

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

Post by "Don" of March 7, 2020 at 11:12 PM

Fragment 551 famously reads λάθε βιώσας and is usually translated as "Live unknown." It could also be translated as "Live hidden," "Live unnoticed," or "Live while escaping notice."

But how do we square this coming from Epicurus who is known two thousand years after he died. Did he live by this maxim? We can't say Epicurus was even unknown during his life. So how are we to understand λάθε βιώσας as it pertains to him and ourselves?

Epicurus encouraged people to shun the world of politics and the public life. Attracting notice to yourself in politics or in pursuit of power was a dangerous path and didn't lead to pleasure, nor aponia, nor ataraxia. This appears to have direct applicability to Epicureans in general.

"Keep your head down!" might be a more appropriate way of paraphrasing this Fragment. Or even better maybe "Don't be obtrusive" or "Don't get in people's faces."

Epicurus certainly advocated helping people find their way to ataraxia. Why else would he have written letters and epitomes, have founded the Garden, and have insisted that we cultivate friendships one-on-one. Epicurus didn't say "live unknown to all of existence." He didn't say "go live as a hermit." He was known to close friends and those who had an interest in listening to his philosophy and deciding which pleasures to choose and which to reject. He even made a point of arguing his case against his detractors and those he found espousing unsound doctrine. He didn't "live unknown." You could find him *if* you wanted to. He just didn't teach in the agora or in the stoas. You came to him. "Hey, you know where to find me. It's not hard. But I'm not going to get in your face or make you listen to me if you don't want to. But you could really use my help."

Look at Diogenes of Oenoanda. He put up a solid stone wall that's stood the test of time, albeit in a ruined state. He made Epicureanism available to the masses, but you could walk by his wall and not read it if you wanted to. He lived unknown again in the sense that "I'm going to undertake building this wall, but I can't make you read it. But you could really use my help."

We need to be *willing* to live unknown to the masses, not to go looking for celebrity, but to be available to our friends and those who may seek our advice. Don't go looking for your name in lights or your face on the cover of TIME magazine. If it *happens,* roll with it. But don't seek it out. However, you can have meaningful conversations. You can form the bonds of friendship. You can even make plans for your funerals and write your wills just as Epicurus did! Just know that there are no guarantees once you die that you'll be known... and learn to be okay with that. It's nothing to us. We can make ourselves available to the curious, but we don't need to

stand on the street corner like some itinerant preacher handing out tracts and screaming at passers-by.

To get a more nuanced idea of λάθε, consider VS 7: *It is easy to commit an injustice **undetected**, but impossible to be sure that you have escaped detection.* ἀδικοῦντα **λαθεῖν** μὲν δύσκολον, πίστιν δὲ λαβεῖν ὑπὲρ τοῦ λαθεῖν ἀδύνατον. This "undetected" connotation sheds another light on λαθε βιωσας. It appears to be saying that we can think we're "undetected" or unnoticed, but chances are that somehow we're going to be found out sooner or later. If we take Fragment 551 and VS 7 in tandem, both can seem to inform the other. Consider if we would say "It is easy to attempt to live undetected, but impossible to be sure that you have escaped detection." I'm not saying that's entirely legitimate but indulge it as a thought experiment and it expands the meaning of both.

This is how I'm beginning to understand the meaning of λάθε βιώσας.

I'm curious to read how others interpret this well-known fragment and how they believe it may be applicable (or not) to an Epicurean practice.

Post by "Cassius" of March 8, 2020 at 7:17 AM

I largely agree with your conclusions here but in regard to this fragment I always caution against reading too much into it (beyond what you are doing here) because it comes to us with absolutely zero context. To my understanding we have zero knowledge about when or where or how or in what situation this was stated, or even for sure that it was Epicurus himself. And given as a premise that ALL rules of conduct are contextual, we would need to know much more than we do to conclude how much emphasis Epicurus and the key Epicureans placed on such views, since as you say they did not exactly "live unknown" themselves.

As I see it the phrase can be helpful for discussion, just like the "tetrapharmakon" but overemphasis on it creates many of the same problems that overemphasis of the tetrapharmakon does.

We simply don't have enough surrounding context to know the use cases that were referenced, or who said these things and why.

People who don't understand the full depth of Epicurus can easily misinterpret both, so it's important to provide the background first (as you've done here) so these phrases don't get misused, as they probably often are in the hands of those who want to keep Epicurus safely confined in the hermit-like box they have created for him.

Post by “Don” of March 8, 2020 at 8:55 AM

EXCELLENT points, [Cassius](#) ! Fragments are just that: fragments devoid of context, tantalizing though they may be. And I firmly agree we shouldn't get too hung up on them. They're so tempting, though, since we have so little of Epicurus' texts to dig into. Alas!

