

Classics Book Club

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Photo: *Musa reading a volumen (scroll)*. Attic red-figure lekythos, ca. 435-425 BC. From Boeotia.

Book club to discuss Lucretius in June

By: Lyndi Robins, CHaSS Communications Journalist

Mark Damen, a professor of history at USU, is hosting a book club in June to discuss *The Swerve*, a Pulitzer Prize winning book by Stephen Greenblatt. *The Swerve* examines the philosophical poetry of Roman poet and philosopher Lucretius as found in his book *De Rerum Natura*.

De Rerum Natura is a Latin phrase which, in English, translates to “on the nature of things.”

Featuring six poems which examine atoms, the universe and the creation, all at the intersection of physics and ethics, *De Rerum Natura* is one of Lucretius’ most notorious works.

According to Damen, Lucretius’ theories, as stated in *De Rerum Natura*, are well ahead of their time.

“His work is amazingly modern,” Damen said. “He can’t just talk about science; he has to also talk about ethics. He says, ‘If the world is made up of atoms, then humans must also be made of atoms.’”

Studying the works of Lucretius offers a new perspective into the development of modern science and ethical ideas.

“We live in a very privileged age. It was only a century ago that Rutherford proved there were atoms,” Damen said. “We look back on Lucretius’ poem and see it as a bit primitive, but it was the state of thinking for 2000 years.”

All members of the book club will receive a free copy of *The Swerve*, complimentary of the USU Classics Program.

Damen believes diverse perspectives enhance conversation. For that reason, individuals from all backgrounds and fields of study are encouraged to participate in the book club.

“With the whole human enterprise of curiosity, there is nobody of any background that I would think did not have something to add to a conversation,” Damen said. “I would love to have the richness of discourse that comes from diversity.”

This is the second book club hosted by the classics department. When USU’s 2020-21 Christmas break was extended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the original book club was created to help students stay engaged in learning over the long break.

“That book club was a success. It kept classic history on everyone’s mind and was met with great participation and lively discussions,” Damen said.

To Damen, understanding history is key to understanding oneself. This book club will explore key historical theories and their relevance to the modern world.

“You don’t understand yourself until you understand where you came from,” Damen said. “If you stay for even five minutes, you’ll learn something.”

Want to join?

This opportunity is available to the public. The club will meet online every Saturday in June from 1-2:00 p.m. All USU students, alumni and community members are all welcome to join and may do so by emailing mark.damen@usu.edu.

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