Principal Doctrines

Except where noted, this translation is by Cyril Bailey, as contained in his text "Epicurus - The Extant Remains." The doctrine number is hyperlinked to our Lexicon for additional translations and notes.

For detailed discussion of each doctrine, please post here: The Principal Doctrines.

For those who may wish to print this page, several notes are included at the bottom of this page as to the source of the translation of each doctrine listed here. The "Scholia Commentary" to PD01 and PD29 are included at the end as well.

For an excellent resource useful in comparing each of these in different translations, see Nate's compilation of alternate translations here.

PD01. The blessed and incorruptible nature knows no trouble itself, nor causes trouble to any other, so that it is never constrained by anger or favor. For all such things exist only in the weak. PD01: This version is primarily Bailey, but with "incorruptible" substituted for "immortal." Bailey's Extant Remains version is: "The blessed and immortal nature knows no trouble itself, nor causes trouble to any other, so that it is never constrained by anger or favor. For all such things exist only in the weak." See Discussion of this version here.

PD02. Death is nothing to us, for that which is dissolved is without sensation; and that which lacks sensation is nothing to us.

PD03. The limit of quantity in pleasures is the removal of all that is painful. Wherever pleasure is present, as long as it is there, there is neither pain of body, nor of mind, nor of both at once.

PD04. Pain does not last continuously in the flesh, but the acutest pain is there for a very short time, and even that which just exceeds the pleasure in the flesh does not continue for many days at once. But chronic illnesses permit a predominance of pleasure over pain in the flesh.

PD05. It is not possible to live pleasantly without living prudently, honorably, and justly, [nor again to live a life of prudence, honor, and justice] without living pleasantly. And the man who does not possess the pleasant life is not living prudently, honorably, and justly, [and the man who does not possess the virtuous life] cannot possibly live pleasantly.

PD06. In order that men might not fear one another, there was a natural benefit to be had from government and kingship, provided that they are able to bring about this result. PD06: The translation given is by *Mensch*. Formerly we used Eugene O'Connor from "The Essential Epicurus": "Whatever you can provide yourself with to secure protection from men is a natural good." Bailey: "To secure protection from men anything is a natural good by which you may be able to attain this end." New Greek Version: "In order to obtain security from other people, there was (always) the natural good of sovereignty and kingship, through which (someone) once could have accomplished this." This version is up for review given that the Greek for sovereignty and kingship clearly appears in the text but is emended out by Usener and others. See the discussion of PD06 for further detail.

PD07. Some men wished to become famous and conspicuous, thinking that they would thus win for themselves safety from other men. Wherefore if the life of such men is safe, they have obtained the good which nature craves; but if it is not safe, they do not possess that for which they strove at first by the instinct of nature.

PD08. No pleasure is a bad thing in itself; but the means which produce some pleasures bring with them disturbances many times greater than the pleasures.

PD09. If every pleasure could be intensified so that it lasted, and influenced the whole organism or the most essential parts of our nature, pleasures would never differ from one another. PD09 - "If all pleasure had been capable of accumulation,—if this had gone on not only by recurrence in time, but all over the frame or, at any rate, over the principal parts of man's nature, there would never have been any difference between one pleasure and another, as in fact there is." Hicks (1925)

PD10. If the things that produce the pleasures of profligates could dispel the fears of the mind about the phenomena of the sky, and death, and its pains, and also teach the limits of desires (and of pains), we should never have cause to blame them: for they would be filling themselves full, with pleasures from every source, and never have pain of body or mind, which is the evil of life.

PD11. If we were not troubled by our suspicions of the phenomena of the sky, and about death, fearing that it concerns us, and also by our failure to grasp the limits of pains and desires, we should have no need of natural science.

PD12. A man cannot dispel his fear about the most important matters if he does not know what is the nature of the universe, but suspects the truth of some mythical story. So that, without natural science, it is not possible to attain our pleasures unalloyed.

PD13. There is no profit in securing protection in relation to men, if things above, and things beneath the earth, and indeed all in the boundless universe, remain matters of suspicion.

PD14. The most unalloyed source of protection from men, which is secured to some extent by a certain force of expulsion, is in fact the immunity which results from a quiet life, and retirement from the world.

PD15. The wealth demanded by nature is both limited and easily procured; that demanded by idle imaginings stretches on to infinity.

PD16. In but few things chance hinders a wise man, but the greatest and most important matters, reason has ordained, and throughout the whole period of life does and will ordain.

PD17. The just man is most free from trouble; the unjust most full of trouble.

PD18. The pleasure in the flesh is not increased when once the pain due to want is removed, but is only varied: and the limit as regards pleasure in the mind is begotten by the reasoned understanding of these very pleasures, and of the emotions akin to them, which used to cause the greatest fear to the mind.

PD19. Infinite time contains no greater pleasure than limited time, if one measures, by reason, the limits of pleasure.

PD20. The flesh perceives the limits of pleasure as unlimited, and unlimited time is required to supply it. But the mind, having attained a reasoned understanding of the ultimate good of the flesh and its limits, and having dissipated the fears concerning the time to come, supplies us with the complete life, and we have no further need of infinite time; but neither does the mind shun pleasure, nor, when circumstances begin to bring about the departure from life, does it approach its end as though it fell short, in any way, of the best life.

