

VS42 - Versions of Vatican Saying 42

Post by "Onenski" of November 8, 2023 at 7:52 PM

There are at least two versions of this Vatican Saying.

In one side, Usener, Bailey, Long and Sedley, Marcovich:

Quote

Ὁ αὐτὸς χρόνος καὶ γενέσεως τοῦ μεγίστου ἀγαθοῦ καὶ **ἀπολαύσεως**.

"The greatest blessing is created and enjoyed at the same moment" [Bailey]

In the other side, Bignone, Arrighetti and Enrique Álvarez:

Quote

Ὁ αὐτὸς χρόνος καὶ γενέσεως τοῦ μεγίστου ἀγαθοῦ καὶ **ἀπολύσεως <τοῦ κακοῦ>**.

"The production of the greatest good and (the) release from evil (happens at) [the same time]." [Epicurus Wiki]

"The same time corresponds to the birth of the greatest good and the dissolution of evil." (Enrique Alvarez, translated)

Here's Alvarez's comments:

"Given the difficulty of finding a clear meaning to the text as it is offered in the codex, the sentence has raised several hermeneutical possibilities and various modifications have been proposed.

We have followed Bignone's interpretation (with which Arrighetti also agrees), who observes in the sentence a polemic on the question of pleasure against the Platonic point of view put forward in the [Philebus](#), where Plato considers pleasure as a γένεσις ("process," "becoming") and, consequently, admits the existence of mixed pleasures, that is, of processes in which pleasure can occur mixed with pain. If, in the light of the Letter to Meneceus and KD3, we understand that the greatest good referred to in the sentence is pleasure, conceived by Epicurus as deprivation of pain, with the addition of <τοῦ κακοῦ> proposed by Bignone, VS42 would come to say that pleasure and pain cannot coexist at the same time; therefore, when the greatest good is generated (i. e. pleasure), the greatest evil (i. e. pain), dissipates.

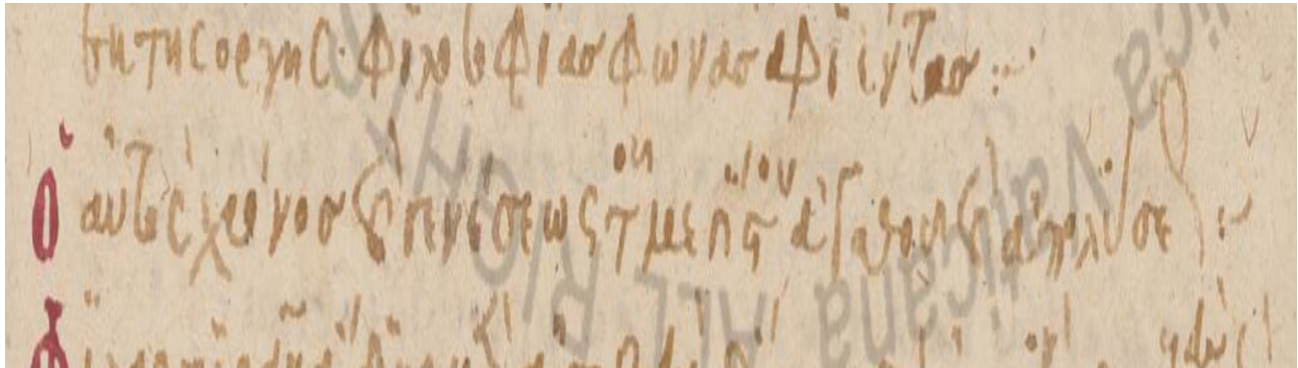
Usener, whose criterion Bailey, Long and Sedley and Marcovich have followed, proposes to correct ἀπολύσεως ("dissolution", "elimination") by ἀπολαύσεως ("enjoyment"), interpreting the sentence as describing a type of pleasures whose enjoyment (ἀπόλαυσις) is simultaneous with their generation or development (γένεσις), i.e., those cases in which the genesis of pleasure coincides with its enjoyment, such as the exercise of philosophy (cf. VS27). Bailey cites precisely VS27."

What do you think, [Don](#) ?

