

# Knowledge of the Gods as "Manifest"

Post by "Joshua" of December 12, 2022 at 5:05 PM

What Elli is saying here is very much in line with Lucretius' allowance for what we might call metaphorical gods--the grain as Ceres and the wine as Bacchus and so on. But there is a separate question as to whether there are *personal* gods with limited *physical* bodies and no involvement in human affairs--and it's clear to me at least that Epicurus accepted those as well. So the question is this--do those gods present themselves to our five senses, or do they not? The answer to that as I see it is no.

If they do exist, and yet do not present to our five senses, how do we know of them? If not sensation, and if not feeling, then the answer must be anticipation. To quote Lucretius;

*And, Memmius, unless*

*From out thy mind thou spewest all of this*

*And casteth far from thee all thoughts which be*

*Unworthy gods and alien to their peace,*

*Then often will the holy majesties*

*Of the high gods be harmful unto thee,*

*As by thy thought degraded,- not, indeed,*

*That essence supreme of gods could be by this*

*So outraged as in wrath to thirst to seek*

*Revenge keen; but even because thyself*

*Thou plaguest with the notion that the gods,*

*Even they, the Calm Ones in serene repose,*

*Do roll the mighty waves of wrath on wrath;*

*Nor wilt thou enter with a serene breast*

*Shrines of the gods; nor wilt thou able be*

*In tranquil peace of mind to take and know*

*Those images which from their holy bodies*

*Are carried into intellects of men,  
As the announcers of their form divine.*

*-Book VI, Leonard Translation*

So it is the images or simulacra of the bodies of these gods that inform our knowledge of them, interfacing directly with our "intellects" and forming our preconceptions.

But soft! Did Lucretius in Book V not just make the point that our preconceptions that interpret and integrate these images can be very, very flawed? He says that a Centaur is what happens in our minds when the image of a horse and the image of a man get jumbled together. But we only think we *know* that Centaurs aren't real because we actually can use our senses to evaluate the horse, and the man, and because our reason can act on our sensory knowledge of them.

So under those constraints, how do we evaluate our preconceptions of the gods? We have no sensory information, and no means of getting any. We have nothing for reason to act on in assessing the images themselves.

I suspect that [Don](#) has translated it correctly, but it is certainly worth reminding ourselves that Epicurus' theology is possibly the most elusive and sinuous part of his philosophy--the preconceptions, the most difficult of his Canon of epistemology.