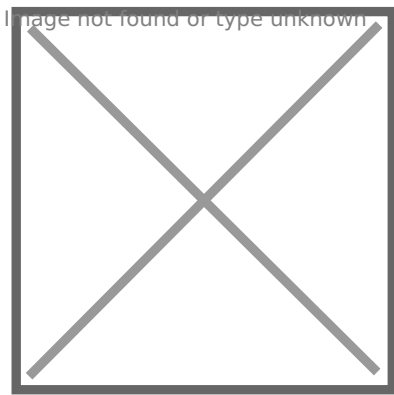


Epicureans On Kingship

Post by "Cassius" of August 2, 2022 at 10:16 AM

We have been talking a lot recently (summer 2022) about the "natural and necessary" distinction, and I think most of us agree that extreme political power is going to be way down on the list of things Epicurus would advise pursuing, regardless of how we classify it. That's why the article I am linking here caught my eye, as it may contain some hints on how Epicurus viewed even such things that are superficially dangerous such as "kingship." Looks to contain some surprising information. Written by Sean McConnell of Cambridge.



[Epicureans on kingship](#)

Diogenes Laertius lists in his catalogue of Epicurus's works (10.28) a treatise On Kingship, which is unfortunately no longer extant. Owing to the...

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EPICUREANS ON KINGSHIP

Diogenes Laertius lists in his catalogue of Epicurus' works (10.28) a treatise *On Kingship*, which is unfortunately no longer extant. Owing to the Epicureans' antipathy to politics, such a work might be viewed with surprise and presumed to be virulently negative in outlook. Indeed, Plutarch reports that the Epicureans wrote on kingship only to ward people away from living in the company of kings (*Adv. Col.* 1127a) and that they maintained that to be king oneself was a terrible mistake (*Adv. Col.* 1125c-d). However, the scattered evidence that remains suggests the Epicurean views on kingship were both nuanced and sophisticated. In this paper I seek to reconstruct a viable account of the Epicurean position on kingship.

In the first section I argue that Epicurus and other early members of the school held a fundamentally neutral view on the intrinsic good of kingship: they maintained that it is not necessarily either good or bad and that the matter must be judged on a case by case basis. Here I also identify some criteria for judging that a particular instance of kingship is a good thing. I then attempt to refute two alternative accounts of the Epicurean position that appear in the literature: the negative view reported by Plutarch, which at first blush appears to accord closely with what we see in the fifth book of Lucretius' *De rerum natura* and which is argued for by Fowler,¹ and a positive view, argued for by Gigante and Dorandi² on the basis of a controversial passage in Diogenes Laertius' account of the Epicurean wise man (10.121b). I argue that Lucretius' account of kingship and the passage from Diogenes Laertius ultimately accord with the earlier Epicurean views. These two sections cover much familiar territory, but they lay the foundation for further enquiry into more neglected aspects of Epicurean thought on kingship. In the third and final section I argue that the Epicureans considered kingship to be the form of government most suited for the pursuit of the Epicurean life in 'mixed' societies. Here I show how we can recover an account of the Epicurean ideal king that offers valuable new perspectives on other aspects of their ethical system: the Epicureans in all likelihood made an ethical distinction between two sorts of people—those 'normal' people with a disposition suited to be Epicureans and those of such a nature that they could not follow fully Epicurean tenets but who could be of use ruling—and developed their views on how kingship could be

Post by "Cassius" of August 2, 2022 at 10:23 AM

Excerpt starting page 182:

The view that the Epicureans had an emphatically conditional stance towards the good of kingship contrasts with both sides in a recent scholarly dispute. Gigante and Dorandi take the acknowledged benefits of monarchy further and argue that Epicurus had a genuinely positive attitude towards kingship. 16 To establish their claim, they focus on an important passage in Diogenes Laertius' account of the Epicurean wise man, which I have delayed discussing until this point. Here is the orthodox presentation and translation of the text:

χρηματιεῖσθαί τε, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ μόνης σοφίας, ἀπορήσαντα. καὶ
μόναρχον ἐν καιρῷ θεραπεύσειν.

