

Episode 245 - Cicero's OTNOTG 20 - Right, Wrong, Or Incomplete?

Post by "Cassius" of September 12, 2024 at 8:00 PM

It's been a busy week for me and editing has gone more slowly than in recent weeks, but I expect to have this episode up no later than Saturday morning. In the meantime, I am coming across several additional items that we need to cite in this thread, especially since they appear late in the episode, where we do by far our best analysis of this week's material.

The first of the references we need to link is the Isaac Asimov article we discussed recently. I highly recommend this entire article as extremely helpful in adjusting our attitudes toward how to appreciate the Epicurean view of the universe in light of the criticism that it gets from some quarters that parts of its physics are outdated. Here's the link to the [Isaac Asimov article "The Relativity of Wrong"](#) discussion.

Also, as we were giving closing comments Joshua came up with another reference which was very helpful on much the same point. As I recall it stems from a movie and an article in "National Review" magazine and an exchange between Ben Stein and Richard Dawkins.

Joshua if you could link to that material I would appreciate it, because these points are critical to understanding of the Epicurean method of reasoning both on the gods specifically but on the rest of the universe as well, and these two articles explain a lot.

Much of the criticism Cicero embedded in Cotta's criticisms of Epicurus boil down to the argument that "because you can't explain the specifics of the gods' blood, and the gods' bodies, and many of the other suggestions you make about gods, NOTHING you say is credible, and we should throw out ALL your suggestions, including that gods live blessed lives and don't cause trouble for (or give rewards to) humans. Cotta's argument is rooted in skepticism, but has a superficial attractiveness to it, because the Epicurean attitude is generally disposed against useless speculation where evidence is minimal. We can agree or disagree with the ancient Epicureans on the view that the nature of gods is a subject that deserves serious discussion, but for those who are interested in it we can trace the outlines of where Epicurus was going, and the Asimov and Dawkins discussions can help us see that regardless of the incompleteness of their knowledge, the Epicureans were surely a lot closer to being "right" about the nature of gods than their mainstream opponents.

I see no reason why people of good will toward Epicurus can't debate among themselves whether it is useful to discuss "quasi-blood" and "quasi bodies," and I am personally very convinced that it is superior to debate the unobservable based on analogies to our own experiences rather than to supernatural explanations. But what's not debatable is that the Epicureans were surely right that whatever gods may exist, those gods don't spend their time

plotting eternal damnation for humans. And the importance of that conclusion stands head and shoulders above any uncertainties about the details.