

2024 Discussion Of Current Books On Epicurus

Post by “Pacatus” of June 4, 2024 at 5:41 PM

I have just finished Wilson’s *Epicureanism: A Very Brief Introduction*. It is, indeed, very brief: the text being 120 pages.

As I read, I realized that the books we talk about here fall generally into two categories (though one might often “bleed” into the other): (1) the pragmatic – in terms of how one might live as an Epicurean in our modern times (and why that is worthy of consideration); and (2) the more straightforwardly “philosophical” – in the contemporary sense of that term. In the first category are such as Emily Austin, Hiram Crespo, Haris Dimitriadis and Wilson’s *How to Live as an Epicurean* (which I need to revisit). In the second category are DeWitt’s *Epicurus and His Philosophy*, *Epicurean Philosophy: An introduction from the “Garden of Athens”* (Christos Yapijakis Editor) – and Wilson’s *Very Brief Introduction*.

What one might recommend as an introduction thus ought to consider where a given person’s interest and prior exposure might be. (I tend to return more to those in the first category.) With that said, Wilson’s *Very Brief Introduction* might be considered as a sort of “outline primer” to, say, DeWitt.

Her treatment of Epicureanism is what I might call “critically fair” (fair as in evenhanded). She often skillfully sets up the arguments of Epicurus’ critics (such as the Stoics and – especially -- the Christians and Kant), only to effectively dismantle (or at least diminish) them. Where she herself offers criticism (or affirms those of others), it was generally in the manner of “it seems” – to her, or to majority contemporary thought. In other words, she seems to leave room (at least implicitly) for cogent criticism of her criticism. [And that has been accomplished, without direct reference to Wilson, on here many times.]

In sum – and, as I said, contingent on my revisiting of her *How to Live as an Epicurean* – I am revising my opinions recorded above in this thread to a more affirmative view. 😊

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On reflection of my thoughts in the 2nd paragraph above, I searched my (much diminished) philosophy shelf, and found a book I had forgotten: *Atoms, Pleasure, Virtue: The Philosophy of Epicurus* by Avraam Koen (1995). Has anyone else read it? The book was drawn from his PhD dissertation. It seems to be out of print but available: the Amazon price for the paperback is a hefty \$61.75.

My copy is riddled with highlights, underlines and marginal notes – some of which I started to skim. If I find anything I think worth discussing here, I’ll post it.