

A Discussion of Epicurean Concepts of Divinity

Post by "Cassius" of May 15, 2016 at 4:51 PM

Cassius Amicus

May 8 at 10:22am

As we parse true and false definitions of "god" in the Epicurean context, there is a very explicit section near the end of Book 2 of "On The Nature of Things" to consider. Here, Lucretius calls Epicurean physics (eternal and infinite universe) to the task of overthrowing the standard definition of universe-creating supernatural gods. He then applies another physics principle (nature never creates only one single thing of a kind) to establish that the universe as a whole is teeming with life. Having set the context that there are boundless life forms in the boundless universe, Lucretius then sums up his argument that supernatural gods do **not** exist by appealing to the calm and undisturbed nature of the **true** [Epicurean gods](#) which **do** exist. Here are three different translations for comparison:

Munro:

Yet how little, you know, wearied as all are to satiety with seeing, any one now cares to look up into heaven's glittering quarters! Cease therefore to be dismayed by the mere novelty and so to reject reason from your mind with loathing: weigh the questions rather with keen judgment and if they seem to you to be true, surrender, or if they are a falsehood, gird yourself to the encounter.

For since the sum of space is unlimited outside beyond these walls of the world, the mind seeks to apprehend what there is yonder there, to which the spirit ever yearns to look forward, and to which the mind's emission reaches in free and unembarrassed flight. In the first place we see that round in all directions, about above and underneath, throughout the universe there is no bound, as I have shown and as the thing of itself proclaims with loud voice and as clearly shines out in the nature of bottomless space. In no wise then can it be deemed probable, when space yawns illimitable towards all points and seeds in number numberless and sum unfathomable fly about in manifold ways driven on in ceaseless motion, that this single earth and heaven have been brought into being, that those bodies of matter so many in number do nothing outside them; the more so that this world has been made by nature, just as the seeds of things have chanced spontaneously to clash, after being brought together in manifold wise without purpose, without foresight, without result, and at last have filtered through such seeds as, suddenly thrown together, were fitted to become on each occasion the rudiments of great things, of earth sea and heaven and the race of living things. Wherefore again and again I say you must admit that there are elsewhere other combinations of matter like to this with ether holds in its greedy grasp.

Again when much matter is at hand, when room is there and there is no thing, no cause to hinder, things sure enough must go on and be completed. Well, then, if on the one hand there is so great a store of seeds as the whole life of living creatures cannot reckon up, and if the same force and nature abide in them and have the power to throw the seeds of things together into their several places in the same way as they are thrown together into our world, you must admit that in other parts of space there -are other earths and various races of men and kinds of wild beasts.

Moreover in the sum of all there is no one thing which is begotten single in its kind and grows up single and sole of its kind; but a thing always belongs to some class and there are many other things in the same kind. First, in the case of living things, most noble Memmius, you will find that in this sort has been begotten the mountain-ranging race of wild beasts, in this sort the breed of men, in this sort too the mute shoals of scaly creatures and all bodies of fowls. Therefore on a like principle you must admit that earth, and sun, moon, sea, and all things else that are, are not single in their kind, but rather in number past numbering; since the deep-set boundary-mark of life just as much awaits these and they are just as much of a body that had birth, as any class of things which here on earth abounds in samples of its kind.

If you well apprehend and keep in mind these things, nature free at once and rid of her haughty lords is seen to do all things spontaneously of herself without the meddling of the gods. For I appeal to the holy breasts of the gods who in tranquil peace pass a calm time and an unruffled existence, who can rule the sum, who can hold in his hand with controlling force the strong reins, of the immeasurable deep?

Humphries:

And yet, a sight like this, Marvelous as it is, now draws no man To lift his gaze to heaven's bright areas. We are a jaded lot. But even so Don't be too shocked by something new, too scared To use your reasoning sense, to weigh and balance, So that if in the end a thing seems true, You welcome it with open arms; if false, You do your very best to strike it down.

The sum of space is infinite, reaching far Beyond the ramparts of the world; the mind Persists in questioning: what can be there?

What is there so far off, toward which the urge Of the free spirit flies? There is no end, No limit to the cosmos, above, below, Around, about, stretching on every side. This I have proven, but the fact itself Cries loud in proclamation, nature's deep Is luminous with proof. The universe Is infinitely wide; its vastness holds Innumerable seeds, beyond all count, Beyond all possibility of number, Flying along their everlasting ways. So it must be unthinkable that our sky And our round world are precious and unique While all those other motes of matter flit In idleness, achieve, accomplish nothing, Especially since this world of ours was made By natural process, as the atoms came Together, willy-nilly, quite by chance, Quite casually and quite intentionless Knocking against each other, massed, or spaced So as to colander others through, and cause Such combinations and conglomerates As form the origin of mighty things, Earth, sea and sky, and animals and men.

Face up to this, acknowledge it. I tell you Over and over - out beyond our world There are, elsewhere, other assemblages Of matter, making other worlds. Oh, ours Is not the only one in air's embrace. With infinite matter available, infinite space, And infinite lack of any interference, Things certainly ought to happen. If we have More seeds, right now, than any man can count, More than all men of all time past could reckon, And if we have, in nature, the same power To cast them anywhere at all, as once They were cast here together, let's admit - We really have to - there are other worlds, More than one race of men, and many kinds Of animal generations.

Furthermore, Adding up all the sum, you'll never find One single thing completely different From all the rest, alone, apart, unique,

Sole product, single specimen of its kind. Look at the animals: is this not true Of mountain-ranging species, and of men, Of the silent schools of fish, of flying things? Likewise you must admit that earth, sun, moon, Ocean, and all the rest, are not unique, But beyond reckoning or estimate. Their term of life is definitely set And so remains, their substance is of stuff No less ephemeral than what we see In the teeming multitudes of our own earth.

Holding this knowledge, you can't help but see That nature has no tyrants over her, But always acts of her own will; she has No part of any godhead whatsoever. By all that's holy in the tranquil calm Where the gods pass serene eternal days I ask you - which of them is strong enough To rule the sum of things, to hold the reins Of absolute profundity, or move the skies To turn together? Who can warm the lands To fruitfulness with fire sent down from heaven? Who can be immanent in every time, In every place - to cloud the world in dark, To shake the quiet areas of sky With terrible sound? Who sends the lightning's blast Even at his own temples? Who departs To wilderness, but as he goes, in wrath, Lets fly the bolts that pass the guilty by And murder undeserving innocents?

