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Mezentius the Epicurean*

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SUMMARY: This paper argues that Mezentius, the *contemptor divum* ("scorner of the gods") in Virgil's *Aeneid*, can be read as an allegorical Epicurean. His Epicurean element helps to explain his dramatic transformation from a symbol of *impietas* to one of *pietas* in Books 7–10, as well as *pius Aeneas*' reverse transformation into an impious Giant figure. These transformations parallel the inversion of the traditional meanings of *pietas* and *impietas* in Lucretius and other Epicurean writers; in addition, the Giant-like Mezentius evokes the subversive Gigantomachy of Lucretius, which celebrates the archetypal scorners of the gods as positive symbols of Epicureanism. The "redeemed" Mezentius allows for an Epicurean reading of the *Aeneid*, in which *impietas* is redefined as true piety.

THE ROLE OF EPICUREANISM IN THE *AENEID* continues to be a hotly debated topic.[1] While there is no consensus on Virgil's overall attitude towards Epicureanism, most scholars find either that Epicureanism is discredited in the *Aeneid* or that the epic's philosophy is too eclectic to be labeled. In other words, despite associations between Virgil and Epicureanism in ancient biographical

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[1] Two recent books largely dedicated to the topic of Virgil and Epicureanism (Adler and Armstrong et al., eds.) display the continuing interest in the subject, as well as the wide range of opinions on the issues involved. Further bibliography can be found in these books, and in Mellinghoff-Bourgerie.

sources,[2] only a few have argued that the *Aeneid* displays a strongly Epicurean message.[3] The reason is clear enough: the *Aeneid* is a foundation epic and its hero is politically engaged and divinely guided. To argue that beneath all of that lies an Epicurean message would seem to require both a negative attitude towards the poem's hero and a non-literal interpretation of the divine apparatus.[4] In addition, since the most Epicurean character in the *Aeneid* is usually said to be Dido, an Epicurean reading of the *Aeneid* would require not only a critique of Aeneas but also a redemption of his opposition.[5]

These obstacles to an Epicurean *Aeneid* are not as great as they seem, however, since many readers of Virgil's epic believe it to contain criticism of Aeneas, sympathy for his enemies, and a complex presentation of the divine world. Recently even Dido's Epicureanism has been given sympathetic treatment. Gordon's perceptive analysis of Dido's relation to the Phaeacians of Homer, and particularly to their role in philosophic debate as both positive and negative symbols of Epicureanism, leads her to conclude that "one can imagine various Epicurean responses to the *Aeneid*, including Epicurean readings that accept Dido as a worthy representative of the Garden" (207). I would like to further Gordon's attempt to open up possible Epicurean readings of the *Aeneid* by adducing another opponent of Aeneas with complex allegorical, intertextual, and ethical connections to Epicureanism. I will argue that Mezentius, even more than Dido, evokes Epicurean philosophy, and in a manner that similarly allows for an Epicurean reading of the poem's action.[6]

[2] On the biographical evidence see most recently Armstrong, who also notes the papyrological evidence linking Virgil with Epicureanism in the dedication of Philodemus' *On Flattery*. See also Gigante 2004 (with bibliography).

[3] E.g., Frank, Herrmann, Sforza, G. Williams, Mellinghoff-Bourgerie.

[4] There have been attempts to reconcile Aeneas' character with Epicurean belief, most notably by Mellinghoff-Bourgerie. More frequently critics have suggested that aspects of his characterization can be considered Epicurean but that his overall philosophic pedigree is more complex (e.g., Johnston on Aeneas' piety; Erler, Galinsky 1988 and 1994, and Fish 2004 on Aeneas' anger). A majority of critics associate Aeneas exclusively with non-Epicurean philosophies such as Stoicism, Platonism, or Aristotelianism.

[5] Cf. Feeney 1991: 172–73: "… the urge to read an Epicurean *Aeneid* founders with Dido, who is herself a character with an Epicurean reading of the poem's action—a reading which is proved comprehensively wrong." On Dido's Epicureanism see Pease, Mellinghoff-Bourgerie, Dyson 1996, Gordon, Adler.

[6] Not everyone associates Dido with Epicureanism (e.g., Gigante 2004: 97), and even those who do include caveats. E.g., Dyson 1996: 204: "This is not to say that Dido *is* an Epicurean, but rather that her shifting relationship to Epicureanism is an important aspect of her character"; Gordon 204: "I do not mean to reduce the *Aeneid* to an allegory on Stoic and Epicurean world views … . My far simpler claim is that attention to the

Since the Epicurean layer to Mezentius' characterization has not been emphasized before,[7] I will first present evidence for its existence and then suggest ways in which an Epicurean Mezentius complicates the reader's evaluation of *pius Aeneas*.

1. THE PIETY OF *IMPIETAS*

Before setting out the specific ways in which Mezentius can be connected to Epicurean doctrine, I will show more broadly how Virgil's transformation of Mezentius, from a symbol of *impietas* to one of *pietas*, might be connected to a rhetorical defense of Epicureanism in which *impietas* is redefined as *pietas*. Indeed for many readers the most striking aspect of Mezentius' characterization is precisely the transformation he seems to undergo in Books 7–10.[8] He is introduced by the narrator in Book 7 as a scorner of the gods (648 *contemptor divum*[9]) and an unworthy father to his noble son Lausus (653–54). Evander deepens our negative impression of Mezentius by depicting him as a cruel tyrant given to sadistic methods of torture (8.478–95). In Books 9 and 10, however, Mezentius grows progressively more sympathetic: his Homeric *aristeia* on the battlefield presents him as a strong and noble warrior who does not deign to hit his enemy from behind (10.732–35). In addition, Mezentius' close relationship with his son Lausus dominates the last part of Book 10 and gives a further positive dimension to his character: when Lausus, trying to save his father's life, dies at the hands of Aeneas, Mezentius mourns the loss of his son with one of the most poignant soliloquies in the *Aeneid* (10.846–56); finally, he becomes the epitome of paternal *pietas* by asking Aeneas to bury him with his son.

Despite these striking changes in the presentation of Mezentius, most readers agree that Mezentius' "redemption" is *not* the result of a spiritual trans-

Phaeacian lineage of Dido demonstrates that her Epicurean connections are deeper, more varied, and more sophisticated than has hitherto been noted." I would include similar caveats for my analysis of Mezentius the Epicurean and suggest that Virgil, far from acting the part of a blunt allegorist, shows a sophisticated awareness of the ways of reading epic and wields philosophic allegories as one of many poetic tools.

[7] La Penna 22–26 briefly compares Mezentius' autonomy to the self-sufficiency of the Stoic and Epicurean sage; however, he ends by favoring the Stoic comparison and suggests that Mezentius is "il rovesciamento del *sapiens* stoico" (25) because of his rejection of divinity.

[8] The bibliography on Mezentius is long. Comprehensive treatments include Glenn 1971a, Burke 1974a, Thome, La Penna, Gotoff.

[9] The text of Virgil is that of Mynors. Translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

formation of his character.[10] On the contrary, the one consistent aspect of Mezentius' portrayal is his *impietas* towards the gods, and Book 10, far from deemphasizing this aspect of his character, intensifies it: Mezentius addresses his spear as a god and vows to dedicate Aeneas' armor to Lausus (773–76); he also goes into his final battle reaffirming his lack of concern for any of the gods (880 *nec divum parcimus ulli*). It seems, then, that Mezentius' transformation into a symbol of *pietas* is not a simple redemption of his impiety; instead, it challenges the reader to form a more complex understanding of *impietas*.

At the same time, Aeneas, the archetype of *pietas*, undergoes an opposite progression in the text and becomes a symbol of *impietas*. After Pallas' death he goes on a vicious rampage in which he seizes prisoners for human sacrifice (10.517–20) and kills several suppliant enemies, including a priest (10.537–41). Later he kills Lausus as Lausus tries to defend his father Mezentius, and he utters the wonderfully ironic line (10.812) *fallit te incautum pietas tua* ("your *pietas* deceives you and makes you reckless").[11] His behavior is well symbolized by the shocking comparison of Aeneas to Aegaeon, a hundred-armed Giant who fights *against* Jove (10.565–70). Although metaphorically Aeneas has become a *contemptor divum*, his traditional religious piety is in fact unaltered: in contrast to Mezentius, he enters his final duel by calling on the aid of the gods (10.875–76) and, after killing Mezentius, dedicates his armor to Mars (11.1–16). In other words, just as Mezentius' transformation stretches the meaning of *impietas* by uniting a rejection of traditional religious behavior with paternal piety, so Aeneas' pushes the limits of *pietas* by associating *religio* with vicious behavior.

