

Episode One Hundred Thirty-Five - The Letter to Menoecus 02 - On The Nature of the Gods

Post by "Cassius" of August 8, 2022 at 8:11 AM

Welcome to Episode One Hundred Thirty-Five of Lucretius Today.

This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

I am your host Cassius, and together with our panelists from the EpicureanFriends.com forum, we'll walk you through the ancient Epicurean texts, and we'll discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. We encourage you to study Epicurus for yourself, and we suggest the best place to start is the book "Epicurus and His Philosophy" by Canadian professor Norman DeWitt.

If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

Today we continue our discussion of [Epicurus' Letter to Menoecus](#), this week discussing the [Epicurean gods](#). Now let's join Martin reading today's text:

Bailey:

[123] The things which I used unceasingly to commend to you, these do and practice, considering them to be the first principles of the good life. First of all believe that god is a being immortal and blessed, even as the common idea of a god is engraved on men's minds, and do not assign to him anything alien to his immortality or ill-suited to his blessedness: but believe about him everything that can uphold his blessedness and immortality. For gods there are, since the knowledge of them is by clear vision. But they are not such as the many believe them to be: for indeed they do not consistently represent them as they believe them to be. And the impious man is not he who popularly denies the gods of the many, but he who attaches to the gods the beliefs of the many.

[124] For the statements of the many about the gods are not conceptions derived from sensation, but false suppositions, according to which the greatest misfortunes befall the wicked and the greatest blessings (the good) by the gift of the gods. For men being accustomed always to their own virtues welcome those like themselves, but regard all that is not of their nature as alien.

Hicks:

[123] Those things which without ceasing I have declared unto thee, those do, and exercise thyself therein, holding them to be the elements of right life. First believe that God is a living being immortal and blessed, according to the notion of a god indicated by the common sense of mankind; and so believing, thou shalt not affirm of him aught that is foreign to his immortality or that agrees not with blessedness, but shalt believe about him whatever may uphold both his blessedness and his immortality. For verily there are gods, and the knowledge of them is manifest; but they are not such as the multitude believe, seeing that men do not steadfastly maintain the notions they form respecting them. Not the man who denies the gods worshipped by the multitude, but he who affirms of the gods what the multitude believes about them is truly impious.

[124] For the utterances of the multitude about the gods are not true preconceptions but false assumptions; hence it is that the greatest evils happen to the wicked and the greatest blessings happen to the good from the hand of the gods, seeing that they are always favourable to their own good qualities and take pleasure in men like unto themselves, but reject as alien whatever is not of their kind.

Post by “Don” of August 8, 2022 at 8:31 AM

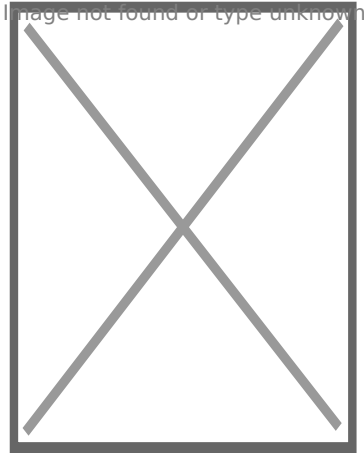
If I may be so bold as to add in my contribution to the discussion of the letter:

Quote

[123] And, Menoikeus, I was continuously exhorting you to practice, to study, and to meditate on those things which I state distinctly to be the essential elements of a noble, beautiful, and virtuous life. First, believe that the god is a blessed and imperishable thing as is the common, general understanding of the god. You, Menoikeus, believe everything about which a god is able to preserve its own imperishability and blessedness for itself. Do not attribute anything foreign to its incorruptibility or incongruous with the blessedness of the god! Gods exist, and the knowledge of them is manifest to the mind's eye. The gods do not exist in the way that the 'hoi polloi' believe them to, because they do not perceive what maintains the gods. One is not impious who does not take up the gods of the hoi polloi; but the one who attributes the beliefs of the hoi polloi to the gods. [124] For what they believe are not prolepses, but rather the judgements of the hoi polloi concerning the gods which are false, hasty assumptions. So, they believe the greatest evils are brought to the wicked from the gods as well as the greatest aid to the good, because the hoi polloi are

believing that the gods accept those who resemble themselves who are similar through all excellences and goodness; all those not of their sort are strange and alien.

Here also is a link to the full commentary to these sections as well:



[Letter To Menoikeus: A New Translation With Commentary : Don Boozar : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

A new translation of the Letter to Menoikeus (Menoecus) by Epicurus with commentary. archive.org

Post by “Cassius” of August 9, 2022 at 5:31 PM

Since we are going to tackle the thorny issue of the nature of the [Epicurean gods](#) in this coming podcast episode, it would probably be a good idea to post some of the most central additional references we have on this topic:

[PD01](#) The blessed and immortal nature knows no trouble itself, nor causes trouble to any other, so that it is never constrained by anger or favor. For all such things exist only in the weak.

Velleius from Cicero's "On the Nature of the Gods"

Quote

Hereupon Velleius began, in the confident manner (I need not say) that is customary with Epicureans, afraid of nothing so much as lest he should appear to have doubts about anything. One would have supposed he had just come down from the assembly of the gods in the intermundane spaces of Epicurus! “I am not going to expound to you

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2625-episode-one-hundred-thirty-five-the-letter-to-menoecus-02-on-the-nature-of-the/>

doctrines that are mere baseless figments of the imagination, such as the artisan deity and world-builder of Plato's *Timaeus*, or that old hag of a fortuneteller the *Pronoia* (which, we may render 'Providence') of the Stoics; nor yet a world endowed with a mind and senses of its own, a spherical, rotatory god of burning fire; these are the marvels and monstrosities of philosophers who do not reason but dream.

"What power of mental vision enabled your master Plato to descry the vast and elaborate architectural process which, as he makes out, the deity adopted in building the structure of the universe? What method of engineering was employed? What tools and levers and derricks? What agents carried out so vast an undertaking? And how were air, fire, water and earth enabled to obey and execute the will of the architect? How did the five regular solids, which are the basis of all other forms of matter, come into existence so nicely adapted to make impressions on our minds and produce sensations?

"It would be a lengthy task to advert upon every detail of a system that is such as to seem the result of idle theorizing rather than of real research; but the prize example is that the thinker who represented the world not merely as having had an origin but even as almost made by hand, also declared that it will exist for ever. Can you suppose that a man can have even dipped into natural philosophy if he imagines that anything that has come into being can be eternal? What composite whole is not capable of dissolution? What thing is there that has a beginning but not an end?

"While as for your Stoic Providence, Lucilius, if it is the same thing as Plato's creator, I repeat my previous questions, what were its agents and instruments, and how was the entire undertaking planned out and carried through? If on the contrary it is something different, I ask why it made the world mortal. and not everlasting as did Plato's divine creator?

"Moreover I would put to both of you the question, why did these deities suddenly awake into activity as world-builders after countless ages of slumber? For though the world did not exist, it does not follow that ages did not exist—meaning by ages, not periods made up of a number of days and nights in annual courses, for ages in this sense I admit could not have been produced without the circular motion of the firmament; but from the infinite past there has existed an eternity not measured by limited divisions of time, but of a nature intelligible in terms of extension; since it is inconceivable that there was ever a time when time did not exist. Well then, Balbus, what I ask is, why did your Providence remain idle all through that extent of time of which you speak? Was it in order to avoid fatigue?

