

# Episode 234 - Cicero's OTNOTG - 09 - Dealing With Marcus Aurelius And The Canonical Basis For the Epicurean View Of Divinity

Post by "Cassius" of June 18, 2024 at 3:42 PM

Welcome to Episode 234 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the most complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

**Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at [EpicureanFriends.com](https://www.epicureanfriends.com).**

For our new listeners, let me remind you of several ground rules for both our podcast and our forum.

First: Our aim is to bring you an accurate presentation of [classical Epicurean philosophy](#) as the ancient Epicureans understood it.

Second: We won't be talking about modern political issues in this podcast. How you apply Epicurus in your own life is of course entirely up to you. We call this approach "[Not Neo-Epicurean, But Epicurean](#)." Epicurean philosophy is a philosophy of its own, it's not the same as Stoicism, Humanism, Buddhism, Taoism, Atheism, Libertarianism or Marxism - it is unique and must be understood on its own, not in terms of any conventional modern morality.

Third: One of the most important things to keep in mind is that the Epicureans often used words very differently than we do today. To the Epicureans, Gods were not omnipotent or omniscient, so Epicurean references to "Gods" do not mean at all the same thing as in major religions today. In the Epicurean theory of knowledge, [all sensations are true](#), but that does not mean all opinions are true, but that the raw data reported by the senses is reported without the injection of opinion, as the opinion-making process takes place in the mind, where it is subject to mistakes, rather than in the senses. In Epicurean ethics, "Pleasure" refers not ONLY to sensory stimulation, but also to every experience of life which is not felt to be painful. The classical texts show that Epicurus was not focused on luxury, like some people say, but neither did he teach minimalism, as other people say. Epicurus taught that all experiences of life fall under one of two feelings - pleasure and pain - and those feelings -- and not gods, idealism, or virtue - are the guides that Nature gave us by which to live. More than anything else, Epicurus taught that the universe is not supernatural in any way, and that means there's no life after death, and any happiness we'll ever have comes in THIS life, which is why it is so important not to waste

time in confusion.

Today we are continuing to review the Epicurean sections of Cicero's "On the Nature of The Gods," as presented by the Epicurean spokesman Velleius, beginning at the end of Section 10.

For the main text we are using primarily the [Yonge translation, available here at Archive.org](#). The text which we include in these posts is available [here](#). We will also refer to the public domain version of the Loeb series, which contains both Latin and English, [as translated by H. Rackham](#).

Additional versions can be found here:

- [Frances Brooks 1896 translation at Online Library of Liberty](#)
- [Lacus Curtius Edition \(Rackham\)](#)
- [PDF Of Loeb Edition at Archive.org by Rackham](#)
- [Gutenberg.org version by CD Yonge](#)

A list of arguments presented [will be maintained here](#).

## **Today's Text**

XVI. Thus far have I been rather exposing the dreams of dotards than giving the opinions of philosophers. Not much more absurd than these are the fables of the poets, who owe all their power of doing harm to the sweetness of their language; who have represented the Gods as enraged with anger and inflamed with lust; who have brought before our eyes their wars, battles, combats, wounds; their hatreds, dissensions, discords, births, deaths, complaints, and lamentations; their indulgences in all kinds of intemperance; their adulteries; their chains; their amours with mortals, and mortals begotten by immortals. To these idle and ridiculous flights of the poets we may add the prodigious stories invented by the Magi, and by the Egyptians also, which were of the same nature, together with the extravagant notions of the multitude at all times, who, from total ignorance of the truth, are always fluctuating in uncertainty.

Now, whoever reflects on the rashness and absurdity of these tenets must inevitably entertain the highest respect and veneration for Epicurus, and perhaps even rank him in the number of those beings who are the subject of this dispute; for he alone first founded the idea of the existence of the Gods on the impression which nature herself hath made on the minds of all men. For what nation, what people are there, who have not, without any learning, a natural idea, or prenotion, of a Deity? Epicurus calls this πρόληψις; that is, an antecedent conception of the fact in the mind, without which nothing can be understood, inquired after, or discoursed on; the force and advantage of which reasoning we receive from that celestial volume of Epicurus concerning the Rule and Judgment of Things.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/60495815>

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### **Post by “Cassius” of June 18, 2024 at 3:50 PM**

There are two "tangents" I'd like to take in this Episode 233 before we get very far into Velleius:

(1) First, I'd like to supplement last week's episode attacking the Stoics by covering some choice quotations from Marcus Aurelius about the gods. Modern Stoics might be tempted to say "You only criticized Zeno and Chryssipus and Cleanthes - I don't care about them - I want to live like a ROMAN EMPEROR." We need some quotes from him to show that the same criticisms apply. **Suggestions for quotes from Marcus Aurelius as to Gods, Fate, or Divination would be most appreciated!**

(2) Then, before we get into what Velleius says about Propelopsis, let's review the text references to the Canonical Faculties and the ground rules that we would expect to apply to anything that Velleius has to say about how we reason about the gods. Let's recap the general positions about [all sensations are true](#), multiple possibilities, waiting, PDs 23-25, etc. I will post some general notes on those.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of June 18, 2024 at 4:53 PM**

I've set up a list of key citations relating to Canonics for easy access when we set the stage for Velleius' discussion of prolepsis. Not that they really answer any questions with certainty, but I think we if keep them in mind when we discuss what Velleius IS asserting we can eliminate a lot of confusion about what he is NOT asserting.

147

Now back to researching on Marcus Aurelius on gods/fate/divination. All contributions appreciated.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of June 18, 2024 at 4:58 PM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3915-episode-234-cicero-s-otnotg-09-dealing-with-marcus-aurelius-and-the-canonical-ba/>

I checked my old "[Comparison Chart With the Stoics](#)" to see what I collected years ago on Stoics and the Gods, and unfortunately I see no Marcus Aurelius. This is what I did collect:

**Epictetus - Enchiridion: 31.** Be assured that the essential property of piety towards the gods is to form right opinions concerning them, as existing and as governing the universe with goodness and justice. And fix yourself in this resolution, to obey them, and yield to them, and willingly follow them in all events, as produced by the most perfect understanding. For thus you will never find fault with the gods, nor accuse them as neglecting you. And it is not possible for this to be effected any other way than by withdrawing yourself from things not in our own control, and placing good or evil in those only which are. For if you suppose any of the things not in our own control to be either good or evil, when you are disappointed of what you wish, or incur what you would avoid, you must necessarily find fault with and blame the authors. For every animal is naturally formed to fly and abhor things that appear hurtful, and the causes of them; and to pursue and admire those which appear beneficial, and the causes of them. It is impractical, then, that one who supposes himself to be hurt should be happy about the person who, he thinks, hurts him, just as it is impossible to be happy about the hurt itself. Hence, also, a father is reviled by a son, when he does not impart to him the things which he takes to be good; and the supposing empire to be a good made Polynices and Eteocles mutually enemies. On this account the husbandman, the sailor, the merchant, on this account those who lose wives and children, revile the gods. For where interest is, there too is piety placed. So that, whoever is careful to regulate his desires and aversions as he ought, is, by the very same means, careful of piety likewise. But it is also incumbent on everyone to offer libations and sacrifices and first fruits, conformably to the customs of his country, with purity, and not in a slovenly manner, nor negligently, nor sparingly, nor beyond his ability. 32. When you have recourse to divination, remember that you know not what the event will be, and you come to learn it of the diviner; but of what nature it is you know before you come, at least if you are a philosopher. For if it is among the things not in our own control, it can by no means be either good or evil. Don't, therefore, bring either desire or aversion with you to the diviner (else you will approach him trembling), but first acquire a distinct knowledge that every event is indifferent and nothing to you., of whatever sort it may be, for it will be in your power to make a right use of it, and this no one can hinder; then come with confidence to the gods, as your counselors, and afterwards, when any counsel is given you, remember what counselors you have assumed, and whose advice you will neglect if you disobey. Come to divination, as Socrates prescribed, in cases of which the whole consideration relates to the event, and in which no opportunities are afforded by reason, or any other art, to discover the thing proposed to be learned. When, therefore, it is our duty to share the danger of a friend or of our country, we ought not to consult the oracle whether we will share it with them or not. For, though the diviner should forewarn you that the victims are unfavorable, this means no more than that either death or mutilation or exile is portended. But we have reason within us, and it directs, even with these hazards, to the greater diviner, the Pythian god, who cast out of the temple the person who gave no assistance to his friend while another was murdering him.

**Epicetetus, Enchiridion: 2.** Upon all occasions we ought to have these maxims ready at hand:

"Conduct me, Jove, and you, O Destiny, Wherever your decrees have fixed my station."  
*Cleanthes*

"I follow cheerfully; and, did I not, Wicked and wretched, I must follow still Whoever yields properly to Fate, is deemed Wise among men, and knows the laws of heaven." *Euripides, Frag. 965*

And this third: "O Crito, if it thus pleases the gods, thus let it be. Anytus and Melitus may kill me indeed, but hurt me they cannot." *Plato's Crito and Apology*

**Diogenes Laertius, Life of Zeno: 88.** And this is why the end may be defined as life in accordance with nature, or, in other words, in accordance with our own human nature as well as that of the universe, a life in which we refrain from every action forbidden by the law common to all things, that is to say, the right reason which pervades all things, and is identical with this Zeus, lord and ruler of all that is.

**Diogenes Laertius, Life of Zeno:** The good, it is added, are also worshippers of God; for they have acquaintance with the rites of the gods, and piety is the knowledge of how to serve the gods. Further, they will sacrifice to the gods and they keep themselves pure; for they avoid all acts that are offences against the gods, and the gods think highly of them: for they are holy and just in what concerns the gods. The wise too are the only priests; for they have made sacrifices their study, as also the building of temples, purifications, and all the other matters appertaining to the gods.

**Diogenes Laertius, Life of Zeno:** And the wise man, they say, will offer prayers, and ask for good things from the gods: so Posidonius in the first book of his treatise *On Duties*, and Hecato in his third book *On Paradoxes*.

**Diogenes Laertius, Life of Zeno:** The deity, say they, is a living being, immortal, rational, perfect or intelligent in happiness, admitting nothing evil, taking providential care of the world and all that therein is, but he is not of human shape. He is, however, the artificer of the universe and, as it were, the father of all, both in general and in that particular part of him which is all-pervading, and which is called many names according to its various powers. They give the name Dia (Δία) because all things are due to (διὰ) him; Zeus (Ζῆνα) in so far as he is the cause of life (ζῆν) or pervades all life; the name Athena is given, because the ruling part of the divinity extends to the aether; the name Hera marks its extension to the air; he is called Hephaestus since it spreads to the creative fire; Poseidon, since it stretches to the sea; Demeter, since it reaches to the earth. Similarly men have given the deity his other titles, fastening, as best they can, on some one or other of his peculiar attributes.

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**Post by “Cassius” of June 19, 2024 at 1:59 PM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3915-episode-234-cicero-s-otnotg-09-dealing-with-marcus-aurelius-and-the-canonical-ba/>

As to Marcus Aurelius, [this post by the traditionalist Stoic Chris Fisher](#) summarizes some key points:

As Mark Forstater wrote in his insightful book *The Spiritual Teachings of Marcus Aurelius*:

#### Quote

*Until the time of Neoplatonism, Stoicism was the most highly spiritualised form of philosophy in ancient Greece and Rome. It was so spiritualised that it is as accurate to call it a religion as a philosophy.* [\[5\]](#)

As Henry Sedgewick points out in his biography of Marcus Aurelius, the traditional religions did not provide what he was looking for,

#### Quote

*Marcus was seeking a religion, as I have said, but there was none at hand that he could accept. The old Roman religion was a mere series of ceremonies, with nothing sacred except lingering patriotic sentiment, and withal marred by superstitions, such as those at Lanuvium. Foreign religions were no better. Syrian priests, like mountebanks, trundled images of the Magna Mater about the countryside, hoping to wheedle peasants out of their pennies; the worshippers of the Egyptian gods offered sensuous exaltation, and mysteries that disregarded reason. Christianity, as we understand it, was utterly unknown to him. He was compelled to look for religion in philosophy; for there only, as he thought, and perhaps thought truly, could a man, without doing wrong to his reason, find spiritual help to enable him to do his duty and keep his soul pure.* [\[6\]](#)

Marcus did not find consolation in the rituals of traditional religions or the mediation of priests. He was looking for psychological strength and consolation which could allow him to keep his mind pure in trying times and under troublesome circumstances. Marcus discovered the personal religious practice he was looking for within the deeply spiritual philosophy of Stoicism. [\[7\]](#) As a result, his life became an example of the power of Stoicism in a person's inner life. Sedgewick argues,

#### Quote

*Marcus Aurelius is not a prodigy among men, unheralded by what has come before; on the contrary he is the ripe product of the spiritual movement that expressed itself in the Stoic philosophy, or rather, as it had then become, the Stoic religion.* [\[8\]](#)

As can be seen in his *Meditations*, Marcus followed the Stoic path and became his own priest, in service to the gods,

## Quote

*For such a man, who no longer postpones his endeavour to take his place among the best, is indeed a priest and servant of the gods, behaving rightly towards the deity stationed within him, so ensuring that the mortal being remains unpolluted by pleasures, invulnerable to every pain, untouched by any wrong, unconscious of any evil, a wrestler in the greatest contest of all... (Meditations 3.4.3)*

In *Meditations* 3.16, Marcus draws upon the importance of the divine while discussing four models of human behavior.

## Quote

*Body, soul, intellect: for the body, sense-impressions; for the soul, impulses; for the intellect, judgements. To receive impressions by means of images is something that we share even with cattle; and to be drawn this way and that by the puppet-strings of impulse, we share with wild beasts, with catamites, and with a Phalaris or a Nero; and to have the intellect as a guide towards what appear to be duties is something that we share with those who do not believe in the gods, with those who betray their country, with those who will do anything whatever behind locked doors. If you share everything else with those whom I have just mentioned, there remains the special characteristic of a good person, namely, to love and welcome all that happens to him and is spun for him as his fate, and not to defile the guardian-spirit seated within his breast, nor to trouble it with a host of fancies, but to preserve it in cheerful serenity, following God in an orderly fashion, never uttering a word that is contrary to the truth nor performing an action that is contrary to justice.*

...

[i]n *Meditations* 2.12-13, Marcus juxtaposes the persons who “hold fast to the guardian-spirit within” with those whose sole focus is on intellectual pursuits:

## Quote

*Consider too how a human being makes contact with God, and through what part of himself, and how that part of him must be disposed if he is to do so. There is nothing more pitiable than the person who makes the circuit of everything and, as the poet says, ‘searches into the depths of the earth’, and tries to read the secrets of his neighbour’s soul, yet fails to perceive that it is enough to hold fast to the guardian-spirit within him and serve it single-mindedly; and this service is to keep it pure from passion and irresponsibility and dissatisfaction with anything that comes from gods or human beings. For what comes from the gods is worthy of reverence because of their*

*goodness, and what comes from human beings should be dear to us because we share a common nature...*

...

