

## Points of Wisdom from Epicurus

**Thank you for supporting** The Classics Cave.

**You'll find** books, readings, workouts, and more at [www.theclassicscave.com](http://www.theclassicscave.com). **Do you want to support the Cave's mission?** Let's talk! Contact Tim Young at [tim@theclassicscave.com](mailto:tim@theclassicscave.com) to sponsor or donate to the Cave.

"O Epicurus! You who were first able to raise so bright a light from so great a darkness, shedding light on the blessings of life! . . . For as soon as your system of philosophy that arose in your divine intellect begins to proclaim aloud the nature of things, the terrors of the mind disperse and the walls of the world open wide. . . . You placed human existence from amid great waves of trouble and great darkness of the mind into a condition of tranquility and a clear light. . . . I follow you, the glory of the Greeks!" —Titus Lucretius Carus

**The Classics Cave** • [www.theclassicscave.com](http://www.theclassicscave.com)

**Note** • The following points of wisdom come from *The Best of Epicurus: The Life, Writings & Teachings of Epicurus the Greek Philosopher*. Each begins in *italics* with a single word or more indicating the point's topic or meaning. For more points of wisdom from Epicurus organized by topic, buy the Cave's *The Wisdom & Way of Epicurus*.

### Points of Wisdom from Epicurus

*The time for philosophy is now.* Let no one put off studying philosophy when he is young, nor become weary of it when he is old, for no age is too early or too late for the health of the soul. To suggest that the time for studying philosophy has not yet come or that it is long gone is like saying that it is too early or too late for happiness.

*Do philosophy.* We must not merely pretend to practice philosophy; rather, we must actually do it. For we do not merely need the appearance of health, but true health.

*Ponder the goal of life.* The better man is the one who has considered the natural goal of life. . . . The goal of a blessedly happy life is to secure bodily health and mental tranquility.

*Rise to happiness with a friend.* Friendship dances around the world of men calling out to all of us, "Rise up to happiness!"

*Practice happiness.* We must practice those things that produce happiness since if happiness is present, we possess everything, and if it is not, we do everything to acquire it.

*Seize the day.* We come into being only once and will not be born a second time. Rather, we necessarily will never exist again—forever. And though you have no power over tomorrow, you put off feeling joy today.

## POINTS OF WISDOM ▪ FROM EPICURUS

Life is consumed by such indecision and procrastination! And so, each one of us is dying without engaging in life today.

*Focus on what is absolutely necessary.* Our one need is to live undisturbed, without trouble. We have come to the point where our life has no need for non-rational and empty opinion.

*Keep the goal in mind.* Everything we do is for the sake of being free from pain and from fear. The soul's storm scatters as soon as we achieve this condition. Then we have no need to go around looking for anything that is lacking or seeking something else by which the good of the soul and the good of the body will be fulfilled.

*Do not seek what cannot procure tranquility.* Soul-disturbance is not resolved, nor is true joy produced, by the possession of the greatest wealth, nor by the honor and admiration of the many, nor by any other thing that is the result of indefinite factors.

*Keep in mind: we all die.* Some men spend their whole lives procuring for themselves those things necessary to life without grasping that each of us was poured a mortal mixture to drink at our birth.

*Know the basic kinds of desire.* Of the desires, some are natural, and some are groundless. Of the natural desires, some are necessary, and some are merely natural. And of the necessary desires, some are necessary for happiness, some for freeing the body from disturbance, and some for living itself.

*Be aware of the nature of unnecessary desire.* Unnecessary desires are those that lead to no pain if they remain unsatisfied. They involve an appetite that is easily relieved whenever its satisfaction is hard to procure or when it seems likely to cause harm.

*Strive to obey nature when satisfying your desires.* We must obey nature rather than doing violence to her. We will obey nature by satisfying the necessary desires and the natural desires, too, as long as they do no harm, but sharply rejecting the harmful desires.

*Realize the difference between natural and groundless things.* Everything natural is easy to get, but whatever is groundless is hard.

*Pleasure is the goal of life.* For proof that pleasure is the goal of life, Epicurus points to the fact that living things, as soon as they are born, are quite satisfied with pleasure, whereas they are naturally upset with pain—and this without rational reflection.

*Know the parameters of the need for pleasure.* We have the need for pleasure only when we feel pain due to the absence of pleasure. When we feel no pain, however, there is no need for pleasure. For this reason, we say that pleasure is the beginning point and goal of living happily. We recognize that pleasure is our first good, present at birth, and that it is the beginning point of every choice and avoidance. We resort to pleasure when we use feeling as the measure for judging every good.

*Know the measure of pleasure.* The standard measure for the greatest amount of pleasure is the removal of

every pain. Whenever pleasure is present, as long as it lasts, there is neither pain nor distress nor both together.

*Understand how pleasure may increase (or not).* Pleasure in the flesh will not increase after need-based pain is removed. After that, pleasure may only be varied.

*When to choose pleasure and when to allow pain—know the advantages and disadvantages.* Even though pleasure is our first and inborn good, we nevertheless do not choose every pleasure. Rather, we oftentimes forgo many pleasures when a greater annoyance will follow from choosing them. And oftentimes we acknowledge that many pains are better than many pleasures when an even greater pleasure follows from patiently enduring these pains for a long period of time. And so, even though every pleasure is naturally good and fitting, not every pleasure is to be chosen. In the same way, even though every pain is bad, not every pain is always to be avoided. To be sure, we may aptly judge every case by measuring one feeling in comparison with the other and taking a look at the advantages and disadvantages of both sides. Sometimes we treat a good thing as though it is bad. On the other hand, sometimes we treat a bad thing as though it is good.

