

There is some uncertainty about the order of the dialogues – different orders are found in different sources. Relihan follows the version which groups almost all the dialogues involving Menippus at the beginning. This makes a coherent progression, following on from the two previous works, in the development of Menippus' character and his acquisition of wisdom, notably the encouragement of sympathy rather than scorn for suffering mortals.

The dialogues themselves certainly are amusing and witty, and Relihan's translation is eminently performable. The usual Underworld characters appear, along with famous men (not many women) from history. Recurrent themes include the equality of all after death and the vanity of human pretension; humour derives from the twisting of traditional details (Menippus can't afford to pay Charon an obol as, being a Cynic, he is too poor) or typical human situations (legacy hunting, attitudes to death).

The book concludes with an Afterword on the term 'Menippean satire' (not used until 1581 AD by one Justus Lipsius). Lucian is a major source, but his role seems to obscure rather than illuminate the historical Menippus. We need to consider the Menippus dialogues as a whole in order to retrieve the true character of Menippus.

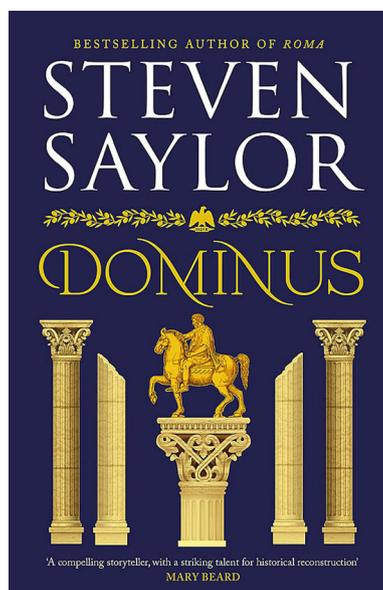
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Dominus

Saylor (S.). Pp. xii+480, map. London: Constable, 2021. Cased, £18.99. ISBN: 978-1-4721-2365-7

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Dominus is the third part of Steven Saylor's ambitious trilogy of novels in which he has attempted to tackle the story of Rome from its pre-history to the fourth century CE, culminating in Constantine's conversion to Christianity. This is a fascinating book, very much in the tradition of Edward Rutherfurd's novels *Sarum* and *London*, and one which would be invaluable for a student or teacher wanting to gain a broad overview of a period of history with which they might be unfamiliar.

Dominus begins in CE 165 in the reign of Marcus Aurelius and moves at a cracking pace through the subsequent events down to 326 CE and the reign of Constantine the Great. Initially this book

did not hook me in the same way that some of Saylor's *Roma Sub Rosa* detective novels have. This is the downside to such an ambitious and epic project, as the speed of travel can be a little bewildering. However, it is well worth persevering with and, overall, this reviewer enjoyed it immensely. The story of Rome is told from the perspective of a series of members of the Pinarii, a patrician family whose roots can be traced back to the beginning of Rome's history. Saylor has modelled his leading family on real characters from the historical record, though it is clear that he has relied upon much invention to flesh out the bones of their story. The Pinarii are a family of craftsmen and writers and this puts them into close contact with a series of imperial regimes. Thus, Saylor is able to explore key political and social events from the viewpoint of his leading characters. The broad scope of the book does make it a little difficult to truly connect with the various members of the Pinarii, but Saylor does a good job of representing their ambitions, worries and achievements.

One of the best parts of this book is the way in which Saylor explores some of the more eccentric and famous figures from Roman history. The physician Galen is a prominent character and it is clear that Saylor has researched widely, using the extensive records that we have of Galen's writings, to construct a believable and enjoyable character. One thing which prospective readers should be aware of is that this book will take time to read as it will spark lots of questions and you will undoubtedly find yourself needing to look up lots of the references to find out what really did happen and what is Saylor's invention. He weaves these two things seamlessly, making it difficult to judge without checking. I won't ruin the story, but I especially enjoyed his account of Galen's ultimate demise at a grand old age. Saylor's presentation of the emperors Commodus, Caracalla and Elagabalus are especially chilling – the sense of fear and unease felt by the various members of the Pinarii is communicated very effectively and, even though I knew how the stories of these emperors would end, it was interesting to experience through the eyes of a prominent Roman with much to lose, rather than from a sterile 21st century perspective.

One area of Roman history which has long confused me is the third century crisis, following the death of Alexander Severus. Saylor does a superb job of conveying the confusing series of events, choosing particular vignettes to focus on in detail, whilst not labouring any of his points. I was lucky to have read this book in hard copy; I do think a Kindle version might be more difficult as I did spend time flicking to the maps and family trees provided, as well as double checking which year we were now in. However, this is an issue with e-books generally, rather than a criticism of this work in particular. This would be an excellent summer reading task for a student or teacher who wanted to gain a good oversight of this period of history before embarking upon some more academic research. Helpfully, Saylor has provided detailed notes at the end explaining which sources he used in researching his book and this would be a great place to begin any further reading.

The final thing which I enjoyed was the descriptions of the artworks supposedly created by the Pinarii family throughout the book. I found the account of the Arch of Constantine especially interesting, given the well-known academic debate about whether it represents a decline in artistic standards within Rome in the 4th century. Saylor's take on this is that this was thanks to Constantine himself who demanded 'can't you just reuse bits and pieces of old sculpture...use the bric-a-brac that's lying all about the city'. The presentation of Constantine overall is not especially generous, which makes a refreshing change from reading some of the more contemporary accounts of his reign given by early Christian

writers. The theme of Christianity and the threat that it poses to the old Roman religion is explored throughout the years of the book and is cleverly reflected in the title; at the beginning and throughout 'Dominus' relates to the emperor but, by the end, it is a new master that is in charge of Rome's future. Overall, I highly recommend *Dominus* and I now plan to read parts one and two to help fill in other gaps in my knowledge.

