

Epicureans and the Ancient Greek Gods (Imagery of "Gods" / "Gods Among Men")

Post by "Matt" of February 12, 2019 at 4:01 PM

There has been an enormous amount of discussion in the past in regard to the theological aspects of Epicurean philosophy. There is, as of this moment, no consensus of opinion in regard to that subject and it continues to remain inconclusive.

However, this post is not focused on that generalized subject, but rather on the gods of Ancient Greece and Rome and the use of them specifically as "role models" either aesthetically or in a practical manner for an Epicurean.

The gods of Ancient Greece and Rome were derived from common Indo-European deities. These deities, such as Zeus, Aries, Athena, Poseidon etc., have their counterparts in the ancient Indian, Iranian, and Celtic/Germanic pantheons. Almost every deity has a foreign counterpart that fulfills the same role. So the only particular reason why an Epicurean might adopt the specific Greco-Roman versions of these polytheistic deities would be for culturally aesthetic purposes.

Much of what we know of the myths and legends of the gods come from Hesiod and Ovid. It is clear that the known Greco-Roman myths derive much of their character from Mesopotamian, Levantine and Hittite archetypes. Some examples are: Cronus castrating Uranus, Zeus battling Typhon, the deluge of Deucalion etc. Like their foreign counterparts, the Roman and Olympian deities are far from an Epicurean ideal and do not represent the Epicurean archetypal deity.

These deities are described in the *Theogony* and *Metamorphosis* as having identical emotions as mortal beings. They interfere in human affairs constantly and are petty, wrathful, cowardly, amorous etc. The latter emotion of being amorous is particularly prevalent among some of the gods including Zeus, king of the gods, who is *polyamorous*. Zeus had multiple divine relationships, but worse Zeus was also a seducer of mortals and was described as taking the form of a Swan to seduce a human female and even worse he is described as the pederastic abductor of Ganymede. There is no other way to describe the latter except as debauchery. This is only one example, there are many, many more throughout the myths implicating many of the gods.

So where does that leave the Epicureans? Hopefully far, far away from the traditional Greco-Roman deities. The deities are far from what is described in PD.1 as they interfere constantly in human affairs and are exceptionally emotional, often troubled by minor offenses committed by

mortals.

Should modern Epicureans be partnering with neo-pagan reconstruction religious groups? Or promoting the aesthetic ideals of Greco-Roman religion?

In my opinion, I say emphatically NO. Such a relationship would be an endorsement of superstition and it contradicts the core principles of Epicurean theology. In my opinion there is no room for Zeus or Jupiter in modern Epicurean iconography or thought as it would be the same as glorifying Indra or Ba'al of foreign pantheons. It would simply be hypocritical and a denial of PD.1.

So the question becomes, what can modern Epicureans use for an aesthetic image for their *specific* philosophic deities in lieu of the debauched Olympians?

Post by “Cassius” of February 12, 2019 at 5:55 PM

Thanks for the detailed commentary. I've been thinking about this recently too, and incorporating some of the imagery in several graphics more as a discussion starter than anything else.

As you know LD from my prior posting, I am one who takes the position that Epicurus was serious about "gods" as he defined them existing. But for the moment that is not the part on which I would like to focus.

The reason I am comfortable incorporating Greek imagery into my graphics is that regardless of the "real" angle, I believe that Epicurus thought that the gods were useful as images of perfect happiness toward which to aspire. Certainly he rejected the myths about them doing all sorts of crazy things, but I suspect that even after rejecting that aspect he still found it useful to discuss the issue of how gods would be perfectly happy by personifying them. I am not aware that Epicurus spoke about "god" or in generic terms, rather than using the standard names - but of course I know the record is difficult to assess.

There is of course the call to live as "gods among men," and it is apparent that he embraced the public festivals, and did not argue at all (to my understanding) that they were disembodied spirits.

It appears to me, consistent with the reference to using the Phaeacian imagery from Homer as an example of the best life, that Epicurus believed it was useful to visualize the best life as one not altogether unlike the Greeks pictured the gods as living on Olympus, without all the childish melodrama.

To take this further, as you also know I believe that it is worse than useless to define the best life as "absence of pain." I believe that description applies only to the "limit of quantity" for the reasons discussed elsewhere. I also believe that anyone challenged to visualize what "absence of pain" means in realistic terms will end up visualizing an experience that any ordinary human being can understand in sensual terms, and not as a non-sensual abstraction.

Therefore I believe that Epicurus intended that his students incorporate godlike imagery as visualizations of the best life, such as described by Torquatus:

"The truth of the position that pleasure is the ultimate good will most readily appear from the following illustration. Let us imagine a man living in the continuous enjoyment of numerous and vivid pleasures alike of body and of mind, undisturbed either by the presence or by the prospect of pain: what possible state of existence could we describe as being more excellent or more desirable? One so situated must possess in the first place a strength of mind that is proof against all fear of death or of pain; he will know that death means complete unconsciousness, and that pain is generally light if long and short if strong, so that its intensity is compensated by brief duration and its continuance by diminishing severity. Let such a man moreover have no dread of any supernatural power; let him never suffer the pleasures of the past to fade away, but constantly renew their enjoyment in recollection, and his lot will be one which will not admit of further improvement."

To me, there is nothing wrong, and much that is right, and perhaps a lot that is inevitable, in visualizing this picture in human form much as Zeus or any other idealized Greek god might appear. Of course I don't mean to particularize this to Greece or Rome and to exclude other nations and ethnicity, as they will likely have their own equivalents that is perfectly appropriate for them to use.

But Epicurus spoke of the "enemies of Hellas," and I do not believe he would think it appropriate to abstract out to ideal form a "human" stripped of all background, family, friends, and culture. So use of the Greek/Roman imagery among those of us who follow in that heritage (which very likely includes everyone reading this, no matter what nation they may currently reside) seems very appropriate to me.

This is an excellent thing to discuss and I have an open mind as to the basic point.

Post by "Cassius" of February 12, 2019 at 7:31 PM

LD let me ask you that question I am discussing -- If you were trying to visualize the highest and best life you could live, what kind of imagery would you visualize?

I think this is a good question for anyone studying Epicurus. The Epicurean world is real - it's this one, between birth and death - and whatever goal we set for ourselves also has to be real, and therefore should be something we can visualize.

Post by “Hiram” of February 13, 2019 at 6:29 AM

[Quote from Laughing Democritus](#)

In my opinion there is no room for Zeus or Jupiter in modern Epicurean iconography or thought as it would be the same as glorifying Indra or Ba'al of foreign pantheons. It would simply be hypocritical and a denial of PD.1.

my understanding is that PD1 is meant to DENY the common beliefs about the gods, and replace them with wholesome ones, to correct them. Every religion has its superstitions and errors: EP is meant to reform religion so that it produces pure, effortless pleasure.

Post by “Elli” of February 13, 2019 at 8:27 AM

LD wrote : <<So where does that leave the Epicureans? Hopefully far, far away from the traditional Greco-Roman deities. The deities are far from what is described in PD.1 as they interfere constantly in human affairs and are exceptionally emotional, often troubled by minor offenses committed by mortals.

Should modern Epicureans be partnering with neo-pagan reconstruction religious groups? Or promoting the aesthetic ideals of Greco-Roman religion?

In my opinion, I say emphatically NO>>.

In my opinion, if I would be so thirsty for a glass of water, I'll say emphatically **YES** to the more clean, and emphatically **NO** to the more muddy.

And that is because it is not wise while someone tries to clean a mess inside his home, when a neighbor enters to that home without offering a helpful hand for cleaning that mess, but in opposite that neighbor is placing more mess. It is of what someone is doing when speaks about

Epicurean Greek gods. Since the vision of gods in Epicureans' minds is engraved **clean** and **obvious** either when are awake or they are asleep. Because their desire is to practice the art **to live like god among men**. And the desire to live like god among men, **can't be if someone follows the tradition of monotheistic false religions of our era. This is the obvious definitely and irrevocably.**

Since with the usage of the Canon every issue is measured in accordance with the experiences and the circumstances in the reality we live. And the now-days we live, the circumstances are leading better to follow the Greek-Roman polytheistic gods, since they were acting more humanitarian and more natural !

Because if Epicurus lived in our era what would say emphatically on the issue of Greek-Roman gods? What he would choose **among polytheistic** tradition of Greek-Roman Gods and the **monotheistic** Christianity/Judaism/Islamism God of our era? Well, he would say **emphatically YES** to the former! Since the vision of the former have turned upside down not only by the opposite philosophical schools in Epicurus's era, but by the monotheistic religions of our era. Because Epicurus insists: if the vision of gods that is engraved to the peoples' mind is without fears is **clear**, and pleasurable. If the vision of gods that is engraved to the peoples' mind produced fears is **unclear** and **painful**. If the vision of gods is heavy loaded with the burden of responsibilities on how the celestial phenomena are occurred, is **unclear**. If it is not, so then it is **clear**. What is then producing more fear and pain as a religion ? The polytheistic Greek Roman religion or the monotheistic religion?

