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Epicureanism as a philosophical alternative to Greek religion. The theology of Epicurus as an important element of Epicurean "Care for the Soul"

Abstract. The philosophy of Epicurus of Samos could have been perceived by the ancient Greeks as an alternative to their religion and classical philosophy. Epicurus questioned almost all of the most important "dogmas" of the religious and philosophical tradition of the Greeks – as the source of various superstitions and fears that torment people and do not allow them to enjoy a life in harmony with nature. He proposed his philosophy as a kind of "therapy for the soul." His theological thought was an important element of this therapy, a philosophical "care for the health of the soul."

Keywords: Epicurus, religion, ethics, theology, *tetrapharmakos*

Introduction

Epicurus of Samos was undoubtedly one of the most outstanding Greek philosophers and theologians, one of the bravest and most original in his views. Unlike classical Greek philosophers such as Aristotle, he looked at the world and people not through the eyes of a metaphysician, like Aristotle who looks at everything from a metaphysical point of view and tries to find the metaphysical layers of all things and all phenomena, but through the eyes

of an anthropologist who sees everything from the perspective of real human existential problems. Moreover, he was primarily a practitioner, at least more of a practitioner than a theoretician. More precisely, he was a man of "therapeutic" practice ("therapeutic" in the philosophical and ethical sense). It is this "therapeutic" point of view that clearly demonstrates the ethical and anthropological meaning of Epicurus's theology (and his philosophy in general). His theological thought was an important element of his philosophical therapy – philosophical "therapy of the soul" ("care for the health of the soul," as he wrote in one of his letters). This was clearly expressed in his letters, as well as in the writings of his ancient critics and commentators on his philosophy, such as Cicero and Diogenes Laertius.

Epicureans had a strong, sensual contact with nature. It can be said that they were very sensual in their perception of the nature of the world and the nature of man, while their senses-oriented approach was characteristic only of people who are very closely connected with their physical nature. They used to experience the whole world (but also their life and their humanity) in its physicality and sensuality (but this had nothing to do with sensual hedonism they were wrongly accused of (Seneca, *De vita beata*, XIII 1–3 – Seneca here defends the Epicureans against this unjust accusation). Even their inner life, to which they transferred their happiness, as written by Plutarch (Plutarch, *Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum*, 1088 C, D), was saturated with sensuality. It was due to the essence of their philosophy. Therefore, this philosophy was not intended for those who had the tendency to experience life within its rational and logical frames (in Epicurus's times Stoicism would probably fit them best), neither was it suitable for those who used to experience their life mostly in its spiritual dimension (such people would surely benefit from the spirituality of Greek mysteries, such as Orphism, since philosophy in Epicurus's times did not have much to offer in this respect). Epicureanism was therefore a philosophical current for senses-oriented people who preferred to embrace their life fully sensually. Nevertheless, it would not befit those who spent their whole life chasing earthly delights (such a life had nothing to do with Epicureanism), although Epicurean ethics is in fact a form of Hedonism. (The problem of correlation between pleasure, in hedonistic sense, and moral virtue is discussed in: Brovkin, 2012, pp. 340–349; Mitsis, 1988, pp. 59–97). Neither was it destined for people who lead a life devoid of reflection and critical thinking on all social, civilisational and cultural, particularly religious, and ideological, superstitions. This philosophy was predominantly for those who were ready to enjoy life exactly as it had been created by nature itself, free from any social or civilisational superstitions and irrational fears (which cumulated in parallel with the development of civilisation and culture) encoded in common cultural

consciousness (in a regular process of upbringing), which disrupted people's natural rhythm of living (harmonious with nature and stemming from it) making life less and less natural, thus unhappy. Epicurus's goal was to free people from the abovementioned superstitions and fears that kept them in a predicament of false beliefs and delusions impeding their journey to natural (since dictated by nature itself) happiness. He equated this human happiness with pleasure provided by human nature and life itself. As aptly pointed out by Mitsis, "Epicurus analyses pleasure not primarily as a subjective state of consciousness or mental event but rather as the overall healthy condition or functioning of a natural organism, because he is attempting to demonstrate how pleasure can serve as the objective, natural goal that structures our actions and consequently gives an overall unity and organization to our lives" (Mitsis, 1988, pp. 8, 11–58; Krokiewicz, 1961, pp. 211–186; Müller, 1991, pp. 71–81).

