

# Pros and Cons Of Considering Epicurean Philosophy To Be A "Religion"

Post by "Cassius" of January 22, 2024 at 9:24 AM

Let's get out in front of some questions that people might ask about [Nate's Hedonicon video](#). For example:

## [Quote from Nate](#)

Second, I did it to consecrate (what I call) *my religion*.

What is an appropriate answer to someone who would criticize the idea of seeing Epicurean philosophy as a "religion?"

The answer would probably involve first dealing with the old problem of definitions and talk about what it means to be a "religion."

1. What is a fair definition of a "religion?"
2. Does the definition of religion itself require that all religions be "bad," or is it possible to have a "good" religion?
3. Did the ancient Epicureans see their own views of the gods as "true religion," or something else?
4. They clearly contended that having correct views about the gods is important.
5. Did they have "practices" that were a necessary part of those views?
6. Did those views and/or practices constitute a "religion?"
7. What relation should ancient Epicurean practices have on Epicureans today?

Another question would be:

1. If Epicurean philosophy were viewed as analogous to a religion, would there be "denominations" within the "religion?"
2. To what extent would the religion be "uniform" across all Epicureans?

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Post by "Cassius" of January 22, 2024 at 12:09 PM

That's a good start to the conversation. I too consider Epicurean philosophy to at the very least "stand in the place of" what passes for religion today, and I've even argued in the past that if censorship issues get worse we might want to consider claiming "freedom of religion" as protection for the Epicurean viewpoint.

But I am also aware that any discussion of "religion" strikes some people extremely poorly as they come from a very different paradigm. So I think its good to flesh out the details and the terminology publicly because there's no doubt there will be people who will object to it. I suspect in the end there are good ways to explain the issue that advance the ball, and I agree with your point number 7 - it's a core aspect of Epicurean philosophy to have a clear position on the nature of divinity.

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### **Post by “TauPhi” of January 22, 2024 at 4:37 PM**

People feel good kneeling. Not to look too silly, they invented gods so the can kneel purposefully. Here came Epicurus and told them it was still quite silly to kneel purposefully. They got up to cheer him and went back on their knees to cheer him some more. People do love kneeling.

This is the path where philosophy and religion get mixed. Please consider if this is the path worth taking. Please also do not take it as a personal attack of any sort. I have no intention of attacking anyone. I'm writing it only for people to think about it. That is all.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 22, 2024 at 5:50 PM**

TauPhi I think I understand at least one aspect of where you are going and I bet that this Vatican Saying is not your favorite either:

[Quote from Cassius](#)

VS32. The veneration of the wise man is a great blessing to those who venerate him.

You're definitely right in my view that people can go overboard with "kneeling." But does that mean that there is never an appropriate time in life when kneeling is the right course? I'd generally agree that it's a bad idea in most every situation, and yet I don't know anymore that I am willing to condemn (for example) every example of "kingship" as improper. The ancient Romans who I often look to as models had "dictators" temporarily, and though they were better off (in my view) in the republic when they didn't have kings, I don't know that I can say that kneeling would "always" be inappropriate, as long as it was understood as a limited gesture.

Similarly with "gods" and "reverence," the emotions that go along with holding something or someone in very high esteem don't seem to me as something to \*always\* consider as prohibited. My main view at the moment would be that the limits and circumstances for such emotions and activities need to be tightly defined, rather than outright prohibited.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of January 22, 2024 at 6:24 PM**

Actually we should probably clarify "kneeling" before we go too much further. I think Nate is largely speaking figuratively in that last post on kneeling. We can speculate what participation in public rituals meant, but I am not aware of any specific evidence that Epicurus ever kneeled to anybody. The issue is figuratively and that's part of the whole issue of reverencing.

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### **Post by "TauPhi" of January 22, 2024 at 7:03 PM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

You're definitely right in my view that people can go overboard with "kneeling." But does that mean that there is never an appropriate time in life when kneeling is the right course?

If an act of kneeling is the act of an ultimate personal defeat and acceptance that someone else is better equipped to govern our lives then I say yes, never should be an appropriate time for such an act. I'm talking about that kind of kneeling. The transfer of responsibility for our lives; the hope that there's something bigger that will hug us and keep us safe; the inability to face indifference of the Universe.

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Similarly with "gods" and "reverence," the emotions that go along with holding something or someone in very high esteem don't seem to me as something to \*always\* consider as prohibited. My main view at the moment would be that the limits and circumstances for such emotions and activities need to be tightly defined, rather than outright prohibited.

Holding someone in very high esteem doesn't entitle them to become gods. Why not keeping things plain and simple? Why the need for facade and flowery, religious language that can be easily misleading? And to be clear, I'm not in favour of prohibition. It's everyone's personal choice how they perceive their reality. But when we're talking about widespread ideas like Epicureanism, I'm getting worried when I see 'holy', 'religion' etc. next to it. Epicurus was not a god, not a prophet and most definitely was not holy. He was a guy who had an extraordinary gift of perceiving how things seem to work and he was kind enough to translate his powerful gift of observation for others' benefit. And not everything he observed, described or advocated for stood the test of time. He was not an oracle and when people try to paint him as such, his legacy suffers. Epicurus was a philosopher. Let's treat him as such.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of January 22, 2024 at 7:05 PM**

I am not talking to anyone in this thread but I can imagine certain lurkers hyperventilating right now. Everyone needs to understand that the "gods" that Epicurus was talking about, and that as I understand it Nate is talking about, are not literally Zeus and Venus and the rest. If we go down the road of "piety toward the gods" too far without reminding everyone forcefully what [Epicurean gods](#) ARE, and ARE NOT, then we get into the same misunderstandings that we have about pleasure, virtue, and other terms.

I don't think the texts support the view that Epicurus was talking about reverence toward Zeus, Yahweh, or any other conventional gods, as those names are commonly understood. We have to start back at the beginning of the sequence, on what is the nature of divinity, before we can make sense of the downstream discussions of piety.

Divinity is not "Nature itself" either, but it's a capacity that exists within nature that makes possible beings who while not supernatural are still worthy of "reverence" because of the benefit that such reverence brings to us in bringing us further into consistency with Nature itself and the pleasure that nature gives as guidance.

## Post by “Cassius” of January 22, 2024 at 7:09 PM

For the record I did not see post 11 before I posted 12. We cross-posted. And I didn't have TP in mind at all about hyperventilating 😊

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## Post by “Cassius” of January 22, 2024 at 7:36 PM

Part of the clarity that needs to be brought to the discussion is "What is it that Epicurus is saying to reverence?" All the letter to Menoecus says is "immortal and blessed." Immortal is relatively clear (deathless) but the meaning of "blessedness" is what has to be explained and visualized. Only then can you make progress in understanding what it is you are having reverence toward.

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

First of all believe that god is a being immortal and blessed, even as the common idea of a god is engraved on men's minds, and do not assign to him anything alien to his immortality or ill-suited to his blessedness: but believe about him everything that can uphold his blessedness and immortality.

And as to the blessed existence one of the most detailed statements is from Torquatus:

### Quote

[40] XII. Again, the truth that pleasure is the supreme good can be most easily apprehended from the following consideration. Let us imagine an individual in the enjoyment of pleasures great, numerous and constant, both mental and bodily, with no pain to thwart or threaten them; I ask what circumstances can we describe as more excellent than these or more desirable? A man whose circumstances are such must needs possess, as well as other things, a robust mind subject to no fear of death or pain, because death is apart from sensation, and pain when lasting is usually slight, when oppressive is of short duration, so that its temporariness reconciles us to its intensity, and its slowness to its continuance.

[41] When in addition we suppose that such a man is in no awe of the influence of the gods, and does not allow his past pleasures to slip away, but takes delight in constantly

recalling them, what circumstance is it possible to add to these, to make his condition better?

So to me you end up with piety toward the "idea" of this kind of existence in general, more so than to Zeus or any other specific alleged example of it. The question of whether an individual entity qualifies as divine is always going to be a question of fact that depends on circumstances, but the "preconception" of divinity is something that comes before its application to any particular individual.

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## Post by “Kalosyni” of January 23, 2024 at 11:04 AM

There appears to be two camps within the current resurgence of Epicurean philosophy:

- One camp who may wish to see a special kind of reverence and a special way of interacting and disseminating the historical ideas of Epicurus, by labeling it "a religion", and there-by appealing to those who are looking for something "bigger-than-themselves", and perscribing certain behaviors in line with "religious feelings", as well as creating a "priestly/teacher class" and a "student/disciple class" within a tight-knit community that shares the same urge for how to view Epicureanism.

I feel fairly certain that most of us here on this EpicureanFriends forum do not fall into this first camp. However if there are some who do, then you may enjoy the company of others who have that same belief by checking out what is offered by the [Society of Friends of Epicurus](#). From their [FAQ page](#) there is a link to a page explaining more about how they view things regarding [Epicureanism as a Religious Identity](#).

Now for the other camp, as I see it myself regarding my personal view of Epicurean philosophy, and which many others here on this forum may also hold as a beneficial view: Epicureanism is (and should be seen as) a philosophy and not a religion.

Here are a few benefits of seeing Epicureanism as a philosophy rather than a religion:

1. Your personal understanding comes first rather than having to depend on interpretations outside of yourself - you interpret the extant texts as it pleases you, because you apply them to modern life and your own unique situation.
2. If you are dealing with very troubling issues, you visit a therapist rather than rely upon Epicurean teachings (and rather than relying on religious rituals or potentially relying on "teachers" who are not therapists).

3. You are free to test Epicurean philosophy and reject the parts that do not work for you.
4. You are not expected to do any rituals or attend any meetings, and you will still be respected if you don't participate, and your respect will be based on your understanding rather than adherence to "religious goals" - and there are no religious goals or rituals, rather only personal goals which you freely choose for yourself.
5. It feels safe, free, and open for those who are atheists to participate in studying the philosophy of Epicurus - because there is no group requirement regarding the "gods/god" and this is something to be considered for each person privately.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 23, 2024 at 11:59 AM**

To avoid unnecessary talking past each other I suggest people be clear about the use of the word religion, especially making clear what they think that the word religion means and whether it can ever be used beneficially. Nate has stated that he wants to "take back the word" and it seems to be that is a large part of this discussion. Part of that discussion is: Do we have evidence of "religio" in Latin or equivalent in Greek being used positively by the ancient Epicureans?

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### **Post by “Bryan” of January 23, 2024 at 1:50 PM**

Whichever etymology we go with: (1) *relego* ("choose, gather") or (2) *religō* ("bind, moor") we have nothing inherently objectionable. Having chosen Epicurean philosophy, I have gathered my focus toward it and moored myself in the philosophy. In this sense it is no trouble for me to say that my "my religion is Epicureanism." But as you know, that wording is more poetic than exact (I re-read your "On '-isms' and Pleasure Wisdom" article last night, very good!)

I do agree that it does not benefit us to throw away terms because they are misused by others. If we throw out 'god' because others have used the term incorrectly, we have let them win the argument. I think Epicurus would agree that we should not throw out the word 'religion' -- but clearly it comes with its own baggage.

We do have **Religio** as a bad word in Lucretius, his "*oppressa grāvī sub rēligiōne*" (*pressed down underneath heavy religion*), "*sæpius illa Rēligiō péperit scelerôsá<sup>a</sup> tqu<sup>e</sup> ímpia fácta*" (more often Religion produces wicked and ungodly acts), etc.

Nevertheless, we understand, as Lucretius often stated, that the supernatural claims are the problem of 'religion,' not our human desire to gather a tradition and stick to it.

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## Post by “Pacatus” of January 23, 2024 at 2:20 PM

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

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Display More

I find that I have thumbed-up several posts here that are somewhat in disagreement with one another. 🤔😄 But the above by [Kalosyni](#) (from post b#16) particularly resonates with me. In fact, I have copied it into my own files for reference - as I couldn't state it any better. 👍 (I have been part of religious communities that would largely affirm her points - but my experience is that they are rare indeed.)

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## Post by “TauPhi” of January 23, 2024 at 2:52 PM

### [Quote from Nate](#)

In Vatican Saying 29, he literally compares himself to an oracle.

What is your argument here @Nate ? That Epicurus was an oracle because he literally compared himself to an oracle? It may seem that you are trying to put some prophet clothes on Epicurus but by putting forward arguments like that you strip him of his wisdom and present him to public eye as a naked nutcase for people to laugh at. And why wouldn't they laugh at a dude claiming to be an oracle?

Or maybe you're trying to say we should treat everything Epicurus said as gospel? In that case where's the space for philosophy? Where's the room for trying to live wisely by thinking about, discussing and putting to test Epicurus' ideas and see which of these enhance our lives and which are useless? If we take anything as infallible gospel, we are not lovers of wisdom but lovers of being led to slaughterhouse as blind sheep.

### [Quote from Nate](#)

I mean to take back those words and return them to their original meanings. "Holy" originally shared a meaning with "Wholesome" or "Healthy", which are excellent descriptions of a key aspect of the Good Life in the Epicurean tradition.

Why would you even attempt to return any words to their original meaning? It's like trying to revert a river with a stick. It's perfectly normal and desirable for languages and their vocabulary to evolve together with people that use them. Languages are meant to change to allow humans for efficient communication. Active languages are not meant to be preserved in their original form and put on display in a museum. And I agree that 'wholesome' and 'healthy' are excellent descriptions. 'Holy' might have meant all that centuries ago but now it means completely different thing. And in 21st century we have words like 'wholesome' and 'healthy' and I don't see any reason why not to use them when talking about something that is wholesome and healthy. You can't expect that people telepathically know that you personally change meanings of words because you like their past meanings. You could have titled your book: 'The Hedonicon: The Wholesome Book of Epicurus' but...

**Disclaimer:** @Nate. We don't know each other personally and we only passively exchange ideas here on the forum so I want to make sure that you don't imagine me as a vicious troll trying persistently to undermine your work. I am not that person. On the contrary, I think your book is a great collection of valuable texts and all credit to you for compiling it. All my arguments are strictly related to dangers of mixing religion with philosophy.

...but you chose to use 'Holy'. If I knew nothing about Epicurus and Epicureanism and I came across your book, I'd probably assume it's a book about another nutcase claiming the usual holy nonsense and I'd classify the book as yet another mental diarrhea. And I absolutely don't want this to happen! Your book is a collection of priceless achievement of human thought and

people can benefit greatly reading Epicurean texts.

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### **Post by “Pacatus” of January 23, 2024 at 3:47 PM**

[Kalosyni](#) (from post #16 above, which I already quoted): “2. If you are dealing with very troubling issues, you visit a therapist rather than rely upon Epicurean teachings (and rather than relying on religious rituals or potentially relying on "teachers" who are not therapists).”

I just wanted to add a few comments to this particular point:

Many therapists (if not most) are also teachers; mine (who also later became a friend) was – even as he disclaimed the usage that Kalosyni seems allude to here: he said, “I am not, and will not be, your ‘guru’.” There are, of course, many theories and styles of therapy. My guy was pretty eclectic, rather than dogmatic (in the modern, generally pejorative, sense).

Also, from my experience in 12-Step rooms (which I will not detail): a few were quite religious in nature; the one in which I was most comfortable was not. Many of the people were religious (in a “higher power = god” sense) – but a number were not; and there was no pressure at all. Also, the steps were generally seen (in that room) as suggestions, not rules – and a number of “old-timers” freely said that they drew on them to make their own, personal “program,” taking what was useful and leaving the rest. I still draw upon a 12-Step daily meditation source that is geared toward agnostics and atheists (but without rejection of the more religious).

Finally, I see Epicurean philosophy as a therapeutic source to draw upon for my own ongoing “recovery” (from whatever – in the 12-Step usage of that term).

With that said, I repeat that I found Kalosyni’s points in the above-referenced post to resonate the most to me – in words that I cannot improve upon.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 23, 2024 at 5:11 PM**

#### [Quote from Nate](#)

Ultimately, this is meant to be the reference guide I wish I had when I began studying this 10 years ago. It took me two dozen books before I really felt like I understood the framework of history and literature which is unavailable in a single text. This is the

book I would have wanted.

I think this is a key point. I am seeing things much differently than I saw them even several years ago. The more you concentrate on what the Epicureans actually wrote, rather than the filtering and commentary that comes through the modern commentators, the more I think you can internalize how serious they likely were in how they took their views.

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## Post by “Joshua” of January 23, 2024 at 5:15 PM

### Quote

So, within that context, while I (personally) identify significantly more with Lucretius' anti-religious attitude, I think that Epicurus' personal expression of pious devotion might have been (in general) closer to the Roman idea of "religio".

I credit the book [Long Live Latin](#) for helping me to understand this, and I think it's worth considering; Lucretius had a separate word which he used in Book 5 for his understanding of pious devotion. The Latin word is *pietas*, which he contrasts with *religio*. Around line 1200 (Bailey translation);

### Quote

Nor is it piety at all to be seen often with veiled head turning towards a stone, and to draw near to every altar, no, nor to lie prostrate on the ground with outstretched palms before the shrines of the gods, nor to sprinkle the altars with the streaming blood of beasts, nor to link vow to vow, but rather to be able to contemplate all things with a mind at rest.

