

# VS41 - Translations of VS 41

## Post by "Martin" of May 21, 2018 at 7:15 AM

A: "We must laugh and philosophize at the same time and do our household duties and employ our other faculties, and never

cease proclaiming the sayings of the true philosophy." (as quoted here, on the Epicurean Friends page)

B: "At one and the same time we must philosophize, laugh, and manage our household and other business, while never ceasing to proclaim the words of true philosophy." (as quoted in a post in the FB EP page from June 2017)

C: "One shall laugh and at the same time philosophize, manage one's household, apply one's further capabilities, and never

cease proclaiming the sayings of the true philosophy." (translated by me from Krautz' German translation)

D: "One must laugh and seek wisdom and tend to one's home life and use one's other goods, and always recount the

pronouncements of true philosophy." (Peter Saint-Andre in <http://www.monadnock.net/epicurus/vatican-sayings.html>)

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## Post by "Martin" of May 21, 2018 at 7:17 AM

Interpretations of the translations of VS 41 and their differences:

Translation A mandates laughing and philosophizing simultaneously, postulates the existence of household duties, mandates employing our other faculties and mandates to missionize.

Translation B mandates to do all listed tasks simultaneously and replaces doing the household duties with managing the household and other business (i.e. coordinatig the work of slaves in Epicurus' case or coordinating the work of paid service providers and coworkers today).

Translation C sounds slightly less mandatory than the other translations. It urges to do all listed tasks simultaneously and replaces doing the household duties with managing one's household

but lacks the extension to other business in B.

Translation D mandates the listed tasks and replaces the house-keeping with a more general home life, the other faculties/capabilities with other goods, the duty to missionize with a duty to just recount. It does not contain any requirement for multi-tasking.

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## **Post by “Martin” of May 21, 2018 at 7:22 AM**

My personal opinion on VS 41:

1. I do not like the "must" or "shall" in the translations. I am a bit more comfortable with the "should" suggested by Matt Jackson in the post on VS 41 from June 2017 on the FB EP page.

2. Based on my hedonic calculus, I do not accept the existence of household duties beyond the minimum requirements to which I agreed by signing a rental contract or by buying an apartment in a house which is subject to a legal framework, i.e. duties which are usually easy and quickly to fulfill without daily chores. Briefly coordinating domestic aids would probably be an acceptable task for me but not spending considerable time for house-keeping by myself every day.

3. Whereas I know people who love multi-tasking, it goes beyond my capability. In most cases, I reject it outright for myself. I remember a case where a multi-tasking coworker made gross mistakes with unpleasurable consequences. The published

reports on traffic accidents caused or facilitated by diversions (due to e.g. texting, making phone calls, watching a video, reading a journal, drinking) strongly advise against multi-tasking at times when one task requires full attention.

4. I do sometimes smile when philosophizing or reading philosophical texts and feel joyful after I have found a great idea but laughing does usually not fit into philosophizing or reading philosophical texts (except for laughter about hilarious

nonsense or intentional jokes in those texts).

5. Discussing ideas with like-minded and/or open-minded people is a great pleasure but missionizing is not compatible with my hedonic calculus. Only if someone asks for an alternative world view, I would tell him about Epicurus' philosophy.

6. Recounting pronouncements is fine if a beginner wants to memorize or internalize the philosophy, which then increases his/her pleasure. For me, recounting pronouncements daily is waisting time which I would rather spend on more pleasurable activities or more or less painful

preparations for future pleasures.

7. I like "goods" in translation D. This implies to actually use the tools and toys which I have collected. The actual use provides valuable feedback on which acquisitions were wise and which were poorly thought through or possibly expressions of an unhealthy desire for more possessions just for the sake of having more.

8. I disagree the least with translation D.

9. In summary, VS 41 seems to contradict the big picture of Epicurus' philosophy.

10. I hope I am still an Epicurean despite my disagreements with parts of VS 41.

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## **Post by "Cassius" of May 21, 2018 at 9:02 AM**

Martin thank you very much for posting this! This is exactly the kind of analysis which advances the ball of our work in studying and understanding Lucretius.

Every day and every moment I study the Epicurean texts I wonder about whether I am really getting the subtlety of the meaning of the text. With the Latin I have a small amount of independent ability to look at the words and test the meaning (or see if a word or phrase is left out in the translation, as often seems to be the case).

I completely agree with you that "must" and words of command are not consistent with the tone of Epicurean philosophy. I am sure that in particular writings and contexts that some Epicureans would take "poetic license" and use broad phrasing, but if there are indeed no gods and no ideal forms/ideas, then there is not going to be "one way" of doing anything, and the closer we get to making a particular technique sound universal, the more careful we need to be.

Other comments:

Your (2) - And I agree that "duties" is a word about which we always have to be careful. Self-imposed obligations are one thing, but "duties" in modern English implies universal requirements which would not be Epicurean.

Your (3) - When I was anticipating what your comments about [VS41](#) would be, This is the one I definitely expected you to include. I think different people with different personalities are going to have different opinions about this. This is a compliment to you when I say that my wife is German, like you, and she HATES my "multitasking." It is against her personal nature to do anything other than focus precisely on whatever task is at hand. I can read her point of view in every one of your comments. 😊

Your (4) - My wife would TOTALLY agree with you.

Your (5) - I suppose the key here is "missionizing." I fully agree that it is inappropriate to talk philosophy or anything else controversial with people who do not explicitly or implicitly invite our opinion. To do so is at the least rude, and generally unproductive. However I think the broader context is that whenever we do see an opening to speak with people with whom these ideas are of mutual interest, it can expand our circle of friends and therefore enhance our personal happiness if we are able to do so. Context will control here, as always.

Your (6) - Yes I think this is primarily for beginners and newer students, or also perhaps in those times of uncertainty when we want to retrace our thinking and get "back to basics." Here I recall the quote from Thomas Jefferson which I think is worth quoting here: "But enough of criticism: let me turn to your puzzling letter of May 12. on matter, spirit, motion etc. It's crowd of scepticisms kept me from sleep. I read it, and laid it down: read it, and laid it down, again and again: and to give rest to my mind, **I was obliged to recur ultimately to my habitual anodyne, 'I feel: therefore I exist.'** I feel bodies which are not myself: there are other existencies then. I call them *matter*. I feel them changing place. This gives me motion. Where there is an absence of matter, I call it *void*, or *nothing*, or *immaterial space*. On the basis of sensation, of matter and motion, we may erect the fabric of all the certainties we can have or need." ([Jefferson to John Adams, 1820](#))

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So in sum my personal opinion is that the objections you raise are legitimate, but primarily the problems that you are citing are contextual and as you indicate also, matters which largely go to issues of translation and our own concerns that the Epicureans might be talking as (for example) modern Jehovah's Witnesses, who I think display most all of the irritating concerns you mention. So I think with clarifications to put it in a modern context, [VS41](#) has a lot of good to offer.

And while of course neither I or anyone else has the right to say that you are or are not an Epicurean, I personally don't see your concerns as non-Epicurean at all. In fact your whole approach of scrutinizing the texts and comparing the translations to the reality that you observe yourself is, in my view, the very essence of what it means to be an Epicurean.