

Episode One Hundred Forty-Three - Diogenes of Oinoanda (Part 3) The Superiority of The Epicurean Viewpoint on "Gods"

Post by "Cassius" of October 5, 2022 at 10:51 AM

Welcome to Episode One Hundred Forty-Three of Lucretius Today.

This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

I am your host Cassius, and together with our panelists from the EpicureanFriends.com forum, we'll walk you through the ancient Epicurean texts, and we'll discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. We encourage you to study Epicurus for yourself, and we suggest the best place to start is the book "Epicurus and His Philosophy" by Canadian professor Norman DeWitt.

If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

This week we will continue with the Inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda, and discuss Epicurean view of the superiority of their point of view about divinity over the supernatural religious views of much of the rest of the world.

Now let's join Joshua reading today's text, starting with Fragment 16:

Fr. 16 and [they vehemently] denounce the [most pious people] as [atheistic]. And in fact it will become evident that it is not we [who deny] the [gods, but others.] Thus [Diagoras of Melos, with certain others who closely followed his] theory, categorically asserted that gods do not exist and [vigorously] attacked [all those who thought otherwise.] Protagoras of Abdera in effect put forward the same view as Diagoras, but expressed it differently to avoid its excessive audacity. For he said that he did not know whether gods exist, which is the same as saying that he knew that they do not exist. If indeed he had balanced the first statement with «However, I do not know that they do not exist,» [perhaps] he [would] almost have a [circumlocution] to [avoid the appearance of denying] the gods completely. [But he said] «I do not know that they exist,» [and not] «I do not know that they do not exist,» doing [exactly] the same [as Diagoras, who indefatigably did not stop] saying that [he did] not [know] that they exist.

Fr. 19 [Let us then contradict Homer, who] talks [all sorts of nonsense] about them, [representing them sometimes as adulterers, sometimes as] lame, [sometimes as thievish, or even as being struck by mortals with a spear,] as well as inducing the craftsmen to produce inappropriate portrayals. Some statues of gods shoot arrows and are produced holding] a bow, [represented] like Heracles in Homer; others are attended by a body-guard of wild beasts; others are angry with the prosperous, like Nemesis according to popular opinion; whereas we ought to make statues of the gods genial and smiling, so that we may smile back at them rather than be afraid of them. Well, then, you people, let us reverence the gods [rightly] both at festivals and on [unhallowed occasions, both] publicly [and privately], and let us observe the customs [of our fathers in relation to them and let not the imperishable beings be falsely accused at all] by us [in our vain fear that they are responsible for all misfortunes], bringing [sufferings to us] and [contriving burdensome obligations] for themselves. ,,,,

Fr. 20 [So it is obvious that wrong-doers, given that they do not fear the penalties imposed by the laws, are not] afraid of [the gods.] This [has to be] conceded. For if they were [afraid, they] would not [do wrong]. As for [all] the others, [it is my opinion] that the [wise] are not [(reasoning indicates) righteous] on account of the gods, but on account of [thinking] correctly and the [opinions] they hold [regarding] certain things [and especially] pains and death (for indeed invariably and without exception human beings do wrong either on account of fear or on account of pleasures), and that ordinary people on the other hand are righteous, in so far as they are righteous, on account of the laws and the penalties, imposed by the laws, hanging over them. But even if some of their number are conscientious on account of the laws, they are few: only just two or three individuals are to be found among great segments of multitudes, and not even these are steadfast in acting righteously; for they are not soundly persuaded about providence. A clear indication of the complete inability of the gods to prevent wrong-doings is provided by the nations of the Jews and Egyptians, who, as well as being the most superstitious of all peoples, are the vilest of all peoples. On account of what kind of gods, then, will human beings be righteous? For they are not righteous on account of the real ones or on account of Plato's and Socrates' Judges in Hades. We are left with this conclusion; otherwise, why should not those who disregard the laws scorn fables much more? So, with regard to righteousness, neither does our doctrine do harm [nor does] the opposite [doctrine help], while, with regard to the other condition, the opposite doctrine not only does not help, but on the contrary also does harm, whereas our doctrine not only does not harm, but also helps. For the one removes disturbances, while the other adds them, as has already been made clear to you before.

