

Addressing Cicero's Argument That Epicurean Philosophy Cannot Be Spoken In The Senate

Post by "Cassius" of June 13, 2022 at 1:48 PM

This is spurred by the new book ""Epicureans In Rome" linked by Joshua here: ["Lucretius on the Size of the Sun", by T.H.M. Gellar-Goad](#)

Chapter Two of that Book is: "Sint Ista Graecorum: How to be an Epicurean in Late Republican Rome - Evidence from Cicero's On Ends" and the writer (Geert Roskam) says:

Quote

"In the second book of On Ends, Cicero blames Torquatus for an embarrassing inconsistency. Whereas Torquatus claims to do everything for the sake of pleasure, he cannot possibly maintain this stance while addressing the senate (2.74 - 77). On such occasions, he prefers to dwell on duty, fair-dealing, moral worth and so on; in short, to switch to the vocabulary of the Stoics and Peripatetics. And not without reason, for to be honest about his real political motivations when talking to the senators would almost surely ruin his later political career (□.□□). And thus, Cicero concludes, Torquatus is forced to employ artificial language in order to conceal what he really thinks, or "change his opinions like his clothes," confining his true convictions to a small circle of intimate friends and defending counterfeit opinions in public (□.□□) this, to my mind, is one of the strongest arguments in Book □ of On Ends. Cicero knew very well what kind of discourse was usually heard in the Roman senate and saw an obvious contrast with Torquatus' Epicurean ideals. The whole passage is characterized by a strong rhetorical tone, but also makes a valid philosophical point, on the basis of the specifically Roman political context. What could Torquatus say in reply to this challenge? (emphasis added)

Roskom goes on and gives some discussion that takes the edge off this, but I don't think we need to admit that this is even a strong argument I think it is in fact easy to recast stand Stoic calls to "honor" and "duty" and "virtue" into the framework of "love of country" and "love of friends" and "the pleasures that we value in our community" in ways that make clear the ultimate argument that everything we value stems from the pleasure that it brings us.

Roskom also seems to fault Torquatus for not having much to say on this point, but I think in all issues like that we have to go first to the point that this Torquatus and this conversation were not real, and we would not expect a lawyer/advocate like Cicero to "play fair" and give his opponent the last and best word.

I think it would be easy and fun as an exercise to take most any of Cicero's famous speeches to the Senate (and the Phillipics come to my mind first) and recast / rewrite them as if Cicero were an Epicurean and if he were using Epicurus' arguments in the Senate.

When I can find the time I will take one of these Phillipics and rewrite it, asking for the same things Cicero was asking for from the Senate, but writing it in Epicurean terms:

[M. Tullius Cicero, Orations, The fourteen orations against Marcus Antonius \(Philippics\), THE FOURTEEN ORATIONS OF M. T. CICERO AGAINST MARCUS ANTONIUS, CALLED PHILIPPICS., section 1](#)