

# Did Epicurus Advise Marriage or Not? Diogenes Laertius Text Difficulty

**Post by “Cassius” of June 29, 2021 at 4:07 PM**

This topic has been discussed in several places and it might be best to link to those here, rather than start the thread anew. As we come across those discussions (primarily under ethics, I think) let's link them here.

OK that was easy - the primary information is found HERE in the FAQ - <https://www.epicureanfriends.com/wcf/index.php?...arriage#entry-8>

And HERE for the FAQ Discussion - [What Did Epicurus Say About Marriage?](#)

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**Post by “Eikadistes” of June 29, 2021 at 5:23 PM**

Right off the bat, I think I need some context into what "marriage" meant to ancient Greeks.

*Were they primarily economic arrangements? Was there a romantic tradition that encouraged the subjective pursuit of passion? Were they as bad at picking partners as our current divorce rates suggest we are? Were couples expected to produce children? Was marriage primarily an institution to promote reproduction? Did ancient Greek marriages suffocate women with domestic roles? Did they put excessive economic strain on men? How prevalent and severe were sexually-transmitted infections at the time? How universally-accepted was pederasty? How tolerant were Greeks on non-traditional sexual practices? For that matter, what **were** the Greeks traditional sexual practices? How old were men and women, on average, when they married? I'm curious because I have no idea.*

Depending on the definition of "marriage" to ancient Greeks, I may have more or less sympathy with Epicurus' position. *Marriage as companionship between two best friends* is utterly different than *marriage as marrying-off your 13-year-old daughter for political gain*. Historically, "marriage" tends to imply "duty" or "social responsibility", which is antithetical to Epicurean philosophy, so if that's the tree up which Epicurus was barking, I definitely agree.

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**Post by “A\_Gardner” of June 30, 2021 at 11:29 AM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2080-did-epicurus-advise-marriage-or-not-diogenes-laertius-text-difficulty/>

I'll preface my answer with my knowledge of Greek attitudes towards marriage coming from my armchair studies and personal curiosity of Ancient and Hellenistic society.

With that, it appears for the majority of Greek and Roman history, marriage was based more off of economic arrangements and entanglements rather than preference, pleasure, or passion. This is why both historically and mythologically you see multiple lovers, mistresses, and other forms of what Christians would label as extramarital affairs.

This being the case, I can see an argument against marriage from the Epicurean perspective, as committing to a relationship due to economic/political reasons would prove itself quite a non-pleasure overall.

I think in his saying on marriage, there's even the clause in there that may back this opinion up, as (and forgive any butchering as I'm recalling from memory) it states " The wise man will not marry UNLESS social convention demands it so."

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### Post by "Cassius" of June 30, 2021 at 1:01 PM

These posts are good to point out the very large potential differences in what "marriage" means.". I wonder if we know anything about how the term related to the issue of having children. Do I detect that there are t2o clauses and that the "have children" is treated somewhat differently in both?

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### Post by "Don" of June 30, 2021 at 6:36 PM

[Quote from A Gardner](#)

The wise man will not marry UNLESS social convention demands it so."

The actual word used is **διατραπήσῃσθαί** "**to turn away from one's purpose.**" (**infinitive future passive**) but this brings more questions. The wise man will not marry unless he turns aside from his purpose. What's the wise man's purpose? Purpose isn't in the word itself but implied in the definition. That's the meaning in the passive sense: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...y%3Ddiatre%2Fpw>

## **Post by “Cassius” of June 30, 2021 at 8:17 PM**

At least in my mind, a wise man's conceptualized / generalized purpose is to live as happily as possible given his circumstances, with happiness also conceptually / generally understood to mean that individual's personal "calculation" of the mix of pleasures and pains that are open to him.

As we have seen Lucretius refer to several times, Epicurus apparently observed / held that people differ in their makeup as to what makes them happy. Some people are more group-oriented, some more solitary, some hot-tempered, some mild, and huge numbers of other variations. Or as my wife might put it, some are "marriage material" and some are not. In a very general sense I would suspect that that kind of thing is what Epicurus is getting at, plus all the innumerable circumstances of life that can make marriage / children more or less possible to a particular individual. But always in the context of keeping the goal focused on living happily.

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## **Post by “Don” of June 30, 2021 at 10:47 PM**

But what does it mean for the wise man "to turn aside from his purpose" and decide to marry? Is he turning away from seeking pleasure? I find that hard to believe. Or is he postponing his own pleasure to marry and raise a family? Or...? I'm genuinely confused about what this could mean. Cassius gives some good ideas on the purpose, but what does it mean to turn away from one's purpose in this characteristic of the wise one?

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## **Post by “Cassius” of July 1, 2021 at 12:00 AM**

### [Quote from Don](#)

The wise man will not marry unless he turns aside from his purpose

Ok that seems to be the issue. You are translating it that way ("unless he turns aside from his purpose"), but the others are not, correct? Maybe this is an instance where there is some subtlety they properly detect and you do not? Do you have any other authority following your view? Do we know why they chose not to follow what appears to you to be the normal

construction? Were they "correcting" the text?

I would agree with your view that the wise man would never turn aside from his purpose, other than perhaps in the sense of temporarily accepting some lesser pain for some greater pleasure later. But I do not consider that kind of decisionmaking to be really "turning aside from one's purpose" since the overall goal remains the same.

I feel like the sense that Bailey is conveying is most consistent with the philosophy and therefore most likely to be correct:

#### Quote

"Sexual intercourse, they say, has never done a man good, and he is lucky if it has not harmed him. 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."

In other words i would expect Epicurus to see some form of marriage and children to be most consistent in general with nature for most people (for the continuation of the species, as nature calls all species to survive). Therefore he would see it to be generally advisable, but would always allow the caveat that there may be individual circumstances personal to the person involved which would make marriage and children inadvisable or impossible.

