

"Wise Man" Saying as to Rejoicing At the Misfortune of Another

Post by "Cassius" of June 28, 2021 at 5:40 PM

Today I received a question from one of our readers ([shahabgh66](#)) who asked about this excerpt from the section of Diogenes Laertius devoted to the string of sayings about what the "wise man" will or will not do:

He will rejoice at another's misfortunes, but only for his correction.

The question is - what does this mean? - because it is a little un-intuitive that we would ever rejoice at the misfortunes of another, even those that are instructive. But presumably that is the point, that when someone is corrected through misfortune that is something to be happy about (?)

Post by "Don" of June 28, 2021 at 7:09 PM

Where is this? I don't see that in my version that I did:
<https://sites.google.com/view/epicureansage>

There's a section in Lucretius where he talks about being on hill and seeing a shipwreck and being grateful for not being involved in the catastrophe. Or something like that. But I don't remember this in the "wise man" sayings.

I see this in the Perseus edition online: "He will be grateful to anyone when he is corrected." DL X.120. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...0%3Achapter%3D1>

Post by "Cassius" of June 28, 2021 at 9:35 PM

Bailey's extant remains has this as line 121 of the book from Diogenes Laertius:

[121] He will erect statues of others, but whether he had one himself or not, he would be indifferent. Only the Wise man could discourse rightly on music and poetry, but in practice he would not compose poems. One wise man is not wiser than another. He will be ready to make money, but only when he is in straits and by means of his philosophy. He will pay court to a king, if occasion demands. **He will rejoice at another's misfortunes**, but only for his correction. And he will gather together a school, but never so as to become a popular leader. He will give lectures in public, but never unless asked; he will give definite teaching and not profess doubt. In his sleep he will be as he is awake, and on occasion he will even die for a friend.

Post by "Don" of June 28, 2021 at 9:42 PM

Yeah, that's not how Hicks at Perseus translates that section:

Quote

And he will make money, but only by his wisdom, if he should be in poverty, and he will pay court to a king, if need be. He will be grateful to anyone when he is corrected. He will found a school, but not in such a manner as to draw the crowd after him

Post by "Don" of June 28, 2021 at 10:29 PM

It seems the phrase in question comes right before the talk about establishment of a school. In the Greek, this is that sentence right before the school one:

Quote

καὶ ἐπιχαρήσεσθαί τινι ἐπὶ τῷ διορθώματι

So, we can try to dissect it and see what we come up with. Here we go...

καὶ = just and conjunction: "and, also, etc"

ἐπιχαρήσεσθαί

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=e%29pixarh%2Fsesqai%2F&la=greek&can=e%29pixarh%2Fs>

Ah! So, that's where the ambiguity is coming in! The definition LSJ gives is "*rejoice over, exult over, mostly of malignant joy*" but also "*rarely in good sense, to rejoice in another's joy*". The first sense is followed by the dative case, the latter by the accusative. The word used here is in the future infinitive middle. The middle "tense" always points back to the individual so I could see this meaning "will take joy in one's own misfortune." Maybe.

τινι "to anyone/anything" (dative)

ἐπὶ τῷ διορθώματι "for a means of correction, or setting right."
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=diorqw%2Fmati&la=greek&can=diorqw%2Fmati0&prior=tw=>

As y'all know, my ancient Greek is rudimentary, but I could see this line meaning that the wise one rejoices in their own misfortunes because they can use it as a means of correction for themselves. If they mess up, it's seen as an opportunity for correction. I would need to see more translations but I think that's at least plausible looking at the Greek.

