

Marriage, Children, & Personal Relationships - Greater Difficulties and Risk Can Make Them Harder Than Ever. Epicurean Perspectives on Remedies

Post by "Cassius" of July 15, 2026 at 3:31 PM

ADMIN NOTE: The original version of this thread, along with the original first post, has been deleted. The following is a reconstruction from the main part of the posts that were present as of 7/15/26. If anyone's prior post here needs correcting, please let me know and I will adjust it.

SUMMARY OF ORIGINAL POST 7/1/2026

The post asks whether marriage and children are still "worth it" given the financial burden and relational strain they now entail, framing declining birth rates across Europe, Japan, and Korea as people rationally pursuing pleasure by avoiding the anxiety and cost of family life — costs the author pegs at \$300k-\$1.8M per child depending on replacement-rate assumptions. It traces this to a widening rift between the feminist movement (women pursuing career and independence over homemaking) and MGTOW (men, inspired by Schopenhauer's view of romantic love as nature's trap, opting out of marriage to protect their time and autonomy), arguing both sexes are still chasing pleasure, just no longer through the couple-and-children model. The author draws a historical parallel to Augustus Caesar's responses -- the Lex Iulia and Lex Papia Poppaea, which used law to push marriage and reproduction — and asks whether benefits for larger families should be tried today.

The second half turns more speculative and rhetorical: it lists childless historical figures (Da Vinci, Plato, Kant, Epicurus himself) as a counterpoint before pivoting to civilizational stakes — AI/robot labor replacing workers, mass immigration replacing native populations, and whether "too much pleasure" among a leisured class (the "Otiosi") produces decadence and nihilism, invoking Nietzsche's warning about Western moral decline. It closes by comparing today's turmoil to the chaos after Alexander the Great's death that led Epicurus to found the Garden, implying that whatever the answer to the marriage/children question, the philosophy's real offer is a stable, peaceful community amid social upheaval, now some 2,333 years running.

Cassius - 7/2/26:

Basic analysis of this issue is also going to be related to, or a subset of, the entire question of friendship relationships, and there we have some clear points:

1 - We pursue friendship for pleasure, even though over time the pleasure of our friends

becomes as important to us as our own.

2 - We must run risks in order to obtain friendship.

3 - We know going into a friendship that one of us is likely to die first, so if it is the friend then any friendship is going to entail at least that pain, which is very intense. Of course there are other pains as well, but the pain of a friend dying is particularly intense and serves as a good illustration of the point that friendship or any other relationship among humans is not a rose garden of all pleasures and no pains, and that we choose these relationships, even though there will be a large cost in pain, when we judge that the pleasure will outweigh the pain.

Post by “Noah Calderon” of July 2, 2026 at 9:11 AM

Marriage and children don't seem to have been out of the question for Epicureans, but Epicurus and his followers definitely seemed to place more emphasis on friendship more generally than on pair-bonding, romance, and reproduction. This makes sense because strong friendship and community provide the strongest and most natural sense of security and freedom from worry about not having access to the necessary things in life. It would require a lot of zeroes to already be in one's bank statement or budget to be confident that raising children would be pleasurable enough to justify the cost, as this post points out. Having a good group of friends one is on equal grounds with allows one to spread costs and energy and also just amplifies enjoyment. The same goes for your friendship with the person you are producing the children with or who you are marrying. Lacking respect or equality in gender relations might engender resentment and pain and distort the relationship which should be one of support and mutual pleasure.

Of course, the environment one lives in must also be conducive to raising children, but that veers into how we organize society and therefore politics. If we're looking for just advice for the Epicurean on raising children and marrying, I would say the philosophy makes it quite clear that you have to have a strong community and strong friendships (especially with the person you are marrying) first. Maybe seeing these things as purely individual or familial is eroding the personal pleasure they produce, and placed in the context of supportive friendships they become more bearable. In any case, that's the reason I am personally not prioritizing them as a young person, and I live in a country with very supportive politics for childrearing.

On this note it would be interesting to hear from anyone on this forum that has researched what the marriage institution in Epicurean communities in ancient times actually looked like, and how it might have differed from today.

