

On The Question: "How Long Should We Desire To Live?"

Post by "Cassius" of April 18, 2021 at 8:30 AM

Lucretius Book Five:

Brown 1743: "Indeed, when we are once born, we should strive (whoever he be) to preserve our life, so long as we find an engaging pleasure in our being...."

Munro 1886: "Whoever has been born must want to continue in life, so long as fond pleasure shall keep him...."

Bailey 1921: "For whosoever has been born must needs wish to abide in life, so long as enticing pleasure shall hold him."

My comment:

Once again I find the 1743 edition more in tune with what I think the meaning should be if viewed in accord with the sweep of the philosophy ("engaging" is a positive word).

Munro's "keep" probably will strike some as odd language but it's probably accurate if we look back to older usages of keep (I remember the hymn phrase "The Lord bless you and keep you...." which does not seem to have a negative connotation).

But Bailey's "hold" has almost a Buddhist sound to it and I would accordingly reject that implication as negative. I would probably add this to my personal list of examples from Bailey where his choice of words reflects poorly on his assessment of Epicurean philosophy.

Does pleasure "hold" us, or does it provide the very goal and reason for living? If Bailey agreed personally with the latter option I don't think he would have used the word "hold" - if he didn't like "engage" and wanted to follow Munro's direction then "keep" or even "sustain" would have been a better choice.