Post by "Godfrey" of June 28, 2021 at 11:31 PM

Not knowing Greek, I'm focused on "but only for his correction." A related sentiment might be:

VS74: "*In a scholarly debate, he who loses gains more because he has learned something.*"

Post by "Don" of June 29, 2021 at 7:18 AM

Well, this is interesting:

Yonge translates that line in combination with the preceding one:

Quote

he will propitiate an absolute ruler when occasion requires, and will humor him for the sake of correcting his habits;

<https://standardebooks.org/ebooks/diogene...ok-10#part-10-1>

Skeptical of this, but this adds even more ambiguity to the question.

https://www.tertullian.org/rpearse/manusc...es_laertius.htm That's an interesting article on the manuscripts and printed editions of DL's Lives.

This is a **perfect** example of the hazards of reading only **one** translation of an ancient text (or, in fact, any non-English original text in translation).

Post by “Don” of June 29, 2021 at 7:34 AM

<http://www.mikrosapoplous.gr/dl/dl10.html>

Oh! Now this is interesting!! This Greek text (based on Long, it looked like) refers to Usener fragments!

καὶ ἐπιχαρήσεσθαί (fg. 592 Us.) τινι ἐπὶ τῷ διορθώματι

LOL! Usener fragment 592 just lists this line from Diogenes Laertius! So, DL **is** the source for this line.

However, Usener didn't include the part about the ruler *μόναρχον* in fragment 592. He put that as fragment 577. So, I'm not sure where Yonge is getting his interpretation.

Post by “Don” of June 29, 2021 at 8:00 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Not knowing Greek, I'm focused on "but only for his correction." A related sentiment might be:

VS74: *"In a scholarly debate, he who loses gains more because he has learned something."*

Excellent observation, [Godfrey](#) !!

Post by “Cassius” of June 29, 2021 at 8:50 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

This is a *perfect* example of the hazards of reading only *one* translation of an ancient text (or, in fact, any non-English original text in translation).

As another example, I'm still trying to determine whether Epicurus wanted me to get married or not! 😊

Post by “Eikadistes” of June 29, 2021 at 12:10 PM

Quote

"...And inspired before the same loud clamor, some will strive with the effort of Apollophanes [the Stoic] to advance wonderfully to the podium, but others, having landed in [philosophy's] harbor and with hopes offered them that 'not even the venerable flame of Zeus would be able to prevent them taking from the highest point of the citadel' a life that is happy, afterwards, in spite of opposing winds...." (Philodemus, P.Herc 463)

Suppose a small gang of people in poverty are set on committing theft: Let's say **one** member of the group (we'll call them "*Buddy*") has a change of heart and decides to go home at the last minute. *Fast-forward several months* ... the rest of the group has been caught and sentenced.

Prior to the group being sentenced, Buddy felt apprehension, knowing that, *maybe*, he could have *gotten away with it*. If he *had*, the money he acquired could have helped him escape poverty, as it may potentially for the rest of the gang who went through with the theft.

Just before sentencing, Buddy was kicking himself in the pants.

Upon the gang being sentenced, Buddy feels tremendous **relief**, like drinking water when thirsty, or eating when hungry, or making a sound choice when anxious. Their sentencing indicates that Buddy was prudent and made the profitable choice. Prior to the gang being sentenced, Buddy felt anxiety. The moment of the sentencing, Buddy feels vindicated.

It would be a mistake to view Buddy as being a sadist for feeling pleasure at a situation that leads others to pain; it would also be a mistake to judge Buddy for not choosing to perform a sacrificial act of altruism (*such as taking credit for the theft to release his "friends"*).

Post by “Don” of June 29, 2021 at 12:41 PM

I like your way of thinking, @Nate ! We can take pleasure in learning from others mistakes "for setting right" our own choices without taking pleasure in the actual misfortune of others. Learn by observation but not Schadenfreude.

Post by “Don” of June 29, 2021 at 3:03 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

[Quote from Don](#)

This is a *perfect* example of the hazards of reading only *one* translation of an ancient text (or, in fact, any non-English original text in translation).

As another example, I'm still trying to determine whether Epicurus wanted me to get married or not! 😊

That is an excellent example. Here's my take: <https://sites.google.com/view/epicurean...l-relationships>

Post by “Cassius” of June 29, 2021 at 3:59 PM

Thanks for that link! I will add that one to the list of problem translations.