Bailey:

Yet think how no one now, wearied with satiety of seeing, deigns to gaze up at the shining quarters of the sky! Wherefore cease to spew out reason from your mind, struck with terror at mere newness, but rather with eager judgement weigh things, and, if you see them true, lift your hands and yield, or, if it is false, gird yourself to battle.

For our mind now seeks to reason, since the sum of space is boundless out beyond the walls of this world, what there is far out there, whither the spirit desires always to look forward, and whither the unfettered projection of our mind flies on unchecked. First of all, we find that in every direction everywhere, and on either side, above and below, through all the universe, there is no limit, as I have shown, and indeed the truth cries out for itself and the nature of the deep shines clear. Now in no way must we think it likely, since towards every side is infinite empty space, and seeds in unnumbered numbers in the deep universe fly about in many ways driven on in everlasting motion, that this one world and sky was brought to birth, but that beyond it all those bodies of matter do naught; above all, since this world was so made by nature, as the seeds of things themselves of their own accord, jostling from time to time, were driven together in many ways, rashly, idly, and in vain, and at last those united, which,

suddenly cast together, might become ever and anon the beginnings of great things, of earth and sea and sky, and the race of living things. Wherefore, again and again, you must needs confess that there are here and there other gatherings of matter, such as is this, which the ether holds in its greedy grip.

Moreover, when there is much matter ready to hand, when space is there, and no thing, no cause delays, things must, we may be sure, be carried on and completed. As it is, if there is so great a store of seeds as the whole life of living things could not number, and if the same force and nature abides which could throw together the seeds of things, each into their place in like manner as they are thrown together here, it must needs be that you confess that there are other worlds in other regions, and diverse races of men and tribes of wild beasts.

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

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

JS

JS Cassius Amicus Are you saying that " *true* [Epicurean gods](#) which *do* exist" as ACTUAL LIVING DEITIES or what follows from the ETERNAL LAWS OF NATURE? I see no proof of living gods. Naturalism only holds the sovereignty of natural principles (e.g. gravitational constant, mu, fine structure constant and other real and scientifically proven fixed values...).

Like · Reply · May 9 at 12:18pm

Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus First and foremost, I am saying that we can't clearly discuss the issue until we are clear on what the Epicureans actually believed and taught. Despite the immense hurdles involved given our own prejudices and definitions, I think we owe the Epicureans the respect to take them at their words and accept their definitions before we pronounce them "wrong."

Virtually every discussion, even here, seems to ignore the Epicurean definition of "god" in preference to the standard Jude-Christian-Islamic definition of the term. So for instance when you say "I see no proof of living gods" are you saying that you reject the probability of life outside of Earth? If you accept that life exists in other places besides Earth, do you reject the probability of there being life forms of greater lifespan and intelligence and technology (including ability to experience undiluted pleasure) than our own?

This selection from Lucretius is very clear as to the basis for arguing that forms of life "higher" than humans can with confidence be expected to exist elsewhere in the universe. That's not to say that we will ever find them ourselves, but that is not the fault of the argument, it is a result of our stage of technology.

As I read this, the Epicureans were saying that just as it is necessary (in the experience of most men, anyway) to have an answer to the question "Where did the Earth come from?" it is also necessary to have confidence in the answer to the questions "Are we alone in the universe?" and "Are we the highest life form within the universe?" I get the point that a lot of people think that it is sufficient to say "we don't know" to such questions, but it seems clear that Epicurus was driving toward the view that we should have confidence in those observations that are clear to us. Once the eternal / infinite universe is established by the "nothing from nothing" observation, it is a very short step to the conclusion that "we are not alone" based on the "nature never creates a single thing of a kind" observation.

It is not possible to take these speculations a lot further without descending into "the gods speak Greek" level of speculation, but that does not mean that one should not go as far as the evidence indicates. And what the evidence does clearly indicate to Epicurus seems pretty clear to me - that we are not alone in the universe, nor are we the "highest" form of life possible. Carrying the argument to that point and stopping short of the supernatural would have been within the capability of every ancient Epicurean. I believe it is mainly just our own corruption by Judeo-Christian-Islamic monotheism that makes the conclusion so difficult to accept today. But that difficulty is no reason to step back from it, and it is certainly no reason not to respect the Epicureans enough to state their position clearly before one dismisses (or embraces) it.

Like · Reply · 2 · May 9 at 1:26pm · Edited

JS

JS I agree that there is most probably many other life-forms. I intuit from the above you agree in the existence of extra-terrestrials which we deduce rationally by it's probability. However, do you believe these beings as "imperishable" (PD1)? If so, this is as unsupported as the other 5000 gods presently believed with no evidence.

Like · Reply · May 9 at 3:14pm · Edited

Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus First of all, again, my goal is not to agree or disagree, but to understand and restate accurately the position of the ancient Epicureans.

Secondly, I think it is important to emphasize not "probability in general" but to cite the specific arguments that support the probability. (Nature never makes only a single one of a kind; also the "isonomia" argument which is considerably more difficult.)

But to deal with your specific question, I again think you are trivializing the argument of Lucretius unnecessarily. I don't care that you disparage whether I agree with it or not, but I do think that people who disparage it ought first to be able to state the Epicurean argument sympathetically before equating it to "5000 gods presently believed in with no evidence."

Neither Lucretius (nor I) have cited any ****particular**** "god" as imperishable or omnipotent or anything else. That would be the equivalent of asserting that Yahweh or Allah or some specific god exists. The argument is simply that it is probable to the point of effective certainty that there exists, within the natural universe, natural living beings which have reached the ability to regenerate so as to be deathless.

By analogy, I have never and will never see an "atom" (considered properly as an indivisible particle), and yet I organize my life with confidence that they exist. Some might say that it is not necessary to take a position on whether atoms exist, but the Epicureans considered it to be mentally healthy for confident living to be able to identify a mechanism by which the universe functions (1) without supernatural guidance but also (2) with repeatable regularity.

