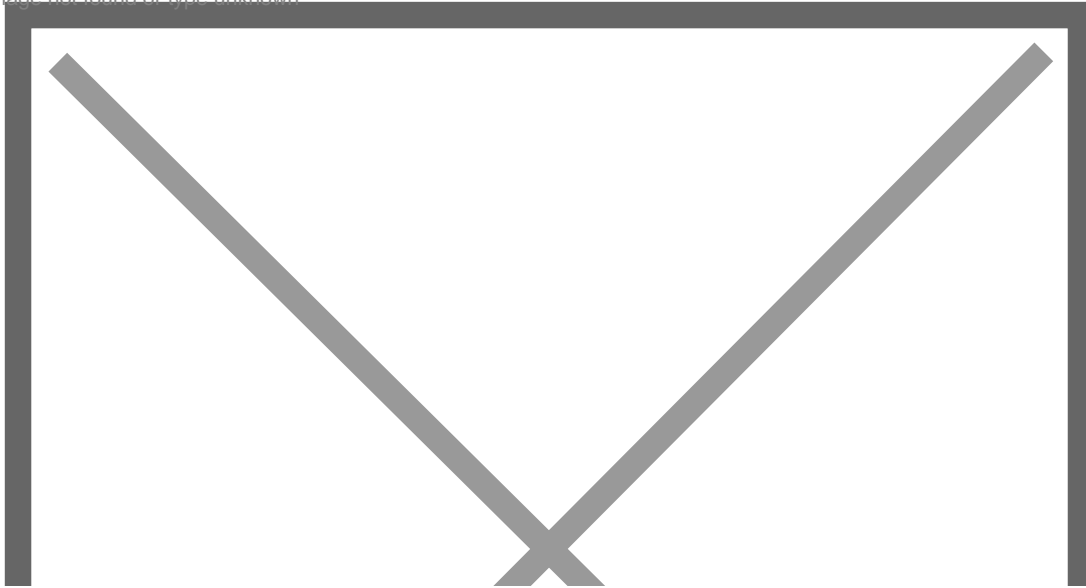


EpicureanFriends Wiki

Table Of Contents

- [1. Introduction](#)
 - [1.1. The Epicurean Paradigm Shift](#)
 - [1.2. 1. Plutarch](#)
 - [1.3. 2. Sextus Empiricus](#)
 - [1.4. 3. Seneca](#)
 - [1.5. 4. Clement of Alexandria](#)
 - [1.6. 5. Diogenes Laertius](#)
 - [1.6.1. Virtue](#)
 - [1.6.2. Pleasure](#)
 - [1.6.3. Death](#)
 - [1.6.4. Gods](#)
- [2. About EpicureanFriends.com](#)
 - [2.1. Who Is Welcome To Participate At EpicureanFriends.com?](#)
- [3. Major Doctrines Of Classical Epicurean Philosophy](#)
 - [3.1. Nothing Can Be Created From Nothing.](#)
 - [3.2. The Universe Is Infinite In Size And Eternal In Time And Has No Gods Over It.](#)
 - [3.3. The Nature of Gods Contains Nothing That Is Inconsistent With Incorruption And Blessedness](#)
 - [3.4. Death Is Nothing To Us.](#)
 - [3.5. There Is No Necessity To Live Under The Control Of Necessity.](#)
 - [3.6. He Who Says "Nothing Can Be Known" Knows Nothing.](#)
 - [3.7. All Sensations Are "True."](#)
 - [3.8. Virtue Is Not Absolute Or An End In Itself - All Good And Evil Consists In Sensation.](#)
 - [3.9. Pleasure is The Guide of Life.](#)
 - [3.10. By "Pleasure" We Mean All Experience That Is Not Painful](#)
 - [3.11. Life Is Desirable, But Unlimited Time Contains No Greater Pleasure Than Limited Time.](#)
- [4. Three Divisions of Epicurean Philosophy](#)
 - [4.1. Physics](#)
 - [4.2. Canonics](#)
 - [4.3. Ethics](#)
- [5. History Of The Epicurean School](#)
- [6. Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [7. Recommended Reading](#)
- [8. The Lucretius Today Podcast](#)
- [9. Articles Section](#)
- [10. Youtube Page](#)
- [11. Special Resources Page](#)
- [12. Image Gallery](#)
- [13. Personal Outlines of Epicurean Philosophy](#)
- [14. Self Study Courses](#)
- [15. Zoom Meetings](#)
- [16. Site Map](#)

