

Welcome Wbernys!

Post by "Cassius" of October 7, 2025 at 4:34 PM

Welcome [wbernys](#) !

There is one last step to complete your registration:

All new registrants must post a response to this message here in this welcome thread (we do this in order to minimize spam registrations).

You must post your response within 24 hours, or your account will be subject to deletion.

Please say "Hello" by introducing yourself, tell us what prompted your interest in Epicureanism and which particular aspects of Epicureanism most interest you, and/or post a question.

This forum is the place for students of Epicurus to coordinate their studies and work together to promote the philosophy of Epicurus. Please remember that all posting here is subject to our [Community Standards and associated Terms of Use](#). Please be sure to read that document to understand our ground rules.

Please understand that the leaders of this forum are well aware that many fans of Epicurus may have sincerely-held views of what Epicurus taught that are incompatible with the purposes and standards of this forum. This forum is dedicated exclusively to the study and support of people who are committed to classical Epicurean views. As a result, this forum is not for people who seek to mix and match Epicurean views with positions that are inherently inconsistent with the core teachings of Epicurus.

All of us who are here have arrived at our respect for Epicurus after long journeys through other philosophies, and we do not demand of others what we were not able to do ourselves. Epicurean philosophy is very different from most other philosophies, and it takes time to understand how deep those differences really are. That's why we have membership levels here at the forum which allow for new participants to discuss and develop their own learning, but it's also why we have standards that will lead in some cases to arguments being limited, and even participants being removed, when the purposes of the community require it. Epicurean philosophy is not inherently democratic, or committed to unlimited free speech, or devoted to any other form of organization other than the pursuit of truth and happy living through pleasure as explained in the principles of Epicurean philosophy.

One way you can be assured of your time here will be productive is to tell us a little about yourself and your background in reading Epicurean texts. It would also be helpful if you could

tell us how you found this forum, and any particular areas of interest that you already have.

You can also check out our [Getting Started](#) page for ideas on how to use this website.

We have found over the years that there are a number of key texts and references which most all serious students of Epicurus will want to read and evaluate for themselves. Those include the following.

["Epicurus and His Philosophy"](#) by Norman DeWitt

[The Biography of Epicurus by Diogenes Laertius](#). This includes the surviving letters of Epicurus, including those to [Herodotus](#), [Pythocles](#), and [Menoceus](#).

["On The Nature of Things"](#) - by Lucretius (a poetic abridgement of Epicurus' "On Nature"

["Epicurus on Pleasure"](#) - By Boris [Nikolsky](#)

The chapters on Epicurus in [Gosling and Taylor's "The Greeks On Pleasure."](#)

[Cicero's "On Ends" - Torquatus Section](#)

[Cicero's "On The Nature of the Gods" - Velleius Section](#)

The Inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda - [Martin Ferguson Smith translation](#)

[A Few Days In Athens" - Frances Wright](#)

Lucian Core Texts on Epicurus: (1) [Alexander the Oracle-Monger](#), (2) [Hermotimus](#)

[Philodemus "On Methods of Inference"](#) (De Lacy version, including his appendix on relationship of Epicurean canon to Aristotle and other Greeks)

"The Greeks on Pleasure" -Gosling & Taylor Sections on Epicurus, especially the [section on katastematic and kinetic pleasure](#) which explains why ultimately this distinction was not of great significance to Epicurus.

It is by no means essential or required that you have read these texts before participating in the forum, but your understanding of Epicurus will be much enhanced the more of these you have read. Feel free to join in on one or more of our conversation threads under various topics found throughout the forum, where you can to ask questions or to add in any of your insights as you study the Epicurean philosophy.

And time has also indicated to us that if you can find the time to read one book which will best explain [classical Epicurean philosophy](#), as opposed to most modern "eclectic" interpretations of Epicurus, that book is Norman DeWitt's Epicurus And His Philosophy.

(If you have any questions regarding the usage of the forum or finding info, please post any questions in this thread).

Welcome to the forum!

