

Episode 241 - Cicero's OTNOTG 16 - A Common Thread Between The Epicurean View Of "The Gods" and "The Good"

Post by "Cassius" of August 8, 2024 at 6:17 PM

Welcome to Episode 241 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the most complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where we have a thread to discuss this and all of our podcast episodes.

Today we are continuing to review Cicero's "On the Nature of The Gods," which began with the Epicurean spokesman Velleius defending the Epicurean point of view. This week will continue into Section 21 as Cotta, the Academic Skeptic, responds to Velleius, and we - in turn - will respond to Cotta in particular and the Skeptical argument in general.

For the main text we are using primarily the [Yonge translation, available here at Archive.org](#). The text which we include in these posts is available [here](#). We will also refer to the public domain version of the Loeb series, which contains both Latin and English, [as translated by H. Rackham](#).

Additional versions can be found here:

- [Frances Brooks 1896 translation at Online Library of Liberty](#)
- [Lacus Curtius Edition \(Rackham\)](#)
- [PDF Of Loeb Edition at Archive.org by Rackham](#)
- [Gutenberg.org version by CD Yonge](#)

A list of arguments presented [will eventually be put together here](#).

Today's Text

XXIII. ...

I allow that there are Gods. Instruct me, then, concerning their origin; inform me where they are, what sort of body, what mind, they have, and what is their course of life; for these I am

desirous of knowing. You attribute the most absolute power and efficacy to atoms. Out of them you pretend that everything is made. But there are no atoms, for there is nothing without body; every place is occupied by body, therefore there can be no such thing as a vacuum or an atom.

XXIV. I advance these principles of the naturalists without knowing whether they are true or false; yet they are more like truth than those statements of yours; for they are the absurdities in which Democritus, or before him Leucippus, used to indulge, saying that there are certain light corpuscles—some smooth, some rough, some round, some square, some crooked and bent as bows—which by a fortuitous concourse made heaven and earth, without the influence of any natural power. This opinion, C. Velleius, you have brought down to these our times; and you would sooner be deprived of the greatest advantages of life than of that authority; for before you were acquainted with those tenets, you thought that you ought to profess yourself an Epicurean; so that it was necessary that you should either embrace these absurdities or lose the philosophical character which you had taken upon you; and what could bribe you to renounce the Epicurean opinion? Nothing, you say, can prevail on you to forsake the truth and the sure means of a happy life. But is that the truth? for I shall not contest your happy life, which you think the Deity himself does not enjoy unless he languishes in idleness.

But where is truth? Is it in your innumerable worlds, some of which are rising, some falling, at every moment of time? Or is it in your atomical corpuscles, which form such excellent works without the direction of any natural power or reason? But I was forgetting my liberality, which I had promised to exert in your case, and exceeding the bounds which I at first proposed to myself. Granting, then, everything to be made of atoms, what advantage is that to your argument? For we are searching after the nature of the Gods; and allowing them to be made of atoms, they cannot be eternal, because whatever is made of atoms must have had a beginning: if so, there were no Gods till there was this beginning; and if the Gods have had a beginning, they must necessarily have an end, as you have before contended when you were discussing Plato's world. Where, then, is your beatitude and immortality, in which two words you say that God is expressed, the endeavor to prove which reduces you to the greatest perplexities? For you said that God had no body, but something like body; and no blood, but something like blood.

XXV. It is a frequent practice among you, when you assert anything that has no resemblance to truth, and wish to avoid reprehension, to advance something else which is absolutely and utterly impossible, in order that it may seem to your adversaries better to grant that point which has been a matter of doubt than to keep on pertinaciously contradicting you on every point: like Epicurus, who, when he found that if his atoms were allowed to descend by their own weight, our actions could not be in our own power, because their motions would be certain and necessary, invented an expedient, which escaped Democritus, to avoid necessity. He says that when the atoms descend by their own weight and gravity, they move a little obliquely. Surely, to make such an assertion as this is what one ought more to be ashamed of than the acknowledging ourselves unable to defend the proposition. His practice is the same against the

logicians, who say that in all propositions in which yes or no is required, one of them must be true; he was afraid that if this were granted, then, in such a proposition as "Epicurus will be alive or dead to-morrow," either one or the other must necessarily be admitted; therefore he absolutely denied the necessity of yes or no.

Can anything show stupidity in a greater degree? Zeno, being pressed by Arcesilas, who pronounced all things to be false which are perceived by the senses, said that some things were false, but not all. Epicurus was afraid that if any one thing seen should be false, nothing could be true; and therefore he asserted all the senses to be infallible directors of truth. Nothing can be more rash than this; for by endeavoring to repel a light stroke, he receives a heavy blow. On the subject of the nature of the Gods, he falls into the same errors. While he would avoid the concretion of individual bodies, lest death and dissolution should be the consequence, he denies that the Gods have body, but says they have something like body; and says they have no blood, but something like blood."

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/61015142>

Post by "Cassius" of August 11, 2024 at 4:26 PM

Well we made a little more progress in today's episode, rather than spending most of the time on a single sentence, but we did go back over the implications of Joshua's theorizing about the parallels in logical structure between Torquatus' explanation of Epicurus' views on the 'highest good' and Velleius' explanation of Epicurus' views on the nature of a 'god.' I will get this episode edited and up over the next several days as the issue involved goes to the general issue of definitions now being discussed in a parallel thread [over the nature of 'desire' and Epicurus' use of words](#) in non-standard ways. We've begun to move forward in the podcast discussion a little past this topic, but next week we'll probably touch on it again as I want to suggest that the same issue Joshua is observing as to "the good" and "gods" probably also applies to "pleasure," in my view. There are more implications of what Joshua is suggesting than we have yet fully discussed.

