SONYA WURSTER

The W.H. Allen Memorial Lecture is an annual lecture held at Ormond College to commemorate the life and work of Barney Allen (1875-1949), who was a teacher of Classics, Vice-Master at Ormond College and the first secretary of the Classical Association of Victoria, as well as its second president — a combined service to the CAV of 37 years.

Of all the Greek philosophical schools, Epicureanism is perhaps the most widely misunderstood. The extent to which the school’s key messages have been obscured over some 2000 years is most clearly seen in the way the term is used in a contemporary context. ‘Epicurean’ and ‘epicure’ now refer to a person devoted to sensual enjoyment, especially that derived from food and drink, and there are numerous food and wine magazines as well as restaurants that label themselves ‘epicurean’. In comparison, the term ‘stoic’ refers to a person who can endure hardship or pain without showing their feelings or complaining. Although this is reductive to the extreme, it does get across the way that ancient Stoicism focused on feeling indifference, or ἀπάθεια, towards anything external. Epicureans and Stoics were fierce rivals in the ancient world, and the way that the term stoic more closely reflects its namesake, while its epicurean counterpart does not, is no accident. First of all, it is the result of parallels between Stoicism and Christianity, which enabled key Stoic ideas to be incorporated and transformed by Christian theologians. In contrast, Epicureanism, with its emphasis on hedonism and the denial of divine providence, jarred with the Church’s teachings. Secondly, it is the result of which ancient texts were preserved, and the interests of later scholiasts and commentators largely dictated which texts have come down to us today.¹ Epicurus is reputed to have been a prolific writer, but most of his works did not make the transition from papyrus roll to codex and then to manuscript. Instead, short citations of Epicurus’ works appear in other writers. Often these writers are opponents of Epicurus and misrepresent his teachings. The works of Cicero, Plutarch, Sextus Empiricus, Seneca, Athenaeus and Lactantius fall into this category. Not all of the texts preserved by later scribes and scholars were hostile, but, as in the case of Diogenes Laertius’ doxographical work entitled ‘The Lives of Eminent Philosophers’, they can be Stoicising in nature.

It is in Diogenes’ work that we find Epicurus’ own words in the form of three letters. The letters detail Epicurus’ physical theory, offer a brief introduction to ethics and give an account of their views on astronomy and meteorology.² Diogenes fills in the gaps on topics not covered by the letters,³ and he also provides a list of Epicurus’ works.⁴ Diogenes also recorded the Principal Sayings, also known as the Κύριαι Δόξαι (KD), short maxims designed for rote learning by students. The δόξαι recorded by Diogenes have some overlap with the so-called Vatican Sayings, which were found in a manuscript in the Vatican. Likewise, the KD were recorded by Diogenes Oenoanda in an inscription, which was discovered in Turkey in 1884. The inscription also records some of Diogenes’ own views on Epicurean teachings. There are variations between our three sources for the KD, which suggests that

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² The Letter to Herodotus (Diog. Laert. 10.34-83) outlines Epicurus’ physical doctrines; the Letter to Pythocles (Diog. Laert. 10.83-116) offers an account of astronomy and meteorology; the Letter to Menoeceus (Diog. Laert. 10.121-135) is a very brief introduction to Epicurean ethics.
³ For an introductory discussion of Epicurus’ views, see Diog. Laert. 10.29-34. For a report of Epicurus’ ethical positions, see Diog. Laert. 10.117-121. For the difference between Cyrenaic and Epicurean pleasure, see Diog. Laert. 10.136-138.
⁴ Diog. Laert. 10.27.
they were ‘an organic, expandable collection of Epicurus’ sayings that were sometimes transmitted orally.’ Another important source for Epicureanism is Lucretius’ epic poem, De rerum natura or The nature of things, six books of hexameter verse that outlines Epicurus’ physical and epistemological doctrines. The source for this was most likely Epicurus’ On nature. Despite Cicero’s hostility toward Epicureanism, his De finibus and Tusculanae Disputationes are important sources of information for Epicurean ethics, while De natura deorum presents Epicurean views of the gods alongside the views of the Stoic and Academic schools. Similarly, Plutarch, despite his dislike of Epicurean teachings, offers some evidence, especially in his attack on Colotes, a follower of Epicurus. We also find information in his critique of the Epicurean dictum to live unnoticed in Is ‘Live Inconspicuously’ a wise precept? and in his polemical piece called ‘It is quite impossible to enjoy life on Epicurean principles’.

