

Simulacra, gods and the dead

Post by "Cassius" of November 14, 2020 at 4:30 AM

[Quote from timrobbe](#)

The gods are perfect entities and therefor never die.

This is probably insufficient, as written, to capture the big picture. The gods remain alive, not because they are perfect, and because "perfect" somehow implies immortality, but because they have achieved a method of replenishing their atomic structure so that their overall existence remains in place without necessity of ending. The gods may be said to enjoy "perfect bliss" or "perfect pleasure" but to say today that "the gods are perfect" implies all sorts of other attributes that the Epicureans did not state belonged to the gods.

If that point is not clear then let's discuss further.

[Quote from timrobbe](#)

We know of the gods because in our dreams we receive simulacra of the atoms making up the bodies of the gods.

That is only a part of the full picture of what we know the Epicureans said. If you will refer to the [Velleius section of Cicero's "On the Nature of the Gods,"](#) there you will find the most detailed information we have on what Epicurus taught, which involved anticipations, isonomia, and the view that Nature never creates only a single thing of a kind.

Yes there are passages in several texts which indicate that "images of the gods" are a source of information, but those images (like the anticipations themselves) would be subject to the same issue that you are concerned about - there is always a potential for distortion and inaccuracy in any single perception from any source.

I think it is fair to say that "Images" as a source of information about the gods would necessarily be received from a very long distance away (the gods are in the "intermundia" which we can't see or otherwise sense with the five senses) and in addition to distortions of many types I think you are right - those images might be floating around from dead gods, just like from dead people.

I am with Dewitt that a fair reading of all the texts indicates that the anticipations would be the

most reliable way to reach basic conclusions about the gods. Anything that comes from images would be especially subject to correction by comparison to the ultimate conclusions we would draw with higher confidence from the anticipations - such as that the gods live in perfect pleasure and peace and safety and therefore have no need for friends or enemies among humans.

I think the most reliable summary of information we have about the gods would be the section "The New Piety" in DeWitt's "Epicurus and His Philosophy" (which I think you have, right?). I concur with DeWitt that the Velleius material, which was delivered specifically on the point you are asking about (What do we know about the gods and how do we know it?) is good evidence that "anticipations" are the major and overriding source of information, since it seems clear that Velleius rests the thrust of his argument in that department rather than on images.