

# **"Liberty" - As discussed by Socrates and Aristippus vs. Epicurus**

**Post by "Cassius" of June 23, 2020 at 12:47 PM**

It would be worth thinking about how "liberty" might be evaluated by Epicurus given his views on justice. I don't immediately have an Epicurean text reference but surely the Epicureans would have been aware of [one of the most memorable Socratic passages on "liberty"](#):

**Nay," replied Aristippus, "for my part I am no candidate for slavery; but there is, as I hold, a middle path in which I am fain to walk. That way leads neither through rule nor slavery, but through liberty, which is the royal road to happiness."**

which is followed by:

**"Ah," said Socrates, "if only that path can avoid the world as well as rule and slavery, there may be something in what you say. But, since you are in the world, if you intend neither to rule nor to be ruled, and do not choose to truckle to the rulers**

**— I think you must see that the stronger have a way of making the weaker rue their lot both in public and in private life, and treating them like slaves. You cannot be unaware that where some have sown and planted, others cut their corn and fell their trees, and in all manner of ways harass the weaker if they refuse to bow down, until they are persuaded to accept slavery as an escape from war with the stronger. So, too, in private life do not brave and mighty men enslave and plunder the cowardly and feeble folk?"**

**"Yes, but my plan for avoiding such treatment is this. I do not shut myself up in the four corners of a community, but am a stranger in every land."**

**"A very cunning trick, that!" cried Socrates, "for ever since the death of Sinis and Sceiron and Procrustes<sup>1</sup> no one injures strangers! And yet nowadays those who take a hand in the affairs of their homeland pass laws to protect themselves from injury, get friends to help them over and above those whom nature has given them, encompass their cities with fortresses, get themselves weapons to ward off the workers of mischief; and besides all this seek to make allies in other lands; and in spite of all these precautions, they are still wronged.**

**But you, with none of these advantages, spend much time on the open road, where so many come to harm; and into whatever city you enter, you rank below all its citizens, and are one of those specially marked down for attack by intending wrongdoers; and yet, because you are a stranger, do you expect to escape injury? What gives you confidence? Is it that the cities by proclamation guarantee your**

**safety in your coming and going? Or is it the thought that no master would find you worth having among his slaves? For who would care to have a man in his house who wants to do no work and has a weakness for high living?**