

# Happy Twentieth of January, 2019

Post by "Cassius" of January 20, 2019 at 12:16 PM

Happy Twentieth! For this 20th I would like to remind friends of Epicurus of the Greek tradition of considering Epicurus and Epicureans as "Phaeacian." This label may not have been attached as a compliment by those who first used it, but the label helps us triangulate on how the ancients understood Epicurean philosophy and Epicurus' view of the goal of life. The following excerpt from a work by Pamela Gordon (her article "Phaeacian Dido") gives us the passage from Homer which Epicurus apparently adopted for himself, and which was applied to him as a summary of the Epicurean goal.

"I maintain there is no telos more pleasing than when good cheer fills all the people, and guests sitting side by side throughout the halls listen to the bard, and the tables are loaded with bread and meat, and a steward drawing wine from the bowl brings it around to fill our cups. To my mind this (telos) is something most beautiful."

Heraclitus also sheds some light on the apparent origins of the cliché, for he makes it clear that Epicurus has been dubbed a "Phaeacian" not simply because Epicurus (as a Hellenistic philosopher who praised the virtues of pleasure) seemed to be vaguely similar to the Phaeacians (who were generally regarded as archetypal hedonists).<sup>6</sup> Heraclitus reveals that the supposed connection is in fact more precise: there was an established tradition of reading Odysseus' professed appreciation of Phaeacian pleasures (*Od.* 9.5–11) as an Epicurean manifesto. Odysseus delivers his famous declaration, of course, at the Phaeacian banquet soon after his rescue by the princess Nausikaa. After years of war, and years of wandering through inhuman realms Odysseus declares:

οὐ γὰρ ἐγὼ γέ τι σφίσι τέλος χαριέστερον εἶναι  
ἢ δεῖ εὐφροσύνη μὲν ἔχει κατὰ δῆμον ἴπαντα,  
δαίτυμονες δ' ἀνὰ δόματα δοουδίζονται ἀοιδῶ  
ἤματα ἔξαιτες, παρὰ δὲ πλῆθος τραπέζαι  
σίτου καὶ κρεμῶν, μῆθρι δ' ἐκ κρητῆρος ἀφύσσων  
οἴνοχθος φορέσθαι καὶ ἔγχληθ' ἀετῆσαι·  
τοῦτό τι μοι κάλλιστον ἐνὶ φρεσὶν εἴθεταί εἶναι.

*Od.* 9.5–11

I maintain there is no *telos* more pleasing than when good cheer fills all the people, and guests sitting side by side throughout the halls listen to the bard, and the tables are loaded with bread and meat, and a steward drawing wine from the bowl brings it around to fill our cups. To my mind this (*telos*) is something most beautiful.

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