

Reasoning through the Letter to Menoecus' On the Gods

Post by “Eikadistes” of October 24, 2025 at 5:02 PM

[Quote from DaveT](#)

[Quote from Eikadistes](#)

He quotes Epíkouros as writing "...that it is possible even for many eternal and immortal gods to exist"

"Possible" does not remotely approach

Just for the record, since I've been parsing through the Greek, he writes ἐξεῖναι (*exeínai*), the present, active infinitive of ἐξεῖναι meaning "to be possible" or also "to be allowed", so, that's a fair translation. I think he's just saying that "eternal god" concept is coherent with Epicurean physics ... so long as any given "eternal god" only exists as a formation in the minds of people.

[Quote from DaveT](#)

This general topic of who, or what gods may exist and what they do seems pretty vaguely written

I don't read it as quite "vague" in [On Piety](#), or with the description of *eidola* in *Herodotos*.

They take us through a moment-by-moment procession of the means by which different bundles of particles coalesce to form mental images. This corresponds with Epíkouros' description in the *Epistle to Herodotos* of "impulses" that "sequentially" travel through a kind of "relay" in the soul to then "sublimate" together to form "images" which are then "apprehended by the intellect".

[Quote from DaveT](#)

If there is only matter and void in his world view, how can transcendent gods

Definitely no transcendent *thing* exists or transcends bodies and void — no doubt about that.

I purport that the natural gods (*natural* simply meaning "made of particles") can exist as images in the mind that coalesce together *from different streams of compatible images*.

[Quote from DaveT](#)

I wonder how important the existence of gods was to Epicurus anyway, since his foundation was to simply not fear the gods (if they even possibly exist?)

This is a great point, and I agree, if by "existence of gods" you mean "the presence of chunky lifeforms living beyond the stars", and I think it reinforces the notion that gods are appearances in the mind. Suppose there are **not** *gods-as-extraordinary-lifeforms-beyond-the-stars*: this in no way impacts Epicurean piety, prayer, or practice. The entire process of engaging piety only requires deities to exist as deeply inspiring icons and idols. If they aren't "'really' out there", no big deal.

[Quote from DaveT](#)

He certainly never, that I have seen, propounded on where they came from and why they exist at all, did he?

I think we can take the description from the *Epistle to Herodotos* as a reliable description of the formation of the mental appearance of gods. As Obbink translates in *On Piety*, there is a further delineation of two kinds of mental images, some bundles of particles that all come from the "same" source, and some bundles of "similar" particles that come together from multiple sources; the gods, as I read it, are identified as images of the latter, a mixture of bundles from different sources.

Nonetheless, you might appreciate the following, because after going on-and-on about all of the above in *On Piety*, Philódēmos (if we accept Obbink's reconstruction) concedes that "no one has been prolific in finding convincing demonstrations for the existences of **the gods**; nevertheless all men, with the exception of some [...] worship them, as do we" (οὐδεὶς εἰκνουμένας περὶ τ[οῦ **Θ**]εοῦς ὑπάρχει[ιν τὰς ἀπο]δείξεις εὐπ[όρησ]εν· ὁμῶς δε [σέβ]ονται πάντε[ς εἰ μὴ παρ]άκοποί τινε[ς αὐτούς, *On Piety*, Col. 23, 13-17), so I think your previous point, if I'm reading you correctly, is true, that the hard, chunky, massive, physical existence of animal-like-beings, beyond-the-stars is unnecessary for the Epicurean understanding of theology and practice of piety to still be true.