

From Philodemus

Post by "Don" of October 30, 2020 at 2:42 PM

Quote

From Philodemus "On Piety", referring to Epicurus' "On Nature", Bk. 13. Translation from "The Epicurus Reader" by Brad Inwood: "In book 13 [he mentions] the congeniality which god feels for some and the alienation [for others]."

This sounds also like the section of the Letter to Menoikeus that is notoriously difficult to translate (not just by me, but by others)

124c. ταῖς γὰρ ἰδίαις οἰκειούμενοι διὰ παντὸς ἀρεταῖς τοὺς ὁμοίους ἀποδέχονται,

Again, γάρ "for, because"...

ταῖς ἰδίαις = tais idiais (dative)

"to/for the peculiar, distinct, personal ... "

οἰκειούμενοι = oikeioumenoi "to be familiarized to; become familiar with" (Note: again connected with the οικεῖος "house, family, household, private sphere.")

διὰ παντὸς ἀρεταῖς = dia pantos aretais "through/by means of all ἀρεταῖς" ἀρεταῖς is the plural of ἀρετή = aretē which is usually translated "virtue" especially in works of other schools of philosophy. However, its semantic spectrum is a little wider than this:

goodness, excellence

manliness, prowess, rank, valour

virtue

character, reputation, glory, fame, dignity, distinction

miracle, wonder

More on the difficulty of translating this passage below, but suffice it to say that we should regroup in smaller passages. So, so far we have:

ταῖς γὰρ ἰδίαις οἰκειούμενοι διὰ παντὸς ἀρεταῖς... "Because those who are familiar with each other through all excellences and goodness

ὁμοίους ἀποδέχονται, = homioius apodekhontai, τοὺς ὁμοίους (accusative) "those who are like, resembling" ἀποδέχονται "admit, accept, demonstrate" (3d person plural)

"Because those who are familiar with each other through all excellences and goodness (the gods) accept those who resemble themselves.."

124d. πᾶν τὸ μὴ τοιοῦτον ὡς ἀλλότριον νομίζοντες. = pan to mē toiouton hōs allotrion nomizontes. πᾶν "all, everything" τὸ μὴ τοιοῦτον "one not of this sort" ὡς "like, as" ἀλλότριον "foreign, strange, alien" (accusative) νομίζοντες = "believing" (masculine nominative/vocative plural of νομίζων)

124b-d isn't the easiest section to parse, evidently for both myself and scholars. According to Peter Saint-Andre: "This is a puzzling sentence. Some translators understand it as applying to "the gods" from the previous sentence, with the sense that the gods would not interfere in human affairs because they don't care about ("consider as alien") mortal creatures who are so different from themselves. Other translators understand it as applying to "most people" from the previous sentence, with the sense that most people assume that immortal beings so different from themselves must want to interfere in human affairs. I lean toward the former interpretation." I am inclined to agree with Saint-Andre's position here and have used a variation on this understanding to get the literal translation below.

Since 124a-d finish the topic started in 123, let's bring together that section before proceeding:

Greek: οὐ γὰρ προλήψεις εἰσίν, ἀλλ' ὑπολήψεις ψευδεῖς αἰ τῶν πολλῶν ὑπὲρ θεῶν ἀποφάσεις: ἔνθεν αἰ μέγιστα βλάβαι τε τοῖς κακοῖς ἐκ θεῶν ἐπάγονται καὶ ὠφέλεια τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς. ταῖς γὰρ ἰδίαις οἰκειούμενοι διὰ παντὸς ἀρεταῖς τοὺς ὁμοίους ἀποδέχονται, πᾶν τὸ μὴ τοιοῦτον ὡς ἀλλότριον νομίζοντες.

Literal translation: "For they are not prolepses, but the judgements of the hoi polloi concerning the gods [are] false hasty assumptions. Thence, the greatest evils are brought to the wicked from the gods as well as the greatest aid to the good. Because they (the hoi polloi) are believing that those who are familiar with each other through all excellences and goodness (the gods) accept those who resemble themselves; all those not of their sort (are) strange and alien."

I take this to mean the gods, as conceived of by the hoi polloi, believe that they gods - who are full of all excellences and virtue - grant favors and aid to good humans because they are like themselves; those who are evil, the gods reject as foreign and strange.