*Introduction**

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I

Preliminary remarks

The contemporary historiographical debate – the point of arrival in a long and distinguished tradition of studies – has highlighted the importance of Plotinus' reception of Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic philosophies as a topic for insightful discussion in the field and the development of theoretical paradigms and methods of argumentation. Within this new perspective, some useful enquiries have been launched into Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism and Scepticism. Yet when it comes to Epicureanism, the investigation has only just begun.

Our reason for embarking on the project *Gli atomi di Epicuro e l'ordine di Plotino* (*Epicurus' atoms and Plotinus' order*), however, does not merely lie in the fact that this is an understudied topic. Rather, the investigation of Plotinus' reception of other philosophical traditions apart from Platonism led us, by extension, to consider the prospect that focusing on influences from Epicurus, or the Epicureans, or both – and hence on Plotinus' possible use of Epicurean doctrines – might be a way of shedding more light on the philosopher's *atelier*. In particular, we hoped that this investigation would help clarify some problematic issues related to Plotinus' thought and bring out some common threads running throughout his treatises; that it might provide some new hints with regard to his education in Alexandria, about which little is known; and, finally, that it might offer some clues (or at any rate orientation) as to the identity of the philosophers Plotinus engages with, in such a way as to illustrate the development of his own doctrine.

* In this Introduction Parts I and II were written mostly by D. P. Taormina, whereas Parts III and IV were written mostly by A. Longo.

§ 1 Plotinus' teaching in context

The first, preliminary question to be addressed is an external, institutional one: did Plotinus' circle leave any room for Epicurean philosophy? This philosophy was certainly taught as part of higher education, if only – as seems likely – in a condensed form, at least up until the fourth century: an oration by the rhetor Himerius in honour of Hermogenes, the proconsul of Achaea between c. 353 and 358, states that the opinions shared by Democritus and Epicurus formed an integral part of the official's education (*Orat.* XLVIII § 18–25 Colonna). Still, Epicurean texts did not feature at all in the study curriculum of Platonist schools and circles in Late Antiquity – and this also applies to Plotinus' circle. Porphyry makes no mention of them when presenting Plotinus' writings and the lessons the latter held in Rome between AD 244 and 269: 'Stoic and Peripatetic doctrines are embedded in his writings and . . . condensed in them are the ideas of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.' When Porphyry is describing what texts were read in the school, he passes over Epicurus and the Epicureans in silence and only mentions – in addition to Plato – Imperial Age commentators such as the Platonists Numenius, Atticus, Severus, Cronius and Gaius, along with Peripatetics such as Aspasius, Alexander of Aphrodisias and Adrastus (Porph. *Plot.*14).

Nevertheless, other factual elements stand in contrast to this silence. We know that just before Plotinus, Epicurean writings were still circulating throughout the Mediterranean basin, as evidenced by *POxy.* 5077 (late first/early second century), the Oenoanda inscription (late second/early third century) and Diogenes Laertius (first half of the third century). Besides, Epicurean philosophy was still being taught and discussed by philosophers in at least three important cultural centres of the Empire: Athens, Alexandria and Rome. The chairs of philosophy established by Marcus Aurelius († 180) in Athens also included a chair of Epicurean philosophy, as attested in inscriptions testifying that Plotina – Trajan's wife – petitioned Hadrian on matters regarding the succession of the head of the Epicurean school in Athens.[1] Again in Athens, in 176, Atticus – probably the first to fill the chair of Platonic philosophy established by Marcus Aurelius,[2] and the author of commentaries on Plato that were read within Plotinus' circle (Porph. *Plot.* 14.10–14) – launched a violent attack on the Epicurean conception of the gods and providence (Attic. fr. 3 = frr. 368 and 532 Us.). Finally, the head of the Aristotelian school in Athens, Alexander of Aphrodisias, seems to frequently engage with

[1] *IG* II² 1099 and 1097: see T. Dorandi, Chapter 1, this volume. [2] Whittaker 1989: 664–5.

