

From Philodemus

Post by "Elayne" of October 30, 2020 at 1:52 PM

Bearing in mind our agreed on caveat for this group regarding secondary sources like Philodemus, I question whether this idea of gods feeling congeniality or alienation for us is consistent with the assertion that they are entirely blissful.

In the first place, a feeling of alienation is either a pleasure or a pain, because all feelings in EP are one or the other. Alienation sounds like a pain, something the gods would want to avoid, so if they feel alienation then they are not entirely blissful on a continuous basis and then by definition are not [Epicurean Gods](#). If that is the correct translation-- if he said and meant feeling.

If a being feels congeniality for a human and then that human experiences pain-- let us even say pain impossible to avoid, which Epicurus agreed is a thing-- then to remain entirely and continually blissful, this being could not feel empathetic pain triggered by the pain of the human it feels congenial towards. And what kind of congeniality is that? Certainly not an anthropomorphic congeniality-- not the type of friendship Epicurus describes here in VS 56 "The wise man feels no more pain, when being tortured himself than when his friend is tortured" (which does not mean a wise man feels no pain when being tortured-- that's impossible-- but that the torture of a friend is like his own torture).

Gods who are unable to know how things are going with humans and are amongst their god friends who are not having pain would have no reason to experience empathetic pain. But if we start believing they can have some sort of relational connection with us, and that they have no sorrow at all over our pain, then we could at least say they would be of a very different nature than we are, in a way that we are not encouraged by Epicurus to emulate.

Christians, although many of them do believe their god has sorrow for us, have a mechanism for getting around any god attribute that a member does not understand-- they just have to say it is over their heads and that we can't understand the mind of god. However, nothing in Epicurus' original words implied creatures who would have incomprehensible features-- some behaviors about which we would have to shrug our shoulders and say well who knows, we can't understand gods. Instead, he has made them fairly anthropomorphic in what it would take to cause them pleasure.

This is another reason, besides the material implausibility, that I do not think the original Epicurean description of the gods is compatible with where Philodemus has taken it.