

# The Atheism of Epicurus

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EPICURUS, who defines himself in opposition to notorious atheists of the classical period, argues emphatically in extant works for the existence of a supremely blessed, living, and imperishable form of divinity (τὸν θεὸν ζῶον ἄφθαρτον καὶ μακάριον). Yet there was a tradition current in many circles in antiquity that Epicurus was himself an atheist;<sup>1</sup> and in modern times his hedonism and his opposition to teleology have often been equated with a general godlessness and contempt for traditional religion.<sup>2</sup> Scholars have long puzzled over just how this discrepancy

<sup>1</sup> E.g. Cic. *Nat.D.* 1.123 citing Posidonius (fr.22a Edelstein-Kidd=346 Theiler, quoted 208 *infra*); 1.85 (Cotta). Cf. Sext. *Emp. Math.* 9.58 (209 *infra*); Plut. *Mor.* 1102B, 1112D, 1119D-E, 1123E; Lact. *De ira Dei* 4.7 (Posidonius fr.22b E.-K.=346 Th.); *Inst.Epit.* 31.3. A more complete list in M. Winiarczyk, "Wer galt im Altertum als Atheist?" *Philologus* 128 (1984) 157–83 at 168–70.

<sup>2</sup> A common sentiment is Clem. Alex. *Protr.* 5.66.5 (GCS 52 [15] p.51.6–9 Stählin-Treu): Ἐπικούρου μὲν γὰρ μόνου καὶ ἐκὼν ἐκλήσομαι, ὃς οὐδὲν μέλειν οἶεται τῷ θεῷ, διὰ πάντων ἀσεβῶν. In modern times such representation is commonplace (e.g. E. Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen* III.1<sup>5</sup> [Leipzig 1923] 429f, 437 n.2), including a long line of German idealists, from Hegel through Marx to Sartre. Early protests were issued by F. Bacon (*Essays* no. 16), P. Gassendi (*De vita et moribus Epicuri libri* [Leiden 1647], *Animadversiones in decimum librum Diogenes Laertii* [1649]), and later by G. Guissani (*Studi Lucretiani* [Torino 1845]). The first English translator of Lucretius, a young Puritan named Lucy Hutchinson who worked in the late 1640's, complains in her preface that she did not really like the poem and only translated it so that people might take a warning from its preposterous impiety (C. A. Gordon, *A Bibliography of Lucretius*<sup>2</sup>, ed. E. J. Kenney [Suffolk 1985] 169). Even the editors of the earliest published portion of Philodemus' *De pietate* could write: "The Stoics and the Epicureans, who made lofty pretensions to popular applause, as the philosophical expounders of the popular religion, loudly accused each other of that atheism, of which both affected to be abhorrent, and of which both were so indubitably culpable. The atheism of the Epicureans seems not to have been questioned by any men of learning, though their exoteric doctrines were so well disguised as not to offend the multitude" (W. Drummond and R. Walpole, *Herculanensia* [London 1810] 123); cf. *Quarterly Review* 3 (1810) 20, which characterized the subject of the treatise as "the piety of atheism."

could have arisen in our ancient sources.<sup>3</sup> Now we know. New work on the papyri recovered from Herculaneum shows that the charge of atheism against Epicurus had its origin in polemics over theology, epistemology, and cultural history, played out in the philosophical schools of the Hellenistic period. More specifically, I shall show here that the charge stemmed partly from Epicurus' rejection of teleology and divine providence, partly from the conviction that no one was ever in a better position than Epicurus to dispense with the gods, once and for all. As a result, many in antiquity held that he that he actually did so. If Epicurus was in fact an atheist, his views would hold little interest for the history of religions or of philosophy. If he was not, how did he come to be regarded as such?

Our evidence is twofold. We have to deal, on the one hand, with the reports of individual doxographers—among them Cicero, Sextus Empiricus, and Plutarch—each with his own philosophical aims and predilections, each dependent upon his own selection of sources. Over against the doxographic record we now have, on the other hand, the new evidence from Herculaneum. One text in particular, an apologetic *De pietate* by the first-century Epicurean Philodemus, presents important information on the issue of Epicurus' atheism. By reconsidering the doxographical record in light of this evidence we may obtain a much clearer picture and chronology of the arguments in the Hellenistic debate. I begin with a general comment on the incidence of atheism in antiquity and a brief review of the climate of opinion (including Epicurus' own theological views) in which such charges arose, then turn to new versions of several texts that reshape our understanding of the problem.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Cic. *Nat.D.* 1.86, where the Academic speaker Cotta declares: *ille (sc. Epicurus) vero deos esse putat*, and later in the same book (1.123) says that *nullos esse deos Epicuro videri*; cf. A. S. Pease, *M. Tulli Ciceronis De Natura Deorum Libri III* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1955) 36–45, esp. 43–45. A similar discrepancy exists in Sextus: *Math.* 9.58 includes Epicurus in a list of atheists, yet this is directly contravened at 64, and at 43–47 is related Epicurus' physical account of the gods: see R. Philippson, *RE Suppl.* 7A (1939) 1154; Pease 44f.

<sup>4</sup> A new edition of *De pietate*, edd. A. Henrichs and D. Obbink, is in preparation. The standard earlier edition is Th. Gomperz, *Philodem über Frömmigkeit (=Herculianische Studien 2 [Leipzig 1866])*, to be supplemented with caution by R. Philippson, "Zur Philodems über die Frömmigkeit," *Hermes* 55 (1920) 225–78, 364–72; 56 (1921) 355–410; and the 1923 Königsberg dissertation of A. Schober, *Philodemi De Pietate pars prior*, now printed in *CronErcol* 18 (1988) 67–125, with

## I. Atheism in Antiquity

Atheism in the ancient world was never a well-defined or ideologically fixed position.<sup>5</sup> But deviation from a proper attitude towards the gods, particularly as recipients of cult, could result in a charge of impiety or in the suspicion of atheism;<sup>6</sup> and we know of many atheists by name, most of them philosophers who worked in or around Athens in the late fifth century B.C. Their views ranged from explicit denial of the gods' existence to a rejection of the grounds for such belief. Philodemus provides a classification of opinion:<sup>7</sup> (1) those who say that it is unknown whether there are

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a preface by Marcello Gigante (65f). Numerous re-editions of individual fragments have appeared in recent years, including one substantial continuous portion: A. HENRICHs, "Die Kritik der stoischen Theologie im *P.Hercul.* 1428," *CronErcol* 4 (1974) 5–32 (hereafter 'Henrichs'); cf. "Towards a New Edition of Philodemus' Treatise *On Piety*," *GRBS* 13 (1972) 67–98.

<sup>5</sup> A. Henrichs, "The Atheism of Prodicus," *CronErcol* 6 (1976) 15–21 at 20. Further on atheism: P. Decharme, *La critique de traditions religieuses chez les grecs* (Paris 1904); J. Geffcken, *Zwei griechische Apologeten* (Leipzig/Berlin 1907); F. Mauthner, *Der Atheismus und seine Geschichte im Abendlande* (Stuttgart 1920–23); A. B. Drachmann, *Atheism in Pagan Antiquity* (London 1922); W. K. C. Guthrie, *OCD*<sup>2</sup> s.v. "Atheism"; W. Nestle, "Atheismus," *RAC* 1 (1950) 866–70; O. Gigon, "Atheismus," *Lexikon der alten Welt* (Zurich/Stuttgart 1965) 370f; W. Fahr, θεοῦς νομίζειν. *Zum Problem der Anfänge des Atheismus bei den Griechen* (Hildesheim 1970); D. Babut, *La religion des philosophes grecques* (Paris 1974); A. Henrichs, "Two Doxographical Notes: Democritus and Prodicus on Religion," *HSCP* 79 (1975) 93–124; K. J. Dover, "The Freedom of the Intellectual in Greek Society," *Talanta* 7 (1976) 25–54; P. A. Meijer, "Philosophers, Intellectuals and Religion in Hellas," in *Faith, Hope and Worship: Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World*, ed. H. S. Versnel (Leiden 1980) 216–63, and the standard bibliography on the major 'atheists' (including Epicurus), esp. Diagoras, Prodicus, Critias, Anaxagoras, Protagoras, Euhemerus, and Theodorus.

<sup>6</sup> E. Derrenne, *Les procès d'impiété intentés aux philosophes à Athènes* (= *Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l'Université de Liège* 45 [Liège 1930]); J. Rudhardt, "La définition du délit d'impiété d'après la législation attique," *MusHelv* 17 (1960) 87–105; M. Ostwald, *From Popular Sovereignty to the Sovereignty of Law* (Berkeley 1986), esp. App. A–C (525–50).

<sup>7</sup> Philod. *De piet.* (*P.Hercul.* 1428 coll. xiv.32–xv.8) p.25 Henrichs. Sextus' division (*Math.* 9.50f), by contrast, is simply into those who say οὐκ εἶναι θεοῦς, and those who, like good Pyrrhonist skeptics, suspend judgment on the question. I do not know whence Philodemus' classification derives; perhaps it is his own. It is in any case unlikely to be Academic (e.g. Carneades or Antiochus) because it does not exhibit the conflation of categories (2) and (3) apparent in Sextus' grouping, taken over from Carneades.

any gods or what they are like (ἢ τοὺς ἄγνωστον εἶ τινές εἰσι θε[οὶ] λέγοντας ἢ ποῖοί τινές εἰσιν); (2) those who say openly that the gods do not exist (ἢ τοὺς δι[α]ρρήδην ὅτι οὐκ εἰ[σ]ὶν ἀποφαινόμενους); and (3) those who clearly imply it (ἢ φανεροὺς ὄντας ὡς ἀνήρουν).

This scheme implies that the charge of atheism could be incurred for something less than an outright denial of the existence of the gods, but the later doxographical and biographical traditions tended to lump Philodemus' first and third groups into the second. The standard rosters of atheists, for instance, regularly if falsely include Protagoras among "those who say that god does not exist" (Sext. Emp. *Math.* 9.56, cf. 50f). In view of explicit statements that Epicurus did deny the existence of the gods, I shall take such denial, or blatant disregard for their cult (commonly construed as tantamount to denial), to be the main points at issue—though Epicurus' views might well turn out to be in some weaker, rhetorical sense 'atheistic' or 'heretical' by implication in the judgment of a particular individual.<sup>8</sup>

## II. *Gnosis Theon*

Denial of the existence of the gods as a point of doctrine is not generally associated with any of the philosophical schools of the Hellenistic period. On the contrary, Sextus Empiricus reports that, for any philosopher who wished to put forth positive views, a doctrine about the gods was by far *the most necessary*, and that it seemed so *to the dogmatists themselves*.<sup>9</sup> We may suppose he meant that any view of the nature and influence of the gods is especially open to suspicion and thus constitutes a kind of natural division between skeptical and dogmatic schools: anyone who purports to philosophize dogmatically would be faced with a challenge from skeptical quarters to produce a theology not only consistent with one's own system but also capable of some measure of

<sup>8</sup> In the way, for instance, that a Moslem might accuse a Christian of being an 'atheist', or when a newspaper editorial alleges that the 'bishop of Durham is an atheist' for taking a certain position in a church controversy. None of the persons engaging in such rhetoric seriously believes the other denies the existence of a divinity. The concept of 'heresy' on the other hand, familiar from western church history, requires a sense of orthodoxy which simply did not obtain in ancient religion.

<sup>9</sup> *Math.* 9.13: ὁ περὶ θεῶν λόγος πάνυ ἀναγκαιότατος εἶναι δοκεῖ τοῖς δογματικῶς φιλοσοφοῦσιν.

certainty. For Academic skeptics, as for the Pyrrhonist Sextus, beliefs about the gods afford no more or less truth than any other opinion. In every case skeptics advise suspension of judgment concerning certain knowledge (ἐποχή περὶ πάντων); they maintain that in the balance of dispute over any given proposition, each opposing argument cancels the other (ἢ τῶν ἀντικειμένων λόγων ἰσοσθένεια), thus making suspension of judgment a dialectical necessity.<sup>10</sup> Propositions about the gods—their diverse origins, fortunes, and significance among mankind, and the wide variation in ritual, literature, and belief fostered by Greek polytheism—are notoriously susceptible to such analysis. Thus they present an essential challenge, as Sextus suggests, to dogmatic philosophers—especially those who, like Stoics and Epicureans, take an emphatically dogmatic position on the issue of epistemology.

Unlike those dualists who adopt a separation of the intelligible world from the world of physical perception (on the grounds that particulars are unstable and hence unknowable), both Stoics and Epicureans are staunch materialists. They ground all knowledge of the intelligible world in sense perception but allow for a complementary system of inference from signs and ‘universal views’ (κοινὰ ἔννοιαι). Thus both arrive at a position (variously argued) whereby certainty of knowledge is attainable, not only regarding mundane appearances and everyday life, but also about complex questions of ethics, physics, and cosmology. For the sake of coherence and consistency, and in order to appropriate within their systems a fair portion of pervasive cultural experience, the criterion

<sup>10</sup> See A. A. Long, “Stoa and Sceptical Academy: Origins and Growth of a Tradition,” *LCM* 5 (1978) 161–74; G. Striker, “Sceptical Strategies,” in M. Schofield *et al.*, ed., *Doubt and Dogmatism* (Oxford 1980) 54–83; D. N. Sedley, “The Motivation of Greek Scepticism,” in M. F. Burnyeat, ed., *The Sceptical Tradition* (Berkeley 1983) 9–23; M. Frede, “The Sceptic’s Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge,” in R. Rorty *et al.*, ed., *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy* (Cambridge 1984) 225–54 (= *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* [Minneapolis 1987] 201–22); H. Tarrant, *Scepticism or Platonism? The Philosophy of the Fourth Academy* (Cambridge 1985); A. M. Ioppolo, *Opinione e scienze: il dibattito tra Stoici e Accademici nel III e nel II secolo a.C.* (Naples 1986), reviewed by J. Annas, “The Heirs of Socrates,” *Phronesis* 33 (1988) 100–12. The approach is best documented in Plut. *Adv. Col.* (Arcesilaus and Middle Academy); Cic. *Acad.* 2 (Carneades); Sext. *Emp. Math.* 7, 9 (Pyrrhonists); for the intervention of Antiochus, see J. Gucker, *Antiochus and the Late Academy* (= *Hypomnemata* 56 [Göttingen 1978]), with D. N. Sedley, “The End of the Academy,” *Phronesis* 26 (1981) 67–75.

of certain knowledge can be applied to issues of theology and religion from both an anthropological (or cultural-historical) and a purely theoretical point of view.<sup>11</sup> Although they arrive at theological positions widely divergent in detail, both Stoics and Epicureans, by deploying an array of sophisticated interpretive techniques, thus claim to have adequately explained, and therefore to have marshalled the support of, the mass of commonly held beliefs about the gods against the erratic δόξαι of deviant thinking (including, of course, the 'views' of their skeptical opponents).<sup>12</sup> In regard to theology and religion, this position allows Stoics and Epicureans to accept both the existence of gods, as a necessary point of doctrine, and the conceptual validity of (or, in the case of the Stoics, tolerance for) popular religious customs and practices.

