

Episode 235 - Cicero's OTNOTG - 10 - Velleius Explains the Epicurean Proleptic View Of Divinity

Post by "Cassius" of June 25, 2024 at 9:11 AM

Welcome to Episode 235 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](https://www.epicureanfriends.com).

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.

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 the same as 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 the Epicurean theory of knowledge, [all sensations are true](#), but that does not mean all opinions are true, but that the raw data reported by the senses is reported without the injection of opinion, as the opinion-making process takes place in the mind, where it is subject to mistakes, rather than in the senses. 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 at Archive.org](#). The text which we include in these posts is available [here](#). 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 arguments presented [will be maintained here](#).

Today's Text

XVII. Here, then, you see the foundation of this question clearly laid; for since it is the constant and universal opinion of mankind, independent of education, custom, or law, that there are Gods, it must necessarily follow that this knowledge is implanted in our minds, or, rather, innate in us. That opinion respecting which there is a general agreement in universal nature must infallibly be true; therefore it must be allowed that there are Gods; for in this we have the concurrence, not only of almost all philosophers, but likewise of the ignorant and illiterate. It must be also confessed that the point is established that we have naturally this idea, as I said before, or prenotion, of the existence of the Gods. As new things require new names, so that prenotion was called πρόληψις by Epicurus; an appellation never used before. On the same principle of reasoning, we think that the Gods are happy and immortal; for that nature which hath assured us that there are Gods has likewise imprinted in our minds the knowledge of their immortality and felicity; and if so, what Epicurus hath declared in these words is true: "That which is eternally happy cannot be burdened with any labor itself, nor can it impose any labor on another; nor can it be influenced by resentment or favor: because things which are liable to such feelings must be weak and frail." We have said enough to prove that we should worship the Gods with piety, and without superstition, if that were the only question.

For the superior and excellent nature of the Gods requires a pious adoration from men, because it is possessed of immortality and the most exalted felicity; for whatever excels has a right to veneration, and all fear of the power and anger of the Gods should be banished; for we must understand that anger and affection are inconsistent with the nature of a happy and immortal being. These apprehensions being removed, no dread of the superior powers remains. To confirm this opinion, our curiosity leads us to inquire into the form and life and action of the intellect and spirit of the Deity.

XVIII. With regard to his form, we are directed partly by nature and partly by reason. All men are told by nature that none but a human form can be ascribed to the Gods; for under what other image did it ever appear to any one either sleeping or waking? and, without having recourse to our first notions, reason itself declares the same; for as it is easy to conceive that the most excellent nature, either because of its happiness or immortality, should be the most beautiful, what composition of limbs, what conformation of lineaments, what form, what aspect, can be more beautiful than the human? Your sect, Lucilius (not like my friend Cotta, who sometimes says one thing and sometimes another), when they represent the divine art and workmanship in the human body, are used to describe how very completely each member is formed, not only for convenience, but also for beauty. Therefore, if the human form excels that of all other animal beings, as God himself is an animated being, he must surely be of that form which is the most beautiful. Besides, the Gods are granted to be perfectly happy; and nobody can be happy without virtue, nor can virtue exist where reason is not; and reason can reside in none but the human form; the Gods, therefore, must be acknowledged to be of human form; yet that form is not body, but something like body; nor does it contain any blood, but something like blood. Though these distinctions were more acutely devised and more artfully expressed by Epicurus than any common capacity can comprehend; yet, depending on your understanding, I shall be more brief on the subject than otherwise I should be. Epicurus, who not only discovered and understood the occult and almost hidden secrets of nature, but explained them with ease, teaches that the power and nature of the Gods is not to be discerned by the senses, but by the mind; nor are they to be considered as bodies of any solidity, or reducible to number, like those things which, because of their firmness, he calls Στερέμνια; but as images, perceived by similitude and transition. As infinite kinds of those images result from innumerable individuals, and centre in the Gods, our minds and understanding are directed towards and fixed with the greatest delight on them, in order to comprehend what that happy and eternal essence is.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/60576810>

Post by “Cassius” of June 25, 2024 at 9:19 AM

Issues I want to be sure to include in this episode:

1. Is "pattern" correct usage in the context of prolepsis? Is the Latin "exemplum" (see Lucretius below)? Is "example" or "notion" a better term? Does "pattern" imply intelligent designer?
2. Is "recognition" correct usage?
3. Are any "patterns" innate at birth? (beavers and dams?)

