

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

Post by "Cassius" of May 20, 2024 at 9:05 AM

## [Quote from Don](#)

maybe it's the self-sufficiency (autarkeia) aspect of the gods. By Epicurean definition, they neither expect praise nor dispense random punishment. They are always "blessed" and have an unshakable (incorruptible) blessed life. So a sage can live a god-like life in the here and now?

I would say it that way too (that the gods are a model of achieving that we can aspire to even if we can't achieve their success ourselves).

Humans, even Epicurus, suffer from diseases and all sorts of nagging pains that detract from a totally pleasant life, and it would be desirable to expand our knowledge and technology to eliminate even those. So even Epicurus himself and the ancient Epicureans would have profited by "reverencing the gods" to the extent that emulating a "better" gives you motivation or ideas to work to maintain your own blessedness (live watching a master tennis player helps younger players get better).

At least that's the way I would interpret the "Captain Kirk perspective" on Epicurean philosophy - do everything possible to achieve more pleasure than pain, and push the envelope as far as you can on what is possible, because you're not going to get a second chance.

That would be another reason why I think there is work to be done on articulating Epicurus' full perspective on "impossible" goals, I don't think we have a well-developed-enough reconciliation of "life is desirable so it's desirable to live longer" with "it's impossible to live forever." Variation may not be new, and may not make the pleasure "greater" in every respect, but it seems clear that variation is itself desirable even if it doesn't "greaten" the total pleasure. Unless this calculation is made clear it seems a lot of people are tempted to accept less than what they could actually obtain if they focused their efforts on trying harder. (And of course I realize that some are going to say "you're just setting yourself up for disappointment," and I would respond with something like: "Since I know there is pain in life, and that I only have one life, I'll gladly accept the inevitability that at some point I will fail to stay alive in exchange for the pleasure that I will obtain by living longer. My goal is not running from every moment of pain, but achieving the most pleasurable life possible, so I gladly accept some pain in exchange for greater pleasure.")

For some reason as I write this I am reminded of the abortion debate, and how medical technology has shifted the date of "viability" shorter and shorter and effectively overturned what seemed to be a way to come up with a dividing line. We surely don't want to talk too much about abortion here, but I think this specific analogy is relevant -- as medical technology advances, it's likely that humans can live longer and longer under better and better conditions, and old dividing lines about how long is reasonable to live will become obsolete.

My reading of Epicurus is that he would fully endorse living longer so long as conditions remain more pleasurable than painful, so it seems to me the focus really needs to be on "live as long as you can reasonably expect to experience more pleasure than pain" rather than suggesting that there is any period of XX number of years that everyone should deem to be sufficient - or too short.