

Welcome JElbert!

Post by “Cassius” of May 28, 2019 at 6:07 AM

Welcome [Joshua](#) ! I see that you have already [posted](#), but when you get a chance please introduce yourself and tell us about your background in Epicurus.

Post by “Joshua” of May 28, 2019 at 10:26 AM

Thank you, Cassius.

I am Joshua, a native of Sioux City, Iowa. I'm a long-haul trucker with a BA in the humanities (a double major in History and English Literature, more specifically).

My early education was concerned mostly with history and political theory, but I was an early reader of the stoics, picking up the *Meditations* in the same week as my high school graduation. In the years that followed I diverged from history in my pleasure reading. I got into Thoreau rather heavily, reading everything he ever published, and followed that thread through *Walden* to the East. Having long since abandoned the Catholicism of my boyhood, I began to devour the great scriptures of the world--the *Bhagavat Gita*, the *Upanishads*, the *Dhammapada* and the sutras of Buddhism. The Chinese classics; *Analects*, *Tao Te Ching*, *Chuang Tzu*. In the meantime I had the opportunity to travel; to Greece, to Italy, to the British Isles.

I began to feel in the end that my own Frank denial of metaphysical idealism and the supernatural were incompatible with this reading. I was an "internet atheist", and without a home East or West. I had, of course, known by then of a materialist school that had flourished in Greece for a time, but its hedonism was repugnant to my sensibilities. I had never read its works.

When a Harvard Professor I quite admired (from *Will in the World*) wrote a book on Epicureanism, I was intrigued. I read it. I read it again. I ordered a copy of Lucretius and read that; and when I soon after read the seminal work of Norman Wentworth DeWitt, I was converted. It was strange; I had been to Herculaneum. To Athens. How had I missed all this?

I consume a lot of audiobooks on the road, but there are four paperbacks by my bed. One is *Walden*. The other three are Lucretius, DeWitt, and Frances Wright. I, too, am an Epicurean!

Post by “Cassius” of May 28, 2019 at 11:00 AM

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

. I'm a long-haul trucker with a BA in the humanities (a double major in History and English Literature, more specifically).

I do ALL my best thinking when I am driving!! 😊

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

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Wow - I want to know more! Who was the Harvard professor to whom you refer?

As to audiobooks, a large part of my "conversion" came from listening to Lucretius via Chartleton Griffin's version at Audible.com. Today I find it a little to "over the top" for my taste, but LISTENING to it read, without my having to pace and reconstruct the sentence structure in my mind, was the first time I really made progress with Epicurean philosophy.

Post by “Joshua” of May 28, 2019 at 11:17 AM

That was a reference to Stephen Greenblatt, who was a Shakespeare scholar and Norton Anthology editor to me, before he was anything else. We were assigned his earlier book in a college course on Shakespeare.

Griffin's reading of the *De Rerum Natura* is the finest reading of any poem I've ever encountered. His rendition of Book I is haunting! Someday I'd like to bite the bullet and start working through a good audio Latin course.

Post by “Cassius” of May 28, 2019 at 12:39 PM

So Greenblatt wrote a book about Epicurus before the *Swerve*? I know I should google but if you could point the way...

Post by “Joshua” of May 28, 2019 at 1:06 PM

Oh, no! Sorry, I meant *The Swerve*. His previous book was *Will in the World*, which was my first of his. A biography of Shakespeare, and nothing to do with Epicurus. *The Swerve*, for all its many faults, genuinely captivated me. Greenblatt reveals the architecture of a solid materialist foundation beneath Lucretius' frequently erroneous didactics.

It's true, for example, that Lucretius has the size of the sun all wrong. But what's more important was the brilliant insight that the Earth was merely one world among many in an infinite and centerless universe. These errors (minor quibbles when compared to the groundless cosmology of the Academics) are nevertheless obstacles to the modern mind in approaching the Epicureans. The texts by Greenblatt and DeWitt are foremost among those attempting to clear those obstacles, and while DeWitt's work is more useful and more important, Greenblatt's work is far more accessible to the general reader.

Post by “Godfrey” of May 28, 2019 at 1:20 PM

Welcome, Joshua!

I, too went from Christianity, to the East, to the Stoics before stumbling upon Epicurus. In some ways it was a very long journey just to get home.

Post by “Cassius” of May 28, 2019 at 2:31 PM

Joshua -- I agree with everything you wrote. We've had some people on the Epicurean boards over the years criticize the *Swerve*, and I personally was a little disappointed that it did not spend more time on the basics of the philosophy. But that's looking a gift horse in the mouth - the *Swerve* introduced a lot of people to Epicurus and is generally very good (maybe more of a

history of the middle ages, in some ways 😊) And although I haven't watched them in a while, if I recall correctly Mr. Greenblatt did some very good videos as well.

I think I could predict that those who first find out about Epicurus through the Swerve, and then read DeWitt before reading anything else, are probably the class most likely to grasp Epicurus most quickly and without many unnecessary detours.

Post by “Hiram” of May 28, 2019 at 3:02 PM

[Joshua](#) you'll likely be interested in the blog series that explore the connections between those writings and Epicurean philosophy:

<http://societyofepicurus.com/epicurean-reas...he-lotus-sutra/>

<http://societyofepicurus.com/the-taoist-hedonism-of-yang-chu/>

<http://societyofepicurus.com/contemplations-on-the-tao-series/>

Post by “Martin” of May 29, 2019 at 4:06 PM

Welcome, Joshua!