PD21. He who has learned the limits of life knows that that which removes the pain due to want, and makes the whole of life complete, is easy to obtain, so that there is no need of actions which involve competition.

PD22. We must consider both the real purpose, and all the evidence of direct perception, to which we always refer the conclusions of opinion; otherwise, all will be full of doubt and confusion.

PD23. If you fight against all sensations, you will have no standard by which to judge even those of them which you say are false.

PD24. If you reject any single sensation, and fail to distinguish between the conclusion of opinion, as to the appearance awaiting confirmation, and that which is actually given by the sensation or feeling, or each

intuitive apprehension of the mind, you will confound all other sensations, as well, with the same groundless opinion, so that you will reject every standard of judgment. And if among the mental images created by your opinion you affirm both that which awaits confirmation, and that which does not, you will not escape error, since you will have preserved the whole cause of doubt in every judgment between what is right and what is wrong.

PD25. If on each occasion, instead of referring your actions to the end of nature, you turn to some other, nearer, standard, when you are making a choice or an avoidance, your actions will not be consistent with your principles.

PD26. Of desires, all that do not lead to a sense of pain, if they are not satisfied, are not necessary, but involve a craving which is easily dispelled when the object is hard to procure, or they seem likely to produce harm.

PD27. Of all the things which wisdom acquires to produce the blessedness of the complete life, far the greatest is the possession of friendship.

PD28. The same knowledge that makes one confident that nothing dreadful is eternal or long-lasting also recognizes, in the face of these limited evils, the security afforded by friendship. PD28 - The translation given is by Eugene O'Connor from "The Essential Epicurus." Bailey: "The same conviction which has given us confidence that there is nothing terrible that lasts forever, or even for long, has also seen the protection of friendship most fully completed in the limited evils of this life."

PD29. Among desires, some are natural (and necessary, some natural) but not necessary, and others neither natural nor necessary, but due to idle imagination.

PD30. Wherever, in the case of desires which are physical, but do not lead to a sense of pain if they are not fulfilled, the effort is intense, such pleasures are due to idle imagination; and it is not owing to their own nature that they fail to be dispelled, but owing to the empty imaginings of the man.

PD31. The justice which arises from nature is a pledge of mutual advantage, to restrain men from harming one another, and save them from being harmed.

PD32. For all living things which have not been able to make compacts not to harm one another, or be harmed, nothing ever is either just or unjust; and likewise, too, for all tribes of men which have been unable, or unwilling, to make compacts not to harm or be harmed.

PD33. Justice never is anything in itself, but in the dealings of men with one another, in any place whatever, and at any time, it is a kind of compact not to harm or be harmed. PD33: Translation by Epicurus.net: "There never was such a thing as absolute justice, but only agreements made in mutual dealings among men in whatever places at various times providing against the infliction or suffering of harm."

PD34. Injustice is not an evil in itself, but only in consequence of the fear which attaches to the apprehension of being unable to escape those appointed to punish such actions.

PD35. It is not possible for one who acts in secret contravention of the terms of the compact not to harm or be harmed to be confident that he will escape detection, even if, at present, he escapes a thousand times. For up to the time of death it cannot be certain that he will indeed escape.

PD36. In its general aspect, justice is the same for all, for it is a kind of mutual advantage in the dealings of men with one another; but with reference to the individual peculiarities of a country, or any other circumstances, the same thing does not turn out to be just for all.

PD37. Among actions which are sanctioned as just by law, that which is proved, on examination, to be of advantage, in the requirements of men's dealings with one another, has the guarantee of justice, whether it is the same for all or not. But if a man makes a law, and it does not turn out to lead to advantage in men's

dealings with each other, then it no longer has the essential nature of justice. And even if the advantage in the matter of justice shifts from one side to the other, but for a while accords with the general concept, it is nonetheless just for that period, in the eyes of those who do not confound themselves with empty sounds, but look to the actual facts.

PD38. Where, provided the circumstances have not been altered, actions which were considered just have been shown not to accord with the general concept, in actual practice, then they are not just. But where, when circumstances have changed, the same actions which were sanctioned as just no longer lead to advantage, they were just at the time, when they were of advantage for the dealings of fellow-citizens with one another, but subsequently they are no longer just, when no longer of advantage.

PD39. The man who has best ordered the element of disquiet arising from external circumstances has made those things that he could akin to himself, and the rest at least not alien; but with all to which he could not do even this, he has refrained from mixing, and has expelled from his life all which it was of advantage to treat thus.

PD40. As many as possess the power to procure complete immunity from their neighbors, these also live most pleasantly with one another, since they have the most certain pledge of security, and, after they have enjoyed the fullest intimacy, they do not lament the previous departure of a dead friend, as though he were to be pitied.

Scholiast Commentary (this version from Epicurism.info)

PD01: Elsewhere he says that the gods are discernible as mental impressions, some being unique, while others look similar, owing to the continuous flow of similar images to the same place, culminating in human form.

PD29: Epicurus considers things which bring relief from pain as natural and necessary, for instance, drinking to relieve thirst. Things that are natural but not necessary merely vary pleasure without removing pain, such as expensive foods. Neither natural nor necessary are, for example, kingship and the erection of statues in one's honor.