The problems with these sources are many. In the case of Diogenes Laertius, we are left with a reductive account derived from Stoic sources. While Cicero’s account is often biased and incomplete in the sense that he transmits only what he selected, Cicero also seems to have relied on later Epicurean handbooks rather than the works of Epicurus, and he does not always seem to have understood what he was transmitting—or he chose to misrepresent the material. Despite the fact that Plutarch and Sextus Empiricus more often quote directly from Epicurus himself, they also tend to distort the school’s messages. Of all these sources, Lucretius is the most reliable, but even he poses problems as he is transforming Epicurus’ Greek into Latin, which means that sometimes Lucretius’ discussion lacks the clarity of Epicurus’ in key respects.

I will begin by discussing what we know of Epicurean doctrines based on the sources that have survived in the manuscript tradition. I will also highlight some of the misconceptions propagated by hostile writers that have impaired our understanding of Epicurus’ teachings. I will then discuss the impact of the discovery of the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum, with particular focus on the works of Philodemus. Material from Philodemus, who wrote on a wide range of topics including death, rhetoric, music, poetry, logic, theology, epistemology, the history of philosophy and ethics, has been fundamental to changing perceptions of Epicurean philosophy. His works have also provided insight into how Epicureans dealt with the competing claims of philosophy and a Roman context.

Epicurus’ Teachings

Hellenistic philosophy was in some part a response to its socio-political environment, and the growth of monarchs after the classical period has been viewed as giving rise to philosophies that prized an authoritative and utterly consistent self, whose power lay in being exactly the opposite to what gave monarchs their power. Thus, many schools of Hellenistic philosophy, Epicureanism included, espoused frugality, simplicity and adaptability. However, these schools were not simply responding to their contemporary context, and the ideas of Socrates were particularly influential on their ethical focus. Like Socrates, Hellenistic philosophy focused on the questioning of convention, the removal of irrational fears and desires, the care of the

5 Gordon (1996), 64.
6 Sedley (1998), xvi; 135-143.
7 Gordon (1996), 52.
8 Hutchinson (1994), xiv.
11 For example, Lucretius uses the Latin term sensus to refer to both sense (αἴσθησις) and feelings (πάθη) (Cisar (2001), 24; Glidden (1979), 155).
soul and self-mastery. However, you had to make a choice as to which school to follow, and, like all the Hellenistic schools, Epicureanism was a way of life. Adherents were expected to live their lives according to the metaphysical, epistemological and ethical teachings of Epicurus. Epicurus himself functioned as a role model, as someone who had lived his life in accordance with his own teachings. The outcome of following the school’s doctrines was *eudaimonia* (εὐδαιμονία), which is often translated as ‘happiness’, although it is better rendered as ‘living well’. Happiness implies a temporary emotion whereas living well conveys the degree to which *eudaimonia* was the ongoing objective of an Epicurean’s actions and attitudes. In fact, Epicurus, like the Stoics, argued *eudaimonia* is a natural good sought by all humans. In short, he regarded humans, regardless of gender, age, or social status as predisposed towards *eudaimonia*, which could be gained with the aid of philosophy.

The goal of attaining εὐδαιμονία was common among the different schools. However, what varied, was their definition of what a *eudaimon* life actually was. For Aristotle, it was activity and the display of virtue in accordance with reason. For the Stoics, virtue and the right attitude were needed for *eudaimonia*. Rather controversially, Epicurus defined *eudaimonia* as hēdonē (ἡδονή) or ‘pleasure’. The modern philosophical position of egoistic hedonism advances the view that morally speaking we should do whatever makes us happiest. As a result, it proposes that we only worry about the consequences of our actions for ourselves. Their effect on anyone else is not important. Epicurean egoistic hedonism varies quite substantially from the description I have just outlined. Firstly, it has a very specific definition of happiness, which is a negative one that defines pleasure not as sensual gratification but as the absence of mental disturbance and physical pain. The best way to gain this pleasure is to live a virtuous and simple life. Secondly, Epicurus teaches that we must consider the consequences of amoral and antisocial behaviour. This particular argument is apparent in Epicurean teachings on justice and friendship, and the complete Epicurean life is lawful, aims at peace and seeks to promote the wellbeing of others. For most Epicureans this will be the wellbeing of one’s friends, but for a select number this may be humankind more broadly.

Epicurean hedonism is thus a strange sort of hedonism. It is characterised by ataraxia (ἀταραξία) or ‘peace of mind’ and ‘aponia’ (ἀπονία) ‘freedom from pain’, which are attained by living simply, by understanding both how the world works and the limits of our desires. Epicurus argued that if four basic principals were followed, then freedom from fear and anxiety and thereby happiness could be achieved. The four key doctrines—that what is good is easy to attain, what bad is easy to endure and that the gods, and death, should not be feared—are referred to as the ‘four-fold remedy’ or *tetrapharmakos* (τετραφάρμακος), and they underpin Epicurean ethics. How did Epicurus arrive at the view that these four simple points could provide the key to our well being? He did so by modifying the atomist theories of Democritus, which held that the basic components of the world are indivisible bits of matter (atoms) moving around in space (void). A particularly problematic aspect of the Democritean theory of atoms was its fatalism and scepticism. Democritus had regarded the senses to be misleading and he was unsure if it was possible to gain knowledge at all. Epicurus resolves the scepticism of Democritean atomism by showing that atomism is consistent with sense perception. He removes the fatalism by introducing his

