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The Gods of Philodemus

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This paper represents an aspect of my current work on the theology of the Epicureans, where I am interested in working out exactly what the Epicureans believed in. Here, I am focusing on Philodemus' conception of the gods, and considering how faithful to Epicurus he was in this area.

Nichols (1976, 154) concludes that 'we accordingly accept the traditional view...that Lucretius was an atheist.' Sedley (1998, 102) refers to Lucretius as a fundamentalist - that, whereas other Epicurean philosophers have developed Epicurus' philosophy in the two hundred years since his death, Lucretius remains true to Epicurus. In this way, the philosophy of Lucretius would seem to be that of Epicurus.

Even so, whether one were to read Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* or even the fragments of Epicurus himself, charges of atheism appear to me to be without foundation. Of course, the nature of atheism itself requires definition.

In *The Apology*, Socrates considers the charge he faces: that he is guilty of corrupting the minds of young; that he believes in deities of his own invention instead of the gods recognised by the state;¹ and that he has taught the young to believe in these new deities. Socrates concludes from this that he is not a complete atheist, as he does believe in gods, but that he just cannot believe in supernatural beings that are bastard children of the gods by nymphs or other monsters.²

However, in *Laws*, Plato considers piety and impiety. On the one hand, the pious person, who believes in gods, has never committed an impious deed voluntarily. The impious person, though, is categorised in one of three ways: he who does not believe in gods; he who, though believing in gods, thinks that they have no care for

¹ 22e-24a.

² 24b-27a.

men; and he who, though believing in gods, believes that they are easily won over and bribed by offerings and prayers.³ These beliefs come from poets, orators, seers and priests.⁴ Plato equally dismisses the views of *naturalists*, who deny the divinity of things.⁵

Obbink (1989, 188-90) considers the very definition of atheism. He admits that it is a difficult issue, as “atheism in the ancient world was never a well-defined or ideologically fixed position. But deviation from a proper attitude towards gods...could result in charges of impiety or in the suspicion of atheism.”

Obbink concludes that “the charge of atheism could be incurred for something less than an outright denial of the existence of the gods.”

It has been suggested that the theism of the Epicureans was so far-removed from conventional belief in the Homeric and Hesiodic pantheon of traditional Olympian gods that it constituted atheism. For Santayana (1935, 62) writes that

it is usual and, in one sense, legitimate to speak of the Epicureans as atheists, since they denied providence and any government of God in the world.

Lucretius and Epicurus are not explicit in their descriptions or explanations of gods, which presents a difficulty. However they do profess to believe in gods. For instance Epicurus, in his letter to Menoeceus, admits that ‘gods there are.’⁶

This is perhaps where Philodemus may be helpful. Bailey (1928, 444) points out that

it is, however, necessary to be cautious, for there is reason to believe that Philodemus - from whom Cicero probably derived his information- had gone beyond the tradition of Epicurus himself and worked out the notion of the constitution of gods on his own lines.

³ 10.885bff.

⁴ 10.885dff.

⁵ 10.886bff.

⁶ ‘θεοὶ μὲν γὰρ εἰσὶν’ (Epicurus, *Ad Men.* 123-4).

But Rist (1972, 163) writes that ‘our other evidence about Epicureanism, in particular that of Cicero, Philodemus and Epicurus himself, gives a more complete picture,’ however, ‘it might be imagined that this evidence has exaggerated the importance of the gods for Epicurus himself.’

The notion that we draw from both Epicurus and Lucretius is that the gods that there are, dwell removed from human affairs, heedless of mortals,⁷ in the ‘spaces between worlds’, the *μετακοσμίαι* as Epicurus himself puts it,⁸ or *intermundia* as Cicero translates this.⁹ They live in peace, removed from all pain,¹⁰ paradigms, it would seem, of a true Epicurean’s life. Indeed Stallings (2007, ix) writes that ‘some think that he (Epicurus) believed them (gods) to exist merely as concepts,’ and Strodach (1963, 51) also writes that

the gods perform. This function is ethical; they are paragons of the good life, exemplifying in their own existence the highest Epicurean ideals.

As Merlan (1960, 50) poses,

is it not entirely possible that they [Epicureans] were ready to invoke Zeus and all the other divinities of popular religion, not to ensure their benevolence but just to express their admiration for these perfect beings?

