

Episode 227 - Cicero's OTNOTG - 02 - Velleius Begins His Attack On Traditional Views Of The Gods

Post by "Eikadistes" of May 20, 2024 at 9:23 PM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

What has "nature used to impress a notion of gods on our minds" if not the very images of the gods?

Drugs. And a few other things, but I'd like to start with *drugs*.

By definition, **psychedelic chemicals** are associated with the religious experience (from the ancient Greek ψυχή [*psykhé*] "mind" or "soul" and δῆλος [*délos*] "manifest" or "visible"). In addition to near-universal consumption of wine, as well as (what I deem to be) *possible*, recreational use of cannabis (as demonstrated by the Scythians according to Herodotus), the many Mystery Rites (such as the Orphic, Dionysian, and Eleusinian Mysteries) of Antiquity presented the average ancient Greek with a variety of ways to induce a religious experience, either through the inhalation or ingestion of **psychoactive substances**. The content of those experiences are categorically inspirational, and the experience, *itself*, can be psychologically and behaviorally transformational.

Dancing. It goes well with drugs for a reason.

Similar neurological patterns are activated through ritualistic **dancing** and/or **drumming**. In Islam, we see this with Sufi whirling, renown as inducing a mystical state. Dancing is a primary form of spiritual expression throughout the worlds cultures, too numerous to name. The repetitive, kinetic and acoustic rituals of rhythmic drumming and dancing are partners in inducing the religious experience. Dancing would have been a feature of Dionysian Mysteries, and the practice had a practical purpose, to induce the psychedelic experience, or, in Epicurean terms (*so long as I am not conflating incompatible ideas*), to "impress a notion of gods on our minds." *Historically-speaking*, getting high while dancing to rhythmic music never gets old (and has never gotten old).

Meditation. It's another pathway to the gods.

Meditation yields similar neurological patters as **drugs**, **dancing**, and **drumming**. We can also throw **chanting** in this category (and, perhaps, **singing**). We find recorded examples in Tibetan Buddhism. For the same reasons that dancing and drumming induce psychedelic experiences, various forms of **meditation**, **chanting**, and **breathing** can facilitate psychological states in which lasting, psychologically-transformational impressions (such that we call them "divine") can be consciously apprehended. Focusing upon the icon of a deity can

induce an experience that can lead to measurably-positive, behavioral changes. Here again, the Mystery Rites come into play.

Dreams. This is the big one in an Epicurean context.

I think that nocturnal dreams are the best example, not only because they are mentioned by Epicurus, but because they are the only psychedelic experience that occurs without consciously initiating it. Very rarely do we chose our dreams, and we are usually *only* observers of our dreams, much as, throughout the day, we are observers of sensations. A strong analogy can be made between the images our eyes apprehend in the day and the images our mind apprehends at night. Both are received without the bias of the rational mind, and can therefore be trusted as sources of data. As with optical illusions, it is up to the intellect to formulate a practical interpretation, but those images are already there for the intellect to consider when it awakens.

Those are some general ways of inducing transformational mental states that illicit the "perception of deities" and inspire the "divine nature". The Epicurean connection between *piety* and *ethics* reinforces to me the proposition (I'm making) that Epicurus' description of the gods (as impressive objects of a dreamy mind) can be expressed as a function of needing to provide a naturalistic explanation for psychedelic experiences, experiences that would have been common among ancient Greeks as demonstrated by the plethora of Mystery Rites.

Epicurean Philosophy is always practical, and Epicurean theology should be no different: sober vocabulary is required to ground theology in physics, or, in other words, to ground the religious experience within the framework of a universe that is made from particles dancing in void. Unlike the gods of metaphysicians, who were purely theoretical, the [Epicurean gods](#) were apparent, and the religious experience was not only accessible, but, through ritual, repeatable and reliable.