

Convincing Demonstrations of the God(s)

Post by “Eikadistes” of August 22, 2023 at 2:34 PM

Philodemus concedes that “...**no one | has been prolific in finding convincing demonstrations for the existence of the gods; nevertheless all men, with the exception of some madmen, worship them, as do we...**” (*On Piety*, Col. 23, Lines 649-656)

I gather from this quote that Epicurus justified some of his theology based on the (then) newly-discovered religious traditions of peoples throughout Alexander's Hellenized, Eurasian empire. That "all people [...] worship them" is an empirical observation made of other cultures, and I have often thought that Epicurus' entire theological platform was an attempt to ground all human behavior in naturalism, and his theological propositions seem to adequately explain the diversity of religious thought that Alexander and others (like Pyrrho) would have encountered during his tours.

I am struck by the first sentiment, that "no one has been prolific in finding convincing demonstrations for the existence of the gods", because ... well, that's precisely how I look at the modern world. It also seems to lend some credence to the *non-Extraterrestrial interpretation* of Epicurus' gods, that our only experience with divinity is within the continuum of the human mind, and that their "real existence" is moot beyond being an inspiring icon.

Still, even within the context of a kind of dogmatic polytheism, sentiments like "no one has been prolific in finding convincing demonstrations for the existence of the gods" really provide some (as I see it) much-needed nuance to the context and function of Epicurean theology.

Post by “Don” of August 23, 2023 at 5:36 AM

Great find. I obviously need to try and get my hands on Obbink's translation of *On Piety* again.

I think your suggestion of this being a reaction to the Greeks' contact with other peoples' religions makes sense, although they would have been aware of the Egyptians and others since the time of Herodotus.

For additional context of that excerpt from Philodemus:

[DCLP/Trismegistos 62400 = LDAB 3563](#)

Column 23

P.Herc. 1077 col. 15

Engraved 1817-1822 by Giovanni Battista Casanova

[...]μενη[.] έναργει-

[.. ά]γαμενοῦντος

[.....]να, καὶ πάν-

τας [κ]ατ' ἀνάγκας

5 [οἱ ταύτῳ] γ' ἔγραψαν ἄ-

[ξίους] γε προαιρέ-

σ[εω]ς ἔνεκα θαυμά-

ζεσθαι καὶ μὴ διὰ τὴν

<ἄ>δυναμίαν ἀνοσίου[ς]

10 νομίζεσθαι· πάντας

δὲ ἀνθρώπους ὥ-

ρα{ι} λέγειν ἀνοσίους, ἔ-

πειδήπερ οὐδεὶς

εἰκνουμένος πε-

15 ρὶ τ[οῦ θε]οῦς ὑπάρ - >

χε[ιν τὰς ἀπο]δείξεις

εὐπ[όρησ]εν· ὅμως

δὲ [σέβ]ονται πάν-

τε[ς εἰ μὴ παρ]άκοποι τι-

20 νε[ς αὐτούς, κα]θάπερ

ἡμ[εῖς·.....]κ[.]α

με[- ca.10 -]λιψαι

το[- ca.11 -]νη

τ[- ca.13 -]

25 κα[.]μεν[...]νωσ

[οὔ]τως [- ca.10 -]

[.]ω γ[- ca.13 -]

[οὐ]χ ὑπ[- ca.10 -]

[.]ο πρὸς τα[...] παρ

ΝΑ ΚΑΙ ΠΑΝ
ΤΑΣ ΑΝΤΑΝΑΓΚΑΣ
ΝΕΓΡΑΨΑΝΑ
ΓΕΤΡΟΔΙΡΕ
ΣΙΣ ΓΕΝΕΚΑΘΑΥΜΑ
ΖΕΘΑΙΚΑΙΜΗΔΙΑΤΗΝ
ΔΥΝΑΜΙΑΝΑΝΟCΙΟΙ
ΝΟΜΙΖΕΘΑΙ ΠΑΝΤΑΣ
ΔΕ ΑΝΘΡΩΠΟΥCΩ
ΡΑΙΛΕΓΕΙΝΑΝΟCΙΟΥCΕ
ΠΕΙΔΗΠΕΡΟΥΔΕΙC
ΕΙΚΝΟΥΜΕΝΑC ΠΕ
ΡΙ ΤΩCΟΥCΥΠΕΡΥ
ΧΕΙΝΟC
ΕΥΓΕΝΟC
ΔΕ ΟΝΤΑΙ ΠΑΝ
ΤΕC ΑΚΟΠΟΙΤΙ
ΝΕΘΑΠΕΡ
ΗΜΕC
ΜΕΝ
ΤΟC
ΤΩC
ΚΑΙ ΜΕΝ
ΤΩC
ΩΓ
ΧΥΓ
ΟΠΡΟC ΤΑ ΠΑΡ

Edit: Oh, I forgot to add that Hiram posted several essays on On Piety, including:

[Reasonings about Philodemus' On Piety \(Part I\) | Society of Friends of Epicurus](#)

I don't necessarily agree with all his conclusions, but he also gives the full quote:

It would be fitting to describe all men as impious, inasmuch as no one has been prolific in finding convincing demonstrations for the existence of the gods; nevertheless all men, with the exception of some madmen, worship them, as do we.

Edit 2: Since everyone can see the holes, I want to give a better idea of the reconstruction of the text, so I'm going to replace the educated guesses of Obbink with O below...

[...]μενη[.] έναργει-

[.. O]γαμενοῦντος

[.....]να, καὶ πάν-

τας Οατ' ἀνάγκας

5 [ΟΟΟΟΟΟΟ]γ ἔγραψαν ἀ-

[ΟΟΟΟΟ] γε προαιρέ-

σ[ΟΟ]ς ἔνεκα θαυμά-

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15 ρὶ τ[ΟΟΟ]ξοῦς ὑπάρ - >

χε[ΟΟΟΟΟΟΟΟ]δείξεις

εὐπ[ΟΟΟΟ]ξεν· ὅμως

δὲ [ΟΟΟ]ονται πάν-

τε[ΟΟΟΟΟΟΟΟ]ἀκοποί τι-

20 νε[000000000]θάπερ
ήμ[000000000]κ[0]α
με[000000000]λιψαι
το[000000000]νη
τ[000000000000000]
25 κα[.0]μεν[000]νωσ
[οὔ]τως [00000000000]
[.]ω γ[000000000000000]
[οὐ]χ ὑπ[00000000000]
[00.]ο πρὸς τα[000] παρ