

# What holds me back from embracing EP

**Post by “EricR” of March 1, 2022 at 11:03 AM**

The most fundamental assertion here is PN03 - "The universe consists of solid bodies and void." As appealing as EP is to me, it seems the entire philosophy is built on that statement. For me, it is a stumbling block as I still wonder about other ways of seeing the universe.

So my question here is this - is it accepted within the community that it's an indisputable fact that "there is nothing other than atoms and void", or is it thought to be a belief that may or may not be true or provable?

It is this question that holds me back from buying into EP fully since I see other ideas such as the eastern notion that "all is Mind (consciousness or spirit)" as among those other ways of seeing the structure of reality. I cannot shake the idea that we don't actually know the truth about the real nature of everything, so we make choices about it. One of these choices is certainly PN03, but it's not the only one.

I personally am confronted with what I think of as "the Mystery" since no matter what set of ideas, religious beliefs, etc. one encounters, there is a point at which I have to admit "I don't know". Going beyond this into "I know" is where all the dangers of religions lay. "Beware - beyond this there be dragons".

So, do Epicureans know there are only atoms and void, or do they believe this.

Note - I am sincere in this question and not trying to be clever or manipulative.

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**Post by “Don” of March 1, 2022 at 11:58 AM**

Excellent question and opportunity for discussion. Here's a quick response from me for now. We know "atoms and void" are not exactly the fundamental building blocks of the universe now. Physics tells us that the universe is made of quantum fields. But, at the level we at which humans need to "care about," we can deal with atoms (and their direct constituents: protons, electrons; quarks, and so on) and the void that surrounds them.

What this means to me is that "atoms and void" is shorthand for a fully material universe. There is no "guiding hand", nothing that can't be measured (eventually). Our "mind" is based on a physical reality. We dissolve into physical parts when we die, nothing immaterial left over. Nothing hiding behind the material universe of which to fear.

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## Post by “Godfrey” of March 1, 2022 at 11:59 AM

@EricR personally I find PN03 very comforting. Over my lifetime I've spent years trying unsuccessfully to come to terms with the supernatural aspects of various religions and philosophies. It was only upon discovering EP that I felt like I'd "come home".

I certainly don't *know* that all is atoms and void, but the best scientific observation over centuries has failed to verify a supernatural phenomenon. If one was to be verified, then I would do my best to understand how that impacts my world view. Actually, "atoms and void" is now understood as matter/energy and void ( [Martin](#) is much more qualified to discuss this than I am!) but, as I see it it still precludes the supernatural.

As I have read some of the ancient arguments for and against atomism over the last few years, I've become increasingly unconvinced by the arguments against. For me, such arguments, at least in the west, are often more concerned with political power than the search for truth. Whether East or West, however, I find that EP is the philosophy that has most accurately anticipated the development and conclusions of modern science and thus can provide a relevant guide to living well.

Even with no supernatural, there's still no end to the mystery of life and the universe! For me, understanding the universe as atoms and void only removes the myth making. I can still enjoy the myths as myths, and often learn from them. But I find an enormous sense of wonder and joy in living in a material universe in which I am an emergent property.

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## Post by “Kalosyni” of March 1, 2022 at 1:11 PM

### [Quote from EricR](#)

It is this question that holds me back from buying into EP fully since I see other ideas such as the eastern notion that "all is Mind (consciousness or spirit)" as among those other ways of seeing the structure of reality.

I will quietly and gently ask you to consider:

Will understanding the hidden structure of reality help you live a happy life? Will it help you make good decisions? Will it give you motivation to pursue what is natural and necessary for happiness?

About my own experience -- I found that "eastern notions" of reality caused me to feel like giving up on life (no need to do, just be) and so they didn't work as a path toward happiness, for me.

And yet maybe for you, there is something that does work for you in "eastern notions of reality"...and if for you it leads to a happy and content life, then you should continue on with it



#### [Quote from EricR](#)


So, do Epicureans know there are only atoms and void, or do they believe this.

I think of reality as a "fully material universe" -- just as Don put it. So no heaven, no rebirth, just this very life, with all its simplicity, feeling the body, feeling the breath, and everything continually unfolding in awareness.

