

Simulacra, gods and the dead

Post by "Don" of November 14, 2020 at 11:57 AM

I heard my name 😊

The "clear vision" translates enargēs ἐναργής in the Greek. Here's an excerpt from my rough draft on that section of the letter. Enargēs is in verse 123f:

123d. πᾶν δὲ τὸ φυλάττειν αὐτοῦ δυνάμενον τὴν μετ' ἀφθαρσίας μακαριότητα περὶ αὐτοῦ δόξαζε.

Remember δὲ "and, so" comes second in Greek but first in English.

The imperative verb comes last again: δόξαζε πᾶν = doxaze pan "You think, believe, imagine everything!" Believe what about everything?

τὸ φυλάττειν αὐτοῦ δυνάμενον τὴν μετ' ἀφθαρσίας μακαριότητα περὶ αὐτοῦ = to phylattein autou dynamenon tēn met' aphtharsias makariotēta peri autou

φυλάττειν = to phylattein "to guard, maintain, preserve, etc." δυνάμενον = "being able, capable, strong enough to do, can"

Bringing all 123d back together: "Being able to preserve its own imperishability and blessedness for itself"

"(You, Menoikeus,) Believe everything about which a god is able to preserve its own imperishability and blessedness for itself."

123e. θεοὶ μὲν γὰρ εἰσιν. θεοὶ μὲν γὰρ εἰσιν. = theoi men gar eisin.

If we take out the μὲν (and look for the inevitable δε in the next phrase) and move γὰρ "because, for" out of the way, we can pare this down to:

θεοὶ εἰσιν. "Gods exist." "There are gods."

The implications of those two words have had entire essays (if not books) written about them. We looked at this a little in 123b with ζῶον. But Epicurus is not equivocating here: Gods exist. What he means by this we simply have to discover from his extant works and fragments.

123f. ἐναργῆς δὲ ἐστὶν αὐτῶν ἡ γνῶσις: Here's our δὲ "on the other hand."

ἐναργῆς [δέ] ἐστὶν αὐτῶν ἡ γνῶσις: = enargēs estin autōn hē gnōsis. "And the knowledge (ἡ γνῶσις) of them (θεοί "gods") is ἐναργῆς." But what does ἐναργῆς mean? It has two primary

definitions:

- visible, palpable, in bodily shape, properly of gods appearing in their own forms (in Homer); so of a dream or vision; ex., ἐναργῆς ταῦρος "in visible form a bull, a very bull"

- manifest to the mind's eye, distinct

This fits right in with our problem with puzzling out how the gods are ζῶον. Are they physically-existent material beings? Are they existing only as mental perceptions manifest merely to the mind's eye? We still don't have a clear idea of Epicurus's meaning!

123g. οἴους δ' αὐτοὺς <οί> πολλοὶ νομίζουσιν, οὐκ εἰσίν: = hoious d' autous <hoi> polloi nomizousin, ouk eisin.

LSJ has this to say about οἴους: "Especially in Attic often stands for ὅτι τοῖος, τοῖα, τοῖον, so that the relative introduces the reason for the preceding statement... "if it is to be intimated that the reason is self-evident, and the assertion is beyond doubt, then δὴ is added..." (Note: Which it is here! δ' is ellided but is actually δή.) <οί> πολλοὶ is exactly what it means in English: "hoi polloi" the common people, the masses. It literally translates as "the many." Paraphrase: "The gods 'do not exist' (οὐκ εἰσίν) in the way that the 'hoi polloi' believe them (i.e., the gods) to."