

New Sedley Chapter On Ancient Greek Atheism

Post by “Don” of March 19, 2022 at 12:20 AM



[Atheism: From the Pre-Socratics to the Hellenistic Age](#)

Atheism: From the Pre-Socratics to the Hellenistic Age

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Epicurus/Epicurean section but also Carneades, which I believe DeWitt mentioned in relation to the *sorites* logical argument.

Note: I'm still in the idealist camp when it comes to the gods. Just sayin'.

Post by “Kalosyni” of March 19, 2022 at 11:25 AM

The section on page 7 - "Epicurus: a Crypto-atheist?" Is highly informative and illuminating.

Here is a quote from Sedley's paper:

Quote

Even according to the alternative, realist interpretation, Epicurus sides with atheism to the extent that he denies all divine intervention in the running of the world, thus claiming to liberate his followers from the fear of divine wrath. But on the idealist

(p. 147) interpretation his position is one that in most theological contexts would be called fully atheistic, and indeed was so called by Epicurus' own critics. Why, if so, would he not declare his atheism openly? Part of the answer may be that Epicurean communities, wherever they sprang up, relied on toleration from the local authorities,

and a reputation for atheism, with its implied rejection of civic cults, would have hampered that objective. But in any case, Epicurus on moral grounds sincerely recommended participation in religious cults as a proper expression of respect for ideal beings, a stance which would have sat very oddly with an outright assertion that these beings do not actually exist.

Post by “Cassius” of March 19, 2022 at 3:10 PM

Yep that's another "practical" argument - which reminds me why I reject it, because it is not compatible with the strict candor that I believe Epicurus displays in everything. That's why I remain firmly in the camp that he said what he meant and meant what he said - which is a better way than saying "realist." Because it's really a matter of whether Epicurus was being truthful or a Platonic noble liar, and I'll never admit the latter.

Post by “Don” of March 19, 2022 at 3:58 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

he said what he meant and meant what he said

What did Epicurus actually say? btw, That's meant to be neither combative nor rhetorical. What are the extant remains of what Epicurus had to say about the gods and our relationship to them? It seems to me both the "realists" and "idealists" can make a case. Personally, I find it hard to believe that Epicurus would believe in over-sized anthropomorphic aliens existing somehow between universes/world-systems. I think he was more sophisticated in his theological leanings than that and had to work within the vocabulary of his time to convey his understanding and that of his school. He said clearly "There are gods" but what "he meant" by that, I believe, is still an open question.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

it's really a matter of whether Epicurus was being truthful or a Platonic noble liar,

I don't accept your premise in that statement. That's a false dichotomy. Or, at best, those two positions don't sit on the same spectrum.

We've all had these go-arounds on the nature of the gods etc. ad infinitum (or is it ad nauseum?)... but there has to be a reason why they keep bobbing to the service.

Post by “Eikadistes” of March 19, 2022 at 5:24 PM

Quote

"The evidence is very clear that in the Epicurean universe gods do exist, and that they are indeed made of atoms. However, when it is asked what this mode of atomic existence amounts to, interpreters divide into two broad parties, the realists and the idealists, with the latter interpretation in effect making Epicurus an atheist. [...] Even according to the alternative, realist interpretation, Epicurus sides with atheism to the extent that he denies all divine intervention in the running of the world, thus claiming to liberate his followers from the fear of divine wrath."

Whenever I see this discussion, it usually seems to following the above structure, with the author admitting, first and foremost, that Epicurus clearly believed in gods and enthusiastically attended religious celebrations. The notion that he qualifies as a contemporary atheist because his theology is incompatible with Abrahamic faiths is anachronistic. It seems to me that Sedley is moving the rhetorical goal post throughout the essay to fit his conclusion.

Quote

But on the idealist (p. 147) interpretation his position is one that in most theological contexts would be called fully atheistic, and indeed was so called by Epicurus' own critics."

This is not true of some of the Cyrenaics. It is also untrue of Skeptics who seem to take agnostic position that portrays Epicurus as a dogmatic theist. Attempting to orient Epicurean theology within the tradition of atheism (for me) is like trying to frame American Democrats as Communists. Many critics of the Democratic Party would be comfortable entertaining this proposition, with the notable exception of *actual* Communists, who would take offense to the suggestion that centrists and liberals are in any way sympathetic to Marxist-Leninism.

If this charges of atheism had merit, I would expect at least one treatise by Philodemus called *Against Piety*, or a polemic by Metrodorus called *Against the Gods*. Instead, we have the exact opposite.

Post by “Cassius” of March 19, 2022 at 5:39 PM

I think this is why the issue persistently bobbles up:

Quote

Personally, I find it hard to believe that Epicurus would believe in over-sized anthropomorphic aliens existing somehow between universes/world-systems. I think he was more sophisticated in his theological leanings than that and had to work within the vocabulary of his time to convey his understanding and that of his school.

Speaking for myself, I personally don't find the alien physical god hypothesis at all unsophisticated. It's a lot easier for me to believe that he left the physical details loose, given our inability to observe them directly, than that he completely obscured what his opinion really was.

I think the dividing line on who accepts which premise arises from that issue - who finds the physics hard to square with modern science and rejects it total, vs who is willing to read it liberally and ground the issue only in that the gods have a material basis that we don't know the details about.

Post by “Godfrey” of March 19, 2022 at 8:03 PM

With the caveat that I haven't read it yet, this paper looks like it could give some context to the discussion. It doesn't look like it mentions Epicurus, but it discusses his predecessors.

Post by “Don” of March 19, 2022 at 9:32 PM

[Quote from Nate](#)

If this charges of atheism had merit, I would expect at least one treatise by Philodemus called Against Piety, or a polemic by Metrodorus called Against the Gods. Instead, we

have the exact opposite

Your political analogy makes a lot of sense, but the matter of merit is beside the point. Many attackers neither strive to exhibit merit nor even take it into consideration. Critics see an opening, stretch a pebble of truth into a whole specious mountain, and go ad hominem on their targets. The charges of impiety and atheism were leveled against the Epicurean school. Philodemus documents it and addresses it directly in *On Piety*. The reason Philodemus didn't write *Against Piety* is because he felt that it was only the Epicureans who were practicing true piety, the only ones who had the correct perspective on the divine. Everybody else was impious. I would make the same case for Metrodorus. Epicureans could take part in the rituals and festivals with a clear conscience because internally they were practicing *true* piety and *knew* they had nothing to fear from the gods.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

he left the physical details loose

I'm not sure if that's the case or not, and the physical details seem inextricably linked to their nature. I don't have Long and Sedley *The Hellenistic Philosophers* available right now, but I'd be interested to see how much detail there is. If I remember, Epicurus talks about the gods' anthropomorphic shape, but I've also seen scholars say that's because the gods are idealized humans, what humans may aspire to. So one has to "see" them in your mind's eye as human-shaped to be able to gain inspiration from them. But Diogenes Laertius directly contrasted the Epicureans' idea of the happiness of the gods with the happiness that humans can experience:

Two sorts of happiness can be conceived, the one the highest possible, such as the gods enjoy, which cannot be augmented, the other admitting addition and subtraction of pleasures.

I also keep coming back to the emphasis and importance Epicurus placed on a correct understanding of the gods. It's first in the letter to Menoikeus. It's the first Principle Doctrine. I maintain it behoves us to examine and come to grips with this because Epicurus found this to be a foundational matter in his philosophy.

Post by "Don" of March 19, 2022 at 11:03 PM

btw... I'm assuming this topic may just come up during the 20th celebration tomorrow. 😊 I'll do my best to join in. Happy 20th Eve!

Post by “Don” of March 20, 2022 at 12:26 AM

I thought it might be helpful to link to [my notes from Philodemus's On Piety](#) (edited/translated by Dr. Dirk Obbink).

I also just (re-)found P.Oxyrhynchus 215 as possibly being written by Epicurus or, at the very least, an Epicurean philosopher: <https://archive.org/details/oxyrhy...up?view=theater>

I found this translation on p. 32 interesting emphasis added):

' Nor, indeed, even when this further statement is made by the ordinary man, •' I fear all the gods and worship them, and to them I wish to make every sacrifice and offering.' It may perhaps imply more taste on his part than the average, nevertheless by this formula he has not yet reached the trustworthy principle of religion. But do you, sir, consider that the most blessed state lies in the formation of a just conception concerning the best thing that we can possibly imagine to exist ; and reverence and worship this idea.' [και θαυμαζε ταυτην την διαληψιν και σεβου']

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, Θθ , θαρσα^λ-εότης , θαυμ-άζω \(tufts.edu\)](#)

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, δ , διαλα κέω , διάληψις \(tufts.edu\)](#)

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, Σ ς, , Σεβάστ-ιος , σέβομαι \(tufts.edu\)](#)

Post by “Godfrey” of March 20, 2022 at 7:16 PM

I've had a chance to read the paper I attached to post #7. Here are some quotes highlighted from the paper that, to me, give a clearer picture of the intersection of philosophy and religion prior to Epicurus and which would have informed Epicurus' practice:

The position of Plato and Socrates thus accords with the standard naturalistic interpretation of the pre-Socratics—that they believed the world functioned entirely according to natural laws. I agree with this interpretation, but I am nonetheless intrigued by the question of what the early Greek philosophers thought they were doing when they entered a temple to pray, sing hymns, or sacrifice. It is highly unlikely that the early Greek philosophers (before 450 BC) would have even entertained notions that we associate with atheism.

Regardless of whether Alcmaeon thought that the universe had been “consciously” created, as in the Timaeus, or is eternal and unique, as we find in Aristotle (and, on my reading, in the Plato’s arguments for the existence of God in Laws 10), neither option in any way suggests that the gods intervene in human affairs. Indeed, humans are an integral part of the nature of things. The fact that humans like the gods are endowed with consciousness suggests that there must be a telos. The gods must have represented the paradigms of virtue and goodness.

While it seems unequivocally clear that there was no room for the supernatural in Anaximenes’ natural philosophy, it seems equally clear that he saw humans as endowed with consciousness and cognition, which they have in common with the all-pervading cosmic divinity. However, since there is nothing in Anaximenes’ description of the celestial bodies that would suggest that they comprise some kind of model for humans to follow, as we saw in Alcmaeon, the question arises as to what divinities he had in mind as models to emulate and address in prayer. One possibility could be hidden in Hippolytus’ account of Anaximenes theory (DK13A7). Here he lists gods and divine things (theous kai theia) as also products or offspring of the originative living substance. These could be a concession to traditional religion or what the materialist Democritus, a century later, understood as images that appear to humans and sometimes speak to them (DK68B166; 175; 217). These are gods, who are givers of good and not evil, and who love only those who hate injustice (B175, 217). These theoi or theia could thus be inspirational models of virtue for human behaviour and wholly worthy of prayer.

There is no room for atheism, but neither is there a notion of intentionality or providence as we find in theism. Anaximander thus represents what I call one of the first secular theories of everything that is expressed in the form of a natural teleology. But this does not, of course, exclude a religious tendency, which could be thought of as the relation between humans and the cosmic order that he would have characterized as divine. I conjecture that Anaximander tried to understand the secrets of the universe, and at the same time he understood the laws of nature as indicative of caring, but non-interfering, gods who were by nature good. We gain a better insight through historia or secular investigation. I think there is evidence of this in his famous fragment (DK12B1) cited above, which can be interpreted as claiming that human society should model the cosmos, which functions according to rigorous laws exemplified in the seasons, night and day, and the regular movements of the celestial bodies (see Naddaf 2005, 86ff). Praying would be about using our reason, making wise decisions, taking responsibility for our actions, and being able to convince others to follow a similar path.

_Xenophanes was also the first of the early philosophers on record to advocate a “higher” form of religious practice—a way of prayer that goes beyond attempts to cajole favors from the gods (DK21B1) The context is how one should behave at a symposium. Xenophanes insists that a sound-minded man (euphronas andras) should first hymn the god (theon humein) with pious words and pure thoughts (euphêmois muthois kai katharosi logois, 1.14), and then after having poured a libation and prayed for the strength to be able to do what is just (speisantas de kai euxemenous ta dikaia dunasthai prêssein, 1.15), make his request. These include bringing

noble deeds to light and striving for aretê or virtue, and, in particular, moderation._

...the accent is on inspirational awareness, not supernatural intervention. With Heraclitus we have the first literary reference to the Delphic maxim “know thyself” (DK22B. 101, 116), and there are also a number of references in Heraclitus to self-knowledge (DK 22B101, 112, 113, 116), the unexamined life (B123), care of the self (B123), and the psuchê as the “true self” (B118, 77). Indeed, there is a considerable affinity with what we find in Socrates. Or better still, Socrates comes across as less of a maverick when we give Heraclitus his due._

Anaxagoras: “Blessed is he who has devoted his life to scientific research (tês historias): he will neither malign nor harm his fellow citizen, but observing the ageless order of immortal nature, will enquire from what source it was composed and in what way. Such men would never take part in shameful deeds” (fragment 910 Nauck). This fragment suggests that the order of nature is the standard of goodness. Indeed, its study (tês historias) will discourage humans from harming one another and doing unjust deeds. This idea seems to be at the core of most of the early Greek philosophers that we have passed in review, and constitutes in large part what can be considered as their religion, that is, living in harmony with nature or the cosmos as they understood it to function.

Socrates didn’t believe in the traditional gods to in the popular sense, for the gods for Socrates were by nature good and perfect, true paradigms of virtue, and thus true models to follow...

It’s unclear when an open hostility toward natural philosophy and thus the religion of the early Greek philosophers originated in Periclean Athens. It is often connected with the Decree of Diopieithes, a seer, around 432. Plutarch, Life of Pericles (32), which is our only source of the Decree, says it attacked “those who fail to respect (nomizein) things divine (ta theia) or teach new doctrines about the heavens.” Its object seemed to be, in particular, the natural philosopher Anaxagoras and ultimately his friend and benefactor Pericles.

Critias of Athens (c. 460–403) claimed that the gods were invented by a clever man in order to frighten those who were surreptitiously evil whether in words or deeds.

Democritus of Abdera, the atomist (c. 460–360), connected the origin of gods with the fear of celestial phenomena (DK68A75, B30), but also considered them living, intelligent, material beings (and thus part of the objective world) that, as images or eidola, are somehow capable of foretelling the future by communicating with humans (68B166). These are all brilliant hypotheses, and in the case of Democritus an acknowledgement that the phenomena of the divine cannot be explained away even for someone for whom in the beginning there were only atoms and the void.

_The religious event required the participation of the entire polis when appealing to god’s grace. It was unlikely that any philosophers missed the occasion for obvious reasons, but they could remind their fellow citizens of the hubris of making a request of a god that was not backed up with a worthy motive. The Seven Sages were after all at the source of the famous

Delphic maxims. And the new “masters of truth” competed opening with the iconic poets._

...in this paper I have attempted to show that all the early Greek philosophers that we passed in review still saw the cosmological order as a model for humans endowed with nous or reason to follow, even if there was no divine intention in the Platonic sense behind it.

Post by “Pacatus” of March 22, 2022 at 4:10 PM

I’ve had to be gone awhile, and will mostly just need to hang out for now and absorb the wisdom of others.

