

# The Closing Paragraph of the Letter to Menoecus

Post by "Kalosyni" of August 5, 2025 at 4:07 PM

Adding a deeper understanding to the closing paragraph: it is more than just poetic words to say "you shall live like a god among men" - philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle also presented their own ideas about "living like the gods" and so Epicurus was using that as a kind of framing to present his system.

Here are some of my notes from last night's Zoom:

The paragraph:

"Meditate therefore on these things and things akin to them night and day by yourself; and with a companion like to yourself, and never shall you be disturbed waking or asleep, but you shall live like a god among men. For a man who lives among immortal blessings is not like unto a mortal being." - Bailey translation

Breaking down the paragraph by some key phrases:

1. "meditate" - contemplate; study and practice
2. "on these things and things akin to them" -- everything in this letter should be contemplated:
  - 1) the importance of loving and practicing wisdom, and knowing what actually brings happiness.
  - 2) the correct understanding of the nature of the gods.
  - 3) the correct understanding of the nature of death.
  - 4) the three kinds of desires.
  - 5) understanding everything that you accept or reject is in terms of health of the body and serenity of the soul. Judge every good thing by the standard of how that thing affects you.
  - 6) not every pleasure is to be chosen and not every pain is always to be shunned. Make your decisions by measuring things side by side and looking at both the advantages and disadvantages.
  - 7) self-reliance is a great good. Those who need luxury the least enjoy it the most, and everything natural is easily obtained whereas everything groundless is hard to get. Training yourself to live without luxury prepares you to more thoroughly enjoy luxury when it does come.
  - 8 ) not the kind of pleasure of decadent people, but sober reasoning, searching out the cause of everything we accept or reject, and driving out opinions that cause the greatest trouble in the soul.

- 9) thus practical wisdom is more valuable than philosophy and is the source of every other excellence. Prudence is what develops the virtues. And the excellences grow up together with the pleasant life, and the pleasant life is inseparable from them.
- 10) for he holds that we are responsible for what we achieve, even though some things happen by necessity, some by chance, and some by our own power, because although necessity is not accountable he sees that chance is unstable whereas the things that are within our power have no other master.

3. "with a companion like to yourself" - this phrase more than hints at the highest form of friendship as described by Aristotle, which rather than utility or pleasure, is the kind of friendship based on a mutual appreciation of the virtues that the other party holds dear. It's the people themselves and the qualities that they represent that provides the incentive for the two parties to be in each other's lives. For Epicureans, wisdom and prudence are core values, as well as the ability to see and understand that there are natural causes at work in the world, rather than supernatural acts caused by gods. Contemplation, study, and practice must be done together with another person who is earnestly seeking to develop the virtues of wisdom and prudence that Epicurus taught.

4. "never shall you be disturbed waking or asleep" - you will be free from disturbance and confusion and which also is the nature of the gods.

5. "you shall live like a god among men" - for Epicurus this comes about by applying yourself to the contemplation, study, and practice of "these things and things akin to them" (everything in the Letter to Menoeceus) as well as experiencing a complete life which has more pleasures than pains.

6. "immortal blessings" - unending "goods" such as friendship - Vatican Saying 78: "The noble soul is devoted most of all to wisdom and to friendship — one a mortal good, the other immortal."

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I will soon add to this thread some clear references to Plato and Aristotle's ideas on the role of contemplation in philosophy as well as "living like the gods".

( [Patrikios](#) asked for a chart comparing Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus and I will also work on that too).

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**Post by “Don” of August 5, 2025 at 5:57 PM**

135c. Ταῦτα οὖν καὶ τὰ τούτοις συγγενῆ μελέτα πρὸς σεαυτὸν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς πρὸς <τε> τὸν ὅμοιον σεαυτῷ,

Meditate (μελέτα) then on this and similar things with yourself day and night as well as together with those like yourself."

ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς literally "day and night" (i.e., all the time)

135d. καὶ οὐδέποτε οὔθ' ὕπαρ οὔτ' ὄναρ διαταραχθήσῃ, ζήσεις δὲ ὡς θεὸς ἐν ἀνθρώποις.

