

Episode 237 - Cicero's OTNOTG - 12 - Isonomia And The Implications of Infinity

Post by "Cassius" of July 12, 2024 at 8:57 AM

This statement early in the Masson article seems helpful I think on a basic point. I added the underline for emphasis:

Quote

By this Velleius seems to mean a law of averages or chances; the law, namely, that of two alternatives equally possible, each will occur with equal frequency if an infinite number of cases be taken.

It seems to me that it is essential to keep in mind the point that we are discussing things that are "possible."

Without getting yet into the difficulty of establishing exactly what is possible, and what is impossible, the logical point has to be kept in mind that infinity is not itself going to change the impossible into the possible.

That which is impossible will have exactly zero occurrences, and no matter how far space or time extends, even to infinity, the number of occurrences of the impossible is going to remain zero.

But the other question is maybe key, before we even get to the "spectrum" issues.

We know from experience on earth that some things are more common than others, and thus there are more grains of sand than there are diamonds, and more stupid people than there are Epicuruses.

But given the fact that diamonds and Epicuruses are possible, do we conclude from the principle of infinity that there are (or have been or will be) an infinite number of diamonds and Epicuruses in the universe?

I am presuming at this point that the answer to that question is "Yes," and that answer is why Lucretius specifically mentions the "even if" possibility of atomic rearrangement in his poem. (To the effect that even if our atoms rearrange themselves into the same configuration in the future, we would not be the same person, as our memories would not be the same.) While in any individual locale certain things are more common than others, taking into account the whole of the infinite universe, there are (or were or will be) an infinite number of diamonds and Epicuruses.

Is that "Yes" the obvious deduction that the Epicureans would have reached, or not?

(Edit: To anticipate where this would go afterwards, obviously it is "possible" to experience pleasure, and "possible" to be alive for a period of time, and so both (1) the degrees of pleasure and (2) the degrees of living over time are to be expected (given local circumstances) to extend all the way from zero to actual or effective infinity.)