

## EPICUREANS ON KINGSHIP\*

Diogenes Laertius lists in his catalogue of Epicurus' works (10.28) a treatise *On Kingship*, which is unfortunately no longer extant. Owing to the Epicureans' antipathy to politics, such a work might be viewed with surprise and presumed to be virulently negative in outlook. Indeed, Plutarch reports that the Epicureans wrote on kingship only to ward people away from living in the company of kings (*Adv. Col.* 1127a) and that they maintained that to be king oneself was a terrible mistake (*Adv. Col.* 1125c-d). However, the scattered evidence that remains suggests the Epicurean views on kingship were both nuanced and sophisticated. In this paper I seek to reconstruct a viable account of the Epicurean position on kingship.

In the first section I argue that Epicurus and other early members of the school held a fundamentally neutral view on the intrinsic good of kingship: they maintained that it is not necessarily either good or bad and that the matter must be judged on a case by case basis. Here I also identify some criteria for judging that a particular instance of kingship is a good thing. I then attempt to refute two alternative accounts of the Epicurean position that appear in the literature: the negative view reported by Plutarch, which at first blush appears to accord closely with what we see in the fifth book of Lucretius' *De rerum natura* and which is argued for by Fowler,<sup>1</sup> and a positive view, argued for by Gigante and Dorandi<sup>2</sup> on the basis of a controversial passage in Diogenes Laertius' account of the Epicurean wise man (10.121b). I argue that Lucretius' account of kingship and the passage from Diogenes Laertius ultimately accord with the earlier Epicurean views. These two sections cover much familiar territory, but they lay the foundation for further enquiry into more neglected aspects of Epicurean thought on kingship. In the third and final section I argue that the Epicureans considered kingship to be the form of government most suited for the pursuit of the Epicurean life in 'mixed' societies. Here I show how we can recover an account of the Epicurean ideal king that offers valuable new perspectives on other aspects of their ethical system: the Epicureans in all likelihood made an ethical distinction between two sorts of people—those 'normal' people with a disposition suited to be Epicureans and those of such a nature that they could not follow fully Epicurean tenets but who could be of use ruling—and developed their views on how kingship could be

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<sup>1</sup> Fowler (1989) esp. 130–50.

<sup>2</sup> Gigante and Dorandi (1980).

implemented successfully in the present socio-political conditions around this fundamental difference, something perhaps best evident in Philodemus' *On the Good King according to Homer*.

### Epicurus and early Epicureans on kingship

Kuriai Doxai 6 and 7 provide us with a valuable insight into Epicurus' own views on kingship:

ἔνεκα τοῦ θαρρεῖν ἐξ ἀνθρώπων, ἣν κατὰ φύσιν [ἀρχῆς καὶ βασιλείας] ἀγαθόν, ἐξ ὧν ἄν ποτε τοῦθ' οἴός τ' ἦ παρὰσκευάζεσθαι.

(Epicurus, Kuria Doxa 6)

In order to have the security coming from men,<sup>3</sup> anything whatsoever [kingship and political rule] that was able to provide this was a natural good.

ἔνδοξοι καὶ περιβλεπτοὶ τινες ἐβουλήθησαν γενέσθαι, τὴν ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἀσφάλειαν οὕτω νομίζοντες περιποιήσεσθαι. ὥστ' εἰ μὲν ἀσφαλῆς ὁ τῶν τοιούτων βίος, ἀπέλαβον τὸ τῆς φύσεως ἀγαθόν· εἰ δὲ μὴ ἀσφαλῆς, οὐκ ἔχουσιν οὐ ἔνεκα ἐξ ἀρχῆς κατὰ τὸ τῆς φύσεως οἰκείον ὠρέχθησαν.

(Epicurus, Kuria Doxa 7)

Some men have wished to become famous and conspicuous, thinking that in this way they would gain for themselves the safety coming from men. Hence, if the life of such men is secure, they have attained the natural good; if, on the other hand, their life is insecure, they do not possess the thing which they sought from the beginning in accordance with what belongs to nature.

<sup>3</sup> I accept Roskam's (2007) 37–9 argument for interpreting ἐξ ἀνθρώπων both here and in KD 7 as 'coming from men' rather than 'against men', the traditional translation. The grammar supports Roskam's interpretation and, on his reading, Epicurus is stating that security can be provided by communal relationships with others, which is a fundamental Epicurean tenet expressed most fully in Lucretius' account of the rise of civilisation where he describes men banding together for their common security in order to overcome the dangers present in the state of nature (5.1011–27). In KD 6 Epicurus makes the point that any form of banding together that successfully provides security is a natural good. Kingship and political rule are clearly not exhaustive in this respect: friendship is another example (SV 34, 39).

The presence of an explicit reference to kingship in KD 6 is striking. However, there is some debate about the authenticity of the phrase ἀρχῆς καὶ βασιλείας. It is present in the manuscripts of Diogenes Laertius but modern editors have made a compelling case not to attribute it to Epicurus. Usener is the first to reject it, simply stating that it is a gloss on ἐξ ὧν made by a later scribe.<sup>4</sup> He is followed by editors including Bignone, Bailey, Hicks, Long, and Marcovich, who all note but excise the phrase; on the other hand, Von der Muehll, Arrighetti, and Bollack acknowledge Usener but keep the phrase as genuine.<sup>5</sup> To be sure, the phrase does rest uneasily with the grammar and flow of the passage: its placement is strange if it goes closely with ἐξ ὧν and its narrow focus undermines the saying's all-encompassing indefinite clause. Bailey explains it as being an 'anticipatory gloss' with KD 7 in mind.<sup>6</sup> I think that it is in all likelihood correct to reject the authenticity of the phrase because of the grammatical awkwardness. Nevertheless, this does not mean that ἀρχή and βασιλεία are not among the things being considered in KD 6 as potential natural goods. Despite the textual problem, kingship can still be considered when analysing these two sayings philosophically.

