

Neoplatonic References and Objections to Epicurus

Post by "Matt" of January 13, 2019 at 12:28 PM

"NO ATOMIC AGGREGATION COULD PRODUCE A SELF-HARMONIZING UNITY.

3. (b.) (No aggregation of atoms could form a whole that would be one and sympathetic with itself.) Others, on the contrary, insist that the soul is constituted by the union of atoms or indivisibles (as thought Leucippus, Democritus and Epicurus.⁴¹) To refute this error, we have to examine the nature of sympathy (or community of affection, a Stoic characteristic of a living being,⁴²) and juxtaposition.⁴³ On the one hand an aggregation of corporeal molecules which are incapable of being united, and which do not feel cannot form a single sympathetic whole such as is the soul, which is sympathetic with herself. On the other hand, how could a body or extension be constituted by (a juxtaposition of) atoms?"

"STOIC AND EPICUREAN CAUSELESS ORIGIN REALLY THE UTMOST DETERMINISM.

Now among the things that become, or among those that although perpetually existent do not always result in the same actions, it may be boldly asserted that everything has a cause. We should not admit (the Stoic contention⁹⁹) that something happens without a cause, nor accept the (Epicurean¹⁰⁰) arbitrary convergence of the atoms, nor believe that any body initiates a movement suddenly and without determining reason, nor suppose (with Epicurus again¹⁰¹) that the soul undertakes some action by a blind impulse, without any motive. Thus to suppose that a thing does not belong to itself, that it could be carried away by involuntary movements, and act without motive, would be to subject it to the most crushing determinism. The will must be excited, or the desire awakened by some interior or exterior stimulus. No determination (is possible) without motive."

"MATERIALISTS SUPPORT DETERMINISM.

Those sages who (like Leucippus, Democritus and Epicurus) assumed material principles such as the atoms, and who explain everything by their motion, their shock and combinations, pretend that everything existent and occurring is caused by the agency of these atoms, their "actions and reactions." This includes, according to them, our appetites and dispositions. The necessity residing in the nature of these principles, and in their effects, is therefore, by these sages, extended to everything that exists. As to the (Ionic Hylicists), who assume other physical (ultimate) principles, referring everything to them, they thus also subject all beings to necessity."

“THE PHYSICAL THEORIES ARE ABSURD.

3. To refer everything to physical causes, whether you call them atoms or elements, and from their disordered motion to deduce order, reason and the soul that directs (the body), is absurd and impossible; nevertheless, to deduce everything from atoms, is, if possible, still more impossible; and consequently many valid objections have been raised against this theory.”

“THE STOIC POLEMIC AGAINST THE EPICUREANS.

To begin with, even if we do admit such atomic principles, their existence does not in any way inevitably lead to either the necessity of all things, or fatality. Let us, indeed, grant the existence of atoms; now some will move downwards—that is, if there is an up and down in the universe—others obliquely, by chance, in various directions. As there will be no order, there will be nothing determinate. Only what will be born of the atoms will be determinate. It will therefore be impossible to guess or predict events, whether by art—and indeed, how could there be any art in the midst of orderless things?—or by enthusiasm, or divine inspiration; for prediction implies that the future is determined. True, bodies will obey the impulses necessarily communicated to them by the atoms; but how could you explain the operations and affections of the soul by movements of atoms? How could atomic shock, whether vertical or oblique, produce in the soul these our reasonings, or appetites, whether necessarily, or in any other way? What explanation could they give of the soul's resistance to the impulsions of the body?”

“EPICURUS TAUGHT CHANCE AND THE GNOSTICS AN EVIL CREATOR.

1. When Epicurus²¹ derives the existence and constitution of the universe from automatism and chance, he commits an absurdity, and stultifies himself. That is self-evident, though the matter have elsewhere been thoroughly demonstrated.²² But (if the world do not owe its origin to chance) we will be compelled to furnish an adequate reason for the existence and creation of all these beings. This (teleological) question deserves the most careful consideration. Things that seem evil do indeed exist, and they do suggest doubts about universal Providence; so that some (like Epicurus²³) insist there is no providence, while others (like the Gnostics²⁴), hold that the demiurgic creator is evil. The subject, therefore, demands thorough investigation of its first principles.

PARTICULAR AND UNIVERSAL PROVIDENCE ASSUMED AS PREMISES.

Let us leave aside this individual providence, which consists in deliberating before an action, and in examining whether we should or should not do something, or whether we should give or not give it. We shall also assume the existence of the universal Providence, and from this principle we shall deduce the consequences.

Excerpt From

Plotinos: Complete Works, v. 4 / In Chronological Order, Grouped in Four Periods

Plotinus

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