

# Long and Sedley, Hellenistic Philosophers, "Gods"

Post by "Cassius" of November 28, 2020 at 7:56 AM

These articles and comments are relevant to one of the things I find most important about this topic:

A superficial hearing of "pleasure" as the guide of life leaves open the possibility that a human could find pleasure living in a cave on bread and water *and never do anything else*.

I don't think that's correct and I don't think Epicurus meant that.

From a practical point of view, it's just not possible to do that, given the threats and hazards of human life and the need to work to make defenses against them. So you could say from a "rational" point of view, under the given facts of life, that a human who tries to go to a cave and live on bread and water will not likely succeed for very long, and not without indeed taking some precautions (obtaining a cave, obtaining the supply of bread and water).

But that's not a very satisfying analysis, and I don't think Epicurus would have relied on it. I think he would have relied on "feeling" as the driving force. But what tells us that one type of pleasure is more desirable to us than another? Certainly the feelings themselves do, but what about the human who has indeed lived all his life on bread and water in a cave and would have come into contact with nothing more to which to aspire (the Lucretian problem of the theory that the gods created the universe - from where did they get their model?)

I think that aspirational goals to improve one's condition are a logical extension of both the general Velleius theory of anticipations as intuitive etchings, plus the specific theory of "gods" as one of those etchings, plus the "images" theory that the mind can be stimulated directly from the outside. It may also be built in to the way "pleasure" functions as a faculty, but for the time being I'll accept that pleasure and pain may be simple go and stop faculties (but if so, programmed by what?).

I doubt the reductionist thought of living in a cave on bread and water was as much of a problem for Epicurus as it is today, and even today it's just a musing that few people really think about carrying out. But I think the question of "Why isn't bread and water in a cave good enough?" is an obvious one that would have concerned Epicurus and been dealt with in a variety of ways. Not by coming up with a list of better or worse, or nobler or baser pleasures, because that would be Platonic absolutism. The issue would have to be dealt with through "faculties" that are individual and contextual, such as the particular "etchings" with which a person might be born, plus the different observations a person makes / comes into contact with during life -- including these "divine images" whatever they are.