

# Episode 273 - TD03 - Is The Soul Immortal And Death Actually A Good/

Post by "Cassius" of March 18, 2025 at 8:39 AM

Welcome to Episode 273 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, where we discuss this and all of our podcast episodes.**

**This week we continue our series covering Cicero's "Tusculan Disputations" from an Epicurean viewpoint. This series addresses five of the greatest questions in philosophy, with Cicero speaking for the majority and Epicurus the main opponent:**

- 1. Is Death An Evil? (Cicero says no and Epicurus says no, but for very different reasons)**
- 2. Is Pain An Evil? (Cicero says no, Epicurus says yes)**
- 3. Does the Wise Man Experience Grief and Fear? (Cicero says no, Epicurus says yes)**
- 4. Does the Wise Man Experience Joy and Desire? (Cicero says no, Epicurus says yes)**
- 5. Is Virtue Sufficient For A Happy Life? (Cicero says yes, Epicurus says no)**

**As we found in Cicero's "On Ends" and "On The Nature of the Gods," Cicero treated Epicurean Philosophy as a major contender in the battle between the philosophies, and in discussing this conflict and explaining Epicurus' answers to these questions, we will deepen our understanding of Epicurus and how he compares to the other major schools.**

**These week we turn our attention further to "Is Death An Evil," and we will read beginning in [Section XII](#) where the discussion continues.**

Quote

## **XII.¶**

A. Explain, therefore, if it is not troublesome to you, first, if you can, that souls do exist after death; secondly, should you fail in that, (and it is a very difficult thing to establish,) that death is free from all evil; for I am not without my fears that this itself is an evil; I do not mean the immediate deprivation of sense, but the fact that we shall hereafter suffer deprivation.

M. I have the best authority in support of the opinion you desire to have established, which ought, and generally has, great weight in all cases. And first, I have all antiquity on that side, which the more near it is to its origin and divine descent, the more clearly, perhaps, on that account did it discern the truth in these matters. This very doctrine, then, was adopted by all those ancients, whom Ennius calls in the Sabine tongue, Casci, namely, that in death there was a sensation, and that, when men departed this life, they were not so entirely destroyed as to perish absolutely. And this may appear from many other circumstances, and especially from the pontifical rites and funeral obsequies, which men of the greatest genius would not have been so solicitous about, and would not have guarded from any injury by such severe laws, but from a firm persuasion that death was not so entire a destruction as wholly to abolish and destroy everything, but rather a kind of transmigration, as it were, and change of life, which was, in the case of illustrious men and women, usually a guide to heaven, while in that of others, it was still confined to the earth, but in such a manner as still to exist. From this, and the sentiments of the Romans,

In heaven Romulus with Gods now lives;

as Ennius saith, agreeing with the common belief; hence, too Hercules is considered so great and propitious a god amongst the Greeks, and from them he was introduced among us, and his worship has extended even to the very ocean itself. This is how it was that Bacchus was deified, the offspring of Semele; and from the same illustrious fame we receive Castor and Pollux as gods, who are reported not only to have helped the Romans to victory in their battles, but to have been the messengers of their success. What shall we say of Ino, the daughter of Cadmus? is she not called Leucothea by the Greeks, and Matuta by us? Nay more; is not the whole of heaven (not to dwell on particulars) almost filled with the offspring of men?

Should I attempt to search into antiquity, and produce from thence what the Greek writers have asserted, it would appear that even those who are called their principal gods, were taken from among men up into heaven.

