

seem to apply to some of these discussions as well. Yet, despite these substantial critical concerns, it should be emphasized that there is plenty of refreshing good sense throughout the book, as well, and an often admirable rigor in the unpacking of details. While it is questionable how much philosophical payoff this has for the larger themes, it is no doubt useful to have the rich variety of normative judgments laid out and examined systematically, as Thomson has done. Anyone working in the field—and in related fields such as empirical moral psychology—can benefit from this, avoiding the pitfall of developing theories based on an impoverished scheme of normative concepts and judgments. One of Thomson's main aims in the book is to show how rich and varied our normative concepts and judgments are, and that is an important contribution.

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Tsouna, Voula. *The Ethics of Philodemus*.  
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Philodemus was an leading figure in Roman intellectual circles of the first century BC, a well-known Epicurean philosopher and teacher, as well as a gifted lyric poet. None of his philosophical works survived antiquity through the usual channels, but since the eighteenth century, excavations at the Villa dei Papiri at Herculaneum have uncovered substantial fragments of work after work. The charred papyrus rolls are in a horrible condition, and the task of reading and editing them continues to this day, but by now we have substantial chunks of works on a wide range of topics, including *On Signs*, *On Piety*, *On Rhetoric*, *On Music*, *On Poems*, *On the Good King according to Homer*, and *On Frank Speech*. In all these we glimpse not only the work of an arguably major ancient thinker but a whole era, in which the major Hellenistic schools were living, competing enterprises, each with its own distinctive social practices, external polemics, and internal rivalries.

*The Ethics of Philodemus* is a brave, lucid, and remarkably user-friendly attempt to make some of this very *recherché* material both accessible and intriguing to nonspecialists. Its subject is Philodemus's writings on moral psychology, which include works dealing with various vices, frank speech, and death. On the whole, it is clearly structured and written, fully documented, and careful in its argument. Of its virtues, the most remarkable one is probably that very user friendliness. Unless you are fluent in Italian as well as Greek, have access to a lavishly endowed research library, and have sufficient papyrological skills to second-guess the latest findings in *Cronache Ercolanesi*, the frontiers of Philodemian scholarship are closed to you: with this book, at least some of his work takes a giant leap toward tractability by nonspecialists. On the other hand, as Tsouna herself notes, this sort of secondary discussion is no substitute for an authoritative edition, with discussion and translation, of the primary texts (like the wonderful editions now provided for parts of *On Piety* and *On Poems* by Dirk Obbink and Richard Janko, respectively). Tsouna supplies plentiful citations and includes key Greek terms in transliteration, but,

inevitably, not everything is explained, and sometimes a lengthy supplement which makes all the difference goes undefended (e.g., 268, 269). Since no text or translation of the works discussed is included here (and in the case of some of these works none is easily accessible), the reader is ill situated to second-guess Tsouna's judgments or engage constructively with the argumentation: among nonspecialist readers, the result may be as much frustration as inspiration.

Only a tiny handful of specialists are equipped to evaluate *The Ethics of Philodemus* as a work of Philodemus scholarship, and I am not one of them. So this review will focus on a different sort of question: what might the reader with a general interest in ancient ethics learn from this book and from Philodemus himself? We might well hope to learn the answer to an enduring historical question. According to both ancient and modern stereotypes, Epicureanism was a remarkably stable theoretical edifice: compared to Stoicism, it showed little factionalism, deviation, or even development over the centuries of its popular run. We know of a few internal controversies (Cicero reports a dispute as to the grounds of the value of friendship), but on the whole, the Epicureanism of Lucretius—and even that of Diogenes of Oenoanda, a wealthy crank of the second century AD who plastered his Anatolian hometown with billboards advertising Epicurean doctrines—seems to be very much that of Epicurus's own *Letters* (and the surviving fragments of his colossal *On Nature*). Philodemus's works should provide an excellent test case for whether Epicureanism ever significantly evolved. Philodemus was a prominent and prolific professional philosopher, enmeshed in Roman debates and probably more influential than we can now detect: if there are turning points or new beginnings in Epicureanism, some of them are likely to be located here.

But *The Ethics of Philodemus* does not really make the answer to this question clear, and that is not Tsouna's fault. A major reason is the hopelessly fragmentary nature of the texts: often it is a matter of guesswork as to what Philodemus is arguing and against whom, let alone exactly how. But the problem goes deeper, for what we can piece together of Philodemus's work often does not seem to be in the realm of ethical theory at all. There is very little argumentative problem solving here, of the sort that a reader familiar with Aristotle's ethics would expect, and few of the systematic definitions and deductions we find in ancient presentations of Stoicism. So far as I can see, we usually cannot tell how Philodemus would have defined the concepts central to his discussion. This may actually express a substantive philosophical position: the Epicureans had their doubts about the value of definition as a Stoic or Aristotelian would understand it. But there is also a more general fogginess here, even allowing for the lacunose character of the texts. Thus, even though most of these works deal with various vices, it remains unclear what exactly Philodemus thinks virtues and vices are, what a complete table of the virtues and vices would include, and how they are related to each other.

