



Liber de Voluptate.

“The Book On Pleasure”

Marsilio Ficino

Written 1457, Published 1497

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for the Ritman Library Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica
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“It is beauty which is admired in that which one loves.”

Ficino, De Amore

Introduction to Marsilio Ficino (19 October 1433 – 1 October 1499) a leading humanist philosopher of the Italian Renaissance. He was the first leader of the Florentine Academy, a revival of Plato's Academy in Athens (387 BC - 529 AD). Indeed, for nearly 1000 years, Plato's works had been lost to the west. But, under the patronage of Cosimo de Medici, Ficino translated all of Plato's works to Latin. He also translated the works of Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus and the Corpus Hermetica. Ficino's efforts to make these classical texts available is reflected in many Renaissance works, eg., Da Vinci, Raphael, Michelangelo [1].

“The importance of the work of Marsilio Ficino of Florence in the awakening, transmission and dissemination of esoteric knowledge in the West cannot be overestimated. By ‘esoteric’, we mean a tradition of religious philosophy which embodies an initiatic mode of teaching—a promise of access to hidden meanings deep within the fabric of the world which will eventually lead the searcher to a condition of gnosis or unity with the source of all being.”
—Angela Voss [2]

In addition to his commentaries on the translated works, Ficino wrote several philosophical books of his own; of these, he is perhaps best known for his work *De Amore* (“On Love”). Presented here is a draft of the first English translation of Ficino's early work, *Liber De Voluptate* (“Book on Pleasure”). Published by Aldus Manutius in 1497, Ficino wrote the manuscript in 1457 when he was only 24 years old. Ficino wrote during a period in which he was both a follower of Plato and an admirer of Epicurus. He was known to have burned another commentary connecting Epicureanism and Platonism (his lost commentary on Lucretius' *De rerum natura*). My hope in digitizing this wonderful book—and arranging translation by Alice Ahearn of Oxford University—was to understand how we might reconcile Platonist virtue with Epicurean pleasure. Can the pursuit of pleasure lead to virtue? Might the pursuit of the greatest virtues lead to the greatest pleasures?

Please enjoy.

JDL

[1] van den Doel, M. J. (2021). Ficino's Fantasy and Michelangelo's Dream. In *Ficino and Fantasy* (pp. 202-267). Brill.

[2] Voss, A. (Ed.). (2006). *Marsilio Ficino (Vol. 9)*. North Atlantic Books.

For a recent thesis:

<https://storage.knaw.nl/2022-11/profielwerkstuk-maurits-van-woercom.pdf>

If you have been invited to this text, I would welcome your comments, commentaries and any suggested corrections.

Please use the comment function or “suggest changes.” Additionally, please consider contributing a longer commentary (1,000-4,000 words) for publication alongside the text.

A Note on the Production of *Liber De Voluptate*: In the following table, Ficino's Neolatin is presented alongside an English translation (provided by [Alice Ahearn](#) of Oxford University, completed February, 2022). A new row begins with the beginning of a new page in the original manuscript and also at the onset of a new chapter. The Neolatin was digitized by [Christian Ruel](#) of Würzburg University. [A scan of the original book is available here](#), a 1497 Venice publication.

De Voluptate was published as a closing addendum within a collection of Ficino's translations, notably and first, “*De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum, Chaldaeorum, Assyriorum*” by Iamblichus. Printed by [Aldus Manutius](#), founder of the Aldine press, the book may have been financed by Girolamo Biondo, a Florentine merchant and printer working in Venice. Ficino's preface addresses the young Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici, the future Pope Leo X. A [complete digitization of the 1497 book](#) is available.

The complete table of contents:

1. Iamblichus de mysteriis Aegyptiorum. Chaldaeorum. Assyriorum.
2. Proclus in Platonicum alcibiadem de anima, atq; daemone.
3. Proclus de sacrificio & magia.
4. Porphyrius de diuinis atq; daemonibus.
5. Synesius Platonicus de somniis.
6. Psellus de daemonibus
7. Expositio pssa & Marsilii in Thophrastū desen su. phantasia. & intellectu.
8. Alcinoi Platonici philosophi liber de doctria Platonis,
9. Speusippi Platonis discipuli liber de platonis difinitionibus
10. Pythagorae philosophi aurea uerba,
11. Symbola Pithagorae philosophi.
12. Xenocratis philosophi platonici liber de morte.
- 13. Marsilii ficini liber de voluptate.**

To Cite: Ficino, M. (1497) "Book on Pleasure: Marsilii Ficini Liber de Voluptate." in *Iamblichus de Mysteriis Aegyptiorum, Chaldaeorum, Assyriorum [and other works]*. Venice: Aldus Manutius, September 1497

