

Reverence and Awe In Epicurean Philosophy

Post by "Cassius" of October 25, 2020 at 6:52 PM

Everybody knows that we have a copy of the Velleius section here, right? <https://www.epicureanfriends.com/wcf/index.php?...re-of-the-gods/>

We might almost want to number each of these lines and talk about them individually. The section I referred to earlier as fascinating to me is this paragraph below, which has been extensively commented on with the conclusion that it really does say that the endless train of images does stream TOWARD the gods, which would appear to us to make no sense, but which must have an explanation. Either the writer or transmitters are wrong about the direction of the stream, or there is something we are missing about which this might give us a clue:

Quote

Epicurus then, as he not merely discerns abstruse and recondite things with his mind's eye, but handles them as tangible realities, teaches that the substance and nature of the gods is such that, in the first place, it is perceived not by the senses but by the mind, and not materially or individually, like the solid objects which Epicurus in virtue of their substantiality entitles *steremnia*; but by our perceiving images owing to their similarity and succession, ***because an endless train of precisely similar images arises from the innumerable atoms and streams towards the gods***, our mind with the keenest feelings of pleasure fixes its gaze on these images, and so attains an understanding of the nature of a being both blessed and eternal.

I don't want to commit that I think the text is correct and the stream does go TOWARD them. I just think this is an example of how we need to try to start at the very foundation of what "images" are all about so we can try to reconstruct what they most probably have thought. I always think that trying to reconstruct what they were saying is the essential first step in understanding them, even if we end up disagreeing with the final result.

In this case, it seems the theory entailed that images are always streaming constantly off everything, and that would include both the gods and us and everything in between. So it is certainly possible that the Epicureans were considering the atoms streaming away from us in the big picture, however it seems more likely and more consistent with the other references that the images (atoms) we're talking about were originating with the gods.

And I'll say as I think I said in the podcast we recorded today, that I don't think that our modern understanding of light waves and sound waves really by necessity invalidates their general conclusions. There's a lot of complexity to consider before reaching that conclusion. It's easy for me to imagine as I spin my head around that indeed "something" is headed my direction from all directions all the time, and thus presumably headed outward from me as well.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1733-reverence-and-awe-in-epicurean-philosophy/?postID=9533#post9533>