

Navigation Outlines

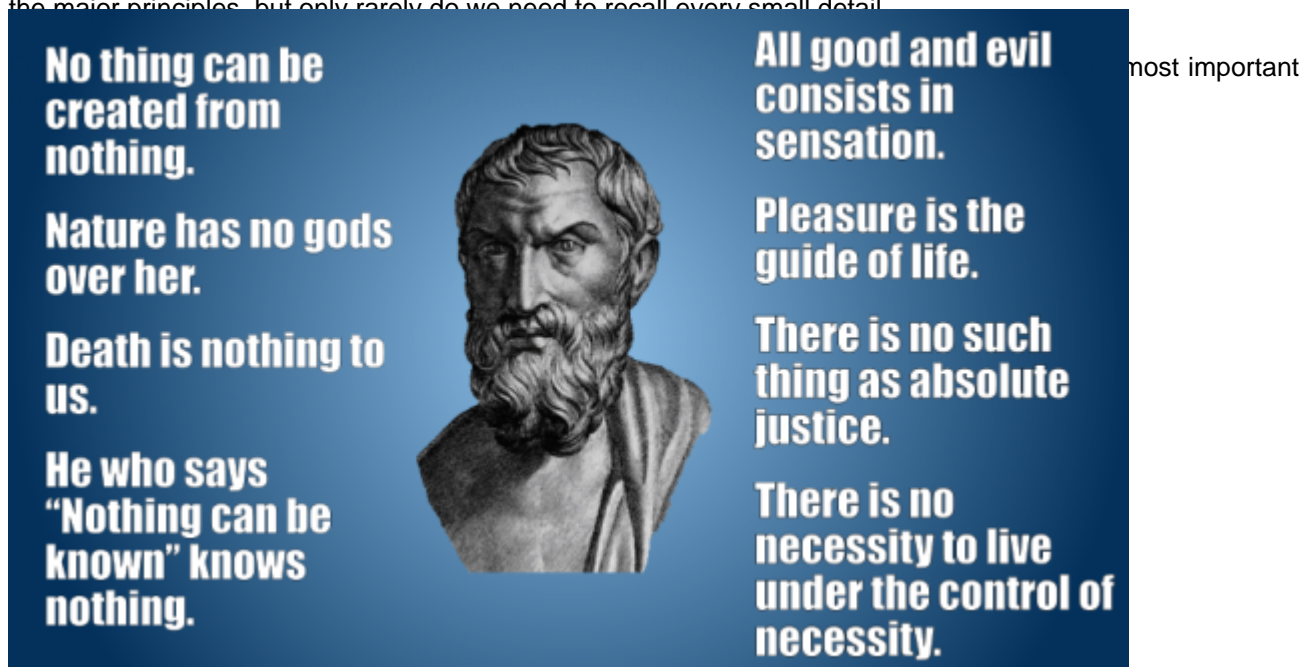
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1. What Is Epicurean Philosophy All About?

Epicurean philosophy is a full worldview based on fundamental conclusions about the nature of the universe, the nature of knowledge, and the nature of human life. This worldview provides guidance for living more fully, joyfully, and fearlessly, and stands in opposition to supernatural religion and virtue-based philosophies.

Epicurus taught that it is good to use [outlines](#) to organize our thoughts, because we frequently have need of the major principles, but only rarely do we need to recall every small detail.



No thing can be created from nothing.

Nature has no gods over her.

Death is nothing to us.

He who says "Nothing can be known" knows nothing.

All good and evil consists in sensation.

Pleasure is the guide of life.

There is no such thing as absolute justice.

