

Episode 201 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 09

Post by “Godfrey” of November 12, 2023 at 1:56 AM

I've only had a chance to read IX, but to my mind, all of the arguments are spurious.

- Classifying desires as three or as two, one of which has two parts: the latter may be important if you're concerned with a system of classification, but the former is, to me, more useful. Cicero is only making an argument about form, not about substance.

- His principal technique seems to be to set up and tear down a straw man. He defines something in a way that has little relation to the idea being examined, then proceeds to tear apart this definition of the idea.

- Cicero defines desire very narrowly and negatively, and completely misses the point that Epicurus has a deeper understanding of desire than he, Cicero, does. (The same as with pleasure.) Understanding that desire isn't an evil to be banished was a major innovation of Epicurus', and his classifications are key to that. Cicero, at least to this point, tries to totally eliminate that by centering his argument on the outmoded (or simply wrong) definition of desire, which lumps all desires into what are correctly considered vain desires. By doing this, he's completely missing out on the nuanced and practical conception of desires in Epicurus' philosophy.

- Cicero was part of the privileged class, and he would use any means to preserve that distinction. He may have been an effective lawyer, but he is an extremely shallow and narrow minded philosopher. In his writings his main project seems to be to tear down any ideas foreign to his own, rather than to honestly and deeply examine such ideas. To this point in this passage he's done just that, and reads to me like a buffoon. But, unlike him, I'll try to keep an open mind going forward. 😊