

Episode 197 -LucretiusToday Interviews Dr. Marcelo Boeri

Post by “Cassius” of October 22, 2023 at 7:36 AM

Welcome to Episode 197 of the Lucretius Today Podcast. Today we are very privileged to present to you an interview with Dr. Marcelo Boeri, Professor of Ancient Philosophy at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. Dr. Boeri is originally from Buenos Aires, and after receiving his Ph.D. from the University of Salvador in 1995, he has worked extensively in the field of Ancient Greek philosophy ever since, lecturing at many distinguished universities around the world.

We are greatly appreciative of Dr. Boeri taking time from his busy schedule to talk with us today about his excellent new book, co-written with Javier Aoiz, entitled **Theory and Practice In Epicurean Political Philosophy - Security, Justice, and Tranquility**. This book is an excellent addition to the field of Epicurean studies, and I would encourage everyone who has any interest in Epicurus' views on engagement with society to be sure to check out this extensively researched and very well argued book.

Dr. Boeri's academic background and contact information: <https://filosofia.uc.cl/academicos-2/5...7-boeri-marcelo>

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/57347852>

Post by “Cassius” of October 22, 2023 at 8:13 PM

Our interview with Dr. Boeri is now live!

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/57347852>

Post by “Cassius” of October 22, 2023 at 8:16 PM

Youtube version for easier sharing and greater discovery:

<https://youtu.be/nraK0Pn45pE>

Post by “Pacatus” of October 22, 2023 at 8:16 PM

Thank you, Cassius! I'll catch it tomorrow -- now I have to watch my Philadelphia Eagles play the Miami Dolphins. ("Fly, Eagles, fly!"). Old Pennsylvania boy, here! 😊

Post by “Cassius” of October 22, 2023 at 8:22 PM

Well once you get your priorities in order and finish the game, I think you'll be very pleased with Dr. Boeri has to say! 😊

Post by “Cassius” of October 22, 2023 at 8:26 PM

Before I forget, special thanks to [Onenski](#) for his assistance with setting up this episode and conducting the interview. Scheduling issues prevented most of our regular podcasters from attending, but Onenski stepped in and did a great job. Thank you!

Post by “Don” of October 22, 2023 at 11:36 PM

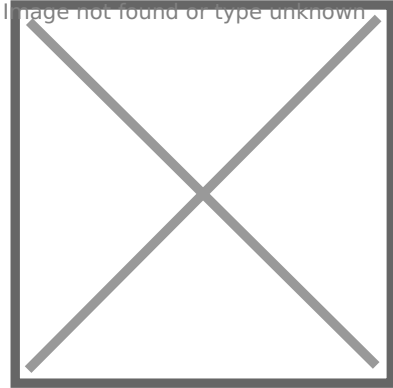
Well done, [Cassius](#) and [Onenski](#) !!! And thanks to Dr. Boeri!!

The conversation was very enjoyable to listen to but also serves as a good enticement to read the book. He did indeed confirm that the common interpretation of "live unknown" is a misinterpretation.

Personally, I did like that Dr. Boeri used the word "stable" to describe ataraxia and aponia. 😊

Post by “Don” of October 22, 2023 at 11:45 PM

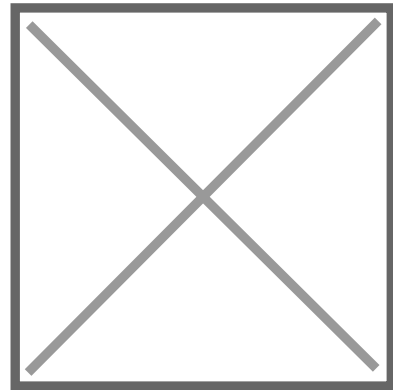
I know [Cassius](#) linked these elsewhere, but for ease of access:



[CICERO AND HIS CLAMOROUS SILENCES](#)

CICERO AND HIS CLAMOROUS SILENCES

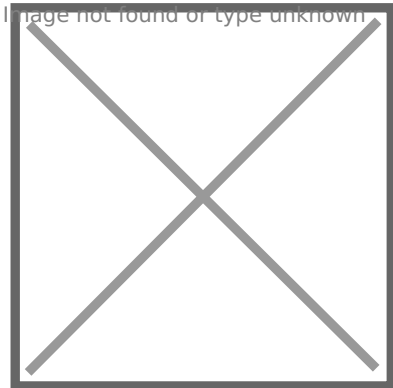
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[The Genealogy of Justice and Laws in Epicureanism](#)

In this paper, we argue that the Epicurean genealogy of justice and laws presuppose an analysis of the just as a modality of the useful, an approach that...

