

# "Foundations of Epicurean Philosophy" Slideshow and Video

**Post by "Cassius" of December 7, 2022 at 8:59 AM**

This audio/multimedia presentation was first put together back in 2015. It needs further improvement, but even in present form it provides a good summary of many of the doctrines and sayings. The purpose of this thread is to provide the latest updates and a place for those comments. As we add updates we will update this first post in the thread.

Please note that these slides are not exact quotations, but a close paraphrase with citations to the text or texts from which the point is taken.

The current version of the text is [here](#). An alternate format is [here](#).

[Here's the video version at Youtube:](#)

(Note: As of 1/21/24 the video version does not contain the latest version of the slides, which contains updated citations. For the updated citations check the slide version and the text version linked below.)

<https://youtu.be/OPNUk5Jv-CA>

[The self-paced slideshow version \(no audio\) is here:](#)



[Below is the original video released in 2015.](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7JWG1Xt1bGg>

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## **Foundations of Epicurean Philosophy**

1. At a time when human life - before the eye of all - lay fowly prostrate upon the Earth, crushed down under the weight of religion, which showed its head from the quarters of heaven with hideous aspect, glowering down upon men, it was a man of Greece who was the first to venture to lift up his mortal eyes, and stand up to Religion, face to face. (Lucretius 1:62)
2. This man could not be discouraged by stories of gods, nor by thunderbolts, nor by the threatening roar of heaven. These served only to spur him on, filling him with courage and the desire to be the first among men to burst the bars holding fast the gates of Nature. (Lucretius 1:62)
3. Thus the living force of his soul won the day. On he passed, far beyond the flaming walls of the world, traversing the immeasurable universe through mind and spirit. (Lucretius 1:62)
4. And from there, he returned again to us - a conqueror - to relate those things that can be, and those that can not, and to tell us on what principle each thing has its powers defined, its boundary-mark set deep. (Lucretius 1:62)
5. By his victory, the terror of religion is trampled underfoot, and we, in turn, are lifted to the stars. (Lucretius 1:62)
6. This man of Greece then saw that mortals had attained those things which their needs required, that their lives had been established in safety, and that they abounded in wealth and honor and fame, and were proud of the good names of their children. (Lucretius 6:9)
7. Yet he also saw that not one, for all that, had a heart that was less anguished, but all lived with tortured minds, without respite, and raging with complaints. (Lucretius 6:9)
8. And then he understood that it was the vessel - a false view of life - that wrought the disease, corrupting and tainting all that was gathered within it, and he saw that this vessel was so leaky and full of holes that it could never be filled. (Lucretius 6:9)
9. So with words of truth he purged the heart of man, setting limits to desires and fears, explaining the truth about the highest good toward which we all should strive, and

- pointing out the path whereby we may work toward that goal on a straight course. (Lucretius 6:9)
10. He explained the nature of evil in mortal affairs, and how these evils come to pass by chance, or by force of Nature, rather than by the will of the gods. (Lucretius 6:9)
  11. And he showed from what gates we must march forth to combat each one, proving to us that it is mostly in vain that men toss their hearts in gloomy billows of care. (Lucretius 6:9)
  12. For just as children tremble and fear everything in the dark, so do we - even in the light - dread things that are not a bit more to be feared than the imagination of children. (Lucretius 6:9)
  13. These terrors and darkneses of mind must be dispelled, but not by gleaming shafts of daylight. Terrors such as these can only be scattered by study of the laws of Nature. (Lucretius 6:9)
  14. And so he taught us to grasp the principles of things above, the principles by which the sun and moon go on their courses, and the forces by which every thing on Earth proceeds. (Lucretius 1:127)
  15. And he taught that above all we must find out by keen reasoning the nature of the soul and of the mind, and the nature of those things that frighten us when we are under the influence of disease, or buried in sleep, or when we seem to see or hear those who are long dead, and whose bones the Earth holds in its embrace. (Lucretius 1:127)
  16. And he taught us that unless, at the very first, we have confidence in our senses as to those things which are clear and apparent to us, there will be nothing to which we can appeal when we seek to prove, by reasoning of the mind, anything about those things which are hidden. (Lucretius 1:420)
  17. Thus the wise man will hold firmly to that which is true, and he will not be a mere skeptic. (Diogenes Laertius 10:121)
  18. Yet there are some men who will claim that nothing at all can be known. As for these, they know not whether even their own claim can be known, since they admit that they know nothing. (Lucretius 4:469)
  19. We therefore decline to argue with men who place their head where their feet should be. And yet, even if we granted their claim that they know nothing, we would still ask these questions: (Lucretius 4:469)
  20. Since they have never yet seen any truth in any thing, how do they know what "knowing" and "not knowing" are? What is it that has produced in them this knowledge of the true and the false? What is it that has proved to them the difference between the doubtful and the certain? (Lucretius 4:469)
  21. That which is able to refute the false must by nature be provable with a higher certainty to be true. And what can fairly be accounted of higher certainty than sensation? (Lucretius 4:478)

