# Episode 190 - Cicero's On Ends - Book One - Part 01

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# Fighting Back Against the Anti-Epicureans - Part 01

*The following episode of episode 190 of the Lucretius Today podcast was released on August 28, 2023. This transcript is being republished as part of a new series of articles entitled "Fighting Back Against the Anti-Epicureans." Our podcast has already examined Cicero's "On Ends" and "On the Nature of The Gods," and we are currently reviewing "Tusculan Disputations" from an Epicurean perspective. Free subscriptions are available at all leading podcast sources. For more information, visit us at* https://www.epicureanfriends.com*.*

***Cassius***

Welcome to 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'll walk you through the Epicurean texts and we'll discuss our 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'll find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

This week we begin our discussions of books one and two of Cicero's *On Ends*, which are largely devoted to Epicurean philosophy. *On Ends* contains important criticisms of Epicurus that have set the tone for analysis of his philosophy for the last two thousand years. 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 in the book.

This week we begin with Book One. We have several sections as the book opens and before it really gets into Epicurus, where Cicero is setting out what his intent is in doing this in general. But it probably makes sense to step back and say a little bit about what we know about how this book originated, when it was written, why it was written, and the context in which was written by Cicero. I don't know that we are able to provide the depth of detail that some scholarly article could provide on that, but I think we know a little bit relevant and important for us to set the tone as we begin to discuss the book.

***Joshua***

Right, Cassius, So this book was written in forty five BC, which is the year before Caesar was assassinated and only two years before Cicero himself was killed, dedicated to Marcus Junius Brutus, and it's this interesting project at the very end of Cicero's life. I think Cassius, as you

pointed out, after the death of his daughter, maybe, to come to terms with some of the most pressing and urgent questions that you face in life. And as Cicero himself says,

> Quote
>
> What other question I ask, is there in life which we should examine with such energy as all the problems with which philosophy is concerned, but particularly the inquiry pursued in these books. What is our end, aim, and goal by what principle all our plans for good living and right action are to be guided? What it is that nature pursues as the highest object of desire, what she shuns as the utmost evil? And seeing that there is extreme disagreement among the most learned men on this subject, who would think it derogatory to the position which every man assigns to me if I investigate what is the best and truest view of every function in life?

So I'm skipping down a little bit to find that, but this sort of outlines what Cicero sees as his project in doing this, to write a Socratic dialogue, which is kind of what this book is, to explore the most fundamental questions of philosophy, and particularly the most important question, which is how should we live our lives?

***Cassius***

Yes, Cicero was going through the most difficult period of his life. Cicero was no longer in control of the Roman Republic, society was in the midst of a lot of turmoil which was going to consummate for Cicero in his own death shortly after this book is written. He is on the outs of political power, and not only has his daughter died focusing his mind on that issue, but his whole life work was in a very real sense unraveling before him, as the republic that he had fought to save in his work during the Catiline Conspiracy and in dealing with the rise of Julius Caesar was turning in a negative way for him. And as my understanding that what he chose to do during this time of sort of an enforced exile from politics is that he turned his attention to philosophy, and rather than simply do nothing, decided to compose this and a number of other philosophical works, that he presumably thought would also assist his legacy.

It's also my understanding that he did not just compose these extemporaneously from his own thoughts. He supposedly had before him textbooks of the different schools that listed out their positions, and in some cases perhaps transferred what they had to say in whole cloth into his final book. So while much of the material in here may not be directly Cicero's own views, they probably represent the best analysis that the different schools of Cicero's time had come to.

***Joshua***

Right. You know, we're kind of skipping over the first few pages of this because a lot of it is quite repetitive and somewhat self congratulatory. But one of the problems or questions that Cicero grapples with in the introduction here in writing this book is that it's quite the done thing at the time to write this kind of literature in Greek and not in Latin. And for Cicero, he wants to write in Latin. He wants there to be a sort of national literature for the Roman people.

And bear in mind, this is before Virgil writes the Aeneid, and so he's confronting this problem right here at the beginning, where he says, some people will look with disfavor on the whole pursuit of philosophy. Some do not object to it if it be laxly carried on, but think that so much devotion to it should not be given. And some people think that it should only be it dealt with in Greek.

And in fact, one of the things Lucretia says in his poem was that Latin language does not have a richness of expression that allows him to convey what he calls the dark discoveries of the Greeks, much to Cicero's irritation.

***Cassius***

Cicero is seeing this project of writing Greek philosophy in Latin to some extent, as part of his life's work, trying to build up this sort of civic nationalism within the Roman people, to help establish a consensus about philosophy that would assist the state, so to speak. And that's where we come to featuring Epicurean philosophy very early in the book as a threat to what he saw as this civic virtue that needed to be reinforced through philosophical work. Even more basic than that, as we go through the book and we are jumping around in the first couple of sections of it, we can cite to you the page numbers, line numbers, etc., out of the version we're reading, because we're going to be discussing On Ends using the James S. Read edition that was published in 1883 by Cambridge.

There are numbers of good editions out there of On Ends, but of course the eighteen eighty three edition of it is in the public domain, and we can very easily refer to everything out of the original text. So we have found in comparing some of the translations, just our personal preference has been that Read's translation tends to be both readable and literal, so we think a balance of Read's presentation makes his version the one to go through as we go through the rest of this podcast series. And as far as the series itself goes, I'm not sure how long this is going to take. It may take quite a while.