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[JAVIER AOIZ AND MARCELO D. BOERI, THEORY AND PRACTICE IN EPICUREAN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY. SECURITY, JUSTICE AND TRANQUILITY, BLOOMSBURY, LONDON, 2023.](#)

JAVIER AOIZ AND MARCELO D. BOERI, THEORY AND PRACTICE IN EPICUREAN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY. SECURITY, JUSTICE AND TRANQUILITY, BLOOMSBURY, LONDON, 2023.

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(cover and front matter)

Post by “Cassius” of October 23, 2023 at 5:46 AM

Thanks very much for those links, Don. Adding them to the Youtube version.

Post by “Joshua” of October 23, 2023 at 1:35 PM

I listened to part of this episode on my lunch break and will listen to the whole thing again this evening, but my preliminary response is very positive! Dr. Boeri is a very engaging speaker, and it's a topic we haven't given a whole lot of time to in the past.

Thank you [Onenski](#) for your help in organizing and participating!

Post by “Pacatus” of October 23, 2023 at 1:55 PM

I finished the podcast. Wonderful! Thank you so much Cassius and Fernando for presenting this, and your fine moderation -- and of course gratitude to Dr. Boeri. 👍

What has initially piqued my interest is the distinction between "contingent politics" versus "everyday/real politics." I need to take some time to explore and mull over that., and where the contextual/circumstantial lines might be. 🤔

Once again, kudos on a fine presentation! Much appreciated! 👍 👍

Post by “Don” of October 23, 2023 at 2:02 PM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

distinction between "contingent politics" versus "everyday/real politics."

I got the impression he was referring to Realpolitik:

[Realpolitik - Wikipedia](#)

Post by “Pacatus” of October 23, 2023 at 3:49 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

I got the impression he was referring to Realpolitik:

I would guess then that "contingent," in this case, means something like political/social activity for aims that are not pragmatic (say, to sustain beneficially secure social contracts, laws and norms), but based on some other "contingent" considerations: such as personal power or enforcement of some ideology. (Think of that as a question ...)

Post by “Cassius” of October 23, 2023 at 4:46 PM

As you know I asked Dr. Boeri to clarify what he meant, as I figured I was not the only one who was unsure. I took his answer to mean much what Lucretius references in DRN -- constantly standing for electoral office and running time after time even after defeat after defeat. For us oldersters out there, there was someone who used to run for president year after year. I don't think I am thinking of Lyndon Larouche, or even Pat Paulson, but someone else (?)

(Edit - Maybe I am thinking "Harold Stassen" but I am skirting near the no politics rule so I'll stop there 😊)

Post by "Pacatus" of October 23, 2023 at 4:58 PM

Question (I am likely to have only questions for now): Prolepsis was also briefly mentioned in the podcast. Can there be a proleptic (or quasi-proleptic) concept of justice? That is not easily expressed in determinative theoretic terms? But that the latter can best be understood as supporting rational arguments?

This would possibly remove idealism from a kind of "moral noncognitivism" (broadly defined) – which, personally, would comport well with my experience (and frustration) with moral idealisms such as those proffered by the Stoics, Kant, and religious divine-command idealisms, and finding more reasonable philosophical grounding – and testing – for my "feelings" of what appears just or unjust via Epicurean philosophy.

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Now, I need to attend to my Phillies in today's National League Championship game; if they win, they win the pennant and move to the World Series! (Keeping my pleasure priorities straight, [Cassius](#) !) 😊😄😎

Post by "Cassius" of October 23, 2023 at 7:15 PM

Pacatus in the book Dr. Boeri and Dr Aioz go into detail analogizing the development of justice and the development of language, which they believe (I think correctly) are both related to prolepsis. I don't recall a lot of detail to offer more than that, but what I think is a part of their analysis is that justice and language emerge naturally, without being handed down by gods or dictated by a few "great men," or existing as a result of Platonic ideals, and so there are going to be differences in conceptions of justice just as there are differences in language.