I see the "marry according to the circumstances of his life" to be the caveat that goes almost without saying in regard to any activity of life. And I see the awkward wording as the result of D.L. describing and condensing the principle, rather than quoting Epicurus directly.

I would see Epicurus' general viewpoint best expressed by himself, in his will, when he provided for taking care that Metrodorus' daughter be married to a member of the school when she comes of age. To me that is the gold standard example of what he really thought, and the awkward wording is the fault of D.L. rather than Epicurus.

This following sentence seems to me to be inconceivable otherwise, as both a daughter or Metrodorus, and a member of the school, both of whom I would presume to be highly valued by Epicurus, and whom he wanted to be wise people, were involved:

#### Quote

"Let them likewise provide for the maintenance of Metrodorus's daughter so long as she is well-ordered and obedient to Hermarchus; **and, when she comes of age, give her in marriage to a husband selected by Hermarchus from among the members of the School;** and out of the revenues accruing to me let Amynomachus and Timocrates in consultation with Hermarchus give to them as much as they think proper for their maintenance year by year."

Now we could speculate that special circumstances were involved here, and that we have the unusual case that both spouses were presumably Epicurean and therefore knew how to handle "marriage" better than most people. Or perhaps the special circumstance was that they were part of the school and had a support structure around them, or money. But I doubt that Epicurus saw them to be an exception to the rule, since he generally seems to have thought that most people had the capacity to understand "right reason" and live according to his views. But I do think also that the point made by A\_Gardner and others that we need to look carefully at what Epicurus considered to be the nature of marriage. Very possibly like justice itself he considered a marriage agreement to be like other agreements, that could change with circumstances, But that's speculation too - the only thing I think is beyond the reach of speculation is that Epicurus would not see a wise man turning aside from his purpose of seeking to live happily - I think it's inconceivable he would take that position about anyone who is wise.

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### **Post by "Marco" of July 1, 2021 at 2:51 PM**

This is another Google translation.

In the Netherlands, Professor Van Buuren delved into this problem. He finds very little of the marriage of romantic love to the Greeks and Romans. He find a lot about the woman as mother and manager of the house. He argues that what we think as romantic love is not natural but socially learned behavior. This feels very strange to us because we experience the romantic love just like very naturally. Romantic love has begun with the minstrels in the 12th century in southern France. The great example is the novel Tristan and Isolde. This culture has spread over the west, later also in the Romantic periode, Madame Bovary, Anna Karenina and later in Disney.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of July 1, 2021 at 3:47 PM**

I suspect that there is a lot to that, but I also think that romantic love as a feeling is more than simply cultural, so surely it was a component of feelings even then. But as to what the "institution of marriage" was back then, then comments seem pretty on track to me.

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### **Post by "Don" of July 1, 2021 at 4:55 PM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2080-did-epicurus-advise-marriage-or-not-diogenes-laertius-text-difficulty/>

### [Quote from Marco](#)

He finds very little of the marriage of romantic love to the Greeks and Romans.

I certainly think this is the case for Marriage as the institution, but I also think there is plenty of evidence for relationships based on what we would recognize as romantic love. Not the least of which is Pericles and Aspasia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aspasia?wprov=sfla1>

Or Metrodorus and Leontion who conceivably could have been the mother of his son and daughter.

I'm not convinced at all that romantic love was created in the Middle Ages. Too much evidence in ancient sources, to me, points to the contrary.

Maybe that's why marriage isn't necessarily promoted? Love outside marriage - in their view - had the potential for more mutual pleasure??

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## **Post by “Cassius” of July 2, 2021 at 9:38 AM**

### [Quote from Don](#)

I'm not convinced at all that romantic love was created in the Middle Ages.

I completely agree with that. Sure there are lots of differences in many ways between people today and people 2000 years ago due to politics, culture, religion, education, etc ----but I am convinced that the basic feelings and attributes that make us up today are very similar to those from many thousands of years ago.

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## **Post by “Eikadistes” of July 2, 2021 at 12:32 PM**

### Quote

“Just as new, and in keeping with this spirit, is Epicurus’ attempt to create an alternative community for philosophers in which normal life could be pursued along with philosophy. Philosophy no longer criticizes or serves the dominant culture; it turns

its back on it, secedes from it, and, most importantly, puts something positive in its place. That Epicureanism was for these reasons unprecedented seems to have been clear to such contemporaries of Epicurus as Damoxenus and Arcesilaus. For them, and for others such as Timon or Menippus who were caught up in the old antagonistic relationship of philosophy and society, Epicurus' vision was either infuriating or amusing. For others, more open to change, the Epicurean alternative was attractive indeed.

The **Epicurean sanction of marriage** is a first indication of the new direction taken by Epicurus in solving the problem of accommodating philosophy and society. By **admitting women to the school and encouraging marriage and child-rearing**, the status of the Epicurean philosopher was no longer decided in terms of the dominant culture but in terms proper to the Epicurean experiment in reconstructing a past stage of history. At what was in Epicurean eyes the most desirable stage of history, **men and women formed foedera** based on free will and mutual interests. It was perhaps inevitable that when it came to putting this idea into practice, the women the Epicureans sought for marriage were not the eligible women of the community at large but the female students of the school, who were in a position to make their *foedera* for philosophically correct reasons. The number of such women seems to have been sufficiently large, at least in Epicurus' day, and was at any rate far greater than it seems to have been in the other schools, where a Hipparchia or Axiothea – both significantly wont to dress in male attire, as if to deny their femininity – is only occasionally to be found. The *hetairai* Boidion, Leontion, Hedeia, Nikidion, Mammarrion, Demelata, Erotion, and Philainis were connected with the school. Metrodorus' sister Batis married Idomeneus (p. 368.5 Usener); Leonteus married Themista (D.L. 10.26). We know that Metrodorus and Polyainos were married and had children, although we do not know the names of their wives (D.L. 10.26). It would be hard to overemphasize the appeal of a school that was willing to grant females full rights of participation in all of its activities. It would have been attractive both to women inclined toward philosophy and, perhaps more importantly, to men who sought the companionship of such sympathetic and intelligent women.