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16 O’Keefe (2010), 16. Democritus was a pre-Socratic philosopher who lived c. 460 BCE to c. 370 BCE.
17 O’Keefe (2010), 16.
18 O’Keefe (2010), 18.
theory of the swerve, which is the random movement of an atom that breaks any sequence of antecedent cause.\textsuperscript{19}

The three main areas of Epicurean philosophy, metaphysics, ethics and epistemology, are mutually dependent and reinforcing. The Epicurean \textit{telos} (τέλος), or goal of life, to live free from anxiety and pain, is confirmed by their empiricist theory of knowledge, which is in turn the result of their views on atomism and a naturalistic account of evolution. According to Epicurus everything is composed of atoms and voids,\textsuperscript{20} and he explained all natural phenomena in atomistic terms, arguing against Plato’s theory of the forms and the belief that the gods control the lives of humans. Because of his materialistic bent, he argued that the senses help us gain knowledge, including knowledge that the goal of life is pleasure, which could be achieved by limiting our desires, by removing our fear of the gods and death.

Aside from seeking to explain the nature of the universe, Epicurus also wished to clarify the nature of the soul. Like the universe, it is also made of atoms, because all things must be made up of atoms. That the soul is composed of atoms is evident from the fact that, firstly, it is aware of what happens in the body and, secondly, it sets physical movement in motion.\textsuperscript{21} The atomic structure of the soul has important consequences for Epicurean ethics. First, since all atoms are perishable so too is the human soul, which means that death should not be feared, because at death our atoms will disperse and we will cease to feel.\textsuperscript{22} In this, the Epicurean view ran counter to mainstream beliefs of an afterlife which potentially included punishment by the gods. Second, it is because the soul is made up of atoms that we have sensations and experience pleasure and pain. The criterion of feeling, \textit{pathē} (πάθη), is the centrepiece of Epicurean ethical choices, and they judge good choices to be those based on a feeling of pleasure and bad choices to be those based on a feeling of pain.\textsuperscript{23} Pleasure also comes in two forms: the first is a kinetic sort, a pleasure that arises from the temporary satisfaction of a desire. For example, the pleasure felt while drinking a good glass of wine. The second, static pleasure, is the state after a desire has been fulfilled.\textsuperscript{24} What this means is that Epicureans did not dismiss all desires. Instead they assessed desires based on three categories: natural and necessary, natural and unnecessary and unnatural and unnecessary.\textsuperscript{25} Natural and necessary desires are those that bring pleasure and are naturally limited, such as simple food and a simple house. Unnecessary and natural desires are those that aim for variation of that feeling of pleasure, for example luxury food. The third category are unnatural and unnecessary desires. These are unbounded desires, such as wealth and power, which cause pain and bring no pleasure. Negative desires are the result of mistaken beliefs as to what will bring happiness.

This emphasis on pleasure led Epicurus to argue that nothing is good or bad \textit{per se} but only for its contribution to pleasure. This is the case with Epicurean virtues, which are instrumental. Thus moderation, courage, and friendship and justice are valuable only for their contribution to pleasure. Justice contributes to pleasure because it is a mutual pact between humans not to harm each other, but it is nothing in itself.\textsuperscript{26} Likewise, the well-known Epicurean dictum that withdrawal from political life is the best means of achieving security arises not from an issue with political involvement itself but from the fact that people

\textsuperscript{19} Lucr. 2.218-219; Lucr. 2.251-255; Long (2006), 158.

\textsuperscript{20} Epicurus \textit{Ep.} Hdt. 40; Morel (2009), 90

\textsuperscript{21} Epicurus \textit{Ep.} Hdt. 63.

\textsuperscript{22} Epicurus \textit{Ep.} Men. 124; Lucr. 3.417-614.

\textsuperscript{23} Epicurus \textit{Ep.} Men. 129.

\textsuperscript{24} Diog. Laert. 10.136.

\textsuperscript{25} Epicurus \textit{Ep.} Men. 129; Epicurus \textit{RS} 29.

