

Is A Fish Dinner A Better Prescription For Pain Than a Treatise of Socrates?

Post by "Cassius" of April 25, 2019 at 7:15 AM

I am afraid the most charitable thing that can be said about Cicero is that he was honestly convinced that the Roman Republic could not survive if everyone became Epicurean. He must have used some such justification in his own mind in order for him to misrepresent so completely the views of Atticus, his best friend, and Cassius Longinus, the person who he looked to to save the Republic from Caesar. Not to mention that he himself had attended Epicurean lectures in Athens, and would have known for himself that his arguments were viciously deceptive.

Apparently either: (1) many people in 50 BC were stupid enough to admire Epicurus and consider themselves Epicurean even though Epicurus suggested that eating fish was a good remedy for losing a loved one, or (2) Cicero was grossly misrepresenting what Epicurus taught.

Option 1 is totally implausible. Option 2 is consistent with the easily observable fact that people who claim a "higher calling" frequently feel justified in lying to pursue their goals:

1 Kings 22:20-23 King James Version (KJV) -

20 And the Lord said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramothgilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner.

21 And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him.

22 And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so.

23 Now therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee.

Important: It's not that Cicero is quoting Epicurus incorrectly - the issue is that the quotes are out of context, and not being applied in the way that an Epicurean would apply them. The quotes are very valuable, because they show us that Epicurus must have had something else in mind other than the absurd meaning that Cicero ascribes to him. And I think the best summary of that meaning is that Epicurus was pointing to FEELING, given to us by Nature, as the proper guide of life, rather than "reason" or "divine revelation" which were suggested to be the proper guides by the philosophers Cicero followed.