

Epicurus and His Influence on History, Ben Gazur,

Post by “Cleveland Okie” of March 31, 2025 at 9:02 PM

Epicurus and His Influence on History, Ben Gazur, Pen & Sword History, 2023

I bought this book as a Kindle in December 2024 for about \$4; Pen and Sword History, a publisher that publishes a lot of military history, often puts its titles on sale. I regret not publicizing here that it was on sale; I was under the impression that I bought it under the regular price. The Kindle is now about \$26, but I will let everyone know if it goes on sale again.

In any event, I thought the book was worth reading. The particular focus of the book is to trace the history of Epicureanism, from the founder and through various figures in history, including the people you already know, such as Lucretius and Thomas Jefferson.

A lot of this stuff was pretty familiar to me, and my favorite bits were about two Romans I had never heard of.

I had known through reading a book called *The Last Assassin: The Hunt for the Killers of Julius Caesar* by Peter Stothard that many of Caesar’s killers were Epicureans. So I was interested in the book’s discussion of a couple of Roman Epicureans I was unfamiliar with who did NOT get involved with politics in the waning days of the Roman Republic.

One of the chapters of the book is about Titus Pomponius, “called Atticus for his love of all things Athenian.”Gazur says it is not certain that Atticus was an Epicurean, but at the very least it appears he was interested in Epicureanism and influenced by it. (I noticed there was a thread about him on this forum, and I will look at it after I post this).

The book says that when Julius Caesar came to Athens, he stayed at Atticus’ home. It says Atticus did not take sides in various civil wars and conflicts. It also says, “His refusal to join a band of rich men in raising funds for Caesar’s assassins led to the collapse of the attempt. But when Brutus, who was a close friend, had to flee to exile he sent him money. He would not support a friend for political reasons, but never ignored a friend in need. When Brutus himself had fallen, Atticus extended friendship to the dead man’s mother, despite the risks.”

There is also a brief mention, citing Plutarch’s *Life of Brutus*, about Brutus’ failed attempt to persuade “Statilius the Epicurean” to join the murder plot against Caesar. “Statilius refused because no wise man would risk danger and civil strife to help the uneducated crowds in the streets,” the book relates.

By my count, I have now read 13 books about Epicureanism since becoming interested in the philosophy after reading the Letter to Menoecus. Here they are, with the most recently read

books at the top:

Epicurus and His Influence on History, Ben Gazur

The Fourfold Remedy: Epicurus and the Art of Happiness, John Sellars.

A Few Days in Athens; being the Translation of a Greek Manuscript Discovered in Herculaneum,
Frances Wright

On the Nature of Things, Lucretius, Ian Johnston translator.

Epicureanism, Tim O'Keefe.

Tending the Epicurean Garden, Hiram Crespo.

The Epicurus Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia, Brad Inwood, Lloyd P. Gerson

Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance, Ada Palmer.

Living for Pleasure: An Epicurean Guide to Life, Emily
Austin.

How to Be an Epicurean: The Ancient Art of Living Well, Catherine Wilson.

Epicureanism: A Very Short Introduction, Catherine Wilson. 11-2021

Epicurus and His Philosophy, Norman W. DeWitt.

*EPICURUS and THE PLEASANT LIFE: A Philosophy of Nature Kindle Edition- November 30, 2022 -
Revised and Expanded 2nd Edition*, Haris Dimitriadis

My favorite is the Emily Austin; O'Keefe's book is a good outline of the philosophy. I got something out of each of these titles.

I have *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism* on my Kindle and will read it soon, although I am thinking of re-reading the Austin again first.

Post by "Cassius" of March 31, 2025 at 9:10 PM

Thanks for posting that Cleveland -- lots of good info in there!

Post by "Joshua" of March 31, 2025 at 9:41 PM

[Quote from Cleveland Okie](#)

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Today (March 31st) happens to be the anniversary of the death of Atticus:

Quote

[21] # After [Atticus] had completed, in such a course of life, seventy-seven years, and had advanced, not less in dignity, than in favour and fortune (for he obtained many legacies on no other account than his goodness of disposition), and had also been in the enjoyment of so happy a state of health, that he had wanted no medicine for thirty years, he contracted a disorder of which at first both himself and the physicians thought lightly, for they supposed it to be a dysentery, and speedy and easy remedies were proposed for it; but after he had passed three months under it without any pain, except what he suffered from the means adopted for his cure, such force of the disease fell into the one intestine, that at last a putrid ulcer broke out through his loins. Before this took place, and when he found that the pain was daily increasing, and that fever was superadded, he caused his son-in-law Agrippa to be called to him, and with him Lucius Cornelius Balbus and Sextus Peducaeus. When he saw that they were come, he said, as he supported himself on his elbow, "How much care and diligence I have employed to restore my health on this occasion, there is no necessity for me to state at large, since I have yourselves as witnesses; and since I have, as I hope, satisfied you, that I have left nothing undone that seemed likely to cure me, it remains that I consult for myself. Of this feeling on my part I had no wish that you should be ignorant; for I have determined on ceasing to feed the disease; as, by the food and drink that I have taken during the last few days, I have prolonged life only so as to increase my pains without hope of recovery. I therefore entreat you, in the first place, to give your approbation to my resolution, and in the next, not to labour in vain by endeavouring to dissuade me from executing it."

[22] Having delivered this address with so much steadiness of voice and countenance, that he seemed to be removing, not out of life, but out of one house into another, -

when Agrippa, weeping over him and kissing him, entreated and conjured him "not to accelerate that which nature herself would bring, and, since he might live some time longer, to preserve his life for himself and his friends,"- he put a stop to his prayers, by an obstinate silence. After he had accordingly abstained from food for two days, the fever suddenly left him, and the disease began to be less oppressive. He persisted, nevertheless, in executing his purpose; and in consequence, on the fifth day after he had fixed his resolution, **and on the last day of March, in the consulship of Cnaeus Domitius and Caius Sosius [32 B.C.], he died.** His body was carried out of his house on a small couch, as he himself had directed, without any funeral pomp, all the respectable portion of the people attending, and a vast crowd of the populace. He was buried close by the Appian Way, at the fifth milestone from the city, in the sepulchre of his uncle Quintus Caecilius.

-Cornelius Nepos, [*The Life of Atticus*](#)

edit; there is a mention of Lucretius in the same source that I was unaware of;

Quote

He also brought off Lucius Julius Calidus, whom I think I may truly assert to have been the most elegant poet that our age has produced since the death of **Lucretius and Catullus**, as well as a man of high character, and distinguished by the best intellectual accomplishments, who, in his absence, after the proscription of the knights, had been enrolled in the number of the proscribed by Publius Volumnius, the captain of Antonius's engineers, on account of his great possessions in Africa; 5 an act on the part of Atticus, of which it was hard to judge at the time, whether it were more onerous or honourable. But it was well known that the friends of Atticus, in times of danger, were not less his care in their absence than when they were present.

Post by “Cleveland Okie” of April 1, 2025 at 10:53 PM

Thanks guys!

All of those anecdotes about Atticus living in stormy political times and refusing to take sides seem oddly familiar....my wife was complaining that my brother in law has never voted and ignored politics. I thought, "Gee, that sounds pretty cool" but decided it was not safe to voice the thought.

Incidentally, the list of books in the [Recommended Reading](#) at the back of Emily Austin's book is quite good; that's how I found the Tim O'Keefe, for example.

Post by “Cassius” of April 2, 2025 at 8:11 AM

[Quote from Cleveland Okie](#)

living in stormy political times and refusing to take sides

That phrasing emphasizes to me that "refusing to take sides" is not at all the same thing as "refusing to take risks" or even "refusing to endure pain." It seems that Atticus was very well ready to take personal risks that might include up to death for offending the wrong people - when he thought that the reward was worth the risk.

It's a point worth emphasizing that refusing to engage in political feuds is not the same thing at all as refusing to take risks under the right circumstances.

Post by “Cleveland Okie” of April 5, 2025 at 7:24 PM

This is a really great point, Cassius, and I appreciate you taking the time to post this.

One of my hobbies is Russian classical music, and Sviatoslav Richter is maybe my favorite all time piano player. Richter was pretty careful to avoid politics and pretty much concentrated on providing his artistry to as many people as possible. Yet he showed up and performed at Boris Pasternak's funeral, certainly a risky thing to do in the old Soviet Union.

For that matter, Dimitri Shostakovich was not in any way a "dissident" and to my knowledge never did anything to deliberately antagonize the authorities. Yet he helped fellow composer Mieczysław Weinberg at considerable personal risk.

Perhaps Richter and Shostakovich got away with it, like some of the things Titus Pomponius "Atticus" did, because it was obvious they were motivated by loyalty and friendship, and not being "political"?