

From The "Golden Mean" to the "Summum Bonum" - Useful or Deceptive Frames of Reference?

Post by "Cassius" of February 16, 2022 at 1:21 PM

This thought just occurs to me:

Do we think that Cicero's Torquatus was mistaken to frame the discussion the way he did? If so, do we think;

- 1) Cicero intentionally or negligently misrepresents the Epicurean argument by doing this?
- 2) Cicero was accurately reporting the way Epicureans were arguing in 50 BC?

I ask that because if we begin to have a consensus that this form of argument was an error in talking to Cicero (who certainly did not agree with Epicurean definitions) then we might profit from figuring out how this happened.

And in that regard I have more "immortal" words from Norman DeWitt on Cicero's presentation of Epicurean ethics: "I do not believe he could have misrepresented the truth so successfully had he not understood it so completely." (Note - this isn't necessary a reference to this part of Torquatus, but to Cicero's commentary on Epicurus in general.)

MARY N. PORTER PACKER. Cicero's Presentation of Epicurean Ethics. New York, The Columbia University Press, 1938. Pp. 127. Columbia Diss.

This study is most commendable. It is clearly written and well printed, acutely reasoned and amply documented. The treatment confines itself to *De Finibus* I-II and is divided into two chapters: 1. Cicero's Presentation of Epicurean Philosophy in *De Finibus* I. 2. Cicero's Critique of Epicurean Philosophy, Presented in *De Finibus* I and II. Each chapter concludes with a summary, and the text of Epicurus himself is abundantly cited. The conclusion is that Cicero failed "to understand Epicureanism as a consistently unified philosophy (p. 81)," but is acquitted of having been "deliberately and intentionally unfair (p. 119)."

It is only to this acquittal that I take exception. Every debater has the choice of arguing to reveal the truth in its entirety or of arguing to make points. The former method is adapted to the Supreme Court, the latter to a trial by jury. Cicero was a crafty old trial lawyer and he deliberately argued to make points, because he was pleading before a reading audience, which functions like a jury, and his shrewd legal mind had long discerned the vulnerability of Epicureanism before this style of attack. His attitude was that of William J. Bryan toward biological evolution, and his pleadings are comparable to a Scopes trial, but I do not believe he could have misrepresented the truth so successfully had he not understood it completely. In the Scopes trial, the crafty old lawyer was on the opposite side—Clarence Darrow.

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