

Letter to Menoikeus translation by Peter Saint-Andre

Post by "Don" of June 10, 2023 at 12:05 AM

I'm glad Elli brought up Diogenes Laertius (DL) 10.21. I had been meaning to check that line. This is where Epicurus himself also uses the word παίδων and where it explicitly means "slave" because he is freeing Mys, Nicias, Lycon, and Phaedrium:

DL 10.21.b, Epicurus's Will: παίδων = "slaves" (male and female enslaved people)

ἀφίημι δὲ τῶν παίδων ἐλεύθερον Μῦν, Νικίαν, Λύκωνα: ἀφίημι δὲ καὶ Φαίδριον ἐλευθερίᾳ.

Of my slaves, I manumit Mys, Nicias, Lycon, and I also give Phaedrium her liberty.

Epicurus also uses the word to mean girl and children (girl & boy) in his Will. Nowhere does he use the word to mean exclusively "boys" as most translators want to do in the Letter to Menoikeus, DL 10.132. I see no compelling reason to require the "having sex with boys and women" route there.

DL 10.20, Epicurus's Will: παιδίω = "girl" (female child)

τὴν δὲ προῖκα τῷ θήλει παιδίω, ἐπειδὴν εἰς ἡλικίαν ἔλθῃ, μερισάτωσαν Ἀμυνόμαχος καὶ Τιμοκράτης ὅσον ἂν ἐπιδέχεται ἀπὸ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων ἀφαιροῦντες μετὰ τῆς Ἑρμάρχου γνώμης.

And when the girl comes of age, let Amynomachus and Timocrates pay her dowry, taking from the property as much as circumstances allow, subject to the approval of Hermarchus.

DL 10.21.a, Epicurus's Will: παιδία = "children" (girl and boy)

Ἐὰν δέ τι τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων περὶ Ἑρμαρχον γένηται πρὸ τοῦ τὰ Μητροδώρου παιδία εἰς ἡλικίαν ἐλθεῖν, δοῦναι Ἀμυνόμαχον καὶ Τιμοκράτην, ...

And if anything should happen to Hermarchus before the children of Metrodorus grow up, Amynomachus and Timocrates shall give from the funds bequeathed by me,...

DL 10.22, Epicurus's Will: παίδων = "children" (boy and girl)

σὺ δ' ἀξίως τῆς ἐκ μειρακίου παραστάσεως πρὸς ἐμὲ καὶ φιλοσοφίαν ἐπιμελοῦ τῶν παίδων Μητροδώρου.

But I would have you, as becomes your life-long attitude to me and to philosophy, watch over the children of Metrodorus."

DL 10.132, Letter to Menoikeus: παίδων (καὶ γυναικῶν)

οὐδ' ἀπολαύσεις παίδων καὶ γυναικῶν

I also find Elli's suggestion that we should take γυναικῶν as "wives" and not simply "women" intriguing as well.

I'm still working on the *exact* connotation of ἀπολαύσεις.

To review, Epicurus is saying in 10.132, that when he says pleasure, he does not mean:

- an endless string of drinking parties and festivals
- ἀπολαύσεις παίδων καὶ γυναικῶν
- an extravagant table of fish and other things

I *remain* leaning toward the sense of not taking advantage of slaves and women/wives, but now Elli has planted the idea in my mind that... Could the phrase means something like "not enjoying the benefits of children and wives" to go along with an ambivalence toward marriage and children. It seems to harsh, since Epicurus was obviously concerned with the well-being of the children of Metrodorus and was not averse to having children named after him. I don't **think** so... but I'm raising it here for discussion. This continues to be a very illuminating and enjoyable discussion. Would that we just had MORE of Epicurus's writings!!

PS. Even though I brought it up for discussion, I remain highly skeptical of a reading like "not enjoying the benefits of children and wives" as in not being a husband and father. It doesn't fit with the drinking and feasting that bracket ἀπολαύσεις παίδων καὶ γυναικῶν. I still find the possible connotation intriguing but not compelling. Wanted to get that in here.