22. Can reasoning alone contradict the senses, when reasoning itself is wholly founded on the senses? If the senses are not true, all reasoning is rendered false as well. (Lucretius 4:478)
23. So if by reasoning you are unable to explain why a thing close at hand appears square, but at a distance appears round, it is far better for you to state that you do not know the reason, rather than to let slip from your grasp your confidence in sensing those things that are clear. (Lucretius 4:500)
24. For if you lose your confidence in your senses, you will ruin the groundwork and foundation on which all of your life and existence rest. (Lucretius 4:500)
25. Not only would reason collapse, but life itself would fall to the ground, were you to lose confidence in your senses and fail to use them to shun those pitfalls in life which must be avoided. (Lucretius 4:500)
26. Just as when you erect a building, if your ruler is crooked, your square is untrue, and your level is sloped, then your construction will be faulty, without symmetry, and leaning, with its parts disposed to fall - all ruined by the first erroneous measurements. (Lucretius 4:500)
27. So too will all your efforts at reasoning about things be distorted and false if the sensations on which your reasoning is based are unreliable. (Lucretius 4:500)
28. Therefore, as we reason, we must grasp firmly the ideas which we attach to words, so that we may thereafter be able to refer to those words with confidence, and not leave everything uncertain, or go on explaining to infinity with words devoid of meaning. (Epicurus to Herodotus - Diogenes Laertius 10:37)
29. Thus while we direct our greatest and highest interests by reason throughout our whole life, we do not rely either on reason or dialectical logic as part of our ultimate Canon of Truth. (Principal Doctrine 16; Diogenes Laertius 10:31; Epicurus to Herodotus - Diogenes Laertius 10:38)
30. Instead, the faculties which constitute our Canon of Truth are our five senses, our preconceptions, and our feelings of pleasure and pain, for it is by means of these that we test those things which are true, and we determine which are obscure and need confirmation. For only when those things which are clear to us are understood is it time to consider those things which are obscure. (Diogenes Laertius 10:31; Epicurus to Herodotus - Diogenes Laertius 10:38)
31. By "preconception" we mean an apprehension or right opinion or thought or general idea stored within the mind, that is to say, a recollection of what has often been presented from without, a preconceived mental picture of a thing, without which nothing can be understood or investigated or discussed. (Diogenes Laertius 10:33; Cicero, On The Nature of the Gods 1:225)
32. By "pleasure" we mean the absence of pain, for there are only two internal sensations, pleasure and pain, which occur to every living creature. Pleasure is akin to nature and pain is alien, and there is no middle condition between pleasure and pain, so anyone who

is conscious of his own condition is necessarily in a state of pleasure or in a state of pain. (Epicurus to Menoeceus - Diogenes Laertius 10.34; Diogenes Laertius 10:131; Cicero, On Ends 1:38)

33. Whatever is free from pain is in pleasure, because wherever pleasure is present, as long as it is there, there is neither pain of body, nor of mind, nor of both at once. And it is therefore as true as any proposition can be that "freedom from pain" and "the negation of pain" mean the same thing as "pleasure," for which reason the highest degree of pleasure is understood to be the removal of all pain, and after that point pleasure may exhibit diversities and differences but is incapable of increase or extension. (Principal Doctrine 3; Cicero, On Ends 2:9-11)
34. So to he who asserts that there are vast multitudes of men who are neither in a state of pain nor a state of pleasure, but in an intermediate state between these two conditions, we say: "No, indeed, for all men who are free from pain are in pleasure, and in fact in the greatest pleasure." (Cicero, On Ends 2:16)
35. And to he who asserts that if pleasure is the highest good every part of our body, even our hands, would constantly feel a longing for pleasure, we say that they feel no such longing because so long as they are free from pain they are in fact experiencing pleasure. (Cicero, On Ends 1:39)
36. The wise man who understands these things is continually happy and in a state of pleasure, as there is in truth no moment when he does not experience more pleasures than pains, and any pains he may encounter have never power enough to prevent him from finding more reasons for joy than for vexation. (Cicero On Ends 1:62)
37. Now, apply your mind, for a new question struggles earnestly to gain your ears, a new aspect of things is about to display itself. (Lucretius 2:1023)
38. Do not be dismayed by the novelty of my words: weigh these matters with keen judgment, and if they seem to you to be true, embrace them, or if they be false, gird yourself to battle them. (Lucretius 2:1023)
39. Just as dogs discover by smell the lair of a wild beast that is covered over with leaves, you, by yourself alone, must learn to see one thing after another, and find your way into dark corners to draw forth the truth. (Lucretius 1:398)
40. Think carefully on these things, and then, one step after another, the true path will grow clear. Not even the darkest night will rob you of the road, for each step will light the torch for the next. (Lucretius 1:1107)
41. So we begin the study of Nature with this first observation: nothing is created out of that which does not exist. For if it were, everything would be created out of everything, with no need of seeds. (Lucretius 1:146-159; Epicurus to Herodotus - Diogenes Laertius 10:39)
42. But if this were so, men might be born out of the sea, fish out of the earth, and birds might burst forth out of the sky. Nor would the same fruits keep constant to trees, but would change; any tree might bear any fruit. (Lucretius 1:159)

43. But in fact we see that this is not so, because things are all produced from fixed seeds, each thing is born and goes forth into the borders of light composed of its own combination of elements; and for this reason all things cannot be gotten out of all things, because in particular things resides a distinct power. (Lucretius 1:159)
44. And from these distinct powers of particular elements, all kinds of herbage and corn and joyous trees even now spring in plenty out of the earth, each after its own fashion, and all preserve their distinctive differences according to a fixed law of nature. (Lucretius 5:907)
45. Again, why do we see the rose put forth in spring, corn in the season of heat, vines yielding at the call of autumn? If things came from nothing, they would rise up suddenly at uncertain periods and unsuitable times of the year, nor would time be required for the growth of things if they could increase out of nothing. (Lucretius 1:174)
46. Little babies would at once grow into men, and trees in a moment would rise and spring out of the ground. But we see that none of these events ever come to pass, since all things grow step by step as is natural. (Lucretius 1:184)
47. We must also observe that in course of time Nature dissolves every thing back into its first bodies, but does not totally annihilate anything. (Lucretius 1:215)
48. For if that which disappears were totally destroyed, all things would have long since perished, since that into which they were dissolved would not exist. (Lucretius 1:225, Epicurus to Herodotus - Diogenes Laertius 10:39)
49. If the elements were themselves mortal, things in a moment would be snatched away to destruction from before our eyes; since no force would be needed to produce disruption among its parts and undo their fastenings. (Lucretius 1:238)
50. But in fact, all things consist of imperishable elements, and nature allows the destruction of nothing to be seen until a force is encountered sufficient to dash things to pieces by a blow, or to pierce through the void places within them and break them up. (Lucretius 1:238)
51. If time, through age, utterly destroys all things, eating up all their matter, out of what does Venus bring back into the light of life the race of living things, each after its kind? Out of what does Earth give them nourishment, furnishing each one with food? (Lucretius 1:225)
52. Out of what do the fountains and rivers keep full the sea? Out of what does ether feed the stars? For infinite time gone by would have eaten up all things if they were formed of mortal bodies. (Lucretius 1:225)
53. Now if those bodies of which the sum of things is composed have existed for an infinite period of time, they no doubt have imperishable bodies, and cannot therefore return to nothing. (Lucretius 1:540)
54. And so in its elements the universe always was such as it is now, and always will be the same. There is nothing new into which the universe can change, for there is nothing new outside the universe which could come into it and bring about change. (Epicurus to Herodotus -Diogenes Laertius 10:39)

