

Comments and Thoughts on DeWitt, Chapter 3

Post by "Don" of April 18, 2020 at 11:47 AM

I certainly appreciate your perspectives. Thank you for taking the time to share them! I concur that it's important to not get hung up on details and miss the "big picture." I also freely admit that this may as well be my first reading of DeWitt as I only vaguely remember passages from my first reading as I'm reading this time. And I haven't even gotten to the meat of the philosophy chapters yet. You all have had years with DeWitt and so have a much broader perspective on his work. I hope you'll be patient with me as I dig into the rest of EAHP.

I also fully agree that a syncretic, cafeteria-style philosophy isn't worth much. Either a philosophy or "art of life" stands on its own or not. I apologize if I gave the impression I was going down that road. That is not my intention.

All that being said, I do not wish to be a DeWittian Epicurean, a Baileyan Epicurean, a Gassendian Epicurean, a Jeffersonian Epicurean, a Stoic Epicurean, but an Epicurean. I want to understand what Epicurus, Metrodorus, Philodemus, Lucretius, et al. taught and wrote to the best of my ability, using all the best scholarship available from multiple sources and using the example of Epicurus to question accepted wisdom and "culture" and to come to my own conclusions.

So, personally, I am withholding my judgement of DeWitt's claim of understanding Epicurus' philosophy better than any others. I definitely agree that academic consensus doesn't necessarily equate with "Truth." I also don't necessarily think the maverick freethinking scholar is always right either. DeWitt's agenda to find Epicureanism hidden in Christianity at every turn raises red flags for me. I fear he may try to make connections where none actually exist or are tenuous at best or have multiple valid explanations (like explanations for meteorological events in Lucretius). However, I *am* looking forward to digging into his anti-Platonic arguments. Epicurus was definitely no fan of the prevailing educational system of his day and it makes sense that he would work to counter that.

This is why I firmly believe, no matter the difficulty, that it is so important to look at the original works (on digitised manuscripts if possible), to compare numerous translations, and to consult authoritative dictionaries and other reference works. Is it a long involved process? Sure! Lifelong maybe. But I want to understand *why* translators and scholars chose the words they did. Because the words of Epicurus and Lucretius and Philodemus et al. - extant and buried in their critics - are the only connection we have to them. I'm reluctant to accept any one person's filter (other than Epicurus' 😊) through which to see this philosophy. If I'm going to make decisions about how to live my life using this philosophy, I'm going to base them on the words of Epicurus (and the other classical Epicureans) as I can reasonably come to understand them. I will gladly and enthusiastically accept the help of fellow aspiring Epicureans online. I will gladly

and enthusiastically accept the help of scholars in the field - DeWitt included, of course! - but I'm going to check footnotes and citations and hold their feet to the proverbial fire to see if their conclusions are confirmed by the words in the original texts that they cite. If they're adding attributes that aren't there or making broad assumptions or trying to make tenuous connections to disparate facts, I'm going to be skeptical of other claims they make that aren't so easily questioned.

And I'm looking forward to taking pleasure in the journey! 😊