Prolepsis of the gods

Post by “Rolf” of June 26, 2025 at 3:59 AM

I’ve got to be honest, I don’t really understand Meno’s paradox and how it’s helpful in the context of Epicurean philosophy. I just watched Matthew Lampert’s video, and while it was helpful in understanding what Socrates/Plato believed, I disagree fundamentally with the premises of the paradox and I don’t see why it’s something that needs to be solved to move forward.

I can know a bit about something (for instance, I know that I want to feel good), but not know anything about how to accomplish that, but still find out about Epicurean philosophy through online research for instance. I can be completely unaware of something but find out about it from a friend and then go on to study it. It really feels like sophistry detached from real life.

Even when Epicurus takes the solution to prolepsis (which makes a lot more sense than Socrates’ solution obviously), I still don’t see why I would need some kind of preconception of something in order to learn about it. I can learn about the concept of a god from somebody else, and maybe the first person to believe in a god did so because they thought it wad a reasonable conclusion as to why natural phenomena behave the way they do. I also don’t see how “knowing” something means we have no need to “enquire” about it. It’s not like knowing and unknowing is some binary state.

Independent of Meno’s paradox, I feel I have some grasp of prolepsis now. I keep going back to the honeybee example: Bees aren’t *just* pleasure-pursuing machines, they have some built-in “rules” they follow. They collect pollen, they live in a hive. On the same token, humans have patterns that they’re naturally drawn to, and the human-animal thus has different things that are necessary for happiness than other animals. It’s clear to me that we’re not just born as blank-slates left to pursue pleasure with no guidelines.

Beyond this though, and assuming my understanding here is correct, I’m very much lost on this topic.