But this recurring “argument” over Epicurus’ “real” understanding of gods struck a chord that made me want to think it out by writing. I think the question is simply unnecessary for following a living Via Epicurea. Though, as scholarly debate it may have some merit, even there it is likely to never be settled.

I tend to believe that all discourse is inescapably interpretive, viz: “I know you believe you understand what you think I said, but you should be aware that what you heard is not what I meant.”

Interpreting written discourse is more fraught when one is unable to enter into actual extended conversation and query. Also (outside of pure mathematics and deductive logic, perhaps) all human communication ought to be taken (to my mind) as imperfect: subject to all sorts of vagaries inherent in the human condition. [Well, certain supernaturalist religions might assert the perfection of certain utterances and texts; but I don’t.]

Cassius once (or more than once) said something to the effect that (my words, not his) there are no litmus tests here for who is or is not a “True Epicurean (TM).” I likely hold some “neo-Epicurean,” as opposed classical Epicurean, beliefs; and am happy to. I do not want to impose them here, and hope that I am not. If I am, I hope you will correct and forgive.

Post by “Cassius” of March 22, 2022 at 5:28 PM

A very constructive post Pacatus and it is good to have you back again!

I recall one of DeWitt's comments being to the effect that Epicurean philosophy faded away when the arguments around it faded away, so perhaps even in the most unbridgeable of

disagreements (which this one is not, by any stretch, unbridgeable) we gain from the energy that is generated.

If it prompted you to reappear and post then I am glad even if we aren't in the most complete possible agreement!

Post by “Pacatus” of March 22, 2022 at 5:53 PM

Thanks, Cassius! One of the things that makes this site unique is that you have created (and sustain) an environment -- a virtual Garden? -- where people can feel safe "even if we aren't in the most complete possible agreement." That's special.

Post by “Cassius” of March 22, 2022 at 7:45 PM

I do my best Pacatus - thank you for the kind words.

Lest anyone think, however, that I am in danger of retiring the helmet, 😊 I should probably clarify and say this:

I've never felt that the "gods" issue is the hill to die on (so to speak) in working toward a reconstituted Epicurean philosophic school. As long as everyone understands that there are no supernatural gods out there creating universes and meddling in human life, that's the great majority of the issue right there. Further, most people don't seem to have a problem in accepting the Epicurean view that there is other life in the universe besides ours, some of which is likely to be higher and some lower than us. That's most of the rest of the way to what Epicurus pretty clearly taught, and whatever is left for dispute doesn't really end up in much different a place whether the "gods" we're talking about literally exist or not.

Unfortunately, I don't expect to ever put the helmet permanently in retirement, because I do think that there will always remain "hills to die on" for the EpicureanFriends project. Those hills are primarily in the lands that border "Stoicism," and in the tendency that some have to want to blend Epicurus with semi-mystical views that are close to Stoicism or even Buddhism. Even in mentioning Stoicism and Buddhism, I know that many of us have been through one or both of those schools, so even those of us who are now the most "fundamentalist" should know from experience that it will always be necessary to be tolerant of people who need time to study and

reflect on the differences.

In the end though, we can expect (and this sounds like the discussion of Epicurus and Zeno in chapter seven of AFDIA that we discussed last Sunday) that in the future there will be calls to water down what we're doing here. There will always be a well-intentioned incentive to be more inclusive of those who want to maintain strong positions (Stoic and Buddhist are only two of many) that amount to rejections of core Epicurean views.

I hope to be around a long time to take care of those issues as they arise, but what I would remind everyone in the future is that the purpose of this forum is not to be a general philosophical forum for everyone regardless of viewpoint. There are many other and better places for that. The purpose of the EpicureanFriends forum is to provide a place where those who really are convinced of the prudence of the core Epicurean positions to work together for the continuance of the school. Because I think the core Epicurean view is correct, I see no conflict at all between the goals of continuing to follow Epicurus, the goal of the pursuit of the truth, and the goal of pursuing the best possible life.

But we know that given human nature there are always going to be disagreements about how to define and pursue those goals. We have to be prepared to respect the right and desire of others to go off in different directions, just as we need to work in a friendly but firm way to preserve the path that we've staked out here.

Post by “Don” of March 22, 2022 at 11:36 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I've never felt that the "gods" issue is the hill to die on (so to speak) in working toward a reconstituted Epicurean philosophic school

Agreed... But I still maintain we should understand *why* Epicurus placed such a high priority in having a correct understanding of the nature of the gods in the PDs, writing to Menoikeus, plus a book written on the topic, plus Philodemus's illustrations of his piety in On Piety, plus Diogenes Laertius's statement that "His piety towards the gods ... no words can describe." (DL X.10)

Plus we need to understand what his correct understanding was and possible applications of that for us today.

I believe a big part of Epicurean piety is knowing that the gods (regardless of their ultimate nature):

- do NOT concern themselves with humans
- do NOT bestow blessings or punishment
- - (although it appears "blessings" or benefit can accrue to the Epicurean "worshipper" of the gods... See below)
- do NOT have any part in the creation or maintenance of the cosmos
- enjoy the "highest possible" happiness (ευδαιμονία) that can be conceived, which cannot be augmented (literally, having no increase in intensity [tightening or slackening])
- can be "worshipped" (in the widest possible sense) within traditional/cultural rites and practices as long as the other characteristics above are adhered to.

Thoughts on that?

Post by "Cassius" of March 23, 2022 at 5:30 AM

I completely agree Don and I am sorry if I was unclear. We generally talk in terms of two possibilities as to whether the gods are "real" or not, and I can live with either one, but regardless of that in either case they DO serve the purposes you list, and I did not mean to imply that dispensing with those purposes is possible.

Post by "Don" of March 23, 2022 at 7:11 AM

Oh, sorry, [Cassius](#) . I didn't mean to imply that you did. I just wanted to lay out the basic similarities that either realists or idealists should be able to agree on. 🙌

Post by "Don" of March 23, 2022 at 7:36 AM

Oh, and second thought: I didn't mean to imply that Epicureans *had* to "worship within traditional/cultural rites and practices," but, taking Epicurus as our example, it's not out of the question for those thus inclined.

Post by “Matt” of March 23, 2022 at 10:33 AM

I think one of the biggest concerns I had with the gods discussion deals with sincerity. Epicurus would've needed, in whatever way, to believe that the gods (in whatever form) were “real” (in whatever sense atomic beings or images in the mind). If not, his opponents that claimed that he was purely avoiding a charge of impiety would be correct. I don't believe he was hiding a complete disbelief and fabricated a theological system to avoid being executed... like Socrates was, but rather he just adapted his system to what he knew of popular religion and the myths...and we ended up with atomic [epicurean gods](#).

I do hold that sincerity of belief is important to trusting the rest of a person's character. If perhaps Epicurus was acting in a manner that fit the description held by his opponents, that he was merely hiding a form of atheism while constructing a false theology that allowed for him to remain in good standing with the pious Greeks, then that would cause the rest of his system to be called into question in my opinion. That would be a very troubling situation. But I don't believe he did that.

Post by “Cassius” of March 23, 2022 at 10:52 AM

[Quote from Matt](#)

I do hold that sincerity of belief is important to trusting the rest of a person's character. If perhaps Epicurus was acting in a manner that fit the description held by his opponents, that he was merely hiding a form of atheism while constructing a false theology that allowed for him to remain in good standing with the pious Greeks, then that would cause the rest of his system to be called into question in my opinion. That would be a very troubling situation. But I don't believe he did that.

Yes that's my view almost exactly. Other philosophers were known to be atheist, and I have a very hard time believing that Epicurus could not himself have found a living situation somewhere - outside of Athens if necessary - where he could teach his views with complete honesty. That means that if he chose to stay in Athens for simple convenience or for the "good life" that it offered, at the expense of being honest with his students, he would be open to charges of the worst kind of hypocrisy. He wasn't hemmed in by some of the scientific views that we think hem us in today.

It appears to me that Epicurus thought that there was nothing at all contradictory to science about gods being made of a form of atoms that they could replenish, any more than that anything contradicted the view that life exists at other places throughout the universe. We don't have to accept the same viewpoint today if we think that there's some scientific fact that contradicts it, but there's no reason to impute modern concerns about the limits of life in the rest of the universe back in time to Epicurus.

A lot of this comes down to the issue of "philosophy" vs "science" and their relative roles, as we've discussed before here on the forum and if I recall maybe even in this thread. I don't think it's necessary to take sides, and I think they both can be reconciled, but I think what Epicurus was warning against in his day, and it still applies today, that it is very tempting for some people to take "science" and make speculative claims that can't be reconciled with sound "philosophy," and whenever that happens a lot of warning bells ought to go off in our minds.

Post by "Matt" of March 23, 2022 at 11:31 AM

A somewhat relevant observation I've made about people and sincerity of belief has recently occurred in the military involving beards. As a standard rule of thumb, men's grooming and appearance disallow any facial hair with the exception of a well maintained mustache. Beards are not allowed unless there is a medical reason for not being able to shave like pseudofolliculitis. But such waivers are rare. However now "religious exemption" has appeared on the scene...

For years certain religions such as the Indian Sikhs were barred from joining most military branches due to the need for a clean shaven face and cropped hair. Short of a professional job such as a Doctor, JAG or Chaplain, no Sikh could join for many, many years. Then overnight the "Norse Pagan" people started popping up, claiming that to truly practice their religion they must maintain a full beard. The Sikhs are of a ethnic and cultural tradition that extends back to the Middle Ages, while the "Norse Pagans" are a 20th and 21st century fabrication and reconstruction of historical beliefs that went extinct back in the early Middle Ages with the advent of Christianity. What I do know is that many people are now claiming to be "Norse Pagans" when ultimately they are atheists or agnostics that truly don't care, but are only claiming this (which is a huge administrative process) so they claim this religious classification. Now if someone TRULY believes that Odin, Thor and the Giants are real...then more power to you, enjoy. However...if you are doing this because you want to sport a beard. I question your sincerity in general and whether you take anything seriously.

Which brings me to the reason WHY we shave: Gas mask seals. To maintain a properly sealed gas mask, a man must have a clean shaven face to make a proper seal. If the seal fails,

chemical agents will seep in and disable or kill the wearer thereby putting themselves in danger...and everyone else. Just like the Greek phalanx we rely on our wingmen and battle buddies to be doing the right thing so we are working as a team to stay safe. So if someone goes down because of a beard, that may also put me in jeopardy.

Now I'm not going to exactly be happy if a pious Sikh is the cause of my demise because he couldn't get a seal on his mask...but I'm going to be DISGUSTED with the person who feigned religious belief and made this disaster possible. Thus there is a real world example of how sincerity of belief or disbelief can really effect the view people have of you.

Post by "Kalosyni" of March 24, 2022 at 12:34 PM

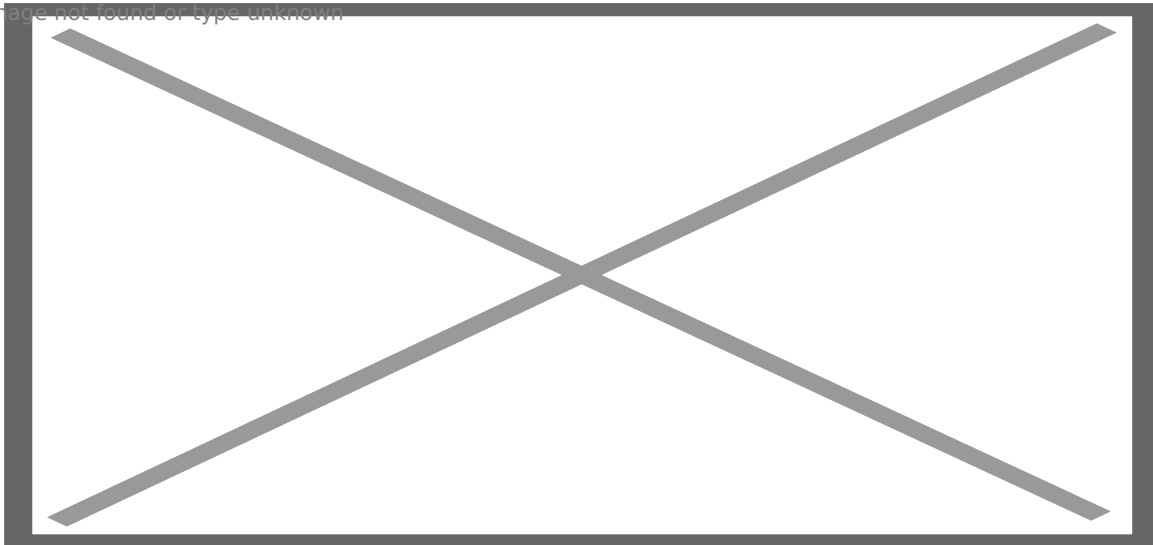
I hope to eventually get more of an understanding around Epicurus' ideas/beliefs about the gods. In the meantime I found this interesting article on impiety, but lots of Greek words (maybe [Don](#) might enjoy deciphering) and I have only read first few paragraphs of introduction.

Here is an excerpt:

Quote

Impiety is an offence, an ἀδικία - i.e., to put it crudely, a wrong that you might do and that is likely to be punished in some way.⁶ Imperative formulations used in preventive laws, such as ἀσεβῆς ἔστω, ἀσεβείτω and ἔνοχος ἔστω ἀσεβεία, categorize a given ἀδικία as an impiety, but also imply that from now on the culprit will be regarded as impious, and this status will legitimize the application of sanctions from other members of the community. In other words, ἀσεβῆς ἔστω, "let him be impious", should be understood as a shorter version of "let him be punished as one who is regarded as impious".⁷ Far from being a simple linguistic twist, the connection between committing an ἀσέβεια and being ἀσεβῆς has not insignificant consequences for how we should understand impiety and its implications in Greek society, as well as the Greek legal system in general.

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[Impiety in Epigraphic Evidence](#)

The concept of impiety (ἀσέβεια) in ancient Greek religion is complex. Firstly, definitions provided by ancient authors themselves point out, as potential...

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My idea right now is this: that it would not detract from my respect for Epicurus even if he was "not honest" in his piety -- and here is why: because the lying does not cause any harm or pain to any other person. But it seems we can't ever know whether he was "honest" or "dishonest".

Post by “Eikadistes” of March 24, 2022 at 1:22 PM

Truthfully, I've been somewhat perplexed that Epicurus supported public religious festivals with enthusiasm while simultaneously maintaining that (1) the prevailing beliefs of his time were false and (2) Idealistic beliefs are harmful. I guess what I want to know is this: in which public festivals, *specifically*, **did** Epicurus participate? Better yet, let me ask, what public festivals existed in Hellenistic Greece were compatible with Epicurean theology? Orphic mysteries and Dionysian rites involved intoxicants and mysticism, Apollonian festivals celebrated a generous and human-centric solar deity ... exactly what was there for Epicurus that was neither (1) a false belief shared with the masses, or (2) Idealism?

(... then again, *just thinking out loud*, I may **actually** understand this, because Christmas has always been one of my favorite celebrations, and Jesus stopped being a part of my Christmas the same year that Santa Claus did, so belief has never been an integral part of my celebration of the Mass of Christ, whom I believe in 0% ... then again, *then again*, my favorite Christmas traditions are medieval, Germanic additions, and I don't participate in any of the Jesus-related parts, so, I could easily forgive someone for arguing that I am not *really* celebrating Christmas "

the right way". Perhaps Epicurus took the best of the public gatherings while quietly rejecting the intellectual propositions of the priests?)

