

Episode 251 - Cicero's OTNOTG 26 - How Niagara Falls Helps Us Understand the Flux, the Heap, and the Epicurean Gods

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Welcome to Episode 251 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 39 as Cotta, the Academic Skeptic, continues to attack the Epicurean view of the nature of divinity.

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

XXXIX. The whole affair, Velleius, is ridiculous. You do not impose images on our eyes only, but on our minds. Such is the privilege which you have assumed of talking nonsense with impunity. But there is, you say, a transition of images flowing on in great crowds in such a way that out of many some one at least must be perceived! I should be ashamed of my incapacity to understand this if you, who assert it, could comprehend it yourselves; for how do you prove that

these images are continued in uninterrupted motion? Or, if uninterrupted, still how do you prove them to be eternal? There is a constant supply, you say, of innumerable atoms. But must they, for that reason, be all eternal? To elude this, you have recourse to equilibration (for so, with your leave, I will call your ἰσονομία), and say that as there is a sort of nature mortal, so there must also be a sort which is immortal. By the same rule, as there are men mortal, there are men immortal; and as some arise from the earth, some must arise from the water also; and as there are causes which destroy, there must likewise be causes which preserve. Be it as you say; but let those causes preserve which have existence themselves. I cannot conceive these your Gods to have any. But how does all this face of things arise from atomic corpuscles? Were there any such atoms (as there are not), they might perhaps impel one another, and be jumbled together in their motion; but they could never be able to impart form, or figure, or color, or animation, so that you by no means demonstrate the immortality of your Deity.

XL. Let us now inquire into his happiness. It is certain that without virtue there can be no happiness; but virtue consists in action: now your Deity does nothing; therefore he is void of virtue, and consequently cannot be happy. What sort of life does he lead? He has a constant supply, you say, of good things, without any intermixture of bad. What are those good things? Sensual pleasures, no doubt; for you know no delight of the mind but what arises from the body, and returns to it. I do not suppose, Velleius, that you are like some of the Epicureans, who are ashamed of those expressions of Epicurus, in which he openly avows that he has no idea of any good separate from wanton and obscene pleasures, which, without a blush, he names distinctly. What food, therefore, what drink, what variety of music or flowers, what kind of pleasures of touch, what odors, will you offer to the Gods to fill them with pleasures? The poets indeed provide them with banquets of nectar and ambrosia, and a Hebe or a Ganymede to serve up the cup. But what is it, Epicurus, that you do for them? For I do not see from whence your Deity should have those things, nor how he could use them. Therefore the nature of man is better constituted for a happy life than the nature of the Gods, because men enjoy various kinds of pleasures; but you look on all those pleasures as superficial which delight the senses only by a titillation, as Epicurus calls it. Where is to be the end of this trifling? Even Philo, who followed the Academy, could not bear to hear the soft and luscious delights of the Epicureans despised; for with his admirable memory he perfectly remembered and used to repeat many sentences of Epicurus in the very words in which they were written. He likewise used to quote many, which were more gross, from Metrodorus, the sage colleague of Epicurus, who blamed his brother Timocrates because he would not allow that everything which had any reference to a happy life was to be measured by the belly; nor has he said this once only, but often. You grant what I say, I perceive; for you know it to be true. I can produce the books, if you should deny it; but I am not now reproving you for referring all things to the standard of pleasure: that is another question. What I am now showing is, that your Gods are destitute of pleasure; and therefore, according to your own manner of reasoning, they are not happy.