


EPICURUS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONCEPT OF *FREEDOM*

Neda Stojanović*

University of Niš, Faculty of Philosophy, Niš, Serbia

ORCID iD: Neda Stojanović

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-6146-9624>

Abstract

This paper examines Epicurus' understanding of the concept of freedom. Although Epicurus provides a materialistic explanation of the origin and way of existence of nature and people, this philosopher indicates the possibility of one's free action, highlighting the phenomenon of atom deviation or slight alteration of the usual path (which implies a movement that does not deviate from its course). By negating determinism, Epicurus claims that human actions are not predetermined. This way of understanding freedom inevitably leads to questions that arise from attempts to understand the phenomenon of chance that is characteristic for modern physics: can we define one's actions as truly one's own or as a result of a random set of circumstances. This presents a problem for determining the role and importance of reason in Epicurus' philosophy. We will try to show that one's freedom implies one's ability to control desires that find their satisfaction in needs that go beyond one's natural and necessary aspects and that have nothing to do with one's nature, but with one's thinking. Also, we will show in what way reason presents a basic means in reaching bliss.

Key words: Epicurus, physics, determinism, freedom, reason.

ЕПИКУРОВО РАЗУМЕВАЊЕ ПОЈМА *СЛОБОДЕ*

Апстракт

У овом раду разматра се Епикурово схватање појма слободе. Иако пружа материјалистичко објашњење порекла и начина постојања природе и човека, овај филозоф указује на могућност људског слободног делања, истичући феномен скретања атома или благог одступања од уобичајене путање (која подразумева кретање која не скреће са свог курса). Негирањем детерминизма, Епикур тврди да човеково делање није предодређено. Овај начин схватања слободе неизбежно води до питања на која наилазимо и у покушајима разумевања феномена случајности карактеристичних за разматрања савремене физике: да ли човекова дела можемо окарактерисати као заиста његова или као резултат случајног стицаја окол-

* Corresponding author: Neda Stojanović, University of Niš, Faculty of Philosophy, Ćirila i Metodija 2, 18101 Niš, Serbia | neda.stojanovic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

ности. Ово представља проблем за одређивање улоге и значаја разума у Епикуровој филозофији. Покушаћемо да покажемо да човекова слобода подразумева способност контроле над жељама које налазе своје задовољење у потребама које превазилазе природне и нужне аспекте човека и које немају везе са човековом природом, већ са његовим мишљењем. Такође, показаћемо на који начин разум представља основно средство у достизању блаженства.

Кључне речи: Епикур, физика, детерминизам, слобода, разум.

INTRODUCTION

By introducing the declination of atoms, Epicurus sought to negate the deterministically organised world on two levels: 1) on the physical level – enabling the spontaneous deflection of atoms, which “initiate cosmogonic patterns of motion,” and 2) on the mental (psychological) level – serving as a necessary condition for human autonomy and freedom (Sedley, 1983, p. 11). Christopher Gill (2009) points out that, although ethics and physics are formulated independently in Epicurus’ philosophy, they support each other, promoting happiness (p. 138). Namely, one of the important connections between physics and ethics is the recognition of human mortality in order to confront the fear of death and the possibility of freedom.

In order to successfully consider the issue of freedom within the framework of Epicurus’ philosophy, it is necessary to keep in mind that the ancient conceptions of freedom and determinism should not be equated with the problem of free will and determinism in contemporary philosophy, that is, with the question of the compatibility of causal determinism¹ with freedom and moral responsibility (O’Keefe 2021). Although Epicurus’ materialistic explanation of nature and human is such that we cannot completely escape certain necessities and contingencies, it guarantees an aspect of freedom that implies one’s ability not only to be morally responsible, but also to reflect on the consequences of fulfilling one’s impulses and desires, as well as to achieve bliss through the proper use of reason.

We will first present Epicurus’ atomistic theory and consider how the declination of atoms affects the understanding of the nature and order of the cosmos. Then, we will focus on what the human psyche² consists of and how it functions, while analysing which part exactly of the psyche is under our control. Finally, we will point out the types of pleasures and desires within Epicurus’ ethics, with the aim of showing that one’s freedom implies the conscientious, moderate, and thoughtful fulfilment of certain types of desires.