Maybe an Epicurean would say "Life is body and mind joyfully dancing toward pleasure, and calmly walking away from pain."

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### **Post by "EricR" of March 1, 2022 at 2:11 PM**

Thanks to all. 

I wasn't wanting to debate or elaborate on the question of atoms/void, or whether it is actually matter/energy quantum fields. That is not what I asked at all. Nor was I saying that an alternative view such as "all is mind" is true or even a better concept.

Here is what I asked: is it accepted within the community that it's an indisputable fact that "there is nothing other than atoms and void", or is it thought to be a belief that may or may not be true or provable?

This is as much an epistemological question as physical.

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### **Post by "Don" of March 1, 2022 at 2:50 PM**

### [Quote from EricR](#)

Here is what I asked: is it accepted within the community that it's an indisputable fact that "there is nothing other than atoms and void", or is it thought to be a belief that may or may not be true or provable?

I would say it is accepted as fact that it is true that we live in a purely material universe. "Atoms and void" is the shorthand for this foundational tenet of the philosophy. From my perspective, it's no more a "belief" than to say that someone has a "belief" in biological evolution or a "belief" in gravity.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of March 1, 2022 at 3:39 PM**

### [Quote from EricR](#)

Is it accepted within the community that it's an indisputable fact that "there is nothing other than atoms and void", or is it thought to be a belief that may or may not be true or provable?

This is as much an epistemological question as physical.

Based on the thread so far (and a short private exchange with Eric) I am pretty sure that a large part of what Eric is asking is the "epistemology" issue - the "certainty" issue.

Was Epicurus teaching a set of facts, or methodology, or combination of the two, by which we should be darn-near "certain" that nothing exists except the "material" realm?

Sometimes we get sidetracked on the question of "the physics has changed" and we start talking about fields and energy and the qualities of "nothingness" and the like, but I think we're now pretty on track that the essential question here is something else:

I don't know if this question will finally set us off on a thorough discussion of Philodemus' "On Signs / On Methods of Inference" (because everyone knows that whenever I have a question I consult Philodemus!) but I am pretty sure that the issues contained there and in [PD22](#) - [PD25](#) are what we need to discuss - with the emphasis being on Philodemus, and the help that is provided by the DeLacy commentary in his translation.

Ultimately one version of the question is: "Do we ever know that we have enough evidence to be "certain" of something? And, if so, "How do we know that we have reached that point?"

This is pretty much the question [where Frances Wright decided to "punt" and take the position that we should take issues like this and classify them as "unanswerable" and/or "not my concern."](#) I will go on record immediately and say that I think she was very wrong to do that. In fact that's my best guess as to why she decided not to spend much effort on Epicurus for the rest of her life, and I think that was a tragic mistake.

So maybe another question that we will answer when we answer Eric is "How do we avoid "the Frances Wright problem?" And that means that part of this debate ought to include a look at [Wright's statements in Chapter 15](#) where she concludes: "Above all, she advances no dogmas, — is slow to assert what is, — and calls nothing impossible." (That "she" in the quote is a reference to "Real Philosophy" personified as "she.")

Can you imagine hearing Epicurus say "I can't say that it's impossible that the universe was created by a supernatural god?" I can't, and in regard to the AFDIA book review these are the issues where we need to point out that Wright was deviating from Epicurus.

Wright will help us make the issue clear, but we won't find the answer there. I think we'll find it in Philodemus, Lucretius, and [Epicurus' letter to Herodotus](#), with a little help from Diogenes Laertius, Diogenes of Oinoanda, and even Sextus Empiricus.

If we could just inspire someone to become the "Epistemologist" of our little garden, and help systematize this issue in the way that Nate has done the PDs or Don has done Menoecus or Joshua has attacked reading Torquatus, we would REALLY accomplish something!

