

Definitions Of Key Greek Terms

Post by "Cassius" of March 11, 2017 at 3:50 PM

[Elli Pensa](#)

[March 9 at 10:54am](#)

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[12](#) You, Jason Baker, Mish Taylor and 9 others

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[nathan harry bartman](#)

[nathan harry bartman](#) Elli, I have some background studying Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, and I'm mostly familiar with the use of 'eudaimonia' (εὐδαιμονία) to describe the state of human excellence (which seems now to be an early precursor to virtue ethics). Within the context of Epicurean philosophy, would you suggest that 'eudaimonia' (εὐδαιμονία) and 'ataraxia' (ἀταραξία) are semantically synonymous? I understand that followers of Stoicism also make use of the word 'ataraxia' (ἀταραξία), but as a consequence of the pursuit of virtue, much like the Peripatetic and Platonic schools. Now that I'm looking at it, would we also suppose that 'aponia' (ἀπονία) is another semantic synonym?


I also have a question about Epicurus' use of 'aretas' (ἀρετή) as "virtues, the means for the goal of pleasure." This description of virtue as a 'means' seems eerily similar to the usage in both Stoic and Platonic schools of thought (I also notice some similarity with Sextus Empiricus' Pyrrhonist Skepticism). I understand that the main difference between these other schools and Epicurus' ideas might be expressed as

follows: (a) Epicurus' use of 'virtues' as a means to pursue tranquility, versus (b) pursuing virtue for it's own sake, with tranquility as an inconsequential side effect.

When I look at it like this, it seems that 'tranquility' is actually the true goal of all schools, but that most schools besides Epicurus' seem to have mislead themselves into believing that they 'want' or 'desire' some abstract, impersonal ideals as oppose to (what I would suggest is their actual goal) a state of tranquility. If everything I've suggested thus far is accurate, then I'd also propose that Epicurean philosophy has simply been unfairly bastardized by the other schools, simply due to it's association (their misunderstanding) with Hedonism. Hell, the Hebrews went so far as to appropriate the word 'epikoros' (סורוקיפא) to refer to atheists, non-believers, or their 'Other.'

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 Jason Baker Image not found or type unknown

Jason Baker I'm not fond of the use of tranquility, I think we have enough context from the extant remains to put that translation to bed, but otherwise that's a succinct analysis of the state of things. Bravo.


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 Elli Pensa Image not found or type unknown

Elli Pensa [נאחאן הארר בארטמן](#) Excellent points. Tranquility is another description of the goal and exist body and soul as we study the Nature properly. I did not understand what do you mean with the Hebrews. You mean that they went so far because maybe they did not like the goal as set by Nature and is that of pleasure ??

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[נאחאן הארר בארטמן](#)

נאחאן הארר בארטמן Yeah, you've got it! I understand that many ancient schools of thought, including religious traditions, looked down on the Epicureans, and misrepresented their philosophy. 'Epikoros' (סורוקיפא) is a good example within Judaism, because they associated Epicureans as strict atheists who rejected their deity as a result of (what they misunderstood to be) Epicurus' insistence on physical indulgence, which doesn't at all capture the nuance of Epicurean philosophy. It seems like these other schools see the goal of Epicurean philosophy as a form of perpetual masturbation.  Image not found or type unknown

[Jason](#), I'm curious what the criticism is of 'tranquility' as a good translation. Is 'pleasure' the preferred translation?

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[Elli Pensa](#)

[Elli Pensa](#) The whole thing that we have to understand is that the measurement on things is dynamic, and is as follows: Let's see the attached picture. It concerns the Epicurean philosophy.

The more the person is concerned with the study of Nature,

the more he succeeds fearlessness,

the more he uses the measurement of pain and pleasure.

These two produce pleasure that belongs to the individual, (because pleasure belongs to the one who feels it, of course).

At the same time, however, the person practices the art of self-sufficiency

which is improved with the study of nature

and the more one achieves self-sufficiency,

the more freedom he acquires and thus greater the pleasure it provides to the individual.

