

"Democracy, the worst form of government."

Post by "Eikadistes" of June 27, 2024 at 10:19 AM

Halfway through Book VII of Philodemus' *On Rhetoric*, I came across the following, surprising quotation:

"Rhetors prefer to live in a **democracy, the worst form of government.**"

I am well aware of Plato's authoritarian politics ... Philodemus seems to identify "The People" with "a vicious mob".

Granted, this is taken out of context, as are many of Philodemus' fragments.

Still, it makes me wonder more about Philodemus' political positions, particularly his sympathy toward Julius Caesar. He has a **lot** to say about civic engagement in *On Rhetoric*.

Post by "Cassius" of June 27, 2024 at 10:35 AM

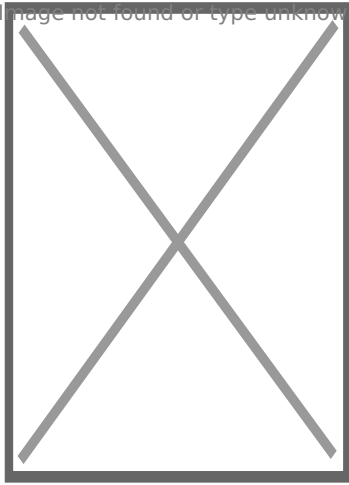
It would be good to collect references like this and compare them with for example Aristotle. Didn't he have some kind of listing of types of government according to how large was the ruling class, and he also had a classification of good and bad forms of each (?).

But the main thing is that it would be helpful to collect the sources, including the reference to Philodemus being sympathetic to Caesar.

I have these two links:

[v.23 \(1919-1920\) - Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences - Biodiversity Heritage Library](#)

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[Philodemi Rhetorica \(trans. Hubbell\) OPTIMIZED : Hubbell : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

Philodemus - On Rhetoric - Translated by Hubbell BEST COPY
archive.org

Here's the "worst form of government" ---
<https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/32303#page/385/mode/1up>

Post by "Cassius" of June 27, 2024 at 10:50 AM

nature is with a person for all the rest of his life, and does not come "in the brief portion of a day."

. . . possible to say that he is going to make even the people understand him in a short time. We may wonder that if he knows this, he did not likewise see that there is a difference between the educated and uneducated in that a clearer statement must be made to the latter. I, 361, col. XCI.

Consequently, expecting to hear similar statements about other forms of expression when he says that the *πίστεως ἀρχαί* such as evidence, torture, are the common property of all, let us say that the knowledge of these belongs to laymen, but their use depends on opportunity, not on knowledge. I, 372, col. XCII.

For just as the physician knows what is probable in disease, and the pilot knows what is probable in weather, so the rhetor considers the course of political events, when something is going to occur in the state, and from this knowledge he says he is going to persuade the people. I, 373, col. XCIII.

The rhetor does not combine his proofs after the fashion of a dialectician or philosopher; for probably this would be displeasing to the multitude. I, 373, col. XCIV.

If they bring means able to rid them of many troubles they will have the philosopher in agreement with them. Making them such offers, those who give advice or plead before a court, then express pity and anger. . . . I, 374, col. XCV.

. . . with whom the majority wish to include the rhetor because of his cringing; for he says, "Let him persuade justly and wisely, let him divert their desires, calm their passions and persuade them individually as friends." I, 374, col. XCVI.

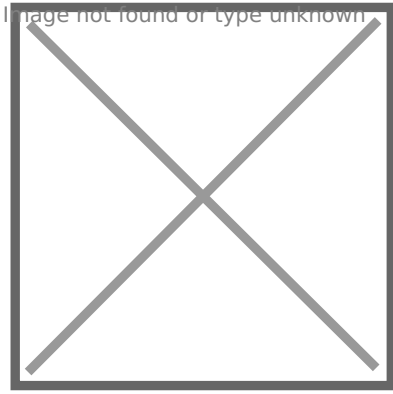
Rhetors prefer to live in a **democracy**, the worst form of government. I, 375, col. XCVII.

[A competent pilot] who did not know where or how or when to sail would be dangerous, fully as much so as the rhetor [who should try to sail a boat in a storm]. For he could not reason about advantage and harm, as such, even if some one has charmed him into thinking that power over all is teachable. I, 375, col. XCVIII.

[If instead of this] he claims that rhetoric is an art because the rhetor produces a certain effect on the emotions, then his shift is not honorable, because it is false that the rhetor possesses universal knowledge, since all poorer artists have wiser men to judge them. I, 376, col. IC.

Post by "Eikadistes" of June 27, 2024 at 11:44 AM

I've also transcribed it as HTML:



[ΠΕΡΙ ΠΗΤΟΡΙΚΗΣ](#)

SELECTIONS FROM ON RHETORIC BY PHILODEMUS OF GADARA BOOK I “Some sciences depend entirely on natural ability and need but little practice; some accomplish...
twentiers.com

Post by “Bryan” of June 27, 2024 at 6:09 PM

Excellent work on your website, [Twentier](#), thank you! The only books I have on Philodemus' Rhetoric are Hubbell's translation (that Cassius shared) and Clive Chandler's work on books 1 & 2, did you use/find any other sources?

Post by “Eikadistes” of June 27, 2024 at 7:04 PM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

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Thanks, [Bryan](#)! I appreciate your feedback.

I've only used Hubbell's translation as my resource.

Post by “Don” of June 28, 2024 at 11:13 PM

I am woefully late to the game on this thread, but ****finally**** feeling well enough to wade (way) back into some of the the threads I missed.

