

# From Philodemus

**Post by "Susan Hill" of October 28, 2020 at 2:09 PM**

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]."

From Philodemus "On Piety" 126 Gomperz (387 U, 114 A)

"Again: 'let us sacrifice to the gods,' he says, 'piously and well, as is appropriate, and let us do everything according to the laws, but [let us do so] not disturbing them at all with our opinions on the topic of those who are best and most majestic; again, we say that it is even right [to do this] on the basis of the opinion which I was discussing. For in this way, by Zeus, it is possible for a mortal nature to live like Zeus, as it appears.'"

From Philodemus "On Piety" 105 Gomperz (157 U, 86 A)

"Moreover, in his letter to Polyaeus he says that one should join in the celebration of the festival of the Anthesteria. For one must remember the gods as being the causes of many good things."

Philodemus, On the Life of the Gods, Vol. Herc. 1, VI col. 1

... to the gods, and he admires their nature and their condition and tries to approach them and, so to speak, yearns to touch them and to be together with them; and he calls Sages "friends of the gods" and the gods "friends of Sages."

Fragments and their sources from [Attalus's website](#):

[ U386 ] Philodemus, On Piety, Vol. Herc. 2, II.76.1 [p. 106 Gomperz] {Obbink I.27.754}:

... he says that as being both the greatest thing, and that which as it were excels in sovereignty, it possesses everything: for every wise man holds pure and holy beliefs about the divine and has understood that this nature is great and august. And it is particularly at festivals that he, progressing to an understand of it, through having its name the whole time on his lips, embraces with conviction more seriously .....

Philodemus, On Music, Vol. Herc. 1, I c.4,6:

Now, these very important things may still be said at the present: that the divine does not need any honor; for us, nevertheless, it's natural to honor it, above all, with pious convictions, even through the rites of national tradition, each according to his proper part.

Philodemus, On the Life of the Gods, Vol. Herc. 1, VI col. 1:

... to the gods, and he admires their nature and their condition and tries to approach them and, so to speak, yearns to touch them and to be together with them; and he calls Sages "friends of the gods" and the gods "friends of Sages."

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## Post by "Elayne" of October 30, 2020 at 1:52 PM

Bearing in mind our agreed on caveat for this group regarding secondary sources like Philodemus, I question whether this idea of gods feeling congeniality or alienation for us is consistent with the assertion that they are entirely blissful.

In the first place, a feeling of alienation is either a pleasure or a pain, because all feelings in EP are one or the other. Alienation sounds like a pain, something the gods would want to avoid, so if they feel alienation then they are not entirely blissful on a continuous basis and then by definition are not [Epicurean Gods](#). If that is the correct translation-- if he said and meant feeling.

If a being feels congeniality for a human and then that human experiences pain-- let us even say pain impossible to avoid, which Epicurus agreed is a thing-- then to remain entirely and continually blissful, this being could not feel empathetic pain triggered by the pain of the human it feels congenial towards. And what kind of congeniality is that? Certainly not an anthropomorphic congeniality-- not the type of friendship Epicurus describes here in VS 56 "The wise man feels no more pain, when being tortured himself than when his friend is tortured" (which does not mean a wise man feels no pain when being tortured-- that's impossible-- but that the torture of a friend is like his own torture).

Gods who are unable to know how things are going with humans and are amongst their god friends who are not having pain would have no reason to experience empathetic pain. But if we start believing they can have some sort of relational connection with us, and that they have no sorrow at all over our pain, then we could at least say they would be of a very different nature than we are, in a way that we are not encouraged by Epicurus to emulate.

Christians, although many of them do believe their god has sorrow for us, have a mechanism for getting around any god attribute that a member does not understand-- they just have to say

it is over their heads and that we can't understand the mind of god. However, nothing in Epicurus' original words implied creatures who would have incomprehensible features-- some behaviors about which we would have to shrug our shoulders and say well who knows, we can't understand gods. Instead, he has made them fairly anthropomorphic in what it would take to cause them pleasure.

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.

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## Post by “Don” of October 30, 2020 at 2:42 PM

### Quote

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 sounds also like the section of the Letter to Menoikeus that is notoriously difficult to translate (not just by me, but by others)

124c. ταῖς γὰρ ἰδίαις οἰκειούμενοι διὰ παντὸς ἀρεταῖς τοὺς ὁμοίους ἀποδέχονται,

Again, γάρ "for, because"...

