

# Long and Sedley, Hellenistic Philosophers, "Gods"

Post by "Don" of November 25, 2020 at 5:41 PM

I'm sharing a scan from Long and Sedley, The Hellenistic Philosophers (1987). This is their commentary section on "Gods."

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Post by "Cassius" of November 26, 2020 at 1:57 AM

Don thank you very much! That's a great contribution to this discussion. For anyone who just skims this thread and doesn't read the whole article, I made a few clips I thought were particularly important for giving a flavor of Sedley's opinions:

to the basic conception, reflecting faulty moral outlooks – just as in another context (24F) the myths about the underworld were explained as projections of men's false moral values. But the hard core of popular theology is vindicated, and turned to philosophical advantage. His inspired suggestion that god is a projection of man's own ethical ideal can be ranked with the most impressive theological theories of antiquity.

'truth' obtains as much in the moral as in the physical sphere, and 'preconceptions' can have an introspective origin in our feelings as well as an empirical origin in our sensory experience of the external world. Thus our natural recognition of the existence of god is closely comparable to, perhaps identical with, our instinctive recognition that there exists for us a natural ethical goal.

lack solidity – cf. the similar locution at 30A – but would scarcely be intelligible if applied to an actually living organism.) Such a vindication of the gods' 'existence' must not be written off as a mere deception or sophistry. Rather, it is an instance of what we have described (15 commentary) as Epicurus' lingering Platonist assumption that any object of thought must somehow objectively exist in order to be thought of.

Moreover, it is clear that Epicurus held that his gods did exist,

Sedley's comment in his conclusion in which he admits that the position he takes cannot be reconciled with the positions of "some" of his adherents (presumably including Philodemus and Lucretius) who he thinks were either deceived or participating in a tradition of keeping the ultimate truth about the gods close at hand among the inner circle:

objects.

It is not hard to see how Epicurus' repudiations of atheism could have deceived some of his adherents into reading him this way. To find an interpretation consistent with their views as well as with Epicurus' own pronouncements seems impossible, and we have settled instead for the only one which seems to us to fit the items of evidence widely regarded as the most authentic; to account for the deviant items as influenced by a very understandable misreading of Epicurus' intentions; and to leave him with a theology which ranks in subtlety and originality with any of his central theories, and which could hope to compete on equal terms with the rival Stoic doctrine (54).

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### Post by "Cassius" of November 26, 2020 at 2:13 AM

I also think that this is a particularly important and perceptive paragraph, but I also think it's one which may be only part of the picture, because I doubt this is a good description of "any process of imagination," and he's not discussing how the mind would accomplish this. He's implicitly acknowledging DeWitt's view that Epicurus held the mind to be a "suprasensory organism" it seems to me without dealing with the issue of "etching" or unfolding of something that existed prior to the outside stimulus. Anyway I do think Sedley is right that we have to consider all this in the context of how the theory of images works generally.

men. That is, by converging on our minds they become...  
In order to make sense of this it is crucial to see that it is simply a standard Epicurean account of the mechanics of concept-formation. Any process of imagination is achieved by the mind's admitting from the surrounding air ('tuning in to', as it were) those of the countless available images which correspond to the required impression, either originating from solid bodies, such as men, or forming accidentally from the limitless stock of atoms (15A 1-4, D). The continuity of an impression is produced by the 'similarity' (E 7, G) of the selected images to each other. The impression can then be further adjusted by enlargement, combination, etc., as briefly explained at 15F (cf. the fuller Stoic account at 39D). Sextus Empiricus (*Against the professors* 3.40) tells us that the generic name for these processes of adjustment was 'transition' (*metabasis*), the term used at E 7, F 2-3. To take the example at F 2, we conceive of a giant by first focusing on a series of images of men, then enlarging the resultant mental impression.

