

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

Post by "Don" of March 22, 2024 at 11:07 PM

First, discussions of the gods strike me as akin to "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?" There's never going to be a right answer. However, I readily admit that Epicurus and the Epicurean school placed profound and primary importance on a right understanding of the gods and our relationship to them. It's first in the letter to Menoikeus, first in [Principal Doctrines](#), first in the Tetracharmos, hinted at in Book 1 (1.44-9) of Lucretius and mentioned in several places thereafter.

But what is that profound and primary importance. From my perspective:

1. The gods did not create nor do they sustain the universe as a whole or our cosmos (world-system).
2. The gods take no notice of our existence.
3. We have no reason to fear their wrath nor to expect any favors from them.
4. The gods are "μακάριον (makarion)" and "ἄφθαρτον (aphtharton)"
 1. μακάριον = "blessed, fortunate, wealthy, 'well-off.'" Possibly having something to do with being wealthy, either literally or figuratively.
 2. ἄφθαρτον = ἄ + φθαρτον = α- "not" + φθαρτον "destructible, perishable."
 3. There are numerous places where mortals are called μακάριον. We can be "blessed" but can we be ἄφθαρτον. I would say, in some ways, yes. If we understand the nature of pleasure, we edge over so slightly closer to being ἄφθαρτον. We're mortal and will always BE mortal. And so we can never BE a god, but if we "meditate on these things" that ingrain in us a visceral understanding of pleasure, the stimulative and the calm pleasures, we can find pleasure in unexpected places within ourselves.
5. The gods lead an effortless life, free from all exertion and pain and troubles, totally imbued with pleasure.
 1. That's why I disagree with [Cassius](#) 's assertion that "the gods require some form of activity to maintain their deathlessness would likely be a significant part of Epicurean theology." I think that is diametrically opposed to Epicurean "theology." The whole point of being a god is to live in blissful pleasure constantly with no intrusion of pain, want, trouble, exertion, etc.

All that said, I'm still not sold on the idea that Epicurus insisted that the gods exist as "animals." I'm going to address that in the next post to make it easier for everyone to react to the above statements. And I'm sure there will be reactions.