

# Episode 202 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 10 - The Animality Argument

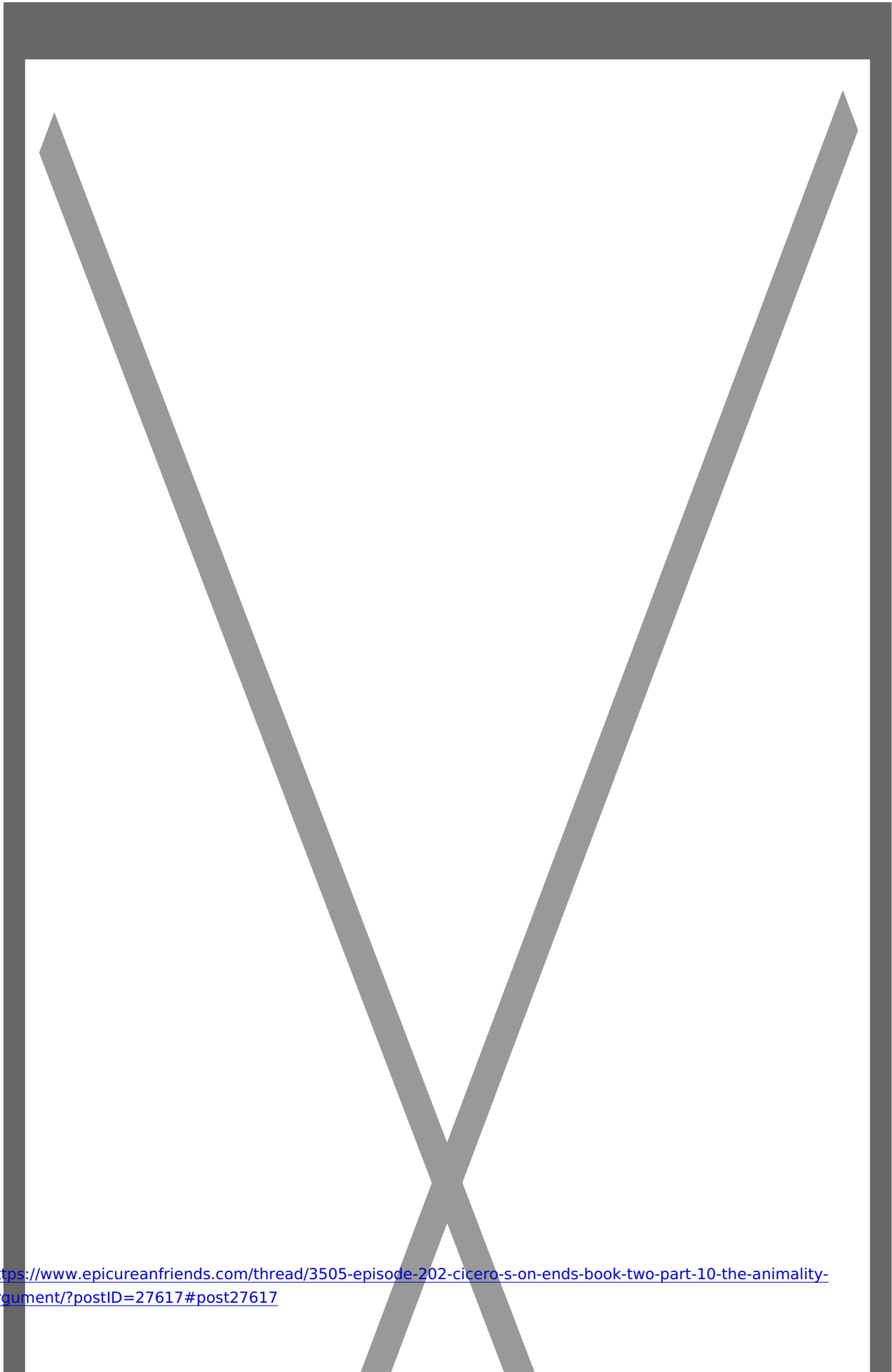
Post by “Cassius” of November 21, 2023 at 6:26 AM

Something else that will play into this episode is that Cicero introduces Carneades as having a significant position on the relationship of pleasure and virtue.

Carneades' name has been mentioned here on the forum superficially for a long time, because Boris [Nikolsky](#) argues that Carneades' division of types of pleasure likely influenced Cicero's argument. We don't get into it too far here, but Cicero mentions that Carneades opposed the Stoics. Here Cicero seems to say that Carneades argued in favor of a dual good of both pleasure and virtue, but when you read the Wikipedia article and see how much of a skeptic Carneades was, it seems unlikely that he ultimately took a position on anything. If we can presume that Cicero was taking cues from Carneades, and it seems so after comparing this Wikipedia article to what Cicero says his own position is, then this is additional reason to go back and pick up [Nikolsky](#)'s commentary on exactly what Cicero might have picked up.

For the moment I will just cite the Wikipedia article but if anyone has any insight into Carneades that might be helpful for us unwinding some of the material in this episode.