I am not exactly sure if or how that relates to your second paragraph but I think it probably does.

Post by "Godfrey" of October 24, 2023 at 1:15 AM

Quote

I would guess then that "contingent," in this case, means something like political/social activity for aims that are not pragmatic (say, to sustain beneficially secure social contracts, laws and norms), but based on some other "contingent" considerations: such as personal power or enforcement of some ideology.

That was my impression: contingent as opposed to realpolitik. But I was confused, and haven't gone back and listened to that part again.

Post by "Pacatus" of October 24, 2023 at 2:56 PM

I don't know if this belongs here, or ought to be transferred elsewhere (e.g., a continuation of the discussion at [Anticipations - Justice & Divine Nature](#)).

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I don't like the word "anticipations" as a rendering of prolepsis. To get at what I said in post #16 here about "moral noncognitivism" (a phrase I think may not be helpful either) and "feeling", I'm going to suggest borrowing a neologism coined by philosopher/psychologist Eugene Gendlin: "**felt-sense.**"

For example, I have a felt-sense of disgust and revulsion and outrage at the abuse of a child – a mental disturbance (τᾶρᾶχή) accompanied by [πίονος](#) in the body (e.g. trembling, muscle-tightening, etc.). I don't need to take account of what the perpetrator thinks/feels in order to act. Nor do I need a set of philosophical or moral principles in order to act. Nor do I need to really think it out at all (hence the "noncognitivism" relative to an ethical response; the felt-sense may be an innately arising response to the situation).

I would not call that a felt-sense of justice – closer to the example in the above-mentioned thread of a child exclaiming "That's not fair!"

But, in order to advocate socially and politically for a compact to prevent and punish child abuse, I do need some defensible concepts/principles of justice – e.g. the compact to neither harm nor be harmed. I would consider that to be realpolitick, and a natural ethical extension of that felt-sense – and quite in line with Epicurean justice. (And maybe the word prolepsis could just be retained as is.)

Post by "Pacatus" of October 24, 2023 at 4:57 PM

[Cassius](#) asked Dr. Boeri about his thoughts on Epicurus' political leanings, e.g. whether he would be inclined to democracy (small d) or monarchism. My recollection is that Dr. Boeri replied that this was a very good, but difficult, question.

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Epicurus lived in Athens from 306 BC till his death in 270 BC. According to a Wikipedia article (all bold/italics mine):

"Athenian democracy developed around the 6th century BC in the [Greek city-state](#) (known as a [polis](#)) of [Athens](#), comprising the city of Athens and the surrounding territory of [Attica](#). Although Athens is the most famous ancient Greek democratic city-state, it was not the only one, nor was it the first; multiple other city-states adopted similar democratic constitutions before Athens.[1] [2] By the late 4th century BC, as many as half of the over one thousand existing Greek cities might have been democracies.[3] Athens practiced a [political system](#) of [legislation](#) and executive bills. **Participation was open to adult, free male citizens (i.e., not a [metic](#)), who probably constituted no more than 30 percent of the total adult population.**[4]

"[Solon](#) (in 594 BC), [Cleisthenes](#) (in 508–07 BC), and [Ephialtes](#) (in 462 BC) contributed to the development of Athenian democracy. Cleisthenes broke up the unlimited power of the nobility by organizing citizens into ten groups based on where they lived, rather than on their wealth.[5] The longest-lasting democratic leader was [Pericles](#). After his death, Athenian democracy was twice briefly interrupted by [oligarchic](#) revolutions in [411](#) and [404](#) BC, towards the end of the [Peloponnesian War](#). It was modified somewhat after it was restored under [Eucleides](#); the most detailed accounts of the system are of this fourth-century modification, rather than the Periclean system. **Democracy was suppressed by the [Macedonians](#) in 322 BC. The Athenian institutions were later revived, but how close they were to a real democracy is debatable.**"

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athenian_democracy)

Under the heading of "[Citizenship in Athens](#)" are these comments:

"Only adult male Athenian citizens who had completed their military training as [ephebes](#) had the right to vote in Athens. **The percentage of the population that actually participated in the government was 10% to 20% of the total number of inhabitants, but this varied from the fifth to the fourth century BC.**[25] This excluded a majority of the population: [slaves](#), freed slaves, children, women and [metics](#) (foreign residents in Athens).[28] The women had limited rights and privileges, had restricted movement in public, and were very segregated from the men."

