

Could Epicurean Involvement In Politics Have Prevented The Fall of Greco-Roman Civilization?

Post by "Cassius" of March 11, 2017 at 4:02 PM

[Nick Bell](#)

[March 8 at 9:45am](#)

Some random thoughts on the epicurean stance on politics,i understand the idea of minimalizing the focus and stress of politics,however,i wonder if that no-participation stance may have also helped in their decline. Epicurean schools were going strong for hundreds of years,and then the christian takeover happened which lead to the outlawing of anything non christian across europe. My thought is that there was a point in time where the christian movement was small and just beginning to gain political favor and power,maybe if the garden schools had been a little more involved in the politics they could have helped disuade said takeover?

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[Tanya Watkins](#) type unknown

[Tanya Watkins](#) My thoughts were, that when Epicurus was alive, to be involved in politics was a very dangerous thing. At that time, it could bring no contentment to your life. It was a situational response.

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[Cassius Amicus](#) type unknown

[Cassius Amicus](#) I think that's a very reasonable discussion to have, especially as to

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what few details are known about what actually happened in that period. Regulars here know my citation to the example of Cassius Longinus as someone very involved in public affairs. The example of Atticus is also relevant, as is the example of the Epicurean who was assisting Antiochus Epiphanes. Also there are relevant comments in Sedly's "Ethics of Brutus and Cassius. And at the most basic level possible, there is the obvious example that the PD's as to justice are not self-enforcing - if bad people are to be restrained from harming us, ****someone**** has to do it, and it would not be Epicurean to look to others what we should do for ourselves.

I am aware that the comments that Tanya raised are the generally accepted opinion about what was going on in Athens at the time of Epicurus. But I don't think that that time period is by any means the last word on the topic, and excessive focus on it to the exclusion of the rest of Epicurean history after the founding is probably an inaccurate way to look at the subject. (Again not referring to Tanya Watkins as being inaccurate, but to the general observation that you see almost everywhere that Epicurean philosophy was part of a "crisis of nerve" of the Greeks.)

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) I would also note that our group preference for staying away from modern politics is largely to keep the focus on the core philosophy, and avoiding getting distracted and stirred up by short-term issues when there is so much work to do on the bigger picture of the philosophy, rather than a flat prohibition for philosophical reasons. If and when there is more interest in discussing the political implications, we can possibly split that off into one or more separate groups.

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[Hiram Crespo](#) or type unknown

[Hiram Crespo](#) as for political Epicureans: Thomas Jefferson, Frances Wright (who was a feminist and abolitionist and defended atheists in the 1800's), and Jose Mujica former president of Uruguay also praises Epicurus from time to time. I think that the choice to delve into politics must be subjected to hedonic calculus in all cases, there is no blanket taboo against politics.

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) Now the issue of dealing with Christianity in its early phases, which

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is a large part of your initial post [Nick Bell](#), is a VERY interesting topic. I've read a good bit of Gibbon on that period, and he has some very famous analysis of the problem and how it contributed to the fall of the Roman Empire.

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[Michael Carteron](#) Image not found or type unknown

[Michael Carteron](#) I think that his view is no longer in favor. The view now seems to be Christianity was an effect, not cause, of the Roman Empire falling.

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[Cassius Amicus](#)

[Cassius Amicus](#) [Michael Carteron](#) do you recall any sources for that? Probably I would easily agree that they went hand in hand and hard to tell which caused which. (And no doubt the opposing view is what the Christians would (and did) argue

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[Michael Carteron](#)

[Michael Carteron](#) No, not offhand. I doubt that just Christianity alone would take down the Roman Empire however. Apparently it got more popular with the decline, especially after the third century crisis. I don't know every detail however, just that I've read Gibbon is largely viewed as outdated and discredited.

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[Cassius Amicus](#)

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[Tanya Watkins](#)

[Tanya Watkins](#) But sure, from to OP's questioning, being more involved would have allowed the idea to survive more strongly. But you also must come back to is it making you content to have that fight? Where is the ideal?

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Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus "But you also must come back to is it making you content to have that fight? Where is the ideal?" That is the continuing quest - to determine the real heart of Epicurean philosophy. Was it to escape pain at all costs, or was it to secure a life of happiness, which requires much more than hiding in a cave? My views on that question are pretty clear 1f609.png 🤔

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Tanya Watkins

Tanya Watkins So, how, as your average person, in Hellenistic times, see the big picture?

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Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus Good question Tanya. What I am referring to is what I understand to be the observation made over and over again by others that at the time of Epicurus Athens was under pressure, and no longer militarily on top, and so as a result of that everyone (including Stoics and Epicureans turned inward, said "woe is me" and went to hide in a cave because they no longer thought they could conquer the world. Now of course that's a caricature but it is what I gather is a widely-held opinion -----

For an example of that I seem to see regular references to a Hellenistic "failure of nerve" -

A phrase from his [Gilbert Murray] 1910 lectures Four Stages of Greek Religion enjoyed public prominence: the "failure of nerve" of the Hellenistic world, of which a turn to irrationalism was symptomatic.[49]

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Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus another reference to the  failure of nerve"

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[Failure of Nerve page](#)

Gilbert Murray describes the descent from the height of third century B.C. Greek...
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Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus **Elli Pensa**, what do you think of the idea of a Greek "failure of nerve" and whether Epicurus was a part of it?

