

Recommended Reading

We always recommend that readers consult the original works of Epicurus, and we maintain here at the forum a collection of [Ancient Epicurean Texts](#), including [Diogenes Laertius Book 10](#) (which contains all of Epicurus' Letters), [Lucretius' De Rerum Natura](#), and many others.

If you are brand new to Epicurus and only read one thing before anything else, read [Torquatus' Presentation of Epicurean Ethics](#) (also available in a more compact, cross-referenced format at [EpicurusToday.com](#)). Most people meet Epicurus first through short, scattered quotations -- often the *Letter to Menoeceus*, or worse, the four-line Tetrapharmakon -- and arrive at a version of "Epicureanism" assembled from those fragments rather than from the system as Epicurus's own students actually presented it. The Tetrapharmakon is the least reliable of these starting points by far: it is many times more compressed than even the Letter, and terse enough that it has been read in sharply different, sometimes incompatible ways by different interpreters -- at best it serves as a reminder of the four main topics for someone who already knows their content, not as a source of that content. The *Letter to Menoeceus* is itself a compressed summary written for a reader who already holds the larger ethical picture in mind; Torquatus's speech is the opposite -- an unhurried, systematic walk through the same ground, addressed to a general audience with no prior grounding at all. The two need each other, but Torquatus is where the system is actually built up in full, and it is the fastest way to find out whether what you already believe about Epicurus matches what he and his school actually taught.

Thus for our regular readers the key links to primary material are as follows. These are also included in the front page right sidebar and various other locations:

1. [Side by side Torquatus on Ethics from Cicero's On Ends](#) -- start here
2. [Side by side Diogenes Laertius, which includes All Letters of Epicurus](#)
3. [Side by side Lucretius "On the Nature of Things"](#)
4. [Side by side Velleius on Epicurus' Views of Divinity, from Cicero's On The Nature of The Gods](#)

Once you have Torquatus and the primary letters under your belt, two modern books will do the most to deepen your understanding: [Epicurus and His Philosophy](#) by Norman DeWitt, and [Living For Pleasure: An Epicurean Guide to Life](#) by Emily Austin:

1. The most sweeping, thorough, and innovative "textbook" of Epicurean philosophy available is Norman DeWitt's ["Epicurus and His Philosophy."](#) No other book presents the full sweep and detail of the philosophy as well as this one, treating Epicurus's positions as a coherent, internally consistent system rather than filtering them through later Stoic, Platonic, or modern secular assumptions. The opening chapter of DeWitt's book can be [read for free here](#), and an article ("[Philosophy For The Millions](#)") summarizing DeWitt's perspective is [here](#).
2. [Dr. Emily Austin's "Living For Pleasure"](#) is a clear, well-written, and genuinely engaging modern introduction to Epicurean ethics, and many of our members have found it a useful on-ramp. Read it alongside Torquatus and DeWitt rather than in their place -- like most modern treatments, it drifts from classical Epicurean positions here and there, and Torquatus and DeWitt remain the standard against which any modern account, including Austin's, should be checked. Our 2023 interview with Dr. Austin on the Lucretius Today podcast is a good introduction to her book.

There are of course other good books about Epicurus, and we maintain a section of our forum devoted to discussion of them [here](#). A word of caution is appropriate: there are many different interpretations of Epicurus, and many of them "adulterated" with Stoic, Buddhist, Judeo-Christian, Platonic, or other philosophies and religions, according to the preferences of their authors. We recommend that those seeking to understand Epicurus start with [Torquatus](#), then [Epicurus and His Philosophy](#) and [Living For Pleasure](#), and then review Diogenes Laertius Book Ten and Lucretius, before moving to other works. Torquatus, DeWitt, and Austin together provide a firm grounding in classical Epicureanism, and they point out where the reader

can expect to find controversies elsewhere as to what Epicurus really taught.

For those who are familiar with Epicurus and want to research remaining fragments, please check here for the [Harris edition of the Usener Epicurea in PDF form](#).

The full list we recommend for students of Epicurus is as follows:

1. [Cicero's "On Ends" -- Torquatus' Presentation of Epicurean Ethics](#) (also at [EpicurusToday.com](#)) -- read this first
2. [The Biography of Epicurus by Diogenes Laertius](#). This includes the surviving letters of Epicurus, including those to [Herodotus](#), [Pythocles](#), and [Menoceus](#).
3. ["On The Nature of Things"](#) - by Lucretius (a poetic abridgement of Epicurus' "On Nature")
4. ["Epicurus and His Philosophy"](#) by Norman DeWitt
5. ["Living For Pleasure"](#) by Emily Austin -- read alongside Torquatus and DeWitt, not in their place
6. [Bernier's Three Discourses By Gassendi, On Happiness, Virtue, and Liberty](#) - Caution! Gassendi compromises with religion and deviates from Epicurus on gods, death, terminating one's life when appropriate, and probably other issues as well. Another example is Chapter 5 (pdf page 113) which takes too ascetic a view of pleasure. These are huge problems which must be kept in mind in reading this book and limit its usefulness. That having been said, however, Gassendi generally makes clear where he departs from Epicurus, and even in his analysis of pleasure he makes clear that Epicurus should not be interpreted as advocating inaction. With these caveats, most of the rest of the material is very useful and deserves review due to its importance as a link in the chain transmitting Epicurus to the modern world.
7. ["Epicurus on Pleasure"](#) - An article by Boris [Nikolsky](#)
8. The chapters on Epicurus in [Gosling and Taylor's "The Greeks On Pleasure."](#)
9. [Cicero's "On The Nature of the Gods" - Velleius Section](#)
10. [The Inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda](#) - **Martin Ferguson Smith translation**
11. [A Few Days In Athens](#) - [Frances Wright](#) - with the criticisms referenced here [link needs to be supplied -- broken in the source file].
12. Lucian of Samosata - Lucian mentions Epicurus in a number of articles, but among the best are [Alexander the Oracle-Monger](#), [Hermotimus](#), and others listed here [link needs to be supplied -- broken in the source file].
13. [Philodemus "On Methods of Inference"](#) (De Lacy version, including his appendix on the history of the Epicurean Canon)
14. *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom* by David Sedley, an in depth exploration of how Lucretius interpreted Epicurus
15. *The Sculpted Word* by Bernard Frischer, a study of Epicurean bronzes and marbles from the ancient world.
16. Haris Dimitriadis' ["Epicurus' And The Pleasant Life"](#)
17. Consider also the following essays/lectures/letters:
 1. The Letter of [Cosma Raimondi](#)
 2. Norman DeWitt's ["Philosophy For The Millions"](#)
 3. John Tyndall's [Belfast Address](#)
 4. An essay on Lucretius from George Santayana's [Three Philosophical Poets](#)
 5. Prof. Ian Johnston's [Lecture on Lucretius](#)
 6. Lucy Hutchinson's [Letter to the Earl of Anglesey](#), disavowing her very early translation of Lucretius

Here is a "library" page at NewEpicurean.com with links to where many additional translations are available for free on the internet [link needs to be supplied -- broken in the source file].

Profile of Past Reading [link needs to be supplied -- broken in the source file]

[Discussion of this FAQ entry at EpicureanFriends.com is here.](#)