

Prolepsis and the Epicurean Gods (discussion split from earlier thread started by Titus)

Post by "Cassius" of June 13, 2026 at 6:21 AM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

. And [Epicurus says] that it is not possible either to investigate, nor to be at a loss, nor indeed to judge -- but not even to refute -- without an anticipation."

So Bryan correct me if I am wrong here but this is how the entire discussion of prolepsis refutes what Plato had taught about ideal forms/reincarnation.

It is an obvious point that you can never investigate, refute, or judge whether you are correct about something unless you start with an understanding of what the "something" is. If you've never dealt with something before you cannot understand it unless you relate it to something you already understand.

Plato and gang want to suggest that you must have been born with from another life, or have been given by a divine god, a set of understandings that you then take and apply to your experience after you are born. You recognize a horse because before you were born you were implanted with the "form" of a horse, and when you see a horse after you are born you know it's a horse because you're remembering your pre-birth knowledge (or what god told you).

Epicurus says that 's nonsense. Like an LLM, your brain has evolved to be able to selectively pick out of the background noise the patterns that repeat within that noise. Sort of similar in a way that in the past when people looked at the noise on the screen of a black and white TV, you could begin to pick out the shapes of the objects on the screen even though they were covered in static.

That ability to pick out repeated patterns comes from the fact that the repeated patterns are in fact there in the static and our minds get used over time to picking them out. We aren't born with the patterns and the patterns are not in fact arbitrary - they are there in the static of the picture if we apply our attention and pick them out. For those of us who tune our TVs to shows about horses, we begin to be able to pick out in the programming the shapes to to which we apply the word "horse" or "equus" or whatever language we use.

This process is entirely natural and has no involvement with gods or pre-birth ideas or supernatural forms. But it is essential to human life and if this process did not exist, we would never be able to investigate, judge, or refute anything. It provides the framework for understanding human knowledge that repudiates the supernaturalism of Plato and all those who claim that truth only exists in a "beyond-world" which is inaccessible to us as humans

using our senses. No geometry or syllogistic logic or divine revelation is required.

The disaster is that even today people continue to accept Plato's basic argument - that truth is impossible for humans to obtain through our natural faculties, and that we either (1) require supernatural assistance to find true knowledge or (2) should give up on the idea of true knowledge in the first place because it doesn't exist.