

**James Warren, *Epicurus and Democritean Ethics, An Archaeology of Ataraxia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. 241pp. \$55.00 ISBN 0-521-81369-7**

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Over the last twenty years, there has been an increased interest in Hellenistic philosophy in general, and in Epicureanism in particular. One might infer from the title of this work that this is another study in the development of Epicureanism. However, this is not the case. Much of this work is a revision of Warren's 1999 doctoral dissertation, and the purpose of the investigation is the philosophical background to the ethical theory of eudaimonistic hedonism proposed by Epicurus. When Warren mentions the "philosophical background" in his introduction, he should say that the focus of the work is on the philosophical background of the ethical theory proposed by Democritus and developed, allegedly, through a succession of different philosophers Warren claims are Democriteans. This succession terminates with Epicurus and his immediate followers. For the moment, I shall pass over comment on this alleged "succession" and make one general comment. There is little in this work that directly bears on Epicurus outside of a few general comments on the connection between Epicurus' notion of *ataraxia* and how Warren proposes this has been influenced by and finds its origin in the Democritean notion of *euthymia*. I find this surprising since Warren has written extensively on Epicurus.<sup>1</sup> What this text lacks is a chapter that lays out Warren's understanding of Epicurus' central ethical notions in order to tie together a number of the arguments Warren develops within the text. The addition of such a chapter would greatly enhance this study. However, in spite of this absence, there is a wealth of information useful in understanding *Democritean* ethics. For the remainder of this review, I shall focus on the relative merits and apparent defects of several of the chapter of this text.

As stated in Warren's introduction, the purpose of his study is "to provide a full account of the philosophical tradition that links

these two men (Epicurus and Democritus). Warren cautions his readers that by describing his method an “archaeology” he risks recalling the Foucauldian “archaeologies”. It is not his intention to use Michel Foucault’s method, but in examining the succession of philosophers whom he sees link Democritus to Epicurus some excavation is in order. No complete texts have survived from either Democritus, Anaxarchus, Pyrrho, or Nausiphanes, nor, for that matter, do we possess any extended discussion on the topic of Ethics from Epicurus.<sup>2</sup> In their absence, one must investigate the “layers” of this tradition within the extent fragments.

Warren, in the first chapter, attempts to identify who are the “Democriteans”. Relying on a short discussion of the teacher-student relationships from Diogenes Laertius, and modifying that account with information from St. Clement of Alexandria, Warren introduces the cast of characters to be discussed. Warren further relies on a passage from St. Clement, where he discussed the “Abderites” who identify the *telos* as: Democritus says the *telos* is *euthymia*, which he also terms *euesto*, Hecataeus says that it is *autarkeia*, Apollodotos of Cyzicus *psychagogia*, Nausiphanes says *akataplexia*, which he claims is the same thing as what Democritus calls *athambia*. This lineage or linkage is untangled, and Warren ultimately argues that they are not the same thing. One thing strikes the reader, since this is the evidence ultimately used to support his thesis concerning the linkage from Democritus to Epicurus, one wonders why Warren does not do more to connect these concepts in this initial chapter so that he can anticipate the connections between these figures? While claiming that these figures form a teacher-student lineage, he also claims that each figure’s identification of the *telos* is distinct. The reader is left wondering what exactly the connection between these figures is. Perhaps if Warren had spelled out the connection between these figures, the reader could grasp the connection between them.

The second chapter, “Democritus’ ethics and atomist psychologies”, I contend, is the best part of the book. After noting the difficulties in the surviving texts attributed to Democritus, Warren attempts to reconstruct the basic outline of Democritean ethics. Starting with the statement from Diogenes Laertius 9.45 “All things happen by virtue of necessity, the vortex being the

cause of the creation of things, and this he calls necessity. The end of action is tranquillity (*euthymia*), which is not identical with pleasure, as some by a false interpretation have understood, but a state in which the soul continues calm and strong, undisturbed by any fear or superstition or any other emotion. This he calls well-being (*euesto*) and many other names.”<sup>3</sup> Here, Warren connects his discussion of Democritus with Epicurus’ discussion of the *telos*, by noting that this sounds very much like *ataraxia*. The reader is cautioned that there is little in this chapter that directly bears on Epicurus, and only at a topical level does Warren connect these concerns of Democritus with those of Epicurus.<sup>4</sup>