Epicurus's philosophy as an alternative to Greek religious culture and Greek classical philosophy

Epicurus's of Samos philosophy could undoubtedly be perceived by Greeks as some sort of an alternative to the Greek philosophy developed up to that point and to all of their religious culture. Epicurus called into question nearly all of the most important "dogmas" of ancient Greeks' philosophical and religious tradition. Yet, above all, he challenged the deeply-rooted in Greek tradition feeling of rationality of the world and its laws, having a lot in common with fatalism, as characteristic of Greek mentality as the aforementioned feeling of rationality and closely connected to it – Greeks were absolutely convinced that almost everything that happened had been determined by Moira, a cosmic mind shaping each and every person's fate (Krokiewicz, 1971, pp. 38–49; 2000, pp. 125–139). In Epicurus's lifetime this conviction would grow even stronger. Every Greek's good or ill fortune would be then trusted to powerful, omnipotent, and whimsical goddess Tyche. She would be worshipped in a unique way, there would be statues and temples raised in her honour.

Epicurus questioned Greek philosophers' conviction, springing from the old religious tradition and deeply embedded in Greeks' awareness, about rational (logical) world order and nature's sapience (intelligence). After all, most Greek philosophers prior to him, as well as Stoics in his lifetime, proclaimed that the nature of the world, in all of its aspects, including the moral one (thus within the scope of natural moral right), is sapient, or even logical (Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I 10, 25–12, 30). That is why all of the earthly phenomena – as believed by many who followed the example of Pythagoreans – both tangible

natural processes and those more subtle ones, like the sounds of an octave in music, could be described and expressed in logical terms, even mathematically in numbers (Drozdek, 2011, pp. 111–136). According to those people, it was not accidental at all, neither was it a result of some arrangement of nonrational matter, as it used to be explained by Democritus, and later by Epicurus. In fact, it was quite the opposite – nature's sapiency and intelligence (as well as its creative dynamism) were believed to be a natural result and a derivative of sapiency, intelligence and creative dynamism of its most basic tissue which those philosophers referred to as "arche," and which in modern language could be called "the DNA of nature." Anaximenes was the first to use the term "arche" with reference to air (Anaximenes frg. A 10; Krokiewicz, 1971, p. 89; Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I 10, 26). Then, Diogenes of Apollonia followed in his footsteps and made the sapiency and intelligence of air (as the arche of all nature) even more explicit when openly calling it "mind" and "god" (Diels, 64 B, pp. 4–5). Yet, it was obviously Heraclitus of Ephesus who stressed the idea of nature's rationality most heavily as he recognized the logicality of the nature of cosmos resulting from it being structurally permeated with the divine Logos which also constitutes its dynamic and, at the same time, rational core (Diels, 22 A, p. 8; Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus mathematicos*, VII 129; Drozdek, 2011, pp. 79–89; Jaeger, 2007, pp. 173–199; Mrówka, 2004, pp. 31–33, 35; Narecki, 1999, pp. 53–94). In the times of Epicurus similar ideas were proclaimed by Stoics (Diogenes Laertios, VII, pp. 134–147; Cicero, *De natura deorum*, II, pp. 14, 36–15, 41). Just like Heraclitus, they considered the logicality behind the laws of nature somewhat related to fatalism (Seneka, *Epistulae*, 107, 11; Diogenes Laertios, VII, p. 149; Magris, 2009, p. 11).

Meanwhile, Epicurus, in defiance of such convictions, claimed that the whole world and all things in it are a thoroughly random set of elementary, material particles devoid of intelligence or any form of reasoning (Diogenes Laertios, X, pp. 35–45, 73–74, 89–90). Intelligence and thought, according to him, emerge no sooner than at a certain level of the existence of the world, and they are nothing more than a form of a peculiar, not least planned, arrangement of such physical particles (atoms), therefore they are equally random. Consequently, Epicurus undermined Ionian philosophers' almost innate conviction about the "logicality" of the universe, and what follows, Stoics' belief in the divine providence, together with its negative next of kin – sombre fatalism (Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I 8,18 – 9, 21 – 10, 24; 20, 54–56; *De fato*, IX 18, 19; X 22, 23; Diogenes Laertios, X 133–134).

