

BOOK REVIEW

Epicurean Ethics in Horace: The Psychology of Satire. By SERGIO YONA. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. 348. Hardback, \$90.00. ISBN: 978-0-19-878655-9.

Yona's book is very interesting and careful and offers a new reading of Horace's *Satires*, which are subject to different scholarly interpretations. In this revision of his doctoral dissertation, Yona points out the role played by Philodemus of Gadara's Epicurean ideals on Horace's thought, as expressed in his *Satires*. That Horace was familiar with Philodemus' epigrams is certain (cf. *Sat.* 1.2.121), and it is also possible that Philodemus was acquainted with Horace's early production. Already Porphyrio connected Horace to Epicureanism (17). Thus, the monograph at stake studies how philosophical ethics modelled ancient satire, something other scholars have studied in the case of other authors—for example, Persius, who, some decades after Horace, was strongly impacted by Stoicism in his *Satires*.¹ This reading is sensible, given that Horace constructs his literary persona as profoundly engaged with Epicurean ethics. For instance, in *Satires* 1.1-3, Horace's ideas on friendship, sex and money, guided by the Epicurean calculus of pleasure and pain, support this kind of self-portrayal, like Horace's depiction of his "philosophical" upbringing in *Satires* 1.4. Horace engaged not only with the writings of Lucretius and Cicero, but also with the philosophy of Philodemus.

Philodemus, a contemporary of Horace, was an Epicurean, who wrote for a Roman audience in Italy, like Horace. His works were preserved by the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE and include ethical treatises on patronage, friendship, flattery, frankness, poverty, wealth and other topics. He is still rather understudied as a philosopher; therefore, the present book comes as a welcome investigation into his philosophy and its immediate impact, in this case on Horace, who was concerned with moral correction. Thus, Yona argues that the main aspects of Philodemus'

¹ Thorough study in my *Stoici Romani Minori*, Milan: Bompiani, 2008, esp. 1361-1515 on Persius; Susanna Braund and Josiah Osgood, eds, *A Companion to Persius and Juvenal*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012; my review in *BMCR* 2013.10.42.

philosophy underlie Horace's critique of Roman society and its shortcomings. Therefore, Philodemean philosophy acts as a Leitmotif of the *Satires*, and Horace, poet and thinker, seems to emerge behind his literary mask.

The Introduction sets out the main scope of the monograph and provides some history of scholarship on Philodemus, Horace and Epicureanism, including by David Armstrong, Jeffrey Fish, David Konstan, Dirk Obbink, Kirk Sanders and others. Yona disagrees with Rolando Ferri, who recognizes parodic treatment of Epicureanism in the *Satires*.

Chapter 1 briefly delineates the philosophical background of Epicureanism in Horace's *Satires*, such as the withdrawal from politics, philosophical gatherings in the countryside, the benefits of a simple life—besides Aristotle's doctrine of the virtuous mean, paradoxes attributed to Chrysippus and Plato's use of irony in his dialogues. The chapter presents the life and works of Philodemus, the discovery of the Herculaneum papyri, Epicurus' and Philodemus' ideas in the fields of economics and patronage and Philodemus' thought on flattery and Epicurean frankness. This sets the methodological background for the monograph. Epicurus' support of self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*) and *penia* but criticism of *ptōkheia* (DL 10.119, probably against Cynicism), followed by Philodemus and Horace (88, 99), was overthrown, I suspect, by Jesus, who dedicated a macarism to the *ptōkhoi* (Luke 6:20) and recommended not to be concerned by what one will eat or wear (Matthew 6:25).²

Epicurus did not regard wealth as an evil in itself (some Patristic thinkers will³), but he did not think it was worth the effort to pursue and retain it (37). Philodemus recommended avoiding the unjust acquisition of wealth—what Origen, I note, will recommend later: *aut multum acquirere cum iniustitia aut modicum cum iustitia: multae divitiae in iniquitate censentur*.⁴ Philodemus (42-3), who left menial works to slaves so as to practice philosophy, and Epicureans more generally, including Horace (*Sat.* 1.6.116), did not criticize slavery, although they recommended that one treat slaves well—like the Stoics, according to whom real slavery

² Ramelli, *Social Justice and the Legitimacy of Slavery*, Oxford: OUP, 2017, ch. 1; "Epicureanism and Early Christianity," in *Oxford Handbook of Epicureanism*, ed. Phillip Mitsis, Oxford: OUP, 2019, ch. 24.