But, are these gods more than paradigms or paragons, and if so, what are they?

A natural, initial question perhaps ought to be from where the Epicureans took their notion of the divine from, and what evidence they gave for this concept. The answer to this is entirely tied up with the word *προλήψις*.

The Epicurean spokesman in Cicero’s *De Natura Deorum*, Velleius, explains the term as follows, that ‘Epicurus uses the word *prolepsis* [transliterated] for these notions, that is, a sort of preconceived mental picture of a thing,¹¹ and so

⁷ Dn 1.44-9.

⁸ *Ad Pyth.* 88-9.

⁹ Dnd 1.18.

¹⁰ Dn 1.44-9.

¹¹ ‘quam appellat *προλήψιν* Epicurus, id est anteceptam animo rei quandam informationem’ (Cicero, Dnd 1.16).

gods exist, because nature herself has imprinted a conception of them on the minds of all mankind. For what nation or what tribe of men is there which possesses untaught some 'preconception' of the gods?¹²

The term *preconception*¹³ itself is difficult, as this is an opinion or idea formed beforehand.¹⁴ But what is this idea formed *before*? Epicurus must mean that the *mental picture* of a god is received in advance of the god itself; that the gods are only known to exist as this *mental picture* was *imprinted* on the mind in advance of the knowledge of their existence; and that this *imprint* was not taught, but was received in advance of any teaching. It is interesting that Lucretius uses the term *notitia* or *notities*,¹⁵ which translates *a being known, an idea, conception* or *notion*,¹⁶ without a prefix denoting *beforehand*, perhaps to avoid any such confusion. For this is not something reasoned, but something acquired initially and innately, even though the faculty of reasoning, the mind, acquires it.

This *προλήψις* is the only evidence that the Epicureans assert for proof of the existence of the gods, that although people might grow up distinctly and apart, all acquire this same *preconception*. This can be traced directly back to Epicurus himself, in his letter to Menoeceus,¹⁷ where he writes that 'the common idea of a god is engraved on men's minds,' and that gods 'there are, since knowledge of them is by clear vision...derived from sensation.'¹⁸ Lucretius follows this, writing that "men used to see with waking mind, and still more in sleep, gods."¹⁹

How exactly is this *preconception* imparted onto humans? At this juncture an appreciation of Epicurean physics and their explanation of vision would be useful. The Epicureans believed that *things* come about, are created, by the collision and thus compounding of atoms. Atoms are the smallest possible units of matter in

¹² 'esse deos, quod in omnium animis eorum notionem impressisset ipsa natura. Quae est enim gens aut quod genus hominum, quod non habeat sine doctrina anticipationem quandam deorum?' (Cicero, Dnd 1.16).

¹³ Masson 1907: 264 translates *προλήψις* as *prenotion*.

¹⁴ Foreman, 1966, 380.

¹⁵ Dn 2.745; 4.476; 479; 5.124; 182; 1047.

¹⁶ Lewis 1996; 542.

¹⁷ Epicurus, *Ad Men.* 123-4.

¹⁸ 'ἐναργῆς γὰρ αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ γνῶσις' (Epicurus, *Ad Men.* 123-4).

¹⁹ 'divom mortalia saecla

egregias animo facies vigilante videbant,
et magis in somnis' (Dn 5.169-71).

Epicureanism, refuting Anaxagorean *homoeomeria* (of matter being infinitely small).²⁰ Such atoms, even when compounded, are in continual motion, and so the compounds themselves are continually losing atoms, whilst also replenishing themselves at the same time.²¹ The atoms on the outside of the compound are of course most liable to be lost, through continual collisions from without, and it is these atoms, or rather thin films of these atoms, that escape and then come to collide with the sensitive eye, and thus allow sight.²²

However, there are various *types* of atom, or rather, atoms of varying size and shape, within limits.²³ The atoms that come to make up mind and soul are said to be the slightest, lightest and swiftest of atoms, and so it is that these are undetectable to the eye, but can be detected by that most sensitive organ, the mind itself.²⁴ Diogenes Laertius records Epicurus as writing ‘that the gods are perceived by reason alone,’²⁵ and Aetius that ‘gods can be contemplated by reason because of the fineness of the nature of their images.’²⁶ So the gods can be apprehended only by the mind, due to the delicacy of their image. Lucretius also writes

that the nature of the gods, being thin and far removed from our senses, is hardly seen by the mind; and since the preconception eludes the touch of the hands, it cannot possibly touch anything that we can touch; for something cannot touch which cannot be touched itself...being thin in accord with the gods’ bodies.²⁷

Now the immediate argument is that, if one can only, as it were, *consider* the gods, then do they really exist at all, or are they merely figments of one’s imagination? Are they indeed merely Strodach’s paradigms or paragons, of how one really ought to live their life? Indeed Cicero’s Cotta mocks the idea of Epicureans ‘worshipping

²⁰ Drn 1.830ff.