As can be imagined, for most Greeks contemporary to Epicurus, both those who had been brought up in the religious tradition, as well as those turning to classical Greek philosophy, the thesis of the haphazardness of the

world was quite shocking. Nevertheless, for some people such a shock turned out to be salutary. Even though Epicurus deprived them of the protection of providence, at the same time he tore them out of the hands of the omnipotent fate and bestowed internal freedom and power upon them, making them more of constructors, if not of their lot (as it was subject to various factors, of what Epicurus was aware), then at least of their own happiness. And such was the centre of attention and a goal for Epicurus's philosophy. It was expected to teach people happiness by making them aware of the nature's structure and mechanisms of functioning, as well as by freeing them from the shackles of multifarious delusions, anxieties, psychoses, and phobias arising from mythological superstitions, as well as from any other cultural beliefs impeding people's struggle for happiness (Diogenes Laertios, X 133–135, 35–37, 80–83, 85–87, 116; Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I 16, 42–19, 50; I 20, 54–56; I 42, 117: II 65, 162; Cicero, *De divinatione*, I 3, 5; II 17, 39, 49; IX 18, 19).

For Greeks equally shocking was Epicurus's attitude towards their other crucial value, namely politicism, understood as the imperative of participating in political life. Politicism had always been an integral part of Greeks' mentality it was even included in the city laws in Athens under Solon's rule. It was not an option for an Athenian to be apolitical. Aristotle, in the times not that distant from Epicurus's, used to teach that men are political by their very own nature. And then comes Epicurus who claims that politicism, and by extension engagement in politics, is a purely private matter having nothing to do with human nature thus better kept at bay if one wishes to live happily and, in a way, fit for a free man (Diogenes Laertios, X 119; X 10). Furthermore, he insists, also contrary to Aristotle, that a state in its structures and laws is an entirely cultural and civilizational construct, and certainly not a natural one, neither is it a work of nature (Diogenes Laertios, X 150–151: Sent. XXXI, XXXII, XXXIII, XXXIV). It does not stem from people's natural needs either. In fact, it is quite the opposite – an artificial formation people could perfectly do without.

Although such beliefs were not as revolutionary in the times of Epicurus as they would have been a hundred years before, still not everybody could subscribe to them. Even Stoicism developing in parallel with Epicureanism was cosmopolitan yet not apolitical (earlier Cynics had been similarly cosmopolitan (Diogenes Laertios, VI 2, 63, 72). Besides, not a single person before Epicurus had expressed their apoliticism as categorically as him.

In a politically changing world (after the fall of old Greek "polis" and everything connected with it) Epicurus's apolitical attitude could prove attractive for some Greeks, yet for most of them, accustomed to pursuing political career from generation to generation, it might have been an insurmountable

obstacle. Epicurus gave a free hand to those with political aspirations, still he warned them about disastrous effects of their ambitions which he considered unnatural and nonessential (Plutarch, *De tranquillitate animi*, 2).

Epicurus's philosophy could undoubtedly be perceived by some Greeks as something revolutionary or at least alternative (in a strictly negative sense) when juxtaposed with plenty of elements in Greek spiritual tradition. Others, in turn, might have viewed it as a kind of philosophical "message" attempting at setting them free from cultural superstitions which up to that point had been treated as a fixed constituent of this tradition, yet in the light of the Epicurean reasoning appeared to be the result of a faulty interpretation of the nature of the world and human being (Diogenes Laertios, X 82–83, 85, 116).

Epicurus's philosophical message. Epicurus versus Socrates

Epicurus included his message in his letters. One of them, *Letter to Menoeceus* (Diogenes Laertios, X 122–138), is particularly meaningful in this regard. It starts with a call on both older and younger people to pursue philosophy. It is a peculiar, as described by Geyer, philosophical manifesto (Geyer, 2004, p. 45), which calls upon all people to "care for the health of their soul," what for Epicurus is equivalent to pursuing happiness (Diogenes Laertios, X 122). This convergence, for a lack of a better word, of the happiness and health of soul is not at all accidental. In fact, it is substantial. For only a person with a healthy soul can be fully happy, as stated by Epicurus. That is why the first step on a journey to happiness is a soul therapy and care for its health, the latter being the crucial element of Epicurus's philosophy. It can be said that professing philosophy in Epicurean convention is in fact "care for the health of the soul," a kind of soul therapy (Diogenes Laertios X 122; Nickel, 2010, pp. 16–18; Geyer, 2004, pp. 45, 48; Gigon, 1983, p. 12; Krokiewicz, 1961, pp. 211–247).