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**Post by "Don" of November 26, 2020 at 5:47 AM**

Glad you found it interesting. I realize it makes reference to other entries in their book but gives enough summary to understand the context of their argument. I thought posting it was a good counterpoint to the realist position stated in the article posted by [Godfrey](#) awhile back "[The Polytheism of the Epicureans](#)" by Paul T. M. Jackson

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**Post by "Cassius" of November 26, 2020 at 7:34 AM**

Don thank you for posting that link and thanks again to Godfrey for posting the Jackson article. These two together really do provide a lot of material to think about. I have just spent the time to reread the majority of the Jackson article and have two comments:

1 - this seems to me to summarize Jackson's position and how he deals with Sedley:

“all that disconcerted” whether people adopted the ‘realist’ or ‘idealist’ interpretation. However, I argue that he would, for this is a vitally important point: the objective of Epicureanism was the acquisition of tranquillity and happiness, which Epicurean doctrine, preconception, and contemplation and emulation of the divine form made possible. The Epicureans had to believe that their gods actually existed as biologically

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alive entities for them to be worthy of emulation, and if they were not, they could not have been worthy ethical models. The ‘idealist’ interpretation is complex and ambitious, but there is no explicit evidence that the Epicureans believed the gods were thought-constructs, and indeed the cumulative weight of the evidence supports the ‘realist’ interpretation.

And this references one of the most important reasons I side with Jackson:

Furthermore, Philodemus defends the sincerity of Epicurean belief in the following way:

If he [Epicurus] had said that gods exist for the sake of social convention, they [the Epicureans] would certainly not have offered demonstrations, since there were not even any objections to tell against them, nor would they [the Epicureans] have fought against those who do away with the divine, nor would they [the Epicureans] have advanced proofs in such extensive argumentation and in the other matters connected with them [the gods] in their [the Epicureans'] books.<sup>62</sup>

It seems very very difficult to believe that we (speaking for Sedley) can be in a better position today to evaluate what Epicurus meant when we have so few reliable works left to us, while Philodemus and Lucretius and others mentioned in these articles in the ancient world had virtually (or fully) the whole library of Epicurean texts available to them for evidence. To me it is not persuasive to think that if Epicurus had held a strongly idealist interpretation as Sedley argues that we would not have more evidence of it, and at the same time if that were true it seems doubtful to me that we would have the testimony of Philodemus and Lucretius and others that this is not simply something going on within our minds.

So I personally continue to hold to a "both" position, with gods serving "both" as symbolic aspirational goals beneficial to contemplate, and also as beings for which Epicurus held there to be "real" evidence of their existence (but not through the standard 5 senses).

For that reason I would side with the view that the "images" perceivable only by the mind that benefit us to contemplate stream "from" and not "to" the gods, and that the contrary statement is a scribal error, but with one caveat: I think it's likely that Epicurus held "images" to be streams of "particles" constantly streaming in all directions from everything at once, so I would expect an ancient Epicurean to presume that even while particles are streaming toward us from other things (including but not limited to "gods") there are particles streaming outward from us (towards those "gods") as well.

I think there is a lot of room for additional deduction here about what these sources mean. And I think one of the underappreciated implications is that if the "gods" are deathless then they presumably had no starting point, as implied in the discussion of how "similarities" can be immortal. This "similarities" reference is new to me and probably deserves more attention.

I would expect this cannot mean "platonic ideal forms" or "conceptions" in our understanding of "mental conceptions" (which is what Sedley seems to be arguing the gods to be) so what *would* it mean?

And so Aëtius claims, “the same philosopher [Epicurus] says elsewhere that there are four existences immortal in their kinds, namely, the atoms, the void, the

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universe, the similarities”.<sup>19</sup> Philodemus in his *On Piety* had considered what these ‘similarities’ are:

[A god’s] constitution out of things similar would obviously be a unified entity. For it is possible for beings constituted out of similarity for ever to have perfect happiness, since unified entities can be formed no less out of identical than out of similar elements and both kinds of entity are recognised by Epicurus as being exactly the same things, for example in his book *On Holiness*. The demonstration that this involves no contradiction may be passed over. Therefore, he was wont to say that nature brought all these things to completion alike. And that for the most part they came about when they are formed from an aggregation of various similar particles.<sup>20</sup>

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### Post by “Cassius” of November 26, 2020 at 7:48 AM

OK I am at a stopping point for the moment but I want to conclude by agreeing with this paragraph from Jackson in most respects, except for the implication of the part underlined in red. I don't think the Epicureans thought that the the gods were real because it was important to think of them that way, I think the Epicureans thought the gods were real, and that it is important to think of them as real, because of the various arguments that they made in favor both of their existence and of the function that contemplating them serves for us.

