ℕ𝕆 POLITICS*

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*unless bailing friends from jail, shielding fugitives from extradition, subverting property laws, emancipating slaves, empowering migrants, amplifying female voices, funding monthly outreach programs, financing stone monuments, patronizing finance ministers, ridiculing popular beliefs, supporting good legislation, encouraging advantageous policies, distributing…

The Fruits of Society

Epíkouros did not mince words:

> ΟΥΔΕ ΠΟΛΙΤΕΥΕΣΘΑΙ
> *oúde politeúesthai*[1]

Life is best "**NOT TO BE POLITICKED**".[2] For the sake of living well, lovers of wisdom are exhorted by the Sage to neither "pursue public office", nor "conduct government", nor "administer the state". After all, the "purest security is generated out of the peace and withdrawal from the masses",[3] as also it "is predominately perfected [by] friendship".[4] A life of constant struggle makes it difficult for a person to "take risks for the sake of friendship".[5] Political ambition itself challenges the natural goal of living a sweet life. God would never suffer the stress of office — *why should the wise*?[6]

Even so, the Hēgēmṓn recognizes that "*some* security" can be expected to be "generated out of [mutual association with other] people" so far as concerns a "certain supportive power and [mutual] abundance".[7] Epíkouros *never* passes an injunction against observing jurisprudence, nor dismisses the benefits of practical legislation. He affirms that the wise "will serve jury duty" and "at [a certain] time [will even be willing] to serve a monarch [...] and will gain notoriety in public".[8] Hérmarkhos quips that even "the multitude" see an obvious "advantage arising from an association with each other."[9]

While "nothing is needed" in terms of things "acquired through competitions" and political "assemblies",[10] *nowhere* does the Sage dismiss the benefits of civic engagement, nor disparage the fruits of mutual association. After all, "it *is* possible for [the divine] nature to exist even with many troubles surrounding it."[11] "The wealth of Nature" that "is both defined and obtainable"[12] includes not only resources and replenishments, but people to call friends, and a place to practice friendship.

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1 **οὐδὲ πολιτεύσεσθαι** (*oúdé politeúsesthai*) meaning "not to be politicked" (Laértios 10.119). *Politeúsesthai* is the present middle/passive infinitive of *politeúō* meaning "to be politically-involved" with the connotation of wanting "to pursue public office", wishing "to conduct government", seeking "to meddle in affairs", or hoping "to administer the state".
2 Epíkouros, *On Lifestyles* (as preserved by Diogénēs Laértios 10.119)
3 Epíkouros, *Key Doctrine* 14 (*Ibid*., 10.143)
4 *Ibid.* 28 (*Ibid*., 10.148)
5 Epíkouros, *Vatican Saying* 28
6 Cicero records **μή πολιτεύσεσθαι** (*mḗ politeúsesthai*) that the wise "should not to be politically-involved" (Usener 8).
7 Epíkouros, *Key Doctrine* 14 (*Ibid*., 10.143)
8 Diogénēs Laértios, *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers* 10.120
9 *Ibid.*
10 Epíkouros, *Key Doctrine* 21 (*Ibid*., 10.146)
11 Philódēmos, *On Piety*, Col. 3
12 Epíkouros, *Key Doctrine* 15 (*Ibid*., 10.144)

ΤΩΝ ΣΥΜΠΟΛΙΤΕΥΟΜΕΝΩΝ
tṓn sympoliteuoménōn[13]

In the case "**of those being governed together**" or "**of those being politically-engaged with one another**"[14] (e.g. *neighbors, citizens*) the cultivation of mutual associations is foundational to living a good life. Indeed "only as a result of [learning to live with] those [others] can the [good life] possibly hope to be procured".[15] Far from demonizing all *pólis*-related activities, Epíkouros affirms that *any* association that cultivates "courage out of [living with other] people *is,* by nature, good". When it comes to mutual association, the fruits of "political" activity are still sweet.

Bustle, No Hustle

The verb **πολιτεύω** (*politeúō*) includes both [1] the activity of "holding public office" and also [2] the general conditions related to "living as a citizen" (in a *pólis*). Epíkouros questions the practicality the former, but remarks on the utility of the latter. On *one* hand, he warns against the troubles that come from administering the affairs of the state. On the *other*, he praises the advantages that come from "being a citizen", "being governed together", and "living in a state". The Hēgēmṓn warns against the troubles that come from living with *politics*, but defends the benefits of living within *polities*.

Ticks of the Pólis

Over *half* of the human population (over 4 billion people) of the 21st-century live in *póleis,* but this was not *always* the case. In the ancient world, less than 5% of *all* human beings lived in urban centers. As a result, *pólis*-related activities were once *much less* characteristic of the average human experience. The vast majority of humanity was dispersed across the globe in loose networks of settlements.

Epíkouros, however, was **not** among them. Nor was his family, nor most of his friends, nor many of his students. In fact, the Sage spent the vast majority of his life within the jurisdiction of a *póleis*. Raised in the prosperous, maritime hub of Sámos, Epíkouros was conscripted to Athens, the largest *pólis* in Greece, "City of the Violet Crown".[16] After two years of services, Epíkouros returns to his family in Ionia, who had since moved to rural Kolophṓn — the village presented him with limited, intellectual opportunities, so the Gargettian pursued education in nearby Téōs. Once he finished his education, he launched a career in Mytilḗnē, the largest *pólis* on the island of Lésbos, until advancing to the hub of Lámpsakos, where he cultivated a devoted following. He then returned to Athens, and founded the Garden. As his moniker suggests, the "Gargettian" was well-acquainted with the ways of the *póleis*.

