

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

Post by “Joshua” of October 31, 2021 at 8:43 AM

NOTE FROM CASSIUS --- This post is where Joshua introduced us to John Tyndall's "Belfast Address" which is a remarkable document with much discussion of Epicurus and materialism. This thread is now devoted to that topic. A version here at the forum is located here: [Tyndall - Address at Belfast](#) If you would like a pure text version to run through a text-to-speech engine, a version is located here: <http://www.epicureanfriends.com/wcf/filebase/i...lfast/#versions>

See this post below for an audio MP3 version: [RE: John Tyndall - Address Delivered Before the British Association Assembled At Belfast - 1874](#)

George Santayana; *Three Philosophical Poets*; 1910. Contrasts Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe.

John Tyndall; *The Belfast Address*; 1874. A history of atomism, and an argument against the 'God of the Gaps'.

James Parks Caldwell; *Diary*; 1863-1864. Prison diary of a Confederate soldier, praises Lucretius.

Post by “Don” of November 1, 2021 at 7:13 AM

I hope you don't mind, but I couldn't resist trying to find the books you mentioned online. The Tyndall one of far more detailed about Epicurus than I expected.

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

John Tyndall; *The Belfast Address*; 1874. A history of atomism, and an argument against the 'God of the Gaps'.

[Address delivered before the British association assembled at Belfast.](#)

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

George Santayana; *Three Philosophical Poets*; 1910. Contrasts Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe.

[Three philosophical poets: Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe, by George Santayana...](#)

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

James Parks Caldwell; *Diary*; 1863-1864. Prison diary of a Confederate soldier, praises Lucretius.

I wasn't able to find this one freely available. It appears the diary was first published in book form in *A Northern Confederate at Johnson's Island Prison: The Civil War Diaries of James Parks Caldwell*, George H. Jones, Ed. 2010. 277 pages.

"A college graduate at 16 and a founder of the Sigma Chi fraternity, Caldwell entered the Confederate Army as an artillery lieutenant. He fought at Shiloh, Port Hudson and other campaigns before being captured in 1863 and imprisoned on Johnson's Island, in Lake Erie, near Sandusky, Ohio. He kept a daily diary for 18 months, describing the prison food and conditions, as well as his classical and intellectual interests. The book features letters, a poem, notes, and an index."

Post by "Joshua" of November 1, 2021 at 7:32 AM

The Belfast Address should be required reading around here!

And I'd like to read that diary in general.

Post by "Cassius" of November 1, 2021 at 8:52 AM

I have never read the Belfast address and will try to do so today. It would be a lot easier for me personally if we had audio copies read by someone sympathetic - I wonder who that might be?



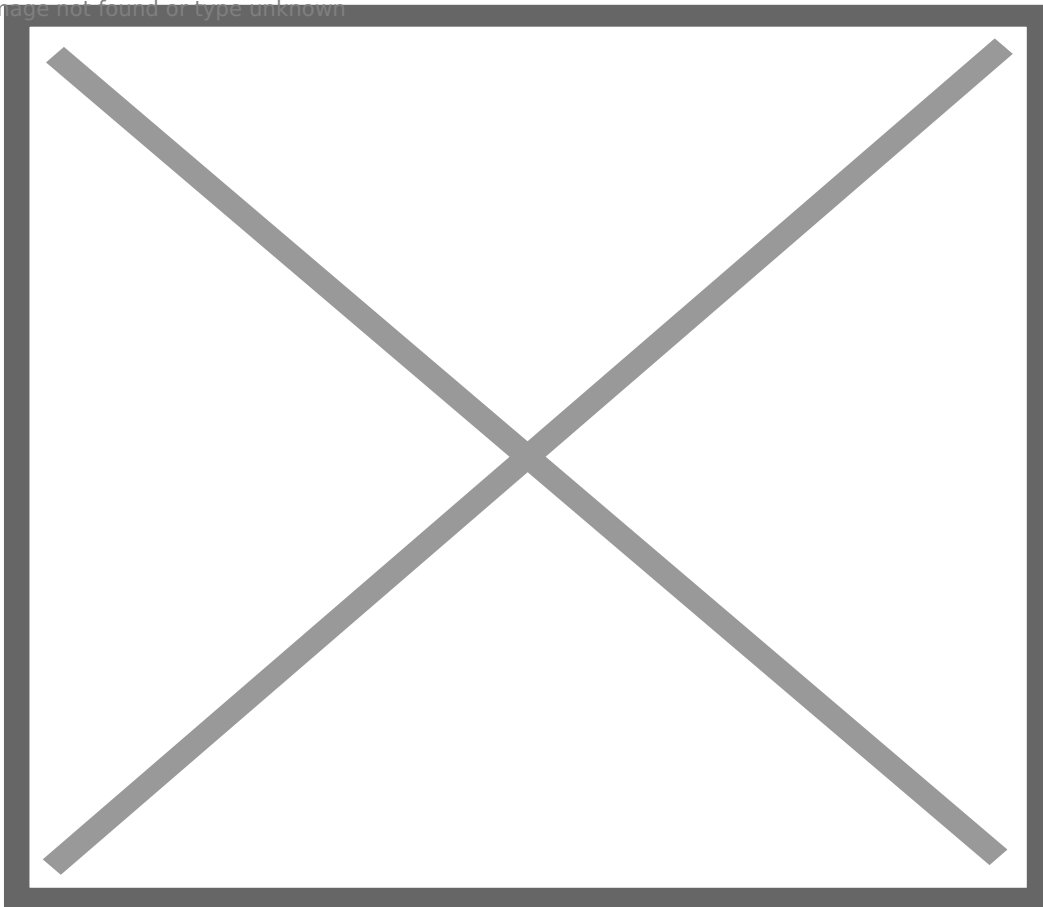
Failing that (and no doubt for good reason) we can always run some of these through one of the better text-to-speech engines, but that probably means have it in good "text" form from which an engine can translate.

I downloaded from Don's link several different formats. The PDF version is a series of images and this likely unusable. The Epub and txt versions are in decent shape, but will need editing to correct errors where the scanning and OCR failed.

I have done one run-through and uploaded a cleaner TXT version here: [Tyndal - Address at Belfast](#)

I also placed a copy here where collaborative editing can be done:

Image not found or type unknown



[Tyndall - Address at Belfast - Epicureanfriends.com](#)

www.epicureanfriends.com

That's not efficient to have two copies, but I realize that for someone who knows what they are doing, having the TXT file for use in a Text editor is a lot easier than trying to edit online.

I will work with this today and find a way forward.

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2247-john-tyndall-address-delivered-before-the-british-association-assembled-at-belfa/>

Already the version in the lexicon might be usable if someone calls up that page and has a "text reader" application on their telephone.

Post by "Cassius" of November 1, 2021 at 9:30 AM

If someone wants to try listening to this, here is an effort:

it's not great, but it's better than nothing, and can be improved.

Wow that was a terrible first effort. I will improve it and repost

Post by "Cassius" of November 1, 2021 at 9:01 PM

Ok here is a much better second effort of an MP3 version of the Belfast Address: <https://www.swisstransfer.com/d/e59f721c-d21...20-69259164f37e> No doubt there are still some errors. Please report them and help me get a better transcript here: [Tyndall - Address at Belfast](#)

I still haven't completed a full run-through, and I hesitate to sound like I am fully endorsing this until I fully absorb his conclusions and where he leaves the argument - which I haven't yet been able to finish.

I note in scanning the latter part of the text that a lot of it cites Darwin, and that always gives me pause. I am of course well disposed toward Darwin and what Darwin stands for in the public mind, but I have never read much of Darwin himself to be able to know for myself. Much of the reason I mention this is that I am not an expert on Nietzsche either - by far - but I think I am aware that Nietzsche did not think highly of Darwin. Not that I consider Nietzsche a standard of perfection either, but given Nietzsche's appreciation for Epicurus I am concerned that there may be some deep-seated philosophic issues that I need to understand. In the meantime I think it's best if I continue to hold back in being as sweeping in an endorsement of Darwin as his work on evolution might indicate would be the case.

I note that Tyndall is touching on some of the deeper philosophical issues in this essay, so maybe in reviewing this speech he'll help us explore what I think is a similar issue: Why so many good scientific-minded Brits of the last several hundred years could end up being so good on "raw science" but so bad on philosophy. (And I say that as someone who is genetically primary a Brit himself, if I understand my DNA results!)

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!