

Greenblatt and his Detractors

Post by “Joshua” of February 1, 2022 at 2:08 PM

Quote

It's not my place to point out that the book conveniently disregards a key part of Epicureanism, ataraxia, that urges us to withdraw from the world and to "be indifferent to suffering and death in other people" — a disturbing apathy at odds with much of modernity, not to mention the civic ethics of the early modern period. "De rerum natura" actually proposes an apathetic, anesthetized calm that is as incompatible with empathy, compassion, affection, bodily pleasure, or joyful happiness as it is with pain. Hardly inspiring, and hardly an improvement on, well, anything.

Cassius' recent mention of Stephen Greenblatt has reminded me of one of my favorite hobby-horses---Greenblatt's detractors.

The above quote comes from an [article](#) in Vox, written by (of course) a Medievalist.

More:

Quote

I am not a classicist or a philosopher, so I won't go into how actual philosophers point out that Epicureanism wasn't anywhere as widespread in the classical world as Greenblatt suggests [...]

Why it should be the province of philosophers to determine this 'fact' is beyond my power to say. But I am interested in the question. How should we go about determining how widespread Epicureanism was in Antiquity?

We know that geographically we can place ancient Epicureanism on three different continents. We can place them as far north and west as Autun in France, and as far south and east as Alexandria. We know from Cicero that the oldest Latin texts in his day were written by Epicureans (Amafinius?)

We know also from Cicero that Epicureanism was popular among the *hoi polloi*, and from Plotina herself that an Empress of Rome was sympathetic to them. Gravestones, finger rings, busts, papyrus scrolls...is there a way to collate all this information?