(Diogenes Laertius 10.121b)

He will make money, but only from his wisdom, if he is hard up. He will on occasion pay court to a king. (tr. Long and Sedley 1987)

The passage is traditionally interpreted as saying that the wise man will make money, but in the exceptional circumstance of poverty and only from the source of his wisdom; also, in exceptional circumstances he will pay court to a king. Extraordinary circumstances and actions are the key concerns. This traditional interpretation sits

well within the context of the conditional view I have been advocating: there is no general value judgement made on kingship in this passage, only that the wise man may ἐν καιρῷ ('at the opportune moment' or 'in due measure') 17 involve himself in kingly rule, perhaps when circumstances are such that benefits will accrue from such an action. The phrase ἐν καιρῷ seems to be strongly indicative of the conditional nature of the Epicureans' attitudes towards kingship. However, Gigante and Dorandi argue that the traditional way of interpreting this passage is misguided; they claim that it is in fact indicative of quite a different picture.

The key premise in their argument is the emendation of this crucial passage to read: χρηματιεῖσθαί τε, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ μόνης σοφίας εὐπορήσαντα καὶ μόναρχον ἐν καιρῷ θεραπεύσειν. Their rendering and interpretation of the passage suggests that the wise man will make money as normal practice, but being well-resourced from his wisdom

alone he will pay court to a king at an opportune time. 18

Their interpretation of the text has a number of strengths. In particular, the claim that the wise man will make money as normal practice is supported by Epicurean thought on economics, a very important point that is largely ignored by commentators on this passage. 19 Philodemus, in his economic treatises *On Wealth* and *On Household Economics*, for which his major source is Metrodorus, 20 maintains that the Epicurean will make money and acquire wealth as normal

practice, at least to some extent. 21

Epicurus states that one must not seek wealth or affluence for its own sake (SV 30); Philodemus also advocates only doing the correct amount of work one must in order to acquire sufficient goods (On Household Economics col. 15.45–16.6, col. 16.44–17.2, col. 18.7–20). 22 There is a balance between sufficient work for survival and mental

tranquillity, but the type of work undertaken does not seem overly significant. Philodemus maintains that basic labour such as tending land, and even commercial enterprise involving slaves and commodities (On Household Economics col. 23.7–22), is sanctioned so long as one does not do too much. He also declares certain avenues of

wealth to be unfitting or base, such as soldiering (On Household Economics col. 22.17–28), horsemanship and mining (col. 23.1–6), and sophistic and competitive discourses (col. 23.22–36). Most significantly, it appears that wisdom is not the sole legitimate source of wealth, as is suggested in the traditional interpretation of Diogenes Laertius 10.121b, although one should unquestionably use one's wisdom in order to judge proper limits of work and expenditure. 23 Gigante and Dorandi successfully capture this idea in their interpretation; but does their proposed emendation of the text stand up to scrutiny?

The strongest case in favour of emending the text rests on the economic considerations attributed to the wise man that immediately precede in the text of Diogenes Laertius, namely that he will not be a Cynic, not beg, that he will be

concerned with his dignity and the future, and that he will acquire the needs of life (Diog. Laert. 10.118–20). 24 Gigante and Dorandi argue that because the wise man has such economic concerns, especially not to live an impoverished Cynic, day-to-day, hand-to-mouth lifestyle, he is allowed to pursue a course of action in accordance with his Epicurean principles that best meets these economic concerns. They claim that the best course is offered by the court of a king since here lies the best chance to secure the economic goods, both now and into the future. The ideal Epicurean relationship to the king would be one of philosophical tutor or advisor, a position in which one

could have an income and productively and pleasurably guide the king's rule in accordance with Epicurean principles: 'Il saggio professerà la sua sapienza per procurarsi i mezzi di sostentamento facendo anche la corte ad un monarca ed insieme alla gioia per il progresso morale del monarca riceverà pure un guadagno materiale.' 25

Their emendation makes sense, they claim, as it ties the idea of money-making with that of tending to the king philosophically, thus uniting the economic and philosophical interests ascribed to the wise man. 26 Thus, they conclude, the Epicureans have a fundamentally positive view of the institution of kingship, even though the

Epicurean himself would not wish to be the king.

Post by “Cassius” of August 2, 2022 at 10:29 AM

Just going to include the opening part of the introduction to this section on "The Epicurean ideal king."

In this final section I argue that the Epicureans were not content simply to identify that kingship might or might not be a good thing: they also developed a sophisticated prescriptive account of how the political institution of monarchy could successfully realise goods, for both kings and Epicurean subjects, in the present sociopolitical conditions.

