

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 10:51 AM

Sometimes the most contentious issues generate the most progress.

I would say that the construction "Whenever you find creatures that are living beings, blessed, and imperishable, ... you know for sure that those are not [Epicurean gods](#)." can be very useful if made more complete and clear.

I have added the ellipsis because I don't think it is clear what 'find' means, nor is it complete.

As to "find," much revolves around whether "images received by the mind" should be included within "find."

But the bigger issue I have is the completeness. The following variations that make the statement more complete I would say are clearly in harmony with Epicurus, and more practical to apply, especially as will be needed for application as we begin space travel and start finding alien life:

- Whenever you find creatures who appear to be living beings, blessed, and imperishable, and yet causing trouble for others or experiencing trouble themselves, you know for sure that those are not [Epicurean gods](#).

Or -

- Whenever you find creatures who appear to be living beings, blessed, and imperishable, and yet suffering from pain disease or dying, you know for sure that those are not [Epicurean gods](#).

But in contrast, to construct something that leads to "Whenever you find creatures who appear to be living beings, blessed, and imperishable, you know for sure that these are not gods" shifts the emphasis to a physics test, rather than one that follows the logical definition that Epicurus sets out in both Menoecus and [PD01](#).

In addition to being a physics test that is not clearly present in the texts, the latter construction rings of a dualism between gods and the rest of the universe. I know of no reason to infer that gods cannot come into contact with any non-god entity whatsoever under any circumstances. It seems clear that that was in part the reason for the discussion of the intermundia. To say that by definition they cannot have any contact with any other forms of matter would place them entirely outside the sphere of natural entities composed of atoms, which Epicurus seems to be

working hard to keep them squarely within.

As to not making the gods a physics test, I would apply what David Sedley says about pleasure in "Epicurus' Refutation of Determinism" (my emphasis added):

By establishing that cognitive scepticism, the direct outcome of reductionist atomism, is self-refuting and untenable in practice, Epicurus justifies his non-reductionist alternative, according to which sensations are true and there are therefore bona fide truths at the phenomenal level accessible through them. The same will apply to the *pathe*, which Epicurus also held to be veridical. Pleasure, for example, is a direct datum of experience. It is commonly assumed that Epicurus must have equated pleasure with such and such a kind of movement of soul atoms; but although he will have taken it to have some explanation at the atomic level, I know of no evidence that he, any more than most moral philosophers or psychologists, would have held that an adequate analysis of it could be found at that level. Physics are strikingly absent from Epicurus' ethical writings, and it is curious that interpreters are so much readier to import them there than they are when it comes to the moral philosophy of Plato or Aristotle.