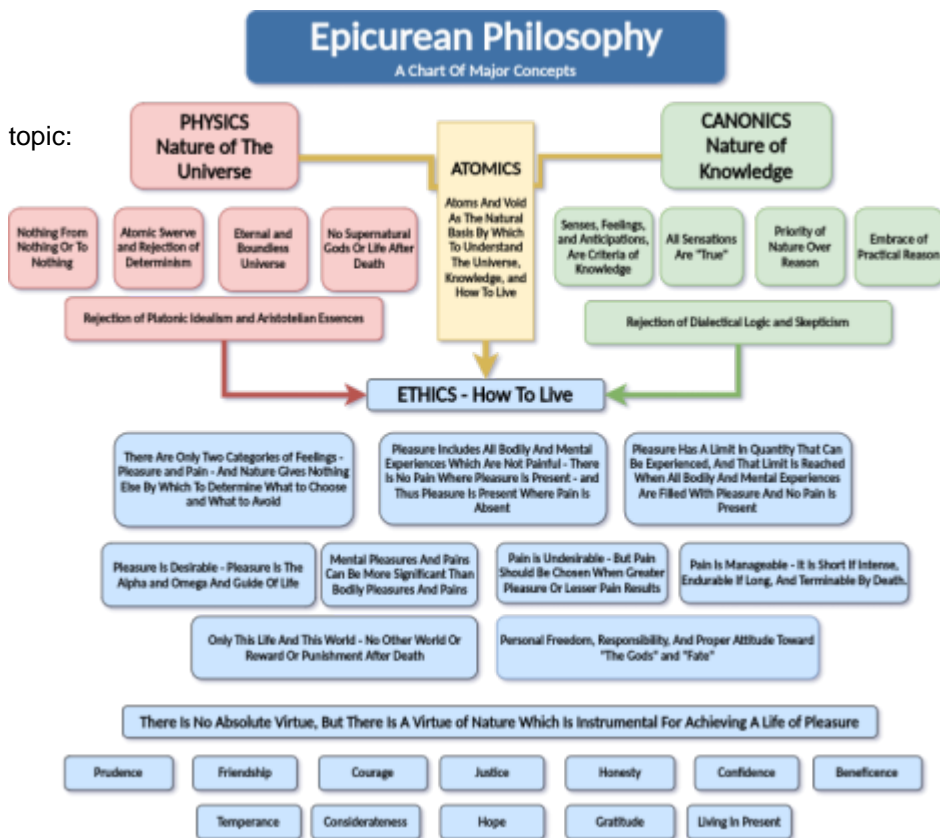
There is no necessity to live under the control of necessity.

most important

2. Navigation Map

Expanding further, we have our "[Navigation Map](#)" which places the doctrines of Epicurus in a larger context. Discussion of the map is [here](#), or you can click on any of the boxes on the map to go to discussion of that

topic:



3. Single Page Outline

Another special format is our collapsible Single Page Outline contained in a single HTML file which you can download to your device for reference anytime. The discussion of that file is [here](#) and a [direct link is here](#).

Welcome! Click the arrow symbol ► to expand each item. For an alternate format click here: [Page View](#).

- **Welcome To The EpicureanFriends Navigation Outline! Click The Arrowhead At Left For Help.**
- **Definitions and Clarifications. The following terms and phrases carry special meaning and significance in Epicurean philosophy:**
- **Physics - The Universe Is Composed of Atomic Particles And Void, And Was Not Created By Supernatural Forces.**
- **Canonics - Knowledge Can Be Obtained Through the Sensations, Anticipations, and Feelings.**
- **Ethics - The Feeling of Pleasure Is The Guide of Life.**
- **Practical Advice - Implementation of Epicurean Philosophy In Your Life Starts Here.**

4. Text Outlines

Thomas Jefferson's outline of Epicurean philosophy can be found [here](#), and in page below and throughout our forum you will find similar outlines, such as the following:

1. **Physics: The Universe Operates on Natural Principles, Neither Chaotically Nor At The Will Of Supernatural Gods, There is No Fate, And There Is No Life After Death**
 1. Nothing Is Ever Observed to Be Created From That Which Does Not Exist, Nor is Anything Destroyed to Total Nothingness, Either By The Gods Or By Any Other Cause.
 2. True Gods Are Self-Sufficient And Able to Sustain Their Happiness Without Interruption; Such Beings Do Not Interfere In The Affairs Of Humans
 3. The Universe Operates Through Natural Processes Involving Elemental Particles And Void, And Life Itself Arises Naturally
 4. Our World Is Constantly Changing, But The Universe As A Whole Is Eternal
 5. The Atoms have the Capacity To Swerve At No Fixed Time and No Fixed Place, And This Means There is No Fate.
 6. The Universe As A Whole Is Without Boundaries, And There Are No "Gods" Or Anything Else Outside Of it
 7. Nature Never Creates Only A Single Thing of A Kind, And So The Existence of Life On Earth Indicates Life Also Exists On Other Suitable Worlds Throughout the Universe
 8. All Things In Our World Which Come Together From Atoms and Void, Including Our Bodies And Souls, Eventually Break Apart
 9. The Soul Is Born With The Body And Cannot Survive Without It
 10. Death Is The End of All Sensation, And There Is No Experience of Pleasure and Pain Or Anything Else Without Sensation
2. **Canonics: The Three Faculties Which Constitute Our Standard of Truth Are the Senses, The Anticipations (Pre-Conceptions), and the Feelings**
 1. It Is Absurd To Argue That Nothing Can Be Known, Because He Who Argues That Nothing Can Be Known Contradicts His Own Argument
 2. Proper Reasoning Must Be Based On Evidence From The Senses And Is Not Valid Without Such Evidence

