

Did Epicurus Advise Marriage or Not? Diogenes Laertius Text Difficulty

Post by “Pacatus” of January 28, 2024 at 2:09 PM

Whilst reading Sider on Philodemus poetry, I came across the following –

Sider (pp. 35-36):

“as both Chilton and Grilli agree, Epicurus does **allow** his followers to marry, although **only in exceptional circumstances**. This view is in line with the several other less than absolute strictures of Epicurus listed by Diogenes, including the general prohibition against writing poetry.³⁸

“What these exceptional circumstances are neither Epicurus nor our sources spell out, but we may imagine that much would depend on the character of the woman. Since, moreover, women were welcome into the Garden for their intellectual abilities, these fellow Epicureans would seem to be obvious candidates for wives. Since, furthermore, women were appreciated for their bodies as well as their minds, sex being regarded as a providing a natural, albeit unnecessary, pleasure, sexual passion would not be expected to stop at marriage. ...

“A woman who could satisfy both body and mind would make the ideal wife.”

Use of the phrase “**allow** ... although only ...” implies that Epicurus’ authority was such that he could also *forbid* (*disallow*) his followers from marrying.

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Now the comments in this thread, including [Cassius](#) in post #8 and [Don](#) translations, indicate that no one here would be in agreement with such authoritarian innuendoes. Nor does Hick’s “Occasionally he *may* marry ...” imply that.

But there seems to be some such authoritarian interpretation out there in the scholarly world.

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I looked up the Chilton article, “Did Epicurus approve of marriage? A study of Diogenes Laertius 10.119” and found it here: https://www.jstor.org/stable/4181668...an_tab_contents

Chilton proffers the following interpretation: “In general the wise man will not marry but sometimes depending on the circumstances of his life, he will marry” – but then argues that it must be wrong.

Chilton also discusses the question of the wise man “turning away from his purpose,” etc., discussed in this thread above from post #5.

But Chilton does not – unless I missed it – suggest that Epicurus in some authoritarian manner allowed/forbade marriage unless some approved conditions were met.

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Chilton is also cited here, “Epicurus on Sex, Marriage and Children” by Tad Brennan: https://www.jstor.org/stable/270440?...an_tab_contents

Brennan says that Epicurus “*advised against marriage ... but permitted it in exceptional cases.*” (p. 348-349) This could be taken as a somewhat weaker position than Sider’s – but seems a bit confusing.

He also says, referring to Epicurus’ will: “These texts, then, show that Epicurus did *permit and indeed encourage marriage* and child-rearing-not as a rule, but for certain Epicureans, in certain circumstances. And they also indicate what sort of circumstances these were.”

He concludes on marriage: “By and large, Epicurus will advise Epicureans not to marry, but sometimes, in exceptional circumstances, he will advise certain of them to marry.” (p. 350) **Advise, not allow/permit/forbid.**

All in all, Brennan seems at best sloppy on his use of language.