## Conclusion

Despite Epicurean resistance to orthodoxy, and indeed despite their own unorthodox beliefs, Epicureans were not atheists on the modern sense of the word. They believed in gods, presented evidence for their existence, described their nature, homes, and their lives. And these gods were considered to be real, living beings rather than as figments of the imagination, so important were they to Epicureans and their own individual journeys towards tranquillity and happiness. Indeed, so pious were the Epicureans that, beyond a philosophy, Epicureanism might perhaps be regarded as a religion in its own right.

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With the caveat that the word "religion" is so polluted by connotations as to be almost useless, I do also agree with the observations that the Epicureans saw their philosophy not as anti-religion but as a purification of religion, purged of its absurdities.

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### **Post by "Don" of November 26, 2020 at 8:55 AM**

Food for thought, [Cassius](#) . Thanks for digging back into Jackson. Lots to think about. 🤔

For the time being, I'm still in the Sedley/idealist camp. From my perspective, either position remains within Epicureanism so we can have a vigorous debate within the big tent 😊

I'm posting because I just had the thought that the reason that prolepses of both justice and the gods are talked about in the texts is because both are thought constructs. The whole prolepses thing is a hard nut to crack.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of November 26, 2020 at 10:40 AM**

### [Quote from Don](#)

The whole prolepses thing is a hard nut to crack.

Yes it is, as is a lot of Epicurean philosophy. As to justice I am totally with you, because I cannot imagine that "justice" or any "virtue" is anything but a thought construct.

I tend to think that we aren't looking deeply enough at the big picture. I think Sedley is right that the issue of how images work and how the mind deals with them is important and has lots of facets. The joke from Cicero to Cassius in [January 45 BC](#) about the mind being struck by images seems right on point - and it is interesting that Cassius Longinus denies the aspect that Cicero is alleging:

### Quote

For it somehow happens, that whenever I write anything to you, you seem to be at my very elbow; and that, not by way of visions of images, as your new friends term them, who believe that even mental visions are conjured up by what [Caius](#) calls spectres (for let me remind you that Caius the [Insubrian](#), an [Epicurean](#), who died lately, gives the name of spectres to what the famous [Gargettian](#) [Epicurus], and long before that [Democritus](#), called images).

2 But, even supposing that the eye can be struck by these spectres because they run up against it quite of their own accord, how the mind can be so struck is more than I can see. It will be your duty to explain to me, when you arrive here safe and sound, whether the spectre of you is at my command to come up as soon as the whim has taken me to think about you - and not only about you, who always occupy my inmost heart, but suppose I begin thinking about the Isle of [Britain](#), will the image of that wing its way to my consciousness?

### [15.19] **Cassius to Cicero**

[Brundisium, latter half of January, 45 B.C.]

I hope that you are well. I assure you that on this tour of mine there is nothing that gives me more pleasure to do than to write to you; for I seem to be talking and joking with you face to face. And yet that does not come to pass because of those spectres; and, by way of retaliation for that, in my next letter I shall let loose upon you such a rabble of [Stoic](#) boors that you will proclaim Caius a true-born Athenian.

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## Post by “Godfrey” of November 26, 2020 at 4:10 PM

I haven't yet read the full Sedley piece so I might be repeating something in there or in Jackson. But for the full context of this and similar discussions we've got to keep in mind that Epicurus was considering a very specific notion of gods, which of course was the Greek idea. I think that that's part of the difficulty in that it's very tempting for people today to intermingle a variety of conceptions of gods and god and "spirituality" with the Greek conception of gods. Similarly with the physics: part of the beauty of Epicurean physics is how relevant they are to today's physics. This can beguile us into conflating our ideas with his. Taken together this makes for a very tangled web: modern notions of physics can confuse Epicurean notions of gods, and vice versa.