Frankly being greek and living in our days, my vision of the image of Zeus does not produce to me any fear or any pain. I like the image of Zeus as the natural phenomenon of the thunder and the rain, which is falling like sperm to fertilize bravely the thirsty land. That's why I know that Greeks near other things, they create him as the lover of the more magnificent mortal women Lida, Europe, Ious, Leto, Alcmene, Semele, Olympiad of Philip. I prefer a god acting as human being than a god acting like an ascetic unnatural being.

So, if Epicurus lived in our era he would say (paraphrasing this paragraph from his epistle to Meneoceus which shows that **he is not absolute and aphoristic on the issue on Myths for greek gods**) : For, indeed, it were better to follow the myths about the polytheistic Greek-Roman gods as were more humanitarian and more naturalistic than to become a slave to the painful deeds and the necessity that provoked by the monotheistic false religions and false unnatural gods : for the former suggest a hope to lead you in the pleasure to love your city and be friendly with your fellow citizens by worship them, whereas the latter involves pains and sacrifices and fears that are imposed by authorities with such powers which know no placation.

And that also means : for the former there is a hope to lead the people to the constitution of **real Democracy** and **pleasure**, but the latter it is evidenced that lead **to the sufferings of oligarchy and tyranny.**

Epicurus' Description of the Wise Man : **The wise man will not become a tyrant.** What the wise man will become ? A citizen that loves his city, respecting the laws when they are beneficial and pleasurable, to such an extent to live as **autonomous** for **changing the laws if are harmful.** Because the epicurean man is friendly firstly to his fellow citizens participating to the common affairs that are also the feasts of his city with the worship of the polytheistic gods. Since how you will be friendly with the strangers if you are not friendly with the familiar ones firstly? So, the Epicureans are opposite to the ideology of "globalism" that lead the people to live without identity. And the identity is rooted and in the DNA as the first principles (anticipations) that are came by Epicuru's **greek ancestors.**

Pericle's words in his epitaph : **"Our constitution does not copy the laws of neighboring states; it is rather a pattern for others. Its administration favors the many instead of the few. This is why it is called Democracy. Our laws afford equal justice to all in their private differences. Advancement in public life depends on reputation for capability, not social standing. Class does not interfere with merit, nor does poverty bar the way. If a man is able to serve the state, he is not hindered by the obscurity of his condition.**

"The freedom that we enjoy in our government extends also to our ordinary life. There, far from exercising a jealous surveillance over each other, we do not feel called upon to be angry with our neighbor for doing what he likes. Yet freedom in our private lives does not make us lawless as citizens. We respect and obey our legislators and our laws, particularly those that protect the injured, whether these laws are actually on the statute books, or belong to that code which, although unwritten, yet cannot be broken without acknowledged disgrace.... Because «τὸ εὐδαιμον τὸ ἐλεύθερον, τὸ δ' ἐλεύθερον τὸ εὐψυχον κρίναντες». i.e. we are judging that bliss means freedom; and freedom means bravery. ...and they are surely to be esteemed the bravest spirits who, having the clearest sense both of the pains and pleasures of life, do not on that account shrink from danger...And "our city also provides means for the mind to refresh itself from labor. We celebrate [athletic] games and worship [to the gods] all the year round, and the elegance of our homes and businesses forms a daily source of pleasure. Our city draws the produce of the world into our harbor, so that to Athenians the fruits of other countries are as familiar a luxury as those of their own".

So, Epicurus, when he established his school/Garden in Athens, he had in his mind the above words by Pericles that survived by Thucydides. This was Epicuru's identity that came by his ancestors, these were his anticipations, since inside these words by Pericles someone could realize that the participation to the feasts of the city produced also to the epicureans pleasurable feelings indeed. That identity is proved also in their arts as well as with the building of **the Parthenon** that is the same proof of the pleasure they enjoyed. This is the big picture

inside the Parthenon : it had neither mummies of monarchs and kings, nor relics of ascetic saints and innards of ascetic Popes, i.e. it had had not the worship of death, but the worship of **life** itself. It had had not the worship of the unnatural, but the worship of **natural**. That was the reason that inside the Parthenon was a huge statue of Athena that was virgin and remained virgin as she did not give birth to any child. In opposite Mary of christians gave birth to four children and they keep her as virgin. This is unnatural and ridicule, this is madness Epicurus would say, if he lived in our era, as he would say emphatically **YES** to the natural, and the humanitarian that was inside to the polytheistic Greek-Roman Gods !

Post by “Cassius” of February 13, 2019 at 9:04 AM

[Quote from elli](#)

I prefer a god acting as human being than a god acting like an ascetic unnatural being.

Yes, I do too. I think this is a very important subject to discuss.

Aside from Epicurus' statement that "gods" exist, what is more primary about how we discuss anything than "that which has no sensation is nothing to us" as part of PD2?

If a subject cannot be considered in terms of sensations, then it seems to me that the subject can have no relevance at all. Which means to me that if the subject of the best and highest life cannot be considered in terms of sensations that are intelligible to us, then the subject is essentially nothing to us.

So you can take that and go in two directions:

(1) You can say that since "gods" do not appear immediately in front of us and interact with us the subject has no relevance at all, just like being dead.

(2) Or you can say that "gods" conveys a manner of living which is intelligible to all of us in the form of our picture of human-like beings experiencing the best possible sensations - "living in the continuous enjoyment of numerous and vivid pleasures alike of body and of mind, undisturbed either by the presence or by the prospect of pain."

If Epicurus stood for anything, he stood on the position that the soul cannot survive absent the body, and therefore all that is good must be experienced from birth to death. (Cited by DeWitt as encapsulated in VS 42. "The same time produces both the beginning of the greatest good and the dissolution of the evil." Or, as DeWitt translates it: "The same span of time includes

both the beginning and termination of the greatest good." (p 219)

All this appears to mean that the greatest good has to be experienceable by humans in a way that humans can understand, and humans can't understand anything which is not understandable in terms of sensation. And what better way is there to convey anything than to describe by analogy how a thing "feels" to us?

Torquatus again in On Ends: "Further, every mental presentation has its origin in sensation: so that no certain knowledge will be possible, unless [all sensations are true](#), as the theory of Epicurus teaches that they are. Those who deny the validity of sensation and say that nothing can be perceived, having excluded the evidence of the senses, are unable even to expound their own argument. Besides, by abolishing knowledge and science they abolish all possibility of rational life and action."

Also, and even more to the point from Diogenes Laertius: " For all our notions are derived from perceptions, either by actual contact or **by analogy, or resemblance, or composition**, with some slight aid from reasoning.

So in my view, do we have to convey the meaning of godhood with a picture of Zeus? No. But we have to convey the image of godhood with something, and in the absence of better alternatives in the form of images that mean more to us, then I would think continuing to use Zeus and the rest makes as much sense for at least some of us today as it did for ancient Epicureans.

Post by "Matt" of February 13, 2019 at 10:21 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

LD let me ask you that question I am discussing -- If you were trying to visualize the highest and best life you could live, what kind of imagery would you visualize?

Cassius, to answer your question in regard to how I would visualize the highest "deified" good in life from an Epicurean perspective, I would say that it would have to correspond entirely to the description of the Epicurean specific deities. Anything short of that might as well be *nothing at all*. This issue of visualizing the [Epicurean gods](#) becomes immensely difficult as they are described in a very specific way. This could be a subject of discussion for another thread entirely...building a physical image of an Epicurean god from what has been given to us from Epicurus. If that is even possible I do not know.

As for just imagery that corresponds to just the "highest and best life" in our non-divine realm it would have to be imagery of pleasure that is available to mortals on a daily basis food, sex, friends etc. These images are of common things that give us pleasure. Down to earth images etc.

And to respond to Elli...Hi Elli!

Once again in my opinion, to accept the Greco-Roman gods for the purposes iconography is in my opinion continuing to add attributes to the divine beings that Epicurus said was considered impious. Zeus is the Zeus of the *Theogony*, no matter how you try to swing it. There is no Epicurean Zeus, if it is argued that the pederastic and wrathful Zeus of the *Theogony* is some aberration of impious poets, then it can be argued that all deities could be models for Epicurean iconography regardless of culture. You would not be constrained to Greco-Roman deities but would be free to utilize the Hindu and Mesopotamian Pantheons as well. Logically it doesn't make any sense to argue in favor of them.

Post by “Matt” of February 13, 2019 at 10:45 AM

As always the reason for this post is to keep everyone talking and thinking. I, as you know, am not a believer in the Epicurean deities as they are described. I believe they are purely idealistic.

But my point here was to refine this argument further to examine whether it is wise to use the images of the debauched Greco-Roman deities, since they certainly do not represent the Epicurean ideal.

It's like the expression "having (keeping) my cake and eat it too."

If you argue against other deities and religious ideas as being superstitious or perverse yet wholesale accept obviously perverse deities as being acceptable. Then it is my opinion that it becomes an exceptionally hypocritical position to take.

If anything the abandonment of the polytheistic deities of the ancient religion actually helps the Epicurean concept of deity, but keeping them, in my opinion, opens you up to serious criticism.