"But god cannot know fatigue; and also there was no fatigue in question, since all the elements, sky, fire, earth and sea, were obedient to the divine will. Also, why should god take a fancy to decorate the firmament with figures and illuminations, like an

aedile? If it was to embellish his own abode, then it seems that he had previously been dwelling for an infinite time in a dark and gloomy hovel!

“And are we to suppose that thenceforward the varied beauties which we see adorning earth and sky have afforded him pleasure? How can a god take pleasure in things this sort? And if he did, he could not have dispensed with it so long. Or were these beauties designed for the sake of men, as your school usually maintains? For the sake of wise men? If so, all this vast effort of construction took place on account of a handful of people. For the sake of fools then?

“But in the first place there was no reason for god to do a service to the wicked; and secondly, what good did he do? Inasmuch as all fools are beyond question extremely miserable, precisely because they are fools (for what can be mentioned more miserable than folly?), and in the second place because there are so many troubles in life that, though wise men can assuage them by balancing against them life's advantages, fools can neither avoid their approach nor endure their presence.

“Those on the other hand who said that the world is itself endowed with life and with wisdom, failed entirely to discern what shape the nature of an intelligent living being could conceivably possess. I will touch on this a little later; for the present I will confine myself to expressing my surprise at their stupidity in holding that a being who is immortal and also blessed is of a spherical shape, merely on the ground that Plato pronounces a sphere to be the most beautiful of all figures. For my own part, on the score of appearance I prefer either a cylinder or a cube or a cone or a pyramid. Then, what mode of existence is assigned to their spherical deity? Why, he is in a state of rotation, spinning round with a velocity that surpasses all powers of conception. But what room there can be in such an existence for steadfastness of mind and for happiness, I cannot see. Also, why should a condition that is painful in the human body, if even the smallest part of it is affected, be supposed to be painless in the deity? Now clearly the earth, being a part of the world, is also a part of god.

“Yet we see that vast portions of the earth's surface are uninhabitable deserts, being either scorched by the sun's proximity, or frost-bound and covered with snow owing to its extreme remoteness. But if the world is god, these, being parts of the world, must be regarded as limbs of god, undergoing the extremes of heat and cold respectively.

“So much, Lucilius, for the doctrines of your school. To show what [the older systems] are like, I will trace their history from the remotest of your predecessors. Thales of Miletus, who was the first person to investigate these matters, said that water was the first principle of things, but that god was the mind that molded all things out of water—supposing that gods can exist without sensation; and why did he make mind an adjunct of water, if mind can exist by itself, devoid of body? The view of Anaximander is that the gods are not everlasting but are born and perish at long intervals of time, and

that they are worlds, countless in number. But how can we conceive of god save as living for ever? Next, Anaximenes held that air is god, and that it has a beginning in time, and is immeasurable and infinite in extent, and is always in motion; just as if formless air could be god, especially seeing that it is proper to god to possess not merely some shape but the most beautiful shape; or as if anything that has had a beginning must not necessarily be mortal.

“Then there is Anaxagoras, the successor of Anaximenes; he was the first thinker to hold that the orderly disposition of the universe is designed and perfected by the rational power of an infinite mind. But in saying this he failed to see that there can be no such thing as sentient and continuous activity in that which is infinite, and that sensation in general can only occur when the subject itself becomes sentient by the impact of a sensation. Further, if he intended his infinite mind to be a definite living creature, it must have some inner principle of life to justify the name. But mind is itself the innermost principle. Mind therefore will have an outer integument of body. But this Anaxagoras will not allow; yet mind naked and simple, without any material adjunct to serve as an organ of sensation, seems to elude the capacity of our understanding. Alcmaeon of Croton, who attributed divinity to the sun, moon and other heavenly bodies, and also to the soul, did not perceive that he was bestowing immortality on things that are mortal.

“As for Pythagoras, who believed that the entire substance of the universe is penetrated and pervaded by a soul of which our souls are fragments, he failed to notice that this severance of the souls of men from the world-soul means the dismemberment and rending asunder of god; and that when their souls are unhappy, as happens to most men, then a portion of god is unhappy; which is impossible.

“Again, if the soul of man is divine, why is it not omniscient? Moreover, if the Pythagorean god is pure soul, how is he implanted in, or diffused throughout, the world? Next, Xenophanes endowed the universe with mind, and held that, as being infinite, it was god. His view of mind is as open to objection as that of the rest; but on the subject of infinity he incurs still severer criticism, for the infinite can have no sensation and no contact with anything outside.

“As for Parmenides, he invents a purely fanciful something resembling a crown—*stephanè* is his name for it—an unbroken ring of glowing lights, the sky, encircling the sky, which he entitles god; but no one can imagine this to possess divine form, or sensation. He also has many other portentous notions; he deifies war, strife, lust, and the like, things which can be destroyed by disease or sleep or forgetfulness or lapse of time; and he also deifies the stars, but this has been criticized in another philosopher and need not be dealt with now in the case of Parmenides.

“Empedocles again among many other blunders comes to grief most disgracefully in his theology. He assigns divinity to the four substances which in his system are the constituent elements of the universe, although manifestly these substances both come into and pass out of existence, and are entirely devoid of sensation. Protagoras also, who declares he has no clear views whatever about the gods, whether they exist or do not exist, or what they are like, seems to have no notion at all of the divine nature. Then in what a maze of error is Democritus involved, who at one moment ranks as gods his roving ‘images,’ at another the substance that emits and radiates these images, and at another again the scientific intelligences of man! At the same time his denial of immutability, and therefore of eternity, to everything whatsoever surely involves a repudiation of deity so absolute as to leave no conception of a divine being remaining! Diogenes of Apollonia makes air a god; but how can air have sensation, or divinity in any shape ? The inconsistencies of Plato are a long story.

“In the *Timaeus* he says that it is impossible to name the father of the universe; and in the *Laws* he deprecates all inquiry into the nature of the deity. Again, he holds that god is entirely incorporeal (in Greek, *asomatos*); but divine incorporeity is inconceivable, for an incorporeal deity would necessarily be incapable of sensation, and also of practical wisdom, and of pleasure, all of which are attributes essential to our conception of deity. Yet both in the *Timaeus* and the *Laws* he says that the world, the sky, the stars, the earth, and our souls are gods, in addition to those in whom we have been taught to believe by ancestral tradition; but it is obvious that these propositions are both inherently false and mutually destructive.

“Xenophon also commits almost the same errors, though in fewer words; for in his memoir of the sayings of Socrates he represents Socrates as arguing that it is wrong to inquire about the form of god, but also as saying that both the sun and the soul are god, and as speaking at one moment of a single god and at another of several: utterances that involve almost the same mistakes as do those which we quoted from Plato.

“Antisthenes also, in his book entitled *The Natural Philosopher*, says that while there are many gods of popular belief, there is one god in nature, so depriving divinity of all meaning or substance. Very similarly Speusippus, following his uncle Plato, and speaking of a certain force that governs all things and is endowed with life, does his best to root out the notion of deity from our minds altogether. And Aristotle in the Third Book of his *Philosophy* has a great many confused notions, [not] disagreeing with the doctrines of his master Plato; at one moment he assigns divinity exclusively to the intellect, at another he says that the world is itself a god, then again he puts some other being over the world, and assigns to this being the role of regulating and sustaining the world-motion by means of a sort of inverse rotation; then he says that the celestial heat is god—not realizing that the heavens are a part of that world which

elsewhere he himself has entitled god.

