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CICERO
ON ENDS

Translated by
H. RACKHAM

CICERO

DE FINIBUS BONORUM ET MALORUM

WITH AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY

H. RACKHAM

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INTRODUCTION.

The de Finibus.

The *de Finibus Bonorum et Malorum* is a treatise on the theory of Ethics. It expounds and criticizes the three ethical systems most prominent in Cicero's day, the Epicurean, the Stoic and that of the Academy under Antiochus. The most elaborate of Cicero's philosophical writings, it has had fewer readers than his less technical essays on moral subjects. But it is of importance to the student of philosophy as the only systematic account surviving from antiquity of those rules of life which divided the allegiance of thoughtful men during the centuries when the old religions had lost their hold and Christianity had not yet emerged. And the topics that it handles can never lose their interest.

The meaning of the title.

The title 'About the Ends of Goods and Evils' requires explanation. It was Aristotle who put the ethical problem in the form of the question, What is the Τέλος or End, the supreme aim of man's endeavour, in the attainment of which his Good or Well-being lies? For Aristotle, *Telos* connoted not only 'aim,' but 'completion'; and he found the answer to his question in the complete development and right exercise of the faculties of man's nature, and particularly of the distinctively human faculty of Reason. The life of the Intellect was the Best, the Chief Good; and lesser Goods were Means to the attainment of this End. Thus was introduced the notion of an ascending scale of Goods, and this affected the interpretation of the term *Telos*. *Telos* came to be understood as denoting not so much the end or aim of endeavour as the end or extreme

point of a series, the topmost good. To this was naturally opposed an extreme of minus value, the topmost, or rather bottommost, evil. Hence arose the expressions τέλος ἀγαθῶν, τέλος κακῶν, 'End of Goods, of Evils,' which occur in Philodemus, *Rhetoric* I, 218. 8 ff. (Sūdhans), and are translated by Cicero *finis bonorum, malorum.* As a title for his book he throws this phrase into the plural, meaning '*different views* as to the Chief Good and Evil.'[1] Hence in title and to some extent in method, the *de Finibus* may be compared with such modern works as Martineau's *Types of Ethical Theory* and Sidgwick's *Methods of Ethics.*

Cicero as a writer on philosophy.

Cicero belongs to a type not unknown in English life, that of the statesman who is also a student and a writer. From his youth he aspired to play a part in public affairs, and the first step towards this ambition was to learn to speak. He approached Greek philosophy as part of a liberal education for a political career, and he looked on it as supplying themes for practice in oratory. But his real interest in it went deeper; the study of it formed his mind and humanized his character, and he loved it to the end of his life.

In his youth he heard the heads of the three chief Schools of Athens, Phaedrus the Epicurean, Diodo-

[1] This use of the plural occurs in *Academica* II, 132, 'omnibus eis finibus bonorum quos exposui malorum finis esse contrarios'; although *ib.* II, 114, 'fines bonorum et malorum instituas' means 'finem bonorum et finem malorum,' and some scholars so interpret the phrase in the present titles: see Philippson *Philologische Wochenschrift*, 1913, p. 613 (published after the first edition of this book had gone to press) and *ib.* 1923, p. 11.

tus the Stoic, and Philo the Academic, who had come to Rome to escape the disturbances of the Mithradatic War. When already launched in public life, he withdrew, at the age of 27 (79 B.C.), to devote two more years to philosophy and rhetoric. Six months were spent at Athens, and the introduction to *de Finibus* Book V gives a brilliant picture of his student life there with his friends. No passage more vividly displays what Athens and her memories meant to the cultivated Roman. At Athens Cicero attended the lectures of the Epicurean Zeno and the Academic Antiochus. Passing on to Rhodes to work under the leading professors of rhetoric, he there met Posidonius, the most renowned Stoic of the day. He returned to Rome to plunge into his career as advocate and statesman; but his Letters show him continuing his studies in his intervals of leisure. For many years the Stoic Diodotus was an inmate of his house.