Post by “Cassius” of February 13, 2019 at 10:51 AM

I want to think more about this before I go too much further. At this moment I am acutely reminded that I am not an Epicurean god because I think I have an allergy attack going on, and when my mind is not clear I cannot receive those clear images as data from which to discuss this! 😊

Unless you purge your mind of such conceits, and banish them your breast, and forebear to think unworthily of the gods, by charging them with things that break their peace, those sacred deities you will believe are always angry and offended with you; not that the supreme power of the gods can be so ruffled as to be eager to punish severely in their resentments, but because you fancy those beings, who enjoy a perfect peace in themselves, are subject to anger and the extravagances of revenge: and therefore you will no more approach their shrines with an easy mind, no more in tranquility and peace will you be able to receive the images, the representations of their divine forms, that form from their pure bodies and strike powerfully upon the minds of men: From hence you may collect what a wretched life you are to lead.

Post by “Elli” of February 13, 2019 at 1:28 PM

And to respond to Matt. Hi Matt !

Wherever is a hypothesis with an immortal and blissful being there is also and the hypothesis that that being is able to feel the continuous pleasures, so then why that immortal being could not chose and the "peaderasty" ? And when the greeks spoke about peaderasty (paedi+eros) they did not mean sex with the little children i.e. under the age of sexual consent that is called as "peadophilia", but their admiration of the beautiful bodies and forms both of young men and women. The period of time of youth was from 18 years until 29 years old. The myth of Zeus that had the pleasure to admire the young beautiful Ganymedes is natural as natural is the sensation to realize that one of the moons of Zeus/Jupiter is called Ganymedes.

Homer, Iliad, Book XX, lines 233-235 wrote : Ganymedes as the loveliest born of the race of mortals, and therefore the gods caught him away to themselves, to be Zeus' wine-pourer, for the sake of his beauty, so he might be among the immortals. —

In greek language we use the greek word "παῖδι" [paedi] and "παῖδαρος" [paedaros] that means "big boy/guy". When we see a young man with handsome and attractive features, we say "αὐτός εἶναι παῖδαρος" means he is gorgeous, he is a very good looking big boy/guy".

According to the sources we have the natural and humanitarian Epicurus when he is addressing to his friends both the young boys/guys and mature guys i.e. men and women.

"He (Epicurus) basely flattered Mithras, the viceroy of Lysimachus, bestowing on him in his letters Apollo's titles of "Healer" and "Lord". They further charged that he extolled Idomeneus, Herodotus, and Timocrates, who had published his esoteric doctrines, and flattered them for that very reason. Also that in his letters he wrote to Leontion: "O Lord Apollo, my dear little Leontion, with what tumultuous applause we were inspired as we read your letter." Then again to Themista, the wife of Leonteus: "I am quite ready, if you do not come to see me, to roll around three times on my own axis and be propelled to any place that you, including Themista, agree upon"; and to the beautiful Pythocles he wrote: "I will sit quiet and await with desire your god-like coming" and, as Theodorus says in the fourth book of his work, Against Epicurus, in another letter to Themista he thinks he preaches to her.

It is added that he corresponded with many courtesans, and especially with Leontion, of whom Metrodorus also was enamored. It is observed too that in his treatise On the Ethical End he writes in these terms : "I know not how to conceive the good, apart from the pleasures of taste, of sex, of sound, and the pleasures of beautiful form."

In the basis of Greek-Roman culture this is the conclusion : Eros is everywhere and in everything around. Eros feels the mother to her little child. Eros feels the friend for his/her friend. Eros feel the lovers. Eros feel the parents for their children. Eros is the positive and the natural of life. Eros is synonym with Zeus and eros is described to the pantheistic GreekRoman gods. Epicureans chose EROS that gives birth and life in this planet Gaia, and the mother of EROS, as Lucretius summons her to his epic work DRN, is Aphrodite/Venus. 😊

Post by "Matt" of February 13, 2019 at 2:47 PM

Hi Elli,

Thank you for your detailed response.

However, I still maintain my objections to the ancient polytheistic religion on the grounds that they violate PD.1.

In your response you are equating Eros/Zeus with a *mythological* reasoning. Basically that Zeus is not a *real* deity that has any consequence on mortal lives, but rather he is an allegorical idealistic figure of human imagination. He is an imaginary being that is the product of the mind and desires of poets. In this scenario neither Zeus nor Ganymede are real and therefore they are not of any concern to us.

But...

Conversely, if you say that Zeus is as real as you and I are, and that he resides on top of Mt. Olympus, and his desire for Ganymede caused him to take the form of an eagle and abscond with him then we are dealing with something entirely different. So I ask how this corresponds to the Epicurean doctrine that the gods are remote, removed and unaffected by mortals, how do these two doctrines coexist?

We can see now that there are multiple levels to this discussion:

First, whether or not the [Epicurean gods](#) are even possible. Whether they are real or simply allegorical figures. (Which the debate continues ad infinitum without resolution.)

And second, pertaining to this specific post, if the Epicurean deities should be associated with the Greco-Roman polytheistic deities.

If the gods (Epicurean or polytheistic) are ***not real*** and figments of the mind only, there is no need to utilize any images whatsoever of any deity because what they represent strongly contradicts with what Epicurus spoke of. Which ultimately collapses back onto itself because there are no gods of any kind Epicurean or otherwise.

If the gods are ***real*** then we arrive at the usual debate over how they can be real given the specific requirements placed on them by Epicurus, and how we should even be able to imagine them. This of course opens up Epicureanism to strong, strong criticism.

Either way it is my opinion that attempting to hold on to Zeus and Hera, will overall not be beneficial when trying to explain away Allah or Vishnu.

Post by “Elli” of February 13, 2019 at 3:52 PM

Sorry Matt, but you did not read carefully whatever I wrote above. Who told you that Ganymedes was not real ? And who told you that Homer wrote just fairy tales ? The Trojan war as described by Homer was real. Every greek myth can be interpreted very clearly in accordance with reality and Nature. Ganymedes maybe was a handsome young boy that died young and had been sung by the poetical tradition. And that's all.

Moreover, these were the gods of Epicurus as described by Dimitris Liantinis, and as I can understand them!

What defines the difference between Greeks and Christians? A difference that from a certain point and beyond is being opposed, opposition, rift, a fight fire with water.

This which is defines the difference is something else and clear, as the olive leaf. But for this reason exactly is ultimate and extreme.

The difference between the two is that the Greeks built a world based on observation and understanding, while the Christians built a world based on the assumption and imagination.

The observation of the Greeks is of such of a quality that always is to be ensure in practical from what is happening in Nature, and always demonstrated in tangible from the experiment in the laboratory.

BECAUSE...

The Religion of the Greeks

If we count the strong position that the gods and the religions gave birth in primarily level from the fear of human towards life, and in advanced and to a second level of this matter from the fear of human towards death, then we will find that the religion of the Greeks is an exception as occurred that differently constitutes a unique mission.

The religion of the Greeks did not come from their fear, but it came from their sorrow to overcome the pain caused by rational vision for Nature and life, and death.

In other words, the religion of the Greeks created by their honest and brave attitude to overcome their pessimism and melancholy.

But between the fear of life and death, and the need of the Greeks to capitulate with their pain from what gave birth to their knowledge that the world is heavy, there is a little difference which gives the maximum effect.

The religion of the Greeks, i.e. is not the case and offspring of the imagination, like all other religions, but it is the aesthetic representation of the phenomena of Nature.

Thus, the gods of the Greeks are not neither secret and invisible presences. They are not ghosts of the mind, and wind's constructions, hypothetical words and invents of reasons, and beings of a waking sleep.

Instead, the gods of the Greeks are the images made up from the natural phenomena with slender intelligence and dexterity. They made by fluttering of a rational imagination, the whole, the simple, the non trembling, and the prosperous.

And above all this: the gods of Greeks they attested by sensory, touching them with the hands, facing them with the eyes, there are factual and materialistic.

Apollo suddenly, is the sun and the music regularity of the Nature.

Artemis is the Moon. Both of those two sisters symbolize the light of the day and night and were born on the island of Delos, word which means the same the clarity and the light.

Neptune is the sea.

Hephaestus is the fire and the metals.

Athena is the intelligence of the human, for this she is the protector of the ingenious Odysseus.

Aeolus is the sixteen airs to the seas.

Demeter is the joy of the fruits, the wheat, the rhubarb, the apple trees and vines, as the verse of Artsivald Maklis says.

And Jupiter is the thunder and the rain, which is falling like sperm to fertilize bravely the thirsty land. That's why the Greeks near other things, they create him as the lover of the more magnificent mortal women. Lida, Europe, Ious, Leto, Alcmena, Semele, and Olympiad of Philip.

Thus, the story goes and with the thirty thousand gods of the Greeks. Everyone is also a real, functional, indestructible, the beneficial and harmful true and a beautiful natural phenomenon.

In other words, the religion of the Greeks is an aesthetic status of Nature's elements, and in this way it is a variant of the Greek's art.

