

Princeton/Stanford Working Papers in Classics

SAVING THE APPEARANCES
The Phenomenology of Epiphany in Atomist Theology

Version 1.0

May 2006

Jacob L. Mackey

Princeton University

Abstract: In this paper I propose an approach to Epicurean theology that avoids the stalemate of "realist" and "idealist" interpretations. I argue that Epicurean theology is more *phenomenological* than metaphysical, its purpose less to ground and justify dogmatic commitment to whatever form of existence the gods may enjoy than to account for a prevalent aspect of ancient religious experience, epiphany, and to assimilate that experience to Epicurean philosophical *therapeia*.

In the process I reconstruct and reassess the equally epiphanic theology of Democritus that forms a source for Epicurus' theological thought. His theology has also been unprofitably construed by modern scholars as a reductive dismissal of the gods as mere psychological effects or manifest fictions. Instead, Democritus was at least as accommodating of the phenomena of religious experience as Epicurus: his own theology is likewise founded on epiphany and he too attempts a therapeutic analysis of its attendant effects.

© Jacob L. Mackey. jmackey@princeton.edu

SAVING THE APPEARANCES
The Phenomenology of Epiphany in Atomist Theology¹

JACOB L MACKEY, Princeton University

* * * * *

It is surely no accident that a paper dealing largely with Epicureanism should have been selected by our conference organizers for preprandial presentation.² After all, Epicureans were known already to the audiences of New Comedy as archetypal cooks, masters of the culinary arts.³ Of course, the New Comedians were full of good fun, and I trust we will not let the fact that the Epicurean doctrine of ἡδονή does not advocate intemperance (*Ep. Men.* 131) interfere with our own appetites. But neither, when we read in Dionysius of Halicarnassus that "those who practice the atheistic philosophies" (a slur surely meant to include Epicureans) "demolish all the epiphanies of the gods...on the grounds that nothing human matters to any of the gods,"⁴ should we let his contention dissuade us from investigating Epicurus' professed theism and the place of epiphany within it.

¹ My main title alludes, first, to the phrase used by Simplicius *et al.* to describe the explanation of celestial phenomena without betrayal of prior metaphysical assumptions, i.e., σφάζειν τὰ φαινόμενα, and second, to Owen Barfield's 1957 *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* (its title already an allusion to Simplicius), which emphasizes the participation of the perceiver in the phenomenon. The reason for these allusions will, I hope, become clear in what follows.

I am grateful to Dirk Obbink for granting me access to his MS of Phld. *De piet.*, part 2 and for helping me, at an early stage, to crystallize my central thesis by suggesting the phrase "phenomenology of epiphany." Any irresponsibility in the deployment of these gifts is my own.

I thank David Armstrong, Holger Essler, Brooke Holmes, Verity Platt and Marcel Widzisz for discussing various drafts of this paper with me. At a late stage of revision for this volume my MS benefitted from the salutary attentions of Bob Kaster, Joshua Katz, Denis Feeney and Will Shearin.

² A shorter version of this paper was scheduled to be read just before the evening meal on the first full day of the *Theoi Epiphaneis* conference, Tuesday, 20 July 2004. I thank Verity Platt for reading it in my absence when a family emergency thwarted my travel plans.

³ See, e.g., Damoxenus' *Suntrophoi* (fr. 2) *ap.* Ath. 60.9ff. (Kaibel).

⁴ Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.68 (translations are my own unless otherwise indicated). The last clause in particular (ὡς οὐδενὶ θεῶν μέλον ἀνθρώπων οὐδενός) reads like a report of Epicurean doctrine (though Plato *Leg.* 10.885b can already refer to those who believe gods exist but "do not care about humans" (οὐ φροντίζειν ἀνθρώπων) (cf. Gabba 1991, 123). If so, Dionysios was clearly unfamiliar with Phld. *De piet.* 9421-57 (Obbink, forthcoming), where it is precisely a philosophical denial of epiphany that comes up for criticism, Phld. complaining because Socrates (at Xen. *Mem.* 4.3.13-14) "says that the shape of god is not

For epiphany forms the very foundation of atomist theology. Unlike the Stoics, who formulated proof after scholastic proof for divine existence—the so-called *e gradibus entium, via eminentiae, via analogiae*, the argument from design, and so forth⁵—Epicurus and, so far as the evidence permits us to assert, his predecessor Democritus were not in the first place concerned to appeal to logical demonstration in order to justify their belief in gods. For this reason the atomist philosophers have seemed to provide unsatisfactory, inconsistent or even unintelligible answers to the traditional question posed to them by ancient doxographer and modern scholar alike, the question εἰ εἰσὶ θεοί, "whether gods exist".⁶ This ontological question, which both Democritus and Epicurus would have answered in the affirmative, entails specifying what sort of existence the gods enjoy; here again critics both ancient and modern have expressed dissatisfaction and disagreement over atomist accounts. Thus Balbus in Cicero's *De natura deorum* faults Democritus and Epicurus for, as he sees it, reducing the gods' ontological status to that of mere *simulacra* and *imagines*.⁷ And in the modern era scholars have been polarized since the nineteenth century between "realists" and "idealists", the former arguing that Epicurus conceived his deities as having real, discrete

seen, but rather his works" ([οὐκ] ὁρᾶσθ[αί] φη|[σιν το]ῦ θεοῦ [τ]ῆν | [μορφὴν] ἀλλὰ τᾶργα (trans. Obbink)).

The godlessness of Epicurean philosophy was something of a *topos* in antiquity, as the existence of a work—Phld. *De piet.* (Obbink 1996 & forthcoming)—largely devoted to demonstrating E(picurus') piety indicates (see Obbink 1989, 188 & 202ff.). For charges of atheism see, e.g., Cotta's remarks at Cic. *De nat. deor.* 1.85 & 123 and Sext. Emp. *Math.* 9.58. Further references in Winiarczyk 1984, 168-70, where, however, Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.68 is omitted.

⁵ See, e.g., Mansfeld 1999, 454 & 457-62.

⁶ See, e.g., Asmis 1984, 317: "Epicurean positive theology...is perhaps the least satisfactory of their doctrines". For the question as to the gods' existence cf., e.g., Sext. Emp. *Math.* 9. 48 (ἀκολούθως δὲ ζητῶμεν καὶ περὶ τοῦ εἰ εἰσὶ θεοί) and Mansfeld 1999, 454-5 ("Epicurus [was] obliged to formulate arguments in support of the existence of the gods"). In fact, the closest thing to a formal proof of existence that we get in Epicureanism is the highly rhetorical proof from *consensio omnium* at Cic. *De nat. deor.* 1.43-44 (on which see Obbink 1992, 193-202).

⁷ Cic. *De nat. deor.* 2.76: *Primum igitur aut negandum est esse deos, quod et Democritus simulacra et Epicurus imagines inducens quodam modo negat.* Cf. the remarks of Velleius at 1.29 & Cotta at 1.75, 1.120 & 1.123.

existence like that of any solid object in the world, the latter protesting that the philosopher's gods did indeed exist, but strictly as ideational constructs, not independent of the human mind.⁸ In this paper, I seek to skirt this ontological morass by contending that we should rather approach the atomist theological program as a *phenomenology of epiphany*, an inquiry into the divine, not as it is in itself, *quoad se*, but *quoad nos*, as it is perceived or experienced—classically, through epiphany. Atomist thought about the gods may thus be viewed as only *secondarily* an inquiry into the metaphysics of the divine nature; *primarily*, I submit, Epicurus and Democritus offered their theological programs in an attempt to accommodate an ineradicable aspect of contemporary religious experience within their own systems of philosophical *therapeia*. This is not to deny that these atomists are doing metaphysical work in support of their theological views; but, as will emerge, the metaphysical aspects of their theological thought—uncertain as these aspects are, whether by design, inattention or fault of transmission—appear as secondary, largely intended to "save the appearances" of divine apparition and provide *ad hoc* grounding for their phenomenology of epiphany and their assessment of its attendant ethical and epistemological consequences.

I. Epiphany in Ancient Greek Culture

One need only refer to the table of contents of this volume to see that epiphany as a phenomenon pervades Greek culture from top to bottom. We find literary representations of epiphany in poetry and prose, graphic depictions in every medium and

⁸ Long & Sedley 1987, vol. 1, 144-9, represents the classic recent formulation of the idealist position. Their thesis has a venerable pedigree, for which see the references at Obbink 1996, 11n3 and Obbink 2002, 214n104. Add the most recent contributions, Purinton 2001 and 2002. Cf. also Kany-Turpin 1986. For the realist position, see Mansfeld 1993, with references (and cf. Mansfeld 1999). Santoro 2000, 60-5, Kleve 2003, and Wigodsky 2004 represent the latest defenses of the realist position.

the testimony of individuals in a profusion of first person reports, including inscriptions and papyri.⁹ We have an example of the latter, presented with perhaps a touch of literary art, in a papyrus from Oxyrhynchus that describes Asclepius' appearance to two people at his temple in Memphis. The author lay ill and incubating, his mother watching over him, until "a terrifying divine apparition (φαντασία) approached...larger than a man, clothed in shining raiment, carrying a book in his left hand" and cured his illness. Both mother and son saw the god, she with eyes open, he in his sleep.¹⁰ It is worth noting that two large *stelai* recording curative epiphanies of much this sort were erected at Epidaurus at about the time of Epicurus' birth.¹¹ These divine manifestations should not be viewed as superstitious curiosities superadded to a non-experiential Greek religious orthodoxy. Instead, epiphany—and the phenomenon encompasses not only the appearance of a god in bodily form, but also a variety of direct divine interventions in the mundane order of things—was the distinctive mechanism through which, as Christian Wildberg writes, "the

⁹ Pfister 1924 is fundamental. Excellent discussions: Dodds 1951, 102-134; Hanson 1980; Versnel 1987; Lane Fox 1987, 102-67. See van Straten 1976 for a review of the epigraphical/votive evidence.

¹⁰ P.Oxy 11.1381, coll. v-vii (ii AD). My translation is based on Hunt's.

καρηβαίρηθεις [δ]ὲ τοῖς πόνοις {ἀ}λήθιαργος [ἐ]ἰς ὕπνον ἐφερόμην· [ἦ] δὲ μήτηρ (...) ταῖς ἐμαῖς ὑπερλαγ[ο]ῦσα βασάνοις ἐκαθείζετο μηδὲ καθ' ὀλίγον ὕπνου | μετ[α]λαμβάνουσα. εἴτ' ἐξαπ[ί]λινης ἑώρα--οὔτ' ὄναρ οὔθ' ὕπνος, ὀφθαλμοὶ γὰρ ἦσαν | ἀκείνητοι διηनुγμένοι, | βλέποντες μὲν οὐκ ἀκρειβῶς, θ[ε]οῦ εἰὰ γὰρ αὐτὴν μετὰ | (vi) δέ[ο]υς εἰσήει φαντασία[ν] | καὶ ἀκό[π]ως κατ[ο]πτεύειν | κωλύουσα εἴτε αὐτὸν τὸν | θεὸν εἴτε αὐτοῦ θεράποντας. πλὴν ἦν τις ὑπερμήκης μὲν ἢ κατ' ἀνθρώπων λαμπ[ρ]αῖς ἡμφιεσμένος ὀθόνας τῆ εὐωνύμῳ χειρὶ φέρων βίβλον | ὅς μόνον ἀπὸ κεφαλ[ῆ]ς | ἕως ποδῶν δις καὶ τρι[ί]ς | ἐπισκοπήσας με ἀφανῆς | ἐγ[έ]νετο. (...) διαλα[λή]σαντί μοι τὴν τοῦ | (vii) θεοῦ προ[ε]λομένη μηνύειν ἀρετὴν προλαβὼν ἐγὼ πάντα ἀλήγγελον αὐτῆ· ὅσα [γ]ὰρ δι[ὰ] τῆς | ὄψεως εἶδεν τὰτα ἐγ[ὼ] δι' ὄνειράτων ἐφαντασιώθη.

My head heavy with toils, I was lapsing half-conscious into sleep. But my mother, [...] overwrought for my torments, was sitting up, not catching a bit of sleep. Then suddenly she saw—it was neither dream nor sleep, for her eyes were unmovingly open though not perceiving clearly, for a terrifying divine apparition (vi) approached her, easily preventing her from seeing either the god himself or his servants—only that there was some being, larger than a man, clothed in shining raiment, carrying a book in his left hand, who, after merely looking me over from head to foot two or three times, disappeared. [*The author's fever abates; he wakes*]. When she spoke to me, (vii) wishing to reveal the virtue of the god, I, anticipating her, declared the whole story to her. For everything she saw with her eyes, I saw with my mind in a dream.

¹¹ Edelstein & Edelstein 1945, T. 423 (vol. 1, pp. 221-37) (= *IG* IV² 1, 121-2).

unilateral relationship of the divine to the world of mortals" was expressed and was thus a condition of the possibility of cultic religiosity.¹²

II. Democritus' εἶδωλα and the Aetiology of Belief in Gods

Democritus and the Greek atomists would have been the last philosophers to dismiss the phenomenon of epiphany. Their epistemological commitments forbade them simply to discount any appearance or perception as an empty hallucination without basis in atomic reality (Aët. 4.8.10 = DK 67 A 30):¹³

Λεύκιππος, Δημόκριτος, Ἐπίκουρος τὴν αἴσθησιν καὶ τὴν νόησιν γίνεσθαι εἰδώλων ἔξωθεν προσιόντων· μηδενὶ γὰρ ἐπιβάλλειν μηδετέραν χωρὶς τοῦ προσπίπτοντος εἰδώλου.

Leucippus, Democritus, and Epicurus: perception and thought come about due to εἶδωλα [i.e., atomic images] coming in from outside; for neither occurs to anyone without εἶδωλα impinging.

On this principle, Democritus would have been obliged to accept that appearances of the gods had an objective basis in the interaction of atoms and void that was independent of the perceiver.¹⁴ Any account of epiphany he offered would have to incorporate the impingement of atomic images, εἶδωλα, upon the sensoria.¹⁵ Thus Sextus Empiricus is

¹² Wildberg 1999-2000, 235, describes three "dimensions" in the relationship between gods and mortals: epiphany, piety ("the unilateral relationship of humans to the divine"), and reciprocity ("the notion of religious consequentialism"). As we shall see, atomist theological thought accepted all three of these dimensions as givens while transforming them in subtle but fundamental ways.

