

Episode 229 - Cicero's OTNOTG - 04 - Velleius Continues His Attack On Intelligent Design

Post by "Cassius" of May 13, 2024 at 2:46 PM

Welcome to Episode 229 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the most complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com. Be aware that none of us are professional philosophers, and everyone here is a self-taught Epicurean.

For our new listeners, let me remind you of several ground rules for both our podcast and our forum.

First: Our aim is to bring you an accurate presentation of [classical Epicurean philosophy](#) as the ancient Epicureans understood it, which is often not the same as presented by many modern commentators. We encourage you to study Epicurus for yourself, and one of the best places to start is the book, "Epicurus and His Philosophy" by Canadian professor Norman DeWitt.

Second: We won't be talking about modern political issues in this podcast. How you apply Epicurus in your own life is of course entirely up to you. We call this approach "Not Neo-Epicurean, But Epicurean." Epicurean philosophy is a philosophy of its own, it's not Stoicism, Humanism, Buddhism, Taoism, Atheism, Libertarianism or Marxism - it is unique and must be understood on its own, not in terms of any conventional modern morality.

Third: One of the most important things to keep in mind is that the Epicureans often used words very differently than we do today. To the Epicureans, Gods were not omnipotent or omniscient, so Epicurean references to "Gods" do not mean at all the same thing as in major religions today. In Epicurean ethics, "Pleasure" refers not ONLY to sensory stimulation, but also to every experience of life which is not felt to be painful. The classical texts show that Epicurus was not focused on luxury, like some people say, but neither did he teach minimalism, as other people say. Epicurus taught that all experiences of life fall under one of two feelings - pleasure and pain - and those feelings -- and not gods, idealism, or virtue - are the guides that Nature gave us by which to live. More than anything else, Epicurus taught that the universe is not supernatural in any way, and that means there's no life after death, and any happiness we'll ever have comes in THIS life, which is why it is so important not to waste time in confusion.

Today we are continuing to review the Epicurean sections of Cicero's "On the Nature of The Gods," as presented by the Epicurean spokesman Velleius, beginning at the end of Section 10.

For the main text we are using primarily the [Yonge translation, available here](#). The text which we include in these posts is the Yonge version, the full version of which is here at Epicureanfriends. We will also refer to the public domain version of the Loeb series, which contains both Latin and English, [as translated by H. Rackham](#).

Additional versions can be found here:

- [Frances Brooks 1896 translation at Online Library of Liberty](#)
- [Lacus Curtius Edition \(Rackham\)](#)
- [PDF Of Loeb Edition at Archive.org by Rackham](#)
- [Gutenberg.org version by CD Yonge](#)

A list of Velleius' arguments against the existence of supernatural gods will be [here](#).

Today's Text

These are your doctrines, Lucilius; but what those of others are I will endeavor to ascertain by tracing them back from the earliest of ancient philosophers. Thales the Milesian, who first inquired after such subjects, asserted water to be the origin of things, and that God was that mind which formed all things from water. If the Gods can exist without corporeal sense, and if there can be a mind without a body, why did he annex a mind to water?

It was Anaximander's opinion that the Gods were born; that after a great length of time they died; and that they are innumerable worlds. But what conception can we possibly have of a Deity who is not eternal?

Anaximenes, after him, taught that the air is God, and that he was generated, and that he is immense, infinite, and always in motion; as if air, which has no form, could possibly be God; for the Deity must necessarily be not only of some form or other, but of the most beautiful form. Besides, is not everything that had a beginning subject to mortality?

XI. Anaxagoras, who received his learning from Anaximenes, was the first who affirmed the system and disposition of all things to be contrived and perfected by the power and reason of an infinite mind; in which infinity he did not perceive that there could be no conjunction of sense and motion, nor any sense in the least degree, where nature herself could feel no impulse. If he would have this mind to be a sort of animal, then there must be some more internal principle from whence that animal should receive its appellation. But what can be more internal than the mind? Let it, therefore, be clothed with an external body. But this is not agreeable to his doctrine; but we are utterly unable to conceive how a pure simple mind can

exist without any substance annexed to it.

Alcmæon of Crotona, in attributing a divinity to the sun, the moon, and the rest of the stars, and also to the mind, did not perceive that he was ascribing immortality to mortal beings.

Pythagoras, who supposed the Deity to be one soul, mixing with and pervading all nature, from which our souls are taken, did not consider that the Deity himself must, in consequence of this doctrine, be maimed and torn with the rending every human soul from it; nor that, when the human mind is afflicted (as is the case in many instances), that part of the Deity must likewise be afflicted, which cannot be. If the human mind were a Deity, how could it be ignorant of any thing? Besides, how could that Deity, if it is nothing but soul, be mixed with, or infused into, the world?