The Geometric evidence of this proposal is given by the fact that the religion of the Greeks is all in their art.

Post by "Elli" of February 13, 2019 at 4:26 PM

Ionic, by C.P. Cavafy

That we've broken their statues,
that we've driven them out of their temples,
doesn't mean at all that the gods are dead.
O land of Ionia, they're still in love with you,
their souls still keep your memory.
When an August dawn wakes over you,
your atmosphere is potent with their life,

and sometimes a young ethereal figure,
indistinct, in rapid flight,
wings across your hills.

The Trojan horse, the deception and the great duplicity of Cavafic irony is: Julian, Emperor of Rome.

For Cavafy, Julian is the one brought up a christian. He is the covert fourth Hierarch. As a child in church he was a reader. As a youth he was a deacon at mass. He was raised in the cloisters, courtyards and cells of priests, monks, ministers and bishops. For years and years his mind was purged by the endless cycle of chanting, praying and leaning over liturgical books. Julian is a theurgic scientist. He is the emperor subservient to the Holy Synod and is responsible for organizing state governance according to the ecclesiastical system of the christians. A shame for his lauded victories in Germany as a young man which were reminiscent of that illustrious Caesar, Germanicus. Who was the ruler of mighty Rome three hundred years before. Julian denounced the Greek Epicurus and Pyrrho the skeptic. And praised the anatolian influences of Pythagoras with his communes, mysticism, belief in reincarnation and his theurgies. The primary deities in his "new religion" were not Zeus and Dionysus but Mithra and the great mother Cybele. For all intents and purposes the man was hazy and confusing. For Cavafy, Julian is the covert fourth Hierarch. The three hierarchs supposedly imbued the church with the hellenic spirit. Julian attempted to imbue hellenism with the spirit of the church. The debilitating effect is the same. An absurd conjunction so the deception may continue.

It is upon this deception that Cavafy sets up his great engine. A siege engine of such exquisite craftsmanship that far surpassed the capabilities of Demetrius the Besieger for whom the poem King Demetrius was written. A powerful poem like its subject: Death. The design of the engine is such that on the face of it he seems to be ridiculing Julian and the Greeks, while in essence he is waging war against the christians. Cavafy uses the character of Julian to suggest and symbolize the contradictions and bastardization of the modern Greek. Someone who boasts and brags about their hellenism, but who in essence is christian and jewish. For Cavafy understood it deeply that hellenism and christianity are like fire and water.

The entire body of work of Cavafy, as a philosophical treatise, crystallizes into three questions. First, the matter of Theodicy and of Death. In other words, the matter of the tragic fate that awaits every human being in the world. Second, the analysis of both worldviews, the Hellenic and the Jewish. A quick reading, for example, of the poem Of the Jews (50 A.D.) will teach you more about the differences between the two perspectives than you would learn by studying a routine academic treatise 400 pages long. Third and last, his interpretation of the decline and fall of modern civilization, perceived through the kaleidoscope of the decline of the alexandrian and roman years. Cavafy is not a christian. He does not believe in heavenly kingdoms or the kingdoms of ruffians. In the Horses of Achilles, a brilliant and monumental poem about man's woe in front of the eternal calamity of death, he says that the body of Patroclus returned "to

the great Nothingness". Which is where you, I, and everyone else will return. And let us not forget that he persistently regarded the "Hellenic" idea as the noblest pursuit and attribute ever achieved by mankind upon the planet. (Dimitris Liantinis, from his book "Gemma")

Post by "Matt" of February 13, 2019 at 4:34 PM

[Quote from elli](#)

Sorry Matt, but you did not read carefully whatever I wrote above. Who told you that Ganymedes was not real ? And who told you that Homer wrote just fairy tales ? The Trojan war as described by Homer was real. Every greek myth can interpret very clearly in accordance with reality and Nature. Ganymedes maybe was a handsome young boy that died young and had been sung by the poetical tradition.

"Sorry Matt, but you did not read carefully whatever I wrote above."

Actually Elli, I read it very closely, and have been reading your responses to these questions in the past extremely closely (for some time now). I've been trying to understand what you and others actually believe in regard to this subject. Please do not think that I am confused by anything that you or others have said. I have a full and clear understanding of this subject. 😊

Post by "Matt" of February 13, 2019 at 4:52 PM

I can tell you (from my personal observations) that all modern adherents of Epicureanism have varying views of the gods.

Some *don't* believe. In fact they don't believe in any gods. Some say Epicurus was just mistaken and take the position of atheism.

Some people *truly* believe they exist and maintain metaphysical formulas and arguments to uphold these beliefs.

Others appear to take a rhetorical approach. This approach has less to do with actual knowledge or belief, but more to the effect of attempting persuasion to accept a doctrine without exploring the reason behind it.

Post by “Elli” of February 14, 2019 at 5:13 AM

I imagine Cato the elder that would say in Latin : "ceterum censeo Imperium Romanum Orientale postea Byzantinum esse delendam".

Because from the Byzantine era has started and there was the final battle for the destruction of the genuine Greek-Roman Cosmotheasis (worldview) and as a way of life.

And as Dimitris Liantinis Dimitris says to his book “Gemma”: "The space, the spatium or this s the physicists talk about, within which the de-Hellenisation of the Greeks took place, is Christian Byzantium. And the time, the tempus or the t the physicists talk about, within whose duration the process of Jew-ification of the Greeks took place, stretches from the time of Emperor Theodosius until this very day. Theodosius destroyed temples, ravaged ancient statues, closed down stadiums, theatres, Greek schools. All the sources that were the lifestream of the Hellenic way of life. This is why he is remembered as “the Great”. Which is the way his predecessor, Constantine, is also remembered. The Caesar who murdered his own wife and son. And they were first called “Great” by those who also called “Great” the Emperors Athanasius, Basil and all their ilk.

Destroyers, forgers, vandals of the Hellenic idea. But there is another voice, persistently whispering from the shadows, that all the brutalities the Christians inflicted upon the Greeks mean nothing in the end for those that did not become Jewish-Greeks but remained Hellenic-Greeks. It rises from a distant place and is only heard by a few: Just because we tore their statues down, and cast them from their temples, does not mean that the gods are dead. This is Cavafy, dear reader, not some miser. Not some invented god. And the poem is called Ionian. It is not called Cherubicon.

The dissolution and extinguishing of the classical Greek by Jewish-minded Christians lasted from the time of Theodosius until the time of Empress Eudoxia. Up to 843AD, with the official restitution of the icons. This holiday in the Orthodox calendar is celebrated annually since then, at the beginning of Spring! It is a grandiose celebration attended by state officials and foreign dignitaries. Viewed from a positive perspective, it symbolizes the triumph of Christianity. But viewed from its negative perspective, it represents the utter destruction of everything Greek. It is the tombstone of the Hellenic idea. That story reached its sad conclusion with the light defeated and darkness triumphant. With the Sunday of Orthodoxy and the appearance of the modern Greek identity. So Greeks only by name and superficially. And Jews to the bone, the blood, the heart, the intestines and the bile. Herein lies the key, the reason and the cause of the national schizophrenia".

Post by “Cassius” of February 14, 2019 at 7:11 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/737-epicureans-and-the-ancient-greek-gods-imagery-of-gods-gods-among-men/>

Ok I am feeling a little better and just read the most recent posts. I don't think any of us think that many of the details of the stories of the gods acting childishly are relevant or useful, other than maybe at most in the way that various stories in the Bible (David / Bathsheba?) add depth to the full story.

But it does seem clear to me that

(1) Epicurus thought that healthy aspirational images of living deathlessly and pleasurably and without pain can come from the gods, regardless of whether we today want to consider those images as emanating from real beings or from anticipatory constructs of the mind.

(2) Mental pictures of a type which represent actual attainable examples of living that sort of highest life are useful and necessary not only to children, but to adults, for many reasons, not the least of which is so that we can communicate intelligibly about what we consider to be the highest sort of life available to humans.

Epicurus through Lucretius said that without a model the gods could not have created worlds, and I think it is safe to say that without a model it is not possible to visualize, work for, or obtain the highest Epicurean life.

That as much as anything is what I object to about the modern obsession with "absence of pain" - it is a disembodied ghost - an unattainable abstraction no more intelligible than the "trinity."

Post by “Cassius” of February 14, 2019 at 7:33 AM

Right now if I knew a young person who was confused and wanted a model of what it would mean to be an Epicurean I would be at a loss to draw such a picture. I might refer them to read "A Few Days In Athens" and of course if they were old enough I might suggest the DeWitt book, but those are not adequate to provide the vision necessary to convey the full picture.

I don't know if @Nate would be interested in commenting here but this is related to the artistry of being able to capture the essence in pictures / music / poetry etc.

To repeat the allusion, even the gods would have needed models to create worlds.

