

# Proposed Menoikeus Week-long (7 Session) Study Guide Outline

Post by “Don” of July 21, 2024 at 9:14 AM

Below is my VERY ROUGH first draft of an outline for a week-long (ie, 7 sessions) study session of the letter. Aspirational at this point! I envision a PowerPoint presentation with audio narration. Again, aspirational but I'm putting it online to keep my feet to the fire so to speak. This is also to be read in conjunction with my translation and commentary.

Thoughts welcomed.

Menoikeus Study Outline

## 1. Session 1: Background/Context

1. What is the Letter to Menoikeus?
  1. Who is Epicurus?
  2. Who is Menoikeus?
    1. LOL! How do you even pronounce Menoikeus/Menoecus!
2. How did the Letter survive? Where is it found?
  1. Include Manuscripts?
3. General themes
4. Why study the Letter?
  1. Most complete surviving exposition of Epicurean ethics from Epicurus
5. Epicurean ethics is built on a foundation of Physics and Epistemology
  1. Diogenes Laertius includes Herodotus letter (physics) first
    1. Stick to sensations and feelings
    2. Nothing comes into being out of what is non-existent.
    3. τὸ πᾶν ἔστι σώματα καὶ κενόν - The Universe (The All) is bodies and void/space/emptiness
    4. There are atoms and bodies composed of atoms.
    5. The Universe is infinite.
  2. And so on... Primary take-away: *We live in a material universe.*

## 2. Session 2: The Time to Study and Practice Philosophy Is Always Now! (Verses 121-123)

1. Greeting
2. The time to study philosophy is always right now!
  1. Why do we study?
    1. For the health/soundness of the mind/soul/"animating life principle"  
(πρὸς τὸ κατὰ ψυχὴν ὑγιαῖνον)
  2. Never too young or too old
  3. Never untimely or out of season

1. Can't say the season has not yet arrived
2. Can't say the proper time has not yet arrived or has passed
4. Saying it's not time is the same as saying the time for eudaimonia has not yet arrived or has passed
  1. What is eudaimonia?? We'll see this again soon below.
    1. Eudaimonia is often translated "happiness"
      1. My opinion: This falls far short!
        1. IF we use modern positive psychology's definition of "happiness" = "subjective well-being" maybe.
      2. *The Stanford philosophy site gave an explanation of eudaimonia as "The term is perhaps best understood in connection with the success or good fortune a person would enjoy when under the protection of a guardian angel." To me, the concept is better understood as "fortunate, having an inner sense of well-being, resilient, "rich" in the metaphorical sense, confident in one's self-reliance, content (BUT not milquetoast doormat-y contentment), able to appreciate "the little things" and so on. To me, "happy" doesn't fit that semantic hole neatly. Maybe "happiness" or a "sense of happiness." If we can agree that \*that\* is what "happy" means, I can use the word... but I won't be "happy" about it (From EpicureanFriends post)*
3. Both the young and the old must pursue the love of wisdom (philosophy)
  1. The old can "become young again"
    1. By means of gratitude for all the good things in the past
      1. Bailey: "by the grateful recollection of the past', ie. of the philosophic truths which he learnt in earlier life."
      2. Boozer: by feeling gratitude for past pleasures!
        1. Bailey is too narrow!
      3. Vatican Saying 17: It is not the young man who is most happy, but the old man who has lived beautifully; for despite being at his very peak the young man stumbles around as if he were of many minds, whereas the old man has settled into old age as if in a harbor, **secure in his gratitude for the good things he was once unsure of.**
      4. Vatican Saying 19: **He who forgets the good things he had yesterday** becomes an old man today.
        1. τοῦ γεγονότος ἀμνήμων ἀγαθοῦ γέρων τήμερον γεγένηται.
  2. The young can "at the same time be old/venerable"
    1. "by means of/through the fearlessness of what is intended to be done, what is to come."
    2. The young can get the benefits of being older without living the years yet by being fearless in looking ahead and weighing the consequences of their actions in the future, i.e., seeing themselves as being older and

experiencing the consequences of their actions.

