

# Classical Epicurean Philosophy

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The following is a list of major doctrines of Classical Epicurean Philosophy. Each item is linked to a separate wiki page which contains additional information. EpicureanFriends uses this list as a benchmark to help ensure that the forum is consistent with the major ideas of the ancient Epicurean school. EpicureanFriends participants are not required to agree with each one, but ongoing "campaigning" against them is not permitted here on the forum. There are of course many other ideas within Epicurean philosophy which are not covered here. The goal of this list is to convey distinguishing aspects of Epicurean thought using terminology closely approximating the original texts.

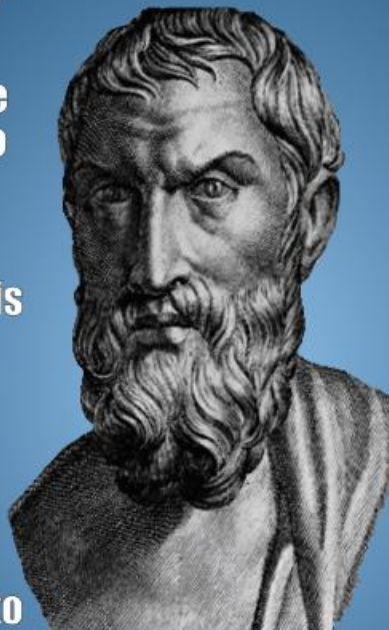
**Nothing can be created from nothing.**

**The universe is infinite and eternal and has no gods over it.**

**The nature of gods contains nothing that is inconsistent with incorruption and blessedness.**

**Death is nothing to us.**

**There is no necessity to live under the control of necessity.**



**He who says "Nothing can be known" knows nothing.**

**All sensations are "true."**

**Virtue is not absolute or an end in itself - all good and evil consists in sensation.**

**Pleasure is the guide of life.**

**By "Pleasure" we mean all experience that is not painful.**

**Life is desirable, but unlimited time contains no greater pleasure than limited time.**

## **1. Nothing Can Be Created From Nothing.**

1. Working solely with the science available two thousand years ago, Epicurus observed that nothing ever arises from nothing, and nothing is ever completely destroyed to nothing. From this Epicurus deduced the existence of atoms - elemental particles moving through empty space from which over time all things are made and return. Given that nothing we observe ever comes into existence except through pre-existing atoms, Epicurus concluded that the universe as a whole has always existed, and that while bodies come and go, there was never a time before the universe as a whole came into being.
2. Given that the universe has always existed, we can firmly reject the contention that the universe was created at some point in time by supernatural forces. All that we see around us is a result of the natural movement of atoms through void over time. This does not mean that *only* the atoms are real, however, because Nature tells us that bodies made from atoms are also real. More than anything else, this commitment to the true reality of Nature, and the rejection of all notions of the supernatural, is the starting point for everything else in the Epicurean worldview.
3. As Epicurus wrote to Herodotus: "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." (Bailey - line 38) This is the way Epicurus teaches us to reason - always stating the evidence behind our conclusions, and never accepting any possibilities based on pure speculation or wishful thinking. The atomic basis of the universe explains how all that we see around us came into existence neither randomly or chaotically, but *naturally* as a result of elemental particles moving through space. The properties of atoms, and not the dictates of any supernatural forces, determines what can, and what cannot, come into being.
4. Citations:
  1. Epicurus to Herodotus, line 38
    1. Bailey: "[N]othing 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. "

## 2. Lucretius 1:146

1. Bailey: "This terror then, this darkness of the mind, must needs be scattered not by the rays of the sun and the gleaming shafts of day, but by the outer view and the inner law of nature; whose first rule shall take its start for us from this, that nothing is ever begotten of nothing by divine will."
5. *Notes:* A more precise translation than Bailey renders would likely be: "Nothing can be created from that which did not previously exist." In general the point is that everything comes from that which already exists, meaning that nothing comes from that which does not already exist.
6. [Discussion Forum](#)

## 2. The Universe Is Infinite In Size And Eternal In Time And Has No Gods Over It.

1. Once Epicurus determined that the universe results from atoms moving naturally through void, he reasoned that the universe could not exist if the atoms were infinite in number but space were limited in size. If that were so, everything would be close-packed and nothing could move. Likewise, the universe could not exist if the atoms were limited in number but space were unlimited in size. If that were so, the atoms would never combine into bodies, any more that debris floating on a vast ocean could ever come together to form solid objects. Epicurus therefore deduced that universe is infinite in size - both the number of atoms and the extent of space are infinite in extent.
2. From this Epicurus concluded that there can be nothing "outside" the universe as a whole, and so everything that exists is a part of the universe if it exists at all. This conclusion eliminates the possibility of supernatural forces existing "over" or "outside" the universe, and it focuses our attention on the tremendous implications of infinity. Given the infinity of atoms and space, all combinations of atoms which are possible can be expected to come into existence an infinite number of times and places. This does not mean that "anything" is possible, because some combinations of atoms are physically impossible. We know, for example, that there are no "Centaur's," or "Supernatural Gods," because it is Nature itself which sets the limits between what is possible and what is impossible.
3. As Epicurus wrote to Herodotus: "These brief sayings, if all these points are borne in mind, afford a sufficient outline for our understanding of the nature of existing things. Furthermore, there are infinite worlds both like and unlike this world of ours. For the atoms being infinite in number, as was proved already, are borne on far out into space. For those atoms, which are of such nature that a world could be created out of them or made by them, have not been used up either on one world or on a limited number of worlds, nor again on all the worlds which are alike, or on those which are different from these. So that there nowhere exists an obstacle to the infinite number of the worlds." (Bailey, at 45).
4. Major Implications:
  1. The universe is infinite in size.
  2. The universe is eternal in time - As a whole has always existed and will always exist.
  3. Infinity allows things that are possible - such as the earth - to occur an infinite number of times.
  4. Life exists in an infinite number of places throughout the universe.
  5. Supernatural gods do not exist.
5. Citations:
  1. The universe is infinite in size.
    1. Lucretius Book One - [951] But since I have taught that the most solid bodies of matter fly about for ever unvanquished through the ages, come now, let us unfold, whether there be a certain limit to their full sum or not; and likewise the void that we have discovered, or room or space, in which all things are carried on, let us see clearly whether it is all altogether bounded or spreads out limitless and immeasurably deep.
    2. [958] The whole universe then is bounded in no direction of its ways; for then it would be bound to have an extreme point. Now it is seen that nothing can have an extreme point, unless there be something beyond to bound it, so that there is seen to be a spot further than which the nature of our sense cannot follow it. As it is, since we must admit that there is nothing outside the whole sum, it has not an extreme point, it lacks therefore

bound and limit. Nor does it matter in which quarter of it you take your stand; so true is it that, whatever place every man takes up, he leaves the whole boundless just as much on every side.

