

# Velleius - Epicurus On The True Nature Of Divinity - New Home Page Video

Post by “Cassius” of October 29, 2025 at 7:17 PM

Today we're introducing the second new home page attraction - a media presentation of Velleius' speech explaining Epicurus' view of divinity from Cicero's On The Nature of The Gods. I'll repeat what I said about the current state of both this and the other text-to-speech production:

1. This audio voice is far from perfect. {Actually, I think this one is better than the Torquatus version, for some strange reason, as they were produced in the same way.) Much effort has been put into this version, but the AI voice has a long way to go, so lower your expectations. We want the best, but we also want to reach as many people with this information as possible. If we wait for perfection, some will miss having this available to him that might otherwise see it.
2. The text is adapted from the same versions that we already have on the website, but it needs to be improved. I will be placing this text on "Github," a public site where text can be edited in a collaborative manner. I will appreciate submissions for corrections and will get them up as soon as possible. Again, the tradeoff here is that if we wait for perfection before we publish this, some will miss it who might otherwise profit from it.
3. One merit of this audio voice is that it is entirely in the public domain. We can continue to work on improving it and distribute this with no copyright concerns whatsoever.
4. It will be desirable to add graphics throughout the video to illustrate the text. That will be a huge task, and suggestions on how to do that will be appreciated.
5. As this text is not copyrighted, anyone who wants to proceed on their own to produce a better version is welcome to do so. Our goal is to promote the philosophy of Epicurus with the best material available, not to promote the graphics skill of me (which are obviously poor) or of anyone else.
6. Check [THIS POST](#) for more technical info.
7. We will be regularly updating this to improve the text and presentation quality. One side effect of that, however, is that it is not possible to proofread a new version, without watching the whole thing. That means regression errors may creep into another part of the file as a result of editing an existing error. Please feel free to report any and all errors anytime you observe one, as we may not already be aware of it for this reason.

<https://youtu.be/ZN7Ch9Tdif8>

## **Post by “kochiekoch” of November 1, 2025 at 11:27 AM**

I actually sat and watched this thing. ☐☐

It was pretty good, and the format that you have set up as is good for study. It's better than just sitting down reading it.

As for the quality, I didn't think it was so bad despite your concerns. Already watched the first of the Torquatus videos as well. Not too bad. Probably next week I'll get to the other two.

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## **Post by “Cassius” of November 1, 2025 at 1:35 PM**

Thanks for the input Steve, It's my intent to lower expectations to reduce disappointment, but yes it's already much better than the older TTS i used some years ago. And it's just going to get better over time. In the meantime, as we listen to this one, I am hoping we can catch significant errors or questionable word choices in the text so that the text part gets better over time too.

And it's also relevant that I am targeting this for easy access by "newcomers" who want an introduction perhaps while they are driving or have time to listen to something rather than sitting down to pore through a book.

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## **Post by “DaveT” of November 2, 2025 at 9:47 AM**

I finished listening just now. I enjoyed this audio and found it easily understandable, especially with the subtitles.

My first reaction to Cicero's style while writing as Velleius, was that he could have been a writer for the late American comedian George Carlin. Real biting logic and cynical style of humor to make his points. I was intrigued on several practical points as I listened, so, to our Epicurean friends, can you answer some history questions for me?

- How could Cicero know so much detail of the views of so many Greek thinkers on the divinities he referred to in this narrative?
  - Were these views in kept in writings widely owned by people like Cicero?

- If he wrote this in the last two years of his life, how did he have time to collect and actually study those others, and then write so specifically and style-wise authoritatively?
  - Where might he have found the time to compile his notes, too?
    - Or was he not so conversant about the others, and rather was he willing to exaggerate their views to make his argumentative points while speaking as Velleius?

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### Post by “Cassius” of November 2, 2025 at 10:08 AM

That question comes at an opportune time so in addition to discussing it here we'll address it in today's podcast recording!

