

What "Live Unknown" means to me (Lathe Biosas)

Post by "Pacatus" of October 21, 2023 at 4:55 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

--Don't get involved in politics (political activities or political debates)

I remain unconvinced that Epicurus thought that being a good Epicurean meant always refraining from political activity, or that he did not recognize the dependency of a society (the *polis*; Latin *civitas*) in which the Garden could flourish on politics. Although, [Kalosyni's](#) cautions on the matter are well-taken.

Though the book *Theory and Practice in Epicurean Political Philosophy. Security, justice and tranquility* by Javier Aoiz & Marcelo Boeri remains, sadly beyond my budget (maybe I need to set up a targeted savings plan), I have read their "Cicero and his Clamorous Silences" (https://www.academia.edu/82815606/CICER...MOROUS_SILENCES). A few excerpts below:

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The opponents of Epicureanism in antiquity successfully established a cliché that has remained to this day: the theoretical and practical disinterest of Epicurus and the Epicureans in political communities. The best proof of their success is the transformation of the expressions «live unnoticed» (λάθε βιώσας) and «do not participate in politics» (μη πολιτεύσασθαι) into famous Epicurean slogans.

Nevertheless, Philodemus, like Lucretius and in accordance with Epicurus' views, in no way condemns the activity of any politician.

The normative or regulative function of the Epicurean political model is embodied in the preconception of the just.

Nor did Epicurus' conception of justice and law alienate him from his city. Epicurus shares in the rejection of two figures who represent contempt for the laws of the polis: the tyrant and the Cynics.

Indeed, among Epicurus' friends there were politicians who were influential and close (even very close) to Epicureanism, such as Idomeneus, a prominent politician of Lampsacus, and Mithres, Lysimachus' minister of finance, who provided financial aid to the Garden.

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The bottom line seems to be that Epicurus supported and relied on the norms and institutions of the Athenian polis - and they necessarily derive from political activity,

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even if Epicurus himself did not actively participate in politics - at least formally. Today, we also so depend and rely - and so may need to respond politically when necessary if those societal laws, contracts and norms are threatened.

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I also found a Google translation of their essay “¿Cuán apolíticos fueron Epicuro y los epicúreos? La polis griega y sus ilustres ciudadanos epicúreos” (https://www.academia.edu/77829847/Cu%C3%A1n_epic%C3%BAreos) - “How Apolitical were Epicurus and the Epicureans?: the Greek Polis and their Illustrious Epicurean Citizens”. (<https://www.scielo.br/j/trans/a/nSSz...qNMPQb/?lang=es>)

A few excerpts from that translation:

“In this article we argue that the fact that there were prominent citizens of different Greek cities who adhered to Epicureanism, felt themselves Epicureans and were recognized as such, shows that slogans such as “live hidden” and “do not participate in politics”, which suggest a complete apoliticism on the part of Epicurus and the Epicureans, distort the true meaning of staying away from contingent politics.”

“If, as the title of this article somewhat rhetorically describes, there were prominent citizens of different Greek cities who adhered to Epicurean doctrines, who felt themselves Epicureans and who were recognized as such by their fellow citizens, it does not seem reasonable to infer (from the slogans mostly present in the indirect tradition) a complete apoliticism on the part of Epicurus and the Epicureans nor a “hidden living”. We maintain that there are reasons to suppose that these slogans do not adequately describe the character of Epicurus himself and his practical life (committed to relations of kinship and friendship, philanthropy, the rites of the city, and its legal provisions in the purchase, sale and inheritance of property, etc.), nor that of his followers.”

“It is natural to think that the way of life of those who adhered to Epicureanism over several centuries did not follow a single pattern. Social class, gender, political community and historical context must have led to different modalities of belonging or adhering to Epicureanism.”

“Nor did Epicurus' conception of justice and laws separate him from his city. Epicurus shares the rejection of two figures who represent contempt for the laws of the polis: the tyrant and the cynics (DL X 119).”

“The wise Epicurean, unlike the cynic, is concerned with property and the future; He considers that the property and security of the polis constitute a legitimate means of reinforcing tranquility and minimizing fear.”

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In sum, it may be a necessity of prudent choice - at least under some circumstances - to forgo the “close” pleasures, and endure some unpleasantness - in order to secure the political environment (laws, contracts, regulations, civic norms) that allows for there to be continued

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pleasant life at all, where one has at least some hope of neither promoting harm nor being harmed. Just as one might endure the pain of surgery and subsequent physical therapy in order to thereafter enjoy a continued pleasant life. This is the way that I look at my own occasions of political and social activism over the years: I did not particularly enjoy those activities – and they were often both mentally and physically stressful – but they seemed, in the broader view and longer run, to be the prudent choice; and now seem to me to be the prudent Epicurean choice.