But because Cicero does focus on the key criticisms of Epicurean philosophy that these other philosophers had put together over the years, this book presents us the most important arguments *against* Epicurean philosophy, which it's important obviously to be able to deal with. If you believe that Epicurean philosophy is of benefit to you, you don't want to spend your time following a philosophy that can easily be refuted. So we've previously gone through the first section in Book One, where Torquatus presents the pro Epicurean ethics in a narrative form that is very interesting and very helpful to read. What we found when we went through Torquatus before is that while that's a great pro Epicurean set of material, there's also a lot of criticism in the rest of the books that is more difficult to easily go through.

So we've started with Torquatus to help present for people the outlines of the pro Epicurean position, and now we're doubling back, and we're going back into what Cicero had to say in his mind refute the Epicurean position. A lot of the problem in Cicero's presentation is that he does not allow Torquatus to respond to much of the criticism, and a lot of what we're going to hope to do is we go through this is we're going to address what Cicero did not allow Torquatus to

address, or did not allow Torquatus to address in full, which is probably the real issue here. Cicero skimps on the time that he gives to Torquatus In the end, after a long slashing attack on Epicurean philosophy In Book Two, Cicero ends the discussion about having Torquatus say well, you better go talk to Siro and Philodemus about that, and just ends the discussion. So that's more of our background. As we go through this, we're still in Roman numerals one, two, and three of the Read edition.

***Joshua***

Just to follow up Cassius, just on something you said relating to Cicero and the nature of his project. He says, like I said, this is somewhat self congratulatory this introduction, but he says at the beginning of section four:

> Quote
>
> For myself, however, since as I believe, amid the occupations, exertions, and dangers of the Forum, I never deserted the post to which I was appointed by the Roman people. I assuredly am bound also to strive to the best of my power, that my fellow countrymen may become more learned through my diligence zeal and industry, and while declining all serious contest with those who prefer to read Greek, if only they do read it and not merely make pretense, it is my duty to give my services to those who either desire to enjoy both literatures, or who do not greatly feel the want of the Greek, if they are provided with literature of their own.

So it's like you said, he's at the end of his life here. The senatorial faction has lost, and now he is devoting himself to the cultural approach to saving the soul of Rome.

***Cassius***

And then he ends what he has to say in that section four by saying,

> Quote
>
> For my part, I believe I have in the present work pretty nearly expounded the whole problem concerning the standards of good and evil. And in the course of the work, I have so far as I could, traced out not only my own views, but also the statements made by each separate school of philosophy.

That reminds me - there's a common perception out there that Cicero was a Stoic, and that's not accurate. Cicero's own position is some amalgamation of Plato and Aristotle.

Wikipedia refers to him as an Academic Skeptic, a hybrid system of Platonism Aristotelianism, which he viewed as a single old academy tradition. And then, although we may not choose to cover it in the series of podcasts, once you get further into on ends and Cicero turns to the discussion of Stoicism, Cicero is almost as negative about Stoicism as he is about Epicurus. And

so those who approach the subject thinking that Cicero is basically speaking for the Stoics need to understand that that's not really what's going on here. Cicero is more appropriately thought of as speaking for sort of a hybrid of Plato and Aristotle.

***Joshua***

Okay, so starting now in section five, the setting for our drama here is the Bay of Naples, in a town called Cuma, where Cicero has a villa.

And this is what he says,

> Quote
>
> To begin with the easiest opinions. Let the theory of Epicurus first enter the arena. It is to most people thoroughly familiar, and you will perceive that I have set it forth with an exactness which is not commonly surpassed even by the adherents of the school themselves, for my desire is to find truth and not to confound, as it were, some opponent.

And then he describes that his interlocutors in this discussion will be Lucius Torquatus, the Epicurean, and Gaius Triarius.

***Cassius***

Do we know much about Gaius Triarius? I'm thinking that we do not. Other than as Cicero says here that he's a younger person at the time of this discussion, and he's presented as sort of a commentator a few times, but doesn't participate strongly of the debate.

***Joshua***

Right, And I've described this as sort of a Socratic dialogue, but there are also elements of the symposium style conversation in which you always have people in the room to bounce the conversation off of. So it's not just two people.

The room is filled in with other figures. And in this case, guys Triarius is that figure.

***Cassius***

Yes, And this is another good time to point out that we are going through in this section five - it's the beginning of the Torquatus narrative of his presentation of Epicurean philosophy. We are not going to go through this in the level of detail as we previously did in episodes ninety three through one hundred and eleven.

In these episodes, as we go through Cicero again, we're going to hit the highlights and review what we think are some of those important aspects of the Torquatus section, but we're not going to spend the same amount of time.

***Joshua***

Right, And so here in section five, they get right into it. Torquatus presents the challenge to Cicero. He says,

> Quote
>
> Now that I have you free, I shall learn what is the reason why you do not exactly dislike our teacher Epicurus, as do most who disagree with him, but certainly do not approve of him, though I believe that he alone has seen the truth and has set free the minds of men for the most grievous misconceptions. But I judge that your pleasure in him, like that of our friend Triarius, is diminished because he cared little for those graces that adorn the style of a Plato and Aristotle and a Theophrastus.

