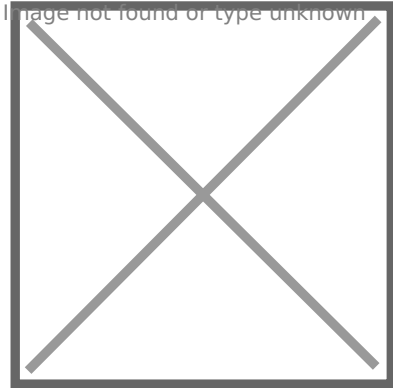


Contemplative Isolation and Constructive Sociability in the Epicurean Tradition

Post by "Don" of October 11, 2021 at 10:33 PM



[A View From the Garden: Contemplative Isolation and Constructive Sociability in Lucretius and in the Epicurean Tradition, in R. Matuszewski \(ed.\), Being Alone in Antiquity: Ancient Ideas and Experiences of Misanthropy, Isolation, and Solitude, Berlin](#)

N.B. These are the uncorrected proofs of the above-mentioned article. It is often assumed that Epicurean philosophy and its foremost Roman prophet, T....

www.academia.edu

Fabio Tutrone. *A View from the Garden: Contemplative Isolation and Constructive Sociability in Lucretius and in the Epicurean Tradition*

An interesting paper that lays out a thought-provoking perspective on a number of points. Haven't read it completely, but I liked the parts I've read so far including a nuanced view of "live unknown." The author talks about its contextual nature.

Post by "Don" of October 12, 2021 at 5:04 AM

"Roman readers seem to have discussed with fervor Cicero's work *On the Commonwealth* (*De Re Publica*), which strongly advocated the importance of political commitment as an altruistic, law-abiding service and warned against the risks of contemplative isolation.² Cicero's main target in the first polemical part of *On the Commonwealth* were the Epicureans, who - as Cicero himself says elsewhere - took Italy by storm and founded several communities of wisdom-practitioners in imitation of Epicurus' Athenian garden."

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2225-contemplative-isolation-and-constructive-sociability-in-the-epicurean-tradition/>

I was unaware of this work by Cicero. Maybe worth finding, and it may be worth finding out if this was written pre- or post-de Finibus. So, Cicero really didn't like Epicureanism even with Epicurean friends.

Post by “Don” of October 12, 2021 at 5:14 AM

"In Epicurus' own words, "the same conviction that inspires confidence that no evil is eternal or even enduring, also makes us aware that in our limited conditions of life friendship affords us the most perfect security".²⁴"

Tutrone's translation of [PD28](#)

Post by “Don” of October 12, 2021 at 5:20 AM

"...the Epicurean quest for enduring (or 'katastematic') pleasure could not adopt any other strategy than the rational construction of a mutually supportive community"

I don't know whether I've read the translation of katastematic as "enduring" before. I find that an intriguing nuance.

Post by “Don” of October 12, 2021 at 5:32 AM

This is such a rare occurrence to run into this sentiment below in an academic paper that I'm pulling out this long quote to highlight it. See the paper itself for the references in the footnotes:

"One should wholeheartedly agree with Elizabeth Asmis that "the picture that has been painted of Epicureans as living in alternative communities, separate from the rest of society, needs to be corrected", as Epicureanism "keeps a person integrated in the daily routine of ordinary life while shifting his or her aims away from those of the rest of society".²⁷ A committed Epicurean was typically asked to absorb, and meditate on, Epicurus' teachings in order to reorient his thoughts, emotions, and preferences in the everyday flow of moral experience. In order to reach this goal, a coherent set of psychagogic methods and stochastic techniques was