In the same way, I have never and will likely never see a deathless being that is entirely self-sufficient. Yet I can readily see how the Epicureans would have thought it mentally healthy to consider a proper definition of "godhood" in conformity with characteristics that we can understand. Agnosticism is entirely acceptable as an answer to lots of questions, but not when we are discussing the role of gods in nature and everyone around us is suggesting that we pray for rewards or cower in fear. In those cases, and those are the cases most men face, then "I don't know" whether such punishing and rewarding gods exist isn't a good enough response. In that context Epicurean "gods" serve a purpose similar to Epicurean "atoms." We cannot see, touch, taste, smell, or hear them, and yet we organize our lives as if they exist and we understand basic attributes of their nature.

Like · Reply · 4 · May 9 at 6:05pm · Edited

JS

JS

Like · Reply · May 9 at 6:20pm

JS

JS So then you must be convinced in deathless beings or gods. Fair enough. I have to say I'm unconvinced but am now more clear of your position here.

Like · Reply · 2 · May 9 at 6:21pm

Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus In your last reply, you mix "deathless beings" which is a term consistent with the Epicurean position, with the indeterminate term "gods." By doing so you seem to insist on the standard Judeo-Christian-Islamic-monotheistic definition of "gods" - which is most certainly **not** consistent with the Epicurean position. What I am "convinced of" is that the ancient Epicureans were very sharp, and that those who sell them short before they take the time to attempt to understand their position do a disservice to both the ancient Epicureans and to themselves.

Like · Reply · 4 · May 10 at 8:19am

JB

JB Jerry, despite our previous disagreements I am sympathetic to your position on the gods. That said, as I repeatedly mull over the Epicurean concept of gods I find the Abrahamic concept of god becoming uprooted from my preconceptions as it is a deeply unsatisfying construct. The early cultural repetition of such a perverse concept is extremely difficult to let go of, but I'm finding that "... the study of philosophy pleasure accompanies growing knowledge; for pleasure does not follow learning; rather, learning and pleasure advance side by side."

Unlike · Reply · 4 · May 10 at 1:13pm · Edited

JS

JS JB I too have had to uproot theistic beliefs from my life. This has allowed me to truly find a happiness that comes from releasing the dread that comes from unsupported beliefs and opinions. Epicureanism answers the most basic questions of what is, how to think and live. The more obscure issues of physics and causes, I will leave to the province of the natural sciences.

Like · Reply · 1 · May 10 at 2:31pm · Edited

CJ

CJ JS You mention that you see no proof of living gods. In epicurean epistemology there is no need for such a proof, and even delivering such a proof would be unimaginable because gods are non evident. By definition such a proof not exist. Supposition about nonevident things is true when there is a possibility derived from and based on atomistic principles and there is no evidence of our senses that contest it. If we would dismissed epicurean atomism like you suggest but at the same time we would keep leftovers from epicurean epistemolgy (after all most of it is mended together with physics so it have to go with it) then only HONEST answer would be something similar to answer of Protagoras: "We have no means of knowing whether they exist or not, nor of what sort they may be, because of the obscurity of the subject, and the brevity of human life".

For the record orbiting teapots and spaghetti-monster are evident if there are any,

Unlike · Reply · 2 · May 10 at 2:26pm

JS

JS It is best to leave behind the meer question of a spaghetti monster or deathless being if the question itself creates turmoil in our minds. Tranquility is seated on the bedrock of a clear mind. "A wise man proportions his beliefs to the evidence." - David Hume.

Like · Reply · 1 · May 10 at 2:30pm

Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus This gets to the root of the issue where Jerry and I differ: "It is best to leave behind the mere question of a spaghetti monster or deathless being if the question itself creates turmoil in our minds." I do not believe most people can or should approach life in this way. Most people are constantly confronted with issues which demand our attention and which are not in our power to ignore. Such questions, for most people, not limited to those who live in areas of religious fanaticism (where their very lives depend on understanding the issues) include questions about the origin of the universe and the existence of gods. Taking an "I don't

know and I don't care" approach to the questions that vex most normal human beings is itself the trap door to falling into pits of anxiety from which there is no escape. Epicurean philosophy is not about evading questions, it is about finding answers to questions that will allow us to live our lives happily.

Like · Reply · 2 · May 10 at 2:47pm

JS

JS The best way to relieve fear is knowledge. PD 12 "One cannot rid himself of his primal fears if he does not understand the nature of the universe but instead suspects the truth of some mythical story. So without the study of nature, there can be no enjoyment of pure pleasure."

https://web.archive.org/.../wiki.../Principal_Doctrine_12

Principal Doctrine 12 - Epicurus Wiki

One cannot rid himself of his primal fears if he does not understand the nature of the universe but instead suspects the truth of some mythical story. So without the study of nature, there can be no enjoyment of pure pleasure.

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JB

JB Jerry, is it the question that causes turmoil or is it the lack of a satisfactory answer?

Epicurus tells us that the gods, as conceived by the many, do not exist and those who hold those beliefs are the ones who are actually impious. Biologically immortal beings exist here on earth, why shouldn't they exist elsewhere in the universe in a state of complete tranquility?

The Epicurean preconception of gods is far more interesting to discuss with someone from the Abrahamic faiths than my usual atheism. I enjoy having an answer to their questions about gods instead of what amounts to a dismissive non-answer from their perspective. The former primes them to think about their conceptions, the latter makes them combative, generally speaking.

Unlike · Reply · 1 · May 10 at 3:35pm

Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus Context makes a tremendous difference. I grew up and live now in a very religious area where I am constantly confronted by discussion about "god." Many places in the

world are like that. On the other hand, there are apparently places where society has largely deemed talk of religion to be irrelevant, and the majority follow some form of "atheism." For those in such an area I can certainly see that discussion of godhood is largely irrelevant except as a very abstract matter.

Like · Reply · 2 · May 10 at 4:08pm

HD

HD JB

"Biologically immortal beings exist here on earth". This statement is contrary to the epicurean canon of truth. Do you have any evidence? Otherwise we enter into idealism and in very dangerous waters. Epicurus assumption for their existence has been found false and therefore his conclusion. Do you still believe in the reality of dreams? Or the preconceptions of gods? We live in 2016 not in 300 bc!

Like · Reply · 1 · May 11 at 12:13am

JB

JB Turritopsis dohrnii, for one. Here, I did some Googling: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biological_immortality

Like · Reply · May 11 at 9:38am

HD

HD This reference is unrelated to gods.

Like · Reply · May 11 at 9:43am

JB

JB Jerry was talking about deathless beings. We have those here, within our local environment. Is it so difficult to think that others may exist elsewhere in the universe in a form more advanced than they do here?