Regarding the prolepses, I've no problem with a prolepsis of justice (fairness?) as it does seem to be something seen in children and some animals. Plus the PDs are quite specific on how to work with that prolepsis. A prolepsis of the gods is more difficult to sort out: is this prolepsis supposed to be the same in all cultures?

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## Post by “Don” of November 26, 2020 at 4:23 PM

### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

A prolepsis of the gods is more difficult to sort out: is this prolepsis supposed to be the same in all cultures

Fully agree about the sorting out 😊 My take has been that he was taking about a baseline across all cultures (or at least those Epicurus knew about!), and that baseline was incorruptibility ἀφθαρτος and blessedness μακάριος. That's it. Otherwise, the gods were not as the hoi polloi conceived of them. I love it that hoi polloi "the many" οἱ πολλοί is literally what Epicurus called other people with ill-conceived ideas about the gods

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## Post by “Cassius” of November 26, 2020 at 5:48 PM

### [Quote from Don](#)

incorruptibility ἀφθαρτος and blessedness μακάριος

I agree with Don but I myself am unsure of the implications of even those two words. I suspect it really reduces to something relatively simple and straightforward, such as "imperviousness to pain or death" and spending all their time on things they enjoy doing, although even that is ambiguous. I do think that there are implications of being "at the top of the chain" that means that there are implications of intelligence and activity that would disqualify simple forms of life (amoebas, whatever) from being considered "gods."

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### Post by "Godfrey" of November 26, 2020 at 6:59 PM

Where is it that the [Epicurean gods](#) are described as being in human form and speaking Greek? Is that in Cicero? Lucretius? I wonder how that relates to this discussion... 🤔

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### Post by "Cassius" of November 27, 2020 at 6:44 AM

Godfrey the human form part is in Velleius / Cicero's on the nature of the gods:

Quote

"For the divine form we have the hints of nature supplemented by the teachings of reason. From nature all men of all races derive the notion of gods as having human shape and none other; for in what other shape do they ever appear to anyone, awake or asleep? But not to make primary concepts the sole test of all things, reason itself delivers the pronouncement. For it seems appropriate that a being who is the most exalted, whether by reason of his happiness or of his eternity, should also be the most beautiful; but what disposition of the limbs, what cast of features, what shape or outline can be more beautiful than the human form? You Stoics at least, Lucilius, (for my friend Cotta says one thing at one time and another at another) are wont to portray the skill of the divine creator by enlarging on beauty as well as the utility of design displayed in all parts of the human figure. But if the human figure surpasses the form of all other living beings, and god is a living being, god must possess the shape which is the most beautiful of all; and since it is agreed that the gods are supremely happy, and no one

can be happy without virtue, and virtue cannot exist without reason, and reason is only found in the human shape, it follows that the gods possess the form of man. Yet their form is not corporeal, but only resembles bodily substance; it does not contain blood, but the semblance of blood.

“These discoveries of Epicurus are so acute in themselves and so subtly expressed that not everyone would be capable of appreciating them. Still I may rely on your intelligence, and make my exposition briefer than the subject demands. Epicurus then, as he not merely discerns abstruse and recondite things with his mind's eye, but handles them as tangible realities, teaches that the substance and nature of the gods is such that, in the first place, it is perceived not by the senses but by the mind, and not materially or individually, like the solid objects which Epicurus in virtue of their substantiality entitles *steremnia*; but by our perceiving images owing to their similarity and succession, because an endless train of precisely similar images arises from the innumerable atoms and streams towards the gods, our mind with the keenest feelings of pleasure fixes its gaze on these images, and so attains an understanding of the nature of a being both blessed and eternal.

“Moreover there is the supremely potent principle of infinity, which claims the closest and most careful study; we must understand that it has in the sum of things everything has its exact match and counterpart. This property is termed by Epicurus *isonomia*, or the principle of uniform distribution. From this principle it follows that if the whole number of mortals be so many, there must exist no less a number of immortals, and if the causes of destruction are beyond count, the causes of conservation also are bound to be infinite.