Then Xenophanes, who said that everything in the world which had any existence, with the addition of intellect, was God, is as liable to exception as the rest, especially in relation to the infinity of it, in which there can be nothing sentient, nothing composite.

Parmenides formed a conceit to himself of something circular like a crown. (He names it Stephane.) It is an orb of constant light and heat around the heavens; this he calls God; in which there is no room to imagine any divine form or sense. And he uttered many other absurdities on the same subject; for he ascribed a divinity to war, to discord, to lust, and other passions of the same kind, which are destroyed by disease, or sleep, or oblivion, or age. The same honor he gives to the stars; but I shall forbear making any objections to his system here, having already done it in another place.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/60139771>

Post by “Cassius” of May 13, 2024 at 2:47 PM

Ok Joshua and others, we now have an intersection of two discussions: (1) On the Nature of the Gods, and (2) The Monkey Typewriter Theorem! We'll work to answer this by next Sunday!

[Quote from Wikipedia](#)

One of the earliest instances of the use of the "monkey metaphor" is that of French mathematician [Émile Borel](#) in 1913,^[1] but the first instance may have been even earlier. [Jorge Luis Borges](#) traced the history of this idea from [Aristotle's *On Generation and Corruption*](#) and [Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*](#) (On the Nature of the Gods), through

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3849-episode-229-cicero-s-otnotg-04-velleius-continues-his-attack-on-intelligent-desi/>

[Blaise Pascal](#) and [Jonathan Swift](#), up to modern statements with their iconic simians and typewriters.^[2] In the early 20th century, Borel and [Arthur Eddington](#) used the theorem to illustrate the timescales implicit in the foundations of [statistical mechanics](#).

Looks to me like we're making good progress and will be able to unwind this question here:

Post

[RE: New Article Attacking Epicurean Physics: "Science Versus the Oldest Anti-Intelligent Design Argument "](#)

[...]

So what IS this guy's point? Is he arguing for intelligent design? A quick scan of the website "about" section does not make clear the site's orientation.

OK I guess the site does contain clues:

epicureanfriends.com/wcf/attachment/4738/

This link originally came up through a Google search, so that's how I found it.



Cassius

May 13, 2024 at 4:14 PM

Post by “Cassius” of May 18, 2024 at 10:05 AM

I've been reminded recently that our podcast is often the first point of contact that people have when they hear about EpicureanFriends, and that in the early months of the episode we used a longer introduction to each episode to address those new listeners.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3849-episode-229-cicero-s-otnotg-04-velleius-continues-his-attack-on-intelligent-desi/>

Over time I shortened that just for the sake of time, but in this episode and probably for the foreseeable future we'll go back to a revised version of the old one for the sake of those new listeners. Regulars can skip over the first two minutes if they prefer, but I think the tradeoff is worth it for the sake of new people who decide to take a chance on the podcast, just like we include similar points for those who sample the front page of the forum.

The revised opening will be something like this:

Welcome to Episode 229 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the most 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, **each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com.** Be aware that none of us are professional philosophers, and everyone here is a self-taught Epicurean.

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Post by “Cassius” of May 18, 2024 at 10:15 AM

Agenda For This Episode

1. Did Epicurus Argue That Infinity Alone (given eternal time and boundless space, *anything* can happen, and *anything* includes life) is sufficient explanation for life in the universe? We'll respond to this argument as mentioned in [this recent article](#), especially since [this Wikipedia article](#) suggests that this argument will appear later in "On The Nature of The Gods."
2. These are your doctrines, Lucilius; but what those of others are I will endeavor to ascertain by tracing them back from the earliest of ancient philosophers. [Thales the Milesian](#), who first inquired after such subjects, asserted water to be the origin of things, and that God was that mind which formed all things from water. If the Gods can exist without corporeal sense, and if there can be a mind without a body, why did he annex a mind to water?
3. It was [Anaximander's](#) opinion that the Gods were born; that after a great length of time they died; and that they are innumerable worlds. But what conception can we possibly have of a Deity who is not eternal?
4. [Anaximenes](#), after him, taught that the air is God, and that he was generated, and that he is immense, infinite, and always in motion; as if air, which has no form, could possibly be God; for the Deity must necessarily be not only of some form or other, but of the most beautiful form. Besides, is not everything that had a beginning subject to mortality?
5. XI. [Anaxagoras](#), who received his learning from Anaximenes, was the first who affirmed the system and disposition of all things to be contrived and perfected by the power and reason of an infinite mind; in which infinity he did not perceive that there could be no conjunction of sense and motion, nor any sense in the least degree, where nature herself could feel no impulse. If he would have this mind to be a sort of animal, then there must be some more internal principle from whence that animal should receive its appellation. But what can be more internal than the mind? Let it, therefore, be clothed with an external body. But this is not agreeable to his doctrine; but we are utterly unable to conceive how a pure simple mind can exist without any substance annexed to it.
6. [Alcmæon of Crotona](#), in attributing a divinity to the sun, the moon, and the rest of the stars, and also to the mind, did not perceive that he was ascribing immortality to mortal beings.
7. [Pythagoras](#), who supposed the Deity to be one soul, mixing with and pervading all nature, from which our souls are taken, did not consider that the Deity himself must, in