All living things, even hydras and jellyfish, shun pain and pursue pleasure. Is it entirely inconceivable that something like a hydra or jellyfish might fulfill the concept of a perfect being, an Epicurean god, if it were found immortal and in a state of complete tranquility? Forget needing five senses or being a chordate. Why does a god need to resemble humanity in any way to serve as an example to emulate? All it has to possess is the experience of continuous and unperturbed tranquility for eternity, the details are quite irrelevant.

Personally, while I find the Epicurean argument on gods /more/ useful when arguing religion with my Abrahamic friends, I still remain effectively an atheist. Statistically, the chances of us (as a species) ever meeting an extra-terrestrial intelligence, much less encounter one that might meet the definition of an Epicurean god is so vanishingly small that it may well be an impossibility. I suspect that if one or several even exist in our universe that we would never even be able to encounter them because they would have secured themselves to such an extent that it would be impossible.

Gods have always just been a thought experiment Haris, despite any arguments to the contrary. They serve a purpose as such, but are nothing more.

Like · Reply · May 11 at 10:00am · Edited

HD

HD Thinking is an idealistic attitude in reaching truth. Also the techniques of analogy, induction and so on, are prone to errors. So we need evidence, in the epicurean sense. Otherwise we are mere idealists.

Like · Reply · May 11 at 10:01am

JB

JB I'm not certain what you mean by "evidence, in the epicurean sense."

Like · Reply · May 11 at 10:19am

HD

HD the senses and real life experience.

Like · Reply · May 11 at 10:21am

JB

JB So, evidence.

There's a lot of analogy and induction used in Epicurean philosophy, I'm not certain that it should be discarded due to being prone to errors. Thinking about gods is an error, but it causes lots of harm to people so it's useful to analogize and use inductive reasoning to ease their suffering when dealing with an idea that is completely imaginary.

Like · Reply · May 11 at 10:28am

HD

HD No one nowadays excepts the validity of this technique. It is out of the question in the era of scientific explosion.

Like · Reply · May 11 at 10:33am

JB

JB Supposition is the basis from which we develop testable hypotheses. Analogy (mathematics and geometry are analogs of real phenomena) is useful to explain things that are difficult to grasp when direct observation is difficult due to perspective.

A map with errors still can be useful, particularly when new observations are used to update it. Some times "here be dragons" suffices to mark a place when direct observation isn't currently possible. We know something is there, we just don't know what form it takes but it might still be useful to make an educated guess. Kind of like the recent Kepler announcement about potentially habitable planets.

Like · Reply · May 11 at 10:49am

Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

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Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus Haris what is your reasoning behind this statement? "Epicurus assumption for their existence has been found false." What assumption are you referring to specifically, and how has it been "found false"?

Like · Reply · 1 · May 11 at 6:42am · Edited

Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus As for biological immortality I know nothing but what is in this wikipedia article so I am interested in Jason's response. It sounds from reading this that it might be better to refer to these examples as "approaching" immortality because they can certainly be killed. However the example of these very-long-lived beings provides observation from real life that life-span is not limited by supernatural forces. Thus in the right environment (speculated

reasonably but perhaps primitively to be "between the worlds" by the Epicureans) effective immortality might be achievable. And it is my understanding that the concept of isonomia and/or anticipations in this department would be built on/reinforced by just such observations (that some things have short lifespans but others have long ones, indicating a spectrum from lowest to highest in lifespans).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biological_immortality

Like · Reply · 2 · May 11 at 6:52am · Edited

HD

HD The conclusion of Epicurus that gods exist (1,2) is based on the assumption that dreams are true and represent reality(3,4). So as long as we the modern humans are concerned to accept the conclusion have to accept the reality of the dreams, which has been rejected. Hence, we have to reject the conclusion for the existence of gods as well.

1. For the utterances of the multitude about the gods are not true preconceptions but false assumptions;
2. For there are gods, and the knowledge of them is manifest; them to be the elements of right life. First believe that God is a living being immortal and blessed, according to the notion of a god indicated by the common sense of mankind; and so believing,
3. For the presentations which, for example, 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.
4. Even the objects presented to madmen and to people in dreams are true, for they produce effects—i.e. movements in the mind—which that which is unreal never does.

Like · Reply · 2 · May 11 at 7:01am

Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus So you discount totally the statement in Cicero's "On The Nature of the Gods":

“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. For the divine form we have the hints of nature supplemented by the teachings of reason. From nature all men of all races derive the notion of gods as having human shape and none other; for in what other shape do they ever appear to anyone, awake or asleep? But not to make primary concepts the sole test of all

things, reason itself delivers the pronouncement. For it seems appropriate that a being who is the most exalted, whether by reason of his happiness or of his eternity, should also be the most beautiful; but what disposition of the limbs, what cast of features, what shape or outline can be more beautiful than the human form? You Stoics at least, Lucilius, (for my friend Cotta says one thing at one time and another at another) are wont to portray the skill of the divine creator by enlarging on beauty as well as the utility of design displayed in all parts of the human figure. But if the human figure surpasses the form of all other living beings, and god is a living being, god must possess the shape which is the most beautiful of all; and since it is agreed that the gods are supremely happy, and no one can be happy without virtue, and virtue cannot exist without reason, and reason is only found in the human shape, it follows that the gods possess the form of man. Yet their form is not corporeal, but only resembles bodily substance; it does not contain blood, but the semblance of blood.

“These discoveries of Epicurus are so acute in themselves and so subtly expressed that not everyone would be capable of appreciating them. Still I may rely on your intelligence, and make my exposition briefer than the subject demands. Epicurus then, as he not merely discerns abstruse and recondite things with his mind's eye, but handles them as tangible realities, teaches that the substance and nature of the gods is such that, in the first place, it is perceived not by the senses but by the mind, and not materially or individually, like the solid objects which Epicurus in virtue of their substantiality entitles *steremnia*; but by our perceiving images owing to their similarity and succession, because an endless train of precisely similar images arises from the innumerable atoms and streams towards the gods, our mind with the keenest feelings of pleasure fixes its gaze on these images, and so attains an understanding of the nature of a being both blessed and eternal. Moreover there is the supremely potent principle of infinity, which claims the closest and most careful study; we must understand that it has in the sum of things everything has its exact match and counterpart. This property is termed by Epicurus *isonomia*, or the principle of uniform distribution. From this principle it follows that if the whole number of mortals be so many, there must exist no less a number of immortals, and if the causes of destruction are beyond count, the causes of conservation also are bound to be infinite.

