

(Diderot) Denis - "Epicureism, or Epicurism", Vol. 5 of The Encyclopedia

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EPICUREISM or EPICURISM, noun. m. (*History of Philosophy* .) The Elean sect gave birth to the *Epicurean sect* . Never has philosophy been less heard and more slandered than that of *Epicurus* . This philosopher was accused of atheism, although he admitted the existence of the gods, that he frequented the temples, and that he had no reluctance to prostrate himself to the feet of the altars. He was regarded as the apologist for debauchery, he whose life was a continual practice of all the virtues, and especially of temperance. The prejudice was so general that it must be admitted, to the shame of the Stoics who did everything to spread it, that the *Epicureans* were very honest people who had the worst reputation. But so that we can make an enlightened judgment of the doctrine of *Epicurus* , we will introduce this very philosopher, surrounded by his disciples, & dictating his lessons to them in the shade of the trees he had planted. It is therefore he who will speak in the rest of this article; & we hope that the reader is fair enough to remember this. The only thing we will allow ourselves is to throw some of the most immediate consequences that we can deduce from its principles.

Philosophy in general . Man was born to think & to act, & Philosophy is made to regulate the understanding & the will of man: everything that deviates from this goal is frivolous. Happiness is acquired by the exercise of reason, the practice of virtue, & the moderate use of pleasures; which supposes the health of the body and the soul. If the most important knowledge is what to avoid & do, the young man cannot give himself up too early to the study of Philosophy, & the old man give it up too late. I distinguish between my disciples three kinds of characters: there are men, like me, that no obstacle repels, & who advance alone & in a movement of their own, towards truth, virtue & Bliss ; men, such as Metrodorus, who need an example that encourages them; & others, such as Hermaque, who must be subjected to a kind of violence. I love them & value them all. Oh, my friends! is there anything older than the truth? was not truth before all Philosophers? The philosopher will therefore despise all authority & will march straight to the truth, dismissing all the vain ghosts who will present themselves on his path, & the irony of Socrates & the voluptuousness of *Epicurus* . Why do the people remain plunged into error? is that he takes names for evidence. Make principles for yourself; may they be few in number, but fruitful in consequence. Let us not neglect the study of nature, but let us apply ourselves particularly to the science of manners. Of what use would be us the deep knowledge of the beings which are outside us, if we could, without this knowledge, dissipate the fear, obviate the pain, & satisfy our needs? The use of dialectics pushed to excess, degenerates into the art of sowing thorns all Sciences: I hate this art. True Logic can be reduced to few rules. In Nature there are only things & our ideas; & consequently there are only two kinds of truths, some of

existence, others of induction. The truths of existence belong to the senses; those of induction, to reason. Rush is the main source of our mistakes. I will never tire of telling you, *wait*. Without the proper use of the senses, there are no ideas or preconceptions; & without preconceptions, there is neither opinion nor doubt. Far from being able to work in search of the truth, we are not even able to make signs. Multiply the preconceptions by assiduous use of your senses; study the precise value of the signs which others have instituted, & carefully determine the value of those which you will institute. If you resolve to speak, prefer the simplest & most common expressions, or fear that you will not be heard, & lose the time to interpret yourself. When you listen, try to feel the full force of the words. It is by a habitual exercise of these principles that you will be able to discern effortlessly the true, the false, the obscure & the ambiguous. But it is not enough that you know how to put truth in your reasoning, it is also necessary that you know how to put wisdom in your actions. In general, when the pleasure will not cause any pain in its continuation, do not swing to kiss it; if the pain it will cause is less than it, embrace it again: even embrace the pain which you will promise yourself great pleasure. You will not calculate badly when you abandon yourself to a pleasure that will cause you too much pain, or that will deprive you of greater pleasure.

Physiology in general. What goal will we propose in the study of Physiology? if not to know the general causes of phenomena, so that delivered from all vain terrors, we abandon ourselves without remorse to our reasonable appetites; & that after having enjoyed life, we left it without regret. Nothing has been done with nothing. The Universe has always been, and always will be. There is only matter & le vuide; for we cannot imagine any adjoining being. Add to the notion of empty impenetrability, figure & gravity, & you will have the idea of matter. Separate from the idea of matter the same qualities, & you will have the notion of sight. Nature considered, apart from matter, gives the seen; the empty space gives the notion of the place; the place crossed gives the idea of region. What will we mean by space, if not the empty space considered as extended? The necessity of sight is demonstrated by itself; for without emptiness, where would bodies exist? where would they move? But what is the empty? is it a quality? is it a thing? It is not a quality. But if it is a thing, then it is a bodily thing? there is no doubt about it. This uniform, homogeneous, immense, eternal thing crosses all bodies without altering them, determines them, marks their limits, and contains them. The Universe is the aggregate of matter & of vacuum. The matter is infinite, the vuide is infinite: because if the vuide were infinite & the matter finished, nothing would retain the bodies & would not limit their differences: the percussions & the repercussions would cease; & the Universe, far from forming a whole, would be in no instant of the duration which will follow, but a heap of isolated bodies, lost in the vastness of space. If, on the contrary, the matter were infinite and the finite empty, there would be bodies which would not be in space, which is absurd. We will therefore not apply to the Universe any of these expressions by which we distinguish dimensions & we determine points in finite bodies. The Universe is motionless, because there is no space beyond it. It is immutable, because it is neither susceptible to increase nor decrease. It is eternal, since it has not started, & it will not end. However, beings move there, laws are executed, phenomena succeed one another. Between these phenomena, some occur, others last, and others pass, but