"Some Athenian citizens were far more active than others, but the vast numbers required for the system to work testify to a breadth of direct participation among those eligible that greatly surpassed any present-day democracy.[25] Athenian citizens

had to be descended from citizens; after the reforms of Pericles and Cimon in 450 BC, only those descended from two Athenian parents could claim citizenship.”

Under the heading **“Women in Athens”** are these excerpts:

“With participation in Athenian Democracy only being available to adult male Athenian citizens, women were left out of government and public roles. Even in the case of citizenry, the term was rarely used in reference to women. Rather, women were often referred to as an *astē* which meant "a woman belonging to the city" or *Attikē gunē* which meant 'an Attic woman/wife'. Even the term Athenian was largely reserved for just male citizens.”

“In addition to being barred from any form of formal participation in government, women were also largely left out of public discussions and speeches with orators going as far as leaving out the names of wives and daughters of citizens or finding round about ways of referring to them. Pushed out of the public sphere, women's role was confined to the private sphere of working in the home and being cast as a second-rate human, subservient to her male guardian whether that be a father or husband.”

- All the more remarkable that Epicurus not only allowed women in the Garden, but also to participate in philosophy as well (e.g. Leontion)!

Under the heading: **“Main Bodies of Government”**:

“There were three political bodies where citizens gathered in numbers running into the hundreds or thousands. These are the assembly (in some cases with a quorum of 6,000), the council of 500 (*boule*), and the courts (a minimum of 200 people, on some occasions up to 6,000). Of these three bodies, the assembly and the courts were the true sites of power – although courts, unlike the assembly, were never simply called the *demos* ('the people'), as they were manned by just those citizens over thirty. Crucially, citizens voting in both were not subject to review and prosecution, as were council members and all other officeholders.”

“As the system evolved, the courts (that is, citizens under another guise) intruded upon the power of the assembly. Starting in 355 BC, political trials were no longer held in the assembly, but only in a court. In 416 BC, the *graphē paranómōn* ('indictment against measures contrary to the laws') was introduced. Under this, anything passed or proposed by the assembly could be put on hold for review before a jury – which might annul it and perhaps punish the proposer as well.”

“In the 5th century, there were no procedural differences between an executive decree and a law. They were both simply passed by the assembly. However, beginning in 403 BC, they were set sharply apart. Henceforth, laws were made not in the assembly, but by special panels of citizens drawn from the annual jury pool of 6,000. These were known as the *nomothetai* (*νομοθέται*, 'the lawmakers').”

“The institutions sketched above – assembly, officeholders, council, courts – are incomplete without the figure that drove the whole system, *Ho boulomenos* ('he who wishes', or 'anyone who wishes'). This expression encapsulated **the right of citizens to take the initiative to stand to speak in the assembly, to initiate a public lawsuit (that is, one held to affect the political community as a whole), to propose a law before the lawmakers, or to approach the council with suggestions.** Unlike officeholders, the **citizen initiator** was not voted on before taking up office or automatically reviewed after stepping down; these institutions had, after all, no set tenure and might be an action lasting only a moment. However, any stepping forward into the democratic limelight was risky. If another citizen initiator chose, a public figure could be called to account for their actions and punished. In situations involving a public figure, the initiator was referred to as a *kategoros* ('accuser'), a term also used in cases involving homicide, rather than *ho diokon* ('the one who pursues').”

“Pericles, according to Thucydides, characterized the Athenians as being very well-informed on politics: ‘We do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he has no business here at all.’”

Under the section **“Criticism”**:

Athenian democracy had many critics, both ancient and modern. Ancient Greek critics of Athenian democracy include [Thucydides](#) the general and historian, [Aristophanes](#) the playwright, [Plato](#) the pupil of Socrates, [Aristotle](#) the pupil of Plato, and a writer known as the [Old Oligarch](#). **While modern critics are more likely to find fault with the restrictive qualifications for political involvement, these ancients viewed democracy as being too inclusive. For them, the common people were not necessarily the right people to rule and were likely to make huge mistakes.**[\[73\]](#) According to Samons:

“The modern desire to look to Athens for lessons or encouragement for modern thought, government, or society must confront this strange paradox: the people that gave rise to and practiced ancient democracy left us almost nothing but criticism of this form of regime (on a philosophical or theoretical level). And what is more, the actual history of Athens in the period of its democratic government is marked by numerous failures, mistakes, and misdeeds—most infamously, the execution of Socrates—that would seem to discredit the ubiquitous modern idea that democracy leads to good government.”

