

Welcome Cleveland Oakie!

Post by “Joshua” of October 21, 2021 at 10:58 AM

I'll take a shot at some of these;

Quote

1. I'm most of the way through DeWitt's book, and in Chapter 14 he writes of Epicurus, "He favored a minimum of government and chose to look upon men as free individuals in a society transcending local political boundaries." Is this an eccentric opinion of DeWitt's, or would most experts on Epicurus describe him as a kind of libertarian or classical liberal?

While we do heavily push DeWitt as the best introduction to Epicurean Philosophy, many of us also recognize his tendency in several ways to extrapolate beyond the textual evidence. I cannot recall a citation in the relevant texts where this opinion is directly expressed.

Complicating the problem are several historical facts worth mentioning. First, and in support of DeWitt's assertion, we do know that Epicurus chose to settle in democratic Athens. He had other options, some of which had more centralized governments. (I'll also mention that we try to avoid the thorny issue of politics on this forum, for what I think are obvious reasons.)

The second factor is that capitalism as we understand it did not exist, and had not been proposed. Further, Epicurus himself held slaves; it's difficult in any age to hold liberty as a strong value when slavery is *de rigeur*. There are no classical texts from any author surviving which propose abolitionism as an object. The ancients simply saw these issues differently than we do.

Quote

2. Now that I know more about Epicureanism, thanks to DeWitt's book, I have to say that the Epicurean position that puzzles me the most is the denunciation of mathematics. Is there an ancient Greek cultural context here that I'm not getting?

There certainly is! Epicurus lived in a demon-haunted age, and Mathematics were not exempt from this broader context. Pythagoras had proposed a connection between geometry and the "10 concentric celestial spheres". His claim was not only about geometry and astronomy, but about "Truth". Plato as well saw a connection between Euclidean geometric theorems, and the kind of pure absolute moral theory that he himself was dabbling in; hence the sign over his door—"Let no man enter here who has not studied geometry".

This will help to indicate the other problem with Mathematics—namely, that the Ancient Greeks had no real taste for their practical application. As an example of this; the Alexandrians *had* done the work of developing an understanding of pneumatics and hydraulics, and they even devised a basic steam engine. And what did they use things for? Tricks and sorcery to complement the charlatanism of the temples and oracles.

Yes, that's right; they were *one* step away from attaching a piston and a wheel to this contraption, by which effort they could have discovered locomotive power! But they didn't.

Epicurus did not have time for philosophy that did not invite a practical application. He was surrounded by geometers, and at the end of all their inquiries they were finding God.

He knew they were on the wrong track entirely, and so dismissed them.