

# **Episode 163 - "Epicurus And His Philosophy" Part 17 - Chapter 8 - Sensations, Anticipations, And Feelings 04**

**Post by "Cassius" of February 21, 2023 at 3:49 PM**

Welcome to Episode 163 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world. Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

We're now in the process of a series of podcasts intended to provide a general overview of Epicurean philosophy based on the organizational structure employed by Norman DeWitt in his book "Epicurus and His Philosophy."

Sensations

Epicurus Not An Empiricist

Anticipations

The Account of Laertius

The Element of Anticipation

Evidences From Specific Context

Later Evidences

Feelings

This week we continue in Chapter 8 with "Anticipations."

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/52872279>

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**Post by "Cassius" of February 21, 2023 at 3:51 PM**

Thanks to Don for this very helpful article: Epicurean Prolepsis by David Glidden.

### [Epicurean Prolepsis](#)

The paper I presented at the SAGP session was NOT the same as my much longer paper that was subsequently published in Oxford Studies, where I had by then...

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I am reading that article now and it shoots at a lot of what seems generally accepted about anticipations. I read Glidden to agree with DeWitt in being very critical of Diogenes Laertius, but he is also critical of Cicero, on the grounds that both of them have too much Stoic influence. I like what I am reading so far.

For example:

#### Quote

Consequently I see no foundation for the most common interpretation, that Epicurean prolepsis is some kind of conceptual device. The most popular version of this thesis has been that prolepseis are the meanings of individual words, as they might also have been for the Stoics, individual concepts which when strung together in the appropriate way would provide meaning to sentences, constituting lekta. Now I have argued against this interpretation in "Epicurean Semantics," where I pointed out that we should take the evidence of Plutarch and Sextus seriously, that there is nothing in Epicureanism comparable to what the Stoics claimed was the significance ( *t\_o semainomenon* ) of voiced sounds. The Epicureans made do with just voiced sounds, or utterances, and the events happening in the world which those utterances referred to. Attention to everything which the Epicureans say about the origin and character of language suggests that utterances label states of the world, or else they are vacuous sounds. The prolepseis, then, are not vehicles of meaning, but conveyances of evidence making claims on the world, not making sense of our vocabulary.

Some would maintain that nevertheless prolepseis are mental representations, though what they represent are complex ideas about the world. This too seems unlikely. The authority of perception and the authority of our feelings would be called into question, with disastrous consequences for Epicurean empiricism, were it the case that what it is we see or how it is we feel were somehow dependent upon our own subjective perspective and viewpoint. The Epicureans were adamant on the mechanical, automatic character of perception and feeling, which somehow guaranteed the information we received from our senses was information about the state of the world, as opposed to our state of mind. The purely referential character of what it is we perceive and the pleasure and pain we feel is what guarantees the epistemic authority of aisthesis and pathē.

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## Post by “Cassius” of February 21, 2023 at 4:05 PM

This is particularly good too:

### Quote

From the examples we do have in Epicurus it seems that prolepsis is concerned with the character of a thing or a state of affairs — what it is to be just, as opposed to what the instantiations of justice are, what the character of the gods is, as opposed to who the gods are. Given Epicurean epistemic realism, these claims on the character of some thing or state must be seen as claims on the world, so that prolepsis, like aisthesis for a realist, is ambiguous between the psychological act of apprehension and the content discerned, some feature of the world. In the case of prolepsis what is discerned should be some abiding character in things, as opposed to some temporary appearance. Not surprisingly. Epicurean atomism suggests the need for these two different kinds of information. Since all that exists are simply atoms moving in the void, on any occasion what one perceives is, as it were, a time slice of a continuous process ----so the apple looks green now. It is also the case that certain atomic configurations are relatively abiding in any particular cosmos. And so in our world water has a particular atomic arrangement and iron another. Information about the one, the state of current appearances, is not the same as information about the other, the relatively abiding state of nature.

The history of Plato's Forms and Aristotle's natural kinds should have made Epicurus more sensitive to this issue than Democritus would have been, and in any case this sensitivity to the abiding structures in nature is certainly obvious from the *De Rerum Natura*. There is clearly a need for information about these abiding structures in natural philosophy and this need can be satisfied in part by Epicurean inference and confirmation.

But it also appears that we can recognize the abiding character in perceived things and states. We recognize justice to be what serves social interest, the gods to be blessed and immortal. Such recognitions are part of the evidence, not part of our inferences. And prolepsis, it seems, constitutes such recognitions.