And you discount also, from Lucretius, this elaboration:

"Moreover in the sum of all there is no one thing which is begotten single in its kind and grows up single and sole of its kind; but a thing always belongs to some class and there are many other things in the same kind. First, in the case of living things, most noble Memmius, you will find that in this sort has been begotten the mountain-ranging race of wild beasts, in this sort the breed of men, in this sort too the mute shoals of scaly creatures and all bodies of fowls.

Therefore on a like principle you must admit that earth, and sun, moon, sea, and all things else that are, are not single in their kind, but rather in number past numbering; since the deep-set boundary-mark of life just as much awaits these and they are just as much of a body that had birth, as any class of things which here on earth abounds in samples of its kind."

And in discounting these arguments in the texts, you limit the proof of "gods" to be solely based on "dreams," despite these references and despite Epicurus' citation of anticipations in his letter to Menoeceus?

It seems that the crux of our disagreement is that you limit the proof you are willing to consider of the existence of [Epicurean gods](#) to "dreams." And by that I gather you mean the ordinary term of "dreams" and not the "images" discussion. I would maintain that the texts show that the Epicureans did not limit their argument to dreams (arising from images) at all, and that the far more important part of their argument were their natural observations as referenced above.

We will certainly agree to disagree, but it is helpful to everyone to state the relevant positions clearly.

Like · Reply · 2 · May 11 at 9:23am

HD

HD There is also the canon of truth regarding the external environment, that introduces the criteria of 1)confirmation and 2) non contradiction. Non of these abide with the existence of gods. By appying the epicurean rules we dissaprove the epicurean claim for the existence of gods. This shows that his assumptions were false.

Like · Reply · 1 · May 11 at 9:31am

HC

HC Speaking of immortals... <http://www.livescience.com/53178-hydra-may-live-forever.html>

Hail the Hydra, an Animal That May Be Immortal

LIVESCIENCE.COM

Like · Reply · Remove Preview · 2 · May 11 at 11:28am

JB replied · 6 Replies

Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus It appears to me here, Haris, when you say "There is also the canon of truth regarding the external environment, that introduces the criteria of 1)confirmation and 2) non contradiction. None of these abide with the existence of gods." ...that you are presuming that we have proof of the "external environment" so superior to the ancient Epicureans that we can be certain that they were incorrect. While we certainly have methods of searching out into space that are far superior to those of the ancient Epicureans - presuming that you adhere to the Epicurean boundless universe theorem - then we cannot by definition claim to know what exists in the boundless space that is beyond our ability to pierce even with our current technology.

Second but related, I presume also that you do not believe that we on Earth are the only living beings in the universe. If we are not the only living beings in the universe, are you prepared to say with confidence that none anywhere are higher? Are you prepared to say with confidence that none have achieved deathlessness in their own environments?

An argument is frequently made (it is not my favorite, by the way) that men should keep themselves in perspective because our earth is but a speck in the universe. That is not my favorite argument because it can be used to demean the importance of life too far. But I believe the Epicureans saw (see the Lucretius passage) that it is damaging to believe that Earth is the only location of life in the universe. Such a conclusion is so counter-rational to the infinite/boundless/natural universe theorem that it plays directly into the hands of those who argue that the Earth was created supernaturally for our own benefit.

If for no other reason than the one I just stated, it seems to me to be very important to preserve the Epicurean argument in its purity. As for me, I step back from presuming that our technology, while superior, can claim things that it manifestly cannot claim (to be able to see into "ALL" of the universe and know ALL things that are far out in space, and to therefore establish the counterintuitive - the conclusion no deathless beings exist anywhere.)

Like · Reply · 1 · May 11 at 11:48am

HD

HD Cassius,

We should not use the same arguments both to defend ourselves and attack our idealistic opponents. If someone claims that something exists he has to present his arguments and evidence to support his views and not expect the others that he's wrong.

Epicurus was interested in knowledge that potentially influence human happiness. He showed no interest in knowledge that did not affect directly or indirectly one's life. If there is sensual or scientific evidence that convince me that a knowledge is related to my happiness then I may be interested in examining it. We are not to study anything without the criterion of utility. So this issue of immortality does not affect my well-being at all. Neither it serves as a convincing proof that other entities of any nature exist.

To me this issue under discussion has to do with our own perceptions and influences and not with any real reason. So Epicurus would advise to look into our own perceptions instead of trying to claim something that has no proof and is only conceptual reasoning.

Like · Reply · 1 · May 11 at 12:12pm

JS

JS Asserting infinite beings and asserting in deathless beings are two species of arguments with the later having no other claim then baseless opinion.

Like · Reply · 1 · May 11 at 1:21pm

JB

JB Jerry, I concur with infinite beings, no such thing can even exist in a material universe such as ours, given the preconditions. Physical immortality on the other hand isn't beyond the realm of possibility at least to the extent that internal factors aren't the cause of death as evidenced by recent discoveries right here on Earth of creatures that can continually regenerate given sufficient energy input. Perhaps if they were in possession of the ability to defend against chance, as the wise man is exhorted to do, they might achieve a true immortality not dependent on circumstance. There may very well be some sentient creatures out in the infinitude of space that have achieved this particular combination of attributes that also are in a state of perpetual ataraxia.

That's certainly something worthy of emulation, the sole purpose that the concept of gods serve in Epicurean philosophy if I'm not mistaken, contra the Abrahamic conception of gods which forever remains out of reach given the impossibility of a supernatural existence.

Let us not borrow concepts from religious systems. The utility of discussing [Epicurean gods](#) is in presuming a conception that is consistent with the evidence at hand and extrapolating from there in order to give us a basis from which to experimentally test for their existence. You cannot test the supernatural. Let's not get stuck on those non-atomistic concepts!

This is why we need to talk about [Epicurean gods](#). Our concept of the gods has been perverted through polluted thinking that has infected our culture. It's far easier to just ignore it and say we're atheists and Epicurus was a closeted atheist, but that shuts down conversation and leaves very real suffering unsalved. Supposition is the cornerstone of discovery and without the study of nature there is no enjoyment of pure pleasure. I think the idea of extra-terrestrial Epicurean "gods" is an (but not necessarily the only) elegant solution that fits well in an atomistic theory of the universe. How arrogant to think that we're the highest form of life in the infinitude!

