

The Wise Man Will Marry and Have Children ... According To The Circumstances of His Life

Post by “Cassius” of October 28, 2019 at 10:31 AM

I wish I had more to give! 😊

Michele [here is a post I made about this issue in 2011](#) with the following being the core part on this discrepancy (pasting from the earlier post).

Here is how I concluded at the time that Bailey (and the others listed here) are correct - that Epicurus DID advise marriage and children, but (like everything else) according to circumstances:

As I have discussed in earlier posts, there is a maddening discrepancy in the various translations of Diogenes Laertius in the crucial “Wise Man” sequence. CD Yonge’s 1853 translation reports that Epicurus thought marriage to be a bad idea: “Marriage, they say, is never any good to a man, and we must be quite content if it does no harm; and the wise man will never marry or beget children, as Epicurus himself lays down in his Doubts and in his treatises on Nature. Still, under certain circumstances in his life he will forsake these rules and marry.”

The Loeb Classical Library version of the R.D. Hicks translation, which dates from 1931, concurs: “Nor, again, will the wise man marry and rear a family: so Epicurus says in the Problems and in the De Natura. Occasionally he may marry due to special circumstances in his life.”

But Cyril Bailey in his 1926 translation says the opposite: “Moreover, the wise man will marry and have children, as Epicurus says in the Problems and in the work On Nature. But he will marry according to the circumstances of his life.”

[Selection 121](#) or type unknown

The more modern Epicurus Reader translation by Inwood and Gerson agrees with Bailey: “And indeed the wise man will marry and father children....”

public speaker. "Sexual intercourse", they say, "never helped anyone, and one must be satisfied if it has not harmed."

119. And indeed the wise man will marry and father children, as Epicurus says in his *Problems* and in the *On Nature*. But he will marry [only] when it is indicated by the circumstances of his life at a given time. And some will be diverted from this. Nor indeed will he rant and rave while under the influence of drink, as Epicurus says in his *Symposium*. Nor will

The 1963 text by George Strodach endorses the same view: "In addition, the wise man will marry and beget children.... but he will marry according to his station in life, whatever it may be."

12. In addition, the wise man will marry and (119) beget children, as Epicurus tells us in *Problems* and his work *On Nature*; but he will marry according to his station in life, whatever it may be.

In my view, this question is best answered by the observation that Epicurus himself provided in his last will and testament that the child of his valued student Metrodorus be married off **to an Epicurean** when she came of age. As Yonge translates: "In the same way also, they [Aminomachus and Timocrates] shall be the guardians of the daughter of Metrodorus, and when she is of marriageable age, they shall give her to whomsoever Hermarchus shall select of his companions in philosophy, provided she is well behaved and obedient to Hermarchus."

It seems clear to me, therefore, that Epicurus held that marriage and child-bearing are natural, proper, and beneficial activities in which to engage, **so long as partners are properly educated in and devoted to Epicurean principles of living.**

It seems to me that this conclusion is also a logical extension of the very clear Epicurean principle that "friendship" is central to living a happy life. As Cicero wrote in "On Ends," Epicurus "pronounced in regard to friendship that of all the means to happiness that wisdom has devised, none is greater, none is more fruitful, none is more delightful than friendship." A happy marriage to one who is not only one's mate but also one's best friend would certainly seem to be a logical application of this principle.

We do, however, also have to consider the very strong cautions that abound in Epicurean literature against taking an unrealistic attitude toward romantic love. In addition to the admonitions stated in the Wise Man section cited above, there is the famous Vatican Saying 51, which contains what is widely regarded to be Epicurus' advice to a young man: "You tell me that the stimulus of the flesh makes you too prone to the pleasures of love. Provided that you do not break the laws or good customs and do not distress any of your neighbors or do harm to your body or squander your pittance, you may indulge your inclination as you please. Yet it is

impossible not to come up against one or other of these barriers, *for the pleasures of love never profited a man and he is lucky if they do him no harm.*"

And again from Cicero's *On Ends*, we see the Epicurean advocate listing those who are "*enslaved to the follies of love*" as among those men whose failings "render their lives one unbroken round of misery."

And perhaps most famously of all, we have the long dissertation of Lucretius at the end of Book IV, which reminds us that the intense emotions involved in romantic love are ultimately derived from Nature's call to procreation, and that the intensity of the emotion must be kept under control if we are to live happy lives and escape misery. Lucretius abounds with practical advice in this department, reminding us to keep our emotions under control, and that we can escape the mischief of unhappy romance if we do not stand in our own way: "And yet even when you are entangled and held fast, you may still escape the mischief, unless you stand in your own way and overlook all the defects of the mind and body of the person you woo. But men often do this, blinded by passion, and they attribute to the beloved advantages which are not really theirs."

Now let us turn back to the present and to our own lives. I would be fascinated to know how many readers of the NewEpicurean blog, or any of the various Epicurus facebook pages, have been successful in finding mates who share some or most of their Epicurean viewpoints. It is certainly possible to live a happy and fulfilling life without an Epicurean romantic partner, and I can imagine few things worse than feeling trapped in a marriage where one's mate fails to understand, or even actively deprecates, the insights of Epicurus. But in the world we live in today, it unfortunately seems that the best most students of Epicurus can realistically hope for is to find a mate who shares what some might call a basic "sense of life" compatible with Epicureanism — but even that goal will not be reachable for some, and others will not find it satisfactory.