

Article: "Extraterrestrial Life May Look Nothing Like Life On Earth..." (and for our purposes, applying the article to "gods")

Post by "Cassius" of December 13, 2024 at 8:45 PM

[Quote from TauPhi](#)

I am responding to your parallel of looking for extraterrestrial life to looking for [Epicurean gods](#). I am talking about active, physical pursuit of finding life (and gods) in the universe, not about an abstract deliberation on their existence or non-existence.

We definitely disagree on that. People in the past who were not able to go to the stars were limited in their knowledge, but had no need for regret about it, because they could not. People in the future can go to the stars and the Epicurean theories of life on other worlds and even divinity will have even more practical meaning than it does today. And the very thought that we should restrict ourselves from exploring space and learning more about the universe is antithetical to Epicurus' emphasis on studying nature as the best way to live happily. The best way to learn more about nature and our place in it will be to go to the stars. Not everyone will want to or be able to do that, but the idea of arguing against the desirability of doing so - for those who wish to - would be against the positive and even combative spirit of the ancient Epicureans.

[Quote from TauPhi](#)

And again I have to disagree with this, taking the Epicurean perspective into consideration. It doesn't matter how much progress we make. Even if we have technology to be everywhere at the same time in the universe, [Epicurean gods](#) are off limit to humans. This is non-negotiable. Otherwise, the idea of such gods collapses entirely and Epicurus is proven dead wrong in this area of his philosophy.

Again, we disagree. The texts are not clear that they are by nature non-sensible to us for all time, only that they are in the intermundia and/or for whatever reason they are not something we sense EXCEPT through prolepsis, and Epicurus is labeling that as "clear." So we disagree on this aspect -- totally - in taking it to the conclusion that any other interpretation would "collapse" the philosophy.

You're going further even than the "idealists" would go in stating that it would be "impossible" to gain additional knowledge about divinity.

[Quote from TauPhi](#)

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4183-article-extraterrestrial-life-may-look-nothing-like-life-on-earth-and-for-our-pu/?postID=33328#post33328>

The first part is about non-gods. The second part is about gods. They don't mix.

Again, I think we're just in fundamental disagreement here because you are maintaining that it is inherently impossible to gain additional knowledge in the future (after space travel) than we have today, and I think that's a fundamentally flawed perspective. We'll learn much more in the future about everything as we travel out into space, including what forms life may take in which it lives happily and imperishably.

This discussion is exactly what I thought might occur and I am glad to have the opportunity to explore it.

The biggest hurdle in Epicurean philosophy is to take seriously that Epicurus was using important words in different ways than the majority use them.

Pleasure IS the absence of pain literally and fully in Epicurean philosophy, because the feelings are defined to be one of two - either pleasure or pain, with no middle or third option. But most people are like Cicero, and that choice of wording just goes past them like water off a duck's back. Like Cicero, they insist on equating pleasure with sensual stimulation *alone*, and they refuse to include within pleasure other positive experiences of life that don't include sensory stimulation, so they have to get that definition out of their minds if they are going to understand Epicurus' position better than Cicero did.

The same thing is going on with gods. I am not going to assert why any one individual thinks the way they do, but I *will* assert that most every living being on the earth today has been conditioned to think that "gods" are supernatural, omniscient, omnipotent, and all the other baggage that goes along with monotheism.

Epicurus was clearly breaking from that and saying that should define godhood as ONLY being happy and imperishable. That's why he could talk about being gods among men and not seem ridiculous, because he didn't for a minute entertain that there is anything supernatural about being a god. Being "imperishable" is somewhat allegorical, but even there there is allegory in surrounding yourself with "immortal" things like friendship.

It's possible Tau Phi that you have a unique perspective that makes you impervious to concerns about divinity, and again if that is so I applaud you for it. But you are in a small minority of people on earth if you are, and it was Epicurus' view that it was not sufficient to say "supernatural gods do not exist."

His direction clearly seems to be, "Supernatural gods do not exist, but the idea of "divinity" is not crazy at all, and there is good reason that people think about it." There's lots and lots of speculation that can be had about images and prolepsis and "why" Epicurus thought that people have legitimate concerns about divinity, and that's the kind of thing that this forum is setup to do -- to explore what Epicurus taught and then apply it as productively as possible. This is not one of those fringe areas of physics that is easy to admit that modern science has

changed. This is a core area of human philosophy and psychology which is going to be with us as long as we are human.

And to repeat, even the "idealists" who reject the view that Epicurus thought his gods really existed appear to me to be essentially in agreement with how important a question this is. Having a proper perspective on divinity is a lot more than saying negatively "supernatural gods don't exist." It's an essential part of the picture to understand where the issue comes from and to have a positive position that relates to where we want to go in living as close to happily and imperishably as we can.