

# More Thoughts on The "Idealism vs Realism" Question About the Epicurean "Gods"

Post by "Cassius" of April 19, 2019 at 10:02 AM

Poster: The question of whether Epicureanism is a realist or idealist remains unresolved. Apart from the problems of the exegesis and interpretation, there is the innately thorny nature of the questions themselves. Whether realist or idealist, both positions serve as a grounding for the prescriptive parts of Epicurean ethics and psychology. Idealism seems to provide the stronger case.

Cassius:

Poster, are you quoting someone or just stating your opinion? As to your conclusion, I disagree. If Epicurus had been saying one thing and meaning something entirely different, Epicurus would have been a hypocrite and had no credibility among the very intelligent circles of Greek and Roman philosophers. So it's my opinion that "idealism" as the sole basis for his position - a kind of Platonic "noble myth" would cut the legs out from anyone wishing to take Epicurus seriously - then or now. But we are all entitled to our own opinions, and to which Epicurean texts we choose to take seriously. I simply choose to take them \*all\* seriously, and not to reject any of them out of hand.

Also: Let me be clear on this aspect: I do think that the texts clearly indicate that the Epicurean theory of "the gods" has an aspect in which discussion of them serves as a motivating "ideal" to which to aspire. Just like Epicurus said that the veneration of wise men is good for those who do the veneration, the contemplation of how life might possibly be serves as a visual goal to which everyone can and should aspire. There's no necessary tension between the two positions - as they should not be, because what worth is an "ideal" that cannot be in any real fashion attained? As far as I can tell from the texts that are left, the "gods" are distinguished mainly from other living beings in that they (1) do not die, and (2) do not appear to have any pains (either they have totally eliminated them or they are insignificant).

In Epicurus' time, and still today, people die, so that aspect of being a god is to this point unattainable. But the goal of living happily as long as possible is still relevant to us. Also, the goal of living in as much pleasure as possible, and with as little pain as possible, is very relevant to us as well.

Thinking about "gods" as an actual embodiment of these goals no doubt served a useful purpose to the ancient Epicureans, and I submit that in some form it still serves a useful purpose. We are flying blind with very few authoritative texts available on what the Epicureans thought and did, but if someone today isn't visualizing life as they would like to see it exist for

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them, they are very possibly as lost as they can possibly be. And straightening out that confusion is what a \*full\* understanding of Epicurean philosophy can accomplish.