At some point in the early history of the debate over epistemology, partly in response to the dogmatists' appeal to the *sensus communis*, it was pointed out<sup>13</sup> that an impressive body of distinguished thinkers had in fact cast doubt (either explicitly or, more often, implicitly) upon the validity of sense impressions and common beliefs, and upon the possibility of certain knowledge.<sup>14</sup> This posed considerable difficulty for the dogmatists, who were now

<sup>11</sup> M. Schofield, "Preconception, Argument, and God," in Schofield (*supra* n.10) 283–308; P. A. Brunt, "Philosophy and Religion in the Late Republic," in M. Griffin *et al.*, ed., *Philosophia Togata: Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society* (Oxford 1989) 97–119.

<sup>12</sup> So also Philodemus' use of the early technical term συνοικείωσις in *De Pietate* (*P.Hercul.* 1428 VII–IX) to criticize Chrysippus' use of allegory; A. Henrichs, "Philodemus De Pietate als mythographische Quelle," *CronErcol* 3 (1975) 5–38 at 16–18; F. Buffière, *Les mythes d'Homère et la pensée grecque*<sup>2</sup> (Paris 1973) Index s.v. "Philodème." For Stoics: M. Schofield, "The Syllogisms of Zeno of Citium," *Phronesis* 28 (1983) 31–58.

<sup>13</sup> By Arcesilaus, who of course wrote nothing. Our best evidence is therefore the contemporary attack on Arcesilaus by Epicurus' pupil Colotes (as preserved by Plutarch, who three centuries later still felt compelled to refute it). Colotes counters Arcesilaus (whom he never in fact mentions) by arguing against certain figures adduced by Arcesilaus as authorities—though these figures are not the only ones attacked by Colotes: see P. A. Vander Waerdt, "Colotes and the Epicurean Refutation of Skepticism" (225–67 *infra*).

<sup>14</sup> See Cic. *Acad.* 2.14, 72–76 (*cf.* 1.44–46); Plut. *Mor.* 1108B, 1121F–22A; Sedley (1983 [*supra* n.10]) 15f with n.27; P. De Lacy and B. Einarson, in the Loeb edition of Plutarch's *Moralia* XIV (London 1967) 155f, 165; P. DeLacy, "Colotes' First Criticism of Democritus," in J. Mau and G. Schmidt, ed., *Isonomia. Studien zur Gleichheitsvorstellung im griechischen Denken* (Berlin 1964) 67–86; Vander Waerdt (*supra* n.13) 247–53.

faced with the unhappy prospect of defending κοινὰ ἔννοιαι (e.g. about the gods) without the support of the *consensus omnium*. In response to challenges from skeptical quarters over the κριτήριο τῆς ἀληθείας, the dogmatists counter by intensifying their dogmatism. The Epicureans stress their claim for validity of sense perception to the point of universality (Epicurus' infamous dictum "all perceptions are true," D.L. 10.32, 146f; Sext. Emp. *Math.* 7.201–10; Plut. *Mor.* 1109–10) against the introduction by Stoics of a special kind of unfalsifiable perception (the φαντασία καταληπτική).<sup>15</sup> Epicureans further develop an argument according to which any thinker's wholesale dismissal of ordinary perception and commonly held views is, if not in fact impious, on a practical level quite perilous because, if taken to undermine all confidence in physical reality, it would make it impossible not only to engage in rational debate and decisive action but even to live life as we know it.<sup>16</sup>

If not entirely valid, this self-refutation argument has a certain rhetorical persuasiveness.<sup>17</sup> It also drew into the debate the cultural

<sup>15</sup> G. Striker, "Epicurus on the Truth of Sense Impressions," *AGPh* 59 (1977) 125–42; C. C. W. Taylor, "All perceptions are true," in Schofield (*supra* n.10) 105–24; F. H. Sandbach, "*Phantasia Kataleptike*," in A. A. Long, ed., *Problems in Stoicism* (London 1971) 9–21; M. Frede, "Stoics and Sceptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions," in Burnyeat (*supra* n.10) 65–93.

<sup>16</sup> The argument from 'livability' appears fully developed already in Colotes' attack on Arcesilaus, and has a long history in Hellenistic philosophy. Stoics use it against the skeptical Academy under the name ἀπραξία (Plut. *Mor.* 1122A; Cic. *Acad.* 2.25; D.L. 7.171, 9.107), or alternatively named the Γόργων (with a double entendre characteristic of Stoic names for logical puzzles) since the argument is said to "turn one's opponents to stone": Cic. *Ad fam.* 9.8.1; Arr. *Epict.Diss.* 1.5.1–3. Pyrrhonists refer to it as ἀνεπεργησία (Sext. Emp. *Math.* 9.162) and ἀνεπέργητος (*Pyr.* 1.23f, 226; *Math.* 7.30). See also Striker (*supra* n.10) 63 with n.25; M. F. Burnyeat, "Can the Sceptic Live his Scepticism?" in Schofield (*supra* n.10) 20–53 (= *The Sceptical Tradition* [*supra* n.10] 117–48).

<sup>17</sup> M. F. Burnyeat, "Protagoras and Self-refutation in Later Greek Philosophy," *PhilRev* 85 (1976) 44–69, esp. 62ff, on the earliest form, which occurs in Epicurus; "The Upside-down Back-to-front Sceptic of Lucretius IV 472," *Philologus* 122 (1978) 197–206; D. N. Sedley, "Epicurus' Refutation of Determinism," in Σοζήτης: *Studi sull' Epicureismo greco e romano offerti à Marcello Gigante* I (Naples 1983) 1–51. On the problems with the validity of the self-refutation argument, see Burnyeat, who stresses the argument's rhetorical appeal (*cf.* however Vander Waerdt [*supra* n.13] 242–45). The argument strikes many as a crude sophism. It must be remembered that philosophy in antiquity was conducted on a largely oral and agonistic basis; the ability to silence one's opponent in the public forum counted most.

stigma that in the popular mind attached to a denial of the established order of things.<sup>18</sup> Thus the dogmatists characterized the skeptical position as tantamount to suicidal destruction of both individual and society. The argument is perhaps best known from Lucretius (4.472ff), but we have earlier examples of its use against Academic skepticism. Epicurus' pupil Colotes, for instance, argues that a "universal suspension of judgment" (ἐποχή περὶ πάντων), if consistently adopted, would result in the disappearance of the institutions characteristic of civilization and reduce the life of men to that of beasts.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the most striking illustration of this stage of the debate is Epicurus' claim (preserved by Diogenes of Oenoanda) that Protagoras, in saying that he knew not whether there were gods, meant exactly the same thing (τὸ αὐτό) as Diagoras, who said there were none at all.<sup>20</sup> Epicurus' often ridiculed conclusion about the 'atheism' of Protagoras (who never said οὐκ εἶναι θεούς) turns out to be true from the Epicureans' point of view: for Protagoras, like Diagoras, had precipitously destroyed the traditional foundation for the beliefs upon which they based knowledge of the gods' existence and nature.

### III. Epicurus and the Gods

To judge from his extant writings, Epicurus had no doubts about the necessity of giving an account of the gods. He seems in fact to

<sup>18</sup> On the motif of philosophical polemic see esp. H. Reiche, "Myth and Magic in Cosmological Polemics," *RhM* 114 (1971) 296–329, esp. 304ff.

<sup>19</sup> Plut. *Mor.* 1124D. Part of the argument is that civilization could not have developed as it did if sense perception were not reliable and basic beliefs true: the very existence of cities and laws, like the demonstrated ability of even the skeptic to live, entails that the skeptic's position is a false one. In this form the argument appears prominently in *De pietate* (*P.Hercul.* 1428 xiv.24–xv.13) p.25 Henrichs, but deployed against *Stoic* theology (or against Academic appeals to Stoic theology against Epicureans) and in the account of the origin of civilization at Philod. *De piet.* (*P.Hercul.* 229 I–VII) pp.142–48 Gomperz.

<sup>20</sup> Diog. Oen. fr.11–12 Chilton: ἔφησε (sc. Protagoras) γὰρ μὴ εἰδέναι εἰ θεοὶ εἰσιν. τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶν τὸ αὐτὸ τῷ λέγειν εἰδέναι ὅτι μὴ εἰσιν, which, as it follows in Diogenes' treatise directly upon Epicurus' account of the origin of language from *Περὶ φύσεως* 12, almost certainly derives from the discussion of cultural history in that book; cf. Philod. *De piet.* p.112.8 G. κᾶ[λλοις] (see the new text 216f *infra*). Cf. C. W. Chilton, "An Epicurean View of Protagoras," *Phronesis* 7 (1962) 105–09; P. A. Vander Waerdt, "Hermarchus and the Epicurean Genealogy of Morals," *TAPA* 118 (1988) 87–106, who cites (89, 91 n.20) the relevant texts from Epicurus' *Περὶ φύσεως* 12.



have placed it first in his system:<sup>21</sup> the gods are the subject<sup>22</sup> of the first of the *Kyriai doxai* and stand first in the letter *Ad Menoecium*, where Epicurus asserts that the gods exist, that they do so as supremely blessed, imperishable, yet living beings, and that ordinary knowledge of them, being derived from primary conceptions (προλήψεις), must be clear or evident: θεοὶ μὲν γὰρ εἰσὶν ἐναργῆς γὰρ αὐτῶν ἔστιν ἡ γνῶσις. Norden cited this passage for its early use of γνῶσις in a theological context, as implying a cognitive relationship between man and the gods.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, ἐναργῆς is an Epicurean catchword implying that such primary conceptions have a sound causal origin in perception.<sup>24</sup> Epicurus' assertion was no doubt intended to be provocative, much like the notorious claim that "all perceptions are true," which it partly recalls.<sup>25</sup> Epicurus also states explicitly that the gods are anthropomorphic (Σ *ad KD* 1), perfectly blessed and immortal (*Ep. ad Men.* 123, τὸν ζῶον ἄφθαρτον καὶ μακάριον), and that they do not participate in the affairs of our world or the working of the cosmos (*Ep. ad Her.* 76–78), such activities being incompatible with their blessedness and imperishability.<sup>26</sup> Our conceptions result from a constant stream of images—for Epicurus the only immediate objects of perception—espe-

<sup>21</sup> For the same reasons the Stoics placed it *last*. They argued from their etymology of τέλειος, τελετή, and the like (as allusions to the *arcana philosophiae*) that theology should come last (after physics, logic, and ethics) in philosophical inquiry: Plut. *Mor.* 1035B, 718B, 382D–E; *Etym. Magn.* s.v. τελετή (SVF II 1008, cf. I 538); P. Boyancé, *Le cult des Muses* (Paris 1937) 42f, 49 n.2; C. A. Lobeck, *Aglaophamus* I (Königsberg 1829) 123ff.

<sup>22</sup> So also Lucr. 1.62ff, Philod. *De dis* 1, the first colon of the Epicurean four-fold remedy (τετραφάρμακος), and first in Diogenes of Oenoanda's list of the causes of all evil (fr.28 col. vii Chilton).

<sup>23</sup> E. Norden, *Agnostos Theos* (Leipzig/Berlin 1913) 87ff, esp. 96f. Henrichs (1975 [*supra* n.5]) 109 compares *P.Hercul.* 1428 xvi.7–9 (Democritus 68A75 D.-K.): τὸ ἐξεργαζόμενον γνόντας (sc. τοὺς πρώτους ἀνθρώπους) σέβασθαι.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Democritus' view that the gods exist as exceptionally large, long-lived, circumambient images, endowed with speech and prophetic powers, and capable of conferring benefit or harm (68A74, 77–79; B142, 166). Epicurean criticism of Democritus' theory at Diog. Oen. new fr.1.2.7–3.14 (15G Long-Sedley [n.48 *infra*): M. F. Smith, *AJA* 74 (1970) 51–62; CQ n.s. 22 (1972) 159–62; D. Clay, "An Epicurean Interpretation of Dreams," *AJP* 101 (1980) 342–65.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *supra* 193.

<sup>26</sup> Epicurus and his followers employ 'gods' (plural) and 'the divine' (sing.) indiscriminately as the occasion suits, as well as a range of substantives (τὸ μακάριον, τὸ σεμνόν, τὸ δαιμόνιον)—and a neologism, τὸ σέμνωμα (*Epic. Ep. ad Her.* 77, *P.Oxy.* II 215 l.30).

cially fine in structure, like the atoms of the soul and so perceptible only by thought (λόγῳ θεωρητοί), that are naturally imprinted (especially during sleep) on the minds of all men. Naturally we do not 'see' the gods as we do material entities, but we can discern their characteristics, as we do those of atoms, on the analogy of ordinary sense-impressions.