I'll quote my own words from an old thread;

"*Pietas*, then, is not a synonym of *religio* but its true opposite. *Religio* is a kind of madness born of superstition; it is attended by fear, traffics in well-worn lies, and delights in obscurantism and servility. *Pietas* is the spirit of understanding born of inquiry; it brings peace, "reveals darkly hidden things", and delights in clarity and the health of the unburdened soul."

My building has a problem with porch pirates, which is the only reason I haven't gotten your book yet, but I'll find a way to get it soon! Several neighbors have doorbell cameras now so I hope the problem will resolve itself.

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## Post by “Bryan” of January 23, 2024 at 8:59 PM

Great point about *Pietas*, Joshua!

Following Nate's post on Polystratus, I was reading this similar quote from him which seems to relate in a general way to this discussion today:

"Certain remedies are beneficial to the one who suffers from one disease, others to the one who suffers from another illness; and such remedies benefit the patient in the throes of a violent fever, others to the one whose temperature is too low, and... It is the same for what concerns actions: there too, it is not profitable for all to perform the same acts; but some acts are beneficial for some and others for others. And it is not true that all opinions are false, but they depend on the differences that exist both in individual natures and in circumstances."  
(Polystratus, de irrationali contemptu)

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## Post by “Cassius” of January 24, 2024 at 10:32 AM

Also I'd just like to interject before I forget: One of the biggest problems that gives me personally the most caution with "religion" is better described - at least for me - as "ritualism." "Rituals" give me the creeps and are generally a big turn-off for me. I realize there's a fine line between "ceremonies" and "memorials" and "habits," but I think the idea of mandatory and elaborate "ritual" helps describe at least a part of the problem. To me, "ritualism" goes along with the "mind control" that is often associated with religions, and things that seem like "rituals" have to be approached with caution. Joshua's quote from Lucretius 5:1200 really helps put this in perspective.

Here is the Daniel Brown edition version of that:

Quote from Daniel Brown's Lucretius 5:1194

Nor can there be any piety for a wretch with his head veiled, to be ever turning himself about towards a stone, to creep to every altar, to throw himself flat upon the ground, to spread his arms before the shrines of the gods, to sprinkle the altars abundantly with the blood of beasts, and to heap vows upon vows. To look upon things with an undisturbed mind, this is Piety. For when we behold the celestial canopy of the great world, and the heavens spread over with the shining stars; when we reflect upon the courses of the sun and moon, then doubts – that before lay quiet under a load of other evils – begin to awake, and grow strong within us. What! Are there gods endued with so great power that can direct the various motions of all the bright luminaries above? For

the ignorance of causes gives great uneasiness to the doubting mind of man. And hence we doubt whether the world had a beginning, and shall ever have an end; how long the heavens (the walls of this world) shall be able to bear the fatigue of such mighty motions, or whether they are made eternal by the gods, and so shall forever roll on, and despise the strong power of devouring age.

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### **Post by “Don” of January 24, 2024 at 11:35 AM**

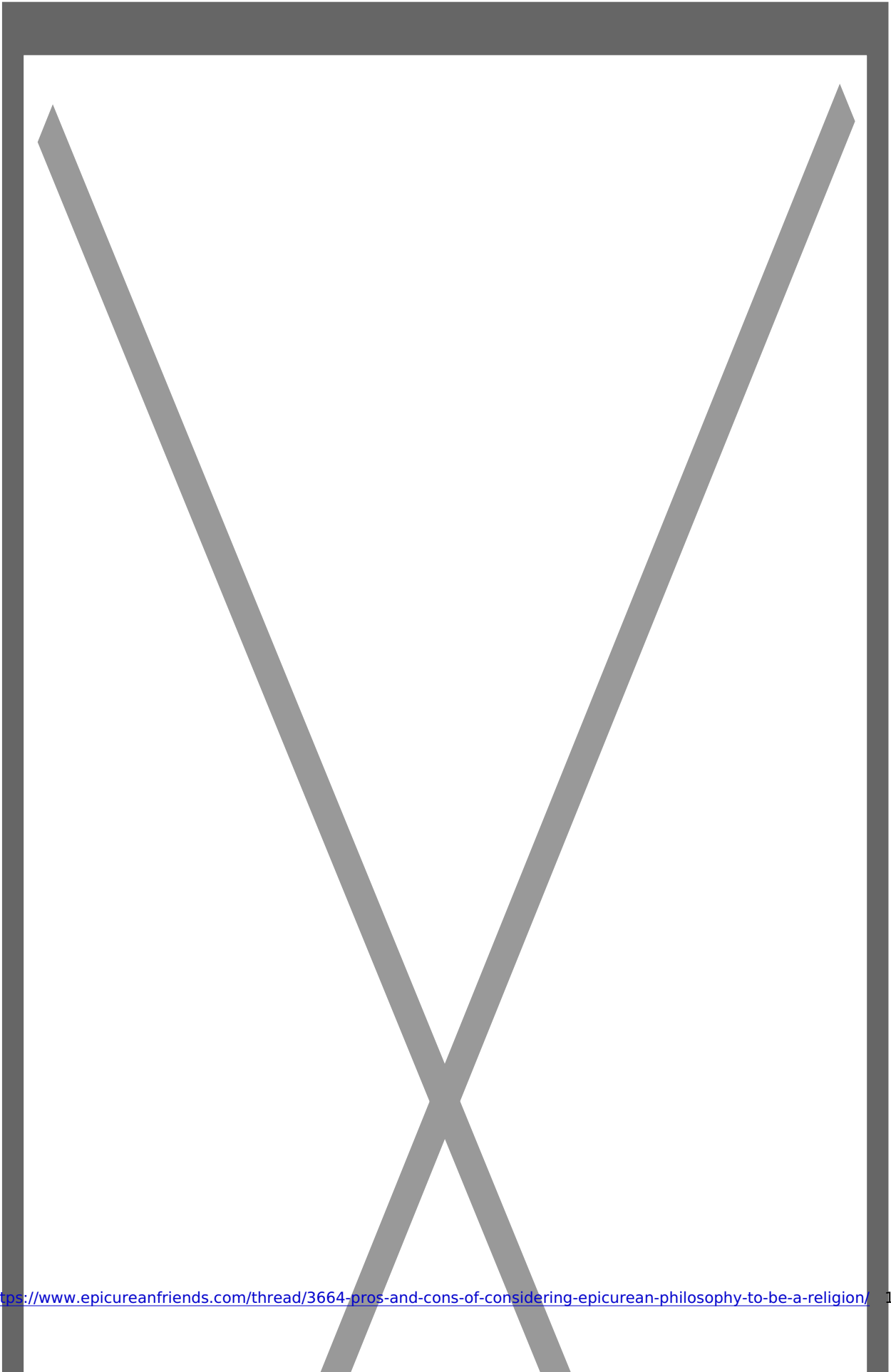
#### [Quote from Nate](#)

Where does that leave the word "Superstitio" in relation to "Pietas" and "Religio"?

And, as a further point, why did Lucretius not use "Superstitio"?

This helps...

Image not found or type unknown



[Glossary of ancient Roman religion - Wikipedia](#)

en.wikipedia.org

*superstitio*

*Superstitio was excessive devotion and enthusiasm in religious observance, in the sense of "doing or believing more than was necessary", or "irregular" religious practice that conflicted with Roman custom. ...Before the Christian era, superstitio was seen as a vice of individuals.*

Lucretius' opposition to religio in favor of pietas conveys to me possibly the difference between outward "proper" performance of rituals expected of one versus the inward reason for performing those rites and rituals. Epicurus took part in the rites, festivals, and rituals of his city BUT with the proper inward piety.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of January 24, 2024 at 12:11 PM**

The "super" is probably very clear - I wonder what the "stitio" refers to?

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### **Post by "Don" of January 24, 2024 at 12:33 PM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

The "super" is probably very clear - I wonder what the "stitio" refers to?

It's from *superstō* + *-tiō* < *super* + *stō*

"To stand upon or over"

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### **Post by "Kalosyni" of January 24, 2024 at 12:43 PM**

This brought up the idea that the label "superstition" has not always been understood in the way that we do in the modern scientific world. Just found this book "Superstition: A Very Short Introduction"

Abstract (Chapter 1 - The Origins of Superstition):

#### Quote

'The origins of superstition' describes practices of magic, prophecy, and divination in the ancient world, and the changing meaning of superstition through time. Throughout its long history, superstition has been a transactional concept with no fixed meaning of its own except in contrast to some other, more accepted world-view. The origin of the concept is found in ancient Greece in the 4th century bce, and for the next 2,000 years, superstition stood in contrast to the religious practices recommended by the elites. The word 'superstition' has often been levelled at practices that, even today, we would consider magical or paranormal, and yet versions of most of these practices are still with us.

Source link:

[The origins of superstition](#)

Abstract. 'The origins of superstition' describes practices of magic, prophecy, and divination in the ancient world, and the changing meaning of superstition th  
academic.oup.com

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### **Post by "Don" of January 24, 2024 at 1:34 PM**

That Wikipedia entry offers a better translation of superstitiō is "religiosity" as opposed to "superstition." Keeping this in mind helps.

And translation of religio is "religious scruple" instead of just "religion."

Those Latin spellings can imply meanings of English words that are not actually present, regardless of the similar spelling.

PS. On further thought, "superstition" could be an acceptable translation of religio since religio is concerned with the outward performance of the correct rituals in hope of a favorable benefit from the gods. It's akin to someone now carrying a rabbits foot for good luck or crossing your fingers or knocking on wood, etc.

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### **Post by "Don" of January 24, 2024 at 3:16 PM**

@Nate : I think the title sounds cool and I was unaware of the *Apostolicon* and the other history, but my pop culture mind went straight to *Necronomicon* when I saw your title the first time 😊

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### Post by “Pacatus” of January 24, 2024 at 5:49 PM

#### [Quote from Nate](#)

"I will be obedient to Epicurus, according to whom I have made it my choice to live."

I actually hate that oath – and any similar oaths. If something does not resonate, there is no reason to cling to it like some immutable creed. (Did that enough times in my erroneous past.) I do not commit myself to the idea that Epicurus must have been right about everything – and so will not “troth” myself to any such oath or vow. Epicurean philosophy (and therapy) does provide a kind of lodestone now for me in guiding my life – richly so. But any “*religio*” – in terms of binding myself to some creedal requirement – that I reject (again, been there). If it works for you, under your own understanding, that’s great. No judgment on that. Truly.

I also am steeped in the idea of the evolution of language, and such things as metaphorical and analogical usages (as well as the vagaries of translation). (And one of my pleasurable games as a poet is to find and resurrect archaic usages in English from time to time.)

Note: Not only (as I noted earlier in this thread) have I thumbed-up posts on both side of this discussion (including yours), I appreciate your work – especially relevant to here, in the *Hedonicon*. So any interpretation of what I say here that might imply less than a high personal regard would be just wrong.

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### Post by “Don” of January 24, 2024 at 5:55 PM

I've seen bumper stickers like "Kindness is my religion" and that sort of thing, too.

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### Post by “Bryan” of January 24, 2024 at 6:20 PM

Let me give another Polystratus quote "Thus, either all these things, which each person clearly perceives and works upon, must be said to be false -- or, not wanting to shamelessly dispute and fight against the obvious, we should not regard the 'noble' and the 'shameful' as falsely believed just because they are not the same for everyone -- in contrast to stone or gold or anything else of that kind."

ὥστε ἢ καὶ ταῦτα πάντα φατέον ψευδῆ εἶναι, ἃ περιφανῶς ἕκαστος θεωρεῖ ὃ ἐργάζεται, ἢ, μὴ βουλόμενον ἀναισχυντεῖν καὶ μάχεσθαι τοῖς φανεροῖς, οὐδὲ τὰ καλὰ καὶ τὰ αἰσχρὰ ἀρτέον ὡς ψευδῶς νομιζόμενα, ὅτι οὐ πᾶσι ταῦτά ἐστὶν ὡςπερ λίθος ἢ χρυ[σο]ς ἢ ἄλλο τι τῶν τοιούτων (P.Herc. 336 col. 16 sup.)

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## Post by “Cassius” of January 24, 2024 at 6:55 PM

### [Quote from Nate](#)

So I definitely feel [for] anyone who finds aspects of the ancient Epicurean tradition to be cultish.

We know that there were disagreements among the Epicureans about the nature of friendship and about the status of there being a 'fourth leg' of the canon at the very least, and probably many other things. So all these words (to include "cultish") are going to be a moving target for us just as they were 2000 years ago. I think we have to expect that different people will have different comfort levels with all of these issues.

I think we should all take comfort here that EpicureanFriends is first, foremost, and always will be a "discussion forum." We have clear parameters of discussion that are intended to further the mission of bettering our understanding of the philosophy and reconstructing it more accurately, but we're much more in the "school" metaphor here than we are in a "church" or "religion" metaphor. All the ideas that Nate is suggesting are well within our scope of discussion, but as far as the forum goes we're just "discussing" them and not taking steps to implement anything.

Everyone has no doubt seen the recent front page revisions which are intended to further advance the quality of our interactions. The more people are informed at the very start about the key aspects of Epicurean philosophy, the more we can avoid misunderstandings and help get people where they need to be - whether here or somewhere else. We've been "lucky" that we've had relatively few trolling incidents to deal with, but we'll continue to work to make sure that the core fundamental ideas of Epicurus get the attention and respect that they deserve.

Hopefully we can move further over time into facilitating real-world meetings or meet-up groups in local areas, but if and when we get to that stage we'll adhere to the basic plan we have going now: we're a place for discussion among like-minded friends about the philosophy of Epicurus. Any project to do any tighter "organization" is a much more complex endeavor, and anyone who has enough time can remind themselves of those complexities [here](#).

So with that in mind I am hoping everyone will be free to express their opinions about this subject without fear that Epicureanfriends itself is going to turn into anything more than a discussion forum. If our posts end up facilitating new projects (and I hope many new projects will come from our work) those will be organized carefully and deliberately and with great care - and separately and with clarity and bright lines - just as you would expect Epicureans to tackle any project.

[Note: I added the [for] into my quote from Nate because I think that's what he meant.]

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### **Post by “Don” of January 24, 2024 at 7:36 PM**

#### [Quote from Nate](#)

We have historical evidence of doctrinal disputes between geographically isolated Gardens, and those disputes seem to be resolved by the Athenian Scholarch,

Do you have the references for that? I'd be curious to follow-up on those!

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### **Post by “DavidN” of January 25, 2024 at 1:01 AM**

"The IRS determines that an organization meets religious purpose based on two main guidelines:

- That the particular religious beliefs of the organization are truly and sincerely held.
- That the practices and rituals associated with the organization's religious belief or creed aren't illegal or contrary to clearly defined public charity"

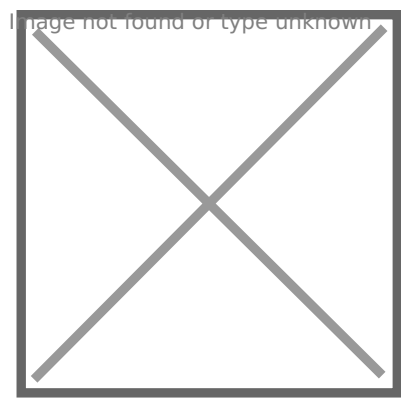
As Cassius already pointed out there are legal protections and incentives to being considered a religion in the united states. Even more for being a "church". But these are things whose utility is not yet necessary, but something I've pondered on occasion, usually after watching something about Scientology and all the shenanigans they get away with because of there religious status.

Secondly as Cassius also already pointed out, any discussion of Epicureanism as a religion requires a high level of understanding of Epicureanism and alot of redefining of terms as there understood today in order to align with Epicureanism. Which at the moment I find distracts more from study then it currently provides utility. That's not to say that at some point that might change, so I'll reserve the right to revisit the topic at a later date.

