



Cicero, *Utopia*, and Pleasure

In the background of the discussion of pleasure in *Utopia* is Cicero's *De finibus bonorum et malorum* (See the sidenote at 188/42: *Fines bonorum*) and the centuries-long debate on happiness and pleasure. Raphael begins the discussion with one slight criticism: the Utopians "seem over-inclined" to identify happiness with pleasure (188/40-44). He then expresses surprise that the Utopians justify this "self-indulgent" way of life by a "religion which is sober and strict ... almost gloomy and stern" (188/47-49). Raphael goes on to explain that the official Utopian ethic holds that happiness is not any pleasure but only "good and honorable [*bona atque honesta*]" pleasure (189/5). But how does one determine which of the many available pleasure(s) will bring happiness? Here begins *Utopia*'s playful and challenging "calculus" of pleasures, which begins with the Epicurean view but introduces other criteria to consider as well. The following account presents *Utopia*'s calculus in the form of five rules.

1st rule: Utopians should "only be concerned not to sacrifice a greater pleasure for a lesser one and not to pursue one that would be requited by pain" (188/70-72). How does one determine "greater" and "lesser" pleasure? And which pleasures will repay with pain? A list of qualifications follows whereby reason determines what pleasures will bring happiness.

The Utopians define virtue as "living according to nature" (189/11-12, 50). They believe that reason follows nature when it leads one to:

- 1) "love and revere the majesty of God" (189/16);
- 2) live "with as little anxiety and as much joy as possible" (189/19-20);
- 3) exert themselves to help all others to achieve this same end (189/20-21);
 - because of "natural fellowship" [*naturae societate*] (189/21-22);
 - because "the very essence of humanity [*humanitas*] ... is to relieve the distress of others, eliminate sadness from their lives, and restore them to a joyful life, that is, to pleasure" (189/29-33);
 - because nature "prescribes ... a joyous life" for all and "to help each other to lead [more] cheerful [*bilarioris*] lives" (189/48-52);
- 4) keep "not only private pacts ... but also [legitimate] public laws" (189/60-62; see 62-69 for what constitutes a "legitimate" law);
- 5) accept the work or duty "[*officium*] of *humanitas* & *benignitas*" towards others (189/72-73).

This first rule is qualified by compulsory beliefs that contradict Epicurus's own theory of the afterlife (188/57-62, 204/73-74; compulsory: 188/50-55, 60-72).

2nd rule: "consciousness of having done a good deed and the thought of the love and good will of those you have benefited will give you mental pleasure that outweighs any loss of bodily comfort" (189/77-81).

This rule is strengthened by the compulsory belief that God repays passing pleasures with "never-ending joy" (189/81-83).

3rd rule: "pursues whatever is pleasurable by nature, i.e., pleasures not achieved through wrongdoing, or acquired with the loss of a greater pleasure, or followed by hardship [*labor*]" (190/11-14).

Two pages of "false pleasures" follow, including: clothing, honors, gems, gambling, hunting (190-91)

4th rule: "impose the limitation that a lesser should not impede a greater pleasure or that a pleasure should not cause pain at some later time – and they think this will necessarily happen if the pleasure is dishonorable [*inbonesta*]" (192/100-193/4).

- 1) This rule is like the 1st rule but it explicitly forbids what is without *honestas*.
- 2) This rule is given after two pages of "true pleasures" for the soul and body. True pleasures of the soul are briefly stated at 191/66-70 and restated at 192/50-53). True pleasures of the body are divided into two classes: first, replenishing, discharging, scratching/rubbing, "tickling" of music (191/71-86); second, physical health, explained as the cause of other pleasures (191/87-192/48; 53-99 argues for health as first of bodily pleasures).

5th rule: "in return for...effort [*laboris*]...expect greater pleasure from God" (193/11-12).

Utopians' claim about pleasure: "no truer doctrine" is possible, unless heaven should "reveal something holier" (193/21-22).

Raphael's claim: He says he is not defending Utopian principles, but he is certain that "nowhere [*nusquam*] is there a more extraordinary people [*praestantiorem populum*] or a happier commonwealth [*feliciorem rempublicam*]" (193/28-33).

Questions to consider: How persuasive is each rule as presented? Why give such prominence to social pleasures and obligations, for example, under rule 1? How well are the different types of pleasure distinguished under rule 4? How persuasive are the roles given to God and religious fear, in contrast to Epicurus's actual teachings about these subjects?