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## Post by “Cassius” of February 21, 2023 at 4:13 PM

Last night in our zoom session Godfrey reminded us that there is discussion of the issue of anticipations in the book recently released by the Athens Greece Epicurean group. We need to link here the discussion we have had previously.

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## Post by “Cassius” of February 21, 2023 at 4:24 PM

It looks like the full article that Glidden wrote later is:

Glidden, D. (1985), ‘Epicurean Prolepsis’, Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy

Until I can track that down I just want to again indicate my appreciation to Don because the article he found has already converted my views on this subject to Glidden's camp, which I had never read before today. It might be a good way to summarize it to say that Dewitt was right in not trusting Diogenes Laertius but he should not have trusted Cicero either! Whenever I see someone pursue the argument that our understanding of Epicurus has been altered by Stoicizing it I tend to find that path very helpful.

This is the one we need 1985 Volume III:



Jump to:	Volume III, 1985
2005–now	Order this volume for delivery to: <a href="#">America</a> <a href="#">Europe/Africa/Asia/Australasia</a>
2021–2025	SEHAMAN, ALEXANDER, “Men’s Paradox and Socrates as a Teacher”, 1–30
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1991–1995	FINE, GAIL, “Separation: A Reply to Morrison”, 159–65
1986–1990	MORRISON, DONALD, “Separation: A Reply to Fine”, 167–73
1985–1985	GLIDDEN, DAVID K., “Epicurean prolepsis”, 175–217
Supplements	MIGNUCCI, MARIO, “Logic and Omniscience: Alexander of Aphrodisias and Proclus”, 219–46
	POLANSKY, RONALD M., “Professor Vlastos’s Analysis of Socratic Elenchos”, 247–59
	KARN, CHARLES, “The Beautiful and the Genuine: A Discussion of Paul Woodruff, Plato, Hippias Major”, 261–87
	WHITE, NICHOLAS, “Nature and Regularity in Stoic Ethics: A Discussion of Anna Maria Ippolito, Aristotle di Chio e lo Stoicismo Antico”, 289–305
	LENNIX, JAMES G., “Demarcating Ancient Science: A Discussion of G. E. R. Lloyd, Science, Folklore and Ideology: the Life Sciences in Ancient Greece”, 307–24

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## Post by “Cassius” of February 21, 2023 at 8:01 PM

Added to the file archive here are:

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2918-episode-163-epicurus-and-his-philosophy-part-17-chapter-8-sensations-anticipatio/>



- IF prolepsis are part of Canonic (criteria of truth), they have to be pre-rational, a faculty that isn't involved in concept-formation.
- Therefore, a prolepsis is NOT like a stored word in linguistics. The word does not come first.
- I believe I got this from Glidden but it made immediate sense. I hope I'm interpreting his paper correctly:
  - Aisthesis - sensation simply registers incoming stimuli
  - Pathos - pleasure and pain - register an emotional, pre-rational reaction to stimuli
  - Prolepsis - recognizes patterns - especially recurring patterns - from the sensations. It is those recurring patterns that cognition and reason work on to assign names to.
- The prolepsis recognize recurring patterns. The sensations - aisthesis - cannot assemble forms or recognize patterns. I'm making the analogy of pixels. The sensations will determine what color an individual pixel is. The sensations cannot recognize a pattern of pixels. The prolepsis does assemble collections of pixels into patterns. These patterns are recognized repeatedly. When the patterns re-occur over time, reason and cognition take over and assign a name in a particular language to that pattern. As that pattern gets recognized repeatedly by the prolepsis - the non-rational - it reinforces what name has been given to that pattern, thus reinforcing that pattern.
  - That said, the prolepsis works in babies, too, before language. They can begin to recognize patterns and discern the form of something - they can recognize animals and so on. They may call all four-legged animals a "doggy" for awhile, but over time their faculty of prolepsis discerns finer and finer patterns from the pixels registered by their sensations.
  - And by pixels, I mean discrete units involved in the sensations. Pixels is probably the closest analogy to sight. But smells would be the individual units of molecules or smells. If we recognize a particular pattern in a smell over time we can begin to recognize this as distinct then we will eventually assign "cinnamon" or "skunk!" to a pattern of a smell. Same way with sound waves sensed by our ears. The sensation of touch leading to a pattern we finally recognize as "soft" "fluffy" "scratchy" even before we can assign a name to it.
- The prolepsis can also recognize patterns of behavior, as in a prolepsis of "justice." I maintain this is the innate sense of fairness that is tested in babies and toddlers. They recognize a pattern of behavior - equity in the number of cookies, etc. - and what we would call a prolepsis of "justice/fairness" is recognized. Note that the babies are NOT assigning words yet, they can't. They don't have the capacity for language. But the pattern is recognized, will be reinforced, and will eventually be given a name/word by the language of the baby's parents and culture.
- I'm still working on the prolepsis of the gods - of divinity - BUT I think it has something to do with the innate ability to recognize awe and wonder - to be in awe, to be amazed, to be transfixed in wonder.

