

Episode 194 - The Epicurean Arguments In Cicero's On Ends - Book One - Part 04

Post by "Cassius" of October 3, 2023 at 1:54 AM

I will eventually set this up as a different topic but for the time being I think this is the first time we have addressed this, so I will keep it here. If Epicurus rejected Aristotelian essentialism as much as he rejected Plato's idealism, then it may be that Epicurus objected to definitions to the extent that they rely on purported essences. It seems there may be much more to this issue than what Torquatus briefly summarized as to Epicurus' reliance on analogizing the proof that pleasure is desirable to "look there / snow is white " -

From Wikipedia under "Definition" -

In classical thought, a definition was taken to be a statement of the essence of a thing. [Aristotle](#) had it that an object's essential attributes form its "essential nature", and that a definition of the object must include these essential attributes.[\[11\]](#)

The idea that a definition should state the essence of a thing led to the distinction between *nominal* and *real* essence—a distinction originating with Aristotle. In the [Posterior Analytics](#),[\[12\]](#) he says that the meaning of a made-up name can be known (he gives the example "goat stag") without knowing what he calls the "essential nature" of the thing that the name would denote (if there were such a thing). This led medieval logicians to distinguish between what they called the *quid nominis*, or the "whatness of the name", and the underlying nature common to all the things it names, which they called the *quid rei*, or the "whatness of the thing".[\[13\]](#) The name "[hobbit](#)", for example, is perfectly meaningful. It has a *quid nominis*, but one could not know the real nature of hobbits, and so the *quid rei* of hobbits cannot be known. By contrast, the name "man" denotes real things (men) that have a certain *quid rei*. The meaning of a name is distinct from the nature that a thing must have in order that the name apply to it.

This leads to a corresponding distinction between *nominal* and *real* definitions. A nominal definition is the definition explaining what a word means (i.e., which says what the "nominal essence" is), and is definition in the classical sense as given above. A real definition, by contrast, is one expressing the real nature or *quid rei* of the thing.

This preoccupation with essence dissipated in much of modern philosophy. [Analytic philosophy](#), in particular, is critical of attempts to elucidate the essence of a thing. [Russell](#) described essence as "a hopelessly muddle-headed notion".[\[14\]](#)

More recently [Kripke's](#) formalisation of [possible world](#) semantics in [modal logic](#) led to a new approach to [essentialism](#). Insofar as the essential properties of a thing are *necessary* to it, they are those things that it possesses in all possible worlds. Kripke refers to names used in this way

as [rigid designators](#).

Also:

The **Posterior Analytics** ([Greek](#): Ἀναλυτικὰ Ὑστερα; [Latin](#): *Analytica Posteriora*) is a text from [Aristotle's Organon](#) that deals with [demonstration](#), [definition](#), and [scientific knowledge](#). The demonstration is distinguished as a [syllogism](#) *productive of scientific knowledge*, while the definition marked as *the statement of a thing's nature, ... a statement of the meaning of the name, or of an equivalent nominal formula*