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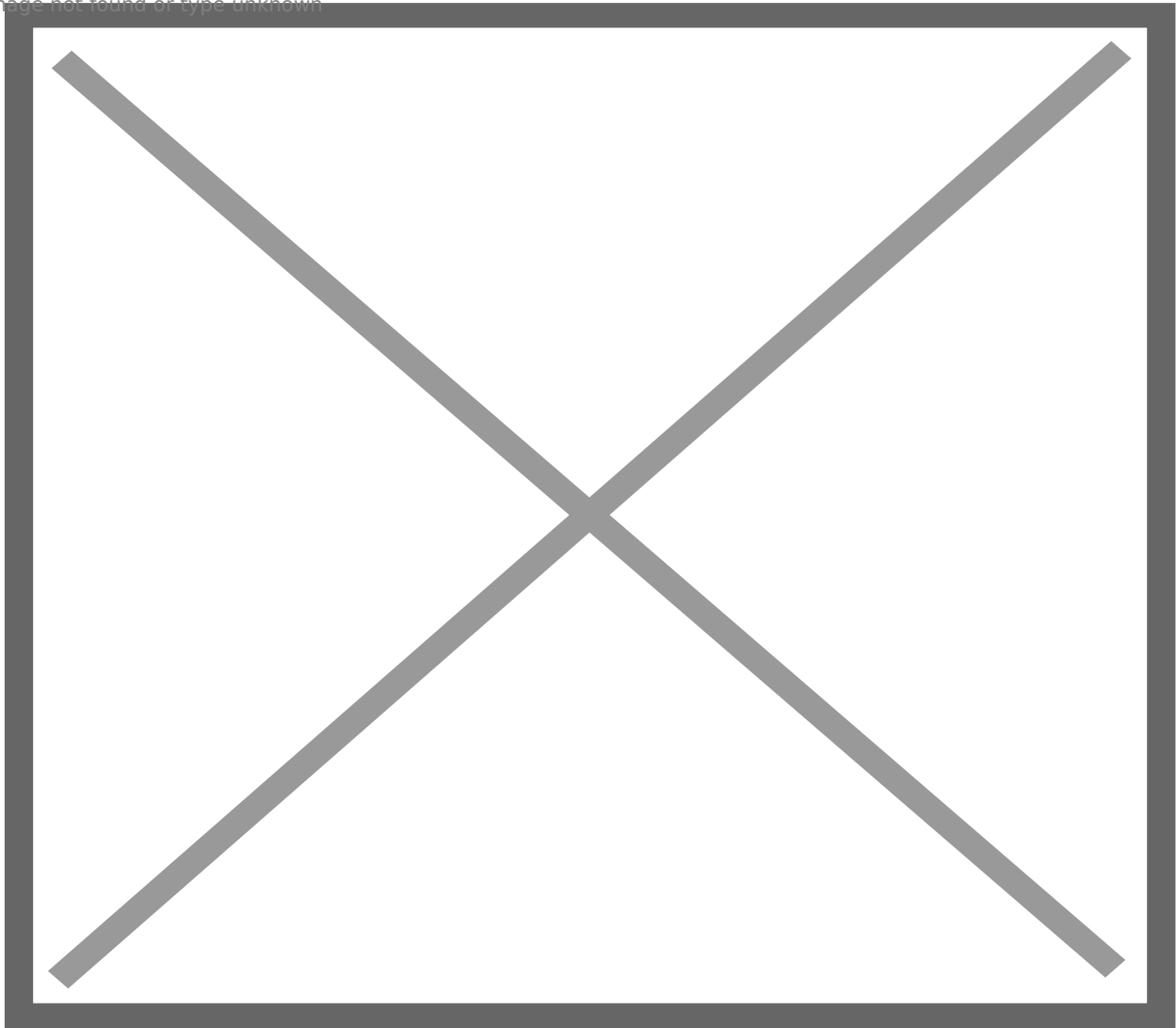
**Post by “Don” of January 25, 2024 at 5:58 AM**

To add to [DavidN](#) 's post (not that I'm advocating one direction or another, just providing references):



["Churches" Defined | Internal Revenue Service](#)  
[www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov)

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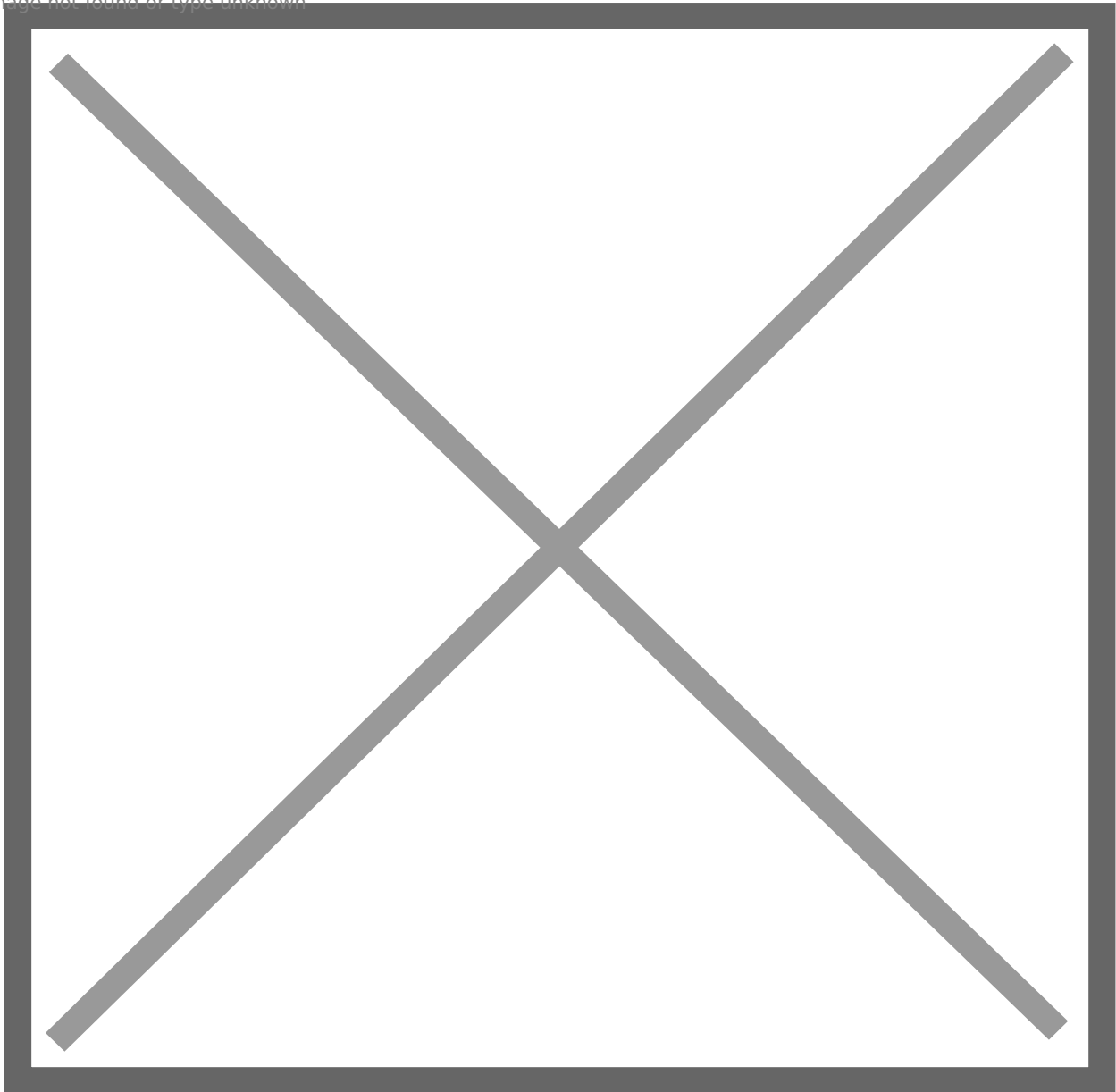
### [Religious Nonprofit Organizations and Churches](#)

Understanding differences between the terms “churches” and “religious organizations” is important for religious groups seeking 501(c) (3) tax-exempt status.

[www.score.org](http://www.score.org)

So, 501(c)(3) is the broad category of tax-exempt charitable organizations. And it's relatively easy to start your own tax -exempt "church", as John Oliver demonstrated:

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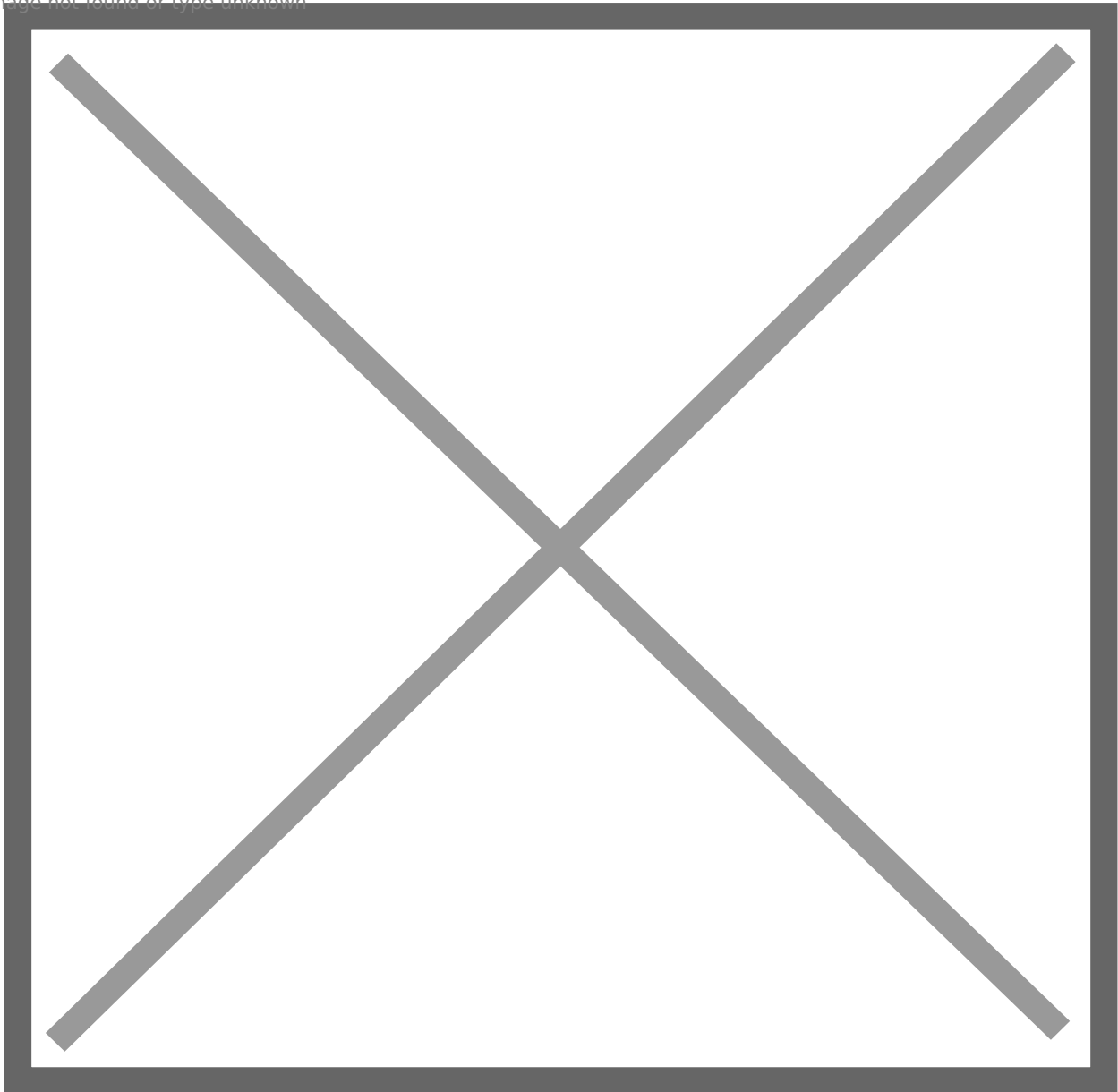


### [It's Surprisingly Easy To Start Your Own Church](#)

If you're hoping to start your own IRS-approved religious organization, look no further than the guidelines below.

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

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[John Oliver Exposes Televangelism, Then Forms His Own Tax-Exempt Church](#)

Call 1-800-THIS-IS-LEGAL for a special message from a "megareverend."

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

Note: I want to add that I understand that Nate and others (and myself in some ways) are not using "religion" in relation to Epicureanism in a satirical or flippant way like the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster or John Oliver's "church." I respect the "taking back the word idea" but these links show how broad and ill -defined the word is from a legal and secular perspective.

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**Post by "Don" of January 25, 2024 at 7:49 AM**

Serendipitous discovery this morning:

<https://www.npr.org/2024/01/24/1226371734/religious-nones-are-now-the-largest-single-group-in-the-u-s>

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## **Post by “Kalosyni” of January 25, 2024 at 8:54 AM**

Some thoughts this morning...So there could be these two desires:

1. A desire to bring an internal "religious/spiritual" aspect to one's thoughts regarding the importance and application of Epicurean philosophy. This could be done on one's own. And there are as many ways to give words to this as there are individuals.

2. A desire to bring a group of people together for an "Epicurean Church".

My thoughts coming up: as soon as you move from what is internal to creating an externalization of this in a group or church setting, then you will have a few problems on your hands. 1) The problem of power vs. submission - who will lead the church and how will they do it. 2) How will the church deal with those who are not properly submitting to the leaders or goals of the church 3) How will the church remove a leader that is doing unethical actions, behaving in a overly-controlling manner, or working against the long-term goals of the church. 4) Since the idea of being "tax-exempt" came up and usually churches give monetary support to their leaders, there is the question of how does paying someone for their time affect how the leader leads a group, and how does it affect the people who are giving money to the leader (how they all relate to each other, and which further feeds into the problem of power vs. submission).

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## **Post by “DavidN” of January 26, 2024 at 5:04 PM**

A church can be lead by vote or committee, and instead of employing a "priest" or speaker fulltime you could have guest speakers, like you do for your interview podcasts. I know that submission may be a problem in contemporary religions but I don't see it as an issue as much with Epicureanism otherwise it's not being properly practiced.

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## Post by “DavidN” of January 26, 2024 at 5:25 PM

As far as the question "is it a religion" to me goes. Does it take the place of a contemporary religion in your daily life? IE Does it inform your sense of morality and justice, do you draw comfort or strength from it's teachings? Do you endeavor to live as an Epicurean or is it just a discussion topic, would be the dividing line for me. Spirituality and mysticism need not apply. My example of a non faith based religion... non revealed religion, better term, is Deism a la Thomas Paine. Early science taking the place of mysticism and an uncaring creator god taking the place of more classical deities. So there is historical precedent for a modern evolution of religion. But in the end I see it as a personal choice for everyone how they choose to see, and practice Epicureanism.

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## Post by “Kalosyni” of January 26, 2024 at 8:24 PM

### [Quote from DavidN](#)

As far as the question "is it a religion" to me goes. Does it take the place of a contemporary religion in your daily life? IE Does it inform your sense of morality and justice, do you draw comfort or strength from it's teachings? Do you endeavor to live as an Epicurean or is it just a discussion topic, would be the dividing line for me.

It is coming to me, that there can be lots of ways that one could decide to refer to how they feel about Epicurean philosophy...and now the idea of "life philosophy" is popping into my head...or "world view" -- and probably the benefit of deciding on a particular label is that if you want to talk about it to a friend who doesn't know anything about it, then you could use your chosen label to convey what you feel about it. And I could imagine that if one said it was a religion, then their friend would be asking different questions than if one said "life philosophy" but everyone can choose to go there or not, depending on how they feel.

And I do think you'd have two slightly divergent groups if one group says "we have a church and this is a religion" compared to "we have a life philosophy, and this is a practice group".

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## Post by “DavidN” of January 26, 2024 at 8:42 PM

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

#### [Quote from DavidN](#)

As far as the question "is it a religion" to me goes. Does it take the place of a contemporary religion in your daily life? IE Does it inform your sense of morality and justice, do you draw comfort or strength from it's teachings? Do you endeavor to live as an Epicurean or is it just a discussion topic, would be the dividing line for me.

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And I do think you'd have two slightly divergent groups if one group says "we have a church and this is a religion" compared to "we have a life philosophy, and this is a practice group".

Or I often think about it as if someone were to ask me what my religion is or if I have a religion how I would respond. Definitely not as neatly as a catholic or other mainstream religious person could, nor do I consider myself to simply be atheist, I might reply that I'm Deist or Agnostic but that feels incomplete to me. I might say that Epicurean philosophy takes the place in my life that religion would, though many may not see it as an exact replacement for religion it appears functional enough to me, and if I ever get a job that lets you take religious holidays off I'll get to take every 20th off. 😄

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of January 31, 2024 at 10:54 AM**

Found this interesting fragment...that the rituals to the gods were not followed at Epicurus' Symposium:

Quote

**Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists*, V p, 179B:** Again, Homer tells us what we are to do before we begin to eat, namely, we are to offer as first-fruits some of the food to the gods. ... Homer also shows us the feaster at least offering libations ... all of which Plato also retains in his symposium. But with Epicurus there is no libation, no preliminary offering to the gods; on the contrary, it is like what Simonides says of the lawless woman: "Oftentimes she eats up the offerings before they are consecrated."

[Source](#)

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### Post by "Pacatus" of January 31, 2024 at 1:04 PM

@Nate: If religious feelings (e.g. awe and wonder) and sentiments – and rituals and the like, inherited or your own – bring pleasure, then embrace them. I always liked “high church” services – Episcopalian – with the bells and incense, etc., after a priest friend described it all as “holy fun”. And I can still take pleasure in Gregorian chant. And I can find inspiration and intuitive insight in contemplating various archetypes of the “divine” as representing the highest blessedness and eudaimonia, or as aspects of nature – even if I don’t think they exist in reality (I tend to the “idealist” understanding, but I also maintain a certain agnosticism on the subject), with what I take to be an Epicurean attitude (a strict-atheist psychiatrist that I briefly knew – not as a patient – suggested similar contemplation as usefully therapeutic).

But when I could not believe in, and bind myself to (*religare*), the “cultic” rules and commands of the church – adherence to received theology and creeds without question, confession of sins for salvation, etc. – then it was time to extricate myself (even if that was painful at the time). I suppose that one might participate in such religious ceremonies as a (secret) Epicurean, but I could not (or at least I would have to eliminate for myself certain contents of the service, and just be quiet).

