

Episode 205 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 13 - Addressing Cicero's Contentions On The Nature of Morailty

Post by "Joshua" of December 16, 2023 at 5:24 PM

As promised, I have tracked down the quote that I attributed to Cicero around the 46:30 mark. It comes from his [De Senectute](#), *On Old Age*, in a work that Cicero sent to Atticus. The main speaker of the work is Cato.

Quote

For these reasons, Scipio, my old age sits light upon me (for you said that this has been a cause of wonder to you and Laelius), and not only is not burdensome, but is even happy. And if I err in my belief that the souls of men are immortal, I gladly err, nor do I wish this error which gives me pleasure to be wrested from me while I live. But if when dead I am going to be without sensation (as *some petty philosophers* think), then I have no fear that these seers, when they are dead, will have the laugh on me!

Notice the snideness of that last remark. One of the pastimes of a certain kind of religious person is to mock the people who disagree with them with false certainty about that alleged afterlife. "Christopher Hitchens knows the truth now, and he's burning in hell!" In Cicero's hands it takes a slightly different form, prefiguring Pascal's Wager; "If Epicurus turns out to be right, he can have a good laugh at me." Obviously he cannot have that laugh, which is the whole point.

In the third century Tertullian, foreseeing the death of antiquity and the beginning of the long darkness, particularly relished the presumptive possession of this non-knowledge:

Quote

What a panorama of spectacle on that day! Which sight shall excite my wonder? Which, my laughter? Where shall I rejoice, where exult--as I see so many and so mighty kings, whose ascent to heaven used to be made known by public announcement, now along with Jupiter himself, along with the very witnesses of their ascent, groaning in the depths of darkness? Governors of provinces, too, who persecuted the name of the Lord, melting in flames fiercer than those they themselves kindled in their rage against the Christians braving them with contempt?

Whom else shall I behold? Those wise philosophers blushing before their followers as they burn together, the followers whom they taught that the world is no concern of

God's, whom they assured that either they had no souls at all or that what souls they had would never return to their former bodies? The poets also, trembling, not before the judgment seat of Rhadamanthus or of Minos, but of Christ whom they did not expect to meet.

Then will the tragic actors be worth hearing, more vocal in their own catastrophe; then the comic actors will be worth watching, more lither of limb in the fire; then the charioteer will be worth seeing, red all over on his fiery wheel; then the athletes will be worth observing, not in their gymnasiums, but thrown about by fire--unless I might not wish to look at them even then but would prefer to turn an insatiable gaze on those who vented their rage on the Lord.

"This is He," I will say, "the son of the carpenter and the harlot, the sabbath-breaker, the Samaritan who had a devil. This is He whom you purchased from Judas, this is He who was struck with reed and fist, defiled with spittle, given gall and vinegar to drink. This is He whom the disciples secretly stole away to spread the story of His resurrection, or whom the gardener removed lest his lettuces be trampled by the throng of curious idlers."

What praetor or consul or quaestor or priest with all his munificence will ever bestow on you the favor of beholding and exulting in such sights? Yet, such scenes as these are in a measure already ours by faith in the vision of the spirit. But what are those things which "eye has not seen nor ear heard and which have not entered into the heart of man"? Things of greater delight, I believe, than circus, both kinds of theater, and any stadium.