## **XIII.¶**

Examine the sepulchres of those which are shown in Greece; recollect, for you have been initiated, what lessons are taught in the mysteries; then will you perceive how extensive this doctrine is. But they who were not acquainted with natural philosophy, (for it did not begin to be in vogue till many years later,) had no higher belief than what natural reason could give them; they were not acquainted with the principles and causes of things; they were often induced by certain visions, and those generally in the night, to think that those men, who had departed from this life, were still alive. And this may further be brought as an irrefragable argument for us to believe that there are gods,—that there never was any nation so barbarous, nor any people in the world so savage, as to be without some notion of gods: many have wrong notions of the gods, for that is the nature and ordinary consequence of bad customs, yet all allow that there is a certain divine nature and energy. Nor does this proceed from the conversation of men, or the agreement of philosophers; it is not an opinion established by institutions or by laws; but, no doubt, in every case the consent of all nations is to be looked on as a law of nature. Who is there, then, that does not lament the loss of his friends, principally from imagining them deprived of the conveniences of life? Take away this opinion, and you remove with it all grief; for no one is afflicted merely on account of a loss sustained by himself. Perhaps we may be sorry, and grieve a little; but that bitter lamentation, and those mournful tears, have their origin in our apprehensions that he whom we loved is deprived of all the advantages of life, and is sensible of his loss. And we are led to this opinion by nature, without any arguments or any instruction.

#### XIV.¶

But the greatest proof of all is, that nature herself gives a silent judgment in favour of the immortality of the soul, inasmuch as all are anxious, and that to a great degree, about the things which concern futurity;—

One plants what future ages shall enjoy,

as Statius saith in his *Synephebi*. What is his object in doing so, except that he is interested in posterity? Shall the industrious husbandman, then, plant trees the fruit of which he shall never see? and shall not the great man found laws, institutions, and a republic? What does the procreation of children imply—and our care to continue our names—and our adoptions—and our scrupulous exactness in drawing up wills—and the inscriptions on monuments, and panegyrics, but that our thoughts run on futurity? There is no doubt but a judgment may be formed of nature in general, from looking at each nature in its most perfect specimens; and what is a more perfect specimen of a man, than those are who look on themselves as born for the assistance, the protection, and the preservation of others? Hercules has gone to heaven; he never would have gone thither, had he not, whilst amongst men, made that road for himself. These things

are of old date, and have, besides, the sanction of universal religion.

## XV.¶

What will you say? what do you imagine that so many and such great men of our republic, who have sacrificed their lives for its good, expected? Do you believe that they thought that their names should not continue beyond their lives? None ever encountered death for their country, but under a firm persuasion of immortality! Themistocles might have lived at his ease; so might Epaminondas; and, not to look abroad and amongst the ancients for instances, so might I myself. But, somehow or other, there clings to our minds a certain presage of future ages; and this both exists most firmly and appears most clearly, in men of the loftiest genius and greatest souls. Take away this, and who would be so mad as to spend his life amidst toils and dangers? I speak of those in power. What are the poet's views but to be ennobled after death? What else is the object of these lines—

Behold old Ennius here, who erst

Thy fathers' great exploits rehearsed?

He is challenging the reward of glory from those men whose ancestors he himself had ennobled by his poetry. And in the same spirit he says in another passage—

Let none with tears my funeral grace, for I

Claim from my works an immortality.

Why do I mention poets? the very mechanics are desirous of fame after death. Why did Phidias include a likeness of himself in the shield of Minerva, when he was not allowed to inscribe his name on it? What do our philosophers think on the subject? do not they put their names to those very books which they write on the contempt of glory? If, then, universal consent is the voice of nature, and if it is the general opinion everywhere, that those who have quitted this life are still interested in something; we also must subscribe to that opinion. And if we think that men of the greatest abilities and virtue see most clearly into the power of nature, because they themselves are her most perfect work; it is very probable that, as every great man is especially anxious to benefit posterity, there is something of which he himself will be sensible after death.

Display More

(We will likely go further depending on the time we have.)

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**We'll be reading from the [Charles Yonge edition](#).**

**Here is a link to our discussion guide: [Epicurean Views Of Tusculun Disputations](#)**

Our thread here at the forum specifically dedicated to [Tusculum Disputations](#) is [here](#).

For purposes of planning ahead, this series will be followed by a series on the Epicurean-relevant material in Cicero's "Academic Questions." A thread devoted to that series where you can make comments on what aspects of "Academic Questions" to include is [here](#).

