

Pros and Cons Of Considering Epicurean Philosophy To Be A "Religion"

Post by "Cassius" of March 25, 2024 at 8:47 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

This strikes me as similar to Aquinas 's fourth argument for God (which, surprise, I don't think works either):

I am by no means an expert on this argument, but I see two separate things going on in this aspect of the discussion, one of which is valid and one of which is not:

1 - The first part, observing the progression, seems valid to me: "But "more" and "less" are predicated of different things, according as they resemble in their different ways something which is the maximum, as a thing is said to be hotter according as it more nearly resembles that which is hottest;" (But what we're really saying is that they are similar to each other, which we can observe, not something which we can't observe.)

2 - But this part seems to me to involve a leap which is NOT valid: "Now the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus; as fire, which is the maximum heat, is the cause of all hot things. Therefore there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God."

I don't see how "1" necessarily leads to "2" at all, and at least at the moment that's where I think Epicurus would object: I think he'd say that yes we can see a progressive scale in real things, and we can rank them in order of superiority, using our senses and preconceptions and feelings-- these are all "real" things. But as for then leaping to the conclusion that all of these real items were originally generated by a "perfect" model of them, which was the "cause" of them -- I would say that's totally a hard stop and something that Epicurus would reject.

Possibly this is also a variation of not letting the "perfect" be the enemy of the "good" in that there are many things in this world that we deal with and assess that are in fact "real," but we shouldn't let our assessment of them be colored or watered down by our speculation that there is a "perfect" which makes them all fade in comparison.

Update: I wonder if this "cause" issue as stated here in this way is what Frances Wright had in mind when she swatted hard at it in A Few Days In Athens.

A Few Days In Athens Chapter 15 (and this extends much further in length and detail through the rest of the chapter):

“Without challenging the meaning of the terms you have employed,” said Metrodorus, “I would observe, that there is little danger of our pushing investigation too far. Unhappily the limits prescribed to us by our few and imperfect senses must ever cramp the sphere of our observation, as compared to the boundless range of things; and that even when we shall have strained and improved our senses to the uttermost. We trace an effect to a cause, and that cause to another cause, and so on, till we hold some few links of a chain, whose extent like the charmed circle, is without beginning as without end.”