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### Post by “Eikadistes” of November 2, 2025 at 11:42 AM

#### [Quote from DaveT](#)

How could Cicero know so much detail of the views of so many Greek thinkers on the divinities he referred to in this narrative?

Cicero, himself, visited the Athenian Garden under the leadership of Zénōn of Sidon, a scholar who instructed Philódēmos — Philódēmos, himself, was a contemporary of Cicero. Many of Cicero's texts are responses to contemporary philosophical opponents with whom he was actively corresponding (not Philódēmos in this case, but other contemporaries, and Roman inheritors of the Hellenistic traditions). He lived at a unique, cultural intersection of professional law and national politics, so his relations were diverse and his resources were expansive. He was in the thick of it.

As a general observation, however, I think we should take caution against receiving Velleius at his word, because Velleius isn't always speaking — Cicero is speaking *through* Velleius, and using him as a literary tool, ultimately to persuade his audience to his cause, not necessarily

provide an objective survey of history. So, I think that anything that the character Velleius proposes in Cicero's narrative needs to be referenced against the established doctrines set by Epíkouros and preserved by Philódēmos. There are a few things Cicero records that are surprising, so I read him cautiously.

As far as the dialogue is represented [Cassius](#) , great video! The text provides a wealth of attestation that reinforces existing opinions and the presentation exhibits it clearly; it also reliably provides a critique that accurately represents the criticism from Epicurean opponents.

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## Post by “Cassius” of November 2, 2025 at 3:30 PM

### [Quote from Eikadistes](#)

Cicero is speaking through Velleius, and using him as a literary tool, ultimately to persuade his audience to his cause, not necessarily provide an objective survey of history. So, I think that anything that the character Velleius proposes in Cicero's narrative needs to be referenced against the established doctrines set by Epíkouros and preserved by Philódēmos. There are a few things Cicero records that are surprising, so I read him cautiously.

Eikadistes I agree with this general concern, but as of yet I have not (to my memory) run into anything *spoken by Velleius* that I have found reason to question as being in actual or potential conflict with any other authoritative texts. Have you seen anything in particular to question from that section? If any occur to you over time and you remember this thread I hope you'll point them out so we can include those caveats in future discussions.

Same goes for the statements of Torquatus in *On Ends*. Elli and others tell me that they do not agree that Torquatus should have defended his ancestor who executed his son for violating the rules of battle. I don't share that view, because I think as extreme as the situation is, it's an example of how context has to be taken into account in all situations, and I can imagine that in a military family if someone blunders and jeopardizes the whole army then they would expect to give and receive the same punishment as anyone else. But that's definitely a hard case. It's an example of something I'd like to make a list of. If there's a reasonable argument that Velleius or Torquatus say something that can be challenged as potentially not good Epicurean philosophy, I'd like to keep a list and address those issues over time, if they exist. While Frances Wright is not in the same category as an authentic ancient Epicurean text, I definitely have trouble with some of her formulations and we have a thread here going through those.

And this reminds me that these two long narrations by reputed Epicureans stand out in my mind for their contribution to our knowledge of Epicurus. I have been for the last couple of days

trying to remember if there are any other extended presentations like these two in other works of Cicero, or similar sections in other writers. if anyone is aware of anything comparable to these Torquatus and Velleius speeches please let me know. Just to be clear of course I am not talking about Lucretius or Diogenes of Oinoanda or fragments from Philodemus, etc. -- I am talking about well-preserved extended narrations by someone in the ancient world claiming to be an Epicurean that have been preserved by someone else, as Cicero has preserved these two. I am thinking at the moment that there is nothing quite like these two long narrations given in the names of Torquatus and Velleius.

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## Post by “Eikadistes” of November 6, 2025 at 10:01 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

[Quote from Eikadistes](#)

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Eikadistes I agree with this general concern, but as of yet I have not (to my memory) run into anything *spoken by Velleius* that I have found reason to question as being in actual or potential conflict with any other authoritative texts. Have you seen anything in particular to question from that section? If any occur to you over time and you remember this thread I hope you'll point them out so we can include those caveats in future discussions.