There is nothing particularly novel or odd in the aforementioned expression, as such an attitude towards philosophy had been deep-rooted in Greece for ages, and many philosophers, both prior to and contemporary with Epicurus, perceived it that way. Yet it was mostly Socrates in Plato's dialogues (Plato, *Apologia Socratis*, 30 A–B – this is, of course, a well-known Socratic theme of "care for the soul") who described philosophy in such a way, therefore he is the one most strongly associated with such expressions. It may seem that Epicurus and Socrates share the same philosophical mentality, even though they represent completely different philosophical tradition. Yet in fact, Socrates had in mind something else than Epicurus, namely issues of

purely moral nature. Epicurus, however, thought about real soul therapy for the adepts of his philosophy, curing them from various anxieties and phobias lying within the scope of philosophy, thus formed as a result of misunderstanding human nature and the nature of the world in general (Diogenes Laertios, X 133–135, 35–37, 80–83, 85–87, 116). Again, his views might have appeared to be similar to Socrates's, yet Socrates had a completely different understanding of human nature. For Socrates human nature was simply the same as soul, describable in moral terms (Sarri, 1997, pp. 153–171, 175–214, 257–269). Its proper and somewhat natural environment was the world of moral values, perfect for humans to focus on their own moral consciousness and their own human happiness (in compliance with nature). According to Socrates, this world of moral values constituted man's natural environment. Such were Socrates's views. Epicurus, in turn, shifted the focus of man's consciousness onto sensory and mental world he understood in physical terms. Similarly, he perceived human nature in physical terms (also in moral aspect) and subordinated everything to it. According to Epicurus, a human being, just like all phenomena, is a cluster of atoms. His or her soul is also made of atoms (however, more subtle ones than those which constitute the matter of body). The atoms of soul permeate the atoms of body and together they create one psychophysical organism. The extraordinary feature of such a system is consciousness, tightly connected with the movements of the atoms of soul. The state of consciousness (including buoyancy) is a result of movement of the atoms of soul. Human being, unlike other beings, can influence such movement, thus impact one's state of consciousness. There is certain positive feedback between the acts of consciousness and the movements of the atoms of soul. Thanks to it, human being can harmonize the movement of the atoms of soul by means of thoughts, imagination and feelings arising from them, and therefore shape one's state of consciousness, and, eventually, one's own happiness. This is a key practice in Epicurus's therapy or maybe autotherapy (Diogenes Laertios, X 63–68; Geyer, 2004, pp. 45–56, 75–110; Konstan, 1973, pp. 3–34; Krokiewicz, 1961, pp. 194–286; Bartling, 1994; Held, 2007; Mitsis, 1988, p. 131; Müller, 1991; Pąkcińska, 1959). It can be said that the adequacy of a human being and nature was obvious for him, just like it was for other Greek philosophers, but contrary to them he understood nature in purely physical terms, stripping it of any forms of the supernatural. Both Socrates and Epicurus strived for human happiness, however, the latter understood happiness as something more specific and more interim than Socrates.

In Plato's *Apology of Socrates,* the titular philosopher referred to himself as a gods' messenger (Plato, *Apologia Socratis*, 30 A; 31 A–B). Obviously, the connotations were not religious. He limited himself to talking older and

younger people into taking proper care of their soul in order to make it as valuable as possible (Plato, *Apologia Socratis*, 30 A–B). All of his teachings could be encapsulated in one sentence: "[...] it is evil and disgraceful to do wrong and to disobey him who is better than I, whether he be god or man" (Plato, *Apologia Socratis*, 29 B; transl. H. Fowler), and further on: "for to arrive in the nether world having one's soul full fraught with a heap of misdeeds is the uttermost of all evils" (Plato, *Gorgias*, 522 E; transl. W. Lamb).

Getting back to Epicurus, he most certainly had no doubts either as to the real value of religions known to him, or to their attitude towards "actual" gods (as understood by Epicurus). He wrote about it in his *Letter to Menoeceus* (Diogenes Laertios, X 123–124). As all philosophers, he must have remembered that Socrates, the most noble among Athenians, was sentenced to death (for his impiety and atheism) according to the religious laws in force in the city of Athens which were protecting the traditional faith in God. Also, he must have been familiar with dark stories behind these religions, about which Lucretius, a great admirer of his philosophy, would write a few centuries later (Lucretius, *De natura rerurm*, 80–155; Serres, 2000, pp. 115–142). His intention was certainly not to announce one more "true" religion. Nevertheless, it is not challenging to notice that his philosophy has a subtly religious tone. Moreover, Epicureans' way of life resembles living in religious communes (Krokiewicz, 1961, p. 284; Pawłowski, 2007, pp. 19–21, 82–89). That is the impression left by his extant writings which can be interpretated as a kind of message, if not religious, then at least para-religious, and for sure philosophical. The sole form of these texts induces such way of thinking as they are letters of clearly apostolic character, or at least permeated with apostolic zeal not contradictory to their often scientific content (Diogenes Laertios, X 35–117; 122–135). That is why it is not an exaggeration to say that what Epicurus preached can be referred to as philosophical "message" expected to "deliver" contemporary Greeks from the torment caused by various phobias, anxieties, and delusions, also those arisen from religion (Diogenes Laertios, X 133–135; Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I 42, 117). It was a "redemptive" element of his philosophical message. The second element was a tiding that each and every person, regardless of their social status, personal or health issues, can be happy, right here, right now. Epicurus himself served as evidence for that since all his life he had suffered from an acute sickness (Diogenes Laertios, X 7; 11; 12; Plutarch, *Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum*, 1088 B). It was a significant point in Epicurus's teachings. He used to teach that every person out of their physicality is capable of attaining happiness, however, regarding their certain social or cultural circumstances they should make an effort indicated by Epicurus's philosophy. Above all, they must study Epicureanism and all of

