

Episode 247 - Cicero's OTNOTG 22 - Cotta Continues To Attack The Epicurean View That Gods Are Natural Living Beings

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Welcome to Episode 247 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, continues to insist that gods are supernatural and not at all similar to humans. We will, in turn, respond to Cotta's particular and general arguments.

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

XXXII. ...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.

XXXIII. You have enumerated with so ready a memory, and so copiously, the opinions of philosophers, from Thales the Milesian, concerning the nature of the Gods, that I am surprised to see so much learning in a Roman. But do you think they were all madmen who thought that a Deity could by some possibility exist without hands and feet? Does not even this consideration have weight with you when you consider what is the use and advantage of limbs in men, and lead you to admit that the Gods have no need of them? What necessity can there be of feet, without walking; or of hands, if there is nothing to be grasped? The same may be asked of the other parts of the body, in which nothing is vain, nothing useless, nothing superfluous; therefore we may infer that no art can imitate the skill of nature. Shall the Deity, then, have a tongue, and not speak—teeth, palate, and jaws, though he will have no use for them? Shall the members which nature has given to the body for the sake of generation be useless to the Deity? Nor would the internal parts be less superfluous than the external. What comeliness is there in the heart, the lungs, the liver, and the rest of them, abstracted from their use? I mention these because you place them in the Deity on account of the beauty of the human form.

Depending on these dreams, not only Epicurus, Metrodorus, and Hermachus declaimed against Pythagoras, Plato, and Empedocles, but that little harlot Leontium presumed to write against Theophrastus: indeed, she had a neat Attic style; but yet, to think of her arguing against Theophrastus! So much did the garden of Epicurus abound with these liberties, and, indeed, you are always complaining against them. Zeno wrangled. Why need I mention Albutius? Nothing could be more elegant or humane than Phædrus; yet a sharp expression would disgust the old man. Epicurus treated Aristotle with great contumely. He foully slandered Phædo, the disciple of Socrates. He pelted Timocrates, the brother of his companion Metrodorus, with whole volumes, because he disagreed with him in some trifling point of philosophy. He was ungrateful even to Democritus, whose follower he was; and his master Nausiphanes, from whom he learned nothing, had no better treatment from him.

XXXIV. Zeno gave abusive language not only to those who were then living, as Apollodorus, Syllus, and the rest, but he called Socrates, who was the father of philosophy, the Attic buffoon, using the Latin word *Scurra*. He never called Chrysippus by any name but Chesippus. And you yourself a little before, when you were numbering up a senate, as we may call them, of

philosophers, scrupled not to say that the most eminent men talked like foolish, visionary dotards. Certainly, therefore, if they have all erred in regard to the nature of the Gods, it is to be feared there are no such beings. What you deliver on that head are all whimsical notions, and not worthy the consideration even of old women. For you do not seem to be in the least aware what a task you draw on yourselves, if you should prevail on us to grant that the same form is common to Gods and men. The Deity would then require the same trouble in dressing, and the same care of the body, that mankind does. He must walk, run, lie down, lean, sit, hold, speak, and discourse. You need not be told the consequence of making the Gods male and female.

Therefore I cannot sufficiently wonder how this chief of yours came to entertain these strange opinions. But you constantly insist on the certainty of this tenet, that the Deity is both happy and immortal. Supposing he is so, would his happiness be less perfect if he had not two feet? Or cannot that blessedness or beatitude—call it which you will (they are both harsh terms, but we must mollify them by use)—can it not, I say, exist in that sun, or in this world, or in some eternal mind that has not human shape or limbs? All you say against it is, that you never saw any happiness in the sun or the world. What, then? Did you ever see any world but this? No, you will say. Why, therefore, do you presume to assert that there are not only six hundred thousand worlds, but that they are innumerable? Reason tells you so. Will not reason tell you likewise that as, in our inquiries into the most excellent nature, we find none but the divine nature can be happy and eternal, so the same divine nature surpasses us in excellence of mind; and as in mind, so in body? Why, therefore, as we are inferior in all other respects, should we be equal in form? For human virtue approaches nearer to the divinity than human form.

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