Image not found or type unknown



1. Introduction

Welcome to EpicureanFriends, where we are dedicated to the study and promotion of the philosophy of Epicurus. This wiki is a work-in-progress, so if you don't find something you need, please check our [frequently asked questions](#) or [ask in the forums](#).

1.1. The Epicurean Paradigm Shift

There is nothing more important at the very beginning of the study of Epicurus than to come to grips with the fact that Epicurus uses important philosophical terms in non-standard ways. Epicurus' innovative use of words like "pleasure" was controversial even in his own time, and understanding his reasons for reexamining these key terms is essential to understanding his philosophy as a whole.

We know that Epicurus was using words in a non-standard way from a number of sources, especially Cicero, who discusses this criticism extensively in *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum* (On the Ends of Good and Evil). Below are some key examples:

1. **On the Redefinition of "Pleasure"**: Cicero criticizes Epicurus' use of "pleasure" (*voluptas*) to include both physical pleasure and the "absence of pain" (*aponia*), arguing that such redefinition is misleading. In *De Finibus* (Book II, 5.16), Cicero writes:

Quote

"Epicurus is constantly changing the meaning of words to make his case seem more plausible. He maintains that the absence of pain is the highest pleasure; but what man with any intelligence could ever call this 'pleasure'?"

2. **On the Meaning of "Good" and "Virtue"**: Cicero objects to Epicurus' view that "virtue" (*virtus*) is not intrinsically good but only valuable as a means to achieve pleasure. He suggests this undermines traditional philosophical terminology:

Quote

"He says that virtue cannot exist without pleasure, nor pleasure without virtue; but how inconsistent and contradictory are such assertions! For if it is pleasure that constitutes the supreme good, what place is left for virtue?" (*De Finibus*, Book II, 6.18)

3. **On the Ambiguity of "Pain"**: Cicero also criticizes the conflation of the absence of pain with a positive pleasure. In *De Finibus* (Book II, 8.25), he remarks:

Quote

"It seems absurd to use the term 'pleasure' for a state in which we merely feel no pain. By this reasoning, Epicurus has redefined language itself, making words mean what they do not naturally mean."

4. **On the Redefinition of "Natural Desires"**: Cicero argues against Epicurus' classification of desires into "natural and necessary," "natural and unnecessary," and "neither natural nor necessary." He suggests this categorization is artificial and complicates what should be simple:

Quote

"Epicurus distinguishes desires in a way that appears clever, but his subtle distinctions only serve to confuse the mind rather than clarify it. What could be simpler than understanding what we need and what we do not?" (*De Finibus*, Book I, 13.41)

Other ancient authorities made similar criticisms. Here are several other notable examples:

1.2. 1. Plutarch

Plutarch, a vocal critic of Epicurean philosophy, frequently targeted Epicurus' linguistic practices. In his essay *Against Colotes*, he accuses Epicurus of creating unnecessary confusion by redefining established terms. For example:

- Plutarch critiques the way Epicurus equates the absence of pain (*aponia*) with pleasure, claiming that this redefinition is an attempt to make his philosophy more palatable while abandoning traditional clarity.
- He also criticizes Epicurus for subordinating virtues to pleasure, stating that such a redefinition undermines the integrity of moral discourse.

