

God and the Atom by Victor Stenger: A Very Brief Review

Post by “Godfrey” of February 20, 2020 at 8:24 PM

Being somewhat unsatisfied regarding the cosmological questions, I just finished reading **The Dancing Universe: From Creation Myths to the Big Bang, by Marcelo Gleiser**. I found it to be an excellent complement to God and the Atom.

Where God and the Atom deals with, yes, atomism, The Dancing Universe deals with, well, the universe. The book begins by categorizing various types of creation myths, then proceeds through the history of physics through the Big Bang. Where Stenger is an experimental physicist, Gleiser is a theoretical physicist. Where Stenger provides equations, Gleiser provides concepts and thought experiments (and the book is much more pleasurable to read, for me as a non-scientist). Where Stenger highlights the opposition between atomists and anti-atomists, Gleiser explores the religious motivations of various scientists and how the results of their experiments often conflicted with their beliefs. Stenger states his view on the universe fairly briefly and more or less definitively (he’s written other books on the subject, which I’ve not read). Gleiser ends the book with the state of current thinking (the book was written in 1997) having shown the crooked path leading up to this point and thereby implying a continuing crooked path. Where Stenger features Epicurus prominently, Gleiser barely mentions him.

Despite that last point, I came away from the book with a greatly renewed appreciation of Epicurus’ contribution. Not that I didn’t appreciate his ideas before reading this, but somehow the process of walking through this history of thought (conceptually, without equations 😊) really dialed me in to the subject. It also prompted me to recall the time spent a couple of summers ago reading the Stoics in my hammock and grappling hopelessly with the big questions, not knowing at the time that somebody by the name of Epicurus had set us on the path to understanding so long ago. What a journey it’s been!

Speaking as a layman, I recommend either or both of these two books to anyone looking to modernize their understanding of Epicurean physics. It’s a challenge, but quite rewarding.