Having travelled a long way from a darker version of Christianity to a more enlightened, open-minded version to Zen to (briefly) a neo-Stoicism, I find Epicureanism to be a kind of Kuhnian “paradigm shift” in thinking – in many ways, including questions of gods and religion, and religious activity. And I found [Joshua](#)’s point about *pietas* versus *religio* in post #25 helpful.

With all that said, I go back to [Kalosyni](#)’s 5 points in post # 16: If they apply to your understanding of religion, then I have no problem (but, again, that seems to reflect a kind of paradigm shift from more conventional understandings of the word).

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## Post by “Cassius” of January 31, 2024 at 1:14 PM

### [Quote from Pacatus](#)

but, again, that seems to reflect a kind of paradigm shift from more conventional understandings of the word

"Paradigm shifts from from conventional understandings of the word" seems to be much of what we're doing lately. It's a real challenge to think about where this goes in terms of how to convey the difference in meaning of words. It's hard to attached the prefix "Epicurean-" to everything but it seems to me that when we're talking about religion and the word cult and the like almost everything has to be considered in that "Epicurean-religion" "Epicurean-gods" context. I am not sure if the word "cult" has enough benefit in it to put it in the class of words that could or should be rehabilitated. Does "cult" add anything that can't be obtained through discussion "religion" in Epicurean terms? I think some people here would take the position that "religion is in itself a bad word" which has no merit worth rehabilitating, and some don't.

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## Post by “Bryan” of January 31, 2024 at 1:44 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

It's a real challenge to think about where this goes in terms of how to convey the difference in meaning of words.

In a general sense, this was also a struggle at the time. Epicurus says, talking to Metrodorus (David Sedley translation, On Nature Part 28):

(Fragment 6, Column 1) "For it was so necessary to point out that we, by observing that those who speak the same language as us, in contrast to our own use of words, were assigning some unsuspected false connotation in addition to those meanings...

(fr. 13, col. 2) ...and you also used in those days to assign [names] without adapting certain conventional usages, in order that you should not make plain the principle that by assigning any name one expresses a particular opinion, and see and reflect upon the indiscriminate treatment of words and objects. (fr. 13, col. 3) And I too used to notice that you did not establish a difference between two sets of words and then say that you chose one set because it was better than choosing the other...

(fr. 13, col. 5 sup.) Perhaps, though, you might say that it is inappropriate to lengthen the discussion by citing these cases. Quite so, Metrodorus. For I do not doubt that you could cite many cases, from your own past observations, of certain people taking words in various ridiculous senses, and indeed in every sense in preference to their actual linguistic meanings, whereas our own usage does not flout linguistic convention, nor do we alter names with regard to the objects of perception.

(fr. 13, col. 5 inf.) ... not because] others transfer words from the class of that which is knowable to denote that which is unknowable, but because of their own errors, which we point out in our work *On Ambiguity*."

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## Post by "Cassius" of January 31, 2024 at 3:47 PM

You know, in regard to this use of words issue, I have been struck over the last several months by this passage from page 240 of DeWitt's book:

### Quote

"The extension of the name of pleasure to this normal state of being was the major innovation of the new hedonism. It was in the negative form, freedom from pain of body and distress of mind, that it drew the most persistent and vigorous condemnation from adversaries. The contention was that the application of the name of pleasure to this state was unjustified on the ground that two different things were thereby being denominated by one name. Cicero made a great to-do over this argument, but it is really superficial and captious. The fact that the name of pleasure was not customarily applied to the normal or static state did not alter the fact that the name ought to be applied to it; nor that reason justified the application; nor that human beings would be the happier for so reasoning and believing.

I have read lots of books and articles on Epicurus but I can't recall a paragraph that expressed this issue in quite this way - a way I find much more clear than anything else I recall reading.

You could repeat that format over and over with other key concepts such as:

The fact that the name of virtue was not customarily applied to define conduct that is practically efficient to producing a pleasurable life did not alter the fact that the name ought to be applied to it; nor that reason justified the application; nor that human beings would be the happier for so reasoning and believing.

*The fact that the name of gods was not customarily applied to beings that are not supernatural, or to blissful ways of life to which we should aspire, did not alter the fact that the name ought to be applied to it; nor that reason justified the application; nor that human beings would be the happier for so reasoning and believing.*

*The fact that the name "absence of pain" was not customarily applied to all experiences of pleasure did not alter the fact that the name ought to be applied to it; nor that reason justified the application; nor that human beings would be the happier for so reasoning and believing.*

*The fact that the name "death is nothing to us" was not customarily applied to describe the state of non-being after death, did not alter the fact that the name ought to be applied to it; nor that reason justified the application; nor that human beings would be the happier for so reasoning and believing.*

There are probably other examples as well, but those are the first that come to mind.

Further -- I am sure that other writers must have written other short and concise and clear statements of Epicurean "clarification" or "redefinition" as it relates to understanding the philosophy. Maybe some of you guys can think of statements similar to that passage from page 240 of EAHP. Unfortunately, what I seem to remember is statement after statement to the effect that "Epicurus didn't really mean pleasure, he meant absence of pain," with an explicit or implicit nod toward this being a Stoic or Buddhist or apathetic way of looking at the question.

If you can think of other formulations similar to DeWitt's, focusing on "absence of pain" applying to any non-painful experience whatsoever ("the normal state of being") please post them, and if there are enough we'll make a new thread of them.

This is an extremely important issue to understand. People who aren't willing to be flexible in following the twists and turns of word meaning are never going to be anything but frustrated with Epicurus -- as was one Marcus Tullius Cicero.

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## **Post by "Bryan" of January 31, 2024 at 4:04 PM**

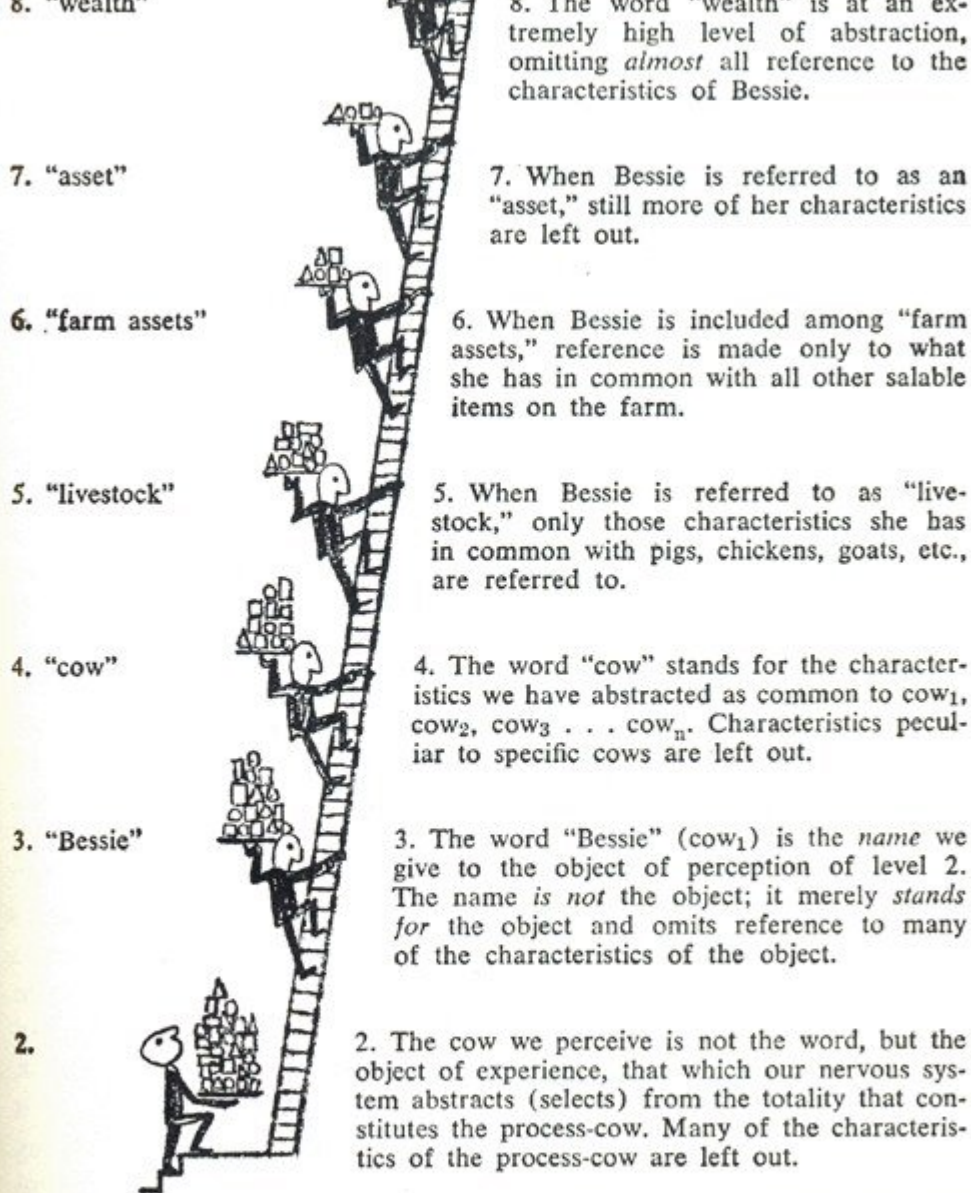
We also have Philodemus *On Home Economics* (column 20, Tsouna translation):

"we must refer to the preconception that we possess about 'a good moneymaker,' ask in whom the content of that preconception is substantiated and in what manner that person makes money, and ascribe the predicate 'good moneymaker' [to whoever it may be in whom] those features are attested"

## **Post by “Kalosyni” of January 31, 2024 at 4:26 PM**

There is a concept called the “Ladder of Abstraction” created by American linguist S. I. Hayakawa in his 1939 book *Language in Action*. It describes the way that humans think and communicate in varying degrees of abstraction.

From concrete at the bottom to abstract at the top:



1. The cow known to science ultimately consists of atoms, electrons, etc., according to present-day scientific inference. Characteristics (represented by circles) are infinite at this level and ever-changing. This is the *process level*.

[Up and Down the Ladder of Abstraction - Choosing the appropriate abstraction level - jtoy](#)

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## Post by “Peter Konstans” of February 1, 2024 at 2:08 PM

We should think in those terms: 'what can we do so that Epicureanism will survive our own demise and the demise of our descendants and the demise of the descendants of our descendants and so on and so on ad infinitum?' I think that calling Epicureanism a religion is a good strategy to get us there so I see Nate's attitude in a positive light. He is right to suggest that Epicurus took piety (and a certain sensual restraint I would add) seriously. In this respect he was as far removed from being a LaVeyan figure as he was from being a protestant preacher.

Plutarch tells us that Epicurus (against the counsel of most sages) saw nothing wrong with seeking sexual relations while being an old man and we can infer that he encouraged it. For all his ill-will I see no good reason not to accept this testimony by Plutarch as authentic. This alone tells us that Epicurus was not a traditional moralist which is an important point because traditional ideas of virtue propagated by most sages were closely linked with respect for popular religion.

That being said, I think Epicurus would have endorsed plenty of the Delphic Maxims. The problem with counterculture-type hedonism and individualism is that it attracts people who are not willing to work seriously and make sacrifices. If we allow Epicureanism to attract those types in large numbers we will perish in the long run. Epicurus, who had organizational talent, must have understood that personal moral quality matters. I would also suggest that we avoid people attracted to mysticism.

Calling Epicureanism a religion is not enough. It has to become an actual organization with rights and responsibilities; with a division of labor, duties and rewards. In other words a formal structure like the Garden is needed, headed by a 'gardener-in-chief' and his close associates. Once again, every precaution must be taken to deter anarchist types who just want to drink and have sex. Absent that, Epicureanism will not survive long. I suspect that a huge reason why ancient Epicureanism didn't survive to Late Antiquity is because it attracted more pleasure-consumers than pleasure-workers. Epicurus would have sacrificed his life for his friends. We need people that are capable of doing the same in a crisis.

That is still not enough. In my view it is important to become completely intolerant towards other religions and traditions. It is important to fight them and to mock them mercilessly and to never desist in doing so. History shows that political and religious traditions that allow or worse put a premium on tolerance do not survive long. Now this is my own personal view. The majority here probably disagree with me and that's fine.

## Post by “Pacatus” of February 1, 2024 at 5:30 PM

So, Peter, in this “Epicurean ‘church’” you seem to espouse –

Would those who disagree with any of its tenets/creeds/commandments be told to simply “get in line, or get out?” Would that be a free choice, or come with threats – à la the Catholic Inquisition?

How authoritarian (totalitarian) would the kind of leadership hierarchy you seem to propose be?

Would there be some kind of incentivized informant network to identify heretics?

My eldest son identifies as a (neo-) Stoic: Would I need to shun him? Denounce him?

I have dear friends who identify as (liberal) Christians – do I need to mock/shun/denounce them?

You seem to think that people should be willing to sacrifice their lives for the prescribed “Epicurean” principles. Is that not just another demand for absolute allegiance to an idealism?

And what price personal integrity?

+++++

I personally doubt that what would survive under your program (as outlined here) would be “Epicurean” except in name only, since I think that this philosophy is – at core – anti-idealist. And anti-totalitarian.

---

## Post by “Peter Konstans” of February 1, 2024 at 6:31 PM

### [Quote from Pacatus](#)

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Would those who disagree with any of its tenets/creeds/commandments be told to simply “get in line, or get out?” Would that be a free choice, or come with threats – à la the Catholic Inquisition?

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I personally doubt that what would survive under your program (as outlined here) would be "Epicurean" except in name only, since I think that this philosophy is - at core - anti-idealist. And anti-totalitarian.

Display More

My vision is not about building a 'church'. It is about building a real flesh-and-blood community structured around a strong Epicurean Identity. This community just like any other real community would have 'leaders' i.e. persons that everybody else regards highly and which have certain responsibilities. There's nothing idealistic here.

Nobody would be prevented from joining the community as long as they swear to live and abide by our common values. And naturally this community would not include persons who insist on other creeds and views on life. We should stive to assimilate, not to be assimilated. Besides, we need to find compatible people to live with if we want to maximize our happiness. If a certain family member doesn't want to be a part, that's ok. Adults should be free to do whatever they wish with their lives. So nothing totalitarian here.

The requirement that people should be willing to sacrifice their lives to save their friends and maintain their honor and integrity would ensure that we attract serious people. The kind of people who will not cut and run after life punches them in the face. The early Christians for example were people of similar mettle. They survived the prosecutions under the emperors because they had managed to form a network of communities whose members had forged a common strong and proud identity and who needed each other. Let's imitate success.

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**Post by "Pacatus" of February 1, 2024 at 6:41 PM**

### [Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

The requirement that people should be willing to sacrifice their lives to save their friends and maintain their honor and integrity would ensure that we attract serious people.

That strikes me as quite different from being willing to sacrifice one's life for a set of dictated principles.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of February 1, 2024 at 7:25 PM**

For now let me just say that the specifics of what procedures and Epicurean community might adopt strikes me as a very legitimate topic, so long as we are clear that we here in the forum are not that community, and so such a community would have to start up independently, with some of the people in this forum agreeing with those specifics and some not agreeing. It is extremely hard to get something like that off the ground, quite apart from the issue of whether it is desirable or not.

I often call peoples' attention to this very long thread we had when we (ultimately fruitlessly) discussed [whether people in this forum would agree to the principles of the Society of Epicurus](#).

It proved to be a non-starter even to try to agree on a general set of principles. Agreeing to a much more rigorous set of procedures would be even harder.

I think it's legitimate to discuss here at the forum general ideas as to how such a group might operate, but we probably need to be careful and reserve some of the more aggressive details and let anyone thinking such a group is a good idea take that discussion elsewhere. It's a hard question as to what makes sense to discuss here and what doesn't, but I suggest everyone avoid getting too intense on either side of questions that for the moment at least are purely hypothetical. This is probably an excellent time to remember the problems that Don and others regularly point out about the dangers of hypotheticals and the difficulty of keeping them in touch with reality.

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### **Post by “Peter Konstans” of February 2, 2024 at 5:13 AM**

### [Quote from Pacatus](#)

#### [Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

The requirement that people should be willing to sacrifice their lives to save their friends and maintain their honor and integrity would ensure that we attract serious people.

That strikes me as quite different from being willing to sacrifice one's life for a set of dictated principles.

Can you give an example (whether hypothetical or historical or personal) of a principles-based sacrifice that you see as good and one that you see as bad? As I see it, making sacrifices on behalf of principles is simply part of the human condition. Human beings have the unique ability to subordinate aspects of their biology in pursuit of values. No other animal does that as far as I know. For example Catholic priests sacrifice (with various degrees of success) the strong biological urge of sexuality because that's part of the principles of being a catholic priest. Defeated warriors (like the extremely competent and energetic Walter Model) choose to die rather than surrender, overriding the supreme biological urge of self-preservation for no other reason than to preserve their honor and the dignity of the institutions they represent. Even the principle of Epicurean pleasure requires making sacrifices. Over time I have learned to resist the urge to consume cheap electronic entertainment and now reading a book feels like a supreme sensual delight. I have learned to resist the urge to consume calorie-rich food with abandon so that now a piece of cheddar feels like manna from heaven.