Let's not insist on completeness of the analysis (which anyway does not exist), but in the method.

It includes the general picture. We can later move to the rest which are the multiple causes of human happiness. We can combine the rest. Then, we are going to see what emerges from the composition of the rest. In a more compound form we will observe the rebound and feedback. The more this process provides pleasure to a person, the greater the desire to study the Nature. The system does not use the law of excluded middle, i.e. pleasure or no pleasure, fearlessness or not fearlessness etc, but uses the Epicurean Multi-valued logic where the above causes constantly get different values depending on the decisions and our actions. Imagine, for example, that I give great importance to the fearlessness and succeed pleasure from there, but I give little importance to self-sufficiency. So, depending on the general activity at a certain time, one cause will affect the other continuously taking different values and all the separate data will pulsate and will affect one another

until the system settles and perhaps I wish that calmness means Katastematic pleasure of the individual. The system is dynamic, it is evolving like the nature and covers the needs of the Epicurean philosophy, which observes things as they proceed and as Diogenes of Oenoanda writes (in response to Peripatetics) this flow, flowing as he says, can be scrolled quickly but not so fast as not to conceive a situation of it.

(An excerpt on the issue entitled : "The crisis and the epicurean reasoning" by [Γεώργιος Καπλάνης](#), founding member in the Garden of Thessaloniki.

Image may contain 1 person

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[Cassius Amicus](#) type unknown

[Cassius Amicus](#) I will second Jason's comment. To the extent we are talking about an English word that has a common meaning, 'tranquility' as a statement of the Epicurean goal seems woefully understated. Now, to the extent that someone assigns a technical definition to the word "tranquility" that explicitly conveys other core information, such as the description of the highest life contained in Torquatus and discussed here recently, then so be it. But to the extent that the English meaning of 'tranquility' is essentially "calm" then it is not just insufficient, but woefully insufficient, to describe what Epicurus said. Now if someone wants to assert that the goal of stoicism is tranquility, I would not object, but even there it is probably much too narrow.

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[Elli Pensa](#)

[Elli Pensa](#) [ηατῆαη ηαααα βααααα](#) tranquility is synonym with the calmness and is a description of the goal of pleasure.

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[Cassius Amicus](#)

[Cassius Amicus](#) Elli when you say "a description of the goal of pleasure" I am concerned that this formulation has the same problem as attempting to define "yellow" separately from "things that are yellow." I don't think calmness is itself something that exists apart...[See More](#)

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[Jason Baker](#)

[Jason Baker](#) [ηατῆαη](#), I think that both English words (tranquility and pleasure) are

too abrupt and don't convey the meaning originally intended. I think that any translation of ataraxia, aponia, arete, is going to be several words, if not sentences, in length in order to capture the full meaning outside of the context of the whole (small-c) canon.

Epicureans were derided for using so-called "novel" definitions of common words. I don't think they were novel, but that they weren't understood properly even in antiquity outside of the context within which they were used. [Elli](#) hints at that with the multivalent logic discussion.

This is a good argument for describing Epicurean Gardens as initiatory organizations.

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Jason Baker

[Jason Baker](#) Tranquility doesn't effectively convey the "undisturbed experience of pleasure" that I think ataraxia refers to.

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) Another way of looking at it: Is it not proper to look at a mouse at rest and say that it is tranquil? Putting aside all the many issues arising from comparing mice to men, "calmness" alone surely cannot be considered sufficient to convey the goal of a life which has pleasure as its guide.

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) Just to make it available readily, this is the same issue Edith Porter Packer was struggling with in her "Cicero's Presentation of Epicurean Ethics." NHB raises a very real issue that must be dealt with precisely in considering the role of tranquility....[See More](#) Image not found. It may have been moved or deleted.