Unlike · Reply · 1 · May 11 at 4:57pm · Edited

Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus Jerry: Who has asserted "infinite beings??" Certainly not me! I realize the difficulty of talking through an issue where the Epicurean definitions are different from the common ones, but it is essential not to track back and forth, and I am trying to be as clear as possible that I am sticking with *Epicurean* definitions of godhood, not the common one.....

Like · Reply · 1 · May 11 at 4:55pm

Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus Haris please be assured I mean nothing here as an *attack* on you or anyone who disagrees with me. I find this discussion very helpful because I believe it is an important comment. With that prelude let me comment on a couple of your points. JB has stated several of them, but let me address them too:

" If someone claims that something exists he has to present his arguments and evidence to support his views and not expect the others that he's wrong." >>>

"Epicurus was interested in knowledge that potentially influence human happiness. He showed no interest in knowledge that did not affect directly or indirectly one's life." >>

"If there is sensual or scientific evidence that convince me that a knowledge is related to my happiness then I may be interested in examining it. We are not to study anything without the criterion of utility. So this issue of immortality does not affect my well-being at all. Neither it serves as a convincing proof that other entities of any nature exist. To me this issue under discussion has to do with our own perceptions and influences and not with any real reason. So Epicurus would advise to look into our own perceptions instead of trying to claim something that has no proof and is only conceptual reasoning."

Like · Reply · 1 · May 11 at 5:16pm

Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus Keeping in mind that I think our first and foremost inquiry ought to be that we *understand* what the Epicureans held, before we *judge* what the Epicureans held, here is a section from DeWitt directly on point:

EXISTENCE OF THE GODS

Those who are bound to make an empiricist of Epicurus have been compelled to represent him as finding the evidence for the existence of gods in vision. This is an error and a curious one; it was Eudoxus and Plato who appealed to vision as evidence of the existence of gods.¹² The former declared that it mattered little what a man thought of the gods of Greek mythology but it mattered much what he thought about the visible gods, that is, the planets. It was on account of his revulsion from this teaching that Epicurus damned the Eudoxans as "enemies of Hellas."

«

So far as vision is concerned, Epicurus denied that the gods were visible to the physical eye, though he did think them visible to the mind when operating as a supersensory organ of vision. The value attached to this evidence, however, was strictly limited. It served two purposes: first, to furnish a hint concerning the form of the gods, and second, to awaken in the minds of men the innate notion of the divine being there residing. This innate notion, Prolepsis or Anticipation, was the prime and primal evidence of the existence of gods. According to this notion the gods enjoyed perfect happiness and were immune to corruption. Add to this the information that they were anthropomorphic, gleaned from visions whether of day or night, and this is the sum total of knowledge attainable without recourse to reason and deduction.

The first approach, as in the letter to the lad Menoecus, is dogmatic: "For there are gods, because the knowledge of them is manifest." u This is the appeal to the authority of Nature. The recognition of the existence of gods is apparent among all races. Cicero makes the meaning clear: "For what race is there or what breed of men that does not possess what we may call an Anticipation of gods, which Epicurus calls a Prolepsis?"^{1B} This is what Epicurus calls by way of description "the universal idea" of the divine being. Its validity, however, depends only in part upon its universality; its main validity derives from the fact that the human being is believed to be preconditioned by Nature for the reception of the idea in advance of experience. For this reason the idea is called an Anticipation or Prolepsis. This priority to experience is part of its qualification as a criterion.

By Cicero's time, however, the syncretism of Stoic and Epicurean ideas had long been in progress, and he erred in saying that Nature had "stamped" this idea of the divine upon the minds of men as if with a seal upon wax.¹⁶ Such a comparison, it is true, was known to Epicurus but he employed it to illustrate the precision of the impression made upon vision by the pressure of the streams of images or idols which account for the sense of sight. Cicero went even farther astray when he wrote of the notion of godhead as "incised" or "engraved" upon the mind.¹⁷ The word he employed, *insculpsit*, could by no interpretation connote faintness or dimness of outline, which was an essential implication of the theory of Epicurus.

The semantic area in which the terminology of Epicurus belongs is that of biology. He thinks of the beginning and growth of the Prolepsis as a genetic process. The newborn infant lacks the use of certain senses, not to say reason; he is only potentially a rational creature. Still, just as the use of the senses exists potentially in the infant and so precedes and anticipates experience, so the capability of apprehending abstract ideas exists potentially from the first and only by degrees becomes actual in pace with experience, instruction, and reflection. As already mentioned, the idea of god is thought of as emerging in the mind just as the network of veins emerges in the embryo, prefiguring and anticipating the development of the whole organism. The mistake of Cicero was to intrude the Stoic idea of the mind as a tablet, capable of receiving impressions. This was not Epicurean.

Once this "universal idea" of the divine being, congenitally existing in the minds of men, has been assumed to precede and anticipate experience, the question that next presents itself is by what agency this potential experience is made actual. Bearing upon this question is the belief of Epicurus that the stimulus to thought and action of necessity comes from without; even the act of walking is believed by him to be preceded by images of the person in the act of walking, a preview of modern gestalt psychology.¹⁸ It is consistent with this belief in the external stimulus that Sextus Empiricus, who is a rather careful citator, informs us that according to

Epicurus man derived his idea of godhead from the visions of sleep, the assumption being that these correspond to external realities.¹⁹ This evidence is confirmed by the testimony of Lucretius.²⁰

In scanning the latter's testimony, however, the reader must be on guard to observe that true religion and false religion took their start from the same experiences, and the poet is chiefly concerned for the moment with false religion. Nevertheless, he is in accord with the evidences above quoted when he heads his list with visions of the gods witnessed by day or more often by night. It was from these that men first learned of the form of the gods, their stature and beauty. The rest of the passage belongs to the story of superstition.