these vicissitudes are relative to the parts, not to the whole. The only consequence that can be drawn from generations and destruction is that there are elements from which beings are generated, and in which they resolve. We cannot conceive of training or resolution without an idea of composition; & we do not have the idea of composition, without admitting simple, primitive & constituent particles. These are the particles that we will call *atoms*. The atom can neither divide, simplify, nor resolve; it is essentially unalterable & finite: whence it follows that in a finite compound, whatever it may be, there is no kind of infinity either in magnitude, in extent, or in number. Homogeneous, having regard to their solidity and their inalterability, atoms have specific qualities which differentiate them. These qualities bring out grandeur, figure, gravity, and all those which emanate from it, such as polite and angular. One should not put among the latter, hot, cold, & others similar; that would be to confuse immutable qualities with momentary effects. Although we assign to the atom all the dimensions of the sensitive body, it is however smaller than any imaginable portion of matter: it escapes our senses, the scope of which is the measure of the imaginable, either in smallness or in greatness. It is by the difference of atoms that most of the phenomena relating to sensations & passions will be explained. The diversity of figure being a necessary continuation of the diversity of magnitude, it would not be impossible that in all this Universe there was not a compound perfectly equal to another. Although there are atoms, some angular, others hooked, their points do not get blunt, their angles never break. I attribute gravity to them as an essential quality, because currently moving, or tending to move, it can only be as a consequence of an intrinsic force, which one can neither conceive nor call other than *weighting*. The atom has two main movements; a fall or weighting movement which prevails or which will prevail without the assistance of any foreign action; & the shock or the movement of reflection that it receives when meeting another. This last kind of movement is varied according to the infinite diversity of masses and directions. The first being an intrinsic energy of matter, it is this that we must look at as the curator of movement in Nature, and the eternal cause of compositions. The general direction of the atoms carried by the weighting movement is not parallel; it is a little convergent; it is to this convergence that we must relate the shocks, the coherences, the compositions of atoms, the formation of bodies, the order of the Universe with all its phenomena. But where does this convergence arise? of the original diversity of atoms, both in mass and in figure, & in weighting force. Such is the speed of an atom & the non-resistance of the seen, that if the atom was not stopped by any obstacle, it would travel the largest intelligible space in the smallest time. Indeed, what would delay it? What is vuide, with regard to movement? As soon as the combined atoms have formed a compound, they have in this compound, & the compound has in space different motions, different actions, both intrinsic and extrinsic, both in the distance and in the place. What is commonly called *elements*, comes from compounds of atoms; we can look at these compounds as principles, but not first. The atom is the primary cause by which everything is, and the raw material of which everything is. It is essentially active & by itself. This activity descends from the atom to the element, from the element to the compound, & varies according to all possible compositions. But any product activity or the local movement, or the trend. This is the universal principle of destruction & regeneration. The vicissitudes of the