In addition to the argument from the grammar, Bailey offers a philosophical argument for rejecting a consideration of kingship. He argues that to keep the gloss would imply that political and kingly rule are potential means for acquiring security, a vital condition for one's pursuit of *ataraxia* (e.g., KD 14, 31–40, SV 31, 33, 80), and that this is anathema to Epicurus' philosophy: 'he could not speak of this mistaken idea as κατὰ φύσιν ἀγαθόν'.<sup>7</sup> However, Bailey misses a vital subtlety in Epicurus' argument here: political and kingly rule are in fact natural goods if circumstances in the world are such that political and kingly rule offer security; they are not necessarily bad.<sup>8</sup> Bailey has missed an important aspect of the logic of KD 6: it is a general claim that is not ascribing categorical value to anything in particular. KD 7 then responds to this general claim.

The two sayings are tied closely together via a concern for security (τὸ θαρρεῖν, ἀσφάλεια), and they seem to form a pair. The logical relationship between the two is most important: KD 6 posits the general view that anything could possibly be beneficial

<sup>4</sup> Usener (1887) 72; it also might be an incorporated marginal note or heading, [περὶ] ἀρχῆς καὶ βασιλείας. There are further controversies concerning the text of KD 6.

<sup>5</sup> Bignone (1920) 58, Bailey (1926) 94, Hicks (1931) 2.664–5, H. Long (1964) 560, Marcovich (1999) 804, Von der Muehll (1922) 52, Arrighetti (1973) 122–3, Bollack (1975) 255.

<sup>6</sup> Bailey (1926) 352.

<sup>7</sup> Bailey (1926) 352.

<sup>8</sup> It is not only Bailey who neglects the conditional force of Epicurus' view: Van der Waerdt (1987) 421, for example, states that Epicurus 'is certain that politics is inherently inimical to *eudaimonia*'.

to a person if it provides the security coming from other men; KD 7 then suggests that fame and conspicuousness in particular, which we can consider necessary accompaniments to being king, might or might not provide this security. The modal logic is vital. To be sure, it is possible that being king could be a natural good, so long as it provides security; but there is no necessary connection between being king and possessing the security coming from other men. KD 6 and 7 illustrate that Epicurus' stance on the value of kingship is conditional rather than dogmatically positive or negative. This is a view stressed recently by Roskam and it seems to me to be surely correct.<sup>9</sup>

The assumption that we have been employing thus far is that these two sayings are concerned with the security of the individual in the position of king. However, a distinction needs to be made between the security of the king himself and the security of the subjects, those living under kingly rule. There are two distinct issues here: the good of being king oneself and the good of the political institution of monarchy. Although suggesting that being king oneself might provide security, these two sayings present no judgement on the question of monarchy's benefits to the subjects. However, Epicurus' follower Colotes writes that those who set up monarchical and other forms of government did a service as they provided great security (*πολλή ἀσφάλεια*) and tranquillity (*ἡσυχία*) to men (ap. Plut. *Adv. Col.* 1124d),<sup>10</sup> a view Long claims 'we have every reason to think would have been endorsed by any sane member of the school'.<sup>11</sup>

Colotes' assertion seems to recall KD 6: he infers that in certain historical circumstances kingship has provided security and so has been a natural good. But, once more, it seems that the good of kingship for the subjects is a conditional issue to be decided on a case by case basis. Clearly kingship provides security for the subjects and so is good only if it is administered well: instances of tyranny, selfish rule, or mismanaged military campaigns, for example, might lead to added dangers for the subjects, thus making that instance of kingship undesirable.

This conditional stance also accords with evidence from later sources. Despite Epicurus' calls to refrain from politics (e.g. SV 58; fr. 8, 548, 551 Usener), perhaps because historical evidence suggests that as a matter of fact politics is not a particularly successful way in which to gain security (cf. Lucr. 5.1105–40), Seneca and Cicero both record that the Epicureans allowed involvement in certain circumstances (Sen. *De otio* 3.2; Cic. *Rep.* 1.10; cf. fr. 554 Usener).<sup>12</sup> Further, there are historical reports of

<sup>9</sup> Roskam (2007) 37–9.

<sup>10</sup> Note that Colotes dedicated his work to a king, Ptolemy II (Plut. *Adv. Col.* 1107e).

<sup>11</sup> Long (1986) 291. See also Roskam (2007) 80–1.

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed assessment of the conditions in which the Epicureans could reasonably engage in politics, see Roskam (2007) 50–6 with further references.

Epicureans associating with kings. A certain Cineas seems to have been a philosopher-advisor to a king, Pyrrhus, and to have described to him Epicurean doctrine (Plut. *Pyrrh.* 14, 20).<sup>13</sup> Indeed, other early Epicurean figures were personally associated with kings, maybe even Epicurus himself (Plut. *Adv. Col.* 1126c).<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, for reasons that are uncertain, Epicurus forcefully urged Idomeneus to give up the court (fr. 133 Usener). This historical picture of Epicureans selectively living in the company of kings and involving themselves in kingly rule can also be seen as indicative of the Epicureans' emphatically conditional attitude towards the good of kingship.<sup>15</sup>

In sum, Epicurus and early members of the school consider the good of kingship to be conditional on whether or not it provides security conducive to the pursuit of *ataraxia*. They maintain this to be a strictly empirical matter: there is no necessary connection between being king oneself, living in the company of kings, or living under kingly rule and possessing security; nor are they necessarily detrimental to one's pursuit of *ataraxia*. The issue has to be judged on a case by case basis. To be sure, Epicurus' calls to refrain from politics suggest that being king oneself and living in the company of kings have not proved to be high percentage strategies for gaining security, but this is not indicative of a dogmatic attitude and has no bearing on the intrinsic good of kingship.

