

Episode One Hundred Twelve - Epicurus' Letter to Herodotus 01 (Introduction)

Post by "Cassius" of March 4, 2022 at 6:40 PM

Welcome to Episode One Hundred Twelve of Lucretius and Epicurus Today.

This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world, and to Epicurus, the founder of the Epicurean School.

I am your host Cassius, and together with our panelists from the EpicureanFriends.com forum, we'll walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we'll discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. We encourage you to study Epicurus for yourself, and we suggest the best place to start is the book "Epicurus and His Philosophy" by Canadian professor Norman DeWitt.

If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

At this point in our podcast we have completed our review of Lucretius' Poem, and we have covered the detailed presentation of Epicurean Ethics given by "Torquatus" in Book One of Cicero's On Ends. Today we turn to the higher-level presentation of these issues as found in Epicurus' own letter to Herodotus, which like Lucretius' poem covers a combination of the full system.

Now let's join Joshua reading today's text:

Bailey:

[35] For those who are unable, Herodotus, to work in detail through all that I have written about nature, or to peruse the larger books which I have composed, I have already prepared at sufficient length an epitome of the whole system, that they may keep adequately in mind at least the most general principles in each department, in order that as occasion arises they may be able to assist themselves on the most important points, in so far as they undertake the study of nature. But those also who have made considerable progress in the survey of the main principles ought to bear in mind the scheme of the whole system set forth in its essentials. For we have frequent need of the general view, but not so often of the detailed exposition.

[36] Indeed it is necessary to go back on the main principles, and constantly to fix in one's memory enough to give one the most essential comprehension of the truth. And in fact the

accurate knowledge of details will be fully discovered, if the general principles in the various departments are thoroughly grasped and borne in mind; for even in the case of one fully initiated the most essential feature in all accurate knowledge is the capacity to make a rapid use of observation and mental apprehension, and this can be done if everything is summed up in elementary principles and formulae. For it is not possible for anyone to abbreviate the complete course through the whole system, if he cannot embrace in his own mind by means of short formulae all that might be set out with accuracy in detail.

[37] Wherefore since the method I have described is valuable to all those who are accustomed to the investigation of nature, I who urge upon others the constant occupation in the investigation of nature, and find my own peace chiefly in a life so occupied, have composed for you another epitome on these lines, summing up the first principles of the whole doctrine.

Hicks:

[35] For those who are unable to study carefully all my physical writings or to go into the longer treatises at all, I have myself prepared an epitome of the whole system, Herodotus, to preserve in the memory enough of the [principal doctrines](#), to the end that on every occasion they may be able to aid themselves on the most important points, so far as they take up the study of Physics. Those who have made some advance in the survey of the entire system ought to fix in their minds under the principal headings an elementary outline of the whole treatment of the subject. For a comprehensive view is often required, the details but seldom.

[36] To the former, then - the main heads - we must continually return, and must memorize them so far as to get a valid conception of the facts, as well as the means of discovering all the details exactly when once the general outlines are rightly understood and remembered; since it is the privilege of the mature student to make a ready use of his conceptions by referring every one of them to elementary facts and simple terms. For it is impossible to gather up the results of continuous diligent study of the entirety of things, unless we can embrace in short formulas and hold in mind all that might have been accurately expressed even to the minutest detail.

[37] Hence, since such a course is of service to all who take up natural science, I, who devote to the subject my continuous energy and reap the calm enjoyment of a life like this, have prepared for you just such an epitome and manual of the doctrines as a whole.

In the first place, Herodotus, you must understand what it is that words denote, in order that by reference to this we may be in a position to test opinions, inquiries, or problems, so that our proofs may not run on untested ad infinitum, nor the terms we use be empty of meaning.

Yonge:

[35] For those who are unable to study carefully all my physical writings or to go into the longer treatises at all, I have myself prepared an epitome of the whole system, Herodotus, to preserve in the memory enough of the [principal doctrines](#), to the end that on every occasion they may

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Links to the full Letter:

- [The Letter To Herodotus Here At EpicureanFriends](#)
- [Epicurus College Course Materials](#)

Post by “Joshua” of March 6, 2022 at 11:38 AM

As we are finally getting into the Letters of Epicurus himself, I want to take this opportunity to plug [Don](#) 's [Translation and Commentary](#) on the *Letter to Menoikeus*, which work I have cited in this recording, and which, if you have not looked into it, is well worth your time.

Show Notes:

On Epitomes

- We talked quite a lot about the practice of epitomes, summaries and outlines, for more information on which it will be useful to review *Epicurus and his Philosophy* by Norman DeWitt.

- For contrast, one may look at the [Enchiridion](#), or Handbook, of the sayings of Epictetus. The Stoic handbooks of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius deal quite extensively with practical advice for day to day living, but do not spare much time for metaphysics. In contrast, Epicurus was quite happy to devote an entire epitome to an overview of the physics, which he discussed at length in his *Magnum Opus* "On Nature". DeWitt suggests (as does the first paragraph of this Letter) that there were really two epitomes, and that this is the 'little epitome'.

David Allan Coe

- David Allan Coe is, apparently, an American Singer-Songwriter. If I had known who he was, perhaps I could have corrected [Cassius](#) sooner, but *alas!*

David Allen

- David Allen is an American consultant on efficiency in life and business, whose wildly popular book [Getting Things Done](#) has become a standard for organization and time management using checklists, outlines, notebooks and a master calendar or diary.

