

Episode 239 - Cicero's OTNOTG 14 - The Dishonesty Of Academic Skepticism vs. Epicurus' Commitment To Truth

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Welcome to Episode 239 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, where we have a thread to discuss this and all of our podcast episodes.

Today we are continuing to review Cicero's "On the Nature of The Gods," which began with the Epicurean spokesman Velleius defending the Epicurean point of view. This week will continue into Section 21 as Cotta, the Academic Skeptic, responds to Velleius, and we - in turn - will respond to Cotta in particular and the Skeptical argument in general.

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 eventually be put together here](#).

Today's Text

XXI. Cotta, with his usual courtesy, then began. Velleius, says he, were it not for something which you have advanced, I should have remained silent; for I have often observed, as I did just now upon hearing you, that I cannot so easily conceive why a proposition is true as why it is false. Should you ask me what I take the nature of the Gods to be, I should perhaps make no answer. But if you should ask whether I think it to be of that nature which you have described, I

should answer that I was as far as possible from agreeing with you. However, before I enter on the subject of your discourse and what you have advanced upon it, I will give you my opinion of yourself. Your intimate friend, L. Crassus, has been often heard by me to say that you were beyond all question superior to all our learned Romans; and that few Epicureans in Greece were to be compared to you. But as I knew what a wonderful esteem he had for you, I imagined that might make him the more lavish in commendation of you. Now, however, though I do not choose to praise any one when present, yet I must confess that I think you have delivered your thoughts clearly on an obscure and very intricate subject; that you are not only copious in your sentiments, but more elegant in your language than your sect generally are.

When I was at Athens, I went often to hear Zeno, by the advice of Philo, who used to call him the chief of the Epicureans; partly, probably, in order to judge more easily how completely those principles could be refuted after I had heard them stated by the most learned of the Epicureans. And, indeed, he did not speak in any ordinary manner; but, like you, with clearness, gravity, and elegance; yet what frequently gave me great uneasiness when I heard him, as it did while I attended to you, was to see so excellent a genius falling into such frivolous (excuse my freedom), not to say foolish, doctrines.

However, I shall not at present offer anything better; for, as I said before, we can in most subjects, especially in physics, sooner discover what is not true than what is.

XXII. If you should ask me what God is, or what his character and nature are, I should follow the example of Simonides, who, when Hiero the tyrant proposed the same question to him, desired a day to consider of it. When he required his answer the next day, Simonides begged two days more; and as he kept constantly desiring double the number which he had required before instead of giving his answer, Hiero, with surprise, asked him his meaning in doing so: "Because," says he, "the longer I meditate on it, the more obscure it appears to me." Simonides, who was not only a delightful poet, but reputed a wise and learned man in other branches of knowledge, found, I suppose, so many acute and refined arguments occurring to him, that he was doubtful which was the truest, and therefore despaired of discovering any truth.

But does your Epicurus (for I had rather contend with him than with you) say anything that is worthy the name of philosophy, or even of common-sense?

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/60851858>