

Six Key Assertions of Epicurean Thought

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<p>ASSERTION 1: The universe is composed of combinations of elemental matter in motion through space; nothing is eternal except the elemental matter; and nothing exists except combinations of matter and space. I know these things because my senses tell me that bodies exist, and reason tells me that space must exist within which I observe the bodies to move. Besides bodies and space and the properties and qualities that arise naturally from their combinations, nothing else exists or can even be conceived to exist.</p>	<p>BECAUSE – "First of all, that nothing is created out of that which does not exist: for if it were, everything would be created out of everything with no need of seeds. And again, if that which disappears were destroyed into that which did not exist, all things would have perished, since that into which they were dissolved would not exist. Furthermore, the universe always was such as it is now, and always will be the same. For there is nothing into which it changes: for outside the universe there is nothing which could come into it and bring about the change. Moreover, the universe is bodies and space: for that bodies exist, sense itself witnesses in the experience of all men, and in accordance with the evidence of sense we must of necessity judge of the imperceptible by reasoning, as I have already said. And if there were not that which we term void and place and intangible existence, bodies would have nowhere to exist and nothing through which to move, as they are seen to move. And besides these two, nothing can even be thought of either by conception or on the analogy of things conceivable such as could be grasped as whole existences and not spoken of as the accidents or properties of such existences." (Epicurus' Letter to Herodotus)</p>
<p>ASSERTION 2: There are no supernatural Gods telling me how I should live, or offering me rewards or threatening me with punishment after death.</p>	<p>BECAUSE – "The blessed and immortal nature knows no trouble itself nor causes trouble to any other, so that it is never constrained by anger or favor. For all such things exist only in the weak." (PD1)</p>
<p>ASSERTION 3: My life and my consciousness end forever at my death, and all that I will ever experience will occur in the few short years that I am alive.</p>	<p>BECAUSE – "Death is nothing to us, for that which is dissolved is without sensation; and that which lacks sensation is nothing to us." (PD2)</p>
<p>ASSERTION 4: Pleasure has been established by Nature as the goal of my life, and I am not persuaded by those who argue that Pleasure has no limit, is unquenchable, and therefore cannot be the ultimate goal.</p>	<p>BECAUSE – "The limit of quantity in pleasures is the removal of all that is painful. Wherever pleasure is present, as long as it is there, there is neither pain of body nor of mind, nor of both at once." (PD3)</p>
<p>ASSERTION 5: I do not fear the pain that I will encounter as I pursue the goal of Pleasure.</p>	<p>BECAUSE – "Pain does not last continuously in the flesh, but the acutest pain is there for a very short time, and even that which just exceeds the pleasure in the flesh does not continue for many days at once. But chronic illnesses permit a predominance of pleasure over pain in the flesh." (PD4)</p>
<p>ASSERTION 6: I have confidence in these things because my senses show them to me, and truth is derived from the senses, which cannot be contradicted by arguments which are not based on the senses.</p>	<p>BECAUSE – "You will find that knowledge of truth is originally derived from the senses, nor can the senses be contradicted, for whatever is able by the evidence of an opposite truth to convince the senses of falsehood, must be something of greater certainty than they. But what can deserve greater credit than the senses require from us? Will reason, derived from erring sense, claim the privilege to contradict it? Reason – that depends wholly upon the senses, which unless you allow to be true, all reason must be false. ... And though reason is not able to assign a cause why an object that is really four-square when near, should appear round when seen at a distance; yet, if we cannot explain this difficulty, it is better to give any solution, even a false one, than to deliver up all Certainty out of our power, to break in upon our first principle of belief, and tear up all foundations upon which our life and security depend. For not only all reason must be overthrown, but life itself must be immediately extinguished, unless you give credit to your senses. These direct you to fly from a precipice and other evils of this sort which are to be avoided, and to pursue what tends to your security. All therefore is nothing more than an empty parade of words that can be offered against the certainty of sense." (Lucretius Book 4)</p>

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