

Was Epicurus Influenced by Xenophanes?

Post by “Eikadistes” of April 6, 2026 at 12:25 PM

I have yet to find Xenophanes in the extent works of Epíkouros, Metródōros, Hermarkhos, Polyainos, Polystratos, Karneiskos, Dēmētrios of Lakonia, Zēnon, Philódēmos, or either Diogénēs.

Lucretius **does** allude to Xenophanes (but not by name) somewhere around Book 1 Line 715 in describing the philosopher who supposed the world to be composed of "earth with water" (as opposed to particles, or water like Thales, or fire like Herakleitos, etc.).

I personally love Xenophanes' notion that gods look like believers in the mind of believers. Epicureans would **loosely** agree with Xenophanes here. As Philódēmos writes, through a process of ὑπερβάσεως (*hyperbáseōs*) “transposition” (*On Piety*, Col. 12.9, 324-5), transposed formations have been ἀποτετελεσμένωι (*ápotetelesménōi*) “rendered” to human souls in human forms. Just like centaurs (in being horse + human) a god is (blessedness + human), and that suggests to me that a rational being on another planet would perceive a god to be a blessed example of their species.

It's a loose connection, and I think the Epicureans were making an inference from the fact that the human form contains a rational intellect, and that is a pre-requisite for a blessed being (because anything irrational is going to have a painful life), so I do **not** believe that Epicureans would agree that a conceptual triangle, or a cow could, in any way, actually qualify as a god. Plus, realistically, and practically, Xenophanes mixes the notion of human happiness with a triangle, so....

It definitely holds for the comment about different human cultures, such as Ethiopians and Thracians. I maintain that part of Epíkouros' theology is an anthropology of religion triggered by Alexander's expansion to India, so the knowledge that Indians, and Persians (etc.) have god-like concepts supports part of Xenophanes' statement about Africans and Europeans.