

Comments and Thoughts on DeWitt, Chapter 3

Post by "Cassius" of April 18, 2020 at 2:53 PM

[Quote from Eugenios](#)

DeWitt's agenda to find Epicureanism hidden in Christianity at every turn raises red flags for me.

This is a very good point, and definitely something to be concerned about. In my reading, however, through the full book and through his "St Paul and Epicurus" and his academic articles, I find something very interesting to me: I find ZERO in the way of "proselytizing" or even inuendo that Christianity is correct and Epicurus is wrong. Zero. Absolutely zero. The favorable perspectives are always (I should say almost but I really don't remember any exceptions) limited to psychological issues related to friendliness and neighborliness and social concern, or comparisons of "salvation" perspectives, indicating again psychological goals. NEVER to my recollection does DeWitt make a comment that really reveals what his own perspective on religion is, or that his (DeWitt's) personal perspective is superior, or even relevant, to Epicurus' perspective.

So I think I can reassure you that if you are expecting that to pop out of each succeeding chapter, or even in St Paul and Epicurus, you need not be overly concerned.

This raises the issue of what DeWitt's own viewpoint really was, and why he has this interest in Christian analogies. I don't think we'll ever know for sure, but I can't help but suspect that the it is equally or not more possible that DeWitt is using these analogies as a way to draw in religion-oriented people who might not otherwise be interested in Epicurus. He certainly goes in that direction (and succeeds, I think) in St Paul and Epicurus, where he explains many new testament references as being addressed to those who understood Epicurean philosophy. And in those explanations (such as the reference to the "weak and beggarly elements") I think DeWitt makes valid points.

And no doubt there was some measure of "prudence" on his part in 1930's Canada that he not take himself entirely outside the existing societal framework, which I presume was still then largely Christian.

My personal guess - and it is just a guess - is that DeWitt knew exactly what he was doing, and that his regular references to Christian analogies were conscious decisions to (1) reach more readers, (2) maintain his own respectability, and (3) follow the actual facts, which are pretty much with him, as far as he goes.

And that's consistent with what I would expect someone in his position to do, much in the same vein as Frances Wright's book (which I hope you have on your reading list). Once you identify Epicurus as a revolutionary philosophical figure who turns upside down virtually every aspect of "establishment" thinking, and once you identify what you believe are chronic misrepresentations and misunderstandings calculated by Epicurus' enemies to bury his teachings as far out of sight as possible, it's hard to resist a significant degree of evangelical spirit. It's important to keep that within bounds so as to maintain one's credibility and not get carried away, but I think that's what we see in DeWitt. And in my view he succeeds better than any book I know of -- better even than Frances Wright's book, which targets a significantly different audience.

As for the rest of your comments I can't think of a better way to attack this than the way you are doing, and it's going to be very valuable for us all if you share as many of your observations as possible. As you say we're not interested in being Bailey Epicureans or DeWitt Epicureans - we want to know first and foremost what Epicurus himself taught, and then we can judge for ourselves from that.