

What Evidence Do We Have That Frances Wright Personally Was An Epicurean?

Post by "Cassius" of September 24, 2020 at 6:05 AM

There is now absolutely no doubt in my mind but that Frances Wright was the author of AFDIA. Not only is the writing style is there, but also much of the basic theory. More examples are below.

But rather than ending my feeling that something is strange here, my feeling of strangeness has at least doubled. I think Joshua has put his finger exactly on the issue with the DeWitt quote. Wright made the decision to bulldoze forward with the substance of Epicurean theory while at the same time dropping all attribution to its authors.

So yes it presumably must have been a factor that she decided the religious question was too hot to handle, and indeed the end of AFDIA does attack religion, but indicates that much more could be said about it - without carrying through in full force.

Interesting as that is, I think the question more important to consider is how this applies to the issue of those who see Epicurus devoted to "living unknown" and "avoiding politics" and pursuing "absence of pain" at all costs.

Here is someone who has shown a deep understanding and appreciation of what would appear to be every significant aspect of Epicurean philosophy at a level undocumented since the ancient world, and yet she uses that knowledge in a way that every respectable modern commentator for at least 500 years (with the exception of DeWitt) would hold to be totally unacceptable to Epicurus!

If that is the case (and I think we can document a mountain of evidence that it is) who is wrong about Epicurus? The non-DeWitt modern commentators, or Frances Wright, Thomas Jefferson, Julius Caesar, Cassius Longinus, and others we've only begun to discuss?

What we're seeing with Frances Wright in these passages is an amplification of Jefferson's words in his letter to William Short that he attributed specifically to EPICURUS:

"I take the liberty of observing that you are not a true disciple of our master Epicurus, in indulging the indolence to which you say you are yielding. One of his canons, you know, was that "that indulgence which prevents a greater pleasure, or produces a greater pain, is to be avoided." Your love of repose will lead, in its progress, to a suspension of healthy exercise, a relaxation of mind, an indifference to everything around you, and finally to a debility of body, and hebetude of mind, the farthest of all things from the happiness which the well-regulated indulgences of Epicurus ensure; fortitude, you know is one of his four cardinal virtues. **That**

teaches us to meet and surmount difficulties; not to fly from them, like cowards; and to fly, too, in vain, for they will meet and arrest us at every turn of our road. Weigh this matter well; brace yourself up...."

From page 63 of the 1829 Courses of Popular Lectures:

Now we stand in relation, more near or more remote, to all substances and all existences within the range of our observation; that is, to the whole of matter, of which whole we ourselves form a part.

We shall understand this relation more accurately if we bear in mind, that the simple elements of all things are eternal in duration and ever changing in position. We may analyze or decompose all substances, from the rocks of the mountain to the flesh of our own bodies; we may destroy sentient existences—the ox in the market, or the insect beneath our foot; we may watch the progress of rapid or more gradual decomposition by age or disease in our own bodies; but let us not imagine that here is destruction, here is only change. We may evaporate water into steam, or convert it into air; we may transform the blazing diamond into the elements of dull carbon; we may

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stop the current juices in the plant or the tree, and leave it fading and withering until we find only an earthy heap on the soil; we may arrest the action of organic life, and stretch the warm and sentient being a cold, dull clod of corruption at our feet—yet have we neither taken from, nor added to, the elements before us. We have changed one substance into other substances, ended one existence to start others into being. The same matter is there; its appearance only is changed, and its qualities diversified. These facts being so, as observation and experience attest, it follows, not merely that we form at this moment a part of one great whole, but that we ever have and ever shall form a part of the same. Under various forms, with varying qualities, the elements which now compose our bodies have ever held, and will ever hold, a place in the vast infinity of matter; and, consequently, ever mingling and mingled with the elements of all things, we stand, in our very nature, allied and associated with the air we breathe, the dust, the stone, the flower we tread; the worm that crawls the insect that hums around us its tiny song

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ment. Easily, as pleasantly, should we tread all the paths of knowledge; and advancing, without check or backsliding, become familiar with every object within the circle of each opening horizon, until the whole map of material existence, with all its occurrences and changes, lay revealed to our sight and apprehension. Then would our education be simply a voyage of discovery. We should have only to look within us and to look without us, to store up facts and to register them for future generations. Far other is our occupation now. Instead of establishing facts, we have to overthrow errors; instead of ascertaining what is, we have to chase from our imaginations what is not. Before we can open our eyes, we have to ask leave of our superstitions; before we can exercise our faculties, we have to ask leave of each other. When I think how easy and delightful the task would be to present you with a simple table of just knowledge—to arrange under the single head of MATTER AND ITS PHENOMENA, all the real objects of human investigation and real subjects of human enquiry;