And then Torquatus says,

> Quote
>
> I can scarcely bring myself to believe that you deem his opinions to be wanting in truth.

So here we set the stage for Cicero's response, which he says:

> Quote
>
> Just see how great is your mistake. It is not the style of your philosopher which displeases me, for he writes in plain terms. And while I should not feel averse to any philosopher for displaying eloquence, I should still not demand it very loudly if he did not possess it. It is in his subject matter that he fails to content me, and what I say concerns a number of topics....

So that's the main problem.

***Cassius***

Yes, he has started out by saying that Torquatus is going to be presenting a discussion of the ethics side and pleasure, and that's probably something significant here, because Cicero is going to spend a few minutes, as we further from what Joshua just read in discussing his complaints about the physics of Epicurus. But he's setting out here early that Cicero's position is not that he disagrees with Epicurus's *style* of presentation, but that he disagrees with the *content* and the *merit* of what Epicurus had to say. And as they go further there, Cicero's pointing out that Cicero is familiar with Epicurean philosophy.

He says,

> Quote

> Unless you suppose I heard falsely from Phaedrus or Zeno, both of whom were my teachers, and in whom certainly the one thing that I approved of was their diligence, then all the tenets of Epicurus are quite familiar to me, and I constantly attended the lectures of the philosophers I've just named in the company with my friend Atticus, who on his side felt admiration for both, and for Phaedrus even affection, and we used to discuss with each other every day the lessons we learned, nor did the dispute ever turned on my understanding, but on my approval.

So as they're setting out here, Cicero's taking the position that don't say that I don't *understand* Epicurus, because I understand Epicurus very very well. I went to classes in Epicurean philosophy. I discussed it with my best friend Atticus every day. *I know what I'm talking about*, and don't think that any disagreement I have is based on superficial disagreement with this style. *I understand what he's saying, and I disagree with the heart of it* - basically is Cicero's position.

***Joshua***

I think you've caught the flavor of it.

So Torquatus picks up then with:

> Quote
>
> So what is the matter? Then what is it about Epicurean philosophy that you don't like?

And Cicero replies:

> Quote
>
> At the outset in natural science, which is his chief boast, he is, in the first place, altogether unoriginal. He states the doctrines of Democritus with a few changes, but of such a nature that, in my opinion, he destroyed the theories which he desires to amend. Democritus holds that through the limitless void, which has neither highest nor lowest point, nor center, nor end, nor bound, the atoms, as he calls them, meaning thereby bodies indivisible, owing to their impenetrability, sweep along in such a manner that by their collisions they adhere to each other and produce all objects which exist and are discernible.

And the problem in Cicero's view is that when Epicurus is simply transmitting the ideas of Democritus, Cicero doesn't agree with the ideas, he doesn't find support for them, but he doesn't think that they're as completely full of error as when Epicurus improvises.

***Cassius***

Cicero is objecting that Epicurus is unoriginal. Now he's going to eventually say that Epicurus is wrong, But whether Epicurus is original or unoriginal is really not particularly relevant to whether Epicurus is right. If you're right, you're right. If you're wrong, you're wrong, And gosh knows you have all these cliches about standing on the shoulders of giants and so forth. In philosophy and in much else, it's not a crime to be unoriginal and to simply take the best of what other people have come before you with and adopt it and then extend it.

So, at least in that initial criticism by Cicero, I think you see the beginnings of how Cicero is going to deflect off in other directions rather than deal with exactly the truth of what Epicurus is saying. And also in this point as well, although he doesn't say it explicitly, where he talks about Democritus, Democritus has this issue with being a determinist, and Democritus' interpretation of the way that atoms were moving would be much more consistent and compatible with a theistic point of view that Cicero is endorsing than what Epicurus is ultimately going to say.

So I think that's noteworthy as well that Cicero can find decent things to say about Democritus, because Cicero's own philosophy isn't totally incompatible. As we discussed last week with Gassendi, the classical way of reconciling Epicurus with religion is to say, well, "God created the atoms," and "God works through the atoms." Whether or not Cicero was anticipating that here or not, Cicero would not have nearly the problem with Democritus' deterministic views as he has with Epicurus's views, on the point that we're now going to turn to.

***Joshua***

Yeah, that's very well said, so, Cicero says next:

> Quote
>
> The peculiar downfall of Epicurus is this: He pronounces that the same indivisible and impenetrable bodies are carried downward by their own weight in a straight line. This, he declares to be the natural movement of all bodies. Then, in a moment instructs this shrewd fellow that if all bodies were carried along perpendicularly, and as I said, in a straight line, no one atom could ever touch another. Consequently, he introduced an idea purely fictitious. He declared that the atoms swerved very little, the least bit possible. This swerving produced attachments, combinations and unions of atoms one with another, out of which was evolved the universe and all the divisions of the universe, and all the things therein,

So you're right, Cassius, it's this idea of the swerve or the *clinamen*, and what it has to do, and how it bears on the issue of ethics, which is the point of the book. By the way, the title of the book is *De Finibus Bonorum Et Malorum* in Latin, which means On the Ends of Good and Evil. So it is very much ethics that we're talking about. And sometimes you'll hear the book referred to as *On Moral Ends* or simply as *On Ends*, so it's very much an ethical discussion. But Cicero can 't help but get a few jabs in before we get to that point.

