

Any Recommendations on “The Oxford Handbook of Epicurus and Epicureanism”?

Post by “Patrikios” of November 5, 2025 at 3:03 PM

After scanning the Epicurean Friends ‘[Recommended Reading](#)’ webpage, and the New Epicurean library; I find no recommendation for “***The Oxford Handbook of Epicurus and Epicureanism***”. Has anyone read it, and are the translations acceptable?

I’m reading the Kindle ‘sample’ with the first chapter, but at \$47 for paperback or \$31 for Kindle version, I’d like to be sure it is worth having for reference.

Thanks for any insight.

Post by “Cassius” of November 5, 2025 at 3:35 PM

If you get it please be sure to let us know your thoughts. I don't remember reading myself.

Post by “Eikadistes” of November 5, 2025 at 4:33 PM

It's an exceptional resource. It also may *not* be the best resource for new students.

As an academic text, *The Handbook* is organized as a collection of essays from respected scholars. In total (in over 800 pages), they present a synoptic view of Epicurean Philosophy; in *particular*, each focuses on a specific topic; some of those topics are much more narrow in scope than other overviews. Sometimes, the topics covered express interpretative disagreements in contemporary scholarship; in these cases, a background in the philosophy may be assumed by the author.

I think that students *may* struggle with the presentation — for example, depending on the author, and the author's *voice*, they *may*, or *may not* assume that you already know ancient Greek, or may or may not employ non-standard, in-text citations, or may over-use academic jargon, so I anticipate that some of the essays might strike new readers as being

(understandably) obfuscating. Some of the topics are tangential, and inter-disciplinary, so I think of *The Handbook* as more of a supplement.

Still, each essay is filled with great information. The book is expansive, and the authors, as one would expect of academics, provide voluminous support for their analyses. You'll also find a wealth of peripheral, historical information as it relates to non-Epicureans, and modern philosophers.

It's also chunky enough that it stands up on its own on a bookshelf.

Post by “TauPhi” of November 5, 2025 at 4:55 PM

[Quote from Eikadistes](#)

It's an exceptional resource.

I second that. It was one of the first books on Epicurean philosophy I've read and to this day I don't regret it. The amount of information there is extraordinary.

Post by “Matteng” of November 6, 2025 at 5:23 PM

I also have read it the 2. time some months ago. I can recommend it when interested in a more academic approach and not all chapters were interesting for me but 80% were.

But some chapters contain more wisdom than I thought on the first look. For example the chapter of poets(infos about Lucretius and Philodemus) or about language which I thought first would be boring but then show crucial differences for example between Platon and Epicurus (how words natural evolved by using similiar sounds in groups vs they come from perfect forms in another world or are top down defined and used)

Post by “Patrikios” of November 9, 2025 at 12:52 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4794-any-recommendations-on-the-oxford-handbook-of-epicurus-and-epicureanism/>

[TauPhi](#) , and [Matteng](#) , thank you for your comments and encouragement on the chapters.

The Oxford Handbook is a collection of papers by different authors, vs the DeWitt single author approach, to encompass the breadth of Epicurus history and Epicureanism philosophy. So, I am delving into separate chapters to gain insight into some key topics.

For example, Chapter 5. Theology goes into great length on explaining the nature of [Epicurean gods](#) (elaborating on KD01) and explaining the 'prolepsis of the gods'. I was particularly helped by this explanation in the section, "**The Ethical Meaning of Epicurean Theology**"

Quote

The simulacra of the gods, then, bring benefits, and thus to participate in prayers and in religious ceremonies (cf. Diog. Oen. fr. 19 II 6–11 Smith) means to “interiorize” in an effective way the (pleasurable) divine simulacra and to put into practice the commitment to become like a god among men.

What this means to me is that when I do my deep meditation and contemplate on the blessedness and incorruptibility of the 'gods', I am better able to understand what the 'divine simulacra' are implanting in my mind. The text in this chapter makes clear that our knowledge of [Epicurean gods](#) comes through prolepsis—a criterion of truth formed by repeated perceptions of divine simulacra striking our minds. When I practice my repeated meditation, I can focus contemplating how [Epicurean gods](#) are **beings** who are genuinely **incorruptible** (aphtharsia) and **blessed** (makariotēs). The prolepsis contains the essential characteristics: gods as living beings free from perturbation, experiencing continuous atomic replenishment that prevents their dissolution. My goal isn't worship in the traditional sense, but assimilation of the feelings—how it feels to live "**like a god among men**".

