

Gaius Cassius Longinus' Political Actions

Post by "Pacatus" of February 1, 2024 at 5:53 PM

I have become, lately, more interested in Gaius Cassius Longinus – particularly the relationship between his anti-totalitarian (anti-Caesarian) politics and his Epicurean philosophy. There seems to be some question as to how much his Epicureanism informed (or at least supported) his extreme actions in support of the Republic – as opposed to Julius Caesar's totalitarian quest.

An analogy that I thought of is Christian theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer's implication in the plot to assassinate Hitler (for which he died in a Nazi concentration camp).

Discussion?

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Do I need to say that I am not affirming political assassination as a moral choice? I am just asking the broader question ...

His main biography is here: [Gaius Cassius Longinus - Main Biography](#)

Post by "Cassius" of February 1, 2024 at 8:10 PM

Under the influence of reading Cicero in years past, I used to be totally against Caesar and on Longinus' side and content to label Brutus and Longinus' actions as simply "general anti-dictator" and those of a "liberator," which they claimed to be.

I am not nearly so firm on that today. I still have the highest respect for Longinus and think he was sincerely trying to apply Epicurean philosophy as he understood it (and I do think he understood it well). However at this point I focus on that I just don't have enough information about the forces at work in the Roman Civil War to be sure which side I would personally agree with. It seems that some of Caesar's supporters and possibly Caesar himself had substantial Epicurean leanings, so I don't think we can say with confidence that all Epicureans were on Longinus' side.

There's usually at least two sides to every story, and my view today is that I personally don't have enough information to know whether Caesar was or could have been primarily a reformer

of a rotten aristocracy, or whether he was truly a power-seeking totalitarian who was driven to be king and happy to overthrow the "Limited" government of the republic. He certainly knew enough to refuse the title of king up to the end, even though some of his supporters wanted to give it to him. That's not an entirely different situation than that of George Washington.

We don't want to turn this into a discussion of modern political assassinations, but I personally am definitely interested in learning whatever there is to be learned about more of the facts of the Roman civil war situation. I think that those historical details would help us better understand the rise and fall of the Epicurean movement in the Roman period.

The big question that generally gets raised is "Cassius couldn't have been a good Epicurean because a good Epicurean would never step forward so firmly into public life...." and that position I totally reject. So I think this would definitely be a useful discussion to learn more details about how Cassius might have viewed the situation. I suspect it was not simply an abstract "I love the Senate and the traditions of the Roman Republic" position, but I just don't know what other factors were involved.

Post by “Godfrey” of February 1, 2024 at 8:43 PM

Just as a general point: in ancient Rome as well as in this forum, I imagine that there are Epicureans all over the political spectrum. So the question isn't whether or not certain political actions made a certain historical figure an Epicurean, but how various Epicureans lived their philosophy. Unfortunately it would seem to be that what we have to go on is the historical record and not the philosophical affiliation of various figures.

Post by “Novem” of February 2, 2024 at 3:20 AM

I found this [thread on Caesar](#), for additional reference on the other side of the civil war.

I'm also interested to see how Epicureans thought of the Roman Republic and their commentary on Roman politics as something to add to Epicurean sociopolitical thought, like with Philodemus' "On the Good King" which highlights Epicurean virtues for a statesman.

Post by “DavidN” of February 8, 2024 at 3:26 AM

I don't know enough about the detailed political environment of the late roman republic to comment specifically to it, however I do frame all of my political arguments and investigations with the **iron law of oligarchy**. With this criterion alone I could see that Caesar may have seen himself as a reformer of a corrupt system, who then fell to the same affliction himself. Leading me to believe that both men may have been exercising epicureanism as the situation appeared to them. However this is all assumption, I'd have to do alot more research to arrive at position I felt strongly enough to advocate.

The **iron law of oligarchy** developed Robert Michels in his book *Political Parties*. It asserts that rule by an elite, or oligarchy, is inevitable as an "iron law" within any democratic organization as part of the "tactical and technical necessities" of organization. Michels stated that the official goal of representative democracy of eliminating elite rule was impossible, that representative democracy is a façade legitimizing the rule of a particular elite, and that elite rule, which he refers to as oligarchy, is inevitable.

"It is organization which gives dominion of the elected over the electors. [...] Who says organization, says oligarchy."

"Historical evolution mocks all the prophylactic measures that have been adopted for the prevention of oligarchy."