The participants in the school were **not only encouraged to marry and raise children but also to dwell together in the Garden** (D.L. 10.10 citing two sources). The arrangement is not otherwise encountered in a philosophical school. The Epicurean school was thus both an education enterprise and a genuine community where, we may assume, all the normal activities of life took place alongside learning and study. Here, then, is another reason why Epicurus deprived himself of the legal loophole of the religious association: he conceived of his organization as an alternative *polis*, not simply as a specialized part of the traditional city-state. An ancient and non-Epicurean witness, Numenius, seems to be reporting Epicurus' success in this with an observer's

disinterested eye when he says (*apud* Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* 14.5.3) that 'Epicureans in the Garden resemble people living in a well-organized state.'

(Frischer, *The Sculpted World, Epicureanism and Philosophical Recruitment in Ancient Greece*, 61-63)

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### Post by "Cassius" of July 3, 2021 at 7:11 AM

Thanks for finding that Nate - I have the book but if I read that I had forgotten it. Some of that seems pretty aggressively speculative but I don't know that any is far-fetched.

This seems like a particularly interesting reference to track down in full - I have not heard of this either:

#### Quote

An ancient and non-Epicurean witness, Numenius, seems to be reporting Epicurus' success in this with an observer's disinterested eye when he says (*apud* Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* 14.5.3) that 'Epicureans in the Garden resemble people living in a well-organized state.'

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### Post by "Cassius" of July 3, 2021 at 7:18 AM

I wonder if [this](#) is the full reference, because if so someone could argue that this is philosophical only and not dealing with lifestyle: (had to include the Stoic paragraph too for fun!)

#### CHAPTER V

[NUMENIUS] 'FOR the time then of Speusippus, sister's son to Plato, and Xenocrates the successor of Speusippus, and Polemon who succeeded Xenocrates in the School, the character of the doctrine always continued nearly the same, so far as concerned this much belauded suspension of judgement which was not yet introduced, and some other things perchance of this kind. For in other respects they did not abide by the original tradition, but partly weakened it in many ways, and partly distorted it: and beginning from his time, sooner or later they diverged purposely or unconsciously, and partly from some other cause perhaps other than

rivalry.

'And though for the sake of Xenocrates I do not wish to say anything disparaging, nevertheless I am more anxious to defend Plato. For in fact it grieves me that they did not do and suffer everything to maintain in "every way an entire agreement with Plato on all points. Yet Plato deserved this at their hands, for though not superior to Pythagoras the Great, yet neither perhaps was he inferior to him; and it was by closely following and reverencing him that the friends of Pythagoras became the chief causes of his great reputation.

'And the Epicureans, having observed this, though they were wrong, were never seen on any point to have opposed the doctrines of Epicurus in any way; but by acknowledging that they held the same opinions with a learned sage they naturally for this reason gained the title themselves: and with the later Epicureans it was for the most part a fixed rule never to express any opposition either to one another or to Epicurus on any point worth mentioning: but innovation is with them a transgression or rather an impiety, and is condemned. And for this reason no one even dares to differ, but from their constant agreement among themselves their doctrines are quietly held in perfect peace. Thus the School of Epicurus is like some true republic, perfectly free from sedition, with one mind in common and one consent; from which cause they were, and are, and seemingly will be zealous disciples.

'But the Stoic sect is torn by factions, which began with their founders, and have not ceased even yet. They delight in refuting one another with angry arguments, one party among them having still remained steadfast, and others having changed. So their founders are like extreme oligarchs, who by quarrelling among themselves have caused those who came after to censure freely both their predecessors and each other, as still being more Stoical one party than the other, and especially those who showed themselves more captious in technicalities; for these were the very men who, surpassing the others in meddlesomeness and petty quibbles, were the more quick to find fault.

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## Post by "Don" of July 3, 2021 at 8:55 AM

Hmmm... After reading the ancient source text (Thanks, [Cassius](#) !!), Frischer seems to me to be going off on a DeWittean historical fiction flight of fancy. He wants to write a good story, but I don't see his conclusion supported by the ancient text itself.

That said, I found the ancient text fascinating! Certainly sets up a contrast with the Stoics, and puts that "controversy" with the "4th leg of the Canon" into a different context, too.

## Post by “Cassius” of July 3, 2021 at 11:03 AM

How would you apply this to the "4th leg" Don?

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## Post by “Don” of July 3, 2021 at 11:08 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

How would you apply this to the "4th leg" Don?

Oh, just that it may not be as big of a controversy as we are taking it. If the Epicureans were primarily in agreement, as this text seems to say, maybe we (and DL) are reading more into that than is necessary. Maybe there's some way to reconcile it without seeing it as a schism in the school.

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## Post by “Eikadistes” of July 3, 2021 at 11:16 AM

### [Quote from Don](#)

Hmmm... After reading the ancient source text (Thanks, [Cassius](#) !!), Frischer seems to me to be going off on a DeWittean historical fiction flight of fancy. He wants to write a good story, but I don't see his conclusion supported by the ancient text itself.

That said, I found the ancient text fascinating! Certainly sets up a contrast with the Stoics, and puts that "controversy" with the "4th leg of the Canon" into a different context, too.

I've had a similar reaction to reading Frischer's literature. I'm finding a trend in modern scholarship of sympathetic authors and enthusiasts taking poetic licenses to adapt Epicurean philosophy to their social context. Many of their conclusions are based on tenuous links, and their descriptions take advantage of a historical gap due to a lack of source material. I don't necessarily think that their conclusions are incoherent with Epicurean philosophy, so I find them to be useful ways of engaging a contemporary audience; still, the authors seem to place low priority on acknowledging their personal fictions, and that can be problematic.

