

# Article On Contemplation on the Gods

Post by “Kalosyni” of March 19, 2024 at 5:06 PM

This [article on Contemplation on the Gods](#) brings up the practice of thinking about the gods as blissful. For some people this may not be necessary, but for others who were brought up with the idea of a punishing god, then it might be helpful (as the things we were taught as children can linger on in the back of the mind).

The article lists the following exercises to deconstruct false conceptions of the gods:

## Quote

First lesson: change how we think of the divine. ...Instead, think of the god as a supremely happy biological entity existing within our universe, not above it.

Second lesson: let’s imagine ourselves as living amongst the gods.

Third lesson: picture multiple gods.

Fourth lesson: view the gods as embodiments of happiness. ...*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.*

The proposed exercises in the article suggest a jump off point and give some food for thought. It does bring up in my mind questions about what exactly Philodemus said about "placing before the eyes" practices.

[Bryan](#) and [DavidN](#) and [Cassius](#) what are your thoughts?

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Post by “Kalosyni” of March 19, 2024 at 5:12 PM

I am considering this with regard to Easter, since this suggests the practice of deconstructing false conceptions of the gods.

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Post by “Joshua” of March 19, 2024 at 6:58 PM

## Display Spoiler

### Quote

During his stay in England, Bruno wrote and published a flood of strange works. The extraordinary daring of these works may be gauged by taking in the implications of a single passage from one of them, *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, printed in 1584. The passage—quoted here in Ingrid D. Rowland’s fine translation—is long, but its length is very much part of the point. Mercury, the herald of the gods, is recounting to Sofia all the things Jove has assigned him to bring about. He has ordered

that today at noon two of the melons in Father Franzino’s melon patch will be perfectly ripe, but that they won’t be picked until three days from now, when they will no longer be considered good to eat. He requests that at the same moment, on the jujube tree at the base of Monte Cicala in the house of Giovanni Bruno, thirty perfect jujubes will be picked, and he says that several shall fall to earth still green, and that fifteen shall be eaten by worms. That Vasta, wife of Albenzio Savolino, when she means to curl the hair at her temples, shall burn fifty-seven hairs for having let the curling iron get too hot, but she won’t burn her scalp and hence shall not swear when she smells the stench, but shall endure it patiently. That from the dung of her ox two hundred and fifty-two dung beetles shall be born, of which fourteen shall be trampled and killed by Albenzio’s foot, twenty-six shall die upside down, twenty-two shall live in a hole, eighty shall make a pilgrim’s progress around the yard, forty-two shall retire to live under the stone by the door, sixteen shall roll their ball of dung wherever they please, and the rest shall scurry around at random.

This is by no means all that Mercury has to arrange.

Laurenza, when she combs her hair, shall lose seventeen hairs and break thirteen, and of these, ten shall grow back within three days and seven shall never grow back at all. Antonio Savolino’s bitch shall conceive five puppies, of which three shall live out their natural lifespan and two shall be thrown away, and of these three the first shall resemble its mother, the second shall be mongrel, and the third shall partly resemble the father and partly resemble Polidoro’s dog. In that moment a cuckoo shall be heard from La Starza, cuckooing twelve times, no more and no fewer, whereupon it shall leave and fly to the ruins of Castle Cicala for eleven minutes, and then shall fly off to Scarvaita, and as for what happens next, we’ll see to it later.

Mercury’s work in this one tiny corner of a tiny corner of the Campagna is still not done.

That the skirt Mastro Danese is cutting on his board shall come out crooked. That twelve bedbugs shall leave the slats of Costantino’s bed and head toward the pillow:

seven large ones, four small, and one middlesized, and as for the one who shall survive until this evening's candlelight, we'll see to it. That fifteen minutes thereafter, because of the movement of her tongue, which she has passed over her palate four times, the old lady of Fiurulo shall lose the third right molar in her lower jaw, and it shall fall without blood and without pain, because that molar has been loose for seventeen months. That Ambrogio on the one hundred twelfth thrust shall finally have driven home his business with his wife, but shall not impregnate her this time, but rather another, using the sperm into which the cooked leek that he has just eaten with millet and wine sauce shall have been converted. Martinello's son is beginning to grow hair on his chest, and his voice is beginning to crack. That Paulino, when he bends over to pick up a broken needle, shall snap the red drawstring of his underpants....

