

# The Epicurean Gods As A Standard To Which To Aspire

Post by "Cassius" of July 13, 2018 at 10:53 AM

Recently (July 7th) MK posted the following as part of a post on whether the Epicureans were in fact "atheists." The part I'd like to focus on is: "The gods are integral to Epicurean ethics as a standard to aspire to of absolute ataraxia." Without getting into the debate about what "ataraxia" means, I think there is another important point here. We may or may not agree with them, but it seems clear that to the Epicureans the "gods" were not simply abstractions - from the texts we know that they had a form/appearance "similar" to humans, a language "similar" to humans (Greek), and presumably other real attributes which allowed Epicurus and the ancient Epicureans to participate in public ceremonies without considering themselves to be ludicrous. We can add Lucretius' "hymn to Venus" as Roman example, and also cite Cicero, as did Martin, for the point that Epicureans were firmly convinced of their speculations on many of these aspects of divinity.

My question is this: Are we today overlooking an important (integral? critical?) component of Epicurean philosophy when we fail to articulate and identify concrete examples of the ultimate standards to which we should aspire? It sounds like the ancient Epicureans were quite comfortable in referencing Venus and / or Zeus and similar entities in ways that were consistent with their philosophy. By failing to consider this part of Epicurean philosophy, are we failing to identify in concrete terms the standard to which we should aspire, and leaving our standard at a useless level of abstraction?