Post by "Don" of November 8, 2023 at 10:49 PM

I happened to tackle this exact saying here: [RE: If Death Is Nothing To Us, Then Life Is Everything to Us](#)

First, we return to the manuscript:

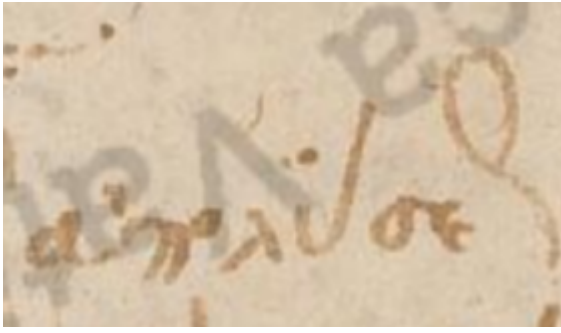


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Here's what I see in the manuscript itself:

Ὁ αὐτὸς χρόνος καὶ γενέσεως τοῦ μεγίστου ἀγαθοῦ καὶ ἀπολύσεως.

The pivotal last word is:



From what I see it's ἀ'π^ολύσε(ως).

That last swoopy letter is a ligature substantiated in the literature: [pasted-from-clipboard.png](#)

So, what were the scholars' transcriptions:

Transcription 1: Usener, Bailey, Long and Sedley, Marcovich (UBLS)

Ὁ αὐτὸς χρόνος καὶ γενέσεως τοῦ μεγίστου ἀγαθοῦ καὶ ἀπολύσεως.

"The greatest blessing is created and enjoyed at the same moment" [Bailey]

Transcription 2: Bignone, Arrighetti and Enrique Álvarez (BAA)

Ὁ αὐτὸς χρόνος καὶ γενέσεως τοῦ μεγίστου ἀγαθοῦ καὶ ἀπολύσεως <τοῦ κακοῦ>.

"The production of the greatest good and (the) release from evil (happens at) [the same time]."
[Epicurus Wiki]

"The same time corresponds to the birth of the greatest good and the dissolution of evil."
(Enrique Alvarez, translated)

Now, I have issues with each alternative transcription/translation. UBLS "corrects" the text, which I always have issues with. However, ἀπόλαυσις is used in [VS27](#) as the text has noted, so *maybe* they have *some* justification for their correction. BAA adds in the parenthetical <τοῦ κακοῦ> which I would leave out since it is not extant in the manuscript.

If I go with the manuscript, as written, I would offer:

There's a lot of genitive cases in that construction:

γενέσεως τοῦ μεγίστου ἀγαθοῦ

ἀπολύσεως

The καὶ...καὶ... typically can be translated both...and...

So, I would get something like...

(At) the same time, there is both a generation/creation and a releasing/letting go of the greatest good.

The greatest good most likely means pleasure itself.

Now, what the saying mean? That's a very good question. Maybe a commentary on the fleeting nature of feeling pleasure?

In fact, if I would accept the ἀπολαύσεως "correction" by UBLS, I could support their "The greatest blessing is created and enjoyed at the same moment." However, I have that nagging inclination to go with what the text actually has!

Post by "Cassius" of November 9, 2023 at 7:31 AM

One question I raised in the discussion last night Don, is whether the question is the coming and going of pleasure itself, or of the "greatest good." I know that the issues are related but is the issue that pleasure and pain do not co-exist at any moment, or is the issue related to the "greatest pleasure" (100% pleasure 0% pain) or some combination.

In other words, what is the proposed "take-away" from this saying? That pleasure and pain are the two alternative feelings, or that they never co-exist at the same moment, or what? Does adding in the issue of "the greatest pleasure" add something to the issue that pleasure and pain do not co-exist?

Post by "Don" of November 9, 2023 at 7:51 AM

Good questions. I'll have to cogitate on those.

To throw another curve: the specific phrase τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν "the greatest good" is what Epicurus calls phronesis "practical wisdom" in the letter to Menoikeus.

Often, ταγαθος (tagathos) "the greatest good" is used when referring to pleasure specifically, although I believe τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν is used, too, I think.

Do I think it refers to phronesis and not pleasure? Probably not, but it's worth at least entertaining other possibilities.

It also fascinates me that ONE LETTER can completely change the meaning of a sentence:
ἀπολαύσεως, ἀπολύσεως

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 9, 2023 at 10:05 AM

I am wondering if [VS41](#) and 42 should be read together as one unit?

"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. At the very same time, the greatest good is created and the greatest evil is removed." (Saint-Andre translation)

Post by “Don” of November 9, 2023 at 10:25 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

I am wondering if [VS41](#) and 42 should be read together as one unit?