One thought that came to mind reading this thread is that the word ["democracy" didn't mean exactly what we take it to mean today in Ancient Rome and Athens](#). ...although honestly there are some similarities, both positive and negative. Attempting to cleave to the "no politics" rule of this forum, I'll not go into details. But it seems Philodemus is especially concerned about the people - the hoi polloi, if you will - being able to be swayed by the rhetorical abilities of individuals skilled in the art of speech-making. < sarcasm > I'm glad that's not a concern anymore! < / sarcasm >

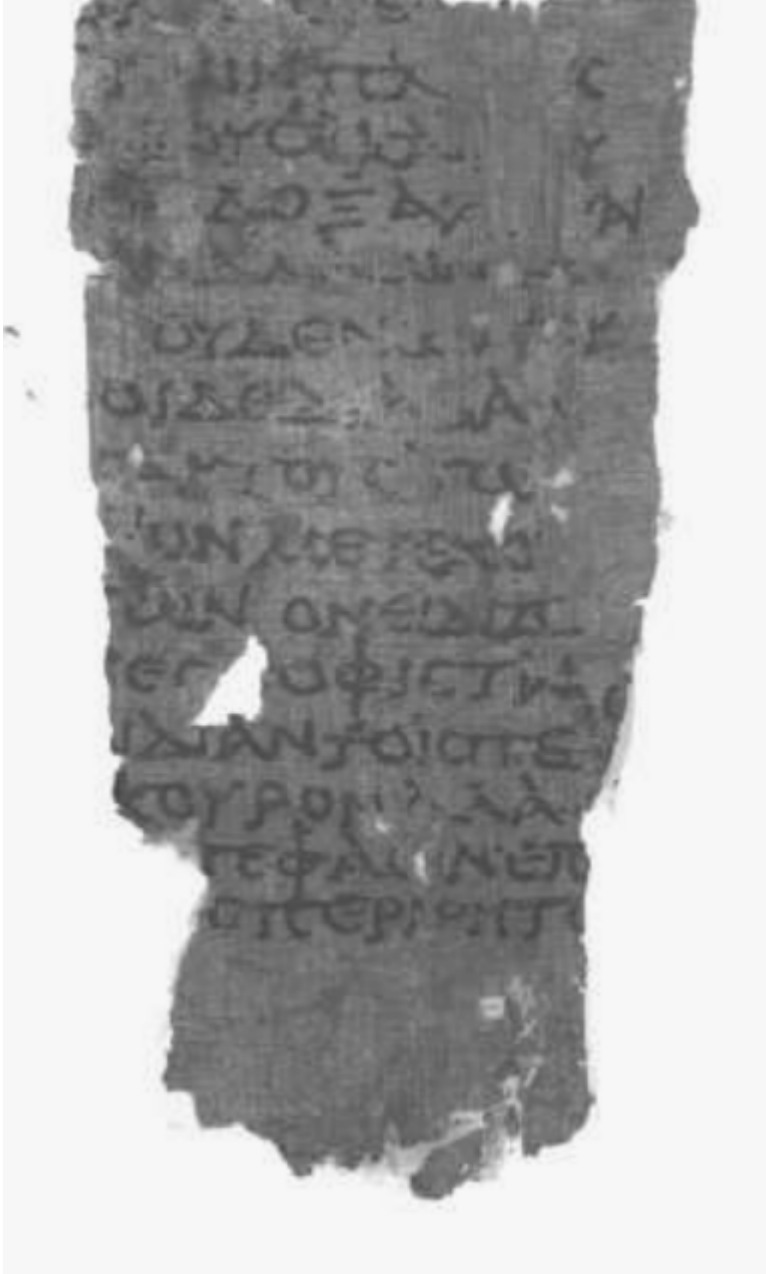
When it comes to Philodemus, I always like to go back and see what we're physically dealing with -- not just translation, but what physical remains are the translators working with. Toward that end...

[Website of Holger Essler](#)

And one example from that page: Philodemus: De rhetorica 1 (PHerc. 232, 234, 247, 250, 398, 426, 463, 1115, 1427, 1601, 1606, 1612, 1619, 1813), encoded by Claudio Vergara, Corinna Lang, Marcel Moser and Vanessa Zetzmann, revision by Vincenzo Damiani and Holger Essler (WCE)...

[DCLP/Trismegistos 62474 = LDAB 3650](#)

What I also find fascinating are some of the multi-spectral images of the papyri! fragment right N 1619 fr. 4 (=P.Herc. 1619) (Not a drawing but an actual photographic image. That's cool!)



Post by “Cassius” of June 29, 2024 at 9:41 AM

Just for future planning purposes, after a while here in "General Discussion" we'll move this thread to the Philodemus section. I'll probably also link it or create a version of it for the

"Justice" section as well, probably to point up the "Typology Chart" that Bryan linked above, so we can have a "forms of government" discussion. Such discussion is fully appropriate given its discussion in the texts, and it won't violate the "no politics" rule so long as we stay clear of discussion modern historical particulars that still evoke lots of emotion.

Given commonalities with parts of Aristotle at some future point it's probably worth citing to the section of Aristotle where the typology is explained, and then we can compare the full discussion there to the surviving Epicurean material and look for parallels / contrasts.

There are a lot of interesting statements in this Rhetoric that should be explored but it all seems kind of disjointed due to the fragmentation so we'll have to pull it out carefully.

Note - We'll want to correlate that with the Boeri book: [Interview With Dr. Marcelo Boeri: Theory and Practice In Epicurean Political Philosophy](#)