The ideal Epicurean society is one in which every person is an Epicurean, a situation that ensures justice, tranquillity, and peace for all (KD 40; Diogenes of Oinoanda fr. 56). 38 The next best situation seems to be one in which most people act in accordance with the utility of justice (like Epicureans) and those that do not appreciate the utility of justice are kept in check by fear of punishment, 39 a scenario that the Epicureans presented as having been historically realised (Hermarchus ap. Porphyry, *De abs.* 1.7.1–8.5). 40 In this situation, a knowledgeable ‘governing’ body ensures compliance and punishment via legislation, thus promoting the good of those in the society (Hermarchus ap. Porphyry, *De abs.* 1.10.4–11.2). 41 However, in the present circumstances the Epicureans were small communities, minority groups within wider societies. 42 They may have thought about how they might maximise the goods accruing from this less than ideal situation. 43 They clearly made an effort to live in harmony

with the wider society, by, for example, encouraging involvement in state festivals (Diog. Laert. 10.120). Although we do not have any extant evidence confirming this, there might also have been some consideration of existing political structures most conducive to Epicurean life. 44 At any rate, we can attempt a credible reconstruction of

Epicurean views.

Although not always desirable and certainly not ideal, monarchy is, pragmatically, a very attractive political option for the Epicurean. Democracy or a republic, for example, would require involvement of the citizens every so often in the political process—something the Epicurean does not want to do if it can be avoided (SV 58).

Even if other systems provided the same benefits, the deciding factor would be the need for personal involvement in public affairs. To be sure, an oligarchy in which the Epicurean citizens are not politically involved would be a viable option, but equally so would be monarchy (or any form of autocratic rule). 45 Since it seems that monarchy was a political system singled out for particular attention by Epicurus himself, let us leave aside the possibility of oligarchy and focus on monarchy.

Post by “Don” of August 2, 2022 at 10:52 AM

[Epicurean Sage - Service to a king... A sage will be grateful to anyone who corrects them](#)

Hicks: And he will make money, but only by his wisdom, if he should be in poverty, and he will pay court to a king, if need be. Yonge: The wise man will also,...
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Post by “Cassius” of August 2, 2022 at 11:27 AM

Here is a KEY passage that we'll want to be sure to keep in mind and discuss:

But just what sort of person would place himself in the position of king given the natural end of pleasure with which all humans should identify (Epic. Men. 128-9; Cic. Fin. 1.42), and to which political life is typically not conducive? A comment from Plutarch may hold the key to answering this question:

οὐδ' Ἐπίκουρος οἶεται δεῖν ἡσυχάζειν, ἀλλὰ τῇ φύσει χρῆσθαι
πολιτευομένους καὶ πράσσοντας τὰ κοινὰ τοὺς φιλοτίμους καὶ
φιλοδόξους, ὡς μᾶλλον ὑπ' ἀπραγμοσύνης ταραττεσθαι καὶ
κακοῦσθαι πεφυκότας, ἂν ὧν ὀρέγονται μὴ τυγχάνωσιν.

(Plutarch, De tranquillitate animi 465f-466a)

Epicurus does not think that it is necessary for the lover of honour and the lover of fame to be tranquil but to employ their nature in political participation and prosecuting public business because, given their nature, by not taking part in public matters they are harmed and disturbed more, if they do not obtain the things which they seek.

Although Epicurus calls everyone to a life of tranquillity and abstention from public affairs (e.g., fr. 548 Usener), Plutarch reports that he advocates political participation for those who are by nature positively disposed towards fame and honour. Immediately following this comment, Plutarch claims that it is absurd for Epicurus to urge the most eager people who are unable to lead a tranquil life rather than the most qualified to enter politics (ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνος μὲν ἄτοπος οὐ τοὺς δυναμένους τὰ κοινὰ πράσσειν προτρεπόμενος ἀλλὰ τοὺς ἡσυχίαν ἄγειν μὴ δυναμένους, 466a). It seems, however, that Epicurus could readily defend himself from such criticism. One can envisage an argument along the following lines: in the current socio-political conditions it

benefits the Epicureans to have the lovers of fame and honour rule, even though it is the Epicureans who know best how to rule. On the one hand, this allows the Epicureans to avoid active participation in politics and pursue a tranquil life, although they can still reap the benefits such as security provided by political institutions. On the other hand, as Plutarch himself states, this situation also benefits the lovers of fame and honour: owing to their nature, they would be more disturbed by doing nothing and so they are actually increasing their calm and happiness by involvement in public life. Thus, they too can be seen as applying correctly the 'hedonic calculus' (Epic. Men. 129–30) 56 given their specific circumstances (cf. Lactantius Div. Inst. 3.6) and everyone wins. 57 But clearly there are some important outstanding issues.