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<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3505-episode-202-cicero-s-on-ends-book-two-part-10-the-animality-argument/?postID=27617#post27617>

[Carneades - Wikipedia](#)

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Carneades ([/kɑːrˈniːədiːz/](#); [Greek](#): Καρνεάδης, Karneadēs, "of [Carnea](#)"; 214/3–129/8 BC<sup>[2]</sup>) was a [Greek](#) philosopher,<sup>[3]</sup> perhaps the most prominent head of the [Skeptical Academy](#) in ancient Greece.<sup>[3]</sup> He was born in [Cyrene](#).<sup>[4]</sup> By the year 159 BC,<sup>[citation needed]</sup> he had begun to attack many previous [dogmatic](#) doctrines, especially [Stoicism](#) and even the [Epicureans](#),<sup>[5]</sup> whom previous skeptics had spared.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

As [scholarch](#) (leader) of the [Academy](#), he was one of three philosophers sent to [Rome](#) in 155 BC where his lectures on the uncertainty of [justice](#) caused consternation among leading politicians.<sup>[6]</sup><sup>[7]</sup><sup>[8]</sup> He left no writings.<sup>[9]</sup> Many of his opinions are known only via his successor [Clitomachus](#).<sup>[10]</sup> He seems to have doubted the ability not just of the [senses](#) but of [reason](#) too in acquiring [truth](#). His skepticism was, however, moderated by the belief that we can, nevertheless, ascertain probabilities (not in the sense of statistical probability, but in the sense of persuasiveness)<sup>[11]</sup> of truth, to enable us to act.<sup>[12]</sup>

Carneades, the son of Epicomus or Philokomus, was born at [Cyrene](#), [North Africa](#) in 214/213 BC. He migrated early to [Athens](#). There he attended the lectures of the [Stoics](#), learning their logic from [Diogenes of Babylon](#) and studying the works of [Chrysippus](#). He subsequently focused his efforts on refuting the Stoics, attaching himself to the [Platonic Academy](#), which had suffered from the attacks of the Stoics. On the death of [Hegesinus of Pergamon](#), he was chosen [scholarch](#) (head) of the Academy. His great eloquence and skill in argument revived the glories of the Academic Skeptics. He asserted nothing (not even that nothing can be asserted), and carried on a vigorous argument against every [dogma](#) maintained by other sects.

In the year 155 BC, when he was fifty-eight years old, he was chosen with the Stoic [Diogenes of Babylon](#) and the [Peripatetic Critolaus](#) to go as ambassadors to [Rome](#) to deprecate the fine of 500 talents which had been imposed on the Athenians for the destruction of [Oropus](#). During his stay at Rome, he attracted great notice from his eloquent speeches on philosophical subjects. It was here that, in the presence of [Cato the Elder](#), he delivered his several orations on [justice](#). The first oration was in commendation of the [virtue](#) of [Roman justice](#). The next day he delivered the second oration, in which he refuted all the arguments he had made the day before. He persuasively attempted to prove that justice was inevitably problematic, and not a given when it came to virtue, but merely a compact device deemed necessary for the maintenance of a well-ordered society. This oration shocked Cato. Recognizing the potential danger of Carneades' arguments, Cato moved the [Roman Senate](#) to send Carneades back to Athens to prevent Roman youth from being exposed to a re-examining of Roman doctrines. Carneades lived twenty-seven years after this at [Athens](#).

Carneades is known as an [Academic Skeptic](#). Academic Skeptics (so called because this was the type of skepticism taught in [Plato's Academy](#) in [Athens](#)) hold that [all knowledge is impossible](#), except for the knowledge that all other knowledge is impossible.

Carneades left no writings, and all that is known of his lectures is derived from his intimate friend and pupil, [Clitomachus](#); but so true was he to his own principles of withholding assent, that Clitomachus confesses he never could ascertain what his master really thought on any subject.[\[citation needed\]](#) In [ethics](#), which more particularly were the subject of his long and laborious study, he seems to have denied the conformity of the moral ideas with nature. This he particularly insisted on in the second oration on [Justice](#), in which he manifestly wished to convey his own notions on the subject; and he there maintains that ideas of justice are not derived from nature, but that they are purely artificial for purposes of expediency.[\[citation needed\]](#)

All this, however, was nothing but the special application of his general theory, that people did not possess, and never could possess, any criterion of [truth](#).

Carneades argued that, if there were a criterion, it must exist either in [reason](#) (logos), or [sensation](#) (aisthêsis), or [conception](#) ([phantasia](#)). But then reason itself depends on conception, and this again on sensation; and we have no means of judging whether our sensations are true or false, whether they correspond to the objects that produce them, or carry wrong impressions to the mind, producing false conceptions and ideas, and leading reason also into error. Therefore, sensation, conception, and reason, are alike disqualified for being the criterion of truth.[\[citation needed\]](#)

But after all, people must live and act, and must have some rule of [practical life](#); therefore, although it is impossible to pronounce anything as absolutely true, we may yet establish probabilities of various degrees. For, although we cannot say that any given conception or sensation is in itself true, yet some sensations appear to us more true than others, and we must be guided by that which seems the most true. Again, sensations are not single, but generally combined with others, which either confirm or contradict them; and the greater this combination the greater is the probability of that being true which the rest combine to confirm; and the case in which the greatest number of conceptions, each in themselves apparently most true, should combine to affirm that which also in itself appears most true, would present to Carneades the highest probability, and his nearest approach to truth.[\[17\]](#)