Post by "Cassius" of August 11, 2024 at 6:12 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3988-episode-241-cicero-s-otnotg-16-a-common-thread-between-the-epicurean-view-of-the/>

Anybody who wants to can save this message and with my blessings slap me every time i am participating in a discussion about things in which we firmly believe the existence of, without ever having seen or heard or touched or tasted or smelled them directly, if I fail to make sure that we site ATOMS as a prime example of such a thing! I am afraid I failed to do so at least in at one spot in this episode so I will have to use every method I can to try to do better!

Post by “Cassius” of August 13, 2024 at 8:13 AM

Episode 241 will be posted before the end of today. In the meantime, I want to note a point that Joshua brought up right at the end of the episode, which boils down to the point that:

- taking the position "I don't accept anything without evidence to support it" is a good logical position to take as a general rule to avoid mistakes.
- however relying on that general rule may not be nearly helpful to obtaining confidence and therefore happiness as being able to say "I have looked thoroughly into this subject and based on what I have found I am confident that X is true and Y is not true.

I took the time to post this also in part because Joshua also reminds us at the end of the episode about Epicurus' emphasis on the importance of studying infinity and its implications, and i think those two points go hand in hand as core aspects of the Epicurean approach to the issue of divinity.

Post by “Cassius” of August 13, 2024 at 11:18 AM

Lucretius Today Episode 241 - A Common Thread Between The Epicurean View Of "The Gods" and "The Good" - is now available:

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/61015142>

Post by “Cassius” of August 13, 2024 at 11:31 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3988-episode-241-cicero-s-otnotg-16-a-common-thread-between-the-epicurean-view-of-the/>

This episode turned out to have a different focus than was expected when I picked a preliminary title referring to atoms, so I've re-titled it to refer to what was actually discussed. This change occurred because the major focus turned out to be a comment Joshua introduced last week about a link between the way Epicurus approaches the subject of both "the gods" and "the good."

I should also note that I added the material which appears from 16:15 to 18:54 was an extension of the previous several minutes of recording that I added after the main recording was completed. Therefore the lack of any comment from Joshua or Kalosyni about that material is attributable mainly to the fact that they didn't hear that when we first recorded. As usual the merit or lack of merit of that section is entirely on me, so don't blame them for failing to correct me if that section is absolutely off base. (If anyone is tempted to go straight to 16:15 to start listening, I would warn that it would be difficult to evaluate that segment without hearing Joshua's discussion relating this back to last week, which starts close to the very beginning of the podcast.)

Post by “Don” of August 14, 2024 at 11:50 PM

Excellent, thought-provoking episode! Thank you all.

Post by “Don” of August 15, 2024 at 12:36 AM

This episode made me go back and examine the relevant sections of the letter to Menoikeus... And I found myself asking "What **really** is the prolepsis of the gods that Epicurus is proposing?" I thought it's straight forward: A god is a blessed and imperishable 'being'. But I'm not so sure. Let me break down the text and show where I'm coming from:

First, on the one hand, believing that the god is a blessed and imperishable thing as is the common, general understanding of the god... πρώτον μὲν τὸν θεὸν ζῶον ἄφθαρτον καὶ μακάριον νομίζων,...

First = not numerically, but "primarily, foremost, most importantly."

believe = νομίζων "believing, holding, considering" (present active participle of νομίζω) To me "believing" involves a cognitive act of choosing to believe, hold, or acknowledge something.

You can choose to believe the earth is flat. However, once you have evidence available, you can become convinced to believe the earth is round. Believe that the god is blessed and imperishable has too much *semantic* and *conceptual* content to be the prolepsis, which I believe most of us take to be a pre-rational, pre-conceptual impression (like sensations).

Even ζῶον (as I've mentioned before) can be a "living being/animal" but also an "image" of a living being as in the painting of a horse. Could Epicurus be hedging his bets here? Is the god only apprehended by the mind and contemplation because it is really is an image constructed by the mind, like the painting on a cloth or wall, in the mind itself of the one who turns their thoughts toward the god?

...as the common understanding (mental perception, idea, concept) of the god has been outlined...ὡς ἡ κοινὴ τοῦ θεοῦ νόησις ὑπεγράφη,

The use of ὑπεγράφη (hypegraphe) is especially interesting in this context because this word literally means to be outlined with the intent of someone filling in the details, like the image of letters indicated by a teacher by an outline or tracing for the student to then follow. It seems according to this, the most basic characteristics of the god are merely outlines in our mind on top of which all the incorrect assumptions and concepts of the hoi polloi are piled on. But those characteristics of blessedness and imperishability seem far too "detailed" to be considered ὑπεγράφη (hypegraphe).

Then we have:

Do not attribute anything foreign to the incorruptibility or incongruous with the blessedness of itself (i.e., the god)! μηθὲν μήτε τῆς ἀφθαρσίας ἀλλότριον μήτε τῆς μακαριότητος ἀνοίκειον αὐτῷ πρόσαπτε.

