

Episode 237 - Cicero's OTNOTG - 12 - Isonomia And The Implications of Infinity

Post by "Cassius" of July 11, 2024 at 7:08 AM

Welcome to Episode 237 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.

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. We will continue with Section 18 and begin moving into 19.

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 eventually be put together here](#).

Today's Text

XIX. 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 $\text{\iota}\text{\sigma}\text{\nu}\text{\omicron}\text{\nu}\text{\omicron}\text{\mu}\text{\iota}\text{\alpha}$; 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; and if those which perish are innumerable, those which are preserved ought also to be countless. Your sect, Balbus, frequently ask us how the Gods live, and how they pass their time? Their life is the most happy, and the most abounding with all kinds of blessings, which can be conceived. They do nothing. They are embarrassed with no business; nor do they perform any work. They rejoice in the possession of their own wisdom and virtue. They are satisfied that they shall ever enjoy the fulness of eternal pleasures.

XX. Such a Deity may properly be called happy; but yours is a most laborious God. For let us suppose the world a Deity—what can be a more uneasy state than, without the least cessation, to be whirled about the axle-tree of heaven with a surprising celerity? But nothing can be happy that is not at ease. Or let us suppose a Deity residing in the world, who directs and governs it, who preserves the courses of the stars, the changes of the seasons, and the vicissitudes and orders of things, surveying the earth and the sea, and accommodating them to the advantage and necessities of man. Truly this Deity is embarrassed with a very troublesome and laborious office. We make a happy life to consist in a tranquillity of mind, a perfect freedom from care, and an exemption from all employment. The philosopher from whom we received all our knowledge has taught us that the world was made by nature; that there was no occasion for a workhouse to frame it in; and that, though you deny the possibility of such a work without

divine skill, it is so easy to her, that she has made, does make, and will make innumerable worlds. But, because you do not conceive that nature is able to produce such effects without some rational aid, you are forced, like the tragic poets, when you cannot wind up your argument in any other way, to have recourse to a Deity, whose assistance you would not seek, if you could view that vast and unbounded magnitude of regions in all parts; where the mind, extending and spreading itself, travels so far and wide that it can find no end, no extremity to stop at. In this immensity of breadth, length, and height, a most boundless company of innumerable atoms are fluttering about, which, notwithstanding the interposition of a void space, meet and cohere, and continue clinging to one another; and by this union these modifications and forms of things arise, which, in your opinions, could not possibly be made without the help of bellows and anvils. Thus you have imposed on us an eternal master, whom we must dread day and night. For who can be free from fear of a Deity who foresees, regards, and takes notice of everything; one who thinks all things his own; a curious, ever-busy God?

Hence first arose your Εἰμαρμένη, as you call it, your fatal necessity; so that, whatever happens, you affirm that it flows from an eternal chain and continuance of causes. Of what value is this philosophy, which, like old women and illiterate men, attributes everything to fate? Then follows your μαντική, in Latin called divinatio, divination; which, if we would listen to you, would plunge us into such superstition that we should fall down and worship your inspectors into sacrifices, your augurs, your soothsayers, your prophets, and your fortune-tellers.

Epicurus having freed us from these terrors and restored us to liberty, we have no dread of those beings whom we have reason to think entirely free from all trouble themselves, and who do not impose any on others. We pay our adoration, indeed, with piety and reverence to that essence which is above all excellence and perfection. But I fear my zeal for this doctrine has made me too prolix. However, I could not easily leave so eminent and important a subject unfinished, though I must confess I should rather endeavor to hear than speak so long.

Post by “Cassius” of July 11, 2024 at 7:10 AM

Last week's episode will be released later today, and listeners will find that we did not move too far ahead in the text, as we discussed more general topics. This week we will definitely reach the section discussion "isonomia," and as we discussed on the Wednesday Zoom last night that topic is going to take some preparation to make sense of it. I'll post here some of DeWitt's commentary, and if others have suggestions for where it is discussed by other commentators please post that here too.

We will also want to include in this discussion what Lucretius has to say about related topics, such as "nature never makes only a single thing of a kind," and we'll need to find that reference.

Post by "Cassius" of July 11, 2024 at 7:14 AM

Quote from Dewitt's "Epicurus And His Philosophy"

ISONOMY AND THE GODS

In spite of a supercilious opinion to the contrary, Epicurus was not a muddled thinker but a very systematic one. He enunciated his Twelve Elementary Principles and adhered to them closely. Two of these, the fifth and sixth, asserted the infinity of the universe in respect of matter and space. To this idea of infinity he ascribed fundamental importance. He exhorted the young Pythocles to study it as one of those master principles which would render easy the recognition of causation in details.⁶⁸ Cicero must have been recalling some similar exhortation when he wrote: "But of the very greatest importance is the significance of infinity and in the highest degree deserving of intense and diligent contemplation."⁶⁹ He was quoting Epicurus.

It was from this principle that Epicurus deduced his chief theoretical confirmation of belief in the existence of gods. It was from this that he arrived at knowledge of their number and by secondary deduction at knowledge of their abode. He so interpreted the significance of infinity as to extend it from matter and space to the sphere of values, that is, to perfection and imperfection. In brief, if the universe were thought to be imperfect throughout its infinite extent, it could no longer be called infinite. This necessity of thought impelled him to promulgate a subsidiary principle, which he called *isonomia*, a sort of cosmic justice, according to which the imperfection in particular parts of the universe is offset by the perfection of the whole. Cicero rendered it *aequabilis tributio*, "equitable apportionment."⁷⁰ The mistake of rendering it as "equilibrium" must be avoided.

The term *isonomia* itself, which may be anglicized as isonomy, deserves a note. That it is lacking in extant Epicurean texts, all of them elementary, and is transmitted only by Cicero is evidence of its belonging to higher doctrine and advanced studies. Epicurus switched its meaning slightly, as he did that of the word *prolepsis*. To the Greeks it signified equality of all before the law, a boast of Athenians in particular. It was a mate to *eunomia*, government by law, as opposed to barbaric despotism, a boast of Greeks in general. That Epicurus thought to make capital of this happy connotation may be considered certain. He was vindicating for Nature a sort of justice, the bad being overbalanced by the good. It is also possible that he was remotely influenced by the teachings of Zoroaster, well known in his day through the conquests of Alexander, according to whom good and evil, as represented by Ormazd and Ahriman, battled for the upper hand in mundane affairs.

Whatever may be the facts concerning this influence, Epicurus discovered a reasonable way of allowing for the triumph of good in the universe, which seemed impossible under atomic materialism. Thus in his system of thought isonomy plays a part comparable to that of teleology with Plato and Aristotle. Teleology was inferred from the evidences of design, and design presumes agencies of benevolence, whether natural or divine. Epicurus was bound to reject design because the world seemed filled with imperfections, which he listed, but by extending the doctrine of infinity to apply to values he was able, however curiously, to discover room for perfection along with imperfection.

