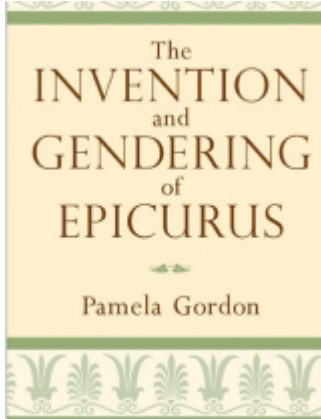


Gordon (Pamela) - The Invention and Gendering Of Epicurus

Post by "Cassius" of January 30, 2023 at 7:54 PM

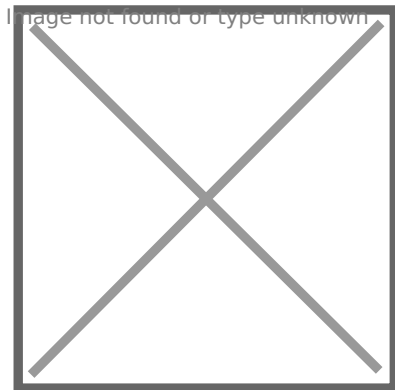


This book comes highly recommended (as in the podcast with Emily Austin) but I am sad to say that I have past and am not able to discuss it in detail. It definitely sounds like we need to have some discussion of it, and I don't think we have a previous thread on it. (If someone finds one please let me know and I will merge.)

In addition to general commentary it looks like we are going to find some specific unexpected nuggets that we don't see elsewhere, so I hope we can help save some time by pointing those out to be sure we don't miss them.

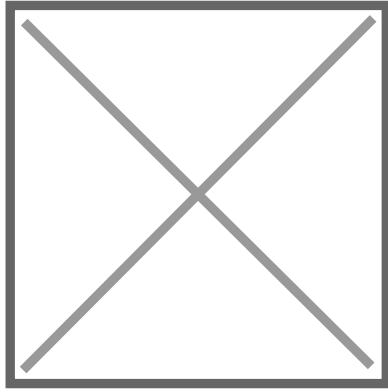
Post by "Don" of January 30, 2023 at 8:43 PM

Reviews



[The Invention and Gendering of Epicurus, by Pamela Gordon](#)

The Invention and Gendering of Epicurus, by Pamela Gordon
www.academia.edu



[Review of The Invention and Gendering of Epicurus, by Pamela Gordon](#)

Review of The Invention and Gendering of Epicurus, by Pamela Gordon

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Post by “Little Rocker” of January 31, 2023 at 12:21 PM

O'Keefe's review seems spot-on. I've read most, though not all, of the book. None of the chapters offer a deep dive into the philosophy itself, but they all explore features (and criticisms of) Epicureanism that, it seems to me, continue in the current discussion of Epicureanism as somehow the weak inferior to Stoicism's 'active life of pursuing power and money.' The book is also filled with interesting historical tidbits. And, like O'Keefe says, she doesn't try to make too much of the evidence we have. I think another strength of her book is that she doesn't get lost in contemporary theory, instead doing what strikes me as old school classical research.

Post by “Cassius” of January 31, 2023 at 1:09 PM

[Quote from Little Rocker](#)

And, like O'Keefe says, she doesn't try to make too much of the evidence we have

That's a constant temptation and a good warning. Aside from checking alternate translations and commentaries to compare different readings, it seems to me that another basic category of check amounts to what Lucretius says in book one about starting from the observational basics about the universe. Taking those observations you then - like a hunting dog or using the light of

one step to enlighten another- you sniff out and deduce for yourself what can be supported as unchanging vs what is a matter of opinion that changes with circumstance. I have to think that is what Epicurus himself would say that he was doing.

When we find something that changes as a matter of context we should clearly label it so. That doesn't make it less important to us individually, but it cautions us that we are not a supernatural "God" or "Nature" ourselves. Then we take that into account as we decide what we think is "true" or "right," and what we choose to do about it.

That section in Lucretius about eternal properties of atoms vs accidents/events/emergent properties of bodies, and how they relate to the Trojan War, needs a lot more attention than it has been given.

Post by “Don” of September 1, 2023 at 10:25 PM

Notes from *The Invention and Gendering of Epicurus*; Chapt. 4: Virtus and Voluptas

by Dr. Pamela Gordon (2012)

I just finished reading Dr. Gordon's book and would highly recommend it for an interesting and oft-neglected perspective. It provides wonderful context for the variety of slurs and invectives thrown at the Garden since its very beginning up to the present.

In light of the upcoming discussions on Cicero's Epicurean attacks planned for the Lucretius Today podcast, I wanted to provide some ideas gleaned from Dr. Gordon's chapter specifically looking at Cicero's (and Romans') gendered attacks on the Epicurean school specifically.

The entire chapter looks at the juxtaposition of Greek *ἡδονή* (*hedone*), translated into Latin as *voluptas*, against Roman *virtus*. *Virtus* can be slippery, and, as has been pointed out before on the forum, is directly related to Latin *vir*, the word for "man" (i.e., male human). So, masculinity, manliness, manly virtues, etc., gets at the general idea of *virtus*. English "virtue" is NOT an easy translation of *virtus*. *Voluptas* is presented then as being the opposite of everything it means to be manly! How convenient.

