

Vatican Sayings

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The following translations are by Cyril Bailey (Oxford, 1926 "[Epicurus, The Extant Remains](#)") except where noted. Please refer to the notes at the end of this page for citations other than to Bailey. References to the Epicurus Reader are to the work by Brad Inwood and L.P. Gerson, Hackett Publishing, 1994. References to DeWitt are to "Epicurus and His Philosophy" by Norman W. DeWitt, 1954. *For discussion of each item, please see [the forum devoted to these sayings](#).*

1. VS01

A blessed and indestructible being has no trouble himself, and brings no trouble upon any other being; so he is free from anger and partiality, for all such things imply weakness.

2. VS02

[Death is nothing to us](#); for that which has been dissolved into its elements experiences no sensations, and that which has no sensation is nothing to us.

3. VS03

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. VS04

All bodily suffering is negligible; for that which causes acute pain has short duration, and that which endures long in the flesh causes but mild pain. Note 4: Alternate: All bodily suffering is easy to disregard: for that which causes acute pain has short duration, and that which endures long in the flesh causes but mild pain.

5. VS05

It is impossible to live a pleasant life without living wisely and honorably and justly, and it is impossible to live wisely and honorably and justly without living pleasantly. Whenever any one of these is lacking, when, for instance, a man is not able to live wisely, though he lives honorably and justly, it is impossible for him to live a pleasant life.

6. VS06

It is impossible for a man who secretly violates the terms of the agreement not to harm or be harmed to feel confident that he will remain undiscovered, even if he has already escaped ten thousand times; for until his death he is never sure that he will not be detected. Note 6: See [PD35](#).

7. VS07

It is hard for an evil-doer to escape detection, but to be confident that he will continue to escape detection indefinitely is impossible. Note 7: The Epicurus Reader: "It is hard to commit injustice and escape detection, but to be confident of escaping detection is impossible."

8. VS08

The wealth required by Nature is limited and is easy to procure; but the wealth required by vain ideals extends to infinity. Note 8: See [PD15](#).

9. VS09

Necessity is an evil, but [there is no necessity to live under the control of necessity](#).

10. VS10

Remember that you are mortal, and have a limited time to live, and have devoted yourself to discussions on Nature for all time and eternity, and have seen "things that are now and are to come and have been."

[VS11](#). For most men rest is stagnation, and activity is madness.

VS12. The just man is most free from disturbance, while the unjust is full of the utmost disturbance. Note 12: See [PD17](#).

VS13. Of all the things which wisdom acquires to produce the blessedness of the complete life, far the greatest is the possession of friendship. [PD27](#).

VS14. We are born once and cannot be born twice, but for all time must be no more. But you, who are not master of tomorrow, postpone your happiness. Life is wasted in procrastination, and each one of us dies while occupied. Note 14. The Bailey version ends "without allowing himself leisure."

VS15. We value our characters as something peculiar to ourselves, whether they are good, and we are esteemed by men or not, so ought we value the characters of others, if they are well-disposed to us.

VS16. No one when he sees evil deliberately chooses it, but is enticed by it as being good in comparison with a greater evil, and so pursues it. Note 16. The Epicurus Reader: "No one who sees what is bad chooses it, but being lured [by it] as being good compared to what is even worse that it he is caught in the snare."

VS17. It is not the young man who should be thought happy, but the old man who has lived a good life. For the young man at the height of his powers is unstable, and is carried this way and that by fortune, like a headlong stream. But the old man has come to anchor in old age, as though in port, and the good things for which before he hardly hoped he has brought into safe harbor in his grateful recollections.

VS18. Remove sight, association, and contact, and the passion of love is at an end.

VS19. Forgetting the good that has been, he has become old this very day.

VS20. Of our desires some are natural and necessary, others are natural but not necessary; and others are neither natural nor necessary, but are due to groundless opinion.

VS21. We must not force Nature but persuade her. We shall persuade her if we satisfy the necessary desires, and also those bodily desires that do not harm us, while sternly checking those that are harmful. Note 21. See Principle Doctrine 29.

VS22. Unlimited time and limited time afford an equal amount of pleasure, if we measure the limits of that pleasure by reason. Note 22. See Principle Doctrine 19.

VS23. Every friendship is worth choosing for its own sake, though it takes its origin from the benefits. Note 23. This is the Inwood / Gerson Epicurus Reader version.

VS24. Dreams have no divine character nor any prophetic force, but they originate from the influx of images.

