

# **Tyrannicide and Tranquillity**



## **Can Epicureanism justify the assassination of Julius Caesar?**

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**Declaration**

I have read and understood The University of Edinburgh guidelines on plagiarism and declare that this written dissertation is all my own work except where I indicate otherwise by proper use of quotes and references.

Thank you, to my parents for all their support, to Inna for her help and advice and to the Edinburgh Philosophy department an excellent year

## **Abstract**

In this essay I discuss the role of Cassius' philosophical beliefs in his decision to assassinate Caesar. I analyse the situation of Cassius and discuss whether or not Epicureanism can justify the assassination, then I use these conclusions to establish the importance of Epicureanism in Cassius' decision. I take the relevant aspects of Epicurean philosophy (privacy, friendship, fear, stability and justice) separately and make a judgement as to what parts of Epicureanism encourage or discourage the assassination. I bring this together with a discussion of how each of these aspects contributes to the Epicurean goal of tranquillity and thus assess whether the assassination is the correct course of action for an Epicurean. I conclude that, though some aspects of Epicureanism would encourage Cassius to murder Caesar, the assassination is still unjustifiable due to both the personal and political beliefs of Epicureanism. I further conclude that Cassius held Epicureanism as a theoretical ideology, whilst holding his Republican beliefs as more practical in application. Overall this shows that Cassius' political beliefs were more important than his philosophical allegiances in these decisions; this gives weight to Griffin's theory that Greek philosophy's role in Roman politics was more theoretical than practical.

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## Introduction

On the Ides of March of 44 BC Julius Caesar was murdered on the steps of the Theatre of Pompey; stabbed to death by Cassius, Brutus and forty other senators. History has favoured explaining the assassination in terms of political and personal issues and it is often overlooked that the two leaders of the conspiracy were philosophers; Brutus was an Antiochean Platonist and Cassius was an Epicurean. The importance of politics and personality in explaining this event is crucial but the prejudice of seeing Romans as political animals with only a passing interest in philosophy unbalances our view of the events.<sup>1</sup> Modern views of the role of Cassius' Epicureanism, and of the importance of Greek philosophy to Roman politics are mixed. Momigliano says:

There is a conspicuous date in the history of Roman Epicureanism: the date (46 BC) at which Cassius turned Epicurean, not to enjoy the pleasures of the Garden, but to reach the conclusion that the tyrant had to be eliminated.<sup>2</sup>

Momigliano placed Epicureanism strongly at the heart of Cassius' decision, whilst arguing that his views and justifications were unorthodox and aimed at reaching higher ideals than traditional Epicureanism. Conversely, Sedley said:

I dare say that most courses of action can be justified given a little ingenuity, whatever the philosophical principles you start from. Cassius' role in the assassination is eloquent testimony to that.<sup>3</sup>

Sedley insinuates that Cassius is clearly contravening Epicureanism whilst convincing himself otherwise. Sedley also argues that Cassius is not in fact pursuing the Epicurean goal of tranquillity, but instead a kind of moral satisfaction, unknown to orthodox Epicureanism.<sup>4</sup> Griffin argues, more conservatively that Epicureanism was not the basis for the assassination, but rather that Roman politicians, including Cassius, saw philosophy as theoretical, and thus useful in forming a framework within which to assess political ideology, but insufficient in providing a complete guide on

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<sup>1</sup> Sedley, *The Ethics of Brutus and Cassius*, pp 41-2

<sup>2</sup> Momigliano, *Review of Farrington, B. Science and Politics in the Ancient World*, pp 151

<sup>3</sup> Sedley, *The Ethics of Brutus and Cassius*, pp 53

<sup>4</sup> Sedley, *The Ethics of Brutus and Cassius*, pp 46-7

how to act.<sup>5</sup> Plutarch shows us good evidence of this when he describes how Brutus used hypothetical debates about tyranny to ‘test the water’ with possible recruits to the conspiracy.<sup>6</sup>

Cassius, like most aristocratic Romans, was educated in all the major philosophical schools.<sup>7</sup> The date of his conversion to Epicureanism is debated, but usually put between 48 and 46 BC; the battle of Pharsalus may have triggered this conversion.<sup>8</sup> Despite Caesar’s clemency after the battle, Cassius and many other prominent Pompey supporters consigned themselves to the political wilderness, to which the Epicurean practice of a quiet life would have been very compatible. Evidence of Cassius’ conversion to Epicureanism is shown in his correspondence with Cicero.<sup>9</sup> Whilst Cassius was away from Rome Caesar won the last battles of the civil war and then returned to Rome where he ruled as a tyrant; he was declared dictator for life and the Republic was disbanded in all but name. After a few years Cassius returned to Rome, becoming Praetor in 44 BC.<sup>10</sup> Around this time Cassius began to form the conspiracy against Caesar. It is evident from the sources that Cassius was the driving force behind the conspiracy, Plutarch and Suetonius both say that it was Cassius who brought Brutus into the plot and attribute the most of the planning to him.<sup>11</sup> He plays a central role in the events and the sources conclude that he was both single-minded about the assassination and absolutely confident that they were acting justly.

Throughout this essay I will discuss the relevant aspects of Epicureanism alongside the historical context and make a judgement as to whether Cassius was justified in assassinating Caesar. Before I go on I would like to note that I do not intend to apply any hindsight. Cassius could not have predicted the 2<sup>nd</sup> triumvirate or the principate which resulted from his actions. Furthermore it would go against Epicurean philosophy to examine an action in this way, as Epicurus says:

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<sup>5</sup> Griffin, *Philosophy, Politics and Politicians in Rome*, pp 36-7

<sup>6</sup> Sedley, *The Ethics of Brutus and Cassius*, pp 44

<sup>7</sup> Sedley, *Epicureanism in the Roman Republic*, pp 36

<sup>8</sup> Sedley, *The Ethics of Brutus and Cassius*, pp 41, Cassius had sided with Pompey, against Caesar, in the civil war. The defeat of Pompey here dealt a large to blow to the Republicans and many, including Cicero, Cassius and Brutus surrendered.

<sup>9</sup> Cicero, *Letters to his Friends*, 15.19

<sup>10</sup> Plutarch, *Brutus*, 7

<sup>11</sup> Plutarch, *Brutus*, 8, 10, Suetonius, *Life of Caesar*, 80

The misfortune of the wise is better than the prosperity of the fool. It is better, in short, that what is well judged in action should not owe its successful issue to the aid of chance.<sup>12</sup>

Cassius' decision to assassinate Caesar was either a wise decision or it was not, regardless of the resulting events.

## **Living Unnoticed**

In *Against Colotes*, Plutarch attacked the Epicureans saying:

But who are they that utterly confound and abolish this? Are they not those who withdraw themselves and their followers from all part in the government? ... Are they not those who declare that reigning and being a king is mistaking the path and straying from the right way of felicity? And they write in express terms: "We are to treat how a man may best keep and preserve the end of Nature, and how he may from the very beginning avoid entering of his own free will and voluntarily upon offices of magistracy, and government over the people."<sup>13</sup>

Though Plutarch's presentation is particularly biased, he does highlight the first major problem for Cassius, the *de facto* view that Epicureans should avoid public life and 'live unnoticed'. Epicureans argued that engaging in politics, public life or generally attracting attention would be detrimental to living a tranquil life. Needless to say, assassinating a tyrant attracts a great deal of attention and thus I shall examine this Epicurean doctrine to see if it forbids Cassius' decision or allows for any special dispensation.

### *1.1 Reasons for 'Live Unnoticed'*

The 'live unnoticed' doctrine is rooted in Epicurus' analysis of the type of desires which Epicureans should pursue and the kind they should avoid. Epicurus says:

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<sup>12</sup> Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*, 135 (Inwood & Gerson)

<sup>13</sup> Plutarch, *Against Colotes*, 31 (Goodwin)

Of our desires some are natural and necessary, others are natural but not necessary; and others are neither natural nor necessary, but are due to groundless opinion.

Those natural desires which entail no pain when unsatisfied, though pursued with an intense effort, are also due to groundless opinion; and it is not because of their own nature they are not got rid of but because of man's groundless opinions.<sup>14</sup>

Epicurus wants to distinguish between the types of desires we should act upon and those we should resist. Necessary desires are those which are needed for pleasure<sup>15</sup> and life, those which cause pain when not fulfilled, like food, water and shelter. Natural desires are ones which are innate and not created by cultural surroundings; food and water are both natural as well as necessary. The second passage shows that a natural desire can be unnecessary if it entails no pain when it is unfulfilled. Sex, for example, is a natural desire but not a necessary one, because we can live without it despite the desire being innate and instinctual. Unnatural and unnecessary desires are for things which man both does not need and has no natural desire for; wealth, fame and power are good examples. These desires are created by groundless opinion; culture and upbringing create false ideas about the value of these goods and we come to desire them, despite their superficiality.<sup>16</sup>

Epicurus distinguished between the different types of desires because he wanted to show why acting on some desires leads to tranquillity whilst others do not. The natural and necessary desires lead to tranquillity because they lead us to the things we need to keep us from suffering unnecessary pain. Acting upon unnatural desires, on the other hand, does not relieve us from any pain because being denied them would not cause any; furthermore the pursuit of these desires can lead us into unnecessary problems and worse allow us to become accustomed to fulfilling these desires, thus causing us pain when we cannot do so. For example dining nightly on lobster, caviar

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<sup>14</sup> Epicurus, *Key Doctrines*, 29-30 (Inwood & Gerson)

<sup>15</sup> The Epicurean description of pleasure was very original. Epicurus believed pleasure had two facets: Kinetic pleasures, which were physical and immediate (eating food, sexual intercourse) and static pleasures, which are more psychological and permanent (contentment, knowing one has friends). Kinetic pleasures are necessary to gain static pleasures, for example the kinetic pleasure of enjoying a friend's company leads to the static pleasure of knowing one has friends. See Mitsis (1988, pp 11-51).

<sup>16</sup> Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, pp 103-5

and foie gras is unwise because becoming accustomed to unnecessary delicacies forces you to continue to supplement these expensive desires and cause disturbance through the threat that these rare foods might be denied you at some later point.<sup>17</sup> By becoming accustomed to a simple and frugal diet, you can have the same pleasure from the fulfilment of your necessary desire to eat, without the fear of going without. Epicurus is reported to have said "Send me a little pot of cheese, that, when I like, I may dine sumptuously."<sup>18</sup> Epicurus had become so accustomed to simple frugal dining that, to his palate, cheese was a delicacy, thus he could derive as much pleasure from cheese as a normal man would from lobster. Adjusting one's lifestyle so as to only pursue natural and necessary desires is the best course to tranquillity.

However, having said this, it is important to note that Epicurus is not against obtaining or pursuing unnatural and unnecessary goods outright. Epicurus says:

Although pleasure is the greatest good, not every pleasure is worth choosing. We may instead avoid certain pleasures when, by doing so, we avoid greater pains. We may also choose to accept pain if, by doing so, it results in greater pleasure. So while every pleasure is naturally good, not every pleasure should be chosen. Likewise, every pain is naturally evil, but not every pain is to be avoided. Only upon considering all consequences should we decide.<sup>19</sup>

Given this an Epicurean should not always pursue pleasure and avoid pain, and similarly not just fulfil the necessary and avoid the unnecessary. Though wealth is unnecessary for pleasure, some wealth is needed to obtain the basic necessary goods needed for tranquillity. Thus some unnecessary goods can have a secondary value in their relation to obtaining necessary goods. A point of distinction would be that goods which are unnecessary and unnatural should never be pursued for themselves, but only to secure necessary goods. This displays a type of hedonistic calculus, that the value of goods and the wisdom of decisions are decided by their utility in obtaining tranquillity. This shows a pragmatic approach to obtaining happiness and shows also that there are exceptions where pursuing unnecessary goods is the wise decision.