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### **Post by “Pacatus” of February 2, 2024 at 1:14 PM**

“Even the principle of Epicurean pleasure requires making sacrifices.” It requires choices and trade-offs. And not sacrifice to the “principle” – let alone to some “principle of Epicureanism.” And the trade-offs are simply for the *practical* goal of happiness defined as the most pleasant/pleasurable life (which includes others). You seem to be largely just substituting the word “principle” for “ideal.” Or perhaps deliberately confusing them. Are you trying to craft an “Epicureanism” that is really subsumed under Stoic values and ethics? It sounds like it.

I am sure you'll be able to find plenty of people to take loyalty oaths and pledges of obedience, and to sacrifice themselves on the altar of your principles, Peter, at the beck of their leaders (under whatever “ism” you invoke). I will not be one of them – and that's on principle. (Argumentum finale est.)

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## Post by “Peter Konstans” of February 2, 2024 at 3:55 PM

### [Quote from Pacatus](#)

“Even the principle of Epicurean pleasure requires making sacrifices.” It requires choices and trade-offs. And not sacrifice to the “principle” – let alone to some “principle of Epicureanism.” And the trade-offs are simply for the *practical* goal of happiness defined as the most pleasant/pleasurable life (which includes others). You seem to be largely just substituting the word “principle” for “ideal.” Or perhaps deliberately confusing them. Are you trying to craft an “Epicureanism” that is really subsumed under Stoic values and ethics? It sounds like it.

I am sure you’ll be able to find plenty of people to take loyalty oaths and pledges of obedience, and to sacrifice themselves on the altar of your principles, Peter, at the beck of their leaders (under whatever “ism” you invoke). I will not be one of them – and that’s on principle. (Argumentum finale est.)

I will just make one brief comment: the idea that a world is possible where individual and collective sacrifices are pointless and unnecessary is the very definition of Utopia.

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## Post by “Kalosyni” of February 3, 2024 at 9:03 AM

### [Quote from Bryan](#)

We also have Philodemus On Home Economics (column 20, Tsouna translation):

"we must refer to the preconception that we possess about 'a good moneymaker,' ask in whom the content of that preconception is substantiated and in what manner that person makes money, and ascribe the predicate 'good moneymaker' [to whoever it may be in whom] those feature are attested"

In Diogenes Laertus Book X, it says of Epicurus:

"The terms he used for things were the ordinary terms, and Aristophanes the grammarian credits him with a very characteristic style. He was so lucid a writer that in the work *On Rhetoric* he makes clearness the sole requisite."

Now if we look at what Philodemus wrote in the example here, as referring to the preconception, then we have this formula:

1. word or phrase
2. a very specific person (or possibly also a very specific event or specific object)
3. specific actions (exact unfolding details)

So then rather than using words (or phrases) abstractly, we tie them down to clear, specific, and exact instances.

Now...if we were to go back to the beginning of this entire thread and every person goes back and explains each and every abstract word with this much clearer way of speaking...then we might have something much more beneficial. In my opinion we would all be much better off if when posting with more clarity and exactness (less abstraction...myself included).

And I am very grateful to [Bryan](#) for finding that helpful quote by Philodemus.

So this goes for words such as "religion", "philosophy", and in a recent post the word "sacrifice"...and any other vague words here.

Let me try with the word "philosophy" (with the formula based on Philodemus)

1. philosophy
2. David Sedley

--- and the story of the Garden within "A Few Days in Athens"

3. interpretation of the writings of Epicurus (what David Sedley does)

---- a group of people who come together to study what Epicurus had to say (in "A Few Days in Athens" ...how they gathered in a school)

So this hopefully illustrates more clearly what I mean by philosophy. And the formula is based on past things (not future things).

If those who used words such as "religion" or any other words that may need clarifying, may like to try this out, to bring more clarity. (Possibly every person would have a slightly different way of rendering clarity for a particular word?)

\*\*\*\*

Edit: I see I wasn't as clear and exact as Philodemus recommends, since I wasn't specific enough about what David Sedley does (which clarifies the word philosophy) and also didn't include enough details from "A Few Days in Athens).

## Post by “Pacatus” of February 3, 2024 at 7:48 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

I wasn't specific enough

I doubt that perfect precision in language is ever possible. Maybe the most we can strive for is to understand one another (in whatever Wittgensteinian “language game” sets the context).

But you’ve laid out some good guidelines here – so I wouldn’t lament that you weren’t “specific enough”: I think we all get it (within the “language game” where we are aware of Sedley and Frances Wright) – so I think you did a good job. 👍

+++++

EDIT: I also think this goes to Philodemus’ understanding of poetry (as opposed to philosophical prose) – and its purpose. Didactic poetry is possible, but even there (à la Lucretius) we have metaphor and such, that need to be interpreted. 😊

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## Post by “Pacatus” of February 3, 2024 at 8:06 PM

A simplistic example of what Wittgenstein meant by confusing the context of different “language games” –

Behind a closed door, I am heard to say: “The goal is to topple the king.”

Outside the door, royal guards hear my utterance and rush to warn the king of a pending coup.

But I am really hunched over a chess board, talking about the ultimate goal of chess: checkmate.

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## Post by “DavidN” of February 8, 2024 at 1:53 AM

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

We should think in those terms: 'what can we do so that Epicureanism will survive our own demise and the demise of our descendants and the demise of the descendants of our descendants and so on and so on ad infinitum?' I think that calling Epicureanism a religion is a good strategy to get us there so I see Nate's attitude in a positive light. He is right to suggest that Epicurus took piety (and a certain sensual restraint I would add) seriously. In this respect he was as far removed from being a LaVeyan figure as he was from being a protestant preacher.

Plutarch tells us that Epicurus (against the counsel of most sages) saw nothing wrong with seeking sexual relations while being an old man and we can infer that he encouraged it. For all his ill-will I see no good reason not to accept this testimony by Plutarch as authentic. This alone tells us that Epicurus was not a traditional moralist which is an important point because traditional ideas of virtue propagated by most sages were closely linked with respect for popular religion.

That being said, I think Epicurus would have endorsed plenty of the Delphic Maxims. The problem with counterculture-type hedonism and individualism is that it attracts people who are not willing to work seriously and make sacrifices. If we allow Epicureanism to attract those types in large numbers we will perish in the long run. Epicurus, who had organizational talent, must have understood that personal moral quality matters. I would also suggest that we avoid people attracted to mysticism.

Calling Epicureanism a religion is not enough. It has to become an actual organization with rights and responsibilities; with a division of labor, duties and rewards. In other words a formal structure like the Garden is needed, headed by a 'gardener-in-chief' and his close associates. Once again, every precaution must be taken to deter anarchist types who just want to drink and have sex. Absent that, Epicureanism will not survive long. I suspect that a huge reason why ancient Epicureanism didn't survive to Late Antiquity is because it attracted more pleasure-consumers than pleasure-workers. Epicurus would have sacrificed his life for his friends. We need people that are capable of doing the same in a crisis.

That is still not enough. In my view it is important to become completely intolerant towards other religions and traditions. It is important to fight them and to mock them mercilessly and to never desist in doing so. History shows that political and religious traditions that allow or worse put a premium on tolerance do not survive long. Now this is my own personal view. The majority here probably disagree with me and that's fine.

I don't think centralized hierarchical structures are compatible with Epicureanism. Self-sufficiency, being an epicurean virtue, is increasingly stifled the more centralized and top heavy power structures becomes. I also don't agree with your analysis of the decline of epicureanism in late antiquity, from what I've read most scholars think that in the face of environmental and societal changes the appeal of Epicureanism to the general populis declined.

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**Post by “Cassius” of March 17, 2024 at 12:21 PM**

This thread was taking a strong turn into discussion of hierarchy in social structures, so that part of the discussion has been split to the link below. Let's keep the discussion of "Pro's and Con's of Considering Epicurean Philosophy as a Religion" here, and let's move the more general "social and societal" aspects of hierarchical structures here to the link below.

In both threads, let's remain aware of the "no partisan / contemporary politics" rules of the forum.

Thread

**[Epicurean Views On Hierarchy In Social Structures](#)**

[...]

What was so special about the social and environmental conditions in the centuries when Epicureanism was popular as opposed to those when it declined? Nothing much really. It was the same old agrarian society. In any case Christianity and Islam have survived plenty of devastating social shifts and the same should be demanded of any successful creed aiming at the hearts of as many people as possible.

I agree that modern (and ancient) forms of social organization are not compatible with...

Peter Konstans

March 13, 2024 at 9:19 AM

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**Post by “Peter Konstans” of March 19, 2024 at 11:04 AM**

Epicureanism deserves to be called a religion because it systematically answers the most profound questions of life. Aristotle managed to create an all-encompassing philosophical system too and we know that the Christian church establishment made good use of the services of Aristotle's 'philosophy' for least one full millennium.

Indeed, Christianity would not have evolved to something beyond a cult for society's lost and confused if it hadn't assimilated various aspects of ancient philosophy. So if Christianity could manage to profit from philosophy and remain a religion so too could Epicurean philosophy assimilate various religious tropes to benefit from their appeal to the human soul and at the same time remain true to itself.

Let's consider what alternative Epicureanism can offer to the prevailing theistic and nihilistic theories about the origin of the universe.

Daniel Everett (an ex-missionary turned atheist and linguist known for his theories about the origin of language) explains why it would make better sense to think of the universe as the collective output of a divine culture of gods, rather than the output of a single creator.

'One frequent theistic answer to the question of how DNA and subsequent forms of life evolved is the 'watchmaker' theory. Watches were, at the time of this metaphor, the highest technology known. For many reasons, discussions of philosophers and theists often revolve around the most advanced technology of the day. In this case, watches are intricate, complicated, hierarchical in structure and obviously designed. So if someone found a watch on a distant planet, the presence of that watch would indicate that somewhere there was a designer who had a purpose in mind for it, designed it and fabricated it.

There are modern theologians and theistic scientists who consider this argument sound, substituting a complex organ such as the eye in place of the watch. But philosopher David Hume pointed out three serious problems with the watch analogy. First, the materials of the watch are not found naturally – the watch is built from human-made materials. This makes the analogy artificial. As Hume said, it would make much more sense to use something composed exclusively of organic materials, such as a squash, instead of a watch because one can observe that squashes come forth on their own.

Hume's second objection is that one may not use experiential knowledge to infer a conclusion about non-experiential knowledge. If you understand what a watch is, you also know that the watch was created. One could even observe a watch being made. Yet no one could have any direct experience with the creation of the world. Thus the conclusion that because a watch has a designer the universe also does is not only empirically unjustified but also illogical.

Finally, Hume remarked that even if a watch did show that every complicated thing, the universe in particular, has a designer, this lesson would still have nothing to say about the nature of that designer. Such reasoning thus, even if it had not been shown to be invalid, supports no known religion or idea of a deity above any other.

Perhaps the most effective argument against the watchmaker analogy, however, comes from culture. No person can make a watch or its component materials by themselves. A watch is the output of a culture, not a designer. If the universe was designed, this design would have required a society, not a god, unless that god were far different than it is described in the major religions.'

We could thus theorize that the part of observable reality we call the universe is an artefact created by the divine activities and interactions of the [Epicurean gods](#) residing in the intermundia. As a divine artefact, the universe has a divine purpose or meaning (hence refuting cosmological nihilism) but this purpose is relevant only to the gods, and completely irrelevant and infathomable to us.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of March 19, 2024 at 11:59 AM**

Lots of food for thought in that post Peter, thank you.

No doubt an obvious rejoinder is that Lucretius said that the universe could not have been created by the gods because they had no pattern to go by.

How would you incorporate that?

Regardless of your answer it is worth considering the question of how to get from where we are to where we would like to be, even if the first step is not the final step, and I can see how your suggestion could make sense if it can be reconciled as one alternative that both agrees with the available evidence and does not conflict with it.

Does it survive the test of not conflicting with the available evidence in Epicurean terms?

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### **Post by “Cassius” of March 19, 2024 at 1:02 PM**

Also for example : I am presuming that in your scenario you are not presuming that at any step of the way that something was created from nothing, as that would violate an established Epicurean position.

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### **Post by “Peter Konstans” of March 20, 2024 at 12:23 PM**

A particular cosmos, is only a temporary agglomeration of atoms, and it is only one of an infinite number of such cosmoi, which come into existence and then dissolve away. So time and

space experience individual periods of birth and death as each cosmos comes and goes but this cycle extends to infinity.

Atoms themselves were forged in stellar explosions but where exactly the raw physical energy that set the universe alight ultimately comes from is unknown. Since the universe can't have just 'popped up' as the late Hawkings believed we must assume that it actually has divine roots.

But just like Lucretius we must rule out the notion that the universe was designed like a machine because our scientific knowledge of its nature is enough to show us conclusively that there is no deliberate fabrication process taking place. What we observe is a discharge of energy and then we see the universe harvesting this energy and arranging itself in a random evolutionary manner.

We must then suppose that the universes emanate from the energies of divine entities that dwell in a realm beyond time and space that we cannot observe.

Since we can't imagine blessed immortal beings creating and using tools, the universes couldn't have been made to serve a strict utilitarian purpose like watches. Instead, they could be something more akin to a work of art than a tool. They could represent a sort of spiritual or contemplative activity by the gods with the purpose of imitating the platonic One, the theoretical ineffable principle of reality, inaccessible even to the gods.

Just as the Epicureans prayed to the gods not to request favors but to contemplate them and receive some of their divine essence, it can be assumed that the gods contemplate the One and that this contemplation results in a burst of creative energy that perpetually generates finite universes.

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## Post by “Don” of March 20, 2024 at 1:02 PM

### [Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

Since the universe can't have just 'popped up' as the late Hawkings believed we must assume that it actually has divine roots.

### [Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

They could represent a sort of spiritual or contemplative activity by the gods with the purpose of imitating the platonic One, the theoretical ineffable principle of reality,

inaccessible even to the gods.

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

receive some of their divine essence, it can be assumed that the gods contemplate the One and that this contemplation results in a burst of creative energy that perpetually generates finite universes.

Hmmm...I would't think any of that is Epicurean, either classical or modern. Are you getting those ideas from specific textual references?

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## Post by “Cassius” of March 20, 2024 at 1:05 PM

Point 1

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

Atoms themselves were forged in stellar explosions but where exactly the raw physical energy that set the universe alight ultimately comes from is unknown. Since the universe can't have just 'popped up' as the late Hawkings believed we must assume that it actually has divine roots.

Point 2

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

We must then suppose that the universes emanate from the energies of divine entities that dwell in a realm beyond time and space that we cannot observe.

Point 3

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

Just as the Epicureans prayed to the gods not to request favors but to contemplate them and receive some of their divine essence, it can be assumed that the gods contemplate the One and that this contemplation results in a burst of creative energy that perpetually generates finite universes.

OK then Peter I presume then that these are your personal viewpoints and you are not representing them as consistent with Epicurean philosophy. Fair enough if you think those positions could be supported by "modern science," but not Epicurean viewpoints, as I understand your statement of them.

Because certainly in Epicurean terms:

- 1 - Atoms are eternal and were never created at any point in time from energy or anything else.
- 2 - I guess you're basing that on point one, but it's definitely not the Epicurean position.
- 3 - I see no Epicurean reason for thinking that gods contemplate "The One" any more than we contemplate "the one," because Epicurean are atomists and there is no "the one."

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### **Post by "Cassius" of March 20, 2024 at 1:06 PM**

I see Don and I posted simultaneously on almost exactly the same points. 😊

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### **Post by "Peter Konstans" of March 20, 2024 at 3:10 PM**

Atoms are defined today as the basic particles of the [chemical elements](#). According to modern cosmology atoms did not exist forever. They were created through the process of nucleosynthesis. Are we in agreement that modern cosmology is correct in this?

According to Epicureanism gods exist between the intermundia, i. e. between the infinite cosmoi. Are we in agreement that this doesn't go against any Epicurean position?

The existence of [Epicurean gods](#) raises the question where they came from. The logical answer to that would be that they emerged from a single divine source.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of March 20, 2024 at 3:18 PM**

As for me, my answers are:

### [Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

According to modern cosmology atoms did not exist forever. They were created through the process of nucleosynthesis. Are we in agreement that modern cosmology is correct in this?

I am definitely \*not\* in agreement with that. The purpose of this forum is to research and apply Epicurean philosophy, not "modern cosmology," especially on issues that are highly contentious and conflict with logical reasoning as to whether the universe as a whole had a beginning or is eternal. As for my personal views they are absolutely with Epicurus on this one. There are at some level particles that have been around eternally, whether "atom" is the right word for those particles is going to be a question of terminology.

### [Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

According to Epicureanism gods exist between the intermundia, i. e. between the infinite cosmoi. Are we in agreement that this doesn't go against any Epicurean position?

We are in agreement that the [Epicurean gods](#) exist in the intermundia, which is hypothesized to be between the "worlds." I am not sure what you refer to when you say "this" however. The first part of your statement as to the gods existing in the intermundia is no doubt what the Epicureans held.

### [Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

The existence of [Epicurean gods](#) raises the question where they came from. The logical answer to that would be that they emerged from a single divine source.

No, we would not be in agreement here either. The logical answer to any recurring process in a universe that is eternal and had no beginning is that these processes have been going on forever, and that there was never a "first." And to the extent your "divine" is intended to imply "supernatural" we were certainly not be in agreement.