According to a fragment of Philodemus' *De pietate*,<sup>27</sup> Epicurus gave a similar account of the origin of belief in the gods in Book 12 of his magnum opus *Περὶ φύσεως* (a source for *DRN* 5), this time from a cultural-historical perspective. The first men (πρῶτοι ἄνθρωποι), he says, having received images of the gods in dreams, recognized that they exist and so formed an understanding<sup>28</sup> of their divine nature (N 1077 XIX.23–29 [*HV*<sup>2</sup> II 83; p.113 G.]):<sup>29</sup>

κάν τῶι δω-  
 24 δεκάτ[ω]ι περὶ φ[ύ]-  
 σ[ε]ω[ς] το]ύς πρώτους  
 φη[σὶν ἄ]νθρώπους  
 εἰς ν[οή]ματα (τῶν) [ἔ]ξω  
 28 βα(ί)νειν ἀφθάρτων  
 φύσεων.

And in Book 12 of *On Nature* he says that the first men arrived at conceptions of imperishable external entities.

<sup>27</sup> Excerpted from the forthcoming edition (*supra* n.4). The texts amalgamate the readings of the Oxford and Naples copies (O and N) with the supplements of all editors and commentators. For a facsimile of the Naples copy, see *Herculaneum voluminum quae supersunt, Collectio altera* II (Naples 1863) (= *HV*<sup>2</sup> II). Sublinear asterisks indicate editorial corrections of putative errors in the nineteenth-century copy; for editorial conventions see Henrichs (*supra* n.4 [1972]) 72f n.15.

<sup>28</sup> For the expression εἰς νοήματα βαίνειν (27f), cf. Philod. *De piet.* p.106.13–15 G. ε[ἰ]ς ἐπίνοιαν αὐτῆς (sc. φύσεως τοῦ θεοῦ) βαδίζοντα; Epic. *De nat.* 31.21.16f Arr.<sup>2</sup> οὐ βαδιεῖ[τ]αι ἐπὶ τῶν ψευδῶν; Plat. *Leg.* 793b βαίνειν ἐκτὸς τοῦ καλοῦ; *Resp.* 380D ἐκβαίνειν τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ιδέας. For φύσεις in the sense of 'existing things', as here, see Epic. *De nat.* 24.48.7, 17; 24.49.4, 8, 27 Arr.<sup>2</sup>; *Ep. ad Her.* 40, 48, 68, 71.

<sup>29</sup> According to another portion of this account, *P.Hercul.* 1098 XIX.11–17 (*De piet.* p.133 G.), this knowledge was attained by means of corporeal sensation: τὴν παραισθήσει σαρκ[ί]νηι περιληπτὴν αἴσ[θη]σιν. This fragmentary account should be supplemented by Sext. *Emp. Math.* 9.25 (Epic. fr.356 Us.), which attests that according to Epicurus people originally derived the conception of god from presentations received in sleep (ἐκ τῶν κατὰ τοὺς ὕπνους φαντασιῶν οἰεῖται τοὺς ἄνθρωπους ἔννοιαν ἐσπακέναι θεοῦ), and quotes Epicurus' explanation: "For when great images of human shape impressed them during sleep, they supposed that some such gods of human shape really existed" (μεγάλων γὰρ εἰδώλων, φησί, καὶ ἀνθρωπομόρφων κατὰ τοὺς ὕπνους προσπιπτόντων ὑπέλαβον καὶ ταῖς ἀληθείαις ὑπάρχειν τινὰς τοιούτους θεοὺς ἀνθρωπομόρφους), and 9.43 (both standard accounts of concept formation); and *Lucr.* 5.1168ff.

23–29 Epic. fr.84 Us., 27.1 Arr.<sup>2</sup> 23 κἀν Bücheler: KPN N 24–26 Bücheler 27 Obbink: ΕΓC (vel EH) N[. . .]MHTA N: ἐπιν[οή]ματα Usener τῶν add. Obbink 27f Obbink: [.]ΞΩIBANEIN N: λαμβάνειν emendavit Usener 28 corr. Bücheler: ΑΦΟΡΤΩΝ N post τῶν spat. vac. N

Presumably at the beginning of civilization, men conceived the gods as anthropomorphic, blessed, imperishable, and so on; later, as in the nearly contemporary anthropological theories of Theophrastus and Dicaearchus, this conception of the gods underwent a process of devolution, becoming contaminated with false notions. But in guaranteeing a correct πρόληψις of the gods to the earliest men,<sup>30</sup> Epicurus effectively denies the pre-anthropomorphic stage of thinking about the gods that Theophrastus assigns to early man.<sup>31</sup>

Among false notions about the gods introduced at an early stage of civilization (according to the Epicurean theory of cultural history) is that they intervene in this world to reward the good, punish the bad, and so on.<sup>32</sup> Epicurus states emphatically that the gods, being blessed and imperishable, could not conceivably reside in this world, where they could be neither entirely free from care nor immune to earthly forces of destruction. This is the main point of Lucretius' planned digression at 5.146f (*illud item non est ut possis credere, sedis esse deum sanctas in mundi partibus ullis*), while his description of the *sedes quietae* of the Epicurean gods at 3.18–23 (a rendering of the Homeric picture of a cloudless, radiant Olympus at *Od.* 6.42–46) is intended to demonstrate that mankind has always conceptualized the gods in much the same way, or to underscore poetically how deeply rooted is such a conception of the gods (as alien to our world) in traditional thinking—rather than to provide an account in dogmatic terms of their actual home.<sup>33</sup> Some later

<sup>30</sup> Or something approaching it (line 27 νοήματα); cf. Cic. *Nat.D.* 1.43 *anticipationem quandam deorum*, and K. Kleve, *Gnosis theon* (=SymbOslo Suppl. 19 [Oslo 1963]) 99 with n.6.

<sup>31</sup> Theophr. *De piet.*, ap. Porph. *Abst.* 2.5; cf. Reiche (*supra* n.18) 331 n.50. So also Epicurus' account corrects Democritus' anthropological version (68A75) of the origin of religious belief.

<sup>32</sup> Philod. *De piet.* pp.142–48 G. (*P.Hercul.* 229 I–VII); Lucr. 5.1161–1240.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. the belief in a Homeric Olympus rationalized at Arist. *Cael.* 284a, and compare the extra-cosmic abodes of the gods in Ar. *Pax* (esp. 207–09) and *Aves*: Z. A. Pokrovskaja, "Les dieux d'Epicure et Térée de Thrace," *Eirene* 19 (1982) 57–70. Later reflections: Hermocles' ithyphallic hymn (on the entry of Demetrius Poliorcetes into Athens in 294) ap. Ath. 6.253D–F (Powell, *Coll.Alex.* 173–75); Lucian

authors did of course occupy themselves in speculating where, in the Epicurean universe, such gods could exist.<sup>34</sup> But if Epicurus himself ever answered the question “where do the gods live?” (and there is no reason to think that he did, or should have had to), he is likely to have said that they do not live in this world.<sup>35</sup> Epicurus chose rather to stress the persistence and regularity of individual conceptions of the divine, and the effect (primarily social and psychological) of these conceptions upon life in this world.

Naturally Epicurus does not consider every conception of a god

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*Iupp. Trag.* 45, probably modelled on a (Varronian) Menippean (R. Helm, *Lucian und Menipp* [Leipzig 1906] 149 n.3).

<sup>34</sup> Principally the *intermundia* (μετακόσμια, διαστήματα), the interstices between worlds in the Epicurean universe: so Cic. *Nat.D.* 1.18, *Div.* 2.40 (cf. *Fin.* 2.75). For a list of references—none earlier than Cicero and most (Seneca, Quintilian, Plutarch, Augustine) almost certainly derived from him—see Pease (*supra* n. 3) on both passages, and F. Peters, *T. Lucretius et M. Cicero quo modo vocabula Graeca Epicuri disciplinae propria Latine verterint* (diss.Münster 1926), who includes Christian authors. This view was not known to the Epicurean sources used by Cicero in *Nat.D.*; thus it does not occur in Velleius' exposition in book one, where we might have expected it, though Cicero adds disparaging references to it in his prefaces, perhaps in a willful misinterpretation of *Lucr.* 3.18–25, which he will by this time have known; cf. esp. Dionysius episcopus *Περὶ φύσεως ap. Eus. Praep.Evang.* 14.27.8 p.782c (=Epic. fr.364 Us. in part). On the τὴν μετακόσ[μιον χώραν] of Philod. *De morte* 4 col. xv.8 (p.146 Kuiper), see Philod. *De dis* p.24 Diels: “Hier ist aber das platonische Elysium, nicht der epikureische Götterwohnsitz gemeint.” I take *De dis* 3 viii.20–ix.27 (p.26) to be an account of how the random passage through the cosmos of εἶδωλα which figure in the process of conceptualizing the gods accidentally gives rise to the belief in catasterism and the cult of apotheosized rulers—and not an account of images emanating from the gods' permanent places of existing. Contrary to the constant assertion of commentators, Lucretius in his remarks on the gods does not mention or allude to the *intermundia*.

<sup>35</sup> According to an important and relatively early source—Atticus, who had reason to be informed on the subject—Epicurus simply locates the gods somewhere outside our world (*ap. Eus. Praep.Evang.* 15.5 p.800b [Epic. fr.362 Us.]: ἔξω πον τοῦ κόσμου καθίδρυσε), which is consistent with their being in the *intermundia*, but is equally likely to be an extension of an original statement to the effect that they cannot exist, at least as conceived by many people, anywhere in this world. Atticus said nothing about the μετακόσμια, and it is clear from the only other source with a pretence to a doxographical pedigree (Hippolytus' φιλοσοφούμενα) that the specification of the μετακόσμια was an inference from the belief that Epicurus locates the οἰκητήριον of the gods ἔξω τοῦ κόσμου (Diels, *Dox.Graec.* 572). Moreover, both *Plut. Mor.* 731D and *Philo De somn.* 1.184 place the Epicurean gods either in the μετακόσμια or in some other world, which suggests an elaboration of an original ἔξω πον τοῦ κόσμου, or οὐδαμοῦ ἐν τῷ (ἡμῶν) κόσμῳ.

to be true. The gods represented by theologians and poets, together with such popular conceptions as engender fear, are based not on προλήψεις but on false notions due to the contamination of originally clear concepts. Thus Epicurus and his followers often imply an obligation to preserve (φυλάττειν) the integrity of the gods by ensuring that our concepts of them are not impaired. In *Ep. ad Men.*, for example, Epicurus argues that the conception of the gods held by many is defective; this requires (a) showing that it conflicts with another more fundamental (pre)conception, that of the gods as perfectly blessed,<sup>36</sup> and (b) explaining how the faulty conception arose. Similarly a failure to preserve our conception of the gods unimpaired effectively “abolishes” them (ἀνοίρειν, *tollere*) by distorting the experientially based preconceptions that guarantee genuine knowledge.

Epicurus’ emphasis on the rôle that we play in this process cannot be too strongly emphasized. If it was an innovation of fifth-century sophistic thinking that man could, by his own thought and action, divorce himself from the gods, it was equally a novelty of Hellenistic theologies that man could by the same process align himself with divinity, *whether or not* that divinity is conceived (as e.g. in Plato) as exercising care for individuals. In this respect then, Epicurus seems to have substituted for the causal and governing rôles accorded to the divine in earlier Greek philosophy the notion, already familiar from Plato and Aristotle, of the divine as a normative object of *moral* emulation (ὁμοίωσις θεῶν). Since for Epicurus the gods share with men pleasure as an ethical *telos*, and since our conceptions of them embody the Epicurean ideals of blessedness and tranquillity, the gods stand in relation to the wise virtually as paradigms of moral excellence. This accounts for Epicurus’ insistence that we conceive of the gods as anthropomorphic and capable of speech.<sup>37</sup> While the intervention of the gods in the world is ruled out by its incompatibility with their own blessedness, they do nevertheless have a real, if indirect, influence on the human world, inasmuch as one’s own view of the gods has a major impact

<sup>36</sup> 123f (on the constitution of the text, see most recently Vander Waerdt [*supra* n.20] 101 n.50); *Ep. ad Her.* 76f; *Plut. Mor.* 1051E, 1075E.

<sup>37</sup> So also Epicurus is credited with having held (following the common Hellenistic trend of deification of great men) that the individual sage could achieve a kind of divinity: see esp. D. Clay, “The Cults of Epicurus,” *CronErcol* 16 (1986) 11–28 and *infra* n.45.

for better or worse on one's own *διάθεσις*, or psychosomatic constitution.<sup>38</sup> Naturally a 'true' conception of the gods is easily distorted by all sorts of false beliefs (e.g. that they exercise power, malevolence, *etc.*—the consequence of a literal reading of the tales of poets). But the wise, who preserve a correct conception of the gods, derive a sense of immense calm and religious awe from perceiving and imitating their nature. For Epicureans, the restriction of divine attributes to those compatible with blessedness and imperishability is less a devaluation of traditional forms of piety than a source of a deeper psychological dimension of religious ritual.<sup>39</sup> Thus traditional forms of worship are regarded as a natural response to the recognition of the divine nature, and are not only tolerated by Epicurus but recommended to his followers. Numerous acts of worship by Epicurus and individual Epicureans are attested, including sacrifice,<sup>40</sup> adoration of statues,<sup>41</sup> dedications,<sup>42</sup> mystery initiation,<sup>43</sup> and participation in calendrical festivals<sup>44</sup> and rites of

<sup>38</sup> See esp. W. Schmid, "Götter und Menschen in der Theologie Epikurs," *RhM* 94 (1951) 97–156; A.-J. Festugière, *Epicure et ses dieux* <sup>2</sup> (Paris 1968) 36–100.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Theophr. *De piet.*, *ap.* Porph. *Abst.* 2.19; R. Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford 1983) 322–27; W. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, tr. J. Raffan (Cambridge [Mass.] 1985) 77; *P.Oxy.* II 215 ll.2f τμη[α]ν αὐτὴν τὴν θεωρίαν, with Burkert 311; D. Obbink, "POxy. 215 and Epicurean Religious Theoria," in *Atti del XVII congresso internazionale di papirologia II* (Naples 1984) 607–19.