²¹ Drn 2. 62-111.

²² Drn 4.26ff.

²³ Drn 2.478-80.

²⁴ Drn 3. 177-88.

²⁵ 1925, 663-5.

²⁶ In Inwood, Gerson and Hutchinson 1994: 96, Text 106: Aetius 1.7.34 = Dox.Gr. p.306 (355 U).

²⁷ ‘tenvis enim natura deum longeque remota
sensibus ab nostris animi vix mente videtur;
quae quoniam manuum tactum suffugit et ictum,
tactile nil nobis quod sit contingere debet;
tangere enim non quit quod tangi non licet ipsum...
tenues de corpore eorum’ (Drn 5.148-154); see Epicurus, *Ad Men.* 123-4; *quae* is read as referring to *preconception*, which is described in the previous lines, though without a specific term.

images'²⁸ and 'empty imaginations,'²⁹ or, at best, 'shadow-deities.'³⁰ Recently Sedley (1998, 66) has suggested that these gods are merely *thought-constructs*, and do not really exist as living beings, that are alive in the universe.

The scholarship is divided on this issue, as to whether these gods really existed or not. On the one hand, Nichols concludes that gods cannot exist. Considering Epicurean physics, he writes (1976, 113) that

this world, being mortal, cannot have resisted the forces of infinite time; it must therefore have come into being. This argument against the world's eternity is equally valid against the eternity of anything (any compound of atoms), including the gods...we conclude that...immortal blessed gods cannot exist.

And, in terms of the evidence put forward by the Epicureans for the existence of the gods, *προλήψις*, Nichols is entirely unconvinced. He writes (150-5) that

we shall argue that it is by no means sufficient to prove that gods exist...from this analysis of the evidence for the gods' existence, we conclude that it is obviously insufficient...since this evidence, then, is insufficient, we conclude that according to Lucretius gods do not exist.³¹

And more generally, Nichols (25) writes that the *De Rerum Natura* 'argues against customary religious beliefs and deprives our world and everything in it of any divine attributes.'

On the other hand, Masson (1907, 264) writes that there is, however, 'unquestionable evidence that both Epicurus and Lucretius did firmly believe in the existence of these deities, strange as they are;' that Epicurus holds that 'the "general

²⁸ 'simulacra quae venerantes' (Cicero, Dnd 1.75).

²⁹ 'motum inanem' (Cicero, Dnd 1.103).

³⁰ 'adumbratorum deorum' (Cicero, Dnd 1.73).

³¹ Though Nichols goes on to write that he 'can believe that Epicureans, if pressed in discussion and unwilling to admit they were atheists, might have argued along Bailey's lines [that the gods do exist]; [but] I cannot believe that this was Lucretius' own opinion.' He also writes (53) that 'Bailey (on Dn 2.625) points out that Lucretius seems to show a more vehement anti-theological aim than Epicurus.' I argued above that I do not think that Lucretius differs from Epicurus in this way. In fact, by including this *caveat*, of a hypothetical situation when Epicureans are pressed, Nichols counters his own argument.

notion"³² in the minds of all men is sufficient proof of the eternity and blessedness of the gods;' and that 'to Epicurus the inflow of the divine images into our mind is proof positive that gods exist.'

How do I respond to this conflicting scholarship? First of all, one must recall Epicurus' own words, that 'gods there are.'³³ It may then be suggested that gods do exist, but only as images, like Democritean gods.³⁴ One must return to Epicurean physics again. Images are merely the exterior films being shed from compounds. They do not come about independently. So an image must have originated in a solid body.³⁵ Therefore, such images cannot be the gods themselves, only their form, and so, in this way, the existence of these images would prove the existence of gods.