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<sup>17</sup> Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*, 130-1

<sup>18</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, 10.11

<sup>19</sup> Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*, 129 (Inwood & Gerson)

It is natural to assume that public office, as well as the wealth and fame associated with it, are unnatural and unnecessary because they are not needed for pleasure and do not cause pain when absent. Furthermore Epicurus says that politics and public life are prisons, which prevents us from pursuing tranquillity.<sup>20</sup> This is easy to understand, as politics brings unnecessary burdens and pains without contributing to pleasure. Epicurus also says that any possible gains from public life are better gained from a quiet life, a life which will grant the purest security.<sup>21</sup> Epicurus was likely motivated, in this doctrine, by the volatility of public life in Athens; the great successes and honour earned by politicians like Alcibiades and Themistokles inevitably led them to exile or death, and Socrates' very public practise of philosophy resulted in his execution. It follows that tranquillity would be impossible whilst living with these potential problems; any security gained from politics, though theoretically possible, would feel unstable and temporary. Lucretius repeats this orthodoxy, saying:

Avarice and blind lust for status, which drive wretched people to encroach beyond the boundaries of right and sometimes, as accomplices and abettors in crime, to strive night and day with prodigious effort to scale the summit of wealth. These sores of life are nourished in no small degree by the dread of death. ... Some throw away their lives in an effort to gain statues and renown.

He describes how a serene and untroubled life is incompatible with striving for wealth and fame because these pursuits lead to crime, envy and endless ambition. Lucretius explains that the motivations to be involved in public life are founded on avarice and rooted in the fear of death; because politicians are motivated by a desired view of their *post mortem* legacy.<sup>22</sup> Through this Lucretius unmasks political motivations as solely self-interested and founded on groundless opinion, defining them clearly as unnecessary and unnatural. Lucretius is even more hard-line about the 'live unnoticed' doctrine than Epicurus, leaving no exceptions for political life being acceptable.<sup>23</sup> This is likely a reflection of the volatile and often fatal nature of Roman politics.

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<sup>20</sup> Epicurus, *Vatican Sayings*, 58

<sup>21</sup> Epicurus, *Key Doctrines*, 7

<sup>22</sup> Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, 3.59-86 (Smith)

<sup>23</sup> Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, pp 90-5

The Epicureans also make a positive argument, expressing the value of an unnoticed life. The crux of this argument is security, the security of continued basic needs and the security from pain and death. The Epicureans argue that living unnoticed is much better than public life at attaining tranquillity, and thus show that politics is not a reliable secondary good for attaining this tranquillity.<sup>24</sup> Living a quiet life allows Epicureans to discreetly obtain all the natural goods they need, providing they habituate themselves to simplistic lifestyles. Attracting little attention means that you will avoid lawsuits, making enemies and other conflicts with your neighbours. Conversely, politicians will make enemies and fear countless evils. The simple life allows one to pursue beneficial activities, namely philosophy, which, according to Epicurus, is therapeutic to the soul. All of this speaks to the Epicurean, saying that an unnoticed life will almost always be more tranquil than a public one.

### 1.2 *Exceptions to 'Live Unnoticed'*

As I have said, the value of any Epicurean doctrine or decision directly relates to whether or not it contributes to the subject's tranquillity; given this we must see 'live unnoticed' as practical wisdom, which will yield results in most cases, rather than a rule, which must be strictly adhered to.<sup>25</sup> Thus, living unnoticed has secondary value to Epicureans, meaning that an Epicurean would not live a private life for privacy's sake, but simply because in most cases it is the best course of action to attain tranquillity. If this is practical advice there must be exceptions to it. Epicurus said:

In order to obtain protection from other men, any means for attaining this end is a natural good.

Some men want fame and status, thinking that they would thus make themselves secure against other men. If the life of such men really were secure, they have attained a natural good; if, however, it is insecure, they have not attained the end which by nature's own prompting they originally sought.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Epicurus, *Key Doctrines*, 14

<sup>25</sup> Earle, *Live Hidden*, pp 97-8

<sup>26</sup> Epicurus, *Key Doctrines*, 6-7 (Inwood & Gerson)

These examples show that Epicurus believed that gaining security through power and public office was possible sometimes, if a little unlikely. This reinforces the idea that their value is solely based on whether they do in fact bring security and that ‘living unnoticed’ is a practical piece of advice, not a rule.<sup>27</sup>

There is also good evidence to show that the Epicureans understood some specific exceptions to the abstention from public life. Seneca says that, conversely to the Stoic principle of engaging in politics except in volatile situations, the Epicureans abstain from politics except in a state of emergency. Cicero and Plutarch also agree with this, saying that exceptional situations can justify an Epicurean entering political life.<sup>28</sup> Though this principle is not mentioned by any Epicureans, its appearance amongst these sources gives it credence; furthermore its compatibility with the hedonistic calculus makes it reasonable to accept this as a genuine Epicurean doctrine.

An Epicurean community needs certain things to survive and prosper: the security of law and order, the freedom to practise philosophy, the stability to provide the necessities of life, such as food and water and the confidence that the state will maintain these things. It is for these reasons that Epicureanism, despite its private nature, exists within societies; to gain the benefits of a secure and ordered state.<sup>29</sup> Given this, a state of emergency, for an Epicurean would be a situation where these basic needs are threatened or lost. For example, if a Roman senator were to suggest that the practise of Epicureanism be banned, an Epicurean would have sufficient reason to enter public life and challenge him. Such an example of a direct attack against Epicureanism is easy to adjudicate; we must decide whether things like civil strife, civil war and tyranny, which do not directly threaten Epicureanism, should count as emergency situation. Modern writers have made many attempts at answering this, some argue for liberal readings, permitting Epicureans to enter politics in order to make life more favourable for other Epicureans, whilst others see it as more restrictive, only permitting defence from direct attacks against Epicureanism or the breakdown of justice.<sup>30</sup> The key factor here though is common to all Epicurean moral

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<sup>27</sup> Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, pp 37-9

<sup>28</sup> Cicero, *Republic*, 1.10-1, Plutarch, *Against Colotes*, 31, Seneca, *On Leisure*, 3.2

<sup>29</sup> Brown, *Politics and Society*, pp 196

<sup>30</sup> Fowler, *Lucretius and Politics*, pp 127-8, Griffin, *Philosophy, Politics and Politicians in Rome*, pp 30

philosophy, any political activity must be justified as contributing to tranquillity; it appears to me that ‘a state of emergency’ may not require a precise definition, instead rational calculus of the costs and gains of political involvement are enough. The idea of political emergencies shows that the abstention from political life is purely practical, there can and will be reasons to enter public life. Rome in 44 BC was definitely an exceptional situation because of decades of civil strife, which had led to a tyrant, usurping the Republic. In later chapters I will assess whether this was an appropriate political emergency, requiring political action from Epicureans.

We can also point to specific examples of Epicurean philosophers who have made themselves publicly known. Epicurus himself wrote letters to several Athenian politicians and Kings, giving advice; through this he made many friends throughout the Greek world.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore his practice of philosophy and the texts he wrote brought him great fame. Despite his simplistic lifestyle, it would be wrong to describe Epicurus’ life as unnoticed, but we can show that his works and correspondence would have led to tranquillity and thus justify the exposure. Publishing and teaching philosophy was clearly a labour of love and any trouble he would have suffered because of it would have been easily offset by the pleasure of reaching people with his philosophy. Similarly any exposure he would have suffered from corresponding with political figures would have been offset by the pleasures of friendship and helping others. Diogenes of Oenoanda’s monumental inscription shows this same calculus; though it directly conflicted with the idea of living unnoticed, teaching Epicurean philosophy was apparently of great importance to him, as is shown in the opening of the inscription.<sup>32</sup> These individuals show concrete examples of how the hedonistic calculus can favour disregarding ‘live unnoticed’ in the pursuit of tranquillity.

### 1.3 *Habituation and ‘Live Unnoticed’*

The importance of moral development and habituation also contributes to the relativity of the ‘live unnoticed’ doctrine. It is acknowledged by Epicureans that

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<sup>31</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, 10.4-5, Seneca *Letters on Ethics*, 22.5-6

<sup>32</sup> Diogenes of Oenoanda, Fr. 1-2

someone cannot simply read Epicurus' works, accept their validity and immediately become an Epicurean sage. The nature of Epicurus' ethics is shedding one's false opinions and unnecessary attachments gradually, through practising Epicurean philosophy in your everyday life. Becoming an Epicurean sage is something which takes time; as such not every Epicurean is at the same stage of control over their desires. As I have said earlier, Epicurus believed it was better to habituate yourself to a frugal diet rather than an extravagant one. Within this is an implicit assumption, that someone who had habituated himself to an extravagant diet would not be able to give it up without suffering disturbance from the loss, otherwise extravagance would not be a problem because you would be able to effortlessly switch between an extravagant lifestyle and a frugal one. Epicurus' argument is precisely the opposite, that the habituation of fulfilling unnecessary desires creates reliance upon them. If we were to imagine a man with an extravagant diet who spontaneously converts to Epicureanism, what would be his best course of action? A clean switch to bread and water is too much to ask, as this would cause unnecessary disturbance. Alternatively he could, over time, reduce his extravagance and slowly habituate himself to a frugal diet; this is the more accurate representation of Epicurean ethics.

This is very important for Cassius because he was a member of an old Roman political family and he had been raised to take a place in Roman politics. He had been involved in politics many years before his conversion to Epicureanism, beginning with his Quaestorship in 53 BC. The pursuit of politics and an esteemed place in public life was something he had been taught from an early age, and by the time of his conversion he had already become deeply involved in it. His dedication to the Republic, as shown by Plutarch, and his long and dedicated political service, which is shown in his letters to Cicero, are testimony to the importance of politics in his life.<sup>33</sup> Cassius is like a glutton of politics and the same lessons apply. It would be unwise to completely break from public life because he had become so habituated to it. Though he should aim at an unnoticed life, Cassius would likely be unable to find tranquillity if he had not come to terms with leaving politics.

A similar point is also made by Plutarch:

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<sup>33</sup> Plutarch, *Brutus*, 8-9, Cicero, *Letters to his Friends*, 15.14-5, *Letters to Atticus*, 7.21, 23-4

Even Epicurus believes that men who are eager for honour and glory should not lead an inactive life, but that they should fulfil their natures by engaging in politics and entering public life, on the ground that, because of their natural dispositions, they are more likely to be disturbed and harmed by inactivity if they do not obtain what they desire.<sup>34</sup>

This passage shows that Epicurus believed that people who deeply desired to lead a political life should not deny themselves; this is likely meant for people like Cassius, who have been raised to pursue such a life and have engaged in it for most of their life.<sup>35</sup> This may also distinguish Cassius from similar Roman Epicureans who lived through the same civil strife, without engaging in public life.<sup>36</sup>

#### 1.4 Conclusion

This shows two relevant points, that concerning the ‘live unnoticed’ doctrine, Epicureanism makes exceptions both for individuals and circumstances. Cassius is undoubtedly one of these exceptions and the civil strife of the period deserves to be considered as an exceptional circumstance. However, though the Republic may have been in troubling times, which would justify Cassius being involved in politics, the question remains as whether murdering a tyrant was the correct course of action for Cassius.

### Friendship

Epicurus believed that friendship was of paramount importance in obtaining tranquillity. Friends bring pleasure through companionship and security through material and psychological support, which is crucial to tranquillity.<sup>37</sup> Having friends means you will have financial aid when you have money problems, help when you are

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<sup>34</sup> Plutarch, *On Tranquillity of Mind*, 465f-466a (Helmbold) This asks the question ‘can there unnatural, necessary pleasure, which Epicurus never mentioned?’

<sup>35</sup> Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, pp 52-3

<sup>36</sup> Atticus, though a Roman Epicurean of the same period made a different choice in deciding to live unnoticed; as Atticus was an equite, not born into the political elite like Cassius, he likely would not have had the same forceful drive to join public life.

