

# ANTE OCULOS



**Epicurus and the  
Evidence-Based Life**  
Cassius Amicus



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**By Cassius Amicus**

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*At one and the same time we must philosophize,  
laugh, and manage our household and other business, while never ceasing to proclaim the words of the true  
philosophy.*

Epicurean Saying XVI From the Vatican Collection



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**[Doctrine 1.](#)** Any being which is happy and imperishable neither has trouble itself, nor does it cause trouble to anything else. A perfect being does not have feelings either of anger or gratitude, for these feelings only exist in the weak.

**[Doctrine 2.](#)** Death is nothing to us, because that which is dead has no sensations, and that which cannot be sensed is nothing to us.

**[Doctrine 3.](#)** Life affords continuous pleasure so long as nothing is present to cause us to feel pain. The highest possible state of pleasure that can be achieved is experienced at the removal of every cause of pain.

**[Doctrine 4.](#)** Bodily pain does not last continuously. The most intense pain is present only for a very short time, and pain which outweighs the body’s pleasures does not continue for long. Even chronic pain permits a predominance of pleasure over pain.

**Doctrine 5.** It is not possible to live pleasantly without living wisely, honorably, and justly. Nor can one live wisely, honorably, and justly without living pleasantly. But those who for any reason do not live wisely, honorably, and justly cannot possibly live pleasantly.

**Doctrine 6.** Any means by which we can secure protection from other men is a natural good.

**Doctrine 7.** For the sake of feeling confidence and security in regard to other men, some men wish to be eminent and powerful, failing to remember the limits of kingly power. If such men happen to achieve a life of safety, then they have attained their goal, which is a good. But if their lives are not in fact safe, they have failed in obtaining the goal for the sake of which they originally desired power, and that is the result that generally occurs according to Nature.

**Doctrine 8.** No pleasure is intrinsically bad; but that which is necessary to achieve some pleasures brings with it disturbances many times greater than those same pleasures.

**Doctrine 9.** If any pleasure could be intensified so that it did not come to an end, and affected the whole person or the most essential parts of our nature, there would be no room for the experience of new pleasures.

**Doctrine 10.** If those things which debauched men consider pleasurable in fact put an end to the fears of the mind, and of the heavens, and of death, and of pain; and if those same pleasures taught us the natural limits of our desires, we would have no reason to blame those who devote themselves to such pursuits.

**Doctrine 11.** If fears relating to the heavens did not disturb us, and if the terrors of death did not concern us, and if we had the courage to contemplate the natural limits of pain and of desire, we would have no need to study the nature of things.

**Doctrine 12.** It is not possible for a man to banish all fear of the essential questions of life unless he understands the nature of the universe, and unless he banishes all consideration that the fables told about the universe could be true. Therefore a man cannot enjoy full happiness, untroubled by turmoil, unless he acts to gain knowledge of the nature of things.

**Doctrine 13.** It does no good for a man to secure himself safety from other men so long as he remains in a state of fear about heaven, about hell, and about the nature of the boundless universe.

**Doctrine 14.** Great power and wealth may, up to a certain point, bring us security from other men. But the greatest security depends upon tranquility of the soul and freedom from the crowd of men.

**Doctrine 15.** The Natural desires are easily obtained and satisfied, but the unnatural desires can never be satisfied.

**Doctrine 16.** Chance only rarely intrudes into the lives of wise men, because wise men direct the greatest and most important matters of life by the power of reason.

**Doctrine 17.** The man who is just is, of all men, the most free from trouble, but the unjust man is a perpetual prey to turmoil.

**Doctrine 18.** Once the pain arising from need is removed, physical pleasure is not increased, and only varies in another direction. The essential happiness of the soul depends on understanding this, and on understanding the nature of similar questions which cause great concern of the mind.

**Doctrine 19.** If we measure the limits of pleasure by reason, infinite and finite time both provide the opportunity for complete pleasure.

**Doctrine 20.** We assume that physical pleasure is unlimited, and that unlimited time is required to procure it. But through understanding the natural goals and limits of the body, and by dissolving the fear of eternity, we produce a complete life that has no need infinite time. The wise man neither flees enjoyment, nor, when events cause him to exit from life, does he look back as if he had missed any essential aspect of life.

**Doctrine 21.** He who is acquainted with the natural limits of life understands that those things that remove the pain that arises from need, and those things which make the whole of life complete, are easily obtainable, and that he has no need of those things that can only be attained with trouble.

**Doctrine 22.** We must keep in mind the conceptions established by reality and the evidence provided by our senses, and to those we must refer all our opinions, otherwise all things in life will be full of confusion and doubt.

**Doctrine 23.** If we resist the senses, we have nothing left to which we can refer, or by which we may judge, the falsehood of the senses which we condemn.

**Doctrine 24.** We must not discard any evidence provided by a sense simply because it does not fit our prior conceptions, and we must always distinguish between those matters which are certain and those which are uncertain. We must do this so we can determine whether our conclusions go beyond that which is justified by the actual evidence of the senses. We cannot be confident of our conclusions unless they are justified by actual, immediate, and clear evidence, and this evidence must come from the five senses, from the sense of pain and pleasure, and from the conceptions of the mind which arise from the Anticipations. If we fail to keep in mind the distinction between the certain and the uncertain, we inject error into the evaluation of the evidence provided by the senses, and we destroy in that area of inquiry every means of distinguishing the true from the false.

**Doctrine 25.** If we consider those opinions which are only an tentative, and must await further information before they can be verified, to be of equal authority with those opinions which bear about them an immediate certainty, we will not escape error. For if we do this we overlook the reason for doubt between that which is right and that which is wrong.

**Doctrine 26.** If on every occasion we do not refer all our actions to the chief end of Nature, and if we turn aside to some other standard when we are determining what to seek or to avoid, then our actions will not be consistent with our principles.

**Doctrine 27.** Of all the things which the wise man seeks to acquire to produce the happiness of a complete life, by far the most important is the possession of friendship.

**Doctrine 28.** The same opinion that encourages us to trust that no evil will be everlasting, or even of long duration, shows us that in the space of life allotted to us the protection of friendship is the most sure

and trustworthy.

**Doctrine 29.** Of the desires, some are natural and necessary, some are natural but not necessary, and some are neither natural nor necessary, but owe their existence to vain imagination.

**Doctrine 30.** In the case of physical desires which require intense effort to attain and do not lead to a sense of pain if they are not fulfilled, such desires are due to idle imagination. It is not because of their own nature that they fail to be dispelled, but because of the empty imaginings of the man.

**Doctrine 31.** Natural justice arises from a covenant between men for their mutual advantage to refrain from harming one another.

**Doctrine 32.** For those living things that are unable to enter into a covenant to refrain from harming one another, nothing is just or unjust, and this applies also to those men who are either unwilling or unable to enter into such a covenant.

**Doctrine 33.** Justice has no independent existence, but results only from the agreement of men to enter mutual covenants to refrain from harming one another.

**Doctrine 34.** Injustice is not evil in itself; it is evil because fear of not escaping punishment necessarily arises from it.

**Doctrine 35.** It is not possible for men who secretly violate a mutual covenant not to harm one another to believe that they will always escape detection. Even if they have escaped it ten thousand times already, so long as they live they cannot be certain that they will not be detected.

**Doctrine 36.** In general, justice is the same for all, for justice is a mutual advantage in the dealings of men with each other, but in different nations and under different circumstances, the application of justice may differ.

**Doctrine 37.** Among those actions which the law sanctions as just, that which is determined to be of mutual advantage is in fact just whether or not it is universally regarded to be so. But if a law, once established, is determined not to be mutually advantageous, then it is by nature unjust. As to those laws which were at first just, but later become unjust, such laws were in fact just for the period in which they were of mutual advantage, at least in the eyes of those who do not confound themselves with empty words, but look to the actual facts.

**Doctrine 38.** Where actions which were formerly considered to be just under former circumstances are seen not to accord with the general concept of mutual advantage, then they are seen not to have been just. But actions which were in fact of mutual advantage and therefore just at one time under former circumstances, but cease being of mutual advantage under new circumstances, cease also being just.

**Doctrine 39.** He who desires to live tranquilly without having anything to fear from other men ought to make them his friends. Those whom he cannot make friends he should at least avoid rendering enemies, and if that is not in his power, he should avoid all dealings with them as much as possible, and keep away from them as far as it is in his interest to do so.

**Doctrine 40.** The happiest men are those who have arrived at the point of having nothing to fear from their neighbors. Such men live with one another most pleasantly, having the firmest grounds of confidence in one another, enjoying the full advantages of friendship, and not lamenting the departure of their dead friends as though they were to be pitied.

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**Foreword**

*Humana – ANTE OCULOS – foede cum vita iaceret in terris, oppressa gravi sub religione, quae caput a caeli regionibus ostendebat horribili super aspectu mortalibus instans, primum Graius homo mortalis tollere contra est oculos ausus primusque obsistere contra. Quem neque fama deum nec fulmina nec minitanti murmure compressit caelum, Sed eo magis acrem inritat animi virtutem, effringere ut arcta naturae primus portarum claustra cupiret. Ergo vivida vis animi pervicit et extra processit longe flammantia moenia mundi atque omne immensum peragravit mente animoque. Unde refert nobis victor quid possit oriri, quid nequeat, finita potestas denique cuique qua nam sit ratione atque alte terminus haerens. Quare religio pedibus subiecta vicissim opteritur, nos exaequat victoria caelo.*

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*When humanity – BEFORE EYES – foully with life lay prostrate upon the earth, crushed down gravely beneath religion, which showed its head from the regions of heaven with hideous aspect, scowling down upon mortal men, a man of Greece was the first who dared to lift his mortal eyes and stand up against it. This man neither the fame of the gods, nor thunderbolts, nor even the deafening roar of heaven could quash, but those things only spurred on the eager courage of his soul, filling him with desire to be the first to burst the tight bars on Nature’s gates. Thus the living force of his soul won the day, and on he passed, far beyond the flaming walls of the world, traveling with his mind and with his spirit the immeasurable universe. And from there he returned to us – like a conqueror – to tell us what can be, and what cannot, and on what principle and deep-set boundary mark Nature has established all things. In this way religion is thrown down and trampled underfoot, and his victory raises us equal with the sky.*

*Lucretius, De Rerum Natura, Book I*

The above lines are taken from Book I of the great Roman hymn to Epicurean philosophy, **On The Nature of Things**, written by Titus Lucretius Carus in the first century BC. In Lucretius’ day there was no need to specify the famous name of the man of Greece who had burst the tight bars on Nature’s gates and trampled religion underfoot. Today, however, the name of **Epicurus**, the man known to the ancient world as the “Master-BUILDER of Human Happiness,” is all but forgotten, and what memory of it remains is clouded with misunderstanding and misrepresentation. The means by which this cloud may be dispelled is referenced in a phrase Lucretius uses –almost in passing – in the lines above, and for that reason this phrase has been chosen for the title of this book.

“*Ante Oculos*” – “*before eyes*” is a phrase that rings strangely in modern ears. The same voices who have denounced Epicurus for ages have taught us that truth is in the eyes of the beholder, and so we reflexively ask *to whose eyes does Lucretius refer?* Does he refer to the eyes of God, who alone knows truth, as the peddlers of religion tell us? Does he refer to the eyes of the Academic elites, elevated above the unwashed masses by their “higher learning,” as the false philosophers tell us? Does he refer to the eyes of the Politicians or of the Rich, for whom “might” or “money” makes right, as much of the rest of the world tells us? The answer, of course, is that Lucretius was referring to none of these.

Epicurus won the devotion of Lucretius and millions of followers through the ages because he founded his school on the proposition that truth is not subject to the claims of priests, professors, or princes. Epicurus taught that truth and reality do exist, that they can be found by men, and that on the foundation provided by **Nature** men can live in peace and happiness. Thus when Lucretius employed the term *before eyes*, he was referring to truth established *according to the faculties provided by Nature* – a method of establishing truth recognized and taught by Epicurus with which religious revelation, philosophical skepticism, and the caprice of the rich and politically powerful are wholly incompatible.

Because so much of Epicurus’ work has been lost over the ages, there is a great need for new texts for the use of those who seek to study Epicurus for themselves, perhaps for the first time. It is for the purpose of making the Epicurean texts more readily accessible that this volume has been prepared. Thus the emphasis here is not on new analysis, but on providing new accessibility to ancient material in a new and understandable form – material which can then assist in providing a foundation and motivation for many future works.

Those who are unfamiliar with the personal history of Epicurus should turn first to the [Appendix](#) and refer to the biographical section of the work of [Diogenes Laertius](#). This ancient author wrote while Rome still ruled the western world, and the Epicurean movement was still strong, and it is he who preserved for us the majority of what is known today about the life of Epicurus. The text of Diogenes Laertius forms the raw material from which most modern biographies of Epicurus is drawn, and it is here that the student who wishes to know Epicurus for himself, directly, rather than through the often-biased eyes of later commentators, should start. For those who find this present volume and wish to move deeper into the study of Epicurus, this author recommends one book above all: **Epicurus and His Philosophy** by Norman W. DeWitt. No other work has done more to reacquaint the modern world with the true teachings of Epicurus.

As for this current work, our main text has been prepared in what is essentially a series of outlines proceeding sequentially from lesser to greater levels of detail. The unavoidable result of this outline form is a frequent repetition of major principles at each level, but as the purpose of the work is to serve as a textual reference for the

new student of Epicurus rather for than entertainment, it is to be hoped that this flaw will be forgiven. The basic scheme is simple: Chapter 1 provides a general overview of the main themes with which most new students of Epicurus are probably unfamiliar. In turn, Chapters 2 through 8 address in greater detail a number of particularly significant aspects of Epicurean thought. The greatest level of detail is found in Chapters 9 through 13, which contain selected narrative excerpts from the primary surviving documents of the Epicurean period. Chapter 14 closes the main section of this work with an exercise in visualizing Epicurean doctrine through an ancient mosaic discovered in the ruins of Pompeii. Chapter 15, the Appendix, provides additional primary source material, much of which is incorporated into the main text, if at all, only references for footnotes. Much of the material here, for example the references to Epicurus in the letters of Seneca, is very valuable in its own right.

Just as with those Epicurean texts circulated in the ancient world, this text is not meant to be read once and set aside. The student who wishes to apply the wisdom of Epicurus to his own life will regularly wish to refer, at a minimum, to the following selections:

[Epicurus' letter to Menoecus](#)

[Epicurus' letter to Herodotus](#)

[Epicurus' letter to Pythocles](#)

[Cicero's Defense of Epicurus](#)

[The Principal Doctrines of Epicurus](#)

[The Vatican Collection of the Sayings of Epicurus](#)

[Epicurus' Sayings About "The Wise Man"](#)

Before closing this foreword, there is an important but disturbing aspect of this study which must be addressed. As one proceeds in the study of Epicurus, this matter will grow from a nagging concern and eventually burst forth in questions that demand to be answered:

***How has the wisdom of Epicurus become so nearly lost to the world?***

***How has the reputation of one of mankind's greatest benefactors been consigned to such abuse?***

The material in this work will answer these and many other questions, but be prepared to learn this bitter truth:

***Despite all the wisdom and happiness that Epicurus offered to men, many and strong were the forces of Religion, Education, Wealth, and Political Power which arrayed themselves against him. These forces are as active today as they were in Epicurus' day, and they will seek to prevent you from grasping the life of happiness that Epicurus offers.***

The material in this work will assist you in learning Epicurus' means for overcoming these opponents. But your time is limited: as Lucretius wrote, *life is a gift to no man, only a loan to him*. While life is in your possession you must ***exert yourself*** – as Nature provides – to achieve the happiness that is possible to you. The wisdom to which this book is only a brief introduction is your legacy from the greatest mind of the ancient world. Study and apply it, and it which will assist you in finding your own place in the Nature of Things. Your goal is no less than that which Epicurus described to Menoecus, no doubt with a smile: the goal of living your life as ***"a god among men."***



## About This Book

Those who are not professional philosophers have little time or inclination to study the jumble of conflicting opinions put forth by so many religions and philosophies. Epicurus recognized this difficulty, but he also saw that all men have an urgent need to know how to live happily *now*. The genius of Epicurus was that he saw that this need can only be satisfied *by obtaining for oneself a basic understanding of the nature of the universe*.

All men must face the fact that the short span of life leaves but little time to experience happy lives. Epicurus saw clearly that of all the evils that result from false religion and philosophy, perhaps the worst is this: that they separate men from the *time that Nature has given them to enjoy life*, the one precious commodity that men cannot renew.

Epicurus stressed that the path to happiness is open to every person of at least average intelligence. But those who seek out Epicurus' path cannot expect to read a text passively and be magically transformed. Instead, students of Epicurus must "un-learn" much of what they have generally been taught – both about the world and about Epicurus himself. Ages of false philosophers and priests have recognized Epicurus as their mortal enemy. The war of disinformation they have waged against him has rendered his true teachings difficult to recognize, and our lack of familiarity with his method of thought has rendered those teachings even harder to understand.

There is one peculiar aspect of fog that envelops Epicurus which will be helpful to address immediately. Epicurus held that if an individual is to live happily he must obtain and grasp *for himself* a basic understanding of the nature of the universe. Such understanding can come only by actively grasping of the material, not through mere reading or even memorization. Epicurus saw that it would not be sufficient for him to explain his principles in lengthy treatises. Although he did in fact compose such works for those who could use them, he also prepared summaries to be used for conveying the basic principles to the average man, and it is those summaries – rather than the treatises – that largely survive to us today. Thus the writings of Epicurus have largely come down to us in a very terse form of outlined principles, rather than applications. This makes Epicurus' doctrines superficially easy to grasp (at least in most cases), but the deeper meaning of each principle can only be recognized with study and reflection. The student must *study and apply each principle in his own mind* if he is to understand its full implication and application.

As a teaching tool, summaries and outlines serve their purpose very well, but the terseness of this form invites corruption by those who have an interest in disparaging them. This tactic can be seen particularly well in the treatment often afforded to one of the most famous Epicurean doctrines, the phrase "[\*Death is nothing to us.\*](#)"

Epicurus' enemies denounce this phrase as ridiculous on its face, arguing that the universal fear of death is most certainly "something" – and a very great "something" indeed. But the short phrase "death is nothing to us" carries a far deeper meaning, as well as implications that are far from foolish.

Epicurus observed that the only matters which have any real meaning to us are *those things that we experience through our sensations*. Our sensations, however, begin at birth and end at death. This means that once we die we experience no sensations of any kind, and for that reason the state of "being dead" – to the extent that state has any meaning at all – is a state of "nothingness" to us. This leads to conclusions that strike at the very heart of religion: If death is a state of nothingness, then the religious promise of reward in heaven or punishment in hell after death is revealed as the false pretension that it is. Even more importantly, once we understand that we experience nothing after our death, we see quite urgently that *all that we can experience must occur to us in the short span of time in which we are alive*. The Epicurean therefore not only does not dismiss the notion of death lightly, he earnestly and diligently applies this knowledge to pursue the happiest life possible to him while he is still alive. Although the state of being dead is a state of nothingness, the imperative of death is itself a supreme motivation for us to use our time wisely. In the Epicurean words of the Roman poet Horace, we must all *carpe diem* – "seize the day."

This attack on phrase "death is nothing to us" is but one example of the war that has created the fog of deception and misunderstanding that hangs over Epicureanism and makes navigation difficult for the new student. In a first effort to dispel this fog, [Chapter 1](#) of this book "sets the map" by starting, not with the *beginning details* of Epicurus' reasoning, but with several of the important *conclusions* he reached about the universe and the nature of human life.

Before we can place these conclusions in perspective and see how they fit into the overall map, we must understand how Epicurus arrived at them and justified them as true. [Chapter 2](#) is therefore an introduction to Epicurus' insight

into the tests of truth provided to man *by Nature*. This test of truth is not a mere procedural device, but a method of thought which is at the very heart of Epicureanism, constituting in effect the lamp by which the Epicurean path is illuminated.

This Epicurean method of thought will be amplified throughout this work, but its importance calls for close attention from the very beginning of our study:

Men look up at the night sky and see that the universe appears to be *infinite*, but they know through harsh experience that their own knowledge is *limited*. Epicurus saw that Nature requires us to confront and accept this limitation if we are to live and act here and now on Earth, within the realm that is open to us. Nature denies to man the ability to *both* live happily *and also* stand transfixed looking up at the stars, immobilized by the fear that he does not possess perfect knowledge of the unknown. The choice is ours, but the choice must be made. ***The choice to live happily requires that we choose to focus our eyes on the evidence that Nature has granted us the ability to see.***

Epicurus also saw that man's natural fear of the unknown is seized upon as a tool by false priests, professors, and politicians who demand obedience through the call for "certainty." The call for "certainty" in human action is a false standard which can never be met, and the real evil of those who call for it is that they are aware of the trap which they lay for the unthinking. The only remedy for this abomination is for men to acknowledge that their knowledge and their lives are ***limited to the scope to the bounds established by Nature***. Priests, professors, and politicians will always argue that without their special insights men are helpless, because without their aid men are not capable of seeing far enough back in time to understand the universe's "creation," or far enough ahead to see the "fate" that the gods hold in store for us.

Nature has no use for such foolish arguments, and neither does Epicurus. Nature calls men to rely on *her*, to trust the senses *she* has provided, and to live our lives on the terms that *she* has set. Man's choice is *Nature* or the false gods of priests, philosophers, and politicians – men cannot live happily under both.

Epicurus also identified another critical problem that must be identified early in our study. This is the error of those who, following the example of Plato, hold that knowledge can be validated ***through reason alone, and that reason itself the highest standard of truth***. This attractive error is particularly perilous because "reason" is in fact an essential tool for the understanding of Nature. The trap arises, however, from the fact that reason can never be ***divorced*** from Nature. "Reason" has no existence or valid meaning when separated from Nature, and thus it must always be recognized that *Nature*, not "reason" provides the only valid standard of truth

Epicurus taught that all truth must be grounded in clear observations of evidence obtained through man's Natural faculties. "Reason," on the other hand, is a *process*, and not a natural faculty. The determination of truth arises through direct comparison of evidence provided through the faculties. This means that we determine the truth of concepts by seeing that they are both (1) clearly supported by the available evidence and (2) not contradicted by any evidence. This is Nature's means for establishing any knowledge. *New* knowledge is gained by obtaining new evidence – through the natural faculties – and comparing that evidence to those conceptions which are already established to be true. What we consider to be "reason" is indeed critical to this process, but "reason" is ultimately nothing more than the description we apply to our mental application of Nature's laws of consistency and contradiction. This method of determining truth by comparison is so fundamental that the Epicureans adopted the "spirit level" as a symbol employed not only by Lucretius, but also in the Pompeiian mosaic referred to in Chapter 15 of this current work.

Having now identified both the most significant of his major conclusions and the method by Epicurus established them, we turn back in [Chapter 3](#) for a brief examination of Epicurus' most elemental observations about the nature of the universe. Here we see the view of reality on which Epicurus erected his entire system.

A detailed discussion of atoms, void, and motion is far beyond the scope of this work, but it is critical to see that Epicurus grounded his philosophy directly on evidence provided by Nature, rather than on theoretical speculations based only on words. It is here that we observe, for example, that Nature's evidence shows us that the elements of the universe are neither created nor destroyed. It is because these elements are never seen to be created or destroyed that we must then conclude that the universe as a whole was never created from nothing – neither by any god nor by any other supernatural or unnatural means. This observation, in turn, underpins the doctrine that ***everything*** in the

universe operates in accord with the eternal nature of the elements of which it is composed, and not according to the whim of any gods.

Here we see the Epicurean method of thought in full bloom: The Epicurean firmly establishes his conclusion that the universe follows the laws of Nature –and not the whims of “gods” or the chaos of “randomness” – on the foundation that all natural evidence *supports* this conclusion and no natural evidence *contradicts* it. The Epicurean dismisses any musings to the contrary as foolishness at best and rebellion against nature at worst, seeing clearly that neither is compatible with any hope of living happily in accord with Nature.

In [Chapter 4](#) we focus on the further implications of the rejection of the claim that gods control the lives of men. Here, modern students who are familiar only with the extremes of religious piety or nihilistic atheism must come to terms with a startling alternative: Epicurus held that Nature provides reliable evidence (primarily in the form of “anticipations”) that “gods” of a certain type **do** exist. But our opinions of the gods must be conformed to the knowledge that Nature provides to men though the preconceptions, and foremost among these preconceptions is that any god worthy of the name is “perfect” and has no need of anger or favor. Such gods as may exist are firmly recognized to take no interest in human affairs.

Epicurus denied that gods direct the universe, but he also denied the contention of those philosophers who claimed that the universe is a chaotic jumble operating at random and in which all things are possible. This he established by observing that although there is no evidence that the universe came into being by act of gods or “accident,” we do possess firm and uncontradicted evidence that Nature exists through the operation of the eternal elements that conform to their own eternal laws – laws which determine within definite limits what is and what is not possible.

This disposes with both the whim of the gods and mechanistic necessity as obstacles to man’s happiness. In its place Epicurus erected a recognition of Natural ground rules and guard rails within which the universe moves, and according to which men may lead the happy lives for which Nature provides.

As if this were not enough to ensure the everlasting enmity of priests and false philosophers, Epicurus proceeded to the one ultimate observation that destroys all their pretensions: the observation that higher animals such as men possess *free will*, and that this free will, and that this free will endows us with control and responsibility over our own lives.

Never one to shrink from a challenge, Epicurus staked his conclusion on another observation about the Nature of the universe, one which could be seen clearly, but only by analogy – the only method allowed by Nature. This was the observation that if men can choose to deviate from their paths at no fixed time and no fixed place according only to their own will to do so, this right of choice must itself derive from the fact that Nature has endowed certain fundamental elements of the universe from which men are in part composed with *the self-motivated power to “swerve.”*

Once again, Epicurus staked his position on the grounds and within the limits that Nature provided, but he did not profess to omnipotence. Lucretius states clearly that very little is known about the nature of the swerve other than that it exists, and that the ultimate constituent of life (the “life element”) was so unknown that it had not even been given a specific name. Yet Epicurus held tenaciously to his method, because living according to the evidence provided by Nature, rather than professing “certainty” is the only path consistent with Nature. The available evidence supports the existence of the swerve and of the life element, even if man’s power of discernment is unable to establish every aspect of their natures. Here is the dividing line that Epicurus emphasizes so emphatically in Principle Doctrines 24, 25, and 26. Nature provides man a certain amount of evidence, but no more; we must neither claim that something is clearly established when it is not, nor shrink from defending that which the evidence supports. That the power to swerve exists is proven by the clear observation of our faculties, for we see that men and animals change their course motion at no fixed time, and at no fixed space. That we know that life exists, and that nothing can be created from nothing, is all the evidence we need to sustain our conviction that life is a capacity inherent in a certain eternal elemental component of the universe. That the full and complete picture of these issues is not known to the science of Epicurus’ day – *or of our own* – is a fact of life that hinders us not at all from our pursuit of a happy life.

[Chapter 5](#) addresses the second of Epicurus’ best-known observations: the aforementioned fact that man’s

consciousness ends at death. Because consciousness ends when life ends, death is not to be feared; death is simply a state of nothingness which can best be thought of as a deep and endless sleep. Epicureanism, the philosophy of living happily, devotes great attention to the implications of death. No punishment or reward awaits us, and in [Book III](#) of *De Rerum Natura* Lucretius has preserved a matchless string of insightful arguments calculated to equip the Epicurean fearlessly to confront the fear – and the actuality – of death.

[Chapter 6](#) examines the Epicurean doctrine expressed in Lucretius' words as "the highest goal toward which we all are aiming." To the extent the world thinks it knows anything about Epicurus at all, it thinks it knows that Epicurus held that "pleasure" is Nature's guide for determining how to live one's life. This common confusion must be dispelled: when Epicurus referred to "pleasure," he was not referring to some sort of supernatural experience which equates with religious piety or philosophic devotion to "virtue." As Lucretius wrote, pleasure is the "**guide** of life." Pleasure no more constitutes the "end" of life than following a guide through halls of exhibits constitutes the "end" of a visit to a museum. Epicurus saw that "virtue" is meaningless if divorced from the goal that is to be accomplished by means of displaying it, and he further saw that "pleasure" is not some Platonic "ideal" that exists only in theory. Instead, pleasure is a faculty and a direct connection with reality – akin to the senses – with which Nature endows living beings as a means of showing them how to live successfully.

Having identified Nature's purpose for man as the pursuit of a happy life (and not momentary pleasure), Epicurus then saw that the very grasp of life itself – the grasp of a life in accord with nature – equates to the highest of pleasure, *so long as that experience is sustained without pain*. Given the immensity of space and eternity, and the brevity of our life within those spans, our to exist at all affords us the opportunity for the greatest of pleasure. A life of happiness is therefore a potential open to all men of average intelligence and circumstances, and the fact that all men are mortal is not an insurmountable obstacle to achieving a happy life. Nature has provided that living things measure life not in terms of *length*, but in terms of *happiness*, and thus the number of years one lives tells us nothing about whether that life has been well spent.

Having now covered the means for defeating the fear of gods and the fear of death, in [Chapter 7](#) we review Epicurus' doctrine that *pain* is not to be feared because it is *almost always* manageable and *always* escapable. The avoidance of mental and physical pain, however, is not automatic; success in this goal comes only if we study and apply the laws of Nature. Men are born with the tools for obtaining happiness, but not with the knowledge that only comes through using those tools. Epicurus taught that Nature requires us to engage in a "scheme of systematic contemplation" if we are to overcome both the false fears of gods and death, and such practical concerns as the need for food and shelter. Thus the study of Nature is not merely a suggestion of Epicurus for bettering one's life, but a commandment of Nature must be heeded if we are to survive at all.

[Chapter 8](#) concludes the "overview" section of this work by examining how Epicurus himself, even after his death, served as an motivating example for the ancient Epicureans. Here we briefly examine the esteem in which Epicurus was held both by his followers in both the ancient world and in more recent times, as in the example of Thomas Jefferson.

With [Chapter 9](#) we begin the section of this text to which the reader is encouraged to return again and again. In this chapter, the student will find selections from the most important original ancient texts. Most of these were apparently prepared by Epicurus himself, as recorded by Diogenes Laertius, but also included here is a uniquely helpful essay in which Cicero recorded an eloquent defense of Epicurus against his Stoic critics.

[Chapter 10](#) provides a presentation of the Forty Principal Doctrines, each one followed by alternate translations and relevant excerpts from other surviving Epicurean texts.

In [Chapter 11](#) the student will find the second of the three most useful lists of Epicurean doctrine that survive from the ancient world. This collection, discovered in more recent times in the Vatican Library, contains a number of Epicurean sayings not found in Diogenes Laertius' list of the Principal Doctrines.

[Chapter 12](#) provides the third most useful list of Epicurean sayings, those about the "Wise Man" as recorded by Diogenes Laertius. This list of sayings appear to have been written as a set of guidelines not only to wise men in general, but particularly to those who would act for others as guides along the path established by Epicurus.

[Chapter 13](#) is devoted to the only other repository of Epicurean thought that rivals – or exceeds – that of Diogenes Laertius. Lucretius’ monumental poem *De Rerum Natura – On the Nature of Things* – has been translated many times in recent centuries, and it deserves many books devoted entirely to itself. The selections included here are only those which reinforce basic Epicurean doctrines that are discussed elsewhere in this work. The work as a whole is a treasure trove of information about Epicurean thought, and any serious student of Epicurus is urged to turn quickly to the printed or audiobook versions of Rolfe Humphries’ inspired translation, *The Way Things Are*.

[Chapter 14](#) provides a brief explanation of the illustration on the cover of this book, which was arranged from a sketch of a bust of Epicurus found in Herculaneum superimposed over a mosaic unearthed in Pompeii in the eighteenth century. There is no way to be certain that the artist intended to convey Epicurean meanings when he created the mosaic, but regardless of such intent or the lack thereof, the mosaic provides an excellent medium for summarizing visually some of the most important concepts of Epicureanism.

The material provided in Chapter 15, the [Appendix](#), has been selected to provide both an accessible version of the most important texts already referenced, plus additional material from the ancient world beyond that which has been incorporated in first fourteen chapters of this book.

First in significance, and containing the great majority of what is believed to be Epicurus’ own writing, is the biography prepared in approximately 225 AD by [Diogenes Laertius](#). Within that biography are preserved the three letters thought to have been written by Epicurus himself, the list of sayings about “the Wise Man,” and the Principal Doctrines. This biography is our most reliable source of information about the philosophy of Epicurus.

Next in significance in the Appendix are several lengthy passages on Epicurus left to us by [Cicero](#). The reader should be cautioned that Cicero was a follower of Plato, the philosopher whom Epicurus rejected in almost every significant respect. Cicero largely accepted Plato’s views that reliable knowledge of anything is difficult or impossible to obtain, that such knowledge as is available to man is obtained only through reason alone, and that the universe was created by one or more supernatural gods who intervene directly in human affairs.<sup>1</sup> Cicero recognized Epicurus as the foremost enemy of these ideas in the ancient world, and his bias against Epicurus in these areas is clear. Nevertheless, many of Cicero’s closest friends were Epicureans, and the presentations of Epicurean doctrine which Cicero preserved are invaluable to us today.

Next in the Appendix are several letters between Cicero and [Gaius Cassius Longinus](#), whose leadership of the revolution against Julius Caesar even after his conversion to Epicureanism is a source of much consternation for those academics who assert Epicureanism requires total withdrawal from a life of public action. Despite the common allegation that Epicureanism breeds pacifism in politics, Cassius’ letters show he saw his active resistance to political tyranny as entirely consistent with a proper application of the principles of Epicurus.

Also included here are selected works of [Lucius Annaeus Seneca](#), who quoted Epicurus regularly in a series of letters in the middle of the first century AD. Although he was essentially a Platonist like Cicero, Seneca’s letters preserve for us many valuable quotations and doctrines espoused by Epicurus and his followers.

Rounding out the Appendix are selections from [Thomas Jefferson](#), whose avowed reverence for Epicurus is little known today. The full text of Jefferson’s letter to William Short is particularly striking in showing that Jefferson was well-read in the Epicurean literature and in provides a direct link relatively recent history and the ancient Epicureans.

Jefferson’s letter also reminds us of Epicurus’ advice that we compose outlines as a way of furthering our own understanding of true philosophy.<sup>2</sup> As Epicurus explained in his letter to Herodotus:

*This method being useful even to those who are already familiarized with the laws of the universe, I recommend them, while still pursuing without intermission the study of Nature, which contributes more than anything else to the tranquility and happiness of life, to make a concise statement, or summary, of their opinions.<sup>3</sup>*

It is hoped that the current work will be of assistance to others who decide – along with Jefferson and ages of past Epicureans – to pursue their own study of the Master-Builder of Human Happiness.



Throughout this work where abbreviations are used to works contained in the Appendix the following conventions are employed:

DL-LM – Diogenes Laertius – Letter to Menoeceus

DL-LH – Diogenes Laertius – Letter to Herodotus

DL-LP – Diogenes Laertius – Letter to Pythocles

DL-SM – Diogenes Laertius – Principal Doctrines

DRN – Lucretius – De Rerum Natura

ONOTG – Cicero – On the Nature of the Gods

OEOGE – Cicero – On the Ends of Good and Evil

CASS – Cassius – Correspondence with Cicero

SEN – Seneca – Selected Writings

VAT – Unknown – Vatican List

Note: All texts contained in this book were prepared from material either in the public domain or otherwise available for inclusion here. The paraphrases included here in Chapters 1 – 14 were prepared by the current author from the great translators of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Of these translators, special recognition is due to Charles Duke Yonge (1812-1891) translator of Diogenes Laertius, and to Hugh Andrew Johnstone Munro, translator of Lucretius. The version of Cicero used here is that of Horace Rackham. Meriting special attention as a translator is Rolfe Humphries, whose *The Way Things Are* provides the most readable modern translation of Lucretius.

Among the commentators on Epicurus referenced here, special recognition must go to two:

First and foremost, recognition is owed to Norman W. DeWitt, Professor of Latin at the University of Toronto, whose articles and treatise *Epicurus and His Philosophy* have been a leading influence on many of the interpretations of Epicurus included here. Also of note for the student of Epicurus is Cyril Bailey, translator, commentator, and author of *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus*. In the opinion of this author the formulations and interpretations of DeWitt are more accurate and insightful where they differ from those of Bailey, but Bailey's work is also very valuable to the student of Epicurus.



## Chapter 1. An Overview of Epicureanism

*As you say of yourself, I too am an Epicurean. I consider the genuine (not the imputed) doctrines of Epicurus as containing everything rational in moral philosophy which Greece and Rome have left us.*

– Thomas Jefferson, Letter to William Short, October 31, 1819<sup>4</sup>

When Thomas Jefferson wrote “I too am an Epicurean,” he was not referring to his taste in food or wine. Many people today are totally unfamiliar with Epicurus, but Jefferson had thoroughly studied the man he considered his “master,” and he knew well the tenets of the philosopher whose fame had once eclipsed that of Plato and Aristotle.

Today, even those who should know better refer to Epicurus as an “Atheist” who denied the existence of gods, as a “Hedonist” dedicated to “Pleasure” above all, or as a “Materialist” who believed that the universe came into being by “Accident.” Some of these are misunderstandings and others are intentional deceptions, but all can be corrected by studying the original works of Epicurus.

The greatest part of the confusion that exists today comes from failing to understand that Epicurus derived his conclusions by tenaciously following this central insight: man’s search for knowledge must be grounded and based in the senses – the faculties that Nature provides as his direct connection with reality. This method must be thoroughly understood and appreciated – for it is the antidote to false religion and philosophy.

Nature equips men with a clear, simple, and direct road to truth, but Nature does not provide that all men must travel this road or reach its destination. The ability of each person to walk this road varies with his own abilities. Some men are born blind, or labor under mental infirmities, and their road is much more difficult. As a rule, however, Nature equips healthy men with three faculties, which can be thought of as categories of senses, that Epicurus identified as key to obtaining true knowledge and living happy lives. These three faculties are:

1. *The five senses – (sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste),*
2. *The sense of pain and pleasure, and*
3. *The sense of innate conceptual knowledge which Epicurus called “preconceptions” or “anticipations.”*

These faculties allow us to obtain information which we may then use to separate the true from the false. These faculties themselves, however do not perform any *evaluation* of the information that they receive. It is the individual intellect which evaluates and judges the evidence, and determines the extent to which the information it provides corresponds with reality. Only if the faculties are employed in a manner consistent with their nature will they lead to the determination of truth rather than error.

Through these faculties, we first observe those things that are effectively *ante oculos* – directly before our eyes. With the information that is clear and directly before our eyes as a base, we then make additional observations and corollate the new and previously unknown evidence against the facts that are already known. This is the process that we so loosely call “reasoning.” Gradually, over time, after multiple observations and repeated trial and error, we begin to reach a determination of truth. It is possible to build and increase human knowledge in this way (and only in this way) because reality is governed by unchanging laws of Nature. Reality is always consistent and never contradicts itself, so we may count on truth, once determined in accord with Nature’s laws, to provide a firm basis for additional discoveries.

There is a critical danger that must be avoided in regard to facts which are too distant or obscured to be grasped directly. We must never confuse our speculative reasoning with established fact. In order to do this, we must never allow our speculations to either (1) contradict truths which our faculties have previously established with clarity, or (2) embrace and consider something as “confirmed” when the facts available to us are inadequate to grasp the matter clearly.

This danger confronts us because – unless we guard against it – men tend to “reason” beyond what the evidence supports. Men are tempted by those who preach “faith” to accept views – such as how we should live our lives, how we should view death, or how our destinies are controlled by the gods – that are not supported, and are in fact contradicted, by the evidence provided by the faculties Nature has granted to us. Epicurus held that to give in to such temptation is to rebel against Nature, guarantees despair and confusion, and renders a life of happiness impossible.

Epicurus therefore employed his faculties to examine the nature of the universe directly around him. The evidence he clearly observed led to the conclusion which serves as the first fundamental physical principle of Epicureanism:

**“Nothing can be created from nothing.”** This conclusion is not supported by the faith of priests, the abstract reasoning of academics, or the power of wealth or political office, but by the *evidence of the senses*. It is a conclusion that is consistent with every observation a man can observe with his own eyes and in his own experience, and even after lifetimes of experience there has been no reliable evidence in conflict with it.

Once we establish by observation that nothing can be created from nothing, there is no basis for allowing any exception to be entertained in our minds. There is no basis for allowing ourselves to believe that this rule has *ever* been violated, neither thousands of years ago in the creation stories of the religionists, nor billions of years ago in theories of speculative “scientists.” It is a fatal error to entertain in our minds that any law of Nature that has been clearly established could ever be violated – only evidence provided by Nature itself would be sufficient for such a conclusion. For a man to believe that a law of Nature is subject to repeal is not at all the same as “keeping an open mind.” Error is very possible in matters of speculation, but to “keep an open mind” in regard to the law of gravity as one approaches the edge of a cliff is a matter of life or death. Epicurus therefore held that it is urgently important for all men to keep a clear view of which matters are subject to error, and which are not. To fail to keep this distinction clearly in view is to abandon the entire framework of knowledge established by Nature. This issue cannot be taken lightly – it is this framework of decision-making that sustains not only all valid scientific reasoning but our very ability to live our lives at all.

The first fundamental physical principle may be carried much further. Once we see that nothing is or has ever been created from nothing, then we have also established that those things that do exist must be composed of some basic material that is itself **eternal**. Although our eyes are not able to see the individual atoms, Epicurus reasoned – based on what he could observe – that in order for this material to be eternal, it must be *indivisible*. This fundamental material, whether we think of it today as “atomic” or “subatomic,” has not only always existed, but it also *possesses the same characteristics now that it always has possessed, and always will possess those characteristics, no matter how it moves and combines with other material over the ages*.

It at this basic level and with this observation – that the basic material of the universe always has and will always exist according to its own laws and characteristics – that Epicurus grounded his reasoning about the laws of Nature and how men should live. From here (and many other observations about the nature of the physical universe) he proceeded to name his four most fundamental doctrines:

First, Nature reveals to us directly through our senses – here including the sense known as the “preconceptions” – that any god worthy of the name must be perfect and without flaw. Emotions of anger or gratitude are not consistent with perfection, so any gods which do exist will exhibit neither anger nor gratitude. Nature shows to us here on Earth that she never creates only one thing of a single kind, so it is reasonable to believe that out in the limitless universe there are in fact other worlds, other races of men, and other forms of life, including immortal “gods” – but **all** of these come into being according to the laws of Nature and are governed by those same laws. Thus we conclude that no meddling gods govern our lives, and it is *we* – not the gods – who determine our lives and deserve credit or blame for our actions. Neither gods nor a mechanistic universe have set our future; men have no fate but what we make for ourselves.

Second, Nature shows us through our faculties that our consciousness begins at birth and ends at death. Just as all that happened before our birth has no effect on us during our lives, neither does anything that happens after our death have any effect on us while we live. Thus we can be sure that there is no hell or punishment threatening us after death, and we know both that what comes in life is everything to us and that death is nothing to us.

Third, Nature has established that our consciousness of being alive is by itself a very great pleasure, and it is only pain that detracts from our enjoyment of life. Nature provides that we require only a very few things (food, water, air, shelter), and it is an illusion (or – too often – the result of an intentional deception) to believe that anything more is required in order for us to live a complete life that is full of happiness. Neither power, fame, material possessions, or an unlimited lifespan are required for us to live happily in accord with Nature.

Fourth, Nature has established that the pain that detracts from living a happy life is not continuous, not unconquerable, and thus not to be feared. Intense pain lasts only briefly – it either departs quickly or brings our life to a quick end, and by either means is equally gone. Pain that is not intense is outweighed by the pleasure which life itself gives to us. It generally departs in due course, or becomes manageable over time, as we continue to experience

the pleasures of life. In those cases where we find extended pain unbearable, it is easily within our power to end such pain by ending our lives. Even when this is necessary we need feel no regret. All men have limited lifespans, and Nature does not call us to measure our lives in terms of length, but in terms of happiness.

Epicureanism is of course much wider in scope than can be contained in the first four principles. The remainder of the forty doctrines provide principles for the application of the evidence provided by Nature to many additional aspects of human life. At this point in our study, however, we will defer those specifics in favor of examining in greater detail the Epicurean method by which these doctrines were derived.



## Chapter 2. Nature's Test of Truth

*It is only by firmly grasping a well-reasoned scientific study of Nature, and observing Epicurus' Canon of Truth that has fallen, as it were, from heaven, which affords us a knowledge of the universe. Only by making that Canon the test of all our judgments can we always hope to stand fast in our convictions, undeterred and unshaken by the eloquence of any man.*

– Cicero, “*On The Ends of Good and Evil*”

As with us today, the ancient Epicureans lived in a world where even men who were not blinded by religious zeal had been persuaded by philosophers such as Plato that their senses were not a reliable source of knowledge on how men should live. In the place of religious revelation, the reigning philosophers had erected their own edifice – abstract reasoning alone – as the only reliable method for determining truth. Epicurus saw the error in both alternatives. As recorded by Cicero, Epicurus trained his philosophical guns on the error of his most powerful enemies, the followers of Plato:

*Theoretical logic, on which [the] Platonic school lays such stress, Epicurus held to be of **no assistance either as a guide to conduct or as an aid to thought**. In contrast, he deemed Natural Philosophy to be **all-important**. Natural Philosophy explains to us the meaning of terms, the nature of cause and effect, and the laws of consistency and contradiction.*

Epicurus emphasized Natural Philosophy rather than reason because speculation – no matter how “reasonable” – is worthless if not based on real and true evidence. The results of reasoning will necessarily be false if the evidence on which that reasoning is based is itself false. Epicurus acknowledged the vital importance of reason throughout his work, but he emphasized that it was necessarily a *secondary* tool. Because reason relies for its accuracy on the information obtained through the senses, reason alone can never be used to contradict a fact that has been established by the senses to be true.

In addition to establishing that reason is an essential tool to use in support of the senses, but never in contradiction to them, Epicurus also observed that Nature *demand*s that men rely on their senses if they wish to live. If a man does not use his sense of eyesight to see a cliff in his path, and then turn to avoid it, his life comes to a quick end. Epicurus therefore observed that regardless of the quibbles of those who attack the senses, *all* men *do* use the senses successfully – every day – to obtain the knowledge that is necessary to sustain their lives. Thus all men, regardless of their vain opinions to the contrary, rely on the fact that the senses are up to the task of providing the information that is necessary to life.

Epicurus then turned his attention to the question of obtaining knowledge beyond the minimum amount necessary to avoid falling off cliffs and otherwise sustaining our lives. Looking again to Nature for guidance, Epicurus observed that all desires, including the desire for knowledge, can be divided into three categories: (1) those desires that are natural *and* necessary for life, (2) those desires that are natural *but not necessary for life*, and (3) those desires which are *neither* natural *nor* necessary for life.

Epicurus observed that Nature has established that those desires which are both natural and necessary for life, such as air, food, water, and basic clothing and shelter, are relatively easy to obtain. In a similar way, those desires which are natural, *but not necessary*, such as the desire for luxuries such as more refined food, shelter, and clothing, are not quite so easy to fulfill, but may still be obtained by exerting a reasonable degree of effort. On the other hand, Nature has established that those desires that are *neither natural nor necessary*, such as political power or great riches, are difficult or impossible to obtain or keep.

Epicurus then applied these three categories to determine the proper attitude to take toward the desire for knowledge:

The knowledge that is natural and necessary for life, such as that which is required to sustain one's life by avoiding cliffs, is easy to obtain by simply opening one's eyes and observing what is before of us to be seen.

The knowledge that is natural but not necessary for life, such as that which is required to improve one's living conditions through agriculture and the applied sciences, is also readily available given reasonable mental effort. It may not be necessary for us to learn the knowledge necessary to sleep on a soft bed rather than on the hard ground, but the desire to do so is natural, and Nature provides that knowledge to obtain this luxury is readily available if we apply our minds appropriately.

But knowledge that is neither natural nor necessary for life, such as the desire that some men have to know all the facts of an infinite universe – knowledge clearly beyond the ability of any single man to know – is *impossible* to obtain. No man in any age has the ability to comprehend the movement of all the stars and the planets in boundless space, or the events of infinite past or future time, so therefore *it makes no sense to concern oneself unduly about them*. In regard to such things that Nature has established to have no practical relationship to our lives and to be clearly beyond the limits of our reach, Epicurus held that “It is not good to desire what is impossible.”

Let us now examine a number of the ancient texts to see how Epicurus devoted much attention to the method by which men may expand their knowledge beyond those things that are immediately evident. To restate what we saw earlier, Epicurus dismissed the methods advanced by both the Platonists (abstract reasoning) and the religionists (divine revelation). Epicurus held that because reasoning is fully dependent on the senses, the evidence that is before our eyes can never be deprecated in favor of opinions asserted by any other method. Nature requires us to start with the evidence that is before our eyes, which we possess the means to determine clearly, and then proceed from there. Once concepts are formed from facts which are close at hand and for which the evidence is clear are established with certainty, we are equipped to apply those concepts to any new evidence which our faculties allow us to obtain, and thereby expand the limits of the view that we can determine clearly.

The critical requirement is that we must apply the laws of consistency and contradiction and never accept any conclusion that would contradict some matter that has already been established with certainty. This necessarily follows from the observation that reason is dependent on the validity of the information established by the faculties. The process of examining those things which are close at hand is the process of studying Nature, which Epicurus referred to as the study of Natural Philosophy. In the words Cicero recorded in the following passage, Epicurus held that the study of Nature could go nowhere if the senses cannot be trusted to provide reliable information:

*... [W]ithout a firm understanding of the world of Nature, it is impossible to maintain the validity of the perceptions [which we reach based on] our senses. Every mental presentation has its origin in sensation, and no knowledge or perception is possible unless the sensations are reliable, as the theory of Epicurus teaches us that they are. Those who deny the reliability of sensation and say that nothing can be known, by excluding the evidence of the senses, are unable even to make their own argument. By abolishing knowledge and science, they abolish all possibility of rational life and action. In contrast, Natural Philosophy supplies courage to face the fear of death, and resolution to resist the terrors of religion. Natural Philosophy provides peace of mind by removing all ignorance of the mysteries of Nature, and provides self-control, by explaining the nature of the desires and allowing us to distinguish their different kinds. In addition, the Canon or Criterion of Knowledge which Epicurus established shows us the method by which we evaluate the evidence of the senses and discern truth from falsehood.*

Lucretius records for us Epicurus' scorn for the folly of those who argue that knowledge is impossible, and his

emphasis on trusting the senses, as follows:

*[I]f a man contends that nothing can be known, he knows not whether this contention itself can be known, since he admits that he knows nothing. I will therefore decline to argue the question against him who places his head where his feet should be. And yet granting that this man knows his contention to be true, I would still ask this question: Since he has never yet seen any truth in any thing, how does he know what “knowing” and “not knowing” are? What has produced his knowledge of the difference between the true and the false, and between the doubtful and the certain?*

*You will find that all knowledge of the true comes from the senses, and that the senses cannot be refuted. For anything which on its own can distinguish that which is false from that which is true must by nature possess a higher certainty than the thing which it judges.*

*Well, then, what can fairly be accounted of higher certainty than the senses? Shall reasoning alone be able to contradict the sensations? No, not when reasoning is itself wholly reliant on the senses for its accuracy. If the evidence of the senses is not true, then all reasoning based on that evidence is rendered false. Are the ears able to take the eyes to task, or the sense of touch take the ears to task? Shall the sense of taste or smell or vision call into question the sense of touch? No, for each sense has its own separate and distinct office and power. ... It therefore follows that no sense can refute any other. Nor can any sense take itself to task, since equal credit must be assigned to the evidence it produces at all times. What has at any time appeared true to each sense must be taken as a true sensation.*

*At times you may experience sensations which your reason is unable to explain – for example, why a tower close at hand is seen to be square, but when seen at a distance appears round. In such cases it is better, if you are at a loss for a reason to explain this, to admit that you do not know the truth of the matter, rather than to accept an explanation that makes no sense. If you accept as true a possibility that contradicts your senses, you have set the stage to let slip from your grasp all those other things which you know to be manifestly true. In so doing you will ruin the groundwork of all your beliefs, and wrench up all the foundations on which life and existence rest. For not only would all reason give way, but life itself would fall to the ground, unless you pursue the truth and choose to trust the senses, shunning the steep cliffs of life that must be avoided. All that host of words drawn out in array against the senses is quite without meaning.*

*If, in the construction of a building, the measuring stick first applied by the builder is crooked, or his square is untrue and swerves from its straight lines, or if there is the slightest hitch in any part of his level, all the construction will turn out to be faulty, crooked, sloping, leaning forward or backward, without symmetry, so that some parts seem ready to fall, and others do fall, all ruined by the first erroneous measurements. So too, all reasoning of things which is not founded on the senses will prove to be distorted and false.<sup>5</sup>*

As Lucretius observed, the student of Nature must be prepared to defeat the arguments of those (such as the followers of Plato or religion) who assert that no knowledge is possible except through their special insights. The key to disarming such arguments is to remember that whether they are alleged to be based on “abstract reason” or “divine revelation”, such arguments refute themselves – the person who makes them ***in fact relies on the senses to speak, hear, and conduct the argument***. This is the likely meaning of Lucretius’ observation that such men “put their head where their feet should be.” When one is in doubt whether a tower is square or round, the answer is not found in abstract logical formulas or in divine revelation, but in using one’s feet to walk toward the tower and find out the fact by seeing for oneself.

Before we proceed further, it is important to provide additional background on the faculties based on the work of Norman W. DeWitt, twentieth-century authority on Epicurus and author of the book “Epicurus and His Philosophy.” The three categories of faculties may be described as follows:

The first category is “**the five senses**” – sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. Through this faculty, men gather evidence about specific aspects of their surroundings.

The second category is the “**pleasure-pain mechanism**,” sometimes referred to as “the passions.” Through this faculty, Nature provides men evidence of what is for them good and bad, or pleasing and displeasing, in the sense that men find that fire is hot, and honey is sweet.

The third category is the “**Anticipations**,” also referred to as “**Preconceptions**.” Through this faculty, Nature has endowed men with the power to form and use concepts. Just as the pain/pleasure mechanism evaluates certain aspects of nature, the Anticipations are essentially an intuition or disposition to form concepts in a particular manner. This intuition is referred to as a “pre-conception” because it exists prior to any experience with examples of the matter being observed. An example of an anticipation is the general idea that most men have of “justice.”

Each of these three faculties has been established by Nature as a direct means of obtaining evidence about reality. These faculties provide only the means, however, and not evaluation of the content; the evidence provided in any single sensation may not represent a full or accurate picture of the object being observed. All evidence received through the faculties must be processed by the mind, which must consider any limitations under which the evidence was obtained. Each faculty faithfully reports to the mind what it observes, without any evaluation of the information, so the faculties by nature cannot *misinterpret* what they receive. But all evidence *must* be interpreted *by the mind*, and the mind is very definitely subject to error if it fails to process the information correctly.

Stated in simple terms, Epicurus held that the mind operates by taking the information provided by the faculties, establishing it to be true through multiple observations, and then organizing that information into concepts, which are then used as a standard against which to process new information as it is received. This operation can fail for a number of reasons, such as when we fail to consider any limitations in what was observed or when we fail to account for any distortions that might have intervened between the object and ourselves. In such cases we make mistakes because our mind is operating on evaluations that we believe to be accurate, but which are not, and we jump to an incorrect conclusion based on some prior experience or disposition toward a particular result. In the words of Lucretius:

*Many are the marvels ... we see which seek to shake the credit of the senses. But such efforts are quite in vain, since the greatest part of these cases deceive us on account of the opinions which we add ourselves, taking things as seen which have not been seen by the senses. For nothing is harder than to separate those facts that are clearly true from those that are doubtful which the mind adds itself.*

In all cases, it is the task of the mind is to verify that the evidence we received has in fact provided us with a “clear view” of the object being observed. Our best method of confirming this is to obtain multiple consistent reports through as many of the three basic faculties as possible, and even to compare those observations with those made by other men, if possible. Only when we have a clear view of the matter at hand is the mind justified in concluding that it has sufficient evidence to grasp what is true, and to conclude that it has reached an accurate determination on a matter – in other words, what may be described as a *clear view*.

Until we work to place ourselves in position to grasp that clear view, we are vulnerable to making a mistake by misinterpreting the evidence. Classic examples of this are when we see a square tower at a distance that appears to be round, or when we see a straight stick partially submerged in water that appears to be bent. Under these conditions, the distance and the water distort the image. If our minds do not compensate, we may jump to the incorrect conclusion that the tower is in fact round and the stick is in fact bent. Nature provides us the means to correct these errors by walking toward the tower for a closer view, and by removing the stick from the water and looking at it again. Only by **taking action to obtain a clear view** can we be sure that we have sufficient evidence to reach an accurate conclusion.

With this as background, we turn to Diogenes Laertius, who recorded the following:

*In regard to the five senses, [Epicurus states] that the senses themselves are devoid of reason, and they are not capable of receiving any impressions from memory. For they are not by themselves the cause of any impression, and when they have received any impression from any external cause, they can add nothing to it, nor can they subtract anything from it. Moreover, they are not within the control of the other senses; for one sense cannot judge another, as all observations have an equal value, and their objects are not*

*identical. In other words, one sensation cannot control another, since the effects of all of them influence us equally. Also, reason by itself cannot pronounce judgment on the senses; for... all reasoning rests on the senses for its foundation. Reality and the evidence provided by the senses establish the certainty of our faculties; for the impressions of sight and hearing are just as real, just as evident, as pain.*

*It follows from these considerations that we should judge those things which are obscure by their analogy to those things which we perceive directly. In fact, every notion proceeds from the evidence provided by the senses, either directly, or as a result of some analogy, or proportion, or combination to that which we do perceive directly, reasoning always participating in these operations. ....*

*In regard to the preconceptions, Epicurus meant a sort of comprehension, or right opinion, or notion, or general idea which exists within us. In other words, a preconception is a kind of mental recollection of an external object that we experience before we perceive it. For instance, one example is the idea: "Man is a being of such and such Nature." At the same moment that we utter the word man, we conceive the figure of a man, in virtue of a preconception which we owe to the preceding operations of the senses. [An anticipation is] therefore the first notion which each word awakens within us .... In fact, we could not seek for anything if we did not previously have some notion about it. To enable us to affirm that what we see at a distance is a horse or an ox, we must have some preconception in our minds which makes us acquainted with the form of a horse and an ox. We could not even give names to things, if we did not have a preliminary notion of what the things were.*

*These preconceptions then furnish us with certainty. And with respect to judgments, their certainty depends on our referring them to some previous notion which has already been established to be certain. This is how we affirm or judge the answer to any question; for instance, "How do we know whether this thing is a man?"*

Here we must return to DeWitt's framework for several important clarifications:

First, in regard to the senses, it is necessary to pay careful attention to what is meant by observing that "all sensations are true." The senses report to the mind exactly what they observe, and the senses do not lie. The senses neither add to nor subtract from the information that they receive, but neither do they reason, evaluate, or process that information – they are true *witnesses* to what they observe.

But just as may occur in a courtroom, a witness may be telling the truth but nevertheless not know the accurate or the entire story. As with all testimony, the mind must act as judge and jury, evaluating whether the evidence the sensation is providing is a complete and accurate picture of the object being observed. If we do not adequately consider any limiting or distorting conditions under which the sensation may have been received, our minds are apt to misinterpret that sensation. When the eyes see a tower at a distance, it is the mind that must compensate for the distance as it perceives whether the object is round, square, or indeed whether it is a tower at all.

On this point, Epicurus' detractors allege that he held that all senses are "true to reality" and provide us "infallible" information about the object being observed. By this they mean us to believe that Epicurus was obtuse enough to believe that if he held a stick in water and it appeared to be bent, then it must **in reality** be bent. This contention is (1) absurd, and (2) completely contradicted by the observation that Epicurus composed a book on the subject of *analyzing* the sensations – a book that would have been completely unnecessary if he had really held that the information the senses provide is complete and infallible. The truth is that Epicurus held that each sensation must be evaluated and compared to what has already been established to be true before the mind can reach a judgment about what the sensation is observing.

Second, in regard to the pain/pleasure mechanism, Epicurus held that *Nature* is the ultimate guide of conduct. The pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain is not an overriding motive that supersedes all else, but one among many secondary sources of information – albeit an important one. The focus always remains, however, on the **primary requirement** – that *Nature* be obeyed in all things.

Epicurus' enemies reverse this priority and allege that he taught "sensualism" and sought immediate physical pleasure over all other considerations. This is the opposite of the truth. With pleasure as with all things, Epicurus'

method of analysis was to start with the evidence before our eyes and follow that evidence to its conclusion. Here, the evidence is that Nature has endowed all men with the pain/pleasure mechanism, which serves as a guide to assist us in determining what is desirable. But pleasure and pain are only *guides*. *Nature*, which is at the center of all things, frequently requires men to forsake that guide, and to avoid pleasure and choose pain. Nature's ultimate goal ("*the highest goal toward which we all are aiming*") is not *momentary physical pleasure*, but *a healthy mind and a healthy body living a life of happiness in accord with Nature*. The problem here is that some men simply can not or will not accept that Nature has established the pursuit of individual happiness as the guide of life. Such men insist on "virtue" or "the will of god" or "the good of others" or some other standard of their own rather than the standard provided by Nature. In this matter as in all things, Epicurus refused to place any consideration above that of Nature.

Third, in regard to the "Anticipations," it must be observed that Epicurus was not simply referring here to the concepts that men form by reflecting on the things that they have seen, touched, or otherwise already experienced. The name "pre-conception" is given to this faculty because Epicurus held it to be a predisposition, or intuition, toward forming conceptual knowledge in a manner pre-programmed by Nature. In this way the Anticipations are analogous to the five senses, or to the pleasure/pain mechanism, in that each of these three faculties is tuned by Nature to operate in a particular way. The reasoning mind forms and applies concepts based on the evidence input from each of the three faculties. The input from the Anticipations are intuitions in the field of abstract ideas that influence the conceptions that we form.

In addition to the previously-mentioned sense of "justice," Epicurus held that the existence of perfect and eternal superior beings – gods – was also an anticipation provided by nature. Epicurus stated emphatically that he was not an atheist, and his belief in gods as perfect – and therefore unconcerned and uninvolved with earthly matters – rested on this idea being established by Nature as an "Anticipation." It was in this sense that Epicurus wrote in his letter to Menoeceus that the superstitions of the common people about the gods were "not true anticipations." In contrast, Epicurus recorded in the first of his Crucial Doctrines a correct anticipation:

*That which is happy and imperishable neither has trouble itself, nor does it cause trouble to anything else. It is not subject to feelings either of anger or gratitude, for these feelings only exist in that which is weak.*

Now that we have established the five senses, the pain/pleasure mechanism, and the Anticipations as the three fundamental faculties through which all knowledge is gained, we next turn to this important question: How does the mind process the information provided by these three faculties and determine from them whether an opinion is true or false? On this subject Diogenes Laertius recorded the following:

*The Epicureans refer to 'opinion' as supposition, and say that it is at times true, and at times false. An opinion which is supported by evidence, and is not contradicted by other evidence is true. An opinion which is not supported by evidence, and is contradicted by other evidence, is false. On this account they have introduced the expression of "waiting," such as when, before pronouncing that a thing seen is a tower, we must wait until we approach it, and learn what it looks like when we are nearby.*

From this we see that Epicurus held that in order to determine whether an opinion is true we must verify the evidence provided by each faculty to determine if it provides an accurate picture of the thing being observed. The mind accomplishes this by first starting with the evidence that is nearby, and for which it has a clear view, and forming an opinion, or concept that it judges to be true, of the matter being considered. The mind then takes each new sensation provided by any faculty and compares it against this conception that is known to be true based on prior evidence. If the conception is supported by the evidence, and not contradicted by the evidence, then the opinion is true. If the mind finds that new evidence contradicts the opinion, or that it has formed an opinion without any evidence to support it, then the opinion must be judged to be false. In this process, the mind must consider all sensations from all the faculties, without ignoring any, because as we have already discussed, all sensations are true reporters of what they observe. Not until the mind obtains a clear view, with clear evidence supporting the conclusion, and with all evidence that at first seemed contradictory reconciled with it, may the mind reach the conclusion that its opinion is true.

From this we see that the determination of truth is a process in which the observer must actively seek out, gather, and process the information that is obtainable. One should expect that very often this process will take time, and it is essential to recognize that until such time as a clear view is achieved – if ever – the observer must "wait" until he

has gathered sufficient evidence. In the meantime, conflicting evidence requires that we classify the matter as uncertain, rather than true or false. In the example of perceiving whether a tower at a distance is square or round, the observer must not take a position on the tower's shape until he approaches close enough to be certain. In regard to the stick partially submerged in water, the observer must wait until he removes the stick from the water before he can take the position that it is straight.

The point stressed here by Epicurus is that it is critically important to keep separate in our minds the distinction between what is true and what is false and what is uncertain. If we have gathered enough information to have a clear view, we must classify the matter as true or false. If we do not have sufficient information to have a clear view, we must classify the matter as uncertain. The failure to identify and keep these categories separate leads inevitably to confusion in all walks of life.

These principles from the Canon were enshrined in two of Epicurus' Crucial Doctrines, which can be paraphrased as follows:

*(24) You must not discard any evidence provided by a sense simply because it does not fit your prior conceptions, and you must always distinguish between those matters which are certain and those which are uncertain by keeping them separate. You must always do this so you can determine whether your conclusion goes beyond that which is justified by the actual evidence of the senses. You cannot be confident of your determination unless your conclusion is justified by actual, immediate, and clear evidence which comes from the senses, from the pain/pleasure mechanism, and from the conceptions of the mind which arise from the anticipations. If you fail to keep these distinctions in mind, you will be injecting error into the evaluation of the evidence provided by the senses, and you will destroy in that area of inquiry every means of distinguishing the true from the false.*

*(25) If you consider those ideas which are only an opinion, and must await further information before they can be verified, to be of equal authority with those ideas which bear about them an immediate certainty, you will not escape error. For if you do this you will be confusing doubtful opinions with those which are not doubtful, and true judgments with those of an uncertain character.*

Thus we see that Epicurus taught that truth is determined in a particular matter by obtaining and evaluating any evidence available from the three faculties. Where we find that our opinion is confirmed by multiple observations of direct evidence, and no other evidence exists which contradicts that opinion, then we judge the opinion to be true. This process necessarily involves accounting for any limitations in the sensations or any distortions that may exist between us and the object being observed. Because all sensations truly report what they observe, we must never ignore the implications of any observation, or take any evidence out of context, or elevate the evidence of one sensation over contradictory evidence from another. When we fail to heed any evidence that contradicts our opinions from any faculty, or when we confuse what has been confirmed as true with what we should realize is only tentative, we are apt to go wrong. Before we reach firm conclusions we must wait until we have obtained a clear view that has been confirmed by direct evidence from our three faculties, and we must never allow any opinion that is not supported by evidence, or is contradicted by any evidence, to be considered true.

As we near the end of this discussion of Nature's test of truth, we can recapitulate and summarize Epicurus' view as follows:

Only the foolish take the position that no knowledge of anything is possible. Nature requires that we seek out and obtain knowledge if we wish to live at all, and especially if we wish to live happily. The scope of knowledge open to us is vast, and we must seek to expand it throughout our lives, but it is equally important to remember that it is not good to ask for that which is impossible. There are Natural limits to the amount of knowledge a single man can obtain, and although it is essential to happiness that we seek out and obtain all the knowledge that we can, we must keep a clear view of the limitations of nature. It is a major mistake to concern oneself with the pursuit of knowledge beyond that which nature allows us to obtain.

Epicurus held that the "Canon of Truth" is the three faculties that Nature provides through which we obtain knowledge of reality. These three faculties are: the Five Senses, the Passions, and the

Anticipations.

The five senses are seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting.

The passions are the feelings of pleasure and pain.

The anticipations are intuitive natural dispositions that Nature provides to assist us in the formation of abstract concepts.

The three faculties are reliable because they are true witnesses, and they report just what they observe. They neither add to nor subtract from the information they receive.

None of the three faculties can contradict the other, because they all rule supreme within their own area of expertise. Sensations from one faculty cannot invalidate sensations from another faculty, nor can different sensations from the same faculty invalidate each other. All information received through the faculties must be considered and reconciled in order to gain a clear view of the matter being observed and to separate the true from the false.

It is the role of the mind to take the evidence provided by the three faculties and process it properly. The mind does not operate automatically, however, and error can occur in the process of evaluating the evidence. The key to avoiding error is to obtain a clear view of the matter being considered before reaching a conclusion.

Until such time as we have obtained a clear view of a matter, we must “wait” before we reach a conclusion about it. When we do not have a clear view, we must firmly identify the matter as uncertain, and wait until we are able to obtain further evidence before taking a position on the truth of the matter.

At all times we must keep separate in our minds those things which we know to be true or false from those things which are uncertain. If we confuse together those things that are certain with those things that are uncertain, we will lose grasp of the method by which we know anything to be true. Not only will we become hopelessly confused, we will then have no means to separate the true from the false.

In order to arrive at truth in any new matter we must always start with those things for which we already have a clear view. We must then reason by analogy, by proportion, and by similar methods to compare the evidence about those things that are uncertain with those things that we do know to be true. Starting with those things that are directly before our eyes, we then apply that knowledge to those things which are distant or obscure, and in this way we expand the range of our clear view.

In those situations where we do not have a clear view of a matter, we must accept as possible any alternative which can be squared with the evidence that we do know to be true. We must not, however, accept any possibility which contradicts those things that we do know to be true, or allow ourselves to take inconsistent positions. When the facts support the possibility that any of several alternatives may be true, it is wrong to assert that we know which alternative is correct.

Abstract reasoning alone and by itself is not a reliable source of knowledge, nor does it rank higher or even equal in importance with the three faculties. This is because reason relies for its foundation on the accuracy of the sensations received from the three faculties. Truth comes by obtaining a clear view of the matter being observed, not by abstract reasoning.

Although reason is dependent on the three faculties, it is critically important that the mind employ reason to evaluate the evidence it obtains. The wise man will govern all important affairs of his life by reasoning based on the evidence provided by the three faculties.

As an example of the correct process of determining truth, the first and most basic observation which we can see with our own eyes and can verify through our other faculties is that nothing is ever created from nothing. We know this not because we reason it to be true, but because all of the evidence that we obtain from our faculties establishes that all things come from other things. Never do we see anything come from nothing.

Our second basic observation is that we also see that no thing is ever destroyed completely to nothing. Once again, we know this not because reason establishes it, but because our faculties establish for us from experience that nothing is ever destroyed completely to nothing.

From these first two observations, that nothing comes from nothing, and that nothing goes to nothing, our faculties provide all the proof we need to conclude that the universe as a whole has always existed. Those things that we see before our own eyes may constantly change, but they are never created from nothing by any god or by any supernatural force, nor are they ever completely destroyed. Some may argue that a reasonable case can be constructed that the universe was created by a supernatural god. But this is an example of the error that results from reasoning which is not based on evidence that our faculties can verify, and which contradicts existing evidence that we do know to be true. For all the evidence that we can observe establishes that no thing ever comes from nothing, and to accept for a moment that any thing ever came from nothing would be to accept something that contradicts all that we already know from our own experience to be true.

We also see that all of the universe is composed of a combination of things that exist and empty space, which we call matter and void. Our senses establish that all that we observe is composed of matter and void, and it is on these observations that our reason validates that nothing else exists but matter and void.

Because we have a clear view that matter is never created from nothing or totally destroyed, we reason by analogy that the fundamental material of the universe must consist of some type of indivisible particles which are themselves indestructible and possess unique properties that are eternal and unchanging.

All things, including living things such as men, are made up of this fundamental material of the universe. We can also observe that men and other living beings have free will, and can decide for themselves in what direction they wish to move. We thus conclude that the motion of the fundamental material of the universe is not fully controlled by laws of necessity that confine them to a necessary course. At least some of this fundamental material has the capacity to “swerve” from the course it otherwise would take.