55. It is also true that everything in the universe is composed of bodies and space. As to bodies, the sense experience of all men perceives their existence. As to imperceptible space, we must reason from that to which the senses do testify. (Epicurus to Herodotus - Diogenes Laertius 10:39; Lucretius 1:418)
56. And if that which we call space did not exist, bodies would have nowhere to be, and nothing through which to move. But we see that bodies do exist, and that they do move, so we know that space exists. (Epicurus to Herodotus - Diogenes Laertius 10:40; Lucretius 1:329)
57. Besides bodies and space, nothing can even be thought of, either by conception or by analogy, so nothing can exist other than those things which are properties or qualities of bodies and space. (Epicurus to Herodotus - Diogenes Laertius 10:40; Lucretius 1:430)
58. A property of a thing is that which can in no case be separated without utter destruction accompanying the severance, such as the weight of a stone, the heat of fire, or the fluidity of water. (Lucretius 1:449)
59. A quality of a thing is a relationship such as slavery or liberty, poverty or riches, and war or peace - which may come and go while the nature of the thing remains unharmed. (Lucretius 1:449)
60. Besides properties and qualities of bodies and space, no third nature can be considered to exist, neither can any third nature be perceived by our senses or grasped by the reasoning mind. (Lucretius 1:445)
61. But some men say that there exist, in another reality, a third nature which they call patterns, from which all things have been constructed by a divine creator. (Plato - Timaeus 29)
62. But no third nature can exist, only combinations of bodies and space. Such things as "Helen taken by Paris," or "Troy subdued in war," are not things that exist in themselves, but events in the lives of those who lived long ago, and these have now been irrevocably swept away by time. (Lucretius 1:464)
63. As we turn our attention to the sum total of all the bodies and space that exist, we conclude that the universe as a whole is boundless. (Epicurus to Herodotus - Diogenes Laertius 10:41; Lucretius 1:958)
64. For that which is bounded has an extreme point, and the extreme point is seen against something else. So because the universe as a whole has no extreme point, it has no limit, and as it has no limit, it must be boundless. (Epicurus to Herodotus - Diogenes Laertius 10:41; Lucretius 1:968)
65. And in this boundless universe there are limitless numbers of worlds, some of which are like our own, and among such worlds there are living creatures and plants such as we see in this world. (Epicurus - Letter to Herodotus 10:45; Lucretius 2:1048)
66. For in the sum of all that exists there is no one thing which is begotten by itself alone, sole instance of its kind, but a thing always belongs to some class of which there are many others. (Lucretius 2:1077)

67. And if there is so great a store of seeds that the whole can never be counted, and if the same force and nature abide in them as we see here in our own world, then we must admit that in other parts of space there are other Earths, other kinds of wild beasts, and other races of men. (Lucretius 2:1067)
68. And there are also "gods," and the knowledge of them is manifest; but these "gods" are not such as the multitude believe, because men do not steadfastly maintain the notions they form respecting them. (Epicurus to Menoecus - Diogenes Laertius 10:123)
69. It is not the man who denies the gods worshiped by the multitude who is impious, but he who affirms of the gods what the multitude believes about them. For the beliefs of the multitude about the gods are not true preconceptions, but false assumptions. (Epicurus to Menoecus - Diogenes Laertius 10:124)
70. And among these false assumptions are the view that the gods cause evil to happen to the wicked and blessings to happen to the good, and that the gods favor and take pleasure in some men and reject others. (Epicurus to Menoecus - Diogenes Laertius 10:124)
71. So we must understand that when we see in the sky revolutions and eclipses, and risings and settings, these take place without the command of any being who enjoys immortality and perfect bliss. (Epicurus to Herodotus - Diogenes Laertius 10:77; Epicurus to Pythocles - Diogenes Laertius 10:97)
72. For troubles and anxieties, and feelings of anger and partiality, do not accord with divinity, but imply weakness and fear and dependence upon one's neighbors. (Epicurus to Herodotus - Diogenes Laertius 10:77)
73. Thus we must always hold fast to the majesty which attaches to such notions as bliss and immortality, lest we generate opinions inconsistent with this majesty. (Epicurus to Herodotus - Diogenes Laertius 10:77)
74. For such error and inconsistency will produce the worst disturbances in our minds. Hence where we find phenomena invariably recurring, this recurrence must be ascribed to the original interception and conglomeration of atoms whereby the world was formed. (Epicurus to Herodotus - Diogenes Laertius 10:77)
75. So let the regularity of the orbits be explained in the same way as ordinary incidents within our own experience. The divine nature must not on any account be used to explain this, but must be kept free from all tasks and in perfect bliss. (Epicurus to Pythocles - Diogenes Laertius 10:97)
76. Unless this is done, the study of celestial phenomena will be in vain, as indeed it has been in vain for those who have fallen into the folly of supposing that these events can happen only in one way, and who reject all other possible explanations. (Epicurus to Pythocles - Diogenes Laertius 10:97)
77. For in this way many men are carried into the realm of the unintelligible, and are unable to take a comprehensive view of those facts which are clues to the rest. (Epicurus to Pythocles - Diogenes Laertius 10:97)