“But how could the divine consciousness which he assigns to the heavens persist in a state of such rapid motion? Where moreover are all the gods of accepted belief, if we count the heavens also as a god? Again, in maintaining that god is incorporeal, he robs him entirely of sensation, and also of wisdom.

“Moreover, how is motion possible for an incorporeal being, and how, if he is always in motion, can he enjoy tranquillity and bliss? Nor was his fellow-pupil Xenocrates any wiser on this subject. His volumes *On the Nature of the Gods* give no intelligible account of the divine form; for he states that there are eight gods: five inhabiting the planets, and in a state of motion; one consisting of all the fixed stars, which are to be regarded as separate members constituting a single deity; seventh he adds the sun, and eighth the moon. But what sensation of bliss these beings can enjoy it is impossible to conceive.

“Another member of the school of Plato, Heraclides of Pontus, filled volume after volume with childish fictions; at one moment he deems the world divine, at another the intellect; he also assigns divinity to the planets, and holds that the deity is devoid of sensation and mutable of form; and again in the same volume he reckons earth and sky as gods. Theophrastus also is intolerably inconsistent; at one moment he assigns divine pre-eminence to mind, at another to the heavens, and then again to the constellations and stars in the heavens. Nor is his pupil, Strato, surnamed the Natural Philosopher, worthy of attention; in his view the sole repository of divine power is nature, which contains in itself the causes of birth, growth, and decay, but is entirely devoid of sensation and of form.

“Lastly, Balbus, I come to your Stoic school. Zeno's view is that the law of nature is divine, and that its function is to command what is right and to forbid the opposite. How he makes out this law to be alive passes our comprehension; yet we undoubtedly expect god to be a living being. In another passage, however, Zeno declares that the aether is god—if there is any meaning in a god without sensation, a form of deity that never presents itself to us when we offer up our prayers and supplications and make our vows. And in other books again he holds the view that a ‘reason’ which pervades all nature is possessed of divine power. He likewise attributes the same powers to the stars, or at another time to the years, the months and the seasons. Again, in his interpretation of Hesiod's *Theogony* (or “Origin of the Gods”) he does away with the customary and received ideas of the gods altogether, for he does not reckon either Jupiter, Juno, or Vesta gods, or any being that bears a personal name, but teaches that these names have been assigned allegorically to dumb and lifeless things. Zeno's pupil Aristo holds equally mistaken views. He thinks that the form of the deity cannot be comprehended, and he denies the gods sensation, and in fact is uncertain whether god

is a living being at all.

“Cleanthes, who attended Zeno's lectures at the a time as the last-named, at one moment says that the world itself is god, at another gives this name to the mind and soul of the universe, and at another decides that the most unquestionable deity is that remote all-surrounding fiery atmosphere called the aether, which encircles and embraces the universe on its outer side at an exceedingly lofty altitude; while in the books that he wrote to combat hedonism he babbles like one demented, now imagining gods of some definite shape and form, now assigning full divinity to the stars, now pronouncing that nothing is more divine than reason.

“The result is that the god whom we apprehend by our intelligence, and desire to make to correspond with a mental concept as a seal tallies with its impression, has utterly and entirely vanished.

“Persaeus, another pupil of Zeno, says that men have deified those persons who have made some discovery of special utility for civilization, and that useful and health-giving things have themselves been called by divine names; he did not even say that they were discoveries of the gods, but speaks of them as actually divine. But what could be more ridiculous than to award divine honors to things mean and ugly, or to give the rank of gods to men now dead and gone, whose worship could only take the form of lamentation?

“Chrysippus, who is deemed to be the most skillful interpreter of the Stoic dreams, musters an enormous mob of unknown gods—so utterly unknown that even imagination cannot guess at their form and nature, although our mind appears capable of visualizing anything; for he says that divine power resides in reason, and in the soul and mind of the universe; he calls the world itself a god, and also the all-pervading world-soul, and again the guiding principle of that soul, which operates in the intellect and reason, and the common and all-embracing nature of things; also the power of Fate, and the Necessity that governs future events; beside this, the fire that I previously termed aether; and also all fluid and soluble substances, such as water, earth, air, the sun, moon, and stars, and the all-embracing unity things; and even those human beings who have attained immortality. He also argues that the god whom men call Jupiter is the aether, and that Neptune is the air which permeates the sea, and the goddess called Ceres the earth; and he deals in the same way with the whole series of the names of the gods. He also identifies Jupiter with the mighty Law, everlasting and eternal, which is our guide of and instructress in duty, and which he entitles Necessity or Fate, and the Everlasting Truth of future events; none of which conceptions is of such a nature as to be deemed to possess divinity. This is what is contained in his *Nature of the Gods*, Book I.

“In Book II, he aims at reconciling the myths of Orpheus, Musaeus, Hesiod, and Homer with his own theology as enunciated in Book I, and so makes out that even the earliest poets of antiquity, who had no notion of these doctrines, were really Stoics. In this he is followed by Diogenes of Babylon, who in his book entitled *Minerva* rationalizes the myth of the birth of the virgin goddess from Jove by explaining it as an allegory of the processes of nature.

“I have given a rough account of what are more like the dreams of madmen than the considered opinions of philosophers. For they are little less absurd than the outpourings of the poets, harmful as these have been owing to the mere charm of their style. The poets have represented the gods as inflamed by anger and maddened by lust, and have displayed to our gaze their wars and battles, their fights and wounds, their hatreds, enmities and quarrels, their births and deaths, their complaints and lamentations, the utter and unbridled license of their passions, their adulteries and imprisonments, their unions with human beings and the birth of mortal progeny from an immortal parent. With the errors of the poets may be classed the monstrous doctrines of the magi and the insane mythology of Egypt, and also the popular beliefs, which are a mere mass of inconsistencies sprung from ignorance.

“Anyone pondering on the baseless and irrational character of these doctrines ought to regard Epicurus with reverence, and to rank him as one of the very gods about whom we are inquiring. For he alone perceived, first, that the gods exist, because nature herself has imprinted a conception of them on the minds of all mankind. For what nation or what tribe of men is there but possesses untaught some ‘preconception’ of the gods? Such notions Epicurus designates by the word *prolepsis*, that is, a sort of preconceived mental picture of a thing, without which nothing can be understood or investigated or discussed. The force and value of this argument we learn in that work of genius, Epicurus's *Rule or Standard of Judgment*.

“You see therefore that the foundation (for such it is) of our inquiry has been well and truly laid. For the belief in the gods has not been established by authority, custom, or law, but rests on the unanimous and abiding consensus of mankind; their existence is therefore a necessary inference, since we possess an instinctive or rather an innate concept of them; but a belief which all men by nature share must necessarily be true; therefore it must be admitted that the gods exist. And since this truth is almost universally accepted not only among philosophers but also among the unlearned, we must admit it as also being an accepted truth that we possess a ‘preconception,’ as I called it above, or ‘prior notion,’ of the gods. (For we are bound to employ novel terms to denote novel ideas, just as Epicurus himself employed the word *prolepsis* in a sense in which no one had ever used it before). We have then a preconception of such a nature that we believe the gods to be blessed and immortal. For nature, which bestowed upon us an idea of the gods themselves, also engraved on our minds the

belief that they are eternal and blessed. If this is so, the famous maxim of Epicurus truthfully enunciates that 'that which is blessed and eternal can neither know trouble itself nor cause trouble to another, and accordingly cannot feel either anger or favor, since all such things belong only to the weak.'

