

Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 215

Post by “Eikadistes” of August 17, 2022 at 9:44 AM

I like this definition of “god” as “(the being) the best among beings”. I’ve recently come to see how functional and non-abstract the word “god” can be employed in our casual vernacular. If I ask you whom the “God of Rock” or “God of Pop” is, we’ll probably come up with a few similar answer. We experienced the “Lord of the Dance” without being confused into believing that Michael Flatley was a Creator-deity. If a person walks by and someone remarks, “he is a god” or “she is a goddess”, we know they are commenting on some semblance of physical perfection. Similarly, the “God [of a human]” would be that human's prototype of the perfect person, thus, being a reflection of our inner ideals.

I am partial to an idea expressed by Xenophanes: *“Ethiopians say that their gods are snub-nosed and black; Thracians that theirs are blue-eyed and red-haired [...] But if horses or oxen or lion had hands or could draw with their hands and accomplish such works as men, horses would draw the figures of the gods as similar to horses, and they would make the bodies of the sort which each of them had”*. Unsurprisingly, then, the god of the poor is a martyr, the god of the monarchs is kingly, the god of the pacifists is peaceful, and the god of the warriors is sacrificial (or some fascile thereof).

I am coming to appreciate how insightful Epicurus' observation was. There is a preconception of “god” because we can employ the phrase so easily with common language to express “the perfect version [of]”. Prior to getting subsumed by the theological rabbit hole, we already know what a “god” is and are comfortable assigning people we find extraordinarily skilled or admirable the designation of “[a] god” or “goddess”. For the sake of prudence and practical wisdom, it would be dysfunctional, or at least linguistically odd to assume that “[a] god” could be something other than “perfect”. How could the God of Rock make mistakes on a guitar? Why would the God of Dance trip over their own feet? Why would the God of Living Beings incite trouble or death that would threaten the lives of other beings? If there were a Creator that occasionally destroyed its creations, why would we identify that being as a "god"? That's just a bad Creator.