<sup>40</sup> For offerings and blood sacrifice: Philod. *De piet.* pp.126.9f, 127.14, 146.6 G.; Ath. 179D (Epic. fr.56 Us.); Plut. *Mor.* 1102B (Epic. fr.30 Us.); Porph. *Abst.* 1.7–12 (an account and defense of the pre-historical institution of animal sacrifice)=Hermarchus fr.24 Krohn=fr.34 in F. Longo Auricchio, *Ermarco frammenti (=La scuola di Epicuro* 6 [Naples 1987]); cf. Vander Waerdt (*supra* n.20); D. Obbink, *CQ N.S.* 38 (1988) 428–35.

<sup>41</sup> Adoration of cult statues (ἀγάλματα): Philod. *De piet.* pp.103.13ff, 124.21ff G.; Cic. *Nat.D.* 1.85; Origen *c.Cels.* 7.66 (Epic. fr.390 Us.); so also use of statues and amulets as talismans: B. Frischer, *The Sculpted Word: Epicureanism and Philosophical Recruitment in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley 1982) 87–128.

<sup>42</sup> Dedication of ἀναθήματα: D.L. 10.126; A. E. Raubitschek, "Phaedrus and his Roman Pupils," *Hesperia* 18 (1949) 96–103 (dedicatory herms to the gods of Eleusis); C. J. Castner, "Epicurean *Hetairai* as Dedicants to Healing Deities," *GRBS* 23 (1982) 51–57 (to Asclepius at Epidaurus).

<sup>43</sup> Initiation in the Attic (*i.e.*, Eleusinian) mysteries: Philod. *De piet.* p.127.24ff G.

<sup>44</sup> The Attic festival of the Pitchers (τῶν Χοῶν) on the second day of Anthesteria: Philod. *De piet.* p.127.24ff G.; cf. *P.Hercul.* 1077 xi.25–28 (p.105 G.) with Usener's restorations (=Epic. fr.157 Us., fr.86 Arr.<sup>2</sup>).

private and ancestral cult.<sup>45</sup> Their opponents, considering such practices incompatible with a rejection of natural teleology, divine providence, and divination, viewed them as insincere parodies designed to cultivate popular favor.<sup>46</sup> But they were intended rather to illustrate the Epicurean theory of religion and social cohesion, and the degree to which cultural phenomena (including false beliefs) can be accounted for on atomist principles, without recourse to the teleology of Stoics and Peripatetics: for Epicurus, like Prodicus and Democritus, viewed cult as a natural outgrowth of cultural history. Similarly, we find Epicureans, in an attempt to rationalize and thereby vindicate popular belief, maintaining the proposition that gods are actually capable of doing men harm (*i.e.*, the wicked, as a result of their own depraved conceptions of the gods).<sup>47</sup>

While the gods exist for Epicurus fundamentally as concepts, as has been argued recently,<sup>48</sup> and their effects stem primarily from our concepts of them, it may nevertheless be missing the point to insist that Epicurus' gods exist as 'mere' concepts.<sup>49</sup> According to

<sup>45</sup> For religious feasting (εὐωχία) especially in the context of private or ancestral cult, see in particular Philod. *De piet.* p.104 G. and the five separate calendrical rites stipulated by Epicurus in his will (D.L. 10.18ff), which provide for the continuing funeral cult (τὰ ἐναγίσματα) of his parents and brothers (*cf.* *De piet.* p.18.20ff G.), the celebration of his own birthday on 10 Gamelion (together with similar rites for his brothers and for Polyaeus), and most importantly, the gatherings on the twentieth of each month (ταῖς εἰκάσι) to commemorate himself and his favorite pupil Metrodorus. For the traditionally religious character of these rites of private cult, see esp. D. Clay, "Individual and Community in the First Generation of the Epicurean School," in *Συζήτησις I* (*supra* n.17) 255–79 at 272ff and (*supra* n.37) 11–28.

<sup>46</sup> On Epicurus' rejection of divination, see D.L. 10.135, with C. Diano, *StIt* 12 (1935) 237ff.

<sup>47</sup> *E.g.* Philod. *De piet.* (*P.Hercul.* 1428 XII) pp.22f Henrichs.

<sup>48</sup> A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* I (Cambridge 1987) 144–49, an account to which I am much indebted in this section, as against the traditional interpretation: *cf.* G. Schömann, *Schediasma de Epicuri theologia* IV (Gryphiswald 1864) 346; F. A. Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus* I<sup>2</sup> (Iserlohn 1873) 76f; J. Bollack, *La pensée du plaisir* (Paris 1975) 236–38; D. N. Sedley, *CR* NS. 29 (1979) 82–84; A. A. Long, "Epicureans and Stoics," in *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (New York 1986) 135–53 at 142–45.

<sup>49</sup> As did many of Epicurus' ancient detractors (*e.g.* Cotta *ap.* Cic. *Nat.D.* 1.77: Epicurus' gods are no more than images). The natural, if mistaken, conclusion is that Epicurus 'didn't believe the gods exist', on the erroneous assumption that gods could not sufficiently or 'really exist' as 'mere ideas'. In the Epicurean view, concepts in fact have the same corporeal, atomic composition as all ὑπάρχοντα.

Epicurus, our concepts of the gods have a unique ontological status: our only access to the divine is through such concepts, just as our only access to solid objects is through the impressions they present to us.<sup>50</sup> Epicurus believes that these impressions are always true, insofar as they always provide reliable information: our “preconceptions” of the gods are “a genuine piece of moral knowledge, an accurate intuition of man’s natural good.”<sup>51</sup> Epicurus’ carefully orchestrated theory of the way in which human cultures conceptualize the gods represents an attempt to ensure the physical possibility of the conditions necessary to produce these ideas.

#### IV. The Atheism of Epicurus

By the beginning of the first century B.C., when works like Philodemus’ *De pietate* and Cicero’s *De natura deorum* drew the attention of an educated public, we find that Epicurus, who had been carefully dogmatic in his own pronouncements about the gods, was being paraded in certain circles as an atheist. In later antiquity the view that Epicurus was in fact a ‘closet’ atheist, whose statements about the gods were only intended to placate a hostile public, became in fact the *communis opinio*.<sup>52</sup> We know, however, that at the beginning of the first century B.C. it was still a sufficiently controversial issue that entire books were devoted to the subject.

It might be supposed that the charge of atheism against Epicurus originated with an actual indictment of Epicurus (or even the threat of one) on charges of impiety (ἀσέβεια), stemming from social or political hostility to his theology. If so, we might reasonably expect that such charges would have been utilized (or even fabricated) by the well-known early anti-Epicurean tradition, perhaps *e.g.* by the

<sup>50</sup> According to Epicurean theory, the eternally regular pattern of cognition of the gods by mankind is facilitated by streams of ‘similar’ images (*e.g.* Σ *ad K.D.* 1). Our conceptions of them are thus said to constitute (or result from) a unique class of imperishable existents called in technical accounts ‘similarities’ (ὁμοιότητες; Aetius *Plac.* 1.7, in Diels, *Dox.Graec.* 307) or ‘unities’ (ἐνότητες; Epic. *De sanct.* fr. 41 Us. [fr.19.4 Arr.<sup>2</sup>] *ap.* Philod. *De piet.* p.110.4–19 G.) because, unique among existing things, they are always formed in the same way. Thus they are distinguished from other purely mental existents (*e.g.* the idea of a satyr, a cyclops, or an eternally long-lived man) which are imaginatively or fortuitously formed by combination and reduction or expansion of images: see Sext. *Emp. Math.* 9.43–47.

<sup>51</sup> Long-Sedley (*supra* n.48) 147.

<sup>52</sup> See *e.g.* Winiarczyk (*supra* n.1) 157–83 at 168–79 (on Epicurus and his followers).



dissident Epicurean Timocrates, brother of Metrodorus. But while our sources for this anti-Epicurean tradition are given to exaggerated slander in other respects, they say nothing of atheism or impiety.<sup>53</sup> Philodemus, for his part, takes great pride in pointing out that Epicurus' detractors could cite no instance in which Epicurus had been satirized in comedy, a genre which, as says, was only too given to harassment of philosophers for their objectionable or outlandish views (O 1077 I center [missing in N, HV<sup>2</sup> II; p.93 G.]):

to those who were so diverse in their chosen styles of life as well (Epicurus was) inoffensive, so that not only did he not engage in any lawsuit against anyone, he did not even have a quarrel. Indeed, while some philosophers were prosecuted for their way of life and for their teachings, and some have been exiled from city and league and put to death, and all have become the butt of writers of comedy, only Epicurus grandly secured protection for himself together with those who dwelt sincerely with him, without falling prey to the virtue-hating and all-harassing mouth of comedy.

Philodemus' claims are supported by the record, at least insofar as Epicurus' own life is concerned (the passage may in fact intend a contrast with Socrates in this respect).<sup>54</sup> 'Epicureans' do appear occasionally in Hellenistic comedy (often, for example, as cooks—μάγειροι—pandering to the delicacies of taste), but in no surviving instance are they satirized explicitly for their theological views.<sup>55</sup>

So also neither the remains of Epicurus' own work nor that of his

<sup>53</sup> See D.L. 10.4–9, a list of οἱ δυσμενῶς ἔχοντες πρὸς Ἐπίκουρον. A possible exception is that Diogenes includes in his response to this tradition (10.10) the defense: τῆς μὲν γὰρ πρὸς θεοὺς ὀσιότητος καὶ πρὸς πατρίδα φιλίας ἄλεκτος ἡ διάθεσις (sc. τοῦ Ἐπικούρου), though this might equally be taken as the language of conventional encomium. On Timocrates' distortion of Epicurus' views, see D. N. Sedley, "Epicurus and his Professional Rivals," in *Etudes sur l'Epicurisme antique* (= *Cahiers de Philologie* III.1 [Lille 1976]) 121–59.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. n.59 *infra* for attestations of social and political harassment; all are non-Attic and postdate the lifetime of Epicurus.

<sup>55</sup> E.g. Damoxenus' Σύντροφοι *ap.* Ath. 3.101F–103B=fr.2 in *PCG* V; Athenion's Σαμόθρακες *ap.* Ath. 14.660E–661D=fr.1 in *PCG* IV; Menander fr.750 Körte; E. Bignone, "Epicuro e i comici greci, Teocrito e Ateneo," *A&R* SER. VI (1938) 75–92 (= *L'Aristotele perduto* II [Florence 1936] 223–47); K. Büchner, "Epikur bei Menander," *Silt* 14 (1937) 155–66; M. Pohlenz, "Menander und Epikur," *Hermes* 78 (1943) 27–75; A. Barigazzi, "Uomini e dei in Epicuro," *Acme* 8 (1955) 37–55 at 52ff; F. Wehrli, "Menander und die Philosophie," in *Ménandre* (= *Entr.Hardt* 16 [Geneva 1969]) 147–69, with further literature cited there. It is unclear whether the Epicurean μάγειροι are being satirized for their attitude towards sacrifice and religious feasting or towards pleasure in general (the two are not mutually exclusive).

earliest followers contain any implication of, or response to, charges of impiety. Rather, we know that Epicurus<sup>56</sup> attacked notorious fifth-century atheists, including Prodicus, Diagoras, and Critias among others, for removing the divine ἐκ τῶν ὄντων, which rather suggests an effort to distinguish his own philosophy from theoretical atheism. Epicurus' famous affirmation of the existence of gods at *Ep. ad Men.* 123 (quoted *supra* 195)—an emphatic inversion of the atheists' notorious credo οὐκ εἶναι θεούς and intended no doubt to be equally provocative in its (positive) dogmatism—indicates a desire to leave no doubt on the question. But it is unlikely to have been a response to any actual charge of impiety, especially in light of what follows: οἷους δ' αὐτοὺς (οἱ) πολλοὶ νομίζουσιν οὐκ εἰσὶν .... ἀσεβῆς δ' οὐχ ὁ τοὺς τῶν πολλῶν θεοὺς ἀναιρῶν, ἀλλ' ὁ τὰς τῶν πολλῶν δόξας (here='false beliefs') θεοῖς προσάπτων ("but they [*sc.* the gods] are not such as the many believe them to be.... And the impious man is not he who denies the gods of the many, but he who attaches to the gods the beliefs of the many about them"), which is anything but a concession to traditional beliefs about the gods.<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, public trials in Athens of philosophers for denying the traditional gods seem to have been confined to the second half of the fifth and to the fourth centuries.<sup>58</sup> In other cities we do find episodes in which Epicureans are faced with expulsion, but in every case such litigation is directed at their hedonism rather than their theology.<sup>59</sup> Even the public charges of impiety promulgated at

<sup>56</sup> In Book 12 of his *Περὶ φύσεως*: *P.Hercul.* 1077 xviii, see 216 *infra*.

<sup>57</sup> The ancient assumption that Epicurus could not have publicly denied the existence of the gods, if he so wished, seems to be totally unfounded; many others certainly did so, *cf.* Drachmann (*supra* n.5) 12ff, Dover (*supra* n.5) 25–54, Winiarczyk (*supra* n.1) 168–70. The Epicureans placed a high premium on social harmony, though this seems to have hindered them not at all in the development of positive doctrine (*e.g.* their theory of pleasure, for which they did incur harsh persecution).