In respect of the evidence afforded by dreams it is timely to issue a general and a specific warning: the general warning is against the assumption that the doctrines of Epicurus are easy to understand; the specific warning is against assigning more than a minimum value to the evidence of dreams. The vision of gods seen in a dream is no more evidence for the existence of gods than a vision of centaurs is evidence for the existence of centaurs. Only two functions are assigned to dreams in the extant authorities: one function, as gleaned from Sextus Empiricus, is to act as a stimulus to the innate Prolepsis of godhead, which up to a point is merely potential, and thus render it actual;²¹ the other function is to furnish a hint, and no more, of the form of the gods, as Cicero informs us.²² More will be said of this under the heading that next follows.

Confirmatory evidence for the existence of gods was found in logical deduction; this will be discussed in the section on Isonomy and the Gods.

Like · Reply · 1 · May 11 at 5:21pm

Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus Also from Dewitt:

ISONOMY AND THE GODS (part 1)

In spite of a supercilious opinion to the contrary, Epicurus was not a muddled thinker but a very systematic one. He enunciated his Twelve Elementary Principles and adhered to them closely. Two of these, the fifth and sixth, asserted the infinity of the universe in respect of matter and

space. To this idea of infinity he ascribed fundamental importance. He exhorted the young Pythocles to study it as one of those master principles which would render easy the recognition of causation in details.⁶⁸ Cicero must have been recalling some similar exhortation when he wrote: "But of the very greatest importance is the significance of infinity and in the highest degree deserving of intense and diligent contemplation."⁶⁹ He was quoting Epicurus.

It was from this principle that Epicurus deduced his chief theoretical confirmation of belief in the existence of gods. It was from this that he arrived at knowledge of their number and by secondary deduction at knowledge of their abode. He so interpreted the significance of infinity as to extend it from matter and space to the sphere of values, that is, to perfection and imperfection. In brief, if the universe were thought to be imperfect throughout its infinite extent, it could no longer be called infinite. This necessity of thought impelled him to promulgate a subsidiary principle, which he called *isonomia*, a sort of cosmic justice, according to which the imperfection in particular parts of the universe is offset by the perfection of the whole. Cicero rendered it *aequabilis tributio*, "equitable apportionment."⁷⁰ The mistake of rendering it as "equilibrium" must be avoided.

The term *isonomia* itself, which may be anglicized as *isonomy*, deserves a note. That it is lacking in extant Epicurean texts, all of them elementary, and is transmitted only by Cicero is evidence of its belonging to higher doctrine and advanced studies. Epicurus switched its meaning slightly, as he did that of the word *prolepsis*. To the Greeks it signified equality of all before the law, a boast of Athenians in particular. It was a mate to *eunomia*, government by law, as opposed to barbaric despotism, a boast of Greeks in general. That Epicurus thought to make capital of this happy connotation may be considered certain. He was vindicating for Nature a sort of justice, the bad being overbalanced by the good. It is also possible that he was remotely influenced by the teachings of Zoroaster, well known in his day through the conquests of Alexander, according to whom good and evil, as represented by Ormazd and Ahriman, battled for the upper hand in mundane affairs.

Whatever may be the facts concerning this influence, Epicurus discovered a reasonable way of allowing for the triumph of good in the universe, which seemed impossible under atomic materialism. Thus in his system of thought *isonomy* plays a part comparable to that of teleology with Plato and Aristotle. Teleology was inferred from the evidences of design, and design presumes agencies of benevolence, whether natural or divine. Epicurus was bound to reject design because the world seemed filled with imperfections, which he listed, but by extending the doctrine of infinity to apply to values he was able, however curiously, to discover room for perfection along with imperfection.

Like · Reply · 1 · May 11 at 5:24pm

Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus Isonomy and the Gods - Part 2

That he employed isonomy as theoretical proof of the existence of gods is well documented. For example, Lactantius, who may have been an Epicurean before his conversion to Christianity, quotes Epicurus as arguing "that the divine exists because there is bound to be something surpassing, superlative and blessed."⁷¹ The necessity here appealed to is a necessity of thought, which becomes a necessity of existence. The existence of the imperfect in an infinite universe demands belief in the existence of the perfect. Cicero employs very similar language: "It is his doctrine that there are gods, because there is bound to be some surpassing being than which nothing is better."⁷² Like the statement of Lactantius, this recognizes a necessity of existence arising from a necessity of thought; the order of Nature cannot be imperfect throughout its whole extent; it is bound to culminate in something superior, that is, in gods.

It is possible to attain more precision in the exposition. Cicero, though brutally brief, exhibits some precision of statement. The infinity of the universe, as usual, serves as a major premise. This being assumed, Cicero declares: "The nature of the universe must be such that all similars correspond to all similars."⁷³ One class of similars is obviously taken to be human beings, all belonging to the same grade of existence in the order of Nature. As Philodemus expresses it in a book about logic, entitled *On Evidences*, "It is impossible to think of Epicurus as man and Metrodorus as non-man."⁷⁴ Another class of similars is the gods. This being understood, the truth of Cicero's next statement follows logically: "If it be granted that the number of mortals is such and such, the number of immortals is not less."⁷⁵ This reasoning calls for no exegesis, but two points are worthy of mention: first, Cicero is not precise in calling the gods immortals; according to strict doctrine they are not deathless, only incorruptible of body; the second point is that Epicurus is more polytheistic in belief than his own countrymen.

The next item, however, calls for close scrutiny. Just as human beings constitute one set of similars and the gods another, so the forces that preserve constitute one set and the forces that destroy constitute another.

At this point a sign of warning is to be raised. There is also another pair of forces that are opposed to each other, those that create and those that destroy.⁷⁶ The difference is that the latter operate in each of the innumerable worlds, while the former hold sway in the universe at

large. For example, in a world such as our own, which is one of many, the forces of creation have the upper hand during its youthful vigor. At long last, however, the forces of destruction gradually gain the superiority and eventually the world is dissolved into its elements.⁷⁷

In the universe at large, on the contrary, the situation is different and the forces opposed to each other are not those that destroy and those that create but those that destroy and those that preserve. Moreover, a new aspect of infinity is invoked, the infinity of time. The universe is eternal and unchanging. Matter can neither be created nor destroyed. The sum of things is always the same, as Lucretius says. This truth is contained in the first two of the Twelve Elementary Principles. In combination they are made to read: "The universe has always been the same as it now is and always will be the same."⁷⁸ This can be true only on the principle that the forces that preserve are at all times superior to the forces that destroy.

