

Episode One Hundred Four - More Torquatus and a Question: Was The Ancient Epicurean Movement A Cult?

Post by "Cassius" of January 15, 2022 at 5:34 AM

I think Joshua's points are correct as far as they go, but in order to really grapple with DeWitt's full opinion on this we would need to go to his chapters on epistemology to pull out exactly what he says about it, especially the sections where he contrasts Epicurus with John Locke and calls Locke's (or was it Gassendi's?) view of Epicurus's empiricism and calls that "naive."

(I am going to write this from memory first before I check the sources.)

What I recall is that the point is more centered on (1) anticipations, which Joshua touched on, but also (2) Epicurus' use of deductive logic, which firmly depends on the senses, but **does** go beyond them.

Let's take (2) first, and as I write this I am struck by how important this issue is and how it no doubt is something that a Frances Wright will not swallow. In my view this is why she writes her material late in AFDIA about the essence of science being observation, and basically rejecting all turning of observation into theory. (If you want to trace that further, she does that even more explicitly in some of her collected lectures that were published later.)

As I recall DeWitt pointing out, Epicurean physics goes further than just observation to take positions on things that can never be touched or observed directly by the senses -- such things as the existence of atoms and on many basic questions of the universe (Is it eternal? Did it have a beginning in time? Does it have an end in space?)

DeWitt points out that Epicurus took firm positions on these issues through deductive chain reasoning (I clearly recall reference to chain reasoning in this context so we can word search on that too).

As such, the theory of Epicurean physics is validated by observation that the information of the senses does not contradict the theory, and in fact supports the theory so strongly that we can be "certain" of it -- but the theory itself was never first in the senses.

And this goes further into the profound issues to of Death (we've never been there to observe it first hand) and the gods (more complex due to the issue of images, but we've never been to the intermundia to observe it directly as one might argue a "strict empiricist" would demand.

Now yes, DeWitt also links this issue to anticipations, and here is where DeWitt uses the word "intuitionist" in contrast to empiricist. We've had many discussions on this difficult issue but this

is where deWitt references the Velleius material and says that at least one aspect of the anticipations is to provide sort of a genetic code that unfolds like a flower which does not at birth contain any stored information (wisdom? knowledge? data?) but which is genetically coded to dispose us to think in particular directions (the two topics Epicurus mentions DeWitt says are justice and divinity - and maybe time too? I would have to check on time).

This puts Epicurus in direct contradiction to Aristotelian and Lockean "blank slate" theory which is more consistent with empiricism ('nothing in the mind that did not first come through the senses').

So I think Dewitt is really ultimately making his statement in the context of the blank slate contention, which I think is tightly related to empiricism (and is or should be findable if we looked up empiricism and studied its origins).

That's a start let me save this before i lose it.

But yes I think DeWitt is correct on this. And in my mind, I link this to the argument I regularly reference in the book by Jackson Barrwis "Dialogue on innate Principles" which is a full-front attack on John Locke based largely on this same issue. (Which I thought highly enough to [make a site about](#), although it appears to need total revamping as only some of the links work.)