Post by “Eikadistes” of June 29, 2021 at 4:56 PM

There's a consistent metaphor of harbors and storms at sea through Epicurean lore, inspired both by both Odysseus' shipwreck on the island of the Phaeacians and the later association of Epicurus with his own shipwreck, prior to establishing the Garden. Using this same metaphor, Lucretius explains how it can be pleasure to watch the *vast travails* of others:

Quote

"It's sweet, when winds blow wild on open seas,
to watch from land your neighbor's vast travail,
not that men's miseries bring us dear delight
but that to see what ills we're spared is sweet;
sweet, too, to watch the cruel contest of war
ranging the field when you need share no danger.
But nothing is sweeter than to dwell in peace
high in the well-walled temples of the wise,
whence looking down we may see other men
wavering, wandering, seeking a way of life
with wit against wit, line against noble line,
contending, striving, straining night and day,
to rise to the top of the heap, High Lord of Things.
O wretched minds of men, O poor blind hearts!"

(*De Rerum Natura* translated by Frank O. Copley, Book 2, Lines 1-14)

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I share a similar feeling with this analogy living in Florida with hurricanes. For me, the stormy skies are beautiful. The winds are still captivating. The exploding power transformers are magical. Skipping work is a relief. Knowing that I don't have to fight with crowds in public is a blessing. I've always had the privilege of living beneath a safe roof on high ground.

Hurricanes mean something completely different to lonely seniors, or people living in mobile homes, or homeless members of our society, or people living within modest means near the seashore. To them, this event is an existential threat. It's not a joke, it's not a poetic metaphor, it's not something at which to smile. It's terrifying, tragic, and life-changing.

*I have **never** lived through a **non**-deadly hurricane.* Every hurricane for which I have been present has always lead to at least one drowning. While I was watching those trees dance in the wind, others were hiding on a floor while a tree fell through their roof. The juxtaposition between peoples' experiences based on their levels of security is staggering.

That juxtaposition also provides a learning opportunity. For every person that dies of disease, there was a case study that contributes to a future treatment. For every drowning during a hurricane, civil engineers design better and better structures, and people adopt safer and safer practices. It is always a pleasure to grow wiser and practice prudence.

Post by “Cassius” of June 29, 2021 at 5:01 PM

Nate your reference to Florida reminds me of the Champlain Towers collapse. That nighttime surveillance video of the collapse is almost surreal. But more to the point, until the engineers determine what really happened, I bet a lot of people are going through tremendous anxiety worrying that the same thing could happen to them. And like you said hopefully the diagnosis will make a repetition less likely.

Post by “Don” of July 3, 2021 at 10:48 AM

From my perspective, I think we've cracked the meaning of that phrase which on first impression seemed to have a negative connotation. We take pleasure in escaping the misfortune experienced by others, not in their misfortune itself. We also need to learn from that misfortune "for our own correction." How can we apply what we learn from seeing others' misfortune in our own lives to be not at the mercy of Fortune? If we don't apply it, we are not leading a "wise" life.

How's that?

Post by “Cassius” of July 3, 2021 at 11:05 AM

And I agree we do want to live a "wise" life because we don't place wisdom as a goal in itself, but employ it among the most valuable tools we can have to pursue our goal (happiness/pleasure) as successfully as possible.

Post by “Don” of July 3, 2021 at 1:00 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

And I agree we do want to live a "wise" life because we don't place wisdom as a goal in itself, but employ it among the most valuable tools we can have to pursue our goal (happiness/pleasure) as successfully as possible.

Amen! (We need an Epicurean equivalent of that 😊) * Practical, sensible wisdom - phronimos - is one of the three characteristics Epicurus singles out for living a pleasurable life in PD5

*The closest we seem to come is Παῖαν ἄναξ Paian anax.