CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Jeffrey Fish and Kirk R. Sanders

The influential historiographer of philosophy Eduard Zeller, in his monumental *Die Philosophie der Griechen*, criticized the 'philosophical sterility' and 'intellectual torpor' of the Epicurean school, which, he claimed, remained more than any of its rivals confined throughout its history to the utterances of its founder.[1] In his abridged *Grundriß der Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie*, Zeller went so far as to assert that none of Epicurus' successors 'made any attempt worth mentioning' to the development of the school's doctrines.[2] A survey of much more recent histories of Hellenistic philosophy confirms that these stereotypes, which find antecedents already in antiquity,[3] have proven persistent.[4] As a consequence, studies of Epicurean philosophy remain disproportionately studies of Epicurus' philosophy. The present collection represents an attempt to help correct this imbalance and the misperceptions that sustain it. The essays contained herein explore various aspects of the interplay between tradition and innovation within Epicureanism.

That interplay begins with Epicurus himself, who was both heir to a rich philosophical tradition and the founder of a new philosophical school. The opening essay by Michael Erler, 'Autodidact and student: on the relationship of authority and autonomy in Epicurus and the Epicurean tradition',

[1] See Zeller 1923: 390–3. An English translation, based on an earlier edition of the same work, can be found in Zeller 1870: 394–6.

[2] Zeller 1883: 245–6. This particular claim was posthumously excised from the work's thirteenth (and final) edition by W. Nestle, who rewrote much of the material on Epicureanism; it is therefore absent from the most recent, English translation (= Zeller 1931); however, see Zeller 1890: 257.

[3] See, for example, the comments of Numenius preserved in Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* 14.5.3: 'The later Epicureans as a rule never expressed opposition either to one another or to Epicurus on any matter worth mentioning. On the contrary, they even condemned innovation as indecent, or rather impious' (ὑπῆρξέ τε ἐκ τοῦ ἐπὶ πλεῖστον τοῖς μετέπειτα Ἐπικουρείοις μηδ' αὐτοῖς εἰπεῖν πω ἐναντίον οὔτε ἀλλήλοις οὔτε Ἐπικούρῳ μηδὲν εἰς μηδέν, ὅτου καὶ μνησθῆναι ἄξιον· ἀλλ' ἔστιν αὐτοῖς παρανόμημα, μᾶλλον δὲ ἀσέβημα, καὶ κατέγνωσται τὸ καινοτομηθέν).

[4] Cf. the descriptions of the Epicurean school in Long 1986a: 11; Ferguson 1990: 2261; Hossenfelder 1995: 101; and Everson 1997: 190.

explores how Epicurus balanced these two contrasting roles. Critics both ancient and modern have viewed Epicurus' repeated, emphatic declarations of his own independence and originality as transparent attempts to mask the extent of his indebtedness to various predecessors. Erler instead situates Epicurus' admittedly outré claims within a larger literary and philosophical debate focused on the proper relationship between innovation and commitment to established authority. In staking out a position that sought to give both authority and innovation their proper places, Epicurus also established guidelines that would govern the ways in which subsequent generations of Epicureans related to their own tradition.

Later Epicureans admittedly harboured an almost religious reverence toward the school's founding fathers, a group that included, in addition to Epicurus himself, Metrodorus, Polyaenus and Hermarchus. Lucretius even goes so far in the proem to Book 5 of his *De rerum natura* as to proclaim Epicurus divine: *deus ille fuit*, *deus*.[5] Direct criticism of or open disagreement with any of 'The Men' (οἱ ἄνδρες), as these four were collectively known, was out of the question.[6] With the possible exception of some of Epicurus' earliest writings, which the author himself explicitly recognized as flawed,[7] their collective written works assumed canonical status within the school.[8] Such reverential attitudes are not, however, unique to the Epicureans among Greek philosophical schools. Similar things could be said of the role Zeno of Citium and the statements or writings attributed to him play for later Stoics, or even of Plato and certain of his dialogues for the later Academy. Indeed, David Sedley has argued convincingly elsewhere that a quasi-religious commitment to the authority of a founding figure, or figures, is itself the principal source of cohesion and identity for philosophical movements generally during the Hellenistic period.[9]

