

Athenian Political Prejudices

Post by “Eikadistes” of December 24, 2025 at 12:02 PM

I was reviewing the [Last Will](#), and something occurred to me about (potentially) anti-Epicurean, Athenian prejudices against the Garden. I think there's a misogynistic assumption laced-in there, and a xenophobic element that reflects property laws, which was a primary concern in the Will. Epíkouros, *himself*, seems to have been respected, but I'm not so sure about the rest.

Based on my attempt to [reconstruct](#) Epicurean history by each, individually-attested figure's name, I am considering the following, based on 27 or so, well-established, [early Epicureans](#) (there are another 20 or so from uncertain locations):

- Almost half of Epíkouros' closests friends were non-Athenians, from Lampsakos.

I'm curious if anyone might be able to expand on sociological prejudices in ancient Athens (that city, in particular, for context in the Garden). My general understanding is that prejudicial, cultural thinking among the Greeks had less to do with your appearance and more to do with whether or not you could speak Greek, but I'm sure that's just a generalization.

I might be influenced by current events, but, I'm curious if some of the attitudes regarding immigration that are playing out right now in America (and were seeded a long time ago) are in any way comparable to prejudicial attitudes of traditional minds in ancient Athens. Or maybe they lack those characteristics that I am calling “prejudicial”? (or not...)

Anyway, here is another consideration I had, if they faced xenophobia (which, again, based on the #1 concern as Epíkouros states in the Last Will, I think it may been). The following may have been a challenge in making a “first-impression”:

- Two of the four Founders were Lampsakian.
- One of the four Founders was Lesbian (...I *think* that's the proper demonym?)
- The main Founder has Athenian citizenship **only** by a technicality, through his parents. He, himself, was born, raised, educated, and began his career in another territory. He did not acquire property in Athens until his 30s.

Was there Athenian prejudice by native Athenians versus foreign-born Athenians? We're having this exact debate right now in America, and re-defining how we look at citizenship based on location of birth. I suppose this is not *just* a modern issue.

Would foreign-born people establishing the Garden down the road from the Academy have been received ... sort of ... the way that establishing an Islamic, cultural center in NYC was received by many after 9/11? Political evaluation aside, I observed a lot of traditional minds

angered by that suggestion, and I wonder if we can find an analogue in Antiquity.

All right, so, if any other philosophers represented sociologically prejudicial attitudes of any type (I'm looking at you, Aristotle), I wonder if they attached their nativist prejudices against the Garden. For example, I can imagine a Peripatetic student, rambling about the Lyceum, complaining about "those damn foreigners" in the Garden ... or not! I'm just curious.

Here's another consideration I'm wondering:

- Of Epíkouros' closest associates (as I count), 25% or so were *hetairai*.

Unless the names of hetairai were over-represented by biographers in an effort to exaggerate and demonize Epíkouros' sex-life, and others were under-represented, the Garden seems to have been safe for women seeking education, including pregnant women, and, mothers. This was not the case with all schools of philosophy, and Aristotle, in particular ... talked a lot of shit.

The Peripatetics entertained a misogynistic attitude, but they weren't the only ones. As I understand, this was a popular view, given the Athenian political system. Outside of the non-traditional Cynics, I imagine that the hetairai were popular targets for Epicurean opponents. We have record of this from polemics, and then later demonization from Christian writers. Dr. Pamela Gordon writes extensively about this in her book *The Invention and Gendering of Epicurus*.

So, imagine you're a grumpy, prejudicial Peripatetic in 300 BCE, and the Epicureans moved into the Garden only a few years ago. Everyone seems to be *charmed* by the Founder, but he has a bone to pick with *virtue*, has been kicked out of at least one island in the past for his teachings, and keeps unusual company ... about 3 of 4 Epicureans from their perspective are either foreigners, or women whom they unfairly disparaged as prostitutes.

If there were prejudicial minds among the schools of their opponents, Epicureans must have been prime targets for a form of misogynistic, xenophobic prejudice that is very recognizable from a contemporary perspective.

'Same time, I don't mean to project my own perception of history on them. So I'm curious.

Post by "Joshua" of December 24, 2025 at 2:50 PM

Epicurus' status was clearly low by birth, and that he was derided for this in antiquity is a matter of record. But that he was born in the colonies is a symptom of his low status rather than the cause of it.