Post by “Matt” of February 14, 2019 at 11:17 AM

Nate would be the man for that for sure. 😊

Post by “Cassius” of February 14, 2019 at 1:19 PM

I need to update and reformat this list, but when I worked before on listing the known Epicureans of the ancient world this is the list I came up with:

(So perhaps if we are looking for people to image this is a good place to start)

<https://newepicurean.com/resources/honor-roll-of-epicureans/>

Post by “Cassius” of February 14, 2019 at 1:34 PM

Name	Period	Status	Verification Source	Comments
Epicurus	300 BC	Self-Evident		
Metrodorus		Avowed Epicurean	Diogenes Laertius	
Hermarchus		Avowed Epicurean	Diogenes Laertius	
Polyaenas		Avowed Epicurean	Diogenes Laertius	
Philonides of Laodicea	200-130 BC	Avowed Epicurean	Life of Philonides from Herculaneum	Court Philosopher of Antiochus IV Epiphanes
Philonides of Laodicea	200-130 BC	Avowed Epicurean	Life of Philonides from Herculaneum	Court Philosopher of Antiochus IV Epiphanes
Titus Lucretius Carus	50 BC	Avowed Epicurean	De Rerum Natura	

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/737-epicureans-and-the-ancient-greek-gods-imagery-of-gods-gods-among-men/>

Catius Insuber			Cicero	Mentioned by Cicero in letter to Cassius of January 45 BC as "lately dead."
				Mentioned by Cassius in letter to Cicero of January 45 BC as, with Amafinius, a translator of Epicurus. Wikipedia
Amafinius			Cassius	Mentioned by Cassius in letter to Cicero of January 45 BC as, with Catius, a translator of Epicurus. Wikipedia
Titus Pomponius Atticus	50 BC	Avowed Epicurean	Cicero	Wikipedia
Pansa				Mentioned by Cassius in letter to Cicero of January 45 BC: "Consequently Pansa, who follows pleasure, keeps his hold on virtue, and those also whom you call pleasure-lovers are lovers of what is good and lovers of justice, and cultivate and keep all the virtues."
Gaius Cassius Longinus	50 BC	Avowed Epicurean	Letters to Cicero	
Horace (Quintus Horatius Flaccus)	50 BC			Wikipedia
Philodemus of Gadara			Herculaneum Papers	
Diogenes Laertius	200 AD ?	Unclear	Statements in Epicurus' Biography	
Diogenes of Oinoanda		Avowed Epicurean	Author of the Epicurean Inscription	
Pompeia Plotina	Died circa 120 AD			Wikipedia Wife of Trajan; Adopted Mother of Hadrian; wrote letter to Hadrian asking for special consideration under Roman law for Epicurean School.
Thomas Jefferson	Avowed Epicurean	Letter to William Short		

Post by “Matt” of February 14, 2019 at 1:34 PM

I think it would be an interesting artistic exercise to attempt to create an "Epicurean Deity" based solely on the philosophical description, devoid of the polytheistic accretions.

Post by “Matt” of February 14, 2019 at 1:40 PM

That way you avoid being associated with something that perhaps does not represent your philosophical convictions.

Post by “Hiram” of February 14, 2019 at 1:56 PM

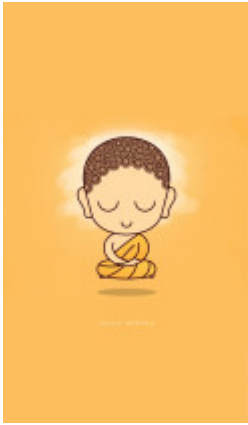
[Quote from Laughing Democritus](#)

I think it would be an interesting artistic exercise to attempt to create an "Epicurean Deity" based solely on the philosophical description, devoid of the polytheistic accretions.

I could not find a smiling Venus or Aphrodite when I searched on google, but I found a SMILING Lakshmi, which is the Hindu version.

[7e8381089187a6065f9431620f6d36e.jpg](#)

Post by “Hiram” of February 14, 2019 at 1:59 PM



Post by “Matt” of February 14, 2019 at 2:01 PM

I think the general concept behind Hindu Iconography has a great potential to help in creating an image. The Hindus have mastered that art form.

Post by “Cassius” of February 14, 2019 at 2:16 PM

[Quote from Laughing Democritus](#)

I think it would be an interesting artistic exercise to attempt to create an "Epicurean Deity" based solely on the philosophical description, devoid of the polytheistic accretions.

I don't really disagree with that wording, but I think part of the issue we are talking about is whether the description is *purely* philosophical / conceptual, or whether it includes the actual references to the material in "On the Nature of the Gods," Lucretius' poem, etc. An Epicurean deity to an ancient Greco-Roman Epicurean would presumably not look exactly like a Hindu version or an African version or an Asian version, but similar characteristics could be embodied using any of the cultural pictures, I would think.

Post by “Cassius” of February 14, 2019 at 2:18 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/737-epicureans-and-the-ancient-greek-gods-imagery-of-gods-gods-among-men/>

And of course in this discussion we also have to consider the specific phrase "gods among men," and the serious or semi-serious or allegorical references to Epicurus himself as a god, for which reason you could presumably have idealized but recognizable figures of men and women serving as examples of "gods among men."

In fact what we may be talking about here is visualizing "gods among men" as much as visualizing "gods" themselves."

And it may also be relevant to consider the relationship of this topic to the way the Romans ended up considering their emperors as "gods"

Post by "Matt" of February 14, 2019 at 2:34 PM

I would definitely think you'd want to incorporate the imagery from On the Nature of The Gods.

Post by "Matt" of February 14, 2019 at 3:33 PM

I will be very interested to observe the results if that project gets off the ground because it would illustrate more clearly what the Epicurean deities would *have* to be like according to the philosophical descriptions. Like I've said previously, I don't know if its even possible to do this given their very particular description, but I think it would be interesting to see.

You'll then be able to compare them against the old Greco-Roman depictions to see where they diverge.

Then you can pit them against other deities from other religions and philosophy to see where they stand. 😊

Post by "Eikadistes" of February 18, 2019 at 2:02 PM

Typically, religious imagery is symbolic, and the actual elements of the image aren't considered to be expressive of objective reality. Shape, contour, and color are removed from their natural

orientation, and repurposed for the purely symbolic. For example, the picture of Lakshmi depicts a goddess clothed in gold, representing wealth and prosperity (who knows if such a being would have actually preferred yellow tones). We also observe that--though clearly human in form--she has four arms, representing the four, possible aims of life (as identified in Hindu philosophy), being Kama (Sensual Gratification), Artha (Economic Success), Dharma (Spiritual Fulfillment), and Moksha (Transcendental Liberation). Her depiction expresses ideas, and not atoms.

Epicurus warns us against explicitly mythologizing our experience, so attempting to express the 'Ideal Epicurean Being' as an image is incredibly difficult. Like the creator of the image of Lakshmi, we, too, are tasking ourselves with encoding meaning through shape, contour, and color, which requires that we mythologize our experience rather than express it at the atomic level. Thus, we run into frequent discussion about 'the gods' without being able to describe their specific qualities (not generalizations like 'they're made of atoms' or 'they represent the ethical ideal', but specifics like, 'here is a description of their evolutionary history, their location in spacetime, and the biochemical means by which they are capable of maintaining constant pleasure).

It may not be the case that there are any universal images that can adequately express the character of 'the [atomic] gods'. Epicurus doesn't seem to have written any hymns, prescribed prayer rituals, or dedicated any of his writing to Hellenistic deities like Lucretius later did, so I question if Epicurus personally viewed 'the gods' as anything but 'symbolic mental imagery that most people seem to rely upon to orient themselves toward pursuing satisfaction'. I sometimes wonder if Epicurus simply appropriated the symbolic imagery of 'God' as a teaching tool when attempting to instruct religious-minded students, sort of like when atheists rhetorically invoke the Ten Commandments to traditionally-minded Christians to justify their progressive position (like being against Capital Punishment).

In general, I think it might be more appropriate to dig into the imagery of our own experiences if we're trying to find 'the gods'. For some Epicureans, it may have been Epicurus; for other Hellenists, it may have been giant, intergalactic beings who accidentally communicate through dreams; for Nietzsche, it may have been the *Übermensch*; for contemporary American youth, it may be superheroes; for contemporary atheists, it may be astronauts; for many of us, it may be parents, mentors, or teachers who provide powerful examples that we can strive to emulate. All of these people become characters in our mind that allow us to reflect upon the choices we make. Maybe those mental ideations are the same tangible entities that Epicurus called 'the gods'.

Post by “Cassius” of February 18, 2019 at 5:05 PM

Yes I agree Nate --->

[Quote from Nate](#)

so attempting to express the 'Ideal Epicurean Being' as an image is incredibly difficult.

Yes especially since the word "ideal" indicates something that does not exist. We are talking even in Epicurean terms about beings that exist, even as "gods among men" exist. I think our first and maybe best shot is as you indicate, depicting images of people who are outstandingly successful in the important areas of life. For some reason Sean Connery as James Bond kind of exemplifies (in my mind) as the ultimate "spy." I think we're talking about depicting people who are in the process of living this description:

The truth of the position that pleasure is the ultimate good will most readily appear from the following illustration. Let us imagine a man living in the continuous enjoyment of numerous and vivid pleasures alike of body and of mind, undisturbed either by the presence or by the prospect of pain: what possible state of existence could we describe as being more excellent or more desirable? One so situated must possess in the first place a strength of mind that is proof against all fear of death or of pain; he will know that death means complete unconsciousness, and that pain is generally light if long and short if strong, so that its intensity is compensated by brief duration and its continuance by diminishing severity. Let such a man moreover have no dread of any supernatural power; let him never suffer the pleasures of the past to fade away, but constantly renew their enjoyment in recollection, and his lot will be one which will not admit of further improvement.