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## Post by “Don” of July 3, 2021 at 8:27 PM

To try to steer this back to the original question in a roundabout way: I'm leaning toward accepting the Greek text which Bailey provides in his Epicurus: The Extant Remains: <https://archive.org/details/Bailey...e/n160/mode/1up> After looking at some commentary online on the most trustworthy Diogenes Laertius manuscripts as well as the prefatory commentary in Bailey regarding Usener's scholarship in comparing and "correcting" said manuscripts, it seems to me that Bailey is on solid ground. So, until Sedley gives a full translation of DL Book X, I'm going to use Bailey as my source text.

I bring this up because the Greek section(s) in the Oxford Arundel manuscript of DL do not match the sections in the Perseus online edition. So, I felt I needed some authoritative edition. For now, I'm going with Bailey. When I was recently trying to puzzle out the meaning in the "pleasure at other's misfortune" thread, I can't across this discrepancy between Arundel and Usener/Bailey.

So, what does Bailey say about the marriage question?

One of the key relevant passages is at the start of "verse" 119 in Laertius:

Perseus/Hicks: [119] Καὶ μηδὲ καὶ γαμήσειν καὶ τεκνοποιήσειν τὸν σοφόν, ὡς Ἐπίκουρος ἐν ταῖς Διαπορίαις καὶ ἐν τοῖς Περὶ φύσεως. κατὰ περίστασιν δὲ ποτε βίου γαμήσειν

Usener/Bailey: [119] Καὶ μην καὶ γαμήσειν καὶ τεκνοποιήσειν τὸν σοφόν, ὡς Ἐπίκουρος ἐν ταῖς Διαπορίαις καὶ ἐν τοῖς Περὶ φύσεως. κατὰ περίστασιν δὲ ποτε βίου γαμήσειν

The only difference is that Hicks' 2nd word is μηδέ and Usener's is μήν.

Hicks' μηδέ "(connecting two clauses, used with the same constructions as [μή](#) (μέ)) but not, and not, nor"

which seems to me we would have to look at the preceding phrase and connect it to this one.

Usener's μήν on the other hand is:

"used to strengthen statements: verily, surely, truly, definitely (after other particles)

(καὶ μήν) used to introduce something new or convey affirmation"

Hicks' is negative, Usener's is positive, and this is born out on their translations:

Hicks': "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 owing to special circumstances in his life."

Usener/Bailey: "Moreover, the wise man will marry and raise children..."

Whether or not Epicurus advocated marriage and childrearing depends on the presence or absence of  $-\delta\epsilon$  or  $-\nu$  after  $\mu\eta$ -. I would dearly like to see images of the manuscripts, but without that we have to decide which scholar we're going to trust. I think I trust Usener/Bailey on the Greek.

All that being said though, Bailey's English translation doesn't make any sense!...

"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."

Saying "he will marry... But he will marry..." However, **\*\*maybe\*\*** he will marry but he will marry according to certain circumstances NOT due to compulsion or cultural convention??

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### **Post by "Cassius" of July 3, 2021 at 8:48 PM**

If you are saying that Hicks is the source of the "not marry" viewpoint, then I would bolster that with my observations that I find Hicks to take a VERY negative position on Epicurus. I remember reading his "Stoics and Epicureans" and being struck with how negative and pessimistic Hicks' worldview seemed to me to be - very stoic.

Thank you for all the research!

This is what I am remembering: <https://newepicurean.com/is-that-all-th...and-epicureans/>

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### **Post by "Don" of July 3, 2021 at 9:11 PM**

The only way to figure out what could be the correct one is to:

1. see if there's room for one or two letters if there's a missing piece of the manuscript: MH(N) vs MH( $\Delta\epsilon$ ).
2. If there's not a lacuna, compare ALL the extant manuscripts and calculate where and how the are differences.

If it's the latter, Usener seems to have examined the manuscripts or at least authoritative copies.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2080-did-epicurus-advise-marriage-or-not-diogenes-laertius-text-difficulty/>

If the former, you're right in that one's positive or negative disposition may influence seeing MHN or MHΔE.

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## Post by “Pacatus” of January 28, 2024 at 2:09 PM

Whilst reading Sider on Philodemus poetry, I came across the following –

Sider (pp. 35-36):

“as both Chilton and Grilli agree, Epicurus does **allow** his followers to marry, although **only in exceptional circumstances**. This view is in line with the several other less than absolute strictures of Epicurus listed by Diogenes, including the general prohibition against writing poetry.<sup>38</sup>

“What these exceptional circumstances are neither Epicurus nor our sources spell out, but we may imagine that much would depend on the character of the woman. Since, moreover, women were welcome into the Garden for their intellectual abilities, these fellow Epicureans would seem to be obvious candidates for wives. Since, furthermore, women were appreciated for their bodies as well as their minds, sex being regarded as a providing a natural, albeit unnecessary, pleasure, sexual passion would not be expected to stop at marriage. ...

“A woman who could satisfy both body and mind would make the ideal wife.”

Use of the phrase “**allow** ... although only ...” implies that Epicurus’ authority was such that he could also *forbid* (*disallow*) his followers from marrying.

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Now the comments in this thread, including [Cassius](#) in post #8 and [Don](#) translations, indicate that no one here would be in agreement with such authoritarian innuendoes. Nor does Hick’s “Occasionally he *may* marry ...” imply that.

But there seems to be some such authoritarian interpretation out there in the scholarly world.

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I looked up the Chilton article, “Did Epicurus approve of marriage? A study of Diogenes Laertius 10.119” and found it here: [https://www.jstor.org/stable/4181668...an\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/4181668...an_tab_contents)

Chilton proffers the following interpretation: “In general the wise man will not marry but sometimes depending on the circumstances of his life, he will marry” – but then argues that it must be wrong.

Chilton also discusses the question of the wise man “turning away from his purpose,” etc., discussed in this thread above from post #5.