¹ Causal determinism implies that every event is considered necessary, as it is conditioned by previous situations, including the laws of nature (Hofer 2024);

² We will use the term psyche (ψυχή) as a term that encompasses the concepts of soul and mind, or rather as a broader term than the two mentioned above;

*EPICURUS AND (IN-)DETERMINISM**Epicurus' atomistic theory*

Epicurus believed that atoms and empty space were the only elements of the universe, that is, that the only thing that exists are atoms moving in the void. Although atoms cannot be further divided, he did not consider them to be the smallest and most fundamental parts of matter. For him, these are the *minima*³ (Diog. Laert. X 58-59), “irreducible particles” that form a homogeneous whole in atoms and cannot exist independently of them (Atanasijević, 2022, p. 28). Atoms differ from each other in weight, size and shape. They are constantly moving, that is falling, which Epicurus indicates by describing movements that are to be imagined in an upward and downward direction. Moreover, everything that exists consists of atoms and empty space, in which these atoms move and collide with each other. If empty space did not exist, things could neither move nor come into being (Lucr. I, 327-359). To explain how the world came into existence, Epicurus allows for the collision of atoms. If there were no deflections, Lucretius states, everything would just fall down like raindrops through the empty space, which would mean that nature could not create anything without collisions (Lucr. II, 198-224). Without these contacts, other worlds would not have come into existence, some similar to ours, some not. In the *Letter to Herodotus*, Epicurus indicates the necessity of equal speed of atoms during their motion if they do not encounter any resistance (Diog. Laert. X 61). According to him, both heavy and light atoms then fall at the same speed, regardless of their weight. Since this is the case, there is no change in trajectory. Lucretius specifies that for Epicurus, in addition to weight and collision, there is a third⁴ cause of the motion of atoms that prevents their trajectory from being determined by the impact of other atoms, at the same time representing the source of our innate power (Lucr. II, 283-314). As they fall downward through empty space under the influence of their own weight, atoms divert very slightly from their vertical to an indeterminate place and at an indeterminate time (Lucr. II, 198-224). Although we cannot perceive this change with our senses, since it is almost imperceptible, we can still consider it as a turn in the motion of the atoms.

Physical aspects of necessity, chance, and 'our own agency'

With this understanding, Epicurus seeks to refute determinism, that is, the view that everything in the universe, including human beings, is

³ K. Atanasijević in *Epicurus' Atomism* (2022) shows that this is not Epicurus' original teaching, but that it was already present and developed in the principles of the old atomism (pp. 30-35);

⁴ K. Atanasijević (2022) argues that this is an original contribution of Epicurus, and not an idea that could have been found earlier in Democritus' teachings (pp. 52-54, 60);

“governed by causal laws and operate in accordance with them” (Bunnin & Yu, 2009, p. 177). In that way, he acknowledges that some events occur without previously determined and established causes or conditions. In the *Letters to Menoecus*, Epicurus claims that “some things happen of necessity, others by chance, others through our own agency” (Diog. Laert. X 134).

In Epicurus’ physical theory, we can consider the laws according to which atoms move, collide and are created, as well as their speeds of movement, sizes and types, as necessary. The above-mentioned properties of atoms represent the basis and regularities according to which the world exists and functions. In other words, as Pierre-Marie Morel (2009) states, Epicurus’ thesis about atoms forming the basis of all bodies (Diog. Laert. X 40) offers

a law which all natural phenomena obey and is the central claim in a set of propositions which constitute the theoretical core of natural philosophy.

(p. 66)

On the other hand, there are situations that happen by chance. For this purpose, we will consider the explanation provided by modern physics. David Bohm, one of the most prominent theoretical physicists of the 20th century, indicates that the concept of chance⁵ should be understood as a possibility considered outside of a given context, that is, a law (Bom, 1972, p. 63). Although we observe that there are necessary relations between objects in nature, that is, between phenomena in the most diverse conditions and processes, the necessity of a causal law is “never absolute” (Bom, 1972, p. 36). Bohm illustrates this with the following example, in which he uses the law of falling of a dropped body, and takes a piece of paper as the body. It may happen that this paper, if a strong wind blows, rises and does not fall, as it should according to the aforementioned law. Also, the effects of the wind depends largely on the position of clouds, the temperature of the body, water masses, etc. All of these circumstances are accidental in the sense that they are not implied by this law, since it is impossible for it to be formulated in such a way as to include *all* the causal relations on which its implementation in nature depends. Let’s return to Epicurus. By postulating the declination of atoms, or the deviation of atoms from their path, Epicurus acknowledges chance, randomness or uncertainty, and departs from lawfulness and necessity.