compounds are only modes of movement, and the consequences of the essential activity of the atoms which constitute them. How many times have we not attributed to imaginary causes, the effects of this activity which can, depending on the occurrences, carry the portions of a being to immense distances, or itself. to end in shock, in imperceptible translations? It is she who changes the soft into acid, the soft into hard, & c. And even, what is the destiny, if not the universality of the causes or specific activities of the atom, considered or solitary, or in composition with other atoms? The essential qualities known to atoms are not in great number; however, they are sufficient for the infinite variety of qualities of the compounds. From the more or less large separation of atoms, the dense, the rare, the opaque, the transparent are born: this is where the fluidity, liquidity, hardness, softness, volume, &vs. Where will we make the figure depend, if not on the component parts; & weight, if not intrinsic weighting force? however to speak with exactitude, there is nothing which is absolutely heavy or light. You have to make the same judgment of cold and hot. But what is time? It is in nature a series of events; & in our understanding, a notion which is the source of a thousand errors: We must make the same judgment of space. In nature, without body there is no space; without successive events, no time. Movement & rest are states whose notion is inseparable in us from those of space & time. There will be new productions in nature only as far as the diverse composition of the atoms admits. The uncreated & unalterable atom is the principle of all generation & of all corruption. It follows from its essential & intrinsic activity, that there is no compound which is eternal: however it would not be absolutely impossible that after our dissolution, there would not be a general combination of all the matter, which restored to the Universe the same aspect that it has, or at least a partial combination of the elements that constitute us, as a result of which we would be resurrected; but it would be without memory of the past. The memory goes out at the time of destruction. The world is only a small portion of the Universe, the limits of which the weakness of our senses has fixed; because the Universe is unlimited. Considered in relation to its parts & their reciprocal order, the world is one; he has no soul: he is therefore not a god; his training requires no intelligent and supreme cause. Why resort to such causes in Philosophy, when everything could be generated and can be explained by movement, matter, and sight? The world is the result of chance, not the execution of a design. The atoms have matured from all eternity. Considered in the general agitation from which beings were to hatch in time, this is what we have called *chaos* ; considered after natures were hatched, & the order introduced into this portion of space, as we see it, is what we called *the world*: it would be a prejudice to conceive otherwise origin of the earth, the sea, & the heavens. The combination of atoms first formed the general seeds; these seeds developed, and all the animals, without excluding man, were produced alone, isolated. When the seeds were used up, the land stopped producing them, and the species were perpetuated by different generation paths. Let us be careful not to relate to us the transactions of nature, things have been done, without there being any other cause than the universal chain of material beings which worked, either for our happiness or for our misfortune . Let us also leave there the geniuses and the demons; if they were, many things, or would not be, or would be otherwise. Those who imagined these natures were not philosophers, & those who saw them were only visionaries. But if the world has

started, why should it not end? is it not a whole compound? is it not a finished compound? has the atom not retained its activity in this large compound, as well as in its smaller portion there? Is not this activity also a principle of alteration & destruction? What revolts our imagination are the false measures we have taken of the extent & time; we relate everything to the point of the space we occupy, & to the short instant of our duration. But to judge our world, it must be compared to the immensity of the Universe, & to the eternity of time: then would this globe have a thousand times more scope, will enter into general law, & we we will see that all accidents of the molecule are avoided. There is only immutable, unchanging, eternal, only the atom; the worlds will pass, the atom will remain as it is. There is nothing repugnant about the plurality of worlds. There may be worlds like the ours; there may be different. They must be considered as large vortices leaning against each other, which constrict smaller ones, & which together fill the infinite void. In the midst of the general movement which produced ours, this mass of atoms which we call *Earth*, occupied the center; other clusters went to form the sky and the stars which light it. Let us not be imposed on the fall of the bass: the bass has no common center; they fall parallel. Let us conclude the absurdity of the Antipodes. The Earth is not a spherical body; it is a large disc that the atmosphere holds suspended in space: the Earth has no soul; it is therefore not a divinity. It is to earthly exhalations, to sudden shocks, to the meeting of certain opposing elements, to the action of fire, that one must attribute his tremors. If the rivers do not increase the seas, it is because relatively to these volumes of water, to their immense reservoirs, & to the quantity of vapors which the Sun raises from their surface, the rivers are only weak flows. The waters of the sea spread throughout the land mass, water it, meet, gather, & come to rush again into the basins from which they were extravasated: it is in this circulation that they are stripped of their bitterness. The flooding of the Nile is caused by Etesian winds, which drown the sea at the mouths of this river, accumulate sand dams there, and make it flow back on itself. Mountains are as old as the earth. Plants have in common with animals, that they are born, nourish, grow, wither, & die: but it is not a soul which vivifies them; everything is executed in these beings by movement & interposition. In animals, each organ prepares a portion of seed, and transmits it to a common reservoir: hence this analogy proper to seminal molecules, which separates them, distributes them, each arranges them to form a part similar to that which has prepared, and all of them, to father a similar animal. No intelligence presides over this mechanism. Everything being executed as if it did not exist, why then should we suppose its action? The eyes were not made to see, nor the feet to walk: but the animal had feet, and it walked; eyes, & he saw. The human soul is bodily; those who assert the contrary do not get along, & speak without having any ideas. If it were incorporeal, as they claim, it could neither act nor suffer; its heterogeneity would make its action on the body impossible. To resort to some immaterial principle, in order to explain this action, it is not to resolve the difficulty, it is only to transport it to another object. If there were in nature some being who could change natures, the truth would be no more than an empty name: now for an immaterial being to be an instrument applicable to a body, it would be necessary to change the nature of one or the other. Let us beware, however, of confusing the soul with the rest of the animal substance. The soul is made up of atoms so united, so light, so mobile, that it can