78. To assign a single cause for these effects which we see in the sky, when the facts suggest several causes, is madness and a strange inconsistency. (Epicurus to Pythocles - Diogenes Laertius 10:97)
79. Yet this is done by some, who assign meaningless causes for the movement of stars whenever they persist in saddling the divinity with burdensome tasks. (Epicurus to Pythocles - Diogenes Laertius 10:113)
80. To lay down as assured a single explanation of these phenomena is worthy only of those who seek to dazzle the multitude with marvels. (Epicurus to Pythocles - Diogenes Laertius 10:114)
81. Such are those men who, straying widely from true reason, are famous for obscurity, more among the frivolous than among those earnest men who seek the truth. (Lucretius 1:635)
82. For fools admire things which they perceive to be concealed under involved language, and they believe those things which tickle the ear and are varnished over with finely sounding phrases. (Lucretius 1:635)
83. Some men who oppose us assert that Nature cannot without the providence of the gods vary the seasons of the year, bring forth crops, or do all those other things which Divine Pleasure, the Guide of Life, prompts men and other living things to do, escorting us in person, and enticing us by her guidance, so that neither mankind nor any race of living things may come to an end. (Lucretius 2:167)
84. Likewise there are those who seek to foretell the weather from the behavior of certain animals, which is mere coincidence. (Epicurus to Pythocles - Diogenes Laertius 10:115)
85. For animals offer no necessary reason why a storm should be produced, and no divine being sits aloft, observing when these animals go out, and afterwards fulfilling the signs which they have given. (Epicurus to Pythocles - Diogenes Laertius 10:115)
86. Such folly as this would not occur to the most ordinary being of the slightest enlightenment, much less to a divinity who enjoys perfect blissfulness. (Epicurus to Pythocles - Diogenes Laertius 10:116)
87. But do not be afraid that, in following true reason, you are entering on unholy ground, or treading the path of sin. (Lucretius 1:80)
88. For on the contrary it is Religion that has given birth to the most sinful and unholy deeds. So great are the evil deeds which religion can prompt! (Lucretius 1:80)
89. And so those men are wrong who claim that fear of the gods is necessary to keep men from doing evil. (Diogenes of Oinoanda - Fragment 20)
90. For wrong-doers, who do not fear the penalty of law, are likewise not afraid either of true gods, or of the gods of Plato and Socrates, otherwise they would not do wrong. (Diogenes of Oinoanda - Fragment 20)
91. And so we see that those nations which are the most superstitious are often the vilest of peoples. (Diogenes of Oinoanda - Fragment 20)

92. So be aware that the priests, by means of terrorizing threats, will seek to cause you to fall away from true reason. (Lucretius 1:102)
93. How many dreams they lay out for you, to upset the calculations of your life, and confound all your future plans with fear! (Lucretius 1:102)
94. These tales are spun for a reason. The priests know that men, so long as they fear everlasting pain after death, have no means of resisting the threats of religion. (Lucretius 1:102)
95. Therefore you must come to understand that [death is nothing to us](#), for good and evil require the capacity for sensation, and death is the end of all sensation. (Epicurus to Menoecus - Diogenes Laertius 10:124; Epicurus' Principal Doctrine 2)
96. A correct understanding that [death is nothing to us](#) allows us to enjoy life, not by adding to life a limitless time, but by taking away the yearning after immortality. (Epicurus to Menoecus - Diogenes Laertius 10:124)
97. For life has no terrors for him who has thoroughly understood that there are no terrors in ceasing to live. (Epicurus to Menoecus - Diogenes Laertius 10:125)
98. Foolish then is the man who says that he fears death, not because it will pain him when it comes, but because it pains him to think of it now. But it makes no sense to fear that which can cause no pain when it is present. (Epicurus to Menoecus - Diogenes Laertius 10:125)
99. Death, therefore, which some say is the most awful of evils, is nothing to us, seeing that, when we are alive, death has not yet come, and, when death has come, we no longer exist. (Epicurus to Menoecus - Diogenes Laertius 10:125)
100. And so while we live, let neither the young be slow to seek wisdom, nor the old weary in the search of it. For no age is too early or too late for the health of the soul. (Epicurus to Menoecus - Diogenes Laertius 10:122)
101. And to say that the season for studying philosophy has not yet come, or that it is past and gone, is like saying that the season for happiness has not yet come, or that it is now no more. (Epicurus to Menoecus - Diogenes Laertius 10:122)
102. But some men argue that happiness is not the goal of life, and that there is some particular final and ultimate good, an End to which all other things are means, while not itself a means to anything else. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends - 1:IX)
103. But we say that it is Pleasure which is our first and kindred good, the alpha and omega of a blessed life, and that all Pleasure is good. (Epicurus to Menoecus - Diogenes Laertius 10:129; Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:IX)
104. And so the "greatest good" is that which brings about unsurpassable joy, such as the bare escape from some dreadful calamity. (Plutarch - Epicurean Fragment - Usener 423)
105. And this is the nature of 'the good,' if one apprehends it rightly, and stands by his finding, and does not go on walking round and round, harping uselessly on the meaning of 'good.' (Plutarch - Epicurean Fragment - Usener 423)

