

# Welcome AGB!

**Post by “Cassius” of September 1, 2021 at 4:34 AM**

Welcome [AGB](#) !

This is the place for students of Epicurus to coordinate their studies and work together to promote the philosophy of Epicurus. Please remember that all posting here is subject to our [Community Standards / Rules of the Forum](#) our [Not Neo-Epicurean, But Epicurean](#) and our [Posting Policy statements](#) and [associated posts](#).

Please understand that the leaders of this forum are well aware that many fans of Epicurus may have sincerely-held views of what Epicurus taught that are incompatible with the purposes and standards of this forum. This forum is dedicated exclusively to the study and support of people who are committed to classical Epicurean views. As a result, this forum is not for people who seek to mix and match some Epicurean views with positions that are inherently inconsistent with the core teachings of Epicurus.

All of us who are here have arrived at our respect for Epicurus after long journeys through other philosophies, and we do not demand of others what we were not able to do ourselves. Epicurean philosophy is very different from other viewpoints, and it takes time to understand how deep those differences really are. That's why we have membership levels here at the forum which allow for new participants to discuss and develop their own learning, but it's also why we have standards that will lead in some cases to arguments being limited, and even participants being removed, when the purposes of the community require it. Epicurean philosophy is not inherently democratic, or committed to unlimited free speech, or devoted to any other form of organization other than the pursuit by our community of happy living through the principles of Epicurean philosophy.

One way you can be most assured of your time here being productive is to tell us a little about yourself and personal your background in reading Epicurean texts. It would also be helpful if you could tell us how you found this forum, and any particular areas of interest that you have which would help us make sure that your questions and thoughts are addressed.

In that regard 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.

1. ["Epicurus and His Philosophy"](#) by Norman DeWitt
2. [The Biography of Epicurus by Diogenes Laertius](#). This includes the surviving letters of Epicurus, including those to [Herodotus](#), [Pythocles](#), and [Menoceus](#).

3. ["On The Nature of Things"](#) - by Lucretius (a poetic abridgement of Epicurus' "On Nature")
4. ["Epicurus on Pleasure"](#) - By Boris [Nikolsky](#)
5. The chapters on Epicurus in [Gosling and Taylor's "The Greeks On Pleasure."](#)
6. [Cicero's "On Ends" - Torquatus Section](#)
7. [Cicero's "On The Nature of the Gods" - Velleius Section](#)
8. The Inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda - [Martin Ferguson Smith translation](#)
9. [A Few Days In Athens" - Frances Wright](#)
10. Lucian Core Texts on Epicurus: (1) [Alexander the Oracle-Monger](#), (2) [Hermetimus](#)
11. [Philodemus "On Methods of Inference"](#) (De Lacy version, including his appendix on relationship of Epicurean canon to Aristotle and other Greeks)
12. "The Greeks on Pleasure" -Gosling & Taylor Sections on Epicurus, especially the [section on katastematic and kinetic pleasure](#) which explains why ultimately this distinction was not of great significance to Epicurus.

It is by no means essential or required that you have read these texts before participating in the forum, but your understanding of Epicurus will be much enhanced the more of these you have read.

And time has also indicated to us that if you can find the time to read one book which will best explain [classical Epicurean philosophy](#), as opposed to most modern "eclectic" interpretations of Epicurus, that book is Norman DeWitt's ***Epicurus And His Philosophy.***