¹³ The Epicurean maxim "all sense impressions are true" is well known (Lucr. 4.478-9; Diog. Laert. 10.31-2; fr. 253 Us; see Long & Sedley 1987, vol. 1, 77-8, and below, section III). For D(emocritus), the correspondence of sense impressions and appearances to the actual state of things is more problematic (see the comparison of D. and E. on this score in Furley 1993; the evidence for D.'s epistemology is evaluated in Guthrie 1965, 454-65, and Taylor 1999, 216-22), but note here esp. D.'s account of the objective origin of visions seen in dreams, explained in Plut. *Quaest. conv.* VIII 10, 2 p. 734f (= DK 68 A 77).

¹⁴ DK 68 B 9: τὰ ἄτομα μόνον καὶ τὸ κενόν. For E., see *Ep. Hdt.* 39-40.

¹⁵ Cf. Guthrie 1965, 478: "Democritus could not on his own principles do other than suppose that these [i.e., beliefs about the forms of the gods] were the effect of material images or atomic films."

able to criticize the Abderite for positing the presence of εἶδωλα of the gods in the air around us (*Math.* 9.42):¹⁶

τὸ δὲ εἶδωλα εἶναι ἐν τῷ περιέχοντι ὑπερφυῆ καὶ ἀνθρωποειδεῖς ἔχοντα μορφὰς καὶ καθόλου τοιαῦτα ὅποια βούλεται αὐτῷ ἀναπλάττειν Δημόκριτος, παντελῶς ἐστὶ δυσπαράδεκτον.

That there are in the atmosphere εἶδωλα that have enormous man-like shapes, and in general every sort of thing Democritus wishes to invent for himself, is entirely unacceptable.

Democritus held that these divine εἶδωλα fall upon our sensoria, communicating to our perception the grand, anthropomorphous forms of the gods. He may have conceived of his epiphanic εἶδωλα as atomic effluences, diaphanous films of atoms that preserve the form of the divine substance from which they emanate—ἀπὸ τῆς θείας οὐσίας in the testimony of Clement¹⁷—and thus no different from the εἶδωλα of ordinary, solid objects in his theory of perception.¹⁸ But it is at least equally probable that for Democritus the gods are nothing but εἶδωλα, as two separate sources, Hermippus and Sextus Empiricus, indicate.¹⁹ Cicero was aware of this uncertainty, if not in fact its source. The polemical account of Democritus' theology offered by the Epicurean Velleius at *De natura deorum* 1.29 is the first notice we have of the ambiguity:

¹⁶ Not in DK. Cf. Hermipp. *De astrol.* 1.XVI.122 (= DK 68 A 78): τὸ μέντοι τοῦ Δημοκρίτου (οὐ) καλῶς ἂν ἔχοι παραλιπεῖν, ὅς εἶδωλα αὐτοῦς (sc. τοὺς δαίμονας) ὀνομάζων μεστόν τε εἶναι τὸν ἄερα τούτων φησί.

¹⁷ Clem. *Strom.* 5.13.87.3 (= DK 68 A 79); cf. Cic. *De nat. deor.* 1.29 (= DK 68 A 74), quoted below.

¹⁸ In D.'s theory of perception εἶδωλα (or δεικέλα: DK 68 B 123) are fine webs of atoms that emanate from objects and cause visual sensation by striking the eye; cf. Diog. Laert. 9.44: ὁρᾶν δ' ἡμᾶς κατ' εἰδώλων ἐμπτώσεις. This simple version of 'idolic' theory, which D. may have taken from Leucippus (see DK 67 A 29), is complicated in some accounts (see Theophr. *De sens.* 49-83 (= DK 68 A 135)) by the thesis that the eye itself emits a stream of atoms that goes out to meet the effluence from objects and that in tandem these produce an imprint (ἀποτύπωσις) on the air between them; this imprint then enters the eye and produces vision. On these two versions of D.'s theory of perception see Guthrie 1965, 438-45, and Furley 1987, 131ff. Burkert 1977 argues that for D., εἶδωλα are associated solely with "parapsychological" phenomena, such as epiphany, and *not* with his theory of perception *per se*. This seems doubtful on the evidence of, e.g., Theophr. *De sens.* 51 (cited by Burkert, p. 103), where Theophr., citing D.'s book *Περὶ τῶν εἰδώλων* (I accept Burkert's (pp. 103-4) suggested emendation of the *Περὶ τῶν εἰδῶν* of the MSS), wonders why D. did not limit his theory to the impact of εἶδωλα but introduced the superfluous "imprint" as well.

¹⁹ Hermipp. *De astrol.* 1.XVI.122 (= DK 68 A 78), quoted above, n16. Sext. Emp. *Math.* 9.19 (= DK 68 B 166): ὅθεν τούτων αὐτῶν φαντασίαν λαβόντες οἱ παλαιοὶ ὑπενόησαν εἶναι θεόν, μηδενὸς ἄλλου παρὰ ταῦτα (sc. εἶδωλα) ὄντος θεοῦ [τοῦ] ἄφθαρτον φύσιν ἔχοντος.

Quid? Democritus, qui tum imagines eorumque circumitus in deorum numero refert, tum illam naturam quae imagines fundat ac mittat, tum sententiam intellegentiamque nostram, nonne in maximo errore versatur?

What about Democritus, who sometimes counts the *imagines* [i.e., εἶδωλα] and their wanderings in the number of the gods, at other times that substance which pours forth and emits the *imagines*, at yet other times our thought and intelligence—doesn't he seem to involve himself in the greatest error?

It is worth noting that Cotta's criticisms at 1.120 do not repeat this ambiguity, but assume that Democritus' gods are *imagines*. Thus, if we discount Velleius' remarks as designed to make Democritus look incoherent, we are left with the very clear statements of Hermippus (quoted in note 16) and especially Sextus Empiricus (quoted in note 19) that the gods *are* εἶδωλα, and we can oppose to this only the testimony of Clement that εἶδωλα flow ἀπὸ τῆς θείας οὐσίας. This latter, and Cicero's Epicurean caricaturization, might simply have resulted from these authors' confusion (intentional or not) of the idolic gods with the more mundane εἶδωλα, which do flow from discrete solid objects and as such are a familiar feature of Democritus' theory of perception (for which see note 18).

The Ciceronian passage quoted above introduces a third possibility of course, again somewhat distorted by polemic, to wit, that the gods are *sententia intellegentiaque nostra*. Cotta restates this, somewhat more intelligibly, at 1.120: *principia mentis quae sunt in...universo deos esse dicit*. This doctrine is known to Aëtius, who reports that according to Democritus, "the divine is mind in spherical fire".²⁰ Add to this Tertullian's notice that Democritus "supposes that the gods came into being with the rest of the heavenly fire".²¹ As a group, these testimonia can perhaps be rationalized into the single doctrine that the substance of the gods consists predominantly or entirely of round, fiery

²⁰ Aët. *Plac.* 1.7.16: Δημόκριτος (sc. φησι) νοῦν τὸν θεὸν ἐν πυρὶ σφαιροειδεῖ. See McGibbon 1965, 390.

²¹ Tertull. *Ad nat.* 2.2: *cum reliquo igni superno deos ortos Democritus suspicatur*. Diels-Kranz groups these last two passages, along with Cic. *De nat. deor.* 1.29 and 1.120, under 68 A 74.

atoms of the sort that make up our minds or souls.²² This doctrine does not conflict in principle with either of the mutually exclusive theses concerning whether the gods are purely idolic in nature or rather discrete sources of εἶδωλα. An economical way to accommodate all the evidence, then, might be to suppose that Democritus meant for his gods to be identified with the εἶδωλα and that their idolic nature is a corollary of their composition from fine, noetic fire atoms. That is, he conceives of them as diaphanous beings of pure mind or soul, as ethereal as his thoroughgoing materialism will allow.

Of course, it is precisely attempts to formulate definitive answers to questions about the gods as they are in themselves that I am hoping to avoid, and given the state of the Democritean evidence, such questions are probably unanswerable in principle. Indeed, the inconsistency in the doxographical record may itself be a sign of Democritus' reigning interest in the phenomena of religion at the expense of a description of their precise metaphysical underpinnings. In any event, attempts to resolve such issues obscure the more certain and, for my purposes here, more interesting fact that the εἶδωλα—the calling card, as it were, of the Democritean gods—represent a fundamentally 'epiphanic' or phenomenalist way of approaching both the divine and, more importantly, the epistemological problem of human conceptions of the divine. In this sense, Democritus puts his theology in the service much less of an ontology of the divine nature than of a cultural anthropology, an aetiology of mankind's religious ideas and experience.²³

²² D. did not differentiate between mind (νοῦς) and soul (ψυχή): Diog. Laert. 9.44 (= DK 68 A 1), DK 68 A 101 & A 113. On mind/soul's composition from fire atoms add DK 68 A 102 & A 106 to the preceding references. Hourcade 2000 reduces the divine to the human mind, wrongly I think, given D.'s emphasis on the adventitious nature of epiphany: "*l'intellect humain, constitué d'atomes ignés, [est] l'unique réalité théique*" (p. 88).

²³ Cf. Jaeger 1947, 180: "Democritus saw a serious epistemological problem in the very existence of religious ideas in the mind of man." See Cole 1967 for a detailed study of the anthropological and cultural-historical aspects of atomist thought.

Thus, in his history of human cultural development, Democritus marshals the εἶδωλα in order to explain the first stirrings of religion among primitive people. Sextus Empiricus preserves the following doctrine (*Math.* 9.19 = DK 68 B 166):

Δημόκριτος δὲ εἶδωλά τινά φησιν ἐμπελάζειν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις...· εἶναι δὲ ταῦτα μεγάλα τε καὶ ὑπερφυῆ καὶ δύσφθαρτα μὲν, οὐκ ἄφθαρτα δέ, προσημαίνειν τε τὰ μέλλοντα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις θεωρούμενα καὶ φωνὰς ἀφιέντα. ὅθεν τούτων αὐτῶν φαντασίαν λαβόντες οἱ παλαιοὶ ὑπενόησαν εἶναι θεόν.

Democritus says that certain εἶδωλα come to men...; and the εἶδωλα are great and huge and they die hard, but they are not indestructible, and they foretell the future to people when they are perceived and emit voice. Hence, having received the apparition of these εἶδωλα, the ancients understood that god exists.

Sextus writes to much the same effect in introducing the Democritean citation at *Math.* 9.42, quoted partially above. There he represents the εἶδωλα as Democritus' answer to the question, "how people acquired the notion of gods" (εἰς...τὸ πῶς νόησιν θεῶν ἔσχον ἄνθρωποι). Scholars have tended to see in this aetiological aspect of Democritean thought merely a reductive attempt to explain away religious aspects of culture.²⁴ To be sure, the fifth century did have its share of demystifiers. Prodicus, infamous in antiquity as an atheist, posited that early mankind simply deified those things it found beneficial to life: the sun, the moon, rivers, bread, and wine.²⁵ We have, too, the *Sisyphus*, probably by Critias, which contains verses ascribing belief in gods to deliberate human invention for the sake of social and political control (DK 88 B 25). A milder, agnostic view appears to

²⁴ E.g., Bailey 1928, 175-7, Vlastos 1945, 579-581 (esp. 580n24), Montano 1984, and Babut 1974, 49 ("...on est forcé d'admettre que celui-ci s'est arrêté à la dernière étape qui précède la négation pure et simple de l'existence des dieux"). Most commentators, essentially concurring, consciously or not, with ancient charges of atheism (for which: Winiarczyk 1984, 163, and Salem 1996, 293-4), have tried in one way or another to diminish the theological element in D.'s thought: to the preceding references add, e.g., Zeller 1881, 286ff., Freeman 1953, 314-5, Salem 1996, 293-300, Hourcade 2000 and, in their own ways, Warren 2002, 36 (with n27 & n28) and Jaeger 1947, 180-1, this latter the most sympathetic. Against this chorus McGibbon 1965, Eisenberger 1970, and Taylor 1999, 211-6, offer refreshing perspective. Note too that Sextus, who preserves a number of our most valuable fragments for D.'s theology, does *not* include him under the heading of atheist in his tripartite *schema* at *Math.* 9.50ff., and this even though he *does* impugn the sincerity of Epicurus' theism (*Math.* 9.58).

²⁵ DK 84 B 5. Prodicus' atheism: Henrichs 1976.

have been professed by Protagoras in his treatise *On Gods* (DK 80 B 4). Against this backdrop of agnosticism, and psychologizing, politicizing demystification, Democritus in fact stood out in sharp contrast. As we have seen, he was largely constrained to accept religious phenomena, not only epiphany but also divination and prophecy (as indeed the quotation above suggests), and even the evil eye and the divine madness of poets.²⁶ We will return to the theological aspects of Democritus' cultural anthropology in section IV.

III. Epicurean Phenomenology of Epiphany

Epicurus, like his predecessor, constructs his theology so as to save the appearances. That is, he seeks to acknowledge the phenomenon of epiphanic experience under terms that do not put him in conflict with his own fundamental metaphysical and epistemological principles. Indeed, on these very principles he could hardly deny the experience of epiphany its objectivity. Like Democritus, he requires the impact of εἶδωλα on the sensoria for both vision and mental visualization (*Ep. Hdt.* 49):²⁷

δεῖ δὲ καὶ νομίζειν ἐπεισιόντος τινὸς ἀπὸ τῶν ἔξωθεν τὰς μορφὰς ὀρᾶν ἡμᾶς καὶ διανοεῖσθαι.

It is necessary to suppose that we see and think of shapes due to something coming in to us from the things outside us.

And like Democritus, he organizes his phenomenology of epiphany along diachronic and synchronic axes, that is to say, 1) a chronicle of the phenomenon's manifestation in cultural history, coupled with 2) an attempt to specify the underlying atomic conditions, as in Democritus' fiery, free-floating εἶδωλα, that must obtain in order to render the phenomenon intelligible in terms of the atomist system. This latter aspect of Epicurean

²⁶ Divination: DK 68 A 138; prophecy: B 166; evil eye: A 77; divine madness B 17, 18 & 21.

²⁷ See also n13 and accompanying text, above.

theology has resulted in a bifurcation of scholarly opinion along realist and idealist lines; I shall propose a way out of the stalemate.