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## **Post by "Matt" of March 1, 2022 at 4:03 PM**

In the last few months I've been flirting with some ideas that come out of Taoist philosophy that seem to work well with my concept of the material universe within EP and also seem to enhance my overall view of reality. Lately I feel that I sense nature's "behavior"...not in a supernatural, providential or pantheistic way, but more in the way nature and the cosmos seem to operate upon fixed processes that are very reliable in their outcomes and that nature has a will of it's own independent from human will. Almost like a "behavior," Nature manifests and unmanifests, creates stars and galaxies and simultaneously destroys them, causes living beings to act according to instinct to sustain life and create more life, while simultaneously killing and destroying other life. These processes exist independently of our speculation and even our existence. In Taoism, the ineffable and apophatic aspects of nature are best understood by living in accord with them or flowing with them, as opposed to necessarily knowing them. So

there is always room for some introspective awe about unknowns in nature, yet since we will live in the universe and are a part of it the best way to know nature is to live in accord with it, and we can take comfort in knowing that life operates upon certain principles that we can come to rely on. Atoms and void, and their behavior, rely upon each other to make the universe the way it is. Being and non-being “create” each other...just like up creates down, hard creates soft etc. they are concepts that we define, but they exist as aggregates in nature.

I started thinking about nature in this way a little while ago when I realized that though I have plans and desires for my life, nature has its own plans that I’m subject to. Nature operates upon certain reliable principles and the real magic is observing them and understanding that everything operates according to its will.

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### Post by “Don” of March 1, 2022 at 4:15 PM

#### [Quote from Matt](#)

*nature has its own plans that I’m subject to. Nature operates upon certain reliable principles and the real magic is observing them and understanding that everything operates according to its will.*

I can deeply appreciate where you're coming from. I too have/had some affinity for that line of thought.

My only caution would be to echo Lucretius (e.g., say Bacchus for wine, etc) and to see that language as purely poetic and not literal.

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### Post by “Cassius” of March 1, 2022 at 4:19 PM

This is Munro's version of the text in Book Two Don is referencing:

[644] All which, well and beautifully as it is set forth and told, is yet widely removed from true reason. For the nature of gods must ever in itself of necessity enjoy immortality together with supreme of repose, far removed and withdrawn from our concerns; since exempt from every pain, exempt from all dangers, strong in its own resources, not wanting aught of us, it is neither gained by favors nor moved by anger. And here if any one thinks proper to call the sea Neptune and corn Ceres and chooses rather to misuse the name of Bacchus than to utter the term that

belongs to that liquor, let us allow him to declare that the earth is mother of the gods, if he only forbear in earnest to stain his mind with foul religion. The earth however is at all times without feeling, and because it receives into it the first- beginnings of many things, it brings them forth in many ways into the light of the sun.

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### **Post by “Matt” of March 1, 2022 at 4:34 PM**

And I’m using this language poetically. The reason I see nature this way is because, though I operate seeking a pleasurable life, which is the goal of EP, I can see that the universe doesn’t explicitly care that “Matt” the individual is saturated in pleasure (though I may deeply care), nature has created avenues for me to experience pleasure as the goal. If I go swimming in the ocean seeking pleasure, and I am devoured by a rogue great white shark operating on the same hunger satisfying hedonic principle that drives me to head to my local steakhouse for a sumptuous dinner, nature didn’t play favorites. We are equals, the shark and I. This time the shark’s instinctual pleasure seeking won out. The difference is for me to know how nature works and not attempt to find pleasure in shark infested waters where I’m the the sumptuous meal.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of March 1, 2022 at 4:58 PM**

Well I took the time to look at Sedley's article "On Signs" but it is of only limited use. He doesn't attempt to start from scratch and explain the basic issues in laymen's terms. We're generally talk about issues of how and why and when it is permissible to draw conclusions about that which cannot be observed from that which can be observed. DeLacey's book has a long set of commentaries (at the end of the book) that are much more clear about the basic issues. But Sedley is probably more up-to-date, and here are a couple of clips from Sedley that may be a little helpful:

