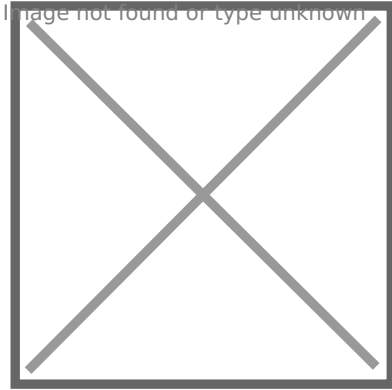


Paper On Epicurean Engagement With Society - Jeffrey Fish - "Not All Politicians Are Sisyphus"

Post by "Don" of March 6, 2023 at 9:37 PM



[Not all politicians are Sisyphus: What Roman Epicureans were taught about politics," in Epicurus and the Epicurean Tradition, ed. J. Fish and K. Sanders \(Cambridge\) 2011 72-104](#)

When it comes to political involvement, some of our most important sources on early Epicureanism frame the question in terms regularly employed by their Stoic...

www.academia.edu

Post by "Cassius" of March 6, 2023 at 9:56 PM

Well I am just starting this article but it is already clear that Don wins the coveted "Article Most Likely To Win Cassius' Approval" Award for the day!

from public life to the company of Epicurean friends.

I maintain instead that *On the Good King* itself constitutes a positive case for a form of Epicurean statesmanship.¹³ Although Philodemus' analysis of Homeric kings makes use of several stock elements from kingship literature, he concentrates on one theme especially compatible with Epicureanism, and one, I think, especially articulated within the school. *KD* 7 identifies glory as a risky pleasure, but adds that there would be no reason not to enjoy it were it risk-free. A ruler's virtuous exercise of power leads to, or at least tends to promote, his safety.¹⁴ I suggest that, with the help of Philodemus and others like him, Roman statesmen were able to connect two strands of Epicurean thought in order to justify their political life: one, that a person's virtues are productive of the good will and love of others, actual pleasures in themselves;¹⁵ the other, that power can in fact lead to safety. Combining the two could result in the claim that the virtuous exercise of political power can sometimes provide safety as well as pleasure to a ruler. Epicurean statesmen in previous generations likely held a similar point of view.

Post by "Cassius" of March 6, 2023 at 10:35 PM

This is a fact of history that is new to me -- I was not aware that the historical Torquatus of Cicero's time had died as a hero in battle only a few years before *De Finibus* was written. Not sure exactly the implication of that but it strikes me that Fish is correct that this would have been a factor in Cicero choosing to use him as the Epicurean spokesman - presumably indicating Torquatus' good standing in Cicero's mind.

88

JEFFREY FISH

his own safety for that of others,¹⁶ something no true Epicurean could ever consistently do. Cicero's intention in selecting Torquatus as his Epicurean spokesman was presumably to enforce a paradox, although the creation of a backdrop that served to subvert Torquatus' argument may also have been a factor. The fact that Torquatus had died as a hero in battle less than two years before the composition of *De finibus* will have been constantly present to the minds of its audience. Cicero is hardly alone in doubting

Post by "Cassius" of March 6, 2023 at 10:44 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2945-paper-on-epicurean-engagement-with-society-jeffrey-fish-not-all-politicians-are/>

Cropped and OCR'd version of this article is now here:

File

[Jeffrey Fish - Not All Politicians Are Sisyphus - What Roman Epicureans Were Taught About Politics](#)

CHAPTER 1
Not all politicians are Sisyphus: what Roman Epicureans were taught about politics
Jeffrey Fish

A review of political conditions, some of the most important in the history of the Roman Republic, is presented in the opening of the *De Re Publica*. The text is a translation of the original Latin text, with a commentary on the text. The text is a translation of the original Latin text, with a commentary on the text. The text is a translation of the original Latin text, with a commentary on the text.

Well researched presentation of the argument that Epicurean philosophy can embrace, in proper circumstances, prudent participation in political affairs. I think this document is likely to become one of our key references on "engagement with society."



Cassius

March 6, 2023 at 10:43 PM

Post by “Cassius” of March 6, 2023 at 10:54 PM

There is a lot of discussion in this article about Philodemus' "On The Good King" but I do not recall that we have discussed it here much in the past.

We need to find the best available translations / reconstructions of what is left and start a thread on that under Ethics:

Although there is an understanding that the just ruler will reign over a prospering and peaceful kingdom, Philodemus' focus is the well-being and happiness of the ruler.⁶¹ In a quotation already known to earlier editors, through the just and pious king a land is said to flourish for him, and its people are said to prosper (*Od.* 19.112–14). Of crucial importance to Philodemus, Homer affirms that there is *enjoyment* in living and ruling justly. Such a view of virtue is entirely foreign to Stoicism, a point overlooked in previous attempts to view the treatise through that lens.⁶² It would also have proven unappealing to Peripatetics or Platonists.⁶³ Although Cicero stresses the importance and utility of a good reputation in his letter to his brother Quintus on how to best govern a province,⁶⁴ he is committed to viewing the happiness of a ruler and the happiness of his people as essentially two separate things. The goal of happiness for those governed will often mean the unhappiness of the virtuous ruler, a false dichotomy for Philodemus.⁶⁵ By exploring how a ruler, through his virtue, creates as safe and stable a rule as possible, Philodemus' treatise also presents the inverse of what we find in the discussion of politics by his contemporary and fellow Epicurean,

Post by “Joshua” of March 6, 2023 at 11:58 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2945-paper-on-epicurean-engagement-with-society-jeffrey-fish-not-all-politicians-are/>

