

Isonomy

Post by "Cassius" of January 22, 2018 at 1:53 PM

This is a thread for discussion the details of Isonomy, as found in Cicero's "On The Nature of the Gods" and discussed by Dewitt in his chapter On Piety

File

[DeWitt on Isonomy](#)



DeWitt on Isonomy, one of the Epicurean arguments for divinity



Cassius

January 22, 2018 at 1:51 PM

Post by "Hiram" of January 22, 2018 at 3:18 PM

Okay, I remember the problem.

"He so interpreted the significance of infinity as to extend it from matter and space to the sphere of VALUES - perfection and imperfection..."

This is what in my view DOES NOT follow from infinity. Why would infinity of space and atoms imply infinity of values, or of "imperfection", etc.

What IS perfection anyway? Where in nature is it observable? And why do we need to imagine that it exists somewhere?

And that this theory was posited in service of a theology also raises questions, not about sincerity, but about the need. Because if what it was seeking to explain was entirely non-observable, then it may be that it starts from a faulty premise.

Post by "Cassius" of January 22, 2018 at 3:36 PM

That first quote from DeWitt ("He so interpreted the significance of infinity as to extend it from matter and space to the sphere of VALUES - perfection and imperfection...") I think is purely DeWitt's suggestion, if the text is only this:

"Surely the mighty power of the Infinite Being is most worthy our great and earnest contemplation; the Nature of which we must necessarily understand to be such that everything in it is made to correspond completely to some other answering part. This is called by Epicurus ἰσονομία (isonomia); that is to say, an equal distribution or even disposition of things. From hence he draws this inference, that, as there is such a vast multitude of mortals, there cannot be a less number of immortals. Further, if those which perish are innumerable, those which are preserved ought also to be countless.

In talking about "values" I think DeWitt is making a reasonable guess, but as I see it the paragraph breaks down into four observations:

1 - the Nature of which we must necessarily understand to be such that everything in it is made to correspond completely to some other answering part. - everything has a corresponding answering part (?)

2 - "This is called by Epicurus ἰσονομία (isonomia); that is to say, an equal distribution or even disposition of things." - equal distribution

3 - From hence he draws this inference, that, as there is such a vast multitude of mortals, there cannot be a less number of immortals.

4 - Further, if those which perish are innumerable, those which are preserved ought also to be countless.

My reading of these points is that we see things here on earth exist on a scale of COMPLEXITY and/or "SUCCESS" in their achievements. For examples worms on one end and men on the other, on the scale of living beings, minnows vs dolphins, etc. This is hard evidence of a scale of progression in things like acuity of sight, acuity of hearing, physical abilities, and mental abilities.

I gather that Epicurus argued that from this scale of progression here on other it is proper to infer that that scale extends higher in other parts of the universe where life exists. Given that the universe is eternal in time and infinite in space, we should expect the scale of progression to extend these complexities and accomplishments to what we would consider an extreme degree. At the higher end of the scale of progression we should expect to find beings that are far higher in complexity and mental and physical success in humans. And as our human goal is to

live as long as possible, and to live in as much pleasure/little pain as possible, it is to be expected that somewhere there are beings which have succeeded in those fields to the point where they are both deathless and painless. And that even though we might not be able to see these beings with our own eyes in the light of day, we should deduce that they exist from the things that we do see in the universe, just as we deduce (on the simple/primitive end of the scale) that atoms exist without seeing them. So in that way inferring the existence of deathless and painless beings is just the flip side of the process of inferring the existence of atoms.

Post by “Maciej” of January 23, 2018 at 8:37 AM

And dreams of pious people which are perceptions of mind are attesting for/confirming truth of this inference.

This is what in my opinion is the problem with so called third interpretation. Their proponents do not appreciate how canonically sound epicurus theology is. 1. Blissful and imperishable being is possible. 2. What is conceivably possible to exist in infinite universe necessarily somewhere exist. C: Blissfull and imperishable being necessarily somewhere exist.

I would love to hear real arguement for 3rd interpretation. What was said to this day is insufficient in my opinion.

Cassius. Your idea of epicurean theology is the same as mine exopt I think that [epicurean gods](#) are deathless and painless by nature and not by succes "in those fields" through progress or evolution as you seems to imply.

Post by “Cassius” of January 23, 2018 at 9:17 AM

Maciej -- By this:

"except I think that [epicurean gods](#) are deathless and painless by nature and not by success "in those fields" through progress or evolution as you seems to imply"

I presume you mean that you think gods did not have a beginning point? In other words, you think because they are deathless they have no end point, but because you think that they are that way "by nature" that the gods have always existed and did not have a beginning point. If that is your view, do you mean "all gods" or "particular gods" never had a beginning point?