## Providence or Atoms

Quote

*But perhaps you are discontented with what is allotted to you from the whole? Then call to mind the alternative, 'either providence or atoms' and all the proofs that the universe should be regarded as a kind of constitutional state. (Meditations 4.3.5)*

Marcus Aurelius understood and accepted the Stoic worldview, which includes a rationally ordered and providential cosmos. Additionally, Marcus relied on the Stoic theory of psychology, which asserts that our emotions are connected to our value judgments. Therefore, he understood how one's accepted worldview could affect their judgments of events in the world. In his *Meditations*, Marcus links acceptance of a providential worldview to a 'cheerful mind' (2.3) and sees a call to action within it (2.4). Again, in *Meditations* 4.3.5, he suggests our resentment of the circumstance of our lives is the result of denying providence.<sup>[11]</sup> As Dragona-Monachou makes clear,

Quote

*Divine providence is a firm belief of Marcus Aurelius's. He declares: "The gods exist and have concern for human affairs" (2, 11, 3). The "whole divine economy is pervaded by providence" (2, 3, 1). He considers "life not worth living unless there exist providential gods" (2, 11, 2), and believes that the existence of providential gods is a by far more plausible and acceptable alternative to atoms, chance or confusion (4, 3, 3; 4, 27; 9, 9; 7, 19, etc.).<sup>[12]</sup>*

...

Even though the meaning of some of Marcus' "providence or atoms" passages appear unclear when considered individually, few scholars doubt Marcus' commitment to providence. As Pierre Hadot writes,

Quote

*Whatever modern historians may claim, the dilemma “either providence or chance,” when used by Seneca or by Marcus Aurelius, does not signify either the renunciation of Stoic physical theories or an eclectic attitude which refuses to decide between Epicureanism and Stoicism. In fact, we can see that Marcus has already made his choice between Epicureanism and Stoicism, by the very way in which he describes the Epicurean model with a variety of pejorative terms...[\[14\]](#)*

While addressing a common question, “How much of a Stoic is Marcus Aurelius in the *Meditations*?” Christopher Gill writes,

Quote

*On the one hand, apart from his explicit allegiance to Stoicism (e.g., I 7- 8), the dominating themes are strongly Stoic and there are clear signs of the influence of Epictetus’ ethical programme. On the other hand, the style is idiosyncratic, with strong Heraclitean, Cynic, and Platonic colouring... Most puzzling of all, despite his frequent adoption of a cosmic perspective on ethical life, he sometimes expresses indifference about which worldview is correct: the Stoic providential one or the Epicurean view that the universe is a fortuitous collection of atoms...The ‘providence or atoms’ theme is more puzzling, though in some passages the question seems more open than in others. But it may be important that Marcus acknowledges, in *Meditations* I 17, that he has not himself actually completed the three-part Stoic curriculum (including logic and physics) that would yield the cosmic understanding he seeks to apply to his own life. Hence, the Stoic worldview has to be, in this respect, taken on trust (though Marcus overwhelmingly does take it on trust) – a fact perhaps acknowledged in his use of the ‘providence or atoms’ theme.[\[15\]](#)*

...

After pointing out that Marcus leaves the competing hypotheses of several “unresolved issues in Stoic physics” open, David Sedley writes:

Quote

*His unexpected openness to Epicurean physics as an alternative to the Stoic model reads as if it were an extension of this same policy, despite the obvious difference that he is palpably committed to the truth of Stoicism and hence the falsity of Epicureanism.[\[20\]](#)*

...

As David Sedley notes in his chapter titled *Marcus Aurelius on Physics*, in *A Companion to Marcus Aurelius*:

#### Quote

*In reminding himself to apply physical thinking to every idea he entertains, Marcus captures a vital aspect of his meditations. The question what part physics plays in Stoic ethics has been a frequent subject of modern debate. In Marcus we may find no theoretical answer to that question, but we get to see, worked out in practice, his recognition that reflection on how the cosmos functions is an absolutely integral part of the Stoic moral life. Throughout his reflections on human values, he can be seen constantly turning to the cosmos as a concept to think with.*

*Marcus' cosmos or world is recognizably and indeed technically Stoic. It is a single, finite, cohesive organism, surrounded by void. Partly as a consequence, it is entirely self-contained and cohesive in its functioning, internally governed by the inexorable sequence of causes known as 'fate'. So far as its underlying constitution is concerned, it is composed out of two ultimate items, of which one is a pliable material substrate, and the other, acting upon this, a single intelligent divine causal power, sometimes identified with its 'seminal reason' (spermatikos logos).<sup>[22]</sup>*

Many moderns question the necessity of providence for the practice of Stoicism. To do so, they must modify Stoicism in ways that remove one of its most potent psychological tools—a trust that all events in nature, even those we would typically judge as bad, have a purpose and serve the good of the whole. This trust and the attitude of gratitude that springs from it are expressed beautifully by Marcus in one of my favorite passages.

#### Quote

*Everything suits me that suits your designs, O my universe. Nothing is too early or too late for me that is in your own good time. All is fruit for me that your seasons bring, O nature. All proceeds from you, all subsists in you, and to you all things return. (Meditations 4.23)*

It is simply not possible to make sense of passages like this apart from Marcus' absolute and unequivocal trust in the providential nature of the cosmos. These are not the words of a begrudging acceptance of life's events. Marcus exhibits something far more perceptive than a bear and forbear attitude toward events that were not up to him. No, he is expressing a profound trust that every event in Nature has a purpose. Marcus didn't need to remind himself about the detailed, technical, philosophical arguments for providence in his journal; he lived it every day of his life, and that was proof enough for him.

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## Post by “Cassius” of June 19, 2024 at 10:16 PM

We had a very good discussion of prolepsis in our Wednesday Zoom tonight and one thing (of several) that come from it is that I definitely think part of the ground work we want to lay is to refer to the case of Centaurs, discussed in Lucretius, and observe that Lucretius said both (1) that the images of the centaur do strike our minds, but also (2) centaurs do not and cannot exist.

I think that gives us some important leads to follow as to what is involved in the faculty of prolepsis, and how we have to distinguish the fact that prolepses are true in the sense of "honestly reported" but not true to the facts in the sense of the conclusion "centaurs exist."

### [Book 4:732 \(Bailey\)](#)

[722] Come now, let me tell you what things stir the mind, and learn in a few words whence come the things which come into the understanding.

[724] First of all I say this, that many idols of things wander about in many ways in all directions on every side, fine idols, which easily become linked with one another in the air, when they come across one another's path, like spider's web and gold leaf. For indeed these idols are far finer in their texture than those which fill the eyes and arouse sight, since these pierce through the pores of the body and awake the fine nature of the mind within, and arouse its sensation.

[732] And so we see Centaurs and the limbs of Scyllas, and the dog-faces of Cerberus and idols of those who have met death, and whose bones are held in the embrace of earth; since idols of every kind are borne everywhere, some which are created of their own accord even in the air, some which depart in each case from diverse things, and those again which are made and put together from the shapes of these. For in truth the image of the Centaur comes not from a living thing, since there never was the nature of such a living creature, but when by chance the images of man and horse have met, they cling together readily at once, as we have said ere now, because of their subtle nature and fine fabric. All other things of this kind are fashioned in the same way. And when they move nimbly with exceeding lightness, as I have shown ere now, any one such subtle image stirs their mind; for the mind is fine and of itself wondrous nimble.

[749] That these things come to pass as I tell, you may easily learn from this. Inasmuch as the one is like the other, what we see with the mind, and what we see with the eyes, they must needs be created in like manner.

[752] Now, therefore, since I have shown that I see a lion maybe, by means of idols, which severally stir the eyes, we may know that the mind is moved in like manner, in that it sees a

lion and all else neither more nor less than the eyes, except that it sees finer idols.

[757] And when sleep has relaxed the limbs, the understanding of the mind is for no other cause awake, but that these same idols stir our minds then, as when we are awake, insomuch that we seem surely to behold even one who has quitted life, and is holden by death and the earth. This nature constrains to come to pass just because all the senses of the body are checked and at rest throughout the limbs, nor can they refute the falsehood by true facts. Moreover, the memory lies at rest, and is torpid in slumber, nor does it argue against us that he, whom the understanding believes that it beholds alive, has long ago won to death and doom.

[768] For the rest, it is not wonderful that the idols should move and toss their arms and their other limbs in rhythmic time. For it comes to pass that the image in sleep seems to do this; inasmuch as when the first image passes away and then another comes to birth in a different posture, the former seems then to have changed its gesture. And indeed we must suppose that this comes to pass in quick process: so great is the speed, so great the store of things, so great, in any one instant that we can perceive, the abundance of the little parts of images, whereby the supply may be continued.

[777] And in these matters many questions are asked, and there are many things we must make clear, if we wish to set forth the truth plainly.

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So the **image** of a Centaur is real, and reported honestly to us through the faculty that receives images, and yet we do not conclude simply from perceiving an image of a Centaur that **Centaurs** are real, because we have all sorts of other observations that through deductive reasoning establish to us, and lead us to conclude, that Centaurs cannot exist, and thus that the images of Centaurs we received were not generated by real Centaurs.

An obvious question arises: If we are to conclude that the gods exist and are blessed and imperishable, it would seem that those conclusions must be based on more observations, and more deductive reasoning, and not simply on the receipt of images. Images constitute real evidence, since they are canonical, and yet we override that evidence by comparing it to other evidence and deem the image evidence insufficient to conclude "centaurs exist in reality."

In the case of gods, what additional observations and reasoning provide the impetus to conclude that gods are blessed and imperishable? We'll no doubt want to look at what else Velleius says for that evidence, including isonomia and infinity and the examples of deductive reasoning that Velleius gives.

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**Post by "Cassius" of June 20, 2024 at 4:15 AM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3915-episode-234-cicero-s-otnotg-09-dealing-with-marcus-aurelius-and-the-canonical-ba/>

One additional thing I'd like to memorialize from the Wednesday Zoom: Bryan pointed out something that I think boils down to close to this (Bryan can correct me if better way to say it):

All of us are constantly being bombarded from all directions at all times with all sorts of sensations, with all sorts of feelings, and also with all sorts of "images."

For the moment we may (or may not) want to consider the essence of all of these bombardments as movements of atoms that touch us / impact us in different ways. The three canonical faculties are our inborn ability to perceive movement or presence of atoms which constitute light (sight), sound (hearing), odors (smell), touch, or in the case of images - arrangements of atoms in films which are essentially filmy "shapes" which retain to greater or lesser degree the shapes of their source.

We can take or leave that last paragraph, because the essential point being made right now is that we're constantly being bombarded from the outside with all sorts of atomic impacts.

I take Bryan's point to be that "something" within us must constitute a faculty of selectively focusing our attention and pointing us towards identifying what is significant to us and what is not. Whatever that mechanism is, whether that's a description of a "faculty of prolepsis" or a description of something else, such a process *is* going on within us, and such a faculty is born with us at birth, and such ability does in fact get sharper over time as we process multiple experiences over time.

Perhaps an analogy is that pleasure and pain are essentially our *reactions* to events as they occur. Our genetics are etched to operate in a way that predisposes us to particularize what happens to us and to find some events more pleasurable (and painful) than others.

Similarly each of our five senses are etched to operate in a way that disposes us to distinguish between the things that impact our senses and to relay that reaction to the brain for further processing. It should not be a stretch to think that there would be a faculty that disposes our mind to distinguish between the images that impact our senses and to find some more significant than others, and to relay that to the brain for further processing. Only after the brain receives these inputs and starts processing them into "opinions" is "truth" or "error" a relevant consideration. An exercise of the operation of the eyes and ears and nose is never "right" or "wrong;" the a feeling of pleasure and pain is never "right" or "wrong," and likewise on that analogy an exercise of of the faculty of prolepsis is never "right" or "wrong." (I take it that Tau Phi is emphatically in agreement with the importance of emphasizing that truth or error does not exist in the faculties, but in the conclusions/opinions of the mind.)

Perhaps describing the action of the faculty we are talking about as one of *selective focusing of attention* is a little more neutral than the "pattern-recognition" term that we also discussed. "Recognizing a pattern" maybe rings a little to close to "recognizing an idea." I think most of us are disposed to reject "innate ideas" for maybe the same reason that Lucretius thought it was a

good argument to say that the gods could not have created the universe because even the gods would have had no pattern by which to go.

On the other hand, it seems most of accept without hesitation that we are programmed at birth to find some things *pleasurable* and some things *painful* in varying degrees, so certain forms of "programming" as related to the operation of a faculty of prolepsis in selectively focusing images doesn't seem to be out of line with Epicurus' approach.

One of the Nietzsche quotes from Beyond Good and Evil that we included in the last episode ([Gutenberg edition, translated by Helen Zimmern](#) ) Chapter 1, section 9 -

#### Quote

... Is not living *valuing, preferring, being unjust, being limited, endeavouring to be different?* ..... while you pretend to read with rapture the canon of your law in Nature, you want something quite the contrary, you extraordinary stage-players and self-deluders! In your pride you wish to dictate your morals and ideals to Nature, to Nature herself, and to incorporate them therein; you insist that it shall be Nature "according to the Stoa," and would like everything to be made after your own image, as a vast, eternal glorification and generalism of Stoicism!

Surely the faculty of pleasure and pain is an example of programming that disposes us to *value* or *prefer* some things over others. It might not be too much of a stretch to analogize prolepsis very broadly as involving a disposition of the mind to *value* or *prefer* or *focus* on some images other than others, without which faculty we would never be able to focus on or distinguish any images in particular as different from any of the other myriads of images that constantly bombard us.

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### Post by "Cassius" of June 20, 2024 at 6:45 AM

If post #7 is largely or partly correct, one more focused way to state the takeaway might be:

While the faculty of prolepsis is involved in the processes of the mind in forming the following statement, the statement "gods exist somewhere in the universe and are blessed and imperishable" is an opinion of the mind and may be either true or false (or something on which to "wait" for more information before calling true or false), but it is not *itself* "a" prolepsis, as no prolepsis is ever in itself true or false.

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## Post by “Bryan” of June 20, 2024 at 10:59 AM

To tie together *the immediate impression of the anticipation* with the scholia's "*conceived of through contemplation by reasoning*," we have Epicurus, On Nature, Book 25:

[Sedley 20C.1] From the very outset we always have seeds: some directing us towards these, some towards those, some towards these *and* those actions and thoughts and characters, in greater and smaller numbers. Consequently that which we develop – characteristics of this or that kind – is at first absolutely up to us; and the things which of necessity flow in through our passages from that which surrounds us are at one stage up to us and depend upon beliefs of our own making...

Sedley construction, Book 25, P.Herc. 1056 col. 21 (fr. B 43): ...[ἐκ] τε [τῆς πρ]ώτης ἀρχῆς σπέρμ[ατα ἡμῖν ἀγ]ωγά, τὰ μὲν εἰς τάδ[ε] τὰ δ' εἰς τάδε τὰ δ' εἰς ἄμφω [ταῦ]τά [ἐ]στιν ἀεὶ [κα]ὶ πρά[ξ]εων [καὶ] διανοήσεων καὶ διαθέ[σε]ων καὶ πλεί[ω] καὶ ἐλάττωι. ὥστε παρ' ἡμᾶς π[ρ]ώτον ἀπλῶς τὸ ἀπογεγεννημένον ἤδη γείνεσθαι, [τ]οῖα ἢ τοῖα, καὶ τ[ὰ ἐ]κ τοῦ περιέχοντος κ[α]τ' ἀνάγκην διὰ τοὺς πό[ρους] ] εἰσρέο[ν]τα [παρ'] ἡμᾶς π[ο]τε γει[ίνε]σθαι καὶ παρὰ τ[ὰς] ] ἡμε[τέρα]ς [ἐ]ξ ἡμῶν αὐτ[ῶν] δόξ[ας]...

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## Post by “Bryan” of June 20, 2024 at 11:20 AM

I want to also include this because it mentions both the automatic insertion of images along with the anticipation (of responsibility), which seems exactly equivalent to, as we say "the sense of guilt."

