

THE POSSIBILITY OF EUDAIMONIA
(HAPPINESS AND HUMAN FLOURISHING)
IN THE WORLD TODAY



EDITED BY
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The Possibility of Eudaimonia in the World Today

Višnja Knežević

Eudaimonia, Pleasure and the Defeat of Particularity

ABSTRACT: In the times where the predominant description of the world has become that of the so-called “post-truth” reality, all the questions on the possibilities of leading a fulfilled life, the life of εὐδαιμονία, seem to have become irrelevant, if not unattainable. This is due to the reason that εὐδαιμονία, as such, intrinsically involves a connection with the truth and the universal. On the other hand, the concept of a fulfilled life should not exclude subjective happiness. The latter has always been intertwined with the concept of pleasure. Nonetheless, what the contemporary world-view has to offer is not at all the compound of pleasure and truth, the dialectics of particular and the universal. Instead, it is a paradigm of life led by undifferentiated particular pleasures, to be desired and pursued for the sole purpose of their being pleasurable. Paradoxical as it may seem, the issue is not a new one.

The first aim of this paper is to critically assess the Epicurean concept of pleasure. Rather than taking an a priori moralistic stance, I intent to point out that the concept in question is intrinsically, i.e., theoretically problematic. My second aim is to critically analyze the hedonistic world-view as such assessing it primarily as a political attitude. In addition, I hope to show that in contrast to ancient hedonism, which I regard as a type of unintentional individual escapism, contemporary hedonism has transformed into a systematically induced and politically desired ideology of activism prevention. Phrased in the context of Platonic terminology, it has become the discourse of the Cave. Thus, beginning with the sources analysis, the paper is mainly conceived as a critique of an idea targeting both its early and its ultimate manifestations.

KEY-WORDS: εὐδαιμονία, καταστήματα, pleasure, truth, particularity, contemporaneity, ideology.

I. The Inconsistency of Pleasure

Two types of Greek hedonism are historically known to us, the Cyrenaic and the Epicurean one, with indication that the two schools considerably articulated their respective positions as theoretical responses to one another’s objections [Long 1999: 634 ff; Erler & Schofield 1999: 654–5]. The distinction between them is not *primarily* in their relationship towards pleasure (ἡδονή), which they both identify as an end and our “first and kindred good” [DL X.129.1–2, cf. DL II.8. 88.2–4], but in their relationship

to the concept of εὐδαιμονία understood as the aim of life. Whereas Epicurus acknowledges an integral concept of εὐδαιμονία, a whole-life τέλος [DL II.8. 87.5, X.128, etc.], the Cyrenaics refute its integrity and totality, either equating it, for the better, with the mere sum of all particular goals (τέλη), i.e. pleasures throughout the life [DL II.8. 87.5–88.2],¹ or for worse, negating the whole arithmetical “reality” of εὐδαιμονία and affirming a unique action pleasure in every peculiar case, as the Annicerians did [SSR IV G4]. The difference between nature of ἡδονή between the two schools may, then, be regarded as a direct consequence of their theoretical standpoints concerning εὐδαιμονία. Hence the Cyrenaics define pleasure significantly through, and as motion [DL II.8. 86.7–8,² SSR IV B5], whereas Epicurus admits both types of pleasure – the kinetic (κατὰ κίνησιν, *in motu*) and the katastematic ones (καταστήματα, *in stabilitate*).

It is noteworthy that the division of pleasure into kinetic and katastematic type is not originally to be found in Epicurus’ own writings. However, we may be certain that it was his position since one finds it in the scholia to Epicurus, as well as in the writings of Cicero and Plutarch on Epicureanism.³ Thus Diogenes Laertius informs us that

He [sc. Epicurus] differs from the Cyrenaics with regard to pleasure. They do not include under the term the pleasure which is a state of rest (οἱ μὲν γὰρ τὴν καταστηματικὴν οὐκ ἐγκρίνουσι), but only that which consists in motion (μόνην δὲ τὴν ἐν κινήσει). Epicurus admits both (ἀμφοτέρω); also pleasure of mind as well as of body (ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος), as he states in his work *On Choice and Avoidance* and in that *On the Ethical End*, and in the first book of his work *On Human Life* and in the epistle to his philosopher friends in Mytilene. [...] Epicurus in *On Choices* says as follows: ‘Tranquility of mind and freedom from bodily pain are static pleasures; joy, delight and merriment are seen [to consist] in motion belonging to activity’ (ὁ δ’ Ἐπίκουρος ἐν τῷ Περὶ αἰρέσεων οὕτω λέγει· ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἀταραξία καὶ ἀπονία καταστηματικαὶ εἰσιν ἡδοναί· ἡ δὲ χαρὰ καὶ ἡ εὐφροσύνη κατὰ κίνησιν ἐνεργεῖα βλέπονται).”

