

# Epicureans On Kingship

Post by "Cassius" of August 2, 2022 at 11:38 AM

This passage irritates me for a number of reasons, not the least is by gosh ***translate the darn word!!!*** If this author wants to assert that the "best life" is "ataraxia" then be decent enough to say that "the best life is tranquility" or something else that is understandable in English and makes clear that this writer is committed to the view that the best life is guided by the goal of "ataraxia" rather than "pleasure." If he would just stick with pleasure it would be much easier to reconcile what he thinks are apparent difficulties. If the best life is to be "surrounded by numerous and vivid pleasures" while at the same time with minimal or no pain, then the person who places a high stock in the pleasure of *involvement with society* is not going to be content with *uninvolvement with society*. Does that expose him to danger of more pain? Certainly. Is that a "wrong" decision under Epicurean theory? I would assert certainly NOT, for the reasons stated in this article and the quote under discussion.

All these discussions are shot through with nervousness and anxiety for the simple reason that they are committed to the view that Epicurus thought that no one would accept any pain that wasn't absolutely necessary for remaining alive, and that's a ridiculous interpretation of the philosophy as a whole, the life that Epicurus chose, and the life that leading Epicureans chose for the next several hundred years.

This account avoids conflict with the cradle argument. However, the implication here is that reason has not been able to cure the desires of these people for unnecessary things such as fame and honour. A case can be made for accepting this scenario. For a start, the political life suiting these people is not the best life (it is not ataraxia). Rather, in the case of these people it would appear that the possibility of ataraxia has been vitiated owing to various pressures that have affected their nature. This might be discovered by the persistent failure of Epicurean treatment in practice. A hint of this picture can be found in Philodemus' *On Frank Speech*: there he suggests that some people are sent away uncured (ἀπεθέρντο ἀθεραπεύτου, fr. 84.11–12; cf. fr. 86.5–6), even after every effort is made to treat them (fr. 63–5).<sup>18</sup> Although the context is

<sup>18</sup>On Epicurus' psychological hedonism, see in particular Woolf (2004). Cooper (1998) makes the case for not ascribing this view to Epicurus. On the cradle argument more generally, see Brunschwig (1988).

<sup>19</sup>All references to Philodemus, *On Frank Speech*, see to the text of Konstan, Clay, Glad, Thom, and Ware (1998). They provide an English translation.