

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

Post by "Cassius" of November 3, 2024 at 6:40 AM

Two things to add at the moment:

1) So where does that "WHY CALL HIM GOD?" structure come from in the English formulation? Are we not seeing that in any of the authorities, even Hume?

2) As to the Academic Skeptics wanting to construct arguments against the Stoics as much as against the Epicureans, we not only have that setup in Humes Dialogue Concerning Natural Religion, where one of the main speakers is named Cleanthes, and the anti-Stoic sections (which we have not covered) in On Ends and On The Nature of the Gods, but also this from the opening sections of Cicero's Academica (Yonge translation). He's previously in the text referenced conflicts between the Academics and Epicureans and Stoics, and then says this:

Quote

... For those men are so simple as to think the good of a sheep and of a man the same thing. While you know the character and extent of the accuracy which philosophers of our school profess. Again, if you follow Zeno, it is a hard thing to make any one understand what that genuine and simple good is which cannot be separated from honesty; while Epicurus asserts that he is wholly unable to comprehend what the character of that good may be which is unconnected with pleasures which affect the senses. But if we follow the doctrines of the Old Academy which, as you know, we prefer, then with what accuracy must we apply ourselves to explain it; with what shrewdness and even with what obscurity must we argue against the Stoics!

Just in terms of our own discussions in the podcast and the forum, there is a lot of background evidence that would justify re-orienting our thoughts to how Cicero considered the Stoics to be almost as wrong-headed as the Epicureans, but since Cicero didn't quarrel with the Stoic ethics Cicero isn't as remembered today for being anti-Stoic. And in our discussions we haven't scratched the surface of Carneades, who appears to have been oriented against the Stoics similarly as Cicero.

Even a brief review of the first book of the Academic questions helps a lot to put the relationships between the Academics, the Peripatetics, the Stoics and even the Epicureans into perspective, with everything revolving around the issue of knowledge and when (or if) we are ever justified in claiming it:

Quote

Then I replied—Arcesilas, as we understand, directed all his attacks against Zeno, not out of obstinacy or any desire of gaining the victory, as it appears to me, but by reason of the obscurity of those things which had brought Socrates to the confession of ignorance, and even before Socrates, Democritus, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, and nearly all the ancients; who asserted that nothing could be ascertained, or perceived, or known: that the senses of man were narrow, his mind feeble, the course of his life short, and that truth, as Democritus said, was sunk in the deep; that everything depended on opinions and established customs; that nothing was left to truth. They said in short, that everything was enveloped in darkness; therefore Arcesilas asserted that there was nothing which could be known, not even that very piece of knowledge which Socrates had left himself. Thus he thought that everything lay hid in secret, and that there was nothing which could be discerned or understood; for which reasons it was not right for any one to profess or affirm anything, or sanction anything by his assent, but men ought always to restrain their rashness and to keep it in check [pg 021] so as to guard it against every fall. For rashness would be very remarkable when anything unknown or false was approved of; and nothing could be more discreditable than for a man's assent and approbation to precede his knowledge and perception of a fact. And he used to act consistently with these principles, so as to pass most of his days in arguing against every one's opinion, in order that when equally important reasons were found for both sides of the same question, the judgment might more naturally be suspended, and prevented from giving assent to either.