerson apparently admired. I'd cut him some slack for Newton and Galileo and Copernicus at least to a degree, but if someone finds themselves identifying with the majority of the rest of the names on that list they are in the wrong place with Epicurus!

--- Getting back to Pacatus' comment, I think most of us agree that Epicurus clearly held that there are times and places to be "dogmatic" and times and places not to be dogmatic.

And there are times when "consistency" is of more value than others.

But if Emerson really spoke so broadly as to say this, I'd have to conclude that he's going far beyond "poetic license." --> *With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall.*

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## Post by “Cassius” of March 13, 2026 at 11:27 AM

As to Emerson's statements about consistency Joshua reminded me in the most recent podcast (324 - not yet posted as of this writing) about what Cicero had to say in [Tusculan Disputations](#). In this section he's arguing against Epicurus, but what he's saying about consistency I think most of us would agree with. I think Epicurus would agree too, and that Epicurus would defend his position on the grounds that he WAS being consistent. This particular argument shows why the meaning of "Good" is so important, and why it is so important to understand Epicurus' argument that all good ultimately resolves down to "pleasure." And that leads us directly to the expansive meaning that Epicurus gives to the term "pleasure," refusing to restrict it to physical stimulation (as Cicero accuses Epicurus of doing) but including within "pleasure" all living experience that is not painful:

Quote from Cicero in Tusculan Disputations

X.

But it is the duty of one who would argue accurately, to consider not what is said, but what is said consistently. As in that very opinion which we have adopted in this discussion, namely, that every good man is always happy; it is clear what I mean by good men: I call those both wise and good men, who are provided and adorned with every virtue. Let us see, then, who are to be called happy. I imagine, indeed, that those men are to be called so, who are possessed of good without any alloy of evil: nor is there any other notion connected with the word that expresses happiness, but an absolute enjoyment of good without any evil. Virtue cannot attain this, if there is anything good besides itself: for a crowd of evils would present themselves, if we were to allow poverty, obscurity, humility, solitude, the loss of friends, acute pains of the body, the loss of health, weakness, blindness, the ruin of one's country, banishment, slavery, to be evils: for a wise man may be afflicted by all these evils, numerous and important as they are, and many others also may be added; for they are brought on by chance, which may attack a wise man: but if these things are evils, who can maintain that a wise man is always happy, when all these evils may light on him at the same time? I therefore do not easily agree with my friend Brutus, nor with our common masters, nor those ancient ones, Aristotle, Speusippus, Xenocrates, Polemon, who reckon all that I have mentioned above as evils, and yet they say that a wise man is always happy; nor can I allow them, because they are charmed with this beautiful and illustrious title, which would very well become Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato, to persuade my mind, that strength, health, beauty, riches, honours, power, with the beauty of which they are ravished, are contemptible, and that all those things which are the opposites of these are not to be regarded. Then might they declare openly, with

a loud voice, that neither the attacks of fortune, nor the opinion of the multitude, nor pain, nor poverty, occasion them any apprehensions; and that they have everything within themselves, and that there is nothing whatever which they consider as good but what is within their own power. Nor can I by any means allow the same person, who falls into the vulgar opinion of good and evil, to make use of these expressions, which can only become a great and exalted man. Struck with which glory, up starts Epicurus, who, with submission to the Gods, thinks a wise man always happy. He is much charmed with the dignity of this opinion, but he never would have owned that, had he attended to himself: for what is there more inconsistent, than for one who could say that pain was the greatest or the only evil, to think also that a wise man can possibly say in the midst of his torture, How sweet is this! We are not, therefore, to form our judgment of philosophers from detached sentences, but from their consistency with themselves, and their ordinary manner of talking.

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### Post by “Don” of March 16, 2026 at 11:05 PM

#### [Quote from Pacatus](#)

As I read through this, I had to remind myself that [Cassius](#) is using the word “dogmatic” in the sense that the Hellenistic philosophers such as Epicurus did – not the sense of “characterized by or given to the expression of *opinions* very strongly or positively *as if* they were facts.” [Merriam-Webster] I think his comments about contemporary legal standards of proof are illustrative.

FWIW...

#### [Epicurean Sage - Declare their beliefs and not remain in doubt](#)

Hicks: He will be a dogmatist but not a mere sceptic; Yonge: he will pronounce dogmas, and will express no doubts; Mensch: He will assert his opinions and will...  
sites.google.com

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### Post by “DaveT” of March 17, 2026 at 12:36 PM

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4964-circumstantial-indirect-and-direct-evidence-dogmatism-vs-skepticism/>

It's probably also a good way of looking at it to compare this to court.

