

Episode 205 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 13 - Addressing Cicero's Contentions On The Nature of Morality

Post by "Joshua" of December 10, 2023 at 2:50 AM

Three classes of "meritorious qualities";

- **Dutifulness;** "And this same reason has given man a yearning for his fellow men, and an agreement with them based on nature and language and intercourse, so that starting from affection for those of his own household and his own kin, he gradually takes wider range and connects himself by fellowship first with his countrymen, then with the whole human race, and, as Plato wrote to Archytas, bears in mind that he was not born for himself alone, but for his fatherland and his kindred, so that only a slight part of his existence remains for himself."
- **Truthfulness;** "And seeing that nature again has implanted in man a passion for gazing upon the truth, as is seen very clearly when, being free from anxieties, we long to know even what takes place in the sky; so led on by these instincts we love all forms of truth, I mean all things trustworthy, candid and consistent, while we hate things unsound, insincere and deceptive, for instance cheating, perjury, spite, injustice."
- **Indomitability;** "Reason again brings with it a rich and splendid spirit, suited to command rather than obedience, regarding all that may happen to man as not only enduring, but even inconsiderable, a certain lofty and exalted spirit, which fears nothing, bows to none, and is ever unconquerable."

And a fourth quality;

- **Orderliness;** "And now that we have marked out these three classes of things moral, there follows a fourth endowed with the same loveliness and dependent on the other three; in this is comprised the spirit of orderliness and self-control."

Bear in mind Cicero's project here; as he stated at the top of page 49, it is his opinion "that if I shew there is something moral, which is essentially desirable by reason of its inherent qualities and for its own sake, all the doctrines of your school are overthrown."

In his *Republic*, Cicero gives us a fuller description of this Natural Law, and the foundation of his morality;

Quote

There is in fact a true law - namely, right reason - which is in accordance with nature,

applies to all men, and is unchangeable and eternal. By its commands this law summons men

to the performance of their duties; by its prohibitions it restrains them from doing wrong. Its

commands and prohibitions always influence good men, but are without effect upon the bad. To

invalidate this law by human legislation is never morally right, nor is it permissible ever to

restrict its operation , and to annul it wholly is impossible. Neither the senate nor the people

can absolve us from our obligation to obey this law, and it requires no Sextus Aelius to expound

and interpret it. It will not lay down one rule at Rome and another at Athens, nor will it be

one rule to-day and another tomorrow. But there will be one law, eternal and

unchangeable, binding at all times upon all peoples; and there will be, as it were, one common

master and ruler of men, namely God, who is the author of this law, its interpreter, and its

sponsor. The man who will not obey it will abandon his better self, and, in denying the true

nature of a man, will thereby suffer the severest of penalties, though he has escaped all the other

consequences which men call punishments. (Cicero, THE REPUBLIC, II, 22.)

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Lucretius' extensive treatment of early human history paints a very different picture; (Ian Johnston translation)

Quote

Then, once they had acquired huts, hides, and fire

and woman linked up with man and moved

into one [home and] learned [marriage customs],
and they saw themselves creating offspring,
at that point the human race first began
to soften. Fire meant their freezing limbs
could no longer tolerate the cold so well
under heaven's roof, sexual habits made
their strength diminish, and children soon
shattered the stern character of parents
with their endearing charms. And then neighbours
began to join in mutual agreements,
seeking not to harm each other or be harmed,
and they entrusted children and the race
of women to the care of all, pointing out
with vocal sounds, gestures, and broken words
that it was right for all to have pity
on the weak. And though they could not create
universal harmony, nonetheless,
large numbers would faithfully keep their word,
or else the human race would, even then,
have been entirely killed off, and breeding
could not have kept up their generations
to this very day.

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And finally, Lucretius' response to the claim that the gods will punish those who violate their law;

Quote

O unhappy race of men,
when they ascribed such actions to the gods
and added to them bitter rage! What sorrows
they then made for themselves, what wounds for us,
what weeping for our children yet to come!

There is no piety in being seen
time and again turning towards a stone
with one's head covered and approaching close
to every altar, and hurling oneself
prostrate on the ground, stretching out one's palms
before gods' shrines, or spreading lots of blood
from four-footed beasts on altars, or piling
sacred pledges onto sacred pledges,
but rather in being able to perceive
all things with one's mind at peace.

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