Post by “Elli” of July 2, 2026 at 1:40 PM

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/5177-marriage-children-personal-relationships-greater-difficulties-and-risk-can-make/?postID=40726#post40726>

Hello to all epicurean friends,

[ADMIN NOTE: THE FOLLOWING REFERS TO THE DELETED POST] Sorry but your whole text is a measurement of turmoil, not pleasure. You count taxes, cost of living, politics, technology, decline, demographics, robots, migration, feminism, MGTOW, Schopenhauer, Augustus, Rome, Nietzsche, the West , but you do not count yourself.

Epicurus says that every desire must be judged by the pleasure it brings and the disturbance it creates. You judge having children in terms of the market, not in terms of the Canon. Physiology (biology) is clear; it has an unforgiving law: children are the future of the city.

Without children, society dies. Lucretius describes how human nature softened when people first saw their children; children created friendship, empathy, cooperation. Biology, anthropology, and history agree: children are not a “cost,” they are a bond. They are the natural root of human sociality.

And here we must see something else: you invoke Schopenhauer - a man who saw the world through his personal trauma. Schopenhauer looked at his relationship with his mother, felt rejection and turmoil, and concluded that “the world is will and representation” and that life is suffering. But this is not the physiology of the world - it is the projection of his own psychological condition onto the world. Epicurus (the physician) would tell him: “If your mother did not love you, that is a condition that cannot be changed now, but it does not mean that nature is evil or that love is a trap. It simply means that you never learned to build the community that would support you.” Trauma is not philosophy; it is an obstacle. And when trauma becomes ideology, philosophy stops healing and starts fortifying. When we say “marriage is a trap,” we no longer need to risk rejection. When we say “everything is decline,” we no longer need to try to build anything. It becomes a convenient empty belief that protects us from the pain of possible failure.

But the Canon does not impose having children; it measures it. If having children increases your pleasure, have children. If it increases your turmoil, do not. A child is not an economic act; it is a desire. And every desire is judged by the pleasure and the disturbance it brings - not by its cost.

And here lies the real problem: if we are afraid, it is because we are alone. Our turmoil is not biological; it is socially constructed. It is borrowed from a society that supports no one. Epicurus said it clearly: “When the wise man limits himself to what is natural and necessary, he knows more how to give than to receive; such a treasure of self-sufficiency he has found.” Self-sufficiency does not mean isolation; it means friendship. It means community. It means people who share burdens. It means you are not afraid to give, because you are not afraid of being left alone.

You measure having children inside a society that has dissolved into individuals without face and without identity - an amorphous mass. That is why it seems like a burden. When you live in

a society where everyone is alone, where there are no communities, no support networks, no stable friendships, no functioning family structures, when everything has become individual and nothing is shared, then every burden feels unbearable. But in Epicurus' Garden, having children is not a burden; it is an act of pleasure. There, the children of friends are the children of all, the community shares the burden, friendship provides security, and giving creates self-sufficiency.

And here comes something very simple: even if you do not want children, you do not live in a vacuum. Some of your friends will have children. Some of your relatives will have children. Some people around you will carry burdens that you do not carry. And you, says Epicurus - as someone who wants to be wise and self-sufficient - can offer help. Do you know what pleasure you will gain from that? The pleasure of participation, of care, of community. The pleasure Epicurus describes: to give more than you take. Unless you do not want to help either friends or relatives, but then you go against one of the most beautiful Epicurean sayings: LXI.(61)

"Beautiful indeed is our relationship with those around us, and especially with our relatives, who because of this become even more willing." Friendship and kinship are not burdens; they are sources of pleasure. And offering help to the children of friends and relatives is an act of self-sufficiency, not an act of cost.

Epicurean ethics shows that having children is not a burden when there is community. In his will, Epicurus cared for the children of his friends: he gave them guardianship, financial support, moral support. In the Garden, children are not a private matter; they are a shared responsibility. Friendship reduces the turmoil of having children. Community shares the burden. Community protects children. Community gives security. Community gives pleasure. Community gives a future. Nietzsche said it clearly: "Unhappy marriages do not come from lack of love, but from lack of friendship." If you find friendship, you find companionship. If you find companionship, you find security. If you find security, having children is not a burden; it is pleasure. Friendship is the foundation of self-sufficiency. Friendship is the foundation of the future.