That he employed isonomy as theoretical proof of the existence of gods is well documented. For example, Lactantius, who may have been an Epicurean before his conversion to Christianity, quotes Epicurus as arguing "that the divine exists because there is bound to be something surpassing, superlative and blessed."⁷¹ The necessity here appealed to is a necessity of thought, which becomes a necessity of existence. The existence of the imperfect in an infinite universe demands belief in the existence of the perfect. Cicero employs very similar language: "It is his doctrine that there are gods, because there is bound to be some surpassing being than which nothing is better."⁷² Like the statement of Lactantius, this recognizes a necessity of existence arising from a necessity of thought; the order of Nature cannot be imperfect throughout its whole extent; it is bound to culminate in something superior, that is, in gods.

It is possible to attain more precision in the exposition. Cicero, though brutally brief, exhibits some precision of statement. The infinity of the universe, as usual, serves as a major premise. This being assumed, Cicero declares: "The nature of the universe must be such that all similars correspond to all similars."⁷³ One class of similars is obviously taken to be human beings, all belonging to the same grade of existence in the order of Nature. As Philodemus expresses it in a book about logic, entitled *On Evidences*, "It is impossible to think of Epicurus as man and Metrodorus as non-man."⁷⁴ Another class of similars is the gods. This being understood, the truth of Cicero's next statement follows logically: "If it be granted that the number of mortals is such and such, the number of immortals is not less."⁷⁵ This reasoning calls for no exegesis, but two points are worthy of mention: first, Cicero is not precise in calling the gods immortals; according to strict doctrine they are not deathless, only incorruptible of body; the second point is that Epicurus is more polytheistic in belief than his own countrymen.

The next item, however, calls for close scrutiny. Just as human beings constitute one set of similars and the gods another, so the forces that preserve constitute one set and the forces that destroy constitute another.

At this point a sign of warning is to be raised. There is also another pair of forces that are opposed to each other, those that create and those that destroy.⁷⁶ The difference

is that the latter operate in each of the innumerable worlds, while the former hold sway in the universe at large. For example, in a world such as our own, which is one of many, the forces of creation have the upper hand during its youthful vigor. At long last, however, the forces of destruction gradually gain the superiority and eventually the world is dissolved into its elements.⁷⁷

In the universe at large, on the contrary, the situation is different and the forces opposed to each other are not those that destroy and those that create but those that destroy and those that preserve. Moreover, a new aspect of infinity is invoked, the infinity of time. The universe is eternal and unchanging. Matter can neither be created nor destroyed. The sum of things is always the same, as Lucretius says. This truth is contained in the first two of the Twelve Elementary Principles. In combination they are made to read: "The universe has always been the same as it now is and always will be the same."⁷⁸ This can be true only on the principle that the forces that preserve are at all times superior to the forces that destroy.

It follows that Cicero was writing strictly by the book when he made his spokesman draw the following conclusion from the doctrine of isonomy: "And if the forces that destroy are innumerable, the forces that preserve must by the same token be infinite."⁷⁹ This doctrine, it is essential to repeat, holds only for the universe at large. It is not applicable to the individual world and it does not mean that the prevalence of elephants in India is balanced by the prevalence of wolves in Russia. Isonomy does not mean "equal distribution" but "equitable apportionment." It does not denote balance or equilibrium. No two sets of similar forces are in balance; in the individual world the forces of destruction always prevail at last, and in the universe at large the forces of preservation prevail at all times.

By this time three aspects of the principles of isonomy have been brought forward: first, that in an infinite universe perfection is bound to exist as well as imperfection; that is, "that there must be some surpassing being, than which nothing is better"; second, that the number of these beings, the gods, cannot be less than the number of mortals; and third, that in the universe at large the forces of preservation always prevail over the forces of destruction.

All three of these are direct inferences from the infinity and eternity of the universe. There remains to be drawn an indirect inference of primary importance. Since in the individual worlds the forces of destruction always prevail in the end, it follows that the incorruptible gods can have their dwelling place only outside of the individual worlds, that is, in the free spaces between the worlds, the so-called *intermundia*, where the forces of preservation are always superior. There is more to be said on this topic in the section that follows.

Display More

Post by “Cassius” of July 11, 2024 at 7:26 AM

As usual I think DeWitt is going in a very productive direction but I don't know that he explains it as persuasively as he could.

When he says : "The necessity here appealed to is a necessity of thought, which becomes a necessity of existence. The existence of the imperfect in an infinite universe demands belief in the existence of the perfect. " I doubt it's best to use the words "perfect" and "imperfect" because of the connotations of magic those words carry.

In the very next sentence DeWitt quotes what I think is the better alternative: "Cicero employs very similar language: "It is his doctrine that there are gods, because there is bound to be some surpassing being than which nothing is better." ⁷² Like the statement of Lactantius, this recognizes a necessity of existence arising from a necessity of thought; the order of Nature cannot be imperfect throughout its whole extent; it is bound to culminate in something superior, that is, in gods."

So I wouldn't say we're talking about "perfect" vs "imperfect," but rather more in the line of a spectrum from poor, good, better, best -- in that whenever you line up a spectrum, you're going to have *something* at the top of the spectrum. Simply being at the top of the spectrum does not mean that you are of a different type than what came before -- if you weren't of the same type you wouldn't be on the same spectrum in the first place. So simply being at the top of the "living beings experiencing pleasure" spectrum doesn't mean necessarily anything more than that all your time is pleasurable and that you don't ever have to die. Translating Cicero as saying "surpassing" does not require any kind of "magical" connotation.

That kind of interpretation would seem to me to be consistent with the way Lactantius and Cicero are understanding what Epicurus had said, and it would be consistent with Epicurean physics and not introduce any kind of "magical" analysis of deriving the existence of a 'supernatural' being from the existence of the "natural." That's an obvious non-starter under epicurean physics and should not even be entertained as a possibility of what he was saying.

Post by “Cassius” of July 11, 2024 at 7:32 AM

Lucretius Book 2: 1077 - Bailey:

[1077] This there is too that in the universe there is nothing single, nothing born unique and growing unique and alone, but it is always of some tribe, and there are many things in the

same race. First of all turn your mind to living creatures; you will find that in this wise is begotten the race of wild beasts that haunts the mountains, in this wise the stock of men, in this wise again the dumb herds of scaly fishes, and all the bodies of flying fowls. Wherefore you must confess in the same way that sky and earth and sun, moon, sea, and all else that exists, are not unique, but rather of number numberless; inasmuch as the deep-fixed boundary-stone of life awaits these as surely, and they are just as much of a body that has birth, as every race which is here on earth, abounding in things after its kind.

Post by “Cassius” of July 11, 2024 at 7:37 AM

I think DeWitt is correct about this too, where he says that from infinity "Epicurus deduced his chief theoretical confirmation of belief in the existence of gods." This view would strongly influence how we interpret what Velleius says about prolepsis being the basis. Under this view prolepsis alone would not write in our minds "gods exist and are blessed and imperishable" but rather prolepsis provides the spark to get us started thinking about the subject, at which point our reasoning takes over and through isonomia and related argument leads us to more specific conceptual conclusions.