Moreover, as the history of Christianity (to cite only one obvious example) amply illustrates, deep-rooted allegiance to the same authority figures and canonical texts precludes neither intense exegetical disputes among the faithful nor substantive doctrinal innovations over time. The depiction of Epicurus and his colleagues as authors of a system so comprehensive,

[5] Lucr. 5.8.
[6] On the special status enjoyed by Epicurus, Metrodorus, Polyaenus and Hermarchus, see esp. Longo Auricchio 1978.
[7] See Sedley 1973.
[8] There were also apparently at least some disagreements among later Epicureans about the authenticity of certain works attributed to the founders of Epicureanism, including the still much-debated *Letter to Pythocles*; see, for example, fr. 25 in Angeli and Colaizzo 1979: 80.
[9] Sedley 1989: 97.

richly detailed, and internally consistent as to leave room for subsequent generations to indulge in only occasional, niggling disagreements about relatively trivial matters, fits poorly the ancient evidence. (The realm of physics, where Epicurus himself borrowed many details of his system wholesale from the pre-Platonic atomists Democritus and Leucippus, may constitute a relative exception.) The debate among Epicureans as to whether Epicurus' denunciation of rhetoric was intended to be universal or restricted to its political and forensic branches has been well documented.[10] The intended scope and precise meaning of Epicurus' disparaging comments regarding attempts either to compose or to theorize about poetry were subjects of similar controversy.[11] And in *De finibus*, Cicero reports disagreements among contemporary Epicureans even on issues of central concern to their ethical theory. According to Torquatus, Cicero's Epicurean spokesperson in the dialogue, members of the school differed as to whether the claim that pleasure is the good requires proof – and if so, of what sort[12] – as well as regarding the proper basis for friendship.[13] While it is typical in such debates for all sides to champion their own fidelity and to insist upon their opponents' heresy,[14] this fact only highlights the difficulty or danger in applying labels such as 'orthodox' and 'heterodox' to disputants within a developing and evolving tradition,[15] as was Epicureanism throughout the Hellenistic period.

Issues of continuity and faithful exegesis are among the many at stake in the ongoing debate between so-called 'realist' and 'idealist' interpretations of Epicurus' pronouncements on the gods. In broad terms, realist interpretations maintain that Epicurus regarded the gods as genuine atomic compounds possessed of the properties that correspond to our concept (*prolêpsis*) of them. Idealist interpretations, by contrast, claim that Epicurus did not mean to attribute a mind-independent existence to his gods, but rather intended them as some form of 'thought-constructs'.[16] Proponents of an idealist interpretation necessarily see the realism vis-à-vis the

[10] See ibid., esp. 107–17; Chandler 2006.
[11] On many aspects of which, see the essays collected in Obbink 1995.
[12] Cic. *Fin.* 1.29–31.
[13] Cic. *Fin.* 1.65–70. On this issue see Warren 2004 and ch. 6 by Armstrong in this volume.
[14] A passage from Philodemus' *On Anger*, a text that receives a good deal of attention in the present volume, affords one particularly striking example. In col. 45,15–16, Philodemus expresses his indignation at Epicureans who 'wish to be faithful to the books' (ἐπὶ τοῖς βυβλιακοῖς εἶναι θέλουσιν) and yet disagree with him on the sense intended by Epicurus and Metrodorus in their use of the word θυμός.
[15] Cf. Dillon 1988: 125.
[16] The chapters by Sedley and Konstan in this volume (= ch. 3 and ch. 4 respectively) catalogue the principal figures and works on each side of the debate.

