

The Letter to Menoecus - Translation By Cyril Bailey

Post by "Eikadistes" of December 22, 2021 at 12:07 PM

[Quote from camotero](#)

Does someone care to elaborate on what Epicurus could've meant here?

Totally! (*Sorry I'm late to the conversation*).

The English translations of the second paragraph of the *Epistle to Menoikeus* disappoint me, and I came up with a paraphrasing (*not a translation, but a re-wording*) that I think better contextualizes his nuances:

".... What I have to share with you should be seriously considered if you want to live well. First, having acknowledged that **'a god'** is properly defined as **'a ceaselessly satisfied being'**, do not contradict this acknowledgment by proposing that something *other* than only **'a ceaselessly satisfied being'** could qualify as **'a god'**, for the natural anticipation of **'a perfect existence'** is relatable and therefore implicitly accessible to all living beings; But herein, note that this acknowledgment is seen as being controversial to the masses who employ myth to obscure the contradiction: that a being worthy of reverence could become *embarrassingly impassioned* by the activities of one specific species of primate on Earth. These are true *perverters* of our *natural* religious sympathies—despite their popular appeal to the general public—for their propositions are ultimately at odds with the reality of their own lived experiences as animals; So, as far as this material theology goes, *tragedy* strikes those *beholden to superstition*, and *fortune* favors the *students of nature*, because **'a being who lives a perfectly pleasant life'** knows that **'a perfect existence'** means studying nature to develop ways to preserve their pleasure, such as cultivating friendships with other **'ceaselessly satisfied beings'** who *also* guard against the misery that results from any disruptions to the continuation of their **'divine existences'**"

"God" (or "the gods", "deity", "divinity") is a pre-conceptual category, like "Justice". Whether or not we have any individual examples of "gods" is irrelevant: we know "the Perfect Existence" when we see it. We know Justice when we see it, even though "Justice", itself, refers to a condition or state, rather than an object or item. A *mutual agreement* is an example of the concept of Justice, though, it will end, and newer circumstances may no longer be evident of Justice. However, for that time, the mutual agreement had all of the marks of a "just" agreement.

Likewise, Epicurus posits that we implicitly recognize "the Perfect Existence" because, *like Justice*, the expectation of *Living Your Best Life* comes from Nature, and that's what "God" is: *Nature giving you direct knowledge through pleasure and pain as to what Living Your Best Life*

looks like.

Many beings in an infinite universe fit that definition. If we were to gain knowledge of an extraterrestrial entity who enjoys a life of ceaseless satisfaction, and therein neither causes drama nor suffers anyone else's drama, we'll all recognize that as "God". Furthermore, this pre-conceptual impression also informs us as to what is not "God", for example: a being that adopts homo sapiens as surrogates and declares our primate species to be "its children".

Epicurus was **neither** saying (so to speak), "Displace reasonable judgment and practice blind faith in the Divine Entity That Guides You (because its Favor is real)", **nor** was he saying "We all dream about Space Zeus (et. al.), and having raw unconditional belief in the physical existence of those Space Olympians is a reliable way to live."

He was saying "If you think 'god' is anything **but** 'an animal living a perfectly-pleasurable life', then you're going to get confused and easily manipulated by supernatural religion, and you'll suffer."

Stevie Wonder really said it better than I just did:

"When you believe in things that you don't understand, then you suffer. Superstition ain't the way."

So this is sort of Epicurus' way of naturalizing the phenomena of *human belief in the supernatural*.

It's the natural impulse to know and pursue *living your best life* ("the perfect existence", "the gods", "God"). When we look to the perfect existence as something **other** than (1) really [physically] existing [being a real goal you can actually achieve in your natural lifespan], and (2) constantly being "perfect" [in other words, "full of uninterrupted pleasure"], then we are turning away from the reliable preconception of the perfect existence, and, instead, adopting some mythic narrative that was invented in accordance to the misunderstandings of the authors who peddled it.