P.Herc. 1056 col. 22 (fr. B 44), & P.Herc. 1191 fr. 110 [Sedley 20C.2-4] ...by which we never cease to be affected, the fact that we rebuke, oppose and reform each other as if the responsibility lay also in ourselves, and not just in our congenital make-up and in the accidental necessity of that which surrounds and penetrates us. For if someone were to attribute – to the very processes of rebuking and being rebuked – the accidental necessity of whatever happens to be present to oneself at the time, I'm afraid that he can never in this way understand *<his own behavior in continuing the debate... He may simply choose to maintain his thesis while in practice continuing to>* blame or praise. But if he were to act in this way he would be leaving intact the very same behavior which as far as our own selves are concerned creates the preconception of our own responsibility (τὴν τῆς αἰτίας πρό[λη]ψιν).

## Post by “Bryan” of June 20, 2024 at 1:42 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

the statement "gods exist somewhere in the universe and are blessed and imperishable" is an opinion of the mind and may be either true or false

The sense that the gods exist somewhere in the universe and are blessed and imperishable is just as natural to humans as a sense of justice and a sense of guilt.

The statement/thought "I feel guilty because..." only comes after a real and automatic sense of guilt -- similarly the statement/thought that "the gods exist somewhere in the universe and are blessed and imperishable" only comes after a real and automatic sense of the gods being blessed and imperishable.

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## Post by “Cassius” of June 20, 2024 at 3:27 PM

You're making a distinction there Bryan that I want to be sure I understand. To be clear about my own view:

1 - I think that Epicurus thought that a solid case exists that the type of gods he is talking about not only serve a very useful purpose to reverence, but also that such beings do exist somewhere in the universe. So I think he would say that his evidence and argument mean that the statement "gods exist somewhere in the universe and are blessed and imperishable" is a true opinion. (I know some disagree with that, but that's my personal view.)

2 - I think however that I would not describe "gods exist somewhere in the universe and are blessed and imperishable" as a "sense." I would describe "gods exist somewhere in the universe and are blessed and imperishable" as statement or proposition or an opinion that I have adopted based significantly in part on the operation of a "sense" that assists me in the process of organizing the evidence and that "tells" me, in reaction to the opinion, that the opinion seems valid. Maybe here I might describe that at least in part as a "sense of confidence" that I sometimes have about opinions that are surely true, vs. a much less confident feeling I have when an opinion is on shaky ground. Talking about this reminds me that somewhere in the distant past of the forum there were comments made by some to the effect that a "sense of confidence" might be a part of the prolepsis picture.

3 - I think most of us agree that pleasure and pain are highly analogous to a "sense," in that we say we "feel good" or "feel bad" and the "feel" in that sentence seems naturally to associate with feeling smooth or rough or seeing color or hearing sound. But I still think to bring any clarity to this we would have to be more specific about "what" a faculty of prolepsis "processes" as its function. And the closer we get to saying that prolepses processes "ideas" such as "guilt" - such as to say that "feeling guilty comes only after a real and automatic sense of guilt" - then the further that intrudes into the conceptual reasoning process where true and false apply. In the case of justice or guilt, I'd be more apt to say that the prolepses is processing the "relationships" (possibly the relationships of the atoms in the images that we are processing), and that it is then the feeling of pleasure and pain that comes into play to assess whether we find the particular relationship agreeable or not.

So what I am looking for a position on is whether "gods exist and are blessed and imperishable" \*IS ITSELF\* a prolepsis, or - from the point of view of Epicurus - whether it is a "true opinion that has been formed taking into account the operation of the proleptic faculty and other things as well."

I'm trying to focus on that because I can't see it proper to say that the eyes "flat out tell me" that "I see a bird" or that the ears "flat out tell me" that "I hear music" or that pleasure tells me that "I am eating honey." In turn I cannot see it proper to say that a prolepsis "flat out tells me" that "a god is imperishable" or any other statement that amounts to a "proposition." Each of those underlined statements seem to me to be "propositions" that are formed in the mind *after the use of* inputs from all three of the categories of faculties, including prolepsis, rather than conclusions of those faculties themselves.

Can you clarify further?

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## **Post by "Bryan" of June 20, 2024 at 4:18 PM**

For part 1. Yes, absolutely.

Part 2. Yes, just as we can form an idea of guilt, this idea only forms from a prior and automatic sense of guilt. Same for the gods and justice and all anticipations.

Part 3. As we know, the anticipations do not process information anymore than the eyes. We can focus our attention internally (mental focus) and externally (visual focus).

The proposition that "the gods exist somewhere in the universe and are blessed and imperishable" emerges only after a real and automatic sense of the gods being blessed and imperishable.

In some circumstances you may sense many trees around you, at other times you may sense guilt from the circumstances, at other times you may sense the gods.

Your eyes do not give you the proposition "there is a green tree outside" when you sense (visually focus on) the green tree outside --- just as your anticipations do not give you the proposition "the gods are incorruptible" when you sense (mentally focus on) the incorruptible gods.

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### Post by “Cassius” of June 20, 2024 at 4:42 PM

I think we are at least 99% together, maybe more, except possibly for this:

[Quote from Bryan](#)

In some circumstances you may sense many trees around you, at other times you may sense guilt from the circumstances, at other times you may sense the gods.

It sounds like you're talking about some kind of "intuition" or "intuitive sense," and I am open to that wording at least in part because I think that's the direction DeWitt goes.

But I am having a hard time getting a grip on how to explain "intuition" in clear terms. Is it the difference between Windows95 and Windows 11 in terms of much more advanced processing power, or is it the difference between a computer with a keyboard vs a computer with lots of additional peripheral input devices, or what kind of analogy or explanation can be given to "intuition?"

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### Post by “Bryan” of June 20, 2024 at 5:22 PM

This is a physical sense that stems from contact -- impressions of particles entering your body -- just like all the other senses. We can only form propositions after we have this sense/contact.

In some circumstances you may focus on being physically touched by the images of trees that are around you, at other times you may focus on being *physically touched by circumstances in a way that produces* a sense of guilt (or lack of guilt) or a sense of justice (or lack of justice), at

other times you may focus on being being physically touched by the images of the gods.

Just as we have an innate ability to sense trees with our eyes, we have an innate ability to sense gods with our mind.

If we take "intuition" as meaning "expectation based on experience" then we can say that we get "intuition" over time based upon the data from our senses. From continuity of sense impressions we gain confident expectations regarding the operations of nature.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of June 20, 2024 at 6:51 PM**

Bryan would you agree or disagree with saying that the difficulty of prolepsis operates on "images?"

And do you see any connection between the Centaur / image example in Lucretius and prolepsis?

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of June 20, 2024 at 6:59 PM**

The following post is a reposting from last night's zoom thread:

Thinking that perhaps my "prolepsis" of the phrase "canon of truth" is incorrect, especially if it is really refering not to "truth" but to *aletheia*:

*Aletheia* is variously translated as "unconcealedness", "[disclosure](#)", "revealing", or "unclosedness". The literal meaning of the word ἀ-λήθεια is "the state of not being hidden; the state of being [evident](#)." It also means factuality or reality.

Source: [Wikipedia](#)

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So the canon is not the method of how we get to "that which is true" but how we get to "that which is revealed"... am I wrong in this?

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### **Post by “Bryan” of June 20, 2024 at 7:54 PM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3915-episode-234-cicero-s-otnotg-09-dealing-with-marcus-aurelius-and-the-canonical-ba/>

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Bryan would you agree or disagree with saying that the faculty of prolepsis operates on "images?"

Agree, certainly. Just as all our senses. We smell and see the film that comes from our meal, for example.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

And do you see any connection between the Centaur / image example in Lucretius and prolepsis?

Yes you can have real and immediate impressions of centaurs, particularly if you are asleep or crazy. But if you are sane and awake those impressions lack continuity -- when you are sane and awake you do not see centaurs frequently.

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**Post by "Cassius" of June 20, 2024 at 7:57 PM**

[Quote from Bryan](#)

We smell and see the film that comes from our meal, for example.

Ok now \*there\* is another potential issue. I thought that "images" are received directly by the mind, without going through the eyes, and that the "images" technically speaking are not visible or otherwise detectable by the five senses. Is that not the implication of the discussion in Book 4 of Lucretius, and the implication of what Cicero says to Cassius about the mind selecting images as involved in thinking of someone who is not present?

---

**Post by "Don" of June 21, 2024 at 8:06 AM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

### [Quote from Bryan](#)

We smell and see the film that comes from our meal, for example.

Ok now \*there\* is another potential issue. I thought that "images" are received directly by the mind, without going through the eyes, and that the "images" technically speaking are not visible or otherwise detectable by the five senses. Is that not the implication of the discussion in Book 4 of Lucretius, and the implication of what Cicero says to Cassius about the mind selecting images as involved in thinking of someone who is not present?

My understanding is that \*all\* our sensations are based on "images"/fields/eidola. The mental faculty simply picks up the finest, most subtle images. But all sensations are based on touch, from the sense of touch itself to vision touching the images emitted by objects, to the mental faculty touching the finest most subtle fields.

Of course, we now know that this isn't how our senses actually work. But Epicurus posited a completely material theory of sensation, so he gets kudos for that.

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## **Post by "Cassius" of June 21, 2024 at 8:15 AM**

### [Quote from Don](#)

My understanding is that \*all\* our sensations are based on "images"/fields/eidola. The mental faculty simply picks up the finest, most subtle images. But all sensations are based on touch, from the sense of touch itself to vision touching the images emitted by objects, to the mental faculty touching the finest most subtle fields.

As to "all sensations are based on touch," I would agree, that contact between atoms is the way all of them work - no "action at a distance" without touch.

But I think we ought to dig further, presumably into book 4 of Lucretius, to clarify whether smell or touch or taste, for example, are based on "images."

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## **Post by "Cassius" of June 21, 2024 at 8:28 AM**

The long discussion of images begins in section 26 of Book 4. I would say that Epicurus seems to be making a distinction about our ability to perceive the retained "shapes" of the groups of atoms that stream off the surface of things, and that this retained shape would not necessarily be the same as seeing, hearing tasting etc. For example the reference below to perceiving them in sleep are presumably not involving the eyes because our eyes are closed when asleep?

But the references do seem to be dealt with as a group so it's going to be difficult to pull it apart. Some of this might apply to mirages and some might not, and then there's the separate discussion (somewhere else) about how images are involved before we walk or take other actions.

[26] But since I have taught of what manner are the beginnings of all things, and how, differing in their diverse forms, of their own accord they fly on, spurred by everlasting motion; and in what way each several thing can be created from them; and since I have taught what was the nature of the mind, and whereof composed it grew in due order with the body, and in what way rent asunder it passed back into its first-beginnings: now I will begin to tell you what exceeding nearly concerns this theme, that there are what we call idols of things; which, like films stripped from the outermost body of things, fly forward and backward through the air; and they too when they meet us in waking hours affright our minds, yea, and in sleep too, when we often gaze on wondrous shapes, and the idols of those who have lost the light of day, which in awful wise have often roused us, as we lay languid, from our sleep; lest by chance we should think that souls escape from Acheron, or that shades fly abroad among the living, or that something of us can be left after death, when body alike and the nature of mind have perished and parted asunder into their several first-beginnings. I say then that likenesses of things and their shapes are given off by things from the outermost body of things, which may be called, as it were, films or even rind, because the image bears an appearance and form like to that, whatever it be, from whose body it appears to be shed, ere it wanders abroad. That we may learn from this, however dull be our wits.

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### **Post by "TauPhi" of June 21, 2024 at 10:22 AM**

What follows is an excerpt from a publication from 1923 by my favourite Epicurean scholar Adam Krokiewicz. It comes from a journal called 'Przegląd Humanistyczny'. I did my best to translate it as accurately as possible and provided some comments to make it easier to digest as the fragment is rather dense. For the sake of completeness, I also attached the original text

in Polish and left the source information at the bottom. I hope it helps with the discussion on prolepsis and images.

Epicurus distinguished three criteria of truth, sensations - **αἰσθήσεις**, anticipations - **προλήψεις** and feelings - **πάθη**, as well as two abilities of the cognitive subject, namely the passive one - perception or sensitivity to external stimuli, and the active one - reasoning.

Epicurus' three criteria present three automatic and passive, three independent of human will, results of external stimuli, i.e. images - **εἰδωλα**. Sensations and feelings are of the nature of the momentary present, as opposed to lasting anticipations. Due to the moment of the present, so-called accidents\* - **τά συμβεβηκότα** and attributes\* - **τά συμπτώματα** correspond to permanent anticipations, which have specific perceptions, in fact the same as image perceptions of the mind - **φανταστικαὶ ἐπιβολαὶ τῆς διανοίας** correspond to immediate sensations and feelings.

The conscious and cognitive human will only refers to anticipations, recorded in the names of external objects, which with their images influence the senses and the human mind. The human mind, thanks to its active reasoning ability (by observation - **περίπτωσις**, analogies - **ἀναλογία**, similarities - **ὁμοιότης** and synthesis - **σύνθεσις**), can become aware of individual objects' attributes based on the names and anticipations associated with them, and derive from them more and more general accidents of these objects. This way it is possible to know, in addition to their fundamentally hidden nature - **φύσις**, which consists of accidents, also their until now hidden general and unavoidable condition, for example, that man, as man, is mortal. The described course of reasoning is the so-called Epicurean induction.

[\*] TauPhi's clarification (might not be precise): Accidents and attributes are understood as philosophical concepts:

accidents - secondary characteristics that are not essential to a thing's identity and may change over time.

attributes - characteristics or qualities associated with a particular substance (substance understood as an essential quality that make up the core of an object or thing, and is often used to refer to physical matter). Attributes can be both physical or non-physical in nature.

Please see more detailed explanation here: <https://www.philosophos.org/metaphysical-t...ssence-accident>

Original text and source:

"Epikur rozróżniał trzy kryterja prawdy, wrażenia - αἰσθήσεις, wyobrażenia typowe - προλήψεις i

uczucia - πάθη, tudzież dwie zdolności podmiotu poznającego, a mianowicie bierną - postrzegania, względnie czucia na bodźce zewnętrzne, i czynną - rozumowania. Trzy kryteria Epikura przedstawiają trzy automatyczne i bierne, trzy niezależne od woli ludzkiej rezultaty bodźców zewnętrznych, czyli wizerunków - εἰδωλα, przyczem wrażenia i uczucia mają charakter momentalnej terażniejszości w przeciwieństwie do trwałych wyobrażeń typowych. Trwałym wyobrażeniom typowym odpowiadają ze względu na moment terażniejszości tak zwane przynależności - τὰ συμβεβηκότα i przypadłości - τὰ συμπτώματα, mające swoiste narzuty, w gruncie rzeczy takie same wizerunkowe narzuty umysłu - φανταστικά ἐπιβολὰ τῆς διανοίας, jakie mają doraźne wrażenia i uczucia. Świadoma i poznawcza wola ludzka nawiązuje dopiero do wyobrażeń typowych, utrwalonych w nazwach zewnętrznych przedmiotów, działających swemi wizerunkami na zmysły i umysł człowieka. Umysł ludzki może dzięki swej czynnej zdolności rozumowania uświadomić sobie na podstawie nazw i związanych z nimi wyobrażeń typowych przypadłości poszczególnych przedmiotów, wyłuskać z nich na mocy obserwacji - περίπτωσις, ustosunkowania - ἀναλογία, podobieństwa - ὁμοίότης i związku - σύνθεσις rodzajowe, coraz to ogólniejsze przynależności owych przedmiotów i w ten sposób poznać obok ich zasadniczo niejawną natury - φύσις, która się składa z przynależności, także ich do czasu niejawną przypadłość generalną i nieuchronną, naprzykład to, że człowiek, jako człowiek, jest śmiertelnym. Na opisanym przebiegu rozumowania polega tak zwana indukcja epikurejska."