the accompanying practices and meditations aimed at altering one's awareness (Diogenes Laertios, X 135; Cicero, *De finibus bonorum et malorum*, II 30, 96; *Disputationes Tusculanae*, III 15, 33).

It is clearly noticeable that ideals popularized by Epicurus were contradictory to what was propagated in accordance with Greek *paideia*. Epicurus resented it for disregarding real human nature and, as a result, promoting false ideals. He was particularly critical of Greek religiousness, both traditional (Olympic) and mysterial. The former was criticized for promoting a false image of gods, one that was incurring anxiety and unrightful claims against gods, but also for feeding people's superstitiousness (Diogenes Laertios, X 116; 123–124, 134–135; Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I 16, 42–43; 41, 115; 42, 117; 43, 121; 44, 123-124; II 65, 162), which, according to Epicurus, had nothing to do with actual gods (that is those who emerged as part of Epicurus's theology) but instead caused serious soul illnesses (Diogenes Laertios, X 81–82; Cicero, *De finibus bonorum et malorum*, I 18, 59–61). The latter (religiousness connected with mysterial cults) was accused of spreading phobias, anxieties and delusions of eschatological nature, also of instilling fear of punishment in the afterlife on the one hand, and tempting with equally false eschatological hopes which encouraged people to push their plans for happiness beyond the limits of their physical life (that is, according to Epicurus, in the realm of non-being) on the other.

Therapeutic meaning of Epicurus's philosophy

After criticizing Greeks' religious projections, Epicurus goes even further. One could say that his critical attitude towards Greek devotion is a consequence of his philosophical perception of the world on the one hand, and merely an element of his philosophical therapy on the other. This therapy, the soul therapy, gives meaning to Epicurus's philosophy. It is safe to say that Epicurus's whole philosophy focuses on this particular therapy. Epicurus wishes to treat his disciples for soul-hollowing diseases which give such symptoms as the abovementioned phobias and delusions (also of religious character). Those were expected to be cured predominantly by means of Epicurean studies set to examine the nature of the world and human being. The aim was to alter one's consciousness, what was strongly argued by Epicurus in his letters (Diogenes Laertios, X 83; 116; 135). Such a transformation could be possible through incessant contemplation of the issues connected with these studies (Diogenes Laertios, X 135). Contemplation seemed to be the basic measure in the Epicu-

rean therapy. It also included reflection based on Epicurus's ethical teachings given in the form of short sententiae (among these, his famous "*kyriai doxai*" (Diogenes Laertios, X 139–154; Cicero, *De finibus bonorum et malorum,* II 7. 20; Pawłowski, 1996, pp. 363–369), as well as taking a trip down the memory lane as some thoughts were focused on previously experienced pleasure; and there was also meditation on future happiness (Cicero, *Disputationes Tusculanae*, III 15, 33), which included reflection on gods' happiness. All of these shaped the awareness of the entrants of Epicurean philosophy, curing them of multifarious diseases arisen from the miscomprehension of nature, and therefore they were the best path to reach happiness: "Exercise thyself in these and kindred precepts day and night, both by thyself and with him who is like unto thee; then never, either in waking or in dream, wilt thou be disturbed, but wilt live as a god among men. For man loses all semblance of mortality by living in the midst of immortal blessings" (Diogenes Laertios, X 135, transl. R.D. Hicks).

An apprentice of Epicureanism was thereby turning into a tuner of one's own awareness and an architect of one's own happiness.