To put it in more precise and positive terms, with many of Philodemus's ethical writings we seem to be in the realm not of ethical theory but of a once-prominent yet little-understood genre, Hellenistic characterology (67). The work one recalls again and again is Theophrastus's *Characters*, with their quasi-empirical (and deliberately clichéd) depictions of idealized types like the boaster and the boor. And any reader who has been baffled in the attempt to trace the

workings of Peripatetic moral theory in the *Characters* can now relive that frustration with Philodemus and Epicureanism. For it is rare for Philodemus's psychologizing to elaborate or even show any systematic dependence on the proprietary principles of Epicurean theory. The portraits remain at a lightly descriptive level, with a great deal of rather banal praise and blame worked in. Philodemus is also a great lump-together, and thanks to his insistence on charging any given vice with as many awful consequences as possible, they all end up sounding much the same (cf. 35–37, 146). These discussions must have involved sufficient content to have stood in a polemical relation to various predecessors and rivals, for Philodemus spends a lot of time responding to criticisms and rival accounts, both Epicurean and extramural. Alas, his writing tends to be particularly telegraphic and obscure in these polemical contexts. (Near the end, Tsouna quotes a couple of lovely set-piece passages exhorting us to overcome the fear of death [304–5], but on the whole Philodemus here is a clunky, unclear writer.) Together with the lacunose nature of the material, this means that the case of *On Anger* is fairly typical: there, as Tsouna puts it, “Philodemus argues against many opponents, and it is not always easy to identify either who they are or what positions they hold” (196).

Tsouna is an observant reader, sensitive to dialectical distinctions and questions of authorial strategy. She argues that Philodemus's extended character studies express the Epicurean conception of moral philosophy as therapeutic: his depictions of the vices are exercises in the therapeutic technique of ‘setting-before-the-eyes’ (204–8). Since it is a truism that Hellenistic ethics was, among other things, therapeutic in its aims, it is good to have our conception of Epicurean therapeutic method fleshed out in this way. Still, Tsouna does not go into much detail about how such therapeutic techniques are supposed to work, and perhaps there is not much to be said about them. Another interesting aspect of these works is that the vices Philodemus is concerned with are not quite the familiar ones—the conceptual focus is ‘off’, if our expectations have been shaped by *Republic* IV and *Nicomachean Ethics* III–V. It is refreshing, and usefully disorienting, to read a book on ancient ethics in which temperance, justice, and political virtue seem to be conceptually peripheral, while flattery, free speech, household management, revenge, and malicious joy are central topics. The fine-grained character of Philodemus's analyses is also appealing. Fans of Victorian novels will appreciate his delicate distinctions between the flatterer, the sycophant, the parasite, and the obsequious man. (Alas, once again, “his view regarding the logical relations among these vices remains unclear,” though Tsouna offers some suggestions; 130.) Teachers will also be intrigued by his concern with the ethics of the profession. His account of ‘frank speech’ (*parrhêsia*) focuses on how a teacher should most effectively criticize and correct various kinds of students (92–113). (Epicureans advocated a disturbing, oddly Maoist practice of vehement public criticism and self-criticism within the philosophical community.) And he consistently defends the ‘Sage’, emphasizing that he is not paid (he just receives gifts from grateful disciples), not arrogant (he merely disdains vulgarity), not obsequious or flattering (rather hospitable and a giver of deserved praise), and not irascible (though he will speak critically when called for). It would be nice to know whether such defenses are responses to particular attacks—and by and against whom—and, yet again, to what extent the

concerns here (and the conception of the Sage being assumed) tell us anything about Epicureanism in particular.

The doctrine which seems to do most of the heavy lifting in Philodemus's treatment of the vices is the unimportance for happiness of worldly goods and wealth in particular. It is by going wrong about this that we end up falling victim to various vices, and it is because the error is fundamentally cognitive that all vice counts as a kind of irrationality. This is strikingly reminiscent of Stoic treatments of vice and emotion, and, like the Stoics, Philodemus seems to concede something to accusations of overintellectualism by allowing for 'bites' of psychological pain (as opposed to all-out emotion) and for normative counterparts to vicious emotions (the Sage will feel *orgê*, anger, but not *thumos*, rage). This shared quasi intellectualism gives one the sense (as do some other Hellenistic authors) that at Rome 'philosopher' named a social role, one which involved adopting the stance of an intellectualist, moralizing social critic, and that some of our surviving texts are written more from that standpoint than on the basis of the doctrines of any particular school.