<sup>58</sup> Drachmann (*supra* n.5) 6f; Derenne (*supra* n.6) 214–16 (public indictments of philosophers only in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.) and 264–66 (confined to Athens). *Cf.* J. Lipsius, *Das attische Recht und Rechtsverfahren* I (Leipzig 1908) 358.

<sup>59</sup> For instances see H. Usener, *Epicurea* (Leipzig 1887) lxxii ff. These include the expulsion of Epicureans by the Messenians; Philiscus and Alcaeus expelled from Rome by L. Postumius (Ath. 547A; Ael. *VH* 9.12; *De provid.* fr.39 Herch. *ap. Suda s.v.* Ἐπίκουρος, also the expulsion of unnamed Epicureans from Lyttus). For legislation of Messene and Phalanna against Epicureans, *P.Hercul.* 155/339 (Philod. *De*

Athens seem to have been directed in the first instance against alleged disregard for religious custom, and this attitude may not have been widely extended to include theoretical speculation about the gods (Socrates is perhaps a notable exception).<sup>60</sup> This does not, of course, mean that philosophical views did not matter, but rather that in certain respects the community of rites and religious practices constituted the primary level of social, political, and religious activity. Some modern theorists, for instance, hold that it is mistaken to adopt structures of *belief* as the starting-point for analyzing ancient religion as a cultural phenomenon;<sup>61</sup> the basic level of sig-

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*Stoicis*) III.6–8 Dorandi (*CronErcol* 12 [1982] 99): καὶ διὰ τὴν ἠ[δ]ονὴν ὑπὸ Φαλανναίων καὶ Μεσσηνίων ἐκβεβλήσθαι τοὺς Ἐπικου[ρ]εῖους (the text of *VH*<sup>1</sup>, quoted by Usener, should be ignored). Notices of expulsions of Epicureans from unspecified cities: Sext. Emp. *Math.* 2.25; Cleomedes 2.1; Plur. *Mor.* 1100D.

<sup>60</sup> See esp. Dover (*supra* n.5) 25–54; Rudhardt (*supra* n.6) 87–105. A possible exception would be the controversial charge of impiety for the introduction of *καὶνὰ δαιμόνια*, which could conceivably have been directed toward philosophical reinterpretations of the traditional gods. Such considerations, however, did not figure in the charges of impiety promulgated in the late fourth century against Aristotle and Theophrastus, the examples which will have been closest in time to Epicurus.

<sup>61</sup> For a review of modern approaches to the controversy see S. R. F. Price, *Rituals of Power: the Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge 1984) 7–22, esp. 7–11. Brunt (*supra* n.11) 183 with n.17 is skeptical to the point of anachronism. The value of “the mental attitudes of the vulgar” (Brunt 182) as a category of analysis is difficult to assess. But the claim that “in philosophic discourse propositions of the kind ‘gods exist’ and ‘gods care for mankind,’ were clearly taken to be ... susceptible of demonstration or refutation or doubt on rational grounds, and philosophers clearly supposed that ordinary men understood them in the same way” (183 n.17) demands careful consideration. First, Cicero’s motives are undoubtedly polemical; whatever his own view, the appeal to popular belief is an argumentative tactic. Second, with respect to the gods as recipients of cult, the status of ‘belief’ is particularly complex, and many in antiquity were uncomfortable with a literal understanding of pronouncements regarding the gods and their cult (see the list of counter-examples at Cic. *Nat. D.* 3.39–63, and the conclusion at 64). In the schools *allegoresis* and Euhemerism flourished and the criticism of traditional religion in popular philosophy continued unabated. As for the ‘vulgar’, many rituals and myths, so far from being susceptible to rational, literal explanation, were popularly regarded as utterly baffling if considered in such terms. A standard example in antiquity was the Attic *bouphonia*, which already Aristophanes (*Nubes* 985ff) portrays as exemplifying a type of religious rite whose significance no one could understand (cf. Theophr. *De piet.*, ap. Porph. *Abst.* 2.29–31; Paus. 1.24.4, 28.10; Ael. *VH* 8.3; *Suda s.vv.* Βουφόνια, Θαυλῶν; Hesch. *s.v.* Βουτύπος). So also Ar. *Aves* 960–90, *Thesm.* 236, 248, 331–51, *Nub.* 254–68, *Pax*

nificant activity in ritual need not be one that expresses a specific rational view, but rather one that exemplifies a conventional mode of conduct.<sup>62</sup> Greek religion was in many respects as concerned with *praxis* as with belief; generally more important considerations are the cohesion of the social group and the evocative power of its symbols, the preservation of social distinctions, and the transmission of a cultural heritage.

On this view Epicurus would have been beyond reproach (as later Epicureans took such delight in pointing out), not only because he could be shown to have scrupulously observed rites of traditional cult, and to have defended the use of religious language, but also because his theory of the origin and development of religion in cultural history (by which this appropriation of traditional cult was justified) emphasized the group-oriented functions of religion.

On the other hand, the detractors of Epicurus, as we shall see, *do* give primacy to structures of belief: they regard religious rituals as expressions of specific beliefs about the workings of the divine. For this reason they accuse the Epicureans of inconsistency with regard to practice and beliefs. The Epicurean position is complex: on another level, of course, the Epicureans are prepared to argue critically and to isolate contradictions between practice and belief; but they choose to do so largely by emphasizing the social and psychological consequences of holding *false* beliefs about the gods. In contrast to the Stoics on this point, the Epicureans hold that

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1056–60; Dem. 18.258ff; Hdt. 7.34f parody religious liturgy or ritual as woefully inexplicable in purely literal terms: see H. Kleinknecht, *Die Gebetsparodie in der Antike* (=Tübinger Beitr. z. Altertumswiss. 28 [Stuttgart 1939]); W. Horn, *Gebet und Gebetsparodie in den Komödien des Aristophanes* [Nürnberg 1970]). Someone must have been laughing. At the same time, those who did feel constrained to argue for true belief as a basis for the gods and their cult (see Zeno's famous syllogism deducing the existence of the divine from honors paid in cult: Sext. Emp. *Math.* 9.133) could also condemn the use of utilitarian or literally-construed prayer (D.L. 7.124=Posidonius fr.40 Edelstein-Kidd: the wise man will pray for τὰ ἀγαθά, which are necessarily non-material).

<sup>62</sup> An alternative though related cognitive approach is the *symbolic* one, according to which myths and rituals do not in fact mean what they might normally seem to mean. This view holds that religious customs directly entail beliefs, but only in so far as they embody symbolic or *metaphorical* truths. In antiquity this approach was developed to its greatest lengths by those who had recourse to *allegoresis* to explain myth, although only Epicureans (who remained rather hostile towards myth) seem to have extended it to an explanation of ritual practices.

participants in traditional religion really mean what they said about the gods; but at the same time they seek selectively to exclude such meanings as appear to conflict with the theoretical workings of the observable world according to the constraints of atomism.

Thus we find that issues in the modern debate between the cognitive (or literalist) and the more public, evocative (or symbolic) approaches to ancient religion were being worked out already in the philosophical schools of the Hellenistic period. Skeptics incline towards the former position, viewing ritual literally as an outward expression of a set of beliefs, which can then be enlisted to test or refute criteria current in the epistemological debate. Materialists, on the other hand, confident of the criterial value of sense perception and experientially-based reasoning, deny cognitive content to ritual, and invoke a symbolic or psychological explanation for ritual as a phenomenon and its persistence through time. For them, particular rituals do not express any specific relationship between gods and mankind. But when properly understood, they are ethically significant and tell us something about human psychology as well as our cultural past. In both cases, positions taken in the epistemological debate predetermine one's theological views, while much theological debate is conducted primarily in pursuit of criterial questions and of establishing lines of demarcation in the epistemological debate. By Cicero's time (*De natura deorum* is probably the most obvious and misunderstood example) the two issues are interdependent and inextricably intertwined.

To be sure, Epicurean *practice* regarding religious ritual offers little reason for questioning the later defense of Epicurus on this charge of inconsistency. An almost identical approach, after all, was adopted in practice by all the Hellenistic philosophical schools (except perhaps the early Cynics). Even the skeptical Pyrrhonists advocate adherence to traditional religious customs without any claim to knowledge of the nature of the divine;<sup>63</sup> and the Academic skeptic Carneades, so far from ever being charged with impiety,<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> See Pyrrho *Test.* 55, 62 Decleva Caizzi (fr.68, 81 Diels); Sext. *Emp. Pyr.* 1.23f, 226, 246; 3.12; *Math.* 9.49; Burnyeat (*supra* n.16) 33 (=126); J. Barnes, "The Beliefs of a Pyrrhonist," *PCPS* 28 (1982) esp. 15f; Frede (*supra* n.10) 225–54.

<sup>64</sup> The contrast, I think, was first drawn by Drachmann (*supra* n.5) 8; cf. Derronne (*supra* n.6) 216 (Cicero *Nat.D.* 3.44 says much the same of Carneades). The reported indictment of Protagoras for holding virtually an identical position regarding the gods illustrates the apparent contrast between Hellenistic tolerance towards intellectuals and the early reaction to fifth-century rationalism.

was actually entrusted with important affairs of state as a diplomatic emissary.<sup>65</sup>

Let us begin again. If contemporary social hostility is an unpromising candidate for the source of the tradition concerning Epicurus' atheism, we must look next to the Hellenistic philosophers themselves, in whose debates the charge of irreverence towards the established order of things was a common argumentative tactic. As it happens, one of the earliest attested allegations of atheism against Epicurus comes from philosophical quarters. The Academic speaker Cotta concludes the first book of Cicero's *De natura deorum* with a citation from Posidonius' Περὶ θεῶν:

*verius est igitur nimirum illud quod familiaris omnium nostrum Posidonius disseruit in libro quinto de natura deorum, nullos esse deos Epicuro videri, quaeque is de deis immortalibus dixerit invidiae detestandae gratia dixisse*

It is doubtless therefore truer to say, as our good friend Posidonius argued in the fifth book of his *On the Nature of the Gods*, that Epicurus does not really believe in the gods at all, and that he said what he did about the immortal gods only for the sake of deprecating popular odium.<sup>66</sup>

According to Cicero, Posidonius did not say that Epicurus ever explicitly denied the existence of gods (in fact, the fragment implies knowledge of statements to the contrary), nor that he was regarded as an atheist by his contemporaries (*videri*, in contrast to *dixerit*, is inferential), but only that he might have been, if his true views had

<sup>65</sup> To be sure, later skeptics advocate the suspension of *all* belief with regard to certain knowledge; *i.e.*, they consider positive claims for the non-existence of gods on the same epistemological footing as dogmatic claims for their existence: in the end, they supposed, opposing positions will cancel each other and lead to the suspension of judgment that they advocate. In this respect they succeeded in epistemologically actualizing and legitimizing the intermediate position as regards the gods of Protagoras, yet (unlike Prodicus) without recourse to the symbolic interpretation of ritual and myth; *cf.* Henrichs (1975 [*supra* n.5]) 109 n.63.

<sup>66</sup> Cic. *Nat.D.* 1.123 (Posid. fr.22a Edelstein-Kidd=346 Theiler). On the context, see further G. Rudberg, *Forschungen zu Poseidonios (=Vetenskaps-Samfundet i Uppsala 20.3 [1918])* 30ff. See also J. Heinemann, *Poseidonius' metaphysische Schriften II* (Breslau 1928) 153f; K. Reinhardt, *Kosmos und Sympathie* (Munich 1926) 181f; M. Pohlenz, *GGA* (1930) 143; R. Philippson, *RE* 7A (1939) 1154; H. Uri, *Cicero und die epikureische Philosophie* (Munich 1914) 106f; G. Pfligersdorffer, *Studien zu Poseidonios (=SBWien 232.5 [1959])*.

been popularly known.<sup>67</sup> Posidonius thus represents Epicurus as an atheist whose explicit pronouncements on the gods are merely specious attempts to placate a potentially hostile public. Posidonius' remark is well-suited to Cotta's critique of Epicurus' theology: Epicurus would have been better off to have denied the existence of the gods (they play no integral rôle in his physical system), and so might just as well have done so.<sup>68</sup>

Did Posidonius invent Epicurus' atheism? Our only other source is Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 9.58: καὶ Ἐπίκουρος δὲ κατ' ἐνίουσ ὡς μὲν πρὸς τοὺς πολλοὺς ἀπολείπει θεόν, ὡς δὲ πρὸς τὴν φύσιν τῶν πραγμάτων οὐδαμῶς ("and, according to some, Epicurus in his popular exposition allows the existence of god, but in expounding the physical nature of things he does not allow it"). The latter clause suggests that it is Epicurus' physical system (presumably its lack of teleology and denial of divine providence) that seemed to conflict with his statements and practice concerning the gods.<sup>69</sup> That is, the philosophical charge of atheism against Epicurus by-passes Epicurus' explicit statements, attacking instead the premises of his physical system, and inferring that the gods have no necessary place in this system. The problem of the precise identification of the source of this charge has been much discussed, though Sextus' handling of the matter certainly suggests a skeptical origin.<sup>70</sup> Owing

<sup>67</sup> Apparently *quaeque* refers to Epicurus' account of the gods, in popular or technical terms. This would include his attitude towards participation in traditional religion and his habit of using religious language allusively, both ridiculed in the lines preceding the citation of Posidonius, and earlier at 1.115.