“You Stoics are also fond of asking us, Balbus, what is the mode of life of the gods and how they pass their days. The answer is, their life is the happiest conceivable, and the one most bountifully furnished with all good things. God is entirely inactive and free from all ties of occupation; he toils not neither does he labor, but he takes delight in his own wisdom and virtue, and knows with absolute certainty that he will always enjoy pleasures at once consummate and everlasting.

The speak greek part I think is Philodemus - I will check ---

We don't have a good online reference for the Philodemus to point to - if anyone knows one, please comment. Here is one excerpt from [one article](#); I know this is in DeWitt too:

This anthropomorphism of Philodemus<sup>44</sup> (something that is completely absent from the Stoics) and the description of the gods' traits in great detail goes beyond that of Epicurus and goes further by attributing to the gods characteristics from the human world.<sup>45</sup> We have seen that he emphasizes that in addition to the characteristics, even the language of the gods is the same as that of humans: «ἢ Ἑλληνίδεσσι ὑμῶν ἑστὶν ἀδελφότης ἀλλόθεν» (Col. 14 6-7). They speak Greek (or something familiar) and this is also the language of wise people: «ἑταίροισί Ἑλληνίδεσσι πῶθεν γινώσκουσιν» (Col. 14 12-13).<sup>46</sup> With the anthropomorphism of the gods, Philodemus opposes the accusations of the Skeptical and Stoics regarding the nature of the gods; accusations which the Epicureans are called to deal with.

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## Post by “Don” of November 27, 2020 at 7:08 AM

One thing that struck me this morning is that there has to be a difference between gods and life on other planets. By definition in some sources, the gods "live" *in* the intermundia/metakosmia - *between* cosmos. Other forms of life would have to live within a cosmos, on other worlds. If I remember correctly, the texts talk about other *cosmoi* cosmoses (for lack of a better plural). Whether that translates as "world" or "universe" is irrelevant here. They're both orderly conglomerations of atoms. The gods don't live in a cosmos. They live *between* cosmoi.

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## Post by “Cassius” of November 27, 2020 at 7:11 AM

### [Quote from Don](#)

They're both orderly conglomerations of atoms. The gods don't live in a cosmos. They live between cosmoi.

Yes I agree. I am thinking this stems from the proposition that in order to remain deathless they need to be living in an area of perfect calmness, but we're in an area with very little to work with. In this context I wish we had more on the ""similarities" as that might throw more light on the term "orderly conglomeration of atoms."

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## Post by “Don” of November 27, 2020 at 7:35 AM

I just came across another Jackson article ,(pdf) The Gods of Philodemus:

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&sourc...7Dxq3P6xcZehnbj>

I don't think this is the same one previously posted.

Edit: Hmmm... I'm seeing some similar quotes. If it is the same article, mea culpa.

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## Post by "Don" of November 27, 2020 at 8:04 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

[Quote from Don](#)

They're both orderly conglomerations of atoms. The gods don't live in a cosmos. They live between cosmoi.

Yes I agree. I am thinking this stems from the proposition that in order to remain deathless they need to be living in an area of perfect calmness, but we're in an area with very little to work with. In this context I wish we had more on the ""similarities" as that might throw more light on the term "orderly conglomeration of atoms."

From what I can read, the "similarities" are simply compounds made up of identical types of atoms. The (realist) gods are "incorruptible" because all their atoms are the same and are constantly being replenished with the same. They're in equilibrium.

For cosmos, here's the LSJ entry:

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...7:entry=ko/smos>

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## Post by "Don" of November 27, 2020 at 8:07 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Where is it that the [Epicurean gods](#) are described as being in human form and speaking Greek? Is that in Cicero? Lucretius? I wonder how that relates to this discussion.... 🤔

"Yet if cattle or horses or lions had hands and could draw, And could sculpt like men, then the horses would draw their gods. Like horses, and cattle like cattle; and each they would shape. Bodies of gods in the likeness, each kind, of their own." Xenophanes

<https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Xenophanes>

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## Post by "Cassius" of November 28, 2020 at 7:56 AM

These articles and comments are relevant to one of the things I find most important about this topic:

A superficial hearing of "pleasure" as the guide of life leaves open the possibility that a human could find pleasure living in a cave on bread and water *and never do anything else*.

