Epicurus, gods and God

Post by “Cassius” of October 14, 2019 at 7:19 PM

> Quote from Godfrey
>
> then the probability of any given thing existing in the universe would be 100% and if I'm not mistaken this doesn't seem to be the case in EP.

Yes Godfrey you are right in seeing an issue here. As I read Lucretius, he is very firm that although there may be a numberless but not infinite number of shapes, and an infinite number of atoms of those different shapes, the possible combinations are NOT unlimited, as you will recall that Lucretius points out that certain things like Centaurs cannot exist. Also even at the very beginning of Lucretius, Epicurus is pointing out "whence he returns a conqueror **to tell us what can, what cannot come into being.**

So I don't think the Epicureans thought that the probability of any given thing existing in the universe would be 100%_ **We** probably need to be very careful with this wording though - i guess the point would be that it is possible for us to "imagine" things that are physically impossible.

> Quote from Godfrey
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> chance is involved in the combinations of atoms.

I consider this to be a very difficult subject too, and not really possible to grapple with without getting to a definition of what "chance" really means. My go-to academic piece on this is the AA Long "Chance and Natural Law in Epicureanism" and I super-highly recommend that on this point. With the basic point being that "the swerve" is not as sweeping a force as it may seem. Certainly in some areas it is of supreme importance, but it does not seem to carry through everywhere or even in "most" day to day situations not involving higher animals -- but I need to let long explain his argument.... A short summary is "Why would ANYTHING be predictable if atoms were constantly swerving in an uncontrolled way? But we see that most things ARE predictable, so there has to be an explanation for when the swerve is controlling and when it is not. Long, I think, puts his finger on the answer very well.

> Quote from Godfrey
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> And how can "equitable apportionment" occur in a chance system?

Ah, THERE it is! Good question, and I think Long's essay answers it. The key is in the definition of "chance." The system is not at all "chance" in the sense of chaotic, but is governed by what amounts to "natural law" that arises from the properties of the atoms and the qualities of the bodies that they form. While we talk about the importance of the swerve in "free will" and in the original formation of the universe, it appears that Epicurus contemplated that the swerve really has very little day-to-day impact on the mechanisms of non-animate life. But again, Long has this much better than I do.

But Long's killer argument (for me) is this: If the swerve were such an important part of Epicurus' system that, in the end, nothing is really predictable, then Cicero (and others) would have MERCILESSLY attacked the inconsistency of such a system. How could Epicurus have thought that atomism explained ANYTHING if in fact the atoms were so haphazard? Answer: he didn't think they were haphazard. He doesn't even mention the swerve in his own summary letters. The swerve is important, but not like we (who drink of the Heisenberg theory) seem to think it is.

> Quote from Godfrey
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> Is the reason for more gods than mortals because the forces of preservation must exceed the forces of destruction in an everlasting universe?

1 - I would say that that is definitely NOT the reason for that - gods have nothing to do with controlling forces of preservation . But 2 Did Dewitt say that there are MORE immortals than mortals?\

> Quote from Godfrey
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> I'm completely on board with his third premise of preservation exceeding destruction. My understanding, however, is that that would apply only to the atoms. All else is compounds and is subject to dissolution.

Well, isn't dewitt saying that the forces of preservation exceed the forces of destruction only on a "universe-wide" scale? Such that as you say all things that come together eventually come apart, but at the same time, elsewhere, new things are coming together? I gather that what he is really saying is that despite the constant change, the "forces of preservation" are sufficient to keep at least SOME things together all the time, so that the universe is not just a field of floating atoms that have no contact with each other. No doubt my wording there could be improved, because you are right in my view to observe that regardless of anything else, everything that comes together is thought to eventually come apart, with the exception of the bodies of the gods themselves, but in their case, only because they have perfected the science of somehow keeping their atoms together indefinitely.