<sup>68</sup> See e.g. the tentative formulation at 1.87f, and the conclusion *nullos esse deos* (on the authority of Posidonius) at 1.115.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Lactant. *De ira Dei* 4.7 (Posid. fr.22b E.-K.=346 Theiler): *itaque verbis illum deos relinquere, re autem ipsa tollere quibus nullum motum nullum tribuit officium*; here the last clause cannot be simply derivative from the corresponding passage in Cicero, as most commentators assume, though for the idea cf. *Nat.D.* 1.92, 101f; *Plut. Mor.* 1117b (Epic. fr.141 Us., 65 Arr.<sup>2</sup>), ἀφυσιωλόγητον; *Mor.* 1102b (Epic. fr.30 Us.), ὑποκρίνεται γὰρ εὐχὰς καὶ προσκυνήσεις οὐθέν δεόμενος διὰ φόβον τῶν πολλῶν καὶ φθέγγεται φωνὰς ἐναντίας οἷς φιλοσοφεῖ ... οὕτω γὰρ Ἐπίκουρος οἴεται δεῖν σχηματίζεσθαι καὶ μὴ φθονεῖν μηδ' ἀπεχθάνεσθαι τοῖς πολλοῖς; *Mor.* 1119D-E, 1123A, 1124E.

<sup>70</sup> See Pease on Cic. *Nat.D.* 1.123; R. Hirzel, *Untersuchungen zu Ciceros philosophischen Schriften* I (Leipzig 1877) 33–37; Philippson (*supra* n.66); *SymbOslo* 20 (1940) 25f. Hirzel (37) argues (implausibly, I think) that the source of Sextus' charge cannot be Posidonius *alone*, because Sextus asserts that this view was held κατ' ἐνίουσ. Nor is there the slightest evidence for Hirzel's further suggestion that

to the uncertain state of the text of *De pietate*, the (relatively early) testimony of Philodemus has never been properly drawn into the debate. Now that reconstruction of the text is on firmer ground, the charges transmitted by Posidonius and Sextus can be seen to be identical to those addressed by Philodemus in that work, for here the papyri too support a skeptical origin. Several passages will serve to illustrate this, showing how context can aid in interpretation. In the first, the author concludes his catalogue of Epicurus' positive arguments about the gods in these words (N 1077 xv.3–21 [*HV*<sup>2</sup> II 79; p.109 G.]):

	καὶ πάν-	...and that of necessity
4	τας [κ]ατ' ἀνάγκας [οἱ ταὐτὸν] ἔγραψαν ἀ- [ξίους] γε προαιρέ- σ[εως] ἔνεκα θαυμά-	all who have written in this fashion deserve to be ad- mired because of their inten- tions and not, on account of
8	ζεσθαι καὶ μὴ διὰ τὴν (ἀ)δυναμίαν ἀνοσίου[ς] νομίζεσθαι· πάντας δὲ ἀνθρώπους ὥ-	inability, to be regarded as impious. It would be fitting ("it is time") to describe all men as impious, inasmuch as
12	ρα[ι] λέγειν ἀνοσίους, ἐ- πειδήπερ οὐδεὶς εἰκνουμένας πε- ρὶ τ[οῦ θ]εοῦς ὑπάρ-	no one furnishes convincing demonstrations for the exist- ence of the gods; neverthe- less all men (with the excep-

the charge of impiety against Epicurus originates in the Old Stoa. With κατ' ἐπίου should be compared Cic. *Nat.D.* 1.85: *quamquam video nonnullis videri Epicurum ... verbis reliquisse deos, re sustulisse* (for the purposes of argument, Cotta here accepts that Epicurus meant what he said about the gods, which *may* indicate a source different from 123, but Academic method certainly allows argumentation from one's opponent's premises [so also Sext. *Emp. Math.* 9.58; cf. 64]). Diels, *Dox. Graec.* 225 and *Sibyllinische Blätter* (Berlin 1890) 21f, argues that the ample five books of Posidonius' *Περὶ θεῶν* were filled with lists of examples of theological views rather than argument. Since we know that Posidonius in that work *ignored* Epicurus' explicit views on the gods, perhaps his physical views were adduced (on someone else's authority) as an example of *atheism*. In any case (on Diels' assumption) Posidonius too is likely to have followed a source for the atheism of Epicurus. On the doxographic character of Posidonius' work in these areas (as borne out by his influence on the later doxographies), see most recently P. A. Vander Waerdt, "Peripatetic Soul-Division, Posidonius, and Middle Platonic Moral Psychology," *GRBS* 26 (1985) 373–94, who defends (at 318 n.30) Diels' general formulation against his subsequent detractors.



- 16 χε[ιν τὰς ἀπο]δείξεις                    tion of some madmen) wor-  
 εὐπ[όρησ]εν· ὁμῶς                        ship them, as do we.  
 δὲ [σέβ]ονται πάν-  
 τε[ς εἰ μὴ παρά]κοποί τι-  
 20 νε[ς αὐτούς, κα]θάπερ  
 ἡμ[εῖς].

3f πάντας N: πάντες corr. Gomperz falso (cf. vv.9, 10) 5 Philippson: aut ]ν aut ]αι N: [οἱ περὶ θεῶ]ν Gomperz (app. crit.) sed spatium longius, ut vid. 6 Gomperz 7 Bücheler 9 ἄ- add. Bücheler ἀνοσίου[ς] Obbink: -ΣΙΟΙ [. N: ἀνόσιοι Bücheler, edd. omnes 11f ὦρα (sc. ὦρα {ι}) Bücheler: ΩΙΡΑΙ N: (μ)ωρία Gomperz 15 τ[οῦ] Philippson: τ[οὺς θε]οὺς Gomperz: T[. .]COYE N 15f ὑπάρχε[ιν] Anon. A: ὑπάρχε[ι] Gomperz 16 [τὰς] Philippson [ἀπο]δείξεις Gomperz 17 εὐπ[όρησ]εν Philippson post εν spat. vac. N 18–20 [σέβ]ονται ... τινε[ς] Gomperz (app. crit.) 20f Philippson

Here Philodemus complains that his opponents completely ignore the kind of detailed argumentation about the nature of the gods that he has delineated in the preceding columns. (Previous editors misunderstood this passage because, by reading the columns of *P.Hercul.* 1077 in the wrong order, they thought this text came *before* the series of arguments on the gods.)<sup>71</sup> In this respect the Epicurean authors cited are not lacking in δύναμις.<sup>72</sup> They are perfectly capable of producing detailed discussions on the nature of the gods; but the validity of their conclusions had never been called into question. Similarly, we know that in the charges of Posidonius and Sextus, the Epicureans' theological doctrines are not attacked specifically; instead, they are regarded on more general grounds as insincere. But the adversaries' claim must have been a more general, perhaps skeptical one (presumably directed towards the *premises* of these accounts), since Philodemus offers in response the dogmatic claim (on the basis of *consensus omnium*) for the existence of gods. Here he brings into sharp focus the implications

<sup>71</sup> D. Obbink, "Philodemus, *De pietate* I" (diss. Stanford 1986) 24–43.

<sup>72</sup> For the meaning of ἀδυναμία in 9 ('inability' due to defect of intelligence) see L. Tarán, *Academica: Plato, Philip of Opus, and the Pseudo-Platonic Epinomis* (Philadelphia 1975) 292, on [Plat.] *Epin.* 985E3–4; cf. *Leg.* 821A8–B2, *Hip. Ma.* 295E9–10; *Arist. Poet.* 1460b17. Possibly ἀδυναμία here refers to lack of power or influence, as at Marcus Aurelius 2.2.3 (with Farquharson's note, II 520).

of his opponents' criticism:<sup>73</sup> if Epicurus is to be regarded as impious because his physical system does not offer logical proofs (ἀποδείξεις) for the gods' existence, so also must virtually all mankind, though this hardly keeps them from worshipping gods as existing beings.<sup>74</sup> Epicurus and his followers do so too, as the author proceeds to document in detail.

The papyri help further. Later in the treatise, at the conclusion of his catalogue of instances of religious participation by Epicurus and his followers, Philodemus reviews the charges of atheism and impiety promulgated by his opponents (O 1077 II left and right (missing in N, *HV*<sup>2</sup> II; pp.93f G.):

## Col. 46

<p>[ . . . καὶ τὴν εὐεργε]-          σίαν οἷς ὁ βίος ἡ[μ]ῶν          διασώζεται, φ[λ]υ-          αρίαν δὲ νομίζουσ-          4 θαι καὶ τὰ μυ[στήρι]-          α καὶ τὰς ἐορτὰς ἄ-          τε τῶν δ(ι)' οὐς γείνο[ν]-          τα[ι] λ[ε]γομένων μ[η]-          8 δενὸς ἐπιστρέφε[σ]-          θαι. καὶ φασὶ τὸν          'Επίκουρον ἐκπεφευ-          γ[έν]αι τὸν 'Αττ[ι]κ[ὸν]          12 ὄ[χλ]ον οὐχ ὅτι ε[. . .]          ΤΗΟΓΕCΟΝΤΟ[. . . ἦτ]-</p>	<p>[Our opponents object that          Epicurus accepts] benefaction          (from the gods), by which          things our life is preserved,          but that the mysteries and the          festivals are to be regarded as          foolishness, since those (<i>i.e.</i>          the gods) for whose sake they          (<i>i.e.</i> mysteries and festivals)          take place are said to pay no at-          tention to anything. They also          claim that Epicurus escaped          from the Athenian masses not          because [ - - - - ] he had less</p>
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<sup>73</sup> In lines 11f a more literal reading of ὦρα is: "it is fitting time to call all men impious" (*i.e.*, if, on the opponents' view, one were to regard the Epicureans described in the previous lines as impious, it would be necessary to call all men impious). For ὦρα *sc. ἐστί=tempus est*, see Philod. *De mus.* p.105.15 Kemke (p.216 Van Krevelen): (if one is to follow the common man's value judgments, many unworthy practices have been honored), καὶ φιλοσοφίαν δὲ διὰ τὸ μὴ τετευχένα[ι τ]οῖς ὄλοις ἐπάθλων ἀτει[μ]άλζειν ὦρα.

<sup>74</sup> Philodemus contrasts this rhetorical argument (he later calls it a πίστις) for their existence with ἀπόδειξις. On the argument from *consensus omnium*, see esp. Cic. *Nat.D.* 1.43, *Div.* 1.1, with Pease's notes on both; Arist. *Eth.Nic.* 1172b36–1173a1, *Cael.* 270b5–6; Sext. *Emp. Math.* 9.61–65; R. Schian, *Untersuchungen über das 'argumentum e consensu omnium'* (Hildesheim 1973); Schofield (*supra* n.11) 283–308. The Epicureans combine the *consensus* argument with their doctrine (for which see Epic. *Ep. ad Men.* 123; Cic. *Nat.D.* 1.44) that it is part of human nature to form προλήψεις of the gods.

- τον άσεβεῖς εἶχ[εν]  
 ὑπόληψεις, ἀλλὰ τῶι]  
 16 διαλεληθέναι[ι πολ]-  
 λους ἀνθ[ρ]ώπου[ς]  
 [τ]ῆν φιλοσοφί[α]ν α[ὐ]-  
 [τ]οῦ. προσεπιφέρου-  
 20 σιν δὲ καὶ διότ[ι]  
 τ[ῶ]ν ἀγαθῶν ἀνδρῶν  
 καὶ δικαίων παραι-  
 ρούμεθα τὰ[ς] καλὰς  
 24 ἐλπίδας ἅς ἐν τοῖς  
 [θ]εοῖς ἔχουσι καὶ δι-  
 [ὰ] τοῦτο μετὰ τὰς  
 καλλιερήσεις καὶ  
 Col. 47  
 τὰς σπου[δαίας κεύ]-  
 φώνους λ[ιτὰς ἀναι]-  
 ρ'ο'(<ῦ)μεν [τὴν παρα]-  
 4 μυθίαν [τῶν εὐω]-  
 χιῶν.

Col. 46: O 1077 II laev. (p.94 G.; desunt N, HV<sup>2</sup> II) + O 1077 I (p.93 G.; desunt N, HV<sup>2</sup> II) 1 [τὰ ὠφέλιμα καὶ τὴν εὐεργε]σίαν coni. Obbink 3 corr. Gomperz: χομ- O 4f Gomperz 6f (vel γείνεται[ι]) Henrichs (cf. e.g. Philod. *Rhet.* I 104.31–34, 191.24f): ΔΟΥΓΓΙΝΕ[ ]ΤΑ[ ] N (de hoc loco desperavit Gomperz) 7 Obbink: Λ[.]ΤΟΜΕΝΩΝ O 11 γ[ supplenda ex O 1077 I.10 (sottoposto): ἐκπεφει[γέν]αι Gomperz 12 Philippson: Θ[(?) probavit O 1077 I.11 (sottoposto): [δῆμ]ον Gomperz: [μῶμ]ον Diels 12f E[. . .] O 1077 II + ΤΗΟΓΕCΟΝΤΟ[. . . .] O 1077 I.12 (sottoposto)+O 1077 II: [Ἐπι]κου[ρ]ος ὄντω[ς] Philippson (sed nomen Epicuri iam v.10 supra) 13–26\* Gomperz 17 init. supplenda ex O 1077 I: [.]ους O 1077 II 18 [.]ην ex O 1077 I: [.]C O 1077 II 19 corr. Gomperz: ΕΥ[.] O 27 Philippson: ΚΑΛΝΕΡ O: καλὰς ῥήσεις Gomperz haesitanter 27f: columnas 46–47 coniunxit O 1077 I

Col. 47: O 1077 II dext. (p.94 G.; desunt N, HV<sup>2</sup> II) 1 σπου[δαίας] Gomperz 1f [κεύ]φώνους Philippson λ[ιτὰς] Obbink: Λ[ O: εὐχὰς] Philippson 2f Gomperz: P[[Ω]] ὈΜΕΝ[ O 3f Gomperz: 4f [τῶν εὐ]χιῶν Philippson