Post by "Eikadistes" of March 24, 2022 at 1:27 PM

Better yet, I acknowledge that my critical political opinions do not keep me from enjoying hot dogs, hamburgers, family, yard games, and beer on the Fourth of July. Those pleasures do not *need* to be justified by ideology to enjoy.

So, I think I get it (*given that I'm not just massively projecting my own bubble on Epicurus*).

Post by "Cassius" of March 24, 2022 at 2:41 PM

[Quote from Nate](#)

Perhaps Epicurus took the best of the public gatherings while quietly rejecting the intellectual propositions of the priests?)

I have to think that you are 100% right on this. Those sentences in Diogenes Laertius are far too slender for us to read into it that he wholesale embraced all sorts of religious mysteries just for the sake of a good time at their meetings. He was teaching that those views weren't just wrong, but impious, so you have to be right.

Post by "Don" of March 24, 2022 at 2:42 PM

Very good posts, @Nate . And I like where you ended up.

I'll have to go back and check my notes on Obbink's work on On Piety to see if I wrote down any mention of specific rites Epicurus took part in. Can't remember off the top of my head.

There's also the fact that the religious rites in ancient Athens included dramatic festivals and things we might not consider religious. I guess **similar** to your mention of Christmas and July

4.

[Cassius](#) , do I remember mention somewhere of Epicurus approving music but not dance or some such thing (other than than "I can't imagine the good without... pleasing movements, etc.")?

Post by “Cassius” of March 24, 2022 at 2:45 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

do I remember mention somewhere of Epicurus approving music but not dance or some such thing (other than than "I can't imagine the good without... pleasing movements, etc.")?

Hmmm at the moment I cannot confirm your memory there, and given the previous identification of the good by one of the earlier guys as "smooth motion" which seems to fit the atomism paradigm, I am thinking he probably didn't disapprove of dancing in any kind of general way -- probably the opposite in fact - and I don't recall any specific denunciation of it either. Maybe there's a passing reference in Lucretius to not liking aspects of some of the mystery cults which contained wild out-of-control dancing? But at the moment I can't even confirm that.

Post by “Don” of March 24, 2022 at 10:26 PM

[Quote from Nate](#)

I guess what I want to know is this: in which public festivals, specifically, did Epicurus participate? Better yet, let me ask, what public festivals existed in Hellenistic Greece were compatible with Epicurean theology?

Your question made me go back and look at my posted notes on On Piety. This post talks about those festivals:

Post

RE: Philodemus On Piety

The following are excerpts and notes from columns 27-36 of Obbink's Philodemus On Piety which outline the participation of Epicurus himself and the early Epicureans in religious festivals and other rites and practices. Obbink also shared more detailed notes in his book, so I may try and share some of those pages in later posts. For now, the material below has proved quite interesting...

Quoted in col. 27, On Piety: Epicurus, On Gods (Περὶ Θεῶν): as being both the greatest thing and that...



Don

December 25, 2020 at 10:05 PM

You can of course check out the link, but here are some excerpts:

Col. 28/9: Epicurus wrote to Phyrson during the archonship of Aristonymus (289/8 BCE) about Phyrson's countryman from Colophon, Theodotus, Epicurus says that he (Epicurus) shared in all the festivals... Epicurus celebrated the festival of the Choes and the urban mysteries and the other festivals at a meagre dinner, and that it was necessary for him (prob. Theodotus) to celebrate this feast of the Twentieth for distinguished revelers, while those in the house decorated it most piously ('ὀλως) and after making invitations to host a feast for all of them.

Notes

For festivals, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthesteria>

The Choes were part of this festival dedicated to Dionysus

The "urban mysteries" refer to the Attic Dionysia, either the Lenaea (in the month of Gamelion, Epicurus's birth month) or Lesser Mysteries during 20-6 Anthesteria, both in honor of Dionysus.

I find it interesting that the festivals mentioned were dedicated to Dionysus. It could just be coincidence that those are mentioned; or Athens had a lot of Dionysian festivals; or Epicurus had an affinity for Dionysian festivals or the god. No way to tell from what I've read so far.

Col. 29: Epicurus advised them to retain asservations made by means of these and similar expressions, and above all to preserve those made by Zeus himself (maintain the practice of swearing by Zeus by name νή Δία!)... Not merely "it must be so!"

Notes

So, Epicureans, feel free to pepper your writing and conversation with νή Δία! "By Zeus!"

Post by “Don” of March 25, 2022 at 9:04 AM

@Nate especially might be interested in seeing the papyrus transcription and images of On Piety:

[DCLP/Trismegistos 62400 = LDAB 3563](#)

Scroll down there for columns 28, 29.

Post by “Eikadistes” of March 25, 2022 at 12:07 PM

After researching a bit, some of the rituals and traditions surprised me. While I often think of Epicurus’ theism in terms of someone with a conservative mentality, social norms in ancient Greece make the word “conservative” unhelpful by comparison to my American eyes. Wine drunkenness seemed to have been a central feature, as did (possibly) public sexual intercourse, and a vibe that seems to me to be a mix between the *Day of the Dead* and *Carnival*.

I observe how readily non-Mexican and non-Irish Americans celebrate the non-civic, but totally fun *Cinco de Mayo* and *St. Patrick’s Days*, versus how the civic, but totally non-fun *Columbus Day* has little ritualistic value to supporters (except as a political symbol for contemporary cultural tensions). If the ancient Greeks were as smart as the owners of some of the theatres in which I have performed, I have to imagine that they were smart enough to get their audiences drunk (makes for a better show), and (what a coincidence), Greek religion was, *literally*, the origin of theatre.

In general, ancient Greek civic holidays seem to have been celebrations associated with sensual indulgence. I wonder if that’s why Epicurus was pro-religious celebration. He wasn’t exactly avoiding red meat for Lent, or fasting for Ramadan (nor were his gods). The festival (Khoës) the author names was fairly orgiastic. I am curious if Epicurus’ philosophical opponents looked at civic holidays with suspicion, and, instead, preferred more private, esoteric practices.

Post by “Don” of March 25, 2022 at 3:16 PM

I dug into the transcriptions in light of the summaries in those notes I pasted. Please remember my Greek is rudimentary at best. As a way to jump back in to my studies, I’ve just started [the](#)

[video series from the Center for Hellenic Studies](#). Don't have the book, so we'll see how it goes.

I defer to the translations in my notes (from Obbink), but it's nice to see names and phrases corroborated in the papyrus.

Anyway, here are some excerpts:

Column 28, lines 10-15: [ἐ\[ὕρ\]ίσ\]κεται](#) [πάσαις](#) [ταῖς](#) [πατρίοις](#) [έορταῖς](#) ((filler)) [καὶ](#) [θυσίαις](#) [κε\[χ\]τ\[*\] \[η-\]](#) μένος. "to all the traditional feasts and sacrifices"

[πατρίοις](#) patriois, related to patrimony, patriot, having to do with hereditary or what's been handed down from the forefathers.

[έορταῖς](#) feasts

[θυσίαις](#) sacrifices, burnt-offerings

Column 28, lines 15-21: ἐπ' Ἄρ[ιστ]ωνύμου μέγ γὰ[ρ] (For during the time of archon Aristomenos) Φύρσωνι (to Physon) περί τινος αὐτοῦ [πολείτου Θεοδότου](#) (fellow-citizen Theodotos) γράφων καὶ [τῶν έορτῶν](#) [φησι (he says)] [πασῶν](#) (of all the feasts)

Column 28, line 24/25: τὴν τω[ν] Χε[*]ῶν έορτὴν "the feast of Khoai"

Well, that was fun! 😊

Post by “Eikadistes” of March 25, 2022 at 4:47 PM

I found some hostility to the Athenian festivals from Epicurus' opponents.

Cynics saw the religious festivals as wasteful: “[Philodemus] claims that Epicurus himself took part in Athenian festivals and was even initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries. The major exceptions to this conventionalism were the Cynics, followers of Diogenes of Sinope on the north-east coast of Asia Minor (c. 400 to c. 325 BC). [...] He was reputed never to take part in religious rituals and to hold that there was nothing wrong with stealing from temples or committing anything else conventionally seen as sacrilegious.” (*Religions of the Ancient Greeks*, 136)

Plato thought that some of the festivals promoted false morality, glorified drunkenness, and generally celebrated vice: “Plato [...] proposes to institute a rigid regime of cultic events that would stand in contrast to the Athenian festivals with their crowds of choruses singing songs of no fixed genre” (*Greek and Roman Festivals: Content, Meaning, and Practice* 220). “Dionysus’ gift of wine, when unmediated, is the originary example of the Dionysiac symptomatic behaviour

that Plato condemned" (*Performance and Culture in Plato's Laws* 383). "The Greater Dionysia [...] was celebrated with a bout of public drunkenness of which Plato heartily disapproved (*Laws* I 637a-b)" (*Plato the Myth Maker*, 21).

I did not locate any mentions of either Pyrrho or Epictetus displaying hostility toward public events, but I strongly suspect their derision given the overwhelming Stoic condemnation of intoxicants. Marcus Aurelius seems to only have supported such festivals as a point of control: "Marcus Aurelius [...] was [not] personally keen on public spectacles [...] but, like all emperors, [he] had to placate the mob" (*Marcus Aurelius: A Life* 82). There also seems to be an accusation by critics that festivals eroded civic virtue: "celebrations and 'religious' festivals in honor of the gods had become so numerous that the emperor Marcus Aurelius finally had to step in and limit them to a sensible maximum of 135 per year" (*The Hedonism Handbook: Mastering the Lost Arts of Leisure and Pleasure*).

Conversely, the Cyrenaics (at least, their founder) were fond of the public spectacles, and seems to have specifically patronized the goddess of love and sexuality: "The philosopher Aristippus is said to have spent two months a year at the festival [of Aphrodite] with the courtesan Lais" (*Pain and Pleasure in Classical Times* 66).

Post by "Joshua" of March 25, 2022 at 5:11 PM

There is a passage in the Latin text of Lucretius that alludes to the *Parentalia* and *Feralia*, which I'll need to find. These are consecutive feasts for dead ancestors and baleful spirits, as the names imply. Most English translations that I've seen do not capture the allusion, but it's there in the Latin.

Post by "Godfrey" of March 25, 2022 at 5:42 PM

From *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes* by Edith Hamilton:

...people felt about Dionysus as about no other god. He was not only outside of them, he was within them, too. They could be transformed by him into being like him. The momentary sense of exultant power wine-drinking can give was only a sign to show men that they had within them more than they knew; "they could themselves become divine."

To think in this way was far removed from the old idea of worshiping the god by drinking enough to be gay or to be freed from care or to get drunk. There were followers of Dionysus who never drank wine at all. It is not known when the great change took place, lifting the god who freed men for a moment through drunkenness to the god who freed them through inspiration, but one very remarkable result of it made Dionysus for all future ages the most important of the gods of Greece.

What was done at his great festival was open to all the world and is a living influence today. No other festival in Greece could compare with it. It took place in the spring when the vine begins to put forth its branches, and it lasted for five days. They were days of perfect peace and enjoyment. All the ordinary business of life stopped. No one could be put in prison; prisoners were even released so that they could share in the general rejoicing. But the place where people gathered to do honor to the god was not a wild wilderness made horrible by savage deeds and a bloody feast; it was not even a temple precinct with ordered sacrifices and priestly ceremonies. It was a theater; and the ceremony was the performance of a play.

I was unaware of this change in Dionysian revelry. As underlined, she doesn't say when this change happened, and I suspect it was after Epicurus' time. But it potentially brings a different perspective to the festivals.

Further on she states that

His worshipers believed that his death and resurrection showed that the soul lives on forever after the body dies.

So that's problematic.

Post by “Don” of March 25, 2022 at 11:35 PM

Well, this has turned into a very interesting thread!

Post by “Don” of March 26, 2022 at 6:54 AM

| [Quote from Godfrey](#)

...people felt about Dionysus as about no other god. He was not only outside of them, he was within them, too. They could be transformed by him into being like him. The momentary sense of exultant power wine-drinking can give was only a sign to show men that they had within them more than they knew; "they could themselves become divine."

That's a very interesting summary and direct quote, [Godfrey](#) . As I'm sure you meant to emphasize, this seems to echo or parallel Epicurus's ideas that we can live like gods among mortals. I agree that last part is problematic, but I would be curious of the timeline of developments. Maybe that's why Epicurus could enthusiastically participate in the feasts and sacrifices, and of the Dionysian ones especially, while overlaying it all with his version of piety.

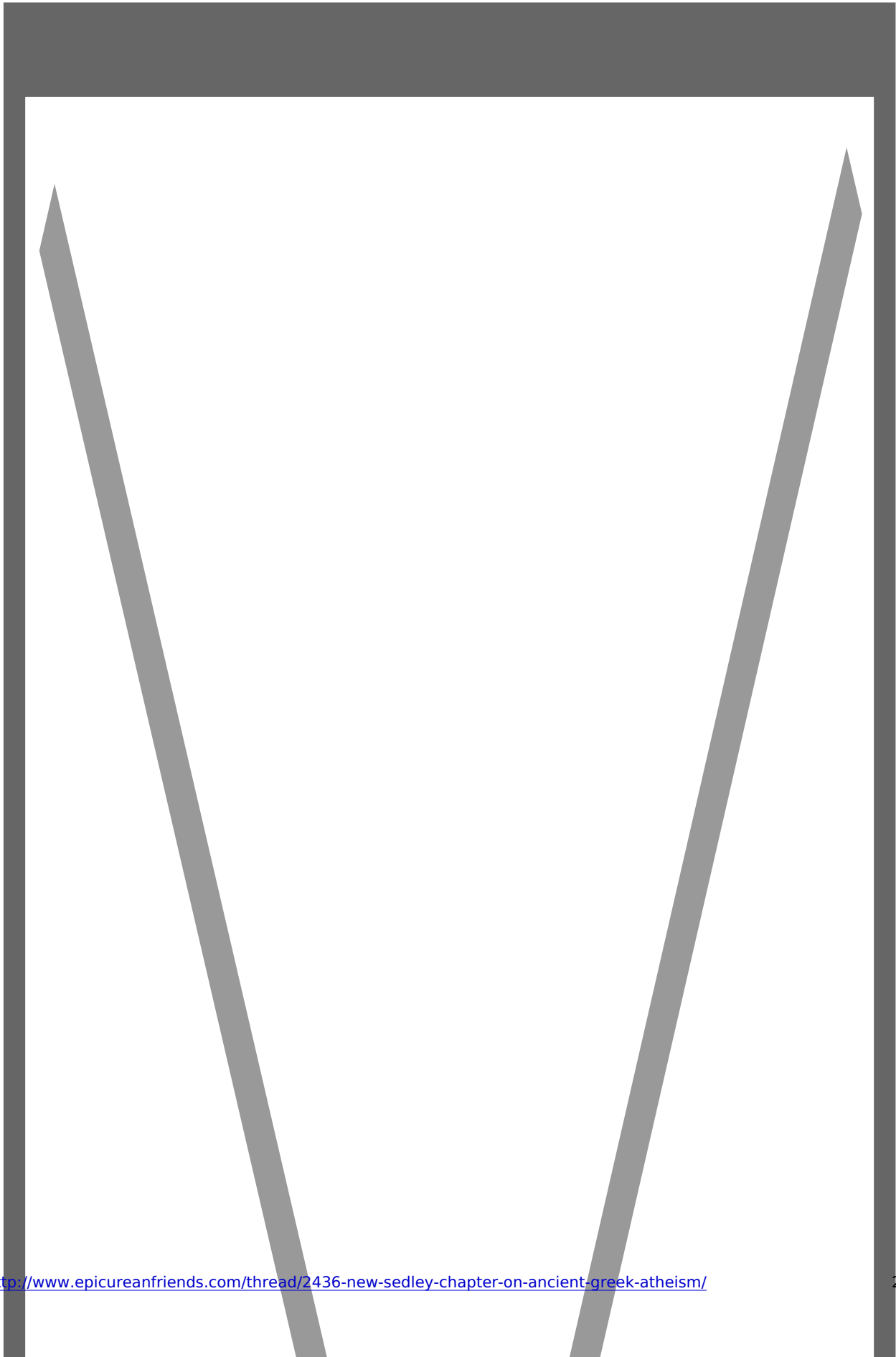
I'm still trying to find the words Obbink translated as "meagre feast" which *could* be nothing more than a reference to maza and wine.

