

Episode 253 - How The "Riddle Of Epicurus" Fits Into the Epicurean View of The Gods - Cicero's OTNOTG 28

Post by "Eikadistes" of October 30, 2024 at 1:25 PM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

The Riddle of Epicurus

We'll go over this during our Nov. 3rd recording, so here are a few links;

David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4583/4583-h/4583-h.htm>

(control+F search 'epicur' to locate the passage)

And the New Epicurean article on the history of the dilemma;

<https://newepicurean.com/derivation-of-...le-of-epicurus/>

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I wanted to mention that I've recently com across a few scholars who suggested that this trilemma *actually* comes from a [Skeptic](#) (perhaps [Carneades](#) the [Academic](#)), and **not** Epicurus ([Larrimore, Mark Joseph. *The Problem of Evil: A Reader.* Blackwell, 2001](#)). Based on *De Ira Dei* [David Hume](#) attributes this argument to Epicurus: "***Epicurus's old questions are yet unanswered. Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?***" ([Dialogues concerning Natural Religion](#) 1779). While it comports with Epicurean theology, it does not correspond with any extant writings of Epicurus nor another Epicurean. I also note that Lactantius documented this material approximately 600 years after Epicurus was teaching in Athens. <<https://twentiers.com/anger-of-god>>

From Lactantius, On the Anger of God "You see, therefore, that we have greater need of wisdom on account of evils; and unless these things had been proposed to us, we should not be a rational animal. But if this account is true, which the Stoics were in no manner able to see, that argument also of Epicurus is done away. **God, he says, either wishes to take away evils, and is unable; or He is able, and is unwilling; or He is neither willing nor able, or He is both willing and able. If He is willing and is unable, He is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God; if He is able and unwilling, He is envious,**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4112-episode-253-how-the-riddle-of-epicurus-fits-into-the-epicurean-view-of-the-gods/?postID=32798#post32798>

which is equally at variance with God; if He is neither willing nor able, He is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God; if He is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? or why does He not remove them?² I know that many of the philosophers, who defend providence, are accustomed to be disturbed by this argument, and are almost driven against their will to admit that God takes no interest in anything, which Epicurus especially aims at; but having examined the matter, we easily do away with this formidable argument. For God is able to do whatever He wishes, and there is no weakness or envy in God. He is able, therefore, to take away evils; but He does not wish to do so, and yet He is not on that account envious. For on this account He does not take them away, because He at the same time gives wisdom, as I have shown; and there is more of goodness and pleasure in wisdom than of annoyance in evils. For wisdom causes us even to know God, and by that knowledge to attain to immortality, which is the chief good. Therefore, unless we first know evil, we shall be unable to know good. But Epicurus did not see this, nor did any other, that if evils are taken away, wisdom is in like manner taken away; and that no traces of virtue remain in man, the nature of which consists in enduring and overcoming the bitterness of evils. And thus, for the sake of a slight gain in the taking away of evils, we should be deprived of a good, which is very great, and true, and peculiar to us. It is plain, therefore, that all things are proposed for the sake of man, as well evils as also goods" (Chapter 13, translated by William Fletcher 1886).