As often in Hellenistic philosophical polemic, Philodemus does not here respond to his opponents by name. But the criticisms of

Epicurus outlined here agree with those attested by Posidonius and Sextus, augmenting them in some detail. Philodemus reports the basis for his opponents' attack on Epicurus: they acknowledge that Epicurus professes to accept certain features of traditional religion (46.1f: we get good things from the gods).<sup>75</sup> But they allege that Epicurus (implicitly) rejects the literal understanding upon which traditional religion is based. Accepting the Epicurean premise that the gods are removed from this world and unmoved by human appeals, the opponents proceed to argue that such gods, for whom rites of worship as mysteries and festivals are conducted, must necessarily take no notice of them (3–9). Therefore, they conclude, Epicurus' practice of observing religious measures is insincere: in other words, his practice contracts his belief.<sup>76</sup> This is made especially clear by the link between the two columns, which now afford some continuous sense:<sup>77</sup> the Epicureans are said to engage in prayer and other rites of traditional religion, while in effect "doing away with the consolation" (47.3f [παρα]μυθίαν) offered by cult that constitutes the theoretical basis for such acts (namely, that we are rewarded in return by the gods).<sup>78</sup>

Philodemus' opponents further allege (9–21) that Epicurus' true views (on the gods) were in fact unknown to people generally, as a result of his flight (following the doctrine of λάθε βιώσας) from the masses. Several columns later, Philodemus capitalizes upon the

<sup>75</sup> That Epicurus professes to accept *some* features of traditional religion as valid seems clear from the implied contrary of 46.2f φ[λ]υαρίαν δὲ κτλ. which came in the lacuna immediately preceding the beginning of the column. I tentatively suggest "benefits" (*i.e.*, from the gods) on the basis of the restoration [εὐεργε]σίαν in 1, preceded by τὰ ὠφέλιμα (or something similar) since οἷς in 1 requires another (masculine or neuter) antecedent. Cf. Epic. *Ep. ad Men.* 124 ἐκ θεῶν ἐπάγονται καὶ ὠφέλεια; Philod. *De piet. (P.Hercul.* 1428 xii.22–25) p.23 Henrichs ἐξ αὐτῶν (*sc.* θεῶν) λέγομεν παρακολουθεῖν κα[ὶ] τῶν ἀγαθῶν τὰ μέγιστα; Epic. *ap.* Philod. *De piet.* p.124 G. (on the text, see D. N. Sedley, *CronErcol* 4 [1974] 89–92), and p.145.11–21 G. On Epicurean "βλάβη-ὠφέλεια-Lehre" see especially Schmid (*supra* n.38) 115–26.

<sup>76</sup> Epicurus' detractors (who assume that specific rituals entail specific beliefs) conclude that the Epicurean practice of engaging in ritual is insincere (46.19–47.5). Philodemus has already demonstrated in considerable detail that Epicurus participated in the Attic (*i.e.* Eleusinian) mysteries (p.127.24ff G.) and in specific calendrical festivals (p.127.24ff G.; cf. 105 G.=Epic. fr.157 Us., 86 Arr.<sup>2</sup>).

<sup>77</sup> See Obbink (*supra* n.71) 116–19, 160–62.

<sup>78</sup> At 47.2f, [ἀνα]πο(ῶ)μεν is clearly inferential; so also Philod. *De piet. (P.Hercul.* 1428 col. xv.5–8) p.25 Henrichs, quoted *supra* 189f.

premise that Epicurus' views went unknown at Athens in order to refute the allegation that they caused social harm; his opponents' charge of atheism itself betrays the fact that it had no historical basis, but was rather a rhetorical ploy derived from later philosophical polemics. Philodemus further suggests an alternative explanation (quoted in part *supra* 203) for Epicurus' flight from the masses and argues that by conceptually preserving the philosophical integrity of the Greek gods as free from care or blame, Epicurus actually holds views *more* pious than those of the masses.<sup>79</sup>

The (unnamed) detractors of Epicurus thus capitalize on his own premises and allege that participation in religious ritual, if sincere, would conflict with basic Epicurean doctrines (*e.g.*, their denial of cosmic teleology and divine providence, insofar as these would "destroy the theoretical basis"—*do ut des*—for such ritual). Epicurus' opponents regard ritual primarily as the outward expression of a set of literal beliefs about the gods (*i.e.*, that the gods confer benefits on mankind in return for rites conducted in their honor), an approach rejected (at least implicitly) by the Epicureans.<sup>80</sup>

As in the charges reported by Posidonius and Sextus, the opponents of Philodemus represent Epicurus as an atheist whose true views on the gods were screened from the public by the allegedly contradictory practice of religious observance. If we can identify these opponents with Posidonius and Sextus' source on this point (*supra* 208f), we can go one step further towards isolating the origin of this tradition.

## V. Gods and Madmen

Sextus' testimony is particularly important because it suggests that the charge of atheism against Epicurus has a *skeptical* origin. In Sextus' doxographical account of οἱ περὶ θεῶν λόγοι, Epicurus is included at the end of a long list of notorious atheists, which Sextus presents to show that belief in the gods' existence is by no means

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Epic. *Ep. ad Men.* 123. On the psychology of the Epicurean 'flight' from the masses, see esp. Frischer (*supra* n.41).

<sup>80</sup> In fact, Philodemus is careful in the preceding section listing instances of Epicurean participation in cult to delineate its theoretical justification (*i.e.*, based not on a literal understanding of pronouncements and procedures regarding the divine, but on considerations of personal psychology and social justice).

universal; in this way the skeptics argue that the dogmatists' appeal to universally accepted opinion about the gods has no claim to validity.<sup>81</sup> This list of atheists had in fact a long history in Hellenistic doxography, though it is unknown at what juncture the name of Epicurus became incorporated into the catalogue.<sup>82</sup> This must have occurred at some point earlier than the work of Posidonius and Philodemus, though there is no evidence that it goes back to Epicurus' own day.<sup>83</sup> The inclusion of Epicurus, whose dogmatic pronouncements on the gods were well-known, would be curious enough; but in fact the earliest known ancestor of Sextus' list of atheists appeared in *Epicurus'* own work (Book 12 of Περὶ φύσεως) and is known, as it happens, only from a fragment preserved by Philodemus in *De pietate*. I offer here a text of the fragment (87 Us., 27.2 Arr.<sup>2</sup>), substantially revised after examination of the original (N 1077 XVIII.1–12 [*HV*<sup>2</sup> II 82; p.112 G.]):

καὶ πᾶσαν μ[ανίαν 'E]-  
 πίκουρος ἐμ[έμψα]-  
 το τοῖς τὸ [θεῖον ἐ]-  
 4 κ τῶν ὄντων [ἀναι]-  
 ροῦσιν, ὡς κἀ[ν τῶι]  
 δωδεκάτω[ι Προ]-

Similarly, for their complete madness Epicurus reproached those who remove the divine from the sum of things, as in Book 12 (of *On Nature*) he re-

<sup>81</sup> For the introduction of atheists (usually philosophers) by Academic skeptics as a counter-argument, see Cic. *Nat.D.* 1.62–64; 3.8, 11, 17 with Pease on 1.43; by Pyrrhonists: Sext. Emp. *Math.* 9.50–59 (cf. 191f). At *Nat.D.* 1.63 Cotta suspects there must be some, but cannot name any; so also Plut. *Mor.* 1075A; Diod. 3.9.2 and Sext. Emp. *Pyr.* 3.234 name only ὀλίγοι τῶν Αἰθιόπων. One dogmatic alternative was to posit a stage in cultural history when atheism had developed (the 'first men' having universally believed in gods): so Theophr. *De piet.*, ap. Porph. *Abst.* 2.8, and Simpl. *In Epict. Ench.* 222c–23A; Epic. *De nat.* 12, ap. Philod. *De piet.* (*P.Hercul.* 229 I–VII) pp.113, 142–48 G.

<sup>82</sup> On the catalogue of atheists and its transmission in antiquity, see M. Winiarczyk, "Der erste Atheistenkatalog des Kleitomachos," *Philologus* 120 (1976) 32–46 (who provides a *stemma*), esp. 37 and 44ff on Epicurus and Philodemus (cf. T. Thalheim, *RE* 2 [1896] 1529; F. Zucker, *Philologus* 64 [1905] 460–69).

<sup>83</sup> Constraints of anachronism require that the composition of Posidonius' Περὶ θεῶν antedate the dramatic date of Cicero's dialogue, i.e., before 77–75 B.C. Cicero heard Posidonius lecture in Rhodes in 78; all the speakers in the dialogue could have heard him (as ambassador from Rhodes) at Rome in 86. The treatise *De pietate* could have been written as early as this date, or as late as the 50's—if Philodemus wrote it; if not, it dates from the *floruit* of Phaedrus at the turn of the century.

δίκωι καὶ Δια[γόραι]  
 8 καὶ Ἐρίτῑαι καὶ ἄλλοις]  
 μέμφεται] φᾶς κα[ὶ παρα]-  
 κόπτ[ει]ν καὶ [μαίνεσ]-  
 θαι καὶ βακχεύου-  
 12 σιν αὐτοὺς [εἰ]κά[ζει].

proaches Prodicus, Diago-  
 ras, and Critias among  
 others, saying that they  
 rave like lunatics and  
 likens them to Bacchant  
 revelers.

1–4 Obbink 1: μ[ονήν] Philippson 2f: ΕΛ[ Ν: ἐξ [εἴλε]το Philipp-  
 son 3: πο[λλοῖς] Philippson 4f: [ἀλλ' ἐ]προῦσιν Usener (unde  
 Philippson, *Symb Oslo* 19 [1939] 24): [φλυα]προῦσιν dubitanter  
 Gomperz (unde Philippson 1921) 5–8 Bücheler 6 δωδεκάτω[ι], sc.  
 Περὶ φύσεως, ut titulum libri Epicuri coll. fr.82–87 Us. + *P.Hercul.*  
 1111 fr.44 8 Ἐρίτῑαι corr. ex τριτῑαι Ν καὶ ἄλλοις] Usener 9  
 μέμφεται] φᾶς πα[ρα] Usener: ΜΕΝC[. .]ΘΑCΚΑ Ν κα[ὶ παρα]  
 Gomperz 10f Gomperz 12 Usener

This fragment was not included by Diels-Kranz in *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, presumably because in the form in which it was presented by the editors of the day, the fragment contained no clear representation of the views of the thinkers named.<sup>84</sup> The paratactic character of the early catalogue style (exemplified more fully by the lists of poets and philosophers in *P.Hercul.* 1428) is apparent even from this brief citation. Cicero says that Epicureans when reeling off such lists sounded like the censor calling off the roll of the senate.<sup>85</sup> Nestle first recognized that this list of atheists was later taken over and considerably expanded by Clitomachus, the adherent of Carneades.<sup>86</sup> Thanks to Nestle's observation, we know that

<sup>84</sup> The use of αἰρεῖν (4f) and its compounds to denote the (negative) implications of philosophical views is common parlance. For the locution, see *De piet.* (*P.Hercul.* 1428 XII.11ff) p.21 Henrichs, τῶν ἀπλῶς τὸ θεῖον ἀ[ν]αιρούντων; *Plut. Mor.* 1124D, and often; with the dative participle: *Sext. Emp. Math.* 9.123; cf. *Epic. Ep. ad Her.* 71, οὐκ ἐξελατέον ἐκ τοῦ ὄντος ταύτην τὴν ἐναργεῖαν. Previous reconstructions were based on a misreading from the Naples apograph (in line 2). Winiarczyk (*supra* n.82) 37, 44f, relying on Usener's ἀλλ' ἐπροῦσιν, wrongly concludes that Philodemus is dependent upon an Academic report for Epicurus' list of atheists.

<sup>85</sup> *Cic. Nat.D.* 1.94: *cum tamquam senatum philosophorum recitares, summos viros desipere delirare dementis esse dicebas.* For earlier examples of the paratactic catalogue-style in lists, see Gorgias 82B11.6ff D.-K.; Antiphon Soph. 87B44 II.26–IV.22 D.-K.; [*Xen.*] *Ath. Pol.* 2.11ff.

<sup>86</sup> *Theophil. Ad Autol.* 3.7; W. Nestle, *Vom Mythos zum Logos* (Stuttgart 1942) 416 and (*supra* n.5) 869, with Winiarczyk's corrections (*supra* n.82) 35f.

Sextus' list is a direct descendent of Clitomachus'.<sup>87</sup> The catalogue of atheists, a version of which appears in Cicero (*Nat.D.* 1.63), was also a popular argumentative device among members of the later skeptical Academy. It was repeatedly augmented because the more historical instances of atheism that could be adduced, the more damaging was the objection to the argument from *consensus omnium* and the validity of κοινὰ ἔννοιαι. Placed side by side with some of the absurdities about the gods put forth by dogmatic philosophers, the catalogue of atheists provides a striking illustration of the contraposition and equipollence of arguments, on the basis of which the skeptic recommends suspension of judgment. Carneades himself was fond of this line of attack;<sup>88</sup> and since Carneades (through Clitomachus) had a hand in the expansion of the catalogue, he (or Clitomachus) may have included Epicurus in the list. If so, Carneades may be the ultimate source for the atheism of Epicurus,<sup>89</sup> if not identical with the opponents of Philodemus in the passages from *De pietate* discussed above, as well as the source of the charges of Posidonius and Sextus.<sup>90</sup>

In the absence of more specific testimony, this remains of course

<sup>87</sup> Sext. Emp. *Math.* 9.1, 140, 182, 190, and see Winiarczyk (*supra* n.82) 32–46; Diels, *Dox. Graec.* 58f; Henrichs (1975 [*supra* n.5]) 113 n.72.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Cic. *Acad.* 2.117 (from Carneades): *est inter magnos homines summa dissentio*, and the catalogue of philosophers that follows.

