

Epicurus vs Schopenhauer - Orientation Discussion

Post by "Elli" of June 12, 2026 at 7:59 AM

Dear friend Martin hi! 😊 Thanks for your comment.

What I meant is not that Schopenhauer left no letters to his mother, but that Epicurus is the only one of the three - Epicurus, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche - who left us a letter *of that tone, that emotional quality, and that human clarity*. Schopenhauer's letters to his mother certainly exist, but they are famously tense, cold, and full of conflict. None of them resemble the letter we have from Epicurus. ❤️

Lets' see again the letter of Epicurus to His Mother (Diogenes of Oenoanda fr. 125-126)

"...you must think carefully and with certainty about these matters. For indeed, the images (in dreams) of things not present to our sight, when they reach the soul, fill it with the greatest fear. But if you examine the whole issue attentively, you will understand that these images appear entirely the same - whether of things absent or present. For since they are not perceived by touch but by the mind, they possess the same power with regard to what is not present as they do to what is present. Therefore, mother, do not let these things frighten you. You must not consider your dreams about me as ominous. On the contrary, think that day by day, as I acquire something good, I advance more and more toward happiness. For not small nor fruitless are the things that make our condition resemble that of the gods and show that mortality does not make us inferior to the incorruptible and blessed nature. For as long as we live, we rejoice in the same way as the gods... ..equally so, if it perceives diminution. But if it no longer has sensation, how could it be diminished? Think of me, mother, as surrounded by such blessings, always happy; and take pride in what I do. And, for Zeus' sake, show greater restraint with the money you constantly send me. I do not want you to lack anything so that I may have more; better that I lack and you do not. Besides, I live comfortably in every respect, thanks to my friends and to the money my father continually sends me. Recently, in fact, he sent me nine minas through Cleon. Therefore none of you should worry about me, but rather support one another..."

The above letter of Epicurus to his mother is one of those texts you do not simply read...you *hear* it. You hear the tone of his voice, the calmness, the tenderness, the absence of any trace of irony or severity. Here, he does not speak as a philosopher, but as a son. His mother is anxious, troubled by dreams that frighten her, sending him money not out of duty, but out of that primordial maternal need to be present, to protect, to support. And Epicurus does not reject her, does not scold her, does not push her away. He speaks to her in a way only someone raised in emotional safety can speak: with clarity, with serenity, with that quiet strength that does not need to raise its voice to be heard.

He explains to her that the images of the mind, whether of things present or absent, have the same power, and that she must not let her dreams terrify her. This is not philosophical instruction; it is emotional regulation. It is the adult son who can contain his mother's fear without being swallowed by it. It is the mark of a secure bond, a bond not built on guilt, fear, or dependency, but on a deep, steady, human presence. And when he asks her to be more sparing with the money she sends him, he does not do so out of pride or self-sufficiency. He does it because he has internalized a maternal figure he does not need to protect from himself, but rather to relieve from her excessive generosity. It is the moment when care becomes mutual, when love matures and is no longer one-sided.

And at the end, when he says: "Think of me as surrounded by blessings and be proud of what I do," we see that he is not asking for validation. He is asking for recognition, the most mature form of connection between mother and son. In this small letter, it becomes clear that Epicurus' philosophy was not born from trauma but from safety. It is not a defense against life; it is the natural continuation of a childhood in which life was not an enemy. This is why his philosophy is serene, earthly, human: the philosophy of a man who grew up in light.

And here lies the answer to why women flourished in his Garden. This should not surprise us. Epicurus carried within him a maternal figure who was warm, steady, non-guilt-inducing, and non-threatening. A man raised in such a way does not fear women, does not belittle them, does not idealize them, does not exclude them. That is why in the Garden women were equals, participated in teaching, lived alongside men, had a voice, a role and a presence. The Garden was the first philosophical space in antiquity where women truly flourished. Because only a man who does not fear his mother, does not fear women, does not fear the body, does not fear the life itself.

The mother is the first mirror of the child. Through her gaze he learns whether the world is habitable or hostile, whether life is a gift or a threat, whether existence is joy or burden. And before a son even meets his father, he meets him through her: through the way she speaks to him, the way she thinks of him, the way she carries him within herself. If the mother does not poison, does not seek revenge, does not demand alliances, then the son can see both parents as human beings and not as opposing camps. And then he learns something few people ever learn in life: that love does not require perfection, it requires presence and mutual care. It requires being there, not being flawless. It requires truth, not roles. It requires people with feelings, not statues.

And when parents, even separated, remain united in their role, when they do not poison one another in the child's mind, when they do not ask the child to become judge or ally, then the son receives the rare gift of loving both without guilt, without fear, without division. He gains the freedom to see both the good and the flawed - because no one is perfect- without needing to choose sides. He gains the ability to love human beings, not ideals. And this is the foundation of a healthy soul.

If Epicurus is the example of light, other philosophers show how the childhood relationship with the mother can become shadow, wound, or void.

- Socrates carried the hardness of a mother who worked endlessly as a midwife, in poverty and without tenderness; and his philosophy became an exercise in death.
- Plato grew up in the coldness of an aristocratic mother who demanded perfection; and his philosophy became an escape from the world.
- Aristotle grew up orphaned, without a maternal figure to internalize; and his philosophy became the logical organization of a world that never embraced him.
- Schopenhauer grew up with a mother who rejected him; and his philosophy became suffering.
- Nietzsche grew up in suffocating religious austerity; and his philosophy became a cry of transcendence.
- Kant grew up in moralistic coldness; and his philosophy became duty without warmth.

And then, within this panorama, Epicurus shines as the exception. His philosophy is not defense, not reaction, not wound. It is the natural continuation of a childhood in which life was not an enemy. It is the thought of a man who grew up in pleasure —and offered pleasure. That is why women flourished only in the Garden. Because only there was a man who had learned from childhood that life is not a threat, but a GREAT gift. And only someone who learned from his mother clarity and presence could teach others that eudaemonia is not a theory, it is a way of living. 😊