Believe everything about which a god is able to preserve its own imperishability and blessedness for itself. πᾶν δὲ τὸ φυλάττειν αὐτοῦ δυνάμενον τὴν μετα ἀφθαρσίας μακαριότητα περὶ αὐτὸν δόξαζε.

In this case, "believe" is actually δόξαζε (doxaze) "think, suppose, imagine, hold the opinion that" This word is connected with δοξαι in Principle Doctrines κυριαὶ δοξαι (kyriai doxai)

So, Epicurus exhorts his students to believe the god is a blessed and imperishable being (or the image of a being in their mind), to hold the believe that the god is able to preserve its own blessedness and imperishability, because the common idea of the god is engraved somehow in our minds by the faintest outline.

I still find it hard to believe that the prolepsis of the gods includes all that, somehow including all that conceptual framework.

This line of thought is one reason I continue to be intrigued by the "idealist" position of the [Epicurean gods](#). The god's blessedness and incorruptibility is maintained by our very focus on their blessedness and incorruptibility in our minds. As we approach a temple or image, that

image of blessedness and incorruptibility allows the Epicurean to interact with a divine image as the physical representation of that image in the mind of a blessed and incorruptible being - and ONLY as that - without all the baggage of imagining a vengeful, wrathful god.

Still very much a work-in-progress but that a direction of inquiry I'm heading down.

Post by "Cassius" of August 15, 2024 at 7:39 AM

Very well stated Don!

The only caveat I would have is that when one of us refers to the "idealist" position, the implication is that "the idealist position" means that "gods are a mental construction but they don't really exist."

I think the better view in slightly different words is that what Epicurus is doing is providing a "definition" of a god.

The important problem with what is being referred to as "the idealist view" is that "the idealist view" contains a non sequitur in that it appears to presume that the thing defined does not exist. I would submit that this presumption is false and has no place in describing Epicurus' position, and it is error to refuse to honor the definition that Epicurus is stating. The question of whether beings which fit the definition actually exist is entirely separate.

It is as "the idealist position" is taking the position that "I can define for you what it means to be a Ford Model T, but Ford Model T's do not exist." It does not follow from the definition of a Model T that they do not exist, even though we know separately today that they are very hard to find.

The correct position is "I can define for you what it means to be a Ford Model T, but the question of whether you can find a real Ford Model T is entirely separate, and depends on whether you have access to a car museum."

Or to refer to centaurs, the right formulation would be: "I can define for you what it means to be a centaur, but the question of whether centaurs exist is separate. In the case of centaurs, it is biologically impossible for humans and horses to interbreed, so therefore we are confident that centaurs do exist except in our imagination and artwork."

So I would submit the correct position as to gods is best not described as realist or idealist, but described taking that Epicurus is saying what he means and meaning what he says, which taken all together is something like:

I can define for you what it means to be a god, which is that gods are living beings who are blessed and imperishable. We have formed this opinion as to the proper definition based on our faculty of prolepsis, through which we detect patterns and arrangements within the perceptions that we have received throughout our lives through our five senses, our feelings of pain and pleasure, and our mental reception of images. But our opinion of the definition of a god is not itself a prolepsis, any more than our definition of a god is itself a real god, or our eyes relaying to our minds that it sees the light given off by a candle is itself a real candle.

There are many opinions of the proper definition of a god, and many people who assert the existence of many particular gods. Some people hold the opinion that stars are gods, and that gods take an interest in humanity and that gods choose some people as friends and others as enemies. The question of whether any particular asserted god really exists is not answered by stating a definition of gods in general.

For you to maintain that a particular god exists, you will need to provide more than an opinion without evidence. And I can already tell you as a rule of evidence (and we need rules of evidence such as consistent definitions if we are to communicate clearly) that if the description you are asserting conflicts in any way with our definition, which you will recall is to be (1) living, (2) totally blessed, and (3) incorruptible, then what you are describing is not a god. What you are describing may exist, if you have proof of it, but whatever it may be, it is not a "god." Alexander the Oracle-Monger's fake snake does exist as puppet that can be touched and viewed, but it is certainly not a "god."

Going further, I can also tell you that if what you are describing is (4) in any way impossible under the laws of physics we have previously set forth, then what you are describing not only is (A) not a "god," but (B) does not exist at all, because it is physically impossible. That is how I know that your assertions of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence are false, because they are physically impossible.

Post by “Don” of August 15, 2024 at 8:34 AM

Some good points you raise. Heading out the door to work, but I wanted to get this down...

I think the "existence" of something doesn't necessarily mean its being able to be touched or seen. Epicurus clearly says the gods are only perceptible by the mind... at least to us mortals.

There is also the issue of Epicurus's saying that we have a prolepsis of *justice*. Just can't be seen or touched but "we know it when we see it" due to a prolepsis. Of course, for my part, we have the same issue with that in that if justice is, at its root, to neither be intentionally harmed nor to intentionally harm others, that also has a load of semantic and conceptual content for

something (the prolepsis) that I think we believe is a pre-rational faculty.

Throwing it out there for discussion.