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3935-episode-235-cicero-s-otnotg-10-velleius-explains-the-epicurean-proleptic-view-of/>

4. Relationship of "patterns" and "images"
5. Does the mind itself create patterns?
6. Lucretius 5:181, see [post 40 above](#): [181-Bailey] Further, how was there first implanted in the gods a pattern for the begetting of things, yea, and the concept of man, so that they might know and see in their mind what they wished to do, or in what way was the power of the first-beginnings ever learnt, or what they could do when they shifted their order one with the other, if nature did not herself give a model of creation? For so many first-beginnings of things in many ways, driven on by blows from time everlasting until now, and moved by their own weight, have been wont to be borne on, and to unite in every way, and essay everything that they might create, meeting one with another, that it is no wonder if they have fallen also into such arrangements, and have passed into such movements, as those whereby this present sum of things is carried on, ever and again replenished.
 1. Martin Ferguson Smith - Furthermore, how was a model for the creation of things implanted in the gods? How did they obtain the conception of human beings, so that they might know and perceive in their minds what they wished to produce? And how did they ever recognize the capacity of the primary particles and the potential effect of their different arrangements, if nature herself did not furnish them with a pattern for creation? The fact is that from time everlasting countless elements, impelled by blows and by their own weight, have never ceased to move in manifold ways, making all kinds of unions and experimenting with everything they could combine to create. 17 It is not surprising therefore that they have at last fallen into such arrangements, and acquired such movements, as those whereby this aggregate of things is maintained and constantly renewed.
 2. MFS Note 16 - 16. 181-186: The same argument is used in 1046 1049, where Lucr. is maintaining that language cannot have been an artificial invention. The point is that neither the gods nor the inventors of language can have had a conception of what they wanted to create, if nature had not already created a world or language that they could use as a model. The argument depends on an important principle of Epicurean epistemology, which is that repeated reception of sense impressions creates in the mind a general conception of each class of things, and that without these conceptions, to which further sense impressions are referred, scientific knowledge would be impossible. On (pre)conceptions as a criterion of truth, see p. xxv.
 3. MFS Note page xxv - "Sensation by itself is irrational and incapable of memory, but the repeated reception of sense impressions creates in the mind general conceptions of all classes of things. Both in Greek and in Latin these general conceptions are often (though not by Lucretius) called "preconceptions," because, once created in the mind, they remain there, and further sense impressions are referred to them for testing and identification. However, it is important to understand that the (pre)conceptions are not innate, but derived from sensation. Indeed it is because they are derived from sensation that they are valid. Without

nam gaudere novis rebus debere videtur 170
 cui veteres obsunt ; sed cui nil accidit aegri
 tempore in anteacto, cum pulchre degeret aevom, they are the
 quid potuit novitatis amorem accendere tali ?
 175 at, credo, in tenebris vita ac maerore iacebat,
 donec diluxit rerum genitalis origo. 175
 174 quidve mali fuerat nobis non esse creatis ?¹
 177 natus enim debet quicumque est velle manere
 in vita, donec retinebit blanda voluptas :
 qui numquam vero vitae gustavit amorem
 nec fuit in numero, quid obest non esse creatum ? 180
 exemplum porro gignundis rebus et ipsa
 notities divis hominum unde est insita primum,
 quid vellent facere ut scirent animoque viderent,
 quove modost umquam vis cognita principiorum
 quidque inter sese permutato ordine possent, 185
 si non ipsa dedit specimen natura creandi ?
 namque ita multa modis multis primordia rerum
 ex infinito iam tempore percita plagis
 ponderibusque suis consuerunt concita ferri
 omnimodisque coire atque omnia pertemptare, 190
 quaecumque inter se possent congressa creare,²
 ut non sit mirum si in talis disposituras
 deciderunt quoque et in talis venere meatus,
 qualibus haec rerum geritur nunc summa novando.
 Quod si iam rerum ignorem primordia quae sint, 195
 hoc tamen ex ipsis caeli rationibus ausim
 confirmare aliisque ex rebus reddere multis,
 nequaquam nobis divinitus esse paratam
 naturam rerum ; tanta stat praedita culpa.

¹ ll. 174-5 placed before 176 by Lamb., Munro³. In ed. 2
 M. placed them after 169. ² ll. 188-191 = 423-426.

Post by “Cassius” of July 2, 2024 at 7:16 AM

Episode 235 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. This week we deal move ahead with Velleius's presentation of the proleptic basis for the Epicurean view of divinity.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/60576810>