3. [968] Moreover, suppose now that all space were created finite, if one were to run on to the end, to its furthest coasts, and throw a flying dart, would you have it that that dart, hurled with might and main, goes on whither it is sped and flies afar, or do you think that something can check and bar its way? For one or the other you must needs admit and choose. Yet both shut off your escape and constrain you to grant that the universe spreads out free from limit. For whether there is something to check it and bring it about that it arrives not whither it was sped, nor plants itself in the goal, or whether it fares forward, it set not forth from the end. In this way I will press on, and wherever you shall set the furthest coasts, I shall ask what then becomes of the dart. It will come to pass that nowhere can a bound be set and room for flight ever prolongs the chance of flight. Lastly, before our eyes one thing is seen to bound another; air is as a wall between the hills, and mountains between tracts of air, land bounds the sea, and again sea bounds all lands; yet the universe in truth there is nothing to limit outside.
  4. [984] Moreover, if all the space in the whole universe were shut in on all sides, and were created with borders determined, and had been bounded, then the store of matter would have flowed together with solid weight from all sides to the bottom, nor could anything be carried on beneath the canopy of the sky, nor would there be sky at all, nor the light of the sun, since in truth all matter would lie idle piled together by sinking down from limitless time. But as it is, no rest, we may be sure, has been granted to the bodies of the first-beginnings, because there is no bottom at all, whither they may, as it were, flow together, and make their resting-place. All things are for ever carried on in ceaseless movement from all sides, and bodies of matter, are even stirred up and supplied from beneath out of limitless space.
  5. [998] Lastly, one thing is seen before our eyes to be the limit of another; air separates hills and mountains air, earth bounds sea and contrariwise the sea is the boundary of all lands; the universe, however, has nothing outside to be its limit.
2. The universe as a whole has always existed and will always exist.
    1. *Epicurus to Herodotus* - 37 - Having made these points clear, we must now consider things imperceptible to the senses. First of all, that 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. And again, if that which disappears were destroyed into that which did not exist, all things would have perished, since that into which they were dissolved would not exist. Furthermore, the universe always was such as it is now, and always will be the same. For there is nothing into which it changes: for outside the universe there is nothing which could come into it and bring about the change.
    2. *Velleius in Cicero's On the Nature of the Gods* - 1:IX. But I would demand of you both, why these world-builders started up so suddenly, and lay dormant for so many ages? For we are not to conclude that, if there was no world, there were therefore no ages. I do not now speak of such ages as are finished by a certain number of days and nights in annual courses; for I acknowledge that those could not be without the revolution of the world; but there was a certain eternity from infinite time, not measured by any circumscription of seasons; but how that was in space we cannot understand, because we cannot possibly have even the slightest idea of time before time was.
  3. Infinity allows things that are possible - such as the earth - to occur an unlimited number of times.
    1. *Velleius, in Cicero's On The Nature of The Gods*, XIX - Moreover, there is the supremely potent principle of infinity, which claims the closest and most careful study....
    2. *Epicurus to Herodotus* 45 - These brief sayings, if all these points are borne in mind, afford a sufficient outline for our understanding of the nature of existing things. Furthermore, there are infinite worlds both like and unlike this world of ours. For the atoms being infinite in number, as was proved already, are borne on far out into space.

For those atoms, which are of such nature that a world could be created out of them or made by them, have not been used up either on one world or on a limited number of worlds, nor again on all the worlds which are alike, or on those which are different from these. So that there nowhere exists an obstacle to the infinite number of the worlds.

3. *Lucretius Book 2, Bailey: [522]* And since I have taught this much, I will hasten to link on a truth which holds to it and wins belief from it, that the first-beginnings of things, which are formed with a shape like to one another, are in number infinite. For since the difference of forms is limited, it must needs be that those which are alike are unlimited, or else that the sum of matter is created limited, which I have proved not to be, showing in my verses that the tiny bodies of matter from everlasting always keep up the sum of things, as the team of blows is harnessed on unbroken on every side. [532] For in that you see that certain animals are more rare, and perceive that nature is less fruitful in them, yet in another quarter and spot, in some distant lands, there may be many in that kind, and so the tale is made up; even as in the race of four-footed beasts we see that elephants with their snaky hands come first of all, by whose many thousands India is embattled with a bulwark of ivory, so that no way can be found into its inner parts: so great is the multitude of those beasts, whereof we see but a very few samples. [541] But still, let me grant this too, let there be, if you will, some one thing unique, alone in the body of its birth, to which there is not a fellow in the whole wide world; yet unless there is an unlimited stock of matter, from which it might be conceived and brought to birth, it will not be able to be created, nor, after that, to grow on and be nourished.
4. *Lucretius Book 3 Bailey - [843]* And even if the nature of mind and the power of soul has feeling, after it has been rent asunder from our body, yet it is naught to us, who are made one by the mating and marriage of body and soul. Nor, if time should gather together our substance after our decease and bring it back again as it is now placed, if once more the light of life should be vouchsafed to us, yet, even were that done, it would not concern us at all, when once the remembrance of our former selves were snapped in twain. And even now we care not at all for the selves that we once were, not at all are we touched by any torturing pain for them. For when you look back over all the lapse of immeasurable time that now is gone, and think how manifold are the motions of matter, you could easily believe this too, that these same seeds, whereof we now are made, have often been placed in the same order as they are now; and yet we cannot recall that in our mind's memory; for in between lies a break in life, and all the motions have wandered everywhere far astray from sense.
5. *Diogenes of Oinoanda Letter to Antipater - Fr. 63* So, as I was saying, having had my appetite most keenly whetted by all the advantage of the voyage, I shall try to meet you as soon as winter had ended, sailing first either to Athens or to Chalcis and Boeotia. But, since this is uncertain, both on account of the changeability and inconstancy of our fortunes and on account of my old age besides, I am sending you, in accordance with your request, the arguments concerning an infinite number of worlds. And you have enjoyed good fortune in the matter; for, before your letter arrived, Theodoridas of Lindus, a member of our school not unknown to you, who is still a novice in philosophy, was dealing with the same doctrine. And this doctrine came to be better articulated as a result of being turned over between the two of us face to face; for our agreements and disagreements with one another, and also our questionings, rendered the inquiry into the object of our search more precise. I am therefore sending you that dialogue, Antipater, so that you may be in the same position as if you yourself were present, like Theodoridas, agreeing about some matters and making further inquiries in cases where you had doubts. The dialogue began something like this: «Diogenes,» said Theodoridas, «that the [doctrine laid down] by Epicurus on an infinite number of worlds is true [I am confident], ..... as [if] ..... Epicurus .....
4. Life exists in an infinite number of places throughout the universe.
  1. *Lucretius [2:1048]* First of all, we find that in every direction everywhere, and on either side, above and below, through all the universe, there is no limit, as I have shown, and



indeed the truth cries out for itself and the nature of the deep shines clear. Now in no way must we think it likely, since towards every side is infinite empty space, and seeds in unnumbered numbers in the deep universe fly about in many ways driven on in everlasting motion, that this one world and sky was brought to birth, but that beyond it all those bodies of matter do naught; above all, since this world was so made by nature, as the seeds of things themselves of their own accord, jostling from time to time, were driven together in many ways, rashly, idly, and in vain, and at last those united, which, suddenly cast together, might become ever and anon the beginnings of great things, of earth and sea and sky, and the race of living things. Wherefore, again and again, you must needs confess that there are here and there other gatherings of matter, such as is this, which the ether holds in its greedy grip.