Post by “Cassius” of August 15, 2024 at 9:15 AM

I would say we need to add "justice" to the same list of conceptual definitions that contains "the good," "gods," and "pleasure" (and no doubt the list goes on). One version of that list might be something like:

Concept	Epicurus' Definition / Explanation of the Concept
"the good" or "the highest good"	"this in the opinion of all philosophers must needs be <u>such that we are bound to test all things by it, but the standard itself by nothing.</u> " (Torquatus in On Ends 1)
"the highest good"	"The limit of quantity in pleasures is <u>the removal of all that is painful.</u> " PD03
"gods"	"god is <u>a being immortal and blessed....</u> " (Letter to Menoeceus) "By pleasure we mean <u>the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul</u> " (Letter to Menoeceus). "Wherever pleasure is present, as long as it is there, there is neither pain of body, nor of mind, nor of both at once." (PD03) "For it would not wish for it for this reason, inasmuch as <u>whatever is free from pain is in pleasure.</u> " (On Ends 1:39) "Cicero: "...[B]ut unless you are extraordinarily obstinate you are bound to admit that 'freedom from pain' does not mean the same thing as 'pleasure.'" Torquatus: "Well but on this point you will find me obstinate, for it is as true as any proposition can be." (On Ends 2:9)
"pleasure"	
"justice"	"justice ... is <u>a kind of mutual advantage in the dealings of men with one another</u> " which is pretty much the same as "justice is <u>a kind of compact not to harm or be harmed.</u> "

Seems to me we have a similar problem involved in accepting the definitions of "gods" and "pleasure." it is so ingrained in us to accept "gods" as supernatural, and to accept "pleasure" as "limited to sensory stimulation" that we kick back against accepting the obvious meanings. The definitions are simple: "Gods" are simply any being that is totally happy and deathless, and "Pleasure" is any experience in life where pain is not present in that experience. The requirement of life, however, is that we apply these definitions to particular experiences, and

that's a constantly moving target of dealing with particulars that don't always exactly fit within our conceptual definitions. But if we didn't have the conceptual definitions we couldn't discuss or think or possibly make any progress toward them.

Post by “Don” of August 15, 2024 at 9:59 AM

But we don't have prolepsis of the good and pleasure. One is a philosophical concept, the other is a direct connection to reality. Epicurus did posit prolepsis of the god and justice.

Post by “Cassius” of August 15, 2024 at 10:09 AM

It sounds like perhaps the issue you just touched on is what is referred to here:

Quote from On Ends Book 1

[31] There are however some of our own school, who want to state these principles with greater refinement, and who say that it is not enough to leave the question of good or evil to the decision of sense, but that thought and reasoning also enable us to understand both that pleasure in itself is matter for desire and that pain is in itself matter for aversion. So they say that there lies in our minds a kind of natural and inbred conception leading us to feel that the one thing is fit for us to seek, the other to reject. Others again, with whom I agree, finding that many arguments are alleged by philosophers to prove that pleasure is not to be reckoned among things good nor pain among things evil, judge that we ought not to be too confident about our case, and think that we should lead proof and argue carefully and carry on the debate about pleasure and pain by using the most elaborate reasonings.

Would be good to discuss this and get opinions on this from [Joshua](#) and [Bryan](#) and anyone else who is interested in contributing so we can compare, as it sounds like it was a controversy among the ancient Epicureans.

This (*So they say that there lies in our minds a kind of natural and inbred conception leading us to feel that the one thing is fit for us to seek, the other to reject*) sounds pretty close to something in which "prolepsis" is involved.

At least at this moment I would entertain the notion that "good" and "pleasure" are indeed matters in which prolepsis is involved in forming as a conception. To me "Good" is clearly an opinion or concept that has to be pulled together from relationships/patterns and not just purely abstractly. When "Pleasure" is taken to refer not just to a single experience/feeling, but to the "concept of pleasure" referring to all particular pleasures, I would say the same thing - the opinion as to what "pleasure" means as a concept comes from pulling together relationships/patterns of discrete pleasurable experiences.

Post by “Eikadistes” of August 15, 2024 at 10:21 AM

I continue to have suspicions about the "Idealist" interpretation:

What good is a god that is just a dream?

The whole thing strikes me as an example of the placebo effect. The placebo effect tends to stop working the moment the test subject realizes that they are just a test subject.

For a different example, typically, after a child learns that Santa Claus is a cultural myth, they stop putting out milk and cookies before going to bed. Furthermore, there are no children who believe in one of the mythical figures (like the Easter Bunny) while simultaneously rejecting another (like Santa Claus). The principle that allows you to reject one is applicable to the others.

If you go from being a person who prays (as wish fulfillment), and then you learn that god does not listen to prayers and does not grant wishes ... what's the point of praying?

I go back-and-forth with my family on the latter point. They all recommend prayer, and either believes that God answers their prayers, or that the act of praying to God makes them feel peaceful. For me, I cannot find peace in a God that only exists as a symbol in my mind. In fact, that very acknowledgment is the thing that makes me feel like prayer is ridiculous in the first place.

Really, it's not just the "idealist" interpretation.

Honestly, what's the point of prayer if no one is listening?

I've really never been able to accept Epicurean theology ... unless we're talking about drugs. If we can all entertain the idea that "the image of god" is something that happens "when you drink kykeon during Dionysian mystery rites", then I am 100% on board. That is a real experience, it is repeatable, it is measurable, we have thousands of years of documented "encounters with gods" while ingesting intoxicants from every human group, during every time

period in history. The experience is overwhelmingly positive. (If you have any personal doubts, just look at research being done with Psilocybin, LSD, and MDMA on post-traumatic stress and depression.)

Still ... I have equal doubts about my proposition that Epicureans were tripping.