<sup>37</sup> Mitsis, *Epicurus’ Ethical Theory*, pp 98-9

sick and protection from your enemies. Having these things when they are needed and knowing you will have them, should trouble befall you, allows you to live peacefully in the knowledge that you will be able to endure any crisis.<sup>38</sup> This is why Epicurus says:

Of all the things that wisdom provides for the complete happiness of one's entire life, by far the greatest is friendship.

The same judgment produces confidence that dreadful things are not everlasting, and that security amidst the limited number of dreadful things is most easily achieved through friendship.<sup>39</sup>

In obtaining tranquillity nothing is given the same precedence as friendship. Epicurus even says 'Friendship is worth choosing for its own sake';<sup>40</sup> which is especially confusing because Epicurus holds that pleasure and tranquillity should be the only things we should value for themselves.<sup>41</sup> This means that all Epicureans should cultivate a network of friendships, governed by mutual aid, and maintain them, remaining absolutely loyal to those commitments.<sup>42</sup> Cassius was friends with many members of the Roman political elite, notably, Cicero and Brutus.<sup>43</sup> The impact of the action on his friends and how it would affect his relationship are important factors to be analysed. Thus I shall examine the important friendships and judge how they would be affected.

## 2.1 *Cassius and Caesar*

Cassius and Caesar were friends publicly, Caesar having granted Cassius clemency after the battle of Pharsalus and having made him Praetor in 44 BC.<sup>44</sup> This would have presented a thin illusion of friendship and would create a sense of betrayal after the assassination. However, in truth there was no affection whatsoever between the

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<sup>38</sup> Rist, *Epicurus on Friendship*, pp 122

<sup>39</sup> Epicurus, *Key Doctrines*, 27-8 (Inwood & Gerson)

<sup>40</sup> Epicurus, *Vatican Sayings*, 23

<sup>41</sup> This debate over whether Epicureans can truly value friends for their own sake is a long one, which I shall not get into. See O'Keefe (2001), Mitsis (1988)

<sup>42</sup> O'Keefe, *Epicureanism*, pp 148

<sup>43</sup> Cicero, *Letters to his Friends*, 15.18, Plutarch, *Brutus*, 1.3

<sup>44</sup> Plutarch, *Caesar*, 57

two, Cassius was betraying no one and none of Cassius' friends, knowing the truth of the matter, would have perceived this as a betrayal and thus the assassination would not serve to weaken any of his true friendships. This public friendship is irrelevant to Epicureanism and I shall move on.

## 2.2 *Cassius and the Roman Elite*

Cassius undoubtedly had friends amongst the Roman political elite Cicero's letters show that they were close friends and Plutarch says that Brutus was also a true friend to Cassius.<sup>45</sup> There are doubtlessly many others within the Senate and the rest of Roman politics who would have counted him a close friend, particularly amongst Republicans who hated Caesar. It is not hard to imagine a network of friends and allies, who had fought together against Caesar with Pompey and had taken solace with each other after his defeat, together mourning the death of the Republic. I do not wish to speculate too much, but it is no great leap to suppose that most of Cassius' close friends would have been Republicans, many of whom he likely would have recruited for the conspiracy.

Firstly, amongst these Republicans, the murder of Caesar would have been considered almost unanimously as liberation and a great favour to them. Caesar's tyranny had denied Roman politicians the right to pursue proper political careers, true power was monopolised by Caesar and the only sure way to progress in politics was through Caesar's patronage.<sup>46</sup> The disenchantment of Cicero is shown in a letter to Cassius which ends 'About politics I can write nothing, for I do not care to write what I feel.'<sup>47</sup> The assassination thus gave back the opportunity for Cassius' friends to follow their political ambitions; his friends were troubled and distraught over the autocracy of Caesar and, as a true Epicurean friend should, Cassius came to their aid.

As well as helping out friends Cassius is helping out himself by aiding them. The favour of assassinating Caesar would have so greatly endeared him to these men that he could guarantee their trust and loyalty. Cicero, after the assassination, through his

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<sup>45</sup> Cicero, *Letters to his Friends*, 15.19

<sup>46</sup> Suetonius, *Caesar*, 41

<sup>47</sup> Cicero, *Letters to his Friends*, 15.16

letters shows an unwavering support for Brutus and Cassius; his attempt to have them pardoned for Caesar's murder shows the strength of this loyalty.<sup>48</sup> The action itself of assassinating Caesar would have created a great bond between the conspirators; Cassius would have felt his confidence in these men grow strongly as they freed the Republic together. This strengthening of loyalty and confidence within friendships is very important to Epicureans. Having friends one can count on to deliver help when needed, as I have said, is a priority in reaching tranquillity. Amongst these men Cassius, having freed them of a tyrant, could undoubtedly count many loyal friends who would aid him in any crisis he might suffer. The pleasure of helping friends and security gained from their debt to him, make the murder of Caesar seem like a wise choice for Cassius.

However there is a tension here; though Cassius' friends may want Caesar murdered, is it what they really need? Epicurean friendship is about mutual aid, helping your friends when they need help, but Epicureanism might not necessarily consider Cassius' friends as 'needing help'. Political freedom is not necessary for tranquillity, and if tranquillity is not threatened Cassius may not be required to come to the aid of his friends. The question here is 'should an Epicurean help a non-Epicurean pursue non-Epicurean goals?' The problem with answering this is that Epicurean discussion on friendship is framed in the ideal Epicurean community, in which everyone is an Epicurean following their desires correctly. We have very little to go on, when deciding whether an Epicurean should help a friend do something which would not benefit (and might harm) their tranquillity because it did not come up much for Epicurean philosophers. The simpler answer would be to say no, it would be wrong to help a friend achieve a goal, which was not in their best interest and a better choice would be to dissuade them from such goal.<sup>49</sup> Alternatively, we might argue that the goal of helping a friend is not to help them attain tranquillity but to gain security from their loyalty through helping them. If so, then the nature of your help and what end it leads to is not important, what matters is whether it cultivates your relationship and strengthens loyalty and thus your security. The first answer presumes a certain amount of altruism in Epicurean friendship, whilst the second plays more to the

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<sup>48</sup> Plutarch, *Cicero*, 42

<sup>49</sup> Epicurus wrote letters to friends, trying to dissuade them from entering politics, Seneca *Letters on Ethics*, 22.5-6

Epicurean doctrine that the subject's own tranquillity is the most important factor. This problem comes down to the debate mentioned earlier, whether Epicurean friendship is genuinely altruistic or not, and given the depth of the debate I shall not venture into it here but I will point out that the central importance held by the subject's tranquillity in Epicurean ethics should give the second answer more weight.

### 2.3 *Brutus and Caesar*

Although Cassius and Caesar were not friends, historical evidence shows that Brutus and Caesar were very close for a long time. Though Brutus joined Pompey during the civil war the two still remained friends.<sup>50</sup> After the war Caesar is shown to continue this friendship, favouring Brutus with a position as Consul.<sup>51</sup> Brutus in joining the conspiracy betrayed a life long friend, and though he was not an Epicurean, it is worth analysing the impact of this betrayal and what importance it holds for Cassius.

Firstly, the betrayal of a friend is always the wrong decision in Epicureanism; it is one of few rules which Epicureans seem to believe cannot be broken under any circumstances. This is because trust would be impossible within a relationship without absolute loyalty and the betrayal of any friend would cripple all your friendships through revealing yourself to be an untrustworthy individual.<sup>52</sup> Epicureans would also hold that betraying a friend would cause great psychological disturbance, making tranquillity difficult. Given this, if Cassius were in Brutus' position, assassinating Caesar would be the wrong course of action because it would damage his friendships and cause disturbance. However, Brutus is not an Epicurean and does not hold these same views about friendship and psychology. We are thus faced with another dilemma; should Cassius be encouraging Brutus to do something which he believes to be harmful, and would not do himself. The question again seems to come down to, to what extent Cassius is 'other-regarding' in his friendship with Brutus. There are two key points here to discuss, to what extent Cassius feels the disturbances of his friend Brutus and how important is it that Brutus is not an Epicurean and holds to different values.

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<sup>50</sup> Caesar having asked his men to make sure Brutus was not killed in the battle of Pharsalus shows this. Plutarch, *Brutus*, 5.1

<sup>51</sup> Plutarch, *Caesar*, 62

<sup>52</sup> Rist, *Epicurus on Friendship*, pp 128

The consensus among Epicurean writers is that friends should be loved as much as oneself, but what they value in those friendships is debated. Torquatus in Cicero's *On Ends* lays out three views held by Epicureans: The first view holds we do not value the pleasure of our friends as much as our own, but still take pleasure in their pleasures. The second holds that initially friends are made solely for utility, but over time become valued for themselves and thus the subject will become attached to their pleasure and pain. Third view holds that Epicurean friendship is a contract of mutual affection, to love each other as one loves oneself.<sup>53</sup> Each of these views promotes an idea of 'other-regarding' which would imply that Cassius either literally feels his friends' pains and pleasures or should at least act as if he does. The first view, however, does hold that despite this 'other-regarding' the subject's own tranquillity is more important. It is difficult to discern which, if any, of these views was more orthodox and impossible to assign one of them to Cassius. However, despite this, it seems that such a close friendship as the one between Brutus and Cassius would create a certain amount of transfer of pain and pleasure, whichever view of friendship he should take. Though Cassius should not necessarily treat Brutus as if he were himself, he needs to take into account a certain amount of disturbance which would result from his friend betraying another friend. This said, this disturbance of Brutus over the betrayal would be offset by the gains made by the murder of Caesar, which are discussed in 2.2.

As I mentioned in 2.2, the fact that Brutus was not an Epicurean should be a factor in Cassius' decision. Brutus was neither aiming to attain tranquillity nor did necessarily hold that friends should never be betrayed. Given this we have to decide whether the pleasure and pain felt by Cassius from his friendship with Brutus is decided by what Brutus believes or what Cassius believes. If Brutus' beliefs are more important, there is good argument for the assassination, because Brutus was hostile to tyranny and his philosophical views (Antiochean Platonism) were also intolerant of tyranny.<sup>54</sup> Thus, if Cassius respects Brutus' views in this sense he would not suffer disturbance through him from the betrayal of Caesar; furthermore, his support of Brutus' anti-tyrannical views would have strengthened their friendship. On the other hand it could be said

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<sup>53</sup> Cicero, *On Ends*, 1.20

<sup>54</sup> Sedley, *The Ethics of Brutus and Cassius*, pp 53

that, according to Epicureanism, it would not matter whether Brutus was an Epicurean or not, he would still suffer disturbance from the betrayal, simply because he is human. This argument is strong, particularly as Epicureanism would have seen Brutus' failure to recognise the pain of betrayal as 'groundless opinion.' We are left with an impasse: on the one hand, Cassius gains through strengthening his friendship with Brutus, but at the same time he suffers from Brutus' personal disturbance.

There is one final point I would like to make about Brutus and Caesar. By exhorting Brutus to join the conspiracy, Cassius took part in orchestrating the one of the most powerful and enduring scenes of betrayal in human history, '*et tu Brutei?*' This moment is a scar on the fraternity of friendship, for which Cassius is partly responsible.<sup>55</sup> Though such a consequence has no definable place within Epicurean ethics, the short term result would be Roman politicians losing trust in their friends, knowing that such a man as Brutus could turn on an old friend over politics. This is a problem because it weakens the possibility of having a network of trusting friends. Having a network of friends, which have confidence in each other, is the ideal for Epicureans because it creates the enduring security that can bring about tranquillity.

#### 2.4 Conclusion

For Cassius' decision, friendship presents complicated problems. His relationship with Cicero and the other senators would have encouraged him to assassinate Caesar, but Brutus' connection with Caesar presents a strong reason not to go ahead. Overall, Cassius would have a stronger network of friendships if he killed Caesar, but would have to accept a certain amount of disturbance through Brutus. This said, even if Brutus suffered from the action, it would not damage his loyalty to Cassius. Cassius is caught between the interests of the larger network of friends and the interests of Brutus. As the aim of an Epicurean is to establish a strong loyal network of friends and that Epicureans accept that sometimes you have to suffer disturbance so that you will be more tranquil later, it seems that assassinating Caesar is the best course of action where friendship is concerned.

