

Biographical Details of Norman W. DeWitt

Post by "Cassius" of July 25, 2023 at 9:05 AM

Your comments are helpful for someone tackling the book so I am glad Joshua started the thread.

[Quote from Don](#)

I *fully* agree that his methodical, synoptic approach is valuable

If I had to point to one thing, this is the key. The prime issue that I believe I see in many people who think they appreciate Epicurus is that they start and stop with the ethics as if they are self-evident and can be understood fully just by reading the letter to Menoecus. I am convinced that anyone who takes the time to get a grasp of the "big picture" of the philosophy, including the physics and canonics, is in most cases likely to come away from the ethics with an entirely different picture than those who think that the implications of pleasure as being the guide of life are easy to grasp on first reading.

DeWitt's book goes after a synthesis of the big picture in a way that I don't think most other commentators even attempt to do, and that's its great merit. As anyone who dives into it will see, it's difficult to understand or evaluate or even trace down many of the allusions that Dewitt mentions, but someone who makes an effort to grasp the big picture is going to be far better off than those who don't even make the effort.

I think that's what we're after here at EpicureanFriends too, and if there emerges from that a distinct flavor that separates this from other approaches, it's not adherence to DeWitt's conclusions that makes the difference. It's much more a shared approach of going after everything we can find that sheds light on what Epicurus may have been thinking, and trying to place it fairly but sympathetically to reconstruct the larger picture, that makes the difference.