

Episode 230 - Cicero's OTNOTG - 05 - Velleius Attacks Misplaced Ideas of Divinity

Post by "Cassius" of May 23, 2024 at 2:31 PM

Welcome to Episode 230 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the most complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com.

For our new listeners, let me remind you of several ground rules for both our podcast and our forum.

First: Our aim is to bring you an accurate presentation of [classical Epicurean philosophy](#) as the ancient Epicureans understood it.

Second: We won't be talking about modern political issues in this podcast. How you apply Epicurus in your own life is of course entirely up to you. We call this approach "Not Neo-Epicurean, But Epicurean." Epicurean philosophy is a philosophy of its own, it's not the same as Stoicism, Humanism, Buddhism, Taoism, Atheism, Libertarianism or Marxism - it is unique and must be understood on its own, not in terms of any conventional modern morality.

Third: One of the most important things to keep in mind is that the Epicureans often used words very differently than we do today. To the Epicureans, Gods were not omnipotent or omniscient, so Epicurean references to "Gods" do not mean at all the same thing as in major religions today. In the Epicurean theory of knowledge, [all sensations are true](#), but that does not mean all opinions are true, but that the raw data reported by the senses is reported without the injection of opinion, as the opinion-making process takes place in the mind, where it is subject to mistakes, rather than in the senses. In Epicurean ethics, "Pleasure" refers not ONLY to sensory stimulation, but also to every experience of life which is not felt to be painful. The classical texts show that Epicurus was not focused on luxury, like some people say, but neither did he teach minimalism, as other people say. Epicurus taught that all experiences of life fall under one of two feelings - pleasure and pain - and those feelings -- and not gods, idealism, or virtue - are the guides that Nature gave us by which to live. More than anything else, Epicurus taught that the universe is not supernatural in any way, and that means there's no life after death, and any happiness we'll ever have comes in THIS life, which is why it is so important not to waste time in confusion.

Today we are continuing to review the Epicurean sections of Cicero's "On the Nature of The Gods," as presented by the Epicurean spokesman Velleius, beginning at the end of Section 10.

For the main text we are using primarily the [Yonge translation, available here](#). The text which we include in these posts is the Yonge version, the full version of which is here at Epicureanfriends. We will also refer to the public domain version of the Loeb series, which contains both Latin and English, [as translated by H. Rackham](#).

Additional versions can be found here:

- [Frances Brooks 1896 translation at Online Library of Liberty](#)
- [Lacus Curtius Edition \(Rackham\)](#)
- [PDF Of Loeb Edition at Archive.org by Rackham](#)
- [Gutenberg.org version by CD Yonge](#)

A list of arguments presented [will be maintained here](#).

Today's Text

XI. Anaxagoras, who received his learning from Anaximenes, was the first who affirmed the system and disposition of all things to be contrived and perfected by the power and reason of an infinite mind; in which infinity he did not perceive that there could be no conjunction of sense and motion, nor any sense in the least degree, where nature herself could feel no impulse. If he would have this mind to be a sort of animal, then there must be some more internal principle from whence that animal should receive its appellation. But what can be more internal than the mind? Let it, therefore, be clothed with an external body. But this is not agreeable to his doctrine; but we are utterly unable to conceive how a pure simple mind can exist without any substance annexed to it.

Alcmæon of Crotona, in attributing a divinity to the sun, the moon, and the rest of the stars, and also to the mind, did not perceive that he was ascribing immortality to mortal beings.

Pythagoras, who supposed the Deity to be one soul, mixing with and pervading all nature, from which our souls are taken, did not consider that the Deity himself must, in consequence of this doctrine, be maimed and torn with the rending every human soul from it; nor that, when the human mind is afflicted (as is the case in many instances), that part of the Deity must likewise be afflicted, which cannot be. If the human mind were a Deity, how could it be ignorant of any thing? Besides, how could that Deity, if it is nothing but soul, be mixed with, or infused into, the world?

Then Xenophanes, who said that everything in the world which had any existence, with the addition of intellect, was God, is as liable to exception as the rest, especially in relation to the infinity of it, in which there can be nothing sentient, nothing composite.

Parmenides formed a conceit to himself of something circular like a crown. (He names it Stephane.) It is an orb of constant light and heat around the heavens; this he calls God; in which there is no room to imagine any divine form or sense. And he uttered many other absurdities on the same subject; for he ascribed a divinity to war, to discord, to lust, and other passions of the same kind, which are destroyed by disease, or sleep, or oblivion, or age. The same honor he gives to the stars; but I shall forbear making any objections to his system here, having already done it in another place.

XII. Empedocles, who erred in many things, is most grossly mistaken in his notion of the Gods. He lays down four natures as divine, from which he thinks that all things were made. Yet it is evident that they have a beginning, that they decay, and that they are void of all sense.

Protagoras did not seem to have any idea of the real nature of the Gods; for he acknowledged that he was altogether ignorant whether there are or are not any, or what they are.

What shall I say of Democritus, who classes our images of objects, and their orbs, in the number of the Gods; as he does that principle through which those images appear and have their influence? He deifies likewise our knowledge and understanding. Is he not involved in a very great error? And because nothing continues always in the same state, he denies that anything is everlasting, does he not thereby entirely destroy the Deity, and make it impossible to form any opinion of him?

Diogenes of Apollonia looks upon the air to be a Deity. But what sense can the air have? or what divine form can be attributed to it?

It would be tedious to show the uncertainty of Plato's opinion; for, in his *Timæus*, he denies the propriety of asserting that there is one great father or creator of the world; and, in his book of *Laws*, he thinks we ought not to make too strict an inquiry into the nature of the Deity. And as for his statement when he asserts that God is a being without any body—what the Greeks call *ἄσώματος*—it is certainly quite unintelligible how that theory can possibly be true; for such a God must then necessarily be destitute of sense, prudence, and pleasure; all which things are comprehended in our notion of the Gods. He likewise asserts in his *Timæus*, and in his *Laws*, that the world, the heavens, the stars, the mind, and those Gods which are delivered down to us from our ancestors, constitute the Deity. These opinions, taken separately, are apparently false; and, together, are directly inconsistent with each other.

Xenophon has committed almost the same mistakes, but in fewer words. In those sayings which he has related of Socrates, he introduces him disputing the lawfulness of inquiring into the form of the Deity, and makes him assert the sun and the mind to be Deities: he represents him likewise as affirming the being of one God only, and at another time of many; which are errors of almost the same kind which I before took notice of in Plato.

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