SOURCE: Adam Krokiewicz 'O szczęściu epikurejskim' - Przegląd Humanistyczny Year II; Volumes I and II; 1-6.1923; pages 260-261

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## Post by "Don" of June 21, 2024 at 11:23 AM

### [Quote from TauPhi](#)

so-called accidents\* - τὰ συμβεβηκότα

Just to be clear for anyone reading this, [TauPhi](#) 's footnote is exactly right:

### [Accident \(philosophy\) - Wikipedia](#)

#### Quote

An accident (Greek συμβεβηκός), in metaphysics and philosophy, is a property that the entity or substance has contingently, without which the substance can still retain its identity. An accident does not affect its essence, according to many philosophers. It does not mean an "accident" as used in common speech, a chance incident, normally harmful.

Philosophically speaking then, as I understand, my having a beard is one of my accidents; my being a human is an attribute of mine.

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### Post by “Bryan” of June 21, 2024 at 12:07 PM

τὰ Συμβεβηκότα	Coniūncta	"Inseparable Characteristics"	"Properties"	Fundamental qualities, Inherent attributes
τὰ Συμπτώματα	Ēventa	"Separable Characteristics"	"Accidents" "Symptoms"	Potential qualities, Incidental attributes

*This outline is specific to Epicurus. For example, Aristotle uses τὰ συμβεβηκότα, with the sense of τὰ συμπτώματα.*

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### Post by “Cassius” of June 21, 2024 at 12:08 PM

In regard to Don's notable beard, this is why I prefer how the 1743 edition translates Lucretius' "eventum" as "event" rather than accident.

Yes the philosophers seem to prefer to use the word, "accident," but in English parlance "accident" implies "fortuitousness" or "chance" in a way that should not be presumed.

It would probably raise the eyebrows of the normal person to think that it is an "accident" that Don has a beard worthy of Epicurus. It's much more appropriate to say that Don's beard is an "event" of Don's life, which conveys that it is an event that has occurred after much deliberate thought, rather than as an "accident" that Don lost his access to his razors through no input of his own.

Yes it is true that Don's beard could be removed from him without Don losing his identity, and that's what makes his beard an "event." But Don's beard surely should not be thought of to arise "by accident" any more than other emergent properties of bodies arise by "accident." Indeed, it's exactly the point of Epicurean physics - that emergent properties do not arise by the intention of gods, but neither do they arise "randomly" or by "chance" or "accident." Most

things in the universe arise from the "laws of nature" that arise repeatedly, reliably, and predictably from the movement of the atoms through the void.

For those who find this topic interesting, we explored it further with the Latin from Lucretius in this thread:

Post

**[RE: Time in Epicurus, Lucretius, and Aristotle](#)**

[...]

Yes that is exactly the point.

In the mechanical aspects of the universe, things are not "accidental/fortuitous" in the sense that the exact same combinations of the same atoms in the same way at the same places will accidentally/fortuitously produce different results - they produce repeatable and reliable results, and that is why we see the regularity in the universe. The word "accident" can imply that the result could be otherwise for unknowable factors, and I would say that that is why...



Cassius

September 6, 2023 at 9:42 AM

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**Post by “Bryan” of June 21, 2024 at 12:47 PM**

We also must keep in mind that Epicurus and Aristotle use συμβεβηκός in different ways (Aristotle himself is inconsistent), so we have to get the Epicurean-specific idea for it. General definitions will tend to favor Aristotle, so it can be confusing (please see my last post above).

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**Post by “Don” of June 21, 2024 at 1:24 PM**

[Quote from Bryan](#)

τὰ Συμβεβηκότα	Coniūncta	"Inseparable Characteristics"	"Properties"	Fundamental qualities, Inherent attributes
τὰ Συμπτώματα	Ēventa	"Separable Characteristics"	"Accidents" "Symptoms"	Potential qualities, Incidental attributes

*This outline is specific to Epicurus. For example, Aristotle uses τὰ συμβεβηκότα, with the sense of τὰ συμπτώματα.*

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So... Did I get that exactly opposite?? 😊

## Post by "Little Rocker" of June 21, 2024 at 5:19 PM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

τὰ Συμβεβηκότα	Coniūncta	"Inseparable Characteristics"	"Properties"	Fundamental qualities, Inherent attributes
τὰ Συμπτώματα	Ēventa	"Separable Characteristics"	"Accidents" "Symptoms"	Potential qualities, Incidental attributes

*This outline is specific to Epicurus. For example, Aristotle uses τὰ συμβεβηκότα, with the sense of τὰ συμπτώματα.*

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This is interesting. So as the dictionary entry would have it (LSJ?), for Epicurus, Συμβεβηκότα are properties without which a thing would cease to be what it is but that do not feature in the definition. Do you think that's because those properties are not sufficient to distinguish a particular thing from everything else, as someone like Plato demanded of a definition? Would

that mean something like, the gods' properties of being 'immortal and indestructible' are definitional, but that the gods having the property of 'living being' is one of τὰ Συμβεβηκότα?

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### Post by “Godfrey” of June 21, 2024 at 7:56 PM

Might it be that [Don](#) 's beard is actually a property, since facial hair is natural to human males? The clean-shaven faces of some of us such as myself would then be events, since if we were to stop shaving, our facial hair would return to its natural state.

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### Post by “Bryan” of June 21, 2024 at 9:33 PM

I believe there are only four instances of τὰ Συμβεβηκότα in Diogenes Laertius book 10, all in the letter to Herodotus.

10.40b [Sedley] Over and above these [atoms and void] nothing can be conceived, either by imagination or by analogy with what can be imagined, as things grasped in terms of complete natures, and not as what we call the "accidents " and "properties (συμβεβηκότα)" of these.

10.50b [Hicks] And whatever presentation we derive by direct contact, whether it be with the mind or with the sense-organs, be it shape that is presented or other properties ( **συμβεβηκότων**), this shape as presented is the shape of the solid thing, and it is due either to a close coherence of the image as a whole or to a mere remnant of its parts.

10.68b [Hicks] Moreover, shapes and colours, magnitudes and weights, and in short all those qualities which are predicated of body, in so far as they are perpetual properties ( **συμβεβηκότα**) either of all bodies or of visible bodies, are knowable by sensation of these very properties – these, I say, must not be supposed to exist independently by themselves (for that is inconceivable).

10.71b [Hicks] Nor, on the other hand, must we suppose the accident to have independent existence, for this is just as inconceivable in the case of accidents as in that of the permanent properties (**τῶν αἰδίων συμβεβηκότων**); but, as is manifest, they should all be regarded as accidents, not as permanent concomitants, of bodies, nor yet as having the rank of independent existence. Rather they are seen to be exactly as and what sensation itself makes

them individually claim to be.

We also have this, which is probably from Epicurus' book 25 On Nature:

P.Herc. 419 fr. 5: ...οὔτε γὰρ ἔν [τί] [ῆν] ὥς τὸ **συμβεβηκ[ὸς]** [κ]αὶ ὦι **συμβέβηκ[ε]** [ῥη]τέον εἶναι - οὔτ[ε ἔτε]ρον ὥς τὸ ἀ[πό τινος δι]αστήματος [ἐπεισερχό]μενον...

Therefore we know that:

The whole natures are, and are only, the atoms and the void. Everything is either an atom or the void - or an emergent characteristic of atoms and void. Emergent characteristics are of two types:

(1) Lucretius gives examples of inseparable characteristics (τὰ Συμβεβηκότα): Weight to stone, Heat to fire, Liquidity to water, Touch to bodies.

(2) Lucretius gives examples of separable characteristics (τὰ Συμπτώματα): Slavery/Freedom, Poverty/Riches, Peace/War.

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There is more in Philodemus, but I am not sure where LSJ is getting the idea that τὰ Συμβεβηκότα "do not feature in the definition" of a thing. I would have a hard time "defining" fire without mentioning heat, and the same for the rest of Lucretius' examples.

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## Post by "Cassius" of June 21, 2024 at 9:46 PM

1 - Great research work Bryan - thank you!

2 - (This is a poorly-thought-out comment but I will make it anyway) Consistent with that research and other things that we've discussed, it seems to me that LR's suggestion here:

### [Quote from Little Rocker](#)

Would that mean something like, the gods' properties of being 'immortal and indestructible' are definitional, but that the gods having the property of 'living being' is one of τὰ Συμβεβηκότα?

... might be plausible as I can see "being a living being" as being more important than "deathlessness." We could not conceive of a god not being a "living being," but we could conceive of particular a god voluntarily giving up its immortality, because a particular god might choose for some reason to stop acting to maintain its deathlessness. Is it not possible to imagine that a god too might choose to leave the theatre when for some reason (hard to describe) the play ceased to please it? At the very least, it would not make sense to deprive a god of the free will to make such a decision.

Edit - My eyes have trouble following the Greek so I'll just refer to separable and inseparable. So to restate what I wrote, I can see "being a living being" as being inseparable from godhood. If you aren't living you can't be a god. But I can see "incorruptibility" as being separable from godhood, because I can imagine a god choosing to exit the theatre, and actually I can't imagine depriving a god of such a power. I find it conceivable to say that a god who chose to exit the theatre was still, while he existed, a god, and I can't imagine "trapping" a god into a situation where he could not choose to stop existing.

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### Post by "Bryan" of June 22, 2024 at 1:48 AM

Although we often speak of the <sup>(1)</sup>sensations, <sup>(2)</sup>feelings, and <sup>(3)</sup>anticipations

That comes from Laertius' summary:

D.L 10.31 In *The Canon*, Epicurus affirms the criteria of truth are the sensations and the preconceptions and the feelings, and the Epicureans (also affirm) the image-based focus of the mind.

We also must remember:

We have Epicurus' words on the issue. Epicurus tells us exactly what the anticipations are in PD 24:

PD 24. If you simply reject any one sensation and you will not separate <sup>(A)</sup>a theory about what is still pending versus <sup>(B)</sup>what is actually present according to <sup>(1)</sup>sensation, <sup>(2)</sup>feelings, and <sup>(3)</sup>**the whole visual focus of the mind**: then you will disturb even the remaining senses with empty thought - as you will be rejecting the whole basis of judgment.

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### Post by "Cassius" of June 22, 2024 at 5:58 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3915-episode-234-cicero-s-otnotg-09-dealing-with-marcus-aurelius-and-the-canonical-ba/>

Lining the two sources up like that is a reminder of DeWitt's view that the reference to "the Epicureans generally" adding a fourth criteria was arguably a mistake. The way you've translated that "focus of the mind" reference would appear to indicate that there's no reason to split the term into two, and that it's best to think of there being only three categories, with the third being something like "the faculty that is involved in the focusing of the mind" as what Epicurus originally set forth.

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### **Post by “TauPhi” of June 22, 2024 at 7:27 AM**

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

We have Epicurus' words on the issue. Epicurus tells us exactly what the anticipations are in PD 24:

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

Lining the two sources up like that is a reminder of DeWitt's view that the reference to "the Epicureans generally" adding a fourth criteria was arguably a mistake.

These two comments makes me realise I may understand less about Epicurean criteria of truth than I previously thought... and previously I thought: 'Damn, what did those crazy Epicureans smoke?'

[Bryan](#) , can you explain why do you think PD 24 is about anticipations? To me, it is about every criteria of truth except anticipations. The way I see it, it's about all momentary (that is right here, right now) criteria: senses, feelings and image perceptions of the mind. Anticipations are different to these because they are not only 'right here, right now'. They are lasting (they create permanent mental imprints).

For that reason, I don't think the fourth criterion is a mistake. It's linked with other 'momentary' criteria and it serves similar function there to 'properties' and 'accidents' which are linked with 'permanent' anticipations.

Please don't hesitate and point out flaws in my thinking as I really would like to confidently say one day: 'Hey, I get it now. Those Epicureans were not as crazy as I thought.'

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### **Post by “Bryan” of June 22, 2024 at 11:22 AM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3915-episode-234-cicero-s-otnotg-09-dealing-with-marcus-aurelius-and-the-canonical-ba/>

Laertius gives <sup>(1)</sup>sensations, <sup>(2)</sup>feelings, and <sup>(x)</sup>anticipations and <sup>(3)</sup>**image-based focus of the mind**.

Epicurus himself says <sup>(1)</sup>sensation, <sup>(2)</sup>feelings, and <sup>(3)</sup>**the whole visual focus of the mind**

There is no discrepancy, but if there was, it is the anticipations that are the addition by Laertius -- because both mention <sup>(1)</sup>sensation, <sup>(2)</sup>feelings, and <sup>(3)</sup>**mental focus**.

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

there's no reason to split the term into two, and that it's best to think of there being only three categories

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

I don't think the fourth criterion is a mistake.

You are both correct. Fundamentally any and all sensation is our measure of truth -- we receive information from all impressions from the outside world that interact with our body.

10.51a [Hicks] For the presentations which, e.g., are received in a picture or arise in dreams, or from **any other form of apprehension by the mind or by the other criteria of truth**, would never have resembled what we call the real and true things, had it not been for certain actual things of the kind with which we come in contact.

10.51a [Bailey] For the similarity between the things which exist, which we call real and the images received as a likeness of things and produced either in sleep or through some other acts of apprehension on the part of the mind or the other instruments of judgment, could never be, unless there were some effluences of this nature actually brought into contact with our senses.

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The anticipations are just as momentary as your sight -- and your use of them can improve in the same way: over time you can increase your discipline/ability to focus on what is real, as Epicurus says "through the influences entering from the surrounding environment, taking the guidances towards improvement." (P.Herc. 1191 fr. 124).

Epicurus also says, in Book 25, P.Herc. 1056 col. 21 (fr. B 43) [Sedley 20C.1] From the very outset we always have seeds: some directing us towards these, some towards those, some towards these *and* those actions and thoughts and characters, in greater and smaller numbers. Consequently that which we develop - characteristics of this or that kind - is at first absolutely up to us; and the things which of necessity flow in through our passages from that which surrounds us are at one stage up to us...

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## Post by “Cassius” of June 23, 2024 at 7:51 AM

As we get close to recording I definitely want to be sure we go over citations as to what the Epicureans meant by "true" or "real." Including what Bryan just quoted, several are:

Diogenes Laertius [31] Logic they reject as misleading. For they say it is sufficient for physicists to be guided by what things say of themselves. Thus in *The Canon* Epicurus says that the tests of truth are the sensations and concepts and the feelings; the Epicureans add to these the intuitive apprehensions of the mind. And this he says himself too in the summary addressed to Herodotus and in the [Principal Doctrines](#). For, he says, all sensation is irrational and does not admit of memory; for it is not set in motion by itself, nor when it is set in motion by something else, can it add to it or take from it. [32] Nor is there anything which can refute the sensations. For a similar sensation cannot refute a similar because it is equivalent in validity, nor a dissimilar a dissimilar, for the objects of which they are the criteria are not the same; nor again can reason, for all reason is dependent upon sensations; nor can one sensation refute another, for we attend to them all alike. Again, the fact of apperception confirms the truth of the sensations. And seeing and hearing are as much facts as feeling pain. From this it follows that as regards the imperceptible we must draw inferences from phenomena. For all thoughts have their origin in sensations by means of coincidence and analogy and similarity and combination, reasoning too contributing something. And the visions of the insane and those in dreams are true, for they cause movement, and that which does not exist cannot cause movement.

U244

***Sextus Empiricus, Against the Logicians II ( Against the Dogmatists, II).9:*** Epicurus said that all sensibles were true and real. For there is no difference between saying that something is true and that it is real. And that is why, in giving a formalization of the true and the false, he says, “that which is such as it is said to be, is true” and “that which is not such as it is said to be, is false.”

