

Reverence and Awe In Epicurean Philosophy

Post by "Cassius" of October 23, 2020 at 9:45 AM

[Quote from Susan Hill](#)

for learning and for feeling affiliated with a group

Yes I have always thought that "feeling affiliated with a group" is an important enjoyable experience that we're lacking in, and need to work to cultivate.

[Quote from Susan Hill](#)

because they can't shake the feeling that there must be something bigger or more profound than the human mind in the universe.

Ok that's the profound issue with lots of ramifications. It can easily lead to a "supernatural creator" argument that would be irreconcilable with Epicurean physics on the nature of the universe, and yet it is clear the Epicureans saw a feeling of "reverence" to be a very legitimate part of their philosophy. There's of course all the discussion in Lucretius about the gods, in the opening of Book 1 and in the rest of the book two, and there's that saying to the effect of "Thanks be to blessed Nature that she has made what is necessary easy to obtain, and ... what is necessary easy to obtain, and what is not easy unnecessary."

Combined in that last saying you've got an attitude that is either reverence or close to reverence, combined with a word "blessed" that describes something similar, even if all of it is completely natural and absolutely not part of a divine creator of the universe.

We have not tended to talk about this much - I kind of associate it in my mind with the category of "images," which we also don't talk about much but which I think has great potential for being explored. With images, however, the issue is more plainly non-supernatural, in that everyone understands implicitly that the senses of sight and hearing and other things imply a movement of "atoms" across space (presumably from object to our eyes) that supernatural gods aren't necessarily involved in.

With the topic of divinity though (and eternity and infinity, which have some of the same issues) it's more important to keep the lines of distinction clear. I know not everyone thinks the same way about these issues or considers them to be important, but I personally consider the category something that I hope anyone interested in it will explore and post about. I think it's related to the "sense of being affiliated" feeling that is important to a lot of people to have, and important to cultivate if we expect to develop anything more than just a small group of isolated period in a small corner of the internet.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1733-reverence-and-awe-in-epicurean-philosophy/?postID=9462#post9462>

And all this is also related to the creationism arguments about "design" and how those should be evaluated logically. The issue of how organization can arise from non-organization is closely related to whether life can emerge from non-life. Even as I type this I have several tracks of mind about it. Living beings are surely made from non-living components. But that not the same issue as whether that process of life from non-life is ongoing and continuous (I think it probably is, but I'm not 100% sure how to express that). There's also the "infinity / eternity" issue, which presumably means that there's no way to go behind the issue that the universe (as a whole) is eternal and so living things have always existed somewhere just as has the non-living. Similarly, under Epicurean theory, were the individual gods at one point "born," or has there eternally been a "race of gods" that has always existed somewhere, just like there has been a spectrum of living beings existing somewhere eternally?

I personally don't think these issues are answered or made irrelevant by "big bang" or other physics theories indicating that "the universe" had a beginning point in time. That's because personally I think Epicurus took the "logical position" that the universe cannot possibly have an end point, so whatever "big bang" we are observing is "local" rather than "universal." The interplay between "logical position" and "local experiments and their interpretations" is very hard to sort out.

Going back to the recently quoted excerpt from the letter to Velleius, it seems clear that Epicurus did in fact seem more willing to accept a logical position in an area we today *might* find to be overreaching:

"Moreover there is the supremely potent principle of infinity, which claims the closest and most careful study; we must understand that it has in the sum of things everything has its exact match and counterpart. This property is termed by Epicurus *isonomia*, or the principle of uniform distribution. From this principle it follows that if the whole number of mortals be so many, there must exist no less a number of immortals, and if the causes of destruction are beyond count, the causes of conservation also are bound to be infinite.

All these are issues that i do not know the answer to, but I think that those who are interested in should pursue, and I would tell anyone interested in them to let's set up a subforum to post our thoughts and explorations over time.