### The dogmatic alternatives

The view that the Epicureans had an emphatically conditional stance towards the good of kingship contrasts with both sides in a recent scholarly dispute. Gigante and Dorandi take the acknowledged benefits of monarchy further and argue that Epicurus had a genuinely positive attitude towards kingship.<sup>16</sup> To establish their claim, they focus on an important passage in Diogenes Laertius' account of the Epicurean wise man, which I have delayed discussing until this point. Here is the orthodox presentation and translation of the text:

<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere Plutarch claims that no Epicurean has ever been an advisor to a king (*Adv. Col.* 1126e). See Benferhat (2005) 44–7.

<sup>14</sup> See Momigliano (1935), Grimal (1986) 262–3, Warren (2002) 156 n. 26, Benferhat (2005) 35–56, and Roskam (2007) 48–9, 55. Strikingly, the tyrant Lysias of Tarsus is said to have been an Epicurean (*Athen. Deipn.* 5.215b–c).

<sup>15</sup> See Warren (2002) 156.

<sup>16</sup> Gigante and Dorandi (1980) and Dorandi (1982) 22–32.

χρηματιεῖσθαι τε, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ μόνης σοφίας, ἀπορήσαντα. καὶ  
μόναρχον ἐν καιρῷ θεραπεύσειν.

(Diogenes Laertius 10.121b)

He will make money, but only from his wisdom, if he is hard up. He will  
on occasion pay court to a king. (tr. Long and Sedley 1987)

The passage is traditionally interpreted as saying that the wise man will make money, but in the exceptional circumstance of poverty and only from the source of his wisdom; also, in exceptional circumstances he will pay court to a king. Extraordinary circumstances and actions are the key concerns. This traditional interpretation sits well within the context of the conditional view I have been advocating: there is no general value judgement made on kingship in this passage, only that the wise man may ἐν καιρῷ ('at the opportune moment' or 'in due measure')<sup>17</sup> involve himself in kingly rule, perhaps when circumstances are such that benefits will accrue from such an action. The phrase ἐν καιρῷ seems to be strongly indicative of the conditional nature of the Epicureans' attitudes towards kingship. However, Gigante and Dorandi argue that the traditional way of interpreting this passage is misguided; they claim that it is in fact indicative of quite a different picture.

The key premise in their argument is the emendation of this crucial passage to read: χρηματιεῖσθαι τε, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ μόνης σοφίας εὐπορήσαντα καὶ μόναρχον ἐν καιρῷ θεραπεύσειν. Their rendering and interpretation of the passage suggests that the wise man will make money as normal practice, but being well-resourced from his wisdom alone he will pay court to a king at an opportune time.<sup>18</sup>

Their interpretation of the text has a number of strengths. In particular, the claim that the wise man will make money as normal practice is supported by Epicurean thought on economics, a very important point that is largely ignored by commentators on this passage.<sup>19</sup> Philodemus, in his economic treatises *On Wealth* and *On Household Economics*, for which his major source is Metrodorus,<sup>20</sup> maintains that the Epicurean will make money and acquire wealth as normal practice, at least to some extent.<sup>21</sup> Epicurus states that one must not seek wealth or affluence for its own sake (SV 30);

<sup>17</sup> The sense of ἐν καιρῷ is notoriously hard to pin down: Wilson (1980) emphasises 'due measure', having surveyed the phrase, and Race (1981) concurs, although stressing the 'opportune' or 'critical' sense as well.

<sup>18</sup> See Gigante and Dorandi (1980) 484–6; note also Gigante (1976) 439 and (1992) 35.

<sup>19</sup> Gigante and Dorandi (1980) 485–6 and Gigante (1992) 35–6 note this relationship. I could find no other commentators on the passage noting such parallels.

<sup>20</sup> See Tsouna McKirahan (1996) 702–14 and Balch (2004) 186–9.

<sup>21</sup> For full and detailed discussion, see Tsouna (2007) 177–94.

Philodemus also advocates only doing the correct amount of work one must in order to acquire sufficient goods (*On Household Economics* col. 15.45–16.6, col. 16.44–17.2, col. 18.7–20).<sup>22</sup> There is a balance between sufficient work for survival and mental tranquillity, but the type of work undertaken does not seem overly significant. Philodemus maintains that basic labour such as tending land, and even commercial enterprise involving slaves and commodities (*On Household Economics* col. 23.7–22), is sanctioned so long as one does not do too much. He also declares certain avenues of wealth to be unfitting or base, such as soldiering (*On Household Economics* col. 22.17–28), horsemanship and mining (col. 23.1–6), and sophistic and competitive discourses (col. 23.22–36). Most significantly, it appears that wisdom is not the sole legitimate source of wealth, as is suggested in the traditional interpretation of Diogenes Laertius 10.121b, although one should unquestionably use one's wisdom in order to judge proper limits of work and expenditure.<sup>23</sup> Gigante and Dorandi successfully capture this idea in their interpretation; but does their proposed emendation of the text stand up to scrutiny?

The strongest case in favour of emending the text rests on the economic considerations attributed to the wise man that immediately precede in the text of Diogenes Laertius, namely that he will not be a Cynic, not beg, that he will be concerned with his dignity and the future, and that he will acquire the needs of life (Diog. Laert. 10.118–20).<sup>24</sup> Gigante and Dorandi argue that because the wise man has such economic concerns, especially not to live an impoverished Cynic, day-to-day, hand-to-mouth lifestyle, he is allowed to pursue a course of action in accordance with his Epicurean principles that best meets these economic concerns. They claim that the best course is offered by the court of a king since here lies the best chance to secure the economic goods, both now and into the future. The ideal Epicurean relationship to the king would be one of philosophical tutor or advisor, a position in which one could have an income and productively and pleasurably guide the king's rule in accordance with Epicurean principles: 'Il saggio professorà la sua sapienza per procurarsi i mezzi di sostentamento facendo anche la corte ad un monarca ed insieme alla gioia per il progresso morale del monarca riceverà pure un guadagno materiale.'<sup>25</sup> Their emendation makes sense, they claim, as it ties the idea of money-making with that of tending to the king philosophically, thus uniting the economic and

<sup>22</sup> See Asmis (2004) 156–70; also Tsouna (2007) 179–80 and Roskam (2007) 117–19. All references to Philodemus, *On Household Economics* are to the text of Jensen (1906). There is an Italian translation: Laurenti (1973).