Letter to Herodotus [51]: For the similarity between the things which exist, which we call real, and the images received as a likeness of things and produced either in sleep or through some other acts of apprehension on the part of the mind or the other instruments of judgment, could never be, unless there were some effluences of this nature actually brought into contact with our senses. And error would not exist unless another kind of movement too were produced inside ourselves, closely linked to the apprehension of images, but differing from it; and it is owing to this, supposing it is not confirmed, or is contradicted, that falsehood arises; but if it is confirmed or not contradicted, it is true.

Cicero, *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*, I.7.22: Turn next to the second division of philosophy, the department of Method and of Dialectic, which its termed Logikē. Of the whole armor of

Logic your founder, as it seems to me, is absolutely destitute. He does away with Definition; he has no doctrine of Division or Partition; he gives no rules for Deduction or Syllogistic Inference, and imparts no method for resolving Dilemmas or for detecting Fallacies of Equivocation. The Criteria of reality he places in sensation; once let the senses accept as true something that is false, and every possible criterion of truth and falsehood seems to him to be immediately destroyed. {lacuna} He lays the very greatest stress upon that which, as he declares, Nature herself decrees and sanctions, that is: the feelings of pleasure and pain. These he maintains lie at the root of every act of choice and of avoidance.

U247 Sextus Empiricus, Against the Logicians, I (Against the Dogmatists, I) 203: Epicurus says that there are two things which are linked to each other, presentation and opinion, and that of these presentation (which he also calls 'clear fact') is always true. For just as the primary feelings, i.e., pleasure and pain, come to be from certain productive factors and in accordance with productive factors themselves (for example, pleasure comes to be from pleasant things and pain from painful things, and what causes pleasure can never fail to be pleasant, nor can what produces pain not be painful; but rather, it is necessary that what gives pleasure should be pleasant and that what gives pain should, in its nature, be painful), likewise, in the case of presentations, which are feelings within us, what causes each of them is presented in every respect and unqualifiedly, and since it is presented it cannot help but exist in truth just as it is presented [...lacuna...] that it is productive of presentation. And one must reason similarly for the individual senses. For what is visible not only is presented as visible but also is such as it is presented; and what is audible is not only presented as audible, but also is like that in truth; and similarly for the rest. Therefore, it turns out that all presentations are true. And reasonably so. For if, the Epicureans say, a presentation is true if it comes from an existing object and in accordance with the existing object, and if every presentation arises from the object presented and in accordance with the presented object itself, then necessarily every presentation is true.

Peter Konstans very helpfully collected some cites for us on this point here:

Post

**[RE: Pros and Cons Of Considering Epicurean Philosophy To Be A "Religion"](#)**

I recommend reading the academic book

Pleasure, Mind, and Soul, Selected Papers in Ancient Philosophy by C. C. W. Taylor

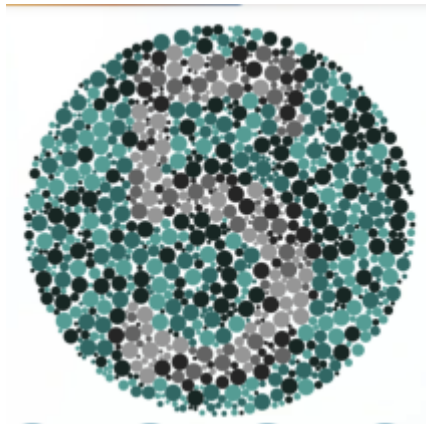
The second chapter examines the Epicurean thesis that all perceptions are true, arguing that what it means is that every instance of sensory presentation (widely construed, to include dreams, hallucinations, and imagination as well as perception proper) consists in the stimulation of a sense-organ by a real object, which is represented in that perception exactly as it is in...

Peter Konstans  
March 25, 2024 at 4:13 AM

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### **Post by “Don” of June 23, 2024 at 11:42 AM**

Over the past few years, the most cogent suggestion as to what the faculty of prolepsis is the faculty of discerning patterns out of the cacophony of our sensations. It seems to me (to summarize what I've come to understand) that our sensations suck in all the applicable sensory stimuli - mental and physical - from our environment. The faculty of the prolepsis sieves those sensations to find discernible patterns, patterns that have been encountered before, repeated patterns that that faculty have significance within that cacophony. As we encounter them more often, we can find tune that recognition. A crude analogy is If a child's family has a "dog" , all animals are "dog" for awhile until the toddler discerns patterns that fine tune their recognition of patterns identified with other animals. Another crude analogy is the ability to discern patterns within a color blind test, ex.



The full circle is the flood of sensations. Prolepsis allows one to pick out the shape. Then reason/cognition steps in and assigns meaning, as in "that's the number 5."

To me pleasure and pain enter in after prolepsis but before assignment of cognitive meaning.

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### **Post by “Bryan” of June 23, 2024 at 12:46 PM**

Don, I mostly agree with your conclusion, but one issue I see is that the "faculty of discerning" would be a faculty of thought --- and not a faculty of the senses. The senses, anticipations included, are still in the "suck in all the sensory stimuli" phase.

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## Post by "Cassius" of June 23, 2024 at 1:02 PM

I agree with Don's post and analogize to pattern recognition, and also suggest that we can go further based on other citations.

In addition to the Centaur analogy, but I am convinced we also have to take into account what Lucretius said in Book 5 as to why the gods could not have created the universe:

### Quote

[181] Further, how was there first implanted in the gods a pattern for the begetting of things, yea, and the concept of man, so that they might know and see in their mind what they wished to do, or in what way was the power of the first-beginnings ever learnt, or what they could do when they shifted their order one with the other, if nature did not herself give a model of creation? For so many first-beginnings of things in many ways, driven on by blows from time everlasting until now, and moved by their own weight, have been wont to be borne on, and to unite in every way, and essay everything that they might create, meeting one with another, that it is no wonder if they have fallen also into such arrangements, and have passed into such movements, as those whereby this present sum of things is carried on, ever and again replenished.

Seems to me that Lucretius is arguing that the gods could not have created the universe because (if they pre-existed the universe) then they would never have been exposed to any "pattern" that gave them the idea of a universe.

And that sounds like a very good argument to me that remains valid today.

Carrying the point forward, where do these "patterns" come from? It isn't sufficient to say that they are "etched" into us at birth, or for us to just say that this is precursor to genetic encoding and that that answers our concerns. How did that "etching" come about? Did the gods etch us, as the Stoics would probably argue? Or did it just "randomly" happen, which I think is equally untenable?

It looks to me like Epicurus would have said that in an eternal universe, nothing can be said to come absolutely "first." Instead, what has always eternally been happening is the flow of atoms through void.

From that perspective the sequence would be more like:

Atoms have always flowed through void naturally, combining into bodies, from which emergent properties and qualities have arisen. There was never a "first body."

As bodies grow they give off from their surfaces flows of atoms, which flows are in the shape of their surfaces. These flows of atoms in the shape of their surfaces are images.

The images are constantly flowing through the universe, some images combining with each other in ways that do not reflect their true origins (such as images of centaurs). Other images largely or fully retain fidelity to their original source, and thereby conveying to us sensations of concrete objects which we can be confident have independent existence external to us.

The atoms have always combined into bodies, and so this flow of images has also always existed. Simultaneously, along with these filmy flows, more solid bodies have combined into living beings. These living beings have thus always been exposed to the flows of images. Over time, individual species of living beings develop, as a result of their continued impact with flows of atoms, an ability to think, and over time the repeated exposure to light and dark and eventually trees and stars become exposure to trees and universes and more abstract relationships, one of which abstract relationships becomes identified as "divinity."

So to say simply that "prolepsis is the faculty that allows us to recognize the shapes or forms of the images that strike us" (which is pretty close to saying that it is "pattern recognition") is helpful. But the rest of the story seems to me how they are tied to the flow of images, which arise from the atoms themselves turning into bodies and in turn giving off images, thus eliminating any concern about divine origin of the whole process from start to finish. The "flow of images" would explain both the origin of the proleptic faculty and how it sharpens over time.

And it seems to me that "flows of images" remains a valid way to look at the situation, even though we don't think exactly in those terms today. We don't talk about "atoms" in quite the same way either, but the word continues to be useful, and the word "images" can be useful too if we are careful about what it means.

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**Post by "Don" of June 23, 2024 at 7:03 PM**

[Quote from Bryan](#)

Don, I mostly agree with your conclusion, but one issue I see is that the "faculty of discerning" would be a faculty of thought --- and not a faculty of the senses. The senses, anticipations included, are still in the "suck in all the sensory stimuli" phase.

I'm not seeing prolepsis as a faculty of thought. To me, there's only recognition of meaningful patterns on which thought can work to assign names or concepts. The analogy of the sieve is the best I can do right now, still feeling under the weather. I would agree that the faculty of prolepsis sucks in everything, but it's like that mechanical sorting bank that has slots for pennies, nickels, etc., in the crudest way. We're born with an innate sorting ability, otherwise our little brains would short circuit from all the stimuli. We have the ability to focus on patterns of significance in our environment. Now I'm not saying at this time how that translates into a "prolepsis of justice" etc., but I think I can get there from here.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of June 23, 2024 at 7:20 PM**

I have gotten the feeling that you have been under the weather for longer than usual so I hope you feel better soon. The issue of prolepsis will still be there after you recover! 😊

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### **Post by "Cassius" of June 23, 2024 at 9:32 PM**

In an uncharacteristic bout of self-discipline, we stayed with the plan today and limited ourselves to finishing up on Marcus Aurelius and then reviewing basic Epicurean canonics theory before digging too far into Velleius' proleptic argument for the Epicurean view of gods.

Editing on the podcast is going well so it will be released possibly as soon as Monday night, but certainly no later than Tuesday. That will give us, one more week before memorializing in Podcast form next Sunday our attempt at unwinding the full argument.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of June 24, 2024 at 12:57 PM**

At the end of this episode (to be released soon) Joshua makes the recommendation that it would be helpful to review our interview with Dr. David Glidden in our prior [Episode 166](#).

I agree with that recommendation, and I have been listening to it again myself. I think Dr. Glidden's approach has a lot of merit, and his viewpoint of prolepsis as being related to processing of patterns, and being pre-conceptual, largely goes against the platonic and stoic-influenced orthodoxy, and shares a lot of commonality with what i think a lot of us here are thinking.

I have a slight caution, however, to anyone who might be listening to the episode for the first time. You'll find that Dr. Glidden has a very strong Buddhist streak, so it should not be presumed that every aspect of what Dr. Glidden says is something with which all of us at EpicureanFriends would agree with. Those aspects of his commentary should be self-evident, and just like with all guests and all statements made on the podcast, people can accept or reject those as they like.

It's the 'materialist' nature of his analysis of Epicurus' view of prolepsis which is the focus of the discussion, and in that aspect I think his comments are uniformly helpful. Perhaps at some point we can get Dr. Glidden back on the show because he's a delightful and intelligent man, and his views on prolepsis are useful for thinking "outside the box" on prolepsis.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of June 24, 2024 at 3:26 PM**

If anyone gets a chance to listen to Dr. Glidden again, I suggest listening closely to the way the phrases the "pattern" facility. To be fair to Dr. Glidden, we're asking him about papers he wrote 30 years ago, so i wouldn't expect him to be ultra-precise in his wording.

For example, I think a lot of us like the idea of "patterns" being involved. But is a prolepsis actually 'recognizing" a pattern, or "detecting" that a "shape" is involved, or exactly what?

For example in the the "stick" vs "snake" example that Don asks about - By the time we get to discussing "sticks" and "snakes" are we already past prolepsis and at the "conceptual" level?

I think Dr. Glidden is saying in significant part that the "anticipation' aspect involved is the "matching" or some other "processing" of "patterns," such that as with animals there is an "intuitive leap" that preserves the safety of the organism by guesswork at what the pattern or shape is going to reveal before it is fully recognized, and thus that helps preserve us from walking on snakes and the like, before we can consciously identify the words stick or snake or dynamite stick or anything else.

So the "anticipatory / matching / guesswork / intuitive" aspect of a process is probably at least partly involved.

By asking this question I am trying to continue to focus on identifying a word or a description of what it is that prolepses are processing: "For example in the the "stick" vs "snake" example that Don asks about - By the time we get to discussing "sticks" and "snakes" are we already past prolepsis and at the "conceptual" level?"

I think most of us agree that prolepses are working (1) before concepts are involved, and (2) somewhat "jumping ahead" so as to match and create reactions before conscious conceptual thought takes place.

I can see the likelihood of more than one source of these "patterns" - (1)conscious consideration of images as we grow up, as is the example of oxen used by Laertius, and also (2) "inborn" detection of certain patterns which accounts for how animals and babies and similar living being develop (or are born with) a pattern/shape-detection ability before they are exposed to any patterns/shapes in the first place. (As to item 2, I think we have to consider instinct such as bird migration (?) and beaver dam-building (?) in that discussion.)

This current episode will not likely include, but i will be sure next week's episode includes, discussion of Lucretius 5:181, which I see as important light on this question, as mentioned in [post 40 above](#)

#### Quote

[181] Further, how was there first implanted in the gods a pattern for the begetting of things, yea, and the concept of man, so that they might know and see in their mind what they wished to do, or in what way was the power of the first-beginnings ever learnt, or what they could do when they shifted their order one with the other, if nature did not herself give a model of creation? For so many first-beginnings of things in many ways, driven on by blows from time everlasting until now, and moved by their own weight, have been wont to be borne on, and to unite in every way, and essay everything that they might create, meeting one with another, that it is no wonder if they have fallen also into such arrangements, and have passed into such movements, as those whereby this present sum of things is carried on, ever and again replenished.

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**Post by “Cassius” of June 24, 2024 at 6:10 PM**

Episode 234 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. This week we deal with Marcus Aurelius' views of fate and the gods, and we discuss the canonical basis for the Epicurean view of divinity.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/60495815>

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### **Post by “Cassius” of June 25, 2024 at 10:04 AM**

One more cite - this is the Lucretius1743 edition, in the 100's

Nor are you to believe that the sacred mansions of the gods are placed in any parts of this world of ours, for the nature of the gods is so subtle, and at so remote a distance from our senses, that it can scarce be apprehended by the mind. Since therefore it cannot be touched or felt by our hands, it can touch nothing that it is the object of our senses, for nothing has a power to touch that is incapable of being touched itself. For this reason the abodes of the gods must be far different from ours; they must be subtle, and answerable to their own nature. But the truth of this I shall more fully prove in another place.

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### **Post by “Bryan” of June 25, 2024 at 2:23 PM**

Great job guys, thank you!

Well said Joshua, at 36:50 *"it is not the prolepsis that is wrong -- while the sensory input is streaming into our senses, the mind is adding it's own layer to that -- and this layer of opinion is where error comes in. In all of these cases, if you are not aware of that ongoing process, it becomes very difficult to distinguish what is true from what is not true."*

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The description of the prolepsis was excellent all the way through! *"The distinction, which seems very clear to us, between the senses and the mind may not have been made to the same degree among the Epicureans in the ancient world."*

Well said and certainty true!

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3915-episode-234-cicero-s-otnotg-09-dealing-with-marcus-aurelius-and-the-canonical-ba/>

10.49a Δεῖ δὲ καὶ νομίζειν - ἐπεισιόντος τινὸς ἀπὸ τῶν ἔξωθεν - τὰς μορφὰς ὁρᾶν ἡμᾶς καὶ διανοεῖσθαι.

It is also necessary to understand that - by something entering from the outside - we see forms and think.

[Hicks] We must also consider that it is by the entrance of something coming from external objects that we see their shapes and think of them.