106. And by this we mean that pleasurable living is the ultimate end prescribed by Nature. If you do not on every occasion refer each of your actions to this end, but instead of this you turn to some other end, your actions will not be consistent with your goal. (Epicurus - Principal Doctrine 25)
107. For we see that every animal, as soon as it is born, seeks for pleasure, and delights in pleasure, while it recoils from pain, and so far as possible avoids it. This every young animal does as long as it remains unperverted, at the prompting of Nature's own unbiased and honest verdict. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:IX)
108. It is pleasure that fills the sea with ships and the lands with corn, and by pleasure is every kind of living thing conceived, rising up to behold the light of the sun. (Lucretius 1:1)
109. And in the pleasure of spring the birds take flight, the wild herds bound over green pastures and swim the rapid rivers, each in turn following the charms of pleasure with desire leading them on to continue their races. (Lucretius 1:1)
110. The proof that pleasure is our guide of life is more luminous than daylight itself. Our evidence is derived entirely from Nature's sources, and rests firmly for confirmation on the unbiased and unimpeachable evidence of the senses. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:XXI)
111. Lispering babies, even dumb animals, prompted by Nature's teaching, can almost find the voice to proclaim to us that there is no welfare but pleasure, no hardship but pain, and their judgment in these matters is neither sophistic nor biased. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:XXI)
112. Thus there is no necessity for argument or discussion to prove that pleasure is desirable and pain is to be avoided. These facts are perceived by the senses, in the same way that we perceive that fire is hot, snow is white, and honey is sweet. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:IX)
113. If we were to strip a man of all sensation, nothing would remain of his life. It therefore follows that Nature herself, through these faculties of sensation, is the judge of that which is in accord with or contrary to nature. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:IX)
114. And what faculty does Nature grant for perception and judgment of that which is to be desired and avoided besides pleasure and pain? (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:IX)
115. None of this needs to be proved by elaborate argument: it is enough merely to draw attention to it. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:IX)
116. For there is a difference between formal syllogistic proof of a thing and a mere notice or reminder. Syllogistic reasoning is appropriate for abstract and hidden matters, but mere observation is all that is necessary to establish facts which are obvious and evident. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:IX)
117. Nevertheless, some men use syllogistic reasoning to argue that pleasurable living is not the goal of life. They argue that "the good" is something with a certain limit beyond which nothing is higher, but that pleasure cannot be the good because it has no limit. (Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics, Book 10)

118. To these men we say that pleasure does have a limit, for a man's life is like a vessel, and a man's limit of pleasure is reached when his vessel is filled with pleasure, and all pain which accompanies that pleasure is removed. (Epicurus - [Principal Doctrines](#) 3, 18, 19, 20; Lucretius 6:9)
119. For when the pain of want is removed, bodily pleasure does not increase, and only varies. (Epicurus - Principle Doctrine 18)
120. Mental pleasure also has a limit, and this limit is reached when we reflect on the limits of the bodily pleasures, and the limits on the fears that cause the mind the greatest alarms. (Epicurus - Principle Doctrine 18)
121. For although the body itself knows no limits to the time required to fulfill its pleasures, the mind, intellectually grasping the goal and the limits of the flesh is capable of banishing all terror of the future, and of procuring a life that is complete in the knowledge that we have no need of unlimited time. (Epicurus - Principle Doctrine 20)
122. This is because the mind can grasp that if we measure the limits of pleasure through reason, unlimited time can afford no purer pleasure than limited time. (Epicurus - Principle Doctrines 18, 19, 20)
123. But it is impossible for someone to dispel the pain of fear about the most important matters in life if he does not understand the nature of the universe, and if he gives credence to myths. (Epicurus - Vatican Saying 49)
124. So for those who do not study nature, there can be no enjoyment of pure pleasure. (Epicurus - Vatican Saying 49)
125. Other men argue that pleasure cannot be "the good" because the pleasant life is more desirable when Virtue is added. (Aristotle - Nichomachean Ethics, Book 10)
126. These men say that if the addition of Virtue is better, then pleasure is not the good; for the good cannot become more desirable by the addition of anything to it. (Aristotle - Nichomachean Ethics, Book 10; Seneca, Letters to Lucilius, 66:45)
127. But those who place the Good in Virtue are beguiled by the glamour of a name, and do not understand the true demands of Nature. If they will simply listen to Epicurus, they will be delivered from the grossest error. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:IX)
128. These men speak grandly about the transcendent beauty of the virtues; but were they not productive of pleasure, who would deem them either praiseworthy or desirable? (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:XIII)
129. We esteem the art of medicine not for its interest as a science, but for its conduciveness to health; the art of navigation is commended for its practical and not its scientific value, because it conveys the rules for sailing a ship with success. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:XIII)
130. So also Wisdom, which must be considered as the art of living, if it effected no result would not be desired. But as it is, wisdom is desired, because it is the artificer that procures and produces pleasure. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:XIII)