It follows that Cicero was writing strictly by the book when he made his spokesman draw the following conclusion from the doctrine of isonomy: "And if the forces that destroy are innumerable, the forces that preserve must by the same token be infinite."⁷⁹ This doctrine, it is essential to repeat, holds only for the universe at large. It is not applicable to the individual world and it does not mean that the prevalence of elephants in India is balanced by the prevalence of wolves in Russia. Isonomy does not mean "equal distribution" but "equitable apportionment." It does not denote balance or equilibrium. No two sets of similar forces are in balance; in the individual world the forces of destruction always prevail at last, and in the universe at large the forces of preservation prevail at all times.

By this time three aspects of the principles of isonomy have been brought forward: first, that in an infinite universe perfection is bound to exist as well as imperfection; that is, "that there must be some surpassing being, than which nothing is better"; second, that the number of these beings, the gods, cannot be less than the number of mortals; and third, that in the universe at large the forces of preservation always prevail over the forces of destruction.

All three of these are direct inferences from the infinity and eternity of the universe. There remains to be drawn an indirect inference of primary importance. Since in the individual worlds the forces of destruction always prevail in the end, it follows that the incorruptible gods can have their dwelling place only outside of the individual worlds, that is, in the free spaces between the worlds, the so-called intermundia, where the forces of preservation are always superior. There is more to be said on this topic in the section that follows.

Like · Reply · 1 · May 11 at 5:24pm

Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus Reading over this reminds me how influential Dewitt has been on my thought patterns. I wish I had done a more articulate job of representing these passages, particularly in regard to the important point that Epicurus himself did not call the "gods" "deathless." That observation points out the necessity of being very careful about the word "immortal" too. The principles we are discussing here have sweeping implications far beyond just their use in opposing "false religion."

Like · Reply · 1 · May 11 at 5:30pm · Edited

HD

HD I feel that we disagree to disagree, as we search truth by different means. Your documentation is excellent from an ancient epicurean point of view, which had to employ hypothesizing, reasoning and a lot of phantasy. From the other hand I look for truth by modern means such as science, supported by sensual and empirical data. None of your arguments is based on any of these contemporary criteria, so I cannot agree with them, although I find them interesting out of mere curiosity.

We should be though very considerate when we use reasoning to find truth for this is not the recommendation of the epicurean philosophy. Instead it suggests to use science, the senses and experiences. Logical reasoning was the only means of the ancients that's why they made some crucial mistakes, such as the size of the sun, or the existence of gods. By employing reasoning today we run the risk to accept the christian god, or afterlife. I don't see the difference between a humane immortal god and a spiritual Christian god, as long as the proof in both cases is reasoning. To me overuse of reasoning leads to stoicism, Platonism, and in any sort of reasonable philosophy.

The fundamental premise of the epicurean philosophy is to rely on the truth of the senses and not of reasoning. If we cross this line we enter in alien waters.

Like · Reply · 1 · May 12 at 1:29am

JS

JS "Intuition untested and unsupported is an uncertain guarantee of the truth." - Bertrand Russell

Like · Reply · 1 · May 12 at 11:11am

CJ

CJ but russel wasn't sure that it is uncertain because he did "not feel absolutely certain of anything" . And BTW famous people are not certain criteria of truth, that I am certain of" smile

emoticon

Unlike · Reply · 1 · May 12 at 2:36pm

JS

JS He was certain there was no teapot revolving around the sun. A good criterion of logic here is venerability and no infinite beings cannot be discerned from the present knowledge of science. For instance rules of Blackbody Radiation and Thermodynamics rules out an "impermanent being."

Like · Reply · May 12 at 5:28pm

CJ

CJ JS And other rules accept that at the beginning there was nothing and then it exploded, that one-dimensional objects exist and that you can drill a hole in space... and accept all this without evidence.

The raven calling the crow black.

But there is other implication in your answer that is interesting. If scientific laws are capable of ruling something out they are themselves criteria of truth. very unsure, sometimes contradictory and changing in time but criteria of truth nevertheless.

Unlike · Reply · 2 · May 12 at 6:41pm · Edited

Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus Very profound, IMO, Cyril, " If scientific laws are capable of ruling something out they are themselves criteria of truth..." and very consistent with DeWitt's interpretations. Your point illustrates why "scientific laws" were **not** listed as part of the Epicurean canon of truth, but the senses/anticipations/feelings of pain-pleasure **were.**

Like · Reply · 2 · May 12 at 8:16pm

JB

JB Science is less a noun than a verb. It's a method of exploring and describing the universe in human-relatable terms. It's the map, not the territory. We see the map and the territory with our eyes, but we don't confuse the two when we're in the midst of the area it depicts. Confusion happens when we get really invested in the map being correct when there's a lack of evidence and we haven't explored the territory.

Talking about scientific laws, Jerry, what do you think of the ongoing kerfuffle over the Cosmological Constant? Have you taken a side? Despite my amateur interest and participation in historic astronomy, I don't know any astronomers personally to ask their professional opinion.

Unlike · Reply · 2 · May 12 at 9:32pm

CJ

CJ Cassius Amicus I would go further and say that in Epicurean Physics there are no scientific laws in modern meaning of the term. There are limits of nature that are reflected by thinking mind by unconceivability. The word unconceivable, unimaginable and similar words are used many, many times in Herodotus, Pythocles and DRN and Philodemus Method of Inference to set natural limits of thing itself, its quality or attribute. Modern scientific laws do not qualify to be criteria of truth. They are from canonical point of view opinions and as such they can be true or false, in contrast to sensations, ideas and feelings which are what they are. This is my take on the issue.

Saying this I really like the metaphore that JB draws with map and territory. It illustrates the essential difference of perspective of philosophy (not just Ep.) and science and our discussion here is really about relation of those two. It brings to mind picture of cartographer and wanderer arguing about what is behind the next hill. Perspective is different but as long as subject is the same this discussion will continue, hopefully without bad feelings but with good will and appreciation on both sides.

Like · Reply · 1 · May 13 at 4:29pm

JS

JS The cosmological constant was never proven and was the fudge factor Einstein called his major blunder when he visited Mt Palomar and saw proof of an expanding Universe. Einstein hoped to find a static Universe. But present data of distant Quasars shows a repulsive force does exist. We are living in interesting times where our instruments are having us redefine the very existence of energies that we have no clue what they are. I can't wait to see what we learn next!

Like · Reply · 2 · May 13 at 7:10pm