From these basic observations, and others similar to them, we can derive truth about the nature of the universe, and gain confidence that our existence is governed by Natural Laws, rather than by any divine being whose whims can override the laws of Nature.

Nature has provided that the desires and the knowledge necessary to live our lives is easy to obtain, and that the desires and the knowledge men naturally seek are also readily attainable by our efforts. But Nature has also provided that the desires which are vain and idle, including the desires for knowledge beyond that which is natural are difficult or impossible to obtain or possess. For these arrangements we should be thankful to Nature, for if we follow Nature’s laws and live our lives wisely, honorably, and justly, happiness will follow.



## Chapter 3. Principles of Nature

*Thou, father, art discoverer of things. Thou furnishes us with fatherly precepts, and as bees sip of all things in the flowery lawns, we, in like manner, feed from out thy pages upon all the golden maxims – golden I say – most worthy ever of endless life. For as soon as thy philosophy, issuing from a godlike intellect, has begun with loud voice to proclaim the NATURE OF THINGS, the terrors of the mind are dispelled, the walls of the world part asunder, and I see things in operation throughout the whole void.*

*Lucretius, De Rerum Natura, Book III*

Epicurus identified twelve propositions of Nature that he considered to be especially important in the formulation of his philosophy. These are proven to be true, not by Platonic abstract reason or by Religious divine revelation, but by the evidence we gather from direct observation of Nature as evaluated using the rules found in Epicurus' Canon of Truth. The following presentation (based on the work of DeWitt) groups these principles into four related sections:

### ***I. The Basic Material of the Universe Is Eternal.***

*Although the things we see in the universe constantly change, the basic elements from which the universe is made have never been created by any god or by any force outside the universe, nor will it ever be completely destroyed. The basic material of the universe is therefore eternal.*<sup>6</sup>

**1. No thing comes from nothing.** Neither gods nor any other forces are observed to create any thing from nothing. So “no thing comes from nothing.”<sup>7</sup>

Once we see that nothing comes from nothing, and we recognize that all things come into being from preexisting “seeds” in accord with their basic Nature, we will see that all things come into being naturally and without any intervention from the gods.

We observe that Nature determines the characteristics qualities of all things, and the limits and boundaries of what is possible to them, including how all things come into being, grow, and pass away.

We observe that life does not arise at random, but that Nature also contains life-giving particles that, under certain conditions, are capable of growth and life.<sup>8</sup>

**2. No thing decays entirely to nothing.** All things pass away and change back into the essential material from which they are made, but nothing is ever absolutely destroyed to nothing.<sup>9</sup>

One reason know that nothing passes away to nothing is that otherwise, given the eternity of time that has already passed, all things would by now have passed away and nothing would be left in the universe. And we know that no new matter is being created from nothing, because we have already observed that “no thing comes from nothing.”

We conclude therefore that the basic material of the universe is indestructible – although the basic material of the universe is constantly in motion and capable of changing its form, it has never come into existence from nothing, nor will it ever decay into nothing, and it is therefore eternal.

Do not doubt that matter is indestructible simply because the atoms are too small to see – you cannot see the air or odors either and yet you know they exist.

These observations do not mean that the current form of the universe always stays the same, because the material is constantly changing form, but the material from which the universe is made is itself eternal and unchangeable.<sup>10</sup>

We also conclude that there is a limit to divisibility; there is a level at which particle sizes are the smallest possible, and from these particles which are indivisible and eternal the universe is made.<sup>11</sup>

## ***II. Nothing Exists in the Universe But That Which Exists.***

*There are no other dimensions; nothing exists above, below, or outside the universe of things that exist. The Universe is Infinite and contains an infinite amount of matter and void.*

**3. The entirety of the universe is a combination of things that exist (“matter”) and empty space separating those things that do exist (“void”).**<sup>12</sup> Nature’s work is done by particles so small that they are unseen, yet they are bodies that have a real existence.<sup>13</sup> In addition, within the things you see there are not just particles of matter but also “void”.<sup>14</sup>

We know that void exists because otherwise movement would be impossible; but we see that things do move, so we know void exists.<sup>15</sup>

We must also observe that all things are not made from a single substance, but from combinations of distinct elements.<sup>16</sup> Fools often admire the things their blindness sees in hidden meanings, and an example is Heraclites, who argued that all things are made from a single substance – fire.

The basic elements of the universe combine in different ways to form all things, in the same way that the same letters form different words when the letters are arranged differently

**4. All things are made up of combinations of matter and void.** We conclude that the Nature of everything is dual – everything is made up of matter and void – nothing exists in the universe except matter and void.<sup>17</sup>

**5. There is an infinite amount of matter in the universe.** This means that there is also an infinite number of other worlds beside ours.<sup>18</sup>

6. There is an infinite amount of void in the universe.

## ***III. Change Occurs Due to The Nature of Components of the Universe, and Change is Not Mechanistic or Determined by Fate or By Any Other Force outside the components themselves.***

7. The elements are always in motion.<sup>19</sup>

8. The elements move at a uniform speed.<sup>20</sup>

**9. Motion in empty space is linear.** In compounds, the material of the universe vibrates against the surrounding material, bringing about change which has no external cause.<sup>21</sup>

10. Certain elements are capable of slightly swerving at any point in space or time.<sup>22</sup>

## ***IV. Nature Determines What Is Possible and What is Not Possible According to The Characteristics of the Material From Which the Universe Is Made.***

*This means that although Nature is infinite and eternal, there are limits to what is possible. Infinity of time and space do not imply “randomness”, nor do they mean that all things are possible.*

11. The elements have unique characteristics, including weight, shape, and size.

12. The number of unique characteristics (the different weights, shapes, and sizes of matter) are beyond calculation, but *not infinite*.<sup>23</sup>

Much of Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* is devoted to exploring these principals in great detail. That study deserves a volume of its own, which time does not allow here. For now, we must turn to Epicurus' application of these principles to the issue of how men should live.



## Chapter 4. No Fate But What We Make

*The wise man laughs at the idea of “Fate,” which some set up as the mistress of all things, because the wise man understands that while some things do happen by chance, most things happen due to our own actions. The wise man sees that Fate or Necessity cannot exist if men are truly free, and he also sees that Fortune is not in constant control of the lives of men. But the wise man sees that our actions are free, and because they are free, our actions are our own responsibility, and we deserve either blame or praise for them.*

*Epicurus – Letter to Menoecus*

Even those men who do not normally see themselves as under the control of religion or of a mechanistic universe often find themselves burdened by what they perceive as their “fate” – their inexorable destiny that they have no power to overcome. This is an issue important enough to deserve separate treatment here. As usual, we start at the beginning:

Epicurus taught that as we observe the universe around us, we see that although everything is constantly changing, nothing springs into existence *entirely from nothing*,<sup>24</sup> and nothing decays *entirely to nothing*.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, all living things are born, grow old, and die, starting from and returning to the elements from which they were composed. Even man and the higher animals, who we see possess the power of free will to act according to their desires, are born from eternal elements and return at death to those same elements. All of human experience shows us that *never* has any element – or any man – sprung into existence from nothing, nor decayed to nothing. Our bedrock proof of this proposition rests in our senses. We observe that as we look around us that men do not arise full grown from the oceans, fish do not arise from the earth, and birds do not burst forth full-grown from the sky.<sup>26</sup> This level of proof, uncontradicted in the history of mankind, is the highest allowed by Nature.

From these observations about reality we conclude that the elements of which the universe is composed were never created – they have existed eternally and always will exist with the same characteristics eternally determined by Nature.<sup>27</sup> Although these elements are constantly in motion and constantly undergoing change – that motion and change is always strictly in accord with the laws of Nature.<sup>28</sup> All of the elements of the universe *exist* (and have always existed and always will exist) and *change* (and have always changed and always will change) according to natural processes as established by Nature. Even though the universe is eternal and infinite in size, there are definite limitations on the possible arrangements of matter – all things cannot be joined together in all ways.<sup>29</sup> The universe had no beginning and has no end, either in time or space, but Nature's eternal laws limit and govern the entire universe through eternity.

Although Nature's laws provide limits and boundaries to what is possible, there is at least one aspect of reality that is clearly before our eyes, and clearly **not** controlled by any outside force in mechanistic fashion. There is no doubt about what is directly before our eyes, and that we can clearly observe from their actions: **men and the higher animals have the free will to change their course at no set time or place.** The ancient texts remaining to us do not contain Epicurus' own words on the source of this free will, but we do retain a reliable discussion of this subject in **De Rerum Natura**.

In Book II, Lucretius records the following:

[225] This point too, we should understand: when bodies are carried downward through void by their own weight, **at uncertain times and uncertain places they push themselves a little from their course by the slightest of inclinations.** If these bodies did not swerve, they would all fall down like drops of rain through the deep void, they would never have collided together, and thus nature would never have produced anything.

But if anyone happens to believe that heavier bodies are carried more quickly through space and fall from above to collide with the lighter bodies, he goes far astray from true reason. For we see that when bodies fall through water or air they quicken their descents in proportion to their weights, because the water and the air cannot retard everything in equal degree, but more readily give way and are overpowered by things that are heavier. On the other hand, empty void cannot offer resistance to anything in any direction at any time, but must, as is its nature, continually give way. For this reason all things are moved and borne along with equal velocity through the unresisting void, though they are of unequal weights. Therefore heavier things will never be able to fall from above on lighter nor of themselves to beget blows sufficient to produce the varied motions by which nature carries on things. Wherefore again and again I say bodies must swerve a little; and yet not more than the least possible; lest we be found to be imagining oblique motions, and this the reality should refute. For this we see to be plain and evident, that weighty things cannot travel obliquely when they fall from above at least so far as can be perceived. But that nothing swerves to any degree case from the straight course, who is there that can perceive?

**Again, is all motion forever linked together, and does new motion always spring from another in a fixed order? If first-beginnings do not, by swerving, make some commencement of motion to break through the decrees of fate, so that one cause does not follow another cause from eternity, how have all living creatures here on earth wrested from the fates the power by which we go forward whichever way the will leads, by which we likewise change the direction of our motions neither at a fixed time nor at a fixed place, but when and where the mind itself has prompted? Beyond doubt in these things a man's own will determines each beginning, and from this beginning motions travel through the limbs.**

Do you not also see, when the gates are thrown open at a given moment, that the eager powers of the horses cannot start forward so instantaneously as their minds desire? The whole store of matter throughout the body must be sought out in order that, stirred up through all the frame, it may follow with undivided effort the leading of the mind. By this you see that the beginning of motion is born in the heart, and the action first commences in the will of the mind and is next transmitted throughout the body and frame.

Quite different is the case when we move on, propelled by a stroke inflicted by the compulsion of another. In that case, it is quite clear that all the matter of the whole body moves against our inclination, until the will has reined it in throughout the limbs. **Do you see then in this case that, though an outward force often pushes men on and compels them frequently to advance against their will, there yet is something in our breast sufficient to struggle against and resist it? And when, too, this something chooses, the matter of the body is compelled to change its course through the limbs and frame, and after it has been forced forward, it is reined in and settles back into its place.**

For this reason in first-beginnings too you must admit that besides outside blows and weight **there is another cause of motion, from which our power of free action has been begotten within us, since we see that nothing can come from nothing. Weight alone would require that all things were overmastered and caused by blows from outward forces. But the mind itself does not feel an internal necessity in all its actions, and it is not overmastered and compelled to bear and put up with this. Rather, the freedom of the mind is caused by a minute swerving of first beginnings at no fixed place and no fixed time.**

We can safely derive from this that Epicurus held that the free will which we see that men possess derives from the ability of atoms to swerve. Thus is free will grounded in the elemental forces of Nature, rather than in the caprice of gods or the mechanisms of necessity.

The implications of this view are expounded on in several texts. First, the full statement from the letter to Menoeceus, from which the heading of this chapter was taken, is as follows:

*The wise man laughs at the idea of "Fate", which some set up as the mistress of all things, because the wise man understands that while some things do happen by chance, most things happen due to our own actions. The wise man sees that Fate or Necessity cannot exist if men are truly free, and he also sees that Fortune is not in constant control of the lives of men. But the wise man sees that our actions are free, and because they are free, our actions are our own responsibility, and we deserve either blame or praise for them. It would therefore be better to believe in the fables that are told about the gods than to be a slave to the idea of Fate or Necessity as put forth by false philosophers. At least the fables which are told about the gods hold out to us the possibility that we may avert the gods' wrath by paying them honor. The false philosophers, on the other hand, present us with no hope of control over our own lives, and no escape from an inexorable Fate. In the same way, the wise man does not consider Fortune to be a goddess, as some men esteem her to be, for the wise man knows that nothing is done at random by a god. Nor does he consider that such randomness as may exist renders all events of life impossible to predict. Likewise, he does not believe that the gods give chance events to men so as to make them live happily. The wise man understands that while chance may lead to great good, it may also lead to great evil, and he therefore thinks it to be better to be unsuccessful when acting in accord with reason than to be successful by chance when acting as a fool.*

In his work ***On the Nature of the Gods***, Cicero recorded these passages:

*Do not attend, said [Epicurus], to these idle and imaginary tales. Do not attend to the "operator and builder of the World," the God of Plato's Timæus; nor to the old prophetic dame, the "Fate" of the Stoics, which the Latins call Providence; nor to that round, burning, revolving deity, "the World," [which some] endow with sense and understanding. These are the prodigies and wonders, not of inquisitive philosophers, but of dreamers!*

...

*The philosopher from whom we received all our knowledge [Epicurus] has taught us that the world was made by Nature; that there was no occasion for a workhouse to frame it in. [He taught us further] that, though you deny the possibility of the world being made without divine skill, this is so easy for Nature that she has made, does make, and will make innumerable worlds. But because you do not conceive that Nature is able to produce these results without some rational aid, you are forced like the tragic poets, when you cannot wind up your argument in any other way, to have recourse to a Deity. You would not seek the assistance of such a Deity if you could view the vast and unbounded magnitude of the universe in all its parts. There the mind, extending and spreading itself, travels so far and wide that it can find no end, no extremity to stop at. In this immensity of breadth, length, and height, a boundless company of innumerable atoms are fluttering about. Those atoms, notwithstanding the interposition of a void space, meet and cohere, and continue clinging to one another. By this union the modifications and forms of things arise, which in your opinions could not possibly be done without the help of bellows and anvils. Thus you have imposed on us an eternal master, whom we must dread day and night. For who can be free from fear of a Deity who foresees, regards, and takes notice of everything; one who thinks all things are his own; a curious, ever-busy God? From here first arose your Fate, or as you call it, your fatal necessity; so that whatever happens, you affirm that it flows from an eternal chain and continuance of causes. Of what value is this philosophy, which, like old women and illiterate men, attributes everything to fate? Then follows your "divination"—which, if we would listen to you, would plunge us into such superstition that we should fall down and worship your inspectors into sacrifices, your augurs, your soothsayers, your prophets, and your fortune-tellers. Epicurus has freed us from these terrors and restored us to liberty, and we have no dread of those beings whom we have reason to think entirely free from all trouble themselves, and who do not impose any troubles on others. We pay our adoration, indeed, with piety and reverence to that essence which is above all excellence and perfection.*

The same sentiments are found in Epicurus' letter to Pythocles:

*Further, the forecasts some give based on the conduct of certain animals arise from a fortuitous combination of circumstances, for there is no necessary connection between certain animals and winter. These animals do not produce winter, nor is there any divine being sitting aloft watching the exits of these*

*animals and then fulfilling signs of this kind. No folly such as this would occur to any being who is even moderately comfortable, much less to a god who is possessed of perfect happiness.*

In sum, it is Nature's law that human life is not mechanistically controlled by any sort of Fate. Men do have free will to control their own lives, and is us to whom the credit or the blame for our action accrues.



## Chapter 5. Think About Death

*Wait for me but a moment, and I will pay you from my own account. Meanwhile, Epicurus will oblige me with these words: “Think on death” .... The meaning is clear – that it is a wonderful thing to learn thoroughly how to die. You may deem it superfluous to learn a text that can be used only once; but that is just the reason why we ought to think on a thing. When we can never prove whether we really know a thing, we must always be learning it. “Think on death.” In saying this, he bids us think on freedom. He who has learned to die has unlearned slavery; he is above any external power, or, at any rate, he is beyond it. What terrors have prisons and bonds and bars for him? His way out is clear. There is only one chain which binds us to life, and that is the love of life. The chain may not be cast off, but it may be rubbed away, so that, when necessity shall demand, nothing may retard or hinder us from being ready to do at once that which at some time we are bound to do.*

– *Lucius Annaeus Seneca*

Nature provides that all men are born, have a period of life for growth and living, and then pass away. To deny the necessity of this cycle of birth and death is to rebel against a fundamental law of Nature. As is the case with rebellion against any fundamental Natural law, if we fail to understand and embrace this cycle we render it impossible to live a truly happy life.

Although the fact that individual lives must come to an end may seem grim, this is because we fail to remember that dying is natural and no more to be feared than being born. Those things to which we have unlimited access, such as air, we do not value highly, and limited access and change are required if we are to savor our pleasures and experience new ones – an essential part of feeling a pleasure is the realization that it is not permanent.<sup>30</sup> It is not possible to increase the intensity of a pleasure once the pain arising from lack of that pleasure is removed, for at that point we only move on to the desire to experience a different pleasure. Our finite lifespans therefore do not deprive us of any intensity of pleasure that is possible to us.<sup>31</sup> Seen thus in the light of reason and the facts of our mortal nature, we have no need for infinite time in order to experience that which is possible to us as men.<sup>32</sup> This knowledge enables us to overcome the desires of the flesh, which are insatiable. Contemplation of the law of nature assures us that we have no need for infinite time, in this way when by our lot or by our choice it becomes our time to exit this life, we can do so with contentment.<sup>33</sup>

Further, we must dismiss the false and foolish fear of eternal punishment after death, and its equally unfounded twin, the hope for eternal reward after death. It is true that we do not know the nature of the soul, and that it appears to be a combination of elements, some of which have not been identified.<sup>34</sup> Because nothing comes from nothing, just as with all other eternal elements, there must also be one or more eternal “life elements” that distinguish us as living things.<sup>35</sup>

But although these life elements are eternal, we observe ample evidence that our *consciousness* is not eternal, because we observe that consciousness grows and changes over time, experiences periods of health and sickness, and depends ultimately on the body and its senses for connection with reality and with continuation. We have no memory of any life before our births, and because all our sensations end at death our consciousness also ends forever at death, so it is not possible for it to experience any further reward or punishment after death. Therefore death is nothing but a state of unconsciousness – of nothingness – akin to eternal sleep.<sup>36</sup> Even if we were to assume that our souls had some permanent existence and we held other lives before our current lifetime, we now have no memory or any other concern about that existence. In the same way, any theoretical experience our souls may have

after death has no concern for us.<sup>37</sup> Understood in this way, Nature holds up the eternity past before our birth as a mirror of the eternity that will come after our death – and neither is any concern to us today.<sup>38</sup> Even if we were to suppose that the soul has some feeling after death, it is only by the union of our current body and soul that we exist as individuals, and thus after death we are not present to experience any feeling.<sup>39</sup> Even if all the atoms of our bodies were rearranged in some future time to come together just as we are now, this result would not concern us at all once the chain of our consciousness has been broken.<sup>40</sup> We therefore see that a man’s consciousness lives for only a definite period of time, during which we are called to live fully according to Nature’s laws and without fear of death.<sup>41</sup> The future is neither wholly ours nor wholly not ours. Life is not a gift, only a loan to us, and therefore we must seize the day.<sup>42</sup> Men who do not understand the nature of things flee from themselves, but cannot escape. Their only hope is to realize that they must reconcile themselves not to the current hour, but to the state in which they will spend eternity.<sup>43</sup>



## Chapter 6. The Highest Goal Toward Which We All Are Aiming

*So there must, he knew, be some corruption in the jar, the vase, the vessel of life - enough to spoil whatever good came through it from without. Either it leaked, impossible to fill, or stank and fouled its contents. So he cleansed our hearts by words of truth; he put an end to greeds and fears; he showed **THE HIGHEST GOOD TOWARD WHICH WE ALL ARE AIMING**, showed the way, a straight and narrow path.*

*Lucretius, De Rerum Natura, Book VI (Humphries)*

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*But some, ignorant of the matter, believe that Nature cannot without the providence of the gods ... vary the seasons of the year, and bring forth all the other things which **DIVINE PLEASURE, THE GUIDE OF LIFE**, prompts men to approach.*

*Lucretius, De Rerum Natura, Book II, line 170*

Nature has established a life of happiness as man’s calling and given him Pleasure as guide toward that goal.<sup>44</sup> When we say that pleasure is the guide, however, it is important to understand that we are not speaking of the pleasures of debauched men or mere sensual enjoyment, as some men will attempt to make you believe. Instead, we recognize that life without pain is pleasurable in itself, and the ultimate pleasure to which Nature calls us is the freedom of the body from pain and the soul from confusion. This is because there is no state of existence that is between pleasure and pain, and therefore all life without pain is pleasurable. A pleasant life free from pain can only come from sober contemplation of all our actions to ensure that they conform to the principles of Nature.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, contemplation of the lessons of the Nature of things, and the freedom from the turmoil that plagues most men, are among life’s sweetest pleasures.<sup>46</sup>

Experience shows us that release from any pain is a pleasure, and indeed among the greatest pleasures are those when we escape from death.<sup>47</sup> A happy life of any degree cannot be obtained, however, unless we live wisely, honorably, and justly, nor can one who does not live wisely, honorably, and justly achieve a life of pleasure. For this reason wisdom is more valuable even than detailed philosophic wisdom, for all the other virtues spring from wisdom.<sup>48</sup> The wise man therefore does not consider Fortune to be a goddess, or “chance” a cause to rely on, because he thinks it better to be unfortunate in accordance with reason than to be fortunate as a fool.<sup>49</sup>

The wise man has correct and holy opinions of the gods as they really exist, is utterly fearless with respect to death, has properly understood the ends fixed by Nature, understands that Nature’s goal of a happy life is readily obtained, and understands that great evils, when they occur and cannot be avoided, last only a short while and cause only brief pain. The wise man knows that there is no such thing as Fate, and he understands that some things happen by

chance and others due to our own actions. The wise man rejects any form of Fate or Necessity, whether argued on a religious or any other basis, because he knows that Fate destroys any possibility of control over our own lives. The wise man sees that men do have free will, and because our actions are our own responsibility we deserve either blame or praise for them.<sup>50</sup>

At birth, however, Nature does not provide us the food which we require to live, nor does Nature provide our minds with a clear understanding of how to pursue happiness. The mind is no less a part of our body than our hands or feet,<sup>51</sup> and the mind must seek out and acquire knowledge of Nature's laws and boundaries to sustain its health just as the body must seek out food and water.<sup>52</sup> The only way for men to grow in wisdom and to dispel the childish fantasies of dangers that lurk in the dark is by study of the law of Nature.<sup>53</sup>

We must clearly come to understand that Nature calls us to lives of happiness and pleasure, and we must not shrink from this realization. If in fact those debaucheries for which we condemn the drunken and the dissolute brought them peace of mind and happy lives, we would have no cause for condemning their actions as debaucheries. It is the actual productiveness of an activity toward the realization of happy lives that allows us to know the difference between what is good and what is evil.<sup>54</sup> Another aspect of the same consideration is that we would have no need to study any of the sciences, or to study the nature of things at all, if we did not fear the mysteries of the sky and if we did not fear death.<sup>55</sup> We must therefore keep the goal of a happy life clearly in mind and refer to it to determine whatever we think and believe. If we allow any consideration other than this ultimate law of Nature to enter into our judgment, all things will be full of confusion and uncertainty.<sup>56</sup> We must therefore on every occasion guide our actions by reasoning according to Nature's goal of a happy life, and if we turn aside from that object to seek or avoid some other object, our lives will be full of confusion and conflict.<sup>57</sup>

Because the goal is a life of happiness rather than momentary physical pleasure, we must come to understand that Nature requires that we not rely on fortune or chance, but affirmatively act to order all of the great and important decisions of our lives by the power of reason.<sup>58</sup> As a result, we will sometimes choose to experience some pain in order to achieve a greater pleasure as a result.<sup>59</sup> Sadly, men often fail to seek out knowledge of Nature's rules of choice and avoidance. As a result, men are plagued by doubt and error, and they experience great anxieties and fears about their goals and actions. In contrast, the man who lives by justice and wisdom is the freest of all men from turmoil of mind.<sup>60</sup> If men are to live happy lives they cannot avoid the exertion of mind and body which Nature requires.

While it is true that some men will be struck down by illness, accident, or by the malice of others, the goal of living a happy life is readily attainable for most men. These possibilities are required if we are to have free will, but Nature allows us to achieve happy lives if we simply identify and remove those things that cause us pain.<sup>61</sup> The true riches that Nature calls men to seek are simple and readily procurable, but the vain desires are insatiable, and we have no real need of them.<sup>62</sup> It is of great assistance for us to recognize that of all the desires that men experience, some are natural and necessary, some are natural but not necessary, and some are neither natural nor necessary.<sup>63</sup> Those desires that do not lead to pain when they are not satisfied are not necessary, and it is easy to discipline ourselves to refrain from them when they are difficult to obtain or likely to produce injury.<sup>64</sup> If the failure to satisfy a desire does not lead to pain, that is proof that the desire does not arise from nature, but from vain imagination.<sup>65</sup> Viewed in this way, we realize that the keys to happiness are not found in great wealth and power, as many people seek and then realize to be ineffective.<sup>66</sup> Rather, the wise man pursues a simple life suitable to his circumstances, seeking out and enjoying what is available and can be obtained at reasonable cost, and in general guiding his life by prudence and reason.<sup>67</sup> Nature has provided that if we follow her laws what is truly good in life is relatively easy to get, and what is truly terrible in life is relatively easy to avoid.<sup>68</sup>

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, Epicurus did not maintain that "pleasure" was the goal of life. In the words of Lucretius, divine pleasure is the *guide* of life, but we must seek further to determine the goal toward which Nature's guide is leading.

The answer to this question is found throughout the texts that remain available to us, but perhaps nowhere is the answer more clearly set forth than in Cicero's *On The Ends of Good and Evil*. In the course of presenting the defense of Epicurus, Cicero records a series of specific attributes about the man who achieves Nature's highest rewards:

*Let us imagine a man who is living in the continuous enjoyment of numerous vivid pleasures, of both body and of mind, and who is undisturbed either by the presence or by the prospect of pain. What possible state of existence could we describe as being more excellent or more desirable? A man so situated must possess in the first place a strength of mind that is impregnable against all fear of death or of pain. He will have no fear of death because he will know that death only means complete unconsciousness, and he will have no fear of pain, because he will know that while he is alive, pain that is long is generally light, and pain that is strong is generally short. In other words, he will also know that the intensity of pain is alleviated by the briefness of its duration, and that continuing pain is bearable because it is generally of lesser severity. Let such a man moreover have no fear of any supernatural power; let him never allow the pleasures of the past to fade away, but let him constantly renew their enjoyment in his recollection, and his lot will be one which will not admit of further improvement.*

It is helpful to list these attributes in outline for emphasis. Nature's highest goal for man is an existence in which he:

1. Lives in the continuous enjoyment of numerous pleasures of the body;
2. Lives in the continuous enjoyment of numerous pleasures of the mind;
3. Lives undisturbed by the presence of pain of the body;
4. Lives undisturbed by the presence of pain of the mind;
5. Lives undisturbed by the prospect of pain of the body;
6. Lives undisturbed by the prospect of pain of the mind.

Although this list may seem overly simple and repetitive, each item carries profound implications. Even in his description of the desirability of this existence, Epicurus joined the result with the means by which the result could be obtained, and we see from this how the goals are achieved through the proper application of the Principal Doctrines.

First, in the life which Nature calls us to lead, we must have a strength of mind that is impregnable against all fear of death or of pain. Because death and some degree of pain are unavoidable in life, the Epicurean will achieve victory over fear of death by remembering the Second Principal Doctrine, which teaches him that death means complete unconsciousness, not punishment in hell.

The Epicurean will achieve victory over fear of bodily pain by remembering the Fourth Principal Doctrine, which teaches him that while he is alive, pain that is long is generally light, and pain that is strong is generally short. The same doctrine will remind him that the intensity of pain is alleviated by the briefness of its duration, and that continuing pain is bearable because it is generally of lesser severity.

The Epicurean will achieve victory over mental anxiety by remembering the First Principal Doctrine, which teaches him to have no fear of any supernatural power.

And the Epicurean will achieve a life of continuous enjoyment by remembering the Third Principal Doctrine, which teaches him that there is no higher pleasure in life than the happiness which he achieves through victory over pain of body and mind, which means that, as Cicero includes in this passage, that if the Epicurean grasps firmly in his mind the pleasures of the past and refuses to let them fade away, and constantly renews their enjoyment in his recollection, his lot will be one which will not admit of further improvement.



## **Chapter 7. The Antidote to Fear and Pain**

*The Muses' grace is on me, as I write clear verse about dark matters. This is not a senseless affectation; there's reason to it. Just as when doctors try to give to children a bitter medicine, they rim the cup with honey's sweetness, honey's golden flavor, to fool the silly little things, as far as the lips at least, so that they'll take the bitter dosage, and swallow it down, fooled, but not swindled, but brought to health again through double-*

*dealing – So now do I, because this doctrine seems too grim for those who never yet have tried it, so grim that people shrink from it, mean to explain the system in a sweeter music – to rim the lesson, as it were, with honey, hoping, in this way, to hold your mind with verses while you are learning all that form, that pattern, of the way things are.*

*Lucretius, De Rerum Natura, Book I (Humphries)*

Nature has established that it is not possible for us to banish the fears and anxieties which prevent us from living a happy life unless we study and understand the essential nature of things.<sup>69</sup> Happiness is impossible if we allow ourselves to believe that fables such as the existence of a Hell could be true.<sup>70</sup> No amount of wealth or power are sufficient to secure happiness if we live in a state of fear about heaven, hell, and the infinite.<sup>71</sup> While it is true that wealth and power can to some extent be helpful, ultimate security and tranquility comes only from wisdom and freedom from dependence on the crowd of men.<sup>72</sup> It is not possible for us to live happily unless we live in constant awareness of and compliance with Nature's laws. As Epicurus held, "it is not possible to live a happy life without wisdom, honesty, and justice, nor is it possible to live a life with wisdom, honesty, and justice without happiness."<sup>73</sup>

One need only look up at the night sky to see the vastness of the universe and realize that in one lifetime we can never learn all there is to know about the universe. Rather than acknowledge this, however, some men despair, give up their grasp of that knowledge which is in fact possible to them, and fall prey to false gods and philosophies.<sup>74</sup> This error is fatal to happiness, because Nature requires that if we are to live we must use our free will to take control of our lives and act on the knowledge that is available to us. Unless we have the courage to trust the senses and the evidence that Nature has provided to us we have no hope of living happy lives.

Among the most critical errors we make is to reject Nature's provision of Pleasure as our guide, a life of happiness as our goal, and reason as our indispensable tool. We are often encouraged in this error by men who promote false religions and philosophies, and we must be prepared to understand why they are wrong.<sup>75</sup> Such men set up many beguiling reasons why we can not or should not seek to control our own lives. Some men choose false religion as their guide, with life in some other dimension as their goal. Other men choose false philosophy as their guide, with high-sounding notions such as "Virtue" or "The Common Good" as their goal. The arguments of such men can be as terrifying as any monster that a child thinks may be lurking in the dark, and such fears can only be dispelled by study of the true nature of things.

In order to defeat false religion, we must understand an essential truth about the nature of the gods. We acknowledge that the universe is boundless, and Nature provides us with intuition that beings higher than ourselves can and do exist. But it is contrary to all the evidence to assert that the universe was created by supernatural gods who exist outside our universe, who require men's obedience, or who offer men some new existence after death. By its very definition, a "god" is a perfect being, and beings which are perfect have no need for work of any kind, no need for worship, and no interest in punishment.<sup>76</sup> Any gods that do exist therefore give us no reason to be fearful of punishment or expectant of reward.<sup>77</sup> It is not those who disbelieve the common views about the gods who are being impious, but those who hold the opinions of the majority of religions.<sup>78</sup> The opinions about the gods held by most people are not true anticipations based on evidence, but false opinions.<sup>79</sup> There is no evidence to support the false tales of eternal punishment after death, and once we see that our consciousness ends at death, at which point all our troubles are over, we will finally be able to resist the priests' threats of everlasting torment.<sup>80</sup>

Just as with false religions, we must defeat the false philosophers who argue that knowledge is impossible, free will is a fiction, and all things are governed by mechanistic necessity or randomness. We must not be dismayed that we do not know the answer to all questions, and we must embrace the fact that Nature has set a definite limit to our lifespans and therefore to our ability to gather knowledge. False philosophers pervert this law of nature and attempt to convince us that because all knowledge is not attainable, no knowledge is attainable. They argue that men disagree as to what are the laws of Nature, and therefore no such laws exist. These false philosophers spend much energy attacking the validity of our senses, because they realize that their arguments are easily defeated if men will but believe their eyes, and observe that no priest or philosopher has ever been able to produce evidence that any law of Nature has been or can ever be violated.

In place of the evidence they lack to support their argument, false philosophers offer only their own ignorance as proof that universe is unknowable and unpredictable. Such men will argue to you that the universe is random, and

some new fact may come to light at any moment which will overturn all your existing knowledge. Other false philosophers will argue not randomness, but “necessity”, and argue that your every action and thought are controlled by “fate” that deprives you of the free will necessary to control your own life. If you have to choose between them before you come to understand and accept the Nature of Things, it is actually better for you to follow the false religions than to accept the false philosophers who say you have no control over your life. At least the illusory hope set forth by religion, false as it may be, provides some hope that you might obtain happiness by placating their gods. Even this is better than the complete inability to control your life, or hope for happiness, that results in a universe that is random or controlled by fate.<sup>81</sup>

It is essential to recognize that a life of true happiness is not possible unless a man dispels both erroneous religion and erroneous philosophy from his mind, and replaces them with an active awareness and appreciation of the true Nature of things.<sup>82</sup> Each man must recognize that there are many things within the universe that will never be known to him. But though the universe does not provide us with knowledge of all things, Nature does provide us with both a free will and ready access to all the knowledge that is essential to living happily. No matter how enticing the offer, terrible the threat, or beguiling the argument, if a man gives up the knowledge that Nature does provide for the sake of some desire, goal, or supposed knowledge that Nature does not allow, such a man is in rebellion against Nature. To rebel against Nature is to forfeit all connection to reason and reality – everything on which human life is based – and such a man dooms himself to a life of misery. We must therefore content ourselves with the knowledge that is ours, and we should despise, disdain, and hold in contempt those who are unable or unwilling to distinguish the certain from the possible. Holding fast to that which is certain, we shall not be any more troubled by the sight of those things which are as yet undetermined than if we knew the real causes of them.<sup>83</sup>



## Chapter 8. The Master-BUILDER of Human Happiness

*I must now explain to you how the mistaken idea arose in some quarters that pleasure should be disparaged and pain should be exalted. To do so, I will give you a complete account of the system, and point out to you the actual teachings of Epicurus, who we consider to be the great explorer of truth, the MASTER-BUILDER OF HUMAN HAPPINESS.*

*Cicero – On The Ends of Good And Evil*

Epicurus taught that of all the things which wisdom tells us to seek out in order to procure a happy life, the most important is the possession of friends.<sup>84</sup> In the time allotted to us to live, our greatest security and our greatest pleasure come from the experiences of friendship.<sup>85</sup> Epicurus instructed his students to study Nature both alone and with their friends, that in this way they might achieve lives “as gods among men.” No doubt this expression was stated with a smile, but ultimately Epicurus was certainly serious: there is no higher life than that which is lived in the constant presence of the highest pleasures: those which come from contemplating the greatest truths that relieve us from the greatest fears.<sup>86</sup>

In addition to his doctrine that friendship is the greatest tool of wisdom for the securing of happiness, Epicurus also taught that we must order our general affairs in accord with the dictates of justice. In order to do this, we must understand that natural justice has no independent existence, but comes about solely by covenant among men to avoid injuring each other.<sup>87</sup> Some animals and men are unable or unwilling to enter into such a covenant to refrain from mutual injury, and for those no concept of natural justice applies.<sup>88</sup>

Because justice has no independent existence and is not established by gods, force, or otherwise, it is grounded solely in voluntary consent.<sup>89</sup> A thing is just only so long as it brings mutual gain. Injustice is undesirable because it is inconsistent with happiness, and because it creates a fear of punishment that cannot be avoided.<sup>90</sup><sup>91</sup>

Justice can be viewed as the interest that all men have in avoiding injury, but due to differences in place and

circumstance, the precise rules of justice will vary.<sup>92</sup> Natural justice derives its authority from its actual usefulness in securing the safety of the general body of men, and whether it is universally regarded as just by the majority is of no consequence.<sup>93</sup> Likewise, the majority may change their view over time as to what is actually useful, but any question is always settled by what is – according to Nature – *actually* useful, not by referring to the opinion of the majority.<sup>94</sup>

Thus it is most productive for happiness for men to live among each other as friends, observing the rules of natural justice. Those whom we cannot make friends we should at least seek to avoid making enemies, and if for some reason that is impossible then we should avoid all connection with them.<sup>95</sup> The happiest men are those who live with each other without fear, enjoying the advantages of common society, with firm confidence grounded in a shared understanding of the nature of things. It is with friends such as these that we must seize the time available to us for living. Then, when death ultimately comes, we must remember the good times that we experienced in the past, and we must not lament our friend's passing, knowing as we do that our deceased friend has found nothing in death but the end of all his troubles.<sup>96</sup>

During his own time, as Diogenes Laertius records, Epicurus not only preached but lived his philosophy, surrounding himself in his Garden in Athens with friends to the end of his life. In later years, Epicurus' life took on an almost godlike brilliance in the mind of his followers. As Lucretius recorded in book V of *De Rerum Natura*:

*WHOSE genius is able to frame a poem worthy of the grandeur of these discoveries? Who is so great a master of words as to be able to compose praises equal to those which he who won such prizes and left them to us deserves? I think no mortal man is up to the task. For if we must speak in terms that the acknowledged grandeur of his discoveries demands, we must consider him a god. For it was he who first discovered that plan of life which is now termed wisdom, and who by trained skill rescued life from such great fog and thick darkness, and who anchored it safely in so perfect a calm and in so brilliant a light. Compare the godlike discoveries of others in ancient times. Ceres is famed for showing mortals the use of corn, and Liber for showing men the vine-born juice of the grape, but life might well have subsisted along without these things, as we are told some nations even now live without them. But a happy life is not possible without a clean heart, and so with greater reason this man is deemed by us to be a god, from whom come those sweet balms of life which even now are distributed over great nations and gently soothe men's minds.*

*If you shall suppose that the deeds of Hercules surpass these, you will be carried far away from true reason. For how could the great gaping jaws of the Nemean lion harm us now, or even the bristled Arcadian boar? What could the bull of Crete do, or the Hydra of Lerna, with its venomous snakes? How could the triple-breasted might of threefold Geryon that dwelt in the Stymphalian swamps do us injury, or the horses of Thracian Diomedes breathing fire from their nostrils? What harm could the serpent which guards the bright golden apples of the Hesperides, fierce and dangerous of aspect, girding the tree with his enormous body beside the Atlantic shore – what harm could it do to us, as we never go there and no barbarian ventures to approach it?*

*It is the same with all other monsters of this kind which Hercules destroyed – if they had never been vanquished, what harm could they do, I ask, even if they were now alive? None, I think, for the earth even now abounds with wild beasts throughout the mountains and forests, and yet these are places which we have it within our power to shun.*

*But unless the heart is cleared, what battles and dangers find their way into our lives! What poignant cares inspired by lust tear apart the pitiful man, and what mighty fears and turmoil are caused by pride, lust, and wantonness? What disasters they bring about, and what sloth does luxury bring! He who subdued all these and banished them from the mind by words, not by arms – does he not deserve to be ranked among the gods? All the more so because he delivered many precepts in beautiful and god-like phrases about the immortal gods themselves, and opened up to us by his teachings all of the nature of things.*

During his life, Epicurus brought to men a message that was revolutionary in scope. For hundreds of years in the ancient world, his wisdom inspired millions of men to seek lives of happiness and to dismiss the errors and the lies

of false religions and philosophies.

But in time the message of Epicurus began to fade. Its very success made it the chief target of those profited from religion and false philosophy, and as time passed new variations of the old religions and philosophies arose. Even though these competitors possessed no more evidence to support them than before, they eventually succeeded in enticing even those men who had heard him to forget the wisdom of Epicurus.

The eternal issues that Epicurus addressed remain with us today. We, too, face the same necessity to study and apply the laws of Nature if we wish to live happy lives. Epicurus continues to call each of us to study the nature of things for ourselves and to seek out like-minded friends in the pursuit of happy living. His words still call us to gird our minds for battle, and to prepare ourselves to meet and defeat the errors of false religion and philosophy. As Epicurus taught, it is essential that we study Nature, that we trust the senses that Nature has provided, and that we never succumb to the siren calls of those who claim to have knowledge higher than Nature herself.

In the words of Epicurus addressed to Herodotus:

*If this reasoning be understood as valid, and preserved carefully in the memory, the man who allows himself to be influenced by it, even though he may not descend to a profound study of its details, will have a great superiority of character over other men. He will personally discover a great number of truths which I have myself set forth in my entire work. These truths, being stored in his memory, will be a constant assistance to him.<sup>97</sup>*



## Chapter 9. Selections from the Core Texts of Epicureanism

*Meditate then, on all these things, and on those things which are related to them, both day and night, and both alone and with like-minded companions. For if you will do this, you will never be disturbed while asleep or awake by imagined fears, but you will live like a god among men. For a man who lives among immortal blessings is in no respect like a mortal being.*

*Epicurus – Letter to Menoeceus*

This chapter contains selections from some of the most clear and important statements of Epicurean doctrine left to the modern world. These same texts are included in the Appendix in more complete form, with additional citations and translations. The advanced student of Epicurus will return to these texts again and again, study them in alternate translations, and even (if possible) learn to understand them in their original Greek and Latin forms. For the new student, however, the following selections are invaluable aids to understanding the points that the Epicureans found most essential.

### The “Defense of Epicurus” by Cicero

An elaborate defense of Epicurus was once delivered to me by Lucius Torquatus, a scholar of consummate knowledge, with Gaius Triarius, a youth of great learning and seriousness of character, assisting at the discussion. Both of these men had called to pay me their respects at my place at Cuma.

....

“I will start then,” Torquatus said, “in the manner approved by Epicurus himself, the author of the system — by setting forth the essence of the thing that is the object of our inquiry. Not that I suppose that you do not understand

my purpose, but because this is the logical method of procedure. We are inquiring, then, into what is the final and ultimate good. All philosophers agree that the ultimate good is the end we seek to attain, for which all other things are the means we use to gain it, while it is not itself a means through which we seek to attain anything else. Epicurus holds that Nature's ultimate goal for life is pleasure, or happiness, which he holds to be the chief good, with pain, whether physical or mental, being the chief evil.

Epicurus sets out to show this as follows: Every living thing, as soon as it is born, seeks after pleasure, and delights in it as its chief good. It also recoils from pain as its chief evil, and avoids pain so far as is possible. Nature's own unbiased and honest judgment leads every living thing to do this from birth, and it continues to do this as long as it remains uncorrupted. Epicurus refuses to admit any need for discussion to prove that pleasure is to be desired and pain is to be avoided, because these facts, he thinks, are perceived by the senses, in the same way that fire is hot, snow is white, and honey is sweet. None of these things need be proved by elaborate argument — it is enough merely to draw attention to them. For there is a difference, he holds, between a formal logical proof of a thing, and a mere notice or reminder. Logical proofs are the method for discovering abstract and difficult truths, but on the other hand a mere notice is all that is required for indicating facts that are obvious and evident.

Observe that if one removes from mankind of all the faculties that Nature has provided, nothing remains. It follows, then, that Nature herself is the judge of that which is in accord with or contrary to Nature. And what does Nature give to perceive or to judge, or to guide actions of choice and of avoidance, except pleasure and pain?

...

I must now explain to you how the mistaken idea arose in some quarters that pleasure should be disparaged and pain should be exalted. To do so, I will give you a complete account of the system, and point out to you the actual teachings of Epicurus, who we consider to be the great explorer of truth, the master-builder of human happiness.

No one rejects, dislikes, or avoids pleasure on its own account. Those who reject pleasure do so because men who do not know how to pursue pleasure rationally suffer consequences that are extremely painful. Nor does anyone love or pursue or desire to obtain pain on its own account. Those who pursue pain do so because on occasion toil and pain can produce some great pleasure. To take a trivial example, which of us ever undertakes laborious physical exercise, except to obtain some advantage from it? But who has any right to find fault with those men who choose to enjoy pleasures that have no annoying consequences, or those who avoid pains that produce no resulting pleasures?

On the other hand, we denounce with righteous indignation men who are so beguiled and demoralized by the charms of the pleasure of the moment, who are so blinded by desire, that they cannot foresee the pain and trouble that are bound to follow. Equal blame belongs to those who fail in their duties because their will is weak, which is the same as saying that they fail because they shrink back from toil and pain. These cases are simple and easy to understand. In a free hour, when our power of choice is unrestrained and when nothing prevents us from doing what we like best, every pleasure is to be welcomed and every pain is to be avoided. But in certain circumstances, such as because of the claims of duty or the obligations of business, it will frequently occur that pleasures have to be put aside and annoyances accepted. The wise man always holds in these matters to this principle of selection: he rejects some pleasures in order to secure other and greater pleasures, or else he endures some pains to avoid worse pains.

This being the theory I hold, why should I be afraid of not being able to reconcile it with the case of the Torquati, my ancestors [who were renowned for dealing harshly even with their own family when necessary]? Your references to them previously were historically correct, and showed your kind and friendly feeling towards me. But all the same, I am not to be bribed by your flattery of my family, and you will not find me a less resolute opponent.

Tell me, then, what explanation would you put upon their actions? Do you really believe that they charged an armed enemy, or treated their children, their own flesh and blood, so cruelly, without a thought for their own interest or advantage? Even wild animals do not act in that way — they do not run amok so blindly that we cannot discern any purpose in their movements. Can you suppose then that my heroic ancestors performed their famous deeds without any motive at all?

What their motive was, I will consider in a moment: for the present I will confidently assert, that if they had a motive for those undoubtedly glorious exploits, that motive was not a love of virtue solely for itself.

*You say:* "He wrestled the necklace from his foe"

*I answer:* "Yes, and he saved himself from death."

*You say:* "But he braved great danger"

*I answer:* "Yes, before the eyes of an army."

*You say:* "What did he gain by it?"

*I answer:* "Honor and esteem, the strongest guarantees of security in life."

*You say:* "He sentenced his own son to death!"

*I answer:* "If he had no motive, I am sorry to be the descendant of anyone so savage and inhuman. But if his purpose for inflicting pain upon himself was to establish his authority as a commander, and to tighten the reins of discipline during a very serious war by holding over his army the fear of punishment, then his action was aimed at ensuring the safety of his fellow-citizens, upon which he knew his own safety depended."

This is a principle of wide application. Students of your Platonic school, who are such diligent students of history, have found a favorite field for the display of their eloquence in recalling the stories of brave and famous men of old. Your school praises their actions, not on the grounds that those actions were useful, but because of the alleged abstract splendor of "moral worth." But all of this falls to the ground once we recognize the principle that I have just described — the principle that some pleasures are to be foregone for the purpose of getting greater pleasures, and that some pains are to be endured for the sake of escaping greater pains.

But enough has been said at this stage about the glorious exploits of the heroes of the past. The tendency of the virtues to produce pleasure is a topic that I will treat later on. At present I shall proceed to the nature of pleasure itself, and I shall work to remove the misconceptions of ignorance, and show you how serious, how temperate, and how simple is the school that is supposedly sensual, lax and luxurious.

The happiness we pursue does not consist solely of the delightful feelings of physical pleasures. On the contrary, according to Epicurus the greatest pleasure is that which is experienced as a result of the complete removal of all pain, physical and mental. When we are released from pain, the mere sensation of complete emancipation and relief from distress is itself a source of great gratification. But everything that causes gratification is a pleasure, just as everything that causes distress is a pain. Therefore the complete removal of pain has correctly been termed a pleasure. For example, when hunger and thirst are banished by food and drink, the mere fact of getting rid of those distresses brings pleasure as a result. So as a rule, the removal of pain causes pleasure to take its place.

For that reason Epicurus held that there is no such thing as a neutral state of feeling that is somewhere between pleasure and pain. This is because for the living being, the entire absence of pain, a state supposed by some philosophers to be neutral, is not only a state of pleasure, but a pleasure of the highest order.

A man who is living and conscious of his condition at all necessarily feels either pleasure or pain. Epicurus holds that the experience of the complete absence of all pain is the highest point, or the "limit," of pleasure. Beyond this point, pleasure may vary in kind, but it does not vary in intensity or degree.

To illustrate this, my father used to tell me (when he wanted to show his wit at the expense of the Stoics) that there was once in Athens a statue of the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus. This statue was fashioned with Chrysippus holding out one hand, in a gesture intended to indicate the delight which he used to take in the following little play on words:

*"Does your hand desire anything, while it is in its present condition?"*

*"No, nothing."*

*"But if pleasure were a good, it would want pleasure."*

*“Yes, I suppose it would.”*

*“Therefore pleasure is not a good.”*

This is an argument, my father declared, which not even a dumb statue would employ, if a statue could speak. This is because the argument is cogent enough as an objection to those who pursue sensual pleasures as the only goal of life, but it does not touch Epicurus. For if the only kind of pleasure were that which, so to speak, tickles the senses with a feeling of delight, neither the hand nor any other member of the body could be satisfied with the absence of pain, if it were not accompanied by an active sensation of pleasure. If, however, as Epicurus holds, the highest pleasure is experienced at the removal of all pain, then the man who responded to Chrysippus was wrong to be misled by his questions. This is because the man's first answer, that his hand was in a condition that wanted nothing, was correct. But his second answer, that if pleasure were a good, his hand would want it, was not correct. This was wrong because the hand had no need to desire any additional pleasure, because the state in which it was in – a state without pain – was itself a state of pleasure.

The truth of the view that pleasure or happiness is the ultimate good will readily appear from the following additional illustration:

Let us imagine a man who is living in the continuous enjoyment of numerous vivid pleasures, of both body and of mind, and who is undisturbed either by the presence or by the prospect of pain. What possible state of existence could we describe as being more excellent or more desirable? A man so situated must possess in the first place a strength of mind that is impregnable against all fear of death or of pain. He will have no fear of death because he will know that death only means complete unconsciousness, and he will have no fear of pain, because he will know that while he is alive, pain that is long is generally light, and pain that is strong is generally short. In other words, he will also know that the intensity of pain is alleviated by the briefness of its duration, and that continuing pain is bearable because it is generally of lesser severity. Let such a man moreover have no fear of any supernatural power; let him never allow the pleasures of the past to fade away, but let him constantly renew their enjoyment in his recollection, and his lot will be one which will not admit of further improvement.

On the other hand, imagine a man who is crushed beneath the heaviest load of mental and bodily anguish which humanity is able to sustain. Grant him no prospect of ultimate relief; let him neither have, nor hope to have, a gleam of pleasure. Can one describe or imagine a more pitiable state? If, then, a life full of pain is the thing most to be avoided, it follows that to live in pain is the highest evil; and it also follows that a life of pleasure and happiness is the ultimate good. The mind possesses nothing within itself on which it can rest as final. Every fear, every sorrow, can be traced back to pain — and there is nothing besides pain which has the capacity to cause either anxiety or distress.

Pleasure and pain therefore supply the motives and the principles of choice and of avoidance, and thus they are the springs of conduct generally. This being so, it clearly follows that actions are right and praiseworthy only to the extent that they are productive of a life of happiness. But something which is not itself a means to obtain anything else, but to which all other things are but the means by which it is to be acquired, is what the Greeks term the highest, or final good. It must therefore be admitted that the chief good of man is to live happily.

Those who place the chief good in “virtue” alone are beguiled by the glamor of a name, and they do not understand the true demands of Nature. If they will but consent to listen to Epicurus, they will be delivered from the grossest error. Your school waxes eloquently on the supposedly transcendent beauty of the “virtues.” But were they not productive of pleasure, who would deem the virtues either praiseworthy or desirable?

We value the art of medicine not for its interest as a science, but because it produces health. We commend the art of navigation for its practical, and not its scientific value, because it conveys the rules for sailing a ship with success. So also Wisdom, which must be considered as the art of living, would not be desired if it produced no result. As it is, however, wisdom is desired, because it is the craftsman that produces and procures pleasure. The meaning that I attach to pleasure and happiness must by this time be clear to you, and you must no longer be biased against my argument due to the discreditable associations that others have attached to the terms.

The great disturbing factor in man's life is ignorance of good and evil. Mistaken ideas about these frequently rob us

of our greatest pleasures, and torment us with the most cruel pains of mind. Thus we need the aid of Wisdom to rid us of our fears and unnatural desires, to root out all our errors and prejudices, and to serve as our infallible guide to the attainment of happiness.

Wisdom alone can banish sorrow from our hearts and protect us from alarm and apprehension. Become a student of Wisdom, and you may live in peace and quench the glowing flames of vain desires. For the vain desires are incapable of satisfaction — they ruin not only individuals but whole families, and in fact they often shake the very foundations of the state. It is the vain desires that are the source of hatred, quarreling, strife, sedition, and war. Nor do the vain desires flaunt themselves only away from home, and turn their onslaughts solely against other people. For even when they are imprisoned within the heart of the individual man, they quarrel and fall out among themselves, and this can have no result but to render the whole of life embittered.

For this reason it is only the wise man, who prunes away all the rotten growth of vanity and error, who can possibly live untroubled by sorrow and by fear, and who can live contentedly within the bounds that Nature has set.

Nothing could be more instructive and helpful to right living than Epicurus' doctrine as to the different classes of the desires. One kind he classified as both natural and necessary, a second as natural but not necessary, and a third as neither natural nor necessary. The principle of the classification comes from observing that the necessary desires are gratified with little trouble or expense. The natural desires also require little effort, since the quantity of Nature's riches which suffices to bring contentment is both small and easily obtained. In contrast, for the vain and idle desires, no boundary or limit can be discovered.

Therefore we observe that ignorance and error reduce the whole of life to confusion. It is Wisdom alone that is able to protect us from the onslaught of the vain appetites and the menace of fears. Only wisdom is able to teach us to bear the hardships of fortune with moderation, and only wisdom is able to show us the paths that lead to calmness and to peace. Why then should we hesitate to proudly affirm that Wisdom is to be desired, not for its own sake, but for the sake of the happiness it brings? And why therefore should we hesitate to affirm that Folly is to be avoided, again not for its own sake, because of the injuries that follow in its path?

This same principle leads us also to pronounce that Temperance is not desirable for its own sake, but because it bestows peace of mind, and soothes the heart with a calming sense of harmony. For it is temperance that warns us to be guided by reason in what we desire and in what we choose to avoid.

Nor is it enough to judge what it is right to do or leave undone, we must also take action according to our judgment. Most men, however, lack tenacity of purpose. Their resolution weakens and succumbs as soon as the fair form of pleasure meets their gaze, and they surrender themselves prisoner to their passions, failing to foresee the inevitable result. Thus for the sake of small and unnecessary pleasures, which they might have obtained by other means or even denied themselves altogether without pain, they incur serious disease, loss of fortune, or disgrace, and often become liable to the penalties of the law and of the courts of justice.

Other men, however, resolve to enjoy their pleasures so as to avoid all painful consequences, they retain their sense of judgment, and they avoid being seduced by pleasure into courses that they see to be wrong. Such men reap the very highest pleasure by forgoing other pleasures. In a similar way, wise men voluntarily endure certain pains to avoid incurring greater pain by not doing so. This clearly shows us that temperance is not desirable for its own sake. Instead, temperance is desirable, not because it renounces pleasures, but because it produces greater pleasures.

The same lesson will be found to be true of Courage. The performance of labors and the endurance of pains are not attractive in and of themselves. Neither are patience, industry, watchfulness, or that much-praised virtue, perseverance, or even courage itself, worthy of praise apart from that which they produce. Instead, we aim at these virtues in order to live without anxiety and fear and so far as possible, to be free from pain of mind and body.

The fear of death plays havoc with the calm and even tenor of life, and it is a pitiful thing to bow the head to pain and bear it abjectly and feebly. Such weakness has caused many men to betray their parents or their friends; some even betray their own country, and very many utterly fall to ruin themselves. On the other hand, a strong and lofty spirit is entirely free from anxiety and sorrow, and makes light of death, for the dead are only as they were before they were born. It is wise to recall that pains of great severity are ended by death, and slight pains have frequent

intervals of respite; while pains of medium intensity lie within our ability to control. If pains are endurable then we can bear them, and if they are unendurable, we may choose ourselves to leave life's theater serenely when the play has ceased to please us.

These considerations prove that timidity and cowardice are not to be condemned, and courage and endurance are not to be praised, in and of themselves. Timidity and cowardice are rejected because they bring pain, and courage and endurance are coveted because they produce pleasure.

It remains to speak of Justice to complete the list of the virtues. But justice admits of practically the same explanation as the others. I have already shown that Wisdom, Temperance and Courage are so closely linked with happiness that they cannot possibly be severed from it. The same must be deemed to be the case with Justice. Not only does Justice never cause anyone harm, but on the contrary it always brings some benefit, partly because of its calming influence on the mind, and partly because of the hope that it provides of never-failing access to the things that one's uncorrupted nature really needs. And just as Rashness, License and Cowardice are always tormenting the mind, always awakening trouble and discord, so Unrighteousness, when firmly rooted in the heart, causes restlessness by the mere fact of its presence. Once unrighteousness has found expression in some deed of wickedness, no matter how secret the act may appear, it can never be free of the fear that it will one day be detected.

The usual consequences of crime are suspicion, gossip, and rumor — after that comes the accuser, then the judge. Many wrongdoers even turn evidence against themselves . . . . And even if any transgressors think themselves to be well fortified against detection by their fellow men, they still dread the eye of heaven, and fancy that the pangs of anxiety that night and day gnaw at their hearts are sent by Providence to punish them.

So in what way can wickedness be thought to be worthwhile, in view of its effect in increasing the distresses of life by bringing with it the burden of a guilty conscience, the penalties of the law, and the hatred of one's fellow men?"

Nevertheless, some men indulge without limit their avarice, ambition, love of power, lust, gluttony, and those other desires which ill-gotten gains can never diminish, but rather inflame. Such men are the proper subjects for restraint, rather than for reformation.

Men of sound natures, therefore, are summoned by the voice of true reason to justice, equity, and honesty.

For those without eloquence or resources, dishonesty is not a good policy, since it is difficult for such a man to succeed in his designs, or to make good his success once it is achieved. On the other hand, for those who are rich and intelligent, generous conduct seems more appropriate, for liberality wins them affection and good will, the surest means to a life of peace. This is especially true since we see that there is really no need for anyone to transgress, because the desires that spring from Nature are easily gratified without doing wrong to any man, and those desires that are vain and idle can be resisted by observing that they set their sights on nothing that is really desirable, and that there is more loss inherent in injustice than there is profit in the gains that it may bring for a time.

As with the other virtues, Justice cannot correctly be said to be desirable in and of itself. Here again, Justice is desirable because it is so highly productive of gratification. Esteem and affection are gratifying because they render life safer and happier. Thus we hold that injustice is to be avoided not simply on account of the disadvantages that result from being unjust, but even more, because when injustice dwells in a man's heart, it never allows him to breathe freely or to know a moment's rest.

Thus Epicurus shows us that the alleged glory of "Virtue," on which the Platonic philosophers love to expound so eloquently, has in the final analysis no meaning at all unless it is based on living happily, because happiness is the only thing that is intrinsically attractive and desirable. It therefore cannot be doubted that pleasure is the one supreme and final good, and that a life of happiness is nothing else than a life of pleasure.

Having thus firmly established the doctrine, we turn to several corollaries which I will briefly mention:

First, the natural ends of good and evil, that is, pleasure and pain, are not open to mistake. Where people go wrong is in not knowing what things are in fact productive of pleasure and pain.

Also, we hold that mental pleasures and pains are always connected with bodily matters, and cannot exist without a bodily basis. . . . Men do of course experience mental pleasure that is agreeable and mental pain that is annoying, but both of these we assert arise out of and are based upon matters connected with the body.

Even though mental pleasures and pains arise from the body, we maintain that this does not preclude mental pleasures and pains from being much more intense than those of the body. This is because the body can feel only what is present to it at the moment, whereas the mind is also aware of the past and of the future. For example, even granting that pain of body is equally painful, yet our sensation of pain can be enormously increased by the mental apprehension that some evil of unlimited magnitude and duration threatens to befall us hereafter. This same consideration applies to pleasure — a pleasure is greater if it is not accompanied by any apprehension of evil. We therefore see that intense mental pleasure or distress contributes more to our happiness or misery than bodily pleasure or pain of equal duration.

Further, we do not agree with those who allege that when pleasure is withdrawn, anxiety follows at once. That result is true only in those situations where the pleasure happens to be replaced directly by a pain. The truth is, in general, we are glad whenever we lose a pain, even though no active sensation of pleasure comes immediately in its place. This fact serves to show us how life in the absence of pain is so great a pleasure.

Moreover, just as we are elated by the anticipation of good things to come, so we are delighted by the recollection of good things in the past. Fools are tormented by the remembrance of former evils, but to wise men, memory is a pleasure — through it they renew the good things of the past. Within us all resides, if we will it, both the power to obliterate our misfortunes by permanently forgetting them, and the power to summon up pleasant and agreeable memories of our successes. When we concentrate our mental vision closely on the events of the past, then sorrow or gladness follows according to whether these events were evil or good.

Here indeed is the renowned road to happiness — open, simple, and direct! For clearly man can have no greater good than complete freedom from pain and sorrow coupled with the enjoyment of the highest bodily and mental pleasures. Notice then how the theory embraces every possible enhancement of life, every aid to the achievement of that chief good — a life of happiness — which is our object. Epicurus, the man whom you denounce as given to excessive sensuality, cries aloud that no one can live pleasantly without living wisely, honorably and justly, and no one can live wisely, honorably and justly without living pleasantly.

A city torn by faction cannot prosper, nor can a house whose masters are at strife. Much less then can a mind that is divided against itself and filled with inward discord taste any particle of pure and liberal pleasure. One who is perpetually swayed by conflicting and incompatible opinions and desires can know no peace or calm.

If the pleasantness of life is diminished by the serious bodily diseases, how much more must it be diminished by the diseases of the mind! Extravagant and vain desires for riches, fame, power, and other pleasures of license, are nothing but mental diseases. Grief, trouble and sorrow gnaw the heart and consume it with anxiety if men fail to realize that the mind need feel no pain unless it is connected with some pain of body, present or to come. Yet all foolish men are afflicted by at least one of these diseases — and therefore there is no foolish man who is not unhappy.

And always there is death, the stone of Tantalus ever hanging over men's heads, and then there is religion, that poisons and destroys all peace of mind. Fools do not recall their past happiness or enjoy their present blessings — they only look forward to the desires of the future, and as the future is always uncertain, they are consumed with agony and terror. And the climax of their torment is when they perceive, too late, that all their dreams of wealth or station, power or fame, have come to nothing. For fools can never hold the pleasures for which they hoped, and for which they were inspired to undergo all their arduous toils.

Or look again at men who are petty, narrow-minded, confirmed pessimists, or others who are spiteful, envious, ill-tempered, unsociable, abusive, cantankerous. Look at those who are enslaved to the follies of love, or those who are impudent, reckless, wanton, headstrong and yet irresolute, always changing their minds. Such failings render their lives one unbroken round of misery. The result is that no foolish man can be happy, nor any wise man fail to be happy. This is a truth that we establish far more conclusively than do the Platonic philosophers, who maintain that nothing is good save that vague phantom which they entitle "Moral Worth," a title more splendid in sound than it is

substantial in reality. Such men are gravely mistaken when, resting on this vague idea of “Moral Worth” they allege that Virtue has no need of pleasure, and that Virtue is sufficient for itself.

At the same time, this view can be stated in a form to which we do not object, and can indeed endorse. For Epicurus tells us that the Wise Man is always happy. The Wise Man’s desires are kept within Nature’s bounds, and he disregards death. The wise man has a true conception, untainted by fear, of the Divine Nature. If it be expedient to depart from life, the wise man does not hesitate to do so. Thus equipped, the wise man enjoys perpetual pleasure, for there is no moment when the pleasures he experiences do not outbalance his pains, since he remembers the past with delight, he grasps the present with a full realization of its pleasantness, and he does not rely wholly upon the future. The Wise Man looks forward to the future, but finds his true enjoyment in the present. Also, the wise man is entirely free from the vices that I referenced a few moments ago, and he derives considerable pleasure from comparing his own existence with the life of the foolish. Any pains that the Wise Man may encounter are never so severe but that he has more cause for gladness than for sorrow.

It was a central doctrine of Epicurus that “the Wise Man is but little interfered with by fortune. The great concerns of life, the things that matter, are controlled by his own wisdom and reason.” Epicurus also taught that “No greater pleasure could be derived from a life of infinite duration, than is actually afforded by this existence, which we know to be finite.”

Theoretical logic, on which your Platonic school lays such stress, Epicurus held to be of no assistance either as a guide to conduct or as an aid to thought. In contrast, he deemed Natural Philosophy to be all-important. Natural Philosophy explains to us the meaning of terms, the nature of cause and effect, and the laws of consistency and contradiction. A thorough knowledge of the facts of Nature relieves us of the burden of superstition, frees us from fear of death, and shields us against the disturbing effects of ignorance, which is often in itself a cause of terrifying fears. A knowledge of those things that Nature truly requires improves the moral character as well. It is only by firmly grasping a well-reasoned scientific study of Nature, and observing Epicurus’ Canon of truth that has fallen, as it were, from heaven, which affords us a knowledge of the universe. Only by making that Canon the test of all our judgments can we hope always to stand fast in our convictions, undeterred and unshaken by the eloquence of any man.

On the other hand, without a firm understanding of the world of Nature, it is impossible to maintain the validity of the perceptions of our senses. Every mental presentation has its origin in sensation, and no knowledge or perception is possible unless the sensations are reliable, as the theory of Epicurus teaches us that they are. Those who deny the reliability of sensation and say that nothing can be known, having excluded the evidence of the senses, are unable even to make their own argument. By abolishing knowledge and science, they abolish all possibility of rational life and action. Thus Natural Philosophy supplies courage to face the fear of death; and resolution to resist the terrors of religion. Natural Philosophy provides peace of mind by removing all ignorance of the mysteries of Nature, and provides self-control, by explaining the Nature of the desires and allowing us to distinguish their different kinds. In addition, the Canon or Criterion of Knowledge which Epicurus established shows us the method by which we evaluate the evidence of the senses and discern truth from falsehood.

There remains a topic that is supremely relevant to this discussion – the subject of Friendship. Your [Platonic] school maintains that if pleasure is held to be the Chief Good, friendship will cease to exist. In contrast, Epicurus has pronounced in regard to friendship that of all the means to happiness that wisdom has devised, none is greater, none is more fruitful, none is more delightful than friendship. Not only did Epicurus commend the importance of friendship through his words, but far more, through the example of his life and his conduct. How rare and great friendship is can be seen in the mythical stories of antiquity. Review the legends from the remotest of ages, and, many and varied as they are, you will barely find in them three pairs of friends, beginning with Theseus and ending with Orestes. Yet Epicurus in a single house (and a small one at that) maintained a whole company of friends, united by the closest sympathy and affection, and this still goes on today in the Epicurean school.

...

The Epicureans maintain that friendship can no more be separated from pleasure than can the virtues, which we have discussed already. A solitary, friendless life is necessarily beset by secret dangers and alarms. Hence reason itself advises the acquisition of friends. The possession of friends gives confidence and a firmly rooted hope of winning

pleasure. And just as hatred, jealousy and contempt are hindrances to pleasure, so friendship is the most trustworthy preserver and also creator of pleasure for both our friends and for ourselves. Friendship affords us enjoyment in the present, and it inspires us with hope for the near and distant future. Thus it is not possible to secure uninterrupted gratification in life without friendship, nor to preserve friendship itself unless we love our friends as much as ourselves. ... For we rejoice in our friends' joy as much as in our own, and we are equally pained by their sorrows. Therefore the wise man will feel exactly the same towards his friends as he does towards himself, and he will exert himself as much for his friend's pleasure as he would for his own. All that has been said about the essential connection of the virtues with pleasure must be repeated about friendship. Epicurus well said (and I give almost his exact words): "The same creed that has given us courage to overcome all fear of everlasting or long-enduring evil after death has discerned that friendship is our strongest safeguard in this present term of life.

...

All these considerations go to prove not only that the rationale of friendship is not impaired by the identification of the chief good with pleasure, but, in fact, without this, no foundation for friendship whatsoever can be found."

In sum, then, the theory I have set forth is clearer and more luminous than daylight itself. It is derived entirely from Nature's source. My whole discussion relies for confirmation on the unbiased and unimpeachable evidence of the senses. Lispering babies, even dumb animals, prompted by Nature's teaching, can almost find the voice to proclaim to us that in life there is no welfare but pleasure, no hardship but pain – and their judgment in these matters is neither corrupted nor biased. Ought we then not to feel the greatest gratitude to Epicurus, the man who listened to these words from Nature's own voice, and grasped their meaning so firmly and so fully that he was able to guide all sane-minded men into the path of peace and happiness, of calmness and repose?

You amuse yourself by thinking that Epicurus was uneducated. The truth is that Epicurus refused to consider any education to be worthy of the name if it did not teach us the means to live happily. Was Epicurus to spend his time, as you encourage Triarius and me to do, perusing the poets, who give us nothing solid and useful, but only childish amusement? Was Epicurus to occupy himself like Plato, with music and geometry, arithmetic and astronomy, which are at best mere tools, and which, if they start from false premises, can never reveal truth or contribute anything to make our lives happier and therefore better?

Was Epicurus to study the limited arts such as these, and neglect the master art, so difficult but correspondingly so fruitful, the art of living? No! It was not Epicurus who was uninformed. The truly uneducated are those who ask us to go on studying until old age the subjects that we ought to be ashamed not to have learned when we were children!

## **The Letter to Menoeceus by Epicurus**

*Epicurus to Menoeceus, Greetings-*

Let no one delay in the study of philosophy while he is young, and when he is old, let him not become weary of the study. For no man can ever find the time unsuitable or too late to study the health of his soul.

And he who asserts either that it is too soon to study philosophy, or that the hour is passed, is like a man who would say that the time has not yet come to be happy, or that it is too late to be happy.

So both the young and the old must study philosophy – that as one grows old he may be young in the blessings that come from the grateful recollection of those good things that have passed, and that even in youth he may have the wisdom of age, since he will know no fear of what is to come. It is necessary for us, then, to meditate on the things which produce happiness, since if happiness is present we have everything, and when happiness is absent we do everything with a view to possess it.

Now, I will repeat to you those things that I have constantly recommended to you, and I would have you do and practice them, as they are the elements of living well:

First of all, believe that a god is an incorruptible and happy being, just as Nature has commonly engraved on the minds of men. But attach to your theology nothing which is inconsistent with incorruptibility or with happiness, and believe that a god possesses everything which is necessary to preserve its own nature.

Indeed the gods do exist, and Nature gives to us a degree of knowledge of them. But gods are not of the character which most people attribute to them, and the conception of the gods held by most people is far from pure. It is not the man who discards the gods believed in by the many who is impious, but he who applies to the gods the false opinions that most people entertain about them. For the assertions of most people about the gods are not true intuitions given to them by Nature, but false opinions of their own, such as the idea that gods send misfortune to the wicked and blessings to the good. False opinions such as these arise because men think of the gods as if they had human qualities, and men do not understand that the gods have virtues that are different from their own.

Next, accustom yourself to think that death is a matter with which we are not at all concerned. This is because all good and all evil come to us through sensation, and death brings the end of all our sensations. The correct understanding that death is no concern of ours allows us to take pleasure in our mortal lives, not because it adds to life an infinite span of time, but because it relieves us of the longing for immortality as a refuge from the fear of death. For there can be nothing terrible in living for a man who rightly comprehends that there is nothing terrible in ceasing to live.