DL X. 136,⁴ translation by author, following Hicks⁵

¹ δοκεῖ δ’ αὐτοῖς καὶ τέλος εὐδαιμονίας διαφέρειν. τέλος μὲν γὰρ εἶναι τὴν κατὰ μέρος ἡδονήν, εὐδαιμονίαν δὲ τὸ ἐκ τῶν μερικῶν ἡδονῶν σύστημα [...] εἶναι τε τὴν μερικὴν ἡδονήν δι’ αὐτὴν αἰρετήν· τὴν δ’ εὐδαιμονίαν οὐ δι’ αὐτήν, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὰς κατὰ μέρος ἡδονάς.

² δύο πάθη ὑφίσταντο, πόνον καὶ ἡδονήν, τὴν μὲν λείαν κίνησιν, τὴν ἡδονήν, τὸν δὲ πόνον τραχεῖαν κίνησιν. Cf. DL II.8. 89.3: ἐν κινήσει γὰρ εἶναι ἀμφοτέρω [...].

³ Although Plutarch is not to be uncritically trusted in his description of Epicurus’ understanding of pleasure since he often attributes the priority of carnal pleasures to the latter (which was not Epicurus’ case), we may be certain that Epicurus had made the distinction between the static and the pleasures of motion. For dispute on authenticity of the distinction in question, cf. Erler & Schofield 1999: 654, Gosling & Taylor 1982, Purinton 1993, Merlan 1960, etc. One may comment *en passant* that allowing the katastematic type, Epicurus embraces a more “essentialist” oriented approach to pleasure, whereas the Cyrenaics seek for the “nominalist” solution. This insight will have its effects in history of philosophy later on, particularly on Nietzsche.

⁴ Cf. Cic. *Fin.* II.31–2

⁵ Hereafter, all the translations of DL are by Hicks, if not emphasized differently.

If one acknowledges a whole-life pleasure as the ultimate goal of life in its totality, εὐδαιμονία has to be a constant, and this ought to be the actual intentional meaning of κατάστημα.⁶ The problem, however, arises if one attempts a more precise understanding of the content of the κατάστημα. On the one hand, κατάστημα may be interpreted from a broader framework of Epicurus' ethics, i.e., as the complete absence of bodily pains and soul turmoils or fears (ἀπονία καὶ ἀταραξία). The definition, however, is merely a negative one. On the other hand, κατάστημα may be understood positively: pleasure as a well-balanced state of the body and the psyche, as Erler & Schofield suggest [Erler & Schofield 1999: 656]. This alternative is absent from the primary sources on Epicurus but it may perhaps be concluded, body wise, from the ancient comments of Cicero and Plutarch [Cic.*Fin.* I.37, Plu. *Non Posse* 1089 D]. At *Non Posse* 1089 D, Plutarch mentions "painlessness" (ἀπονία) and the "stable and settled condition of the flesh" (τὸ εὐσταθὲς σαρκὸς κατάστημα) as the "absurdity" (ἀτοπία) wherein the Epicureans "take refuge" (ὑποφεύγειν). Some insinuation may, too, be found in *Epist. Men.* [DL X.128.3], where Epicurus talks about securing health of the body and tranquility of the mind as τέλος of a happy/blessed life (τὴν τοῦ σώματος ὑγίειαν καὶ τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀταραξίαν, ἐπεὶ τοῦτο τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν ἐστι τέλος).⁷

One may notice that, firstly, Laertius defines "the stable and settled condition of the flesh", the bodily κατάστημα, as the *very* absence of pain. Secondly, Epicurus does not define ἡ τοῦ σώματος ὑγίεια independently of the absence of pain. Thirdly, he explicitly says that "all our actions are for the sake of feeling neither the bodily pain, nor fear (τούτου γὰρ χάριν πάντα πράττομεν, ὅπως μήτε ἀλγῶμεν μήτε ταρβῶμεν)," [DL X.128.4].⁸ If one is to follow consistently the sources, they suggest that the "stable condition of the flesh" is just another name for "the absence of bodily pain." By analogy, the same is suggested for the tranquility of the soul, i.e., it is the absence of fear.

On the other hand, if health of the body is something different than the absence of the pain, whatever it might be, it is but a means for attaining the absence of pain. (*Mutatis mutandis*, the same applies to soul.) The latter is hardly the case, but if so, the health of the body and the tranquility of mind cannot constitute εὐδαιμονία since they are not of intrinsic value. In fact, they would more or less have the same instrumental value as the one attributed to justice and wisdom in Epicurean ethics.⁹

⁶ One cannot but notice another significant effect of Epicurean and Cyrenaic positions regarding the notion of time. The concept of εὐδαιμονία as a whole-life τέλος presupposes a continual time hypothesis, whereas the Cyrenaic standpoint, with its particularly instantiated pleasures, implies the momentary account of time, i.e., the instant temporal notion. One might object, though, that if pleasure and pain are defined through motion and given the fact that motion is possible in time only, continuum is altogether not driven out of the Cyrenaic theoretical position. Rather, it becomes an important characterization of the instant itself.