Quote

"It was from this principle [infinity] that Epicurus deduced his chief theoretical confirmation of belief in the existence of gods. It was from this that he arrived at knowledge of their number and by secondary deduction at knowledge of their abode."

Post by “Cassius” of July 11, 2024 at 7:41 AM

Also very probably related, Lucretius Book 2, Bailey:

[522] And since I have taught this much, I will hasten to link on a truth which holds to it and wins belief from it, that the first-beginnings of things, which are formed with a shape like to one another, are in number infinite. For since the difference of forms is limited, it must needs be that those which are alike are unlimited, or else that the sum of matter is created limited, which I have proved not to be, showing in my verses that the tiny bodies of matter from everlasting

always keep up the sum of things, as the team of blows is harnessed on unbroken on every side.

[532] For in that you see that certain animals are more rare, and perceive that nature is less fruitful in them, yet in another quarter and spot, in some distant lands, there may be many in that kind, and so the tale is made up; even as in the race of four-footed beasts we see that elephants with their snaky hands come first of all, by whose many thousands India is embattled with a bulwark of ivory, so that no way can be found into its inner parts: so great is the multitude of those beasts, whereof we see but a very few samples.

[541] But still, let me grant this too, let there be, if you will, some one thing unique, alone in the body of its birth, to which there is not a fellow in the whole wide world; yet unless there is an unlimited stock of matter, from which it might be conceived and brought to birth, it will not be able to be created, nor, after that, to grow on and be nourished.

And here from book three is where Lucretius mentions the possibility that our atoms might in the future come together again as they are now placed:

[843] And even if the nature of mind and the power of soul has feeling, after it has been rent asunder from our body, yet it is naught to us, who are made one by the mating and marriage of body and soul. Nor, if time should gather together our substance after our decease and bring it back again as it is now placed, if once more the light of life should be vouchsafed to us, yet, even were that done, it would not concern us at all, when once the remembrance of our former selves were snapped in twain. And even now we care not at all for the selves that we once were, not at all are we touched by any torturing pain for them. For when you look back over all the lapse of immeasurable time that now is gone, and think how manifold are the motions of matter, you could easily believe this too, that these same seeds, whereof we now are made, have often been placed in the same order as they are now; and yet we cannot recall that in our mind's memory; for in between lies a break in life, and all the motions have wandered everywhere far astray from sense.

Post by "Cassius" of July 11, 2024 at 9:04 AM

1. Here on Earth, we observe for ourselves many different types of people and animals.
2. We observe that some live longer lives, some live shorter lives.
3. We observe that some live more pleasant lives, some live less pleasant lives.
4. We also observe that nature never makes only a single thing of a kind.
5. Because of our understanding of the atoms, we confidently expect that the universe is boundless, and that it has always existed and will continue to exist for a boundless period

of time. We therefore expect that there are boundless numbers of other "people" in the universe, many of whom are a part of species which have been around a lot longer than we have.

6. Given the above, why would we *not* expect that some of those species have extended their length of life, and their experience of pleasure, so that both their lives and there pleasures are unending, uninterrupted by death or pain? And why would we *not* expect that we benefit from thinking about how they might have achieved that goal, so that we ourselves can make our pleasures and our lives last longer and without interruption to the extent we are able? Stated positively, it seems to me that Epicurus is saying that we *should* reach those conclusions.

Does there really have to be anything more to Epicurean theology than that? Is not *everything* beyond that which causes so much controversy (expectations of omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence), false opinions that people under the influence of non-Epicurean perspectives are adding in, *none* of which false opinions are appropriate when Epicurean physics and canonic are consistently applied?

From this perspective, and taking into account how far we observe medical science has come in less than 2000 years, I would say that Epicurean theology is *more* persuasive than it was in 50BC or 250BC!

Maybe somebody can convince me that the above chain reasoning is not a fair summary of Epicurean theology, but to the extent it *is* a fair summary, I am personally 100% convinced of its validity! 😊

Edit: I would say that "prolepsis" comes in mostly to allow stages 1, 2, and 3 to occur - but 1,2, and 3 are not examples of prolepsis themselves. Without a faculty of prolepsis, we would "look" but we would never "see" things that lead us to form concepts such as Earth, "we," "people," "animals," or any of the rest of the concepts being used to construct this chain reasoning. I would say a faculty of prolepsis is necessary to organize and construct every step of the chain reasoning, but that none of the individual links in the chain are themselves "a prolepsis."

Post by "TauPhi" of July 11, 2024 at 10:09 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Maybe somebody can convince me that the above chain reasoning is not a fair summary of Epicurean theology, but to the extent it *is* a fair summary, I am personally 100% convinced of its validity! 😊

I never thought I would say it, due to our differences in this subject matter, but I like your post [Cassius](#) . Thank you for not using 'gods' when writing it. Now, if I could convince you to drop 'theology' in favour of something like 'celebration of nature' just to make sure we don't have anything supernatural in the equation, I'm sure we could go for a beer, or a barrel of it, and talk and think about what is possible in this universe and how to get where we want to get using nothing more magical than our good friends: matter and void. Maybe it wouldn't be strictly Epicurean conversation, but having an Epicurean and an Epicurean friend talking sounds good enough to me.

Post by “Cassius” of July 11, 2024 at 10:35 AM

[Quote from TauPhi](#)

Now, if I could convince you to drop 'theology' in favour of something like 'celebration of nature' j

Yes for those who were not there, "the definition question" was the issue that several of us discussed on Zoom last night. Tau Phi and several others are firmly in what I will call the - "*What the heck was Epicurus doing messing with the definitions of words?!?#!&^????*" camp. 😊

That's where Cicero was too, so they are in very respectable company!

However *challenging and changing the definitions we give to words* seems to be a central element of the whole Epicurean project. That means there will need to be smoother and more persuasive ways to convince people that that is a valid approach. I think Bryan and Joshua at the very least have some good ideas on that, because the list of words that Epicurus was using in unique ways seems to be very long. Even if we start only with the list Cicero himself gives, the list goes all the way from *pleasure* to *prolepsis*, and that just gets us started with the "p's," without even mentioning the "g-words!"

Right now I am still inclined to go with DeWitt's reasoning:

Quote from "Epicurus And His Philosophy" page 240 - Norman DeWitt (emphasis added)

"The extension of the name of pleasure to this normal state of being was the major innovation of the new hedonism. It was in the negative form, freedom from pain of body and distress of mind, that it drew the most persistent and vigorous condemnation from adversaries. The contention was that the application of the name of pleasure to this state was unjustified on the ground that two different things were thereby being denominated by one name. Cicero made a great to-do over this argument, but it is really superficial and captious. The fact that the name of pleasure was not customarily applied to the normal or static state did not alter the fact that the name ought to be applied to it; nor that reason justified the application; nor that human beings would be the happier for so reasoning and believing.