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## **Post by "DavidN" of March 20, 2024 at 8:48 PM**

I would point out that if we can't understand the gods, how can we rule out the universe as a "tool". For all we know our universe is a microverse battery powering gods car.

## Post by “Peter Konstans” of March 21, 2024 at 5:10 AM

We are in agreement that there have always been atoms or particles in some form just as we are in agreement that there are infinite cosmoi. But it doesn't go against any Epicurean position to suggest that each particular cosmos is finite. As long as we accept that the universe doesn't ever run out of cosmoi, no Epicurean position is violated.

Epicurus writes:

'First believe that god is a living being immortal and blessed, according to the notion of a god indicated by the common sense of mankind; and so believing, thou shalt not affirm of him aught that is foreign to his immortality or that agrees not with blessedness, but shalt believe about him whatever may uphold both his blessedness and his immortality.'

Following Epicurus we affirm that gods are a part of nature and as such not 'supernatural' but since they are immortal we also affirm that they are 'supernatural' in the sense that the matter that makes them up doesn't dissolve.

Epicurus encourages us to believe about the Gods whatever upholds their blessedness and immortality. The idea that gods are engaged in contemplative activity similar to prayer is an idea that doesn't violate the notion of their blessedness in itself.

The idea that reality has a divine foundation (i. e. that space and time are not the whole of reality but simply a part of it) is the only way to support the notion that the universe has existed forever and always will exist and it is the only way to counter cosmological nihilism.

Immortality and indestructibility are not observed anywhere in space and time. If the cosmos has no divine foundation then both the place of the gods in it and the notion of infinity run into logical problems.

That's why modern cosmologists tend to believe in a finite, one-shot, once-in-an-eternity universe that came from nothing i. e. 'quantum fluctuations'. I am not saying they are correct but if you assume that the universe has absolutely no divine foundation then it makes sense to think this way.

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## Post by “Cassius” of March 21, 2024 at 6:47 AM

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

Following Epicurus we affirm that gods are a part of nature and as such not 'supernatural' but since they are immortal we also affirm that they are 'supernatural' in the sense that the matter that makes them up doesn't dissolve.

I don't think that is quite correct. There is no reason to consider that the particles that make up the gods are different from any other particles. The difference is that the gods "replace" their particles in such a way that their pseudo-bodies never deteriorate like ours do. That's not supernatural - that's working within nature to continue their preservation, and that requires effort on their part (as per fragments discussed by Dewitt).

#### [Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

Epicurus encourages us to believe about the Gods whatever upholds their blessedness and immortality. The idea that gods are engaged in contemplative activity similar to prayer is an idea that doesn't violate the notion of their blessedness in itself.

Certainly contemplation could be a part, but if you are suggesting that that is \*all\* that they do, I see no reason for that conclusion, and it might well contradict the position stated above that the gods must act to maintain their deathlessness.

#### [Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

The idea that reality has a divine foundation (i. e. that space and time are not the whole of reality but simply a part of it) is the only way to support the notion that the universe has existed forever and always will exist and it is the only way to counter cosmological nihilism.

This is totally fail to follow as a reasonable suggestion and see no hint of it in the way that Epicurus constructed his view of the eternity of fundamental particles.

#### [Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

Immortality and indestructibility are not observed anywhere in space and time. If the cosmos has no divine foundation then both the place of the gods in it and the notion of infinity run into logical problems.

They are not observed, they are \*deduced\* from what we do see, as explained in more detail by Lucretius, so I would disagree here as well.

#### [Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

That's why modern cosmologists tend to believe in a finite, one-shot, once-in-an-eternity universe that came from nothing i. e. 'quantum fluctuations'. I am not saying they are correct but if you assume that the universe has absolutely no divine foundation then it makes sense to think this way.

Again I wonder why you switch the term from "supernatural" to "divine." Do you mean to imply a difference? As to the point that modern cosmologists tend to go off in that direction, that's probably correct, and why I recommend people avoid them like the plague. I think Epicurus' deductive logic about an eternal and infinite universe, based on observations of what we do see every day around us makes much more sense than postulating a one-shot deal that violates that which we do see.

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### **Post by “Peter Konstans” of March 21, 2024 at 9:31 AM**

As Epicureans we agree that the gods are fully material beings (not an ultra-fine essence or 'spirit') and that they are created and sustained by natural processes. It is reasonable to assume that the gods are not passive entities like cogs in a machine but free and able to interact with their environment or with each other in way that ensures their body doesn't decay. Certainly this view fits the notion of their blessedness better than if we were to assume that they are completely passive.

However we can't assume that the gods are engaged in a struggle to 'feed' and preserve their bodies similar to that of biological beings. This would imply that they are not blessed but live in a state of at least partial insecurity. The idea that instead of dealing with issues of survival the gods engage in care-free creative activity (like creating works of art) and then in contemplation as a means of 'resting' from creative activity fits the image of blessedness better. Maybe the gods even have a blessed 'end' where they reach a stage of existence so high that they merge with God. Again, this doesn't by itself violate the notion of blessedness.

'Supernatural' traditionally implies superiority in hierarchial terms, like the ability of a god to put natural things in order and provide for the needs of nature and people as if he were a governor and law-maker. In other words it emphasizes the power or 'imperium' god has over creation. By using the word 'divine' I wanted to frame godly superiority in purely ontological terms: the gods are superior to us because they enjoy a more secure and blissful existence than we do, not because they are more 'powerful'.

The notion that reality has a divine foundation means theism. It means that divine beings in some form exist, that the universe is in some form a divine expression and that the whole of

reality emanates in some way from ontologically superior planes. I don't agree that this whole theistic notion by itself necessarily contradicts the eternity of the world, the eternity of particles, or the ability of nature to manage its course independently of divine oversight and guidance by means of natural laws.

Religions are false and harmful not because they accept the reality of a divine sphere (regardless of how they define this sphere) but because of their completely false notions about the divine.

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## Post by “Cassius” of March 21, 2024 at 9:51 AM

### [Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

However we can't assume that the gods are engaged in a struggle to 'feed' and preserve their bodies similar to that of biological beings. This would imply that they are not blessed but live in a state of at least partial insecurity. The idea that instead of dealing with issues of survival the gods engage in care-free creative activity (like creating works of art) and then in contemplation as a means of 'resting' from creative activity fits the image of blessedness better.

Here is the very interesting section in DeWitt that explains the "gods must preserve their deathlessness" issue, which begins on page 267:

### Quote

At the outset it must be observed and kept diligently in mind that nowhere in his extant writings does Epicurus call the gods immortal. This might be thought an accident of the tradition were it not for the fact that other considerations rule out this possibility. If Lucretius does call them immortal repeatedly, this may be set down as an indication that he never really mastered the Epicurean lore of the gods and did not live to make an intensive study of it in preparation for writing about it.

The reasoning behind this doctrine of incorruptibility is readily discerned. From the doctrine that nothing exists except atoms and void it follows that the bodies of the gods must be corporeal. Gods are *zoa*, "animate beings." They are thus units in the ascending order of Nature, as is man. Being in this order and corporeal, they cannot be deathless. If deathlessness were inherent in their nature, they would be in another class by themselves. Since they do belong in the same class as man, it is a logical

necessity to think of their incorruptibility as by some means preserved. Since in the cosmos of Epicurus, unlike that of Plato, this incorruptibility lacked a superior being to guarantee its continuance, the sole possibility was that the gods preserved it for themselves by their own vigilance. Thus it must be discerned that just as the happiness of man is self-achieved, so the happiness of the gods is self-preserved.

However astonishing this doctrine may seem, it is well authenticated. Plutarch, for example, who, though hostile, wrote with texts of Epicurus before him, has this to say: "Freedom from pain along with incorruptibility should have been inherent in the nature of the blissful being, standing in no need of active concern."<sup>57</sup> This manifestly implies that the [Epicurean gods](#) were unable to take their immunity from corruption for granted but must concern themselves for its perpetuation.

The incongruity between this selfish concern for their own bodily security and their indifference to the good of mankind was certain to elicit condemnation from believers in divine providence, and this has not escaped record. Thus the Christian Eusebius quotes his Atticus as saying: "According to Epicurus it's good-bye to providence, in spite of the fact that according to him the gods bring to bear all diligent care for the preservation of their own peculiar blessings."<sup>58</sup>

When once it has been discerned that the gods are under the necessity of preserving their own blessings, the next step is to learn that this activity is ascribed to them as a virtue. The recognition of this fact will serve to explain a rather cryptic statement from the pen of Epicurus himself. Writing of the "false suppositions" of the multitude, who thought of the gods, now as punishing the wicked, now as having venal relationships with them, he concluded as follows: "for [the gods], being exclusively devoted to their own peculiar virtues, are partial to those like themselves, deeming all that is not such as alien."<sup>59</sup> The first half of this statement has been variously interpreted, but the recognition of our puzzling doctrine will make the meaning intelligible. Just as it is the virtue of men to achieve their own happiness, so it is the virtue of the gods to preserve their own blissfulness. This task so completely engages their attention that no participation in human affairs is possible.

This notion was so well known as to have been familiar to the dull Horatian commentator Porphyry, who lived early in the third century A.d. Horace had quoted freely from Lucretius: "I have learned the lesson that the gods live a life free from concern."<sup>60</sup> The comment runs: "This derives from the doctrine of the Epicureans, who assert that the gods cannot be immortal unless enjoying leisure and immune from all responsibility."

This doctrine has two facets. The gods are characterized by two attributes, blissfulness and incorruptibility. Neither is inherent in their nature. They are incorruptible only

because the contingency of destruction is avertible by their vigilance. If this seems subtle, the notion that keeps company with it is more so and also paradoxical. Let it be allowed that incorruptibility is tantamount to eternal life. Then, according to Epicurus, this eternal life is not to be thought a cause of happiness but rather the perpetuity of happiness is a cause of eternal life. The gods win eternal life by maintaining their own pleasures perpetually. This conceit appealed to Menander, who exploited it in his *Eunuchus*. It survives through transfer to the *Andria* of Terence, where the happy lover is made to exclaim: "I think the life of the gods to be everlasting for the reason that their pleasures are perpetual, because immortality is assured to me if no grief shall intervene to mar this joy." <sup>81</sup> This is labeled as "Epicurean dogma" by the Donatus commentary.

This curious conceit consists in a curious semantic shift. Since the life of the gods becomes immortal only through perpetuity of happiness, it follows that the word *immortal* comes to denote a quality of life, something superb or exquisite. This is the only sense in which it is employed in the extant remains of Epicurus. For example, the good Epicurean "lives among immortal blessings" and friendship is styled an "immortal good." <sup>62</sup>

The notion that this activity should be ascribed to the gods as a virtue seemed as weird to Plutarch as it does today: "This is not what we mean when we speak of virtue as strong and vice as weak; we do not apply the words to the perpetuation and dissolution of body; wherefore [the Epicureans] are at fault when they represent eternal life as accruing to the divine being through guarding against and dispelling the forces that would destroy." <sup>63</sup> Manifestly the gods are not assured of their safety merely by dwelling in the spaces between the worlds. They must also be forever on the watch. This is the view satirically presented by Seneca: "[The divine being] in the space between this heaven and another . . . dodges the debris of the worlds crashing to ruin above it and around it." <sup>64</sup>

Very differently are described the divine abodes in the opening lines of the third book of Lucretius; all is at rest, no wind, no rain, no frost, no snow, and no clouds, but always serenity of sky; Nature unmasked supplies all needs and nothing occurs at any time to mar the perfection of peace. <sup>65</sup>

This contrast between Lucretius and Seneca marks a chimerical union in the thought of Epicurus between a relentless logic and a sort of romanticism. The logic can be made clear by a chain argument. It has its source in a tenacious materialism, which demands that the bodies of the gods be corporeal; by the same logic the corporeal cannot be immune from the hazard of destruction; the gods are consequently not deathless, only incorruptible; this incorruptibility, not being inherent, demands some sort of conservation, which can only be ascribed to the foresight and effort of the gods

themselves. This, then, is their virtue, to preserve their own happiness and incorruptibility.

The weakness of logic, of course, is its lack of dynamic. Men do not feel called to devote their lives to the propagation of syllogisms. The merit of romanticism, on the contrary, is the dynamic that goes with it. It is powered by emotion. Lucretius often handles the logic of Epicurus with clarity and skill, but the force of propulsion behind the logic is emotion, pity for the superstitious misery of man and eagerness to emancipate him. In respect of this enthusiasm Lucretius seems to surpass his master, and yet Epicurus is on record as saying: "[The wise man] will be more susceptible of emotion than other men and this will be no obstacle to his wisdom." <sup>6a</sup> Here we have the recognition of the chimerical blend of logic and romanticism. It is the latter, the emotion, the eagerness to emancipate men from fear and to show them the road to happiness, that leads Epicurus to extol the blissfulness of the gods as a perfection to contemplate and imitate. It is the logic of materialism that compels him to deny it to them as a birthright, so to say, and to impose upon them the necessity of preserving it.

Strange as this contingent immortality may seem, a similar notion was entertained by Plato. According to him the eternity of the cosmos depends upon the will of the supreme demiurge; since he was the creator, he could also destroy. It is impossible, however, to think of him choosing to do so.<sup>87</sup> Thus the cosmos is eternal because it is subject to a contingency that will never occur. Even the immortality of the Christian falls in the same class: being the gift of God it could also be withdrawn by the same power, but perfect faith exists that this contingency will never occur.

Display More

#### [Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

Maybe the gods even have a blessed 'end' where they reach a stage of existence so high that they merge with God.

I can't imagine the phrase "merge with God" to be something Epicurus would find consistent.

#### [Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

The notion that reality has a divine foundation means theism. It means that divine beings in some form exist, that the universe is in some form a divine expression and that the whole of reality emanates in some way from ontologically superior planes.

No I don't see that as compatible with Epicurus at all. There is no implication whatsoever that the universe arises from the divinities, and in fact quite the opposite - any "divinities" that exist are purely natural.

### [Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

Religions are false and harmful not because they accept the reality of a divine sphere (regardless of how they define this sphere) but because of their completely false notions about the divine.

Now that sentence I agree with as being exactly what Epicurus is saying.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of March 21, 2024 at 9:58 AM**

I have to add as an aside to what I quoted from DeWitt above that I've never seen that argument anywhere else. If someone has seen it elsewhere, please let me know, because I tend to see this is one example of the value of DeWitt's approach. DeWitt charges ahead to explore important questions where few others seem to want to go. If I have a criticism it is as I said in a recent podcast, that sometimes I don't think DeWitt *follows his own lead far enough*. So if I had been him I would not have written the following to imply that Lucretius' approach was superior to that of Epicurus (if in fact it does; as I reread it, I think DeWitt is maybe just making the point that you need both):

#### Quote

The weakness of logic, of course, is its lack of dynamic. Men do not feel called to devote their lives to the propagation of syllogisms. The merit of romanticism, on the contrary, is the dynamic that goes with it. It is powered by emotion. Lucretius often handles the logic of Epicurus with clarity and skill, but the force of propulsion behind the logic is emotion, pity for the superstitious misery of man and eagerness to emancipate him. In respect of this enthusiasm Lucretius seems to surpass his master, and yet Epicurus is on record as saying: "[The wise man] will be more susceptible of emotion than other men and this will be no obstacle to his wisdom." <sup>6a</sup> Here we have the recognition of the chimerical blend of logic and romanticism. It is the latter, the emotion, the eagerness to emancipate men from fear and to show them the road to happiness, that leads Epicurus to extol the blissfulness of the gods as a perfection to contemplate and imitate. It is the logic of materialism that compels him to deny it to them as a birthright, so to say, and to impose upon them the necessity of preserving it.

DeWitt has himself pointed out that:

#### Quote

“The extension of the name of pleasure to this normal state of being was the major innovation of the new hedonism. It was in the negative form, freedom from pain of body and distress of mind, that it drew the most persistent and vigorous condemnation from adversaries. The contention was that the application of the name of pleasure to this state was unjustified on the ground that two different things were thereby being denominated by one name. Cicero made a great to-do over this argument, but it is really superficial and captious. The fact that the name of pleasure was not customarily applied to the normal or static state did not alter the fact that the name ought to be applied to it; nor that reason justified the application; nor that human beings would be the happier for so reasoning and believing.”

To me this logical reasoning about the gods sustaining their own deathlessness is very similar to the example of the logical reasoning behind concluding that if the feelings are only two, then the absence of pain *is* pleasure, and vice versa. Both are logical assertions that stand or fall on the precise meaning of words that are asserted to correspond with the actual facts of reality, and to the rejection of interpretations that contradict these conclusions.

The gods are composed of atoms and void and therefore they are not by nature immortal. The feelings are two and therefore the presence of one is the absence of the other. Granting the premises of these propositions, then, to paraphrase Torquatus, nothing can be more true than the truth of these propositions, and Epicurus was asserting them dogmatically as established beyond doubt.

Yes we need "emotion" and "romanticism" to give force to the conclusions, but the logical reasoning supports the emotion and romanticism, it doesn't undermine it. DeWitt pioneers the discussion of the gods not being naturally deathless, but then he unfortunately draws back from the conclusion, when he should follow each step out to the end.

Lucretius *may* have tripped up on calling the gods immortal (I say *may* because I see this as more likely an issue of connotation and translation / wording), but I don't think there's anything inconsistent at all about the emotion and drive of Lucretius compared to Epicurus. We don't have the texts but I feel sure Epicurus was at least as driven and intense as Lucretius himself.

