

Letter to Menoikeus translation by Peter Saint-Andre

Post by "Don" of June 2, 2023 at 10:49 PM

[Quote from stpeter](#)

Preliminary and somewhat poetic modification: I think I'll change "the enjoyment of sleep" to "lying in a bed of desire", which echoes the roundabout wording in the original Greek.

In going back - again - to the Greek wording and the text itself, I can see how this is a viable solution.

I find it interesting that the two groups singled out specifically would be the prodigals and those who "lying in a bed" among sensual pleasures. The one of the specific activities is ... (looks at screen... looks back at line 131... looks at line 132....)

I JUST SAW THIS... BY ZEUS!! I've completely overlooked the key!!! Just now, I went back to look at the Greek...

Here's what it says in 131:

οὐ τὰς τῶν ἀσώτων ἡδονὰς καὶ τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας

"not the pleasures of the prodigals AND (nor) [our *&%#@ mystery phrase here!]

THIS is what it says in 132...

οὐδ' ἀπολαύσεις παίδων καὶ γυναικῶν

nor ἀπολαύσεις of boys/children/slaves and women (I prefer to use the "slaves" connotation)

Anything look similar in those two phrases!!!!????

οὐδ' ἀπολαύσεις is usually translated as "nor the act of enjoying, nor the taking pleasure in..."

THE SAME WORD is used in both places in the Greek! They have to be connected!

I have to process this. I can't believe I overlooked this until right now!! For now, here is the section in my translation/commentary on the mention in 132:

ἀπολαύσεις

In translations of the Letter I have seen, οὐδ' ἀπολαύσεις is always given a straightforward sexual meaning:

"not sexual love" (Hicks)

"sexual enjoyment" (Epicurus Wiki)

"enjoying [boys and women]" (Saint-Andre)

"enjoyment (of female society)" (Yonge)

"sexual pleasures (with boys and women)" (DeWitt)

"satisfaction of lusts" (Bailey)

ἀπολαύσεις, according to LSJ, doesn't have this sexual connotation by itself. I'll admit that it could be here within the context of this passage. My contention is that Epicurus is getting at a deeper, more nuanced point. ἀπολαύω does have to do with enjoying something (or someone, in this case), but it seems to also include a sense of taking advantage or taking benefit from something (or someone). I can't necessarily vouch for the authority of [a website by Georgios Babiniotis](#), but the etymology he gives of the word implies something taken as booty. Translated into English, Babiniotis states "it is a delight that comes from an acquisition that has been preceded by conflict, an exercise of violence that offers the joy of fruition and power." So that idea of taking enjoyment in something you feel entitled to or that you can take advantage of with impunity underlies the word Epicurus decided to use. It's not just a sexual meaning. So, in light of all that, I would advocate translating that phrase as "not taking advantage of slaves (or boys) and women," Admittedly, it's most often likely advantage for sex, but the translation for which I'm advocating expands that sense. For me, this fits into the egalitarian ethos of the Garden in which slaves and women took active roles in the life of the school. People who took advantage of these members of society - who were most often seen by ancient Greek society as the lowest, least important members - would be going against the equality of opportunity that the Garden professed. From my perspective, this also seems to fit with the characteristic of the sage shared by Diogenes Laertius: γυναικί τ' οὐ μιγήσεσθαι τὸν σοφὸν ἧ οἱ νόμοι ἀπαγορεύουσιν "The wise one will not establish a sexual relationship in a way that is against the law or forbidden by custom." Now, I know ancient "law or custom" is a wide spectrum, but I'm using that as the translation for νόμοι. In the end, my perspective is that ἀπολαύσεις - yet again - demonstrates the inadequacy of relying on a single translator or translation and not digging into the original Greek.