Seen in this way, it was a silly man who once said that he feared death, not because it would grieve him when it was present, but because it grieved him now to consider it to be coming in the future. But it is absurd that something that does not distress a man when it is present should afflict him when it has not yet arrived. Therefore the most terrifying of fears, death, is nothing to us, since so long as we exist death is not present with us, and when death comes, then we no longer exist. Death, then, is of no concern either to the living or to the dead – to the living, death has no existence, and to the dead, no concerns of any kind are possible.

Many people, however, flee from death as if it were the greatest of evils, while at other times these same people wish for death as a rest from the evils of life. But the wise man embraces life, and he does not fear death, for life affords the opportunity for happiness, and the wise man does not consider the mere absence of life to be an evil. Just as he chooses food not according to what is most abundant, but according to what is best; so too, the wise man does not seek to live the life that is the longest, but the happiest.

And so he who advises a young man to live well, and an old man to die well, is a simpleton, not only because life is desirable for both the young and the old, but also because the wisdom to live well is the same as the wisdom to die well.

Equally wrong was the man who said:

*'Tis well not to be born, but when born, tis well to pass with quickness to the gates of Death.*

If this was really his opinion, why then did he not end his own life? For it was easily in his power to do so, if this was really his belief. But if this man was joking, then he was talking foolishly in a case where foolishness ought not be allowed.

As to how we live our lives, we must always remember that the future does not wholly belong to us. But on the other hand, the future does not wholly NOT belong to us either. In this I mean that we can never wait on the future with a feeling of certainty that it will come to pass, but neither can we despair that the future is something that will never arrive.

We must also consider that some of our human desires are given to us by Nature, and some are vain and empty. Of the Natural desires, some are necessary, and some are not. Of the necessary desires, some are necessary to our happiness, and some are necessary if our body is to be free from trouble. Some desires are in fact necessary for living itself. He who has a correct understanding of these things will always decide what to choose and what to avoid by referring to the goal of obtaining a body that is healthy and a soul that is free from turmoil, since this is the aim of living happily. It is for the sake of living happily that we do everything, as we wish to avoid grief and fear. When once we have attained this goal, the storm of the soul is ended, because we neither have the need to go

looking for something that we lack, nor to go seeking something else by which the good of our soul or of our body would be improved.

For you see when we lack pleasure and we grieve, we have need of pleasure, because pleasure is not present. But so long as we do not grieve, life affords us no lack of pleasure. On this account we affirm that Nature has provided that Pleasure is the beginning and end of living happily; for we have recognized that Nature has provided that happiness is the first good that is innate within us. To this view of Happiness as our starting point and as our goal we refer every question of what to choose and what to avoid. And to this same goal of happy living we again and again return, because whether a thing brings Happiness is the rule by which we judge every good. But although happiness is the first and a natural good, for this same reason we do not choose every pleasure whatsoever, but at many times we pass over certain pleasures when difficulty is likely to ensue from choosing them. Likewise, we think that certain pains are better than some pleasures, when a greater pleasure will follow them, even if we first endure pain for time.

Every Pleasure is therefore by its own Nature a good, but it does not follow that every pleasure is worthy of being chosen, just as every pain is an evil, and yet every pain must not be avoided. Nature requires that we resolve all these matters by measuring and reasoning whether the ultimate result is suitable or unsuitable to bringing about a happy life; for at times we may determine that what appears to be good is in fact an evil, and at other times we may determine that what appears to be evil is in fact a good.

As we pursue happiness we also hold that self-reliance is a great good, not in order that we will always be satisfied with little, but in order that if circumstances do not allow that we have much, we may wisely make use of the little that we have. This is because we are genuinely persuaded that men who are able to do without luxury are the best able to enjoy luxury when it is available.

We also believe that Nature provides that everything which is necessary to life is easily obtained, and that those things which are idle or vain are difficult to possess. Simple flavors give as much pleasure as costly fare when everything that causes pain, and every feeling of want, is removed. Bread and water give the most extreme pleasure when someone in great need eats of them. To accustom oneself, therefore, to simple and inexpensive habits is a great ingredient towards perfecting one's health, and makes one free from hesitation in facing the necessary affairs of life. And when on certain occasions we fall in with more sumptuous fare, this attitude renders us better disposed towards luxuries, as we are then fearless with regard to the possibility that we may thereafter lose them.

When, therefore, we say that pleasure or happiness is the chief good, we are not speaking of the pleasures of debauched men, or those pleasures which lie in sensual enjoyment, as some allege about us who are ignorant, or who disagree with us, or who perversely misrepresent our opinions. Instead, when we speak of pleasure or happiness as the chief good, we mean the freedom of the body from pain and the freedom of the soul from confusion. For it is not continued drinking and reveling, or the temporary pleasures of sexual relations, or feasts of fish or such other things as a costly table supplies that make life pleasant. Instead, Nature provides that life is made pleasant by sober contemplation, and by close examination of the reasons for all decisions we make as to what we choose and what we avoid. It is by these means that we put to flight the vain opinions from which arise the greater part of the confusion that troubles the soul.

Now, the beginning and the greatest good of all these things is wisdom. Wisdom is something more valuable even than philosophy itself, inasmuch as all the other virtues spring from it. Wisdom teaches us that it is not possible to live happily unless one also lives wisely, and honestly, and justly; and that one cannot live wisely and honestly and justly without also living happily. For these virtues are by nature bound up together with the happy life, and the happy life is inseparable from these virtues.

Considering this, who can you think to be a better man than he who has holy opinions about the gods, who is utterly fearless in facing death, who properly contemplates the goals and limits of life as fixed by Nature, and who understands that Nature has established that the greatest goods are readily experienced and easily obtained, while the greatest evils last but a short period and cause only brief pain?

The wise man laughs at the idea of "Fate," which some set up as the mistress of all things, because the wise man understands that while some things do happen by chance, most things happen due to our own actions. The wise man sees that Fate or Necessity cannot exist if men are truly free, and he also sees that Fortune is not in constant control

of the lives of men. But the wise man sees that our actions are free, and because they are free, our actions are our own responsibility, and we deserve either blame or praise for them.

It would therefore be better to believe in the fables that are told about the gods than to be a slave to the idea of Fate or Necessity as put forth by false philosophers. At least the fables which are told about the gods hold out to us the possibility that we may avert the gods' wrath by paying them honor. The false philosophers, on the other hand, present us with no hope of control over our own lives, and no escape from an inexorable Fate.

In the same way, the wise man does not consider Fortune to be a goddess, as some men esteem her to be, for the wise man knows that nothing is done at random by a god. Nor does he consider that such randomness as may exist renders all events of life impossible to predict. Likewise, he does not believe that the gods give chance events to men so as to make them live happily. The wise man understands that while chance may lead to great good, it may also lead to great evil, and he therefore thinks it to be better to be unsuccessful when acting in accord with reason than to be successful by chance when acting as a fool.

Meditate then, on all these things, and on those things which are related to them, both day and night, and both alone and with like-minded companions. For if you will do this, you will never be disturbed while asleep or awake by imagined fears, but you will live like a god among men. For a man who lives among immortal blessings is in no respect like a mortal being.

## **The Letter to Herodotus by Epicurus**

*Epicurus to Herodotus, wishing he may do well.*

For those, Herodotus, who are not able to work through in detail all the things which I have written about Nature, or who are not able to investigate the longer books which I have composed on the subject, I have prepared this abridgment of the whole system on Nature to enable them to recall accurately the most fundamental points. I have done this so that on all occasions they may be able to refer to the most important principles as they devote themselves to the study of nature. And it is indeed necessary that as we proceed in the study of the details of the main principles, we always keep in mind the essential points of the whole system. This is because we have frequent need of the overall view, and it is only less often that we need the detailed exposition. For it is frequently necessary to go back to the main principles, and fix in our minds the principles on which we may rest, so that we may arrive at the most complete understanding of the truth.

An accurate knowledge of the details in the various areas of study may be obtained if we thoroughly grasp and keep in mind the general principles. Even for those who are well advanced in the study of nature, the most essential benefit of all accurate knowledge is the capacity to make a rapid use of what the mind has already observed and apprehended, and this can be done if we sum everything up in elementary principles and outlines. For it is not possible to summarize a complete description of the whole system if one cannot embrace in his own mind by means of short formulas all the principles that might be set out over time in greater detail.

The method I have described is valuable, and since I urge others to constantly occupy themselves with the study of nature, and I find my own happiness in a life engaged in that study, I have composed for you this summary of the most important principles of the whole doctrine.

First of all, Herodotus, one must determine with exactness the meaning and concept behind every word so that we are able to refer to that concept as an established standard as we pursue our research. Otherwise, the judgments that we reach will have no foundation, and we will go on studying to infinity without understanding, because we will be using words devoid of meaning. In fact, it is absolutely necessary that we grasp directly the fundamental concept which each word expresses, without need of reminder, if we are to have a standard on which to rest all our investigations. In order to do this we must keep all our investigations in accord with and reconciled to the evidence from our senses, especially in those matters in which our minds have grasped a clear view and reached a firm judgment. We must do this so we may identify that point in the examination where we find it necessary to reserve

judgment as to the truth of a matter, which will occur when we do not have immediately perceptible to us sufficient evidence to form a clear determination.

When this foundation is once laid, we may pass on to the study of those things about which the evidence is not immediately clear to us. [On questions such as this there are a number of fundamental principles of nature which we must keep in mind:]

First of all, we must admit that nothing can come from that which does not exist. Were this fact otherwise, then everything would be produced from everything, and there would be no need of any first beginnings, or seeds.

Second, if that which disappeared were so absolutely destroyed as to become non-existent, then everything would soon perish, as the things into which they would be dissolved would have no existence. As a result of these first two principles, we conclude that the universe as a whole has always been in existence as it now is and always will be in existence. For there is nothing else into which the universal whole can change, and there is nothing beyond the universe which can penetrate into it and produce anything new.

Next, we observe that everything that exists in the universe is formed from bodies that have a material existence of some kind. We know this because our senses bear witness in every case that bodies have a real existence, and the evidence of the senses, as I have said before, must be the rule of our reasoning about everything, even that which we are not able to perceive directly. We also consider that what we call the void, or space, has a real existence, as otherwise there would be nothing on which the bodies could be contained, or across which they could move, as we see that they really do move. As a result of these observations we conclude that one cannot conceive, either through human perception, or through any analogy founded on perception, anything that exists which is not either an attribute, or an incident of material things or empty space, which we call matter and void.

Of those things that are material, some are composed of single elements, and others are formed from combinations of elements. The elements are indivisible, and thus are impervious to any kind of transformation. If this were not so, everything would eventually dissolve into non-existence. The elements exist unchanging by their own nature, even though the combined bodies which they compose change and dissolve, because the elements are absolutely solid, and as such they offer no point through which any destructive force can enter. It follows, therefore, as a matter of absolute necessity, that the fundamental material of the universe must be composed of elements that are themselves indivisible.

In addition, the universe is boundless. We know this because we observe that anything which has a bound has an extreme point on that boundary, and that extreme point is seen to face something else. Because the universe has no extreme point, it has no limit, and because it has no limit it must be boundless.

Furthermore, the universe is boundless both in the number of material things and in the extent of empty space. We know this because if the empty space were boundless, but the number of material things were not, then the material things would never come together, but would be carried about and scattered throughout empty space, never colliding and never staying in one place. On the other hand, if the number of material things were boundless, but the extent of empty space were not, the material things would not have room to take their place or move about.

...

[As we move to the consideration of phenomena such as the nature of sight and images], we must consider that there may be [various] manners in which things of this kind are produced. But we must never accept anything in these various possibilities which at all contradicts the senses, and [in evaluating these things] we must consider in what way the senses are exercised and the relationship that is established between the external objects we observe and ourselves.

...

[We must also consider] the possibility of error and false judgments. These arise due to our supposing that a preconceived idea will be confirmed, or at any event will not be overturned, by additional evidence when we receive it. Falseness and error arise when we form an opinion prematurely, without waiting for additional evidence to

confirm or to contradict our conclusion before reaching it. [We must always recognize that] the representations we receive from images have been received by our intelligence like reflections from a mirror, whether those images are perceived in a dream or through any other conceptions of the mind or the senses. But [we cannot conclude that] these representations resemble the objects from which they came closely enough so that we can call them real and true unless we are examining objects that we perceive directly. Error arises when we receive impressions which our minds accept as a direct representation but which in fact are not. In such cases, due to considerations that are unique to ourselves, our minds mistakenly take these indirect perceptions and form conceptions which go beyond the reality of the actual object. Error results when our minds reach conclusions based on evidence that is not confirmed, or is contradictory, rather than based on evidence that we directly observe to be confirmed and uncontradicted.

We must carefully preserve these principles so that we will not reject the authority of our faculties when we perceive truth directly. We must also observe these principles so that we will not allow our minds to believe that what is false or what is speculative has been established with equal firmness with what is true, because this results in everything being thrown into confusion.

As to the heavenly phenomena, such as the motion and course of the stars, their rising and setting, the eclipses, and all other appearances of this sort, we must beware of thinking that they are produced by any superior being whose business it is to regulate the order of the world. For a god is a being which is immortal and perfectly happy, free of cares and anxieties. Benevolence and anger, however, far from being compatible with perfection, are on the contrary the consequence of weakness, of fear, and of the desire which a thing has for something that it lacks. Therefore we must not fancy that the globes of fire which roll on in space are gods which enjoy a perfect happiness, and which give themselves, with reflection and wisdom, the motions which they possess.

On this subject we must respect the established notions, but only if they do not at all contradict the respect due to the truth. For nothing is more calculated to trouble the soul than the strife of contradictory notions and principles. We must therefore conclude that from the first movement of the heavenly bodies at the time of the organization of the universe, there results some sort of necessary cause which regulates their course to this very day.

Let us be well assured that it is to natural science which belongs the determination of the causes of these heavenly phenomena. Happiness comes through the study of natural science, by which we acquire the knowledge of analogous phenomena, which then aids us in the understanding of ethical matters. The heavenly phenomena, on the other hand, admit of several explanations. There is no reason that they must necessarily be of a particular character, and one may explain them in various manners. In short, a moment's consideration will show that the heavenly phenomena have no relationship with gods, which are imperishable and happy beings which suffer no destruction or confusion.

As for the theoretical knowledge of the rising and setting of the stars, of the movement of the sun between the tropics, and of the eclipses, and all other similar phenomena, that is utterly useless as far as having any influence upon happiness. Moreover, those who possess knowledge of the movement of the stars, but are nonetheless ignorant of Nature and of the most probable causes of that movement, are no more protected from fear than if they were in the most complete ignorance. Such men experience the most lively fears, for the knowledge of the motion of the stars that they do possess inspires in them troubles which they cannot resolve, and those troubles cannot be dissipated except through a clear perception of the reasons for these phenomena.

As for us, we find many explanations of the motions of the sun, of the rising and setting of the stars, of the eclipses, and of similar phenomena. One must not think that this method of explanation is insufficient to procure happiness and tranquility. Let us content ourselves with examining how it is that similar phenomena are brought about directly under our own eyes, and let us apply these observations to the heavenly objects and to everything which is known only indirectly. Let us despise those people who are unable to distinguish those facts which may be explained in various ways from those facts which can only be explained in one single way. Let us disdain those men who do not understand the means of explaining the heavenly phenomena in ways that do not excite fear in us. Once we understand that a phenomenon can be brought about by Nature in any of several natural ways, rather than by the gods in a way that inspires fear, we shall not be more troubled at the sight of it than if we actually knew the real cause.

We must also recall that the thing which principally troubles the spirit of men is the persuasion which they cherish

that the stars are gods, [which we must always remember are] beings that are imperishable and perfectly happy. Such men fear that their thoughts and actions are displeasing to the will of these superior beings. Deluded by these fables, such men fear an eternity of punishment, and they fear the insensibility of death, as if that could affect them. What do I say? It is not the falseness of their beliefs, but their lack of knowledge and blindness, which governs them in all things. This is true to such a degree that, not even considering the truth of whether they really fear their gods, they are just as much troubled as if they really believed in these vain phantoms.

Real freedom from this kind of trouble consists in being emancipated from all these things, and in preserving the recollection of the principles which we have established, especially those that are most essential. Accordingly, it is well to pay careful attention to the phenomena with which we are familiar and to the sensations, both general and particular, which we have confirmed to be true. In sum, we must take note of the immediate evidence which each of our faculties furnishes to us. For if we pay attention to those points where uncertainty arises, we shall divine the causes of confusion and fear correctly. In this way we may trace back the heavenly phenomena to their causes, and deliver ourselves from those feelings which inspire the common people with extreme terror at every step.

This, Herodotus, is a summary and abridgment of the whole question of natural philosophy. Study for yourself to prove that this reasoning is valid, and preserve it carefully in your memory. For the man who allows himself to be directed by it, even though he may not proceed to a profound study of the details, will have a great superiority of character over other men. He will personally discover a great number of truths which I have set forth in my other works, and these truths, being stored in his memory, will be a constant assistance to him. By means of these principles, those who study the details sufficiently will be able to bring their detailed knowledge to bear on the general subject, and they will understand without difficulty almost the entire circle of natural philosophy. Those, on the other hand, who have not yet arrived at a comprehensive understanding, and who have not been able to hear me lecture on these subjects, will be able to understand the main part of the essential ideas, and from them they will derive assistance for the tranquility and happiness of life.

## **The Letter to Pythocles by Epicurus**

*Epicurus to Pythocles, wishing he may do well.*

Cleon has brought me your letter, in which you continue to show towards me an affection worthy of the friendship which I have for you. You devote all your care, so you tell me, to engraving in your memory those ideas which contribute to the happiness of life. And you entreat me at the same time to send you a simple abridgment and abstract of my ideas on the heavenly phenomena, in order that you may preserve the recollection of them without difficulty. For, you say, what I have written on this subject in my other works is difficult to recall, even with continual study.

I willingly yield to your desire, and I have good hope that in fulfilling what you ask I shall also be useful to many others, especially to those who are as yet novices in the real knowledge of Nature, and to those to whom the perplexities and the ordinary affairs of life leave but little time for leisure. Be careful then to seize on these precepts thoroughly, engrave them deeply in your memory, and meditate on them with the abridgment addressed to Herodotus, which I also send to you.

Know then, that the only aim of the knowledge of the heavenly phenomena, both those which we can observe directly, and those on which we can only speculate, is freedom from anxiety, and the calmness which is derived from a firm belief; and this is the aim of every science.

It is not good to desire what is impossible and to endeavor to articulate a uniform theory about everything. Accordingly, we should not adopt here the method which we have followed in our researches into ethics or in the solution of problems of natural philosophy. There we said, for instance, that there are no other things except matter and the void, and that the atoms are the principle elements of things, and so on. In other words, we gave a precise and simple explanation for every fact that could be conformed to what we see [and observe directly].

We cannot act in the same way with respect to the heavenly phenomena. These phenomena may arise from several different causes, and we may arrive at many different explanations on this subject that are equally agreeable with the appearances that we can observe through the senses. In regard to the stars and planets we do not have the ability to reason out new principles and to lay down absolute rules for the interpretation of Nature, because the only guide for us to follow here are the appearances themselves. Our object then that we have in view is not to set up a system of vain opinions, but rather to attain a life that is exempt from every kind of fear and turmoil.

So long as we accept only those explanations of the heavenly phenomena that are conformable with the evidence we see, we are not inspired with any fears, as are those who allow that any hypothesis at all may possibly be true. But if we abandon the rule of accepting only those hypotheses that are reasonable, and we renounce the attempt to explain the heavenly phenomena by means of analogies that are founded on the evidence provided by senses, then we are conducting ourselves in complete disregard of the science of Nature in favor of falling into fables.

It is possible that the heavenly phenomena may only appear to be similar to those things that we see taking place around us here on earth, but that in fact there is no real analogy, because the movement of the stars and planets may be produced by many different causes. Nevertheless, we must observe how each of these things appear to us, and we must distinguish the different circumstances under which they occur to determine if what we see in the skies can be explained by analogous phenomena which arise closer and under our own eyes.

...

It is possible that the moon has a light of her own, or that she reflects that of the sun. For we see around us many objects which are luminous themselves, and many others which have only a borrowed light. We will not be alarmed by any of the celestial phenomena if we always recall that there are many explanations that are possible. No fears will arise unless we allow ourselves to be foolishly carried away to propose an inconsistent and separate explanation for each phenomenon, sometimes in one way and sometimes in another.

The appearance of a face on the moon may depend either on the features of the moon, or on some interference with our vision, or on any other reasonable cause capable of accounting for such an appearance. One must not neglect to apply this same method to all the heavenly phenomena; for from the moment when one comes to entertain any theories that contradict the evidence of the senses, it will be impossible to possess perfect tranquility and happiness.

The eclipses of the sun and moon may depend either on the fact that these celestial bodies extinguish themselves, a phenomenon which we often see produced here under our eyes, or on the fact that other bodies, the earth, the heaven, or something else of the same kind, interposes between them and us. We must compare whatever different explanations appear reasonable to what we observe, and recall that it is not impossible that many causes may at one and the same time concur to produce the same effect.

...

The regular and periodic march of the heavenly phenomena has nothing in it that would surprise us if we would only pay attention to the analogous facts which take place here on earth under our own eyes. Above all things, let us beware against making a god interpose itself here, for we ought always to consider a god to be exempt from all toil and perfectly happy. Otherwise we shall find ourselves giving vain explanations to the heavenly phenomena, as has happened already to a crowd of philosophers. Because they do not recognize what is really possible and what is not, they have fallen into vain theories, supposing that for all phenomena there is but one single mode of production, and rejecting all other explanations which are also founded on probability. They have adopted the most unreasonable opinions because they failed to place in the forefront of the analysis the evidence of the senses, which ought always to serve as the first basis for explaining all phenomena.

The difference in the length of nights and days may arise from the fact that the passage of the sun above the earth is more or less rapid according to the length of the regions of the sky through which it passes. Another cause may relate to the possibility that certain regions are passed through more rapidly than others, as is seen to be the case by our own eyes in earthly matters to which we can compare the heavenly phenomena. Those who maintain on this point that only one explanation is possible put themselves in opposition to facts, and lose sight of the bounds set to human knowledge.

The predictions about the future which are derived from the stars may, like those which we derive from animals, arise from simple coincidence. They may also have other causes, for example, some change in the air. These two suppositions both harmonize equally with the facts, but it is not possible to attribute these things to one cause or to another.

...

It is possible that thunder arises from the movement of the winds revolving in the cavities of the clouds, of which we may see an image in vessels of liquid in our own daily use. It may also arise from the noise of fire acted upon by the wind inside them, and from the tearings and ruptures of the clouds when they have received a sort of crystalline consistency. As is often the case, experience drawn from our senses teaches us that the heavenly phenomena, and thunder in particular, may be produced in many different manners.

....

The thunderbolt may be produced either by a violent condensation of the winds, or by their rapid motion and collisions. .... In short, one may give a number of explanations of the thunderbolt. Above all things we must always be on guard against fables, and fables will easily be avoided if one follows faithfully the phenomena that are observed directly in searching for the explanation of those things which are only perceived indirectly.

...

[T]o assign one single cause to all these phenomena, when the experience of our senses suggests several, is folly. This is the conduct of ignorant astrologers who covet a vain knowledge and who assign imaginary causes to facts because they wish to leave wholly to the gods the care of the government of the universe.

...

To give one uniform and positive explanation of all these facts, is not consistent with the conduct of any people but those who love to flash prodigies in the eyes of the multitude.

....

Further, the forecasts some give based on the conduct of certain animals arise from a fortuitous combination of circumstances; for there is no necessary connection between certain animals and winter. These animals do not produce winter; nor is there any divine being sitting aloft watching the exits of these animals, and then fulfilling signs of this kind. No folly such as this would occur to any being who is even moderately comfortable, much less to a god who is possessed of perfect happiness.

Imprint all these precepts in your memory, Pythocles, and you will easily escape fables, and it will be easy for you to discover other truths that are analogous to these. Above all, apply yourself to the study of general principles of the infinite, and of questions of this kind, and to the investigation of the different criteria of knowledge, and of the principles of choice and avoidance, and to the study of the chief good, keeping in mind the purpose of all our researches. When the general questions are once resolved in your mind, the means to resolve all particular difficulties will become clear to you.

As to those who will not apply themselves to these principles, such men will neither be able to give a good explanation for these same matters, nor to reach that end to which all our researches tend, [a life of happiness].



## Chapter 10. The Principal Doctrines of Epicurus

*Let us ... now add the finishing stroke, as one may say, to this whole treatise, and to the life of the philosopher; giving some of his fundamental maxims, and closing the whole work with them, taking that for our end which is the beginning of happiness.*

– *Diogenes Laertius*

With the above words Diogenes Laertius ended his biography of Epicurus. New students of Epicurus are naturally drawn to this list as a short-cut in their study, but those unfamiliar with Epicureanism will quickly observe that the order and the context of these maxims is not immediately apparent.

Rather than proceeding from fundamentals to application, the list is apparently ordered according to the importance of each doctrine to the practical production of happiness in the life of the common man. This ordering therefore requires the reader to bring to the table at least a basic familiarity with the principles behind the doctrines and their relationship to each other. The student who has familiarized himself with the material in preceding chapters will have little difficulty in understanding the proper role of each maxim.

To enhance the usefulness of this presentation, each maxim here followed by citations from other relevant surviving Epicurean texts as contained in the Appendix.

### **1. Any being which is happy and imperishable neither has trouble itself, nor does it cause trouble to anything else. A perfect being does not have feelings either of anger or gratitude, for these feelings only exist in the weak.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey:* The blessed and immortal nature knows no trouble itself nor causes trouble to any other, so that it is never constrained by anger or favor. For all such things exist only in the weak. *Yonge:* The blessed and immortal nature knows no trouble itself nor causes trouble to any other, so that it is never constrained by anger or favor. For all such things exist only in the weak.

*Letter to Menoeceus:* First of all, believe that a god is an incorruptible and happy being, just as Nature has commonly engraved on the minds of men. But attach to your theology nothing which is inconsistent with incorruptibility or with happiness, and believe that a god possesses everything which is necessary to preserve its own nature. Indeed the gods do exist, and Nature gives to us a degree of knowledge of them. But gods are not of the character which most people attribute to them, and the conception of the gods held by most people is far from pure. It is not the man who discards the gods believed in by the many who is impious, but he who applies to the gods the false opinions that most people entertain about them. For the assertions of most people about the gods are not true intuitions given to them by Nature, but false opinions of their own, such as the idea that gods send misfortune to the wicked and blessings to the good. False opinions such as these arise because men think of the gods as if they had human qualities, and men do not understand that the gods have virtues that are different from their own.

*Letter to Herodotus:* As to the heavenly phenomena, such as the motion and course of the stars, their rising and setting, the eclipses, and all other appearances of this sort, we must beware of thinking that they are produced by any superior being whose business it is to regulate the order of the world. For a god is a being which is immortal and perfectly happy, free of cares and anxieties. Benevolence and anger, however, far from being compatible with perfection, are on the contrary the consequence of weakness, of fear, and of the desire which a thing has for something that it lacks. Therefore we must not fancy that the globes of fire which roll on in space are gods which enjoy a perfect happiness, and which give themselves, with reflection and wisdom, the motions which they possess. On this subject we must respect the established notions, but only if they do not at all contradict the respect due to the truth. For nothing is more calculated to trouble the soul

than the strife of contradictory notions and principles. We must therefore conclude that from the first movement of the heavenly bodies at the time of the organization of the universe, there results some sort of necessary cause which regulates their course to this very day. Let us be well assured that it is to natural science which belongs the determination of the causes of these heavenly phenomena. Happiness comes through the study of natural science, by which we acquire the knowledge of analogous phenomena, which then aids us in the understanding of ethical matters. The heavenly phenomena, on the other hand, admit of several explanations. There is no reason that they must necessarily be of a particular character, and one may explain them in various manners. In short, a moment's consideration will show that the heavenly phenomena have no relationship with gods, which are imperishable and happy beings which suffer no destruction or confusion.

*Letter to Pythocles:* Further, the forecasts some give based on the conduct of certain animals arise from a fortuitous combination of circumstances; for there is no necessary connection between certain animals and winter. These animals do not produce winter; nor is there any divine being sitting aloft watching the exits of these animals, and then fulfilling signs of this kind. No folly such as this would occur to any being who is even moderately comfortable, much less to a god who is possessed of perfect happiness.

*Lucretius De Rerum Natura Book II:* For by nature of the gods must always in themselves of necessity enjoy immortality together with supreme repose, far removed and withdrawn from our concerns. This is because a god is exempt from every pain, exempt from all dangers, strong in its own resources, not wanting anything of us, and it neither gains by favors nor is moved by anger. And if any one thinks proper to call the sea Neptune and corn Ceres and chooses rather to misuse the name of Bacchus than to utter the term that belongs to that liquor, let us allow him to declare that the earth is mother of the gods, if he will in truth forbear from staining his mind with foul religion.

*NewEpicurean Commentary:* Nature has endowed men with Anticipations that gods do exist, and the clearest of these anticipations is that a god is perfect a perfect being which has no troubles of its own, nor does it cause trouble to anything else. A perfect being has all of its needs already fulfilled and is without weakness of its own, and as a result such a being does not feel anger or gratitude, as such emotions exist only in beings that are weak. It is therefore false to believe that a perfect "God" intervenes in the lives of men, for good or evil, nor does such a being seek to punish you or reward you for your actions, either during your life or after your death.

## **2. Death is nothing to us, because that which is dead has no sensations, and that which cannot be sensed is nothing to us.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey:* Death is nothing to us: for that which is dissolved is without sensation; and that which lacks sensation is nothing to us. *Yonge:* Death is nothing to us: for that which is dissolved is without sensation; and that which lacks sensation is nothing to us. *Strodach:* Death means nothing to us, because that which has been broken down into atoms has no sensation, and that which has no sensation is no concern of ours.

*Letter to Menoecus:* Next, accustom yourself to think that death is a matter with which we are not at all concerned. This is because all good and all evil come to us through sensation, and death brings the end of all our sensations. The correct understanding that death is no concern of ours allows us to take pleasure in our mortal lives, not because it adds to life an infinite span of time, but because it relieves us of the longing for immortality as a refuge from the fear of death. For there can be nothing terrible in living for a man who rightly comprehends that there is nothing terrible in ceasing to live. Seen in this way, it was a silly man who once said that he feared death, not because it would grieve him when it was present, but because it grieved him now to consider it to be coming in the future. But it is absurd that something that does not distress a man when it is

present should afflict him when it has not yet arrived. Therefore the most terrifying of fears, death, is nothing to us, since so long as we exist death is not present with us, and when death comes, then we no longer exist. Death, then, is of no concern either to the living or to the dead – to the living, death has no existence, and to the dead, no concerns of any kind are possible.

*Cicero's Defense of Epicurus*: Observe that if one removes from mankind of all the faculties that Nature has provided, nothing remains.

*Cicero's Defense of Epicurus*: Let us imagine a man who is living in the continuous enjoyment of numerous vivid pleasures, of both body and of mind, and who is undisturbed either by the presence or by the prospect of pain. What possible state of existence could we describe as being more excellent or more desirable? A man so situated must possess in the first place a strength of mind that is impregnable against all fear of death or of pain. *He will have no fear of death because he will know that death only means complete unconsciousness*, and he will have no fear of pain, because he will know that while he is alive, pain that is long is generally light, and pain that is strong is generally short. In other words, he will also know that the intensity of pain is alleviated by the briefness of its duration, and that continuing pain is bearable because it is generally of lesser severity. Let such a man moreover have no fear of any supernatural power; let him never allow the pleasures of the past to fade away, but let him constantly renew their enjoyment in his recollection, and his lot will be one which will not admit of further improvement.

*Cicero's Defense of Epicurus*: The fear of death plays havoc with the calm and even tenor of life, and it is a pitiful thing to bow the head to pain and bear it abjectly and feebly. Such weakness has caused many men to betray their parents or their friends; some even betray their own country, and very many utterly fall to ruin themselves. On the other hand, a strong and lofty spirit is entirely free from anxiety and sorrow, and makes light of death, for the dead are only as they were before they were born. It is wise to recall that pains of great severity are ended by death, and slight pains have frequent intervals of respite; while pains of medium intensity lie within our ability to control. If pains are endurable then we can bear them, and if they are unendurable, we may choose ourselves to leave life's theater serenely when the play has ceased to please us.

*Lucretius De Rerum Natura Book III*: Death is nothing to us, concerning us not at all, since the nature of the mind is mortal. Think how in times gone by we felt no distress when the Carthaginians from all sides came together to do battle, and all things were shaken by war's troubling uproar, shuddering and quaking beneath high heaven, and mortal men were in doubt which of the two peoples it would be whose empire would fall by land and sea. So the same applies when we ourselves shall be no more, when our body and soul are separated, out of the both of which we are formed into a single being. You may be sure that for us, who shall then be no more, nothing whatever can happen to excite sensation, not if earth itself should be overturned to mingle with the sea and the sea with heaven. And even supposing the nature of the mind and power of the soul do have feeling, after they have been severed from our body, that is still nothing to us, who by the marriage of body and soul are formed into one single being.

And even if time should gather up after our death that material from which we are made and put it once more into the position in which it now holds, and give the light of life to us again – even this result even would not concern us at all. This is because the chain of our self-consciousness has been snapped asunder, just as we now have no concern about any life which the material from which we are made might have held before our birth, nor do we feel any distress about that prior life. When you look back on the whole past course of immeasurable time, and think how many are the combinations which the motions of matter take, you may easily believe that the very same seeds from which we are now formed have often before been placed in the same order in which they now are. And yet we can recall no memory of this — a break in our existence has been interposed, and all the materials from which we are made have wandered to and fro, far astray from the sensations they once produced. For he to whom evil befalls must exist as his own person at the time that evil comes, if the misery and suffering are to happen to him at all. But since death precludes this, and takes away the existence of him on whom evil can be brought, you may be sure

that we have nothing to fear after death. He who does not exist cannot become miserable, and once death has taken away his mortal life, it does not matter at all whether he has lived at any other time. Therefore when you see a man bemoaning his hard life, worrying that after death he shall either rot with his body laid in the grave, or be devoured by flames, or by the jaws of wild beasts, you may be sure that there lurks in his heart a secret fear, though he may declare that he does not believe that any sense will remain to him after death. Such a man does not really hold the conclusion which he professes to hold, nor believe the principle which he professes.

For such a man may profess that his body is fully dead, but yet unconsciously imagine something of self to survive, and worry that birds and beasts will rend his body after death, moaning for his end. Such a man does not separate himself from what remains after he has died, and instead he fancies himself to be those remains, and he stands by and impregnates those remains with his own sensations. For this reason he makes much of bemoaning that he has been born mortal, and he does not see that after death there will be no other self to remain and lament to itself that he has met death, and to stand and grieve that he is lying there mangled or burnt. For if it is an evil to be pulled about by the devouring jaws of wild beasts after death, I cannot see why it should not be just as cruel a pain to be laid on fires and burn in hot flames, or to be placed in honey and stifled, or to stiffen with cold, stretched on the smooth surface of an icy slab of stone, or to be pressed down and crushed by a load of earth above.

Some men say to themselves: "No more shall my house admit me with glad welcome, nor a virtuous wife and sweet children run to be the first to snatch kisses and touch my heart with joy. No more may I be prosperous in my doings, a safeguard to my own. One disastrous day has taken from me, luckless man, all the many prizes of life." But these men do not add: "And now no longer does any craving for these things beset me either." For if these men could rightly perceive this in thought, and follow up the thought in words, they would release themselves from great distress and apprehension of mind: "You, even as you are now, sunk in the sleep of death, shall continue so to be so for all time to come, freed from all distressful pains. But we who remain, with a sorrow that could not be healed, wept for you when close you turned to an ashen heap on your funeral pile, and no length of days shall pluck from our hearts our ever-during grief." To those who mourn for the dead, this question should be asked: "What is there in death so extremely bitter, if it comes in the end to sleep and rest, that anyone should pine over the dead in never-ending sorrow?" This too men often love to say, when they have reclined at table, cup in hand, and shaded their brows with crowns: "Short is this enjoyment for poor weak men; presently it will have passed and never after may it be called back!" Such men say this as if, after their death, their chief affliction will be thirst and parching drought, burning them up, luckless wretches, or craving for any thing else. What folly!

No one feels the need for himself and life when mind and body are together sunk in sleep. For all we care, this sleep might be everlasting, and no craving whatever for ourselves would move us. And yet those first beginnings throughout our frame wander far away from their sense-producing motions before a man starts up from sleep and collects himself. Death therefore must be thought to concern us much less than sleep, if less there can be than what we see to be nothing during sleep, for a greater dispersion of our first-beginnings follows after death, and no one wakes up once the chill cessation of life has come. If Nature could suddenly utter a voice and address us in person, she might use words such as these: "Why do you, O mortal, go on to such length in sickly sorrow? Why do you bemoan and bewail death? For have you had a good life, and do you say that the life you have lost has been welcome to you, and that your blessings have not all been poured as if into a perforated jar, from which they have run through and been lost to no avail? If your life has been so blessed, why not then depart from life like a guest filled with food and drink as if at the end of a party, and with relief that it is over enter upon untroubled rest?"

"But if on the other hand you have had a bad life, and all that you enjoyed has been squandered and lost, and if life is a grievance to you, why seek to continue that life any longer, to be wasted in its turn and utterly lost for nothing? Why not rather make an end of life and its troubles? For there is nothing more which I can contrive for you to give you pleasure. All things are always the same,

and even if your body is not yet decayed with age nor worn out and exhausted, yet all things will remain the same, even if you should outlast all men now living – even if you should never die!” What answer could we give to Nature, but that her case is well-founded and that she pleads it honestly and well? If, however, a man more advanced in years should complain about his death more than is right, would Nature not with even greater cause raise her voice in words such as these: “Away with thy tears, rascal; a truce to your complaining. Your death comes after full enjoyment of all the prizes of life. Because you nevertheless yearn for what you do not have, and despise what you do have, life has slipped from your grasp unfinished and unsatisfied. And now, before you expected it, death has taken its stand at your bedside, before you can take your departure satisfied and filled with good things. Give up those things that are unsuited to your age, and with good grace and nobility get up and go: you must.”

Nature’s charge would be brought with good reason, for old things must give way and be supplanted by the new, and new things must ever be replenished out of old things. No one is delivered over to the pit and black Tartarus to be utterly destroyed – matter is needed for future generations to grow. All of these, too, will follow you when you have finished your term of life, just as all those that have come before and after, no less than you, have and always will come to their own ends. Thus one thing will never cease to rise out of another – life is granted to none to possess forever, to all it is only a loan. Think how the bygone antiquity of everlasting time before our birth was nothing to us. Nature holds those ancient days up to us as a mirror of the time yet to come after our death. Is there anything in this that looks appalling, anything that appears gloomy? Is this not a rest more untroubled than any sleep?

***Lucretius De Rerum Natura Book III:*** This too you may sometimes say to yourself, “Even worthy Ancus has seen his eyes close to the light, and he was a far better man than you. And since then many other kings and potentates have been laid low. Even that great king who once paved a way over the sea as a path for his legions to march, and taught them to pass on foot over the roaring of the sea, trampling on it with his horses, had the light taken from him and shed forth his soul from his dying body. Even the son of the Scipios, thunderbolt of war, terror of Carthage, yielded his bones to earth just as if he were the lowest laborer. Think, too, of the inventors of all sciences and arts, think of those such as Homer, who was without a peer, but yet now sleeps the same sleep as the others. Then there was Democritus who, when he found that his memory was failing him in old age, offered up himself to death. Even Epicurus himself, who surpassed in intellect all other men and quenched the light of all rivals, as the sun quenches the stars, passed away when his light of life had run its course. Will you then hesitate and think it a hardship for you to die? You for whom life is not far from death even while you yet live and see the light of day? You, who spends the greater part of your time in sleep, and snore even when you are wide awake, and never cease seeing visions? You, who have a mind troubled with groundless terrors, and cannot discover what it is that troubles you? You, pitiful man that you are, pressed on all sides with many cares, who constantly stray due to the tumbled wanderings of your mind?

If, just as men feel the weight of the load on their minds which oppresses them, they would understand from what causes this load is produced, and why such a weight lies on their hearts, they would not spend their lives as we see most of them do. Such men never know – any one of them – what they want, and thus always seek a change of place as though they might there lay down their burdens. Men who are sick of being home often issue forth from their mansions, but just as suddenly come back to it, once they find that they are no better off abroad. Such men race to their country-house, driving his horses in headlong haste as if hurrying to bring help to a house on fire. But then the moment he reaches the door of his house he yawns, and sinks heavily into sleep, seeking forgetfulness, or even in haste goes back again to town. In this way each man flies from himself, but as you may be sure is commonly the case, he cannot escape from himself, which always clings to him against his wishes. Such a man hates himself because he is sick, but does not know not the cause of his sickness. For if he could rightly see into these matters, giving up all other distractions, he would study to learn the Nature of things, since the point at stake is his condition – not for one hour – but for eternity: the state in which all mortals must pass all the time which remains after death.

Once more, what evil lust for life is this which constrains us with such force to be so troubled by doubt and danger? A set term of life is fixed for all mortals, and death cannot be avoided – meet it we must. Moreover, we are always engaged in the same pursuits, and no new pleasure is available by living on. But so long as we crave what we lack, that desire seems to transcend all the rest. When once it is obtained, we then crave something else, and ever does the same thirst for life possess us, as we gape for with open mouth. It is quite doubtful what fortune the future will bring with it, or what chance will bring us, or what end is at hand. Nor, by prolonging life, do we take one moment from the time we pass in death, nor can we by worrying spend a moment less in the eternity of death. You may live as many generations as you please during your life, but nonetheless everlasting death will await you. For the man who ended his life today will be no less time in nonexistence than the man who died many months or many years ago.

*NewEpicurean Commentary:* In regard to death, we must keep in mind that we are conscious that we are alive only because we experience life through our eyes, ears, and our other sensations. When we die, these sensations come to an end, and thus so does our ability to experience anything. For that reason, death is not to be feared, because once you are dead, your sensations end, and thus your consciousness ends. Even if the components which made up your consciousness continue to exist in some form, in such a state whatever is left of you has no sensation and therefore no ability to feel any kind of pain. Further, do not allow yourself to feel any regret that your consciousness will not live forever. You do not now worry about your condition during all the time that passed before you were born, and in the same way there is no need for you to worry about the eternity that will pass after your death. All the things that will happen after your death are simply a mirror of all that happened before you were born — neither should cause you to fear to live today to its fullest potential. This is not to say that death is of no significance to us. Death is a part of our nature as human beings, but Nature has designed us to live, and our natural goal is to live a life of happiness. A life of good health and happiness is to be pursued with all our strength, and the ending of that life is certainly of very great significance. What is referred to here is simply that death is the end of our consciousness, and we have no continued state after death to be concerned about, and so in that context, indeed, death is nothing to us.

### **3. Life affords continuous pleasure so long as nothing is present to cause us to feel pain. The highest possible state of pleasure that can be achieved is experienced at the removal of every cause of pain.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey:* The limit of the 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 or of mind, nor of both at once. *Yonge:* 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. *Strodach:* The quantitative limit of pleasure is the elimination of all feelings of pain. Wherever the pleasurable state exists, there is neither bodily pain nor mental pain nor both together, so long as the pain continues.

*Letter to Menoecus:* For you see when we lack pleasure and we grieve, we have need of pleasure, because pleasure is not present. But so long as we do not grieve, life affords us no lack of pleasure. On this account we affirm that Nature has provided that Pleasure is the beginning and end of living happily; for we have recognized that Nature has provided that happiness is the first good that is innate within us.

*Letter to Menoecus:* When, therefore, we say that pleasure or happiness is the chief good, we are not speaking of the pleasures of debauched men, or those pleasures which lie in sensual enjoyment, as some allege about us who are ignorant, or who disagree with us, or who perversely misrepresent our opinions. Instead, when we speak of pleasure or happiness as the chief good, we mean the freedom of the body from pain and the freedom of the soul from confusion. For it is not

continued drinking and reveling, or the temporary pleasures of sexual relations, or feasts of fish or such other things as a costly table supplies that make life pleasant. Instead, Nature provides that life is made pleasant by sober contemplation, and by close examination of the reasons for all decisions we make as to what we choose and what we avoid. It is by these means that we put to flight the vain opinions from which arise the greater part of the confusion that troubles the soul.

**Cicero's Defense of Epicurus:** The happiness we pursue does not consist solely of the delightful feelings of physical pleasures. On the contrary, according to Epicurus the greatest pleasure is that which is experienced as a result of the complete removal of all pain, physical and mental. When we are released from pain, the mere sensation of complete emancipation and relief from distress is itself a source of great gratification. But everything that causes gratification is a pleasure, just as everything that causes distress is a pain. Therefore the complete removal of pain has correctly been termed a pleasure. For example, when hunger and thirst are banished by food and drink, the mere fact of getting rid of those distresses brings pleasure as a result. So as a rule, the removal of pain causes pleasure to take its place. For that reason Epicurus held that there is no such thing as a neutral state of feeling that is somewhere between pleasure and pain. This is because for the living being, the entire absence of pain, a state supposed by some philosophers to be neutral, is not only a state of pleasure, but a pleasure of the highest order. A man who is living and conscious of his condition at all necessarily feels either pleasure or pain. Epicurus holds that the experience of the complete absence of all pain is the highest point, or the "limit," of pleasure. Beyond this point, pleasure may vary in kind, but it does not vary in intensity or degree.

To illustrate this, my father used to tell me (when he wanted to show his wit at the expense of the Stoics) that there was once in Athens a statue of the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus. This statue was fashioned with Chrysippus holding out one hand, in a gesture intended to indicate the delight which he used to take in the following little play on words: "Does your hand desire anything, while it is in its present condition?" "No, nothing." "But if pleasure were a good, it would want pleasure." "Yes, I suppose it would." "Therefore pleasure is not a good." This is an argument, my father declared, which not even a dumb statue would employ, if a statue could speak. This is because the argument is cogent enough as an objection to those who pursue sensual pleasures as the only goal of life, but it does not touch Epicurus. For if the only kind of pleasure were that which, so to speak, tickles the senses with a feeling of delight, neither the hand nor any other member of the body could be satisfied with the absence of pain, if it were not accompanied by an active sensation of pleasure. If, however, as Epicurus holds, the highest pleasure is experienced at the removal of all pain, then the man who responded to Chrysippus was wrong to be misled by his questions. This is because the man's first answer, that his hand was in a condition that wanted nothing, was correct. But his second answer, that if pleasure were a good, his hand would want it, was not correct. This was wrong because the hand had no need to desire any additional pleasure, because the state in which it was in – a state without pain – was itself a state of pleasure.

**Cicero's Defense of Epicurus:** Further, we do not agree with those who allege that when pleasure is withdrawn, anxiety follows at once. That result is true only in those situations where the pleasure happens to be replaced directly by a pain. The truth is, in general, we are glad whenever we lose a pain, even though no active sensation of pleasure comes immediately in its place. This fact serves to show us how life in the absence of pain is so great a pleasure.

**New Epicurean Commentary:** Nature has established that the greatest pleasure toward which all men should strive is the achievement of a state where one has eliminated from one's life all mental and physical pain whatsoever. The state of being alive and conscious is a great pleasure, in fact the greatest of them all, but the nature of existence is that throughout our lives we have needs that cause us to experience pain. As a result most of our life is spent fulfilling our needs, such as those for food, water, air, shelter, etc. Because every gratification of a need or satisfaction of pain brings with it a great pleasure, and because a life completely without mental or physical pain is itself the greatest of pleasure, we are required to face appetites that are by nature incapable of being satisfied. Rather, each of us is provided by Nature with a path to achieving all the pleasure that can be achieved by devoting ourselves rationally to the elimination of pain in our lives. Once

we have achieved pleasure, we have no need of anything else, because we then neither lack anything to satisfy any need, nor need anything further to attain pleasure.

**4. Bodily pain does not last continuously. The most intense pain is present only for a very short time, and pain which outweighs the body's pleasures does not continue for long. Even chronic pain permits a predominance of pleasure over pain.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey:* Pain does not last continuously in the flesh, but the acutest pain is there for a very short time, and even that which just exceeds the pleasure in the flesh does not continue for many days at once. But chronic illnesses permit a predominance of pleasure over pain in the flesh. *Yonge:* Pain does not last continuously in the flesh, but the acutest pain is there for a very short time, and even that which just exceeds the pleasure in the flesh does not continue for many days at once. But chronic illnesses permit a predominance of pleasure over pain in the flesh.

*Vatican Saying 3:* Continuous bodily pain does not last long; instead, pain, if extreme, is present a very short time, and even that degree of pain which slightly exceeds bodily pleasure does not last for many days at once. Diseases of long duration allow an excess of bodily pleasure over pain.

*Vatican Saying 4:* 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.

*NewEpicurean Commentary:* Nature provides that into every life some amount of pain will come, but we should not live our lives in fear of pain to come. This is because Nature has provided that in the vast majority of cases, the pain that we confront will either be of relatively low intensity so that it is endurable and offset by pleasures that we will continue to experience even while the pain is present, or else, if the pain is sharp and intense, it will also be brief. If it is so sharp and long as to be unendurable, it is readily possible to escape it by ending one's own life. Thus there is no reason to be in constant worry about future pain.

**5. It is not possible to live pleasantly without living wisely, honorably, and justly. Nor can one live wisely, honorably, and justly without living pleasantly. But those who for any reason do not live wisely, honorably, and justly cannot possibly live pleasantly.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey:* It is not possible to live pleasantly without living prudently and honorably and justly, [nor again to live a life of prudence, honor, and justice] without living pleasantly. And the man who does not possess the pleasant life is not living prudently and honorably and justly, [and the man who does not possess the virtuous life] cannot possibly live pleasantly. *Yonge:* It is not possible to live pleasantly without living prudently and honorably and justly, [nor again to live a life of prudence, honor, and justice] without living pleasantly. And the man who does not possess the pleasant life, is not living prudently and honorably and justly, [and the man who does not possess the virtuous life] cannot possibly live pleasantly.

*Letter to Menoceus:* Now, the beginning and the greatest good of all these things is wisdom. Wisdom is something more valuable even than philosophy itself, inasmuch as all the other virtues spring from it. Wisdom teaches us that it is not possible to live happily unless one also lives wisely, and honestly, and justly; and that one cannot live wisely and honestly and justly without also living happily. For these virtues are by nature bound up together with the happy life, and the happy life is inseparable from these virtues.

*Cicero's Defense of Epicurus:* Here indeed is the renowned road to happiness — open, simple,

and direct! For clearly man can have no greater good than complete freedom from pain and sorrow coupled with the enjoyment of the highest bodily and mental pleasures. Notice then how the theory embraces every possible enhancement of life, every aid to the achievement of that chief good – a life of happiness – which is our object. Epicurus, the man whom you denounce as given to excessive sensuality, cries aloud that no one can live pleasantly without living wisely, honorably and justly, and no one can live wisely, honorably and justly without living pleasantly.

*Cicero's Defense of Epicurus*: Or look again at men who are petty, narrow-minded, confirmed pessimists, or others who are spiteful, envious, ill-tempered, unsociable, abusive, cantankerous. Look at those who are enslaved to the follies of love, or those who are impudent, reckless, wanton, headstrong and yet irresolute, always changing their minds. Such failings render their lives one unbroken round of misery. The result is that no foolish man can be happy, nor any wise man fail to be happy. This is a truth that we establish far more conclusively than do the Platonic philosophers, who maintain that nothing is good save that vague phantom which they entitle "Moral Worth," a title more splendid in sound than it is substantial in reality. Such men are gravely mistaken when, resting on this vague idea of "Moral Worth" they allege that Virtue has no need of pleasure, and that Virtue is sufficient for itself. At the same time, this view can be stated in a form to which we do not object, and can indeed endorse. For Epicurus tells us that the Wise Man is always happy. The Wise Man's desires are kept within Nature's bounds, and he disregards death. The wise man has a true conception, untainted by fear, of the Divine Nature. If it be expedient to depart from life, the wise man does not hesitate to do so. Thus equipped, the wise man enjoys perpetual pleasure, for there is no moment when the pleasures he experiences do not outbalance his pains, since he remembers the past with delight, he grasps the present with a full realization of its pleasantness, and he does not rely wholly upon the future. The Wise Man looks forward to the future, but finds his true enjoyment in the present. Also, the wise man is entirely free from the vices that I referenced a few moments ago, and he derives considerable pleasure from comparing his own existence with the life of the foolish. Any pains that the Wise Man may encounter are never so severe but that he has more cause for gladness than for sorrow.

*Letter to Pythocles*: Imprint all these precepts in your memory, Pythocles, and you will easily escape fables, and it will be easy for you to discover other truths that are analogous to these. Above all, apply yourself to the study of general principles of the infinite, and of questions of this kind, and to the investigation of the different criteria of knowledge, and of the principles of choice and avoidance, and to the study of the chief good, keeping in mind the purpose of all our researches. When the general questions are once resolved in your mind, the means to resolve all particular difficulties will become clear to you. As to those who will not apply themselves to these principles, such men will neither be able to give a good explanation for these same matters, nor to reach that end to which all our researches tend, [a life of happiness].

## **6. Any means by which we can secure protection from other men is a natural good.**

*Alternate Translations*: *Bailey*: To secure protection from men anything is a natural good, by which you may be able to attain this end. *Yonge*: To secure protection from men anything is a natural good by which you may be able to attain this end. *Strodach*: Any means by which it is possible to procure freedom from fearing other men is a natural good.

*NewEpicurean Commentary*: Because the goal of living a happy life is the highest value, it is right for men to protect themselves from the oppression of others in any way necessary. This observation is related to Crucial Doctrine 33 and Crucial Doctrine 34, which hold that "justice" has no existence independent from the voluntary covenant between men not to harm each other, and that no actions are unjust as to those men who are not able or willing to enter such a covenant.

7. **For the sake of feeling confidence and security in regard to other men, some men wish to be eminent and powerful, failing to remember the limits of kingly power. If such men happen to achieve a life of safety, then they have attained their goal, which is a good. But if their lives are not in fact safe, they have failed in obtaining the goal for the sake of which they originally desired power, and that is the result that generally occurs according to Nature.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey:* Some men wished to become famous and conspicuous, thinking that they would thus win for themselves safety from other men. Wherefore if the life of such men is safe, they have obtained the good which nature craves; but if it is not safe, they do not possess that for which they strove at first by the instinct of nature. *Yonge:* Some men wished to become famous and conspicuous, thinking that they would thus win for themselves safety from other men. Wherefore if the life of such men is safe, they have obtained the good which nature craves, but if it is not safe, they do not possess that for which they strove at first by the instinct of nature. *Strodach:* Some men have desired to gain reputation and to be well regarded, thinking in this way to gain protection from other people. If the lives of such men are secure, they have acquired a natural blessing; but if they are not, they do not possess what they originally reached for by natural instinct.

*Lucretius De Rerum Natura Book V:* For a man who orders his life by the rule of true reason, a frugal subsistence joined to a contented mind is for him great riches, as never is there any lack of a little. But some men desire to be famous and powerful in order that their fortunes might rest on a firm foundation, and that they might be able by their wealth to lead a tranquil life. This is in vain, since their struggle to mount up to the heights of power renders their path full of danger. Even if they reach it, envy, like a thunderbolt, strikes them from the summit and dashes them down with ignominy into the roar of Tartarus. The highest summits are often blasted by envy as if by a thunderbolt, so it is better to obey in peace and quiet than to wish to rule with supreme power and be the master of kingdoms. Such men wear themselves out to no purpose and sweat drops of blood as they struggle on the road of ambition, since they gather their knowledge from the mouths of others and follow after hearsay, rather than following the dictates of their own feelings. This course does not prevail now, nor will it prevail in the future any more than it has prevailed in the past.

*Cicero's Defense of Epicurus:* And always there is death, the stone of Tantalus ever hanging over men's heads, and then there is religion, that poisons and destroys all peace of mind. Fools do not recall their past happiness or enjoy their present blessings – they only look forward to the desires of the future, and as the future is always uncertain, they are consumed with agony and terror. And the climax of their torment is when they perceive, too late, that all their dreams of wealth or station, power or fame, have come to nothing. For fools can never hold the pleasures for which they hoped, and for which they were inspired to undergo all their arduous toils.

*Lucretius De Rerum Natura Book II:* It is sweet, when on the great sea the winds trouble its waters, to behold from land another's deep distress; not that it is a pleasure or a delight that any should be afflicted, but because it is sweet to see from what evils you are yourself exempt. It is sweet also to look upon the mighty struggles of armies arrayed along the plains without sharing yourself in the danger. But nothing is more welcome than to hold lofty and serene positions well fortified by the learning of the wise. From here you may look down upon others and see them wandering, going astray in their search for the path of life, and contesting among themselves their intellect, the rivalry of their birth, their striving night and day with tremendous effort to struggle up to the summit of power and be masters of the world. O miserable minds of men! O blinded hearts! In what darkness of life and in what great danger is passed this term of life whatever its duration. How can you choose not to see that Nature craves for herself no more than this: that the body feel no pain, and the mind enjoy a feeling of pleasure exempt from care and fear?

*Lucretius De Rerum Natura Book III:* In life, too, we have a Sisyphus before our eyes. Such is

the man who is bent on seeking political office, constantly seeking political power, but who always retires defeated and disappointed. To ask for power, empty as it is, but to never find it despite the constant chase for it – this is forcing uphill a stone which, after all one's effort, rolls back again from the summit and in headlong haste finds once again the levels of the plain.

*Vatican Saying 58*: We must free ourselves from the prison of public education and politics.

**8. No pleasure is intrinsically bad; but that which is necessary to achieve some pleasures brings with it disturbances many times greater than those same pleasures.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey*: No pleasure is a bad thing in itself, but the means which produce some pleasures bring with them disturbances many times greater than the pleasures. *Yonge*: No pleasure is a bad thing in itself: but the means which produce some pleasures bring with them disturbances many times greater than the pleasures.

*Cicero's Defense of Epicurus*: No one rejects, dislikes, or avoids pleasure on its own account. Those who reject pleasure do so because men who do not know how to pursue pleasure rationally suffer consequences that are extremely painful. Nor does anyone love or pursue or desire to obtain pain on its own account. Those who pursue pain do so because on occasion toil and pain can produce some great pleasure. To take a trivial example, which of us ever undertakes laborious physical exercise, except to obtain some advantage from it? But who has any right to find fault with those men who choose to enjoy pleasures that have no annoying consequences, or those who avoid pains that produce no resulting pleasures? On the other hand, we denounce with righteous indignation men who are so beguiled and demoralized by the charms of the pleasure of the moment, who are so blinded by desire, that they cannot foresee the pain and trouble that are bound to follow. Equal blame belongs to those who fail in their duties because their will is weak, which is the same as saying that they fail because they shrink back from toil and pain. These cases are simple and easy to understand. In a free hour, when our power of choice is unrestrained and when nothing prevents us from doing what we like best, every pleasure is to be welcomed and every pain is to be avoided. But in certain circumstances, such as because of the claims of duty or the obligations of business, it will frequently occur that pleasures have to be put aside and annoyances accepted. The wise man always holds in these matters to this principle of selection: he rejects some pleasures in order to secure other and greater pleasures, or else he endures some pains to avoid worse pains.

*Lucretius De Rerum Natura Book III*: Nor do birds eat away into the breast of Tityos in Hell nor could they find during eternity enough food to peck from his large breast. However huge the bulk of his body, even if with outspread limbs he took up the space not of nine acres, as the story goes, but of the whole earth – even so he would not be able to endure everlasting pain and supply food from his body forever. But in our own world we know men such as Tityos: those who, groveling in love, or torn by troubled thoughts from any other passion, are eaten up by bitter anguish as if by vultures.

**9. If any pleasure could be intensified so that it did not come to an end, and affected the whole person or the most essential parts of our nature, there would be no room for the experience of new pleasures.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey*: If every pleasure could be intensified so that it lasted and influenced the whole organism or the most essential parts of our nature, pleasures would never differ from one another. *Yonge*: If every pleasure could be intensified so that it lasted and influenced the whole organism or the most essential parts of our nature, pleasures would never differ from one another. *Strodach*: If all pleasures could be compressed in time and intensity, and

were characteristic of the whole man or his more important aspects, the various pleasures would not differ from each other.

*NewEpicurean Commentary:* Nature provides that if a pleasure lasted forever, and consumed your whole experience, then no new pleasure could be experienced because the first would never end. Thus, in the same way that neither the atoms nor the void can consume the whole of existence, Nature provides for change and limits to pleasure.

**10. If those things which debauched men consider pleasurable in fact put an end to the fears of the mind, and of the heavens, and of death, and of pain; and if those same pleasures taught us the natural limits of our desires, we would have no reason to blame those devote themselves to such pursuits.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey:* If the things that produce the pleasures of profligates could dispel the fears of the mind about the phenomena of the sky and death and its pains, and also teach the limits of desires (and of pains), we should never have cause to blame them: for they would be filling themselves full with pleasures from every source and never have pain of body or of mind, which is the evil of life. *Yonge:* If the things that produce the pleasures of profligates could dispel the fears of the mind about the phenomena of the sky and death and its pains, and also teach the limits of desires (and of pains), we should never have cause to blame them: for they would be filling themselves full with pleasures from every source and never have pain of body or of mind, which is the evil of life.

*NewEpicurean Commentary:* Nature provides that our goal is to live a happy life, and thus the true and only test of how to live is to follow that which in fact produces a life of happiness, not momentary pleasure. A happy life is one in which we experience pleasure, have no fears as to punishment by gods, or fear of death, or fear of pain, and in which we recognize the natural limits of our desires. If the activities that men consider to be debauchery brought this result, those activities would be proper to pursue. Also, compare Crucial Doctrine 35 for another example of Epicurus' commitment to the implications of his positions. In Doctrine 10 we see that Nature's ultimate standard of living a happy life would justify even those things we think of as debauched, IF they in fact led to happiness, and in Doctrine 35 we see that those things which we think of as evil, such as injustice, are bad only because they bring pain, and not because they violate some hypothetical Platonic/religious ideal that does not exist in Nature.

**11. If fears relating to the heavens did not disturb us, and if the terrors of death did not concern us, and if we had the courage to contemplate the natural limits of pain and of desire, we would have no need to study the nature of things.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey:* If we were not troubled by our suspicions of the phenomena of the sky and about death, fearing that it concerns us, and also by our failure to grasp the limits of pains and desires, we should have no need of natural science. *Yonge:* If we were not troubled by our suspicions of the phenomena of the sky and about death, fearing that it concerns us, and also by our failure to grasp the limits of pains and desires, we should have no need of natural science.

*Letter to Pythocles:* Know then, that the only aim of the knowledge of the heavenly phenomena, both those which we can observe directly, and those on which we can only speculate, is freedom from anxiety, and the calmness which is derived from a firm belief; and this is the aim of every science.

*Letter to Herodotus:* As for the theoretical knowledge of the rising and setting of the stars, of the

movement of the sun between the tropics, and of the eclipses, and all other similar phenomena, that is utterly useless as far as having any influence upon happiness. Moreover, those who possess knowledge of the movement of the stars, but are nonetheless ignorant of Nature and of the most probable causes of that movement, are no more protected from fear than if they were in the most complete ignorance. Such men experience the most lively fears, for the knowledge of the motion of the stars that they do possess inspires in them troubles which they cannot resolve, and those troubles cannot be dissipated except through a clear perception of the reasons for these phenomena. As for us, we find many explanations of the motions of the sun, of the rising and setting of the stars, of the eclipses, and of similar phenomena. One must not think that this method of explanation is insufficient to procure happiness and tranquility. Let us content ourselves with examining how it is that similar phenomena are brought about directly under our own eyes, and let us apply these observations to the heavenly objects and to everything which is known only indirectly. Let us despise those people who are unable to distinguish those facts which may be explained in various ways from those facts which can only be explained in one single way. Let us disdain those men who do not understand the means of explaining the heavenly phenomena in ways that do not excite fear in us.

Once we understand that a phenomenon can be brought about by Nature in any of several natural ways, rather than by the gods in a way that inspires fear, we shall not be more troubled at the sight of it than if we actually knew the real cause. We must also recall that the thing which principally troubles the spirit of men is the persuasion which they cherish that the stars are gods, [which we must always remember are] beings that are imperishable and perfectly happy. Such men fear that their thoughts and actions are displeasing to the will of these superior beings. Deluded by these fables, such men fear an eternity of punishment, and they fear the insensibility of death, as if that could affect them. What do I say? It is not the falseness of their beliefs, but their lack of knowledge and blindness, which governs them in all things. This is true to such a degree that, not even considering the truth of whether they really fear their gods, they are just as much troubled as if they really believed in these vain phantoms. Real freedom from this kind of trouble consists in being emancipated from all these things, and in preserving the recollection of the principles which we have established, especially those that are most essential. Accordingly, it is well to pay careful attention to the phenomena with which we are familiar and to the sensations, both general and particular, which we have confirmed to be true. In sum, we must take note of the immediate evidence which each of our faculties furnishes to us. For if we pay attention to those points where uncertainty arises, we shall divine the causes of confusion and fear correctly. In this way we may trace back the heavenly phenomena to their causes, and deliver ourselves from those feelings which inspire the common people with extreme terror at every step.

*New Epicurean Commentary:* Many circumstances, including religion and some philosophers, call out to us to adopt false opinions. We are not born with knowledge of the phenomena we see in the skies; the seas seem mysterious, the diseases we suffer from seem inexplicable, death seems to be a horrible fate, and great danger is posed to us by those religions and philosophies who seek to deceive us into following them rather than the guidelines set by Nature. If these dangers did not exist and did not cause us to be fearful and deprive us of joy of mind, we would have no reason to study science or philosophy. It is for this reason, and this reason alone, that we study science and philosophy, as those are the antidote to all false opinion and terrors of the mind. Note that we say “this reason alone” not to disparage the study of the study of Nature, but to reinforce that everything we do is for the attainment of a happy life. Far from disparaging the study of Nature, in recognizing that this study is required for a happy life we recognize how important the study of Nature is.

- 12. It is not possible for a man to banish all fear of the essential questions of life unless he understands the nature of the universe, and unless he banishes all consideration that the fables told about the universe could be true. Therefore a man cannot enjoy full**

## **happiness, untroubled by turmoil, unless he acts to gain knowledge of the nature of things.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey:* A man cannot dispel his fear about the most important matters if he does not know what is the nature of the universe but suspects the truth of some mythical story. So that without natural science it is not possible to attain our pleasures unalloyed. *Yonge:* A man cannot dispel his fear about the most important matters if he does not know what is the nature of the universe but suspects the truth of some mythical story. So that without natural science it is not possible to attain our pleasures unalloyed

*Letter to Menoecus:* Let no one delay in the study of philosophy while he is young, and when he is old, let him not become weary of the study. For no man can ever find the time unsuitable or too late to study the health of his soul. And he who asserts either that it is too soon to study philosophy, or that the hour is passed, is like a man who would say that the time has not yet come to be happy, or that it is too late to be happy. So both the young and the old must study philosophy – that as one grows old he may be young in the blessings that come from the grateful recollection of those good things that have passed, and that even in youth he may have the wisdom of age, since he will know no fear of what is to come. It is necessary for us, then, to meditate on the things which produce happiness, since if happiness is present we have everything, and when happiness is absent we do everything with a view to possess it.

*Letter to Menoecus:* Meditate then, on all these things, and on those things which are related to them, both day and night, and both alone and with like-minded companions. For if you will do this, you will never be disturbed while asleep or awake by imagined fears, but you will live like a god among men. For a man who lives among immortal blessings is in no respect like a mortal being.

*Cicero's Defense of Epicurus:* The great disturbing factor in man's life is ignorance of good and evil. Mistaken ideas about these frequently rob us of our greatest pleasures, and torment us with the most cruel pains of mind. Thus we need the aid of Wisdom to rid us of our fears and unnatural desires, to root out all our errors and prejudices, and to serve as our infallible guide to the attainment of happiness. Wisdom alone can banish sorrow from our hearts and protect us from alarm and apprehension. Become a student of Wisdom, and you may live in peace and quench the glowing flames of vain desires. For the vain desires are incapable of satisfaction — they ruin not only individuals but whole families, and in fact they often shake the very foundations of the state. It is the vain desires that are the source of hatred, quarreling, strife, sedition, and war. Nor do the vain desires flaunt themselves only away from home, and turn their onslaughts solely against other people. For even when they are imprisoned within the heart of the individual man, they quarrel and fall out among themselves, and this can have no result but to render the whole of life embittered. For this reason it is only the wise man, who prunes away all the rotten growth of vanity and error, who can possibly live untroubled by sorrow and by fear, and who can live contentedly within the bounds that Nature has set.

*Cicero's Defense of Epicurus:* Therefore we observe that ignorance and error reduce the whole of life to confusion. It is Wisdom alone that is able to protect us from the onslaught of the vain appetites and the menace of fears. Only wisdom is able to teach us to bear the hardships of fortune with moderation, and only wisdom is able to show us the paths that lead to calmness and to peace. Why then should we hesitate to proudly affirm that Wisdom is to be desired, not for its own sake, but for the sake of the happiness it brings? And why therefore should we hesitate to affirm that Folly is to be avoided, again not for its own sake, because of the injuries that follow in its path?"

*Cicero's Defense of Epicurus:* Theoretical logic, on which your Platonic school lays such stress, Epicurus held to be of no assistance either as a guide to conduct or as an aid to thought. In contrast, he deemed Natural Philosophy to be all-important. Natural Philosophy explains to us the meaning of terms, the nature of cause and effect, and the laws of consistency and contradiction. A

thorough knowledge of the facts of Nature relieves us of the burden of superstition, frees us from fear of death, and shields us against the disturbing effects of ignorance, which is often in itself a cause of terrifying fears. A knowledge of those things that Nature truly requires improves the moral character as well. It is only by firmly grasping a well-reasoned scientific study of Nature, and observing Epicurus' Canon of truth that has fallen, as it were, from heaven, which affords us a knowledge of the universe. Only by making that Canon the test of all our judgments can we hope always to stand fast in our convictions, undeterred and unshaken by the eloquence of any man. On the other hand, without a firm understanding of the world of Nature, it is impossible to maintain the validity of the perceptions of our senses. Every mental presentation has its origin in sensation, and no knowledge or perception is possible unless the sensations are reliable, as the theory of Epicurus teaches us that they are. Those who deny the reliability of sensation and say that nothing can be known, having excluded the evidence of the senses, are unable even to make their own argument. By abolishing knowledge and science, they abolish all possibility of rational life and action. Thus Natural Philosophy supplies courage to face the fear of death; and resolution to resist the terrors of religion. Natural Philosophy provides peace of mind by removing all ignorance of the mysteries of Nature, and provides self-control, by explaining the Nature of the desires and allowing us to distinguish their different kinds. In addition, the Canon or Criterion of Knowledge which Epicurus established shows us the method by which we evaluate the evidence of the senses and discern truth from falsehood.

***Letter to Pythocles:*** It is not good to desire what is impossible and to endeavor to articulate a uniform theory about everything. Accordingly, we should not adopt here the method which we have followed in our researches into ethics or in the solution of problems of natural philosophy. There we said, for instance, that there are no other things except matter and the void, and that the atoms are the principle elements of things, and so on. In other words, we gave a precise and simple explanation for every fact that could be conformed to what we see [and observe directly]. We cannot act in the same way with respect to the heavenly phenomena. These phenomena may arise from several different causes, and we may arrive at many different explanations on this subject that are equally agreeable with the appearances that we can observe through the senses. In regard to the stars and planets we do not have the ability to reason out new principles and to lay down absolute rules for the interpretation of Nature, because the only guide for us to follow here are the appearances themselves. Our object then that we have in view is not to set up a system of vain opinions, but rather to attain a life that is exempt from every kind of fear and turmoil. So long as we accept only those explanations of the heavenly phenomena that are conformable with the evidence we see, we are not inspired with any fears, as are those who allow that any hypothesis at all may possibly be true. But if we abandon the rule of accepting only those hypotheses that are reasonable, and we renounce the attempt to explain the heavenly phenomena by means of analogies that are founded on the evidence provided by senses, then we are conducting ourselves in complete disregard of the science of Nature in favor of falling into fables.