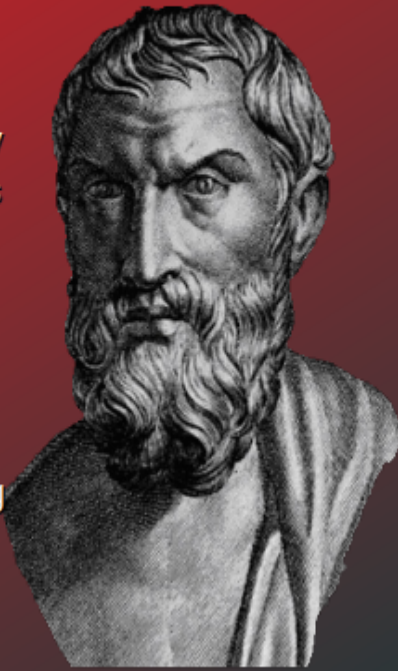
Not Neo-Epicurean, But Epicurean

1. Not "flourishing," "human potential," "self-actualization," or "meaningfulness," but happiness grounded in the feeling of pleasure.
2. Not "absence of pain" as a full statement of the goal of life, but "the Feelings are two, pleasure and pain" and "Pleasure is the beginning and the end of a happy life."
3. Not virtue for the sake of virtue, but virtue as instrumental for the attainment of pleasure.
4. Not "the greatest good for the greatest number," but "Every desire must be confronted with this question: What will happen to me if the object of my desire is accomplished and what if it is not?"
5. Not "humanism," "transhumanism," "individualism," "collectivism," "egoism," "altruism," "social progress," "Marxism," "democracy," "tyranny," or any "one size fits all" political ideal of any kind, but social structure based on friendship which "is formed and maintained by means of a community of life among those who have reached the fullness of pleasure."
6. Not "hard determinism," but "some things happen from necessity, some from chance, and others through our own choice."
7. Not "supernaturalism," but "materialism."
8. Not "supernatural gods," or "life after death," but confidence in a fully material universe and "for those men for whom wisdom is possible, and who do seek it, such men may truly live as gods."
9. Not only "short term hedonism," but "it is to continuous pleasures that I invite you."
10. Not "rationalism," but "all reason is dependent upon sensations."
11. Not fearful of death nor careless of losing life, but valuing life for the opportunity of pleasure it brings.

Our Posting Policy At EpicureanFriends.com:

"No Partisan Politics," "No Supernatural Religion," and "No Absolute Virtue"

This forum is dedicated to promoting the philosophy of Epicurus, and not to any partisan political positions whether "left," "right," or "center." The task of rediscovering Epicurean philosophy requires that such discussions be held elsewhere. Posts violating this rule are subject to removal.



Epicurean philosophy firmly rejects the viewpoint that there are any supernatural forces or absolute virtues or Platonic ideals of any kind. Argument which is based on supernatural claims, or "absolute" virtues or ideals of any kind, are in violation of this rule and subject to removal.

**Nothing can be created
from nothing.**

**Nature has no gods over
her.**

**Do not assign to the
gods anything that is
inconsistent with
incorruption and
blessedness.**

Death is nothing to us.

**There is no necessity to
live under the control of
necessity.**



**He who says “Nothing
can be known” knows
nothing.**

All sensations are “true.”

**Virtue is not absolute or
an end in itself - all good
and evil consists in
sensation.**

**Pleasure is the guide of
life.**

**By “Pleasure” we mean
all experience that is not
painful.**

**Life is desirable, but unlimited time contains no greater
pleasure than limited time.**

Post by “Cassius” of October 7, 2025 at 4:35 PM

Welcome Webernys and I apologize for the delay in getting you approved! I don't have record of your original email so I am not sure what happened there but thank you for being persistent, and please let us know a little about your interest in Epicurus.

Post by “Don” of October 7, 2025 at 4:46 PM

Welcome aboard!

Post by “wbernys” of October 7, 2025 at 7:31 PM

Hello All, pleasure to meet some fellow Epicureans and thanks to Cassius for approval. I basically got into with an interest in ethics from a naturalist viewpoint. I am atheist (as i imagine most of you are) but wanted to find a proper system to base my life around. I tried Stoicism for a little bit and then Aristotelianism but found that neither worked out as it relied on nonsense about following the "natural order of the universe", "virtue in itself", or "fulfilling your function" with no proof these things are real let alone why he should care about them so i decided to check out Epicurus.

I ended up loving his philosophy in part because he never assumed more than was fair to assume and focused on helping people in a similar state as I (people needing help without reliance of religion and superstition) and i think a quote from Flint Dibble, an archeology communicator sums it up "we work from the known to the unknown" and within found a beautiful analysis of how to deal with fear of death and separate natural desires from vain and empty ones from a complete naturalist worldview.