Voluptas is routinely reviled by the Romans! The typical opposite of *voluptas* for Roman culture was *dolor* ("pain"). Gordon makes a point that Torquatus often makes the contrast between *voluptas/dolor*. Lucretius does this as well (e.g., 3.251-55; 2.967-68). Torquatus talks about choosing to endure toil (labor) and pain (*dolor*) for long-term *voluptas*. And for the Romans (and Cicero!), the ability to endure pain was a manly man trait! Cicero hits that hard in *Tusc. Disp.* (2.15, 2.46) where he talks about avoiding pain leads one to an "effeminate and unthinking"

(effeminata ac levis) fear of pain. Whereas some (and even Cicero) have lauded Epicurus' bravery on his deathbed when he was facing the pain of his illness, Cicero calls him only forticulum "a little bit brave" in Tusc.Disp.2.45. He can't bring himself to think of Epicurus in a manly virtus light.

The decision to translate Greek ἡδονή (hedone) as voluptas in Latin was not a foregone conclusion. The alliteration between "womanish" voluptas and "manly" virtus was irresistible to Roman writers though. Cicero asserts (because, of course, he does) that there's CLEARLY only one way to translate hedone, and that's voluptas (Fin.2.12-13) and yet he's even willing to leave a word in Greek when necessary (Fin. 3.15). Cicero concedes that voluptas can have two connotations: "gladness of mind" and "pleasing sensations in the body," (Fin. 2:13) and yet he stresses that only the bodily aspects are good usage. Again, how convenient.

To pull out our focus, the hedone/voluptas translation didn't have to be seen as a problem for Latin-speaking Epicureans as long as it wasn't paired with virtus. Lucretius embraced voluptas. Some simply didn't translate it, e.g., Gaius Cassius Longinus leaves hedone untranslated in letters to Cicero (Ad fam.15.19.2). Cassius, in fact, notes and seems to disregard Cicero's juxtaposition of voluptas/virtus in talking about the Epicurean general/politician Pansa (Ad fam.15.19.3). Cassius notably uses *virtutes* (the plural of virtus), which Gordon says sends the message that the Epicureans are not concerned so much with virtus itself (manly masculinity) as they are with upholding a range of "virtues," i.e., wisdom, justice, etc.

Gordon also relates how Seneca was another Latin writer (almost 100 years later than Cicero) who made a big deal out of the voluptas/virtus pair.

Another interesting twist that Gordon highlights is that virtus is seen as particularly Roman and that voluptas is seen as foreign. Virtus is seen as a ROMAN trait of manly Romans being what it means to be Roman men. This is where Gordon also talks about Cicero's diatribes against the Epicurean consul Calpurnius Piso Caesonius, patron of Philodemus. Cicero does NOT like Piso, and has a whole speech against him (<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Cic.+Pis.+1>) and speaks against him in other speeches as well. Gordon goes on for awhile talking about Cicero's attacks on Piso. The takeaway for me is that Cicero can't assail Piso's virtus from a physical, outward sense. The guy exudes Roman uprightness, manliness; he walks right, looks right, talks right. He's big and hairy with stern bushy eyebrows. The model of Roman virtus. But Cicero takes the "looks can be deceiving" tack.

Gordon finishes the chapter noting how Cicero's hostility against voluptas and his use of the charged meanings of voluptas/virtus falls away in his letters to friends. He can use the formula "I took great pleasure in your letter" without any irony or apology. "Manly virtue" and "pleasure" can sit side by side with no animosity. When writing to his Epicurean friends, he talks about taking pleasure in his integrity as consul and his taking pleasure in his virtue. He talks about missing the pleasure of his daughter Tullia's goodness. And even the virtus of his wife

and daughter. The rhetorical cudgel of voluptas/virtus seems to be reserved for attacks on Epicurus and his school, and this evaporates when Cicero is out of the limelight and speaking about or with family and friends.

I truly dislike Cicero.

(CORRECTION: Cicero's attacks on Calpurnius Piso Caesonius also encompass a large chunk of Chapter 5, which is where the eyebrow comments come in. I appear to have conflated Chaps. 4 & 5, which just leads me to recommend reading the whole book 😊)

Post by “Joshua” of September 1, 2023 at 11:24 PM

Thank you Don, that is very timely advice and well taken! We'll be sure to consult this in the coming weeks (...months) and I'll need to get a copy as well.

Post by “Cassius” of September 2, 2023 at 1:01 AM

I am not sure what we will choose to focus on after we near the end of Book 2 but I agree that the full 5 books are very worthwhile. I have not studied them in full but several years ago I listened to them all in speech to text over a long trip and I found them very very helpful - the slashing attacks on Stoicism especially.

Thanks Don.

Post by “Godfrey” of September 2, 2023 at 2:35 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

I truly dislike Cicero

This makes me smile ☺☺