<sup>23</sup> See Tsouna (2007) 181–94; also Tsouna McKirahan (1996) 711–14.

<sup>24</sup> See Gigante and Dorandi (1980) 483–6.

<sup>25</sup> Gigante and Dorandi (1980) 486. This seems very similar to the Stoic idea that the kingly life and making money by courting a king are positive indifferents (Stobaeus 2.109,10–110,4 Wachsmuth).

philosophical interests ascribed to the wise man.<sup>26</sup> Thus, they conclude, the Epicureans have a fundamentally positive view of the institution of kingship, even though the Epicurean himself would not wish to be the king.

Fowler objects strongly to their argument. He posits instead that the Epicureans held a negative view of kingship, a position in keeping with Plutarch's report on Epicurean attitudes (*Adv. Col.* 1125c-d, 1127a). Fowler premises his case heavily on Lucretius' treatment of politics and kingship in the fifth book of the *De rerum natura*.<sup>27</sup> There Lucretius recounts how kings arose naturally and built cities and citadels for their own security (5.1105–9), acting fairly by dividing resources between their subjects (5.1110–12) before the discovery of gold led to a selfish concern for securing their own wealth by fame or by force (5.1114–22). Lucretius then demonstrates how being king led only to disaster due to others' ambition and envy towards those with wealth, fame, and power (5.1123–40). He claims assertively that it is better to obey in peace than to rule with *imperium* and to hold kingdoms (*regna tenere*) (5.1129–1130), and states emphatically that political office is not conducive to a safe or tranquil life: it has never been in the past, is not at present, and will not be in the future (5.1135; cf. 2.35–54).

At first glance Lucretius' account of kingship appears fundamentally negative and seems to support both Plutarch's report of the Epicurean position (*Adv. Col.* 1125c-d, 1127a) and Fowler's thesis. However, Lucretius makes no claim about the intrinsic worth of kingship here. Rather, he presents in strong terms an empirical observation: historical and current examples suggest that being king is not a viable means towards obtaining goods conducive to *ataraxia*, and it is a reasonable inference that this will also be the case in the future; but the possibility that being king might succeed in gaining these goods in some future cases is not ruled out categorically. So Lucretius' account is consistent with KD 6 and 7, even though there is no explicit admission by Lucretius that being king might potentially be a good thing, which we see clearly in KD 6 and 7. There is the possibility that Lucretius' treatment of kingship has been influenced by various socio-political factors at odds with those present in Hellenistic times. For a Roman to talk of a *rex* there could be a certain colouring distinct from the Hellenistic βασιλεύς or μόναρχος.<sup>28</sup> Also, perhaps Lucretius' negativity is influenced by a concern to refute the Stoic view that the kingly life is a positive indifferent

<sup>26</sup>There is some further support for their view. Philodemus states that the best source of wealth is gifts from those receptive to one's philosophising, as happened with Epicurus (*On Household Economics* col. 23.22–36). Perhaps the court of the king offers the best chance for such gifts while at the same time promising other benefits for the Epicurean if the king then rules virtuously.

<sup>27</sup>See Fowler (1989) 130–50.

<sup>28</sup>See Rawson (1975) 156–9, Griffin (1989) 30 and Erskine (1991).

(Stobaeus, 2.109,10–12 Wachsmuth).<sup>29</sup> In any case, strictly speaking, Lucretius' account is in keeping with a neutral position on the intrinsic worth of kingship and the conditional stance we have already detailed, although it obviously suggests that in practice the Epicureans saw the empirical evidence stacking up solidly against choosing to be king oneself. Perhaps this is why Plutarch neglects the conditional nature of the Epicurean position and reports that the Epicureans write on kingship only to ward people off being king or living in the company of kings, but we do not on this basis have to ascribe to the Epicureans a dogmatically negative view on kingship.

In direct response to Gigante and Dorandi's case for a positive view, Fowler rejects the emendation of Diogenes Laertius 10.121b, claiming that it unnecessarily violates the sense of the passage:<sup>30</sup>

This is ingenious, but the emended εὐπορήσαντα is redundant and the connection suggested between the maxims overelaborate. Keeping the manuscript ἀπορήσαντα there is a link with ἐν καιρῷ in the following maxim: both detail things the wise man will not normally do but may be forced to by circumstances. The Gigante interpretation is at best not needed.

Fowler presents this as a knock-down argument, but it is not clear that it is so conclusive. Modern translators usually interpret ἀπορήσαντα as simply meaning 'hard up' or 'in poverty'.<sup>31</sup> But being in a state of poverty was not considered bad by the Epicureans (SV 25); only being in abject destitution, lacking everything, was to be avoided (Philod. *On Wealth* col. 41.9–15, col. 42.31–8, col. 45.15–17).<sup>32</sup> As long as one possessed sufficient resources for life, one had no motivation to do anything extraordinary. SV 33 asserts that having the bare essentials of life allows one to rival Zeus in happiness, and SV 44 maintains that the wise man knows better giving rather than receiving a share of resources if he has just the necessities (cf. SV 67, 77). It seems that being in poverty is not a special circumstance allowing special action. Thus, ἀπορήσαντα need not be implying any special considerations, unless ἀπορήσαντα means strictly 'not possessing the necessities of life'.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Although Furlley (1966) argues that Lucretius does not target the Stoics for criticism.

