

Can You Suggest A Reading List For New Students of Epicurus?

Post by "Cassius" of December 9, 2018 at 11:46 AM

This thread is the place for discussion of the FAQ found [here](#).

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Please consult the links and material on [this page](#), keeping in mind the following preliminary recommendation:

The ancient Epicurean texts that remain to us today are available freely on the internet in many different translations. There are many websites and articles available on the internet with many varying opinions as to the true teachings of Epicurus and many varying evaluations of the merit of those teachings. Unless you are already familiar with the major issues of Greek philosophy, it is very helpful to start the study of Epicurus with a sympathetic overview which attempts to present the full picture of Epicurean philosophy as an ancient Roman or Greek would have known it. That overview can be found in Norman DeWitt's [Epicurus And His Philosophy](#). Only when you have heard the Epicurean side presented fairly are you equipped to deal with the legions of critics of Epicurus, and only then can you develop your own fair verdict on Epicurus' conclusions. A taste of Professor DeWitt's approach and assessment of Epicurus can be found in his article "[Philosophy For The Millions](#)."

If you do not have immediate access to DeWitt's book, a second source that provides a very accessible picture of the sweep of Epicurean Philosophy is **Frances Wright's A Few Days In Athens**. [The full book is available here](#)

Wright's book is a fictional story about a young student in ancient Athens attempting to pick from several competing schools, and she does a great job of contrasting Epicurus with the alternatives, especially with stoicism. Wright's book is highly recommended, and like DeWitt does not lead the reader off into a rabbit chase after ataraxia / "absence of pain" as the goal of life.

So as an initial list in the order I would suggest a new student of Epicurus start, I would list:

1. "[Epicurus and His Philosophy](#)" by Norman DeWitt - If you are already "into" philosophy and want a sweeping textbook approach.
2. "[Living For Pleasure](#)" by Emily Austin - If you are new to philosophy and want a conversational, engaging, and easy-to-read approach.
3. "**[A Few Days In Athens](#)**" by Frances Wright - If you would prefer to read a fictional story written by a dynamic woman who was a friend of Thomas Jefferson and far ahead of her

time.

[Recommended Reading](#) List (books and texts). We have found over the years that there are a number of key texts and references which most all serious students of Epicurus will want to read and evaluate for themselves. Those include the following:

- ["Epicurus and His Philosophy"](#) by Norman DeWitt
- [The Biography of Epicurus by Diogenes Laertius](#). This includes the surviving letters of Epicurus, including those to [Herodotus](#), [Pythocles](#), and [Menoceus](#).
- ["On The Nature of Things"](#) - by Lucretius (a poetic abridgement of Epicurus' "On Nature")
- ["Epicurus on Pleasure"](#) - By Boris [Nikolsky](#)
- The chapters on Epicurus in [Gosling and Taylor's "The Greeks On Pleasure."](#)
- [Cicero's "On Ends" - Torquatus Section](#)
- [Cicero's "On The Nature of the Gods" - Velleius Section](#)
- The Inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda - [Martin Ferguson Smith translation](#)
- [A Few Days In Athens" - Frances Wright](#)
- Lucian Core Texts on Epicurus: (1) [Alexander the Oracle-Monger](#), (2) [Hermodotus Philodemus "On Methods of Inference"](#) (De Lacy version, including his appendix on relationship of Epicurean canon to Aristotle and other Greeks)

As a starting point, DeWitt's introduction in the opening chapter of his book can be read for free [here](#) or in article form [here](#).

Here is a "[library](#)" page with links to many primary sources available for free on the internet.