Quote

"Epicurus reassigns to pleasure the name of every good, claiming that virtues derive their value only from their service to pleasure, and in doing so, he robs virtues of their independent worth." (*Against Colotes*, 1122C)

1.3. 2. Sextus Empiricus

Sextus Empiricus, in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, points out inconsistencies in Epicurean definitions, especially regarding "pleasure" and "pain." While Sextus primarily adopts a skeptical stance, he highlights how Epicurus' redefinitions deviate from ordinary language:

- He notes that equating the absence of pain with pleasure creates a linguistic paradox, as people traditionally view pleasure as an active state rather than a passive absence.

Quote

"By calling the mere removal of pain 'pleasure,' Epicurus distorts the common understanding of pleasure as an active sensation." (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Book III, 177)

1.4. 3. Seneca

Seneca, though a Stoic, critiques Epicurus' redefinitions in his letters. While he occasionally praises Epicurus' insights, he disapproves of how Epicurus manipulates language to suit his arguments:

- In *Letters to Lucilius* (Letter 92), Seneca challenges Epicurus' claim that tranquility (absence of disturbance) is the highest pleasure, arguing that this blurs the distinction between pleasure and peace of mind:

Quote

"Epicurus twists words to claim that tranquility, which even the Stoics hold dear, is pleasure. Yet tranquility is not pleasure but the condition that allows for its enjoyment."

1.5. 4. Clement of Alexandria

Clement of Alexandria, a Christian critic of Epicureanism, accuses Epicurus of corrupting the moral vocabulary of his time. In *Stromata*, he argues that Epicurus' redefinition of terms like "pleasure" and "virtue" leads people astray:

- Clement writes that Epicurus' use of words was designed to make hedonism seem respectable, masking its true implications.

Quote

"Epicurus renames vice as virtue by claiming that all virtues serve the pleasure of the body, thus misleading those who seek moral clarity." (*Stromata*, II.21)

1.6. 5. Diogenes Laertius

Although Diogenes Laertius is generally sympathetic to Epicureanism in his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, he acknowledges that many critics took issue with Epicurus' language:

- He notes that Epicurus was accused of rejecting traditional philosophical terminology and creating his own definitions, which alienated other philosophers.

Quote

"Epicurus' habit of inventing definitions for terms like 'pleasure' and 'virtue' led many of his opponents to call him a corrupter of language." (*Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Book X, 4)

Of course Epicurus did not invent an entirely different language. Epicurus held that certain things in ordinary language are clear without need of elaborate definitions. It is sufficient, for example, to point to fire to understand that it is hot; to snow to understand that it is white, and to honey to understand that it is sweet.

Abstractions, however, like "Virtue," "Death," and "Gods," require explanation. Even "Pleasure," which is not an abstraction when referring to ice cream, requires explanation when the term is used to describe a goal of life. The difference between those things that require no explanation and abstractions that do require explanation was expressed by an Epicurean spokesman as follows:

Quote from Torquatus In Cicero's On Ends

[30] Every creature, as soon as it is born, seeks after pleasure and delights therein as in its supreme good, while it recoils from pain as its supreme evil, and banishes that, so far as it can, from its own presence, and this it does while still uncorrupted, and while nature herself prompts unbiased and unaffected decisions. So he says we need no reasoning or debate to shew why pleasure is matter for desire, pain for aversion. These facts he thinks are simply perceived, just as the fact that fire is hot, snow is white, and honey sweet, no one of which facts are we bound to support by elaborate arguments; it is enough merely to draw attention to the fact; *and there is a difference between proof and formal argument on the one hand and a slight hint and direction of the attention on the other; the one process reveals to us mysteries and things under a veil, so to speak; the other enables us to pronounce upon patent and evident facts.*

Epicurus is well known for rejecting conventional views of the nature of "things" by holding that the world is composed neither of "four elements" nor of "supernatural fire." Instead, Epicurus held that everything in the universe is composed of innumerable particles and void.

What is not so well known is that Epicurus also rejected conventional views of the nature of key philosophic terms such as Pleasure, Gods, Virtue, and Death. Just as Epicurus held that false presumptions underlay commonly-held but erroneous ideas in physics, Epicurus held that false presumptions also underlay conventional but erroneous ideas in ethics. Epicurus did not simply reject conventional assessments of pleasure, virtue, gods, and death, he rejected the conventional view of what those words even mean when rightly understood.

