

PD01 - Gratitude and Weakness (Especially In Relation to the Gods)

Post by “Don” of May 9, 2023 at 5:16 AM

Great paper! Thanks for sharing. The take on the gods near the end seems spot on from my perspective:

Quote

The gods exist, but because they are ‘blessed and indestructible’ they need not feel gratitude. Gratitude indicates weakness and is relevant only for those who have deficiencies and thus need others to help or benefit them. That humans feel anger or gratitude reveals our limitations and dependency. So, if wisdom enables a human to ‘live as a god among men’ (Ep. Men. 135), would not a wise and virtuous person also have no need for gratitude?

The answer, it seems to me, must be ‘no.’ The fact that gods feel no gratitude does not mean that we should not; though Epicureans seek to emulate the gods’ tranquility and happiness, no human can attain their invulnerability or immortality, and any desire to do so would be unnatural and empty.

It is important to remember, in this context, that for Epicureans all virtues—like moderation and justice—are defined not absolutely, by an independent objective standard. They are instrumentally valuable because they contribute to a pleasurable life, and so what counts as virtuous in a case depends on what in fact produces happiness (Ep. Men. 132).

...for indestructible and perfectly self-sufficient gods, gratitude is not a value, while for vulnerable and deficient humans, it is. No matter how wise we become, we cannot eliminate these facts about what we are. Gratitude is part of how we achieve what limited and imperfect self-sufficiency we can obtain.