<sup>89</sup> Zeno the Epicurean, who had a prominent influence on *De pietate*, heard Carneades at Athens (Cic. *Acad.* 1.96, who notes that Zeno *ab eo* [*sc. Carneade*] *plurimum dissentiret*). For the indebtedness of portions of *De piet.* to Zeno Epicureus (who wrote a Περὶ εὐσεβείας; Philod. Πρὸς τοὺς [σοφιστάς] [*P.Hercul.* 1005] col. vii.20 p.93 Sbordone=A. Angeli and M. Colaizzo, "I frammenti di Zeno Sidonio," *CronErcol* 9 [1979] 75 fr.12), see Hirzel, *Untersuchungen* III (1883) 26ff; R. Philippson, *Hermes* 56 (1921) 364; Diels, *Dox. Graec.* 126f. The thesis that most of the polemic in *De pietate* dates from the *floruit* of Carneades and Zeno Epicureus is supported by the fact that the chronological catalogue of Stoic philosophers criticized in *P.Hercul.* 1428 stops with Diogenes of Babylon, a contemporary of Zeno and Carneades.

<sup>90</sup> Even if the author of *De piet.* were refuting the account of Posidonius (on the chronology, *supra* n.83), he must have directed the argument toward his earlier Academic source: at *P.Hercul.* 1077 xv (*supra* 210) he adduces the argument from *consensus omnium* against his opponent—which would hardly be effective against a Stoic, since Stoics and Epicureans were in complete agreement on this point (they differ as to the precise content of the πρόληψις of the divine). The Stoic Balbus, e.g., appeals to this argument (Cic. *Nat.D.* 2.5, 12)—against Cotta and the Academic skeptics.



a mere possibility. Have we any reason to suppose that Epicurus' theology was ever represented in this light by Carneades? Plutarch does in fact preserve a remnant of Carneades' own allegations against Epicurus (*Mor.* 1089C=Epic. fr.436 Us.). Carneades is said to have mocked (ἔσκωπτε) Epicurus for making too much of pleasures derived from the cultic observance of the ancestral εἰκάδες:

οὔτε τοὺς μετρίους καὶ σώφρονας εἰκὸς ἐνδιατρίβειν τῇ ἐπινοίᾳ τῶν τοιούτων οὐδὲ ἄπερ ἔσκωπτε τὸν Ἐπίκουρον Καρνεάδης<sup>91</sup> πράττοντας οἶον ἐξ ἐφ' ἡμερίδων ἀναλέγεσθαι “ποσάκις Ἡδεΐα καὶ Λεοντίῳ συνῆλθον;” ἢ “ποῦ Θάσιον ἔπιον;” ἢ “ποίας εἰκάδος ἐδείπνησα πολυτελέστατα;”

It is quite unlikely that persons of moderation and temperance should dwell on such thoughts and do the sort of things with which Carneades mocked Epicurus, and gather as from an official record-book statistics about “How often I got together with Hedeia or Leontion,” “Where I drank Thasian wine,” or “At which of our school's festival celebrations I had the most sumptuous dinner.”<sup>92</sup>

Carneades' specific object of attack in this instance is probably the doctrine of pleasure. Yet his criticism clearly implies that Epicurus had no greater regard for, or better grounds for observing, rites of ancestral cult than he did for drinking fine wine or having intercourse with one of the Epicurean *hetairai*. Thus the charge that Epicurus' observance of traditional cult was insincere is present already in Carneades, a view that corresponds fairly closely to the first and third charges delineated by Philodemus in the passage discussed above. If the charge of insincerity can be linked with Carneades, the other allegations (that Epicurus does not really mean what he says about the gods) seem to follow necessarily. Certainty may be unattainable, but Carneades (unlike e.g. Posidonius) had everything to gain by representing Epicurus—an avowed dogmatist and critic of notorious atheists—as himself an unbeliever; and it would be

<sup>91</sup> Ἐπίκουρον add. Bern.; Καρνεάδης Wytttenbach: καρνεάδην X<sup>2</sup>g: κοριάδην X<sup>1</sup>a: καρνέα c.

<sup>92</sup> See *supra* nn.37, 45. The εἰκάδες were celebrations held by the Epicureans on the twentieth of each month on the model of Athenian ancestral and private cult, first in honor of Metrodorus, and after Epicurus' death, in his honor. They included a cultic dinner, libations of wine, symposiastic activities, and other elements of private, ancestral, and hero cult: D.L. 10.18; Clay (*supra* n.37) 11–28.

characteristic of Carneades' method to hoist Epicurus by his own petard, as it were, by including Epicurus in his list of atheists.<sup>93</sup>

Thus the skeptical Academic invention of the 'atheism' of Epicurus was, at least originally, a cunningly thought out argument intended to expose the uncompromisingly anti-teleological focus of the Epicurean system, as well as some peculiarities in their theology—in particular with regard to the cultural appropriation of religious forms. Philodemus' treatise documents a further stage of the controversy, insofar as it shows how the later Epicureans answer the Academic argument point for point, clarifying Epicurus' views on the rôle of religion in an hedonistic ethics and an atomist view of cultural history. They succeed at least in exposing the historical and biographical weaknesses of the skeptical argument. Moreover, they do in fact propose a counter-argument to the rather damaging objection the Academics raise—on the basis of the historical incidence of atheism—to the dogmatists' appeal to universal opinion about the gods. Although well-documented in *De pietate*, this argument has gone relatively unrecognized. As a strategy for preserving the alleged universality of belief in gods, the Epicureans counter by imputing *insanity* to such thinkers (including skeptics), considering them not merely philosophical deviants, but actual madmen (παράκοποι),<sup>94</sup> whose abnormal views do not figure in the determination of universally accepted and naturally formed opinion.<sup>95</sup> In this way

<sup>93</sup> For the possibility that Epicurus compiled this list in a self-refutation argument, reducing the figures named to a state of insanity and thus to ἀπραξία, see *infra*; this move would closely parallel Carneades' method, which employs his interlocutors' premises (but never his own) to attack their doctrines: see Striker (*supra* n.10) 54–83; on the arguments *ad hominem* in the skeptical Academy, see J. Annas and J. Barnes, *The Modes of Scepticism* (Cambridge 1985) 14, 45, 49f. The recurrent argument in Cotta's speech in *De natura deorum* that Epicurus' theology is unnecessary, and therefore better dispensed with, certainly has a Carneadean ring to it. Carneades' criticism of the Epicurean *clinamen* (Cic. *Fat.* 23–25) takes exactly the same form; see Sedley (*supra* n.17) 49f and n.70.

<sup>94</sup> For the argument (especially in theological polemic) to which the Epicureans were particularly but by no means exclusively addicted, see Xen. *Mem.* 1.10–15 (of sophists); Pease on Cicero *Nat.D.* 1.37 (*quasi delirans*), 1.34 (*puerilibus fabulis*), 1.94 (*desipere delirare dementis esse*); Long-Sedley (*supra* n.48) I 23H with II 151f. For an example of its re-use by an Academic skeptic against a Stoic: Cic. *Nat.D.* 3.62.

<sup>95</sup> Arist. *Eth.Eud.* 1214b28ff excludes children and the insane from the range of those whose ethical opinions would be surveyed: they are in need not of arguments (λόγοι) but of either political or medical chastisement; so also *Eth.Nic.* 1179

Philodemus is content to *exclude* known atheists from his argument from *consensus omnium*: πάντε[ς εἰ μὴ παρά]κοποί τινες).<sup>96</sup> Now that we know the original order of columns in *De pietate*, we can understand why. In the new reconstruction, this passage follows closely upon the citation (discussed above, from Book 12 of *Περὶ φύσεως*) that reports that the “first men” (πρῶτοι ἄνθρωποι) originally formed *proper* conceptions of divine nature.<sup>97</sup> In the succeeding citation (also from *Περὶ φύσεως* 12) on the madness of Prodicus, Diagoras, and Critias, atheism—together with the theories of these writers, which ascribe the development of belief in the gods to fear of natural phenomena or fictions invented for political control (and thus implicitly “remove the divine from the sum of things”)—is explained as a later, deviant stage in cultural history.<sup>98</sup>

The Epicurean counter-argument has a certain rhetorical appeal, particularly in the sphere of epistemology. A skeptical opponent, for instance, could be placed in a position of ἀπραξία, and thus silenced or forced to concede the possibility of his irrationality (and hence to sacrifice the credibility of his position), or to advance a positive defense of his skepticism in violation of ἐποχή περὶ πάντων or at least upon grounds that would play well into the hands of materialists appealing to sense impression and common notions.

The result of the Academic argument was the misrepresentation of Epicurus as an atheist that gained abiding credibility in the minds of the educated public, to judge from its ready acceptance by Cicero. At the same time, there is simply no reason to suppose that

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b28f on the irrational persons whose πάθος responds not to λόγος but to βία: M. Nussbaum, “Therapeutic Arguments: Epicurus and Aristotle,” in *The Norms of Nature: Studies in Hellenistic Ethics*, edd. M. Schofield and G. Striker (Cambridge 1986) 31–74 at 58f; cf. contra P. A. Vander Waerdt, *CQ* ns. 37 (1987) 412 n.40.

<sup>96</sup> *Supra* 210f. The argument is also present in Cicero: see *Nat.D.* 1.37 (*quasi delirans*) with Pease *ad loc.*, and Philippson (*supra* 217) 28f, for lists of corresponding expressions in Philodemus and Cicero.

<sup>97</sup> Philod. *De piet.* p.113 G. (*P.Hercul.* 1077 xix.23–29): edited *supra* 196.

<sup>98</sup> One portion of this account appears in Philod. *De piet.* (*P.Hercul.* 229 i–vii) pp. 142–48 G., and another at Lucr. 5.1168ff. Of course knowing the precise order of citations in *De pietate* tells us nothing certain about the original order of these fragments in *Περὶ φύσεως* 12 (Epicurus may have begun the section on early religion by attacking the theories of Prodicus *et al.*). But Epicurus’ language in the present fragment suggests an attempt to associate their views with the secondary, deviant stage of thinking about the gods.

any ancient writer had at his disposal, as a basis for the charge, anything that we would dignify by the name of 'evidence'. To be sure, Epicurus' theology, like that of Prodicus, represents a complex borderline case between orthodox belief and heresy, insofar as Epicurus fully accepts the gods' existence but, in denying that they care for the affairs of men, represents them as essentially different from the traditional gods.<sup>99</sup> Yet this can hardly justify his skeptical opponents' charge, for it centers not on Epicurus' principal claim (namely, the possibility of the physical existence of gods without recourse to cosmic teleology and divine providence), but rather on its sincerity. At the same time, one of Epicurus' important arguments—that collective atheism is unknown, while isolated cases of atheism are easily accounted for through impaired concepts—is almost totally obscured in the Hellenistic debate. In this sense the entire history of the debate can be regarded as corroborating a theory popular a generation ago among French historians of philosophy and now somewhat out of favor: namely, that the Hellenistic controversy over skepticism (or, more accurately, its methods of argumentation), with its emphasis on playing off one philosophical school or set of doctrines against another, has the effect of distorting the distinctions of doctrine between dogmatic thinkers.<sup>100</sup> The lasting result of the polemical representation of Epicurus as an atheist was a distortion of historical fact.

To be sure, the Epicureans themselves play no small rôle in this process, and Epicurus' representation (perpetuated not only by the skeptics but by Philodemus) of Prodicus, Protagoras, and Critias as "atheists" (because they implicitly "did away with the divine") may be cited in this respect. Epicurus, however, has a justifiable dogmatic point of contention with these figures over the rôle played

<sup>99</sup> Henrichs (1976 [*supra* n.5]) 21 (on Prodicus), quoting Drachmann (*supra* n.5) 3.

<sup>100</sup> See A.-J. Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* II (Paris 1949) 359, 362–69 ("Le scepticisme et les doxographies"), esp. 366 and n.1. Festugière, characteristic of his era, was searching for "les origines de l'éclectisme et syncrétisme." Following L. Robin, *Pyrrhon et le scepticisme grec* (Paris 1944) 129–34, he argues (367–69) that the skepticism of the New Academy before Antiochus, with its obsession for playing off the doctrines of one philosophical school against another, had the effect of "effacer les traits caractéristiques qui distinguent chaque doctrine" and led ultimately to "un 'syncrétisme' qui, sacrifiant ce qu'en chacune il y a d'original, les brouille toutes et finalement, fausse l'histoire." Even the Stoicizing dogmatism resurrected by Antiochus is viewed as "un dogmatisme éclectique."

by religion in the origin and development of civilization. In Epicurean terms, Prodicus and Critias actually *had* denied the rôle of the gods themselves in the origin of religion (and thus in the order of things), and Epicurus would have liked to have had no part of it.<sup>101</sup> Hellenistic philosophy was itself in many respects a philosophy of doxography, and the latter was as easily distorted as the former.<sup>102</sup>

BARNARD COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY  
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<sup>101</sup> For a valiant attempt to save Prodicus on the point of having done away with the *traditional* gods, see Henrichs (1976 [*supra* n.5]) 15–21, who argues that Prodicus denied their divinity, but granted them at least a past *human* existence; cf. *HSCP* 88 (1984) 139–58. Epicurus would still disagree.

<sup>102</sup> The ‘scissors-and-paste’ method characteristic of many doxographers was adopted by philosophers and could, on occasion, direct the course of inquiry. Cf. the assessment of the relation between source criticism and philosophy in antiquity by A. E. Douglas, *Cicero* (=G&R *New Surveys in the Classics* 2 [Oxford 1968]) 28, with the reaction of J. Mejer, *Diogenes Laertius and his Hellenistic Background* (=Hermes Einzelschr. 40 [Wiesbaden 1978]) 10ff.

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