[media]<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/65090710/media>

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### **Post by “Cassius” of March 22, 2025 at 9:25 PM**

I'm experimenting using the side-by-side format the possibility of making notes on each section of Tusculun Disputations as we go through it. The notes I've made so far for this episode's section are here. Please feel free to offer suggestions or comments on any of the sections (coded by Roman numerals) and I'll add those in as we go further.

[EpicureanFriends' Tusculan Disputations Side By Side Viewer](#)

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### **Post by “Don” of March 23, 2025 at 7:28 AM**

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

I'm experimenting using the side-by-side format the possibility of making notes on each section of Tusculun Disputations as we go through it

This is a great idea!! Okay, I was stalling on my Menoikeus reformating because of all the hard html coding. But this text and note format has some potential as demonstrated right here by your work, [Cassius](#) . I need to go back and look more at that side by side ... software? Template? Thing? Thanks for the practical proof of concept!

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## Post by “Cassius” of March 23, 2025 at 8:29 AM

If you need any help getting started just let me know.

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## Post by “Don” of March 23, 2025 at 10:29 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

If you need any help getting started just let me know.

I may very well take you up on that. I'll noodle around and then try and send a message to you in the next weeks or so.

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## Post by “Cassius” of March 23, 2025 at 8:26 PM

I'll post more on this as I continue to edit today's episode, but I want to bring out something that anyone who is following along can help us consider on a point that relates both to the existence of "gods" and to the existence of "souls."

Cicero's first arguments to the student that death is not an evil because we are not there mirrors pretty closely Epicurus' argument, but Cicero does not cite Epicurus as his authority for the argument.

Today, especially as we get into section XIII of part one, we're going to see Cicero make an argument that we should believe that the soul can survive the death of the body because that's what most all the great men of the past have thought. As he gets into this in Section XIII, he's going to include some material that arguably is very close to Velleius' argument based on prolepsis for the existence of gods as beings blessed and imperishable.

### Quote

Examine the sepulchres of those which are shown in Greece; recollect, for you have been initiated, what lessons are taught in the mysteries; then will you perceive how extensive this doctrine is. But they who were not acquainted with natural philosophy,

(for it did not begin to be in vogue till many years later,) had no higher belief than what natural reason could give them; they were not acquainted with the principles and causes of things; they were often induced by certain visions, and those generally in the night, to think that those men, who had departed from this life, were still alive. And this may further be brought as an irrefragable argument for us to believe that there are gods,—that there never was any nation so barbarous, nor any people in the world so savage, as to be without some notion of gods: many have wrong notions of the gods, for that is the nature and ordinary consequence of bad customs, yet all allow that there is a certain divine nature and energy. Nor does this proceed from the conversation of men, or the agreement of philosophers; it is not an opinion established by institutions or by laws; but, no doubt, in every case the consent of all nations is to be looked on as a law of nature. Who is there, then, that does not lament the loss of his friends, principally from imagining them deprived of the conveniences of life? Take away this opinion, and you remove with it all grief; for no one is afflicted merely on account of a loss sustained by himself. Perhaps we may be sorry, and grieve a little; but that bitter lamentation, and those mournful tears, have their origin in our apprehensions that he whom we loved is deprived of all the advantages of life, and is sensible of his loss. And we are led to this opinion by nature, without any arguments or any instruction.

Again he does not attribute this argument to Epicurus either, but if you compare the text in Book one of on the nature of the gods, around section XVII, with the argument here in XIII of TD. there are some pretty striking parallels.

The main reason I point this out is that I have a germ of a thought that what we are seeing here is Cicero's misinterpretation of the Epicurean argument from prolepsis, first in the case of the existence of gods, which we know Epicurus did consider to be related to prolepsis, and next on the existence of souls, which I don't know that we do see Epicurus say is related to prolepsis.

