

# Matthew Stewart: "Nature's God, The Heretical Origins Of The American Republic" (2015)

Post by "Cassius" of April 1, 2025 at 8:25 PM

I've seen this book praised many times here in the past by @Eikadistes and [Joshua](#) so it's well past time we have thread dedicated to it.

Just in the last week or so have I had time to pick it up, and I have to say I am very impressed so far. This is a subject (usually filed under "Deism") that I started reading into shortly after college, and it had a major impact on my thinking long before I picked up Epicurus. I'm less than a quarter of the way through it but I'm already very impressed by its level of detail, including material on Ethan Allen, whose "Reason The Only Oracle of Man" I read many years ago. But it had not sunk into my consciousness that there was a relationship between him and Thomas Young, a figure that I posted about years ago, but never pursued (that I can recall).

Thread

## [Thomas Young of Massachusetts](#)

Threadstarter post

This link comes from [Wikipedia on Thomas Young](#):

[https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent...=english\\_theses](https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent...=english_theses)

[epicureanfriends.com/wcf/attachment/2813/](http://epicureanfriends.com/wcf/attachment/2813/)

(However this sounds like the writer's overlay rather than a cite to Epicurus.)

Another: [Reason and Revolution: The Radicalism of Thomas Young](#)

For me, the real litmus test of whether someone was an "Epicurean Influencer" often comes down to: *Did they embrace eternal universe rather than a Deistic clockmaker model?* Unless they...



Cassius

June 16, 2022 at 1:49 PM

While strictly speaking "Deism" is considered to be closer to the watchmaker model, where the universe was originally created by a supernatural god, and therefore not compatible with Epicurean physics, it seems that there was a lot of variation among the thoughts of those who were labeled as deists, and some of them may indeed have had almost a full Epicurean viewpoint.

I post this because over time and new people discover this book, I'd like it to have a thread that people can find to add their thoughts. No doubt there are many details about people like Young who are mentioned in the book about whom it would be good to research to look for clues to the development of their thought and Epicurean connections.

Also, while we always need to steer clear of contemporary partisan politics, I think one of the most important implications of studying these figures is the connection between their "activism" and their Epicurean-adjacent worldviews. It seems like almost a whole generation of people, even those who were not as educated as others, understood that this non-supernatural worldview logically leads to greater, not not lesser, interest in and engagement with the world around them. And rather than living in "fear" or being unwilling to experience any pain at all, they went to a lot of effort and personal risk to pursue living as they thought it should be conducted.

It's frustrating to read in Stewart's book about how so many of them from Washington and Franklin and even Jefferson kept their views to themselves, no doubt out of concern for what would happen to them if they were too vocal. Even so it is motivating to read about these figures and consider the extent to which we can add to their work given that our environment -- at least for now -- allows many of us to speak a little more openly than was available to them.

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## **Post by "Cassius" of April 8, 2025 at 7:30 PM**

@Eikadistes - today I finished the chapter in this book on Epicurus - "Epicurus' Dangerous Idea."

It's got to be one of the deepest treatments of Epicurus that I've read in many a day, and given that it was released as recently as 2015 it's probably one of the longer recent treatments out there - certainly in a book meant for general readership.

It may not be quite as "broad," but it's a *\*much\** deeper treatment of some of the core ideas than the chapter on Epicurus in Greenblatt's "The Swerve."

He's giving far more detail than I am familiar with, but one person I wish he had referenced (although she's after the revolutionary period so I can understand her being omitted) was Frances Wright and her *Few Days In Athens*.

I'm looking forward to reading it to the end but wanted to re-engage you on your overall impression of the book. Did it lead you to any additional reading on any of the many lesser-known figures that he talks about from the followers of Bruno (Vallini?) on up to the 1800's? It sounds like Thomas Young was a key figure and link to Epicurus.

There's also a lot of general reflection on how to present revolutionary religious ideas when you know that many people around you aren't ready to hear them.

This might be one of the best general-interest books to talk about Epicurus since "The Swerve," and it almost certainly deserves more attention than we've given it.

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### **Post by “Eikadistes” of April 8, 2025 at 8:50 PM**

I've read a lot more into Ethan Allen based on the availability of material. *Nature's God* introduced me to Thomas Young, but he seems to be a bit of a difficult historical figure to pin down in terms of daily activities. This book did two things that really helped me: one was to demonstrate how "Epicurean" our world really is (regardless of the bumper stickers we have), and the other was to help foster a feeling that non-Christians had a big, important, positive part to play in our history.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of April 8, 2025 at 9:03 PM**

Thanks. I'll have a lot more to say when I finish the book but I'm definitely impressed so far.