Epicurus begins his treatment of the gods in the *Epistle to Menoecus* by acknowledging the self-evidence of the existence of divine beings: θεοὶ μὲν γὰρ εἰσὶν· ἐναργῆς γὰρ αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ γνῶσις, "The gods exist; for the knowledge of them is clear" (123). Philodemus reports that Epicurus insisted on the self-evidence, ἐνάργεια, of our knowledge of the gods in his magnum opus *On Nature* as well:²⁸

...καὶ [τῶι δευ]τέρῳ καὶ [τριακοσ]τῶι, καὶ τῶν [θεῶν ἐ]νάργεια φησὶν
κατα]λαμβάνεσθαι τὸ ὄν]...

...in Book 32, he [*sc.* Epicurus] says that the existence of the gods is apprehended with clarity...

The lexeme ἐνάργεια used in these two passages is a byword of epiphanic narrative,²⁹ first employed in such contexts in Homeric and Hesiodic poetry, where in fact it appears to have played a part in the formulaics of epiphany,³⁰ and still in use as late as the second century A.D., when an inscription at Ephesus could speak of the ἐναργεῖς ἐπιφανείας of the goddess Artemis.³¹ Even outside of theophanic contexts, ἐνάργεια and its cognates always retained a strong connotation of the manifest and visual. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, for example, describes it as the power of rhetoric to put τὰ λεγόμενα before the mind's eye.³² Epicurus, more than any other philosopher, incorporated the term and its cognates into his idiolect to signify that which is founded in immediate sensory

²⁸ Epic. Περὶ φύσεως 32 *ap. Phld. De piet.*, 1888-92 (Obbink). Trans. Obbink, with modifications.

²⁹ Versnel 1987, 48.

³⁰ Cf. the line ends θεοὶ φαίνεσθαι ἐναργεῖς, *Il.* 20.131; θεοὶ φαίνονται ἐναργεῖς, *Od.* 7.201 & 16.161 (cf. *Od.* 3.419-20 & 4.839-41). Hes. *Cat. fr.* 165.5 (M-W): ἀθανά]των οἳ οἱ τότε ἐναργεῖς ἄντ' ἐφάνησαν.

³¹ *Ephesos* 24b, line 14 (= Syll³ 867b), cited in LSJ s.v. ἐπιφάνεια.

³² Dion. Hal. *Lys.* 7: αὐτῆ [*sc.* ἐναργεία] δ' ἐστὶ δύναμις τις ὑπὸ τὰς αἰσθήσεις ἄγουσα τὰ λεγόμενα. Cf. Zanker 1981, who argues that literary criticism borrowed the term from Epicurean philosophy.

experience and thus needs no demonstration, but rather serves as the basis for all argument and inference.³³

Thus, by describing knowledge of the gods as *ἐναργής*, Epicurus indicates that no logical proof is required to demonstrate their existence. By the same token, we may be sure that he intends to emphasize the perceptual and inductive—rather than the inferential or deductive—aspects of that knowledge.³⁴ Here the Epicurean tradition is unanimous. Lucretius, in his disquisition on the origin of civilization, proposes to tell us "the cause that has spread the divine presence of the gods throughout the entire world" (5.1161ff.). "Namely," he writes (5.1169ff.),

*quippe etenim iam tum divom mortalia saecla
egregias animo facies vigilante videbant
et magis in somnis mirando corporis auctu.* 1170

Already long ago mortal generations used to see / with waking minds, and even more in sleep, /
the appearances of the gods, dazzling in the marvelous size of their bodies.

In this passage, Lucretius will have drawn on Book 12 of his master's *On Nature*.³⁵ We have a fragment of this book, preserved in Philodemus' treatise *De pietate*, which hints at the archaeology of religion there put forth. The fragment states, "In Book 12 of *On Nature* he [*sc.* Epicurus] says that the first people arrived at conceptions of imperishable

³³ With, e.g., the statement of epistemological method at *Ep. Hdt.* 82 (ὅθεν τοῖς πάθεσι προσεκτέον τοῖς παροῦσι καὶ ταῖς αἰσθήσεσι...καὶ πάση τῇ παρούσῃ καθ' ἕκαστον τῶν κριτηρίων ἐναργεία), cf., on inference from a starting point in *ἐνάργεια*, Phld. *De signis* XV.21 (De Lacy & De Lacy 1978): γελοῖον δ' ἐστὶν ἐκ τῆς ἐναργείας σημειοῦμενον περὶ τῶν ἀδήλων [μάχε]σθαι τῆ[ι ἐ]ναργείαι. Cf. Sext. Emp. *Math.* 7.216 (πάντων δὲ κρητὶς καὶ θεμέλιος ἡ ἐνάργεια) and Diog. Laert. 10.33 (ἐναργεῖς οὖν εἰσιν αἱ προλήψεις).

³⁴ On the inductive aspect of *ἐναργής* in E.'s theology see Festugière 1955, 68n39. Contrast this with the Stoic method of proof through logical demonstration as reported at Diog. Laert. 7.52: ἡ δὲ κατάληψις γίνεται κατ' αὐτοὺς αἰσθήσει μὲν λευκῶν καὶ μελάνων καὶ τραχέων καὶ λείων, λόγῳ δὲ τῶν δι' ἀποδείξεως συναγομένων, ὥσπερ τὸ θεοῦ εἶναι, καὶ προνοεῖν τούτους ("It is by sense perception, they hold, that we get cognition of white and black, rough and smooth, but it is by reason that we get cognition of conclusions reached through demonstration, such as the gods' existence and their providence" (trans. Long & Sedley 1987, vol. 1, 248)).

³⁵ Sedley 1998, 121-2. On the larger structural correspondence between *De re. nat.* and Epicurus' *On Nature*, see *ibid.*, 134-65.

external entities", though the text is too broken to indicate *how* they did so.³⁶ Here the doxographical tradition comes to our aid and confirms Lucretius' fidelity to his model (Sex. Emp. *Math.* 9.25 = fr. 353 Us.):³⁷

Ἐπίκουρος δὲ ἐκ τῶν κατὰ τοὺς ὕπνους φαντασιῶν οἶεται τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἔννοιαν ἐσπακέναι θεοῦ· μεγάλων γὰρ εἰδώλων, φησί, καὶ ἀνθρωπομόρφων κατὰ τοὺς ὕπνους προσπιπτόντων ὑπέλαβον καὶ ταῖς ἀληθείαις ὑπάρχειν τινὰς τοιούτους θεοὺς ἀνθρωπομόρφους.

Epicurus thinks that men drew the notion of god from the appearances received in sleep. For, he says, when great εἶδωλα in human form befell them in their sleep, they supposed that some such gods in human form actually existed.

While Sextus mentions only epiphanies received in sleep, the passage from Lucretius quoted above indicates that the phenomenon could also affect the waking mind (*animo...vigilante videbant...et magis in somnis*, 5.1170-1).³⁸ In this, Epicurus was probably following the line taken by Democritus, who likely conceived of epiphany as occurring both to people in the waking state and, as evidence from Plutarch and elsewhere suggests, to sleepers.³⁹ Both atomists no doubt saw that the distinction between waking and sleeping was not, in a sense, terribly important in the typology of Greek epiphany. Waking epiphanies were often reported to have had a dream-like quality, such that the subject did not know whether he or she was asleep or awake, and in general the evidence suggests that the distinction between wakefulness and sleep became irrelevant

³⁶ Epicurus, fr. 84 Us. (= 27.1 Arr.²). I quote Obbink's trans. from Phld. *De piet.* 225-31 (Obbink): καὶ τῶν δωδεκάτ[ω]ν Περὶ φ[ύ]σ[ε]ω[ς] το]ύς πρώτους | φη[σ]ὶν ἄ[ν]θρώπους | ἐπὶ ὑ[σ]ή[μ]ατα (τῶν ἔ)ξω | βα[ί]νειν ἀφθάρτων | φύσεων.

³⁷ Obbink 1996, 6n1 & 306-7. Cf. Sext. Emp. *Math.* 9.43.

³⁸ Cf. Cic. *De nat. deor.* 1.46: *quae enim forma alia occurrit umquam aut vigilanti cuiquam aut dormienti?*

³⁹ The evidence for sleep-epiphany in D. is everywhere strongly suggestive but, despite what Guthrie 1965, 482, Clay 1980 *passim*, Smith 1993, 449 & 465 and others imply, nowhere conclusive. See Plut. *Quaest. Conv.* 734F *et seq.* (= DK 68 A 77), Cic. *De div.* 1.5 & 2.120, Diog. Oen. fr. 9.IV & fr. 10.IV-V (Smith).

or was destabilized during the experience, as the reports of the sick man and his mother in the papyrus cited above indicate.⁴⁰

This situation in the larger culture is reflected in the Epicurean phenomenology of epiphany. The gods are perceived not by one of the five senses, but by the mind: they are λόγῳ θεωρητοί.⁴¹ Thus, the experience of god is a psychic affair, and it matters little whether the subject is awake or asleep during the encounter. Recall that for Democritus, the gods, however else they are to be conceived, were composed of the finest atoms, those of fire. For Epicurus, the phenomenologically psychic nature of epiphany has its metaphysical correlate in the doctrine that the εἶδωλα of the gods are composed of exceptionally fine particles, of a sort too subtle to register to our gross vision, yet of a "size to fit into our...*thought*" (διάνοια).⁴² Aëtius reports Epicurus' teaching on ἡ λεπτομέρεια τῆς τῶν εἰδώλων φύσεως of the gods (1.7.37 = fr. 355 Us.). And Lucretius writes of their perception by the mind alone: *tenuis enim natura deum.../...vix mente videtur* (5.148-9).⁴³ As all of this implies, Epicurus counted the mind as a sense organ which, like the bodily senses, required the impingement of atoms from the outside in order to account for perception or visualization of any kind. In this assimilation of mental perception to the sensory, dream epiphanies and waking epiphanies, to the extent they are distinguishable, constitute merely two distinct, but not qualitatively dissimilar, cases of the mind's reception of impinging εἶδωλα.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ P.Oxy 11.1381, quoted above, n10. Cf. Versnel 1987, 48-9: "[O]ur material does not allow us to draw a clear distinction between epiphany 'proper' and dream-vision" (p. 48). Cf. esp. Hanson 1980, 1408-9 and van Straten 1976, 13-4.

⁴¹ Scholion to Epicurus *KD* 1 (quoted below, n67). Cf. Aët. 1.7.37 (fr. 355 Us.): ἀνθρωποειδεῖς μὲν τοὺς θεοὺς, λόγῳ δὲ πάντας θεωρητοὺς διὰ τὴν λεπτομέρειαν τῆς τῶν εἰδώλων φύσεως.

⁴² *Ep. Hdt.* 49, a general exposition on εἶδωλα that are too fine for the five senses; cf. esp. *Lucret.* 4.728-31.

⁴³ Cf. *Lucret.* 6.76-7 and *Cic. De nat. deor.* 1.49: *ut primum non sensu sed mente cernatur.*

⁴⁴ Mind as sense organ: *Ep. Hdt.* 38, 49-52, 62 and *KD* 24, with Asmis 1984, 86-91. See esp. *Lucret.* 4.750-1: *quod mente videmus / atque oculis, simili fieri ratione necesse est.* Epicurean dreams: *Ep. Hdt.* 49-52 with

Divine epiphanies, whether to the sleeping or waking mind, apprised ancient people of the gods' anthropomorphous, superhuman stature and their power of speech.⁴⁵ These recurrent visions provided early mankind not only the grounds of their belief in the gods' existence, but also, due to their ἐνάργεια, a basis for inference about them. Lucretius tells us that the regularity and fixity over time exhibited by the divine apparitions led the ancients to ascribe immortality to the gods (5.1175-8):

*aeternamque dabant vitam, quia semper eorum
subpeditabatur facies et forma manebat.*

They gave them eternal life, since the appearance / of them was in constant supply and their forms endured.

Here the atomists part ways. Democritus, no doubt constrained by his own theory of the διάλυσις of all atomic compounds, and indeed the *kosmoi* themselves,⁴⁶ will say of his 'idolic' gods only that they are δύσφθαρτα, not ἄφθαρτα (DK 68 B 166). Epicurus, beholden to the same doctrine of universal disintegration,⁴⁷ nonetheless felt the need to preserve divine immortality, as Lucretius' account hints and as we shall see below.

The ancients attributed eternal happiness to the gods as well. Constitutionally incapable of fearing death, and magnificent in aspect, what could possibly disturb the peace of such beings? (Lucr. 5.1179-82):

fortunisque ideo longe praestare putabant,

Asmis 1984, 146-50; Lucr. 4.722ff., esp. 728-31; Diog. Oen. fr. 9, esp. coll. II-VI and fr. 10, esp. coll. II-IV (Smith 1993) and Diog. Laert. 10.32. See further Clay 1980. On "deceptive" dreams see Lucr. 4.732-48, who accounts for "false" dreams, e.g., of centaurs, by explaining that 1) such images can form spontaneously in midair, or 2) the *imagines* of a man and a horse may mingle in midair, and thus impress a garbled picture of a man-horse on our minds. In these cases the dream is "true" in the sense that it reflects really existing *imagines*: error or deception arises in the assumption of the sleeping mind, which lacks the criterial support of the five bodily senses, that the *imagines* correspond to existing solid objects, e.g., actual centaurs (Lucr. 4.762-4 and Diog. Oen. fr. 9.IV-V (Smith)). I return to Lucr.'s account of image formation below.

⁴⁵ Anthropomorphism and size: Lucr. 5.1161ff.; Sext. Emp. *Math.* 9.25 (= fr. 353 Us. & cf. *ibid.* 9.43); Scholion to *KD* 1; Aët. 1.7.37 (fr. 355 Us.). Power of speech: Lucr. *loc. cit.*; Sext. Emp. *Math.* 9. 178 (fr. 357 Us.); Hermarchus fr. 32 (Longo Auricchio) *ap.* Phld. *De dis* III (PHerc 152/157), coll. XIII-XIV.

⁴⁶ E.g., DK 68 A 37, A 82 & B 297.

⁴⁷ E.g., *Ep. Hdt.* 73: καὶ πάλιν διαλύεσθαι πάντα.

*quod mortis timor haut quemquam vexaret eorum, 1180
et simul in somnis quia multa et mira videbant
efficere et nullum capere ipsos inde laborem.*

Thus they supposed them to be far superior in their fortunes, / because fear of death never bothered any of them, / and because at the same time in dreams they saw them accomplish / many wonders and to suffer no trouble for it themselves.