⁷ Note that he does not use "εὐδαιμόνως" but "μακαρίως," the latter being his preferable adverb meaning "happily" or "blissful."

⁸ Translated by author, following Hicks.

⁹ Notwithstanding the contents of DL 140, tenet 5, where Epicurus says that "It is impossible to live a pleasant life without living wisely and well and justly, and it is impossible to live wisely and well and justly

Furthermore, how are we to understand a positive description of the health of the body since Epicurus himself offers none? Perhaps by referring to the Hippocratic understanding of health as a balanced state of body in general, bodily fluids in particular? If this is so, it is open to question whether a well-balanced body is a (static) condition at all, for it, in fact, amounts to *attaining and maintaining* the harmony of the body. If one extends this understanding to the soul, one may perhaps hypothesize a similar understanding of the soul's balance, sc., as a positive description of the tranquility of mind. But if the healthy body and a balanced mind are identified as pleasures, pleasure would essentially be a constant process of such-and-such conditioning, or balancing, *not* its result. Such interpretation would suggest that Epicurus' *καταστήματα* are not devoid of activity – on the contrary. Body wise, we may suppose that the activity in question, or at least one of them, is gymnastics. Soul wise, the activity referred to ought to be the mental activity.

Activity, then, is not only included into the *καταστήματα*, it is and should be their *conditio sine qua non*. This may be substantiated by direct evidence at DL X.78.1–3, where Epicurus emphasizes that bliss (*τὸ μακάριον*) depends on the right and exact knowledge (*ἀκρίβεια*) of the nature and causality of the first-most and ruling things (*ἡ τῶν κυριωτάτων αἰτία*), i.e. of the celestial and atmospheric phenomena.¹⁰ (The knowledge, however, does not pertain to astronomy [DL X.79.1–6] but to natural science, *φυσιολογία*, whereby Epicurus primarily has in mind his atomistic physics, constituting the very theoretical core of the whole of his system of *δόγματα*.¹¹) Along with this, comes philosophy. It is not clear whether she is a continuation of physics, its companion, complement and, perhaps, completion, or a more general theory, but the following is certain: philosophy is “for the health of the soul” (*πρὸς τὸ κατὰ ψυχὴν ὑγιαῖνον*) and for the sake of attaining a happy and fulfilled life (*εὐδαιμονία*) [DL X.122.1–8].¹²

without living pleasantly,” I believe that this fragment should be read in a broader context of fragments DL 144, tenet 17, 150, tenets 31, 33, 34 and 36. The latter imply that the cardinal virtues – justice, primarily – are to be regarded as means to an end rather than the end itself. A recent critique of Epicurus' “utilitarian” ethics has been made by I. Deretić [2019].

¹⁰ καὶ μὴν καὶ τὸ τὴν ὑπὲρ τῶν κυριωτάτων αἰτίαν ἐξακριβῶσαι φυσιολογίας ἔργον εἶναι δεῖ νομίζειν, καὶ τὸ μακάριον ἐνταῦθα πεπτωκέναι καὶ ἐν τῷ τίνες φύσεις αἰ θεωρούμεναι κατὰ τὰ μετέωρα ταυτί, καὶ ὅσα συντείνει πρὸς τὴν εἰς τοῦτο ἀκρίβειαν.

¹¹ Cf. DL X.83.7–11 (The conclusion of *Epist.Her.*) In nuce, true knowledge of the so-called divine heavenly bodies is that they are but masses of fire, free from any volition, action or causality, let alone care for humankind. Cf. DL X.81. Furthermore: that celestial phenomena may have multiple causes, i.e. one should not restrain their investigation by a strictly-one-cause/explanation hypothesis [DL X.80] (contra Platonem?). Finally, having secured the core knowledge of atomistic structure of nature, one can derive the knowledge of death as destruction of the body and soul atomic compounds, indicating the end of all sensation and feeling. Thereby, “death, the most awful of evils, is nothing to us, seeing that, when we are, death is not come, and when death is come, we are not.” Cf. DL X.125.4–5; DL X.124.5–8, as well as 126.1–3, 7.

¹² μήτε νέος τις ὦν μελλέτω φιλοσοφεῖν, μήτε γέρον ὑπάρχων κοπιάτω φιλοσοφῶν· οὔτε γὰρ ἄωρος οὐδέεις ἐστὶν οὔτε πάρωρος πρὸς τὸ κατὰ ψυχὴν ὑγιαῖνον. ὁ δὲ λέγων ἢ μήπω τοῦ φιλοσοφεῖν ὑπάρχειν ἢ