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) And ηατῆα ηαααα βαατῆαα let me be quick to be clear that I do not mean to be critical of you personally in these comments. You are raising what is I think probably THE most important question in practical application of Epicurean

philosophy, and I am glad you raise it in the articulate manner that you do!

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[ηαθηαη ηαααυ βαααααη](#)

[ηαθηαη ηαααυ βαααααη](#) I appreciate you clarity, [Cassius](#), as well as your critical analysis! I'm glad we're getting to the meat of the issue, because this helps me refine my own understanding of the text.

I think I see what you mean. While 'tranquility' captures an piece of...[See More](#)

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[Elli Pensa](#)

[Elli Pensa](#) IMO [ηαθηαη ηαααυ βαααααη](#) tranquility as a term IS NOT the absence of something else. Let's see Epicurus what says on tranquility or calmness : «παρεγγυῶν τὸ συνεχὲς ἐνέργημα ἐν φυσιολογίᾳ καὶ τοιοῦτῳ μάλιστα ἐγγαληνίζων τῷ βίῳ» (“I recommend constant activity in the study of nature and this way more than any other I bring calm to my life”) For this purpose, he introduced Κανονικὸν (Canonikon), an empirical methodology of inquiry consisting of observation by the senses and drawing inferences for the unknown based on analogies with the observed. This approach made Epicurean philosophy very comprehensive and among all ancient philosophies by far the most compatible with modern scientific findings.====> Thus, we read that the [#constant #activity](#) in the study of Nature makes the person to be "εναγγαλίζων" calm, serene, tranquil, because with this way he achieves the goal of the pure pleasure !!  [PD-12](#) It is impossible for someone to dispel his fears about the most important matters if he doesn't know the nature of the Universe but still gives some credence to myths. So without the study of nature there is no enjoyment of pure pleasure.

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[Jason Baker](#)


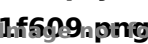

[Jason Baker](#) How is this [Elli](#)?

Constant use of Canonics without disturbance from false opinion allows the enjoyment of pleasure unmixed.

Too unwieldy? It seems clear to me but I'm used to stilted language with my study of Early Modern English texts.

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Elli Pensa

Elli Pensa Excellent **Jason**  (y) **Constant use of Canonics without disturbance from groundles opinions and empty beliefs allows the enjoyment of pleasure unmixed. That goes like a poem !**  
Unlike · Reply · 3 · March 9 at 4:22pm

Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus **ηαθηα ηαγγ βατμαη** yes I think you are moving in the right direction but I still have issues. As I was driving for the last couple of hours one of the thoughts I had in general was this: I believe it is very poor practice to use a foreign language word without translation, because to use the foreign language one in another language implies that the word CANNOT be translated, or is so complicated to translate that it is not worthwhile. I believe all of these words have ready English equivalent because at the deep level we are talking about, nature made the issues readily graspable, as they are descriptions of our experiences that all of us share (on the order Epicurus' observation that pleasure needs no defense because we perceive it - in the same way that we perceive that sugar is sweet and snow is white - the issue is not complex).

Of course I say that not having been trained in a word of Greek, and only a few of Latin, but i take as my example Lucretius who to my knowledge did not use Greek words for these issues.

I believe ataraxia translates to nothing more complex than "calmness", or "a condition absent disturbance," which is just two ways of saying the same thing.

I believe aponia translates to nothing more complex than "without pain", which because of the Epicurean observation that pleasure and pain are the only two feelings, means nothing more than a condition in which the living being is experiencing nothing but pleasure, without any pain.

I believe it is prejudging the issue and reading into it our own predispositions to consider the untranslated word "ataraxia," (which is the word most people like to throw around), as a difficult to understand complex concept which only by deep study into Epicurus is understandable. But that is exactly what is often done, and in my view that is damaging.

Epicurus and Lucretius make clear that the faculty of pleasure is the guide to how to live, and successfully following that guide means nothing more than living pleurably as ordinary mortals understand that. We can embellish that position all we want to with implications that he is describing some equivalent to salvation or to "virtue" in the stoic sage sense, but I contend that the texts read as whole do not justify that conclusion.