This redefinition of traditional notions of *pietas* and *impietas* is a rhetorical strategy used by Lucretius in his Epicurean poem.[12] For example, the *DRN* begins after the proem with a depiction of *religio* as a monstrous tyrant defeated by Epicurus (1.62–79), and Epicurus' victory is followed by a dramatic example of the evils of *religio* (1.101 *tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*),

[10] Sullivan 1969 is an exception to this consensus. See n. 39 below.

[11] Aeneas' conflict with Lausus is frequently cited as creating a crisis for Aeneas' *pietas*. E.g., Putnam 1995: 137: "Moreover, through his son's sacrifice the *contemptor divum* elicits a vivid demonstration of *pietas* which in turn forces *pius* Aeneas to become a killer of the pious"; Saylor 50: "The crisis for *pietas* comes in the duel of Aeneas and Lausus where the former in being *pius* destroys the latter who is also *pius*." On Servius' elaborate strategy for avoiding this crisis in his explanation of the line (*ad* 10.812) see Thomas 2001: 111.

[12] Lucretius inherits the strategy from Epicurus (see Epicur. *Ep.* 3.123–24). On its pre-Socratic pedigree see Hardie 1986: 236–37. The text of Lucretius is that of Bailey.

namely, the sacrifice of Iphigenia by her father (1.84–101). In between these two narratives Lucretius preemptively denies the impiety of Epicurean studies (1.80–82) and associates impiety instead with religion (1.82–83 … *saepius illa / religio peperit scelerosa atque impia facta*). In Book 5 (1198–203) he explicitly redefines *pietas*, stating that it is *not* found in traditional religious behavior such as praying to the gods or sacrificing but is simply the ability to view the world with a quiet mind (1203 *sed mage pacata posse omnia mente tueri*).

Lucretius also uses mythological allusions to support this Epicurean redefinition of *pietas*. Specifically, as Hardie and others have pointed out, Lucretius seizes upon the Giants and their attack on the gods as a positive model for the Epicurean conquest of religion, and he transforms these mythical archetypes of *impietas* into pious Epicurean heroes.[13] The identification between Epicureans and the Giants seems to have been made by opponents of Epicureanism, as well, since in Book 5 Lucretius denies that Epicureans should be punished like the Giants because of their belief in a mortal and materialistic world (5.114–21).[14] Thus, just as Gordon has shown that the identification of Homer's Phaeacians with Epicurean hedonism was utilized by both opponents and proponents of Epicureanism, so it seems the Giants too were dynamic symbols, used polemically as both heroes and villains in philosophic debate on the nature of Epicureanism.

Virgil has his own dynamic symbol of mythological *impietas* in the Giant-like character of Mezentius, and I will show that he uses him similarly to explore an Epicurean version of *pietas*.[15] Hardie has argued that Lucretius and Virgil make *opposing* use of gigantomachic imagery in their epics: "For Virgil the Giants are an example of how not to attempt the journey to heaven" (1986:

[13] Hardie 1986: 209–13. For Lucretius' valorization of the Giants see also Schrijvers 254–55, Gale 42–45 and 192–93, Volk 106–8.

[14] It has been suggested that this comparison between Epicureans and Giants develops from passages in Plato and Aristotle in which the philosophic impiety of materialist philosophers, who would deny either the divinity of the world or the existence of incorporeal substances, is likened to the crimes of the Giants. See esp. Bignone 2.79–81, also Vian (esp. 6), Reiche, Gale 44–45, Clay 1997: 190–92, Gigandet 327–32, Volk 100–106. The ancient references are found in: Pl. *Sph.* 246a–b, *Lg.* 3.701c; Arist. *de Philosophia* fr. 18 Ross. See also Plu. *Mor.* 926d, 1119b.

[15] Mezentius is not literally a Giant, but he does have a symbolic connection to the Giants through his contempt for the gods and his links to other Giant-like characters such as Polyphemus and Orion. On connections between Mezentius and Polyphemus see Glenn 1971a. The comparison to Orion is made explicitly in a simile in 10.763–68. See also Leach, Hardie 1986: 97 and 155.

209). In other words, Hardie suggests that Virgil, instead of subversively glorifying the Giants as Lucretius had done, reverts to the traditional use of the Gigantomachy as a symbol of the victory of order against chaos. Thus, Aeneas, falling in line with Hercules as a slayer of Giants and foreshadowing the role of Augustus in Actium, "acts as a Giant-killer in his defeat of the monstrous Mezentius."[16] I would argue that while this traditional kind of Gigantomachy is present in the *Aeneid*, so too is the subversive Epicurean kind: after Virgil carefully marshals the forces of order and disorder, gods and monsters, he not only conflates the two sides but also reverses the connotations of good and evil attached to them.[17] One of the most striking instances of this reversal comes in the confrontation between Aeneas and Mezentius in Book 10. Thus, the reader has a choice in evaluating Mezentius: she can view him as an impious villain who, like so many Roman villains, is granted a noble defeat, or she can take an Epicurean turn and explore the piety of *impietas*.

2. ALLEGORICAL MEZENTIUS

I would now like to show how the two major portraits of Mezentius, the "impious" Mezentius of Evander's tale and the "pious" Mezentius at the end of Book 10, may be interpreted allegorically as providing a negative and a positive image, respectively, of Epicureanism. Unlike Lucretius, Virgil does not explicitly state that the negative version of his *contemptor divum* is the wrong one and the positive version correct; however, by making the two versions difficult to reconcile he at least foregrounds the problem of interpreting Mezentius' character and allows for an Epicurean reading that might reevaluate Evander's testimony in light of Mezentius' transformation.

A. Evander's Mezentius

In Evander's condemnation of Mezentius as a cruel tyrant (8.478–95), he attributes a bizarre crime to him that is not found in any of the traditional stories about Mezentius (485–88):

> "mortua quin etiam iungebat corpora vivis
> componens manibusque manus atque oribus ora,
> tormenti genus, et sanie taboque fluentis
> complexu in misero longa sic morte necabat."

[16] Hardie 1986: 155. See further Hardie 1986: 85–156 for a discussion of "the tradition of political Gigantomachic imagery" (ch. 3.1) and the *Aeneid*'s symbolic Gigantomachies.

[17] O'Hara, too, suggests important revisions to Hardie's analysis of Gigantomachy in the *Aeneid* and emphasizes that the moments in which Aeneas is metaphorically associated with Giants threaten the neat dichotomy of Hardie's thesis.

> "Indeed he would even join dead bodies with living ones, fitting together hands with hands and faces with faces, a kind of torture, and as they were oozing with blood and gore in a miserable embrace, he would kill them with this drawn-out death."

Virgil clearly knows the traditional version of Mezentius' crimes, namely, that he demanded the *primitiae* ("first-fruits") of the gods for himself, because he has Aeneas subtly allude to it in 11.16 when he calls the dead Mezentius himself the *primitiae*.[18] Why does Virgil change it? Most critics suggest that, in attributing to Mezentius the heinous practice Evander describes, a torture attributed by Aristotle and Cicero to Etruscan pirates, Virgil makes Mezentius a more symbolically evil character and also something of a scapegoat for the Etruscan nation.[19] What these explanations leave out, however, is the philosophic context of Aristotle's and Cicero's description of the torture: both use it as a metaphor for the Platonic/Orphic/Pythagorean conception of the soul, and particularly for the theory that the incarnate human life is a form of punishment—the very theory that Anchises expounds in the Underworld (6.724–51).[20] Thus, Mezentius' binding together of living bodies to dead ones is a remythologization of the binding together of the soul to the body.

Placed in its original philosophic context, then, Mezentius' torture might also be interpreted as symbolizing the Epicurean/materialist embrace of the incarnate life: for the Epicurean, both body and soul are corporeal and tightly linked to each other, so the incarnate life is the only one available to human beings and the body *protects* the soul instead of imprisoning it.[21] Thus, in changing Mezentius' crime from demanding the *primitiae* of the gods to binding together the living with the dead, Virgil creates a striking symbol of materialist ethics.[22] Like the Epicurean Giants of Lucretius, who declare that the

[18] On Mezentius' demand for the *primitiae* see Cato (*ap.* Macr. 3.5.10), Varro (*ap.* Plin. *Nat.* 14.88), D. H. 1.65.2, *Fast. Praen.* (*CIL* I. p. 236, 316), Ov. *Fast*. 4.863–900. See also Eden, Glenn 1971b, Burke 1974b, Thome 189–92, La Penna 8–9.

[19] Briquel 181. See also Jones and Thome 205.

[20] See esp. Anchises' description of the body as a "blind prison" for the soul (734 *carcere caeco*). On the philosophic context of the torture metaphor in Aristotle see Brunschwig. The passages of Aristotle and Cicero are *Protr.* fr. 60 Rose and *Hort.* fr. 95 Müller respectively.

[21] See Lucr. 3.323–49 and Epicur. *Ep.* 1.63–64.