separate from the body without losing its weight appreciably. This network, despite its extreme subtlety, has several distinct qualities; it is aerial, igneous, mobile, & sensitive. Widespread throughout the body, it is the cause of passions, actions, movements, faculties, thoughts, and all other functions, whether spiritual or animal; it is he who feels, but he holds this power of the body. At the moment when the soul separates from the body, the sensibility vanishes, because it was the result of their union; the senses are only a diverse touch; there are constantly flowing from the very bodies, simulacra which are similar to them, and which strike our senses. The senses are common to humans & all animals. Reason can be exercised, even when the senses rest. I mean by *spirit*, the most untied portion of the soul. The spirit is diffused in all the substance of the soul, as the soul is diffused in all the substance of the body; he is united to him; it forms only one being with it; he produces his acts in almost indivisible moments; it has its seat in the heart indeed it is beyond that emanate joy, sadness, strength, pusillanimity, & c. The soul thinks, as the eye sees, by simulacra or idols; it is affected by two general feelings, pain and pleasure. Disturb the natural state of the body parts, & you will produce pain; restore body parts to their natural state, and you will hatch the pleasure. If these parts instead of oscillating could remain in rest, or we would stop feeling, or, fixed in a state of unalterable peace, we would experience perhaps the most voluptuous of all the situations. Pain & pleasure are born desire and aversion. The soul in general becomes exhausted & opens up to pleasure; it withers & barely tightens. To live is to experience these alternative movements. Passions vary according to the combination of atoms that make up the fabric of the soul. Idols come to strike meaning; sound awakens the imagination; the imagination excites the soul, and the soul makes the body move. If the body falls from weakness or fatigue, the overwhelmed or distracted soul succumbs to sleep. The state in which she is obsessed with wandering simulacra who torment her or who involuntarily amuse her, is what we will call *insomnia* or *dream*, according to the degree of consciousness which she has left of her state. Death is only the cessation of sensibility. The dissolved body, the soul is dissolved; his faculties are destroyed; she no longer thinks; it is not remembered; it neither suffers nor acts. Dissolution is not annihilation; it is only a separation of elementary particles. The soul was not before the body was formed, why would it be after its destruction? As there is no longer any sense after death, the soul is capable of neither pain nor pleasure. Far from us then the fable of the hells & the Elisha, & all these false stories whose superstition frightens the bad guys that it does not find enough punished by their very crimes, or rewards the good ones who are not enough rewarded by their own virtue. We conclude that the study of nature is not superfluous, since it leads man to knowledge which assures peace in his soul, which frees his mind from all vain terrors, which elevates it to the level gods, & who bring him back to the only real motives he has for fulfilling his duties The stars are heaps of fire. I compare the Sun to a spongy body, whose immense cavities are penetrated by an igneous matter, which soars in all directions. The celestial bodies have no soul: they are therefore not gods. Among these bodies, there are fixed and errans: these latter *planets* are called. Although they all seem spherical to us, they can be either cylinders, or cones, or discs, or arbitrary portions of a sphere; all these figures & many others do not dislike phenomena. Their movements are carried out, or as a consequence of a general revolution of

the sky which carries them away, or of a translation which is proper to them & in which they cross the vast expanse of the heavens which is permeable to them. The Sun rises & sets, rising on the horizon & descending below, or lighting up in the east & going out in the west, consumed & reproduced daily. This star is the home of our world: it is from there that all heat spreads; it only takes a few sparks of this fire to ignite our whole atmosphere. The Moon & the planets can shine either from their own light, or from a light borrowed from the Sun; & the eclipses have for cause, or the momentary extinction of the eclipsed body, or the interposition of a body which eclipses it. If it happens to a planet to cross regions full of materials contrary to fire & to light, will it not go out? will it not be eclipsed? The clouds are either masses of air condensed by the action of the winds, or clusters of atoms which have gradually accumulated, or high vapors from the earth and the seas. The winds are either currents of atoms in the atmosphere, or perhaps impetuous breaths which escape from the earth and the waters, or even a portion of air set in motion by the action of the Sun. If igneous molecules unite, form a mass, and are pressed in a cloud, they will make every effort to escape from it, and the cloud will not open without lightning & without thunder. When the waters suspended in the atmosphere are scarce and scattered, they will fall as rain on the earth, or by their own weight, or by the agitation of the winds. The same phenomenon will take place when they form thick masses; if the heat comes to make them scarce, or the winds to disperse them. They fall in drops, meeting in their fall: these frozen drops or by the cold or by the wind, form hail. The same phenomenon will take place if some sudden heat resolves an icy cloud. When the Sun is in a particular opposition with a cloud, which it strikes with its rays, it forms the rainbow. The colors of the rainbow make an effect of this opposition, & of the humid air which produces them all, or which produces only one which diversifies according to the region it crosses, & the way she moves there. When the earth has been drenched with long rains & heated by violent heat, the vapors which rise from it infect the air & spread death in the distance, & c.