Over a lifetime we want to experience as much pleasure as possible, and we want to do that calmly and continuously and without gaps (the ataraxia reference) and we want to do it with as little pain mixed in as possible (the aponia reference, which means pure pleasure). What Stoics so frequently do is to take the tools and make them the end, and it is a parallel problem to take the adverbs (calmly and purely) out of context and elevate them to focus of attention, the exclusion of the foundation references of experiencing pleasure and avoiding pain, which is what the adverbs are modifying in the first place.

So in your last post you have largely done the same thing - you are describing the Epicurean goal of life without mentioning pleasure and pain!

Again I think a part of the problem here arises from the prejudice that the word "pleasure" carries. We are not talking about cake, pies, and sex - at least, not JUST about cake pies and sex. We are talking about the faculty of pleasure, which really means pleasurable feelings arising from ANY activity - yes sex, but also friendship, and music, and contemplation of the universe - and philosophic discussion as we are doing now. We should not be shrinking back from doing exactly what Epicurus did - We should name PLEASURE as the goal of living regardless of what the prudes and the hypocrites say (but rarely apply o themselves in private). Pleasure is not cakes and pies, pleasure is the faculty that Nature gave us to order our lives and tell us what to do with those lives. To substitute ANY other term and description is to evade the issue and in my review to rebel against nature's guidance. So in my view it is Epicureans who truly follow nature, and Stoics and other philosophers who are the true decadents.

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) Here is another thought I had while driving tonight. One of the passages that I have always considered most striking is the end of the Torquatus monologue where Torquatus says that we should be ashamed that we have not learned these basic truths, as E...[See More](#)

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) One last thought for this sequence: Another thing I think is going on is that people are programmed to be looking for "the goal" (the relates to DeWitt's summum bonum argument too, I think). If we are religious we tend to think of the goal of life is to "do what god wants us to do" - and due to the very helpful priestly class, we all have a general idea that god wants us all to do basically the same thing (be holy while supporting the priestly class).

If we are Stoic or mainstream philosophers, we believe the general goal is to "be virtuous" and we all have a general idea that that means to be courageous, strong, rational, etc., which might sound fairly broad but translates into being a cross between Mr. Spock and Mother Teresa - pretty easy to define.

However if we are Epicurean we are told that "[pleasure is the guide of life](#)" - but we all know that there are innumerable things that are pleasurable to us, and that does not sound like a discrete and well-defined enough goal. And that is where a lot of the problem arises, because that faculty of pleasure (and its opposite pain) is what nature gave us, and nature didn't tell us specific places to find that pleasure, except between very wide limits.

And resistance to that idea that "pleasure is the guide" is wide and deep. Ha - I think about the videos about Epicurus I see on the internet, and if you watch them you might think that Epicurus set up his Garden in Athens solely so he could say "Don't fall for advertising and commercialism in the 21st century." Sure, it is important to Epicurean doctrine that we adjust our desires to our means, and that we not seek to overshoot our capacities so that we end up disappointed unnecessarily. But that's just another observation / adverb / guideline like avoiding political careers, or avoiding seeking fame as one's primary goal. It is a good idea not to be overly "greedy" for material things because if you set that as a priority you will very likely cause yourself all sorts of problems. But "avoiding being greedy" is not the goal of life! The goal of life is always to live pleurably, and that is why Epicurus advised against living too luxuriously but also advised against living too frugally. The target is always pleasant living under the circumstances, and circumstances vary tremendously.

Which takes me back to the first observation - saying "[pleasure is the guide of life](#)"

is not a copout, and it's not a poor sister to the admirable goals of living godly or living virtuously. It's simply a recognition that nature has given you many different options in how you might live pleurably, and that Epicurus was smart enough not to fall for the Stoic/Platonic error of trying to dictate to Nature how we "should have been" created.