I'm with you there. I think my primary criticism is with the *authenticity* of the characters' arguments rather than the *coherence* of the arguments. Overwhelmingly, I like what he has to say. For example, his characterization of mythic gods as "world-builders" who may have suffered from ennui, or found themselves alone in an infinite dungeon of darkness, reminds me of the critical tone Diogenes takes against the cartoonish depictions of "god". I particularly like this critical approach.

I wonder, however, if these observations reflect statements made by Epíkouros, himself, anywhere in *On Nature* or another text, or whether these are comical inferences (though

coherent) made by a later admirer? Or else, here again, are the amusing examples described by Velleius poetic devices employed by Cicero to shape his character and enliven his text for readers? I think a sympathetic reader would find Velleius to be an enjoyable character, and I would personally wish for this likable depiction to reflect a real, likable personality from history. Though, I could also see how an opponent might find Velleius to be disrespectful or mocking, in which case, the characterizing of Velleius as mocking by his opponents (if that's how you read it) might have been Cicero's way to discredit his opponent by associating their philosophy with jarring behavior.

For example, with his discussion of the composition of the "blood" of deities — that seems (to me) like it may have been a point of fascination with Cicero, or his readers, but I'm not sure that the Epicurean philosophers had interest in the topic of "god blood". I haven't found discussion of "god blood" in any of the Hellenistic texts. This could potentially be a strawman argument to make Epicureans seem like they represent their positions in a ... cartoonish (?) way. Velleius at a point seems unable to further elaborate upon his argument, and resorts to justification by authority (which is not one of the three criteria of knowledge): "*Though these distinctions were more acutely devised and more artfully expressed by Epicurus than any common capacity can comprehend*". Or, I may be treating the characterization unfairly. I'm just suspicious of it as a literary tool or a rhetorical tactic.

I've been thinking about it kind of like this: imagine one philosopher shows another the spatter from someone getting shot in a video game. They point at the screen and ask, "what's happened?" The other person *probably* wouldn't say, "oh, well our eyes are observing the images generated on the LCD screen from optical output rendered in a computer..." — they'd say, "That's a kill streak. So bloody..." Now, of course, they wouldn't mean, warm, sticky, real blood from a human animal in need of immediate medical intervention, they'd just mean "the comic violence that just happened on-screen". ... now, imagine that you personally walk into a room, expecting to hold a symposium with two friends with opposing philosophies, and the topic of conversation is a heated discussion over ... the "reality" of the cartoon blood ... and both sides are *passionately* engaged in the argument ... well, I might roll my eyes and wonder "Is this the *caliber of thought* I'm dealing with?"

If I'm Cicero, and I want to convince *undecided voters* that the attractive, rational, Epicurean position is false, I might try to associate the position with figures who get caught up on ideas like "god blood". That's not to say it's incoherent. I think a huge part of Epicurean theology was to demonstrate that the images of the mind are all "real", just not necessarily "true". Breaking down, however, god bodies into *amalgamations of organs*, and not *eidola*, seems like it could be a kind of red herring or else a sort of scarecrow from Cicero. ... or not, but, I'm suspicious.

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**Post by “DaveT” of November 8, 2025 at 11:05 AM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4789-velleius-epicurus-on-the-true-nature-of-divinity-new-home-page-video/>

@Eikadistes After following the thread here, I'm concluding that you have two minds on the message attributed to Velleius by Cicero.

Is it fair to say that the practical follower of Epicurus may take delight in the lampooning of Velleius' targets?

And is it fair to say that the academic who teaches and /or writes on the contested philosophies should footnote Cicero's possibly fictive discourse by Velleius as suspicious and motivated by antagonism?

And if I'm concluding fairly on the academic's suspicious view, why ought the message be suspect? Where does that take the student? Should they not simply rely on the meaning of the words used to decide on the value of the message.