

Article: "Significance of Worship and Prayer among the Epicureans" by George Depue Hadzsits

Post by "Susan Hill" of November 15, 2020 at 10:57 AM

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Quote

[Quote from Susan Hill](#) I recently finished reading "The Significance of Worship and Prayer among the Epicureans" by George Depue Hadzsits. (Was it you who recommended that to me?? If not, have you read it?) It definitely takes things a little farther in suggesting that the pious can achieve a certain familiarity with the divine... I will go through it again and select some edifying excerpts for the Divinity forum.

[Quote from DON](#) I just finished reading the Hadzsits article. Very intriguing. He does seem to provide more concrete motivations for the ancient Epicureans to take part in the standard rituals and prayers of the time. I think I'll have to read it again to get all the information from it. I get the impression that the gods - Venus, Athena, etc - could literally embody individual qualities of the [Epicurean gods](#) and so be an object of prayer and worship. That would lead one to emulate and embody those qualities oneself on a deeper personal level. No benefit flowed from the gods, but that didn't preclude gaining benefit from the practice. Is that part of what you got? Or am I misunderstanding?

Here are some of my highlights from the paper. Hadzsits provides lots of citations from Lucretius, Philodemus, Cicero, and others, so they can be examined more closely if desired.

pg. 75: "...the gods of the Epicurean theology inspired the sincere Epicurean with intense enthusiasm, catching for Lucretius a certain glow... To Philodemus. also, the gods were truly inspiring, great and august... The inspirational power of the gods, as revealed to the Epicureans, was for them unlimited; the religious problem was counted among the big problems of life, and one of the great conditions of human happiness and superiority was an Epicurean pious attitude toward and holy regard for divinity..."

There was a lot of criticism of Epicurean theology because people could not imagine how anyone could or would have pious sentiment for gods that did not intercede in human affairs. How could they make use of the "existing machinery of worship, pg. 77" (religious ceremonies and temple attendance) without hypocrisy?

Hadzsits suggests this may have been a "convenient means to an end, pg 79", that there was an emotional appreciation of the "allegory, poetry, symbolism" and tradition of the religious

institutions, but that such appreciation was "necessarily accompanied with a conscious intellectual reservation", pg 78.

Now this is where there will be dissent within the ranks:

pg. 82: "

*tus, honores, preces adhibeamus?*³ But even among the Epicureans a belief in a reciprocal relation between God and man *did* exist, withal that the gods did not care for man; but the comparative subtlety of the Epicurean *theory* seems not to have been fully comprehended in antiquity,⁴ nor, perhaps, fully realized, in *practice*, even within the Epicurean school, — and the Epicureans remained in religious isolation.⁵ The deeper significance of worship and prayer depended upon the Epicurean definition of *εὐσέβεια* and *pietas*, and included a

re-interpretation of this reciprocal relation between man and God.

The Epicureans¹ counted themselves among those philosophers who believed that the gods bestow τῶν ἀγαθῶν τὰ μέγιστα, but might also be βλάβης καὶ κακῶν . . . αἰτίους, — a theory tenable even within the circle of Epicurean theology, a theory subject, however, to re-interpretation by the Epicureans who rejected the vulgar² idea of divine ὠφελίαι and βλαβαί. Now,

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[Sorry - see the Snippets for the Greek....]

So what is he getting at, that there is anything reciprocal between humans and gods?

He writes (pg. 84), "Through the mediation of worship and prayer, the intellectually gifted and the spiritually equipped drew nearest to the gods, in whose care rested that form of redemption which was possible under the terms of Epicurean psychology and epistemology; worship and prayer were but the media, the final means, in fact, of communication with the gods, whereby the Epicurean — through the saving grace of wisdom having become susceptible to the divine influence — was capable of receiving that blessing from the gods which alone, according to Epicurean thought, was a possibility. Worship and prayer completed the religious mood of the suppliant wise man, who alone could obtain from the gods what Epicureanism characterized as εὐσέβεια. Under all these conditions, the reciprocal relation between the Epicurean and his gods, resting on the worshipper's intellectual-spiritual aspiration, was completed by the reward of inspiration of a divine tranquility, — while the consequent subjective exaltation to realize in conscience or in deed that which might have been the formal burden of Epicurean

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τοῖς θεοῖς καὶ θαυμάζει τῆ[ν] φύσιν [αὐτῶν κ(αι)] τὴν διάθεσιν καὶ περᾶται συνεγγί[ζειν] αὐτῆι καὶ καθαπερὶ γλίχεται θιγε[ῖν] καὶ συ[ν]εῖναι, καλεῖ τ[ε] καὶ τοὺς σοφοὺς τῶν [θεῶν] φίλους καὶ τοὺς θεοὺς τῶν σοφῶν.¹

And in the notes: "Epicurean religiosity was a matter of enlightenment and its intensity was in proportion to the clarity of the vision."

Again, there are a lot citations here in the paper.

This is a difficult passage, but I think that the idea is that the gods are the repository of the perfection of Epicurean eudaimonia, and that through appropriate worship and prayer one can be influenced/blessed/rewarded with a similar (god-like) disposition. So the word "communication" might be more along the lines of perceiving the blessed state of the gods, and receiving that into one's psyche. Somehow, the spiritual aspiration and practice itself brings about the sought-after receptivity and redemption. It was efficacious towards realizing Epicurean sagehood.

How it would be "reciprocal" - as in the gods receiving something from us, is not clear to me.

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