***Lucretius De Rerum Natura Book I:*** When human life – before the eyes of all – lay foully prostrate upon the earth, crushed down under the weight of religion, which glowered down from heaven upon mortal men with a hideous appearance, one man – a Greek – first dared to lift up his mortal eyes and stand up face-to-face against religion. This man could not be quashed either by stories of gods or thunderbolts or even by the deafening roar of heaven. Those things only spurred on the eager courage of his soul, filling him with desire to be the first to burst the tight bars placed on Nature's gates. The living force of his soul won the day, and on he passed, far beyond the flaming walls of the world, traveling with his mind and with his spirit the immeasurable universe. And from there he returned to us – like a conqueror – to tell us what can be, and what cannot, and on what principle and deep-set boundary mark Nature has established all things. Through this knowledge, superstition is thrown down and trampled underfoot, and by his victory we are raised equal with the stars.

***Lucretius De Rerum Natura Book I:*** Your terror and darkness of mind must be dispelled – not by the rays of the sun and glittering shafts of day, but by the study of the law of nature.

[Lucretius De Rerum Natura Book II](#): For even as children are terrified and dread all things in the thick darkness, thus we in the daylight fear at times things not a bit more to be dreaded than those which children shudder at in the dark and fancy to be true. Therefore this terror and darkness of mind must be dispelled, not by the rays of the sun and glittering shafts of day, but by a clear view of the law of Nature.

[Lucretius De Rerum Natura Book III](#): So far, I have shown in what way all things have their first beginnings, of such diverse shapes, which fly spontaneously on in everlasting motion, and how all things are produced out of these. Next, my verses must clear up the nature of the mind and soul, and drive the dread of Hell headlong away, since that dread troubles the life of man from its inmost depths, and overspreads all things with the blackness of death, allowing no pleasure to be pure and unalloyed.

[Lucretius De Rerum Natura Book III](#): And men are driven on by an unreal dread, wishing to escape and keep the gates of death far away. They amass wealth by civil bloodshed and greedily double their riches, piling up murder on murder. Such men cruelly celebrate the sad death of a brother, and hate and fear the tables of their relatives. Often, from the same fear, envy causes them to grieve, and they moan that before their very eyes another person is powerful, famous, and walks arrayed in gorgeous dignity, while they are wallowing in darkness and dirt. Some wear themselves to death for the sake of statues and a famous name. Often men dread death to such a degree that hate of life and the sight of daylight seizes them so that in their sorrow they commit suicide, quite forgetting that this fear of death was the source of their worries. Fear of death prompts some men to forsake all sense of shame, and others to burst asunder the bonds of friendship, overturning duty at its very base. Often men even betray their country and their parents in seeking to escape the realms of Hell. For even as children are flurried and dread all things in the thick darkness, thus we in the daylight fear things not a bit more to be dreaded than what children shudder at in the dark and fancy to be real. This terror and darkness of mind must be dispelled, not by the rays of the sun and glittering shafts of day, but by the study of the law of Nature.

[Lucretius De Rerum Natura Book III](#): In truth there is no Tantalus, poor wretch, numbed by groundless terror as the story goes, fearing a huge stone hanging in the air above him. In life, however, a baseless dread of the gods terrifies men, and the falling rock they fear is the bad luck that chance brings to each one.

[Vatican Saying 49](#): 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.

**13. It does no good for a man to secure himself safety from other men so long as he remains in a state of fear about heaven, about hell, and about the nature of the boundless universe.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey*: There is no profit in securing protection in relation to men if things above and things beneath the earth and indeed all in the boundless universe remain matters of suspicion. *Yonge*: There is no profit in securing protection in relation to men if things above and things beneath the earth and indeed all in the boundless universe remain matters of suspicion.

[Vatican Saying 72](#): 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.

[Lucretius De Rerum Natura Book I](#): We shall begin with this first principle: nothing ever comes from nothing by divine power. In truth, fear holds all mortals in check, because they see many

operations go on in earth and heaven, the causes of which they can in no way understand, and therefore they believe them to be done by divine power. Once we shall have seen that nothing can be produced from nothing, we shall then more correctly ascertain that which we are seeking, both the elements out of which every thing can be produced and the manner in which all things are done – without the hand of the gods.

*NewEpicurean Commentary:* Security in the form of physical protection from other men does you no good if you still fear the basic Nature of the universe, because you cannot live a happy life unless you understand your place in the infinite and eternal universe.

**14. Great power and wealth may, up to a certain point, bring us security from other men. But the greatest security depends upon tranquility of the soul and freedom from the crowd of men.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey:* The most unalloyed source of protection from men, which is secured to some extent by a certain force of expulsion, is in fact the immunity which results from a quiet life and the retirement from the world. *Yonge:* The most unalloyed source of protection from men, which is secured to some extent by a certain force of expulsion, is in fact the immunity which results from a quiet life and the retirement from the world. *Strodach:* The simplest means of procuring protection from other men (which is gained to a certain extent by deterrent force) is the security of quiet solitude and withdrawal from the mass of people.

*NewEpicurean Commentary:* Wealth and power are possessions that are desirable in that they bring a certain amount of security against dangers presented by other men and Nature, but the most important possession is a calm mind that is governed by reason and deters unwise indulgence in any pleasure or appetite. Only a calm mind governed by reason is fully secure against the dangers one can expect to encounter.

**15. The Natural desires are easily obtained and satisfied, but the unnatural desires can never be satisfied.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey:* The wealth demanded by Nature is both limited and easily procured; that demanded by idle imaginings stretches on to infinity. *Yonge:* The wealth demanded by Nature is both limited and easily procured; that demanded by idle imaginings stretches on to infinity.

*Letter to Menoecus:* We must also consider that some of our human desires are given to us by Nature, and some are vain and empty. Of the Natural desires, some are necessary, and some are not. Of the necessary desires, some are necessary to our happiness, and some are necessary if our body is to be free from trouble. Some desires are in fact necessary for living itself. He who has a correct understanding of these things will always decide what to choose and what to avoid by referring to the goal of obtaining a body that is healthy and a soul that is free from turmoil, since this is the aim of living happily. It is for the sake of living happily that we do everything, as we wish to avoid grief and fear. When once we have attained this goal, the storm of the soul is ended, because we neither have the need to go looking for something that we lack, nor to go seeking something else by which the good of our soul or of our body would be improved.

*Letter to Menoecus:* As we pursue happiness we also hold that self-reliance is a great good, not in order that we will always be satisfied with little, but in order that if circumstances do not allow that we have much, we may wisely make use of the little that we have. This is because we are genuinely persuaded that men who are able to do without luxury are the best able to enjoy luxury when it is available. We also believe that Nature provides that everything which is necessary to

life is easily obtained, and that those things which are idle or vain are difficult to possess. Simple flavors give as much pleasure as costly fare when everything that causes pain, and every feeling of want, is removed. Bread and water give the most extreme pleasure when someone in great need eats of them. To accustom oneself, therefore, to simple and inexpensive habits is a great ingredient towards perfecting one's health, and makes one free from hesitation in facing the necessary affairs of life. And when on certain occasions we fall in with more sumptuous fare, this attitude renders us better disposed towards luxuries, as we are then fearless with regard to the possibility that we may thereafter lose them.

***Cicero's Defense of Epicurus:*** Nothing could be more instructive and helpful to right living than Epicurus' doctrine as to the different classes of the desires. One kind he classified as both natural and necessary, a second as natural but not necessary, and a third as neither natural nor necessary. The principle of the classification comes from observing that the necessary desires are gratified with little trouble or expense. The natural desires also require little effort, since the quantity of Nature's riches which suffices to bring contentment is both small and easily obtained. In contrast, for the vain and idle desires, no boundary or limit can be discovered.

***Lucretius De Rerum Natura Book II:*** It is sweet, when on the great sea the winds trouble its waters, to behold from land another's deep distress; not that it is a pleasure or a delight that any should be afflicted, but because it is sweet to see from what evils you are yourself exempt. It is sweet also to look upon the mighty struggles of armies arrayed along the plains without sharing yourself in the danger. But nothing is more welcome than to hold lofty and serene positions well fortified by the learning of the wise. From here you may look down upon others and see them wandering, going astray in their search for the path of life, and contesting among themselves their intellect, the rivalry of their birth, their striving night and day with tremendous effort to struggle up to the summit of power and be masters of the world. O miserable minds of men! O blinded hearts! In what darkness of life and in what great danger you pass this term of life, whatever its duration. How can you choose not to see that Nature craves for herself no more than this: that the body feel no pain, and the mind enjoy pleasure exempt from care and fear? Thus we see that for the body's nature few things are needed – only such things as take away pain. Although at times luxuries can provide us many choice delights, Nature for her part does not need them, and never misses it when there are no golden images of youths throughout the house, holding in their right hands flaming lamps to light the nightly banquet, or when the house does not shine with silver or glitter with gold, or when there are no paneled and gilded roofs to echo the sound of harp. Men who lack such things are just as happy when they spread themselves in groups on soft grass beside a stream of water under the limbs of a high tree, and at no great cost pleasantly refresh their bodies, especially when the weather smiles and the seasons sprinkle the green grass with flowers. Nor does fever leave the body any sooner if you toss about under an elegant bedspread amid bright purple linens than if you must lie under a poor man's blanket. Since treasure is of no avail to the body, any more than is high birth or the glory of kingly power, by this we see that treasure and high birth are of no service to the mind either. In the same way, when you see your legions swarm over the battleground, strengthened front and rear by powerful reserves and great force of cavalry, and when you marshal them together well armed and in high spirits, do you find that these scare away the fears of religion, and that those fears fly panic-stricken from your mind? Or do you find that when you see your navy sail forth and spread itself far and wide over the waters, does that drive away the fear of death and leave your heart untroubled and free from care? But we see that this is laughable, because in truth the real fears and cares of men do not run from the clash of arms and weapons. If these same fears trouble kings and caesars, and if their fears are not quieted by the glitter of gold or the brilliant sheen of the purple robe, how can you suspect that these matters can be resolved by reason alone, when the whole of life is a struggle in the dark?

***Vatican Saying 8:*** The wealth required by Nature is limited and is easy to procure; but the wealth required by vain ideals extends to infinity.

***NewEpicurean Commentary:*** The desires that Nature reasonably establishes for us are easy to obtain, but the desires that exceed the benchmark of what is reasonable are all-consuming and

insatiable.

**16. Chance only rarely intrudes into the lives of wise men, because wise men direct the greatest and most important matters of life by the power of reason.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey:* In but few things chance hinders a wise man, but the greatest and most important matters reason has ordained and throughout the whole period of life does and will ordain. *Yonge:* In but few things chance hinders a wise man, but the greatest and most important matters reason has ordained and throughout the whole period of life does and will ordain.

*Letter to Menoecus:* The wise man laughs at the idea of “Fate”, which some set up as the mistress of all things, because the wise man understands that while some things do happen by chance, most things happen due to our own actions. The wise man sees that Fate or Necessity cannot exist if men are truly free, and he also sees that Fortune is not in constant control of the lives of men. But the wise man sees that our actions are free, and because they are free, our actions are our own responsibility, and we deserve either blame or praise for them. It would therefore be better to believe in the fables that are told about the gods than to be a slave to the idea of Fate or Necessity as put forth by false philosophers. At least the fables which are told about the gods hold out to us the possibility that we may avert the gods’ wrath by paying them honor. The false philosophers, on the other hand, present us with no hope of control over our own lives, and no escape from an inexorable Fate. In the same way, the wise man does not consider Fortune to be a goddess, as some men esteem her to be, for the wise man knows that nothing is done at random by a god. Nor does he consider that such randomness as may exist renders all events of life impossible to predict. Likewise, he does not believe that the gods give chance events to men so as to make them live happily. The wise man understands that while chance may lead to great good, it may also lead to great evil, and he therefore thinks it to be better to be unsuccessful when acting in accord with reason than to be successful by chance when acting as a fool.

*Cicero’s Defense of Epicurus:* This same principle leads us also to pronounce that Temperance is not desirable for its own sake, but because it bestows peace of mind, and soothes the heart with a calming sense of harmony. For it is temperance that warns us to be guided by reason in what we desire and in what we choose to avoid. Nor is it enough to judge what it is right to do or leave undone, we must also take action according to our judgment. Most men, however, lack tenacity of purpose. Their resolution weakens and succumbs as soon as the fair form of pleasure meets their gaze, and they surrender themselves prisoner to their passions, failing to foresee the inevitable result. Thus for the sake of small and unnecessary pleasures, which they might have obtained by other means or even denied themselves altogether without pain, they incur serious disease, loss of fortune, or disgrace, and often become liable to the penalties of the law and of the courts of justice. Other men, however, resolve to enjoy their pleasures so as to avoid all painful consequences, they retain their sense of judgment, and they avoid being seduced by pleasure into courses that they see to be wrong. Such men reap the very highest pleasure by forgoing other pleasures. In a similar way, wise men voluntarily endure certain pains to avoid incurring greater pain by not doing so. This clearly shows us that temperance is not desirable for its own sake. Instead, temperance is desirable, not because it renounces pleasures, but because it produces greater pleasures.

*Cicero’s Defense of Epicurus:* It was a central doctrine of Epicurus that “the Wise Man is but little interfered with by fortune. The great concerns of life, the things that matter, are controlled by his own wisdom and reason.”

*Vatican Saying 47:* 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.

*NewEpicurean Commentary:* The wise man does not seek after good luck, but knows that some unhappy events in life are accidental and unavoidable, while at the same time generally few and rare. By living a life according to reason and Nature you can expect to obtain the true and essential happiness that is important as the goal of life, and in so doing you will avoid unnecessary turmoil.

**17. The man who is just is, of all men, the most free from trouble, but the unjust man is a perpetual prey to turmoil.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey:* The just man is most free from trouble; the unjust most full of trouble. *Yonge:* The just man is most free from trouble; the unjust most full of trouble

*Vatican Saying 12:* The just man is most free from disturbance, while the unjust is full of the utmost disturbance.

*Cicero's Defense of Epicurus:* Cicero's Defense of Epicurus: It remains to speak of Justice to complete the list of the virtues. But justice admits of practically the same explanation as the others. I have already shown that Wisdom, Temperance and Courage are so closely linked with happiness that they cannot possibly be severed from it. The same must be deemed to be the case with Justice. Not only does Justice never cause anyone harm, but on the contrary it always brings some benefit, partly because of its calming influence on the mind, and partly because of the hope that it provides of never-failing access to the things that one's uncorrupted nature really needs. And just as Rashness, License and Cowardice are always tormenting the mind, always awakening trouble and discord, so Unrighteousness, when firmly rooted in the heart, causes restlessness by the mere fact of its presence. Once unrighteousness has found expression in some deed of wickedness, no matter how secret the act may appear, it can never be free of the fear that it will one day be detected. The usual consequences of crime are suspicion, gossip, and rumor — after that comes the accuser, then the judge. Many wrongdoers even turn evidence against themselves ..... And even if any transgressors think themselves to be well fortified against detection by their fellow men, they still dread the eye of heaven, and fancy that the pangs of anxiety that night and day gnaw at their hearts are sent by Providence to punish them. So in what way can wickedness be thought to be worthwhile, in view of its effect in increasing the distresses of life by bringing with it the burden of a guilty conscience, the penalties of the law, and the hatred of one's fellow men?

*NewEpicurean Commentary:* Living one's life justly is the best way to avoid turmoil, as he who is unjust is perpetually prey to fear that his unjustness will be found out.

**18. Once the pain arising from need is removed, physical pleasure is not increased, and only varies in another direction. The essential happiness of the soul depends on understanding this, and on understanding the nature of similar questions which cause great concern to the mind.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey:* 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.

*Cicero's Defense of Epicurus:* A man who is living and conscious of his condition at all necessarily feels either pleasure or pain. Epicurus holds that the experience of the complete absence of all pain is the highest point, or the "limit," of pleasure. Beyond this point, pleasure may

vary in kind, but it does not vary in intensity or degree.

*NewEpicurean Comment:* Once pain arising from need has been removed, bodily pleasure does not increase in intensity — the body merely turns to other pleasures. It is critical to happiness in life that one reflect on and understand the benchmarks, limits, and boundaries that Nature has set. If desires are allowed to go unrestrained then we are defying the limits set by Nature, and defying Nature leads to the worst terrors and anxieties of life.

**19. If we measure the limits of pleasure by reason, infinite and finite time both provide the opportunity for complete pleasure.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey:* Infinite time contains no greater pleasure than limited time, if one measures by reason the limits of pleasure. *Strodach:* Infinite time contains no greater pleasure than does finite time, if one determines the limits of pleasure rationally.

*Cicero's Defense of Epicurus:* Epicurus also taught that “No greater pleasure could be derived from a life of infinite duration, than is actually afforded by this existence, which we know to be finite.”

*Vatican Saying 22:* Unlimited time and limited time afford an equal amount of pleasure, if we measure the limits of that pleasure by reason.

*NewEpicurean Commentary:* The universe is eternal and infinite in space, but Nature provides that only certain things and events are possible. Nature provides a limited life span for a single human consciousness, and although time goes on without end, a human consciousness can experience only so much, even though time is infinite. The limit of the amount of pleasure that can be experienced by a single human is thus set by Nature, and if we recognize that limit we see that we need not be concerned about obtaining more time than Nature has provided.

**20. We assume that physical pleasure is unlimited, and that unlimited time is required to procure it. But through understanding the natural goals and limits of the body, and by dissolving the fear of eternity, we produce a complete life that has no need of infinite time. The wise man neither flees enjoyment, nor, when events cause him to exit from life, does he look back as if he has missed any essential aspect of life.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey:* 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. *Strodach:* The body takes the limits of pleasure to be infinite, and infinite time would provide such pleasure. But the mind has provided us with the complete life by a rational examination of the body's goals and limitations and by dispelling our fears about a life after death, and so we no longer need unlimited time. On the other hand, [the mind] does not avoid pleasure, nor, when conditions occasion our departure from life, does it come to the end in a manner that would suggest that it had fallen short in any way of the best possible existence.

*Letter to Menoecus:* Many people, however, flee from death as if it were the greatest of evils, while at other times these same people wish for death as a rest from the evils of life. But the wise man embraces life, and he does not fear death, for life affords the opportunity for happiness, and

the wise man does not consider the mere absence of life to be an evil. Just as he chooses food not according to what is most abundant, but according to what is best; so too, the wise man does not seek to live the life that is the longest, but the happiest. And so he who advises a young man to live well, and an old man to die well, is a simpleton, not only because life is desirable for both the young and the old, but also because the wisdom to live well is the same as the wisdom to die well. Equally wrong was the man who said: 'Tis well not to be born, but when born, tis well to pass with quickness to the gates of Death.' If this was really his opinion, why then did he not end his own life? For it was easily in his power to do so, if this was really his belief. But if this man was joking, then he was talking foolishly in a case where foolishness ought not be allowed.

*NewEpicurean Commentary:* Bodily pleasures seem unlimited, and so the body seems to wish to live forever. But the mind, recognizing that Nature does not allow the body to live forever, and recognizing that there is nothing to fear in the eternal time after death, guides us to a complete and optimal life, and we then realize that we no longer have the need for an unlimited time. Even though the mind enjoys pleasure, the mind does not feel remorse when the end of life approaches, so long as the mind has led the person to live the best life possible to him according to Nature.

**21. He who is acquainted with the natural limits of life understands that those things that remove the pain that arises from need, and those things which make the whole of life complete, are easily obtainable, and that he has no need of those things that can only be attained with trouble.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey:* 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. *Strodach:* One who understands the limits of the good life knows that what eliminates the pains brought on by need and what makes the whole of life perfect is easily obtained, so that there is no need for enterprises that entail the struggle for success.

*NewEpicurean Commentary:* An understanding of Nature leads us to see that the things which Nature requires — those things that remove physical pain — are easy to obtain, and are all that are needed to furnish a complete and optimal life. Thus the man who understands the laws of Nature no longer desires those things which are more trouble to obtain than they are worth.

**22. We must keep in mind the conceptions established by reality and the evidence provided by our senses, and to those we must refer all our opinions, otherwise all things in life will be full of confusion and doubt.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey:* We must consider both the real purpose and all the evidence of direct perception, to which we always refer the conclusions of opinion, otherwise all will be full of doubt and confusion. *Strodach:* It is necessary to take into account both the actual goal of life and the whole body of clear and distinct percepts to which we refer our judgments. If we fail to do this, everything will be in disorder and confusion.

*Diogenes Laertius:* In regard to the five senses, [Epicurus states] that the senses themselves are devoid of reason, and they are not capable of receiving any impressions from memory. For they are not by themselves the cause of any impression, and when they have received any impression from any external cause, they can add nothing to it, nor can they subtract anything from it. Moreover, they are not within the control of the other senses; for one sense cannot judge another, as all observations have an equal value, and their objects are not identical. In other words, one sensation cannot control another, since the effects of all of them influence us equally. Also, reason

by itself cannot pronounce judgment on the senses; for ... all reasoning rests on the senses for its foundation. Reality and the evidence provided by the senses establish the certainty of our faculties; for the impressions of sight and hearing are just as real, just as evident, as pain. It follows from these considerations that we should judge those things which are obscure by their analogy to those things which we perceive directly. In fact, every notion proceeds from the evidence provided by the senses, either directly, or as a result of some analogy, or proportion, or combination to that which we do perceive directly, reasoning always participating in these operations.

In regard to the preconceptions, Epicurus meant a sort of comprehension, or right opinion, or notion, or general idea which exists within us. In other words, a preconception is a kind of mental recollection of an external object that we experience before we perceive it. For instance, one example is the idea: "Man is a being of such and such Nature." At the same moment that we utter the word man, we conceive the figure of a man, in virtue of a preconception which we owe to the preceding operations of the senses. [An anticipation is] therefore the first notion which each word awakens within us .... In fact, we could not seek for anything if we did not previously have some notion about it. To enable us to affirm that what we see at a distance is a horse or an ox, we must have some preconception in our minds which makes us acquainted with the form of a horse and an ox. We could not even give names to things, if we did not have a preliminary notion of what the things were. These preconceptions then furnish us with certainty. And with respect to judgments, their certainty depends on our referring them to some previous notion which has already been established to be certain. This is how we affirm or judge the answer to any question; for instance, "How do we know whether this thing is a man?"

***Letter to Herodotus:*** First of all, Herodotus, one must determine with exactness the meaning and concept behind every word so that we are able to refer to that concept as an established standard as we pursue our research. Otherwise, the judgments that we reach will have no foundation, and we will go on studying to infinity without understanding, because we will be using words devoid of meaning. In fact, it is absolutely necessary that we grasp directly the fundamental concept which each word expresses, without need of reminder, if we are to have a standard on which to rest all our investigations. In order to do this we must keep all our investigations in accord with and reconciled to the evidence from our senses, especially in those matters in which our minds have grasped a clear view and reached a firm judgment. We must do this so we may identify that point in the examination where we find it necessary to reserve judgment as to the truth of a matter, which will occur when we do not have immediately perceptible to us sufficient evidence to form a clear determination.

***Letter to Pythocles:*** The regular and periodic march of the heavenly phenomena has nothing in it that would surprise us if we would only pay attention to the analogous facts which take place here on earth under our own eyes. Above all things, let us beware against making a god interpose itself here, for we ought always to consider a god to be exempt from all toil and perfectly happy. Otherwise we shall find ourselves giving vain explanations to the heavenly phenomena, as has happened already to a crowd of philosophers. Because they do not recognize what is really possible and what is not, they have fallen into vain theories, supposing that for all phenomena there is but one single mode of production, and rejecting all other explanations which are also founded on probability. They have adopted the most unreasonable opinions because they failed to place in the forefront of the analysis the evidence of the senses, which ought always to serve as the first basis for explaining all phenomena.

***Letter to Pythocles:*** The thunderbolt may be produced either by a violent condensation of the winds, or by their rapid motion and collisions. .... In short, one may give a number of explanations of the thunderbolt. Above all things we must always be on guard against fables, and fables will easily be avoided if one follows faithfully the phenomena that are observed directly in searching for the explanation of those things which are only perceived indirectly.

***Lucretius De Rerum Natura Book I:*** But now to resume the thread of the design that I am weaving in verse: all nature then, as it exists by itself, is founded on two things: there are bodies

and there is void in which these bodies are placed and through which they move about. For that material things exist is declared by the general acknowledgement of mankind. *Unless, at the very first, our conviction of this is firmly grounded, there will be nothing to which we can appeal in regard to things that are only perceived indirectly, in order to prove anything by the reasoning of the mind.* Then again, if room and space which we call void did not exist, bodies could not be placed anywhere nor move about at all to any side; as we have demonstrated to you already.

***NewEpicurean Commentary:*** The ultimate goal of human life is to live a happy life here on this earth, in this reality, without being deceived that there is some other dimension or other standard for how we should live our lives. The key to determining the laws of Nature, and how they apply to us, is to refer all questions to our senses, and to make sure that all our opinions are consistent with reality as we sense and experience it. Applying any other standard other than a reasoned understanding of reality as experienced through our senses will lead to a life full of confusion and turmoil.

### **23. If we resist the senses, we have nothing left to which we can refer, or by which we may judge, the falsehood of the senses which we condemn.**

***Alternate Translations:*** *Bailey:* If you fight against all sensations you will have no standard by which to judge even those of them which you say are false. *Strodach:* If you reject all sensations, you will not have any point of reference by which to judge even the ones you claim are false.

***Lucretius, De Rerum Natura Book IV:*** [I]f a man contends that nothing can be known, he knows not whether this contention itself can be known, since he admits that he knows nothing. I will therefore decline to argue the question against him who places his head where his feet should be. And yet granting that this man knows his contention to be true, I would still ask this question: Since he has never yet seen any truth in any thing, how does he know what “knowing” and “not knowing” are? What has produced his knowledge of the difference between the true and the false, and between the doubtful and the certain? You will find that all knowledge of the true comes from the senses, and that the senses cannot be refuted. For anything which on its own can distinguish that which is false from that which is true must by nature possess a higher certainty than the thing which it judges. Well, then, what can fairly be accounted of higher certainty than the senses? Shall reasoning alone be able to contradict the sensations? No, not when reasoning is itself wholly reliant on the senses for its accuracy. If the evidence of the senses is not true, then all reasoning based on that evidence is rendered false. Are the ears able to take the eyes to task, or the sense of touch take the ears to task? Shall the sense of taste or smell or vision call into question the sense of touch? No, for each sense has its own separate and distinct office and power. ... It therefore follows that no sense can refute any other. Nor can any sense take itself to task, since equal credit must be assigned to the evidence it produces at all times. What has at any time appeared true to each sense must be taken as a true sensation.

At times you may experience sensations which your reason is unable to explain – for example, why a tower close at hand is seen to be square, but when seen at a distance appears round. In such cases it is better, if you are at a loss for a reason to explain this, to admit that you do not know the truth of the matter, rather than to accept an explanation that makes no sense. If you accept as true a possibility that contradicts your senses, you have set the stage to let slip from your grasp all those other things which you know to be manifestly true. In so doing you will ruin the groundwork of all your beliefs, and wrench up all the foundations on which life and existence rest. For not only would all reason give way, but life itself would fall to the ground, unless you pursue the truth and choose to trust the senses, shunning the steep cliffs of life that must be avoided. All that host of words drawn out in array against the senses is quite without meaning. If, in the construction of a building, the measuring stick first applied by the builder is crooked, or his square is untrue and swerves from its straight lines, or if there is the slightest hitch in any part of his level, all the construction will turn out to be faulty, crooked, sloping, leaning forward or backward, without

symmetry, so that some parts seem ready to fall, and others do fall, all ruined by the first erroneous measurements. So too, all reasoning of things which is not founded on the senses will prove to be distorted and false.

***Lucretius De Rerum Natura Book I:*** To say that all things are fire, and that nothing really exists except fire, as one philosopher does, is clearly sheer insanity. For this man takes his stand on the side of the senses at the same time that he fights against the senses. His argument challenges the authority of the senses, on which rests all our convictions, even his own belief about this fire (as he calls it) that is known only to himself. For what he is saying is that he believes that the senses can truly perceive fire, but he does not believe they can perceive all other things, which are not a bit less clear! Now this is clearly as false as it is foolish, for to what shall we appeal to resolve the question? What more certain test can we apply but that of the senses to judge truth and falsehood? Why should anyone choose to abolish all other things and choose to leave only fire? Why not abolish fire, and hold that nature is composed of all other things? It would be equal madness to affirm either one or the other position.

***Letter to Herodotus:*** [As we move to the consideration of phenomena such as the nature of sight and images], we must consider that there may be [various] manners in which things of this kind are produced. But we must never accept anything in these various possibilities which at all contradicts the senses, and [in evaluating these things] we must consider in what way the senses are exercised and the relationship that is established between the external objects we observe and ourselves.

- 24. We must not discard any evidence provided by a sense simply because it does not fit our prior conceptions, and we must always distinguish between those matters which are certain and those which are uncertain. We must do this so we can determine whether our conclusions go beyond that which is justified by the actual evidence of the senses. We cannot be confident of our conclusions unless they are justified by actual, immediate, and clear evidence, and this evidence must come from the five senses, from the sense of pain and pleasure, and from the conceptions of the mind which arise from the Anticipations. If we fail to keep in mind the distinction between the certain and the uncertain, we inject error into the evaluation of the evidence provided by the senses, and we destroy in that area of inquiry every means of distinguishing the true from the false.**

***Alternate Translations: Bailey:*** If you reject any single sensation and fail to distinguish between the conclusion of opinion as to the appearance awaiting confirmation and that which is actually given by the sensation or feeling, or each intuitive apprehension of the mind, you will confound all other sensations as well with the same groundless opinion, so that you will reject every standard of judgment. And if among the mental images created by your opinion you affirm both that which awaits confirmation and that which does not, you will not escape error, since you will have preserved the whole cause of doubt in every judgment between what is right and what is wrong.

***Strodach:*** If you summarily rule out any single sensation and do not make a distinction between the element of belief that is superimposed on a percept that awaits verification and what is actually present in sensation or in the feelings or some precept of the mind itself, you will cast doubt on all other sensations by your unfounded interpretation and consequently abandon all the criteria of truth. On the other hand, in cases of interpreted data, if you accept as true those that need verification as well as those that do not, you will still be in error, since the whole question at issue in every judgment of what is true or not true will be left intact.

***Letter to Herodotus:*** [We must also consider] the possibility of error and false judgments. These arise due to our supposing that a preconceived idea will be confirmed, or at any event will not be

overturned, by additional evidence when we receive it. Falsehood and error arise when we form an opinion prematurely, without waiting for additional evidence to confirm or to contradict our conclusion before reaching it. [We must always recognize that] the representations we receive from images have been received by our intelligence like reflections from a mirror, whether those images are perceived in a dream or through any other conceptions of the mind or the senses. But [we cannot conclude that] these representations resemble the objects from which they came closely enough so that we can call them real and true unless we are examining objects that we perceive directly. Error arises when we receive impressions which our minds accept as a direct representation but which in fact are not. In such cases, due to considerations that are unique to ourselves, our minds mistakenly take these indirect perceptions and form conceptions which go beyond the reality of the actual object. Error results when our minds reach conclusions based on evidence that is not confirmed, or is contradictory, rather than based on evidence that we directly observe to be confirmed and uncontradicted.

We must carefully preserve these principles so that we will not reject the authority of our faculties when we perceive truth directly. We must also observe these principles so that we will not allow our minds to believe that what is false or what is speculative has been established with equal firmness with what is true, because this results in everything being thrown into confusion. If you simply reject any sensory experience which you believe to be incorrect, and you fail to reason and integrate those sensations which appear to conflict with those you know to be true, you will introduce a fundamental error into your logic that will lead you to be unable to separate true from false. Also, is a blunder to consider that some theory that is untested, and not proven to conform with reality, has the same status of truth as other knowledge which you know to be true, and which has been proven to be consistent with reality. This latter error is a blunder because you will then introduce doubt into your reasoning and lose the ability to distinguish the true from the false in everything.

**25. If we consider those opinions which are only tentative, and must await further information before they can be verified, to be of equal authority with those opinions which bear about them an immediate certainty, we will not escape error. For if we do this we overlook the reason for doubt between that which is right and that which is wrong.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey:* If on each occasion instead of referring your actions to the ends of nature you turn to some other nearer standard when you are making a choice or an avoidance, your actions will not be consistent with your principles. *Strodach:* If at any time you fail to refer each of your acts to nature's standard, and turn off instead in some other direction when making a choice to avoid or to pursue, your actions will not be consistent with your creed.

*Lucretius De Rerum Natura Book IV:* Many are the marvels ... we see which seek to shake the credit of the senses. But such efforts are quite in vain, since the greatest part of these cases deceive us on account of the opinions which we add ourselves, taking things as seen which have not been seen by the senses. For nothing is harder than to separate those facts that are clearly true from those that are doubtful which the mind adds itself.

*Diogenes Laertius:* The Epicureans refer to 'opinion' as supposition, and say that it is at times true, and at times false. An opinion which is supported by evidence, and is not contradicted by other evidence is true. An opinion which is not supported by evidence, and is contradicted by other evidence, is false. On this account they have introduced the expression of "waiting," such as when, before pronouncing that a thing seen is a tower, we must wait until we approach it, and learn what it looks like when we are nearby.

*NewEpicurean Commentary:* If you allow yourself to think that speculations which are not

grounded in reality (such as speculations about the heavens or about infinity, subjects which you do not have the ability to verify) are of equal authority with deductive reasoning grounded in direct evidence (such as observations about things close at hand that you know to be true by experience) you will surely fall into error, because you will be confusing what is speculative with what is certain.

**26. If on every occasion we do not refer all our actions to the chief end of Nature, and if we turn aside to some other standard when we are determining what to seek or to avoid, then our actions will not be consistent with our principles.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey:* Of desires, all that do not lead to a sense of pain if they are not satisfied are not necessary, but involve a craving which is easily dispelled when the object is hard to procure or they seem likely to produce harm.

*Letter to Menoecus:* To this view of Happiness as our starting point and as our goal we refer every question of what to choose and what to avoid. And to this same goal of happy living we again and again return, because whether a thing brings Happiness is the rule by which we judge every good.

*Cicero's Defense of Epicurus:* Epicurus holds that Nature's ultimate goal for life is pleasure, or happiness, which he holds to be the chief good, with pain, whether physical or mental, being the chief evil. Epicurus sets out to show this as follows: Every living thing, as soon as it is born, seeks after pleasure, and delights in it as its chief good. It also recoils from pain as its chief evil, and avoids pain so far as is possible. Nature's own unbiased and honest judgment leads every living thing to do this from birth, and it continues to do as long as it remains uncorrupted. Epicurus refuses to admit any need for discussion to prove that pleasure is to be desired and pain is to be avoided, because these facts, he thinks, are perceived by the senses, in the same way that fire is hot, snow is white, and honey is sweet. None of these things need be proved by elaborate argument — it is enough merely to draw attention to them.

*Cicero's Defense of Epicurus:* A city torn by faction cannot prosper, nor can a house whose masters are at strife. Much less then can a mind that is divided against itself and filled with inward discord taste any particle of pure and liberal pleasure. One who is perpetually swayed by conflicting and incompatible opinions and desires can know no peace or calm. If the pleasantness of life is diminished by the serious bodily diseases, how much more must it be diminished by the diseases of the mind! Extravagant and vain desires for riches, fame, power, and other pleasures of license, are nothing but mental diseases. Grief, trouble and sorrow gnaw the heart and consume it with anxiety if men fail to realize that the mind need feel no pain unless it is connected with some pain of body, present or to come. Yet all foolish men are afflicted by at least one of these diseases — and therefore there is no foolish man who is not unhappy.

*New Epicurean Commentary:* Nature provides that we must act according to the ultimate goal set for us by Nature — a life a happiness. All actions must therefore be judged according to whether those actions will or will not lead to attaining a happy life. If we use any other standard we will find ourselves in hopeless confusion.

**27. Of all the things which the wise man seeks to acquire to produce the happiness of a complete life, by far the most important is the possession of friendship.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey:* Of all the things which wisdom acquires to produce the blessedness of the complete life, far the greatest is the possession of friendship. *Strodach:* Of all the things that wisdom provides for the happiness of the whole man, by far the most important is

the acquisition of friendship.

***Cicero's Defense of Epicurus:*** There remains a topic that is supremely relevant to this discussion – the subject of Friendship. Your [Platonic] school maintains that if pleasure is held to be the Chief Good, friendship will cease to exist. In contrast, Epicurus has pronounced in regard to friendship that of all the means to happiness that wisdom has devised, none is greater, none is more fruitful, none is more delightful than friendship. Not only did Epicurus commend the importance of friendship through his words, but far more, through the example of his life and his conduct. How rare and great friendship is can be seen in the mythical stories of antiquity. Review the legends from the remotest of ages, and, many and varied as they are, you will barely find in them three pairs of friends, beginning with Theseus and ending with Orestes. Yet Epicurus in a single house (and a small one at that) maintained a whole company of friends, united by the closest sympathy and affection, and this still goes on today in the Epicurean school. ... The Epicureans maintain that friendship can no more be separated from pleasure than can the virtues, which we have discussed already. A solitary, friendless life is necessarily beset by secret dangers and alarms. Hence reason itself advises the acquisition of friends. The possession of friends gives confidence and a firmly rooted hope of winning pleasure. And just as hatred, jealousy and contempt are hindrances to pleasure, so friendship is the most trustworthy preserver and also creator of pleasure for both our friends and for ourselves. Friendship affords us enjoyment in the present, and it inspires us with hope for the near and distant future.

Thus it is not possible to secure uninterrupted gratification in life without friendship, nor to preserve friendship itself unless we love our friends as much as ourselves. ... For we rejoice in our friends' joy as much as in our own, and we are equally pained by their sorrows. Therefore the wise man will feel exactly the same towards his friends as he does towards himself, and he will exert himself as much for his friend's pleasure as he would for his own. All that has been said about the essential connection of the virtues with pleasure must be repeated about friendship. Epicurus well said (and I give almost his exact words): "The same creed that has given us courage to overcome all fear of everlasting or long-enduring evil after death has discerned that friendship is our strongest safeguard in this present term of life. ... All these considerations go to prove not only that the rationale of friendship is not impaired by the identification of the chief good with pleasure, but, in fact, without this, no foundation for friendship whatsoever can be found."

***Vatican Saying 78:*** The noble soul occupies itself with wisdom and friendship; of these the one is a mortal good, the other immortal.

## **28. The same opinion that encourages us to trust that no evil will be everlasting, or even of long duration, shows us that in the space of life allotted to us the protection of friendship is the most sure and trustworthy.**

***Alternate Translations:*** *Bailey:* The same conviction which has given us confidence that there is nothing terrible that lasts forever or even for long has also seen the protection of friendship most fully completed in the limited evils of this life. *Yonge:* Of all the things which wisdom provides for the happiness of the whole life, by far the most important is the acquisition of friendship. *Strodach:* It is the same judgment that has made us feel confident that nothing fearful is of long duration or everlasting, and that has seen personal security during our limited span of life most nearly perfected by friendship.

***NewEpicurean Commentary:*** A firm understanding of the Nature of things allows us to see that nothing terrible lasts forever, or even for a long time, and it also allows us to see that nothing enhances our security so much as does friendship.

**29. Of the desires, some are natural and necessary, some are natural but not necessary, and some are neither natural nor necessary, but owe their existence to vain imagination.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey:* Among desires some are natural (and necessary, some natural) but not necessary, and others neither natural nor necessary, but due to idle imagination.

*Vatican Saying 20:* 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.

*NewEpicurean Commentary:* You will more easily keep reason in charge of your desires if you remember that some desires are both natural and necessary, some are natural but not necessary, and some are neither natural nor necessary but purely the result of illusions that we pick up from other people.

**30. In the case of physical desires which require intense effort to attain and do not lead to a sense of pain if they are not fulfilled, such desires are due to idle imagination. It is not because of their own nature that they fail to be dispelled, but because of the empty imaginings of the man.**

*Alternate Translations:* *Bailey:* Wherever in the case of desires which are physical, but do not lead to a sense of pain if they are not fulfilled, the effort is intense, such pleasures are due to idle imagination, and it is not owing to their nature that they fail to be dispelled, but owing to the empty imaginings of the man.

*Letter to Menoecus:* But although happiness is the first and a natural good, for this same reason we do not choose every pleasure whatsoever, but at many times we pass over certain pleasures when difficulty is likely to ensue from choosing them. Likewise, we think that certain pains are better than some pleasures, when a greater pleasure will follow them, even if we first endure pain for time. Every Pleasure is therefore by its own Nature a good, but it does not follow that every pleasure is worthy of being chosen, just as every pain is an evil, and yet every pain must not be avoided. Nature requires that we resolve all these matters by measuring and reasoning whether the ultimate result is suitable or unsuitable to bringing about a happy life; for at times we may determine that what appears to be good is in fact an evil, and at other times we may determine that what appears to be evil is in fact a good.

*Vatican Saying 21:* We must not violate nature, but obey her; and we shall obey her if we fulfill those desires that are necessary, and also those that are natural but bring no harm to us, but we must sternly reject those that are harmful.

*Cicero's Defense of Epicurus:* First, the natural ends of good and evil, that is, pleasure and pain, are not open to mistake. Where people go wrong is in not knowing what things are in fact productive of pleasure and pain.

*NewEpicurean Commentary:* The illusory desires that we pick up from other people include some desires that are natural, but would not create any pain if not fulfilled. Such desires can be overcome by acknowledging that they are difficult to gratify or likely to produce harm greater than achieving the desire is worth.

**31. Natural justice arises from a covenant between men for their mutual advantage to refrain from harming one another.**

*Alternate Translations: Bailey:* The justice which arises from nature is a pledge of mutual advantage to restrain men from harming one another and save them from being harmed.

*Cicero's Defense of Epicurus:* It remains to speak of Justice to complete the list of the virtues. But justice admits of practically the same explanation as the others. I have already shown that Wisdom, Temperance and Courage are so closely linked with happiness that they cannot possibly be severed from it. The same must be deemed to be the case with Justice. Not only does Justice never cause anyone harm, but on the contrary it always brings some benefit, partly because of its calming influence on the mind, and partly because of the hope that it provides of never-failing access to the things that one's uncorrupted nature really needs. And just as Rashness, License and Cowardice are always tormenting the mind, always awakening trouble and discord, so Unrighteousness, when firmly rooted in the heart, causes restlessness by the mere fact of its presence. Once unrighteousness has found expression in some deed of wickedness, no matter how secret the act may appear, it can never be free of the fear that it will one day be detected. The usual consequences of crime are suspicion, gossip, and rumor – after that comes the accuser, then the judge. Many wrongdoers even turn evidence against themselves .....

And even if any transgressors think themselves to be well fortified against detection by their fellow men, they still dread the eye of heaven, and fancy that the pangs of anxiety that night and day gnaw at their hearts are sent by Providence to punish them. So in what way can wickedness be thought to be worthwhile, in view of its effect in increasing the distresses of life by bringing with it the burden of a guilty conscience, the penalties of the law, and the hatred of one's fellow men?" Nevertheless, some men indulge without limit their avarice, ambition, love of power, lust, gluttony, and those other desires which ill-gotten gains can never diminish, but rather inflame. Such men are the proper subjects for restraint, rather than for reformation. Men of sound natures, therefore, are summoned by the voice of true reason to justice, equity, and honesty. For those without eloquence or resources, dishonesty is not a good policy, since it is difficult for such a man to succeed in his designs, or to make good his success once it is achieved. On the other hand, for those who are rich and intelligent, generous conduct seems more appropriate, for liberality wins them affection and good will, the surest means to a life of peace. This is especially true since we see that there is really no need for anyone to transgress, because the desires that spring from Nature are easily gratified without doing wrong to any man, and those desires that are vain and idle can be resisted by observing that they set their sights on nothing that is really desirable, and that there is more loss inherent in injustice than there is profit in the gains that it may bring for a time.

*NewEpicurean Commentary:* The concept of "justice" derives from the mutual advantage that comes from an agreement not to inflict or allow harm.

**32. For those living things that are unable to enter into a covenant to refrain from harming one another, nothing is just or unjust, and this applies also to those men who are either unwilling or unable to enter into such a covenant.**

*Alternate Translations: Bailey:* For all living things which have not been able to make compacts not to harm one another or be harmed, nothing is either just or unjust, and likewise too for all tribes of men which have been unable or unwilling to make compacts not to harm or be harmed.

*Cicero's Defense of Epicurus:* Nevertheless, some men indulge without limit their avarice, ambition, love of power, lust, gluttony, and those other desires which ill-gotten gains can never diminish, but rather inflame. Such men are the proper subjects for restraint, rather than for reformation.

*NewEpicurean Commentary:* There is no concept of justice or injustice between living creatures

that are incapable of making agreements not to harm one another, and this includes men who are unable or unwilling to make such agreements.

### **33. Justice has no independent existence, but results only from the agreement of men to enter mutual covenants to refrain from harming one another.**

*Alternate Translations: 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 to be harmed.

*Cicero's Defense of Epicurus:* Pleasure and pain therefore supply the motives and the principles of choice and of avoidance, and thus they are the springs of conduct generally. This being so, it clearly follows that actions are right and praiseworthy only to the extent that they are productive of a life of happiness. But something which is not itself a means to obtain anything else, but to which all other things are but the means by which it is to be acquired, is what the Greeks term the highest, or final good. It must therefore be admitted that the chief good of man is to live happily. Those who place the chief good in "virtue" alone are beguiled by the glamor of a name, and they do not understand the true demands of Nature. If they will but consent to listen to Epicurus, they will be delivered from the grossest error. Your school waxes eloquently on the supposedly transcendent beauty of the "virtues." But were they not productive of pleasure, who would deem the virtues either praiseworthy or desirable? We value the art of medicine not for its interest as a science, but because it produces health. We commend the art of navigation for its practical, and not its scientific value, because it conveys the rules for sailing a ship with success. So also Wisdom, which must be considered as the art of living, would not be desired if it produced no result. As it is, however, wisdom is desired, because it is the craftsman that produces and procures pleasure. The meaning that I attach to pleasure and happiness must by this time be clear to you, and you must no longer be biased against my argument due to the discreditable associations that others have attached to the terms.

*Cicero's Defense of Epicurus:* As with the other virtues, Justice cannot correctly be said to be desirable in and of itself. Here again, Justice is desirable because it is so highly productive of gratification. Esteem and affection are gratifying because they render life safer and happier. Thus we hold that injustice is to be avoided not simply on account of the disadvantages that result from being unjust, but even more, because when injustice dwells in a man's heart, it never allows him to breathe freely or to know a moment's rest.

*Cicero's Defense of Epicurus:* Lispering babies, even dumb animals, prompted by Nature's teaching, can almost find the voice to proclaim to us that in life there is no welfare but pleasure, no hardship but pain – and their judgment in these matters is neither corrupted nor biased.

*New Epicurean Commentary:* There is no such thing as "absolute justice." "Justice" depends entirely on the circumstances of specific mutual agreements among men, made a various times and places, not to inflict or allow harm to each other.

### **34. Injustice is not evil in itself; it is evil because fear of not escaping punishment necessarily arises from it.**

*Alternate Translations: Bailey:* Injustice is not an evil in itself, but only in consequence of the fear which attaches to the apprehension of being unable to escape those appointed to punish such action.

*Cicero's Defense of Epicurus:* The mind possesses nothing within itself on which it can rest as

final. Every fear, every sorrow, can be traced back to pain — and there is nothing besides pain which has the capacity to cause either anxiety or distress.

*Cicero's Defense of Epicurus*: As with the other virtues, Justice cannot correctly be said to be desirable in and of itself. Here again, Justice is desirable because it is so highly productive of gratification. Esteem and affection are gratifying because they render life safer and happier. Thus we hold that injustice is to be avoided not simply on account of the disadvantages that result from being unjust, but even more, because when injustice dwells in a man's heart, it never allows him to breathe freely or to know a moment's rest.

*NewEpicurean Commentary*: Acts of injustice are not evil in themselves, but only because we see that those who *have* committed the unjust act are never free of the turmoil of fear of suffering punishment for those unjust acts. This is an application of the rule that the desires of debauched men would not be blameworthy if they in fact procured a happy life. Ultimately the order of Nature is that all good derives from pleasure, all evil derives from pain.

**35. It is not possible for men who secretly violate a mutual covenant not to harm one another to believe that they will always escape detection. Even if they have escaped it ten thousand times already, so long as they live they cannot be certain that they will not be detected.**

*Alternate Translations: Bailey*: It is not possible for one who acts in secret contravention of the terms of the compact not to harm or be harmed to be confident that he will escape detection, even if at present he escapes a thousand times. For up to the time of death it cannot be certain that he will indeed escape.

*Lucretius De Rerum Natura Book II*: In addition, Cerberus and the Furies are idle tales, and Tartarus as well, belching forth hideous fires from his throat. Such things have never existed anywhere, and in truth can never exist. But there is in life a dread of punishment for evil deeds: the prison, the frightful hurling down from the rock, the scourgings, the executioners, the dungeon of the doomed, and the torches. And even when these do not come, yet the conscience-stricken mind torments itself with fear of the fire and the lash, and sees no end to such punishment fearing that those very evils will be enhanced after death.

*Vatican Saying 70*: 1. Let nothing be done in your life which will cause you fear if it becomes known to your neighbor.

*NewEpicurean Commentary*: One who acts unjustly is not isolated from the punishment of mental turmoil by the thought that he has acted secretly and will not get caught, even if he has gotten away with the unjust act a thousand times before, because up until the moment of death there is no certainty that he will escape detection.

**36. In general, justice is the same for all, for justice is a mutual advantage in the dealings of men with each other, but in different nations and under different circumstances, the application of justice may differ.**

*Alternate Translations: 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.

*NewEpicurean Commentary:* The concept of justice is essentially the same for all people insofar as it derives from mutual benefit. But the details of how justice is applied may *vary* in particular circumstances.

- 37. Among those actions which the law sanctions as just, that which is determined to be of mutual advantage is in fact just whether or not it is universally regarded to be so. But if a law, once established, is determined not to be mutually advantageous, then it is by nature unjust. As to those laws which were at first just, but later become unjust, such laws were in fact just for the period in which they were of mutual advantage, at least in the eyes of those who do not confound themselves with empty words, but look to the actual facts.**

*Alternate Translations:* *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 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 none the less just for that period in the eyes of those who do not confound themselves with empty sounds but look to the actual facts. *Strodach:* In the case of actions that are legally regarded as just, those that are of tested utility in meeting the needs of human society have the hallmark of justice, whether they turn out to be equally just in all cases or not. On the other hand, if somebody lays down a law and it does not prove to be of advantage in human relations, then such a law no longer has the true character of justice. And even if the element of utility should undergo a change after harmonizing for a time with the conception of justice, the law was still just during that period, in the judgment of those who are not confused by meaningless words but who look at the actualities.

*Vatican Saying 13:* Among the things held to be just by law, whatever is proved to be of advantage in men's dealings has the stamp of justice, whether or not it be the same for all; but if a man makes a law and it does not prove to be mutually advantageous, then this is no longer just. And if what is mutually advantageous varies and only for a time corresponds to our concept of justice, nevertheless for that time it is just for those who do not trouble themselves about empty words, but look simply at the facts.

*NewEpicurean Commentary:* Actions that are mutually beneficial are to be considered just whether they are the same for all peoples or not. Laws that are not mutually advantageous are no longer to be considered just. Therefore we see that justice can change over time and is dependent on circumstances, not on some absolute other-dimensional standard.

- 38. Where actions which were formerly considered to be just under former circumstances are seen not to accord with the general concept of mutual advantage, then they are seen not to have been just. But actions which were in fact of mutual advantage and therefore just at one time under former circumstances, but cease being of mutual advantage under new circumstances, cease also being just.**

*Alternate Translations:* *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, there 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. *Strodach*: In cases where the surrounding conditions are not new and where laws regarded as just have been shown to be inconsistent with the conception of justice in their actual workings, such laws are unjust. Again, in cases where the circumstances are new and where the same laws, once deemed to be just, are no longer serviceable, the laws in this case were just as long as they were useful to the community of citizens, but later when they were no longer useful they became unjust.

- 39. He who desires to live tranquilly without having anything to fear from other men ought to make them his friends. Those whom he cannot make friends he should at least avoid rendering enemies, and if that is not in his power, he should avoid all dealings with them as much as possible, and keep away from them as far as it is in his interest to do so.**

*Alternate Translations: Bailey*: The man who has best ordered the element of disquiet arising from external circumstances has made those things that he could akin to himself, and the rest at least not alien. But with all to which he could not do even this, he has refrained from mixing, and has expelled from his life all which it was of advantage to treat thus. *Strodach*: The person who is the most successful in controlling the disturbing elements that come from the outside world has assimilated to himself what he could, and what he could not assimilate he has at least not alienated. Where he could not do even this, he has disassociated himself or eliminated all that it was expedient to treat in this way.

*NewEpicurean Commentary*: If you desire to live tranquilly then you ought to make friends with your neighbors. If you cannot make friends of them, you should at least avoid making enemies of them, and if you cannot even do that, you should avoid all dealings with them to the extent possible.

- 40. The happiest men are those who have arrived at the point of having nothing to fear from their neighbors. Such men live with one another most pleasantly, having the firmest grounds of confidence in one another, enjoying the full advantages of friendship, and not lamenting the departure of their dead friends as though they were to be pitied.**

*Alternate Translations: Bailey*: As many as possess the power to procure complete immunity from their neighbors, these also live most pleasantly with one another, since they have the most certain pledge of security, and after they have enjoyed the fullest intimacy, they do not lament the previous departure of a dead friend as though he were to be pitied.

*Vatican Saying 66*: Let us show our feeling for our lost friends not by lamentation but by meditation.

*NewEpicurean Commentary*: The happiest men are those who enjoy the condition of having nothing to fear from those around them. Such men have the firmest grounds for confidence in one another, and enjoy the full benefits of friendship, and they do not mourn a friend who dies before they do, as there is in such situation no need for pity.



## Chapter 11. The “Vatican Collection” of the Sayings of Epicurus

This list of Epicurean sayings was discovered in 1888 at the Vatican. Its author is unknown, but the manuscript is reputed to date from the Fourteenth Century. Little beyond this is known about its origin. The following translation follows that of Cyril Bailey except where noted.

VS1. 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. ([Principal Doctrine 1](#))

VS2. 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.

VS3. Continuous bodily pain does not last long; instead, pain, if extreme, is present a very short time, and even that degree of pain which slightly exceeds bodily pleasure does not last for many days at once. Diseases of long duration allow an excess of bodily pleasure over pain.

VS4. 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.

VS5. 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, the man is not able to live wisely, though he lives honorably and justly, it is impossible for him to live a pleasant life. ([Principal Doctrine 5](#))

VS6. 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. (see [Principal Doctrine 35](#))

VS7. It is hard for an evil-doer to escape detection, but to be confident that he will continue to escape detection indefinitely is impossible.

VS8. The wealth required by Nature is limited and is easy to procure; but the wealth required by vain ideals extends to infinity. (see [Principal Doctrine 15](#))

VS9. Necessity is an evil, but there is no necessity to live under the control of necessity.

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. (See [Principal Doctrine 17](#))

VS13. Among the things held to be just by law, whatever is proved to be of advantage in men’s dealings has the stamp of justice, whether or not it be the same for all; but if a man makes a law and it does not prove to be mutually advantageous, then this is no longer just. And if what is mutually advantageous varies and only for a time corresponds to our concept of justice, nevertheless for that time it is just for those who do not trouble themselves about empty words, but look simply at the facts. (see [Principal Doctrine 37](#))

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 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.

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. (see [Principal Doctrine 29](#))

VS21. We must not violate nature, but obey her; and we shall obey her if we fulfill those desires that are necessary, and also those that are natural but bring no harm to us, but we must sternly reject those that are harmful.

VS22. Unlimited time and limited time afford an equal amount of pleasure, if we measure the limits of that pleasure by reason. (see [Principal Doctrine 19](#))

VS23. All friendship is desirable in itself, though it starts from the need of help.

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 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.

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. 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 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.<sup>98</sup>

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. (see [Principal Doctrine 12](#))

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. (see [Principal Doctrine 8](#))

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.<sup>99</sup>

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.<sup>100</sup>

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 of 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 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.



## Chapter 12. Epicurus' Sayings About "The Wise Man"

The following list of Epicurus' sayings about "the wise man" is taken from the biography of Diogenes Laertius. The translation here is by Cyril Bailey except where noted.

WM1. Injuries are done among men either because of hatred, envy, or contempt, all which the wise man overcomes by reason.

WM2. When once a man has attained wisdom he no longer has any tendency contrary to it, nor does he willingly pretend that he has. He will be more deeply moved by feelings than other men, but this will not prove to be an obstacle to wisdom.

WM3. A man cannot become wise in every kind of physical constitution, or in every nation.

WM4. Even if the wise man were to be put to torture, he would still be happy.

WM5. The wise man shows gratitude and constantly speaks well of his friends whether they are present or absent.

WM6. The wise man will not groan and howl when he is put to the torture.

WM7. The wise man will not have intercourse with any woman whom the laws forbid, as Diogenes says, in his epitome of the Ethical Maxims of Epicurus.

WM8. The wise man will not punish his servants, but will rather pity them and forgive any that are deserving.

WM9. The Epicureans do not think that the wise man will fall in love, or be anxious about his burial, for they hold that love is not a passion inspired by the gods, as Diogenes says in his twelfth book.

WM10. The Epicureans assert that the wise man will not make elegant speeches.

WM11. Sexual intercourse, the Epicureans say, has never done a man good, and he is lucky if it has not harmed him.

WM12. The wise man will marry and have children, as Epicurus says in treatises *On Problems* and *On Nature*, but only in accord with the circumstances of his life.

WM13. The wise man will never indulge in drunkenness, says Epicurus, in his *Banquet*,

- WM14. The wise man will not entangle himself in affairs of state, as Epicurus says in his first book on *Lives*.
- WM15. The wise man will not become a tyrant.
- WM16. The wise man will not live like a Cynic, as he says in his second book on *Lives*, nor become a beggar.
- WM17. Even if the wise man should lose his eyesight, he will not end his whole life, as he says in the same book.
- WM18. The wise man will not be subject to grief, as Diogenes says, in the fifth book of his *Select Opinions*.
- WM19. The wise man will not object to go to the courts of law.
- WM20. The wise man will leave books and memorials of himself behind him, but he will not be fond of frequenting assemblies.
- WM21. The wise man will take care of his property and provide for the future.
- WM22. The wise man will be fond of the countryside.
- WM23. The wise man will resist fortune.
- WM24. The wise man will not mourn the death of his friends.
- WM25. The wise man will show a regard for his reputation to such an extent as to avoid being despised.
- WM26. The wise man will find more pleasure than other men in public spectacles.
- WM27. The wise man will erect statues of others, but he will be indifferent as to raising one for himself.
- WM28. The wise man is the only person who can converse correctly about music and poetry, but he will not himself compose poems.
- WM29. One wise man is not wiser than another.
- WM30. The wise man will also, if he is in need, earn money, but only by his wisdom.
- WM31. The wise man will appease an absolute ruler when occasion requires.
- WM32. The wise man will rejoice at another's misfortune, but only for his correction.
- WM33. The wise man will gather together a school, but never so as to become a leader of crowds.
- WM34. The wise man will give lectures in public, but it will be against his inclination and never unless asked.
- WM35. The wise man will teach things that are definite, rather than doubtful musings.
- WM36. The wise man will be the same whether asleep or awake.
- WM37. The wise man will be willing even to die for a friend.
- WM38. The wise man holds that all faults are not of equal gravity.
- WM39. The wise man holds that health is a blessing to some, but a matter of indifference to others.
- WM40. The wise man holds that courage is a quality that does not come by nature, but by a consideration of what is to one's advantage.

WM41. The wise man holds that friendship is first brought about due to practical need, just as we sow the earth for crops, but it is formed and maintained by means of a community of life among those who find mutual pleasure in it.

WM42. The wise man holds that there are two types of happiness – complete happiness, such as belongs to a god, which admits of no increase, and lesser happiness, which can be increased or decreased.



### **Chapter 13. Lucretius – Selections** **From *De Rerum Natura***

*Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas, atque metus omnis et inexorabile fatum subiecit pedibus strepitumque  
Acherontis avari.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*Happy was he who was able of things to know the cause, and more, all fears and inexorable fate he trampled  
underfoot, along with the roar of greedy Hell.*

*Virgil's Georgics, line 490*

Scholars generally agree that the above lines (verse 490 of Virgil's *Georgics*) refer to Lucretius, who composed *On The Nature of Things* in about 55 BC. Though majestic in form and sweeping in scope, the poem was intended to be understood by the average knowledgeable citizen of the Roman world, and not only by educated philosophers.

Although the general themes do not require a deep prior familiarity with the philosophy of Epicurus, most of us today neither speak Latin nor have any experience with the normal allusions to everyday life and superstitions that were as commonly understood by ancient Romans as the story of Adam and Eve is to us today.

The presentation that follows is a greatly-condensed and paraphrased selection of excerpts that removes the poetic form and many of the allusions to contemporary Roman life. This method strips the poem of most of its beauty, but provides a closer focus on the basic argument and philosophy.

The reader should note that each of the six books is sweeping in scope, and the headings added here are for convenience only. Each of the books starts with a general statement alluding to the value of Epicurus and his philosophy, and each book contains elements of great interest to the student of Epicurean philosophy.



*On the left is an unlabeled engraving from Herculaneum; on the right is an ancient ring design which H.A.J. Munro placed on the front of his translation of **De Rerum Natura** because he believed it to portray Lucretius.*

## **Book I – Nature the Lawgiver of the Universe; The Evil of False Religion; The Need for the Study of Nature; The Nature of Existence I**

*VENUS, mother of the Roman nation, beloved of men and gods: Beneath the stars of heaven you fill the ship-carrying sea and the corn-bearing land with your presence! Through you every kind of living thing is conceived, rises up, and beholds the light of the sun, and before you fly the winds and the clouds of heaven. ... For you the earth puts forth sweet-smelling flowers, for you the waves of the sea laugh, and for you the heavens shine with outspread light. Throughout seas, mountains, rivers and plains you strike fond love into the hearts of all living things, and you inspire them with desire to continue their races. Since you alone are the mistress of the Nature of things, and without you nothing rises up into the light, and nothing grows to be glad or lovely, I ask that you help me in writing these verses on the nature of things ....*

*...As you hear what follows, withdraw from other cares, and with undistracted ear and keen mind employ true reasoning so that you will not abandon with disdain the gifts I set out for you before you understand them. For I am about to explain to you the ultimate system of the universe, and the nature of the gods, and I will explain to you the nature of the elements – those first beginnings out of which nature creates and nourishes all things, and into which all things are dissolved back after their destruction. These first beginnings we call “matter” or the “seeds of things” or the “first beginnings” or “atoms” – because from these elements all things are made.*

...

When human life – before the eyes of all – lay foully prostrate upon the earth, crushed down under the weight of religion, which scowled down from heaven upon mortal men with a hideous appearance, one man—a Greek – first dared to lift up his mortal eyes and stand up face-to-face against religion. This man could not be quashed either by stories of gods or thunderbolts or even by the deafening roar of heaven. Those things only spurred on the eager courage of his soul, filling him with desire to be the first to burst the tight bars placed on Nature’s gates. The living

force of his soul won the day, and on he passed, far beyond the flaming walls of the world, traveling with his mind and with his spirit the immeasurable universe. And from there he returned to us – like a conqueror – to tell us what can be, and what cannot, and on what principle and deep-set boundary mark Nature has established all things. Through this knowledge, superstition is thrown down and trampled underfoot, and by his victory we are raised equal with the stars.

In this I fear, however: that you may imagine that you are entering onto unholy ground, and treading the path of sin. On the contrary, very often it is religion itself that gives birth to the most sinful and unholy deeds.

Remember the example of the leaders of the Danai, foremost of men, who foully polluted the altar in Aulis with the blood of the king's daughter. Recall how she saw her father standing sorrowful before the altar, while beside him the priests hid the knife, and how she saw her countrymen shed tears at the sight. Speechless in terror, she dropped down on her knees and sank to the ground, and even in that moment it was no help to her that she had been the king's first-borne child. For it was by the hands of the priests themselves that she was lifted up, shivering, to the altar – not to the performance of the bridal rites as suited her age, but to fall a sad victim, sacrificed by her own father, that in this way he might purchase from the gods a happy and prosperous departure for his fleet. So great are the evils to which religion can persuade us!

You yourself at some point, overcome by the terrorizing tales of the priests, may seek to fall away from us. For indeed, how many dreams they imagine for you – enough to upset all the calculations of your life and trouble all your affairs with fear! And they invent these dreams for good reason, because if men were ever to realize that there is a fixed limit to their woes, they would be able to withstand the terrors of religion and the threats of their priests. But as it is men have no means of resisting those threats, since men believe that they must fear everlasting punishment after death. Men fear eternal punishment because they do not understand the nature of their souls, and they do not understand whether their souls were born with their bodies, or whether their souls found their way into their bodies at birth from somewhere else. Neither do they understand whether their souls perish with them when their bodies die, or whether their souls live on to visit the gloom of Hell ....

In order to address these fears we must firmly grasp the principles by which the sun and moon proceed in their courses, and we must grasp the forces which govern how those things we see here on earth occur. But most of all we must search out with our keenest reason the nature of our souls and of our minds. And we must also search out explanations for those visions that we sometimes see when we are awake and under the influence of disease, or when we are buried in sleep, so that we seem to see face to face, and hear speaking to us, those who are long dead and buried.

....

In short, your terrors and darkneses of mind must be dispelled – not by the rays of the sun and glittering shafts of daylight – but rather by the study of the laws of Nature.

We shall begin with this first principle: ***nothing ever comes from nothing by divine power***. It is true that fear troubles all men, because they see things on earth and in the sky which they cannot explain, and they therefore believe that those things are done by divine power. Once we understand that ***nothing can be produced from nothing***, we shall then understand the explanation for all these mysterious things. We will see that all these mysteries are produced from Nature's elements, and we will see how all these things occur naturally – without the hand of any god.

We know that nothing can be produced from nothing, because if things did come from nothing, any thing might be born from anything, for nothing would require a seed. Men, for example, might instantly rise out of the sea, fish rise out of the earth, and birds out of the sky. Nor would the same fruits always grow from the same trees, but would change over time, and any tree might bear any fruit. For if there were not first-beginning elemental seeds for each, how could things have a fixed and unvarying origin? But in fact we see that all things are produced from fixed seeds, and each thing is born and grows according to the nature of its own seeds. It is for this reason that all things cannot be gotten out of all things, because *within each particular thing resides distinct powers and characteristics*. Why do we see the rose bloom in the spring, corn in the summer, and vines in the autumn, if not because it is the nature of their own fixed seeds to spring forth at the proper time? But if things could come from nothing, roses and

corn and vines would rise up suddenly at uncertain and unsuitable times of the year, inasmuch as there would be no seeds to keep them from bursting forth in an unwelcome season.

Also, if things could grow from nothing no time would be required for them to grow after their seeds had come together. Little babies could in an instant grow into men, and trees could spring out of the ground in a moment. But we see plainly that none of these events ever comes to pass, and we see that all things grow step by step at a fixed rate, as is natural, and this is because all things grow from a fixed seed which follows its own nature. In the same way, without fixed seasons of rain, the earth is unable to put forth its produce, nor can anything sustain its own life if it is unable to obtain its own food. Thus you may hold with conviction that distinct basic elements make up the composition of the many things that we see, in the same way that we see distinct letters of the alphabet composing many different words.

Again, why do we not see Nature producing men of such size and strength as to be able to wade on foot across the sea, or tear apart great mountains with only their hands, or outlive many generations of men? The reason we never see such things is that unchanging first-beginnings have been assigned by Nature for all that exists, and the nature of all those things that can arise from these first-beginnings is fixed.

We must admit therefore that nothing can come from nothing, since all things require seed before they can be born. Just as we see that fields that are tilled surpass those that are untilled, we may infer that there are in the soil first-beginnings which we stimulate to rise by our labor. If these first-beginnings did not exist, you would see all sorts of things arise from the fields spontaneously, and in greater perfection, without the need of our labors!

Next, we observe that over time Nature dissolves everything back into its own elemental bodies, but that *Nature does not totally annihilate anything*. If things were made up of parts that could be destroyed entirely, we would see things snatched away to destruction in an instant from before our eyes. No force would be needed to disrupt the parts of things and to undo their fastenings. In fact, however, all things consist of *imperishable elements*, and we see that Nature destroys nothing unless it encounters a force sufficient to dash it to pieces by blows, or by being pierced and broken up from within.

If time utterly destroyed things when they age, and ate up all their elements to nothing, out of what does Venus bring back into the light of life all living things, each after its own kind? If all things could be utterly destroyed, out of what does the earth give nourishment to those things that are brought back to life? Out of what do the earth's fountains and rivers keep full the sea? Out of what does nature feed the stars? *For infinite time has gone by already*, and the passing of infinite time would necessarily have consumed all things to nothing if they were composed of elements that were mortal and could be completely destroyed. Therefore, if all those things that we see today continue to exist, despite the eternity of time that has gone by, then those things that we see are no doubt composed of immortal elements which cannot return to nothing.

...

Now to proceed with the thread of my design: All nature is composed of two things: (1) material bodies and (2) void, or empty space in which these bodies exist and through which these bodies move about. The existence of material things is established by the senses that all men share, and unless, at the very first, we firmly ground our convictions about those material things that we perceive directly, there will be nothing to which we can appeal to prove anything by the reasoning of the mind, especially in regard to those things that we only perceive indirectly. In the same way, we must acknowledge that if void and empty space do not exist, material bodies would have no place to exist, or to move about in any direction, in the way that we see that they do move.

Moreover there is nothing which you can affirm to exist except matter and void – nothing which would constitute a third kind of nature. For whatever exists as an entity must itself be composed of these two things. If a thing exists at all and can be touched in however slight a way, no matter how large or small it may be, it must be counted as a part of the total sum of material things. But if a thing is intangible and unable to hinder any thing from passing through it on any side, then this is what we call “the void.” Whatever exists as an entity will either do something itself or will allow other things that do exist to do things to it. But nothing can do or allow things to be done to it unless it has a material existence, and nothing can furnish room in which material things can act except the void. Thus besides void and material things no third nature can exist, because no third nature can at any time be observed

by our senses or conceived by our reasoning minds.

...

[690] To say as one philosopher does that all things are made up of fire, and that nothing really exists except fire, is sheer insanity. For this man takes his stand *on the side of the senses* at the same time that he  *fights against* the senses. His argument challenges the authority of the senses, on which rest all our convictions, even his own conviction about this “fire” (as he calls it) that is known only to himself. For what he is saying is that he believes that the senses can truly perceive fire, but he does not believe they can perceive all other things, which are not a bit less clear! Now this is as false as it is foolish, for to what shall we appeal to resolve the question? What more certain test can we apply but that of the senses to judge truth and falsehood? Why should anyone choose to abolish all other things that we see and choose to leave only fire? Why not abolish fire, and hold that all nature is composed of all other things besides fire? It would be equal madness to affirm either one or the other of these positions.

...

[921] Now mark and learn what remains to be known and hear it more distinctly. My mind does not fail to perceive how dark and difficult these things are – but the great hope of praise has smitten my heart, and at the same time has struck into my heart sweet love of the muses. Now, inspired by those muses, I travel in thought the pathless fields never yet walked by any man. I approach and drink from untasted springs, and I gather for my head a crown of flowers from places where the muses have never before crowned the brows of men. I do this because I teach great things, I endeavor to release the mind from the bondage of religion, and I do so by means of verses inlaid with the charm of the muses themselves.

