

Give Us an Example of God!

Post by “Eikadistes” of August 29, 2024 at 3:53 PM

[Quote from Novem](#)

Naturalistic deism?

I hesitate to apply "deism" to Epicurean theology because of the connotation of a creator. The deities in our case are products of nature, never masters. *Though*, "deism" does shoot closer to the mark when trying to convey a sense of distance between a worshipper and the object of their worship. Using contemporary jargon, I think Epicurean theology is compatible with terms like "*polytheism*" and "*henotheism*" (worship of a divine nature manifest as multiple deities), as well as, perhaps "*kathenotheism*" or "*monolatry*" (worship of one deity at a time), or maybe even "*inclusive monotheism*", depending on the context in which Zeus might be invoked.

Epicurus wrote about numerous (*technically* "infinite") individual deities (which qualifies the "poly-" part), and each of those deities shared the same divine nature (which might, *arguably*, justify adding the nuance of "mono-"). Also, we have evidence of ancient Epicureans who were both recognized pan-Hellenically as "Philosophers" and also as local priests; they would have made sacrifices or expressed piety to local deities while maintaining atomism. So, ancient Epicurean philosophy would have been seen as being compatible with Hellenic polytheism, so long as followers reject the Homeric interpretations of gods as being troublesome.

We often return to this point: there is a struggle in trying to define organic expressions of piety while employing vocabulary that has been trademarked by "Big Religion".

I think that part of this inquiry points back to Epicurus' exhortation to Menoikeus to maintain a consistent theology. The critique Epicurus made against the beliefs of the Athenian masses is just poignant and resonant as it is today: *Why would and/or how could a divine being prescribe/facilitate/instigate harm?* I think it is safe to say that the proposition by some that mass shootings (among other grotesque examples, like the holocaust, or sexual abuse of children) are "part of God's plan" is measurably disturbing (in that it produces anxiety). A pre-modern analogue to this was the inability by most people to provide a confident explanation for atmospheric electrical discharge. The prescription for either is theological consistency.

At the end of the day, I think part of my feeling that some of these words are limited is a point cannot be made more digestible with a proverbial spoonful of sugar because it is one of the fundamental spiritual practices we have, in reciting the definitions of key concepts: if one is willing to use the term "god" in the first place, one must admit that "god" is perfect. The "god of rock" strums the best guitar solos, the "god of pop" is an peerless performer, the "Lord of the Dance" would never trip over their own feet, the "Great One" has the best statistics in the NHL,

so a "god" of humans would never condemn humanity, and the "god" of living beings would not threaten lives, and the "divine nature", itself, cannot be responsible for harm.

While I struggle with the idea of piety, *personally*, **this** is where I find it to be useful, not necessarily in constructing a positive image of god in my mind, but in deconstructing incoherent assumptions that are largely informed by either unexamined myths or intentional propaganda.

That was a bit of a tangent; I think really just meant to answer with, "**atomistic polytheism**".