***Cassius***

And his jabs include:

> Quote
>
> While this whole theory is a childish imagination, it does not even prove what he desires. For not only is this very swerving a capricious fiction, but further, for no reason whatever, he robs the atoms of the motion natural to all heavy substances, which he says is a perpendicular line.

***Joshua***

Right. And then he says,

> Quote
>
> Nor is it proper in a natural philosopher to believe in a least possible body, a hypothesis he certainly never would have formed if he had chosen to learn mathematics of his friend Polyaenus, rather than to make him actually unlearn what he knew himself.

What Cicero is indicating here is that in mathematics, what you can do is you can divide and divide and divide and divide. If you've ever looked into YouTube, for example, and looked at images produced by a fractal set, where there's infinite detail, infinite subdivision of detail in a finite space, mathematics can do that kind of thing. But the problem is that we're not living in a world of pure mathematics, are we? We're living in a world that is physical and has reality, and so that to me is part of Cicero's problem there. He's expecting nature to behave as purely and perfectly as mathematics does, but it's just not realistic that it should do so.

***Cassius***

And I think this would be important to Cicero. He's attacking the issue of infinite divisibility. And this is important to Cicero - it's important to Epicurus - because this issue of the atoms being the way nature works is central to refuting the theistic, God-centered, God-driven view of the universe.

Epicures spends a significant amount of time on this and the letter to Herodotus, and it's extensively discussed in Lucretius, that if you allow for infinite divisibility, then you ultimately have nothing solid ever to come to rest on. And if you have no ultimate solid, unchanging form, then in the analysis that Epicurus came up with, you would have no way for continuity and regular activity to occur in the universe. So I would say, in these two sections already, you're having Cicero used Democritus in a way that he could live with the deterministic aspect of it, but he is not going to live with the swerve as anything that would break free from the chains of fate or from an all powerful God.

***Joshua***

Right. And the other problem with Epicurus' and Democritus' atomism is that it presents a direct alternative to Aristotle and his theory of substances and accidents or events, which is the basis by the way of the Catholic Eucharist, the transubstantiation of the substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Jesus.

Once you drill down into the substrate of matter and begin to know a lot about it, it makes these supernatural claims very, very difficult to justify, and for Cicero that's a problem.

***Cassius***

Yeah, and it's not sufficient, I would say - in responding to Cicero on this infinite divisibility - it's not sufficient simply to say, well, just go listen to the mathematicians and they'll tell you why there's no least part or no limit to divisibility.

And in terms as we go through here trying to identify further responses to this, because they're going to end up turning to ethics in the end and not go back over this part. I think what you've got here is this issue of whether you can just simply say, go listen to the mathematicians and they'll tell you that there can't be an atom. That's as far as Cicero takes the argument.

The next issue, which we've discussed before, is the size of the sun.

Cicero says,

> Quote
>
> Democritus believes the sun to be of great size, as is expected from a man of education and a mathematician.

Again, a reference to mathematics as the answer to these philosophical questions.

> Quote
>
> This philosopher thinks is as a foot broad perhaps, for he pronounces its real size, it's the same as its apparent size, or as it may be either just a little larger or smaller.

We've discussed the size of the sun issue before, and we can put something in the show notes leading back to particularly the article by a professor named Gellar-Goad, who goes into an analysis of this question and ends up concluding that what Epicurus is really saying is that the Sun and the stars are the size *they appear to be*, with the emphasis on - you have to go to the appearances to determine the truth, which is basically a statement that you have to technologically use what you have to come to your best estimate of something, and not just imagine it based on your theories that the sun and the stars and the moon are gods.

***Joshua***

Yeah, like you said, we talked about this in a previous episode of the podcast. In the series on the Letter to Pythocles for about forty-five minutes, so I would direct any attention to that episode because we really did cover I think all of the really critical points here.

One of the things to keep in mind as we go through this is no Epicurean on record has ever given a measurement or an account of how big they think the Sun is. Epicurus speaks about it in this language that is necessarily hesitant and uncertain because he simply doesn't know the answer.

But he says that eclipses could be caused by the interposition of the Moon between the Earth and the Sun, and the interposition of the Earth between the Moon and the Sun. And what that would suggest is that both the Sun and the Moon were significantly larger than as Cicero absurdly says here *a foot in diameter*. So the Epicureans actually do come off quite good on this, I think, but you have to read the letter sympathetically, and probably as Cassius you said that article by T. H. M. Gellar-Goad "*Epicurus And The Size Of The Sun*" to really get a good understanding of it.

***Cassius***

Yes.

One additional thing I'd like to say on that would be that Epicurus' key position is as stated in Lucretius Book Four as to the tower at a distance. When Lucretius specifically goes through the point that if you don't understand why a tower at a distance looks round, but when you're up close to it square, then it is better for you to entertain a wrong answer than it is to say that your senses cannot be trusted. Ultimately, you have to rely on the senses and additional observation, additional perspectives, and so forth over time to determine what the truth is. You can't get there by reason alone without observation, and I think that is Epicurus' essential point in pointing to *what it appears to be*.