I had also forgotten before writing this that the source for this fragment is [Plutarch's diatribe against this very Fragment itself](#). So, already in that respect, we're at a disadvantage! The very source of the (let's say) "infamous" saying of Epicurus is a polemic against that very "infamous" saying of Epicurus taken out of context to attack him! That's a vicious circle if I ever saw one.



And these lines from Plutarch lead me to believe I *may* be on the right track (or I have enough to cover myself), emphasis added:

*And in fine, to what purpose, Epicurus, did you **keep a public table**? Why that **concourse of friends**, that resort of fair young men, **at your doors**? Why so many thousand lines so elaborately **composed and writ** upon Metrodorus, Aristobulus, and Chaeredemus, that death itself might not rob us of them; if virtue must be doomed to oblivion, art to idleness and inactivity, philosophy to silence, and all a man's happiness must be forgotten?*

Again, I freely admit we do not have Epicurus' context, merely the disgruntled ramblings of a fierce critic. But from my perspective as an aspiring Epicurean, I see that Epicurus invited people in to his public table. He greeted people at his door. He wrote but didn't see the need to pontificate in the agora. One may say he lived, let's say at most, unobtrusively but was NOT disengaged from society, his friends, and those that sought him out. He most likely said/wrote the words *lâthe biōsas* since Plutarch is so worked up about it in ancient times, but we have no surviving text of his. Plutarch simply takes *lâthe biōsas* out of context and runs with it... And HE gets to be the last word on it for posterity! That's aggravating.

[Note: I've also found [Attalus' website helpful for the sources](#), U551 in our current case here.]

Post by “Cassius” of March 8, 2020 at 9:00 AM

[Quote from Eugenios](#)

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disadvantage! The very source of the (let's say) "infamous" saying of Epicurus is a polemic against that very "infamous" saying of Epicurus taken out of context to attack him! That's a vicious circle if I ever saw one. 😊

Thank you for looking that up Eugenios, when I wrote I failed to take the time to do that - but you are exactly right from my perspective.

[Quote from Eugenios](#)

but was NOT disengaged from society, his friends, and those that sought him out.

Yes that's the key from my perspective. Unfortunately the "live unknown" is used primarily (in my experience) to imply the opposite, and that Epicurus was essentially a hermit. Used properly the phrase gives us lots of good warning about things to avoid, but improperly it reinforces one of the worst and most untrue stereotypes by Epicurus' enemies.

Post by “Don” of March 8, 2020 at 10:49 AM

I did find another source for this from the [Emperor Julian in his letter to Themistius the Philosopher](#). From this, it appears Julian is saying the context of Epicurus' láthe biōsas was simply "Don't get involved in politics" plain and simple. Julian was writing 200+ years after Plutarch but could still easily have had access to far more primary Epicurean sources than we do. If that's the case, it would seem Plutarch was purposefully mischaracterizing the saying and taking it out of context, blowing it all out of proportion to its original intent. I know... Hard to believe he'd do that! 😊

Post by “Cassius” of March 8, 2020 at 11:22 AM

As much as I've always wanted to like Julian, isn't he the one who said that he was happy to see that Epicurus' texts were hard to find? So again an enemy of Epicurus even to mention it, but you're right he does not seem as bad here since he seems to be limiting the impact and stating a way it can be applied correctly, which is what I think we agree Epicurus would have said:

Quote

And this indeed may happen, but you will not be sure of it until that final day." Do you think that such a man after being told all this would choose even to live in a sea-port town? Would he not bid adieu to money-making and all the advantages of commerce, and caring little for troops of friends and acquaintances abroad, and all that he might learn about nations and cities, would he not approve the wisdom of the son of Neocles [10] who bids us "Live in obscurity"? Indeed, you apparently perceived this, and by your abuse of Epicurus you tried to forestall me and to eradicate beforehand any such purpose. For you go on to say that it was to be expected that so idle a man as he should commend leisure and conversations during walks. Now for my part I have long been firmly convinced that Epicurus was mistaken in that view of his, but whether it be proper to urge into public life any and every man, both him who lacks natural abilities and him who is not yet completely equipped, is a point that deserves the most careful consideration.

Post by "Don" of March 8, 2020 at 11:51 AM

Quote

"Now for my part I have long been firmly convinced that Epicurus was mistaken in that view of his, but **whether it be proper to urge into public life any and every man, both him who lacks natural abilities and him who is not yet completely equipped, is a point that deserves the most careful consideration.**" Julian

I hear you! Julian was the last gasp of pagan learning, but he wasn't an Epicurean advocate for sure. That emphasis I added above to his quote is what's making me think that Epicurus was just talking about "urg[ing] into public life any and every man." Romans were VERY big into getting involved in politics, so any suggestion that this wasn't laudatory would have been jumped on.

