This book explains and critically evaluates the central Epicurean views about life and death. Warren begins by laying out some of the questions we might naturally have about death (and the associated worries). Such questions include, What is the nature of death? Is being dead bad for the deceased? Is it bad for someone that he or she is going to die? Is it bad for someone if he or she dies sooner rather than later? He then proceeds to present and discuss Epicurean answers to these (and related) questions.

W. points out that the Epicureans' arguments against the badness of death (for the deceased) rely on two crucial assumptions. First, the Epicureans claim that for something to be good or bad for some person it (or perhaps a consequence of it) must be perceived by that person. (W. employs this formulation on p. 215; I think a more philosophically promising formulation might require that the thing in question be perceived or at least capable of being perceived.) Second, the Epicureans claim that death is the destruction of the person (and thus his or her ability to perceive). From these two assumptions it follows that death cannot be bad for the individual who dies.

W. has an extremely helpful discussion of the famous Symmetry Argument often attributed to Lucretius. According to the Symmetry Argument, we should have symmetric attitudes toward prenatal and posthumous non-existence; since we do not regret our prenatal non-existence, we should not look to the prospect of our deaths (posthumous non-existence) with fear or anxiety. It is often thought (in contemporary philosophical discussions) that the Symmetry Argument provides an additional argument for the Epicurean conclusions that death is not bad for the individual who dies and thus that it should not be the object of fear or anxiety – an argument that does not rely on the above two assumptions. W. points out that it is highly implausible to suppose that there is such an argument in Lucretius or any of the other ancient followers of Epicurus. W. helpfully distinguishes two versions of the Symmetry Argument. He contends that the Epicureans held the first version, which employs the two Epicurean assumptions identified above, and does not provide any additional reason to accept the conclusions. According to W., there is no textual support for the contemporary view that Lucretius’ Symmetry Argument offers a new and different reason to accept the Epicurean conclusion.

W. also argues that, although the second version of the Symmetry Argument does indeed purport to offer a new reason to accept the Epicurean conclusions, it is problematic in so far as it depends essentially on contentious views about personal identity. That is, W. argues that ‘Parfitian’ strategies for defending the apparent asymmetry in our attitudes toward prenatal non-existence and posthumous non-existence are not promising, and that the best way to defend the asymmetry relies on the controversial claim that we can die later than we actually die, but we cannot have been born (significantly) earlier than we actually are born. I shall return to W.’s discussion of this point below.

Whereas many commentators focus simply on the Epicurean arguments for the conclusion that death is not a bad thing for the deceased (and thus that we should not fear death), W. also discusses the Epicurean arguments that we should not fear mortality (the fact that we will die sometime) and also that we should not fear dying too soon. W. contends that, in response to the latter worry, the Epicureans argue that a life is ‘complete’ in so far as it involves no pain or suffering. That is, W. contends that
the Epicureans hold the (highly implausible) view that pleasure cannot be increased past the point of eliminating all pain. This, together with their ethical hedonism, can be employed to argue that someone who follows the Epicurean maxims for leading a pleasurable life can attain a kind of completeness within a finite life, and should not deem a sooner death a bad thing (or fear it).

W. rightly finds the Epicurean views that pleasure cannot be increased past the elimination of pain, and that a complete life is one with maximum pleasure (so construed), highly unsatisfying. He also considers a number of criticisms to the effect that the consequences of accepting the Epicurean conclusions are unacceptable. Specifically, W. considers the worries that a sincere and consistent Epicurean would have no reason to make out a will or even to expend any efforts to continue to live. He deems these worries powerful. One can understand the worries in the form of a dilemma; in so far as death is not a bad thing for the deceased and thus not something to be feared, it becomes unclear why one should wish to continue to live. If the Epicurean conclusions about death are to be accepted, then why bother writing a will or taking pains to extend one's life at all? To the extent that one has lived a 'complete' life, the Epicurean is 'ready for burial'; although this is supposed to be reassuring, it is also problematic.

This is a very fine book. It blends historical and textual analysis with philosophical discussion in a seamless, illuminating way. It should be of interest to classical scholars, historians of philosophy, and also philosophers interested in the set of questions about life and death under discussion. The book is written in a sophisticated and yet clear, uncluttered, and even elegant way. It is thus of potential interest to a wider audience of thoughtful and reflective people interested in this fascinating set of issues.

