

Fact-checking DeWitt's "St. Paul and Epicurus"

Post by "Titus" of October 7, 2023 at 7:40 PM

Although I do not expect any new revelations from examining DeWitt's work on the epistles of St. Paul, I still consider his study a quite remarkable approach to decipher and understand St. Paul under the light of Epicureanism. Others claim that he creates in a quite persuasive way scientific fiction.

Unfortunately, a quick research via search engines doesn't show any kind of reception by theologians or other researchers. I'm uncomfortable with the fact that on the one hand, there are some astonishing clues by DeWitt, which would bring light to tricky passages in the writings of Paul. On the other hand, having no critiques or recensions by experts at all, makes fact-checking a tricky task. Personally, I don't have any knowledge of Ancient Greek, too.

My strategy would be this way:

1. Starting a systematic literature research. Perhaps there may be some hidden articles on the issue which are invisible to a superficial investigation.
2. Trying to consult theology professors/professionals who are specialized on the New Testament.

Do you have any ideas/proposals on how to handle such an investigation? Has anyone of you already tried to do a check?

Post by "Cassius" of October 7, 2023 at 8:01 PM

Titus I would propose that you just set up a thread for each suggestion by DeWitt you find interesting and people can then pursue that specific reference over time. I agree this is worth pursuing whether anyone has in the past followed DeWitt's lead or not. Let me look and see if we have one and if we don't I will set up a sub forum specifically for this book and you can create a thread on each verse or topic.

Post by "Cassius" of October 7, 2023 at 8:08 PM

OK Titus here is a forum specifically dedicated to St Paul and Epicurus. Unless you have a better idea I would suggest that you or others interested in this just open a thread for each specific verse or issue that is contained in the book. I think we have at least a couple of posts on this book somewhere already so i will try to round them up and put them there too.

"Here" now means the forum where you are reading this:

[Norman DeWitt's "St Paul And Epicurus"](#)

Post by “Cassius” of October 7, 2023 at 10:24 PM

I am particularly looking forward to the analysis of whether Epicurus was in their mind as the, or one of the, antichrist(s)!



Post by “Cassius” of October 7, 2023 at 10:28 PM

Plus, other than the statement of Cicero about Epicurean philosophy taking Italy by storm in 50BC, I am not aware of much discussion at all about how popular Epicurean philosophy was in the Hellenized world by 50 AD. How much of the population of Greece ever was a blend of something that could be considered Epicurean? When Paul was complaining in general about the non-Christians, I have no idea how many in fact might have been Epicureans for these allusions DeWitt is drawing to be likely. Were the Epicureans always a small sect, or is it possible that in the relevant areas that we are talking about Epicurean views had in fact penetrated strongly. I am not sure I have read anything which even tried to project that. Is it possible that the Epicureans attained a level of popularity that no one today really suspects or admits? Is it possible that they far outnumbered the Stoics? I have no clue.

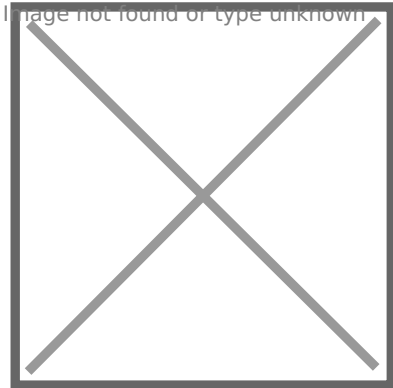
We have a tendency to think that Epicurean popularity somehow nosedived after Lucretius, but is it possible that that is not in fact the case and that it continued to be extremely popular, or perhaps even a majority, until the Christians took over?

Post by “Don” of October 7, 2023 at 10:34 PM

The only *explicit* mention of Epicureans in the Bible is in Acts:

Acts 17:18

Also some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with him. Some said, "What does this pretentious babbler want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign divinities." (This was because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.)



[Bible Gateway passage: Acts 17 - New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition](#)

The Uproar in Thessalonica - After Paul and Silas had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue....

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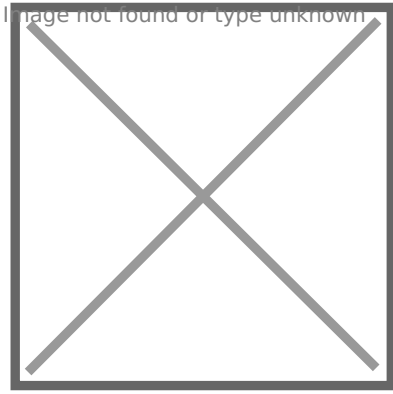
But they were obviously around!

Paul was writing probably 48-60 CE.

Plus, remember the composition of Acts is usually dated to around 80-90 CE, although some scholars suggest 110-120 CE. So, there were most likely a significant number of Epicureans at that time for the reading audience to know who these "Epicureans" were.

Post by "Don" of October 7, 2023 at 11:29 PM

Haven't read this yet but could prove interesting or applicable:



[Paul and the Athens Epicureans: Between Polytheisms, Atheisms and Monotheisms, Diogenes 205, 2004, p. 47-60.](#)

Paul the apostle seems to have considered philosophy as a rival more than an enemy: when he approached the Athens Aeropagus to explain the Christians' new...

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