Nonetheless, what Epicurus says is not that philosophy, natural science, and all the activities of knowledge acquirement constitute bliss, but that the bliss depends on them. They are means to an end, not the end itself. In fact, this is precisely what Plutarch testifies, directly quoting Epicurus: “Thus Epicurus himself [...] says: ‘If we were not troubled with misgivings about celestial phenomena and again about death and pain, we should never have stood in need of natural philosophy’ [...],” [Plu. *Non Posse* 1092 B 1–4, cf. DL 142, tenet 11]. Thus the mental activity of the knowledge-acquiring type or critical activity per se is not to be perceived as εὐδαιμονία, or pleasure, but as that which is for the sake of pleasure. This being so, identifying Epicurus’ psychic κατάσταση, soul’s tranquility, with a concept such as the one of βίος θεωρητικός contradicts the sources. Epicurus’ position cannot be brought close to Plato’s and Aristotle’s since both of the latter presuppose the theoretical life (or philosophy) as an intrinsic, autonomous good.¹³ Moreover, the sources are explicit that the καταστήματα consist of the tranquility of mind and freedom from bodily pain. Every activity whatsoever is linked to sensation [DL X. 136].

As I have already tackled upon, we do not have any evidence that Epicurus’ concept of health, either physical or the health of the psyche (the tranquility of mind) can be conceived in analogy with the Hippocratic concept of health. At the only locus where ἀταραξία is positively described, it is described as “having a continual remembrance of those things¹⁴ which are complete and first-most and ruling (ἡ δὲ ἀταραξία τὸ τούτων πάντων ἀπολελύσθαι καὶ συνεχῆ μνήμην ἔχειν τῶν ὅλων καὶ κυριωτάτων),” [DL X.82.1–2, cf. Plu. 1091 A et pass.]. What is more, such definition makes the very concept of the κατάσταση inconsistent. Having remembrance/memory is a mental activity, one which has to be renewed from time to time, at that. Thus even if it is not conceived as βίος θεωρητικός, it still involves mental activity. Epicurus himself, however links every activity (ἐνέργεια) with motion; and motion he links with sensation. This confusion at the very core of the pleasure concept may, perhaps, lay at the background of Plutarch’s conviction, present throughout his treatise contra Epicurus, that the latter prioritizes the pleasures of the body. Rather than prioritizing them, I would say, Epicurus does not make a consistent distinction between the kinetic and the kataschematic pleasures. The problem would at least partly be solved by involving activity in the καταστήματα, but this would redefine the very concept of the “static” pleasure

παρεληλυθέναι τὴν ὥραν ὁμοίως ἔστι τῷ λέγοντι πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν ἢ μήπω παρεῖναι τὴν ὥραν ἢ μηκέτι εἶναι τὴν ὥραν. ὥστε φιλοσοφητέον καὶ νέω καὶ γέροντι [...]. μελετᾶν οὖν χρὴ τὰ ποιούντα τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν, εἴ περ παρούσης μὲν αὐτῆς, πάντα ἔχομεν, ἀπούσης δέ, πάντα πράττομεν εἰς τὸ ταύτην ἔχειν.

¹³ Nonetheless, there are authors who hold that Epicurus’ position may well derive some way or other from Aristotelian and Plato’s ideas. Cf. Erler & Schofield 1999: 656, n. 41 & 43, et pass.

¹⁴ “τὰ ὅλα καὶ κυριώτατα” can refer to “things”, as I have translated, and this is the usual employment of the *npl.* when it comes without an accompanying noun. However, the continuation of the fragment does indeed involve the talk about truths, so Hicks translates “the highest and most important truths.” Both are justified. The point is that, even if Epicurus talks here about the truths, these refer to the first-most and ruling things, i.e. the celestial phenomena.

ultimately resulting in its redundancy.

If Epicurus had included activity in ἀταραξία and consequently completely renounced the concept of static pleasure, his position would have been far more convincing. Nonetheless, except some far stretched insinuation, I have not found this point in him. Activity, for Epicurus, remains formally connected with sensation, i.e., with the body. And yet again, where he actually does provide a description of pleasure – if not yet a definition – Epicurus does so in a circular manner: pleasure is the absence of pain and pain is because of the absence of pleasure [DL X.128.7–8;¹⁵ cf. Cic.*Fin.* II.6–19]. Finally, at DL X. 131., Epicurus provides a definition of pleasure: “By pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul.”¹⁶ Thus, the only remaining consistent definition of ἀταραξία is a negative one: the tranquility of mind is the absence of soul turmoils. Mutatis mutandis, the same is the case with the bodily κατάσταση – it is equal to the freedom from bodily pain.