Unfortunately, Tsouna has comparatively little to say about these matters of genre and intellectual climate. Her interest lies elsewhere: for Tsouna's avowed aim is to revive interest in Philodemus as an ethical theorist, whose insights into topics like anger and death usefully can be compared with those of contemporary analytical philosophers. Her strongest card for Philodemus as moral philosopher is his *On Death*, in which he elaborates on the Epicurean account of why death is not to be feared—a set of arguments familiar from the *Letter to Herodotus* and Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* III and still inspiring analysis and debate today. Tsouna persistently, if forgivably, oversells Philodemus's originality and acuity (though she usually comes up with a balanced verdict in the end), and here she is particularly concerned to insist that Philodemus contributes novel arguments to the debate (241). But most of his innovations are additions of questionable value at the periphery: for instance, Philodemus tries to apply the standard Epicurean 'symmetry' argument, that death can be no more a harm than our antenatal nonexistence, to more particular fears, for example, the fear of dying without a tomb or without children or without being remembered. His arguments against fear of the dying process are also not impressive (one amounts to noting that it does not necessarily involve great pain), to the extent they are recoverable at all. Tsouna here branches out to discuss Epicurean argument on the topic of death (and its contemporary reception) in a general way, but it is not clear to me that her analyses really advance the state of the art—or that Philodemus's did. In fact, Philodemus emerges here as something of a waffler and backpedaler, or as Tsouna more politely puts it in one case, "pressed by the objections of rivals, he nuances the canonical position of his school and makes it more palatable" (276). On the whole, Tsouna's scrupulous accounting tends to inadvertently confirm that Epicurus's own articulation of his ideas left little room for constructive innovation.

In short, Philodemus's texts do not fully cooperate with the aspirations of this brave and intriguing study: they lack a critical mass of clearly reconstructible argument and the kind of systematic theoretical analysis that one could bring into fruitful contrast with Aristotle and the Stoics, with Epicurus's own original arguments, or with contemporary moral philosophy. Instead we find an awkward

mix of fine-grained descriptive moral psychology, hortatory rhetoric, and frustratingly obscure polemic, much of it on topics which will strike most readers (contemporary philosophers and historians alike) as peripheral. That Philodemus's works on ethics do not fit our expectations for ancient ethical theory is arguably the most interesting thing about them. And it is a tribute to the integrity and thoroughness of Tsouna's work that it makes this visible, though it goes against the grain of her own argument.

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Zack, Naomi. *Ethics for Disaster*.  
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Ever since Garrett Hardin's 1974 *BioScience* article on lifeboat ethics ("Living on a Lifeboat," *BioScience* 24 [1974]: 561–68), a number of philosophers and policy makers have either used or criticized his lifeboat framework in debates over natural-resource distribution and famine relief. Because the paradigmatic lifeboat exceeds its carrying capacity, contains more people (developed nations) than it was designed to hold, and therefore is at risk of capsizing, it poses a troubling ethical question. Under what circumstances, if any, does the lifeboat captain have obligations to take drowning swimmers (developing nations) into the boat? In her book, Zack uses lifeboat-ethics scenarios as opportunities for reflecting on how to apply competing moral systems to various natural and human-caused disasters.

Zack's slim, readable volume has six chapters. The first three focus on disaster ethics, while the second three chapters address disaster politics.

Chapter 1 considers the obligation to prepare for disasters in ways that preserve existing moral principles. Chapter 2 discusses various disaster scenarios that are cases of "lifeboat ethics." Chapter 3 focuses on which virtues are most appropriate to dealing with disaster. Chapter 4 addresses government's obligation to prepare citizens for survival in second "states of nature" caused by disaster. Chapter 5 discusses the importance of emphasizing human dignity in dealing with disaster. Chapter 6 supports need-based models of disaster preparation and response.

At least six strengths stand out in Zack's book. One is its important topic, natural and human-caused disasters and related ethical problems. A second strength is the book's use of much historical and political information that helpfully contextualizes questions of disaster relief and disaster ethics, as when Zack uses information from the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security (93). The book's creativity and insights constitute a refreshing third strength. It relies extensively on novels and movies to illustrate various virtues and moral problems, such as whether a well intentioned, patriotism-driven CIA agent ought to achieve a presumed greater good by murdering a likely-to-escape malefactor, while subverting his due-process rights and thus violating the law. A fourth