

# The attitude to have when working at your Job

Post by "Eoghan Gardiner" of May 6, 2022 at 5:32 AM

41. At one and the same time we must philosophize, laugh, and manage our household and other business, while never ceasing to proclaim the words of true philosophy.

The fact of modern life is that we need to work in order to support ourselves and not many people enjoy their jobs (I for one don't but try to have a good time with my colleagues when at work)

It seems to me the above Vatican saying is the attitude we must have within in order to live a pleasant life at work. As any Irish mother of the past few centuries would tell us managing a household is not easy especially when children are young and so I think we can make a comparison between managing the household which Epicurus speaks about to working a regular job.

For most people, if given the choice they wouldn't go to work as much as they do, especially considering that working your whole life is not a guarantee of security and definitely not a guarantee of a pleasurable life.

How many times have we heard of men and women in their 70s beginning to enjoy retirement and then their natural end has come?

We can't escape work, so we must enjoy work. Epicurus tells us how "philosophise, laugh and proclaim the words of philosophy".

Philosophise: We can always think or have handy near us some sayings of Epicurus, we can read the succulent words and meditate on them and internalise them more and more finally making them our own words. We can keep in mind that our end is pleasure and not worry about what the goodness is but instead we choose goodness which is none other than pleasure.

Laugh: The freedom to laugh freely, is a free pleasure and easily attained. I take Epicurus advice and think back to good times with friends, funny jokes I've heard or just laugh with joy that we are free from the bonds of idealism and abstract notions of what being good is. I can laugh with joy at the fact of being alive.

Proclaim the true words of philosophy: to never cease proclaiming to myself and if the chance arrives to others Epicurus doctrine. To talk about it at any time as it is easy to talk about we don't need to go through countless syllogism but instead we can make talking philosophy what it is supposed to be namely fun.

I'm trying to think of ways and attitudes to apply Epicurus sayings to life.

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## Post by “Don” of May 6, 2022 at 7:19 AM

Good post!

Even jobs we've chosen can sometimes overwhelm us. I have Vatican Saying 35 hanging in my office pointing toward my desk to remind me of this. It doesn't mean we can't always look for new opportunities if the chance comes, but ...

VS35 Don't ruin the things you have by wanting more, but realize that they too are things you once did wish for. οὐ δεῖ λυμᾶσθαι τὰ ἔχοντα ἀπόντων ἐπιθυμίᾳ, ἀλλ'



ἐπιλογίζεσθαι ὅτι καὶ ταῦτα τῶν εὐκταίων ἦν.

I try to remember that going to work is a choice. We always have the choice to not go to work. But would that choice give us pleasure or pain? Most likely, in the end, we wouldn't have enough money if we didn't go to work, so we go. Can we look for a different job? Of course! But that isn't always feasible with health care being job-tied at least in the US. I like the attitude [Eoghan Gardiner](#) is putting forward. That coupled with VS35 can hopefully get us through the day.

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## Post by “Cassius” of May 6, 2022 at 8:49 AM

### [Quote from Eoghan Gardiner](#)

How many times have we heard of men and women in their 70s beginning to enjoy retirement and then their natural end has come?

I agree with both posts above and when we think about the choice to approach life cheerfully or sadly, we can always remember that death is inevitable, and we don't get an extension of time

for the period we spend moping around feeling sad. The end comes too soon whether we've spent our time cheerfully or not, so to the best of our ability we need to spend time as enjoyably as we can.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of May 6, 2022 at 1:38 PM**

I would only add the importance of being aware of your feelings of pleasure and pain, and make choices and avoidances accordingly.

As [Don](#) mentioned, even a dream job has negative aspects and days where you're just not into being there. But from time to time it can be useful to take stock of your situation. Beyond financial necessity, are you getting any sort of gratification from your work or are you trying to paper over misery with a coating of pleasure?

I sometimes think of Epicurean ethics as applying on different "levels". This isn't a matter of ranking pleasures, but is an understanding that some aspects of life have a greater overall effect on a person than others. For example, for me, fully embracing the Epicurean worldview has an extremely wide ranging effect. How we spend the majority of our time (job, living situation &c) also has great importance. I try to pursue desires or pleasures which resonate throughout my experience.

One model that I've come across that I've applied to choices and avoidances is to take into consideration autonomy (am I in a situation where I'm able to do things which are important to me?), competence (am I able to feel a sense of growth or accomplishment in what I'm doing?) and relatedness (friendship, being in nature, feeling awe, connectedness). I consider these aspects to be varieties of pleasure, and when I can combine all three I tend to find a particular richness in the particular activity.

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### **Post by “Don” of May 6, 2022 at 6:59 PM**

#### [Quote from Eoghan Gardiner](#)

41. At one and the same time we must philosophize, laugh, and manage our household and other business, while never ceasing to proclaim the words of true philosophy.

41. One must laugh and seek wisdom and tend to one's home life and use one's other goods, and always recount the pronouncements of true philosophy. γελᾶν ἅμα δεῖ (one must) καὶ φιλοσοφεῖν (philosophein) καὶ οἰκονομεῖν καὶ τοῖς λοιποῖς οἰκειώμασι χρῆσθαι καὶ μηδαμῆ λήγειν τὰς ἐκ τῆς ὀρθῆς φιλοσοφίας φωνὰς ἀφιέντας.

I wanted to comment on the translation [Eoghan Gardiner](#) used initially. Plus, to me this sounds like mindfulness! Do all while philosophizing.