"And never, neither awake nor in sleep, throw oneself into confusion, and you will live as a god among humans."

135e. οὐθὲν γὰρ ἔοικε θνητῷ ζῶν ζῶν ἄνθρωπος ἐν ἀθανάτοις ἀγαθοῖς.

οὐθὲν γὰρ "because no one ...

ἔοικε "to be like; seems..."

θνητῷ ζῶν "for a mortal being (living thing)"

ζῶν is the dative form of ζῶν which we met way back in 123 when talking about the gods.

ἐν ἀθανάτοις ἀγαθοῖς "in the midst of everlasting good things (pleasure)."

ἀθανάτοις (< αθάνατος (athanatos)) means literally a- "un-, not" + thanatos "dying" so immortal and eternal are one sense; however, it also conveys perpetual or everlasting which seems more appropriate in this context.

"Because no person who lives among eternal good things (pleasure) is like a mortal being."

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## Post by "Kalosyni" of August 5, 2025 at 7:52 PM

Epicurus may have written about specific things as considered "eternal goods/pleasures" (besides friendship) but we only have a small portion of what he wrote.

And, I wanted to add that the reason that I brought up Plato and Aristotle here with regard to contemplation and living like the gods, is that this letter as a protreptic, presents a possibility that Epicurus was intending to reach out and appeal to students from other schools of philosophy.

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Edit note: another reason (idea) that these "framings" were extending throughout various philosophical schools.

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## Post by "Don" of August 5, 2025 at 11:50 PM

A couple notes on some of the pivotal words in this paragraph.

### διαταραχθήση (diatarakhthese)

Note the the breakdown: dia-tarakhthese. That second component is directly related to **tarakhe** and it's opposite **ataraxia** (*ataraksia*)

From διαταράσσω, to throw into great confusion, confound utterly. I'm taking the dia- to convey confusion throughout oneself, from one end to the other (i.e., consider English "diameter" measure across)

So, by using this word, Epicurus is referring back to the ataraxia that comes from contemplating the points in this letter and, from that contemplation and study, having a firm, unshakable knowledge of how the world works; a firm foundation upon which to fully experience every pleasure you choose to partake of and to weather every pain that comes your way. That unshakable foundation once firmly in place in your mind will be a part of you, whether sleeping or awake, day or night.

ἐν ἀθανάτοις ἀγαθοῖς. (en athanatois agathois)

[Kalosyni](#) is right to ask about these "immortal goods." It is a tricky concept, and one I'm still wrestling with myself. Here's one take I've come up with.

athanatos (a + thanatos) does mean "un-dying" but it has a wider connotation. [LSJ has some citations that are worth looking at](#), including Lysias, *Funeral Oration*. There the term used is ἀθάνατον μνήμην "have left behind an immortal memory arising from their valor. " So, what is left behind after someone dies is "undying," including the memories others have of you, the legacy you "leave behind" doesn't die with you. This idea seems relevant to me in that the friends and loved ones we leave behind allow us to "live on" to be "undying" (as long as our memory lives one... it's not technically immortal). The effect we have on people while alive is undying.

I still maintain that ἐν ἀθανάτοις ἀγαθοῖς is "among undying goods" means "among undying pleasures" as in good=pleasure. Thinking of other "undying pleasures" is a good exercise. What lives on after we die? What is it about our lives that, in the words of Maximus in *Gladiator*,

"echo through eternity"?

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### Post by “Kalosyni” of August 6, 2025 at 1:46 PM

#### [Quote from Don](#)

I still maintain that ἐν ἀθανάτοις ἀγαθοῖς is "among undying goods" means "among undying pleasures" as in good=pleasure.

I am curious if it is the same word for "goods" that Aristotle uses when he talks about instrumental, intrinsic, and external "goods"?

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### Post by “Don” of August 6, 2025 at 2:39 PM

#### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

#### [Quote from Don](#)

I still maintain that ἐν ἀθανάτοις ἀγαθοῖς is "among undying goods" means "among undying pleasures" as in good=pleasure.

I am curious if it is the same word for "goods" that Aristotle uses when he talks about instrumental, intrinsic, and external "goods"?

