

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

Post by "Cassius" of May 21, 2024 at 8:37 AM

Very interesting quote. And I agree with how speculative this reconstruction of the text seemed to me when I first checked out his book. But I agree with his reasoning that Epicurus would have thought that there would always be intelligent beings somewhere thinking about these things.

I was listening yesterday to Greg Sadler deride the Epicurean arguments in "On The Nature of the Gods" as easier to refute than the Stoic arguments, but one of the things he said prompts this comment about what Velleius said:

Quote

"You see therefore that the foundation (for such it is) of our inquiry has been well and truly laid. For the belief in the gods has not been established by authority, custom, or law, but rests on the unanimous and abiding consensus of mankind; their existence is therefore a necessary inference, since we possess an instinctive or rather an innate concept of them; but a belief which all men by nature share must necessarily be true; therefore it must be admitted that the gods exist. And since this truth is almost universally accepted not only among philosophers but also among the unlearned, we must admit it as also being an accepted truth that we possess a 'preconception,' as I called it above, or 'prior notion,' of the gods. (For we are bound to employ novel terms to denote novel ideas, just as Epicurus himself employed the word *prolepsis* in a sense in which no one had ever used it before)."

Right now I am entertaining the thought that the focus ought to be not on Epicurus inventing the idea and the term *prolepsis* from nothing, but on the "in a sense in which no one had ever used it before." (I'm sure that this has been probably obvious to everyone but me.)

If Epicurus was *expanding* the term *prolepsis* to cover more things in the same way that he expanded use of the word "pleasure," then you could analogize that:

- just as Epicurus appears to have expanded the existing term "pleasure" to cover not just agreeable stimulative sensations (which the Cyreniacs and everyone else too agrees with), but to include all awareness of feeling that is not painful (with which standard philosophers would disagree);

would it not make sense to consider that:

- Epicurus may have expanded the existing term "prolepsis" to cover not just the recognition of physical objects like men or horses or oxes as a result of having seen examples of them over time (which is the example Diogenes Laertius gives, and everyone agrees with as a process that definitely happens), but to include identification of abstractions such as justice or divinity which require considerably more organizing in the mind because they aren't physical objects that can be touched or seen or heard or smelled or tasted (which is a process with which other philosophers - especially blank slate philosophers - would disagree).

The point of this post being that maybe the emphasis on prolepsis can be analogized to the expansion of the word as an explanation of why Diogenes Laertius' explanation does not seem complete.

For reference this is pretty close to what Dewitt says around page 142 et seq.