I'm certainly not saying I have this all figured out. FAR from it. This is where my head is at right now... but I could change my mind before Sunday, too!

CASSIUS:

That appears to me to be very close to what I am reading from Glidden and it is also not far from Dewitts position. I think it differs significantly from Sedley and I am confident it differs totally from Bailey. I can't recall where Tsouna comes down other than that I seem to recall she favors Laertius over Velleius.

So I think I agree with all your bullet points. We just need to be careful to point out that:

- this conclusion is Not easy to reach based on a simple reading of Laertius alone.
- ultimately too this gets wrapped up in whether an anticipation of gods is inscribed in all men at birth (Velleius) or whether it only occurs after receiving mental "images" after birth .

And we also need to stick with our pattern of following chapter 8 by using the book as the discussion guide, but that should be easy because Dewitt conducts the analysis the same way most everyone does.

CASSIUS:

"IF prolepseis are part of Canonic (criteria of truth), they have to be pre-rational, a faculty that isn't involved in concept-formation."

And yes that strikes me too as a very critical part - and it is an important part of Dewitts position too. Dewitt gets loose and occasionally uses the word idea but the essence of his position is that it is prerational. I think we are likely to agree that a fully formed "idea" is never equivalent to "anticipation.". Ideas require formation in the mind after observation and thought (they don't come from a Platonic world) and anticipations must be something that go in at the start of the process before an idea is formed. It's a pre-idea, not an idea. It can't be a description of the process of taking an idea and matching it against new observations, which is what Laertius describes.

That is one reason I would really like to see Glidden's full article to see whether he specifically agrees with all or part of Dewitt - the short article does not mention sources.

No matter what else we stress about anticipations, this point of what it means to be canonic seems to me to be absolutely fundamental and something we are safe taking a position on.

And I don't think that Tsouna or maybe even Sedley honor it - they dont seem to be as bothered by the feedback loop that would be created as Glidden is and I think we are.

But I am not by any means on top of all the articles and that is the main reason I think there is lots we have to hedge on.

One more thing I would like to see us mention - I don't know where it is but I see reference to Epicurus saying that names are more precise than definitions - that it is better to say "there is Socrates" than to say "there is famous philosophy man and teacher of Plato etc etc etc."

That seems to me to be helpful in showing that Epicurus warned away from definition-obsession and that seems related to how real life isn't a process of constant definition-mongering.

I can see the possibility that Epicurus was saying that in real life we test the truth of opinions by comparing them first against patterns recognized / assembled pre-rationally, rather than by a syllogistic reasoning process of converting everything into words and constantly comparing things against definitions.

Thus the mind would have principles of operation that control how it processes patterns just like the eyes have principles of operation that control how it processes light. The eyes don't tell us what we are seeing and neither do anticipations give us fully formed ideas. Both are inputs and not conclusory opinions.

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## **Post by “Joshua” of February 26, 2023 at 11:28 AM**

Show Notes:

Imperial Units of Measurement at Trafalgar Square

[Imperial Units of Length Melt as Parliament Burns \(Science in Trafalgar Square, London\)](#)