So to interpolate that last sentence to our current context:

The fact that the name of "gods" has not been customarily applied to beings who live only in pleasure and without any pain, and who can continue to live for an unlimited lifespan, does not alter the fact that the name ought to be applied to them; nor that reason justifies the application; nor that human beings would be the happier for so reasoning and believing.

Post by "TauPhi" of July 11, 2024 at 11:43 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Tau Phi and several others are firmly in what I will call the - "What the heck was Epicurus doing messing with the definitions of words?!?#!&^????" camp. 😊

When people start to mess with the definitions of words which are generally accepted, they mud the waters, cause communication breakdowns and create incomprehensible mess. Epicurus created a system of philosophy, not an incomprehensible mess so I don't think I am in the aforementioned camp.

I think Epicurus tried to convince people to think about the ideas behind some words from different perspective and prove how this new perspective is more beneficial. This is one of the reasons I don't consider myself an Epicurean. It's not because I don't like unnecessary redefinition of words (which I don't). I don't agree with some Epicurean ideas - like the idea of gods. When Epicurus talked about gods, he tried to explain how the accepted idea of gods is

ridiculous (to great success, I may add) but he still thought about them as gods in generally accepted meaning of the word. He wasn't an atheist in disguise. He was a pious man honestly believing [Epicurean gods](#) exist. And this IDEA is what I don't agree with.

Post by “Godfrey” of July 11, 2024 at 5:30 PM

OK. So. To expose my ignorance, I'm stuck on one thing regarding isonomia:

It's evident that there is a hierarchy of beings (unless there are things we don't know about "lower" creatures which make them godlike to us 😬). It's also evident (I think) that there is no such thing as "perfect" in a material universe. Given these, and infinite time, how is there even a "best" of a given thing, or an apex of a hierarchy? Accepting that the quantity of forms is limited (per Lucretius' quoted above), then perhaps at a given time there may be something that might *possibly* be considered an apex of a given set. But as time continues infinitely, how does that remain at the apex? First, the thing would have to be immortal; this would seem to be a logical consequence in order for something to have even a chance of remaining at the top. But as other things evolve, it would seem that odds are that the former apex would eventually not be at the apex anymore.

A sports analogy: sports leagues are fixed quantities, at least for a time. Or the same thing with countries... No team or country ever has remained at the top of the heap for more than a relatively short time.

Anyway, I'm trying to reason this out as I type and my mind is melting. So I'll consider this my limit for now. But for clarity, this is *not* an attempt to argue against the gods, this is an attempt to make sense of this one (limited) aspect of isonomia and infinity.

Post by “Cassius” of July 11, 2024 at 5:56 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

But as time continues infinitely, how does that remain at the apex?

I think that is where Dewitt is right to focus on the gods not being "by nature" immortal, and that they must act to remain so.

And I don't think we we saying anything other than "living a totally pleasurable life" and "having the capacity to continue without death.". So within those two characteristics (death and life) there is a theoretical limit that any number of living beings could attain.

So I wouldnt say "best" implies that a particular set of gods outranks another.

Post by “Don” of July 11, 2024 at 7:29 PM

For your isonomia discussion:

Theories Concerning Epicurean Theology and Metaphysics

John Masson

The Classical Review 16 (9), 453-459, 1902

IN a-long chapter, entitled 'The [Epicurean Gods](#) and the doctrine of Isonomia,' Giussani discusses the doctrine of 'Isonomia,' that is to say of the 'Balance of Forces in the universe' as bearing upon Epicurus's theology. A singular theory has been propounded on this subject by Scott which Giussani adopts and develops farther. Both scholars find a very essential connection between the two doctrines. (Direct link to PDF below)

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Post by “Cassius” of July 12, 2024 at 7:04 AM

Thank you Don, that John Masson article is quite something. I recommend it, but only to those who have the power to keep focus through its intricate twists and turns. I've read through it once and there is so much going on in it that it reminds me to keep the big picture in mind and not get too far into the weeds. This one definitely goes into the weeds!

I understand Masson's viewpoint to include that both Scott and Giussiani thought there was a very close relationship between isonomia and Epicurus' proof of the existence and/or nature of the gods.

And I also understand that Masson is in violent disagreement with some of the details of what Scott and Giussani wrote.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3961-episode-237-cicero-s-otnotg-12-isonomia-and-the-implications-of-infinity/>

But by the time he goes through all the details and reaches the end of the article, I am not exactly sure whether Masson himself thinks that there is a relationship between isonomia and proof of the gods, or what that relationship is.

But no doubt there's a lot of interesting material in it¹

Post by "Cassius" of July 12, 2024 at 8:57 AM

This statement early in the Masson article seems helpful I think on a basic point. I added the underline for emphasis:

Quote

By this Velleius seems to mean a law of averages or chances; the law, namely, that of two alternatives equally possible, each will occur with equal frequency if an infinite number of cases be taken.

It seems to me that it is essential to keep in mind the point that we are discussing things that are "possible."

Without getting yet into the difficulty of establishing exactly what is possible, and what is impossible, the logical point has to be kept in mind that infinity is not itself going to change the impossible into the possible.

That which is impossible will have exactly zero occurrences, and no matter how far space or time extends, even to infinity, the number of occurrences of the impossible is going to remain zero.

But the other question is maybe key, before we even get to the "spectrum" issues.

We know from experience on earth that some things are more common than others, and thus there are more grains of sand than there are diamonds, and more stupid people than there are Epicuruses.

But given the fact that diamonds and Epicuruses are possible, do we conclude from the principle of infinity that there are (or have been or will be) an infinite number of diamonds and Epicurus's in the universe?

I am presuming at this point that the answer to that question is "Yes," and that answer is why Lucretius specifically mentions the "even if" possibility of atomic rearrangement in his poem. (To the effect that even if our atoms rearrange themselves into the same configuration in the

future, we would not be the same person, as our memories would not be the same.) While in any individual locale certain things are more common than others, taking into account the whole of the infinite universe, there are (or were or will be) an infinite number of diamonds and Epicuruses.

Is that "Yes" the obvious deduction that the Epicureans would have reached, or not?

(Edit: To anticipate where this would go afterwards, obviously it is "possible" to experience pleasure, and "possible" to be alive for a period of time, and so both (1) the degrees of pleasure and (2) the degrees of living over time are to be expected (given local circumstances) to extend all the way from zero to actual or effective infinity.)

Post by "Godfrey" of July 13, 2024 at 12:41 PM

Quote

By this Velleius seems to mean a law of averages or chances; the law, namely, that of two alternatives equally possible, each will occur with equal frequency if an infinite number of cases be taken.

I finally realized what it is that I can't reconcile about isonomia, at least as presented by the great deceiver Cicero. As presented, it appears to depend on examining dichotomies. But, in general, I don't think that infinity implies dichotomies other than as described in Newton's laws. Take the gods, for example: I think that we all agree that there is the possibility of a spectrum of beings, some of which may be considered to be lower and some higher. But lower how? Higher how? And how do you compare theoretical quantities in a spectrum? Because Cicero (as Velleius) is comparing "an equal number" of mortals and immortals. How do you split a spectrum into a dichotomy?