The remainder of the chapter is an analysis of the longest surviving fragment of Democritus, B191. This fragment begins with “*Euthymia* arises in men through a moderation of joy (*terpsios*) and a good balance (*symmetriai*) in life. Deficiencies and excesses tend to change into one another and set up great motions in the soul. Souls moved out of large intervals are neither well settled nor *euthymoi*. Warren confirms that “Democritus is no full-blooded hedonist” because *euthymia* “depends on two ‘moderations’: a specific moderation of *terpsis* and a more general moderation of one’s life”. But, what is *terpsis*? Warren’s contention is that *terpsis* is not the same thing as pleasure (*hedone*), and notes that there are fragments from Democritus that caution the identification of the good with pleasure. Warren suggests that we should understand *terpsis* as “joy” and to distinguish between joy and pleasure. Pleasure is the feeling one might have that is or is not beneficial, whereas joy is a feeling we can accept as *objectively* good. I have some reservations about this suggestion. In particular, Warren distances his interpretation of this important fragment from any physicalist interpretation. This is unfortunate. The passage does suggest that *euthymia* comes into existence through a moderation of joy (*euthymia ginetai metrioteti terpsios*). The notion of moderation is important here. *Metriotes* literally means a middle condition.<sup>5</sup> Connecting the notion of a middle condition with joy, the passage suggests that there is a proper condition of the soul in which the *telos* comes into existence for human beings on account of a balanced life and a middle condition of joy. The second sentence of this fragment further elaborates what that middle

condition of joy consists in. Here, Democritus explains that deficiencies and excesses tend to change into one another and set up great motions in the soul. This results in souls being moved out of large intervals that are neither well settled nor *euthymoi*. If we follow Warren's earlier suggestion that *euthymia* anticipates Epicurus' notion of *ataraxia*, then *euthymia* is a state of the soul in the middle or well balanced condition. Further, the fragment suggests that the extreme conditions set up great motions within the soul that inhibit or prevent this condition from coming into existence. One further suggestion connecting Epicurus with Democritus is a passage from Epicurus' *On the Telos*. In this fragment, Epicurus states: For the well-balanced state of the flesh (*to gar eustathes katastema tes sarkos*) and the confident expectation about it (*sic. the flesh*) holds the greatest and most secure joy for those able to think (*On the Telos*: Usener: frag. 63. [trans. Purrinton]). This passage suggests that *ataraxia* comes into existence on account of the well-balanced state of the flesh and the confident expectation about this state that holds the greatest and most secure joy for men. Further, in Porphyry's *On Abstinence*, there is a passage that will be useful here.

As for eating meat, it relieves neither any of our nature's stress nor a desire whose non-satisfaction would give rise to any pain. It involves a violent gratification (*ten de charin biaian eiche*) which is swiftly combined with its opposite. What it contributes to is not life's maintenance but variation of pleasures, just like sex or the drinking of exotic wines, all of which our nature is quite capable of doing without (Porphyry, *On Abstinence*: 1.51.6 (Usener frag 464, part. [trans. Long and Sedley])).

The language of this passage suggests that certain empty pleasures, e.g., eating meat, involve a violent gratification that is swiftly combined with its opposite. This movement from one gratification to another is reminiscent of the language found in B 191 concerning the excesses and deficiencies that set up great motions in the soul that prevent *euthymia* from coming into existence in men. This would suggest that the notions of pleasure and joy are more closely linked than Warren suggests. *In lieu* of Warren's analysis, I would

urge that this distinction in Democritus between *terpsis* and *hedone* anticipates Epicurus' distinction between joy (*chara*) and kinetic pleasure.<sup>6</sup>

I have one final comment on this chapter. By distancing himself from a physicalist interpretation of Democritus here, Warren is left defending a *psychologist* interpretation of pleasure and pain. This bars him from exploring some important connections between Democritus and the ancient Hippocritean materials.