3. The Three Canonical Faculties Are Reliable Because They are Incapable of Memory, And They Report Honestly To Us Without Opinion
4. ["All Sensations Are True"](#) in the sense that they are reported truly and honestly, not because every individual sensation reveals to us a complete picture of the matter under consideration.
5. The Only Guarantee of Truth Is The Verification Of Reality Through Multiple Separate Sensations
6. We Lose Not Only Reason, But Life Itself, If We Fail To Have the Courage To Trust The Senses
3. [Ethics: The Guide of Life is Pleasure](#)
 1. All Good And Evil Consist In Sensation Because Nature Gives Us Only Pleasure And Pain By Which To Determine What to Choose And What To Avoid, and Therefore [Pleasure Is The Guide Of Life](#)
 2. There Are Only Two Feelings, Pleasure and Pain, And If You Are Aware Of Anything At All What You Are Aware Of Is One Or The Other.
 3. There Is No Neutral State Between Pleasure And Pain, And Therefore Pleasure Equals The Absence of Pain, Pain Equals The Absence of Pleasure, And The Highest Quantity of Pleasure Is The Total Absence of Pain.
 4. Pleasure Consists of [Both](#) Sensory Stimulation And All Other Mental and Bodily Experience of Life Which Are Not Painful.
 5. Pleasure is To Be Pursued And Pain Is To Be Avoided, But At Times Pain Is To Be Chosen For The Sake of Greater Pleasure Or Lesser Pain
 6. Pleasure is The Beginning And End of A Happy Life; Therefore Happiness Is Grounded in Pleasure, And A Happy Life Is One In Which Pleasure Predominates Over Pain
 7. There Is No Absolute Standard Of Virtue, Piety, Reason, Justice, Or Single Way to Pursue Pleasure, Constituting A Single Way of Life For All People At All Times
 8. Virtue, Piety, Reason and Justice Are Valuable Only Insofar As They Bring Pleasure And Thereby Happiness
 9. There Is No Heaven or Hell After Death In Which We Are Rewarded or Punished
 10. Life Is Short And We Should Pursue Pleasure While We Can And View Our Time As Too Precious To Waste

5. "Foundations of Epicurean Philosophy" Outline

On an even more expanded basis, we have the ["Foundations of Epicurean Philosophy"](#) presentation, based on the formulations found in the texts of Epicurus, Lucretius, Diogenes Laertius, and others. This outline is presented in text form [here](#), and in slideshow form [here](#). Discussion is [here](#) and in video form below:

There's nothing magic about the precise formulations you see in these outlines. Over time we regularly revise them in ways we think make them more clear and understandable. In studying important but unfamiliar issues like the Epicurean view of Pleasure, or Anticipations, or Virtue, it's always best to look over as many alternate translations and discussions as possible. You can save much time by asking questions of those on the forum who have previously examined the same issues.

One of the most helpful ways that you can enhance your own understanding of Epicurus is to follow his advice to Herodotus and prepare your own outline of the philosophy. Don't be surprised to find yourself regularly revising it and shifting the items up and down in order of importance. That is to be expected as your comprehension of the importance of the various issues matures. It will take considerable time to realize the many implications of the fundamental principles. EpicureanFriends.com has an entire section of our forum devoted to helping you draw up your own outline. Check out those resources [here](#).