I'll be interested to find if anyone finds anything else in this topic.

Post by “Don” of March 26, 2022 at 7:46 AM

A list for further searching for full access somewhere or reading in depth:

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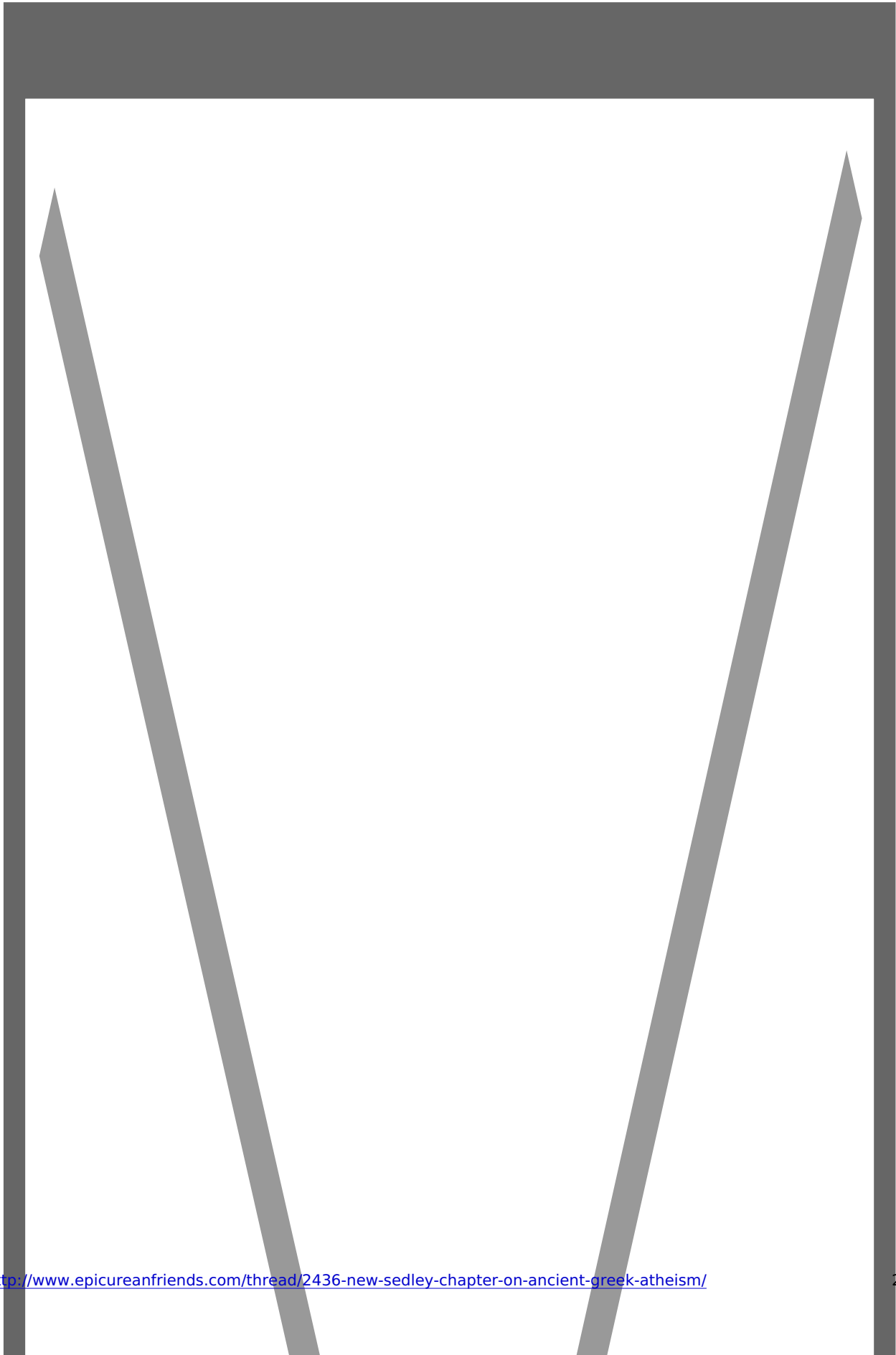
[Plato, Hyperides, and Hellenistic Cult Practice](#)

Abstract This paper investigates the commemoration of the dead as practised in the Epicurean school: for this purpose, it first discusses the remembrance of...

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<https://philpapers.org/rec/AISEAA> (full text available at link) This one may have surfaced before.

Image not found or type unknown



[Epicurean Economics](#)

Abstract This paper offers an analysis of Philodemus' views on wealth in the context of Epicurean economic theory in general. The discussion is in three parts....

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Post by "Godfrey" of March 28, 2022 at 12:15 AM

Sedley's article which started this thread has a very unique translation from the Letter to Menoecus.

Quote

"First of all, consider god an immortal and blessed living being, as the common notion of god is in outline, and attach to him nothing alien to imperishability or inappropriate to blessedness, but believe about him everything that is capable of protecting that combination of blessedness and imperishability. For although there are gods—the knowledge of them being self-evident—they are not as the many regard them, since by regarding them as of that kind the many fail to protect them." (Epicurus, Letter to Menoecus 123-4)

This heavily coded statement combines the firm assertion that there are gods with an instruction to us to conceive those gods in a way which will 'protect' them. Later Epicureans seem to have no doubt that their school's founder was referring, in realist mode, to biologically immortal beings. But the language chosen at least licenses an idealist alternative, that our gods are a projection of our own thought, whose invulnerability it falls to us to ensure.

Unless I'm missing something, every translation that I'm familiar with is diametrically opposed to the underlined portion above. Typically, the gods fail to protect those with wrong ideas of them. Sedley uses his version as support of the idealist interpretation, although I don't see this interpretation as *necessary* for that.

Does anybody have any insight into this particular translation? Including [Don](#), of course 😊🤔

Post by "Godfrey" of March 28, 2022 at 12:29 AM

Here's the translation from The Hellenistic Philosophers by Long and Sedley:

Quote

Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus 123-4

(1) First, think of god as an imperishable and blessed creature, as the common idea of god is in outline, and attach to him nothing alien to imperishability or inappropriate to blessedness, but believe about him everything that can preserve his combination of blessedness and imperishability. (2) For there are gods - the knowledge of them is self-evident. (3) But they are not such as the many believe them to be. For by their beliefs as to their nature the many do not preserve them. The impious man is not he who denies the gods of the many, but he who attaches to gods the beliefs of the many about them. For they are not preconceptions but false suppositions, the assertions of the many about gods. It is through these that the greatest harms, the ones affecting bad men, stem from gods, and the greatest benefits too. (4) For having a total affinity for their own virtues, they are receptive to those who are like them, and consider alien all that is not of that kind.

This puts it in a more complete context, and now I see that [Don](#) has

Quote

The gods do not exist in the way that the 'hoi polloi' believe them to, because they do not perceive what maintains the gods.

I've never noticed this phrase before and it adds quite a bit to chew on!

Post by “Don” of March 28, 2022 at 6:50 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Typically, the gods fail to protect those with wrong ideas of them.

That idea comes in with the section that follows the section you quoted:

Quote

One is not impious who does not take up the gods of the hoi polloi; but the one who attributes the beliefs of the hoi polloi to the gods. [124] For what they believe are not prolepses, but rather the judgements of the hoi polloi concerning the gods which are false, hasty assumptions. So, they believe the greatest evils are brought to the wicked from the gods as well as the greatest aid to the good, because the hoi polloi are believing that the gods accept those who resemble themselves who are similar through all excellences and goodness; all those not of their sort are strange and alien.

For another comparison, here's the Epicurus Wiki which gives an interesting take: [http://wiki.epicurism.info/Letter to Menoeceus/](http://wiki.epicurism.info/Letter%20to%20Menoceus/)

Quote

But do not believe anything about divine nature other than what is congenial for an eternally happy existence. The gods do exist because we have preconceived notions of them. But they are not like how most people describe them, because they do not retain the notion of the gods that they first receive. Rejecting the popular myths does not make one impious. Impious is one who upholds popular beliefs about the gods, because those pronouncements are false opinions rather than actual preconceptions.

And Saint-Andre's:

[Letter to Menoikos, by Epicurus](#)

Quote

Do not ascribe to god anything that is inconsistent with immortality and blissfulness; instead, believe about god everything that can support immortality and blissfulness. For gods there are: our knowledge of them is clear. Yet they are not such as most people believe; indeed most people are not even consistent in what they believe. It is not impious to deny the gods that most people believe in, but to ascribe to the gods what most people believe.

Your underlined section in the translations takes into account :

Quote

οὐ γὰρ φυλάττουσιν αὐτοὺς οἴους νοοῦσιν. ἀσεβῆς δὲ οὐχ ὁ τοὺς τῶν πολλῶν θεοὺς ἀναιρῶν, ἀλλ' ὁ τὰς τῶν πολλῶν δόξας θεοῖς προσάπτων.

An even more literal translation of these lines would be:

γὰρ... For, because... (has to be second word in phrase for arcane grammatical reasons)

φυλάττουσιν αὐτοὺς οἴους... they are protecting/defending/maintaining/preserving them (appears to refer to the gods)

οὐ νοοῦσιν they (the hoi polloi) are not perceiving/conceiving/seeing

ἀσεβῆς δὲ οὐχ ὁ τοὺς τῶν πολλῶν θεοὺς ἀναιρῶν "for **impiety is not that which is ordained/appointed/taken up by the hoi polloi**"

των πολλῶν is simply the genitive case of 'οἱ πολλοί (hoi polloi) "the many" which means exactly what it does in English: the masses, the common people. τὰς δόξας (tas doxas) are the beliefs or doctrines, same word in the Principal Doctrines. So, "One is not impious who does not take up the gods of the hoi polloi; but the one who attributes the beliefs of the hoi polloi to the gods."

Post by "Cassius" of March 28, 2022 at 7:49 AM

So the Epicurus wiki puts preconceptions there but the others do not? Possible to tell why?

That must be where once long ago I thought I read that.

Post by "Don" of March 28, 2022 at 8:00 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

So the Epicurus wiki puts preconceptions there but the others do not? Possible to tell why?

That must be where once long ago I thought I read that.

It's there in 124.

[124] οὐ γὰρ προλήψεις (prolepseis) εἰσὶν ἄλλ' ὑπολήψεις ψευδεῖς (hypolepseis pseudeis "false opinions") αἱ τῶν πολλῶν ὑπὲρ θεῶν ἀποφάσεις,

Post by “Godfrey” of April 10, 2022 at 7:17 PM

I just happened across this passage in Lucretius, which relates to the LM passage discussed above:

"Unless you expel these ideas from your mind and drive far away beliefs unworthy of the gods and alien to their tranquillity, the holy divinity of the gods, damaged by you, will frequently do you harm: not because of the possibility of violating the gods' supreme power, and of their consequent angry thirst for bitter vengeance, but because you yourself will imagine that those tranquil and peaceful beings are rolling mighty billows of wrath against you. You will be unable to visit the shrines of the gods with a calm heart, and incapable of receiving with tranquillity and peace the images from their holy bodies which travel into men's minds to reveal the gods' appearance. The direct effect on your life is obvious." (Lucretius 6.68-79, Long and Sedley translation, The Hellenistic Philosophers)

This reads to me like the best resolution of the realist and idealist views that I've seen. It appears to acknowledge the realist view that the gods exist, while at the same time stressing that what is important to our well-being is how we view them.

Sitting here in 2022, the idea that we get images of the gods "from their holy bodies" is what makes the gods so problematic. That sounds silly today, but it's perfectly consistent with Epicurus' atomism. To me, the idea that in an infinite universe there are beings which would appear godlike to us (realist) is reasonable (admittedly I do enjoy science fiction ☹️). I also agree with the (idealist) notion that how we think of potential godlike beings can be of benefit or harm to us. The cleavage between the two is how we interpret the images and anticipations.... Our modern theories of perception invalidate the ancient idea of images of beings reaching us from afar; instead, our anticipations (at least to my understanding) of gods are passed down to us in the same manner as, say, language. So the "black" of the realist view and the "white" of the idealist view are both valid. It's just the shades of grey in between which have naturally changed over the millennia.

Post by “Cassius” of April 10, 2022 at 7:51 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Sitting here in 2022, the idea that we get images of the gods "from their holy bodies" is what makes the gods so problematic.

I agree with you. However in the back of my mind there are these gnawing doubts probably caused by too much science fiction, but which appears to me to be reasonable enough not to dismiss totally out of hand: That just like there are an innumerable number of television and radio waves (containing lots of intelligent information) passing through us at any moment, but which we are not equipped by nature to decode, it seems reasonable to me to have entertained that whatever travels between the objects we look at (through our eyes) and travels to our eyes, is also something that is traveling at all times in all directions outward from that object, traveling through the air to distances we may not think of as possible, but which might be decodable given the right "technology."

And to be clear, I am thinking in terms of how light from our planet travels long distances (like the lights we see in our telescopes from other planets) such that over long distances we are actually looking at something that is now in the past at the location of that planet or star.

Again I am not advocating that such things really do happen, and I admit our science has advanced an awful lot without finding the ability to decode much information from those lights traveling from so far away. But is it impossible to think that new technologies in the distant future can't decode more than we can now? I would say no, but primarily what I would say is that I don't think it was unreasonable for the ancient Epicureans to think in those terms, and it would probably be something that our scientists continue to work on to improve the resolution of our existing telescopes.

I have to stop now, but I haven't even addressed whether it is possible for such waves to exist above or beyond our spectrum of visible light.

But the important thing is to update our views to be consistent with what we know now, without being so rigid as to think that our current technology is the "last word." So I would say that what we have to insist is impossible is that those beings are supernatural - on the other hand there is not in my view grounds to insist that it is impossible that we will ever detect the existence of other beings through radio or other waves that reasonably may exist.