Epicurus of course did not say that souls can survive death, but he does seem to say that souls do exist, so the question arises whether Epicurus could have considered that there is a prolepsis in regard to the existence souls in the first place. (Asked another way, does Epicurus say both that we have prolepses that incline us to believe that gods are blessed and imperishable, and also that we have prolepses to believe that we have souls? (The potential prolepsis I am asking about is not "that souls survive death," but that "we should consider that we have souls even though just like gods we cannot see or touch them.")

The two sections I am comparing are:

[Tusculan Disputations XIII](#)

[On the Nature of the Gods XVII and thereabouts](#) (sorry this link doesn't take you directly to the paragraph - I'll fix that in the future)

Key to this analysis is that I think most of us agree that the faculty of prolepsis leads toward formation of opinions, but that a prolepsis is not itself an opinion. Cicero doesn't seem to accept this, and he seems to think that an Epicurean prolepsis is a fully formed opinion, and since all men have the opinion that gods exist and that souls survive death, that makes it true. I also think most of us agree that Epicurus would say that it doesn't matter how many people think a thing to be so, that's not sufficient evidence of its truth - we should require sound reasoning based on observations from the senses, prolepsis, and feelings, and these are not subject to majority vote.

So:

Is this section XIII of Tusculan Disputations an Epicurean argument meant to mirror Velleius section XVII in On The Nature of the Gods? If it's an Epicurean argument, was Cicero extending it to the existence of souls on his own, without precedent from Epicurean texts, or is it likely that the Epicureans reasoned this way in regard to souls as well as gods?

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## Post by "Don" of March 23, 2025 at 11:07 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

If it's an Epicurean argument, was Cicero extending it to the existence of souls on his own, without precedent from Epicurean texts, or is it likely that the Epicureans reasoned this way in regard to souls as well as gods?

I'm not convinced that the prolepsis of the gods includes their blessedness and incorruptibility. The prolepsis has to do with their existence. The blessedness and incorruptibility are the proper "beliefs" that we should assign to them. When Epicurus says (in the letter to Menoikeus):

*believe that the god is a blessed and imperishable thing as is the common, general understanding of the god. You, [Menoikeus], believe everything about which a god is able to preserve its own imperishability and blessedness for itself. Do not attribute anything foreign to its incorruptibility or incongruous with the blessedness of the god!*

He's using the word "believe" and "general understanding" and "attribute" not prolepsis. Then later:

*Gods exist (θεοὶ εἰσὶν), and the knowledge of them is manifest to the mind's eye.*

That "enarges ἐναργῆς" or "manifest to the mind's eye" to me says that the existence of the gods is the readily discernible "knowledge" and nothing more. Then, by reason, we assign the proper common, general understanding of the god as incorruptible and blessed.

On the other hand, the "soul" (shudder... I \*really\* dislike using that loaded term) is apparent because we're alive. BUT \*remember\* neither Epicurus nor Cicero uses our Christian-laden term "soul."

Epicurus consistently talks about the ψυχή (psykhe - psyche) which is akin to the Latin anima. Both can refer to "the animating principle of a human or animal body, vital spirit, soul, life." The ψυχή can also be thought as the "mind" or where reason happens. It seems the big argument - then and now - was whether this seat of reason or the principle that gave animation and life to a body, human or animal, existed separately from the body or whether it came into existence with the physical body. Did it exist prior to the body or can it exist after the body decays? Or is it inextricably interwoven WITH the body, arising together and decaying together at death?

The difference between gods and the soul/ψυχή/anima is that we can see the latter at work every time we look at a living body... or sense our own existence for that matter! No prolepsis is needed. A body is animate, it has an anima/ψυχή. A body is dead, something happened to the anima/ψυχή.

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

Key to this analysis is that I think most of us agree that the faculty of prolepses leads toward formation of opinions, but that a prolepsis is not itself an opinion. Cicero doesn't seem to accept this, and he seems to think that an Epicurean prolepsis is a fully formed opinion, and since all men have the opinion that gods exist and that souls survive death, that makes it true. I also think most of us agree that Epicurus would say that it doesn't matter how many people think a thing to be so, that's not sufficient evidence of its truth - we should require sound reasoning based on observations from the senses, prolepsis, and feelings, and these are not subject to majority vote.