As for the situations that happen through our own agency, we will mention two important consequences that arise from Epicurus’ atomistic theory, and are associated, through the way the cosmos is organised and understood, to our ability to lead a peaceful and blissful life. In order to do that, one should stop fearing the gods and death. First, it is true that gods exist, but they are not as people imagine and represent them to themselves. Attila Németh (2020) points out that Epicurus’ intention was not to negate

⁵ We will use this word, like David Bohm, in its broadest sense: as the opposite of necessity.

the existence of gods, but rather to negate their status as “active cosmological principles” (p. 224). According to Epicurus, people mistakenly believe that the gods interfere in their world, punishing the wicked and rewarding the good. Liberation from this type of fear consists in the following:

[B]elieve that God is a living being immortal and blessed, according to the notion of a god indicated by the common sense 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.

(Diog. Laert. X 123)

Second, thinking about life after death ceases to be a cause of pain when one accepts that one's soul will cease to exist. Death is “nothing to us, seeing that, when we are, death is not come, and, when death is come, we are not” (Diog. Laert. X 125). If one decides to surmount one's fears in this way, one will be able to lead a blissful life. With this understanding, Epicurus wants to free one from divine providence. However, the question arises whether the negation of divinity as active cosmological principle is sufficient to guarantee one's freedom, given the physical theory that implies the subjugation of atoms to certain laws.

EPICURUS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL (IN)DETERMINISM

The materialistic explanation of the psyche

Epicurus' physical theory, in addition to the existence of the world and happenings in nature, also explains the functioning of the human psyche. Gill (2009) points out that Epicureanism:

combines an account of the psyche as bodily, and atomic, with a conception of human beings as coherent and complex wholes, capable of advanced psychological and ethical functions.

(p. 126)

In what follows, we will first consider the consequences of such an understanding of the psyche and indicate its composition and structure, and then examine whether any part of the psyche remains beyond the reach of necessity and chance.

The one's psyche is also composed of atoms. It is “a corporeal thing, composed of fine particles, dispersed all over the frame” and which resembles “wind with an admixture of heat, in some respects like wind, in others like heat” (Diog. Laert. X 63). David Konstan (2022) points out two consequences that arise from the fact that the psyche is of a material nature. The first concerns the Epicurean understanding of death. According to Epicurus, the psyche cannot survive the death of the body, since it is an inseparable part of it and does not exist independently of it (Lucr. III, 327-

358). In simple terms, since atoms constitute its essence, when they, due to death, disperse, the psyche also disappears. Therefore, Epicurus believes that death should not be sought or feared, as we pointed out earlier, since it is “nothing to us, for good and evil imply sentience, and death is the privation of all sentience” (Diog. Laert. X 124-125). The second consequence implies the way in which the psyche reacts to impressions from nature, regardless of whether they originate from the outside or arise within the human being (Konstan 2022). Gill (2009) argues that “[i]n principle, it would seem, *all* phenomena are taken explicable by reference to atomic structure and interaction” (p. 128). In other words, all these impressions are created by the collision of atoms, thus providing one with the possibility of seeing, hearing, smelling, etc. Therefore, the psyche is the bearer of all sensory perceptions. Lucretius in *Book 4* explains in detail how all our senses function and what one needs in order to live. He notes that everything created in the human body gives the bodily organs and perception a purpose (Lucr. IV, 811-842). Simply put, sight did not exist until the eyes were created, or speech before the tongue was created, etc. We will not, however, deal in more detail with the cognitive theory within the framework of Epicurus’ philosophy. Our intention was only to highlight the way in which the psyche functions, since it is composed of atoms and it is an inseparable part of the body.