In the ancient world, prevailing philosophic schools refused to accept Epicurus' unconventional viewpoints. As a result, the leading schools pilloried Epicurus as at best a muddled thinker and at worst an immoral reprobate. Those attitudes prevail even today, but Epicurus' *enemies* are not alone in misinterpreting his views. The errors made by Epicurus' foes are matched those who believe themselves to be Epicurus' friends, but who ignore Epicurus' rejection of conventional ideas about key aspects of human life.

The truly revolutionary nature of Epicurean philosophy cannot be understood without seeing that Epicurus' doubled down on his rejection of conventional paradigms in natural science with rejection of conventional paradigms in ethics. Just as the rejection of elemental "earth, air, wind, and fire" leads to a revolution in physical science, the rejection of conventional views of the best way to live, the meaning of death, and the nature of gods leads to the Epicurean revolution in ethics. Pursuing such a revolution required Epicurus to explain what his enemies disparaged as an entirely new vocabulary of key terms, with the result that attempts to understand Epicurus without understanding his use of terms has exasperated both foes and well-meaning but misinformed friends alike for two thousand years.

1.6.1. Virtue

Given that the universe is composed of particles moving through void, Epicurus saw that there can be no such thing as absolute and universal ethical laws, written for all time and places and people. What would be the source or authority of such law if there is no center to the universe, no single perspective that can be deemed eternally correct?

In such a universe there is no possibility of a supernatural god establishing absolute rules of conduct. As a result, **Virtue** in Epicurean terms is necessarily contextual, and seen as a set of tools to be employed in life which will vary in nature and use along with individual needs, desires, and other circumstances.

Virtue cannot therefore be an end in itself, or its own reward. Virtue in Epicurean terms is an important tool, but it is a tool invented by human beings for the sake of something else. In a totally natural universe in which there are no supernatural gods and no absolute virtue, what can that "something else" be?

1.6.2. Pleasure

The "something else" for which virtue is but a tool is in Epicurean terms none other than the feeling of "Pleasure." Pleasure, however, has a sweeping but very specific meaning in Epicurean terminology. Epicurus held that there are only two categories of feelings, and all evaluations of what is desirable and what is undesirable in life are ultimately within one of the two. These two very broad categories of feelings are "Pleasure" and "Pain." The second of these, with which our current definitions are most consistent, is "pain." Pain is any mental or physical feeling which we find to be undesirable in itself - in a word - painful. When Epicurus speaks of pain, we have no problem applying our standard perspectives and understanding what he means.

Pleasure, on the other hand, is in Epicurean terms a much more sweeping concept than which most of us appreciate. If some feelings are clearly painful and undesirable in themselves, and if there are only two categories of feelings, then what type of feelings are left to fall under the category of Pleasure? Simply put, all feelings of life, whether mental, physical, emotional, or whatever qualifying words you wish to employ, which are not in themselves painful are Pleasurable.

This view of Pleasure means that all attempts to separate out some pleasures so as to assign them special worthiness or unworthiness are ultimately misleading. Those who praise "simple pleasures" as more worthy or desirable than "luxurious pleasures" are equally wrong in Epicurean terms. All choices in life are to be evaluated by asking what will be the full consequences of choosing one course or the other. The wise person will evaluate all the consequences - mental, physical, long-term, short-term, and of whatsoever kind - and make choices based on their best estimate of whether in that person's experience Pleasure or Pain will predominate as a result.

Does this mean that a person considers only the person's own pleasure and pain? Of course not: Epicurus held that our most important avenue for happy living is our friends, and so the full consequences of our actions take into account how the people around us will respond to our choices, which is a reality that we ourselves must - for very practical reasons - take into account in our calculations.