I was immediately enthralled but didn't immediately accept all the [principal doctrines](#) (especially 3 and 18)and even was a Cyrenaic for a little bit because of this but as i understood his doctrine more fully (Shamefully with help from Chatgpt lol) and purchased a translation of his own works from penguin publishing (The Art of Happiness) along with a Lucretius translation by Humphries (The Way Things Are) i ended up understanding him more fully and now am a full Epicurean (except for you know antiquated scientific views like the size of the sun as most of you are i hope).

My favorite part of Epicureanism is probably the Tetra pharmakos "Fourfold Cure" (I know Cassius expressed a dislike for it, but i myself consider to be a nice summary of Epicurean philosophy). Can't wait to know you all more. Sorry if this is a bit winded lol.

Post by “wbernys” of October 7, 2025 at 7:35 PM

I would also like to ask a question for those who don't mind on "atoms and void". From what i can tell science tells us that the space between atoms is not really "empty space" but more like

energy (electromagnetic, gravitational energy, quantum waves) which provided no friction and has no form, thus allowing movement. Do you all consider this to be a kind of "Epicurean void" or do you still believe in the classical void that there's empty space in-between?

Thanks all.

Post by “Kalosyni” of October 7, 2025 at 8:09 PM

Welcome to the forum [wbernys](#) !

[Martin](#) maybe you can give a good answer to the question in the above post.

Post by “Eikadistes” of October 7, 2025 at 8:58 PM

[Quote from wbernys](#)

I was immediately enthralled but didn't immediately accept all the [principal doctrines](#) (especially 3 and 18)and even was a Cyrenaic for a little bit

We all go through a Cyrenaic phase. I won't hold that against you. 😊

Post by “Don” of October 7, 2025 at 10:15 PM

[Quote from wbernys](#)

I would also like to ask a question for those who don't mind on "atoms and void". From what i can tell science tells us that the space between atoms is not really "empty space" but more like energy (electromagnetic, gravitational energy, quantum waves) which provided no friction and has no form, thus allowing movement. Do you all consider this to be a kind of "Epicurean void" or do you still believe in the classical void that there's empty space in-between?

My perspective on "atoms and void" are that, most importantly, Epicurus was not - and could not be - talking about [the modern Standard Model](#) of particle physics. The parallels between Epicurus' "ἄτομος" and the modern "atom" should not be taken too literally. They can be taken figuratively or metaphorically though.

Epicurus use of the term ἄτομος (atomos) conveyed that there were indivisible fundamental material "things" that were not capable of being cut/divided into smaller pieces that made up all the material things we see around us throughout the cosmos and, indeed, the entire universe. Not tinier and tinier replicas of the things themselves (bones are not made of tiny bones) or similar ideas. He didn't see only four elements: fire, earth, air, water, with one being predominant. Epicurus genius insight was that these atomoi could make up an infinite number of different things, things that would be eventually broken down into their constitute atomoi, reconstituted as something else, and the cycle goes on and on ad infinitum, forward and back.

The modern Standard Theory has gone beyond Epicurus, but - from my perspective again - has built on Epicurus' ideas (via Lucretius primarily and the Renaissance scholars that read him). As the CERN site says: "The theories and discoveries of thousands of physicists since the 1930s have resulted in a remarkable insight into the fundamental structure of matter: everything in the universe is found to be made from a few basic building blocks called fundamental particles, governed by four fundamental forces." On face value, that insight is remarkably similar - in the BROADEST and most GENERAL sense - to Epicurus' insights 2,000+ years ago. But only in the BROADEST and most GENERAL way. I can't emphasize that enough.

So, to be an Epicurean - again from my perspective - means to accept that we live in a physical, material universe made up of fundamental particles governed by understandable principles. We should not feel compelled to adhere to ideas that are millennia old. But in the broadest sense, I have no problem with the idea of "atoms and void" as a general metaphorical phrase as long as I understand it to be pointing to fundamental particles making up the physical universe, moving through "space" however you'd like to understand that.

Post by “Don” of October 7, 2025 at 10:28 PM

[Quote from wbernys](#)

i ended up understanding him more fully and now am a full Epicurean (except for you know antiquated scientific views like the size of the sun as most of you are i hope).