This is attested by the sources. At DL X.139, tenet 3, Epicurus says that “The magnitude of pleasure reaches its limit in the removal of all pain. When pleasure is present, so long as it is uninterrupted, there is no pain either of body or of mind or of both together.”¹⁷ What Epicurus seems to be saying is that the state of pleasure at least coincides with the state of the absence of pain. On the other hand, at DL 144, tenet 18, he says that “Pleasure in the flesh admits no increase when once the pain of want has been removed; after that it only admits of variation (ἀλλὰ μόνον ποικίλλεται).” It is difficult to understand what Epicurus meant when he said that after the removal of the pain a variation of pleasure might be present. Indeed, a different degree of presence, or rather absence, of pain may result in a different intensity of pleasure, but what does it mean to say that there is a variety in pleasure after the total elimination of pain? Perhaps, the absence can be differently sensitized depending on the nature of the pain eliminated? For example, the sensation of the absence of pain after a workout is completely different than the one of the absence of pain (hopefully) felt several moments after your finger was pressed by the door? Whatever the case may be, the feeling of pleasure is for Epicurus undoubtedly linked to the feeling of the absence of pain and it makes little difference if the relation between them is that of coincidence or identity. Ontologically, it might be a significant difference. Epistemologically, however, it is not. In other words, we do not have a feeling of pleasure per se and independently of the feeling of the absence of pain, or soul

¹⁵ “When we are pained because of the absence of pleasure, then, and then only, do we feel the need of pleasure. (τότε γάρ ἡδονῆς χρεῖαν ἔχομεν, ὅταν ἐκ τοῦ μὴ παρῆναι τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀλγῶμεν· ὅταν δὲ μὴ ἀλγῶμεν, οὐκέτι τῆς ἡδονῆς δεόμεθα.)”

¹⁶ “Ὅταν οὖν λέγωμεν ἡδονὴν τέλος ὑπάρχειν, οὐ τὰς τῶν ἀσώτων ἡδονὰς καὶ τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας λέγομεν, ὡς τινες ἀγνοοῦντες καὶ οὐχ ὁμολογοῦντες ἢ κακῶς ἐκδεχόμενοι νομίζουσιν, ἀλλὰ τὸ μῆτε ἀλγεῖν κατὰ σῶμα μῆτε ταράττεσθαι κατὰ ψυχὴν.”

¹⁷ Ὅρος τοῦ μεγέθους τῶν ἡδονῶν ἢ παντὸς τοῦ ἀλγοῦντος ὑπεξαίρεσις. ὅπου δ’ ἂν τὸ ἡδόμενον ἐνῆ, καθ’ ὃν ἂν χρόνον ἦ, οὐκ ἔστι τὸ ἀλγοῦν ἢ τὸ λυπούμενον ἢ τὸ συναμφοτέρον. Cf. DL 145, tenet 19.

turmoils. What is more, it makes little difference whether the pains or turmoils are positive (e.g., during workout or scientific exploration) or negative (e.g. as a result of a broken finger or sadness).

II. Abundance or poverty?

Before proceeding further, I would like to direct attention to Hegel's insights on Epicurus. Hegel observes that inconsistency is to be found at the very heart of Epicureanism. Albeit pleasure is intended as "the self-consciousness of the particular *as* particular", the principle of affirming particularity and individuality par excellence, in the end it is abrogated in the universal, i.e., the thought, or reason, which in a manner is its opposition [LHP II: 301, 309, et pass.]. Whether one chooses to include the thought, understood as activity into Epicurus' description of ἀταραξία, or one does not, Hegel's remark remains true. This is so due to fact that the reflection partaking of Epicurean blissful and fulfilled life is not a dialectical one, but that of reason. Moreover, at DL X.120.12 it is said that an Epicurean wise man will be a dogmatist but he will not dwell in the aporiae (δογματιεῖν τε καὶ οὐκ ἀπορήσειν – DL X.120.12). This, in fact, means that an Epicurean does not philosophize. Such attitude is a direct consequence of positioning sensation as the core of knowledge. Platonically speaking, when sensation is the ultimate source of knowledge, the knowledge in question does not transcend δόξα. Is that not the very rationale why Epicurus' concept of philosophy is not that of "the science of the free man" but a "ready-made" system of δόγματα?

In characterizing Epicurus' system, precisely this is Hegel's point: "[...] if existence for sensation is to be regarded as the truth, the necessity for the Notion is altogether abrogated, and in the absence of speculative interest things cease to form united whole, all things being in point of fact lowered to the point of view of the ordinary human understanding" [LHP II: 277]. Therefore, although some universality is attained in Epicurus' ideal of a happy and fulfilled life, the universality obtained is not a dialectical one. At the same time, however, it does not integrate the particular but does away with it [cf. LHP II: 310–11]. On the one hand, the ordinary human understanding becomes the truth of sensation – on the other, and at the same time it negates the sensation. In as much as it negates sensation, it destroys particularity while not reaching the Notion. (Of course, if it did reach it, the particularity would not be destroyed, but preserved). In the end, the Epicurean position may be conflated with the Stoic one, in spite of their mutual differences.¹⁸ Both positions, in Hegel's view, remain but one-sided "dogmatisms inconsistent with themselves by the necessity of the Notion, that is, they contain

¹⁸ "Thus it happens that, while materially, or as to content, Epicurus makes individuality a principle, on the other hand he requires the universality of thinking, and his philosophy is thus in accordance with that of the Stoics" [LHP II: 302]; "[...] the principle of Epicurus [...] by means of the inversion of making the guiding principle to be found in thought proceeding from Reason, [...] passes into Stoicism, as even Seneca himself has admitted" [LHP II: 309]. Hegel often points this out in his lecture on Epicurus.

the contrary principle within them” [LHP II: 310].

