

# Classical Epicurean Philosophy

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## 1. Introduction

The EpicureanFriends forum works to ensure that the activities of the forum are consistent with the ancient Epicurean school by emphasizing the following points. Participants are not required to agree with all of these, but we do require that the spirit of the philosophy as presented here be respected in all public posting on the forum. These points are presented in greater detail and context on our [Foundations of Epicurean Philosophy](#) page.

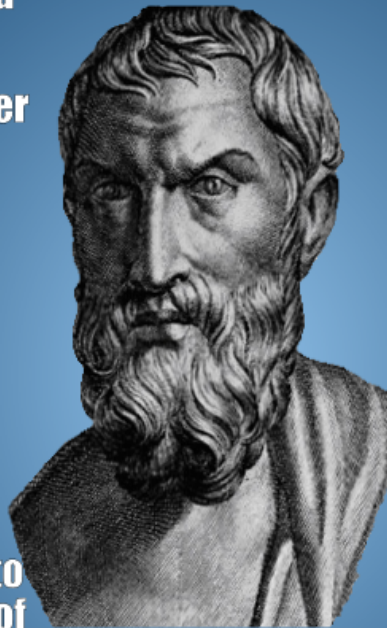
**Nothing can be created from nothing.**

**Nature has no gods over her.**

**Do not assign to the gods anything 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.**

### 1.1. Nothing Can Be Created From Nothing.

1. Major Implications:
  1. The universe as a whole is eternal and was never created by supernatural gods.
2. 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."
3. 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.
4. [Discussion Forum](#)

### 1.2. Nature Has No Gods Over Her.

1. Major Implications:
  1. Supernatural gods do not exist.
2. Citations:
  1. Epicurus To Herodotus, line 77
    1. 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
  1. 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**
  1. *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.**"
  2. *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.**"
  3. *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."
  4. *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. "
  5. *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. "
3. *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.
4. [Discussion Forum](#)

### **1.3. Do Not Assign To The Gods Anything That Is Inconsistent With Incorruption And Blessedness**

1. Major Implications:
  1. It is necessary to have a proper view of the nature of divinity.
2. 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 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. Notes:
5. [Discussion Forum](#).

## 1.4. Death Is Nothing To Us.

1. 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.
2. 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."

3. Notes: There is no existence after death. There is one life to live, and, afterwards, we no longer exist except in the memories of friends and loved ones.

4. [Discussion Forum](#)

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

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. Notes:

4. [Discussion Forum](#)

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

1. Major Implications

1. Radical skepticism is self-contradictory nonsense.

2. 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."

3. Notes:

4. [Discussion Forum](#)

## 1.7. All Sensations Are "True."

1. Major Implications: Error does not occur in the senses, but in the mind in forming opinions about what the sensations are reporting.

2. 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. Notes:
  9. Discussion Forum

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

1. 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.
2. Citations:
1. **Letter to Menoecus [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."
3. [Discussion Forum](#)



#### 4. [Discussion Forum](#)

### 1.9. Pleasure is The Guide of Life.

#### 1. Major Implications:

1. Neither supernatural gods nor ideal forms nor logic or rationalism are the guides of life.

#### 2. 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.*

3. 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.**

4. *Notes*: There is no higher good than pleasure, no greater evil than pain.

5. [Discussion Forum](#)

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

1. Major Implications:

2. 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. Notes:
9. Discussion Forum:

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

1. Major Implications: Life is generally desirable because it generally affords the opportunity for pleasure.
2. Citations:
  1. [PD19](#). Infinite time contains no greater pleasure than limited time, if one measures, by reason, the limits of pleasure.
  2. Letter to Menoecus 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. Notes:
7. [Discussion Forum](#):