"If we sought to attain nothing else beside piety in worshipping the gods and freedom from superstition, what has been said had sufficed; since the exalted nature of the gods, being both eternal and supremely blessed, would receive man's pious worship (for what is highest commands the reverence that is its due); and furthermore all fear of the divine Power or divine anger would have been banished (since it is understood that anger and favor alike are excluded from the nature of a being at once blessed and immortal, and that these being eliminated we are menaced by no fears in regard to the powers above). But the mind strives to strengthen this belief by trying to discover the form of god, the mode of his activity, and the operation of his intelligence.

"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.

“This is the god whom we should call happy in the proper sense of the term; your Stoic god seems to us to be grievously overworked. If the world itself is god, what can be less restful than to revolve at incredible speed round the axis of the heavens without a single moment of respite? But repose is an essential condition of happiness. If on the other hand some god resides within the world as its governor and pilot, maintaining the courses of the stars, the changes of the seasons, and all the ordered processes of creation, and keeping a watch on land and sea to guard the interests and lives of men, why, what a bondage of irksome and laborious business is his!

“We for our part deem happiness to consist in tranquillity of mind and entire exemption from all duties. For he who taught us all the rest has also taught us that the world was made by nature, without needing an artificer to construct it, and that the act of creation, which according to you cannot be performed without divine skill, is so easy, that nature will create, is creating, and has created worlds without number. You on the contrary cannot see how nature can achieve all this without the aid of some intelligence, and so, like the tragic poets, being unable to the plot of your drama to a dénouement, you have recourse to a god; whose intervention you assuredly would not require if you would but contemplate the measureless and boundless extent of space that stretches in every direction, into which when the mind projects and propels itself, it journeys onward far and wide without ever sighting any margin or ultimate point where it can stop. Well then, in this immensity of length and breadth and height there flits an infinite quantity of atoms innumerable, which though separated by void yet cohere together, and taking hold each of another form unions wherefrom are created

those shapes and forms of things which you think cannot be created without the aid of bellows and anvils, and so have saddled us with an eternal master, whom day and night we are to fear; for who would not fear a prying busybody of a god, who foresees and thinks of and notices all things, and deems that everything is his concern?

“An outcome of this theology was first of all your doctrine of Necessity or Fate, *heimarmene* as you termed it, the theory that every event is the result of an eternal truth and an unbroken sequence of causation. But what value can be assigned to a philosophy which thinks that everything happens by fate? It is a belief for old women; and ignorant old women at that. And next follows your doctrine of *mantike*, or Divination, which would so steep us in superstition, if we consented to listen to you, that we should be the devotees of soothsayers, augurs, oracle-mongers, seers, and interpreters of dreams. But Epicurus has set us free from superstitious terrors and delivered us out of captivity, so that we have no fear of beings who, we know, create no trouble for themselves and seek to cause none to others, while we worship with reverence the transcendent majesty of nature.

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Post by “Cassius” of August 9, 2022 at 5:34 PM

In addition to Velleius, we ought to be able to get some additional quotes from other sources, such as Philodemus' "On Piety." Let me see what I can find and add those here:

Obbirk page 143:

Quote

... those who eliminate the divine from existing things Epicurus reproached for their complete madness, as in book 12 he reproaches Prodicus, Diagoras, and Critias among others, saying that they rave like lunatics, and he likens them to Bacchant revelers, admonishing them not to trouble or disturb us. For indeed they explain the names of the gods by changing letters, just as Antisthenes, substituting the most common, ascribes the particular to imposition and even earlier through some act of deceit. Likewise Herrnarchus in the final book of his *Against Empedocles* also cites this passage...

Post by “Cassius” of August 9, 2022 at 5:41 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2625-episode-one-hundred-thirty-five-the-letter-to-menoceus-02-on-the-nature-of-the/>

I see that Don had a thread on "On Piety" earlier here: [Philodemus On Piety](#)

I'd like to see us pull out some quotes and put here and I will do that, as I can find them, in the post above.

Unfortunately this is all so fragmentary that there's lots of commentary but very few full readable sentences to work with,

Post by "Cassius" of August 9, 2022 at 5:53 PM

Lucretius Book Five Line 146:

[146] These things therefore are not possessed of divine sense, since they cannot be quickened with the vital feeling. This too you may not possibly believe, that the holy seats of the gods exist in any parts of the world: the fine nature of the gods far withdrawn from our senses is hardly seen by the thought of the mind; and since it has ever eluded the touch and stroke of the hands, it must touch nothing which is tangible for us; for that cannot touch which does not admit of being touched in turn. And therefore their seats as well must be unlike our seats, fine, even as their bodies are fine. All which I will prove to you later in copious argument.

Post by "Don" of August 9, 2022 at 9:57 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

[PD01](#) The blessed and immortal nature knows no trouble itself, nor causes trouble to any other, so that it is never constrained by anger or favor. For all such things exist only in the weak.

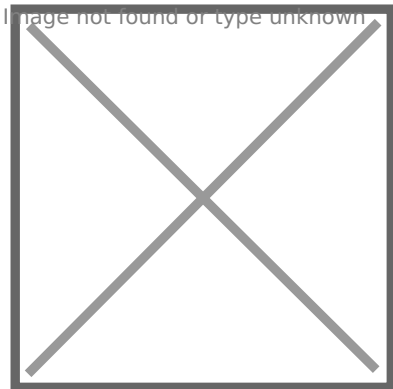
I'm adding in [PD01](#) along with its ancient scholia commentary:

Τὸ μακάριον καὶ ἄφθαρτον οὔτε αὐτὸ πράγματα ἔχει οὔτε ἄλλω παρέχει, ὥστε οὔτε ὀργαῖς οὔτε χάρισι συνέχεται: ἐν ἀσθενεῖ γὰρ πᾶν τὸ τοιοῦτον. [ἐν ἄλλοις δέ φησι τοὺς θεοὺς λόγῳ θεωρητοῦς, οὓς μὲν κατ' ἀριθμὸν ὑφ' ἐστῶτας, οὓς δὲ καθ' ὁμοειδείαν ἐκ τῆς συνεχοῦς ἐπιρρύσεως τῶν ὁμοίων εἰδώλων ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ἀποτετελεσμένῳ ἀνθρωποειδῶς.]

Perseus Project translation: 1. A blessed and eternal being has no trouble himself and brings no trouble upon any other being ; hence he is exempt from movements of anger and partiality, for every such movement implies weakness [Elsewhere he says that the gods are discernible by reason alone, some being numerically distinct, while others result uniformly from the continuous influx of similar images directed to the same spot and in human form.]

Post by “Don” of August 10, 2022 at 6:42 AM

For those with enough stamina (I myself have not read the entire paper), this paper by Sedley may prove thought-provoking on the [Epicurean gods](#)



[Epicurus' theological innatism](#)

Epicurus' theological innatism

www.academia.edu

Post by “Joshua” of August 10, 2022 at 7:35 PM

We're going to have to come to terms with "god" in the singular in both translations and--even worse--"God" with a capital G in Hicks. In the former case, I can allow for some wiggle room, when taking a/the god as the type of a class. The latter case strikes completely the wrong note in my view.

An illustration of the first example would be something like this;

"The lion does not concern himself with the opinions of the sheep."

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2625-episode-one-hundred-thirty-five-the-letter-to-menoceus-02-on-the-nature-of-the/>

It's clear from context in that phrase that we're *not* talking about a particular lion, or saying or implying that only one lion exists. What we're speaking of in that phrase is something like "lion-dom", or lion-kind.

