

Who are capable of figuring the problem out

Post by "Patrikios" of June 5, 2025 at 4:25 PM

In Norman DeWitt's *Epicurus and His Philosophy*, I found this interesting quote. This is in Chapter XIV: The New Virtues, in the section on **Hope**. DeWitt quotes Vatican Saying 33.

"The cry of the flesh is not to hunger, not to thirst, not to suffer cold, because, possessing these and expecting to possess them, a man may vie with Zeus himself in respect of happiness."

Then while discussing how hope is 'confident expectation', DeWitt cites this quote:

*"The stable condition of **well-being** in the flesh and the **confident hope** concerning this means the height of enjoyment and the greatest certainty of it **for those who are capable of figuring the problem out.**"*

The footnote reference is :

*Ep. 105.
⁸⁸ Hor., Sat. 1.3.66; Sen., Ep. 105.4; Harper's Latin Dictionary s.v. sensus II.3.*

Any thoughts from our more learned friends as to what was meant by, and who are "**those who are capable of figuring the problem out**" ?

I'm still trying to figure this problem out 😊

Thanks

Post by "Cassius" of June 5, 2025 at 5:25 PM

If I recall correctly DeWitt thinks that this was a direct jibe at Plato, who held that you have to be able to know geometry in order to be a philosopher. I'll look for a cite for that.

Post by "TauPhi" of June 5, 2025 at 5:47 PM

Hor., Sat. 1.3.66 = Horace's 'Satires' Book I, Satire III, line 66

Relevant fragment with line 66 highlighted:

[...]

But WE put virtue down to vice's score,
And foul the vessel that was clean before:
See, here's a modest man, who ranks too low
In his own judgment; him we nickname slow:
Another, ever on his guard, takes care
No enemy shall catch him unaware,
(Small wonder, truly, in a world like this,
Beset with dogs that growl and snakes that hiss);
We turn his merit to a fault, and style
His prudence mere disguise, his caution guile.
Or take some honest soul, who, full of glee,
Breaks on a patron's solitude, like me,
Finds his Maecenas book in hand or dumb,
And pokes him with remarks, the first that come;

We cry "He lacks e'en common tact." Alas!

What hasty laws against ourselves we pass!
For none is born without his faults: the best
But bears a lighter wallet than the rest.
A man of genial nature, as is fair,
My virtues with my vices will compare,
And, as with good or bad he fills the scale,
Lean to the better side, should that prevail:
So, when he seeks my friendship, I will trim
The wavering balance in my turn for him.
He that has fears his blotches may offend
Speaks gently of the pimples of his friend:
For reciprocity exacts her dues,
And they that need excuse must needs excuse.

[...]

Sen., Ep. 105.4 = Seneca's 'Moral letters to Lucilius' Letter 105, fragment 4:

[...]

As to not being feared, a moderate fortune and an easy disposition will guarantee you that; men should know that you are the sort of person who can be offended without danger; and your reconciliation should be easy and sure. Moreover, it is as troublesome to be feared at home as

abroad; it is as bad to be feared by a slave as by a gentleman. For every one has strength enough to do you some harm. Besides, he who is feared, fears also; no one has been able to arouse terror and live in peace of mind.

[...]

Post by “Joshua” of June 5, 2025 at 9:43 PM

[Patrikios](#) , the reference there is to Usener fragment U68, quoted here from [Attalus](#).

Quote

[U68]

Plutarch, That Epicurus actually makes a pleasant life impossible, 4, p. 1089D:

It is this, I believe, that has driven them, seeing for themselves the absurdities to which they were reduced, to take refuge in the "painlessness" and the "stable condition of the flesh," supposing that the pleasurable life is found in thinking of this state as about to occur in people or as being achieved; for the "stable and settled condition of the flesh," and the "trustworthy expectation" of this condition contain, they say, the highest and the most assured delight **for men who are able to reflect**. Now to begin with, observe their conduct here, how they keep decanting this "pleasure" or "painlessness" or "stable condition" of theirs back and forth, from body to mind and then once more from mind to body.

Aulus Gellius, Attic Nights, IX.5.2:

Epicurus makes pleasure the highest good but defines it as *sarkos eustathes katastema*, or "a well-balanced condition of the body."

That Epicurus Actually Makes a Pleasant Life Impossible is part of *Against Colotes (Adversus Colotem)*, which in turn is bundled up in a massive collection of Plutarch's works called *Moralia*. The Internet archive has the Loeb set of *Moralia* that runs to 16 volumes in modern print. This is from [Volume 14](#);

Quote

“It is this, I believe, that has driven them, seeing for themselves the absurdities to which they were reduced, to take refuge in the 'painlessness' and the 'stable condition

of the flesh,' supposing that the pleasurable life is found in thinking of this state as about to occur in people or as being achieved; for the 'stable and settled condition of the flesh' and the 'trustworthy expectation' of this condition contain, they say, the highest and the most assured delight **for men who are able to reflect**. (5.) Now first observe their conduct here, how they keep decanting this 'pleasure' or 'painlessness' or 'stable condition' of theirs back and forth, from body to mind and then once more from mind to body, compelled, since pleasure is not retained in the mind but leaks and slips away, to attach it to its source, shoring up 'the pleasure of the body with the delight of the soul,' as Epicurus puts it, but in the end passing once more by anticipation from the delight to the pleasure.

