

Discussion of the Society of Epicurus' 20 Tenets of 12/21/19

Post by "Cassius" of January 8, 2020 at 8:45 PM

I was about to come back and post about this and I see Mike raises the issue:

Quote

. And if he is a mortal god, he must have been at least a super human

That's the part that is not correct, if your implication by the word "super" means "supernatural" or "non-natural."

I get the impression that 98% of the issue is that people today insist that there can be only one definition of "god." They absolutely **refuse** to consider a "god" to be anything less than omnipotent, omniscience, omnipresent, and all those "magical" qualities that the eastern religions specialize in. It's amazing -- they can read the Epicurean material about a god being natural and not omnipotent, and when they get to the end of the sentence they just refuse to entertain it -- almost as if they had never read the words in the sentence! All the while it is patently obvious and well-known that Greek gods themselves were in no way omniscient or omnipresent or all-powerful, and yet we seem to have no problem accepting that Venus or Zeus were called "gods." It is today as if no kind of god can exist except a Jesus or a Mohammed or a Yahweh -- how amazingly narrow minded we have become! There's no way in the world that I personally am going to let the Christians and the Jews and the Muslims dictate to me what the word "god" MUST mean, and I feel sure that Epicurus felt the same way about the religious pushers of supernaturalism in his day.

I don't think Epicurus admitted any of those things about true gods -- and that is why I used the Michael Jackson analogy -- I think he was using the word in a relative sense, to indicate full success in living (which means never dying) and full success in pleasure (which means never experiencing any pain) all in an absolutely natural way.

I know that means that people today will say "**Well then he should not have called them gods!**"

But we don't get to decide the meaning of terms -- whoever is living at the time gets to define things the way he wants, and I think that Epicurus thought it was perfectly appropriate to use the term "gods" in a way that accepts some attributes and discards others.

If that's 98% of the issue, then the other 2% of the issue is "Well we've got great telescopes and we've never seen any." The limitation in that argument ought to be obvious to anyone who

is willing to entertain that the size of the universe is infinite. We've never yet discovered life elsewhere in the universe either, but as for me I am 100% confident that it's just a matter of time.

[Quote from Mike Anyayahan](#)

Is it a form of sarcasm?

Absolutely not! Epicurus was not saying anything disparaging about his form of "gods" at all. He might have said something disparaging about the so-called supernatural gods, but there is nothing that I am aware of that documents that. The "Epicurus' riddle" is not really traceable back to Epicurus himself, but to the early church fathers' characterization of Epicurus' position, which I don't consider reliable in that degree of detail (the contradictions pointed out in the riddle sound Epicurean, but the "why call him god?" is probably not Epicurean, in my opinion since that conflicts with the rest of what we know about the Epicurean position).

[Quote from Mike Anyayahan](#)

I find it odd that Epicurus tells us not to harm others (so that they won't harm us, too, and inflict pain on us) while telling us not to fear the God (because he is harmless). It seems to me that this god is so useless he is close to non-existing entity.

I am not aware of any location where Epicurus tells us not to harm others. He tells us that if we do harm others we can expect retaliation, so we better be prepared and consider whether we want to harm that person or not, but he does not tell us absolutely not to harm others, and in fact it is implicit that we certainly will "harm" others if necessary and appropriate to protect our safety and happiness.

As far as this kind of god being useless, the first response of course is that it is not necessary for something to be useful to us in order for it to exist. Secondly, there is a "use" for [Epicurean gods](#), as discussed above and by DeWitt. The argument seems to be that it enhances our happiness to have a correct conception of the highest form of life possible, and to realize that such a being is of no threat to us, and to serve as a sort of example of what we ourselves should strive for to the extent of our ability. I think it's a reasonable analogy to suggest that lots of young people improved their basketball skills by comparing themselves in their minds to Michael Jordan and other basketball "gods," just for one example, even though Michael Jordan never saw them, never instructed them, and never cared whether they existed or not.