Even thinking of "mortal" and "immortal" as possibilities sets up a logical fallacy. Since there is nothing immortal other than atoms and void (and you can't even accurately say that there is an equal quantity of atoms and void), using the word immortal is inaccurate as we've often discussed on the forum. So we're left with living things: how do you split living things into two categories? The only operation that seems to make sense is to chunk the spectrum into several categories, then say that there is an equal possibility of *each category* occurring. And one or more of those categories may have figured out how to live forever (give or take). But that isn't at all what Cicero (as Velleius) is saying. He's saying that for every mortal there is an immortal. More logically, I suspect that what he's really saying is that for everything natural there is something supernatural. That's his agenda here, that there's an earthly realm and a

supernatural realm. And we have few if any other sources to compare his take on isonomia with, so as so often with Cicero, we're sent down a rabbit hole trying to make sense of his words.

In terms of isonomia, comparing forces such as creation and destruction makes intuitive sense to me. But comparing quantities of things does not, at least in the way that Cicero has done. And it must *always* be remembered that Cicero has an agenda, and that his agenda is not favorable to Epicurus.

Post by "Cassius" of July 13, 2024 at 3:13 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

More logically, I suspect that what he's really saying is that for everything natural there is something supernatural

I understand your concern in the post in general (I think) but I don't think that this would be a fair criticism of what is presented. I do think we can presume that Cicero is not taking the time to present the most complete Epicurean argument possible, because he doesn't agree with it, but I do not think that his Epicurean friends would allow him to cross a line to an absolute falsehood like that. Cicero well knows that no Epicurean would accept anything "supernatural," and it would have destroyed his credibility to his friends (to whom he was writing, not to us 2000 years later) to try to do so. He was writing to real people of his own time trying to save Rome, and to grossly misrepresent Epicurean philosophy on a factual point like that would not be consistent with his goal of being effective with his friends. They would simply dismissed him not as having a legitimate concern, but as "you don't know what you are talking about." Lawyers don't win cases in fair trials stating obvious mistruths that are easily disproven, and accusing Epicureans of believing in supernatural beings would never pass that kind of "smell test."

And as for the "immortal" part, that is exactly why DeWitt stresses that Epicurue' own writing is better viewed as "deathless" rather than immortal. Epicurue would not have allowed anything to be supernaturally immortal, and even in the mouth of Cicero and Epicurean argument cannot be fairly construed that way.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

lower how? Higher how? And how do you compare theoretical quantities in a spectrum?

I think that is exactly where "prolepsis" comes in. The mind is recognizing that certain things are of a type and belong in a spectrum, while other things are not of that type and are outside that spectrum, likely due to images and other sensory data building up genetically (over long time) into similar "patterns."

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Because Cicero (as Vellius) is comparing "an equal number" of mortals and immortals

Right now my best guesstimate on that is that of things that are possible, in an infinite and eternal universe, though in any locality some things are more common than others, there is -- at once or over time -- an infinite number of each and every possible thing, and "infinite number" is equal to "infinite number."

And I would say this is the path by which to unwind their path:

[Quote from Letter To Pythocles](#)

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.

Post by "Godfrey" of July 13, 2024 at 7:10 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Right now my best guesstimate on that is that of things that are possible, in an infinite and eternal universe, though in any locality some things are more common than others, there is -- at once or over time -- an infinite number of each and every possible

thing, and "infinite number" is equal to "infinite number."

To paraphrase, for anything that is possible in an infinite and eternal universe, there is an infinite number of that thing. From that it can be said that anything that exists, exists in the same quantity as any other thing spread throughout the universe. Infinite bananas, infinite 1965 Mustangs, infinite deathless beings....

I just had to type this in order to wrap my head around it.

So, although it's presented as a dichotomy, an equal number of perishable and imperishable beings really isn't a dichotomy. It's not even a spectrum. We know that there are perishable beings, and we can posit that there are imperishable beings by reasoning about a spectrum of beings with varying perishability. Assuming from this that there are imperishable beings, the number of them will be infinite, just like the number of perishable beings or the number of pencils. Put another way, the number of bananas cannot be less than the number of monkeys. The fact that monkeys eat bananas means nothing in this regard.

Another question regards "two alternatives equally possible." What are the relative quantities of two alternatives that are not equally possible? Wouldn't they still be equal as both are infinite in number? As long as one of a thing exists, there are an infinite number of that thing since there is never just one of any thing. Is this correct? The degree of possibility shouldn't enter into it. This in fact would be a potential dichotomy: either something exists, or it doesn't. If it doesn't there are none of it, if it does there are the same number of it as there are of any other thing, which is an infinite number.

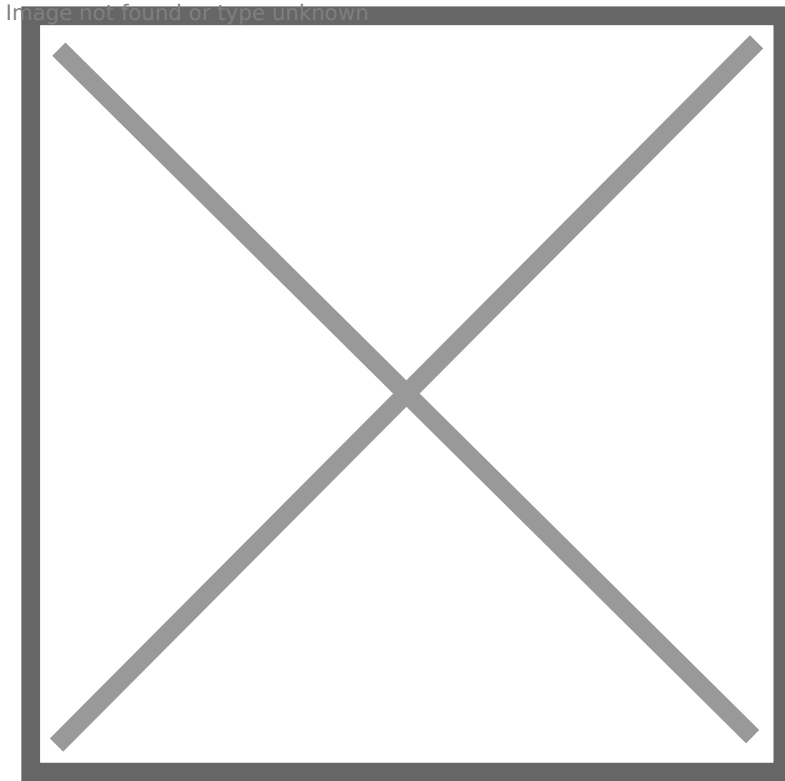
Post by "Cassius" of July 13, 2024 at 7:42 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Another question regards "two alternatives equally possible." What are the relative quantities of two alternatives that are not equally possible? Wouldn't they still be equal as both are infinite in number?

I'm still thinking about it, but I suspect the answer is "Yes, in total" and that the caveat that makes things reasonable is that in any locality some things can easily be more common than others, just as they are here on earth.