That kind of picture really doesn't require costumes or idealizations at all.

Post by "Matt" of February 19, 2019 at 3:39 PM

Ok so I've been meditating on this for the last couple of days and I've come to a conclusion...

I agree with Nate that all anyone would be doing trying to capture an "ideal" Epicurean deity in canvas would be just reinventing the wheel. From a universal point of view, it's just not going to work or even be meaningful to the philosophy.

So here's what I've come up with...

I believe that Epicurean philosophy (in modern times) owes a serious explanation for their gods. My personal opinion is that the "metacosmic" deities are really, really difficult to maintain for

the average adherent of the philosophy. So what I believe will work with the philosophy in modern times is a *very soft pantheism*.

This shifts all the focus off the idealized deities and puts it right back on *nature*. What is deity? It's nature. What would we use for images? Beautiful images of nature. The best sunsets, sunrises landscapes, seascapes, star fields and galaxies.

This soft pantheism differs from the more Stoic pantheism and panpsychism, that affirms that a divine mind is immanent and active in everything.

With a soft pantheism there is some wiggle room, not much for a faint agnostic flavoring of Providence. Enough to satisfy former religious theists and *not enough* to drive ANY dogmas or doctrines at all. Basically Providence in this scheme is the observable fact that that we have cosmic order that is conducive to life and self reflection as opposed to undefined molecular chaos swirling in the void.

So those are my thoughts on this...

The easiest transition for a theist to the Epicurean system is to promote nature oriented pantheism. No images of gods, just universally beautiful images of nature. Things that give pleasure and please the eye.

Post by "Cassius" of February 19, 2019 at 5:10 PM

Ha! I bet you expect I will object to that Matthaesus!

First, unless I misunderstand what you are saying (possible, as I am reading during a class) you are advocating the stoic model of "nature as deity." I feel sure Epicurus would object to that, because he believed he had established real living intelligent beings with deathlessness and blissfulness, first of all.

Second, I think it is the wrong direction even to discuss "idealized deities" with the emphasis on the "idealized" as the problem. Epicurus was theorizing as to actual attributes of actual beings which are a part of nature, and the term "idealized" is fraught with danger as inconsistent with that approach.

And yep "Basically Providence in this scheme is the observable fact that that we have cosmic order that is conducive to life and self reflection as opposed to undefined molecular chaos swirling in the void" I think Epicurus would object to the word "order" to the extent that that implies that there is an outside force organizing the matter which organizes by its own properties into the life and other bodies that we see and experience.

At risk of being too random I want to paste the following here, because I think it relates directly to this discussion in terms of the causation issues, as it shows how Cicero describes his main objection to Epicurean physics:

"Still, there is a great deal in each of them (Epicurus and Democritus) with which I do not agree, and especially this: in the study of Nature there are two questions to be asked, first, what is the matter out of which each thing is made, second, what is the force by which it is made; now Democritus and Epicurus have discussed the question of matter, but they have not considered the question of force or the efficient cause."

Same issue, stated another way by Cicero: "The swerving is itself an arbitrary fiction; for Epicurus says the atoms swerve without a cause, — yet this is the capital offense in a natural philosopher, to speak of something taking place uncaused."

And one more major physics objection by Cicero: Irrelevant to us today, or important to refute? "It is also unworthy of a natural philosopher to deny the infinite divisibility of matter; an error that assuredly Epicurus would have avoided, if he had been willing to let his friend Polyaenus teach him geometry instead of making Polyaenus himself unlearn it."

Post by “Matt” of February 19, 2019 at 7:05 PM

Yep! That’s what I was trying to do! Haha

I knew you would object, I will sustain it so as to not fall into a spiraling wormhole of theology ad nauseam tonight... for everyone’s wellbeing and sanity.Haha 😄

Post by “bradley.whitley” of March 11, 2019 at 11:43 AM

[Elli](#)

Interesting posts. I would like to hear more on this matter. Fascinating.

Post by “Clive” of March 15, 2019 at 7:31 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/737-epicureans-and-the-ancient-greek-gods-imagery-of-gods-gods-among-men/>

I think I agree with elli.

Re;- "These deities are described in the Theogony and Metamorphosis as having identical emotions as mortal beings". Surely that is because some of them are personifications of natural psychological forces, isn't it? Others may also be personifications of natural physical forces, such as storms and earthquakes (Poseidon). As we know, now, the emotions are mediated by the limbic system, which evolved before the cortex, in order to preserve cellular homeostasis. Of course, Hesiod, Ovid, or Epicurus, couldn't have known about Darwinian evolution or homeostasis because the systematic study of biology only really got started with Aristotle.

We don't have to worship the gods, we don't need to be afraid of them, and we don't have to agree with Hesiod (or even Ovid) about our general approach to life, but we should recognise that these emotions exist, and we need to deal with them through art, as well as through science and philosophy.

Post by “Cassius” of March 15, 2019 at 7:23 PM

Yes, welcome Clive to the discussion and to the forum!

Post by “Clive” of March 17, 2019 at 7:07 PM

I may be wrong about any of this. As I have said elsewhere, I'm not an expert. I am not aware of the point of view that says 'Aristotelian biological thought was an impediment to the advancement of biology', but it may be so. Aristotle wasn't really a scientist. Science, as we now know it, only started much later, probably in the 'Enlightenment'. But certainly not before Francis Bacon. The existence of atoms, as understood in the modern physical/chemical sense, as opposed to Epicurean 'atoms', was only scientifically confirmed in the early 20th century (after Max Planck started the train of thought and enquiry that led to quantum theory). I consider that modern biological understanding only really started with Darwin, in the 19th century. Empirical discoveries have always been made. But I don't know of any systematic biological thought before Aristotle.

Post by “Matt” of March 18, 2019 at 7:17 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/737-epicureans-and-the-ancient-greek-gods-imagery-of-gods-gods-among-men/>

Hi Clive,

I wanted to swing by and welcome you. I've been taking a short hiatus but I would enjoy discussing your thoughts further when I return.

If you read further up the thread you'll see that there are three positions modern Epicureans take on the gods issue. Two of which posit that the gods do not actually exist and one (the Traditional view) that they fundamentally do exist.

This discussion is primarily concerned with the Epicurean conception of deity and whether the gods, as specifically described by Epicurus, are capable of existing or not. Some Epicureans hold that there are real beings, as real as you and I are existing in the universe or the *intermundia*. Others are claiming pure atheism and still others claim they are not real but just allegorical and artistic interpretations of the human psyche and nature.

Post by "Matt" of March 18, 2019 at 7:31 AM

I have been interested in Epicurean Theology for the last few years. I've argued that it can be a linchpin aspect of the philosophy if it is examined very, very closely and carefully.

But I'm an oddball of the group. 😊

Once again, welcome!

Post by "Cassius" of March 18, 2019 at 9:05 AM

[Quote from Matthaeus](#)

But I'm an oddball of the group. 😊

LOL

Post by "Cassius" of March 18, 2019 at 7:29 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/737-epicureans-and-the-ancient-greek-gods-imagery-of-gods-gods-among-men/>

[Quote from Oscar](#)

I'm interested to hear more.

I bet you will get your wish, Oscar! 😊

Post by “Clive” of March 18, 2019 at 8:50 PM

Matthaeus,

Re;- "If you read further up the thread you'll see that there are three positions modern Epicureans take on the gods issue. Two of which posit that the gods do not actually exist and one (the Traditional view) that they fundamentally do exist".

Yes, I see that now. As I am new to the site I'm still trying to find my way around it.

I don't know exactly how Epicurus thought of the gods, or how modern Epicureans think of them. I suppose I haven't read enough about it. I know that I prefer the 'allegorical and artistic interpretations of the human psyche and nature' version. But I don't know whether Epicurus would have agreed.

Is it possible that Epicurus didn't really know either, but had to say "the gods exist" to avoid accusations of atheism? Then he would have had to fit the gods in with his axiomatic "everything consists of atoms and void", so proposed material gods who existed somewhere else?

I think also Lucretius started *De rerum natura* with a hymn to Venus as a personification of fertility. My Latin isn't good enough to read it other than in translation.

It's only a suggestion - probably completely wrong. My interest in Epicurus has more to do with his advice on how to live a pleasant life than how he thought of the gods, but I have wondered about this, myself, without coming to any firm conclusions.

Post by “Matt” of March 25, 2019 at 10:06 AM

Yes indeed, Lucretius does open his work with a hymn honoring Venus.

