

Episode 215 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 22 - The Epicurean View Of Happiness

Post by "Cassius" of February 17, 2024 at 5:19 PM

Considering this from Diogenes of Oinoanda in the same context, when he says "But since, as I say, the issue is not «what is the means of happiness?» but «what is happiness and what is the ultimate goal of our nature?», I say both now and always, shouting out loudly to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that pleasure is the end of the best mode of life, while the virtues, which are inopportunately messed about by these people (being transferred from the place of the means to that of the end), are in no way an end, but the means to the end," It seems legitimate to ask whether "happiness" is really that much different from a "virtue" such as "wisdom" and whether it constitutes anything more than an ongoing assessment of your personal mix of pleasures and pains, in which the mix of pleasure is always subject to increase or decrease but which should never go less than 50% (in the sense that the wise man always has more reason for joy than vexation, according to Torquatus). And if so the complete pleasure of the gods hardly seems different than human pleasure in anything more than that for the gods they have the confident expectation that a 100% life of pleasure will continue without end, while ours comes to an end with death.

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... [the latter] being as malicious as the former.

I shall discuss folly shortly, the virtues and pleasure now.

If, gentlemen, the point at issue between these people and us involved inquiry into «what is the means of happiness?» and they wanted to say «the virtues» (which would actually be true), it would be unnecessary to take any other step than to agree with them about this, without more ado. But since, as I say, the issue is not «what is the means of happiness?» but «what is happiness and what is the ultimate goal of our nature?», I say both now and always, shouting out loudly to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that pleasure is the end of the best mode of life, while the virtues, which are inopportunately messed about by these people (being transferred from the place of the means to that of the end), are in no way an end, but the means to the end.

Let us therefore now state that this is true, making it our starting-point.

Suppose, then, someone were to ask someone, though it is a naive question, «who is it whom these virtues benefit?», obviously the answer will be «man.» The virtues certainly do not make provision for these birds flying past, enabling them to fly well, or for each of the other animals: they do not desert the nature with which they live and by which they have been engendered; rather it is for the sake of this nature that the virtues do everything and exist.