

# Personal mottos?

**Post by “Joshua” of May 15, 2025 at 8:56 PM**

Lucian of Samosata is a notable case of someone who managed to cross several boundaries, of class, language, and nationality; he was born in Roman Syria on the banks of the Euphrates, and his native tongue was probably a dialect of Aramaic. If his own biographical writings are to be believed (a dubious proposition, some think), he was apprenticed to his uncle, a sculptor. Failing in that, he traveled for an education, finding his way first to Ionia and then to Athens.

He learned Greek and wrote with good style, gaining fame for himself and popularity (and notoriety) for his works. They were sporadically read in the east in the middle ages and since the Renaissance have never gone out of fashion in the west.

It was an exceptional career, and one that would be very difficult for most non-Greeks to imitate.

Things are quite different now. Literacy and education are widespread, books are mass-produced and easily accessible, and the internet has rendered most historical obstacles to learning obsolete.

In compensation, we have our own challenges; adherence to a philosophical sect is no longer the default. The language barrier between nations is less daunting than it was once, but the barrier between us and the language of the ancient texts is in some ways higher now than it has been in centuries; studying classics is also no longer the default.

Epicurus himself may have been in poor health; it depends which sources you rely upon. Here is the Suda, a tenth century Byzantine encyclopedia:

## Quote

This man assigned no importance to religion;[1] but there were three brothers [sc. of his],[2] who died in the most pitiful way, struck down by countless diseases.[3] As for Epicurus, although still young, he was not able to easily descend from his bed by himself, but he was short-sighted and fearful of facing the sunlight, for he disliked the most brilliant and shining of the gods. And indeed he turned his eyes away even from the light of fire, and from his lower orifices blood used to drip down, and such was the consumption of his body that he was not even able to carry the weight of his own clothes.[4] And Metrodorus[5] and Polyaeus[6], both of them his companions, died in the worst way men can die, and indeed they took for their impiety a requital that nobody might ever blame. So easily overcome by pleasure was Epicurus that in his last moments he wrote in his will a disposition that a sacrifice be offered once a year to his

father, his mother and his brothers, and to the previously mentioned Metrodorus and Polyaeus, but twice a year to himself;[7] so that even in this the sage honored the higher degree of profligacy. And he had some tables of stone built, and gave orders that these be put in his tomb, this greedy and gluttonous man. He devised these things not because he was rich, but because his appetites had driven him mad, as if those things should die along with him.

So the compilers of the Suda are clearly hostile, but what about the fragments of Epicurus' own letters? Some scholars (DeWitt and Diskin Clay among them) have suggested that Epicurus makes reference to his travelling in a three-wheeled cart, as Pamela Gordon explains:

#### Quote

Next we hear about the claim that Epicurus wrote letters that flattered Lysimachus' minister Mithras, addressing him as one ought to address Apollo. At this point, we meet the fragments of the letters to Leontion and Themista mentioned in the previous section of this chapter. □The language of these letters is extravagant: "By Lord Apollo, my dear little Leontion, how we burst into applause when we read your letter" (Παιᾶν ἄναξ, φίλον Λεοντᾶριον, οἴου κροτοθορύβου ἡμᾶς ἐνέπλησας ἀναγνόντας σου τὸ ἐπιστόλιον); "If you [plural], and Themista in particular invite me, I am capable of twirling thrice and rushing to wherever you are" (Οἷός τε . . . εἰμί, ἐὰν μὴ ὑμεῖς πρὸς με ἀφίκησθε, αὐτὸς τρικύλιστος, ὅπου ἂν ὑμεῖς καὶ Θεμίστα παρακαλήτε, ὠθεῖσθαι, 10.5)[[footnote 35](#)]. Idiosyncratic Epicurean language of the sort parodied in New Comedy may be at play here. The signification of "twirling thrice" is lost to modern readers, and the word for "applause" (κροτοθορύβου) was unusual enough to inspire an entry in the Suda, with this fragmentary letter as the only source (kappa 2480 Adler). Diogenes also records that these sources assert that Epicurus wrote to Pythocles (whom they identify as "good looking"), "I shall sit here awaiting your desired, godlike entrance" (10.5).

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[[footnote 35](#).] Clay (1998: 247), who offers the translation "on a three-wheeled cart," stresses the writer's "enthusiasm and warmth."

Presumably inferring that τρικύλιστος somehow derives from τρι - κύκλος, three - cycle.

Maybe the [symbol of Epicureanism](#) should be a tricycle!