

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

Post by “Don” of May 21, 2024 at 7:35 AM

We're lucky to have On Piety, but Obbink's reconstruction of the text is speculative at best in some areas of the papyrus. Even the parts of the papyrus that are more complete often provide citations without much context. Obbink et al are more than happy to provide commentary, but much of that appears speculative. However, all that said, I need to dig deeper into Obbink's translation and commentary. One paragraph that caught my eye this morning was:

solution, as in Epic. *KD* 1) and (2) possessing it eternally (see on 352), i.e. being eternal. The problem is, of course, that normal compounds (and our ideas of them), which *ὑπάρχουσιν ἐκ τῶν αὐτῶν*, must all be subject to corporeal dissolution. Unlike them, in the the Epicurean theory, the gods and our ideas of them, because they *ὑπάρχουσιν ἐκ τῆς ὁμοιότητος* and, because the supply of similar images is inexhaustible, are not subject to such dissolution. Of course in one sense they are always undergoing such dissolution, viz. in the minds of individual thinkers; but they are constantly and eternally being reformed, their constitutions out of similars being constantly replenished. Of course my own idea of the gods (while it includes the aspect of imperishability) cannot *guarantee* them a form of existence throughout all time. It is unknown how Epicurus might have proposed to get around this difficulty. On the one hand, regularity of human nature guarantees that it has been going on since the earliest humans (a view specifically attributed to Epicurus below, 225–31) and can be expected to do so as long as there are humans, the aberrant counter-examples posed by notorious atheists in human history (519–30) notwithstanding. Epicurus, impressed by the regularity and consistency with which we form conceptions of the gods, concluded that there must for this reason be something basically and naturally right about the idea (see Obbink 1992*b*, especially 199–202). While humans as a lot will not of course exist eternally (a view argued, for example, by Lucretius) to think about the gods for ever, nevertheless, since there exist now and will in the future exist worlds both like and unlike ours (*Ad Herod.* 45), there will on this reasoning always be



something around which thinks more or less like humans to conceive them

Fascinating stuff!