***Welcome to the forum!***

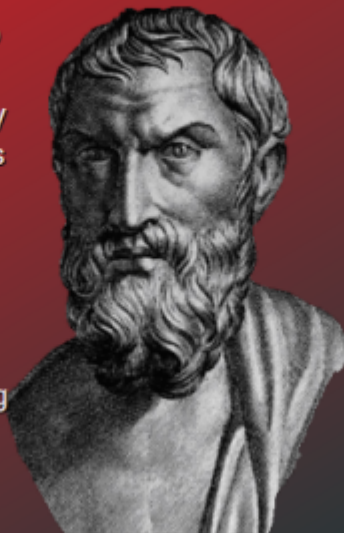
# Not Neo-Epicurean, But Epicurean

1. Not "flourishing," "human potential," "self-actualization," or "meaningfulness," but happiness grounded in the feeling of pleasure.
2. Not "absence of pain" as a full statement of the goal of life, but "the Feelings are two, pleasure and pain" and "Pleasure is the beginning and the end of a happy life."
3. Not virtue for the sake of virtue, but virtue as instrumental for the attainment of pleasure.
4. Not "the greatest good for the greatest number," but "Every desire must be confronted with this question: What will happen to me if the object of my desire is accomplished and what if it is not?"
5. Not "humanism," "transhumanism," "individualism," "collectivism," "egoism," "altruism," "social progress," "Marxism," "democracy," "tyranny," or any "one size fits all" political ideal of any kind, but social structure based on friendship which "is formed and maintained by means of a community of life among those who have reached the fullness of pleasure."
6. Not "hard determinism," but "some things happen from necessity, some from chance, and others through our own choice."
7. Not "supernaturalism," but "materialism."
8. Not "supernatural gods," or "life after death," but confidence in a fully material universe and "for those men for whom wisdom is possible, and who do seek it, such men may truly live as gods."
9. Not only "short term hedonism," but "it is to continuous pleasures that I invite you."
10. Not "rationalism," but "all reason is dependent upon sensations."
11. Not fearful of death nor careless of losing life, but valuing life for the opportunity of pleasure it brings.

## Our Posting Policy At EpicureanFriends.com:

**"No Partisan Politics," "No Supernatural Religion," and "No Absolute Virtue"**

This forum is dedicated to promoting the philosophy of Epicurus, and not to any partisan political positions whether "left," "right," or "center." The task of rediscovering Epicurean philosophy requires that such discussions be held elsewhere. Posts violating this rule are subject to removal.



Epicurean philosophy firmly rejects the viewpoint that there are any supernatural forces or absolute virtues or Platonic ideals of any kind. Argument which is based on supernatural claims, or "absolute" virtues or ideals of any kind, are in violation of this rule and subject to removal.

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**Post by "AGB" of September 1, 2021 at 2:03 PM**

Thank you Cassius for the welcome! I'm glad I came across this site when I was looking for sources on Epicurus and Lucretius that I could not find on Amazon or from other booksellers.

I'm a retired lawyer and now have the time to focus on areas that have long interested me. In recent months I've been studying Ancient Greek Philosophy and already have learned much from going through just a few of the sources on this great site. I'm looking forward to learning more and participating.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of September 1, 2021 at 7:11 PM**

Glad to have you AGB -- that is my profession as well, so good to have someone else to help offset Cicero in his anti-Epicurean lawyer arguments!

I always fear that I am too pushy on my main reading recommendation, but just in case you've somehow escaped my regular call-outs on this site (they are actually easy to miss if you mainly use a phone for access) please be sure to check out Norman Dewitt's book for what I think is by far the most sympathetic and sweeping introduction to Epicurean philosophy. [Here's a page of info about it.](#)

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### **Post by “Martin” of September 2, 2021 at 2:52 AM**

Welcome AGB!

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### **Post by “AGB” of September 2, 2021 at 5:22 PM**

Thanks Cassius and Martin!

Cassius, I appreciate that you had a list of main reading recommendations -- I've ordered all (other than those on the site) and should get DeWitt today as well as the Diogenes Laertius biography. Also, good to be alerted to Cicero's anti-Epicurean lawyer arguments -- I'll look for them now.

Would you and/or Martin have any recommendations for Greek and Latin introductions or grammars. It's been decades since I studied either language.

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### **Post by “Don” of September 2, 2021 at 8:46 PM**

Χαίρε, AGB! Welcome!

