



Pleasure and the Sapiens: Seneca De vita Beata 11.1

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operations against Athens in 86. The soil of Megara was already poor by nature (Strabo 9.1.8). Whether or not the Romans had evacuated before the August grain harvest, we can suspect that the crop of 84 was destroyed or consumed. So we can see why, when Diodorus took up his duties as *agoranomos* in 84, he found the granaries of the Megarid empty.

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PLEASURE AND THE SAPIENS: SENECA *DE VITA BEATA* 11.1

At *De vita beata* 3.3–4.5 Seneca offers a number of definitions of the good life. In the course of his account he mentions several times (3.4, 4.4, 4.5) the *tranquilitas* and *gaudium* that are necessary consequences of happiness, though not constituents of it.¹ At 5.1–4 he contrasts this *tranquilitas* with that sought by the Epicureans and Pyrrhonists.² At 6.1 Seneca imagines the objection of an Epicurean interlocutor; this leads to a discussion of the relationship between *virtus* and *voluptas* that extends

I would like to thank the members of the Latin Philosophy Reading Group at the University of Michigan, Jay Reed, Charles Brittain, my two anonymous readers, and Elizabeth Asmis for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this note.

1. For this distinction, see 15.2–3.

2. These schools are implicitly introduced at 5.2, where Seneca mentions those persons whom an obtuse nature or their own ignorance has consigned to the rank of cattle or inanimate objects. The comparison to cattle is standard anti-Epicurean rhetoric (e.g., Sen. *Ep.* 92.6 and Cic. *Amic.* 9.32). I follow Reitzenstein (1984, 623) in reading *inanimalium* for the manuscripts' *animalium*. For comparison of skeptics to rocks, see Arr. *Epict. diss.* 1.5.1–7.

all the way through 16.3. The majority of this discussion (6.1–14.3) is taken up by Seneca's dialogue with his imagined Epicurean interlocutor.³ Within this dialogue the largest part (7.1–12.5) is Seneca's rebuttal of the Epicurean claim that it is not possible to separate virtue and pleasure (7.1, 10.1).

At 10.3, in the midst of this rebuttal, Seneca contrasts the Epicurean and Stoic positions regarding pleasure in a series of antitheses addressed to his interlocutor: "You embrace pleasure, I restrain it; you enjoy pleasure, I use it; you think that it is the highest good, I do not think it is a good at all; you do everything for the sake of pleasure, I do nothing for its sake."⁴ At 11.1 Seneca clarifies his use of the first person in these antitheses: "When I say that 'I' do nothing for the sake of pleasure, I am speaking as that wise person to whom . . ." At this point there is a question about the text. Our extant manuscripts unanimously read *cui soli concedis voluptatem* ("to whom alone you grant pleasure"). This reading is followed by the majority of editors.⁵ However, Emil Hermes and R. D. Reynolds both read *concedimus*, following an emendation by Johannes Müller.⁶ Müller argues that *concedis* is incomprehensible because the antecedent of *cui* (viz., *de illo loquor sapiente*) clearly refers to the Stoic, not the Epicurean sage. The manuscript reading would thus have the Epicurean claiming that only the Stoic sage feels pleasure, which is absurd. Müller notes that the *Coloniensis* of Gruter emended *concedis* to *concedo*.⁷ The correct reading, he suggests, would be *concedimus*: "to whom alone we [Stoics] grant pleasure." Müller cites *De vita beata* 4.2 (*licet et ita finire, ut beatum dicamus hominem eum . . . cui vera voluptas erit voluptatum contemptio*) and *Epistulae* 59.2 (*Scio, inquam . . . gaudium nisi sapienti non contingere*) as parallels.

On either reading 11.1 presents us with the highly paradoxical claim that pleasure is only experienced by the ideal wise person. But the philosophical and historical significance of this claim depends on whether we attribute it to the Epicureans or the Stoics. In this note I argue against Müller's emendation and in favor of the manuscript reading.

The Stoics rejoice in paradoxes. They claim that only the ideal wise person is a friend (all others are enemies), a free person (all others are slaves), a king, a politician, a judge, an orator, a dialectician, and so forth (see Diog. Laert. 7.121–24 and Alexander of Aphrodisias *SVF* 2.124). More to the point, they claim that happiness and the εὐπάθεια, including joy (χαρά, *gaudium*), are the exclusive possessions of the wise person. Thus, we can see the initial plausibility of reading 11.1 as "we Stoics grant pleasure to the wise person alone." However, this particular claim is unparalleled in our earlier sources, and upon closer consideration of the school's attitudes

3. For Seneca's discussion with the Epicurean interlocutor, see Asmis 1990, 235–42. The imagined interlocutor at 15.1, who suggests that the highest good is a blend of *virtus* and *voluptas*, seems to be an Academic or Peripatetic. Grimal (1967, 402–3) compares this interlocutor's position with the one Cicero ascribes to the Peripatetic Calliphon (c. third to second centuries B.C.E.) at *De finibus* 2.19 and 2.34.

4. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

5. See Fickert 1845; Haase 1881; Hurst and Whiting 1877; Gertz 1886; Bourgerie 1923; Basore 1932; Grimal 1969a; and Viansino 1990. On the manuscript tradition, see Reynolds 1968, with references to earlier studies at 1968, 363 nn. 2–3, and 1977.

6. See Hermes 1905; Reynolds 1977; and Müller 1889, 25. This reading is also adopted by Schiesaro (2000), Costa (1994), and Davie (2008), all of whom follow Reynolds' text. See also Asmis 1990, 242 with n. 72.

7. See Fickert 1845, 160. On this history of this lost manuscript, see Reynolds 1968, 317 n. 1.

toward pleasure it seems highly unlikely. The proper analysis of each of the titles listed above contains some reference to virtue, wisdom, or goodness; the same is true of the εὐπάθειαι. Thus, the possession of virtue is a necessary condition that limits these things to sages.⁸ But this is not the case with pleasure. According to the standard Stoic doctrine, ἡδονή is one of the four primary πάθη; it is the (mistaken) opinion that some present thing is good and of such a kind that we should be elated about it (see Stob. *Ecl.* 2.88; Andronicus *SVF* 3.391; and Galen *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* 4.2.4). The wise person never opines and thus never has pleasure in this sense.

There is another sense of ἡδονή in early Stoicism, described by Diogenes Laertius as a by-product (ἐπιγένημα) of natural activity at 7.85–86. This may also be the same sense of pleasure that Diogenes classifies as an indifferent at 7.101.⁹ A. A. Long and David Sedley argue that this type of pleasure is the involuntary product of natural human experience.¹⁰ If so, it is likely that the wise person experiences these pleasures. Indeed, Seneca presumably has this type of pleasure in mind at 9.2 and 12.2 since in both passages he emphasizes that the pleasures of the sage are spontaneous by-products (*accessiones*) and not the proper ends of action. But there is no reason to think that such pleasures are limited to the wise person. Indifferents are the common property of the wise and the ignorant. Indeed, Diogenes attributes this type of pleasure to nonrational animals at 7.86.

What Müller's emendation requires is a sense of *voluptas* that can be plausibly limited to the Stoic wise person. One possibility is suggested at *De vita beata* 4.2, where Seneca says that the *sapiens* can be defined as one for whom true pleasure is *contemptio voluptatum*. But two problems arise. First, it is doubtful that this refers to a pleasure that is unique to the sage. Seneca does not say that only sages can have *contemptio voluptatum*. Contempt for pleasures can be a necessary condition for sagacity without sagacity being a necessary condition for contempt. Neither does *contemptio voluptatum* seem to be essentially connected to wisdom or virtue in a way that would limit it to the sage. Those who are progressing toward virtue will presumably also display such contempt and take some pleasure in this aspect of their moral development.¹¹ Second, it is unlikely that Seneca is referring back to 4.2 at 11.1. It would be very odd for Seneca to refer to *contemptio voluptatum* simply as *voluptas* in the middle of his argument with the Epicurean interlocutor without signaling to the reader that he is using *voluptas* in a highly restricted way.

8. See Long and Sedley 1987, 1: 376.

9. The Stoics differed as to how pleasure should be classified within the category of indifferents (see Sext. *Emp. Math.* 11.73). The options are conveniently reviewed in Bett 1997, 106–7. Gosling and Taylor (1984, 419–27) deny that the Stoics distinguished two types of pleasure, assimilating the by-product view to the *pathe* view. Their argument is rejected by Long and Sedley (1987, 1: 421, 2: 343 and 405); and Bett (1997, 405). See also Görler 1984, although his interpretation is not widely accepted. Asmis (1990, esp. 240–42) compares these distinctions with Seneca's use of *voluptas*.

10. See Long and Sedley 1987, 2: 343 and 405.

11. At 20.3 Seneca says that the *progrediens* will resolve to *contemnere divitias* equally whether present or absent. The same could easily be said, I think, of pleasures. Asmis (1990, 232 n. 46) takes *vera voluptas* as referring to *χαρά*. She suggests that Seneca uses *voluptas* in place of the more common *gaudium* in order to score a rhetorical point. But *χαρά* is proper elation at the good, and it would be odd to describe *contemptio* itself as a kind of elation. One may feel a certain pleasure at the fact that one scorns pleasures. But since moral progress is itself only a preferred indifferent (see Diog. Laert. 7.106), this pleasure should fall under ἡδονή as an indifferent, not under *χαρά*. In any case, I do not think we should place too much weight on *contemptio voluptatum*. Asmis is correct that Seneca's motivation here is rhetorical, not doctrinal.

