

Episode 206 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 14 - More On The Nature of Morality

Post by "Cassius" of December 15, 2023 at 9:12 AM

Welcome to Episode 206 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world. Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

This week we continue our discussion of Book Two of Cicero's On Ends, which is largely devoted Cicero's attack on Epicurean Philosophy. Going through this book gives us the opportunity to review those attacks, take them apart, and respond to them as an ancient Epicurean might have done, and much more fully than Cicero allowed Torquatus, his Epicurean spokesman, to do.

Follow along with us here: [Cicero's On Ends - Complete Reid Edition](#). Check any typos or other questions against the original PDF which can be found [here](#).

This week we move through Section XV and into XVI, starting roughly here:

Do you not see how extensive is this disagreement? A famous philosopher, by whom not only Greece and Italy, but even all foreign nations have been thrown into excitement, declares that he does not understand what morality means, if it does not lie in pleasure, unless perhaps it be some qualities extolled by the babble of the crowd. But I hold such qualities to be often actually immoral, and if at any time they be not immoral, they are then not immoral when the crowd extols what is essentially in its own nature right and deserves to be extolled; yet it is not called moral for the reason that it is applauded by many men, but because it is of such a nature that even if men knew nothing -about it, or had even been struck with dumbness, it would deserve to be extolled for its inherent loveliness and beauty. So again, yielding to nature, which cannot be withstood, he makes in another passage the statement which you also put forward a little while ago, that an agreeable life is not possible, unless it be also a moral life. What does he now mean by moral? The same that he means by agreeable? So this is it, that a moral life is not possible, unless it be also a moral life? Or, unless it accord with the talk of the multitude? He declares then that without this he cannot live agreeably? What is more immoral than that the life of a wise man should depend on the conversation of those who are no wise men? What is it then that in this passage he understands by moral? Assuredly nothing but what can with justice be extolled in and for itself. Since if it be extolled for the pleasure it brings, what kind of merit is that which can be bought in the meat- market? Seeing that he assigns such a place to morality

as to declare that without it an agreeable life is impossible, he is not the man to adopt the kind of morality which depends on the multitude, and to declare that without that an agreeable life is an impossibility, or to understand anything else to be moral except what is right in itself and worthy of eulogy for its own sake, in its own essence, unaided, and by its own constitution.

XVI. So, Torquatus, when you stated how Epicurus cries aloud that an agreeable life is not possible, unless it be a moral, a wise, and a just life, you yourself seemed to me to be uttering a vaunt. Such energy was breathed into your words by the grandeur of those objects which your words represented, that you seemed to grow taller, and sometimes ceased your walk, and gazing at us almost deposed as a witness that morality and justice are sometimes eulogized by Epicurus. How well it became you to take these words on your lips, for if they were never uttered by philosophers, we should not care to have any philosophy at all! It is from a passion for those phrases which are very seldom employed by Epicurus, wisdom, I mean, courage, justice, temperance, that men of preeminent ability have devoted themselves to the pursuit of philosophy. Our eyesight, says Plato, is the keenest sense we have, yet it does not enable us to descry wisdom. What passionate affection for herself would she inspire in us! Why so? Because she is so crafty that she can build the fabric of the pleasures in the most excellent manner? Why is justice praised, or whence comes this saying so hackneyed from of old, a man you may play with in the dark? This proverb, though pointed at one thing only, has this very wide application, that in all transactions we should be influenced by the character of our actions and not by the presence of witnesses. Indeed the arguments you alleged were insignificant and very weak, I mean, that unprincipled men are tortured by their own consciousness within them, and also by the fear of punishment, which they either suffer, or live in dread of suffering at some time. It is not proper to imagine your bad man as a coward or a weakling, torturing himself about any- thing he has done, and frightened at everything, but rather as one who craftily judges of everything by his interests, being keen, shrewd and hardened, so that he readily devises means for cheating without detection, without witnesses, without any accomplice. Do you think I am speaking of Lucius Tubulus ? He, having presided as praetor over the court for trying murderers, took bribes in view of trials with such openness, that in the following year Publius Scaevola, the tribune of the commons, carried a bill in the popular assembly directing an inquiry to be made into the matter. Under this bill the senate voted that the inquiry should be conducted by Gnaeus Caepio the consul; Tubulus went into exile at once, and did not venture to defend himself; the facts were indeed evident.

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