

Post-Philippi Troubles in The Ancient Epicurean World

Post by "Cassius" of December 15, 2022 at 1:04 PM

Last night in our Zoom we discussed the apparent backsliding of Horace later in life from his earlier Epicurean views. Joshua talked about this in our most recent podcast and if I can find the quote he read then I will post it in this thread too.

As part of that discussed we mentioned but did not pursue that the environment after [the defeat of Cassius and Brutus at Philippi](#) was not favorable to the Epicureans.

I see in Haris Dimitriadis' preface to the second edition of his book he writes:

Quote

The development of Epicurean ethics: As far as Epicurus's philosophy is concerned, we know that following the introduction of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire, it was abolished by law, along with the other philosophical schools.

The "abolished by law" is what I have heard but have not researched. I thought I had read that Augustus closed all the schools, not just the Epicurean, and that would predate the Christian issue. Presumably this would have hurt all the schools, but if the Epicureans were "taking Italy by storm" as Cicero complained, then this would have been especially damaging to the Epicureans.

I don't have more to add at the moment other than to start this thread in hopes of future discussion about this point.

Post by "Cassius" of December 15, 2022 at 6:28 PM

Shamelessly cutting and pasting a post that Joshua just made, here is his quote from the fallen Horace:

"Once I wandered, an expert in crazy wisdom, a scant and infrequent adorer of gods, now I'm forced to set sail and return, to go back to the paths I abandoned. For Jupiter, Father of all of the gods, who generally splits the clouds with his lightning, flashing away, drove thundering

horses, and his swift chariot, through the clear sky, till the dull earth, and the wandering rivers, and Styx, and dread Taenarus' hateful headland, and Atlas's mountain-summits shook. The god has the power to replace the highest with the lowest, bring down the famous, and raise the obscure to the heights. And greedy Fortune with her shrill whirring, carries away the crown and delights in setting it, there."

--Horace, Ode 1.34, Translated by A. S. Kline

This, this it is, O Memmius, to see through
The very nature of fire-fraught thunderbolt;
O this it is to mark by what blind force
It maketh each effect, and not, O not
To unwind Etrurian scrolls oracular,
Inquiring tokens of occult will of gods,
Even as to whence the flying flame hath come,
Or to which half of heaven it turns, or how
Through walled places it hath wound its way,
Or, after proving its dominion there,
How it hath speeded forth from thence amain,
Or what the thunderstroke portends of ill
From out high heaven. But if Jupiter
And other gods shake those refulgent vaults
With dread reverberations and hurl fire
Whither it pleases each, why smite they not
Mortals of reckless and revolting crimes,
That such may pant from a transpierced breast
Forth flames of the red levin- unto men
A drastic lesson?- why is rather he-

O he self-conscious of no foul offence-
Involved in flames, though innocent, and clasped
Up-caught in skiey whirlwind and in fire?
Nay, why, then, aim they at eternal wastes,
And spend themselves in vain?- perchance, even so
To exercise their arms and strengthen shoulders?
Why suffer they the Father's javelin
To be so blunted on the earth? And why
Doth he himself allow it, nor spare the same
Even for his enemies? O why most oft
Aims he at lofty places? Why behold we
Marks of his lightnings most on mountain tops?
Then for what reason shoots he at the sea?-
What sacrilege have waves and bulk of brine
And floating fields of foam been guilty of?
Besides, if 'tis his will that we beware
Against the lightning-stroke, why feareth he
To grant us power for to behold the shot?
And, contrariwise, if wills he to o'erwhelm us,
Quite off our guard, with fire, why thunders he
Off in yon quarter, so that we may shun?
Why rouseth he beforehand darkling air
And the far din and rumblings? And O how
Canst thou believe he shoots at one same time
Into diverse directions? Or darest thou

Contend that never hath it come to pass
That divers strokes have happened at one time?
But oft and often hath it come to pass,
And often still it must, that, even as showers
And rains o'er many regions fall, so too
Dart many thunderbolts at one same time.

Again, why never hurtles Jupiter

A bolt upon the lands nor pours abroad

Clap upon clap, when skies are cloudless all?

Or, say, doth he, so soon as ever the clouds
Have come thereunder, then into the same
Descend in person, and that from thence he may
Near-by decide upon the stroke of shaft?

And, lastly, why, with devastating bolt

Shakes he asunder holy shrines of gods

And his own thrones of splendour, and to-breaks

The well-wrought idols of divinities,

And robs of glory his own images

By wound of violence?

