

Characteristics of the Wise Man, 1-9 Rough Draft of Outline

Post by “Don” of May 29, 2020 at 1:20 AM

Characteristics of an Epicurean Sage

The following is a comparison of two translations of Diogenes Laertius’s exposition of “the views of Epicurus himself and his school concerning the wise man.” There are not a lot of male pronouns in the text and many of the verbs are 3rd-person-plural (“They” do this or that...), but “the sage” or “the wise one” is the translation of ὁ σοφός, a male noun. Many of the characteristics are also aimed at men. However, gender neutral language will be used when possible in the notes, because, in light of the inclusion of women in the Garden and writing philosophical treatises, being a σοφός should (theoretically) be open to both men and women.

I undertook this to see what characteristics of someone considered a sage in Epicurean philosophy would be “outdated” and which ones could apply to our time.

The two translation under consideration are the Hicks (1925) translation as provided by Wikisource https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Lives_of_...osophers/Book_X and the Yonge (1895) translation available at Project Gutenberg: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/57342/57...-h.htm#Page_424 of Diogenes Laertius, Lives, Book X:117-121 with notes on the original text. For the original text, I am using the Greek version on the Perseus Digital Library: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3atext%3a1999.01.0257>.

I have found that Yonge may have been using a different Greek text than the Hicks version on Perseus. This may account for some of the discrepancies. Also consulted was the digitized Oxford-held manuscript of DL online at <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Vi...l ms 531 fs001r> (page f171v) This is the page where section 117 begins.

I will also be referring from time to time to the 2018 translation by Pamela Mensch from OUP.

Format: Hicks translation is first, followed (indented) by Yonge. Article author’s notes come last in each bullet point.

(Working on transferring the outline format from Google Docs to forum format)

- There are three motives to injurious acts among men – hatred, envy, and contempt; and these the wise man overcomes by reason.
- 1. He said that injuries existed among men, either in consequence of hatred, or of envy, or of contempt, all which the wise man overcomes by reason.
 1. NOTE: The three motives in the original (accusative case) are:
 1. Μῖσος: hate, hatred, grudge (LSJ)

1. Trivia: origin of the mis- in misanthrope
2. Φθόνον: ill-will or malice, esp. envy or jealousy of the good fortune of others (LSJ)
3. Καταφρόνησιν: contempt, disdain (LSJ)

Moreover, he who has once become wise never more assumes the opposite habit, not even in semblance, if he can help it.

1. Also, that a man who has once been wise can never receive the contrary disposition, nor can he of his own accord invent such a state of things as that he should be subjected to the dominion of the passions; nor can he hinder himself in his progress towards wisdom.

He will be more susceptible of emotion than other men: that will be no hindrance to his wisdom.

1. NOTE: Yonge seems to include the emotions and their non-hindrances with the above. i.e., the wise one will not let the passions hinder progress towards wisdom once they've become wise.
2. NOTE: The original text (per Perseus) is: ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν ἄπαξ γενόμενον σοφὸν μηκέτι τὴν ἐναντίαν λαμβάνειν διάθεσιν μηδὲ πλάττειν ἐκόντα: πάθει μᾶλλον συσχεθήσασθαι: οὐκ ἂν ἐμποδίσει πρὸς τὴν σοφίαν. Which is composed of three clauses:
 1. ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν ἄπαξ γενόμενον σοφὸν μηκέτι τὴν ἐναντίαν λαμβάνειν διάθεσιν μηδὲ πλάττειν ἐκόντα:
 1. Literally: Also, the once-arisen sage will no longer fall back to the opposite disposition nor be put into that mold wittingly (on purpose).
 2. πάθει μᾶλλον συσχεθήσασθαι:
 1. Literally: By the pathē they will exceedingly be affected...
 3. οὐκ ἂν ἐμποδίσει πρὸς τὴν σοφίαν.
 1. Literally: This will not be a hindrance on the path to wisdom.
 3. NOTE: However, the digitized manuscript appears to have, (with punctuation as interpreted by me):
 1. ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν ἄπαξ γενόμενον σοφὸν, μηκέτι τὴν ἐναντίαν λαμβάνειν διάθεσιν· μηδὲ πλάττειν ἐκόντα πάθει μᾶλλον συσχεθήσασθαι· οὐκ ἂν ἐμποδίσει πρὸς τὴν σοφίαν.
 2. The manuscript then gives five different clauses or phrases:
 3. ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν ἄπαξ γενόμενον σοφὸν,
 1. Literally: Once one has become wise... (the once-arisen sage)
 4. μηκέτι τὴν ἐναντίαν λαμβάνειν διάθεσιν·
 1. Literally: ... will no longer fall back to the opposite disposition...
 5. μηδὲ πλάττειν ἐκόντα πάθει μᾶλλον συσχεθήσασθαι·
 1. Literally: .. nor (μηδέ) be put into (that) mold readily/wittingly by the πάθη exceedingly to be affected...
 1. Συσχεθήσασθαι: future infinitive “to be constrained, distressed, afflicted, and, generally, to be affected by anything whether in mind or body”
 6. οὐκ ἂν ἐμποδίσει πρὸς τὴν σοφίαν.
 1. Literally: .. This would not impede/hamper/fetter (their way) toward wisdom.