Post by "Cassius" of March 8, 2020 at 12:38 PM

Right. Plus apparently Julian was properly concerned about getting "good" Greco-Romans to participate in public life so as to offset the nefarious influence of the Christians. I can't help but think that in those circumstances, Epicurus would have urged exactly the same thing as Julian,

since the very survival of the Greco-Roman-Epicurean way of life that they valued was at stake and was about to be overwhelmed. .

Post by “Don” of March 8, 2020 at 1:39 PM

Exactly! I hadn't thought of that, but I would agree with you. That makes sense!

And what are left with from most people?

Λάθε βιώσας = (In a stuffy, stereotypical academic accent) "Oh, yes. From these two words taken out of context, we can *clearly* see that Epicurus advocated being a hermit." LOL 😄

Post by “Hiram” of March 9, 2020 at 11:13 AM

From what else we know of EP, I think the context here is that fame, the public life, is neither a natural nor necessary desire. This is in the category of the empty desires.

Post by “Cassius” of March 9, 2020 at 1:02 PM

I would be very careful there. Fame is one thing, but "public life" is a broad term, and to the extent that times require public action - an appropriate day to comment on this, given coronavirus panic - then public life may be required, as i think there are hints if not explicit record of Epicurus saying. "Fame" on the other hand, might be something that is a byproduct and never really a sound goal in the first place, nor would it seem likely to be required in the same way that public action might be required.

Post by “Don” of March 9, 2020 at 2:23 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I would be very careful there. Fame is one thing, but "public life" is a broad term,...

Now that you put it that way, I would agree. Epicurus was arguably a public figure in the sense that he was a known figure. Did he seek out the publicity/fame? Arguably not, but he didn't shrink from a public fight in his works that were circulated. And we know people tried to malign him during and after his life.

To paraphrase: Some people seek fame; others have fame thrust upon them. It's also a matter of what they do with that fame once it is there.

Post by "Cassius" of March 9, 2020 at 2:26 PM

Yes I think that's exactly right. And in case I haven't said so recently, I see no reason to discount Cassius Longinus' understanding of Epicurean philosophy, as he was willing to debate it even with Cicero, and he (and others he cites in his letters) were both devoted Epicureans and also leaders in Roman public affairs.

If we have to choose between what the commentators today, and the enemies of Epicurus, tell us, vs what we can observe for ourselves as to what leading Epicureans actually did, I will take "what the leading Epicureans actually did" every time!

Post by "Titus" of February 8, 2021 at 3:56 PM

Behind analyzing Epicurean persons and writings in history on this topic, we could also argue with the Epicurean's way of thinking and his approach to the universe. In my opinion, an Epicurean focuses in his daily life primarily on sensations, feelings and the preconceptions. By to do so, he leaves behind the ideas of the men of the crowd. Contrary, referring to the ideas of the crowd is the daily basis of action for a politician. (Heavily) involving in politics, as you can see by observing politicians, always means to adapt and to repeat phrases and ideas which are just related to artificial constructions that have no relations with the basic nature of things. Finally, involving in politics is able to drive a person far away from (in my opinion) the core propagation of Epicurean philosophy: Focussing on your natural perception and by this revealing your true personality, that is common with the easily acquirable pleasure of nature.

Post by “Joshua” of February 10, 2021 at 6:52 PM

I somehow missed this thread in May, but I'm glad to have caught it now.

It's true that we don't have much context here *from an Epicurean point of view*, but in other respects the context is quite rich—it involves the whole history of Greek culture.

The belief among these ancients seems to have been that the underworld was not a place of torture, except in a few notable and extreme cases, but a place of forgottenness. Achilles, Pericles, Homer—a handful of the select and renowned have gone to the Happy Isles, and their names will echo until the world ends. But the common lot of humanity is to wander forever listlessly as shades (“pale in wondrous wise” to quote a translation of Lucretius in reference to Ennius); no name, no face, no memory. Utterly forgotten. The *Damnatio Memoriae* was not only a punishment for tyrants brought low. It was, to the Greeks, the sad fate of almost all of us.

How happy, then, to be an Epicurean! Death holds no terror; no, not even the subtle anguish of living on without really living; of *being*, yet without Being. Yes, most of us will be forgotten, and not so long after our deaths.

But we will not care, because we will not exist.