There is no question that the ancient Epicureans did in fact have reverence for the ancient Roman and Hellenic deities, at the very least in some allegorical or poetic sense. Basically that the deities represented forces of nature or human emotion.

Obviously an allegorical god is not the same thing as a real "atomic" god. The issue is that Epicurus himself posits that the gods are in fact real. Going as far to give them particular attributes and sensations. Yet without giving any evidence of their existence as specifically described.

Epicurus may have known his gods did not exist, but he promulgated a very specific theology that assured his followers that *they do in fact exist* only to avoid accusations of atheism. In this case, a person needs to be able to look past or justify a complete theological fabrication (an outright lie) by Epicurus himself, which in my opinion is an ethical dilemma that casts a very long shadow.

It's an interesting study.

Post by "Cassius" of March 25, 2019 at 10:35 AM

It's a never ending topic that for sure. All of these points are questions for debate;

Quote: "The issue is that Epicurus himself posits that the gods are in fact real."

I have definitely seen the points where Epicurus says that gods exist, but never have I seen a specific statement that Zeus or Apollo or any other SPECIFIC god existed in the way that the other greeks held them to exist .

[Quote from Matthaeus](#)

Yet without giving any evidence of their existence as specifically described.

Of course in addition to the observation that most of the works are lost, we do have in "On The Nature of the Gods" a brief description of some of the major aspects.

[Quote from Matthaeus](#)

that assured his followers that they do in fact exist only to avoid accusations of atheism. I

That is also not something I believe to be true. Most of his contemporaries apparently felt him to be a true-blue atheist despite his denials, so it intended as a ruse it was not very effective.

[Quote from Matthaheus](#)

a person needs to be able to look past or justify a complete theological fabrication (an outright lie) by Epicurus himself,

And of course I fully disagree with that 😊

Post by “Cassius” of March 25, 2019 at 10:46 AM

My views are probably clear in other places, Clive, but to summarize here I take the position that Epicurus was absolutely serious that in an infinite and eternal universe full of life there are going to be beings which are perfectly happy and don't die. That really is a highly likely and reasonable conclusion of the fundamental premises about life in the universe. But that also really has nothing necessarily to do omnipotence, or omniscience, or with Zeus and Athena running around creating havoc, all of which specifically or implicitly Epicurus denounced.

One thing that is ABSOLUTELY clear is that Epicurus said that there are no "supernatural" gods in control of the universe.

And my personal position is that much of the conflict comes from the fact that Epicurus was willing to use the word "gods" to describe his blissful beings (apparently, it would be necessary to check the Greek) while most people INSIST that the word "god" must mean supernatural or omniscient or omnipotent or some combination of the three.

Post by “Matt” of March 25, 2019 at 11:04 AM

And of course I respect your positions on all points Cassius. As always. ?

Post by “Matt” of March 25, 2019 at 11:12 AM

This is topic has been debated *ad infinitum* especially among the core members here. My counter views represent those who criticized Epicurus on this subject (both pagan and Christian).

Though the subject is endlessly discussed with no reconciliation, It represents an important critical analysis of a very important aspect of the philosophy. If anything it lends itself to a modern version or continuation of Cicero’s dialogue.

Post by “Matt” of March 25, 2019 at 11:18 AM

Hi Oscar,

You are correct Epicurus did not posit personal gods, but he did posit that his gods were real. The problem is that he asserts their reality without evidence of any kind. Ultimately that would be a form of idealism.

Like I said before, a person has to justify their position on this given the evidence and testimony. I personally consider it a lie or fabrication if he presented something to be true without evidence. Especially if he *knowingly* presented this while disbelieving it. That would be a serious offense. But we hope that was not true.

Post by “Matt” of March 25, 2019 at 11:20 AM

If he truly believed they were real, that of course is the preferred traditional opinion, we are able to discuss the inner details of why he believed they were real without evidence.

Post by “Cassius” of March 25, 2019 at 11:37 AM

Quote from [Matthaeus](#)

Though the subject is endlessly discussed with no reconciliation, It represents an important critical analysis of a very important aspect of the philosophy.

I fully agree with that. Everyone who studies Epicurus needs to study this aspect of his thought, just as much as his thought on the size of the sun, which shows his approach.

[Quote from Matthaheus](#)

The problem is that he asserts their reality without evidence of any kind.

I think this is the heart of the dispute - the meaning and implications of the word "evidence." Maybe because of my legal occupation, I am fully comfortable with the idea that circumstantial evidence is fully as admissible in considering difficult issues as is "direct" evidence. While it would certainly be preferable to have "eyeball" /photograph evidence of a "god" in its native environment, we don't have that level of science available to us, just as we can't eyeball atoms but have firm confidence that they exist.

So in my world the issue is not that Epicurus did not have any evidence, but that some people don't accept his evidence as sufficient, and that in itself leads off into very important issues of debate over the nature of "evidence." Here we are at a terrible loss of texts, although I do think that Philodemus' "On Methods of Inference" is helpful, and other clear implications can be drawn in other texts that Epicurus was well aware of the issues involved in "circumstantial evidence."

Post by “Matt” of March 25, 2019 at 11:42 AM

It is a real shame that so few writings exist on this topic. No doubt many, many did at one time exist.

But I guess this modern dialogue fills some of that gap.?

Post by “Matt” of March 25, 2019 at 2:21 PM

“I mean, you want to be honest but sometimes you don't want to hurt peoples feelings? Or you want to be honest, but you give a prescription of sugar-pills because there's the placebo effect.

You don't want to be harmful to someone with a phobia, yet you let them hold a snake or tarantula because exposure can also help us overcome phobias."

I totally understand what you are saying in regard to a placebo, but the presuppositional opinion that the gods are not to be feared is circular in this case. Plus if you believe this theology is a placebo then you have your answer as to whether Epicurus truly believed in his own gods.

The very last thing I want is a placebo for the possible underlying meaning of the cosmos. If anything, that only makes me feel that I have been condescended to by Epicurus. And that he is arguing from a position of authority and special knowledge. Neither of which can be afforded to him.

Post by "Cassius" of March 25, 2019 at 4:29 PM

At the risk of getting too basic, I think one of the many issues that Epicurus was concerned about was the evidence implications of "Life exists only on earth."

Much like "The earth is the center of the universe," if either or both of those are true, then there is clearly something special about the earth, and that something special would imply a supernatural explanation.

I therefore think that it was important to Epicurus to make the obvious point that there is never only one thing of a kind here on earth, and therefore (if the universe is boundless and eternal, as he had elsewhere given his argument) then life will exist throughout the universe, and not just here.

Once the existence of life throughout the universe is established through "never one of a kind" then you apply the "isonomia" that things also exist in a progression from "lower" to higher" in terms of complexity, and you arrive fairly easily at the conclusion that there are beings in the universe who do not die, and don't work all day to pay taxes.

I personally am satisfied that even if Epicurus' argument is ultimately no more complex than this, that it is compelling.

Post by "Matt" of March 25, 2019 at 4:35 PM

Oscar,

I totally understand your perspective. Although I think we have very different expectations from our healthcare providers?.

We clearly disagree on this point:

That I strongly stand by the idea that the gods being characterized as benign is fundamentally presupposed and the reasoning circular. My reasoning is that since there is no evidence or precedent for either the gods existing or whether they are supernatural or natural, there is no way that Epicurus can say anything about them unless he had some very intimate contact with them. No special knowledge of hypothetical entities could ever be attained to the degree of specificity as Epicurus described them to be from pure abstract reasoning.

I believe Epicurus was a powerful and influential philosopher. In my personal pantheon of philosophers Epicurus and Epictetus are filed under "E". The ideas of Epicurus like all philosophers, ancient and modern will be criticized posthumously over and over again. I don't hold a special or hostile critique of him any more than I do of Pythagoras or Plotinus, they and their ideas are products of the times they lived.

I like to evaluate all claims to a certified knowledge of the universe's and my own raison d'être. Epicurus like many others made certified claims, so I pry deep into those ideas. That's why we are all here discussing this philosophy. We all seek out knowledge and truth.

Post by "Cassius" of March 25, 2019 at 4:48 PM

Mattheus not to try to pin you down for the sake of pinning you down, but it might help the flow of the conversation if we all understood what you personally think is the most compelling argument on the ultimate issues. Can you give that in condensed form? 😊

Post by "Matt" of March 25, 2019 at 5:00 PM

RE: Cassius

Sure!

My opinion is that I fundamentally agree with many of the observations of the natural world and that the human senses are fundamental to how we interpret reality. I think he is spot on on with the idea that what we see and sense “is what is” and we cannot base our life on unfounded superstition or abstractions.

I believe in friendship and the mutual benefit of living in philosophical harmony as essential to human progress and harmony.

I believe pleasure is fundamentally good and not an evil to be denied.

My only issue, and it was the issue that caused me to no longer refer to myself as an Epicurean was the theology issue. It was a dealbreaker. I think that aspect aside, which we discuss quite regularly, we agree on more ideas than not.

Post by “Cassius” of March 25, 2019 at 5:04 PM

[Quote from Matthaueus](#)

My only issue, and it was the issue that caused me to no longer refer to myself as an Epicurean was the theology issue. It was a dealbreaker. I think that aspect aside, which we discuss quite regularly, we agree on more ideas than not.

