

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.

Post by "Don" of April 18, 2021 at 1:06 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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I would see hold here in your sense of keep, something that "holds you up" or "supports you." I don't see hold on this sense as having a negative restraint on you. Consider engage and "hold your attention."

Post by "Cassius" of April 18, 2021 at 2:38 PM

You're quite possibly right in this instance, but I am afraid I have a significant sequence of Bailey choices that have convinced me to be suspicious 😊

But rather than be negative let me focus on the positive: I continue to be fascinated that the older, unknown Daniel Browne translator frequently strikes me as best. And he's not that far in time from the Creech translation that I find to be almost unusable. So there's something fascinating to me about that 1743 version.

Post by "Godfrey" of April 18, 2021 at 2:40 PM

Brown does seem to be the most accurate to the philosophy; as to the Latin, I have no idea. He also uses "should" in the first part of the sentence rather than "must" or "must needs." Should, to me, is the better choice (again, not knowing Latin).

What line is this? I'm curious how the more contemporary translators treat it.

Post by "Cassius" of April 18, 2021 at 2:46 PM

Godfrey according to MFS its somewhere around 170 - 180

Post by “Cassius” of April 18, 2021 at 2:48 PM

I am sorry to say I see MFS as a regression too (seductive being ambiguously negative)

"Again, how could it have harmed us never to have been created? Are we to believe that our life lay groveling in murk and misery until the first day of creation dawned for us? All people, once born, must certainly wish to remain in life, so long as seductive pleasure detains them; but if one has never tasted the love of life or been numbered [180] among the living, how does it harm one not to have been created?"

Post by “Cassius” of April 18, 2021 at 3:11 PM

I have tremendous respect for MFS' work and I think he probably deserves the title "greatest living expert on Lucretius" and certainly on Diogenes of Oinoanda, but I am afraid I observe the same kind of tendency toward asceticism in MFS that I see in other modern commentators. It's way off topic to go down this rabbit hole, but I actually find David Sedley to have less of that tendency than does MFS. All of which just leads me to conclude that in every question of Lucretius it's best to look at all four (Daniel Brown, Munro, Bailey AND MFS) to compare the word choices. I also sometimes like what I see in Stallings and especially in Rolfe Humphries - who we rarely talk about but who is the basis for my favorite professional reading of Lucretius - but anytime someone is aiming to preserve the "poetry" aspect I have the concern that they are likely making concessions in accuracy in order to achieve the flair of poetry.

Post by “Godfrey” of April 18, 2021 at 3:20 PM

Was this line in the podcast today?

Post by “Cassius” of April 18, 2021 at 3:21 PM

Yes we did discuss it! We covered only half of the material I originally intended because there was so much in it. i will get it posted as soon as I can but may take a couple of days.

Post by “Don” of April 18, 2021 at 4:17 PM

When it comes to word choices, I highly recommend returning to the Latin text available at the Perseus Digital Library

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...%3a1999.02.0130>

This allows you line by line access plus you can click a word and get taken directly to authoritative dictionaries.

Post by “Godfrey” of April 18, 2021 at 7:01 PM

Stallings: *"For anyone who has been born desires to hold on tight To life - at least as long as he's detained by sweet delight"*

Melville: *"A man once born must wish to stay in life So long as soothing pleasure keeps him there."*

Leonard, 1916 (from Perseus): *"Whosoever Hath been begotten wills perforce to stay In life, so long as fond delight detains"*

Personally I prefer the implications of Stallings and Leonard in this case. I notice from the Smith excerpt, however, that the context of this line has quite a bit going on. I'll await the podcast discussion before going any further. All in due time!

Post by “Don” of April 18, 2021 at 8:55 PM

The key phrase here seems to be:

retinebit blanda voluptas;

Retinebit is the verb translated as keep, etc, in the translations. Here are its connotations:

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l...146&i=1#lexicon>

o hold in check, keep within bounds, to restrain, check

Voluptas is simply they Latin for pleasure, ἡδονή hēdonē. What kind of pleasure?

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l...146&i=1#lexicon>

Blanda: Flattering, pleasant, agreeable, enticing, alluring, charming, seductive

So, as long as we are held in check, restrained, bound to this life by enticing, alluring pleasure. Or whatever paraphrase you want to use with those connotations.

Post by “Cassius” of April 18, 2021 at 9:26 PM

sounds like an example where a set of standard connotations would be called into question by what we know of the broader context of what is being discussed. Of course we could question Lucretius' choice of words too. Probably that passage about pleasure being akin to our nature and pain being destructive would be relevant here too.

VS37. Nature is weak toward evil, not toward good: because it is saved by pleasures, but destroyed by pains.