In these cases, the ancients worked out the implications of what they saw with the help of a logical process for which the Epicurean technical term was *μετάβασις*. Sextus Empiricus describes *μετάβασις*, as it operated in theological contexts, as inference about the gods by way of analogy with human beings (*Math.* 9.45-6):⁴⁸

Οἱ δὲ καὶ πρὸς τοῦτό φασι, ὅτι ἡ μὲν ἀρχὴ τῆς νοήσεως τοῦ εἶναι θεὸν γέγονεν ἀπὸ τῶν κατὰ τοὺς ὕπνου ἰνδαλλομένων...τὸ δὲ αἰδίον εἶναι τὸν θεὸν καὶ ἄφθαρτον καὶ τέλειον ἐν εὐδαιμονίᾳ παρήλθε κατὰ τὴν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων μετάβασιν. [...] οὕτως ἄνθρωπον εὐδαιμόνα νοήσαντες καὶ μακάριον καὶ συμπεπληρωμένον πᾶσι τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς, εἶτα ταῦτα ἐπιτείναντες τὸν ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐκείνοις ἄκρον ἐνοήσαμεν θεόν. (46) καὶ πάλιν πολυχρόνιον τινα φαντασιωθέντες ἄνθρωπον οἱ παλαιοὶ ἐπηύξησαν τὸν χρόνον εἰς ἄπειρον, προσσυνάψαντες τῷ ἐνεστῶτι καὶ τὸν παρῳχημένον καὶ τὸν μέλλοντα· εἶτα ἐντεῦθεν εἰς ἔννοιαν αἰδίου παραγεγόμενοι ἔφασαν καὶ αἰδίον εἶναι τὸν θεόν.

And against this they [*sc.* Epicureans] say that the origin of the idea that there is a god arose from images in sleep...but that god is eternal and imperishable and perfect in happiness came about by analogical inference (*μετάβασις*) from human beings. [...] Thus, conceiving a man who is happy and blessed and full of everything good, then by extending this we conceive god as highest in these same things. [46] And again, having envisioned a certain long-lived man, the ancients extended his lifetime to infinity, by combining the past and future with the present. Then arriving in this way at the notion of eternity they said god is also eternal.

By analogy with the happiness and longevity of men, the ancients inferred that the gods, if their divinity was to set them apart, must possess happiness and longevity in the superlative degree. Thus, when Epicurus instructs us to think of god as ζῶος, ἄφθαρτος καὶ μακάριος (*Ep. Men.* 123; cf. *KD* 1), he but restates in prescriptive form the conclusions that, as the descriptive reports of Lucretius and Sextus show, he deemed the ancients to have reached based on their epiphanic encounters.

⁴⁸ The term and its cognates are used regularly in Phld. *De signis* (see s.vv. in the index of De Lacy & De Lacy 1978, 139, and the remarks about its application in Epicurean theology, pp. 204-5).

Existence, immortality and blessedness thus constitute ἡ κοινὴ τοῦ θεοῦ νόησις (*Ep. Men.* 123), that is, the basic notion of god that all people, insofar as they *have* a notion of god, necessarily share. Note that this set of indispensable attributes is arrived at by a two stage process.⁴⁹ The first stage consists of repeated exposure to the particulars of experience, in this case, epiphanies. Here the notion of the gods' existence (as well as, of course, their outward form) is acquired. In a second stage, further additions to this notion, immortality and blessedness, are both suggested by the gods aspect and acquired by "metabatic" reasoning. These two stages map neatly onto the general theory of human cultural development outlined by Epicurus at *Epistle to Herodotus* 75, where primitive man learns his first lessons directly, from "things themselves" (ὕπὸ αὐτῶν τῶν πραγμάτων διδαχθῆναί) and later employs the faculty of reason, λογισμός, to sharpen what he has learned from the senses (τὸν δὲ λογισμὸν τὰ...παρεγγυηθέντα ὕστερον ἐπακριβοῦν).⁵⁰ We will examine a darker aspect of this second stage, as well as a third stage that is characterized by the further innovations of reason (προσεξευρίσκειν), in section IV.⁵¹

Lucretius' language puts the distinction between the first two stages in sharp relief. In the first stage, the ancients simply "saw", '*videbant*' (5.1170), the imperfective aspect of the verb indicating the ongoing nature of their visual experience. On the basis of what they saw, they then "attributed" ('*tribuebant*', 5.1172), "granted" ('*dabant*', 5.1175),

⁴⁹ Cf. Purinton 2001, 200.

⁵⁰ Cf. Blickman 1989, 159.

⁵¹ *Ep. Hdt.* 75-6 illustrates these three stages with the example of the origin of language. In the first stage, πάθη and φαντάσματα spontaneously give rise to the first words. In the second stage, the rudimentary language is rationalized through the coining of terms (τὰ ἴδια (sc. ὀνόματα) τεθῆναι) and the weeding out of ambiguities (τὰς δηλώσεις ἥττον ἀμφιβόλους). In the third stage, knowledgeable men (τοὺς συνειδότας) introduce novel concepts and discoveries (οὐ συνορώμενα πράγματα) as well as the terminological innovations in which to express them. See further Campbell 2003, 283ff., with references.

and "supposed" (*putabant'*, 5.1178 & 1179) that certain qualities pertained to the divine. It is clear that this dual process of perception and logical inference, reported in *De rerum natura* 5, but of course derived from Epicurus himself, was conceived as not only historical and aetiological but as the ongoing ground of our knowledge of deity. This is evident in the language, to which that of Lucretius is so obviously akin, of Epicurus' assertion that our knowledge of the gods is ἐναργής, and of his further injunction that we "consider", "attach" and "believe" (νομίζων, πρόσαπτε, δόξαζε) that the qualities of imperishability and bliss belong to the divine nature (*Ep. Hdt.* 123):

Πρῶτον μὲν τὸν θεὸν ζῶον ἄφθαρτον καὶ μακάριον νομίζων, ὡς ἡ κοινὴ τοῦ θεοῦ νόησις ὑπεγράφη, μὴθὲν μήτε τῆς ἀφθαρσίας ἀλλότριον μήτε τῆς μακαριότητος ἀνοίκειον αὐτῷ πρόσαπτε· πᾶν δὲ τὸ φυλάττειν αὐτοῦ δυνάμενον τὴν μετὰ ἀφθαρσίας μακαριότητα περὶ αὐτὸν δόξαζε.

First, *considering* the god to be living, imperishable and blessed, as the common notion of god is in outline, *attach* nothing to him that is either foreign to imperishability or unsuited to blessedness. But *believe* everything about him that is able to preserve his blessedness along with his imperishability.

The notion of gods of imperishable bliss thus compounded from experience and inference forms, in the technical lexicon of Epicurean epistemology, the πρόληψις of divinity,⁵² that is, the generic concept which is guaranteed to be true as a result of its formulation from both repeated experience of particulars and warranted inference from them.

That the gods' blessedness presents no *prima facie* conflict with the principles of atomism appears obvious; but for the Epicureans immortality was not only a concomitant of but a requirement for divine blessedness, for if the gods were liable to destruction, they would be as liable to anxiety about their deaths as we are. The Epicureans, then, unlike Democritus, who claimed neither blessedness nor immortality for his gods, had to find a way to reconcile divine imperishability with their doctrine of universal disintegration.

⁵² *Ep. Men.* 124. Cf. Diog. Laert. 10.31 & 33 and see further Long & Sedley 1987, vol. 1, 89.

This Cicero's Epicurean, Velleius, attempts to do at *De natura deorum* 1.49, a passage that constitutes, for our purposes, a convenient place to survey briefly the realist v. idealist impasse and then to try to find a plausible route around, rather than through, it.

In an earlier passage Velleius had stated that a very similar conception of the gods—indeed, the conception arrived at, in cultural history, by earliest mankind—is shared by all humanity (1.43):

quae est enim gens aut quod genus hominum quod non habeat sine doctrina anticipationem quandam deorum, quam appellat πρόληψιν Epicurus id est anteceptam animo rei quandam informationem...?

For what people or race of men is there that does not have, without being taught, a certain "preconception" of the gods, which Epicurus called πρόληψις, that is, a certain delineation of a thing preconceived by the mind...?

This πρόληψις, he says, is such that all mankind thinks of the gods as blessed and immortal beings in human form (*ut deos beatos et immortales putemus*, 1.45; *a natura habemus omnes omnium gentium speciem nullam aliam nisi humanam deorum*, 1.46). In the passage that follows at 1.49 he lays out the physics behind the phenomenon of epiphany that underlies our πρόληψις of the gods:

Epicurus autem...docet eam esse vim et naturam deorum, ut primum non sensu sed mente cernatur, nec soliditate quadam nec ad numerum, ut ea quae ille propter firmitatem στερέμνια appellat, sed imaginibus similitudine et transitione perceptis, cum infinita simillarum imaginum species ex innumerabilibus individuis existat et ad deos adfluat, cum maximis voluptatibus in eas imagines mentem intentam infixamque nostram intellegentiam capere quae sit et beata natura et aeterna.

Epicurus teaches that the essence and constitution of the gods is such that it is primarily discerned not by sensation but by the mind, having neither any solidity nor numerical unity like those things which, on account of their firmness, he calls "solid objects;" but the images are grasped by their similarity and by a process of crossing-over, since an endless vision of very similar images arises from the innumerable atoms and flows to the gods, and our minds, fixed and intent, with the greatest pleasure, on these images, gain an understanding of what a blessed and eternal nature is.

Before delving into this passage, and the controversy that I intend to focalize through it, it will be prudent to make a first approach to the differences in the assumptions behind the realist and idealist views via another Epicurean text, Lucretius' *De rerum natura*. An

episode in book 4 makes explicit the Epicurean doctrine implied in Velleius' assertion, in the passage above, that an endless stream of godly *imagines* are available to the mind to focus on. Lucretius explains that '*simulacra*'—a synonym for *imagines*/εἰδῶλα—of every sort fill the atmosphere (*passim...feruntur*, 4.735). These *simulacra* arise in three ways.

- 1) Some are generated '*sponte sua...aere in ipso*' (4.736);
- 2) others flow '*variis ab rebus*' (4.737);
- 3) still others are compounded of *simulacra* of the former two classes ('*ex horum facta figuris*', 4.738) that have collided and stuck together in midair.

These three processes are forever engendering an infinite variety and quantity of tenuous images that our minds focus on in order to visualize everything from mundane objects to absent friends to imaginary beings such as centaurs (4.732-817). Lucretius describes the manner in which our minds pick out images of a given type (4.802-4):

*et quia tenuia sunt, nisi quae contendit, acute
cernere non potis est animus; proinde omnia quae sunt
praeterea pereunt, nisi si ad quae se ipse paravit.*

since the images are fine, the mind is only able to perceive sharply / those it strains to see; then all the images that exist / besides these perish, except those for which the mind has prepared itself.

This is the "mental focusing"—Epicurus terms it ἐπιβολὴ τῆς διανοίας (*Ep. Hdt.* 51)—to which Velleius refers when he says, "our minds, fixed and intent, with the greatest pleasure, on these images, gain an understanding of what a blessed and eternal nature is".⁵³

One way to characterize the difference between the realist and idealist views is as a disagreement over which of the three image-generating processes listed by Lucretius should be regarded as the primary source of images of the gods. Realists will opt for model 2, saying that the gods, as independently existing entities, that is, *res* among many other *variae res*, emit the *imagines* which we perceive. Idealists, on the other hand, will

⁵³ On ἐπιβολὴ τῆς διανοίας see Asmis 1984, 118-126.

choose models 1 and/or 3, asserting that the images of the gods arise randomly, or are but agglutinations of random, human-shaped images formed in accord with models 1 and 2.

Thus, to turn now to the Ciceronian passage presented above, it is possible to present a cogent summary of Velleius' speech along idealist lines as follows. Our minds pick out and conflate the godlike *imagines* that are eternally and randomly being generated out of the infinite fund of atoms and flowing toward us (*cum infinita simillarum imaginum species ex innumerabilibus individuis existat*) and in this way we arrive at the discrete concepts of our various deities. Thus, since any individual god is, in effect, nothing but the sum of its images in the human mind, no god exists as a numerically distinct, solid object, as for example you or I do (*nec soliditate quadam nec ad numerum, ut ea quae ille propter firmitatem στερέμνια appellat*). The gods are, instead, "thought-constructs".⁵⁴

On this idealist reading, Cicero's term *similitudo/simillimus* must be taken as referring to the similarity of the *imagines* to each other, their formal unity or identity, rather than to their similarity to a divine body, a solid original from which they flow, as Velleius' express insistence that the gods are not στερέμνια seems to require. More difficult is the term *transitio*, which Jeffrey Purinton has recently argued translates ὑπέρβασις τῶν μεταξύ,⁵⁵ a formula found in Epicurean theological contexts that describes "the mental leap over the gap between similar mental images, giving the

⁵⁴ Long & Sedley 1987, vol. 1, 145.

⁵⁵ Purinton 2001, 183ff. & 203ff., argues rightly against the Long & Sedley (1987, vol. 2, 149) view that *transitio* translates μετάβασις. Their view has a long history (for which see Rist 1972, 143), as does Purinton's (see Rist 1972, 144n1).

impression of permanence...in the conceptual entity".⁵⁶ Thus, the phrase *imaginibus similitudine et transitione perceptis* should be read as implying that the mind conflates the many distinct but similar divine images that it receives, thus converting what has mere formal unity—that is, the god *qua* stream of *simillumae imagines*—into a numerical unity—in Philodemus' terms, the god *qua* ἐνότης κατ' ἀριθμόν,⁵⁷ a "numerical unity", if only in the oneness of the mental conception thus compounded from the multitude of images. This interpretation of *transitio*, regardless of its Greek equivalent, appears to find support in Cotta's restatement of Velleius' speech at 1.109: *fluentium frequenter transitio fit visionum ut e multis una videatur*, "the process of crossing-over...has the effect that out of many visions a single one appears".

On the idealist interpretation, then, it is only from a phenomenological, *quoad nos* standpoint that the gods exist as unified, permanent entities; *quoad se* Epicurus' gods exist *only as* adventitious images, *nec ad numerum*.⁵⁸ In effect, these atomists posit a kind of reciprocity between our reception of the gods' εἶδωλα and the gods' existence, that is, they hold epiphany to be not only the occasion of our knowledge of the gods but, in a sense, the condition of the possibility of their very existence.