Theology . After having posited as a principle that there is in nature only matter and sight, what shall we think of the gods? Will we abandon our philosophy to subjugate popular opinions, or will we say that the gods are bodily beings? Since they are gods, they are happy; they enjoy themselves in peace; nothing that happens below affects and troubles them; & it is sufficiently demonstrated by the phenomena of the physical world & of the moral world, that they had no part in the production of beings, & that they take no part in their conservation. It is nature itself that has put the notion of their existence in our soul. Who are the people so barbarous, who do not have some anticipated notion of the gods? will we oppose the general consent of men? will we raise our voice against the voice of nature? Nature does not lie; the existence of the gods would be proven even by our prejudices. So many phenomena, which have only been attributed to them because the nature of these beings & the cause of the phenomena were ignored; Are not so many other errors as many guarantees of general belief? If a man has been struck in sleep by some great simulacrum, and that he has remembered it when he woke up; he concluded that this idol necessarily had its model wandering in nature; the voices he may have heard, did not allow him to doubt that this model was of an intelligent nature; & the constancy of the appearance in different times & in the same form, that it was not immortal: but the being

which is immortal, is unalterable, & the being which is unalterable, is perfectly happy, since it n 'acts on nothing, nothing on him, The existence of the gods was therefore & will therefore forever be a sterile existence, & for the very reason that it cannot be altered; for the principle of activity, which is the fruitful source of all destruction and of all reproduction, must be destroyed in these beings. We therefore have nothing to hope for or fear. What is divination? what are wonders? what are religions? If it were of some worship to the gods, it would be that of an admiration that one cannot refuse to all that offers us the attractive image of perfection & happiness. We are led to believe the gods of human form; it is that which all the nations allotted to them; it is the only one under which reason is exercised, and virtue practiced. If their substance were intangible, they would have no sense, no perception, no pleasure, no pain. Their body, however, is not like ours, it is only a similar combination of more subtle atoms; it is the same organization, but they are infinitely more perfect organs; it is a particular nature so untied, so tenuous, that no cause can neither reach it, nor alter it, nor unite with it, nor divide it, & that it can have no action. We ignore the places the gods inhabit: this world is not worthy of them, no doubt; they may well have taken refuge in the empty intervals that the adjoining worlds leave between them.

Morals . Happiness is the end of life: it is the secret confession of the human heart; it is the obvious term of the very actions which distance it. He who kills himself regards death as good. It is not a question of reforming nature, but of directing its general slope. What can happen badly to man is to see happiness where he is not, or to see it where he is indeed, but to be mistaken about the means of obtaining it. What then will be the first step in our moral philosophy, if not to seek what constitutes true happiness? Let this important study be our current occupation. Since we want to be happy from this moment, let's not put off until tomorrow to know what happiness is. The madman always offers to live, and he never lives. It is only given to immortals to be supremely happy. A madness which we first have to guarantee ourselves is to forget that we are only men. Since we hope to never be as perfect as the gods we have offered ourselves as models, let us resolve not to be as happy. Because my eye does not pierce the immensity of spaces, will I disdain to open it on the objects that surround me? These objects will become an inexhaustible source of pleasure, if I know how to enjoy them or neglect them. Pain is always an evil, pleasure always a good: but there is no pure pleasure. The flowers grow on our feet, and we must at least bend down to pick them. However, oh voluptuousness! it is for you alone that we do everything we do; it is never you that we avoid, but the pain that accompanies you only too often. You warm our cold reason; it is from your energy that the firmness of the soul & the strength of the will are born; it is you who move us, who transport us, & when we pick up roses to form a bed for the young beauty who charmed us, & when braving the fury of tyrants, we enter head down & eyes closed in ardent bulls that she prepared. Voluptuousness takes all kinds of forms. It is therefore important to know the price of the objects under which it can appear to us, so that we are not uncertain when it is convenient for us to welcome or reject it, to live or to pass away. After the health of the soul, there is nothing more precious than the health of the body. If the health of the body is felt particularly in a few limbs, it is not general. If the soul goes excessively to the practice of a