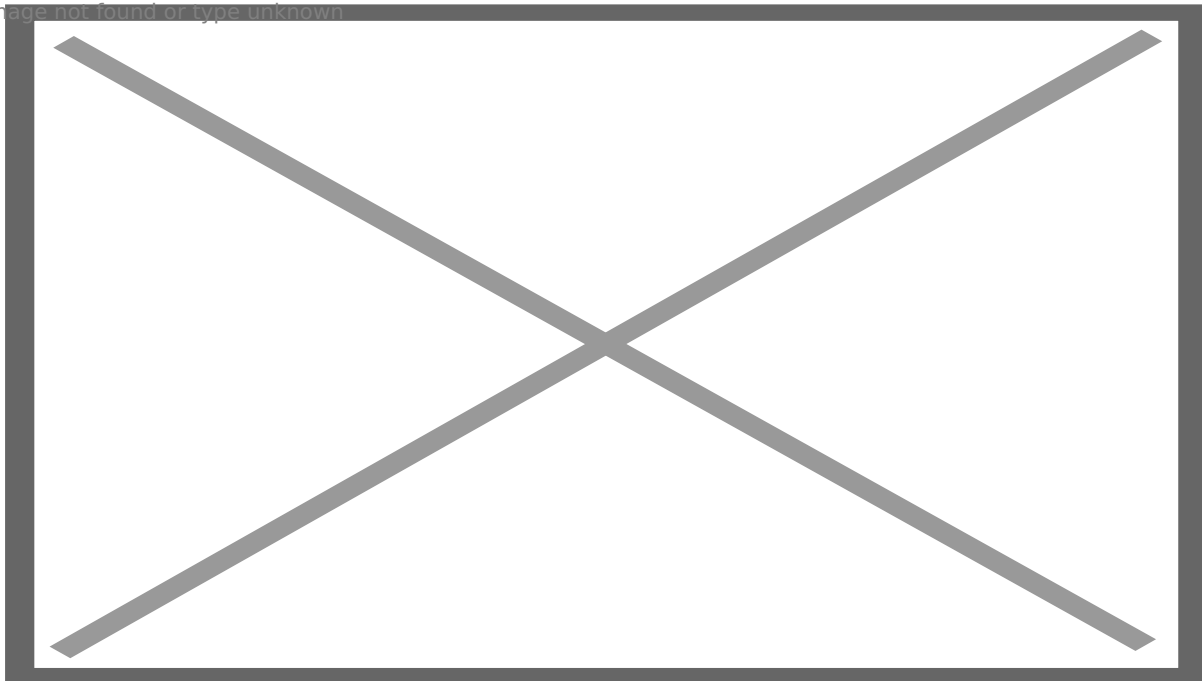
Post by “Kalosyni” of August 10, 2024 at 2:38 PM

Wasn't sure where to post this...I found this article which brings up a "prolepsis of "god" (and explains "System 1" thinking which sounds like Epicurean prolepsis).

Quote

System 1, on the other hand, is intuitive, instinctual and automatic. These capabilities regularly develop in humans, regardless of where they are born. They are survival mechanisms. System 1 bestows us with an innate revulsion of rotting meat, allows us to speak our native language without thinking about it and gives babies the ability to recognise parents and distinguish between living and nonliving objects.

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<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3935-episode-235-cicero-s-otnotg-10-velleius-explains-the-epicurean-proleptic-view-of/>

[Will religion ever disappear?](#)

Atheism is on the rise around the world, so does that mean spirituality will soon be a thing of the past? Rachel Nuwer investigates.

www.bbc.com

Quote

In addition to helping us navigate the dangers of the world and find a mate, some scholars think that System 1 also enabled religions to evolve and perpetuate. System 1, for example, makes us instinctually primed to see life forces - a phenomenon called hypersensitive agency detection - everywhere we go, regardless of whether they're there or not. Millennia ago, that tendency probably helped us avoid concealed danger, such as lions crouched in the grass or venomous snakes concealed in the bush. But it also made us vulnerable to inferring the existence of invisible agents - whether they took the form of a benevolent god watching over us, an unappeased ancestor punishing us with a drought or a monster lurking in the shadows.

Post by "Cassius" of August 10, 2024 at 3:55 PM

One statement made in that article caught my eye:

Quote

Similarly, System 1 encourages us to see things dualistically, meaning we have trouble thinking of the mind and body as a single unit. This tendency emerges quite early: young children, regardless of their cultural background, are inclined to believe that [they have an immortal soul](#) - that their essence or personhood existed somewhere prior to their birth, and will always continue to exist.

I tend to doubt that that statement is true as a general tendency apart from the conditioning of religion / culture / upbringing. I would doubt that children raised in nature, who quickly get exposed to the cycle of life with the animals they see around them constantly being born and dying, would have any problem seeing for themselves that they too are part of the same cycle.

Post by "Kalosyni" of August 10, 2024 at 6:27 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3935-episode-235-cicero-s-otnotg-10-velleius-explains-the-epicurean-proleptic-view-of/>

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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I found this on how young children have difficulty understanding the concept of death:

Quote

Up to 3 Years of Age

- Do not understand death, but rather experience it as separation.
- Developmental task is to differentiate self from environment; accomplish through exploring contrasting states of being and non being in game playing.
- Senses feelings of adults.
- Depends on nonverbal communication for care, affection and reassurance.

3 to 6 Years of Age

- Cannot truly understand the meaning of death.
- Recognize it as something “special,” but unable to understand its inevitability, universality, irreversibility and nothingness.
- Magical thinking is characteristic, with the child believing in the power of his wishes.
- Common to consider death as retribution for bad thoughts or deeds.
- Play serves to relieve the reality of the loss; may seem not to be reacting to the loss.

For higher age groups you can read about it [here](#).