

John Tyndall - Address Delivered Before the British Association Assembled At Belfast - 1874

Post by "Cassius" of November 2, 2021 at 5:18 PM

OK I just finished listening to the full address. Before I forget here are some preliminary comments:

(1) The only thing that jumps out at me as a major issue is that Tyndall says that Lucretius invented the swerve himself and that this was an innovation (a negative one) from Epicurus and Democritus. I am aware that some commentators take that position but I don't think it is justified by the full history and I would definitely warn people against this interpretation.

(2) All in all I do think this work deserves reading by most everyone here. It's a good snapshot of where people were in the late 1800's. But at the same time, "where people were in the late 1800's" doesn't translate directly into a bolstering of the goal of this forum (to promote Epicurean philosophy) because it also preserves what I would say are their failures in following up on Epicurus more supportively, which I think was readily possible. If I had more time I would extend this point to carry it through why England has proved itself largely anti-Epicurean even up through today.

(3) Related to point two I think is the nervousness I have whenever people focus on the Darwin arguments. I certainly see how they fit in with the liberation of the world from religion, but I have this gnawing doubt about them and I suspect the doubt is based on this: I personally don't think that any number of "purely scientific observations" about changes in life over the eons really adds up to a "philosophic" argument about the origin of life and the existence (or not) of supernatural gods.

(4) I think this is the issue that bothers me with Frances Wright. No matter how long your string of observations are, you are still at some point left to make a logical deduction about things you have not observed, and numbers of observations don't add up "by themselves" to a logical conclusion. You've still got to take a position on the "epistemology" questions of how you process the evidence into a conclusion. I realize now over time that this is why I personally am much more comfortable with the persuasive power of "nothing comes from nothing or goes to nothing" than some other people who are also strong fans of Epicurus are. To me personally, you could stack up all the observations of natural phenomena and the details of bees and flowers ad infinitum, and those would still have not nearly the impact on me as the argument that "we don't see anything coming from nothing or going to nothing, and we would if there are supernatural forces, therefore there are no supernatural forces." I think that's why I am also singularly unimpressed by Aristotle -- for all the apparent work he put into his process of categorization, that doesn't add up to anything special in my mind, and in fact it smacks of its

own kind of "word-gaming" since his categories end up seeming very arbitrary to me.

Thats all I have time for right now but I suspect that's enough!