But Chilton does not – unless I missed it – suggest that Epicurus in some authoritarian manner allowed/forbade marriage unless some approved conditions were met.

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Chilton is also cited here, “Epicurus on Sex, Marriage and Children” by Tad Brennan: [https://www.jstor.org/stable/270440?...an\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/270440?...an_tab_contents)

Brennan says that Epicurus “*advised against marriage ... but permitted it in exceptional cases.*” (p. 348-349) This could be taken as a somewhat weaker position than Sider’s – but seems a bit confusing.

He also says, referring to Epicurus’ will: “These texts, then, show that Epicurus did *permit and indeed encourage marriage* and child-rearing-not as a rule, but for certain Epicureans, in certain circumstances. And they also indicate what sort of circumstances these were.”

He concludes on marriage: “By and large, Epicurus will advise Epicureans not to marry, but sometimes, in exceptional circumstances, he will advise certain of them to marry.” (p. 350) **Advise, not allow/permit/forbid.**

All in all, Brennan seems at best sloppy on his use of language.

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## Post by “Don” of January 28, 2024 at 2:24 PM

I'll have to look those articles up!! Thanks for the references.

One thing to remember in this discussion was that, Epicurean or not, women's lives were circumscribed within the general Greek culture. Look at his Will and talking about the daughter of Metrodorus:

*Let them likewise provide for the maintenance of Metrodorus's daughter,<sup>32</sup> so long as she is well-ordered and obedient to Hermarchus; and, when she comes of age, **give her in marriage to a husband selected by Hermarchus from among the members of the School** ; and out of the revenues accruing to me let Amynomachus and Timocrates in consultation with Hermarchus give to them as much as they think proper for their maintenance year by year.*

That said, I don't get the impression that Epicurus was forbidding marriages but I can see men (and women! in the Garden) asking his counsel and advice on who they were thinking of marrying.

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## Post by “Cassius” of January 28, 2024 at 2:31 PM

Lots of good research there, thank you Pacatus!

None of it changes my view that Epicurus was not a dictator and did not forbid or grant allowances on much of anything (except presumably deference to philosophical core issues, and this would certainly not be among those).

Further, I am more convinced than ever at this point in my studying that Epicurus was extremely practical and did not have absolute right and wrong bright lines on most any kind of action, and most any kind of action may be needed depending on circumstances, even engagement in the "political" world as needed. So given his flexibility toward even the virtues I would have expected him to see marriage as no more mandatory or forbidden as a general rule. and just as Lucretius ends Book 4, habit and long standing benefit can render even the unpredictable institution of matrimony as something from which the wise can benefit, if the appropriate spouse is available.

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## Post by “Cassius” of January 28, 2024 at 2:40 PM

I didn't see Dons post before writing my post 25. The Will stands out in my mind as an insurmountable obstacle to those who want to argue that Epicurus forbid or even discouraged marriage. Given the will it can continue to be argued that he advised caution and deliberation, as he did with everything, but the argument that he was a strong opponent or he forbid it is to me just more evidence of how hostile much of the academic world is to Epicurus.

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## Post by “Pacatus” of January 28, 2024 at 2:54 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

the argument that he was a strong opponent or he forbid it is to me just more evidence of how hostile much of the academic world is to Epicurus

Even among scholars who, for one reason or another, carved out for themselves a niche in Epicurean scholarship. Even if sometimes it's a subconscious bias that creeps in. I hope Sider's work on the actual poems of Philodemus is better! 😡

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## Post by “Pacatus” of January 28, 2024 at 3:00 PM

### [Quote from Don](#)

Epicurean or not, women's lives were circumscribed within the general Greek culture.

Epicurus pushed the edges of such circumscription within the Garden (it seems to me) – and that’s clearly all he could do. But that “that’s all” can serve as an exemplar for when circumstances change – and the Leontion’s and Themistas of our time (and other strong women) can be celebrated.

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## Post by “Don” of January 28, 2024 at 3:28 PM

### [Quote from Pacatus](#)

Epicurus pushed the edges of such circumscription within the Garden (it seems to me)

Fully agree! Letting women and slaves study philosophy??!! Clutch my pearls! 😬

However, marriages still needed to be sanctioned by the state and the culture to be legal and to allow for inheritance and the other legal and social aspects to be legitimate.

### Quote

#### Sexual Relationships

The wise one will not establish a sexual relationship in a way that is against the law or forbidden by custom. Epicureans generally think that the sage will never succumb to lustful desire or be overwhelmed by sexual passions. According to the school, sexual passion is not sent by any supernatural force. They say that having sex like animals never did anyone any good, and people should be content if it does no harm. Epicurus also said that the wise one will not marry nor raise a family (and talked about the pains

involved with that life); however, under certain circumstances, the wise one will forsake these rules and decide to marry. (118, 119)

### [Epicurean Sage](#)

My goal in this translation of Diogenes Laertius's Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book X.117-121, was to be as literal as possible to preserve the flavor of...  
sites.google.com

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## 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 [μηδὲ](#), 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 [μηδὲ](#), 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.*"

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## Post by "Joshua" of October 29, 2024 at 6:33 PM

### Quote

The error here is the original translators' rendering of the first three words of this sentence. Some render μηδὲ, which is very clearly the oppositional word "not", whereas others render μέν, which is not oppositional and may just be reinforcing the καί

It's been a while since I looked into this, but here is the English text in the Yonge translation;

### Quote

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. 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. That the wise man, however, cannot exist in every state of body, nor in every nation. That even if the wise man were to be put to the torture, he would still be happy. That the wise man will only feel gratitude to his friends, but to them equally[467] whether they are present or absent. Nor will he groan and howl when he is put to the torture. Nor will he marry a wife whom the laws forbid, as Diogenes says, in his epitome of the Ethical Maxims of Epicurus. He will punish his servants, but also pity them, and show indulgence to any

that are virtuous. They do not think that the wise man will ever be in love, nor that he will be anxious about his burial, nor that love is a passion inspired by the Gods, as Diogenes says in his twelfth book. They also assert that he will be indifferent to the study of oratory. Marriage, say they, 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 it down, in his Doubts and in his treatises on Nature. Still, under certain circumstances of life, he will forsake these rules and marry. Nor will he ever indulge in drunkenness, says Epicurus, in his Banquet, nor will he entangle himself in affairs of state (as he says in his first book on Lives). Nor will he become a tyrant. Nor will he become a Cynic (as he says in his second book about Lives). Nor a beggar. And even, though he should lose his eyes, he will still partake of life (as he says in the same book).