It is at this point then that I initially call upon Philodemus for assistance. In his *De Pietate*, Philodemus writes that the 'images were true...therefore they simply and necessarily supposed that he left unquestioned the existence of blessed and eternal beings.'³⁶ This is Philodemus on *προλήψις*, without using the term, and recalling Epicurus, that 'gods there are.'³⁷ Philodemus' point is that Epicurus took it for granted that the senses were trustworthy, and so, if the senses perceived gods, then the gods were real, and therefore it was pointless arguing that they existed, because they clearly did, and so Epicurus did not spend much time on this.

So humans have no choice but to accept their senses. And Philodemus cites Epicurus himself, who wrote that early humans held that

the object of thought was a thing perceived, being itself relative to a solid body...this rational perception is grasped by corporeal sensation, which the early humans knew was derived from a physical entity.³⁸

³² Here Masson refers to *προλήψις* by *general notion*, which perhaps avoids the confusion demonstrated previously.

³³ 'θεοὶ μὲν γὰρ εἰσὶν' (Epicurus, *Ad Men.* 123-4).

³⁴ Waterfield 2009: 186-7 T26 (DK 68A74; T 172C; Cicero, *Dnd* 1.43 Plasberg).

³⁵ *Dnd* 4.26ff.

³⁶ 'οἰσθ' ὑπα[ρχ...]των [... ...] κατ' ἀλή[θει]α[ν...] ἀπεφα[ιν...] ὑποζωμ[...] ὅλης αὐτ[...]να πραγμα[...] τὰς φαντασ[ίας ἀλήθεις εἶναι...][ὑ]πελάμβαν[ον τοίνυν] ἀπλῶς καὶ ἀν[αγκασ]τῶς ζῶια μ[ακάρια] καὶ διαίωνια [κατα]λείπειν' (Obbink 1996: 153) [24, 670ff].

³⁷ 'θεοὶ μὲν γὰρ εἰσὶν' (Epicurus, *Ad Men.* 123-4).

³⁸ 'οἰσθ[...]πα[...]ς ν[...]των των [...]νων μηδ[...]σι παρετι[...]μενον τὸ μὴ [...]τον εἶναι νοε[π]δὸν αἰσ[θ]θανόμενον τ'εἰς τὸ στερέμ[...]ημα ἔχειν αὐτ[...] δ[ια]νοουμένους τὴν παραισθήσει

Again, this is Philodemus on *προλήψεις*. On the one hand, we can extract from this that the image itself is something tangible, and corporeal, but perhaps more than this that the image itself originated in something tangible and corporeal, a god, in the same way as I argued above.

What then are these images? Lucretius writes that the images of gods are ‘conspicuous in beauty and of marvellous bodily stature.’³⁹ Sextus Empiricus records Epicurus as saying that since ‘large anthropomorphic images strike the mind while they sleep, they supposed that some such anthropomorphic gods also existed in reality.’⁴⁰ And Cicero’s Velleius argues that ‘from nature all men of all races derive the notion of gods as having human shape and none other.’⁴¹

Why, as Cotta asks, would inactive gods need limbs?⁴² Sextus Empiricus makes a similar point, that

if [the divine] exists, it is either vocal or non-vocal. Well, to say that god is non-vocal is completely absurd and in conflict with the common conceptions. But if [the divine] is vocal, then it uses its voice and has speech organs, like lungs, a windpipe, tongue and mouth.⁴³

One of the reasons is, I think, that if gods are superior to humans, then they must be so in all ways. They must at the very least, perhaps, be furnished with all that a human is. If they decide to use these or rather to live in peace and at rest is then quite another matter.

This reminds me of Lucretius, considering the evolution of humans, writing

do not suppose that the clear light of the eyes was made in order that we might be able to see before us.⁴⁴

σάρκ[ι]νη περιληπτὴν αἴσ[θη]σιν, ἣν καὶ ἀπ[ὸ] φύ[σε]ως ἔγ[νω]σαν εἰσ[τα]πέμπεσθαι’ (Obbink 1996: 135) [15, 410ff].

³⁹ Drn 5.1169-71.

⁴⁰ In Inwood, Gerson and Hutchinson 1994: 96, Text 105: Sextus M 9.25 (353 U).

⁴¹ ‘nam a natura habemus omnes omnium speciem nullam aliam nisi humanam deorum’ (Cicero, Dnd 1.49).

