Episode 226 - Cicero's On The Nature of The Gods - Epicurean Section 01 - Introduction

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- Topics For This Week:
  - Cicero says that the greater part of mankind is united in what Nature leads us to suppose, which is that there are gods.
  - Protagorus and Diagorus the Melian and Theodorus of Cyrene entirely believed that there are no gods.
    - Protagorus [ ]Protagoras (/prəʊˈtæɡəˌræs/; Greek: Πρωταγόρας; c. 490 BC – c. 420 BC)[1] was a pre-Socratic Greek philosopher and rhetorical theorist. He is numbered as one of the sophists by Plato. In his dialogue Protagoras, Plato credits him with inventing the role of the professional sophist. Protagoras also is believed to have created a major controversy during ancient times through his statement that, "Man is the measure of all things," interpreted (possibly wrongly, since he disagreed) by Plato to mean that there is no objective truth; Protagoras seems to have meant that each person's own personal history, experiences and expectations, developed over their lifetime, determine their judgments, opinions, and statements regarding "truth" (which is the title of the book in which Protagoras made this statement). When a person makes a judgment about a certain thing—good or bad or beautiful or unjust—that person will differ from other people's judgments because their experience has been different.]
    - Diagorus the Melian Diagoras "the Atheist" of Melos (Greek: Διαγόρας ὁ Μήλιος) was a Greek poet and sophist of the 5th century BC. Throughout antiquity, he was regarded as an atheist, but very little is known for certain about what he actually believed. Anecdotes about his life indicate that he spoke out against ancient Greek religion. He allegedly chopped up a wooden statue of Heracles and used it to roast his lentils and revealed the secrets of the Eleusinian Mysteries. The Athenians accused him of asebeia (impiety) and banished him from their city. He died in Corinth.
    - Theodorus of Cyrene [Theodorus of Cyrene (Greek: Θεόδωρος ὁ Κυρηναῖος) was an ancient Greek mathematician who lived during the 5th century BC. The only first-hand accounts of him that survive are in three of Plato's dialogues: the Theaetetus, the Sophist, and the Statesman. In the former dialogue, he posits a mathematical construction now known as the Spiral of Theodorus. Little is known as Theodorus' biography beyond what can be

inferred from Plato's dialogues. He was born in the northern African colony of Cyrene, and apparently taught both there and in Athens.[1] He complains of old age in the Theaetetus, the dramatic date of 399 BC of which suggests his period of flourishing to have occurred in the mid-5th century. The text also associates him with the sophist Protagoras, with whom he claims to have studied before turning to geometry.[2] A dubious tradition repeated among ancient biographers like Diogenes Laërtius[3] held that Plato later studied with him in Cyrene, Libya.[1] This eminent mathematician Theodorus was, along with Alcibiades and many other of Socrates' companions (many of whom would be associated with the Thirty Tyrants), accused of distributing the mysteries at a symposium, according to Plutarch, who himself was priest of the temple at Delphi.]

- Those who affirm that gods exist are divided on many details, but the most important question that divides them is whether the gods are active in the affairs of our world or inactive.
  - How many people today hold to that view of "inactive" gods? Why?
- If the gods are inactive there is no reason to worry about piety, but it is possible that if we cast off piety then the virtues - including the most excellent, which is justice, may perish with it!
  - Note: This is specifically rejected in Diogenes of Oinoanda Fragment 20 -
    - **Fragment 20** - [So it is obvious that wrong-doers, given that they do not fear the penalties imposed by the laws, are not] afraid of [the gods.] This [has to be] conceded. For if they were [afraid, they] would not [do wrong]. As for [all] the others, [it is my opinion] that the [wise] are not [(reasoning indicates) righteous] on account of the gods, but on account of [thinking] correctly and the [opinions] they hold [regarding] certain things [and especially] pains and death (for indeed invariably and without exception human beings do wrong either on account of fear or on account of pleasures), and that ordinary people on the other hand are righteous, in so far as they are righteous, on account of the laws and the penalties, imposed by the laws, hanging over them. But even if some of their number are conscientious on account of the laws, they are few: only just two or three individuals are to be found among great segments of multitudes, and not even these are steadfast in acting righteously; for they are not soundly persuaded about providence. A clear indication of the complete inability of the gods to prevent wrong-doings is provided by the nations of the Jews and Egyptians, who, as well as being the most superstitious of all peoples, are the vilest of all peoples.
    - On account of what kind of gods, then, will human beings be righteous? For they are not righteous on account of the real ones or on account of Plato’s and Socrates’ Judges in Hades. We are left with this conclusion;

otherwise, why should not those who disregard the laws scorn fables much more?