The most common phrasing in this passage is "nor will the wise man...". The few sentences that don't start with nor instead start with 'also', 'however', or 'still', which seems to indicate that this is principally a list of what the wise man *will not do*, with the few exceptions marked off as such.

#### Quote

Some render μηδὲ, 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.

I suspect that it won't be sufficient to examine only the sentence under consideration, where the preceding and following sentences might contribute to a proper reading of the conjunctions.

That being said, the Greeks got a whole hell of a lot of mileage out of that one word καί. It's certainly beyond my powers to parse!

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### Post by “Don” of October 29, 2024 at 6:37 PM

#### [Quote from Eikadistes](#)

Don do you have a copy of the original manuscript?

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/wcf/user/311-don/#wall/comment484>

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2080-did-epicurus-advise-marriage-or-not-diogenes-laertius-text-difficulty/>

This post on my wall has links to the available online digitized DL manuscripts.

As far as "original," that's open to definition/interpretation. We certainly don't have DL's autographs or his sources in many cases. The ones we do have are centuries removed from him; however, they're the best we have!

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### Post by “Eikadistes” of October 29, 2024 at 8:12 PM

Regarding part of that section, here is how White (2021) translates:

"119 **Moreover, the wise man will both marry and have children**, as Epicurus says in *Perplexities* and in *On Nature*; he will marry at a time suited to his circumstances in life, and some will refuse to do so. However, he will not chatter away over drink, says Epicurus in the *Symposium*. Nor will he participate in government, as in *On Lives* Book 1; nor will he be a tyrant. nor will he act like a Cynic, as in *On Lives* Book 2; nor will he go begging. But even if his sight is impaired, he will not take his own life, as he says in the same work. also the wise man will feel sorrow, says Diogenes in *Selections* Book 5; and he will go to court, and he will leave behind writings, but he will not deliver ceremonial addresses."

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### Post by “Bryan” of October 29, 2024 at 9:49 PM

[Quote from Eikadistes](#)

καὶ διατραπήσεσθαι τινας

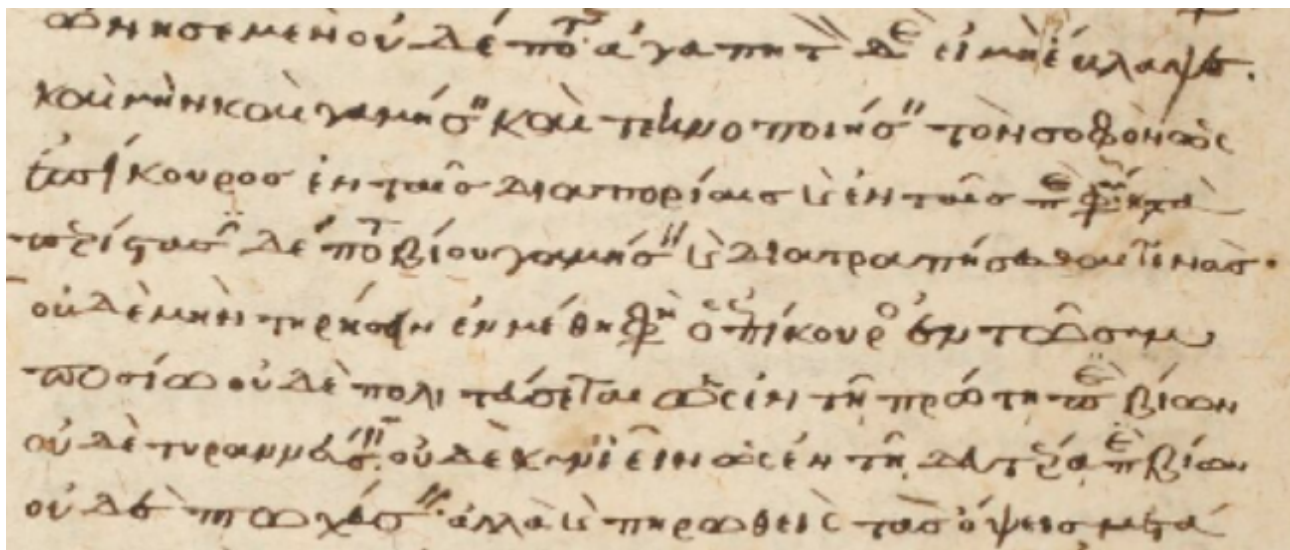
Yes I think we can ignore that period some editors add and can connect this with the preceding κατὰ περίστασις δέ ποτε βίου γαμήσειν.

With Τινας as a subject-accusative which pluralizes its reference to τὸν Σοφόν and takes the infinitives γαμήσειν and διατραπήσεσθαι (taken as middle), we could have:

...and [Epíkouros says] in "*On Nature*" that some [wise men] will marry at some point in [their] life according to circumstance and [some] will refuse [to marry].

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**Post by "Don" of October 29, 2024 at 10:38 PM**



Pertinent section from Paris codex MSS (Gr. 1759), known as P (Publication date : 1075-1150 ). That second line here (which starts "119") looks to me certainly like:

και μην και γαμησειν και τεκνοποιησειν τον σοφον...

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, μην](#)

verily, truly? for μην?

There is a δε once you get to δε ποτε βιου γαμησειν...

