

Epicureanism as the spiritual essence or 'religion' of an entire community

Post by “Cassius” of October 6, 2023 at 4:12 PM

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

A culture of modesty in politicians such as that enforced by the ancient Roman censors would be beneficial.

I fully agree and this reminds me of the story about the person whispering in the ear of the general in the triumph that he is only a mortal.

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

So for reasons rooted in Epicurean ethics, any action and attitude that could conceivably diminish the benevolent disposition of individuals towards the group (for example extreme wealth inequality or jailing people for trivial matters like drug possession for personal use or treating poor foreigners equally or better than the poorest natives) must be seen as unjust because it invites the violent forces of destruction.

I generally agree here, but the details are tricky. Cassius Longinus did not think that force / violence (presumably only in extreme circumstances) was off limits, and I do not consider him to be a bad Epicurean for so engaging. Or, at the very least, I don't have enough information to be comfortable concluding as to the extremity of the situation whether he was or was not correct in his choices. In any case I don't think there can be a "bright line" on these issues. I would see the following references as allowing for force or physical violence in the proper circumstances, and I suspect that there are others that could be drawn to the same conclusion with these simply being among the most prominent:

[PD06](#). In order that men might not fear one another, there was a natural benefit to be had from government and kingship, provided that they are able to bring about this result.

[PD07](#). Some men wished to become famous and conspicuous, thinking that they would thus win for themselves safety from other men. Wherefore if the life of such men is safe, they have obtained the good which nature craves; but if it is not safe, they do not possess that for which they strove at first by the instinct of nature.

[PD14](#). The most unalloyed source of protection from men, which is secured to some extent by a certain force of expulsion, is in fact the immunity which results from a quiet life, and retirement from the world.

[PD39](#). The man who has best ordered the element of disquiet arising from external circumstances has made those things that he could akin to himself, and the rest at least not alien; but with all to which he could not do even this, he has refrained from mixing, and has expelled from his life all which it was of advantage to treat thus.

[PD40](#). As many as possess the power to procure complete immunity from their neighbors, these also live most pleasantly with one another, since they have the most certain pledge of security, and, after they have enjoyed the fullest intimacy, they do not lament the previous departure of a dead friend, as though he were to be pitied.

Torquatus in On Ends Book One -XVI: Yet nevertheless some men indulge without limit their avarice, ambition and love of power, lust, gluttony and those other desires, which ill-gotten gains can never diminish but rather must inflame the more; inasmuch that they appear proper subjects for restraint rather than for reformation. Men of sound natures, therefore, are summoned by the voice of true reason to justice, equity, and honesty. For one without eloquence or resources dishonesty is not good policy, since it is difficult for such a man to succeed in his designs, or to make good his success when once achieved.

This is a subject in which it is very difficult to talk without summoning up modern partisan political examples, but I think it's both important that we discuss this in generic terms as we are now doing, and also important to keep those modern hot-button examples at bay so that the discussion can be truly exhaustive. Once we flesh out the principles we can let people apply those principles to their personal situations as they see fit.

Edit: Cassius mentions [in his letter to Cicero](#) of January, 45 BC, that another general fighting on the same side as Cassius -- Panza -- was also a follower of Pleasure. ("*Consequently Panza, who follows pleasure, keeps his hold on virtue, and those also whom you call pleasure-lovers are lovers of what is good and lovers of justice, and cultivate and keep all the virtues.*") And of course I have not listed in the above cites Torquatus' defense of his ancestors who fought enemies barehanded and even had members of their family executed for failing to obey military rules of order in explicitly Epicurean terms.