\textsuperscript{26} See Epicurus RS 31-33.
suffer unnecessary harm when trying to attain political office.\textsuperscript{27} This is a point of view articulated in \textit{RS 7}:

\begin{quote}
Some wish to become famous and respected, believing that they would gain security from men. Thus if the life of such men is secure, they acquire the natural good; if it is not secure, they do not have that for which they strove from the beginning according what is naturally congenital. (Epicurus \textit{RS 7})\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

Here, Epicurus suggests that politics is a possible, although highly unlikely way to gain \textit{ataraxia} because it is too dependent on fame and the respect of others, over which we have no control. In short, this sort of security is based on external goods, which are inherently fragile and beyond our control. In contrast, true security is self-mastery over our own desires. This is an idea we see expressed in \textit{KD 58}, when Epicurus contrasts the true freedom of the wise man to that of the politician: ἐκλυτέον ἑαυτοῦς ἐκ τοῦ περὶ τὰ ἐγκύκλια καὶ πολιτικὰ δεσμωτηρίου (‘[t]hey must free themselves from the prison of general education and politics’, Epicurus \textit{RS 58}).\textsuperscript{29} In the case of both \textit{RS 7} and \textit{RS 58}, Epicurus does not prohibit participation in politics rather he seeks to highlight the general misconceptions that lead people into taking part. Epicurus’ strategy of showing the way that incorrect beliefs lead to unhappiness highlights the therapeutic nature of Epicurean teachings, and they aim to help followers overcome the negative desires that inhibit their happiness.

Epicurus’ social theory reflects his view on the importance of pleasure, and he regards friends as essential for gaining \textit{ataraxia} and \textit{aporia}. According to Epicurus, friendship is, in fact, the best means of gaining \textit{eudaimonia}, because it offers security when one has withdrawn from the many.\textsuperscript{30} Just how important friendship was to Epicurus is indicated by his statement that ὁ γενναῖος περὶ σοφίαν καὶ φιλίαν μάλιστα γίγνεται, ὅν τὸ μὲν ἐστὶ θυντὸν ἀγαθόν, τὸ δὲ ἀθάνατον (‘[t]he high-minded man is most engaged in wisdom and friendship, of which the former is a mortal good and the latter an immortal good’, Epicurus \textit{Sent. Vat. 78}). Friendship rates more highly for Epicurus than wisdom because the gods have friends but do not require wisdom to live a happy life—they have blessed and immortal natures which means that wisdom is unnecessary for them.\textsuperscript{31} The significance of Epicurus’ statement that friendship is an immortal good lies not only in the fact that friendship is as important as wisdom but that it allows humans to be more like the gods, a central goal of Epicurean sages.\textsuperscript{32}

Based on the sources preserved in the manuscript tradition, including Epicurus’ own letters, Lucretius and the doxographical tradition, we are presented with a reasonably rounded image of Epicurus and his philosophies,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[27] Roskam (2007), 38.
\item[28] Citations in Ancient Greek are from Muehl, Peter von der (ed.), (1966), \textit{Epicurus: Epistulae Tres et Ratae Sententiae} (Stuttgart: Teubner). My translation follows Roskam (2007, 38), who has argued based on analogy with other instances of the term that \& should be understood as ‘from’ rather than ‘against’.
\item[29] Fowler (1989), 125.
\item[31] Rist (1980), 122. On the fact that the gods have friends, see Phld. \textit{De dis} 3.1 and fr. 85.
\end{footnotes}
context, that depict Epicureans as food-loving sensualists. So, for example, he includes a quote from Metrodorus, one of the school’s founders, to his brother to Timocrates, in which Metrodorus says that it is not the role of Epicureans to save Greece ‘but to eat and drink wine, a pleasure and no harm to the belly’ (ἀλλ᾽ ἐσθίειν καὶ πίνειν οἶνον, ὦ Τιμόκρατες, ἀβλαβῶς τῇ γαστρί καὶ κεχαρισμένως’, Plut. Non posse 1098c).37 Cicero’s depiction of Epicurean pleasure is more nuanced. He argues that having pleasure as a philosophical goal or telos (τέλος) is dangerous because it is open to wilful misinterpretation by members of the Roman elite who use it to justify decadent lifestyles.38 He acknowledges the discursive power of misrepresenting the school’s hedonistic doctrines in the In Pisonem, saying audistis profecto dici philosophos Epicureos omnis res quae sint homini expetendae voluptate metiri; rectene an secus, nihil ad nos aut, si ad nos, nihil ad hoc tempus (‘of course, you have heard it said that Epicurean philosophers measure everything that is desired by man by pleasure; whether rightly or not is nothing to us, or, if it is, it is not important right now’, Cic. Pis. 68).39 Cicero thus presents the misinterpretation of Epicurean pleasure as a choice, both for those who disparage it and for those who incorrectly practice it.

Aside from the school’s telos, ancient writers also took issue with their apparent injunction to withdraw from politics. Plutarch accuses Epicurean views of destroying human life because of their opinions of politics and justice.40 Cicero likewise presents the Epicurean stance on politics as anti-social, a representation that he constructs by comparing Epicurean and Roman values.