First, why are there people with this special nature who warrant a different sort of advice from the norm? Secondly, why should we think that letting these eager but unqualified people rule will be beneficial rather than detrimental?

It is striking that Plutarch's report contains a clear distinction between those people who have a nature disposed towards fame and honour and who should pursue such things, and those 'normal' people, of a nature suited to be Epicureans, who should eschew fame and honour. If we accept that Plutarch's report is accurate, then it seems

that Epicurus did acknowledge that there are two distinct sorts of people: some just have a certain natural (τῆ φύσει, πεφυκότας) disposition for fame and honour, which leadership can provide, and will never be satisfied without fulfilling it; some people are unable to live a tranquil life, the life of the Epicurean, and should instead practise

politics. However, in the normal context of Epicurean ethics, the man who wanted fame or power would be misguided—he would desire an empty end, have an unnatural and unnecessary desire (Lucr. 3.995–1002, 5.1131–5). Moreover, such a twisted view on the world should always be able to be cured by reason, meaning the innate part of one's nature will not influence one's pursuit of ataraxia (Lucr. 3.307–22). In order to reconcile these conflicting claims, we need to look more closely at what 'nature' means in Plutarch's report.

Post by "Cassius" of August 2, 2022 at 11:38 AM

This passage irritates me for a number of reasons, not the least is by gosh ***translate the darn word!!!*** **If this author wants to assert that the "best life" is "ataraxia" then be decent enough to say that "the best life is tranquility" or something else that is understandable in English and makes clear that this writer is committed to the view that the best life is guided by the goal of "ataraxia" rather than "pleasure."** **If he would just stick with pleasure it would be much easier to reconcile what he thinks**

are apparent difficulties. If the best life is to be "surrounded by numerous and vivid pleasures" while at the same time with minimal or no pain, then the person who places a high stock in the pleasure of *involvement with society* is not going to be content with *uninvolvement with society*. Does that expose him to danger of more pain? Certainly. Is that a "wrong" decision under Epicurean theory? I would assert certainly NOT, for the reasons stated in this article and the quote under discussion.

All these discussions are shot through with nervousness and anxiety for the simple reason that they are committed to the view that Epicurus thought that no one would accept any pain that wasn't absolutely necessary for remaining alive, and that's a ridiculous interpretation of the philosophy as a whole, the life that Epicurus chose, and the life that leading Epicureans chose for the next several hundred years.

This account avoids conflict with the cradle argument. However, the implication here is that reason has not been able to cure the desires of these people for unnecessary things such as fame and honour. A case can be made for accepting this scenario. For a start, the political life suiting these people is not the best life (it is not *ataraxia*). Rather, in the case of these people it would appear that the possibility of *ataraxia* has been vitiated owing to various pressures that have affected their nature. This might be discovered by the persistent failure of Epicurean treatment in practice. A hint of this picture can be found in Philodemus' *On Frank Speech*: there he suggests that some people are sent away uncured (*καρθεύντος ἀθεραπεύτου*, fr. 84.11–12; cf. fr. 86.5–6), even after every effort is made to treat them (fr. 63–5).¹⁸ Although the context is

¹⁸On Epicurus' psychological hedonism, see in particular Woolf (2004). Cooper (1998) makes the case for not ascribing this view to Epicurus. On the cradle argument more generally, see Brunschwig (1988).

¹⁹All references to Philodemus, *On Frank Speech*, are to the text of Konstan, Clay, Glaz, Thom, and Ware (1988). They provide an English translation.

Post by "Elli" of August 4, 2022 at 4:10 AM

If we examine both exhortations by Epicurus on the wise man, we see that:

- a) The wise man will give lectures in public only if asked.
- b) The wise man will serve a monarch when occasion requires.

IMO for an epicurean to involve with any public political affairs, it is an issue ONLY IF is asked!

The greek word "θεραπεύω" has several meanings e.g. a) I am in the service of someone b) I heal someone c) I appease someone for setting him in the right position.

The word "θεραπεύω" does not mean "pay court to" since this phrase includes "flattery" and I am not quite sure that Epicurus would use this phrase with such meaning. Since, epicureans are not flatterers like Plato that was the flatterer of the King Dionysus in Syracuse. HA 😊

If you connect that the wise man will give lectures in public only IF asked, then the wise man will serve or appease or heal (through philosophical exhortations) a king only if asked. Because an epicurean feels pleasure if he corrects/heals someone OR if he is being corrected/healed by someone else. So simple, I suppose!

