

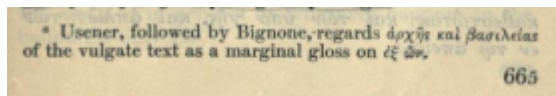
PD06 - Disputes as to correct translation of PD6 - Should it refer to "sovereignty" and "kingship"?

Post by "Cassius" of November 23, 2017 at 6:40 PM

I am informed by Elli P. that there are serious issues with the standard English translation of PD6. The versions we most commonly see are:

Bailey: "To secure protection from men anything is a natural good, by which you may be able to attain this end." (note the strangely-placed comma)

Hicks/Loeb: "In order to obtain security from other men any means whatsoever of procuring this was a natural good."



But Hicks notes a problem:

Elli cites this version of the ancient Greek text by Archontia Liontaki, who is a philologist of the ancient and new Greek language, and a member of the current Garden of Epicurus in Athens :

VI. 6 Ἔνεκα τοῦ θαρρεῖν ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἦν κατὰ φύσιν ἀρχῆς καὶ βασιλείας ἀγαθόν, ἐξ ὧν ἄν ποτε τοῦτο οἷός τ' ἦ παρασκευάζεσθαι.

And this is Liontaki's translation from the ancient to new Greek:

VI.(6) Με σκοπό την απόκτηση ασφάλειας απέναντι στους ανθρώπους, υπήρχε (πάντα) το φυσικό αγαθό της κυριαρχίας και της βασιλείας, μέσω των οποίων (κάποιος) μπορούσε κάποτε να το καταφέρει αυτό.

Elli translates this new Greek into English as follows:

VI. (6) In order to obtain security from other people, there was (always) the natural good of sovereignty and kingship, through which (someone) once could have accomplished this.

Elli also notes that Eric Anderson translates:

PD 6 That natural benefit of kingship and high office is (and only is) the degree to which they provide security from other men.

What a tangled web.

If specific words such as kingship are there, it would seem they should be included. But some of the best academic minds of the 20th century decided that they had good reason for leaving it out. I would think a fair discussion of which translation is best would have to discuss why Bailey / Bignone / Usener came to the conclusion they did, even if in the end it was wrong. No doubt they had a reason, and they were not just being sloppy. Just saying "they were wrong" doesn't seem like the best approach, or else we call into question everything else they decided (which probably should be done, but can't practically be attempted without a strong foundation).

Which brings up another topic- many of the ancient texts are translated in very "stilted" and unwieldy English, which is probably not necessarily the way it would be translated by a scholar starting from scratch today. And so we are left with texts written in very hard-to-read fashion that are not necessarily the most accurate in communicating the message intended. We desperately need a full rewrite done by someone who is both (1) competent, and (2) friendly to Epicurus, so as to avoid contamination from Stoic/Platonist preconceptions.

Elli tells me that such a work is being planned by leaders of the Athenian Garden of Epicurus. As I find out more I will update that information here.

Post by "Cassius" of November 23, 2017 at 7:05 PM

One more comment I'd like to preserve here is the observation that the scheme of dividing the Doctrines up into 40 separate items does not seem to go back to the ancient world, and was added somewhere along the way. If the doctrines were written more in "letter" form, with no intent that each of the 40 stand alone, then it would make sense to read six and seven together (as Elli points out). Also, I think I have seen it argued that Epicurus and Lucretius sometimes used the writing device of repetition - saying the same thing several times in different ways in quick succession - for purposes of emphasis and clarity. Maybe what we have as PD 6 is just a warm-up for the main point, which is in PD 7, and the thoughts were never intended by Epicurus to be separated but to be one long flowing single thought.

Post by "Elli" of October 12, 2018 at 2:50 PM

VI. (6) "In order to obtain security from other people, there was (always) the natural good of sovereignty and kingship, through which (someone) once could have accomplished this". This translation comes from the ancient greek to newgreek by Archontia Liontaki, member of the

Garden in Athens.

As we know Bailey et.al erased some words in the above Saying.

However, in Epicurus' Description of the Wise Man, by Diogenes Laertius, we observe :

31. The wise man will appease an absolute ruler when occasion requires. (translation also by Cyril Bailey)

I find the above as unaccurate translation ! What means "will appease" and what means "when occasion requires" and what means "absolute ruler"?

I've read from the ancient greek text, by DL : "Ο σοφός και μόναρχον εν καιρώ θεραπεύσειν".

New greek translation : Ο σοφός σε μια ευκαιρία θα υπηρετήσει ακόμη και βασιλέα/μονάρχη .

In english my translation is : the wise man in an occasion, will serve even a king/monarch !

The greek words used are :

"θεραπεύω" that in ancient greek means "I serve" someone or an art or a science, and NOT "I appease".

"καιρός" (occasion) literally in greek means "the right time ; and alas, if you let it go or let it pass through your attention".

"μονάρχης" in greek means the monarch or the king and NOT an "absolute ruler".

More free translation for the above 31 is : "The wise man will observe the phenomena and if there is the right time he will realize it right away, even to serve a king or monarch. in my opinion that motto "Lathe Viosas" is a cunning and came after, just to be spreaded around, so deviously." 😏

Post by "Cassius" of October 13, 2018 at 10:52 AM

Thank you Elli!