[Yonge] Also, one must admit that something passes from external objects into us in order to produce in us sight and the knowledge of forms.

[Bailey] Now we must suppose too that it is when something enters us from external objects that we not only see but think of their shapes.

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### Post by “Pacatus” of June 25, 2024 at 5:53 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

recognition of meaningful patterns

I just want to add (perhaps redundantly, having just blundered in here 😞 ) that such pattern recognition is (most?) often intuitive, rather than the result of any (time consuming) discursive analysis of all the elements forming the pattern. That is something that chess masters have often have relied on, rather than complicated calculative iterations. The intuition does rely on memory, of course.

And by “intuition” here, I mean something like “immediate apprehension or cognition” (per Webster’s).

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### Post by “Little Rocker” of June 30, 2024 at 12:23 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

[Quote from Bryan](#)

Don, I mostly agree with your conclusion, but one issue I see is that the "faculty of discerning" would be a faculty of thought --- and not a faculty of the senses. The senses, anticipations included, are still in the "suck in all the sensory stimuli" phase.

I'm not seeing prolepsis as a faculty of thought. To me, there's only recognition of meaningful patterns on which thought can work to assign names or concepts.

So I'm getting a bit turned around about a rather fundamental thing, I'm afraid. It has always seemed to me that prolepseis can only result from the exercise of thought and memory. Am I reading you both correctly as denying that thought and memory play a key role in prolepseis?

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### Post by "Bryan" of June 30, 2024 at 12:44 PM

Hello Little Rocker, thank you for the question!

Our measure of truth is pre-cognitive sensation.

10.38b Ἔτι τε <sup>[1]</sup>τὰς αἰσθήσεις δεῖ πάντως τηρεῖν καὶ ἀπλῶς <sup>[1]</sup>τὰς παρούσας ἐπιβολὰς εἴτε <sup>[1a]</sup>διανοίας εἶθ' <sup>[1b]</sup>ἔτου δήποτε τῶν κριτηρίων, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ <sup>[2]</sup>τὰ ὑπάρχοντα πάθη - ὅπως ἂν καὶ <sup>[A]</sup>τὸ προσμένον καὶ <sup>[B]</sup>τὸ ἄδηλον ἔχωμεν οἷς σημειωσόμεθα.

It is necessary to always preserve <sup>[1]</sup>the senses and simply<sup>[1]</sup>the present impressions, whether <sup>[1a]</sup>of the mind or <sup>[1b]</sup>of any of the criteria, and likewise <sup>[2]</sup>the existing feelings - so that we may also have that by which we will interpret <sup>[A]</sup>what is pending confirmation and <sup>[B]</sup>what is unseen.

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When we focus on our [1a] mental images we have a pre-cognitive sensation of that mental image -- just as when we focus our [1b] eyes on something we have pre-cognitive sensations of that thing.

With this context, we have Bailey very correctly translating "ἐννόημα" as "mental image."

10.38a: Ἀνάγκη γὰρ τὸ **πρῶτον ἐννόημα** καθ' ἕκαστον φθόγγον βλέπεσθαι καὶ μηθὲν ἀποδειξέως προσδεῖσθαι – εἴπερ ἔξομεν τὸ ζητούμενον ἢ ἀπορούμενον καὶ δοξαζόμενον ἐφ' ὃ ἀνάξομεν.

For it is necessary that the **primary concept** is seen for each word and in no way has need of proof – if we are to have that to which we will refer the inquiry, uncertainty, or belief.

[Hicks] For the **primary signification** of every term employed must be clearly seen, and ought to need no proving, this being necessary – if we are to have [something] to which the point at issue or the problem or the opinion before us can be referred.

[Bailey] For this purpose it is essential that the first **mental image** associated with each word should be regarded, and that there should be no need of explanation – if we are really to have [a standard] to which to refer a problem of investigation or reflection or a mental inference.

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### Post by “Little Rocker” of June 30, 2024 at 1:17 PM

Thanks, Bryan. I think that helps me better understand your view. So it makes sense to me (and I think there's textual evidence to suggest) that Epicurus might think the intellect, like the sensory organs, receives *eidola* ('films') of an intelligible variety. And if that were true, the intellect, like the eyes, 'perceives' the objects. Then we could say that intellect and sensation really are closely tied, as Joshua was suggesting. But then a complete perception of an object would involve a faculty of intellect, right, not only sensory organs?

And a general concept (e.g., 'horse') that serves as the starting point for investigation, doesn't that require repeated experiences, if not of horses, then of animals other than horses with which to contrast it? And would that not require memory? So if there is a 'criterion' of horse, then it seems to me that it must depend on thought and memory. And I admit that I think that if Epicurus doesn't think that, then I'm not sure his view is plausible.

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### Post by “Bryan” of June 30, 2024 at 3:13 PM

#### [Quote from Little Rocker](#)

And a general concept (e.g., 'horse') that serves as the starting point for investigation, doesn't that require repeated experiences

It is the repeated experiences that serve as the starting point for the investigation / formation of concepts.

Using our direct allogical sensations as tools (our measuring sticks of truth) we then use our logical functions and memory for such activities as investigation and formation of concepts.

Thank you for the conversation!

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## Post by “Little Rocker” of June 30, 2024 at 5:51 PM

### [Quote from Bryan](#)

Our measure of truth is pre-cognitive sensation.

Apologies if this is getting laborious, but I guess I'm starting to think this is actually what we disagree about. First, I suspect Epicurus thinks that sensation of external objects includes cognitive content as part of a package deal.

See DL 10.49: the outlines "enter us [from the objects], entering the vision **or** the intellect **according to the size and fit** [of the effluences]...And whatever presentation we receive by a form of application, **whether by the intellect or** the sense organs....this is the shape of the solid object." trans. Inwood and Gerson.

So in other words, I'm not sure sensation of the external world can be pre-cognitive because sensation itself contains cognitive content. But perhaps by 'pre-cognitive' you're taking 'cognitive' to involve the processing of or reflection on the contents of intellect--making inferences, etc.

Even then, though, it doesn't seem to me that Epicurus considers sensation (including its associated cognitive content) the only measure of truth, though it initiates inquiry and can constrain what's true. It seems to me that Epicurus thinks opinions can be true or false, and not all opinions are about sensations. Sensations don't have to confirm an opinion for the opinion to count as true. They just can't rule it out (DL 10. 51).

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## Post by “Cassius” of June 30, 2024 at 6:47 PM

### [Quote from Little Rocker](#)

But then a complete perception of an object would involve a faculty of intellect, right, not only sensory organs?

From my point of view, a "complete perception" of an object would be more a function of repeated observations, from different perspectives, at different distances, using all of the faculties of perception, but there is where I would draw the line, and as far as the process of drawing those observations into an opinion that is right or wrong, that part I would classify as "intellectual" and therefore no longer "perception."

### [Quote from Little Rocker](#)

So if there is a 'criterion' of horse, then it seems to me that it must depend on thought and memory. And I admit that I think that if Epicurus doesn't think that, then I'm not sure his view is plausible.

This is the point in the conversation where I go with DeWitt, who argues that in regard to concrete objects to which we are exposed over time we will indeed form a concept (mental picture) of a horse, and then use that concept in the future to apply the same "word" to new instances of four-legged animals when we see them, to form an opinion as to whether those animals are or are not horses. This is what Laetius hammers home, but in my view this is describing what is done *after* the five senses and feelings and anticipations have relayed their input to the mind. DeWitt's position seems to me to be that Laetius is confusing the process of "working with" proleptic input with the more important issue of "forming" proleptic input, and that the process of forming proleptic input to the mind is completely pre-rational, pre-conceptual, and actually is present as a faculty and in operation *before* we ever see our first horse, just as the eyes are operational and functional before we ever use them to see (and then in the mind) to classify anything at all.

### [Quote from Little Rocker](#)

It seems to me that Epicurus thinks opinions can be true or false, and not all opinions are about sensations. Sensations don't have to confirm an opinion for the opinion to count as true.

As to "not all opinions are about sensations" I would agree with that. We can definitely have opinions about opinions (adding layers upon layers there). And I would say that there is proleptic involvement in the assembling of opinions about opinions. But that proleptic involvement would not involve telling us which opinions are true, but would function more on the order of recognizing in the first place that arithmetic has some relationship to calculus about which to take notice.

In discussing today the issue of what Lucretius means about the gods not having a pattern by which to create the universe, it seemed to me that Lucretius should not be interpreted so much as taking the position that gods cannot create planets and the like from existing materials (I would expect Epicurus to take the position that they can in fact do things that we will be capable of one day). Rather, it seems to me that the emphasis is on that no one, gods or human, can do anything without their minds having the disposition to assemble experiences into more complicated constructs (the anthropomorphizing Don mentioned earlier today being an example). I would therefore see the example as implying that both gods and men must rely on Nature to provide the disposition and ability for a mind to construct abstractions, but the faculty of prolepsis is not any single abstraction which is formed, but the \*capability\* to form abstractions in the first place.

I would say that the meaning is more likely to be that were it not for the faculty of anticipations, the raw data presented by (1) the five senses (2) the feelings of pain and pleasure, and (3) previous anticipations would never be assembled into any abstractions whatsoever. To me, that distinction keeps the focus on prolepsis being a pre-rational, pre-cognitive faculty, and yet still gives it an important place in the formation and use of concepts.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of June 30, 2024 at 6:57 PM**

For those who are reading along here and don't have ready access to DeWitt's text, here is how he introduces the subject in his Chapter 8. I don't agree that Lucretius has no help to offer, but much of the rest seems useful:

#### Quote

The innate capacity to distinguish colors is an anticipation of experience no less than the innate capacity to distinguish between justice and injustice. The difference is that the color-sense is part of the individual's preconditioning for life in his physical environment and emerges in early childhood, while the sense of justice is part of the preconditioning for life in the social environment and emerges later, developing in pace with experience, instruction, and reflection. How the Anticipation functions as a criterion may be seen in the case of the gods: it is impossible to think of them as in need of anything, for example, because according to the idea universal among men their happiness is perfect.

Unfortunately the traditional accounts of the Anticipations have gone far astray. Three excellent reasons can be cited for these aberrations: first, in the graded textbooks of Epicurus the topic was reserved for advanced students and entirely omitted from both

the Little and the Big Epitome; consequently Lucretius has no help to offer; second, already in antiquity the concepts of such abstract things as justice had become confused with the general concepts of such concrete things as horses and oxen; third, modern scholars have become victims of the confusion of the ancients and on their own account have committed the error of merging the Anticipations with the Sensations.

It is highly probable that Epicurus allowed even to certain animals, especially elephants, the possession of these embryonic anticipations of social virtues. The tendency of the day was to have recourse to the study of irrational creatures in order to learn the teachings of Nature. It should be recalled too that not only was Epicurus very eager to have information of Pyrrho, who had been in India, but also that the writings of Alexander's associates, Aristobulus, Nearchus, and Onesicritus concerning India were available in his youth, and the same is true of the description of India by Megasthenes of the time of Seleucus. The elder Pliny, who quotes three of the above writers, ascribed to elephants "a sort of divination of justice,"<sup>31</sup> an excellent equivalent of the Epicurean Anticipation. Pliny also ascribes to elephants the possession of pride, honesty, prudence, equity, and even religion.<sup>32</sup> All of these fall squarely into the category of abstract notions, where the Anticipations belong.

The term *prolepsis* was correctly rendered by Cicero as *anticipatio* or *praenotio*<sup>33</sup> and less precisely, though intelligently, by the elder Pliny as *divinatio*. It is wrongly rendered as "concept" by those who confuse the general concept of such a thing as an ox with the abstract idea of justice. One scholar prefers "preconception," but perhaps "preconcept" would be preferable. It seems most advantageous, however, to adhere to "Anticipation" because this is the meaning of the Greek word *prolepsis*.

Two explicit accounts of the term have fortunately survived from antiquity, the first from Cicero and the second from Diogenes Laertius. Unfortunately there is virtual unanimity among modern scholars that the authority of Cicero is to be rejected and that of Laertius accepted. This would mean that the word of a stodgy compiler weighs more with us than that of the gifted Cicero. It means also that we, who possess about seventy pages of the text of Epicurus, are in a better position to form a judgment than Cicero himself, who knew all the outstanding Epicureans of his time, whether Greek or Roman, and enjoyed access to all the original texts.

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**Post by "Bryan" of June 30, 2024 at 7:01 PM**

### [Quote from Little Rocker](#)

sensation itself contains cognitive content

It seems to me that Epicurus coalesces mental sensation with sensation from the other sense organs -- and distinguishes all these sensations from thought.

[10.49, Bailey] For external objects could not make on us an impression of the nature of their own colour and shape by means of the air which lies between us and them, nor again by means of the rays or effluences of any sort which pass from us to them — nearly so well as if models, similar in color and shape, leave the objects and enter according to their respective size either into our sight or into our mind.

You see with your eyes with the same mechanism that you see mental images: the eidola creates both, and in the same way. And, of course, the process of the eidola contacting or entering the body is not a process that involves logic (even if we are focusing on specific contacts/sensations).

### [Quote from Little Rocker](#)

It seems to me that Epicurus thinks opinions can be true or false, and not all opinions are about sensations. Sensations don't have to confirm an opinion for the opinion to count as true. They just can't rule it out (DL 10. 51).

Absolutely. Our measure of truth can extend beyond sensation -- by reference to sensation. As Epicurus often says about his considerations of the non-visible, "none of these things are contracticed by the senses."

Thanks again!

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## Post by “Don” of June 30, 2024 at 7:17 PM

### [Quote from Little Rocker](#)

Apologies if this is getting laborious

LOL! This is what some of us live for! 😄 Here's my take on this topic... as of this writing. Views subject to change in the time it takes me to type this!

## Quote

DL. 10.49 (Hicks) "We must also consider that it is by *the entrance of something coming from external objects* that we see their shapes and think of them. For external things would not stamp on us their own nature of colour and form through the medium of the air which is between them and us, or by means of rays of light or currents of any sort going from us to them, so well as *by the entrance into our eyes or minds, to whichever their size is suitable, of certain films coming from the things themselves*, these films or outlines being of the same colour and shape as the external things themselves."

Let me start at the beginning for my little digression here:

1." Now in *The Canon* Epicurus affirms that our (1) sensations (αἰσθήσεις) and (2) preconceptions (προλήψεις) and our (3) feelings (πάθη) are *the standards of truth* ; the Epicureans generally make *(4/2b/?)* perceptions of mental presentations (τὰς φανταστικὰς ἐπιβολὰς τῆς διανοίας) to be also standards." DL.10.31. (emphasis and numbers added; I'm going to leave 4/2b/? sit for a moment)

It seems to me that, according to Epicurus, αἰσθήσεις (sensations) include not only what we moderns would call "sensations" (tasting, touching, hearing, tasting, smelling) but also a mental sense that apprehends finely-grained images only sensible to our minds/psykhe. These are the direct impressions coming from external objects. To me, Epicurus is saying these are always the standard of "truth" ἀλήθεια "truth, opp. lie or mere appearance; truth, reality, opp. appearance" (LSJ) So, the sensations are our direct link to an external reality that exists in actuality and is not an appearance (or, to put it in Platonic terms) a mere shadow of a greater reality. There is *no opinion* offered on the sensation at this point. It is the seal that impresses itself on the wax. We can have an opinion of the artfulness of the seal or the appropriateness of the seal; but not until it is imprinted on the wax.

I have more to offer, but I see I'm running behind in the postings.... Let me catch up then wade back in if appropriate.

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## Post by "Bryan" of June 30, 2024 at 7:22 PM

### [Quote from Don](#)

(4/2b/?)

2b! But really all 1.

