

Circumstantial (Indirect) and Direct Evidence / Dogmatism vs Skepticism

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.

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.*