<sup>30</sup> Fowler (1989) 131. Gigante (1992) 35–6 is not moved by Fowler's response and simply restates his argument.

<sup>31</sup> For example, Hicks (1931) 2.647 and Long and Sedley (1987) 1.133.

<sup>32</sup> See Balch (2004) 180–95. All references to Philodemus, *On Wealth* are to the text of Tepedino Guerra (1978).

<sup>33</sup> The other instance of ἀπορεῖν a few lines later in Diogenes Laertius 10.121b, δογματιεῖν τε καὶ οὐκ ἀπορήσειν, offers no help in justifying this interpretation, since here the meaning appears to be 'at a loss' in the sense of Socratic *aporia*. Compare also fr. 255, 486 Usener.

With this latter meaning of ἀπορήσαντα the passage would seem to be stating that the wise man will make money as normal practice (χρηματτεισθαί τε), which as we have seen should not involve undue toil and effort, should not impinge on mental tranquillity, and should not be done for its own sake.<sup>34</sup> But if the exceptional circumstances of abject destitution force the sage to focus on making money he will use his wisdom alone by seeking to offer intellectual services rather than by resorting to soldiering, mining, sophistic or competitive discourses, or so forth.<sup>35</sup> This is an important clarification of the meaning of Diogenes Laertius 10.121b, and it also removes one of the economic arguments in support of Gigante and Dorandi's emendation of ἀπορήσαντα: as it stands the passage can be interpreted in such a way that it accords with Epicurean economic thought and so no change is required on this score. They have even less justification for making an emendation without manuscript support—it is an ad hoc change.<sup>36</sup> In fact, their economic argument for the wise man's keen involvement in kingly rule is extremely problematic as it rests on a fallacy.

The talk in Diogenes Laertius 10.118–20 of the wise man not being a Cynic and not begging, to which Gigante and Dorandi appeal, is simply stating that the wise man should not live an ascetic life. It does not concern forbidden actions if the wise man finds himself in abject destitution. This is a subtle but vital distinction, since Gigante and Dorandi seem to think the wise man should court a king rather than beg in order to attain the basic necessities of life ἐν καιρῷ.<sup>37</sup> Not living an ascetic life does not force the sage into such economic considerations, even though the wise man will also make arrangements for the future: there is the distinct hint of a false dilemma being played out. For the Epicurean, being in poverty or having just enough is sufficient and a matter of indifference. That is a small step up from asceticism, and Epicurus maintains that acquiring sufficient goods is relatively safe and easy (KD 15, 21; Cic. Fin. 2.28). It is hard to see the extra motivation to seek the court of kings, or how this is the best option to secure one's basic goods, especially when other pressures such as λάθε βιώσας ('live unnoticed') are considered as well. Any claim that the economic considerations ascribed to the wise man entail a positive judgement on the worth of kingship is unwarranted.

<sup>34</sup> Pages 183–4 above.

<sup>35</sup> Note that other acceptable avenues of income listed by Philodemus in *On Household Economics* such as commercial enterprise and tending land presuppose some existing wealth whereas in abject destitution the sage has nothing except the boon of his wisdom.

<sup>36</sup> See Gigante and Dorandi (1980) 487, 492, for two other dubious emendations of crucial texts, especially the inversion of the force of Plutarch's report that the Epicureans wrote on kingship only to ward people off living in the company of kings (*Adv. Col.* 1127a) by retaining μή.

<sup>37</sup> See Gigante and Dorandi (1980) 485–6.

### The Epicurean ideal king

In this final section I argue that the Epicureans were not content simply to identify that kingship might or might not be a good thing: they also developed a sophisticated prescriptive account of how the political institution of monarchy could successfully realise goods, for both kings and Epicurean subjects, in the present socio-political conditions.

The ideal Epicurean society is one in which every person is an Epicurean, a situation that ensures justice, tranquillity, and peace for all (KD 40; Diogenes of Oinoanda fr. 56).<sup>38</sup> The next best situation seems to be one in which most people act in accordance with the utility of justice (like Epicureans) and those that do not appreciate the utility of justice are kept in check by fear of punishment,<sup>39</sup> a scenario that the Epicureans presented as having been historically realised (Hermarchus ap. Porphyry, *De abs.* 1.7.1–8.5).<sup>40</sup> In this situation, a knowledgeable ‘governing’ body ensures compliance and punishment via legislation, thus promoting the good of those in the society (Hermarchus ap. Porphyry, *De abs.* 1.10.4–11.2).<sup>41</sup> However, in the present circumstances the Epicureans were small communities, minority groups within wider societies.<sup>42</sup> They may have thought about how they might maximise the goods accruing from this less than ideal situation.<sup>43</sup> They clearly made an effort to live in harmony with the wider society, by, for example, encouraging involvement in state festivals (Diog. Laert. 10.120). Although we do not have any extant evidence confirming this, there might also have been some consideration of existing political structures most conducive to Epicurean life.<sup>44</sup> At any rate, we can attempt a credible reconstruction of Epicurean views.

Although not always desirable and certainly not ideal, monarchy is, pragmatically, a very attractive political option for the Epicurean. Democracy or a republic, for example, would require involvement of the citizens every so often in the political

<sup>38</sup> References to Diogenes of Oinoanda are to the text of Smith (1993). He also provides an English translation.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *Lucr.* 5.1019–27. See also Armstrong (1997) 328–9, Alberti (1995) 164–79 and Goldschmidt (1982) 319–22.

<sup>40</sup> On Epicurean primitivism, see most recently Campbell (2003) 11–12.

<sup>41</sup> See Van der Waerdt (1988) 92.

<sup>42</sup> For discussion of Epicurean group identity and relations with wider society, see Frischer (1982) 61–86; also Roskam (2007) 49–66.