Epicurus, like Socrates, was mainly a guide, a doctor of human souls. According to one of his thoughts (preserved in Porphyry's writings), he held an opinion that "vain is the word of that philosopher who can ease no mortal trouble. As there is no profit in the physician's art unless it cure the diseases of the body, so there is none in philosophy, unless it expel the troubles of the soul" (Porphyrius, *Ad Marcellam*, 31; Usener, 1887, p. 221, transl. A. Zimmern, Epicurean Friends, 2024). He felt he had the vocation for healing people suffering from spiritual aches and pains he considered the main obstacle to health and happiness of soul. However, "health" and "happiness" of soul seem to be interchangeable terms here. Epicurus was convinced that a healthy soul is, by definition, felicitous. That is why, according to his philosophical assumptions, the essence of Epicurean studies did not lie solely in cognizing and deciphering the mysteries of nature and human beings themselves, but rather on "soul therapy" (of course based on acquired knowledge of natural sciences and anthropology), that was supposed to completely alter the awareness of students and change their perception of themselves and the whole world. Epicurus himself emphasized this plenty of times in his letters, also in those of "scientific" character, that is in *Letter to Herodotus* and *Letter to Pythocles*, in which he indeed elaborated on serious scientific issues (Diogenes Laertios, X 82–83, 85, 143). The transformation was manifesting itself as a state of inner peace being the result of deep understanding of physical reality, including the world of physical gods. This inner peace was to be the symptom of a healthy, thus also felicitous, soul.

Epicurean studies were the foundation of the soul therapy, as they offered explanation as to the nature of the world and men, while their main medical remedy was the so-called *tetrapharmakos*, a four-part medicine in the form of four brief thoughts summarizing the most important principles of Epicurus's philosophy. When applied to a soul as food for thought, they were supposed to treat various fears and phobias while freeing from unnatural and gratuitous desires, needs and ambitions plaguing people similarly to those fears, and making it impossible for them to feel happiness they were destined for by nature itself. *Tetrapharmakos* comes down to four simple truths of Epicureanism: 1) a deity is not fearsome; 2) death is nothing; 3) what is good is easy to get; 4) what is terrible is easy to endure. These were kept in the collection entitled *Principal Doctrines (kyriai doxai)*. Epicurus also passed them along in his *Letter to Menoeceus* (Diogenes Laertios, X 122–138).

Each of the four truths was expected to serve as a cure for one out of four most burdensome fears bothering people: fear of gods, death, suffering, and inability to reach happiness. Alongside the fear of death, the most hassling and, at the same time, the most debilitating one, was the fear of gods. It becomes the first topic Epicurus discusses in his therapeutic discourse in *Letter to Menoeceus*.

Therapy treating fear of gods

At the very beginning of his therapeutic discourse in *Letter to Menoeceus,* Epicurus confesses that for him the existence of gods is absolutely evident and indisputable (Diogenes Laertios, X 123, 124, 139). He holds an opinion that people's widespread faith serves as a sufficient proof of gods' existence (Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I 16, 43–19, 50; I 36, 100). Naturally, gods are not as they are imagined by people or presented in Greek religious tradition. According to Epicurus, Greeks' traditional projections about gods are utterly ludicrous and unfounded as they are contrary to gods' felicity which they supposedly indulge in incessantly and undisturbed. As stated by Epicurus in his very first sententia of *Principal Doctrines*,[1] as well as in his *Letter to Menoeceus*, gods are not only immortal, but they are always happy: "Those things which without ceasing I have declared unto thee, those do, and exercise thyself therein, holding them to be the elements of right life. First believe that God is a living being immortal and blessed, according to the notion of a god indicated by the common sense

[1] Diogenes Laertios, X 139: "A blessed and eternal being has no trouble himself and brings no trouble upon any other being; hence he is exempt from movements of anger and partiality, for every such movement implies weakness" (transl. R.D. Hicks).

of mankind; and so believing, thou shalt not affirm of him aught that is foreign to his immortality or that agrees not with blessedness, but shalt believe about him whatever may uphold both his blessedness and his immortality. For verily there are gods, and the knowledge of them is manifest.[2] But they are not such as the multitude believe, seeing that men do not steadfastly maintain the notions they form respecting them (In other words, attributing human traits to gods, what is in opposition to their blessedness and immortality (Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I 16, 42–43). Not the man who denies the gods worshipped by the multitude, but he who affirms of the gods what the multitude believes about them is truly impious; the utterances of the multitude about the gods are not true preconceptions[3] but false assumptions (Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I 16, 42–43); hence it is that the greatest evils happen to the wicked and the greatest blessings happen to the good from the hand of the gods [...]" (Diogenes Laertios, X 123; transl. R.D. Hicks).