12.14–31). The similarity between the two subjects is so strong that it becomes ‘inconceivable’ that an essential predicate of one should fail to belong to the other. This kind of inconceivability may lack strict logical force, but it is regarded as an entirely cogent criterion of inference,<sup>46</sup> and the best available (12.32–6; 33.1–9). Sometimes it establishes direct resemblances: to take a mathematical example, it is inconceivable that while the square of four in our world has an area equal to its perimeter its counterparts in other worlds should not (15.28–16.1). Sometimes the inference is analogical: it is inconceivable that while all phenomenal bodies have weight atoms should not (37.12–24).<sup>47</sup>

The favoured example of a sign-inference based solely on the similarity method is ‘Since men within our experience are mortal, men outside our experience are mortal’, and it is instructive to follow its role in the debate. First of all, it illustrates the Epicureans’ grounds for defending the cogency of their method. The premiss that men within our experience are mortal embodies, they point out, extensive research and weighing up of evidence. Both historical records and current experience support it without

46. Strictly speaking, this inconceivability is the proper counterpart of ‘elimination’ in the elimination method, each functioning as the criterion of validity for its class of sign-inference; while ‘similarity’ matches Chrysippian *sunartēsis*, each of them describing the nature of the connexion between antecedent and consequent. Nevertheless, the ‘elimination method’ and the ‘similarity method’ of sign-inference are properly co-ordinate with each other, the apparent asymmetry resulting merely from the different shorthands used in naming them. ‘Inconceivability method’ would have restored symmetry but been too uninformative a title for the Epicureans to adopt.
47. This passage presumably gave one example of simple resemblance, one of analogy. The first is lost in the lacuna. The second is fragmentary, and it may be safer to discount the De Lacys’ ingenious restorations in 19–20 and to take the preserved words at their perfectly satisfactory face value (cf. Philippson, *Diss.*, 39).

that science could work purely by deduction from necessary truths the Stoics were failing to attach sufficient weight to the inductive element in the human learning process to which their epistemology paid lip service (*SVF* II 83; Cicero, *Ac.* II 21, 30). And one can see the point of their refusal to bow to Stoic pressure by reformulating the mortality argument into a deductively valid one: either way it rested primarily on the inductive similarity method, and nothing was gained by adopting a formulation which disguised this fact.

This leads us on to the central problem: why, in spite of all, do the Epicureans concede that some sign-inferences, including that of void from motion, do rely on the elimination method (12.1–14; 14.11–14; 35.29–36.7)? Jürgen Mau, following a suggestion by Bahnsch, interestingly argues that the object was to tease the Stoics by making the repugnant inference from motion to void look logically valid even on their own criterion.<sup>52</sup> And the De

letter before εἰν appears to be δ or λ. In Epicurean usage συμβεβηκός is just 'property', with 'permanent property', or 'permanent concomitant', and σύμπτωμα, 'accident', as its two species (Demetrius Lacon ap. S.E. *M* x 219ff.; thus also Epicurus, *Ep.Hdt.* 68–71, contrary to the usual interpretation); that the latter species is intended at 34.11ff. can be inferred from the contrast with 33.35–34.5, and was presumably made clear by the καθ' ὃν τῶ[δ]πον clause qualifying it: 'that this is a property of that in the way in which . . .'

50. The De Lacys' punctuation may mislead: ὄν in 34.25 is resumptive after the long genitive absolute (Denniston, *op. cit.* (n. 25), 428–9), introducing the main clause. In 27–9 I would translate: 'We make sign-inferences according to each of them [viz. the meanings of 'insofar as'], whichever reason dictates' (see LSJ, *s.v.* αἰρέω A II 5).

51. λαμβάνομεν (34.33–4) = 'ascertain' (cf. 35.6), not 'understand'.

52. 'Über die Zuweisung zweier Epikur-Fragmente', *Philologus* 99 (1955), 93–111.

important to the twin principles of epimachism and *oikeiōtē* *turēsis*. I choose the almost literal translations 'attestation' and 'non-contestation', which provide the convenient cognate verbs 'attested' and 'uncontested'. (The verb 'contest' must be thought of here in the sense 'bring evidence against'.) Our only full account of these methods is provided by Sextus Empiricus at *M* VII 211–16 in the course of his historical survey of theories concerning the criterion of truth. It follows a very full and lucid summary of Epicurus' doctrine that all sensations are true (203–10).