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<sup>55</sup> Though William Shakespeare is likely more to blame than anyone

## Fear

Thucydides named fear as the ‘truest cause’ of war, and this applies equally well to tyrannicide. The autocracy of Sulla led to a great number of executions, senators of Caesar’s time would no doubt have feared the same kind of violence.<sup>56</sup> In conventional morality, fear of death would be considered adequate justification for pre-emptive action. In the case of Caesar’s tyranny it appears quite acceptable for the average Roman to take action if he believed his life was in danger. Antiquity even gives us good examples. Harmodius and Aristogeiton were praised as heroes when they murdered the Athenian tyrant Hippias’ brother.<sup>57</sup> The destruction of Carthage was justified as necessary in order to remove permanently the persistent threat.<sup>58</sup> It might be easy for the average Roman to accept the murder of tyrant, in what could be described as self-defence. However, Epicureans viewed fear and the correct ways of dealing with fear differently to the average Roman.

According to Epicurus, tranquillity is obtained by freeing oneself from fear and distress. This permeates through most of Epicurean ethical philosophy, but at the personal level, Epicureans identified two key causes of fear: the fear of death and false opinions about gods.<sup>59</sup> In this section I shall examine the Epicureans’ view of the death and whether Cassius’ conspiracy can be justified as an attempt to deal with fear. I will focus on Cassius’ own position and leave any fears for the state of society for later chapters.

### 3.1 *Epicurus and the Fear of Death*

One of the most consistent statements in Epicurean philosophy is “death is nothing to us.” Death is not something to be feared or resented, nor should death promote any unwise action in order to evade it. To the Epicureans, death is inevitable and final but it is not an evil.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.23, Velleius Paterculus, *History of Rome*, 2.28

<sup>57</sup> Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution*, 18

<sup>58</sup> Plutarch, *Cato the Elder*, 26

<sup>59</sup> Epicurus, *Letter to Herodotus*, 81, *Letter to Menoeceus*, 128, Gill, *Psychology*, pp 138

<sup>60</sup> Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*, 124, Warren, *Removing Fear*, pp 243

Being strict atomists the Epicureans held that the soul is an atomic compound, which exists within the body. It is corporeal, like all bodies in Epicurean physics, and reliant on both the constituent parts of its compounded nature and the existence of the body to maintain it. Thus when the body dies and can no longer function, the soul dissipates; at death the soul compound breaks down into its constituent atoms leaving no trace of itself. Furthermore, the soul relies on the body to obtain sensory data; without the sense organs the soul cannot experience the world in any way.<sup>61</sup> Given this the Epicureans draw their conclusions:

1. An evil which is not experienced is not an evil
2. The soul-compound breaks down upon death, and all thought, consciousness and sensory experience cease
3. Death cannot be experienced and thus is not an evil

One must have life to know goods and evils; life and death cannot be present at the same time, and if we are not present for death, we cannot suffer from it.<sup>62</sup> This is argument of disembodiment, that because death cannot be experienced we need not fear it, nor will we desire life when we are dead, for we will have no faculties with which to desire it.<sup>63</sup> Epicureans also argue that pre-life, our non-existence which lasted aeons before our birth, is the state that we will be in once we have died; without a soul or sensory perception. Thus the Epicureans argue that our non-existence caused no suffering in this state for the same reasons that death will cause no suffering; we have no soul or sensory perception, so we cannot experience pain or pleasure and thus ‘death is nothing to us.’<sup>64</sup>

Death is not a bad thing and an Epicurean should not consider his own death as an evil when making his decisions. Furthermore an Epicurean could not argue that his being dead should be an evil if it impacted negatively on his friends, because in the state of death he would have no perception of his friends’ condition. Sometimes death can even be the correct choice, as Diogenes Laertius says “sometime he (the Epicurean

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<sup>61</sup> Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, 3.94-176, 625-35, 838-43,

<sup>62</sup> Bradley, *When is Death Bad for the One who Dies?*, pp 2-3

<sup>63</sup> Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, 3.913-30

<sup>64</sup> Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, 3.852-4

sage) will die for a friend.”<sup>65</sup> This means sometimes that if an Epicurean were forced to choose between his own life and the life of a friend, failure to prevent the death of a friend may cause such disturbance that the nothingness of death would be preferable.<sup>66</sup> Given this we would have to say that the fear of death should never be a factor in Epicurean decision making, as it is not an evil or a pain, it does not have an impact on the hedonistic calculus. This means the threat of death in an ethical decision should not warrant consideration; for example, if someone compels an Epicurean to do something unjust with the threat of death, the Epicurean should refuse, knowing that he is not in fact threatened, because death is nothing to him. However this does not mean that Epicureans should be indifferent to death. If an Epicurean were in the path of speeding car he would step aside; death is nothing, but life is still worthwhile.<sup>67</sup> Though an Epicurean should not fear death, he will take steps to prevent it. The extent to which they will do so is unknown because this is not explored at length in the extant Epicurean works.

Though they do not believe death is an evil, Epicureans do hold that the fear of death is a major cause of disturbance in peoples’ souls. According to Epicureans, groundless opinions about death, both religious and philosophical, are one of the greatest causes of anxiety and thus it is crucial to remove these disturbances to attain tranquillity.<sup>68</sup> For Epicureans the correct thing to do this is to understand death, through the arguments mentioned above, and thus remove one’s fear of death. It would be incorrect to attempt to try to remove the fear of death by gaining power and security and removing threats to yourself because this would be an endless and inevitably futile effort. Thus the only way to free oneself from the fear of death is to both understand and accept it.

### 3.2 *Fear of a Tyrant*

At face value a Roman politician should have good cause to fear death, living under Caesar’s tyranny. When Sulla was dictator of Rome he executed many Roman politicians; some were genuine enemies, some were politicians who were powerful

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<sup>65</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, 10. 119

<sup>66</sup> O’Keefe, *Epicureanism*, pp 151

<sup>67</sup> Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*, 124

<sup>68</sup> Gill, *Psychology*, pp 138

enough to pose a threat to him and a few were innocents who were just unlucky. Cassius and his friends knew their history and doubtlessly expected no less from their new tyrant; the Roman senators of the time would have anticipated a fresh wave of proscriptions, believing no one to be safe. Cassius had more reason to fear execution than most; he had the misfortune of being both a past enemy of Caesar (from the civil war) and being powerful and influential enough to pose a threat to Caesar. If Sulla or Octavian had been in Caesar's place, Cassius would have undoubtedly been executed immediately after the civil war. We also know from Plutarch that Caesar was well aware of Brutus and Cassius' threat to him, for he says:

Once, when he (Caesar) was told that Antony and Dolabella were plotting revolution, he said it was not the fat and long-haired fellows that troubled him, but those pale and lean ones; meaning Brutus and Cassius.<sup>69</sup>

Given this we have good reason to say that Caesar being alive was a clear threat to Cassius' life.

However one might argue that the threat to Cassius' life is overstated. Despite Rome's fears over the volatility and ruthlessness of tyrants, Caesar had refrained from mass proscriptions. Caesar had offered clemency to all his enemies in the civil war, even ones as influential as Cicero and Brutus. Arguably, if he had wanted Cassius, or any of the other Roman senators, dead, the apt time to execute them would have been immediately after the war while their apparent opposition was still fresh. Caesar had also offered to important political positions to Cassius; it seems unlikely he would entrust magistracies to someone he considered an enemy and planned to execute.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, Cassius says in a letter to Cicero that he would sooner have Caesar as a dictator rather Gnaeus Pompey, implying that Caesar showed restraint where others might not.<sup>71</sup> This shows that there was most likely no direct threat to Cassius' life from Caesar during the period. It does not, however, show that Cassius should not fear execution at some later point, for as long Caesar ruled as a tyrant his life or death was dependent upon him. Though Caesar might be benevolent now, at a later date,

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<sup>69</sup> Plutarch, *Brutus*, 8 (Perrin), This is also mentioned in Plutarch, *Antony*, 11

<sup>70</sup> Plutarch, *Brutus*, 7

<sup>71</sup> Cicero, *Letters to his Friends*, 15.19

Caesar might simply decide to get rid of Cassius. It seems that Caesar is a threat, but not a direct threat at that time.

Initially the obvious conclusion for Cassius should be that this fear of execution is irrelevant. If death is nothing to Epicureans then the threat of execution should not be a factor in any of Cassius' ethical decisions; for life is not made better by being longer, death is not an evil and even should the execution be painful, it would be short. On the other hand, the anxiety caused by the lingering threat of execution would be a cause of disturbance, which must be dealt with. However as I have shown earlier, trying to remove the external causes of fear is unwise for Epicureans and thus executing Caesar in order to remove the fear of what he might do is an unwise course of action. The correct choice would be to focus on understanding death and coming to terms with it.

However, although assassinating Caesar based on the fear of death would be the wrong choice for an Epicurean, doing it to remove the threat of death might not be. As I have said in 3.1, an Epicurean would step out of way of a moving car to avoid being killed, because life is not troubling and he chooses to live. We can extend this further, if an Epicurean should step away from moving car, then surely he should also act in self defence, should someone try to kill him, despite death not being an evil. Given this we can say that if the assassination of Caesar is legitimate self defence, then Cassius could legitimately kill Caesar, and this would be the same as stepping out of the way of a moving car. This argument has its problems though. Firstly, Caesar is not a car inexorably moving towards Cassius, the threat is neither direct nor immediate; Cassius does not know that Caesar will execute him for certain, so it would be wrong to treat him as such. Secondly, Roman politics is more complicated than a car on a road; it would be more apt to describe it as a countless number of interconnecting roads with thousands of cars speeding in different directions. Cassius has no way of knowing that if he should remove the threat of Caesar he would not be creating more threats to his life; should he step out of the way of this car he may well be stepping into the path of another danger, such as legal prosecution, revenge from the Caesar's supporters or political instability. This comes back to what I have said earlier about trying to deal with the threats which cause fear; the causes of fear cannot be eradicated because there will always more after you have removed one, it would be

an endless and futile task. Thus Cassius would be better served coming to terms with death itself rather than trying to remove Caesar's threat.

### 3.3 *Fear of Compulsion*

Living under a tyrant has more troubles to deal with than the fear of execution; Caesar had power to compel action from other Romans, dictate their lifestyle and the choices of individuals. This is an obvious threat to Cassius, particularly if he wants to pursue Epicurean ethics and an Epicurean lifestyle. The Epicurean maxim, to engage in politics in emergency situations, has often been interpreted as meaning that an Epicurean should enter politics to defend the right to practice Epicureanism and the Epicurean community, so this threat of compulsion does seem relevant.

However, the threat of compulsion is the same as the threat of execution. For example, should Caesar decide to compel Cassius to cease being an Epicurean, he would need to enforce this with punishment, but the only punishment which would be final enough to prevent his practise would be execution. Fines, imprisonment or exile would not prevent a true Epicurean from practising the principles of his philosophy, only execution would be a true threat. All compulsion is rooted in this same threat of execution, and as I have shown earlier, the threat of death should not concern Cassius and thus the threat of compulsion should not be his concern either. However, what I have said concerns the threat of compulsion to Cassius and not the threat to Epicureanism itself. In later chapters I will examine the threat of Caesar to Epicureanism as a whole and its relevance to Cassius' decision.

### 3.4 *Conclusion*

For Cassius, the fear of death, no matter how real and likely, should not be a factor in his decision to assassinate Caesar, nor should it be seen as an acceptable justification. What this has shown is that there is a more preferable option for Cassius to deal with the fear of Caesar, to understand death and understand that Caesar poses no true threat to him because death is not an evil. Nonetheless Epicureanism did understand that fear was a complex psychological issue which could not be controlled and placated easily. Inevitably Cassius' would have suffered some disturbance from fear of Caesar

but his assassination would still be unwise because the fear of death would still be present in one form or another because of the danger of Roman political life and the instability of the period.