virtue, it is not entirely virtuous. The musician is not satisfied with tempering some of the strings of his lyre; it would be to wish for the concert of the society, that we imitate it, & that we do not leave, either to our virtues, or to our passions, to be either too loose or too tense, & to make a sound or too deaf or too sharp. If we make some case of our fellow men, we will find pleasure in fulfilling our duties, because it is a sure way of being considered. We will not despise the pleasures of the senses; but we will not do the insult to ourselves, to compare the honest with the sensual. How will he who is mistaken in choosing a state be happy? how to choose a state without knowing each other? & how to be satisfied in one's state, if we confuse the needs of nature, the appetites of passion, & the deviations of fantasy? You must have a goal in mind if you do not want to act on an adventure. It is not always impossible to seize the future. Everything must tend towards the practice of virtue, the preservation of liberty and life, and the contempt for death. As long as we are, death is nothing, and it is nothing again when we are no longer. We fear the gods only because we make them similar to men. What is the godless, if not the one who worships the gods of the people? If true piety consisted in prostrating oneself before any cut stone, there would be nothing more common: but as it consists in soundly judging the nature of the gods, it is a rare virtue. What is called *natural law* is only a symbol of general utility. General utility & common consent must be the two main rules of our actions. There is never any certainty that the crime remains ignored: the person who commits it is therefore a fool who plays a game where there is more to lose than to win. Friendship is one of the greatest goods of life, and decency, one of the greatest virtues of society. Be decent, because you are not animals, & you live in cities, & not in the depths of the forests, & c.

These are the fundamental points of the doctrine of *Epicurus*, the only one of all the ancient Philosophers who was able to reconcile his morality with what he could take for the true happiness of man, & his precepts with appetites & needs of nature; therefore he had and will always have a great number of disciples. We become Stoic, but we are born *Epicurean*.

Epicurus was Athenian, from the village of Gargette & from the tribe of Aegean. His father was called *Neoclès*, & his mother *Chérestrata*: their ancestors had not been without distinction; but destitution had debased their descendants. Since Neocles had nothing but a small field, which did not provide for his subsistence, he made himself schoolmaster; the good old Chérestrata, holding her son by the hand, went into the houses to make chandeliers, drive out the specters, lift the incantations; it was *Epicurus* who had taught him the formulas of expiation, and all the nonsense of this kind of superstition.

Epicurus was born in the third year of the hundred and ninth Olympiad, the seventh day of the month of Gamilion. He had three brothers, Neoclès, Charideme & Aristobule: Plutarch cites them as models of the rarest fraternal tenderness. *Epicurus* remained in Teos until the age of eighteen: he then went to Athens with the little supply of knowledge which he had made in his father's school; but his stay was not long. Alexander dies; Perdiccas sorry Attica, & *Epicure* is forced to wander from Athens to Colophone, to Mytilene, & to Lampsaque. Popular unrest

interrupted his studies; but did not prevent his progress. Men of genius, such as *Epicurus*, lose little time; their activity throws itself on everything; they observe & learn without being aware of it; & these lights, acquired almost effortlessly, are all the more estimable as they relate to more general objects. While the Naturalist has his eye applied to the end of the instrument which magnifies a particular object, he does not enjoy the general spectacle of nature which surrounds him. So it is with the philosopher; he does not enter the world scene until he leaves his cabinet; & it is there that he collects these germs of knowledge which remain long ignored in the depths of his soul, because it is not a deep & determined meditation, but accidental glances that he owes them: precious germs, which develop sooner or later for the happiness of mankind.

Epicurus was thirty-seven years old when he reappeared in Athens: he was disciple of the Platonic Pamphile, whose visions he despised supremely: he could not suffer the perpetual fallacies of Pyrrhon: he left the school of the Pythagorean Nausiphanes, dissatisfied with the numbers & metempsychosis. He knew too well the nature of man and his strength, to accommodate the severity of Stoicism. He busied himself with leafing through the works of Anaxagoras, Archelaus, Metrodore & Democritus; he attached himself particularly to the latter's philosophy, and he made it the foundations of his own.

The Platonists occupy the academy, the Peripatheticians the Lyceum, the Cynics the cynosarge, the Stoics the portico; *Epicurus* established his school in a delightful garden, from which he bought the ground, and which he had planted for this use. It was he who taught the Athenians to transport the spectacle of the countryside to their city walls. He was forty-four years old when Athens, besieged by Demetrius, was sorry for the famine: *Epicurus*, resolved to live or die with his friends, distributed them beans every day, which he shared with them. We went to its gardens from all parts of Greece, Egypt and Asia: we were attracted by its lights and its virtues, but above all by the conformity of its principles with the feelings of nature. All the philosophers of his time seemed to have conspired against the pleasures of the senses & against voluptuousness: *Epicurus* took up the defense; & the Athenian youth, deceived by the word *voluptuousness*, ran to hear it. He spared the weakness of his listeners; he put as much skill into retaining them as he had used to attract them; he only gradually developed his principles for them. The lessons were given at the table or at the promenade; it was either in the shade of the woods, or on the softness of the beds, that he inspired them with enthusiasm for virtue, temperance, frugality, love for the public good, firmness of soul, the reasonable taste for pleasure, and the contempt for life. His school, obscure in the beginnings, ends up being one of the most brilliant and the most numerous.

