

Episode 246 - Cicero's OTNOTG 21 - Examining Epicurean Evidence-Based Reasoning

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Welcome to Episode 246 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 27 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

XXXI. In his statement of this sentence, some think that he avoided speaking clearly on purpose, though it was manifestly without design. But they judge ill of a man who had not the least art. It is doubtful whether he means that there is any being happy and immortal, or that if there is any being happy, he must likewise be immortal. They do not consider that he speaks here, indeed, ambiguously; but in many other places both he and Metrodorus explain themselves as clearly as you have done. But he believed there are Gods; nor have I ever seen any one who was more exceedingly afraid of what he declared ought to be no objects of fear,

namely, death and the Gods, with the apprehensions of which the common rank of people are very little affected; but he says that the minds of all mortals are terrified by them. Many thousands of men commit robberies in the face of death; others rifle all the temples they can get into: such as these, no doubt, must be greatly terrified, the one by the fears of death, and the others by the fear of the Gods.

But since you dare not (for I am now addressing my discourse to Epicurus himself) absolutely deny the existence of the Gods, what hinders you from ascribing a divine nature to the sun, the world, or some eternal mind? I never, says he, saw wisdom and a rational soul in any but a human form. What! did you ever observe anything like the sun, the moon, or the five moving planets? The sun, terminating his course in two extreme parts of one circle, finishes his annual revolutions. The moon, receiving her light from the sun, completes the same course in the space of a month. The five planets in the same circle, some nearer, others more remote from the earth, begin the same courses together, and finish them in different spaces of time. Did you ever observe anything like this, Epicurus? So that, according to you, there can be neither sun, moon, nor stars, because nothing can exist but what we have touched or seen. What! have you ever seen the Deity himself? Why else do you believe there is any? If this doctrine prevails, we must reject all that history relates or reason discovers; and the people who inhabit inland countries must not believe there is such a thing as the sea. This is so narrow a way of thinking that if you had been born in Seriphus, and never had been from out of that island, where you had frequently been in the habit of seeing little hares and foxes, you would not, therefore, believe that there are such beasts as lions and panthers; and if any one should describe an elephant to you, you would think that he designed to laugh at you.

XXXII. You indeed, Velleius, have concluded your argument, not after the manner of your own sect, but of the logicians, to which your people are utter strangers. You have taken it for granted that the Gods are happy. I allow it. You say that without virtue no one can be happy. I willingly concur with you in this also. You likewise say that virtue cannot reside where reason is not. That I must necessarily allow. You add, moreover, that reason cannot exist but in a human form. Who, do you think, will admit that? If it were true, what occasion was there to come so gradually to it? And to what purpose? You might have answered it on your own authority. I perceive your gradations from happiness to virtue, and from virtue to reason; but how do you come from reason to human form? There, indeed, you do not descend by degrees, but precipitately.

Nor can I conceive why Epicurus should rather say the Gods are like men than that men are like the Gods. You ask what is the difference; for, say you, if this is like that, that is like this. I grant it; but this I assert, that the Gods could not take their form from men; for the Gods always existed, and never had a beginning, if they are to exist eternally; but men had a beginning: therefore that form, of which the immortal Gods are, must have had existence before mankind; consequently, the Gods should not be said to be of human form, but our form should be called divine. However, let this be as you will. I now inquire how this extraordinary good fortune came about; for you deny that reason had any share in the formation of things. But still, what was this extraordinary fortune? Whence proceeded that happy concourse of atoms which gave so

sudden a rise to men in the form of Gods? Are we to suppose the divine seed fell from heaven upon earth, and that men sprung up in the likeness of their celestial sires? I wish you would assert it; for I should not be unwilling to acknowledge my relation to the Gods. But you say nothing like it; no, our resemblance to the Gods, it seems, was by chance. Must I now seek for arguments to refute this doctrine seriously? I wish I could as easily discover what is true as I can overthrow what is false.

[Transcript](#)

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