

# Episode 336 - EATAQ18 - A Coherent Whole Or An Arbitrary Mess - The Necessity of The Study of Nature and Knowledge In Addition To Ethics

Post by “Cassius” of May 31, 2026 at 9:55 AM

Notes for today: On Natue of the Gods Book 1

15 " 'Yes, but Epicurus actually wrote books about holiness<sup>43</sup> and piety.' But what is the language of these books? Such that you think you are listening to a Coruncanus or a Scaevola, high priests, not to the man who destroyed the very foundations of religion, and overthrew — not by main force like Xerxes, but by argument — the temples and the altars of the immortal gods. Why, what reason have you for maintaining that men owe worship to the gods, if the gods not only pay no respect to men,<sup>44</sup> but care for nothing and do nothing at all? 116 'But deity possesses an excellence and pre-eminence which must of its own nature attract the worship of the wise.' Now how can there be any excellence in a being so p<sup>113</sup> engrossed in the delights of his own pleasure that he always has been, is, and will continue to be entirely idle and inactive? Furthermore how can you owe piety to a person who has bestowed nothing upon you? or how can you owe anything at all to one who has done you no service? Piety is justice towards the gods; but how can any claims of justice exist between us and them, if god and man have nothing in common? Holiness is the science of divine worship; but I fail to see why the gods should be worshipped if we neither have received nor hope to receive benefit from them. 42 117 On the other hand what reason is there for adoring the gods on the ground of our admiration for the divine nature, if we cannot see that that nature possesses any special excellence?

One of the clearest statements comes in *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.51–52, where Velleius explains that the gods are perfectly happy and immortal and therefore undertake no labor, administration, or governance of the world. The [Epicurean gods](#):

## Quote

are not burdened with any occupation,  
have no business to perform,  
enjoy their own wisdom and virtue,  
and live in complete happiness.

Cotta then repeatedly ridicules this position. In 1.93–124 he argues that the [Epicurean gods](#) are practically useless because they neither create the world, govern it, care for mankind, punish the wicked, nor reward the good.

One of Cicero's most famous formulations occurs in *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.121, where Cotta essentially asks what sort of deity can be imagined that:

Quote

does nothing, undertakes nothing, cares about nothing.

The Latin often quoted is:

Quote

*nihil agit, nihil molitur, nulla re occupatur*

("does nothing, undertakes nothing, is occupied with nothing").

This is probably the passage most often cited when people say that Cicero accused the Epicureans of believing that the gods "do nothing."

There are also related criticisms in *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.115–124, where Cotta argues that a god who neither acts nor governs is little different from a decorative figure.