[22] Even the story involving the *primitiae*, which lingers in the background of Virgil's presentation, might underscore Mezentius' Epicurean connections: Plutarch quotes a letter from Epicurus to Idomeneus in which he instructs Idomeneus to send him "first-fruits (ἀπαρχάς) for the service of our sacred body" (*Mor*. 1117d–e = fr. 130 Usener). In addition, Obbink 519 notes a story about Epicurus and *primitiae*: "According to Athenaeus, Epicurus cared nothing for libations or first-fruit offerings (ἀπαρχαί), but resembled

earth is not immortal, or the materialist Giants of Plato's *Sophist* (246a–b), who drag everything down from heaven to earth and deny the existence of anything without a body, Mezentius conflates the living with the dead. From the non-materialist's point of view, this is a form of torture.

Like Anchises, Evander espouses a decidedly non-Epicurean world view. When Aeneas first encounters him he is engaged in an elaborate religious festival to honor Hercules (8.102–305), the hero whom Lucretius had polemically supplanted with Epicurus in *DRN* 5.22–42. Indeed, as Hardie notes, "The site of Rome is dominated by un-Lucretian values" (1986: 217).[23] Thus, Evander is not only a political enemy of Mezentius but also, symbolically, a philosophic one, and it is from this non-Epicurean perspective that Mezentius' crimes are viewed.[24]

Of course, an interpretation of Evander and Mezentius as representing different philosophies is not the only reason to use caution in evaluating Evander's testimony. After all, Aeneas' enemies describe *him* as a cruel tyrant and pirate,[25] and rhetorical speeches in the *Aeneid* have a tendency to exaggerate the truth.[26] Yet most critics allow that the hostile characterizations of Aeneas are exaggerations without allowing the same possibility for Mezentius. In the end, however one interprets Evander's biases, the reader still must question why the depraved tyrant of his tale has so little in common with the Mezentius of Books 9 and 10.

Semonides' uncouth woman … . The standard interpretation is that the woman commonly feasts on sacrificial offerings, left near tombs and other places, which have gone unburned."

[23] See also Lyne 1987: 33–37 on Evander's Stoic allegiances. He notes (36–37), "To be Stoically hardy—despising wealth and so on—is, for Evander, to follow divine principle. Simplicity and fortitude are in his view virtues esteemed by God; and to aspire to them is to aspire to divinity. Immediately adjacent to Evander's instruction, Vergil exhibits gods in a scene of seduction and opulence. The irony is surely clear … . The gullible Evander has a view of God which Vergil's organization of scenes shows to be emphatically misplaced."

[24] Evander's political motivations for wanting Aeneas to attack Mezentius and the Latins are abundantly clear, as the Tiber god reveals that the Arcadians are continually at war with the Latins (8.55).

[25] See 7.362, 10.774, 11.484, 12.7 (through simile), 12.75. On the association of *latro* in 12.7 with Aeneas see Putnam 1965: 154, Lyne 1989: 162–65, Thomas 1998: 289.

[26] Highet's study on speeches in the *Aeneid* concludes (289): "Vergil, it seems, held that powerful oratory was incompatible with pure truth, and that every speaker presented his or her own case by misrepresenting the facts." See also Heinze 324–32, Feeney 1983, Hardie 1998. Evander, in addition to potentially misrepresenting Mezentius' character, seems to misrepresent the number of Etruscans opposing their ousted leader. He gives the impression that all of Etruria is against Mezentius, and that Mezentius' only ally is Turnus (8.489–95). In fact, from Mezentius' hometown alone, more than three times as many are fighting with him as against him: while 1000 men follow Lausus from Caere (7.652–53), only 300 fight on the side of Aeneas (10.182–83).

B. Mezentius' Final Scene

Mezentius' final scene (10.833–908) intensifies the philosophic component of his character and reorients the reader to a distinctly positive evaluation of it.[27] The scene also includes a critical examination of several Epicurean doctrines and highlights inconsistencies in this philosophy that were notorious points of debate in antiquity. Thus, even this "transformed" Mezentius invites multiple perspectives on Epicureanism.

The introduction of Mezentius the philosopher is immediately reflected in the landscape (833–38):

> Interea genitor Tiberini ad fluminis undam
> vulnera siccabat lymphis corpusque levabat
> arboris acclinis trunco. procul aerea ramis
> dependet galea et prato gravia arma quiescunt.
> stant lecti circum iuvenes; ipse aeger anhelans
> colla fovet fusus propexam in pectore barbam.
>
> Meanwhile, at the banks of the Tiber River, the father was stanching his wounds with water and resting his body, leaning against the trunk of a tree. At a distance his bronze helmet hangs down from the branches and his heavy arms rest peacefully on the meadow. Chosen young men stand around; he himself, sick, breathing deeply, supports his neck and pours his beard brushed forward on his chest.

This pastoral scene forms a striking contrast to the world of war and seems to make a philosophic statement: Lucretius twice uses pastoral scenery to evoke an ideal of tranquility and self-sufficiency, and Virgil intersperses the *Eclogues* and *Georgics* with Epicurean-tinged landscapes of serenity.[28] Mezentius blends

[27] The "transitional" Mezentius, i.e., the Homeric warrior in Books 9 and 10, also has some potentially positive Epicurean characteristics. In similes that compare Mezentius to a cliff and a boar, respectively, Mezentius' imperturbability in the face of continual assaults from the outside world is emphasized (10.693–96, 10.707–18). La Penna (see n. 7 above) connects this quality in Mezentius to the *autarkeia* of an Epicurean or Stoic sage, and Thome, too, detects a spiritual dimension in the language of the cliff simile (54–56). While Epicureans did not have a monopoly on the ideal of inner strength in the face of external blows, I would argue that Mezentius' combination of this quality with his continued defiance of the traditional gods pushes him in the direction of Epicureanism, instead of the perverted Stoicism argued for by La Penna.

[28] See Lucr. 2.20–36 and 5.1379–411. In particular, compare *propter aquae rivum* (Lucr. 2.30) with *ad fluminis undam* (*A.* 10.833), *corpora curant* (Lucr. 2.31) with *corpusque levabat* (*A.* 10.834), and *sub ramis arboris altae* (Lucr. 2.30) with *arboris acclinis trunco* (*A.* 10.835). Also particularly Lucretian-sounding in Mezentius' setting is the use of

into this pastoral world as nature helps him rest and heal. Even his name is effaced in this merging with nature; he becomes *genitor*. With the added detail of Mezentius' beard, the stage is set for his transformation into a philosopher of the Garden.[29]

Mezentius' tranquility is quickly disturbed by his concern for Lausus (839–43), and his devastation upon seeing his son's dead body prompts him to pour dust on his white hair and stretch his arms to the sky before collapsing on Lausus' body (844–45). Mezentius' gesture to the sky (844–45 *ambas / ad caelum tendit palmas*) has caused controversy since it looks suspiciously like praying, and some have argued that it is indeed a prayer to the gods (e.g., Sullivan 1968). Most critics, however, interpret it instead as an instinctual reaction displaying his utter grief and helplessness, since no verbalized prayer follows the gesture and there is no other indication that Mezentius has lessened his contempt for the gods.[30] I follow this latter approach but add that the gesture, in which Mezentius reaches for the sky but ends up clinging to the body of his dead son (845 *corpore inhaeret*), poignantly replicates Mezentius' "torture" from Book 8, as a living body is once again bound to a dead one.[31] This time, however, the materialist world view it signifies is charged with tragedy, and the agonizing emotion and questioning that follows suggests that there may be developing a touch of the anti-Lucretius in Mezentius.[32]

Indeed Mezentius' first words after his son's death seem to critique Epicurean values (10.846–49):

"tantane me tenuit vivendi, nate, voluptas,
ut pro me hostili paterer succedere dextrae,

quiescunt in line 836. Lucretius uses *quiesco*, *quies*, or *quietus* 25 times. On the Epicurean tone of Virgil's pastoral imagery see most recently Rundin, with further bibliography (161).

[29] On beards in the iconography of philosophers see Zanker 108–113; on the iconography of Epicurus and Epicureans see Frischer 129–282 and Zanker 113–29.

[30] E.g., Nethercut 35 and Thome 119–21. Servius *ad* 10.845 interprets the gesture as angry protest against the gods: *increpans deos, quasi sacrilegus*.

[31] Note, too, that the description of Mezentius' literal embrace of Lausus' body resembles the metaphorical language Cicero uses to describe the source of Epicurean pleasures in *de Finibus* (2.106): *tu totus haeres in corpore*.

[32] Mezentius' grief is not necessarily unEpicurean. Cf. Plutarch's report of the Epicurean belief that it is natural to weep and feel grief over the deaths of loved ones (*Mor.* 1101a–b = fr. 120 Usener). See also D. L. 10.120. Fish 1998: 101 provides an important reassessment of the Epicurean attitude towards grief and shows that "Lucretius, for all his abrasiveness, does not, as is commonly believed, altogether forbid emotional reaction of the sort that Horace expresses in his *Odes* towards death. Philodemus not only allows for emotional reaction towards death, but is much more sympathetic in tone than Lucretius."

