

Episode 255 - Cotta Argues That Epicurean Gods Are As Despicable As Are Epicureans Themselves - Cicero's OTNOTG 30

Post by "Cassius" of November 13, 2024 at 8:15 AM

Welcome to Episode 255 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 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 41 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

XLIII. Even that great man Democritus, from whose fountains Epicurus watered his little garden, seems to me to be very inferior to his usual acuteness when speaking about the nature of the Gods. For at one time he thinks that there are images endowed with divinity, inherent in the universality of things; at another, that the principles and minds contained in the universe are Gods; then he attributes divinity to animated images, employing themselves in doing us good

or harm; and, lastly, he speaks of certain images of such vast extent that they encompass the whole outside of the universe; all which opinions are more worthy of the country of Democritus than of Democritus himself; for who can frame in his mind any ideas of such images? who can admire them? who can think they merit a religious adoration?

But Epicurus, when he divests the Gods of the power of doing good, extirpates all religion from the minds of men; for though he says the divine nature is the best and the most excellent of all natures, he will not allow it to be susceptible of any benevolence, by which he destroys the chief and peculiar attribute of the most perfect being. For what is better and more excellent than goodness and beneficence? To refuse your Gods that quality is to say that no man is any object of their favor, and no Gods either; that they neither love nor esteem any one; in short, that they not only give themselves no trouble about us, but even look on each other with the greatest indifference.

XLIV. How much more reasonable is the doctrine of the Stoics, whom you censure? It is one of their maxims that the wise are friends to the wise, though unknown to each other; for as nothing is more amiable than virtue, he who possesses it is worthy our love, to whatever country he belongs. But what evils do your principles bring, when you make good actions and benevolence the marks of imbecility! For, not to mention the power and nature of the Gods, you hold that even men, if they had no need of mutual assistance, would be neither courteous nor beneficent. Is there no natural charity in the dispositions of good men? The very name of love, from which friendship is derived, is dear to men; and if friendship is to centre in our own advantage only, without regard to him whom we esteem a friend, it cannot be called friendship, but a sort of traffic for our own profit. Pastures, lands, and herds of cattle are valued in the same manner on account of the profit we gather from them; but charity and friendship expect no return. How much more reason have we to think that the Gods, who want nothing, should love each other, and employ themselves about us! If it were not so, why should we pray to or adore them? Why do the priests preside over the altars, and the augurs over the auspices? What have we to ask of the Gods, and why do we prefer our vows to them?

But Epicurus, you say, has written a book concerning sanctity. A trifling performance by a man whose wit is not so remarkable in it, as the unrestrained license of writing which he has permitted himself; for what sanctity can there be if the Gods take no care of human affairs? Or how can that nature be called animated which neither regards nor performs anything? Therefore our friend Posidonius has well observed, in his fifth book of the Nature of the Gods, that Epicurus believed there were no Gods, and that what he had said about the immortal Gods was only said from a desire to avoid unpopularity. He could not be so weak as to imagine that the Deity has only the outward features of a simple mortal, without any real solidity; that he has all the members of a man, without the least power to use them—a certain unsubstantial pellucid being, neither favorable nor beneficial to any one, neither regarding nor doing anything. There can be no such being in nature; and as Epicurus said this plainly, he allows the Gods in words, and destroys them in fact; and if the Deity is truly such a being that he shows no favor, no benevolence to mankind, away with him! For why should I entreat him to be propitious? He can be propitious to none, since, as you say, all his favor and benevolence are

the effects of imbecility.

- End of Book One -

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