You may find Gellar-Goad's article on "the size of the sun" an interest counterpoint to that "as most of you are I hope." 😊

https://resolve-he.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/9B9D08457AB2AE45B44845464818346A/9781009281393c10_168-185.pdf/lucretius_on_the_size_of_the_sun.pdf

It's a provocative article, and one that's got a lot of discussion on the forum. I'll admit that I had never thought of the "size of the sun" issue in this way before, offhandedly dismissing it as "Oh, Epicurus can't be right about everything." Gellar-Goad brings an intriguing (and fairly convincing) argument against that perspective.

Quote

The Epicureans did not believe that the sun was the size of a human foot. They distinguished between the sun's actual size and the size of its appearance, the latter of which was the only magnitude measurable from earth with the technology available. In this matter as almost everywhere else, the Epicureans appealed to the truth of sense-perception - with the important caution that discerning reality from appearance requires perception-based judgment, which itself is not guaranteed to be true.

...

In closing I argue that the size of the sun is an Epicurean shibboleth. In Epicurus, in Lucretius and in Demetrius, we see the same nostrum repeated, with progressive elaborations that do not fully clarify the basic precept. The persistence of Epicureans in this formulation is not so much the result of reflexive dogma or pseudo-intellectual obscurantism as it is a passphrase, a litmus test. Think like an Epicurean, and you will figure out that the sun's appearance and the sun itself are two related but distinct things with two different sizes; that you must keep the infallible data of the senses, tactile as well as visual, in proper perspective when making judgments about your perception; and that the available data is insufficient to estimate the sun's magnitude to an acceptable degree of confidence. Think that Epicureans believe the sun's diameter is a foot, that they are absurd, and you have exposed yourself as un-Epicurean.

There's also an extensive thread about that, too: ["Lucretius on the Size of the Sun", by T.H.M. Gellar-Goad](#)

Post by "Don" of October 7, 2025 at 10:32 PM

[Quote from wbernys](#)

My favorite part of Epicureanism is probably the Tetra pharmakos "Fourfold Cure" (I know Cassian expressed a dislike for it, but I myself consider it to be a nice summary of Epicurean philosophy).

I completely agree with you on having an affinity for the Tetrpharmakos. I like that it is a documented connection to the ancient Epicurean community. Granted, it's not clear from Philodemus' work if he was approving or disapproving of its use, but there's no doubt that it was being used in Epicurean communities as the philosophy distilled down to one of its smallest summaries.

Post by "Joshua" of October 7, 2025 at 10:35 PM

Welcome!

Regarding the gods, the size of the sun, and the findings of modern physics, these are questions of perennial interest around here.

My own view is this: if I am going to hold forth as an Epicurean, I have an obligation to try to *understand* his system of thought to the best of my ability. When I am trying to explain Epicureanism to others, I try to explain it the way I think Epicurus himself understood it. I don't always succeed in presenting it well, or accurately, but I try never to intentionally *misrepresent*.

That being said, I do not feel obligated to agree with the ancients on every point; and when I am stating my own views, I try to make it clear that that's what I'm doing.

To quote Thoreau, the cart before the horse is neither useful nor beautiful. The philosophy of Epicurus is not best understood as a set of pass/fail litmus tests.

Quote

XIII. Those who place the Chief Good in virtue alone are beguiled by the glamour of a name, and do not understand the true demands of nature. If they will consent to listen to Epicurus, they will be delivered from the grossest error. Your school dilates on the transcendent beauty of the virtues; but were they not productive of pleasure, who would deem them either praiseworthy or desirable? We esteem the art of medicine not for its interest as a science, but for its conduciveness to health; the art of navigation is commended for its practical and not its scientific value, because it conveys the rules for sailing a ship with success. So also Wisdom, which must be considered as the art of

living, if it effected no result would not be desired; but as it is, it is desired, because it is the artificer that procures and produces pleasure.

-Torquatus, Cicero's *On Ends*

Post by “wbernys” of October 7, 2025 at 10:54 PM

I've actually already read Gellar-Goad's article [Don](#) but sad to say I find it a little muddled and think we just need to accept the Epicureans we're wrong on this, they simply didn't have the tools we have. I think explanations of "real meaning" fall a little flat and remind me of how Christians explain Jesus failed apocalyptic predictions.

