

Looking for a book recommendation

Post by “Cleveland Okie” of June 18, 2024 at 9:23 PM

My main avenue for learning about Epicureanism has been through reading books. Here is what I have read so far:

Tending the Epicurean Garden, Hiram Crespo.

The Epicurus Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia, Epicurus, Brad Inwood, Lloyd P. Gerson

Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance, Ada Palmer.

Living for Pleasure: An Epicurean Guide to Life, Emily Austin.

How to Be an Epicurean: The Ancient Art of Living Well, Catherine Wilson.

Epicureanism: A Very Short Introduction, Catherine Wilson.

Epicurus and His Philosophy, Norman W. DeWitt.

EPICURUS and THE PLEASANT LIFE: A Philosophy of Nature Kindle Edition– November 30, 2022 -

Revised and Expanded 2nd Edition, Haris Dimitriadis

Swerve, Stephen Greenblatt.

(I tried to read the William Wallace book but just couldn't get into it).

Except for the Greenblatt, which I read years ago, I have read all the others in the last few years after reading the "Letter to Menoeceus" and thereby becoming really interested in Epicureanism.

I am particularly interested in how to apply Epicureanism to my actual life, so I found the Austin, Crespo and Dimitriadis particularly useful. The Austin book is my favorite and I've already read it twice and will likely read it again soon. The Crespo had some features I didn't care for -- I particularly disliked all the talk of Epicurean "therapy" -- but I thought the chapter on the four remedies was quite good. The Dimitriadis has its moments for me.

I have put Tim O'Keefe's book on hold at the library, simply because Emily Austin recommends it in her book, and I plan to finally read a translation of Lucretius. But what else should I try?

Post by “Cassius” of June 18, 2024 at 10:15 PM

Cleveland good to hear from you!

It's not of the self-help variety, but I don't see "A Few Days In Athens" on your list. It's really pretty brilliant, just don't let the "flowery" nature of the first chapter put you off.

Beyond that, I would recommend LISTENING to the Charlton Griffin version of Lucretius.

Seems like you have covered most of the bases -- but I also don't see the Boeri book on your list - even though it is about "politics" it's really about the extent of engagement that Epicurus really suggested, and it contains a lot of good detail that otherwise doesn't get talked about that much.

The Lucretius Today Podcast Interviews:
Dr. Marcelo Boeri
co-author of
**THEORY AND PRACTICE IN
EPICUREAN POLITICAL
PHILOSOPHY:
Security, Justice, And Tranquility**



Article

[Interview With Dr. Marcelo Boeri: Theory and Practice In Epicurean Political Philosophy](#)

In Episode 197 of the Lucretius Today Podcast, on October 19, 2023, we were privileged to speak with Dr. Marcelo Boeri, co-author with Javier Aoz of Theory and Practice In Epicurean Political Philosophy - Security, Justice, and Tranquility.



Cassius

January 11, 2024 at 8:20 AM

But mostly now you've hit the problem that we really need *new* literature that actually follows what the school taught.

Post by "Joshua" of June 19, 2024 at 2:27 AM

The three books I can think of that are absent from your list are;

- *A Few Days in Athens* by Frances Wright, a fictional story set in the Garden
- *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom* by David Sedley, an in depth exploration of how Lucretius interpreted Epicurus
- *The Sculpted Word* by Bernard Frischer, a study of Epicurean bronzes and marbles from the ancient world

I would also glance over the following essays/lectures/letters and see if they catch your eye;

- John Tyndall's [Belfast Address](#)
- An essay on Lucretius from George Santayana's [Three Philosophical Poets](#)
- Prof. Ian Johnston's [Lecture on Lucretius](#)
- Lucy Hutchinson's [Letter to the Earl of Anglesey](#), disavowing her very early translation of Lucretius

And it's sometimes fruitful to read the introductions to the various translations, even if you have no intention of reading the translation itself.

Quote

But Lucretius was not a mere poet, casting into graceful language the interesting results of thought. He was a real student both of nature and man, and from his stores of information we may learn not only his errors but the happy guesses and pregnant suggestions of ancient science. Thus, for instance, his doctrines of elemental atoms and images have a real relation to the more substantial theories of modern times. Moreover, the questions vitally affecting the position of man in the world, which are suggested or discussed by Lucretius, are parallel to questions which have risen into prominence in connection with the increasing study of nature. Most conspicuous among these, is the relation of physical inquiry to religious belief. Objections were urged against such inquiry in ancient times, on the ground of its impiety and unbelief. Just as there are found in modern times those who reprobate the audacity and insufficiency of reason, there were those in the time of Lucretius who denounced the inquiries into physical phenomena as dishonoring immortal things by mortal words.

The views of Lucretius on the nature and origin of life, the progressive advance of man from the rudest condition, by the exercise of his senses and accumulated experience, his denial of final causes, his resolution of all knowledge into the intimations of sense, his materialism and consequent denial of immortality, and his utilitarianism in morals, all present striking parallels to the opinions of one of the great schools of modern thought, and one passage on the preservation and destruction of species looks like a faint poetic anticipation of a theory which has attracted much notice in the present day.