If the idealist analysis is right, we see what the heirs have done with their patrimony of Democritean εἶδωλα. The Epicureans have devised a ploy that allows them to save the appearances, that is, to preserve the phenomenally implied immortality of the gods without the violation of the principles of their physics that the supposition of

⁵⁶ Obbink 1996, 129n5 and see 324-27. Cf. Woodward 1989, 41-2. The formula appears at Phld. *De piet.* 326-7 (Obbink); cf. the variant ὑπέρβασις τοῦ μεταξὺ at Phld. *De dis* III, col. 9.20 (Diels 1917; Woodward 1989).

⁵⁷ Phld. *De piet.* 327-8 (cf. 205-19 & 347-64) (Obbink); cf. Obbink 1996, 324-6.

⁵⁸ So Bollack 1975, 236: "*Les dieux n'ont d'autre identité que la projection eidétique de la succession même des images perçues*".

immortal bodies would entail. Gods who are conflated by the mind from a succession of images are not susceptible to the destruction that would attend discrete, object-like entities; rather, they are rendered immortal by the eternal succession of their εἶδωλα, a succession which serves to guarantee mankind's undying ideation of and belief in immortal beings. Thus, the 'opinio' of the gods' immortal existence results 'non instituto aliquo aut more aut lege' and remains 'ad unum omnium firma consensio' (*De nat. deor.* 1.44) because, as Lucretius says (5.1175-6), '*semper eorum / subpeditabatur facies et forma manebat*'.⁵⁹

Not so fast, the realists will say. Shouldn't we take care to interpret Cicero's derivative and potentially garbled or hostile report of Epicurean doctrine in light of the *ipsissima verba* of Epicurus and his disciples?⁶⁰ (Indeed, we ourselves have seen that there was reason to question the representations of Democritus' views that Cicero puts in Velleius' mouth.) Most importantly, as we saw above, Epicurus describes his gods as ζῶα (*Ep. Men.* 123), by which he surely means that they are living beings like you or me.⁶¹ Moreover, Lucretian evidence points to the same conclusion, for the poet refers explicitly to the divine body when he speaks of the *simulacra* that flow '*de corpore...sancto.../ in mentis hominum divinae nuntia formae*' (6.76-7). It is difficult to make this Lucretian evidence harmonize with Velleius' assertion at 1.49 that the gods possess neither solidity nor numerical identity like other objects, στερέμνια. To make matters worse Velleius explicitly says, in the first sentence of 1.49 (not quoted above), that the gods have '*nec corpus...sed quasi corpus*'. That this doctrine is no mere Ciceronian idiosyncrasy we have

⁵⁹ See further, Long & Sedley 1987, vol. 1, 145-6. Purinton 2001, professing a qualified idealism, is a recent treatment of this Ciceronian passage; he considers, as well, Phld.'s very similar words at *De piet.* 320-375 (Obbink).

⁶⁰ Mansfeld 1993, 174 & 190.

⁶¹ Mansfeld 1993, 178ff.

on the authority of Philodemus' *De dis* III.⁶² But the realist is able to rationalize these apparently contradictory testimonia by interpreting the Ciceronian passage, as Jaap Mansfeld does, to imply that Velleius "does not say that the gods possess no numerical identity at all, but only that *qua* objects of perception they lack both the firmness and the numerical individuality of the *steremnia* around us".⁶³

Realist commentators differ too on the crucial question of how the Epicureans explain the gods' immortality, a disagreement that is again based on their rather different understanding of Velleius' speech. Recall the words, quoted above in context, of Cicero's Epicurean spokesman at *De natura deorum* 1.49:

infinita simillarum imaginum species ex innumerabilibus individuis existat et ad deos adfluat

an endless vision of very similar images arises from the innumerable atoms and flows to the gods. In the two words *ad deos*, transmitted by the manuscripts,⁶⁴ we are faced with a textual and hermeneutical crux which can, in a sense, stand metonymically for the whole realist v. idealist debate. Long and Sedley, advocates of an idealist interpretation, accept the reading of the MSS. They take Velleius' assertion that the images "flow to the gods" to be saying of the images that "by converging on our minds they *become* our gods".⁶⁵ Others, opting for an interpretation consonant with realism, choose simply to emend the transmitted text, as does Dyck, who adopts in his 2003 edition Davies' *a deis*.⁶⁶ With this reading, the *infinita simillarum imaginum species* flows *from* the gods, who can now be conceived (in spite of Velleius' admonition) as numerically distinct entities who emit

⁶² On *quasi corpus* and its Philodemean parallels, see the salutary account in Sanders 2004.

⁶³ Mansfeld 1993, 195.

⁶⁴ Only B¹ offers a variant to *ad deos* in the haplographical *ad eos*.

⁶⁵ Long & Sedley 1987, vol. 1, 145 (original emphasis).

⁶⁶ Cf. Lambinus' emendation *ad nos* and Heindorf's *a diis ad nos*. The term *species* five words before in the same sentence is frequently emended as well (Long & Sedley 1987 vol. 2, 147-9 opt for Brieger's *series*), but Cotta's repetition of it at *De nat. deor.* 1.105 supports it here (thus Mansfeld 1999, 472n109).

imagines of themselves. Other scholars sympathetic to the realist view, recognizing that likely confirmation for *ad deos* comes from the similar locution ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό in the scholion to *KD* 1,⁶⁷ have attempted to interpret the transmitted reading in a way amenable to realism. They save the appearances of immortal gods by contending that we are to understand *ad deos* as referring to the atomic economy of divine immortality. If the gods are to enjoy eternal existence they require the replenishment of the atoms that they, like all solid bodies, are continually sloughing off; unique among existing things, the realist says, they are in the enviable position of having atomic images forever flowing *to* them, *ad deos*, thus establishing equilibrium by replacing the images that are, necessarily, forever flowing from them.⁶⁸

In this way these two little words serve to distill particularly vexed, and inextricably connected, issues of text and interpretation. *Ratio et res ipsa* is simply no help philologically, since the *res* is precisely what is in interpretive doubt and *ratio* is, in this case, largely dependent on one's foregone assumptions about the *res*. Of course, *ad deos* does have the virtue of being both the manuscript reading and, in a sense, the *lectio difficilior*, but even if it were agreed by all to be unimpeachably secure, its construal, as we have seen, is by no means incontestable. In the end, neither realist nor idealist can produce an account of all the evidence that is capable of shaking the other's foregone commitments. From an idealist point of view, realists elide or strain crucial Ciceronian and related evidence; from a realist viewpoint, idealists have to discount aspects of

⁶⁷ Scholion to Epicurus *Kyriai Doxai* 1: ἐν ἄλλοις δέ φησι τοὺς θεοὺς λόγῳ θεωρητοῦς, οὓς μὲν κατ' ἀριθμὸν ὑφ'εστῶτας, οὓς δὲ κατὰ ὁμοειδειαν, ἐκ τῆς συνεχοῦς ἐπιρρύσεως τῶν ὁμοίων εἰδώλων ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ἀποτελεσμένων, ἀνθρωποειδεῖς. A discussion of this highly compressed and vexed bit of doxographical data, which is as contested as the Cic. passage under discussion (for a taste, see almost any of the references in n8), is prohibited here by considerations of space.

⁶⁸ E.g., Rist 1972, 144-6 & 174; Mansfeld 1993, 191n47, 192 & 196-201 (cf. Mansfeld 1999, 473, with references); most recently, Kleve 2003, 264-6.

Lucretius and misread Epicurus himself. It might thus appear that positing a controversy about the nature of the gods internal to Epicureanism could afford us a way out of the impasse. But such a move would neglect the fact that all our sources, Epicurean or otherwise, claim to represent the views of the founder of the school. No later Epicurean represents himself as an apostate from the master's theological teachings, nor do the doxographical sources report any such apostasy.⁶⁹ More likely, I submit, the Epicureans simply did not feel the need to construct a single, consistent theory of the divine ontology. Nor would their own principles necessarily have required it.

Consider Epicurus' methodological principle which dictates that in the case of meteorological and other phenomena whose exact causes are not immediately available to our apprehension, we should entertain any and all causal explanations that are not inconsistent with the phenomena or the basic principles of the atomist system.⁷⁰ Indeed, Epicurus indicates that in these questions, to strive for a precision that is beyond our grasp is to invite psychological turmoil. Since the goal of science is ἀταραξία, only the level of explanation that conduces to this end need be attained. He begins the *Epistle to Pythocles* (85-6) by stating that ethical problems and the elementary metaphysical and physical questions—the composition of the universe from atoms and void—can be decisively settled through single (μοναχῆ) explanations, but that some phenomena are susceptible to explanation by any number (πλεοναχῆ) of scientifically possible causes between which it is vain to attempt to adjudicate (*Ep. Pyth.* 86-7):⁷¹

ὅπερ ἐπὶ τῶν μετεώρων οὐχ ὑπάρχει, ἀλλὰ ταῦτά γε πλεοναχὴν ἔχει καὶ τῆς γενέσεως αἰτίαν καὶ τῆς οὐσίας ταῖς αἰσθήσεσι σύμφωνον κατηγορίαν. οὐ γὰρ κατὰ ἀξιώματα κενὰ καὶ

⁶⁹ Long & Sedley 1987, vol. 1, 102-103, assert that Lucretius did not understand the master's teaching on the divine constitution, but not that he willfully flouted orthodoxy. See Kleve 2003, 255-6 & 265.

⁷⁰ On Epicurus' acceptance of multiple causal explanations, see Asmis 1984, 321-30.

⁷¹ Cf. *Ep. Hdt.* 78-82; *Ep. Pyth.* 85-8, 92-3 & 98.

νομοθεσίας φυσιολογητέον, ἀλλ' ὡς τὰ φαινόμενα ἐκκαλεῖται· (87) οὐ γὰρ ἰδιαλογίας καὶ κενῆς δόξης ὁ βίος ἡμῶν ἔχει χρείαν, ἀλλὰ τοῦ ἀθορύβως ἡμᾶς ζῆν. πάντα μὲν οὖν γίνεται ἀσειστῶς κατὰ πάντων κατὰ πλεοναχὸν τρόπον ἐκκαθαιρομένων συμφώνως τοῖς φαινομένοις, ὅταν τις τὸ πιθανολογούμενον ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν δεόντως καταλίπη· ὅταν δέ τις τὸ μὲν ἀπολίπη τὸ δὲ ἐκβάλη ὁμοίως σύμφωνον ὄν τῷ φαινομένῳ, δῆλον ὅτι καὶ ἐκ παντὸς ἐκπίπτει φυσιολογήματος, ἐπὶ δὲ τὸν μῦθον καταρρεῖ.

This [i.e., the method of positing single causes] does not hold in the case of meteorological phenomena, but these things have multiple causes of their coming-to-be and multiple predications about their existence that agree with perceptions. For we should not provide explanations of nature in accord with empty dogmas and decrees, but as the phenomena invite. (87) For our life has no need of subjective theory and empty opinion, but we need to live without disturbance. No disturbance arises with respect to all the things that are accounted for by the method of multiple causes in agreement with the phenomena, whenever one admits, as one ought, what is explained by probability. But whenever one accepts one explanation and rejects another that is likewise in agreement with the phenomenon, it is clear that one falls away from all scientific reasoning and descends into myth.

A single illustration of Epicurus' method of multiple causes will suffice here. He asserts that the source of the moon's light cannot be determined to the exclusion of all other possibilities. Since the moon is not an object that we can approach for examination or upon which we can conduct experiments, we must content ourselves with positing a variety of inherently possible sources for its light, forgoing any urge to explain its observed illumination by recourse to a single cause (*Ep. Pyth.* 94-5):⁷²

ἔτι τε ἐνδέχεται (μὲν) τὴν σελήνην ἐξ ἑαυτῆς ἔχειν τὸ φῶς, ἐνδέχεται δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἡλίου. (95) καὶ γὰρ παρ' ἡμῖν θεωρεῖται πολλὰ μὲν ἐξ ἑαυτῶν ἔχοντα, πολλὰ δὲ ἀφ' ἐτέρων· καὶ οὐθὲν ἐμποδοστατεῖ τῶν ἐν τοῖς μετεώροις φαινομένων, εἴαν τις τοῦ πλεοναχοῦ τρόπου αἰεὶ μνήμην ἔχη καὶ τὰς ἀκολουθοῦσας αὐτοῖς ὑποθέσεις ἅμα καὶ αἰτίας συνθεωρῇ καὶ μὴ ἀναβλέπων εἰς τὰ ἀνακόλουθα ταῦτ' ὀγκοῖ ματαίως καὶ καταρρέπη ἄλλοτε ἄλλως ἐπὶ τὸν μοναχὸν τρόπον.

Besides, it is possible that the moon has its own light, and it is possible that it gets it from the sun. (95) For in fact in our experience many things are seen to have their own light, and many get their light from something else. None of the meteorological phenomena stands in our way, if we always remember the method of multiple causes and observe at the same time the explanations and causes that accord with the phenomena, and if we do not look to what does not accord and heap these things up in vain and fall back in one way or another to the method of a single cause.

Is it conceivable that for the Epicureans, the gods might well have been analogous to the moon in this example? That epiphany, like the light of the moon, might have been a phenomenon that admitted of a number of plausible explanations? The gods are not

⁷² Cf. *Lucr.* 6.703-11 and, for a multitude of such examples, *Lucr.* 5.509ff.

available for us to touch and observe at close hand, like trees or our own bodies or any of the things of our daily experience; like the celestial bodies, we perceive them only through the apparition of εἶδωλα that stream to us across indeterminate distances.⁷³ Thus, on Epicurus' principle of multiple causes, the εἶδωλα of the gods might well be explained by appeal to any one of the three ways listed by Lucretius, which we examined above. They might well, as the realists suggest, flow from the bodies of the gods. Or, as the idealist position requires, the gods' εἶδωλα might equally well arise spontaneously in the atmosphere, from the random agglomeration of atoms. Indeed some gods might be the result, as Philodemus appears to say in a controversial passage in *De dis* III, of the collision and adhesion of εἶδωλα in midair. At coll. 8.37-9.14 he writes of the intertwining or entanglement (his verb is συμπ[λέ]κονται, col. 8.41) of what must be the gods' εἶδωλα with the εἶδωλα of stars and other heavenly bodies and of the impression generated in those receiving the resulting epiphanies that the sun and the moon *are* gods.⁷⁴ Whatever the proper interpretation of this difficult passage, I would suggest that our epiphanies of the gods can on good atomist principles result from any one or a combination of these three causes, none of which, in the nature of the case, can be either decisively ruled out or definitively proven.

