HOW TO BE AN EPICUREAN

M. EURINGER: *Epikur. Antike Lebensfreude in der Gegenwart*. Pp. 144. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2003. Paper, €18. ISBN: 3-17-017957-8.

This book is not for specialists in Epicurean philosophy. Rather, it is a kind of protreptic. Its author wishes to provide the reader with basic information about Epicurean philosophy and to make him consider if and how he could live his life according to Epicurean teachings. Euringer thinks that one can profit from reading the books of Epicurus and his pupils. E. wishes to persuade his reader that the nucleus of Epicurean thought can be transferred into modern life (p. 7) and will help to achieve 'antike Lebensfreude in der Gegenwart' (as the subtitle of his book reads).

The first chapter of the book (pp. 9–78), called 'Der Garten des Epikur', outlines Epicurus' life, the historical and philosophical context and the basic tenets of Epicurean philosophy. A short overview of the *Nachleben* of Epicurean philosophy (pp. 19ff.) gives some idea of the importance of the Epicurean tradition in European history of ideas, despite a long tradition of polemic and misunderstandings of Epicurus' doctrines. This tradition, one might add, can be traced back to the very beginning of Epicurus' school, when Epicurus' pupil Timocrates left the Kepos, became a renegade, and started his fight against his former teacher. It is also worth noting that despite their harsh criticism of Epicurean philosophy as a whole, even Christian readers were impressed by Epicurean ethics and especially by the Epicurean technique of living. Important figures like Augustine or Lorenzo Valla (pp. 89–78) agreed that Epicurus had interesting things to say about how to handle irritating phenomena and how to control affections like the fear of death in order to gain *eudaimonia*.

E. then covers the main fields of Epicurean philosophy. Physics and atomism are dealt with and seen in the context of Epicurus' fight against irrational fear of death and his concept of philosophy as a therapy of the soul (pp. 48ff.). E.'s main focus is on Epicurean ethics. It is here, E. argues, that modern readers might find help in their search for *eudaimonia*. E. rightly underlines the rational aspect and the therapeutic character of Epicurean philosophy (pp. 54ff.). There is a link between happiness, self-mastery, and reason. Epicureanism can indeed be called a philosphy of life based on rationality. Epicurus' philosophy—like all Hellenistic philosophy—is based on arguments and the analysis of concepts.

The information about Epicurean philosophy in the first chapter is reliable, although sometimes very sketchy. E. seems to suggest that Epicurus died in 274 B.C. (p. 12); the cover of the book, however, gives the right date (p. 271). In the second chapter (pp. 79–137) E. considers whether it is possible to use Epicurus' ethics, especially his hedonistic calculus, as a guide for life in the modern world. In this context E. discusses important problems like sexuality, theology, psychology, friendship, or euthanasia (pp. 102ff.). E. certainly is right in insisting on the rational basis of Epicurean philosophy, which proves its value in life. Epicurus' project was to give a rational orientation to the world.

E. refers to ancient sources like Diogenes Laertius, Lucretius, Cicero, Seneca, Plutarch, Lactantius, and—although only once—Horace and Virgil. Unfortunately he has not much to say about Epicurus' later followers like Philodemus. This is a pity, because Phiodemus' books help us to understand why Epicurean instructions were successful in the Roman context and how later Epicureans managed to meet the

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expectations of their contemporaries, for instance by stressing the fact that Epicurean philosophy offers knowledge of philosophical dogmata, but also the ability to turn those dogmata into maxims of practical action. A focus on later developments in Epicureanism could have strengthened E.'s case that Epicurus' philosophy is attractive even today, because of its claim to be adaptable and practicable in different cultural contexts.

E. has interesting things to say about how to use Epicurean arguments in the context of modern life. Sometimes, however, his arguments seem rather speculative and even unconvincing. E.'s Epicurus sometimes seems to look like a modern lifestyle guru. It should not be forgotten that Epicurus does advanced philosophy and strives for real knowledge of how the world works. His thirty-seven books of *On nature* obviously were a very tough read. It is true that the Epicureans advocate the good life or *eudaimonia* as the goal of all actions. But it should be kept in mind that Epicurean *eudaimonia* stands for tranquillity of mind and for the conduct of a successful and fulfilled life, which can be achieved and measured by rational human means like the hedonistic calculus. It seems doubtful that Epicurus really wants—as E. seems to claim, following the modern rather subjective concept of *Glück* (and 'Happiness'?)—that everybody will be happy 'nach seiner Façon' (p. 137). Epicurus rather wishes that everybody will happy *nach Epikurs Façon*, which for everyone will be the same.

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PLUTARCH VS. EPICUREANS

J. BOULOGNE: *Plutarque dans le miroir d'Épicure. Analyse d'une critique systématique de l'épicurisme*. Pp. 253. Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2003. Paper, €27. ISBN: 2-85939-805-8.

In his second monograph on Plutarch, B. returns to the subject of his 1986 *thèse d'État*. Rather than to close-read the three extant anti-Epicurean essays one by one, B. offers a structured synoptic account of Plutarch's attacks, arranging the evidence and argument by topic with elegant pedantry. Part I addresses natural philosophy, covering the theories of perception and cognition, atomist physics, theology, the nature of the soul, and language. Part II deals with a variety of issues related to hedonist ethics as well as with the attitudes to law and friendship. No index of any kind is provided.

My guess is that the (unstated) ambition of the book was to become a counterpart to D. Babut's monumental *Plutarque et le Stoïcisme*; indeed, B. notes that for Plutarch anti-Stoic and anti-Epicurean polemics run parallel (p. 32 with n. 76). Like Babut, B. attempts rationalized stock-taking, on the assumption that hostility towards Epicureanism is a stable axis of the Plutarchan oeuvre (pp. 18–19). Plutarch's lunges against Epicurus and Colotes are themed and classified, nearly always confronted with Epicurean material, and concisely compared with other authors' polemics (Cicero: pp. 139, 212–13, 215–16).

B.'s aim is to evaluate Plutarch's critique of Epicureanism objectively, for what it is worth (p. 39). Plutarch is plausibly credited with adequate first-hand knowledge of the Epicurean texts (pp. 14–17, 220–1, and *passim*)—although I remain unconvinced

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