

Episode 228 - Cicero's OTNOTG - 03 - Velleius Asks "What Woke The Gods To Create The World?"

Post by "Cassius" of May 10, 2024 at 8:16 PM

I am going to try to keep a running list of Velleius' arguments against the existence of supernatural gods. [The full list will be here.](#) Below are the new ones we will add in Episode 288:

1. What were the world-building gods doing for an eternity of time before they made the universe?
 1. "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. I 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.
2. Who benefited from the creation of the universe? If for the wise, that's a very small number. If for fools, why?
 1. 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.

3. Those who assert that the world itself is a god make no sense, because a round world hurtling through space cannot be a god.
 1. They who affirm the world to be an animated and intelligent being have by no means discovered the nature of the mind, nor are able to conceive in what form that essence can exist; but of that I shall speak more hereafter. At present I must express my surprise at the weakness of those who endeavor to make it out to be not only animated and immortal, but likewise happy, and round, because Plato says that is the most beautiful form; whereas I think a cylinder, a square, a cone, or a pyramid more beautiful. But what life do they attribute to that round Deity? Truly it is a being whirled about with a celerity to which nothing can be even conceived by the imagination as equal; nor can I imagine how a settled mind and happy life can consist in such motion, the least degree of which would be troublesome to us. Why, therefore, should it not be considered troublesome also to the Deity? For the earth itself, as it is part of the world, is part also of the Deity. We see vast tracts of land barren and uninhabitable; some, because they are scorched by the too near approach of the sun; others, because they are bound up with frost and snow, through the great distance which the sun is from them. Therefore, if the world is a Deity, as these are parts of the world, some of the Deity's limbs must be said to be scorched, and some frozen.