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37 Citation in Ancient Greek are from Bernardakis, Gregorius N. (1895), Plutarch. Moralia. (Leipzig: Teubner). See Gordon (2004, 16) for a discussion of this quote.
38 Cic. Sest. 23.
Where the ideal statesman actively creates leisure for others through his involvement in politics, Cicero claims that the result of Epicurean quietude is the end of the republic. Through Lucius Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus, a famous Epicurean and possible patron of Philodemus, Cicero depicts Epicureans as selfishly looking after their own desires. He even has Piso say that those who maintain the state (reipublicae consulendum), who feel a sense of dignity (dignitati esse serviendum), who lead lives dictated by a sense of duty (offici rationem in omni vita) and who sacrifice themselves for their fatherland (adenda pro patria pericula, vulnera exiciendi, mortem oppetendum) belong to this mad and insane group of men. In putting these words into Piso’s mouth, Cicero distorts the Epicurean message, that it is misguided to believe that political power will bring security.

Together with their views on political involvement, Epicureans were also lambasted for their belief in the nature of the gods, and they were often labelled atheists because they did not hold the belief that the gods played a role in human affairs. Epicurean views on bodily nature provided a further reason why they were called atheists. The Epicurean argument that everything is composed of destructible material compounds, except for the gods who are indestructible, was heavily criticised by other schools, who said that this was just a cover for the atheistic tendencies of the Garden. A further ground for charges of atheism was the Epicurean view on sense-perception: if the only things which were considered to exist were those which they had directly experienced, then how could they think the gods exist? Epicureans were not atheists, and their belief that the gods did not interfere in the lives of humans was not a cover for this view. In fact, the gods were important behavioural models for Epicureans. It is also possible to reconcile their views on atomism with their belief in the gods as immortal. We know that the Epicureans thought of the gods as immortal because they believed that gods were able to replenish with external matter and because, unlike humans, they were composed of a material that allowed atoms to pass through them. Likewise, although the Epicureans firmly held that sense-perception was an essential element in gaining knowledge, they also argued that it was possible to infer the existence of unobservable phenomena, such as the existence of the gods, from observable phenomena.

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43 Lucius Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus was consul in 58 BCE and proconsul of Macedonia in 57-55 BCE. His daughter, Calpurnia, married Julius Caesar. He was from a plebeian family whose power increased in the second century BCE. See Nisbet (1961, v-vi) for Piso’s biography. More recently Griffin (2001, 86) examines the historical figure of Piso.
44 Cic. Sest. 10.23.
47 Cic. Nat. D. 1.88. The question of whether or not the Epicureans held realist or idealist views of the gods continues to be an issue of some debate. Long and Sedley (1987, 145) were among the first to suggest that Epicurean gods were only thought-constructs, which is the idealist view. Sedley (2011) has continued to argue that they held an idealist view of the gods. Konstan (2011) in the same volume argues the opposite, saying that the Epicureans held a realist view, which means that they conceived of the gods as real beings, composed of atoms and as possessing properties that correspond to the πρόδηλησις (‘preconception’ or ‘basic grasp’) of them as blessed and immortal beings. Obbink (1996, 3-6 and 2002) also examines the issue more indirectly. For a brief discussion of the topic, see also Konstan (2008): 115-116. Asmis (2009) contextualises the discussion within a broader examination of Epicurean views on sense perception. For Philodemus’ own views on sense perception see De signis, in which he argues that a valid inference is made based on similarities. For how Philodemus’ views build on Epicurus’, see Asmis (2009), 88 and 100. De Lacy and De Lacy (1941, 204-205) discuss the fact that Philodemus uses the same theory of sense perception in De dis and De signis. For the importance of the Epicurean approach to logic, and its differences to Aristotelian logic, see Kapp (1947).
Epicurus was also criticised for his pedagogical views, and he was notorious in antiquity for his negative attitude to *paideia*, the main system of education in the Hellenistic period. Much of the evidence for Epicurus’ negative attitude toward *paideia* comes from hostile sources. These sources assume their readers’ familiarity with the stereotype, already well established in antiquity, which depicted Epicurus as anti-intellectual. For writers such as Cicero, Athenaeus and Plutarch, Epicurus’ negative attitude toward *paideia* validated this image. Epicurus’ dismissal of poetry, which within traditional education played an important role in providing moral guidance, also contributed to the perception of him as uneducated.

Cicero and Athenaeus claim that Epicurus disparaged *paideia* to disguise his own lack of education within the system. This representation can be seen as an attempt to undermine his contribution to philosophy, and these writers respond to Epicurus’ view that it only through the study of nature and not *paideia* that we can achieve the Epicurean *telos*. Due to the limited number and nature of the Epicurean sources, it was easy for philosophers and thinkers to continue to take the negative interpretations of Epicurean pleasure, political involvement, theology and attitudes to *paideia* at face value.

