

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

Post by "Don" of September 1, 2022 at 8:27 PM

The quote is actually from Theognis. Here's the section in my commentary:

Which brings us to the last section of verse 126 where Epicurus directly quotes - word for word - from the Elegiac Poems of Theognis

Theognis, lines 425-428:

"The best lot of all for man is never to have been born nor seen the beams of the burning Sun; this failing, to pass the gates of Hades as soon as one may, and lie under a goodly heap of earth."

In Greek:

πάντων μὲν μὴ φῦναι ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἄριστον

μηδ' ἐσιδεῖν αὐγάς ὀξέος ἡελίου:

φύντα δ' ὅπως ὤκιστα πύλας Αἴδαο περῆσαι καὶ κεῖσθαι πολλήν γῆν ἐπαμυσάμενον.

Now, compare that highlighted section from Theognis to line 126g in the Letter to Menoikeus:

126g. πολὺ δὲ χεῖρων καὶ ὁ λέγων καλὸν μὲν μὴ φῦναι, φύντα δ' ὅπως ὤκιστα πύλας Αἴδαο περῆσαι.

Those seven words of Epicurus's are clearly meant to be a quote. He paraphrases the first section about it being good to not have been born at all, then quotes Theognis to bring it on home. Theognis calls it ἄριστον "the best" to not have been born; Epicurus simply says that "they say it is καλός." With this being the case then, my recommendation would be to always translate that phrase within "quotation marks" to emphasize Epicurus's erudition and awareness of the common sayings of his day.