developed by Epicurus and later Epicurean instructors.²⁸ Recent scholarship has demonstrated that even the Epicurean injunction to “live unnoticed” (λάθε βιώσας) and “not to engage in politics” (μὴ πολιτεύεσθαι) – two expressions that are never attested in Epicurus’ Key Doctrines, but only in later sources – does not amount to anything like a general a priori rule.²⁹ Building on the earlier surveys of David Sedley,³⁰ Miriam Griffin,³¹ and Elizabeth Asmis,³² among many others, Geert Roskam and Jeffrey Fish have pointed out that Epicurus’ caveat against the dangers of political life was not dogmatic. Rather, Epicurus’ followers were expected to make their choices on the basis of a situation-based hedonic calculus, taking into account their natural disposition (φύσις or διάθεσις) as well as the exact time (καιρός) and circumstances (περίστασις) of their acts.³³ Most of the times, the hedonic calculus will suggest avoiding the turmoil of politics. But there will be moments when the sage will be called to step into the public arena, for his own good or for that of others – as happened to Epicurus himself, who praised Metrodorus for ransoming Mithres, Lysimachus’ minister, from the hands of a Macedonian general.³⁴ The history of modern scholarship on Epicureanism is replete with discussions of possible “exceptions” to the Epicurean rule of political isolation. Efforts have been made to excuse – or to blame as unorthodox – the behavior of avowed Epicureans such as Idomeneus and Mithres (who held public offices in the early Hellenistic period),³⁵ Antiochus IV Epiphanes (who was converted to Epicureanism by Philonides of Laodicea-on-Sea),³⁶ Colotes (who dedicated his work on good kingship to Ptolemy II Philadelphus),³⁷ Cassius (who planned Caesar’s assassination),³⁸ and Calpurnius Piso (who supported Philodemus’ contubernium while serving as magistrate in Rome).³⁹ Yet there is no need to quibble about exceptions, betrayals, and philosophical heresies if one recognizes that Epicureanism was a non-dogmatic and non-isolationist doctrine that approached moral issues such as marriage, political involvement, and the use of poetry from a supremely rational and pragmatic perspective.⁴⁰

Post by “Don” of October 12, 2021 at 5:52 AM

This was one of the interpretations we talked about in episode 92 of the podcast:

"As Alessandro Schiesaro pointed out, the plague episode is Lucretius’ “final spiritual exercise” for the reader, who is led to see in the very textual structure of *De Rerum Natura* – from the opening hymn to Venus’ creative force to the final disintegration of the ville lumière of Greece – the cyclical movement of nature.⁸¹"

Post by “Don” of October 12, 2021 at 6:06 AM

I differ with the author's translation of ἀταραξία (ataraxia) as "impassiveness" and would use something like "tranquility," but I find the paper overall very compelling and thought-provoking. Final excerpt below:

"While making his final catechistic efforts in Book 6, the poet can legitimately hope that his student sees the true nature of the imperturbable gods and approaches their shrines "with an untroubled breast" (placido cum pectore, 6.75) - which, of course, cannot be done by common worshippers and could not be done by the reader himself at the start of his textual pilgrimage. Creating an untroubled breast (or placidum pectus) is the fundamental purpose of all the six books of De Rerum Natura, whose contemplative devices are carefully modelled on the traditional Epicurean practice of philologia medicans - the therapeutic reading, analysis, and memorization of Epicurus' writings that, as Lucian reminds us, could "produce peace (εἰρήνη), impassiveness (ἀταραξία), and freedom (ἐλευθερία) in readers".¹⁰¹

Post by "Cassius" of October 12, 2021 at 7:43 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

So, Cicero really didn't like Epicureanism even with Epicurean friends.

I don't have the time sequence of the different books down in my mind other than that apparently a good number of them were written near the end of his life when he had been forced into retirement by the civil war and was not a happy camper. I also understand that the death of his daughter in this period (or nearby) further darkened his outlook. But it seems like more than anything else the recurring theme is that Cicero was a politician interested in the health of the state above all, and he didn't have the creativity to see how an expansive reading of "pleasure" could be made to be consistent with his goal of citizenship.

[Quote from Don](#)

- two expressions that are never attested in Epicurus' Key Doctrines, but only in later sources - does not amount to anything like a general a priori rule.

Yes indeed you can hear me cheering him on there....

And post number 5 above in general - the extended excerpt - is just outstanding. That's what I am referring to as the lead that Cicero could have used to thread together Epicurean views and the requirements of good citizenship - but he chose not to go that route and instead ended up with his head detached from his body without really putting up a fight, unlike Atticus who

maintained friendly relations with both sides or Cassius who at least put up a strong fight before he exited the stage of his own volition.

Post by “Don” of October 12, 2021 at 12:52 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

“with an untroubled breast” (placido cum pectore, 6.75)

This is a reminder that Epicureans felt the mind resided in the area of the heart, so this phrase makes perfect sense in that context.