Conjuring up in hallucinatory detail the hamlet where he was born, Bruno staged a philosophical farce, designed to show that divine providence, at least as popularly understood, is rubbish. The details were all deliberately trivial but the stakes were extremely high: to mock Jesus' claim that the hairs on one's head are all numbered risked provoking an unpleasant visit from the thought police. Religion was not a laughing matter, at least for the officials assigned to enforce orthodoxy. They did not treat even trivial jokes lightly. In France, a villager named Isambard was arrested for having exclaimed, when a friar announced after mass that he would say a few words about God, "The fewer the better." In Spain, a tailor named Garcia Lopez, coming out of church just after the priest had announced the long schedule of services for the coming week, quipped that "When we were Jews, we were bored stiff by one Passover each year, and now each day seems to be a Passover and feast-day." Garcia Lopez was denounced to the Inquisition.

But Bruno was in England. Despite the vigorous efforts that Thomas More made, during his time as chancellor, to establish one, England had no Inquisition. Though it was still quite possible to get into serious trouble for unguarded speech, Bruno may have felt more at liberty to speak his mind, or, in this case, to indulge in raucous, wildly subversive laughter. 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.

Display More

This is a long passage from Stephen Greenblatt's *The Swerve*, in which Ingrid D. Rowland's translation of Giordano Bruno takes to task the claim of divine providence by elevating it to the level of the absurd. It is very long, and I *hope* the 'spoiler' effect shortens it. In any case, it goes a long way toward deconstructing one of the central misconceptions of the gods, and the last paragraph is excellent.

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### Post by “Pacatus” of March 19, 2024 at 7:10 PM

From [Joshua](#) 's "spoiler": "Nature is not an abstract capacity, but a generative mother, bringing forth everything that exists. We have, in other words, entered the Lucretian universe."

*Natura naturans*: "Nature naturing" -- though not necessarily in accordance with Spinoza's philosophical understanding.

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### Post by “Kalosyni” of March 19, 2024 at 7:40 PM

Regarding the article I linked to in post 1 above, I am not saying that all of the proposed exercises in the article are "correct" or should be done.

Edit note: moved quoted material up into post one above.

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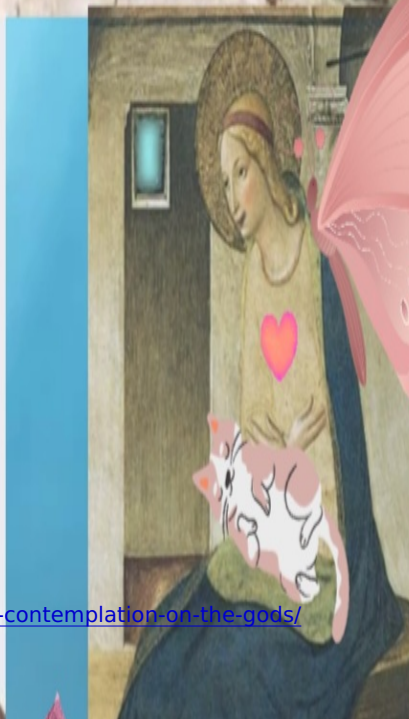
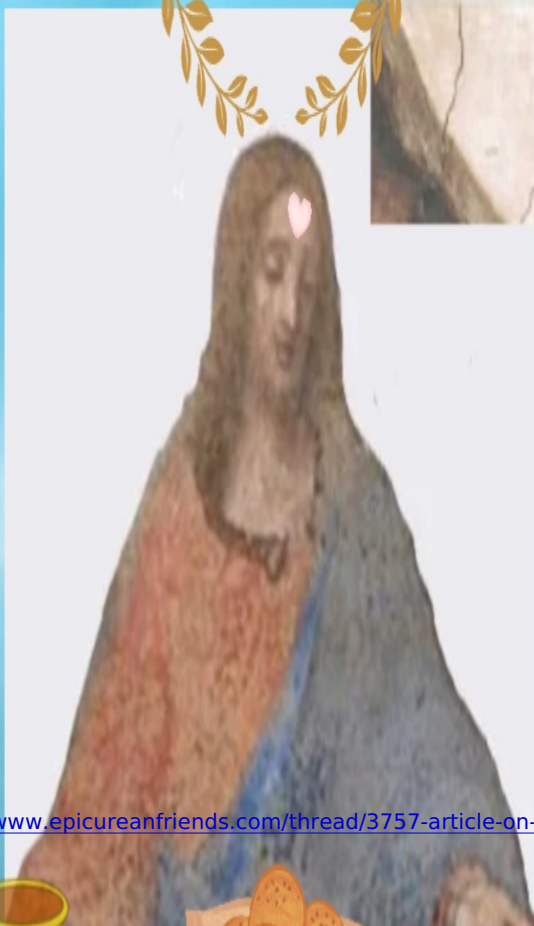
### Post by “Kalosyni” of March 19, 2024 at 9:24 PM