Epicurean doctrine in his writings, although this doctrine is not always mentioned explicitly.[3]

In Alexandria, anti-Epicurean polemics flourished at least from the time of Philo onwards[4] and took the form of a defence of Christian doctrine against pagan culture, which reached its apex with Origen and his pupil, Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria.

Likewise, we know that Epicurean texts were circulating in second-century Rome. Usener (*Epicurea*, LXXIV–LXXVI) spoke of a new flourishing of Epicurean philosophy, and this reconstruction has been confirmed – if only in more prudent tones – in the recent studies by J. Ferguson and M. Erler.[5] According to this reconstruction, starting from Hadrian's time and then even more so under the Antonines (138–92), Epicurean ranks swelled. This phenomenon is attested by Galen, who wrote a number of books against Epicurean philosophy. These are listed in *On My Own Books*, ch. XIX Boudon-Millot: *On the Happy and Blessed Life according to Epicurus*, in two books; *On Concealed Pleasure according to Epicurus*, in two books; *That the Factors Producing Pleasure have been Inadequately Expressed by Epicurus*, in one book, etc.

Even in Plotinus' own day, it is clear that Epicurean doctrines were far from being forgotten or neglected,[6] as is shown by the way in which they are taken up by Porphyry in forty-odd passages from *De abstinentia* and his *Letter to Marcella* – collected in Usener's *Epicurea* – as well as by Origen in *Contra Celsum* (written around 248).[7] What is particularly significant is the fact that Porphyry, a pupil of Plotinus, also refers to Hermarchus, who, despite being a successor to Epicurus, did not enjoy the same standing as his master (*Abst.* I 26.4).

The same also applies to the period just after Plotinus, as evidenced by Lactantius' virulent refutations of Epicurean doctrine.[8]

[3] Significantly, explicit mention of Epicurus is made not only in works transmitted in Greek, but also in the treatise *On Providence*, which in Abū Bišr Mattā ibn Yūnus' Arab translation bears the title of *On Providence: Treatise by Alexander of Aphrodisias Expounding and Clarifying the Opinions of Democritus, Epicurus and Other Philosophers with Regard to Providence* (see Thillet 2003). Clear traces of a discussion of Epicurean doctrines have also been found in passages that make no mention of Epicurus: see G. Leone's in-depth introduction to Book 2 of Epicurus' *On Nature* (Leone 2012: 72–3, 92, 106, 112, 140–1, 147, 151, 157–8, 164–5), as well as the notes in the new edition of *De anima libri mantissa* by R. W. Sharples (Sharples 2008) and the succinct observations made by Avotins 1980: 429–54.

[4] See Le Boulluec 1998a: 129–52, esp. 140–3.

[5] Ferguson 1990: 2257–327, esp. 2297–302; Erler 2009.

[6] Ferguson 1990: 2302–9.

[7] On the problematic dating of the work, see Chadwick 1980: XV.

[8] See, most recently, Althoff 1999: 33–53; Kany-Turpin 2000: 218–30; Pizzani 2001: 171–203; Moreschini 2005: 299–300 and 304–6; Spinelli (in press).

Moreover, we know that Plotinus drew upon the writing of authors such as Plutarch of Chaeronea, who served as a significant vector for the knowledge of Epicureanism.[9]

But if this is the context in which Plotinus was operating, is it reasonable to maintain that he utterly ignored Epicurean philosophy? The question grows even more interesting in the light of further considerations, ones internal to Plotinian philosophy.