I like to note that several translations put philosophize first when instead the first word in Greek is γελᾶν, the infinitive of γελάω "laugh." So the emphasis is on the laughing first. Syntax not being constrained by word order like English (Joe bit the dog vs The dog but Joe), ancient Greek can choose what to emphasize by word order. The translations should really be something like: "One must laugh and - at the same time - pursue the love wisdom, administer the rest of one's household affairs,..." I really like the coupling of laughing and philosophizing. I wonder if this is an echo of Democritus.

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### Post by "Don" of May 7, 2022 at 2:44 PM

#### [Greek Word Study Tool](#)

Not to belabor this any longer than necessary, but I also found the very end of that saying enjoyable as well:

ἐκ τῆς ὀρθῆς φιλοσοφίας φωνὰς ἀφιέντας.

ek tēs orthēs philosophias phōnas aphientas.

That last word, translated as "recount" had the connotation (see LSJ entry above) of "let loose" or "let fly from oneself." So, I see echoes of the epicurean "triumph-song" noted elsewhere in the texts. Let loose, baby!!

The orthēs is the same ortho- as in orthodox or orthography.

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### Post by "reneliza" of May 10, 2022 at 12:56 PM

#### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

are you trying to paper over misery with a coating of pleasure?

Just out of curiosity - is this what Epicurus was doing in his final days when he was (apparently) cheerful and in high spirits even though he was in tremendous pain? Where is the line drawn for when it's ideal to find pleasure in less than ideal circumstances and when that's a delusion being used to mask the pain?

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### **Post by “Pacatus” of May 10, 2022 at 2:14 PM**

[Quote from Don](#)

I wonder if this is an echo of Democritus.

Philosophus Ridens: the Laughing Philosopher.

"Best is for a person to live a cheerful life as little distressed as possible."

"A life without festivity is a long road without an inn."

--Democritus

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### **Post by “Pacatus” of May 10, 2022 at 2:51 PM**

From a poem I wrote a couple of years back, entitled “Democritus Ridens.” (The quotes I posted above were the epigraph for the poem.)

He taught the world is round, fashioned of atoms whirling

in space -- that cheerfulness is a flourishing fountain

of health, a natural spring to cure our fevered fears.

Plato hated him: too much mirth, too little divine.

Epicurus, with liberating swerve, welcomed him

-- and all us commoners -- into his pleasant garden.  
Now this amiable sage lampoons my gravity,  
pretentious habits of self-baiting guilt and despair,  
glancing askance in amusement from his portrait perch --  
with an anachronistic plume-feather in his cap.  
My plea, on this day weighing down like an iron sigh:  
“O *Philosophus Ridens*, enlighten me to laugh!”

~ ~ ~

Coda:

Let us offer to those who suffer daily travail  
at least the respite of cheerfulness: a festive inn,  
however rustic, along the wearying long road—

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“Plume feather”: reference to a reproduction I have of a painting by Jacob Duck (c. 1600-1667), titled “Laughing Democritus Seated Next To A Terrestrial Globe”



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**Post by “Don” of May 10, 2022 at 4:05 PM**

[Quote from reneliza](#)

### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

are you trying to paper over misery with a coating of pleasure?

Just out of curiosity - is this what Epicurus was doing in his final days when he was (apparently) cheerful and in high spirits even though he was in tremendous pain? Where is the line drawn for when it's ideal to find pleasure in less than ideal circumstances and when that's a delusion being used to mask the pain?

I get the impression that [Godfrey](#) was referring to when we try fooling ourselves. With Epicurus, no doubt that he felt and acknowledged his pain - no getting around that - but he could also experience pleasure in the memory of talking with friends. What he wrote was:

*My continual sufferings from strangury and dysentery are so great that nothing could augment them ; but over against them all I set gladness of mind at the remembrance of our past conversations.*

The word for "over against them" had the connotation of holding ground against as in the line of battle. So, he was in great pain, but he fought against that - arrayed himself against that - with memories of friendship. He didn't paper over anything, he used his life's philosophy to fight against what would otherwise have been overwhelming and what did in short order actual kill him.

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## Post by "Godfrey" of May 10, 2022 at 8:55 PM

That's a great question [reneliza](#) !

In the quote that you referenced I was attempting to articulate some of my thinking regarding pleasure and pain as guides. Part of the difficult work in following this ethical theory is to really listen to and feel our pain. Sometimes that pain is in the foreground as Epicurus described on his deathbed, but sometimes it's more of a chronic ache that we've become used to living with. It's the latter situation that I was trying to address.

We always seek to have a balance of pleasure over pain; sometimes we just need to take a penetrating look at our pain and examine a variety of solutions to what's ailing us. \*Ideally\*, we've been able to structure our lives so that each of our various "roles" brings us a balance of pleasure. If there's a particular role that brings a balance of pain, maybe there's a way to treat that. Or you could look at it as different "levels" of pleasures... or "reaches" of pleasure. What

comes immediately to mind for me as a deep level or far reaching pleasure is an understanding of one's guiding philosophy, as this has a positive effect on all aspects of my life. Others are what Epicurus refers to as natural and necessary desires, which can give a person a grounding of pleasure in their life.

As for Epicurus on his deathbed, he knew it was the end for him and he was enjoying looking back on a life well lived, despite his extreme pain. That wasn't papering over pain, but an experience that anybody would want (*sans* the extreme pain!). And you don't have to die to do it, you can look back on a day well lived, or any experience well lived, and bask in a certain joy.

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**Post by “isychos” of May 11, 2022 at 6:06 PM**

Thank you for raising this topic [Eoghan Gardiner](#), this is something I often find myself battling with, some great suggestions to reflect upon and apply to one's attitude to/at work