However, I want to make clear I'm not trying to demean them due to some antiqued science, everyone else in Antiquity got the size wrong as the article points out and as [Cassius](#) points out the Epicureans at least had reliable and good reasons for their beliefs unlike Platonic nonsense about Astral Gods or Aristotle's Aether or Pliny the Elder's "things tend toward their natural place" explanation for why antipodes don't fall off. They were wrong but had more integrity than most. That's what counts in the end.

Post by “Don” of October 7, 2025 at 11:59 PM

Fair enough. I certainly see where you're coming from.

I personally find it hard to believe Epicurus and his school really thought that the sun was about the size of a football when he wrote it "may be a little larger or a little smaller, or precisely as great as it is seen to be." They could see the sun set behind the hills or fall over the horizon where they had seen ships pass into the distance. The sun "as it is seen to be" is larger than one of those ships or it's in the distance or larger than the hill it is passing behind. That's why Gellar-Goad's article at least made me take a second look at what those texts could be saying. The school said to trust the senses, and my senses would tell me the sun is bigger than a hill or boat at least. The moon obscures the sun during an eclipse, and the moon is bigger than the hills too. Or maybe I'm biased by the modern knowledge I can't unknow?

That said, I certainly don't discount the possibility that they could have just got it wrong.

Post by “Eikadistes” of October 8, 2025 at 9:17 AM

[Quote from wbernys](#)

I've actually already read Gellar-Goad's article [Don](#) but sad to say I find it a little muddled and think we just need to accept the Epicureans we're wrong on this, they simply didn't have the tools we have. I think explanations of "real meaning" fall a little flat and remind me of how Christians explain Jesus failed apocalyptic predictions.

From my humble attempts at translating, I have **never** found a statement where Epíkouros positively says that *the sun is a hot melon a few miles up*. He never gives a definite size, suggesting that "the [Sun] in relation to itself, either [it is] greater [than] of that which is being observed, or slightly smaller, or [it is] as great as it happens to be." (Epistle to Pythokles 91). His thesis, as I read, is that astronomical objects are too distant to allow us to make accurate measurements.

(If disagreements in measurements between the JWST and the Hubble are any indication, we are **still** struggling over this point of contention, except on the scale of massive, cosmic filaments).

Even as a general observation, Epíkouros seems to indicate that the sun is "truly great", as he writes to Pythokles (so I've translated personally) "the size of both the Sun and of the rest of the glowers appears of such [great] size in relation to us [and] truly is so great" (10.91). Compared to other nearby objects, the sun cannot be easily "obstructed" behind a tree the way that a piece of fruit becomes completely obstructed. You need an eclipse; in other words, the only things big enough to block the sun other massive objects whose size we cannot accurately measure.

*Also, just a quick side-note: we take "the size of the sun" for granted. **It's not obvious.** Consider neutron stars, which are the size of New York City, and can only shed heat on planets that orbit extremely close. Hypothetically, all this time of human history, prior to the 20th-century, the sun could have been a neutron star the size of New York City, and we wouldn't have known the difference.*

I'd also like to add their context as naturalists and materialists. Epíkouros' personal philosophical hero was the naturalist Anaxagoras, who uniquely theorized that the sun was, at least, as big as a massive, geographical landmass (he names the Peloponnese). Further, having regularly sailed along the Ionian coast, Epíkouros (and the rest of the Ionians, I imagine) clearly witnessed mountains shrinking in the distance as they sailed, whereas the sun never shrinks. It would have been radically anomalous for Epíkouros to have suggested that the sun is smaller than mountains.

But he did get "heat" totally wrong. There are no "heat" particles. With respect, I think "the sun is a hot melon" is an attractive argument to opponents, but it is a colorful exaggeration. There are plenty of other things Epikouros got wrong that are educational points of comparison (like "heat").

Post by "Cassius" of October 8, 2025 at 10:23 AM

Quote

Lucretius 4-462

Wondrously many other things of this sort we see, all of which would fain spoil our trust in the senses; all in vain, since the greatest part of these things deceives us on account of the opinions of the mind, which we add ourselves, so that things not seen by the senses are counted as seen. For nothing is harder than to distinguish things manifest from things uncertain, which the mind straightway adds of itself.

I think the posts above have done a good job of responding to the size of the sun concern, so I'll add only how I fit all this together in my mind:

Epicurus' main concern was fighting against those who think that their minds can impose their will and take precedence over nature. All "measurement" issues essentially come down to imposing units of measure that we construct in our own minds, and the confusion arises when we begin to think that our mental processes are superior to reality. Thus the ultimate issue to Epicurus was not to be a technician and measure things by a certain number of units, but to point out that units are our construction, and we should always follow nature, not our own constructions.

