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*Grasp and Dissent: Cicero and Epicurean Philosophy* by  
Stefano Maso (review)

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Stefano Maso. *Grasp and Dissent: Cicero and Epicurean Philosophy*. Philosophie hellénistique et romaine. Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2015. Pp. 272. Paper, €70.00.

This book will be of considerable interest to those familiar with Hellenistic philosophy generally and with Cicero's philosophical dialogues in particular. Maso's close readings of the primary texts produce many valuable insights into Cicero's philosophical worldview and his complex and nuanced attitude toward Epicurean physics, theology, epistemology, and ethics. One of the central themes of the work is the tempering of Cicero's devotion to the primacy of the political life. Maso aims to show how this is reflected over time in his attitude toward Epicureanism, while he struggles against the political realities that excluded him from playing the civic role he craved and that eventually cost him his life. Indeed, we can see Cicero's philosophical project, outlined in the opening sections of *De Divinatione* 2, as emblematic of his lifelong attempt to harmonize the demands of the practical or political life with those of the contemplative life, that is, the attempt to combine *otium* (even if initially unwelcome) with *dignitas* and *negotium*.

Broadly speaking, Maso argues that the Epicurean system plays a more prominent role in Cicero's philosophical reflections than scholars have typically acknowledged: "More than a doctrine to be presented and studied alongside those of other philosophical schools . . . it seems to be a point of reference for Cicero" (215). With a nod to Antiochus, we might say that Cicero sees the disputes between Academics, Stoics, and Peripatetics as mere sibling rivalries compared to the profound threat posed by Epicureanism. And yet, Cicero's philosophical education began with the Epicurean Phaedrus; and he enjoyed very close friendships with Atticus and other Epicureans throughout his life.

In developing his case, Maso convincingly shows that Cicero's knowledge of all aspects of Epicureanism is extensive and subtle. My overall assessment is that this work makes significant contributions to our understanding of Cicero the philosopher. However, I would also like to briefly discuss a tension in Maso's interpretation that could have been brought more explicitly to the fore. On the one hand, we have the repeated insistence in the philosophical dialogues that the primary goal is to seek out and give shape to the truth or its closest approximation, that is, the view that enjoys the most convincing, rational justification. But on the other hand, we find numerous instances, especially in the arguments for and against Epicureanism, of apparent misrepresentation or at least rhetorical subterfuge.

Under the latter heading, Maso remarks that Cicero knew full well that his reconstruction of the Epicurean swerve was "inherently skewed" (72). And with regard to the arguments against the existence of the Epicurean gods, he claims, "Cicero once again succeeded by lightly and dexterously manipulating the original doctrine" (89). Similarly, in attempting to demonstrate the incompatibility between pleasure as the *summum bonum* and virtue in *De Finibus* 2, Cicero imposes "a framework cleverly designed to undermine the credibility of Epicurean ethics at its foundation" (171). None of this sounds like the even-handed pursuit of truth that is supposed to inform Academic philosophical inquiry.

Ultimately, the question that deserves more explicit and detailed treatment than Maso provides is whether Cicero rejects Epicureanism on the basis of its incompatibility with traditional Roman virtue and his sense of political obligation, that is, on pragmatic grounds, or on epistemic grounds, either because of its incompatibility with his preferred Stoic, Academic, or Peripatetic doctrines, or because of its proponents' inability to provide a convincing and coherent philosophical defense. Of course, the answer is most likely to be a combination of these. But that in itself raises important issues. For example, does Cicero subordinate his philosophical pursuit of truth to the overriding aim of the preservation of the Republic and traditional virtue? If so, his critique of Epicureanism is far less in the service of seeking truth than in the service of undermining the potentially pernicious effects of the growing popularity of Epicureanism.

Unless we are able to discern some fundamental connection between the epistemic and pragmatic constraints on Cicero's rejection of Epicureanism, they appear to be at odds. Insofar as the overriding consideration is the preservation of the Republic and traditional

Roman virtue, Cicero is under no obligation to adhere strictly to rational methods and norms that may reasonably be expected to get us closer to the truth. And insofar as the overriding consideration is to get closer to the truth, then it should not matter whether that truth will in fact contribute to the preservation of the Republic and traditional Roman virtue.

*Grasp and Dissent* is an English translation of Maso's *Capire e dissentire* (Bibliopolis, 2008); the new edition also contains a brief review of some of the relevant research that has appeared in the intervening years. One final note: there are far too many minor typographical and grammatical errors. Taken individually these are negligible, but the collective effect was quite distracting; this book really deserved more careful editing.

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Ursula Goldenbaum and Christopher Kluz, editors. *Doing Without Free Will: Spinoza and Contemporary Moral Problems*. Lanham-London: Lexington Books, 2015. Pp. xxviii + 136. Cloth, \$80.00.

Spinoza's moral philosophy is trending. This is the fourth book written in English in six years devoted to various aspects of it; that may not qualify as viral, but it is progress. The volume's five essays cover moral responsibility, *akrasia*, moral realism, and Spinoza's model of human nature: the free man. Hence its subtitle is misleading. There is nothing uniquely contemporary about the issues discussed, as is evident from the essays themselves. Also, the moral problems are not the type one might expect. You will not find an analysis of Spinoza's position on the moral status of non-human animals, for example. What you will find is an effort to bring Spinoza into contemporary debates. In their introduction, Goldenbaum and Kluz offer a historical overview of the free-will debate, which, according to their account, has culminated in a present-day stalemate. The upshot is that it is time for philosophers to give Spinoza consideration because, according to the editors, his views defy the categories that led to the predicament.

Goldenbaum and Kluz set a laudable goal for the book. But the essays are of uneven quality and, in my judgment, only one will be of interest to non-historians. I will summarize each, starting with one of my favorites.

In "Freedom from Resentment: Spinoza's Way with the Reactive Attitudes," J. Thomas Cook compares Spinoza's and P. F. Strawson's theories of moral responsibility. As Cook points out, others have noted and discussed similarities and differences in their views (e.g. Jonathan Bennett's *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*), but no in-depth comparison had been made. While providing clear synopses of their views, Cook focuses on a subset of reactive attitudes (i.e. blame and indignation) and organizes his discussion around questions that arise about their doctrines and arguments. The result is philosophically interesting and a contribution to scholarship.

In "Rehumanizing Spinoza's Free Man," Matthew Homan's aim is to show that Spinoza's model of human nature is attainable. Two questions are central to this issue. First, how ideal is Spinoza's free man? Second, how imperfect are Spinoza's actual human beings? According to Homan, the free man is an ideal, but the model's freedom is not perfect freedom. Rather, it is a "very human" ideal (80). Homan maintains that Spinoza's actual human beings are imperfect, but not so imperfect that we cannot attain the free man's human-caliber freedom. By a careful examination of the free man propositions, Homan makes a strong case for his interpretation, and in doing so contributes to the current scholarly debate.

In "Recovering Spinoza's Theory of *Akrasia*," Julia Haas defends a reading according to which the core of Spinoza's account of *akrasia* is contained in the propositions that open *Ethics* 4 (i.e. 4p1–4p8). At issue, in part, is whether there is a valid basis for Spinoza's talk of an emotion's strength (4p9). Contrary to a view held by Bennett and Michael Della Rocca, Haas argues that Spinoza has the resources to underwrite this move. While Martin Lin (*JHP*