### The Discovery of the Papyri

The discovery of the papyri at Herculaneum has been fundamental to changing perceptions of Epicureanism. The first papyri rolls were discovered at Herculaneum in October 1752. Camillo Paderni, director of the Museum Herculaneum and the workers initially took the charred papyri for pieces of wood and disposed of them. After a short time, their consistently cylindrical shape was noticed, but they were thought to be rolls of fabric or fishing nets so were again discarded. Eventually Paderni realised that he had found papyri. Over time it became clear that they belonged to an Epicurean philosopher, Philodemus, and that they contained an amazingly diverse range of treatises on ethics, theology, logic and epistemology, poetic, musical and rhetorical theory, and the history of philosophy. When the papyri were first discovered, the outer layers were scrapped off and the remaining better-preserved portions of the papyri were cut in half. In 1753 Padre Antonio Piaggio from the Vatican was brought in to assist. He worked out that the scrolls did not need to be cut all the way through, and that they could be cut along existing column lines. This method left the scrolls in three pieces, but meant that each layer was destroyed in the process. To get around this problem, drawings, called *disegni*, were made of each outer layer. The centrepiece, or midollo, was usually preserved, so Piaggio invented a machine to open it. Each piece of scroll was given a number by Piaggio. Usually he started from the inside and worked out, which meant they were opened in reverse. Piaggio kept good records for those scrolls he opened, but for *On poems* and *On music*, which had been opened by Paderni, he renumbered them with his inside to outside system without telling anyone. For two centuries people read the works back to front, and it was only in the
1990s that scholars realised that this was the case.

The condition of the scrolls and the way in which they were first opened had a huge impact on the reception of Philodemus’ works, and many scholars felt it would have been much better if the scrolls had been authored by Vergil, Livy, Aristotle or someone else whose works were regarded as more important than those of an Epicurean philosopher. In the 1908 *Herculaneum Buried*, Ethel Barker says that the ‘works of Philodemus himself are of little or no value as philosophy or literature.’ It was a commonly held view that Philodemus was unoriginal, a view that relates to the general perception of Epicureans as orthodox and dogmatic. It was not until the 1970s when Marcello Gigante opened the Centro Internazionale per lo Studio dei Papiri Ercolansì that a greater appreciation for the value of Philodemus’ works grew. Gigante ensured that new editions of the works were released. He also opened up access to the papyri, which resulted in even more revised editions. The use of a number of new technologies, particularly multispectral photography, has assisted in the clarification of fragments. Reordering the papyrus in turn meant that these texts made much greater sense. For example, it led Dirk Obbink and Daniel Delattre to realise that *De pietate* and *De musica* had been ordered backwards by previous scholars.

### Philodemus’ Contribution to Our Understanding of Epicurean Philosophy

The outcome of clearer editions has been to show that Philodemus made significant contributions to the development of Epicurean doctrines, which in turn has led to the realisation that Epicureans were not nearly as dogmatic and unchanging as our hostile sources had led us to believe. It is now understood that Philodemus’ ideas were much less derivative than originally thought, especially in the theory of art. Philodemus argues that art holds only aesthetic value rather than logical or moral value, and he applies this definition to the areas of music, poetry and rhetoric. In short, he argues against theories of mimesis held by the majority of other ancient philosophical schools. In *De rhetorica*, Philodemus argues that sophistic, but not political, rhetoric is an art. Throughout the treatise, he questions the traditional status of rhetoric as the preserve of politicians and instead argues that sophistic rhetoric is useful for philosophers, whose careers depend on writing and speaking.

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55 Sider (2005), 60.
56 Barker (1908), 82.
57 Comparetti described Philodemus as ‘an obscure, verbose and inauthentic Epicurean of the days of Cicero’ (Sider 2005, 63). This is a perspective expressed by some scholars in the twentieth century. So, Sedley (1989, 99 and 104) presents Philodemus as lacking philosophical independence and compares his works to Arrian’s transcripts of Epictetus’ teaching. The negative view of many philosophical works from the late republic also extended to Cicero, and as, Striker (2001) notes, it was often the case that the philosophical value of Cicero’s works was ignored in the twentieth century.

58 Obbink (1996), 45 comments that the latest columns drawn by the artists would have actually been the first. That this was the case with *De musica*, see Delatte (2004, 247) and (2007, cii). For a discussion of how Obbink and Delatte have helped modern scholars to better understand how ancient texts were read, see Janko (1995).


