

Epicurus, gods and God

Post by "Cassius" of October 17, 2019 at 8:32 AM

Godfrey we may be trying to fit too much into a single thread - this thread is yours so you should steer it. We can open other threads on any of these issues.

But another aspect of this subject (to the extent it is the role of "the gods" in Epicurean philosophy) which we have not exactly touched on is the issue of "explaining how religion came to be and get control of so many people."

There are many passages in Lucretius, plus the reference in "on the nature of the gods" that talk about both how "anticipations" and "images" (which DeWitt thinks is different from the anticipations part) played a part in the rise of the viewpoint that there are such things as divinities in almost(?) every cultural/national group that developed over time.

It seems pretty clear that while some of the rise of religion was the result of corruption, the Epicureans were also pointing to natural reasons for its development, and that too is an area of interest for a lot of people that helps bring the big picture of "the role of religion in humanity" into focus. The issue of "images" floating through the air is to us today one of the least-discussed aspects of the Epicurean texts, but as with everything else I would not dismiss any of it without looking closely at it, especially since DeWitt argues that Epicurus seems to have been talking about the brain having the ability to sense certain kinds of "images" directly, and not through the eyes or other senses.

It's total speculation to try to make too much of that part of the images issue without more texts, but it seems to me that the best way to understand something is to try to reconstruct it as best possible. Then if we think something went off the rails somewhere we can separate out what we don't believe while still profiting from the part that seems to be well grounded.