As for talking about "dichotomies we probably need to define that:



[dichotomy](#)

1. a difference between two completely opposite ideas or things: 2. a...
[dictionary.cambridge.org](#)

dichotomy

noun [[C usually singular](#)]

formal us /daɪˈkɑːtə.mi/ uk /daɪˈkɒt.ə.mi/

[Add to word list](#)

a [difference](#) between two [completely opposite ideas](#) or things.

I don't really know if it adds anything to talk about "dichotomies" if that is all the word means. It's the details behind that which will need to be examined.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

To paraphrase, for anything that is possible in an infinite and eternal universe, there is an infinite number of that thing. From that it can be said that anything that exists,

exists in the same quantity as any other thing spread throughout the universe. Infinite bananas, infinite 1965 Mustangs, infinite deathless beings....

That seems to me to be a reasonably good way of describing the potential theory, although we don't know for sure that this is an accurate description of it. I am sure others will come up with more potential corollaries, especially as to whether time should be taken into account, or just the infinity of space.

But for the moment that's a working description that does not involve anything supernatural, and comports with the example Lucretius speculating that the atoms of one's bodies could eventually come back into essentially similar positions to where they were before.

Post by “Godfrey” of July 13, 2024 at 7:44 PM

Since my mind is spiraling like a balloon spewing air....

Could it be that Epicurus believed in beings which are immortal, not just imperturbable or incorruptible as we interpret them? We think in terms of a Big Bang and an expanding universe whereas he was doing some of the original reasoning regarding infinity. I seem to recall that he s the gods as being made of something special, in addition to living in the intermundia. Thinking as someone living 2000 years ago, why wouldn't this have existed infinitely into the past as well as the future?

OK, I need a nap now.

Post by “Cassius” of July 13, 2024 at 8:13 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Thinking as someone living 2000 years ago, why wouldn't this have existed infinitely into the past as well as the future?

I would say the anchor in all this will always remain that Epicurean physics tells us that nothing has eternally the same existence except atoms, and that the universe as a whole has nothing outside it or above it which created it. There was never a "first" moment in the universe.

I expect they would say that the same processes which are going on now will have been going on eternally, so in that sense it would be concluded that the class of deathless beings, which are a part of that process, have been around forever.

Now as to any single deathless being having existed forever and not having a beginning, I would tend to think that the Epicureans would not have thought that likely. My best guess at the moment is that they would see the *process* of atoms coming together, and eventually deathless beings resulting, would have been a *process* that has been repeating forever. As a result, a class of beings which are deathless has existed forever. One question that might arise would be "Well if there is new ones all the time does the universe fill up with gods?" To which the answer would be "no" because the universe is infinite in size, and there are not *new* atoms being generated to create gods -- that would be part of the "flowing atoms" theory - the deathless beings make use of existing atoms.

I think probably the biggest stumbling block to clear discussion about this is that we have to totally eliminate the possibility that there was ever a *first* anything, except in a particular locality and particular slice of time. From a "universal" perspective, whatever processes are going on today (which means they are possible) have been going on forever, and there was never a 'first' anything. *That's* pretty hard to get one's head around, but no harder than to get one's mind around that there *was* a first. The idea that there was a "universal first" is religious conditioning, not validated by neutral observation of nature.

Post by “Cassius” of July 13, 2024 at 10:33 PM

Here from book three is where Lucretius mentions the possibility that our atoms might in the future come together again as they are now placed:

[843] And even if the nature of mind and the power of soul has feeling, after it has been rent asunder from our body, yet it is naught to us, who are made one by the mating and marriage of body and soul. Nor, if time should gather together our substance after our decease and bring it back again as it is now placed, if once more the light of life should be vouchsafed to us, yet, even were that done, it would not concern us at all, when once the remembrance of our former selves were snapped in twain. And even now we care not at all for the selves that we once were, not at all are we touched by any torturing pain for them. For when you look back over all the lapse of immeasurable time that now is gone, and think how manifold are the motions of matter, you could easily believe this too, that these same seeds, whereof we now are made, have often been placed in the same order as they are now; and yet we cannot recall that in our mind's memory; for in between lies a break in life, and all the motions have wandered everywhere far astray from sense.

Post by “Cassius” of July 13, 2024 at 10:37 PM

More articles to gather over time:

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/638785> - On Some Epicurean and Lucretian Arguments for the Infinity of the Universe Ivars Avotins The Classical Quarterly Vol. 33, No. 2 (1983), pp. 421-427 (7 pages)

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3295240> Infinity in Epicurean Philosophy Marshall E. Blume The Classical Journal Vol. 60, No. 4 (Jan., 1965), pp. 174-176 (3 pages) Published By: The Johns Hopkins University Press

Post by “Godfrey” of July 14, 2024 at 1:41 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I don't really know if it adds anything to talk about "dichotomies" if that is all the word means. It's the details behind that which will need to be examined

That is exactly my point: the only reason to mention dichotomies is that "mortal" and "immortal" are seemingly set up as opposites (what I'm calling dichotomous) by Cicero. I guess the point I would make is that, after reasoning it out, setting them up in that way is meaningless and therefore, to me, Cicero is setting his argument up in a way that is basically irrelevant. However, if there's textual evidence that Epicurus set up his argument in the same way, then I'd wonder whether I'm missing something.

As for the possible immortality of the gods, isn't it stated somewhere that Epicurus proposed that the gods are made of a different type of matter? I'm again exposing my ignorance here: I can't point to a source of this idea, and it's not something that I would posit. But I can see how someone who was developing atomic theory more or less from scratch might consider such an idea if they were convinced of the existence of material, immortal (and blissful) beings with no beginning and no end, in the same way that atoms have no beginning or end. These beings would have all of the characteristics that we commonly attribute to them in our discussions, but they would at the same time individually have no beginning or end due to the type of matter from which they're made. So my question is whether there is any credible textual evidence that

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Epicurus considered this to be a valid possibility. 2300 years ago this may have seemed reasonable, even if it doesn't seem so to us moderns.

At any rate, I'm not espousing this idea, I'm just trying to flesh out the arguments and the associated reasoning.

Post by “Cassius” of July 14, 2024 at 6:51 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

I'm just trying to flesh out the arguments and the associated reasoning.

Yep - that is all any of us can do.

As for "type of matter" I am not recalling much specific at this moment, but there's definitely the references in Lucretius to the soul being made of particularly smooth and small (?) types of atoms - but that in no way implies that there is anything supernatural or eternal about it. So while the structure of such beings definitely seems to play into how they maintain themselves and replace their atoms indefinitely, I don't think anything supernatural is implied any more than the structure of the human soul which allows us to be intelligent implies anything supernatural.