If we're going to reach a conclusion about something, we have to tell the jury the standard of proof.

Telling them to just decide what's "probably" happened or happened "with a high degree of confidence" isn't what we do, especially in important criminal cases.

Perhaps you might also have discussed that in **Civil Law** cases where "probably" is acceptable.

In criminal cases, people go to prison. Generally, in civil cases which are far more common, you don't go to prison.

And I am suggesting this clarification because, when we are discussing standards of proof in response to the beginning question of this thread. But sometimes *beyond reasonable doubt*, like in criminal cases, or *probably (more likely than not)* like in civil cases, need a lot more clarification when applied to issues we have in this thread.

Proof, whether to support philosophical, scientific, or legal subjects, whether directly or circumstantially arrived at, by consensus or individual logic, must be clearly defined as a basis for discussion. . And not just defined, but also limited in application. Otherwise, when we discuss the ancient debates of Hellenistic philosophers, we can get distracted from the original topic under study in the thread.

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## Post by "Cassius" of March 17, 2026 at 1:46 PM

Right - the burden of proof issue is certainly relevant to standards of proof so let's discuss that too.

In these philosophic questions does the burden of proof rest on the person asserting something that is contrary to observable evidence? Or on the person asserting what all observable evidence supports? And will we ever allow circumstantial evidence alone to be the basis of "knowledge."

In our courtroom situation, the burden of proof is on the side bringing the charge or claim, and the proof standard is higher in criminal cases than in civil cases due to how much is at stake. Importantly, *circumstantial evidence is allowed to be the basis of decision in both circumstances*. (In fact I was reading this morning about the [Utah woman found guilty this week](#) for murdering her husband with fentanyl. It appears this is an example of a murder conviction based largely or fully on circumstantial evidence. Certainly no one saw her administer the poison.)

The most important questions in life stem from whether we are created and governed by supernatural forces, and whether we have supernatural souls that survive after death. It is reasonable to assert that these issues determine everything else in ethics. If there are in fact supernatural forces beyond our senses, those forces would provide benefits or penalties that overwhelm any lesser ethical judgment based purely on sensation. (In this discussion I think Epicurus would include anticipations and feelings of pleasure and pain as also being direct natural faculties equivalent in status to the five senses.)

We do not have control over how long we live. No moment that passes in which we have made choices based on wrong presumptions can ever be retrieved, and in every case our lives are over far too quickly. We only live once, so the need for finality is urgent.

Given the implications of the options and implications as to whether the universe is natural and whether we have souls that survive death., Epicurus held that "I don't know" is not a proper or sufficient answer. I would analogize his decision here to his decision to revolt against his teachers who could not reasonably explain the theory of the universe being organized out of chaos by an outside force.

As to the available evidence, there is no observable evidence of supernatural forces or life after death. We are not born having those conceptions in our minds. If someone is going to argue that we should live life based on those contentions, it is reasonable to take the position, as Epicurus did, that those people provide very strong evidence and meet a very high burden of proof.

And what kind of proof is most important and definitive? This is what book 4 of Lucretius is devoted to, all around the section in which Lucretius discusses the problems of illusions that make proof of things difficult, but that in the end we come to the conclusion that knowledge is possible, and the standard of knowledge is met by the evidence of the sense, from which we can make conclusions based either on direct sensation or reasoning from circumstantial evidence which does come from sensation.

Quote from Lucretius 4:469

"If anyone thinks that he knows nothing, he cannot be sure that he knows this, when he confesses that he knows nothing at all. I shall avoid disputing with such a trifler, who perverts all things, and like a tumbler with his head prone to the earth, can go no otherwise than backwards." (Lucretius 4:469)

Epicurus saw no reason to suggest that supernatural souls or forces are "possible," and thus there is no reason to consider those issues under a standard of probability. And there are many important reasons NOT to do that.

In short I do agree that we need to be clear on who has the *burden* of proof, what level of "*proof*" is required, and be clear that we do take the position that *knowledge* is possible.

If we don't address these then we are left of the position of the person who says that nothing can be known, and we never make any progress towards deciding how to live.

Last comment: And as you also reference, we have to decide who is the factfinder. In court the factfinder is either the judge or jury. In our own lives, we have to decide whether we are going to make decisions for ourselves, defer our decisionmaking to others, or try to avoid decisionmaking completely. Epicurus never appeals to authorities other than the sensations, anticipations and feelings, and I think the strong implication of that is that he thought we have to make these decisions for ourselves.