Therefore, according to the quoted fragment, "blessedness" is gods' natural, or even organic, if one can call it that way, feature; and certainly a significant one. They are "blessed" out of their nature. Apart from that, in the "inter-world" (*intermundia*) areas they inhabit there are no factors that could cause any disturbance to their happiness (Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I 16, 42). It is for the same reason that they do not yield to any emotions, such as anger or sadness, neither do they have any weaknesses that could impact their state of felicity. That is why they cannot take care of people or engage in any human affairs.

Epicurus directs his criticism also towards people's, including philosophers', beliefs in celestial bodies allegedly being gods. He does not consider them gods for sure. These celestial bodies are merely ordinary clusters of matter, while their nature is determined by the same atoms which compose everything that exists in the universe. Their behaviour is governed by natural laws of physics resulting from atomistic construction of every single thing and determining the movement of plants and all that exists (Diogenes Laertios, X 97–98).

Therefore, the same natural laws arising from the atomistic structure of things and governing the world of all beings and the entire cosmos, also define the existence and life of gods. They are not exempted from natural law marking out the way of living for all creatures. Common mythological presumptions about gods not only prevaricate but can be considered a plain blasphemy

[2] According to Epicurus, the existence of gods is evident (cf. Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I 16, 43–19, 50; 36, 100).

[3] It is about the so-called eidola of gods, incredibly subtle "images" that access human minds directly and generate the ideas of gods. Unfortunately, people tend to link them with their superstitions which have their origins in misunderstanding of laws governing natural phenomena (cf. Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I 16, 43–19, 50).

(Diogenes Laertios, X 122–124; Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I 16, 42–43). The same applies to religion, with all its magical cult and rituals, which distorts the real image of gods while instilling fear into people and feeding them with unfounded and false hopes.

In any case, the physical model of the world created by Epicurus ruled out fixed in Greek tradition and preserved by nearly all Greek philosophers' belief in the existence of some ideal, divine order with divine providence, and, consequently, banished any possibility of the divine impact on the world. For that particular reason, the philosopher of Samos exposed himself to the accusations of being an atheist (Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I 30, 85; 44, 123–124; II 23, 59; III 1, 3; Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus physicos*, I 43). As a matter of fact, according to his philosophical ideas (as it ought to be mentioned), it seems that common myths and superstitions were about to be replaced with his own. Nevertheless, he was most probably convinced that gods exist, however, he certainly imagined them differently from tradition-bound Greeks. In his *Letter to Menoeceus* he implies that a human being has an almost innate (as a result of being born in a certain culture) idea of gods which is very common and constitutes an element of an all-human cultural awareness (Diogenes Laertios, X 122–124). Though it is not necessarily evidence of the philosopher's true beliefs, but merely an element of a game and possibly a didactic measure, as faith in gods, and particularly contemplation on their happiness is a very important constituent of the Epicurean therapy (Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I 16, 43; I 17, 44–45; I 36, 100); still, it seems very probable. In any case, at least according to declarations, the existence of gods is self-evident to him, it does not require any additional proof (Diogenes Laertios, X 122–124; Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I 16, 43–19, 59; I 36, 100). Epicurus seems to believe that the common certainty about the existence of gods makes for a sufficient argument supporting that conviction, still, he must have been aware that such reasoning is questionable as far as logic is concerned. That is why he also resorted to a "scientific" argument using the theory of "spirit-images," that is "images" given out by all things and making them cognizable. These "spirit-images" (*eidola*) are to be emitted also by gods as they are built out of atoms as well, however theirs are more subtle ones. And these "spirit-images" (*eidola*), as subtle as atoms composing the substance gods are made of, were supposed to serve as a proof of gods' existence. Thanks to their exceptional subtlety they reach human minds directly, unmediated by sensory receptors, especially when people are asleep (Diogenes Laertios, X 122–124; Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I 16, 43–19, 59; I 36, 100). Not only are they to confirm gods' existence, but also their human-like form, an idea which might raise serious doubts, yet remains consistent with the Epicurean canon saying that

the medium of cognition are the abovementioned "spirit-images," or, in other words, images sent by all beings and received by sensory receptors, and in case of gods' subtle spirit-images – directly by the mind. Logically, of course, the last argument (about spirit-images as information carriers) is as doubtful as the previous one. People living in various cultures turn out to have completely disparate projections of gods. According to the theory of spirit-images, they would have to correspond with the existing figures of gods. Yet in Epicurus's view, all people attribute gods with figures as that is how they reveal themselves in front of human beings; what is more, a human figure is both the most advantageous and the most beautiful (Cicero, *De natura deorum* I 18, 46–49).

