

CHAPTER 10. THE PRINCIPAL DOCTRINES OF EPICURUS

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.

CHAPTER 11. THE “VATICAN COLLECTION” OF THE SAYINGS OF EPICURUS

CHAPTER 12. EPICURUS’ SAYINGS ABOUT “THE WISE MAN”

CHAPTER 13. LUCRETIUS – SELECTIONS FROM DE RERUM NATURA

DRN Book I

DRN Book II

DRN Book III

DRN Book IV

DRN Book V

DRN Book VI

CHAPTER 14. EPICUREANISM IN A POMPEIIAN MOSAIC

CHAPTER 15. APPENDIX

Diogenes Laertius – The Life of Epicurus

The Will of Epicurus