

Perspectives On "Proving" That Pleasure is "The Good"

Post by "Cassius" of December 22, 2022 at 2:23 PM

[Quote from Todd](#)

After reading Torquatus (I will admit that I didn't get all the way through), I didn't get the impression that Cicero was cleverly misleading his readers. OTOH, maybe he was just very good at it!

You may not have seen this quote from a review written by Norman Dewitt:

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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[Quote from Todd](#)

But this strikes me as a rather bland, (somewhat) non-controversial flavor of Epicureanism. I would like to be able to make stronger claims, and to do that, you have

to be very clear on what words actually mean and how concepts relate. Again, this is possibly a personal failing of mine.

Certainly you're not the only one. And at least to some point, it surely isn't a failing. I do think there is a question however whether at some point the quest becomes counterproductive, and that's what Epicurus seems to have been warning against. I doubt that we've reached that point in this discussion, but it's good to keep in mind that at some point we might.