131. We must therefore act to pursue those things which bring happiness, since, if that be present, we have everything, and, if that be absent, all our actions are directed towards attaining it. (Epicurus to Menoeceus - Diogenes Laertius 10:122)
132. If the point at issue here involved only the means of obtaining happiness, and our enemies wanted to say "the virtues" - which would actually be true - we would simply agree without more ado. (Diogenes of Oinoanda Fragment 32 )
133. But the issue is not "what is the means of happiness," but "what is happiness itself and what is the ultimate goal of our nature." (Diogenes of Oinoanda Fragment 32)
134. To this we say both now and always, shouting out loudly to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that Pleasure is the end of the best way of life, while the virtues, which are messed about by our enemies and transferred from the place of the means to that of the end, are in no way the end in themselves, but the means to the end. (Diogenes of Oinoanda Fragment 32)
135. But a great error has arisen among men in the mistaken idea of condemning pleasure and praising pain. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:X)
136. For no one rejects, dislikes or avoids pleasure itself, because it is pleasure, but because those who do not know how to pursue pleasure rationally encounter consequences that are extremely painful. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:X)
137. Nor again is there anyone who loves or pursues or desires pain itself, because it is pain, but because they see that circumstances occur in which toil and pain can procure some great pleasure. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:X)
138. For example, who among us ever undertakes laborious physical exercise except to obtain some advantage? (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:X)
139. But who has any right to find fault with a man who chooses to enjoy pleasures that have no annoying consequences, or one who avoids a pain that produces no resulting pleasure? (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:X)
140. On the other hand, we denounce with righteous indignation men who are so beguiled and demoralized by the charms of the pleasure of the moment that they cannot foresee the pain and trouble that are bound to follow. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:X)
141. Equal blame belongs to those who fail in their undertakings through weakness of will, which is the same as saying that they shrink from toil and pain. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:X)
142. But in a free hour, when our power of choice is unlimited, and nothing prevents our being able to do what we like best, every pleasure is to be welcomed and every pain avoided. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:X)
143. In certain emergencies, or owing to the claims of ordinary life, it will frequently occur that pleasures have to be postponed and annoyances accepted. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends -1:X)
144. The wise man always holds in these matters to this principle of selection: he rejects some pleasures to secure other and greater pleasures, and he endures some pain to avoid

- other and worse pains. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:X)
145. And so question each of your desires, and ask: "What will happen to me if that which this desire seeks is achieved, and what if it is not?" (Epicurus - Vatican Saying 71)
  146. All pleasure is good, because it is naturally pleasing to us, but not all pleasure should be chosen. And in the same way all pain is evil, and yet not all pain is to be shunned. (Epicurus to Menoeceus - Diogenes Laertius 10:129)
  147. It is by measuring one against another, and by looking at the conveniences and inconveniences, that all these matters must be judged. (Epicurus to Menoeceus - Diogenes Laertius 10:130)
  148. When we say, then, that pleasure is the end and aim, we do not mean the pleasures of the prodigal, who indulges in an unbroken succession of drinking-bouts, revelry, sexual lust, and the delicacies of a luxurious table, as we are understood to do by some through ignorance, prejudice, or willful misrepresentation. (Epicurus to Menoeceus - Diogenes Laertius 10:131)
  149. Instead, we say that a pleasant life is produced by those thoughts and actions which we choose and avoid after we reason soberly, and after we banish those beliefs through which the greatest tumults take possession of the soul. (Epicurus to Menoeceus - Diogenes Laertius 10:131)
  150. And we also say that mental pleasures and pains can be much more intense than those of the body; since the body can feel only what is present to it at the moment, whereas the mind is also aware of the past and of the future. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:XVII)
  151. Thus intense mental pleasure or distress contributes more to our happiness or misery than a bodily pleasure or pain of equal duration. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:XVII)
  152. This being the theory of Pleasure that we hold, why need we be afraid of not being able to reconcile it with the glorious exploits of our ancestors? We confidently assert that if they had a motive for the dangers that they braved in battle, that motive was not a love of virtue in and for itself. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:X)
  153. For when our ancestors braved great dangers before the eyes of their armies, they earned for themselves both the safety of their fellow citizens as well as honor and esteem, the strongest guarantees of security in life. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:XVII)
  154. And so we must act for ourselves to determine what to choose and avoid, and therefore the wise man scorns Fate, which some introduce as sovereign over all things. (Epicurus to Menoeceus - Diogenes Laertius 10:133)
  155. The wise man affirms that some things happen by necessity, others happen by chance, and others happen through our own agency. (Epicurus to Menoeceus - Diogenes Laertius 10:133)
  156. For the wise man sees that necessity destroys responsibility, and that chance is inconstant, but our own actions are autonomous, and it is to our own actions that praise and blame naturally attach. (Epicurus to Menoeceus - Diogenes Laertius 10:133)

157. It would be better to accept the legends of the gods than to bow beneath the yoke of destiny which determinist philosophers have imposed. (Epicurus to Menoecus - Diogenes Laertius 10:134)
158. The legends of the gods at least hold out some faint hope that we may escape punishment, if we honor them, but the necessity of the determinist philosophers is deaf to all entreaties. (Epicurus to Menoecus - Diogenes Laertius 10:134)
159. Necessity is an evil; but there is no necessity for continuing to live with necessity, and if life is unendurable, we may serenely quit life's theater when the play has ceased to please us. (Epicurus - Vatican Saying 9, Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:XV)
160. On the other hand, the man who has many good reasons for ending his own life is of very small account. (Epicurus - Vatican Saying 38)
161. And this is because life is desirable, and those who say that it would be better never to have been born are the most foolish. For such men could easily depart from life if they truly believed what they were saying. (Epicurus to Menoecus - Diogenes Laertius 10:126)
162. As for us, we say that even as men choose of food not merely and simply the larger portion, but the more pleasant, so the wise seek to enjoy the time which is most pleasant, and not merely that which is longest. (Epicurus to Menoecus - Diogenes Laertius 10:126)
163. And we also say that the wise man does not hold Fortune to be a god, as the world in general does, for in the action of a god there is no disorder. (Epicurus to Menoecus - Diogenes Laertius 10:134)
164. The misfortune of the wise is better than the prosperity of the fool, and it is better that what we judge to be good action not owe its success to the aid of chance. (Epicurus to Menoecus - Diogenes Laertius 10:135)
165. And that is why we regard independence of outward things to be a great good, not so that we in all cases will have little, but so that we will be content with little if we do not have much. (Epicurus to Menoecus - Diogenes Laertius 10:130)
166. This is because we are honestly persuaded that we have the sweetest enjoyment of luxury when we are least in need of it. (Epicurus to Menoecus - Diogenes Laertius 10:130)
167. To habituate oneself to a simple and inexpensive diet supplies all that is needed for health, and enables a man to meet the necessary requirements of life without shrinking. (Epicurus to Menoecus - Diogenes Laertius 10:131)
168. This places us in a better condition to enjoy those times when we approach luxury, and renders us fearless of fortune. (Epicurus to Menoecus - Diogenes Laertius 10:131)
169. But there is also a limit in simple living, and he who fails to understand this falls into an error as great as that of the man who gives way to extravagance. (Epicurus - Vatican Saying 63)
170. And likewise, to those men who say that emotion is to be avoided or repressed as a danger to the good life, we say that the wise man feels his emotions more deeply than do