6. A Caution As To The Meaning Of Pleasure

It is impossible to appreciate the depth of Epicurean philosophy without wrestling what Epicurus really meant when he discussed "pleasure." Unfortunately, much modern discussion tends to pigeonhole Epicurus at one of two extremes - as either focused exclusively on immediate sensory stimulations, or - quite the opposite and much more damaging - as an ascetic. Both of these interpretations surely cannot be correct, and in fact neither are correct.

Anyone who reads Epicurus for themselves will immediately find that the caricature of Epicurus as focused exclusively on immediate sensory stimulation is false. The ascetic argument, however, is more dangerous because there are sections of text which can be read to assert that position if Epicurus' full definition of pleasure is ignored. The ascetics argue that Epicurus turned the common understanding of Pleasure on its head by elevating absence of disturbance (*ataraxia* or "*tranquility*") as something separate and more desirable than Pleasure (*hedone*) itself. Those who maintain this generally argue that Epicurus taught that "resting" (*katastematic*) pleasures, which they rarely attempt to define, are far more important than the normal "active" (*kinetic*) pleasures, such as joy and delight, that most people cherish.

In truth Epicurus did not turn the definition of Pleasure on its head, as Cicero and many others assert, but he expanded the definition of pleasure to include not only immediate sensory stimulation, but also all other experiences of life which are not painful. Epicurus held life to be desirable, and no matter what you are doing in life, mentally or physically, if you are alive you are feeling pleasure whenever you are not feeling pain.

There is much discussion of these issues here at EpicureanFriends, but the most important threshold issue is to understand that Epicurus held that there are only two feelings, pleasure and pain, and that if a person is aware of anything at all he is experiencing one or the other. This means that any and all normal and healthy mental and physical experiences in life which are not felt to be painful are in fact pleasurable. This expansion of the word pleasure far beyond immediate sensory stimulation is the key to seeing how the Epicurean view of pleasure works. As Norman DeWitt states on page 240 of "Epicurus And His Philosophy" (emphasis added):

Quote

"The extension of the name of pleasure to this normal state of being was the major innovation of the new hedonism. It was in the negative form, freedom from pain of body and distress of mind, that it drew the most persistent and vigorous condemnation from adversaries. The contention was that the application of the name of pleasure to this state was unjustified on the ground that two different things were thereby being denominated by one name. Cicero made a great to-do over this argument, but it is really superficial and captious. The fact that the name of pleasure was not customarily applied to the normal or static state did not alter the fact that the name ought to be applied to it; nor that reason justified the application; nor that human beings would be the happier for so reasoning and believing.

For those who are interested in pursuing the katastematic-kinetic debate, start with [Boris Nikolsky's article "Epicurus on Pleasure."](#) As [Nikolsky](#) explains, the distinction between katastematic and kinetic pleasure was very likely not held to be important by Epicurus at all, but instead derives from a later Stoic-influenced overlay on Epicurus' teachings. For more detail on Epicurus' common sense approach to pleasure, consult the chapters on Epicurus in Gosling and Taylor's "**The Greeks on Pleasure**," especially chapter 19 "*Katastematic and Kinetic Pleasure*." For evidence that the ascetic interpretation of Epicurean philosophy contradicts core premises of the philosophy (and therefore cannot be correct!) see the Wentham article "[Cicero's Interpretation of Katastematic Pleasure](#)."

These articles provide detail, but the best way to reboot your understanding of the philosophy is to consult the best general book on Epicurus, [Norman DeWitt's "Epicurus and His Philosophy."](#)

DeWitt provides the sweeping overview of Epicurean philosophy that every new student of Epicurus needs to read. In the process of starting from scratch, you'll see that DeWitt presents a comprehensive and coherent overview in which the katastematic - kinetic distinction rates little more than a brief mention. You'll then see why the best record we have of Epicurus' philosophy - the biography by Diogenes Laertius, addresses the issue only by stating explicitly that Epicurus endorsed **both** *types of pleasure*.

For additional assistance in these and other issues, please check out our table of [Major Issues In Understanding Epicurean Philosophy](#). And of course, ask questions in the Forum!

There's much more to explain and discuss, but for now, thank you for dropping by, and please let us hear from you! Start now by reading and posting in our [General Forum](#), or in one of the special sections listed below: