

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

Post by "Cassius" of September 22, 2024 at 8:46 AM

Notes for the section to be discussed in this episode:

Section XXXII

1. Cotta accuses Velleius' argument of being based on logic - a technique that the Epicureans allegedly oppose - rather than on the senses.
2. Cotta agrees with Velleius that the gods are happy, that without virtue no one can be happy, and that virtue requires reason. Cotta disagrees with Velleius, however, that the gods are of human form, and he alleges that this is a leap which is not justified.
3. Cotta asserts that Velleius says that the gods are of human form, when he could just as easily have said that men are of godlike form. This is petty wordplay, because when two things are similar to each other, it makes no difference which order you state the things that are similar to each other.
4. Note that Cotta asserts that the gods always existed, which is required if they are immortal, and therefore existed first before men. It is not clear that this is Velleius' position, especially when you ask about "particular gods" rather than gods as a class, or human beings as a class. If "human beings" is a term that applies only to people of Earth, then yes that class had a beginning after the earth was formed, but that does not mean that there are not other human-like beings in the rest of the universe, or that the class of human-like beings has not always existed, just like the class of the gods.

1. *[Letter to Herodotus 73 ] - "And in addition to what we have already said we must believe that worlds, and indeed every limited compound body which continuously exhibits a similar appearance to the things we see, were created from the infinite, and that all such things, greater and less alike, were separated off from individual agglomerations of matter; and that all are again dissolved, some more quickly, some more slowly, some suffering from one set of causes, others from another. [74] And further we must believe that these worlds were neither created all of necessity with one configuration nor yet with every kind of shape. Furthermore, we must believe that in all worlds there are living creatures and plants and other things we see in this world; for indeed no one could prove that in a world of one kind there might or might not have been included the kinds of seeds from which living things and plants and all the rest of the things we see are composed, and that in a world of another kind they could not have been."*

2. [ Lucretius 2:1048 ] [1048] *\*First of all, we find that in every direction everywhere, and on either side, above and below, through all the universe, there is no limit, as I have shown, and indeed the truth cries out for itself and the nature of the deep shines clear. Now in no way must we think it likely, since towards every side is infinite empty space, and seeds in unnumbered numbers in the deep universe fly about in many ways driven on in everlasting motion, that this one world and sky was brought to birth, but that beyond it all those bodies of matter do naught; above all, since this world was so made by nature, as the seeds of things themselves of their own accord, jostling from time to time, were driven together in many ways, rashly, idly, and in vain, and at last those united, which, suddenly cast together, might become ever and anon the beginnings of great things, of earth and sea and sky, and the race of living things. Wherefore, again and again, you must needs confess that there are here and there other gatherings of matter, such as is this, which the ether holds in its greedy grip. [1067] Moreover, when there is much matter ready to hand, when space is there, and no thing, no cause delays, things must, we may be sure, be carried on and completed. As it is, if there is so great a store of seeds as the whole life of living things could not number, and if the same force and nature abides which could throw together the seeds of things, each into their place in like manner as they are thrown together here, it must needs be that you confess that there are other worlds in other regions, and diverse races of men and tribes of wild beasts. [1077] This there is too that in the universe there is nothing single, nothing born unique and growing unique and alone, but it is always of some tribe, and there are many things in the same race. First of all turn your mind to living creatures; you will find that in this wise is begotten the race of wild beasts that haunts the mountains, in this wise the stock of men, in this wise again the dumb herds of scaly fishes, and all the bodies of flying fowls. Wherefore you must confess in the same way that sky and earth and sun, moon, sea, and all else that exists, are not unique, but rather of number numberless; inasmuch as the deep-fixed boundary-stone of life awaits these as surely, and they are just as much of a body that has birth, as every race which is here on earth, abounding in things after its kind.*

5. Cotta asks how this extraordinary good fortune (of the existence of men and gods) came about, because you Epicureans deny that reason had anything to do with the formation of things. What was this extraordinary fortune? Are we to suppose the divine seed fell from heaven upon earth? Cotta says that Velleius does not assert this (though Cotta would welcome it) - Cotta asserts that Velleius alleges that this happened "by chance." Surely you can't be serious! Cotta says in effect: "I wish it were as easy to show what is true as it is to show that what you say is false!"

### Section XXXIII

1. Cotta says that Velleius' history of philosophers regarding the nature of the gods is so good that he is surprised to see so much learning in a Roman. (Sort of weird statement - isn't Cotta Roman too?)
2. Cotta asks Velleius if he thinks those philosophers who held that gods can exist without human attributes (hand and feet) were madmen? Don't you understand that the gods have no need of hands and feet like humans do? (Cotta is alleging that gods are supernatural and don't need such things.)
3. Cotta says: "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." What does "No art may imitate the skill of nature" mean? Rackham translates "so that no art can imitate the cunning of nature's handiwork."
4. Cotta says he mentions tongues and teeth and jaws and heart, lung, liver, and says "I mention these because you place them in the Deity on account of the beauty of the human form." -- This is also petty - Velleius made no such specific assertions - only that the gods had some kind of bodies similar in appearance to humans -- not that the gods bodies contained the same exact characteristics as humans.
5. Cotta characterizes Epicurean reasoning as dreams, and calls Leontium a harlot who presumed to write against Theophrastus. The Garden of Epicurus \*abounded\* with these criticisms of the other philosophers. Cotta then gives a list of other philosophers Epicurus attacks, which would seem to imply confirmation of what Diogenes Laertius has to say about Epicurus calling the other philosophers names.