

Episode 227 - Cicero's OTNOTG - 02 - Velleius Begins His Attack On Traditional Views Of The Gods

Post by "Cassius" of May 2, 2024 at 2:32 PM

In this episode let's talk about:

- - The three main schools of thought on the gods:
 - - Stoics (Lucilius Balbus) (split the honorable from the profitable and go with the honorable)
 - - Epicureans (Velleius) (go with the profitable)
 - - Academics (Gaius Cotta) (they're not sure) Cicero is also in this category
 - - Peripatetics would have been represented by Marcus Piso, but he is not present. (combine the honorable with the profitable)
 - - 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.
- - The role of confidence in Epicurean philosophy - "After this, Velleius, with the confidence peculiar to his sect, dreading nothing so much as to seem to doubt of anything, began as if he had just then descended from the council of the Gods, and Epicurus's intervals of worlds."
- - Velleius says do not attend to:
 - - idle and imaginary tales;
 - - nor to the operator and builder of the World, the God of Plato's Timæus;
 - - nor to the old prophetic dame, the Πρόνοια of the Stoics, which the Latins call
 - Providence;
 - - nor to that round, that burning, revolving deity, the World, endowed with sense and understanding; the prodigies and wonders, not of inquisitive philosophers, but of dreamers!
- - First the attack on Plato's gods:
 - - What was his evidence? "For with what eyes of the mind was your Plato able to see that workhouse of such stupendous toil, in which he makes the world to be modeled and built by God?"
 - - Plato cannot explain how god created the universe: "What materials, what tools, what bars, what machines, what servants, were employed in so vast a work? How could the air, fire, water, and earth pay obedience and submit to the will of the architect? From whence arose those five forms, of which the rest were composed,

so aptly contributing to frame the mind and produce the senses? It is tedious to go through all, as they are of such a sort that they look

- more like things to be desired than to be discovered. (wishful thinking)
- - How can Plato's god have created an eternal world? "But, what is more remarkable, he gives us a world which has been not only created, but, if I may so say, in a manner formed with hands, and yet he says it is eternal. Do you conceive him to have the least skill in natural philosophy <ins> who is capable of thinking anything to be everlasting that had a beginning?</ins> For what can possibly ever have been put together which cannot be dissolved again? Or what is there that had a beginning which will not have an end?
- - Attack on the Stoic god:
 - - If your Providence, Lucilius Balbus, is the same as Plato's God, I ask you, as before, who were the assistants, what were the engines, what was the plan and preparation of the whole work? If it is not the same, then why did she make the world mortal, and not everlasting, like Plato's God?
- - Attack on Both Stoics and Academics:
 - - It makes no sense that the god woke up one day and created the world after doing something else for an eternity beforehand:
 - - But I would demand of you both, why these world-builders started up so suddenly, and lay dormant for so many ages? For we are not to conclude that, if there was no world, there were therefore no ages. I do not now speak of such ages as are finished by a certain number of days and nights in annual courses; for I acknowledge that those could not be without the revolution of the world; but there was a certain eternity from infinite time, not measured by any circumscription of seasons; but how that was in space we cannot understand, because we cannot possibly have even the slightest idea of time before time was.
 - - Why were the gods idle for so long?
 - - desire, therefore, to know, Balbus, why this Providence of yours was idle for such an immense space of time? Did she avoid labor? But that could have no effect on the Deity; nor could there be any labor, since all nature, air, fire, earth, and water would obey the divine essence. What was it that incited the Deity to act the part of an ædile, to illuminate and
 - decorate the world? If it was in order that God might be the better accommodated in his habitation, then he must have been dwelling an infinite length of time before in darkness as in a dungeon. But do we imagine that he was afterward delighted with that variety with which we see the heaven and earth adorned? What entertainment could that be to the Deity? If it was any, he would not have been without it so long.

- - Who benefited from the creation? If for the wise, that's a small number. For fools? why?
 - - Or were these things made, as you almost assert, by God for the sake of men? Was it for the wise? If so, then this great design was adopted for the sake of a very small number. Or for the sake of fools? First of all, there was no reason why God should consult the advantage of the wicked; and, further, what could be his object in doing so, since all fools are, without doubt, the most miserable of men, chiefly because they are fools? For what can we pronounce more deplorable than folly? Besides, there are many inconveniences in life which the wise can learn to think lightly of by dwelling rather on the advantages which they receive; but which fools are unable to avoid when they are coming, or to bear when they are come.