Post by “Eikadistes” of April 7, 2022 at 2:10 AM

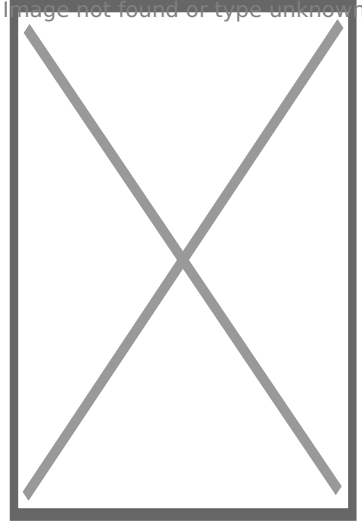
For me, “**lay low**” is our best contemporary idiom that expresses the basic meaning of ΛΑΘΕ ΒΙΩΣΑΣ. Somewhere behind it are “*going underground*” and maybe either “*take the red pill*” or “*turn on, tune in, drop out*”. *Turn on* your natural intellectual faculties, *tune in* to the teachings of Epicurus, *drop out* of superstitious religious cults.

I also find connections with Vatican Saying 58 (“*We must free ourselves from the prison of public education and politics*”) and Fragment 24 (“*I congratulate you, Apelles, in that you have approached philosophy free from all corruption*”).

Post by “Cassius” of May 13, 2023 at 7:30 PM

I am adding to this thread because the "lathe biosas" issue is coming up tomorrow in our book review of the Emily Austin "Living for Pleasure."

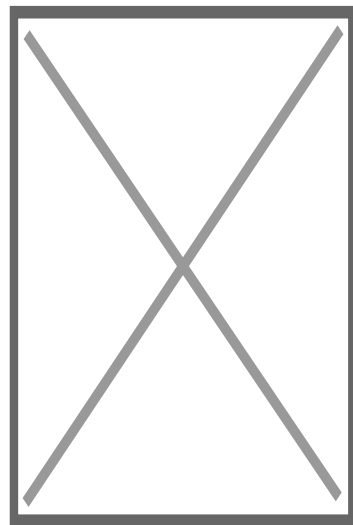
I wanted to add this link where the primary source for this phrase as being Epicurean is recorded - in Plutarch:



[Plutarch's Moralia in sixteen volumes. Vol.14: 1086C-1147A \[Loeb 428\] : Plutarchus / Plutarch \(46 - ca. 122\) : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](https://archive.org/details/moraliainfiftee14plutarchive.org)

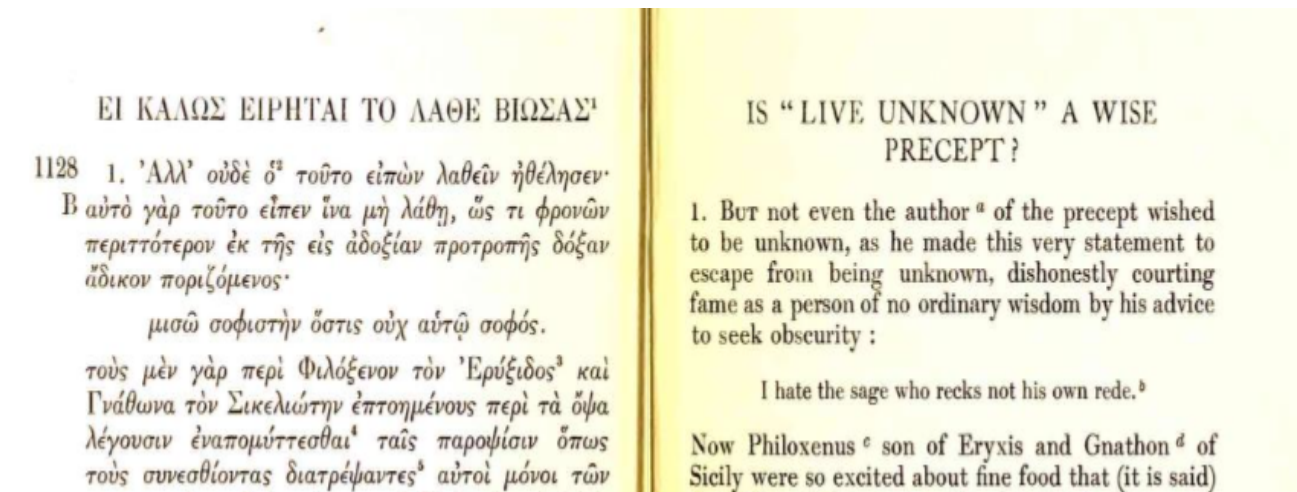
Source: <https://archive.org/details/moraliainfiftee14plutarchive.org>

The essay is "Is Live Unknown a Wise Precept?" and it begins on the page at this link:



[Plutarch's Moralia in sixteen volumes. Vol.14: 1086C-1147A \[Loeb 428\] : Plutarchus / Plutarch \(46 - ca. 122\) : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](https://archive.org/details/moraliainfiftee14plutarchive.org)

Source: <https://archive.org/details/moraliainfiftee14plutarchive.org>



Post by "Don" of May 13, 2023 at 9:58 PM

I find it interesting that the phrase is often translated as "Live unknown" as if the imperative verb is "Live!". But the verb here is λάθε:

[Quote from Quora](#)

Linguistically, the phrase λαθε βιωσας uses the verb λανθανω, which I think is unique to Ancient Greek: it roughly means 'to escape the notice of...' takes the accusative of the person whose attention you avoid and the participle of the action you do without the person noticing. Complicated! The phrase literally means "Escape the notice [of everyone?] having lived your life".

λαθε= inflection of λανθάνω (lanthánō):

second-person singular aorist active imperative

It's also a singular imperative. It's addressed to one person.

A. (active) to escape notice

1. (transitive) escape a person's notice

2. (transitive) to do [+participle or rarely infinitive = something] without being noticed [+accusative = by someone]

So, using 2 it literally does go something like the Quora answer gives.

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, λανθάνω](#)

In light of all that, is it a commentary having something to do about being concerned with what happens *after* one's death?

[Quote from Hellenistic Greek](#)

the aorist infinitive does not express progressive aspect. It presents the action expressed by the verb as a complete unit with a beginning and end.

Post by “Little Rocker” of May 16, 2023 at 1:42 PM

I once read all (or at least most) of Roskam's *Live Unnoticed*. Let me see whether I can track down some key passages from that and post them later. The main thing that I remember Roskam arguing (and that I agree with) is that the advice depends on circumstance, much like most other Epicurean advice.. Sometimes it is actually more prudent to get involved in public affairs when it bears directly on your own security. But I think we are to understand that those circumstances are few and far between.

I myself (perhaps mistakenly) have come to believe that it means, at least in part, that we should not *care* to be noticed. We should not do things for that reason. We should be perfectly content, to use something like Don's rendering of *lanthano*, to be overlooked or unnoticed.

Post by “Kalosyni” of October 20, 2023 at 10:20 AM

From all of the above postings it seems that "live unknown" can relate to the following list of ideas:

--Don't try to make a name for yourself

--Don't do things that put you in the spotlight such as becoming a politician

- Don't teach Epicurean philosophy publically
- Don't get involved in politics (political activities or political debates)
- Don't be concerned with being known after you die
- Don't take on (espouse) the groundless ideas of the crowd

And there are reasons for "why" for all of the above are important to consider, although it should be understood that there isn't some kind of absolute rule against these. If your life is beginning to move into a "hellish" direction, you may choose to do something to prevent it from getting worse.

If your life is going well and there isn't any extremely pressing reason to publically engage in politics, then take heed, because you are highly likely to end up creating a "hellish" life for yourself, and you will have ruined your chances for enjoying this one life. (Perhaps in modern times we have more room for consequence-free expression of opinions because of the internet).

In addition to the above, I see "live unknown" as the start of the consideration of whether or not we "owe" time and energy to upholding the well-being of the city-state/nation/commons. If that kind of action gives you pleasure, then go ahead (but you will likely encounter difficulties). If it isn't something that comes naturally, then don't feel that you are doing something wrong by not getting involved. If things around you are going downhill and you need to protect your life necessities, then of course take action. And since everything is politically polarized, don't be surprised of bad consequences that you encounter when you do take action.

Post by "Don" of October 20, 2023 at 11:31 AM

Nicely done. The only line I'd amend is:

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

--Don't teach Epicurean philosophy publically

Don't teach Epicurean philosophy publically (unless invited)

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 Aoz & 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/CICERO...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 πολιτεύσεσθαι) 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, 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%A9n_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 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.

Post by “Cassius” of October 22, 2023 at 5:00 AM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

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.

Pacatus I think you will be very pleased with the vigorous way Dr. Boeri argues the thesis of his book in our upcoming podcast with him. May be a few more days but should be released "soon."

Post by “Pacatus” of October 22, 2023 at 7:13 PM

In my perusal of past threads, I came on this post by [Cassius](#) – which I reproduce in full:

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Here's my answer: By no means did the classical Epicureans take the position that we should "never" be involved in politics. Look at the example of Cassius Longinus, and there are others as well.

The caution I always make is that people are individuals and have different programming for pleasure and pain, and by no means do everyone take pleasure and pain in the same things.