"Retaining his imperium, or power to command, Torquatus was in Africa in 47.[17] There the surviving boni raised an army which included 40,000 men (about 8 legions), a powerful cavalry force led by Caesar's former right-hand man, the talented Titus Labienus, forces of allied local kings and 60 war elephants. The two armies engaged in small skirmishes to gauge the strength of the opposing force, during which two legions switched to Caesar's side. Meanwhile, Caesar expected reinforcements from Sicily. In the beginning of February 46, Caesar arrived in Thapsus and besieged the city. The boni, led by Metellus Scipio, could not risk the loss of this position and were forced to accept battle. Scipio commanded "without skill or success",[18] and Caesar won a crushing victory which ended the war. Torquatus fled the field along with Scipio, attempting to escape to Hispania, but was trapped at Hippo Regius by the fleet of Publius Sittius. Scipio committed suicide on board a ship and Torquatus either committed suicide with him or was captured and executed.[19]"

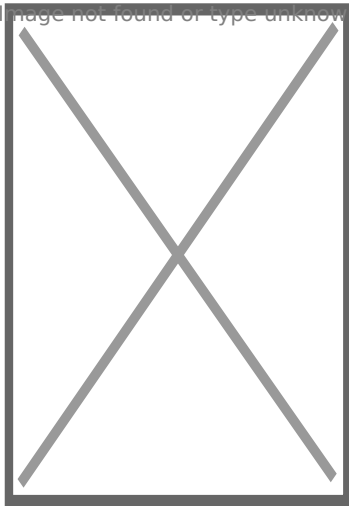
Post by "Cassius" of March 7, 2023 at 1:28 AM

So Torquatus was fighting with the remains of Pompey's Senatorial forces, against Caesar?

No doubt that would have endeared him to Cicero, if true.

Post by "Don" of March 7, 2023 at 4:51 AM

Image not found or type unknown



[Philodemi Peri tou kath' homeron agathou basileos libellus; editit \[.\] Alexander Olivieri : Philodemus, ca. 110-ca. 40 B.C : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

26

archive.org

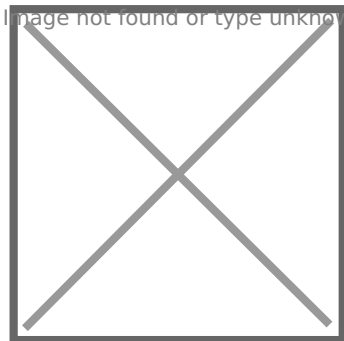
"On the Good King According to Homer" in Greek and Latin.

Not the most helpful for us, but posting here to provide an idea of the condition of the papyrus. You can take a look at the Greek text and see the are fragments at the beginning but a good amount of in relatively good shape.

Also:

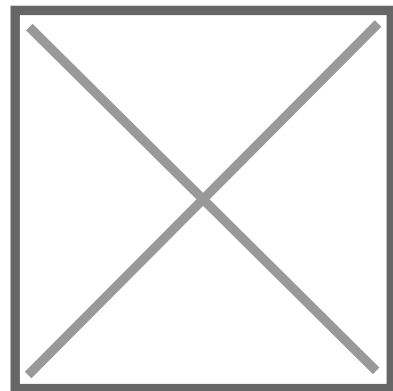
[23.1.Fish | Society for Classical Studies](#)

Image not found or type unknown



[Jeffrey Fish](#)

www.baylor.edu



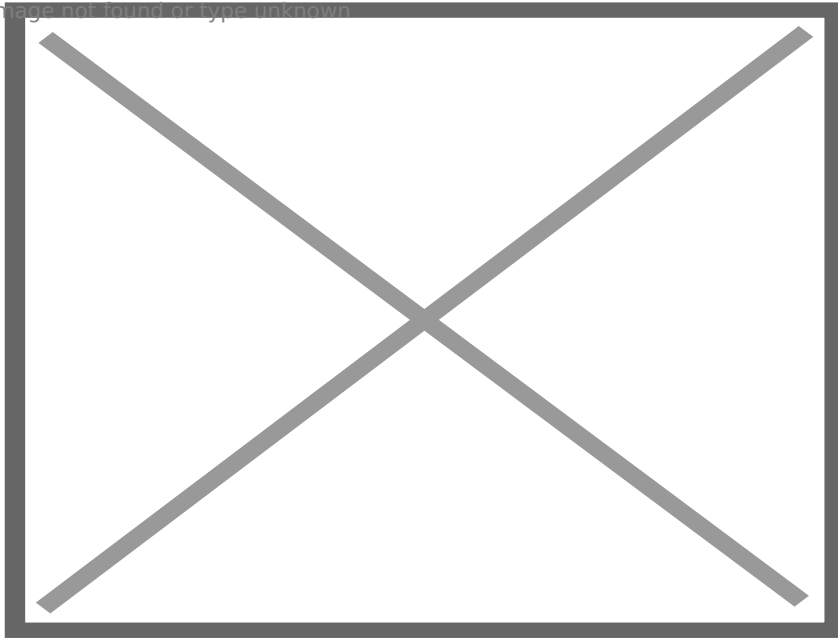
[The Closing Columns of Philodemus' ON THE GOOD KING ACCORDING TO HOMER, PHERC. 1507 COLS. 95-98 \(= COLS. 40-43 DORANDI\)](#)

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...

www.academia.edu

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2945-paper-on-epicurean-engagement-with-society-jeffrey-fish-not-all-politicians-are/>

Image not found or type unknown



[Odysseus and the Epicureans](#)

Odysseus was one of the classic role models for the Stoics. And he was my favorite mythological hero when I was a kid. Both excellent reasons for this...

howtobeastocic.wordpress.com

Post by “Cassius” of March 7, 2023 at 7:21 AM

Thank you Don! This is such a recurring question that I am going to redo the [FAQ on "Engagement with Society"](#) based on the material in this article, and also add Dr. Fish to the list of people that would make potential good interviewees on the podcast.