And as you said, Joshua, I don't know that Epicurus was ever quoted as saying it's a foot or a mile or any particular size. The real emphatic point to take home from Epicurean philosophy on the size of the planets and the moon of the sun is that you have to rely on appearance, which means the senses and observation to determine it, and not just be absolutely confident that it's ten million miles away or whatever based on your mathematical calculations. The calculations alone without observation will not get you to the right answer.

***Joshua***

Probably also worth noting that in the century before Epicurus, there was a philosopher named Anaxagoras, and it was his opinion that the sun was a ball of hot metal larger than the Peloponnese.

But even that is really really small compared to the actual size of the Sun. So you know, Cicero is writing here with the benefit of several hundred years of work on this question in Alexandria, where you do have people like Eratosthenes of Cyrene who are measuring the circumference of

the earth and so forth and making these calculations. But in the world of the fourth and third century BC in Athens, there's simply less information about it.

***Cassius***

Yeah, the big problem that we have is the lack of information and the loss of all of these texts, and we're forced to basically reconstruct from whatever sources we can find. I say that because the next couple of sentences are an example of that. When Cicero mentioned is what some of the doctrines of Democritus were. He says that he doesn't necessarily agree with Democritus on those, but he lists several, one of which we were talking about recently on the forum is the issue of images.

I see that what he says here as to Democritus, he says that Democritus' theories included "*the forms which they call idols, by whose inroad we not only see but even think*." So that would be a tangent to pursue that any further. But he's mentioning there the fact that images are involved in thought, and that those ideas trace all the way back to Democritus. In the end, it doesn't matter whether they come from Democritus or not if they are correct, but it would require a lot of investigation to determine where the theories came from originally.

***Joshua***

Right, and on the question of sight, by the way, the Epicureans and Democritus here were correct. It is reflected light from objects that causes sight, and not as sort of searching headlight that lights up things as it moves on them. Cicero ends this section by saying, and though these are matters I by no means accept, still I wish that Democritus, who has been applauded by all others, had not been reviled by this man who followed him beyond all others.

There's a passage in Diogenes Laertius in book ten dealing with some of the things that Epicurus allegedly had to say about other philosophers, and one of the issues with that is that Diogenes Laertius immediately follows it up by saying that the people who say all these things are nonsense, because Epicurus has innumerable people willing to testify to his good nature.

So it's hard to say. DeWitt seems to come down on the opinion that Epicurus really did say some of these things. Diogenes Laertius says that he didn't. I don't know, and of course, like you said, Cassius, almost everything that we would need to settle the question has been lost.

***Cassius***

And what we certainly don't have is the context in which he said them, because I can easily believe that Epicurus was very critical of Democritus' ethical or even religious theory if he's a hard determinist, because Epicurus identified that as a terrible conclusion to reach, and you can imagine him saying something extremely negative about Democritus in that area, while at the same time saying good things about Democritus in another area.

And then as the years go by, you have the critics of Epicurus preserving only the things that make Epicurus look bad, as opposed to the full picture of that. You can look in Lucretius and see

references to Democritus as a reference to a great man who greatly erred on certain issues. So I would think that that is much more likely the perspective that Epicurus took towards Democritus than reviling him in general, as you might conclude by reading Cicero here.

***Joshua***

Just one more thing - Democritus also had some skeptical tendencies.

One of the ideas that survives from Democritus is this quote that says:

> Quote
>
> Of truth we know nothing, for truth lies at the bottom of the well.

And for Epicurus, the pursuit of truth and a genuine, factual understanding of the universe that we live in, of the nature of human life, of death, of all of these questions, relies and has to rely in some sense on the belief that it is possible to come to some knowledge about these things, and that that knowledge does not lie inaccessible at the bottom of a well.

***Cassius***

Exactly. So Cicero has started out here accusing Epicurus of being basically ungrateful and misrepresenting and misusing the doctrines of Democritus, without explaining that Democritus held two of the doctrines that Epicurus held to be most damaging to human life in this *skepticism* that you've just discussed, and then the *determinism* that we discussed previously. So you would expect that Epicurus would have both good and bad things to say about Democritus depending on the subject that he talking about.

We've been discussing some basic physics with the atoms and the void. Cicero now moves to a discussion of the second division of philosophy, which comprises dialectical investigation.

Now we're going to discuss this issue of dialectical logic that Cicero and certain academics are so high on, and why Cicero feels that Epicurus failed in this particular area. As we go through these criticisms, we know how strongly Cicero disagreed with Epicurus about these.

***Joshua***

Right. Now Cicero has already said that what nature really is is a representation in truth of pure mathematics. It's an image of pure mathematics. That's the reason we know that matter can be infinitely subdivided, according to Cicero here. So when he comes to this issue of logic and dialectical reasoning, we're going to hear a lot of the same kind of stuff.

He really does think that Plato and Aristotle and some of these thinkers were right in what they had to say, and it could not be further really from some of the opinions of Epicurus.

***Cassius***

And so Cicero's criticisms are sweeping in this department. Cicero says that Epicurus:

> Quote
>
> does away with the process of definition. He has nothing to teach about subdivision or partition. He lays down no methods for constructing and shaping an argument. He does not show about what means fallacies are to be unriddled, or the senses of ambiguous terms disentangled. He places his criterion of objective truth and the senses, and he thinks if they once admit of any particle of falsehood for truth, all possibility of a criterion of truth and falsehood is destroyed.

