

Clear But Not Convincing Evidence

Post by "Don" of October 14, 2024 at 5:38 PM

123f. ἐναργῆς γὰρ αὐτῶν ἔστιν ἡ γνῶσις.

Here's our δέ "on the other hand."

ἐναργῆς [δέ] ἔστιν αὐτῶν ἡ γνῶσις

"And the knowledge (ἡ γνῶσις (gnōsis)) of them (θεοί "gods", note the plural here) is ἐναργῆς."
But what does ἐναργῆς mean?

LSJ provides two primary definitions:

visible, palpable, in bodily shape, properly of gods appearing in their own forms (in Homer); so of a dream or vision; ex., ἐναργῆς ταῦρος "in visible form a bull, a very bull"

manifest to the mind's eye, distinct

Epicurus can't mean the first meaning since he's adamant that the gods don't interact with humans. But the second definition coincides with his contention (and the idea of the prolepsis of the gods) that the gods are apprehended by the mind only. In first Principal Doctrine's scholia (i.e., a note added to the text by a later author), we read τοὺς θεοὺς λόγῳ θεωρητοῦς "the gods are conceived of through contemplation by reasoning." We don't - can't! - see the [Epicurean gods](#) with our physical eyes as Homer describes seeing the Olympian gods "in visible form." Homer's gods were ἐναργῆς in one sense of the word; Epicurus's in the other sense. The truth of the gods' existence in Epicurus's philosophy takes place entirely in our minds by reasoning through their existence by means of contemplation. But through that contemplation, Epicurus asserts that their existence is ἐναργῆς "clearly discernible to us / manifest to us in our minds."

This emphasis on contemplation is interesting in light of the characteristic of the Epicurean sage in Diogenes Laertius Book X.30: μᾶλλον τε εὐφρανθήσεσθαι τῶν ἄλλων ἐν ταῖς θεωρίαις. I continue to maintain that "in contemplation" is the best translation of ἐν ταῖς θεωρίαις for this characteristic of the sage: "The sage will also enjoy themselves more than others in contemplation, speculation, and theorizing." Many translators see this as referring to state festivals and spectacles. I've explored the use of the word elsewhere in Diogenes Laertius' work as well as in Aristotle online. <https://sites.google.com/view/epicurean...tion?authuser=0> If the gods are "manifest" in contemplation, this seems consistent with that characteristic of an Epicurean sage.

Unfortunately, this does nothing to resolve our problem with puzzling out how a god is a ζῶον. Are they physically-existent material beings? Are they existing only as mental perceptions

manifest merely to the mind's eye? The ambiguous nature of εναργής doesn't necessarily help us fully. It does, however, set up some of Epicurus's clever wordplay contrasting his view with Homer's.