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## Post by “Don” of June 30, 2024 at 7:34 PM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

[Quote from Don](#)

(4/2b/?)

2b! But really all 1.

Ah! I think I see what you're doing there. So  $1a + 1b = \alpha\iota\sigma\theta\eta\sigma\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ ?

I think I was originally seeing τὰς φανταστικὰς ἐπιβολὰς τῆς διανοίας being a riff on or related to the προλήψεις, but it's honestly been awhile since I considered it.

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## Post by “Little Rocker” of June 30, 2024 at 7:42 PM

I suppose the question is whether Epicurus thought ἐπιβολὰς τῆς διανοίας was a different criterion from 'the other criteria' (τῶν κριτηρίων). You could think the Epicureans were taking it as an additional criterion from a straightforward reading of the Letter to Herodotus itself. See DL X 38, and especially 51 (τινὰς ἐπιβολὰς τῆς διανοίας ἢ τῶν λοιπῶν κριτηρίων). But then what would it contribute that the other criteria do not?

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## Post by “Cassius” of June 30, 2024 at 8:08 PM

LR's last question I think points out the problem in making the criteria to be four rather than three. I have always thought that the following arguments on this point, also from Chapter 8, seemed persuasive to me:

The following objections may also occur to the mind of the reader: if the formation of the general concept ensues upon acts of sensation, then all elements of anticipation are removed; again, if it is formed as the residuum of acts of sensation, this is a sort of inductive process and no result of a rational process can itself be a primary criterion of truth, which Epicurus declared

the prolepsis to be; still again, if the general concept is the sum of a series of sensations, then the prolepsis is merged with sensation, and the second criterion of Epicurus disappears. This, in turn, would mean that Epicurus possessed no criterion of truth on the abstract levels of thought. Such a conclusion is hardly to be tolerated.

....

Even within Epicurean circles the term prolepsis underwent unjustified extensions. For instance, Epicurus, recognizing Nature as the canon or norm, had asserted that, just as we observe fire to be hot, snow to be cold, and honey to be sweet, so, from the behavior of newborn creatures, we observe pleasure to be the telos or end. Certain of his followers, however, shaken no doubt by Stoic criticism, took the position that the doctrine was an innate idea, that is, a prolepsis.<sup>48</sup> In strict logic this error was a confusion between quid and quale. The problem was not to decide what could be predicated of the end or telos but what was the identity of the end. Was it pleasure or was it something else?

....

When once these ambiguities and confusions have been discerned and eliminated, it is possible to state the teaching of Epicurus with some of that precision by which he set high store. In the meaning of the Canon, then, a sensation is an aisthesis. All such sensations may possess value; otherwise there would be no sense in saying, "We pay attention to all sensations." Their values, however, range all the way from totality to zero. The value is total only when the sensation is immediate. For example, when Aristotle says, "The sense of sight is not deceived as to color," this is true only of the close view, because colors fade in more distant views.

Sensations, however, usually present themselves in combinations of color, shape, size, smell, and so on. An immediate presentation of such a composite unit is a phantasia. All such presentations are true, but they do not rank as criteria in the meaning of the Canon, for the reason that the intelligence has come into play. An act of recognition (epaisthesis) has taken place in the mind of the observer, which is secondary to the primary reaction that registered color, shape, size, smell, and so forth.

That Epicurus did not regard these composite sensations as criteria is made clear by a statement of his own: "The fidelity of the recognitions guarantees the truth of the sensations."<sup>19</sup> For example, the animal standing yonder is recognized as a dun-colored ox. This is a secondary reaction. Only the primary perceptions of color, shape, size, and so on constitute a direct contact between man and the physical environment. The truth of these perceptions is confirmed by the fidelity of the recognition.

....

Again, let it be assumed that the quality of sweetness is registered by sensation. It is not, however, sensation that says, "This is honey"; a secondary reaction in the form of a recognition involving intelligence has taken place. This, in the terminology of Epicurus, is "a fantastic

perception of the intelligence." These were not given the rank of criteria by Epicurus for the reason already cited. It is on record, however, that later Epicureans did so.<sup>20</sup>

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## Post by “Eikadistes” of June 30, 2024 at 8:28 PM

### [Quote from Don](#)

it's honestly been awhile since I considered it.

Me, too.

I had once supposed that "ἐπιβολὰς τῆς διανοίας" was a direct synonym for "προλήψεις", but I have since come to see an "προλήψεις" as just one type of "ἐπιβολὰς τῆς διανοίας", some of which are canon (like a raw, mental impressions), and some of which are vain (like astrological predictions).

If that taxonomy is reasonable, then, applied to the divine nature, the true "προλήψεις" are naturally-occurring icons (in dreams) that once inspired ancient hominids to plant the seeds of spirituality that would eventually develop into national cults. Some of the "ἐπιβολὰς τῆς διανοίας" about the divine nature are coherent with the basic notion of a "divine creature", such as the proposition that Hermarkhos and Philodemos seem to insist, that (1) the blessed figures of our natural aspirations correspond with metacosmic waveform creatures whose bodies pump ghostly blood and respire imagination, or also (2) the coherence of admirably "godlike" human (i.e. Epicurus) who are near-enough to the general notion of the "προλήψεις" of a "god" that the concept becomes present and useful and meaningful in the way that word-making first naturally develops. Likewise, some "ἐπιβολὰς τῆς διανοίας" are vain, like the beliefs that (a) magic genies grants personal favors, or that (b) the divine nature is punishing you by willing Mercury into retrograde, which mysteriously, metaphysically drops your credit score.

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## Post by “Don” of June 30, 2024 at 10:04 PM

### [Quote from DL 10.37-38](#)

"In the first place, Herodotus, *you must understand what it is that words denote*, in order that *by reference to this* we may be in a position to *test opinions, inquiries, or problems*, so that our proofs may not run on untested ad infinitum, nor the terms we use be empty of meaning. [38] *For the primary signification of every term employed must be clearly seen, and ought to need no proving*; this being necessary, if we are to have something to which the point at issue or the problem or the opinion before us can be referred.

"Next, we must by all means stick to our sensations, that is, simply to the present *impressions* (ἐπιβολὰς) *whether of the mind \*or\* of any criterion\** whatever (εἴτε διανοίας εἴθ' ὅτου δήποτε τῶν κριτηρίων), and similarly to our actual feelings (παθη), in order that we may have the means of determining that which needs confirmation and that which is obscure.

I read this as Epicurus conveying that *words* can be - should be - referenced back to and denoting impressions of the senses. He urges Herodotus to test "opinions, inquiries, or problems" in reference to real sensations impressed upon the senses (including the mind) from the real, true external-to-ourselves world.

I see "or of any criterion"\* as referring to the other senses - tasting, hearing, etc. - and he includes the mind (διανοίας "thinking faculty, intelligence, understanding" LSJ) specifically in that list of "sensations" as all members in his list of criteria.

The "every term... ought to need no proving" appears to also say that words need to refer back to a mental/physical sensation of some kind, an impression from the real world.

The criteria of truth then, to me, are the sensations, the prolepseis, and the feelings, precisely because they all interact *directly* with the "real external world." They are the impressions set upon us from the world outside ourselves. These criteria are our first line of contact, unmitigated by "opinions, inquiries, or problems", with the real, true, existing world in which we live.

Now, are opinions almost instantaneous sometimes, following directly on the heels of sensations and prolepseis? Sure! I have no problem with that. Consider you're walking through the woods, your sensations register a long skinny shape on the ground, your prolepseis have identified this shape as a danger in the past (the grooves are well worn in your eye's and mind's apprehension of the shape... so the "prolepseis" slips right into the groove, metaphorically).. your reason jumps in with "Snake!" and you jump back. It is only seconds later that you realize it was a discarded rope. Your opinion was in error, even though there was indeed a long slender shape that registered in your sensations from our external environment. Your sensations were true. Your prolepsis faculty registered the pattern seen and reinforced. Your feelings registered pain. It was your opinion layered on top that got it "wrong."

That's a VERY rudimentary scenario illustrating where my mind is at right now on this topic. To get a "modern Epicurean" take on things, I still think it is fruitful to dig into the work of Dr. Lisa Feldman Barrett and her colleagues. I think that line of modern research has a lot of ideas worth exploring when it comes to really understanding how the mind actually works, and I still find a number of very interesting Epicurean echoes if not parallels in it.

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## Post by “TauPhi” of June 30, 2024 at 10:55 PM

### [Quote from Little Rocker](#)

I suppose the question is whether Epicurus thought ἐπιβολὰς τῆς διανοίας was a different criterion from 'the other criteria' (τῶν κριτηρίων). You could think the Epicureans were taking it as an additional criterion from a straightforward reading of the Letter to Herodotus itself. See DL X 38, and especially 51 (τινὰς ἐπιβολὰς τῆς διανοίας ἢ τῶν λοιπῶν κριτηρίων). But then what would it contribute that the other criteria do not?

Image perceptions of the mind are 'senses at the distance', so to speak. According to Epicureans every object (most likely with the exception of singular atoms and the void - but let's not go there right now) emits images - εἰδωλα. That's why we have two ways of detecting objects:

1) direct contact - eidolas do not make any difference as we have exposure to the objects themselves. In this scenario, the senses are criterion of truth (take precedence) for image perceptions of the mind, which in simpler terms, makes the 4th criterion irrelevant.

2) indirect contact - we get the truth about objects by their eidolas sent to us at the distance (this is the example of a round tower in Epicurean terms). In this scenario, the 4th criterion is crucial and it is considered a full-fledged criterion of truth (equal to the other canonical three criteria) allowing us to know the truth about objects outside of direct sensations.

The answers to your questions [Little Rocker](#) are probably something like that:

### [Quote from Little Rocker](#)

whether Epicurus thought ἐπιβολὰς τῆς διανοίας was a different criterion from 'the other criteria' (τῶν κριτηρίων).

Yes, most likely and probably he reserved the three canonical criteria for 'perfect conditions of getting to the truth' without complications arising from 'suspension of belief' due to 'eidolas' possible distortions resulting from the distance between the observer and the object.

[Quote from Little Rocker](#)

But then what would it contribute that the other criteria do not?

The ability to know truth about our surroundings outside of the direct contact.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of July 1, 2024 at 1:26 AM**

[Quote from Don](#)

Now, are opinions almost instantaneous sometimes, following directly on the heels of sensations and prolepsis? Sure! I have no problem with that. Consider you're walking through the woods, your sensations register a long skinny shape on the ground, your prolepsis have identified this shape as a danger in the past (the grooves are well worn in your eye's and mind's apprehension of the shape... so the "prolepsis" slips right into the groove, metaphorically).. your reason jumps in with "Snake!" and you jump back. It is only seconds later that you realize it was a discarded rope. Your opinion was in error...

In a manner analogous to pulling your hand from a hot stove, I would interpret jumping back from the "snake" as a reflex rather than an instantaneous opinion. As I understand it (for the moment at least), opinion occurs when you realize that it was a rope, based on the additional sensations from looking at it directly. However it could be that this isn't opinion either, but instead "focusing of the mind" on the object. You have a prolepsis of a rope which somehow comes into play when you focus your mind on the object.

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### **Post by “Don” of July 1, 2024 at 7:34 AM**

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

In a manner analogous to pulling your hand from a hot stove, I would interpret jumping back from the "snake" as a reflex rather than an instantaneous opinion.

But how would we define a "reflex" in ancient Epicurean terms as opposed to other mental or physical activities?

Honestly, in some ways, I think we're trying to do two different things here, and I admit I've contributed. On the one hand, it seems to me, we're trying to get a grasp on Epicurus's understanding of the mind and sensations and prolepsis and how he understood thought and memory etc. On the other, I'm trying to shoehorn a 2,000+ year old round peg into a modern neuroscience square hole. The understanding of Epicurus's perspective is interesting, valuable, and worthwhile from a philosophical and historical perspective but I'm skeptical if it's possible to "translate" that perspective and connect it to a modern neuroscience understanding of the brain, perception, sensation, etc. Understanding the brain and sensation in a modern setting and requiring a lining-up of Epicurus's terms or ideas with that seems fraught with difficulties. I'm beginning to think it might be better to simply acknowledge that the two frames are irreconcilable, and move on to understanding each (the ancient and modern) separately.

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## Post by "Cassius" of July 1, 2024 at 10:07 AM

### [Quote from Don](#)

On the other, I'm trying to shoehorn a 2,000+ year old round peg into a modern neuroscience square hole. The understanding of Epicurus's perspective is interesting, valuable, and worthwhile from a philosophical and historical perspective but I'm skeptical if it's possible to "translate" that perspective and connect it to a modern neuroscience understanding of the brain, perception, sensation, etc.

I'm not focusing on you or this discussion with this comment, but yes I think you've put your finger on a big problem. Epicurus wasn't working in our current framework and I'd say we need to first understand Epicurus in his own terms before we can even begin to apply what he said to another framework.

But to repeat this isn't a problem of individuals in this discussion, I think the entire history of Epicurus is warped almost beyond recognition by trying to interpret him in terms of ideas that he never thought or considered plausible. Epicurus was working in the framework that had been put in place by Plato and others well before his time, and it's going to be more revealing to compare him to what came \*before\* than to what came \*after\*.

I'd say that much of the frustration that we find in disagreements about Epicurus among commentators comes from that attempt to force him into Stoic or Buddhist or modern psychology frameworks. We can and should do that, but *after* we're confident of Epicurus's views, not before.

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## Post by “Little Rocker” of July 1, 2024 at 8:20 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I think the entire history of Epicurus is warped almost beyond recognition by trying to interpret him in terms of ideas that he never thought or considered plausible.

Yes, exactly this.

### [Quote from Don](#)

On the one hand, it seems to me, we're trying to get a grasp on Epicurus's understanding of the mind and sensations and prolepsis and how he understood thought and memory etc. On the other, I'm trying to shoehorn a 2,000+ year old round peg into a modern neuroscience square hole. The understanding of Epicurus's perspective is interesting, valuable, and worthwhile from a philosophical and historical perspective but I'm skeptical if it's possible to "translate" that perspective and connect it to a modern neuroscience understanding of the brain, perception, sensation, etc....I'm beginning to think it might be better to simply acknowledge that the two frames are irreconcilable, and move on to understanding each (the ancient and modern) separately.

For what it's worth, I tend to have two criteria that guide my efforts to 'figure Epicurus out':

Criterion 1: the text is the chief constraint. If we want to take Epicurus on his own terms, the text itself has to support, or at least not decisively rule out, a viable reading, and I prefer, all things considered, to keep my body of primary text reasonably narrow (as in, what we have from Epicurus, not what Plutarch or Clement of Alexandria say about Epicurus).

Criterion 2: I know this is contentious, but I also think we should seek the most philosophically and empirically charitable account the text can sustain. That means we should rule out interpretations that unnecessarily saddle Epicurus with untenable positions, *if* a more plausible position can be attributed to Epicurus within the bounds of textual evidence. Which is to say I think it's totally fine, Don, to consider whether Epicurus might be in striking distance of what might count as a viable contender of a view today. I think it's always good to ask, 'how close is

he to our current understanding?' Even if, in the end, it turns out the answer is, 'nowhere near.'

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## Post by “Don” of July 1, 2024 at 10:21 PM

### [Quote from Little Rocker](#)

Criterion 1: the text is the chief constraint. If we want to take Epicurus on his own terms, the text itself has to support, or at least not decisively rule out, a viable reading, and I prefer, all things considered, to keep my body of primary text reasonably narrow (as in, what we have from Epicurus, not what Plutarch or Clement of Alexandria say about Epicurus).