⁴² Cicero, Dnd 1.89.

⁴³ In Inwood, Gerson & Hutchinson 1994: np, Text 107: Sextus M 9.178 (357 U).

⁴⁴ Drn 4.823ff.

This could equally apply to limbs and speech organs. Lucretius is suggesting that the use we have of such is secondary- they existed before a use was acquired. And so a god may have a mouth and lungs, for instance, but not be inclined to speak.

Considering the atomic nature of the gods, we again need to remind ourselves about the Epicurean cosmos, and Epicurean physics. Lucretius tells us that everything is either atom or void, and that there is no third nature.⁴⁵ If there are gods in the Epicurean system, which I have demonstrated there are, then these must also be atomic.

Of course the word *atom*, *ἄτομος*, means *indivisible*.⁴⁶ In such a way they are permanent and indestructible. However, when atoms collide and cohere to form compounds, such compounds are not permanent and indestructible. Therefore, if a god is a compound of such atoms, the god too is not permanent and indestructible. Unless it is that the god is one atom. This is not possible. Atoms may be of variable size and shape, but they do exist within limits, the *foedera naturae*. It is not possible for an atom, then, to exist at a size above the level of sense-perception, say, the size of a human.⁴⁷ So there is an immediate and sizeable problem. The gods are atomic, but atomic compounds are destructible. Of course, one must question the nature of divinity, but we find Epicurus himself writing that the gods are *immortal*.⁴⁸ So, ostensibly, we have gods that *are* immortal, but constructed of things (compounds) that are not. This paradox is best summed up by Sextus Empiricus, writing

according to some, Epicurus in his popular exposition allows the existence of god, but in expounding the physical nature of things he does not allow it.⁴⁹

Again, we must revisit Philodemus for assistance. Relatively early in what we have of the *De Pietate*, Philodemus reveals a typical charge that Epicurus' gods cannot be atomic, writing that

⁴⁵ Dn 1.430-2.

⁴⁶ Liddell & Scott 1997: 113.

⁴⁷ Dn 2.478-80.

⁴⁸ Epicurus, *Ad Men.* 123-4.

⁴⁹ 'καὶ Ἐπίκουρος δὲ κατ' ἐνίου ὡς μὲν πρὸς τοὺς πολλοὺς ἀπολείπει θεόν, ὡς δὲ πρὸς τὴν φύσιν τῶν πραγμάτων οὐδαμῶς' (Sextus Empiricus, *Adv.math.* 9. 58, in Obbink 1996: 16).

the claim is that Epicurus does not allow for the gods among bodies in saying 'of bodies, some are compounds, and others those of which compounds are formed (atoms)'; for he considers the gods to be neither simple entities nor compounds, since those (gods) are completely eternal, while these (all compounds) are destructible. So in no way can gods have bodies, since they are indestructible.⁵⁰

How though does Philodemus solve the paradox, of having atomic but immortal gods? He continues, that

its constitution out of things similar would obviously be a unified entity. For it is possible for beings constituted out of similarity for ever to have perfect happiness, since unified entities can be formed no less out of identical than out of similar elements and both kinds of entity are recognised by Epicurus as being exactly the same things, for example in his book *On Holiness*.⁵¹

Philodemus seems to be suggesting that the atomic constitution of the gods is of matter that is *similar* (ὁμοιος), brought together as a *unified entity* (ἐνότης). What Philodemus is suggesting is the only viable alternative, that the gods are compounds of the *same* (αὐτόι) atoms. This presents a problem, as we are told by Lucretius that, within the *foedera naturae*, nothing can consist of only one *type* of atom.⁵² Yet, quoting Cicero's Velleius,⁵³ that *god is a living being*, we recall Lucretius' exposition in *De Rerum Natura* that a living thing is that composed of both body and soul. And we find in Philodemus' *De Signis* the following, that a god is not 'generated and yet is composed of soul and body; with this he will be living and deathless'.⁵⁴

This again denies any issue in having atomic *but* immortal gods. Therefore the gods must be composed of one type of body-atom, and one type of soul-atom, and so the dilemma that Lucretius would have presented is evaded. Even the body-atoms must be of an extremely tenuous nature, like the soul-atoms, so as to evade all sensation