I shall begin with some speculation about the historical credentials of this account, based on a close look at 213–14, which reads as follows:

Non-contestation is the following (*akolouthia*) from that which is apparent of the non-apparent thing posited and believed. For example, Epicurus, in saying that there is void, which is non-apparent, confirms this through the self-evident fact of motion. For if void does not exist there ought not to be motion either, since the moving body would lack a place to pass into as a result of everything's being full and solid. Therefore the non-apparent thing believed is uncontested by that which is apparent, since there is motion. Contestation, on the other hand, is something which conflicts with non-contestation. For it is the elimination (*anaskeuē*) of that which is apparent by the positing of the non-apparent thing. For example, the Stoic says that void does not exist,

57. This seems to be the gist of the difficult 31.1–8: there are three species of 'antecedent' sign (cf. 32.11–12), that is, in addition to 'similar' signs, also 'dissimilar' signs (presumably as in most inferences by the elimination method, e.g. motion as a sign of void) and even 'opposite' signs (e.g. going up as a sign of imminent coming down, or night of day?); but if these latter two 'are to be demonstrative of anything, they must necessarily receive the addition of signs which proceed [retaining *πορευομένων* at 31.5–6] on the principle of similarity'. If that is the correct interpretation, the Epicureans apparently deny that an inference by the elimination method is in itself a sign-inference, yet allow that its premiss may be a sign: a delicate position, which the Stoics are said not properly to appreciate (32.8–13). The point, I imagine, is that although the sign-inference which leads us from motion to void is incomplete without its similarity method stage, so that the elimination method stage does not on its own qualify as a sign-inference, nevertheless, *within* the two-stage inference it is motion that operates as the sign of void; and motion is a 'dissimilar' sign operating by the elimination method.

*Letter to Pythocles* that a good many of the alternative explanations listed are those propounded by Presocratic philosophers, for whom Epicurus had considerable respect.<sup>71</sup> Epicurus recognises that nearly all the theories under consideration have sufficient explanatory force, and knows no way of choosing between these except by testing them for consistency with more familiar phenomena. Unfortunately most pass that test too, and all of those must therefore be accepted as true, if not in our world then at any rate in some part of the universe, whose infinity guarantees that all possibilities are realised (Lucretius v 526–33).<sup>72</sup> If, then, the multiple-explanation principle is an answer to the problem of choosing between existing cosmological doctrines of equal explanatory power, it may well be that a similar motivation lies behind the claim that for the basic laws of physics only one theory is consistent with phenomena. For Epicurus did not regard his own system as definitively established until he had shown rival physical theories to fail the test of consistency with phenomena. Books XIV and XV of his work *On Nature* were probably devoted to this enterprise,<sup>73</sup> and are represented for us in Lucretius by the refutations of Heraclitus, Empedocles and Anaxagoras (l 635–920).<sup>74</sup> Thus Epicurus' methodology arises from something re-

...sounding the celebrated sceptical *anaptonia* argument. Many philosophers have equally satisfactory explanations of the phenomenal world, but since they cannot all be true why accept any of them? Epicurus' answer is twofold. Sometimes there is indeed no way of choosing between them, but in that case we are not compelled to take the self-destructive step of disbelieving them all. Instead, thanks to the infinity of the universe, we can believe them all.<sup>75</sup> Sometimes, on the other hand, there is ground for choosing between them, for despite their equal explanatory power there may only be one of them which is consistent with the entire range of phenomena.