2. Lucretius [2:1067] Moreover, when there is much matter ready to hand, when space is there, and no thing, no cause delays, things must, we may be sure, be carried on and completed. As it is, if there is so great a store of seeds as the whole life of living things could not number, and if the same force and nature abides which could throw together the seeds of things, each into their place in like manner as they are thrown together here, it must needs be that you confess that there are other worlds in other regions, and diverse races of men and tribes of wild beasts.
3. *Lucretius Book 2: 1077 - Bailey:* [1077] This there is too that in the universe there is nothing single, nothing born unique and growing unique and alone, but it is always of some tribe, and there are many things in the same race. First of all turn your mind to living creatures; you will find that in this wise is begotten the race of wild beasts that haunts the mountains, in this wise the stock of men, in this wise again the dumb herds of scaly fishes, and all the bodies of flying fowls. Wherefore you must confess in the same way that sky and earth and sun, moon, sea, and all else that exists, are not unique, but rather of number numberless; inasmuch as the deep-fixed boundary-stone of life awaits these as surely, and they are just as much of a body that has birth, as every race which is here on earth, abounding in things after its kind.
5. Supernatural gods did not create the universe, do not rule over the universe, and do not exist at all. Any "gods" that exist are within the universe and entirely natural.
  1. Epicurus To Herodotus, line 77 (Bailey): Furthermore, the motions of the heavenly bodies and their turnings and eclipses and risings and settings, and kindred phenomena to these, must not be thought to be due to any being who controls and ordains or has ordained them and at the same time enjoys perfect bliss together with immortality (for trouble and care and anger and kindness are not consistent with a life of blessedness, but these things come to pass where there is weakness and fear and dependence on neighbors).
  2. Epicurus to Pythocles, line 97 (Bailey): Next the regularity of the periods of the heavenly bodies must be understood in the same way as such regularity is seen in some of the events that happen on earth. And do not let the divine nature be introduced at any point into these considerations, but let it be preserved free from burdensome duties and in entire blessedness.
  3. **Lucretius Book 2 - 1090 (Bailey):** "And if you learn this surely, and cling to it, nature is seen, free at once, and quit of her proud rulers, doing all things of her own accord alone, **without control of gods.**" *Humphries* - Holding this knowledge, you can't help but see, That nature has no tyrants over her, But always acts of her own will; **she has no part of any godhead whatsoever.**" *Brown 1743* - "These things, if you rightly apprehend, Nature will appear free in her operations, **wholly from under the power of domineering deities**, and to act all things voluntarily, and of herself, without the assistance of gods." *Munro* - "If you well apprehend and keep in mind these things, nature free at once and rid of her haughty lords is seen to do all things spontaneously of herself without the meddling of the gods." *M.F. Smith* - "Once you obtain a firm grasp of these facts, you see that nature is her own mistress and is exempt from the oppression of arrogant despots, accomplishing everything by herself spontaneously and

independently and free from the jurisdiction of the gods. "

4. *Notes:* Alternate ways to consider this would include: "There are no supernatural causes," or "The gods, however they are defined, have no impact on the cosmos," or "If gods exist, they don't control the universe nor do they bestow blessings or curses on humans." The point is that there are no supernatural, divine, or mystical forces that intervene in or create the universe.

6. [Discussion Forum](#)

7. Dedicated Wiki Page: [The Universe Is Infinite And Eternal And Has No Gods Over It](#)

### 3. The Nature of Gods Contains Nothing That Is Inconsistent With Incorruption And Blessedness.

1. In his characteristic commitment to pursuing truth wherever it leads, Epicurus did not stop at denying the existence of supernatural places or gods. Epicurus observed that we see here on Earth that Nature never makes a single thing of a kind, and that things of a kind are distributed over a spectrum of primitive through advanced conditions. Epicurus therefore reasoned that from this that the universe is filled with other Earths, and other types of living beings, some of which are less advanced and some more advanced than humans. Here on earth we see that life struggles to extend its life and its happiness, and Epicurus deduced that throughout the universe there are beings even more successful at this than humans. We should therefore expect that the universe contains beings which are *totally* happy and *totally* deathless, and these beings deserve to be regarded as "gods," when we consider how that term should be accurately defined.
2. Even though we do not observe such beings here on earth with our eyes and ears and other senses, our minds are disposed by Nature to realize that such beings are possible. We as humans benefit from identifying these beings as models which we can and do emulate to the extent possible as part of our natural striving to live more happy and healthy lives. Even more importantly, the identification of "gods" having no characteristics inconsistent with blessedness and imperishability enables us to grasp firmly that we have nothing to fear from such beings, as they are exclusively concerned with their own happiness.
3. As Epicurus said to Menoeceus, "First of all believe that god is a being immortal and blessed, even as the common idea of a god is engraved on men's minds, and do not assign to him anything alien to his incorruption or ill-suited to his blessedness: but believe about him everything that can uphold his blessedness and incorruption. For gods there are, since the knowledge of them is by clear vision. But they are not such as the many believe them to be: for indeed they do not consistently represent them as they believe them to be. And the impious man is not he who popularly denies the gods of the many, but he who attaches to the gods the beliefs of the many. For the statements of the many about the gods are not conceptions derived from sensation, but false suppositions, according to which the greatest misfortunes befall the wicked and the greatest blessings (the good) by the gift of the gods. For men being accustomed always to their own virtues welcome those like themselves, but regard all that is not of their nature as alien." (Bailey at 123)
4. Citations:
  1. Epicurus to Menoeceus [123] The things which I used unceasingly to commend to you, these do and practice, considering them to be the first principles of the good life. First of all believe that god is a being immortal and blessed, even as the common idea of a god is engraved on men's minds, and do not assign to him anything alien to his incorruption or ill-suited to his blessedness: but believe about him everything that can uphold his blessedness and incorruption. For gods there are, since the knowledge of them is by clear vision. But they are not such as the many believe them to be: for indeed they do not consistently represent them as they believe them to be. And the impious man is not he who popularly denies the gods of the many, but he who attaches to the gods the beliefs of the many. [124] For the statements of the many about the gods are not conceptions derived from sensation, but false suppositions, according to which the greatest misfortunes befall the wicked and the greatest blessings (the good) by the gift of the gods. For men being accustomed always to their own virtues welcome

those like themselves, but regard all that is not of their nature as alien.

2. Lucretius 6:43. Brown: "The various wonders men behold in the earth and in the heavens perplex their minds, trembling and in suspense, and make them humble with the fear of the gods, and press them groveling to the ground; and being ignorant of the cause of these events, they are forced to confess the sovereignty and give up everything to the command of these deities. And the effects they are unable to account for by reason they imagine were brought about by the influence of the gods; for such as well know that the gods lead a life of tranquility and ease, if they should still wonder by what power the world is carried on, especially in the the things they see over their heads in the heavens above, they relapse again into their old superstition; they raise over themselves a set of cruel tyrants who, the wretches fancy, can do all things, because they know nothing of what can or what cannot be, or by what means a finite power is fixed to every being, and a boundary immovable which it cannot pass. Such are more liable to mistakes and to be carried widely from the right way. [68] Unless you purge your mind of such conceits, and banish them from your breast, and forbear to think unworthily of the gods, by charging them with things that break their peace, those sacred deities you will believe are always angry and offended with you; not that the supreme power of the gods can be so ruffled as to be eager to punish severely in their resentments, but because you fancy those beings, who enjoy a perfect peace in themselves, are subject to anger and the extravagances of revenge: and therefore you will no more approach their shrines with an easy mind, no more in tranquility and peace will you be able to receive the images, the representations of their divine forms, that form from their pure bodies and strike powerfully upon the minds of men: From hence you may collect what a wretched life you are to lead."
3. Lucretius 3:14-30 (Johnston): "For once that philosophy which arose in your godlike mind has begun to speak about the nature of things, then terrors in the mind disperse, the world's walls fall open, I see what is going on in all the void, the majesty and calm habitations of the gods reveal themselves in places where no winds disturb, no clouds bring showers, no white snow falls congealed with bitter frost to harm them, the always cloudless aether vaults above, and they smile, as far and as wide as the light spreads out. Then, too, nature provides plentiful supplies of all things – their peace is not disturbed by anything at any time. The regions of Acheron, by contrast, are nowhere to be seen, and earth presents no barrier to a full view of all events going on throughout the void lying underfoot. Godlike pleasure and awe take hold of me up there with these things, to think that nature, through your genius, is laid out so clearly, so openly exposed on every side."
4. [Discussion Forum](#).
5. Dedicated Wiki Page: [Gods Have No Attributes Inconsistent With Blessedness And Incorruptibility](#)