        - So, with regard to righteousness, neither does our doctrine do harm [not does] the opposite [doctrine help], while, with regard to the other condition, the opposite doctrine not only does not help, but on the contrary also does harm, whereas our doctrine not only does not harm, but also helps. For the one removes disturbances, while the other adds them, as has already been made clear to you before. That not only [is our doctrine] helpful, [but also the opposite doctrine harmful, is clearly shown by] the [Stoics as they go astray. For they say in opposition to us] that the god both is maker of [the] world and takes providential care of it, providing for all things, including human beings. Well, in the first place, we come to this question: was it, may I ask, for his own sake that the god created the world [or for the sake of human beings? For it is obvious that it was from a wish to benefit either himself or human beings that he embarked on this] undertaking. For how could it have been otherwise, if nothing is produced without a cause and these things are produced by a god? Let us then examine this view and what Stoics mean. It was, they say, from a wish to have a city and fellow-citizens, just as if [he were an exile from a city, that] the god [created the world and human beings. However, this supposition, a concoction of empty talking, is] self-evidently a fable, composed to gain the attention of an audience, not a natural philosopher's argument searching for the truth and inferring from probabilities things not palpable to sense. Yet even if, in the belief that he was doing some good [to himself, the god] really [made the world and human beings], ...
    - Other philosophers believe the whole world is directed and governed by the gods, and they consult and provide for the preservation of mankind.
        - Carnaedes rejected this. What do we know about Carneades? [Carneades (/kɑːrˈniːədiːz/; Greek: Καρνεάδης, Karneadēs, "of Carnea"; 214/3–129/8 BC[2]) was a Greek philosopher,[3] perhaps the most prominent head of the Skeptical Academy in ancient Greece.[3] He was born in Cyrene.[4] By the year 159 BC,[citation needed] he had begun to attack many previous dogmatic doctrines, especially Stoicism and even the Epicureans,[5] whom previous skeptics had spared.]
    - Then Cicero explains why he turned from politics to philosophy, and why he took up the Academic School as his own since it has been long neglgected and foresaken and buries things in a kind of artificial night.
        - In truth, he has been studying philosophy and associating with philosophers all his life.
        - The practical reason why he started writing is that the republic had been taken over by Caesar, and he wanted to reproduce in Latin the learning of the

Greeks.
        - Also death of his daughter and other things led to melancholy disposition.
    - People should not care about his opinion, they should care about what is reasonable, and they should reject the custom of the Pythagoreans to refer all questions to whether the master (Pythagorus) said it himself.
    - As to why he chose the Academy, we should look to his book on the "Academic Questions." The custom of the Academy is to "dispute all things and assume nothing certainly" and was begun by Socrates and reinvigorated by Carneades.
    - Cicero denies that he thinks that nothing whatsoever is true, but that there is so much falsehood blended with truth that there is no certain rule for judging what is true, and it follows that many things are probable enough, even though not evident to the senses, that a wise man chooses to direct his conduct by them.
    - So he is going to go through all the opinions of the major schools about the nature of the gods, and if we find that all of them agree on something, or that what any one says is absolutely true, then he will give up the Academy!
    - The scene then of the dispute will be home of Gaius Aurelius Cotta, who was talking with Senator Gaius Velleius, the Epicurean. Quintus Lucillius Balbus was also there, taking the Stoic side. Cicero says that if Marcus Piso were present, no school would lack an advocate. It appears that Piso would have represented the Peripatetics, because Cotta says that Antiochus held that the Peripatetics did not differ from the Stoics in substance but only in words. Cotta says this is actually a significant difference, but says more on that later.
    - Velleius is asked to repeat what he is previously said for Cicero to hear it. Velleius replies with a smile that Cicero will not be fair but an advocate for Cotta's views, because just like Cotta, Cicero had learned from Philo to be certain of nothing. In response, Cicero proclaims his impartiality and lack of bias. 🙂