And I compose in verse for the same reason that doctors, when dispensing nauseous medicine to children, first smear the rim of their medicine-cup with honey. For doctors do this so that the unknowing child may take the bitter medicine at least as far as his lips, and drink it up, and in this way be fooled, but not betrayed, but brought to health again. In my case, since my doctrine seems somewhat bitter at first, and many shrink back from it, I set it forth in sweet-toned verse, overlaid with the honey of the muses, that in this way I may engage your mind on the truth of these verses until you can come to clearly understand the essential nature of things.

...

If you will follow my path you will come to understand these and many other things with little trouble, for one thing after another will grow clear to you. Nor will the darkness of night hide the path from you, but you shall come to see all the essential truths of nature, as each principle kindles a light that will illuminate the next.



## **Book II – The Sweetness of Life Secured Through Wisdom; The Swerve of the Atoms and Free Will**

It is sweet, when winds trouble the waters on the great sea, to behold from land the distress of others, not because it is a pleasure that any should be afflicted, but because it is sweet to see from what evils you are yourself exempt. It is sweet also to look upon the mighty struggles of armies arrayed in battle without sharing yourself in the danger. But nothing is more welcome than to hold lofty and serene positions that are well fortified by the learning of the wise. From here you may look down upon others and see them wandering, going astray in their search for the correct path of life, and contesting among themselves their intellect, their station in life, and striving night and day with tremendous effort to struggle up to the summit of power and be masters of the world.

O miserable minds of men! O blinded hearts! In what darkness of life and in what great danger you pass this term of life, whatever its duration. How can you choose not to see that Nature craves for herself no more than this: that

the body feel no pain, and the mind enjoy pleasure exempt from care and fear?

We see that by nature the body needs but little – only such things as take away pain. Although at times luxuries can provide us many choice delights, Nature for her part does not need them, and she never misses it when there are no golden images of youths throughout the house, holding in their right hands flaming lamps to light the nightly banquet. Nature cares not a bit when the house does not shine with silver or glitter with gold, or when there are no paneled and gilded roofs to echo the sound of harp. Men who lack such things are just as happy when they spread themselves in groups on soft grass beside a stream of water under the limbs of a high tree, and at no great cost pleasantly refresh their bodies, especially when the weather smiles and the seasons sprinkle the green grass with flowers. Nor does fever leave the body any sooner if you toss about under an elegant bedspread amid bright purple linen than if you must lay under a poor man's blanket.

Since treasure is of no avail to the body, any more than is high birth or the glory of kingly power, by this we see that treasure and high birth are not necessary for the mind either. When you see your legions swarm over the battleground, strengthened front and rear by powerful reserves and strong cavalry, well armed and in high spirits, do you find that these scare away the fears of religion, and that fear of the gods flees panic-stricken from your mind? Or do you find that when you see your navy sail forth and spread itself far and wide over the waters, does that drive away the fear of death and leave your heart untroubled and free from care?

We see that this is laughable, because in truth the real fears and cares of men do not run from the clash of arms and weapons. If these same fears trouble kings and caesars, and if their fears are not quieted by the glitter of gold or the brilliance of the purple robe, how can you suspect that these matters can be resolved by reason alone, when the whole of life is a struggle in the dark?

For even as children are terrified and dread all things in the thick darkness, thus we in the daylight fear at times things that are not a bit more to be dreaded than those which children shudder at in the dark and imagine to be true. Therefore this terror and darkness of mind must be dispelled, not by the rays of the sun and glittering shafts of day, but by a clear view of the law of Nature.

...

[165] But some in opposition to our views, and ignorant of the nature of things, believe that without the providence of gods nature could not vary the seasons of the year and bring forth crops. Such men do not see that those things that are done through the agency of divine pleasure, the guide of life, which leads men to continue their race through the arts of Venus, that mankind may not come to an end. Now when they suppose that the gods designed all things for the sake of men, they seem to me in all respects to have strayed far from true reason. For even if I did not know what atoms are, yet judging by the very arrangements of heaven I would venture to affirm and maintain that this World has by no means been made for us by divine power, so great are the defects with which it stands encumbered.

...

[225] This point too, we should understand: when bodies are carried downward through void by their own weight, at uncertain times and uncertain places they push themselves a little from their course by the slightest of inclinations. If these bodies did not swerve, they would all fall down like drops of rain through the deep void, they would never have collided together, and thus nature would never have produced anything.

But if anyone happens to believe that heavier bodies are carried more quickly through space and fall from above to collide with the lighter bodies, he goes far astray from true reason. For we see that when bodies fall through water or air they quicken their descents in proportion to their weights, because the water and the air cannot retard everything in equal degree, but more readily give way and are overpowered by things that are heavier. On the other hand, empty void cannot offer resistance to anything in any direction at any time, but must, as is its nature, continually give way. For this reason all things are moved and borne along with equal velocity through the unresisting void, though they are of unequal weights. Therefore heavier things will never be able to fall from above on lighter nor of themselves to beget blows sufficient to produce the varied motions by which nature carries on things. Wherefore again and again I say bodies must swerve a little; and yet not more than the least possible; lest we be found to be imagining oblique motions, and this the reality should refute. For this we see to be plain and evident,

that weighty things cannot travel obliquely when they fall from above at least so far as can be perceived. But that nothing swerves to any degree case from the straight course, who is there that can perceive?

Again, is all motion forever linked together, and does new motion always spring from another in a fixed order? If first-beginnings do not, by swerving, make some commencement of motion to break through the decrees of fate, so that one cause does not follow another cause from eternity, how have all living creatures here on earth wrested from the fates the power by which we go forward whichever way the will leads, by which we likewise change the direction of our motions neither at a fixed time nor at a fixed place, but when and where the mind itself has prompted? Beyond doubt in these things a man's own will determines each beginning, and from this beginning motions travel through the limbs.

Do you not also see, when the gates are thrown open at a given moment, that the eager powers of the horses cannot start forward so instantaneously as their minds desire? The whole store of matter throughout the body must be sought out in order that, stirred up through all the frame, it may follow with undivided effort the leading of the mind. By this you see that the beginning of motion is born in the heart, and the action first commences in the will of the mind and is next transmitted throughout the body and frame.

Quite different is the case when we move on, propelled by a stroke inflicted by the compulsion of another. In that case, it is quite clear that all the matter of the whole body moves against our inclination, until the will has reined it in throughout the limbs. Do you see then in this case that, though an outward force often pushes men on and compels them frequently to advance against their will, there yet is something in our breast sufficient to struggle against and resist it? And when, too, this something chooses, the matter of the body is compelled to change its course through the limbs and frame, and after it has been forced forward, it is reined in and settles back into its place.

For this reason in first-beginnings too you must admit that besides outside blows and weight there is another cause of motion, from which our power of free action has been begotten within us, since we see that nothing can come from nothing. Weight alone would require that all things were overmastered and caused by blows from outward forces. But the mind itself does not feel an internal necessity in all its actions, and it is not overmastered and compelled to bear and put up with this. Rather, the freedom of the mind is caused by a minute swerving of first beginnings at no fixed place and no fixed time.

Nor was the universe as a whole ever more closely massed nor held apart by larger spaces between; for nothing is either added to its bulk or lost to it. For that reason the bodies of the first-beginnings in times gone by have always moved in the same way in which now they move, and they will ever hereafter be borne along in like manner, and the things which have been begotten will be begotten after the same law and will grow and will wax in strength so far as is given to each by the decrees of Nature. No force can change the sum of things; for there is nothing outside the universe, either into which any matter from the universe can escape, or out of which a new supply of matter can arise and burst into the universe and change the Nature of things and alter their motions.

...

[625] For by nature of the gods must always in themselves of necessity enjoy immortality together with supreme repose, far removed and withdrawn from our concerns. This is because a god is exempt from every pain, exempt from all dangers, strong in its own resources, not wanting anything of us, and it neither gains by favors nor is moved by anger.

And if any one thinks proper to call the sea Neptune and corn Ceres and chooses rather to misuse the name of Bacchus than to utter the term that belongs to that liquor, let us allow him to declare that the earth is mother of the gods, if he will in truth forbear from staining his mind with foul religion.

The earth however is at all time without feeling, and because it receives into it the first-beginnings of many things, it brings them forth in many ways into the light of the sun. And so the woolly flocks and the martial breed of horses and horned herds, though often beneath the same sky slaking their thirst from one stream of water, yet have all their life a dissimilar appearance and retain the Nature of their parents and severally imitate their ways each after its kind. So great is the diversity of matter in any kind of herbage, so great in every river! And hence, too, any one you please out of the whole number of living creatures is made up of bones, blood, vein, heat, moisture, flesh, sinews;

and these things again differ widely from one another and are composed of first-beginnings of unlike shape.

Furthermore, whatever things are set on fire and burned, have stored up in their bodies, if nothing else, at least those particles out of which they radiate fire and send out light and make sparks fly and scatter embers all about. If you will go over all other things by a like process of reasoning, you will thus find that they conceal in their body the seeds of many things and contain elements of various shapes. Again you see many things to which are given at once both color and taste together with smell; especially those many offerings which are burned on the altars. These must therefore be made up of elements of different shapes; for smell enters in where color does not pass, color is sensed in one way, and taste in another; so that you know they differ in the shapes of their first elements. Therefore different forms unite into one mass, and things are made up of a mixture of seeds.

[689] Moreover, throughout these very verses of ours you see many elements common to many words, though yet you must admit that the verses and words are different and composed of different elements. Only a few letters that are in common run through them, and no two words or verses one with another are made up entirely of the same, and as a rule they do not all resemble one the other. In the same way, although in all things there are many first-beginnings common to many things, yet they can make up together a quite dissimilar whole, so that men and corn and trees may fairly be said to consist of different elements.

And yet we may not suppose that all things can be joined together in all ways. If that were possible, then you would see prodigies produced everywhere, such as forms springing up half-man half-beast, tall branches sprouting from an animal's body, limbs of land-creatures joined with those of sea-animals, and even chimeras which breathe flames from noisy mouths. It is plain to see, however, that nothing of the sort occurs, since we see that all things are produced from fixed seeds, and a fixed mother can preserve the mark of her kind. This you must realize takes place due to a fixed law of nature. For the particles of food suitable for each thing pass into the frame and join together to produce the appropriate motions of the organism. But on the other hand we see Nature throw out on the earth things that are alien, and many things are ejected from the body as if impelled by blows – those I mean which have not been able to join on to any part, nor when inside the body to feel in unison with and adopt the vital motions of that body.

But lest you should happen to suppose that living things alone are bound by these conditions, such a law keeps all things within their limits. For even as all created things are in their whole nature unlike each other, thus each must consist of first-beginnings of unlike shape; not that a small number of things that are of a like form, because as a rule all things do not resemble one the other. Since the seeds differ, there must be between the atoms a difference in the spaces between their passages, their connections, their weights, their collisions, and their motions; all which not only separate living bodies, but hold apart the lands and the sea, and separate the heaven from the earth.

...

[1023] Apply now, I entreat you, your mind to true reason. For a new question struggles earnestly to gain your ears, a new aspect of things to display itself. But there is nothing so easy which is not at first more difficult to believe than afterwards; and nothing so great or so marvelous that all do not gradually lose their wonder at it.

Look up at the bright and unsullied hue of heaven and the stars which it holds within it, wandering all about, and the moon and the sun's light of dazzling brilliancy: if all these things were now for the first time suddenly and unexpectedly presented to mortal men, what could be named that would be more marvelous than these things, or that men beforehand would believe to be possible? Nothing, I think — so wondrous and strange would be the sight.

Yet weary as all are to have seen these things, how little any one now cares to look up into heaven's glittering quarters. Cease therefore to be dismayed by the novelty which causes you to fearfully reject reason from your mind. Instead, weigh the questions with keen judgment, and if they seem to you to be true, surrender to them, or if they appear false, gird yourself for battle with them. For since the sum of space is unlimited beyond the walls of this world, the mind seeks to apprehend what there is out there, and the spirit ever yearns to look forward to that toward which the mind's thoughts reach in free and unembarrassed flight.



### **Book III – The Nature of the Soul; Death is Nothing To Us**

It is you – you who were first able amid such thick darkness to raise on high so bright a beacon and shed light on the true interests of life. It is you I follow, glory of the Greek race. And I now plant my footsteps firmly in those you have left, not because I desire to rival you, but because the love I bear for you causes me to yearn to imitate you. For why should a swallow contend with swans, and what likeness is there between the racing of goats with tottering legs and the powerful strength of horses?

You, father, are the discoverer of things, and you furnish us with fatherly precepts. Like bees sipping from flowers, we, O glorious one, in like manner feed from out thy pages on golden maxims – golden I say – that are most worthy of endless life. For as soon as your philosophy, issuing from your godlike intellect, has begun to proclaim the Nature of things, the terrors of the mind are dispelled, and the walls of the world fly open. I see things in operation throughout the whole universe – I see the divinity of the gods as well as their tranquil abodes which neither winds shake nor clouds drench with rain nor snow harms with sharp frosts. An ever cloudless sky canopies them, and they laugh a with light shed in all directions. Nature supplies all their wants, and nothing ever impairs their peace of mind.

But on the other hand the regions of Hell are nowhere to be seen, though earth is no bar seeing all things which are in operation underneath our feet throughout the universe. At the sight of all this a kind of godlike delight mixed with awe overcomes me, to think that Nature by your power is laid open to our eyes and unveiled on every side.

So far, I have shown in what way all things have their first beginnings, of such diverse shapes, which fly spontaneously on in everlasting motion, and how all things are produced out of these. Next, my verses must clear up the nature of the mind and soul, and drive the dread of Hell headlong away, since that dread troubles the life of man from its inmost depths, and overspreads all things with the blackness of death, allowing no pleasure to be pure and unalloyed.

For as to those boasts that men often give out, that “disease and a life of shame are more to be feared than Tartarus’ place of death,” or that “they know the soul to be of blood or wind,” according to how their choice happens to direct, or that “they have no need at all of our philosophy” – you may perceive for the following reasons that all these boasts are made for the sake of glory than because those things are really believed. For we see that such men, no matter their boasting that they have no need of philosophy, go on offering sacrifices to the dead, slaughtering black sheep, making libations to the gods, and turning their thoughts to religion ever more earnestly, even when their religion has failed to prevent them from being exiled from their country, banished far from the sight of men, living degraded by foul charges of guilt, and sunk into every kind of misery.

You can best test the man when he is in doubt and danger, and when he is amid adversity learn who he really is. For then, and not until then, are the words of truth are forced out from the bottom of his heart. His mask is torn off, and the reality is left. Avarice and blind lust for honors lead unhappy men to overstep the bounds of right, and as partners and agents of crime to strive night and day with tremendous effort to struggle up to the summit of power. Such sores of life are in no small measure fostered by the dread of death. For foul scorn and gnawing needs are seen to be far removed from a life of pleasure and security, and are thought to be the same as loitering before the gates of death.

And men are driven on by an unreal dread, wishing to escape and keep the gates of death far away. They amass wealth by civil bloodshed and greedily double their riches, piling up murder on murder. Such men cruelly celebrate the sad death of a brother, and hate and fear the tables of their relatives. Often, from the same fear, envy causes them to grieve, and they moan that before their very eyes another person is powerful, famous, and walks arrayed in gorgeous dignity, while they are wallowing in darkness and dirt. Some wear themselves to death for the sake of statues and a famous name. Often men dread death to such a degree that hate of life and the sight of daylight seizes them so that in their sorrow they commit suicide, quite forgetting that this fear of death was the source of their worries. Fear of death prompts some men to forsake all sense of shame, and others to burst asunder the bonds of friendship, overturning duty at its very base. Often men even betray their country and their parents in seeking to

escape the realms of Hell. For even as children are flurried and dread all things in the thick darkness, thus we in the daylight fear things not a bit more to be dreaded than what children shudder at in the dark and fancy to be real. This terror and darkness of mind must be dispelled, not by the rays of the sun and glittering shafts of day, but by the study of the law of Nature.

...

[94] First I say that the mind, which we often call the understanding, in which dwells the directing and governing principle of life, is no less part of the man than hand and foot and eyes are part of the whole living creature.

.....

[231] We are not however to suppose that the nature of the mind is single. For a certain subtle spirit mixed with heat quits men at death, and then the heat draws air along with it, for there is no heat which does not have air mixed with it, as its nature is rare, and many first beginnings of air must move about through it. Thus the nature of the mind is proved to be threefold; and yet these things all together are not sufficient to produce sensation; since the nature of the case does not allow that any of these can produce sense-giving motions and the thoughts which a man turns over in his mind.

Thus some fourth Nature must be added to these. This fourth nature has no name, and nothing exists more nimble or more fine or of smaller or smoother elements than this. This fourth nature transmits the sense-giving motions through the frame; for it stirs first, as it is made up of small particles. Next the heat and the unseen force of the spirit receive the motions, then the air and all things are set in action, the blood is stirred, and every part of the flesh is filled with sensation. Last of all, whether it be pleasure or pain, the feeling is transmitted to the bones and marrow. No pain can lightly pierce to the bone, nor any sharp malady make its way in, without all things being so thoroughly disordered that no room is left for life, and the parts of the soul fly abroad through all the pores of the body. But in most instances a stop is put to these motions on the surface of the body, and for this reason we are able to retain life.

Now I will try to explain in what way these things are mixed together, by what means they are united, and when they exert their powers. The poverty of my native language deters me against my will, but I will touch upon them in summary fashion to the best of my ability:

The first-beginnings are by their mutual motions interlaced in such a way that none of them can be separated by itself, nor can the function of any first-beginning go on when divided from the rest by any interval – for these functions provide their several powers when of one body. Even so, in any flesh of living creature without exception there is smell and some color and taste, out of all of which is made up one single body. Thus the heat and the air and the unseen power of the spirit mix together to produce a single nature and a nimble force which transmits to the body the origin of motion, and by this means means sense-giving motion first arises through the body. This Nature lurks secreted in the body's innermost depths, and nothing in our body is farther beneath all sight than this, which is the very soul of the soul.

In the same way as the power of the mind and the function of the soul are latent in our limbs and throughout our body, and each part is formed of small bodies, this nameless power made of minute bodies is the very soul of the soul, reigning supreme in the whole body.

...

[320] In many other aspects there must be differences between the varied natures of men and the tempers which follow from these, though at present I am unable to set forth the hidden causes of these or to find names enough for the different shapes of the first-beginnings, from which shapes arise the diversity of things. What I think I may affirm, however, is this: those traces of the different natures which reason is unable to expel from us are so exceedingly slight that there is nothing to hinder us from living lives worthy of gods.

...

[541] So invariably truth wins over false reason and cuts off all retreat from the assailant, and by a two-fold

refutation puts falsehood to rout.

...

[830] Death is nothing to us, concerning us not at all, since the nature of the mind is mortal. Think how in times gone by we felt no distress when the Carthaginians from all sides came together to do battle, and all things were shaken by war's troubling uproar, shuddering and quaking beneath high heaven, and mortal men were in doubt which of the two peoples it would be whose empire would fall by land and sea. So the same applies when we ourselves shall be no more, when our body and soul are separated, out of the both of which we are formed into a single being. You may be sure that for us, who shall then be no more, nothing whatever can happen to excite sensation, not if earth itself should be overturned to mingle with the sea and the sea with heaven.

And even supposing the nature of the mind and power of the soul do have feeling, after they have been severed from our body, that is still nothing to us, who by the marriage of body and soul are formed into one single being. And even if time should gather up after our death that material from which we are made and put it once more into the position in which it now holds, and give the light of life to us again – even this result even would not concern us at all. This is because the chain of our self-consciousness has been snapped asunder, just as we now have no concern about any life which the material from which we are made might have held before our birth, nor do we feel any distress about that prior life. When you look back on the whole past course of immeasurable time, and think how many are the combinations which the motions of matter take, you may easily believe that the very same seeds from which we are now formed have often before been placed in the same order in which they now are. And yet we can recall no memory of this — a break in our existence has been interposed, and all the materials from which we are made have wandered to and fro, far astray from the sensations they once produced.

For he to whom evil befalls must exist as his own person at the time that evil comes, if the misery and suffering are to happen to him at all. But since death precludes this, and takes away the existence of him on whom evil can be brought, you may be sure that we have nothing to fear after death. He who does not exist cannot become miserable, and once death has taken away his mortal life, it does not matter at all whether he has lived at any other time.

Therefore when you see a man bemoaning his hard life, worrying that after death he shall either rot with his body laid in the grave, or be devoured by flames, or by the jaws of wild beasts, you may be sure that there lurks in his heart a secret fear, though he may declare that he does not believe that any sense will remain to him after death. Such a man does not really hold the conclusion which he professes to hold, nor believe the principle which he professes. For such a man may profess that his body is fully dead, but yet unconsciously imagine something of self to survive, and worry that that birds and beasts will rend his body after death, moaning for his end. Such a man does not separate himself from what remains after he has died, and instead he fancies himself to be those remains, and he stands by and impregnates those remains with his own sensations.

For this reason he makes much of bemoaning that he has been born mortal, and he does not see that after death there will be no other self to remain and lament to itself that he has met death, and to stand and grieve that he is lying there mangled or burnt. For if it is an evil to be pulled about by the devouring jaws of wild beasts after death, I cannot see why it should not be just as cruel a pain to be laid on fires and burn in hot flames, or to be placed in honey and stifled, or to stiffen with cold, stretched on the smooth surface of an icy slab of stone, or to be pressed down and crushed by a load of earth above.

Some men say to themselves:

*“No more shall my house admit me with glad welcome, nor a virtuous wife and sweet children run to be the first to snatch kisses and touch my heart with joy. No more may I be prosperous in my doings, a safeguard to my own. One disastrous day has taken from me, luckless man, all the many prizes of life.”*

But these men do not add:

*“And now no longer does any craving for these things beset me either.”*

For if these men could rightly perceive this in thought, and follow up the thought in words, they would release

themselves from great distress and apprehension of mind:

*“You, even as you are now, sunk in the sleep of death, shall continue so to be so for all time to come, freed from all distressful pains. But we who remain, with a sorrow that could not be healed, wept for you when close you turned to an ashen heap on your funeral pile, and no length of days shall pluck from our hearts our ever-during grief.”*

To those who mourn for the dead, this question should be asked:

*“What is there in death so extremely bitter, if it comes in the end to sleep and rest, that anyone should pine over the dead in never-ending sorrow?”*

This too men often love to say, when they have reclined at table, cup in hand, and shaded their brows with crowns:

*” Short is this enjoyment for poor weak men; presently it will have passed and never after may it be called back!”*

Such men say this as if, after their death, their chief affliction will be thirst and parching drought, burning them up, luckless wretches, or craving for any thing else. What folly! No one feels the need for himself and life when mind and body are together sunk in sleep. For all we care, this sleep might be everlasting, and no craving whatever for ourselves would move us. And yet those first beginnings throughout our frame wander far away from their sense-producing motions before a man starts up from sleep and collects himself. Death therefore must be thought to concern us much less than sleep, if less there can be than what we see to be nothing during sleep, for a greater dispersion of our first-beginnings follows after death, and no one wakes up once the chill cessation of life has come.

If Nature could suddenly utter a voice and address us in person, she might use words such as these:

*“Why do you, O mortal, go on to such length in sickly sorrow? Why do you bemoan and bewail death? For have you had a good life, and do you say that the life you have lost has been welcome to you, and that your blessings have not all been poured as if into a perforated jar, from which they have run through and been lost to no avail? If your life has been so blessed, why not then depart from life like a guest filled with food and drink as if at the end of a party, and with relief that it is over enter upon untroubled rest?”*

*“But if on the other hand you have had a bad life, and all that you enjoyed has been squandered and lost, and if life is a grievance to you, why seek to continue that life any longer, to be wasted in its turn and utterly lost for nothing? Why not rather make an end of life and its troubles? For there is nothing more which I can contrive for you to give you pleasure. All things are always the same, and even if your body is not yet decayed with age nor worn out and exhausted, yet all things will remain the same, even if you should outlast all men now living – even if you should never die!”*

What answer could we give to Nature, but that her case is well-founded and that she pleads it honestly and well?

If, however, a man more advanced in years should complain about his death more than is right, would Nature not with even greater cause raise her voice in words such as these:

*“Away with thy tears, rascal; a truce to your complaining. Your death comes after full enjoyment of all the prizes of life. Because you nevertheless yearn for what you do not have, and despise what you do have, life has slipped from your grasp unfinished and unsatisfied. And now, before you expected it, death has taken its stand at your bedside, before you can take your departure satisfied and filled with good things. Give up those things that are unsuited to your age, and with good grace and nobility get up and go: you must.”*

Nature’s charge would be brought with good reason, for old things must give way and be supplanted by the new, and new things must ever be replenished out of old things. No one is delivered over to the pit and black Tartarus to be utterly destroyed – matter is needed for future generations to grow. All of these, too, will follow you when you

have finished your term of life, just as all those that have come before and after, no less than you, have and always will come to their own ends. Thus one thing will never cease to rise out of another – life is granted to none to possess forever, to all it is only a loan. Think how the bygone antiquity of everlasting time before our birth was nothing to us. Nature holds those ancient days up to us as a mirror of the time yet to come after our death. Is there anything in this that looks appalling, anything that appears gloomy? Is this not a rest more untroubled than any sleep?

To be sure, those things which are fabled to exist deep in Hell do in fact exist for us in this life:

In truth there is no Tantalus, poor wretch, numbed by groundless terror as the story goes, fearing a huge stone hanging in the air above him. In life, however, a baseless dread of the gods terrifies men, and the falling rock they fear is the bad luck that chance brings to each one.

Nor do birds eat away into the breast of Tityos in Hell nor could they find during eternity enough food to peck from his large breast. However huge the bulk of his body, even if with outspread limbs he took up the space not of nine acres, as the story goes, but of the whole earth – even so he would not be able to endure everlasting pain and supply food from his body forever. But in our own world we know men such as Tityos: those who, groveling in love, or torn by troubled thoughts from any other passion, are eaten up by bitter anguish as if by vultures.

In life, too, we have a Sisyphus before our eyes. Such is the man who is bent on seeking political office, constantly seeking political power, but who always retires defeated and disappointed. To ask for power, empty as it is, but to never find it despite the constant chase for it – this is forcing uphill a stone which, after all one's effort, rolls back again from the summit and in headlong haste finds once again the levels of the plain.

Then there are those men who are always feeding their insatiable desires, who can never to fill full and satisfy it with good things, as do the seasons of the year for us, when they come round and bring their fruits and varied delights. These men are never filled with the enjoyments of life, and so they are like the maidens of legend, who keep pouring water into a perforated vessel which in spite of all their work can never be filled.

In addition, Cerberus and the Furies are idle tales, and Tartarus as well, belching forth hideous fires from his throat. Such things have never existed anywhere, and in truth can never exist. But there is in life a dread of punishment for evil deeds: the prison, the frightful hurling down from the rock, the scourgings, the executioners, the dungeon of the doomed, and the torches. And even when these do not come, yet the conscience-stricken mind torments itself with fear of the fire and the lash, and sees no end to such punishment fearing that those very evils will be enhanced after death.

In these ways, the life of fools at length becomes a hell here on earth.

This too you may sometimes say to yourself, "Even worthy Ancus has seen his eyes close to the light, and he was a far better man than you. And since then many other kings and potentates have been laid low. Even that great king who once paved a way over the sea as a path for his legions to march, and taught them to pass on foot over the roaring of the sea, trampling on it with his horses, had the light taken from him and shed forth his soul from his dying body. Even the son of the Scipios, thunderbolt of war, terror of Carthage, yielded his bones to earth just as if he were the lowest laborer. Think, too, of the inventors of all sciences and arts, think of those such as Homer, who was without a peer, but yet now sleeps the same sleep as the others. Then there was Democritus who, when he found that his memory was failing him in old age, offered up himself to death. Even Epicurus himself, who surpassed in intellect all other men and quenched the light of all rivals, as the sun quenches the stars, passed away when his light of life had run its course.

Will you then hesitate and think it a hardship for you to die? You for whom life is not far from death even while you yet live and see the light of day? You, who spends the greater part of your time in sleep, and snore even when you are wide awake, and never cease seeing visions? You, who have a mind troubled with groundless terrors, and cannot discover what it is that troubles you? You, pitiful man that you are, pressed on all sides with many cares, who constantly stray due to the tumbled wanderings of your mind?

If, just as men feel the weight of the load on their minds which oppresses them, they would understand from what

causes this load is produced, and why such a weight lies on their hearts, they would not spend their lives as we see most of them do. Such men never know – any one of them – what they want, and thus always seek a change of place as though they might there lay down their burdens. Men who are sick of being home often issue forth from their mansions, but just as suddenly come back to it, once they find that they are no better off abroad. Such men race to their country-house, driving his horses in headlong haste as if hurrying to bring help to a house on fire. But then the moment he reaches the door of his house he yawns, and sinks heavily into sleep, seeking forgetfulness, or even in haste goes back again to town.

In this way each man flies from himself, but as you may be sure is commonly the case, he cannot escape from himself, which always clings to him against his wishes. Such a man hates himself because he is sick, but does not know not the cause of his sickness. For if he could rightly see into these matters, giving up all other distractions, he would study to learn the Nature of things, since the point at stake is his condition – not for one hour – but for eternity: the state in which all mortals must pass all the time which remains after death.

Once more, what evil lust for life is this which constrains us with such force to be so troubled by doubt and danger? A set term of life is fixed for all mortals, and death cannot be avoided – meet it we must. Moreover, we are always engaged in the same pursuits, and no new pleasure is available by living on. But so long as we crave what we lack, that desire seems to transcend all the rest. When once it is obtained, we then crave something else, and ever does the same thirst for life possess us, as we gape for with open mouth.

It is quite doubtful what fortune the future will bring with it, or what chance will bring us, or what end is at hand. Nor, by prolonging life, do we take one moment from the time we pass in death, nor can we by worrying spend a moment less in the eternity of death. You may live as many generations as you please during your life, but nonetheless everlasting death will await you. For the man who ended his life today will be no less time in nonexistence than the man who died many months or many years ago.



## **Book IV – The Evidence-Based Life**

I TRAVERSE the pathless haunts of the Pierides never yet walked by feet of man. I love to approach the untasted springs and to drink from them, and to cull fresh flowers and gather for my head a distinguished crown from spots where the muses have never yet veiled the brows of any man. This is because I teach of great things and work to release the mind from the tight bonds of religious fears, and because on a dark subject I pen lucid verses overlaid with the muses' charm.

And I teach through verse for good reason: Physicians, when they propose to give nauseous wormwood to children, first smear the rim of the bowl with the sweetness of honey, so that the unthinking child will be fooled as far as his lips, and drink up the bitter medicine. Though fooled, such child is not betrayed, but rather by such means recovers health and strength. In the same way, since this doctrine seems bitter to those by whom it has not been tried, and the multitude shrinks back from it in dismay, I have resolved to set forth to you our doctrine in sweet-toned verse, and overlay it with the pleasant honey of the muses. By such means I aim to engage your mind on my verses, until such time as you come to understand the Nature of things and thoroughly grasp the use of this knowledge.

.....

[462] Many are the other marvels ... we see which seek to shake the credit of the senses. But such efforts are quite in vain, since the greatest part of these cases deceive us on account of the opinions which we add ourselves, taking things as seen which have not been seen by the senses. For nothing is harder than to separate those facts that are clearly true from those that are doubtful, which the mind adds itself.

And if a man contends that nothing can be known, he knows not whether this contention itself can be known, since

he admits that he knows nothing. I will therefore decline to argue the question against him who places his head where his feet should be. And yet granting that he knows his contention to be true, I would still put this question: Since he has never yet seen any truth in things, how does he know what “knowing” and “not knowing” are? What has produced his knowledge of the difference between the true and the false, and between the doubtful and the certain?

You will find that it is from the senses that comes all knowledge of the true, and that the senses cannot be refuted. For that which is of itself able to distinguish the false from the true must from the Nature of the case be proved with a higher certainty. Well, then, what can fairly be accounted of higher certainty than the senses? Shall reasoning founded on the senses be able to contradict those same senses, when that reasoning is wholly founded on the senses? If the senses are not true, then all reasoning based on them is rendered false. Shall the ears be able to take the eyes to task, or the sense of touch take ears to task? Shall the sense of taste call in question the sense of touch, or the nostrils refute it or the eyes controvert it? Not so, for each separately has its own distinct office, each its own power. We therefore must perceive what is soft and cold or hot by one distinct faculty, and by another perceive the different colors of things and thus see all objects which have color. Taste too is a separate faculty; smells spring from one source, sounds from another. It therefore must follow that any one sense cannot confute any other. Nor can any sense take itself to task, since equal credit must be assigned to it at all times. What therefore has at any time appeared true to each sense, is true.

At times you may experience sensations which your reason is unable to explain – for example, why a tower close at hand is seen to be square, but when seen at a distance appears round. In such cases it is better, if you are at a loss for a reason to explain this, to admit that you do not know the truth of the matter, rather than to accept an explanation that makes no sense. If you accept as true a possibility that contradicts your senses, you have set the stage to let slip from your grasp all those other things which you know to be manifestly true. In so doing you will ruin the groundwork of all your beliefs, and wrench up all the foundations on which life and existence rest. For not only would all reason give way, but life itself would fall to the ground, unless you pursue the truth and choose to trust the senses, shunning the steep cliffs of life that must be avoided. All that host of words drawn out in array against the senses is quite without meaning.

Once more: As in a building, if the rule first applied by the builder is awry, and the square is untrue and swerves from its straight lines, and if there is the slightest hitch in any part of the level, all the construction must be faulty, all must be awry, crooked, sloping, leaning forwards, leaning backwards, without symmetry, so that some parts seem ready to fall, and others do fall, all ruined by the first erroneous measurements. So too, all reasoning of things which is founded on false interpretations of the senses will prove to be distorted and false.

.....

[1049] Everyone as a rule fall towards their wound, and their blood spurts out in the direction from whence comes the blow by which we are struck. And if he is at close quarters, the red stream of blood covers the foe.

Thus he who is struck by the weapons of Venus, whatever be the object that hits him, inclines to the direction from where he is wounded, and yearns to unite with it and join body with body, a mute desire giving a presage of the pleasure to come.

This pleasure is called by us Venus; from that desire comes the Latin name of love. From this desire first trickles into the heart a drop of Venus' honeyed joy, succeeded soon by chilly cares, for even when that which you love is away, still images of it are at hand and its sweet name is present to the ears.

But it is best to flee such images, and scare away all that feeds love, and turn your mind to another object. It is best to distract your passions elsewhere and not keep your thoughts set on the object of, for in so doing you lay up for yourself cares and unfeeling pain. For the sore gathers strength and becomes stronger by feeding, and every day the madness grows in violence. The misery then becomes aggravated unless you erase the first wounds by new blows, and heal them when yet fresh, roaming elsewhere after Venus, or transferring to something else the emotions of your mind.

And he who shuns love is not without the fruits of Venus, but rather seeks to enjoy only those blessings which are

do not bring with them any pain. It is certain that the pleasure from such things is more unalloyed for the healthy-minded than for the love-sick, for in the very moment of enjoyment the burning desire of lovers wavers and wanders undecided, and they cannot tell what first to enjoy with eyes and hands. What they have sought they tightly squeeze, causing pain of body, and often imprinting their teeth on the lips, clashing mouth to mouth in kissing. In such cases the pleasure is not pure, and there are hidden stings which cause pain and spring those germs of frenzy.

But Venus with light hand breaks the force of these pains during love, and the fond pleasure mingled therein reins in the bites, for one hopes that from the same body from whence springs their burning desire their flame may likewise be quenched. But Nature protests that the very opposite is the truth, for the passion of love is the one thing of all in which, the more we have of it, the more the breast burns with desire.

Meat and drink are taken into the body, and because they can fill up certain fixed parts of it, the craving for drink and bread is easily satisfied. But from the face and beauty of man nothing is given into the body to enjoy but flimsy images; a sorry hope which is often snatched away by the wind. When he is asleep a thirsty man seeks to drink, and though the water does not quench the burning of his thirst, he still seeks the image of waters and toils in vain as he drinks in the midst of an imaginary stream. In the same way Venus mocks lovers with images, for gazing upon bodies cannot satisfy them, nor can lovers with their hands wandering undecided over the whole body rub anything off the soft limbs of the beloved.

At last they unite and enjoy the flower of youth, the body now anticipating delight, with Venus is in the mood to sow the fields of woman, and they greedily clasp each other's body and suck each other's lips and breathe in, pressing teeth on each other's mouth. Yet all this is in vain, since they can rub nothing off nor join their whole bodies, strive as they might to do so, as they are greedily held in the chains of Venus while their limbs melt, overpowered by the pleasure.

At length when the gathered desire has passed, there follows for a brief while a short pause in the burning passion. But then the same frenzy returns, along with the old madness, even though they are at a loss to know what they really desire to get, and cannot find a way to conquer that mischief, and in such utter uncertainty they pine away by a hidden wound.

Then too they waste their strength and ruin themselves by the labor, passing their lives at the beck of the other. Meanwhile their estate melts away and is turned into Babylonian gowns; they neglect their duties and their good name staggers and sickens. On her feet laugh beautiful Sicyonian shoes, yes, and large emeralds with green light set in gold, and a sea-colored dress worn constantly drinks in the sweat.

The noble earnings of their fathers are turned into hair-bands, head-dresses, or sweeping robes and Alidensian dresses. Feasts are set out with rich coverlets and foods, games, cups, perfumes, crowns, and garlands are prepared. But all this is in vain, since out of the well-spring of these delights rises up something bitter, to bring pain amid the very flowers. Either the conscience-stricken mind begins to gnaw itself with remorse to think that it is passing a life of sloth and ruining itself in brothels, or else the lover launches forth some statement of doubtful meaning with words that cleave to the love-sick heart and burn like living fire, or else the lover fancies that she casts her eyes too freely, or looks upon another, and he sees in her face faint traces of a smile.

Such evils as these are found even in love that is lasting and highly prosperous. Even worse, in crossed and hopeless love are so many ills that you may seize them with your eyes closed, as they are past numbering. Thus it is better to watch out for these perils beforehand, in the manner I have prescribed, and be on your guard not to be drawn in to the danger. For to avoid falling into the snares of love is easier than getting out of the net and breaking the strong meshes of Venus after you are caught.

And yet even when you are entangled and held fast, you may still escape the mischief, unless you stand in your own way and overlook all the defects of the mind and body of the person you woo. But men often do this, blinded by passion, and they attribute to the beloved advantages which are not really theirs.

We therefore see women who are manifestly ugly to be objects of endearment, held in the highest admiration. Some lovers jeer at others and advise them to seek the help of Venus, since they are troubled by a disgraceful passion, and often give no thought to their own lover's ugliness. The lover thinks that the beloved who is filthy and smelly "does

not have the love of cleanliness,” the beloved who is stringy and wizened is considered to be “a gazelle;” the beloved who is dumpy and dwarfish is considered to be “from top to toe one of the graces;” the beloved who is big and overgrown is considered to be “awe-inspiring and full of dignity;” the beloved who is dumb is considered to be “bashful;” the beloved who is teasing and gossiping is considered to be “a shining lamp;” the beloved who cannot live from want of flesh is considered to be “a slim darling,” and the beloved who is half-dead with cough is only “slight” – and it is tedious to attempt to report other things of this kind.

However, even if she is of such great dignity of appearance that the very power of Venus shines from all her limbs – remember that there are others too. Remember that you lived without her before you met, and she does all things the same as does an ugly woman, fumigating herself, poor wretch, with nauseous perfumes, her very maids running from her and giggling behind her back. Nevertheless the lover, when shut out, often in tears, covers the threshold with flowers and wreaths, and anoints the haughty doorposts with oil of marjoram, imprinting kisses, poor wretch, on the doors. If he were once admitted, however, and only one single breath should waft his way, he would seek specious reasons for departing, and the long-burning wound would fall to the ground, and he would see his folly, in that he had attributed to her more than is right to concede to a mortal. And our Venuses are well aware of this, so all the more they hide from those whom they wish to retain in the chains of love with the utmost pains all that goes on behind the scenes of life. But all this deception is in vain, since you may still draw forth into the light all these things that are in her mind, and see the truth behind her smiles.

Yet if she is of a fair mind and not troublesome, overlook these games and make allowance for human failings. For the signs of a woman are not always deceptive when she locks the man’s body in her embrace and joins it hers, and holding it and sucking his lips into her lips, drinking in his kisses. Often she does it from the heart, and seeking mutual joy courts him to run the complete race of love. And in no other way could birds, cattle, wild beasts, sheep and mares submit to bear the males, except because the very exuberance of nature in the females burns and joyously draws in the males. Do you not see how those whom mutual pleasure has chained together are often both tortured in their common chains? How often in the highways do dogs, desiring to separate, eagerly pull different ways with all their might, while all the time they are held fast in the strong fetters of Venus! This they would never do unless they experienced mutual joy that is strong enough to force them into the snare and hold them in its meshes. And for this reason again I repeat – there is a common pleasure.

....

[1278] Sometimes, not by any divine grace or arrows of Venus, a woman of inferior beauty comes to be loved, for the wife sometimes by her own acts and accommodating manners and by elegant neatness of person readily habituates you to pass your life with her. Moreover, habit renders love attractive; for that which is struck by repeated blows, however light the force, yet after long course of time is overpowered and gives way. Do you not see also that falling drops of water after long course of time can even scoop a hole through stone?



## **Book V– Other Aspects of the Universe**

WHOSE genius is able to frame a poem worthy of the grandeur of these discoveries? Who is so great a master of words as to be able to compose praises equal to those which he who won such prizes and left them to us deserves? I think no mortal man is up to the task. For if we must speak in terms that the acknowledged grandeur of his discoveries demands, we must consider him a god. For it was he who first discovered that plan of life which is now termed wisdom, and who by trained skill rescued life from such great fog and thick darkness, and who anchored it safely in so perfect a calm and in so brilliant a light. Compare the godlike discoveries of others in ancient times. Ceres is famed for showing mortals the use of corn, and Liber for showing men the vine-born juice of the grape, but life might well have subsisted along without these things, as we are told some nations even now live without them. But a happy life is not possible without a clean heart, and so with greater reason this man is deemed by us to be a god, from whom come those sweet balms of life which even now are distributed over great nations and gently

soothe men's minds.

If you shall suppose that the deeds of Hercules surpass these, you will be carried far away from true reason. For how could the great gaping jaws of the Nemean lion harm us now, or even the bristled Arcadian boar? What could the bull of Crete do, or the Hydra of Lerna, with its venomous snakes? How could the triple-breasted might of threefold Geryon that dwelt in the Stymphalian swamps do us injury, or the horses of Thracian Diomedes breathing fire from their nostrils? What harm could the serpent which guards the bright golden apples of the Hesperides, fierce and dangerous of aspect, girding the tree with his enormous body beside the Atlantic shore – what harm could it do to us, as we never go there and no barbarian ventures to approach it?

It is the same with all other monsters of this kind which Hercules destroyed – if they had never been vanquished, what harm could they do, I ask, even if they were now alive? None, I think, for the earth even now abounds with wild beasts throughout the mountains and forests, and yet these are places which we have it within our power to shun.

But unless the heart is cleared, what battles and dangers find their way into our lives! What poignant cares inspired by lust tear apart the pitiful man, and what mighty fears and turmoil are caused by pride, lust, and wantonness? What disasters they bring about, and what sloth does luxury bring! He who subdued all these and banished them from the mind by words, not by arms – does he not deserve to be ranked among the gods? All the more so because he delivered many precepts in beautiful and god-like phrases about the immortal gods themselves, and opened up to us by his teachings all of the nature of things.

While walking in his footsteps I follow his reasoning and teach by my verses by what law all things are made, and by what necessity there is for them to continue in that law, and how impotent things are to annul the binding statutes of time. Foremost among these teachings is that the Nature of the mind has been formed and born along with the body, and the mind is unable to endure unscathed through eternity, and that it is mere images which mock the mind in sleep, when we seem to see those who have departed life.

The order of my design has now brought me to the point where I must proceed to show that the world also was formed of mortal bodies which have been born from other things. I will also show in what way the union of matter founded the earth, the heaven, the sea, the stars, the sun, and the ball of the moon. I will also show what living creatures sprang out of the earth, and I will show that others never existed. I will show in what way mankind began to use speech according to the names conferred on things, and in what way the fear of the gods gained an entry into men's hearts which is maintained to this day. Further, I will make clear by what force Nature guides the course of the sun and the moon; so that we will not imagine that these traverse their orbits between heaven and earth of their own free will, or by the will of any gods for the purpose of furthering the increase of crops and living creatures.

Even those who have been taught correctly that the gods lead a life without care may nevertheless wonder by what plan all things are carried on, above all in regard to those things which we see in the sky overhead. Wonderment at such things brings the poor wretches to believe in hard taskmasters whom they believe to be almighty, as they do not know what can be, and what cannot be – in short, by what system each thing has its powers defined and its boundary-mark set.

...

[156] It is sheer folly to say that the gods, for the sake of men, have set in order the glorious Nature of the world, and therefore it is proper to praise their work, and to believe that the world will be eternal and immortal. It is likewise folly to hold that it is unholy to state that those things which are alleged to have been established on everlasting foundations by the forethought of the gods in ancient days will one day be utterly overturned from top to bottom. All figments of the imagination of this kind, Memmius, are sheer folly.

For what advantage could our gratitude bring to immortal and blessed beings in return for which they would take the world in hand to administer it? And what novel incident induced those beings, up to that time so long at rest, to desire to change their former lives? For it seems natural that one who is annoyed by old things should rejoice in a new state of things, but for a being to whom no ill has befallen in eternity gone past, when it passed a pleasant existence, what could have kindled a desire to change? Did life lie groveling in darkness and sorrow until the first

dawn of the birth of the universe? What evil would it have been for us never to have been born? Whoever is born wants to continue in life so long as pleasures continue, but for him who has never tasted love, and never been entered on the lists of life, what harm would it have been never to have been born? From where was first implanted in the gods a pattern for creating all things, as well as the preconception of men, so that they knew and saw in their minds what they wanted to create? And in what way was the power of first-beginnings ever determined, and in what way they change their mutual arrangements, unless Nature herself gave the model for making things?

For by Nature the first-beginnings of things, many in number, and in many ways, impelled by collisions from eternity past, and kept in motion by their own weight, have been carried along and united in all manner of ways, thoroughly testing every kind of production possible by their mutual combinations. Thus we should not consider it strange that all things have fallen into their present arrangements, and have come into courses like those out of which the sum of things we now see is carried on by constant renewing.

But even if I did not know what first-beginnings of things are, yet judging by the very arrangement of heaven and by many other facts I would venture to affirm that the Nature of things was by no means made for us by any divine power, so great are the defects with which it is encumbered.

In the first place, of all the space which the vast reach of heaven covers, a portion is occupied by mountains and forests of wild beasts. Rocks and wasteful seas take up and hold wide apart the coasts of different lands. Nearly two thirds of the earth suffers from burning heat and the constant fall of frost. What is left for tillage, nature would overrun with thorns, unless the force of man fought against it, and accustomed himself for the sake of a livelihood to groan beneath the hoe and to cut through the earth by pressing down on the plow. If we did not turn up the clods by laboring on the soil, our plantings would not come up into the clear air. Even then, at times when things earned with great toil put forth their leaves, either the sun bums them up with excessive heat, sudden rain or cold cut them off, or the blasts of the winds waste them by furious hurricane.

If all things were designed for us by the gods, why does Nature give food and increase to the terrible wild beasts that are dangerous to mankind both by sea and land? Why do the seasons of the year bring disease with them? Why does untimely death stalk the earth? Observe that the baby, soon as nature sheds him forth from his mother's womb in to the light, lies naked on the ground, like a sailor cast away by the cruel waves, speechless, wanting everything needed for life. He fills the room with a rueful wailing, as well he might, given that his destiny is to go through so many ills in life. But the young of the flocks, the herds, and the wild beasts grow up needing no rattles, and no need to be addressed in the fond broken accents of the fostering nurse. Young animals do not ask for different dresses according to the season, nor do they need weapons or walls to protect themselves.

...

[878] Centaurs never have existed, and never can there exist things of twofold nature, with double body formed into one frame out of alien limbs, because the faculties and powers of the different parts are not sufficiently similar. However dull of understanding you may be, you may learn this from what follows.

First, observe that a horse when three years old is in the prime of his vigor. Far different is a boy, and often even at that age he will call in his sleep for the milk of the breast. Later, when in advanced age the horse's lusty strength and limbs ebb, then and not until then does the flower of age commence for a boy, and clothe his cheeks in soft down. I tell you this that you will not believe that out of the seed of a man and a horse Centaurs can be born, or that Scyllas with bodies half of fish and half of dogs, or any such other similar thing whose limbs we see cannot harmonize together. For these neither come to their flower at the same time, nor reach the fullness of bodily strength, nor lose it in advanced old age, nor burn with similar passions, nor have compatible manners, nor feel the same things as giving pleasure.

Thus we see bearded goats fatten on hemlock which is poison for a man. Since flame will scorch and burn the bodies of lions just as much as any other kind of flesh, how could it be that a single chimera with the body of a lion, a dragon, and a goat could breathe fire from its mouth? This is why he is wrong who imagines that when the earth was first formed such living creatures could have been begotten, resting upon the futile thought that the world was "new." Such men babble out many similar things, saying that rivers ran with gold and that trees blossomed with precious stones, or that men were born with such giant frame that they could wade on foot across seas and whirl

heaven about them with their hands. The fact that there were many seeds of things in the earth when it first brought forth living creatures does not prove that the earth could have produced beasts of different kinds mixed together. The limbs of different living things cannot be formed into a single frame, because the kinds of plants and trees which even now spring of the earth are not seen to be produced with the several sorts woven into one, but each thing goes on after its own fashion, and all preserve their distinctive differences according to a fixed law of Nature.

....

[1117] Were a man to order his life by the rule of true reason, a frugal subsistence joined to a contented mind is for him great riches, for never is there any lack of a little. But men desire to be famous and powerful in order that their fortunes might rest on a firm foundation, and that they might be able by their wealth to lead a tranquil life. This is in vain, since their struggle to mount up to the heights of power renders their path full of danger. Even if they reach it, envy, like a thunderbolt, strikes men from the summit and dashes them down with ignominy into the roar of Tartarus. The highest summits, and those elevated above other things, are often blasted by envy as if by a thunderbolt, so it is better it is to obey in peace and quiet than to wish to rule with supreme power and be the master of kingdoms. Therefore let such men wear themselves out to no purpose and sweat drops of blood as they struggle on along the road of ambition, since they gather their knowledge from the mouths of others and follow after hearsay, rather than following the dictates of their own feelings. This course does not prevail now, nor will it prevail in the future any more than it has prevailed in the past.

...

[1161] What cause has spread over great nations the worship of the gods, and filled the towns with altars? What cause has led to the performance of the sacred rites which are now in fashion, and which implant in mortals a shuddering awe to raise new temples to the gods over the whole earth, and to crowd them on festive days?

Even in earliest days the races of mortal men would see glorious forms while awake, and in sleep forms of yet more marvelous size of body. To these they would attribute life, because they seemed to move their limbs and to utter lofty words suitable to their glorious aspect and surpassing powers. And they attribute to them immortality, because their faces would continue to appear before them and their forms abide, and because they would not believe that beings possessed of such powers could be overcome by any force. And men believed them to be preeminent in bliss, because none of them was ever troubled by the fear of death, and because in sleep they would see them perform many miracles, yet feel no fatigue from the effort. And men would see the heaven and seasons of the years come around in regular succession, but could not find out the cause, and so they sought a refuge by handing over all things to the gods, and supposing all things to be guided by their approval. And men placed the abodes of the gods in heaven the sun, the clouds, the rains, the winds, and all things of that sort are seen to wander through the heavens

How unfortunate for men that they charged the gods with control of the universe and coupled with that power bitter wrath! What groanings did they then begot for themselves, what wounds for us, what tears for our children's children! It is no act of piety to be seen with veiled head, turning to a stone and approaching every altar, falling prostrate on the ground, spreading out the palms before the statues of the gods, sprinkling the altars with the blood of beasts, and linking vow on to vow. Rather, true piety is to be able to look on all things with a mind at peace.

When we turn our gaze on the heavens far above the glittering stars, and direct our thoughts to the courses of the sun and moon, into our hearts, burdened as they are with other ills, the fear of the gods enters, we begin to believe that the power of the gods is unlimited, and that they wheel the stars about in their varied motions. This is because the lack of power to solve the question troubles the mind with doubts, and we wonder whether there was ever a birth-time of the world, and whether likewise there is to be any end, and how long the world can endure this strain of restless motion, or whether by the grace of the gods with an everlasting existence the world may glide on through eternity and defy the power of immeasurable ages.

Who is there whose mind does not shrink with fear of the gods, whose limbs do not cower in terror, when the earth rocks with the appalling thunderstroke and the roaring runs through the heavens? Do not peoples and nations quake, and are not proud monarchs smitten with fear of the gods, worrying that for some foul transgression or unrighteous word the time of final reckoning has arrived? When the fury of the wind passes over the sea and sweeps over its waters the commander of a fleet, along with his mighty legions and elephants, does he not vow to seek the mercy of

the gods and ask in prayer with fear and trembling for a lull in the gales and for favorable winds? Even so the commander asks in vain, for regardless of his prayers he is often is caught up in the furious hurricane and carried to the shoals of death. Constantly some hidden power seems to trample on human grandeur, and treads under its heel to make sport for itself the renowned rods and cruel axes. And when the whole earth rocks under their feet and towns tumble with the shock, is it any wonder that mortal men abase themselves and ascribe to the gods marvelous powers here on earth that are sufficient to govern all things?

....



## **Book VI – The Epicurean Path**

In days of legend, the renowned city of Athens first showed suffering men the use of corn-producing crop, and showed them a new model of life based on laws. Athens was also the first to bestow on man the sweetest solaces of existence, by giving birth to a man who showed himself gifted with great genius, who poured forth all knowledge from his truth-telling mouth, and whose glory, on account of his godlike discoveries, is spread abroad among men and reaches high as heaven even now that he is dead.

For this man saw that the things which men's needs demand for life had all been provided, and that life, so far as was possible, was placed on a sure footing. He saw that men were great in riches and honors and glory, and that they swelled with pride in the high reputation of their children. Yet he saw also that all these riches did not quiet men's hearts, and that their troubles plagued their lives with no respite, and that they were constrained to complain of their great distress. Seeing these things, he perceived that the vessel itself caused the corruption, and that by its corruption all the things that were gathered into it, however salutary, were spoiled. He saw that this was partly because the vessel was leaky and full of holes, so that it could never by any means be filled full, and partly because the vessel was befouled, so to speak, with a nauseous flavor that contaminated everything which it took in.

He therefore cleansed men's heart with true precepts, and showed the limit to lust and fear, and he explained the chief good toward which we all strive and the direct course by which we might arrive at it. He showed too what evils Nature allows to exist by chance or force in mortal affairs, and from which gates you must sally out to battle each one. Then he also proved that the melancholy tumbling billows of care that plague the hearts of man for the most part need not arise. For even as children are flurried and dread all things in the thick darkness, so we in the daylight fear at times things not a bit more to be dreaded than what children imagine and shudder at in the dark, and fancy to be real. This terror and darkness of mind must be dispelled, not by the rays of the sun and glittering shafts of day, but by the study of the law of Nature. And now the more eagerly I go on in my verses to complete the web of my design.

Since I have shown that the heavens had a birth and are mortal, and since I have unraveled most of all the things which must by nature go on within it, hear further what remains to be told.

Once more I will mount the illustrious chariot of the muses, and ascend to heaven to explain the true law of winds and storms, which men foolishly lay to the charge of the gods. I will tell how, when the winds are angry, they raise fierce tempests, and when there is a lull in their fury, how that anger is appeased, and how the omens presaged their fury have thus been appeased. I will at the same time explain all those other things which mortals observe upon earth and in heaven which abase their souls with fear of the gods. Such things weigh men down and press them to earth because ignorance of their causes constrain men to submit things to the empire of the gods, and to give over to the gods the kingdom of the universe.

For we observe that even those who have been rightly taught that the gods lead a life without care are carried back again into their old religious scruples, if they fear how all things are carried on overhead. Such men, poor wretches, take unto themselves hard taskmasters, whom they believe to be almighty, because they do not understand what can

be, and what cannot be, and on what principle each thing has its powers defined and its boundaries marked. And these men are led all the farther astray by blind reasoning.

Unless you drive from your mind with disgust all these things, and banish far from you all belief in things degrading to the gods and inconsistent with their peace, then holy gods, having their majesty lessened by you, will do you harm. This is not because the supreme power of the gods can be outraged and in their wrath will resolve to exact vengeance against you, but because you will fancy to yourself that they do send billows of wrath against you, even though in reality they enjoy full calm and peace. Nor will you be able to approach the altars of the gods with a calm heart, or will you be able to receive with tranquil peace of mind those images of the diving form which are carried from them into the minds of men. And what kind of life follows after this you may easily conceive.

But I write this poem in order that most truthful reason may drive these things far away from us. Though much has already gone forth from me, much still remains and has to be embellished in smooth-polished verses. I must speak of the law and sights of heaven that must be grasped; of storms and bright lightnings, and of what they do and from what cause they are carried along. All this has to be sung that you will not mark out the heaven into quarters and be startled and distracted on seeing from which of them the fires flash, or to which of the two halves those fires take themselves. I must show in what way the heavenly fires gained entrance within walled places, and how, it gets itself out from these. And so, muse Calliope, solace of men and joy of gods, do point out to me the course ahead as I race toward the white boundary-line of the final goal, that under thy guidance I may win the crown with great applause.

.....

#### END OF POEM



### Chapter 14. Epicureanism In A Pompeian Mosaic

The National Archaeological Museum of Naples contains a mosaic unearthed in Pompeii taken from what is known as the house of Marcus Vesonius Primus. This location is also identified as the “House cum workshop, I, 5, 2, triclinium,” and is thought to date from between 30 BC to 14 AD. The museum inscription reads in part:

*“This emblem was displayed in a triclinium and is one of the most striking for the clarity of its allegorical representation. ... The composition is surmounted by a level with a plumb line, the instrument used by masons to get their constructions straight and level. Below are ... death (the skull) below which are a butterfly (the soul) and a wheel .... On each side, suspended from the arms of the level and kept in perfect balance ... are the symbols of wealth and power on the left (the sceptre and purple) and poverty on the right (the beggar’s scrip and stick). The theme, like the skeletons on the silverware in the treasure of Boscoreale, was intended to remind diners of the fleeting nature of earthly fortunes.”*

Short of some future scholar uncovering an inscription confirming the purpose of the mosaic, there is no way for us to be sure of his intended meaning. Although we have no way to be sure we have the sanction of the artist, we can nevertheless readily make use of the mosaic to illustrate some of the most fundamental points of Epicurean philosophy. The following paragraphs provide a proposed description of each numbered element of the mosaic:

(1) Nature revolves in a cycle like a wheel, within limits that are firmly established and unchanging, just as the motion of the rim of a wheel is determined by its spokes and its center. It is neither Gods, nor Fortune, nor Fate, but Nature which provides the foundation and laws by which the universe revolves and on which all of Life and Death rest. Just as the spokes of the wheel alternate with empty space, all that exists is made up of Matter possessing a distinct existence that is fixed by Nature, and Void, or empty space, in which Matter exists and through which it travels. Nothing exists anywhere except Natural combinations of empty space and elemental things with a

distinct existence fixed by Nature.<sup>101</sup>

(2) From Nature springs Life, like a butterfly, beautiful and fleeting. Life is by Nature happy so long as we are without pain, and we achieve happiness and avoid pain by living wisely, honestly, and justly. Living wisely requires that we study, learn, and follow the eternal laws of Nature which govern the universe. Among those laws it is urgent to remember that life is temporary and will one day end in Death.<sup>102</sup>

(3) Death marks the end of Life, but brings no pain, and its face smiles at us as the end of all our troubles. Life is short in comparison to Death, but Death is not to be feared because Death is established by Nature just as is Life. Death is the end of all our awareness, and the infinity of time after our death concerns us no more than does the infinity of time that passed before our birth.<sup>103</sup>

(4) The Architect's Level is a tool by which we compare one thing against another and evaluate whether those things are true. We establish all knowledge by comparing those things which are unclear against those things for which we already have a clear view. Nature equips us with a competent tool by which to evaluate reality. The three corners of that tool are the Five Bodily Senses, the Sense of Pain and Pleasure, and the Sense of Anticipations. All sensations provide true information, but only if each corner is employed together and in accord with Nature are our conclusions correct.<sup>104</sup>

(5 and 6) The spear, the purple robe, and the insignia of wealth and power are seen to be of equal stature – no greater and no lesser – than the poor man's staff, blanket, and rope. The Architect's level provides a clear view of this reality because its weight points to Nature, Life, and Death. In this manner we evaluate all that is relevant to us so that we may view it clearly in the light of the law of Nature.<sup>105</sup>

# The Nature of Things



## Chapter 15. Appendix

### Diogenes Laertius – The Life of Epicurus

Epicurus was an Athenian, and the son of Neocles and Chaerestrates, of the deme of Gargettus, and of the family of the Philaidae, as Metrodorus tells us in his treatise on Nobility of Birth. Some writers, and among them Heraclides, in his Abridgment of Sotion, say that as the Athenians had colonized Samos, he was brought up there, and came to Athens in his eighteenth year, while Xenocrates was president of the Academy, and Aristotle at Chalcis. But after the death of Alexander the Macedonian, when the Athenians were driven out of Samos by Perdiccas, Epicurus went to Colophon to his father.

And when he had spent some time there, and collected some disciples, he again returned to Athens, in the year of Anaxicrates, and for some time studied philosophy, mingling with the rest of the philosophers; but subsequently, he somehow or other established the school which was called after his name; and he used to say, that he began to study philosophy when he was fourteen years of age; but Apollodorus the Epicurean, in the first book of his account of the life of Epicurus, says, that he came to the study of philosophy, having conceived a great contempt for the grammarians, because they could not explain to him the statements in Hesiodus respecting Chaos.

But Hermippus tells us, that he himself was a teacher of grammar, and that afterwards, having come across the books of Democritus, he applied himself with zeal to philosophy, on which account Timon says of him: –

*The last of all the natural philosophers, And the most shameless too, did come from Samos, A grammar teacher, and the most ill-bred And most unmanageable of mankind.*

And he had for his companions in his philosophical studies, his three brothers, Neocles, Chaeredemus, and Aristobulus, who were excited by his exhortations, as Philodemus the Epicurean relates in the tenth book of the Classification of Philosophers. He had also a slave, whose name was Inus, as Myronianus tells us in his Similar Historical Chapters.

But Diotimus the Stoic was very hostile to him, and calumniated him in a most bitter manner, publishing fifty obscene letters, and attributing them to Epicurus, and also giving him the credit of the letters, which generally go under the name of Chrysippus. And Poseidonius the Stoic, and Nicolaus, and Sotion, in the twelfth of these books, which are entitled the Refutations of Diocles, of which there are altogether twenty-four volumes, and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, have also attacked him with great severity; for they say that he used to accompany his mother when she went about the small cottages, performing purification, and that he used to read the formula, and that he used also to keep a school with his father at very low terms. Also, that he, as well as one of his brothers, was a most profligate man in his morals, and that he used to live with Leontium, the courtesan. Moreover, that he claimed the books of Democritus on Atoms, and that of Aristippus on Pleasure, as his own; and that he was not a legitimate citizen; and this last fact is asserted also by Timocrates, and by Herodotus, in his treatises on the Youth of Epicurus.

They also say that he used to flatter Mithras, the steward of Lysimachus, in a disgraceful manner, calling him in his letters Paeon, and King; and also that he flattered Idomeneus, and Herodotus, and Timocrates who had revealed all his secret practices, and that he flattered them on this very account. And in his letter to Leontium, he says, “O lord Paeon, my dear Leontium, what transports of joy did I feel when I read your charming letter.” And to Themista, the wife of Leonteus, he writes, “I am ready and prepared, if you do not come to me, to roll myself to wherever you and Themista invite me.” And he addresses Pythocles, a beautiful youth, thus, “I will sit quiet,” says he, “awaiting your longed-for and god-like approach.” And at another time, writing to Themista, he says, “That he had determined to make his way with her,” as Theodorus tells us in the fourth book of his treatises against Epicurus.

He also wrote to many other courtesans, and especially to Leontium, with whom Metrodorus also was in love. And in his treatise on the Chief Good, he writes thus, “For I do not know what I can consider good, if I put out of sight the pleasures which arise from flavors, and those which are derived from amatory pleasures, and from music and from the contemplation of beauty.” And in his letter to Pythocles, he writes, “Set sail, my dear boy, and avoid all

sorts of education.”

Epicetetus also attacks him as a most debauched man, and reproaches him most vehemently, and so does Timocrates, the brother of Metrodorus, in his treatise entitled the Merry Guests, and this Timocrates had been a disciple in his school, though he afterwards abandoned it; and he says that he used to vomit twice a day, in consequence of his intemperance; and that he himself had great difficulty in escaping from this nocturnal philosophy, and that mystic kind of association.

He also accuses Epicurus of shameful ignorance in his reasoning, and still more especially in all matters relating to the conduct of life. And says that he was in a pitiable state of health, so that he could not for many years rise up from his sofa; and that he used to spend a mina a day on his eating, as he himself states in his letter to Leontium, and in that to the philosophers at Mitylene. He also says that many courtesans used to live with him and Metrodorus; and among them Marmarium, and Hedeia, and Erotium, and Iridium.

And in the thirty-seven books which he wrote about natural philosophy, they say that he says a great many things of the same kind over and over again, and that in them he writes in contradiction of other philosophers, and especially of Nausiphanes, and speaks as follows, word for word: “But let them be gone. For this man had a continual labor, striving to bring forth the sophistical boastfulness of his mouth, like many other slaves.”

And Epicurus also speaks of Nausiphanes in his letters, in the following terms: “These things led him on to such arrogance of mind, that he abused me and called me a schoolmaster.” He used also to call him Lungs, and Blockhead, and Humbug, and Fornicator. And he used to call Plato’s followers Flatterers of Dionysius, but Plato himself he called Golden. Aristotle he called a debauchee and a glutton, saying that he joined the army after he had squandered his patrimony, and sold drugs. He used to call Protagoras a porter, and the secretary of Democritus, and to say that he taught boys their letters in the streets. Heraclitus, he called a disturber; Democritus, he nicknamed Lerocrates; and Antidorus, Samidorus; the Cynics he called the enemies of Greece; and the Dialecticians he charged with being eaten up with envy. Pyrrhon, he said, was ignorant and unlearned.

But these men who say this are all wrong, for there are plenty of witnesses of the unsurpassable kindness of the man to everybody; both his own country which honored him with brazen statues, and his friends who are so numerous that they could not be counted in whole cities; and all his acquaintances who were bound to him by nothing but the charms of his doctrine, none of whom ever deserted him, except Metrodorus, the son of Stratonicus, who went over to Carneades, probably because he was not able to bear with equanimity the unapproachable excellence of Epicurus. Also, the perpetual succession of his school, which, when every other school decayed, continued without any falling off, and produced a countless number of philosophers, succeeding one another without any interruption. We may also speak here of his gratitude towards his parents, and his kindness to his brothers, and his gentleness to his servants (as is plain from his will, and from the fact too, that they united with him in his philosophical studies, and the most eminent of them was the one whom I have mentioned already, named Inus); and his universal philanthropy towards all men.

His piety towards the gods, and his affection for his country was quite unspeakable; though, from an excess of modesty, he avoided affairs of the state. And though he lived when very difficult times oppressed Greece, he still remained in his own country, only going two or three times across to Ionia to see his friends, who used to throng to him from all quarters, and to live with him in his garden, as we are told by Apollodorus (this garden he bought for eighty minae).

And Diocles, in the third book of his Overview, says that they all lived in the most simple and economical manner; “They were content,” says he, “with a small cup of light wine, and all the rest of their drink was water.” He also tells us that Epicurus would not allow his followers to throw their property into a common stock, as Pythagoras did, who said that the possessions of friends were held in common. For he said that such a doctrine as that was suited rather for those who distrusted one another; and that those who distrusted one another were not friends. But he himself in his letters, says that he is content with water and plain bread, and adds, “Send me a cup, so that if I wish to have a feast, I may have the means.” This was the real character of the man who laid down the doctrine that pleasure was the chief good; who Athenaeus thus mentions in an epigram:

O men, you labor for pernicious ends;  
And out of eager avarice, begin  
Quarrels and wars. And yet the wealth of Nature  
Fixes a narrow limit for desires,  
Though empty judgment is insatiable.  
This lesson the wise child of Neocles  
Had learned by ear, instructed by the Muses,  
Or at the sacred shrine of Delphi's God.

And as we advance further, we shall learn this fact from his dogmas, and his maxims. Of all the ancient philosophers he was, as we are told by Diocles, most attached to Anaxagoras (although on some points he argued against him); and to Archelaus, the master of Socrates. And, Diocles adds, he used to accustom his pupils to preserve his writings in their memory. Apollodorus, in his Chronicles, asserts that he was a pupil of Nausiphanes, and Praxiphanes; but he himself does not mention this; but says in his letter to Eurylochus, that he had been his own instructor. He also agreed with Hermarchus in not admitting that Leucippus deserved to be called a philosopher; though some authors, among whom is Apollodorus, speak of him as the master of Democritus. Demetrius the Magnesian says that he was a pupil of Xenocrates also.

He uses plain language in his works with respect to anything he is speaking of, for which Aristophanes, the grammarian, blames him, on the ground of that style being vulgar. But he was such an admirer of perspicuity, that even in his treatise on Rhetoric, he aims at and recommends nothing but clearness of expression.

And in his letters, instead of the usual civil expressions, "Greeting," "Farewell," and so on, he substitutes, "May you act well," "May you live virtuously," and expressions of that sort. Some of his biographers assert that it was he who composed the treatise entitled the Canon, in imitation of the Tripod of Nausiphanes, whose pupil they say that he was, and add that he was also a pupil of Pamphilus, the Platonist at Samos.

They further tell us that he began to study philosophy at twelve years of age, and that he presided over his school thirty-two years. And he was born as we are told by Apollodorus, in his Chronicles, in the third year of the hundred and ninth Olympiad, in the archonship of Sosigenes, on the seventh day of the month Gamelion, seven years after the death of Plato. And when he was thirty-two years of age, he first set up his school at Mitylene, and after that at Lampsacus; and when he had spent five years in these two cities, he came to Athens; and he died there in the second year of the hundred and twenty-seventh Olympiad, in the archonship of Pytharatus, when he had lived seventy-two years. And Hermarchus, the son of Agemarchus, and a citizen of Mitylene, succeeded him in his school.

He died of the stone, as Hermarchus mentions in his letters, after having been ill a fortnight; and at the end of the fortnight, Hermippus says that he went into a brazen bath, properly tempered with warm water, and asked for a cup of pure wine and drank it; and having recommended his friends to remember his doctrines, he expired. And there is an epigram of ours on him, couched in the following language:

"Now, farewell, remember all my words;"

This was the dying charge of Epicurus.

Then to the bath he went, and drank some wine,

And sank beneath the cold embrace of Hades.

Such was the life of the man, and such was his death.

## **The Will of Epicurus**

And he made his will in the following terms:

According to this, my will, I give all my possessions to Amynomachus, of Bate, the son of Philocrates, and to Timocrates, of Potamos, the son of Demetrius; according to the deed of gift to each, which is deposited in the Metroium; on condition that they make over my garden and all that is attached to it to Hermarchus, of Mitylene, the son of Agemortus; and to those who study philosophy with him, and to whomsoever Hermarchus leaves as his successors in his school, that they may abide and dwell in it, in the study and practice of philosophy; and I give it also to all those who study philosophy according to my doctrines, that they may, to the best of their ability, maintain my school which exists in my garden, in concert with Amynomachus and Timocrates; and I enjoin their heirs to do the same in the most perfect and secure manner that they can; so that they also may maintain my garden, as those also shall to whom my immediate successors hand it down. As for the house in Melita, that Amynomachus and Timocrates shall allow Hermarchus that he may live in it during his life, together with all his companions in philosophy.