The real problem was wealth. Athens was democratic not only in its politics but in its outlook, at least so far as male citizens were concerned, and inheritance was divided equally rather than by primogeniture.

This caused problems, because the largest heritable asset in a family was commonly land, and land only grows by acquisition. Successful landowners could buy more, but unsuccessful ones could only sell what they had, or bequeath it to their heirs; heirs who would each receive an equal portion. If the father had only enough land to support a family, and that land was divided among four sons upon his death, the sons obviously could not each produce enough to support families of their own. Over time, plots got smaller and smaller, and families poorer and poorer.

You see the same problem at work on American Indian reservations today. The solution to this problem in antiquity was to bundle the poorest families onto ships, and send them off to a distant shore to found a colony. The whole project of colonization was the project of thinning out an underclass; not unlike the modern story of the British settlement of Australia as a penal colony.

Epicurus' parents were very probably 'transported' or 'removed' in this way, and on Samos took up whatever work they could find--pedagogy for his father, always a dismal line of work in antiquity, and some kind of low folk magic for his mother, according to the rumors.

There is an interesting epitaph in the Greek Anthology which bears slightly on this question;

Book XI - Convivial and Satirical Epigrams

No. 249 - Lucilius

Quote

"Menophanes bought a field, and from hunger hanged himself on another man's oak. When he was dead they had no earth to throw over him from above, but he was buried for payment in the ground of one of his neighbors. If Epicurus had known of Menophanes' field he would have said that everything is full of fields, not of atoms."

This may at least hint at the problem of land shortages and poverty in Greece at the time.

Ironically, Menophanes deserves some credit because the Standard Model in physics suggests that everything is full of fields! Only kidding.

Aristotle was the private tutor of a whole new generation of rulers (Alexander the Great and Ptolemy I chief among them), and the Academy and the Lyceum attracted the sons of the wealthiest families in Athens. We can expect a certain amount of sneering. I still haven't read Pamela Gordon's book.

Post by “Eikadistes” of December 24, 2025 at 2:54 PM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

Epicurus' parents were very probably 'transported' or 'removed' in this way, and on Samos took up whatever work they could find--pedagogy for his father, always a dismal line of work in antiquity, and some kind of low folk magic for his mother, according to the rumors.

This is fascinating! (And exactly the kind of thing I was looking for). Thank you!

Post by “Joshua” of December 24, 2025 at 2:58 PM

I'll try to remember where I first read about land inheritance in ancient Athens so I can give you a source, but it was a few years ago when I worked in land-surveying so it may take time!

Post by “Joshua” of December 24, 2025 at 3:29 PM

Here is a good start:

[Land reform in Athens - Wikipedia](#)

Quote

Already in the 8th century BC, Hesiod referred to land shortage related to the problems of **dividing inheritance**. In the *Odyssey* it is mentioned that the worst fate of a man, other than death, is to remain without land and thus have to serve another person. **People with no land had to leave Athens and settle in colonies in the west (Sicily and Italy) and east (Asia Minor)**.

I'll keep looking for information relating to the 4th century when Epicurus was born.

Post by “Cassius” of December 24, 2025 at 4:22 PM

Very interesting thread. I don't have much to add at the moment but I want to make a couple of comments:

1 - i seem to remember that there might be some relevant material in Diskin clay's article ["Epicurus' Last Will and Testament"](#)

2 - As this thread proceeds, please everyone be sure to keep the commentary general and not take argumentative positions on current-day issues of immigration / migration. Those are extremely important and even critical issues for everyone in modern life. I urge everyone to pay attention to those issues and take positions and relevant actions in their personal lives. There is going to be strong disagreement, however, on what those positions should be, and this forum is not the place to argue such positions.

3 - Another quote to factor into the mix would be what Diogenes Laertius records here as to what Epicurus said about the Cynics in the list of Epicurus' statements about other philosophers: "...Democritus Lerocritus ('judge of nonsense'), Antidorus he called Sannidorus ('Maniac'), the Cynics 'Enemies of Hellas,' the Logicians 'The destroyers,' and Pyrrho 'The uneducated fool.'"

[EpicureanFriends Side-By-Side Diogenes Laertius Ten](#)