What emerges, then, is the very close dependence of Epicurus' 'non-contestation' and 'contestation' on the problems which faced him as a cosmological theorist establishing his own system. He can be congratulated on his insight that scientific theories lend themselves to falsification more readily than to verification, and it is a pity to resort to an interpretation which robs him of it. A wide gulf lies between his methodology and Antiochus' interpretation of it. Antiochus clearly started with some general information about Epicurus' terminology and usage, and, in characteristically unhistorical fashion, delved into contemporary Epicurean tracts for further elucidation. Not finding there the crucial term 'non-contestation', he mistakenly identified it with the current Epicurean preoccupation *sēmeiōsis*, of which he had achieved a rather superficial understanding. He thus confused a method of confirmation with a method of discovery. If he had read more carefully, he would have found his Epicurean contemporaries perfectly well aware of the purely confirmatory role of non-contestation:

They are also mistaken not to see that we ascertain that there is no obstacle resulting from appearances. For it is not enough to accept the minimal swerves of atoms on the grounds of chance and free will, but it

I think we can find a link where people can read the full article if they are interested. Email me if so. But I think that [the DeLacey commentary](#) is really the place to start, and probably a lot

less discouraging that starting with Sedley's article.

Again, the real challenge is bringing all this down to earth and explaining it in layman's terms, and that work has not yet been done and is calling out to us to do it! 😊

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## Post by “EricR” of March 1, 2022 at 5:30 PM

Fascinating conversation! Thanks, folks.

It reminds me how much discomfort many of us experience with uncertainty. Also, each of you has a personal take on this question which is at it must be. I don't think I can respond to each of your specific comments except to say I appreciate them all. Lots for me to consider and add to the mix. I am far from adamant in my views.

[Cassius](#) I will do my best to read through all the material in your response. Please have patience with an old brain like mine that reads slower than it used to. 😊

[Matt](#) I love your references to Taoism. I've been involved in that tradition for a loooooong time so I know where you're coming from. (I taught a Taoist martial and health art (Baguazhang) for 20 years.)

With regard to atoms and void, I actually have a response for my own question. It goes like this: We DO know that there are particles and space in which they move. This has been validated repeatedly in particle physics. We DO NOT know if there is something transcendent beyond, behind, above, etc.

The example I offered of the eastern assertion that "all is mind, consciousness, spirit" is just that, an assertion. One can choose to believe it which is where it slides into religion. To my thinking, it is a possibility, but here's the salient point...it doesn't matter!

Whether or not there is something other than atoms/void changes nothing about the facts of living that we each face every day. We must meet our needs for food, shelter, etc. no matter what one does or does not believe. Gravity functions the same way for a Christian, Buddhist, or Epicurean. They all fall down, not up. To me, the Epicurean focus on pleasure resonates with me no matter what the actual truth of the universe is.

I fully accept that there may well be only atoms and void. But I try to remain humble enough to know that I don't actually know with certainty if that is the case. The assertion that there is no other possibility seems exactly the same mistake made in religions - mistaking an asserted belief for knowledge. Of course, I may be wrong! 😊

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## Post by “Don” of March 1, 2022 at 5:30 PM

### [Quote from Matt](#)

We are equals, the shark and I.

In an absolute/objective perspective, no question. Totally agree.

From my relative/subjective perspective, I am much more important than the shark.

I am in awe of the universe and its complexity and my miniscule existence in it, and I can take pleasure in that contemplation.

In my choices and rejections, I operate as if I have importance... Because I do... to me.

In \*some\* ways, it echoes the Buddhist Two Truths as to absolute and relative existence.

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## Post by “EricR” of March 1, 2022 at 5:37 PM

### [Quote from Don](#)

I am in awe of the universe and its complexity and my miniscule existence in it, and I can take pleasure in that contemplation.

Couldn't agree more, [Don](#). I was once visiting a mountain range and was sitting on a rock ledge. It suddenly dawned on me that if this was the moment in geological time that this particular rock ledge gave way, I would be swallowed up. Talk about feeling tiny! I started to actually shake. So I quietly got up, thanked the ledge for not killing me and went home for a glass of wine. (ok, 2 glasses) 😊

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## Post by “EricR” of March 1, 2022 at 6:01 PM

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Maybe an Epicurean would say "Life is body and mind joyfully dancing toward pleasure, and calmly walking away from pain."

This is absolutely lovely [Kalosyni](#) Poetic and descriptive. Thanks for that. 🥰

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## Post by “Cassius” of March 1, 2022 at 6:37 PM

### [Quote from EricR](#)

It reminds me how much discomfort many of us experience with uncertainty.

