

Promising New Book ("Living For Pleasure") and Great New Article ("Are The Modern Stoics Really Epicurean?") Both By Emily Austin

Post by "Charles" of November 18, 2022 at 12:11 PM

[Quote from Charles](#)

My biggest issue though, are her chapter(s) concerning politics.

I forgot to elaborate on this. Her issue with politics in the philosophy is that she spends so much time focusing on ethics, specifically the categorization of desires and that section from Torquatus about reform being insufficient, rather than justice and the inherent individualism found within Epicureanism. If I remember correctly, she does briefly bring up the flexibility of the philosophy in the face of Athens facing sieges and blockades, but over the few years I've come to see some of the wisdom in Will Durant's criticism: "...it provides an excellent design for bachelorhood, but hardly for a society."

I feel déjà vu in saying an Epicurean *Government* may be an unfeasible concept. However, an Epicurean society is perhaps much easier to adopt, envision, or mold into than many other philosophies or ideologies. When we think of Epicurean morality, we (as in the forums here) tend to focus on the fact that there is no absolute pleasure. I think the desires are categorized because of this. What may be unnecessary for some is necessary for others. What is unnatural in one culture may be necessary in another to conform without risk of greater pains. Which leads us to the phrases "Live unknown" and "Escape all culture", of which we all know their meaning. Yet Epicurus himself approved of the religious festivities in Athens, and partook in them, while living outside the walls of the city. There are other examples of social conformity such as the advice of paying court to a king, if need be, fulfilling an obligatory military conscription, or engaging with the conventions and customs of marriage by providing dowry, etc.

An Epicurean society is political in the sense of caring for the well-being and health of their country. Its citizens would not be ignorant or secluded from the world around them, on the contrary, they would have knowledge of the various figures and events around them. Epicurus was well read on Plato and his contemporaries; he could not have rejected them and devised the system of the garden had he chosen to completely and utterly withdraw into isolation.

The same applies to civic government and culture. The only difference is that our activism is within the interest of the garden and the safeguarding of our pleasure, not partisan issues that ebb and flow with each week and month. I think focusing on the desires in the scope of a

political society is a bit tunnel visioned. What matters more is the culture that surrounds an Epicurean, and whether their pursuance of pleasure is admonished, encouraged, or ignored. The doctrines concerning justice and no absolute pleasure are the remedy to this. That's the key to flexibility and ultimately the answer of politics within the philosophy.

Edit: I brought up the Will Durant quote to emphasize why the question of an Epicurean society is so hard to answer satisfactorily. It's a question that has been bothering me for years now. I think Austin struggled with it too in her scope of interpersonal ethics applied en masse.