

Long and Sedley, Hellenistic Philosophers, "Gods"

Post by "Cassius" of November 27, 2020 at 6:44 AM

Godfrey the human form part is in Velleius / Cicero's on the nature of the gods:

Quote

"For the divine form we have the hints of nature supplemented by the teachings of reason. From nature all men of all races derive the notion of gods as having human shape and none other; for in what other shape do they ever appear to anyone, awake or asleep? But not to make primary concepts the sole test of all things, reason itself delivers the pronouncement. For it seems appropriate that a being who is the most exalted, whether by reason of his happiness or of his eternity, should also be the most beautiful; but what disposition of the limbs, what cast of features, what shape or outline can be more beautiful than the human form? You Stoics at least, Lucilius, (for my friend Cotta says one thing at one time and another at another) are wont to portray the skill of the divine creator by enlarging on beauty as well as the utility of design displayed in all parts of the human figure. But if the human figure surpasses the form of all other living beings, and god is a living being, god must possess the shape which is the most beautiful of all; and since it is agreed that the gods are supremely happy, and no one can be happy without virtue, and virtue cannot exist without reason, and reason is only found in the human shape, it follows that the gods possess the form of man. Yet their form is not corporeal, but only resembles bodily substance; it does not contain blood, but the semblance of blood.

"These discoveries of Epicurus are so acute in themselves and so subtly expressed that not everyone would be capable of appreciating them. Still I may rely on your intelligence, and make my exposition briefer than the subject demands. Epicurus then, as he not merely discerns abstruse and recondite things with his mind's eye, but handles them as tangible realities, teaches that the substance and nature of the gods is such that, in the first place, it is perceived not by the senses but by the mind, and not materially or individually, like the solid objects which Epicurus in virtue of their substantiality entitles *steremnia*; but by our perceiving images owing to their similarity and succession, because an endless train of precisely similar images arises from the innumerable atoms and streams towards the gods, our mind with the keenest feelings of pleasure fixes its gaze on these images, and so attains an understanding of the nature of a being both blessed and eternal.

"Moreover there is the supremely potent principle of infinity, which claims the closest and most careful study; we must understand that it has in the sum of things everything

has its exact match and counterpart. This property is termed by Epicurus *isonomia*, or the principle of uniform distribution. From this principle it follows that if the whole number of mortals be so many, there must exist no less a number of immortals, and if the causes of destruction are beyond count, the causes of conservation also are bound to be infinite.

“You Stoics are also fond of asking us, Balbus, what is the mode of life of the gods and how they pass their days. The answer is, their life is the happiest conceivable, and the one most bountifully furnished with all good things. God is entirely inactive and free from all ties of occupation; he toils not neither does he labor, but he takes delight in his own wisdom and virtue, and knows with absolute certainty that he will always enjoy pleasures at once consummate and everlasting.

The speak greek part I think is Philodemus - I will check ---

We don't have a good online reference for the Philodemus to point to - if anyone knows one, please comment. Here is one excerpt from [one article](#); I know this is in DeWitt too:

This anthropomorphism of Philodemus⁴⁴ (something that is completely absent from the Stoics) and the description of the gods' traits in great detail goes beyond that of Epicurus and goes further by attributing to the gods characteristics from the human world.⁴⁵ We have seen that he emphasizes that in addition to the characteristics, even the language of the gods is the same as that of humans: «ἐν τῇ ἑλληνικῇ γλώσσῃ λέγουσιν αἰθερῶν θεῶν» (Col. 14 6-7). They speak **Greek** (or something familiar) and this is also the language of wise people: «ἐν κοινῇ τῇ ἑλληνικῇ γλώσσῃ γινώσκουσιν» (Col. 14 12-13).⁴⁶ With the anthropomorphism of the gods, Philodemus opposes the accusations of the Skeptical and Stoics regarding the nature of the gods; accusations which the epicureans are called to deal with.