

Epicurus

Reading 11 – The Turn to Philosophy – Epicurus’ Teachers & Study of Philosophy

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“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

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Reading 11

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The source for the following text is

Book 10 of Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*.

All section numbers are part of Book 10. For example, section 32, or [32], is 10.32.

This reading comes from the Cave’s

The Best of Epicurus: The Life, Writings & Teachings of Epicurus the Greek Philosopher.

The Turn to Philosophy

Epicurus’ Teachers & Study of Philosophy

Diogenes Laertes: [2]

UPON THE DEATH of Alexander of Macedon and the expulsion of the Athenian settlers from Samos by Perdiccas, Epicurus left Athens to join his father in Colophon. He spent some time there collecting students before returning to Athens later on in the archonship of Anaxicrates.

There he spent time with some others studying philosophy. Subsequently, he put forward his own unique views and organized the school that is named after him.

Epicurus himself declares that he came into contact with philosophy at the age of fourteen. In his first

book of his *Life of Epicurus*, Apollodorus the Epicurean explains that he turned to philosophy thanks to his contempt for teachers who were unable to explain the meaning of *chaos* found in Hesiod.

According to Hermippus, however, Epicurus himself began his career as a teacher. Nevertheless, when he happened to encounter the works of Democritus, he took up philosophy. [3] This is the point of Timon’s allusion in the following lines:

The last and most shameless of all the natural philosophers, who came from Samos, a teacher and the son of a teacher. He himself was one of the most unmanageable of living beings.

According to Philodemus the Epicurean in the tenth book of his comprehensive work *On the Philosophers*, Epicurus’ three brothers, Neocles, Chaerodemus, and Aristobulus, joined him in his study of philosophy thanks to Epicurus’ own urging. His slave named Mys also joined him—according to Myronianus’ report in his *Historical Parallels*. . . .

[12] Diocles reports that, among the ancient

philosophers, Epicurus favored Anaxagoras the most, though he occasionally disagreed with him. He also favored Archelaus, Socrates’ teacher. Diocles adds that he used to train his students in committing his treatises to memory.

[13] In his *Chronology*, Apollodorus reports that Epicurus was the student of Nausiphanes and Praxiphanes. But in his letter to Eurylochus, Epicurus himself denies this, saying that he was self-taught.

Both Epicurus and Hermarchus deny the very existence of Leucippus the philosopher. That said, others, including Apollodorus the Epicurean, report that Leucippus was Democritus’ teacher. Demetrius the Magnesians affirms that Epicurus also listened to the lectures of Xenocrates. . . .

[14] In his *Life of Epicurus*, Ariston reports that Epicurus’ treatise called *The Canon* originated from the *Tripod* of Nausiphanes, adding that Epicurus had been a student of this man, as well as of the Platonist Pamphilus in Samos. He further says that Epicurus began to study philosophy when he was twelve years old, and that he started his own school when he was thirty-two.

So ends Reading 11. See you in **another reading or item**.

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