Psychological aspects of necessity, chance and ‘our own agency’

Let us return again to Epicurus’ claim that something happens due to necessity, something due to chance (coincidence), and something due to us (Diog. Laert. X 134). What can we consider necessary from the aspect of the human psyche? First of all, the way in which the psyche exists – inseparably connected to the body, as well as the way in which it enables cognition and more complex psychological functions. Also, the composition and structure, i.e. the types of atoms that make up the psyche. We will point out part of *Book 2*, in which Lucretius describes the variety of combinations of different elements (atoms) that constitute things. Lucretius claims that nothing is made of just one type of atom, but that the composition of things is made up of different forms of them, and that each thing has certain and established seeds – we can say, as its unchanging and permanent underlying principle (Lucr. II, 573-720). In *Book 4*, Lucretius describes and discusses in detail the ways in which a certain type of atom leads to certain sensations and thoughts. The psyche, being of a material nature, is also composed of certain atoms of certain properties and complies them. Moreover, it also possesses a part that is unchangeable, we can say predetermined. This can, to a certain extent, be explained in terms inherent in modern medicine: genetic predispositions, inherited temperaments of children from parents, physical appearance, etc. Therefore, there is a part of us (our psyche and also our physical constitution) over which we have

no power or control. David Sedley (1983) indicates that the target of Epicurus' criticism was a certain type of deterministic teaching – *mechanism* – which advocates the view that human behaviour, among other things, can be

exhaustively explained by changes in material nature [the concepts of chemical and neurophysiological changes, used in modern theory, and the concept of atomic changes used in ancient theory] and that talk about 'intention', 'desire', etc. is redundant, without additional description or explanation.

(p. 32)

By postulating the declination of atoms, Epicurus acknowledges the chance. This leads to the possibility of deviation from above mentioned necessity. Let us return to the example given by Bohm: the paper, instead of falling (which the law of dropped bodies implies), changes its trajectory under the influence of other external factors. In the example, we have emphasised that this change was influenced by factors that were not under the control of the given body (wind, humidity, temperature, etc.). In order to make an analogy with the human psyche, we will mention the *internal cause interpretation*, advocated by Susanne Bobzien. One is not strictly conditioned by the shape and size of the atoms that form one's "mental dispositions" (Bobzien, 2000, p. 318). The declination of atoms represents a departure from the understanding of the psychic structure as fixed and completely unchangeable, determined by specific elements or seeds. In other words, there is the possibility of character development and deviations from the "written" traits in atoms (or genes), as well as from, for example, the influence of the social environment.

Now we will consider what this deviation represents in situations that happen through our own agency and how it is important for Epicurus' understanding of freedom. Cicero states in his work *On Fate* (H.G. Bohn edition from 1853) that, by introducing the third type of movement, namely the declination of atoms, Epicurus was forced, if not explicitly, to admit that this movement has no cause of its own, since it is not conditioned by the necessity of the movement of other atoms (p. 273). The question arises as to who or what is the cause of this movement. Lucretius considers that the declination of atoms explains the power of free motion in living beings and that it begins with the will that passes through all the limbs (Lucr. II, 255-283). Moreover, this motion is quite different from the deflection caused by the collisions of atoms – in the latter case, the atoms do not resist the violent change of trajectory and have no control over it. On the contrary, Lucretius claims that the cause of this deflection, is "this power born in us, since we see that nothing can come to pass from nothing" (Lucr. II, 283-314). Cicero (1853) similarly says the following:

Therefore not to expose ourselves to the ridicule of the natural philosophers by asserting that anything happens without a cause, we must distinctly propound that the nature of an atom is such that it may be moved by its own specific gravity, and that its intrinsic nature is the very cause of its motion. And in the same manner we need not seek for an external cause for the voluntary motions of the mind. For such is the nature of voluntary motion, that it must needs be in our own power, and depend on ourselves, otherwise it is not voluntary. And yet we cannot say that the motion of our free-will is an effect without a cause, for its proper nature is the cause of this effect.

(p. 274)

The question arises as to how the free and voluntary deflection of atoms, understood in this way, can be related to the psyche, that is, how can we equate the explanation of the physical motion of atoms with the mental one. In other words, how can the deflection of atoms in space be equated with the deflection of atoms in the soul? First of all, we will point out the division of the psyche into soul (spirit) and mind, which Lucretius makes in *Book 3*. According to him,

mind and soul are held in union one with the other, and form of themselves a single nature, but the head, as it were, and lord in the whole body is the reason, which we call mind or understanding, and it is firmly seated in the middle region of the breast.

