

Episode One Hundred Twenty-Seven - Letter to Pythocles 02 - The Formation of "Worlds"

Post by "Cassius" of June 24, 2022 at 3:09 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

First aspect: at first it makes sense that in an infinite universe there would be perfection as well as imperfection. But on further thought, how is perfection defined?

Exactly my view too. DeWitt is being too loose in using the word "perfection" without defining it. I do think he makes clear that the gods are not eternal, just "deathless," and that's a good hint that the [Epicurean gods](#) are not everything that we today would invest in the term "perfect" (such as omnipotent or omniscient). The word perfect in this context has to be contextual and limited, like "the perfect basketball player." DeWitt drops the ball here by not making that more clear. (But on the other hand, how many writers have you seen carry the ball nearly this far?)

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Isn't this a mental concept rather than something inherent in a material universe?

It may indeed be a mental concept, but that, in itself, is not a total disqualifier from consideration as part of an evidentiary chain, because we do regularly refer to and use mental concepts if we can reasonably extrapolate from sensory evidence to back them up. We predict atoms exist due to mental concepts *which we derive from what we think is good physical evidence*. The speculations we're talking about now are not arbitrary and groundless, but based on observations here on earth, one example of which is the "nature never creates only a single thing of a kind (which is in Lucretius too).

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

But the key point in my mind is that perfection is a value judgment, and therefore has no place in describing a material universe.

Yes that's the definitional issue. "Perfect" is far too broad and loose a term. One way to get into this deeper would be to check the Latin word that was used. I wouldn't be surprised if its more related to "blessed" than what we are thinking today (omnipotent; omniscient) due to the corruption brought about by Abrahamic religion.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

The second aspect, that the number of gods must equal the number of mortals, makes absolutely no sense to me. Can someone explain this?

Do I not recall that DeWitt says that strict numerical equivalence is not the point, but rather "equitable distribution," which is in itself a loose term?

The way I have always thought of all this that makes sense to me is:

1 - We look around us here on earth and we see "life" in many forms.

2 - We see that Nature never makes only one single thing of a kind.

3 - Some of those life forms are "primitive" single cell organisms, and some of those life forms are extremely complex and powerful and intelligent (let's say Epicurus, or Don, for example 😊)

4 - As I see it we have a mental tendency to organize in our minds a spectrum of these life forms from "lowest" to "highest" in terms of abilities. I personally think that that "tendency" would involve the faculty of anticipations in some way. The anticipation would not be the "concept of low to high life forms" but some very basic organizational drive to link things together that appear to be related . It would be important to note that just like seeing and hearing, that tendency does not had us completed concepts in an infallible way. The tendency would just exist report to us a phenomena, just like sight does, and we'd have to regularly and repeatedly test it to verify any conclusions that we decide to draw from those observations.

5 - We extrapolate that in an infinite and eternal universe there are, and already have been, and infinite number of worlds like ours with intelligent beings.

6 - We can reasonably extrapolate that there is no reason that "Epicurus" or "Don" is the most intelligent and physically powerful life form that can possibly exist, and therefore we extrapolate that "higher" (more intelligent and more powerful life forms) have, do, and will continue to exist.

As for their number, I agree that saying that the same number of mortals and gods exist is pretty "out there." However, over an infinite universe with infinite number of living beings in it, maybe it does make sense to say that the numbers of both are the same, because they are both "infinite."

All this is aggressive speculation but as per the Velleius material and other material DeWitt cites, it does seem well founded in the texts. And that doesn't even include the reference in Lucretius that seems to contemplate a Nietzsche-style "eternal recurrence" when he asks whether it would make a difference to us if our atoms would at any time in the future rearrange themselves in the same way they are now.

I don't think any of this is necessary to believe as core Epicurean philosophy. Some people, following the Frances Wright model, just aren't interested in this kind of big-picture speculation, and if someone is that way and not troubled by these issues, then there is no reason for them to be concerned about them.

But it seems to be natural for a large number of people to want to have *some* kind of reasonable perspective on the "big picture," and this direction does, it seems to me, provide a reasonable framework for those people to have a position on "the big picture" that stops them from being in fear that the lack of ANY explanation exposes them to the oppression of the priests.