- other men, and this is no hindrance to his wisdom. (Diogenes Laertius 10:117)
171. As we decide what it is we should choose and avoid, we must avoid the error of those men who spend their whole lives furnishing for themselves the things they think are proper to life, without realizing that each man at birth was poured a mortal brew to drink. (Epicurus - Vatican Saying 30)
  172. For every man passes out of life as if he had just been born, and the same span of time is both the beginning and the end of his greatest good. (Epicurus - Vatican Saying 60, 42)
  173. So remember that you have been born once and cannot be born a second time, and for all eternity you shall no longer exist. (Epicurus - Vatican Saying 44)
  174. You are not in control of tomorrow, so do not postpone your happiness, and waste your life by delaying, for each one of us dies without enjoying excess time. (Epicurus - Vatican Saying 14)
  175. But we should be grateful to Nature, because she has made the necessities of life easy to acquire, and she has made those things that are difficult to acquire unnecessary. (Epicurus - Usener Fragment 469)
  176. When misfortune comes, we should find solace in the happy memory of what has been, and in the knowledge that what has been cannot be undone. For the man who forgets his past blessings on that day becomes old. (Epicurus - Vatican Saying 19, 55)
  177. Remember also that of all the means which wisdom acquires to ensure happiness throughout the whole of life, by far the most important is friendship. (Epicurus - Principal Doctrine 27)
  178. For friendship dances around the world, bidding us all to awaken to the recognition of happiness. (Epicurus - Vatican Saying 52)
  179. So at one and the same time we must philosophize, laugh, and manage our household and other business, while never ceasing to proclaim the words of true philosophy. (Epicurus - Vatican Saying 41)
  180. And as we proclaim this true philosophy, it is preferable to seem to speak in oracles that are of advantage to all men, even though no men understand us, rather than conform to popular opinion and thereby gain the constant praise that comes from the many. (Epicurus - Vatican Saying 29)
  181. So we must free ourselves from the prison of public education and politics, and hoist our sail and flee that which passes as culture. (Epicurus - Vatican Saying 58)
  182. For the soul neither rids itself of disturbance, nor gains a worthwhile joy, through possession of great wealth, nor by the honor and admiration bestowed by the crowd, nor through any of the other things sought by unlimited desire. (Epicurus - Vatican Saying 81)
  183. The study of nature does not create men who are fond of boasting and chattering, or who show off the culture that impresses the many, but rather men who are strong and self-sufficient, and who take pride in their own personal qualities, not in those that depend on external circumstances. (Epicurus - Vatican Saying 45)
  184. And the greatest fruit of this self-sufficiency is freedom. (Epicurus - Vatican Saying 77)

185. But in contrast to freedom, some men say that there is a single true law which applies universally to all men, and is unchanging and everlasting, and that this single law summons all to duty by its commands and averts all from wrong-doing by its prohibitions. (Cicero - The Republic 3:33)
186. These men say that it is a sin to try to alter or repeal this law, and there should not be different laws at Rome and at Athens, or now and in the future, but one eternal and unchangeable law for all nations and all times. (Cicero - The Republic 3:33)
187. To these men of a single law, we say that there never was such a thing as absolute justice, but only agreements made in mutual dealings among particular men, at various times and places, to provide against infliction or suffering of harm. (Epicurus - Principle Doctrine 33)
188. And while we also say that justice is the same for all, as it is something found mutually beneficial in the dealings of men, justice differs in how it applies to particular places and circumstances, and the same thing is not necessarily just for everyone. (Epicurus - Principle Doctrine 36)
189. Whether a law is just depends on whether it is mutually advantageous, and this varies according to circumstances. A law ceases to be just when it is no longer advantageous for the mutual dealings of the citizens involved. (Epicurus - Principle Doctrine 37)
190. Thus the man who best knows how to meet external threats makes into one family all the creatures he can; and those he can not, he at any rate does not treat as aliens. (Epicurus - Principle Doctrine 39)
191. Where he finds even this impossible, he avoids all dealings, and, so far as is advantageous, excludes them from his life. (Epicurus - Principle Doctrine 39)
192. Yet some men indulge, without limit, their avarice, ambition, and love of power, to the extent that they must be restrained, rather than reformed. Therefore any means of obtaining protection from other men is a natural good. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:XVI; Epicurus - Principle Doctrine 6)
193. Those who possess the power to defend themselves against threats by their neighbors, being thus in possession of the surest guarantee of security, live the most pleasant life with one another. (Epicurus - Principle Doctrine 40)
194. And so let us remember that the most excellent and desirable life consists of living in the continuous enjoyment of numerous and vivid pleasures, of both body and mind, undisturbed either by the presence or by the prospect of pain. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:XII)
195. To achieve this, we must possess a strength of mind that is proof against all fear of death or of pain. We must know that death means only complete unconsciousness. And we must know that pain is generally light, if long, and short, if strong. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:XII)
196. And we must have no dread of any supernatural power; nor must we ever allow the pleasures of the past to fade away, but we must constantly renew their enjoyment in our