<sup>43</sup> See Long (1986) 285–94, 313–16, for the view that the Epicurean lifestyle in fact relied on a ‘mixed’ society. See also Van der Waerdt (1987) 408, Fowler (1989) 129–30, Clay (1998) 101–102 and O’Keefe (2010) 145–6.

<sup>44</sup> Griffin (1989) 28–32, however, argues that the Epicurean account of justice ‘did not lead to any great interest in the virtues of particular types of constitution’. Schofield (1999) 743–4 and Roskam (2007) 55–6 concur.

process—something the Epicurean does not want to do if it can be avoided (SV 58). Even if other systems provided the same benefits, the deciding factor would be the need for personal involvement in public affairs. To be sure, an oligarchy in which the Epicurean citizens are not politically involved would be a viable option, but equally so would be monarchy (or any form of autocratic rule).<sup>45</sup> Since it seems that monarchy was a political system singled out for particular attention by Epicurus himself, let us leave aside the possibility of oligarchy and focus on monarchy.

A paternalist ruler with the best interests of the Epicureans in mind would rule in such a way that the goods conducive to attaining the end were maximised without undue effort on the part of the Epicurean subject.<sup>46</sup> However, paradoxically, the first requirement of the ideal ruler would be that he was not in fact an Epicurean himself. If there were a world-community of Epicureans then there would be no need for a ruler;<sup>47</sup> and in ‘mixed’ societies an Epicurean ideally would not be involved in politics: KD 14 suggests that even if the society were functioning well and providing security and other goods, then the Epicurean would have a detached life away from the many, and Epicurus’ refrains to avoid politics suggest that in current conditions ruling is not generally speaking an attractive yet alone ideal option for the Epicurean. Nonetheless, the non-Epicurean ideal ruler would still have to rule well, that is, meet the requirements of the Epicureans. He would need to possess ‘kingly virtues’.

This special situation regarding the virtues of the Epicureans’ non-Epicurean ideal king provides a fresh insight into our understanding of an enigmatic treatise: Philodemus’ *On the Good King according to Homer*. This treatise, addressed to Philodemus’ Roman patron Lucius Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus and dated to some time in the mid first century BC,<sup>48</sup> is a fragmentary text whose place in the Epicurean tradition and status as a philosophical work have been questioned by scholars.<sup>49</sup> Murray, for instance, claims that it ‘tells as little of Philodemus’ genuine philosophy as do his

<sup>45</sup> This is a widely acknowledged idea: see, recently, Gigante and Dorandi (1980) 489–90, Dorandi (1982) 24–5, Grimal (1986) 260–2, Fowler (1989) 129–30, Salem (1989) 151, Scholz (1998) 276–83, Benferhat (2005) 33–4 and Roskam (2007) 54–6. Its significance for the ongoing debate about the attitudes of Roman Epicureans towards republican and Caesarian autocratic rule—on which see, for example, Momigliano (1941), Bourne (1977), Grimal (1986) 267–73 and Sedley (1997)—is questioned by Benferhat (2005) 233–312.

<sup>46</sup> In the case of oligarchy, a benign set of rulers would achieve the same thing.

<sup>47</sup> See O’Keefe (2001).

<sup>48</sup> Philodemus lived from around 110 to around 35 BC. He came to Rome around 80 BC.

<sup>49</sup> For the most detailed and scientifically rigorous analysis of the state of the papyrus and certainty of the text, see Fish (2002).

epigrams' and that 'in writing it, he cut himself off from the Epicurean tradition'.<sup>50</sup> The unease has arisen owing to a perceived absence of Epicurean philosophy or teaching. However, if the Epicureans acknowledged a special case with regard to the king (or rulers in general), perhaps we should not be so surprised if there is no 'orthodox' Epicurean teaching in the work.<sup>51</sup> And, as well as being a piece of advice directed to Piso (col. 43.15–20),<sup>52</sup> *On the Good King according to Homer*, from what we can tell, does seem concerned with the 'kingly virtues' and the construction of 'a model ruler suitable for emulation'.<sup>53</sup> Let us consider briefly the thrust of these 'kingly virtues'.<sup>54</sup>

Fortunately, in a surviving passage Philodemus provides a neat summary (col. 24.6–18). Here it seems the king should avoid a spiteful and harsh character and instead provide gentleness, fairness, and 'kingly civility', so as to move towards 'stable monarchy' and avoid rule by fear. The passage seems concerned with the virtuous character of the king and how it is conducive to having a stable and just government. In column 27 there are suggestions that the good king must be a 'lover of victory', which is not something we would usually associate with the Epicureans. The good king should not, however, be a 'lover of war' nor 'a lover of battle' (col. 27.17–18), which suggests he is never an aggressor but exercises his military prowess only as necessary in self-defence. Later in the same column Philodemus says that 'X' (we know not what due to a lacuna) must be done 'so that they do not introduce uproarious turmoil concerning the necessities of life' (. . . -τέον ἵνα [μή . . .] . . . [τοῖς ἀ]ναγκαίους

<sup>50</sup>Murray (1965) 165, 173. Scholars have offered a number of suggestions regarding the date and purpose of the treatise. Murray (1965) 174–82, for instance, argues that the work should be considered 'essentially popular and exoteric'. He also suggests that it can be interpreted as applying a rather generalised ethical and political framework concerning kingship, illustrated by Homeric quotations and examples, to the specifically Roman problem of how to be a just and successful proconsul, an office Piso held in 57–55 BC. In contrast, Dorandi (1982) 42–6 argues that the treatise is concerned more with literary patronage; Murray (1984) supports this notion in a shift from his earlier 1965 paper. Asmis (1991) 19–27 can find no Epicurean teaching, but considers it indicative of Epicurean poetics and attitudes concerning the social role of literature. One could list further examples, but Benferhat (2005) 219–32 provides a good survey and reassessment of the disparate views on the date and purpose of the treatise.