Given that difference, I do not think it is possible to take a *Philosophic* position that one view of pleasure or pain is *philosophically* approved by nature for everyone. That is also in my view the clear meaning of the last ten of so, [principal doctrines](#) as to justice, which are all about pointing out that there is no "absolute" justice.

I think Epicurean philosophy is hugely helpful in deciding how to evaluate politics and how to take political positions, but I also think that just like in the Roman Civil War it is possible for Epicureans to be on opposite sides of many important issues, so we should be careful not to overstep our bounds and say that Epicurus would endorse only one set of political positions. The clear (to me) import of the doctrines on Justice tells us to expect that people are going to take different positions about how they want to live, so applications of Epicurean philosophy to politics needs to take that into account.

So in my view too the prohibition here on discussing politics is no so much because there are not Epicurean implications, but because here, and at this stage of trying to organize people to discuss and promote the basics of Epicurean philosophy, we really don't want to be drawn into day-to-day disputes that would demoralize and divide and weaken us before we even get started.

No doubt in the future such divisions will occur, as you can already see them on other websites and commentators, some of which are overtly "leftist" and some of which are not (and quite the opposite in fact). But for now, and for here, we want to focus as a group on learning the basics before we go off as individuals pursuing our individual views of pleasure and pain, much as we would, if we were at a convention, divide up into groups to go to restaurants of various types.

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While I agree with this wonderful post completely, I will add just this caveat:

Under the rubric of "the agreement to neither harm nor be harmed" as the root of Epicurean natural justice, I do not think that one can assent to ideologies or political movements (or parties) that embrace causing harm as a means of securing their own social/political power, without violating Epicurean philosophy on that score. And I think that Epicureanism stands on stronger ground ethically all around than idealist philosophies such as the Stoics or Kantians (or religious/theological "divine command" theories).

LATE EDIT: I should have said "expansion" perhaps, instead of "caveat" given this clear statement by [Cassius](#) : "I think Epicurean philosophy is hugely helpful in deciding how to evaluate politics and how to take political positions."

Post by "Eikadistes" of June 8, 2024 at 11:45 AM

Do we have a picture of Fragment 551?

Post by “Don” of June 8, 2024 at 12:23 PM

[Quote from Twentier](#)

Do we have a picture of Fragment 551?

Not to the best of my knowledge. It would just be contained in Plutarch or that letter anyway...
Not in an Epicurean source.

Post by “TauPhi” of July 13, 2024 at 11:18 PM

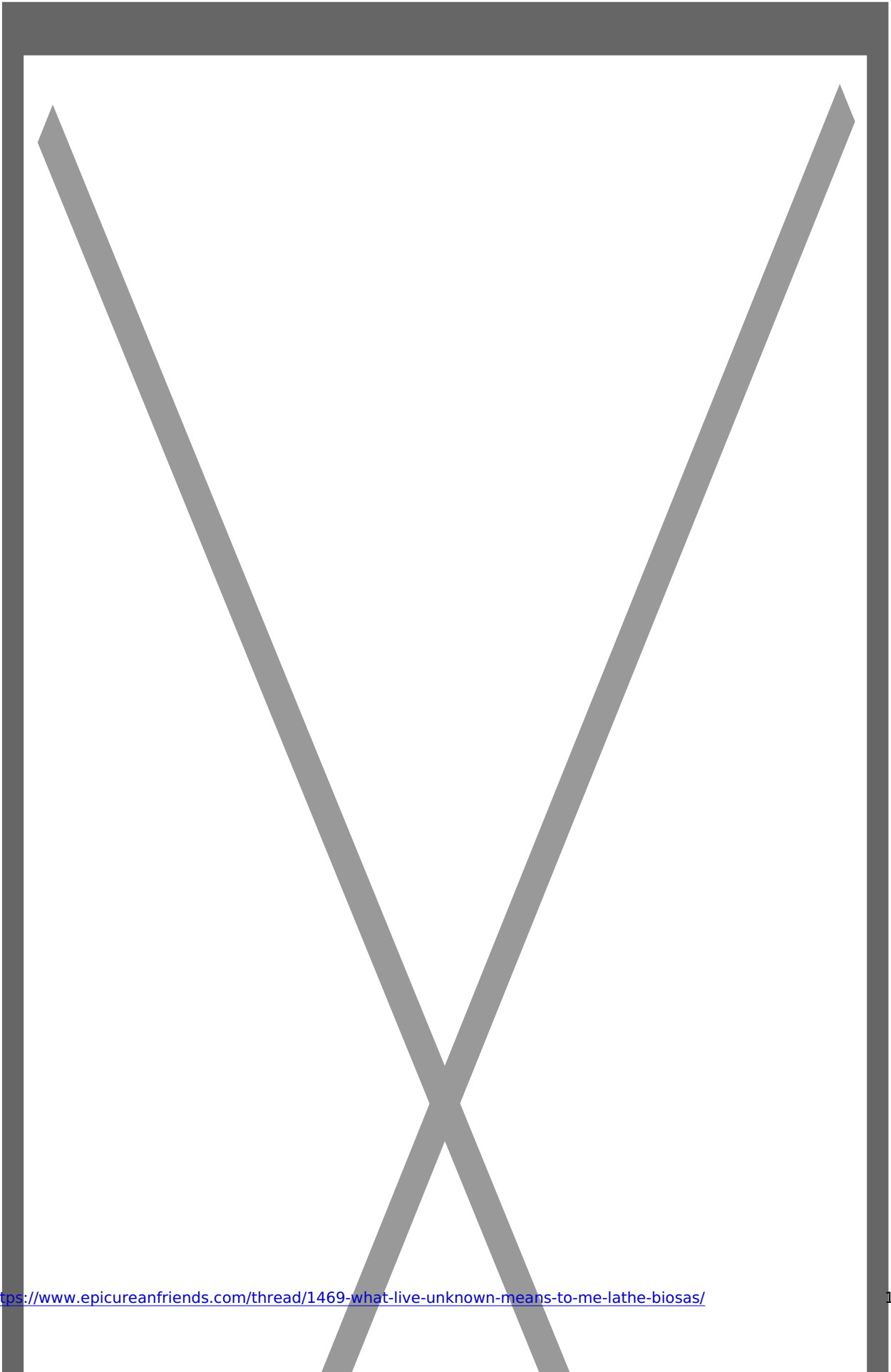
'**De Bono Vitae Humilioris**' is an anonymous poem from Codex Vossianus Q 86 published in 'Anthologia Latina'. Translation comes from John Colin Dunlop's 'Selections from the Latin Anthology: Translated into English Verse' (1838). It is considered to be an Epicurean poem praising 'Lathe Biosas' lifestyle. The date of creation is unknown but it's suspected to be around 1st century AD.