Post by "Don" of April 10, 2022 at 8:12 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I have to stop now, but I haven't even addressed whether it is possible for such waves to exist above or beyond our spectrum of visible light.

I'm not sure what "waves" you're referring to. We do have telescopes that "see" infrared, ultraviolet, radio, microwave, and x-ray wavelengths in the electromagnetic spectrum. There's plenty we can see given the right instruments.

As far as the images of the gods in our minds, our brains aren't receivers... To the best of my understanding.

Post by “Don” of April 10, 2022 at 10:45 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

I just happened across this passage in Lucretius, which relates to the LM passage discussed above:

"Unless you expel these ideas from your mind and drive far away beliefs unworthy of the gods and alien to their tranquillity, the holy divinity of the gods, damaged by you, will frequently do you harm: not because of the possibility of violating the gods' supreme power, and of their consequent angry thirst for bitter vengeance, but because you yourself will imagine that those tranquil and peaceful beings are rolling mighty billows of wrath against you. You will be unable to visit the shrines of the gods with a calm heart, and incapable of receiving with tranquillity and peace the images from their holy bodies which travel into men's minds to reveal the gods' appearance. The direct effect on your life is obvious." (Lucretius 6.68-79, Long and Sedley translation, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*)

This reads to me like the best resolution of the realist and idealist views that I've seen. It appears to acknowledge the realist view that the gods exist, while at the same time stressing that what is important to our well-being is how we view them.

Thank you so much for sharing this, [Godfrey](#) ! I had not seen this before.

For anyone who wants to see the Latin referenced here:

[Lucretius, De Rerum Natura, Liber Sextus, line 43](#)

Quote

quae nisi respuis ex animo longeque remittis
dis indigna putare alienaque pacis eorum,
delibata deum per te tibi numina sancta
saepe oberunt; non quo violari summa deum vis
possit, ut ex ira poenas petere inbibat acris,
sed quia tute tibi placida cum pace quietos
constitues magnos irarum volvere fluctus,
nec delubra deum placido cum pectore adibis,
nec de corpore quae sancto simulacra feruntur
in mentes hominum divinae nuntia formae,
suscipere haec animi tranquilla pace valebis.
inde videre licet qualis iam vita sequatur.

Display More

Images here is "simulacra": <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...ry%3Dsimulacrum>

which seems to have the same double entendre that εἰδωλον does in Greek.

Question: Is Lucretius (and Epicurus) referring to images received from gods "out there" somewhere... or is he referring to the images received of their statues in the shrines? "You will be unable to visit the shrines of the gods with a calm heart, and incapable of receiving with tranquillity and peace the images from their holy bodies which travel into men's minds to reveal the gods' appearance." The fact that he talks first about visiting the shrines of the gods THEN goes directly to "incapable of receiving ... the images from their holy bodies which travel into men's minds" looks ambiguous, at least in this translation. Is it meant to be ambiguous? Does looking at a statue, an image, an εἰδωλον or simulacra of the god, allow one to "see" that god in one's mind?

No answers, just posing a question I never thought of before reading this selection from Long & Sedley.

PS:

I ran part of that Latin through Google Translate (I know, not the greatest option!!), and got this:

...and you will not approach the temples of the gods with a calm heart, nor will you be able to receive these images of the divine form in the minds of men, from the body which is a holy image.

That last part (underlined) sounds to me like the the images are coming from the temples and the images are coming from whatever is in the temples.

I found this line of thinking intriguing, maybe simply because its novel to me. But maybe that's one reason Epicurus was able to enthusiastically advocating taking part in the regular worship of the Greek gods. It was the statues of the gods, the images in the temple as well as seeing the statues themselves that gave the Epicurean access to an image in the mind of a literally larger-than-life, blessed, incorruptible being to which the Epicurean could aspire. Hmm...Food for thought for me at least.

Post by “Godfrey” of April 11, 2022 at 12:59 AM

Cassius, some thoughts on your comment, with an attempt to use methods of inference:

- The idea of films of atoms coming from the gods and into our minds over great distances was consistent with the theory of atomism in the time of Epicurus, and his innovations regarding the theory. I understand it as a conjectural opinion, but Epicurus considered it as true. It's also reasoning by analogy, I think, being formulated similarly to how he reasoned the correctness of atomism in general. As I understand it, it is:

1. Attested: (I perceive this, therefore it is evidence) For Epicurus I would say that this applies.
2. Non-attested: (evidence conflicts with the original evidence) For Epicurus, I think this would not apply.
3. Contested: (if x exists, it implies this doesn't exist) For Epicurus, this would not apply.
4. Non-contested: (this exists, and implies that exists) For Epicurus, this would apply.

So for Epicurus, the idea of films of atoms reaching us from the gods would be attested and non-contested, which would make it a true opinion.

- Today, with far more information with which to work:

1. Attested: we have no evidence of this occurring, so this does not apply.
2. Non-attested: there is evidence that ideas of gods are obtained from the society, family, etc in which one is reared (based on neuroscience), so this applies.

3. Contested: the evidence in 2 exists, and implies that the films of gods from afar don't exist. This applies.

4. Non-contested: there is no current evidence to support the idea of these images from afar being biologically received, so this does not apply.

So for us, this idea is Non-attested and contested, which makes it a false opinion.

Additional evidence made Epicurus' opinion false by this method. Similarly, future evidence could make the current opinion (ideas of gods are propagated through socio-environmental conditions) false.

I'm in the midst of a lengthy process of trying to sort out the methods of inference/logic/reasoning; this is my first attempt at this so I welcome further discussion!

Post by "Cassius" of April 11, 2022 at 3:05 AM

Don: The key additional text regarding the images, where it is stated that they flow TO the gods, is the Velleius section of On the nature of the gods, so that needs review in this context.

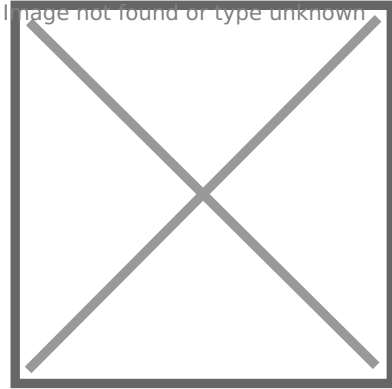
Godfrey: just to be clear in terms of images I think the foundational observations about them is that images was a theory about *everything* and how we perceive them. So the first step in the process is to discuss the theory about things directly in from of us, not starting with gods long distances away.

Also I am not yet sure I find the "attestation" framework more helpful than confusing. The use of parenthetical explanations helps but I don't find those explanations clear enough at this point to be comfortable. Maybe the word "attestation" seems unnecessarily confusing. Does it add something more than the word "evidence?". Because just as in law and in dealing with atoms we are going to need to consider not only direct evidence but also circumstantial evidence, and "attestation" may appear to some to refer only to direct evidence. I think we would all agree that Epicurus embraces reasoning from circumstantial evidence, or else there would be no way to establish the existence of atoms. So it would be important not to let the "attestation" word obscure the complexities of evidence issues. (Maybe that is another way of saying "We really need to do a study of the surviving texts on Epicurean Reasoning so we can bring these issues out into the open - "before our eyes!"

Or maybe I should just say that I don't think item one in the second list to be established for a number of reasons, primarily because I am not sure we have established what the "this" even is which is under discussion. Do we have even any specific examples of a description of an Epicurean observation of a god with which to agree or disagree?

Post by “Cassius” of April 11, 2022 at 3:27 AM

Here is an example of a phenomena which I think would be relevant for discussion of circumstantial evidence in this topic:



[How birds can detect Earth's magnetic field](#)

Researchers have made a key discovery about the internal magnetic compass of birds. Biologists have identified a single protein without which birds probably...
www.sciencedaily.com

Quote

Normally they regulate the biological clock, but have also been considered significant for the magnetic sense. With this study, we now know which of the birds' cryptochromes do what.

"Cry4 is an ideal magnetoreceptor as the level of the protein in the eyes is constant. This is something we expect from a receptor that is used regardless of the time of day," explains Atticus Pinzón-Rodríguez, one of the researchers behind the study.

The conclusion is thus that this specific protein helps the magnetic sense to function, while other cryptochromes, whose levels in the body vary at different times of the day, take care of the biological clock instead.

Last year, Atticus Pinzón-Rodríguez and his colleagues noted that not only migratory birds navigate using a magnetic compass. Even resident birds that do not migrate in the spring and autumn have a magnetic sense and navigate using their internal magnetic compass. He now takes this one step further:

"This and last year's results indicate that other animals, perhaps all of them, have magnetic receptors and can pick up on magnetic fields."

A lot of research remains in order to map in detail how animals discover and use the Earth's magnetic field. What is clear is that it involves chemical reactions that interact with magnetic fields. According to Atticus Pinzón-Rodríguez, this knowledge may be of use when developing new navigation systems.

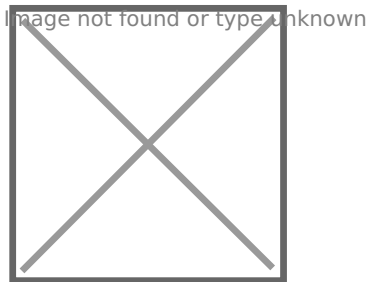
Display More

Absolutely nothing mystical about it, yet something that science is seeming to validate as data being perceived by means other than the conventional senses.

(No doubt there is lots of dispute about even a topic like this, but I am mentioning it only as a potential example of how to approach the investigation of whether information can be perceived directly through other than the conventional senses.)

Post by "Cassius" of April 11, 2022 at 3:36 AM

in addition to the magnetism example, I would include the following in a similar category:

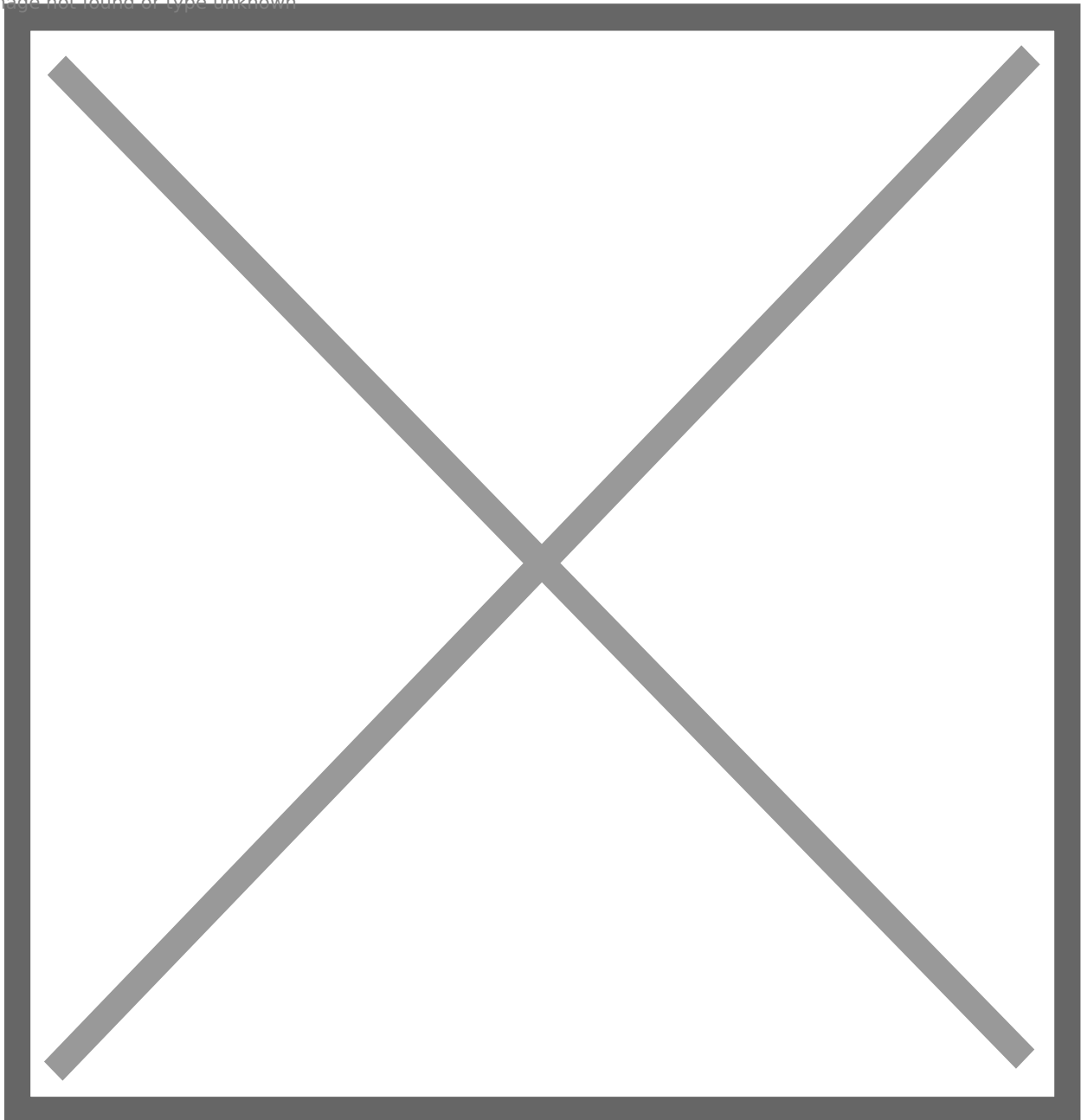


[Central Nervous System Responses to Simulated Galactic Cosmic Rays](#)

In preparation for lunar and Mars missions it is essential to consider the challenges to human health that are posed by long-duration deep space habitation via...

