

Was Epicurus Sexually Active?

Post by “Pacatus” of February 23, 2023 at 6:22 PM

Some time ago, I came upon the following quote by Catherine Wilson (in an interview; I’m not sure if it’s also in her book):

“Epicurus himself liked women and had a series of affairs with women who were uncharacteristically allowed into the school.” <https://medium.com/perennial/how-...ll-ec69bf6c7d5b>

I hasten to say that I have no moral qualms or objections whatsoever. I would suspect that friendship was also part of any such relationships. But I have not been able to find any confirming sources. Has anyone else?

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In addition to the cautions against the dangers of imprudence and profligacy ([PD08](#), VS51 and the letter to Menoceus), there seems to be one thoroughly affirming statement on sexual pleasure (which I think has been quoted here often), from Diogenes Laertius:

“I know not how to conceive the good, apart from the pleasures of taste, sexual pleasures, the pleasures of sound, and the pleasures of beautiful form.” (On the Ethical End, quoted in DL, x, 6)*

[Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, BOOK X, EPICURUS \(341-271 B.C.\)](#)

The Greek word here translated as “sexual pleasures” is ἐρασθῆναι, and inflection of ἔραμαι which is also rendered as love (as it is in Bailey) – but with the connotation of romantic/sexual passion. It seems etymologically related to ἔρωϛ.

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, ἔρα^μαι](#)

[ἔραμαι - Wiktionary](#)

[ἔρωϛ - Wiktionary](#)

This is where I cry out to [Don](#) for help! 🤔

There seems to be a fairly large body of thought that Epicurus was celibate. But that seems to fall into something like the “bread and water in a cave” asceticism (possibly influenced by Stoicism?) that Cassius oft rebukes. Personally, I prefer a full-blooded, full-bodied Epicurus – including the pleasures of sex.

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I'm sure a lot of this has been covered before (and I skimmed the threads a bit), but I'd enjoy hearing other's thoughts (even though it may all be speculative) on the subject - especially with regard to Wilson's claim and the proponents of the idea that Epicurus was (must have been?!) celibate. Thanks in advance.

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* There is an expanded version in Cicero:

"For my part I cannot conceive of anything as the good if I remove the pleasures perceived by means of taste and sex and listening to music, and the pleasant motions felt by the eyes through beautiful sights, or any other pleasures which some sensation generates in a man as a whole. Certainly it is impossible to say that mental delight is the only good. For a delighted mind, as I understand it, consists in the expectation of all the things I just mentioned--to be of a nature able to acquire them without pain. . ." (Epicurus, On the End; Cicero, Tusculan Disputations 3.42-3.)