Post by “Don” of August 10, 2022 at 7:50 PM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

and--even worse--"God" with a capital G in Hicks

I agree that that's absolutely a problematic translation. There is NO monotheistic capital-G God implication in the original text at all that I can see.

Sedley does make a point out of the singular vs plural constructions, using that as one argument for "each person creates their own image of god and uses that as a paradigm of the ideal Epicurean life."

Post by “Joshua” of August 13, 2022 at 11:51 PM

Quote

"I have given a rough account of what are more like the dreams of madmen than the considered opinions of philosophers. For they are little less absurd than the outpourings of the poets, harmful as these have been owing to the mere charm of their style."

Velleius

"But if we assume it to be possible, then truly the life of the gods will pass to men."

Diogenes of Oenoanda

"For not small or ineffectual are these gains for us which make our disposition godlike and show that not even our mortality makes us inferior to the imperishable and blessed nature; for when we are alive, we are as joyful as the gods, knowing that [death is nothing to us](#); and when we are dead, we are without sensation"

-Same

Post by “Joshua” of August 14, 2022 at 12:14 AM

Quote

That laughter had a philosophical point: once you take seriously the claim that God’s providence extends to the fall of a sparrow and the number of hairs on your head, there is virtually no limit, from the agitated dust motes in a beam of sunlight to the planetary conjunctions that are occurring in the heavens above. “O Mercury,” Sofia says pityingly. “You have a lot to do.”

Sofia grasps that it would take billions of tongues to describe all that must happen even in a single moment in a tiny village in the Campagna. At this rate, no one could envy poor Jove. But then Mercury admits that the whole thing does not work that way: there is no artificer god standing outside the universe, barking commands, meting out rewards and punishments, determining everything. The whole idea is absurd. There is an order in the universe, but it is one built into the nature of things, into the matter that composes everything, from stars to men to bedbugs. Nature is not an abstract capacity, but a generative mother, bringing forth everything that exists. We have, in other words, entered the Lucretian universe.

-Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve*

Post by “Cassius” of August 14, 2022 at 8:58 AM

We need to include as background material both the "Riddle" and also the sections from [Diogenes of Oinoanda](#). I will paste them here as I find them:

Fr. 19

[Let us then contradict Homer, who] talks [all sorts of nonsense] about them, [representing them sometimes as adulterers, sometimes as] lame, [sometimes as thievish, or even as being struck by mortals with a spear,] as well as inducing the craftsmen to produce inappropriate portrayals. Some statues of gods shoot arrows and are produced holding] a bow, [represented] like Heracles in Homer; others are attended by a body-guard of wild beasts; others are angry

with the prosperous, like Nemesis according to popular opinion; whereas we ought to make statues of the gods genial and smiling, so that we may smile back at them rather than be afraid of them.

Well, then, you people, let us reverence the gods [rightly] both at festivals and on [unhallowed occasions, both] publicly [and privately], and let us observe the customs [of our fathers in relation to them and let not the imperishable beings be falsely accused at all] by us [in our vain fear that they are responsible for all misfortunes], bringing [sufferings to us] and [contriving burdensome obligations] for themselves. [And let us also call upon] them [by name] ...

Fr. 20

[So it is obvious that wrong-doers, given that they do not fear the penalties imposed by the laws, are not] afraid of [the gods.] This [has to be] conceded. For if they were [afraid, they] would not [do wrong]. As for [all] the others, [it is my opinion] that the [wise] are not [(reasoning indicates) righteous] on account of the gods, but on account of [thinking] correctly and the [opinions] they hold [regarding] certain things [and especially] pains and death (for indeed invariably and without exception human beings do wrong either on account of fear or on account of pleasures), and that ordinary people on the other hand are righteous, in so far as they are righteous, on account of the laws and the penalties, imposed by the laws, hanging over them. But even if some of their number are conscientious on account of the laws, they are few: only just two or three individuals are to be found among great segments of multitudes, and not even these are steadfast in acting righteously; for they are not soundly persuaded about providence. A clear indication of the complete inability of the gods to prevent wrong-doings is provided by the nations of the Jews and Egyptians, who, as well as being the most superstitious of all peoples, are the vilest of all peoples.

On account of what kind of gods, then, will human beings be righteous? For they are not righteous on account of the real ones or on account of Plato's and Socrates' Judges in Hades. We are left with this conclusion; otherwise, why should not those who disregard the laws scorn fables much more?

So, with regard to righteousness, neither does our doctrine do harm [not does] the opposite [doctrine help], while, with regard to the other condition, the opposite doctrine not only does not help, but on the contrary also does harm, whereas our doctrine not only does not harm, but also helps. For the one removes disturbances, while the other adds them, as has already been made clear to you before.

That not only [is our doctrine] helpful, [but also the opposite doctrine harmful, is clearly shown by] the [Stoics as they go astray. For they say in opposition to us] that the god both is maker of [the] world and takes providential care of it, providing for all things, including human beings. Well, in the first place, we come to this question: was it, may I ask, for his own sake that the

god created the world [or for the sake of human beings? For it is obvious that it was from a wish to benefit either himself or human beings that he embarked on this] undertaking. For how could it have been otherwise, if nothing is produced without a cause and these things are produced by a god? Let us then examine this view and what Stoics mean. It was, they say, from a wish to have a city and fellow-citizens, just as if [he were an exile from a city, that] the god [created the world and human beings. However, this supposition, a concoction of empty talking, is] self-evidently a fable, composed to gain the attention of an audience, not a natural philosopher's argument searching for the truth and inferring from probabilities things not palpable to sense. Yet even if, in the belief that he was doing some good [to himself, the god] really [made the world and human beings],

For god [is, I say], a living being, indestructible [and] blessed from [age to] age, having complete [self-sufficiency]. Moreover, what [god, if] he had existed for infinite [time] and enjoyed tranquillity [for thousands of years, would have got] this idea that he needed a city and fellow-citizens? Add to this absurdity that he, being a god, should seek to have beings as fellow-citizens.

And there is this further point too: if he had created the world as a habitation and city for himself, I seek to know where he was living before the world was created; I do not find an answer, at any rate not one consistent with the doctrine of these people when they declare that this world is unique. So for that infinite time, apparently, the god of these people was cityless and homeless and, like an unfortunate man — I do not say «god» —, having neither city nor fellow-citizens, he was destitute and roaming about at random. If therefore the divine nature shall be deemed to have created things for its own sake, all this is absurd; and if for the sake of men, there are yet other more absurd consequences.

Let its divide the discussion into two —the world and men themselves. And first let us speak about the world.

[If indeed] all things are well arranged for men and nothing is antagonistic to them, our situation is like that of creatures made by a god. But let it be agreed first

Post by “Cassius” of August 14, 2022 at 9:01 AM

[The riddle background:](#)

As the Wikipedia article also cites, the major modern source for this argument is David Hume's formulation in [Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion](#):

Quote

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2625-episode-one-hundred-thirty-five-the-letter-to-menoceus-02-on-the-nature-of-the/>

"Is he [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?"

Quote

"[God's] power we allow [is] infinite: Whatever he wills is executed: But neither man nor any other animal are happy: Therefore he does not will their happiness. His wisdom is infinite: He is never mistaken in choosing the means to any end: But the course of nature tends not to human or animal felicity: Therefore it is not established for that purpose. Through the whole compass of human knowledge, there are no inferences more certain and infallible than these. In what respect, then, do his benevolence and mercy resemble the benevolence and mercy of men?"