A second possibility is that at 11.1 Seneca is not talking about ἡδονή at all, but about χαρά, using *voluptas* in place of the more common *gaudium*. Χαρά is the eupathic analogue to pleasure, the proper elation that one feels at the presence of virtue and wisdom. As such it is limited to sages. Seneca himself notes this at *Epistulae* 59.2, which Müller cites as a parallel to 11.1. But in this passage Seneca specifically contrasts *gaudium* (= χαρά) with *voluptas* (= ἡδονή).¹² It is true that we cannot always read through Seneca's Latin to the Greek terms of the early Stoa.¹³ But Seneca clearly uses *gaudium* as a translation of χαρά at several points in *De vita beata* (e.g., 3.4, 4.5, and 15.2), and in the last of these passages he implicitly contrasts it with *voluptas*. Although he sometimes uses *laetitia* in a sense that is closely connected with or even identical to *gaudium* (e.g., 4.4, 15.2, and esp. 22.3: *perpetuam laetitiam ex virtute nascentem*), to my knowledge Seneca never uses *voluptas* in this way.¹⁴ Again, it would be very odd for him to do so in the midst of his dialogue with the Epicurean interlocutor without signaling to the reader.

In summary, then, I see no way of making sense of the claim that "we Stoics grant *voluptas* to the wise person alone." What about the manuscript reading? Can the Epicurean interlocutor plausibly limit *voluptas* to the wise person? Here too we are faced with a paradox since non-sages clearly do experience pleasure in the ordinary sense. To make sense of the claim we should understand *cui soli concedis voluptatem* as meaning that only the wise person lives pleasantly on the whole.¹⁵ In other words, we should take *voluptas* as specifically referring to the kind of pleasure that constitutes the Epicurean *summum bonum*, namely, bodily and mental painlessness.¹⁶ Are we justified in taking *voluptas* in this limited way? Yes, because *concedis* refers back to the Epicurean interlocutor's complaint at 10.1: "You [Seneca] misrepresent what is said by me; for I deny that it is in any way possible to live pleasantly unless one lives honorably as well. . . . I clearly say that the life that I call pleasant does not come about except through the addition of virtue."¹⁷ To move from this claim to the one at 11.1 one merely needs to add the assumption that only the wise person lives virtuously and honorably, which the Stoics grant. Indeed, it is a platitude in Hellenistic ethics that only the wise person achieves the *summum bonum*. So it is not surprising that Seneca would credit the Epicurean with this claim.

It is illuminating to compare Seneca's arguments in this section of the dialogue with those given by Cicero at *De finibus* 2.9–18. Cicero objects that Epicurean

12. *Ep.* 59.2: "I am well aware that, if we use these words in our proper [Stoic] sense, *voluptas* is something shameful and *gaudium* is only attained by the sage; for it is the elation of a soul in secure possession of its own true goods." See Diog. Laert. 7.116: "[The Stoics say that] χαρά is the opposite of ἡδονή since it is reasonable elation."

13. See Inwood (1995, 73–75), who contrasts Seneca with Cicero on this point; likewise Asmis (1990, 232 n. 46).

14. For Seneca's use of *voluptas* in *De vita beata*, see Grimal 1969b, 190–92. Asmis (1990, 232 n. 46) notes that the Stoics subdivided χαρά into τέρψις, εὐφροσύνη, and εὐθυμία (see Andronicus *SVF* 3.432). She suggests that *hilaritas* and *laetitia* may translate either of the first two in Seneca (e.g., at *De vita beata* 4.4 and 15.2), whereas *tranquilitas* often translates εὐθυμία (e.g., at *Tranq.* 2.3).

15. My thanks to Elizabeth Asmis and my anonymous reader for this suggestion.

16. Epicurus holds that the happy life requires both bodily and mental painlessness (see *RS* 3). This seems to be the thrust of the Epicurean interlocutor's objection at 12.1 that Nomentanus and Apicius, the *exempla* of profligate pleasures, will not be happy "since many things that perturb the soul will intrude, and contradictory opinions will disquiet the mind."

