

Article: Norman DeWitt - "Epicurean Kinetics" (Examining a Passage on Motion To Illuminate the Canon of Truth)

Post by "Cassius" of April 17, 2020 at 6:35 AM

A recent discussion about Norman DeWitt's abilities as a translator prompts me to post this 1941 article from "Classical Philology" entitled "Epicurean Kinetics." The title sounds like it is focused on motion, but the real issue under review is the "Canon of Truth." DeWitt attacks the conventional translation of several important passages in the Letter to Herodotus and suggests new interpretations with much different implications.

Full article here:

File

["Epicurean Kinetics" by Norman DeWitt](#)



This article is an analysis of a part of the Letter to Herodotus on motion, but it is really directed toward challenging existing views of the Epicurean "Canon of Truth"



Cassius

April 17, 2020 at 6:33 AM

Excerpt:

We now come to a sentence which, if rightly translated, will compel us to make drastic modifications of our statements of the Epicurean theory of knowledge and will nullify whole sections of Giussani's *Lucretius* and Bailey's *Epicurus*⁹ and his *Greek Atomists and Epicurus*. We are called upon to assume, as before, that we have visible minima of motion, or minima of time in which motion is visible, and, corresponding to these, certain theoretical minima discernible by reason alone or by intuition. What Epicurus then tells us is this, that the analogy between visible mass motion and invisible atomic motion does not hold beyond a certain point: "For the gratuitous inference of opinion concerning the unseen, that naturally units of time discernible only through reason will also be characterized by motion in a straight line, is not true of such things [as atoms endowed with motion]."

To this is appended a clause of supreme importance for the Epicurean theory of cognition, which has, nevertheless, been more atrociously mistranslated than any passage that has come to my knowledge. Consequently, I think it best to print the Greek text, which is undisputed, and to build up a version piecemeal: ἐπεὶ τὸ γε θεωρούμενον πᾶν ἢ κατ' ἐπιβολὴν λαμβανόμενον τῇ διανοίᾳ ἀληθές ἐστι.

Post by "Don" of April 19, 2020 at 10:15 PM

Yes!!

Now I'm getting why you all have the affinity you do for DeWitt's work! The statement in this paper that stood out for me was:

Quote

I think it best to print the Greek text, which is undisputed, and to build up a version piecemeal

THIS is what I've been waiting for in *Epicurus and His Philosophy (EaHP)*!

Unfortunately, he seems to, for the most part, avoid this "building up" in that work. I realize EaHP is geared toward a more "popular" audience so in-depth erudite step by step arguments seem to have been put aside in favor of mere assertion on some points. Plus, he adulterated that work with the "Epicureanism in Christianity" stuff which seems superfluous to me but

which [Cassius](#) had good arguments for DeWitt's inclusion that make sense to me. I don't necessarily accept DeWitt's assertions on those, but I get why he probably put them in (in addition to his obviously believing they're in the New Testament).

But these papers of DeWitt's are great! I have greatly enjoyed reading them! He is definitely striking a blow for Epicurus!