Why couldn't Epicurus have just said "*Gods are no more real than monsters and other dream-entities. You are taking a huge cognitive risk in entertaining the possibilities of either one*"?

Post by “Eikadistes” of August 15, 2024 at 10:34 AM

I might just be griping about a childhood conundrum no one has ever answered satisfactorily:

In 2nd-grade, I learned about ancient Egypt, and I learned that Egyptians had other gods than Jesus. So I wondered, "If the people who built pyramids had thousands of years of history without knowing Jesus, how do we know that Jesus is 'the real god', or even matters at all?"

The minute I accepted that ancient Egyptians had other gods (that Jesus was not the only object of worship) the notion of a "god" suddenly seemed very small, and very imaginary.

Post by “Cassius” of August 15, 2024 at 10:38 AM

[Quote from Twentier](#)

I continue to have suspicions about the "Idealist" interpretation:

What good is a god that is just a dream?

This says to me that Twentier has the same observation I do - that when people say "the idealist interpretation" they mean flatly "[Epicurean gods](#) do not have a physical reality."

And I don't think the "idealist" interpretation as we are defining it here is persuasive for that reason.

It would be easier to talk about the "Voula Tsouna interpretation" or the "David Sedley Interpretation" and then define what that is, because at least then you could quantify exactly what that means if you tried hard enough. For all I know (and I gather that they do) David Sedley or others have some version of a compatibilist view where gods of a type are *both* real

and serve as important idealist models which are worth talking about because they are models.

Post by “Don” of August 15, 2024 at 2:36 PM

On this topic, I keep coming back to the assertion in Cicero (Is it elsewhere?) that the gods live in the between-cosmos area of the universe. By definition, that means there is no world, no world-system, no ordered part of the universe on which a human-shaped god could reside. By definition, the intermundia/metakosmos has no "world." Are we to imagine them floating around like bubbles? They literally would not have a spot to stand or sit in this area of the universe. That's why I have a hard time accepting that Epicurus believed gods were existent beings somehow residing "between world-systems." Quick lunch time rant for now.

I'll hopefully have a chance to address some of @Twentier's very valid concerns from my perspective this evening.

Post by “Bryan” of August 15, 2024 at 3:21 PM

This is also mentioned by Quintilian (Institutio Oratoria, VII.3.5) "for he gave God human form and a place in the spaces between worlds."

And Aetius (Doxography, 2.1.8) gives us, "Epíkouros asserts that the spaces between world-systems are unequal." A world-system, as we know, is a closed system and contains a finite amount of matter, but there is an infinite supply of matter in-between world-systems.

Post by “Bryan” of August 15, 2024 at 3:32 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

This (So they say that there lies in our minds a kind of natural and inbred conception leading us to feel that the one thing is fit for us to seek, the other to reject) sounds pretty close to something in which "prolepsis" is involved.

I'd say that an anticipation must be involved for every word we use -- we would have no idea what any particular word indicated unless we have some general stereotype that we access before we start thinking or speaking about any object or relationship.

Post by "Cassius" of August 15, 2024 at 4:07 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

By definition, that means there is no world, no world-system, no ordered part of the universe on which a human-shaped god could reside. By definition, the intermundia/metakosmos has no "world." Are we to imagine them floating around like bubbles?

I understand why you are arriving at that conclusion, but I don't think it's necessarily the only conclusion to draw, given the ambiguity of what a "world" or a "space between worlds" would really mean.

Post by "Cassius" of August 15, 2024 at 4:12 PM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

I'd say that an anticipation must be involved for every word we use -- we would have no idea what any particular word indicated unless we have some general stereotype that we access before we start thinking or speaking about any object or relationship.

I agree with that so long as the emphasis stays on the word "involved" - because I suspect a lot of people will read what Diogenes Laertius wrote and conclude that anticipations ARE concepts. I think we all or mostly all agree here that anticipations are *not* in themselves concepts, but something that is PRE-concept.

it's awfully tempting to try to boil things down to "I see 5 men. I form a concept of a man. The next time i see a man I match what I see to the concept and conclude 'That is a man.'" But I think that that would be an error to conclude that is the complete picture.

The complete picture contains something before "I see 5 men." Because from before you ever saw your first man, you had some kind of pattern-assembly faculty going on that told you to

associate the head and body and arms and leg into a single "thing." I am thinking that labeling that "thing" as a "man" is something your mind does in forming an opinion AFTER the prolepsis has presented to your mind the perception that the mind needed to organize this particular relationship into something to name and then remember.

Post by “Don” of August 15, 2024 at 7:57 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I don't think it's necessarily the only conclusion to draw

I am certainly open to hearing other conclusions. 😊 Talk me down.

Post by “Cassius” of August 15, 2024 at 9:25 PM

My first thought is that "worlds" appears to refer to a "collection" of lots of objects like planets and stars (presumably) then I would take "world" to be the "collection" of things, and not indicative that it would be impossible for planets or even stars to exist "on their own" part from a "world-system." I seem to recall that even in the letter to Herodotus there is talk of worlds arising from a "vortex" - like spinning, so it would not seem impossible for me if Epicurus considered each "world" to be like a spinning collection of things (like we tend to look at galaxies) with it being possible for objects to be "spun off" into the area that would presumably exist between innumerable galaxies.

