

My struggle with Norman DeWitt

Post by “waterholic” of August 25, 2023 at 1:11 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

The origin of this is from Martha Nussbaum?

[Kalosyni](#) This was my impression of Epicurus using the Norman DeWitt prism, or to put it differently, what I think I would have concluded had I read about Epicurus only NDW.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Compare DeWitt's comments to Gibbon's in his "Fall of the Roman Empire." Gibbon uses sarcasm and false-sounding praise of Christianity to make his derogatory points about the influence of Christianity. DeWitt's comments seem sincere, but then never to my memory rise to a level of saying "the Christians were right!" He's basically just drawing attention to parallels that some will find - and do find - extremely interesting, while others won't.

Indeed, the conclusions are drawn from the context, but the book's approach is to implicitly accept that there is a logical progression of philosophy/religion from the basic/archaic (polytheism) to the more modern, benevolent Christianity and Epicureanism can be compared to the latter. The most innocent explanation is the one suggested by [Joshua](#) that NDW attempts to attract regular readers of his epoch, who would consider this a good incentive to study Epicurus.

But I agree that the comparisons to Christianity are tangential and can be ignored altogether, without impacting the text or the conclusions.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

If you agree with Epicurus that radical skepticism is clearly wrong,

I wholeheartedly agree with Epicurus that radical skepticism is wrong - a position I have arrived years ago and with considerable thought and study.

But the point here is not whether it's possible at all to know anything. But rather, whether it makes sense to spend time and effort to indoctrinate people through mindless repetition of maxims. Once again, I will probably extend [Joshua](#)'s idea that everything needs to be

understood in the context of the time. Learning methods have evolved and what appears to us a little dogmatic, could have been completely normal for the time and place.

Yet another aspect of this issue is the very point of establishing a missionary style effort. From Epicurus' point of view, I see two reasons: 1. to help people (as that's the ultimate goal of the philosophy), 2. build a community of friends - safety in numbers. My impression is that the intensity of this effort in DeWitt's book comes across a little greater than would be warranted by the nature of the school.