7. NOTE: This section appears to mean that the sage will not be exceedingly affected by the passions, emotions, etc., that they won't be overcome with emotion and this is not an impediment on the way to wisdom.
4. NOTE: I am more inclined to take Hicks's interpretation as the text being two separate ideas. This appears to flow better:
 1. The sage, once wise, won't fall back into ignorance, nor will they willingly do this on purpose.
 2. Sages are greatly affected by the pathē (i.e., more so than other people) but this doesn't hinder their progress to wisdom.
5. Trivia: ἐμποδίσαι literally means to have one's feet bound, to be put in fetters.

However, not every bodily constitution nor every nationality would permit a man to become wise.

1. That the wise man, however, cannot exist in every state of body, nor in every nation.
2. Οὐδὲ μὴν ἐκ πάσης σώματος ἕξωος σοφὸν γενέσθαι· ἂν οὐδ' ἐν παντὶ ἔθνει.
3. NOTE: The key phrases here are:
 1. ἐκ πάσης σώματος: (neither) from every body
 1. σώματος "a body, one's life in the physical world"
 2. ἐν παντὶ ἔθνει: (nor) in every ἔθνος (tribe, nation; later referring to "barbarian" nation (non-Hellenic); class of people)
 1. Is this saying that a sage can't be found in every nation or is it saying not in certain classes? The meaning of ἔθνος is broad.
 3. ἕξωος "of a state, habit, condition (of a body)"
4. NOTE: What does this mean? How does this connect with the evangelical nature of the philosophy? We know women were a part of the Garden and wrote treatises, so the "state of body" can't exclude women. And Epicurean communities were in "barbarian" lands. How to interpret this? Is this where DeWitt is getting that Epicurus said non-Greeks couldn't achieve wisdom? I can certainly see that if someone is incapable of studying and applying the philosophy due to mental illness, brain injury, or other condition. I can also see some "nations" not being conducive to allowing or encouraging study and application because of repression, culture, exposure to the philosophy, etc. I would be reluctant to say (for modern applications) anything akin to "women can't be sages" or "Russians can't be sages."

Even on the rack the wise man is happy.

1. That even if the wise man were to be put to the torture, he would still be happy.
2. NOTE: It's important to remember that the original says εὐδαίμονα not "happy." There's a difference!
3. Trivia: στρεβλωθῆῖ literally means "stretch on the wheel or rack, to rack, torture, applied to slaves for the purpose of extracting evidence" (LSJ)

He alone will feel gratitude towards friends, present and absent alike, and show it by word and deed.

1. That the wise man will only feel gratitude to his friends, but to them equally whether they are present or absent.
2. NOTE: Is it Hicks's "he alone will feel" or Yonge's "only feel gratitude towards friends"?
3. NOTE: I find it odd that this clause is sandwiched between two mentions of torture. Is this a scribal error? Does this one about friends reference something about the sage being tortured? The Perseus original text is identical to the digitized Oxford manuscript.

When on the rack, however, he will give vent to cries and groans.

1. Nor will he groan and howl when he is put to the torture.
2. NOTE: Will the σοφός groan or not? The original text runs ὅτε μέντοι **στρεβλοῦται**, ἔνθα καὶ μύζει καὶ οἰμῶζει. There doesn't appear to be a "nor" here:
 1. ὅτε when
 2. μέντοι indeed, however, to be sure
 3. ἔνθα when
 4. μύζει I. (he) murmurs with closed lips, mutters, moans.
 5. (καὶ) οἰμῶζει
 1. (and) wails aloud, laments
3. NOTE: So, Hicks seems to have the upper hand here. This also makes sense in the light of the sage being more affected by the emotions (#3) but also remaining content under torture (#5).

As regards women, he will submit to the restrictions imposed by the law, as Diogenes says in his epitome of Epicurus' ethical doctrines.

1. Nor will he marry a wife whom the laws forbid, as Diogenes says, in his epitome of the Ethical Maxims of Epicurus.
2. Mensch's translation has: The wise man will not consort with women in any manner proscribed by law, as Diogenes says in his Epitome of Epicurus' Ethical Doctrines.
3. NOTE: Does the original text talk about marriage? Sexual relations? Consorting? γυναῖκί τ' οὐ μίγησθαι τὸν σοφὸν ἢ οἱ νόμοι ἀπαγορεύουσιν...
 1. Interestingly, γυναῖκί is the singular dative case "of, by, for (a) woman"
 2. (οὐ) μίγησθαι - one definition is "to (not) have intercourse with, to be united to, of men and women" but another is simply "to (not) mingle with."
 3. οἱ νόμοι ἀπαγορεύουσιν "the laws/customs forbid"
4. NOTE: For a modern application, consider what laws or customs dictate how men and women should behave in establishing a consensual, sexual relationship. This may be the best way to interpret this characteristic.

Nor will he punish his servants; rather he will pity them and make allowance on occasion for those who are of good character.

1. He will punish his servants, but also pity them, and show indulgence to any that are virtuous.
2. Will the σοφός punish their servants or not? The original begins with ουδέ, a mark of negation, so it appears Hicks again has the upper hand here.
3. Trivia: οἰκέτας = "household slaves". Neither translator wants to use the word "slave." Servants aren't the same as slaves.
4. NOTE: It appears the Epicurean will be benevolent to "servants" and will be sure to encourage "good" ones by rewarding them.

Only the first 9 and much revision to go. As a final product, it may end up being my own translation of the list of characteristics with something like the above as endnotes.

Feel free to take a read through and provide comments.