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## Post by “Bryan” of March 21, 2024 at 6:29 PM

Cassius, the quotes you shared from DeWitt really are superb.

Calling the gods immortal does not seem inconsistent with DeWitt's interpretation, because whether the gods are (1) immortal due to their composition or (2) immortal due to their activities, they are still immortal either way.

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### **Post by “Bryan” of March 21, 2024 at 8:44 PM**

(Aetius "Pseudo-Plutarch" *Placita Philosophorum* 1.7.34) "In the judgment of Epicurus, all the Gods are anthropomorphites, or have the shape of men; but they are perceptible only by reason, for their nature admits of no other manner of being apprehended, their parts being so small and fine that they give no corporeal representations. The same Epicurus asserts that there are four other natural beings which are immortal: of this sort are (1) atoms, (2) the vacuum, (3) the infinite, and (4) the similar parts; and these last are called Homoeomeries and likewise elements." (Goodwin trans.)

"Ἐπίκουρος ἀνθρωποειδεῖς μὲν πάντας τοὺς θεοὺς, λόγῳ δὲ πάντας τούτους θεωρητοὺς διὰ τὴν λεπτομέρειαν τῆς τῶν εἰδώλων φύσεως: ὁ δ' αὐτὸς ἄλλως τέσσαρας φύσεις κατὰ γένος ἀφθάρτους τάσδε, [1] τὰ ἄτομα [2] τὸ κενὸν [3] τὸ ἄπειρον [4] τὰς ὁμοιότητας: αὗται δὲ λέγονται ὁμοιομέρεια καὶ στοιχεῖα."

Philodemus makes similar statements that the gods are "constituted by similarity" in his books on the gods. Epicurus argued against Homoiomereia as the constitution of objects in world systems -- and objects in world systems are corruptible in part by the intrusion of matter that is alien to the constitution of that object.

The finite amount of matter that is bound up in world systems has its natural equilibrium (isonomia) in the infinite amount of matter that freely exists in the spaces between the worlds!

(Cicero, DND 1.37.105) "Nor should there ever cease to be an addition of like bodies from the infinite." "Neque deficiat unquam ex infinitis corporibus similibus accessio"

By taking up the matter that is similar to them and excluding what is alien, the gods easily but actively continue their existence.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of March 22, 2024 at 6:33 AM**

### [Quote from Bryan](#)

The same Epicurus asserts that there are four other natural beings which are immortal: of this sort are (1) atoms, (2) the vacuum, (3) the infinite, and (4) the similar parts; and these last are called Homoeomeries and likewise elements." (Goodwin trans.)

Point 3 reminds me of DeWitt's comment about the forces of creation prevailing over those of destruction in the universe as a whole - individual worlds come and go, but the universe as a whole continues forever. To me that makes sense and is a useful point.

Point 4 seems to imply something else that isn't so immediately understandable, at least to me. So this is the same homoeomery that Lucretius argues against "going downward" from our level of existence (that men are not made of little men)? But since we aren't concerned about infinite division on a scale going upward, it is ok to observe that at some level bodies can be grouped together to form larger versions of the same bodies on an infinite or between-the-worlds or "god-level" scale? I think what you are implying Bryan is a grouping of similar particles, perhaps fractal-like - sustainable by flows of similar components, analogous to drops of water forming a waterfall or river or groupings of stars forming a milky way?

The point that even the gods require some form of activity to maintain their deathlessness would likely be a significant part of Epicurean theology, giving us another useful thing to consider as points of emulation. We too have to act properly to sustain our happiness just as they do - there's no supernatural state that "hands it to us free" for men or gods.

Or stated in the way that the death argument is made in Lucretius (if even Epicurus and Scipio had to die, we should not be offended that we too die), then the analogy would be something like: *If even the gods must act properly to maintain their happiness, who are we to complain that we must do the same? We should emulate the gods not only in the result of being happy, but also in the process of getting there, with both gods and men acting property to perpetuate our happiness.*

Note: I made some edits in the above paragraphs to try to be more clear.

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## **Post by "Bryan" of March 22, 2024 at 1:55 PM**

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

The point that even the gods require some form of activity to maintain their deathlessness would likely be a significant part of Epicurean theology, giving us another useful thing to consider as points of emulation. We too have to act properly to sustain our happiness just as they do - there's no supernatural state that "hands it to us free" for men or gods.

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Yes I agree with you completely, including some uncertainty about the positive use of Homoeomeria - whether the atoms with which the gods easily form themselves are (1) all exactly the same kind of atom or (2) just within a class of atoms that is kindred to them. The effect and the appearance is the same either way.

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Throwing this in as well.

(Gaius Cotta via Cicero NDN 1.114) "Nevertheless, I fail to understand how this so-called blessed deity remains unafraid of destruction, given he is relentlessly bombarded and disturbed by an everlasting stream of atoms, and considering that images constantly emanate from him."

Nec tamen video quo modo non vereatur iste deus beatus ne intereat, cum sine ulla intermissione pulsetur agiteturque atomorum incursione sempiterna, cumque ex ipso imagines semper affluant.

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## Post by "TauPhi" of March 22, 2024 at 8:45 PM

I'd like to offer some of my thoughts about few things you said in your last post [Cassius](#).

Before I start, I should clarify that I'm all on board with studying Epicurean theology as any other aspect of Epicureanism for the sake of understanding the philosophy. I do, however, see few problems with taking everything Epicurean at face value just because Epicurus came up

with it. And by 'it' in this case I mean 'emulating gods':

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

The point that even the gods require some form of activity to maintain their deathlessness would likely be a significant part of Epicurean theology, giving us another useful thing to consider as points of emulation. We too have to act properly to sustain our happiness just as they do - there's no supernatural state that "hands it to us free" for men or gods.

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

If even the gods must act properly to maintain their happiness, who are we to complain that we must do the same? We should emulate the gods not only in the result of being happy, but also in the process of getting there, with both gods and men acting properly to perpetuate our happiness.

Epicurus had exactly the same access to knowledge about the nature of gods as we do now two millennia later. No access whatsoever. His description of gods is grounded in pure speculation and wishful thinking. He had no empirical evidence, direct or indirect, to support his claims about gods' deathlessness, blessedness or any other 'nesseses'. So what exactly are we supposed to be emulating? Because the way I see it, it looks like we are supposed to give gods qualities we want them to have and then emulate the qualities we've given them. This kind of approach is similar to: I believe chewing a chewing gum makes people happy. Therefore, from now on I'll be chewing as much chewing gum as humanly possible.

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

If even the gods must act properly to maintain their happiness, who are we to complain that we must do the same?

Well, I'm TauPhi and I'd like to complain that I must do the same because I don't know what 'the same' is. Since I have no way of establishing what 'the gods must act properly' is, would I be far off guessing that to act properly means sticking index fingers in strangers' ears every Tuesday?

I'm fully aware that my chewing gum and sticking fingers examples are absurd but giving gods serious qualities for emulation doesn't make anything less absurd.

Epicureanism is really close to my heart. There's a plethora of beneficial ideas in this philosophy that can be applied in our lives but there are also things demonstratively wrong, or worse, impossible to prove or disprove like [Epicurean gods](#) and trying to incorporate these ideas in our lives may not be such a good idea.

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

We should emulate the gods not only in the result of being happy, but also in the process of getting there, with both gods and men acting properly to perpetuate our happiness.

There's no need to introduce a middleman in the form of gods. By trial and error we can establish things that make our lives worth living for ourselves. There's no need for shifting responsibility or seeking some form of reassurance in imaginary, better versions of ourselves. Instead of looking at fairy tale creatures, let's focus on studying our reality among people like us who also try to figure stuff out without an superpowers like immortality, indestructibility or other made up qualities.

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### **Post by “Bryan” of March 22, 2024 at 10:35 PM**

TauPhi, something that comes to mind is that, as Lucretius says, even things in the same room with us might as well be miles away unless we look at and, to some extent, focus on them.

"...our minds and intelligence straining fixedly towards these images, comes to understand what is the blessed and eternal nature." (Velleius the Epicurean via Cicero DND 1.19.49)

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### **Post by “Don” of March 22, 2024 at 11:07 PM**

First, discussions of the gods strike me as akin to "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?" There's never going to be a right answer. However, I readily admit that Epicurus and the Epicurean school placed profound and primary importance on a right understanding of the gods and our relationship to them. It's first in the letter to Menoikeus, first in [Principal Doctrines](#), first in the Tetrapharmakos, hinted at in Book 1 (1.44-9) of Lucretius and mentioned in several places thereafter.

But what is that profound and primary importance. From my perspective:

1. The gods did not create nor do they sustain the universe as a whole or our cosmos (world-system).
2. The gods take no notice of our existence.
3. We have no reason to fear their wrath nor to expect any favors from them.

4. The gods are "μακάριον (makarion)" and "ἄφθαρτον (aphtharton)"
  1. μακάριον = "blessed, fortunate, wealthy, 'well-off.'" Possibly having something to do with being wealthy, either literally or figuratively.
  2. ἄφθαρτον = ἄ + φθαρτον = α- "not" + φθαρτον "destructible, perishable."
  3. There are numerous places where mortals are called μακάριον. We can be "blessed" but can we be ἄφθαρτον. I would say, in some ways, yes. If we understand the nature of pleasure, we edge over so slightly closer to being ἄφθαρτον. We're mortal and will always BE mortal. And so we can never BE a god, but if we "meditate on these things" that ingrain in us a visceral understanding of pleasure, the stimulative and the calm pleasures, we can find pleasure in unexpected places within ourselves.
5. The gods lead an effortless life, free from all exertion and pain and troubles, totally imbued with pleasure.
  1. That's why I disagree with [Cassius](#) 's assertion that "the gods require some form of activity to maintain their deathlessness would likely be a significant part of Epicurean theology." I think that is diametrically opposed to Epicurean "theology." The whole point of being a god is to live in blissful pleasure constantly with no intrusion of pain, want, trouble, exertion, etc.

All that said, I'm still not sold on the idea that Epicurus insisted that the gods exist as "animals." I'm going to address that in the next post to make it easier for everyone to react to the above statements. And I'm sure there will be reactions.

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## Post by "Don" of March 22, 2024 at 11:56 PM

Quote from Letter to Menoikeus

First, believe that the god is a blessed and imperishable thing (τὸν θεὸν ζῶον) as is the common, general understanding of the god. You, Menoikeus, believe everything about which a god is able to preserve its own imperishability and blessedness for itself. Do not attribute anything foreign to its incorruptibility or incongruous with the blessedness of the god! Gods exist, and the knowledge of them is manifest to the mind's eye.

τὸν θεὸν ζῶον "the god (is a) blessed and imperishable ζῶον. But what is a ζῶον?

First, note the singular "god." Not gods. This use of the singular - a god, the god - in the Menoikeus letter has led Long and Sedley offer that each individual creates their own god, their own image of the divine. I am still firmly rooted in this conceptual camp of the gods rather than imaging inter-cosmic beings hanging out somewhere in the universe. One reason: By definition,

if they are inter-cosmic - literally between world-systems - there is nowhere for them to live! A cosmos is a world-system - ours has Earth at the center surrounded by the orb of the heavenly stars and wandering planets. There is no world in the metakosmos/intermundia - it is literally "between" worlds... No planet, no stars, no world.

But the word ζῶον (zoon) could very well be a clever use of an ordinary word by Epicurus.

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, ζῶον](#)

Yes, it "typically" means living being, animal. It's where we get zoology from.

BUT... it also can mean "in art, figure, image, not necessarily of animals."

And that second definition is NOT a later application that Epicurus didn't know. Here are some examples from Herodotus (c.484–c.425 BCE, from LSJ; Epicurus lived 341–270 BCE) and others:

*The Histories*, [3.88](#): First he made and set up a carved stone, upon which was cut **the figure of a horseman** ( πρῶτον μὲν νυν τύπον ποιησάμενος λίθινον ἔστησε: **ζῶον** δέ οἱ ἐνήην ἀνὴρ ἵππεύς)

*The Histories*, [1.203](#): Here, it is said, are trees growing leaves that men crush and mix with water and use for painting **figures** on their clothing; these **figures** (ζῶα) cannot be washed out, but last as long as the wool, as if they had been woven into it from the first.

*The Histories*, [2.4](#): it was they (Egyptians) who first assigned to the several gods their altars and images and temples, and first carved figures (ζῶα) on stone.

*The Histories*, [2.124](#): [4] (for the road is nearly a mile long and twenty yards wide, and elevated at its highest to a height of sixteen yards, and it is all of stone polished and carved with figures (ζῶων))

*The Histories*, [2.148](#): Near the corner where the labyrinth ends stands a pyramid two hundred and forty feet high, on which **great figures (ζῶα μεγάλα )** are cut.

*The Histories*, [4.88](#): Mandrocles took the first-fruits of these and had a picture (ζῶα) made with them, showing the whole bridge of the Bosphorus

Plato, *Republic*, [515a](#): [515a] and **shapes of animals (ζῶα)** as well, wrought in stone and wood and every material..

Plutarch, *Pericles*, 13: And yet they say that once on a time when Agatharchus the painter (ζῶγραφος "one who paints from life") was boasting loudly of the speed and ease with which he made his figures (ζῶα), Zeuxis heard him, and said, 'Mine take, and last, a long time.'

So, why am I belaboring this point? I find these instances of ζῶα interesting precisely because of the letter to Menoikeus saying in 123 " πρῶτον μὲν τὸν θεὸν ζῶον ἄφθαρτον καὶ μακάριον νομίζων, ὡς ἡ κοινὴ τοῦ θεοῦ νόησις ὑπεγράφη." Usually translated as "First, believe that god is

a blissful, immortal being, as is commonly held. (Saint-Andre); the literal meaning of this line is something like: "Fundamentally/first, know that the god is incorruptible and blessed, as common knowledge of the god is ὑπεγράφη."

ὑπεγράφη "has been outlined, traced"

Epicurus is using the image of outlining or tracing an image to be filled in by another. Consider this like the image of letters indicated by a teacher by an outline or tracing for the student to then follow. So the idea that the gods are imperishable and blessed is, basically, how the gods are commonly understood to be -- that is the general indication of the nature of the gods.

Herodotus and the other citations above all have to do with etching on stone or outlining on fabric. That similarity with the common knowledge of the god being outlined or traced is too enticing not to explore the implications of for me.

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### **Post by "Bryan" of March 23, 2024 at 12:13 AM**

#### [Quote from Don](#)

By definition, if they are inter-cosmic - literally between world-systems - there is nowhere for them to live! A cosmos is a world-system - ours has Earth at the center surrounded by the orb of the heavenly stars and wandering planets. There is no world in the metakosmos/intermundia - it is literally "between" worlds... No planet, no stars, no world.

I certainly agree that the world, in Epicurean terms, is analogous to the modern idea of the "visible universe."

Would you agree that, although there is a finite amount of matter and space in world-systems, there is an infinite amount of matter and space outside of (ie between) world-systems?

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### **Post by "Don" of March 23, 2024 at 12:18 AM**

#### [Quote from Bryan](#)

Would you agree that, although there is a finite amount of matter and space in world-systems, there is an infinite amount of matter and space outside of (ie between) world-

systems?

Yep. I'd agree with that. There are other cosmoi out beyond our world-system taking up some of that infinite matter, then probably some matter floating around between world-systems.

But, by definition, the intermundia/metakosmos doesn't have a world. If it did, it would be a cosmos/mundus.

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### **Post by “Don” of March 23, 2024 at 12:35 AM**

[Quote from Don](#)

Yep. I'd agree with that. There are other cosmoi out beyond our world-system taking up some of that infinite matter, then probably some matter floating around between world-systems.

I have to add that I do NOT think this is the way the universe is actually structured: with worlds enclosed in shells of stars in the firmament, with other shelled-world-systems elsewhere in an infinite universe.

It makes sense to me that we live in an infinite universe (bounded or unbounded remains to be seen) but I do NOT think we live inside nested spheres like the ancient Greeks.

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### **Post by “Bryan” of March 23, 2024 at 1:11 AM**

Do we have the shell idea in the Epicurean texts? Certainly the Stoics do think that— their world-system is singular, finite and bounded. But with Epicurus we have air flows, pressure, gravity (of a sort), infinite world-systems and infinite unbounded space.

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### **Post by “Don” of March 23, 2024 at 2:02 AM**

The shells were the predominate picture of the cosmos. If I remember, it's how Lucretius describes the cosmos/mundus.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of March 23, 2024 at 6:11 AM**

I think Epicurus would completely disagree with contentions that he did not have good evidence or reasoning to support his positions on the gods. My reading is that he was as confident on the basics of this subject as he was on atoms, which we also cannot perceive directly either, but about which we can make confident deductions based on things that we do perceive.

I don't know that I have any significant additional thoughts to add to comments such as those of Tau Phi that he doesn't find Epicurean theology valuable other than to emphasize Don's comments: Regardless of what some of us may think ourselves, Epicurus and the leading Epicureans found it valuable. Given that they clearly thought so, the theology is definitely an important part of the philosophy that someone studying the subject needs to know about if they want to understand Epicurus' conclusions before forming their own. "Epicurean philosophy without the theology" is not fully Epicurean philosophy.