> quem genui? tuane haec genitor per vulnera servor
> morte tua vivens?"
>
> "Did such love of living possess me, son, that I allowed the one whom I bore to yield to the enemy's right hand on my behalf? Am I, your father, saved through these wounds of yours, living by your death?"

Gotoff 201 notes the initial strangeness of these lines: "There has never been the slightest indication of a *vivendi voluptas* in this cold, cruel man. Nor is *paterer*, in the sense required here, in the slightest applicable." However, Mezentius' words are not strange in the context of Epicureanism. *Voluptas* is a marked Epicurean term, and Mezentius' *vivendi voluptas* is not simply a love of life; it is the inescapable drive to seek pleasure, the life force that shapes the ethical world of Epicureans and constitutes their *summum bonum*.[33] As such, it is an accurate depiction of the force that allowed Lausus to die in Mezentius' place.

Mezentius' recognition that his *vivendi voluptas* has destroyed his son is reminiscent of a Lucretian passage arguing that the prolongation of life purely for the sake of living cannot add to its pleasure (3.1081): *nec nova vivendo procuditur ulla voluptas* ("nor is any new pleasure forged by living"). Yet how does an Epicurean know when prolonging life is going to bring pain or pleasure? It is not always possible to calculate rationally or predict the results of one's actions as Epicurus would have one do,[34] and Mezentius has just been through a situation in which his instinct for *voluptas* has destroyed his only real pleasure in life, his son.

This tragic scenario points to another fundamental problem with Epicurean ethics: Epicureans are encouraged to love their friends as much as themselves,[35] and they cited famous mythological friendships as an ideal, such as that between Orestes and Pylades, each of whom was willing to die for the other (e.g., Cic. *Fin.* 1.65). Mezentius' love for Lausus exemplifies the virtue of this type of human connection but also the essential problem that this virtue poses for an ethical system that values self-sufficiency and secure pleasure.[36] Mezentius' soliloquy explores the incompatibility of these fundamental Epicurean tenets, as he finds his life shattered by the death of his son.

[33] Cf. Lucr. 1.1, 2.172, 2.258. See also Epicur. *Ep.* 3.128–32 and Cic. *Fin.* 1.29–42.

[34] E.g., Epicur. *Ep.* 3.132, Cic. *Fin.* 1.32–33. For possible ancient critique of Epicureanism on this score see Indelli and Tsouna-McKirahan 20–21 (discussion of [Phld.] *On Choices and Avoidances* col. I.10–13).

[35] Cf. Epicur. *Sent. Vat.* 23, 52, 78; D. L. 10.120, Cic. *Fin.* 1.68.

[36] For a modern discussion of the problems posed by friendship in Epicurean ethics see Mitsis 98–128 and Warren 39–43. For an ancient discussion see Cic. *Fin.* 2.82–85. Though Mezentius and Lausus are father and son, and not just friends, their relationship

Mezentius' realization that his life has been saved by Lausus' death calls to mind another passage from *DRN*, one in which Lucretius gives a logical explanation of the cycles of creation and destruction in the world (1.262–64):

> haud igitur penitus pereunt quaecumque videntur,
> quando alid ex alio reficit natura nec ullam
> rem gigni patitur nisi morte adiuta aliena.
>
> Therefore whatever is seen does not perish completely, since nature replenishes one thing from another, nor does it allow anything to be born unless aided by the death of another.

The *Aeneid* transfers this cycle of life and death on the atomic level to a human situation in Book 10 and exposes its tragic implications. While Lucretius ridicules those who fear death and attributes this fear to irrational beliefs such as falsely imagining that a part of oneself lives on after death to mourn one's own passing (3.870–93), Mezentius' experience has shown that death can be painful even without a belief in the survival of the soul. If a friend or a son is "another self," as the Epicureans taught, then part of a person does survive to mourn his own passing.

Thus, the death of Lausus has brought Mezentius' Epicureanism to its breaking point, and he exclaims (10.849–50),

> "heu, nunc misero mihi demum
> exitium infelix, nunc alte vulnus adactum!"
>
> "Alas, now at last death is unhappy for miserable me, now the wound is driven deep!"

The reading *exitium* in line 850, despite having the best manuscript support, has provoked controversy and a general preference for *exilium*: "*Exitium infelix* makes no sense here, for death is now a more rather than less attractive prospect for Mezentius."[37] Yet the reading makes sense for Mezentius the Epicu-

to each other is configured along the lines of the romantic, Pyladic relationship of friends like Achilles and Patroclus (see n. 75 below), or even Nisus and Euryalus (cf. the similar introductions of Mezentius and Lausus and Nisus and Euryalus in 7.647–54 and 9.176–83, respectively). The mutual love of Mezentius and Lausus is suppressed initially but fully developed in Book 10.

[37] Harrison *ad* 10.850. See also R. D. Williams 1961. For arguments in favor of *exitium*, see Page *ad* 10.850: "*exitium*. The reading of the best MSS. and certainly right, though Pierius read *exilium*, and is followed by many editors"; Conington *ad* 10.850: "*Exilium* seems to have been read by Serv. and Ti. Donatus. So Gud. originally; and another of Ribbeck's cursives gives it in the margin. Heyne adopted it against the authority of the

rean: the great Epicurean manifesto *nil igitur mors est ad nos* (Lucr. 3.830 "therefore death is nothing to us") is replaced by Mezentius' declaration "*nunc … exitium infelix*" when he realizes that he had more than his own death to fear.

This questioning of Epicurean belief causes Mezentius to critique himself and view his past life and exile from society's point of view (10.851–54[38]):

> "idem ego, nate, tuum maculavi crimine nomen,
> pulsus ob invidiam solio sceptrisque paternis.
> debueram patriae poenas odiisque meorum:
> omnis per mortis animam sontem ipse dedissem!"
>
> "I also have stained your name with crime, son, driven from the throne and ancestral power on account of envy. I should have paid the penalty to my country and to the hatred of my people. I myself should have given my guilty life to every kind of death!"

Mezentius' regrets are carefully worded, and few scholars have interpreted these lines as evidence of true repentance.[39] Mezentius regrets that his past

best MSS., but Wagn. restored from them '*exitium*,' which is perhaps preferable, as Mezentius mentions his exile two lines below"; Gotoff 202 n. 30: "10.850 exitium *MRP*^{2}: exilium *Pa Serv.* Many critics accept *exilium* against the rhetoric. Mezentius deals with his past life, including his exile, in the passage that is introduced by *idem ego* and repeats *nate*. *Nunc*, repeated, refers to his present condition and imminent death." Though not as frequent as *mors*, *exitium* and *exitiale* occur often in Lucretius (12 times combined) to designate death and destruction. I am not persuaded by Dewar's argument that *Theb.* 9.49–53 proves Virgil wrote *exilium* because of Statius' allusions to the scene through *nunc*, *misero*, and *exul*. Mezentius does mention his exile in 852, and the lines from the *Thebaid* are not so closely allusive that *exul ego* (9.52) need refer to *A.* 10.850 instead of 10.852. Even if Statius did read *exilium*, that does not prove that Virgil wrote it a century before. Finally, even if Virgil did write *exilium*, an Epicurean interpretation is still possible, since Epicureans were taught to scorn not only death but also exile and pain. Cf. Cic. *Fin.* 2.57 (regarding an Epicurean) *erit enim instructus ad mortem contemnendam, ad exilium, ad ipsum etiam dolorem.*

[38] On the importance of confession and self-critique in Epicureanism see Nussbaum 134–35, Konstan et al. 8, 10–11, and Phld. *Lib.* fr. 51.

[39] As Gotoff 203 writes, "there is no hint of public repentance on larger moral grounds, no apology to his people, no greater regard for the divinities … . Mezentius is not a morally reformed character"; 203 n. 31: "*Sontem* does not argue against this interpretation. It has the sense of 'adjudged as guilty' and is not necessarily a confession of one's own wrongdoing." See also Thome 128: "Von einer Bekehrung des Mezentius im Sinne einer völligen Abkehr von seiner bisherigen Haltung kann also nicht die Rede sein, selbst seine Reue erscheint insofern fragwürdig, als er nicht eigentlich seine Verbrechen als solche, sondern in erster Linie die daraus resultierenden Folgen bedauert." The most extreme exception to this view is that of Sullivan 1969: 224: "Now at last … he awakens from his megaloma-

actions have adversely affected his son, but he does not detail what his *crimen* was or why his soul was judged *sons*. Indeed the only reasons Mezentius gives for his exile are the envy (*invidiam*) and hatred of his people (*odiisque meorum*), and he certainly provides no confirmation of Evander' version of his crimes.