I know that is broad and ambiguous but I would presume that Epicurus realized we can only see "so far" out into the universe, presumably no further out than our own world. I wouldn't expect him to impose arbitrary limits or descriptions on what kind of matter in what arrangements might exist "between" these world formations.

Post by “Don” of August 15, 2024 at 10:31 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

My first thought is that "worlds" appears to refer to a "collection" of lots of objects like planets and stars (presumably) then I would take "world" to be the "collection" of things, and not indicative that it would be impossible for planets or even stars to exist "on their own" part from a "world-system."

Hmm... Can we first agree that a "world" - in the Epicurean sense - refers to the word κόσμος (kosmos)? That seems to be the usual referent of the English translation "world" in the texts. If so, yes, I would fully agree that it is a "collection" of objects; however, those objects are in an "ordered" arrangement with a planet, stars and wandering stars (what we call "planets"), etc., all enclosed in an ordered pocket of the universe (The All). They all work together in the world-system. I don't see anywhere in the texts that talk about a "planet" forming outside of a kosmos.

A scholion to the letter to Herodotus does talk about different shaped "worlds":

Quote

[74] "And further, we must not suppose that the *worlds* (κόσμοις kosmou) have necessarily one and the same shape. [On the contrary, in the twelfth book "On Nature" he himself says that the shapes of the worlds differ, some being spherical, some oval, others again of shapes different from these. They do not, however, admit of every shape. Nor are they living beings which have been separated from the *infinite* (ἀπείρου apeirou).]

So the shapes of the kosmoi/worlds can differ; they're not all spherical.. but they are all kosmoi.

He also talks about the infinity of worlds in 45:

Quote

"Moreover, there is an infinite number of *worlds* (κόσμοι kosmoi), some like this world, others unlike it. For the atoms being infinite in number, as has just been proved, are borne ever further in their course. For the atoms out of which a *world* (κόσμος kosmos) might arise, or by which a world might be formed, have not all been expended on one world or a finite number of worlds, whether like or unlike this one. Hence there will be nothing to hinder *an infinity of worlds* (τὴν ἀπειρίαν τῶν κόσμων ten apeirian ton kosmon).

There is no such thing as a star or planet outside of a kosmos/world-system. 88-91 are directly relevant to the current conversation:

Quote

"A world (Κόσμος kosmos) is a circumscribed portion of the universe, which contains stars and earth and all other visible things, cut off from the infinite, and terminating [and terminating in a boundary which may be either thick or thin, a boundary whose dissolution will bring about the wreck of all within it] in an exterior which may either revolve or be at rest, and be round or triangular or of any other shape whatever. All these alternatives are possible : they are contradicted by none of the facts in this world, in which an extremity can nowhere be discerned.

[89] "That there is an infinite number of such worlds (κόσμοι kosmoi) can be perceived, and that such a world (κόσμος kosmos) may arise in a world (κόσμῳ kosmoi) or in one of the intermundia (μετακοσμίῳ metakosmioi) (by which term we mean the spaces between worlds (κόσμων kosmon)) in a tolerably empty space and not, as some maintain, in a vast space perfectly clear and void. It arises when certain suitable seeds rush in from a single world or intermundium, or from several, and undergo gradual additions or articulations or changes of place, it may be, and waterings from appropriate sources, until they are matured and firmly settled in so far as the foundations laid can receive them. [90] For it is *not* enough that there should be an aggregation or a vortex in the empty space in which a world may arise, as the necessitarians hold, and may grow until it collide with another, as one of the so-called physicists says. For this is in conflict with facts.

[91] "The sun and moon and the stars generally were **not** of independent origin and later absorbed within our world, [such parts of it at least as serve at all for its defence] ; but they at once began to take form and grow [and so too did earth and sea] by the accretions and whirling motions of certain substances of finest texture, of the nature either of wind or fire, or of both ; for thus sense itself suggests.

So, the sun, moon, and stars (NOTE: No mention of "planet" other than the one on which the beings - human beings in this case - stand) arise as a whole system. The kosmos works as a whole, arises as a whole. It can form within another world or in the intermundia, but the kosmos coalesces and bodies form within the kosmos. There are no suns, moons, or stars independent of a kosmos in which to form.

Post by “Don” of August 15, 2024 at 11:45 PM

I said I was going to respond to some of @Twentier 's thoughts on prayer.

Let me say from the outset that I don't pray. I don't intend to pray, but I could see some use for it in the following ways... even *without believing in god or God or gods*.

It comes down to how one defines "prayer." If it is asking god/God for favors or bargaining with the deity ("Dear Lord, help me pass this test and I'll start going to Wednesday services.")... yeah, that's devoid of utility and basically empty.

However, to me, prayer can also be something like the meal-time "grace" that was used in the Buddhist Plum Village Center where the first line goes "We are thankful for this food, The work of many people and the sharing of other forms of life." It is a mind-shift to an attitude of gratitude. That kind of grateful-attitude form of prayer is in keeping with Epicurean tradition, from my perspective.

There's also contemplative prayer, concentrating or studying a specific text or phrase, sitting with it to really dig into it. POSSIBLY an Epicurean form of this is to contemplate what it means to be a "blessed and incorruptible being" and how that can be manifested in this mortal body and a materialistic world. This could also be an attitude-adjustment in that keeping in mind how a "blessed and incorruptible being" might move in the world and trying to emulate - to the best of one's mortal abilities - that behavior to be more "like a god."