4. "You must study and meditate upon that which produces eudaimonia."
  1. A life of pleasure leads to eudaimonia. It is a natural result of making pleasure your goal.
    1. Eudaimonia is simply another way of expressing what a life of pleasure is.
5. For if indeed that is present, we have everything;
6. if that is not present, we do anything to have it.
7. "And, Menoikeus, I was continuously exhorting you to practice, to study, and to meditate (καὶ πράττετε καὶ μελέτα) on those things which I state distinctly to be **the essential elements of living nobly, beautifully, and virtuously**. (στοιχεῖα τοῦ καλῶς ζῆν)."
  1. Στοιχεῖα = elements, principles, components, etc.
  2. τοῦ καλῶς ζῆν = of living "kalos"-ly
    1. What is καλος "kalos"?

### 3. Session 3: First Step to a Good Life - A Correct Understanding of the Gods (123-124)

1. Πρῶτον - Often translated as "first (in a list)" but better understood as "first" as in "foremost, most prominently"
  1. Understand as "this takes precedence first in your steps to a 'noble' life"
2. the god is a blessed and imperishable thing
  1. τὸν θεὸν ζῶον ἄφθαρτον καὶ μακάριον νομίζων
3. as is the common, general understanding of the god.
  1. ὡς ἡ κοινὴ τοῦ θεοῦ νόησις ὑπεγράφη
    1. Ὑπεγράφη - an interesting choice of words
4. believe everything about which a god is able to preserve its own imperishability and blessedness for itself
  1. Do not attribute anything foreign to its incorruptibility or incongruous with the blessedness of the god!
    1. Later in 123: The gods **do not exist in the way that the 'hoi polloi' believe them to**, because they do not perceive what maintains the gods.
5. Gods exist!
  1. THIS is a bold, clear statement but entire papers and books have been written on what it means!
  2. Why does Epicurus say "gods exist"?
    1. the knowledge of them is manifest to the mind's eye.
      1. Go into discussion of εναργης
6. Impiety:
  1. One isn't "impious" if you believe like the hoi polloi!
    1. You're "impious" if you take on the beliefs of the hoi polloi.
  2. Why was piety/impiety of importance to Epicurus?
    1. What is ἀσεβῆς?

1. From ἀ- (a-, “un-”) + σέβομαι (sébomai, “I feel awe”)
  3. Impiety = ἄσέβειᾶ; Piety = εὐσέβειᾶ (eusebeia)
    1. Philodemus wrote a book titled On Piety (PHerc. 1428)
      1. Authorship is disputed; could be Phaedrus - Philodemus attribution is traditional at this point
        1. peri eusebeias
  7. Prolepses
    1. What is a prolepsis?
      1. What is the relation to hypolepsis, etc?
    2. The hoi polloi are not following prolepses of the god
      1. The hoi polloi have “false, hasty assumptions”
        1. ὑπολήψεις ψευδεῖς = hypolepseis pseudeis
          1. ἀλλ’ ὑπολήψεις ψευδεῖς αἱ τῶν πολλῶν ὑπὲρ θεῶν ἀποφάσεις
  8. Don’t believe the gods favor those who worship them or punish those who are “impious” (according to the hoi polloi)
    1. Acknowledge the ambiguity around this section of the text!
4. **Session 4: Second Step to a Good Life - Death is Nothing to Us! (124-126)**
  1. Nothing does *NOT* mean trivial!
  2. all pleasure and pain are in perception of the senses and the mind
    1. death is the absolute negation of perception
  3. makes the mortality of life enjoyable
    1. not gaining an endless lifetime for oneself
    2. but taking away the yearning for not dying or immortality.
  4. Take pleasure in life!
    1. there is nothing terrible in living for the one who truly comprehends that there is nothing terrible in not living.
    2. the one who says death is to be feared is foolish, not that there will be pain and distress when it is present but that there is pain in anticipation
      1. because that which is present does not trouble, disquiet, or annoy,
      2. and anticipation itself pains and distresses one fruitlessly.
  5. Death as it is understood by the hoi polloi is nothing to us. They believe death is...
    1. that which causes utter horror,
    2. which causes one to shudder,
    3. that “most utterly horrifying of pains”, then is nothing to us.
  6. For us: On the one hand, at the time when we are (that is while we are living), death is not present;
    1. on the other hand, whenever death is present, then we are not (i.e., we don't exist).
      1. Death is neither a concern for those who are living
      2. nor for those whose lives are ended.
  7. The hoi polloi, on the one hand, flee from death as if it is the greatest evil, then,

