CICERO AND EPICURUS ON GODS

A. R. Dyck (ed.): *Cicero:* De natura deorum *Book I*. (Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics.) Pp. x + 236. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Paper, £16.95/US$25 (Cased, £45/US$70). ISBN: 0-521-00630-9 (0-521-80360-8 hbk).

All those interested in Cicero's *philosophica* will feel, once more, indebted to Andrew R. Dyck. In addition to his excellent large-scale commentaries on *De officiis* (Michigan, 1996) and *De legibus* (2004), he now presents a more concise 'commented edition' of *De natura deorum*, Book 1, 'not to replace but to supplement' A. S. Pease's massive commentary of 1958 (p. x). This is too modest. In some respects, D. is simply better. Pease's two volumes may be seen as an 'unrivalled treasure house of information' (D. p. ix), but there is often an excess of details to the point of discouraging less experienced readers. D. does not feel under compulsion to comment on everything. His commentary is wisely selective, yet many-sided: it covers linguistic aspects no less than prosopography, philosophical arguments, rhetorical devices, theology, and the influence of *De natura deorum* in later centuries. It is worthwhile (and, indeed, possible) to read D.'s commentary from top to bottom, whereas Pease will be consulted with profit on specific points.

Text and commentary are preceded by a short introduction offering basic information on Epicurus' theology, Cicero's sources, date, composition and scenery of the dialogue, style and language, and transmission of the text. It is largely well-balanced and an example of sound judgement. I have some doubts, however, as to certain 'features' in Cicero's style sensed by D. as 'pointing ahead to Silver Latinity' (p. 12; see also 134): in 56, there is no accusative and infinitive clause governed by *metuo* (it goes with *intelleximus*); *hic* for *is* as antecedent of a relative clause is a tricky field, given the unreliability of our manuscripts, and as to the 'exploitation of the participle's verbal properties', I could not find anything remarkable.

As currently new critical editions are in the making, D. prints a 'stopgap' text, 'based on but with some variations from Ax's edition' (Teubner 1917, 1933^2). He provides a simplified stemma (p. 17) and a (very) selective apparatus. This is not a good compromise: in the apparatus, the reader is often referred to manuscripts that do not show up in the stemma, and is accordingly left uninformed as to their date and rank, so as to be unable to judge D.'s decisions. Moreover, there being no line numbers, MS readings and conjectures are indicated by section number only (plus, if necessary, the preceding word). This is uncomfortable, and in some cases, e.g. in §1, it is pretty difficult to disentangle what is paradosis and what is conjecture.

There are some fifty 'variations' from Ax's text (listed on pp. 18–19), many of them convincing or deserving serious consideration. But in §1 *ut <non> magno argumento esse debeat* is probably wrong (the general dissent in matters religious is and should be regarded a strong argument . . .), and in §21 the insertion of *<non>* (strangely not mentioned in the list, p. 18) is clearly mistaken: it explodes the sense required ('even if time could not yet be measured, nonetheless (*tamen*) time is conceivable by mere extension'). 60 *spes* (*obscurior*) should be kept: it is better attested, lectio difficilior, and strongly backed by *leg. agr*. 2.66. 117 *liberare* clearly preferable to *liberari*: it is 'easy' for the teacher to 'free' from superstition (for absolute use of *liberare* see *Tusc*. 2.11) rather than for the audience 'to get freed'.

In the commentary, D. provides his readers with firm guidance 'about the architecture of the text' (p. ix), a type of help now and then badly needed, and a

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distinct improvement upon Pease. The introductory synopses preceding major sections are highlights of D.'s book. There is reliable information throughout, and not only 'upper-level students' (blurb) will greatly profit from D.'s scholarship, e.g. by up-to-date details about new papyrus texts on Epicurus' theology. Pages could be filled enumerating new interpretations and fine obervations. But it is hardly true that 'the praise of a person present is rare' (p. 140)—compliments of the kind are rather the rule, and that is nice coquetry: by praising an interlocutor's speech, Cicero evidently praises its author.

Throughout the book, I sense a peculiar deficiency. D. offers ample information about Epicurus' and many others' theological views, about Academic scepticism in general; he also offers useful details on 'Cicero the writer on philosophy' (p. x). However, we learn little of Cicero's own philosophical stance. That is disappointing, and surprising, as *ND* I is an excellent starting point to discuss it. Just think of Cotta's function: it is all too obvious that he, sceptical Academic, is Cicero's spokesman throughout. But then it is hardly correct to speak of 'the conclusion of the dialogue as an evenly divided court' (p. 7, similarly p. 71 on §14); and it comes near to a distortion to group Velleius the arch-dogmatist with Cotta the sceptic as against 'Cicero' and Balbus (p. 7). The mutual relations are more complex. There are massive sceptical caveats in 'Cicero's' epilogue *ND* 3.95 (as D. rightly stresses, p. 71), while Cotta, in substance, is not too far from the Stoic view (ignored by D., who in his note on §61 [p. 143] styles him an 'agnostic'; see also p. 10). The key passage is *ND* 1.61 (Cotta speaking): *hoc quod primum est, esse deos, persuaderi mihi non opinione solum, sed etiam ad veritatem plane velim*. This is strangely misread by D. Cotta does not think of 'rejecting' opinion—he longs for more (*non opinione solum*). He clearly agrees, on the level of 'opinion', that there are gods (see also 62). What Cotta does not accept is the 'proof' offered by Velleius: *rationem tamen, quae a te adfertur, non satis firmam puto* (just so, addressing Balbus, 3.9). This is a sincere confession, not a 'mode (show) of *liberalitas*' (D., p. 10, 143). In Cotta's words we may detect a leitmotif of Cicero's personal feelings and views (see e.g. *Tusc*. 1.24, 1.40, 5.20), as are Cotta's 'doubts' (*multa occurrunt ut interdum nulli esse videantur*, see *Tusc*. 5.3). No, there is no 'tension between an agnostic and a probabilistic stance' in Cotta's/Cicero's scepticism (p. 143). The tension is rather between two 'levels', coexisting permanently in Cicero's thought: down-to-earth rationality (perfectly compatible with probabilism) vs. a 'desired', more edifying position, as I have suggested (e.g. *Ueberweg Antike* 4 [1994], 1099–116). There is no need to subscribe to this interpretation in every detail, but the phenomenon as such seems undisputable. Here, in commenting Cotta's confession (62–3), and elsewhere (e.g. p. 67 on §10 *auctoritas*, contrast 3.10) it would have been helpful, indeed imperative, to refer the reader to such parallels as mentioned, and so to disclose the wider network of Cicero's thought.

The bibliography is rich and admirably up-to-date. One wonders, however, why D. did not care to enter the commented edition of Moreschini (Bologna, 1968) or the annotated bilingual ones of Rackham (Loeb, 1933, quoted on p. 119), Gerlach/Bayer (Tusculum, 1978), and Gigon/Straume-Zimmermann (Tusculum, 1996). And surely Erler's comprehensive exposition of Epicurean philosophy (*Ueberweg Antike* 4 [1994], 29–490) should have been included.

The volume is rounded off by three extensive, well-organized indices. All in all, an important book which will rank high among the commentaries on Cicero's *philosophica*. It deserves many (critical) readers.

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