Under the Triumvirate, as his influence in politics waned, Cicero turned more and more to literature. His earliest essay in rhetoric, the *de Inventione*, had appeared before he was twenty-five; but his first considerable works on rhetoric and on political science, the *de Oratore*, *de Republica*, and *de Legibus*, were written after his return from exile in 57. The opening pages of *de Finibus* Book III give a glimpse of his studies at this period. In 51 he went as Governor to Cilicia; and he wrote no more until the defeat of Pompey at Pharsalus had destroyed his hopes for the Republic.

After his reconciliation with Caesar and return to Rome in the autumn of 46, Cicero resumed writing on rhetoric. In February 45 came the death of his

beloved daughter Tullia, followed soon after by the final downfall of the Pompeians at Munda. Crushed by public and private sorrow, he shut himself up in one of his country houses and sought distraction in unremitting literary work. He conceived the idea, as he implies in the preface to *de Finibus*, of rendering a last service to his country by bringing the treasures of Greek thought within the reach of the Roman public. Both his *Academica* and *de Finibus* were compiled in the following summer; the latter was probably presented to Brutus, to whom it is dedicated, on his visit to Cicero in August 45 (ad Att. XIII, 44). Seven months later Brutus was one of the assassins of Caesar. In the autumn of 44 Cicero flung himself again into the arena with his attack on Antony, which led to his proscription and death in December 43.

Date of de Finibus.

Excepting the *de Oratore*, *de Republica* and *de Legibus*, the whole of Cicero's most important writings on philosophy and rhetoric belong to 46-44 B.C. and were achieved within two years. Such a mass of work so rapidly produced could hardly be original, and in fact it made no claim to be so. It was designed as a sort of encyclopaedia of philosophy for Roman readers. Cicero's plan was to take each chief department of thought in turn, and present the theories of the leading schools upon it, appending to each theory the criticisms of its opponents. Nor had his work that degree of independence which consists in assimilating the thought of others and recasting it in the mould of the writer's own mind. He merely chose some recent hand-book on each side of the question under consideration, and reproduced it in Latin, encasing passages of continuous exposition in a frame of dialogue, and

Method of composition.

adding illustrations from Roman history and poetry. He puts the matter frankly in a letter to Atticus (XII, 52): "You will say, 'What is your method in such compositions?' They are mere transcripts, and cost comparatively little labour; I only supply the words, of which I have a copious flow." In *de Finibus* (I, 6) he rates his work a little higher, not without justice, and claims to be the critic as well as the interpreter of his authorities.

Cicero's philosophical position.

This method of writing was consonant with Cicero's own position in philosophy. Since his early studies under Philo he had been a professed adherent of the New Academy, and as such maintained a sceptical attitude on questions of knowledge. On morals he was more positive; though without a logical basis for his principles, he accepted the verdict of the common moral conscience of his age and country. Epicureanism he abhorred as demoralizing. The Stoics repelled him by their harshness and narrowness, but attracted him by their strict morality and lofty theology. His competence for the task of interpreting Greek thought to Rome was of a qualified order. He had read much, and had heard the chief teachers of the day. But with learning and enthusiasm he combined neither depth of insight nor scientific precision. Yet his services to philosophy must not be underrated. He introduced a novel style of exposition, copious, eloquent, impartial and urbane; and he created a philosophical terminology in Latin which has passed into the languages of modern Europe.

Contents of de Finibus.

The *de Finibus* consists of three separate dialogues, each dealing with one of the chief ethical systems

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of the day. The exponents of each system, and the minor interlocutors, are friends of Cicero's younger days, all of whom were dead when he wrote; brief notes upon them will be found in the Index. The rôle of critic Cicero takes himself throughout.

The first dialogue occupies Books I and II; in the former the Ethics of Epicurus are expounded, and in the latter refuted from the Stoic standpoint. The scene is laid at Cicero's villa in the neighbourhood of Cumae, on the lovely coast a little north of Naples. The spokesman of Epicureanism is L. Manlius Torquatus, a reference to whose praetorship (II, 74) fixes the date of the conversation at 50 B.C., shortly after Cicero's return from his province of Cilicia. A minor part is given to the youthful C. Valerius Triarius.