The basic foundation of the argument is found in Lactantius "[On The Anger of God,](#)" [Chapters 3 and 4.](#)

Quote

For when Epicurus thought that it was inconsistent with God to injure and to inflict harm, which for the most part arises from the affection of anger, he took away from Him beneficence also, since he saw that it followed that if God has anger, He must also have kindness. Therefore, lest he should concede to Him a vice, he deprived Him also of virtue. From this, he says, He is happy and uncorrupted, because He cares about nothing, and neither takes trouble Himself nor occasions it to another. Therefore He is not God, if He is neither moved, which is peculiar to a living being, nor does anything impossible for man, which is peculiar to God, if He has no will at all, no action, in short, no administration, which is worthy of God. And what greater, what more worthy administration can be attributed to God, than the government of the world, and especially of the human race, to which all earthly things are subject?

With the availability of [Thomas Stanley's English version of Gassendi's work on Epicurus](#), we can see on page 174 the argument presented in intermediate form almost as adopted by Hume:

[gassendiriddle](#) r type unknown

Quote

"Moreover, I think it may not be ill argued thus: Either God would take away ills and cannot, or he can and will not, or he neither will nor can, or he both will and can. If he would and cannot, he is impotent, and consequently not God; if he can and will not, envious, which is equally contrary to God's nature; if he neither will nor can, he is both envious and impotent, and consequently not God; if he both will and can, which onely agrees with God, whence are the ills? or why does he not take them away?"

UPDATE 11-4-22 - See Kalosyni's post here about the possible source of this being Sextus Empiricus: [Sextus Empiricus](#)

Post by “Cassius” of August 14, 2022 at 10:26 AM

Lucretius Book Six: Brown

[68] Unless you purge your mind of such conceits, and banish them your breast, and forbear to think unworthily of the gods, by charging them with things that break their peace, those sacred deities you will believe are always angry and offended with you; not that the supreme power of the gods can be so ruffled as to be eager to punish severely in their resentments, but because you fancy those beings, who enjoy a perfect peace in themselves, are subject to anger and the extravagances of revenge: and therefore you will no more approach their shrines with an easy mind, no more in tranquility and peace will you be able to receive the images, the representations of their divine forms, that form from their pure bodies and strike powerfully upon the minds of men: From hence you may collect what a wretched life you are to lead.

Post by “Don” of August 14, 2022 at 10:53 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

and therefore you will no more approach their shrines with an easy mind, no more in tranquility and peace will you be able to receive the images, the representations of their divine forms, that form from their pure bodies and strike powerfully upon the minds of men:

I think it's interesting to consider the opposite of what Lucretius is saying:

If you do purge your mind of such conceits, and do banish them your breast, and do forbear to think unworthily of the gods, then you can approach their shrines with an easy mind, in tranquility and peace will you be able to receive the images, the representations of their divine forms, that form from their pure bodies and strike powerfully upon the minds of men.

That's how Epicurus approached his participation in the rites and festivals of the gods.

Post by “Joshua” of August 14, 2022 at 11:44 AM

Just as a point of interest, Friday the 19th will be the anniversary of the dedication of the first temple of Venus, according to Wikipedia:

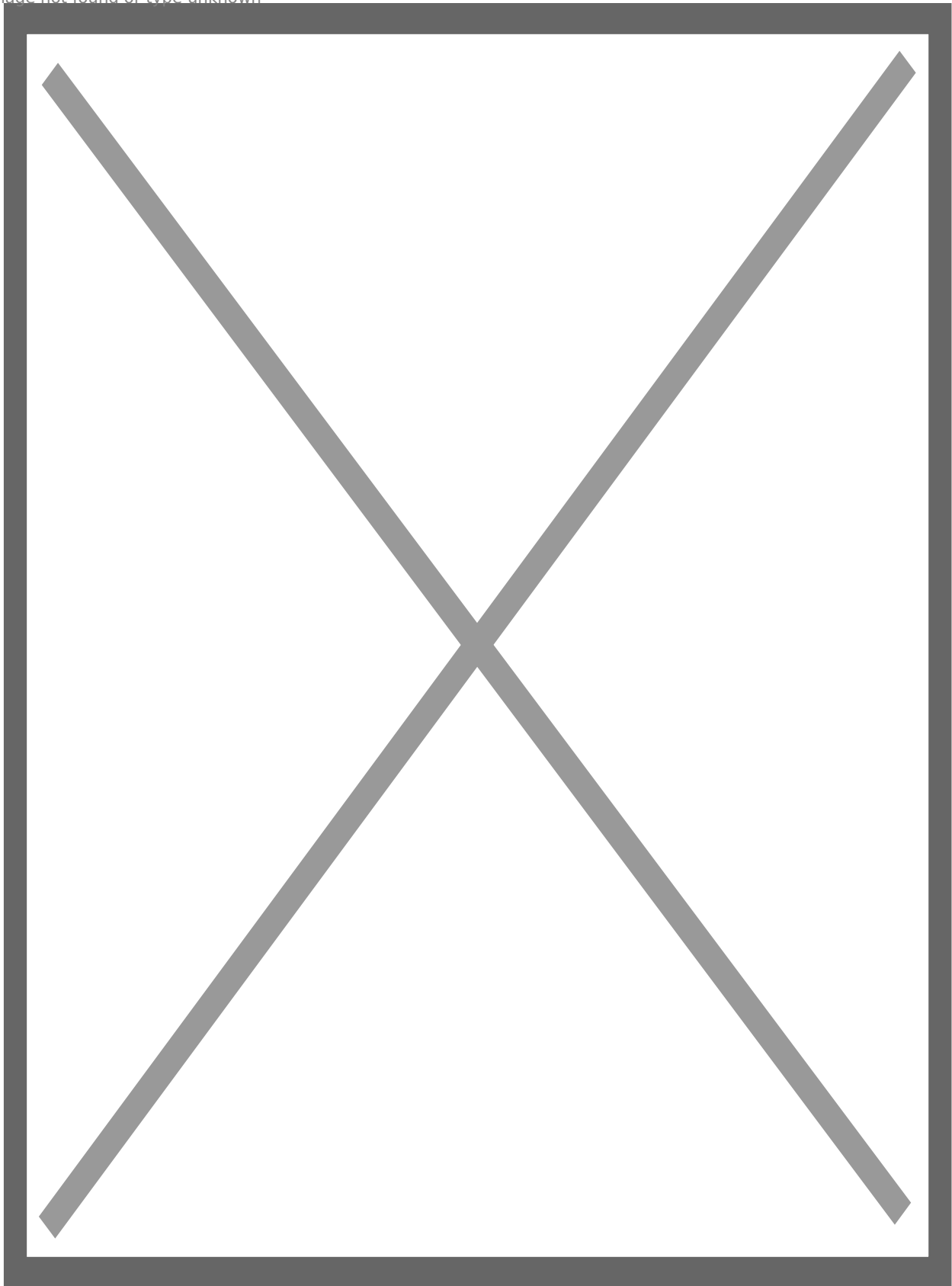
Quote

295 BC - The first temple to Venus, the Roman goddess of love, beauty and fertility, is dedicated by Quintus Fabius Maximus Gurges during the Third Samnite War.

Post by “Don” of August 14, 2022 at 11:49 AM

And August 20 is the anniversary of the Launch of Voyager II in 1977 to explore the cosmos.

