

Article: "Extraterrestrial Life May Look Nothing Like Life On Earth..." (and for our purposes, applying the article to "gods")

Post by "Cassius" of December 14, 2024 at 4:16 AM

Ok - let me go back to the opening post. The point of it (and the thrust of the article, I think) is that to even look for something you have to define what you are looking for. In this sense "look" refers to investigation to establish that something is real.

I can see that we have an ambiguity in what it means to find that something is real. Most of the time we are referring to the five senses to establish reality, but in this case Epicurus / Lucretius seem to be talking about direct receipt of images by the mind as the criteria by which we are motivated to think of them as real.

Most of the time images correspond to things that have physical reality. In the case of centaurs, he's apparently saying that images can arrange themselves and *not* correspond with reality. It's debatable whether gods fit into the category of centaurs or not. Idealists might say gods are in the centaur category and have absolutely no independent existence. Realists might say that gods do have an independent existence, but that existence is not in the form of what we think of as solid bodies, but in the form of "quasi-bodies" of apparently flowing atoms (referencing Velleius here).

As i read the thread now the essential point of controversy that Tau Phi is different from the point of the original post that you should define what you are investigating before you start your investigation.

Tau Phi is suggesting that the act of "finding" something by our having any perception of it whatsoever with any of our five senses by definition means that the perceived thing is not an Epicurean god.

In order to reach that conclusion, I would say that you would need to find a clear statement by an authoritative Epicurean that it is universally inherent in the nature of a god that a god cannot ever be perceptible to one of the human five senses.

(That gets back to the comment Kalosyni made earlier as to exactly what Epicurus said that gods re invisible. Did one of the key Epicureans make a clear statement that rules out an Epicurean god ever being visible under any conditions? If there is such a statement I can't call it to mind, and this issue could have caused the possibility of living in the intermundia to arise as a way to reconcile why they might be visible there but not visible to us here on earth.)

Here I would go back to the question of comparing our knowledge of gods to our knowledge of atoms. Throughout most of history we have had no capacity to sense an atom with any of our five senses, yet we would firmly believe that atoms exist. Do we also take the position that advances in technology will never make it possible through instrumentation to "see" an image of a "smallest" particle? I doubt there is a theoretical impossibility of -- through advanced science -- observing a visualization of an elemental particle.

In Epicurean philosophy as I understand it, "images" are like anything else - they are composed of elemental particles. If you take the David Konstan / traditional realist position that Epicurus meant what he said that gods are perceivable through images, then there is an atomic basis for gods just like anything else, and I would see no theoretical reason why that presence could not be detected at least through advanced instrumentation.

Further, I see no theoretical reason why, as the article indicates, that we should rule out finding living beings which are self-sustaining and successfully regenerate themselves indefinitely. The question of whether they would be detectable to our five senses if we were close enough to them physically is pretty much exactly what the article is all about.

It's not at all obvious to me that the simple act of *our* being able to "detect" them, like we do or will eventually detect atoms, would necessarily amount to their being "disturbed" by our act of being able to detect them. As it is already, I see no reason to infer that it is impossible for an Epicurean god to be aware of humans, even if we stipulate as we do that humans cause no "trouble" for gods. That would be parallel to our being able to visualize an atom through instrumentation -- visualizing an atom would not necessarily cause us any disturbance whatsoever.

To try to summarize at this point, the traditional realist view of [Epicurean gods](#) is that they have *some* kind of physical existence arising from atoms. "Atoms" are non-detectable to our unaided five senses, but I would expect that they either are already or will be detectable in the future via instrumentation. Certainly combinations of atoms frequently become visible and touchable to humans. The bottom line is that such observation is pleasurable and the additional pleasure that such knowledge brings makes it desirable.

To my knowledge there's nothing in the texts that rules out an analogy between combinations of atoms giving rise to other things that are theoretically detectable and combinations of atoms giving rise to gods.

To impose a flat rule that "if they are detectable to humans then they are not gods" seems to me to be going too far. To me, this imposes a limitation on the possibilities that I don't see good reason for in the texts. The texts, especially Lucretius, seem to refer to humans perceiving images of gods when asleep and even sometimes when awake, so to me the texts seem to me to go in the opposite direction.

Yes you have to be flexible in thinking about what "detection" really involves, but that's the very point of the article. it's helpful to think about how we look for things which we don't

ordinarily perceive with our senses here on earth, because there are lots of such things that affect us.

Once we eventually find intelligent life in some other part of the universe, our failure to have detected their existence up to that point did not in any way mean that we should have ever presumed that they did not exist. We have had at least since the time of Epicurus very good reason to firmly expect that intelligent life outside earth exists. For the same reason, we have reason to expect that some of those life forms are imperishable and experience lives that fit Epicurus' definition of godlike. And our act of detecting them in some way doesn't necessarily violate our expectation that they are blessed and imperishable.

OK more than enough for the moment.....