In the second dialogue the Stoic ethics are expounded (in Book III) by M. Cato, and criticized (in Book IV) from the standpoint of Antiochus by Cicero. Cicero has run down to his place at Tusculum, fifteen miles from town, for a brief September holiday, while the Games are on at Rome; and he meets Cato at the neighbouring villa of Lucullus, whose orphan son is Cato's ward. A law passed by Pompey in 52 B.C. is spoken of (IV, 1) as new, so the date falls in that year; Cicero went to Cilicia in 51.

The third dialogue (Book V) goes back to a much earlier period in Cicero's life. Its date is 79 and its scene Athens, where Cicero and his friends are eagerly attending lectures on philosophy. The position of the "Old Academy" of Antiochus is maintained by M. Pupius Piso Calpurnianus, and afterwards criticized by Cicero from the Stoic point of

view; the last word remains with Piso. The others present are Cicero's brother and cousin, and his friend and correspondent Titus Pomponius Atticus, a convinced Epicurean, who had retired to Athens from the civil disorders at Rome, and did not return for over twenty years.

Cicero's sources for de Finibus.

In Book I the exposition of Epicureanism probably comes from some compendium of the school, which seems to have summarized (1) Epicurus's essay *On the Telos*, (2) a résumé of the points at issue between Epicurus and the Cyrenaics (reproduced I, 55 ff), and (3) some Epicurean work on Friendship (I, 65-70).

The Stoic arguments against Epicurus in Book II Cicero derived very likely from Antiochus; but in the criticism of Epicurus there is doubtless more of Cicero's own thought than anywhere else in the work.

The authority for Stoicism relied on in Book III was most probably Diogenes of Babylon, who is referred to by name at III, 33 and 49.

In Books IV and V Cicero appears to have followed Antiochus.

Post-Aristotelian Philosophy.

Alexander the Great died in 323 and Aristotle in 322 B.C. Both Epicurus and Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, began to teach at Athens about twenty years later. The date marks a new era in Greek thought as in Greek life. Speculative energy had exhausted itself; the schools of Plato and Aristotle showed little vigour after the death of their founders. Enlightenment had undermined religion, yet the philosophers seemed to agree about nothing except that things are not what they appear; and the plain

man's mistrust of their conclusions was raised into a system of Scepticism by Pyrrho. Meanwhile the outer order too had changed. For Plato and Aristotle the good life could only be lived in a free city-state, like the little independent Greek cities which they knew; but these had now fallen under the empire of Macedon, and the barrier between Greek and barbarian was giving way. The wars of Alexander's successors rendered all things insecure; exile, slavery, violent death were possibilities with which every man must lay his account.

Epicureanism and Stoicism, however antagonistic, have certain common features corresponding to the needs of the period. Philosophy was systematized, and fell into three recognized departments, Logic, Physics and Ethics; and for both schools the third department stood first in importance. Both schools offered dogma, not speculation; a way of life for man as man, not as Greek citizen. Both abandoned idealism, saw no reality save matter, and accepted sense experience as knowledge. Both studied the world of nature only in order to understand the position of man. Both looked for a happiness secure from fortune's changes; and found it in peace of mind, undisturbed by fear and desire. But here the rival teachers diverged: Epicurus sought peace in the liberation of man's will from nature's law, Zeno in submission to it;[1] and in their conceptions of nature they differed profoundly.

Epicureanism: Canonic.

