

Episode One Hundred Thirty-Seven - The Letter to Menoecus 04 - On Death (Part Two)

Post by "Cassius" of August 28, 2022 at 6:14 PM

Quick comment: When Joshua told the story related by Stephen Greenblatt about his mother, Joshua made a comment to the effect that not everyone was a big fan of "The Swerve" (Greenblatt's book). I left the comment in while editing but just to provide background, in the past we've had some debates about the focus of the book (lots of detail on church politics in the middle ages / not a lot of focus on Epicurean doctrine).

It's also possible that Greenblatt overstates the importance of Lucretius to modern science. But I don't think Joshua or I or most of us here would discourage anyone from reading the book if they find the subjects he covers interesting.

Much of the criticism comes from academic "experts" who aren't really arguing from the point of view of Greenblatt's intended audience (laymen who are not experts in Epicurus or church history).

I have a copy of the book myself and I wouldn't hesitate to recommend it to a generalist reader, but in doing so I would take care to explain what the book is and what it is not. If you go in with proper expectations that it is a generalist history of the church and manuscript preservation with only maybe one strong chapter on Epicurus, then I would say it's a perfectly fine book.

If you want a general big picture combined with details of Epicurean doctrine, go to DeWitt. That's why I always recommend DeWitt first to a reader who really wants to learn about Epicurus.

If you're looking for a generalist book which might perhaps hook a non-philosopher reader to want to read more about Epicurus then "The Swerve" may well be a good choice. Hey, it's a "best seller" if I recall, so that gives the topic some credibility in literary people who might ordinarily shun straight philosophy.