I can't help too much with Latin, but I'd recommend taking a look at:

[JACT Reading Greek](#) collection. There are actually 3 books one needs: Reading Text, Exercises, Self-Learner Notes, so it can get a little pricey.

[Teach Yourself Ancient Greek](#). I like this because it uses snippets and longer paragraphs of actual text right from the start.

There are some very good resources online as well, including:

Luke Ranieri's YouTube Channels: [Scorpio Martianus](#) especially his Ancient Greek in Action! series.

[Textkit Greek and Latin Forum](#) has recommendations and download for public domain books

I also can't say enough good things about the [Perseus Digital Library's Greek and Latin texts](#). There are both original texts and English translations and the classical texts are clickable so each word will open up a dictionary entry. Great for puzzling through texts.

I hope that helps. Welcome aboard!

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### **Post by “Cassius” of September 2, 2021 at 9:04 PM**

AGB I yield totally to Don on this question. I had some basic Latin in high school and college, but never had the first class in Greek.

I still hold out the hope of making some progress in understanding some basic Greek, but I decided some years ago that devoting a lot of time to basic Greek would not be the best use of my time. Perseus, such as Don suggests, and the side-by-side translations let us do basic honesty-checking, but it seems to me that when classical scholars who devote their whole lives to studying the minutia can come to such different conclusions, any hope I have of being able

to second-guess them is itself minute. No doubt there is a lot of pleasure in being able to grasp the original (as I can do somewhat with Lucretius) but in the end the subtleties of the philosophy are going to turn on connotations of words that will always be obscure to me. In those cases, like with an expert witness, I think it's best for me to yield to those who have invested the time to study the known usages of those words in detail.

For that reason I've made a point of always checking three or four (or as many as I can get) translations against each other for consistency, but in the end I go with the one that seems to me to have the best grasp of what I think Epicurus was intending to say -- with the standard being the direction that the whole philosophy seems to be pointing. Whenever a translator comes up with a version that seems to point in a different direction, that sends up the red flags that I try to heed.

For that reason I often listen to DeWitt's versions over some of the others, and in Lucretius I prefer Munro over Bailey, and even the 1743 version over some of the later ones. I think DeWitt, Munro, and 1743 have the most "sympathy" with Epicurus' philosophy and are less likely to go off-key than Bailey.

Again as to Lucretius I also stay away from the "poetic" translations to the extent possible, although I do think Rolfe Humphries has an inspired choice of words in many cases.

There definitely are a number of passages that are either mangled or so foreign to us that we don't have a clear idea of their meaning, and so lend themselves to controversies. I put the whole issue of "absence of pain" near the top of that. I certainly see how sections of the Letter to Menoeceus, and some other passages, can be read to point in one direction, but I also firmly think that the great weight of the philosophy points in a direction different than many modern commentators would give to those selections.

So you may be retired, but it's not time to put away your "statutory interpretation" skills because they will definitely be needed in "reconstructing" many important questions.

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## **Post by "AGB" of September 2, 2021 at 10:21 PM**

Thanks Don for all the info and links. I'll look at the options.

Cassius, I have been debating how much time to devote to studying the languages at this point. I definitely will compare the various translations you mention and not rely on a single one but also would like to have a general sense of how the actual words and structure relate to the translations (btw my BA and MA are in Linguistics). "General sense" is certainly vague but I'm just starting to immerse myself in all that is or could be involved (and had not even considered the usefulness of statutory construction skills).

