

# AFDIA - Chapter Eleven - Text and Discussion

Post by "Cassius" of April 12, 2022 at 5:18 PM

Another point of reference, from David Sedley's "Ethics of Brutus and Cassius"

## Quote

If the aim of Brutus' question was to test Statilius' suitability as a conspirator against Caesar, it must have been one which Brutus knew an Epicurean could in principle answer either way. That is, if Statilius had been sympathetic to the conspiracy -like its instigator his fellow Epicurean Cassius -he might in principle have given the positive answer that the wise should be prepared to sacrifice tranquillity on account of non-philosophers: otherwise there would have been little point in Brutus' putting the question to him. Indeed, since Brutus had already discussed the conspiracy with Cassius, it is a reasonable guess that his test question about jeopardizing one's ataraxia for the public good somehow borrowed from Cassius' own moral reasoning with regard to the assassination.

This constitutes indirect but not negligible evidence that Cassius saw in the current political situation factors which might justify even Epicurean sages in sacrificing their own tranquil detachment. It was, as a matter of fact, an Epicurean tenet already familiar to Cicero (Rep. 1.10) that in exceptional crises the 'no politics' rule might have to be suspended.<sup>31</sup> We have no direct evidence as to how such crises were specified or how the suspension was defended on Epicurean principles. One plausible guess might have been that it was simply a prudential matter of the wise accepting short-term worry for the sake of their own greater long-term tranquillity -for example, working for improved social or political conditions which will, once established, safeguard an Epicurean lifestyle. But Brutus' question implies a very different rationale: it implies that the wise were supposed by some contemporary Epicureans, perhaps including Cassius, to be on occasion driven by an overriding sense of obligation to their non-philosophical fellow-citizens.

<sup>31</sup> cf. Sen., De Otio 3.2, where it is attributed to Epicurus himself. For further discussion of this and other Epicurean principles regarding political involvement, see Fowler, op. cit. (n. 1).

NOTE: That last note appears to be a reference to D. Fowler, *Lucretius and Politics*, 120-50.

NOTE 2 -- Sedley seems to be concerned about a conflict between Cassius' Epicurean views and the "public good." I see no reason to focus on that - the issue was the good (the future pleasure

and happy living) of Cassius and his friends - not some abstract "public good." Cassius need not have been concerned about the future of his Rome because he was concerned about the public good - it would be equally or more reasonable for him to be evaluating the future under Caesar for its impact on the happiness of himself and his friends (however wide a group he construed that to be).