*Small are my treasures, my domain is small;
But quietude makes that blameless little, great:
My tranquil mind no tremors agitate—
Heedless if men my days should slothful call.
Go! Seek the camp—ascend some curule throne—
All the vain joys that sway the bosom taste!
Mean though I am, by no distinctions graced,
Still, (while I live,) I call the hours mine own.*

Est mihi rus parvum, fenus sine crimine parvum,
sed facit haec nobis utraque magna quies.
pacem animus nulla trepidus formidine servat
nec timet ignavae crimina desidiae.
castra alios operosa vocent sellaeque curules
et quicquid vana gaudia mente movet.
pars ego sim plebis, nullo conspectus honore,
dum vivam, dominus temporis ipse mei.

Relevant links:

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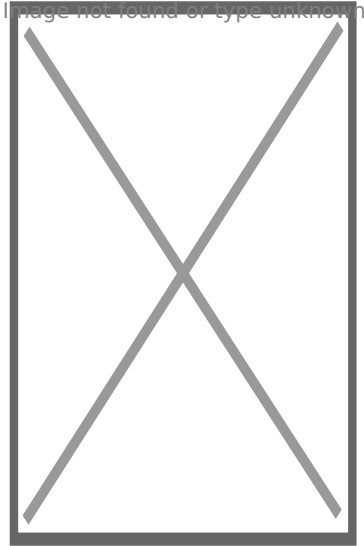
[Isaac Vossius - Wikipedia](#)

en.wikipedia.org

[Codices Vossiani Latini — Brill](#)

[Latin Anthology - Wikipedia](#)

[Laudator Temporis Acti: Dominus Temporis Ipse Mei](#)



[Anthologia latina sive poesis latinae supplementum, ediderunt Franciscus Buecheler et Alexander Riese : Buecheler, Franz, 1837-1908 : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

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archive.org

Post by “Cassius” of July 14, 2024 at 6:55 AM

Thank you - never heard of that - very interesting!

Post by “Don” of July 14, 2024 at 7:45 AM

Great find, [TauPhi](#) . There are some great lines in there. I especially like the last line:

dum vivam, dominus temporis ipse mei.

While I live, I am the master of my time.

(... The master of time is myself)

Post by “Kalosyni” of July 14, 2024 at 7:51 AM

I looked up "curule" and found a [wikipedia](#) entry on it!

Here is the first paragraph:

Quote

In the [Roman Republic](#) and the [Roman Empire](#), the curule chair (*sella curulis*, supposedly from *currus*, "chariot") was the seat upon which magistrates holding [imperium](#) were entitled to sit. This includes [dictators](#), [magistri equitum](#), [consuls](#), [praetors](#), [curule aediles](#), and the [promagistrates](#), temporary or *de facto* holders of such offices.