Post by “DaveT” of November 9, 2025 at 7:35 PM

[Quote from Patrikios](#)

I am better able to understand what the 'divine simulacra' are implanting in my mind.

This made me wonder both what it is, and where it comes from in Epicurus' worldview. and then this next sentence:

[Quote from Patrikios](#)

The text in this chapter makes clear that our knowledge of [Epicurean gods](#) comes through prolepsis—a criterion of truth formed by repeated perceptions of divine simulacra striking our minds.

made me wonder if the author you reference, or Epicurus himself, defined a simulacra the same way as the following definition I quickly scooped from the Internet:

"Ancient Philosophy (Epicureanism): In Epicurean philosophy, "divine simulacra" (or eidola) were believed to be fine atomic emanations that constantly stream from the "quasi-bodies" of the gods and strike human perception. Perceiving these simulacra was a way for humans to form a concept (prolepsis) of the gods, who were seen as models of perfect happiness and imperturbability, but who did not actively intervene in human affairs.

Platonic Philosophy: The term "simulacrum" (from the Latin simulacrum, meaning "likeness, semblance") originates in Platonic philosophy, where it meant a copy of a copy of an ideal Form, often considered an inferior representation."

I left the Plato reference in there because it seemed to clarify the term a bit for me, but focusing on the definition from the Internet on Epicureanism, I'm wondering if his philosophy considers that the simulacra comes from the gods. And then if the gods are indeed influencing mankind's actions in a passive sort of way, isn't this opposite from being indifferent, as I thought Epicurus declared?

Post by “Eikadistes” of November 10, 2025 at 12:42 PM

[Quote from DaveT](#)

but focusing on the definition from the Internet on Epicureanism, I'm wondering if his philosophy considers that the simulacra comes from the gods. And then if the gods are indeed influencing mankind's actions in a passive sort of way, isn't this opposite from being indifferent, as I thought Epicurus declared?

"Superman" positively inspired generations of kids, even if he only existed in 64 colors.

"Lady Liberty" continues to wield a torch for many, even if she's fixed in bronze.

So long as we identify "the gods" as *images* ("simulacra", "eidola"), those images, like any other symbols, have measurable impacts on our physical lives. The *image* of Jesus Christ, *itself*, is a **huge** influence to billions of people. "Jesus" doesn't need to "*truly*" exist to have influence.

Post by “DaveT” of November 10, 2025 at 1:32 PM

@Eikadistes Yes, thank you. I understand your reply, but can you address my use of the Internet description of divine simulacra:

[Quote from DaveT](#)

"Ancient Philosophy (Epicureanism): In Epicurean philosophy, "divine simulacra" (or eidola) were believed to be fine atomic emanations that constantly stream from the "quasi-bodies" of the gods and strike human perception. Perceiving these simulacra was a way for humans to form a concept (prolepsis) of the gods, who were seen as models of perfect happiness and imperturbability, but who did not actively intervene in human affairs."

And then can you address my question earlier, if divine simulacra stream from those "quasi-bodies" of the gods (in the quote above) does Epicurus consider that the simulacra comes from the gods.?

And if Epicurus does consider it so, if the gods are indeed influencing mankind's actions in a passive sort of way, isn't this opposite from being indifferent, as I thought Epicurus declared?

Post by “Eikadistes” of November 11, 2025 at 12:09 PM

[Quote from DaveT](#)

@Eikadistes Yes, thank you. I understand your reply, but can you address my use of the Internet description of divine simulacra:

[Quote from DaveT](#)

"Ancient Philosophy (Epicureanism): In Epicurean philosophy, "divine simulacra" (or eidola) were believed to be fine atomic emanations that constantly stream from the "quasi-bodies" of the gods and strike human perception. Perceiving these simulacra was a way for humans to form a concept (prolepsis) of the gods, who were seen as models of perfect happiness and imperturbability, but who did not actively intervene in human affairs."