<sup>51</sup>Plutarch says that Epicurus, in *On Kingship*, advised kings to suffer vulgar entertainment rather than engage in scholarly or critical debate concerning the arts (*Non posse* 1095c-d), which is not something that obviously fits with 'orthodox' Epicurean teaching.

<sup>52</sup>With the exception of columns 21–31, all references to Philodemus, *On the Good King according to Homer*, are to the text of Dorandi (1982), who also provides an Italian translation and commentary. In the case of columns 21–31 I refer to the text of Fish (2002), who also provides an English translation and commentary on these columns. Asmis (1991) also provides an English translation and commentary, following the text of Dorandi (1982).

<sup>53</sup>Griffin (2001) 90. See also Fish (1999) and Roskam (2007) 123–5.

<sup>54</sup>See Warren (2002) 157 n. 30 for discussion of the kingly vices.

ἐπακτο[ὺς προοσ]άγωσι θορούβους, col. 27.27–9). If we maintain a link between this passage and the earlier theme of military prowess, then this may indicate that the good king is both provider and protector of basic necessities of life for his subjects.<sup>55</sup> Later it is also suggested that the king should not become preoccupied with his own security (a natural Epicurean care) and seek to cause civil unrest amongst his subjects; such a tactic leads only to downfall (col. 28). It also seems the king should be open to wise counsel (col. 32–3). For the king who rules virtuously (τ[ὼ]ι μετ' εὐσ[ε]βεία[ς] καὶ μετ' εὐδ[ι]κίας βασιλεύοντι), 'he [Homer] thinks — the land bears "wheat and barley and the trees are weighed down with fruit"' (φέρειν οἶεται τὴν γῆν· πυρούς καὶ κριθὰ[ς] καὶ βριθεῖν δένδρεα καρπ[ῶ]ι', col. 30.26–30). This suggests the kingdom (and consequently, one might presume, also the king and his subjects) will benefit greatly from the goods brought about by virtuous rule. Although, from what we can tell, Philodemus does not seem motivated by any particular concerns for the good of the Epicurean community in his treatment of the 'good king', the conditions ensuing under such a virtuous monarch would appear to support well their pursuit of *ataraxia*.

But just what sort of person would place himself in the position of king given the natural end of pleasure with which all humans should identify (Epic. *Men.* 128–9; Cic. *Fin.* 1.42), and to which political life is typically not conducive? A comment from Plutarch may hold the key to answering this question:

οὐδ' Ἐπίκουρος οἶεται δεῖν ἡσυχάζειν, ἀλλὰ τῇ φύσει χρῆσθαι πολιτευομένους καὶ πράσσοντας τὰ κοινὰ τοὺς φιλοτίμους καὶ φιλοδόξους, ὡς μᾶλλον ὑπ' ἀπραγμοσύνης ταράττεσθαι καὶ κακοῦσθαι πεφνυότας, ἂν ὧν ὀρέγονται μὴ τυγχάνωσιν.

(Plutarch, *De tranquillitate animi* 465f–466a)

<sup>55</sup>It must be said that the precise meaning of this passage is a controversial issue. Fish (2002) 199 aligns the passage closely with orthodox Epicurean doctrine and translates it: 'in order that . . . [they not] introduce unnecessary troubles and add them to the unavoidable ones'. He interprets θόρυβοι in a technical manner as 'mental disturbances' (223) and thinks that the point of this passage concerns the mental state of kings: by ruling properly kings avoid unnecessary troubles being added to those that their political position already make unavoidable. I tend towards the interpretation of Asmis (1991) 31, who translates the passage: 'in order that they may not bring on disorderly uproar in matters of necessity'. I consider the passage to be concerned predominately with the subjects beneath the king: by loving victory and being successful militarily in self-defence, the king protects his subjects' primary goods, which are conducive to the pursuit of *ataraxia*. In turn this presumably keeps the king more secure, since turmoil among his subjects, over say a lack of grain, might lead to revolt and overthrow.

Epicurus does not think that it is necessary for the lover of honour and the lover of fame to be tranquil but to employ their nature in political participation and prosecuting public business because, given their nature, by not taking part in public matters they are harmed and disturbed more, if they do not obtain the things which they seek.

Although Epicurus calls everyone to a life of tranquillity and abstention from public affairs (e.g., fr. 548 Usener), Plutarch reports that he advocates political participation for those who are by nature positively disposed towards fame and honour. Immediately following this comment, Plutarch claims that it is absurd for Epicurus to urge the most eager people who are unable to lead a tranquil life rather than the most qualified to enter politics (ἀλλ' ἐκείνος μὲν ἄτοπος οὐ τοὺς δυναμένους τὰ κοινὰ πράσσειν προτρεπόμενος ἀλλὰ τοὺς ἡσυχίαν ἄγειν μὴ δυναμένους, 466a). It seems, however, that Epicurus could readily defend himself from such criticism. One can envisage an argument along the following lines: in the current socio-political conditions it benefits the Epicureans to have the lovers of fame and honour rule, even though it is the Epicureans who know best how to rule. On the one hand, this allows the Epicureans to avoid active participation in politics and pursue a tranquil life, although they can still reap the benefits such as security provided by political institutions. On the other hand, as Plutarch himself states, this situation also benefits the lovers of fame and honour: owing to their nature, they would be more disturbed by doing nothing and so they are actually increasing their calm and happiness by involvement in public life. Thus, they too can be seen as applying correctly the 'hedonic calculus' (Epic. *Men.* 129–30)<sup>56</sup> given their specific circumstances (cf. Lactantius *Div. Inst.* 3.6) and everyone wins.<sup>57</sup> But clearly there are some important outstanding issues. First, why are there people with this special nature who warrant a different sort of advice from the norm? Secondly, why should we think that letting these eager but unqualified people rule will be beneficial rather than detrimental?