(Lucretius, III, 115-144)

Why should this be of importance to us? Let us consider the example of the origin of motion that Lucretius explains in *Book 4*. He first describes the creation of the image of walking in the mind, after which the will sets in motion the atoms of the soul, which then affect the body and cause it to move (Lucretius, IV, 871-900). It is also argued that the mind sees in the same way as the eyes see – which brings us back to the previously mentioned corporeal and atomistic nature of the psyche (Lucretius, IV, 722-751). Gill (2009) points out that, although the above explanation of the volitional act (in this case, walking) implicitly implies the possibility of analysing the mind and soul (as physical entities) from the point of view of atoms, this does not mean that it represents an attempt to reduce mental acts to a purely physical or atomistic phenomenon (p. 134). In other words, atomistic and psychological explanations of volitional act are not mutually exclusive. The given example indicates the possibility of the mind's active participation in thought processes and the activation of other parts of the psyche (soul) and body⁶. We will point to a passage in Epicurus's *On Nature*, more precisely in *Book 25*, which states the following:

⁶ We will notice the tendency towards combining the atomistic and psychological aspects in Epicurus' ethics, where he states that a happy life requires pleasure and the

From the very beginning we have seeds which lead us, some to these things, some to those things, and some to both; they are always [the seeds of] actions, and thoughts and dispositions, and are greater or fewer in number. Consequently, what we develop—such or such [actions, thoughts, and dispositions]—is, right from the first, quite simply a result of us; and the influences which by necessity flow from the environment through our passages are at some point up to us and to the opinions which come from within us...

(Inwood & Gerson, 1994, p. 76)

So, our beliefs and thoughts are under our control. Epicurus, with his teachings about the nature of the universe, that is, the divinity – that do not interfere in human life and do not take an active part in the arrangement of the world, and death – which should not be feared, because it does not concern us, strives to free one from external influences, fears and myths, enabling one to become the master of one's own life and at the same time be morally responsible for one's actions (Sedley, 1983; Németh, 2020).

FREEDOM AS THE PRESERVATION OF HUMAN RATIONALITY AND REFLECTION ABOUT THE FUTURE

Tim O'Keefe (2009) points out that there are at least three types of freedom that Epicurus defends: 1) effective agency – the ability of one to act in the way one wants, in order to fulfil one's desires; 2) self-formation of character – the ability of one to modify one's desires for the sake of achieving happiness; and 3) moral responsibility – the ability of one to be morally responsible (p. 142). The first ability concerns the ability to fulfil one's desires. In the example of walking given by Lucretius in *Book 4*, movement is the result of the desire of the mind, that is, the desire to move, which, through the mind and then the soul, is realised on the physical level – in the form of walking. The second ability concerns the ability of one to form one's character so that one is, to a certain extent, free from the influence of a deterministically ordered psyche. We have said more about this in the previous section. Finally, the third ability implies the possibility of one's subjection to praise or blame. We will focus on this ability and, in doing so, point out another aspect of freedom that could imply moral responsibility within the framework of Epicurus' philosophy and ethics: one's reflection on his future actions with the use of reason. In order to successfully discuss the importance of rationality, we will first point out the basic stance of Epicurus' ethics.

absence of pain (as a physical aspect), and tranquility of mind (as a mental one). We will say more about this in the next section;

Natural, necessary and empty desires within Epicurus' hedonistic ethics

Epicurus defines the attainment of pleasure and the absence of pain as the purpose of life and considers these feelings to be the main indicators of what is good and what is evil (Diog. Laert. X 129). Epicurus' philosophy is often considered, quite wrongly, to be a philosophy of hedonism, which emphasises the importance of bodily pleasure. However, Epicurus does not advocate a life of debauchery. When he speaks of pleasure, he does not imply the pleasure that occurs in the moment, but rather the pleasure that includes the entire human life. In other words, it is necessary to lead a modest life, to provide one's soul with peace and one's body with a state free from pain. Bodily pleasures and other pleasures are only certain aspects of the concept of happiness (εὐδαιμονία). This concept is also translated as "bliss" (Bunnin&Yu, 2009, p. 231), a term that Epicurus often uses in his ethics. The purpose of a blissful life, which implies physical health and "untroubled mental tranquillity," should, according to him, be sought in the absence of pain and fear.