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## Post by “Cassius” of September 3, 2021 at 7:35 AM

AGB your comment reminded me of just one of many examples of the controversies about Epicurus. Here is an example of both Cicero's issues and the general controversies about what Epicurus meant. I think i am so used to these controversies that it is probably a good idea for those of us who are regulars here to step back and think about what new readers of Epicurus are expecting to find. If they are looking for a clear and undisputed body of work that everyone

**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,<sup>53</sup> 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.**

**Even at the present day the same objection is raised. For instance, a modern Platonist, ill informed on the true intent of Epicurus, has this to say: “What, in a word, is to be said of a philosophy that begins by regarding pleasure as the only positive good and ends by emptying pleasure of all positive content?”<sup>54</sup> This ignores the fact that this was but one of the definitions of pleasure offered by Epicurus, that he recognized kinetic as well as static pleasures. It ignores also the fact that Epicurus took personal pleasure in public festivals and encouraged**

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surprise! 😊

And for that reason -- that so many of his doctrines are disputed -- I have always remembered and appreciated the very first words of DeWitt's books -- which I think are very important to remember:

**T**HIS book attempts to present for the first time a fairly complete account of the life and teachings of Epicurus. At the very outset the reader should be prepared to think of him at one and the same time as the most revered and the most reviled of all founders of thought in the Graeco-Roman world.

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### Post by “Don” of September 3, 2021 at 8:42 AM

[Quote from AGB](#)

Thanks Don for all the info and links. I'll look at the options.

You're welcome! As means of a disclaimer (since I appear to be talking to two lawyers 😊), I can't even see ancient Greek fluency from where I am, but I've learned enough and continue to learn to puzzle through the original texts. I find that quite pleasurable.

There are a lot of options out there now thanks to the internet. That's one positive of that technology 😊

[Quote from AGB](#)

statutory construction skills).

Now, THAT'S a foreign language to me! 😊

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### Post by “Cassius” of September 3, 2021 at 9:04 AM

Here's a good list of rules of construction. A work of philosophy isn't exactly a statute, and many of these obviously don't apply, but many do:

[https://www.ncsl.org/documents/lss/2013PDS/Rehnquist\\_Court\\_Canons\\_citations.pdf](https://www.ncsl.org/documents/lss/2013PDS/Rehnquist_Court_Canons_citations.pdf)

This list might actually be better than the first list I linked:

## SEMANTIC CANONS

Ordinary-Meaning Canon. Words are to be understood in their ordinary, everyday meanings—unless the context indicates that they bear a technical sense.

Fixed-Meaning Canon. Words must be given the meaning they had when the text was adopted.

Omitted-Case Canon. Nothing is to be added to what the text states or reasonably implies (*casus omissus pro omisso habendus est*). That is, a matter not covered is to be treated as not covered.

General-Terms Canon. General terms are to be given their general meaning (*generalia verba sunt generaliter intelligenda*).

Negative-Implication Canon. The expression of one thing implies the exclusion of others (*expressio unius est exclusio alterius*).

Mandatory/Permissive Canon. Mandatory words impose a duty; permissive words grant discretion.

Conjunctive/Disjunctive Canon. And joins a conjunctive list, or a disjunctive list—but with negatives, plurals, and various specific wordings there are nuances.

Subordinating/Superordinating Canon. Subordinating language (signaled by *subject to*) or superordinating language (signaled by *notwithstanding* or *despite*) merely shows which provision prevails in the event of a clash—but does not necessarily denote a clash of provisions.

Gender/Number Canon. In the absence of a contrary indication, the masculine includes the feminine (and vice versa) and the singular includes the plural (and vice versa).

Presumption of Nonexclusive “Include”. The verb to include introduces examples, not an exhaustive list.

Unintelligibility Canon. An unintelligible text is inoperative.

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**Post by “Joshua” of September 4, 2021 at 6:55 PM**

Welcome, AGB! *Learn to Read Latin* is a good one if you have the discipline for the grammar-based approach. I didn't. Hans Ørberg's *Lingua Latina per se Illustrata* is a direct-reading approach, and, I think, far more pleasureable.

You might also look into the Dowling method, the Schliemann method, and the Old Idiosyncrat's method, courtesy of the late William Harris of Middlebury College. I'll find a link!

In the meantime, I strongly recommend *Latin Per Diem*, which you can find on YouTube.

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**Post by “AGB” of September 4, 2021 at 9:35 PM**

Thanks for the recommendations!