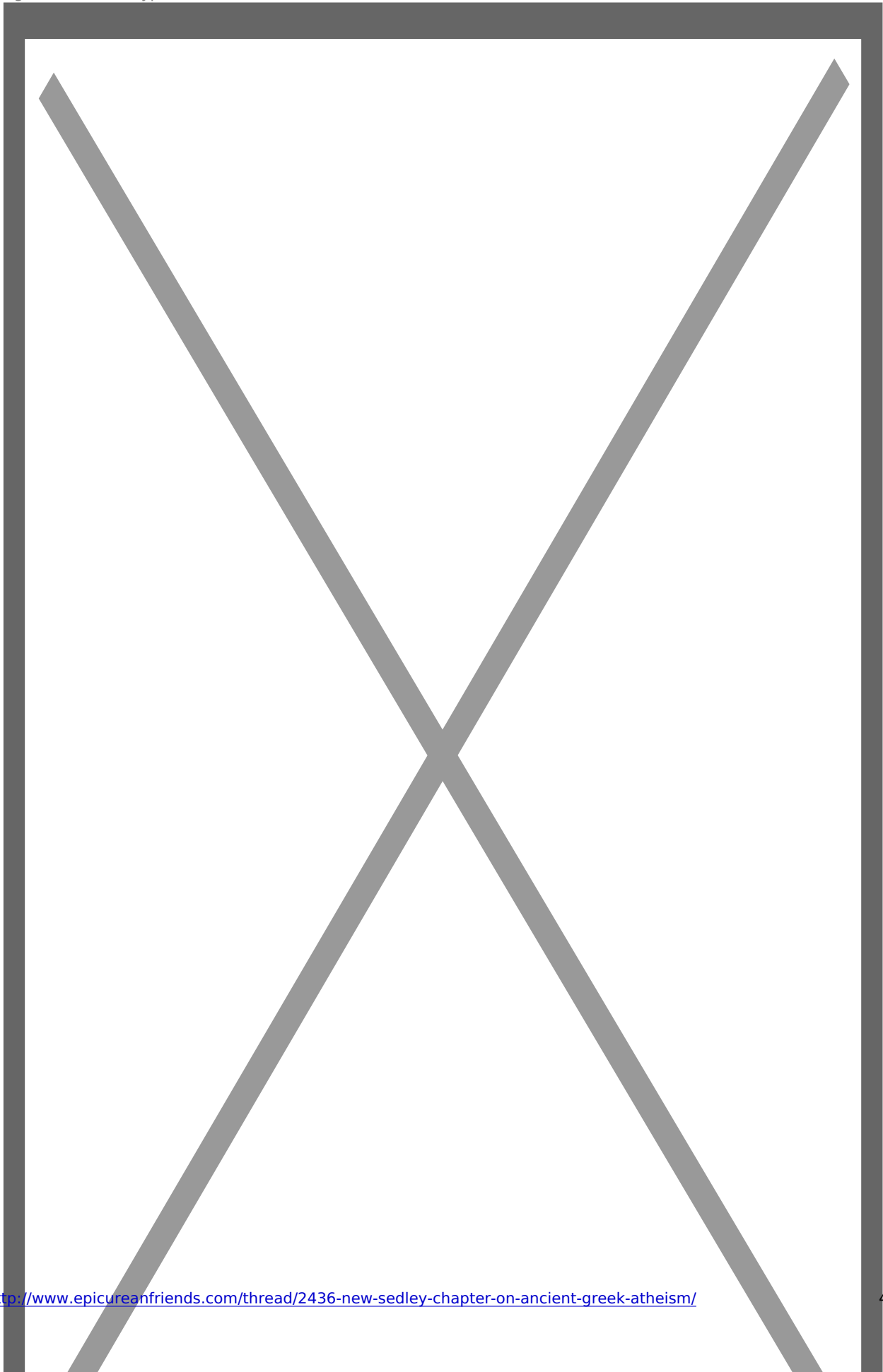
www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov

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[New evidence for a human magnetic sense that lets your brain detect the Earth's magnetic field](#)
Your brain's sensory talents go way beyond those traditional five senses. A team of geoscientists and neurobiologists explored how the human brain monitors and...
theconversation.com

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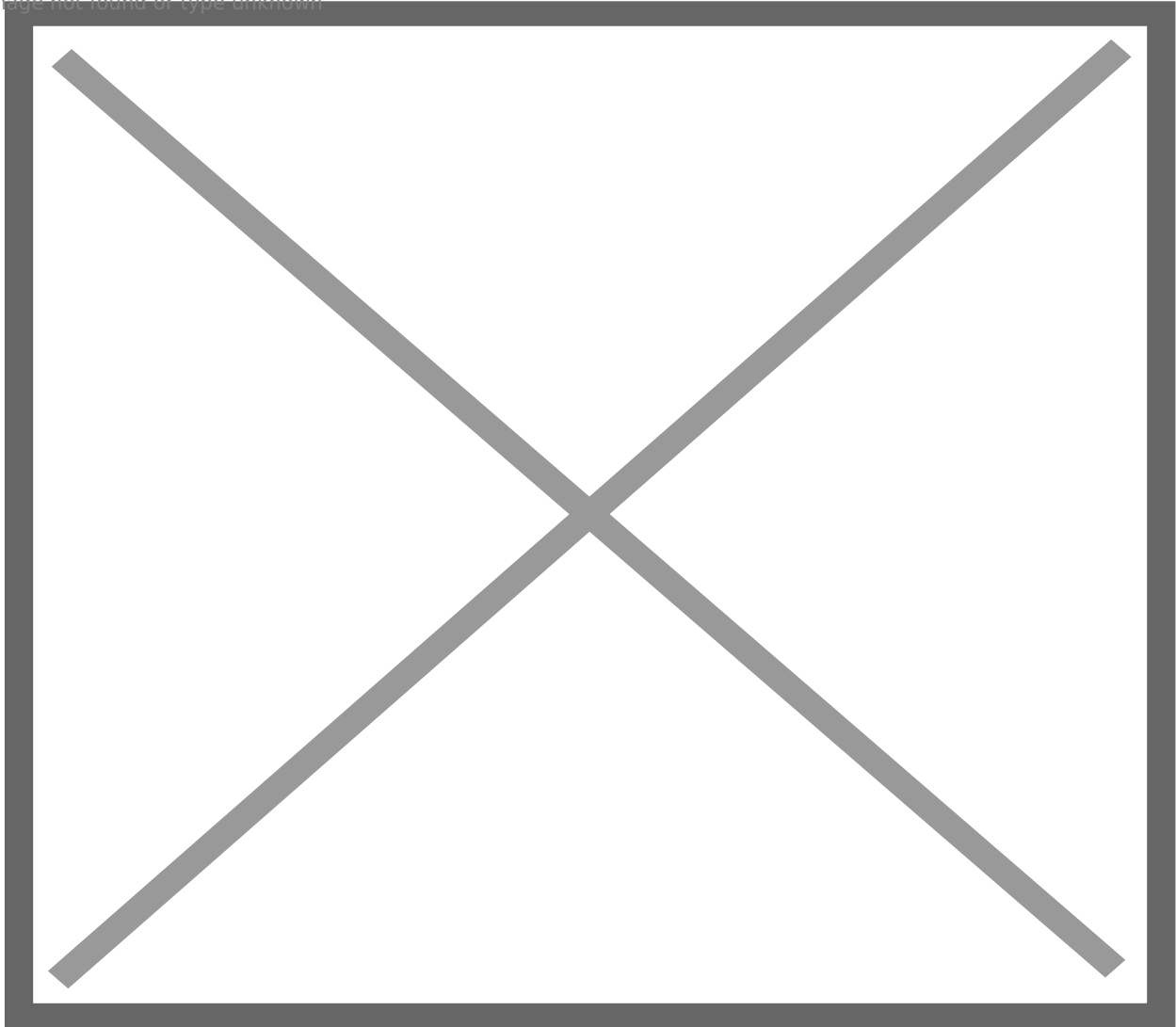


[\(PDF\) Neurological Effects of Space Radiation](#)

PDF | In this brief review, several aspects of radiation effects on the central nervous system are considered. Low to moderate levels (~ 1 to 2 Gy) of... |...

www.researchgate.net

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[Study: Cell Phone Radiation Linked to Overeating More Calories Higher Carbs - Environmental Health Trust](#)

A new study Mobile Phone Radiation Deflects Brain Energy Homeostasis and Prompts Human Food Ingestion published in the journal Nutrients finds cell phone...

ehtrust.org

Post by "Cassius" of April 11, 2022 at 3:48 AM

It would be a joke to suggest that what Epicurus meant about not being able to receive the images of the gods without harm was that he foresaw "Don't go near cosmic rays without radiation shielding!"..... But before we consider that the whole field of "spectres" is nonsense I think it would be prudent to retrace the reasoning steps and recognize that our knowledge of physics even today has a very long way to go. Is it really unreasonable to suspect that predictions that might admittedly be based on overly simplistic views of "atoms flying through space" might still in the end lead to fruitful discoveries? Maybe Epicurus was "sensing" and describing in too rudimentary a form a mechanism that exists, but that we are misinterpreting because we are trying to force it to fit within the "supernatural religion," paradigm which Epicurus never suggested (and indeed denied) was his framework.

Plus - We always seem to go back to the complicated issues of "methods of inference" and which theories are rational to entertain and which are not. That's probably where OUR personal contribution can come, rather than through study of migratory birds or cosmic rays (since we personally are probably not in those occupations).

Post by "Don" of April 11, 2022 at 7:28 AM

Okay here are some random thoughts on this this morning:

1. The films/images coming *from* things *to* our eyes or minds was a direct refutation of the competing ancient theory that our eyes beamed out some kind of ray. To me, it's a lighthouse metaphor (Epicurean theory) vs a flashlight metaphor (Platonic et al metaphor)
2. The films/images are entirely consistent with Epicurus's physics. He needed a way to explain sensation and this is what he came up with.
3. Now, this one has me genuinely stumped: How do images in our minds of the gods differ from images of unicorns and centaurs? Why would the former be considered real and the latter false and a combination of images colliding in the air?
4. It would be a disservice to Epicurus to say he was prescient or worse to ascribe some sort of Nostradamus-like prophetic ability in that humans could receive some as-yet-undiscovered rays. See #1 and #2 above. Epicurus was a man of his time. He responded to contemporary controversies in physics and philosophy with novel answers and significant and deep understanding of human nature and the physical world. It's important to keep that perspective in mind. His philosophy is timeless in its ability to "remove suffering from the soul" but his physics are not modern physics. To me, they're

best understood to drive home the idea that we live in a material world.

Post by “Joshua” of April 11, 2022 at 8:42 AM

Quote

The films/images coming *from* things *to* our eyes or minds was a direct refutation of the competing ancient theory that our eyes beamed out some kind of ray. To me, it's a lighthouse metaphor (Epicurean theory) vs a flashlight metaphor (Platonic et al metaphor)

That was going to be my main angle into this issue on the podcast, but we didn't get that far yesterday. I've been scooped!

Post by “Cassius” of April 11, 2022 at 8:57 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

Now, this one has me genuinely stumped: How do images in our minds of the gods differ from images of unicorns and centaurs? Why would the former be considered real and the latter false and a combination of images colliding in the air?

I would say there that once they get to our minds they appear the same to us, and so it is up to our minds to be able to judge whether they reflect something real or something that results from those random combinations arising through "chance." I suspect Epicurus would say that the primary and even relatively "easy" method of distinguishing (or judge the faithfulness of to the facts) images that reflect real objects and images that reflect random combinations would be their "repeatability." You would generally expect that images coming from real objects will be observed over time and in varying conditions and are thus repeatable, while images arising from random combinations would be unlikely to be repeated in substantially similar form.

At least that would be the starting point of the way I would approach it, which is similar to the way we should approach all sorts of distortions and illusions, as discussed at length in Lucretius Book 4.

Post by "Cassius" of April 11, 2022 at 9:08 AM

Also -- one aspect of what I think Don and Joshua are talking about that we ought to discuss is the whole issue of "action at a distance." How can one thing influence another without any perceptible (to the senses) means of touching? We know that Lucretius / Epicurus specifically dealt with magnetism and/or perhaps static electricity even in their time, and of course this would seem to be an important element of refuting supernaturalism.

And just to be sure this is part of the discussion, it does seem to me to be intuitive to suspect that the objects around you can influence you regardless of whether you are looking at them or listening for them. Maybe the basic point is that one would suspect that whatever is moving between those objects and yourself doesn't stop moving just because you turn your eyes and look in another direction. Since Epicurus was focused on explaining the world in material "atomic" terms, it would seem natural (at least to me) to think about the effects of those atoms (which are postulated to keep their shape as the means of transmitting the qualities of the object) going forward through space regardless of whether we are looking for or listening for them. If it is true that certain birds are evolved to be able to work with magnetic fields, there may be other similar faculties which we have not yet discovered.

I see this discussion as very different from the discussion of "woo" which is centered on supernaturalist views. To keep open the possibility that phenomena exists which has not been discovered does not require that we consider that phenomena to be supernatural. We don't define what is natural and "supernatural," only nature determines what can exist, regardless of our speculations.

Does a tree falling in a forest with no person there to hear it make sound? Of course it does, and the movements of particles from place to place deserves a lot of consideration in natural science very much apart from whether and how a particular human interprets them.

Post by "Cassius" of April 11, 2022 at 9:23 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

The films/images are entirely consistent with Epicurus's physics. He needed a way to explain sensation and this is what he came up with.

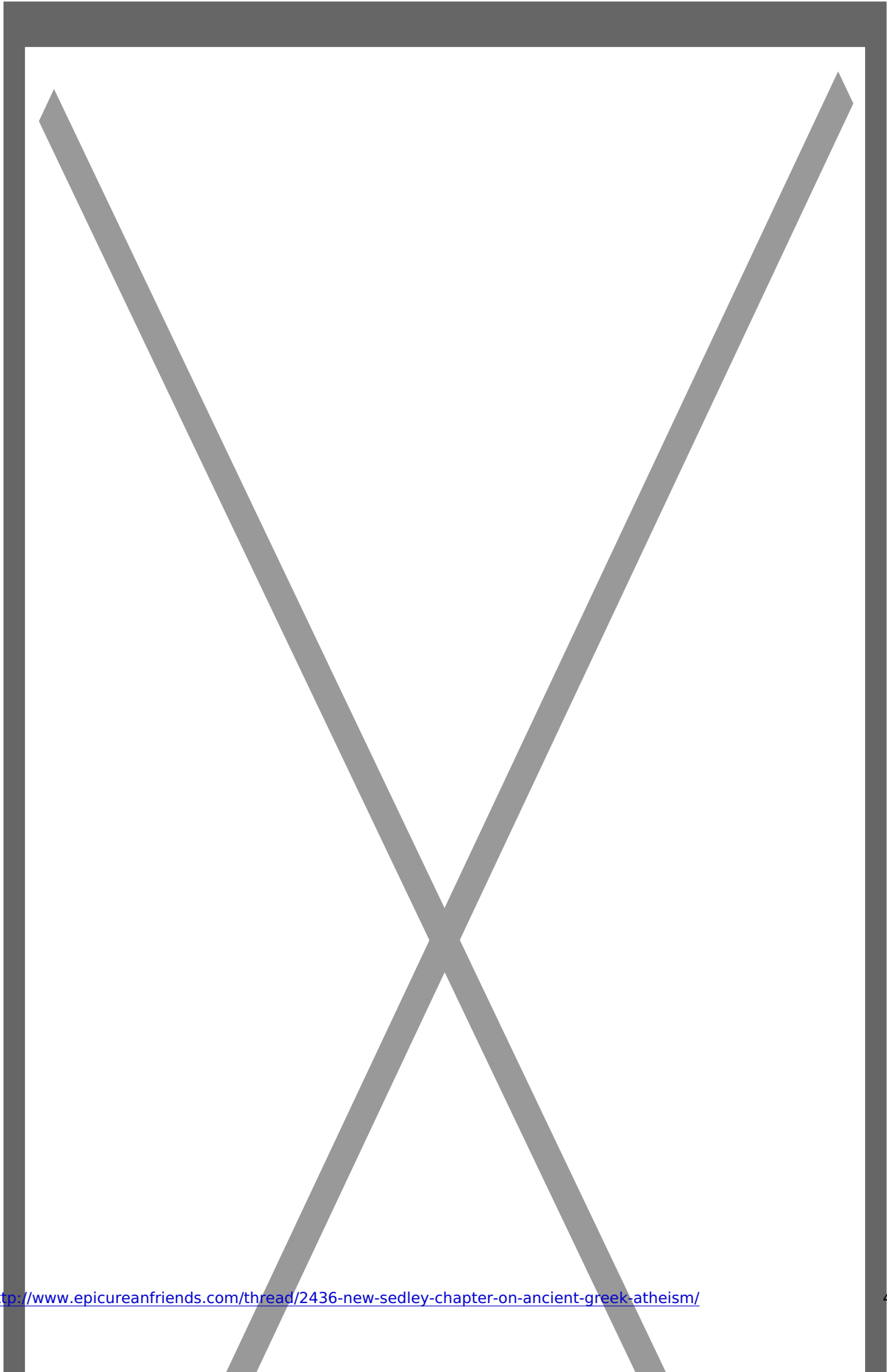
Just a brief comment on this one: In general, I think that there is no reason to dismiss Epicurus' general theory of "images" as totally obsolete. Whether we now consider the moving substance

to be particles emanated or photons bouncing or wave interference or whatever, it does seem to me to be fair to say that "something" is traveling outward from the direction of each object to be perceived by entering our eyes (in the case of light) or sound (in the case of hearing).