Then Aristotle moves onto looking closer at good things in general. He says they are divided into three classes:

1. External goods τῶν ἐκτὸς (ektos)
2. Goods of the soul τῶν δὲ περὶ ψυχὴν (psykhe)
3. Goods of the body καὶ σῶμα (soma)

However, he says unequivocally that those of the “soul” are the κυριώτατα and μάλιστα **ἀγαθὰ** “the highest and best goods.” However, he also stresses that he’s talking about the soul’s “actions and activities” or energeia (Refer back to our discussion of that word back near

the beginning of this text.)

[Epicurean Sage - Nichomachean Ethics Book 1](#)

< Back to Nichomachean Ethics homepage  
Nicomachean Ethics starts out with: "Every art and every investigation, and likewise every practical pursuit or...  
sites.google.com

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### **Post by "Matteng" of August 9, 2025 at 12:44 AM**

From Aristotle I have seen clearer that „philia“ what is mostly translated as „friendship“ and often is understood as „having friends“ means also „friendly love“.

It is a form of love.

And that enhances for me the meaning, it is for me something that we do, an attitude, virtue like prudence, feeling.

It reminds me of buddhist teaching in mahayana as in the image of a bird with 2 wings -> wisdom and compassion.

Similar to this I see prudence (phronesis) and friendly love / friendship (philia) as the main Epicurean values.

But what is an „undying/immortal good“ when death is nothing to someone ? That friends maybe live longer than me ? Hm maybe, but it is about the mortality of the good.

When is a good mortal ?

Maybe something similar like Plato forms but in realistic and earthed ? A good that is maybe not fleeting but maybe has a long endurance at least until the own death or that its consequences last longer maybe over the own death.

But that last aspect maybe confuses the mortality of humans with the mortality of goods ? □□□□

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### **Post by "Kalosyni" of August 9, 2025 at 3:15 PM**

Quote from Matteng

But what is an „undying/immortal good“ when death is nothing to someone ? That friends maybe live longer than me ? Hm maybe, but it is about the mortality of the good.

The memory of the friend and the friendship that was shared lasts even after the friend has died -- in some ways the "friendship-feeling" never dies even if the friend dies.

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### Post by “Kalosyni” of August 9, 2025 at 3:18 PM

#### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

I will soon add to this thread some clear references to Plato and Aristotle's ideas on the role of contemplation in philosophy as well as "living like the gods".

I still haven't gotten to this yet, but still planning to do so.

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### Post by “Kalosyni” of August 18, 2025 at 3:19 PM

"AFTER THE ASCENT: PLATO  
ON BECOMING LIKE GOD" -- JOHN M. ARMSTRONG

<https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=0385716796962ba73a5a32453511cd201>

From the opening paragraph:

#### Quote

Platonic dialogues indicate that humans should strive to become like god. Until recent work by Julia Annas and David Sedley, this had gone largely unnoticed in contemporary Plato scholarship.<sup>1</sup> In this article I explore the idea further by arguing that Plato's later conception of god made a difference to how he conceived of becoming like god. In particular, I argue that Plato's identification of god with  $\nu\omicron\#\zeta$  or intelligence in the *Timaeus*, [Philebus](#), and *Laws*

influences his conception of assimilation to god. Rather than fleeing from the sensible world, becoming like this god commits one to improving it. In the Laws especially, following god requires an effort to unify the city under intelligent law and to educate the citizens in virtue. Plato's otherworldliness is therefore tempered by—of all things—his theology.

Ever since ancient Platonists such as Eudorus, Philo, and Alcinous, Plato's notion of 'becoming like god' (/μο'ωσις θε-.) or 'following god' (1κ3λουθος θε-.) has been understood to be a flight from this world to a higher one.<sup>2</sup> This is due partly to the ancients' heavy reliance on this Theaetetus passage: But bad things cannot be destroyed, Theodorus, for there must always be something opposed to the good. Nor can they gain a place among gods. Rather, by necessity they haunt mortal nature and this place here. That's why one must try to flee from here to there as quickly as possible. Fleeing is becoming like god so far as one can, and to become like god is to become just and pious with wisdom. (176 a 5-b 2)

This shows that there was already the idea of becoming like the gods before Epicurus, but Epicurus has his very different methodology, as we see in the Letter to Menoecus - and which says "living like a god among men". And this also does bring up a necessity for Epicureans to understand what is meant by "gods".