I respectfully believe that the original quote creates a misconception about the nature of "divine simulacra" by mistakenly equating the words "eidola" with "divine images": *eidola* are not necessarily "divine", most are just the mundane images we see throughout the day with our eyes. I have not found "eidola" to be exclusively linked with "god images" in the original texts, so far as εἰδῶλα (*eídōla*) is employed by Epíkouros in the *Epistle to Herodotos*, as well as the context in which *eídōla* are discussed by Philódēmos in his treatise *On Piety*, as well as the way that Lucretius fluidly employs *simulacra* throughout *De Rerum Natura* (I'll cite each Lucretius' examples).

We inherit *simulacra* from Lucretius, who employed it as an approximation for the Greek *eídōla*. It is translated by H. A. J. Munro (whom I consider to be reliable) as "**images**" (1.1060, 2.24, 3.433, 6.420), "**representations**" (2.110), "**mimicry**" (2.324) and "**idols**" (1.123, 5.62, 5.308, 6.80). Lucretius also compares the concept of *simulacra* as "**representations**" against *imago* or "pictures" (2.112). Munro personally inflects *simulacra* as "**idols**" instead of "**images**" when referring to the "pictures of the gods", however, both *divine* images ("of the gods") and *non-divine* images (of normal stuff) are constituted of *simulacra* as is preserved in the language that Lucretius uses.

He pays particular attention to these the visual-mental act of forming internal images in Book Four of *De Rerum Natura*, using declensions of the word *simulacra* several dozen times. A number of scholars have found it helpful to *loosely* equate the "films" of the "images" (*eídōla* and *simulacra*) with the contemporary concept of *photons*, generally speaking, the physical particles of light that we perceive. These particles (*eídōla* or *simulacra*), as the authors describe in high resolution, physically travel from an external body, through the air, and collide with our eyes, creating an impulse that travels through a perceptual relay, creating an internal cascade that yields an internal representation that is apprehensible by the human intellect, experienced by the "mind's eye".

These stanzas in Book Four corresponds with notions expressed by Epíkouros in the *Epistle to Herodotos* (10.46-51). Lucretius means to faithfully represent Epíkouros' teachings in Latin verse, so his neologisms and descriptions of the fact that "things open to sight many emit bodies" corresponds with the Hegemon describing that the "impinging [of images occurs] on account of a certain thing from the *outside*[that enables] us to observe and to consider" (10.49). In each case, the authors consistently explain that the images that human beings reproduce as visual representations in the mind are limited to real forms that have been physically observed in nature. For example, a culture cannot create the myth of a centaur without having *some* knowledge of a horse.

It is important to mention that in both Ep. Her. (49-51) and DRN 4, the authors do **not** discuss the formation of "divine" images, or delineate them as images originating from a special class of beings. Philódēmos, *however*, provides a **high resolution** description in *On Piety*, and compares the formation of "numerically-distinct" images that reflect a "singular", body in one's external environment versus "sublimated" streams of "compatible" images that form in the

imagination from a variety of visual inspirations. Philódēmos explicitly categorizes "the images of the gods" as being the latter, images formed **in the imagination from a variety of sources**. By contrast Epíkouros and Lucretius only ever refer to the *eídola* and *simulacra* of everyday objects like architecture and animals. Our conception of "the **form** of a god" or "the gods" is necessarily conditioned by the visible particles that have previously emanated from human forms, whether those forms are the bodies of our friends, statues of the gods, or drawings of superheroes.

Given this, I want to (respectfully) caution against translators who interpret the "the images of the gods" as "a special class of 'god' particles that originate from 'god'-bodies that exist as animal-beings in a specially-privileged 'god'-biome in outer space that physically exists 'external' of the human mind". I want to caution against translators who interpret "images traveling through space" to mean "...through the vacuum of *deep, outer* space" rather than simply "...traveling from a Google Search page, through the two feet in front of your computer screen, into your eyeball."

I think it is really important to consider Philódēmos' delineation of images into the two categories of things that truly correspond with singular, unitary, external objects versus things that only exist as constructions within the human imagination (which is **not** to lessen the value of their existence as "real" things, just not things that "truly" correspond with singular, unitary objects, independent of the mind). Without considering Philódēmos, I think translators inductively project the manner in which normal images (like a horse) form onto the ways in which "divine" images form, as though the gods are like horses, but in a god barn, somewhere on a god farm, beyond our universe.