In short, Epicurean philosophy says: Measure, and have children if it increases your pleasure. Do not have children if it increases your turmoil. And if you do not want children, offer help to the children of your friends and relatives - you will find a treasure of self-sufficiency. And if you want children but are afraid, find a community or create one yourself. Friendship reduces turmoil and creates homeostasis. Community gives security. Security gives pleasure. And pleasure is wealth, because it is the foundation of life - the foundation that gives a future!

Post by "DaveT" of July 2, 2026 at 2:13 PM

Yes, as Cassius said, there are a lot of issues worth discussing. Not the least one being that

Epicurus seemed to discourage creating children within the marriage contract except if you were one of the rare Wise Men. But that is not my main point. I think the angst, if I can call what you described with that word, is nearly unknown for most of the world's population. The pleasure/avoidance of pain effects involved in childbearing within marriage are not the most basic. Those who desire pleasure, dare I say unnatural and natural/unnecessary ones that are available within western Industrialized educated, rich societies rather than fulfilling some biblical originating duty to procreate are minorities even among that overall group.

Also, the pleasure urge, expressed as sex leading to babies, of the non Industrialized part of the globe, comes from the basic, human (animalistic based desire) to find pleasure in the sex act. I want to say that sex scratches the urge for pleasure far better than unnatural/unnecessary things. Note that I don't say sex is absolutely necessary, but (fill in the blank) sure is pleasurable and available to anyone in every station in life.

As a fellow senior citizen, I respectfully suggest that concern over population ebb and flow in the future is not worth the time spent on it. It is for those elite in every society who enormously profit from the labor of the populations who need to worry. For me, relief over these issues comes from the teaching: Do not fear death. In a sense, we should not fear the future that /will unfold slowly after we are gone, it means nothing to us. And the kids will do fine.

Post by “Elli” of July 2, 2026 at 4:02 PM

Epicurus classifies sex as a desire “natural but not necessary.” He does this for a very precise reason: sex activates two different neurochemical systems in the human organism. One of them is stabilizing; the other is destabilizing.

The stabilizing part is oxytocin - the hormone of bonding, trust, and emotional connection. This is why sex is “natural”: it creates a bond. Oxytocin moves us toward connection, care, and mutual support - all of which are compatible with the Epicurean Physiology, Canon and Ethics.

But this oxytocin bond becomes stable only if it transforms into friendship. If it does not become friendship, the destabilizing systems take over: dopamine (craving and pursuit), noradrenaline (arousal and anxiety), and vasopressin (possessiveness and jealousy). These produce turmoil, not pleasure. They generate instability rather than the “well-balanced constitution” that Metrodorus praised as eustathia. Today in neurobiology has a synonym word with "eustathia" as Homeostasis.

This is exactly why Epicurus says sex is natural but not necessary. If you do not have it, you do not lose your eudaemonia i.e. the homeostatic balance of body and soul. And if you do have it, it brings pleasure only when the oxytocin bond becomes friendship: a stable, reliable, fear-reducing relationship that Epicurus considered the foundation

of self-sufficiency.

Without friendship - the state of security, trust, and mutual reliability - sex by itself activates the destabilizing systems; with friendship, it aligns with the natural ones. And that's all.

Post by "Elli" of July 3, 2026 at 3:24 AM

Epicurus' Political Revolution Without Bloodshed

In On the Education of Children, Plutarch begins with a series of "moral" recommendations that Epicurus would immediately classify as empty beliefs. These are external social norms that have nothing to do with human nature, intimacy, or love, but with what society allows you to choose as a life partner. Plutarch says you must not marry a courtesan, must not marry a concubine, must not marry a woman of humble origin, and - most absurd of all - must not marry a short woman if you are a king. The example of Archidamus is telling: "If you are King Archidamus, do not marry a short woman, because you will produce little lizard-kings instead of real kings." The Spartans fined Archidamus for marrying a short woman, believing her appearance would "pollute" the quality of his offspring. A great expert in DNA, Plutarch... what can we say.

In other words, if you were a Spartan or an Athenian and dared to fall in love with a woman your social circle did not approve of ...watch out, because you'd get fined and socially bullied! Did you dare to love Aspasia, the courtesan? You will never become a statesman like Pericles, nor will you build a democracy... watch out, because you'll get bullied! Did you choose the courtesan Leontion as your life partner? You will never become Metrodorus, nor will you teach philosophy in a school named as Garden... watch out, because you'll get bullied!