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of August 18, 2025 at 4:38 PM**

This is somewhat applicable, and sheds some light on what is being referred to in the closing paragraph of the Letter to Menoecus, a life of contemplation is like living like the gods (of course, minus the Aristotelian emphasis on virtues).

Epicurus would have surely written about this from his own perspective, but so much of his writings were lost.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHmEj0JG62Q>

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 18, 2025 at 5:24 PM**

Unfortunately I am afraid that the general interpretation of "the contemplative life" you quoted above is very entrenched, so it's important to be careful in praising "contemplation" in contrast

with words like "study" or "applying."

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of August 18, 2025 at 8:18 PM**

The phrase "contemplative life" is Christian Catholic, which sounds different than saying "a life of contemplation".

For Epicurus, contemplate/meditate would have meant to think about, study, and apply philosophy.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 19, 2025 at 7:49 AM**

#### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

For Epicurus, contemplate/meditate would have meant to think about, study, and apply philosophy.

And that sense is absolutely appropriate, so long as it is understood that thinking and studying are not the only activities that must be pursued, and which are also desirable to pursue, and which are also of vital importance in human life. Nor would it be appropriate to say that \*thinking alone\* can get you anywhere in life, absent the evidence of the senses as a starting point and on which to base that thinking and apply its results.

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### **Post by “Adrastus” of August 19, 2025 at 9:10 AM**

Excellent thread.

I just wanted to comment on another aspect of what I think is meant by the Nature of "contemplation" "meditation" and so forth.

Lucretius' Ode to Epicurus in Book 1, gives me a stark reminder of how the ancients thought

about the Nature of mind and allowing ones mind to wander or imagine in ones 'mind's eye', at least in dramatic form.

#### Quote

"When human life to view lay foully prostrate upon earth crushed down under the weight of religion, who showed her head from the quarters of heaven with hideous aspect lowering upon mortals, a man of Greece ventured first to lift up his mortal eyes to her face and first to withstand her to her face.

Him neither story of gods nor thunderbolts nor heaven with threatening roar could quell: they only chafed the more the eager courage of his soul, filling him with desire to be the first to burst the fast bars of nature's portals.

Therefore the living force of his soul gained the day: on he passed far beyond the flaming walls of the world and traversed throughout in mind and spirit the immeasurable universe; whence he returns a conqueror to tell us what can, what cannot come into being; in short on what principle each thing has its powers defined, its deep-set boundary mark.

Therefore religion is put underfoot and trampled upon in turn; us his victory brings level with heaven." - Lucretius, De Rereum Natura, Book 1 62-78

So I think about Epicurus' physics and his view of infinite space and time, and infinite atoms and void, as something in which we can 'contemplate/meditate' on when fears about the Gods, primal terror at enormous thoughts or fears about humans overwhelm us. The physics may or may not be 'true' when we consider physics as we know them today, but the whole view of the universe to Epicurus is calming - at least I've found as an object of contemplation - and helps induce the loss of overwhelming fears associated with letting ones imagination run off billions of light years away or into fictive ideas about Gods or other unseeable things ready to strike at us.

I suppose in this way the physics are still immensely useful as, for the contemporary moment, we do not have a scientific view or a scientific cultural discourse that also does not incessantly hound us with thoughts of "other dimensions" or "simulations" that could leave us disconcerted and uneasy. Science isn't supposed to take into account the health of the soul when off discovering or theorizing in the same way Ancient Philosophical systems needed to more or less wrap **everything** up nice and tidy as to be a system of psychological health or attainment.

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**Post by "Cassius" of August 19, 2025 at 9:24 AM**

[Quote from Adrastus](#)

Science isn't supposed to take into account the health of the soul when off discovering or theorizing in the same way Ancient Philosophical systems needed to more or less wrap everything up nice and tidy as to be a system of psychological health or attainment.

I think you're right that this is the general modern position, but whether that is an advancement or a regression is also a matter for debate. 😊