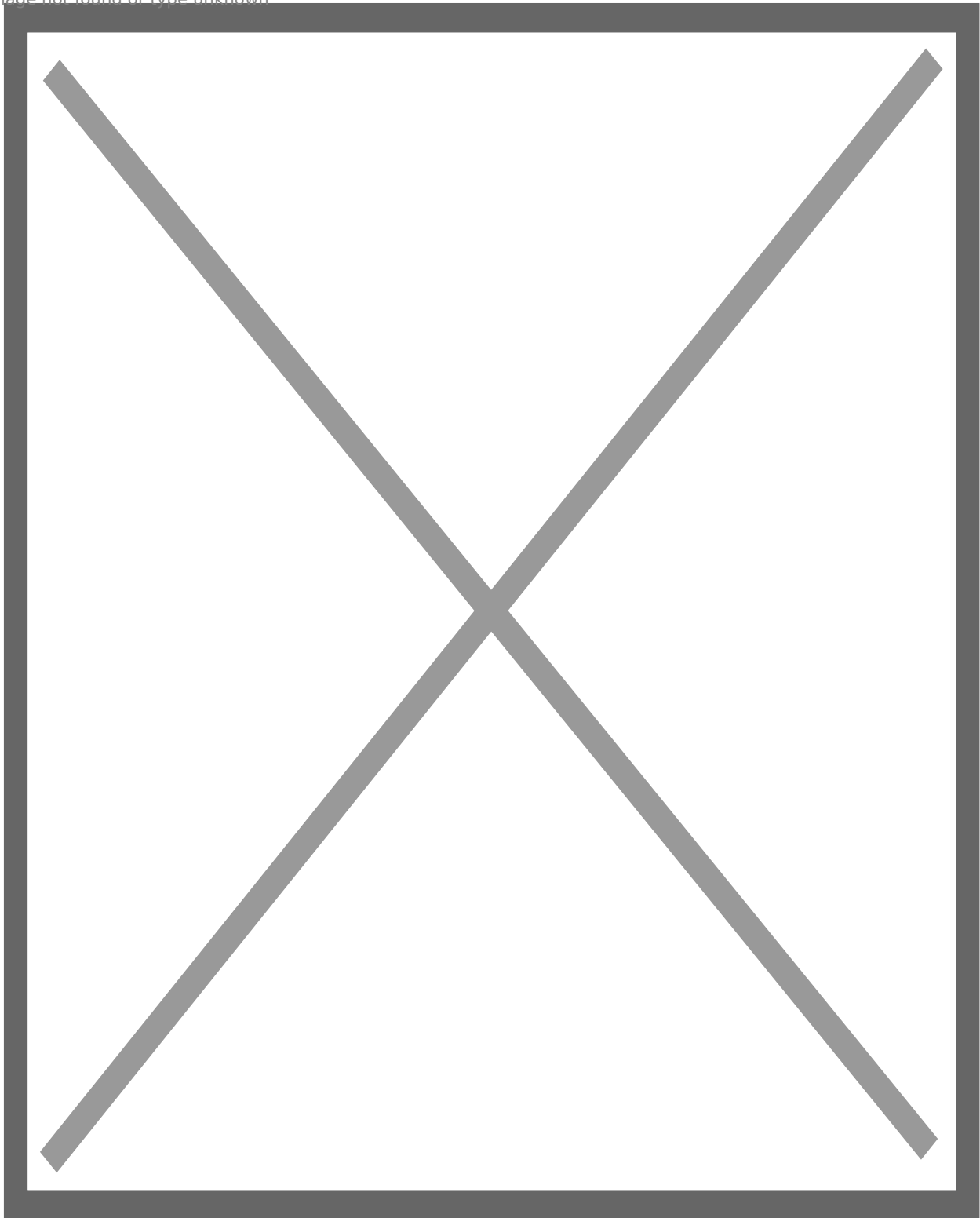
There is a plaque on the south side of Trafalgar Square, just behind the statue of Charles I, that is the reference point from which all distances from London...

[www.science20.com](http://www.science20.com)

Research on the "newly-sighted"

Seeing a flat plane of indiscriminate shape and color:

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[At First Sight: Gaining Sight as an Adult](#)