Epicurus emphasises the importance of a person's self-sufficiency (αὐτάρκεια) and untroubledness (αταραξία) of the soul, that is, the importance of liberating one not only from the influence of the outside world, but also from one's own impulses and passions. We will consider different types of pleasures and desires mentioned in Epicurus' ethics. First of all, we are talking about 1) pleasures of the body and 2) pleasures of the mind, both of which can involve states of rest as well as states of movement (*static* and *transient* pleasures). Diogenes Laertius gives us an examples of static pleasures: peace of mind and the absence of pain, and of transient ones: joy and enjoyment. Epicurus believes that the pleasures and pains of the mind are more important than the pleasures and pains of the body. On the one hand, the pain that occurs in the mind is greater than the pain felt by the body, because the body

endures the storms of the present alone, the mind those of the past
and future as well as the present

(Diog. Laert. X 137)

On the other hand, the pleasures of the mind are greater than the pleasures of the body, because the body can receive an unlimited amount of pleasure for an unlimited time, while the mind does not need this, because it is not focused only on the present (like the body), but also on the past and the future, thereby contemplating the goals and limits of the body (Diog. Laert. X 145).

Second, there is a distinction between necessary, natural, and unnecessary (empty) desires. Laertius states that there are 1) natural and necessary desires, which bring relief from pain – for example, the satisfaction of thirst and hunger; 2) natural and unnecessary desires, which diversify pleasure without removing pain – for example, expensive food; and 3) de-

sires that are neither natural nor necessary, but are the result of one's illusory thinking – for example, the desire for power and domination, as well as the erection of statues in his honour (Diog. Laert. X 149). Desires of the first kind are simply consequences of one's bodily structure, physical constitution, and the way one's body functions – accordingly, one cannot do much to defy them if one wants to live. Desires of the second kind are more focused on pleasure itself than on the satisfaction of natural needs – by insisting on the (unnecessary and excessive) luxury of the means that provide one with pleasures. Finally, desires of the third kind find their satisfaction in needs that go beyond the one's natural and necessary aspects, and find their stronghold in the social community, as well as in political and economic circumstances. As such, they have nothing to do with one's nature, but with one's thinking. This brings us to the role that reason (should) have within Epicurus' ethics.

If we draw a parallel with the hierarchy within the human psyche, we will notice a qualitative difference between its parts – just as with the type of pleasures and pains. Lucretius claims that the mind is more important for life than the soul (Lucr. III, 387-418). The mind, possessing the power of understanding and reason, represents the superior part of the human psyche, without which the soul could not maintain its structure for long. In other words, the importance of reason lies in the fact that, according to Epicurus, it allows us to discern which desires can cause us discomfort or hardship and to understand their consequences. Satisfying one's needs and desires must be moderate and deliberate. If we indulge only in 'empty' desires, our everyday life will soon consist of restlessness and anxiety. According to Epicurus, it is necessary to compare and weigh the usefulness and harmfulness of what we do, eat, drink, etc., since it is sometimes necessary to take evil as good and good as evil, and therefore, one should always examine the types of pleasures and the specificity of their effects on us (Diog. Laert. X 129). One should always examine the reasons for one's choices and avoidances, preventing the emergence of unrest in their own soul. If people could clearly and understandingly perceive the circumstances in which they find themselves and the reasons for their anxiety or apathetic state, they would not lead a restless life, due to insufficient knowledge of themselves and what they really want (Lucr. III, 1041-1069; Diog. Laert. X 128). Prudence, according to Epicurus, is more valuable than philosophy, since all other virtues that are inseparable from a pleasant life stem from reasonable behaviour (Diog. Laert. X 132). In other words, one should simultaneously, using one's reason, strive for both morality and pleasure. Friedrich Jodl (1975) points out that a moral person will therefore know how to satisfy his needs in the simplest and most practical way possible, focusing only on what he needs and nothing more, avoiding fame and a turbulent life (p. 29). According to Atanasijević (2022):

the true meaning of Epicurus's conception of freedom is best illuminated by a passage from Lucretius that states that education cannot change a person's character, and that his strongest inclinations will always dominate. But, although philosophical⁷ education is not capable of suppressing our true nature, it can weaken it to the point that we can lead a life worthy of the gods.

(p. 58)

In this sober reflection and the distinction between necessary, natural and unnecessary pleasures, one's freedom is reflected.