Are you the titan philosopher Epicurus, and you allowed courtesans, and slaves to attend your philosophical school - the Garden - in order to free them from ignorance, fear, and all the things that disturb human life? That's not a philosophical school - that's a filthy brothel... and watch out, because you'll receive brutal and eternal bullying as a philosopher!

These social norms - social class, origin, appearance, "what people will say," height measurements, class moralizing, Platonic "virtue," Spartan punishments - are exactly what Epicurus calls empty beliefs. They are external obstacles telling you which woman you are "allowed" to choose as your life partner and which one you are not. They have nothing to do with happiness, friendship, and pleasure. They are social pressures that produce disturbance, not tranquility. And it is astonishing how easily these beliefs reappear in every era, just with new names.

Epicurus sets no such norms. He does not measure height, origin, class, or wealth. He does not say "whom you are allowed to love in order to marry." On the contrary, we see him offering an

exhortation: “your wife must not be afraid of you, because you did not marry her to serve you, but to be your companion in life”. We see that with this exhortation Epicurus does something deeply radical: he clearly rejects the idea that a relationship - whether marriage or friendship - is a relationship of power. For Epicurus, a relationship is a relationship of friendship. And in ancient Greek, the verb “to love” was the verb “philein” - from which the word philia (friendship) comes. Love is a form of friendship. Friendship is a form of love. And friendship is the highest form of human connection.

Lucretius states it plainly (DRN 4.1278–1287): love is not born from origin, appearance, social class, nor from the mythical “arrows of Aphrodite.” It is born from intimacy and daily interaction, like drops of water falling on a rock and slowly penetrating it over time. This is empiricism, not idealism. This is human nature, not social norm.

And here is the funny part: in the forum, our friend - without realizing it - fell into the same trap as Plutarch. Plutarch measured height, origin, social class. Our friend measures taxes, cost of living, politics, technology, demographic collapse, robots, migration, feminism, MGTOW, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, the decline of the West. In other words, modern empty beliefs. The same external obstacles, just with new names. Both forget the Epicurean criterion: love is born from intimacy, not from social norms.

So the real question is - “should you have children or not.” The real question is with which woman (or man) you will have children or not - and not with which social norms allow or forbid you to choose her as your life partner. Plutarch says: “with the one society approves.” Our friend said: “with the one the era, politics, and economy approve.” Epicurus says: “with the one you love.” Lucretius says: “with the one intimacy binds you to.”

From Diogenes Laertius’ description of the wise man: “And indeed, the wise man will marry and have children, as Epicurus says in On Problems and On Nature, but only in accord with the circumstances of his life.”

And now, we ask : What is the main circumstance? That you love her and she loves you, that you are friends - because we choose friendship for its own sake, but its beginning lies in mutual benefit. Today, many people say they cannot find a partner to have children with. But Epicurus would smile gently and say: you cannot find friends. You cannot find philia (friendship). You cannot find the human warmth that makes love possible. What you call “a crisis of relationships” is simply a crisis of friendship - a crisis of intimacy that leads to loneliness, desertion, and depression. This is the weapon of tyrants: where tyranny exists, there is no friendship, no frank speech, no freedom. But when everything around us collapses, these are the only fortresses that remain standing.

Post by “Elli” of July 3, 2026 at 4:26 AM

Plutarch was not a neutral observer. He was a priest of the Delphic priesthood, an ideological guardian of the Platonic and religious establishment. When he could not refute Epicurus philosophically, he resorted to ad hominem attacks, moralistic slander, and ideological gossip. He even spread the rumor that Epicurus and Metrodorus “shared” Leontion - a claim found nowhere else in antiquity. It was not history; it was propaganda.

And yet, Plutarch himself preserves one of the most extraordinary acts of Epicurean humanity: during a famine in Athens, Epicurus distributed beans one by one to his friends, ensuring that they survived. The irony is striking: the same man who accused the Garden of being a “filthy brothel” records that Epicurus saved human lives with food.

