

Episode 233 - Cicero's OTNOTG - 08 - An Epicurean Attack On The False God Of Stoicism

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Welcome to Episode 233 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the most complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at [EpicureanFriends.com](https://www.epicureanfriends.com).

For our new listeners, let me remind you of several ground rules for both our podcast and our forum.

First: Our aim is to bring you an accurate presentation of [classical Epicurean philosophy](#) as the ancient Epicureans understood it.

Second: We won't be talking about modern political issues in this podcast. How you apply Epicurus in your own life is of course entirely up to you. We call this approach "[Not Neo-Epicurean, But Epicurean](#)." Epicurean philosophy is a philosophy of its own, it's not the same as Stoicism, Humanism, Buddhism, Taoism, Atheism, Libertarianism or Marxism - it is unique and must be understood on its own, not in terms of any conventional modern morality.

Third: One of the most important things to keep in mind is that the Epicureans often used words very differently than we do today. To the Epicureans, Gods were not omnipotent or omniscient, so Epicurean references to "Gods" do not mean at all the same thing as in major religions today. In the Epicurean theory of knowledge, [all sensations are true](#), but that does not mean all opinions are true, but that the raw data reported by the senses is reported without the injection of opinion, as the opinion-making process takes place in the mind, where it is subject to mistakes, rather than in the senses. In Epicurean ethics, "Pleasure" refers not ONLY to sensory stimulation, but also to every experience of life which is not felt to be painful. The classical texts show that Epicurus was not focused on luxury, like some people say, but neither did he teach minimalism, as other people say. Epicurus taught that all experiences of life fall under one of two feelings - pleasure and pain - and those feelings -- and not gods, idealism, or virtue - are the guides that Nature gave us by which to live. More than anything else, Epicurus taught that the universe is not supernatural in any way, and that means there's no life after death, and any happiness we'll ever have comes in THIS life, which is why it is so important not to waste time in confusion.

Today we are continuing to review the Epicurean sections of Cicero's "On the Nature of The Gods," as presented by the Epicurean spokesman Velleius, beginning at the end of Section 10.

For the main text we are using primarily the [Yonge translation, available here at Archive.org](#). The text which we include in these posts is available [here](#). We will also refer to the public domain version of the Loeb series, which contains both Latin and English, [as translated by H. Rackham](#).

Additional versions can be found here:

- [Frances Brooks 1896 translation at Online Library of Liberty](#)
- [Lacus Curtius Edition \(Rackham\)](#)
- [PDF Of Loeb Edition at Archive.org by Rackham](#)
- [Gutenberg.org version by CD Yonge](#)

A list of arguments presented [will be maintained here](#).

Today's Text

XIV. Zeno (to come to your sect, Balbus) thinks the law of nature to be the divinity, and that it has the power to force us to what is right, and to restrain us from what is wrong. How this law can be an animated being I cannot conceive; but that God is so we would certainly maintain. The same person says, in another place, that the sky is God; but can we possibly conceive that God is a being insensible, deaf to our prayers, our wishes, and our vows, and wholly unconnected with us? In other books he thinks there is a certain rational essence pervading all nature, indued with divine efficacy. He attributes the same power to the stars, to the years, to the months, and to the seasons. In his interpretation of Hesiod's Theogony, he entirely destroys the established notions of the Gods; for he excludes Jupiter, Juno, and Vesta, and those esteemed divine, from the number of them; but his doctrine is that these are names which by some kind of allusion are given to mute and inanimate beings. The sentiments of his disciple Aristo are not less erroneous. He thought it impossible to conceive the form of the Deity, and asserts that the Gods are destitute of sense; and he is entirely dubious whether the Deity is an animated being or not.

Cleanthes, who next comes under my notice, a disciple of Zeno at the same time with Aristo, in one place says that the world is God; in another, he attributes divinity to the mind and spirit of universal nature; then he asserts that the most remote, the highest, the all-surrounding, the all-enclosing and embracing heat, which is called the sky, is most certainly the Deity. In the books he wrote against pleasure, in which he seems to be raving, he imagines the Gods to have a certain form and shape; then he ascribes all divinity to the stars; and, lastly, he thinks nothing more divine than reason. So that this God, whom we know mentally and in the speculations of our minds, from which traces we receive our impression, has at last actually no visible form at all.

XV. Persæus, another disciple of Zeno, says that they who have made discoveries advantageous to the life of man should be esteemed as Gods; and the very things, he says, which are healthful and beneficial have derived their names from those of the Gods; so that he thinks it not sufficient to call them the discoveries of Gods, but he urges that they themselves should be deemed divine. What can be more absurd than to ascribe divine honors to sordid and deformed things; or to place among the Gods men who are dead and mixed with the dust, to whose memory all the respect that could be paid would be but mourning for their loss?

Chrysippus, who is looked upon as the most subtle interpreter of the dreams of the Stoics, has mustered up a numerous band of unknown Gods; and so unknown that we are not able to form any idea about them, though our mind seems capable of framing any image to itself in its thoughts. For he says that the divine power is placed in reason, and in the spirit and mind of universal nature; that the world, with a universal effusion of its spirit, is God; that the superior part of that spirit, which is the mind and reason, is the great principle of nature, containing and preserving the chain of all things; that the divinity is the power of fate, and the necessity of future events. He deifies fire also, and what I before called the ethereal spirit, and those elements which naturally proceed from it—water, earth, and air. He attributes divinity to the sun, moon, stars, and universal space, the grand container of all things, and to those men likewise who have obtained immortality. He maintains the sky to be what men call Jupiter; the air, which pervades the sea, to be Neptune; and the earth, Ceres. In like manner he goes through the names of the other Deities. He says that Jupiter is that immutable and eternal law which guides and directs us in our manners; and this he calls fatal necessity, the everlasting verity of future events. But none of these are of such a nature as to seem to carry any indication of divine virtue in them. These are the doctrines contained in his first book of the Nature of the Gods. In the second, he endeavors to accommodate the fables of Orpheus, Musæus, Hesiod, and Homer to what he has advanced in the first, in order that the most ancient poets, who never dreamed of these things, may seem to have been Stoics. Diogenes the Babylonian was a follower of the doctrine of Chrysippus; and in that book which he wrote, entitled “A Treatise concerning Minerva,” he separates the account of Jupiter’s bringing-forth, and the birth of that virgin, from the fabulous, and reduces it to a natural construction.