

Source 1.4: Do gods look like humans?

Around 45 BC, the Roman orator and author Cicero wrote a series of philosophical books entitled De Natura Deorum (On the Nature of the Gods). One of the subjects he wrote about was the appearance of the gods. Romans believed that the gods were anthropomorphic, i.e. that they looked and acted like humans. In the passage below Cicero explains why this was so.

Indeed, when we think about the gods' appearance, we think that the race of the gods is nothing other than human in appearance; for how else does anyone ever imagine – either when they are awake or when they are asleep – that they have pictured the gods? Reason itself declares the same thing. For it is generally agreed that the nature of the gods surpasses all others, either because it is blessed or because it is immortal, and therefore that it must be equivalent to the most beautiful thing. What arrangement of limbs, what shaping of features, what figure, what species is able to be more beautiful than the human one?

Cicero, De Natura Deorum, Book 1.46-47 (with omissions)

Source 1.4: Questions

- **1** What is the first reason Cicero gives to explain why the Romans thought that the gods look like humans?
- **2** Cicero then tells us that reason, i.e. logical thought, brings us to the same conclusion. Use the following questions to help you explain his argument.
 - **a.** What does Cicero mean when he writes that the nature of the gods surpasses all others?
 - **b.** If the gods are better than all other beings, what does Cicero think this means their appearance must be?
 - **c.** What does Cicero think is the most beautiful appearance for a being to have?
- 3 Do you think Cicero's argument is a good one?
- **4** Based on what you know about the gods, do you agree that they should be beautiful?
- **5** Think about the images you have seen of the gods so far. Do you think that they are beautiful? Does our society have the same standards of beauty as the Romans had?

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