And these were not just any beans. They were the “impure,” “unholy” beans forbidden by Pythagoras - the beans the superstitious feared. Epicurus acted exactly as a wise man would: beans can be stored for a very long time, and because the superstitious considered them impure, no one would raid the Garden to steal them. Epicurus chose a resource that fear and superstition would protect for him. This was not only kindness; it was strategic survival. And with this strategy, he saved his friends.

The irony becomes even sharper: according to certain idealist doctrines, it would be “better” to starve than to eat the supposedly impure beans. Epicurus, guided by Nature and the Canon rather than by ideological taboos, used those very beans to preserve life. This contrast shows how detached idealistic prohibitions can become from human reality, while Epicurean philosophy remains grounded, humane, and life-preserving.

Post by “Elli” of July 3, 2026 at 4:43 AM

Quote from Cassius

Thank you for that post Elli!

I am sure someone will ask about this:

Quote

Quote from Elli

Epicurus sets no such norms. He does not measure height, origin, class, or wealth. He does not say “whom you are allowed to love in order to marry.” On the contrary, we see him offering an exhortation: “your wife must not be afraid of you, because you did not marry her to serve you, but to be your companion in life”

Is this an actual quote for which there is a citation, or is this exhortation a paraphrase?

Elli responded:

I have read this quote in a post of a friend, who claimed that said by Epicurus, but this is fake!

Post by “DaveT” of July 3, 2026 at 9:13 AM

Quote

Quote from Elli

Today, many people say they cannot find a partner to have children with. But Epicurus would smile gently and say: you cannot find friends. You cannot find philia (friendship). You cannot find the human warmth that makes love possible. What you call “a crisis of relationships” is simply a crisis of friendship - a crisis of intimacy that leads to loneliness, desertion, and depression.

Elli I enjoyed reading your posts. I'm not sure whether friendship is a subset of intimacy, or intimacy is a subset of friendship. But your statement above made me think of the old saying that to have a friend, you must be a friend. And perhaps to have an intimate (or loving?) relationship you have to love and be open to intimacy.

Post by “Elli” of July 3, 2026 at 11:10 AM

DaveT Thank you for your kind words and your thoughtful reflection.

Epicurus would agree with you that intimacy and friendship are deeply intertwined. In fact, in Diogenes Laertius "on the wise man" we read that friendship begins from practical need, but becomes a “community of life” sustained by mutual pleasure. That shared life -that philia -is exactly what makes intimacy possible.

So when I wrote that modern people cannot find partners because they cannot find friendship, I meant it in this Epicurean sense: intimacy is not something separate from friendship, nor something that appears magically. It grows out of the daily practice of mutual care, openness, and trust. To have a friend, you must be a friend -and to have intimacy, you must cultivate friendship.

Epicurus sees love as the deepening of philia. Without friendship, intimacy cannot arise; without intimacy, love cannot survive. What we call a “crisis of relationships” is, at its root, a crisis of friendship, a crisis of human warmth.

SUMMARY OF DELETED POST 7/4/26

The core argument of this post is that poverty undermines pleasure rather than enabling it: a poor man who has five children will likely raise them hungry and illiterate while shortening his wife's health from repeated childbirth, whereas having only one or two children he can properly feed and educate produces far more actual pleasure and far less pain. The post frames Epicurus himself as evidence for this — not a starry-eyed idealist but a prudent, practical administrator who had to secure real funding to run his school and sustain decades of writing — arguing that marriage and childrearing likewise demand realism, responsibility, and discipline, not just goodwill.

The second half builds a historical case that marriage was traditionally understood as a financial contract (the author traces "wed" to Old English *weddian*, "to pledge/stake"), a partnership of pooled money and land between families that only later got buried under a "romantic" ideal invented by troubadours and artists — an illusion the author says is now supercharged by social media and dating apps, which push men and women toward fantasy partners (the multi-millionaire, the sex goddess) instead of realistic, decent matches like "the apprentice plumber" or "the girl down the street." The author concedes they were once a hedonist but says discovering Epicureanism taught them to balance pleasure with prudence, citing Epicurus's ranking of katastematic pleasure (aponia/ataraxia) over fleeting kinetic pleasure. The piece closes by saying that some financial cushion ("zeroes") is necessary before marrying, so a couple can grow their family only as fast as their means allow — and closes on the Letter to Menoeceus line that "prudence is a more precious thing even than philosophy."