I concur with that. While not using Plutarch, Clement, et al. limits what's available, limiting oneself to *actual* Epicurean writings at least removes some of the likely anti-Epicurean bias inherent in "quotations" from those opposed (vehemently) to the Epicurean school.

Where do you come down on Cicero? Valuable? Reliable? LOL I find Cicero insufferable as a commentator, but he preserved some pivotal information... but how much to trust him as a conveyor of Epicurean teaching?

Curious also about your view of using the Herculaneum material: Philodemus, the fragments of *On Nature*, and so on. I'm *inclined* to make use of it where there is a reasonable amount of intact text, but skeptical of a lot of what might need "reconstruction."

### [Quote from Little Rocker](#)

Criterion 2: I know this is contentious, but I also think we should seek the most philosophically and empirically charitable account the text can sustain.

Sure, I got no problem with that. We have such little text (although, relatively speaking, we have a treasure trove!) that we have to read between the lines sometimes.

### [Quote from Little Rocker](#)

That means we should rule out interpretations that unnecessarily saddle Epicurus with untenable positions, if a more plausible position can be attributed to Epicurus within the bounds of textual evidence.

Yep, agree with that as well.



For me, an example of this idea would be that Epicurus was an ascetic as seems popular in some circles. A more plausible position from my perspective is that he may very well have tested himself from time to time to see how much he could live on and still be satisfied... but I certainly don't see him doing this day in day out. I have source amnesia but seem to remember one author talking about "from time to time" Epicurus would test the limits of this kind of thing and to better appreciate abundance when one has it. I think of Lent or Ramadan in a regular religious context.

#### [Quote from Little Rocker](#)

Which is to say I think it's totally fine, Don, to consider whether Epicurus might be in striking distance of what might count as a viable contender of a view today. I think it's always good to ask, 'how close is he to our current understanding?' Even if, in the end, it turns out the answer is, 'nowhere near.'

I can see that. I think my issue is trying to retrofit modern understanding into an Epicurean context. That's why I think (and, trust me, this is a recent realization on my part) it's vitally important to understand what Epicurus thought, taught, and understood within his own contemporary historical and philosophical context. Once *that* is reasonably well understood, then we can look for parallels or echoes or similarities to modern understandings. Heck, the ancient Greeks coming up with *atoms* - fundamental building blocks of matter common to everything across the cosmos - is pretty darn impressive... even if our modern "atoms" are not *per se* Epicurean or Democritean "atoms." Coming up with a material cosmos and making supernatural gods unnecessary was a great leap forward. It wasn't science but it gets you walking toward a scientific understanding of the universe. Kudos to them!

That said, I'm finding that I'm unable to be as generous when it comes to the psyche and the mind and memory and all that. Our minds don't seem to grasp eidola from their air to conceive of things. Is it impressive that Epicurus posited a material cause for sensation, and the interaction of "soul atoms" to describe the activity of what is actually the human nervous system? You betcha! But Epicurus was working with a completely different paradigm when it comes to the mind. I just don't think we'll find exact parallels of prolepseis from a modern understanding... but I remain open to the idea!! There are several old posts of mine where I've done exactly that after all 😊 For example...

Thread

#### [Dr. Lisa Feldman Barrett on The Functions of the Brain](#)

I just started reading Dr. Barrett's book *How Emotions Are Made* (2017) and find it fascinating. I just finished the first chapter, so, in looking for something to listen to on the treadmill this morning, found her TED talk.

I see implications and applications to Epicurean philosophy (I think). She talks about the basic experiences all humans have from birth like pleasure and displeasure (I'm calling that pain). Overlaid on these basic sensations are the emotions our brains build from contextual...



Don

December 15, 2020 at 7:49 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/wcf/conversation/381-homeostasis/>

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### **Post by “Bryan” of July 2, 2024 at 9:36 AM**

500 years ago modern science also disagreed with Epicurus -- and now more nearly agrees with him.

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### **Post by “Little Rocker” of July 2, 2024 at 10:05 AM**

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

Our minds don't seem to grasp eidola from their air to conceive of things.

Say it ain't so, Don! I mean, at least Santa emits eidola, right?! 😊

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

Where do you come down on Cicero? Valuable? Reliable? LOL I find Cicero insufferable as a commentator, but he preserved some pivotal information... but how much to trust him as a conveyor of Epicurean teaching?...Curious also about your view of using the Herculaneum material: Philodemus, the fragments of On Nature, and so on. I'm inclined to make use of it where there is a reasonable amount of intact text, but skeptical of a lot of what might need "reconstruction."

Cicero, though largely hostile, and burdened with the conceit of a talented undergrad, does seem to me to have one redeeming quality—his Academic Skepticism required him to take

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3915-episode-234-cicero-s-otnotg-09-dealing-with-marcus-aurelius-and-the-canonical-ba/>

seriously and weigh competing positions, never fully accepting any of them. And his bestie was an Epicurean. So I generally take his reports of Epicurean views seriously, *unless* it seems to set the Epicureans up for a too easy dismissal by Cicero's subsequent critique or has the vague odor of emblematically Roman interests that Cicero might have picked up from Philodemus. *And unless he's the only one to say something that radically alters a general understanding.*

I take Philodemus with a dose of caution for the reasons you mention—the text is fragmentary, and reconstruction is sometimes guided by the view of the person producing the reconstruction. The use of AI in reconstruction, though, interests me. I'm also a bit wary of Philodemus because he taught Romans, and Romans were a weird lot.

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

I just don't think we'll find exact parallels of prolepseis from a modern understanding... but I remain open to the idea!!

Yeah, I think if Epicurus is a radical empiricist of the sort that many people take him to be, where the mind contributes nothing to 'complete' perception, and more importantly, to the generation and refinement of *prolepseis*, then he had the wrong view. Nothing bad about that because some people still have that view—it's not a settled question. But I think developmental psychology and animal research show that cognitive systems come prepared to structure the key parts of experience using built-in capacities for abstractions, especially those required to navigate the environment. And honestly, given his Cradle Argument and his view that humans, like animals, are hedonists, I suspect Epicurus would privilege the evidence from those experimental fields, even against his own view, if it got him what he wanted in the end.

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### **Post by “TauPhi” of July 6, 2024 at 8:35 PM**

I stumbled on this today while working on something else. And it reminded me of initial conversation in this thread:

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

This is a physical sense that stems from contact -- impressions of particles entering your body -- just like all the other senses. We can only form propositions after we have this sense/contact.

In some circumstances you may focus on being physically touched by the images of trees that are around you, at other times you may focus on being physically touched by circumstances in a way that produces a sense of guilt (or lack of guilt) or a sense of justice (or lack of justice), at other times you may focus on being being physically touched by the images of the gods.

Just as we have an innate ability to sense trees with our eyes, we have an innate ability to sense gods with our mind.

It's from Catherine Wilson's 'Epicureanism: A Very Short Introduction':

"According to the account given in Cicero's dialogue on this topic, the Epicureans believed that the gods were not perceived by the senses but by the intellect, via images arising from the 'innumerable atoms' that compose thoughts and dreams. While some commentators appear to believe, on the basis of a problematic preposition in Cicero's text, that these images flow from the gods, in the manner of the ordinary idola emitted from solid objects, this does not seem to be what Epicurus had in mind. Rather, **the texts suggest that our thoughts flow to the gods on account of the images.**"

I don't want to make this topic even more complicated, but I'm curious about the direction of the images' flow. Can someone confirm if the images flow from the gods or to the gods according to Epicurus?

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### Post by "Don" of July 6, 2024 at 8:43 PM

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

I don't want to make this topic even more complicated, but I'm curious about the direction of the images' flow. Can someone confirm if the images flow from the gods or to the gods according to Epicurus?

My understanding is that the text explicitly says "to the gods." Translators said "it can't really say that, so we'll correct it" and substituted "from the gods."

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### Post by "Cassius" of July 6, 2024 at 8:50 PM

An additional fly in the ointment is that in reading ahead to a section where Velleius is being attacked, it seems that I remember seeing another reference to these images and the gods, and that in the second reference the preposition goes the other way.

Of course I don't have the cite on the tip of my tongue and without it this comment is useless, but I will see what I can do, and Joshua and I can look for it as we go further in OTNOTG.

Edit - it might be this from later in Book One, but I may remember something even more definite. Plus this is Yonge and I may be remembering Rackham:

XXXVII. "They have nothing to do," your teacher says. Epicurus truly, like indolent boys, thinks nothing preferable to idleness; yet those very boys, when they have a holiday, entertain themselves in some sportive exercise. But we are to suppose the Deity in such an inactive state that if he should move we may justly fear he would be no longer happy. This doctrine divests the Gods of motion and operation; besides, it encourages men to be lazy, as they are by this taught to believe that the least labor is incompatible even with divine felicity.

But let it be as you would have it, that the Deity is in the form and image of a man. Where is his abode? Where is his habitation? Where is the place where he is to be found? What is his course of life? And what is it that constitutes the happiness which you assert that he enjoys? For it seems necessary that a being who is to be happy must use and enjoy what belongs to him. And with regard to place, even those natures which are inanimate have each their proper stations assigned to them: so that the earth is the lowest; then water is next above the earth; the air is above the water; and fire has the highest situation of all allotted to it. Some creatures inhabit the earth, some the water, and some, of an amphibious nature, live in both. There are some, also, which are thought to be born in fire, and which often appear fluttering in burning furnaces.

In the first place, therefore, I ask you, Where is the habitation of your Deity? Secondly, What motive is it that stirs him from his place, supposing he ever moves? And, lastly, since it is peculiar to animated beings to have an inclination to something that is agreeable to their several natures, what is it that the Deity affects, and to what purpose does he exert the motion of his mind and reason? In short, how is he happy? how eternal? Whichever of these points you touch upon, I am afraid you will come lamely off. For there is never a proper end to reasoning which proceeds on a false foundation; for you asserted likewise that the form of the Deity is perceptible by the mind, but not by sense; that it is neither solid, nor invariable in number; that it is to be discerned by similitude and transition, and that a constant supply of images is perpetually flowing on from innumerable atoms, on which our minds are intent; so that we from that conclude that divine nature to be happy and everlasting.

Edit TWO == same implication of direction from the gods:

XXXVIII. What, in the name of those Deities concerning whom we are now disputing, is the meaning of all this? For if they exist only in thought, and have no solidity nor substance, what difference can there be between thinking of a Hippocentaur and thinking of a Deity? Other philosophers call every such conformation of the mind a vain motion; but you term it “the approach and entrance of images into the mind.” Thus, when I imagine that I behold T. Gracchus haranguing the people in the Capitol, and collecting their suffrages concerning M. Octavius, I call that a vain motion of the mind: but you affirm that the images of Gracchus and Octavius are present, which are only conveyed to my mind when they have arrived at the Capitol. The case is the same, you say, in regard to the Deity, with the frequent representation of which the mind is so affected that from thence it may be clearly understood that the Gods are happy and eternal.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of July 6, 2024 at 8:57 PM**

Joshua and I will get to all of this over time, but it's apparent that there is a lot more in OTNOTG in regard to images that is relevant to prolepsis, even if we have to reverse engineer it from Cotta's criticisms:

XXXIX. The whole affair, Velleius, is ridiculous. You do not impose images on our eyes only, but on our minds. Such is the privilege which you have assumed of talking nonsense with impunity. But there is, you say, a transition of images flowing on in great crowds in such a way that out of many some one at least must be perceived! I should be ashamed of my incapacity to understand this if you, who assert it, could comprehend it yourselves; for how do you prove that these images are continued in uninterrupted motion? Or, if uninterrupted, still how do you prove them to be eternal? There is a constant supply, you say, of innumerable atoms. But must they, for that reason, be all eternal? To elude this, you have recourse to equilibration (for so, with your leave, I will call your ἰσονομία), and say that as there is a sort of nature mortal, so there must also be a sort which is immortal. By the same rule, as there are men mortal, there are men immortal; and as some arise from the earth, some must arise from the water also; and as there are causes which destroy, there must likewise be causes which preserve. Be it as you say; but let those causes preserve which have existence themselves. I cannot conceive these your Gods to have any. But how does all this face of things arise from atomic corpuscles? Were there any such atoms (as there are not), they might perhaps impel one another, and be jumbled together in their motion; but they could never be able to impart form, or figure, or color, or animation, so that you by no means demonstrate the immortality of your Deity.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of July 6, 2024 at 9:03 PM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3915-episode-234-cicero-s-otnotg-09-dealing-with-marcus-aurelius-and-the-canonical-ba/>

More:

XLI. But they are free from pain. Is that sufficient for beings who are supposed to enjoy all good things and the most supreme felicity? The Deity, they say, is constantly meditating on his own happiness, for he has no other idea which can possibly occupy his mind. Consider a little; reflect what a figure the Deity would make if he were to be idly thinking of nothing through all eternity but "It is very well with me, and I am happy;" nor do I see why this happy Deity should not fear being destroyed, since, without any intermission, he is driven and agitated by an everlasting incursion of atoms, and since images are constantly floating off from him. Your Deity, therefore, is neither happy nor eternal.

You guys are much better with the text than I am, and i have read many times that the earlier section seems to have the images going the wrong way, but when you look at the rest of what is said in attacking Velleius, it sure looks like a case can be made that everyone understood the images to be coming \*from\* the gods, and the "to" must be some kind of transcription error.

(Of course given the nature of the theory, it IS true that we ourselves are giving off images too, which the gods would be able to observe (if they were so inclined) just like we apparently are argued to perceive theirs. But I wouldn't expect that our paying attention to the idea of gods in any way "focuses" the images streaming off of us to go in the direction of the intermundia.)

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### **Post by "TauPhi" of July 6, 2024 at 9:29 PM**

Thank you [Don](#) and [Cassius](#)

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### **Post by "Bryan" of July 7, 2024 at 1:49 AM**

[Quote from TauPhi](#)

from the gods or to the gods

[Quote from Cassius](#)

it IS true that we ourselves are giving off images too... But I wouldn't expect that our paying attention to the idea of gods in any way "focuses" the images streaming off of us to go in the direction of the intermundia

Yes, I agree all around -- films (τὰ εἶδωλα) come off every object. We can focus on films that come off other objects toward us, but we cannot direct the films that come off us toward other objects.

48b ...for there is a continuous flow from the surface of bodies - not noticeable by decrease due to replenishment - preserving the position in the solid and arrangement of atoms for a long time...

49b For external objects would not imprint their nature of color and shape through the air between us and them... without certain impressions coming to us from the objects (of the same color and of the same shape) according to the size that fits into the vision or mind, by means of swift movements.

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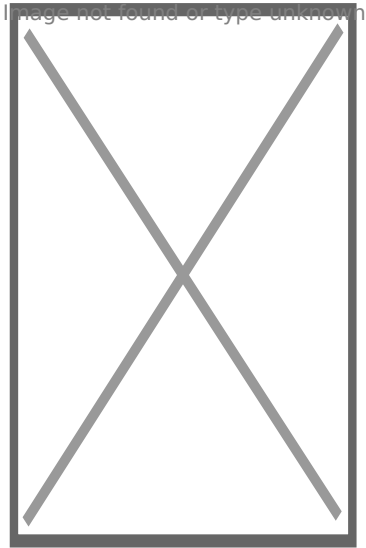
### **Post by “Little Rocker” of July 7, 2024 at 10:46 AM**

Not that we need another vote here, but it seems to me it's got to be 'from the gods' because the reliability of perception depends on the sense-impression being received passively.

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### **Post by “Don” of July 7, 2024 at 11:30 AM**

I encourage everyone to head over to Internet Archive and the free to borrow The Hellenistic Philosophers and read Long & Sedley's commentary on the God section:



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