Out of the income which is derived from that property, which is here bequeathed by me to Amynomachus and Timocrates, I will that they, consulting with Hermarchus, shall arrange in the best manner possible the offerings to the names in honor of the memory of my father, and mother, and brothers, and myself, and that my birthday may be kept as it has been in the habit of being kept, on the tenth day of the month Gamelion; and that the reunion of all the philosophers of our school, established in honor of Metrodorus and myself, may take place on the twentieth day of every month. They shall also celebrate, as I have been in the habit of doing myself, the day consecrated to my brothers, in the month Poseideon; and the day consecrated to memory of Polyaeus, in the month Metageitnion.

Amynomachus and Timocrates shall be the guardians of Epicurus, the son of Metrodorus, and of the son of Polyaeus, as long as they study philosophy under, and live with Hermarchus. In the same way also, they shall be the guardians of the daughter of Metrodorus, and when she is of marriageable age, they shall give her to whomsoever Hermarchus shall select of his companions in philosophy, provided she is well behaved and obedient to Hermarchus. And Amynomachus and Timocrates shall, out of my income, give them such a sum for their support as shall appear sufficient year by year, after due consultation with Hermarchus.

And they shall associate Hermarchus with themselves in the management of my revenues, in order that everything may be done with the approval of that man who has grown old with me in the study of philosophy, and who is now left as the president of all those who have studied philosophy with us. And as for the dowry for the girl when she is come to marriageable age, let Amynomachus and Timocrates arrange that, taking for the purpose such a sum from my property as shall seem to them, in conjunction with Hermarchus, to be reasonable.

And let them also take care of Nicanor, as we ourselves have done; in order that all those who have studied philosophy with us, and who have assisted us with their means, and who have shown great friendship for us, and who have chosen to grow old with us in the study of philosophy, may never be in want of anything as far as our power to prevent it may extend. I further enjoin them to give all my books to Hermarchus; and, if anything should happen to Hermarchus before the children of Metrodorus are grown up, then I desire that Amynomachus and Timocrates, shall take care that, provided they are well behaved, they shall have everything that is necessary for them, as far as the estate which I leave behind me shall allow such things to be furnished to them. And the same men shall also take care of everything else that I have enjoined; so that it may all be fulfilled, as far as the case may permit. Of my slaves, I hereby emancipate Mys, and Nicias, and Lycon: I also give Phaedrium her freedom.

And when he was at the point of death, he wrote the following letter to Idomeneus:

## Letter to Idomeneus

We have written this letter to you on a happy day to us, which is also the last day of our life. For stranguary has attacked me, and also a dysentery, so violent that nothing can be added to the violence of my sufferings. But the cheerfulness of my mind, which arises from there collection of all my philosophical contemplation, counterbalances all these afflictions. And I beg you to take care of the children of Metrodorus, in a manner worth of the devotion shown by the youth to me, and to philosophy.

Such then as I have given it, was his will.

He had a great number of pupils, of whom the most eminent included Metrodorus, the son of Athenaeus or Timocrates and Sande, of Lampsacus; who, from the time that he first became acquainted with him, never left him, except one when he went home for six months, after which he returned to him.

And he was a virtuous man in every respect, as Epicurus tells us in his Fundamental Principles. And he also bears witness to his virtue in the third book of his Timocrates. And being a man of this character, he gave his sister Batis in marriage to Idomeneus; and he himself had Leontium, the Attic courtesan, for his concubine. He was very unmoved at all disturbances, and even at death; as Epicurus tells us, in the first book of his Metrodorus. He is said to have died seven years before Epicurus himself, in the fifty-third year of his age. And Epicurus himself, in the will which I have given above, gives many charges about the guardianship of his children, showing by this that he had been dead some time. He also had a brother whom I have mentioned before, of the name of Timocrates, a trifling, silly man.

Engraving of a Bust of Metrodorus  
as found in Herculaneum.

The writings of Metrodorus are  
these:

three books addressed to Physicians;

one essay on the Sensations;

one addressed to Timocrates;

one on Magnanimity;

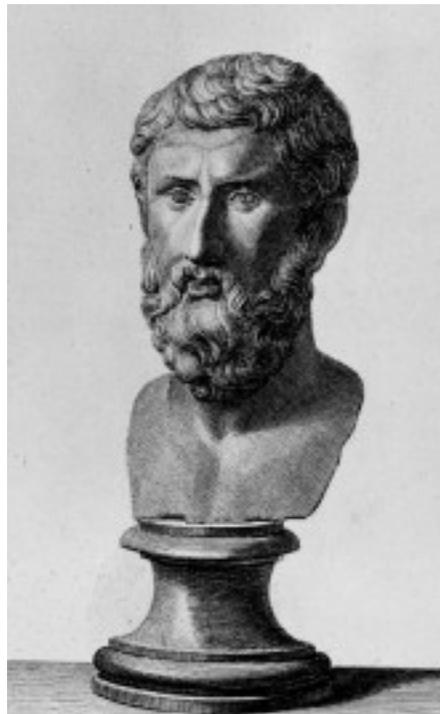
one on the Illness of Epicurus;

one addressed to the Dialecticians;

nine books against the Sophists;

one on the Road to Wisdom;

one on Change;



one on Riches;

one against Democritus;

one on Nobility of Birth.

Likewise Polyaeus, of Lampsacus, the son of Athenodorus, was a man of mild and friendly manners, as Philodemus particularly assures us.

And his successor was Hermarchus, of Mitylene, the son of Agemortus (a poor man), whose favorite pursuit was rhetoric. And the following excellent works of his are extant:

twenty-two books of letters about Empedocles;

an essay on Mathematics;

a treatise against Plato;

another against Aristotle.

And he died of paralysis, being a most eminent man.

Engraving of a Bust of Hermarchus  
as found in Herculaneum.

There was also Leonteus, of Lampsacus, and his wife Themista, to whom Epicurus wrote.

There were also Colotes and Idomeneus; and these also were natives of Lampsacus. And among the most eminent philosophers of the school of Epicurus, were Polystratus, who succeeded Hermarchus, and Dionysius who succeeded him, and Basileides who succeeded him. Likewise Apollodorus, who was nicknamed the tyrant of the garden, was a very eminent man, and wrote more than four hundred books. And



there were the two Ptolemaei of Alexandria, Ptolemaeus the Black, and Ptolemaeus the Fair. And Zenon of Sidon, a pupil of Apollodorus, a very voluminous author; and Demetrius, who was surnamed the Laconian; and Diogenes of Tarsus, who wrote the Select Dialogues; and Orion, and others whom the genuine Epicureans call Sophists.

There were also three other persons of the name of Epicurus; first, the son of Leonteus and Themista; secondly, a native of Magnesia; and lastly, a gladiator.

And Epicurus was a most voluminous author, exceeding all men in the number of his books; for there are more than three hundred volumes of them; and in the whole of them there is not one citation from other sources, but they are

filled wholly with the sentiments of Epicurus himself. In the quantity of his writings he was rivaled by Chrysippus, as Carneades asserts, who calls him a parasite of the books of Epicurus; for if ever this latter wrote anything, Chrysippus immediately set his heart on writing a book of equal size; and in this way he often wrote the same thing over again; putting down whatever came into his head; and he published it all without any corrections, by reason of his haste. And he quotes such numbers of testimonies from other authors, that his books are entirely filled with them alone; as one may find also in the works of Aristotle and Zenon.

Such then, so numerous are the works of Epicurus; the chief of which are the following:

thirty-seven treatises on Natural Philosophy;  
one on Atoms and the Void;  
one on Love;  
an abridgment of the Arguments employed against the Natural Philosophers;  
one against the Doctrines of the Megarians;  
Problems;  
Fundamental Propositions;  
a treatise on Choice and Avoidance;  
another on the Chief Good;  
another on the Criterion, called also the Canon;  
*Chaeridemus*, a treatise on the Gods;  
one on Piety;  
Hegesianax  
four essays on Lives;  
one on Just Dealing;  
Neocles;  
one essay addressed to Themista;  
the Banquet;  
Eurylochus;  
one essay addressed to Metrodorus;  
one on Seeing;  
one on the Angle in an Atom;  
one on Touch;  
one on Fate;  
Opinions on the Passions;  
one treatise addressed to Timocrates;  
Prognostics;  
Exhortations;  
a treatise on Images;  
one on Perceptions;  
Aristobulus;  
an essay on Music;  
one on Justice and the other Virtues;  
one on Gifts and Gratitude;  
Polymedes;  
*Timocrates*, a treatise in three books;  
*Metrodorus*, in five books;  
*Antidorus*, in two books;  
Opinions about Diseases, addressed to Mithras;  
Callistolas;  
an essay on Kingly Power;  
Anaximenes;  
Letters.

And I will endeavor to give an abridgment of the doctrines contained in these works, as it may be agreeable, quoting three letters of his, in which is the epitome of all his philosophy. I will also give his fundamental and peculiar

opinions, and any adages which he uttered which appear worthy of being selected, so that you may be thoroughly acquainted with the man, and may also judge that I understand him.

Now the first letter is one that he wrote to Herodotus, on the subject of Natural Philosophy; the second is one that he wrote to Pythocles, which is about the Heavenly Bodies; the third is addressed to Menoeceus, in which there are discussions about how to live.

We must now begin with the first, after having said a little by way of preface concerning the divisions of philosophy which he adopted.

Now he divides philosophy into three parts. The canonical, the physical, and the ethical. The canonical, which serves as an introduction to knowledge, is contained in the single treatise which is called the Canon. The physical embraces the whole range of speculation on subjects of natural philosophy, and is contained in the thirty-seven books on Nature, and in the letters again it is discussed in an elementary manner. The ethical contains the discussions of Choice and Avoidance; and is comprised in the books about lives, and in some of the Letters, and in the treatise of the Chief Good. Accordingly, most people are in the habit of combining the canonical divisions with the physical; and then they designate the whole under the names of the criterion of the truth, and a discussion of principles, and elements. And they say that the physical division is concerned with production, and destruction, and Nature; and that the ethical division has reference to the objects of choice and avoidance, and lives, and the chief good of mankind.

Dialectics they wholly reject as superfluous. For they say that the correspondence of words with things is sufficient for the natural philosopher to enable him to advance with certainty in the study of Nature.

Now, in the Canon, Epicurus says that the criteria of truth are the senses, and the preconceptions, and the passions. But the Epicureans, in general, add also the perceptive impressions of the intellect. And he says the same thing in his Abridgment, which he addresses to Herodotus, and also in his Fundamental Principles. For, says he, the senses are devoid of reason, nor are they capable of receiving any impressions of memory. For they are not by themselves the cause of any motion, and when they have received any impression from any external cause, then they can add nothing to it, nor can they subtract anything from it. Moreover, they are out of the reach of any control; for one sensation cannot judge of another which resembles itself; for they have all an equal value. Nor can one judge of another which is different from itself; since their objects are not identical. In other words, one sensation cannot control another, since the effects of all of them influence us equally. Again, Reason cannot pronounce on the senses; for we have already said that all reasoning has the senses for its foundation. Reality and the evidence of sensation establish the certainty of the senses; for the impressions of sight and hearing are just as real, just as evident, as pain.

It follows from these considerations that we ought to judge of things which are obscure by their analogy to those which we perceive directly. In fact, every notion proceeds from the senses, either directly, or in consequence of some analogy, or proportion, or combination, reasoning having always a share in these last operations. The visions of insanity and of sleep have a real object for they act upon us; and that which has no reality can produce no action.

By preconception, the Epicureans meant a sort of comprehension as it were, or right opinion, or notion, or general idea which exists in us; or, in other words, the recollection of an external object often perceived beforehand. Such for instance, is the idea: "Man is being of such and such Nature." At the same moment that we utter the word man, we conceive the figure of a man, in virtue of a preconception which we owe to the preceding operations of the senses. Therefore, the first notion which each word awakens in us is a correct one. In fact, we could not seek for anything if we had not previously some notion of it. To enable us to affirm that what we see at a distance is a horse or an ox, we must have some preconception in our minds which makes us acquainted with the form of a horse and an ox. We could not give names to things, if we had not preliminary notion of what the things were.

These preconceptions then furnish us with certainty. And with respect to judgments, their certainty depends on our referring them to some previous notion, of itself certain, in virtue of which we affirm such and such a judgment; for instance, "How do we know whether this thing is a man?"

The Epicureans also refer to 'opinion' as supposition, and say that it is at times true, and at times false. For that which is supported by evidence and not contradicted by evidence is true; but if it is not supported by evidence, and

is contradicted by evidence, then it is false. On which account they have introduced the expression of “waiting,” as when, before pronouncing that a thing seen is a tower, we must wait till we come near, and learn what it looks like when we are near it.

They say that there are two passions, pleasure and pain, which affect everything alive. And that the one is natural, and the other foreign to our Nature; with reference to which all objects of choice and avoidance are judged of. They say also, that there are two kinds of investigation; the one about facts, the other about mere words. And this is as far as an elementary sketch can go – their doctrine about division, and about the criterion.

Let us now go to his letter:

## **Letter to Herodotus**

Epicurus to Herodotus, wishing he may do well.

For those, Herodotus, who are not able accurately to comprehend all the things which I have written about Nature, nor able to investigate those larger books which I have composed on the subject, I have made an abridgment of the whole discussion on this question as far as I thought sufficient to enable them to recollect accurately the most fundamental points. I have done this so that on all occasions, they might be able to assist themselves on the most important and undeniable principles to the extent that they devote themselves to studies on natural philosophy. And here it is necessary for those who have made sufficient progress in their overview of the general question, to recall the principles laid down as elements of the entire discussion. For we have a greater need of a correct understanding of the whole than we have of the details. We must therefore give preference to the knowledge we have already acquired, and lay up in our memory those principles on which we may rest, in order that we may arrive at an exact perception and a certain knowledge of things.

Now, one has arrived at the point of certain knowledge when one has thoroughly embraced the concept, and if I may so express myself, the most essential forms, and when one has impressed them adequately on one’s senses. For the clear and precise knowledge of the whole, taken together, necessarily facilitates one’s perceptions of particulars, when one has brought one’s ideas back to the elements and the fundamental terms. In short, a true synthesis, comprising the entire circle of the phenomena of the universe, ought to be able to encompass in itself, and in a few words, all the particular facts which have been previously studied. This method is useful even to those who are already familiarized with the laws of the universe, and I recommend that they make a concise statement or summary of their opinions, while still pursuing without intermission the study of Nature, which contributes more than anything else to the tranquility and happiness of life.

First of all then, Herodotus, one must determine with exactness the concept which is comprehended under each separate word, in order to be able to refer to that concept, as to a certain criterion. To these conceptions, which emanate from ourselves, we refer back as we examine our greatest researches and difficulties; otherwise our judgment has no foundation. One’s understanding goes on from demonstration to demonstration ad infinitum; or else one gains nothing beyond mere words. In fact, it is absolutely necessary that we should perceive directly, and without the assistance of any demonstration, the fundamental concept which every word expresses. We must do this, if we wish to have any foundation to which we may refer our researches, our difficulties, and our personal judgments. And we must take care to perceive these concepts clearly using whatever criterion which we employ, whether we take as our standard the particular impressions produced on our senses, or the actual impression as a general concept; or whether we cling to the idea by itself, or whether we employ any other criterion.

We must also note carefully the impressions which we receive when we are in the very presence of objects. We must do this in order that we may identify that point in the examination where we find it necessary to reserve judgment as to the truth of a matter, especially when the question is about things of which we do not have immediately perceptible to us sufficient evidence to form a clear determination on the matter.

When these foundations are once laid, we may pass to the study of those things about which the evidence is not immediately clear to us. [On questions such as this there are a number of fundamental principles of nature which we must keep in mind:]

First of all, we must admit that nothing can come from that which does not exist. Were this fact otherwise, then everything would be produced from everything, and there would be no need of any first beginning, or seed.

Second, if that which disappeared were so absolutely destroyed as to become non-existent, then everything would soon perish, as the things into which they would be dissolved would have no existence.

As a result of these first two principles, we conclude that the universe as a whole has always been such as it now is and always will be such. For there is nothing into which the universe can change, and there is nothing beyond the universal whole which can penetrate into the universal whole and produce any change in it.<sup>1</sup>

Next, we observe that everything that exists in the universe is formed from bodies that have a material existence of some kind. We know this because our senses bear us witness in every case that bodies have a real existence, and the evidence of the senses, as I have said before, ought to be the rule of our reasoning about everything, even that which we are not able to perceive directly. We also consider that that which we call the void, or space, or intangible Nature, has a real existence, as otherwise there would be nothing on which the bodies could be contained, or across which they could move, as we see that they really do move. As a result of these observations we conclude that one cannot conceive, either through human perception, or through any analogy founded on perception, any general quality of things which is not either an attribute, or an incident of material things or empty space, which we call matter and void.<sup>2</sup>

Now, of material things, some single elements, and others are formed of combinations of elements. The elements are indivisible, and thus are impervious to any kind of transformation; if this were not so everything would eventually dissolve into non-existence. The elements exist by their own nature, even though the combined bodies which they compose change and dissolve, because the elements are absolutely solid, and as such they offer no point through which any destructive force can enter. It follows, therefore, as a matter of absolute necessity, that the fundamental material of the universe must be composed of elements that are themselves indivisible.

The universe is boundless. We know this because that which is bounded has an extreme point, and that which has an extreme point is looked at in relationship to something else. Consequently, that which does not have an extreme point has no boundary. And if it has no boundary, it must be infinite, and not terminated by any limit. The universe then is infinite, both in regard to the quantity of matter from which it is made up, and to the magnitude of the void. For if the void were infinite, and the amount of matter was finite, then the matter would not be able to rest in any place. The elements of the universe would be transported about, scattered across the infinite void, lacking any power to steady itself, or to keep one another in their places by mutual repulsion. If, on the other hand, the void were finite, while the amount of the matter was infinite, then the elements clearly could never be contained in the void.

Again: the atoms within the combined bodies, and these solid elements from which the combined bodies come, and into which they resolve themselves, assume an incalculable variety of forms. This must be so because the numerous differences which the bodies present to us cannot possibly result from an aggregate of the same forms. Each type of form that we observe contains an innumerable number of atoms, but there is not for that reason an infinity of atoms; it is only that their number is beyond all calculation.<sup>3</sup>

The atoms are in a continual state of motion.<sup>4</sup> Among these atoms, some are separated by great distances, but others

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<sup>1</sup> (And Epicurus establishes the same principles at the beginning of the Great Abridgment; and in the first book of his treatise on Nature.)

<sup>2</sup> (The same principles are laid down in the first, and fourteenth, and fifteenth book of the treatise on Nature; and also in the Great Abridgment.)

<sup>3</sup> (Epicurus adds, a little lower down, that divisibility, ad infinitum, is impossible; for says he, the only things which change are the qualities; unless, indeed one wishes to proceed from division to division, till one arrives absolutely at infinite smallness.)

<sup>4</sup> (He says, farther on, that they move with an equal rapidity from all eternity, since the void offers no more

come very near to one another in the formations of combined bodies, or at times they are enveloped by others which are combining. However, in this latter case, they nevertheless preserve their own peculiar motion, thanks to the Nature of the void which separates the one from the other, and yet offers them no resistance. The solidity which they possess causes them, while knocking against one another, to react one upon the other; till at last the repeated shocks bring on the dissolution of the combined body. For all this there is no external cause, the only cause is the fundamental nature of the atoms and the void.<sup>5</sup>

Further, the number of worlds are also infinite, whether they resemble this one of ours or whether they are different from it. For the atoms are, as to their number, infinite, as I have shown above, and they necessarily move about at immense distances. The infinite multitude of atoms of the universe from which this world is formed, or by which it is produced, could not be entirely absorbed by one single world, nor even by any finite number of worlds, whether we suppose all those worlds to be like our own, or different from it. We see that there is therefore no fact inconsistent with there being an infinity of worlds.

Moreover, we observe that there exist what we call images that resemble, as far as their form goes, the solid bodies which we see, but which differ materially from them in the thinness of their substance. In fact it is not impossible but that there may be in space images that form surfaces without depth, of an extreme thinness. It is also possible that from the solid matter there may emanate some particles which preserve the connection, the disposition, and the motion which they had in the solid body. I give the name of images to these representations; and indeed, their movement through the void takes place without meeting any obstacle or hindrance. These images traverse all imaginable distances in an inconceivable moment of time; for it is the meeting of obstacles, or the absence of obstacles, which produces the rapidity or the slowness of their motion. At any event, a body in motion does not find itself, no matter how fast it is traveling, in two places at the same time, as that is quite inconceivable. From what ever point within the infinite universe it arrives at any appreciable moment, and whatever may be the spot in its course in which we perceive its motion, it has evidently quitted that spot at the moment of our thought. This is because the motion of the images in space, as we have shown up to this point, encounters no obstacle to its rapidity, and it is wholly in the same condition as it would be if its rapidity had been diminished by the shock of some resistance.

It is useful to retain this principle in our studies, and to know that the images have an incomparable thinness. This fact is in no respect contradicted by the evidence of our senses. From this it also follows that the rapidity of movement of the images is incomparable; for they find everywhere an easy passage, and their minuteness causes them to experience no shock, or at any event only a very slight one, where a multitude of elements would very soon encounter significant resistance.

One must not forget that the production of images is continuous; for from the surface of the bodies images of this kind are continually flowing off in a manner too fast for our senses to apprehend, because they are immediately replaced. They preserve for a long time the same disposition and the same arrangement that the atoms do in the solid body, although their form may be sometimes altered. The direct production of images in space is equally instantaneous, because these images are only light substances that lack any depth.

[As we consider phenomena such as the nature of sight and images], we may consider that there may be [various] other manners in which phenomena of this kind are produced, but we must allow nothing in these other possibilities which at all contradicts the senses, and we must consider in what way the senses are exercised and the relationship that is established between external objects and ourselves. In this inquiry, one must admit that something passes over from external objects to us in order to produce in us sight and the knowledge of forms, for it is difficult to conceive that external objects can affect us through the medium of the air which is between us and them, or by means of emissions that proceed from us to them, and still give us an impression of their form and color. This

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resistance to the lightest than it does to the heaviest.)

<sup>5</sup> (He says, further on, that the atoms have no peculiar quality of their own, except from magnitude and weight. As to color, he says in the twelfth book of his Principia, that it varies according to the position of the atoms. Moreover, he does not attribute to the atoms any kind of dimensions; and accordingly, no atom has ever been perceived by the senses; but this expression, if people only recollect what is here said, will by itself offer to the thoughts a sufficient image of the Nature of things.)

phenomenon, on the contrary, is perfectly explained if we admit that certain images of the same color, of the same shape, and of a proportionate magnitude pass from these objects to us, and so arrive at us, being seen and comprehended. These images travel at an exceedingly rapid speed, and the vision is continued so long as on the other side, the solid object, which forms a compact mass comprising a vast quantity of atoms, emits always the same quantity of particles. In this way the images produce in us one single perception which preserves always the same relation to the object. Every conception we form, every sensible perception we receive which bears upon the form or the other attributes of these images, is only the same form of the solid object perceived directly, either in virtue of a sort of actual and continued condensation of the image, or in consequence of the traces which it has left in us.

This leads us to observe the possibility of error and false judgments, which always depend upon our supposing that a preconceived idea will be confirmed, or at any event will not be overturned, by additional evidence as we receive it. In those cases where our supposition is not confirmed, we form our judgments in virtue of a sort of initiation of thought which is connected with our perceptions, and with a direct representation from the object that we observe. In these cases of error, however, the connection is with a conception that is peculiar to ourselves, and this is the parent of error. In fact, the representations we receive from images are reflected by our intelligence like a mirror, whether those images are perceived in a dream or through any other conceptions of the mind or the senses. But these representations do not resemble the objects to the extent that we can call them real and true unless the objects that we are examining are perceived directly. Error arises when we do not perceive objects directly because in those situations we receive impressions which our intelligence connects with a direct representation, but which goes beyond a direct observation. These conceptions are connected with direct perception which produced the representation, but they go beyond the actual object in consequence of impressions that are peculiar to the individual making them. This results in error when the mental apprehension our minds reach is not confirmed by, or is contradicted by, additional evidence. When our mental apprehension is confirmed by additional evidence, or when it is not contradicted by additional evidence, then it produces truth.

We must carefully preserve these principles in order that we will not reject the authority of those of our faculties which perceive truth directly. We must also observe these principles so that we will not allow our minds to believe that what is false or what is speculative has been established with equal firmness with what is true, because this results in everything being thrown into confusion.

Moreover, hearing is produced by some sort of flow proceeding from something that speaks, or sounds, or roars, or in any manner causes any sort of audible circumstances. And this flow is diffused into small bodies which resemble one another in their parts, and which, preserve not only some kind of relation between one another, but even a sort of particular identity with the object from which they emanate. This process puts us, very frequently, into a communication of senses with this object, or at least causes us to become aware of the existence of some external circumstance. If these flows did not carry with them some sort of sympathy, then there would be no such perception. We must not therefore think that it is the air which receives a certain form, under the action of the voice or some other sound. For it is not possible that the voice should act in this manner on the air. But the percussion produced in us when we, by the utterance of a voice, cause a disengagement of certain particles, constitutes a flow resembling a light whisper, and prepares an acoustic sensation in us.

We must admit that the case of smelling is the same as that of hearing. There would be no sense of smell if there did not emanate from objects certain particles capable of producing an impression on the sense of smell. One class of smells is ill-suited to our sense of smell, and consequently producing a disordered response, the other class of smells suited to our senses, and causing it no distress.

One must also allow that the atoms possess none of the qualities of objects perceptible to our senses except form, weight, magnitude, and anything else that is unavoidably inherent in form. Every transient quality is changeable, but the atoms are necessarily unchangeable. This is because there must be in the dissolution of combined bodies something which continues solid and indestructible. Such basic material is of such a kind that it will not change either into what does not exist, or out of what does not exist; but combined bodies result either from a simple rearrangement of parts, or from the addition or subtraction of certain particles. It follows that those basic elements which do not admit of any change in themselves are imperishable, and participate in no respect in the nature of changeable things – In a word, these basic materials have their dimensions and forms immutable determined. And this is proved plainly enough, because even in the transformations which take place under our eyes in consequence of the removal of certain parts, we can still recognize the form of the constituent parts. In contrast, those qualities

which are not constituent parts do not remain like the form, but perish in the dissolution of the combination. The attributes which we have indicated are sufficient to explain all the differences of combined bodies, but in the basic materials must inevitably leave something indestructible, lest everything should resolve itself into non-existence.

However, one must not believe that every degree of magnitude exists in atoms, lest we find ourselves contradicted by what we observe. But we must observe that there are atoms of different magnitudes, because we may then more easily explain our impressions and sensations. In any event, I repeat, it is not necessary for the purpose of explaining the different qualities that we observe to attribute to the atoms every kind of magnitude.

We must not suppose either, that an atom can be so large as to become visible to us. First of all, we do not observe that this is the case. In addition, one cannot even conceive how an atom is to become visible; and we must not believe that in a finite body there are particles of every sort, infinite in number. Consequently, one must reject the doctrine of infinite divisibility into material that is smaller and smaller, lest we should be reducing everything to nothing, and find ourselves forced to admit that in a mass composed of a combination of elements, existence can reduce itself to non-existence.

But one cannot even suppose that a finite thing can be susceptible of transformation ad infinitum, or even of transformation into smaller objects than itself. Once one has said that there are in an object particles of every kind, and in infinite number, there is absolutely no means whatever of imagining that this object can have only a finite size. In fact, it is evident that these particles, though innumerable, have some kind of dimension or other. Whatever this dimension may be in other respects, the objects which are composed of them will have an infinite magnitude. As we examine forms which are determined and limits which are perceived by the senses, however, one conceives easily without it being necessary to study the question that objects composed of infinite material would be infinite in size. Consequently, one must come to look at every object composed of a finite number of elemental particles.

One must also admit that the most minute particle perceptible to the senses is neither absolutely like the objects which are susceptible of change nor absolutely different from them. Such an object has some characteristics in common with the object from which it was a part, but it also differs from them, inasmuch as it itself does not allow any distinct parts to be discerned within it. When then, in virtue of these common characteristics and of this resemblance, we wish to form an idea of the smallest particle perceptible by the senses, it is necessary that we should seize on some characteristic common to these different objects for our terms of comparison. In this way, we examine them successively, from the first to the last, not by themselves, but more as composed of parts in juxtaposition, but only in their extent. In other words, we consider the magnitudes by themselves, and in an abstract manner, inasmuch as they measure a greater or smaller extent. This analogy applies to the atom to the extent that we consider it as having the smallest dimensions possible. By evidence of its minuteness it differs from objects which are perceptible, but still this analogy is applicable to it. In a word, we establish by this comparison, that the atom really has some extent, but we exclude all perceptible dimensions for the sake of investing it with only the smallest proportions.

We may proceed further, taking for our guide the reasoning which discloses to us things which are invisible to the senses. We conclude that the most minute magnitudes, those which are not combinations of other magnitudes, are those which from the limit of our senses are the first measure of the other magnitudes, which are only called greater or lesser in their relation to the others. For these relations which they maintain with those particles which are not subject to transformation, we suffice it to give them this characteristic of first measure. But they cannot, like atoms, combine themselves and form compound bodies in virtue of any motion belonging to themselves.

Moreover, when we are speaking of the infinite we must not say that such or such a point is the highest point, or the lowest. For height and lowness must not be attributed to what is infinite. This is because we know that in reality, if we wish to describe a limit to the infinite, and we conceive a point above our head, this point wherever it may be, will never appear to us to have the character of a limit. Otherwise, that which would be situated above the point so conceived as the limit of the infinite would be at the same moment both high and low in relation to the same point, and this is impossible to imagine.

It follows that thought can only conceive one single movement of change, from low to high, ad infinitum; and one single movement from high to low. From low to high, when even the object in motion, going from us to the places situated above our heads, meets ten thousand times with the feet of those who are above us; and from high to low,

when in the same way it advances towards the heads of those who are below us. For these two movements, looked at by themselves and in their whole, are conceived as really opposed the one to the other, in their progress towards the infinite.

Moreover, all the atoms are necessarily moving at the same speed when they move across the void, when no obstacle thwarts them. For why should heavy atoms move more rapidly than those which are small and light, since neither encounter any obstacle? Why, on the other hand, should the small atoms have a speed superior to that of the large ones, since both sizes find an easy passage everywhere, with no obstacle intervening to thwart their movements? Whether the movement is from low to high or is horizontal movement to and fro in virtue of the reciprocal collisions of the atoms, or is movement downwards in virtue of weight, the speed of all such movement will be all equal, for in whatever sense the atom moves, it must have a movement as rapid as we can comprehend till the moment when it is repelled by some external cause, or meets resistance due to its own weight or the shock of collision with some other object.

Again, even in compound bodies, one atom does not move more rapidly than another. In fact, if one only looks at the continued movement of an atom which takes place in an indivisible moment of time, which is the briefest possible, they all have a movement that is equally rapid. At the same time, an atom does not continue its movement in the same direction in any period of time we can perceive. Rather the atom moves in a series of oscillating movements, and in the last analysis it is from this that results the continued movement of things that is perceptible to the senses. One would therefore deceive himself if he were to suppose, when reasoning about invisible things, that in the short intervals of time which we can conceive the atoms continue to move in the same direction, for our conception of the oscillating movements of atoms is confirmed by our observation of what we perceive directly.

Let us now return to the study of the passions, and of the sensations; for this will be the best method of proving that the soul is a bodily substance, which we believe is composed of light particles, diffused over all the members of the body. In this way the soul presents an analogy to a sort of spirit, having an mixture of heat, resembling at various time one or the other of these two principles – spirit and heat. Also within the soul there exists a special part, endowed with extreme mobility and in immediate sympathy with the rest of the body, due to the exceeding slightness of the elements which compose it. That it is which the faculties of the soul sufficiently prove, and the passions, and the mobility of its Nature, and the thoughts, and, in a word, everything, the privation of which is death. We must admit that it is in the soul most especially that the principle of sensation resides. At the same time, it would not possess this power if it were not enveloped by the rest of the body which communicates it to it, and in its turn receives it from it; but only in certain measure; for there are certain affections of the soul of which it is not capable.

It is on that account that, when the soul departs, the body is no longer possessed of sensation; for it has not this power, (namely that of sensation) in itself; but on the other hand, this power can only manifest itself in the soul through the medium of the body. The soul, reflecting the manifestations which are accomplished in the substance which environs it, realizes in itself, in a virtue or power which belongs to it, the sensible affections, and immediately communicates them to the body in virtue of the reciprocal bonds of sympathy which unite it to the body; that is the reason why the destruction of a part of the body does not draw after it a cessation of all feeling in the soul while it resides in the body, provided that the senses still preserve some energy; although, nevertheless, the dissolution of the corporeal covering, or even of any one of its portions, may sometimes bring on with it the destruction of the soul.

The rest of the body, on the other hand, even when it remains, either as a whole, or in any part, loses all feeling by the dispersion of that aggregate of atoms, whatever it may be, that forms the soul. When the entire combination of the body is dissolved, then the soul too is dissolved, and ceases to retain those faculties which were previously inherent in it, and especially the power of motion; so that sensation perishes equally as far as the soul is concerned; for it is impossible to imagine that it still feels, from the moment when it is no longer in the same conditions of existence, and no longer possesses the same movements of existence in reference to the same organic system; from the moment, in short, when the things which cover and surround it are no longer such, that it retains in them the same movements as before. (*Epicurus expresses the same ideas in other works, and adds that the soul is composed of atoms of the most perfect roundness and lightness; atoms wholly different from those of fire. He distinguishes in it the irrational part which is diffused over the whole body, from the rational part which has its seat in the chest, as is proved by the emotions of fear and joy. He adds that sleep is produced either when the parts of the soul diffused over the whole of the body concentrate themselves, or when they disperse and escape by the pores of the body; for particles emanate from all bodies.*)

It must also be observed that I use the word incorporeal in the usual meaning of the word, to express that which is in itself conceived as such. Now, nothing can be conceived in itself as incorporeal except the void; but the void cannot be either passive or active; it is only the condition and the place of movement. Accordingly, they who pretended that the soul is incorporeal, utter words destitute of sense; for if it had this character, it would not be able either to do or to suffer anything; but, as it is, we see plainly enough that it is liable to both these circumstances.

Let us then apply all these reasonings to the affections and sensations, recollecting the ideas which we laid down at the beginning, and then we shall see clearly that these general principles contain an exact solution of all the particular cases.

As to forms, and hues, and magnitudes, and weight, and the other qualities which one looks upon as attributes, whether it be of every body, or of those bodies only which are visible and perceived by the senses, this is the point of view under which they ought to be considered: they are not particular substances, having a peculiar existence of their own, for that cannot be conceived; nor can one say any more that they have no reality at all. They are not incorporeal substances inherent in the body, nor are they parts of the body. But they constitute by their union, I repeat, the eternal substance of the body. Each of these attributes has ideas and particular perceptions which correspond to it; but they cannot be perceived independently of the whole subject taken entirely. The union of all these perceptions forms the idea of the body. Bodies often possess other attributes which are not eternally inherent in them, but which nevertheless cannot be ranged among the incorporeal and invisible things. Accordingly, it is sufficient to express the general idea of the movement of transference to enable us to conceive in a moment certain distinct qualities, and those combined beings, which, being taken in their totality, receive the name of bodies; and the necessary and eternal attributes without which the body cannot be conceived.

There are certain conceptions corresponding to these attributes; but nevertheless, they cannot be known abstractedly, and independently of some subjects; and further, inasmuch as they are not attributes necessarily inherent in the idea of a body, one can only conceive them in the moment in which they are visible; they are realities nevertheless; and one must not refuse them being an existence merely because they have neither the characteristic of the compound beings to which we give the name of bodies, nor that of the eternal attributes. We should be equally deceived if we were to suppose that they have a separate and independent existence; for that is true neither of them nor of the eternal attributes. They are, as one sees plainly, accidents of the body; accidents which do not of necessity make any part of its Nature; which cannot be considered as independent substances, but still to each of which sensation gives the peculiar character under which it appears to us.

Another important question is that of time. Here we cannot apply any more the method of examination to which we submit other objects, where we study with reference to a given subject; and which we refer to the preconceptions which exist in ourselves. We must seize, by analogy, and going round the whole circle of things comprised under this general denomination for time – we must seize, I say, that essential character which causes us to say that time is long or short. It is not necessary for that purpose to seek for any new forms of expression as preferable to those which are in common use; we may content ourselves with those by which time is usually indicated. Nor need we, as certain philosophers do, affirm any particular attribute of time, for that would be to suppose that its essence is the same as that of this attribute. It is sufficient to seek for the ingredients of which this particular Nature which we call time is composed, and for the means by which it is measured. For this we have no need of demonstration; a simple exposition is sufficient. It is, in fact, evident, that we speak of time as composed of days and nights, and parts of days and nights. Passiveness and impassibility, movement and repose, are equally comprised in time. In short, it is evident that in connection with these different states, we can conceive a particular property to which we give the name of time.

*(Epicurus lays down the same principles in the second book of his treatise on Nature, and in his Great Abridgment.)*

It is from the infinite that the worlds are derived, and all the finite aggregates which present numerous analogies with the things which we observe under our own eyes. Each of these objects, great and small, has been separated from the infinite by a movement peculiar to itself. On the other hand, all these bodies will be successively destroyed, some more, and others less rapidly; some under the influence of one cause, and others because of the agency of some other. *(It is evident, after this, that Epicurus regards the worlds as perishable, since he admits that their parts are capable of transformation. He also says in other places, that the earth rests suspended in the air.)*

*We must not believe that all worlds necessarily have one identical form.* (He says, in fact, in the twelfth book of his treatise on the World, that the worlds differ from one another; some being spherical, other elliptical, and others of other shapes.)

Let us also beware of thinking that animals are derived from the infinite; for there is no one who can prove that the seeds from which animals are born, and plants, and all the other objects which we contemplate, have been brought from the exterior in such a world, and that this same world would not have been able to produce them of itself. This remark applies particularly to the earth.

Again, we must admit that in many and various respects, Nature is both instructed and constrained by circumstances themselves; and that Reason subsequently makes perfect and enriches with additional discoveries the things which it has borrowed from Nature; in some cases rapidly, and in others more slowly. And in some cases according to periods and times greater than those which proceed from the infinite; in other cases according to those which are smaller. So, originally it was only in virtue of express agreements that one gave names to things. But men whose ideas and passion varied according to their respective nations, formed these names of their own accord, uttering diverse sounds produced by each passion, or by each idea, following the differences of the situations and of the peoples. At a later period one established in each nation, in a uniform manner, particular terms intended to render the relations more easy, and language more concise. Educated men introduced the notion of things not discoverable by the senses, and appropriated words to them when they found themselves under the necessity of uttering their thoughts; after this, other men, guided in every point by reason, interpreted these words in the same sense.

As to the heavenly phenomena, such as the motion and course of the stars, the eclipses, their rising and setting, and all other appearances of the same kind, we must beware of thinking that they are produced by any particular being which has regulated, or whose business it is to regulate, for the future, the order of the world, a being immortal and perfectly happy. For the cares and anxieties, the benevolence and the anger, far from being compatible with felicity, are, on the contrary, the consequence of weakness, of fear, and of the want which a thing has of something else. We must not fancy either that these globes of fire, which roll on in space, enjoy a perfect happiness, and give themselves, with reflection and wisdom, the motions which they possess. But we must respect the established notions on this subject, provided, nevertheless, that they do not all contradict the respect due to truth; for nothing is more calculated to trouble the soul than this strife of contradictory notions and principles. We must therefore admit that from the first movement impressed on the heavenly bodies since the organization of the world there is derived a sort of necessity which regulates their course to this day.

Let us be well assured that it is to physiology that it belongs to determine the causes of the most elevated phenomena, and that happiness consists, above all things, in the science of the heavenly things and their Nature, and in the knowledge of analogous phenomena which may aid us in the comprehension of ethics. These heavenly phenomena admit of several explanations; they have no reason of a necessary character, and one may explain them in different manners. In a word, they have no relation – a moment's consideration will prove this by itself – with those imperishable and happy Natures which admit of no division and of no confusion. As for the theoretical knowledge of the rising and setting of the stars, of the movement of the sun between the tropics, of the eclipses, and all other similar phenomena, that is utterly useless, as far as any influence upon happiness that it can have. Moreover, those who, though possessed of this knowledge, are ignorant of Nature, and of the most probable causes of the phenomena, are no more protected from fear than if they were in the most complete ignorance. They even experience the most lively fears, for the trouble with which the knowledge of which they are possessed inspires them can find no issue, and is not dissipated by a clear perception of the reasons of these phenomena.

As to us, we find many explanations of the motions of the sun, of the rising and setting of the stars, of the eclipse and similar phenomena, just as well as of the more particular phenomena. And one must not think that this method of explanation is not sufficient to procure happiness and tranquility. Let us content ourselves with examining how it is that similar phenomena are brought about under our own eyes, and let us apply these observations to the heavenly objects and to everything which is known only indirectly. Let us despise those people who are unable to distinguish facts susceptible of different explanations from others which can only exist and be explained in one single way. Let us disdain those men who do not know, by means of the different images which result from distance, how to give an account of the different appearances of things; who, in a word, are ignorant about what are the objects which can excite any trouble in us. If, then, we know that such a phenomenon can be brought about in the same manner as another given phenomenon of the same character which does not inspire us with any apprehension; and if, on the

other hand, we know that it can take place in many different manners, we shall not be more troubled at sight of it than if we know the real cause of it.

We must also recollect that which principally contributes to trouble the spirit of men is the persuasion which they cherish that the stars are beings imperishable and perfectly happy, and that then one's thoughts and actions are in contradiction to the will of these superior beings. They also being deluded by these fables, apprehend an eternity of evils, and they fear the insensibility of death, as if that could affect them. What do I say? It is not even belief, but inconsiderateness and blindness which govern them in every thing, to such a degree that, not calculating these fears, they are just as much troubled as if they really had faith in these vain phantoms.

And the real freedom from this kind of trouble consists in being emancipated from all these things, and in preserving the recollection of all the principles which we have established, especially of the most essential of them.

Accordingly, it is well to pay a scrupulous attention to existing phenomena and to the sensations, to the general sensations for general things, and to the particular sensations for particular things. In a word, we must take note of this, the immediate evidence with which each of these judicial faculties furnishes us; for, if we attend to these points, namely, whence confusion and fear arise, we shall divine the causes correctly, and we shall deliver ourselves from those feelings, tracing back the heavenly phenomena to their causes, and also all the other which present themselves at every step, and inspire the common people with extreme terror.

This, Herodotus, is a kind of summary and abridgment of the whole question of natural philosophy. So that, if this reasoning be allowed to be valid, and be preserved carefully in the memory, the man who allows himself to be influenced by it, even though he may not descend to a profound study of its details, will have a great superiority of character over other men. He will personally discover a great number of truths which I have myself set forth in my entire work; and these truths being stored in his memory, will be a constant assistance to him. By means of these principles, those who have descended into the details, and have studied the question sufficiently, will be able, in bringing all their particular knowledge to bear on the general subject, to run over without difficulty almost the entire circle of the natural philosophy; those, on the other hand, who are not yet arrived at perfection, and who have not been able to hear me lecture on these subjects, will be able in their minds to run over the main of the essential notions, and to derive assistance from them for the tranquility and happiness of life.

This then is his letter on physics.

## **Letter to Pythocles**

About the heavenly bodies he writes thus:

THE LETTER TO PYTHOCLES, about the heavenly bodies

Epicurus to Pythocles, wishing he may do well.

Cleon has brought me your letter, in which you continue to evince towards me an affection worthy of the friendship which I have for you. You devote all your care, you tell me, to engraving in your memory those ideas which contribute to the happiness of life; and you entreat me at the same time to send you a simple abridgment and abstract of my ideas on the heavenly phenomena, in order that you may without difficulty preserve the recollection of them. For, say you, what I have written on this subject in my other works is difficult to recollect, even with continual study.

I willingly yield to your desire, and I have good hope, that in fulfilling what you ask, I shall be useful too to many others, especially to those who are as yet novices in the real knowledge of Nature, and to those to whom the perplexities and the ordinary affairs of life leave but little leisure. Be careful then to seize on those precepts thoroughly, engrave them deeply in your memory, and meditate on them with the abridgment addressed to Herodotus, which I also send you.

Know then, that the only aim of the knowledge of the heavenly phenomena, both those which are spoken of in contact with one another, and of those which have a spontaneous existence, is that freedom from anxiety, and that

calmness which is derived from a firm belief; and this is the aim of every other science.

It is not good to desire what is impossible, and to endeavor to enunciate a uniform theory about everything; accordingly, we ought not here to adopt the method, which we have followed in our researches into ethics, or in the solution of problems of natural philosophy. We there said, for instance, that there are no other things except bodies and the void, and that the atoms are the principles of things, and so the rest. In a word, we gave a precise and simple explanation for every fact, conformable to appearances.

We cannot act in the same way with respect to the heavenly phenomena. These productions may depend upon several different causes, and we may give many different explanations on this subject, equally agreeing with the impression of the senses. Besides, it is not here a question about reasoning on new principles, and of laying down, *à priori*, rules for the interpretation of Nature. The only guides for us to follow are the appearances themselves; for that which we have in view is not a set of systems and vain opinions, but much rather a life exempt from every kind of disquietude.

The heavenly phenomena do not inspire those who give different explanations of them, conformable with appearances, instead of explaining them by hypothesis, with any alarm. But if, abandoning hypothesis, one at the same time renounces the attempt to explain them by means of analogies founded on appearances, then one is placing one's self altogether at a distance from the science of Nature, in order to fall into fables.

It is possible that the heavenly phenomena may present some apparent characteristics which appear to assimilate them to those phenomena which we see taking place around ourselves, without there being any real analogy at the bottom. For the heavenly phenomena may depend for their production on many different causes. Nevertheless, we must observe the appearances presented by each, and we must distinguish the different circumstances which attach to them, and which can be explained in different manners by means of analogous phenomena which arise under our eyes.

The world is a collection of things embraced by the heaven, containing the stars, the earth, and all visible objects. This collection, separated from the infinite, is terminated by an extremity, which is either rare, or dense, or revolving, or in a state of repose, or of a round, or triangular, or some shape or other in fact, for it may be any shape the dissolution of which must bring the destruction of everything which they embrace. In fact, it can take place in every sort of way, since there is not one of those things that are seen in this world which proves otherwise, and in which we cannot detect any extremity; and that such worlds are infinite in number is easily seen, and in the metakosmion, as we call the space between the worlds, being a huge space made up of matter and void, but not, as some philosophers pretend, an immensity of space absolutely empty. This production of a world may be explained thus: seeds suitably appropriated to such an end may emanate either from one or from several worlds, or from the space that separates them; they flow towards a particular point where they become collected together and organized; after that, other seeds come to unite them together in such a way as to form a durable whole, a basis, a nucleus to which all successive additions unite themselves.

One must not content one's self in this question with saying, as one of the natural philosophers has done, that there is a reunion of the elements, or a violent motion in the void under the influence of necessity, and that the body which is thus produced increases until it come to crash against some other; for this doctrine is contrary to appearances.

The sun, the moon, and the other stars, were originally formed separately, and were afterwards comprehended in the entire total of the world. All the other objects which our world comprises, for instance, the earth and the sea, were also formed spontaneously, and subsequently gained size, by the addition and violent movement of light substances, composed of elements of fire and air, or even of these two principles at once. This explanation, moreover, is in accordance with the impressions of the senses.

As to the magnitude of the sun and of the other stars, it is, as far as we are concerned, such as it appears to us to be. (*This same doctrine is reproduced, and occurs again in the eleventh book of his treatise on Nature; where he says, "if the distance has made it lose its size, a fortiori, it would take away its brilliancy; for color has not, any more than size, the property of traversing distance without alteration."*)

But considered by itself, the sun may be a little greater or a little smaller than it appears; or it may be just such as it

looks; for that is exactly the case with the fires of common occurrence among men, which are perceived by the senses at distance. Besides, all the difficulties on this subject will be easily explained if one attends to the clear evidence of the perceptions, as I have shown in my books about Nature.

The rising and setting of the sun, of the moon, and of the stars, may depend on the fact of their becoming lighted up, and extinguished alternately, and in the order which we behold. One may also give other reasons for the phenomenon, which are not contradicted by any sensible appearances; accordingly, one might explain them by the passage of the stars above and below the earth, for the impressions of the senses agree also with this supposition.

As to their motion, one may make that depend on the circular movement of the entire heaven. One may also suppose that the stars move, while the heaven itself is immovable; for there is nothing to prevent the idea that originally, before the formation of the world, they may have received, by the appointment of fate, an impulse from east to west, and that now their movement continues in consequence of their heat, as the fire naturally proceeds onwards in order to seek the nourishment which suits it.

The inter-tropical movements of the sun and moon may depend, either on the obliquity impressed by fate on the heaven at certain determined epochs, or on the resistance of the air, or on the fact that these ignited bodies stand in need of being nourished by a matter suitable to their Nature, and that this matter fails them; or finally, they may depend on the fact their having originally received an impulse which compels them to move as they do, describing a sort of spiral figure. The sensible evidence does not in the least contradict these different suppositions, and all those of the same kind which one can form, having always a due regard to what is possible, and can bring back each phenomenon to its analogous appearances in sensible facts, without disquieting one's self about the miserable speculations of the astrologers.

The waning and subsequent replenishing of the moon may depend either on a conversion of this body, or on the different forms which the air when in a fiery state can adopt, or perhaps to the interposition of another body, or lastly, to some one of the causes by which one gives account of the analogous phenomena which pass under our eyes. Provided, however, that one does not obstinately adopt an exclusive mode of explanation; and that, for want of knowing what is possible for a man to explain, and what is inaccessible to his intelligence, one does not throw one's self into interminable speculations.

It may also be possibly the case that the moon has a light of her own, or that she reflects that of the sun. For we see around us many objects which are luminous of themselves, and many other which have only a borrowed light. In a word, one will not be arrested by any of the celestial phenomena, provided that one always recollects that there are many explanations possible; that one examines the principles and reasons which agree with this mode of explanation, and that one does not proceed in accounting for the facts which do not agree with this method, to suffer one's self to be foolishly carried away, and to propose a separate explanation for each phenomenon, sometimes in one way, and sometimes in another.

The appearance of a face in the orb of the moon, may depend either on a displacement of its parts, or on the interposition of some obstacle, or on any other cause capable of accounting for such an appearance. For one must not neglect to apply this same method to all the heavenly phenomena; for, from the moment when one comes to any point of contradiction to the evidence of the senses, it will be impossible to possess perfect tranquility and happiness.

The eclipses of the sun and moon may depend either on the fact that these celestial bodies extinguish themselves, a phenomenon which we often see produced under our eyes, or on the fact of other bodies, the earth, the heaven, or something else of the same kind interposing, between them and us. Besides, we must compare the different modes of explanation appropriate to phenomena, and recollect that it is not impossible that many causes may at one and the same time concur in their production. *(He says the same thing in the twelfth book of his treatise on Nature; and adds that the eclipses of the sun arise from the fact that it penetrates into the shade of the moon, to quit it again presently; and the eclipse of the moon from the fact of its entering into the shade of the earth. We also find the same doctrine asserted by Diogenes, the Epicurean, in the first book of his Select Opinions.)*

The regular and periodical march of these phenomena has nothing in it that ought to surprise us, if we only attend to the analogous facts which take place under our eyes. Above all things let us beware of making the Deity interpose here, for that being we ought to suppose exempt from all toil and perfectly happy; otherwise we shall be only giving

vain explanations of the heavenly phenomena, as has happened already to a crowd of authors. Not being able to recognize what is really possible, they have fallen into vain theories, in supposing that for all phenomena there was but one single mode of production, and in rejecting all other explanations which are founded on probability. They have adopted the most unreasonable opinions for want of placing in the front the study of heavenly phenomena, and of sensible facts, which ought to serve to explain the first.

The differences in the length of nights and days may arise from the fact that the passage of the sun above the earth is more or less rapid; and more or less slow, according to the length of the regions which it has to pass through. Or, again, to the fact certain regions are passed through more rapidly than others, as is seen to be the case by our own eyes, in those things to which we can compare the heavenly phenomena. As to those who on this point admit only one explanation as possible, they put themselves in opposition to facts, and lose sight of the bounds set to human knowledge.

The prognostics which are derived from the stars may, like those which we borrow from animals, arise from a simple coincidence. They may also have other causes, for example, some change in the air; for these two suppositions both harmonize equally with facts; but it is impossible to distinguish in what case one is to attribute them to the one cause or to the other.

The clouds may be formed either by the air condensed under the pressure of the winds, or by the agency of atoms set apart for the end, or by emanations from the earth and waters, or by other causes. For there are a great number which are all equally able to produce this effect. When the clouds clash with one another, or undergo any transformation, they produce showers; and the long rains are caused by the motion of the clouds when moved from places suitable to them through the air, when a more violent inundation than usual takes place, from collections of some masses calculated to produce these effects.

Thunder possibly arises from the movement of the winds revolving in the cavities of the clouds; of which we may see an image in vessels in our own daily use. It may also arise from the noise of fire acted upon by the wind in them, and from the tearings and ruptures of the clouds when they have received a sort of crystalline consistency. In a word, experience drawn from our sense, teaches us that all these phenomena, and that one in particular, may be produced in many different manners.

One may also assign different causes to lightning. Either the shock and collision of the clouds produce a fiery appearance, which is followed by lightning; or the lighting up of the clouds by the winds, produces this luminous appearance; or the mutual pressure of the clouds, or that of the wind against them, disengages the lightning. Or, one might say, that the interception of the light diffused from the stars, arrested for a time in the bosom of the clouds, is driven from them subsequently by their own movements, and by those of the winds, and so escapes from their sides; that the lightning is an extremely subtle light that evaporates from the clouds; that the clouds which carry the thunder are collected masses of fire; that the lightning arises from the motion of the fire, or from the conflagration of the wind, in consequence of the rapidity and continuousness of its motion. One may also attribute the luminous appearance of lightning to the rupture of the clouds under the action of the winds, or to the fall of inflammable atoms. Lastly, one may easily find a number of other explanations, if one applies to sensible facts, in order to search out the analogies which they present to the heavenly phenomena.

Lightning precedes thunder, either because it is produced at the same moment that the wind falls on the cloud, while the noise is only heard at the instant when the wind has penetrated into the bosom of the cloud. Or, perhaps, the two phenomena being simultaneous, the lightning arrives among us more rapidly than the noise of the thunder-bolt, as is in fact remarked in other cases when we see at a instance the clash of two objects.

The thunderbolt may be produced either by a violent condensation of the winds, or by their rapid motion and conflagrations. It may arise from the fact of the winds meeting in places which are too dense, in consequence of the accumulation of clouds, and then a portion of the current detaches itself and proceeds towards the lower situations; or else it may be caused by the fire which is contained in the bosom of the clouds precipitating itself downwards. As one may suppose that an immense quantity of fire being accumulated in the clouds dilates, violently bursting the substance which envelops it, because the resistance of the center hinders it from proceeding further. This effect is especially produced in the neighborhood of high mountains; and, accordingly, they are very frequently struck with the thunderbolts. In short, one may give a number of explanations of the thunderbolt; but we ought, above all

things, to be on our guard against fables, and this one will easily be, if one follows faithfully the observable phenomena in the explanation of these things, which are not perceived, except indirectly.

Hurricanes may be caused either by the presence of a cloud, which a violent wind sets in motion and precipitates with a spiral movement towards the lower regions, or by a violent gust which bears a cloud into the neighborhood of some other current, or else by the mere agitation of the wind by itself, when air is brought together from the higher regions and compressed without being able to escape on either side, in consequence of the resistance of the air which surrounds it; when the hurricane descends towards the earth, then there result whirlwinds in proportion to the rapidity of the wind that has produced them; and this phenomenon extends over the sea also.

Earthquakes may arise from the wind penetrating into the interior of the earth, or from the earth itself receiving incessantly the addition of exterior particles, and being in incessant motion as to its constituent atoms, being in consequence disposed to a general vibration. That which permits the wind to penetrate is the fact that falls take place in the interior, or that the air being impressed by the winds insinuates itself into the subterranean caverns. The movement which numberless falls and the reaction of the earth communicates to the ground, when this motion meets bodies of greater resistance and solidity, is sufficient to explain the earthquakes. One might, however, give an account of them in several other ways.

Winds are caused, either by the successive and regular addition of some foreign matter, or else by the reunion of a great quantity of water; and the differences of the winds may arise from the fact that some portions of this same matter fall into the numerous cavities of the earth, and are divided there.

Hail is produced by an energetic condensation acting on the ethereal particles which the cold embraces in every direction; or, in consequence of less violent condensation acting however on aqueous particles, and accompanied by division, in such a manner as to produce, at the same time, the reunion of certain elements and of the collective masses; or by the rupture of some dense and compact mass which would explain at the same time, the numerousness of the particles and their individual hardness. As to the spherical form of the hail, one may easily account for that by admitting that the shocks which it receives in every direction make all the angles disappear, or else that at the moment when the different fragments are formed, each of them is equally embraced on all sides by aqueous or ethereal particles.

Snow may be produced by a light vapor full of moisture which the clouds allow to escape by passage intended for that end, when they are pressed, in a corresponding manner, by other clouds, and set in motion by the wind. Subsequently, these vapors become condensed in their progress under the action of the cold which surrounds the clouds in the lower regions. It may also be the case that this phenomena is produced by clouds of slight density as they become condensed. In this case the snow which escapes from the clouds would be the result of the contact, or approximation of the aqueous particles, which in a still more condensed state produce hail. This effect is most especially produced in the spring. Snow again, may result from the collection of clouds previously condensed and solidified; or from a whole army of other causes.

Dew proceeds from a reunion of particles contained in the air calculated to produce this moist substance. These particles may be also brought from places which are moist or covered with water (for in those places, above all others, it is that dew is abundant). These then reunite, again resume their aqueous form, and fall down. The same phenomena takes place in other cases before our own eyes under many analogies.

Hoarfrost is dew congealed by the influence of the cold air that surrounds it. Ice is formed either by the wearing away of round atoms contained in the water, and the reunion at scalene and acute angles of the atoms which exist in the water, or by an addition from without of these latter particles, which penetrating into the water, solidify it by driving away an equal amount of round atoms.

The rainbow may be produced by the reflection of the solar rays on the moist air; or it may arise from a particular property of light and air, in virtue of which these particular appearances of color are formed, either because the shades which we perceive result directly from this property, or because, on the contrary, it only produces a single shade, which, reflecting itself on the nearest portion of the air, communicates to them the tints which we observe. As to the circular form of the rainbow, that depends either on the fact of the sight perceiving an equal distance in every direction, or the fact of the atoms taking this form when reuniting in the air; or it may be caused by its detaching

from the air which moves towards the moon, certain atoms which, being reunited in the clouds, give rise to this circular appearance.

The lunar halo arises from the fact of the air, which moves towards the moon from all quarters, uniformly intercepting the rays emitted by this heavenly object, in such a way as to form around it a sort of circular cloud which partially veils it. It may also arise from the fact of the moon uniformly rejecting from all quarters, the air which surrounds it, in such a manner as to produce this circular and opaque covering. And perhaps this opacity may be caused by some particle which some current brings from without; perhaps also, the heat communicates to the moon the property of emitting by the pores in its surface, the particles by which this effect is produced.

Comets arise either from the fact, that in the circumstances already stated, there are partial conflagrations in certain points of the heaven; or, that at certain periods, the heaven has above our heads a particular movement which causes them to appear. It may also be the case, that being themselves endowed with a peculiar movement, they advance at the end of certain periods of time, and in consequence of particular circumstances, towards the places which we inhabit. The opposite reasons explain their disappearance.

Certain stars return to the same point in accomplishing their revolutions; and this arises, not only as has been sometimes believed, from the fact of the pole of the world, around which they move, being immovable, but also from the fact that the gyrations of the air which surrounds them, hinder them from deviations like the wandering stars. Perhaps also, this may be caused by the fact, that except in the route in which they move, and in which we perceive them, they do not find any material suitable to their Nature. One may also explain this phenomenon in many other manners, reasoning according to observable facts; thus, it is possible that certain stars may be wandering because that is the Nature of their movements, and, for the same reason, others may be immovable.

It is also possible, that the same necessity which has originally given them their circular movement, may have compelled some to follow their orbit regularly, and have subjected others to an irregular process; we may also suppose that the uniform character of the center which certain stars traverse favors their regular march, and their return to a certain point; and that in the case of others, on the contrary, the differences of the center produce the changes which we observe. Besides, to assign one single cause to all these phenomena, when the experience of our senses suggests us several, is folly. It is the conduct of ignorant astrologers covetous of a vain knowledge, who assigning imaginary causes to facts, wish to leave wholly to the Deity the care of the government of the universe.

Some stars [the planets] appear to be left behind by others in their progress; this arises either from the fact of their having a slower motion, though traversing the same circle; or, because, though they are drawn on by the same propelling power, they have, nevertheless, a movement proper to themselves in a contrary direction; or it may be caused by the fact that, though all are placed in the same sphere of movement, still some have more space to traverse, and others less. To give one uniform and positive explanation of all these facts, is not consistent with the conduct of any people but those who love to flash prodigies in the eyes of the multitude.

Falling stars may be particles detached from the stars, or fragments resulting from their collision; they may also be produced by the fall of substances which are set on fire by the action of the wind; by the reunion of inflammable atoms which are made to come together so as to produce this effect by a sort of reciprocal attraction; or else by the movement which is produced in consequence of the reunion of atoms in the very place where they meet. It may also happen that the light vapors reunite and become condensed under the form of clouds, that they then take fire in consequence of their rotary motion, and that, bursting the obstacles which surround them, they proceed towards the places whither the force by which they are animated drags them. In short, this phenomenon also may admit a great number of explanations.

The forecasts which are drawn from certain animals arise from a fortuitous concurrence of circumstances; for there is no necessary connection between certain animals and winter. They do not produce it; nor is there any divine Nature sitting aloft watching the exits of these animals, and then fulfilling signs of this kind. Nor can such folly as this occur to any being who is even moderately comfortable, much less to one which is possessed of perfect happiness.

Imprint all these precepts in your memory, O Pythocles, and so you will easily escape fables, and it will be easy for you to discover other truths analogous to these. Above all, apply yourself to the study of general principles, of the infinite, and of questions of this kind, and to the investigation of the different criteria and of the passions, and to the

study of the chief good, with a view to which we prosecute all our researches. When these questions are once resolved, all particular difficulties will be made plain to you. As to those who will not apply themselves to these principles, they will neither be able to give a good explanation of these same questions, nor to reach that end to which all our researches tend.

Such are his sentiments on the heavenly phenomena, But concerning the rules of life, and how we ought to choose some things, and avoid others, he writes thus. But first of all, let us go through the opinions which he held, and his disciples held, about the wise man.

## The Wise Man

Injuries are done among men either because of hatred, envy, or contempt, all which the wise man overcomes by reason.

When once a man has attained wisdom he no longer has any contrary tendency to it, nor does he willingly pretend that he has. He will be more deeply moved by feelings than others, but this will not prove to be an obstacle to wisdom.

A man cannot become wise in every kind of physical constitution, or in every nation.

Even if the wise man were to be put to torture, he would still be happy.

The wise man shows gratitude, and constantly speaks well of his friends whether they are present or absent.

The wise man will not groan and howl when he is put to the torture.

The wise man will not have intercourse with any woman whom the laws forbid, as Diogenes says, in his epitome of the Ethical Maxims of Epicurus.

The wise man will not punish his servants, but will rather pity them and forgive any that are deserving.

The Epicureans do not think that the wise man will fall in love, or be anxious about his burial, for they hold that love is not a passion inspired by the gods, as Diogenes says in his twelfth book.

The Epicureans assert that the wise man will not make elegant speeches.

Sexual intercourse, the Epicureans say, has never done a man good, and he is lucky if it has not harmed him.

The wise man will marry and have children, as Epicurus says in treatises *On Problems* and *On Nature*, but only in accord with the circumstances of his life.

The wise man will never indulge in drunkenness, says Epicurus, in his *Banquet*,

The wise man will not entangle himself in affairs of state, as Epicurus says in his first book on *Lives*.

The wise man will not become a tyrant.

The wise man will not live like a Cynic, as he says in his second book on *Lives*, nor become a beggar.

Even if the wise man should lose his eyesight, he will not end his whole life, as he says in the same book.

The wise man will not be subject to grief, as Diogenes says, in the fifth book of his *Select Opinions*.

The wise man will not object to go to the courts of law.

The wise man will leave books and memorials of himself behind him, but he will not be fond of frequenting assemblies.

The wise man will take care of his property, and provide for the future.

The wise man will be fond of the countryside.

The wise man will resist fortune.

The wise man will not mourn the death of his friends.

The wise man will show a regard for his reputation to such an extent as to avoid being despised.

The wise man will find more pleasure than other men in public spectacles.

The wise man will erect statues of others, but he will be indifferent as to raising one for himself.

The wise man is the only person who can converse correctly about music and poetry, but he will not himself compose poems.

One wise man is not wiser than another.

The wise man will also, if he is in need, earn money, but only by his wisdom.

The wise man will appease an absolute ruler when occasion requires.

The wise man will rejoice at another's misfortune, but only for his correction.

The wise man gather together a school, but never so as to become a leader of crowds.  
The wise man will give lectures in public, but it will be against his inclination and never unless asked.  
The wise man will teach things that are definite, rather than doubtful musings..  
The wise man be the same whether asleep or awake.  
The wise man will be willing even to die for a friend.  
The wise man holds that all faults are not of equal gravity.  
The wise man holds that health is a blessing to some, but a matter of indifference to others.  
The wise man holds that courage is a quality that does not come by nature, but by a consideration of what is to one's advantage.  
The wise man holds that friendship is first brought about due to practical need, just as we sow the earth for crops, but it is formed and maintained by means of a community of life among those who find mutual pleasure in it.  
The wise man holds that there are two types of happiness – complete happiness, such as belongs to a god, which admits of no increase, and lesser happiness, which can be increased or decreased.

These are the Epicurean doctrines.

We must now proceed to his letter:

## **Letter to Menoeceus**

*Epicurus to Menoeceus, Greetings.*

Let no one delay in the study of philosophy while he is young, and when he is old, let him not become weary of the study. For no man can ever find the time unsuitable or too late to study the health of his soul.

And he who asserts either that it is too soon to study philosophy, or that the hour is passed, is like a man who would say that the time has not yet come to be happy, or that it is too late to be happy.

So both the young and the old must study philosophy – that as one grows old he may be young in the blessings that come from the grateful recollection of those good things that have passed, and that even in youth he may have the wisdom of age, since he will know no fear of what is to come. It is necessary for us, then, to meditate on the things which produce happiness, since if happiness is present we have everything, and when happiness is absent we do everything with a view to possess it.

Now, I will repeat to you those things that I have constantly recommended to you, and I would have you do and practice them, as they are the elements of living well:

First of all, believe that a god is an incorruptible and happy being, just as Nature has commonly engraved on the minds of men. But attach to your theology nothing which is inconsistent with incorruptibility or with happiness, and believe that a god possesses everything which is necessary to preserve its own nature.

Indeed the gods do exist, and Nature gives to us a degree of knowledge of them. But gods are not of the character which most people attribute to them, and the conception of the gods held by most people is far from pure. It is not the man who discards the gods believed in by the many who is impious, but he who applies to the gods the false opinions that most people entertain about them. For the assertions of most people about the gods are not true intuitions given to them by Nature, but false opinions of their own, such as the idea that gods send misfortune to the wicked and blessings to the good. False opinions such as these arise because men think of the gods as if they had human qualities, and men do not understand that the gods have virtues that are different from their own.

Next, accustom yourself to think that death is a matter with which we are not at all concerned. This is because all good and all evil come to us through sensation, and death brings the end of all our sensations. The correct understanding that death is no concern of ours allows us to take pleasure in our mortal lives, not because it adds to life an infinite span of time, but because it relieves us of the longing for immortality as a refuge from the fear of death. For there can be nothing terrible in living for a man who rightly comprehends that there is nothing terrible in

ceasing to live.

Seen in this way, it was a silly man who once said that he feared death, not because it would grieve him when it was present, but because it grieved him now to consider it to be coming in the future. But it is absurd that something that does not distress a man when it is present should afflict him when it has not yet arrived. Therefore the most terrifying of fears, death, is nothing to us, since so long as we exist death is not present with us, and when death comes, then we no longer exist. Death, then, is of no concern either to the living or to the dead – to the living, death has no existence, and to the dead, no concerns of any kind are possible.

Many people, however, flee from death as if it were the greatest of evils, while at other times these same people wish for death as a rest from the evils of life. But the wise man embraces life, and he does not fear death, for life affords the opportunity for happiness, and the wise man does not consider the mere absence of life to be an evil. Just as he chooses food not according to what is most abundant, but according to what is best; so too, the wise man does not seek to live the life that is the longest, but the happiest.

And so he who advises a young man to **live** well, and an old man to **die** well, is a simpleton, not only because life is desirable for both the young and the old, but also because the wisdom to live well is the same as the wisdom to die well.

Equally wrong was the man who said:

*'Tis well not to be born, but when born*

*Tis well to pass with quickness to the gates of Death.*

If this was really his opinion, why then did he not end his own life? For it was easily in his power to do so, if this was really his belief. But if this man was joking, then he was talking foolishly in a case where foolishness ought not be allowed.

As to how we live our lives, we must always remember that the future does not wholly belong to us. But on the other hand, the future does not wholly NOT belong to us either. In this I mean that we can never wait on the future with a feeling of certainty that it will come to pass, but neither can we despair that the future is something that will never arrive.

We must also consider that some of our human desires are given to us by Nature, and some are vain and empty. Of the Natural desires, some are necessary, and some are not. Of the necessary desires, some are necessary to our happiness, and some are necessary if our body is to be free from trouble. Some desires are in fact necessary for living itself. He who has a correct understanding of these things will always decide what to choose and what to avoid by referring to the goal of obtaining a body that is healthy and a soul that is free from turmoil, since this is the aim of living happily. It is for the sake of living happily that we do everything, as we wish to avoid grief and fear. When once we have attained this goal, the storm of the soul is ended, because we neither have the need to go looking for something that we lack, nor to go seeking something else by which the good of our soul or of our body would be improved.

For you see when we lack pleasure and we grieve, we have need of pleasure, because pleasure is not present. But so long as we do not grieve, life affords us no lack of pleasure. On this account we affirm that Nature has provided that Pleasure is the beginning and end of living happily; for we have recognized that Nature has provided that happiness is the first good that is innate within us. To this view of Happiness as our starting point and as our goal we refer every question of what to choose and what to avoid. And to this same goal of happy living we again and again return, because whether a thing brings Happiness is the rule by which we judge every good. But although happiness is the first and a natural good, for this same reason we do not choose every pleasure whatsoever, but at many times we pass over certain pleasures when difficulty is likely to ensue from choosing them. Likewise, we think that certain pains are better than some pleasures, when a greater pleasure will follow them, even if we first endure pain for time.

Every Pleasure is therefore by its own Nature a good, but it does not follow that every pleasure is worthy of being

chosen, just as every pain is an evil, and yet every pain must not be avoided. Nature requires that we resolve all these matters by measuring and reasoning whether the ultimate result is suitable or unsuitable to bringing about a happy life; for at times we may determine that what appears to be good is in fact an evil, and at other times we may determine that what appears to be evil is in fact a good.

As we pursue happiness we also hold that self-reliance is a great good, not in order that we will always be satisfied with little, but in order that if circumstances do not allow that we have much, we may wisely make use of the little that we have. This is because we are genuinely persuaded that men who are able to do without luxury are the best able to enjoy luxury when it is available.