Post by “Elli” of July 6, 2026 at 2:38 PM

It is striking to observe how someone can speak of prudence while repeating the very error Aristotle made when he claimed that women have fewer teeth than men - without ever opening a single mouth to count. He preferred abstraction to reality, assumption to experience, theory to observation. And here, the same gesture reappears: a man theorizing about marriage, children, and prudence without ever examining the living substance of Epicurean philosophy.

He speaks of marriage as a contract of business, reducing an ancient institution of joy, pleasure, and friendship into a commodity for the marketplace. He has not yet understood that this reduction is one of the primary causes of unhappy marriages: two spouses locked in separate rooms, each counting money in a private chest, each guarding his own fear of death instead of sharing a real pleasant life. When marriage becomes an accounting exercise, joy evaporates, friendship collapses, and the household turns into a pair of isolated treasuries. This is not prudence; it is moral decline - the quiet erosion of philia under the weight of economic suspicion. It is the collapse of friendship into accounting, the transformation of human intimacy

into a spreadsheet, the replacement of shared life with Excel morality, where the only virtue is the balance of columns.

He speaks of children as liabilities, of prudence as financial foresight, as if human bonds were items on a balance sheet. He measures children by the cost of their upbringing, failing to see that the cost of being alone is the one price he is actually paying. Two private anxieties are elevated into universal laws, as though the entire human condition must conform to the architecture of his fear. This is not prudence; it is projection disguised as philosophy.

Epicurus teaches that prudence and pleasure are inseparable - two movements of the same soul. He separates them. Epicurus teaches that friendship is the highest security - the foundation of a life free from fear. He replaces it with economic caution. Epicurus teaches that desires must be measured by the pleasure and disturbance they bring - not by their cost of money. He measures them by risk and liability. What emerges is not Epicurean prudence but Aristotelian household economics, where human beings are evaluated as units of production and reproduction.

And just as Aristotle never counted the teeth, he never counted the pleasures, the friendships, or the disturbances born from fear itself. He counted only the coins. And a man who counts only coins will always conclude that life is too expensive. Epicurus did not build the Garden on contracts, pledges, or liabilities. He built it on friendship, mutual care, shared burdens, and the courage to live pleasantly. Prudence is not the art of avoiding life; it is the art of choosing the life that frees one from fear.

Anyone who wishes to speak of prudence must first open the mouth of the philosophy he invokes - and count its teeth. Otherwise, he remains a prisoner of his own projections, mistaking the ledger for the landscape, merely theorizing about human nature without ever looking at the human beings in front of him.

Post by “Patrikios” of July 7, 2026 at 9:06 PM

This is an interesting thread, to which I'll post other replies. However, to this opening sentence, I would tell someone today, that I have heard this same refrain of similar “burdens” on married life for decades. It was true in 1970, as it is still true today.

The joys of seeing new life grow is a pleasure that can be treasured in memory to outweigh the pain of these burdens - for most people. But not all family relationships turn out well. Many do lead to painful memories that may be difficult to forget.

And yes, there are those persons who don't have the desire, capacity or support to pursue raising children in a meaningful marriage. They today may be pressured into raising a family from a variety of sources. More later. This is just an opening perspective on the topic.

Post by "Cassius" of July 13, 2026 at 7:47 PM

I have been delinquent in not spending more time with this thread, especially since I encouraged the posting of it.

Quote

Quote from Elli

So when I wrote that modern people cannot find partners because they cannot find friendship, I meant it in this Epicurean sense: intimacy is not something separate from friendship, nor something that appears magically. It grows out of the daily practice of mutual care, openness, and trust. To have a friend, you must be a friend -and to have intimacy, you must cultivate friendship.

Yes these are the issues that need discussion to find ways to address them. Another aspect of this is the increasing difficulty of speaking freely to people and letting them know what we actually think about things. Monitoring and censorship and the fact that the internet seems forever can tend to make people reluctant to say what they really think, and in a time when people rely on meeting others online, you don't have much to go on other than a picture and look in someone's eye, and with AI image creation you certainly can't trust even that anymore.

If you are - like many of us - very opinionated and also not in the "majority" on many of these issues, it becomes very difficult to find people who really "connect" with you.