I wish to end with a quibble about W.'s treatment of the second version of the Symmetry Argument. Specifically, I do not think he is entirely fair to the approach to defending the commonsense asymmetry in our attitudes toward prenatal and posthumous non-existence suggested by Anthony Brueckner and me. (We originally suggested this approach in 'Why is Death Bad?' Philosophical Studies 50 [1986], 213–21; reprinted in John Martin Fischer, ed., The Metaphysics of Death [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993], 219–29.) Although W. notes that Brueckner and I follow Derek Parfit, he does not seem to see that the way in which we depart from Parfit (or perhaps elaborate the Parfitian idea) avoids the criticisms W. offers (Warren, pp. 89–91).

Derek Parfit has offered a set of examples in which it appears that people have a ‘temporal bias’ – a preference that, all other things equal, our pains be in the past and our pleasures be in the future. Brueckner and I applied this insight to the ordinary asymmetry in people's attitudes toward prenatal non-existence and death. But we did not do so directly, precisely because (on the Epicurean assumptions) death is not an experiential bad (such as pain). That is, we did not contend that the ordinary asymmetry in attitudes is a special case of the Parfitian asymmetry between past and future pains (as W. appears to assert on pp. 90–1). Rather, we pointed out that death, although an experiential blank, is the deprivation of the goods of life, some of which are experiential goods (such as pleasures). If this is so, and if there is a general preference that our pleasures be in the future, then the ordinary asymmetry in attitudes can be seen as a special case of a Parfitian asymmetry between past and future pleasures. If we prefer that, all other things equal, our pleasures be in the future, and death robs us of future pleasures (whereas prenatal non-existence merely robs us of past pleasures), then it is not so mysterious why we ordinarily have asymmetric attitudes toward prenatal and posthumous non-existence. (Of course, this
is admittedly only a partial explanation, as it subsumes the ordinary asymmetry in attitudes to a putatively ‘deeper’ or ‘more general’ asymmetry – which itself may stand in need of explanation, as W. correctly notes.)

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**Cultural Politics in Polybius**


doi:10.1017/S0009840X05000351

Polybius was both a patriotic Achaean Greek and an admirer, even though a long-term detainee, of Rome; he also viewed his own time as morally a letdown from a better past. These themes permeate his analytical history of the era 264–146 B.C., intended for two ‘audiences’ – Greeks and Romans. His Roman and Achaean analyses, and the messages underlying them, are the themes of C.’s interesting, if at times taxing, study.

Other states (Macedon, the Seleucid Empire, Carthage) figure only in contributing to this discussion. C. sees Polybius as conveying, sometimes in nuanced form, dual messages to his dual ‘audience’, or readership. One, to Romans and pro-Roman Greeks, was that the Roman *poleis* until 167 largely embodied the idealised Hellenic cultural qualities of reason (*logismos*), moderation and justice, making Romans ‘quasi Hellenes’ (pp. 30–46, 57–63, 84–90, 100–22) – indeed quasi-Achaeans, for Polybius’ own state realised the same ideals over the same period (pp. 122–43). This depiction, in C.’s rather jargonic terminology, constitutes ‘a politics of cultural assimilation of the Romans to Hellenism’ (p. 3, etc.; by ‘politics’ C. really means an attitude or assessment). To anti-Roman Greeks, appalled at the brutality of Rome’s Mediterranean hegemony, the message, C. argues, was that Roman virtues both public and private had started to shrivel after 201 (pp. 144–58) and, after 167, largely succumbed to corruption and degeneracy (pp. 159–65, 185–209) – the year, not coincidentally, that Polybius and a thousand other suspect Achaeans were deported to Italy at Rome’s behest. This message constituted ‘a politics of cultural alienation of Romans from Hellenism’ (p. 3, etc.). Achaea, too, headed down a degenerative path at the same time, for other reasons (pp. 166–7, 183–8). Brutality, irrationality, selfishness and greed typify barbarian societies (and near-barbarians like the historian’s pet hate, the Aetolians: pp. 129–36): hence Polybius’ bleak assessment according to C. – ‘both groups [Rome and Achaea] have begun to slide into barbarism’ (p. 237).

C. perceptively analyses several associated topics: how Greeks evaluated Hellenism and barbarism (‘the Hellenic–barbarian bipolarity’, p. 43); the suspicions that old-fashioned Romans harboured towards Greek culture, contrasting with its appeal to other Romans and Polybius’ own social and political conservatism (with the straight-faced comment that ‘for Polybius, barbarians, along with mercenaries, the masses, youth, and women, posed a threat to the social order’, p. 70). He links his decoding of Polybius’ analyses with the historian’s famous *anacyklósis* theory in Book 6: that every political society starts with monarchy, then evolves through several stages until, finally, democracy degenerates into ‘ochlocracy’, mob-rule (pp. 67–99). For