

Thoughts on DeWitt, Chapter 5

Post by "Don" of May 20, 2020 at 6:31 PM

And so we arrive in Athens!

Quote

p. 90: This would afford explanation of the affectionate missive which detractors quoted to disparage Epicurus: "Glory be, darling Leontion, with what jubilation you filled us when we read your precious note."⁴

Footnote 4 cites Diogenes Laertius (DL) 10.5.:

Quote

DL 10.5: "O Lord Apollo, my dear little Leontion, with what tumultuous applause we were inspired as we read your letter."

Παιὼν ἄναξ, φίλον Λεοντάριον, οἴου κροτοθορύβου ἡμᾶς ἐνέπλησας ἀναγνόντας σου τὸ ἐπιστόλιον:

It's interesting that in the last chapter, DeWitt wrote about Epicurus's adding mentions of the gods in his letters, using this exact example: Παιὼν ἄναξ Paian anax. DeWitt is consistent in his "Glory be" translation here. Paian anax is a reference to Apollo and DeWitt's translation removes us from the cultural context of Epicurus's world. I realize DeWitt is paraphrasing, but "Glory be" seems to miss the flavor of Epicurus's style. This is especially true since [Paian has a deeper connotation regarding it's use as an epithet of Apollo](#). The title connotes Apollo as savior, yes, but more as the "healer" or physician of the gods. It was also used as an address to other gods after deliverance from a catastrophe. So, Epicurus's own view of his philosophy as "medicine" in this context is interesting. Epicurus himself is a healer of sorts. Same for anax, lord/master, which also connotes a "master of the house" which Epicurus was as well. DeWitt says that the phrase Paian anax was a favorite one with Epicurus. Did Epicurus see Paian anax in some way referring to himself as physician to his students and Lord of his house? Is that why it was a favorite?

On p. 92, we have an interesting section:

Quote

P. 92: The two properties were not contiguous and there is evidence for believing that Epicurus, whose health was uncertain, sometimes fared back and forth in a three-

wheeled chair.13

Footnote 13 refers to DeWitt's own article: "Epicurus' Three-Wheeled Chair" Norman W. DeWitt. *Classical Philology*. 35:2 (Apr., 1940), pp. 183-185 (3 pages) In it, he parses DL 10.5, specifically:

Quote

...πρὸς δὲ Θεμίσταν τὴν Λεοντέως γυναῖκα Οἴος τε φησὶν εἰμί, ἔαν μὴ ὑμεῖς πρὸς με ἀφίκησθε, αὐτὸς τρικύλιστος, ὅπου ἂν ὑμεῖς καὶ Θεμίστα παρακαλήτε, ὠθεῖσθαι.

and to be more precise, DeWitt is most interested in the word τρικύλιστος which he (in his article) translates as a "three-wheeled chair" pushed by someone and steered by Epicurus due to his ill health. DeWitt makes a fairly compelling case in his article (Another reason I like his articles - overall - more than his book). He mentions that some translators try to make it sound like Epicurus is hurrying or doing some gyrations: "to spin thrice (τρι/three) on my own axis and be propelled" (Hicks). But DeWitt makes the case that the τρικύλιστος (trikylistos) would have been pushed (Hicks: "be propelled" translating

ὠθεῖσθαι "(to be) pushed"). According to DeWitt, τρικύλιστος doesn't occur anywhere else and so is open to interpretation within the context.

On p. 93, DeWitt begins talking about the "Ranks and Titles" within the Garden and school of Epicurus. He begins:

Quote

The title chosen for himself as head was hegemon,¹⁸ which Cicero rendered by dux, "leader" or "guide."

Footnote 18 refers to DL 10.20:

Quote

[20] "Ποιεῖσθωσαν δὲ μεθ' ἑαυτῶν καὶ Ἑρμαρχὸν *κύριον τῶν προσόδων*, ἵνα μετὰ τοῦ συγκαταγεγηρακότος ἡμῖν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ καὶ καταλελειμμένου **ἡγεμόνος** τῶν συμφιλοσοφούντων ἡμῖν ἕκαστα γίνηται.

[20] "Let them make Hermarchus *trustee of the funds* along with themselves, in order that everything may be done in concert with him, who has grown old with me in philosophy and is left at the head of the School.

The phrase that DeWitt appears to be saying that Epicurus "himself" chose "as head was hegemon." The text appears to be ἡγεμόνος τῶν συμφιλοσοφούντων "hegemonos ton symphilosophounton" which appears to simply mean "leader of those join in the love and

pursuit of wisdom." [Hegemonos \(or hegemon\) appears to simply be a "one who leads or guides the way."](#) It seems to me as Epicurus in his will is just saying "make Hermarchus the leader." I'm not entirely convinced that it was a "title" that Epicurus chose for himself. He was simply the leader of the group and needed to name someone to lead them after he died. Because later on on page 93, DeWitt states, with no citation:

Quote

Instructors of all grades were consequently designated by titles that mean "leader" or "guide."