Epicurus's gods had nothing to do with supernaturality or transcendence (in Epicurus's actuality there was not a thing that would slip beyond the nature of the world). They were of the same character as all other beings, and the entire universe whatsoever. Yet in order not to mingle them with people or other earthly inhabitants, Epicurus located them in between the worlds, in spheres with no organized structures except for these gods themselves (Diogenes Laertios, X 123–124; Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I 8, 18 – Cicero writes here about Valleius, that "he behaves as if he had just descended from intermundia where he had attended gods' assembly." See also: Cicero, *De finibus bonorum et malorum*, II 23, 75). Epicurus mentions these inter-worlds in his *Letter to Pythocles* (Diogenes Laertios, X 89). Against all appearances, such kind of gods' location is of major significance. It is Epicurus's way of avoiding divine transcendence and supernaturality. He includes his gods among the entirety of universe comprising innumerate worlds and intermundia areas inhabited by these gods, but at the same time (thanks to the location of their abode) protects them from direct contacts with people.

Conclusion

Epicurus's theology, like his entire philosophical thought, is clearly "therapeutic" and proves useful in treating various soul diseases developed on account of religious beliefs (Diogenes Laertios, X 35–37, 82–83, 85, 116, 135). The master points his disciples towards rather simple yet scientifically satisfying (at least in Epicurus's day) content for philosophical contemplation and meditation. In this content the philosopher includes contemplation of the abovementioned Epicurean gods' blessedness, enabling people to taste and somewhat emulate this "divine" happiness. Still, his principal goal is to dissipate all fears and delusions arisen from religious superstitiousness, as they have no right to be and seem groundless in the real world governed by the laws of atomistic physics.

In moral sense, all that is wrong behind this superstitiousness, and fears and delusions generated by it, consists in the fact that they bar people's way to real (accordant with nature) happiness, they do not allow human beings to enjoy their real life, unique and the only one at their disposal. That is the main reason for Epicurus to direct his criticism against these superstitions, criticism in which he lays bare the falsehood and harmfulness of common beliefs, as well as philosophical theories about gods and their attitude towards people, with an objective to eradicate the major triggers for anxieties and phobias plaguing people out of human faith in gods, in providence and fate (Cicero, *De providentia*, IX 18, 19; X 22, 23; *De natura deorum*, I 20, 54–56), in magic and soothsaying (Diogenes Laertios, X 135–135; Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I 120, 56; II 65, 162; *De divinatione*, II 17, 39, 40: II 65, 162). Epicurus criticizes both Greeks' mythological and poetical projections on gods (Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I 8, 18–19, 59), as well as some philosophical concepts, particularly Platonian (about the divine Creator, the world's soul and the divinity of stars) and Stoic (about the world's soul and the divine providence), which are mutually exclusive with the Epicurean doctrine about the physical structure of all things (Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I 8, 18–19, 59; Algra, 2007, pp. 12–23; Krokiewicz, 1961, pp. 172–210; Lemke, 1973; Martinazzoli, 1947, pp. 278–299; Sedley, 2011, pp. 29–52; Schmid, 1951, pp. 97–156).

There is testimony that Epicurus and his disciples, in spite of criticising common religious beliefs, together with their philosophical equivalents, would worship their intermundia gods, yet without any expectations or demands whatsoever (Diogenes Laertios, X 10; Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I 41, 115–116 – Cicero writes here about Epicurus's alleged piety). They would even be part of traditional cult, yet with no intention of being actively engaged in it, but solely in order to take advantage of the religious atmosphere and indulge in meditation on "true" Epicurean gods, and in this way get closer to them and become more like them, at least emotionally (that is a rather peculiar and noncommittal version of the Platonian and Stoic ideal of "becoming similar to god"). It is confirmed by Philodemus: "Let us sacrifice to the gods devoutly and fittingly on the proper days and let us fittingly perform all the acts of worship in accordance with the laws, in no way disturbing ourselves with opinions in matters concerning the most excellent and august of beings" (Philodemos, *De sanctitate*, p. 126; Usener, 1887, 258, p. 19; transl. K. Algra: Algra, 2007, p. 18; Bignone, 1936, p. 107; Pawłowski, 2007, p. 89). In other words, Epicureans' religiousness was of cultural character. Nevertheless, one can assume that they used the solemn religious atmosphere in order to get into the right mood to contemplate extra-terrestrial "Epicurean" gods and the nature of the world.

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