Agreed. That's why I content that the prolepsis of the gods does not cover their blessed and incorruptibility.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of March 24, 2025 at 7:38 AM**

Thanks for focusing again on the question of which aspects of knowledge of the gods constitute prolepsis and which constitute opinions arising from reasoning.

Below is the Rackham translation of the section from On the Nature of the Gods. It would appear that this goes further than you would go Don?

#### Quote

XVII You see therefore that the foundation (for such it is) of our inquiry has been well and truly laid. For the belief in the gods has not been established by authority, custom or law, but rests on the unanimous and abiding consensus of mankind; their existence is therefore a necessary inference, since we possess an instinctive or rather an innate concept of them; but a belief which all men by nature share must necessarily be true; therefore it must be admitted that the gods exist. And since this truth is almost universally accepted not only among philosophers but also among the unlearned, we must admit it as also being an accepted truth that we possess a 'preconception,' as I called it above, or 'prior notion,' of the gods. (For we are bound to employ novel terms to denote novel ideas, just as Epicurus himself employed the word prolepsis in a sense in which no one had ever used it before.) We have then a preconception of such a nature that we believe the gods to be blessed and immortal. For nature, which bestowed upon us an idea of the gods themselves, also engraved on our minds the belief that they are eternal and blessed. If this is so, the famous maxim of Epicurus truthfully enunciates that "that which is blessed and eternal can neither know trouble itself nor cause trouble to another, and accordingly cannot feel either anger or favor, since all such things belong only to the weak."

And there is an implication from what follows that those three are the starting point from prolepsis, and the rest of the details beyond that are where the reasoning comes in:

#### Quote

If we sought to attain nothing else beside piety in worshiping the gods and freedom from superstition, what has been said had sufficed; since the exalted nature of the gods, being both eternal and supremely blessed, would receive man's pious worship (for what is highest commands the reverence that is its due); and furthermore all fear of the divine power or divine anger would have been banished (since it is understood that anger and favor alike are excluded from the nature of a being at once blessed and immortal, and that these being eliminated we are menaced by no fears in regard to the powers above). But the mind strives to strengthen this belief by trying to discover the form of god, the mode of his activity, and the operation of his intelligence.

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**Post by "TauPhi" of March 24, 2025 at 12:50 PM**

### [Quote from Don](#)

Agreed. That's why I content that the prolepsis of the gods does not cover their blessed and incorruptibility.

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Thanks for focusing again on the question of which aspects of knowledge of the gods constitute prolepsis and which constitute opinions arising from reasoning.

I'm with [Don](#) on this one. Prolepsis, as all Epicurean canonical faculties, is separated from reasoning. The way I see it, prolepsis is a pattern recognition. If I see enough cats in my life, I'll recognize the next one as a cat without thinking about it. If I lift enough cups of coffee in my life, I'll apply a perfect amount of force to lift the next cup of coffee without thinking about it. Epicureans believed that humans' minds are directly hit with the images of gods, so humans were able to develop prolepsis of gods.

The moment we think: 'Sphynx cats are furless', 'Led cups with coffee are heavy', '[Epicurean gods](#) are blessed' is when the reasoning kicks in. Canonical input data is being processed and opinions arise.

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## **Post by “Godfrey” of March 24, 2025 at 2:02 PM**

Rule #1:

Whenever there is a conflict between Cicero and other sources, don't trust Cicero.



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## **Post by “Cassius” of March 24, 2025 at 9:02 PM**

Episode 273 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. Today's episode is entitled: "Is The Soul Immortal And Death Actually A Good? " as we proceed further into part one of Tusculan Disputations

[media]<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/65090710/media>

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## Post by “Cassius” of March 24, 2025 at 9:23 PM

### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

Whenever there is a conflict between Cicero and other sources, don't trust Cicero.