## **Stability**

One of the more common hypotheses for an exceptional situation, which would permit an Epicurean to involve himself in politics, would be to prevent political instability.<sup>72</sup> Epicurean communities required a stable city or nation to exist within and should civil war or conflict threaten this, it would be rational for an Epicurean to involve himself in politics to prevent instability and restore harmony. Lucretius shows the Epicurean's desire for political stability when he says:

So the kings were slain, the time-honoured majesty of thrones and proud sceptres tumbled down in the dust ... Thus the situation sank to the lowest dregs of anarchy, with all seeking sovereignty and supremacy for themselves.

This passage, describes the death of kings and ensuing chaos of anarchy, showing how undesirable political instability is for Epicureans.<sup>73</sup> Epicurus' founded his garden within Athens to gain the security of its walls and army and presumably Epicurus would have sanctioned his followers engaging in Athenian politics if the stability of the polis were endangered. Because of this Epicureans were interested in which political system best promoted stability. There is an implicit assumption within most Epicurean political thought that a benevolent monarchy is the best system to obtain stability because singular rulers are stronger and the monopoly of power allows Epicureans to remain absent from politics.<sup>74</sup> However Epicureans do not place themselves starkly behind monarchy, many Roman Epicureans believed that the Republic was a superior system because it was an equitable social contract between citizens.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, Epicurus chose to found the garden within democratic

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<sup>72</sup> Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, pp 51

<sup>73</sup> Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, 1136-44 (Smith), Konstan, *A Life Worthy of the Gods*, pp 82

<sup>74</sup> Fowler, *Lucretius and Politics*, pp 129-30

<sup>75</sup> Momigliano, *Review of Farrington, B. Science and Politics in the Ancient World*, pp 157

Athens, rather than a monarchy. Though there is debate about the best type of political institution, it is agreed upon that tyranny is unstable and undesirable.<sup>76</sup>

Stability is one of the most important factors for Cassius' decision because the assassination is an attempt at political change, to replace Caesar's tyranny with the traditional Republic. In making this decision Cassius must, as an Epicurean, weigh the merits of both political systems and for Epicureans stability is one of the most important factors in deciding this. Given this we must assess the state of the Republic and the nature of Caesar's tyranny, assessing which, given the information at hand, would provide the safest, most stable community for Epicureanism to thrive in.

#### 4.1 *Stability and the Republic*

The Republic was favourable for stability for several reasons; firstly, because it was the traditional political system in Rome. The Republic had endured for centuries, dating back to the expulsion of the kings in 509 BC and it had survived in the same form (though many changes occurred) up to Cassius' lifetime.<sup>77</sup> The Republic was the status quo for Rome and this appeals to the conservative nature of Epicurean political views; it is fair to say that as the Republic had remained intact for almost 500 years that it was a stable institution. Furthermore as it has existed for so long, all of Rome's institutions; be they religious, political or military were all adapted and evolved to suit the Republic. It would be unwise to inflict a great change on the way Roman politics worked because it would disrupt all the vital institutions that had developed throughout its history. This viewpoint essentially argues that 'if it's not broke, don't fix it' and this chimes very well with the implicit conservative tendencies within Epicurean politics as well as the pragmatism in Epicurean ethics. It would also be unwise to promote change because removing the Republic would encourage further political change. Whilst the Republic remained in force it had the historical weight to discourage political revolution, once it is gone no political system would have the same authority that the Republic could draw from its historical significance and any

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<sup>76</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, 10.119, Philodemus, *On the Good King According to Homer*, Col. 5

<sup>77</sup> Livy, *The History of Rome*, 2

number of challenges would be possible, making civil unrest and revolution more likely in the future.

However, though the Republic had endured for such a long time it did not always produce stability. Constant foreign warfare, though it enriched the elites, was very demanding of the average Roman citizen and on two occasions (Pyrrhus in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and Hannibal in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC) incited foreign invasions into Italy, causing widespread disruption and strife. Political violence also became an issue after the assassinations of the Gracchi brothers, Tiberius in 133 BC and Gaius in 122 BC.<sup>78</sup> From the Gracchi's deaths up until Cassius' lifetime, Roman politics grew increasingly volatile; Sulla and Gaius Marius's conflicts brought strife to Rome during the early 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, and Sulla's victory led to tyranny and mass proscriptions. This political disruption was endemic by Cassius lifetime; its continued presence for the last century was a clear sign that this was not a passing crisis but a deep institutional problem. Though the political structure of the Republic may not be entirely to blame for this instability, the constant civil conflict was a clear sign that the Republic, in its current form, was inept at preventing it. Given this the sole fact that the Republic was traditional and had survived for such a long time is not enough to justify its existence; some might even claim that the Republic's failure to change was a factor in causing these problems.

There is an argument made by Polybius, in which he claims that political systems are in constant revolution; political institutions degrade and over time power is dispersed. A state begins as monarchy which becomes tyranny, then power moves to a small elite aristocracy which becomes an oligarchy, then to democracy, then into a state of mob rule and then finally back into monarchy, when the cycle starts all over again. Polybius believed this was inevitable in simple constitutions because power is always monopolised by a certain group, whether it be a king, the elite or the masses. Whilst one group held all the power they will inevitably become corrupt and degenerate through hereditary succession, which would lead to this constant revolution and perpetual instability.<sup>79</sup> The Roman Republic was believed to have resisted this inexorable degradation and inevitable instability because it was a mixed and balanced

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<sup>78</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, 1.16, 26

<sup>79</sup> Polybius, *Histories*, 6.4-8

political system. The consulship represented monarchical power, the senate represented aristocratic power and the popular assemblies represented democratic power; whilst all these institutions fulfilled their functions all sections of society had a role in the state and each one balanced the other two, preventing degradation. Thus the Republic, through its mixed political system could foster social cohesion and harmony, whilst preventing political and the social instability which was inevitable in simple constitutions. Though this is not an Epicurean argument it was a well established theory amongst Roman intellectuals, Cicero endorsed this view in the *Republic* and Cassius was no doubt aware of it as well.<sup>80</sup> Roman history also demonstrates the Republic's ability to adapt and bring disenfranchised groups into the system; on two occasions the plebeians seceded from Rome, once in 494 BC over political elitism and again in 287 BC over economic deprivation, and were able to come to terms with the patricians both times. This shows how the Republic was an inclusive, socially cohesive system which promoted stability.<sup>81</sup>

On the other hand, one might argue that though the Republic maintained social cohesion in the early and middle periods, there is good evidence to show that this cohesion, and thus the stability it brought, degraded in the later period. Sulla's autocratic dictatorship is a clear example of tyranny, which the other institutions were unable to counter.<sup>82</sup> The social war from 91-88 BC shows that the exclusivity of the Republic was still a major issue, capable of causing severe unrest very close to Rome.<sup>83</sup> Most damaging of all was the growing rift between rich and poor. The dramatic expansion of the empire caused an influx of wealth and slaves which benefited the wealthy at the expense of poor. This caused major civil unrest and the inevitable rise of populist politicians, which exploited the divide between rich and poor to gather power to themselves and unbalance the system. The Republic was powerless to stop these deep social problems from becoming entrenched in Roman society; this destroyed the social cohesion of Rome and created political instability, which inevitably led to destructive civil wars.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Cicero *Republic*, 1.42, 45

<sup>81</sup> Livy, *The History of Rome*, 2. 23-33

<sup>82</sup> Plutarch, *Sulla*, 31

<sup>83</sup> Velleius Paterculus, *History of Rome*, 15-6

<sup>84</sup> This is by no means a full account of the social, economic, military and political problems which led to the decline and fall of the Roman Republic, the details and debate over the issue are better discussed elsewhere.

Overall the merits of the Republican system in creating stability appear either purely theoretical or grossly outdated. Though there is good reason to believe philosophically that the Republic could promote stability, it is clear that during Cassius' time it was unable to do so. One might argue that it is unfair to presume that a contemporary Roman, such as Cassius, would be able to analyse correctly these deep social problems and the Republic's role in promoting them, arguing that these issues are only clear through hindsight and wider view of the development of Rome over the Republican period. However, though Cassius might not have been able to perceive the deep social trends, the outward symptoms, such as populist politicians and impoverished lower classes, would have been clear for anyone to see and it would have been obvious that the current political system was not promoting stability. Had the conflict between Caesar and Pompey been the first civil conflict in Rome, Cassius may have been excused for interpreting this as a problem caused by the individuals involved rather than the system. This however, was not the case, and the repeated civil conflicts throughout the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC show that the Republic itself was at fault.

#### 4.2 *Stability and Caesar*

The first point to address is the Epicurean hostility to tyranny. Caesar was undoubtedly a tyrant of Rome so it is worth analysing why Epicureanism disliked tyranny and whether these arguments apply to Caesar. Though there is no complete criticism of tyranny in the Epicurean corpus, there are several brief mentions of it: Diogenes Laertius said the Epicurean sage would not be a tyrant, Diogenes of Oenoanda's inscription says 'By making men tyrants you permit outrages' and it is thought that Epicurus' work, *On Life*, contained a critique of tyranny.<sup>85</sup> Philodemus' fragmentary work, *On the Good King According to Homer*, also contains a criticism of tyranny, saying that those who rule through the fear of their subjects are tyrannical and create instability.<sup>86</sup> These mentions of tyranny indicate that most Epicurean philosophers believed that tyrannical regimes were unstable because they ruled harshly and used fear, which inevitably created instability and revolution. It is likely

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<sup>85</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, 10.119, Diogenes of Oenoanda, Frag 22, Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, pp 36

<sup>86</sup> Philodemus, *The Good King According to Homer*, Col. 24

that Lucretius' passage describing the death of kings and ensuing anarchy refers to this idea of tyranny causing unrest; the line 'the people eagerly trample on what they once feared' shows that he believed harsh leaders caused this type of revolution.<sup>87</sup>

The Epicureans, as I have said, do support peaceful monarchies, so their criticisms of tyranny do not apply to all singular rulers. Given this we must draw a distinction between monarchy and tyranny in order to judge whether Caesar would be an acceptable leader for an Epicurean. Unfortunately, in most places where Epicureans mention monarchy and tyranny, they do not make any qualifications; given this and the Epicurean principle of writing plainly, it is best to assume that they held the traditional meanings of the two words. Plato gives a full description in *The Republic* where he describes tyrants as leaders who arise through the popularity with the masses and rule without the constraint of law.<sup>88</sup> He says tyrants are always corrupt, using their power unjustly to execute and exile people and seize property in a self-destructive manner, eventually leading to their downfall.<sup>89</sup> Tyranny appears to imply, lawlessness, illegitimate power, and the merciless and destructive use of that power. Philodemus shows that he recognises this description when he says:

For a king: ... to practise mildness, fairness, royal gentleness and harmony of disposition to the greatest extent possible, as leading to a stable monarchy and not to a despotic exercise of power by fear. But Cambyses...<sup>90</sup>

Unfortunately the text after 'Cambyses' is lost, but it is safe to assume that after a description of a benevolent monarch, Cambyses is to be described as acting contrary to this, as a despotic tyrannical figure. We know from Herodotus that Cambyses was despotic and volatile leader, who inspired fear in his subjects; he was, however, the legitimate emperor of Persia. It seems that Philodemus, and likely other Epicureans, are more concerned with the nature of the leader's rule rather than their legitimacy. Thus an Epicurean, judging Caesar's ability to create stability, should focus on whether his rule was fair, lawful and is built on the love of the people rather than whether or not he usurped power from more legitimate authorities.