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Post by “Joshua” of August 14, 2022 at 2:26 PM

I've never been more annoyed with myself after recording than I am today... ☐☐

I've always thought that two things were crucial for anyone presuming to hold forth under the name of Epicurus. The first was to make an honest and diligent effort to understand what he was writing. The second was to express that understanding to others, in a way that was consistent with the plain reading of the text, as well as with the tenor of the whole philosophy.

I don't think I succeeded very well with the second part. Nevertheless, and in lieu of rehashing the issue, I want to take some time to pursue an angle that [Kalosyni](#) introduced.

We were discussing the consideration of an Epicurean god as an image, eidolon, or archetype, and Kalosyni brought up Joseph Campbell. I think it's a connection deserving of further comment.

A word I kept using was 'demarcate'. What I was attempting to illustrate was the contrast I perceived, and wanted to patrol, between the natal moral claims of "religion" and the epistemological claims about the gods being made by Epicurus. And yet I think that Joseph Campbell would suggest that the moral claims have nearly always been secondary and incidental in myth and religion, and that the symbolism and emotional impact has always been primary. I don't know---and it's been many years since I read Campbell, so that I don't know whether I could say more.

One thing I will say is that Lucretius had an advantage that Epicurus did not have. Epicurus could not have respectably cast himself as a Prometheus figure--it would have looked ridiculous. Lucretius, though--writing from the comfortable distance of two and a half centuries--suggests exactly this comparison, and it's this symbol, more than any eidolon of the gods, that I find to be a compelling reason to push forward in the pursuit of pleasure and happiness.

Post by “Cassius” of August 14, 2022 at 3:41 PM

I "liked" Joshua's post in general but I disagree that he did a bad job explaining things. I'll get the final production up as soon as I can and we can let the audience be the judge. We can come back next week if we need to so we can address anything that we decide (or the comments reveal) need revisiting.

As to Joseph Campbell, I had a friend some years ago who tried to introduce me to his material, but I did not get very far into it. I recall coming away from what I did read with a fairly negative appraisal, but I can't remember why, and I would be happy to revisit that since his name keeps coming up among people I respect.

Maybe Kalosyni or Joshua can start a new thread, perhaps in one of the "Art" forums? I suggest art rather than religion because I seem to recall that he was primarily focused on the uses of symbolism, but if I am wrong about that we can place it wherever is appropriate.

Post by “Kalosyni” of August 14, 2022 at 4:06 PM

Some post show thoughts:

Toward the middle or somewhere in the last half, these two options come up:

1) The gods are just ideals, mental constructs, and don't physically exist.

-or-

2) The gods are actual physical beings, a kind of order of beings that exist somewhere in the universe (non-supernatural but yet immortal)

It is unclear exactly, yet either way, we can read that the admonition of Epicurus is to see the gods as incorruptable and blessed.

And I brought up Joseph Campbell and "archetypes" of the gods/goddess, and the muses.

I see now that Joseph Campbell based his work on Carl Jung, so that is really a better source for understanding archetypes.

--Wikipedia article: [Jungian archetypes](#).

--Wikipedia article: [the muses](#).

As for further ideas about how to apply the psychology of archetypes within Epicureanism, I hope to start a new thread.

Post by “Cassius” of August 14, 2022 at 4:56 PM

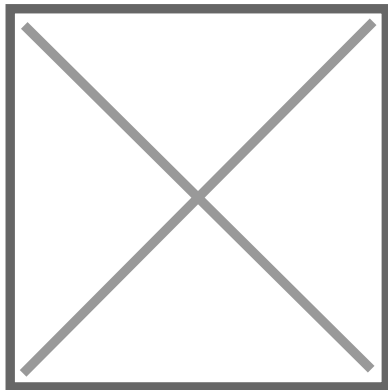
Yes please start a new thread when you can. I remember enough about Campbell to remember that he is pretty controversial, so I suspect once we start discussing that it will become quite detailed.

Post by “Don” of August 14, 2022 at 5:15 PM

I'm looking forward to listening!

Post by “Kalosyni” of August 14, 2022 at 5:57 PM

More on an idealist Epicurean view of the gods, by Sedley:



[Epicurus' theological innatism](#)

Epicurus' theological innatism

www.academia.edu

Post by “Godfrey” of August 14, 2022 at 8:09 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2625-episode-one-hundred-thirty-five-the-letter-to-menoceus-02-on-the-nature-of-the/>

I believe that there's some controversy about the validity of Jungian archetypes even among Jungians. I read an article a while back that discussed that, but I may be confusing the details. If a thread gets going I'll try to find the article and post it.

Post by “Don” of August 14, 2022 at 8:14 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

More on an idealist Epicurean view of the gods, by Sedley:

https://www.academia.edu/11365772/Epicu...ogical_innatism

That's a good one. Sedley is the big name when it comes to this topic.

Post by “Joshua” of August 14, 2022 at 8:21 PM

A book that I always meant to read but never got around to is *God is not One; The Eight Rival Religions that Run the World* by Stephen Prothero. I gather that what he's doing in that book is pushing back against a trend that we see with Epicureanism all the time--the "they're-all-basically-saying-the-same-thing" crowd. Joseph Campbell is often cited as an example of the other camp.

Prothero in his own words:

Quote

According to the Dalai Lama, "the essential message of all religions is very much the same." From this perspective, popularized by "perennial philosophers" such as Aldous Huxley, Joseph Campbell and Huston Smith, all religions are beautiful and all are true. The prevailing metaphor portrays the world's religions as different paths up the same mountain. "It is possible to climb life's mountain from any side," writes Mr. Smith, "but when the top is reached the trails converge."

This is a seductive sentiment in a world in which religious violence can seem as present and potent as God. But it is dangerous, disrespectful and untrue.

Post by “Don” of August 14, 2022 at 8:56 PM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

A book that I always meant to read but never got around to is God is not One; The Eight Rival Religions that Run the World by Stephen Prothero.

Thanks! Added to my Good Reads "Want to read" list

Post by “Kalosyni” of August 14, 2022 at 9:05 PM

I just posted a new thread with links to details on Greek gods/goddess, and also to start exploring archetypes:

Thread

[For Gods There Are](#)

"For verily there are gods, and the knowledge of them is manifest" (Letter of Menoeceus: Hicks translation).

In a recent [podcast the Epicurean understanding of gods was discussed](#).

And further questions came up for me, including the how to imagine why it might be that Epicureans held the gods to be important.

From [Wikipedia "Ancient Greek Religion"](#) "Ancient Greek theology was polytheistic, based on the assumption that there were many gods and goddesses, as well as a range of lesser supernatural...



Kalosyni

August 14, 2022 at 9:00 PM

([Godfrey](#) you mentioned you have an article on Jungian archetypes)

Post by “Cassius” of August 14, 2022 at 10:53 PM

Episode 135 - The Letter to Menoecus 02 - On The Nature of the Gods - is now available.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/50915357>

Post by “Cassius” of August 14, 2022 at 10:55 PM

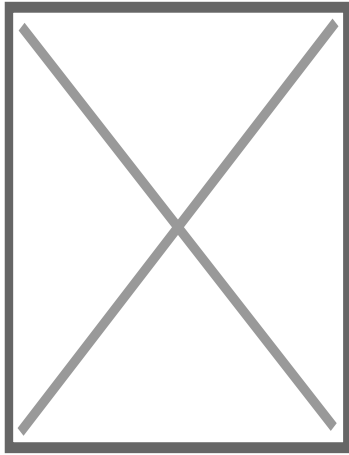
I cannot promise to keep up the pace of same-day turnaround between recording and posting, but there are few issues more intense and interesting than the nature of the gods so I wanted to get this one out as soon as possible.

