

The Letter to Menoikeus - A New Translation with Commentary

Post by “Don” of December 29, 2021 at 1:03 AM

Okay, as teased way back in October 2020 and excerpted a few times since then, I am officially releasing my new in-depth translation and commentary of Epicurus's *Letter to Menoikeus* into the wild.

96-page PDF available for download here:

[pasted-from-clipboard.png](#)

[Epicurus's Letter to Menoikeus - A New Translation and Commentary](#)

I plan to make this a work-in-progress and will revise it in the future. For now, I hope it provides a starting point for discussion, but, more importantly, I hope it serves as an inspiration for others to go back to the original ancient texts.

Enjoy!

Post by “Eikadistes” of December 29, 2021 at 8:26 AM

Phenomenal, Don! Thank you for sharing your work. This is an incredible tool.

Post by “Cassius” of December 29, 2021 at 8:41 AM

Don I am going to feature this on the front page. Also OK to feature on Facebook and elsewhere, correct?

Post by “Don” of December 29, 2021 at 9:38 AM

I was going to waffle, but the reality is that I've released the work into the wild and posted it to your forum. So, if you think it's worthwhile, go for it.

Post by “Matt” of December 29, 2021 at 2:12 PM

Too late! Bullet downrange [Don](#) 😊

Post by “Matt” of December 29, 2021 at 2:14 PM

It's very much worthwhile and a huge help for the Garden. 😊

Post by “Cassius” of December 29, 2021 at 2:37 PM

I think Matt probably observed that I waited about ten seconds between posting that "It's ok to post on Facebook right Don?" question before I posted it to Facebook -- without waiting for Don's answer 😊 I am glad I guessed right!

Post by “Cassius” of December 29, 2021 at 3:48 PM

Principle Doctrine #41, sort of deriving from a mashup of Lucretius and Lucian, which sometimes gets me in trouble, but applies whenever we have something important and useful to post about Epicurus, but we're not sure whether to post it:

"It's easier to get forgiveness than permission - and most of the time, if it helps strike a blow for Epicurus, better not to wait to ask for either."

Post by “Joshua” of December 29, 2021 at 3:52 PM

I have only read the introduction so far, Don, and (feeling slightly the sharp nip of Philodemus' words), can feel myself confident in pronouncing my own:

We're lucky to have this.

Thank you for your hard work. 😊

Post by “Don” of January 1, 2022 at 10:03 PM

btw I'll be curious if anyone tries the maza recipe referenced in verse 131 😊 It's on my list of things to do.

Post by “Godfrey” of January 1, 2022 at 10:48 PM

[Don](#) your new layout works quite well and the verse links in the text are great! I was able to find verse 131 and the maza recipe very quickly.

This quote from the maza article seems to have some relevance to Epicurus' dietary habits:

"The Ancient Greeks prided themselves on a simple, hearty diet, believing it the source of their strength and, to some degree, their superiority. The varied cuisines of other peoples like the Persians were looked down upon as decadent, diet seen as evidence of moral character ("you are what you eat"). Maza has few ingredients, does not require much preparation, and is quite filling: thus, it checks off all the criteria of an ideal Greek staple."

At least according to this, the references that Epicurus makes to diet seem to be much less to do with radical asceticism and more to do with mainstream Greek culture. Another strike against interpreting him as a minimalist 🤔

Post by “Cassius” of January 2, 2022 at 6:30 AM

Don I just noticed that you had posted this here without using the file base feature that Nate uses for his collection of the PDS. It's not emissary to use it, and we definitely want this thread in addition, but you might find the file base feature of keeping track of revisions at a single link useful.

It also keeps track of the number of downloads which is nice.

But you can achieve most of the same effect by just editing the first post here in this thread as you post updated revisions.

Post by “Don” of January 2, 2022 at 9:07 PM

Thanks, Cassius. I've taken your advice and uploaded to the Filebase Library and linked to it from here. I appreciate the suggestion!

Post by “Don” of January 2, 2022 at 9:20 PM

Thanks, Godfrey. I'm glad you find the layout helpful.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

At least according to this, the references that Epicurus makes to diet seem to be much less to do with radical asceticism and more to do with mainstream Greek culture. Another strike against interpreting him as a minimalist

I happened to find this quote about μάζα in The Deipnosophists:

[Athenaeus, The Deipnosophists, Book XIV., chapter 83](#)

It too talks about the basic nature of the meal as a staple.