Let me be clear. I would not seek to assert, in the silence of our evidence, that the Epicureans ever explicitly equated epiphany with τὰ μετέωρα, or made a point of subjecting it to the method of multiple causes. I will, however, suggest that although the

⁷³ The famous *intermundia*, the gods' dwelling places that lie between worlds, have no sure warrant in any surviving Epicurean writings but are cited by Cicero at *De nat. deor.* 1.18. The *intermundia* are often said to be alluded to in Lucr. 3.18-24. See Obbink 1996, 7n5.

⁷⁴ I cite the text of Woodward (1989). An outstanding new edition, of which I have seen parts, of *De dis* III (P.Herc 152/157) in its entirety is in preparation by Holger Essler (University of Würzburg). His text and commentary will shed new light on the many problems of this difficult passage, and thus I put forward my suggestion as to its import (apropos of which, cf. Obbink 1996, 7n5) only tentatively.

conflicting data that have come down to us suggest that Epicurus and his followers formulated any number of what were probably more or less *ad hoc* responses to criticisms lodged by philosophical rivals against, for example, their epiphanic aetiology of belief or the gods' paradoxical immortality, the Epicureans never really felt compelled to work out a single, definitive answer to the question of the divine constitution. The remains of Epicurus' *ipsissima verba* say nothing on the subject: he tells us the gods exist, and exhorts us to *think* (νομίζειν) of the gods as ζῶα (*Ep. Men.* 123), an exhortation that at least potentially leaves open the question of whether they *actually are* living beings apart from our thoughts to that effect about them.⁷⁵ And as the glimpse of the later tradition I have offered above shows, the surviving pronouncements of Epicurus' disciples, no doubt largely extruded under the pressure of philosophical polemic such as Cicero dramatizes in *De natura deorum*, are a welter of contradictions and obscurities that can be reconciled, not without considerable strain, with whatever answer to the question of the divine metaphysics one prefers. In the end, it is difficult to understand what is really at stake in our efforts to supply these atomists with such an answer, or in the struggle between realists and idealists to assert a μοναχὴ αἰτία for the Epicurean phenomenon of epiphany. In a theological context of providence or grace, such as obtains in Christianity, where God is the guarantor and highest instantiation of Being Itself, the ontology of the divine is necessarily a central issue whose answer entails real consequences. But for a theology that asserts the remoteness of the gods from our concerns and denies the divine any agency whatsoever in our world (we will turn to this issue in the next section), such metaphysical questions tend naturally to lose their

⁷⁵ Obbink ??????????. Cf. Mansfeld 1999, ???.

urgency. Again, I do not mean to imply that Epicureans never engaged such questions. Philodemus *De dis* III, for example, with its lengthy, though fragmentary, discussion of the physical basis of the gods' immortality, proves that they did, and did so elaborately.⁷⁶ But *De dis* III is equally concerned with ethical questions, such as the gods' enjoyment of foodstuffs,⁷⁷ sleep⁷⁸ and friendship,⁷⁹ their autarky⁸⁰ and, with perhaps a wink from Philodemus, their use of language, Greek, naturally: κ(αὶ) νῆ Δία γε τὴν Ἑλληνίδα... διάλεκτον.⁸¹ Such questions have at least as much to do with the gods' paradigmatic importance as exemplars for our emulation as with their ontological status.⁸² And even Philodemus could distinguish between worthwhile and superfluously meticulous questions about the gods (*De dis* III, col. 14.21-25):

τὸ τὰ ποῖα ἰ δεῖ ζη[τε]ῖν κ(αὶ) ἀποδιδόναι μέντοι περὶ θεῶν ἢ καὶ τὰ ποῖα μὴ ζητεῖν μηδ' ἀποδιδόναι χαρακτηρίσομεν ἐπισυ[ν]άψ[α]ντες, ἵνα κ(αὶ) τ[ῶν πα]ρελκόντων ἢ [κ(αὶ) ὧν (εἶναι) μὴ] χρῆ σοφισ[μάτων] κατα[φρ]ονῶμεν.

I will indicate, in addition, what sorts of questions about the gods one actually should investigate and expound and what sorts one should not investigate or expound, so that we may disregard distractions and sophistries for which there is no use.

Thus, wholly in keeping with their own concerns and methods, our atomists were ultimately less invested in the technical details of the divine being and more concerned with the phenomena of the gods παρ' ἡμῖν and the ethical consequences of the religious ideas to which they gave rise. To these ethical issues we now turn.

IV. Atomist Aetiology of Religious Error

⁷⁶ Diels 1917. See n74, above.

⁷⁷ *De dis* III, fr. 77 (Diels).

⁷⁸ *De dis* III, coll. 12-13 (Diels).

⁷⁹ *De dis* III, coll. a & c (Diels).

⁸⁰ *De dis* III, col. d (Diels). Cf. fr. 20.

⁸¹ *De dis* III, coll. 13.36-14.7 (Diels). These lines have recently been reedited: Longo Auricchio 1988, 68.

⁸² Note in this connection that the title actually given in the work's *subscriptio* is Π[ερὶ τῆς] εὐστραθ[οῦς] τῶν θεῶν διαγωγ[ῆς] (On the tranquil way of life of the gods). See Essler 2004, 164.

In what has gone before we saw that the aetiological story told by both Democritus and Epicurus posits the experience of epiphany as the origin of mankind's idea of the gods. We also saw that Epicurus described a second stage, in which mankind's raw belief in the gods' existence was modified by a process of inference from sense data to include the predicates of immortality and blessedness. We saw, too, that these stages in the evolution of religious ideas were of a piece with Epicurus' general theory of cultural development. We turn now to two further episodes in religious history, both dealing with theological error. First, Lucretius recounts early man's attribution of otherwise inexplicable meteorological events to divine agency (5.1183-1197; cf. to 1240):

*praeterea caeli rationes ordine certo
et varia annorum cernebant tempora verti
nec poterant quibus id fieret cognoscere causas. 1185
ergo perfugium sibi habebant omnia divis
tradere et illorum nutu facere omnia flecti.
in caeloque deum sedes et templa locarunt,
per caelum volvi quia nox et luna videtur,
luna dies et nox et noctis signa severa 1190
noctivagaeque faces caeli flammaeque volantes,
nubila sol imbres nix venti fulmina grando
et rapidi fremitus et murmura magna minarum.
O genus infelix humanum, talia divis
cum tribuit facta atque iras adiunxit acerbas! 1195
quantos tum gemitus ipsi sibi, quantaque nobis
volnera, quas lacrimas peperere minoribus nostris!*

They [i.e., early humans] observed the patterns of the heavens and the / various seasons of the years turning in their sure order, / and they were not able to understand by what causes this happened. / Therefore their refuge was to entrust everything to the gods / and to make all things directed by their nod. / And they located the seat and abode of the gods in the sky, / since night and the moon are seen revolving through the sky, / moon, day, and night, and the austere constellations of night / and the night-wandering torches of the sky and flying flames, / clouds, sun, rains, snow, winds, lightning, hail, / and the rapid roarings and great rumblings of threatening thunder. / Oh unhappy human race, to attribute such doings / to the gods and to attach to them bitter wrath! / What groans they produced for themselves, and what / wounds for us, what tears for our descendants!

The misprision of natural phenomena propagated a mistaken belief in the favor and wrath of the gods, an error following from want of *physiologia* as much as from a failure to

abide fully by what the πρόληψις of the gods' entailed.⁸³ These lines follow directly upon the verses describing the first and second stages of religion (5.1161-82), in which epiphany and inference lead to knowledge of the divine attributes. The terminology in which Lucretius describes the ancients' erroneous suppositions in the present passage (*tradere, facere, locarunt, tribuit*) is similar (*putabant*, 1178, 1179; *dabant*, 1175) and even the same (*tribuebant*, 1172) as that describing their licit inferences. These factors suggest that the mistaken reasoning described here is but the dark side of the second stage of cultural development, a case in which early man failed to test his inferences about the gods on the touchstone of epiphanic experience. We will return to this point in a moment.

The third and final stage in the degeneration of theology is hinted at in some fragmentary lines of Philodemus' *De pietate* (234-318 (Obbink)). Here, the erroneous second-stage attribution to the gods of πάθη⁸⁴ such as anger leads early humans to believe that divine wrath can be turned to favor through prayer and sacrifice.⁸⁵ These solecisms appear to be the result of a florescence, in this third stage, of poetic myths and theological interpretations thereof (cf. ἡ|ν|ί|τ[το]ν|το, 300-1).⁸⁶ We can perhaps posit a Lucretian parallel, reading his lines on the sacrifice of Iphigeneia (1.80-101) in this light, seeing in them not only an instance of the ills caused by false theological views but also an example of the kind of poetic myth that might originally have led people to think the

⁸³ Cf. Lucr. 6.50-91. The account in *De re. nat.* follows the structure of Epicurus' *On nature*, as is guaranteed by the sequence of topics in the relevant epitome, *Ep. Hdt.* There, §§ 75-76 give a précis of *On nature* 12 on the origin of civilized institutions, and then segue, in §§ 76-82, into an abridgement of *On nature* 13's criticism of astral theology (discussed below; for these correspondences, see Sedley 1998, 122-3). What the epitome drops through abridgment—and Lucr. supplies—is the origin of belief in the gods as well as the origin of the theological error that *does* come up for criticism at *Ep. Hdt.* 76-82 (discussed below). See the charts of correspondences in Sedley 1998, 133 & 136. Phld. *De piet.* 232-288 (Obbink), discussed immediately below, preserves a complementary account of the first attributions of disturbance, anger, etc. to the gods (see comm. *ad loc.*).

⁸⁴ Phld. *De piet.* 307; cf. 238 (Obbink).

⁸⁵ Phld. *De piet.* 257-8; 302-3 (Obbink). Cf. Lucr. 5.1198-1203.

⁸⁶ See Phld. *De piet.* 296-318 (Obbink) with commentary.

gods' anger could be turned to favor through sacrifice. Speculation aside, the clearest evidence we have for such a stage in the Epicurean history of religious error may simply be the second part of Philodemus' *De pietate* itself, an extended, doxographical polemic against the theological views of poets and philosophers. Philodemus ends the first part of his treatise by introducing the second part as follows (2479-2496 (Obbink)):⁸⁷

[κατάρ]ξιωμα δ' ἀπὸ τ[ῶν] ἢ [σεμ]νῶν θεολόγων ἢ [καὶ π]οητῶν, ἐπει[δὴ μ]άλιστα τούτους ἢ [ἐγκω]μιάζουσιν οἱ ἢ [κατ]α[τρ]έχοντες ἢ [μῶ]ν ὡς ἀσεβῆ καὶ ἢ [ἀσύ]μφορα τοῖς ἀν[θρώ]ποις δογματι[ζόν]των. ἀξιῶ δ' ὄ[τι π]αν[ε]χθίστους ἢ [αὐτοὺς] ὡς χορὸν ἢ [διαδ]οῦνα πρὸς ὄ[λον] χρόνον οὐ π[ό]λυς ἀνωφελῆς ἔσται ἢ [πα]ντάπασιν οὔτε ἢ [μα]κρός.

But I shall begin with the self-important theologians and poets, since they are the ones who are especially praised by those who attack us, on the grounds we are setting forth views impious and disadvantageous to mankind. And I think it would not be a useless labour in general nor a long one to display them as arch-enemies for all time in a *choros*.

Thus, this third and final stage of theological error extends from the earliest poet to the latest Stoic.

The tripartite archaeology of religious belief I have reconstructed above conforms to the general theory of cultural history outlined by Epicurus at *Epistle to Herodotus* 75. As we have seen, in a first stage, raw experience teaches its lessons. In a second stage, mankind applies reason to the data of experience in order to sharpen (ἐπακριβοῦν, *Ep. Hdt.* 75) those data further. In the religious history, this stage is ambiguous between progress and error, between true inferences of immortal bliss and false inferences of divine wrath. Finally, in a third stage, people innovate (προσεξυρίσκειν, *Ep. Hdt.* 75), devising new inventions and making fresh discoveries through the exercise of reason. In the *Epistle to Herodotus* (76), Epicurus illustrates this stage with a picture of knowledgeable men (τοὺς συνειδότας) introducing novel concepts and discoveries (οὐ συνωρόμενα πράγματα) as well as the terminological innovations in which to

⁸⁷ Trans. Obbink. For the second part of *De piet.*, see Obbink (forthcoming), superceding Schober 1988.

communicate them. In the religious history, this stage again has its dark side, as certain men, poets and philosophers included, exploit or augment the erroneous views introduced in the second stage, thus leading to a variety of errors in ritual practice and belief.

The foregoing sketch puts us in a position to reconsider some Democritean fragments on religion that have long posed an interpretive problem. As a group, these fragments have almost universally been construed as providing mutually conflicting answers to the same question: the origin of belief in gods.⁸⁸ I prefer to see in them the remains of a three stage theory that forms a sequence cognate with, because at the root of, the Epicurean archaeology of religion. In Democritus' first stage, as we saw in section II., mankind acquires the idea of gods and a belief in their existence through epiphany (DK 68 B 166; Sext. Emp. *Math.* 9.42). In a second stage, which maps neatly onto the scheme evidenced in Lucretius, the wonders and terrors of the heavens lead to the fear that gods control celestial events. Diels-Kranz groups the following fragments under 68 A 75:⁸⁹

Sext. Emp. *Math.* 9.24:

καὶ ὁ Δημόκριτος· ὀρῶντες γάρ, φησί, τὰ ἐν τοῖς μετεώροις παθήματα οἱ παλαιοὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων καθάπερ βροντὰς καὶ ἀστραπὰς κεραυνούς τε καὶ ἄστρον συνόδου ἡλίου τε καὶ σελήνης ἐκλείψεις ἐδειματοῦντο θεοὺς οἰόμενοι τούτων αἰτίους εἶναι.

And Democritus: "Seeing the happenings in the heavens, such as thunder and lightning and thunderbolts and the collisions of stars and the eclipses of the sun and the moon, the ancient peoples were frightened, supposing gods to be the cause of these things."