Post by “Cassius” of August 15, 2022 at 1:56 AM

Now that I think about it we hardly scratched the surface of what we could have talked about. Given how much more we have to cover in the letter I doubt we will want to do a second episode to continue covering the subject more deeply, but we could easily do two or even three or more episodes on the same topic.

Post by “Don” of August 15, 2022 at 9:08 AM

I'll add in the link to my commentary...

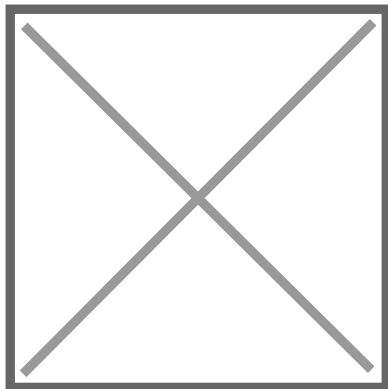


[Letter To Menoikeus: A New Translation With Commentary : Don Boozar : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

A new translation of the Letter to Menoikeus (Menoecus) by Epicurus with commentary.
archive.org

Post by “Don” of August 15, 2022 at 9:53 AM

I thought [Joshua](#) might be interested in this paper...



[Discourse Ex Nihilo: Epicurus and Lucretius in Sixteenth-Century England.](#)

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the afterlife of De rerum natura is the way that the poem’s dynamic treatment of atomism and mutability seems to generate...
www.academia.edu

Post by “Don” of August 15, 2022 at 9:58 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2625-episode-one-hundred-thirty-five-the-letter-to-menoecus-02-on-the-nature-of-the/>

I really liked [Kalosyni](#) 's closing comments. I thought that was a good summary!

Post by “Cassius” of August 15, 2022 at 10:42 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

I really liked Kalosyni 's closing comments. I thought that was a good summary!

Yes I very much agree! If we were doing advertising and selecting interesting passages to highlight in an audio advertisement, that's the passage I would pick from the episode.

Post by “Cassius” of August 15, 2022 at 11:30 AM

Here's another comment I should have included in the "things that seem clear and we all agree on about Epicurean theology" list:

Most of us probably associate some variation of "faith" or 'blind faith" as an inherent attribute of religion, like the supernatural and omniscience and other things we associate with monotheism.

I think we would all agree (would we not?) that there is no hint of "faith" of any kind in Epicurus' attitude toward divinity. He seems to be basing his views firmly on "images" or "anticipations" or some variation of that kind of evidence, and he is not suggesting that we take anything whatsoever "on faith" without evidence. He seems very clear on distinguishing between things we can determine clearly, and what we can't, and there's no hint of suggesting that anything be taken on faith.

Given that the issue of "faith" is so central to our modern views of religion that is a probably a point well worth stressing.

Post by “Eikadistes” of August 15, 2022 at 12:18 PM

I have only found references to "faith" as ΠΙΣΤΙΣ (*pístis*)—as it is usually found in the Christian Gospels—or ΠΙΣΤΩΜΑ (*pístōma*) within the Epicurean context of social stability, having "faith" in one's friends, having "confidence" in one's safety, and having the "guarantee" of a pleasant life. The word ΠΙΣΤΩΜΑ is employed by Epicurus in his final Key Doctrine and is *also* rendered by our English translators as "conviction", "assurance", "confirmation", "a pledge", or "warrant".

Post by “Don” of August 15, 2022 at 12:29 PM

To build on [Eikadistes](#) 's post...

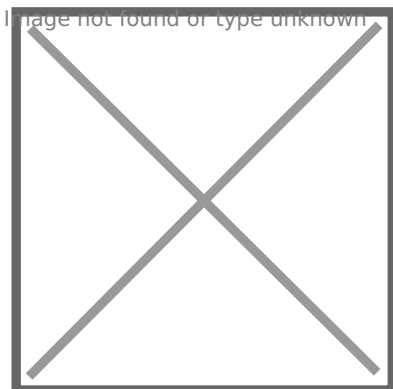
Also, Fragment 68. To those who are able to reason it out, the highest and surest joy is found in the stable health of the body and a firm confidence in keeping it. τὸ γὰρ εὐσταθὲς σαρκὸς κατάστημα καὶ τὸ περὶ ταύτης πιστὸν ἔλπισμα τὴν ἀκροτάτην χαρὰν καὶ βεβαιοτάτην ἔχει τοῖς ἐπιλογίζεσθαι δυναμένοις.

[PD35](#) Οὐκ ἔστι τὸν λάθρα τι κινουῦντα ὧν συνέθεντο πρὸς ἀλλήλους εἰς τὸ μὴ βλάπτειν μηδὲ βλάπτεσθαι, πιστεύειν ὅτι λήσει, κἂν μυριάκις ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος λανθάνῃ. μέχρι γὰρ καταστροφῆς ἄδηλον εἶ καὶ λήσει.

Hicks translation: It is impossible for the man who secretly violates any article of the social compact to feel confident that he will remain undiscovered, even if he has already escaped ten thousand times; for until his death he is never sure he will not be detected.

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, πιστός](#)

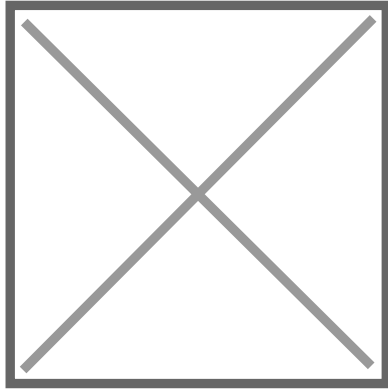
[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, π , πισσόχριστος , πίστις](#)



[G4102 - pistis - Strong's Greek Lexicon \(kjv\)](#)

G4102 - πίστις *pístis*, *pis'-tis*; from ; persuasion, i.e. credence; moral conviction (of religious truth, or the truthfulness of God or a religious teacher),...

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Post by “Joshua” of August 15, 2022 at 5:01 PM

Bookmarked, [Don](#), thank you!

Post by “Don” of August 15, 2022 at 5:47 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I cannot promise to keep up the pace of same-day turnaround between recording and posting

Applause for [Cassius](#) on even attempting the one-day turnaround! Being in the behind-the-scenes of a podcast at work, I know what goes into the post-production. Kudos to you!

Post by “Cassius” of August 15, 2022 at 6:11 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2625-episode-one-hundred-thirty-five-the-letter-to-menoceus-02-on-the-nature-of-the/>

Thanks Don, and as to the comments above on "confidence" I think we're probably all in agreement that "confidence" is at least generally used (if not always used) in the sense of "I have confidence because I have good reason for it" as opposed to "I have confidence but have no reason for it - I have confidence based on blind faith."

I see "faith" in the "blind faith" sense as about the furthest possible from the kind of thing that Epicurus would recommend, and that his "confidence" is always based on reasoning based on firm evidence and/or experience.

I suspect most everyone agrees with that, but if anyone sees any texts which might go the other way, call them out and let's look at them. I am thinking that Blind faith is something that ought to be driven as far from as as possible, like that "bad habit" reference in VS46 - "Let us utterly drive from us our bad habits, as if they were evil men who have long done us great harm."