## 4. Death Is Nothing To Us.

1. Given that the universe is entirely natural, contains nothing that is supernatural, we know that no gods have endowed us with immortal souls that can survive death. Epicurus therefore concluded that consciousness is an attribute of the body, and cannot survive outside the body, so *our lives end forever at death*. This obviously means also that there can be no punishment to fear, or reward to hope for, after death. This knowledge, rather than being cause for despair, frees us to pursue happiness. We are motivated by this, rather than depressed, because the realization that death is *nothingness* to us means that the reverse is also true: life is *everything* to us, and we should pursue it with all the vigor we can muster.
2. The confidence that had no existence for the eternity that passed before we were born, and that we will have no existence for the eternity that will pass after we die, spurs us to focus on making the best use of the time that *is* available to us. As Epicurus wrote in Principal Doctrine 2, "[Death is nothing to us](#) , for that which is dissolved is without sensation; and that which lacks sensation is nothing to us." Not only does Epicurean doctrine provide motivation to live in the here and now, it gives us strength to face the many painful challenges of life. Epicurus taught that pain is manageable if it continues for very long, and that pain is short if it is intense, but in no case does pain have the power to hold us in its grip



- indefinitely, because we always have the power to escape pain through death, where no punishment can reach us.
3. But be clear: life is our most valuable possession, and this is not a sanction for suicide except in the most extreme of circumstances. Epicurus taught that it is a small man indeed who has many reasons for ending his own life. Instead, it is a call to bravery in facing adversity, because as Epicurus wrote to Menoeceus, "There is nothing terrible in life for the man who has truly comprehended that there is nothing terrible in not living."
  4. Major Implications:
    1. Consciousness ends forever at death.
    2. There is no life after death.
    3. There is no punishment or reward after death.
    4. The manner of our death in terms of whether the steps leading up to it are painful, and the timing of our death, in terms of how long we live, are significant to us. This doctrine focuses on what happens (nothing) to the individual after death.
    5. The reverse is also true: Given that for an eternity before birth and for an eternity after death we have no life at all, our life while we have it is extremely important to us.
  5. Citations:
    1. Epicurus' Principal Doctrine 2
      1. Bailey: "[Death is nothing to us](#), for that which is dissolved is without sensation; and that which lacks sensation is nothing to us."
    2. Epicurus to Menoeceus Line 125
      1. Bailey: "For there is nothing terrible in life for the man who has truly comprehended that there is nothing terrible in not living. So that the man speaks but idly who says that he fears death not because it will be painful when it comes, but because it is painful in anticipation. For that which gives no trouble when it comes is but an empty pain in anticipation. So death, the most terrifying of ills, is nothing to us, since so long as we exist, death is not with us; but when death comes, then we do not exist. It does not then concern either the living or the dead, since for the former it is not, and the latter are no more."
    3. Lucretius 3:912
      1. Bailey: [912] This too men often do, when they are lying at the board, and hold their cups in their hands, and shade their faces with garlands: they say from the heart, 'Brief is this enjoyment for us puny men: soon it will be past, nor ever thereafter will it be ours to call it back.' As though in death this were to be foremost among their ills, that thirst would burn the poor wretches and parch them with its drought, or that there would abide with them a yearning for any other thing. For never does any man long for himself and life, when mind and body alike rest in slumber. For all we care sleep may then be never-ending, nor does any yearning for ourselves then beset us. And yet at that time those first-beginnings stray not at all far through our frame away from the motions that bring sense, when a man springs up from sleep and gathers himself together. Much less then should we think that death is to us, if there can be less than what we see to be nothing; for at our dying there follows a greater turmoil and scattering abroad of matter, nor does any one wake and rise again, whom the chill breach of life has once overtaken.
    4. **Lucretius Book Three [560]**
      1. *Munro*: "Therefore, again and again I say, when the enveloping body has been all broken up and the vital airs have been forced out, you must admit that the senses of the mind and the soul are dissolved, since the cause of destruction is one and inseparable for both body and soul."
    5. **Lucretius Book Three [679]**
      1. *Munro*: "Wherefore, again and again I say, we must believe souls to be neither without a birth nor exempted from the law of death; for we must not believe that they could have been so completely united with our bodies, if they found their way into them from without, nor since they are so closely interwoven with them, does it appear that they can get out unharmed and unloose themselves unscathed from all the sinews and bones and joints."

6. [Discussion Forum](#)
7. Dedicated Wiki Page: [Death Is Nothing To Us](#)

## 5. There Is No Necessity To Live Under The Control Of Necessity.

1. During the brief span of life that is available to us there are no supernatural commandments to follow, and it is necessary for us to act wisely to identify the best life available to us. Therefore Epicurus held that there could be nothing more demoralizing than to think that we have no power over our actions and our future. Epicurus therefore singled out two belief systems as particularly false and harmful. The first falsehood is "Determinism" - the view that due to fate, supernatural forces, or even a purely mechanistic understanding of nature of atoms, we have no control whatsoever over our lives.
2. Epicurus realized that Determinism is not only damaging, but demonstrably false. Against such mechanistic views of the universe Epicurus advanced not only the physics of "the swerve of the atom," but he also pointed out the self-contradictory nature Determinism. Epicurus cited this self-contradiction when he wrote: "The man who says that all things come to pass by necessity cannot criticize one who denies that all things come to pass by necessity: for he admits that this too happens of necessity." (VS 40) And as a practical matter, Epicurus pointed out that we do clearly have control over the supreme choice in life: we have the ability to end our lives at any time, so nothing can compel us to *continue* to live under necessity.
3. Epicurus held that if we have the power to make this most important decision in life, we also have the power to control many other lesser aspects of life. Deterministic or fatalistic beliefs are poisons that must be avoided at all costs, so Epicurus wrote "For, indeed, it were better to follow the myths about the gods than to become a slave to the destiny of the natural philosophers: for the former suggests a hope of placating the gods by worship, whereas the latter involves a necessity which knows no placation."
4. Major Implications:
  1. "Hard determinism" is observably wrong because we can control when we exit life.
  2. This is not an invitation to conclude that suicide is a proper course because necessity rules our existence, but to the contrary an affirmation that the fact that we have the power to end our lives is an example of how necessity does not rule every aspect of our existence, implying also that not only life and death but many decisions of lesser importance are also under our control.
5. Citations:
  1. Epicurus' Vatican Saying 9
    1. Bailey: "Necessity is an evil, but [there is no necessity to live under the control of necessity](#)."
  2. Epicurus' Vatican Saying 40
    1. Bailey: "The man who says that all things come to pass by necessity cannot criticize one who denies that all things come to pass by necessity: for he admits that this too happens of necessity."
  3. Epicurus to Menoeceus Line 133
    1. Bailey: "[133] For indeed who, think you, is a better man than he who holds reverent opinions concerning the gods, and is at all times free from fear of death, and has reasoned out the end ordained by nature? He understands that the limit of good things is easy to fulfill and easy to attain, whereas the course of ills is either short in time or slight in pain; he laughs at (destiny), whom some have introduced as the mistress of all things. (He thinks that with us lies the chief power in determining events, some of which happen by necessity) and some by chance, and some are within our control; for while necessity cannot be called to account, he sees that chance is inconstant, but that which is in our control is subject to no master, and to it are naturally attached praise and blame. [134] For, indeed, it were better to follow the myths about the gods than to become a slave to the destiny of the natural philosophers: for the former suggests a hope of placating the gods by worship, whereas the latter involves a necessity which knows no placation. As to chance, he does not regard it as a god as most men do (for in a god's acts there is no disorder), nor as an uncertain cause (of all things) for he does not believe that good and

evil are given by chance to man for the framing of a blessed life, but that opportunities for great good and great evil are afforded by it. [135] He therefore thinks it better to be unfortunate in reasonable action than to prosper in unreason. For it is better in a man's actions that what is well chosen (should fail, rather than that what is ill chosen) should be successful owing to chance.