⁸⁸ Thus, in DK 68 A 75, B 30 & B 166, Guthrie 1965, 478, sees inconsistency, Henrichs 1975, 103, sees "two different but by no means mutually exclusive explanations", Jaeger 1947, 182, finds two different theories for the origin of belief in god, but attempts to reconcile them as moments within a broader, psychologizing explanatory model from awe and fear (cf. Babut 1974, 47-9 & Salem 1996, 297-8). Taylor 1999, 215, puzzlingly suggests that B 166 describes the origin of the *idea* of gods, while A 75 & B 30 explain the origin of belief in their *existence*. The root of the confusion may lie in Sextus' misleading prefatory remark at *Math.* 9.24 (DK 68 A 75): εἰσὶ δὲ οἱ ἀπὸ τῶν γιγνομένων κατὰ τὸν κόσμον παραδόξων ὑπονοήσαντες εἰς ἔννοιαν ἡμᾶς ἐληλυθέναι θεῶν, ἀφ' ἧς φαίνεται εἶναι δόξης καὶ ὁ Δημόκριτος. *Pace* Sextus himself, the words he goes on to quote (see below) seem to me to *presuppose* the concept of god rather than to explain that concept's *origin*.

⁸⁹ Note that Diels-Kranz includes Lucr. 5.1186-93 under 68 A 75 as well.

Democritus *ap. Phld. De piet.* 9203-14 (Obbink, forthcoming)⁹⁰

κα[ι] γαρ τῶν [ἐτῶν] καὶ χρόνων ἐξ [ἀρχῆς] ἡ θέρους ἐντεῦθ[εν καὶ] χε[ι]μῶν καὶ ἔ[αρ καὶ] μεθόπωρον [κ]αὶ π[ά]ντα ταῦτα ἄνωθεν διλειπετῆ γε(ί)νεται· διὸ δὴ καὶ τὸ ἐξεργαζόμενον γνόντας ἰσέβεσθαι. οὐ φαίνεται δὲ μοι Δημόκριτος, ὥσπερ ἔνιοι τὸν ἢ ...

For (they could see that) over the course of years and periods in the beginning summer, and then winter, spring, autumn, and all such phenomena, came from on high, heaven-sent; not surprisingly, therefore, (Democritus says that) they judged the agent causing these things (*sc.* to be a god) and worshipped it. But in my estimate, Democritus does not seem to do, as some do...

This last fragment is difficult, but its sense places it squarely in the second stage of religious development if we take γινώσκω in its meaning "form a judgement, think" (LSJ s.v. II). Hence my translation of the clause διὸ δὴ καὶ τὸ ἐξεργαζόμενον γνόντας ἰσέβεσθαι as "therefore, (Democritus says that) they judged the agent causing these things (*sc.* to be a god) and worshipped it". This fragment, like the one from Sextus, thus gives an *aition* for certain beliefs *about* the gods, whose existence is presupposed, but says nothing about the *origin* of belief *in* the gods.

Finally, Democritus posits a third stage of theological development in which eloquent or sophisticated (λόγιος)⁹¹ individuals attempt to rationalize the gods (and perhaps explain or exploit myths) by *identifying* them with natural forces and by ascribing to them further powers, such as omniscience and omnipotence (DK 68 B 30).⁹²

Clem. *Protr.* 68.5 (cf. Clem. *Strom.* 5.14.102.1)

ἔθεν οὐκ ἀπεικότως ὁ Δημόκριτος τῶν λογίων ἀνθρώπων ὀλίγους φησὶν ἀνατείναντας τὰς χεῖρας ἐνταῦθα, ὃν νῦν ἡέρα καλέομεν οἱ Ἕλληνας, πάντα Δία μυθεῖσθαι, καὶ πάντα οὗτος οἶδεν καὶ διδοῖ καὶ ἀφαιρεῖται, καὶ βασιλεὺς οὗτος τῶν πάντων.

Hence not unreasonably Democritus says that a few of the eloquent men, stretching their hands up to that place which now we Greeks call the air, [said] "Zeus converses about all things with himself, and he knows all, and he gives and takes away, and he is king of all".

⁹⁰ My translation is based on that in Obbink (forthcoming). This fragment is also presented, translated and discussed in Henrichs 1975.

⁹¹ The adjective λόγιος (DK 68 B 30) need not denote approbation: cf. Pfligersdorffer 1943-7, 27, who understands these men as heroic *Kulturschöpfer*; Mansfeld 1999, 470n95 more plausibly suggests they were "clever people" who "capitalized" on the fear and awe generated by natural phenomena.

⁹² Montano 1984, 456, sees in B 30 "*une phase plus avancée*" than that of A 75, i.e., a second stage in which learned men "*ont théorisé une religion plus complexe*" (orig. emph.). He nonetheless perpetuates the error that A 75 describes the origin of belief in gods and condemns B 166 as non-theological (!) (p. 464-7).

In his full account of this final stage, as in the corresponding stage in the Epicurean scheme evidenced by Philodemus, Democritus would presumably have included everyone from archaic poets, such as Hesiod, to philosophers, such as his own somewhat senior contemporary Diogenes of Apollonia, who praised Homer for thinking Zeus was the air, and omniscient (DK 64 A 8).⁹³

V. *Therapeia*

At this point a caveat is in order. As fascinating as this anthropological and cultural-critical strain in their thought is, it would be a mistake to suppose that the atomists pursued these investigations in a disinterested celebration of knowledge for its own sake. Rather, they will have approached these questions in the same spirit in which, as we saw in section III., they approached meteorological phenomena, where the end sought in science was ἀταραξία. Thus, in their cultural-historical work, the Epicureans and, I will suggest, Democritus were carrying out an archaeology of *fear*, trying to uncover the historical and cultural origins of humanity's superstitious fear of the gods—what Theophrastus called *deisidaimonia* (*Char.* 16)—and in this way to restore our religious conceptions to something like an original purity. Plutarch paints a particularly vivid picture of the ills caused by fear of the gods when he writes that the *deisidaimôn* "fears everything, earth, sea, air, sky, darkness, light, an outcry, silence"; his dreams are filled with "frightful images (εἴδωλα) and awesome apparitions and various punishments".⁹⁴ This is a malady that terrorizes its victims with inauspicious epiphanies.

⁹³ See also Diog. Apoll. DK 64 B 5. Cf., e.g., Anaximenes (DK 13 A 10), who thought air was divine.

⁹⁴ Plut. *De superst.* 165e-f. Cf. Theophr. *Char.* 16.8 & 11.

It is also a malady for which Epicurus has a cure. At *Epistle to Herodotus* 76-82 he treats the fear of sky-gods described by Lucretius.⁹⁵ He argues that the *leitourgia*, or public service at one's own expense, of managing a cosmos and directing the weather, as well as anger and favor, are logically inconsistent with blessedness (77):⁹⁶

οὐ γὰρ συμφωνοῦσι πραγματεῖαι καὶ φροντίδες καὶ ὄργαι καὶ χάριτες μακαριότητι, ἀλλ' ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ καὶ φόβῳ καὶ προσδεήσει τῶν πλησίων ταῦτα γίνεται.

For labors and cares and angers and favors do not harmonize with blessedness, but arise in weakness and fear and dependency on neighbors.

The importance of this deduction is seen in the fact that Epicurus makes it his first order of business in his *Kyriai doxai* (*KD* 1): "What is blessed and imperishable neither has any troubles itself nor causes any for another: thus it is bound by neither anger nor favor. For everything of this sort resides in weakness".⁹⁷ As we have seen, Epicurus constructs his aetiology of the idea of god so as to posit blessedness as an indispensable, empirically derived constituent of that idea; this is a calculated move, for it allows him then to argue that blessedness necessarily entails freedom from all concern, fear or favor. Divine involvement in the world is categorically impossible. Just as a circle is *by definition* a geometric figure every point on the circumference of which is equidistant from the center, so god is *by definition* blessed and immortal. And immortal blessedness precludes interventionism just as circularity precludes four right angles. With this, Epicurus hurls a stone that kills the two birds of teleological theology and cultic reciprocity.

It hardly needs saying that epiphany *qua* expression of the divine will is ruled out as well. The vision of a god is instead merely a byproduct of atomic physics (on both

⁹⁵ On E.'s criticism of "astral religion", here and in *Ep. Pyth.*, see Festugière 1955, 73-93.

⁹⁶ Cf. *Ep. Pyth.* 97, 113 & 115-6.

⁹⁷ Similar priority shown in Lucr.'s remarks on *religio* at 1.62ff. and in Diog. Oen.'s placement of fear of the gods first on his list of disturbing emotions at fr. 34.VII (Smith).

realist and idealist views).⁹⁸ But did Epicurus thus intend to abolish cult practice? On the contrary, Philodemus reports that Epicurus himself attended the festivals of the gods, "progressing to an understanding of the divine nature, through having its name the whole time on his lips".⁹⁹ He sublimated cult to a mental askesis, the outward forms of traditional worship executed with proper inward attitude. Epicurean terminology, which emphasizes our role in maintaining the gods' prerogatives, reflects this.¹⁰⁰ As we saw above, the *Letter to Menoecus* enjoins us to "preserve" (φυλάττειν, 123) the blessedness and immortality of the gods in our thoughts, while the *Letter to Herodotus* warns us to "guard the gods' dignity" (πᾶν τὸ σέμνωμα τηρεῖν, 77) in word and concept.¹⁰¹ Not that the gods *per se* need safeguarding from impious thoughts. To return to our geometric analogy, confused ideas about circles—such as the postulate of a circle with four right angles—do no violence to circularity, but merely fail to engage with it, and incidentally may have negative consequences for those, such as geometers, who hold them. Likewise, failures of noetic piety do the gods no evil, and elicit none from them. Rather, bad theology exacts its own penalty in spiritual distress, because the contradiction internal to the illogical notion that a blessed god can be angry creates "the greatest upset in men's souls" (τὸν μέγιστον τάρραχον ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς, *Ep. Hdt.* 77). Great harms or great benefits accrue to us, depending on our theological views: αἱ μέγιστα βλάβαι...ἐκ θεῶν

⁹⁸ Hence E. *Gnom. Vat.* 24: ἐνύπνια οὐκ ἔλαχε φύσιν θεῖαν οὐδὲ μαντικὴν δύναμιν, ἀλλὰ γίνεται κατὰ ἔμπρωσιν εἰδώλων.

⁹⁹ Phld. *De piet.* 765-770 (Obbink): ἐν δ[ὲ] ταῖς ἑορταῖς μ[ά]λιστ' ε[ἰ]ς ἐπίνοιαν αὐτῆς | βαδίζοντα διὰ τὸ | τοῦνομα πάντα | ἀνὰ στόμ' ἔχειν (trans. Obbink with modifications). For E.'s pious attendance at religious events, see Phld. *De piet.* 723-1022 (Obbink) and cf. the discussion of POxy 215 in Obbink 1984.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Obbink 1996, 11-12.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Phld. *De piet.* 786-9 (Obbink): [τῶι φυλάτ]τειν ἐνε[ρ]γε[ῖαι] | τὰς ἐπινο[ῖ]ας τῶν | θεῶν (cf. 828-37).

ἐπάγονται καὶ ὠφέλειαι (*Ep. Men.* 124).¹⁰² The individual thus *participates* in his or her own experience of god. In a sense, then, our epiphanies are up to us: to ensure auspicious encounters we must "save the appearances" of the gods from the distorting picture of popular opinion (ὕπολήψεις ψευδεῖς, *Ep. Men.* 124) and traditional *paideia*.

As we saw above, Democritus' archaeology of religion appears to have set the pattern for that of his descendants. We might well see a cognate therapeutics in the remains of his *oeuvre*.¹⁰³ However, before positing such a parallel it is important first to recall that for Democritus, unlike for Epicurus, the gods are *not* in fact wholly non-interventionist. His gods could reveal the future¹⁰⁴ and he seems to have put *some* stock in prayer.¹⁰⁵ For these reasons, Diogenes of Oenoanda criticized him for investing his εἰδῶλα with excessive agency.¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, Democritus took pains to allay religious anxieties. For example, he tried to neutralize fear of the afterlife by invoking his law of universal διάλυσις, asserting in effect that people make a hell of their own lives through a misbegotten fear that the soul might spend an eternity in Hades (DK 68 B 297; cf. B 234). As this suggests, Democritus believed that the underlying state of our souls was largely responsible for the quality of our response to religious ideas and experiences. He expressed this view in a more general form in his observation that the same atomic

¹⁰² See Lucr. 6.68-79 and Phld. *De piet.* 1023-1689 (Obbink) for a detailed account of the ὠφέλειαι and βλάβαι that derive from good or bad theological attitudes.

¹⁰³ Cf. Warren 2002, 36-9; McGibbon 1965, 395.

¹⁰⁴ DK 68 B 166 (Sext. Emp. *Math.* 9.19): the εἰδῶλα are said to προσημαίνειν τε τὰ μέλλοντα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις θεωρούμενα καὶ φωνὰς ἀφιέντα.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*: Democritus εὔχετο εὐλόγων τυχεῖν εἰδῶλων. Cf. B 217, Taylor 1999, 211 & McGibbon 1965, 393-4.

¹⁰⁶ Diog. Oen. fr. 10.IV-V (Smith), criticizing the kind of view expressed in DK 68 A 77.

compound could be experienced differently by different individuals.¹⁰⁷ Theophrastus reports his view (*De sens.* 63-4 = DK 68 A 135):¹⁰⁸

τῶν δὲ ἄλλων αἰσθητῶν οὐδενὸς εἶναι φύσιν, ἀλλὰ πάντα πάθη τῆς αἰσθήσεως ἀλλοιουμένης, ἐξ ἧς γίνεσθαι τὴν φαντασίαν. [...] σημείον δ' ὡς οὐκ εἰσὶ φύσει τὰ μὴ ταῦτα πᾶσι φαίνεσθαι τοῖς ζώοις, ἀλλ' ὃ ἡμῖν γλυκύ, τοῦτ' ἄλλοις πικρὸν καὶ ἑτέροις ὀξύ καὶ ἄλλοις δριμύ τοῖς δὲ στρυφνόν, καὶ τὰ ἄλλα δ' ὡσαύτως. (64) ἔτι δ' αὐτοὺς μεταβάλλειν τῆι κρήσει κατὰ τὰ πάθη καὶ τὰς ἡλικίας· ἦ καὶ φανερόν ὡς ἡ διάθεσις αἰτία τῆς φαντασίας.

Of the other sensible qualities, (he says) that none has its own nature, but all are affections of the sense that undergoes an alteration; from this sense the sensory impression results. [...] The proof that they [*sc.* αἰσθητά, sensible qualities] do not exist by nature is that things do not appear the same to all creatures, but what is sweet to us is bitter to others and to others sour and to others pungent and to others astringent, and other things are like this too. (64) Moreover, creatures change in their physical constitution in accord with their affections and their age; from this it is clear that their constitution is the cause of their sensory impressions.