As to particles being open to "infinite division," that can be dismissed as a possibility because if things could be divided infinitely there would never be anything firm which maintains its own properties, but we see that properties do have regularity, so infinite divisibility is impossible.

As to possibility of particles being "infinitely large," the reverse is the case, because an infinitely large particle would consume the universe, and we also see that that is not so.

As to the universe as a whole being bounded in size, that is also not possible definitionally, because being bounded means there is an edge, and there can be no edge where there is "nothing" on the other side.

Time likewise is not measured in units except as to our imposing an arbitrary measure on it, and for that purpose any arbitrary measurement such as we commonly use (days, hours, minutes) is suitable, just so long as you don't get the idea that those units are established and enforced by nature.

As to the size of the sun, the answers such as Eikadistes gave seems to me to be correct.

The important thing to Epicurus is not to establish a specific measurement, but to make a properly-understood "man is the measurer of all things" point that all measurements are arbitrarily assigned by us, and to have any usefulness must be in accord with our sensations, as our sensations ("how things appear to be") are ultimately all we have to work with. We use our minds to analyze "illusory" phenomena such as discussed at length in Lucretius Book 4, but the constant problem is that we begin to think that our minds are the authority rather than the data we receive from the senses.

There's nothing more important than to keep in mind that we are not the masters of nature. Nature is the mother of all things, and we have to constantly fight the temptation to think that we can change that.

"The sun is the size that it appears to be" is a way of reinforcing that lesson in very stark terms. It's so effective that we're still debating it two thousand years later.

I don't agree with every detail of the Gellar-Goad article but I think he's correct that Epicurus tended to like to use very confrontational statements like this. We tend to see them in every important area of the philosophy, physics, canonics, and ethics.

Quote

[VS29](#). (Bailey) "In investigating nature I would prefer to speak openly and like an oracle to give answers serviceable to all mankind, even though no one should understand me, rather than to conform to popular opinions and so win the praise freely scattered by the mob."

Post by "Martin" of October 8, 2025 at 12:00 PM

Welcome Wbernys!

Post by "Martin" of October 9, 2025 at 10:53 AM

Quote

I would also like to ask a question for those who don't mind on "atoms and void". From what i can tell science tells us that the space between atoms is not really "empty space" but more like energy (electromagnetic, gravitational energy, quantum waves) which provided no friction and has no form, thus allowing movement. Do you all consider this to be a kind of "Epicurean void" or do you still believe in the classical void that there's empty space in-between?

Quote

[Martin](#) maybe you can give a good answer to the question in the above post.

Don gave already a good answer, but OK, here is my answer:

The space with properties (field) is a kind of "Epicurean void", and there is space in-between particles, which is empty almost everywhere most of the time under typical circumstances on Earth.

There is a fundamental difference between Epicurus and the Kantian philosophy of science adhered to by the majority of modern scientists, of whom I am a dumbed down specimen. After careful consideration, Epicurus came to the conclusion that he found the truth about reality and called his philosophy "true philosophy". "True" referred to materialism, his metaphysics, his ethics and his pre-scientific methodology, not the description of particular phenomena, for which he typically offered multiple materialistic explanations and suspended judgement on which one is true. Today, the majority of scientists think that reality/truth is fundamentally unknowable, but we can create models which describe the phenomena very well. So, when scientists talk like quoted above, they do not mean that this is true for reality but true within the chosen model.

For Newton and Coulomb, masses and charges, respectively, interact at a distance, with the space in between remaining like Epicurus' void.

Faraday changed this. He let mass and charge give properties to the space around them and called that space with properties field. The field affects other masses or charges in that field, and the contributions of these other masses or charges to the field affect the first mass or charge. This was a major progress because it removed the spooky interaction at a distance in Newton's theory of gravity. Field theory was consequently applied to the more recently discovered other fundamental forces. Except for virtual particles occasionally popping up as part of the description of interactions, the space is empty. The field adds something fundamentally new to Epicurus' plain void and enables that coming into existence of virtual particles. Again, this is all talk about properties of a model, not reality. However, there are some scientists, even excellent ones, who believe that science has been approaching the truth and who might claim that they talk about reality and its truth and not just a model of it but ultimately, they can neither know nor prove this.