To me, i think Epicurus saw this theology as essential for at least two major reasons beyond those discussed already in the thread above:

1 - As inoculation against the idea that humans are alone in the universe, and that we therefore occupy some kind of special and supernatural focus of existence. For most ordinary people who think that we are alone in the universe, that's a prescription for a slippery slide toward all sorts of mysticism.

2 - As important for understanding that while "pleasure is pleasure" from a conceptual point of view, there are important questions to be answered as to *which* pleasures to pursue in life. Contemplation of the nature of a truly blessed existence - one which even though "godlike" must act to sustain itself - is similar to Epicurus' views of reverence for men wiser than ourselves. It's an important aspect of our own drive to use our lives in the **most** pleasurable way, and not to settle for less than what we are capable of obtaining.

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### **Post by “TauPhi” of March 23, 2024 at 8:08 AM**

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I don't know that I have any significant additional thoughts to add to comments such as those of Tau Phi that he doesn't find Epicurean theology valuable

I started my previous post with a disclaimer to avoid exactly such misunderstandings. I do find Epicurean theology valuable and very much worth studying. I don't question its importance and I don't pretend it's not an integral part of the whole system. I study [Epicurean gods](#) as closely as any other area of the philosophy because I want to understand it the best I can.

I do question attempts to incorporate gods in our lives at all cost because it was an Epicurean thing to do two thousand years ago. Philosophy should make it easier for us to live our lives in a way our lives are worth living. It should not be a game of who can be the most Epicurean of us all.

I'm not trying to be a contrarian for the sake of it but no matter how hard I try I keep seeing problems with these:

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

1 - As inoculation against the idea that humans are alone in the universe, and that we therefore occupy some kind of special and supernatural focus of existence. For most ordinary people who think that we are alone in the universe, that's a prescription for a slippery slide toward all sorts of mysticism.

How come existence of gods in intermundia, outside of our universe and outside of our reach, can be an indication that we are or we are not alone in the universe? For me, introducing gods to our lives, even for the sake of emulation or as weapon against anthropocentrism, is a prescription for, and not against, mysticism.

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

2 - As important for understanding that while "pleasure is pleasure" from a conceptual point of view, there are important questions to be answered as to which pleasures to pursue in life. Contemplation of the nature of a truly blessed existence - one which even though "godlike" must act to sustain itself - is similar to Epicurus' views of reverence for men wiser than ourselves. It's an important aspect of our own drive to use our lives in the most pleasurable way, and not to settle for less than what we are capable of obtaining.

How can anyone contemplate the nature of a truly blessed existence if no one knows what a truly blessed existence is? Again, it's an exercise in futility. It's nothing more than: I want a truly blessed existence to be like x and y because I feel good making x and y a truly blessed

existence. Gods are not needed for us to establish how to live our lives. We can do it with experience and course correction. I also don't see similarities between gods and wise men. Wise men lived their lives. They have something valuable to teach us because they are human and we can learn from their solutions to their problems as we face similar problems. With [Epicurean gods](#) we have nothing to relate to. They live in alien worlds, live alien lives, have alien values and alien experiences.

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## Post by “Don” of March 23, 2024 at 9:37 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

1 - As inoculation against the idea that humans are alone in the universe, and that we therefore occupy some kind of special and supernatural focus of existence.

My take is that Epicurean philosophy posits other *world-systems*, and that's where the "humans are not alone in the universe" would come from.

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

a slippery slide toward all sorts of mysticism

The slippery slide to mysticism and belief in the supernatural comes from a willingness to see the universe as not completely material or natural with no need of something "above nature" i.e., super-natural. The thinking of "This can't be all there is" is the beginning of the slippery slope.

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Contemplation of the nature of a truly blessed existence - one which even though "godlike" must act to sustain itself - is similar to Epicurus' views of reverence for men wiser than ourselves. It's an important aspect of our own drive to use our lives in the most pleasurable way, and not to settle for less than what we are capable of obtaining.

Again, I don't see the god as "acting to sustain itself." The god's existence should be effortless and pain free. Attributing effort to the god robs them of their

Letter to Menoikeus: "You, Menoikeus, believe everything about which a god *is able* (*δυνάμενον*) to *preserve* (*φυλάττειν*) its own imperishability and blessedness for itself. Do not attribute anything foreign to its incorruptibility or incongruous with the blessedness of the god!"

[φυλάττειν \(phylattein\)](#) "to guard, maintain, preserve, etc." or "to beware of, be on one's guard against, avoid a thing or person"

δυνάμενον (dynamenon) "being able, capable, strong enough to do, can; have the power to"

I take that φυλάττειν as implying that the god avoids anything that would change their incorruptible or blessed nature. The god avoids anything that would go against its nature.

#### [Quote from TauPhi](#)

How can anyone contemplate the nature of a truly blessed existence if no one knows what a truly blessed existence is? Again, it's an exercise in futility. It's nothing more than: I want a truly blessed existence to be like x and y because I feel good making x and y a truly blessed existence. Gods are not needed for us to establish how to live our lives. We can do it with experience and course correction.

This is exactly why I see Sedley's position on the god/divine so interesting. I think it's relatively easy to contemplate "a truly blessed existence" and that Epicurus spells it out: A mind free from trouble and an ease of use of the body without any effort or pain. That's it. From my understanding, that conception of "what could be" is the exact nature of blessedness, of being "makarion." Mortals can never achieve it completely, but we can contend with Zeus if we make the effort to remember what we *can* achieve in this fragile, mortal life. I would completely agree that "we can do it with experience and course correction" as we go about living our lives. The idea of a god floating in the intermundia with no world for it to stand on like some preserved specimen floating in a jar of formaldehyde holds no fascination for me. What does is the idea that I - a mortal human being - can imagine, can have a thought experiment about *my* idea of a blessed life - my "godlike" existence - and work toward that via "experience and course correction" and making choices based on those lived experiences and thinking about consequences.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of March 23, 2024 at 9:53 AM**

#### [Quote from Don](#)

The god avoids anything that would go against its nature.

And I would say that "avoids" = "acting to avoid" and acting is what they have to do to maintain their deathlessness.

#### [Quote from Don](#)

The idea of a god floating in the intermundia with no world for it to stand on like some preserved specimen floating in a jar of formaldehyde holds no fascination for me

I'd say quite likely that's why we see the discussions of the gods having quasi-bodies, and speaking Greek, etc.

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## Post by "Don" of March 23, 2024 at 10:08 AM

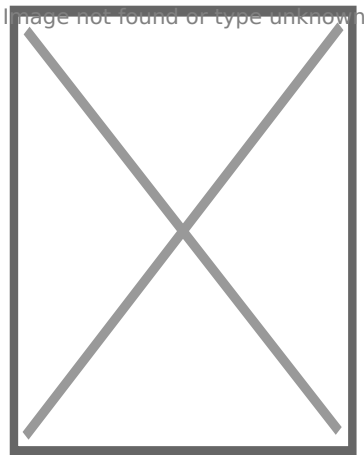
### [Quote from Don](#)

The shells were the predominate picture of the cosmos. If I remember, it's how Lucretius describes the cosmos/mundus.

Instead of just asserting that, let me give some Lucretian citations with commentary:

1.205: *he (Epiurus) fared afar, beyond The flaming ramparts of the world (flammantia moenia mundi), until He wandered the unmeasurable All.* To me the "flaming ramparts of the world" are exactly the outer shell of our cosmos/world-system described by other philosophers of the time. The outer shell - the outer wall/ramparts - are on fire. That's what makes the stars shine. 2:1144 also uses the "ramparts/walls of the world" moenia mundi

1.951 (the spear story):



[On the nature of things : Lucretius Carus, Titus : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

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archive.org

When Lucretius talks about throwing a spear into the void, he's talking about the universe as a Whole, not just the cosmos. The ALL goes on forever to infinity. Our cosmos is bounded. The spear would just keep going into the infinite universe.

I also find it interesting in relation to what's lost in translation sometimes. Lucretius uses both mundus and terra and these are both translated "world" but it seems to me that mundus = cosmos and terra = Earth/our planet within the mundus. Gotta dig into the Latin to see what's really being said.

Again, let me emphasize, I DO NOT believe or think or feel it necessary to think this is the way the universe IS. This idea of the nested cosmos is the ancient's best guess as to how the ALL is built. Now, if you want to go down the rabbit hole of the multiverse/many worlds (multi-ALL? multi-cosmoi?) theory of cosmology, that's probably a discussion for another thread. I do NOT think that Epicurus had some sort of idea or preconception or premonition of modern theoretical physics and its idea of the many-worlds theory. As much as we'd like to imagine Epicurus coming up with that 2,300 years ago, I think that's a bridge too far... even if it is amusing to think about it.

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## Post by “Don” of March 23, 2024 at 11:23 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

And I would say that "avoids" = "acting to avoid" and acting is what they have to do to maintain their deathlessness.

Okay, I guess I'll have to give you the "action" inherent in the verb. Most every verb implies action. My contention then would be effortless action, like muscle memory or some other almost automatic action, like a well-trained practitioner of aikido or ballet but without the years of training required. That's my idea of aponia, by the way. And this is all IF we're talking about some anthropomorphic deity floating in space, which I'm not prepared to embrace wholeheartedly. Just sayin'.

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I'd say quite likely that's why we see the discussions of the gods having quasi-bodies, and speaking Greek, etc.

I'd agree with that. It's an attempt to make sense of it all IF we're looking for floating divine physical beings between world-systems.

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## **Post by “Peter Konstans” of March 23, 2024 at 11:58 AM**

I agree that what you guys and DeWitt say about ancient Epicurean theology is accurate though I think there are missing elements to the puzzle. What might Epicurus have answered if he was asked what natural law necessitates the existence of the gods? Why couldn't the atomic universe simply do without them? Why couldn't they be fully mortal regardless of what the masses think? What would he have answered to Cicero's reasonable reservations about the logical coherence of a strictly atomic view of immortal gods? I am sure that there are some fine details about the system contained in his lost works that we simply don't know of.

At any rate nobody can doubt that Epicurean theology was supposed to function as a medicine against harmful notions regarding the supernatural. The ancient Epicurean conception of the gods worked well as a remedy but only in the context of the ancient polytheistic society it was developed for. Outside this context the medicine can't be expected to take effect. Just as we don't expect anyone to believe in Loki and Zeus today (and the few eccentrics claiming to do so are in reality engaging in what amounts to little more than a form of ancestor worship) it is equally difficult to make people believe in the [Epicurean gods](#).

Atomism continues to remain relevant and essential to Epicurean dogma. The eternity of the world remains relevant and essential too. But the ancient Epicurean conception of the gods is in my view outdated because it cannot play a viable medicinal role in today's environment.

So I think we need to work out a new theological medicine specifically designed for an era in which the most popular harmful notions regarding the universe are based on monotheism or on nihilism. A profitable solution would be to adapt the most crucial aspects of Epicurean theology to a single God only. The result would be a sort of deism but somewhat different from the enlightenment-era deism of the American founding fathers.

Another innovation that future Epicureans will need down the line is a specifically Epicurean place of worship. Ancient Epicureans were able to worship the gods in the same spaces as everyone else. But we modern Epicureans cannot do the same in churches/mosques/synagogues because modern religions lack the civic and folkloric character that pagan religions had which made them tolerable to Epicureans. Today we're dealing with religions that may be seen as fully-fledged rival philosophical systems and for this reason it is impossible to share quarters with them.

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## Post by “Don” of March 23, 2024 at 12:24 PM

### [Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

1. What might Epicurus have answered if he was asked what natural law necessitates the existence of the gods?
2. Why couldn't the atomic universe simply do without them?
3. Why couldn't they be fully mortal regardless of what the masses think?

1. There is no necessity. The universe does not depend on the existence of the gods. Epicurus posits that all peoples appear to have a conception of gods, and therefore gods appear to have some kind of existence. "Gods exist/There are gods" θεοὶ εἰσὶν is a pretty basic statement with no flourishes. How they exist appears to have filled volumes.

2. The universe could exist without them. They serve no creative nor sustaining function for the universe.

3. The "common" knowledge of a god is that it is not mortal. Per Epicurus's definition (from looking at the common knowledge), gods are exactly that which is blessed and incorruptible. That's it. Those two characteristics define what a god is.

### [Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

At any rate nobody can doubt that Epicurean theology was supposed to function as a medicine against harmful notions regarding the supernatural. The ancient Epicurean conception of the gods worked well as a remedy but only in the context of the ancient polytheistic society it was developed for. ... So I think we need to work out a new theological medicine specifically designed for an era in which the most popular harmful notions regarding the universe are based on monotheism or on nihilism. A profitable solution would be to adapt the most crucial aspects of Epicurean theology to a single God only. The result would be a sort of deism but somewhat different from the enlightenment-era deism of the American founding fathers.

I fully agree Epicurean theology was meant as a medicine, in fact, it's the first "medication" in the Tetracharmakos. But I see no disparity in it being applied to polytheism or monotheism. The most important Epicurean theological idea is that we have nothing to fear from divinity, no matter how you conceptualize it. A god neither dishes out punishment nor bestows reward. Otherwise it wouldn't be blessed and incorruptible. From my perspective, that applies equally to Zeus, Jupiter, Odin, Ganesh, Yahweh, or any of the other varieties of god humans have come up with.

### Post by “Cassius” of March 23, 2024 at 1:03 PM

On the "necessity" issue I think we would need to consider the issue of insomnia about which so little is left but which is mentioned by Velleius. It appears that there was some interesting deductive reasoning going on with that topic.

Yes thanks for the spelling correction Don -- "Isonomia" not "insomnia!" 😊

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### Post by “Don” of March 23, 2024 at 1:04 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

insomnia

You mean "isonomia", right 😊

"Autocorrect!" (shakes fist at the sky)

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### Post by “Eikadistes” of March 23, 2024 at 1:13 PM

At this point, this entire thread has been amusing and theoretically obtuse.

Epicureanism is my religion, and there's not a goddamn thing anyone can do about it.

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### Post by “Godfrey” of March 23, 2024 at 1:30 PM

Quote

What might Epicurus have answered if he was asked what natural law necessitates the existence of the gods? Why couldn't the atomic universe simply do without them?

To my understanding, and I think it's in DeWitt and perhaps Cicero, isonomia is the concept that explains this. Isonomia would also explain why there can't be just one god.

I don't really understand the validity of isonomia, but I think the idea is that in an infinite universe, the opposite of each thing must exist, and in equal number. So if there are a certain number of mortals, there must be an equal number of immortals.

The finer point in this particular example would seem to be that isonomia shouldn't be used to posit something which is outside of the system, meaning it shouldn't be used to introduce the supernatural into a purely natural system. So this begs the question: what is meant by "immortal?"

One might see how monotheists could adapt the idea of isonomia to come up with not only a supernatural being, but also another supernatural being opposed to the first one. God and Satan, for instance.

I freely admit that I find the idea of isonomia somewhat baffling, particularly as to its validity. If anyone can clarify it, please do!

Oops, looks like I cross posted....

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## Post by "Cassius" of March 23, 2024 at 1:34 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Isonomia would also explain why there can't be just one god.

Probably also the rule that "nature never creates only one thing of a kind," which is probably related but probably separate.

On the Nature of the Gods:

"Moreover there is the supremely potent principle of infinity, which claims the closest and most careful study; we must understand that it has in the sum of things everything has its exact match and counterpart. This property is termed by Epicurus *isonomia*, or the principle of

uniform distribution. From this principle it follows that if the whole number of mortals be so many, there must exist no less a number of immortals, and if the causes of destruction are beyond count, the causes of conservation also are bound to be infinite."

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### **Post by "Cassius" of March 23, 2024 at 1:35 PM**

Let's see where is the observation that nature never makes only a single thing of a kind..... that might be in Lucretius rather than On The Nature of the Gods....

I would say this eliminates a "single god" from Epicurean consideration as well:

Lucretius 2:1077 -

[1077] This there is too that in the universe there is nothing single, nothing born unique and growing unique and alone, but it is always of some tribe, and there are many things in the same race. First of all turn your mind to living creatures; you will find that in this wise is begotten the race of wild beasts that haunts the mountains, in this wise the stock of men, in this wise again the dumb herds of scaly fishes, and all the bodies of flying fowls. Wherefore you must confess in the same way that sky and earth and sun, moon, sea, and all else that exists, are not unique, but rather of number numberless; inasmuch as the deep-fixed boundary-stone of life awaits these as surely, and they are just as much of a body that has birth, as every race which is here on earth, abounding in things after its kind.

[1090] And if you learn this surely, and cling to it, nature is seen, free at once, and quit of her proud rulers, doing all things of her own accord alone, without control of gods. For by the holy hearts of the gods, which in their tranquil peace pass placid years, and a life of calm, who can avail to rule the whole sum of the boundless, who to hold in his guiding hand the mighty reins of the deep, who to turn round all firmaments at once, and warm all fruitful lands with heavenly fires, or to be at all times present in all places, so as to make darkness with clouds, and shake the calm tracts of heaven with thunder, and then shoot thunderbolts, and often make havoc of his own temples, or moving away into deserts rage furiously there, plying the bolt, which often passes by the guilty and does to death the innocent and undeserving?