

# Did Epicurus Commit Suicide Due To His Disease? (Merger of Two Threads On When Voluntary Death Makes Sense)

Post by "Don" of July 6, 2025 at 7:40 AM

## [Quote from Bryan](#)

"[Arcesilaus] died in a fit of madness, as Hermippus says, after drinking a good deal of unmixed wine, he had by then reached the age of seventy-five, and no man was more highly regarded by the Athenians."

Hicks translates that section as (my emphasis): He died, according to Hermippus, through drinking too freely of unmixed wine which affected his reason; he was already seventy-five and regarded by the Athenians with unparalleled good-will.

## [Quote from Bryan](#)

"My own verses about him run as follows: Why, Arcesilaus, did you draw unmixed wine so unsparingly as to take leave of your sense? I pity you not so much for your death..."

And Hicks in 4.45 (again my emphasis): [45] I have written upon him as follows: Why, pray, Arcesilaus, didst thou quaff so unsparingly unmixed wine as to go out of thy mind? I pity thee not so much for thy death as because *thou didst insult the Muses by immoderate potations*.

There's also Diogenes chapter on Chrysippus:

## Quote

On one occasion, as Hermippus relates, when [Chrysippus] had his school in the Odeum, he was invited by his pupils to a sacrificial feast. There after he had taken a draught of sweet wine unmixed with water, he was seized with dizziness and departed this life *five days afterwards*, having reached the age of seventy-three years, in the 143rd Olympiad. This is the date given by Apollodorus in his Chronology. I have toyed with the subject in the following verses<sup>5</sup> :

Chrysippus turned giddy after gulping down a draught of Bacchus ; he spared not the Porch nor his country nor his own life, but fared straight to the house of Hades.

[185] Another account is that his death was caused by a violent fit of laughter ; for after an ass had eaten up his figs, he cried out to the old woman, "Now give the ass a drink

of pure wine to wash down the figs." And thereupon he laughed so heartily that he died.

Drinking unmixed wine is certainly frowned upon since it brings on giddiness and takes away reason, but I'm still skeptical of seeing it as a metaphor for committing suicide, although it was deemed dangerous it appears. Barbarians were known to drink unmixed wine which is one reason they were "barbaric." There is [an interesting article I found online](#):

#### Quote

Yet more dramatically, Alexander himself – according to one account – brought on his early death at 32 by drinking a separate toast to each of his twenty dinner guests one by one, and then finishing off a twelve-pint pitcher of unmixed wine.

...

Unmixed wine was deemed dangerous: many a Greek poem lamented it as the cause of an untimely death. Even Cleomenes (died 490 BC), the hardman King of Sparta, couldn't handle wine "in the Scythian fashion", i.e. without water, instead tipping his way into lunacy. Given such risks, unmixed wine was reserved only for drinking forfeits.

...

So next time you find yourself knee-deep in unmixed wine, toast the drink of the uncouth and ungodly – and steel yourself for the madness that must follow...

Unmixed wine brought on dizziness, lunacy, etc., but it was also a potent remedy to feeling pain. That would be my suggestion as to why Epicurus called for akraton "unmixed wine" on his last day. He was in severe pain, not to hasten his death. He knew his death was already imminent from the amount of pain he was in.

Additionally, I continue to maintain that VS47 is not talking about suicide. As a reminder for anyone:

#### [Vatican Saying 47 - Epicurus Wiki](#)

Epicurus Wiki does a good job of giving a literal translation of Metrodorus' saying: "...shall we give ourselves in surrender but when that which is necessary extracts [us] (from life)..."

When death comes eventually for all of us, we should not "rage against the dying of the light" but look back on life with satisfaction and not cling like fearful superstitious children, wishing for immortality or a life after death.