

# Reverence and Awe In Epicurean Philosophy

Post by “Joshua” of October 29, 2020 at 1:47 PM

So....there's a lot going on here. ☐☐

Cassius mentioned somewhere the question of the Epicurean theory of images vs the modern theory of light. It is a settled fact that Epicurus got this wrong—objects do not 'shed' atomic films that impinge on the optical nerve. Instead, photons (a particle or a wave, depending on the math/model) strike the object and are reflected to the eye.

Epicurus was wrong, but in comparison to his contemporaries he was more nearly right. His theory was still one of *intromission*—a stream from without touching on the senses. Empedocles, and later Plato, seem to have believed in *extramission*—that light originates in the eyes and flows out in a stream, revealing the object to the mind.

---

Elayne mentioned the penalty for impiety that Epicurus might have suffered had he professed atheism. Certainly in the early days of the same century Socrates was tried and executed on those charges. If we accept that as an excuse, we must accept that Epicurus was in this respect a fraud. He didn't just 'go along to get along'. He wrote, published and instructed an untruth, over the course of his whole life, with the intent to deceive the multitude. He had less courage than Socrates, than Bruno. His mockery of Plato in calling him The Golden must then be the rankest hypocrisy, for he is then a partner in Plato's crime—the project of telling the people a 'useful lie' for political peace.

For my part, I prefer to presume that he was genuine, even if I thought he was wrong.

So upon reflection, this is my procedure;

1.) Everything I think I know about Epicurus' character and system of philosophy dissuades me from believing that he would engage in an elaborate and protracted dissimulation. I take it for granted that he meant what he said.

—1a.) For that reason, I'll continue to study and reflect on his teachings about divinity. I'll try to grasp it as best I can, and to share it with others who are interested.

2.) Nothing in his divinity is particularly anathema to me, or to my senses, or my philosophy. So long as it is not construed to involve creation, or meddling, or miracles, or an afterlife, or the fear of death, or a denial of the senses (or of pleasure), it doesn't present any real problems.

—2a.) For that reason, I'll continue to remain open to the possibility that he may have gotten some of it right—even though in practical terms, I am, and remain, an atheist.

And lastly, I'll link to a poem by the English poet Philip Larkin called [Church Going](#). It was referred to my attention by the [autobiography](#) of Christopher Hitchens, and does capture a sense of my own feelings on the subject.