⁵⁰ 'εαν...δια...θεω[ρ...] νοδαλ[...τ]ὸ λέ[γ]ειν ὡς ο[ὐδ'] ἐν τοῖς σώμασιν [κα] τα[λ]ε[ί]πει τοὺς θεοὺς, "τῶν ζ[ω]μάτων" [λέγω]ν "τὰ μὲν ε[ί]ναι ζ[υ]γκρίσεις, τὰ δ' ἐξ ὧν αἱ συγκρίσεις πεπὸνται" μήτε γὰρ ἀτόμους νομίζουσιν το[ὺς] θεοὺς μήτε ζ[υ]γκρίσεις,] ἐπειδήπερ [οὔτοι μὲν] δ[ι]αιώ[ν]ιοι τελέως, αἱ δὲ πᾶσαι φ[θ]αρταί] μηδὲν [δὲ σώμ]ῃ ἔχουσιν τοὺς θεοὺς ἀφθάρ]τους [δόν]τας' (Obbink 1996: 109) [2, 30ff].

⁵¹ 'το, κα[...] στοιχ[ε]ῖσιν ὁμοίω[ν] οὐσα] φαίνο[ι]τ' ἄ[ν] ἐνότης: δύναται γὰρ ἐκ τῆς ὁμοιότητος ὑπάρχουσι διαιώνιον ἔχειν τὴν τελείαν εὐδαιμονίαν, ἐπειδήπερ οὐχ ἦπτον ἐκ τῶν αὐτῶν ἢ τῶν ὁμοίων στοιχείων ἐνότητες ὑποτελεῖσθαι δύνανται καὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἐπιούρου καταλείπονται καθάπερ ἐν τῷ Περὶ ὁσιότητος αὐτότατα' (Obbink 1996: 131) [13, 340ff].

⁵² Dn 2.581-588.

⁵³ 'deus autem animans est' (Cicero, *Dnd* 1.49).

⁵⁴ 'μη γεννάσθαι συνεσ[τηκέν]α δ' ἐκ ψυχῆς καὶ σώμα[τος] καὶ ἔσ[τ]αι ζῶιον σὺν τούτῳ [καὶ ἀθ]ά[νατον]' (De Lacy 1941: 114) [XXII].

apart from the mind, but varying sizes and shapes of atoms are allowed, as I have said, in Epicurean physics. So it seems to be that compounds of *similar* atoms are more of a *unity* than other atoms, and are thus less destructible. This reminds me of Lucretius' difficult exposition on the *parts* of an atom, that the atom, however small, can be understood to consist of *parts*, but that these *parts* are only *parts* in term of thought, and that they cannot be separated one from the other in reality.⁵⁵ Philodemus cites Metrodorus, a pupil of Epicurus, who writes that

he thinks a compound, made up of things that do not exist as numerically distinct, is not only indestructible, but also is divine.⁵⁶

Again, here is a denial of any issue of having atomic *but* immortal gods.

It may then be that, although *similar* atoms are compounded, they exist in such a unity that the loss and replenishment of atoms, which is rife in the Epicurean universe, is evaded, and this renders the gods immortal. Bailey (1928, 453-4) thinks that this union of similars does not admit alien or fatal elements, and that this is why it remains stable. He cites Schomann as suggesting that the atoms of the gods adhere in a strong permanent combination because they are the same shape, and so are compatible. But an ensuing passage seems to provide a solution even in the event of bodily loss:

I said before that he [Epicurus] called this constitution, and the natures of the images which take on a similar constitution, or even one which may have become numerically a unity as a result of the transcendence of the intervening gaps, sometimes that consisting of the same elements, and sometimes that constituted out of things that are similar and that do not disturb the order of the images, so that the thing at some time disturbed no longer appears unstable.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Dn 2.599-614.

⁵⁶ 'καὶ ὁ Μηττόδωρος δὲ τὴν τοιαύτην ποιεῖται] διαστολήν [ἐν τῷ] Περι μετα [βολῆς,] καὶ φησι νο[εῖν σύγκρισιν τῶν [μὴ κατ' ἀριθμὸν οὐ μόν[ον ἀφ]θαρτον, ἀλλὰ [καὶ θεῖ]αν' (Obbink 1996: 113) [4, 90ff].

