

Satisfying the Conditions of an Epicurean "god"

Post by "Joshua" of August 15, 2019 at 8:21 PM

An interesting thought experiment;

The gods

- 1.) Arose out of eternal Nature. They did not give rise to the natural order; if they exist, the natural order gave rise to them.
- 2.) Are not immortal. They are supposed to survive for aeons because they *preserve themselves incorruptibly*.
- 3.) Are corporeal. They are or have physical bodies.
- 4.) Don't intervene in human affairs.
- 5.) Live in blessedness.

I've been amusing myself by imagining a being that actually satisfies these conditions, and has a chance of actually existing (past, present, or future). A supremely intelligent artificial consciousness would not be immortal, but could sustain itself incorruptibly and indefinitely by replacing and updating it's hardware. Such a being might exist even now, somewhere in the infinite and eternal void. Such a being would be best equipped to outlive it's creators, and would conceivably not trouble itself at all about organic life, any more than we trouble ourselves about dust mites. It would just live on and on through time out of mind, awash in its own pleasures, and utterly unafraid of death.

Well, enough of that. Let us cease worrying about such things, and strive onward in the direction of our own happiness!

Post by "Cassius" of August 15, 2019 at 8:52 PM

I agree with all but the last sentence. I think it DOES help us strive for our own happiness to think about our place in the universe, and that we are neither the only place life exists, nor the highest. That's a severe problem largely cultivated by Abrahamic monotheism.

We are neither "worms" nor are we the "highest" and it helps I think reconcile us to the nature of living and dying to keep things in proper perspective. And I think that is exactly why the

Epicureans devoted so much time to discussing it,

Some of us today seem to think that science has educated us to the point where these issues are no longer troublesome, but I think these are natural issues that will always concern the far greater part of humanity.

Post by “Cassius” of August 15, 2019 at 8:56 PM

Also as to this I think we may have a residual wording issue:

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

The gods

1.) Arose out of eternal Nature. They did not give rise to the natural order; if they exist, the natural order gave rise to them.

I am thinking that our Darwinian evolutionary perspective probably applies only **LOCALLY**, and not universally.

In the universe as a whole I presume that the Epicurean physics means that there has **NEVER BEEN A TIME** when planets with life of all kinds and levels existed. In other words, as a class (and not as individuals), a succession of [Epicurean gods](#) and other life forms would **ALWAYS** have existed into the boundless past, for the same reasons that the atoms have combined into boundless combinations now, and always will.

Locally all things have a birth and death, but births and deaths have been going on infinitely into the infinite past, so I think Epicurean terminology needs to reflect that to be consistent.

Post by “Joshua” of August 15, 2019 at 8:57 PM

To think about our place, yes; but not to *worry* overmuch about it!

Quote

With thinking we may be beside ourselves in a sane sense. By a conscious effort of the mind we can stand aloof from actions and their consequences; and all things, good and bad, go by us like a torrent. We are not wholly involved in Nature. I may be either the drift-wood in the stream, or Indra in the sky looking down on it.

-Thoreau, *Walden*

Post by “Joshua” of August 15, 2019 at 9:02 PM

And you are right, of course, about life existing backwards into the past without bounds. It remains difficult to imagine the seminal nature of atoms and void over eternity. For that matter, it is difficult to imagine eternity!

Post by “Cassius” of August 15, 2019 at 9:07 PM

I think we could almost say with confidence that people who are into Thoreau are not going to be the type who need to worry about this issue very much! 😊

The main reason for my qualification is that I want to be sure that we don't find ourselves ONLY talking to the type of person who likes Thoreau. I think Epicurean philosophy has a truly correct perspective on the universe that can appeal to almost everyone of any mental acuity at all, and we shouldn't limit ourselves to the highly educated. I gather that Cicero indicates that it was the "middle classes" in which Epicurean philosophy was most successful in the ancient world, and I think we could make major inroads into the same classes today.

And those ordinary people are the ones who are most concerned, and will need the most deprogramming, in order to understand how far their ideas of divinity have gone astray.

But we all have our own individual circles in which we move and it's natural that we'll want and need a division of labor and coordination of strengths, rather than a single approach.

Post by “Cassius” of August 16, 2019 at 1:15 PM

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

It remains difficult to imagine the seminal nature of atoms and void over eternity. For that matter, it is difficult to imagine eternity!

I think that difficulty to which you refer has got to be part of the reason that Epicurus ended the letter to Pythocles with this:

*All these things, Pythocles, you must bear in mind; for thus you will escape in most things from superstition and will be enabled to understand what is akin to them. And most of all **give yourself up to the study of the beginnings and of infinity and of the things akin to them**, and also of the criteria of truth and of the feelings, and of the purpose for which we reason out these things. For these points when they are thoroughly studied will most easily enable you to understand the causes of the details. But those who have not thoroughly taken these things to heart could not rightly study them in themselves, nor have they made their own the reason for observing them.*

And I presume part of the thought process there is that the only way to get comfortable with thinking about the issues involved with infinity is to think about them on a regular basis, and so by doing acclimate ourselves to the issues, just like with mortality / death.

If we wait til we approach death to think about death, or if we wait til some priest or academic philosopher hits us with some tricky question about infinity, then we're much less able to deal with those problems than we would be if we had engaged in regular practice.