The remaining chapters of this text move further and further away from actual texts we possess from the ancient world into the realm of speculation. The chapters on Anaxarchus' moral stage and Hecateus of Abdera's instructive ethnography are of this nature. The chapter on Pyrrho and Timon: inhuman indifference, attempts to link Democritus' saying (B125) concerning the conventional designation of perceptibles with Pyrrho's scepticism. Starting with this Democritean reductionist claim concerning the nature of things, Warren links up a reported saying of Pyrrho that makes a related moral claim. "[Pyrrho] said that nothing was fine or foul or just or unjust, and generally for all things that nothing is in truth, but that men do everything through custom and habit."<sup>7</sup> I find much in this chapter compelling, but I find Warren's suggestion that Pyrrho himself was not a sceptic to be unconvincing.

My final comment concerns the chapter on Nausiphanes. It would be important and valuable to further explore this philosopher, because of his connection to Epicurus.<sup>8</sup> Clearly, from Diogenes Laertius report, Nausiphanes instructed Epicurus on the works of Democritus. Most of what we know of this shadowy figure comes from Diogenes Laertius report of him in connection to Epicurus as well as some fragments from Philodemus' work *On Rhetoric*. My problem with this chapter is that it relies too heavily on *hostile* reports of Nausiphanes. This is unfortunate, since this philosopher did not merit a section in Diogenes Laertius text.<sup>9</sup> With the absence of any texts directly from Nausiphanes, one is left suspicious of the interpretation Warren makes of his doctrines.

The final chapter of the text, a mere eight pages, is intended to draw together the connection between Democritus and Epicurus concerning the topics of Determinism, Scepticism, and Ethics. Unfortunately, Warren does not tell us how Epicurus' own view

grew out of Democritean ethics. The topics Warren does discuss, Epicurus' anti-determinism and anti-scepticism, are true enough. But, the reader is left puzzled why Warren did not elaborate why these positions that Epicurus held were important for attainment of the *telos*, or why these doctrines had to be rejected in order for philosophy to prepare one for experience of the *telos*.

All in all, there are portions of this text that merit investigation and further scholarship. It is an uneven text, with sections that are firmly within the current scholarship, while others rest on speculation.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> A small sampling of Warren's articles on Epicurus are: Warren, James. "Epicurus And The Pleasures Of The Future". *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*. Vol 21. 2001. p. 135-179. and Warren, James. "Epicurean Immorality". *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*. Vol 18. 2000. p. 231-261.

<sup>2</sup> We do, however, possess a small summary of Epicurus' ethical views in the *Letter to Menoeceus*. This is our main surviving source from Epicurus of his ethical views.

<sup>3</sup> DL 9.45. Translated by R.D. Hicks. Note: Warren translates this passage somewhat differently. "He says that *euthymia* is the goal of life-which is not identical with pleasure as some have mistakenly understood, but is the state in which the soul proceeds peacefully and well settled, disturbed by no fear or superstition or any other passion. He also calls this *euesto* and many other names.

<sup>4</sup> Some of the topical concerns that deserve more analysis are the removal of fear, superstition, and the removal of anxiety in order to attain the *telos*.

<sup>5</sup> LSJ sv.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffry Purrington makes a similar remark in his article "Epicurus on the *Telos*", *Phronesis* 38. 1993. p. 281-321.

<sup>7</sup> DL 9.61

<sup>8</sup> Diogenes Laertius reports that Epicurus was instructed by Nausiphanes and Praxiphanes (DL 10.13).

<sup>9</sup> The condition of Philodemus' *On Rhetoric* is in poor condition. Warren has done an admirable job collating the scattered comments Philodemus makes about Nausiphanes. One hopes that further discoveries at Herculaneum will reveal more about this important figure.