

Horace - Buying Pleasure With Pain is Harmful (????)

Post by "Cassius" of August 22, 2025 at 9:53 AM

The P.E. More book "Hellenistic Philosophies" concludes a section on Epicurus with this quote:

"Speme voluptates, nocet empta dolore voluptas" which is suggested to be translated as "Hope for pleasures, but pleasure bought with pain is harmful."

I'm looking for the original without much success so far - I cannot confirm this search result below, but it should be relatively easy to trace this further.

If the suggested translation is correct, then I have to think that this may be an indication of Horace's fall from Epicurean grace, so to speak, because this would in my view contradict the explicit words of Epicurus in the letter to Menoeceus, and contradict the way Torquatus explains the issue in "On Ends."

The issue would be that a flat condemnation of every undergoing any pain for the sake of a greater pleasure, would indeed bolster the ultra-minimalist argument that we should never seek any pleasure that costs any amount of pain, a view to which I think most all of us here on the forum would object.

Hopefully when we trace the origin of this back there will be additional context to explain this. Further, a simple tweaking of the verb from "is" to "can be" or "sometimes is" would solve the problem. But a flat prohibition against every undergoing any pain for the sake of pleasure would in my mind be irreconcilable with correct Epicurean doctrine. If there is no way to redeem this quote, it may prove to be an excellent citation to establish that Horace cannot be relied on for correct Epicurean interpretations. And such a viewpoint would also help explain why Horace was indeed reputed to have let go of his Epicurean views later in life - he didn't understand or apply them properly.

Here's the first search results:

The Latin phrase "Speme voluptates, nocet empta dolore voluptas" can be translated into English as "Hope for pleasures, but pleasure bought with pain is harmful." A reliable source for this translation is the work of Horace, a Roman poet, as this phrase is derived from his writings, specifically from his "Epistles" (Book I, Epistle II, line 55). The Latin text and its English translation can be found in reputable classical literature databases or translations of Horace's works. For a reliable source, you can refer to:

- Perseus Digital Library (Tufts University): This provides access to Horace's original Latin texts and translations. The specific line can be found in Horace's Epistles (Book I, Epistle II).

Link: [Perseus Digital Library - Horace's Epistles](#)

This source includes the original Latin text and reliable English translations, ensuring accuracy for your query.