I don't think that's correct and I don't think Epicurus meant that.

From a practical point of view, it's just not possible to do that, given the threats and hazards of human life and the need to work to make defenses against them. So you could say from a "rational" point of view, under the given facts of life, that a human who tries to go to a cave and live on bread and water will not likely succeed for very long, and not without indeed taking some precautions (obtaining a cave, obtaining the supply of bread and water).

But that's not a very satisfying analysis, and I don't think Epicurus would have relied on it. I think he would have relied on "feeling" as the driving force. But what tells us that one type of pleasure is more desirable to us than another? Certainly the feelings themselves do, but what about the human who has indeed lived all his life on bread and water in a cave and would have come into contact with nothing more to which to aspire (the Lucretian problem of the theory that the gods created the universe - from where did they get their model?)

I think that aspirational goals to improve one's condition are a logical extension of both the general Velleius theory of anticipations as intuitive etchings, plus the specific theory of "gods" as one of those etchings, plus the "images" theory that the mind can be stimulated directly from the outside. It may also be built in to the way "pleasure" functions as a faculty, but for the time being I'll accept that pleasure and pain may be simple go and stop faculties (but if so, programmed by what?).

I doubt the reductionist thought of living in a cave on bread and water was as much of a problem for Epicurus as it is today, and even today it's just a musing that few people really think about carrying out. But I think the question of "Why isn't bread and water in a cave good enough?" is an obvious one that would have concerned Epicurus and been dealt with in a variety of ways. Not by coming up with a list of better or worse, or nobler or baser pleasures,

because that would be Platonic absolutism. The issue would have to be dealt with through "faculties" that are individual and contextual, such as the particular "etchings" with which a person might be born, plus the different observations a person makes / comes into contact with during life -- including these "divine images" whatever they are.

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## Post by "Don" of November 28, 2020 at 11:10 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

A superficial hearing of "pleasure" as the guide of life leaves open the possibility that a human could find pleasure living in a cave on bread and water and never do anything else.

[Cassius](#) , I've seen you make the "bread & water + living in a cave" remark before and had some thoughts and questions.

"bread & water": I realize many people see Epicurus's remark about bread and water and that infamous "pot of cheese" as endorsing \*only\* living on bread and water and the occasional cheese. They posit an ascetic Epicureanism. I agree with you, that's just silly. It seems to be putting a Christian mortification of the flesh back onto Epicureanism. Here's my take:

I do remember some texts talking about Epicurus's occasional fasts as experiments to see how much he could live on and be satisfied. He seems to have wanted to learn what was the minimal level that could provide pleasure. I don't get the impression that that's what he did all the time; otherwise, the occasional nature of those fasts wouldn't have been noteworthy. But it seems to me he did experiment with minimalism. Not as a rule, but I'll call him minimal-curious.

In my interpretation, he does call his students to moderate their pleasures or at least to choose wisely, prudently. Not every pleasure is to be chosen, not every pain is to be avoided.

So, those who posit the "bread and water" diet take one instance as indicative of the whole experience. But it seems to me that you sometimes posit that Epicurus never ate just "bread and water" and that the idea is farcical. I come down somewhere in the middle. The division of desires appears to me to be a roadmap of what desires to pursue. And those you pursue should lead to an overall pleasurable well-being.

