

# **JAMES MILNE / MILL, Mentor of Frances Wright**

**Post by "Cassius" of May 14, 2020 at 2:48 PM**

Very interesting material here, including support for Dewitt's contention that according to Epicurus "LIFE ITSELF" was the "greatest good." Note also the discussion on how "the distinction between good and bad pleasures did not make sense." I found this page because I am looking into Jame Milne as a potential mentor and/or collaborator and/or ghost writer of "A Few Days In Athens" but this material is interesting on its own.

EGOISM: See ETHICAL EGOISM; PSYCHOLOGICAL EGOISM.

EGOISTICALLY ADJUSTED UTILITY: See AGENT-NEUTRAL AND AGENT-RELATIVE.

## EPICUREANISM

Epicureanism is a term derived from the name of the ancient hedonist philosopher, Epicurus (341–271 BC), who lived in Athens approximately a century after the death of Socrates. When John Stuart Mill depicted the “standard of morals” of his father, James Mill, he wrote in passing that “[it] was Epicurean inasmuch as it was utilitarian, taking as the exclusive test of right and wrong, the tendency of actions to produce pleasure and pain” (CW, vol. 1, p. 49). In *Utilitarianism* (1861), Mill wrote freely of Epicureanism and noted that “every writer, from Epicurus to Bentham, who maintained the theory of utility, meant by it, not something to be contradistinguished from pleasure, but pleasure itself, together with exemption from pain” (CW, vol. 10, p. 209).

Mill also acknowledged that Epicureanism had been under attack since antiquity as a “mean and grovelling” doctrine “worthy only of swine,” and one major object of Mill’s essay was to defend utilitarianism from these sorts of criticisms (p. 210). He did so partly by pointing to the way in which utilitarianism could include the “agreeable” or the “ornamental” as well as the useful (p. 209). His account of the Epicurean doctrine of pleasure also showed how it could adopt Stoic and Christian elements, and he insisted that “there is no known Epicurean

imagination, and of the moral sentiments, a much higher value as pleasures than to those of mere sensation” (p. 211).

In these remarks, Mill was restating aspects of the Epicurean tradition, which in the previous generation found its leading advocates in Jeremy Bentham and William Paley. But to grasp fully this tradition, one must turn to antiquity and to the two main thinkers, Epicurus and Lucretius. Epicurus established his school in Athens in 306 BC and advanced the view that no pleasure was bad or evil. The connections that Epicurus made between pleasure and health and pain and disease enabled him to argue, against the position of Plato and Aristotle, that the distinction between good and bad pleasures did not make sense. All pleasures were good in the sense that health was good, even though some pleasures were mixed in incorporating or leading to pain. As health was good, it was arguable that life itself was the greatest good, with disease of body or soul the greatest evil. The good life for the Epicurean consisted of the development of economic and psychological self-sufficiency and contentment, cultivating one’s inner and actual “garden” and seeking a state of *ataraxia* where one lived quietly and serenely in bodily health with little physical and psychological distress. The most important virtue for Epicurus was prudence, and while an emphasis was placed on the egoistic pleasures connected with friendship, little attention was given to social values and instincts. Justice, for Epicurus, was a means of obtaining security from the attacks of others. He saw justice as a “pledge of mutual advantage to restrain men from harming one another and save them from being harmed.” This pledge of mutual advantage was also regarded as useful (Epicurus, pp. 102–105).

Justice was not considered a virtue in the sense that we can discover, as in Plato’s *Republic*, its unchanging properties in the human soul and society. It existed for human

Note: As to collaboration and/or ghost writing, I have no desire to take any credit from Frances Wright, but I simply cannot see how the same person who had the insight to write "A Few Days In Athens" could not write anything else at all about Epicurus for the rest of her life, as it

appears was the case for Frances Wright. I have long thought that the "aside" within AFDIA where she criticizes the philosopher whose work was virtually Epicurean without giving credit to Epicurus is a major tip as to the origin of the book.