

# Episode One Hundred Forty-Six - "Epicurus And His Philosophy" Part 02 - The Three Divisions of Epicurean Philosophy

Post by "Cassius" of October 24, 2022 at 5:46 AM

Welcome to Episode One Hundred Forty-Six of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

Each week we'll walk you through the ancient Epicurean texts, and we'll discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at [EpicureanFriends.com](http://EpicureanFriends.com), where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

We're now in the process of a series of podcasts intended to provide a general overview of Epicurean philosophy based on the organizational structure employed by Norman DeWitt in his book "Epicurus and His Philosophy."

This week we take a look at the three major divisions of Epicurean philosophy. Now let's join the discussion:

## **Epicurus employed teaching devices which are important in understanding his philosophy.**

- Setting The 'Attitude' or (diathesis, Greek). This device stresses at the very beginning the attitude to take toward the subject. For example, the [Principal doctrines](#) set the attitude to take toward gods, death, pleasure, and pain.
- Start With An 'Outline' or the 'Synoptic View.' This means starting with the 'big picture' before proceeding to detailed discussion of the finer points, so that the fine points are kept in perspective. Epicurus' teachings were therefore presented in order from the general to the particular.
  - Physics:
    - The first principles of Physics were presented as the Twelve Elementary Principles
    - The *First Epitome* of Physics was the Letter to Herodotus
    - The *Second Epitome* of Physics is what we have today as the material adapted into poem form in Lucretius *On The Nature of Things*.
    - The Full presentation of Physics was the Thirty-Seven Books on Nature.
  - Ethics:

- Ethical passages of 40 Doctrines
- Letter to Menoeceus
- Longer Works Now Lost.
- Canonics:
  - Epistemological passages of 40 Doctrines
  - Epistemological passages in “On the Nature of Things”
  - The “Celestial Book” on Canonics now lost.
- Warning: View The Literature On Epicurus With Great Care
  - Little remains of the trustworthy texts other than a small amount of original material from Epicurus, supplemented by the poem of Lucretius. The secondary literature is mostly hostile and cannot be received uncritically. Most modern scholars prefer to “hunt with the pack” and take the secondary literature at face value. This results in the greatly distorted picture of Epicurus dominant today.
  - In separating out the false material it is useful to employ another device used by Epicurus: that of contrasting and opposing “True Opinions” against “False Opinions.”

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/51748685>

## Post by “Cassius” of October 30, 2022 at 11:47 AM

As Kalosyni mentioned in the podcast today: a draft of a prototype of an expanding/collapsing outline of Epicurean philosophy. Needs to be drastically revised and update but might serve as a rough example for those who want to develop a better version using current web technologies:

Here's a picture:



<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2715-episode-one-hundred-forty-six-epicurus-and-his-philosophy-part-02-the-three-divi/>

Here's the clickable version:

[Fundamentals of Epicurean Philosophy](#)

Description is here:

[Fundamentals of Epicurean Philosophy - An Outline - NewEpicurean](#)

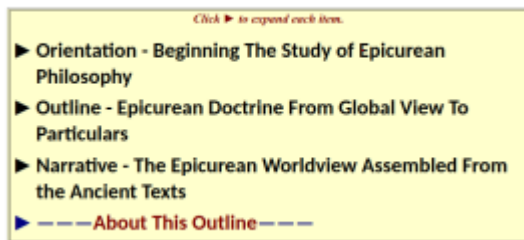
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## Post by "Cassius" of October 30, 2022 at 11:51 AM

Oops I forgot I actually produced two versions - this one entitled "Overview." Same caveats apply that this is just a prototype and needs dramatic revision.

Here's a picture:

### [Overview Of Epicurean Philosophy](#)



Here's the clickable version:

[Overview of Epicurean Philosophy](#)

Description is here:

[Overview of Epicurean Philosophy - A New Outline - NewEpicurean](#)

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## Post by "Cassius" of October 31, 2022 at 1:54 AM

I am told that not everyone can click on the pointer icons and expand/collapse the outlines in the "clickable versions" of the above two posts. If you're unable to do that please post here as I

would like to investigate the cause. It works for me on both android and desktop.

(Note that the pictures in the post aren't clickable. I just posted those so you would see what you're going to get when you follow the link. Also note that you must click directly on the pointer icon and not the full text of each line. That's an example of why the content needs to be reworked using different technology.)

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## **Post by "Cassius" of October 31, 2022 at 2:06 AM**

Oh that last comment reminds me of one of my favorite subjects - outlining software. There is even a website dedicated to the topic: <http://www.outlinersoftware.com>

Those two outlines above were produced with the software that I have sworn by for 20+ years: Ecco Pro. If I make it to 90 years old and die at my computer I will probably be typing into my Ecco outlines at the moment I kick off. Unfortunately development of Ecco stopped long ago, and today probably the premier interactive outliners that feature easy expanding and collapsing include Logseq and Dynalist.