Mezentius finishes his soliloquy by announcing his intention to end his life (855–56): "*nunc vivo neque adhuc homines lucemque relinquo. / sed linquam*."[40] Despite the fact that Mezentius now recognizes the pain of death, there are no signs that he adopts a new philosophy or departs from Epicurean belief in any major way. On the contrary, he meets his death in a heroic, Epicurean fashion.[41] He begins by ordering his horse Rhaebus to be led in and then addresses him (856–66):

> simul hoc dicens attollit in aegrum
> se femur et, quamquam vis alto vulnere tardat,
> haud deiectus equum duci iubet. hoc decus illi,
> hoc solamen erat, bellis hoc victor abibat
> omnibus. adloquitur maerentem et talibus infit:
> "Rhaebe, diu, res si qua diu mortalibus ulla est,
> viximus. aut hodie victor spolia illa cruenti
> et caput Aeneae referes Lausique dolorum
> ultor eris mecum, aut, aperit si nulla viam vis,
> occumbes pariter; neque enim, fortissime, credo,
> iussa aliena pati et dominos dignabere Teucros."

> Saying this, he raises himself on his wounded thigh and, although his power is diminished by the deep wound, he is not at all downhearted but orders his horse to be led in. This was his glory, this his comfort, and from all his battles he departed as victor on this horse. He addresses him grieving and begins with these words: "Rhaebus, we have lived a long time, if anything for mortals is long. Today you will either bring back as victor those spoils and head of bloodthirsty Aeneas and be an avenger with me of the pains of Lausus, or, if force does not find a way, you will fall together with me; for I do not believe, most brave one, that you will deign to endure someone else's orders and Trojan masters."

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nia and delusions of greatness to a new awareness, to the bitter truth: he has sinned and greatly sinned against Heaven and his son. One thing alone remains for him: he will atone for his misdeeds by avenging the death of his son or by dying for him in turn."

[40] On Seneca's interpretation of Epicurus as approving of suicide when the conditions of life are bad enough see Gordon 207–10. See also Epicur. *Sent. Vat.* 9 and Cic. *Fin.* 1.62.

[41] There is an Epicurean tradition of meeting death in a courageous fashion, beginning with the accounts of Epicurus' own death (cf. D. L. 10.22). Even Cicero admits that Epicurus' death was admirable, though he goes on to suggest that it was thereby inconsistent with his philosophy (*Fin.* 2.96–98). See further my discussion of Epicurean suicide below.

Mezentius deals with his physical distress like a good Epicurean, by countering his present pain with mental strength (858 *haud deiectus*) and by recollecting pleasant times from his past (858–62).[42] Mezentius' bond with Rhaebus now takes the place of the relationship he had with Lausus as he pledges either to live or die together with him to avenge the "pains of Lausus" (863 *Lausique dolorum*).[43]

The consolation that Rhaebus provides prompts Mezentius to reflect on his situation with a piece of consolatory rhetoric (861–62 *Rhaebe, diu, res si qua diu mortalibus ulla est, / viximus*). These lines resonate with Lucretius' use of *consolatio* at the end of Book 3 (esp. 3.931–77), in which he argues that people should depart from life with a feeling of contentment and not sadness or complaint.[44] More importantly, these lines connect Mezentius the Epicurean with Dido, who meets her death with a similar, philosophic pronouncement: 4.653 *vixi et quem dederat cursum Fortuna peregi* ("I have lived, and I have completed the course that Fortune granted"). Gordon notes the many uses Seneca makes of Dido's phrase, including a vignette in which he relates that an Epicurean named Diodorus committed suicide while quoting her words; she concludes (207), "For Seneca, Dido's words are not merely Virgilian or tragic in a general sense. Rather: for Seneca, Dido's *Vixi* … is emblematic of the type of respectable, austere Epicureanism that he often admired." While Dido has been allowed these philosophic moments by her ancient readers, Mezentius has not: Servius struggles to explain the attribution of these philosophic words to a "sacrilegious man" (*homini sacrilego*) and notes that *critici* fault the line for being inconsistent with Mezentius' character (*ad* 10.861). However, they are only inconsistent if the transformation of the sacrilegious Mezentius into a philosopher has gone unnoticed.

Mezentius' confrontation with Aeneas provides a final glimpse of his Epicurean nature. He handles his emotions in a particularly Epicurean way, and I would argue that Mezentius, and not Aeneas, is the character who best represents Epicurean anger in the *Aeneid*.[45] Of course critics are quick to note the difficulty of positing one, orthodox version of Epicurean anger,[46] but

[42] For a concise statement of this Epicurean method for dealing with pain by turning the mind away from the present (*avocatio*) through remembrance of the past (*revocatio*) see Cic. *Tusc*. 3.32–33. On *avocatio* see also n. 65 below.

[43] While *dolor* is a common word in Virgil, it is also the technical Epicurean word for the opposite of *voluptas*.

[44] On Lucretius' *consolatio* see Kenney 31–34.

[45] On Aeneas and Epicurean anger see Galinsky 1988: 335–37, Rieks 38–39, Erler, Galinsky 1994: 193–99, Fish 2004, Indelli 107. For criticisms of the description of Aeneas' anger as "Epicurean" see Fowler 31–33 and Gill 217.

[46] On the competing Epicurean theories of anger see Erler 116–17, Procopé 377–86, Fowler 19, 24–25, 29–30, Harris 102.

Philodemus' version, with its distinction between "natural" and "empty" anger[47] and its emphasis on the importance of the underlying disposition of the angry person,[48] provides a model that usefully clarifies Mezentius' behavior at the end of Book 10. According to Philodemus, anger and a need for retaliation are natural responses,[49] but anger is connected to belief, and the underlying belief determines the quality of the anger. Thus, good, Epicurean anger, based on correct notions about the world,[50] may not look different from bad, unEpicurean anger to an observer, but it is different.[51]

Externally, then, Mezentius' desire for vengeance (864 *ultor eris mecum*) and feelings of anger after the death of Lausus appear identical to the rage of an unEpicurean figure such as Turnus, a similarity underscored by the exact repetition of 10.870–71 (*aestuat ingens / uno in corde pudor mixtoque insania luctu*) at 12.666–67. They are not identical, however, for Mezentius' underlying disposition is as Epicurean as ever, as the following exchanges with Aeneas show. Not only does he show no joy at the prospect of vengeance, a fact brought out by the contrast with the happiness Aeneas feels when faced with an opportunity to kill Mezentius (874 *Aeneas agnovit enim laetusque precatur*),[52] but his anger is short-lived.[53] After line 871, Mezentius is never again described as angry or emotional; on the contrary, he engages in a rational dialogue with Aeneas and even tries to assuage Aeneas' anger.

After Aeneas' happy prayer to Apollo (875–76), Mezentius responds (878–82):

> ille autem: "quid me erepto, saevissime, nato
> terres? haec via sola fuit qua perdere posses:

[47] Phld. *Ir.* xxxviii 1–6, xxxix 7–8 Indelli. See Procopé 371–73 and Fowler 25–26.

[48] *Ir.* xxxvii–xxxviii. See Procopé 374–77 and Fowler 28–30.

[49] "Good men experience anger both if someone wrongs their friends and if a friend sins against himself, without expecting any evil … to come to them personally" (*Ir.* xli 17–25, trans. Procopé).

[50] In the case of a wise man, anger "arises from the perception of how the nature of things is, and from having no false opinions in the measurement of damages and the punishment of people doing us harm" (*Ir.* xxxvii 32–39, trans. Fowler).

[51] UnEpicurean anger might be based on a belief in the intrinsic pleasure and value of vengeance, or on feelings of betrayal by the gods. See Procopé 372 and *Ir.* xl 8, xlii 21–31. For the similarity of appearance see Annas 196–97 n. 27.

[52] *Pace* Fish 2004: 133 n. 41: "Aeneas prays joyfully to Apollo … which I think says more about his piety … than any battle joy."

[53] Cf. *Ir.* xlvii 29–41, trans. Procopé: "If arousal commonly follows upon supposition, and the wise man is harmed by someone intentionally and supposes himself to be harmed but only to the extent that he has been, he will certainly be angry, but briefly, since he never has the impression of having received any great harm, not regarding anything external as great."

> nec mortem horremus nec divum parcimus ulli.
> desine, nam venio moriturus et haec tibi porto
> dona prius."
>
> But he replied: "Most savage one, why are you trying to terrify me now that my son has been ripped away? This was the only way you could destroy me. For I neither tremble before death nor show consideration for any of the gods. Cease, for I come to die, but first I bring these gifts to you."