1.6.3. Death

Epicurus' atomist views also demanded a more clear view of death. Rather than hopeful equivocation that perhaps the souls of at least great men might survive after death, Epicurus boldly held that because the soul (like everything else) is material (composed of particles and void) then the end of life leads to *nothing*. In Epicurus' famous words, [*death is nothing to us*](#), but not because the fact of death is insignificant.

The fact that human beings die and their consciousnesses come to an end is of critical importance to our estimation of the value of life. Only the living can experience pleasure, and this realization places the importance of living wisely and in good mental and physical health at the center of Epicurus' worldview. Such is the importance of seeing that death is nothing, and that there is no reward or punishment after death, that the proper view of death as absence of sensation ranks as the second most important in Epicurus' own list of his key teachings.

1.6.4. Gods

While the fact of death is the second most important of Epicurus' doctrines, there is one doctrine of even greater importance: Epicurus' claim to hold a valid conception of what it means to be a god. Nothing is more fundamental to the Epicurean worldview than that nothing supernatural - including supernatural gods - can

exist. From the very beginning of the philosophy - harking back to the very first step of concluding that "[nothing can be created from nothing](#)," it is foundational to see that the universe as a whole has existed for eternity, and that there is nothing in the complexity that indicates intelligent design or that the universe was created or is supervised by supernatural gods.

But unlike what we know as "atheism" today, Epicurus was emphatic that the Earth is not the only place in the universe where life exists. Epicurus held that there are an infinite number of worlds, some like ours, and some not like ours, on which beings of many types exist.

Epicurus held that there are no supernatural gods directing our lives or rewarding or punishing us after death. Epicurus held that our "spirit" (our mind and intelligence) cannot survive after our death, because our body and all that is within it returns to the particles from which it came. But consistent with his views of the infinite universe, Epicurus held also that if beings outside of earth can find ways to continuously resist the deterioration of their bodies, then they can effectively live on without end.

As part of his total rejection of supernatural religion, Epicurus held that a proper and natural use of the term "god" would be to use that word to designate any and all living beings who are deathless and who succeed in living totally pain-free lives.

Epicurus rejected all aspects of supernatural gods, supernatural souls, and supernatural reward or punishment after death. But Epicurus held that it is not sufficient just to say "no" when people suggest that such gods can and do exist. Epicurus held that the term "gods" should be given real meaning, and that real meaning serves to provide for us a paradigm of how the best life might exist, as totally happy and totally without fear of death.

Epicurus spoke of living "as gods among men," and Epicurus' poet Lucretius praised Epicurus as someone who should be considered to have been a "god," if anyone deserved that title. This terminology shocks both militant atheists and militant religionists today, as it did in Epicurus' own time, but Epicurus was never afraid to shock to the sensibilities of the narrow-minded. The Epicureans insisted that they were not nihilistic atheists, and instead insisted their this view of the nature of gods is the only one worthy of being considered truly divine.

In regard to we humans who cannot duplicate the imperishability of gods, but who wish to do our best to emulate their experience, the Epicureans left to us this formulation, preserved to us by Cicero in his work "On Ends"

Quote from Torquatus In Cicero's On Ends

That pleasure is the boundary of all good things may be easily seen from this consideration: Let us imagine a person enjoying pleasures great, numerous, and perpetual, both of mind and body, with no pain either interrupting him at present or impending over him; what condition can we call superior to or more desirable than this? For it is inevitable that there must be in a man who is in this condition a firmness of mind which fears neither death nor pain, because death is void of all sensation; and pain, if it is of long duration, is a trifle, while if severe it is usually of brief duration; so that its brevity is a consolation if it is violent, and its trifling nature if it is enduring. And when there is added to these circumstances that such a man has no fear of the deity of the gods, and does not suffer past pleasures to be entirely lost, but delights himself with the continued recollection of them, what can be added to this which will be any improvement to it?