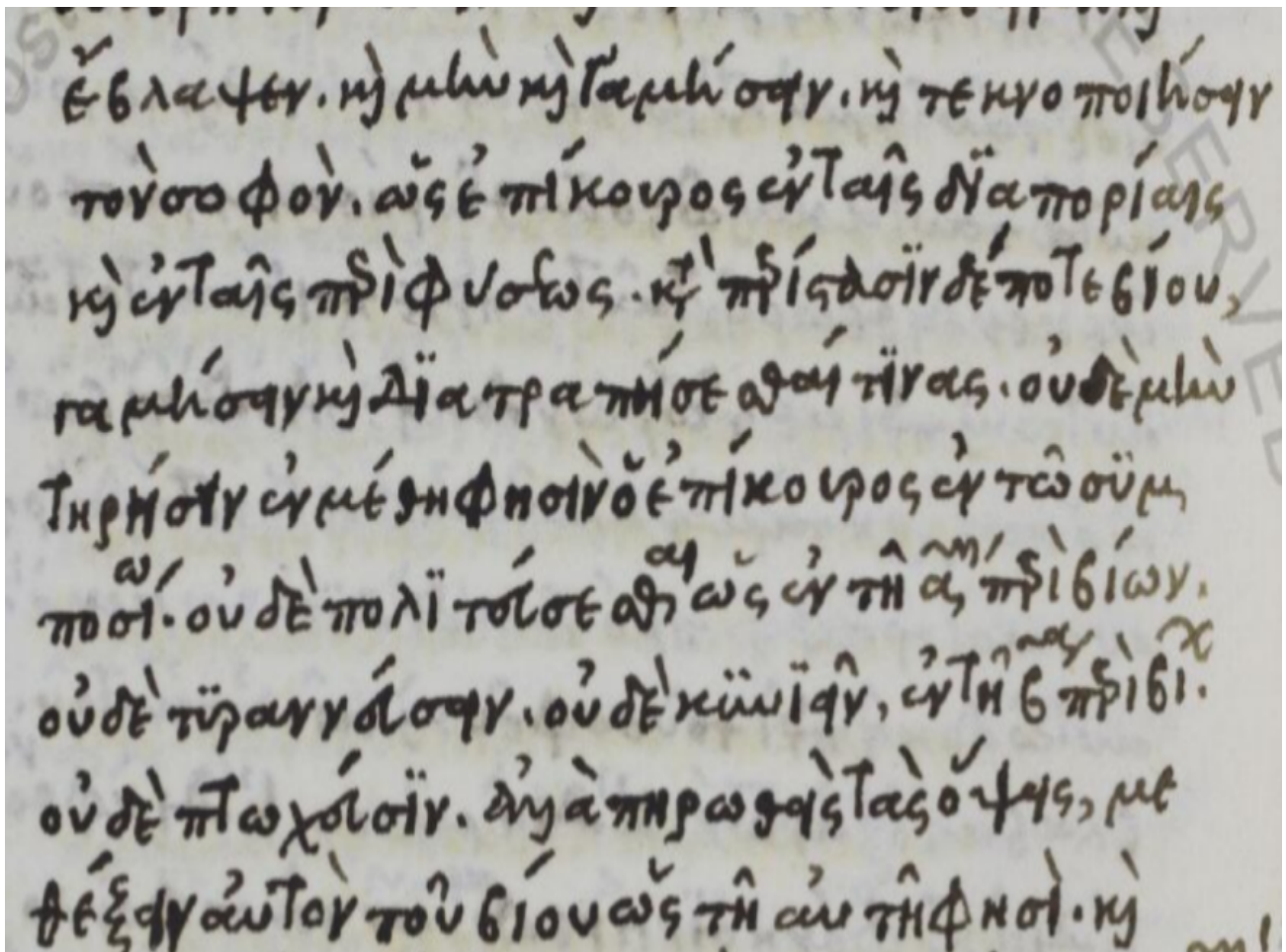
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**Post by "Don" of October 30, 2024 at 6:33 AM**

That said, I'll need to check the other manuscripts. Some may have μηδέ after that first και.

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**Post by "Don" of October 30, 2024 at 8:52 AM**



[DigiVatLib](#)

284v - cod. Vaticanus Palatinus Graecus 261 (=S)

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**Post by "Bryan" of October 30, 2024 at 10:39 AM**

Thanks for these Don! So it seems these two agree and both have [μήν](#).

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**Post by "Don" of October 30, 2024 at 11:55 AM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2080-did-epicurus-advise-marriage-or-not-diogenes-laertius-text-difficulty/>

I was a bit confused with the ascender in your 4734, but that does appear to be a variant ēta form.

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### **Post by “DaveT” of May 12, 2026 at 4:22 PM**

I just finished reading this entire thread. Unless you all came to a final conclusion of *whether or when* Epicurus condoned marriage, which I did not pick up, I had another thought that might bear some scrutiny. And that is: What did he mean when he pointed to the "wise" man or men?

As you know, I'm no expert on Greek philosophy, though I think I've picked up a similarity among some of the pre-Socratic and later philosophers. Certainly each of them was considered a wise man in their time. But it looks to me that some of them they didn't think many men could actually become as wise as their particular teacher.

I don't have a problem with any great philosopher thinking that not many of those ordinary folks could be as wise as they were. And I'm not hitting on Epicurus, since he was a truly wise man.

Nevertheless, I'm wondering if he believed there could be very many wise men among the general population of his followers and they had a higher calling from him than all of the others. And among those who were deemed wise, was he simply advocating those few should devote themselves to teaching.

What do you know about this issue? Have you seen or read evidence of who and how many men would qualify as wise in the Garden? And secondly would they have been the ones Epicurus advised NOT to marry if it took them away from spreading the Epicurean canon?

