

From Philodemus

Post by "Cassius" of October 30, 2020 at 2:57 PM

[Quote from Susan Hill](#)

From Philodemus "On Piety", referring to Epicurus' "On Nature", Bk. 13. Translation from "The Epicurus Reader" by Brad Inwood

"In book 13 [he mentions] the congeniality which god feels for some and the alienation [for others]."

This is the first quote I would focus on here, but I'll discuss it below in context of Elayne's comment.

[Quote from Elayne](#)

This is another reason, besides the material implausibility, that I do not think the original Epicurean description of the gods is compatible with where Philodemus has taken it.

First, I agree with the drift of Elayne's post that this quote needs to be scrutinized very closely. On its face, it would contradict the most basic statements that gods show no concern whatsoever for humans, plus even more, it contradicts the specific statement that they don't play favorites and enemies.

But rather than assume that this is where Philodemus has taken it, I first question the accuracy of the rendition. Even as quoted, it appears to be a fragment, and indeed if in Book 13 Epicurus did "mention" the issue of congeniality and alienation, I would first and strongly presume that he mentioned it only to denounce it - and it doesn't seem firm from the quote which is the case. This (when the rendition creates a clear conflict) is an example where I don't trust the compilers whatsoever, and would not put any stock in that until we traced back exactly what condition this particular text was in that produced this rendition.

Without intending to sound negative toward anyone in particular, almost every time I have gone back to the more academic texts which print renditions of the texts in addition to the proposed translation, it seems to me that I have found HIGHLY fragmentary material, wherein even the fragments that are left are largely guesswork on which we are relying on someone we may not even know at all to recreate the letters. Despite the best of intentions, people have a tendency to see what they want to see, or what they expect to see, so whenever there is a proposed rendition that would conflict with a more basic principle, the highest level of scrutiny should be required.

Thus while I am prepared to believe that Philodemus may not always have been an "orthodox" Epicurean, I tend to give him the benefit of the doubt and put the suspicion on the transmission rather than on the original text.

So in this example, for instance, it's highly helpful to cite these along with the proposed rendition. Now the task is up to those of us who can find the time to do it to trace back further and see where Inwood and Gerson got their original text.

All of this keeps constantly bouncing me back and forth between the divinity and the "methods of inference" discussion. I don't think we have any choice in much of what we do but to rely on "experts." I certainly don't know a word of Greek myself. But even worse than that is that we have to trust that the texts are not corrupted, and in many cases we have no idea about the chain of transmission.

What do we do in those cases? Roughly speaking,. we have to verify the experts as much as we can, I think, and then we are basically in the situation discussed in Hermetimus.