I can cite this example from Charles Frederick Johnson, published 11 years after Darwin's *Origin of Species*, when questions relating to teleology in nature were more urgent than they seem to us now. When Lucretius writes about the development of the eye and other organs, it's easy to gloss over what is really a full frontal assault against Aristotle. I probably wouldn't have picked up on that before reading this passage from Johnson.

Then there is this paragraph from [Cyril Bailey](#);

Quote

But it would be the greatest mistake to think of Lucretius or his master as the author of a mere polemic against religion. Still less is Epicurus justly represented—as has sometimes been the case—as patching together from various sources a crude piecemeal view of the world to combat superstition and afford a plausible basis for a moral theory of doubtful moral tendency. If there is one point that modern work at Epicureanism tends to reveal, it is that it was a serious philosophy, a consistent whole derived from a single starting-point and following step by step with logical precision. As such Lucretius had learnt it, and as such he intended to present it, and many of the difficulties which modern critics have found in his detail, many of the puerilities at which they have scoffed, are to be explained by the perfectly consistent and relentless application of his fundamental principles. He has seemed trivial or inconsistent or obscure to his critics, because they would not take him seriously enough.

So there is occasionally good fruit in these introductions (which are, I'll be the first to admit, just as often repetitive and tiresome). I don't have a favorite, but John Mason Good's is singularly bad.

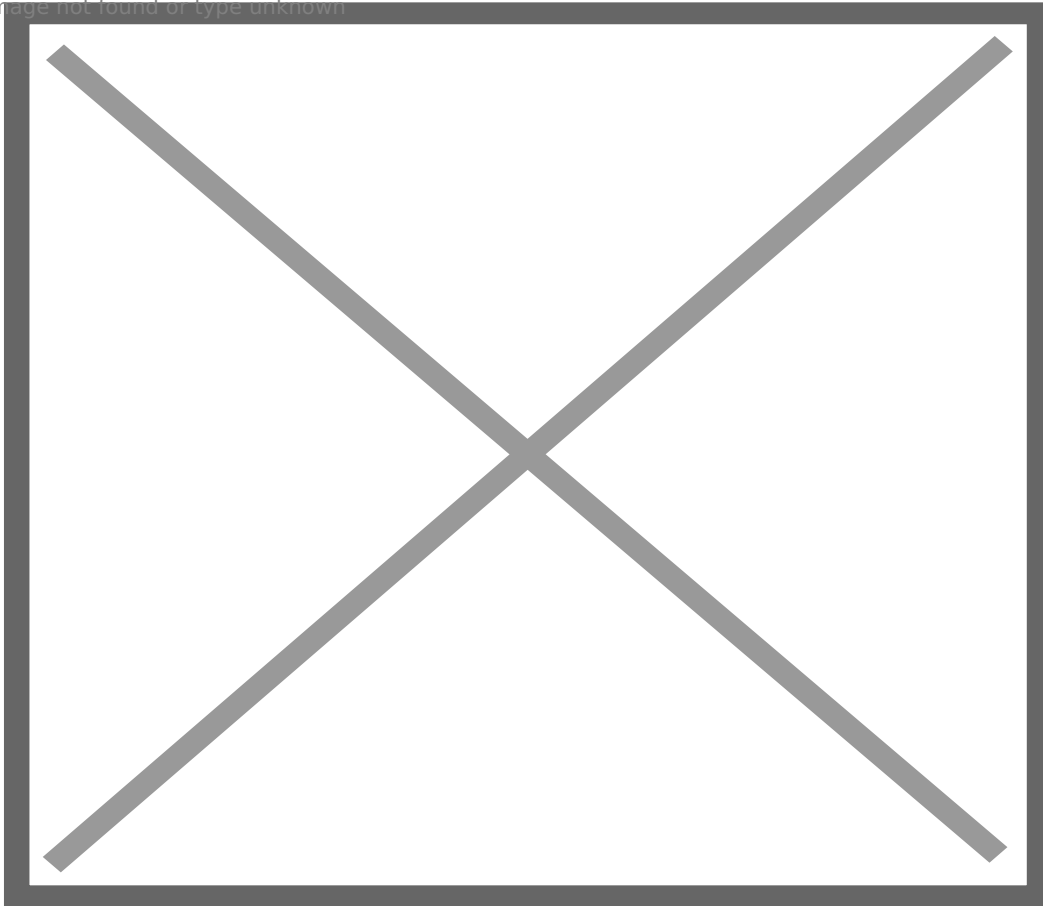
Post by “Joshua” of June 19, 2024 at 2:40 AM

And I can't resist this [poem](#) from Robert Frost!

Post by “Cassius” of June 19, 2024 at 6:37 AM

Great suggestions Joshua - I have updated the Reading List FAQ with them.

