

Angela Longo and Daniela Patrizia Taormina (eds.)

Plotinus and Epicurus: Matter, Perception, Pleasure, Cambridge University Press, 2016, 236pp., £64.99 (US\$ 99.99), ISBN 9781107124219.

As Peter Adamson recently noted,¹ there has been a great vitality in Neoplatonic scholarship in the last ten years. One of the sources of this vitality is the increasing focus on a wider range of influences upon Plotinus, beyond Plato and Aristotle, to encompass the Presocratics and the Gnostics. This volume, edited by Angela Longo and Daniela Taormina, explores Epicurean influences on Plotinus. Longo and Taormina are motivated in part by the relatively few publications on this topic. The contributions assembled in this volume demonstrate that there is much to be gained by exploring the relationship between such drastically opposed views.

In the introduction, Longo and Taormina explain the two aims of the project: first, to understand Plotinus' thought better; second, to identify the thinkers with whom Plotinus engages. The latter problem is particularly difficult when dealing with Plotinus, who rarely mentions his opponents by name. This is especially true concerning Epicurus, whose name is mentioned but once in the corpus. All but one of the essays in this collection therefore focus on passages which their authors believe to contain anti-Epicurean arguments or to allude to Epicurean ideas.

First, Tiziano Dorandi tackles the question of how well Plotinus would have known Epicurus' thought. His paper will be especially helpful for those who work on Plotinus, but are trained primarily as philosophers, rather than as philologists. Dorandi reviews evidence from 2nd- and 3rd-century texts and inscriptions to show that Epicureanism was still lively in the period just before Plotinus and that some Epicurean works (not just doxographies) were accessible around this time.

The next section is dedicated to the way in which Plotinus makes use of anti-Epicurean arguments to confront non-Epicurean opponents. Longo examines the singular mention of Epicurus in the *Enneads*, found in Plotinus' polemics against the Gnostics (11.9). Here, Plotinus focuses on the pursuit of bodily pleasure and the denial of providence—views that the Gnostics and the Epicureans share. Longo also explores how the anti-Epicurean arguments were used in the wider debate between Christians and pagans. The third paper, by Manuel Mazzetti, also focuses on the relationship between Epicurean and Gnostic rejections of providence. Mazzetti compares the passage from 11.9

1 Adamson, P. (2015). "Neoplatonism: The Last Ten Years". *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* 9: 205-20.

with other discussions of providence in the *Enneads*, with the aim of establishing that some passages which were previously thought to reference the Peripatetics are in fact aimed at Epicureans and Gnostics. Next, Mauricio Pagotto Marsola looks at the passage in v.9 where Plotinus categorizes persons according to their attitudes to the sensible and the intelligible realms. The first category of persons, whom Plotinus compares to “heavy birds”, are frequently assumed to be Epicureans. Marsola argues that this is too simplistic and that we need to consider the Gnostics as other possible targets in this passage.

This part of the volume ends with two complementary papers by Pierre-Marie Morel and Taormina respectively on v.5.1, where Plotinus compares the type of activity characteristic of Intellect with the way that sense-perception operates. Morel’s paper takes on the question of whether Plotinus is here attacking the Epicureans or the Peripatetics for their views about sense-perception. He provides an excellent overview of Plotinus’ arguments for the identification of the Intellect with its objects, the intelligibles. While Morel thinks it is impossible to isolate the Epicureans as the sole targets of criticism in this passage, Taormina argues that reading it as distinctly anti-Epicurean allows us to connect it with other anti-Epicurean passages from the *Enneads* in order better to understand Plotinus’ own view of sense-perception. These papers are connected not only through their discussion of the same texts, but also insofar as they do some substantive philosophical exegesis of Plotinus’ own views.

Part III of the volume, too, concentrates on Plotinus’ philosophical views, with the focus turning to the use of anti-Epicurean arguments against actual Epicurean doctrines. Marco Ninci’s paper explores a passage in II.4.7, where Plotinus argues that atomism fails to give an adequate account of matter. Despite the brevity of the passage, Ninci distinguishes five arguments against the atomist position. He engages in an in-depth, if somewhat meandering, elaboration of Plotinus’ own account of matter. Erik Eliasson’s paper, too, explores Plotinus’ attacks on atomism, this time with respect to the way atomists explain the motions of bodies, the creation of the cosmos, and agency. He skilfully rescues Plotinus from the accusation that he creates a straw-man determinist to represent the Epicureans in III.1.

The final part of the volume turns to the more positive project of identifying instances of Epicurean influence on Plotinus. Andrei Cornea analyzes the three instances of a distinctly Epicurean formula (*athroa epibolē*) in the *Enneads* and explains how Plotinus takes this Epicurean formula to articulate a distinctly Plotinian thesis. Plotinus’ use of a term which is otherwise absent in non-Epicurean works gives some of the best evidence for one of the main theses of the volume: that Plotinus had more than a passing understanding