gods evident in, for example, Lucretius' *De rerum natura* and Cicero's summary of Epicurean theology in *De natura deorum* as departures, intentional or otherwise, from Epicurus' own stated views. The publication in 1987 of A. A. Long and David Sedley's *The Hellenistic Philosophers* was instrumental in reviving the idealist interpretation, which had earlier achieved a measure of popularity among commentators in the nineteenth century. In the present volume's 'Epicurus' theological innatism', Sedley himself seeks to offer further, indirect support for such a reading by focusing on one previously overlooked aspect of the debate, namely, the origin of our concept of the gods. In regard to concept formation generally, Epicurus is an acknowledged empiricist: our *prolêpseis* are products of repeated sense impressions; 'a memory of that which has frequently appeared from outside' (μνήμην τοῦ πολλάκις ἔξωθεν φανέντος), in the words of Diogenes Laertius (DL 10.33). According to Sedley, however, our concept of the gods represents an important exception. Epicurus, he argues, regards this particular *prolêpsis* as innate, the product of a universal human predisposition to form idealizations of the good life. But if our concept of the gods – unlike, say, that of horses or cats – does not result from any direct empirical encounter with external, living beings corresponding to the concept, neither can it afford any evidence of their independent existence. A central, epistemological prop of the realist interpretation is thus called into question. David Konstan's 'Epicurus on the gods' attempts to meet this challenge head on. In this vigorous defence of a realist reading, Konstan attempts to explain both the empirical origins of our *prolêpsis* of the gods and the compatibility of one of its central features, the gods' indestructibility, with the basic tenets of Epicurean physics.

Developments in the study of the Herculaneum papyri have proven especially important in opening up exciting new avenues for the study of the Epicurean tradition. Herculaneum, a Roman resort town located not far from present-day Naples, was buried by the same volcanic eruption of Mt Vesuvius in AD 79 that destroyed the neighbouring city of Pompeii. As with Pompeii, excavation of Herculaneum began in the mid-eighteenth century. Among the first and most important finds was a large villa that likely belonged to L. Calpurnius Piso, father-in-law to Julius Caesar and an important figure in the life of first-century Rome in his own right.[17] (He served, for example, as consul in 58 BC.) Inside this villa were found, in addition to large numbers of artistic treasures, the remains of a vast library

[17] On Piso as the villa's likely owner, see Sider 2005: 5–8; cf. Capasso 1991: 43–64.

of papyri, the surviving fragments of which are now housed at the *Biblioteca Nazionale* in Naples. Those papyri recovered to date are almost entirely philosophical in nature and Epicurean in origin. They include the only extant copies, partially preserved, of books from Epicurus' own magnum opus, *On Nature*.[18] Most of the hundreds of other works now identified were otherwise completely unknown to us.[19] Of these, by far the largest number were authored by a previously obscure Epicurean philosopher of the first century BC named Philodemus.

Prior to the rediscovery of Herculaneum, the only writings attributed to Philodemus known to have survived antiquity were some thirty-odd epigrams.[20] While his philosophical writings – which may never have been, strictly speaking, 'published'[21] – were first discovered over two centuries ago, it is only as the result of much more recent developments that they have finally begun to attract the attention they deserve.[22] The first of these developments was the establishment in 1970 of the *Centro Internazionale per lo Studio dei Papiri Ercolanesi* (CISPE) under the direction of Professor Marcello Gigante. This was followed in 1971 by the appearance of the pioneering journal *Cronache Ercolanesi* with Gigante as editor and the initiation of *La Scuola di Epicuro*, a series of editions of Herculaneum papyri produced under the sponsorship of CISPE.[23] CISPE opened access to the papyri themselves to a broad range of international scholars; *Cronache Ercolanesi* and *La Scuola di Epicuro* helped disseminate these scholars' discoveries to an ever wider audience.[24]

[18] For a discussion of the work, see Sedley 1998a: 94–132.

[19] Details regarding the various papyri can be found in the latest catalogue of Herculaneum papyri, Del Mastro 2005, and in earlier printed catalogues, Gigante 1979; Capasso 1989; and Del Mastro 2000.

[20] These have been collected, together with an introduction and commentary, in Sider 1997, along with a recently discovered papyrus listing the opening words of a few dozen more.

[21] So Sedley 1989: 105; cf. also Obbink 2004: 73–84.

[22] The early attempts at editions of Herculaneum texts were by no means entirely fruitless (see Capasso 1991 for their general history), but the fact that many of them proved unreliable helped to cast a shadow of scepticism over the entire field of Herculaneum papyrology. The unreliability of earlier editions was often a result of their complete dependence on the pencil transcriptions (disegni) produced at the time of each papyrus' unrolling, or on published etchings derived from these, rather than on an autopsy of the fragments themselves.

[23] For a brief history of CISPE and a summary of Marcello Gigante's many contributions to the study of the Herculaneum papyri, see Arrighetti et al. 2002.