Post by “TauPhi” of July 14, 2024 at 12:38 PM

I'm mentioning it here because I don't want to pollute [Joshua](#) 's post on translation of Lucretius as it is shaping to be something special, but for those interested, Joshua mentioned 'The Satires of Juvenal' at the end of his first post. Take a look at satire X (starting at page 260 in Joshua's link). You'll find a lot of Epicurean influences in this satire including, once more, the theme of 'lathe biosas'.

Satire X is not strictly Epicurean as the gods there are painted as the 'standard' ones but I think you'll find a lot of interesting points there, nonetheless.

Direct link to Joshua's post:

Thread

[**Authorship of the 1743 Prose Translation of Lucretius**](#)

Introduction

In a forum [thread](#) from 2018, @Cassius raised the question of authorship as to the translator of

the prose edition of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* that was printed in London "for Daniel Brown (sometimes Browne), at the sign of the Black Swan without Temple-Bar." Cassius has prepared a [copy](#) of the text for the forum, derived from the [PDF version](#) at Internet Archive (archive.org).

The translation in question was printed with facing Latin and English text in two volumes, octavo size,...



Joshua

July 14, 2024 at 9:37 AM

Post by “Eikadistes” of August 13, 2025 at 6:37 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

In light of all that, is it a commentary having something to do about being concerned with what happens *after* one's death?

While doing some translating, I've been considering that *látthe* may have been employed to imply that "*failing to escape notice*", or "*getting caught up in the affairs and politics of the polis*" or "*having great admiration based on being servile to a mob*" is akin to **death**, or a kind of imprisonment.

I read the ancient idiom as "**Escape notice** [and] **live!**", which, I think, might also be read as "[If you don't] **escape notice** [you might not] **live** [proverbially or otherwise]!", either biologically, or socially, to be imprisoned or restrained, or legally restricted, "*being disallowed to live a free life*".

With that in mind, I think there's a criticism attached to the idiom *látthe biōsas* of the political life, and the celebrity lifestyle, and any livelihood that requires tolerance of excessive amounts of bullshit in the form of superficial conversations, shallow relationships, and unnatural goals.

Post by “TauPhi” of October 10, 2025 at 11:47 AM

'**Freedom**' by John Norris is not an Epicurean poem. In fact, the author could be the very antithesis of an Epicurean philosopher. Nevertheless, I hope you enjoy the poem as much as I do. It's a pretty neat depiction of 'Lathe Biosas' lifestyle.

Please find the transcription and the link to a book published in 1699 where this poem comes from (page 113).

I.

*I do not ask thee Fate, to give
This little span a long Reprieve.
Thy pleasures here are all so poor and vain,
I care not hence how soon I'm gone.
Date as thou wilt my Time, I shan't complain;
May I but still live free, and call it all my own.*

II.

*Let my Sand slide away apace;
I care not, so I hold the Glass.
Let me my Time, my Books, my Self enjoy;
Give me from Cares a sure retreat;
Let no impertinence my Hours imploy,
That's in one word, kind Heaven, let me ne're be great.*

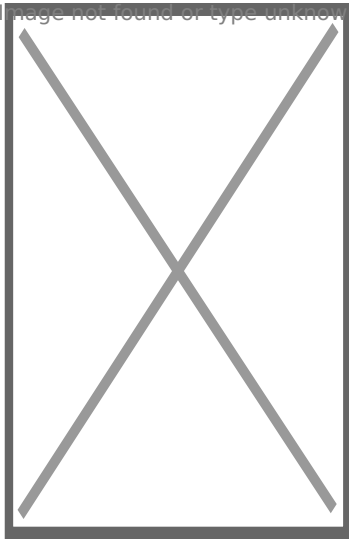
III.

*In vain from Chains and Fetters free
The great Man boasts of Liberty.
He's pinnion'd up by formal Rules of State;
Can ne're from Noise and Dust retire;
He's haunted still by Crouds that round him wait,
His lot's to be in Pain, as that of Fools t' admire.*

IV.

*Mean while the Swain has calm repose,
Freely he comes and freely goes.
Thus the bright Stars whose station is more high,
Are fix'd, and by strict measures move,
While lower Planets wanton in the Sky,
Are bound to no set Laws, but humoursomly rove.*

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[A collection of miscellanies, ... 1699 : Norris, John. : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

A collection of miscellanies, ... 1699..Digitized from IA40313713-55.Next issue: bim_early-english-books-1641-1700_a-discourse-concerning-t_norris-john_1685.
archive.org