

Did Epicurus Advise Marriage or Not? Diogenes Laertius Text Difficulty

Post by “Eikadistes” of October 29, 2024 at 5:40 PM

I'm re-visiting this.

[Don](#) do you have a copy of the original manuscript?

The error here is the original translators' rendering of the first three words of this sentence. Some render [μηδέ](#), which is very clearly the oppositional word "**not**", whereas others render μέν, which is not oppositional and may just be reinforcing the *καί*. This is the difference between "**and will not marry**" versus "**and also will marry**". This is a rather significant contention.

After citing this position to Epicurus' book *Puzzles* and *On Nature*, the following clause features the word [δέ](#), which is another oppositional "**but**", denoting a change in direction from the last sentence. We have another future verb here ("**will marry**"), so that leads me to believe that the first sentence should be [μηδέ](#), that a wise person is "**not**" usually likely to marry. That seems consistent.

But then this phrase, which seems to sit by itself:

[καὶ διατραπήσεσθαί τινας](#)

There are no nominative or genitive words in this clause, so I'm assuming the subject is implied.

[καὶ](#) usually means "**and**" (or some other supportive conjunction)

[τινας](#) is a plural, indefinite, accusative pronoun, so it should have to be "**them**", right?

I'm also assuming that "them" is the recipient of the action in this sentence.

[διατραπήσεσθαί](#) is the action, and ugh ... I wish we had more examples.

So, breaking it down ... since there's only one example of it ... the root is *διατρέπω*, from *δια* ("by, for, through") and *τρέπω* ("to turn, rotate, divert"). It ends in *-esthai*, so I assume this is the future, middle infinitive form. So, that leads me to interpret this word as "**will turn away from**".

Altogether, we've got "**and will turn away from them.**"

So, regarding the pronoun "**them**" ... as far as I can tell, the only actual nouns that have been used so far (besides citing "Epicurus" and his books "Puzzles" and "On Nature") are "circumstances" and "of life". Otherwise, the concepts "wife", "children", and "marriage" are

implied by verbs, but those nouns are not used by themselves. So the thing the wise person is turning away from ...

"and will turn away from [their family]" or "[the circumstance productive of family]."

Either way, as I'm now reading this, it seems like Epicurus was saying "*Wise people don't start a family. Even if you find the right person, starting a family is still unwise.*"