

Pros and Cons Of Considering Epicurean Philosophy To Be A "Religion"

Post by "Peter Konstans" of March 21, 2024 at 9:31 AM

As Epicureans we agree that the gods are fully material beings (not an ultra-fine essence or 'spirit') and that they are created and sustained by natural processes. It is reasonable to assume that the gods are not passive entities like cogs in a machine but free and able to interact with their environment or with each other in way that ensures their body doesn't decay. Certainly this view fits the notion of their blessedness better than if we were to assume that they are completely passive.

However we can't assume that the gods are engaged in a struggle to 'feed' and preserve their bodies similar to that of biological beings. This would imply that they are not blessed but live in a state of at least partial insecurity. The idea that instead of dealing with issues of survival the gods engage in care-free creative activity (like creating works of art) and then in contemplation as a means of 'resting' from creative activity fits the image of blessedness better. Maybe the gods even have a blessed 'end' where they reach a stage of existence so high that they merge with God. Again, this doesn't by itself violate the notion of blessedness.

'Supernatural' traditionally implies superiority in hierarchial terms, like the ability of a god to put natural things in order and provide for the needs of nature and people as if he were a governor and law-maker. In other words it emphasizes the power or 'imperium' god has over creation. By using the word 'divine' I wanted to frame godly superiority in purely ontological terms: the gods are superior to us because they enjoy a more secure and blissful existence than we do, not because they are more 'powerful'.

The notion that reality has a divine foundation means theism. It means that divine beings in some form exist, that the universe is in some form a divine expression and that the whole of reality emanates in some way from ontologically superior planes. I don't agree that this whole theistic notion by itself necessarily contradicts the eternity of the world, the eternity of particles, or the ability of nature to manage its course independently of divine oversight and guidance by means of natural laws.

Religions are false and harmful not because they accept the reality of a divine sphere (regardless of how they define this sphere) but because of their completely false notions about the divine.