Tranquility

Love

Joy

Peace



The  
Abode  
of  
Eternal  
Bliss

Collage I created using art from The Sistine Chapel, The Last Supper, and The Annunciation -- Imagining the eternal bliss of God the Father, Jesus the Son, and Mary the Mother (or Mary as the "Holy Spirit").

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## Post by “Joshua” of March 19, 2024 at 10:01 PM

I think the linked article is quite good. I haven't read the whole series, but it's a promising start, heavy on quotations to the relevant source texts.

### Quote

Before we start exploring this conception of divinity and how it leads to the Epicurean ideal of friendship, we should clarify a few things: the object of this article is not to defend the existence of the [Epicurean gods](#), for which there is obviously no evidence, nor point out any potential inconsistencies in their arguments concerning the gods.[4] In order to move forward, we can simply think of these gods as part of an ethical thought experiment that will lead to practical results on how we think about and experience our lives and our relationships.[5]

We start with a tentatively idealist approach to the question of the gods, which I think is more than fair. I know, for example, that a marble bust of Epicurus is of course *not* Epicurus himself, but it is nevertheless useful as a stimulant to thought and introspection. I'm happy to engage with the gods on this ground, and happy also to acknowledge that this is, for me, as far as it goes. The *Iliad* is a penetrating and insightful epic, resplendent with pride and pathos, even if every word of it is fiction; and I would be a beggarly wretch indeed if robbed of this and other literary majesties.

After some further comment, we get on to the bit about deconstructing our previous conceptions of the divine--and here I think there is a fork in the road. People are not all the same, and what works for one may be of little use to another; I think I am that kind of person for whom theory is more elemental, and even more real and tangible, than practice. This is paradox, of course, but I can summon to my defense in this case no other than the renowned Anglican apologist C. S. Lewis:

### Quote

I believe that many who find that "nothing happens" when they sit down, or kneel down, to a book of devotion, would find that the heart sings unbidden while they are working their way through a tough bit of theology with a pipe in their teeth and a pencil in their hand.

*-On the Incarnation*

As it happens, every word of this, right down to my former use of the tobacco pipe, is true to my experience.

Now I do not say that this is the best way to deconstruct one's former faith, but it is the one that works best for me. What we really need is an increased appreciation for the fact that people suffer and heal differently, stress and thrive differently, and that in the matter of a living philosophy one outline or summary or presentation rarely fits all.

All that being said, I think the article and the exercises are both good. 👍 (Again, I haven't read past the first linked page in the 5-part series.)

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### **Post by "Bryan" of March 19, 2024 at 11:48 PM**

I had not seen these articles before -- I enjoyed them, thank you for sharing Kalosyni!

Some good points:

- (1) We benefit from embracing the excellence of the human form, gods in human form, and idols of gods in human form.
- (2) We benefit from having high levels of tolerance and acceptance (although not in a way that risks our health and safety).
- (3) We benefit from envisioning the life we want to live and working to make it a reality.
- (4) We benefit by remembering and being grateful for the past and in this way we can always access goods and friendships that have past.