

Principal Doctrines by Odysseus Makridis

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Principal Doctrines

Odysseus Makridis

As presented in *Letters and Sayings of Epicurus* (2005)

1. “That which is blessed and indestructible has no affairs of its own to attend to; nor does it inflict any trouble on others. So, it is agitated neither by ire nor by partiality. For all such are to be found in that which lacks power.”
2. “[Death is nothing to us](#). Because, what has been dissolved has no sense perception; and, according to us, what has no sense perception is nothing to worry about.”
3. “Pleasure has its <upper> limit in the removal of everything that produces pain. For, wherever that which produces pleasure resides, for as long as it abides, there can be nothing that produces pain, grief, or both.”
4. “What produces pain does not remain constantly in the body over a long period of time; it is rather that the maximal pain persists for the least span of time, and even that bodily pain which barely exceeds pleasure does not continue to happen for many days <in a row.> And, indeed, chronic illnesses themselves have an excess of what produces bodily pleasure over what is productive of pain.”
5. “It is impossible to lead a pleasant life without leading a life that is prudent, proper, and just. Nor is it possible to live a life that is prudent, proper, and just without living a life that is pleasant. Whoever lacks <any one of> the above <elements of a good and pleasant life> cannot have a good life.”
6. “This <human ability to lead a good life> originally became possible by nature and for the sake of imparting courage in human beings <who were then living in a pre-social condition.> And this is the natural origin and principle on which all authority—be it even kingship—is based. And it is from the same <natural propensities> that a human being is able also to arrange a good and pleasant life.”
7. “Some have wished to become famous and enviable, thinking that they would in this way procure for themselves security from other human beings. In that case: if their life is secure, they have indeed enjoyed what is the good by nature; if, however, they are not safe, they still lack that naturally familiar good for the sake of which our appetites have striven from the very

first stirrings of human nature and in accordance with natural principles.”

8. “No pleasure is a morally bad thing in itself. But the agents that produce certain pleasures bring about vexations that outnumber the pleasures themselves.”

9. “If all pleasures could be added together consecutively with respect to space and duration, and across the entire span over which they had all existed, or at least across the principal parts of human nature <which are naturally susceptible to pleasures:> then, pleasures would not be different from each other in any respect.”

10. “If those elements that are productive of the pleasures of the debauched released them from the mental apprehensions aroused by natural phenomena, fear of death, and <obsessive anticipation of> pain; if, in addition, they formed their characters in such a way that they knew when to set a limit to their desires, we would then never have anything to censure them about: indeed, they would then be fully actualizing all the pleasures and in no way would they have either what is painful or what is productive of grief in them—and it is this latter condition <which they would be avoiding> that is morally bad.”

11. “If we were never perturbed by frightful second-guessing of natural phenomena and death; if, adding to the above, we were never <beset by> failure to comprehend the proper limits of pains and pleasures: then, we would have no need of natural science.”

12. It is impossible to be released from fear about the most important things for one who, not having adequate knowledge as to what the nature of the whole is, is trying to second-guess this or that in accordance with the <traditional> fairy tales. Hence, it is impossible to enjoy the pleasures in full unless one has studied natural science.”

13. “There is generally no benefit in procuring safety and protection from other human beings when one lives constantly in frightful conjecture about what is over our heads and those that are under the earth and those that simply are, without qualification, in boundless space.”

14. “Although safety from human beings may be secured, up to a point, by means of bountiful resources and power that can exempt one from <some risks;> yet, the most genuine safety comes from leading a tranquil private life and keeping aloof from the masses.”

15. “The bounty of nature is not only easy to extract as a resource; it also has its own limits set <by nature> <so that one cannot run into excess insofar as he is attuned to nature;> but the opulence of hollow fancies plunges precipitously into a space that has no limits.”

16. “The wise are rarely infringed by chance; the matters that are most significant and decisive have been, are, and always will be governed by reason throughout the entire span of a wise person’s life.”

17. “The just person is the most imperturbable; but the unjust is filled with ample distress.”

18. “Bodily pleasure cannot increase anymore once all the pain produced by need has been removed, even if this happened for the first time; <after that point, additional> pleasure can

only <accrue from> variation. But the limit of the pleasure produced by mental pursuits is generally attained by means of reflecting on all those things, and on others kindred to the things, which furnish the mind with the greatest frights.”

19. “Time without limit affords the same amount of pleasure as does limited time—if one measures the limits of pleasure precisely and by using reasoned judgment.”

20. “The body picks out the end points of pleasure as lying beyond any limit, and marks the time needed to procure this <pleasure> as being unlimited. But the mind, grasping the final goal and terminating limits of the body by means of comprehending judgment, and obliterating the dread of an eternal afterlife, makes possible a life that reaches all goals “within itself and has no need whatever of infinite time. But it should not <be thought> that the mind flees from pleasure —not even at that moment when circumstances bring about the extraction from this life—or that it destroys the pleasures as if they were unworthy of the best life.”

21. “He who knows well the limits of living also knows that to remove pain caused by need is easy—resources for that are not lacking—so that one’s entire life can be rendered complete and replete with all possible purposes. It follows that there is no need whatever of things unless they are won by noble struggle.”

22. “When all is said and done, we need to take into account what kinds of things exist in the universe and every vivid and clear sense perception, to which we must refer opinions; if we fail to do so, everything will be full of gullibility and confusion.”

