

New Sedley Chapter On Ancient Greek Atheism

Post by "Don" of April 10, 2022 at 10:45 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

I just happened across this passage in Lucretius, which relates to the LM passage discussed above:

"Unless you expel these ideas from your mind and drive far away beliefs unworthy of the gods and alien to their tranquillity, the holy divinity of the gods, damaged by you, will frequently do you harm: not because of the possibility of violating the gods' supreme power, and of their consequent angry thirst for bitter vengeance, but because you yourself will imagine that those tranquil and peaceful beings are rolling mighty billows of wrath against you. You will be unable to visit the shrines of the gods with a calm heart, and incapable of receiving with tranquillity and peace the images from their holy bodies which travel into men's minds to reveal the gods' appearance. The direct effect on your life is obvious." (Lucretius 6.68-79, Long and Sedley translation, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*)

This reads to me like the best resolution of the realist and idealist views that I've seen. It appears to acknowledge the realist view that the gods exist, while at the same time stressing that what is important to our well-being is how we view them.

Thank you so much for sharing this, [Godfrey](#) ! I had not seen this before.

For anyone who wants to see the Latin referenced here:

[Lucretius, De Rerum Natura, Liber Sextus, line 43](#)

Quote

quae nisi respuis ex animo longeque remittis
dis indigna putare alienaque pacis eorum,
delibata deum per te tibi numina sancta
saepe oberunt; non quo violari summa deum vis
possit, ut ex ira poenas petere inbibat acris,

sed quia tute tibi placida cum pace quietos
constitues magnos irarum volvere fluctus,
nec delubra deum placido cum pectore adibis,
nec de corpore quae sancto simulacra feruntur
in mentes hominum divinae nuntia formae,
suscipere haec animi tranquilla pace valebis.
inde videre licet qualis iam vita sequatur.

Display More

Images here is "simulacra": <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...ry%3Dsimulacrum>

which seems to have the same double entendre that εἰδωλον does in Greek.

Question: Is Lucretius (and Epicurus) referring to images received from gods "out there" somewhere... or is he referring to the images received of their statues in the shrines? "You will be unable to visit the shrines of the gods with a calm heart, and incapable of receiving with tranquillity and peace the images from their holy bodies which travel into men's minds to reveal the gods' appearance." The fact that he talks first about visiting the shrines of the gods THEN goes directly to "incapable of receiving ... the images from their holy bodies which travel into men's minds" looks ambiguous, at least in this translation. Is it meant to be ambiguous? Does looking at a statue, an image, an εἰδωλον or simulacra of the god, allow one to "see" that god in one's mind?

No answers, just posing a question I never thought of before reading this selection from Long & Sedley.

PS:

I ran part of that Latin through Google Translate (I know, not the greatest option!!), and got this:

...and you will not approach the temples of the gods with a calm heart, nor will you be able to receive these images of the divine form in the minds of men, from the body which is a holy image.

That last part (underlined) sounds to me like the the images are coming from the temples and the images are coming from whatever is in the temples.

I found this line of thinking intriguing, maybe simply because its novel to me. But maybe that's one reason Epicurus was able to enthusiastically advocating taking part in the regular worship of the Greek gods. It was the statues of the gods, the images in the temple as well as seeing the statues themselves that gave the Epicurean access to an image in the mind of a literally

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2436-new-sedley-chapter-on-ancient-greek-atheism/?postID=17506#post17506>

larger-than-life, blessed, incorruptible being to which the Epicurean could aspire. Hmm...Food for thought for me at least.