Of course the forum here itself has an outlining function, but no ability to expand and collapse ("fold"). Another example is the current outline for the LucretiusToday podcast we are using at the wiki page [https://epicuruscollege.com/wiki/lucretius...I\\_series\\_-\\_eahp](https://epicuruscollege.com/wiki/lucretius...I_series_-_eahp) That outline is generated by Dokuwiki and it works ok for "folding," but it doesn't have the ability to zoom to different levels (for example, to show only all first and second level headings) like full featured outlining software can do.

Repeating Kalosyni's original comment I think it would be a great project for anyone (and many people) to organize their Epicurean research and produce public "live" outlines that can be viewed at varying levels.

If I were to attack such a project at the moment I would probably use Dynalist, but if anyone has better suggestions please post in the thread. I know a lot of us are familiar with WordPress - maybe WordPress has an outliner plugin? Numbers of us have done blogs in the past but if we could figure out a way to publish live outlines that can be interactively zoomed at varying levels, that format would probably be at least as useful as the standard blog format organized by date.

If anyone is interested in working on such a project they should of course feel free to copy and paste the text of my existing outlines above into their own new formats for further development and revision.

In fact, the existing two outlines above are simple HTML, and anyone who is proficient in HTML can simply download the existing page (it's all a single HTML page) and modify it to make it much more attractive. I never learned real CSS skills so I was only able to make minimal changes to the format generated by EccoPro. Should be easy for someone with HTML/CSS skills to modify it. For example I see that as you drill down through the bullets the font sizes don't seem to match. If anyone wants to spend time cleaning up the HTML in these versions I would gladly update the existing versions on this and the NewEpicurean websites. But I suspect it makes the most sense to take the text and rework it using an up-to-date static site generator.

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of October 31, 2022 at 7:43 AM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Also note that you must click directly on the pointer icon and not the full text of each line.

Thanks! I see that clicking on the tiny pointer icon is the magic key to getting the outline to unfold.

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I think it would be a great project for anyone (and many people) to organize their Epicurean research and produce public "live" outlines that can be viewed at varying levels.

I will definitely see what I can do, and will be a matter of finding the right app for that 😊

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### **Post by “Cassius” of October 31, 2022 at 10:13 AM**

Quick comment on desirable ways to manipulate an outline:

<https://youtu.be/TSqwfcEvNXQ>

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of October 31, 2022 at 3:02 PM**

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2715-episode-one-hundred-forty-six-epicurus-and-his-philosophy-part-02-the-three-divi/>

I was just reading a thread about the [Tetrapharmakos](#) (and how it is a quick way of summarizing the first four Principle Doctrines) and in this thread an important point about outlines and summaries is brought up:

Quote by Cassius:

Quote

It's possible to summarize or to abstract too strongly to the point where essential details get left out, and that's what I think is defective in both of these two formulations.

I am a big fan of outlining and I love to do it, but part of the trick of doing it right is to distill the elements down to the essentials without cutting too much, or without cutting too little.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of November 1, 2022 at 9:55 AM**

Episode 146 - The Second of our Introductory series of podcasts on Epicurean Philosophy is now available. This week we focus on "The Three Divisions of Epicurean Philosophy" (Physics, Canonics, and Ethics).

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/51748685>

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of November 4, 2022 at 11:03 AM**

Notes from Podcast 146:

1:40 -- The Three Divisions of Epicurean Philosophy -- As presented by Diogenes Laertius and other Epicurean documents such as the poem by Lucretius *On the Nature of Things*, and also the Inscription of the Wall of Oenoanda.

--The Physics - the nature of the universe as a whole, the examination of the way things are and how things work from a natural basis as opposed to a supernatural basis, and place of humanity in the world and on the earth.

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2715-episode-one-hundred-forty-six-epicurus-and-his-philosophy-part-02-the-three-divi/>

--The Epistemology and the Canonics - the science of how you know anything at all (what knowledge is possible and how you gain knowledge). How you gather evidence and process evidence, and form opinions.

--The Ethics -- how you should live after you understand the nature of the universe, and how you think about things through the canonics.

3:15 -- We are organizing our presentation according to the commentary of Norman DeWitt and we have talked about why that book is a good place to start. However some students who are serious in their studies are going to want to read the original extant texts as quickly as they can.