Epicure vécut dans la celibat: the concerns which followed marriage seemed to him incompatible with the assiduous exercise of philosophy; moreover, he wanted the philosopher's wife to be wise, rich and beautiful. He occupied himself with studying, writing & teaching: he had composed more than three hundred different treatises; we have none left. He did not make enough of the elegance to which the Athenians were so sensitive; he was content to be true,

clear & deep. He was cherished by the great, admired by his rivals, & adored by his disciples: he received in his gardens several famous women, Leontium, mistress of Metrodore; Themist, wife of Leontius; Philenides, one of the most honest women of Athens; Nécidie, Erotie, Hédie, Marmarie, Bodie, Phédrie, & c. His fellow citizens, the men of the world most inclined to gossip, and the most shady superstition, accused him neither of debauchery nor of impiety.

The ferocious Stoics overwhelmed him with insults; he abandoned his person to them, defended his dogmas with force, and endeavored to demonstrate the vanity of their system. He ruined his health by dint of work: in the last times of his life he could neither support a garment, nor get out of his bed, nor suffer. light, or see fire. He urinated blood; his bladder was gradually closed by the growths of a stone: however he wrote to one of his friends that the spectacle of his past life suspended his pains.

When he felt his end approaching, he called his disciples; he bequeathed his gardens to them; he assured the state of several children without fortune, of which he had become the tutor; he frees his slaves; he ordered his funeral, & died aged seventy-two years, the second year of the one hundred and twenty-seventh Olympiad. He was universally missed: the republic ordered him a monument; & a certain Theotimus, convinced that he had composed infamous letters, addressed to some of the women who frequented his gardens, was condemned to lose his life.

Epicurean philosophy was continuously taught. from its institution until the time of Augustus; she made the greatest progress in Rome. The sect was composed there of the majority of men of letters & statesmen; Lucrece sang *epicureanism* , Celse professed it under Adrien, Pliny the Naturalist under Tiberius: the names of Lucien & Diogene Laerce are still famous among the *Epicureans* .

Epicureanism had, with the decline of the Roman Empire, the fate of all knowledge, it did not emerge from an oversight of more than a thousand years until the beginning of the seventeenth century: the discredit of plastic forms put the atoms in honor. Magnene, from Luxeu in Burgundy, published his *democritus reviviscens* , a mediocre work, in which the author always takes his reveries for the feelings of Democritus & *Epicurus* . To Magnene succeeded Pierre Gassendi, one of the men who do most honor to Philosophy & to the nation: he was born in the month of January of the year 1592, in Chantersier, a small village in Provence, a league from Digne , where he made his humanities. He had soft mores, sound judgment, & deep knowledge: he was versed in Astronomy, ancient & modern Philosophy, Metaphysics, languages, history, antiquities; his learning was almost universal. It could have been said of him that never had a philosopher been a better humanist, nor a humanist so good a philosopher: his writings are not without approval; he is clear in his reasoning, & right in his ideas. He was among us the restorer of the *philosophy of Epicurus*: his life was full of troubles; unceasingly he attacked & was attacked: but he was not less attentive in his arguments, either with Fludd, or with Lord Herbert, or with Descartes, to put honesty than reason on his side.

Gassendi had for disciples or for sectarians, several men who immortalized themselves, Chapelle, Moliere, Bernier, the abbot of Chaulieu, the grand-prior of Vendôme, the marquis de la Fare, the knight of Bouillon, the marshal of Catinat, & several other extraordinary men, who, by a contrast of pleasant and sublime qualities, united in them heroism with softness, the taste for virtue with that of pleasure, the political qualities with literary talents, & who formed among us different schools of moral *epicureanism* which we will talk about.

The oldest and the first of these schools where the ethics of *Epicurus* have been practiced and professed, was rue des Tournelles, in the house of Ninon Lenclos; it is there that this extraordinary woman collected all that the court and the city had of polite, enlightened & voluptuous men; we saw Madame Scarron there; the Countess de la Suze, famous for her elegies; the Countess of Olonne, so boasted by her rare beauty & the number of her friends, Saint-Evremont, who professed since *epicureanism* in London, where he had for disciples the famous Count of Grammont, the poet Waller, & Madame de Mazarin; the Duchess of Bouillon Mancini, who was since of the Temple school; des Yvetaux, (see Arcadiens), M. de Gourville, Madame de la Fayette, M. le Duc de la Rochefoucault, & several others, who had formed at the Hotel de Rambouillet a school of Platonism, which they abandoned to go increase society & listen to the lessons of the *Epicurean* .

