

Prolepsis Citations from Long & Sedley

Post by "Cassius" of July 6, 2024 at 11:00 PM

[Quote from Twentier](#)

Or is this just his response to Plato's belief in innate ideas that precede birth and have a more fundamental reality than death.

Twentier while I don't think this is *all* there is to it, I do think this is a major part. The whole question of how the mind works is too fundamental to leave to the possibility of supernatural influence. Living things are pretty clearly not just a "blank slate," and if you are going to tackle explaining chaos and how the universe was not created but eternal, you have to come up with an explanation of how thought also arises from the atoms.

Plato and everyone else decided to default to the supernatural. Epicurus refused to do that and instead came up with a theory in which everything - including thought - stems from flows of atoms. I think the answer to unwinding this lies more in following a chain of reasoning which begins with moving atoms and then inch by inch assembles into arms and legs and eyes and brains and thought. Everything has to stem from flows of atoms; beavers have to have imprinted upon them at birth - naturally - the disposition to build dams. Flows of atoms from place to place are the only way to solve the action-at-a-distance problem without defaulting to the supernatural.

I think Epicurus was 100% serious about his ideas of divinity. There has to be a natural process by which pleasure arises from flows of atoms, and everything more complicated builds on that over time. And the reason I agree with you that this is so important is that you just can't leave these kind of things without a natural explanation or -- we see what the priests have managed to do even after Epicurus came along. The same nihilism which bothers so many people today is going to attack anyone who doesn't ultimately come to grips with whether there's something otherworldly and more than our existence, or whether our existence and happiness needs no outside justification.

And in the end I don't see what Epicurus proposed as absurd at all. Everything - including every living thing - is constantly bombarded from all sides with atoms flowing from all directions, and those atoms *do* both influence us, as they are also influenced by where they came from. They come to us and induce reactions on our part - reactions through the five senses, and for all we know reactions directly on our body like the sun causes us to make Vitamin D. And those influences impact all parts of us - including our minds - and our brains wire themselves over time in response to these patterns. As our brains wire themselves we find ourselves in tune with certain patterns that have struck us in the past, and our genetics find ways to transmit over generations dispositions to respond analogously in the future.

Also, as we've been discussing lately, our minds form patterns of behavior as to pleasure and pain that allow us to think about what a "higher" life would be like if we never faced pain or death. We can imagine and benefit from considering what that life would look like - everyone needs a goal and vision of how they would like to live. In parallel with that aspirational aspect, we can think about how in an infinite and eternal universe that is filled with planets like Earth there are bound to be beings that have reached that level. And our consideration of that level of performance constitutes a goal for ourselves mentally and conceptually, just like all pleasure constitutes a goal for us.

I'm far from saying that this kind of explanation solves all the issues, but I think that it's a very reasonable approach and one that continues to have a lot more validity than most any I can name. And It sure beats giving in to the priests or to suicidal nihilism.