

Week 1: Epicurus, the Garden, and the Extant Texts

Post by "Kalosyni" of May 24, 2024 at 7:56 PM

Week 1 - Epicurus, the Garden, and the Extant Texts

This week's focus will be on the historical context of Epicurus and the Garden, as well as an introduction to the extant texts.

This post will contain the continued development of a self-paced 7-week course - "Introduction to the Philosophy of Epicurus". To read the course overview and syllabus [click here](#).

Here you will find links to posts, threads, and other materials on the EpicureanFriends forum which will guide you through self-pace study.

We welcome any specific questions regarding each week's specific topics, whether or not they have been covered in any other existing threads - just go ahead and please post. Thanks!

Week 1: Epicurus, the Garden, and the Extant Texts

-- Section 1.1 - Epicurus and the Garden --

1. [A Short Biography of Epicurus by Diogenes Laertius](#)
2. [What Did Epicurus Look Like? - Busts and Depictions of Epicurus](#)
3. Where was the school of Epicurus located? Article excerpts:

Quote

While we will probably never know the exact location of Epicurus's Garden in ancient Athens, we can take a number of educated guesses. We have two primary sources from which to make these guesses: ancient texts that hint at the location of the Garden and modern archaeological excavations. This paper will present the evidence for several possible - and even probable - locations for the properties where Epicurus lived and taught and where his school existed for several centuries after his death.

One of the primary goals of this exercise is to dispel the myth that Epicurus and his students fled society and founded their communities far from city centers, isolated

from society. As will be demonstrated, Epicurus's Garden was not inaccessible to passers-by or curious visitors.

Seneca himself states that the motto displayed at the entrance to the original Garden invited people to enter:

"Hospes hic bene manebis, hic summum bonum voluptas est."

O Guest, here you will do well to tarry; here our highest good is pleasure. (Seneca, Epistulae morales ad Lucilium, Letter XXI)

Quote

Situating the Garden along one of the busiest and most important thoroughfares in Athens will hopefully dispel rumors of the Epicureans being hidden away like hermits. The Garden was easily accessible, making it easily visited for a lecture by Epicurus by those in all ranks of Athenian society.

Quote

...Epicurus's Garden was described as being along the road that led from the Dipylon Gate in the city walls of Athens directly to the open-air gymnasium known as the Academy where a certain philosopher by the name of Plato established his school. It's no more than a pleasant stroll from the Gate to the Academy, and the Garden would have been a welcoming stop along the way. Most scholars do not claim that Plato placed his school in some remote location, and the Garden was even closer to the city than the Academy. The Garden was only a short walk from the city, and Epicurus also encouraged his students to take part in the festivals held regularly in Athenian life.

You will find the full article here: ["Where Was the Garden of Epicurus? The Evidence from the Ancient Sources and Archaeology"](#) (article by forum member Don).

4. Listen to Lucretius Today podcast presentations containing in-depth historical background on Epicurus - [Episode 149](#) --- [Episode 150](#) --- [Episode 151](#) - based on material from Norman DeWitt's book "Epicurus and His Philosophy."

5. [Epicurean Philosophers Timeline Listing](#) by forum member Eikadistes.

-- Section 1.2 - An Overview of Epicurean Texts --

We believe that the best way to arrive at a correct understanding of Epicurean philosophy is for each person to study the core texts for themselves, rather than relying on short summaries (or potentially incorrect opinions often found elsewhere on the internet). When taking into account the full body of extant texts we can correctly see the system of thought and worldview that Epicurus created.

1. Familiarize yourself with: [the list of core texts](#).
2. [Recommended reading](#) for this week: [The Letter to Menoeceus](#).

-- Section 1.3 - A General Overview of the Philosophy of Epicurus --

1. Forum members reply to: [How would you explain to someone new "What is Epicurean Philosophy is All About?"](#)
2. Outlines: [Epicurean Philosophy expandable outline \(and navigation\)](#)

Post by “Kalosyni” of March 24, 2025 at 10:01 AM

Additional material for Section 1.2:

Here is an very good overview of the [Principal Doctrines](#).

The following is copied here from an earlier post created by forum member Don.

Sept. 23, 2023 - posted by Don

In looking at the PDs for some ideas, I took a clue from Cyril Bailey's summary of the PDs. He categorized them as:

1-4: The tetracharmakos, the four-fold fundamental principles necessary for a tranquil life

5: The relation of pleasure to virtue

6, 7: Protection from external disturbances

8-10: The selection of pleasures

11-13: The ethical value of physical science

14-21: The wise man's life in relation to nature, his fellow men, and to true pleasure (can be sub-divided)

22-26: The tests and standards of moral (i.e., truly pleasant) action

27, 28: Friendship

29, 30: The classification of desires

31-38: Justice and injustice

39, 40: The wise man's life in the Epicurean community

Now there are many things about which I don't agree with Bailey, but this list is helpful as a starting point.

[PD01](#) and [PD02](#) are the ubiquitous correct understanding of the gods and death.

[PD05](#) gives the standard formula about living pleasurably entails living virtuously/ethically, and vice versa.

[PD08](#) to [PD10](#) talks about making the correct choices and rejections, the core of Epicurean day to day (moment to moment) practice. The practice seems to me to be brought up again in [PD20](#) through [PD26](#). Those are sections I need to investigate in my unending quest to re-compose *Principle Doctrines* as a text. [PD29](#) (necessary, unnecessary desires, etc.) and [PD30](#) are an important "how to do it" text as well.

[PD11](#) to [PD13](#) talk about the necessity of understanding "how things work" when it comes to allaying fears and superstitions about "astronomical phenomena and death and suffering," "myths," and "what is above and below the earth and in general about the infinite unknown." This conveys the importance of studying natural science and to understand how the physical, material universe works.

[PD14](#) and [PD15](#) talks about the fact that unlimited wealth isn't necessary to pursue a pleasurable life. Sufficient wealth is "limited and easy to acquire."

[PD17](#) is a good reminder: "One who acts aright (δίκαιος) is utterly steady and serene (ἀταρακτότατος), whereas one who goes astray is full of trouble and confusion."

[PD27](#) is our friendship one!

The Justice PDs are important from an ethical standpoint in that they say how people should treat each other, especially [PD31](#) "Natural justice is a covenant for mutual benefit, to not harm one another or be harmed."

[PD39](#) and 40 are not straightforward when trying to translate, but are potentially helpful.