And I think that's an important part of why Epicurus thought that it is important to track these issues down to a conclusion, and not leave them hanging, as did Frances Wright. At risk of offense when I make that observation I would not be surprised if some would say that if you were to "take a poll" on whether these issues are super-important (Epicurus) or can be put to the side (Wright), the answers to this question might be found to correlate to some degree by male / female. At any rate, regardless of sex, some people are more concerned about them than others, and it's interesting to think about why that divide exists. It might also be influenced by childhood indoctrination into religion. Why did Epicurus find it necessary to pursue his whole life the answer to the "Chaos" problem, while Frances Wright put it entirely aside.

This really deserves a long and detailed treatment, at least as much time as we would devote to a "personal outline." But I haven't done one and can only offer some random thoughts:

1 - I think we can trace the Epicurean viewpoint on this best by looking at Lucretius' argument for atoms and void and the other basic questions in Book One of his poem. He's using deductive reasoning to turn observations of things which can be observed into opinions about things which cannot be observed. And in regard to these "close-at-hand" issues, he does not resort to multiple explanations - he reaches conclusions which are to all intents and purposes "certain," especially when you look at them from a high-level view. Some of the terminology and observations might need revision today, but I think essentially the same reasoning applies today to exclude to a reasonable certainty the existence of supernatural universe-creating forces.

2 - Then there's the logical component of deciding what "reasonable certainty" really means. Do we have to conclude that because we are not omniscient we therefore can never be certain of anything? To me that's one way of stating the ultimate question, and I can't answer that in

any way but to say that we DO have the means to determine with reasonable certainty those things that are most important to us, like the existence of the supernatural and absence of life after death. The evidence in support of those positions I find to be compelling, and the arguments against it I find to be totally speculative. And how do we stack up and weigh "speculation without evidence and against tons of evidence" in the balance? We don't give much if any significance in our day-to-day decisions, and it seems to me we should give it less significance the more important the question.

3 - If someone wants to argue that we need "faith" or "trust" I would say Yes, I agree to an extent, but trust in what? There is lots of evidence that Nature has given us our senses, and basic reasoning to use them, but no real evidence of supernatural revelations exist other than hearsay from people who in my humble opinion have shown them selves to be supremely untrustworthy and even deceptive. So if I have to "trust" someone or something I find it much easier to "Trust Nature" and play the cards we are dealt as she gave them to us.

I could go on and on and on but will stop there for now. I do think that we all have to tackle these issues and be able to articulate our positions on them, or we've entirely missed an whole 1/3 of Epicurean philosophy. I think these can be done in a LOT simpler way than to play the elaborate word games of the Stoics and others, and I think it's important that we work to reconstruct and explain Epicurus' arguments on these issues by (1) starting where he started and reasoning based on his patterns, and (2) exploring the surviving texts. Based on that two-pronged approach I think we can reconstruct his viewpoint pretty accurately.

Even as it is today, I personally find it pretty compelling.

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### **Post by “Don” of March 1, 2022 at 7:08 PM**

"The sage will declare a definite position and not remain in doubt or be puzzled."

[Epicurean Sage - Declare their beliefs and not remain in doubt](#)

Hicks: He will be a dogmatist but not a mere sceptic; Yonge: he will pronounce dogmas, and will express no doubts; Mensch: He will assert his opinions and will...

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of March 1, 2022 at 8:08 PM**

Coincidentally, I just read this very short story by Lucian which deals with this issue:

[Swans and Amber | Electrum \[The Lucian of Samosata Project\]](#)

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### **Post by “Cassius” of March 2, 2022 at 5:46 AM**

Thank you Godfrey!

Some years ago I went through Lucian's works and pulled out the ones that dealt with Epicurus specifically, like Alexander the Oracle Monger, which are very good.

But I never spent much time with the rest, and this one is an example that there is a lot of good material there that we need to harvest.

For example: How many of us have read Lucian's "[The Porch vs. Pleasure](#)"?

Now that we are much further along than I was when I produced my Lucian collection in epub, we are much better equipped to tackle the collection again and add them to our discussions.

