

Episode 273 - TD03 - Is The Soul Immortal And Death Actually A Good/

Post by "Don" of March 23, 2025 at 11:07 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

If it's an Epicurean argument, was Cicero extending it to the existence of souls on his own, without precedent from Epicurean texts, or is it likely that the Epicureans reasoned this way in regard to souls as well as gods?

I'm not convinced that the prolepsis of the gods includes their blessedness and incorruptibility. The prolepsis has to do with their existence. The blessedness and incorruptibility are the proper "beliefs" that we should assign to them. When Epicurus says (in the letter to Menoikeus):

believe that the god is a blessed and imperishable thing as is the common, general understanding of the god. You, [Menoikeus], believe everything about which a god is able to preserve its own imperishability and blessedness for itself. Do not attribute anything foreign to its incorruptibility or incongruous with the blessedness of the god!

He's using the word "believe" and "general understanding" and "attribute" not prolepsis. Then later:

Gods exist (θεοὶ εἶσι), and the knowledge of them is manifest to the mind's eye.

That "enarges ἐναργῆς" or "manifest to the mind's eye" to me says that the existence of the gods is the readily discernible "knowledge" and nothing more. Then, by reason, we assign the proper common, general understanding of the god as incorruptible and blessed.

On the other hand, the "soul" (shudder... I *really* dislike using that loaded term) is apparent because we're alive. BUT *remember* neither Epicurus nor Cicero uses our Christian-laden term "soul."

Epicurus consistently talks about the ψυχή (psykhe - psyche) which is akin to the Latin anima. Both can refer to "the animating principle of a human or animal body, vital spirit, soul, life." The ψυχή can also be thought as the "mind" or where reason happens. It seems the big argument - then and now - was whether this seat of reason or the principle that gave animation and life to a body, human or animal, existed separately from the body or whether it came into existence with the physical body. Did it exist prior to the body or can it exist after the body decays? Or is it inextricably interwoven WITH the body, arising together and decaying together at death?

The difference between gods and the soul/ψυχή/anima is that we can see the latter at work every time we look at a living body... or sense our own existence for that matter! No prolepsis is needed. A body is animate, it has an anima/ψυχή. A body is dead, something happened to the anima/ψυχή.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Key to this analysis is that I think most of us agree that the faculty of prolepses leads toward formation of opinions, but that a prolepsis is not itself an opinion. Cicero doesn't seem to accept this, and he seems to think that an Epicurean prolepsis is a fully formed opinion, and since all men have the opinion that gods exist and that souls survive death, that makes it true. I also think most of us agree that Epicurus would say that it doesn't matter how many people think a thing to be so, that's not sufficient evidence of its truth - we should require sound reasoning based on observations from the senses, prolepsis, and feelings, and these are not subject to majority vote.

Agreed. That's why I content that the prolepsis of the gods does not cover their blessed and incorruptibility.