

The Epicurean Gods As A Standard To Which To Aspire

Post by "Cassius" of July 16, 2018 at 10:29 AM

A poster at Facebook wrote on this topic:

I have wanted to say something since seeing the notification, but did not want to gloss so serious a subject. I have time at the minute though, so here I go!

Reflex reaction: yes. Dispensing with all talk of the [Epicurean gods](#) is certainly to lose sight of something central to the school.

Face value, the answer is simple. To be an authentic Epicurean requires a firm grounding in the classics.

This is fairly obvious to me anyway. How you can know who Epicurus is but not Zeus would be beyond me.

Anybody actually interested must know who or what Lucretius or Philodemus speak of when writing. You cannot meaningfully read the Epicurean literature outside the classical context, really.

To claim the Olympians are culturally irrelevant or incomprehensible is ridiculous. Why are you reading an ancient Hellenic thinker at all anyway then?

As for the non-intervention of deities equalling the non-existence of them - it's a patently poor argument. Epicurus himself saw a definite difference. Don't think much of his reasoning powers: why are you here?

In the original comment quoted I provided two ways in which Epicurus insisted on the gods' importance to his thought: anthropological aetiology and top standard of ataraxia.

They are complimentary sides to a single coin. We can aspire to perfect equanimity because we are physically and mentally like the beings that already live it. Take away the latter, the former becomes a sizably trickier task.

Are we fitted for that state? Or is it a superhuman impossibility engendered in the same way as superhuman beings by the brain of primitive homines sapientes? An Epicurean's top task becomes a mimetic delusion à la Dawkins.

As for the factual existence of the gods, I wouldn't like to go to war for them on this front. Still, a religious quality of commitment to atheism is at least as narrow-minded as an Abrahamic monotheism.

Most educated people in Western societies today tick "Spiritual but not religious" when asked. I don't know that it is helpful to be dismissive of the ubiquitous human experience here. Particularly with such crushing and uncomprehending condescension.

What one senses staring out from Delphi or up at the ceiling standing in the centre of the Pantheon, has precisely fuck all to do with knowing what makes thunder.

An ideal Epicurean would see the legitimacy of mythos, and the gods in them as powers personified, for education and reflection, poetic and philosophical. The same could be said of the ideal applicant to Oxford or Cambridge 70 years ago. Couldn't read Greek, need not apply. Sad the state of affairs presently in academia.

Finally, so far as I can tell, nobody has engaged with Epicurus' argument for that there are in very fact gods. I outlined it in the relevant earlier comment.

If you are a thoroughgoing materialist, it is tremendously difficult to account for the universal scale of the human experience here. Where the concept comes from, why it is not culturally confined, its persistence across literally all recorded time.

If you face facts and the only explanations allowable are material causality: how do you escape his conclusion that they must have some basis in physical reality?