In addition, it seems that Marcuse was right to say that Epicureanism transforms pleasure into an unsustainable abstractum [Marcuse 2009: 125]. The information provided about the Epicurean notion of pleasure does not reach far beyond the notion of absence of pain and fear. Not much more can be said about the Good either. Aside from pleasure being the ultimate good, the Good itself is described by “a thing that arises out of your very escape from evil and from your memory and reflection and gratitude that this has happened to you” [Plu. *Non Posse* 1091 B2–5].¹⁹ Plutarch laughs at this with great irony: “Oh the great pleasure and blessed state this company enjoy, as they revel in suffering no hardship or anxiety or pain!” [Plu. *Non Posse* 1091 B 10–12]. Far from being a state of abundance, εὐδαιμονία conceived as life of pleasure seems more like a state of poverty and self-contradiction.

This was already pointed out by the ancient writers. Plato [*Phlb.* 44 a7–8, 43 c8] emphasized that pleasure and freedom from pain “each have a nature of their own” (ἡ φύσις ἑκατέρου), commenting that the painless life was also “devoid of charm.” Plutarch [*Non Posse* 1091 E–F] concluded that the Epicurean pleasure is “that of slaves or prisoners released from confinement, overjoyed to be anointed and bathed after the cruel usage and the flogging, but knowing neither the taste nor the vision of a free man’s delight [...] advancing no farther, this delight of theirs, than to escape the anxiety [...]” whereas the Cyrenaic Anniceris compared Epicurus’ εὐδαιμονία with the state of corpse. Life devoid of all suffering (πάθη) is a life devoid of all sensation and feeling, thus being akin to death [SSR IV G4].

Nietzsche, it seems, was having the same thought when objecting to classical hedonism that its εὐδαιμονία resembles the unconscious state of “falling asleep” [GM III.17]. From his standpoint, the will to power is more fundamental than pleasure. Thus, unlike the rich and lively, who want victory, those for whom pleasure is but absence of pain are the ascetic, the slaves, the exhausted in need of rest, relaxation, peace and calm – not the victors. Their happiness belongs to the nihilistic religions and philosophies [WP 703; cf. GM I.10, III.17; A 57; KSA XI.16 (Nachgelassene Fragmente 1884–1885); BGE 200].²⁰ Similarly to Plutarch, Nietzsche characterizes Epicurus as the one whose happiness is the happiness of the suffering and the sick, in whose hands morality becomes a matter of cleverness in calculating what will bring the best balance of happiness over unhappiness, and thus as one of the leading examples – Pyrrho being

¹⁹ Plutarch even quotes Epicurus: “For what produces a jubilation unsurpassed is the contrast of the great evil escaped (τὸ παρ’ αὐτὸ πεφυγμένον μέγα κακόν· καὶ αὐτὴ φύσις ἀγαθοῦ).” Cf. Plu. *Non Posse* 1091 B6–7.

²⁰ One might suppose that the Cyrenaic version of hedonism is closer to Nietzsche’s heart than the Epicurean one, which, in return is closer to Schopenhauer, due to its intellectualism accentuating the cognitive aspects of pleasure. For that reason I cannot agree with Bett, who intends reconciliation between Nietzsche and Epicurus [Bett 2005: 60 ff.]. More importantly, nonetheless, the German philosopher completely redefines the whole concept of pleasure to include suffering, thus breaking off from all the classical forms of hedonism that identify happiness and pleasure with the absence of pain.

the other one – of decadence in Greek thought [KSA XIII.276–78 (Nachlassene Fragmente 1887–1889); GS 370; KSA X.307 (Nachgelassene Fragmente 1882–1884)].

This being said, the Epicurean concept of calculation has been singled out and criticized throughout the history of thought. The Epicurean reason, ὁ λογισμός, the supposed foundation of wisdom, amounts to a petty calculus of a life lived by an imperative of cowardly evading the pain, as much as it is possible. Certainly, a life in fear or pain hardly merits to be called life at all, let alone a pleasant life, but this does not make fear and pain the most important human emotions. In fact, a life in constant calculation regarding fear and pain is a life constantly *lived* in them.²¹ This is implicitly present already in Plutarch,²² highlighted much later by Nietzsche and problematized in Marcuse's critique of hedonism. The latter rightly observes that the Epicurean sage's reason is only "occupied with the calculation of risks and with the psychic technique of extracting the best from everything [...] It appears only as subjective cunning and private expertise [...]," [Marcuse 2009: 128]. Thus, in Marcuse's view, Epicurean hedonism is a negative form of hedonism, deprived of its own meaning and finding its satisfaction and truth not in attaining the pleasure itself but in the pain avoided, i.e., in the "evasion of the conflict with the established order: the socially permitted if not desired form of pleasure" [Marcuse 2009: 127].

