

Epicurus and the Art of Land Surveying

Post by “Joshua” of January 23, 2020 at 10:47 PM

As I was setting up the instrument the other day in preparation for a topographic land survey, I found myself thinking back to Plato's dictum;

"Let no one who is ignorant of geometry enter here."

Now, It happens that I am not altogether ignorant of geometry; but working as a land survey rodman is giving me a more thorough education in its practical application than I had ever hoped for. My library (after much shrinking) is beginning to expand in odd directions; I've ordered four books on land surveying and one, an irresistible Loeb edition by the Roman engineer Frontinus, on the engineering of aqueducts. Lucretius in several places makes reference to "boundary marks" and "the shining borders of the light", and I've lately found myself reading those lines with a fresh eye. Perhaps I will bring myself closer to those Epicureans of whom Torquatus said,

Quote

We value the art of medicine not for its interest as a science, but because it produces health. We commend the art of navigation for its practical, and not its scientific value, because it conveys the rules for sailing a ship with success.

I haven't been as active here as I'd like to be, but I do remain dedicated to the study of Epicurus and the pursuit of pleasure.

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Quote

Great thoughts hallow any labor. To-day I earned seventy-five cents heaving manure out of a pen, and made a good bargain of it. If the ditcher muses the while how he may live uprightly, the ditching spade and turf knife may be engraved on the coat-of-arms of his posterity. —The Journal of Henry David Thoreau

Post by “Cassius” of January 24, 2020 at 5:56 AM

Great to hear from you - post whenever you can. So you've move from truck-driving to surveying? Quite a move there must be a story behind how you picked surveying!

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

"the shining borders of the light",


Interesting that you picked that reference because it is one that interests me too. I think i have seen it rendered as well "shores of light" as if a reference to a seacoast, and it has always made me wonder what was being implied by the allusion. I gather that it generally is used in context of certain atoms coming together into bodies which then become visible - which were not visible before due to their size - but it seems to have been a metaphor for birth or something else that we ought to recognize as significant given that the phrase is used regularly - and I bet this is worth discussion to bring out the subtext.

Post by “Joshua” of January 24, 2020 at 8:22 AM

Quote

Great to hear from you - post whenever you can. So you've move from truck-driving to surveying? Quite a move there must be a story behind how you picked surveying!

Actually, Cassius, I sort of just fell into it through a family connection. But land surveying was Henry David Thoreau's profession for most of his life—and in fact a handful of his surveys, including the survey of Walden Pond, are still on file at the records office in Concord, Massachusetts. And *that* pleases me immensely. I love being outside, and the work isn't bad.

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