"Living in a cave": I don't remember the texts talking about a cave. Am I correct in assuming you use this as hyperbolic shorthand for your opposition to literal interpretations of the biosas "live unknown" and "Epicurus forbade being active in politics"? I completely agree that Epicureans shouldn't live in a cave. *By Apollo!* We have the Garden itself and the importance of

friendship ready at hand to dismiss that idea! But... In my interpretation of the texts, there is, as a general rule in Epicurus's teaching, a recommendation to *lathe biosas* as in "keep your head down." Individuals can have different inclinations and Epicurus and Philodemus (among others) make allowances for those who do find pleasure in politics and an active political life. On the other hand, one is encouraged to write texts and to provide public instruction when invited to. And to start a school but don't attract a crowd, literally not to *ὀχλαγωγῆσαι* "to court the mob" or "to attract a crowd." So, by no means should Epicureans live in a cave. Leave that to Christian and Tibetan Buddhist monks. But I do see a general recommendation to not rock the boat, and I think this comes from Epicurus's own life experience. That's why, for example, he didn't teach publicly in the agora or a stoa or a gymnasium but taught in his own private property. Now, I also don't think those who see the Gardens as hippy communes have it quite right either. It seems there was a core that lived full time in the Garden including Epicurus (although I'm still not clear if there Garden was attached to his house or separate), senior members like Hermarchus, some slaves, some students, but I get the impression that it also allowed for "commuter students" too. Since they didn't combine their funds, the hippy commune or cult analogy also seems to break down fairly quickly.

To come back to the cave, you appear to advocate a strong, assertive Epicureanism and I think the philosophy makes allowances for those with that disposition. But, generally, I see a philosophy with a more nuanced approach to confronting society. Epicurus was a revolutionary radical thinker and believed he found the best route to achieving *eudaimonia*. But I think he knew if he tried to boldly proselytize in the agora he'd be risking a lot (see the fate of Socrates, for example) and the philosophy could be lost.

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## Post by "Cassius" of November 28, 2020 at 1:33 PM

### [Quote from Don](#)

Living in a cave": I don't remember the texts talking about a cave. Am I correct in assuming you use this as hyperbolic shorthand for your opposition to literal interpretations of *lathe biosas* "live unknown" and "Epicurus forbade being active in politics"?

Yes - exactly.

### [Quote from Don](#)

But I do see a general recommendation to not rock the boat, and I think this comes from Epicurus's own life experience.

i would rather put that "a general recommendation to be prudent in how you go about rocking the boat.". I think you are correct and Epicurus saw himself as a revolutionary , but knew that the deepest revolution has to be prepared for at a deep level - a position we face too today, I think.

Sorry to be short but I am driving....

In general I agree with your comments - what you perceive is there mostly due to ten years of fencing with Stoics on facebook who think that there is nothing interesting about Epicurus other than a twist-of-words take on asceticism. And on general they are quite unstoically assertive in how they advocate their position and ridicule the common sense approach you are taking.

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### **Post by "Don" of November 28, 2020 at 1:38 PM**

Hey! Be careful driving! 😬

[Quote from Cassius](#)

general recommendation to be prudent in how you go about rocking the boat.

I like that take!

Ah, the Stoics! A thorn in our sides for 2,000 years 😏

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### **Post by "Cassius" of November 28, 2020 at 2:21 PM**

i do have a tendency to be sarcastic and hyperbolic and without hearing my voice that can be a danger I have to watch.

But I will say in accord with the letter to Menoecus that I would rather worship at the altar of a revealed religion any day of the week rather than give in to an across the board asceticism in the name of "freedom from pain" or in the name of "virtue."

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**Post by “Don” of November 28, 2020 at 4:56 PM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

i do have a tendency to be sarcastic and hyperbolic and without hearing my voice that can be a danger I have to watch.

But I will say in accord with the letter to Menoecus that I would rather worship at the altar of a revealed religion any day of the week rather than give in to an across the board asceticism in the name of "freedom from pain" or in the name of "virtue."

How do you say amen in Greek? Oh, yeah....

ἀμήν!!

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**Post by “Cassius” of November 29, 2020 at 1:34 PM**

[Don](#) as for an example of the drift toward asceticism which is so widespread, check out this post: [Is Romantic Love a Vainglory](#)

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**Post by “Don” of November 29, 2020 at 2:01 PM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

[Don](#) as for an example of the drift toward asceticism which is so widespread, check out this post: [Is Romantic Love a Vainglory](#)

Yep. Noticed that "drift" there too.