In addition to demonstrating his correct disposition with a statement of the Epicurean manifesto not to fear death or the gods (880),[54] Mezentius adopts a pedagogical stance with Aeneas that closely mirrors that of Epicurean psychotherapists. Philodemus' *On Anger* touches upon the importance of rebuking and correcting misconceived notions of anger[55] and engages in debate with dissident Epicureans who rejected the role of therapeutic vituperation on the grounds that it would probably be wasted on those consumed with anger. In addition, *On Anger* is part of a larger work, *On Conduct and Characters*, that includes a treatise devoted to the subject of therapeutic correction, *On Frank Criticism*.[56] Thus, not only is Mezentius' anger Epicurean, but his attempts to correct Aeneas' rage by demonstrating the pointlessness of his threats and prayer to Apollo are likewise Epicurean.[57]

Frank criticism and philosophic therapy do not always work when a student is overwhelmed by anger,[58] and Aeneas' fury shows no sign of abating.

[54] Harrison *ad* 10.880 notes that *mortem horrere* is "not found before this passage of Vergil" and suggests it "may echo πεφρικέναι τὸν θάνατον in the *de Morte* of the Epicurean Philodemus (*Pap. Erc.* 39.7)." Cf. also Epicur. *Ep.* 3.125: τὸ φρικωδέστατον ... τῶν κακῶν ὁ θάνατος. Cicero uses a similar phrase in his discussion of the importance of not fearing death in *Tusc.* 2.2: *verum etiam quia nihil habet mors quod sit horrendum*; while he may not be specifically referencing Epicureanism in this passage, his use does suggest a philosophic provenance for the phrase.

[55] Philodemus notes Epicurus' own propensity to rebuke his friends if he felt they needed psychic correction (*Ir.* xxxv 18–40).

[56] Konstan et al. 6. Notably, Virgil's name, along with those of Varius, Plotius, and Quintilius Varus, is mentioned by Philodemus in another treatise that probably forms part of *On Conduct and Characters* (see Gigante 1995: 47 and n. 2 above). For more on Epicurean "therapy" see Nussbaum 102–39.

[57] Mezentius' perception of Aeneas' temperament is vividly conveyed by *saevissime* (878). The superlative of *saevus* is used only two other times in the *Aeneid*, once of Juno, when Aeneas is shown a vision of her destroying Troy (2.612), and once of the news brought to Turnus about the devastation of his forces (11.896). Of course, Aeneas is *saevissimus* from Mezentius' perspective, but the label is consistent with the portrait of the raging Aeneas shown earlier in the book from other perspectives (e.g., 569 *desaevit*; 802 *furit*; 813 *saevae … irae*).

[58] A point made by the "dissident" Epicurean Timasagoras in *Ir.* vii 6–24 (see Procopé 379).

After he tires of fending off Mezentius' spear throws (888–89), he strikes Rhaebus, who rears up and collapses on top of Mezentius (890–94), once more creating a poignant image of a dead body bound to a living one. Aeneas then approaches again with threats (896–98):

> advolat Aeneas vaginaque eripit ensem
> et super haec: "ubi nunc Mezentius acer et illa
> effera vis animi?"
>
> Aeneas rushes over, draws his sword from his sheath and says over him: "Where now is the fierce Mezentius and that savage strength of mind?"

Aeneas' taunt raises the same question the reader might ask who expects Evander's Mezentius to display himself. In fact, Mezentius *is* displaying his *vis animi* if that expression is placed in a Lucretian context.[59]

After Mezentius regains his mental composure,[60] Aeneas' taunts are met by another attempt at philosophic reasoning (898–902):

> contra Tyrrhenus, ut auras
> suspiciens hausit caelum mentemque recepit:
> "hostis amare, quid increpitas mortemque minaris?
> nullum in caede nefas, nec sic ad proelia veni,
> nec tecum meus haec pepigit mihi foedera Lausus."
>
> The Etruscan, as he recovered his mind while looking up at the sky and drinking in the air, replied: "Bitter enemy, why do you rebuke me and threaten death? There is nothing impious in my being killed, not thus did I come to battle, nor did my Lausus make this pact for me with you."

Though lines 901–2 are often read simply as a statement of the rules of war,[61] they have further resonance. Mezentius' words underscore the Epicurean belief that there is no absolute right or wrong, no *fas* or *nefas* in human life, but only pleasure and pain. Destruction, slaughter, and death are natural parts of the life cycle, not manifestations of *Furor impius*.[62]

[59] Cf. Harrison *ad* 10.897–98: "*vis animi* is taken from Lucretius, who has it nine times," the first of which refers to the conquering mind of Epicurus, 1.72 *ergo vivida vis animi pervicit*.

[60] Harrison *ad* 10.898–99 also points out the Lucretian pedigree of *mentemque recepit* and compares Lucr. 3.505 *paulatim redit in sensus animamque receptat*, the context of which is Lucretius' proof that the mind is mortal because it suffers along with the body.

[61] E.g., Harrison *ad* 10.901 and Thome 163.

[62] In addition, Mezentius' mention of *foedera* might reference the central importance of contracts in Epicurean society (e.g., Lucr. 5.1025, 1155).

On this point Mezentius is preceded by another Epicurean anger-therapist in the *Aeneid*. In Book 2 Venus, the Epicurean goddess *par excellence*,[63] stops Aeneas, who is consumed with anger and desire for vengeance, from killing Helen (2.594–95): "*nate, quis indomitas tantus dolor excitat iras? / quid furis?*"[64] Venus tries to diminish Aeneas' anger by recalling his attention to saving his family (595–600)[65] and by demonstrating that the underlying motivations for his rage are misguided: it is not Helen or Paris who has caused Troy's fall (601–2) but the *divum inclementia* (602). Venus uses the language of philosophic revelation[66] to unveil the nature of things for Aeneas, and she reveals an image of cosmic destruction: Neptune, Juno, Pallas, and Jupiter are all cooperating in the effort to bring down Troy (608–18), and she urges Aeneas to take flight and put an end to his toil (619).

The logic of Venus' revelation has baffled some critics and given cause to question the content of the preceding scene, in which Aeneas contemplates killing Helen.[67] However, if Venus' revelation is read as an Epicurean allegory it

[63] At least, she is symbolically such in line 1 of Lucretius: *Aeneadum genetrix, hominum divumque voluptas*. On Lucretius' symbolic use of Venus as an Epicurean divinity, and particularly one that rivals the Stoics' Zeus, see Asmis.

[64] In describing Venus as an Epicurean anger-therapist, my argument is similar to that of Fish 2004, esp. 120–24, though his work was not yet published when I wrote this. While we agree on Venus' Epicurean pedigree in this scene, we differ in our interpretations of the emphasis of her teaching, as well as in our assessment of Aeneas' response to the anger therapy (on which, see n. 81 below).

[65] Perhaps reflecting the Epicurean technique of *avocatio*? Cf. Procopé 380–81: "[The Epicureans'] own preference, when it came to curing grief, was for *avocatio*, for 'calling away' the sorrowing mind from painful to pleasant thoughts … . An authentically Epicurean cure for anger would likewise be to distract the mind from its grievances and thoughts of getting even." See also Fish 2004: 122: "Venus rebukes Aeneas for his anger, showing him that it runs counter to the best interest of both himself and those whom he loves. What about his father, his wife, and his son? This part of her response almost versifies Philodemus' treatise (col. xv 15–19): 'Such ecstasy this passion creates that it makes the angry man throw away the very things he most dreadfully desired.'"

[66] 2.604–7: "*aspice* (*namque omnem, quae nunc obducta tuenti / mortalis hebetat visus tibi et umida circum / caligat, nubem eripiam; tu ne qua parentis / iussa time neu praeceptis parere recusa*)." For the fog/darkness-clearing capabilities of philosophy see Cic. *Tusc.* 1.64 *ab animo tamquam ab oculis caliginem dispulit* (sc. *philosophia*), *ut omnia supera infera, prima ultima media videremus*; Lucr. 1.146–48 *hunc igitur terrorem animi tenebrasque necessest / non radii solis neque lucida tela diei / discutiant, sed naturae species ratioque* (repeated and elaborated at 2.55–61, 3.87–93, 6.35–42); 1.1115–17 *namque alid ex alio clarescet nec tibi caeca / nox iter eripiet quin ultima naturai / pervideas: ita res accendent lumina rebus*. For the combination of *praecepta* and revelation cf. also Lucr. 3.1–30.

