

Clear But Not Convincing Evidence

Post by “Joshua” of October 21, 2024 at 11:25 PM

Quote

Wouldn't appeal to some common prolepsis (on the question of gods' existence) be subject to the ad populum fallacy?

I have a pet theory that I think solves most of the problems in the following paragraphs from the letter to Menoikeus:

First of all believe that god is a being immortal and blessed, even as the common idea of a god is engraved on men's minds, and do not assign to him anything alien to his immortality or ill-suited to his blessedness: but believe about him everything that can uphold his blessedness and immortality.

- This passage is merely definitional, *not* proleptic; the clue for me is that this is the only place in the text where Epicurus refers to "God" in the singular.
 - Consider also what Epicurus wrote in the letter to Herodotus;
 - *First of all, Herodotus, we must grasp the ideas attached to words, in order that we may be able to refer to them and so to judge the inferences of opinion or problems of investigation or reflection, so that we may not either leave everything uncertain and go on explaining to infinity or use words devoid of meaning.*

[38] For this purpose it is essential that the first mental image associated with each word should be regarded, and that there should be no need of explanation, if we are really to have a standard to which to refer a problem of investigation or reflection or a mental inference.

- In this case, Epicurus is using the popular understanding of the word 'god'; the gods are blessed and immortal.

For gods there are, since the knowledge of them is by clear vision.

- NOW we are getting into prolepsis. The number has changed from singular to plural, and Epicurus is making a claim that according to his philosophy can *only* be supported by one or more of the legs of the canon; either we know that the gods exist because of sensation, or because of feeling, or because of prolepsis, or by some combination of the three.

But they are not such as the many believe them to be: for indeed they do not consistently represent them as they believe them to be.

- In this sentence, Epicurus is building on the previous passages.
 - 1) A god is such and such by definition. 2) We know the gods exist because of Prolepsis. 3) However, the hoi polloi imagine gods that are inconsistent even with their own ideas of the gods. Their mistaken view is not proleptic or otherwise canonic.

And the impious man is not he who popularly denies the gods of the many, but he who attaches to the gods the beliefs of the many.

- [continuing from above] 4) And, further, their mistaken view might actually be considered impious.

For the statements of the many about the gods are not conceptions derived from sensation, but false suppositions, according to which the greatest misfortunes befall the wicked and the greatest blessings (the good) by the gift of the gods.

- [continuing from above] 5) The errors of that mistaken view are formed in judgment, not in the Prolepsis.

In summary, the following claim is derived from any given *individual's* prolepsis:

- The gods exist.

And the following claims do not derive from any canonic faculty:

- The gods are blessed and incorruptible (mere definition)
- The hoi polloi hold wrong views concerning the gods (wrong view contradicts mere definition)
- It is impious to hold wrong views concerning the gods (noncanonical ethical judgment)

Edit; I should add that I still consider myself to have a poor understanding of prolepsis as a canonic faculty, so *caveat emptor* with regards to everything I wrote here!