

Episode Two - The Achievement of Epicurus

Post by "Godfrey" of October 3, 2020 at 4:17 PM

It's a fascinating and involved question as to what Epicurus thought of religion and the gods. There are some threads here addressing the "idealist" vs the "realist" viewpoints. These basically correspond to the view that Epicurus considered the gods to be a mental construct for contemplation vs the view that he considered the gods to be real. The thread that Don linked to above has an essay that presents a case for the realist interpretation, which I found thought provoking.

As mentioned in the essay, the prolepses are intricately intertwined with the conception of the gods, along with the idea that we know of the gods from extremely fine particles that they emit. These two subjects (gods and prolepses) just might be the least understood ideas in EP.

The issue of how we interpret these ideas today adds yet another layer of complexity. On recent threads we've discussed justice and truth as prolepses; are the gods a prolepsis as Epicurus apparently states? Today many (if not most) of us are indoctrinated from childhood into believing in a single god. Prolepses, however, are "pre-conceptual" and more primitive, and to the best of my limited knowledge, primitive societies believed in multiple gods (although not of the Epicurean kind). To me there seems to be a prolepsis of awe/wonder at the immensity of the universe, but does this translate to a prolepsis of gods? Didn't primitive gods function as explanations of the mysteries of existence? And didn't Epicurus, and subsequent science, dispel many of these mysteries?

But I'm rambling....