According to Epicurus, it is one's thoughts and beliefs that are under one's control. The ability to use one's reason to select between bodily desires and pleasures that bring bliss indicates one's freedom in one's actions. We would agree with O'Keefe (2005) when he says that the core of Epicurus' ethics is the ability of an individual to reflect on his attitudes and desires and to change them, using his reason and taking into account the consequences that certain decisions might cause (pp. 23-24). O'Keefe believes (2005), quite rightly, that this philosopher wanted to preserve the possibility of one's rational and effective reflection on one's future actions (p. 17). In order for an individual to be able to structure his life in this way, the future needs to be open to change. Determinism implies the opposite, that is, that the future is strictly determined by the previous state of affairs and that it cannot be changed. This aspect of understanding the world and human does not suit Epicurus, who wants to make freedom possible, and therefore tends to negate this way of understanding them, arguing in favour of one's ability to rationally organise and lead one's life, while striving for pleasures.

We must remember that the future is neither wholly ours nor wholly not ours, so that neither must we count upon it as quite certain to come nor despair of it as quite certain not to come.

(Diog. Laert. X 127)

CONCLUSION

Epicurus, with his physical theory, indicates the existence of certain regularities that led to the emergence of the world and influenced the formation of its specific features. However, although he provides a materialistic explanation of the origin and mode of existence of nature and people, Epicurus advocates the possibility of human free action, emphasising the phenomenon of the deviation (declination) of the atom or a slight deviation from its vertical. Since the human soul is composed of atoms, it also functions according to the same principles as everything else in nature, which implies that declination can also be attributed to it as its feature.

⁷ We will understand this 'philosophical' in the sense of the ability to (self)reflect – in accordance with the point we want to prove here.

Epicurus seeks to refute the deterministic understanding of the state of affairs, which claims that everything is determined by previous events and that it is impossible to change its course. However, the question arises whether we can always claim that one is truly the cause of one's actions. Considering the basic standpoint of Epicurus' ethics, his division of pleasure into bodily and mental, as well as the division of desires into necessary, natural and empty (unnecessary), we come to the conclusion that one's freedom implies one's ability to control desires and impulses that are neither natural nor necessary, but rather those that depend on one's own opinion, beliefs and thinking. What one can do is to reflect, using reason, on one's desires and the consequences that may arise from one's striving for them. In other words, the ability to use one's reason to select among pleasures and decide which ones to strive for indicates, according to Epicurus, the existence of one's freedom. By striving for the absence of suffering, rather than for bodily impulses, one shows that one is able to practice the wisdom that will bring bliss. In this way, the future is open to the individual and prone to change, and he is the one who causes these changes.

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ЕПИКУРОВО РАЗУМЕВАЊЕ ПОЈМА СЛОБОДЕ

Неда Стојановић

Универзитет у Нишу, Филозофски факултет, Ниш, Србија

Резиме

Епикур својом атомистичком теоријом указује на могућност слободе у човековом делању. Допуштајући дефлексију атома, који представљају (пored празног простора) конституенте универзума, али уједно и човека (његове душе), он одбацује детерминистичку теорију према којој је све предодређено. Тиме се сврстава у заступнике индетерминистичког схватања, које подразумева дешавање догађаја без претходно одређених или условљених узрока. Иако Епикур одбацује детерминизам, не можемо са сигурношћу тврдити да је човек увек узрочник свог делања, будући да постоје параметри који могу бити изван његових моћи и контроле. Ипак, Епикур својим учењем о природи свемира, то јест боговима – који се не мешају у људски живот и не узимају активног учешћа у уређењу света, и смрти – које се не треба плашити, јер нас се она не тиче, тежи да човека ослободи од спољашњих утицаја, страхова и митова, омогућајући му да он постане господар свог живота. Другим речима, иако је Епикурово материјалистичко објашњење природе и човека такво да не можемо у потпуности избећи одређеним нужностима и случајностима, оно гарантује аспект слободе који подразумева човекову способност не само да буде морално одговоран, него и да рефлектује о последицама остварења својих побуда и жеља, као и да правилном употребом разума достигне блаженство. Човек својим разумом може селектовати и бирати задовољства и бол(и) којима се хоће или неће подрвћи. Разматрајући основне ставове Епикурове етике, његове поделе задовољстава на телесно и умно, као и поделу жеља на нужне, природне и ништавне, долазимо до закључка да човекова слобода подразумева способност контроле над жељама и побудама које нису ни природне нити нужне, већ над онима које зависе од његовог мишљења. Такође, ова слобода подразумева способност појединца да рефлектује над својим ставовима и жељама и да исте промени, служећи се својим разумом и притом узимајући у обзир последице које би одређене одлуке могле да узрокују у будућности.