

Biographical Details of Norman W. DeWitt

Post by “Don” of July 25, 2023 at 8:41 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Probably a good place for another general comment about DeWitt. It has been said at various times and places that the emphasis on DeWitt's book here at EpicureanFriends gives the group a "DeWittian" flavor. I don't really know what that would mean, but if it's in part true, in my mind it is not because there is any particular "DeWittian" spin on Epicurean philosophy.

In doing a quick search for "DeWittian/DeWittian" on the forum and finding that only I and Cassius seem to have been the only people to actually use that term in writing, I'll add my two cent reply to his post.

I have great respect for DeWitt's scholarship, especially his individual academic papers.

I think he has some interesting takes on difficult topics. Look no further than his conjecture that Epicurus owned a three-wheeled chair due to his infirmities. I don't necessarily agree with all his takes, but he's willing to dive in where others fear to tread.

I have no doubt of his passion for Epicurus and his philosophy and in spreading the word about its applicability and usefulness.

What I personally have issues with is his tendency to go far beyond what the texts and evidence have to offer. Especially the books written in retirement: *Epicurus and His Philosophy* and *St. Paul and Epicurus*. I think he often interprets and extrapolates far too much with very little evidence to make a point he wants to make. Following up on his references is frustrating because his text will say one thing and the reference don't back it up. Or he'll simply make things up for the sake of historical narrative or philosophical stance. He was skilled at creating historical fiction based loosely on the evidence. That's one of my big issues with DeWitt.

The other, again especially in *Epicurus and His Philosophy*, is his antiquated and sometimes opaque writing style. Parsing DeWitt can sometimes be almost as difficult as parsing ancient Greek! That is one of the reasons I'm reluctant to fully endorse DeWitt as an introduction to Epicurus and his philosophy. I *fully* agree that his methodical, synoptic approach is valuable and I am grateful for the podcast for taking the time to really go through his book. That has been extremely valuable. But confronted with *Epicurus and His Philosophy* as a starting point can be daunting, and I fully admit I have yet to get through a reading cover to cover. For me, he's valuable to dip into now and again, but I can't do prolonged readings. That's one of the reasons I like his papers: short and to the point.

DeWittean is NOT meant to be pejorative (all the time), but I still feel that he's not the be all and end all - the arkhe and the telos - of Epicurean scholarship. Nor do I think Cassius thinks that! I just thought I'd get my perspective out there.