Post by “Elli” of October 15, 2018 at 5:03 PM

It's my pleasure...to serve only the one wise monarch and a king of philosophy : Epicurus ! 👍

Post by “Eikadistes” of September 8, 2021 at 8:54 AM

[Elli](#), I'm curious what you think of this translation by Odysseus Makridis:

6. “This <human ability to lead a good life> originally became possible by nature and for the sake of imparting courage in human beings <who were then living in a pre-social condition.> And this is the natural origin and principle on which all authority—be it even kingship—is based. And it is from the same <natural propensities> that a human being is able also to arrange a good and pleasant life.” (*Letters and Sayings of Epicurus*)

Post by “Cassius” of September 8, 2021 at 9:00 AM

Elli has been away for a while but I hope this will encourage her to drop by again soon!

Post by “Cassius” of September 8, 2021 at 9:02 AM

And Nate thank you again for having a better memory than I do, because this is another thread where we need to suit up [Don](#) on one side vs Norman DeWitt on the other (and apparently Archontia Liantaki too) as to whether to read sovereignty / kingship into Epicurus' writings on self-protection.

(But we were talking earlier about [PD14](#) there. [RE: PD14 - Alternate Translations](#) Nevertheless a related issue?)

Post by “Joshua” of September 8, 2021 at 11:27 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/217-pd06-disputes-as-to-correct-translation-of-pd6-should-it-refer-to-sovereignty-an/>

There's a biographical data point that bears on this question, yes? In his early career he made the city of Mytilene too hot to hold him, and was driven to Lampsacus and the mercy of a king? I don't know if I have the details right exactly.

Post by “Don” of September 8, 2021 at 11:57 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

And Nate thank you again for having a better memory than I do, because this is another thread where we need to suit up [Don](#) on one side vs Norman DeWitt on the other (and apparently Archontia Lontaki too) as to whether to read sovereignty / kingship into Epicurus' writings on self-protection.

(But we were talking earlier about [PD14](#) there. [RE: PD14 - Alternate Translations](#) Nevertheless a related issue?)

I see it's been upgraded to a "dispute" now 😊 Get ready to ruuummble!!!

Post by “wbernys” of April 12, 2026 at 2:27 PM

[Quote from Eikadistes](#)

Someday, I would like to fatten-up The Hedonicon with the works of Philódēmos

Certainly would be awesome. I mainly want Torquatus (And Velleius) speech included and some of the english to be more clear and a little less archaic (PD6 in hedonicon is a example where i struggled to understand it). Got the best of Epicurus by classic caves. Like that the most.

Post by “Eikadistes” of April 12, 2026 at 5:38 PM

[Quote from wbernys](#)

[Quote from Eikadistes](#)

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That's really perceptive, and I appreciate you noting that one, in particular, because of **all** of the *Doctrines*, I find 6 to be *unquestionably* the most mis-translated, due to the language. You're right, it does need an update, though I caution that other translators are making compromises.

(This might warrant another thread, but...)

Compared against any other doctrine, *Six* has been translated with more difference than any. [You'll find the most differences with each translators treatment of 6.](#) I found that each translator makes some compromise at some point in negotiating with (what seems to me to be) unique phrasing, so, the awkward phrasing that you notice is definitely intentional with *that* one at this point.

Of all available translators, I personally find Makridis (2005) to have rendered a translation of *Doxa 6* that seems to reflect the semantics most authentically, so I used that more as a model:

Quote

"This <human ability to lead a good life> originally became possible by nature and for the sake of imparting courage in human beings <who were then living in a pre-social condition.> And this is the natural origin and principle on which all authority—be it even kingship—is based. And it is from the same <natural propensities> that a human being is able also to arrange a good and pleasant life."

I like him because he adds some commentary, particularly noting "kingship" as being a translators addition, not authentic vocabulary. The rest seem content to invoke modern political language:

Quote

"As for the assurance of safety from the attacks of men, by virtue of the nature of **political dominion and kingly power** this is a good thing, no matter by whose aid one is able to procure it." - De Witt, *Epicurus and His Philosophy* 79 (1954)

"Political rule and kingly power being what they are, it is a good thing to feel secure in human relations no matter through whose agency one is able to attain this." - De Witt, St. Paul and Epicurus 187 (1954)

*"The natural good of **public office and kingship** is for the sake of getting confidence from [other] men, [at least] from those from whom one is able to provide this." - Inwood & Gerson (1994)*

*"That natural benefit of **kingship and high office** is (and only is) the degree to which they provide security from other men."- Anderson (2004)*

*"It is a natural benefit of **leadership and kingship** to take courage from other men (or at least from the sort of men who can give one courage." - Saint-Andre (2008)*

"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." - Mensch (2018)

"There was some natural good in leadership and kingship for the purpose of establishing mutual confidence among people, any time someone is thereby able to do so." - White (2021)

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There's this trend you'll notice them doing where they present two, parallel, sociopolitical words ("political rule and kingly power", "public office and kingship", "kingship and high office", "leadership and kingship", "leadership and kingship"), but those words are not in the original text. Instead, we find a few "to be's" a few infinitives, and frustratingly ambivalent pronouns.

[This is a great one to dive into the language for personal study.](#)

To mention a point that [Don](#) always champions, the *Doctrines* should be taken as a whole. While KD6 seems awkward on its own, it makes a lot more sense when you contextualize it against KD5 (*you've gotta be peaceful and practical about pleasure*), and KD7 (*fame usually isn't practical*).

That said, thanks again, and I'll definitely review for the sake of fluidity.