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<sup>87</sup> Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, 1136-40

<sup>88</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 565c-d

<sup>89</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 565e,-569c

<sup>90</sup> Philodemus, *On the Good King According to Homer*, Col. 24 (Asmis)

As an individual Caesar was praised for his personal restraint, he was a thoughtful and measured character who acted rationally, without religious superstition. Even Cato, one of his greatest enemies, said that his self-control, particularly concerning consumption of alcohol, was admirable.<sup>91</sup> This restraint is also reflected in his clemency towards his enemies; following the civil war he pardoned everyone who laid down arms and later involved many politicians who had fought against him in the governing of Rome. This showed that Caesar lacked the volatility, vindictiveness and merciless nature that is normally associated with tyranny. Epicureans endorse these traits as those of a good monarch; Philodemus says that clemency is important for a king and it has been theorised that the central aim of *On the Good King According to Homer* is a plea for restraint and self-control in Roman politics.<sup>92</sup> Thus Caesar's personality seems very appropriate for an Epicurean monarch.

Caesar was also very popular with the Roman the people. From his victories in Gaul onwards he became the most popular politician in Rome and thus his tyranny was supported by the love of the people. He nurtured and maintained this popularity through continued military success, donations of money and food to the Roman people and the funding of public entertainment.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, Caesar won the support of the Italians and many provincials by admitting them into the senate; though this was likely a political move to control the senate, it won him popularity with people who had previously been excluded from the Roman political system.<sup>94</sup> This shows that despite being technically a tyrant, his rule was based on the support of wide section of Roman society; this wide support is a source of stability because, unlike during the Republic, rival politicians could not provoke the hostility required to cause instability. It is also important that this support is genuine and not based on fear; Caesar's benevolence to the Roman people meant they had no desire to depose him, drawing the state into anarchy as Lucretius describes. The only major exception to this wide support is the aristocracy; though the elite were not controlled through threats and proscriptions they were mostly still hostile to his reign and only restrained

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<sup>91</sup> Suetonius, *Caesar*, 53, 59, Caesar's lack superstition about gods and omens would have been particularly appealing to Epicureans because they believed that superstitious beliefs caused irrationality

<sup>92</sup> Murray, *Philodemus On the Good King According to Homer*, pp 177

<sup>93</sup> Suetonius, *Caesar*, 37-9

<sup>94</sup> Velleius Paterculus, through his highly positive account of Caesar, shows that the Italians admired him.

themselves out of fear or impotency. As I have said in the last chapter there was no direct threat to the lives of individual members of Roman elite; many who remained hostile to the regime were allowed to retreat from public life and some were even allowed to continue their political careers. This again shows that though Caesar may not be a legitimate king, he does veer more to the picture of an Epicurean benevolent monarch because, for the most part, he rules with the consent of the populace.

Despite being an unlawful leader, Caesar shows himself to have the appropriate personality and style of leadership for a monarch that an Epicurean should approve of. Caesar's tyranny also provides the traditional advantages of a single leader: the strength of singular leadership and the monopolisation of power.<sup>95</sup> Overall, where stability is concerned, Caesar's tyranny appears to be perfectly acceptable for an Epicurean and certainly not a state of emergency, whilst the Republic appears incapable of providing stability. However one final, and rather speculative, problem worth considering would be that, though Caesar may be a stable ruler, the future is uncertain; would Caesar institutionalise the monarchy and if so could Cassius rely upon similarly restrained and well-loved leaders taking his place. Such speculation is unsuitable for Cassius' decision but it is important to note that the stability of any monarchy depends on the personality behind it.

### 4.3 Conclusion

In comparison both systems appear to show their merits, but Epicureanism should favour Caesar's tyranny for several reasons. Caesar rules in the manner of a benevolent monarch rather than a tyrant and he achieved a measure of the stability. The Republic, on the other hand, though theoretically should produce stability, fails to achieve these results. The Epicurean sense of *Realpolitik* would favour Caesar, simply because he is more capable of achieving results. There is no room in Epicureanism for any ideological commitment to a certain form of government; though a sense of practical conservatism may favour the Republic, to promote it out of faith would be entirely un-Epicurean. Lastly even if an Epicurean were to believe that the Republic was the more favourable system for promoting stability he would need to

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<sup>95</sup> Complete monopoly of power would prevent any civic burdens being placed on Epicureans; this is very compatible with 'unnoticed life'

accept that assassinating Caesar and changing the system would create immediate instability. This more than anything should stay Cassius' hand; the apparent stability of the moment should not count as 'a state of emergency' and if acting might create instability that would mean Cassius would require strong, conclusive justification to go through with the conspiracy and he does not appear to have this.

## **Justice**

Although Epicureans are silent concerning most political issues, the topic of justice is discussed extensively. Epicurus says:

For prudence is the source of all other virtues, teaching that it is impossible to live pleasantly without living prudently, honourably and justly.<sup>96</sup>

For Epicureans, living virtuously and attaining tranquillity was directly linked, thus living a just life is necessary for Epicureans. Epicurean justice is both a private and a public virtue and thus an Epicurean must act justly and look to promote justice in society. Privately the absence of justice causes psychological disharmony through both the guilt of acting unjustly and the fear of punishment for committing unjust actions.<sup>97</sup> Publicly the absence of justice creates a state of anarchy and chaos, in which people do not respect their mutual associations with each other. Lucretius tells us that if early human civilisations had not created and honoured just agreements then the human race would have been entirely extinguished.<sup>98</sup>

Justice is an important issue for Cassius because, in his decision, he should be taking into account both whether the decision to assassinate Caesar is just, personally speaking, and whether or not the tyranny or the Republic are just political institutions. A likely 'state of emergency' to justify Epicurean political action would be a breakdown of justice, as the loss of security would be so great that it would impair tranquillity.<sup>99</sup> Given this it is important to analyse, once again, whether the tyranny

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<sup>96</sup> Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*, 132 (Inwood & Gerson)

<sup>97</sup> Epicurus, *Key Doctrines*, 34-5

<sup>98</sup> Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, 1020-30, 1140-50

<sup>99</sup> Griffin, *Philosophy, Politics and Politicians in Rome*, pp 30

constitutes a breakdown in justice and whether it gives Cassius sufficient justification to take action.

### 5.1 *Epicurean Justice*

Epicureans believe in contractual justice, the grounding tenet being ‘a pledge of reciprocal usefulness, neither to harm nor be harmed.’<sup>100</sup> Epicurus says that justice is a secondary property, which does not exist in its own right; it did not exist before civilisation and does not exist between beings unwilling or unable to make reciprocal contracts.<sup>101</sup> Thus Epicurus appears to give a conventionalist account of justice, which seems to describe justice simply as contracts between human beings, based on mutual advantage. However, Epicurus gives an independent qualification for justice, saying:

Of actions believed to be just, that whose usefulness in circumstances of mutual associations is supported by the testimony [of experience] has the attribute of serving as just whether it is the same for everyone or not. And if someone passes a law and it does not turn out to be in accord with what is useful in mutual associations, this no longer possess the nature of justice.<sup>102</sup>

This means that there is a standard by which convention can be judged to be just or unjust, whether a convention is ‘useful in mutual association.’ This gives Epicurean justice a foundation in nature; as human beings naturally desire security, they naturally come to desire these contracts of mutual association.<sup>103</sup> This does however create a tension: if there is an independent standard drawn from nature then what role, if any, does convention serve?<sup>104</sup> A similar issue is found within David Hume’s description of justice; he also holds that justice has an independent standard (public utility) and yet it draws on convention.<sup>105</sup> Hume believed that though convention does not decide whether something is just or unjust, a stable, dominant convention can

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<sup>100</sup> Epicurus, *Key Doctrines*, 31

<sup>101</sup> Epicurus, *Key Doctrines*, 32-3, Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, 927-1011, Porphyry, *On Abstinence*, 1.10.1-12.7

<sup>102</sup> Epicurus, *key Doctrines*, 37 (Inwood & Gerson)

<sup>103</sup> This shows that Epicurean justice crosses the traditional boundaries of the ‘nature versus convention’ debate, which was initiated by the sophists in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC.

<sup>104</sup> Mitsis, *Epicurus’ Ethical Theory*, pp 80-1

<sup>105</sup> Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3

provide the conformity which is necessary to achieve justice.<sup>106</sup> This same answer applies to Epicureanism; though the standard of justice may be the same for all, conformity to a convention helps realise the benefits of mutual cooperation. Even a sage needs the coordination achieved by a stable convention to gain the security from knowing that a reciprocal community will be realised.<sup>107</sup>

It is also important to make a distinction between two senses of Epicurean justice; ideal and practical. Ideal Epicurean justice is voluntary cooperation within a community which fully recognises the value of these mutual contracts. This is eloquently put by Diogenes of Oenoanda:

So we shall not achieve wisdom universally, since not all are capable of it. But if we assume it to be possible, then truly the life of the gods will pass to men. For everything will be full of justice and mutual love, and there will come to be no need of fortifications or laws and all the things which we contrive on account of one another.<sup>108</sup>

Here Diogenes speculates that if everyone were to understand the benefits, both to the individual and the community, of living justly, then law and punishment would be unnecessary, because people would accept just contracts voluntarily.<sup>109</sup> Lucretius' description of the first human communities is close to this situation because the members submit to contracts voluntarily; however the motivation for accepting them is the fear of living outside of society rather than a correct understanding of what is best for mutual association.<sup>110</sup>

The ideal picture, as Diogenes himself admits, is unrealistic for contemporary politics and any foreseeable future. The Epicureans also present a more practical sense of justice. Epicureans accept that not all people either understand the value of just contracts or understand the nature of justice and thus laws must be put in place to

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<sup>106</sup> Gauthier, *David Hume, Contractarian*, pp 7-11

<sup>107</sup> Brown, *Politics and Society*, pp 194

<sup>108</sup> Diogenes of Oenoanda, Frag. 56 (Chilton)

<sup>109</sup> Armstrong, *Epicurean Justice*, pp 326

<sup>110</sup> Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, 1020-30

motivate them to be just.<sup>111</sup> Lucretius presents law and the threat of punishment as a necessary evil; people's irrational behaviour and ignorance of justice requires the threat of punishment to promote the outward effect of a just society. Despite this rather pessimistic view of mankind Epicureans do not believe, as Hobbes does, that mankind is by its very nature cruel and self-interested; rather that humans innately desire the stability of justice but are ignorant of how to achieve it.<sup>112</sup> This kind of law, which enforces mutual cooperation is not necessary to make Epicureans just, rather its purpose is to protect Epicureans from people who act unjustly.<sup>113</sup> Arguably an ideal sense of justice is possible amongst a small Epicurean community, but legislation is necessary to maintain justice in larger societies. Epicurean communities existed within and relied upon larger nations for security, thus we can say that an Epicurean community is reliant on a practical justice within the larger community to maintain that security. Without law and order, security within society would be impossible, and thus an Epicurean should in his daily life promote justice through just action and, in extreme cases, he should take political action to prevent the breakdown of justice.<sup>114</sup>

As Epicureanism is an egoist philosophy the benefits to the individual must be spelled out explicitly. As I have mentioned, justice in society prevents, or at least discourages, one member of the society from harming another, thus creating security for the community, which leads to security for the individual.<sup>115</sup> This justice is self-fulfilling: by conforming to the just conventions of society you promote it by example and breed confidence in your neighbours that you will continue to honour these conventions. This confidence motivates your neighbours to fulfil their contracts to you; as long as conventions are held by most members of a community, the community at large will still honour them. Conversely, contravening just conventions breeds insecurity; if other people do not hold to conventions then there is far less motivation for you to do so yourself. Furthermore, as just contracts are conceived to prevent people from harming each other, an Epicurean, who would have no desire to harm another, would lose nothing from obeying a just contract; whilst he would gain

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<sup>111</sup> Porphyry, *On Abstinence*, 1.7.1-9.4

<sup>112</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1.11

<sup>113</sup> Mitsis, *Epicurean Ethical Theory*, pp 89

<sup>114</sup> Griffin, *Philosophy, Politics and Politicians at Rome*, pp 30

<sup>115</sup> Armstrong, *Epicurean Justice*, pp 329-30

the security in knowing that others would not harm him.<sup>116</sup> Acting justly as an individual and promoting a practical sense of justice is highly beneficial for an Epicurean's security and will aid him in attaining tranquillity.