[67] E.g., Goold 157: "To Aeneas, as he appears in the Helen Episode, Venus' line of argument is irrelevant: he has conceded that Troy is fallen; his thoughts are bent on the spiteful

makes perfect sense:[68] Venus, the Epicurean symbol of pleasure and creation, reveals to Aeneas an image of destruction that resonates with several Lucretian descriptions of the eventual destruction of the world.[69] In other words, Venus is teaching Aeneas about the natural cycles of creation and destruction, a theme at the heart of Lucretius' poem.[70] She replaces his moralized view of the war, in which human error is to blame, with an amoral cosmic process: she provides no explanation for the *divum inclementia*; it simply exists, and Aeneas must accept it. He should realize that vengeance has no point in such a world and focus instead on his family, a symbol of creation. Thus, the universe of Venus' revelation is very different from the teleological world view provided by Jupiter in Book 1 (257–96)—it is a world in which there is *nullum in caede nefas*.[71]

Like Venus, Mezentius knows there is *furor* all around, and as he dies he asks Aeneas' help in defending against it (903–6):

killing of Helen, never mind what happens to himself; he rushes forward and in a moment would have accomplished the deed. Why tell him in this situation that the gods are destroying Troy?" On the authenticity of the Helen scene see Fish 2004: 125–29 (with bibliography); my argument does not depend on its authenticity since Venus' words are undisputed.

[68] While no Epicurean would literally believe that a goddess could intervene to check one's anger or that gods participated in battles, both of these scene-types reflect Homeric scenes that were frequently allegorized, such as Athena's checking of Achilles' anger in *Il.* 1.188–222 (on the parallels with the Venus scene see Conte 201–2 and Fish 2004: 126–27), or the theomachies in *Il.* 20 and 21. On Homeric allegory see Gale 19–26 (with further bibliography), and on Lucretius' use of allegory see Gale 26–45 and *passim*, as well as Gigandet.

[69] See Hardie 1986: 193: "Finally it may be noted that in describing the Sack of Troy Virgil transfers back to its proper sphere the language of destroying cities which Lucretius had applied to the destruction of the world: with *Aeneid* 2.625 'ex imo verti' compare Lucr. 5.163 'ab imo evertere summa'; with *Aeneid* 2.611 f. 'totamque a sedibus urbem / eruit' compare Lucr. 5.162 'sollicitare suis…ex sedibus'." A belief in the world's mortality is an important Epicurean doctrine that sets them apart from other philosophies (and that prompted Lucretius to associate Epicureans with Giants in 5.114–21).

[70] See Minadeo, Mellinghoff-Bourgerie 106–11, Gale 208–28.

[71] Cf. Lyne 1987: 78: "So the reason why Jupiter is hostile to Troy, or, to put it more precisely, the reason why his plan for a Roman future should so vigorously involve him in the *destruction* of Troy, is not clear … . If Book 1 suggests a comfortably Stoical Jupiter, a further voice complicates this picture." While unmotivated *divum inclementia* may seem more tragic than Epicurean (cf. E. *Tr.* 600), Venus' instructions to Aeneas give it an Epicurean overlay: she is teaching him to accept disaster with a quiet mind and to balance it with positive thoughts of family. Of course, this is Lucretius' tactic, as well. Cf. Clay 1983: 266: "So Lucretius' reader arrives at the end of *De rerum natura* to face a spectacle of disease and disturbance and also to face the final test of his mastery of the poem. He is left to contemplate the ugliest face of an indifferent nature that destroyed, even as it created, the highest form of civilization … . Its end is the last and the greatest test of the reader who

> "unum hoc per si qua est victis venia hostibus oro:
> corpus humo patiare tegi. scio acerba meorum
> circumstare odia: hunc, oro, defende furorem
> et me consortem nati concede sepulcro."
>
> "This one thing I beg, by whatever goodwill there is for conquered enemies, allow my body to be buried in the ground. I know the fierce hatred of my people surrounds me: I beg you, defend me against this fury and allow me to share a tomb with my son."

Mezentius' final request that Aeneas bury him together with Lausus might point to another notorious controversy in Epicurean philosophy: despite the fact that Epicureanism emphasized that there is no life after death and encouraged a lack of concern for what happens to the dead body,[72] Epicureans still paid quite a bit of attention to honoring the dead. For instance, Epicurus left a will that included, among other things, provisions for funeral rites for his family, as well as celebrations in his, and other Epicureans', honor.[73] In addition, Clay 1986 has demonstrated the existence of hero cults in honor of dead Epicureans. Such seemingly contradictory beliefs and behavior have provoked ancient and modern debate over whether or not Epicureans were essentially inconsistent in their treatment of life after death.[74] While Mezentius' request to be buried with Lausus is not the same as leaving a will or worshipping a dead Epicurean, it raises the same problematic charge of inconsistency if Mezentius' character is to be allied with Epicureanism.

Yet Mezentius' final request is not inconsistent with the sort of critical examination of Epicureanism that his final scene has already provoked. In particular, the symbiotic relationship of Mezentius and Lausus has been shown to embody both the ideal of Epicurean friendship and the inherent contradictions of that Epicurean ideal. In this final request, then, Mezentius chooses to honor that ideal friendship with a romantic gesture that has a literary, instead of philosophic, pedigree.[75] While the request is not consistent with an Epicurean lack of concern for the body after death, it is consistent with the

would master its teaching; for the piety the poem makes possible is the ability to contemplate everything and anything with a mind that has found its peace."

[72] Cf. D. L. 10.118 οὐδὲ ταφῆς φροντιεῖν. Cf. also Lucr. 3.870–93, in which he explains the faulty logic lying behind fears about what happens to the body after death.

[73] See D. L. 10.16–21.

[74] For the ancient critique see Cic. *Fin*. 2.101 and Plu. *Mor.* 1128f–29a; for a modern critique see Warren.

[75] Cf. Patroclus' request to be buried with Achilles (*Il.* 23.83–92). See also E. *Alc.* 365–68.

value Epicureanism placed on Pyladic friendship, and it completes the transformation of Mezentius into a symbol of *pietas*.[76]

Mezentius also dies as a symbol of wisdom (907–8):

> haec loquitur, iuguloque haud inscius accipit ensem
> undantique animam diffundit in arma cruore.
>
> He speaks these things and not at all unknowing he receives the sword to his throat and pours out his spirit onto his weapons in waves of blood.

In addition to dying with full mental composure (898–99 *ut auras / suspiciens hausit caelum mentemque recepit*), Mezentius is one of the very few characters in the *Aeneid* gifted with an epithet denoting knowledge (907 *haud inscius*).[77] In contrast, Aeneas, for all of his divine education, remains *ignarus* throughout the *Aeneid*.[78] Thus, Mezentius accepts his death like a philosopher, with full knowledge and equanimity.[79]

[76] It should also be noted that Mezentius has no particular reason to believe that Aeneas will fulfill his request; thus, the pleasure he gets from making the irrational request may well be all he is seeking. There is no evidence in the text to indicate that Aeneas fulfills Mezentius' dying wish and some evidence to indicate he does not: at the beginning of Book 11 Aeneas creates a trophy with Mezentius' armor, and Virgil notes that the chestplate is pierced twelve times (9–10). Most critics take this to mean that Mezentius' body was indeed exposed to the fury of the twelve cities of the Etruscan federation (e.g., Servius *ad* 11.9, Eden 32, Lyne 1989: 113, Panoussi 67, Anderson 198, Dyson 2001: 185).

[77] Cf. also the description of his *mens* as *praesaga* in 10.843. Other characters described as possessing some kind of general knowledge of the present or future include Dido (4.508 *haud ignara futuri*), the Sibyl (6.66 *praescia venturi*), Vulcan (8.627 *haud vatum ignarus venturique inscius aevi*), Cymodocea (10.247 *haud ignara modi*), and Juturna (12.227 *haud nescia rerum*). Note that with the exception of Dido and Mezentius, these figures are divine.

[78] E.g., 1.332, 2.106, 2.384, 3.338, 3.382, 3.569, 8.730, 10.25, 10.85 (*bis*), 10.228. For a list of lines in which Aeneas is labeled *inscius*, *nescius*, or *ignarus* see Chew 620 n. 11, who notes that "these epithets are paired with Aeneas much more frequently than with any other character" and that "ignorance is a defining trait of Aeneas" (620). For the contrast between Mezentius and Aeneas with respect to knowledge see Nethercut 34 and Boyle 97.

[79] Virgil emphasizes Mezentius' materialism once more in his description of the dispersion of his spirit (*animam diffundit*). Cf. Lucr. 3.436–47: *et nebula ac fumus quoniam discedit in auras, / crede animam quoque diffundi multoque perire.* Though most commentators compare Mezentius' death to a gladiator's (e.g., Harrison *ad* 10.907), there are also hints of a philosopher's suicide in his complete willingness to die and his accepting of the sword (*contra* Gotoff 210 n. 49). Mezentius' knowing and willing death also contributes to the imagery of *devotio* that pervades his final scene, on which see Leigh. The portrait of Mezentius as a heroic, *devotus* general counters Cicero's argument that Epicureans, with their philosophy of *voluptas*, could never attain the level of bravery reached by Decius in his *devotio* (*Fin.* 2.61).

3. THE IMPIETY OF *PIETAS*

In my analysis of the Epicurean aspects of Mezentius' character, I have briefly touched upon the ways in which Aeneas steps into the role of the impious monster just as Mezentius is transformed into a pious philosopher. Now, I would like to examine further what might be wrong with Aeneas' *pietas* from the perspective of an Epicurean reader of the *Aeneid*.