⁵⁷ 'προσδία [...εἶπο]ν δ' ἐγὼ [πρὶν ἤδη τῆ]σδε τὴν [σύ]σ[τασιν] καὶ τὰ[ς] φύ[σεις] αὐ[τὸν] τῶν [εἰ]δῶ[λων] ὁμοίαν λαμβανόντων ἢ ἀριθμὸν [σύγκ]ρισιν ὅτε μὲν [τὴν τῶν] αὐτῶν καλεῖται, [ὅτε δὲ] τὴν ἐκ τῶν [ὁμοίων,] καὶ τὴν ἐκείνων τῶν οὐ [ταραπτόν]των, ὡσ[τε τὸ] πο[τὲ] τα[ραχθὲν] [ἄ]λον μηκέτ' ἄσταθὲ[ς] προπίπτειν. ἀλλ[λ]ων [...] καὶ [...] μὴ [...] αν κατα [...] καὶ τῶν [...] των κρίσεων [...] ἀφθαρτον' (Obbink 1996: 129) [12, 320ff].

The close connection between an object and its image here is important. The image was formerly a part of the god, so in essence they, the object and image, were one and the same entity. Also important is the distinction between *same* (αὐτός) and *similar* (ὅμοιος): the object or its image is all made up of the *same* atoms. If any are lost, they are immediately replenished by *similar* atoms. These are of the same type, but are given a slightly different term so as to allow distinction between those atoms that made up the object, and those that are replenishing it. In this way then, loss of atoms is completely nullified, and again the gods are rendered immortal. There would need to be an infinite amount of such atoms to allow this, but this too is allowed in Epicurean physics.⁵⁸

From the other ancient sources, we learn of Epicurean physics; specifically of their theory of vision and then of *προλήψις*, the evidence for the existence of the gods; the nature of these *images*; what the gods are like, in terms of where they live and what they do, or rather do not, do, and the issues that these raise; and also what they are, atomic and immortal.

Philodemus emphasises the evidence of *προλήψις*; he grapples with the difficult physics and offers solutions to the dilemma of having atomic *but* immortal gods, in terms of atomic composition and arrangement; and he also suggests that these gods possess souls. In sum, he provides deeper argumentation and proof for the existence of gods, and it is in this way that he is useful.

In conclusion then, what is the picture of the Epicurean gods that Philodemus helps us to acquire? That ‘gods there are’, living removed and apart, in the spaces between worlds, places composed similarly to those that inhabit them. These are anthropomorphic gods, which are atomic and corporeal; yet they are constructed of only one type of soul-atom and one type of body-atom, and given this material, its structure and its unity, they are imperishable and immortal. In any event there would be a ready supply of like matter to replenish lost matter; and indeed it is this lost matter, which must occur infrequently and on a relatively small scale, that humans are able to perceive through thought. These images, though, are not deities in their

⁵⁸ Dn 1.951-1051.

own right; they possess all of the faculties that humans possess, though whether they would utilise them is questionable, living at peace.

But how far is Philodemus faithful to original Epicureanism? It is true that Philodemus has developed the original, but he has done so in a logical fashion and in a manner that teases out the subtleties and elucidates the ambiguities of the original. In this paper then, I hope to have demonstrated that what Philodemus sets out is not in conflict with earlier material, but is an expansion on it, and so he contributes to our understanding of the Epicurean stance on the divine.

Reflecting upon the stances of Nichols and Masson, I lean towards the latter. There is evidence for the existence of gods, and evidence that does not contradict Epicurean physics, but that sits within it. However peculiar these gods are, they still belong to the Epicurean universe.

Therefore, by considering the ancient sources, especially the more recent discoveries from Herculaneum, and bringing them together, and by considering Epicurean theism alongside Epicurean physics, I have been able to create a more complete picture, demonstrating that the Epicureans were not atheists in the strictest sense of the word, and that they did believe in gods. And I have demonstrated what the nature of these gods was, albeit one which was far-removed from any commonly-held conception.

Abbreviations

Ad Pyth.- *Ad Pythocles*

Ad Men.- *Ad Menoeceus*

Drn- *De Rerum Natura*

Dnd- *De Natura Deorum*

Dox.Gr- *Doxographi Graeci*

U- Usener

DK- Diels-Kranz

Sextus M- Sextus Empiricus

Adv.math- *Adversus mathematicos*

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