

Life Found Elsewhere?

Post by “kochiekoch” of April 17, 2025 at 6:10 AM

This is all tentative, but heck, it's intriguing! 😊

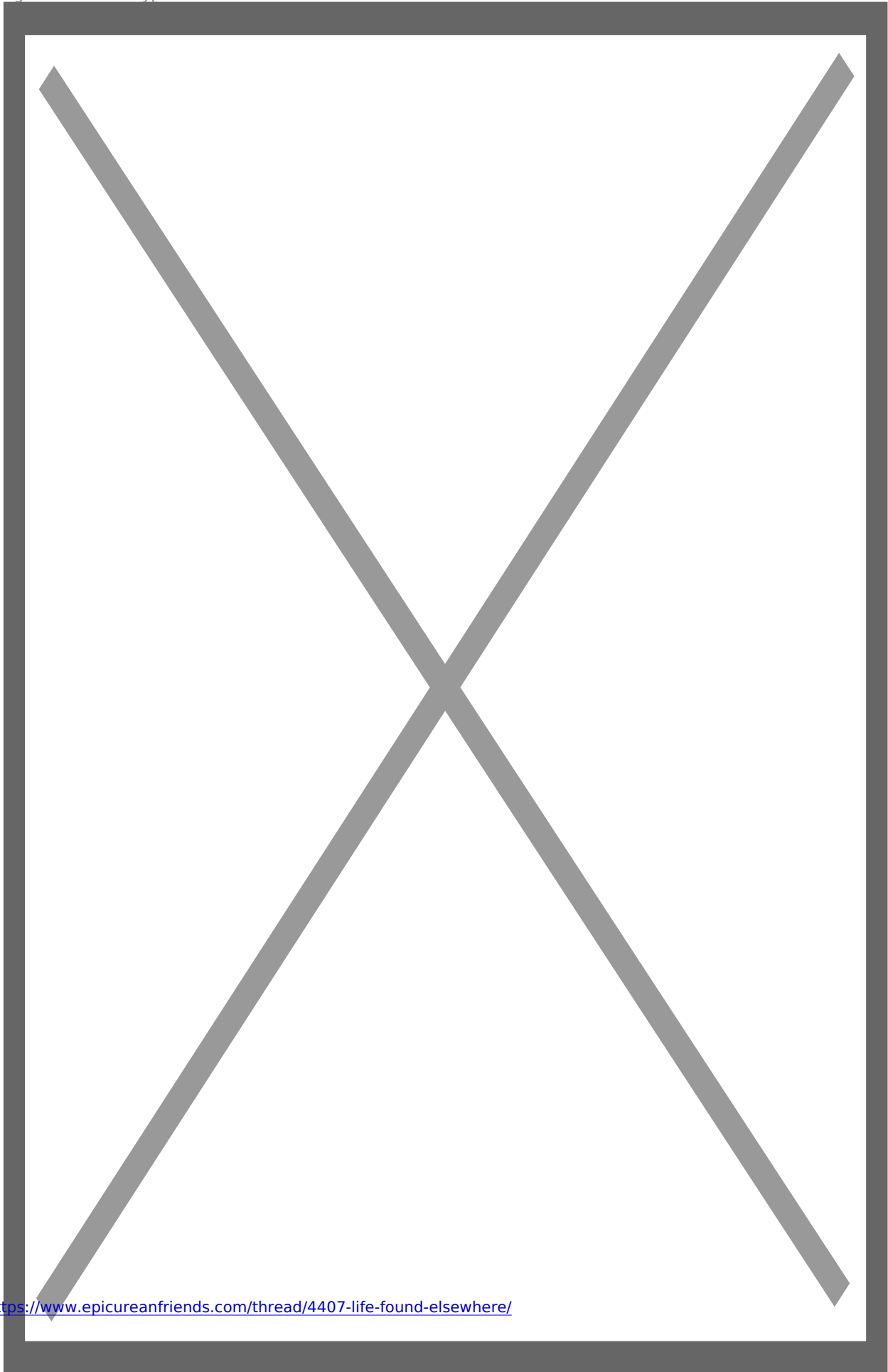
[Scientists find promising hints of life on distant planet K2-18b](#)

Post by “Don” of April 17, 2025 at 6:30 AM

Sounds more promising than the "phosphine on Venus" findings from several years ago. But 124 light years away 😞 It sounds like it could be giant mats of floating algae or something.

I'm holding out a glimmer of hope for the Europa Clipper mission!

Image not found or type unknown



Post by “kochiekoch” of April 17, 2025 at 6:44 AM

Best of luck to the Clipper. 😊 There could be life on Europa too. All over the universe as Epicurus suggested.

Post by “Rolf” of April 17, 2025 at 7:25 AM

Woah, exciting stuff! It's insane how we're able to detect things like this from such a tremendous distance.

I apologise for hijacking this thread with *yawn* philosophical discussion, but hypothetically speaking, what would happen to Epicurus' argument on the existence of life across the universe if we somehow ruled out the existence of life beyond earth?

Post by “Cassius” of April 17, 2025 at 8:14 AM

That question would be similar to:

"What would happen if we found that there is a tribe of pink elephants living underground on the other side of the moon and that they created the universe?"

