

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

Post by "Cassius" of September 2, 2022 at 9:01 AM

"Greek poetic pessimism" -- Maybe that was part of why Epicurus was hostile to at least some aspects of poetry?

## Abstract

The aim of this thesis is twofold: it explores Giacomo Leopardi's (1798-1837) interpretation of, and engagement with, Greek pessimistic thought and, through him, it investigates the complex and elusive phenomenon of Greek pessimistic thought itself. This thesis contends that Greek pessimistic thought – epitomised by but not limited to the famous wisdom of Silenus, the μὴ φῶναι topos – is an important element of Greek thought, a fundamental part of some of Greece's greatest literary works, and a vital element in the understanding of Greek culture in general. Yet this aspect of ancient thought has not yet received the attention it deserves, and in the history of its interpretation it has often been forgotten, denied, or purposefully obliterated. Furthermore, the pessimistic side of Greek thought plays a crucial role in both the modern history of the interpretation of antiquity and the intellectual history of Europe; I argue that this history is fundamentally incomplete without the appreciation of Leopardi's role in it. By his study of and engagement with ancient sources Leopardi contributed to the 19th century rediscovery of Greek pessimistic wisdom, alongside, though chronologically before, the likes of Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Jacob Burckhardt. Having outlined some fundamental steps in the history of the reception of Greek pessimism, this thesis examines the cardinal components of Leopardi's reception of it: his use of Greek conceptions of humanity to undermine modernity's anthropocentric fallacy, his reinterpretation of the Homeric simile of the leaves and its pessimistic undertones, and his views on the idea that it would be best for man not to be born.