These are off the top of my head. I also said above that "I don't intend to pray" but looking at what I've typed... who knows. Maybe I'll try one of those forms of "prayer" in the future after all.

Post by "Joshua" of August 16, 2024 at 12:54 AM

Quote

(NOTE: No mention of "planet" other than the one on which the beings - human beings in this case - stand)

The planets *are* stars in this analysis--they are the "wandering stars" spoken of in the Letter to Pythocles;

Quote

That some of the stars should wander in their course, if indeed it is the case that their movements are such, while others do not move in this manner, may be due to the reason that from the first as they moved in their circles they were so constrained by necessity that some of them move along the same regular orbit, and others along one

which is associated with certain irregularities: or it may be that among the regions to which they are carried in some places there are regular tracts of air which urge them on successively in the same direction and provide flame for them regularly, while in other places the tracts are irregular, so that the aberrations which we observe result.

τινὰ τῶν ἄστρων πλανᾶσθαι, εἰ οὕτω ταῖς κινήσεσι χρώμενα συμβαίνει, τινὰ δὲ ὀμαλῶς κινεῖσθαι, 177 [113] ἐνδέχεται μὲν καὶ παρὰ τὸ κύκλῳ κινούμενα ἐξ ἀρχῆς οὕτω κατηναγκάσθαι, ὥστε τὰ μὲν κατὰ τὴν αὐτὴν δίνην φέρεσθαι ὀμαλῆ οὕσαν, τὰ δὲ κατὰ τιν' ἄλλην τισὶν ἀνωμαλίαις χρωμένην.

ἄστρων πλανᾶσθαι, astron planasthai, wandering stars. Planet means 'wanderer'.

Post by “Cassius” of August 16, 2024 at 6:53 AM

1 - Ok adding to the mix on the discussion of what might be "between the worlds," I guess i should have said that what could be there is a "quasi-planet!" 😊 Actually now that I think about it, it does seem to be important to what Velleius is saying that the gods are not of firm solid shape, so I suppose that doesn't require a firm solid planet to stand on.

2.

[Quote from Don](#)

I said I was going to respond to some of Twentier 's thoughts on prayer.

Going back behind that statement -- what authorities do we have that Epicurus said that we should "pray" to a god? I'm thinking that anything that exists is later and of less authority, more like someone like Horace talking about asking gods what he can't provide for himself. Are there other more specific references?

I think I remember how this line of thought got started in this thread, (What good is a god that is just a dream?), followed by some references to Christian prayer and then that Epicurean theology is hard to make sense of. While I don't read Twentier as suggesting "prayer" to [Epicurean gods](#), I can see how someone skimming the entirety of this thread casually, including Don's detailed explanations above, might get confused. Probably it's worthwhile to be clear about this:

Twentier could you clarify your thoughts about what you think the ancient Epicurean toward prayer was?

Post by “Don” of August 16, 2024 at 6:58 AM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

The planets are stars in this analysis--they are the "wandering stars" spoken of in the Letter to Pythocles;

Exactly. The ancient Greeks saw those as *literally* "wandering stars." They didn't think of them as "worlds" or "planets" like we conceive of a planet as another body circling a star. They're not a kosmos. They're simply ἄστρων πλανᾶσθαι, astron planasthai, stars who for some reason wander across the ἄστρα that are fixed in place in the night sky.

Post by “Don” of August 16, 2024 at 7:06 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Twentier could you clarify your thoughts about what you think the ancient Epicurean toward prayer was?

I'll jump in here. Philodemus's On Piety is probably the most detailed account we have left of Epicurus's attitude to worship writ large. For example:

Post

[RE: Philodemus On Piety](#)

The following are excerpts and notes from columns 27-36 of Obbink's Philodemus On Piety which outline the participation of Epicurus himself and the early Epicureans in religious festivals and other rites and practices. Obbink also shared more detailed notes in his book, so I may try and share some of those pages in later posts. For now, the material below has proved quite interesting...

Quoted in col. 27, On Piety: Epicurus, On Gods (Περὶ Θεῶν): as being both the greatest thing

and that...



Don

December 25, 2020 at 10:05 PM

Post by “Cassius” of August 16, 2024 at 7:15 AM

So the general thrust is words like 'shared in festivals' and 'participated in worship' - and nothing specific about praying in terms of asking for things and expecting a reply (?)

Post by “Don” of August 16, 2024 at 7:36 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

So the general thrust is words like 'shared in festivals' and 'participated in worship' - and nothing specific about praying in terms of asking for things and expecting a reply (?)

That would be my general understanding. We know his asking for favors from the gods would have been completely against his understanding of the gods. However, the details of his participation in the rites, ceremonies, and worship are intriguing.

Post by “Eikadistes” of August 16, 2024 at 12:35 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

[Quote from Joshua](#)

The planets are stars in this analysis--they are the "wandering stars" spoken of in the Letter to Pythocles;

Exactly. The ancient Greeks saw those as *literally* "wandering stars." They didn't think of them as "worlds" or "planets" like we conceive of a planet as another body circling a star. They're not a kosmos. They're simply ἄστρον πλανᾶσθαι, astron planasthai, stars who for some reason wander across the ἄστρα that are fixed in place in the night sky.

I love the way they described celestial objects.

