

Are the Gods Totally Painless? Does Calling Us To "Continuous Pleasure" Mean Totally Painless?

Distinctly controversial, on the contrary, both in the time of Epicurus and centuries later, was the question whether the bodies of the gods were corporeal or incorporeal. For the benefit of youthful disciples the teaching was dogmatic. In his syllabus addressed to the young Menoeceus Epicurus loses no time in defining the divine being as "a living creature," incorruptible and blissful, and the term employed is *zoön*, "animal," applicable to beasts as well as to human beings.²⁹ This is important: the gods are viewed as part of the natural order of living corporeal things, the *scala naturae*. Their place is at the top of the scale but not outside of it.

While deeper inquiry into the nature of the gods was reserved for advanced students and for the very last place in the curriculum of study, the nature of the soul was explained for the young Herodotus, and similar reasoning applies to the nature of the gods.³⁰ The major premise is the third of the Twelve Elementary Principles, which states that the universe is composed of solid bodies—that is, atoms—and void. From this it is deduced, on the principle of the excluded middle, that there is nothing incorporeal except void, which can neither receive nor deliver a stimulus. If either the soul or the god is incorporeal, they must be equated with void, but both are capable of delivering a stimulus; the gods, for example, stimulate the sensory capacity of the mind in visions. Therefore the bodies of the gods must be corporeal.