§ 2 *The name of Epicurus*

One initial consideration concerns a rather curious fact: Plotinus explicitly refers to Epicurus by name. This is an unusual thing, since – as is widely known – Plotinus rarely mentions other philosophers and only does so if a considerable chronological gap exists between himself and the philosopher named. Thus, for instance, aside from Plato, mention is made of Aristotle (four times), Heraclitus (four times), Empedocles (six times), Pythagoras (four times) and Anaxagoras (twice). The authors Porphyry mentions in *Vita Plotini* 14, however, are never named in the *Enneads*, and this also applies to the Stoics, who are nonetheless well represented and widely drawn upon within the conceptual framework developed by Plotinus.[10] The explicit reference made to Epicurus, therefore, would appear to be an exception to Plotinus' rule of silence. This exception is made in the central treatise 33 (*Enn.* II 9), which bears the Porphyrian title of *Against the Gnostics*.

The passage in question makes up fr. 403 Us. and is also referred to in fr. 368:

> For there are two conceptions regarding the attainment of the end: one finds the end in bodily pleasure, the other emphasises moral uprightness and virtue . . . Insofar as he does away with providence, Epicurus exhorts us to pursue pleasure, which is all that remains; but this doctrine [i.e. the Gnostic] after having offended the lord of providence and providence itself, scorned all laws of this world and mocked virtue, even more insolently . . . abolished wisdom and justice.

Plotinus, therefore, links Epicurus to the Gnostics and thus establishes a connection between the denial of providence and the pursuit of pleasure, functional to his anti-Gnostic attack.[11]

[9] On this question, see Kegachia 2012 and Corti 2014, esp. 21–8, with further references.
[10] The literature on Plotinus and the Stoics is abundant. I would only refer to Graeser 1972; Zamora Calvo 2003; Bonazzi 2005; Hoffmann 2005; R. Dufour 2006b.
[11] On the reference to Epicurus in treatise 33, see below p. 14, as well as A. Longo's contribution, which is in turn related to that by M. Mazzetti, Chapters 2 and 3, this volume.

This, then, is not just a curious fact: it is also something interesting from a theoretical perspective; indeed, it becomes most relevant if we bear in mind that the Syriac tradition provides an image of Gnosticism as a doctrine strongly influenced by Epicureanism, or even intertwined with it. In a forthcoming article ('Ungodly Cosmologies') in the *Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, edited by S. Schmidtke, Patricia Crone emphasises how, according to the Bardesanites (i.e. the followers of Bardesanes, a Syrian Gnostic of the second–third century along the lines of Zostrianos, which is to say one of Plotinus' Gnostics), 'reason', 'power' and 'thought' are all composed of atoms. The Bardesanites further explain that the world consists of light and darkness, which are ultimately separable, by combining the Stoic notion of interpenetration with the Epicurean one of atoms. Some Arab sources record the atomistic views held by the Manichaeans, whereas Syriac ones reveal that Epicurus, who was usually denounced as an atheist and hedonist by the Church Fathers, was still reckoned among the great philosophers by one David Bar Paulos in Syria as late as the seventh century. These few examples are enough to show that the Epicurus–Gnostic connection may not only have served specific argumentative aims, but may also reflect a specific historical situation.[12]

Certainly, when viewed in the light of this information provided by orientalists, the reference made to Epicurus in treatise 33 enables us to bring into focus one significant aspect of Plotinus' way of treating his predecessors. Plotinus is neither a Hegelian philosopher nor a historian of philosophy, despite what seems to be suggested in recent studies that present Plotinus as taking stock of previous philosophical doctrines. Rather, Plotinus takes an interest in these doctrines and draws upon them in order to carry out his own polemics.

§ 3 Lexical questions

A second consideration concerns the language used by Plotinus: in the *Enneads* terms are found that may well have been borrowed from Epicurus and his followers. Let us consider here just a couple of examples: the most striking one is certainly ἐπιβολή, which does not appear to be used in a technical sense by Plato, Aristotle or the Stoics, but most certainly has a technical meaning in Epicurus' writing, where it acquires considerable importance (see Usener 1977). What is also typically Epicurean is the expression φανταστικὴ ἐπιβολὴ τῆς διανοίας (e.g. *RS* 24 § 147, Lucr. *DRN* 2.740), which also occurs in Philo (*De posteritate Caini* 21.1), Galen

[12] On these themes, see Dhanani 1994.

(*De instrumento odoratus* 1.2.2 Kollesch) and finally Plotinus (tr. 12 (*Enn.* II 4) 10.3).[13]

Another term of Epicurean origin is ἐπιλογισμός, which had already been taken up by Platonists (and especially Plutarch) before Plotinus. The latter only uses it once, in *On Dialectics* tr. 20 (*Enn.* I 3.6.10), in order to define φρόνησις and single it out from other virtues: 'The other virtues – Plotinus states – apply reasoning to particular experiences and acts, whereas φρόνησις consists in a certain ἐπιλογισμός, pertaining to the universal in particular, which evaluates whether things are mutually connected and whether it is necessary . . . to refrain from acting or whether, in general, a completely different conduct is preferable.'[14]

Now, however we are to interpret these lexical elements, it is clear that they provide a clue suggesting we should further investigate the matter.

§ 4 The latest studies on Plotinus and Epicurus

One last consideration concerns the present state of Plotinian studies. It was previously noted that research based on Epicurus' presence in Plotinus has only just begun. Only a handful of studies have been specifically devoted to this topic, and it is worth briefly mentioning them in chronological order.

In 1938 A. H. Armstrong published his article 'The Gods in Plato, Plotinus, Epicurus', *CQ* 32: 190–6. At least partly inspired by recent findings on Epicureanism, Armstrong compared some of the features which Plotinus assigns to the gods with those listed by Epicurus: imperturbability and impassivity (*ataraxia*) – which both authors attribute not just to the gods but also to the figure of the philosopher – and the safeguarding of the universe, which according to both is conducted through serene, effortless rule. Armstrong regarded these 'resemblances' as being 'sufficiently remarkable to make the comparison worthwhile'; however, he categorically ruled out the possibility that Epicurus may have influenced Plotinus.

The next study appeared in 1981, with the publication of J.-P. Dumont's article 'Plotin et la doxographie épicurienne' (in *Néoplatonisme: Mélanges offerts à J. Trouillard*. Fontenay-aux-Roses: 191–204). The author here only goes through Henry-Schwyzer's *index fontium* (fourteen passages in all), reaching a two-fold conclusion: most testimonia on Epicureanism rely on Peripatetic and especially Stoic doxographers; the idea that Plotinus is referring to Epicurean doctrine is only a hypothesis.

[13] See A. Cornea, Chapter 9, and P.-M. Morel, Chapter 5, this volume.
[14] See Schniewind 2008: 199–204.

A markedly toned-down version of this thesis appears in M. Tortorelli Ghidini's work (1996) 'L'ambigua presenza di Epicuro in Plotino' (in *Epicureismo greco e romano*, ed. G. Giannantoni and M. Gigante. Naples: vol. VII 987–97). By focusing especially on the doctrine of happiness, the author reaches the conclusion that the Epicurean notions found in the *Enneads* do not merely serve polemical purposes, but significantly contribute to shaping Plotinus' cultural background (996).

A work published not long afterwards, D. J. O'Meara's (1999) 'Epicurus Neoplatonicus' (in *Zur Rezeption der hellenistischen Philosophie in der Spätantike*, ed. Th. Fuhrer and M. Erler. Stuttgart: 83–91), stresses the importance of Epicurean thought for Plotinus. The author certainly notes that Plotinus is critical of Epicurean physics – of the atomistic theory in tr. 3 (*Enn.* III 1) 2.9–17, of the idea of the soul as an aggregate of atoms in tr. 2 (*Enn.* IV 7) 3.1–3 – as well as of the cognitive theory based on sense perception in tr. 32 (*Enn.* V 5) 1.12–14. The scholar suggests that Plotinus provides a depiction of Epicurean philosophers through the image of 'heavy birds' that have gathered much from the earth and are so weighed down that they cannot fly high, despite having been equipped with wings by nature (tr. 5 (*Enn.* V 9) 1.1–17). Still, O'Meara maintains that Plotinus also acknowledges the positive role played by Epicureanism, especially in tr. 46 (*Enn.* I 4) *On Happiness*: the arguments developed in the first two chapters of this treatise are more than just polemical, since they also show that Epicurean premises can lead to Plotinian conclusions (see A. Linguiti, Chapter 10, this volume).

L. P. Gerson, (2003) 'Plotinus and Epicurean Epistemology' (in *Epicurus: His Continuing Influence and Contemporary Relevance*, ed. D. R. Gordon and D. B. Suits. Rochester N.Y.: 69–80) focuses on Plotinus' criticism of Epicurean epistemology.

J. M. Charrue, (2006) 'Plotin et Epicure', *Emerita* 74: 289–320, presents a comparative reading of Epicurus' and Plotinus' treatment of specific topics such as the divine, the supreme good, matter, perception and images. It shows to what extent Plotinus embraced or rejected Epicurean notions.

Outside of any systematic picture, we then find some important leads in the latest translations of Plotinus' treatises published in the collection *Les Ecrits de Plotin*. This is the case with the translation of tr. 3 (*Enn.* III 1) by M. Chappuis (2006); with that of tr. 36 (*Enn.* I 5) by A. Linguiti (2007), in particular with regard to the perfection of pleasure in the present; and finally with A. Longo's 2009 translation of tr. 2 (*Enn.* IV 7) and especially of ch. 3, which may plausibly be interpreted as an attack on the Epicurean doctrine of the emergence of qualities at specific levels in the

arrangement of atomic aggregates – a topic Epicurus explores in Book 25 of *On Nature*.

It is possible to argue, therefore, that the contemporary debate in the field has indeed also focused on a comparison between Plotinus and Epicureanism; and that this has provided some interesting philosophical and exegetical indications with regard to central topics in Plotinian philosophy, ranging from the conception of matter to that of causality, from the definition of the soul and its cognitive functions to ethics and, especially, the issue of happiness.

§ 5 New data concerning the texts

One last consideration: much of the Plotinus–Epicurus dossier is based on Usener's *Epicurea*. While this is no doubt a fundamental work, since its publication in 1887 many new finds have been made in the field of Epicureanism – let us think of the progress in the publication and interpretation of the Herculaneum papyri, or of the ongoing publication of the Oenoanda inscription. In addition, many Gnostic texts, which at first sight would appear to be closely connected to Plotinus' criticism of Epicurus, have only recently been translated and published. An updated overview of the matter is thus in order.

II

Some aspects of Plotinus' approach to Epicureanism

§ 6 Aims

The ten studies collected in this volume seek to address the questions just posed and to investigate in greater detail the first points raised for discussion. An attempt is made here to provide an initial update of the Plotinus–Epicurus dossier in the light of recent findings on Epicureanism and its spread across the Mediterranean, in order to assess the meaning of Plotinus' explicit mention of Epicurus and, finally, to investigate the linguistic elements linking the two philosophers.

The primary aim of the volume is to test its starting hypothesis – and that is: whether certain points in Plotinus' philosophy may be elucidated by specifically referring to his use of Epicurean material, as this emerges from an initial survey.

§ 7 Method

The method employed is that most commonly adopted in Plotinian studies to detect possible references to other previous or contemporary authors within the *Enneads*. As such, it entails no significant innovations. It is well known that Plotinus is reluctant to quote other philosophers and chiefly refers to them in an allusive fashion. These allusions may be identified on the basis of the use of a single meaningful term, or coherent series of terms, which makes the presence of a given theory more explicit. Plotinus removes the doctrinal elements he is alluding to from their original context and deploys them for different reasons: a) he might insert them within a demonstration he is conducting, thereby assimilating them to his own theory; b) conversely, he might use these terms to criticise the author he is alluding to. In the latter case, from the elements in question Plotinus will derive consequences that are utterly foreign to the intentions of the author he is criticising. This procedure introduces another particularity: Plotinus will juxtapose different theories which are similar in content – or are perceived as such – and resort to conventional arguments against one of these doctrines in order to refute another. This makes his critique more effective and easier to convey. In the specific case we are focusing on, Plotinus' approach suggests that two different sets of arguments may be regarded as anti-Epicurean: those explicitly targeting Epicurus, or the Epicureans, or both; and those that are intended to refute non-Epicurean authors, but that are built on material traditionally deployed against Epicurus (as in the case of the Gnostics).

These elements are analysed according to two perspectives: one highlights the chronological order of Plotinian treatises, while the other focuses on the thematic one. Thus, in the present volume, references to Plotinus' work mirror the two approaches (e.g. *Enn*. II 9 (33) or tr. 33 (*Enn*. II 9)). In the *Index locorum* we adopt the chronological order.

§ 8 Plan of the volume

Plotinus' use of Epicureanism is explored according to three different aspects. The first is the polemical aspect, marked by the use of anti-Epicurean arguments – often ones previously exploited by other authors – particularly in order to conduct an ongoing polemic with non-Epicurean authors. The second aspect also reflects Plotinus' polemical attitude, but this time in relation to distinctly Epicurean doctrines, or more generally atomistic ones. The third and final aspect is related to the borrowing of terms, ideas or overall conceptions that may be defined as Epicurean.

These different perspectives cover a wide range of theoretical aspects: from ethics (Longo, Mazzetti, Linguiti, Marsola) to epistemology (Morel, Taormina, Cornea), and from physics (Ninci, Eliasson, Linguiti, Mazzetti) to anthropology (Marsola).

The volume opens with a *liminaire* article by T. Dorandi, 'The school and texts of Epicurus in the early centuries of the Roman empire' (Chapter 1). This study serves a preliminary function and helps frame the enquiry as a whole. In order to understand whether – and in what way – Plotinus read Epicurus, it is necessary first of all to ascertain whether Epicurean philosophy was still being taught in the second and third centuries AD and whether – and in what way – texts by Epicurus, or his successors, or both, were circulating at the time. This question finds an answer in the documentary evidence gathered and presented by Dorandi. This shows that the succession of *diadochoi* in the Epicurean school in Athens continued in the second century AD and that texts by Epicurus were still circulating throughout the Mediterranean – certainly in the Egyptian *chora* in the first and second centuries, as well as in the first half of the third century in the unspecified city where Diogenes Laërtius found and transmitted the texts by Epicurus. This evidence is of the utmost importance: for, on the one hand, it suggests that in the period leading up to Plotinus' work Epicureanism was still an integral feature of the philosophical landscape; on the other, it shows that Plotinus may well have been familiar with Epicurean philosophy, not just by way of the doxographical tradition, as has often been suggested, but through a direct engagement with Epicurean texts.

The confirmation of this possibility is followed by a series of studies specifically focusing on Plotinus and which are divided into three sections. The first section examines the traditional anti-Epicurean arguments which Plotinus deploys against non-Epicurean authors. Its starting-point is provided by A. Longo's analysis (Chapter 2) of the only passage that mentions Epicurus explicitly, the aforementioned tr. 33 (*Enn.* II 9) 15 ('The mention of Epicurus in Plotinus' tr. 33 (*Enn.* II 9) in the context of the polemics between pagans and Christians in the second to third centuries AD: Parallels between Celsus, Plotinus and Origen'). As part of this analysis, A. Longo favours a different interpretative approach from the one that is usually adopted: she focuses on the contrast between Epicurus and Plotinus as a way of investigating the broader context of Platonist anti-Christian (and especially anti-Gnostic) polemic in the second and third centuries on the one hand and of Christian responses to pagan attacks on the other. The paper draws some parallels between Celsus and Plotinus, as well as