## 5.2 *Justice, Tyranny and the Republic*

As I have said in earlier chapters, the assassination is an attempt at political change, to remove the tyranny and restore the Republic. Thus promoting justice is an appropriate justification; if Caesar's tyranny constituted a breakdown of practical justice, and conversely the Republic promoted a just society, this would provide sufficient justification for Caesar's assassination. Both systems must be examined to show, which system, by Epicureans standards, best promotes justice.

Momigliano argues that Epicureans of the Republican period believed that the Republican system was an especially just system: He begins by taking account of the known Epicureans during the civil war, noting whether they sided with Caesar or Pompey; he argues that though there were many prominent Epicurean supporters of Caesar, such as Calpurnius Piso, most sided against him. He argues that this shows that Roman Epicureans had strong political feelings and those who sided with the Republic were of greater number and much more enthusiastic. He then argues that the Epicurean idea of 'Frank Speech' which is discussed by Epicureans as a correct way to discuss philosophy should be taken as having connotations of 'free speech.' If this were so Epicureanism would be both compatible with the Republic and incompatible with tyranny. He then argues that the Epicureans favoured a state founded on consent, which would appropriately fit the Epicurean sense of contractual justice. The Republic, as opposed to the tyranny, shows this consent through its democratic process. Finally Momigliano argues that Lucretius' history of human development places the Republic in an esteemed, advanced position. After the fall of kings, the people set up 'laws and magistracies,' this is a clear reference to the Republican form of government and Momigliano argues that this is an endorsement of the Republic and shows a belief that only this type of system can maintain law and order.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Mitsis, *Epicurean Ethical Theory*, pp 94

<sup>117</sup> Momigliano, *Review of Farrington, B. Science and Politics in the Ancient World*, pp 152-3, 6-7

There are problems with Momigliano's argument. Firstly, in his analysis of the known Epicureans and their political affiliations he neglects to mention that there is a much more arbitrary line of division between those who support or oppose Caesar: class. In the civil war, most of Caesar's supporters were equestrians and most of his opponents were aristocrats; most Roman Epicureans, barring a few exceptions, such as Calpurnius Piso, sided with their class.<sup>118</sup> The apparent favouring of the Republican side of the conflict is likely caused by history's bias to tell the story of aristocracy rather than genuine Epicurean support of the Republic. Secondly there is no evidence that Epicurean 'Parrhesia' has any political connotations; it is described as an appropriate way to discuss philosophy and as being important in social relations. It is anachronistic to apply any sense of 'freedom of speech' to this concept.<sup>119</sup> Lastly, Momigliano's analysis of Lucretius is misleading; though Lucretius does say that 'laws and magistracies' brought an end to civil violence, there is no implication that this is a superior system to monarchy.<sup>120</sup> Though Lucretius history of human development discusses 'advancement', he shows earlier on that human development is not always a good thing. When he compares the fears, which men had to deal with in pre-civilisation to the horrors of war and civil violence which occur in developed civilisations he adopts an appearance of neutrality over the two, as if fear and suffering will beset the human race at every stage of development unless Epicureanism is widely accepted by mankind.<sup>121</sup> Furthermore Lucretius' explanation of the fear of punishment, which came necessarily with this stage of human development, is a strong criticism of the Republic and similar systems. Thus it would be misleading to argue that Lucretius is supporter of the Republic, when at best he seems only to accept it tacitly.

However there is one part of Momigliano's argument which shows good reason for Epicureans to support the Republic; the belief that the Republic is a superior system because it relies on consent. As I have shown in 5.1 Epicurean justice is contractual and is reliant on citizens' ability to make contracts with one another; thus the consent

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<sup>118</sup> Sedley, *Epicureanism and the Roman Republic*, pp 43

<sup>119</sup> Tsouna, *Epicurean Therapeutic Strategies*, pp 252-3, The concept of *Libertas* was important to Roman politicians but this applies more to the freedom to pursue political careers than any modern notion of political liberty

<sup>120</sup> In *Lucretius and Politics* (pp 129-30) Fowler argues that Lucretius has no strict political agenda and would favour a peaceful monarchy over an unstable democratic institution.

<sup>121</sup> Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, 989-1011, Konstan, *A Life Worthy of the Gods*, pp 80-2

of society is very important in those contracts being validated. Though the Republic was run by representative magistracies and an aristocratic senate, laws were passed within the assembly of the people; this meant that for a law to be binding the Roman citizens would have to consent to it. Furthermore the mixed constitution allowed for different sections of society to have appropriate voices in the running of the state; this made an inclusive political system, which appears appropriate for Epicurean justice. The Republic also had judiciary bodies which practised fair and equitable punishment, which, as Lucretius says, prevented people from taking disproportionate revenge for wrongdoings; this further contributes to the first principle of Epicurean justice, that one should make contracts, neither to harm nor be harmed.<sup>122</sup> These principles show that the Republic, as a political system was compatible with Epicurean justice and Philodemus shows that some Epicureans endorsed this. In *On the Good King According to Homer*, he approves of the debates between Greek leaders, acknowledging the importance of mutual consent in government. This is a veiled reference to the strengths of Republican politics, praising the value of taking multiple views into account when making decisions.<sup>123</sup>

However, though theoretically the Republic appears to promote Epicurean justice, it fails to do so in reality. The consent of the people in the Republic was gradually reduced throughout the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. The assassination of the Gracchi, both of whom passed laws with the consent of the people in opposition to the senate, is a defining point because it showed the political elite were willing to use violence to force their political views upon the people. The increase of authority in the senate also unbalanced the system in favour of the aristocrats, further weakening the voices of the people and thus weakening the public consensus in the actions of the government. Economic changes also disrupted the social harmony of the Republic; the influx of slaves into Rome during the 1<sup>st</sup> century caused increasing unemployment amongst the lower classes and the growing wealth of the elites allowed them to acquire land throughout Italy, further monopolising business and depriving the lower classes.<sup>124</sup> Though the political structure remained intact and still theoretically inclusive, the social and economic situation changed to make its strengths

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<sup>122</sup> Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, 1148-50

<sup>123</sup> Philodemus, *On the Good King According to Homer*, Col. 32-3, Murray, *Philodemus On the Good King According to Homer*, pp 176

<sup>124</sup> Adcock, *Roman Political Ideas and Practice*, pp 28-9, 49-50

irrelevant.<sup>125</sup> As I have mentioned in chapter 4, conflict between politicians was common and thus consent between the ruling classes was eroded. Philodemus' *On the Good King According to Homer* can be interpreted as a call for restraint and more equitable relationships between politicians; thus showing recognition of the failings of Roman politics in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. This shows that though the Republic allowed for Epicurean justice in theory, it had failed to do so in practice.

Caesar's tyranny, on the other hand, did not allow for any consent. After he gained the dictatorship *in perpetuity* full sovereignty passed to him; his control over the magistracies through patronage and appointment meant that all the Roman political institutions were under his control and there was no consent from anyone on how the state was managed. This kind of focused power conflicts with ideal Epicurean justice because the contracts which govern society are in hands of one man and thus people would not be able to enter in to them voluntarily; practical justice, however, is still achievable. As I have mentioned earlier, monarchy is an acceptable system for Epicureans because the most important thing is maintaining peace, law and order; though the Republic may have some ideological significance through consent, practical law and order still has more utility in attaining tranquillity. Caesar was very successful at restoring law and order to Rome; by monopolising power he ended the constant political conflicts between Republican politicians. The loyalty he had established in the plebeians and the military made it very difficult for rivals to gain enough support to challenge his dominance; because of this, after defeating his enemies, Caesar was able to maintain a lasting peace in Rome. This all points to Caesar's success at attaining practical Epicurean justice throughout Rome, something the Republic had failed to do in the past century.

For Cassius to justify the assassination through justice, we have to be able to show that Caesar's tyranny was a breakdown of justice. Caesar broke the conventions of the Republic attaining his position, but whether that was just or not is not the issue for Cassius, rather his decision depends on whether the tyranny is a just system once it is in place. As I have shown Caesar's tyranny is perfectly compatible with practical justice and thus, according with Epicureanism, the standards of security are met.

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<sup>125</sup> Fritz, *The Theory of Mixed Constitution in Antiquity*, pp 251-2

Cassius, as an Epicurean, should not risk political action in order to achieve any ideological sense of justice that the Republic may possess, especially when this very action would risk causing an actual breakdown of justice through such a drastic political change.

### 5.3 *A Just Murder?*

A further point which Cassius has to contend with is that by going through the assassination of Caesar he would be breaking the first principle of Epicurean justice, 'not to harm or be harmed.' In a regular situation murder is intolerable for an Epicurean because both guilt and the fear of punishment would cause great disturbance and detract from tranquillity. For the assassination to be acceptable we must explain how the murder of Caesar could be an exception to this rule.

Though murder in Rome was both illegal and unjust there is speculation that tyrannicide had some legal basis and at the very least had a strong cultural value, which could be considered a convention.<sup>126</sup> This convention of tyrannicide gives the possibility of an exception to the 'not to harm or be harmed' rule in Epicurean justice; arguably this concept could be described as a regional irregularities in justice.<sup>127</sup> Thus the peculiarities of Rome and its history of tyrannical rule could allow for tyrannicide to be a just murder by Epicurean standards. However, the standard of justness to which all laws and conventions are held is whether it is 'useful for mutual association' and thus so must tyrannicide. Given what I have shown in 5.2; that Caesar's tyranny restored law and order, which is useful to mutual association, his murder would therefore be detrimental to it. Furthermore, the open murder of an individual detracts from the convention that one should not harm another; the public weakening of the convention makes the possibility of further political murders more common and thus is even more detrimental to stability. Epicurus said that, because the justness of a law is dependent on an independent standard, the justness of a law or convention will be contingent on the current circumstances; thus, tyrannicide may be acceptable when a

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<sup>126</sup> The expulsion of the Tarquin Superbus in 509 BC serves as a precedent for the overthrow of tyrants; whether or not it was written into law, there is still a strong Republican convention of active hostility to tyrants. Cicero's attempt to gain amnesty for Brutus, Cassius and the other conspirators after the assassination shows that such an acknowledgement of tyrannicide as lawful killing was very possible.

<sup>127</sup> Epicurus, *Key Doctrines*, 36

tyrant has a detrimental effect on mutual association but not in the case of Caesar.<sup>128</sup> In this case, tyrannicide is not a legitimate excuse to breach the founding principles of Epicurean justice and thus to murder Caesar would be unjust.

#### 5.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the assassination of Caesar cannot be justified as a private action or public action. Though there may be some advantages to the Republic, Caesar's tyranny is sufficient to provide practical justice to the state and thus provide the necessary security to Epicureans living within it. The conservative and private inclinations of Epicureanism should prevail simply because Caesar's tyranny does not create an emergency situation which would necessitate political action. Any kind ideological argument would be incompatible with Epicureanism and thus Cassius has no justification to murder Caesar by Epicurean standards; furthermore Epicureanism as a whole would favour inaction in this case. Momigliano's sense of 'Heroic Epicureanism' attempts to redefine Epicureanism as more active in promoting the ideals of Epicureanism but as he lacks both source evidence and an explanation of how this would provide tranquillity in any sense we must discard it.