6. [Discussion Forum](#)

7. Dedicated Wiki Page: [There Is No Necessity To Live Under the Control of Necessity](#)

## 6. He Who Says "Nothing Can Be Known" Knows Nothing.

1. The second poisonous doctrine that Epicurus identified is known to us today as Radical Skepticism. Skeptics hold that *nothing* in life can be known with confidence. The Skeptics of Epicurus' time argued, primarily due to their contention that the senses cannot be trusted, that we can never be certain of anything, and at most some things are "probable." Even something as obvious as the expectation that if you jump off a canyon wall you will fall to your death is not certain to such philosophers, it is merely "probable."
2. Epicurus saw that this confidence-destroying doctrine suffers much the same flaw as Determinism - it is self-contradictory nonsense. Anyone who is ridiculous and absurd enough to advocate that "nothing can be known" is taking you for a fool, because he expecting you to accept that he *knows* that "nothing can be known." Epicurus held that that such arguments should not be taken seriously, any more than you should seriously accept the argument from a living person that it would be better never to have been born.
3. Lucretius spoke for Epicurus in writing: " Again, if any one thinks that nothing is known, he knows not whether that can be known either, since he admits that he knows nothing. Against him then I will refrain from joining issue, who plants himself with his head in the place of his feet. And yet were I to grant that he knows this too, yet I would ask this one question; since he has never before seen any truth in things, whence does he know what is knowing, and not knowing each in turn, what thing has begotten the concept of the true and the false, what thing has proved that the doubtful differs from the certain? [Book 4:469]
4. Major Implications
  1. Radical skepticism is self-contradictory nonsense.
5. Citations:
  1. Lucretius 4:469
    1. [469] Again, if any one thinks that nothing is known, he knows not whether that can be known either, since he admits that he knows nothing. Against him then I will refrain from joining issue, who plants himself with his head in the place of his feet. And yet were I to grant that he knows this too, yet I would ask this one question; since he has never before seen any truth in things, whence does he know what is knowing, and not knowing each in turn, what thing has begotten the concept of the true and the false, what thing has proved that the doubtful differs from the certain?
  2. Diogenes of Oinoanda, Fragment 5
    1. Smith: "Now Aristotle and those who hold the same Peripatetic views as Aristotle say that nothing is scientifically knowable, because things are continually in flux and, on account of the rapidity of the flux, evade our apprehension. We on the other hand acknowledge their flux, but not its being so rapid that the nature of each thing [is] at no time apprehensible by sense-perception. And indeed [in no way would the upholders of] the view under discussion have been able to say (and this is just what they do [maintain] that [at one time] this is [white] and this black, while [at another time] neither this is [white nor] that black, [if] they had not had [previous] knowledge of the nature of both white and black."
6. [Discussion Forum](#)
7. Dedicated Wiki Page: [He Who Says That Nothing Can Be Known Knows Nothing](#)

## 7. All Sensations Are "True."

1. If Skepticism and Determinism are false, what did Epicurus advocate instead? Epicurus saw that much of the error of conventional thinkers arises from their contention that the faculties given us by nature are incapable of ascertaining truth, and that we need divine revelation or abstract syllogistic logic to determine what is really true. Epicurus vigorously rejected these assertions, and held that the faculties given to us by nature - the five senses, the feelings of pleasure and pain, and the mental anticipatory faculty of prolepsis - are fully sufficient for living in accord with nature.
2. Epicurus identified that the perceptions of our natural faculties are not at all the same thing as the opinions which we form after processing those perceptions in our minds. Our natural faculties report their perceptions to the mind "truly," in the sense of "honestly," without adding any overlay of opinion of their own. Neither the eyes nor the ears nor any other faculty have any memory, and they simply relay to the mind what they perceive at any moment. It is in *the mind* where the perceptions are stored and turned into *opinions* about what is being perceived, and it is *the mind* which must undertake the task of processing the perceptions accurately. The eyes do not tell our minds what they see and the ears do not tell our minds what they hear, and so on -- truth and error is in the mind, not in the faculties given by nature.
3. The task of determining truth is that of the mind, which requires that we understand both nature and how our faculties process the perceptions provided to us by nature, because our faculties alone are our direct contacts with outside reality. As Lucretius wrote as to our "feelings" in general: "For that body exists is declared by the feeling which all share alike; and unless faith in this feeling be firmly grounded at once and prevail, there will be naught to which we can make appeal about things hidden, so as to prove aught by the reasoning of the mind." (Book 1:418)
4. Find out more in our [All Sensations Are True](#) Wiki page, and discuss this in our [Canonics Forum](#).
5. Major Implications: Error does not occur in the senses, but in the mind in forming opinions about what the sensations are reporting.
6. Citations:
  1. Epicurus to Herodotus 38 - [We] must keep all our investigations in accord with our sensations, and in particular with the immediate apprehensions whether of the mind or of any one of the instruments of judgment, and likewise in accord with the feelings existing in us, in order that we may have indications whereby we may judge both the problem of sense perception and the unseen. ... Moreover, the universe is bodies and space: for that bodies exist, sense itself witnesses in the experience of all men, and in accordance with the evidence of sense we must of necessity judge of the imperceptible by reasoning, as I have already said.
  2. Lucretius 1:418 - For that body exists is declared by the feeling which all share alike; and unless faith in this feeling be firmly grounded at once and prevail, there will be naught to which we can make appeal about things hidden, so as to prove aught by the reasoning of the mind.
  3. Lucretius 4:478 - You will find that the concept of the true is begotten first from the senses, and that the senses cannot be gainsaid. For something must be found with a greater surety, which can of its own authority refute the false by the true. Next then, what must be held to be of greater surety than sense? Will reason, sprung from false sensation, avail to speak against the senses, when it is wholly sprung from the senses? For unless they are true, all reason too becomes false.
  4. Torquatus speaking for Epicurus in On Ends 1:64 - Moreover, unless the constitution of the world is thoroughly understood, we shall by no means be able to justify the verdicts of our senses. Further, our mental perceptions all arise from our sensations; and if these are all to be true, as the system of Epicurus proves to us, then only will cognition and perception become possible. Now those who invalidate sensations and say that perception is altogether impossible, cannot even clear the way for this very argument of theirs when they have thrust the senses aside. Moreover, when cognition and knowledge have been invalidated, every principle concerning the conduct of life and the performance of its business becomes invalidated.  
Epicurus to Herodotus 51 - (Yonge) "And, on the other side, error could not be possible, if we did not receive some other motion also, a sort of initiative of intelligence connected, it is true, with direct representation, but going beyond that representative. These conceptions being

connected with direct perception which produces the representation, but going beyond it."