[24] Important contributions have also been made under the direction of Mario Capasso in *Papyrologica Lupiensia* (1991–present) and in various other publications. Among the most ambitious projects presently under way in Herculaneum papyrology is the Philodemus Translation Project, directed by David Blank, Richard Janko and Dirk Obbink, which promises editions of all of Philodemus' aesthetic works. The first volumes of the projected series have already appeared, editions of *On Poems* 1 and *On Poems* 3–4, (= Janko 2000 and Janko 2010 respectively).

About Philodemus very few biographical details are known with any degree of certainty.[25] He was born in Gadara, a famous Hellenistic city located in the south of modern-day Syria, sometime between 110 and 100 BC, and died, presumably in Italy, sometime between 40 and 35 BC. In his youth, he studied philosophy at the Epicurean Garden in Athens under Zeno of Sidon, the school's scholarch, or leader, at the time.[26] He appears to have emigrated to Italy sometime between 80 and 70 BC. Once in Italy, Philodemus befriended Piso, under whose patronage he rose to prominence in contemporary Roman philosophical and literary circles. Cicero, despite his general disdain for Epicurus and Epicureanism, refers to Philodemus in *De finibus* as a 'most excellent and learned' man.[27] Even Cicero's earlier, blistering attack on Piso delivered before the Roman Senate in 55 BC (= *In Pisonem*), includes praise of Philodemus as 'refined' – at least when not in Piso's company[28] – and credits him with being an accomplished philosopher and poet.[29] Cicero, Philodemus and Piso all figure prominently in Jeffrey Fish's 'Not all politicians are Sisyphus: what Roman Epicureans were taught about politics'. Drawing upon Cicero for support, scholars have tended to dismiss the philosophical commitments of Piso and other Roman statesmen as largely ornamental, while pointing to Philodemus' accommodation of political participation as evidence of his own heterodoxy. Against such claims, Fish argues that Cicero's discussions of Epicurean views on politics are no less suspect than elements of his forensic rhetoric, and that Epicureans had from the start offered the benefits of their philosophy to politicians.

Fish's argument is nicely complemented by David Armstrong's essay, 'Epicurean virtues, Epicurean friendship: Cicero vs the Herculaneum papyri', which connects misconceptions regarding politics to ones regarding related Epicurean attitudes toward virtue and friendship. Armstrong argues that inaccuracies, distortions and omissions in relevant reports by Cicero are once again largely to blame for these misconceptions, including the widespread belief that Epicurus' most enthusiastic declarations on friendship and virtue are sharply at odds with his core ethical commitments. At the end of Book 2 of *De finibus*, Cicero has Torquatus, the dialogue's Epicurean spokesman, express a desire to defer to an authority

[25] Sider, 1997: 3–12, offers a clear and concise biography. The most detailed account of Philodemus' life and works to date is that of Erler 1994: 289–362. For an excellent account in English, see Asmis 1990: 2369–406.

[26] On whom, see also Erler 1994: 268–72 and Kleve and Del Mastro 2000.

[27] Cic. *Fin.* 2.119. [28] Cic. *Pis.* 68.

[29] Ibid., 70. On Cicero's portrait of Philodemus in this particular speech, see esp. Gigante 1983a: 35–54 and Griffin 2001.

such as Philodemus rather than reply himself to Cicero's preceding litany of criticisms. It therefore seems especially fitting that Armstrong seeks to correct some of the deficiencies in Cicero's account of Epicurean ethics by appealing extensively to evidence from a variety of Philodemus' rediscovered works.

The issue of Cicero's reliability as a source also figures prominently in Holger Essler's 'Cicero's use and abuse of Epicurean theology'. The relationship between Cicero's *De natura deorum* (*ND*) and the Epicurean treatise *On Piety* (*De pietate*), of which Philodemus is widely considered the most likely author,[30] has already received substantial scholarly attention.[31] Essler turns his attention to possible connections between the Epicurean portion of Cicero's dialogue and another, lesser-known work by Philodemus entitled *On the Gods* (*De dis*). The comparison proves especially instructive regarding the overall structure of Philodemus' treatise, whose surviving fragments can in isolation seem a jumble of tangentially related arguments and observations. Also revelatory is what Essler's analysis suggests about Cicero's possible methodology for constructing the critique of Epicurean theology that comprises the second half of *ND* 1. Essler builds a circumstantial case that Cicero mined the works of Epicureans authors such as Philodemus for passages explicitly addressing criticisms of Epicurean theology, and then proceeded to incorporate those same criticisms into his own polemic without including, or frequently even acknowledging, the associated Epicurean response.