17. For this standard Epicurean doctrine, see *Ep. Men.* 131–32 and *RS* 5. For the connection between 11.1 and 10.1, see Grimal 1969a, 59–60.

hedonism rests on an abuse of language insofar as it conflates pleasure (*voluptas*) with the absence of pain (*nihil dolendi*). Every competent Latin speaker, he claims, would identify *voluptas* with pleasing stimulations of the senses, that is, titillations (*titillationes* = γαργαλισμοί).¹⁸ Thus, at 2.15–18 Cicero presents Torquatus with a dilemma: either he must abandon his improbable claims about *voluptas*, adopting instead the position of Hieronymus that *vacuitas doloris* is the *summum bonum*; or he must abandon the link between virtue and pleasure, adopting the position of Aristippus. Seneca, for the most part, ignores these distinctions in *De vita beata*. He simply insists that *voluptas* is often observed among the vicious (10.2, 11.3–4, 12.1–3), implicitly relying on the vulgar sense of *voluptas* as *titillationes* all the way up to 12.4, where he finally distinguishes “those sober and moderate pleasures of Epicurus” from the profligate pleasures of those who merely seek the mantle of Epicureanism.

Within the context of these rhetorical arguments the manuscript reading gives us a perfectly coherent understanding of 11.1. At 10.1 the Epicurean interlocutor has attempted to parry the main thrust of Seneca’s arguments by denying that the vicious experience pleasure in the relevant sense.¹⁹ Epicureanism teaches that to live pleasantly one must maintain a consistent grasp on mental and bodily painlessness and that this can only be achieved by living virtuously and honorably. Only the *sapiens* does this consistently. Seneca succinctly acknowledges this objection in the relative clause at 11.1, only to brush it aside in the very next sentence. Here is the whole passage again: “When I say that ‘I’ do nothing for the sake of pleasure, I am speaking as that wise person to whom alone you grant pleasure. But I do not call ‘wise’ one who is subordinate to anything at all, much less pleasure.” Whereas Cicero attacks the Epicurean conception of pleasure, denying the distinction between mere titillation and the pleasures that constitute the *summum bonum*, Seneca chooses to attack the Epicurean conception of the *sapiens*. The Epicurean’s fatal error is not a conceptual confusion about *voluptas*, but rather the mistaken idea that pleasure, however it is understood, is the final end of every action.²⁰

What should we say, then, of Müller’s argument that *de illo loquor sapiente* must refer to the Stoic and not the Epicurean sage? The answer is that the *sapiens* functions as a “thin” concept in Hellenistic philosophy, one to which all the schools may appeal as common property. It is like εὐδαιμονία or the *summum bonum* in this respect. Just as one can genuinely disagree about whether virtuous action or pleasure is the good, so too can Seneca shift seamlessly from Stoic to Epicurean claims about the *sapiens* without altering the reference of the term. By using the grammatical first person to take on the *persona* of the sage, Seneca is correcting the Epicurean’s mistaken conception of the *sapiens*.

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18. For the customary usage of *voluptas* as indicating a delightful stimulation of the senses, see Cic. *Fin.* 2.14. For *titillationes*, see Cic. *Fin.* 1.39 and *Nat. D.* 1.113; Sen. *De vita beata* 5.4 and *Ep.* 92.6–7; and Ath. 546e–f.

19. Seneca is likely thinking of Epicurus’ own complaint (*Ep. Men.* 131–32) that people have misunderstood what he means when he says that pleasure is the good, through either ignorance or willful misinterpretation.

20. This is a constant theme in *De vita beata* 7.1–12.3; see esp. 9.1–4.

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MAXENTIUS AND DIOCLETIAN

The emperor Diocletian abdicated on 1 May 305 and retired to eke out his days in the palace that he had built for himself at Salonae (modern Split) on the Dalmatian coast. Both the ancient sources and modern historians and scholars disagree on the date at which he died some years later. The ancient sources give three different dates for his death.¹ (1) Writing no later than 315, Lactantius places the death of Diocletian, which he represents as suicide by self-starvation, not only before the death of Maximinus in the summer of 313, but also before Constantine's invasion of Italy in 312 (*De mort. pers.* 42). (2) The *Epitome de Caesaribus*, shortly before 400, presents the death of Diocletian as a consequence of his refusal to attend the marriage of Licinius

1. Contrast Paschoud 1971, 192–93: "Sur la date de la mort de Dioclétien, il y a deux traditions: 316, que suit Zosime . . . , et 313, fondée sur Lactance." This misleading assertion is repeated in exactly the same words in Paschoud 2000, 205. Although the sole manuscript of Zosimus 2.8.1 states that Diocletian died "three years later," the context shows that Zosimus ought to be reckoning from his abdication in 305, not from 314, as Paschoud assumes: C. G. Heyne therefore emended the numeral from τριῶν to ὀκτώ.