2. About EpicureanFriends.com

EpicureanFriends was established in 2015 by a group of friends interested in the study of of [Classical Epicurean Philosophy](#), freed from the intrusion of contemporary politics, Stoicism, Platonism, Humanism, Buddhism, Judeo-Christianism, and other "isms" with which many seek to combine it. Our ultimate goal is to

implement Epicurus' instruction to Menoeceus: "*Meditate therefore on these things and things akin to them night and day by yourself; and with a companion like to yourself, and never shall you be disturbed waking or asleep, but you shall live like a god among men. For a man who lives among immortal blessings is not like unto a mortal being.*"

Much more detail about how we work to maintain a constructive environment is contained in our [Community Standards](#), our [Not Neo-Epicurean, But Epicurean](#) statement, and our [Key Posting Policy](#) statement, all of which you will find in [this section of the wiki](#).

A major aspect of these community rules is that we prohibit the discussion of contemporary partisan political issues in our activities. The goal of EpicureanFriends is to focus identifying and understanding Epicurean philosophical doctrine, and we exclude all discussion of contemporary partisan politics, leaving such matters solely to our participants' personal discretion. This is not because we accept the contention of detractors that Epicurus taught extreme versions of "living unknown" or avoidance of "all" political action, but because our priority is a healthy community dedicated to Epicurean Philosophy, and discussion of divisive political issues would be a major obstacle to that goal.

2.1. Who Is Welcome To Participate At EpicureanFriends.com?

EpicureanFriends.com welcomes all who are sincerely interested in Epicurean Philosophy to read our public forums and make use of our public resources. All participants at EpicureanFriends have studied and been a part of other worldviews in the past, and it would be absurd to refuse engagement with those who hold views many of us ourselves held in the past. Our extensive discussion threads and resources are made public explicitly for the purpose of allowing people who do not consider themselves to be Epicurean to better understand the philosophy.

We are, however, an explicitly pro-Epicurean forum, and our goal is to construct a community of those who are supportive of of [Classical Epicurean Philosophy](#). For that reason, full posting and participation privileges are reserved only to those who agree to our [Community Standards](#), our [Not Neo-Epicurean, But Epicurean](#) statement, and our [Key Posting Policy](#) statement.

EpicureanFriends does not encourage eclecticism, and our forums are not the place for extended discussion of non-Epicurean viewpoints. Past threads on non-Epicurean philosophies include:

1. [General Discussion of Contrasts Between Epicurus And Other Philosophers](#)
 1. [Contrasting Epicurus With Platonism](#)
 2. [Contrasting Epicurus With Stoicism](#)
 3. [Contrasting Epicurus With Buddhism](#)
 4. [Contrasting Epicurus with Existentialism / Nihilism](#)
 5. [Contrasting Epicurus With Humanism](#)

Please understand that there are many forums on the internet where other philosophies can be discussed and advocated at length. EpicureanFriends was founded to promote Epicurean philosophy, and we moderate the forum with that goal always in mind. We welcome to the forum all who are sincerely interested in the study of Epicurus and who wish to collaborate with the EpicureanFriends community.

3. Major Doctrines Of Classical Epicurean Philosophy

[Classical Epicurean Philosophy](#) is a worldview that rejects many commonplace assumptions of other philosophies, including the prevailing views of "[pleasure](#)," "[gods](#)," "[virtue](#)," and even "[good and evil](#)." In Epicurean terms, pleasure embraces much more than sensory stimulation, "[gods](#)" exist but are not supernatural, and it is important to act "[virtuously](#)," but "[virtue](#)" is not desirable as an end in itself, but as a means of obtaining pleasure. Likewise, "Good" and "evil" are not abstract absolutes, but are ultimately evaluations based on sensations of pleasure and pain felt by real living things. "Practical Reason" is held to be essential for living wisely, but "dialectical logic" is rejected as misleading. It is a major goal of EpicureanFriends to explore Epicurean terminology in these and other areas so we can appreciate the

philosophy as the ancient Epicureans understood it. For more on terminology and similar topics, [check out our FAQ page](#). We also particularly recommend [Episode 222](#) of the Lucetius Today Podcast where we discuss key terminology issues surrounding "happiness" and "pleasure" and "virtue."