#### **Tranquillity**

Having considered all these factors, the final conclusion must come from a discussion of tranquillity; being the sole end goal of an Epicurean lifestyle it must be the final judge of on whether Cassius was right to assassinate Caesar. I have shown in this paper that despite there being some reasons to believe that the assassination may aid tranquillity (ie. helping friends, freedom etc.), the importance of living unnoticed and political stability give far greater reason not to act. Caesar's tyranny, as it was at the time, was no threat to an Epicurean lifestyle and in no meaningful way was it detrimental to tranquillity. Though there are some contentious arguments over whether the Republic was a more compatible political system with Epicureanism, the conservative nature of Epicurean political thought should lead to favouring the status quo as long as it does not directly threaten anything necessary for an Epicurean

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<sup>128</sup> Epicurus, *Key Doctrines*, 38

lifestyle. The Republic provided nothing necessary for an Epicurean that the tyranny could not. I find that Momigliano's and Sedley's explanations of how Cassius might have justified the assassination lacking. Momigliano's 'Heroic Epicureanism' has very little evidence and its ideological aims are far removed from the modest political goals of Epicureanism. Sedley's proposed concept of 'moral satisfaction' as a secondary end in Epicureanism is appealing but also lacks evidence. Griffin, on the other hand, is more illuminating; her proposal that Roman politicians' philosophical interests were about providing a theoretical basis and framework of ideas rather than a complete guide on political action fits the relationship between Cassius' Epicureanism and his actions particularly well. Cassius' letter to Cicero shows that, though the complete Epicurean lifestyle did not appeal to him at the time, he was still interested in Epicurean virtue. It seems that Cassius appears to be an Epicurean, in touch with the virtues of Epicureanism, but capable of acting independently of them in this unique situation. What my essay has shown is that Epicureanism was not sufficient to provide the justification for the assassination, given this his justification and motivation is likely comes from his staunch Republicanism.

The consequences of Cassius' decision were unfortunately quite the opposite of what he desired. The death of Caesar led to further power struggles; Cassius and Brutus were forced to flee Rome, civil conflict was renewed by the 2<sup>nd</sup> triumvirate and mass proscriptions occurred, in which Cassius' close friend Cicero was executed.<sup>129</sup> Under such circumstances any kind of private, Epicurean lifestyle would have been impossible. Cassius spent the rest of his life at war, gathering legions and fighting allies of the triumvirs; in 42 BC he returned to the West, meeting Brutus in Asia Minor. The two friends led their armies to Philippi, in Macedon, where they were defeated by Antony and Octavian. Knowing the battle was lost Cassius ordered one of his freedmen to kill him, despite suicide being against the beliefs of Epicureanism.<sup>130</sup> This says a great deal about who Cassius was first and foremost, for in his bleakest moment he chose to follow the example of Cato the younger, committing suicide rather than learn to find tranquillity in the situation, as Epicurus

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<sup>129</sup> Plutarch, *Cicero*, 46-8

<sup>130</sup> Though Epicureans believe that death should not be feared, they also believe that life can always be enjoyed despite the situation; thus even if Cassius' position after the battle of Philippi was rather bleak he still should have continued living, just as Epicurus continued to live after illness had made his life very painful.

might have done.<sup>131</sup> In his final act Cassius chose to be a Republican first and an Epicurean second.

What kept Cassius from acting as a true Epicurean were both his strong ideologically Republican, anti-tyrannical beliefs and the unique political problems, which plagued Rome throughout his life. His personal, though un-Epicurean, hostility towards Caesar made it difficult and maybe impossible for him to simply step back from politics and lead a tranquil life; for someone with such strong Republican beliefs tranquillity and tyranny were irreconcilable. This points to a shortcoming in Epicureanism, an inability to understand that certain character traits and deeply held beliefs cannot easily be let go in favour of a tranquil life, that the combination of strong ideals and unfortunate political events can lead a man to a point where tranquillity is impossible and the decision whether to act or not act is irrelevant. What I conclude from my analysis of Cassius position and the important factors of Epicureanism is that the correct course for an Epicurean would be not to assassinate Caesar, but to act correctly, in this way, would be unlikely to help Cassius attain tranquillity because the betrayal of his Republican beliefs would ceaselessly disturb him. This perhaps is an exception to Epicurus' belief that all pains can be endured and tranquillity always attainable as such a deep psychological disturbance may be impossible to overcome.

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<sup>131</sup> Cato the younger committed suicide shortly after the battle of Thapsus. Since Caesar had defeated all resistance to his tyranny Cato decided to end his life, reasoning that to live under a tyrant would be intolerable. This action became a symbol of heroic defiance against tyranny and a precedent for those who believed in the Republic, which many would emulate.

## Appendix – Evidence of Cassius' Epicureanism

A

Cicero *Letters to his Friends* 15.18 – Cicero to Cassius 46 BC

My letter would have been longer had not I been asked for it at the very moment when a post to you was starting; longer too, had it contained some amount of persiflage; as for speaking seriously, we can hardly do so without risk. "Well then," you say, "we can have a laugh." No, I positively assure you, not very easily. And yet, that is the one and only thing we have to distract us from our troubles. "How about our philosophy then?" you will say. Well, yours is one of pleasure, but mine troubles me, because I am ashamed of being a slave. So I pretend to busy myself with other things, to prevent Plato's emphatic reproach from ringing in my ears. (Williams)

B

Cicero *Letters to his Friends* 15.17 – Cicero to Cassius 45 BC

There is no news about Spain, but it is very eagerly awaited. There are rather depressing rumours, but they are unauthenticated. Our friend Pansa set out in military uniform on December the 30th, so that even the man in the street might grasp the fact which you had lately begun to question - that "the good must be chosen for its own sake." For because he relieved many of their afflictions, and because he proved his humanity amid all these disasters, he was escorted on his way by a marvellous display of kindly feeling on the part of honest men. As to your having stayed at Brundisium until now, I strongly approve of it and am glad of it; and upon my word, I think you will act wisely if you "shun vain pursuits." Certainly to me who love you, it will be a pleasure, and for the future when you send home a bundle of letters, remember me, and I'll bless you. For my own part I shall never allow anybody, if I know it, to go to you without a letter from me. (Williams)

C

Cicero *Letters to his Friends* 15.16 – Cicero to Cassius 45 BC

For it somehow happens, that whenever I write anything to you, you seem to be at my very elbow; and that, not by way of visions of images, as your new friends term them, who believe that even mental visions are conjured up by what Catus calls spectres (for let me remind you that Catus the Insubrian, an Epicurean, who died lately, gives the name of spectres to what the famous Gargettian [Epicurus], and long before that Democritus, called images).

But, even supposing that the eye can be struck by these spectres because they run up against it quite of their own accord, how the mind can be so struck is more than I can see. It will be your duty to explain to me, when you arrive here safe and sound, whether the spectre of you is at my command to come up as soon as the whim has taken me to think about you - and not only about you, who always occupy my inmost

heart, but suppose I begin thinking about the Isle of Britain, will the image of that wing its way to my consciousness?

But of this later on. I am only sounding you now to see in what spirit you take it. For if you are angry and annoyed, I shall have more to say, and shall insist upon your being reinstated in that school of philosophy, out of which you have been ousted "by violence and an armed force." In this formula the words "within this year" are not usually added; so even if it is now two or three years since, bewitched by the blandishments of Pleasure, you sent a notice of divorce to Virtue, I am free to act as I like. And yet to whom am I talking? To you, the most gallant gentleman in the world, who, ever since you set foot in the forum, have done nothing but what bears every mark of the most impressive distinction. Why, in that very school you have selected I apprehend there is more vitality than I should have supposed, if only because it has your approval. "How did the whole subject occur to you?" you will say. Because I had nothing else to write. About politics I can write nothing, for I do not care to write what I feel. (Williams)

D

Cicero *Letters to his Friends* 15.19 – Cassius to Cicero 45 BC

I hope that you are well. I assure you that on this tour of mine there is nothing that gives me more pleasure to do than to write to you; for I seem to be talking and joking with you face to face. And yet that does not come to pass because of those spectres; and, by way of retaliation for that, in my next letter I shall let loose upon you such a rabble of Stoic boors that you will proclaim Catus a true-born Athenian.

I am glad that our friend Pansa was sped on his way by universal goodwill when he left the city in military uniform, and that not only on my own account, but also, most assuredly, on that of all our friends. For I hope that men generally will come to understand how much all the world hates cruelty, and how much it loves integrity and clemency, and that the blessings most eagerly sought and coveted by the bad ultimately find their way to the good. For it is hard to convince men that "the good is to be chosen for its own sake"; but that pleasure and tranquillity of mind is acquired by virtue, justice, and the good is both true and demonstrable. Why, Epicurus himself, from whom all the Catiuses and Amafiniuses in the world, incompetent translators of terms as they are, derive their origin, lays it down that "to live a life of pleasure is impossible without living a life of virtue and justice".

Consequently Pansa, who follows pleasure, keeps his hold on virtue, and those also whom you call pleasure-lovers are lovers of what is good and lovers of justice, and cultivate and keep all the virtues. And so Sulla, whose judgment we ought to accept, when he saw that the philosophers were at sixes and sevens, did not investigate the nature of the good, but bought up all the goods there were; and I frankly confess that I bore his death without flinching. Caesar, however, will not let us feel his loss too long; for he has a lot of condemned men to restore to us in his stead, nor will he himself feel the lack of someone to bid at his auctions when once he has cast his eye on Sulla junior.

And now to return to politics; please write back and tell me what is being done in the two Spains. I am terribly full of anxiety, and I would sooner have the old and lenient master [Caesar], than make trial of a new and cruel one. You know what an idiot Gnaeus is; you know how he deems cruelty a virtue; you know how he thinks that we have always scoffed at him. I fear that in his boorish way he will be inclined to reply by wiping our turned-up noses with the sword. Write back as you love me, and tell me what is doing. Ah! how I should like to know whether you read all this with an anxious mind or a mind at ease! For I should know at the same time what it is my duty to do. Not to be too long-winded, I bid you farewell. Continue to love me as you do. If Caesar has conquered, expect me to return quickly. (Williams)

E

Plutarch *Brutus* 37

When the shape had disappeared, Brutus called his servants; but they declared that they had neither heard any words nor seen any apparition, and so he watched the night out. As soon as it was day, however, he sought out Cassius and told him of the apparition. Cassius, who belonged to the school of Epicurus, and was in the habit of taking issue on such topics with Brutus, said: "This is our doctrine, Brutus, that we do not really feel or see everything, but perception by the senses is a pliant and deceitful thing, and besides, the intelligence is very keen to change and transform the thing perceived into any and every shape from one which has no real existence. An impression on the senses is like wax, and the soul of man, in which the plastic material and the plastic power alike exist, can very easily shape and embellish it at pleasure. This is clear from the transformations which occur in dreams, where slight initial material is transformed by the imagination into all sorts of emotions and shapes. The imagination is by nature in perpetual motion, and this motion which it has is fancy, or thought. In thy case, too, the body is worn with hardships and this condition naturally excites and perverts the intelligence. As for genii, it is incredible either that they exist, or, if they do exist, that they have the appearance or the speech of men, or a power that extends to us. For my part, I could wish it were so, in order that not only our men-at-arms, and horses, and ships, which are so numerous, but also the assistance of the gods might give us courage, conducting as we do the fairest and holiest enterprises." With such discourse did Cassius seek to calm Brutus. (Perrin)

F

Plutarch *Brutus* 39

However, it was thought that Cassius had a baleful sign during the lustration; for the lictor brought him his wreath turned upside down. And it is said that before this, also, in a procession at some festival, a golden victory belonging to Cassius, which was being borne along, fell to the ground, its bearer having slipped. And besides, many carrion birds hovered over the camp daily, and swarms of bees were seen clustering at a certain place inside the camp; this place the soothsayers shut off from the rest of the camp, in order to avert by their rites the superstitious fears which were gradually carrying even Cassius himself away from his Epicurean doctrines, and which had altogether subjugated his soldiers. (Perrin)

## G

Plutarch *Caesar* 66

Indeed, it is also said that Cassius, turning his eyes toward the statue of Pompey before the attack began, invoked it silently, although he was much addicted to the doctrines of Epicurus; but the crisis, as it would seem, when the dreadful attempt was now close at hand, replaced his former cool calculations with divinely inspired emotion. (Dryden)

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