History records "the famous Gargettian"[17] as having been born on the Ionian island of Sámos, which was a *cleruchy* or *independent colony* of Athens at the time. His parents hailed from the Attic dḗmē[18] of

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13 **τῶν συμπολιτευομένων** (*tṓn sympoliteuoménōn)* meaning "of those being governed together" or "of those being politically engaged with one another" (*Key Doctrine* 38). Other translators render "of those living together as citizens" in the form of a present active participle (e.g. "living" as citizens), but the verb is conjugated as the middle/passive participle (e.g. "being politicked"), thus, the middle/passive particle of *politeúō* means "being governed together", or "being politically engaged with one another" (Diogénēs Laértios, *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers* 10.153).
14 Epíkouros*, Key Doctrine* 38 (*Diogénēs Laértios, Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers* 10.153)
15 Epíkouros*, Key Doctrine* 6 (*Ibid*., 10.141)
16 Pindar, *Fragment* 76 (c. 5th-century BCE)
17 Cicero, *Epistle to Cassius* (January 45 BCE) 15.16; also Aelian, *Varia Historia* 4.13
18 The **δῆμοι** (*dḗmoi*) were administrative subdivisions of ancient Athens, similar in scale to modern suburbs or boroughs.

Gargēttós,[19] and, as a result of his family's political enfranchisement, he was afforded legal privileges as a citizen, such as the privilege to purchase property. Were it not for the fact of his citizenship and the advantage of his lineage, Epíkouros could not have founded *The Garden*.

Indeed, the Gargettian did not dwell in the wilderness like a locust-eating, doomsday-preaching ascetic.[20] To the contrary, he owned a private home in the center of the largest *pólis* in ancient Greece.

No Sleep Til Melítē

In 306 BCE, after fifteen years off of the coast of Ionia, 35-year-old Epíkouros moves to Athens, largest *pólis* in Greece (and *one* of the largest *póleis* in the Eastern Mediterranean after Syracuse in Sicily and Alexándreia in Egypt). As history records, when given the choice, **the Athenian *pólis* provided the Hēgēmṓn with more utility than the "withdrawal" of isolated settlements**. In an era where most people were not living *pólis*-related lives, the ancient Epicureans *chose* the pleasures of the *pólis*. The students of the Garden chose to hold themselves accountable to *pólis*-related laws, and pay *pólis*-related taxes, embrace *pólis*-related ceremonies, celebrate *pólis*-related holidays, and enjoy *pólis*-related pleasures. In a world of wilderness, Epicureans aimed to enjoy the privileges of the *pólis*.

The fact of his citizenship gave Epíkouros the right to make a number of financial acquisitions: he acquired a residence in affluent Melítē,[21] a city district in the center of Athens. He also deliberately purchased property between the Dípylon Gate and Plátōn's *Akadēmía*, which he called *The Garden*. Citizenship afforded him the right to file his *Will* at the *mētrṓion* (an administrative office that would facilitate inheritance). The document allocated funds for posthumous holidays, facilitated the successor-guardianship of the children of Metródōros and Polyaînos (both having sons named Epikoúros), and established a dowry for Metródōros' daughter. Lastly, it ensured the manumission of four slaves: "I set free Mýs, Nikías, Lýkōn: I likewise grant Little Phaídra [her] freedom."[22]

These inheritances and emancipations were afforded as a consequence of Epíkouros' political status as a citizen. These actions were facilitated by the "supportive power" of the Athenian state. The public officials who preserved the archives (at the *mētrṓion*) ensured that the Hēgemṓn's wishes were executed according to the conditions of his written will. As a result of his legal agency, his public presence, and his willingness to use the machinery of the *pólis*, Epíkouros' best friend, Hérmarkhos, an immigrant who followed him as a child from *Mytilḗnē,* not only becomes the "hēgemṓn having been left behind",[23] but also becomes the financial manager of the *Athenian* Garden. The "succession" of the Epicurean school thus "goes on […] and [has hosted] countless of the familiar authorities". [24]

Hiding in Plain Sight

As a matter of practicality, Epíkouros affirms that the wise "will make plans to gain public approval" even if "only so far as to avoid being treated with contempt [...] and will gain notoriety in public, but not enthusiastically".[25] Were it not for the practical utility of association, "it [might be] better not to

19 "EPÍKOUROS, son of Neoklḗs and Khairestrátē, [was an] Athenian [citizen] of the dḗmē Gargēttós, of the family of the Philaídai, as Mētródōros says in his book *On Pedigree*." (*Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers* 10.1)
20 Contrast against the ascetic John the Baptist from the Second Temple Period (see *Matthew* 3:4).
21 Μελίτη (*Melítē*) was an affluent district at the center of ancient Athens, just west of the Acropolis.
22 Diogénēs Laértios, *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers* 10.21
23 **καταλελειμμένου ἡγεμόνος** (*kataleleimménou hēgemónos*) meaning "of the hēgemṓn having been left behind" (10.20)
24 Diogénēs Laértios, *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers* 10.9
25 *Ibid.,* 10.120

receive public preferment".[26] Yet Philódēmos explains that "philosophers gain the friendship of public men by helping them out of their troubles"[27] and "those whom they find opposed to them they quickly soften".[28] As his biographer describes, the Sage of the Garden exemplifies this ideal:

> *Witnesses* [*revere*] *this considerable man* [*and his*] *unsurpassable goodwill to everyone, both* [*to those in his*] *fatherland* [*who*] *honored him with bronze statues, and his friends, so many* [*in*] *their extent as it would not be possible to measure* [*them with*] *whole cities, and all those familiar* [*with*] *the dogmatic* [*wisdom*] *of his* [*that enables them*] *to gain mastery over the* [*deceitful*] *sirens* [*of suffering*].[29]

Defending the friendly disposition of Epíkouros, Diogénēs further celebrates

> *his unsurpassable kindness* […] *his gratitude to his progenitors, and his beneficence to his brothers, and his gentleness to his servants* […] *and that the* [*servants*] *philosophized with him* […] *and on the whole, his philanthropism* [*was apparent*] *to everyone, indeed his piety for the gods, and his fond disposition for his fatherland; for* [*owing to his*] *hyperbole* [*for*] *kindness, he never fastened to politics*[30]

Live *with Security* (Not "in Obscurity")

Indeed, the Hēgēmṓn "never fastened to politics" as a profession, nor as a means of income, (nor as a dubious obsession), but *certainly,* he fastened to the *pólis,* only leaving Athens "twice or thrice" to visit "friends" in "Ionia", throughout the latter *half* of his life (nearly thirty-five, uninterrupted years in the *pólis).* This may surprise readers familiar with the Sage's recommendation to "live unknown".

