

# Youtube Video Discussing Cicero's "On The Nature of The Gods" (Classical Wisdom Podcast)

Post by "Cassius" of May 23, 2024 at 7:08 PM

I am finding that there has been a lot of recent activity around Cicero's "On The Nature of the Gods."

In addition to the current series that [Professor Greg Sadler is doing](#) from a Stoic perspective, I see there is this video which is an interview with someone who did a new translation (last year) of the same work.

The translator is George J. Thomas (a lawyer who writes under the pen name Quintus Curtius) and Michael Fontaine, Professor of Classics at Cornell University.

I think it's pretty clear that neither of these gentlemen consider themselves to be Epicurean, but I was very impressed with their interest and enthusiasm of interest in Epicurus and in Cicero's work in systematizing a presentation of the major philosophical issues of his day.

Quite possibly the main reason I would suggest people watch this video is that it does a great job of discussing how "On The Nature of the Gods" is a very important work that deals with a lot more than just dry issues of "religion." One quote from the video is that apparently Voltaire said that this book "On The Nature of the Gods" was one of the two most important books ever written. Unfortunately they did not mention what he said the other book was.

They make lots of remarks in this video that are of great interest to our current series of Lucretius Today Podcast episodes, so this is separate thread that we can link to as time goes by.

Also I should say that I purchased a Kindle edition of the new translation, and i am very pleased with it. I also purchased the audio version on Audible, which I'll be frank and say that I am less pleased with, because I personally find the narrator's dramatic tone off-putting. But of course that's a purely personal take and your mileage may vary. I'll continue to look for a "neutral" voice in a free edition and I'll link it here if I can find one. There's a librevox version available, but I have to say I don't find that one to my taste either. 😊

<https://youtu.be/HM1oJHrY-bQ>

## Post by “Cassius” of May 24, 2024 at 3:07 PM

Earlier today I got a chance to review the video I posted above in post #2 and I want to expand my earlier comment. (Caveat: I listened to it, rather than watched it, so I didn't consider facial expressions or motions, so I don't know if those would detract from my otherwise favorable reaction)

I was VERY impressed with the discussion and I think it's well worth watching for most anyone, even if you're not listening to the current episodes of the podcast.

The subjects covered in OTNOTG appear to be much more broad and deep than I expected, so I think we're going to get as much out of it as we got out of "On Ends." This discussion does a good job of pointing out how important these issues are, and how much they turn on issues of physics and of epistemology rather than any narrow view of "religion."

I think over time this video may prompt discussion that will apply to much more than this Episode 230 of our podcast, so I will move it to a separate thread of its own and I encourage further discussion about it.

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## Post by “kochiekoch” of May 29, 2024 at 10:56 AM

Nice presentation! 😊 One ACK! moment thought . Thomas says that Epicureanism requires too much discipline for the average person to practice it! 😄

I guess he skipped over where Cicero was concerned that the philosophy was taking Italy by storm. 😄

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## Post by “Cassius” of May 29, 2024 at 11:54 AM

Good catch kochie. It wasn't clear to me whether he meant something like "true Epicureanism is so ascetic that it isn't possible for a normal person to follow," or rather "if you don't have the thread of hell or the promise of heaven hanging over your head then the normal person doesn't have the willpower to follow it" or rather something else. Maybe if I had seen his facial expression I would have a better idea but I was just listening at the time.

My take from listening was that he genuinely did not sound hostile to Epicurus, more on the order of "mystified" about what certain things meant. There was one part in particular where he said that there was something about the situation that he didn't understand and that he asked the professor to explain to him, but I can't recall exactly the context. But even if my memory is wrong on that, it was interesting to me that he didn't come across to me as a "true believer" either of Cicero's own viewpoint or of the Stoic viewpoint. Given that he's not a professional academic himself, he might well fit the mold of a lot of people who drop in around here, who find these topics fascinating and yet they know they've been told all their lives that they are not supposed to like Epicurus.

A vibe very similar to [that other podcast I posted recently from the Florida "Madisonian" professor who chose to focus on Hume but in doing so seemed to be surprised how much he agreed with Epicurus and Hume.](#)

I actually find both of these last two podcasts encouraging, in that neither are overtly pro-Epicurean, and probably both are oriented in favor of other philosophic positions, and yet both seemed to treat Epicurus in an unexpectedly (to them) favorable way.

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### **Post by "kochiekoch" of May 29, 2024 at 1:15 PM**

Hi there! 😊

No, Thomas doesn't seem particularly hostile to Epicurus in the podcast. He's simply a BIG FAN of Cicero. There are people out there like that. 😊

The context where he made his statement was that Cicero admired Epicurus personally because Epicurus himself was this very disciplined, virtuous, even "monkish" man, while decrying the discipline of his philosophy as being too difficult for the average follower.

Later in the podcast, he agrees that NOBODY KNOWS the full extent of the reach of the philosophy because of the idea of Lathe Biosis.

So, there you go. To Thomas, Epicureanism is a philosophy too difficult for the average person to follow, yet it had a broad, sweeping and largely unknown following. One of the major schools of the ancient world.

We've seen this kind of bias before. 😊 Nothing new.

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### **Post by "Bryan" of May 30, 2024 at 4:05 PM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3865-youtube-video-discussing-cicero-s-on-the-nature-of-the-gods-classical-wisdom-pod/>

After failing to remember Philodemus' name, or if he wrote in Latin or Greek, we get the quote: "We don't have to read the fragments in Herculaneum!" -- Fontaine from Cornell (1:04:07).

Talk about rejecting something without understanding it!

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## **Post by “Godfrey” of June 10, 2024 at 9:00 PM**

One thing which I found interesting came later in the video as Thomas gave a heartfelt take on why the gods and religion are important: personal consolation and civic cohesion (my paraphrase). He feels that religion is necessary even if it's not actually true, and for these two reasons in particular.

What I found illuminating, and disappointing in that the speakers seem to be completely unaware of it, is that Epicurus' take on religion addresses both of these points and attempts to improve upon them by incorporating truth as well. Although the typical discussion is whether the Epicurean view of the gods is realist or idealist, the point of view of Thomas introduces a different take, which I might call "functionalist." By removing the capricious and terrifying aspects of the gods, Epicurus makes them capable of consolation. Not by having them answer our prayers, but by serving as an example. This is pretty much the idealist view, just in the context of giving us a way to look at dealing with troubles. Encouraging his followers to attend the festivals and such serves to promote social cohesion, in addition to the potential pleasure obtained. I wouldn't be as cynical as the speakers and say that he did this to save his skin: I would say that Epicurus was aware of and acknowledged the historic role of religion in society and promoted it in his philosophy. In this context the Epicurean treatment of the gods actually isn't as mystifying as it's commonly made out to be.