5. Epicurus On Nature Book 28, Sedley trans, fr. 13, col. 6 inf. - "I also frequently reflected that if, when I raised difficulties which someone might have turned against us, he should claim that what used to be assimilated from ordinary language was the same as used to be practiced in the written work, many might well conclude that in those days false opinion was represented in that language, whether through an empirical process, an image-based process, or a theoretical process, or through a non-empirical process, not following one of our current divisions, but simply arising from an internal movement; but that now, because the means of expression is adapted to additional ends, discrimination provides a lead towards the truth. However, let no one ever try to get even with you by linking with you any trace of this suspicion; but [turn] to the entire faculty of empirical reasoning..."
6. (Aetius 4.8.10) "Leucippus, Democritus, and Epicurus say that sensation and thought arise in the soul from images that approach from outside, for neither of these can occur to anyone without the image falling upon him."
7. (Aetius 4.9.5 - 6) "Epicurus says that every sensation and every impression is true, but of the opinions some are true and some false; and sensation gives us a false picture in one respect only, namely with regard to objects of thought; but the impression does so in two respects, for there is impression of both sense objects and objects of thought. Parmenides, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Democritus, Epicurus, and Heraclides say that the particular sensations of their own object occur in accordance with the matching sized of the pores, each of the sense objects corresponding to each sense."
8. Dedicated Wiki Page: [All Sensations Are True](#)

## 8. Virtue Is Not Absolute Or An End In Itself - All Good And Evil Consists In Sensation.

1. Skepticism and Determinism do not exhaust the list of lies and errors plaguing humanity. Epicurus saw that false priests and philosophers have erected a false ideal - "virtue" - as the goal of life. Epicurean philosophy has shocked the sensibilities of conventional thinkers for two thousand years by committing itself boldly to the conclusion that "virtue" is not absolute or an end in itself, and that Nature alone provides us the proper guide of life.
2. As with "gods," Epicurus held that "virtue" is a useful concept, but one that has been drastically misunderstood. True "virtue" is not something given by divine revelation, or through logical analysis of ideal forms, but is instead simply a set of tools for living the best life possible. Epicurus held that virtue is not the same for all people, or the same at all times and places, but that instead what is virtuous varies with circumstance, according to whether the action is instrumental for achieving happiness. Good and evil are not absolutes, but instead consist in sensation, as Epicurus explained to Menoeceus: "Become accustomed to the belief that [death is nothing to us](#). For all good and evil consists in sensation, but death is deprivation of sensation. And therefore a right understanding that [death is nothing to us](#) makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not because it adds to it an infinite span of time, but because it takes away the craving for immortality." (124)
3. Likewise, even something as highly regarded as *justice* is not absolute, but observable only in practical effects: "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." (PD36)
4. Find out more in our Virtue Is Not Absolute Or An End In Itself Wiki page, and discuss this in our [Ethics Forum](#).
5. Major Implications:
  1. Absolute ideas of good and evil, as well as virtue, are not valid because such things do not have an independent existence in reality.
  2. Good and evil are relevant only to living beings.



3. Justice is relative to the individuals involved and is not the same for all people at all times, and at all places.
4. What it just at some times for some persons will change with circumstances.
5. Justice is but one example of a "virtue," and just as there is no absolute justice there is no absolute virtue.
6. Citations:
  1. **Letter to Menoeceus [124]**
    1. *Bailey*: "Become accustomed to the belief that death is nothing to us. **For all good and evil consists in sensation**, but death is deprivation of sensation. And therefore a right understanding that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not because it adds to it an infinite span of time, but because it takes away the craving for immortality."
    2. *Hicks*: "Accustom thyself to believe that death is nothing to us, **for good and evil imply sentience**, and death is the privation of all sentience; therefore a right understanding that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not by adding to life an illimitable time, but by taking away the yearning after immortality."
    3. *Inwood-Gerson*: "Get used to believing that death is nothing to us. **For all good and bad consists in sense-experience**, and death is the privation of sense-experience. Hence, a correct knowledge of the fact that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life a matter for contentment, not by adding a limitless time [to life] but by removing the longing for immortality."
    4. *Epicurus Wiki (Epicurism.info)*: "Accustom yourself to thinking that death is no concern to us. All things good and bad are experienced through sensation, but sensation ceases at death. So death is nothing to us, and to know the truth of this makes a mortal life happy -- not by adding infinite time, but by removing the desire for immortality."
    5. Epicurus' Principal Doctrine 33
      1. *Bailey*: "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."
    6. Epicurus' Principal Doctrine 36
      1. *Bailey*: "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."
    7. Epicurus' Principal Doctrine 37
      1. *Bailey*: "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."
    8. Epicurus' Principal Doctrine 38:
      1. *Bailey*: "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."
7. [Discussion Forum](#)

## 9. Pleasure is The Guide of Life.

1. As if Epicurus had not sufficiently shocked conventional sensibilities by dismissing the existence of supernatural gods, and rejecting the pursuit of virtue as an end in itself, Epicurus tripped down on his philosophic revolution by holding that "Pleasure" is not something disreputable, but is indeed the Guide of life. Pointing out that in a universe in which there are no supernatural gods or absolute standards of virtue, it is still necessary to determine how we should live. Epicurus of course looked to Nature, and saw that Nature gives living beings only Pleasure and Pain by which to determine what to choose and what to avoid
2. Flagrantly disregarding the wrath of the orthodox, Epicurus proclaimed Nature quite literally gave humanity "nothing" but Pleasure and Pain as guides. While there are many shades of feeling, all of them resolve down to being categorized pleasurable or painful, *and there are no in-between, mixed, or third alternatives*. As Epicurus' biographer summarized, "The internal sensations they say are two, pleasure and pain, which occur to every living creature, and the one is akin to nature and the other alien: by means of these two choice and avoidance are determined." (Diogenes Laertius 10:34)
3. Epicurus did not consider this to be wordplay or wishful thinking, but the foundation on which to erect the highest and best way of life. Epicurean philosophy always looks to Nature rather than to wishful thinking, and so the Epicureans taught: "Moreover, seeing that if you deprive a man of his senses there is nothing left to him, it is inevitable that Nature herself should be the arbiter of what is in accord with or opposed to nature. Now what facts does she grasp or with what facts is her decision to seek or avoid any particular thing concerned, unless the facts of pleasure and pain? (Torquatus in Cicero's On Ends 1:30)
4. Major Implications:
  1. Neither supernatural gods nor ideal forms nor logic or rationalism are the guides of life.
5. Citations:
  1. As to the definition of Pleasure, see the following citations and the related answer in the [FAQ List](#):
    1. Pleasure is one of the feelings, of which there are only two - pleasure and pain:
      1. **Diogenes Laertius 10:34** : *"The internal sensations they say are two, pleasure and pain, which occur to every living creature, and the one is akin to nature and the other alien: by means of these two choice and avoidance are determined."*
      2. **On Ends 1:30** : *"Moreover, seeing that if you deprive a man of his senses there is nothing left to him, it is inevitable that nature herself should be the arbiter of what is in accord with or opposed to nature. Now what facts does she grasp or with what facts is her decision to seek or avoid any particular thing concerned, unless the facts of pleasure and pain?"*
    2. Given that there are only two feelings, you are feeling one or the other at all times if you are feeling anything at all:
      1. **On Ends 1:38**: *Therefore Epicurus refused to allow that there is any middle term between pain and pleasure; what was thought by some to be a middle term, the absence of all pain, was not only itself pleasure, but the highest pleasure possible. Surely any one who is conscious of his own condition must needs be either in a state of pleasure or in a state of pain. Epicurus thinks that the highest degree of pleasure is defined by the removal of all pain, so that pleasure may afterwards exhibit diversities and differences but is incapable of increase or extension."*
    3. As to pleasure and pain being separate and unmixed in any particular feeling:
      1. **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."*
    4. All of those taken together show that Epicurus did not limit pleasure to what we generally think of as sensory stimulation, but included within pleasure all states of awareness of life that are not felt to be painful. You can see an explicit example of that here in regard

to discussion of one's hand in its normal state of affairs, whenever it is not in some affirmative pain:

1. **On Ends 1:39** : *For if that were the only pleasure which tickled the senses, as it were, if I may say so, and which overflowed and penetrated them with a certain agreeable feeling, then even a hand could not be content with freedom from pain without some pleasing motion of pleasure. But if the highest pleasure is, as Epicurus asserts, to be free from pain, then, O Chrysippus, the first admission was correctly made to you, that the hand, when it was in that condition, was in want of nothing; but the second admission was not equally correct, that if pleasure were a good it would wish for it. For it would not wish for it for this reason, inasmuch as whatever is free from pain is in pleasure.*
5. This position is asserted by comparing the conditions of two people who are not in pain, but who are seemingly in very different conditions: A host at a party who is pouring wine to a guest who is drinking it. Here is the example:
  1. **On Ends 2:16** : *"This, O Torquatus, is doing violence to one's senses; it is wresting out of our minds the understanding of words with which we are imbued; for who can avoid seeing that these three states exist in the nature of things: first, the state of being in pleasure; secondly, that of being in pain; thirdly, that of being in such a condition as we are at this moment, and you too, I imagine, that is to say, neither in pleasure nor in pain; in such pleasure, I mean, as a man who is at a banquet, or in such pain as a man who is being tortured. What! do you not see a vast multitude of men who are neither rejoicing nor suffering, but in an intermediate state between these two conditions? No, indeed, said he; I say that all men who are free from pain are in pleasure, and in the greatest pleasure too. Do you, then, say that the man who, not being thirsty himself, mingles some wine for another, and the thirsty man who drinks it when mixed, are both enjoying the same pleasure?"* [Torquatus objects to the question as quibbling but the implicit answer is "yes" based on the condition of "not being thirsty" and "the thirsty man who drinks" both being conditions of pleasure.]
6. This means that Epicurus was defining all conditions of awareness where pain is not present to be pleasure. It's significant to remember "conditions of awareness" because he is not saying that a rock, which is not feeling pain, to be feeling pleasure. Only the living can feel pleasure or pain, but when you are aware of your condition all of your feelings can be categorized as either painful or pleasurable. You can see this sweeping categorization stated specifically here:
  1. **On Ends 2:9** : Cicero: "...[B]ut unless you are extraordinarily obstinate you are bound to admit that 'freedom from pain' does not mean the same thing as 'pleasure.'" Torquatus: "Well but on this point you will find me obstinate, for it is as true as any proposition can be."
  2. **On Ends 2:11**: Cicero: Still, I replied, granting that there is nothing better (that point I waive for the moment), surely it does not therefore follow that what I may call the negation of pain is the same thing as pleasure?" Torquatus: "Absolutely the same, indeed the negation of pain is a very intense pleasure, the most intense pleasure possible."
7. This is how Epicurus can say that the wise man is continuously feeling pleasure, and how he defines the absence of pain as the highest pleasure. He is not talking about the most intense stimulation, he is talking philosophically about the most pure and complete condition of pleasure where pleasure is defined as a condition where absolutely all pain is gone. The wise man is about to consider this condition to be the most complete pleasure even though it is not the most intense stimulation:
  1. **On Ends 1:56** : *By this time so much at least is plain, that the intensest pleasure or the intensest annoyance felt in the mind exerts more influence on the happiness or wretchedness of life than either feeling, when present for an equal space of time in the body. We refuse to believe, however, that when pleasure is*

*removed, grief instantly ensues, excepting when perchance pain has taken the place of the pleasure; but we think on the contrary that we experience joy on the passing away of pains, even though none of that kind of pleasure which stirs the senses has taken their place; and from this it may be understood how great a pleasure it is to be without pain. [57] But as we are elated by the blessings to which we look forward, so we delight in those which we call to memory. Fools however are tormented by the recollection of misfortunes; wise men rejoice in keeping fresh the thankful recollection of their past blessings. Now it is in the power of our wills to bury our adversity in almost unbroken forgetfulness, and to agreeably and sweetly remind ourselves of our prosperity. But when we look with penetration and concentration of thought upon things that are past, then, if those things are bad, grief usually ensues, if good, joy.*

2. **On Ends 1:62** : *But these doctrines may be stated in a certain manner so as not merely to disarm our criticism, but actually to secure our sanction. For this is the way in which Epicurus represents the wise man as continually happy; he keeps his passions within bounds; about death he is indifferent; he holds true views concerning the eternal gods apart from all dread; he has no hesitation in crossing the boundary of life, if that be the better course. Furnished with these advantages he is continually in a state of pleasure, and there is in truth no moment at which he does not experience more pleasures than pains. For he remembers the past with thankfulness, and the present is so much his own that he is aware of its importance and its agreeableness, nor is he in dependence on the future, but awaits it while enjoying the present; he is also very far removed from those defects of character which I quoted a little time ago, and when he compares the fool's life with his own, he feels great pleasure. And pains, if any befall him, have never power enough to prevent the wise man from finding more reasons for joy than for vexation.*

6. As to Pleasure being the guide of life:

1. **Lucretius Book Two [167]:**

1. *Munro*: "But some in opposition to this, ignorant of matter, believe that nature cannot without the providence of the gods, in such nice conformity to the ways of men, vary the seasons of the year and bring forth crops, aye and all the other things, which **divine pleasure, the guide of life**, prompts men to approach, escorting them in person and enticing them by her fondlings to continue their races through the arts of Venus, that mankind may not come to an end."
2. *Rouse*: "But some in opposition to this, knowing nothing of matter, believe that without the gods' power nature cannot with so exact conformity to the plans of mankind change the seasons of the year, and produce crops, and in a word all else which **divine pleasure, the guide of life**, persuades men to approach, herself leading them and coaxing them, through the ways of Venus, to beget their generations, that the human race may not come to an end."
3. *Humphries*: "Some people do not know how matter works. They think that nature needs the will of the gods to fit the seasons of the year so nicely to human needs, to bring to birth the crops And other blessings, which our guide to life, the radiance of pleasure, makes us crave through Venus' agency. "

2. **Epicurus' Letter to Menoeceus [129]:**

1. *Bailey*: [129] And for this cause we call pleasure the beginning and end of the blessed life. For we recognize pleasure as the first good innate in us, and from pleasure we begin every act of choice and avoidance, and to pleasure we return again, using the feeling as the standard by which we judge every good.