In other words, such a question is absurd because it violates what we are confident about as to the universe, such as that it is not supernatural, that it operates on natural processes of which there is no reason to suspect a supernatural limit, that we observe nature to never make a single thing of kind, that we expect the universe is eternal and that possible combinations of atoms have been continuing infinitely into space and eternally back in time, etc.

This is why canonics / epistemology is much more important an aspect of Epicurean philosophy even than the ethics -- you can't be confident of anything if you don't have a position on when

to be confident of something.

Plato taught that nothing is certain except the eternal forms in another dimension. Aristotle taught a watered down version of the same thing. Religion often teaches that only god knows what is right and wrong.

Epicurus teaches that knowledge is possible through the senses, anticipations, and feelings, and that living successfully depends on having confidence in those faculties. And as a result, once we become confident of something like the existence of atoms, or the infinity of worlds and life not limited to earth, we don't even entertain the possibility of those conclusions being invalidated absent some persuasive evidence to the contrary. As we have absolutely no reason to expect that persuasive evidence to the contrary exists, we disregard that possibility. To do otherwise leads to absolute skepticism, which Epicurus campaigns against as much as any other error.

Post by “Cassius” of April 17, 2025 at 8:21 AM

Some of the things about that you will read in DeWitt about skepticism:

Quote

In the succession of philosophers the place of Epicurus is immediately after Plato and Pyrrho the skeptic. Platonism and skepticism were among his chief abominations.

He was the first to promulgate a dogmatic philosophy, actuated by a passion for certainty and a detestation of skepticism, which he imputed even to Plato.

....

As for Plato, in an earlier age he might have become a dramatist. Thus it is not astonishing that the fruit of their joint invention was the dramatization of logic which is called dialectic, best exemplified by the Platonic dialogues.

Yet this was only the beginning. One false step invites another. The quest of a definition, of justice, for example, presumes the existence of the thing to be defined. If equilateral triangles did not exist, they certainly could not be defined. Assume that justice can be defined and at once it is assumed that justice exists just as equilateral triangles exist. Hence arose Plato's theory of ideas. The word idea means shape or form and he thought of abstract notions as having an independent existence just as geometrical figures exist, a false analogy. The theory of ideas was rejected as an absurdity by the young Epicurus, because he was a materialist and denied all

existences except atoms and space. The theory once rejected, the instrument became useless; scientists have no use for dramatized logic; they depend chiefly upon their senses.

Plato became guilty of another error upon which the sharp-eyed Epicurus did not fail to place a finger. From Pythagoras was inherited the belief in the repeated rebirth or transmigration of souls. Along with

this went the belief that the body was a tomb or prison-house, which blurred the vision of reason and prevented perfection of knowledge. All that the human being perceived was the transient appearance of things as opposed to the eternal ideas. This to Epicurus was virtually skepticism. This error, moreover, was compounded and also aggravated. Closely allied to geometry was the study of astronomy. The latter, in turn, required the observation of heavenly bodies. Thus Plato was in the position of assuming the validity of sensation in the case of the remoter phenomena and denying it in the case of the nearer terrestrial phenomena. This was a glaring inconsistency. The aggravation consisted in the belief that circular motion, which was in those days ascribed to heavenly bodies, was the only perfect and eternal motion and identifiable with Reason itself. Reason, in turn, was identified with the divine nature. Therefore the planets were declared to be gods. This seemed both shocking and absurd to Epicurus: shocking because it meant having more gods to fear, absurd because august gods were assumed to become hurtling balls of fire.

Post by “Don” of April 17, 2025 at 8:31 AM

[Quote from Rolf](#)

what would happen to Epicurus' argument on the existence of life across the universe if we somehow ruled out the existence of life beyond earth?

I don't see any way to rule out the existence of life beyond earth. It's like the analogy (not sure if still current but it likely is) of dipping a cup in the ocean to find if there are fish in the ocean. "Nope, no fish in the ocean!" We've only examined a miniscule infinitesimally small sample of the universe for life elsewhere so far. Also, the chemistry doesn't seem to be all that difficult to get things going. I find it harder to believe there is no life elsewhere than I do to believe life is abundant in the Universe.

Post by “Cassius” of April 17, 2025 at 8:33 AM

Another way of looking at these issues is to compare Epicurean philosophy to rules of evidence that are followed in court (I can speak of the USA but I presume most other courts have similar rules).

Rules of evidence determine what kind of testimony can even be allowed to be heard and considered by the court or jury. Hearsay testimony is mostly disallowed, but it is allowed in some circumstances. There are many other such rules.

But one of the foundational rules of court is that judgments must be made on "evidence," and not on pure speculation. "Circumstantial evidence" (reasonable evaluation of circumstances) is allowed in some cases when "direct evidence" ("I saw it") testimony is not available, or in addition to direct evidence.

But pure speculation ("I think it's possible") is never even allowed in evidence. Courts gain their legitimacy by being based on evidence and not whim, and that means excluding speculations or opinions that are not based on evidence.

Epicurus' canonical approach to life means that he provides rules of evidence that allow you to decide when to believe a thing is true. Epicurus's canonic doesn't require you to be in contact with eternal forms like Plato, or have the testimony of priests to whom truth is revealed like most religions, or to accept that standards of omniscience or omnipotence are a legitimate standard for judging things to be true -- and in fact Epicurus doesn't even accept those as legitimate evidence at all.