Since a major theme of our conversation today was on effective and useful outlines and summaries, we invite you to consider making your [Personal Outline](#) of Epicurean Philosophy, on the model of Epicurus himself as well as Thomas Jefferson.

Post by “Cassius” of March 10, 2022 at 7:39 PM

Editing is going slowly this week but it's getting there. First note for this episode:

Near the beginning of the episode we make several comments regarding which letter Epicurus wrote first in time - to Herodotus, to Menoecus, or to Pythocles.

Of course we know Herodotus comes first in Diogenes Laertius, but I am not sure if I have heard much commentary on whether they were written in an order different than how they appear.

I think Joshua mentions he thinks that DeWitt indicates Menoecus might have been written first, but the main reason I am posting this is that we probably ought to check that in case we need to have a correction to the sequence here in this thread.

Right now I am not remembering what I have read about the order of writing.

Post by “Joshua” of March 10, 2022 at 11:30 PM

Quote

I think Joshua mentions he thinks that DeWitt indicates Menoecus might have been written first, but the main reason I am posting this is that we probably ought to check that in case we need to have a correction to the sequence here in this thread.

I actually cannot find my copy of DeWitt right now, but Wikipedia cites page 9:

Quote

Epicurus's Letter to Menoecus, possibly an early work of his, is written in an eloquent style similar to that of the Athenian rhetorician Isocrates (436–338 BC), but, for his later works, he seems to have adopted the bald, intellectual style of the mathematician Euclid.

Post by “Cassius” of March 11, 2022 at 8:08 AM

A second issue that we discussed was exactly how many "epitomes" (outlines? summaries?) Epicurus prepared of his work.

Did Epicurus prepare (1) his 37 books which constitute his full work, and (2) the letter to Herodotus, which summarizes it at highest level?

Did Epicurus prepare (1) his 37 books which constitute his full work, and (2) the letter to Herodotus, an epitome which summarizes it at highest level, and (3) a larger epitome than Herodotus that also constituted a summary, but was significantly shorter than the full 37 book?

Our discussion included reference to the possibility that Lucretius was working from was (3) a larger epitome, which he was able to use as a guide to decide what excerpts from the 37 books to include in his own poem.

I seemed to remember that DeWitt might have suggested that, plus our text excerpt indicates that Epicurus had previously (before Herodotus) had prepared another summary.

Post by “Cassius” of March 12, 2022 at 10:56 AM

Episode 112 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. Today we begin our discussion of the Letter to Herodotus.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/49039259>

Post by “Don” of March 14, 2022 at 10:13 PM

Nice episode, guys!

First, thank you [Joshua](#) for the kind words about my Menoikeus work. Even if you end up being the only one to get benefit from it, it was worth the effort for all the kind words about it and references you've provided to it. Thank you! 😊

I was also interested in what the original Greek was for Epicurus's finding calm in the study of nature in section 37. I was especially curious if it was ataraxia. It is not. The phrase is ἐγγαληνίζω τῷ βίῳ "I spend life calmly/in tranquility." The verb ἐγγαληνίζω (enggalēnízō) is related to γαληνίζω which denotes to become calm, tranquil, or still, especially of waves or winds... Which is itself related to the many water metaphors that Epicurus uses from ataraxia's calm seas to safe harbors to setting sail on your own little boat to more I'm probably forgetting. LSJ:

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, γ , γα^λακτό-ρυ^τος , γα^λην-ίζω](#)

PS. It appears from the additional sources I've seen that this word (ἐγγαληνίζω < εν "in" + γαληνίζω "I live calmly, in tranquility") only occurs in Epicurus's writing.

Post by “Bryan” of January 20, 2024 at 2:07 AM

Great stuff Don! I agree this word appears to have been important for Epicurus, but I cannot add much to what you have said.

"The word *ataraxy* implies a metaphor derived from the sea and the weather. One of the original synonyms is "calm," *galenismos*, of which the proper application is to the sea, *tranquillitas* in Latin." (DeWitt, pg 225)

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2421-episode-one-hundred-twelve-epicurus-letter-to-herodotus-01-introduction/>

For **Galenismos**:

ὁ **γαληνισμός** 'tranquility' 'peace' or 'calming effect.'

'Pacification' Oxford Handbook (pg 442)

From ἡ **γαλήνη** 'stillness of the sea' 'absence of wind' 'calm,' 'calmness of the mind' 'serenity'

The famous doctor Galen, born about 450 years after Epicurus, also got his name from this word.

*"...and as for all who are not fully among those on the way to being perfected, some of them can from this summary obtain a hasty view of the most important matters without oral instruction so as to secure **peace of mind**." (83b, Bailey)*

*"...while those, on the other hand, who are not altogether entitled to rank as mature students can in silent fashion and as quick as thought run over the doctrines most important for their **peace of mind**." (Hicks)*

*"...will be able in their minds to run over the main of the essential notions, and to derive assistance from them for the **tranquility and happiness of life**." (Yonge)*

A bit more about **Engalenizein**:

*"I who urge upon others the constant occupation in the investigation of nature, and **find my own peace** chiefly in a life so occupied, have composed for you another epitome on these lines, summing up the first principles of the whole doctrine." (37a, Bailey)*

*"I, who devote to the subject my continuous energy and reap **the calm enjoyment** of a life like this, have prepared for you just such an epitome and manual of the doctrines as a whole." (Hicks)*

*"I recommend them, while still pursuing without intermission the study of nature, which contributes more than anything else **to the tranquility and happiness** of life, to make a concise statement, or summary of their opinions." (Yonge)*