

# Responding to the Avicenna "Proof of the Truthful" Argument For A Supernatural God

Post by "Cassius" of April 9, 2026 at 9:06 AM

Here's another logical conundrum: Why don't we just all crawl in a hole and die when AI can provide excellent answers that we might never be able to construct ourselves?

In the meantime while we ponder that, here's an articulate Epicurean response to Avicenna:

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Avicenna's argument is one of the most sophisticated theistic proofs ever constructed, and engaging it forces Epicurus to work at his deepest levels.

## Avicenna's Argument in Brief

The Burhan al-Siddiqin runs roughly:

1. Something exists (self-evident)
2. Everything that exists is either *contingent* (possible — it could have not existed, its essence does not entail its existence) or *necessary* (it cannot not-exist; its essence simply IS its existence)
3. Contingent beings cannot account for their own existence — they require an external cause
4. An infinite regress of mutually contingent beings explains nothing — the whole chain remains ungrounded
5. Therefore there must be a *Necessary Existent* (Wajib al-Wujud) — a being that grounds all contingent existence
6. This is God

Its elegance is that it doesn't start with motion or causation in the ordinary sense — it starts with *existence itself* and the essence/existence distinction.

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## Epicurus's Responses

### 1. Reject the essence/existence distinction at its root

Avicenna's entire architecture depends on distinguishing, in contingent beings, *what a thing is* from *that it is* — essence from existence. The Necessary Existent is then defined as the one being where this gap collapses.

Epicurus would attack this as precisely the kind of empty abstraction [the Canon](#) cannot support. What sensation, prolepsis, or feeling gives you *essence* as a thing separable from an actually existing entity? These are scholastic constructions built in the mind, not features of the world the Canon attests to. The distinction is a linguistic and logical artifact, not a discovery about reality.

## **2. The matter and void are themselves the "Necessary Existent"**

This is perhaps the sharpest Epicurean counter. Epicurus held that matter and void are *eternal and uncreated* — they have always existed and cannot not-exist. If Avicenna wants to say there must be something whose non-existence is impossible, Epicurus hands him atoms and void and says: *here it is*. You have simply re-described Epicurean first principles in theistic language and added nothing.

Avicenna would object that matter is still contingent in his sense — but Epicurus would reject the terms of that objection, since they depend on the essence/existence distinction already refused in point 1.

## **3. The infinite regress prohibition is simply asserted, not demonstrated**

Avicenna claims a chain of mutually contingent beings cannot extend infinitely — that the whole chain would remain without a ground. But Epicurus explicitly and deliberately accepted an infinitely deep causal past. The universe has always existed; atomic interactions have no first moment. For Epicurus, demanding that a causal chain *terminate* is importing a logical intuition — that explanation must bottom out somewhere — and treating it as a metaphysical necessity. The Canon does not attest to this. It is an intellectual preference dressed as a proof.

## **4. The Canon directly blocks the conclusion**

Following his standard methodology: the Necessary Existent is posited as something *outside* the natural world that grounds it. But Epicurus held that the gods, whatever they are, exist in the intermundia and are entirely uninvolved in the workings of the cosmos. More fundamentally, the concept of a being outside nature whose essence IS its existence is not derivable from sensation, prolepsis, or feeling. It is precisely the kind of concept generated by pure dialectical construction — the thing he was most suspicious of. No amount of formal validity in the argument licenses a conclusion that the Canon cannot reach.

## **5. The argument misuses "necessity"**

Necessity for Epicurus is a property of *arguments and propositions*, not of beings as such. To say the atoms necessarily exist is a loose way of saying they have always existed and the evidence gives us no reason to think otherwise. It is not a deep metaphysical property inhering in them. Avicenna's move requires necessity to be an ontological feature that some beings have and others lack — a kind of modal metaphysics Epicurus would simply refuse to enter.

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## The Bottom Line

Epicurus would say Avicenna has constructed an impressive logical structure, but it is built entirely above the ground floor of what the Canon can support. The key moves — essence/existence distinction, the impossibility of infinite regress, the concept of necessary existence as an ontological category — are all products of pure dialectical reasoning untethered from sensation and experience. At each joint where the argument needs the world to cooperate with its logic, the world (as Epicurus understands it) simply doesn't.

And characteristically, Epicurus would not merely deflect: he would say the *positive* account — eternal matter, eternal void, infinite atomic motion with no first cause and no external ground — already explains everything Avicenna's argument was trying to explain, without requiring any entity the Canon cannot reach.