1. on the other hand, they desire for themselves an ending of the evil (pain) in living.
8. the wise one neither begs nor craves for living nor fears not living: Neither to set oneself against living, nor to imagine that it is evil to not live.
  1. Just as the most food is not chosen but that which brings the greatest pleasure;
  2. choose as well not the longest time but that in which one enjoys the fruits of that which bring the greatest pleasure.
9. So, the one who exhorts, on the one hand, for the one who is young to live nobly; and, on the other hand, the one who is old to come to an end nobly is a good-hearted simpleton not only because life is to be welcomed but also because the practice of living well, nobly, and beautifully and the practice of dying well, nobly, and beautifully are the same.
  1. But far worse is the one who says, on the one hand, it is well not to be born; or, on the other hand,
    1. QUOTED PASSAGE: "failing this, to pass through the gates of Hades as soon as possible."
  2. [127] On the one hand, if what they say is persuasive, how does one not depart from life?
    1. For this is readily at hand, if indeed one was to resolve oneself steadfastly to this.
    2. If, on the other hand, this is in jest, one is foolish for making fun of things which do not admit of this.
10. Epicurus includes something that looks a lot like the Stoic's "Dichotomy of Control" clearly showing the Stoics didn't come up with it but just gave it a catchy title. Marketing evidently wins (egads)
  1. Remember that what will be is not completely within our control nor completely outside our control, so that we will not completely expect it to happen nor be completely disappointed if it does not happen. (Saint-Andre)

#### 5. **Session 5: Third Step to a Good Life - Understand Your Desires And Their Role in Pleasure (127-130)**

1. Division of the "Desires" (NOTE: Not Pleasures!!)
  1. Natural and groundless/empty φυσικά, αἱ δὲ κενά
    1. Brief digression on "natural" and "empty"
    2. among the natural desires
      1. some are natural and necessary
      2. others are merely natural
        1. among the necessary desires
          1. some are necessary for happiness
          2. some for physical health
          3. some for life itself.
  2. The division of desires provides criteria for ALL the choices we make
    1. All choices are "

1. The steady contemplation of these facts enables you to understand everything that you accept or reject in terms of the health of the body and the serenity of the soul — since that is the goal of a completely happy life.
2. Our every action is done so that we will not be in pain or fear.
  1. As soon as we achieve this, the soul is released from every storm, since an animal has no other need and must seek nothing else to complete the goodness of body and soul.
  2. Thus we need pleasure only when we are in pain caused by its absence; but when we are not in pain then we have no need of pleasure.
    1. NOTE: This needs to be parsed and explained, especially the “no need of pleasure” οὐκέτι τῆς ἡδονῆς δεόμεθα.
2. This is why we say that pleasure is the beginning and the end of a completely happy life.
  1. For we recognize it as the primary and innate good, we honor it in everything we accept or reject, and we achieve it if we judge every good thing by the standard of how that thing affects us
  2. And because this is the primary and inborn good, we do not choose every pleasure.
    1. we pass up many pleasures when we will gain more of what we need from doing so.
    2. And we consider many pains to be better than pleasures, if we experience a greater pleasure for a long time from having endured those pains.
      1. So every pleasure is a good thing because its nature is favorable to us,
        1. yet not every pleasure is to be chosen
        2. just as every pain is a bad thing,
          1. yet not every pain is always to be shunned.
          2. It is proper to make all these decisions through **measuring things side by side** and looking at **both the advantages and disadvantages**, for sometimes we treat a good thing as bad and a bad thing as good.

## 6. **Session 6: Fourth Step to a Good Life - Self-Reliance & the Meaning of Pleasure (Verses 130-132)**

1. we believe αὐτάρκεια is a great good.
  1. What is we αὐτάρκεια?
  2. It's not being satisfied with ONLY a few things..
    1. But knowing you COULD be content with few things even if we were to have many possessions.