In this case I agree Cicero is wrong, but there are a lot of subtleties here that we wouldn't have but for this section of "On The Nature of the Gods" and now also this section XIII of Tusculan Disputations.

If we add this section of "Tusculan Disputations," to "On The nature of the gods" and also add in some of Cicero's argument in "On Ends" that Joshua references in this episode (that Epicurus identified justice with what people think is justice) I think we can get to see that there's a pattern on this particular issue that Cicero either did not understand or intentionally misrepresented Epicurus.

I doubt Cicero could have made this up from nothing, and Cicero's giving us more to work with than we have solely through Diogenes Laertius, but he's either intentionally or negligently making it sound like Epicurus took the position that if enough people believe something then that is proof that it's true.

(This calls to mind DeWitt's statement that he believed Cicero was intentionally malicious because Cicero could not have *misrepresented* Epicurus so effectively had Cicero not *understood* Epicurus so well. If I were arguing against that, I might point out that Cicero had no problem stating that he disagreed with Epicurus in highly charged moral judgments, so did Cicero really need to mis-state the Epicurean position on prolepsis? It wouldn't have changed his mind if he decided at some point that he did misunderstand prolepsis, but I can see the possibility of confusion, since Cicero did like the "common consent of mankind" argument that others appear to have been making.)

If we think Epicurus was intelligent - which we do - then Epicurus' argument can't be as superficial as saying that something is true because some number of people believe it. But Cicero has spread this allegation and it seems to have become embedded into what is accepted that Epicurus thought. I saw a Greg Sadler video in which he seemed to be accepting that Epicurus took the position that "the common consent of mankind" was Epicurus' proof that gods exist, and it undermines the credibility of anyone to think that they argued that truth can be decided by majority vote.

So defenders of Epicurus have to be able to articulate how what Cicero wrote is wrong, and be able to articulate what Epicurus was really saying instead.

It does seem like Epicurus was basing his argument for existence of gods on prolepsis, but that's not at all the same thing as saying "gods exist because everyone thinks they do." What follows after that has to be a concise explanation of how prolepses are not opinions, but are somehow an input into formation of opinions.

**Post by “Bryan” of March 25, 2025 at 10:55 AM**

(Just throwing this in before I listen).

**Cats exist.** How do we know? For one, most people can see that they exist.

**What is a cat?** A living cat will have some necessary (συμβεβηκότα) qualities—characteristics that reveal what is universal (τὸ καθόλου) to all cats, such as being a mammal, having a head, and possessing a bone structure unique to cats.

You cannot assume anything about a cat you have not seen beyond qualities necessarily associated with any and every cat.

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| <p>ὁ Ἐπιλογισμός [the act of] inductive consideration</p> <hr/> <p><i>distinguishes</i><br/> <sup>(κ)</sup> <i>universal characteristics</i><br/> <i>(necessary qualities, i.e., "properties")</i><br/> <i>from</i><br/> <sup>(-κ)</sup> <i>mere chance characteristics</i><br/> <i>(unnecessary qualities, i.e., "symptoms")</i></p> | <p>[Δ●] ἡ Ἐπιβλητική Δόξα Objective Judgment</p> <hr/> <p><i>judgement of what is directly sensible</i></p> <p><i>truth-value tested by</i><br/> <sup>(M)</sup> <i>attestation and</i> <sup>(W)</sup> <i>contestation</i><br/> <i>from direct practical circumstances</i></p> |
| <p><i>only</i> <sup>(κ)</sup> <i>universal characteristics provide a valid basis for</i></p>  |   |
| <p>ὁ ἀναλογισμός [the act of] analogical consideration</p>  | <p>[Δ○] ἡ Θεωρητική Δόξα Speculative Judgment</p>   |

The anticipations are what we mentally sense before active thinking.

If you cannot imagine a cat without a particular quality, then that quality is part of the anticipation of a cat.