



Principal Doctrines and Letter to Menoeceus (Classic Books)

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Principal Doctrines and Letter to Menoeceus Epicurus Translated by Robert Drew Hicks Epicurus (341–270 BC) was an ancient Greek philosopher as well as the founder of the school of philosophy called Epicureanism. Only a few fragments and letters of Epicurus's 300 written works remain. Much of what is known about Epicurean philosophy derives from later followers and commentators. For Epicurus, the purpose of philosophy was to attain the happy, tranquil life, characterized by ataraxia—peace and freedom from fear—and aponia—the absence of pain—and by living a self-sufficient life surrounded by friends. He taught that pleasure and pain are the measures of what is good and evil; death is the end of both body and soul and should therefore not be feared; the gods neither reward nor punish humans; the universe is infinite and eternal; and events in the world are ultimately based on the motions and interactions of atoms moving in empty space. His parents, Neocles and Chaerestrate, both Athenian-born, and his father a citizen, had emigrated to the Athenian settlement on the Aegean island of Samos about ten years before Epicurus's birth in February 341 BC. As a boy, he studied philosophy for four years under the Platonist teacher Pamphilus. At the age of 18, he went to Athens for his two-year term of military service. The playwright Menander served in the same age-class of the ephebes as Epicurus.

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