

Epicurus, gods and God

Post by "Cassius" of October 15, 2019 at 6:02 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

, apologize if I've offended anyone,

You certainly have not! You're going to have to try pretty hard to be "offensive" with this group, as we should always take things in good humor whenever possible!

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

it's challenging to adopt a belief in gods.

You don't need me to say this, but of course this isn't a belief in "gods" in the standard sense of that term at all - as you know.

As I see it even if you apply everything that Epicurus said literally, you are still talking about nothing more than the kind of reasonable speculations about alien life that you would find in most any Star Trek episode. It might even be better to talk about "divinity" as the subject matter rather than gods, because as I gather the drift, it really amounts to a discussion of "what would perfection look like in the real universe that we live in?" - Then applying those thoughts to the examples of life that we've come into contact with here on Earth to come up with reasonable speculation about how life forms that have mastered deathlessness would act anywhere in the universe.

Which I admit kind of frustrates me in some cases, as it appears that it can be difficult for some people to take the Epicureans at their word, and strip away all the omnipotence, omniscience, and universe-creating supernatural nonsense that religion insists on adding. Some people INSIST on using the standard definitions of gods, and so they insist that Epicurean explanation of "the gods" makes no sense and is unconvincing -- which indeed it WOULD be if you insist on clinging to the standard definitions of gods!

Godfrey I don't know how much additional reading you plan to do, but your discussion here has reminded me of what I think is an important supplement: Philodemus' "On Methods of Inference" is devoted to the topic of how to make inferences when the data is not as clear as we would like, and when we should treat those inferences as valid or insufficient.

If you get interested in that part I highly recommend [this version at Archive.org by De Lacy](#). I do not recall that the part that survives addresses the gods at all, but it is some very interesting material about logic and the differences between Epicurus' approach and the Stoics and others.

I do recall that it does have some specific examples of how we should reason about the way things are in countries that we have never visited, which is pretty obviously analogous to places in the universe that we have never visited. I have learned a lot by reading the Appendix in which De Lacy explains the context of all this, especially as to how even Aristotle had not broken entirely free of Platonism, so even if you don't get a chance to read the main text, I think you would find the Appendix is very worthwhile - especially parts 4-6.

in fact our discussion about this reminds me of the more general point that the reason I like to talk about this subject of the gods is not so much due to "the gods" at all -- but that this is, I think, an excellent test of whether someone sees how dramatically Epicurus departed from the Greek norm in developing his standard of truth. He tears away from faith in Logic and invests it in deductive reasoning based firmly in the senses, and that's the way of course he "proves" the existence of atoms. It seems to me that his position on "the gods" is just a small extension (maybe not an extension at all) of his method of reasoning about the atoms, applied to the stars and man's place in the universe.