- recollection. (Torquatus - Cicero's On Ends 1:XII)
197. Keep in mind all these things you have been taught, and you will escape far away from myth. Devote yourself to the study of first principles of Nature, and of infinity, and of the standards of choice and avoidance, and of the feelings of pleasure and pain, and of the highest goal for which we choose between them. (Epicurus to Pythocles - Diogenes Laertius 10:116)
  198. For if you exercise yourself in these precepts, day and night, both by yourself, and with one who is like-minded, then never will you be disturbed. You will live as a god among men, for men lose all semblance of mortality when they live in the midst of immortal blessings. (Epicurus to Menoeceus - Diogenes Laertius 10:135)
  199. And then, when we do reach the end of our lives, we will say that we have anticipated you, Fortune, and entrenched ourselves against all your secret attacks.(Epicurus - Vatican Saying 47)
  200. And we will not give ourselves up as captives, to you or to any other circumstance, but when it is time for us to go, spitting contempt on life and on those who vainly cling to it, we will leave life - crying aloud in a glorious song of triumph - that we have lived well. (Epicurus - Vatican Saying 47)
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**This presentation was prepared by Cassius Amicus on 2024-01-26. The latest version can always be found at [EpicureanFriends.com](https://www.epicureanfriends.com).**

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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 11, 2024 at 3:22 PM**

For the first time since 2015 I am about to undertake a significant update of this presentation. When I first put it together I did not think I had good enough quotations on "pleasure as the absence of pain" to include a clear meaning of that without perpetuating ambiguities, but I think now with the aid of our review of Book 2 of on ends I have sufficient succinct citations to include a brief explanation of that, probably inserting it right after item 100.

I also want to go through and try to add line numbers for as many citations as possible in addition to the general source reference already included.

But I am posting this note because if anyone has general editorial suggestions to make, this would be a good time to make them. Eventually we will do another multimedia version, including one with human voice and versions with and without background music. Also, importantly, a revised version ultimately needs much better graphics.

In the end the final result is deep and intense, and a lot to take in at one sitting, but hearing it all in context and clear progression I think makes for a very good reference point to check ones understanding of how everything fits together.

If you can tolerate the computer voice and the music (some hate it and some love it) I recommend this set of material as one of the most complete and well documented summaries of the philosophy that we have on the entire site.

There are many difficult decisions to be made in balancing understandability with keeping true to the texts, and I can't promise to address every suggestion, but all will be considered and appreciated.

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## **Post by “Cassius” of January 11, 2024 at 9:57 PM**

The likelihood is that the primary addition regarding pleasure is going to come this way, by addition after the existing line 29, in the canonic section rather than the ethics section:

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30. Instead, the faculties which constitute our Canon of Truth are our five senses, our preconceptions, and our feelings of pleasure and pain, for it is by means of these that we test those things which are true, and we determine which are obscure and need confirmation. For only when those things which are clear to us are understood is it time to consider those things which are obscure. [([Epicurus' Letter to Herodotus](#))]

31. By "preconception" we mean an apprehension or right opinion or thought or general idea stored within the mind, that is to say, a recollection of what has often been presented from without, a sort of preconceived mental picture of a thing, without which nothing can be understood or investigated or discussed. (Diogenes Laertius X:33; "On The Nature of the Gods" section\_\_\_,)

32. By "pleasure" we mean the absence of pain, for there are two internal sensations, pleasure and pain, which occur to every living creature, and pleasure is akin to nature and pain is alien. There is no middle condition between pleasure and pain, so anyone who is conscious of his own condition is necessarily in a state of pleasure or in a state of pain. (Letter to Menoecus; Diogenes Laertius X.34: On Ends Book 2)

33. Whatever is free from pain is in pleasure, because wherever pleasure is present, as long as it is there, there is neither pain of body, nor of mind, nor of both at once. And it is therefore as true as any proposition can be that "freedom from pain" and "the negation of pain" mean the

same thing as "pleasure." (Principal Doctrine 3; On Ends Book 2:9-11)

34. So to he who asserts that there are vast multitudes of men who are neither in a state of pain nor a state of pleasure, but in an intermediate state between these two conditions, we say: "No, indeed, for all men who are free from pain are in pleasure, and in fact in the greatest pleasure." (On Ends Book 2:16)

35. And to he who asserts that if pleasure is the highest good every part of our bodies, even our hands, would constantly feel a longing for pleasure, we say that they feel no such longing because so long as they are free from pain they are in fact experiencing pleasure. (On Ends Book 1:39)

36. The wise man who understands these things will find that any pains he may encounter have never power enough to prevent him from finding more reasons for joy than for vexation, and he who is able to become completely free from all pain is experiencing the most complete pleasure that is possible to him. (On Ends Book 1:62)

37. Now, apply your mind, for a new question struggles earnestly to gain your ears, a new aspect of things is about to display itself. [(Lucretius Book 2)]

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Note: To avoid overstressing this thread I will post interim revisions of the full text here:

[Foundations Of Epicurean Philosophy](#)

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### **Post by "Bryan" of January 12, 2024 at 11:48 AM**

"The overview is often needed but the details we only need occasionally" - and this is an excellent overview!

When I see such good productions as this, I think of page 1 of the 830 page *Oxford Handbook of Epicurus and Epicureanism* which says "...contemporary philosophers continue to churn out article after article of increasing sophistication defending or (mostly) attempting to refute Epicurus's arguments about the harmlessness of death. [...] I imagine many professional scholars may sometimes feel that their contributions somehow lack the immediate visceral appeal of those flashier productions of true believers touting Epicureanism as a cure for everything [...] it is doubtful that many of the scholars in this volume write as believers..."

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**Post by “Kalosyni” of January 13, 2024 at 11:29 AM**

An idea came to me that maybe the text of this could be put into a 2 column table which has a commentary running along side it with further explanation.