Formal Logic Epicurus dismissed as useless, but he raised the problem of knowledge under the heading of Canonic. The *Canon* or measuring-rod,

[1] *Et mihi res non me rebus subiungere conor,* says Horace of his lapses from Stoicism into Cyrenaicism.

the criterion of truth, is furnished by the sensations and by the πάθη or feelings of pleasure and pain. Epicurus's recognition of the latter as qualities of any state of consciousness and as distinct from the sensations of sight, hearing, etc., marks a notable advance in psychology. The sensations and the feelings determine our judgment and volition respectively, and they are all 'true,' i.e., real data of experience. So are the προλήψεις, or 'preconceptions' by which we recognize each fresh sensation, i.e., our general concepts; for these are accumulations of past sensations. It is in ὑπολήψεις, 'opinions,' i.e., judgments about sensations, that error can occur. Opinions are true only when confirmed, or, in the case of those relating to imperceptible objects (e.g. the Void), when not contradicted, by actual sensations. Thus Epicurus adumbrated, however crudely, a logic of inductive science.

Epicurean Physics.

His Natural Philosophy is touched on in *de Finibus*, I, c. vi. It is fully set out in the great poem of Cicero's contemporary, Lucretius, who preaches his master's doctrine with religious fervour as a gospel of deliverance for the spirit of man. Epicurus adopted the Atomic theory of Democritus, according to which the primary realities are an infinite number of tiny particles of matter, indivisible and indestructible, moving by their own weight through an infinite expanse of empty space or Void. Our perishable world and all that it contains consists of temporary clusters of these atoms interspersed with void. Innumerable other worlds beside are constantly forming and dissolving. This universe goes on of itself: there are gods, but they take no part in its guidance;

they live a life of untroubled bliss in the empty spaces between the worlds. The human soul like everything else is material; it consists of atoms of the smallest and most mobile sort, enclosed by the coarser atoms of the body, and dissipated when the body is dissolved by death. Death therefore means extinction.

Thus man was relieved from the superstitions that preyed upon his happiness,—fear of the gods and fear of punishment after death. But a worse tyranny remained if all that happens is caused by inexorable fate. Here comes in the doctrine of the Swerve, which Cicero derides, but which is essential to the system. Democritus had taught that the heavier atoms fell faster through the void than the lighter ones, and so overtook them. Aristotle corrected the error; and Epicurus turned the correction to account. He gave his atoms a uniform vertical velocity, but supposed them to collide by casually making a slight sideway movement. This was the minimum hypothesis that he could think of to account for the formation of things; and it served his purpose by destroying the conception of a fixed order in Nature. The capacity to swerve is shared by the atoms that compose the human soul; hence it accounts for the action of the will, which Epicurus regards as entirely undetermined. In this fortuitous universe man is free to make his own happiness.

Epicurean Ethics.

In Ethics Epicurus based himself on Aristippus, the pupil of Socrates and founder of the School of Cyrene. With Aristippus he held that pleasure is the only good, the sole constituent of man's well-being. Aristippus had drawn the practical inference that the right thing to do is to enjoy each pleasure of the

moment as it offers. His rule of conduct is summed up by Horace's *Carpe diem*. But this naïf hedonism was so modified by Epicurus as to become in his hands an entirely different theory. Its principal tenets are: that the goodness of pleasure is a matter of direct intuition, and is attested by natural instinct, as seen in the actions of infants and animals; that all men's conduct does as a matter of fact aim at pleasure; that the proper aim is to secure the greatest balance of pleasure over pain in the aggregate; that absence of pain is the greatest pleasure, which can only be varied, not augmented, by active gratification of the sense; that pleasure of the mind is based on pleasure of the body, yet that mental pleasure may far surpass bodily in magnitude, including as it does with the consciousness of present gratification the memory of past and the hope of future pleasure; that 'unnatural and unnecessary' desires and emotions are a chief source of unhappiness; and that Prudence, Temperance or self-control, and the other recognized virtues are therefore essential to obtain a life of the greatest pleasure, though at the same time the virtues are of no value save as conducive to pleasure.

This original, and in some respects paradoxical, development of hedonism gave no countenance to the voluptuary. On the contrary Epicurus both preached and practised the simple life, and the cultivation of the ordinary virtues, though under utilitarian sanctions which led him to extreme unorthodoxy in some particulars. Especially, he denied any absolute validity to Justice and to Law, and inculcated abstention from the active duties of citizenship. To Friendship he attached the highest value; and the School that he founded in his Garden in a suburb of Athens,

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