I think the significant thing is as you stated, Don, the issue is more the direction of travel. The Platonic (?) model implies (at least to me) something more supernatural, while the Epicurean model implies what I would consider to be the more correct view that all of our organs of sense are "receiving" something from the outside. We are constantly bathed in "somethings" contacting us from every direction in our environment.

Maybe another issue we could add to the mix is the current controversy over "5G" towers. Originally I dismissed all that talk as largely nonsense, and maybe I still should, but I am no longer confident. (Have there not been recent reports about airplanes being affected?) I still get irritated every time I get on an airplane and have to turn off my cell phone. The line between real problems and kook problems can often be blurry. Even the EU seems to think there is an issue?

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[Is 5G bad for your health? It's complicated, say researchers](#)
ec.europa.eu

Not to get us off on 5G at all, because I still tend to dismiss those concerns. But the issue of how to separate the kooky from the potentially legitimate isn't always easy!

Post by “Cassius” of April 11, 2022 at 9:26 AM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

That was going to be my main angle into this issue on the podcast, but we didn't get that far yesterday. I've been scooped!

We definitely want to be sure to cover that this coming episode!

Post by “Godfrey” of April 11, 2022 at 11:57 AM

I guess that I was unclear in my summaries of attestation &c. My reference point is Sextus Empiricus as described in this previous post:

Thread

[The Beginning of an Outline of Epicurean Reasoning](#)

Getting away from Philodemus On Signs for a moment, I've been looking at The Hellenistic Philosophers by Long and Sedley for original quotes from Epicurus regarding signs and methods of inference. I also had a look at a cluster of Principle Doctrines that are relevant (PD 22 & 23 are from Nate's compilation, with thanks).

PD22 *We must take into account both the underlying purpose and **all the evidence of clear perception, to which we refer our opinions**. Otherwise, everything will be filled with...*



Godfrey

March 17, 2022 at 9:19 PM

In commentary elsewhere in *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, Long and Sedley point out some potential errors in this formulation based on the sources that Sextus Empiricus was using. So there's still a lot to sort out!

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Godfrey: just to be clear in terms of images I think the foundational observations about them is that images was a theory about *everything* and how we perceive them. So the first step in the process is to discuss the theory about things directly in front of us, not starting with gods long distances away.

Agreed. I realized in the middle of posting that this was an important point. The texts have lots of instances of reasoning/inference but very little explanation that I can find. Presently I'm overloaded with unprocessed collected data; I may have to step back and let it percolate for a while.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Do we have even any specific examples of a description of an Epicurean observation of a god with which to agree or disagree?

None that I'm aware of, although there is that description of gods in the form of humans and speaking Greek. I don't remember the source of that, but I remember it as a product of reasoning and not an observation.

Post by “Don” of April 11, 2022 at 12:34 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

The Platonic (?) model implies (at least to me) something more supernatural

I don't believe that's the case.

[History of optics - Wikipedia](#)

"In the fifth century BC, Empedocles postulated that everything was composed of four elements; fire, air, earth and water. He believed that Aphrodite made the human eye out of the four elements and that she lit the fire in the eye which shone out from the eye making sight possible. If this were true, then one could see during the night just as well as during the day, so

Empedocles postulated an interaction between rays from the eyes and rays from a source such as the sun. He stated that light has a finite speed."

Lots to wade through on this thread, but my responses will have to wait until tonight.

Post by "Don" of April 11, 2022 at 2:40 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

You would generally expect that images coming from real objects will be observed over time and in varying conditions and are thus repeatable, while images arising from random combinations would be unlikely to be repeated in substantially similar form

Hmm... I can repeatedly think about centaurs and unicorns in substantially similar forms.

I agree looking in the Lucretius sections may be helpful, but I'm not sure I agree (at first blush) on your repeatability criteria.

Post by "Cassius" of April 11, 2022 at 5:33 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

Hmm... I can repeatedly think about centaurs and unicorns in substantially similar forms.

You can choose to imagine them, but I think it ought to be pretty apparent (at least in most situations) whether you are perceiving something that is "out there" beyond you, or whether you have chosen to summon the image from memory or from a new construct. At least I don't think I have any trouble distinguishing from constructs of my imagination vs things that I am perceiving due to some otherwise passive confrontation with them.

Post by "Cassius" of April 11, 2022 at 5:34 PM

I also want to say for now in this thread too that I have expedited the production of Lucretius Today Episode 117 because although we don't grapple with images very much in this episode, what we do grapple with I think is very closely relevant to what we are discussing here:

Post

[RE: Episode One Hundred Seventeen - Letter to Herodotus 06 - The Doctrine of Infinity of Worlds And Its Implications](#)

I am happy to say that I have been successful in expediting the production of Episode 117 of the Lucretius Today Podcast - because it touches on many very profound issues that we are now discussing on the forum. Today we discuss one of the most important doctrines of Epicurus - one which has many significant implications: the Doctrine of Infinity of Worlds!

[spreaker.com/episode/49402948](https://www.spreaker.com/episode/49402948)



Cassius

April 11, 2022 at 5:29 PM

Post by “Don” of April 11, 2022 at 5:54 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

You can choose to imagine them, but I think it ought to be pretty apparent (at least in most situations) whether you are perceiving something that is "out there" beyond you, or whether you have chosen to summon the image from memory or from a new construct.

See, that's my sticking point here in reference to the gods. No one has ever seen a god and yet Epicurus says we have an image of them?

PS...

Has anyone tracked down the "the gods are giant-people-shaped and speak Greek" citation?

Post by "Cassius" of April 11, 2022 at 7:06 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

See, that's my sticking point here in reference to the gods. No one has ever seen a god and yet Epicurus says we have an image of them?

I would say there that we should not presume that what we are thinking of as "a god" is what Epicurus is thinking, so there's no certainty that what we are perceiving as images of the gods are actually what we are expecting. Maybe the perceptions of the gods even through images are just the "feelings" of blissfulness that we get when we contemplate them. As far as I can tell the majority (maybe all?) of the specifics like tall, shaped like men, speak Greek, and stuff like that -- those could all be later interpolations of later Epicureans rather than from Epicurus himself.

So that's what I am trying to drill down on -- we don't know that when Epicurus was referring to clear visions of the gods he was really talking about seeing beings who look like the statue of Zeus or Athena. Until we are absolutely sure that his "clear visions" constitute seeing human-shaped figures, I don't think we should presume that is what he means.

This is one of those areas where we don't have Lucretius giving direct testimony, and where I do think that we have to take the views of Epicureans 200+ years later as not necessarily of the same reliability of Epicurus himself.

So I really do see that as one of the areas where we have to be extremely careful. It is one thing to speculate that the gods look like humans, that they speak Greek, etc. But are those speculations really the "clear visions" that Epicurus was talking about? I don't think we should jump to that conclusion, and I think that (like you are implying) the fact that we today are not seeing such visions is a good indication that Epicurus didn't either.

But what we have is all so fragmentary -- I think that the issue of the speculations about the nature of the gods could well be just speculations, and that those speculations can co-exist compatibly with Epicurus having said that we have clear visions of them -- but that those clear visions are not of their shape or size or things like that, but of their "blissfulness" --- clear "feelings" or "reactions" to them but that fall short of "visions" like you and I and everyone else are expecting to see.

Post by "Cassius" of April 11, 2022 at 7:09 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

See, that's my sticking point here in reference to the gods. No one has ever seen a god and yet Epicurus says we have an image of them?

Especially we should focus on the part of your question where we use the word "image." It seems pretty clear that "images" are specifically NOT things that we "see." They are "data" that enter our brain through means other than from the eyes -- this is the issue of the mind being a direct receiver of information. Birds presumably don't "see" magnetic waves either, but they still are able to use and be effected by them (if that analogy holds).

Post by “Kalosyni” of April 12, 2022 at 9:23 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

That last part (underlined) sounds to me like the the images are coming from the temples and the images are coming from whatever is in the temples.

I found this line of thinking intriguing, maybe simply because its novel to me. But maybe that's one reason Epicurus was able to enthusiastically advocating taking part in the regular worship of the Greek gods. It was the statues of the gods, the images in the temple as well as seeing the statues themselves that gave the Epicurean access to an image in the mind of a literally larger-than-life, blessed, incorruptible being to which the Epicurean could aspire.

A little late to this thread, replying to Don's post number 47. Having just been to the Parthenon replica in Nashville just two days ago. I think that statues do have an effect on the human psyche. As a modern, I am completely innocent/lacking in belief of ancient Greek religion, but there is something that comes to life through statues (could this be why in Islam all images and also all reproductions of living things are banned?) So the creation of this statue brings Athena to life. It can't affect me the way it might affect someone who is culturally inculcated, so there is no sense of reverence. The sense of what this is goes beyond words and thoughts. Yet perhaps I am uniquely affected and others might not feel anything at all (it's a very subtle feeling anyway).



Post by “Cassius” of April 12, 2022 at 10:24 AM

Thanks for those pictures! Just as a general comment that applies to several different posts, I do agree that some of the "images" being discussed are coming from the statues, but I don't think that includes all of the images, some of which I think they though came directly from the intermundia.

Another general comment is that "images" so firmly conveys "vision" and "seeing" to us that I wonder if it would not be better to use another word (idols or even spectres) to make clear that we are not talking about sights visible to the eye.

When we use the word "images" it is hard for us in casual communication to know for sure which of us are rigorously making that visible/ not visible distinction and which of us are not.

Or maybe another way to make this clear is to always couple "images" with "invisible" so that we discuss "invisible images." That's an option that probably makes the issue clear, but also may sound a little weird - but perhaps not as weird as "spectres."

Post by “Don” of April 12, 2022 at 12:45 PM

'Mental images" might be a better description.

Post by “Cassius” of April 12, 2022 at 1:50 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

Mental images" might be a better description.

Except that I think that term would imply that they originate or exist only in the mind, which would pretty clearly contradict what they Epicureans state- they originate outside the mind.

There are all sorts of pitfalls:

"invisible" images sort of implies woo

"imperceptible" images might work, but they are supposedly perceptible to the mind

"non-visible" is awkward, but might actually be better than Invisible.

there's also the issue as to whether to describe them as "films" or some other word that conveys that they leave the surface of each object in sequence so as to retain to at least some degree the shape of the object. The word "shed" is almost more appropriate from that perspective.

Maybe I am coming around to Catus' "spectres" 😊

Quote

Cassius had recently become a follower of the Epicurean school of philosophy.

[15.16] Cicero to Cassius [Rome, January, 45 B.C.] I expect you must be just a little ashamed of yourself now that this is the third letter that has caught you before you have sent me a single leaf or even a line. But I am not pressing you, for I shall look forward to, or rather insist upon, a longer letter. As for myself, if I always had somebody to trust with them, I should send you as many as three an hour. For it somehow happens, that whenever I write anything to you, you seem to be at my very elbow; and that, not by way of visions of images, as your new friends term them, who believe that even mental visions are conjured up by what Catus calls spectres (for let me remind you that Catus the Insubrian, an Epicurean, who died lately, gives the name of spectres to what the famous Gargettian [Epicurus], and long before that Democritus, called images).

2 But, even supposing that the eye can be struck by these spectres because they run up against it quite of their own accord, how the mind can be so struck is more than I can see. It will be your duty to explain to me, when you arrive here safe and sound, whether the spectre of you is at my command to come up as soon as the whim has taken me to think about you - and not only about you, who always occupy my inmost heart, but suppose I begin thinking about the Isle of Britain, will the image of that wing its way to my consciousness?

3 But of this later on. I am only sounding you now to see in what spirit you take it. For if you are angry and annoyed, I shall have more to say, and shall insist upon your being reinstated in that school of philosophy, out of which you have been ousted "by violence

and an armed force." In this formula the words "within this year" are not usually added; so even if it is now two or three years since, bewitched by the blandishments of Pleasure, you sent a notice of divorce to Virtue, I am free to act as I like. And yet to whom am I talking? To you, the most gallant gentleman in the world, who, ever since you set foot in the forum, have done nothing but what bears every mark of the most impressive distinction. Why, in that very school you have selected I apprehend there is more vitality than I should have supposed, if only because it has your approval. "How did the whole subject occur to you?" you will say. Because I had nothing else to write. About politics I can write nothing, for I do not care to write what I feel.

[15.19] Cassius to Cicero [Brundisium, latter half of January, 45 B.C.] L

I hope that you are well. I assure you that on this tour of mine there is nothing that gives me more pleasure to do than to write to you; for I seem to be talking and joking with you face to face. And yet that does not come to pass because of those spectres; and, by way of retaliation for that, in my next letter I shall let loose upon you such a rabble of Stoic boors that you will proclaim Catus a true-born Athenian.

Display More

[Cicero: Letters to and from Cassius](#)

Seems like the same confusion of issues and words was plaguing Cicero and Cassius.

Post by "Godfrey" of April 12, 2022 at 1:51 PM

From Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods:

XVIII. With regard to his form, we are directed partly by nature and partly by reason. All men are told by nature that none but a human form can be ascribed to the Gods; for under what other image did it ever appear to any one either sleeping or waking? and, without having recourse to our first notions, reason itself declares the same; for as it is easy to conceive that the most excellent nature, either because of its happiness or immortality, should be the most beautiful, what composition of limbs, what conformation of lineaments, what form, what aspect, can be more beautiful than the human? Your sect, Lucilius (not like my friend Cotta, who sometimes says one thing and sometimes another), when they represent the divine art and workmanship in the human body, are used to describe how very completely each member is formed, not only for convenience, but also for beauty. Therefore, if the human form excels that

of all other animal beings, as God himself is an animated being, he must surely be of that form which is the most beautiful. Besides, the Gods are granted to be perfectly happy; and nobody can be happy without virtue, nor can virtue exist where reason is not; and reason can reside in none but the human form; the Gods, therefore, must be acknowledged to be of human form; yet that form is not body, but something like body; nor does it contain any blood, but something like blood. Though these distinctions were more acutely devised and more artfully expressed by Epicurus than any common capacity can comprehend; yet, depending on your understanding, I shall be more brief on the subject than otherwise I should be. Epicurus, who not only discovered and understood the occult and almost hidden secrets of nature, but explained them with ease, teaches that the power and nature of the Gods is not to be discerned by the senses, but by the mind; nor are they to be considered as bodies of any solidity, or reducible to number, like those things which, because of their firmness, he calls Στερέμνια; but as images, perceived by similitude and transition. As infinite kinds of those images result from innumerable individuals, and centre in the Gods, our minds and understanding are directed towards and fixed with the greatest delight on them, in order to comprehend what that happy and eternal essence is.