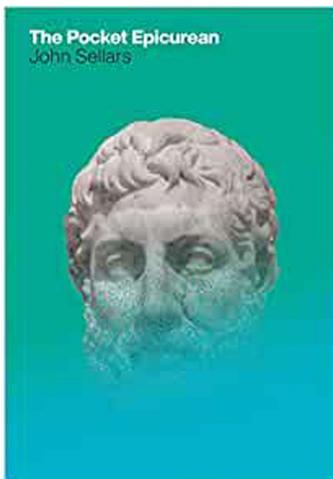
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The Pocket Epicurean

Sellars (J.) Pp. 126. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2021. Cased, US\$12.50.
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This engaging book certainly lives up to its title, being small enough to fit into a jacket pocket and slim enough not to weigh you down. Sellars goes through those areas of Epicureanism most appropriate for a modern non-specialist audience and interprets the ancient wisdom through the eyes of modern life. Epicureanism was misrepresented and misunderstood even in antiquity, and this little book is a worthwhile corrective to the false notions which continue to attach to the word 'Epicurean'.

After an opening chapter on the therapeutic value of philosophy – an important aspect of many ancient philosophers – Sellars homes in on the 'path to tranquillity' by means of the Epicurean mantra of the 'little which is enough'. Epicurus argued that wealth and poverty are relative concepts and contentment is better achieved by limiting desires than by heaping up worrying amounts of wealth. Pleasure was seen as the greatest good, but Sellars is right to show that this is no hedonistic free-for-all since pleasure consists largely in the relief of pain and overindulgence will cause pain and so be counter-productive. Friendship as a key ethical desideratum is given a chapter to itself – although Sellars curiously says nothing about Epicurus' wary attitude towards sexual relations in general and romantic love in particular, and sexuality is also conspicuous by its absence in the discussion of the different types of pleasure.

Chapter 5 ('Why study nature?') explains the atomic theory and stresses its value for the anti-teleological world-view which removed divine agency from the creation and maintenance of the world. Sellars stresses (correctly) that Epicurus was no atheist but rather viewed the gods as paradigmatic of our own potential for

tranquillity: there is nothing to stop us from 'living a life worthy of the gods' as Lucretius tells us (3.322). Sellars might have added here that the study of nature is itself a source of pleasure (cf. Lucretius 3.29-31) and thus is desirable in itself.

Chapter 6 ('Don't fear death') examines the biggest enemy of human happiness and shows how (for the Epicurean) death, as the end of all sensation, is neither good nor bad as it produces neither pleasure nor pain. Furthermore, we did not mind being dead before we were born: as the man once said, the living are just the dead on holiday. Sellars poses some excellent critique of this simplistic view, showing how we might reasonably be unhappy at the thought of potential years of life being taken from us – a point picked up in antiquity from Philodemus onwards. The only answer for the Epicurean is to live in the moment and *carpe diem*.

Chapter 7 ('Explaining everything') is mostly devoted to the Roman poet Lucretius. Sellars briefly revisits the atomic theory and shows how it underpins every aspect of his observations of the universe and of our own experiences of it. Even when the poet is wrong he is always working from consistent principles concerning the nature of matter and void. Lucretius (5.564-5) famously claimed (p. 107) 'that the sun is only about as large as it appears to us' but he was by no means alone in saying this – Heraclitus thought the sun was the size of the human foot – and he had already argued hard (4.216-822) for the veracity of sense-perception in the face of Sceptical opposition. Epicurus himself (Diogenes Laertius 10.91) is somewhat unclear on the subject and mathematical astronomers in antiquity produced speculations that the sun was in fact 18 times the size of the earth. Nobody actually knew who (if anybody) was right. At this point it would have been helpful to the reader for Sellars to explain the Epicurean account of perception as *simulacra* emanating from the atomic surface of objects to illustrate the wider epistemological difficulties of which celestial objects are just a part.

Sellars does not always spell out the logical basis behind the arguments. Early mankind, for example, must have developed social bonds as (if they had not done so) the race would have died out and we would not be here (p.108). This is classic *modus tollens*: (If P, then Q; but not-Q; therefore not-P) and helps to explain how the poet managed to produce intelligent hypotheses about things he had not seen, ranging from the world of the unseen atoms to the furthest reaches of the cosmos. The history of the growth of human civilisation is fascinating – not least because it is the polar opposite of the 'golden age' notion found in poets such as Hesiod – and Sellars well points out that it serves the Epicurean materialistic view which excludes divine agency and which finds naturalistic explanations for everything, as well as helping us to see how we can live in accordance with our nature: 'this poem combining cosmology and anthropology is fundamentally offering lessons in how to live' (p. 111).

Sellars inevitably simplifies his material for a non-specialist readership and sometimes raises a reviewer's eyebrow. He assumes (for example) that Horace is a mouthpiece for Epicureanism even though Horace explicitly said (*Epistles* 1.1.14) that he belonged to no one school. A book of this size inevitably cuts corners and it is to be hoped that readers will pursue the recommended further reading to investigate the finer details. That said, this little book punches far above its modest weight and is a lively and energetic account of Epicureanism, ideal to be put into the hands of anyone of any age who wishes to know just why Epicureans were not epicures and how they managed – armed with nothing more than their senses and their brains – to shape the future of physics for millennia and to inspire a whole counter-culture of what constitutes the 'good life'.

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