ταῖς ἰδίαις = tais idiais (dative)

"to/for the peculiar, distinct, personal ... "

οἰκειούμενοι = oikeioumenoi "to be familiarized to; become familiar with" (Note: again connected with the οικεῖος "house, family, household, private sphere.")

διὰ παντὸς ἀρεταῖς = dia pantos aretais "through/by means of all ἀρεταῖς" ἀρεταῖς is the plural of ἀρετή = aretē which is usually translated "virtue" especially in works of other schools of philosophy. However, its semantic spectrum is a little wider than this:

goodness, excellence

manliness, prowess, rank, valour

virtue

character, reputation, glory, fame, dignity, distinction

miracle, wonder

More on the difficulty of translating this passage below, but suffice it to say that we should regroup in smaller passages. So, so far we have:

ταῖς γὰρ ἰδίαις οἰκειούμενοι διὰ παντὸς ἀρεταῖς... "Because those who are familiar with each other through all excellences and goodness

ὁμοίους ἀποδέχονται, = homoiou apodekhontai, τοὺς ὁμοίους (accusative) "those who are like, resembling" ἀποδέχονται "admit, accept, demonstrate" (3d person plural)

"Because those who are familiar with each other through all excellences and goodness (the gods) accept those who resemble themselves.."

124d. πᾶν τὸ μὴ τοιοῦτον ὡς ἀλλότριον νομίζοντες. = pan to mē toiouton hōs allotrion nomizontes. πᾶν "all, everything" τὸ μὴ τοιοῦτον "one not of this sort" ὡς "like, as" ἀλλότριον "foreign, strange, alien" (accusative) νομίζοντες = "believing" (masculine nominative/vocative plural of νομίζων)

124b-d isn't the easiest section to parse, evidently for both myself and scholars. According to Peter Saint-Andre: "This is a puzzling sentence. Some translators understand it as applying to "the gods" from the previous sentence, with the sense that the gods would not interfere in human affairs because they don't care about ("consider as alien") mortal creatures who are so different from themselves. Other translators understand it as applying to "most people" from the previous sentence, with the sense that most people assume that immortal beings so different from themselves must want to interfere in human affairs. I lean toward the former interpretation." I am inclined to agree with Saint-Andre's position here and have used a variation on this understanding to get the literal translation below.

Since 124a-d finish the topic started in 123, let's bring together that section before proceeding:

Greek: οὐ γὰρ προλήψεις εἰσίν, ἀλλ' ὑπολήψεις ψευδεῖς αἱ τῶν πολλῶν ὑπὲρ θεῶν ἀποφάσεις: ἔνθεν αἱ μέγιστα βλάβαι τε τοῖς κακοῖς ἐκ θεῶν ἐπάγονται καὶ ὠφέλεια τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς. ταῖς γὰρ ἰδίαις οἰκειούμενοι διὰ παντὸς ἀρεταῖς τοὺς ὁμοίους ἀποδέχονται, πᾶν τὸ μὴ τοιοῦτον ὡς ἀλλότριον νομίζοντες.

Literal translation: "For they are not prolepses, but the judgements of the hoi polloi concerning the gods [are] false hasty assumptions. Thence, the greatest evils are brought to the wicked from the gods as well as the greatest aid to the good. Because they (the hoi polloi) are believing that those who are familiar with each other through all excellences and goodness (the gods) accept those who resemble themselves; all those not of their sort (are) strange and alien."

I take this to mean the gods, as conceived of by the hoi polloi, believe that they gods - who are full of all excellences and virtue - grant favors and aid to good humans because they are like themselves; those who are evil, the gods reject as foreign and strange.

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## 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 In 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 Hermotimus.

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## Post by "Don" of October 30, 2020 at 3:16 PM

### Quote

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.

Cmon, [Cassius](#) , you know some Greek! Don't be so hard on yourself 😊 eudaimonia, ataraxia, ....

But I hear you on the fragmentary nature of our sources. That's why that digitized Diogenes Laertius manuscript at Oxford is so helpful. The Herculaneum papyri especially are problematic, both from a preservation perspective and from a public access perspective. That seems to be some closely guarded scholarship there!

Biblical scholars have similar issues; however, it doesn't seem to slow them down. That's one of the reasons I like Bart Ehrman so much! He doesn't shy away from sharing the difficulties in biblical scholarship, but he's also not shy about sharing conclusions and how he gets there.