

Epicurus

Cast of Significant Epicureans – A Quick Reference & Chronology

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This item comes from the Cave's
The Best of Epicurus: The Life, Writings & Teachings of Epicurus the Greek Philosopher.

Cast of Significant Epicureans

A Quick Reference & Chronology

THE FOUNDING—late fourth into the third century BC

EPICURUS: the son of Neocles and Chaerestrates; born in Samos in 341 BC. Influenced by earlier Greek philosophy, Epicurus developed and promoted his philosophy (one of four great ancient Greek schools) from "the Garden" in Athens, after having lived and taught philosophy in Mytilene (on the island of Lesbos) and Lampsacus (along the Hellespont, now the Dardanelles). Epicurus taught that if we could limit ourselves to what can actually be known about reality, then we will obtain happiness, the goal of life. There is no need to fear the gods or death. We need only to satisfy natural and necessary desires and to pay attention to the measure of pleasure (and pain) in order to live in a state of tranquility. Epicurus taught and lived a simple, frugal life (contrary to the modern meaning of epicureanism). He strongly believed in the value of friendship. We possess three major letters of Epicurus (to Herodotus, to Pythocles, and to Menoeceus) and several collections of his principal teachings and sayings. Epicurus died c. 270 BC.

THE EARLY EPICUREANS—late fourth into the third century BC

COLOTES OF LAMPUSACUS (on the Hellespont) (c. 325-260 BC): a favorite of Epicurus. Plutarch relates that when Colotes heard Epicurus teach about the nature of things, he fell on his knees and begged him to instruct him. He also suggests that he was clever but dogmatic. Colotes famously wrote a work that explained how impossible it was to live according to the teachings of the other non-Epicurean philosophers. Like Epicurus, Colotes insisted that theory must (be able to) result in practice.

HERMARCHUS OF MYTILENE (on the island of Lesbos): the son of Agemortus; one of Epicurus' most faithful students and friends, Hermarchus wrote several polemical books against the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, among others. He denied the existence of the atomist Leucippus. When Epicurus died, he left Hermarchus in charge of the Epicurean school. He also gave him his Garden and books.

HERODOTUS: one of Epicurus' students. Epicurus wrote a letter to him, the *Letter to Herodotus*, in which he offers an epitome of his philosophy of nature.

IDOMENEUS OF LAMPUSACUS (on the Hellespont) (c. 325-c. 270 BC): one of Epicurus' students and close friends. He wrote several philosophical and historical works. He married Batis, the sister of Metrodorus. Epicurus' last letter was addressed to Idomeneus. In it, Epicurus joyfully recalls all their discussions.

MENOCEUS: one of Epicurus' students. Epicurus wrote a letter to him, the *Letter to Menoeceus*, in which he offers counsel on how to do philosophy and practice happiness.

METRODORUS OF LAMPUSACUS (on the Hellespont) (c. 331-278 BC): the son of Athenaeus (or of Timocrates) and of Sande; Epicurus' closest follower and friend. He gave his sister Batis to Idomeneus to marry, while he took Leontion, the Athenian prostitute, as his mistress. He wrote many books on a variety of subjects—the sensations, the journey to wisdom, and nobility. The Epicurean school met on the twentieth of every month to commemorate Epicurus and Metrodorus. Epicurus left provisions for Metrodorus' son (Epicurus) and daughter in his will. Brave in the face of death, Metrodorus died seven or eight years before Epicurus.

MYS (Mouse): Epicurus' slave. Mys joined his master in the study of philosophy. Along with Nicias, Lycon, and Phaedrium, Mys was emancipated upon Epicurus' death (according to his will).

NEOCLES, CHAEREDEMUS, AND ARISTOBULUS: Epicurus' three brothers, who joined him in studying philosophy. The Epicurean school joined together to commemorate them on a day in the month of Poseidon (part of December-January).

POLYAENUS OF LAMPUSACUS (on the Hellespont): the son of Athenodorus; one of Epicurus students and close friends. Diogenes Laertius tells us that he was a gentle and friendly man. The Epicurean school joined together to commemorate him on a day in the month of Metageitnion (part of August-September).

PYTHOCLES: one of Epicurus' students. Epicurus wrote a letter to him, the *Letter to Pythocles*, in which he offers multiple explanations regarding phenomena in the sky as well as other natural phenomena.

THEMISTA AND LEONTEUS OF LAMPSACUS (on the Hellespont): married, they were both Epicureans. They called their son Epicurus. Diogenes Laertes reports that Epicurus dedicated his work, the *Neocles*, to Themista, and that he wrote letters to her.

THE SUCCESSORS OF EPICURUS IN THE EPICUREAN SCHOOL

Hermarchus succeeded Epicurus, followed by Polystratus, then Dionysus, Basilides, Apollodorus (the very prolific “tyrant of the Garden”; called Apollodorus the Epicurean by Diogenes Laertius, he wrote a *Life of Epicurus*), the two Ptolemies of Alexandria (one “black” [*melas*] and one “white” [*leukos*]), Zeno of Sidon (who was also prolific), Demetrius (“the Lacedaemonian”), Diogenes of Tarsus, Orion, and others.

EARLY ROMAN EPICUREANISM—first century BC

CALPURNIUS PISO CAESONINUS: the father-in-law of Julius Caesar. He was Philodemus of Gadara’s patron and was likely the owner of the villa in Herculaneum, which held the library in which so many of Philodemus’ works were found in the 1750s onwards. The library itself was buried when Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 AD.

TITUS LUCRETIUS CARUS: Roman poet and author of the epic poem, *On the Nature of Things* (*De Rerum Natura*), in which he explains the logic and tenets of Epicureanism and lauds Epicurus as the liberator of humankind. Cicero admired the genius and craftsmanship of his poetry. We know virtually nothing of Lucretius’ life.

PHILODEMUS OF GADARA: from Gadara in Syria, Philodemus “studied Epicureanism in the Athenian Garden during Zeno of Sidon’s” leadership of the school (first century BC). He ended up in southern Italy where he formed his own “Epicurean circle at Herculaneum,” and was, according to Cicero, one of the most distinguished Epicurean philosophers of his time, influencing such Roman writers as Horace and Virgil. Philodemus was a voluminous writer, writing works on philosophical history, aesthetics, ethics, theology, epistemology, as well as a number of epigrams.

LUCIUS MANLIUS TORQUATUS: Roman statesman, whom Cicero presents as the spokesman for Epicureanism in his work, *On the Ends of Good Things and Bad Things* (*De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*).

LATER EPICUREANS

DIOGENES OF OENOANDA (Oinoanda): a wealthy man who lived during the second century AD in the Roman province of Lycia in what is now south-western Turkey. He left an inscription on a long wall setting out the Epicurean path to understanding and happiness.

POMPEIA PLOTINA: wife of the Roman emperor Trajan (late first and early second century AD). An Epicurean, she actively supported the Epicurean school in Athens.

So ends Item 4. See you in **another reading or item**.

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