After these first *epicureans* , Bernier, Chapelle & Moliere disciples of Gassendi, transferred the school of *Epicure* from rue des Tournelles to Auteuil: Bachaumont, Baron de Blot, whose songs are so rare & so sought after, & Desbarreaux, who was the master of Madame Deshouilleres in the art of poetry & voluptuousness, mainly illustrated the school of Auteuil.

The school of Neuilly succeeded that of Auteuil: it was held, during the short time it lasted, by Chapelle & MM. Sonnings; but scarcely was it instituted than it melted into the school of Anet & du Temple.

What famous names are offered to us in this last one! Chapelle & his disciple Chaulieu, M. de Vendôme, Madame de Bouillon, the Chevalier de Bouillon, the Marquis de la Fare, Rousseau, MM. Sonnings, Father Courtin, Campistron, Palaprat, Baron de Breteuil, father of the illustrious Marquise du Châtelet; the President of Mesmes, President Ferrand, the Marquis de Dangeau, the Duke of Nevers, M. de Catinat, the Comte de Fiesque, the Duke of Foix or de Randan, M. de Périgny, Renier, a friendly guest, who sang & was accompanied by the lute, M. de Lasseré, the duke of the Feuillade, & c. this school is the same as that of St. Maur or Madame la Duchesse.

The school of Seaux gathered all that remained of these sectarians of luxury, elegance, politeness, philosophy, virtues, letters & pleasure, & it also had Cardinal de Polignac, who frequented more out of taste for the disciples of *Epicurus* , than for the doctrine of their master, Hamilton, St Aulaire, Father Gênet, Malesieu, La Motte, M. de Fontenelle, M. de Voltaire, several academicians, & some women famous by their spirit; whence we see that in any place and in any time whatsoever, the *Epicurean* sect has never had more splendor than in France, and especially during the last century. See *Brucker, Gassendi, Lucrece* , & c.

Post by “Cassius” of April 14, 2020 at 6:28 PM

[Quote from Charles](#)

. Man was born to think & to act, & Philosophy is made to regulate the understanding & the will of man: everything that deviates from this goal is frivolous.

Wow that is quite a non-Epicurean start, in my humble opinion! I have not had a chance to read the full article but I will. Thanks for posting this Charles because I think it is very helpful to post and go through as many of the older "encyclopedia" entries that we can find.

Post by “Bryan” of January 24, 2025 at 12:46 AM

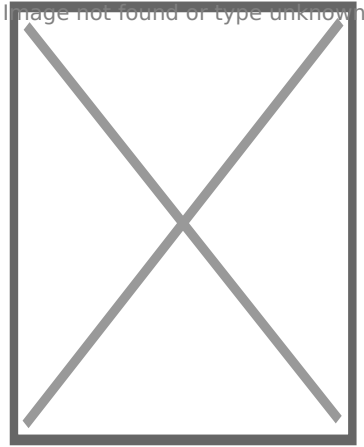
[Quote from Charles](#)

...it also had Cardinal de Polignac, who frequented more out of taste for the disciples of *Epicurus* , than for the doctrine of their master...

I know almost nothing about Polignac's *Anti-Lucretius*, but it must have been very widely published in its day—because copies of it from the 1700s are cheap (sometimes as low as €20), particularly compared to copies of Lucretius from the same period.

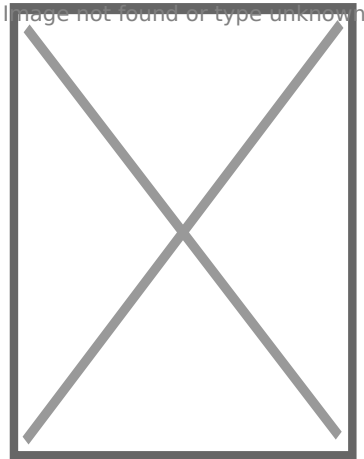
Post by “Don” of January 24, 2025 at 2:16 AM

A 1766 English translation (hard to read, and also with the long S's)



[\[Anti-Lucretius. Books 1-5. English\]. A translation of Anti-Lucretius. By George Canning ... 1766 : Polignac, Melchior de, Cardinal. : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)
[Anti-Lucretius. Books 1-5. English]. A translation of Anti-Lucretius. By George Canning ... 1766..Digitized from IA40313615-50.Next issue:...
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A 1771 edition



[Poems : Canning, George, d. 1771 : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)
With this is bound [Polignac, Melchior de] A translation of Anti-Lucretius. London, 1766
archive.org

Post by “Bryan” of January 24, 2025 at 2:20 AM

How would we get evidence how many were printed and who funded the printing? It is just odd so many are still around!

Post by “Don” of January 24, 2025 at 6:28 AM

"Ain't no party like an Anti-Lucretius party, cause an Anti-Lucretius party don't stop!"