I'm reluctant to read the sayings in the Vatican manuscript in relation to each other. They are clearly demarcated with their red initial letters (except in a few rare cases) and appear to be meant to be read as individual pronouncements.

Post by “Joshua” of November 9, 2023 at 2:32 PM

I found something in [Plutarch](#) that might bear on the question;

"Thus do Epicurus and Metrodorus, while they make avoiding of evil to be the very essence and consummation of good, and so receive but as it were the satisfaction of slaves or of rogues newly discharged the [jail], who are well enough contented if they may but wash and supple their sores and the stripes they received by whipping, but never in their lives had one taste or sight of a generous, clean, unmixed, and unulcerated joy." ([Translation](#) source)

‘ ἀναφερομένων, ἀπειρία δὲ τοῦ κάτω καὶ ἄνω καὶ ἀγνοία τὸ μέσον ἄκρον ἡγουμένων εἶναι καὶ πέρασ: ὡσπερ Ἐπίκουρος ἠγεῖται καὶ Μητρόδωρος, οὐσίαν τάγαθοῦ καὶ ἀκρότητα τὴν τοῦ κακοῦ φυγὴν τιθέμενοι καὶ χαίροντες ἀνδραπόδων τινὰ χαρὰν ἢ δεσμίων ἐξ εἰργμοῦ λυθέντων ἀσμένως ἀλειψαμένων καὶ ἀπολουσαμένων μετὰ τὰς αἰκίας καὶ τὰς μάστιγας, ἐλευθέρας δὲ καὶ καθαῶς καὶ ἀμιγοῦς καὶ ἀμωλωπίστου χαρᾶς ἀγεύστων καὶ ἀθεάτων. οὐ γάρ, εἰ τὸ ψωριᾶν τὴν σάρκα καὶ λημᾶν τὸν ὀφθαλμὸν [p. 378] ἀλλότριον, ἤδη καὶ τὸ κνᾶσθαι καὶ τὸ ἀπομάττεσθαι θαυμάσιον οὐδ’ εἰ τὸ ἀλγεῖν καὶ φοβεῖσθαι τὰ ’

I thought it was notable because Plutarch uses τοῦ κακοῦ, the very phrase used to amend the text of VS42, and in the context of the chief good (pleasure) residing in the removal of evil (pain).

Post by “Joshua” of November 9, 2023 at 2:41 PM

Quote

while they make avoiding of evil to be the very essence and consummation of good

It looks like an alternative translation could be something like;

The sum of the good follows where the height of evil flees.

Which sort of accounts for the time element in the Vatican saying.

Post by “Don” of November 9, 2023 at 7:57 PM

That's a good find, [Joshua](#)

Interestingly, the word used for the good here is τάγαθοῦ.

Post by “Don” of November 9, 2023 at 10:14 PM

I found the only use of ἀπολύσομεν in Diogenes Laertius (10.82). Not sure if it'll be helpful, but ..

"Hence we must attend to present feelings and sense perceptions, whether those of mankind in general or those peculiar to the individual, and also attend to all the clear evidence available, as given by each of the standards of truth. For by studying them we shall rightly trace to its cause and (we shall) banish (ἀπολύσομεν) the source of disturbance and dread, accounting for celestial phenomena and for all other things which from time to time befall us and cause the utmost alarm to the rest of mankind."

Post by "Cassius" of November 15, 2023 at 7:18 PM

I see that the Epicurus.info version [in its main page](#) is different from its wiki version:

42) The time of the beginning of the greatest good [pleasure] and the time of its enjoyment are one.

Post by "Don" of November 15, 2023 at 7:31 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

enjoyment.

Aye, there's the rub.

It ALL depends on one letter.

Do you accept what the manuscript has: ἀπολύσεως? Releasing, letting go

Or do you accept the "correction" by modern scholars: ἀπολαύσεως? enjoyment

Post by "Cassius" of November 15, 2023 at 7:45 PM

So you're saying that the literal version is:

The time of the beginning of the greatest good [pleasure] and the time of its release are one.
(?)

If one and the same thing is being referred to as to having the beginning and the end, then that begins to bend back around toward "the time of the beginning and the end of the greatest good is one" and you could conceivably begin to see "the time" as a reference to a length of time.