I don't find anything in there about speaking Greek. Googling, I came across a reference to this Philodemus referring to the gods in this way, but I can't find a specific cite. Without the quotation in Philodemus, there's always the possibility that Cicero was up to his lawyerly trickery in this passage. The reasoning doesn't seem to be very Epicurean to my reading.

Post by “Cassius” of April 12, 2022 at 1:57 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

I don't find anything in there about speaking Greek. Googling, I came across a reference to this Philodemus referring to the gods in this way, but I can't find a specific cite. Without the quotation in Philodemus, there's always the possibility that Cicero was up to his lawyerly trickery in this passage.

I do think it is in Philodemus, maybe in "On Piety" but I really thought it was in that Velleius section, because I thought it was stated as "a language like Greek," just as in the other psuedo references like psuedo-blood.

If and when I come up with it I will post back - I bet someone here knows more quickly though.

Post by "Don" of April 12, 2022 at 4:04 PM

Quote from Cicero to Cassius

Catius the Insubrian, an Epicurean, who died lately, gives the name of spectres to what the famous Gargettian [Epicurus], and long before that Democritus, called images

[M. Tullius Cicero, Epistulae ad Familiares, ad senatvm et ceteros, Scr. Romae ante mcd. m. Ian. a. 709 \(45\). M. CICERO S. D. C. CASSIO](#)

In the translated letter:

English "spectres" = Latin: spectris

[Charlton T. Lewis, Charles Short, A Latin Dictionary, spectrum](#)

English "images" = Greek εἶδωλον (we've seen before!)

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, εἶδωλον](#)

Post by "Don" of April 12, 2022 at 4:10 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

From Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods:

The Latin section starts for what it's worth here:
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...%3Asection%3D46>

Post by "Cassius" of April 12, 2022 at 4:42 PM

I would dearly love to find some surviving Catius and - whose the other one - Rufinius?

And i need to fix in my mind what "insubrian" means

Insubria is a historical-geographical region which corresponds to the area inhabited in [Classical antiquity](#) by the [Insubres](#); the name can also refer to the [Duchy of Milan](#) (1395-1810).

For several centuries this name stood for an area stretching approximately between the [Adda](#) river in the east and the [Sesia](#) river in the west, and between the [San Gottardo Pass](#) in the north and the [Po river](#) in the south, thus it was a synonym of the Milan region and the countryside areas gravitating towards it.

Post by “Don” of April 12, 2022 at 7:13 PM

Oh, so according to that map, the Insubrians were a Celtic people. Interesting.

Post by “Cassius” of April 12, 2022 at 7:33 PM

Yes interesting. For some reason I was getting in my mind that Catius might have been eastern / Syrian like Philodemus. This expands the geography somewhat.

So for our cosmopolitanism list:

Epicurus et al - Greek

Lucretius et al - Roman

Philodemus - Syrian (?)

Catius - Celtic

Post by “Joshua” of April 12, 2022 at 10:19 PM

Lucian was also Syrian, but has long been noted for his command of the Greek Language.

Diogenes was Lycian or Anatolian.

Post by “Joshua” of April 12, 2022 at 10:25 PM

And I continue to think that it makes sense to situate Epicurus as particularly Ionian. Among the Pre-Socratics, Aristotle called the Ionians *physiologoi*---"those who study nature".

Post by "Don" of April 13, 2022 at 7:20 AM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

Lucian was also Syrian, but has long been noted for his command of the Greek Language.

Agreed. Koine Greek was the lingua franca of the Ancient World for quite some time. That's one reason Marcus Aurelius, a Roman *emperor* could choose to write his diary in Greek.

[Joshua](#) 's note about Lucian is one of the reasons Luke Ranieri chose to call his ancient Greek pronunciation convention "Lucian" <https://lukeranieri.com/lucianpronunciation/>

[Quote from Joshua](#)

And I continue to think that it makes sense to situate Epicurus as particularly Ionian. Among the Pre-Socratics, Aristotle called the Ionians *physiologoi*---"those who study nature".

Agreed, he seems to be firmly in that Ionian tradition. although I wonder how Epicurus would feel about being seen as an Ionian and not Athenian. 😊

Post by "Don" of April 13, 2022 at 8:00 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I would dearly love to find some surviving Catius and - whose the other one - Rufinius?

I heard a sobering statistic on a podcast the other day. It is estimated that we only have 1-3% of all the writings that survived from the ancient world. We will never have access to 97-99% of it all. 😞

Post by “Matt” of April 13, 2022 at 7:40 PM

A Celtic Epicurean??

Post by “Cassius” of April 13, 2022 at 7:44 PM

It would seem so! The "truth" about the nature of the universe isn't the property of any particular group 😊

Post by “Matt” of April 13, 2022 at 7:49 PM

The Celts living in Italy would've been far more reasonable and “civilized” since they would have had significant contact with the Etruscans and Latins for centuries. Probably far more Italian in mannerisms than their Gallic or British counterparts.

Post by “Matt” of April 13, 2022 at 7:55 PM

In a similar way the Celtic people of Spain were significantly influenced by Iberian and Carthaginian societies and they had their own unique Celt-Iberian culture that looked very different from Gaul, but very much Celtic.

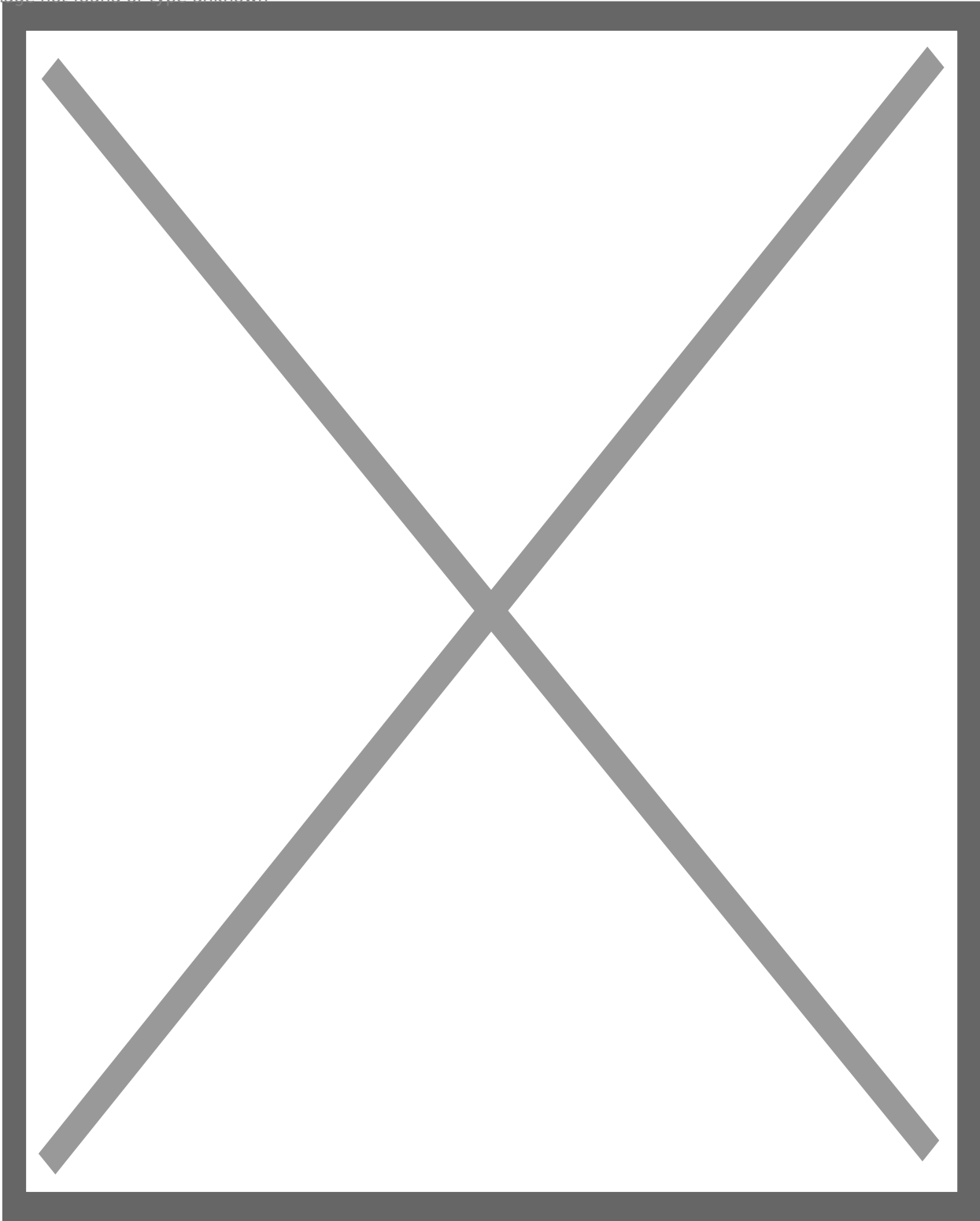
Post by “Don” of April 13, 2022 at 8:47 PM

[Quote from Matt](#)

Probably far more Italian in mannerisms than their Gallic or British counterparts.

Let's not sell the Gauls short. Take a look at the Gallo-Roman city of Nimes and its preserved colosseum and temple.

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[Nîmes - Wikipedia](#)

en.wikipedia.org

The Gauls weren't all Asterix and Obelix (although I have a soft spot for them as well as the historical Vercingetorix himself)

Post by “Don” of April 13, 2022 at 10:10 PM

Plus the Celts were unrivaled (in my opinion) in their artwork* and metallurgy... And they invented the iron-rimmed wheel used for chariots! They were also courageous and respected for their prowess in battle, even in defeat, as portrayed in at least two ancient statues of defeated Gauls. The Celtic and German tribes were formidable enemies, the former eventually embraced within the Empire, that latter kicking the Romans butts (not the least in Teutoburg Forest) and setting a clear boundary to Roman ambition.

But my pride in my ancestral heritage may be showing just a bit with this post. 😊

*PS: Okay, I'll give the Greeks their statuary and pottery, but Celtic artwork remains stunning. I'm including later Celtic artwork in the Christian era but items like the Books of Kells and Lindisfarne are unrivaled (again, my opinion)

Post by “Cassius” of April 16, 2022 at 6:44 AM

Looking at those photos from Autun has me still thinking about this list and my continued frustration with what I see as England's attachment to Stoicism rather than Epicurus. I wonder if we have any evidence of ancient Epicureanism closer to England than Autun?

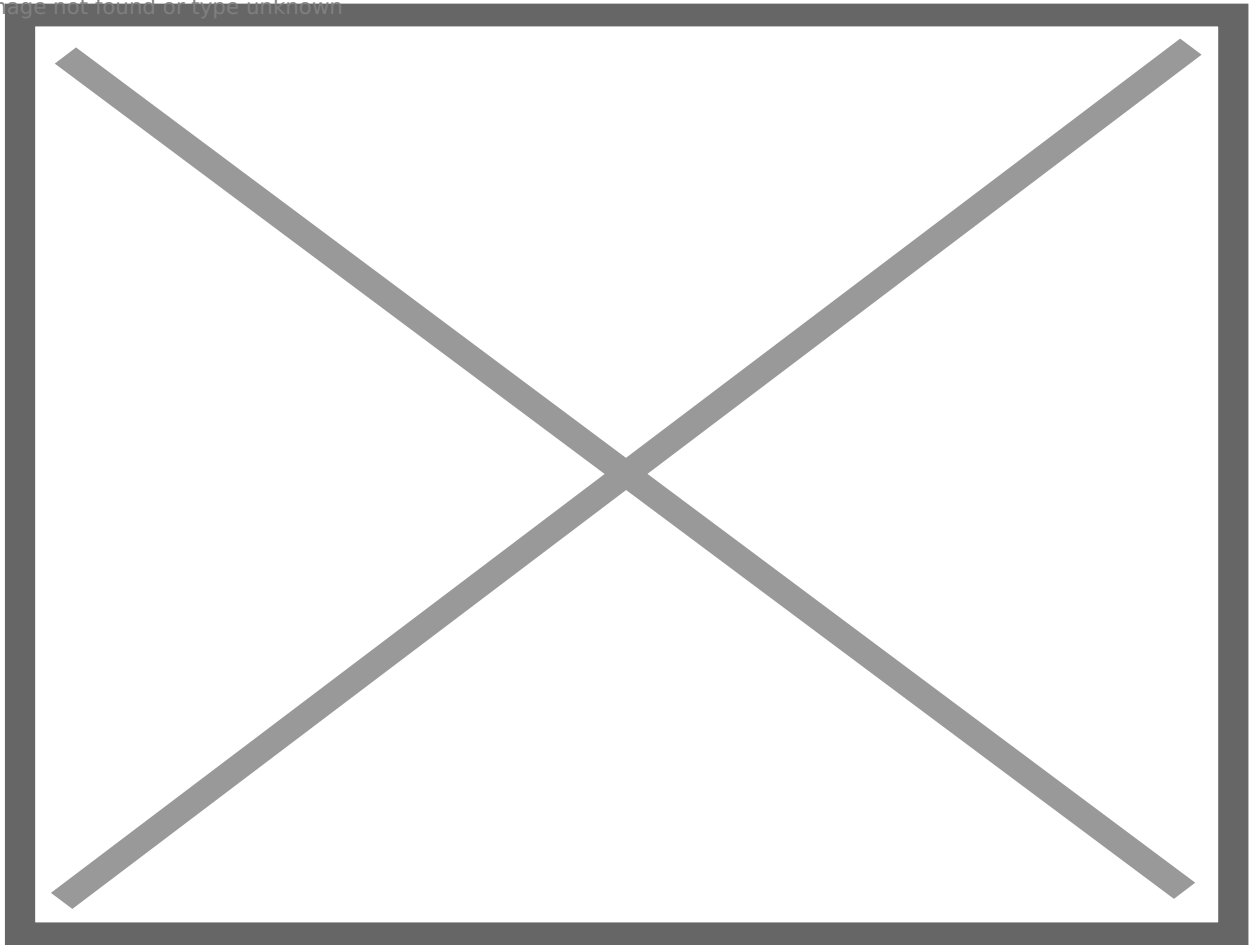
Post by “Don” of April 16, 2022 at 7:56 AM

[Collections Online | British Museum](#)

So, there's the link to the *British Museum* 😊

Not British but putting this article on the Villa dei Papyri here for future reference. Some great photos.

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[Hedonism in Herculaneum | Apollo Magazine](#)

The Villa dei Papiri gives us a glimpse into the world of a Roman statesman and his interest in Epicurean philosophy, writes Emma Park

www.apollo-magazine.com

Post by “Cassius” of April 16, 2022 at 1:00 PM

Yes lots of good information in that article - thank you!

One thing I did not realize is that the article says that there were two Pisos - father and son. The article includes a bust apparently of the son, so I wonder if we shouldn't add to our collection of busts of known Epicureans (we do have one somewhere, don't we? 😊) busts of the two Pisos (if both exist).