Post by “Cassius” of July 14, 2024 at 9:15 AM

Some of the cites to discuss in this episode:

1. *Epicurus to Herodotus 45* - These brief sayings, if all these points are borne in mind, afford a sufficient outline for our understanding of the nature of existing things. Furthermore, there are infinite worlds both like and unlike this world of ours. For the atoms being infinite in number, as was proved already, are borne on far out into space. For those atoms, which are of such nature that a world could be created out of them or made by them, have not been used up either on one world or on a limited number of worlds, nor again on all the worlds which are alike, or on those which are different from these. So that there nowhere exists an obstacle to the infinite number of the worlds. [46] Moreover, there are images like in shape to the solid bodies, far surpassing perceptible things in their subtlety of texture. For it is not impossible that such emanations should be

formed in that which surrounds the objects, nor that there should be opportunities for the formation of such hollow and thin frames, nor that there should be effluences which preserve the respective position and order which they had before in the solid bodies: these images we call idols.

2. *Epicurus to Pythocles 117* - 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.
3. *Epicurus to Menoeceus - [135]* ... Meditate therefore on these things and things akin to them night and day by yourself; and with a companion like to yourself, and never shall you be disturbed waking or asleep, but you shall live like a god among men. For a man who lives among immortal blessings is not like unto a mortal being.
4. *Lucretius Book 2: 1077 - Bailey: [1077]* This there is too that in the universe there is nothing single, nothing born unique and growing unique and alone, but it is always of some tribe, and there are many things in the same race. First of all turn your mind to living creatures; you will find that in this wise is begotten the race of wild beasts that haunts the mountains, in this wise the stock of men, in this wise again the dumb herds of scaly fishes, and all the bodies of flying fowls. Wherefore you must confess in the same way that sky and earth and sun, moon, sea, and all else that exists, are not unique, but rather of number numberless; inasmuch as the deep-fixed boundary-stone of life awaits these as surely, and they are just as much of a body that has birth, as every race which is here on earth, abounding in things after its kind.
5. *Lucretius Book 2, Bailey: [522]* And since I have taught this much, I will hasten to link on a truth which holds to it and wins belief from it, that the first-beginnings of things, which are formed with a shape like to one another, are in number infinite. For since the difference of forms is limited, it must needs be that those which are alike are unlimited, or else that the sum of matter is created limited, which I have proved not to be, showing in my verses that the tiny bodies of matter from everlasting always keep up the sum of things, as the team of blows is harnessed on unbroken on every side. [532] For in that you see that certain animals are more rare, and perceive that nature is less fruitful in them, yet in another quarter and spot, in some distant lands, there may be many in that kind, and so the tale is made up; even as in the race of four-footed beasts we see that elephants with their snaky hands come first of all, by whose many thousands India is embattled with a bulwark of ivory, so that no way can be found into its inner parts: so great is the multitude of those beasts, whereof we see but a very few samples. [541] But still, let me grant this too, let there be, if you will, some one thing unique, alone in the body of its birth, to which there is not a fellow in the whole wide world; yet unless there is

an unlimited stock of matter, from which it might be conceived and brought to birth, it will not be able to be created, nor, after that, to grow on and be nourished.

6. *Lucretius Book 3 Bailey - [843]* And even if the nature of mind and the power of soul has feeling, after it has been rent asunder from our body, yet it is naught to us, who are made one by the mating and marriage of body and soul. Nor, if time should gather together our substance after our decease and bring it back again as it is now placed, if once more the light of life should be vouchsafed to us, yet, even were that done, it would not concern us at all, when once the remembrance of our former selves were snapped in twain. And even now we care not at all for the selves that we once were, not at all are we touched by any torturing pain for them. For when you look back over all the lapse of immeasurable time that now is gone, and think how manifold are the motions of matter, you could easily believe this too, that these same seeds, whereof we now are made, have often been placed in the same order as they are now; and yet we cannot recall that in our mind's memory; for in between lies a break in life, and all the motions have wandered everywhere far astray from sense.
7. Diogenes of Oinoanda Letter to Antipater - Fr. 63 So, as I was saying, having had my appetite most keenly whetted by all the advantage of the voyage, I shall try to meet you as soon as winter had ended, sailing first either to Athens or to Chalcis and Boeotia. But, since this is uncertain, both on account of the changeability and inconstancy of our fortunes and on account of my old age besides, I am sending you, in accordance with your request, the arguments concerning an infinite number of worlds. And you have enjoyed good fortune in the matter; for, before your letter arrived, Theodoridas of Lindus, a member of our school not unknown to you, who is still a novice in philosophy, was dealing with the same doctrine. And this doctrine came to be better articulated as a result of being turned over between the two of us face to face; for our agreements and disagreements with one another, and also our questionings, rendered the inquiry into the object of our search more precise. I am therefore sending you that dialogue, Antipater, so that you may be in the same position as if you yourself were present, like Theodoridas, agreeing about some matters and making further inquiries in cases where you had doubts. The dialogue began something like this: «Diogenes,» said Theodoridas, «that the [doctrine laid down] by Epicurus on an infinite number of worlds is true [I am confident], as [if] Epicurus

Related Issues:

1. Deer Tracks as example of natural creation of roads - larger animals in larger herds create larger paths
2. Paths of least resistance created over time by past experiences - inanimate as well? Patterns in flows of water? (eddies? ripples? vortexes? waves?)
3. Repeated exposure to images creates pathways of thought just like repeated vision creates afterimage?
4. Fractals - Fibonacci sequences

5. Pleasure as related to smooth motion as held by Cyreniacs - Did Democritus also hold this? Did Epicurus?
-

Post by “Cassius” of July 16, 2024 at 11:47 AM

Editing is coming along -- this should be out no later than tomorrow - hopefully sooner.

In the meantime, this part of section 19 (book one) is clearly one of the sections that is most

standing of the nature of a being both blessed and the sum of things everything
50 eternal. Moreover there is the supremely potent principle of infinity, which claims the closest and most careful study; we must understand that it has the following property, that in the sum of things everything has its exact match and counterpart. This property is termed by Epicurus *isonomia*, or the principle of uniform distribution. From this principle it follows that if the whole number of mortals be so many, there must exist no less a number of immortals, and if the causes of destruction are beyond count, the causes of conservation also are bound to be infinite.

Here is Rackham's Latin:

adfluat, cum maximis voluptatibus in eas imagines mentem intentam infixamque nostram intellegentiam 50 capere quae sit et beata natura et aeterna. Summa vero vis infinitatis et magna ac diligenti contemplatione dignissima est, in qua intellegi necesse est eam esse naturam ut omnia omnibus paribus paria respondeant. Hanc *ἰσονομίαν* appellat Epicurus, id est aequabilem tributionem. Ex hac igitur illud efficitur, si mortalium tanta multitudo sit, esse immortalium non minorem, et si quae interimant innumerabilia sint, etiam ea quae conservent infinita esse debere.

It looks to me like that is a rendering of a section of "ut omnia omnibus paribus paria respondeat," so Rackham's "match and counterpart" is as open to question as is Yonge's "everything in it is made to correspond completely to some other answering part." In this instance Yonge's "answering" may be a better rendering of "respondeant" than Rackham's "exact match or counterpart." The decision we make on what words to use is going to greatly influence one's conclusion on what is being said. What would seem most likely for an Epicurean to be thinking in terms of "answering" or "corresponding?" We know the basics of Epicurean physics and canonics which cannot be violated in answering the question, so what are the possibilities?