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Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus {And of course I do NOT think that Epicurus himself had this "failure of nerve," and to the extent that it existed, he was reacting against it, just as Nick Bell is asking about}

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Elli Pensa  failure of nerve"

Elli Pensa Failure of Nerve

That is a proper phrase when someone examines the phenomena and what causes them.

In the Hellenistic era of Epicurus after the death of Great Alexander and the fighting among his descendants who were thirsty for power, in Ancient Athens everything around was collapsed. Things/issues and ideas that brought the descendants of Alexander from East created a decadence in the greek philosophy. Thus, we see the domain schools that were in period of decadence were the Stoic and the Epicurean. But the Epicurean philosophy was, is and would be a huge exception.

Because..

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As we realize the main core of the stoic philosophy is the Moral Act and based its Physics on deterministic Fate or Destiny or Eimarmeni. Thus, the people of Epicurus era became fatalistic by the teachings of the stoicism, and when someone is fatalistic is unable to find solutions in every difficult situation. If you connect now to the Fate and the Apathy and the foggy dream of a goal as the Virtue, the persons become more incapable and not autonomus to change the laws that imposed to them from oligarchy and tyranny. Someone would say : But why the Epicureans that were many in the Hellenistic era did not manage to change those situations of troubles ? Because the Epicureans won't have the ambition to get involved with the politics if they do not be invited for this. In opposite the stoics are ready to get involved in the politics. Here fits the greek expression "opou gamos ke chara e Vasilo proti" and that means "Where there's feasting, of all guests, there Victoria's always first". But when the feast will end back to the same things again and again,

Fatalism and the oriental cunning

<<You have to desire the things to be as they are and not as you wish to be. " Epictetus here. This is a premier sample of a masterful art of life, as they say, close to palliative practices and an outright oriental cunning. Just leave it, he says, it is well ordered from Destiny, that knows before you. It is best to understand that you are part of the Nature and accept with welcomes, even with joy, whatever brings you. He will not make a mistake even if it is bad for you. Good or bad is irrelevant since it is part of the "divine becoming". ([Δημήτρης Λιαρμακόπουλος](#) Dimitris Liarmakopoulos from his article entitled : We, the epicureans, and the stoic today or to these "from the Stoa")>>.

Passions and freedom of will

Professor Theodoridis, and professor Liantinis denounce the stoicism as a philosophy opposing the Greek way. We would agree with them when we see what the stoic reserve the emotions, the passions and the freedom of will, the evidence that we have identified as the "property" of the strong individuality of a Greek man.

The Greeks, as Nietzsche says, and we have talked about this many times in the Garden, first release their passions, and then with prudence their pull them back.

In Epicurean philosophy our feelings are criteria of truth, with what we experience pleasant and unpleasant, so we used the options and our avoidances. Unlike the stoic not only ignore but recommend outset the Apathy. They suggest restriction on

the exercise of our passions at the point to uproot them. Epictetus says: "Stand beside a stone and accuse it. What would you be able to manage? "

In any case advise us to be indifferent for the things themselves because as they say only our judgments for the things is important. This is not entirely wrong, but how to be indifferent for their impact on you? Only if you stifle your feelings. Here we find a strong affinity with the Buddhism. (Dimitris Liarmakopoulos from his article entitled : We, the epicureans, and the stoic today or to those "from the Stoa")

Later after the Roman empire we see these two schools to influence many persons of politics in the Rome too and when there was "Failure of Nerve" we see which philosophy was dominated again.

Later after we see the Byzantine empire that there was an entire "Failure of Nerve"

and we see again which philosophy transformed to religion and is dominated till our days again.

And in our days ? And mankind reckons time from the dies nefastus when this fatality befell— from the first day of Christianity!

— Why not rather from its last?— From today?— The transvaluation of all values!...(Nietzsche)

The transvaluation of all values!... here I want you crab to walk on coals.

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Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

Bill Aheron type unknown

[Bill Aheron](#) Just a thought, but going through life with the goal of maximizing pleasure by avoiding unpleasure, seems like pretty small beer.

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Bill Aheron

Bill Aheron Ontological validity of "atoms & void" to one side

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Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus And yet even though some might want to argue that the glass of beer is small, I would argue that a small glass of beer is better than a fantasy glass of beer.

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Bill Aheron

Bill Aheron Well put.  type unknown

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Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

Ilkka Vuoristo or type unknown

Ilkka Vuoristo Unfortunately such changes in history aren't simple or have one reason. The only way that any other worldview could have prevented the rise of christianity, was to be made the _state_ religion instead of it. And to suppress all other views with force. I can't see any way that Epicurean Philosophy could have endured so much hypocrisy as the followers of Jesus have endured.

Christianity won the battle for Rome, because the emperor saw it as a way to maintain power. We have to remember that at the time of Constantine (~300 AD), there were _many_ christianities. He's the one that says what goes into the Bible and what does not. Almost all of modern christianity is the product of Constantine's committee and Paul... That is to say of Romans.

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Cassius Amicus type unknown

Cassius Amicus And then there is the fascinating story of "Julian the Apostate" (who unfortunately does not appear to have been a fan of Epicurus)

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