60 Haliwell (2002), 250.
61 Phil. *De rhet.* 2.23.33-24.23 Sudhaus; Blank (1995), 187; Blank (2009), 233. Blank (2001, 248) suggest the strategy of writing about rhetoric may have been an attempt to gain
More specifically, he argues that rhetoric can help ethical self-development but only because of the ability of a philosopher to interpret rhetoric and not because of any inherent moral value of the genre.62

In his other two aesthetic treaties, *De poematis* and *De musica*, Philodemus questions the moral utility of poetry, which was traditionally held to be great.63 Music itself, says Philodemus, does not have the power to affect the mind either positively or negatively because it cannot convey qualities of character.64 Due to a paucity of evidence, it is difficult to reconstruct Epicurus’ precise views on poetry, although it is clear that they were at odds with the long-established view that poetry was inherently moral.65 According to ancient sources, Epicurus argued that poetry provided some pleasure but that it held little educational value because it did not conform with the his school’s ethical doctrines.66 One of Philodemus’ aims in writing *De musica* and *De poematis* was to show, in line with Epicurus’ view of poetry as kinetic pleasure, that its value does not lie in its moral content. However, in a departure from what is known of Epicurus’ views, Philodemus says that a good poem is a combination of content and form, subject and style.67 Philodemus also shows that the utility of poetry does not come from the art itself, that is, from the poet; rather, it comes from the wise man’s ability to interpret it.68 Poetry can be a natural and unnecessary good, in that it can bring harmless intellectual pleasure. As David Armstrong says, ‘each exercise in it by a good poet has the glory of being unique in its impact to such an extent that that impact on the mind, not merely the senses, is altered not only by large but by small changes, such as variant readings, none of which are indifferent to the experience as a whole. Thus, even sonic beauty in poetry adds not only to irrational music in the poem but to intellectual meaning.’69 The relevance of such a theory to Augustan poetry is clear, and the Augustan poets were fond of elaborate and highly intentional variations in sound and in the employment of all possible rhetorical figures.70 The connection is also attested more securely by Philodemus’ dedication of one of his treaties, *On flattery*, to four Augustan writers: Plotius Tucca, Varius Rufus, Vergil and Quintilius Varus.71

Aside from the innovative nature of Philodemus’ definition of art, Philodemus also shows himself to be highly original in his approach to ethics, particularly in his ability to sympathetically approach commonly held fears.72 Likewise, Philodemus appears to have refined Epicurean theories of the emotions by mimicking the three categories of desire. Thus, in the same way that Epicureans had always divided desires into natural and necessary, natural and unnecessary, and unnatural and

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62 Phld. *De rhet.* 2.1.26-34. It can help develop ethics because sophistic rhetoric persuades through reason while political rhetoric persuades through negative emotions (Phld. *De rhet.* 2.46.28-47.12 Sudhaus). The stirring up of audiences’ emotions is encouraged by both Crassus and Antonius in *De oratore* (Cic. *De or.* 2.185 and 3.195).

63 For discussions of Philodemus’ poetic theory, see Armstrong (2001); Asmis (1995b); Hammerstaedt (2001); Porter (1995); Janko (2000); Wilkinson (1933).

64 Halliwell (2002), 250.

65 Isocrates’ system of *paideia* was similarly criticised as insufficient because he did not recognise the importance of poetry (Halliwell 2011, 285).

66 Asmis (1995a); Janko (2000), 9; Obbink (1995), iv. Evidence for Epicurus’ views on poetry is limited, but some information can be found in Diog. Laert. 10.121; Epicurus fr. 89 and fr. 43 Arrighetti; Cic. *Fin.* 1.71-2; Plut. *Mor.* 15d, 1086f and 1095c.

67 As Janko (2000, 8) notes, for Philodemus poetry has aesthetic rather than moral value. As Sider (1997, 31) notes, ‘it is not that a poem cannot contain useful or facts or a valid argument; only that these function entirely apart from any poetic virtue contained therein.’


unnecessary, Philodemus also gives a tripartite division to some emotions like anger and love. Thus, in *De ira* Philodemus presents anger as natural and necessary when the harm that causes the feeling of anger is both voluntary and threatens or takes away life, bodily health or happiness. Anger is natural and unnecessary when someone voluntarily harms you, but does not threaten your life, health or happiness. Anger that is caused by a slight harm, such as someone cutting you off in traffic, is unnatural and unnecessary if you react to those slight harms on every occasion with anger. Other emotions, however, such as envy and greed are simply unnatural and unnecessary, because they always originate from misguided beliefs as to what causes happiness. Philodemus’ innovations to various philosophical issues, such as ethics and aesthetics, has highlighted the fact that Epicureans were in fact less dogmatic and much more willing to incorporate outside views than previously thought.