The greatest contrast between Aeneas and Mezentius is revealed by their opposing reactions to the eruption of chaos in their lives. I have already detailed the calm acceptance that Mezentius displays in face of the worst devastation of his life, the loss of his son. After a short-lived burst of emotion, he regains control and displays Epicurean piety by continuing to look on the world with a quiet mind despite the presence of *furor* around him. Thus, in his behavior under stress, Mezentius displays the ability of the Epicurean world-view to help one cope with the assaults of the external world.[80] Nussbaum summarizes (275):

> In general, the account of the non-teleological character of the world, and of our place in it, convinces the pupil not to make impossibly high demands that, being frustrated, will give rise to new rage and new aggression. It also convinces her to interpret the world's damages not as voluntary assaults from gods or nature—but as simply there, the natural conditions of her life, thus as occasions for effort and resistance, but not for anger.

Aeneas' responses to disaster are not calm, and they seem to be connected to his non-Epicurean belief in a divinely controlled world of good and evil. Even though Aeneas receives Epicurean anger-therapy in Book 2, he does not learn from it. In fact, his behavior after the death of Pallas in Book 10, when he prepares human sacrifices (517–20) and kills suppliants and a priest (521–42, 591–601), is a textbook case of a man consumed with non-Epicurean anger.[81] Similarly,

[80] As Lucretius notes (3.55–58), it is only in difficult circumstances that a person's true colors are revealed.

[81] Cf. Philodemus' description of the passion of anger (*Ir.* xiv 22–39): "It inspires one to commit sacrilege, insulting the priests, and outraging suppliants, and sparing not even the divine things themselves and going mad over many things of such a kind" (Indelli's text, translated by D. Armstrong and quoted by Fish 2004: 122). Though defenders of Aeneas in Book 10 frequently note that his regret and pity for Lausus after he has killed him (821–32) mitigate the negative portrayal of his rage, Philodemus specifically denies that "the enraged man's repentance (μεταμέλεια) signif[ies] a return to reason. On the contrary, it indicates an increase of irrationality, since the vengeful man now pulls his hair, sobs, and may even commit suicide (*De ira* xv 9–15)" (Tsouna 242). Thus, I differ from Fish 2004, who suggests that Aeneas learns to control his anger after his mother's lessons in Book 2. He makes the interesting suggestion that Virgil patterns Aeneas' moral development

at the end of the *Aeneid*, he kills the suppliant Turnus, and he does so because he believes Turnus has sinned against Pallas and Pallas must have his vengeance (12.948–49): "… *Pallas te hoc volnere, Pallas / immolat et poenam scelerato ex sanguine sumit*." Though Aeneas does not take joy in this vengeance, his reasoning at the *Aeneid*'s end is nearly identical to that in the Helen scene: in both, he views the damage to his loved ones as a moral wrong and vengeance as a way of making things right with the world.[82] In other words, for Aeneas, there is *nefas in caede*, and there exist absolute moral values apart from pleasure and pain. These are lessons he learned from his father in the Underworld—not from his mother in Troy.

As many critics have noted, strict dichotomies between good and evil do not hold up in the *Aeneid*, and thus the metaphysical foundation for Aeneas' moral decisions is shaky.[83] Aeneas' *pietas* might be associated, then, not with inherently moral behavior, but with a world view in which such behavior exists—or, to put it in ancient terms, with an ethics based on *virtus* instead of *voluptas*.[84] Not only is the foundation of Aeneas' ethics questioned in the *Aeneid*, but its particular brand of religiously and morally justified violence is associated with eruptions of anger and cycles of vengeance. Thus, an Epicurean reading of the *Aeneid* might find in it not only a defense of Mezentius' *impietas* but also an indictment of Aeneas' traditional *pietas* and *religio*.[85]

along the lines set out by Philodemus for Odysseus in *On the Good King According to Homer*: whereas Odysseus behaves incorrectly in his interactions with Polyphemus, he learns to control his *hubris* in Book 22 when he instructs Eurycleia that "it is not piety to glory over slain men" (*Od*. 22.412, trans. Fish). While I am persuaded that this pattern of moral development is a relevant model for Aeneas' character, Aeneas does not seem to live up to it since he does glory over the slain (and dying) Mezentius (*contra* Fish 2004: 133 n. 41), as well as over his other victims in Book 10. Panoussi 69 points out that Aeneas' vaunting words over Mezentius' armor (11.16 "*manibusque meis Mezentius hic est*") have a disconcerting resemblance to those of Clytemnestra after she has killed Agamemnon (*Ag*. 1404–6): οὑτός ἐστιν Ἀγαμέμνων, ἐμὸς / πόσις, νεκρὸς δέ, τῆσδε δεξιᾶς χερὸς / ἔργον.

[82] Even if the Helen scene was not written by Virgil, Venus' undisputed lines (2.601–2) indicate that Aeneas blamed Paris and Helen for the destruction of Troy.

[83] E.g., Lyne 1987: 28 n. 55, Hardie 1993: 73.

[84] Cf. Cicero's pithy formulation of the difference between his ethics and that of the Epicureans (*Tusc*. 3.50): *mihi summum in animo bonum videtur, illi autem in corpore: mihi in virtute, illi in voluptate*.

[85] It might be noted too that Lucretius' most vivid presentation of the evils of *religio* comes in his depiction of Agamemnon's sacrifice of his own daughter (1.80–101). While Aeneas does not sacrifice his own child, he is strongly associated with human sacrifice in the *Aeneid*, both metaphorically and literally. Whenever *immolo* is used in the *Aeneid*, a human is always the victim and Aeneas always the sacrificer (10.519, 10.541, 12.949).

4. CONCLUSION

Mezentius' complex characterization is not a dogmatic presentation of Epicurean philosophy; on the contrary, his shifting, multifaceted character may be matched to many literary and historical models, most of which do not require a drastic re-evaluation of his character or his relationship to Aeneas. However, I hope to have shown that there is a way of reading Mezentius as an allegory for Epicureanism, and that this reading has the potential to reconfigure the moral universe of the text and to redefine the meaning of *pietas*, much as Epicureanism itself attempted to do. While the last critic who attempted a rehabilitation of the intellectual and moral content of Mezentius' *impietas* was ridiculed for trying to convince that "Virgil wrote his masterpiece in order that his readers might turn it inside out,"[86] I believe that this sort of inversion is precisely what Mezentius allows. Even an Epicurean Mezentius, however, invites a critical examination of Epicurean doctrine and probes the limits of its claims to provide a secure means to *voluptas*. More than anything, then, Mezentius' character, like Dido's, provokes debate and presents competing perspectives on the values he represents.

In a frequently quoted passage Seneca derides those who reduce Homer's epics to allegories representing one particular philosophy, and concludes (*Ep.* 88.5): *apparet nihil horum esse in illo, quia omnia sunt; ista enim inter se dissident* ("It is clear that none of these schools is present in him, because all of them are; for they disagree with one another"). Dissenting philosophic voices populate the *Aeneid*, but that does not mean they are not there, and Virgil did not have to believe that Homer was really a philosopher to allude to the tradition of reading epic philosophically.[87] Indeed, through complex characters like Dido and Mezentius, Virgil's poetry can reflect not just a tradition of reading epic allegorically but also a tradition of using mythological characters, like the Phaeacians and Giants, in philosophic debate.

Like the allegories that ancient readers found in Homer, Virgil's allegories are not perfect and pure representations of a particular philosophy, and his characters seamlessly intertwine philosophic allusions with other sorts of liter-

[86] R. D. Williams 1954: 167 (on Sforza). While Sforza does not associate Mezentius with Epicureanism, he does connect his lack of superstitions with moral virtues (47): "Ma, appunto perchè quell'uomo straordinario è libero da ogni pastoia di superstizione, il Nostro gli presta tutte le virtù di onore, lealtà e dirittura, che inflammano i petti liberi." On Sforza and the reactions to his extreme anti-Augustan reading see Thomas 2001: 272–75.

[87] Cf. Wlosok 248: "Given the intellectual context in which Vergil worked, it is *a priori* impossible to believe that he could have done other than imitate Homer with full consciousness of the philosophical and scholarly traditions of Homeric allegorization."

ary models and codes. Thus, it is ultimately up to Virgil's readers to decide which philosophic voices to recognize and also which to commend. It is easy to imagine that most Romans found Aeneas' (unEpicurean) fulfillment of his divine mission admirable, and it is fair to say that Epicureanism is not a dominant voice in the *Aeneid*. However, that does not mean an Epicurean reading is proved "comprehensively wrong." Epicurean readers may well ally themselves with Dido and Mezentius and decide that these characters present better models of heroism, knowledge, and *pietas*, despite their ultimate defeat.

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