The phrase λάθε βιώσας[31] (*láthe biṓsas*, meaning "escape notice ['n'] live!") is usually translated as "live hidden", "unnoticed", "in obscurity", "in anonymity", or "live unknown". Therein, Epíkouros encouraged his friends and followers to cultivate lives of philosophical calm, estranged from egotistical ambitions, indifferent to accolades, immune to the allure of approval, unburdened by popular opinion, unimpressed by affluence, uninspired by opulence, and liberated from vain beliefs about fame. He challenges them to live lives too blissfully unremarkable to appear on the turbulent pages of history. Truly, "there is no method by which one can" reliably "persuade the multitude, either always or in the majority of cases",[32] so politics is an unreliable and often unprofitable career path. To compensate for this condition, success in politics requires either "a lot of money made through unscrupulous means" or "servility to the mob or authority".[33] Neither of those conditions are conducive to happiness.

> ΛΑΘΕ ΒΙΩΣΑΣ
> *láthe*[34] *biṓsas*[35]

This exhortation principally addresses private vulnerabilities (like envy) that lead a person to short-

26 Philódēmos, *On Rhetoric*, II, 154, fr. XII
27 *Ibid.*, II, 133, fr. IV
28 Philódēmos, *On Rhetoric*, II, 160, XXI-XXV. II, 162, fr. XXVII
29 Diogénēs Laértios, *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers* 10.9
30 *Ibid.*, 10.10
31 Usener *Fragment* 551
32 Philódēmos, *On Rhetoric*, II, 120, fr. XIX
33 Epíkouros, *Vatican Saying* 67
34 **Λάθε** (*2nd-person singular, aorist, active, imperative*) of λᾰνθᾰ́νω (*lanthánō*) meaning "[you] escape notice!"
35 **βιώσας** (*2nd-person singular, aorist, active, imperative*) of βιόω (*bióō*) meaning "[you] live!"

sighted decisions, which then increases overall public insecurity. In the context of a *pólis*, Epíkouros' invocation to "live *unknown*" serves not as a *call to the wild*, but an affirmation to live a dignified life navigating society gracefully, *without* attracting unwanted attention. One might "withdraw" from the *trends* "of the masses" and cultivate emotional "stillness", intellectual "peace", and mental "tranquility" without abandoning one's role as a neighbor and fellow citizen. One need not renounce the pleasant comforts of urban life (where they exist), retreat to a cave, or isolate oneself in the vast desert to find peace. The life of the wise need not be suffered in solitude, not silenced for the sake of virtue. To live in a *pólis*, it is necessary "to obtain money, and to prevent disfranchisement and exile".[36]

Epíkouros was not drawn to the *pólis* for its troubles and deceptive rhetoric, but by her pleasures. He thus provides students with a set of expectations as concerns the benefits of both justice and law.

Law & Order

In a perfect community (*of divinities*), "there would be no need of laws".[37] However, within the *póleis* of the Earth, the wise do not observe *all* humans to be "capable of surveying and recollecting what is advantageous". Not all neighbors will exercise neighborly relations, observing "pacts to neither harm nor be harmed".[38] Not all neighbors are willing to observe "the beneficial tendency" of laws, for example, against "readily destroying each other".[39] It is often necessary to defend "against harm from such people".[40] Indeed, for "the sake of achieving a profitable [outcome]", groups of people "should not indiscriminately destroy each other".[41] It is therefore reasonable to safeguard "the salvation"[42] of the community with law — simultaneously, the community "works together for the sake of the distinct salvation of each [person]". Granted, one need not reduce themselves to being a cog in the machine of society, especially "where one [could be] profitable [being] separated", but one must still review their impact so that they are "not to produce ruinous" conditions for neighbors and fellow citizens.

Observing a social contract, Hérmarkhos insists that "legal institutes" originally "became lawful [not] through violence," and forced coercion, "but through the consent of those that used them."[43] Certainly, it would be preferable if all humans "would spontaneously avoid such things" that lead to their neighbors' destruction, yet not everyone can be expected to "do that which is right" in terms "of what is useful" and what is "detrimental".[44] Thus, anticipating inevitable abuses, "legislators ordained, that even involuntary" crime "should not be entirely void of punishment; in order that they might not only afford no pretext for the voluntary imitation of those deeds which were involuntarily performed".[45] "[H]ence legislators, wishing to restrain that indolence which is injurious to our neighbours" employed the tool of legislation and thereafter "prevented the commission of numerous offences".[46] "Hence they endeavored still more firmly to restrain those who readily destroyed each other".[47] Then "in attempting to effect this, they introduced those legal institutes which still remain in cities and nations"[48]

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36 Philódēmos, *On Rhetoric* V
37 Hérmarkhos, *Against Empedoklēs* 1.8
38 Epíkouros, *Key Doctrine* 32
39 Hérmarkhos, *Against Empedoklēs* 1.7
40 *Ibid.*, 1.10
41 *Ibid.*, 1.9
42 *Ibid.*, 1.10
43 *Ibid.*, 1.8
44 *Ibid.*
45 *Ibid.*, 1.9
46 *Ibid.*
47 *Ibid.*, 1.11
48 *Ibid.*

By doing so, ancient legislators act toward "advancing the community itself" in terms of developing "the necessary [services in society]" so that "a befitting [community will have been] generated through [the] long [commitment to the aid] of one another".[49] Unlike many of their philosophical opponents, the Epicureans provided an evolutionary description of human history, and explained that society developed gradually, over long periods, ultimately guided by the natural benefits of nature.

