

Approaching Epicurus Through Cicero

Post by "Cassius" of April 13, 2019 at 7:12 PM

This weekend I finished a review by audiobook of Cicero's "Academic Questions / Tusculun Disputations." I know in my own case, reinforced by the material at Epicurus.net, I have always focused on "On Ends" for key Epicurean passages. Reviewing these other works reminds me that although there is not a long narrative like Torquatus gives in On Ends, there is a tremendous amount of interesting information in other parts of Cicero.

As I type this, the part that jumps out at me is that while I continue to believe that the influence of Abrahamic religions has been one of the most negative influences on the Western world, it seems clear that most, if not all, of the same pernicious influences were inherent in mainstream Greek philosophy of the Socratic / Platonic / Aristotelian / Stoic type, which Cicero seems to have correctly regarded as essentially similar in fundamental nature -- all focuses on a master creator in an essentially monotheistic view. Cicero was right to treat Epicurus as a black sheep among the Greek philosophers, and it's a travesty that modern commentators equate him with the Stoics.

Cicero seems to me to be maybe the best source material for really understanding how fundamental a revolution Epicurus was promoting. Cicero treated with hostility, but considered Epicurus as a major rival, if not quite on par with the Socratic mainstream. Since the others largely agreed with each other, Cicero was constantly comparing and contrasting the mainstream view of virtue, fate, divinity, epistemology, etc., against the Epicurean view.

There's a tremendous amount of good information to be dug out of his works beyond On Ends and On The Nature of the Gods. I am going to devote as much time as I can to working through that and posting quotes that we don't normally discuss here. The text I am working from is the link below:

<https://archive.org/details/academicquestio00cice/page/n5>