Here we cue the Nietzsche "Fraud of Words" passage again to let him drill home how ridiculous it is for us to try to dictate to Nature the rules that WE think should govern, rather than simply look to what Nature has actually given us.

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Elli Pensa

[Elli Pensa](#) [Cassius Amicus](#) When sometimes I say the philosopher is a philosopher during 24 hours a day and even when he writes some memos giving them in the laundry for cleaning his clothes, I speak seriously. This is to say that a philosopher is a teacher and has to apply in practice all of his teachings in his own life inspiring his pupils to preserve all their first principles. Some would say now that what I would say is ad hominem argument, but I have to say that : What the heck we will learn from stoic teachers e.g. Zeno that he went to his death struggling himself and the other Epictetus that was a slave the most of his life ?To not mention the stoic teacher Cleanthis that took the stoic philosophy and made it as it was : a paralyzed theology, when we read in his prayer and that :

Most glorious of immortals, Zeus

The many named, almighty evermore,

Nature's great Sovereign, ruling all by law

Hail to thee! On thee 'tis meet and right

That mortals everywhere should call.

From thee was our begetting; ours alone

Of all that live and move upon the earth

The lot to bear God's likeness.

Thee will I ever chant, thy power praise!

For thee this whole vast cosmos, wheeling round

The earth, obeys, and where thou leadest

It follows, ruled willingly by thee.

In thy unconquerable hands thou holdest fast,

Ready prepared, that two-timed flaming blast,

The ever-living thunderbolt:

Nature's own stroke brings all things to their end.

By it thou guidest aright the sense instinct

Which spreads through all things, mingled even

With stars in heaven, the great and small-

Thou who art King supreme for evermore!

Naught upon earth is wrought in thy despite, oh God.

Nor in the ethereal sphere aloft which ever winds

About its pole, nor in the sea-save only what

The wicked work, in their strange madness,

Yet even so, thou knowest to make the crooked straight.

Prune all excess, give order to the orderless,

For unto thee the unloved still is lovely-

And thus in one all things are harmonized,

The evil with the good, that so one Word

Should be in all things everlastingly.

One Word-which evermore the wicked flee!

Ill-fated, hungering to possess the good

They have no vision of God's universal law,

Nor will they hear, though if obedient in mind

They might obtain a noble life, true wealth.

Instead they rush unthinking after ill:

Some with a shameless zeal for fame,

Others pursuing gain, disorderly;

Still others folly, or pleasures of the flesh.

[But evils are their lot] and other times

Bring other harvests, all unsought-

For all their great desire, its opposite!

But, Zeus, thou giver of every gift,

Who dwellest within the dark clouds, wielding still

The flashing stroke of lightning, save, we pray,

Thy children from this boundless misery.

Scatter, Oh Father, the darkness from their souls,

Grant them to find true understanding

On which relying thou justly rulest all-

While we, thus honoured, in turn will honour thee,

Hymning thy works forever, as is meet

For mortals while no greater right

Belongs even to the gods than evermore

Justly to praise the universal law! :

Oh, this is theology indeed. This leads to the religion indeed. This leads to the confusion indeed. This is against the Nature of all the Things, indeed. 1f61b.png



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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus Jason Baker](#) I think you were rephrasing what Elli was saying and this works well for me "Constant use of Canonics without disturbance from false opinion allows the enjoyment of pleasure unmixed." I think this is correct as far as it goes. Just a mental note though - I get the impression that people think results are / should be guaranteed (like a christian who confesses goes to heaven automatically). And I think it is appropriate to regularly point out that Epicurean philosophy is not magic. We can't do an incantation and be happy. (But wait! isn't that what this mysterious "ataraxia" is, I can hear them say!) (And, didn't Epicurus say that a person who lives virtuously will automatically be happy? I am virtuous; why aren't I happy??)