This is a line at which we'll want to train our best big guns of Latin translation expertise!

Post by "Cassius" of July 16, 2024 at 9:15 PM

Episode 237 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. This week we explore isonomia and the implications of infinity!

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/60713648>

Post by "Cassius" of July 16, 2024 at 9:43 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3961-episode-237-cicero-s-otnotg-12-isonomia-and-the-implications-of-infinity/>

Ok this one is up. Note that we recorded this Sunday morning, before many of our recent conversations on isonomia and infinity, but I think the result is pretty current with recent postings.

Post by “Don” of July 17, 2024 at 9:19 AM

I found the quote from the letter to Pythocles very interesting. "But above all give yourself up to the study of first principles (τὴν τῶν ἀρχῶν) and of infinity (ἄπειρία)..."

Ἄπειρος in its various forms appears around 40 times in Diogenes Laertius book 10, with many in Epicurus's writings.

Ἀρχή about two dozen times.

My little project will be to list those out when I get a chance to see how Ἄπειρος gets used and translated... Since Epicurus appears to call us to study these ideas.

I find it interesting that ἀρχή is a limit, the beginnings or foundations, and ἄπειρος is something without limits.

Post by “Cassius” of July 17, 2024 at 9:41 AM

Thank you Don! That will give us a foundation for dealing with the Latin references, because just the differences between Yonge and Rackham we've seen already indicate that there's a lot of speculation going on about the implications.

The whole issue of limits and absence of limits seems fundamental to everything and carry over from physics to ethics and probably to canonics as well. I would think that Lucretius and people writing in the Latin period understood what was going on and are largely reliable, but the further away we get from people who had access to the wider set of texts the less I would trust the translations.

This is going to feed also into the differences in the way "ut omnia omnibus paribus paria respondeat," is viewed by Rackham as "match and counterpart," vs. Yonge's "everything in it is made to correspond completely to some other answering part."

And on the issue of whether infinity leads to an infinite number of identical things, or simply an infinite number of "like" things, we'll need to scrutinize the words referencing the concept of "like" and "unlike."

Post by “Kalosyni” of July 17, 2024 at 10:24 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

My little project will be to list those out when I get a chance to see how ἄπειρος gets used and translated... Since Epicurus appears to call us to study these ideas.

I find it interesting that ἀρχή is a limit, the beginnings or foundations, and ἄπειρος is something without limits.

Could this be connected with the idea of determining what is possible and what is not possible?

Also, what is in the imagination of the mind (infinity) vs. what has physical potential (that which has limits and boundaries) ?

Also, fear and anxiety arises when a person (especially a child) does not understand the nature of the physical world and starts imagining all sorts of bad things.

Just thinking about practical applications. 😊

Post by “Bryan” of July 17, 2024 at 1:12 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

"answering" may be a better rendering of "respondeant" than Rackham's "exact match or counterpart.

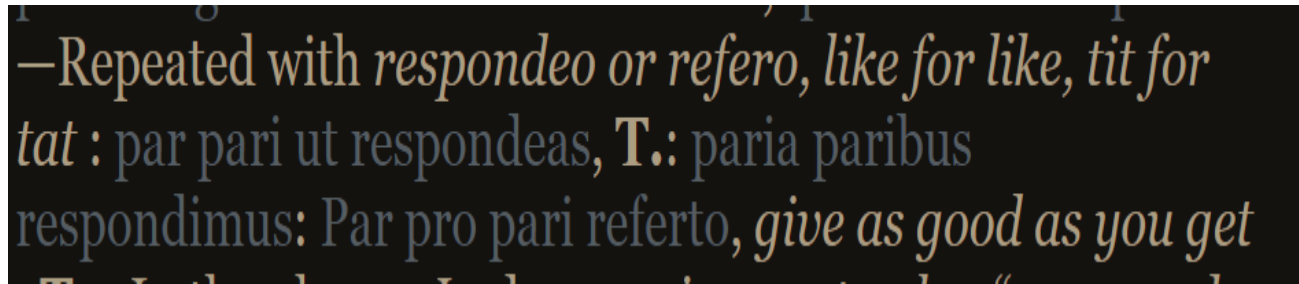
For rēspondēō, we have:

- To promise a thing in return for something else; to offer or present in return.
- To answer, reply, respond (to a question or any statement, friendly or hostile).
- To give an opinion, advice, decision, response (lawyers, priests, oracles).

- To appear before a tribunal, to answer an accusation, meet a charge.
- To answer to; to meet, agree, accord, or correspond with a thing.
- To return, make a return, yield.

"Exact match or counterpart" does seem interpretive. "*Omnia omnibus paribus paria respondeant*" is almost poetic, we have literally "all things correspond as equals to all equal things."

This would not have been so wordy to the Roman ear, as the double use of paria/par is common for *rēspōndēō*:



"give as good as you get"

"return like for like"

4. Par pari respondere, or par pro pari referre, to return like for like, of a repartee: “par pari respondet,” Plaut. Truc. 5, 47; id. Merc. 3, 4, 44; id. Pers. 2, 2, 11; cf.: “paria paribus respondimus,” Cic. Att. 6, 1, 23: “ut sit unde par pari respondeatur,” id. ib. 16, 7, 6: “par pro pari referto, quod eam mordeat,” Ter. Eun. 3, 1, 55 Fleck., Umpfenb., cited ap. Cic. Fam. 1, 9, 19 (Bentl. ex conject. par, pari; cf. Krebs, Antibarbarb. p. 281, ed. 5).—

Omnia omnibus paribus paria respondeant = Everything alike corresponds to everything alike. Hard to argue against, but not packed with meaning. If tautology is ever appropriate, I suppose it would be for isonomía.

Post by “Cassius” of July 17, 2024 at 2:01 PM

Thank you Bryan!

And in regard to Kalosyni's

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Just thinking about practical applications. 😊

I have two comments at the moment:

1 - ALL of these discussions lead to practical conclusions! 😊

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3961-episode-237-cicero-s-otnotg-12-isonomia-and-the-implications-of-infinity/>

and

2 - Since you asked for it, I will raise the stakes:

- Is it not possible that Epicurus was considering his "infinity of mortals is matched by an infinity of non-mortals" (to the extent that is a satisfactory translation) as relevant to comparison of pleasures?

In other words, if all things that exist have an infinite number of counterparts, and infinity of x is the same number as an infinity of y -- does that not have relevance to consideration of "complete" or "pure" pleasure, in the sense that an infinity of the pleasure of eating watermelon is the equivalent of an infinity of being King of Persia.

[PD09](#) relevant here perhaps?

These are quick rough thoughts that will need a lot of sharpening, but in the end I will be surprised if there is NOT an implication of the principles of infinity to the principles of pleasure.

Might this not partially explain why it would be so clear to Epicurus that "total absence of pain" equals "the highest pleasure"?