1. If this is the case, extravagance can be enjoyed when it becomes available... but we don't NEED it to be happy.
3. A simple meal of hearty, wholesome bread and spring water delivers the most extreme pleasure whenever food and drink have been brought to bear against hunger and thirst; and, when extravagant experiences do come up every once in a while, they are experienced more intensely by us, and we are better able to fearlessly face the vicissitudes of fortune.
  1. To emphasize again, Epicurus is not advocating asceticism in these passages and is not requiring us to shun extravagant, lavish, or expensive experiences. First, he calls us to learn to really take pleasure in a simple, everyday meal. Meditate on the fact that if you're really hungry, some barley bread or porridge brought to bear against your hunger can truly be the height of pleasure.
4. So, when we say REPEATEDLY "pleasure is the goal"...
  1. λέγωμεν (subjunctive) - The subjunctive mood has several uses. I believe what's going on here is the subjunctive with λέγωμεν in the indefinite clause is an exhortation "referring to repeated actions in indefinite present time." So what Epicurus is saying is that "we repeatedly say 'pleasure is the τέλος' all the time" when he uses λέγωμεν. Yes, you can say all that with one word in Greek.
  2. We do NOT say:
    1. the pleasure of those who are prodigal
    2. The pleasure of those stuck in delighting in pleasures arising from circumstances outside of ourselves like those who are ignorant,
    3. The pleasure of those who don't agree with us
    4. The pleasure of those who believe wrongly
  3. What we MEAN is that which neither pains the body nor troubles the mind.
  4. It is NOT:
    1. an endless string of drinking parties
    2. (and endless string of) festivals
    3. Taking advantage of slaves and women
    4. An extravagant table of fish and other delicacies.
  5. A Sweet Life is brought forth by *"self-controlled reasoning and examining the cause of every choice and rejection and driving out the greatest number of opinions that take hold of the mind and bring confusion and trouble."*

## **7. Session 7: The Foundation of all is Practical Wisdom & Epicurus's Final Instructions (132-135)**

1. The foundation of "all these" (these steps to a good life) is practical wisdom
  1. Φρόνησις - phronesis
    1. What is phronesis?

2. from practical wisdom springs forth **all the remaining virtues (wisdom, morality, and justice)**, teaching us that a pleasurable life does not exist without the traits of wisdom, morality, and justice; nor do the traits of wisdom, morality, and justice without pleasure: because the virtues grow together with a pleasurable life and the pleasurable life is inseparable from these.
  1. This is a restatement of Principal Doctrine 5!
2. whom do you consider is better or more powerful than:
  1. one who holds pious beliefs concerning the gods;
  2. one who has absolutely no fears concerning death;
  3. one who has rationally determined the τέλος of one's natural state; and the
  4. one who grasps that, on the one hand, good things (namely pleasures) are both easily attained and easily secured, and, on the other hand, evil things (or pains) are either short in time or brief in suffering;
  5. someone who laughs at Fate which is introduced onto the stage of life by many as the mistress of all things?
    1. For that person, even though some things happen
      1. by necessity,
      2. some by chance, and
      3. some by our own power, for although necessity is beyond our control,
    2. they see that chance is unstable and there is no other master beyond themselves, so that praise and its opposite are inseparably connected to themselves. (NOTE: BACK TO AUTARKIA!)
  6. Because of this (having self-reliance as explained above):
    1. it is better to follow the stories of the gods than to be enslaved by the deterministic decrees of the old natural philosophers,
      1. because necessity is not moved by prayer;
    2. and such a one accepts that Fortune is not a god, as the hoi polloi understand (for a god does nothing in a disorderly or haphazardly manner); And it is not the uncertain cause of everything, for one cannot think it can grant good or evil for a person's blessed life; however, it does furnish for oneself the starting point of great goods and great evils,
      1. [135] believing that **it is better to be unfortunate rationally than fortunate irrationally** because it is better to have been deciding the noble way in accomplishing one's actions and to have been foiled than having decided the bad way and to succeed by means of chance.
3. Epicurus's Final Instruction to Menoikeus (and so to us)
  1. Meditate **day and night** then on **this** and **similar things**
    1. by yourself as well as together with those like yourself.

2. And **never**, neither awake nor in sleep, throw yourself into confusion, and
3. you will **live as a god among humans**; because no person who **lives among eternal pleasures** is like a mortal being.
  1. WHAT ARE ETERNAL PLEASURES (Good things)?
    1. ἐν **ἀθανάτοις** ἀγαθοῖς "in the midst of everlasting good things (pleasure)." - the word is athanatois - "undying"
4. Closing thoughts and additional resources (books, EpicureanFriends, etc.)