But that's what "hegemon" means. You can't say Epicurus chose "hegemon" which means "leader" or "guide" as a title for himself and then say all instructors were called "leaders" or "guides" without saying what the original Greek was! That doesn't seem like playing fair.

On 94, we then read:

Quote

Next in rank to the supreme leader stood the three men Metrodorus, Hermarchus, and Polyaeus. The title bestowed upon them was kathegemones. 24

Footnote 24 references Philod., On Anger, frag. 45.1; On Management, col. 12.20; Rhet., vol. i, col. 23.22, p. 49 (Sudhaus). and, unfortunately, I don't have access to Philodemus. However, it would appear to be [καθηγεμόνος](#). One of the definitions in LSJ is simply "of the founders of the Epicurean school", but the basic definition is "leader, guide." Which are the *same* English words as we saw back on p. 93 when DeWitt says "Instructors of all grades were consequently designated by titles that mean "leader" or "guide."" We seem to be going in circles on these! All in all, I'm a little dubious on the "Ranks and Titles" section.

Which moves us along to p. 95 with the mention of Epicurus's slave Mys:

Quote

Since the school was also a publishing concern, the staff must have included a number of literate slaves to serve as secretaries and copyists. The oversight of these would undoubtedly have fallen to the talented slave whose name was Μύς Mys. His position was comparable to that of Tiro in the household of Cicero. He was rewarded by freedom at the master's death, and tradition reports him as a philosopher in his own right.³²

Footnote 32 references D.L. 10.3, 21. DL 10.3 simply says Mys's name and his status as Epicurus's slave. DL 21 simply names the slaves that Epicurus freed in his will: "Of my slaves I manumit Mys, Nicias, Lycon, and I also give Phaedrium her liberty." Again, I *really* wish DeWitt would give a citation for something as pivotal as Mys was a "philosopher in his own right." I have no reason to doubt DeWitt, but it would be great if he backed something up like

that with a citation.

On p. 96, DeWitt writes:

Quote

Since so many women shared the life of the school, it must be assumed that the number of female slaves was proportionate. The oversight of these would have fallen to one Phaedrium, since she was singled out for manumission in the will of the master.³⁸

Footnote 38 again references DL 10.21, again *just* the list of slaves given their freedom on Epicurus's death. Mys supervising the copyists and Phaedrium overseeing the female slaves is pure assumption and colorful historical fiction-writing on DeWitt's part, painting the picture he wants to portray with respect to the management of the Garden. The citations do not back up these roles.

That whole section brings up the topic of slavery in the Garden. We know Epicurus owned slaves. How does that square with the idea of "natural justice" and PD 37? That's a topic for another thread, but one I wrestle with in relation to Epicurus.

p.101 has:

Quote

There is, however, still something to be added. During the first three centuries of Christianity the representations of Christ exhibit a youthful and beardless face, not unlike that of Apollo. The bearded portraits began to appear at a later date and simultaneously with the absorption of the Epicurean sect into the Christian environment. These new pictures of Christ exhibit a similarity to those of Epicurus, then growing obsolete. This similarity is such as to be manifest to the most disinterested observer.

No, I don't buy this, and it's not "manifest to the most disinterested observer." For one glaring difference, the earliest "portraits" of a bearded Jesus have very long hair. [The Wikipedia article on the depiction of Jesus](#) shows one of the earliest bearded images from the late 4th century. The long flowing locks are quite visible. That's not Epicurus. The article does a fairly good job of outlining the various theories of where this bearded depiction comes from, and it's not copies of Epicurus. The references in that article, too, also point to numerous options for where the bearded depiction comes from.

On p. 103, DeWitt asserts that:

Quote

Epicureanism was the prevalent philosophy in New Testament days.

I'm skeptical, especially with no citation to back it up. [This "article" online references several academic papers and gives an interesting look at "ways to at the least approximately quantify the philosophical landscape of the Greco-Roman world."](#) Worth taking a look at.

On p. 104/5, DeWitt talks about the choice of the 20th as the day of honoring Epicurus:

Quote

It was a sacred day in a cult of Apollo and it was on the twentieth that the final rites of initiation were performed in the mysteries of Demeter.

I have no reason to doubt the Apollo reference. I'll accept DeWitt's scholarship on this, but I find it interesting, if this is indeed the case, in light of what I found about Epicurus's use of Paian Anax in his letters and its relation to Apollo.

And, finally, DeWitt's contention that the communal meals of 20th were used as the pattern for the Christian agape feasts... I don't accept that. Communal meals were not uncommon in ancient world, and it's not necessary to ascribe this to Epicureans [See this history of the Love Feasts on Internet Archive.](#)

And so I have to end - unfortunately, again! - in opposition to DeWitt's Christianity/Epicureanism theme. I'm looking forward to getting into his examination of the doctrines of the philosophy and getting away from the history. It was fascinating, and in places enlightening, but there was a lot of historical fiction-writing to add color to his story as he wanted to tell it. But that's simply a lot of what it was from my perspective.