“A new version of democracy was established in 403 BC, but it can be linked with both earlier and subsequent reforms ([graphē paranómōn](#) 416 BC; end of assembly trials 355 BC). For instance, the system of **nomothesia** was introduced. In this:

“A new law might be proposed by any citizen. Any proposal to modify an existing law had to be accompanied by a proposed replacement law. The citizen making the proposal had to publish it [in] advance: publication consisted of writing the proposal on a whitened board located next to the statues of the Eponymous Heroes in the agora. The proposal would be considered by the Council, and would be placed on the agenda of the Assembly in the form of a motion. If the

Assembly voted in favor of the proposed change, the proposal would be referred for further consideration by a group of citizens called nomothetai (literally "establishers of the law")."

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Okay, an already overlong post! 😊😬 But as I was gathering snippets for myself, I thought I'd put them up.

All of which is only intended to outline the kind of (varying) democracy Epicurus might have been familiar with during his tenure in Athens. How much he approved and how much he criticized (and which aspects) – and what he might think of today's institutions – remains an open question. But I suspect he would have disagreed with Pericles.

Post by "Pacatus" of October 24, 2023 at 6:51 PM

I was just re-reading Emily Austin's chapter on "Living Unnoticed: Politics and Power." I think it gives a good, and moderate, analysis of the basis for an Epicurean politics. I will refrain from my penchant for reproducing all the quotes that I particularly like. 😭

But this one hit me personally:

"An Epicurean's political activity must operate within the bounds of their own tranquility." [And I would add: health and well-being.]

Most of my social activism violated those bounds: I was far too often stressed, developed chronic stomach problems, had anxiety nightmares, etc. My father, in his idealistic neo-Kantian zeal, died at a young age from chronic stress and the addictive behaviors (most notably chain smoking) that he used to try to damp it down. (We disagreed politically, and there were some issues we had to agree not to discuss.)

I am also reminded of a story about North American volunteers against the political oppression in El Salvador at the time. The local people were joyously preparing for a religious feast and fiesta. The volunteers asked how they (the locals) could have such cheerfulness in the face of terrible, day-after-day oppression and suffering. The response (in so many words): "You speak like people who will not live here. You come to help because of your kind-heartedness and compassion – but then you will return home. We must remain. How could we endure without occasions for happy celebration?"

If one cannot be active without self-inflicted *τάρᾶχη* and *πόνος* (which you will also likely inflict on those around you), best, all round, to refrain.

Post by “Joshua” of October 24, 2023 at 7:03 PM

Quote

But I suspect he would have disagreed with Pericles.

Interestingly, there is an epigraph in the Greek Anthology attributed to Menander;

"Hail, you twin born sons of Neocles, the one of whom saved his country from slavery, the other from folly."

The first was Themistocles and the second was Epicurus. Both were Athenian citizens, both had fathers named Neocles, both chose the Ceramicus--part cemetery, part potter's quarter--as their public haunt, and both appealed to the lower classes who had been left behind by the aristocracy (in the case of Themistocles) and their state-sponsored male-only Gymnasia (in the case of Epicurus).

Menander was born within a year of Epicurus, and pre-deceased him by twenty years, but it is anyone's guess as to whether the epigraph is genuine.

Post by “Cassius” of October 25, 2023 at 11:55 AM

Dr Boeri has provided us with two reviews of his book - one here

[The Epicurean Life Revealed: Politics and Security - SUN NEWS AUSTIN](#)

Post by “Cassius” of October 25, 2023 at 3:52 PM

I expect this book to generate discussion for years to come, and I expect to cite it as the preferred interpretation of Epicurean engagement in society. That means it deserves a forum of its own, so some of the posts about the book (but not this thread in its entirety, as it applies to the podcast) will be moved here:

[Theory And Practice In Epicurean Political Philosophy - Javier Aoiz and Marcelo Boeri](#)