

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

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infinity." What is that? As reported by Cicero (*ND* I 50,⁴² 109⁴³), Epicurus associated the power of infinity with what he called *isonomia*, "distributive equality." Although, regrettably, the actual term *isonomia* occurs only in one uniquely problematic theological context, where the Epicureans quoted as invoking it appear to be doing so ineptly,⁴⁴ the same principle is clearly put to work, and more illuminatingly, elsewhere in our Epicurean sources. According to Cicero's report of this principle of *isonomia*, the power of infinity is such "that all like things match all like things." That is, in an infinite universe, if two types of thing have coordinate status, they exist in equal quantities. As the name *isonomia*, "distributive equality," implies, this is not a question of the mere fact that the sum totals of the two items will be equal. For since the Epicurean universe is infinite, even when it comes to comparing atoms themselves with the worlds that they combine in vast numbers to constitute, their sum totals will be identical, in the sense that both atoms and worlds will alike have infinitely many exemplars. Consider an arithmetical analogy: in the series of natural numbers, there is an infinity not only of those numbers themselves, but also of cubic numbers, despite the fact that these latter constitute only a minute proportion of the total. *Isonomia* is to be found, not in the compared items' sum totals, but in their distribution. In the arithmetical case, *isonomia* is satisfied by the equal distribution of odd and even numbers. In Epicurean cosmology, *isonomia* is satisfied at the phenomenal level by the equal distribution of opposite pairs of qualities such as hot and cold, and of coordinate species, for example of elephants and horses; and at the atomic level, by the equal distribution of atoms of different types.

42. The Epicurean Velleius: "summa vero vis infinitatis et magna ac diligenti contemplatione dignissima est. in qua intellegi necesse est eam esse naturam, ut omnia omnibus paribus paria respondeant; hanc isonomian appellat Epicurus, id est aequabilem tributionem . . ." "Moreover, the supreme power of infinity fully deserves long and arduous contemplation. . . . You must understand that in it there lies a nature such that all like things match all like things. Epicurus calls this *isonomia*, that is, 'distribution in equal proportions' . . ."

43. The Academic Cotta: "confugis ad aequilibratam (sic enim isonomian, si

There's also this tidbit....