

2024 Discussion Of Current Books On Epicurus

Post by "Cassius" of May 27, 2024 at 3:17 PM

I am glad you posted further to give me a chance to clarify a few things:

[Quote from Don](#)

I agree that Dewitt was a "fanboy" of Epicurus, but I don't see that as necessarily a negative.

Actually i predicted to someone else here on the forum that that would be exactly your take on it! 😊 And of course I agree. "Reverence" for the sage is of great help to those during the "reverencing."

[Quote from Don](#)

He obviously gave them lots of thought, but it seems he didn't feel her could write them as part of his academic career.

It occurs to me that that observation applies not only to DeWitt, but I suspect it has very personal application to someone we've had the privilege to interact with on the podcast - Emily Austin - who may undertake other work on Epicurus in the future. Becoming known as a defender of Epicurus could get your head chopped off some recent centuries ago, it was a guaranteed way to fail to win friends and influence people in the last century, and it's entirely unclear to me what the future holds. Anyone who undertakes that job could be forgiven for thinking that have decided to emulate Don Quixote.

[Quote from Don](#)

To TauPhi 's assertions...

There's always some tension between what needs to be said in context and what might be misunderstood by new readers who skim over threads. TauPhi is a longstanding and respected member of the forum who attends many of our zoom meetings, and as a result those of us who know him know him to be extremely constructive and helpful. I would not normally have responded quite so directly, but we just had an exchange with recent member @Josh about books to read, so I wanted to make an important point.

Since writing that post, I've thought of a better way to make the point.

Here's one way to decide whether someone should read "Living for Pleasure" first or DeWitt's book first (in my estimation anyway).

Below is the first paragraph from the first chapter of both books, and the difference gives you an excellent hint of what to expect:

Living For Pleasure, Chapter One, Paragraph One: "Imagine yourself on vacation. Not everyone enjoys beaches, and some people would rather eat sand than sleep in the woods. Maybe you prefer to vacation in your living room. Now that you've figured out where you are, who's there? You, obviously, but people rarely want to be entirely alone for all that long because we're social creatures. You might be with your romantic partner, or maybe your children or some close friends. Maybe you're there with George Clooney because why not?"

Epicurus And His Philosophy, Chapter One, Paragraph One: "This book attempts to present for the first time a fairly complete account of the life and teachings of Epicurus. At the very outset the reader should be prepared to think of him at one and the same time as the most revered and the most reviled of all founders of thought in the Graeco-Roman world."

If that doesn't help someone pick which book to start first, I don't know what will.

BOTH approaches are legitimate and important, but they appeal to two entirely different segments of readers. BOTH segments are important to and well represented on this forum, and we want to be responsive to the interests and friendship desires of both. And i have both books and recommend them both, sometimes in one order and sometimes in another, depending on what I know about the person who is asking for a place to start.

I would say both are "best in class" for (1) the generalist reader who may be entirely new to Epicurus, and (2) the reader who probably already knows a considerable amount about Epicureanism, Stoicism, and other classical philosophy, and who wants to begin to learn more about where Epicurus fits into that picture.