

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

Post by "Joshua" of November 12, 2023 at 1:06 PM

I made the point that demanding that desire be pulled up by the roots to prevent profligacy would be like demanding that public roads should be pulled out of their beds to prevent highway robbery. It occurs to me now that Robert Bolt's play *A Man for All Seasons* has an exchange that bears on this analogy; that the law stands in the way of vengeance is not an argument against the law, it is an argument against vengeance.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PDBiLT3LASK>

That desire can lead to profligacy is not an argument against desire, it is an argument against profligacy. Epicurus' advice to moderate desire is exactly what is needed here, but Cicero makes him out to be a patron of profligates unless he condemns desire full stop. This is nothing other than fundamentalism. Only a lunatic would demand that roads be destroyed if they provide aid and comfort to vagabonds--a sensible person will weigh that risk against going roadless through thick cover, but what is this if not the vagabond's home turf? He will have us denounce the name of desire, of pleasure, and adopt the speech of his "illustrious men"--but are vagabonds and profligates incapable of putting on such airs? *And thus I clothe my naked villainy/ With odd old ends stol'n out of holy writ;/ And seem a saint, when most I play the devil.* Will they not crouch behind the form of virtue, even behind the name of the gods themselves? Will Cicero throw away arms if they are carried also by deserters? Medicine, if peddled also by quacks? This is not philosophy, this is not wisdom--this is the petulance of a child threatening to take their ball and go home. Yet Cicero counsels even this.

Nature has given us pleasure as the *dux vitae*, the guide of life. To spurn this gift for the virtues held to be noble by the crowd would be to put forth on water not with a star to direct our course, but with mere smoke of public opinion, that falls silent as soon as we are out of earshot from the shore. My pilot in these matters is not so lacking in sense as to succumb to that line. We will cleave to that which announces itself to our natures to be good, and not merely that which announces itself for applause in the forum or the marketplace.