

Episode 230 - Cicero's OTNOTG - 05 - Velleius Attacks Misplaced Ideas of Divinity

Post by "Cassius" of May 26, 2024 at 11:53 AM

In this episode one criticism made by Velleius is I think particularly interesting (and difficult), in that involves infinity, which is one of the subjects to which Epicurus said to pay special attention. Here is the quote, from Book One section XI, this translation by Rackham:

Quote from Velleius in On The Nature of The Gods XI

Next, Xenophanes endowed the universe with mind, and held that, as being infinite, it was god. His view of mind is as open to objection as that of the rest ; but on the subject of infinity he incurs still severer criticism, for the infinite can have no sensation and no contact with anything outside.

My interpretation of this, as stated in the podcast (if it survives editing) is that Epicurus would say that "infinity" is a concept that itself "can have no sensation and no contact with anything outside [itself?]. I suggested that there might be a parallel here in the argument made by Socrates/Plato that the greatest good cannot be pleasure because pleasure can be made better (by adding more) and thus something that can be made better is itself not perfect or complete. Analogously, is there an argument that a divinity cannot be infinite because that means the divinity is not complete (or "perfect" in the sense of completed)?

That's just my first thought, but I wanted to add this to the thread because it seems that Velleius (and therefore probably Epicurus) took the position that a divinity cannot be infinite "for the infinite can have no sensation....."

Thoughts?