

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

Post by “Little Rocker” of June 9, 2024 at 6:44 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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).

[Quote from Bryan](#)

The physical basis for justice is simply the fact that life is a potential characteristic [sýmptōma] of matter -- and justice is a potential characteristic of life.

I've been trying to work through some of these ideas lately, and I've run into perennial problems because people often talk past each other when they use terms like 'empiricism' and 'innate.' So perhaps the two of you can help. The question of whether Epicurus countenances anything as 'innate' comes up most often with the gods, but it seems like DeWitt, for example, also thinks justice is 'innate.' He thinks these fall under 'Anticipations,' and I confess I still haven't quite sorted through his textual evidence with 'Anticipations' (TBD).

Anyway, I've been wondering what it would even mean for Epicurus to consider something 'innate,' since the Platonic 'innate'--a pre-birth experience of abstract objects that we vaguely remember as we go about our daily life--is off the table. So is 'innate' in the sense of 'put in our nature by a creator.' So the chief option would be that it's part of our biological nature/cognitive architecture to categorize the world in a particular way or arrive at a particular conclusion in light of experience. We would be pre-disposed to eventually conclude, 'there must be gods,' or 'justice must be about entering agreements to avoid harm.' And if that were the case, then Epicurus need not think we have pre-existing 'experience' or 'impressions' of these things. We are not 'blank slates,' but instead beings who approach and process the world with a shared apparatus for discernment. And as a result, we arrive at a wide variety of shared conclusions.

Atoms strike me as different, but maybe they're not? After all, if we think, 'there's substance and motion,' then atoms are a highly effective explanation of how there can be both, and

motion and substance certainly seem proleptic, if atoms do not. But does 'arguing for' atoms make Epicurus no longer an empiricist? I tend to think you can remain happily an empiricist and posit underlying explanations for what you observe all the time, so long as you consider them hypotheses.

I suppose I want to think that Epicurus is a dyed-in-the-wool empiricist (even though he posits atoms that he can't see by means of deduction) and might very well think some things are 'innate,' at least in the sense of resulting from use of the standard operating equipment. Does that sound roughly in the vicinity of reasonable?