“Ὅθεν αὐτοί μοι δοκοῦσιν τούτων αισθόμενοι τῶν ἀτοπιῶν³ εἰς τὴν ἀπονίαν καὶ τὴν εὐστάθειαν ὑποφεύγειν τῆς σαρκός, ὡς ἐν τῷ ταύτην ἐπινοεῖν περί τινος⁴ ἐσομένην καὶ γεγενημένην τοῦ ἡδέως ζῆν ὄντος⁵. τὸ γὰρ εὐσταθὲς σαρκὸς⁶ κατάστημα καὶ τὸ περὶ ταύτης πιστὸν ἔλπισμα τὴν ἀκροτάτην χαρὰν καὶ βεβαιοτάτην ἔχειν⁷ τοῖς ἐπιλογίζεσθαι δυναμένοις. (5.) ὄρα δὴ πρῶτον μὲν οἷα ποιοῦσι, τὴν εἴτε ἡδονὴν ταύτην εἴτε ἀπονίαν ἢ⁸ εὐστάθειαν⁹ ἄνω καὶ κάτω μετερῶντες¹⁰ ἐκ τοῦ σώματος εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν, εἶτα πάλιν ἐκ ταύτης εἰς ἐκεῖνο τῷ μὴ στέγειν ἀπορρέουσιν καὶ περιολισθάνουσιν¹¹ ἀναγκαζόμενοι τῇ ἀρχῇ συνάπτειν, καὶ ‘ τὸ μὲν ἡδόμενον ’ ὡς φησι ‘ τῆς σαρκὸς τῷ χαίροντι τῆς ψυχῆς ’ ὑπερείδοντες, αὐθις δ’ ἐκ¹² τοῦ χαίροντος εἰς τὸ ἡδόμενον τῇ ἐλπίδι τελευτῶντες. καὶ πῶς οἶόν τε τῆς βάσεως

And here is Peter Saint-Andre's text and translation at [Monadnock](http://www.monadnock.com);

Quote

68. To those who are able to reason it out, the highest and surest joy is found in the stable health of the body and a firm confidence in keeping it.

τὸ γὰρ εὐσταθὲς σαρκὸς κατάστημα καὶ τὸ περὶ ταύτης πιστὸν ἔλπισμα τὴν ἀκροτάτην χαρὰν καὶ βεβαιοτάτην ἔχει τοῖς ἐπιλογίζεσθαι δυναμένοις.

δυναμένοις refers to capability, and ἐπιλογίζεσθαι (a word that also appears in the Principle Doctrine 22 and Vatican saying 35) seems to carry a meaning like 'reasoning it out'. This latter term *might* be an Epicurean neologism, and would *possibly* be a hapax if his works weren't frequently cited by friends and his critics alike.

So, 'those who are capable of reasoning/realizing/recognizing/figuring'...etc.

Cassius is correct that Dewitt thinks this is a jab at Plato, *Timaeus* 40d;

Quote

The words "those who are capable of figuring the problem out" are a parody of Plato's *Timaeus* 40d, where the text reads "those who are incapable of making the calculations" and the reference is to mathematical calculations of the movements of the celestial bodies, which "bring fears and portents of future events" to the ignorant. Baiting the adversary was a favorite sport of Epicurus.

And here is *Timaeus* 40d;

Quote

[40d] send upon men unable to calculate alarming portents of the things which shall come to pass hereafter,—to describe all this without an inspection of models¹ of these movements would be labor in vain. Wherefore, let this account suffice us, and let our discourse concerning the nature of the visible and generated gods have an end.

μετὰ ταῦτα γενησομένων τοῖς οὐ δυναμένοις λογίζεσθαι πέμπουσιν, τὸ λέγειν ἄνευ δι' ὄψεως τούτων αὖ τῶν μιμημάτων μάταιος ἂν εἴη πόνος: ἀλλὰ ταῦτά τε ἰκανῶς ἡμῖν ταύτη καὶ τὰ περὶ θεῶν ὀρατῶν καὶ γεννητῶν εἰρημένα φύσεως ἐχέτω τέλος.

Post by “Joshua” of June 5, 2025 at 9:52 PM

Oh, and by the way [Patrikios](#) , I think the actual footnote is this;

[image.png](#)

So I don't think those passages that [TauPhi](#) pulled for us are relevant to the question.

⁹⁷ *De Fin.* 2.28.92; *Tusc. Disp.* 2.6.17;
5.9.27; *De Off.* 3.33.117; A. Gellius 9.5.2;
for Cleomedes see *Us.*, p. 89.18–29; *Plut.*,
Non posse 1090; Origen *c. Celsum* 3.80, end.
⁹⁸ *Non posse* 1090a–c.
⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 1089d. See n. 97.

So the text in question is Plutarch, *Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum*. In other words, *Epicurus Actually Makes the Pleasant Life Impossible*.

Post by “Patrikios” of June 6, 2025 at 6:54 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

If I recall correctly DeWitt thinks that this was a direct jibe at Plato, who held that you have to be able to know geometry in order to be a philosopher. I'll look for a cite for that.

[Cassius](#)

Thanks for the insight. I just finished reading the last chapter today which, includes how DeWitt describes Plutarch's attempt to defend himself.[*Epicurus & His Philosophy*, Chapter XV, p 351]

Quote

The result is labored but it possesses merits: it preserves much valuable information and it shows how the proud Platonists writhed under the shafts of Epicurean ridicule, a weapon to which pride is especially vulnerable.

Plutarch is an outright Platonist in his attitude toward Epicurus, and his writings should remind us that the original quarrel was between the Academy and the Garden.