

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

## GRADATION IN GODHEAD

It is one of the more debated problems whether Epicurus recognized the existence of more than one class of gods. Both the specific evidences and general considerations would strongly favor the recognition of two classes, but scholars have been reluctant to make such a concession and

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## EPICURUS AND HIS PHILOSOPHY

they resort, as usual, to the device of emending the text.<sup>44</sup> In view of this situation a synoptic glance over the arguments is in order.

At the outset, as a factor of error, it should be diligently kept in mind that in the main the criticism of Epicurus has been hostile and the general desire has been to represent him as a heretic. In his own view, on the contrary, he was rather a traditionalist. He sponsored the usual polytheism of his countrymen and rationalized it. It has been noted already that his description of the bodies of the gods would not be unacceptable to the Greek who took Homer for a guide.

Although Epicurus had no choice but to call himself a sage or philosopher, he was in reality a reformer and a prophet, concepts for which his language had as yet no names. He believed he had discovered "true philosophy," originating in the teaching of Nature herself, as opposed to the corrupt beliefs of the poets, the multitude, and philosophers. As the upholder of the sanctity and dignity of the gods he rejected all the indecencies ascribed to them by the poets and the venalities and spites ascribed to them by the multitude. He was specially hostile to philosophers such as Eudoxus and Plato, who debased the gods by thinking of them as visible balls of fire coursing in circles around the sky.

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