VS25. Poverty, when measured by the natural purpose of life, is great wealth, but unlimited wealth is great poverty.

VS26. You must understand that whether the discourse be long or short it tends to the same end.

VS27. In the case of other occupations the fruit (of one's labors) comes upon completion of a task while (in the case) of philosophy pleasure is concurrent with knowledge because enjoyment does not come after learning but at the same time (with) learning. Note 27: The text given is the Epicurus Wiki version. Bailey has: "In all other occupations the fruit comes painfully after completion, but, in philosophy, pleasure goes hand in hand with knowledge; for enjoyment does not follow comprehension, but comprehension and enjoyment are simultaneous." The Epicurus Reader has: "In other activities, the rewards come only when people have become, with great difficulty, complete [masters of the activity]; but in philosophy the pleasure accompanies the knowledge. For the enjoyment does not come after the learning but the learning and the enjoyment are simultaneous.

VS28. We must not approve either those who are always ready for friendship, or those who hang back, but for friendship's sake we must run risks.

VS29. For I would certainly prefer, as I study Nature, to announce frankly what is beneficial to all people, even if none agrees with me, rather than to compromise with common opinions, and thus reap the frequent praise of the many. Note 29 Translation by C. Yapijakis, Epicurean Garden of Athens, Greece. Bailey: "In investigating nature I would prefer to speak openly and like an oracle to give answers serviceable to all mankind, even though no one should understand me, rather than to conform to popular opinions and so win the praise freely scattered by the mob."

VS30. Some men, throughout their lives, spend their time gathering together the means of life, for they do not see that the draught swallowed by all of us at birth is a draught of death.

VS31. Against all else it is possible to provide security, but as against death all of us, mortals alike, dwell in an unfortified city.

VS32. The veneration of the wise man is a great blessing to those who venerate him.

VS33. The flesh cries out to be saved from hunger, thirst, and cold. For if a man possess this safety, and hope to possess it, he might rival even Zeus in happiness.

VS34. It is not so much our friends' help that helps us, as it is the confidence of their help.

VS35. We must not spoil the enjoyment of the blessings we have by pining for those we have not, but rather reflect that these too are among the things desirable. Note 35: Translation by Norman DeWitt. Peter St. Andre: "Don't ruin the things you have by wanting what you don't have, but realize that they too are things you once did wish for." Bailey: "We should not spoil what we have by desiring what we do not have, but

remember that what we have too was the gift of fortune.”

VS36. Epicurus’ life, when compared to other men’s in respect of gentleness and self-sufficiency, might be thought a mere legend.

VS37. Nature is weak toward evil, not toward good: because it is saved by pleasures, but destroyed by pains.

VS38. He is a little man in all respects who has many good reasons for quitting life.

VS39. He is no friend who is continually asking for help, nor he who never associates help with friendship. For the former barter kindly feeling for a practical return, and the latter destroys the hope of good in the future.

VS40. 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.

[VS41](#). We must laugh and philosophize at the same time, and do our household duties, and employ our other faculties, and never cease proclaiming the sayings of the true philosophy.

[VS42](#). The same span of time embraces both the beginning and the end of the greatest good. Note 42. This is the Norman DeWitt translation from his article “The Summum Bonum Fallacy” in *The Classical Weekly*, Vol. 44, No. 5 (Dec. 18, 1950), pp. 69-71. The same item is rendered by Epicurus.net as: “The same time produces both the beginning of the greatest good and the dissolution of the evil.” Bailey: “The greatest blessing is created and enjoyed at the same moment.”

VS43. The love of money, if unjustly gained, is impious, and, if justly gained, is shameful; for it is unseemly to be parsimonious, even with justice on one’s side.

VS44. The wise man, when he has accommodated himself to straits, knows better how to give than to receive, so great is the treasure of self-sufficiency which he has discovered.

VS45. The study of nature does not make men productive of boasting or bragging, nor apt to display that culture which is the object of rivalry with the many, but high-spirited and self-sufficient, taking pride in the good things of their own minds and not of their circumstances.

VS46. Let us utterly drive from us our bad habits, as if they were evil men who have long done us great harm.

VS47. I have anticipated thee, Fortune, and entrenched myself against all thy secret attacks. And I will not give myself up as captive to thee or to any other circumstance; but when it is time for me to go, spitting contempt on life and on those who vainly cling to it, I will leave life crying aloud a glorious triumph-song that I have lived well.

