

James Warren

The Pleasures of Reason in Plato, Aristotle, and the Hellenistic Hedonists. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. xii + 234 p. \$95.00. ISBN 9781107025448 (hbk).

Most major ancient Greek philosophical schools maintained that the intellectual life is the most pleasant life. James Warren's clear, careful, and engaging book focuses on the way that Plato, Aristotle, and the Hellenistic hedonists championed the pleasures of the life of reason over the lives of mindless animals and the profligate. Warren settles on a set of skills that mark humans off from other animals, at least by degree if not always by kind: learning, exercise of knowledge, memory, and anticipation. Warren twice traces the dialectic between the focal set of philosophers, each time chronologically. First, he addresses the pleasures of learning and knowing. He then turns to the pleasures of anticipating and remembering. The book is primarily exegetical in nature and does not substantively weigh in on who has the best account or whether the central shared commitment is itself argumentatively sustainable.

Warren's first discussion of Plato centers on two puzzles – whether learning is purely pleasant and whether using and reflecting on one's knowledge is distinctively pleasant. Warren points out a tension in the views of pleasure in the *Philebus* and other key dialogues. While learning is a pure pleasure in the *Philebus*, learning in other dialogues (esp. *Theaetetus*) seems more a painful struggle towards an uncertain understanding, motivated largely by the painful recognition of one's own ignorance. Warren argues that the pains of ignorance and learning would be eliminated or minimized by the educational process of the ideal city of the *Republic*, though this risks overlooking the grave disappointments of those who fail to become philosophers and it does little to assuage the struggles of those outside the ideal city (i.e. all of us). Nevertheless, Warren contends that while Plato accounts for the pleasures of learning, he cannot explain the pleasure of exercising knowledge, since the pleasures of learning seem to end once knowledge is achieved.

In Chapter Three, Warren argues that Aristotle solves this latter concern by distinguishing between first and second actuality, defining pleasure as an activity rather than a coming-to-be, and widening the scope of intellectual pleasures beyond contemplation of the forms. As such, possessing and employing knowledge involves pleasures both contemplative and aesthetic. The combination of these chapters is very useful and elegant, in part because Aristotle comes to the rescue largely by tweaking Plato's existing argumentative commitments. As Warren notes, Aristotle's key distinction between first and second actuality squares with much of Plato's own account (and is in fact suggested in the *Theaetetus*). Warren's discussion of the pleasures of appreciating rational

activities in the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* is helpful and rounds out the discussion of Aristotle as an ecumenical contrast with Plato's austere intellectual diet of contemplating the Forms.

Chapter Four turns to the Hellenistic period with a focus on Epicurus' discussion of the intrinsic value of knowing and Plutarch's critique of Epicurean hedonism in *Non Posse*. Though Epicurus explicitly claimed that knowledge is intrinsically valuable, his critics insisted that he must think knowledge is merely instrumental to pleasure. Worse, Plutarch accuses Epicurus of privileging the satisfaction of bodily and animalistic desires over distinctively contemplative pleasures. Unlike Plato (and like Aristotle), Plutarch expands the class of intellectual pleasures beyond contemplation of the Forms to other objects of intellectual consideration. Warren is surely right that Epicurus' critics tended to be highly uncharitable in their own philosophical self-service. There is some legitimate worry, though, that Epicurus might be smuggling knowledge and virtue in by assuming that one cannot live pleasantly without living virtuously and wisely. Nevertheless, Epicurus clearly considered knowledge and its pleasures as essential to the good life, whether or not his hedonism itself was at odds with his desired result.

In Chapter Five, Warren transitions from the pleasures of learning and knowing to the role of pleasure in proper deliberation about the future, specifically in the *Protagoras* and *Philebus*. Warren draws attention to the different ways Plato thinks agents miscalculate or misjudge pleasures and pains through misleading appearances. The chief difference between the *Protagoras* and the *Philebus* is that the latter develops the inscrutable view of 'false pleasures' as miscalculations that contain false propositional content, while the former maintains that error lies in the discounting of future pains and overestimation of future pleasures. Warren also makes the interesting point that the *Philebus* shows that the process of deliberation about pleasures can itself be pleasant and efficient, at least if one possesses a well-developed character shaped by a history of conscientiously good decisions.

In Chapter Six, Warren fleshes out this latter point by turning more directly to the role of character in the pleasures of anticipation in the *Philebus*. Warren focuses on a key passage in which Socrates connects the ability to experience true anticipatory pleasures and the possession of virtue, especially piety. Warren argues that Socrates does not think that what makes a pleasure true is that it is a true prediction of what will in fact happen (e.g., winning the lottery). Vicious people, after all, might be good at predicting the future. Instead, the virtuous person knows whether something will actually be pleasant when it happens, and this knowledge arises from recognizing the past and future pleasures that form the arc and structure of a good life. Warren argues that