

# Episode 241 - Cicero's OTNOTG 16 - A Common Thread Between The Epicurean View Of "The Gods" and "The Good"

Post by "Eikadistes" of August 16, 2024 at 12:35 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

[Quote from Joshua](#)

The planets are stars in this analysis--they are the "wandering stars" spoken of in the Letter to Pythocles;

Exactly. The ancient Greeks saw those as *literally* "wandering stars." They didn't think of them as "worlds" or "planets" like we conceive of a planet as another body circling a star. They're not a kosmos. They're simply ἄστρων πλανᾶσθαι, astron planasthai, stars who for some reason wander across the ἄστρα that are fixed in place in the night sky.

I love the way they described celestial objects.

Everything in the sky was one kind of "glower" or another. There are countless "glowers" that twinkle. There are a limited number of "wandering glowers" like Jupiter. Then we have "long-haired glowers" like Halley's Comet (which Epicurus *should* have seen with Nausiphanes). Everything else seems to have been categorized as "remaining glowers", which might have included things like meteors, or perhaps even the Andromeda Galaxy (which would have been visible to ancient peoples without ambient light). Our "kosmos", I think, should contain all the "glowers" we can see.

Space is great.

[Quote from Don](#)

These are off the top of my head. I also said above that "I don't intend to pray" but looking at what I've typed... who knows. Maybe I'll try one of those forms of "prayer" in the future after all.

I think you've identified a key question I need to answer, which is "**how** did Epicureans pray?"

When I think of "prayer", my mind goes to intercession, which, I think, Epicurus would have identified as a kind of wish-fulfillment. He definitely rejects this. He acknowledges that the gods are completely removed from the stage of the human drama. They aren't even in the audience.

They don't even live around the theatre. (*It seems likely that they don't go to shows.*)

Then we have various forms of vocal prayer, *hymns*, *songs*, *chanting*, and *mantras*. I think we can find an example of this sort of prayer in Greek theatre. It was musical, religious, and DeWitt (as I recall) describes Epicurus as having been a regular participant. This sort of prayer seems to have provided Epicurus and his friends with a sort of practical utility that was inherently pleasurable.

Meditation is, I think, another form of prayer we can identify (or perhaps "prayer" is a form of "meditation"? The ways we employ these words in English are slippery). Of kind of meditation, I do not think that formless meditation works in this case (in other words, emptying oneself of all sensations, totally withdrawing inward, focusing on concepts like non-existence).

Contemplative prayer is defined in various ways, but in an Epicurean sense, I think this might be a useful framework in which to discuss piety. Ancient Epicureans memorized the Key Doctrines of Epicurean ethics, and the Elementary Principles of his physics. In this regard, I can accept prayer as a natural, cognitive practice, and can acknowledge that I engage in this behavior.

There are other forms we can identify as well. This is just to identify some categories.

So, maybe it's safe to say that Epicurean prayer was as reasonable as "listening to pleasurable music" and "studying nature", so long as those practices yield a happier life.