So here we've got where Cicero is saying that Epicurus is lacking in the techniques of logic which Plato and Aristotle had spent so much time on.

***Joshua***

Right, and in which they had built up a system that derived information about nature and human life and death and the afterlife, and the ordering of the celestial spheres, and so forth, using pure logic and reasoning. It's that quote pure logic contemplating absolute truth or something like that.

So the idea that you can start from nothing and from there, using only logic and definition, build up a system and then just pretend like it's true, which is where we get Plato's cave and the ideal forms and some of these fairly absurd ideas. But it comes from stuff like this, because I think Cicero is right here when he indicates that Epicurus holds the view that if you deny the canonical nature of sense perception, if you deny that as a source of real truth about the world, then it destroys any possibility of a criterion for truth because we are so dependent on that, on evidence that we get through our senses.

***Cassius***

Yeah, Cicero is being tricky here, because he's ridiculing Epicurus' statement that if the senses are not true, all possibility of a criterion of truth and falsehood is destroyed.

He seems to be saying that Epicures should have admitted that the senses are sometimes true and sometimes false, where he says if they once admit of any particle of falsehood for truth. That would be the issue that Epicurus identified -- if the senses are not always trusted, then when do you know when to trust the senses and when not to trust the senses, with the implication from Cicero and the mathematicians that you can do so with logic alone and not with the results of the senses.

Epicurus is saying, no, the senses are always to be trusted, but you have to take each of the sensations, compare them all to each other, and then use common sense and consistency and analogy and different techniques that Epicurus was talking about to reconcile what the senses are saying. But you never throw out a particular sensation just because you think it's wrong. You come to an understanding (if you can eventually) even why those senses that make the

tower look round occurred. You don't say that the senses are wrong, that you look for an understanding of why they are different under different perspectives.

And when he says he does away with the process of definition. I think this is where we've discussed with Martin in the past, the term propositional logic that when you set up these syllogistic formulas of A and B, everything rests on how you're defining A and B. And ultimately, that's the problem with mathematics is that the definitions can never be totally consistent with reality, other than in your mind.

You can say, "*let A equal something.*" But it's in your mind you have done that. You have not necessarily done it in reality, however.

***Joshua***

Right, and you know when you look at, for example, the schools of logic that were in use in medieval Christian theology it's the same kind of thing -- where we're going to prove the existence of God by saying that things exist, everything that exists has a cause, there must be an uncaused cause that caused all of these causes, and that uncaused cause is God.

And thereby by just using logic and essentially making stuff up, you can infer the conclusion of a God, even though that conclusion violates the syllogism by which you established it when you said that everything has a cause, and then you say there is an uncaused cause, and that uncaused causes God. So logic is very useful. Epicurus uses logic himself. It's one of the great sort of secondary or tertiary disciplines of cognition, but for Epicurus, it's not a source of primary information about the world we live in. It's not part of his canon, and it can never be, because logic itself requires something to operate on.

But at any rate, we are on the issue of ethics now, and like you say, this is the key theme of the entire book. And the whole project of Cicero in writing the book is trying to elevate his contemporaries in the study of philosophy, and not just to study philosophy, but to do it right from Cicero's point of view, which is what he's going to lay out in this book.

***Cassius***

Yeah, Joshua, as we go to the next sentence, let me read that with some emphasis, because what he says about Epicurus in this next sentence -- I always think about DeWitt's statement about how Epicurus is one of the most beloved and the most hated of philosophers in history -- listen to what Cicero says next.

> Quote
>
> However, though the scheme belongs to Aristippus and is much better and more frankly advocated by the Cyreniacs, it is in my judgment of such a character that I believe no system more unworthy of the human race.

So Cicero is saying that the Epicurean system is the *most unworthy of the human race that he can think of*. That's a damning condemnation if true.

***Joshua***

Right, yeah, that the Epicureans have stooped so low beneath the dignity of a human being that they are living like *swine* in pursuing pleasure and not pursuing virtue or God or whatever it be.

That's Cicero's point of view. And now, of course we know that Cicero's friend Titus Pomponius Atticus was an Epicurean, and it's somewhat interesting to contemplate what Atticus must have thought when he read this book, which I assume he did. Cicero goes on to say:

> Quote
>
> Nature has, in truth created and shaped us for certain higher aims, in my view at least. I may indeed be wrong, but that is just what I think. Nor do I suppose that the Torquatus who first won for himself the title, either expected to reap any bodily enjoyment from his action when he wrenched the necklet from his foe, or had pleasure in view when he did battle with the Latins in his third consulship on the banks of the Visceras.

So this is going to be a line of attack that Cicero is going to use, particularly to poke and prod his interlocutor Torquatus. Torquatus is the scion of a noble Roman house. His family had served with distinction in wars all throughout Roman history, and their names are famous, and Cicero is using those names to say, When your ancestor did this, when he went to war, was that for pleasure? When your ancestor executed his own son, was that for pleasure? So Cicero is taking it to a very intimate place here by referring to Torquatus' ancestors.