<p>Marsilii Ficini Florentini adhuc adolescentis, Liber de uoluptate, ad Antonium, canisianum. ciuem Florentinum.</p>	<p>From the young Marsilio Ficino of Florence, <i>A Book on Pleasure</i>, to Antonius Canisianus, citizen of Florence.</p>
<p>Prohemium: TRIA DISSERENDI GENERA.</p> <p>Enim cun adessem una tecum in campo litano uestro, & cum regionis illius praecipua amoenitate tum uariorū pomo quibus ea uilla imprimis abundat suauitate duceremur, nos in uoluptatis disputationem incidisse, quam ipse a me requisisti, & cū primū daretur ociū litteris tradere. Hoc ergo ad te de uoluptate opusculum ut primum Figinū redii, sūma ipse cū uoluptate coscripsi.</p> <p>Tria uero sunt ut hinc potissimum exordiamur apud philosophos disserendi genera, unum quo certam aliquam quaestionis partem disputādo defendimus, atq; approbamus, ut peripatetici. ac stoici effecere, Alterum quo quaestione proposita diuersas ad id, quod quaeritur sententias, rationesq; referimus, ut propositis pluribus, inuicemq; collatis, quid ex is probabilius, uerisimiliusq; appareat eligamus, quo academici, ac socratici pene omnes utebantur. Tertium uero genus scepticorum maxime propriū est, qui cum omnia indifferentia esse putent, nec certum, aut probabile habeant quicquid sequantur, ea enim, quae naturae ordine seiuncta distinctaq; sunt confundunt atq; permiscunt ab excellentioribus, quibusq; philosophis reiciuntur.</p>	<p>Introduction: THE THREE KINDS OF DISCUSSION</p> <p>I remember when I was together with you in your country estate—we were carried away by the astonishing beauty of that place and the various fruits with which that villa is abundant—and we were led by that sweetness to stumble into the discussion of pleasure. You yourself asked me to produce this in writing as soon as there was an opportunity: therefore as soon as I returned to Figini, I assembled it myself—with the greatest pleasure.</p> <p>There are three kinds of discussion among the philosophers for us to consider: one by which we defend and approve, by discussion, a certain part of an inquiry, as the Peripatetics and Stoics have done. In another, we offer different opinions and reasons to our end, so that when more have been proposed and gathered, we may select which one of them appears more likely and more plausible—this is the method which academics and almost all Socratics use. The third kind mostly belongs to the sceptics—they think everything is indifferent and they do not hold as certain or probable anything which they follow—those things which are separate and distinct in the natural order, they mingle and mix together. They are rejected by all more distinguished philosophers.</p> <p>So it occurred to me that I needed to propose an argument here out of a discussion of all these</p>

Ego igitur ex iis omnibus academicorum, socraticorumq; indisserendo rationem hoc tempore proponendam mihi decreui. Et enim Plato, quem tā̄ philosophorum deum sequimur, atq; ueneramur, uetateos, qui adhuc in tenera aetate constituti sunt, suam aliqua de re sententiam afferre, ne ut in iunioribus saepe accidit, quod primis annis maxime probauerimus, Id maturiori deinde aetate & grauiori iudicio reuocandum & incontrariam sententiam conuertendum sit. Satius igitur esse censui caeterorum philosophorum de uoluptate sententias breui sermone percurrere, meam exprimere ne contra id quod a Platone nostro docemur aliquid impudenter asseuerarem, & ut tuae, quam noui in philosophiae studiis ardentissimam satisfacerem uoluntati. Sed haec hactenus. ad philosophorum iam opiniones deueniamus.

academics and Socratics. And Plato, whom I follow and revere as a god of philosophers, forbids those who are still in their tender years from offering their own opinion about a particular matter—lest, as happens often to the younger, that we greatly approve of an opinion in our earliest years, then reject it with our older years and greater judgement, and are then converted to the opposite view. Therefore, I decided it was more appropriate to run through the opinions of other philosophers on pleasure in a brief discussion, than to express mine—so as not to shamelessly assert anything against what we are taught by our Plato—and so that I might satisfy your will, which I know is most enthusiastic in the study of philosophy. But enough of this for now. Let us now come down to the philosophers' own opinions.

Caput primū. De partibus animae.

Item de laetitia, gaudio, & uoluptate, secundun Platonem.

PLATO igitur (ut ab eorum principe initium faciam) cū animum in duas partes distribuisset, mente scilicet, ac sensum, menti laeticiam, & gaudium attribuit, sensibus uoluptatem. Verum prima duo haec ïter se differre putat, quod omne gaudium laude sit dignū, laetitia uero partim laudanda, partim uituperanda sit. Esse enim laetitiam ï bonis alicuius possessione quandam mentis elationem, quae tamen modestiam excedere pariter, atq; seruare queat. gaudium uero illam ipsam, quae ex contēplatione, aut alio quo piam uirtutum usu suscipitur iocunditatem. Itaq; ipse idem in phaedro cum de prima illa, ac uera uita, qua in caelorum sedibus animus fruitur loqueretur ait, ueritatis contēplatione nutritur, & gaudet. unde saepenumero gaudium mentis

Chapter 1. On the parts of the soul.

Also on happiness, joy and pleasure, according to Plato.

So Plato (to make a start with the foremost of them), since he had divided the soul (*animus*) into two parts – mind (*mente*), of course, and sense (*sensum*) – attributed joy (*laeticiam*) and gladness (*gaudium*) to the mind, and pleasure (*uoluptatem*) to the senses. But he thinks that these first two diverge, because every gladness is worthy of praise, but joy is partly to be praised, partly to be disparaged. For joy is a kind of elation of mind in someone's possession of good things, which can however exceed modesty as much as preserve it. But gladness is that pious enjoyment which is taken from contemplation, or from some other use of virtues. And so likewise in the Phaedrus when he himself talks about that first and true life (*uita*), which he says the soul enjoys (*fruitur*) in the seat of heaven, it is nourished by contemplation of the truth (*ueritatis*), and is glad. Hence often he calls gladness the