

# Introductory Video on Epicurean Gods and the Three Responses

**Post by "Cassius" of October 29, 2020 at 8:27 AM**

Did I hear it correctly at 1:58 that it is foolish to celebrate festivals "if gods are indifferent to us?"

That's way too ambiguous. As stated (if I heard correctly) it is a statement that gods take an interest in us. I feel sure that the texts (even Philodemus) don't say that, and that the point is rather more like "the issue of divinity is not a matter of indifference to us" which is a totally different point.

That's one precise point of the video we need to examine.

Edit 1: I want to be fair and say that a lot of effort went into the video and there are parts I think are good. I particular liked the graphic of the couple climbing the mountain as appropriate for what was said from about 3:00 to about 3:45

At the 5:00 minute mark or so there is a strong assertion that people "originally" had better anticipations of the gods than later. I question the accuracy of that statement.

I think it's dangerous and not warranted to imply to close a relationship between Epicurus and Theodorus the Cyreniac.

At 6:50, a reference to natural selection in the development of the gods? I have to think that is a pure overlay on the part of the commentator and I don't know of any text reference that would support that (?), as it would be taking a position on whether gods have a beginning, which I don't recall there to be anything on (?)

At 7:26 Epicurus advised us to pray? Are we sure of that specifically?

At 8:00 he cites George Kaplanis, who is Elli's friends. I am not able to confirm immediately what George's views are but just making a note that knowing his more complete views would be useful for evaluating the quote.

At 9:22 the reference to "Epicurean justice based on social contract" is a loaded reference to a very controversial subject.



"Piety and justice appear to be almost the same thing. . . because to break one's oath is to be unjust and also to lie, and both are disturbing."

- Philodemus, *On Piety*

As to that, oh no - quoting very specific material like that without drilling down to the precise text to determine its context and what extent it is reconstructed vs trustworthy is very dangerous. This concern I have underlies everything about many of the texts of Philodemus, which are except in rare instances in very poor condition. Maybe this particular translation is rock solid, but these texts don't deserve the same deference as Diogenes Laertius, Cicero, or some of the other core texts.

I would repeat that caution with much more force in regard to this quote about "doing no harm to anyone" and "make themselves harmless to everyone" and "make themselves noble."

"Those who believe our oracles about the Gods will first wish to imitate their blessedness, insofar as mortals can, so that, since it was seen to come from doing no harm to anyone, they will endeavor most of all to make themselves harmless to everyone as far as it is within their power, and second, to make themselves noble. . . "

- Philodemus, *On Piety*

Same caveat here and on every reference to "noble"

"The just person has noble expectations concerning the Gods, and at the same time exceedingly enjoys pleasures that are unalloyed and effortless."

- Philodemus, *On Piety*

At 11:47: "the true purpose of religion, which is to abide in pleasure." Making note of this as a very broad statement which may be easy to misinterpret.

At 12:50 it is suggested that the "realist" view of gods (a term i don't like) was the "original" view of the Epicureans, but that "some later" Epicureans adopted an idealist interpretations. Who is he referring to here as the "some later Epicureans"? I think he's probably referring to Hiram himself and current people now alive, because I am not aware that any actual ancient

Epicurean from the ancient world and familiar with the texts took that position. That is a huge point and should not be glossed over. The "idealist" interpretation is not supported by any credible ancient Epicurean, so far as I know. If there are such examples it would be important to bring them forward and highlight them, because otherwise I think the inference from the evidence is that anyone who was actually an Epicurean and had access to Epicurean texts either followed Epicurus and considered them "real," or implied that Epicurus was lying about the whole thing.