It is striking that Plutarch's report contains a clear distinction between those people who have a nature disposed towards fame and honour and who should pursue such things, and those 'normal' people, of a nature suited to be Epicureans, who should eschew fame and honour. If we accept that Plutarch's report is accurate, then it seems that Epicurus did acknowledge that there are two distinct sorts of people: some just have a certain natural (τῆ φύσει, πεφυκότας) disposition for fame and honour, which

<sup>56</sup> For detailed discussion of the 'hedonic calculus', see Warren (2001) 138–48.

<sup>57</sup> See Roskam (2007) 52–4.

leadership can provide, and will never be satisfied without fulfilling it; some people are unable to live a tranquil life, the life of the Epicurean, and should instead practise politics. However, in the normal context of Epicurean ethics, the man who wanted fame or power would be misguided—he would desire an empty end, have an unnatural and unnecessary desire (Lucr. 3.995–1002, 5.1131–5). Moreover, such a twisted view on the world should always be able to be cured by reason, meaning the innate part of one’s nature will not influence one’s pursuit of *ataraxia* (Lucr. 3.307–22). In order to reconcile these conflicting claims, we need to look more closely at what ‘nature’ means in Plutarch’s report.

Epicurus’ so-called ‘cradle argument’ establishes that all humans are hedonists by nature, in the sense that all humans have an innate disposition to seek pleasure and avoid pain (Diog. Laert. 10.137).<sup>58</sup> But if some people have an innate disposition to seek fame and honour instead, which implies rather oddly that they do so from birth, then there would seem to be a conflict with the universal scope of the cradle argument. It would imply that some people are not by nature hedonists, which would risk undermining the core foundation of Epicurus’ ethical theory. This suggests that innateness is not the issue here with the talk of ‘nature’ in Plutarch’s report. Rather, Epicurus might concede that our nature is not fixed entirely at birth but parts can be acquired later. Presumably one might acquire a nature with entrenched desires for fame and honour via bad influences during one’s development. Thus, as a result of these adverse pressures, the happiness of these lovers of fame and honour, still considered as pleasure (these people remain hedonists), now depends upon gaining these things, for which political participation rather than the tranquil life is most conducive.

This account avoids conflict with the cradle argument. However, the implication here is that reason has not been able to cure the desires of these people for unnecessary things such as fame and honour. A case can be made for accepting this scenario. For a start, the political life suiting these people is not the best life (it is not *ataraxia*). Rather, in the case of these people it would appear that the possibility of *ataraxia* has been vitiated owing to various pressures that have affected their nature. This might be discovered by the persistent failure of Epicurean treatment in practice. A hint of this picture can be found in Philodemus’ *On Frank Speech*: there he suggests that some people are sent away uncured (παρεθέντος ἀθεράπευτου, fr. 84.11–12; cf. fr. 86.5–6), even after every effort is made to treat them (frr. 63–5).<sup>59</sup> Although the context is

<sup>58</sup>On Epicurus’ psychological hedonism, see in particular Woolf (2004). Cooper (1998) makes the case for not ascribing this view to Epicurus. On the cradle argument more generally, see Brunschwig (1986).

<sup>59</sup>All references to Philodemus, *On Frank Speech*, are to the text of Konstan, Clay, Glad, Thom, and Ware (1998). They provide an English translation.

not clear, there is a possibility that Philodemus is acknowledging that some people are not able to follow precisely Epicurean tenets or be swayed by therapeutic education because of their nature, which is something also hinted at by Plutarch when he states that some people are unable to lead a tranquil life (*De tranq. an.* 466a). Perhaps the power of reason sometimes fails in practice, even though in theory there is always the chance that it will overcome the barriers presented by one's nature. If this were the case, the political life would then be a clear second-best alternative that suits some unfortunate people: it is the most pleasurable life possible to them, but it is by no means the best life possible from a general viewpoint or even particularly good at all.

But why should we think that having these lovers of fame and honour in charge would be beneficial? They might be dreadful rulers and actively harm pursuit of the Epicurean life. The Epicurean reply is by now familiar: the Epicureans can tutor or advise these lovers of fame and honour on what to do, either in person or via treatises, since they know what is required for virtuous rule. Success in this endeavour ensures that there will be benefits for both rulers and Epicurean subjects. This, I suggest, is very much the picture we see with Philodemus and his treatise *On the Good King according to Homer*.

In sum, it seems that the Epicureans tailored their thought on kingship to suit the socio-political conditions of the day by devising an account of how kingship could be implemented successfully. They saw that if one's nature determines that one's happiness or satisfaction depends on fame or being a leader rather than following the normal prescriptions of Epicurean ethics, then a vital role in a 'mixed' society becomes fitted for that person, namely, political and public life. In all likelihood the Epicureans did acknowledge that there is a separate category of person who would naturally wish to be king and who could perhaps be influenced or moulded by the Epicureans into good kings (by fostering in them the special 'kingly virtues'), for the benefit of ruler and subject alike.

### Conclusion

The Epicurean attitude towards kingship is essentially conditional and two-fold in nature: they thought that being king oneself was, generally speaking, bad for one's *ataraxia*; but they also acknowledged that kingly rule could provide subjects with goods conducive to attaining *ataraxia*. In this way they could tolerate particular instances of kingship with the proviso that it did in fact provide these goods. Such a conditional stance deserves to be emphasised.

It should also be emphasised that the Epicureans in all likelihood have a two-level ethics with a special category concerning those with a natural disposition suited for kingship or rule. For these people, being king is in fact a good, so long as they rule virtuously. Moreover, this is a good thing for Epicureans (people with a 'normal' psychological make-up) in 'mixed' societies: if such people rule virtuously then they provide the Epicureans with goods such as security that are conducive to their *ataraxia*. This differentiation between two distinct sorts of person offers a productive way of reading Philodemus' *On the Good King according to Homer* as an Epicurean text and may also hint at the nature of Epicurus' own treatise *On Kingship*.

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