Just to be sure I understand, so you reject Epicurus' view as being insufficient/illogical/whatever, but not because you are certain of your own competitive view, but because you just think his was insufficient - full stop? Or do you believe there was a particular alternative he should have embraced?

Post by “Matt” of March 25, 2019 at 5:07 PM

Oscar,

I respect your opinions and perspective, I absolutely do. And I am very appreciative of the discourse we have here!

As always, I am up to discuss this topic literally until the sun burns out. ?

So anytime, you or anyone has literature, thoughts or new ideas please contact me. I take this very seriously as you can probably tell! Lol

Peace and safety to you.

Post by “Matt” of March 25, 2019 at 5:14 PM

Cassius,

My position is that Epicurus should not have posited his own position on the gods, in the specific way he did.

Whether he believed in them or not, he boxed himself in. To the point he was either fabricating this whole theology or he had some sort of divine revelation. Because in my opinion the formula is far too specific.

My personal belief is that from a philosophical perspective, Divinity if it exists, is ineffable. Literally without a specific object to subject revelation, no knowledge can ever be attained on the subject.

Post by “Cassius” of March 25, 2019 at 5:22 PM

Ok that helps! Thanks!

Post by “Cassius” of March 25, 2019 at 6:42 PM

[Matt](#) in answering that question the most specific discussion of which I am aware in Velleius in Cicero's On the Nature of the Gods:

<http://www.epicurus.net/en/deorum.html>

Post by “Matt” of March 25, 2019 at 7:15 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/737-epicureans-and-the-ancient-greek-gods-imagery-of-gods-gods-among-men/>

Agreed Cassius, that is the most comprehensive description.

The some parts of PD's, VS's and the a few lines of the Letter to Menoecus also contain E's statements on the subject.

Post by "Cassius" of March 25, 2019 at 7:27 PM

[Quote from Oscar](#)

I know this is asking a lot, post the specific attributes and sensations that Epicurus gives to his God(s)?

It would be interesting to try to address this specifically, although it is dangerous to tease too much out of isolated passages, single words, translations, etc.

1. Blessed
2. Immortal

We have then a preconception of such a nature that we believe the gods to be blessed and immortal. For nature, which bestowed upon us an idea of the gods themselves, also engraved on our minds the belief that they are eternal and blessed.

3. Human shape
4. Not corporeal, but resembling a bodily substance
5. Not containing blood, but the semblance of blood

"For the divine form we have the hints of nature supplemented by the teachings of reason. From nature all men of all races derive the notion of gods as having human shape and none other; for in what other shape do they ever appear to anyone, awake or asleep? But not to make primary concepts the sole test of all things, reason itself delivers the pronouncement. For it seems appropriate that a being who is the most exalted, whether by reason of his happiness or of his eternity, should also be the most beautiful; but what disposition of the limbs, what cast of features, what shape or outline can be more beautiful than the human form? You Stoics at least, Lucilius, (for my friend Cotta says one thing at one time and another at another) are wont to portray the skill of the divine creator by enlarging on beauty as well as the utility of design displayed in all parts of the human figure. But if the human figure surpasses the form of all other living beings, and god is a living being, god must possess the shape which is the most

beautiful of all; and since it is agreed that the gods are supremely happy, and no one can be happy without virtue, and virtue cannot exist without reason, and reason is only found in the human shape, it follows that the gods possess the form of man. Yet their form is not corporeal, but only resembles bodily substance; it does not contain blood, but the semblance of blood.

Not part of description but of our perception of them

6. "...an endless train of precisely similar images arises from the innumerable atoms and streams towards the gods,"

7. In number, at least as many gods as there are humans:

From this principle it follows that if the whole number of mortals be so many, there must exist no less a number of immortals, and if the causes of destruction are beyond count, the causes of conservation also are bound to be infinite

8. How they spend their time:

... how they pass their days. The answer is, their life is the happiest conceivable, and the one most bountifully furnished with all good things. God is entirely inactive and free from all ties of occupation; he toils not neither does he labor, but he takes delight in his own wisdom and virtue, and knows with absolute certainty that he will always enjoy pleasures at once consummate and everlasting.

9. Somewhere it is stated that they speak Greek, or a language like Greek, but I am not sure of the cite for that.

Post by "Hiram" of March 26, 2019 at 10:45 AM

[Quote from Matthaesus](#)

Obviously an allegorical god is not the same thing as a real "atomic" god. The issue is that Epicurus himself posits that the gods are in fact real.

Hola Mateo! While I grant your point, here you touch on something interesting. Allegorical and atomic deities are not mutually contradictory, and in your persistent concern with theology you have abandoned the utility and purpose of religious experience, which is to help us experience [pure, effortless pleasure](#).

When Lucretius says that all of nature opens up in spring FOR Venus, he is clearly not referring to a goddess with a physical body that dwells outside of the galaxies. He is using the religious image to induce pleasure, in-spiration.

Post by “Matt” of March 26, 2019 at 11:28 AM

[Quote from Hiram](#)

“and in your persistent concern with theology you have abandoned the utility and purpose of religious experience”

Hola Hiram!

I agree fullheartedly that my persistence has become tiresome and we’ve discussed this subject *ad nauseam*. My purpose for the persistence was only to be “on the record” so to speak, since as we all know it’s easy to be drowned out or lost in the shuffle in online discussions. And as you know I am attempting to diminish my online presence as much as possible and will probably be online significantly less in the future. Cyber communication is often transient and ephemeral.

But I wanted to do due diligence for a subject which I felt was very important. So important that it changed my perspective of the philosophy itself. But I think I have made my position well documented here. I know I’m exhausted from it. ?

Peace to you.

Post by “Matt” of March 26, 2019 at 12:11 PM

Good luck with your interview Oscar!

Post by “Clive” of March 27, 2019 at 6:47 AM

For me the most important thing about Epicurus' and the gods is that he said there is no need to be afraid of them. Whether he contradicted himself, or not, I can't decide. We know so little about the actual life of Epicurus. He was chased out of Mytilene (Lesbos), apparently in some danger to himself. I don't know the exact reasons for that. I don't know whether anyone else does. But it indicates to me that he probably did have to be a bit careful about what he said, especially given that his philosophy is about avoidance of pain. Whilst I don't know whether Epicurus said things he didn't really believe, I do have every sympathy with 'heretics' who recant when threatened with mob violence or state violence. (Botticelli, who painted the 'Birth of Venus', which is posted in this thread did the same).

From what we know about it, Epicurus' description of the gods does seem to me to be consistent with his statement that "the gods exist" and the idea that everything consists of atoms and void.

I have to go to Dorset, tomorrow. While I am there I won't have easy access to the internet. I'll pick up the threads again when I get back home, in a couple of weeks time.

Post by “Clive” of March 27, 2019 at 5:10 PM

Also, I think I read somewhere that Epicurus also said that dreams are made of atoms, didn't he? (or did I imagine that, or dream it?). So the gods were made of the same stuff as dreams?

We still don't really fully understand dreams, in terms of neurobiology (at least, I don't). Some of us now probably think that dreams, thought, feelings, emotions, etc, are holistic properties of the functioning of the brain, probably connected with processes dealing with the sorting of memories and emotions. There can also be a psychological (eg Jungian) interpretation of dreams etc, much of which seems to me to be quite astute (although Jung was open to everything, including, at times, the supernatural)

I personally tend to believe in the most firmly established principles of modern science (which is not necessarily the same as believing anything that any scientist says is true). So, I don't believe in anything that seems to me to be supernatural (although I do also see the need for numinous art). But we can't expect the ancient Greeks to have known about 'science' as we know it. Or to have known what is 'supernatural' and what is not. They lived in a pre-scientific world. I find it quite remarkable that Epicurus was able to achieve the freedom of thought to figure out that the gods have no interest in human affairs so there is no need to be afraid of them. (He could also have said 'assuming they exist' but he didn't say that, so he apparently assumed they did exist and were composed of 'atoms' - like dreams).

I don't need to think that any of the great thinkers of the past were right about everything, in order to be impressed by the things that they were right about.

Likewise, Epicurus spoke about the 'swerve'. That 'atoms' fall down with a 'swerve', because he recognised the need for indeterminacy. We now know that is not very scientifically accurate. But we can't expect Epicurus to have been able to deduce Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. The mere fact that Epicurus saw the need to introduce indeterminacy into the 'atomic' model seems quite remarkable to me.

If we want anything better, we will have to take the best of what we have learned from the thinkers of the past, whilst recognising their mistakes, and try to figure it out for ourselves.

Post by “Cassius” of March 27, 2019 at 6:47 PM

As to dreams, I think Clive you're talking more in the area of "images" (which would also be made of atoms, however). The extended discussion of that is in Lucretius Book IV, and I gather that the Epicureans thought it was essential to discuss images not only as they relate to dreams, but because the movement of atoms back and forth through our eyes, ears, nose, touch, etc is how the senses work.