Link to my epub: [Epub Version of Lucian's Dialogues That Focus on Epicurus](#)

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### **Post by “Don” of March 2, 2022 at 5:51 PM**

A nice YouTube summary of Lucian's A True Story.

<https://youtu.be/UBpDdlirzH0>

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### **Post by “Marco” of March 11, 2022 at 12:49 AM**

The best way that I find to understand the teachings of Epicurus is to try to live them.

And then evaluate the effects in terms of enjoying your life.

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## **Post by “SimonC” of March 11, 2022 at 5:03 AM**

That is very well put. A similar idea as disproving the Eleatics by walking across a room.

As to the original question I think it boils down to the belief that the universe is fundamentally observable. I think this is essentially a dogma, but it is also unclear what someone who argues the opposite would be basing their assertions on if not the same senses.

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## **Post by “Kalosyni” of March 11, 2022 at 11:21 AM**

### [Quote from SimonC](#)

As to the original question I think it boils down to the belief that the universe is fundamentally observable

And with this there is also a similar parallel to the belief in "free will", since they are both complex ideas that can't fall into an "all or nothing" conception. To insist that we have absolute free will would be incorrect, just as insisting that the universe is absolutely fundamentally observable.

The human mind has some "hiccups" when it comes to observing things, as can be seen in [optical illusions](#).

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## **Post by “Cassius” of March 11, 2022 at 8:04 PM**

I would add to Kalosyni's comment that in addition to what Simon said, as to "the universe is observable" comment, that part of what Simon is talking about is an understanding of "epistemology" - having a clear idea of what kind of evidence, and what amount of evidence, is sufficient for confidence in a conclusion. So yes I think Simon is correct and part of what we have to communicate is Epicurus' view of what is reasonable to expect in terms of evidence and how to process it.

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## **Post by “DavidN” of July 20, 2022 at 3:24 AM**

So were talking about the Criterion of Truth, and what amount and class of evidence beyond our own experience should be required to form such an opinion?

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**Post by “Godfrey” of July 20, 2022 at 2:23 PM**

Also about how to reason from the observable to the non-observable.

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**Post by “Pacatus” of July 20, 2022 at 4:43 PM**

[Godfrey](#)

Logical inductive inference from the observable? With willingness to correct if the observables change?

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**Post by “Joshua” of July 20, 2022 at 6:27 PM**

Quote

So we're talking about the Criterion of Truth, and what amount and class of evidence beyond our own experience should be required to form such an opinion?

This must necessarily vary with the nature of the claim being made, or the hypothesis being proposed.

There's an interesting thought experiment in one of Patrick Rothfuss's books, which I will attempt to badly paraphrase from distance and memory:

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"Imagine a wild forest with three villages clinging to its edges. You travel to the first village, and the residents warn you not to go into those woods, for the place is haunted by demons and no one comes back alive.

In the second village, you are again advised to keep a wide berth from the trees, for the forest is home to a powerful witch. All who go there fall under her spell, and are never seen again.

At the third village they tell stories of men who were killed by werewolves in the night, and talk of the howling shrieks by moonlight that pierce the verdant gloom as darkness settles over the hamlet.

Which of these is true? Neither of them? Neither, of course. But here's the real question:

Would *you* go into those woods? Perhaps the witch and the demons are simply bandits or thieves, whose first and best weapon is fear? The howling beasts merely wolves, yet no less deadly for that? Maybe the forest is every bit as dangerous as they all say, though they all say it wrongly."

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The point, I think, is that mundane claims require no great amount of evidence, but fantastical claims demand a great deal more--a demand they seldom satisfy.

I'd like to see someone draw a map of terra incognita and write, "I don't know what's here, but I'll warrant it isn't dragons."

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### **Post by "DavidN" of July 20, 2022 at 8:09 PM**

[Godfrey](#) In the realm of physics I'd argue that modern instruments extend our range of observations into realms previously unobservable.

[Pacatus](#) And our willingness to change our standing beliefs as observations change I believe is part of the criterion of truth. It's one of the things I most like about Epicureanism, the anti-dogmatism of it.