VS48. We must try to make the end of the journey better than the beginning, as long as we are journeying; but when we come to the end, we must be happy and content.

VS49. It is impossible for someone to dispel his fears about the most important matters if he does not know the Nature of the universe, but still gives some credence to myths. So, without the study of Nature, there is no enjoyment of pure pleasure.

VS50. No pleasure is a bad thing in itself, but the things which produce certain pleasures entail disturbances many times greater than the pleasures themselves.

VS51. You tell me that the stimulus of the flesh makes you too prone to the pleasures of love. Provided that you do not break the laws, or good customs, and do not distress any of your neighbors, or do harm to your body, or squander your pittance, you may indulge your inclination as you please. Yet it is impossible not to come up against one or other of these barriers, for the pleasures of love never profited a man and he is lucky if they do him no harm.

VS52. Friendship dances around the world, bidding us all to awaken to the recognition of happiness.

VS53. We must envy no one, for the good do not deserve envy, and the bad, the more they prosper, the more they injure themselves.

VS54. We must not pretend to study philosophy, but study it in reality, for it is not the appearance of health that we need, but real health.

VS55. We must heal our misfortunes by the grateful recollection of what has been, and by the recognition that it is impossible to undo that which has been done.

VS56. The wise man feels no more pain, when being tortured himself than when his friend is tortured.

VS57. On occasion a man will die for his friend, for if he betrays his friend, his whole life will be confounded by distrust and completely upset.

VS58. We must free ourselves from the prison of public education and politics.

VS59. It is not the stomach that is insatiable, as is generally said, but the false opinion that the stomach needs an unlimited amount to fill it.

VS60. Every man passes out of life as though he had just been born.

VS61. Most beautiful too is the sight of those near and dear to us, when our original kinship makes us of one mind; for such sight is great incitement to this end.

VS62. Now if parents are justly angry with their children, it is certainly useless to fight against it, and not to ask for pardon; but if their anger is unjust and irrational, it is quite ridiculous to add fuel to their irrational passion by nursing one's own indignation, and not to attempt to turn aside their wrath in other ways by gentleness.

[VS63](#). Frugality too has a limit, and the man who disregards it is like him who errs through excess.

VS64. Praise from others must come unasked, and we must concern ourselves with the healing of our own lives.

VS65. It is vain to ask of the gods what a man is capable of supplying for himself.

VS66. Let us show our feeling for our lost friends, not by lamentation, but by meditation.

VS67. A free life cannot acquire many possessions, because this is not easy to do without servility to mobs or monarchs, yet it possesses all things in unfailing abundance; and if by chance it obtains many possessions, it is easy to distribute them so as to win the gratitude of neighbors.

VS68. Nothing is sufficient for him to whom what is sufficient seems too little.

VS69. The ungrateful greed of the soul makes the creature everlastingly desire varieties in its lifestyle.

VS70. Let nothing be done in your life which will cause you fear if it becomes known to your neighbor.

[VS71](#). Every desire must be confronted by this question: What will happen to me if the object of my desire is accomplished, and what if it is not?

VS72. There is no advantage to obtaining protection from other men so long as we are alarmed by events above or below the earth, or, in general, by whatever happens in the boundless universe.

VS73. The occurrence of certain bodily pains assists us in guarding against others like them.

VS74. In a philosophical discussion he who is defeated gains more, since he learns more.

VS75. The saying, "look to the end of a long life," shows ungratefulness for past good fortune.

VS76. You are, in your old age, just such as I urge you to be, and you have seen the difference between studying philosophy for oneself and proclaiming it to Greece at large; I rejoice with you.

VS77. The greatest fruit of self-sufficiency is freedom.

VS78. The truly noble man busies himself chiefly with wisdom and friendship, of which the one is an understandable good but the other is immortal. Note 78. See this discussion [here for the reason "understandable" is superior to "immortal" as the best translation. Bailey has: "The noble soul occupies itself with wisdom and friendship; of these, the one is a mortal good, the other immortal."](#)

VS79. The man who is serene causes no disturbance to himself or to another.

VS80. The first measure of security is to watch over one's youth, and to guard against what makes havoc of all by means of maddening desires.

VS81. The disturbance of the soul cannot be ended, nor true joy created, either by the possession of the greatest wealth, or by honor and respect in the eyes of the mob, or by anything else that is associated with, or caused by, unlimited desire.