I think I may agree with you, especially on the implication that one or more of these gods (maybe not all) have always existed. Deathless may be an attribute that might be evolvable over time, but one of the considerations of infinity is "no beginning point" so you are probably right to emphasize that there was no point in the past when there were no "gods"

Post by "Cassius" of January 23, 2018 at 9:18 AM

When one of us has time we ought to include in this thread what are the three interpretations you refer to here "This is what in my opinion is the problem with so called third interpretation." I presume you're probably referring to Hiram's article(s) - I will have to check.

Post by "Cassius" of January 23, 2018 at 9:20 AM

Also Maciej: When you say: "2. What is conceivably possible to exist in infinite universe necessarily somewhere exist."

I gather this is the step to which Hiram objects, and I am not confident of it either. Can you state the basis for your confidence in it?

Post by "Hiram" of January 23, 2018 at 9:58 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Also Maciej: When you say: "2. What is conceivably possible to exist in infinite universe necessarily somewhere exist."

I gather this is the step to which Hiram objects, and I am not confident of it either. Can you state the basis for your confidence in it?

I agree but only up to the point that it obeys laws of nature.

When we study nature, we see that there may be infinite number of atoms, but LIMITED number of combinations of atoms according to the properties of the various elements and laws

of nature. Ergo, there is a limit to the possibilities of life and manifestations of natural phenomena. This is explained (I think) in the Letter to Herodotus.

Post by “Maciej” of January 23, 2018 at 10:01 AM

Necessity of existence of all possibilities is consequence of infinity of universe. What forbids those possibilities to realize when appropriate bodies meet each other at some place. Appropriate bodies cannot be exhausted because there are infinite. There is sufficient amount for space and time for them to make such and such combinations.

Hiram: exactly. And according to Epicurus gods are in the range of limited number of combinations. Nothing in our experience forbids them to exist and physics shows us that they can exist. This is how in general terms Epicurus thought about gods.

Post by “Hiram” of January 23, 2018 at 10:06 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

1 - the Nature of which we must necessarily understand to be such that everything in it is made to correspond completely to some other answering part. - everything has a corresponding answering part (?)

2 - "This is called by Epicurus *ισονμία* (isonomia); that is to say, an equal distribution or even disposition of things." - equal distribution

3 - From hence he draws this inference, that, as there is such a vast multitude of mortals, there cannot be a less number of immortals.

4 - Further, if those which perish are innumerable, those which are preserved ought also to be countless.

I don't see it. So we see a progression (in Darwinian terms, the proper understanding is "adaptation to circumstances according to natural selection", so that you can have a blind mole rat, for instance, perfectly adapted to its environment, yet it's blind--progression does not imply superiority, just adaptation in Darwinian understanding). I can agree that we are likely not the

apex of living beings and that there may be superior beings somewhere. But from there where does it lead to infer that there must be an innumerable number of perfected beings? Or that some kinds of beings correspond to others by need or in number?

When the dinosaurs were extinct, for instance, their atoms did not turn into other beings, they returned to the elements. We have no reason to infer that in the intermundia there was a reduction in amount of beings, etc. I just don't see how one thing follows from another, how the amount of perfected beings must correspond to not perfect ones.

Post by "Hiram" of January 23, 2018 at 10:16 AM

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...D2%3Acard%3D522>

those primal germs

Which have been fashioned all of one like shape

*Are infinite in tale; for, since **the forms***

Themselves are finite in divergences,

Then those which are alike will have to be

Infinite, else the sum of stuff remains

A finite

Lucretius, DRN II-525

It says here that "the forms themselves are finite in divergences", referring to the primal germs (particles).

Post by "Cassius" of January 23, 2018 at 11:34 AM

Referring to this, which is where I think the issues are:

"Necessity of existence of all possibilities is consequence of infinity of universe. What forbids those possibilities to realize when appropriate bodies meet each other at some place.

Appropriate bodies cannot be exhausted because there are infinite. There is sufficient amount for space and time for them to make such and such combinations."

I guess the key word here is "possibilities." You aren't saying that everything IMAGINABLE is possible, only that if it is possible, then it has occurred in an infinite and eternal universe. Of course it is core doctrine, as Lucretius said when he listed things (Centaur?) that not everything we can imagine is possible - the possibilities are limited by combinations of the atoms. Certainly there are many more possible combinations than we have observed here on earth, but that doesn't mean ALL combinations we can imagine are possible.

So when you say "existence of all possibilities" you are excluding imaginary things that aren't possible. And we have to have an argument that deathlessness and perfect happiness is possible and not imaginary. And I presume you're saying that the proof that deathless divinity is possible is that it's just a perfection of a progression that we see already in place here on earth toward longer lifespans and greater variety of pleasures in some living things.

Is that the direction you are going Maciej?

Post by "Maciej" of January 23, 2018 at 12:23 PM

Thank you cassius. More than less, this is my point.

However not progression (which seems to be your idea) but Isonomy generally speaking.

Post by "Cassius" of January 23, 2018 at 12:54 PM

When I use progression I did not mean to imply evolution in particular, which is probably your concern there(?) just that we can observe variations in degree, regardless of what caused them.