In order to clarify the distinctive aspects of [Classical Epicurean Philosophy](#) for both new readers and regular members alike, we place special emphasis on a number of the most central aspects of Epicurean doctrine. These points include:

3.1. 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. Find out more detail in our [Nothing Can Be Created From Nothing](#) Wiki page, and discuss this in our [Physics Forum](#).

3.2. 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. Find out more detail in our [The Universe Is Infinite And Eternal And Has No Gods Over It](#) Wiki page, and discuss this in our [Physics Forum](#).

3.3. 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. Find out more detail in our [Gods Have No Attributes Inconsistent With Blessedness And Incorruptibility](#) Wiki page, and discuss this in our [Physics Forum](#).

3.4. 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. Find out more detail in our [Death Is Nothing To Us](#) Wiki page, and discuss this in our [Physics Forum](#).

3.5. 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. Find out more in our [There Is No Necessity To Live Under The Control of Necessity](#) Wiki page, and discuss this in our [Physics Forum](#).

3.6. 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. Find out more in our [He Who Says That Nothing Can Be Known Knows Nothing](#) Wiki page, and discuss this in our [Canonics Forum](#).

3.7. 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](#).

3.8. 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](#).

3.9. 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. Find out more in our [Pleasure Is The Guide of Life](#) Wiki Page, and discuss in our [Ethics Forum](#).

3.10. 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. Find out more in our [By Pleasure We Mean All Experience That Is Not Painful](#) page on our Wiki, and discuss this in our [Ethics Forum](#).

3.11. 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 Menoecus 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. Find out more in our [Life Is Desirable, But Unlimited Time Contains No Greater Pleasure Than Limited Time](#) Wiki page, and discuss this in our [Ethics Forum](#).

We also have a longer [Foundations of Epicurean Philosophy](#) document, written in progressive narrative form, which is based closely on the ancient texts.

4. Three Divisions of Epicurean Philosophy

Epicurean philosophy is generally divided into Physics, Canonics, and Ethics, and we organize our forums along similar lines. The following subsections incorporate the eleven areas of focus listed above into the larger context of the field of Epicurean Philosophy where they are found:

4.1. Physics

Epicurus erected his entire philosophy upon his understanding of the nature of the universe, including how it is composed of and governed by elemental particles moving through space. Click here for our Wiki entry on [General Principles of Epicurean Physics](#). Click here for our [Physics](#) discussion forum.

4.2. Canonics

Canonics, often known as "epistemology," is closely related to physics. At the same time that we observe and derive our conclusions about the nature of the universe, we must examine what it means to "know" anything. What is truth? What is real? Is confidence in knowledge (or "certainty") possible? Click here for our wiki entry on [General Principles of Epicurean Canonics](#) and here for our [Key Citations In Canonics](#) that remain from the ancient world. Click here for our [Canonics](#) discussion forum.

4.3. Ethics

Ethics is the application of Physics and Canonics to determine the best way to live. Click here for our [Epicurean Ethics](#) page and here for our [Ethics](#) discussion forum.

5. History Of The Epicurean School

- Joshua's [Timeline of Epicureanism From Classical Athens to Late Antiquity](#)
- Twentier's [Timeline of Ancient Epicurean History](#)

6. Frequently Asked Questions

We have a [FAQ](#) to answer many of the questions that normally come up during study. If you have an account and find something missing, let us know and we'll add to it if your question is a common one.

7. Recommended Reading

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

For people who are brand new to Epicurus, we recommend that you start with the two books we recommend most: [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. 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. The most current and best general introduction to [Epicurean ethics](#) is [Dr. Emily Austin's "Living For Pleasure"](#). This is a very readable introduction to Epicurean ideas on how to live that is consistent with the general approach here at EpicureanFriends. 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 [Epicurus and His Philosophy](#) and [Living For Pleasure](#), and then review Diogenes Laertius Book Ten and Lucretius, before moving to other works. The DeWitt and Austin books 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.