Philodemus' rediscovered ethical writings are the particular focus of the essays by Elizabeth Asmis, Voula Tsouna and Kirk Sanders. Central to each is Philodemus' *On Anger*, the only substantially extant treatise by an Epicurean concerning an emotion. The development of any general theory of the emotions is itself quite likely to have been an innovation of later Epicureanism; certainly we have no evidence that Epicurus dealt with the emotions in any systematic fashion. Nevertheless, the theory of 'natural' and 'empty' emotions that underpins Philodemus' discussion of anger has long been recognized as an attempt to extend Epicurus' classification of desires to a new, related context.[32] (Insofar as the Epicureans regard both beliefs and desires as essential to emotions, such an extension is perfectly reasonable.) Epicurus' classificatory schema for desires, however, is in fact tripartite: not only are natural desires opposed to empty ones, but the

[30] On the issue of authorship, see Obbink 1996: 88–99.
[31] In addition to Obbink 1996, see vol. 1 of Pease 1955–8; Dyck 2003.
[32] See, e.g., Annas 1989: 145–64; Procopé 1993: 363–86. For Epicurus' classification of desires, see *Ep. Men.* 127–8; cf. *KD* 29.

genus of natural desire is itself subdivided into two species, 'necessary' and 'non-necessary'. In 'The necessity of anger in Philodemus' *On Anger*', Asmis suggests that reading an analogue of this further distinction between necessary and non-necessary desires into Philodemus' analysis of natural anger may help to resolve otherwise intractable difficulties associated with his discussion of the anger experienced by a sage.

Anger was a popular topic in ancient literature.[33] Tsouna's 'Philodemus, Seneca and Plutarch on anger' compares and contrasts Philodemus' treatise with two subsequent, ancient works on the same subject, Seneca's *De ira* and Plutarch's *On the Control of Anger*, in an effort both to clarify certain philosophical issues common to all and to suggest avenues for further investigation. Despite the shared subject matter, Tsouna reveals how each of the authors in question pursues a distinct agenda in his discussion of the emotion. Differences in the three philosophers' underlying commitments are no doubt part of the explanation. But Tsouna suggests that distinct social and psychological factors may have played an equally important role in determining the outlook of each respective author.

The distinction at the heart of Philodemus' *On Anger* also figures prominently in Sanders' 'Philodemus and the fear of premature death'. Drawing attention to analogous features in *On Death*'s discussion of death-related fears and the treatment of anger in *On Anger*, he argues that Philodemus divided fear, like anger, into 'natural' and 'empty' species. Armed with this distinction, Sanders attempts to show how Epicureans could, and did, accept certain fears of death, including the fear of premature death (once properly understood), as perfectly rational. The picture that emerges from his analysis is of an Epicurean thanatology more nuanced and accommodating than previously recognized.

Collectively, these nine original contributions afford both an excellent overview of the state of the art in Epicurean studies and an indication of its future directions. The breadth and variety of approaches represented herein convey the vitality not only of contemporary scholarship concerning the Epicurean tradition but also of that tradition itself. One hopes that they will also help put to rest the lingering, popular misconception of Epicureanism as a philosophical tradition that stagnated with the passing of its founders.

[33] See, e.g., Harris 2001: 3–16.

