

# Please, no dogmatism, no absolute truths

Post by "Cassius" of March 31, 2019 at 4:47 PM

Here's my view on that:

[Quote from michelepinto](#)

This is why I don't believe I have any truth in my hand.

Taken to an extreme, that would make you a skeptic like Pyrrho, and I am sure you are not one of those! The key word there would be "ANY" truth -- because I know that you do have at least SOME truth 😊 And that is why the part of Lucretius book IV beginning as follows is one of my favorites:

*Bailey: 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?*

*Browne: Lastly, 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.*

*And yet allow that he knows this, I would ask (since he had nothing before to lead him into such a knowledge) whence he had the notion what it was to know, or not to know; what it was that gave him an idea of Truth or Falsehood, and what taught him to distinguish between doubt and certainty?*

[Quote from michelepinto](#)

As it is not possible to prove the existence of God it is not even possible to prove its non-existence. At most we can argue about the possibilities of one thesis or another.

That is very close to the formulation taken by Frances Wright in "A Few Days In Athens" -- but in the context of the general existence of gods such as the Greeks were familiar with, not supernatural gods which could have created the universe, on which I believe Epicurus was rightfully very firm.

[Quote from michelepinto](#)

I have a friend who feels such a comfort in believing that there is a God to take care of him who, if denied, could hardly be happy.

I too have such friends - and family members - and I do not attempt to engage them in these discussions for that same reason - it would destroy the happiness that they have created for themselves, and they would not be able to reconstruct a substitute. But that does not mean that I do not engage people who are capable of handling the truth, hopefully which includes everyone who comes to this forum and reads the ground rules of what we are doing here - pursuing Epicurean philosophy.

[Quote from michelepinto](#)

I don't think this can make them happy, but why should I decide for them?

I absolutely agree that we have absolutely no right to decide for other people what they should choose to believe.

[Quote from michelepinto](#)

But I respect the ideas of others. I'll never find myself saying, I'm right, you're wrong. This is what religions say. Epicurus is not a prophet, but a philosopher, his wisdom is human and perfectible.

Saying "I am right and you are wrong" depends entirely on the subject matter at hand. Many many issues are matters of interpretation and discretion. But if someone tells me that they are never going to die, presuming that the person is someone with whom we have entered discussion in good faith, I tell them "you are wrong."

I say "presuming it is someone who enters discussion in good faith" to distinguish the situation of a conversation with a religious fanatic, with whom I would not choose to engage anyway, but with whom I would not want to talk unless I were sure that the fanatic were not capable of resolving the dispute by force.

So in general I think the issue of how to discuss things is one in which great discretion is required, with the full truth reserved to those with whom the full truth can really be shared.

But on core issues of fact, discussed among friends, I think Epicurus was certainly correct to have said, as [recorded by Diogenes Laertius, that](#)

"[The wise man] will be a dogmatist but not a mere skeptic;."