³ *Social Justice*, ch. 6; "Christian Slavery in Theory and Practice," in *The Cambridge History of Ancient Christianity*, eds Bruce Longenecker and David Willite, Cambridge: CUP, forthcoming.

⁴ *Social Justice*, 198-200; "Slavery and Religion in Late Antiquity: Their Relation to Asceticism and Justice in Christianity and Judaism," in *Slavery in the Late Antique World*, eds. Chris De Wet, Majastina Kahlos, and Ville Vuolanto, forthcoming.

was moral (e.g., enslavement to sins, as analyzed in *Social Justice*, ch. 1). Epicureans' disinterest in asceticism and in the criticism of slavery as an institution confirms the connection that I pointed out (in *Social Justice and the Legitimacy of Slavery*) between asceticism in antiquity and late antiquity and the rejection of slavery.

Chapter 2 analyses *Satires* 1.1-3, whose informal style associates them with diatribes, and highlights how the Epicurean notions of the calculus of pleasure, economic administration (esp. *Satires* 1.1) and frankness contributed to the shaping of these satires. Philodemus emphasized frankness against flattery also to prevent his contemporaries' criticism of his relation to Piso (54). The negative description of agricultural toil (86) can be fruitfully contrasted, I find, with the Roman-Etruscan Stoic Musonius and his praise of it,⁵ probably in an anti-Epicurean polemic. The desire for a "huge heap" (*magno acervo*, *Sat.* 1.1.51) was taken over, I suspect, by Persius, a Stoic but also a satirist, when denouncing immoderate passions (*Sat.* 6.80) by referring to Chrysippus' sorites (precisely *acervum*) as a symbol of infinite desire: *Inventus, Chrysippe, tui finitor acervi!*

Chapter 3 investigates Horace's claims about his "philosophical" education, by his father, as the background of his moral credentials (*Satires* 1.4; 1.6). His father formed his mind while still "tender" (*teneros... animos*, *Sat.* 1.4.128), which reminds me of Persius, who described Cornutus as moulding his own "tender years" (*teneros annos*) with his Socratic education⁶—Persius had Horace in mind again, in connection with philosophy. Horace's father inculcated frank criticism in him. The theme of *oikeiōsis* (149) was not strictly Stoic and was later absorbed by Christian philosophers, as I have argued ("The Stoic Doctrine of Oikeiosis and its Transformation," *Apeiron* 47 (2014) 116–140). Horace's patron Maecenas is described, according to Epicurean parameters, as far from society and political ambition and involved in intimate friendship, in the *locus amoenus* of a garden.

In Chapter 4 Yona shows how Horace endeavors to represent himself as far from flattery but as a pursuer of frankness in his relationship with Maecenas, according to the recommendation of Philodemus and Epicureanism (*Satires* 1.9; 2.5; 2.6). Attention is paid to Horace's criticism of Stoic ineffectual attempts at offering frank criticism (1.3; cf. 2.3; 2.7). The last chapter deals with how Horace presents

⁵ My *Musonio Rufo*, Milan: Bompiani, 2001.

⁶ Examination in my *Stoici romani*, 1361-1515; *Anneo Cornuto*, Milan: Bompiani, 2003; 'Annaeus Cornutus and the Stoic Allegorical Tradition', *AITIA* 8.2 (2018); 'Cornutus,' in *Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Mythography*, forthcoming.

his relationship with Epicurean economics. In spite of his wealth, Horace depicts himself as ready to bear the loss of property with equanimity (*Satires* 2.2; 2.3; 2.7).

There is no general conclusion to the book, but its being well argued throughout does not make it necessary. The Philodemean lens cannot address every angle of Horace's *Satires*, but it is a useful tool that unifies the two books. Even if this monograph is best read by people interested in Epicureanism and Roman satire, most of whom are hopefully familiar with Latin (and Greek), Yona translates into English all ancient and modern languages, thereby providing the widest access to texts and discussions. This is a well-researched book, which actively contributes to the advancement of scholarship and deserves a large and attentive audience.

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