So as I read that I mentally note "Constant use of Canonics without disturbance from false opinion allows the OPPORTUNITY for enjoyment of pleasure unmixed." Because sometimes if the Persians are streaming across the penninsula then no amount of perceptive thinking alone will keep an Athenian happy when the Persians arrive. Maybe this observation I am making is so obvious that it doesn't need to be made, but I get the impression a lot of people coming to philosophy groups are coming with thoroughly messed up lives and looking for instant relief (thus the appeal of Stoicism/anesthesia). They don't realize (or don't want to admit) that ACTION is frequently (always?) necessary to implement Epicurean philosophy and live pleasantly too.

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Elli Pensa

[Elli Pensa](#) <<Because sometimes if the Persians are streaming across the penninsula

then no amount of perceptive thinking alone will keep an Athenian happy when the Persians arrive. Maybe this observation I am making is so obvious that it doesn't need to be made>>.

Sorry [Cassius](#) my friend 1f642.png 😊 I won't agree with you on that concerning the Canon which is an excellent tool for a perceptive thinking in all the issues of our life indeed. What do you think made the Athenians or the Spartans and what made the good ancient greek Generals to win the battles with the numerous soldiers of the Persians? The strategic and perceptive thinking of the Canon :

1) Study of Nature with the Senses looking and searching what is right space to line up.

2) Anticipations or preconceptions based on past and present experiences how the persians used to fight and what was their wicked point-

3) Sober calculation when is the right moment of the opportunity to attack because here is the struggle for all the things..The calculation was also among pleasure and pain. as they had had to chose a pain for the purpose of a future pleasure for all. 1f609.png 😊

Here is a small expert of Epicurus how he uses the strategic thinking of the Canon :

“You will attempt something only when you can attempt it in appropriate circumstances and in the appropriate opportunity. But when comes the right opportunity, you be ready to grab it....”, “When you contemplating the fleeing is prohibited to stay empty-handed ... there is a hope for a way out even in the most difficult situations, if not in too great a hurry before the time, nor too dilatory when the time arrives...” From epistle to Idomeneus, on The Urgent Need for Action (Seneca’s Letters - Book I - Letter XXII).

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) I agree with you Elli! The Canon tells us to ACT! But don't you think a good number of people studying philosophy are simply wanting to live the life of contemplation as if that is the highest and best and really all we have to do? 1f642.png 😊 I think they need constant reminders how impractical that is....

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Elli Pensa

Elli Pensa There are many tools in our life but always it depends on how we use them. Contemplation with the belief that the goddess Athena who was a symbol of a strategic thinking IS the one that she will help you in crucial moments, is a faitytale for the little children. Nature gave us all the faculties to survive and the tools are in our hands...but as I said before it depends on how we use them. The same is with the philosophy of HOW we can apply it in the life according to the reality of Nature. The goal is survival, but what kind of survival is the case. Pressure your emotions and waiting your destiny or measuring with the natural purpose to live as a human being with the proper connection with other human beings ? The conclusion is only this : We can't make social contracts with all the people on this planet Earth. And as Diogenis of Oinoanda says : Those men who hold that this world was created uniquely by the gods, as a place for the gods to live, of course have no answer to this question. By their view, the gods were destitute and roaming about at random for an infinite time before the creation of this world, like an unfortunate man, without a country, who had neither city nor fellow citizens! It is absurd to argue that a divine nature created the world for the sake of the world itself, and it is even more absurd to argue that the gods created men for the gods' own sake. There are too many things wrong, with both the world and with men, for them to have been created by gods!

Let us now turn our attention from gods to men.

Many men pursue philosophy for the sake of wealth and power, with the aim of procuring these either from private individuals, or from kings, who deem philosophy to be a great and precious possession.

Well, it is not in order to gain wealth or power that we Epicureans pursue philosophy! We pursue philosophy so that we may enjoy happiness through attainment of the goal craved by Nature.

But know this also: We Epicureans bring these truths, not to all men whatsoever, but only to those men who are benevolent and capable of receiving this wisdom.

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