***Cassius***

Yes, Joshua, and here's a place for a caution that I'll try to remind myself of, at least as we go through all this, that we're reading Read's translation of the Latin. We're not looking back at the actual Latin. We're not Latin authorities. We can't say for sure that Read got it right. But one thing that's included in what you just read that I find so offensive and so important in understanding these criticisms of Epicurus is where he says,"*the Torquatus who first one for himself the title either expected to reap any bodily enjoyment from his action when he wrenched the necklet from his foe, or had pleasure in view.*"

There's so often this attempt to equate Epicurean philosophy with **bodily enjoyment alone**. Now, certainly it's possible to say that Cicero is just somehow referring to the fact that ultimately in Epicurean philosophy everything is bodily.

But the implication of a wording like this is that you're just looking for immediate, sensual, bodily gratification. Now Torquatus comes back and is allowed to address this, and does address it at length, about how Torquatus was looking forward for the safety and wellbeing of

his community, of his nation, and so forth. So to some extent, Torquatus is given the ability to deal with this later in the work.

But it is so commonplace for people to equate bodily enjoyment as the only goal of Epicurean philosophy. But as Torquatus says later on, *mental pleasure* is frequently of greater significance than *physical pleasure* is. And not that they are at odds with each other. **Both** of them are valued in Epicurean philosophy. In fact, everything that ends up being desirable in life from the viewpoint of Epicurus is the pursuit of pleasure.

So this is probably not going to be the last time that Cicero does this, but to try to characterize Epicurean philosophy as focused only on immediate bodily enjoyment is one of the techniques of argument you see frequently against Epicureans, which is totally unfair when you drill down and read the text.

***Joshua***

Absolutely yes, and Don has addressed this very recently on the forum, just in the last day or two. In comparing the Latin words that Cicero uses for pleasure, he uses the word *voluptas*, and for virtue is the word *virtus*.

And what's interesting about those words is that, like in many other languages, Latin heavily uses gender to separate its nouns, and so pleasure, bodily pleasure in this case is feminine and virtue is masculine. And so it's this sort of trick of language that Cicero is using here that the Epicureans put it the way they put it in the ancient world. Epicureans are womanish, they're like eunuchs. Essentially, is the idea.

Now, Don posted this in response to his reading of a book by Pamela Gordon called *The Invention and Gendering of Epicurus,* Pamela Gordon, a PhD. in Ancient Greek from Bryn Mawr College, a book that I have not read, but that Don is highly recommending at this point. And it bears very heavily on our current conversation with Cicero, because it's the kind of thing that Cicero is doing here.

***Cassius***

Yes, I agree, Joshua. It bears closely on it because - we have it here, and I think we're going to see it after we finished the Torquatus section and throughout the rest of what Cicero is presenting - that his argument repeatedly comes back to the same point over and over, where he said, as you previously read, "Nature has in truth created and shaped us for certain higher aims."

And so he's appealing to religion or some type of transcendental viewpoint that says that this world and the things that we experience in it are not the only things that exist in the universe, and that we should be looking to this other world, or this other dimension, or this other plane of virtue for our real guidance.

And he then turns to talking about the beheading of Torquatus' son, and the different things that Titus Torquatus, who held the consulship, that he didn't give a thought to his own pleasure -- with the point being that I think it may be fair to say that this is Cicero's ultimate argument and ultimately where he grounds all of his criticism of Epicurus, and he will come back to this again and again and again.

***Joshua***

Yes. And what Cicero says here "*And do not say to me why these very actions bring me pleasure as theirs did to the Torquati.*"

And we know, of course that Torquatus is going to make exactly that argument. And Cicero follows it up by saying,

> Quote
>
> Never, indeed, did Epicurus or Metrodorus, or anyone possessed of any wisdom or any knowledge of the tenets of your school ever maintain such a position by such arguments. And when the question is asked, as it often is, why Epicureans are so numerous, I answer that there are, no doubt other motives. But the motive which especially fascinates the crowd is this: They believe their chief to declare that all upright and honorable actions are in themselves productive of delight or rather pleasure.

That's that use of words. There again, he says delight or rather pleasure, bodily pleasure.

> Quote
>
> These excellent persons do not perceive that the whole system is overturned, supposing the truth were really as they imagine. For if we were to admit that such actions are inherently and absolutely pleasant, even though we judge nothing by the standard of the body, then virtue and knowledge would be things absolutely desirable, a conclusion which your leader is far from favoring.

Now, that last line in particular is interesting, because what Cicero is saying is that Epicurus is so mad over the idea of pleasure that virtue and knowledge are not just not the goal or the end in their own say, but they're not even desirable. That's Cicero's portrayal of Epicurus here, and I don't think it could be more wrong.

Epicurus is widely misunderstood, particularly on the point of whether knowledge is worth pursuing, but also on the position of virtue. And I think Francis Wright did a good job when she said that for every ten thousand people who admire the statue of virtue, there is scarcely one who stoops to see the base on which it stands. And that base, of course, is pleasure. So Epicurus, it's true, doesn't value knowledge as the end of all things in human life.

He doesn't value virtue as the end of all things in human life. But he does value them because they are instrumental to the pursuit of pleasure.

***Cassius***

And there are only two feelings, pleasure and pain, and any feeling that is not painful is pleasurable under the Epicurean analysis. Joshua, I think this is a really important section that is worthwhile underlining as we begin to close today's episode.