Epicurus' wise man does not partake in governing of the state and is overall politically inactive (οὐδὲ πολιτεύσεσθαι [DL X.119.4]).²³ He is living a silent and secluded life of a scientific researcher, but not of dialectician, blissed in his little garden with few of his best friends, calculating the "right balance" between pleasure and pain, eating modestly and enjoying his private ἀταραξία.²⁴ In Epicureanism, εὐδαιμονία is a

²¹ What is more, I believe that this point is at the very core of Epicurus' "security" concept (ἀσφαλής; ἡ ἀσφάλεια), beyond its financial and other manifestations, including the intellectual ones [DL X.141, tenets 6, 7 et pass]. (In regards the latter, some people would say that human inclination towards knowledge is not a consequence of their need to surpass their fear of death but a consequence of natural human curiosity.) Neither is the point significantly altered by the fact that an Epicurean would sometimes chose pain over pleasure [DL. X.129.4–8]. As long as the life of pleasure coincides with the life of absence of pain, the cowardly calculus reigns over it.

²² "To do no wrong does nothing to bring assurance; it is not suffering deservedly, but suffering at all that is dreaded [...]" Cf. Plu. *Non Posse* 1090 D 10–12.

²³ Cf. DL II.8. 99.7–8, of Theodorus, a pupil of Anniceris and of Dionysius the dialectician: "It was reasonable, as he thought, for the good man not to risk his life in the defense of his country, for he would never throw wisdom away to benefit the unwise (οὐ γὰρ ἀποβαλεῖν τὴν φρόνησιν ἔνεκα τῆς τῶν ἀφρόνων ὠφελείας)."

²⁴ Notwithstanding the significant contextual differences, it is hard not to recall Hegel's criticism of the so-called *schöne Seele*, which de facto encloses the concept of the unhappy consciousness. Characterized by Hegel as the existence of consciousness in its poorest form, the so-called beautiful soul "lives in dread of besmirching the splendour of its inner being by action and an existence; and in order to preserve the purity of its heart, it flees from contact with the actual world, and persists in its self-willed impotence to renounce its self which is reduced to the extreme of ultimate abstraction [...]" [PS: § 658]. Epicurus' little garden, although factual, may, too, be metaphorically regarded as a confinement to within. In addition, although

private matter, and it is not a mere coincidence that it comes along with political passivity. Notwithstanding all the modern and contemporary theories founded around the concept of political, social, economic etc. individualism, not caring for the issues of one's polis is usually a symptom of crisis. When *ιδιότης* becomes the standard, little does it matter if (s)he is an artist, scientific researcher or the so-called "professional philosopher". In such times, rather than bliss, *ἀταραξία* is a correlative, or a clear manifestation of the desire for asylum, away from reality that does not bring satisfaction. Equally important, nonetheless, is the fact that the concept of this dissatisfying reality potential change is altogether absent. Reality is something to be politically and socially evaded,²⁵ not something to be actively changed.

Epicurean hedonism, along with its concept of *εὐδαιμονία*, fundamentally resides on the prior acceptance and further maintaining of the dissatisfying status quo. One need not be an advocate of Nietzschean concept of will to power in order to notice that at the heart of Epicureanism lie disappointment and resentment [Marcuse 2009: 120].

Albeit it may not seem so, the same is true in case of the Cyrenaic hedonism. The Cyrenaic concept of the most pleasant life as life filled with the biggest possible number of unique action pleasures, giving preference to bodily pleasures over those of the soul, and overall eliminating the morality from the pleasure realm, in fact, intends their satisfaction in reality as it is. This point was noticed already by Marcuse: "This [sc. the Cyrenaic] hedonism fails to differentiate not only between individual pleasures but also between the individuals who enjoy them. They are to gratify themselves just as they are, and the world is to become an object of possible enjoyment just as it is [...]", [cf. DL II.8.66.3–4].²⁶ The author rightly emphasizes that hedonism de facto represents an acceptance of the very structure of the antagonistic society, wherein the world as it is becomes an object of enjoyment only under the condition that it is accepted in its appearance. To accept the world in its appearance means to accept that its best, highest potentialities are not present to the subject of enjoyment since they are not realized in the decisive social relations. Thus, with world's best potentialities already lost, atrophied, and repressed, "any relationship to men and things going beyond their immediacy, any deeper understanding, would immediately come upon their essence, upon that which they could be and are not, and would then suffer [...]" Hedonism wants

Hegel himself had not linked the criticism of Epicurean standpoint with the criticism of beautiful soul, his critique may perhaps be employed to unmask the practical truth of Epicureanism. I am thankful to Michalis Tegos on this remark.

²⁵ Epicurus, indeed, does not shame away from occasional public appearances and speeches [DL X.120.2, X.120.11–12], but these are not related to lawsuits and certainly not to politics.

