

Scientism, Atheism, And The Admissibility Of Spiritual Experience

Post by “Pacatus” of April 12, 2023 at 2:56 PM

I was recently thinking of the debates on [Epicurean gods](#) (whether real or archetypes of some sort - e.g. Don -v- Cassius?). I thought it best to read back through some earlier threads, so I can avoid just repeating.

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I have always been in the idealist camp. But I am trying to flesh out in my own mind the possibility of a naturalist realism that does not essentially “remove” the gods to distant, inaccessible *intermundia* in such a way as to make “theistic” realism - in practical terms - indistinguishable from an idealist view.

A **first** question might be: If there is no communication (no information passed) between/among various *mundi* (including their interstices), how can one have a proleptic intuition of their existence? (I want to note that I agree with Elayne’s affirmation of imagination: can that also be, in terms of brain function, related in some way to prolepsis? I am reading, in my piecemeal way, a scientific treatise on imagination that seems to support the possibility.*)

Second: If the gods are beings of nature, part of nature, why should their natural characteristics not be perceivable (again, perhaps *proleptically*) in nature as we perceive it - i.e., also in our world. [I am not thinking of an animist view, such as “The tree - or the wind, or the sun, whatever - is a god; or inhabited by some god-being.]

Third: If one grants the possibility raised in the second question, then it seems reasonable to say that we - in some way - relate to the divine when we relate to nature around us. This need not entail the kind of transactional reciprocity that Epicurus rejected.

Fourth: If, e.g. using our imagination, we can assign archetypal personalistic features to an idealized divinity (e.g. Lucretius with Venus, under the idealistic view), why should that be beyond the pale in the context of a thoroughly naturalized theistic realism? In that sense, it would seem to be a useful way of relating - according to the nature of our own minds - to a *proleptically* apprehended reality. It would also support (non-transactional) Epicurean piety and prayer, without any implied pretense of putting imaginary flesh on a projected abstraction - which I seem to recall was an accusation levelled at Epicurus by Stoics and Skeptics (Cicero?).

At bottom, it would mean imaging (or borrowing from ancient imagery) a naturalized real divine nature (*proleptically* apprehended) according to our individual proclivities, in order to enhance our ability to relate.

Note: I realize I am using the concept of “naturized real divinity” in a very general – itself somewhat abstract sense. That is something that might be sensed, but difficult to relate to. Hence the need for personal, *imaginal*** renderings (e.g. Zeus, Apollo, Athena).

A (very) rough analogy might be that Hinduism – with its 33 million gods – in which followers are encouraged to choose their own *Ishtadevata* (preferred god), which might not be any of the major god-figures (such as Vishnu, Krishna, Parvati, Lakshmi, etc.).

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* Jim Davies, *Imagination: The Science of Your Mind’s Greatest Power*.

** I am using the word “imaginal” here roughly in the sense of Henry Corbin (who coined the term): an aspect of reality that can only be grasped by the imagination – which, again, as I see it, could relate to *prolepsis*.