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

1. ["Epicurus and His Philosophy"](#) by Norman DeWitt
2. ["Living For Pleasure"](#) by Emily Austin
3. [The Biography of Epicurus by Diogenes Laertius](#). This includes the surviving letters of Epicurus, including those to [Herodotus](#), [Pythocles](#), and [Menoceus](#).

4. ["On The Nature of Things"](#) - by Lucretius (a poetic abridgement of Epicurus' "On Nature")
5. ["Epicurus on Pleasure"](#) - An article by Boris [Nikolsky](#)
6. The chapters on Epicurus in [Gosling and Taylor's "The Greeks On Pleasure."](#)
7. [Cicero's "On Ends" - Torquatus Section](#)
8. [Cicero's "On The Nature of the Gods" - Velleius Section](#)
9. [The Inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda - Martin Ferguson Smith translation](#)
10. [A Few Days In Athens" - Frances Wright](#) - with the [criticisms referenced here](#).
11. 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](#).
12. [Philodemus "On Methods of Inference"](#) (De Lacy version, including his appendix on the history of the Epicurean Canon)
13. *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom* by David Sedley, an in depth exploration of how Lucretius interpreted Epicurus
14. *The Sculpted Word* by Bernard Frischer, a study of Epicurean bronzes and marbles from the ancient world.
15. Haris Dimitriadis' ["Epicurus' And The Pleasant Life"](#)
16. 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.

[Profile of Past Reading](#)

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

8. The Lucretius Today Podcast

In our Lucretius Today podcast we discuss the Epicurean texts in detail each week. Starting with [Episode One](#) in 2020 we went verse by verse through Lucretius' poem, and since then we have covered many other important Epicurean texts. Episodes of special note include [Lucretius Today Interviews Dr. Emily Austin](#), [Letter to Menoecus](#), [The Canon, Reason, and Nature](#), [Epicurus and His Philosophy: The New Hedonism](#), and especially [Episode 200](#) (our anniversary episode discussing our past and future plans for the podcast). We have a page dedicated to a selection of [Quotes](#) used in the podcast, and the best place to familiarize yourself with the episode topics is [here](#).

[Lucretius Today Episode Guide](#)

9. Articles Section

We curate a number of selected [Articles](#) written by participants at EpicureanFriends which discuss Epicurus from the perspective of [Classical Epicurean Philosophy](#).

10. Youtube Page

We have a selection of useful videos produced over the years. Of special note are our [Seven Steps With Epicurus](#) slideshow and our [Foundations of Epicurean Philosophy](#) presentation.

11. Special Resources Page

Our [Special Resources Page](#) provides a variety of informative items prepared by our forum members. Included is our page of [Regional Maps of the Greco-Roman World](#)

12. Image Gallery

Our [Images](#) section provides a collection of images, graphics, and memes by EpicureanFriends forum members. A special selection of our [Featured Images is here](#).

13. Personal Outlines of Epicurean Philosophy

As suggested by Epicurus to Herodotus, and as in the example Thomas Jefferson left to us in his personal writings, one of the best ways to internalize Epicurean Philosophy is to write it out in outline form. See our resources here for sample outlines that help you navigate this site, and work with others [who have posted for us their own outlines here](#).

14. Self Study Courses

Currently we have a [Quiz Section](#). In the future we hope to offer you organized programs in the form of an [Epicurean Week](#) and an [Epicurean Seven Week Program](#).

15. Zoom Meetings

Those who register an account and establish a pattern of productive participation will be invited to our First Monday Meet And Greet meeting, which we conduct on the first Monday of each month. Those who continue thereafter to participate productively will eventually be invited to become “Established Members,” and to join our Wednesday night Zoom study groups and our monthly Twentieth Meeting, and participate in sections of our discussion forum which are limited to Established Members.

16. Site Map

Our [site map](#) has a listing of all major sections of this site. If you have questions, please feel free to ask any member of our [Moderator Team](#).

Much More To Come!