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[Can You Suggest A Reading List For Learning About Epicurus? - Epicureanfriends.com](http://www.epicureanfriends.com)
www.epicureanfriends.com

Post by “Martin” of June 19, 2024 at 6:44 AM

When one of my most experienced coworkers asked the analogous question for more training to my boss of 2004 - 2016, the analogy of his answer would be: If you do not find any more new books on the topic, it is time to start writing books.

Post by “TauPhi” of June 19, 2024 at 7:21 AM

Phillip Mitsis (ed.) - Oxford Handbook of Epicurus and Epicureanism (2020)

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3916-looking-for-a-book-recommendation/>

I learned a lot from this one. It's one of the first I've read on Epicureanism and I definitely don't regret it. It's not about practical application of the philosophy but it's very informative on Epicureanism as a philosophy and it covers pretty much all aspects of it.

Post by “Cleveland Okie” of June 19, 2024 at 11:07 AM

Thank you to everyone who took the time to make a suggestion. I will save this link and use it to find more books to read.

By coincidence I am currently also read a book about U.S. history, "The Vineyard of Liberty" by James MacGregor Burns, and on Page 170 there's a description of dinner at the White House: "Mr. Jefferson said that the Epicurean philosophy came nearest to the truth, in his opinion, of any ancient system of philosophy, but that it had been misunderstood and misrepresented. He wished he work of Gassendi concerning it had been translated ... I mentioned Lucretius. He said that was only a part -- only the natural philosophy. But the moral philosophy was only to be found in Gassendi." (That's John Quincy Adams who is being quoted).

I am sorry I have not checked in very much at this Forum, but I intend to be better about that.

Post by “Cassius” of June 19, 2024 at 11:09 AM

Never heard that reference. Thank you Cleveland!

Post by “Godfrey” of June 19, 2024 at 12:36 PM

This paper on ethics in Lucretius might serve as an appetizer for DRN 😊

Post by “Remus” of June 21, 2024 at 8:36 AM

This arrived. It looks like a worthwhile read.

Javier Aoz & Marcelo D. Boeri

THEORY AND PRACTICE
IN EPICUREAN POLITICAL
PHILOSOPHY

SECURITY, JUSTICE AND TRANQUILITY

But first, I've begun reading this...

living for
pleasure

*an epicurean
guide to life*

Pleasure before politics! 😊

Post by “Cleveland Okie” of October 8, 2024 at 10:45 PM

Joshua and Cassius both recommended "A Few Days in Athens" by Frances Wright, so I wanted to record that I did obtain a copy of it (from Project Gutenberg) and read it; I enjoyed it. Thanks to you both for the recommendation.

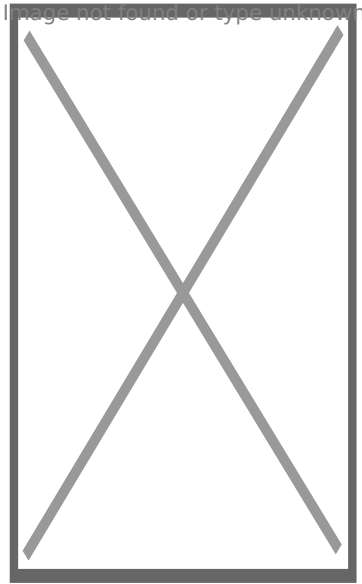
I lately decided that I would spend a bit of time each day reading about Epicureanism, or a book that supports my study of Epicureanism. I am currently reading "Knowledge, Reality, and Value: A Mostly Common Sense Guide to Philosophy" by Michael Huemer, because I wanted to read a primer on philosophy, thinking that such a background might aid my Epicurean studies. I tentatively plan to then re-read Emily Austin's book again, then read "The Cambridge Companion of Epicureanism" (2009), which is included in the "Suggestions for Further Reading" section of Professor Austin's book.

Post by “Cassius” of October 9, 2024 at 9:50 AM

Cleveland your post has me thinking about what I would recommend to someone who "wanted to read a primer on philosophy, thinking that such a background might aid my Epicurean studies."

I haven't read many such primer's myself, and I suppose it would depend on the person and the primer what makes the most sense. If anyone has recommendations of primers that are written from non-Platonist or non-Skeptical or non-Stoic points of view, please comment in this thread.

For some reason something that comes to mind as attempting a basic comparison between Epicurus and others is the Appendix to the DeLacey translation of Philodemus' "On Methods of Inference"



[Philodemus: On methods of inference: a study in ancient empiricism : Philodemus : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](http://uf.catalog.fcla.edu/uf.jsp?st=UF001032148&ix=nu&l=0&V=D)

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archive.org

The three chapter headings in the Appendix have been valuable to my understanding of some very basic issues:

- Sources of Epicurean Empiricism
- Development of Epicurean Logic and Methodology
- The Logical Controversies of the Stoics, Epicureans, and Skeptics

These appendices are relatively detailed, and they for me they were almost more valuable than the translation (of which large parts are missing) for understanding some very basic issues. I seem to recall that David Sedley has some different viewpoints from DeLacy on certain issues (can't remember what right now), but I think these appendices are worthy of reading on their own for the background information they provide.