Many of Philodemus’ changes to Epicurean philosophy can be understood as his willingness to adapt to the Roman context in which he lived and worked. This is particularly the case in his attitude to political involvement, which as I noted earlier was seen as a problematic way of gaining security by Epicureans, although this is not to say that they explicitly prohibited it. Philodemus too regards withdrawal from the many as the best means of gaining the person security required for tranquillity. However, he also acknowledges that some men are either constitutionally inclined toward political life or that it is too difficult for them to disentangle themselves from it given their family obligations. Philodemus also says that it is possible for politicians to have a positive effect on those they rule or for whom they rule. He does not argue that philosophy is able to teach politicians how to be better politicians, but better men; and he does say that the effect of philosophy on politicians is astronomical, (his word not mine) and I give you the relevant passage in full:


It would also be a good thing, if the politician is also well-versed in philosophy, so that he might more actively be a good man, for this reason, we say that philosophy both generally, when it is imputed to a disposition for politics, and also particularly when it gives suitable suggestions for the politicians, will make an astronomical difference for the better.

(Phld. De rhet. 3.15a.16-31 Hammerstaedt)  

Thus Philodemus is concurrently positive and negative about politics. He shows that politicians can do some good at the same time as he disparages politicians as unethical. He strongly associates greed, envy, anger and other.

73 Asmis (2011), 177.
74 Asmis (2011), 177-178.
75 Asmis (2011), 178.
76 Fitzgerald (2004), 2.
77 Wurster (forthcoming).
78 Wurster (forthcoming).
79 Phld. De adul. 4.4-12.
flattery with politics, arguing that these arise from fear brought about by the misguided belief that external goods associated with politics, namely wealth and power, will bring happiness. In this respect, the life of a politician is contrasted to the life of the wise man. However, Philodemus does not deny the possibility that politicians can achieve a state of security through a political life, but he understands politicians as doing so only if they have attained some level of ethical self-realisation, and he sees his role as one of helping them to do so. The kinds of men that Philodemus had in mind is demonstrated by his dedication of De bone rege secundum Homerum to the Roman statesman Piso and of De rhetorica IV to Gaius Vibius Pansa Caetronianus, also a prominent Roman politician. Accordingly, Philodemus shows that gaining a certain degree of ethical self-realisation enables politicians to act with an almost-Epicurean self-mastery. Philodemus’ willingness to recognise different interests amongst his readers reflects the social reality of his audience, many of whom were members of the Roman elite for whom withdrawal from political life was not an option.

This is just one example of the way that Philodemus adapts his Epicurean philosophy to his Roman world and on the whole he is keen to provide Epicurean solutions to Roman problems. Another example includes the way that he explores the nature of friendships between Epicurean wise men who are financially dependent on wealthy benefactors, that is relationships which Roman sources label amicitia. Philodemus also engages in Roman discourse on the nature of otium (‘leisure’) and the importance of labor at the same time as staying true to traditional Epicurean views of bonos (πόνος, ‘work’, ‘labour’, ‘physical pain’). On the one hand, Philodemus offers guidance on how to ethically engage in negotium (‘business’, ‘labour’) to those, including members of the Roman elite, for whom it was the norm, while on the other hand he enjoins fellow wise men to withdraw from the multitude. In this respect, Philodemus’ texts are multivalent, and he writes for an audience that includes both the philosophically-interested and sages. His discussions on the topic of work and philosophical leisure provide insight into how Philodemus dealt with the competing claims of philosophy and his Roman reality.

In conclusion, Philodemus has been instrumental in changing perceptions of Epicurean philosophy by showing scholars that the school was less dogmatic and far more innovative than previously thought. Likewise, the works of Philodemus, together with the fragments of Epicurus’ On nature that were also found in the library at Herculaneum, have demonstrated that, although Epicureans may not have used dialectic and deductive logic, they were capable of complex and technical argumentation. Likewise, Philodemus’ texts clarify important aspects of Epicurean ethics, aesthetic theory and epistemology, which I have not mentioned in this paper. In November last year, a further development was announced that may see the decipherment of even more scrolls, and findings were released on the use of X-ray phase-contrast tomography which revealed letters in the papyri without unrolling them. The advantages of such

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81 Wurster (forthcoming).
82 Phil. De rhet. fr. 13.1-16 Longo Auricchio. According to Phld. De piet. 88.10-16, the lives of politicians are filled with misfortunes.
83 At Phld. De piet. 84.10-26, Philodemus talks about lightening the load of rulers.
84 Gaius Vibius Pansa Caetronianus was consul in 43 BCE; prior to that he had served in Gaul with Caesar. He had governed Bithynia in 47-46 BCE and Cisalpine Gaul in 45 BCE.
85 Wurster (forthcoming).
86 Wurster (forthcoming).
87 Mocella et. al. 2014. Also underdevelopment is a process called Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI), which Dr. Kathryn E. Piquette from Cologne Center for eHumanities, Universität zu Köln is applying to the Herculaneum papyri.
a technique are clear, as it would mean that the destructive process of opening the scrolls could be entirely avoided. We can only hope that new readings and interpretations of the texts from Herculaneum continue to explicate the teachings of Epicurus and that we also find some new authors preserved in the scrolls.

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