Everything in the sky was one kind of "glower" or another. There are countless "glowers" that twinkle. There are a limited number of "wandering glowers" like Jupiter. Then we have "long-haired glowers" like Halley's Comet (which Epicurus *should* have seen with Nausiphanes). Everything else seems to have been categorized as "remaining glowers", which might have included things like meteors, or perhaps even the Andromeda Galaxy (which would have been visible to ancient peoples without ambient light). Our "kosmos", I think, should contain all the "glowers" we can see.

Space is great.

[Quote from Don](#)

These are off the top of my head. I also said above that "I don't intend to pray" but looking at what I've typed... who knows. Maybe I'll try one of those forms of "prayer" in the future after all.

I think you've identified a key question I need to answer, which is "**how** did Epicureans pray?"

When I think of "prayer", my mind goes to intercession, which, I think, Epicurus would have identified as a kind of wish-fulfillment. He definitely rejects this. He acknowledges that the gods are completely removed from the stage of the human drama. They aren't even in the audience. They don't even live around the theatre. (*It seems likely that they don't go to shows.*)

Then we have various forms of vocal prayer, *hymns*, *songs*, *chanting*, and *mantras*. I think we can find an example of this sort of prayer in Greek theatre. It was musical, religious, and DeWitt (as I recall) describes Epicurus as having been a regular participant. This sort of prayer seems to have provided Epicurus and his friends with a sort of practical utility that was inherently pleasurable.

Meditation is, I think, another form of prayer we can identify (or perhaps "prayer" is a form of "meditation"? The ways we employ these words in English are slippery). Of kind of meditation, I do not think that formless meditation works in this case (in other words, emptying oneself of all

sensations, totally withdrawing inward, focusing on concepts like non-existence).

Contemplative prayer is defined in various ways, but in an Epicurean sense, I think this might be a useful framework in which to discuss piety. Ancient Epicureans memorized the Key Doctrines of Epicurean ethics, and the Elementary Principles of his physics. In this regard, I can accept prayer as a natural, cognitive practice, and can acknowledge that I engage in this behavior.

There are other forms we can identify as well. This is just to identify some categories.

So, maybe it's safe to say that Epicurean prayer was as reasonable as "listening to pleasurable music" and "studying nature", so long as those practices yield a happier life.

Post by “Bryan” of August 16, 2024 at 1:04 PM

Great Discussion! Allow me to throw in these quotes as well:

Philódēmos, On Piety, 1.36.1023 - 1.37.1054: ^[Obbink] And for the production of benefits from the gods for good people and harms for bad people, they [the kathēgemónes] allow. And for the wise and just it must be conceived that benefits and harms which are no feebler or even greater than people in general suppose are made complete, not out of weakness or because we have need of anything from God, even in return [of] his benefit [here], and these things [the kathēgemónes] say most piously. And in On Gods what kind of source of retribution and preservation for humans through the deity must be accepted he outlines in some detail. And in book 13 he speaks concerning the affinity or alienation which God has for some people.

And of course we all remember SV65 "it is pointless begging from the gods for what one is sufficiently able to obtain for himself."

P.Oxy 2.215, col. 2, lines 8-16 ^[Chilton] Only be careful that you do not permit any admixture of fear of the gods or of the supposition that in acting as you do you are winning the favour of the gods. For indeed, in the name of Zeus (as men affect to say) what have you to fear in this matter? Do you believe that the gods can do you harm? Is not that, on any showing, to belittle them?

Post by “Don” of August 16, 2024 at 1:15 PM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

Great Discussion! Allow me to throw in these quotes as well:

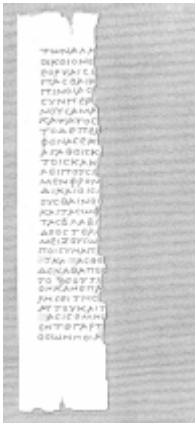
Philódēmos, On Piety, 1.36.1023 - 1.37.1054: [Obbink] And for the production of benefits from the gods for good people and harms for bad people, they [the kathēgemónes] allow. And for the wise and just it must be conceived that benefits and harms which are no feebler or even greater than people in general suppose are made complete, not out of weakness or because we have need of anything from God, even in return [of] his benefit [here], and these things [the kathēgemónes] say most piously. And in On Gods what kind of source of retribution and preservation for humans through the deity must be accepted he outlines in some detail. And in book 13 he speaks concerning the affinity or alienation which God has for some people.

And of course we all remember SV65 "it is pointless begging from the gods for what one is sufficiently able to obtain for himself."

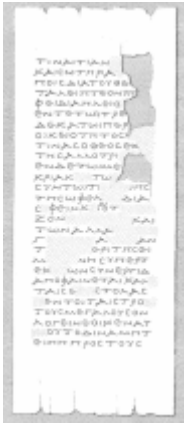
I will say I'd be interested in seeing how much of that is extant and how much is Obbink's reconstruction.

Post by "Don" of August 16, 2024 at 2:22 PM

Col.36... oh my! The entire right half is gone!



Col.37 is *slightly* better...



Post by “Don” of August 16, 2024 at 6:11 PM

To get an idea of what this would look like in a text some might be familiar with, here is a page from *Pride and Prejudice*:

MISS BINGLEY'S
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being an inmate

Post by “Cassius” of August 17, 2024 at 2:31 PM

For reference, here's a transcript of this week's episode. This has been prepared using AI, so it very well may contain errors, but it is useful for finding topics that were discussed.

[Episode 241 - EpicureanFriends Handbook](#)