3:34 -- Books with which to begin Epicurean studies:

Lucretius' poem was Cassius first reading. For Joshua it was Stephen Greenblatt's *The Swerve*, and then the Stallings translation of Lucretius, and then Principle Doctrines and Vatican Sayings (Diogenes Laertius). Martin started with *Epicurus' Extant Texts* by Kraut (similar to Bailey) and recommends to read DeWitt next. Kalosyni started with *How to Be an Epicurean* by Wilson and the text of the Principle Doctrines and Letter to Menoecus.

8:59 -- Discussing Epistemology and Canonics at the same time - Letter to Pythocles -- manifold causes

13:28 -- 12 Fundamentals of Nature -- the ultimate distillation of his principles. That document does not exist today, but has been reassembled from information extracted from Lucretius' poem On the Nature of Things and Letter to Herodotus.

14:43 -- a second (large) epitome of physics which Lucretius used. 37 books on Nature by Epicurus.

15:53 -- Ethics -- 40 Doctrines and Letter to Menoecus

16:11 -- Canonics -- The Celestial Book (which was lost)

16:40 -- Philodemus work On Signs; On Methods of Inference

17:43 -- Epicurus' relationship to Plato and Aristotle, and Pyrrho

18:49 -- Letter to Herodotus may have been the first literature that was put into the hands of any potential Epicurean

21:26 -- [Death is nothing to us](#) (and the Tetrphamacon)

Understanding first about the way the universe works before jumping into this material

22:58 -- Letter to Herodotus and Letter to Pythocles gives a foundation that informs everything else

23:08 -- Joshua comments on Lucretius' poem -- lost 7th book might have been on the nature of the gods -- something to be studied later on in the study. And Joshua comments about how things are presented in *A Few Days in Athens*.

26:20 -- Best way to study is a brief overview and then move to the details. But the poem of Lucretius needs some preparation before reading to avoid being confused regarding the nature of the gods, that the gods are not interfering in human life.

27:40 -- the reason you shouldn't fear the gods, given in the Letter to Menoeceus and the Principle Doctrines, is that the gods aren't what we think of them; the gods are not involved; a perfectly blissful being would not take any interest in rewarding friends or punishing enemies on the small planet earth -- it is not an appeal to just a physics argument, but a logical argument derived from physics. Epicurus may have been talking to people who were all ready been familiar with physics of Epicureanism (12 Elementary Principles, etc) before coming to the understanding that that the gods aren't supernatural and not interfering in our lives.

29:27 -- The goal of pleasure -- as the right way to organize your life, how pleasure relates to happiness. Once you have eliminated the idea of following god or working hard to get into heaven. Feelings (pleasure and pain); calmness and tranquility; peace of mind; how pleasure relates to happiness.

30:55 -- good to start with reading a general summary. A map of the direction in which you are going, and what to study. Joshua mentions that there is a very good summary in Stephen Greenblatt's *The Swerve*

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32:20 -- Material written by people who were hostile to Epicurus. May have been recorded accurately, but the way they present it is in a critical manner (such as Cicero). In some translations of Lucretius, the translators distance themselves in the prologue (Bailey is not supportive of Epicurean Ethics). So any commentary present by these writers may not be consistent with what Epicurus actually presented.

34:58 -- There is a long list of denunciations of Epicurus and Epicurean philosophy out there in western literature -- Thomas More's *Utopia*, Dante's *Inferno*. When they come to a subject in this way, then their opinions and conclusions need to be scrutinized.

35:23 -- Lucretius was best accepted by his peers during his time, praise him and his ideas, compared to what we find during the Renaissance and the modern age, such as with Hutchinson, Lamban, Brown.

37:10 -- DeWitt says French and Italians more sympathetic to Epicureanism than the English - Pierre Gassendi (reintroduced Epicurean studies into the west) and Montaigne quotes Lucretius a lot and quite appreciatively.

37:43 -- Next Week: True Opinions vs False Opinions about Epicurus -- understanding this will help provide a framework for study.

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## Post by “Kalosyni” of November 4, 2022 at 11:20 AM

We had four in attendance during the last Wednesday Night Zoom meeting, on November 2nd, and we ended up discussing which Epicurean books we have read and recommend:

### Quote

Wednesday Zoom Comments:

On the issue of what book to read first, Onenski comments that A Few Days In Athens has strengths as a first book to read because it is approachable. Given that the ethics is what interests lots of people, AFDIA sort of takes that approach.

Onenski also says that in his case he first read Hiram's book as a general introduction. He would still recommend it to some audiences; today he might also recommend.

Kochie says that he has seen some Catherine Wilson videos and that he books might be a good place to start. He himself however likes the Epicurus Reader, and he likes the introduction to that which is also on the Epicurism.info website.

Our next [Zoom meeting \(click here to find out more\)](#) is coming up Wednesday November 9th, and I already have in mind a good topic to discuss, and also we will open it up to anything further based out of this Episode 146. Hope to see you there! 😊