That not only [is our doctrine] helpful, [but also the opposite doctrine harmful, is clearly shown by] the [Stoics as they go astray. For they say in opposition to us] that the god both is maker of [the] world and takes providential care of it, providing for all things, including human beings. Well, in the first place, we come to this question: was it, may I ask, for his own sake that the god created the world [or for the sake of human beings? For it is obvious that it was from a wish to benefit either himself or human beings that he embarked on this] undertaking. For how could it have been otherwise, if nothing is produced without a cause and these things are produced

by a god? Let us then examine this view and what Stoics mean. It was, they say, from a wish to have a city and fellow-citizens, just as if [he were an exile from a city, that] the god [created the world and human beings. However, this supposition, a concoction of empty talking, is] self-evidently a fable, composed to gain the attention of an audience, not a natural philosopher's argument searching for the truth and inferring from probabilities things not palpable to sense. Yet even if, in the belief that he was doing some good [to himself, the god] really [made the world and human beings], For god [is, I say], a living being, indestructible [and] blessed from [age to] age, having complete [self-sufficiency]. Moreover, what [god, if] he had existed for infinite [time] and enjoyed tranquillity [for thousands of years, would have got] this idea that he needed a city and fellow-citizens? Add to this absurdity that he, being a god, should seek to have beings as fellow-citizens. And there is this further point too: if he had created the world as a habitation and city for himself, I seek to know where he was living before the world was created; I do not find an answer, at any rate not one consistent with the doctrine of these people when they declare that this world is unique. So for that infinite time, apparently, the god of these people was cityless and homeless and, like an unfortunate man — I do not say «god» —, having neither city nor fellow-citizens, he was destitute and roaming about at random. If therefore the divine nature shall be deemed to have created things for its own sake, all this is absurd; and if for the sake of men, there are yet other more absurd consequences.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/51537852>

Post by “Cassius” of October 11, 2022 at 6:05 AM

Several references we either mentioned in this episode or which are relevant:

1 - The Epicurus.net page on the history of the Epicurean school and its interactions with others: <https://epicurus.net/en/history.html>

2 - An article by Krystyna Stebnicka- "[Superstitious and Abominable....](#)" [Abstract: "A fragment of the Epicurean account of Diogenes of Oinoanda (2nd century AD), which was found in 1997, revealed a mention of the most superstitious and abominable Jews and Egyptians. The fragment is part of A Treatise on Physics and repeats the Epicurean view that gods do not interfere in people's lives. The aforementioned peoples serve the exemplification that the world of humans is separated from the world of the gods. Both expressions refer to the stereotypical perception of the Jews and Egyptians that is well-known from Greek-Roman literature. However, it seems that the way both ethne imagined their gods - in the form of animals (the Egyptians' view) and without any cultic statues (the Jews' view) - was meaningful for Diogenes, who like

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other Epicureans attached great importance to the worship of images of gods."]

3 -An article "[Ancient Greek and Egyptian Interactions](#)"

4 - Comment by Herodotus about the Egyptians ([Histories, 2:37](#)) "They are religious excessively beyond all other men, and with regard to this they have customs as follows:—they drink from cups of bronze and rinse them out every day, and not some only do this but all: they wear garments of linen always newly washed, and this they make a special point of practice: they circumcise themselves for the sake of cleanliness, preferring to be clean rather than comely. The priests shave themselves all over their body every other day, so that no lice or any other foul thing may come to be upon them when they minister to the gods; and the priests wear garments of linen only and sandals of papyrus, and any other garment they may not take nor other sandals; these wash themselves in cold water twice in a day and twice again in the night; and other religious services they perform (one may almost say) of infinite number. They enjoy also good things not a few, for they do not consume or spend anything of their own substance, but there is sacred bread baked for them and they have each great quantity of flesh of oxen and geese coming in to them each day, and also wine of grapes is given to them; but it is not permitted to them to taste of fish: beans moreover the Egyptians do not at all sow in their land, and those which they grow they neither eat raw nor boil for food; nay the priests do not endure even to look upon them, thinking this to be an unclean kind of pulse: and there is not one priest only for each of the gods but many, and of them one is chief-priest, and whenever a priest dies his son is appointed to his place."

Post by “Cassius” of October 11, 2022 at 10:43 AM

Episode 143 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. Our topic is Diogenes of Oinoanda on the Superiority of The Epicurean Viewpoint on "Gods." This episode is one of our most direct discussions on how the Epicureans did not consider themselves to be atheists, but at the same time denounced supernatural viewpoints about the nature of "gods."

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Post by “Julia” of October 27, 2024 at 1:20 AM

In this episode, it was briefly mentioned how there is reason to believe Lucretius had died before finishing his poem, which would otherwise have included another book discussing the nature of the gods. To everyone who — like me — is a bit bummed out by this, it might offer some cold

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comfort to keep in mind De Rerum Natura was rediscovered in the library of a Christianist monastery, and chances are, had Lucretius finished it, had it included a book discussing the gods, the entire poem might not have survived — or, in any case, the very section of the poem which we're now missing might have been thrown out the library, such that we'd now be missing it all the same.