23. “If you wage battle against all the sensations, <not only will you lose those you are directly fighting against but, also> you won’t even have those sensations left, by reference to which alone you could claim to have won your case.”

24. “If you expel each and every sensation without qualification, and fail to draw <fitting> distinctions applying to what is opined <about sensations> as between what is present already and what is anticipated; or if you fail to draw distinctions applying to what is opined <about sensations> as to whether such opinions are according to sense perception, the passions, or some other imaginary twist of mind: you will, then, confound also the rest of your sensations <in addition to the ones you are trying to expel directly> because of this ineffective way of judging, so that you will also have expelled all criteria for judging what is true and what is false.”

25. “If you don’t judge every one of your actions by reference to the end and goal dictated by nature, in accordance also with the proper natural timing for each action, but, instead, second guessing <nature,> you veer off ahead of time attempting either to pursue or to flee <goals,> then your acts will not be turning out to be consistent with your rationalizations.”

26. “Of desires, those which do not bring one to pain if they remain unfulfilled are not necessary; such desires are actually accompanied by appetites that are easily defused: indeed,

<this is evidently what happens> when it is thought difficult to find the means to satisfy <unnecessary desires> or when the desires themselves are thought to be productive of harm.”

27. “Of all those things by means of which wisdom can procure blessed bliss to last for an entire life, by far the greatest is the acquisition of friends.”

28. “The same (judgment) which enables us to wax confident in contemplating that no dreadful thing is eternal, or even of long duration, also knows well that, in these our constrained circumstances, security depends on having friends more than on anything else.”

29. “Of desires, some are natural and (necessary; some are natural and) not necessary; some are neither natural nor necessary and are only created by empty belief.”

30. “Certain natural desires, which do not reduce one to pain if they are not satisfied, have, nevertheless, a commensurate inherent need for satisfaction. Such desires are born, indeed, of empty belief: the reason they are not defused is not to be traced to their intrinsic nature but to the person’s vacuity”.

31. “Natural justice is an expression of the <natural> interest <everyone has> and consists in both: a) not causing harm to others, and b) not suffering harm for oneself.”

32. “Some animals are incapable of entering into compacts that agree not to inflict harm in order to avoid suffering harm: in the cases of such animals neither moral right nor moral wrong can be said to apply. Similarly, there are communities which are either incapable or unwilling to make treaties that undertake not to inflict harm in order to avoid suffering harm: <in the cases of such communities, the concepts of moral right and moral wrong cannot be said to apply either.>”

33. “Abstract justice “in itself does not exist. Justice rather <comes into being only> in instances of reciprocal intercourse, applies specifically to this or that place <and time,> and consists in a covenanted agreement to refrain from inflicting harm for the sake of not having harm inflicted on oneself.”

34. “Injustice is not a moral evil in itself: what is bad about injustice consists in the wearying apprehension that one might fail to escape detection by those who mete out punishments.”

35. “And it is not possible for someone to be confident that he will not be detected if one has acted surreptitiously in violating any one of the provisions of the social contract, which consists in <an agreement> to refrain from harming for the sake of avoiding harm for oneself; not even if one has escaped detection a myriad times until the present: for even to the moment of one’s final demise, there can be no sure sign or assurance that one will continue to escape detection.”

36. “Generally speaking, justice is one and the same for all: i.e., justice is something or other that is to one’s interest in mutual intercourse. But, speaking on a case-by-case basis, justice is not the same for all as it depends on <specific> regions and factors.”

37. “Among those things that are conventionally accepted as just, whatever is universally acknowledged to be conducive to the purpose of maintaining civic society is necessarily adjudged to be a patently just thing, whether it is the same for all people or not. But if one stipulates something as the law even though it is at cross purposes with the interest of maintaining civic society—such an ordinance does not partake of natural justice in any way. In addition, if and to the extent that the interests which are in accordance with natural justice prove variable, so that concepts of justice can remain harmonious with natural interests only for a certain period of time: we must say that such concepts of justice <though short lived> are no less just within their corresponding frames of time.”

38. <“This is what we must say> if we are not to perturb ourselves with hollow words but rather take our bearings from the truth about human affairs. In those instances, in which, without any new developments arising, it becomes evident that the accepted concepts of justice are not, after all, in harmony with concrete interests or exertions of human effort: we must, in such cases, admit that those concepts of justice have had nothing to do with justice to begin with. But, in those instances, in which novel developments make it disadvantageous to preserve the same <concepts of> justice: in such cases, we must say that the concepts of justice were true in the past, for as long as they were conducive to the mutual association of fellow citizens, but, subsequently, when they were no longer advantageous, they were no longer just to adhere to.”

39. “He who was fittingly constituted in such a way that he could not face up to external dangers prepared a family made up of as many kindred beings as he was able to bring together; or, those he could not bring together, he related to as if they were not, at any rate, members of a different species. And with those beings, which he was altogether unable <either to bring into a family or to relate to in any way,> he did not mingle at all and, to the extent that it was to his benefit to do so, he had nothing to do with them.”

40. “Those who had the greatest ability to prepare defenses against their neighbors, so they could face up to them, were the ones who lived with each most pleasantly—since they had the most certain guarantee <that they were in no danger in any respect.> And, given that they had once enjoyed the most complete intimacy, they would not lament or cry for mercy if one suffered a premature demise.”