> *Then neighbours began to form the bonds of friendship, with a will*
> *Neither to be harmed themselves, nor do another ill,*
> *The safety of babes and womenfolk in one another's trust,*
> *And indicated by gesturing and grunting it was just*
> *For everyone to have mercy on the weak. Without a doubt*
> *Occasional infractions of the peace would come about,*
> *But the vast majority of people faithfully adhered*
> *To the pact, or else man would already have wholly disappeared;*
> *Instead, the human race has propagated to this day*.[50]

Though trouble is risked when pursuing a political career, that does not mean that legislators are categorically unable to help satisfy the natural needs of a community. By contrast, "thousands of [Greeks] have been useful ambassadors, were prudent in their advice, were not the cause of disaster, did not speak with an eye to gain, and were not convicted of malfeasance in office."[51] They are less concerned with trying "to classify and describe metaphors" instead of trying to give "practical working instructions".[52] In this regard, one can "find reason for pursuing practical rhetoric". [53]

Hermarkhos congratulates the wisdom of early legislators: "For those who introduced things of this kind to the multitude, excelled in wisdom" and demonstrated "a rational consideration of utility". To prevent violent crimes, they threatened "the dread of the punishment ordained by law" as a "remedy for" those who possess "ignorance of what is beneficial". For the threat of "punishment forcibly compels such as these to" consider the consequences of being unwilling to "subdue those impulses which lead them to useless actions" and "even now keeps the vulgar in awe, and" contributes to dissuading "them from doing any thing, either publicly or privately, which is not beneficial" to the community.[54]

> [*A*]*ncients legislators* [...] *proclaimed unholy the slaughter of* [*an innocent*] *human* [… due to] ***one, natural association existing*** [***among***] ***the people, in the name of people, due to the similarity of*** [***their***] ***forms and of*** [***their***] ***souls*** […] *a* [*murder is*] *not* [*going*] *to contribute towards* [*easing*] *the whole tension of life* [*that needs*] *to be supported*[55]

Of course, circumstances change. Just laws can become unjust. The machine of politics creates emergent problems of its own that could be avoided by avoiding the *pólis* in the first place. Mutual human association develop prior to the compounding of society, so justice is natural, and informs our political outlooks. On this topic, of the justness of political relations, Epíkouros has *a lot* to say.

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49 Hérmarkhos, *Against Empedoklḗs* 1.10
50 Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 5.1019-1027; translated by A. E. Stallings.
51 Philódēmos, *On Rhetoric*, II, 224, col. XIX
52 *Ibid.,* I, 171, 2, col. XII
53 *Ibid.,* II, 54, 41
54 Hérmarkhos, *Against Empedoklḗs 1.10*
55 *Ibid.,* 1.7

Just Us

At least **half** of the **40** *Key Doctrines*[56] of Epíkouros address the conditions that arise from human co-existence. No less than **9** of those *Doctrines*[57] mention "the nature of the just" or "justice" as when "someone establishes a law".[58] Regarding the origin and nature of justice, Epíkouros writes (in full):

> [31]*The justice of nature is* [a] *pact* [*formed out*] *of a* [*mutual*] *profiting towards the* [*hope*] *neither to harm one another nor to be harmed.* [32]*As of the animals* [*with whom*] *a pact was not able to be drafted in defense of the* [*hope*] *to neither harm nor be harmed, before these* [*pacts existed*] *nothing was just nor unjust; but in like manner also as* [*concerns the case*] *of the tribes* [*with whom a pact*] *was not able* [*to be composed*] or [*with whom*] *a pact was not* ***wished*** *to be composed, in* [*absence*] *of a* [*pact*] *to neither harm nor be harmed* [*so too was nothing just nor unjust*]. [33]*Justice was not something* [*real*] *by itself, but* [*existed*] *in the gatherings* [*of the people*] *for the sake of one another, by however big* [*their*] *assemblies, but at some time,* [*at a*] *certain place,* always for the sake *of a* [*pact*] *neither to harm nor to be harmed.* [34]*Injustice* [*is*] *not by itself evil, but* [*what* is *evil is*] *in the fear concerning the apprehension* [*of*] *whether* [*one*] *will not escape* [*the*] *notice* [*of*] *those punishers* [*who*] *have been monitoring in case of such* [*violations*]. [35]*The one secretly moving* [*against all*] *of that* (*which they agreed* [*upon*] *with each other regarding the* [*pact*] *neither to harm nor to be harmed*) *is not* [*able*] *to have confidence that they will escape notice, even if ten-thousand-times by aid of the* [*one*] *being present they may escape notice; for until a catastrophic end* [*it will be*] *unclear if even they will escape detection.* [36]*Concerning, on one hand, that* [*which is*] *common* [for] *all, what* [*is*] *just* [*is generally*] *the same, for some* [*natural*] *profiting was* [*always*] *being* [*generated by living*] *in a community with one another; concerning, however, what* [*is*] *unique* [*in terms*] *of place and* [*in terms*] *of however long a time* [*one is affected because*] *of the* [*underlying*] *causes then* [*what is*] *just* [*is*] *not* [*for*] *all* [*therefore*] *being followed to be the same.* [37]*What truly is witnessed, that one profits in the service of the community* [*by providing utility*] *to one another,* [*this*] *possesses the character of the just, even if either the same might be generated* [*for*] *all, or even if the same could not* [*be generated for all*]. *If then one should pass* [*a*] *law,* [*that*] *should not result from the profiting of the community between one another,* [*then*] *no longer does it possess the nature of the just. And if it may fall from the* [*mark*] *concerning a just profiting,* [*for the*] *time then* [*that it*] *is fitted to the preconception*[59] *of justice,* [*it is*] *not at all inferior in that way* [*at*] *the time* [*it*] *was just* [*and with reflection*] *the vain cries themselves may not confound, but look to the facts.* [38]*When not* [*thought to be just, in the case*] *of recent* [*changes*] *being generated* [*as a result*] *of the surrounding affairs* [*of state*]*, it was revealed not fitting in regard to the preconception*[60] [*of justice against*] *the* [*things that*] *have been considered just in respect of the same matters* [*that in the past exemplified justice*] *— it was not* [*existing except as*] *those* [*things considered*] *just. But when* [*because*] *of recent* [*changes*] *being generated* [*out*] *of the* [*surrounding*] *affairs* [*of state*]*, it was not yet harmonizing* [*with*] *the same just proceedings, therein then, at the time, truly, it was just, when* [*one*] *was profiting throughout the community with one another* [*in the case*] *of* ***those who are politically-***

56 Epíkouros, *Key Doctrines* 1, 5-7, 13-14, 17, 27-28, 30, 39-40 (*including* 31-38 *on justice*)
57 *Ibid*. 17, 31-38
58 Epíkouros, *Key Doctrine* 37
59 **πρόληψιν** (*prólepsin*) meaning "preconception", "anticipation", "definition", or "common notion".
60 Same note as above [#61]

***engaged together**;*[61] *later then it was still not just, when not profiting together.*

As described, regarding "those who are governed together", Epíkouros expresses concern against both unjust actions, as with "one secretly moving against […] the pact neither to harm nor to be harmed" as well as laws that "no longer possesses the nature of what is just". He expresses equal concern for those "tribes [with whom a pact] was not *able* to be composed" and expresses *specific* concern toward those tribes with whom "pact was not *wished* to be composed", anticipating that the wise may need to respond to hostile parties as they would against wild animals. He observes the mutual benefits of society as when "one passes [a] law" that results in "the profiting of the community between one another", and positively urges that every "one profits in the service of the community [by providing utility] to one another". Indeed, rather than "not engaging in politics", Epíkouros urges students to support laws that "possess the mark of justice". Wise people will respond to unjust laws accordingly, both making "fitting" changes out "of the affairs [of state]", and observing unjust laws selectively.

These foundational observations (in principle) are echoed throughout the documents that punctuate American history. The Declaration of Independence observes "certain unalienable Rights", that "among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed". The Preamble of the U.S. Constitution asserts that "in Order to form a more perfect Union," the "People" set to "establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity". In his Gettysburg Address, President Lincoln describes a "government *of the* people, *by* the people, *for* the people". (*World history presents many more examples than those easily accessible to my mind. Certainly, there are complications and nuances to the implementation of these ideals.)*

As an animal cannot operate within its environment without making biome-related observations, so too is a human animal unable operate within a *pólis* without making *pólis*-related observations. As observers, Epicureans have amassed a breadth of observations within the walls of the *póleis.*

Strong Opinions

As we know from Philódēmos, "it is not like Epicurus to hesitate to speak the truth".[62] After all, the Epicurean sages "will be opinionated and will not be puzzled."[63] *Far* from abstaining from political speech, *many* Epicureans were known for their categorically-political commentary.

Philódēmos outright calls "democracy" the "worst form of government."[64] He tutored Julius Caesar's (then future) wife Calpurnia, and may have shared Cesarean sympathies, as did his close friend, Lucius Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus (Calpurnia's father). These sympathies were shared by prominent Epicureans of 1st-century BCE Rome, including Gaius Trebatius Testa, Gaius Matius, Gaius Vibius Pansa Caetronianus, Lucius Cornelius Balbus, Publius Cornelius Dolabella, and Publius Volumnius Etrapelus. Conversely, a number of the Roman philosophers held positions *against* Caesar, as was the case with Marcus Tullius Cicero and his Epicurean associates Aulus Manlius Torquatus, Lucius Manlius Torquatus, Aulus Hirtius, Gaius Cassius Longinus, Gaius Trebianus, Lucius Papirius Paetus, Marcus Fadius Gallus, and Statilius. The descriptions that Cicero catalogues preserve a spectrum of

61 The *one* and *only* time in extant texts that Epíkouros directly employs the root πολιτευ (*politeu*) is in reference to the benefits of mutual association in the context of living in an urban environment ruled by law.
62 Philódēmos, *On Rhetoric,* II-b
63 Diogénēs Laértios, *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers* 10.120
64 Philódēmos, *On Rhetoric,* VII

positions, from a dozen, political Epicureans, just prior to the collapse of the *Rēs Pūblica*.

The Romans, entrenched in their Great Civil War were *far* from being the only Epicureans of the ancient world who approached the political podium. In 88 BCE an Epicurean[65] ambassador to Mithridátēs VI named Aristíōn[66] seized the Athenian government and assumed the role of a *tyrant*:[67]

> *Archelaus sent them the sacred treasure of Delos by the hands of Aristion, an Athenian citizen, attended by 2,000 soldiers to guard the money. These soldiers Aristion made use of to make himself master of the country, putting to death immediately some of those who favored the Romans and sending others to Mithridates. And* ***these things he did although he professed to be a philosopher of the school of Epicurus****.*

Within two years, the Roman general Sulla would conquer Athens and execute Aristíōn. Twenty years, later, a man named Lysías of Tarsós assumes the role of *tyrant*. Athḗnaios writes:

> *... at Tarsus an Epicurean philosopher* [...] *had become the tyrant of that city, Lysias by name; who having been created by his countrymen Stephanephorus, that is to say, the priest of Heracles, did not lay down his command, but seized on the tyranny. He put on a purple tunic with a white centre, and over that he wore a very superb and costly cloak, and he put on white Lacedaemonian sandals, and assumed also a crown of golden laurel leaves. And* ***he distributed the property of the rich among the poor, and put many to death who did not surrender their property willingly****.*

Echoing the diversity of opinions held by Epicureans during the Roman Republic, the French Epicureans of the Baroque period[68] introduce diverse political commentary into modern, Epicurean literature. They served flavors ranging from *monarchism* to *liberalism* to *anarchism*, united by their common, intellectual descent from the Epicurean Garden, and their shared rejection of the Church.

Early figures, like Michel de Montaigne and François de la Moethe le Vayer advocated "pragmatic" submission to monarchy. Others resisted, like Théophile de Viau and his lover Jacques Vallée Des Barreaux. Some came to question the divine authority of the state like Pierre Gassendi. To these, we add Machiavellian thinkers like Gabriel Naudé, and his friend Gui Patin. Aristocrats hosted salons, like the defiant courtesan Marion Delorme, and her lover Charles de Saint-Évremond, as well as the libertine Ninon de l'Enclos. François VI, Duc de La Rochefoucauld fought in the *Fronde* against both Cardinal Richelieu *and* the King's *Musketeers*. Physician François Bernier came to revile the political "despotism" that he witnessed in Asia. Among poets, Antoinette Deshoulières shared loyalties with King Louis XIV, while Guillaume Amfrye de Chaulieu resisted royal authority. Jean de la Chapelle, the "father of French epicurean poetry" developed nationalistic propaganda against the Habsburg dynasty, while a series of anti-clerical secularists, including Julien Offray de La Mettrie, Denis Diderot, and Paul-Henri Thiry, Baron d'Holbach influenced minds like John Locke and Thomas Jefferson.

During the American Revolution, an Epicurean physician named Thomas helped organize the Boston Tea Party. His student, an Epicurean officer named Ethan helped found the State of Vermont. Another Epicurean friend of theirs (also named Thomas) gets elected as the 3rd President of the United States. In the 19th-century, an Epicurean feminist named Frances advocated utopian socialism. In the 20th-

65 Appianòs of Alexandreús, *Mithridatic Wars* 6.28
66 Aoiz, Javier and Boeri, Marcelo. *Theory and Practice in Epicurean Philosophy* 147-148
67 **τύραννος** (*týrannos*) meaning "tyrant" or "absolute ruler", usually with the connotation of a "dictator" or "despot".
68 For more information, see *Epicureans and Atheists in France, 1650-1729* by Alan Charles Kors (2016).

century, an Epicurean intellectual named Christopher shared critical insights on authoritarianism. In the 21st-century, an Epicurean farmer named José served as the 40th Presidente de la República Oriental del Uruguay. Each of these passionately political figures identified themselves as students of the Garden. "I too am an Epicurean" wrote Thomas Jefferson.[69] Christopher Hitchens echoed Jefferson's statement of purpose.[70] Presidente José Mujica affirmed in his "humble way of thinking, that the problem we are facing is political. The Old Thinkers" like "Epicurus […] put it this way*:* a poor person is not someone who has little but one who needs infinitely more, and more and more."[71]

Based on two-thousands years of anecdotes, it seems unrealistic to attempt to purge the *pólis*-related interests from the human mind, as though the *pólis* were fundamentally evil. Quite the opposite, the origins of political activity serve to promote the benefits of mutual association. Humans have engaged and re-engaged *póleis*-related activities for millennia, whether patronizing the *Théatro tou Dionýsou,* or catching a *Broadway* matinee. Far better is it for a happy human *not* to avoid the *pólis* (as a great pain), but rather, to maximize the natural goods that directly result from *pólis*-related activities. This means gracefully navigate *pólis*-related exchanges, rather than eliminating them from our thoughts.

Speaking Frankly

While one is best to "avoid contact" with antagonists and "expel them from thought", it is not always the case that "these practices prove to be useful".[72] While it might be preferred to eliminate contact with antagonistic personalities, this is not always possible. Citizens must find ways to preserve their peace through compromise. After all, "the harmony that to some is good for others is indifferent".[73]

Unlike the Socratic sages who alleged to "know nothing", Epíkoruos affirms that true sages "will be opinionated."[74] At the same time, the ancient Epicureans criticize Sōkrátēs for having "offended many people and incurred political enmities, from which indeed in time hatred grew".[75] Of course, practicing free speech does not excuse one from the consequences of speaking. Thus, a wise person should "not [get] carried away so as to insult or strut or show contempt [or] do harm".[76] Pick your battles, for "there is no [necessity] to apply frankness in every case."[77] Philódēmos weighs the need to speak frankly against the practical ability of a person to receive criticism, hoping (usually) for them to enjoy the greatest advantage from constructive guidance. He explains that it "is hard work for those who are handling [a topic] by way of an epitome to be precise about every kind"[78] since there are so many unique personalities, distinct relationships, and nuanced contexts. (*Nonetheless, he attempts to do so*).

Philódēmos wonders, "*How will he handle those who have become angry toward him because of his frank criticism*?"[79] First, remember that "some [do not] perceive their own errors" and "it causes [them] to dis[trust]",[80] being "afflicted with passions that puff one up or generally hinder one".[81] Even so, to

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69 Thomas Jefferson, Letter to William Short (31 October 1819).
70 Jules Evans, *Philosophy for Life and Other Dangerous Situations: Ancient Philosophy for Modern Problems* (91)
71 José Mujica, *Human Happiness and the Environment*. Rio +20 Summit (20 June 2012, translated by Vero).
72 Epíkouros, *Key Doctrine* 39 (Diogénēs Laértios, *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers* 10.154)
73 Epíkoruos, *On the Wise* (*Ibid.,* 10.120)
74 Diogénēs Laértios, *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers* 10.120
75 Philódēmos, *On Piety*, Col. 59
76 Philódēmos, *On Frank Criticism*, Col. Ib
77 *Ibid.*, Col. lIb
78 *Ibid.*, Col. Vllb
79 *Ibid.,* Frag. 70
80 *Ibid.,* Frag. 1
81 *Ibid.,* Frag. 66

address the errors, the "wise person and philosopher speaks frankly" understanding that their criticism "should be administered appropriately".[82] As a result, they "will differ for each […] just as a lad differs from a woman and old men will differ […] and youngsters alike [… and one must admonish] prominent [men] and peoples according to each".[83] He notes that privileged citizens "do not gladly accept others confuting them [because] they believe that many people reproach them out of envy".[84]

Some will require "a caring admonishment" instead of "an irony that pleases but pretty much stings" – many will become alienated when stung.[85] Thereafter, they "cannot possibly endure [to listen] to [that them] with goodwill."[86] Others "have judged it right to speak frankly [to] such people, but [moderately], given that sharp frankness bears a similarity to insult, as if insulting indeed out of ill will."[87] Along those lines, one must not say "contemptuous or disparaging things […] in a strained tone".[88] "For how is he going to hate the one who errs […] when he knows that he himself is not perfect and rem[inds himself that everyone is accustomed to err?]"[89] Recognizing the profitability of patience, "if someone […] has been slighted, we do not prevent [them] from casting blame" nor assume them to have "been discredited".[90] Yet demanding all deliveries be sweetened attracts "men who are charlatans […] seizing them after some stress and enchanting them with their subtle kindnesses."[91]

In the case of "those more in need of treatment," a caring teacher "intensifies [frankness]".[92] "[T]he [wise man], being a person-tamer, [probes] the disobedience of a young man who is [arrogant]."[93] As Philódēmos describes, "they [will employ frankness] aggressively in regard to [laziness and] procrastination."[94] Often, a wise person "speaks frankly because" obstinate persons "made him speak frankly toward them".[95] As he explains, "it is necessary to show him his errors forthrightly and speak of his failings publicly."[96] In these cases, "we shall admonish others with great confidence".[97] For the sake education, one must not censure necessary criticism in the name of softening the proverbial blow, since "to act in secret is necessarily most unfriendly, no doubt. For he who does not report [errors] is clearly covering up these things […] and there will be no advantage".[98] The truth must be presented or else the error will not be corrected and the student will not grow. Provoking the temperament of a student "must be risked [or] otherwise [they] do not pay heed" and may never advance in wisdom.[99]

To an extent, it is necessary for the student "to endure admonishment graciously".[100] If they "will behave" tyrannically, then rational minds will rightly "hold [them] to be un[beara]ble",[101] as in the case

82 Philódēmos, *On Frank Criticism*, Frag. 2
83 *Ibid*., Col. VIa
84 *Ibid.*, Col. XXIIIa
85 *Ibid.,* Frag. 26
86 *Ibid.,* Frag. 31
87 *Ibid.,* Frag. 60
88 *Ibid.,* Frag. 39
89 *Ibid.,* Frag. 46
90 *Ibid.,* Frag. 35
91 *Ibid.,* Frag. 60
92 *Ibid.,* Frag. 7
93 *Ibid.*, Frag. 87 N
94 *Ibid.*, Col. Va
95 *Ibid.,* Frag. 58
96 *Ibid.,* Frag. 40
97 *Ibid.,* Frag. 45
98 *Ibid.,* Frag. 41
99 *Ibid.,* Frag. 10
100 *Ibid.,* Frag. 36
101 *Ibid.,* Frag. 34

of "some people who make jokes but do not endure others [making jokes at their expense]".[102] Certainly, wise people will adjust their tone to maximize the retention of those with whom they speak, but wise people need to vent like the rest of us, and Epicureans found pleasure in bonding over issues.

> *Now, if only one person or two or three or four or five or six or any larger number you choose, sir, provided that it is not very large, were in a bad predicament, I should address them individually and do all in my power to give them the best advice. But, as I have said before, the majority of people suffer from a common disease, as in a plague, with their false notions about things, and their number is increasing (for in mutual emulation they catch the disease from one another, like sheep)*[103]

So far as concerns tone, the wise will not "tyrannize", neither inflating dictatorial fantasies, nor indulging authoritarian ambitions (as Epíkouros writes "in the second book of *On Lifestyles*");[104] "nor will they bark like a cynic", after all, "one cannot be fearless" and enjoy the fruits of association if "one causes [others to be] fearful".[105] "In speaking one should not resort to ignoble rhetorical tricks, these have less effect than a straight-forward character".[106] Philódēmos cautions against employing "panegyric" rhetoric to advance an agenda — the wise will neither weaponize "charming speeches"[107] to manipulate crowds, nor patronize politicians with pageantry "in the fashion of the sophists".[108] Philódēmos asks, "*How* can *a natural philosopher become a politician and rhetor*?"[109] He affirms that "by no means should the philosopher acquire political experience",[110] which simply requires one to study "what pleases the crowd and practicing".[111] In this regard, "*politics* is the worst foe of friendship".[112] Whereas "everyone who bears goodwill and practices philosophy intelligently and continually [...] is great in character and indifferent to fame" and "least of all a politician".[113]

Be mindful of what you say — but among true friends, always speak your mind.

Bein' Real and Breakin' Balls

While thoughtful speech is recommended when engaging *acquaintances*, Philódēmos acknowledges that "there is nothing so grand as having one to whom **one will say what is in one's heart**" without censoring oneself as if expecting censure, "for our nature strongly desires to reveal to some people what it thinks."[114] Of course, sharing "what is in one's heart" with the *wrong* person can "further inflame [...] those same men who do not like [them]". Nonetheless, it is far healthier and more pleasurable to be involved "with one who is pure and loves [you] and [...] knows how to treat [you]."[115]

Philódēmos supposes that "the wise men recognize each other, [and] will be reminded pleasurably by one another [...] and they will sting each other with the gentlest of stings and will acknowledge

102 *Philódēmos*, On Frank Criticism, Col. XVII
103 Diogénēs of Oìnóanda, *Fragment* 3; translated by M. F. Smith.
104 Diogénēs Laértios, *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers* 10.119
105 Epíkouros, *Usener Fragment* 537
106 Philódēmos, *On Rhetoric,* II, 126, fr. V
107 *Ibid.,* II, 244, col. XLII
108 *Ibid.,* I, 225, fr. I
109 *Ibid.,* VI
110 *Ibid.,* VI
111 *Ibid.,* I-2
112 *Ibid.,* Frag. 19
113 Philódēmos, *On Frank Criticism*, col. Ia-Ib
114 *Ibid.,* Frag. 28
115 *Ibid.,* Frag. 44

gratitude".[116] Along those lines, a wise person should also be able to take a joke.

Good Without Governing

Ultimately, laws are temporary, conditions are unstable, and legislation is never as robust as inner strength. Even compared against the resources provided by of political agreements, "most valuable of all [is] self-sufficiency",[117] which allows us to "have confidence" when those agreements dissolve and "one might be in want of things".[118] As with every person, every place, and every planet, so, too, will every *pólis* dissolve. In the absence of law, wise people would still act ethically. For "philosophers do not enter politics, yet they help their native land by teaching the young to obey the laws; nay more, by teaching them to act justly even if there are no laws, and to shun injustice as they would fire."[119]

The Epicurean Garden does not require the existence of a stable *pólis* to secure the good life. Plátōn supposed the best life to be lived within an ideal state ruled by a philosopher king. Aristotélēs described humans as being "political animals"[120] that could not flourish without the advancement of political objectives — indeed, Karl Marx preferred Aristotélēs "above all the Ancients".[121] Stoics like the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius approached political office as a philosophical duty, though advising neutrality to "be neither of the green nor of the blue party at the games in the Circus".[122] Epicureans, however, did not evaluate their moral agency as a function their success in the political profession.

Happiness cannot depend upon "great commodities, nor pretentious business, nor authority, nor power, but painlessness and feeling gentleness."[123] After all, Epíkouros affirms to a student that "we must liberate ourselves, out of the prison [built] upon circular [proceedings]"[124] and political[125] [affairs]".[126] He encourages Pythoklḗs to "avoid all programming"[127] and congratulates Apellḗs on having "committed to philosophy cleanly from every impurity" related to acculturation.[128] "[L]et us be content", writes Philódēmos, "to live the quiet life of a philosopher without claiming a share in the ability to manage a city by persuasion".[129] He observes that every "good and honest [person] who confines [their] interest to philosophy alone, and disregards the nonsense of lawyers" and their

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116 *Ibid*., Col. VIIIb
117 Usener 476 – ΑΥΤΑΡΚΕΙΑ or **αὐτάρκεια** (*aútárkeia*) expresses an "autarky", "self-sufficiency", or "independence"
118 Usener 135a – This fragment was preserved by Stobaîos.
119 Philódēmos, *On Rhetoric,* V, Fragment 13
120 Aristotélēs, *Politics*, Book I, 1253a
121 Karl Marx claims: "I have always felt a great tenderness for this philosopher [Hērákleitos], whom I prefer above all the Ancients **save Aristotle**." (*Letter to Ferdinand Lassalle* 21 December 1857)
122 Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 1.5
123 Usener *Fragment* 548
124 ΕΓΚΥΚΛΙΑ or **ἐγκύκλια** (*enkýklia*), meaning "cyclical", "circular", "recurrent", "revolving", or "ordinary" — it refers to both [I] the "gossip" or "daily affairs" that would have been "common to all citizens", and, *elsewhere* [II] *enkúklia* is employed in the context of **ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία** (*énkýklios paideía*) an allegedly "'well-rounded' education" intended for aristocratic children in an effort to prepare them for civic obligations. In this context, the "rearing", training", "education", and "upbringing" is criticized by Epíkouros as being a "circular" system of "programming" designed to indoctrinate aristocratic youths with traditional, mythic rhetoric, instilling them with confusion and anxiety.
125 ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΑ or **πολιτικὰ** (*politikà*) refers to those conditions related to the *pólis* ("city"), or else, the troublesome activities that are administrative in nature. Therein, Epíkouros was not issuing a prohibition against civic engagement, which he elsewhere encourages, but was cautioning students against pursuing a career in political office. Holding office, albeit it through democracy or autocracy often relies upon either "a lot of money" made "through an unscrupulous means" or "servility to the mob or authority", neither of which are conducive to the goal of the good life.
126 Epíkouros, *Vatican Saying* 58
127 *Usener Fragment* 163
128 *Usener Fragment* 117
129 Philódēmos, *On Rhetoric*, I, 234, col. IV

legislative squabbles "can face boldly all such troubles, yea all powers and the whole world."[130]

Brave Enough for Politics

The "political podium" is not the only mechanism by which to affect meaningful change in a *pólis*.

Epíkouros did *not* ban slavery, but he *did* free slaves. He did *not* reform jail, but he *did* post bail. He did *not* legalize women's choices, but he *did* publish female voices. He did *not* manage the State, but he *did* transfer *his* estate to the management of a disenfranchised migrant, circumventing Athenian inheritance laws; he ensured a permanent asylum for philosophical friends of his garden. He was unmoved to speak in the assembly, but was inspired to write for the benefit of future generations.

He *did* abide by civic policies, but he did *not* endorse civil servants. He *did* encourage friends to fight fate, but he did *not* instigate pointless debate. He addressed policies without engaging politics, and he accomplished all of these activities without drawing the attention of vindictive authorities.

Part of This World

While we *can* practice independence from vain desires, we *cannot* practice independence from reality. While "the greatest fruit of self-sufficiency is freedom",[131] we must remember that even the strongest people cannot be "self-sufficient" forever. By definition, mortal life is enriched through fellowship.

> [M]oreover, [it is] right to **help** [**also**] **generations to come** (for they too belong to us, though they are still unborn) and, besides, **love of humanity prompts us to aid also the foreigner**s who come here. […] I wished to use this […] to advertise publicly the [medicines] that bring salvation. These medicines we have put [fully] to the test"[132]

In theologizing about the blessed lifestyles of our divinities, Philódēmos even imagines that "the gods do favors for each other" despite the fact that "each of them is independently capable of providing himself with the most perfect pleasure."[133] The gods are motivated by the good of nature "to maintain their community as a species" through "social intercourse". So, they "also accept from each other what supplies their other needs, even though they are able to provide these things for themselves, just as we (human beings) sometimes do from those who have the same things (as ourselves)."[134]

So far as concerns the reality of modern enfranchisement, one can retire from social affairs and limit career ambitions, but one is much less likely to be able to escape their modern context as a citizen, subject to the laws of the territories in which they reside. To the contrary, "we must simultaneously laugh and philosophize and manage a household and administrate the economic affairs".[135] And when it comes to the skepticism and pessimism of the massive political institutions of the modern era, we should remember, "necessity is evil, but there is no necessity to live with necessity."[136]

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130 Philódēmos, *On Rhetoric*, II, 140, fr. XII
131 **ελευθερία** (*eleuthería*) has been translated as "freedom", "liberty", "manumission", but also refers to a "license".
132 Diogénēs of Oinóanda, *Fragment* 3; translated by M. F. Smith.
133 Philódēmos, *On Gods* III 84
134 *Ibid.,* 87
135 Epíkouros, *Vatican Saying* 41
136 *Ibid.,* 9

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