CHAPTER 2

Autodidact and student: on the relationship of authority and autonomy in Epicurus and the Epicurean tradition

Michael Erler

I INTRODUCTION

Ancient criticism of Epicureanism was characterized by a paradox. Some opponents reproached Epicurus' zeal for originality, which, they emphasized, was actually intended to cover up his own dependence on his predecessors, and so was self-contradictory.[1] On the other hand, opponents complained about the lack of originality and rigid dogmatism of later Epicureans, who allegedly advanced no positions of their own but instead endeavoured to refer everything back to their master, Epicurus: *referre ad unum*, as Seneca puts it.[2] Similar criticisms of Epicurus and the Epicurean tradition are to be found in many modern commentators, though this tendency has been somewhat mitigated in certain recent discussions.[3] It has been acknowledged, for example, that the Epicurean tradition allowed for flexibility and individual emphases.[4] There have also been attempts to qualify Epicurus' claims to originality by noting that such pronouncements are largely restricted to contexts involving his own critical engagements with specific educational figures, as for example his dispute with his schoolteacher over Hesiod's Chaos,[5] while elsewhere Epicurus is perfectly open about his familiarity with his predecessors' doctrines.[6] Whatever the weight of such considerations, however, they fail to eliminate the impression that Epicurus' claims to independence were somehow extraordinary. Both his general attitude and the magnitude of his self-confidence are evidenced by the passage from a letter to Eurylochus in

I would like to thank Jeffrey Fish and Kirk Sanders, who translated this essay, for their many helpful suggestions.

[1] See Cic. *ND* 1.72–3; and Numenius fr. 24.33–6 des Places 1973. For further charges of incoherence, see, e.g., Cic. *Tusc.* 5.26 and Lact. *Div. inst.* 7.3.13; on the latter, see the comments of Ogilvie 1978: 84–7.

[2] Sen. *Ep.* 33.4.

[3] See, e.g., Laks 1976, esp. 68–9; and Sedley 1989.

[4] See Angeli 1988, esp. 86; Sedley 1989; and Erler 1992a.

[5] Cf. Sedley 1976b: 135.

[6] Cf. Gigante 1981, 1992 and 1999.

which Epicurus, in the context of criticizing his own teacher Nausiphanes, proclaims himself to have been 'his own pupil' (ἀκοῦσαι . . . ἑαυτοῦ).[7]

Epicurus' followers apparently viewed him similarly. No doubt his decidedly reserved stance vis-à-vis the attainments of traditional Greek *paideia*, including poetry and rhetoric, influenced their conception of him as a man eminently and uniquely qualified for the pursuit of philosophical truths.[8] Lucretius in particular saw in Epicurus an autodidact who discovered on his own initiative and from his own resources the *ratio vitae*, singling him out for praise as someone who 'sought and found within his own breast,[9] and left behind for us' knowledge of the physical world (5.4–5), or 'the recognized majesty of nature' (*maiestas cognita rerum*; 5.7).[10] Clearly, Epicurus' profession to be self-educated was not merely a feature of his own self-understanding but also a key element in the image that subsequent members of his school constructed of him.[11]

In the following discussion, I shall take seriously Epicurus' claims to independence and attempt to show how despite their extraordinary nature, they may also be seen as part of a tradition concerned with the relationship between self-education (τὸ αὐτοδίδακτον) and outside instruction (διδαχή). By examining these traditional aspects as well as the contemporary context, I hope also to show that there is no conflict between Epicurus' claims and his observed willingness to learn from his predecessors. Originality was for Epicurus less a matter of being closed off from tradition than of standing in a proper relationship to it. To this end, he established straightforward guidelines that allowed him as founder of a school to appropriate material from existing philosophical and literary traditions while still maintaining a critical distance from them, and that allowed his students room for personal emphases, notwithstanding their own firm commitment to school dogma. As practised by the Epicureans, what Seneca labels *referre ad unum* did not preclude a certain free rein. Rather than being contrary to Epicurean dogma, such freedom was in fact integral to it.

2 THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT

With his claim to independence in doctrinal matters, Epicurus clearly wished to position himself in a debate that played out during the Hellenistic

[7] DL 10.13; cf. S.E. *Adv. math.* 1.1–5 (= Nausiphanes 75A 7 Diels and Kranz 1951).
[8] For Epicurus' criticism of traditional *paideia*, see, e.g., Ath. 13.588a (= fr. 117 Us.) and DL 10.6 (= fr. 163 Us.).
[9] Epicurus and his followers, like many other ancient Greek philosophers, believed the physical location of the mind to be in the chest.
[10] Cf. Lucr. 1.62–77 and 3.1–17. [11] On autodidactism in Epicurus, see Balaudé 1994: 17–28.