

My struggle with Norman DeWitt

Post by "Cassius" of August 25, 2023 at 11:14 AM

I had not visited this issue in a while and now I see Elena Nicoli collected some of the best/worst Nussbaum quotes:

The Epicurean pupil only needs to be 'converted'

"Thus this ethical view is pragmatic in some of the same ways that Aristotle's is. But there are some differences that make the use of pragmatic constraints in Epicurus' case seem more disturbing. ... The difference seems to be ... that Aristotle shows respect for and seriously investigates his pupils' full experience of value, viewing all that as material toward the ethical truth. We feel that it is an open question what conception they will choose. This seems less clearly the case with Epicurus. **Nikidion is there not to pursue an inquiry but to be converted.**" (p. 123)

"The physical theory of Epicureanism has a lot of internal elegance and some brilliant argumentation; but **there seems to have been no attempt to test it against observed nature with an open mind in the Aristotelian way. The point is to convince people of its truth**; and its practical contribution is again and again brought forward as a reason for our commitment to it... **It is not altogether an accident that all and only the disturbing views of the universe turn out false.**" (p. 124)

Epicurean therapy numbs its pupils' intellect and critical thinking

"**The Epicurean pupil is not encouraged to bring objections of her own against the system, or to argue dialectically; and as she becomes more dependent on the text and doctrines of the master, she may be less adept at reasoning for herself**" (p. 136)

"**The passivity of the Epicurean pupil, her habits of trust and veneration, may become habitual and spoil her for the active critical task.**" (p. 139)

Is this 'real' philosophy?

"For our account has led us into areas of psychological interaction that do not look much like the give-and-take of philosophical discourse. ... **Furthermore, we must also insist that what all argument is, in this community, is therapy.** ... **But if we feel that there is something more than a little odd about calling the whole of this therapeutic interchange philosophy, and its tools arguments, we will not be wrong.**" (p. 127-128)

According to Nussbaum, in the Epicurean community...

1. Theoretical knowledge, practical reasoning, and critical thinking have no *intrinsic* value

- Learning, understanding, judging and knowing are mere instruments to attain pleasure.

2. There is a stark asymmetry of roles

- The Epicurean pupil simply needs to be converted: s/he is not allowed to reason by herself/himself, but only to trust his/her master.

3. Epicureanism is not 'real' philosophy, but 'mere' therapy