Here is an historical fact of the epicurean Cineas that was a consultant/advisor to the King Pyrrhus.

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Post by “Cassius” of August 4, 2022 at 5:17 AM

Thank you Elli!

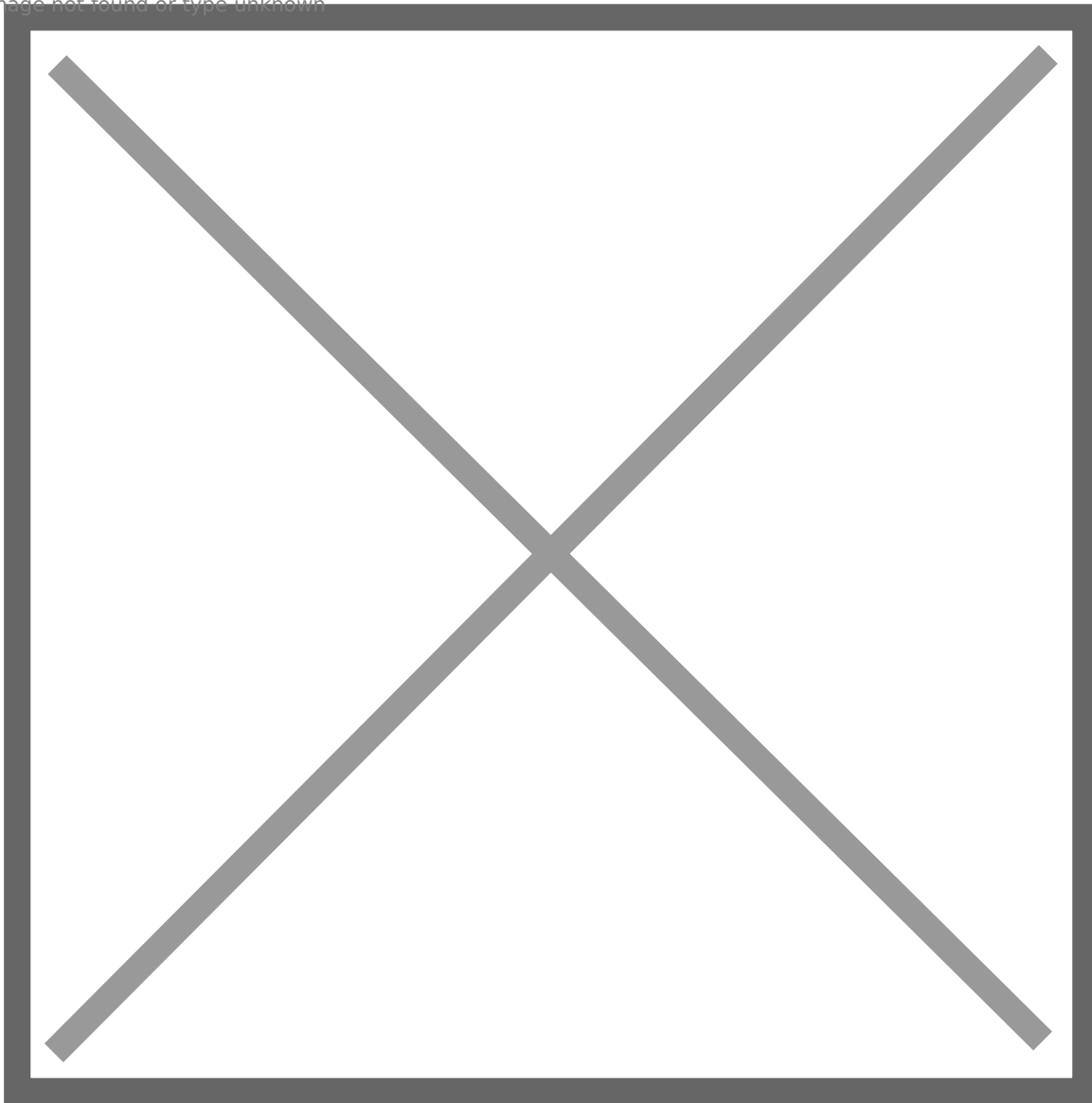
Post by “Don” of August 4, 2022 at 7:12 AM

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

Fun fact:

θεραπεύω (therapeuō) is where the English words "therapeutic, therapy" come from.

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[therapy | Etymology, origin and meaning of therapy by etymonline](#)

THERAPY Meaning: "medical treatment of disease," from Modern Latin therapia, from Greek therapeia "curing, healing,... See definitions of therapy.