-Lucretius Book VI, transl. William Ellery Leonard

Post by “Joshua” of December 15, 2022 at 7:03 PM

[This](#) is John Dryden giving some of his opinion on the matter. I'll pull out a few excerpts;

Quote

[Juvenal] treats tyranny, and all the vices attending it, as they deserve, with the utmost rigour; and consequently a noble soul is better pleased with a zealous vindicator of Roman liberty [i.e. Juvenal] than with a temporising poet, a well-mannered court slave, and a man who is often afraid of laughing in the right place [i.e. Horace]—who is ever decent, because he is naturally servile.

After all, Horace had the disadvantage of the times in which he lived; they were better for the man, but worse for the satirist. It is generally said that those enormous vices which were practised under the reign of Domitian were unknown in the time of Augustus Cæsar; that therefore Juvenal had a larger field than Horace. Little follies were out of doors when oppression was to be scourged instead of avarice; it was no longer time to turn into ridicule the false opinions of philosophers when the Roman liberty was to be asserted. There was more need of a Brutus in Domitian's days to redeem or mend, than of a Horace, if he had then been living, to laugh at a fly-catcher.

Quote

Herein, then, it is that [Aulus Persius Flaccus, a Stoic] has excelled both Juvenal and Horace. He sticks to his own philosophy; he shifts not sides, like Horace (who is sometimes an Epicurean, sometimes a Stoic, sometimes an Eclectic, as his present humour leads him), nor declaims, like Juvenal, against vices more like an orator than a philosopher. Persius is everywhere the same—true to the dogmas of his master. What he has learnt, he teaches vehemently; and what he teaches, that he practises himself.

Quote

Fame is in itself a real good, if we may believe Cicero, who was perhaps too fond of it; but even fame, as Virgil tells us, acquires strength by going forward. Let Epicurus give indolency as an attribute to his gods, and place in it the happiness of the blest: the Divinity which we worship has given us not only a precept against it [indolence], but His own example to the contrary [In the life of Christ].

Quote

We who are better taught by our religion, yet own every wonderful accident which befalls us for the best, to be brought to pass by some special providence of Almighty God, and by the care of guardian angels; and from hence I might infer that no heroic poem can be writ on the Epicurean principles, which I could easily demonstrate if there were need to prove it or I had leisure.

Post by "Cassius" of December 15, 2022 at 7:09 PM

Quote

from hence I might infer that no heroic poem can be writ on the Epicurean principles,

Infuriating.

Thought not giving poetry at the time, Torquatus specifically refutes this in describing his ancestors, and even Cicero had to admit that the example of Cassius showed that there was much more vigor in Epicurean philosophy than Cicero had imagined.

[15.16] **Cicero to Cassius** [Rome, January, 45 B.C.]