Thus it is the interaction between the atoms entering our sense organs and the underlying state of the sense organs themselves, or more generally, our *διάθεσις*, that is responsible for the quality of our perceptions.¹⁰⁹ This excursus puts us in a position to reconcile two seemingly contradictory religious fragments. In one, Sextus testifies that some of Democritus' idolc gods were "beneficent" and others "maleficent" (τὰ μὲν εἶναι ἀγαθοποιὰ τὰ δὲ κακοποιά).¹¹⁰ In the other, Stobaeus preserves the doctrine that the gods are a source only of good for us, while evil is solely a result of human folly (68 B 175). The latter is the key to the former: if the perceiver's underlying disposition or *διάθεσις* affects his reception and interpretation of sense data, then any ill that results

¹⁰⁷ See Furley 1987, 133 & 1993, 78-81.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Theophr. *De sens.* 67, DK 68 B 9 & B 125.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. DK 68 B 9: our perceptions change κατὰ τὸ σῶμα διαθήκην καὶ τῶν ἐπεισιόντων καὶ τῶν ἀντιστηρίζοντων.

¹¹⁰ DK 68 B 166. Cf. Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 2.14 (DK 68 A 76), a passage concerned with the '*effigies dei formaque*' (*ut Democrito placuit, duos (sc. deos) omnino, Poenam et Beneficium*) and Cic. *De nat. deor.* 1.120 (= DK 68 A 74) (*animantes imagines, quae vel prodesse nobis solent vel nocere*). Cf. McGibbon 1965, 395-6.

from epiphany will be largely a function of the perceiver's own psychology and expectations, and these, of course, are inherently amenable to philosophical therapy.¹¹¹

But if Democritus sought such a cure for fear of the gods, his descendant could claim to have found it. Just as Epicurus' therapeutic arguments demonstrate the *logical* priority of his paradigm of divinity, so his archaeology of religion shows its *chronological* priority.¹¹² He razed the edifice of traditional ideas about the gods to the ground, stripping away the strata of false opinion to uncover mankind's original relationship to the gods and to reestablish on this foundation a firm basis for piety. He sought to recapture the benefit alluded to but precluded by traditional cult by displacing divine-human reciprocity to the noetic realm: if we preserve the gods' holiness in our souls they will in turn grace us as exemplars of peace and bliss. In Velleius' words at *De natura deorum* 1.49: "our minds, fixed and intent, with the greatest pleasure, on the images of the gods, gain an understanding of what a blessed and eternal nature is." This vision of holy bliss, in turn, recalls us to the goal of our work in philosophy.

There is of course a tension in the Epicurean hankering for return to an Edenic state, for any salvific philosophy depends upon a prior fall, a *felix culpa* perhaps. Nonetheless if you learn what he has to teach, "you will live as a god among mortals" (*Ep. Men.* 135).¹¹³ Perhaps this is why his disciples could invoke him as Lucretius does, proclaiming, '*deus ille fuit, deus*' (5.8). But enough. A god on earth, a happy fault: this is a story for another day.

¹¹¹ Cf. Democritus' assertion that teaching changes people and in so doing "makes" their nature (ἡ διδασχὴ μεταρυσμοὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπον, μεταρυσμοῦσα δὲ φυσιοποιεῖ, DK 68 B 33). On Democritus' arguments that happiness depends on the right exercise of reason rather than on external circumstance see Annas 2002.

¹¹² Cf. Obbink 2002, 220.

¹¹³ On Epicurean ὁμοίωσις θεῶ see Erler 2002.

SAVING THE APPEARANCES

The Phenomenology of Epiphany in Atomist Theology

Jacob L. Mackey, Princeton University

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Algra, K. *et al.*, eds. 1999. *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*. Cambridge.
- Annas, J. 2002. "Democritus and Eudaimonism." In Caston and Graham, eds., *Presocratic Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Alexander Mourelatos*. Ashgate Publishing Ltd.
- Armstrong, D. *et al.* eds. 2004. *Vergil, Philodemus, and the Augustans*. Austin.
- Asmis, E. 1984. *Epicurus' Scientific Method*. Ithaca.
- Arrighetti, G. 1973. *Epicuro, Opere*². Turin.
- Auvray-Assayas, C. 1998. "Images mentales et représentations figurées." *Images Romaines*: 299-310.
- . & Delattre, D., edd. 2001. *Cicéron et Philodème: la polémique en philosophie*. Études de Littérature Ancienne 12. Paris.
- Babut, D. 1974. *La religion des philosophes grecs, de Thalès aux Stoïciens*. Paris.
- Bailey, C. 1926. *Epicurus: the extant remains*. Oxford.
- . 1928. *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus*. Oxford.
- Blickman, D. R. 1989. "Lucretius, Epicurus, and Prehistory." *HSCP* 92, 157-91.
- Bollack, J. 1975. *La Pensée du plaisir. Epicure: textes moraux, commentaires*. Paris.
- Burkert, W. 1977. "Air-imprints or eidola. Democritus' aetiology of vision." *ICS*, II: 97-109.
- . 1985. *Greek Religion*, trans. J. Raffan. Cambridge, MA.
- Campbell, G. L. 2003. *Lucretius on Creation and Evolution: A Commentary on De rerum natura, book 5, lines 772-1104*. Oxford.
- Clay, D. 1980. "An Epicurean Interpretation of Dreams." *AJP* 101: 342-65.
- Cole, T. 1967. *Democritus and the Sources of Greek Anthropology*. Philological Monograph No. XXV of the American Philological Association: Cleveland.
- De Lacy, P. H. & De Lacy, E. A. 1978. *Philodemus: On Methods of Inference*². Naples.
- Denniston, J. D. 1954. *The Greek Particles*². Oxford.
- Diels, H. 1916. "Philodemos über die Götter, Erstes Buch," *APAW* 1916, Philosophisch-historische Klasse, Nr. 7.
- . 1917. "Philodemos über die Götter, Drittes Buch," *APAW* 1917, Philosophisch-historische Klasse, Nr. 4 und 6.
- Dodds, E. R. 1951. *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Berkeley.
- Dyck, A. R. 2003. *Cicero De natura deorum liber I*. Cambridge.
- Edelstein E.J. and Edelstein, L. 1945. *Asclepius: A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies*, 2 vols. Baltimore.
- Eisenberger, H. 1970. "Demokrits Vorstellung vom Sein und Wirken der Gotter," *RhM* 113, 141-58.
- Erler, M. 2002. "Epicurus as *deus mortalis*. *Homoiosis theoi* and Epicurean Self-cultivation," in Frede and Laks 2002, 159-181.
- Essler, H. 2004. "Die Arbeiten an Philodem, *De dis* III (PHerc. 152/157). Der Beitrag der

- disegni* zur Rekonstruktion der Fragmentreihenfolge." *CErc* 34, 153-204.
- Festugière, A.-J. 1955. *Epicurus and his gods*. Oxford.
- Frede, D. and Laks, A., eds. 2002. *Traditions of Theology*. Leiden.
- Freeman, K. 1953. *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers*³. Oxford.
- Freymuth, G. 1953. *Zur Lehre von den Götterbildern in der Epikureischen Philosophie*. Berlin.
- Furley, D. 1987. *The Greek Cosmologists*. Cambridge.
- . 1993. "Democritus and Epicurus on sensible qualities." In Brunschwig & Nussbaum, eds., *Passions & Perceptions: Studies in Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind. Proceedings of the Fifth Symposium Hellenisticum*. Cambridge.
- Gabba, E. 1991. *Dionysius and 'The History of Archaic Rome'*. Berkeley.
- Guthrie, W. K. C. 1965. *A History of Greek Philosophy, vol. 2: The Presocratic tradition from Parmenides to Democritus*. Cambridge.
- Hanson, J. S. 1980. "Dreams and Visions in the Graeco-Roman World and Early Christianity," *ANRW II*, 23.2, 1395-1427.
- Henrichs, A. 1975. "Two doxographical notes: Democritus and Prodicus on religion." *HSPH* 79, 93-123.
- . 1976. "The Atheism of Prodicus." *CErc* 6, 15-21.
- Hourcade, A. 2000. "Protagoras et Démocrite: le feu divin entre mythe et raison," *RPhA* 18, 87-113.
- Jaeger, W. 1947. *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*. Oxford.
- Kany-Turpin, José. 1986. "Les images divines." *Revue philosophique*, 176: 40-58.
- Kleve, K. 1963. *Gnosis theon: Die Lehre von der natürlichen Gotteserkenntnis in der epikureischen Theologie*. Symbolae Osloenses, Fasc. Suppl. 19. Oslo.
- . 2003. "Epicurean Theology and Herculaneum Papyri." *CErc* 33, 249-266.
- Lane Fox, R. 1987. *Pagans and Christians*. New York.
- Lemke, D. 1973. *Die Theologie Epikurs; Versuch einer Rekonstruktion*. Munich.
- Long, A. A. and Sedley, D. N. 1987. *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2 vols. Cambridge.
- Longo Auricchio, F. 1988. *Ermarco: frammenti*. La Scuola di Epicuro 6. Naples.
- Luria, S. R. 1970. *Democritea*. Leningrad.
- Mansfeld, J. 1992. "A Theophrastean excursus on god." *Phronesis* 37, 314-35.
- . 1993. "Aspects of Epicurean Theology." *Mnemosyne* 46, 172-210.
- . 1999. "Theology," in Algra, K. et al., edd. 1999, 452-478.
- Marcovich, M. 1975. "Democritus on Gods: PHerc. 1428 fr. 16 = VS 68 A 75." *ZPE* 19: 244.
- McGibbon, D. 1965. "The religious thought of Democritus." *Hermes* 93: 385-397.
- Mikalson, J. 1983. *Athenian Popular Religion*. Chapel Hill.
- Montano, A. 1984. "La genèse de la croyance religieuse d'après Démocrite," in *Proceedings of the 1st International Congress on Democritus*. Xanthi.
- Obbink, D. 1984. "POxy. 215 and Epicurean religious ΘΕΩΡΙΑ." *Atti xvii congr. intern. pap.*: 607-619.
- . 1989. "The atheism of Epicurus." *GRBS* 30: 187-223.
- . 1992. "What All Men Believe—Must Be True: Common Conceptions and Consensus Omnium in Aristotle and Hellenistic Philosophy." *OSAP* 10, 193-231.
- . 1995. "Philodemus' *De pietate*." *V seminario internazionale di papirologia*: 203-231.
- . 1996. *Philodemus On Piety, Part I*. Oxford.
- . 2001. "Le livre du *De natura deorum* de Cicéron et le *De pietate* de Philodème," in

- Auvray-Assayas & Delattre, edd. 2001: 203-225.
- . 2002. "'All Gods are True' in Epicurus," in Frede and Laks 2002, 183-221.
- . (forthcoming). *Philodemus On Piety, Part 2*. Oxford.
- Pease, A. S. 1955. *M. Tulli Ciceronis De natura deorum* (2 vols.). Cambridge, MA.
- Pfligersdorffer, G. 1943-7. "Λόγιος und die λόγιοι ἄνθρωποι bei Demokrit," *Weiner Studien* 61-62, 5-49.
- Pfister, F. 1924. "Epiphanie," RE Suppl. 4, 277-323.
- van der Plas, D. 1987. *Effigies Dei: Essays on the History of Religions*. Studies in the History of Religions LI. Leiden.
- Purinton, J. S. 2001. "Epicurus on the nature of the gods." OSAPh 21: 181-231.
- . 2002. (Review of Santoro 2000). CR 52: 267-8.
- Rist, J. M. 1972. *Epicurus: an introduction*. Cambridge.
- Salem, J. 1996. *Démocrite: Grains de Poussière dans un Rayon de Soleil*. Paris.
- Sanders, K. R. 2004. "Cicero *De natura deorum* 1.48-9: Quasi Corpus?" *Mnemosyne* 57, 215-218.
- Santoro, M. 2000. [*Demetrio Lacone*], [*La forma del dio*] (PHerc. 1055). La Scuola di Epicuro 17. Naples.
- Schober, A. 1988. *Philodemi περὶ εὐσεβείας libelli partem priorem restituit Adolf Schober* (Diss. ined. Königsberg, 1923) = CErc 18: 67-125.
- Schofield, M. et al., edd. 1980. *Doubt and Dogmatism: Studies in Hellenistic Epistemology*. Oxford.
- Schofield, M. 1980. "Preconception, Argument and God," in Schofield et al., edd. 1980, 283-308.
- Scott, W. 1883. "The Physical Constitution of the Epicurean Gods." JPh 12, 212-47.
- Sedley, D. 1998. *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*. Cambridge.
- Smith, M. F. 1993. *Diogenes of Oinoanda: the Epicurean Inscription*. Naples.
- van Straten, F.T. 1976. "Daikrates' Dream: a votive relief from Kos and some other *kat' onar* dedications," *Bulletin Antieke Beschaving* 51, 1-38.
- Summers, K. 1995. "Lucretius and the Epicurean tradition of piety." CPh 90 (1): 32-57.
- Taylor, C. C. W. 1999. *The Atomists, Leucippus and Democritus. Fragments: a Text and Translation with a Commentary*. Toronto.
- Usener, H. 1887. *Epicurea*. Leipzig.
- Versnel, H.S. 1987. "What Did Ancient Man See When He Saw God? Some Reflections on Greco-Roman Epiphany," in van der Plas 1987: 42-55.
- Vlastos, G. 1945. 'Ethics and Physics in Democritus.' PR 54 (1945), 578-92.
- Warren, J. 2002. *Epicurus and Democritean Ethics*. Cambridge.
- Wigodsky, M. 2004. "Emotions and Immortality in Philodemus *On the Gods* 3 and the *Aeneid*," in Armstrong et al. 2004, 211-230.
- Wildberg, C. 1999-2000. "Piety as Service, Epiphany as Reciprocity: Two Observations on the Religious Meaning of the Gods in Euripides" ICS 24-25: 235-256.
- Winiarczyk, M. 1984. "Wer galt im Altertum als Atheist?" *Philologus* 128: 157-83.
- Woodward, P. G. 1989. "Star gods in Philodemus, PHerc 152/157." CErc 19, 29-47.
- Zanker, G. 1981. "Enargeia in the Ancient Criticism of Poetry," RhM 124, 297-311.
- Zeller, E. 1881. *A History of Greek Philosophy, vol. 2*, trans. S. F. Alleyne. London.