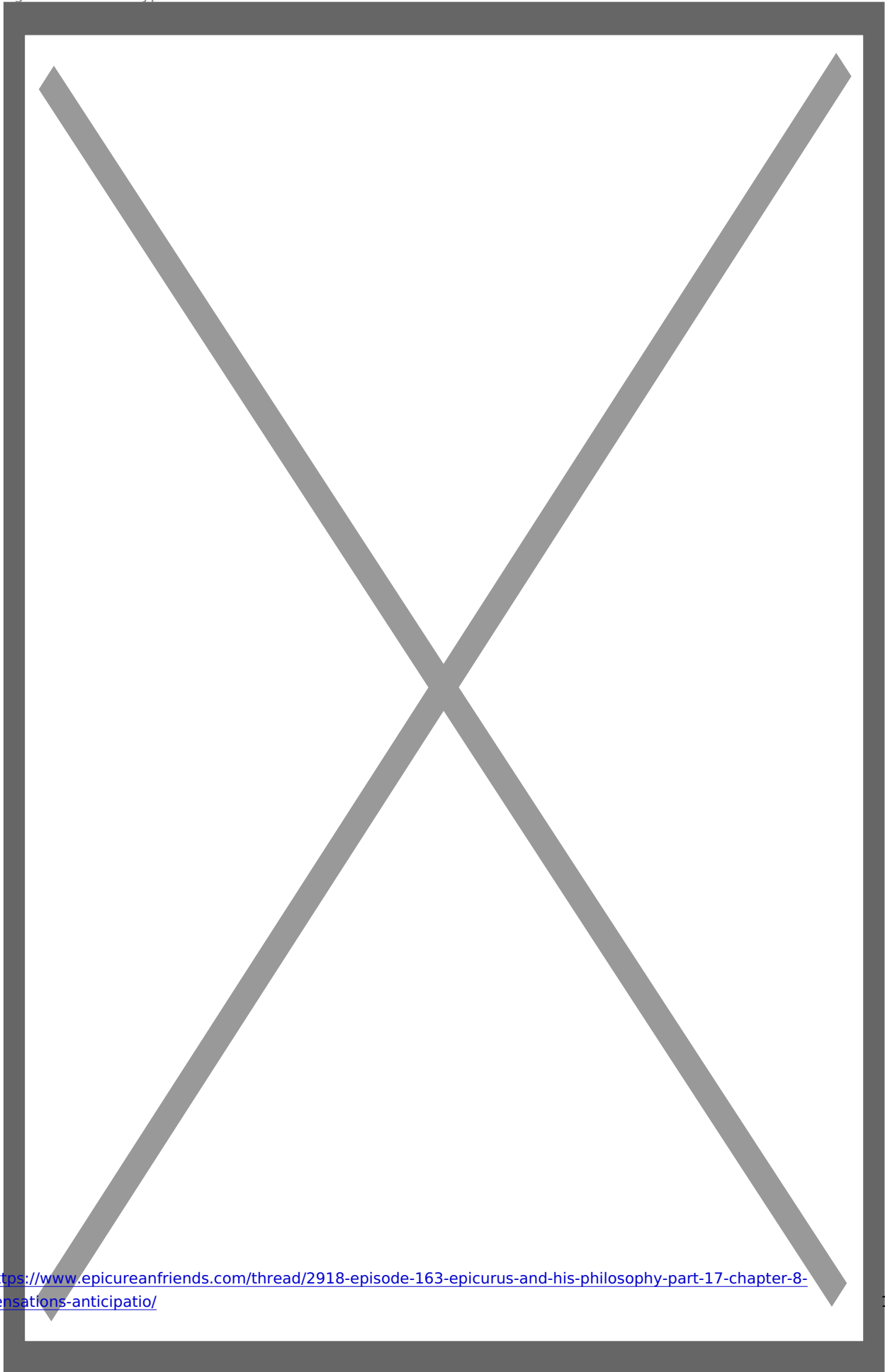
It's harder than you think.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2918-episode-163-epicurus-and-his-philosophy-part-17-chapter-8-sensations-anticipatio/>

www.psychologytoday.com

Recognizing human locomotion:

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[After a lifetime of blindness, newly sighted can immediately identify human locomotion](#)

Researchers find blind patients who had very limited visual exposure to human bodily movement could immediately recognize human locomotion after the removal of...  
news.mit.edu

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**Post by “Cassius” of February 27, 2023 at 8:04 PM**

I hope to have this episode released either later tonight or certainly tomorrow. I think our listeners are really going to enjoy this one and its detailed discussion of anticipations.

As you listen, please think about these questions:

1 - Is a prolepsis/anticipation/preconception something that can be considered "True" or "false"?

2 - As to the statements apparently made by Epicurus as to the gods being blessed and incorruptible - are those statements themselves prolepses/anticipations/preconceptions? Are those statements of opinions which are believed to be true, but not prolepses/anticipations/preconceptions themselves?

3 - If you answer that the blessedness and incorruptibility of the gods are not anticipations themselves, then what role did anticipations play in those statements?

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**Post by “Cassius” of February 27, 2023 at 9:33 PM**

Episode 163 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. This week we continue in Chapter 8 of the DeWitt Book and continue also with our discussion of anticipations. This week Joshua is back and Don joins us as well and so we bring the full strength of our podcasting team to the topic

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/52872279>