We also believe that Nature provides that everything which is necessary to life is easily obtained, and that those things which are idle or vain are difficult to possess. Simple flavors give as much pleasure as costly fare when everything that causes pain, and every feeling of want, is removed. Bread and water give the most extreme pleasure when someone in great need eats of them. To accustom oneself, therefore, to simple and inexpensive habits is a great ingredient towards perfecting one's health, and makes one free from hesitation in facing the necessary affairs of life. And when on certain occasions we fall in with more sumptuous fare, this attitude renders us better disposed towards luxuries, as we are then fearless with regard to the possibility that we may thereafter lose them.

When, therefore, we say that pleasure or happiness is the chief good, we are not speaking of the pleasures of debauched men, or those pleasures which lie in sensual enjoyment, as some allege about us who are ignorant, or who disagree with us, or who perversely misrepresent our opinions. Instead, when we speak of pleasure or happiness as the chief good, we mean the freedom of the body from pain and the freedom of the soul from confusion. For it is not continued drinking and reveling, or the temporary pleasures of sexual relations, or feasts of fish or such other things as a costly table supplies that make life pleasant. Instead, Nature provides that life is made pleasant by sober contemplation, and by close examination of the reasons for all decisions we make as to what we choose and what we avoid. It is by these means that we put to flight the vain opinions from which arise the greater part of the confusion that troubles the soul.

Now, the beginning and the greatest good of all these things is wisdom. Wisdom is something more valuable even than philosophy itself, inasmuch as all the other virtues spring from it. Wisdom teaches us that it is not possible to live happily unless one also lives wisely, and honestly, and justly; and that one cannot live wisely and honestly and justly without also living happily. For these virtues are by nature bound up together with the happy life, and the happy life is inseparable from these virtues.

Considering this, who can you think to be a better man than he who has holy opinions about the gods, who is utterly fearless in facing death, who properly contemplates the goals and limits of life as fixed by Nature, and who understands that Nature has established that the greatest goods are readily experienced and easily obtained, while the greatest evils last but a short period and cause only brief pain?

The wise man laughs at the idea of "Fate", which some set up as the mistress of all things, because the wise man understands that while some things do happen by chance, most things happen due to our own actions. The wise man sees that Fate or Necessity cannot exist if men are truly free, and he also sees that Fortune is not in constant control of the lives of men. But the wise man sees that our actions are free, and because they are free, our actions are our own responsibility, and we deserve either blame or praise for them.

It would therefore be better to believe in the fables that are told about the gods than to be a slave to the idea of Fate or Necessity as put forth by false philosophers. At least the fables which are told about the gods hold out to us the possibility that we may avert the gods' wrath by paying them honor. The false philosophers, on the other hand, present us with no hope of control over our own lives, and no escape from an inexorable Fate.

In the same way, the wise man does not consider Fortune to be a goddess, as some men esteem her to be, for the wise man knows that nothing is done at random by a god. Nor does he consider that such randomness as may exist renders all events of life impossible to predict. Likewise, he does not believe that the gods give chance events to men so as to make them live happily. The wise man understands that while chance may lead to great good, it may also lead to great evil, and he therefore thinks it to be better to be unsuccessful when acting in accord with reason than to be successful by chance when acting as a fool.

Meditate then, on all these things, and on those things which are related to them, both day and night, and both alone and with like-minded companions. For if you will do this, you will never be disturbed while asleep or awake by imagined fears, but you will live like a god among men. For a man who lives among immortal blessings is in no respect like a mortal being.

(In other works, he discards divination; and also in his Little Epitome. And he says divination has no existence; but, if it has any, still we should think that what happens according to it is nothing to us.)

These are his sentiments about the things which concern the life of man, and he has discussed them at greater length elsewhere.

Now, he differs from the Cyrenaics about pleasure. For they do not admit that to pleasure can exist as a state, but place it wholly in motion. He, however, admits both kinds to be pleasure, namely, that of the soul, and that of the body, as he says in his treatise on Choice and Avoidance; and also in his work on the Chief Good; and in the first book of his treatise on Lives, and in his Letter against the Mitylenian Philosophers. And in the same spirit, Diogenes, in the seventeenth book of his Select Discourses, and Metrodorus, in his *Timocrates*, speak thus. “But when pleasure is understood, I mean both that which exists in motion, and that which is a state....” And Epicurus, in his treatise on Choice, speaks thus: “Now, freedom from disquietude, and freedom from pain, are states of pleasure; but joy and cheerfulness are beheld in motion and energy.”

For the Cyrenaics make out the pains of the body to be worse than those of the mind; accordingly, those who do wrong, are punished in the body. But he considers the pains of the soul the worst; for that the flesh is only sensible to present affliction, but the soul feels the past, the present, and the future. Therefore, in the same manner, he contends that the pleasure of the soul are greater than those of the body; and he uses as proof that pleasure is the chief good, the fact that all animals from the moment of their birth are delighted with pleasure, and are offended with pain by their natural instinct, and without the employment of Reason. Therefore, too we, of our own inclinations, flee from pain; so that Heracles, when devoured by his poisoned tunic cries out:

Shouting and groaning, and the rocks around

Re-echoed his sad wails, the mountain heights

Of Locrian lands, and sad Euboea’s hills.

And we choose the virtues for the sake of pleasure, and not on their own account; just as we seek the skill of the physician for the sake of health, as Diogenes says, in the twentieth book of his Select Discourses, where he also calls out that virtue alone is inseparable from pleasure, but that every thing else may be separated from it as mortal.

Let us, however, now add the finishing stroke, as one may say, to this whole treatise, and to the life of the philosopher; giving some of his fundamental maxims, and closing the whole work with them, taking that for our end which is the beginning of happiness.

## The Principal Doctrines

That which is happy and imperishable, neither has trouble itself, nor does it cause it to anything; so that it is not subject to feelings of either anger or gratitude; for these feelings only exist in what is weak.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> (In other passages he says that the gods are speculated on by reason, some existing according to number, and

Death is nothing to us; for that which is dissolved is devoid of sensation, and that which is devoid of sensation is nothing to us.

The limit of great pleasures is the removal of everything which can give pain. And where pleasure is, as long as it lasts, that which gives pain, or that which feels pain, or both of them, are absent.

Pain does not abide continuously in the flesh, but in its extremity it is present only a very short time. That pain which only just exceeds the pleasure in the flesh, does not last many days. But long diseases have in them more that is pleasant than painful to the flesh.

It is not possible to live pleasantly without living prudently, and honorably, and justly; nor to live prudently, and honorably, and justly, without living pleasantly. But to whom it does not happen to live prudently, honorably, and justly cannot possibly live pleasantly.

For the sake of feeling confidence and security with regard to men, anything in Nature is good, if it provides the means to achieve this.<sup>106</sup>

Some men have wished to be eminent and powerful, thinking that so they would secure safety as far as men are concerned. So that if the life of such men is safe, they have attained to the Nature of good; but if it is not safe, then they have failed in obtaining that for the sake of which they originally desired power according to the order of Nature.<sup>107</sup>

No pleasure is intrinsically bad: but the effective causes of some pleasures bring with them a great many perturbations of pleasure.

If every pleasure were condensed, if one may so say, and if each lasted long, and affected the whole body, or the essential parts of it, then there would be no difference between one pleasure and another.

If those things which make the pleasures of debauched men, put an end to the fears of the mind, and to those which arise about the heavenly bodies, and death, and pain; and if they taught us what ought to be the limit of our desires, we should have no pretense for blaming those who wholly devote themselves to pleasure, and who never feel any pain or grief (which is the chief evil) from any quarter.

If apprehensions relating to the heavenly bodies did not disturb us, and if the terrors of death have no concern with us, and if we had the courage to contemplate the boundaries of pain and of the desires, we should have no need of the study of natural science.

It would not be possible for a person to banish all fear about those things which are called most essential, unless he knew what is the Nature of the universe, or if he had any idea that the fables told about it could be true; and therefore a person cannot enjoy unmixed pleasure without physiological knowledge.

It would be no good for a man to secure himself safety as far as men are concerned, while in a state of apprehension as to all the heavenly bodies, and those under the earth, and in short, all those in the infinite.

Irresistible power and great wealth may, up to a certain point, give us security as far as men are concerned; but the security of men in general depends upon the tranquility of their souls, and their freedom from ambition.

The riches of Nature are defined and easily procurable; but vain desires are insatiable.

The wise man is but little favored by fortune; but his reason procures him the greatest and most valuable goods, and these he does enjoy, and will enjoy the whole of his life.

The just man is the freest of all men from disquietude; but the unjust man is a perpetual prey to it.

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others according to some similarity of form, arising from the continual flowing on of similar images, perfected for this very purpose in human form.)

Pleasure in the flesh is not increased, when once the pain arising from want is removed; it is only diversified. The most perfect happiness of the soul depends on these reflections, and on opinions of a similar character on all those questions which cause the greatest alarm to the mind.

Infinite and finite time both have equal pleasure, if any one measures its limits by reason.

The flesh sets no limits to pleasure, and therefore it yearns for an eternity of time. But reason, enabling us to conceive the end and dissolution of the body, and liberating us from the fears relative to eternity, procures for us all the happiness of which life is capable, so completely that we have no further occasion to include eternity in our desires. In this disposition of mind, man is happy even when his troubles engage him to quit life; and to die thus, is for him only to interrupt a life of happiness.

He who is acquainted with the limits of life knows that that which removes the pain which arises from want and which makes the whole of life perfect, is easily procurable; so that he has no need of those things which can only be attained with trouble.

But as to the ultimate aim, we ought to consider it with all the clearness and evidence which we refer to whatever we think and believe; otherwise, all things will be full of confusion and uncertainty of judgment.

If you resist all the senses, you will not even have anything left to which you can refer, or by which you may be able to judge of the falsehood of the senses which you condemn.

If you simply discard a sense, and do not distinguish between the different elements of the judgment, so as to know on the one hand, the opinion which goes beyond the actual sensation, or, on the other, the actual and immediate notion, the affections, and all the conceptions of the mind which arise from the observable representation; you will be imputing trouble into the other senses, and destroying in that quarter every species of criterion.

If you allow equal authority to the ideas, which being only an opinion, require to be verified, and to those which bear about them an immediate certainty, you will not escape error; for you will be confounding doubtful opinions with those which are not doubtful, and true judgments with those of a different character.

If, on every occasion, we do not refer every one of our actions to the chief end of Nature, if we turn aside from that to seek or avoid some other object, there will be a want of agreement between our words and our actions.

Of all the things which wisdom provides for the happiness of the whole life, by far the most important is the acquisition of friendship.

The same opinion encourages man to trust that no evil will be everlasting, or even of long duration; as it sees that, in the space of life allotted to us, the protection of friendship is most sure and trustworthy.

Of the desires, some are natural and necessary, some natural, but not necessary, and some are neither natural nor necessary, but owe their existence to vain opinions. (*Epicurus thinks that those are natural and necessary which put an end to pains as drink when one is thirsty; and that those are natural but not necessary which only diversify pleasure, but do not remove pain, such as expensive food; and that these are neither natural nor necessary, which are such as crowns, or the erection of statues.*)

All desires that lead to no pain when they remain ungratified are unnecessary, and the longing is easily got rid of, when the thing desired is difficult to procure or when the desires seem likely to produce harm.

When those natural desires, which do not lead to pain if they are not satisfied, are violent and insistent, it is a proof that there is an admixture of vain opinion in them; for then energy does not arise from their own Nature, but from the vain opinions of men.

Natural justice is a covenant of what is suitable for leading men to avoid injuring on another, and being injured.

Those animals which are unable to enter into an argument of this Nature, or to guard against doing or sustaining

mutual injury, have no such thing as justice or injustice. And the case is the same with those nations, the members of which are either unwilling or unable to enter into a covenant to respect their mutual interests.

Justice has no independent existence; it results from mutual contracts, and establishes itself wherever there is a mutual engagement to guard against doing or sustaining mutual injury.

Injustice is not intrinsically bad; it has this character only because there is joined with it a fear of not escaping those who are appointed to punish actions of this character.

It is not possible for a man who secretly does anything in contravention of the agreement which men have made with one another, to guard against doing, or sustaining mutual injury, to believe that he shall always escape notice, even if he has escaped notice already ten thousand times; for till his death, it is uncertain whether he will not be detected.

In a general point of view, justice is the same thing to every one; for there is something advantageous in mutual society. Nevertheless, the difference of place, and diverse other circumstances, make justice vary.

From the moment that a thing declared just by the law is generally recognized as useful for the mutual relations of men, it becomes really just, whether it is universally regarded as such or not. But if, on the contrary, a thing established by law is not really useful for social relations, then it is not just; and if that which was just, inasmuch as it was useful, loses this character, after having been for some time considered so, it is not less true that during that time it was really just, at least for those who do not perplex themselves about vain words, but who prefer in every case, examining and judging for themselves.

When, without any fresh circumstances arising a thing which has been declared just in practice does not agree with the impressions of reason, that is a proof that the thing was not really just. In the same way, when in consequence of new circumstances, a thing which has been pronounced just does not any longer appear to agree with utility, the thing which was just, inasmuch as it was useful to the social relations and intercourse of mankind, ceases to be just the moment when it ceases to be useful.

He who desires to live tranquilly without having anything to fear from other men, ought to make himself friends; those whom he cannot make friends of, he should, at least avoid rendering enemies; and if that is not in his power, he should, as far as possible, avoid all intercourse with them, and keep them aloof, as far as it is for his interest to do so.

The happiest men are they who have arrived at the point of having nothing to fear from those who surround them. Such men live with one another most agreeably, having the firmest grounds of confidence in one another, enjoying the advantages of friendship in all their fullness, and not lamenting as a pitiable circumstance, the premature death of their friends.



## **Marcus Tullius Cicero – Selected Works**

Marcus Tullius Cicero left many recorded references to Epicureanism, but his two most extended treatments are in the works “On the Nature of the Gods” and “On the Ends of Good and Evil.” The reader should keep in mind that while Cicero had been trained in Epicureanism in his younger years, by the time these works were composed he considered himself to be a Stoic. As such, he embraced positions on the Nature of the gods and on an afterlife very

much opposed to those of Epicurus.

## On The Ends of Good and Evil

An elaborate defense of Epicurus was once delivered to me by Lucius Torquatus, a scholar of consummate knowledge, with Gaius Triarius, a youth of great learning and seriousness of character, assisting at the discussion. Both of these men had called to pay me their respects at my place at Cuma.

....

“I will start then,” Torquatus said, “in the manner approved by Epicurus himself, the author of the system — by setting forth the essence of the thing that is the object of our inquiry. Not that I suppose that you do not understand my purpose, but because this is the logical method of procedure. We are inquiring, then, into what is the final and ultimate good. All philosophers agree that the ultimate good is the end we seek to attain, for which all other things are the means we use to gain it, while it is not itself a means through which we seek to attain anything else. Epicurus holds that Nature’s ultimate goal for life is pleasure, or happiness, which he holds to be the chief good, with pain, whether physical or mental, being the chief evil.

Epicurus sets out to show this as follows: Every living thing, as soon as it is born, seeks after pleasure, and delights in it as its chief good. It also recoils from pain as its chief evil, and avoids pain so far as is possible. Nature’s own unbiased and honest judgment leads every living thing to do this from birth, and it continues to do as long as it remains uncorrupted. Epicurus refuses to admit any need for discussion to prove that pleasure is to be desired and pain is to be avoided, because these facts, he thinks, are perceived by the senses, in the same way that fire is hot, snow is white, and honey is sweet. None of these things need be proved by elaborate argument — it is enough merely to draw attention to them. For there is a difference, he holds, between a formal logical proof of a thing, and a mere notice or reminder. Logical proofs are the method for discovering abstract and difficult truths, but on the other hand a mere notice is all that is required for indicating facts that are obvious and evident.

Observe that if one removes from mankind of all the faculties that Nature has provided, nothing remains. It follows, then, that Nature herself is the judge of that which is in accord with or contrary to Nature. And what does Nature give to perceive or to judge, or to guide actions of choice and of avoidance, except pleasure and pain?

...

I must now explain to you how the mistaken idea arose in some quarters that pleasure should be disparaged and pain should be exalted. To do so, I will give you a complete account of the system, and point out to you the **actual** teachings of Epicurus, who we consider to be the great explorer of truth, the master-builder of human happiness.

No one rejects, dislikes, or avoids pleasure on its own account. Those who reject pleasure do so because men who do not know how to pursue pleasure rationally suffer consequences that are extremely painful. Nor does anyone love or pursue or desire to obtain pain on its own account. Those who pursue pain do so because on occasion toil and pain can produce some great pleasure. To take a trivial example, which of us ever undertakes laborious physical exercise, except to obtain some advantage from it? But who has any right to find fault with those men who choose to enjoy pleasures that have no annoying consequences, or those who avoid pains that produce no resulting pleasures?

On the other hand, we denounce with righteous indignation men who are so beguiled and demoralized by the charms of the pleasure of the moment, who are so blinded by desire, that they cannot foresee the pain and trouble that are bound to follow. Equal blame belongs to those who fail in their duties because their will is weak, which is the same as saying that they fail because they shrink back from toil and pain. These cases are simple and easy to understand. In a free hour, when our power of choice is unrestrained and when nothing prevents us from doing what we like best, every pleasure is to be welcomed and every pain is to be avoided. But in certain circumstances, such as because of the claims of duty or the obligations of business, it will frequently occur that pleasures have to be put aside and annoyances accepted. The wise man always holds in these matters to this principle of selection: he rejects some pleasures in order to secure other and greater pleasures, or else he endures some pains to avoid worse pains.

This being the theory I hold, why should I be afraid of not being able to reconcile it with the case of the Torquati, my ancestors [who were renowned for dealing harshly even with their own family when necessary]? Your references to them previously were historically correct, and showed your kind and friendly feeling towards me. But all the same, I am not to be bribed by your flattery of my family, and you will not find me a less resolute opponent.

Tell me, then, what explanation would **you** put upon their actions? Do you really believe that they charged an armed enemy, or treated their children, their own flesh and blood, so cruelly, without a thought for their own interest or advantage? Even wild animals do not act in that way — they do not run amok so blindly that we cannot discern any purpose in their movements. Can you suppose then that my heroic ancestors performed their famous deeds without any motive at all?

What their motive was, I will consider in a moment: for the present I will confidently assert, that if they had a motive for those undoubtedly glorious exploits, that motive was not a love of virtue solely for itself.

*You say: "He wrestled the necklace from his foe"*

*I answer: "Yes, and he saved himself from death."*

*You say: "But he braved great danger"*

*I answer: "Yes, before the eyes of an army."*

*You say: "What did he gain by it?"*

*I answer: "Honor and esteem, the strongest guarantees of security in life."*

*You say: "He sentenced his own son to death!"*

*I answer: "If he had no motive, I am sorry to be the descendant of anyone so savage and inhuman. But if his purpose for inflicting pain upon himself was to establish his authority as a commander, and to tighten the reins of discipline during a very serious war by holding over his army the fear of punishment, then his action was aimed at ensuring the safety of his fellow-citizens, upon which he knew his own safety depended."*

This is a principle of wide application. Students of your Platonic school, who are such diligent students of history, have found a favorite field for the display of their eloquence in recalling the stories of brave and famous men of old. Your school praises their actions, not on the grounds that those actions were useful, but because of the alleged abstract splendor of "moral worth." But all of this falls to the ground once we recognize the principle that I have just described — the principle that some pleasures are to be foregone for the purpose of getting greater pleasures, and that some pains are to be endured for the sake of escaping greater pains.

But enough has been said at this stage about the glorious exploits of the heroes of the past. The tendency of the virtues to produce pleasure is a topic that I will treat later on. At present I shall proceed to the nature of pleasure itself, and I shall work to remove the misconceptions of ignorance, and show you how serious, how temperate, and how simple is the school that is supposedly sensual, lax and luxurious.

The happiness we pursue does not consist solely of the delightful feelings of physical pleasures. On the contrary, according to Epicurus the greatest pleasure is that which is experienced as a result of the complete removal of all pain, physical and mental. When we are released from pain, the mere sensation of complete emancipation and relief from distress is itself a source of great gratification. But everything that causes gratification is a pleasure, just as everything that causes distress is a pain. Therefore the complete removal of pain has correctly been termed a pleasure. For example, when hunger and thirst are banished by food and drink, the mere fact of getting rid of those distresses brings pleasure as a result. So as a rule, the removal of pain causes pleasure to take its place.

For that reason Epicurus held that there is no such thing as a neutral state of feeling that is somewhere between pleasure and pain. This is because for the living being, the entire absence of pain, a state supposed by some philosophers to be neutral, is not only a state of pleasure, but a pleasure of the highest order.

A man who is living and conscious of his condition at all necessarily feels either pleasure or pain. Epicurus holds that the experience of the complete absence of all pain is the highest point, or the “limit,” of pleasure. Beyond this point, pleasure may vary in kind, but it does not vary in intensity or degree.

To illustrate this, my father used to tell me (when he wanted to show his wit at the expense of the Stoics) that there was once in Athens a statue of the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus. This statue was fashioned with Chrysippus holding out one hand, in a gesture intended to indicate the delight which he used to take in the following little play on words:

*Does your hand desire anything, while it is in its present condition?*

*No, nothing.*

*But if pleasure were a good, it would want pleasure.*

*Yes, I suppose it would.*

*Therefore pleasure is not a good.*

This is an argument, my father declared, which not even a dumb statue would employ, if a statue could speak. This is because the argument is cogent enough as an objection to those who pursue sensual pleasures as the only goal of life, but it does not touch Epicurus. For if the only kind of pleasure were that which, so to speak, tickles the senses with a feeling of delight, neither the hand nor any other member of the body could be satisfied with the absence of pain, if it were not accompanied by an active sensation of pleasure. If, however, as Epicurus holds, the highest pleasure is experienced at the removal of all pain, then the man who responded to Chrysippus was wrong to be misled by his questions. This is because the man’s first answer, that his hand was in a condition that wanted nothing, was correct. But his second answer, that if pleasure were a good, his hand would want it, was not correct. This was wrong because the hand had no need to desire any additional pleasure, because the state in which it was in – a state without pain – was itself a state of pleasure.

The truth of the view that pleasure or happiness is the ultimate good will readily appear from the following additional illustration:

Let us imagine a man who is living in the continuous enjoyment of numerous vivid pleasures, of both body and of mind, and who is undisturbed either by the presence or by the prospect of pain. What possible state of existence could we describe as being more excellent or more desirable? A man so situated must possess in the first place a strength of mind that is impregnable against all fear of death or of pain. He will have no fear of death because he will know that death only means complete unconsciousness, and he will have no fear of pain, because he will know that while he is alive, pain that is long is generally light, and pain that is strong is generally short. In other words, he will also know that the intensity of pain is alleviated by the briefness of its duration, and that continuing pain is bearable because it is generally of lesser severity. Let such a man moreover have no fear of any supernatural power; let him never allow the pleasures of the past to fade away, but let him constantly renew their enjoyment in his recollection, and his lot will be one which will not admit of further improvement.

On the other hand, imagine a man who is crushed beneath the heaviest load of mental and bodily anguish which humanity is able to sustain. Grant him no prospect of ultimate relief; let him neither have, nor hope to have, a gleam of pleasure. Can one describe or imagine a more pitiable state? If, then, a life full of pain is the thing most to be avoided, it follows that to live in pain is the highest evil; **and it also follows that a life of pleasure and happiness is the ultimate good.** The mind possesses nothing within itself on which it can rest as final. Every fear, every sorrow, can be traced back to pain – and there is nothing besides pain which has the capacity to cause either anxiety or distress.

Pleasure and pain therefore supply the motives and the principles of choice and of avoidance, and thus they are the springs of conduct generally. This being so, it clearly follows that actions are right and praiseworthy only to the extent that they are productive of a life of happiness. But something which is not itself a means to obtain anything else, but to which all other things are but the means by which it is to be acquired, is what the Greeks term the

highest, or final good. It must therefore be admitted that the chief good of man is to live happily.

Those who place the chief good in “virtue” alone are beguiled by the glamor of a name, and they do not understand the true demands of Nature. If they will but consent to listen to Epicurus, they will be delivered from the grossest error. Your school waxes eloquently on the supposedly transcendent beauty of the “virtues.” But were they not productive of pleasure, who would deem the virtues either praiseworthy or desirable?

We value the art of medicine not for its interest as a science, but because it produces health. We commend the art of navigation for its practical, and not its scientific value, because it conveys the rules for sailing a ship with success. So also Wisdom, which must be considered as the art of living, would not be desired if it produced no result. As it is, however, wisdom is desired, because it is the craftsman that produces and procures pleasure. The meaning that I attach to pleasure and happiness must by this time be clear to you, and you must no longer be biased against my argument due to the discreditable associations that others have attached to the terms.

The great disturbing factor in man’s life is ignorance of good and evil. Mistaken ideas about these frequently rob us of our greatest pleasures, and torment us with the most cruel pains of mind. Thus we need the aid of Wisdom to rid us of our fears and unnatural desires, to root out all our errors and prejudices, and to serve as our infallible guide to the attainment of happiness.

Wisdom alone can banish sorrow from our hearts and protect us from alarm and apprehension. Become a student of Wisdom, and you may live in peace and quench the glowing flames of vain desires. For the vain desires are incapable of satisfaction — they ruin not only individuals but whole families, and in fact they often shake the very foundations of the state. It is the vain desires that are the source of hatred, quarreling, strife, sedition, and war. Nor do the vain desires flaunt themselves only away from home, and turn their onslaughts solely against other people. For even when they are imprisoned within the heart of the individual man, they quarrel and fall out among themselves, and this can have no result but to render the whole of life embittered.

For this reason it is only the wise man, who prunes away all the rotten growth of vanity and error, who can possibly live untroubled by sorrow and by fear, and who can live contentedly within the bounds that Nature has set.

Nothing could be more instructive and helpful to right living than Epicurus’ doctrine as to the different classes of the desires. One kind he classified as both natural and necessary, a second as natural but not necessary, and a third as neither natural nor necessary. The principle of the classification comes from observing that the necessary desires are gratified with little trouble or expense. The natural desires also require little effort, since the quantity of Nature’s riches which suffices to bring contentment is both small and easily obtained. In contrast, for the vain and idle desires, no boundary or limit can be discovered.

Therefore we observe that ignorance and error reduce the whole of life to confusion. It is Wisdom alone that is able to protect us from the onslaught of the vain appetites and the menace of fears. Only wisdom is able to teach us to bear the hardships of fortune with moderation, and only wisdom is able to show us the paths that lead to calmness and to peace. Why then should we hesitate to proudly affirm that Wisdom is to be desired, not for its own sake, but *for the sake of the happiness it brings?* **And why therefore should we hesitate to affirm** that Folly is to be avoided, again not for its own sake, because of the injuries that follow in its path?

This same principle leads us also to pronounce that Temperance is not desirable for its own sake, but because it bestows peace of mind, and soothes the heart with a calming sense of harmony. For it is temperance that warns us to be guided by reason in what we desire and in what we choose to avoid.

Nor is it enough to **judge** what it is right to do or leave undone, we must also **take action** according to our judgment. Most men, however, lack tenacity of purpose. Their resolution weakens and succumbs as soon as the fair form of pleasure meets their gaze, and they surrender themselves prisoner to their passions, failing to foresee the inevitable result. Thus for the sake of small and unnecessary pleasures, which they might have obtained by other means or even denied themselves altogether without pain, they incur serious disease, loss of fortune, or disgrace, and often become liable to the penalties of the law and of the courts of justice.

Other men, however, resolve to enjoy their pleasures so as to avoid all painful consequences, they retain their sense

of judgment, and they avoid being seduced by pleasure into courses that they see to be wrong. Such men reap the very highest pleasure by forgoing other pleasures. In a similar way, wise men voluntarily endure certain pains to avoid incurring greater pain by not doing so. This clearly shows us that temperance is not desirable for its own sake. Instead, temperance is desirable, not because it renounces pleasures, but because it produces greater pleasures.

The same lesson will be found to be true of Courage. The performance of labors and the endurance of pains are not attractive in and of themselves. Neither are patience, industry, watchfulness, or that much-praised virtue, perseverance, or even courage itself, worthy of praise apart from that which they produce. Instead, we aim at these virtues in order to live without anxiety and fear and so far as possible, to be free from pain of mind and body.

The fear of death plays havoc with the calm and even tenor of life, and it is a pitiful thing to bow the head to pain and bear it abjectly and feebly. Such weakness has caused many men to betray their parents or their friends; some even betray their own country, and very many utterly fall to ruin themselves. On the other hand, a strong and lofty spirit is entirely free from anxiety and sorrow, and makes light of death, for the dead are only as they were before they were born. It is wise to recall that pains of great severity are ended by death, and slight pains have frequent intervals of respite; while pains of medium intensity lie within our ability to control. If pains are endurable then we can bear them, and if they are unendurable, we may choose ourselves to leave life's theater serenely when the play has ceased to please us.

These considerations prove that timidity and cowardice are not to be condemned, and courage and endurance are not to be praised, in and of themselves. Timidity and cowardice are rejected because they bring pain, and courage and endurance are coveted because they produce pleasure.

It remains to speak of Justice to complete the list of the virtues. But justice admits of practically the same explanation as the others. I have already shown that Wisdom, Temperance and Courage are so closely linked with happiness that they cannot possibly be severed from it. The same must be deemed to be the case with Justice. Not only does Justice never cause anyone harm, but on the contrary it always brings some benefit, partly because of its calming influence on the mind, and partly because of the hope that it provides of never-failing access to the things that one's uncorrupted nature really needs. And just as Rashness, License and Cowardice are always tormenting the mind, always awakening trouble and discord, so Unrighteousness, when firmly rooted in the heart, causes restlessness by the mere fact of its presence. Once unrighteousness has found expression in some deed of wickedness, no matter how secret the act may appear, it can never be free of the fear that it will one day be detected.

The usual consequences of crime are suspicion, gossip, and rumor – after that comes the accuser, then the judge. Many wrongdoers even turn evidence against themselves ..... And even if any transgressors think themselves to be well fortified against detection by their fellow men, they still dread the eye of heaven, and fancy that the pangs of anxiety that night and day gnaw at their hearts are sent by Providence to punish them.

So in what way can wickedness be thought to be worthwhile, in view of its effect in *increasing* the distresses of life by bringing with it the burden of a guilty conscience, the penalties of the law, and the hatred of one's fellow men?"

Nevertheless, some men indulge without limit their avarice, ambition, love of power, lust, gluttony, and those other desires which ill-gotten gains can never diminish, but rather inflame. Such men are the proper subjects for restraint, rather than for reformation.

Men of sound natures, therefore, are summoned by the voice of true reason to justice, equity, and honesty.

For those without eloquence or resources, dishonesty is not a good policy, since it is difficult for such a man to succeed in his designs, or to make good his success once it is achieved. On the other hand, for those who are rich and intelligent, generous conduct seems more appropriate, for liberality wins them affection and good will, the surest means to a life of peace. This is especially true since we see that there is really no need for anyone to transgress, because the desires that spring from Nature are easily gratified without doing wrong to any man, and those desires that are vain and idle can be resisted by observing that they set their sights on nothing that is really desirable, and that there is more loss inherent in injustice than there is profit in the gains that it may bring for a time.

As with the other virtues, Justice cannot correctly be said to be desirable in and of itself. Here again, Justice is

desirable because it is so highly productive of gratification. Esteem and affection are gratifying because they render life safer and happier. Thus we hold that injustice is to be avoided not simply on account of the disadvantages that result from being unjust, but even more, because when injustice dwells in a man's heart, it never allows him to breathe freely or to know a moment's rest.

Thus Epicurus shows us that the alleged glory of "Virtue," on which the Platonic philosophers love to expound so eloquently, has in the final analysis no meaning at all unless it is based on living happily, because happiness is the only thing that is intrinsically attractive and desirable. It therefore cannot be doubted that pleasure is the one supreme and final good, and that a life of happiness is nothing else than a life of pleasure.

Having thus firmly established the doctrine, we turn to several corollaries which I will briefly mention:

First, the natural ends of good and evil, that is, pleasure and pain, are not open to mistake. Where people go wrong is in not knowing what things are in fact productive of pleasure and pain.

Also, we hold that mental pleasures and pains are always connected with bodily matters, and cannot exist without a bodily basis. .... Men do of course experience mental pleasure that is agreeable and mental pain that is annoying, but both of these we assert arise out of and are based upon matters connected with the body.

Even though mental pleasures and pains arise from the body, we maintain that this does not preclude mental pleasures and pains from being much more intense than those of the body. This is because the body can feel only what is present to it at the moment, whereas the mind is also aware of the past and of the future. For example, even granting that pain of body is equally painful, yet our sensation of pain can be enormously increased by the mental apprehension that some evil of unlimited magnitude and duration threatens to befall us hereafter. This same consideration applies to pleasure — a pleasure is greater if it is not accompanied by any apprehension of evil. We therefore see that intense mental pleasure or distress contributes more to our happiness or misery than bodily pleasure or pain of equal duration.

Further, we do not agree with those who allege that when pleasure is withdrawn, anxiety follows at once. That result is true only in those situations where the pleasure happens to be replaced directly by a pain. The truth is, in general, we are glad whenever we lose a pain, even though no active sensation of pleasure comes immediately in its place. This fact serves to show us how life in the absence of pain is so great a pleasure.

Moreover, just as we are elated by the anticipation of good things to come, so we are delighted by the recollection of good things in the past. Fools are tormented by the remembrance of former evils, but to wise men, memory is a pleasure — through it they renew the good things of the past. Within us all resides, if we will it, both the power to obliterate our misfortunes by permanently forgetting them, and the power to summon up pleasant and agreeable memories of our successes. When we concentrate our mental vision closely on the events of the past, then sorrow or gladness follows according to whether these events were evil or good.

Here indeed is the renowned road to happiness — open, simple, and direct! For clearly man can have no greater good than complete freedom from pain and sorrow coupled with the enjoyment of the highest bodily and mental pleasures. Notice then how the theory embraces every possible enhancement of life, every aid to the achievement of that chief good — a life of happiness — which is our object. Epicurus, the man whom you denounce as given to excessive sensuality, cries aloud that no one can live pleasantly without living wisely, honorably and justly, and no one can live wisely, honorably and justly without living pleasantly.

A city torn by faction cannot prosper, nor can a house whose masters are at strife. Much less then can a mind that is divided against itself and filled with inward discord taste any particle of pure and liberal pleasure. One who is perpetually swayed by conflicting and incompatible opinions and desires can know no peace or calm.

If the pleasantness of life is diminished by the serious bodily diseases, *how much more* must it be diminished by the diseases of the mind! Extravagant and vain desires for riches, fame, power, and other pleasures of license, are nothing but mental diseases. Grief, trouble and sorrow gnaw the heart and consume it with anxiety if men fail to realize that the mind need feel no pain unless it is connected with some pain of body, present or to come. Yet all foolish men are afflicted by at least one of these diseases — and therefore there is no foolish man who is not

unhappy.

And always there is death, the stone of Tantalus ever hanging over men's heads, and then there is religion, that poisons and destroys all peace of mind. Fools do not recall their past happiness or enjoy their present blessings – they only look forward to the desires of the future, and as the future is always uncertain, they are consumed with agony and terror. And the climax of their torment is when they perceive, too late, that all their dreams of wealth or station, power or fame, have come to nothing. For fools can never hold the pleasures for which they hoped, and for which they were inspired to undergo all their arduous toils.

Or look again at men who are petty, narrow-minded, confirmed pessimists, or others who are spiteful, envious, ill-tempered, unsociable, abusive, cantankerous. Look at those who are enslaved to the follies of love, or those who are impudent, reckless, wanton, headstrong and yet irresolute, always changing their minds. Such failings render their lives one unbroken round of misery. The result is that no foolish man can be happy, nor any wise man fail to be happy. This is a truth that we establish far more conclusively than do the Platonic philosophers, who maintain that nothing is good save that vague phantom which they entitle "Moral Worth," a title more splendid in sound than it is substantial in reality. Such men are gravely mistaken when, resting on this vague idea of "Moral Worth" they allege that Virtue has no need of pleasure, and that Virtue is sufficient for itself.

At the same time, this view can be stated in a form to which we do not object, and can indeed endorse. For Epicurus tells us that the Wise Man is always happy. The Wise Man's desires are kept within Nature's bounds, and he disregards death. The wise man has a true conception, untainted by fear, of the Divine Nature. If it be expedient to depart from life, the wise man does not hesitate to do so. Thus equipped, the wise man enjoys perpetual pleasure, for there is no moment when the pleasures he experiences do not outbalance his pains, since he remembers the past with delight, he grasps the present with a full realization of its pleasantness, and he does not rely wholly upon the future. The Wise Man looks forward to the future, but finds his true enjoyment in the present. Also, the wise man is entirely free from the vices that I referenced a few moments ago, and he derives considerable pleasure from comparing his own existence with the life of the foolish. Any pains that the Wise Man may encounter are never so severe but that he has more cause for gladness than for sorrow.

It was a central doctrine of Epicurus that "the Wise Man is but little interfered with by fortune. The great concerns of life, the things that matter, are controlled by his own wisdom and reason." Epicurus also taught that "No greater pleasure could be derived from a life of infinite duration, than is actually afforded by this existence, which we know to be finite."

Theoretical logic, on which your Platonic school lays such stress, Epicurus held to be of no assistance either as a guide to conduct or as an aid to thought. In contrast, he deemed Natural Philosophy to be all-important. Natural Philosophy explains to us the meaning of terms, the nature of cause and effect, and the laws of consistency and contradiction. A thorough knowledge of the facts of Nature relieves us of the burden of superstition, frees us from fear of death, and shields us against the disturbing effects of ignorance, which is often in itself a cause of terrifying fears. A knowledge of those things that Nature truly requires improves the moral character as well. It is only by firmly grasping a well-reasoned scientific study of Nature, and observing Epicurus' Canon of truth that has fallen, as it were, from heaven, which affords us a knowledge of the universe. Only by making that Canon the test of all our judgments can we hope always to stand fast in our convictions, undeterred and unshaken by the eloquence of any man.

On the other hand, without a firm understanding of the world of Nature, it is impossible to maintain the validity of the perceptions of our senses. Every mental presentation has its origin in sensation, and no knowledge or perception is possible unless the sensations are reliable, as the theory of Epicurus teaches us that they are. Those who deny the reliability of sensation and say that nothing can be known, having excluded the evidence of the senses, are unable even to make their own argument. By abolishing knowledge and science, they abolish all possibility of rational life and action. Thus Natural Philosophy supplies courage to face the fear of death; and resolution to resist the terrors of religion. Natural Philosophy provides peace of mind by removing all ignorance of the mysteries of Nature, and provides self-control, by explaining the Nature of the desires and allowing us to distinguish their different kinds. In addition, the Canon or Criterion of Knowledge which Epicurus established shows us the method by which we evaluate the evidence of the senses and discern truth from falsehood.

There remains a topic that is supremely relevant to this discussion – the subject of Friendship. Your [Platonic] school maintains that if pleasure is held to be the Chief Good, friendship will cease to exist. In contrast, Epicurus has pronounced in regard to friendship that of all the means to happiness that wisdom has devised, none is greater, none is more fruitful, none is more delightful than friendship. Not only did Epicurus commend the importance of friendship through his words, but far more, through the example of his life and his conduct. How rare and great friendship is can be seen in the mythical stories of antiquity. Review the legends from the remotest of ages, and, many and varied as they are, you will barely find in them three pairs of friends, beginning with Theseus and ending with Orestes. Yet Epicurus in a single house (and a small one at that) maintained a whole company of friends, united by the closest sympathy and affection, and this still goes on today in the Epicurean school.

...

The Epicureans maintain that friendship can no more be separated from pleasure than can the virtues, which we have discussed already. A solitary, friendless life is necessarily beset by secret dangers and alarms. Hence reason itself advises the acquisition of friends. The possession of friends gives confidence and a firmly rooted hope of winning pleasure. And just as hatred, jealousy and contempt are hindrances to pleasure, so friendship is the most trustworthy preserver and also creator of pleasure for both our friends and for ourselves. Friendship affords us enjoyment in the present, and it inspires us with hope for the near and distant future. Thus it is not possible to secure uninterrupted gratification in life without friendship, nor to preserve friendship itself unless we love our friends as much as ourselves.

...

For we rejoice in our friends' joy as much as in our own, and we are equally pained by their sorrows. Therefore the wise man will feel exactly the same towards his friends as he does towards himself, and he will exert himself as much for his friend's pleasure as he would for his own. All that has been said about the essential connection of the virtues with pleasure must be repeated about friendship. Epicurus well said (and I give almost his exact words): "The same creed that has given us courage to overcome all fear of everlasting or long-enduring evil after death has discerned that friendship is our strongest safeguard in this present term of life.

...

All these considerations go to prove not only that the rationale of friendship is not impaired by the identification of the chief good with pleasure, but, in fact, without this, no foundation for friendship whatsoever can be found."

In sum, then, the theory I have set forth is clearer and more luminous than daylight itself. It is derived entirely from Nature's source. My whole discussion relies for confirmation on the unbiased and unimpeachable evidence of the senses. Lispering babies, even dumb animals, prompted by Nature's teaching, can almost find the voice to proclaim to us that in life there is no welfare but pleasure, no hardship but pain – and their judgment in these matters is neither corrupted nor biased. Ought we then not to feel the greatest gratitude to Epicurus, the man who listened to these words from Nature's own voice, and grasped their meaning so firmly and so fully that he was able to guide all sane-minded men into the path of peace and happiness, of calmness and repose?

You amuse yourself by thinking that Epicurus was uneducated. The truth is that Epicurus refused to consider any education to be worthy of the name if it did not teach us the means to live happily. Was Epicurus to spend his time, as you encourage Triarius and me to do, perusing the poets, who give us nothing solid and useful, but only childish amusement? Was Epicurus to occupy himself like Plato, with music and geometry, arithmetic and astronomy, which are at best mere tools, and which, *if they start from false premises*, can never reveal truth or contribute anything to make our lives happier and therefore better?

Was Epicurus to study the limited arts such as these, and neglect the *master* art, so difficult but correspondingly so fruitful, the art of *living*? No! It was not Epicurus who was uninformed. The truly uneducated are those who ask us to go on studying until old age the subjects that we ought to be ashamed not to have learned when we were children!



## On the Nature of the Gods

*The following translation is from "Cicero's Tusculan Disputations; Also, Treatises on The Nature of The Gods, and On The Commonwealth, literally translated, chiefly by C. D. Yonge, New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, Franklin Square 1890.*

Now, to free myself from the reproach of partiality, I propose to lay before you the opinions of various philosophers concerning the Nature of the Gods ....

The manifest disagreement among the most learned on this subject creates doubts in those who imagine they have some certain knowledge of the subject. Which fact I have often taken notice of elsewhere, and I did so more especially at the discussion that was held at my friend C. Cotta's concerning the immortal Gods, and which was carried on with the greatest care, accuracy, and precision; for coming to him at the time of the Latin holidays, according to his own invitation and message from him, I found him sitting in his study, and in a discourse with C. Velleius, the senator, who was then reputed by the Epicureans the ablest of our countrymen. Q. Lucilius Balbus was likewise there, a great proficient in the doctrine of the Stoics, and esteemed equal to the most eminent of the Greeks in that part of knowledge. As soon as Cotta saw me, "You are come," says he, "very seasonably; for I am having a dispute with Velleius on an important subject, which, considering the Nature of your studies, is not improper for you to join in."

"Indeed," said I, "I think I am come very seasonably, as you say; for here are three chiefs of three principal sects met together. If M. Piso was present, no sect of philosophy that is in any esteem would want an advocate."

"If Antiochus's book," replied Cotta, which he lately sent to Balbus, "says true, you have no occasion to wish for your friend Piso; for Antiochus is of the opinion that the Stoics do not differ from the Peripatetics in fact, though they do in words; and I should be glad to know what you think of that book, Balbus."

"I?" said he. "I wonder that Antiochus, a man of the clearest apprehension, should not see what a vast difference there is between the Stoics, who distinguish the honest and the profitable, not only in name, but absolutely in kind, and the Peripatetics, who blend the honest with the profitable in such a manner that they differ only in degrees and proportion, and not in kind. This is not a little difference in words, but a great one in things; but of this hereafter. Now, if you think fit, let us return to what we began with."

"With all my heart," said Cotta. "But that this visitor (looking at me), who is just come in, may not be ignorant of what we are upon, I will inform him that we were discoursing on the Nature of the Gods; concerning which, as it is a subject that always appeared very obscure to me, I prevailed on Velleius to give us the sentiments of Epicurus. Therefore," he continued, "if it is not troublesome, Velleius, repeat what you have already stated to us."

"I will," said he, "though this new-comer will be no advocate for me, but for you; for you have both," added he, with a smile, "learned from the same Philo to be certain of nothing."

"What we have learned from him," replied I, "Cotta will discover; but I would not have you think I am come as an assistant to him, but as an auditor, with an impartial and unbiased mind, and not bound by any obligation to defend any particular principle, whether I like or dislike it."

After this, Velleius, with the confidence peculiar to his sect, dreading nothing so much as to seem to doubt of anything, began as if he had just then descended from the council of the Gods, and Epicurus' intervals of worlds.

"Do not attend," said he, "to these idle and imaginary tales; nor to the operator and builder of the World, the God of Plato's *Timæus*; nor to the old prophetic dame, the [Greek word for "Fate"] of the Stoics, which the Latins call Providence; nor to that round, that burning, revolving deity, the World, endowed with sense and understanding; the prodigies and wonders, not of inquisitive philosophers, but of dreamers!"

“For with what eyes of the mind was your Plato able to see that workhouse of such stupendous toil, in which he makes the world to be modeled and built by God? What materials, what tools, what bars, what machines, what servants, were employed in so vast a work? How could the air, fire, water, and earth pay obedience and submit to the will of the architect? From whence arose those five forms, of which the rest were composed, so aptly contributing to frame the mind and produce the senses? It is tedious to go through all, as they are of such a sort that they look more like things to be desired than to be discovered.”

“But, what is more remarkable, he gives us a world which has been not only created, but, if I may so say, in a manner formed with hands, and yet he says it is eternal. Do you conceive him to have the least skill in natural philosophy who is capable of thinking anything to be everlasting that had a beginning? For what can possibly ever have been put together which cannot be dissolved again? Or what is there that had a beginning which will not have an end? If your Providence, Lucilius, is the same as Plato’s God, I ask you, as before, who were the assistants, what were the engines, what was the plan and preparation of the whole work? If it is not the same, then why did she make the world mortal, and not everlasting, like Plato’s God?”

“But I would demand of you both, why these world-builders started up so suddenly, and lay dormant for so many ages? For we are not to conclude that, if there was no world, there were therefore no ages. I do not now speak of such ages as are finished by a certain number of days and nights in annual courses. For I acknowledge that those could not be without the revolution of the world, as there was a certain eternity from infinite time, not measured by any circumscription of seasons. But how that was in space we cannot understand, because we cannot possibly have even the slightest idea of time before time was. I desire, therefore, to know, Balbus, why this Providence of yours was idle for such an immense space of time? Did she avoid labor? But that could have no effect on the Deity; nor could there be any labor, since all Nature, air, fire, earth, and water would obey the divine essence. What was it that incited the Deity to act the part of an ædile, to illuminate and decorate the world? If it was in order that God might be the better accommodated in his habitation, then he must have been dwelling an infinite length of time before in darkness as in a dungeon. But do we imagine that he was afterward delighted with that variety with which we see the heaven and earth adorned? What entertainment could that be to the Deity? If it was any, he would not have been without it so long.”

“Or were these things made, as you almost assert, by God for the sake of men? Was it for the wise? If so, then this great design was adopted for the sake of a very small number. Or for the sake of fools? First of all, there was no reason why God should consult the advantage of the wicked; and, further, what could be his object in doing so, since all fools are, without doubt, the most miserable of men, chiefly because they are fools? For what can we pronounce more deplorable than folly? Besides, there are many inconveniences in life which the wise can learn to think lightly of by dwelling rather on the advantages which they receive; but which fools are unable to avoid when they are coming, or to bear when they are come.”

“They who affirm the world to be an animated and intelligent being have by no means discovered the Nature of the mind, nor are able to conceive in what form that essence can exist; but of that I shall speak more hereafter. At present I must express my surprise at the weakness of those who endeavor to make it out to be not only animated and immortal, but likewise happy, and round, because Plato says that is the most beautiful form; whereas I think a cylinder, a square, a cone, or a pyramid more beautiful.”

“But what life do they attribute to that round Deity? Truly, it is a being whirled about with a celerity to which nothing can be even conceived by the imagination as equal. Nor can I imagine how a settled mind and happy life can consist in such motion, the least degree of which would be troublesome to us. Why, therefore, should it not be considered troublesome also to the Deity? For the earth itself, as it is part of the world, is part also of the Deity. We see vast tracts of land barren and uninhabitable – some, because they are scorched by the too near approach of the sun; others, because they are bound up with frost and snow, through the great distance which the sun is from them. Therefore, if the world is a Deity, as these are parts of the world, some of the Deity’s limbs must be said to be scorched, and some frozen.”

“These are your doctrines, Lucilius. But what those of others are I will endeavor to ascertain by tracing them back from the earliest of ancient philosophers. Thales, the Milesian, who first inquired after such subjects, asserted water to be the origin of things, and that God was that mind which formed all things from water. If the Gods can exist without corporeal sense, and if there can be a mind without a body, why did he annex a mind to water?”

“It was Anaximander’s opinion that the Gods were born; that after a great length of time they died; and that there are innumerable worlds. But what conception can we possibly have of a Deity who is not eternal?”

“Anaximenes, after him, taught that the air is God, and that he was generated, and that he is immense, infinite, and always in motion; as if air, which has no form, could possibly be God; for the Deity must necessarily be not only of some form or other, but of the most beautiful form. Besides, is not everything that had a beginning subject to mortality?”

“Anaxagoras, who received his learning from Anaximenes, was the first who affirmed the system and disposition of all things to be contrived and perfected by the power and reason of an infinite mind. In that infinity, he did not perceive that there could be no conjunction of sense and motion, nor any sense in the least degree, where Nature herself could feel no impulse. If he would have this mind to be a sort of animal, then there must be some more internal principle from whence that animal should receive its appellation. But what can be more internal than the mind? Let it, therefore, be clothed with an external body. But this is not agreeable to his doctrine, as we are utterly unable to conceive how a pure simple mind can exist without any substance annexed to it.”

“Alcmæon of Crotona, in attributing a divinity to the sun, the moon, and the rest of the stars, and also to the mind, did not perceive that he was ascribing immortality to mortal beings.”

“Pythagoras, who supposed the Deity to be one soul, mixing with and pervading all Nature, from which our souls are taken, did not consider that the Deity himself must, in consequence of this doctrine, be maimed and torn with the rending every human soul from it; nor that, when the human mind is afflicted (as is the case in many instances), that part of the Deity must likewise be afflicted, which cannot be. If the human mind were a Deity, how could it be ignorant of any thing? Besides, how could that Deity, if it is nothing but soul, be mixed with, or infused into, the world?”

“Then Xenophanes, who said that everything in the world which had any existence, with the addition of intellect, was God, is as liable to exception as the rest, especially in relation to the infinity of it, in which there can be nothing sentient, nothing composite.”

“Parmenides formed a conceit to himself of something circular like a crown. (He names it Stephane.) It is an orb of constant light and heat around the heavens; this he calls God; in which there is no room to imagine any divine form or sense. And he uttered many other absurdities on the same subject; for he ascribed a divinity to war, to discord, to lust, and other passions of the same kind, which are destroyed by disease, or sleep, or oblivion, or age. The same honor he gives to the stars; but I shall forbear making any objections to his system here, having already done it in another place.”

“Empedocles, who erred in many things, is most grossly mistaken in his notion of the Gods. He lays down four Natures as divine, from which he thinks that all things were made. Yet it is evident that they have a beginning, that they decay, and that they are void of all sense.”

“Protagoras did not seem to have any idea of the real Nature of the Gods; for he acknowledged that he was altogether ignorant whether there are or are not any, or what they are.”

“What shall I say of Democritus, who classes our images of objects, and their orbs, in the number of the Gods; as he does that principle through which those images appear and have their influence? He deifies likewise our knowledge and understanding. Is he not involved in a very great error? And because nothing continues always in the same state, he denies that anything is everlasting. Does he not thereby entirely destroy the Deity, and make it impossible to form any opinion of him?”

“Diogenes of Apollonia looks upon the air to be a Deity. But what sense can the air have? Or what divine form can be attributed to it?”

“It would be tedious to show the uncertainty of Plato’s opinion. In his Timæus, he denies the propriety of asserting that there is one great father or creator of the world, and in his book of Laws, he thinks we ought not to make too strict an inquiry into the Nature of the Deity. And as for his statement when he asserts that God is a being without

any body — what the Greeks call *incorporeal*<sup>108</sup> — it is certainly quite unintelligible how that theory can possibly be true; for such a God must then necessarily be destitute of sense, prudence, and pleasure; all which things are comprehended in our notion of the Gods. He likewise asserts in his *Timæus*, and in his *Laws*, that the world, the heavens, the stars, the mind, and those Gods which are delivered down to us from our ancestors, constitute the Deity. These opinions, taken separately, are apparently false; and, together, are directly inconsistent with each other.”

“Xenophon has committed almost the same mistakes, but in fewer words. In those sayings which he has related of Socrates, he introduces him disputing the lawfulness of inquiring into the form of the Deity, and makes him assert the sun and the mind to be Deities. He represents him likewise as affirming the being of one God only, and at another time of many; which are errors of almost the same kind which I before took notice of in Plato.”

“Antisthenes, in his book called the *Natural Philosopher*, says that there are many national and one natural Deity; but by this saying he destroys the power and Nature of the Gods.”

“Speusippus is not much less in the wrong; who, following his uncle Plato, says that a certain incorporeal power governs everything; by which he endeavors to root out of our minds the knowledge of the Gods.”

“Aristotle, in his third book of Philosophy, confounds many things together, as the rest have done; but he does not differ from his master Plato. At one time he attributes all divinity to the mind, at another he asserts that the world is God. Soon afterward he makes some other essence preside over the world, and gives it those faculties by which, with certain revolutions, he may govern and preserve the motion of it. Then he asserts the heat of the firmament to be God; not perceiving the firmament to be part of the world, which in another place he had described as God. How can that divine sense of the firmament be preserved in so rapid a motion? And where do the multitude of Gods dwell, if heaven itself is a Deity? But when this philosopher says that God is without a body, he makes him an irrational and insensible being. Besides, how can the world move itself, if it lacks a body? Or how, if it is in perpetual self-motion, can it be easy and happy?”

“Xenocrates, his fellow-pupil, does not appear much wiser on this head, for in his books concerning the Nature of the Gods no divine form is described; but he says the number of them is eight. Five are moving planets; the sixth is contained in all the fixed stars; which, dispersed, are so many several members, but, considered together, are one single Deity; the seventh is the sun; and the eighth the moon. But in what sense they can possibly be happy is not easy to be understood.”

“From the same school of Plato, Heraclides of Pontus stuffed his books with puerile tales. Sometimes he thinks the world a Deity, at other times the mind. He attributes divinity likewise to the wandering stars. He deprives the Deity of sense, and makes his form mutable; and, in the same book again, he makes earth and heaven Deities.”

“The unsteadiness of Theophrastus is equally intolerable. At one time he attributes a divine prerogative to the mind; at another, to the firmament; at another, to the stars and celestial constellations.”

“Nor is his disciple Strato, who is called the naturalist, any more worthy to be regarded; for he thinks that the divine power is diffused through Nature, which is the cause of birth, increase, and diminution, but that it has no sense nor form.”

“Zeno (to come to your sect, Balbus) thinks the law of Nature to be the divinity, and that it has the power to force us to what is right, and to restrain us from what is wrong. How this law can be an animated being I cannot conceive; but that God is so we would certainly maintain. The same person says, in another place, that the sky is God. But can we possibly conceive that God is a being insensible, deaf to our prayers, our wishes, and our vows, and wholly unconnected with us? In other books, he thinks there is a certain rational essence pervading all Nature, indued with divine efficacy. He attributes the same power to the stars, to the years, to the months, and to the seasons. In his interpretation of Hesiod’s *Theogony*, he entirely destroys the established notions of the Gods; for he excludes Jupiter, Juno, and Vesta, and those esteemed divine, from the number of them; but his doctrine is that these are names which by some kind of allusion are given to mute and inanimate beings. The sentiments of his disciple Aristo are not less erroneous. He thought it impossible to conceive the form of the Deity, and asserts that the Gods are destitute of sense; and he is entirely dubious whether the Deity is an animated being or not.”

“Cleanthes, who next comes under my notice, a disciple of Zeno at the same time with Aristo, in one place says that the world is God. In another, he attributes divinity to the mind and spirit of universal Nature. Then he asserts that the most remote, the highest, the all-surrounding, the all-enclosing and embracing heat, which is called the sky, is most certainly the Deity. In the books he wrote against pleasure, in which he seems to be raving, he imagines the Gods to have a certain form and shape; then he ascribes all divinity to the stars; and, lastly, he thinks nothing more divine than reason. So that this God, whom we know mentally and in the speculations of our minds, from which traces we receive our impression, has at last actually no visible form at all.”

“Persæus, another disciple of Zeno, says that they who have made discoveries advantageous to the life of man should be esteemed as Gods. The very things, he says, which are healthful and beneficial have derived their names from those of the Gods. He therefore thinks it not sufficient to call them the discoveries of Gods, but he urges that they themselves should be deemed divine. What can be more absurd than to ascribe divine honors to sordid and deformed things? Or to place among the Gods men who are dead and mixed with the dust, to whose memory all the respect that could be paid would be but mourning for their loss?”

“Chrysippus, who is looked upon as the most subtle interpreter of the dreams of the Stoics, has mustered up a numerous band of unknown Gods; and so unknown that we are not able to form any idea about them, though our mind seems capable of framing any image to itself in its thoughts. For he says that the divine power is placed in reason, and in the spirit and mind of universal Nature; that the world, with a universal effusion of its spirit, is God. He also says that the superior part of that spirit, which is the mind and reason, is the great principle of Nature, containing and preserving the chain of all things; that the divinity is the power of fate, and the necessity of future events. He deifies fire also, and what I before called the ethereal spirit, and those elements which naturally proceed from it — water, earth, and air. He attributes divinity to the sun, moon, stars, and universal space, the grand container of all things, and to those men likewise who have obtained immortality. He maintains the sky to be what men call Jupiter; the air, which pervades the sea, to be Neptune; and the earth, Ceres. In like manner he goes through the names of the other Deities. He says that Jupiter is that immutable and eternal law which guides and directs us in our manners; and this he calls fatal necessity, the everlasting verity of future events. But none of these are of such a Nature as to seem to carry any indication of divine virtue in them. These are the doctrines contained in his first book of the Nature of the Gods. In the second, he endeavors to accommodate the fables of Orpheus, Musæus, Hesiod, and Homer to what he has advanced in the first, in order that the most ancient poets, who never dreamed of these things, may seem to have been Stoics.”

“Diogenes the Babylonian was a follower of the doctrine of Chrysippus; and in that book which he wrote, entitled “A Treatise concerning Minerva,” he separates the account of Jupiter’s bringing-forth, and the birth of that virgin, from the fabulous, and reduces it to a natural construction.”

“Thus far have I been rather exposing the dreams of dotards than giving the opinions of philosophers. Not much more absurd than these are the fables of the poets, who owe all their power of doing harm to the sweetness of their language. They have represented the Gods as enraged with anger and inflamed with lust, and have brought before our eyes their wars, battles, combats, wounds; their hatreds, dissensions, discords, births, deaths, complaints, and lamentations; their indulgences in all kinds of intemperance; their adulteries; their chains; their amours with mortals, and their mortals begotten by immortals. To these idle and ridiculous flights of the poets we may add the prodigious stories invented by the Magi, and by the Egyptians also, which were of the same Nature, together with the extravagant notions of the multitude at all times, who, from total ignorance of the truth, are always fluctuating in uncertainty.”

“Now, whoever reflects on the rashness and absurdity of these tenets must inevitably entertain the highest respect and veneration for Epicurus, and perhaps even rank him in the number of those beings who are the subject of this dispute. For Epicurus alone first founded the idea of the existence of the Gods on the impression which Nature herself hath made on the minds of all men. For what nation, what people are there, who have not, without any learning, a natural idea, or prenotion, of a Deity? Epicurus calls this *anticipation*; that is, an antecedent conception of the fact in the mind, without which nothing can be understood, inquired after, or discoursed on. This is the force and advantage of the reasoning we receive from that celestial volume of Epicurus concerning *The Rule and Judgment of Things*.”

“Here, then, you see the foundation of this question clearly laid. Since it is the constant and universal opinion of

mankind, independent of education, custom, or law, that there are Gods, it must necessarily follow that this knowledge is implanted in our minds, or, rather, innate in us. That opinion respecting which there is a general agreement in universal Nature must infallibly be true. Therefore it must be allowed that there are Gods; for in this we have the concurrence, not only of almost all philosophers, but likewise of the ignorant and illiterate. It must be also confessed that the point is established that we have naturally this idea, as I said before, or prenotion, of the existence of the Gods. As new things require new names, so that prenotion was called *anticipation* by Epicurus; an appellation never used before. On the same principle of reasoning, we think that the Gods are happy and immortal. This is because that same Nature which has assured us that there are Gods has likewise imprinted in our minds the knowledge of their immortality and felicity. And, that being so, what Epicurus hath declared in these words is true: "That which is eternally happy cannot be burdened with any labor itself, nor can it impose any labor on another; nor can it be influenced by resentment or favor: because things which are liable to such feelings must be weak and frail." We have said enough to prove that we should worship the Gods with piety, and without superstition, if that were the only question."

"For the superior and excellent Nature of the Gods requires a pious adoration from men, because it is possessed of immortality and the most exalted felicity. This is because whatever excels has a right to veneration. But on the other hand all fear of the power and anger of the Gods should be banished, for we must understand that anger and affection are inconsistent with the Nature of a happy and immortal being. These apprehensions being removed, no dread of the superior powers remains. To confirm this opinion, our curiosity leads us to inquire into the form and life and action of the intellect and spirit of the Deity."

With regard to his form, we are directed partly by Nature and partly by reason. All men are told by Nature that none but a human form can be ascribed to the Gods; for under what other image did it ever appear to any one either sleeping or waking? And, even without reference to our first notions of the gods, reason itself declares the same. For as it is easy to conceive that the most excellent Nature, either because of its happiness or immortality, should be the most beautiful, what composition of limbs, what conformation of lineaments, what form, what aspect, can be more beautiful than the human?"

"Your sect, Lucilius (not like my friend Cotta, who sometimes says one thing and sometimes another), when they represent the divine art and workmanship in the human body, are used to describe how very completely each member is formed, not only for convenience, but also for beauty. Therefore, if the human form excels that of all other animal beings, as God himself is an animated being, he must surely be of that form which is the most beautiful."

"In addition, the Gods are granted to be perfectly happy; and nobody can be happy without virtue, nor can virtue exist where reason is not; and reason can reside in none but the human form. The Gods, therefore, must be acknowledged to be of human form. Yet that form is not body, but something like body; nor does it contain any blood, but something like blood. These distinctions were more acutely devised and more artfully expressed by Epicurus than any common capacity can comprehend. Yet, as I will depend on your understanding, I shall be more brief on the subject than otherwise I should be."

"Epicurus, who not only discovered and understood the occult and almost hidden secrets of Nature, but explained them with ease, teaches that the power and Nature of the Gods is not to be discerned by the senses, but by the mind. Nor are the Gods to be considered as bodies of any solidity, or reducible to number, like those things which, because of their firmness, he calls *Στερμνία* but as images, perceived by similitude and transition. As infinite kinds of those images result from innumerable individuals, and center in the Gods, our minds and understanding are directed towards and fixed with the greatest delight on them, in order to comprehend what that happy and eternal essence is."

"Surely the mighty power of the Infinite Being is most worthy our great and earnest contemplation; the Nature of which we must necessarily understand to be such that everything in it is made to correspond completely to some other answering part. This is called by Epicurus *ισονμία*; that is to say, an equal distribution or even disposition of things. From hence he draws this inference, that, as there is such a vast multitude of mortals, there cannot be a less number of immortals. Further, if those which perish are innumerable, those which are preserved ought also to be countless. Your sect, Balbus, frequently ask us how the Gods live, and how they pass their time? Their life is the most happy, and the most abounding with all kinds of blessings, which can be conceived. They do nothing. They are embarrassed with no business; nor do they perform any work. They rejoice in the possession of their own

wisdom and virtue. They are satisfied that they shall ever enjoy the fullness of eternal pleasures.”

“Such a Deity may properly be called happy; but yours is a most laborious God. For let us suppose the world a Deity — what can be a more uneasy state than, without the least cessation, to be whirled about the axle-tree of heaven with a surprising celerity? But nothing can be happy that is not at ease. Or let us suppose a Deity residing in the world, who directs and governs it, who preserves the courses of the stars, the changes of the seasons, and the vicissitudes and orders of things, surveying the earth and the sea, and accommodating them to the advantage and necessities of man. Truly this Deity is embarrassed with a very troublesome and laborious office. We make a happy life to consist in a tranquility of mind, a perfect freedom from care, and an exemption from all employment. The philosopher from whom we received all our knowledge has taught us that the world was made by Nature; that there was no occasion for a workhouse to frame it in; and that, though you deny the possibility of such a work without divine skill, it is so easy to her, that she has made, does make, and will make innumerable worlds.

“But, because you do not conceive that Nature is able to produce such effects without some rational aid, you are forced, like the tragic poets, when you cannot wind up your argument in any other way, to have recourse to a Deity. You would not seek the assistance of such a Deity if you could view that vast and unbounded magnitude of the universe in all its parts. There the mind, extending and spreading itself, travels so far and wide that it can find no end, no extremity to stop at. In this immensity of breadth, length, and height, a most boundless company of innumerable atoms are fluttering about. Those atoms, notwithstanding the interposition of a void space, meet and cohere, and continue clinging to one another. By this union these modifications and forms of things arise, which, in your opinions, could not possibly be made without the help of bellows and anvils. Thus you have imposed on us an eternal master, whom we must dread day and night. For who can be free from fear of a Deity who foresees, regards, and takes notice of everything; one who thinks all things his own; a curious, ever-busy God?”

“Hence first arose your *Είμαρμεντι*, as you call it, your fatal necessity; so that, whatever happens, you affirm that it flows from an eternal chain and continuance of causes. Of what value is this philosophy, which, like old women and illiterate men, attributes everything to fate? Then follows your *μανστικτι*, in Latin called *divinatio*, divination; which, if we would listen to you, would plunge us into such superstition that we should fall down and worship your inspectors into sacrifices, your augurs, your soothsayers, your prophets, and your fortune-tellers.”

“Epicurus has freed us from these terrors and restored us to liberty, and we have no dread of those beings whom we have reason to think entirely free from all trouble themselves, and who do not impose any on others. We pay our adoration, indeed, with piety and reverence to that essence which is above all excellence and perfection.”

“But I fear my zeal for this doctrine has made me too prolix. However, I could not easily leave so eminent and important a subject unfinished, though I must confess I should rather endeavor to hear than speak so long.”

## **Gaius Cassius Longinus – Selected Material**

*Gaius Cassius Longinus was a military and political leader whose primary fame was his role in the conspiracy to depose Julius Caesar. Several items of his correspondence are included here because in the years prior to that episode he had converted to the Epicurean philosophy, to the distress of Cicero, who knew that the fate of the Senatorial party and traditional Roman concepts of government depended on his leadership.*

### **Letter from Cassius to Cicero written from Syria, circa 46 B.C.**

CASSIUS LONGINUS TO CICERO (AT ROME) Syria, 7 May, in camp.

If you are well, I am glad. I also am well. I have read your letter in which I recognized your uncommon affection for me. For you seemed not merely to wish me well – as you always have done on private and public grounds alike – but to have involved yourself in very grave responsibility and to be exceedingly anxious about us. Therefore, because in the first place I thought that you would believe that we could not remain inactive when the Republic was crushed: and in the second place because, as you suspected that we were moving, I thought you would be anxious as to our safety and the result of the operations, as soon as I received the legions brought by Aulus Allienus from Egypt, I wrote to you and sent a number of messengers to Rome. I also wrote a dispatch to the senate, which I said was not to be delivered until it had been read to you – if by any chance my messengers have chosen to obey me. If these letters have not reached you, I have no doubt that Dolabella, who seized the government of Asia after the abominable murder of Trebonius, has caught my letter-carriers and intercepted the dispatches.

I have now under me all the Roman forces in Syria. I have been delayed for a short time whilst providing the promised pay for the soldiers. I am only just free from that difficulty. I beg you to consider that the defense of my position is committed to you, as you know full well that I have declined no danger and no labor in the service of my country: as on your suggestion and advice I have taken up arms against the most unscrupulous outlaws: as I have not only collected armies to defend the Republic and liberty, but have also rescued them from the most bloodthirsty tyrants. If Dolabella had anticipated me in getting hold of these armies, he would have strengthened Antony's hands, not only by their actual arrival, but also by giving him reason to think and expect that they were coming. For which achievements defend my soldiers, since you understand that they have done wonderfully good service to the state, and secure that they do not regret having preferred to make the Republic the object of their labors rather than the hope of booty and plunder.

Maintain also the position of the imperators Murcus and Crispus as far as lies in your power. For Bassus was desperately unwilling to hand over his legion to me. Had not his soldiers in spite of him sent agents to me, he would have kept Apamea closed until it had been stormed. I make these remarks to you not only in the name of the Republic, which has always been the object of your deepest affection, but also in the name of our friendship, which I feel sure has the greatest weight with you. Believe me that this army is at the service of the senate and all the most loyal citizens, and above all of yourself. For from continually being told of your patriotism they regard you with wonderful devotion and affection. And if they come to understand that their interests engage your attention, they will also regard themselves as owing you everything.

Since writing this letter I have been informed that Dolabella has arrived in Cilicia with his forces. I shall start for Cilicia. Whatever I succeed in doing I will take care to let you know promptly. I can only hope that we may be as fortunate as our services to the state deserve. Keep well, and love me.

## **Letter from Cicero to Cassius, written from Rome, January of 45 B.C.**

DXXX (F XV, 16)

TO C. CASSIUS LONGINUS (AT BRUNDISIUM)

ROME (JANUARY)

I think you must be a little ashamed at this being the third letter inflicted on you before I have a page or a syllable from you. But I will not press you: I shall expect, or rather exact, a longer letter. For my part, if I had a messenger always at hand, I should write even three an hour. For somehow it makes you seem almost present when I write anything to you, and that not “by way of phantoms of images,” as your new friends express it, who hold that “mental pictures” are caused by what Catius called “spectres” – or I must remind you that Catius Insuber the Epicurean, lately dead, calls “spectres” what the famous Gargettius, and before him Democritus, used to call “images.”

Well, even if my eyes were capable of being struck by these “spectres,” because they spontaneously run in upon them at your will, I do not see how the mind can be struck. You will be obliged to explain it to me, when you return safe and sound, whether the “spectre” of you is at my command, so as to occur to me as soon as I have taken the fancy to think about you; and not only about you, who are in my heart’s core, but supposing I begin thinking about the island of Britain – will its image fly at once into my mind? But of this later on.

I am just sounding you now to see how you take it. For if you are angry and annoyed, I shall say more and demand that you be restored to the sect from which you have been ejected by “violence and armed force.” In an injunction of this sort the words “within this year” are not usually added. Therefore, even if it is now two or three years since you divorced Virtue, seduced by the charms of Pleasure, it will still be open for me to do so. And yet to whom am I speaking? It is to you, the most gallant of men, who ever since you entered public life have done nothing that was not imbued to the utmost with the highest principle. In that very sect of yours I have a misgiving that there must be more stuff than I thought, if only because you accept it. “How did that come into your head?” you will say. Because I had nothing else to say. About politics I can write nothing: for I don’t choose to write down my real opinions.

## **Letter from Cassius to Cicero, written from Brundisium, January, 45 B.C.**

I hope that you are well. I assure you that on this tour of mine there is nothing that gives me more pleasure to do than to write to you; for I seem to be talking and joking with you face to face. And yet that does not come to pass because of those spectres; and, by way of retaliation for that, in my next letter I shall let loose upon you such a rabble of Stoic boors that you will proclaim Catius a true-born Athenian.