I mean all of this as respectfully as I am a total amateur when it comes to linguistics.

[Quote from DaveT](#)

And then can you address my question earlier, if divine simulacra stream from those "quasi-bodies" of the gods (in the quote above) does Epicurus consider that the simulacra comes from the gods.?

"Quasi-bodies" comes from Cicero's character Velleius — [Cassius](#) , here's an example of where I think Cicero is misleading us into an exaggerated conception without *explicitly* making a "false" statements. When it comes to this topic, I personally want to avoid Cicero's input, and focus strictly on what Epíkouros and Philódēmos have to say about the formation of internal images. The notion of "quasi-bodies", here again, makes it sound like "the gods" are *space ghosts* made of *aether*, and that their simulacra are traveling from deep space like x-rays from a quasar. From my humble understanding, the "quasi-bodies" of Velleius should properly refer to "the physical representation that is being physically stored in our physical, human memory" and, further, that this intellectual representation in memory was formed by seeing mundane people in everyday life. Men may think of Aphrodite as having those features that appeal to their

subjective sense of arousal based on their experiences with women whom they have found to be attractive. The gods are pristine physical specimens (as per cultural standards of beauty) — the men are ripped like body builders, the women are soft and voluptuous (...here again, with everyone, I want to emphasize, context aside, that we treat Marvel superheroes *eerily similarly* with the way gods were depicted).

In summation, based on the above sources, I want to suggest that thinking of *simulacra* as "emanating from external gods" *only* makes sense in terms of observing stone statues, or in terms of retrieving visual constructions from memory. I don't think the gods are *space radios*.

[Quote from DaveT](#)

And if Epicurus does consider it so, if the gods are indeed influencing mankind's actions in a passive sort of way, isn't this opposite from being indifferent, as I thought Epicurus declared?

While I want to reinforce, as Diogénes writes, that Epíkouros "only" saw the gods as being "apprehensible" through a directed act of "contemplation" by the "intellect" (10.139), even if we are to consider "the gods" to be *a class of space ghosts who broadcast dreams through radio waves ... **one way of the other***, "the gods" are indifferent and unconcerned with our happiness. The "indifference" of the gods is part of their definition. They are untroubled. They have no stress, no concern, no anxiety, no fear of death, and, therefore, no bio-chemical compulsion to stick out their necks to protect temporary, fragile, extra-terrestrial forms of life (in this case, **us**, Earthlings). They have **so** many **better** things to do than straighten out American healthcare (for example), or ensure that human life is improved through a proliferation of universal, scientific literacy, or mitigate the impact of climate change ... regardless of whether they are *space ghosts* or *comic books*.

(I **really** want to emphasize the "reality" of fictional super-people. The "spirit of Christmas" is a total, mythic fabrication ... that has a measurable, socio-economic impact on our culture. The "spirit of Christmas" is indifferent to its socio-economic impact, as are the images of the gods).

I hope this helps! *I'm also throwing a few of my own ideas out there for general consideration.* Cicero is an exceptional source, but also, a biased one. He *was* a lawyer... he had an agenda, and that agenda was not to produce a neutral, historical survey of competing thoughts. He meant to discredit his opponents by tearing holes in their arguments. It behooved him to exaggerate.

Post by “Cassius” of November 11, 2025 at 12:29 PM

Eikadistes thank you for all that commentary!

I don't disagree with any of it but would mention only slight tone question as to "quasi." In my mind that word for some reason carries a negative connotation that evokes space ghosts, but I don't think what Cicero was conveying should be presumed to carry any baggage with it. I would infer it to mean only "something like" or "something analogous too" or "something that functions analogously" and I would not read more into it than that.

Having said that I agree with virtually everything you wrote there. *Everything* gives off images not just gods and not just things that are close or far away.

Post by “Cassius” of November 11, 2025 at 1:22 PM

As for me personally this may be why i think the word "Quasi" always sounds fake or negative:

kll, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quasimodo>

Post by “DaveT” of November 11, 2025 at 9:03 PM

@Eikadistes Thank you for taking the time to address my questions in detail.