

Creation Out of Nothing is Postbiblical Doctrine

Post by “Don” of May 15, 2024 at 8:05 AM

Dan McClellan does a good quick intro to the mistaken idea of a god creating the universe ex nihilo...

<https://youtu.be/ZPSz3U81ybo?feature=shared>

Post by “Cassius” of May 15, 2024 at 9:33 AM

Is he correct at the 2:20 point in the video to say that "matter in the Platonic worldview is EVIL?"

I am not doubting that as a general summary, but if there are quotes stating that explicitly, those would be good to have - and to know also whether that applies to the Aristotelians and Stoics.

Post by “Joshua” of May 15, 2024 at 10:20 AM

I'm not familiar with any such citation. Certainly Plato thought that matter was a crude and illusory imitation of form--a sort of counterfeit. Literally *insubstantial*, because the substance of every *thing* is not the thing itself or its physical components, but the changeless, timeless *Form* of that kind of thing.

Post by “Don” of May 15, 2024 at 10:26 AM

My take is the Christians ran with Plato's "matter was a crude and illusory imitation of form".

Post by “Eikadistes” of May 15, 2024 at 10:28 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Is he correct at the 2:20 point in the video to say that "matter in the Platonic worldview is EVIL?"

Plato proposed that one's immortal soul becomes trapped in the body like a prison at birth. Consequently, he saw death as the liberation from the soul's imprisonment in a cage of matter. In that regard, Plato saw the matter as being antithetical to the truth that is the Form of the Good.

He saw the material world as being a corruption of a realm of universal concepts, so the natural world and the particular objects within it are seen as cheap copies of a higher truth. In this regard, his propositions are parallel to many ancient Indian notions of ethics, which equates *goodness* with *knowledge*, and equates *ignorance* with *evil*. (Note the word "*guru*", which is derived from "*gu*" and "*ru*" which is translated as "*dispeller [of] darkness*", and note that Plato uses the light of the Sun as a metaphor for the the Form of the Good that overcomes the darkness of matter; neo-Platonists recognized this and found Platonism to be compatible with ancient Indian philosophies).

Based on that, I think it is correct to say that Plato saw matter as being evil.

Post by “Cassius” of May 15, 2024 at 11:27 AM

I can imagine a couple of questions here:

1. Do the terms "good" and "evil" even apply to elements/ atoms / void / matter, or are those things "neutral" in some way?
2. Does that answer differ among the Platonic, Peripatetic, Stoic, and Epicurean Schools?
3. Do we have specific quotes where this issue is specifically addressed?

It seems to me it's not necessarily obvious even in Epicurean terms how "good" and "evil" should be used. Pretty clearly Epicurus said that nature gives us only pleasure and pain in order to know what to choose and what to avoid, so are "good" and "evil" only "abstractions added on

to the pleasure / pain base? Do we have specific quotes that show Epicurus talking about how pleasure and pain relate to good and evil?

In terms of the Platonists, Peripatetics, and Stoics, who are into "virtue" as an end in itself, then the terms "good" and "evil" seem much more natural and easy to apply. It seems to me that all three of them are essentially equating their god/prime mover/ divine fire as the ultimate source of "good," so they can slap that label onto something without all the contextual evaluation (evaluation in terms of pleasure and pain) that is involved in Epicurean philosophy.

i tend to question, along with the title of Nietzsche's book "Beyond Good and Evil," whether Epicurus was not either (1) rejecting the whole "good vs evil" paradigm that was common to the other schools, or (2) redefining those words (good and evil) in terms of pleasure and pain just as he was redefining "gods" and the meaning of "pleasure."

Precision here is probably of particular importance since the Stoics were apparently trying to rehabilitate matter themselves, and perhaps considered matter to be part of divine fire and perhaps therefore "good" in a way that may have distinguished them from Platonics/Peripatetics(?)

Post by “Don” of May 15, 2024 at 11:28 AM

As an aside, I'm a big fan of Dan McClellan 's Data Over Dogma podcast.

Post by “Joshua” of May 15, 2024 at 11:53 AM

VS46. Let us completely rid ourselves of our bad habits as if they were evil men who have done us long and grievous harm.

τὰς φαύλας συνηθείας ὥσπερ ἄνδρας πονηροὺς πολὺν χρόνον μέγα βλάψαντες τελείως ἐκδιώκομεν.

With the usual caveat that we don't know who wrote these maxims.

Post by “Eikadistes” of May 15, 2024 at 12:38 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I can imagine a couple of questions here:

1. Do the terms "good" and "evil" even apply to elements/ atoms / void / matter, or are those things "neutral" in some way?

I think we can address this by acknowledging that Epicurus reserved "good" and "evil" for the domain of Ethics; on the other hand, Plato infused morality into his metaphysics as though "evil" was a property of physical objects that could be weighed and measured. (Here's a weird analogy: consider Romance languages that assign a gender to nouns, *especially* inanimate objects. It can be semantically misleading to apply a sort of personification to sexless objects that lack reproductive organs). Likewise, from an Epicurean perspective, the only measurable qualities of an atom are *size, weight, and shape*, and compound objects are only described by sensible properties (like color); matter, *itself*, does not have a moral dimension. I hesitate to even call particles morally "neutral" because we cannot measure the unconditional morality of a chair, or, for that matter, instruments of war, or harmful drugs.

Case in point, when my wife got out of the hospital (after 8 surgeries with 1 more to go), everyone was horrified that she was taking Oxycodone to manage the pain of those surgeries (this is heavily a consequence of the politicization of medical practices in the US). Too many were concerned that she was going to become addicted, and vocalized that concern ... and not enough people were concerned about that fact that she was in such excruciating pain she was at risk of a cardiac event. They weren't concerned with the (Epicurean) consequences of taking opiates, with weighing the advantages (*decreased pain, a lower heart rate, etc.*) against the disadvantages (*constipation, fogginess, etc.*). Rather, they engaged a (Platonic-Stoic) evaluation that we should abstain from opiates because they are fundamentally, categorically evil. This is a mistake, and caused us unnecessary grief.

Post by "Don" of August 5, 2024 at 9:59 PM

The Data Over Dogma guys did a whole episode debunking the Christian doctrine (not articulated until the 2nd c CE) of creation ex nihilo. It also seems important to note that ex nihilo creation was **not** the general consensus in the ancient world. Although a young Epicurus turned to philosophy when his "schoolmasters ... could not tell him the meaning of "chaos" in Hesiod," he substituted the eternally-existent atoms to explain "where" the universe came from. The pre-existing Chaos provided the building blocks for the cosmos/world-system in Greek mythology even if the elementary school teachers couldn't explain where that came from or what it was to little Epicurus. Schoolmaster there is γραμματιστής or one who literally

teaches how to write the letters of the alphabet and other elementary-school level material.

I found the episode fascinating:

<https://youtu.be/wFcJAbbNOpk?feature=shared>