*(True) pleasure as the absence of pain and trouble—and the need for reason.* When we say that pleasure is the beginning point and goal of life, we do not mean the pleasures of decadent men or the pleasures of sensuality, as some ignorant persons believe, or those who do not agree with us, or those who have willfully misrepresented our position. Rather, by pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul. A pleasant life is not produced by stringing together one drinking party after another, or by having sex with young boys or women, or by enjoying fish and other delicacies set on a luxurious table. Instead, it is produced by sober reasoning that examines what is responsible for every choice and avoidance, and expels those beliefs by which the greatest confusion lays hold of the soul.

*Sex.* Epicureans say that sexual intercourse never benefited anyone. One must be content if it has not caused harm.

*Soul versus body pleasures.* Epicurus believes that pleasures of the soul are greater than those of the body.

*Realize the good of self-sufficiency.* We regard self-sufficiency as a great good not so that we may enjoy just a little in every case, but so that when things are scarce, we may nevertheless be satisfied with little, genuinely persuaded that the ones who derive the greatest pleasure from luxury are the ones who need it the least, and that everything natural is easy to get, but whatever is groundless is hard.

*Simple food (versus gourmet or rich food).* Simple food gives just as much pleasure as rich food does as soon as the hunger pains are gone. A barley cake and water offer the highest possible pleasure when they are given to a hungry man. Getting used to simple and inexpensive food, therefore, aids the health of a man and enables him to perform the necessary requirements of life with resolution. Not only that, but such a habit better disposes us for when we encounter extravagant fare now and again, and makes us fearless in the face of fortune.

*The benefit of (just) enough.* Epicurus declares that if he has enough bread, then he is not inferior to the gods regarding happiness.

## POINTS OF WISDOM ▪ FROM EPICURUS

*Enjoy what is present.* You must not ruin what is present by a longing for what is absent; rather, keep in mind that these things were what you previously desired.

*Be satisfied with enough.* Nothing is enough for someone for whom enough is very little.

*Practical wisdom and other virtues.* Practical wisdom is the greatest good. For this reason, we value practical wisdom even more than philosophy. Every other virtue is produced from practical wisdom, teaching us that we cannot live pleasantly without living wisely, nobly, and justly—just as we cannot live wisely, nobly, and justly without living pleasantly. The virtues have become one with living pleasantly. Living pleasantly is inseparable from the virtues.

*Let reason manage the things of life.* Luck rarely interferes with the wise man. Rather, it is reason that has managed, does manage, and will manage the greatest and most essential things throughout the course of a wise man's life.

*The rational life is one pursuing nature's goal.* If at any moment you do not direct each of your actions to the goal of life indicated by nature, but, instead, you turn aside to some other goal in the act of pursuing some object or avoiding it, your activity will not be consistent with the conclusions drawn from reason.

*Pursue friendship for the sake of happiness.* Of all the means that are procured by wisdom to ensure blessed happiness throughout the whole of life, by far the most important is the acquisition of friendship.

*Friendship and happiness.* Friendship dances around the world of men calling out to all of us, "Rise up to happiness!"

*Act to avoid fear.* Do nothing in your life that will cause you fear if discovered by your neighbor.

*Reputation.* The approval of others is necessarily their own business. As for us, we must get on with our own healing.

*Peace leads to peace.* The man who is free from disturbance within himself is no trouble to another man.

*The causes of harm and the solution (reason).* Harm arises among men through hatred, envy, and contempt. The wise man skirts these by means of reason.

*Death means nothing to us.* Death—that evil which most causes us to shudder—means nothing to us since when we exist, death is not present, and when death is present, we do not exist. In fact, death means nothing either to the living or to those who have finished living since it does not exist for the former, and the latter no longer exist.

*The benefit of understanding what death is.* A right understanding of the fact that death means nothing to us makes the mortal nature of life beneficial to us—not by adding to life an unlimited amount of time, but by taking away the yearning for immortality. For there is no terror at all in living for the one who has thoroughly grasped that there is no terror at all in not living. Foolish, therefore, is the man who says that he

## POINTS OF WISDOM ▪ FROM EPICURUS

fears death because it pains him to think about its eventual coming rather than actually paining him when it comes. Whatever causes no trouble when it is present causes only a groundless pain in its mere anticipation.

For **more points of wisdom** from Epicurus organized by topic,  
buy the Cave's *The Wisdom & Way of Epicurus*.

**Thank you for supporting** The Classics Cave.

**You'll find** books, readings, workouts, and more at [www.theclassicscave.com](http://www.theclassicscave.com). **Do you want to support the Cave's mission?** Let's talk! Contact Tim Young at [tim@theclassicscave.com](mailto:tim@theclassicscave.com) to sponsor or donate to the Cave.

"O Epicurus! You who were first able to raise so bright a light from so great a darkness, shedding light on the blessings of life! . . . For as soon as your system of philosophy that arose in your divine intellect begins to proclaim aloud the nature of things, the terrors of the mind disperse and the walls of the world open wide. . . . You placed human existence from amid great waves of trouble and great darkness of the mind into a condition of tranquility and a clear light. . . . I follow you, the glory of the Greeks!" —Titus Lucretius Carus

**The Classics Cave ▪ [www.theclassicscave.com](http://www.theclassicscave.com)**



**THE CLASSICS CAVE**  
The earliest light for a brighter life  
[www.theclassicscave.com](http://www.theclassicscave.com)

