

Hidden Brain podcast: Suggested Episodes on the Gods & Religion

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At the moment I would tend to think the way Godfrey is going is most likely. It seems likely that prolepsis is, like the eyes or other senses, a pre-conceptual / pre-opinion faculty that is neither right nor wrong. In contrast, even the assertions that "gods are blessed" or "gods are incorruptible" are chock full of conceptual right/wrong content.

So at this point it seems to me that those statements, which are "right" from Epicurus' point of view as stated by Epicurus to Menoeceus and by Velleius to Cicero, are better thought as "based in part on proleptic input" (which probably goes for all 'statements' of any kind that are recognizable to us) rather than "are prolepsis" or "being proleptic" themselves.

More likely than saying that our brains are stamped at birth "gods exist and are incorruptible and blessed," he's saying that our brains are stamped at birth with an operating system that, when exposed to certain experiences, are disposed to "anthropomorphize and to engage in teleological thinking." The results of that process are deemable to be true and consistent with all evidence only when we conclude that gods are blessed and imperishable, which means that they don't have anything to do with us or earth (that would indicate weakness). To reason otherwise contradicts our physics and all other repeatable and verifiable sensory observations.

However in my view there is no conflict at all with concluding that the evidence we do have (including infinite and eternal universe, isonomia, nature never makes only a single thing of a kind) we should expect to exist beings which do have physical reality and are totally happy and deathless. Reasoning in that way provides at least one plausible "explanation" of the phenomena that allows us to dismiss fears of supernatural causation.

Reasoning in that way I see no reason to be concerned that such theories as Don mentions above would "violate Epicurean orthodoxy." The only way they would do so would be if "orthodoxy" required us to jump directly from "human ideas of divinity stem from mental phenomena" to "no superior forms of life exist elsewhere in the universe."

To me such a conclusion is a total *non sequitur* and goes against all scientific observations about life being natural and not supernatural. To reason that way seems to me to be a very basic error that Epicurus would and did reject. The fact that a huge number of people otherwise favorable to Epicurus seem inclined to reason in exactly that way (and conclude that Epicurean style gods do not in fact exist) is to me a defect in the reasoning of those making that assertion, not in the reasoning of Epicurus.