consequence of this doctrine, be maimed and torn with the rending every human soul from it; nor that, when the human mind is afflicted (as is the case in many instances), that part of the Deity must likewise be afflicted, which cannot be. If the human mind were a Deity, how could it be ignorant of any thing? Besides, how could that Deity, if it is nothing but soul, be mixed with, or infused into, the world?

8. Then [Xenophanes](#), who said that everything in the world which had any existence, with the addition of intellect, was God, is as liable to exception as the rest, especially in relation to the infinity of it, in which there can be nothing sentient, nothing composite.
9. [Parmenides](#) formed a conceit to himself of something circular like a crown. (He names it Stephane.) It is an orb of constant light and heat around the heavens; this he calls God; in which there is no room to imagine any divine form or sense. And he uttered many other absurdities on the same subject; for he ascribed a divinity to war, to discord, to lust, and other passions of the same kind, which are destroyed by disease, or sleep, or oblivion, or age. The same honor he gives to the stars; but I shall forbear making any objections to his system here, having already done it in another place.

Post by “Cassius” of May 18, 2024 at 11:01 AM

We are going to need to find a way to incorporate references from Cicero's "On Divination" in this series of episodes as well. For example, here's a good explanation of the boundlessness argument, and I did not know that about Ennius sounds pretty close to Epicurus on the gods:

premises to draw their conclusion from, not one of which is granted to them. But the only conclusion of an argument which can be approved, is one in which the point doubted of is established by facts which are not doubtful.

L. Do you not see how Epicurus, whom the Stoics forsooth term a blunderer, reasons in order to prove that the universe is infinite in the very nature of things? That which is finite, says he, has an end. Every one will concede this. Whatever has an end, may be seen externally from something else. This also may be granted him. Now that which includes all, cannot be discerned externally from anything else. This proposition likewise appears undeniable. Therefore that which includes all, having no end, is necessarily infinite. Thus by the proposition which we are compelled to admit, he clearly proves the point in question.

Now this is just what you dialecticians have not yet done in favour of divination; and you not only bring forward no proposition as your premises, so self-evident as to be universally admitted; but you assume such premises as, even if they be granted, your desired conclusion would be as far as ever from following. For instance, your first proposition is this: If there are Gods they must needs be benevolent. Who will grant you this? Will Epicurus, who asserts that the Gods do not care about any business of their own or of others? or will our own countryman Ennius, who was applauded by all the Romans, when he said—

I've always argued that the Gods exist,
But that they care for mortals I deny;

and then gives reasons for his opinion; but it is not necessary to quote him further. I have said enough to show that your friends assume as certain, propositions which are matters of doubt and controversy.

Post by "Cassius" of May 18, 2024 at 3:21 PM

Those who are following along in the YONGE translation will note that I have changed the link to a different version, [available at Archive.org here](#).

This version contains not only "On The Nature of the Gods" but also "On Divination" and "On Fate," as those works also contain commentary that is relevant to Epicurus' position on these issues.

Post by “Cassius” of May 22, 2024 at 7:49 AM

In this episode Joshua spends some time going through the background of the Milesian school, and that reminds me that if anyone has not seen Episode 7 of Carl Sagan's Cosmos - "Backbone of Night," he does a great job of describing the background of these early philosophers.

I see that episode can currently be viewed here. If you want to skip the good but extensive lead-in you can start around the 14:30 minute mark:

<https://www.bitchute.com/video/pCw0CqiqxKBI/>

Post by “Cassius” of May 22, 2024 at 6:39 PM

Episode 229 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available, with Velleius continuing his attack on Intelligent Design

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/60139771>