

Long and Sedley, Hellenistic Philosophers, "Gods"

Post by "Cassius" of November 26, 2020 at 1:57 AM

Don't thank you very much! That's a great contribution to this discussion. For anyone who just skims this thread and doesn't read the whole article, I made a few clips I thought were particularly important for giving a flavor of Sedley's opinions:

to the basic conception, reflecting faulty moral outlooks – just as in another context (24F) the myths about the underworld were explained as projections of men's false moral values. But the hard core of popular theology is vindicated, and turned to philosophical advantage. His inspired suggestion that god is a projection of man's own ethical ideal can be ranked with the most impressive theological theories of antiquity.

'truth' obtains as much in the moral as in the physical sphere, and our 'preconceptions' can have an introspective origin in our feelings as well as an empirical origin in our sensory experience of the external world. Thus our natural recognition of the existence of god is closely comparable to, perhaps identical with, our instinctive recognition that there exists for us a natural ethical goal.

lack solidity – cf. the similar locution at 30A – but would scarcely be intelligible if applied to an actually living organism.) Such a vindication of the gods' 'existence' must not be written off as a mere deception or sophistry. Rather, it is an instance of what we have described (15 commentary) as Epicurus' lingering Platonist assumption that any object of thought must somehow objectively exist in order to be thought of.

Moreover, it is clear that Epicurus, in which his gods did exist,

Sedley's comment in his conclusion in which he admits that the position he takes cannot be reconciled with the positions of "some" of his adherents (presumably including Philodemus and Lucretius) who he thinks were either deceived or participating in a tradition of keeping the ultimate truth about the gods close at hand among the inner circle:

objects.

It is not hard to see how Epicurus' repudiations of atheism could have deceived some of his adherents into reading him this way. To find an interpretation consistent with their views as well as with Epicurus' own pronouncements seems impossible, and we have settled instead for the only one which seems to us to fit the items of evidence widely regarded as the most authentic; to account for the deviant items as influenced by a very understandable misreading of Epicurus' intentions; and to leave him with a theology which ranks in subtlety and originality with any of his central theories, and which could hope to compete on equal terms with the rival Stoic doctrine (54).