And if you see "the time" as a length of time which demarcates the beginning and end of the greatest good / pleasure (when viewing pleasure as both stimulating and normal activities of life)? You'd potentially be back at Dewitt's suggestion that the focus of the statement is a reference to life - - as starting with birth and ending with death --- being the start and end of pleasure (the greatest good).

But to get there you'd have to see "time" as not "a moment in time" but a "length of time."

In English the wording could go either way. Can it go either way in Greek?

Post by "Don" of November 15, 2023 at 9:00 PM

I would get something like...

(At) the same time, there is both a generation/creation and a releasing/letting go of the greatest good.

Post by "Cassius" of November 15, 2023 at 9:19 PM

In our meeting tonight Pacatus mentioned that the Greek might be chronos which might indicate a longer length of time than a moment? That's my paraphrase and I may have it wrong.

Post by "Don" of November 15, 2023 at 9:33 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

In our meeting tonight Pacatus mentioned that the Greek might be chronos which might indicate a longer length of time than a moment? That's my paraphrase and I may have it wrong.

Ὁ αὐτὸς χρόνος (ho autos khronos) is a set phrase meaning "at the same time, simultaneously; literally, 'the time (is) the same', as in the events are happening at the same time."

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 16, 2023 at 8:06 AM

Is this a reference to beginning and the end... does this mirror 'alpha and omega' in letter to Menoecus?

Post by “Don” of November 16, 2023 at 8:12 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Is this a reference to beginning and the end... does this mirror 'alpha and omega' in letter to Menoecus?

That's an interesting idea. I don't think so, but I'm going to have to think about that some more to be convinced one way or the other.

For ease of reference, here's my commentary on that section of the letter:

Quote

A short digression is now in order to examine that phrase ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος "the foundation and fulfillment, the beginning and end." Often, this is simply translated as "the beginning and the end" as if there's a starting line and a finish line. This is much deeper than that, although the running of a race could be one metaphor that could be used. Let's first look at the word ἀρχὴν (accusative of ἀρχή).

- ἀρχή (arkhē)

- English archeology "study of beginnings/origins" but also the -archy in monarchy, patriarchy, etc.

ἀρχή carries the meaning of beginning, origin, foundation, the farthest point. It even took on the meaning of "the corners of a sheet" by the time the New Testament was being written (Acts 10:11). It also had the connotation of the "beginning of power" residing in a ruler, the "most important person" in a kingdom. It carries the idea of a foundational element or first principle. The alpha (first letter of the Greek alphabet) to τέλος's omega (the last letter of the Greek alphabet) which is how Hicks translated them.

τέλος (telos) carries the meaning of endings, the goal, completion, maturity, result, fulfillment, consummation. Where ἀρχή is the foundation, τέλος is the highest point. The definition of τέλος in LSJ is extensive!

Αρχή is not quite as long but gives the nuance we're working with.