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### **Post by “Cassius” of May 12, 2026 at 4:47 PM**

Great points. I certainly can't speak definitively but I gather some people think that Epicurus was frequently talking about "sages" in the sense of dedicated lifelong philosophers. There's a book out there "Epicurus The Sage" and I have never liked that title or term. I personally don't think Epicurus applied his teachings only to a very small category of super-high-achieving people.

it sounds to me like this notion that the sage is some superhuman specimen has some Stoic connections. In recent reading of On Ends for the podcast, I've come across the contention that Chrysippus held wise men/sages to be as rare as a phoenix, which presumably means extremely rare.

I think Epicurus was describing a philosophy for ordinary people of ordinary intelligence, so I feel sure that his general advice was the same on marriage as on anything else: Ask yourself what will happen if you pursue a particular course, and if can reasonably be anticipated to lead to more pleasure than pain, then it makes sense to pursue it. Of course marriage (depending on society) has more long-term and deep consequences than most any other relationship, so you should be particularly careful. But "be particularly careful to examine your circumstances" does not change the general rule, which is to do your best to anticipate the consequences and act accordingly to pursue the happiest life possible to you.

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**Post by "Bryan" of May 12, 2026 at 5:21 PM**

I agree with you, Cassius. I will parenthetically add that Epicurus does use all of these terms below, and it is clear that they are "grades" or "rankings" of one's advancement, but I doubt the divisions were very formalized.

ὁ ὠκείωμένος	he who is familiar	ΩΚΕΙΩΜΕΝΟΣ <i>made comfortable dwelling</i>
ὁ προβεβηκώς	he who has advanced	ΠΡΟΒΕΒΗΚΩΣ <i>to have walked forward</i>
ὁ ἀποτελούμενος	he who is fully completing [for himself]	ΑΠΟΤΕΛΟΥΜΕΝΟΣ <i>completing out</i>
ὁ τετελειουργημένος	he who has accomplished [for himself]	ΤΕΤΕΛΕΣΙΟΥΡΓΗΜΕΝΟΣ <i>completed work</i>
ὁ σοφός	wise man	ΣΟΦΟΣ <i>knowledge</i>

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**Post by “Don” of May 12, 2026 at 9:33 PM**

[Quote from Bryan](#)

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ὁ σοφός	wise man	ΣΟΦΟΣ <i>knowledge</i>

Do you have the citations/references for those? I'm curious to check them out.

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**Post by "Bryan" of May 12, 2026 at 10:41 PM**

[Quote from Don](#)

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2080-did-epicurus-advise-marriage-or-not-diogenes-laertius-text-difficulty/>

Do you have the citations/references for those? I'm curious to check them out.

thank you for the question! I prefer when the answer rests in *On Nature*... but here we are *On Lives* only!

### 1. ὁ ὠκειωμένος

10.37a. "ὄθεν, δὴ πᾶσι χρησίμης οὕσης τοῖς ὠκειωμένοις φυσιολογία τῆς τοιαύτης ὁδοῦ..."

...therefore, certainly since such a course is useful to all who are familiar with natural science...

### 2. ὁ προβεβηκώς

10.35b. "...καὶ τοὺς προβεβηκότας δὲ ἰκανῶς ἐν τῇ τῶν ὅλων ἐπιβλέψει, τὸν τύπον τῆς ὅλης πραγματείας τὸν κατεστοιχειωμένον δεῖ μνημονεύειν..."

...and Those who have advanced sufficiently in the observation of the whole, must remember the impression of the whole work that has been reduced [to the fundamentals]...

### 3. ὁ ἀποτελούμενος

10.83b. "...Ὅσοι δὲ μὴ παντελῶς τῶν ἀποτελουμένων εἰσίν: ἐκ τούτων καὶ κατὰ τὸν ἄνευ φθόγγων τρόπον..."

...but Those who are not absolutely among those who are fully completing: from these things and in this way without [verbal] expressions...

### 4. ὁ τετελεσιουργημένος...

10.36b. "...ἐπεὶ καὶ, τῷ τετελεσιουργημένῳ τοῦτο Κυριώτατον τοῦ παντὸς ἀκριβώματος γίνεται: τὸ ταῖς ἐπιβολαῖς ὀξέως δύνασθαι χρῆσθαι ἐκάστων πρὸς ἀπλᾶ στοιχειώματα καὶ φωνὰς συναγομένων..."

"...since, for the one who is accomplished, this is the most important Thing produced by total accuracy: to be able to quickly use [our] attentions with each thing referenced by simple component principles and statements..."

### 5. ὁ σοφός... οἶσθα!

## Post by “TauPhi” of May 12, 2026 at 10:57 PM

### [Quote from DaveT](#)

Nevertheless, I'm wondering if he believed there could be very many wise men among the general population of his followers and they had a higher calling from him than all of the others. And among those who were deemed wise, was he simply advocating those few should devote themselves to teaching.

What do you know about this issue? Have you seen or read evidence of who and how many men would qualify as wise in the Garden?

This may partially answer your question, Dave:

### Quote

**Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius*, 52.3:** Epicurus remarks that certain men have worked their way to the truth without anyone's assistance, carving out their own passage. And he gives special praise to these, for their impulse has come from within, and they have forged to the front by themselves. Again, he says, there are others who need outside help, who will not proceed unless someone leads the way, but who will follow faithfully. Of these, he says, Metrodorus was one; this type of man is also excellent, but belongs to the second grade. We ourselves are not of that first class, either; we shall be well-regarded if we are admitted into the second. Nor need you despise a man who can gain salvation only with the assistance of another; the will to be saved means a great deal, too. You will find still another class of man – and a class not to be despised – who can be forced and driven into righteousness, who do not need a guide as much as they require someone to encourage and, as it were, to force them along. This is the third variety. If you ask me for a man of this pattern also, Epicurus tells us that Hermarchus was such. And of the two last-named classes, he is more ready to congratulate the one, but he feels more respect for the other; for although both have reached the same goal, it is a greater credit to have brought about the same result with the more difficult material upon which to work.