

The Nature of Work

Post by "Godfrey" of February 20, 2021 at 5:51 PM

Both Philodemus' On Property Management and the Buddhist tenet of right livelihood offer a framework for thinking about work. Philodemus I believe addresses proper ways for the philosopher to deal with money (broadly speaking), while Buddhist right livelihood might be a bit "idealist" for a proper Epicurean. However they both can provide food for thought.

Isycho's one thing that strikes me from your post is your statement that you've worked at various jobs in various industries. This has two implications from my perspective: you've got a range of experience that you can draw from and build on, and you're not pinned down to one career path which you may have come to dislike. So there seems to be a great degree of freedom available to you in how you choose to "earn a living." If so, take advantage of that and think creatively from the big picture down to the details regarding in what ways you might fashion the most enjoyable life for yourself.

Also keep in mind that if indeed you do have a great degree of choice, that can be an obstacle by itself in that it can be overwhelming. So approach your working life (and overall life) as a process: using the Canon and a healthy amount of reasoning, decide on what you wish to pursue and give it your all. But treat that as a starting point and keep evaluating as you go along so you can "course correct" as necessary. You don't necessarily have to make epic changes; sometimes pleasure is found in the details. Part of living as an Epicurean and following the Canon is always being aware of our sensations, preconceptions and feelings and responding appropriately to what is presented to us. To stop doing this and become attached to a fixed idea of your life is to stop being an Epicurean, even to stop living in some ways.

I spent many years on a career path that eventually became oppressive. I ended up leaving a job that I'd been at for nine years to dive into the great unknown. Not too long after, an opportunity came along which led to a fresh outlook and turned into an enjoyable new career. I never would have had the opportunity if I hadn't previously addressed my fears and left my job. It was possibly the hardest thing that I've ever done, but well worth it. At the time I didn't know about Epicurus, but in retrospect what I did was put aside my fixed opinions and follow the Canon. Who knew?