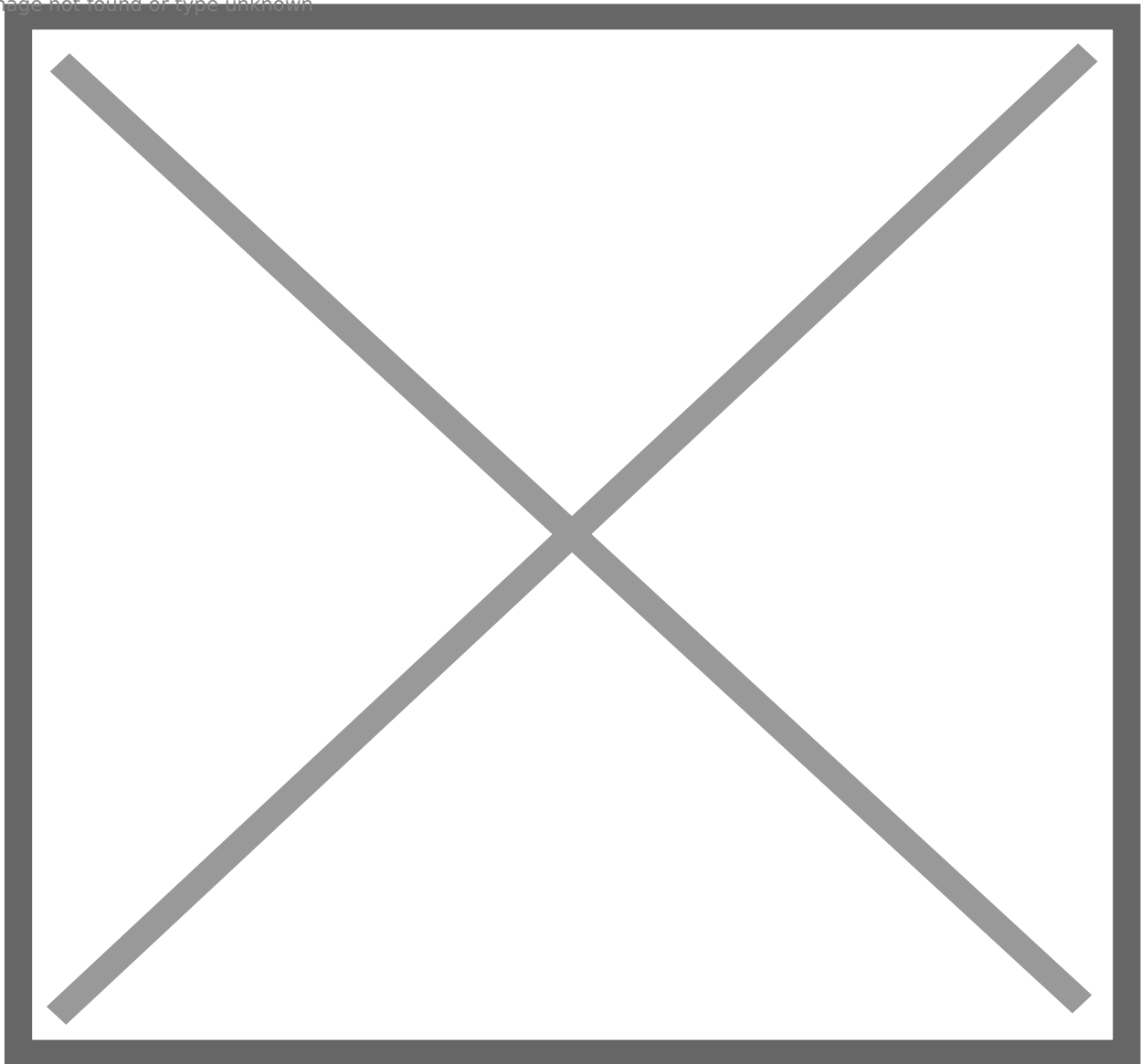
Therefore, to translate ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος as "beginning and end" (every other translation I've seen except Hicks) misses a lot of deeper meaning. This phrase is one that I highly recommend giving more attention to in one's personal translation or at least being aware of when reading. We miss so much by not examining Epicurus's words. Always go back to the texts!

Post by "Pacatus" of November 16, 2023 at 3:31 PM

[Don:](#)

And "the beginning and the end" has a taint of "the alpha and omega" from Revelation.

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[Alpha and Omega - Wikipedia](#)
en.wikipedia.org

Post by “Don” of November 16, 2023 at 11:26 PM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

[Don:](#)

And "the beginning and the end" has a taint of "the alpha and omega" from Revelation.

Just don't take that analogy *too* far. You could just as easily use "the A and Z" which is what it literally is: the first and last letter of the alphabet. I see Hicks use of "alpha and omega" in his translation as simply referring to the foundation (the A, the alpha) and fulfillment (the Z, the omega).

Post by "Cassius" of November 17, 2023 at 2:05 AM

It's an interesting question as to what the A to Z analogy really means. Is "foundation" and "fulfillment" what is going on when we travel from "A to Z"? Is "Z" the "fulfillment" of "A"? (I suppose if you're looking at the full string, then the full string of letters might be seen that way). Or is the analogy really firmly focused on "First to last" which is more of a "time" analogy than a "fulfillment" analogy? (And although it's familiar to us from religion, it probably doesn't deserve that taint, because it's useful apart from religion - right?)

I say all that because I suppose the issue is ultimately "How was Epicurus using it?" When we say "beginning and end" the word "end" gets confusing with "goal." But if we say "first to last" then "last" doesn't have quite the same connotation of goal, it really just means "last," like from our first breath after birth to our last breath in dying.

Post by "Don" of November 17, 2023 at 7:04 AM

I need to note that I personally think "alpha and omega" or "a to z" is a bad translation of ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος (arkhē kai telos). That "alpha and omega" phrase carries way too much Biblical baggage to be useful.

That's why I translate it as "the foundation and fulfillment" (of the blessed life).