But let me emphasize it by saying this. In the Read edition, we're on page ten. We're in section seven - roman numeral seven - of the argument around line twenty-five of this argument. And I want to read a sentence I don't think you read a moment ago that will really I think hit this home. Because Cicero has passed on from his argument that the great military geniuses of the Torquatus family were not after pleasure.

He has moved on from that argument, and he's now stating a new argument. He says:

> Quote
>
> What pleasure do you, Torquatus, or what does our friend Triarius? He derived from literature, from records in the investigation of historical facts, from conning the poets, from learning by heart, though laboriously, so many lines? And don't say to me why these very actions bring me pleasure as theirs did the Torquati.

Cicero is trying to say that Epicurus denied that literature and history and the poets can bring you pleasure, and that that pleasure is included within Epicurean philosophy. He's *denying* that, and saying, *Don't say that to me, that those actions bring me pleasure.*

And in fact, Cicero says,

> Quote
>
> Never, indeed, did Epicurus and Metrodorus, or anyone possessed of any wisdom or knowledge of the tenets of your school, ever maintain such a position by such arguments.

So he's saying there that the Epicureans did *not* embrace literature and poetry and so forth as pleasurable, which I think is just absolutely false. And so then he turns and says, the question is asked why Epicureans are some numerous, and he says that their motive that fascinates the crowd is that they want simply pleasure, which he's *not* using to include those terms of literature and poetry and the light.

And then he says, these persons don't understand that their whole system is overturned, if they were right, because Cicero is saying that if we were to admit that literature and poetry and so forth were pleasurable, then virtue and knowledge would be the things that would be most absolutely desirable - a conclusion with your leader is far from favoring.

Cicero is trying to say that an Epicurean should value virtue and knowledge as the most important things because they bring the most pleasure. Well, to some extent, *that*'s not that far from what Epicurus is actually doing. He's just simply saying that those things are not ends in themselves, but they are valuable* because they bring pleasure*.

But as Epicurus stresses, virtue is an important part -- an essential part --of pursuing pleasure. The criticism that Cicero is bringing seem to be based on trying to limit - again - is that the only pleasure that Epicurus is interested in are the immediate pleasures of the body, which is *not* what Epicurean philosophy is limited to.

***Joshua***

Oh, I completely agree. And his earlier mention of the Cyreniacs and Aristippus kind of drive that point home -- he says the Cyrenaics were not only more honest about it, but they *did* it better.

***Cassius***

Right. The point of all this being, as we begin to close today's episode, is that Cicero has in this opening part laid out the essence of his criticisms against Epicurus, that he's criticizing both his physics, he's criticizing his epistemology, and he's criticizing his ethics, with the implication that there's something higher than pleasure that should be the goal, and that Epicurus's way of stating the goal of life is the most unworthy philosophy for the human race that he's acquainted with.

Okay, let's go around the table and see if we have any closing thoughts. Kalosyni?

***Kalosyni***

Something came up for me towards the very end there regarding Cicero's criticisms - that possibly, at this point, because it had been so many years, the orthodoxy of the school itself might have shifted. The adherence to the original teachings could have shifted by that time, and so Cicero is reacting to something that is going on at that point with the interpretation. I don't know if that's correct or not.

***Joshua***

A very good point, Kalosyni. One thing that Cicero says elsewhere is that the Epicureans are *taking Italy by storm*. And this is not necessarily the educated class. This is not necessarily people who were tutored by prominent philosophers their whole life. This is common people, trades people, people in the streets are adopting Epicureanism.

And one thing Cicero says is, "Do these people understand what Epicurus is saying while I - Cicero - do not? So what he's essentially saying in that case is that they have adopted a version of Epicureanism removed from any intellectual or philosophical underpinning, merely because it supports this idea that pleasure is the good.

Now, I don't know. I don't know that what Cicero is seeing there is accurate to how the Roman era Epicureans were actually living. And we know that he's writing here in the Bay of Naples. This is where you have Philodemus, who's writing sort of abstruse scrolls, not necessarily on pleasure, although he does, but on stuff like on methods of inference and on economics and so forth.

So you have people involved here who are very, very interested in the philosophical side of things. But Cicero almost sees Epicureanism in Italy as a kind of foreign contagion, and that's his language when he says that the Epicureans have taken Italy by storm is militaristic. What he's essentially saying is the Epicureans are like foreign invaders who have laid siege to Rome.

***Cassius***

Kalosyni, one other thing I would add to what you said is that Torquatus himself, as we go further through this section, says that there are differences within the Epicurean community about different ways of argument on certain things such as friendship or on the necessity of arguing this very point about the role of pleasure.

So there definitely had been developments in those two hundred years between Epicurus himself and the time that Cicero was writing this.

Okay, Joshua, any closing comments for today?

***Joshua***

No, I don't think I have any.

***Cassius***

Okay, very good.

Well, we've had an introduction today to where we're going. We'll spend some time next week recapping the arguments of Torquatus in the positive section that Cicero allows to Torquatus, and then after that we'll be back to begin to deal further with the detailed argument that Cicero makes against Epicurean philosophy.

I think we've made a good start today and this should prove to be a very interesting series. So thanks everybody for your time today.

Please join us on the forum and let us know if you have any questions or comments. We'll see you in a week.

Bye.