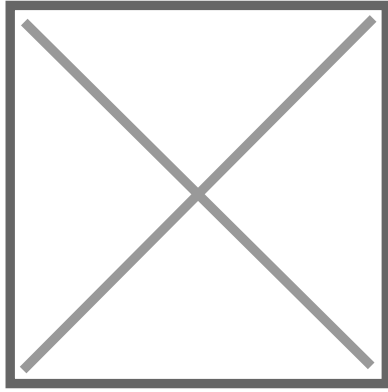
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therapy (n.)

1846, "medical treatment of disease," from Modern Latin therapia, from Greek therapeia "curing, healing, service done to the sick; a waiting on, service," from therapeuein "to cure, treat medically," literally "attend, do service, take care of"

Post by "Don" of August 4, 2022 at 8:28 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2619-epicureans-on-kingship/>



[The Closing Columns of Philodemus' ON THE GOOD KING ACCORDING TO HOMER, PHERC. 1507 COLS. 95-98 \(= COLS. 40-43 DORANDI\)](#)

This article presents a reedition of the nal columns of Philodemus' On the Good King According to Homer (columns 95-98 = cols. 40-43 Dorandi). In the nal...

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Haven't read but looked pertinent possibly. Has actual text and translation from Philodemus "On the Good King According to Homer"

Post by "Elli" of August 4, 2022 at 10:16 AM

On ethics the epicurean terminology is mentioned on medicine i.e. the therapy of a disease that is spread like a plague (see Diogenis of Oinoanda inscription), and that is idealism.

We epicureans are healers as we give the right medicine (philosophy) to patients/idealists. However, patients must ask for their therapy. If not asked bid all of them farewell, leaving them to live inside their platonic illusions and fairytales. IMO monarchy, despotism, kingship, tyranny etc are constitutions of a primitive tradition that platonism and stoicism prevail. 😊

Post by "Cassius" of August 4, 2022 at 10:23 AM

[Quote from elli](#)

IMO monarchy, despotism, kingship, tyranny etc are constitutions of a primitive tradition that platonism and stoicism prevail.

Elli: If you were asked to justify what form of government you think Epicurus would approve of, what would you say, and what would you cite in support of it?

Post by “Elli” of August 4, 2022 at 10:43 AM

Cassius, it depends on what kind of philosophy prevails in a society! If the epicurean would prevail is inclined to the constitution of direct democracy, since on the wise man we read also: "The wise will not become a tyrant". Monarchy and Kingship are despotic regimes and usually lead to tyranny. I have the impression that Epicurus did not like Macedonians at all. Macedonians had Kings e.g. Alexander the great who had Aristotle for his teacher. Epicurus was not a teacher of kings, as we know already, but he was a teacher of common people like us. 😊

Post by “Joshua” of August 4, 2022 at 4:07 PM

Quote

Elli: If you were asked to justify what form of government you think Epicurus would approve of, what would you say, ad what would you cite in support of it?

I can give my take on this, except in the negative;

Epicurean philosophy does not to me seem compatible with a state that does not allow for the freedom of ἀρεσις--that is, hairesis, as in heresy, or the freedom to choose. Constitutional monarchy, parliamentary democracy, direct democracy, social democracy, republic--there are many forms of government that are capable of meeting this very simple requirement. There are also many other forms which are likely to fail this test.

Post by “Don” of August 4, 2022 at 11:24 PM

I would generally concur with [Joshua](#) with the caveat that, in my opinion, Epicureans would want both stability and freedom which is a difficult balance to achieve. So, I'd have to posit that

they wouldn't want a totalitarian form of government that requires conformity among its citizens. However, I find it hard to think that they'd prefer a full true democracy (albeit without women, slaves, etc., participation) like ancient Athens where political positions were determined by lottery. I could see them being alright with a benevolent monarch but then you're at the mercy of who's next in line.

It's a good thought experiment, [Cassius](#) . Those articles and papers on Philodemus and Epicurus are tantalizing. There's not a lot to go on.

Post by “Sid” of October 10, 2022 at 5:11 AM

[Don](#) the point you've raised is very topical in our current times. I won't go into examples but there is such a thing as too much democracy ☐☐. Not all people are informed or wise enough to make decisions which are in the best interests of the country or humanity at large. Unfortunately it seems that the majority often fall in this category. My impression was that Epicurus in general shunned the public life so as such I'm not sure he held an active view on what form of government would be best placed to ensure the good of all. Of course I'm not an expert on this and happy to be corrected,