7. [Discussion Forum](#)

8. Dedicated Wiki Page: [Pleasure Is The Guide of Life](#)

## 10. By "Pleasure" We Mean All Experience That Is Not Painful

1. One might think that stirring philosophers, priests, and politicians to exasperation on the topics of "Gods," and "Virtue" would be enough of a revolution for any one philosopher. But Epicurus's commitment to the truth led him to drive forward to correct the erroneous view of "Pleasure" as well. While virtually everyone before him had properly understood "pleasure" as including sensory stimulation, Epicurus saw this definition as perversely narrow. Epicurus therefore turned to clarifying how the term "pleasure" properly applies to more than sensory stimulation, just as the term "gods" properly applies only to non-supernatural beings.
2. Epicurus realized that since Nature has given us only two feelings, if we are alive and feeling anything at all we then are feeling one or the other of the two. That means if we are not feeling pain, what we are feeling is in fact pleasure. This means that "Pleasure" involves much more than the sensory stimulation, which we have been trained by priests and virtue-based philosophers to consider the only meaning of the term. Once we understand that all experiences in life that are not painful are rightly considered to be pleasurable, Epicurus taught us that we can then use the term "Absence of Pain" as conveying exactly the same meaning as "Pleasure." The benefit of this perspective is that Pleasure becomes something that is widely available through a myriad of ways of life that do not require great pain to experience. Pleasure becomes a workable term to describe the goal of life, and a life of continuous pleasure in which pleasures predominate over pain becomes possible for all but the very few who face extreme circumstances (and even they need not face more pain than pleasure indefinitely.)
3. Just as we should understand "gods" to refer to living beings who are blessed and imperishable, and "virtue" to refer to actions which lead to happiness, we should understand "pleasure" to refer to all experiences of life that are not painful. Torquatus preserves for us this explanation: "Therefore Epicurus refused to allow that there is any middle term between pain and pleasure; what was thought by some to be a middle term, the absence of all pain, was not only itself pleasure, but the highest pleasure possible. Surely any one who is conscious of his own condition must needs be either in a state of pleasure or in a state of pain. Epicurus thinks that the highest degree of pleasure is defined by the removal of all pain, so that pleasure may afterwards exhibit diversities and differences but is incapable of increase or extension." (On Ends 1:38)
4. Citations:
  1. Diogenes Laertius X-34 : "The internal sensations they say are two, pleasure and pain, which occur to every living creature, and the one is akin to nature and the other alien: by means of these two choice and avoidance are determined."
  2. On Ends Book One, 30 : "Moreover, seeing that if you deprive a man of his senses there is nothing left to him, it is inevitable that nature herself should be the arbiter of what is in accord with or opposed to nature. Now what facts does she grasp or with what facts is her decision to seek or avoid any particular thing concerned, unless the facts of pleasure and pain?"
  3. On Ends Book One, 38 : Therefore Epicurus refused to allow that there is any middle term between pain and pleasure; what was thought by some to be a middle term, the absence of all pain, was not only itself pleasure, but the highest pleasure possible. Surely any one who is conscious of his own condition must needs be either in a state of pleasure or in a state of pain. Epicurus thinks that the highest degree of pleasure is defined by the removal of all pain, so that pleasure may afterwards exhibit diversities and differences but is incapable of increase or extension."
  4. On Ends Book One, 39 : For if that were the only pleasure which tickled the senses, as it were, if I may say so, and which overflowed and penetrated them with a certain agreeable feeling, then even a hand could not be content with freedom from pain without some pleasing motion of pleasure. But if the highest pleasure is, as Epicurus asserts, to be free from pain, then, O Chrysippus, the first admission was correctly made to you, that the hand, when it was in that condition, was in want of nothing; but the second admission was not equally correct, that if pleasure were a good it would wish for it. For it would not wish for it for this reason, inasmuch as whatever is free from pain is in pleasure.
  5. On Ends Book Two, 9 : Cicero: "...[B]ut unless you are extraordinarily obstinate you are bound to admit that 'freedom from pain' does not mean the same thing as 'pleasure.'" Torquatus: "Well but on this point you will find me obstinate, for it is as true as any proposition can be."



6. On Ends, Book Two, 11: Cicero: Still, I replied, granting that there is nothing better (that point I waive for the moment), surely it does not therefore follow that what I may call the negation of pain is the same thing as pleasure?" Torquatus: "Absolutely the same, indeed the greatest, beyond which none greater can possibly be." [Plane idem, inquit, et maxima quidem, qua fieri nulla maior potest. (Cic. Fin. 2.11)]
7. On Ends Book Two, 16 : "This, O Torquatus, is doing violence to one's senses; it is wresting out of our minds the understanding of words with which we are imbued; for who can avoid seeing that these three states exist in the nature of things: first, the state of being in pleasure; secondly, that of being in pain; thirdly, that of being in such a condition as we are at this moment, and you too, I imagine, that is to say, neither in pleasure nor in pain; in such pleasure, I mean, as a man who is at a banquet, or in such pain as a man who is being tortured. What! do you not see a vast multitude of men who are neither rejoicing nor suffering, but in an intermediate state between these two conditions? No, indeed, said he; I say that all men who are free from pain are in pleasure, and in the greatest pleasure too. Do you, then, say that the man who, not being thirsty himself, mingles some wine for another, and the thirsty man who drinks it when mixed, are both enjoying the same pleasure?"
8. Dedicated Wiki Page: [By Pleasure We Mean All Experience That Is Not Painful](#)

## 11. Life Is Desirable, But Unlimited Time Contains No Greater Pleasure Than Limited Time.

1. As we close this list of some of Epicurus's most important doctrines, by now it should be no surprise that Epicurus held that life is very desirable. How could he reason otherwise, given that life is a necessity for the experience of pleasure, and pleasure is what Nature has given us as the goal to pursue? But Epicurus knew that humanity is not only fearful of death, but that we covet so strongly the possibility of living forever that we are constantly tempted by mystical claims offering us false promises of eternal life. Epicurus saw that he needed to answer that challenge, and deal with the concern that the inevitable death of our friends and ourselves constitutes a stain on life which forever spoils our happiness. Such a negative view of life was unacceptable to Epicurus, and he pointed out that death in fact does not deprive us of nearly so much as we think it does.
2. Epicurus explains to us that his philosophy allows us to see that no matter how long we live, unlimited time can contain no "greater" pleasure than limited time. This is because time (duration) is only one aspect of pleasure. It makes no more sense for us to seek the longest time of life as the greatest pleasure as it would for us to measure the largest quantity of food at a banquet as being the best way to eat. While time is a relevant dimension, time is not at all the complete picture of pleasure, because pleasure involves not just time but intensity, and the part of the our experience that is affected; and in the end the "best" pleasure is a subjective assessment. Epicurus tells us we can see this by considering the person at a banquet, as already mentioned. Epicurus wrote to Menoeceus that the wise man at a banquet will choose not the *most* food, but the *best* food, and held that our desire should not be for the *longest* life, but the *most pleasant* life.
3. When you remember the Epicurean worldview that there is no supernatural god, no absolute virtue or right and wrong to which we must conform, we can see that the decision as to what is the best life - the most complete life for us - is a matter for us to decide, and that time is neither the most important factor nor the determiner of our decision. Epicurus teaches us to compare our lives to a banquet, or to a jar that we are filling with water. What we should want to do is not to eat the most food, or continue pouring water into the jar after it is full, but to see that the "fullness of pleasure" and the completeness of life is something that we can retain despite our limited lifespans. No jar can be filled more full than full, and no life can be made more complete than complete: once we see that our target is a "complete" life, then "variation" - or the continuous adding-on of new pleasurable experiences -- does not make the experience any more pleasant. And since it is pleasure that Nature gives us as our goal, Epicurean philosophy gives us a fighting chance - if we work to understand it and apply it properly - to consider our lives to be complete and in no need of unlimited time.
4. Citations:

1. [PD19](#). Infinite time contains no greater pleasure than limited time, if one measures, by reason, the limits of pleasure.
2. Letter to Menoeceus 126: "And he who counsels the young man to live well, but the old man to make a good end, is foolish, not merely because of the desirability of life, but also because it is the same training which teaches to live well and to die well."
3. [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.
4. [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.
5. [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.
6. [Discussion Forum](#):
7. Dedicated Wiki Page: [Life Is Desirable, But Unlimited Time Contains No Greater Pleasure Than Limited Time](#)