PS. I also found this:

[Quote](#)

The most common food among the Greeks was the μάζα, a kind of soft cake, which was prepared in different ways, as appears by the various names which were given to it (Pollux, vi. 76). The φυστή μάζα, of which Philocleon partakes on returning home from the courts (Suet. Vesp.610), is said by the Scholiast to have been made of barley and wine. The μάζα continued to the latest times to be the common food of the lower classes. Wheaten or barley bread was the second most usual species of food; it was sometimes made at home, but more usually bought at the market.

From <http://www.hellenicaworld.com/Greece/Ancient/en/Deipnon.html>

Post by “Titus” of October 25, 2023 at 3:45 AM

Verse 134 catches my eye:

Because of this, it is better to follow the stories of the gods than to be enslaved by the deterministic decrees of the old natural philosophers, because necessity is not moved by prayer;

φυσικῶν "of the inquirers into nature, natural philosophers esp. of the Ionic and other pre-Socratic philosophers"

τῆτωνφυσικῶν εἰμαρμένη "the decrees of the old natural philosophers" i.e., determinists, those decreeing fate is all-powerful

Is there anything more to it than Epicurus simply criticising believe in fate and therefore criticising giving up on deciding one's own destiny? (Consequently, emphasising the importance of artisting one's own life)

Is there any given evidence that these philosophers drove their own agendas by declaring what the fates are? If yes, is there anything comparable to it nowadays?

One could also think of it as a critique of the argument: "This is science!" (and therefore truth - trust me, not your senses). Do you think this is appropriate or does it overstretch the argument?

Post by “Cassius” of October 25, 2023 at 7:08 AM

[Quote from Titus](#)

One could also think of it as a critique of the argument: "This is science!" (and therefore truth - trust me, not your senses). Do you think this is appropriate or does it overstretch the argument?

At first thought i don't have much info to offer on the other points but I definitely agree that this is part of Epicurus' attitude. Any kind of argument from "authority" where people are supposed to accept a conclusion that they cannot themselves understand as opposed to what their own senses tell them is going to be highly scrutinized. The Epicureans were confronting their own contemporary arguments about the application of "science" and "mathematics" on the implications of issues such as the size of the sun and the nature of the stars, and separating what can be proved from what goes too far is always tricky.

Post by “Don” of October 25, 2023 at 7:22 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Any kind of argument from "authority" where people are supposed to accept a conclusion that they cannot themselves understand as opposed to what their own senses tell them is going to be highly scrutinized.

This seems connected with what I've been doing on VS27:

Post

[RE: VS27 - Source in Vat.gr.1950 with some commentary](#)

Here's my very literal translation of 27A/B:

27A: *Ἐπὶ μὲν τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιτηδευμάτων · μόλις τελειωθεῖσιν ὁ καρπὸς ἔρχεται*

μὲν and *δὲ* connect two phrases, with a very clunky translation being "on the one hand... On the other hand ...". Sometimes these can be untranslated or paraphrased. Here I'm going clunky to be very literal

ὁ καρπὸς (*ho karpos*) "the fruit, harvest, grain". This word is related to the word that shows up in Latin in "carpe diem."

τῶν ἐπιτηδευμάτων pursuits but also...



Don

October 25, 2023 at 6:44 AM

The saying uses the word gnosis "knowing, understanding" and not just accepting.

Post by “Cleveland Okie” of December 5, 2025 at 12:04 AM

I just wanted to take a moment to mention how much I enjoyed Don's new translation with commentary of "Meditate On These Things: Epicurus's Letter to Menoikeus." I have nothing scholarly to offer, but I thought if I explained why I like it, it might be useful to other people who might be tempted to download it.

There can never be enough translations of the Letter to Menoikeus for those of us who don't know Greek, so the first thing I did was simply read Don's translation.

But I also enjoyed the way Don explained his translation choices, as it helped me think about the text. For example, in some of the translations I have read, Epicurus refers to bread and water, and in some others, to barley cakes and water. So I was interested not just in Don's translation but in his discussion of how he arrived at that translation, and how it relates to being able to enjoy simple food and also being able to enjoy gourmet meals, when the opportunity presents itself.

Post by “Joshua” of December 5, 2025 at 1:30 AM

It is an outstanding resource!

Post by “Don” of December 5, 2025 at 2:30 AM

[Cleveland Okie](#) and [Joshua](#) : Thank you both so much for the kind words. I am so glad y'all have found that work helpful.

I can't believe it's been 2.5 years since I uploaded the revised edition. Time flies.