I am glad that our friend Pansa was sped on his way by universal goodwill when he left the city in military uniform, and that not only on my own account, but also, most assuredly, on that of all our friends. For I hope that men generally will come to understand how much all the world hates cruelty, and how much it loves integrity and clemency, and that the blessings most eagerly sought and coveted by the bad ultimately find their way to the good. For it is hard to convince men that “the good is to be chosen for its own sake”; but that pleasure and tranquility of mind is acquired by virtue, justice, and the good is both true and demonstrable. Why, Epicurus himself, from whom all the Catiuses and Amafiniuses in the world, incompetent translators of terms as they are, derive their origin, lays it down that “to live a life of pleasure is impossible without living a life of virtue and justice”.

Consequently Pansa, who follows pleasure, keeps his hold on virtue, and those also whom you call pleasure-lovers are lovers of what is good and lovers of justice, and cultivate and keep all the virtues. And so Sulla, whose judgment we ought to accept, when he saw that the philosophers were at sixes and sevens, did not investigate the Nature of the good, but bought up all the goods there were; and I frankly confess that I bore his death without flinching. Caesar, however, will not let us feel his loss too long; for he has a lot of condemned men to restore to us in his stead, nor will he himself feel the lack of someone to bid at his auctions when once he has cast his eye on Sulla junior.

And now to return to politics; please write back and tell me what is being done in the two Spains. I am terribly full of anxiety, and I would sooner have the old and lenient master [Caesar], than make trial of a new and cruel one. You know what an idiot Gnaeus is; you know how he deems cruelty a virtue; you know how he thinks that we have always scoffed at him. I fear that in his boorish way he will be inclined to reply by wiping our turned-up noses with the sword. Write back as you love me, and tell me what is doing. Ah! How I should like to know whether you read all this with an anxious mind or a mind at ease! For I should know at the same time what it is my duty to do. Not to be too long-winded, I bid you farewell. Continue to love me as you do. If Caesar has conquered, expect me to return quickly.

### **Excerpt From Plutarch's Life of Brutus**

About the time that they were going to pass out of Asia into Europe, it is said that a wonderful sign was seen by Brutus. He was naturally given to much watching, and by practice and moderation in his diet had reduced his allowance of sleep to a very small amount of time. He never slept in the daytime, and in the night then only when all his business was finished, and when, every one else being gone to rest, he had nobody to discourse with him. But at this time, the war being begun, having the whole state of it to consider, and being solicitous of the event, after his first sleep, which he let himself take after his supper, he spent all the rest of the night in settling his most urgent affairs; which if he could dispatch early and so make a saving of any leisure, he employed himself in reading until the third watch, at which time the centurions and tribunes were used to come to him for orders. Thus one night before he passed out of Asia, he was very late all alone in his tent, with a dim light burning by him, all the rest of the camp being bushed and silent; and reasoning about something with himself and very thoughtful, he fancied some one came in, and, looking up towards the door, he saw a terrible and strange appearance of an unnatural and frightful body standing by him without speaking. Brutus boldly asked it, "What are you, of men or gods, and upon what business come to me?" The figure answered "I am your evil genius, Brutus; you shall see me at Philippi." To which Brutus, not at all disturbed, replied, "Then I shall see you."

As soon as the apparition vanished, he called his servants to him, who all told him that they had neither heard any voice nor seen any vision. So then he continued watching till the morning, when he went to Cassius, and told him of what he had seen. He, who followed the principles of Epicurus's philosophy, and often used to dispute with Brutus concerning matters of this nature, spoke to him thus upon this occasion:

"It is the opinion of our sect, Brutus, that not all that we feel or see is real and true; but that the sense is a most slippery and deceitful thing, and the mind yet more quick and subtle to put the sense in motion and affect it with every kind of change upon no real occasion of fact; just as an impression is made upon wax; and the soul of man, which has in itself both what imprints, and what is imprinted on, may most easily, by its own operations, produce and assume every variety of shape and figure. This is evident from the sudden changes of our dreams; in which the imaginative principle, once started by any trifling matter, goes through a whole series of most diverse emotions and appearances. It is its nature to be ever in motion, and its motion is fantasy or conception. But besides all this, in your case, the body, being tired and distressed with continual toil, naturally works upon the mind and keeps it in an excited and unusual condition. But that there should be any such thing as supernatural beings, or, if there were, that they should have human shape or voice or power that can reach to us, there is no reason for believing; though I confess I could wish that there were such beings, that we might not rely upon our arms only, and our horses and our navy, all which are so numerous and powerful, but might be confident of the assistance of gods also, in this our most sacred and honorable attempt."

With such discourses as these Cassius soothed the mind of Brutus.



## Lucius Annaeus Seneca – Selected References To Epicurus

*The following text consists of excerpts from the letters of Lucius Annaeus Seneca that either make direct reference to Epicurus or clearly convey Epicurean ideas. The translation is that of Richard M. Gummere, Ph.D., Headmaster, William Penn Charter School, Philadelphia, as published by Harvard University Press in 1917. Topics included are:*

[\*On the Urgent Need for Philosophy\*](#)

[\*On the Urgent Need for Action\*](#)

[\*On Living According to Nature Rather than by the Crowd\*](#)

[\*On Sharing True Philosophy With Others\*](#)

[\*On the Proper Attitude Toward Life\*](#)

[\*On the Proper Attitude Toward Death\*](#)

[\*On Friendship And the Need of Some for Assistance With Philosophy\*](#)



### On the Urgent Need for Philosophy

*(Seneca's Letters – Book II Letter XLVIII)*

In answer to the letter which you wrote me while traveling, – a letter as long as the journey itself, – I shall reply later. I ought to go into retirement, and consider what sort of advice I should give you. For you yourself, who consult me, also reflected for a long time whether to do so; how much more, then, should I myself reflect, since more deliberation is necessary in settling than in propounding a problem! And this is particularly true when one thing is advantageous to you and another to me. Am I speaking again in the guise of an Epicurean? But the fact is, the same thing is advantageous to me which is advantageous to you; for I am not your friend unless whatever is at issue concerning you is my concern also. Friendship produces between us a partnership in all our interests. There is no such thing as good or bad fortune for the individual; we live in common. And no one can live happily who has regard to himself alone and transforms everything into a question of his own utility; you must live for your neighbor, if you would live for yourself.

This fellowship, maintained with scrupulous care, which makes us mingle as men with our fellow-men and holds that the human race have certain rights in common, is also of great help in cherishing the more intimate fellowship which is based on friendship, concerning which I began to speak above. For he that has much in common with a fellow-man will have all things in common with a friend. And on this point, my excellent Lucilius, I should like to have those subtle dialecticians of yours advise me how I ought to help a friend, or how a fellowman, rather than tell me in how many ways the word “friend” is used, and how many meanings the word “man” possesses. Lo, Wisdom and Folly are taking opposite sides. Which shall I join? Which party would you have me follow? On that side, “man” is the equivalent of “friend”; on the other side, “friend” is not the equivalent of “man.” The one wants a friend for his own advantage; the other wants to make himself an advantage to his friend. What you have to offer me is nothing but distortion of words and splitting of syllables. It is clear that unless I can devise some very tricky premises and by false deductions tack on to them a fallacy which springs from the truth, I shall not be able to

distinguish between what is desirable and what is to be avoided! I am ashamed! Old men as we are, dealing with a problem so serious, we make play of it!

‘Mouse’ is a syllable. Now a mouse eats its cheese; therefore, a syllable eats cheese.” Suppose now that I cannot solve this problem; see what peril hangs over my head as a result of such ignorance! What a scrape I shall be in! Without doubt I must beware, or some day I shall be catching syllables in a mousetrap, or, if I grow careless, a book may devour my cheese! Unless, perhaps, the following syllogism is shrewder still: “‘Mouse’ is a syllable. Now a syllable does not eat cheese. Therefore a mouse does not eat cheese.” What childish nonsense! Do we knit our brows over this sort of problem? Do we let our beards grow long for this reason? Is this the matter which we teach with sour and pale faces?

***Would you really know what philosophy offers to humanity? Philosophy offers counsel. Death calls away one man, and poverty chafes another; a third is worried either by his neighbor’s wealth or by his own. So-and-so is afraid of bad luck; another desires to get away from his own good fortune. Some are ill-treated by men, others by the gods. Why, then, do you frame for me such games as these? It is no occasion for jest; you are retained as counsel for unhappy men, sick and the needy, and those whose heads are under the poised axe. Whither are you straying? What are you doing? This friend, in whose company you are jesting, is in fear. Help him, and take the noose from about his neck. Men are stretching out imploring hands to you on all sides; lives ruined and in danger of ruin are begging for some assistance; men’s hopes, men’s resources, depend upon you. They ask that you deliver them from all their restlessness, that you reveal to them, scattered and wandering as they are, the clear light of truth. Tell them what nature has made necessary, and what superfluous; tell them how simple are the laws that she has laid down, how pleasant and unimpeded life is for those who follow these laws, but how bitter and perplexed it is for those who have put their trust in opinion rather than in nature.***

I should deem your games of logic to be of some avail in relieving men’s burdens, if you could first show me what part of these burdens they will relieve. What among these games of yours banishes lust? Or controls it? Would that I could say that they were merely of no profit! They are positively harmful. I can make it perfectly clear to you whenever you wish, that a noble spirit when involved in such subtleties is impaired and weakened. I am ashamed to say what weapons they supply to men who are destined to go to war with fortune, and how poorly they equip them! Is this the path to the greatest good? Is philosophy to proceed by such claptrap and by quibbles which would be a disgrace and a reproach even for expounders of the law? For what else is it that you men are doing, when you deliberately ensnare the person to whom you are putting questions, than making it appear that the man has lost his case on a technical error? But just as the judge can reinstate those who have lost a suit in this way, so philosophy has reinstated these victims of quibbling to their former condition. Why do you men abandon your mighty promises, and, after having assured me in high-sounding language that you will permit the glitter of gold to dazzle my eyesight no more than the gleam of the sword, and that I shall, with mighty steadfastness, spurn both that which all men crave and that which all men fear, why do you descend to the ABC’s of scholastic pedants?

What is your answer? Is this the path to heaven? For that is exactly what philosophy promises to me, that I shall be made equal to God. For this I have been summoned, for this purpose have I come. Philosophy, keep your promise! Therefore, my dear Lucilius, withdraw yourself as far as possible from these exceptions and objections of so-called philosophers. Frankness, and simplicity beseem true goodness. Even if there were many years left to you, you would have had to spend them frugally in order to have enough for the necessary thing; but as it is, when your time is so scant, what madness it is to learn superfluous things! Farewell.

*(Seneca’s Letters – Book I – Letter VIII)*

The payment shall not be made from my own property; for I am still conning Epicurus. I read today, in his works, the following sentence: “If you would enjoy real freedom, you must be the slave of Philosophy.” The man who submits and surrenders himself to her is not kept waiting; he is emancipated on the spot. For the very service of Philosophy is freedom.

*(Seneca’s Letters – Book I – Letter XXII)*

Read the letter of Epicurus which appears on this matter; it is addressed to Idomeneus. The writer asks him to hasten as fast as he can, and beat a retreat before some stronger influence comes between and takes from him the

liberty to withdraw. But he also adds that one should attempt nothing except at the time when it can be attempted suitably and seasonably. Then, when the long-sought occasion comes, let him be up and doing. ***Epicurus forbids us to doze when we are meditating escape; he bids us hope for a safe release from even the hardest trials, provided that we are not in too great a hurry before the time, nor too dilatory when the time arrives. ...***

*(Seneca's Letters – Book II – Letter LXXXI)*

Do you maintain, then, that only the wise man knows how to return a favor? Do you maintain that no one else knows how to make restoration to a creditor for a debt? Or, on buying a commodity, to pay full value to the seller? In order not to bring any odium upon myself, let me tell you that Epicurus says the same thing. At any rate, Metrodorus remarks that only the wise man knows how to return a favor.

*(Seneca's Letters – Book I – Letter XXVIII)*

“The knowledge of sin is the beginning of salvation.” This saying of Epicurus seems to me to be a noble one. For he who does not know that he has sinned does not desire correction; you must discover yourself in the wrong before you can reform yourself.

## **On The Urgent Need for Action**

*(Seneca's Letters – Book I – Letter XXIII)*

Now is the time for me to pay my debt. I can give you a saying of your friend Epicurus and thus clear this letter of its obligation. “It is bothersome always to be beginning life.” Or another, which will perhaps express the meaning better: “They live ill who are always beginning to live.” You are right in asking why; the saying certainly stands in need of a commentary. It is because the life of such persons is always incomplete. But a man cannot stand prepared for the approach of death if he has just begun to live. We must make it our aim already to have lived long enough. No one deems that he has done so, if he is just on the point of planning his life. You need not think that there are few of this kind; practically everyone is of such a stamp. Some men, indeed, only begin to live when it is time for them to leave off living. And if this seems surprising to you, I shall add that which will surprise you still more: Some men have left off living before they have begun.

## **On Living According to Nature Rather Than By The Opinion of the Crowd**

*(Seneca's Letters, Book I – Letter XXIX)*

“I have never wished to cater to the crowd; for what I know, they do not approve, and what they approve, I do not know.” “Who said this?” you ask, as if you were ignorant whom I am pressing into service; it is Epicurus.

*(Seneca's Letters, Book I – Letter XXV)*

But do you yourself, as indeed you are doing, show me that you are stout-hearted; lighten your baggage for the march. None of our possessions is essential. Let us return to the law of nature; for then riches are laid up for us. The things which we actually need are free for all, or else cheap; nature craves only bread and water. No one is poor according to this standard; when a man has limited his desires within these bounds, he can challenge the happiness of Jove himself, as Epicurus says. I must insert in this letter one or two more of his sayings: “Do everything as if Epicurus were watching you.” There is no real doubt that it is good for one to have appointed a guardian over oneself, and to have someone whom you may look up to, someone whom you may regard as a witness of your thoughts. It is, indeed, nobler by far to live as you would live under the eyes of some good man, always at your side; but nevertheless I am content if you only act, in whatever you do, as you would act if anyone at all were looking on; because solitude prompts us to all kinds of evil. And when you have progressed so far that you have

also respect for yourself, you may send away your attendant; but until then, set as a guard over yourself the authority of some man, whether your choice be the great Cato or Scipio, or Laelius, – or any man in whose presence even abandoned wretches would check their bad impulses. Meantime, you are engaged in making of yourself the sort of person in whose company you would not dare to sin. When this aim has been accomplished and you begin to hold yourself in some esteem, I shall gradually allow you to do what Epicurus, in another passage, suggests: “The time when you should most of all withdraw into yourself is when you are forced to be in a crowd.”

*(Seneca’s Letters, Book I – Letter XXVII)*

But let me pay off my debt and say farewell: “Real wealth is poverty adjusted to the law of Nature.” Epicurus has this saying in various ways and contexts; but it can never be repeated too often, since it can never be learned too well.

*(Seneca’s Letters – Book I – Letter II)*

The thought for today is one which I discovered in Epicurus; for I am wont to cross over even into the enemy’s camp – not as a deserter, but as a scout. He says: “Contented poverty is an honorable estate.” Indeed, if it be contented, it is not poverty at all. It is not the man who has too little, but the man who craves more, that is poor. What does it matter how much a man has laid up in his safe, or in his warehouse, how large are his flocks and how fat his dividends, if he covets his neighbor’s property, and reckons, not his past gains, but his hopes of gains to come? Do you ask what is the proper limit to wealth? It is, first, to have what is necessary, and, second, to have what is enough.

*(Seneca’s Letters – Book I – Letter IX)*

You desire to know whether Epicurus is right when, in one of his letters, he rebukes those who hold that the wise man is self-sufficient and for that reason does not stand in need of friendships. This is the objection raised by Epicurus against Stilbo and those who believe that the Supreme Good is a soul which is insensible to feeling.

...

But you must not think that our school alone can utter noble words; Epicurus himself, the reviler of Stilbo, spoke similar language; put it down to my credit, though I have already wiped out my debt for the present day. He says: “Whoever does not regard what he has as most ample wealth, is unhappy, though he be master of the whole world.” Or, if the following seems to you a more suitable phrase – for we must try to render the meaning and not the mere words: “A man may rule the world and still be unhappy, if he does not feel that he is supremely happy.” In order, however, that you may know that these sentiments are universal, suggested, of course, by Nature, you will find in one of the comic poets this verse – “Unblest is he who thinks himself unblest.”

*(Seneca’s Letters – Book I – Letter XIV)*

Now you are stretching forth your hand for the daily gift. Golden indeed will be the gift with which I shall load you; and, inasmuch as we have mentioned gold, let me tell you how its use and enjoyment may bring you greater pleasure. “He who needs riches least, enjoys riches most.” “Author’s name, please!” You say. Now, to show you how generous I am, it is my intent to praise the dicta of other schools. The phrase belongs to Epicurus, or Metrodorus, or some one of that particular thinking-shop.

*(Seneca’s Letters – Book I – Letter XVI)*

This also is a saying of Epicurus: “If you live according to nature, you will never be poor; if you live according to opinion, you will never be rich.” Nature’s wants are slight; the demands of opinion are boundless. Suppose that the property of many millionaires is heaped up in your possession. Assume that fortune carries you far beyond the limits of a private income, decks you with gold, clothes you in purple, and brings you to such a degree of luxury and wealth that you can bury the earth under your marble floors; that you may not only possess, but tread upon, riches. Add statues, paintings, and whatever any art has devised for the luxury; you will only learn from such things to crave still greater.

Natural desires are limited; but those which spring from false opinion can have no stopping point. The false has no limits. When you are traveling on a road, there must be an end; but when astray, your wanderings are limitless. Recall your steps, therefore, from idle things, and when you would know whether that which you seek is based upon a natural or upon a misleading desire, consider whether it can stop at any definite point. If you find, after having traveled far, that there is a more distant goal always in view, you may be sure that this condition is contrary to nature.

*(Seneca's Letters – Book I – Letter XVII)*

I shall borrow from Epicurus: “The acquisition of riches has been for many men, not an end, but a change, of troubles.” I do not wonder. For the fault is not in the wealth, but in the mind itself. That which had made poverty a burden to us, has made riches also a burden. Just as it matters little whether you lay a sick man on a wooden or on a golden bed, for whithersoever he be moved he will carry his malady with him; so one need not care whether the diseased mind is bestowed upon riches or upon poverty. His malady goes with the man.

*(Seneca's Letters – Book I – Letter XVIII)*

Even Epicurus, the teacher of pleasure, used to observe stated intervals, during which he satisfied his hunger in niggardly fashion; he wished to see whether he thereby fell short of full and complete happiness, and, if so, by what amount he fell short, and whether this amount was worth purchasing at the price of great effort. At any rate, he makes such a statement in the well known letter written to Polyaeus in the archonship of Charinus. Indeed, he boasts that he himself lived on less than a penny, but that Metrodorus, whose progress was not yet so great, needed a whole penny. Do you think that there can be fullness on such fare? Yes, and there is pleasure also, – not that shifty and fleeting Pleasure which needs a fillip now and then, but a pleasure that is steadfast and sure. For though water, barley-meal, and crusts of barley-bread, are not a cheerful diet, yet it is the highest kind of Pleasure to be able to derive pleasure from this sort of food, and to have reduced one's needs to that modicum which no unfairness of Fortune can snatch away. Even prison fare is more generous; and those who have been set apart for capital punishment are not so meanly fed by the man who is to execute them. Therefore, what a noble soul must one have, to descend of one's own free will to a diet which even those who have been sentenced to death have not to fear! This is indeed forestalling the spear thrusts of Fortune.

...

But now I must begin to fold up my letter. “Settle your debts first,” you cry. Here is a draft on Epicurus; he will pay down the sum: “Ungoverned anger begets madness.” You cannot help knowing the truth of these words, since you have had not only slaves, but also enemies. But indeed this emotion blazes out against all sorts of persons; it springs from love as much as from hate, and shows itself not less in serious matters than in jest and sport. And it makes no difference how important the provocation may be, but into what kind of soul it penetrates. Similarly with fire; it does not matter how great is the flame, but what it falls upon. For solid timbers have repelled a very great fire; conversely, dry and easily inflammable stuff nourishes the slightest spark into a conflagration. So it is with anger, my dear Lucilius; the outcome of a mighty anger is madness, and hence anger should be avoided, not merely that we may escape excess, but that we may have a healthy mind.

*(Seneca's Letters – Book I – Letter XX)*

Although you may look askance, Epicurus will once again be glad to settle my indebtedness: “Believe me, your words will be more imposing if you sleep on a cot and wear rags. For in that case you will not be merely saying them; you will be demonstrating their truth.” I, at any rate, listen in a different spirit to the utterances of our friend Demetrius, after I have seen him reclining without even a cloak to cover him, and, more than this, without rugs to lie upon. He is not only a teacher of the truth, but a witness to the truth. “May not a man, however, despise wealth when it lies in his very pocket?” Of course; he also is great-souled, who sees riches heaped up round him and, after wondering long and deeply because they have come into his possession, smiles, and hears rather than feels that they are his. It means much not to be spoiled by intimacy with riches; and he is truly great who is poor amidst riches. “Yes, but I do not know,” you say, “how the man you speak of will endure poverty, if he falls into it suddenly.” Nor do I, Epicurus, know whether the poor man you speak of will despise riches, should he suddenly fall into them; accordingly, in the case of both, it is the mind that must be appraised, and we must investigate whether your man is

pleased with his poverty, and whether my man is displeased with his riches. Otherwise, the cot-bed and the rags are slight proof of his good intentions, if it has not been made clear that the person concerned endures these trials not from necessity but from preference. It is the mark, however, of a noble spirit not to precipitate oneself into such things on the ground that they are better, but to practice for them on the ground that they are thus easy to endure. And they are easy to endure, Lucilius; when, however, you come to them after long rehearsal, they are even pleasant; for they contain a sense of freedom from care, – and without this nothing is pleasant. I hold it essential, therefore, to do as I have told you in a letter that great men have often done: to reserve a few days in which we may prepare ourselves for real poverty by means of fancied poverty. There is all the more reason for doing this, because we have been steeped in luxury and regard all duties as hard and onerous. Rather let the soul be roused from its sleep and be prodded, and let it be reminded that nature has prescribed very little for us. No man is born rich. Every man, when he first sees light, is commanded to be content with milk and rags. Such is our beginning, and yet kingdoms are all too small for us!

*(Seneca's Letters – Book I – Letter XXI)*

It is your own studies that will make you shine and will render you eminent. Allow me to mention the case of Epicurus. He was writing to Idomeneus and trying to recall him from a showy existence to sure and steadfast renown. Idomeneus was at that time a minister of state who exercised a rigorous authority and had important affairs in hand. “If,” said Epicurus, “you are attracted by fame, my letters will make you more renowned than all the things which you cherish and which make you cherished.” Did Epicurus speak falsely? Who would have known of Idomeneus, had not the philosopher thus engraved his name in those letters of his? All the grandees and satraps, even the king himself, who was petitioned for the title which Idomeneus sought, are sunk in deep oblivion. Cicero’s letters keep the name of Atticus from perishing. It would have profited Atticus nothing to have an Agrippa for a son-in-law, a Tiberius for the husband of his grand-daughter, and a Drusus Caesar for a great-grandson; amid these mighty names his name would never be spoken, had not Cicero bound him to himself. The deep flood of time will roll over us; some few great men will raise their heads above it, and, though destined at the last to depart into the same realms of silence, will battle against oblivion and maintain their ground for long.

...

In order that Idomeneus may not be introduced free of charge into my letter, he shall make up the indebtedness from his own account. It was to him that Epicurus addressed the well-known saying urging him to make Pythocles rich, but not rich in the vulgar and equivocal way. “If you wish,” said he, “to make Pythocles rich, do not add to his store of money, but subtract from his desires.” This idea is too clear to need explanation, and too clever to need reinforcement. There is, however, one point on which I would warn you – not to consider that this statement applies only to riches; its value will be the same, no matter how you apply it. “If you wish to make Pythocles honorable, do not add to his honors, but subtract from his desires”; “if you wish Pythocles to have pleasure for ever, do not add to his pleasures, but subtract from his desires”; “if you wish to make Pythocles an old man, filling his life to the full, do not add to his years, but subtract from his desires.” There is no reason why you should hold that these words belong to Epicurus alone; they are public property. I think we ought to do in philosophy as they are wont to do in the Senate: when someone has made a motion, of which I approve to a certain extent, I ask him to make his motion in two parts, and I vote for the part which I approve. So I am all the more glad to repeat the distinguished words of Epicurus, in order that I may prove to those who have recourse to him through a bad motive, thinking that they will have in him a screen for their own vices, that they must live honorably, no matter what school they follow. Go to his Garden and read the motto carved there: **“Stranger, here you will do well to tarry; here our highest good is pleasure.”** The care-taker of that abode, a kindly host, will be ready for you; he will welcome you with barley-meal and serve you water also in abundance, with these words: “Have you not been well entertained?” “This garden,” he says, “does not whet your appetite; it quenches it. Nor does it make you more thirsty with every drink; it slakes the thirst by a natural cure, a cure that demands no fee. This is the ‘pleasure’ in which I have grown old.”

*(Seneca's Letters – Book II – Letter LXXIX)*

There is Epicurus, for example; mark how greatly he is admired, not only by the more cultured, but also by this ignorant rabble. This man, however, was unknown to Athens itself, near which he had hidden himself away. And so, when he had already survived by many years his friend Metrodorus, he added in a letter these last words, proclaiming with thankful appreciation the friendship that had existed between them: “So greatly blest were

Metrodorus and I that it has been no harm to us to be unknown, and almost unheard of, in this well-known land of Greece.” Is it not true, therefore, that men did not discover him until after he had ceased to be? Has not his renown shone forth, for all that? Metrodorus also admits this fact in one of his letters: that Epicurus and he were not well known to the public; but he declares that after the lifetime of Epicurus and himself any man who might wish to follow in their footsteps would win great and ready-made renown.

## **On Sharing True Philosophy With Others**

*(Seneca’s Letters – Book I – Letter VI)*

It was not the classroom of Epicurus, but living together under the same roof, that made great men of Metrodorus, Hermarchus, and Polyaeus. Therefore I summon you, not merely that you may derive benefit, but that you may confer benefit; for we can assist each other greatly.

*(Seneca’s Letters – Book I – Letter VII)*

The third saying – and a noteworthy one, too, is by Epicurus written to one of the partners of his studies: “I write this not for the many, but for you; each of us is enough of an audience for the other.”

## **On the Proper Attitude Toward Life**

*(Seneca’s Letters – Book II – Letter LXVI)*

We find mentioned in the works of Epicurus two goods, of which his Supreme Good, or blessedness, is composed, namely, a body free from pain and a soul free from disturbance. These goods, if they are complete, do not increase; for how can that which is complete increase? The body is, let us suppose, free from pain; what increase can there be to this absence of pain? The soul is composed and calm; what increase can there be to this tranquility? Just as fair weather, purified into the purest brilliancy, does not admit of a still greater degree of clearness; so, when a man takes care of his body and of his soul, weaving the texture of his good from both, his condition is perfect, and he has found the consummation of his prayers, if there is no commotion in his soul or pain in his body. Whatever delights fall to his lot over and above these two things do not increase his Supreme Good; they merely season it, so to speak, and add spice to it. For the absolute good of man’s nature is satisfied with peace in the body and peace in the soul. I can show you at this moment in the writings of Epicurus a graded list of goods just like that of our own school. For there are some things, he declares, which he prefers should fall to his lot, such as bodily rest free from all inconvenience, and relaxation of the soul as it takes delight in the contemplation of its own goods. And there are other things which, though he would prefer that they did not happen, he nevertheless praises and approves, for example, the kind of resignation, in times of ill-health and serious suffering, to which I alluded a moment ago, and which Epicurus displayed on that last and most blessed day of his life. For he tells us that he had to endure excruciating agony from a diseased bladder and from an ulcerated stomach, so acute that it permitted no increase of pain; “and yet,” he says, “that day was none the less happy.” And no man can spend such a day in happiness unless he possesses the Supreme Good.

*(Seneca’s Letters – Book II – Letter LXXXV)*

Epicurus also decides that one who possesses virtue is happy, but that virtue of itself is not sufficient for the happy life, because the pleasure that results from virtue, and not virtue itself, makes one happy.

*(Seneca’s Letters – Book II – Letter XCII)*

Furthermore, does it not seem just as incredible that any man in the midst of extreme suffering should say, “I am

happy”? And yet this utterance was heard in the very factory of pleasure, when Epicurus said: “Today and one other day have been the happiest of all!” Although in the one case he was tortured by strangury, and in the other by the incurable pain of an ulcerated stomach.

## **On The Proper Attitude Toward Death**

*(Seneca’s Letters – Book I – Letter XXIV)*

Epicurus upbraids those who crave, as much as those who shrink from, death: It is absurd,” he says, “to run towards death because you are tired of life, when it is your manner of life that has made you run towards death.” And in another passage: “What is so absurd as to seek death, when it is through fear of death that you have robbed your life of peace?” And you may add a third statement, of the same stamp: “Men are so thoughtless, nay, so mad, that some, through fear of death, force themselves to die.”

*(Seneca’s Letters – Book I – Letter XII)*

But now I ought to close my letter. “What?” you say; “shall it come to me without any little offering? “Be not afraid; it brings something – nay, more than something, a great deal. For what is more noble than the following saying of which I make this letter the bearer: “It is wrong to live under constraint; but no man is constrained to live under constraint.” Of course not. On all sides lie many short and simple paths to freedom; and let us thank God that no man can be kept in life. We may spurn the very constraints that hold us. “Epicurus,” you reply, “uttered these words; what are you doing with another’s property?” Any truth, I maintain, is my own property. And I shall continue to heap quotations from Epicurus upon you, so that all persons who swear by the words of another, and put a value upon the speaker and not upon the thing spoken, may understand that the best ideas are common property.

*(Seneca’s Letters – Book I – Letter XXII)*

I was just putting the seal upon this letter; but it must be broken again, in order that it may go to you with its customary contribution, bearing with it some noble word. And lo, here is one that occurs to my mind; I do not know whether its truth or its nobility of utterance is the greater. “Spoken by whom?” You ask. By Epicurus; for I am still appropriating other men’s belongings. The words are: “Everyone goes out of life just as if he had but lately entered it.” Take anyone off his guard, young, old, or middle-aged; you will find that all are equally afraid of death, and equally ignorant of life. No one has anything finished, because we have kept putting off into the future all our undertakings. No thought in the quotation given above pleases me more than that it taunts old men with being infants. “No one,” he says, “leaves this world in a different manner from one who has just been born.” That is not true; for we are worse when we die than when we were born; but it is our fault, and not that of Nature. Nature should scold us, saying: “What does this mean? I brought you into the world without desires or fears, free from superstition, treachery and the other curses. Go forth as you were when you entered!” A man has caught the message of wisdom, if he can die as free from care as he was at birth; but as it is we are all aflutter at the approach of the dreaded end. Our courage fails us, our cheeks blanch; our tears fall, though they are unavailing. But what is baser than to fret at the very threshold of peace? The reason, however is, that we are stripped of all our goods, we have jettisoned our cargo of life and are in distress; for no part of it has been packed in the hold; it has all been heaved overboard and has drifted away. Men do not care how nobly they live, but only how long, although it is within the reach of every man to live nobly, but within no man’s power to live long.

*(Seneca's Letters – Book I – Letter XXVI)*

Wait for me but a moment, and I will pay you from my own account. Meanwhile, Epicurus will oblige me with these words: “Think on death,” or rather, if you prefer the phrase, on “migration to heaven.” The meaning is clear – that it is a wonderful thing to learn thoroughly how to die. You may deem it superfluous to learn a text that can be used only once; but that is just the reason why we ought to think on a thing. When we can never prove whether we really know a thing, we must always be learning it. “Think on death.” In saying this, he bids us think on freedom. He who has learned to die has unlearned slavery; he is above any external power, or, at any rate, he is beyond it. What terrors have prisons and bonds and bars for him? His way out is clear. There is only one chain which binds us to life, and that is the love of life. The chain may not be cast off, but it may be rubbed away, so that, when necessity shall demand, nothing may retard or hinder us from being ready to do at once that which at some time we are bound to do.

*(Seneca's Letters – Book I – Letter XXX)*

Indeed, he [apparently Aufidius Bassus] often said, in accord with the counsels of Epicurus: “I hope, first of all, that there is no pain at the moment when a man breathes his last; but if there is, one will find an element of comfort in its very shortness. For no great pain lasts long. And at all events, a man will find relief at the very time when soul and body are being torn asunder, even though the process be accompanied by excruciating pain, in the thought that after this pain is over he can feel no more pain. I am sure, however, that an old man's soul is on his very lips, and that only a little force is necessary to disengage it from the body. A fire which has seized upon a substance that sustains it needs water to quench it, or, sometimes, the destruction of the building itself; but the fire which lacks sustaining fuel dies away of its own accord.”

## **On Friendship and Assisting Others with Philosophy**

*(Seneca's Letters – Book I – Letter XIX)*

However that may be, I shall draw on the account of Epicurus. He says: “You must reflect carefully beforehand with whom you are to eat and drink, rather than what you are to eat and drink. For a dinner of meats without the company of a friend is like the life of a lion or a wolf.” This privilege will not be yours unless you withdraw from the world; otherwise, you will have as guests only those whom your slave-secretary sorts out from the throng of callers. It is, however, a mistake to select your friend in the reception-hall or to test him at the dinner-table. The most serious misfortune for a busy man who is overwhelmed by his possessions is, that he believes men to be his friends when he himself is not a friend to them, and that he deems his favors to be effective in winning friends, although, in the case of certain men, the more they owe, the more they hate. A trifling debt makes a man your debtor; a large one makes him an enemy. “What,” you say, “do not kindnesses establish friendships?” They do, if one has had the privilege of choosing those who are to receive them, and if they are placed judiciously, instead of being scattered broadcast. Therefore, while you are beginning to call your mind your own, meantime apply this maxim of the wise – consider that it is more important who receives a thing, than what it is he receives.

*(Seneca's Letters – Book I – Letter LII)*

Epicurus remarks that certain men have worked their way to the truth without anyone's assistance, carving out their own passage. And he gives special praise to these, for their impulse has come from within, and they have forged to the front by themselves. Again, he says, there are others who need outside help, who will not proceed unless someone leads the way, but who will follow faithfully. Of these, he says, Metrodorus was one; this type of man is also excellent, but belongs to the second grade. We ourselves are not of that first class, either; we shall be well treated if we are admitted into the second. Nor need you despise a man who can gain salvation only with the assistance of another; the will to be saved means a great deal, too. You will find still another class of man, – and a class not to be despised – who can be forced and driven into righteousness, who do not need a guide as much as they require someone to encourage and, as it were, to force them along. This is the third variety. If you ask me for a man of this pattern also, Epicurus tells us that Hermarchus was such. And of the two last-named classes, he is more

ready to congratulate the one, but he feels more respect for the other; for although both reached the same goal, it is a greater credit to have brought about the same result with the more difficult material upon which to work. Suppose that two buildings have been erected, unlike as to their foundations, but equal in height and in grandeur. One is built on faultless ground, and the process of erection goes right ahead. In the other case, the foundations have exhausted the building materials, for they have been sunk into soft and shifting ground and much labor has been wasted in reaching the solid rock. As one looks at both of them, one sees clearly what progress the former has made but the larger and more difficult part of the latter is hidden. So with men's dispositions; some are pliable and easy to manage, but others have to be laboriously wrought out by hand, so to speak, and are wholly employed in the making of their own foundations. I should accordingly deem more fortunate the man who has never had any trouble with himself; but the other, I feel, has deserved better of himself, who has won a victory over the meanness of his own nature, and has not gently led himself, but has wrestled his way, to wisdom.



## **Thomas Jefferson – Selected Works**

### **Letter to William Short, October 31, 1819**

Your favor of the 21<sup>st</sup> is received. My late illness, in which you are so kind as to feel an interest, was produced by a spasmodic stricture of the ilium, which came upon me on the 7<sup>th</sup> inst. The crisis was short, passed over favorably on the fourth day, and I should soon have been well but that a dose of calomel and jalap, in which were only eight or nine grains of the former, brought on a salivation. Of this, however, nothing now remains by a little soreness of the mouth. I have been able to get on horseback for three or four days past.

As you say of yourself, I too am an Epicurean. I consider the genuine (not the imputed) doctrines of Epicurus as containing everything rational in moral philosophy which Greece and Rome have left us. Epictetus indeed, has given us what was good of the stoics; all beyond, of their dogmas, being hypocrisy and grimace. Their great crime was in their calumnies of Epicurus and misrepresentations of his doctrines; in which we lament to see the candid character of Cicero engaging as an accomplice. Diffuse, vapid, rhetorical, but enchanting. His prototype Plato, eloquent as himself, dealing out mysticisms incomprehensible to the human mind, has been deified by certain sects usurping the name of Christians; because, in his foggy conceptions, they found a basis of impenetrable darkness whereon to rear fabrications as delirious, of their own invention. These they fathered blasphemously on him who they claimed as their founder, but who would disclaim them with the indignation which their caricatures of his religion so justly excite.

Of Socrates we have nothing genuine but in the Memorabilia of Xenophon; for Plato makes him one of his interlocutors merely to cover his own whimsies under the mantle of his name; a liberty of which we are told Socrates himself complained. Seneca is indeed a fine moralist, disguising his work at times with some Stoicisms, and affecting too much of antithesis and point, yet giving us on the whole a great deal of sound and practical morality. But the greatest of all the reformers of the depraved religion of his own country, was Jesus of Nazareth. Abstracting what is really his from the rubbish in which it is buried, easily distinguished by its lustre from the dross of his biographers, and as separable from that as the diamond from the dunghill, we have the outlines of a system of the most sublime morality which has ever fallen from the lips of man; outlines which it is lamentable he did not live to fill up. Epictetus and Epicurus give laws for governing ourselves, Jesus a supplement of the duties and charities we owe to others. The establishment of the innocent and genuine character of this benevolent moralist, and the rescuing it from the imputation of imposture, which has resulted from artificial systems (*e.g.* the immaculate conception of

Jesus, his deification, the creation of the world by him, his miraculous powers, his resurrection and visible ascension, his corporeal presence in the Eucharist, the Trinity; original sin, atonement, regeneration, election, orders of Hierarchy, &c.), invented by ultra-Christian sects, and unauthorized by a single word ever uttered by him, is a most desirable object, and one to which Priestley has successfully devoted his labors and learning.

It would in time, it is to be hoped, effect a quiet euthanasia of the heresies of bigotry and fanaticism which have so long triumphed over human reason, and so generally and deeply afflicted mankind; but this work is to be begun by winnowing the grain from the chaff of the historians of his life. I have sometimes thought of translating Epictetus (for he has never been tolerably translated into English) by adding the genuine doctrines of Epicurus from the Syntagma of Gassendi, and an abstract from the Evangelists of whatever has the stamp of the eloquence and fine imagination of Jesus. The last I attempted too hastily some twelve or fifteen years ago. It was the work of two or three nights only, at Washington, after getting through the evening task of reading the letters and papers of the day. But with one foot in the grave, these are now idle projects for me. My business is to beguile the wearisomeness of declining life, as I endeavor to do, by the delights of classical reading and of mathematical truths, and by the consolations of a sound philosophy, equally indifferent to hope and fear.

I take the liberty of observing that you are not a true disciple of our master Epicurus, in indulging the indolence to which you say you are yielding. One of his canons, you know, was that "that indulgence which prevents a greater pleasure, or produces a greater pain, is to be avoided." Your love of repose will lead, in its progress, to a suspension of healthy exercise, a relaxation of mind, an indifference to everything around you, and finally to a debility of body, and hebetude of mind, the farthest of all things from the happiness which the well-regulated indulgences of Epicurus ensure; fortitude, you know is one of his four cardinal virtues. That teaches us to meet and surmount difficulties; not to fly from them, like cowards; and to fly, too, in vain, for they will meet and arrest us at every turn of our road.

Weigh this matter well; brace yourself up; take a seat with Correa, and come and see the finest portion of your country, which, if you have not forgotten, you still do not know, because it is no longer the same as when you knew it. It will add much to the happiness of my recovery to be able to receive Correa and yourself, and prove the estimation in which I hold you both. Come, too, and see your incipient University, which has advanced with great activity this year. By the end of the next, we shall have elegant accommodations for seven professors, and the year following the professors themselves. No secondary character will be received among them. Either the ablest which America or Europe can furnish, or none at all. They will give us the selected society of a great city separated from the dissipations and levities of its ephemeral insects.

I am glad the bust of Condorcet has been saved and so well placed. His genius should be before us; while the lamentable, but singular act of ingratitude which tarnished his latter days, may be thrown behind us.

I will place under this a syllabus of the doctrines of Epicurus, somewhat in the lapidary style, which I wrote some twenty years ago; a like one of the philosophy of Jesus of nearly the same age, is too long to be copied. *Vale, et tibi persuade carissimum te esse mihi.*

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Syllabus of the doctrines of Epicurus

Physical. – The Universe eternal.

Its parts, great and small interchangeable.

Matter and Void alone.

Motion inherent in matter which is weighty and declining.

Eternal circulation of the elements of bodies.

Gods, an order of beings next superior to man, enjoying in their sphere, their own felicities; but not meddling with the concerns of the scale of beings below them.

Moral. – Happiness the aim of life.

Virtue the foundation of happiness.

Utility the test of virtue.

Pleasure active and In-do-lent.

In-do-lence, is the absence of pain, the true felicity.

Active, consists in agreeable motion; it is not happiness, but the means to produce it.

Thus the absence of hunger is an article of felicity; eating the means to obtain it.

The summum bonum is to be not pained in body, nor troubled in mind.

i.e. In-do-lence of body, tranquility of mind.

To procure tranquility of mind we must avoid desire and fear, the two principal diseases of the mind.

Man is a free agent.

Virtue consists in 1) Prudence. 2) Temperance. 3) Fortitude. 4) Justice.

To which are opposed, 1) Folly. 2) Desire. 3) Fear. 4) Deceit.

## **Letter to Charles Thomson, January 9, 1816**

Jefferson's letter to Charles Thomson, from Monticello, January 9, 1816.

by Thomas Jefferson

My dear and ancient friend, — An acquaintance of fifty-two years, for I think ours dates from 1764, calls for an interchange of notice now and then, that we remain in existence, the monuments of another age, and examples of a friendship unaffected by the jarring elements by which we have been surrounded, of revolutions of government, of party and of opinion. I am reminded of this duty by the receipt, through our friend Dr. Patterson, of your synopsis of the four Evangelists. I had procured it as soon as I saw it advertised, and had become familiar with its use; but this copy is the more valued as it comes from your hand. This work bears the stamp of that accuracy which marks everything from you, and will be useful to those who, not taking things on trust, recur for themselves to the fountain of pure morals.

I, too, have made a wee-little book from the same materials, which I call the Philosophy of Jesus; it is a paradigma of his doctrines, made by cutting the texts out of the book, and arranging them on the pages of a blank book, in a certain order of time or subject. A more beautiful or precious morsel of ethics I have never seen; it is a document in proof that I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus, very different from the Platonists, who call me infidel and themselves Christians and preachers of the gospel, while they draw all their characteristic dogmas from what its author never said nor saw. They have compounded from the heathen mysteries a system beyond the comprehension of man, of which the great reformer of the vicious ethics and deism of the Jews, were he to return on earth, would not recognize one feature. If I had time I would add to my little book the Greek, Latin and French texts, in columns side by side. **And I wish I could subjoin a translation of Gossendi's Syntagma of the doctrines of Epicurus, which, notwithstanding the calumnies of the Stoics and caricatures of Cicero, is the most rational system remaining of the philosophy of the ancients, as frugal of vicious indulgence, and fruitful of virtue as the hyperbolical extravagances of his rival sects.**

I retain good health, am rather feeble to walk much, but ride with ease, passing two or three hours a day on horseback, and every three or four months taking in a carriage a journey of ninety miles to a distant possession, where I pass a good deal of my time. My eyes need the aid of glasses by night, and with small print in the day also; my hearing is not quite so sensible as it used to be; no tooth shaking yet, but shivering and shrinking in body from the cold we now experience, my thermometer having been as low as 12 degrees this morning. My greatest oppression is a correspondence afflictingly laborious, the extent of which I have been long endeavoring to curtail. This keeps me at the drudgery of the writing-table all the prime hours of the day, leaving for the gratification of my appetite for reading, only what I can steal from the hours of sleep. Could I reduce this epistolary corvee within the limits of my friends and affairs, and give the time redeemed from it to reading and reflection, to history, ethics, mathematics, my life would be as happy as the infirmities of age would admit, and I should look on its consummation with the composure of one "*qui summum nec me tuit diem nec optat.*"

So much as to myself, and I have given you this string of egotisms in the hope of drawing a similar one from yourself. I have heard from others that you retain your health, a good degree of activity, and all the vivacity and cheerfulness of your mind, but I wish to learn it more minutely from yourself. How has time affected your health and spirits? What are your amusements, literary and social? Tell me everything about yourself, because all will be interesting to me who retains for you ever the same constant and affectionate friendship and respect.

Thomas Jefferson, letter to Charles Thomson, from Monticello, January 9, 1816.

### **Letter to Peter Carr, August 10, 1787**

Jefferson's letter to his nephew, from Paris, August 10, 1787.

Dear Peter, —

I have received your two letters of December 30 and April 18, and am very happy to find by them, as well as by letters from Mr. Wythe, that you have been so fortunate as to attract his notice & good will; I am sure you will find this to have been one of the most fortunate events of your life, as I have ever been sensible it was of mine. I enclose you a sketch of the sciences to which I would wish you to apply, in such order as Mr. Wythe shall advise; I mention, also, the books in them worth your reading, which submit to his correction. Many of these are among your father's books, which he should have brought to you. As I do not recollect those of them not in his library, you must write to me for them, making out a catalogue of such as you think you shall have occasion for, in 18 months from the date of your letter, & consulting Mr. Wythe on the subject. To this sketch, I will add a few particular observations.

Italian. I fear the learning of this language will confound your French and Spanish. Being all of them degenerated dialects of the Latin, they are apt to mix in conversation. I have never seen a person speaking the three languages, who did not mix them. It is a delightful language, but late events having rendered the Spanish more useful, lay it aside to prosecute that.

Spanish. Bestow great attention on this, and endeavor to acquire an accurate knowledge of it. Our future connections with Spain and Spanish America, will render that language a valuable acquisition. The ancient history of that part of America, too, is written in that language. I send you a dictionary.

Moral Philosophy. I think it lost time to attend lectures on this branch. He who made us would have been a pitiful bungler, if he had made the rules of our moral conduct a matter of science. For one man of science, there are thousands who are not. What would have become of them? Man was destined for society. His morality, therefore, was to be formed to this object. He was endowed with a sense of right and wrong, merely relative to this. This sense is as much a part of his Nature, as the sense of hearing, seeing, feeling; it is the true foundation of morality, and not the [beautiful], truth, &c., as fanciful writers have imagined. The moral sense, or conscience, is as much a part of man as his leg or arm. It is given to all human beings in a stronger or weaker degree, as force of members is given them in a greater or less degree. It may be strengthened by exercise, as may any particular limb of the body. This sense is submitted, indeed, in some degree, to the guidance of reason; but it is a small stock which is required for this: even a less one than what we call common sense. State a moral case to a ploughman and a professor. The former will decide it as well, & often better than the latter, because he has not been led astray by artificial rules. In

this branch, therefore, read good books, because they will encourage, as well as direct your feelings. The writings of Sterne, particularly, form the best course of morality that ever was written. Besides these, read the books mentioned in the enclosed paper; and, above all things, lose no occasion of exercising your dispositions to be grateful, to be generous, to be charitable, to be humane, to be true, just, firm, orderly, courageous, &c. Consider every act of this kind, as an exercise which will strengthen your moral faculties & increase your worth.

Religion. Your reason is now mature enough to examine this object. In the first place, divest yourself of all bias in favor of novelty & singularity of opinion. Indulge them in any other subject rather than that of religion. It is too important, and the consequences of error may be too serious. On the other hand, shake off all the fears & servile prejudices, under which weak minds are servilely crouched. Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion. Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blindfolded fear. You will naturally examine first, the religion of your own country. Read the Bible, then as you would read Livy or Tacitus. The facts which are within the ordinary course of Nature, you will believe on the authority of the writer, as you do those of the same kind in Livy & Tacitus. The testimony of the writer weighs in their favor, in one scale, and their not being against the laws of Nature, does not weigh against them. But those facts in the Bible which contradict the laws of Nature, must be examined with more care, and under a variety of faces. Here you must recur to the pretensions of the writer to inspiration from God. Examine upon what evidence his pretensions are founded, and whether that evidence is so strong, as that its falsehood would be more improbable than a change in the laws of Nature, in the case he relates. For example, in the book of Joshua, we are told, the sun stood still several hours. Were we to read that fact in Livy or Tacitus, we should class it with their showers of blood, speaking of statues, beasts, &c. But it is said, that the writer of that book was inspired. Examine, therefore, candidly, what evidence there is of his having been inspired. The pretension is entitled to your inquiry, because millions believe it. On the other hand, you are astronomer enough to know how contrary it is to the law of Nature that a body revolving on its axis, as the earth does, should have stopped, should not, by that sudden stoppage, have prostrated animals, trees, buildings, and should after a certain time have resumed its revolution, & that without a second general prostration. Is this arrest of the earth's motion, or the evidence which affirms it, most within the law of probabilities? You will next read the New Testament. It is the history of a personage called Jesus. Keep in your eye the opposite pretensions: 1, of those who say he was begotten by God, born of a virgin, suspended & reversed the laws of Nature at will, & ascended bodily into heaven; and 2, of those who say he was a man of illegitimate birth, of a benevolent heart, enthusiastic mind, who set out without pretensions to divinity, ended in believing them, and was punished capitally for sedition, by being gibbeted, according to the Roman law, which punished the first commission of that offence by whipping, & the second by exile, or death in fureâ. See this law in the Digest Lib. 48. tit. 19. §. 28. 3. & Lipsius Lib 2. de cruce. cap. 2. These questions are examined in the books I have mentioned under the head of religion, & several others. They will assist you in your inquiries, but keep your reason firmly on the watch in reading them all.

Do not be frightened from this inquiry by any fear of its consequences. If it ends in a belief that there is no God, you will find incitements to virtue in the comfort and pleasantness you feel in its exercise, and the love of others which it will procure you. If you find reason to believe there is a God, a consciousness that you are acting under his eye, & that he approves you, will be a vast additional incitement; if that there be a future state, the hope of a happy existence in that increases the appetite to deserve it; if that Jesus was also a God, you will be comforted by a belief of his aid and love. In fine, I repeat, you must lay aside all prejudice on both sides, and neither believe nor reject anything, because any other persons, or description of persons, have rejected or believed it. Your own reason is the only oracle given you by heaven, and you are answerable, not for the rightness, but uprightness of the decision. I forgot to observe, when speaking of the New Testament, that you should read all the histories of Christ, as well of those whom a council of ecclesiastics have decided for us, to be Pseudo-evangelists, as those they named Evangelists. Because these Pseudo-evangelists pretended to inspiration, as much as the others, and you are to judge their pretensions by your own reason, and not by the reason of those ecclesiastics. Most of these are lost. There are some, however, still extant, collected by Fabricius, which I will endeavor to get & send you.

Traveling. This makes men wiser, but less happy. When men of sober age travel, they gather knowledge, which they may apply usefully for their country; but they are subject ever after to recollections mixed with regret; their affections are weakened by being extended over more objects; & they learn new habits which cannot be gratified when they return home. Young men, who travel, are exposed to all these inconveniences in a higher degree, to others still more serious, and do not acquire that wisdom for which a previous foundation is requisite, by repeated and just observations at home. The glare of pomp and pleasure is analogous to the motion of the blood; it absorbs all

their affection and attention, they are torn from it as from the only good in this world, and return to their home as to a place of exile & condemnation. Their eyes are forever turned back to the object they have lost, & its recollection poisons the residue of their lives. Their first & most delicate passions are hackneyed on unworthy objects here, & they carry home the dregs, insufficient to make themselves or anybody else happy. Add to this, that a habit of idleness, an inability to apply themselves to business is acquired, & renders them useless to themselves & their country. These observations are founded in experience. There is no place where your pursuit of knowledge will be so little obstructed by foreign objects, as in your own country, nor any, wherein the virtues of the heart will be less exposed to be weakened. Be good, be learned, & be industrious, & you will not want the aid of traveling, to render you precious to your country, dear to your friends, happy within yourself. I repeat my advice, to take a great deal of exercise, & on foot. Health is the first requisite after morality. Write to me often, & be assured of the interest I take in your success, as well as the warmth of those sentiments of attachment with which I am, dear Peter, your affectionate friend.

P.S. Let me know your age in your next letter. Your cousins here are well & desire to be remembered to you.



## Additional Reading

The following are recommended for additional information about the life and work of Epicurus.

*Epicurus and His Philosophy* – Norman Wentworth DeWitt, Professor at Victoria College, University of Toronto, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, copyright 1954, University of Minnesota. This work is quite possibly the best available scholarly treatment of the life and philosophy of Epicurus.

*De Rerum Natura, prose translations.* This work is available in many translations. Among the best currently available in prose form is that of Martin Ferguson Smith published by Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., Indianapolis/Cambridge, copyright 1969. This work contains the excellent introduction that is available in full on [Epicurus.info](#).

*De Rerum Natura, poetic translations.* One of the best poetic translations is that of Rolfe Humphries under the name “The Way Things Are” published by the Indiana University Press, copyright 1968.

*De Rerum Natura, Audio version.* The Humphries translation has been presented in a brilliant, highly-understandable and unabridged audio form by Charlton Griffin under the Audio Connoisseur label. This version is available on [Audible.com](#)

*Diogenes of Oeneander* – The fascinating Epicurean wall carving survives only in pieces, but what survives is an invaluable addition to the body of Epicurean literature. The best source for this work is [the section devoted to it at Epicurus.info](#).

[Epicurus.info](#) and [Epicurus.net](#) These web sites are invaluable sources of information, and had they not existed to provide an introduction to the subject, this current work would never have come about. Both contain extensive resources for the study of Epicureanism.



## ENDNOTES

1 “These criticisms, plainly explicit or implicit in the writings of Epicurus, were as stinging and penetrating as any to be urged against Platonism in antiquity, and to men of the Academy they seemed nothing short of blasphemy. Violent measures were taken to suppress the brash heretic.” DeWitt, Norman W., Epicurus and His Philosophy, p. 18.

2 Thomas Jefferson, Letter to William Short, 1819, “Syllabus of the doctrines of Epicurus”

3 DL – Letter to Herodotus, “I recommend them, while still”

4 Thomas Jefferson, Letter to William Short, October 31, 1819

5 DRN IV

6 DL – Letter to Herodotus, “the universal whole always was such as it is now”

7 DL – Letter to Herodotus, “nothing can come from that which does not exist”, DRN Book 1, “begin with this first principle: nothing ever come from nothing by divine power”

8 DL – Letter to Herodotus, “the soul is a bodily substance composed of light particles”

9 DL – Letter to Herodotus, “if that which disappeared were absolutely destroyed”; DL – Letter to Herodotus, “reject the doctrine of infinite divisibility”; DRN Book 1, “nature dissolves everything back into its first bodies and does not totally annihilate anything”

10 DL – Letter to Herodotus, “the atoms are necessarily unchangeable”

11 DL – Letter to Herodotus, “the principles of things must be corporeal, indivisible elements”

12 DRN 1, “all nature then, as it exists by itself, is founded on two things”

13 DL – Letter to Herodotus, “bodies have a real existence”

14 DRN 1, (all nature composed of matter and void)

15 DL – Letter to Herodotus, “as we see that they really do move”; DRN 1, “if room and space did not exist ...”

16 DL – Letter to Herodotus, “some are combinations”

17 DRN 1, “there is nothing which you can affirm to be at once separate from all body and quite distinct from void” DRN 2, #DRN 2 – Analogy of atoms to letters in words

18 DL – Letter to Herodotus, “infinity of worlds”

19 DL – Letter to Herodotus, “the atoms are in a continual state of motion”

20 DL – Letter to Herodotus, “the atoms move with equal rapidity” DL-Letter to Herodotus, “animated by the same rapidity”

21 DL – Letter to Herodotus, “and for all this there is no external cause”

22 DRN 2, “if they were not used to swerve”

23 DL – Letter to Herodotus, “there is not for that reason an infinity of atoms” DL – Letter to Herodotus, “one must not believe that every kind of magnitude exists in atoms” DRN 2 – “we are not to suppose that all things can be joined together in all ways”

24 DL – Letter to Herodotus, “nothing can come from that which does not exist”; DRN Book I (“nothing ever comes from nothing by divine power”)

25 DL – Letter to Herodotus, “if that which disappeared were so absolutely destroyed”; DRN Book I (“does not totally

[annihilate anything](#)")

[26](#) DRN 1, "[if things came from nothing, any kind might be born of any thing](#)"

[27](#) DL – Letter to Herodotus, "[the universal whole always was such as it is now](#)"

[28](#) DRN 1, ("[what can be and what cannot](#)") DRN 1, ("[without the hand of the gods](#)")

[29](#) DRN 2, "[we are not to suppose that all things can be joined together in all ways](#)"

[30](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 8, [DL PD8](#)

[31](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 17, [DL PD17](#)

[32](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 18, [DL PD18](#)

[33](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 19, [DL PD19](#)

[34](#) DRN 3, "[some fourth element must be added to these ...](#)"

[35](#) DL – Letter to Herodotus, "[the soul is a bodily substance composed of light particles](#)" DL – Letter to Herodotus, "[they who pretend the soul is incorporeal utter words destitute of sense.](#)"

[36](#) DL – Letter to Menoeceus, "[death is a matter with which we are not at all concerned](#)" DL – Principal Doctrine 2, [DL PD2](#) DRN 3, "[death is therefore nothing to us](#)"

[37](#) DRN 3, "[As in time gone by we felt no distress when the Carthaginians from all sides came together to do battle ...](#)"

[38](#) DRN 3, "[Nature therefore holds this up to us as a mirror](#)"

[39](#) DRN 3, "[And even supposing that Nature of the mind and power of the soul do feel](#)"

[40](#) DRN 3, "[And if time should gather up our matter after death and put it once more into position ...](#)"

[41](#) DL – Letter to Menoeceus, "[wise man neither rejects life nor is he afraid of not living](#)"

[42](#) DL – Letter to Menoeceus, "[future is not our own, nor, on the other hand, is it wholly not our own.](#)" DRN 3, "[life is granted to none in fee-simple, to all in usufruct](#)"

[43](#) DRN 3, "[since the point at stake is the condition for eternity, not for one hour, in which mortals have to pass all the time ....](#)"

[44](#) DL – Letter to Menoeceus, "[Pleasure is the beginning and end of living happily, for we have recognized this as the first good](#)" DL – Letter to Menoeceus, "[If happiness is present, we have everything](#)" DRN 2, "[divine pleasure, the guide of life](#)"; Cicero ONOTG, "[pleasure is the chief good](#)"; "[it cannot be doubted that pleasure is the one supreme and final good](#)"

[45](#) DL – Letter to Menoeceus, "[we are not speaking of the pleasures of the debauched man](#)"; DRN 2 – "[Nature craves for herself no more than this, that pain hold aloof ....](#)"

[46](#) DRN 2, "[it is sweet, when on the great see the winds trouble the waters](#)"

[47](#) See discussion in Dewitt, Norman W., "The *Summum Bonum* Fallacy". *The Classical Weekly*, Vol. 44, No. 5 (Dec. 18, 1950), pp. 69-71. "That which causes the unsurpassable joy is the bare escape from some awful calamity, and this is the nature of 'good,' if one apprehends it rightly and then stands by his finding, instead of walking around uselessly and harping on the meaning of 'good.'" See also [Vatican Saying 42](#).

[48](#) DL – Letter to Menoeceus, "[beginning and greatest good of all this things is prudence ...](#)"

[49](#) DL – Letter to Menoecus, “[better to be unfortunate in accord with reason ...](#)”

[50](#) DL – Letter to Menoecus, “[Such a man has no belief in Fate ...](#)”

[51](#) DRN 3 – “[the mind.. is no less part of a man than hand and foot and eyes are part of the whole living creature](#)”

[52](#) The mind requires knowledge to be free of anxiety: DL – Letter to Pythocles, “[Know then that the only aim of knowledge ... is freedom from anxiety](#)”; DL – Letter to Pythocles, [unless you imprint these precepts you cannot reach happiness.](#)

[53](#) DRN 2, “[For even as children are flurried and dread all things in the thick darkness](#)”

[54](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 9, [DL PD9](#)

[55](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 10, [DL PD10](#); Also, the aim of all the sciences is freedom from anxiety and the calmness that comes from firm knowledge DL – Letter to Pythocles, (“[this the aim of every other science](#)”)

[56](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 21, [DL PD21](#)

[57](#) DL – Letter to Menoecus, “[with pleasure in mind as the starting point we refer every question of choice and avoidance.](#)”  
DL – Principal Doctrine 25, [DL PD25](#)

[58](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 15, [DL PD15](#) DL – The Wise Man, “[injuries exist among men ... all which the wise man overcomes by Reason.](#)”

[59](#) DL – Letter to Menoecus, “[for the same reason we do not choose every pleasure whatsoever.](#)” DL – Principal Doctrine 7, [DL PD7](#); Our goal is a happy life, not momentary pleasure. Cicero – On Ends, “[we denounce ... men who are.. beguiled.. by the charms of the pleasure of the moment.](#)”

[60](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 16, [DL PD16](#)

[61](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 3, [DL PD3](#)

[62](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 14, [DL PD14](#); DL – Principle Doctrine 20, [DL PD20](#)

[63](#) DL – Letter to Menoecus, “[some of the passions are natural, and some empty](#)” DL – Principal Doctrine 28, [DL PD28](#)

[64](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 29, [DL PD29](#)

[65](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 30, [DL PD30](#)

[66](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 6, [DL PD6](#)

[67](#) DL – Letter to Menoecus, “[Contentment is a great good](#)” DL – The Wise Man, ([This section is devoted to general precepts of wise living](#)) DRN 5, “[But were a man to order his life by the rules of true reason](#)”

[68](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 4, [DL PD4](#)

[69](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 11, [DL PD11](#)

[70](#) DRN 3 – “[the dread of Acheron should be driven headlong forth, troubling as it does the life of man from its inmost depths .... allowing no pleasure to be pure and unalloyed](#)”

[71](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 12, [DL PD12](#)

[72](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 13, [DL PD13](#)

[73](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 5, [DL PD5](#)

[74](#) DRN 1, [Seeing things they do not understand they attribute to the gods;](#); DL – Letter to Herodotus. [\(troubles of the spirit come from belief in fables about the stars as gods\)](#)

[75](#) DRN 1, [“So great are the evils to which religion can persuade”](#)

[76](#) DL – Letter to Herodotus, [“cares and anxieties ... the consequence of weakness”](#) DRN 2, [“supreme repose, far removed and withdrawn from our concerns”](#)

[77](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 1, [DL PD1](#)

[78](#) DL – Letter to Menoeceus, [“that man is not impious”](#)

[79](#) DL – Letter to Menoeceus [“For the assertions of the many about the gods are not anticipations, but false opinions.”](#)

[80](#) DRN 1, [“if men were to see that there was a fixed limit to their woes”](#)

[81](#) DL – Letter to Menoeceus, [“it would therefore be better”](#)

[82](#) DL – Letter to Pythocles, [“Imprint these precepts on your memory, O Pythocles, and so you will easily escape fables.”](#) DRN 1, [“Your terror and darkness of mind must be dispelled ... by the study of the law of nature.”](#)

[83](#) DL – Letter to Herodotus, [“Let us disdain those men who do not know”](#)

[84](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 26, [DL PD26](#)

[85](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 27, [DL PD27](#)

[86](#) DL – Letter to Menoeceus, [“you will live like a god among men”](#)

[87](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 31, [DL PD31](#)

[88](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 32, [DL PD32](#)

[89](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 33, [DL PD33](#)

[90](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 34, [DL PD34](#)

[91](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 35, [DL PD35](#)

[92](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 36, [DL PD36](#); see also DL – Letter to Menoeceus, [“at times we may feel the good as an evil ...”](#)

[93](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 37, [DL PD37](#)

[94](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 38, [DL PD38](#)

[95](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 39, [DL PD39](#)

[96](#) DL – Principal Doctrine 40, [DL PD40](#)

[97](#) DL – Letter to Herodotus, [“a kind of summary ... will be a constant assistance to him”](#)

[98](#) This is the 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.”

[99](#) Items 56 and 57 are unclear in the original. This is an attempt at reconstructing them.

[100](#) Items 56 and 57 are unclear in the original. This is an attempt at reconstructing them.

[101](#) The “Wheel of Nature” DRN Book V: (Now let us sing what is the cause of the motions of the stars. First of all, if the

great globe of the sky turns round, we must say that the air presses on the pole at either end, and holds it outside and closes it in at both ends; and that then another current of air flows above. If the whole sky moves round, it must be driven either by a current above or by a current below, straining on to the same goal, towards which the twinkling stars of the everlasting world roll on; or else that there is another current beneath, to drive up the sphere reversely, as we see streams moving round wheels with their scoops.) In regard to the use of the phrase “wheel of nature” in the ancient world, see James 3:6 American Standard Version:” And the tongue is a fire: the world of iniquity among our members is the tongue, which defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the wheel of nature, and is set on fire by hell.” (From *Bible History Online*: The phrase “wheel of nature” (*trochos tes geneseos*) is used here for “the world in progress.” It is not a very natural figure and has given rise to much discussion. The King James Version accents *trochos* (“course”) instead of *trochos* (“wheel”). But the language throughout is metaphorical and “course” is not a sufficiently metaphorical word. The translation “birth” for *geneseos* (so the Revised Version margin). i.e. “a wheel set in motion by birth.” is out of the question. As the argument turns on results wider than any individual’s existence. “Wheel of nature” is certainly right. But a comparison of life to a wheel in some sense or other (chiefly that of “Fortune’s wheel”) is common enough in Greek and Latin writers, and, indeed the exact combination *trochos geneseos* is found in at least one (Orphic) writer (full references in the commentaries of Mayor and W. Bauer). It would seem, then, that James had heard the phrase, and he used it as a striking figure, with entire indifference to any technical significance it might have. This supposition is preferable to that of an awkward translation from the Aramaic.) DRN Book I; (We shall begin with this first principle: nothing ever comes from nothing by divine power. In truth, fear holds all men in check, because they see many things go on in earth and in the sky, and they fail to understand the cause, believing those things to be done by divine power. Once we shall have seen that nothing can be produced from nothing, we shall then ascertain the explanation of these things, both the elements out of which every thing can be produced and the manner in which all things are done - without the hand of the gods.) DRN Book I: (Lastly, rains die, when father ether has tumbled them into the lap of mother earth; but then goodly crops spring up and boughs are green with leaves upon the trees, trees themselves grow and are laden with fruit; by them in turn our race and the race of wild beasts are fed, by them we see glad towns teem with children and the leafy forests ring on all sides with the song of new birds; through them cattle wearied with their load of fat lay their bodies down about the glad pastures and the white milky stream pours from the distended udders; through them a new brood with weakly limbs frisks and gambols over the soft grass, rapt in their young hearts with the pure new milk. None of the things therefore which seem to be lost is utterly lost, since nature replenishes one thing out of another and does not suffer any thing to be begotten before she has been recruited by the death of some other.) DRN Book V; Letter to Menoecus

**102** Psyche: (In Greek mythology, Psyche was the deification of the human soul. She was portrayed in ancient mosaics as a goddess with butterfly wings. The Greek word *psyche* literally means “spirit, breath, life or animating force “.) DRN Book III: (Wherefore once and again you may know that the nature of the understanding and the soul is formed of exceeding tiny seeds, since when it flees away it carries with it no jot of weight. Nevertheless we must not think that this nature is simple. For it is a certain thin breath that deserts the dying, mingled with heat, and heat moreover draws air with it; nor indeed is there any heat, that has not air too mixed with it. For because its nature is rare, it must needs be that many first-beginnings of air move about in it. Already then we have found the nature of the soul to be triple; and yet all these things are not enough to create sensation, since the mind does not admit that any of these can create the motions that bring sensation. It must be then that some fourth nature too be added to these. But it is altogether without name; than it there exists nothing more nimble, nothing more fine, nor made of smaller or smoother particles. It first sends abroad the motions that bring sensation among the limbs: for it is first stirred, being made up of small shapes; then heat receives the motions and the hidden power of wind, and then air; then all things are set moving, the blood receives the shock and all the flesh feels the thrill; last of all it passes to the bones and marrow, be it pleasure or the heat of opposite kind.) Principle Doctrine 3: (In life we experience continuous pleasure so long as nothing is present to cause us to feel pain. The highest possible state of pleasure that can be achieved is experienced at the removal of every cause of pain); Letter to Menoecus (For you see when we lack pleasure and we grieve, we have need of pleasure, because pleasure is not present. But so long as we do not grieve, life affords us no lack of pleasure. On this account we affirm that Nature has provided that Pleasure is the beginning and end of living happily; for we have recognized that Nature has provided that happiness is the first good that is innate within us.)

**103** DRN Book III (Death is nothing nothing to us, concerning us not at all, since the nature of the mind is mortal. Think how in times gone by we felt no distress when the Carthaginians from all sides came together to do battle, and all things were shaken by war’s troubling uproar, shuddering and quaking beneath high heaven, and mortal men were in doubt which of the two peoples it would be whose empire would fall by land and sea. So the same applies when we ourselves shall be no more, when our body and soul are separated, out of the both of which we are formed into a single being. You may be sure that for us, who shall then be no more, nothing whatever can happen to excite sensation, not if earth itself should be overturned to mingle with the sea and the sea with heaven.); Principle Doctrine 2 (Death is nothing to us, because that which is dead has no sensations, and that which cannot be sensed is nothing to us.); Principle Doctrine 20 (We assume that physical pleasure is unlimited, and that unlimited time is required to procure it. But through understanding the natural goals

and limits of the body, and by dissolving the fear of eternity, we produce a complete life that has no need of infinite time. The wise man neither flees enjoyment, nor, when events cause him to exit from life, does he look back as if he has missed any essential aspect of life.)

**104** DRN Book IV; (As in a building, if the rule first applied by the builder is awry, and the square is untrue and swerves from its straight lines, and if there is the slightest hitch in any part of the level, all the construction must be faulty, all must be awry, crooked, sloping, leaning forwards, leaning backwards, without symmetry, so that some parts seem ready to fall, and others do fall, all ruined by the first erroneous measurements. So too, all reasoning of things which is founded on false interpretations of the senses will prove to be distorted and false.) Principle Doctrine 22; Principle Doctrine 24

**105** DRN Book II (We see that by nature the body needs but little — only such things as take away pain. Although at times luxuries can provide us many choice delights, Nature for her part does not need them, and never misses it when there are no golden images of youths throughout the house, holding in their right hands flaming lamps to light the nightly banquet. Nature cares not a bit when the house does not shine with silver or glitter with gold, or when there are no paneled and gilded roofs to echo the sound of harp. Men who lack such things are just as happy when they spread themselves in groups on soft grass beside a stream of water under the limbs of a high tree, and at no great cost pleasantly refresh their bodies, especially when the weather smiles and the seasons sprinkle the green grass with flowers. Nor does fever leave the body any sooner if you toss about under an elegant bedspread amid bright purple linens than if you must lay under a poor man’s blanket.) Principle Doctrine 26

**106** DeWitt translates PD6 as “To feel secure from the attacks of men is a good according to Nature, no matter by whose agency one is able to obtain this protection.” DeWitt, Norman W., *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 67 (1936), p. 56

**107** The text of this doctrine appears to be corrupted, for its meaning is not clear, nor is it clear whether this portion is one or two doctrines. Yonge separates these; we combine them here in an effort to attain greater clarity.

**108** This is the rendering of the Greek word in the text of Franklin.



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