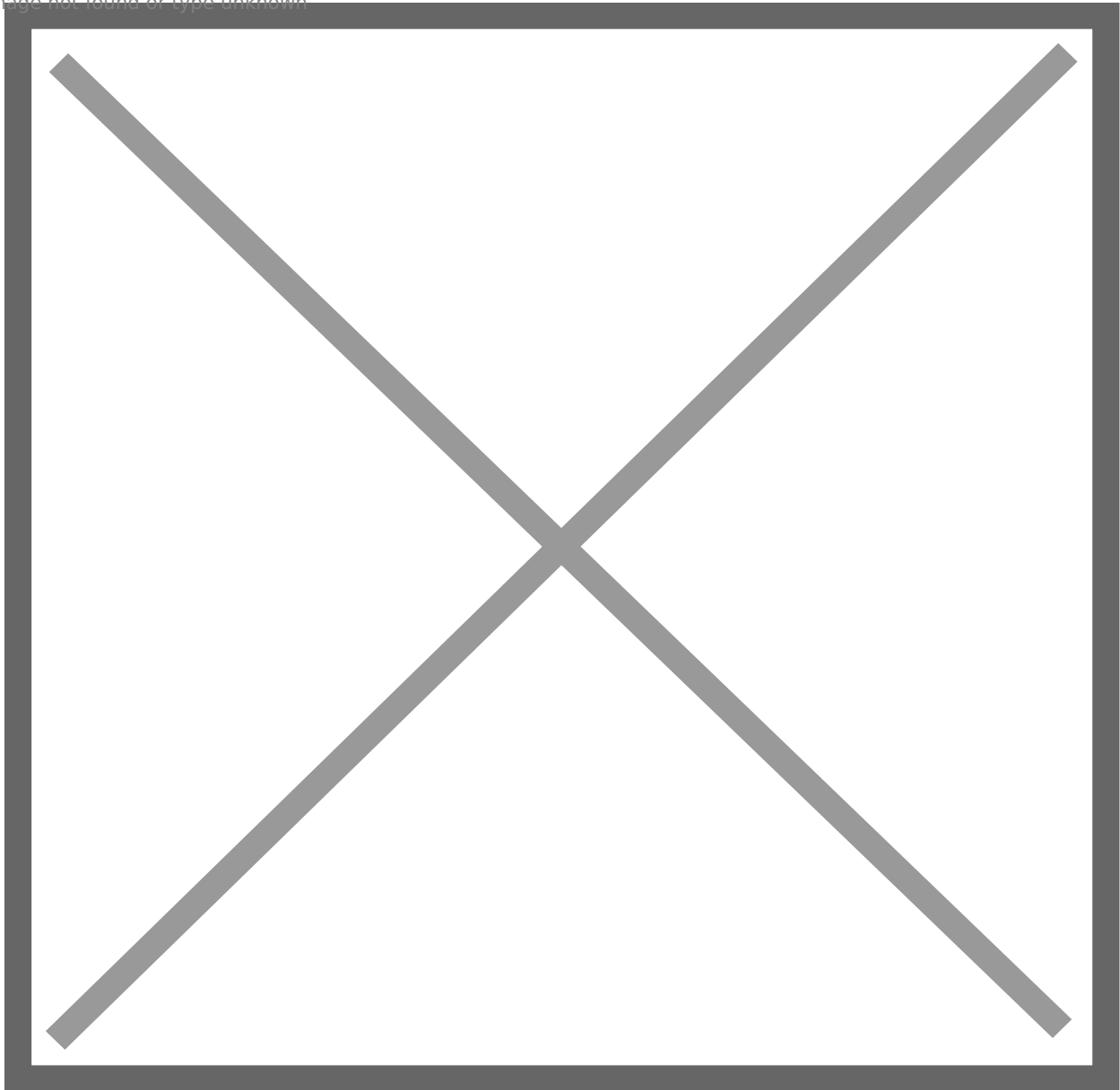
3 But of this later on. I am only sounding you now to see in what spirit you take it. For if you are angry and annoyed, I shall have more to say, and shall insist upon your being reinstated in that school of philosophy, out of which you have been ousted "by violence and an armed force." In this formula the words "within this year" are not usually added; so even if it is now two or three years since, bewitched by the blandishments of Pleasure, you sent a notice of divorce to Virtue, I am free to act as I like. And yet to whom am I talking? To you, the most gallant gentleman in the world, who, ever since you set foot in the forum, have done nothing but what bears every mark of the most impressive distinction. Why, in that very school you have selected I apprehend there is more vitality than I should have supposed, if only because it has your approval. "

Post by "Joshua" of December 15, 2022 at 7:13 PM

I thought that one might get you!

Post by "Joshua" of December 15, 2022 at 7:20 PM

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[Augustus' Political, Social, & Moral Reforms](#)

Augustus is well known for being the first Emperor of Rome, but even more than that, for being a self-proclaimed “Restorer of the Republic.” He believed in...

www.worldhistory.org

This webpage seems to get to the heart of the matter.

Post by “Joshua” of December 15, 2022 at 7:54 PM

Quote

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The closing of the schools of philosophy did not happen until much, much later, under Justinian in 529. But Constantine converted the Empire in the 4th century, and then Julian the Apostate deconverted--but his paganism was not less authoritarian for that, as you may read in his own words [here](#).

In attempting to resurrect the piety of old Rome, he singled out the Epicureans and the Pyrrhonists as being against his project. Himerius was a secretary of Justinian's, and the Encyclopedia Britannica of 1911 says:

Quote

Other declamations, only known from the excerpts in Photius, were imaginary orations put into the mouth of famous persons—Demosthenes advocating the recall of Aeschines from banishment, Hypereides supporting the policy of Demosthenes, Themistocles inveighing against the king of Persia, an orator unnamed attacking Epicurus for atheism before Julian at Constantinople.

Post by "Cassius" of December 15, 2022 at 7:56 PM

This article might also be relevant:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collegium_\(ancient_Rome\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collegium_(ancient_Rome))

I wonder if I am just misremembering something, but it sure does seem like Epicurean momentum fell off a cliff around this time.