²⁶ Of Aristippus Senior, the "(great)grandfather" of the Ancient hedonism: "He derived pleasure from what was present, and did not toil to procure the enjoyment of something not present." Cf., too, the rest of this paragraph: "He was capable of adapting himself to place, time and person, and of playing his part appropriately under whatever circumstances. Hence he found more favor than anybody else with Dionysius, because he could always turn the situation to good account." For all the mentioned reasons, Diogenes called him *ὁ βασιλικὸς κύων* (the king's dog).

to preserve the development and gratification of the individual as a goal within an anarchic and impoverished reality” [Marcuse 2009: 122, 123, 125].

As a consequence, being a de facto acceptance of the status quo, hedonism represents a (more or less) unintentional escape from reality. An Epicurean seeks for refuge in his/her private *ἀταραξία*, whereas a Cyrenaic does so in the momentary satisfactions of his/her body, but the result is one and the same. Both the escape into reflection detached from reality and the escape from reflection about reality into a momentary satisfaction have one common factor: an escape from reality overall conceived as an undeniable cause and witness of one’s own dissatisfaction. The Epicurean formula prescribes seeking pleasure in little (too little, one might add); the Cyrenaic formula seems to provide too much, but the abundance in question is pseudo-abundance. For, if everything is pleasure, then nothing truthfully is pleasure. A constant thrive for it and by all means, the frequenting and the maximization, the never-ending chase for pleasure reveals one simple, neat truth: a feeling of an internal shortage, precisely of that, which one so desperately seeks – the pleasure.

III. A Contemporary Ideology

Given that hedonism simultaneously represents an effort of finding satisfaction by means of prior acceptance of the dissatisfying reality and, paradoxically enough, an avoidance of this very reality, it is doomed to failure as a formula of *εὐδαιμονία*. Its contradiction is inherent. The hedonistic standpoint may, perhaps, be described as an ambivalent one, but the ambivalence in question is founded upon a contradiction that cannot be resolved internally, that is, without reaching into reality in order to factually change the dissatisfying status quo. Resolving the contradiction of hedonism requires concrete action with an upfront confrontation, i.e. with consciousness and self-consciousness. In other words, it requires knowledge of truth. Nevertheless, the truth in question is not the one about divine creatures and their eternal bliss, or about celestial phenomena. It is the truth about one’s repulsive and unjust reality – psychological, economical, political, social, etc.

Marcuse is well aware of this. He observes that hedonism “embodies a correct judgment about society” and that “the truth of hedonism would be its abolition by and in a new principle of social organization.” [Marcuse 2009: 128, 129]. On the other hand, however, he does not reflect enough on the nature of the hedonistic correct judgment about society. Its correctness, its truth, is but unreflected, unconscious. Hedonism is essentially a reaction, not revolution. It is a symptom. (That this is true, we may see by the aftermaths of 1968.) Hereupon I should emphasize that it is not to say that pleasure has not got a role in human happiness and fulfilled life. It is to say that when happiness *amounts to* the life of private pleasure seeking, one may acknowledge it as a certain sign of a crisis – both of subjectivity and of the polis. Thus, hedonism cannot be – as Marcuse thought it to be – the materialistic protest for better life conditions [Marcuse 2009: 121 et pass.]. Rather, it is an unreflected outcry of subjectivity in its seek for asylum.

What is more – and this is a point which I particularly wish to emphasize – hedonism has become one of the main ideological weapons of anesthetizing and controlling the masses. Seeking always more pleasure is a systematically induced and desirable condition. Marcuse thought that hedonism was “useless as ideology” and that it in no way admitted of being employed to justify an order associated with the suppression of freedom and the sacrifice of the individual [Marcuse 2009: 124]. Yet, today we are witnesses to this exactly. Manipulating pleasure has always been a part of the power and domination policy. At the times whereat Marcuse wrote, this policy has already transformed into a system of disciplining. However, with subtle and gradient transition into the society of control, pleasure has become an a priori produced and manipulated tool of control, whereas hedonism has become a dominant *Weltanschauung*. The phenomenon can be observed at all levels – from personal, through social, via mass-media, even up to philosophy.

During the present time, pleasure has become a dominant, alas, perhaps the only feature of the so-called subjectivation. The subjectivation in question belongs to the body, it is a subjectivation without ὑποκείμενον – *a contradictio in adjecto*.²⁷ The Cyrenaic and the Epicurean hedonism were still some kinds of subjective outcries. Contemporary hedonism, in contrast, is a symptom of the complete defeat of particularity. There is no one left to cry and there is no asylum left. Whereas bodies and pleasures are wounds, subjects are lost in what is yet another substitute of a substitute. The outcry for genuine pleasure has become an outcry for substitution. In Nietzsche’s words, it is a state of total defeat of the will to power. Only impotence is left – it is the truth of contemporary hedonism.

This leaves us with an apparent answer to the question of the prospects of εὐδαιμονία today: Under the present circumstances, there are little; that is, if εὐδαιμονία is identified as the life of pleasure seeking. The truth about pleasure cannot be found from within the hedonistic world-view; neither can the overcoming of the respective condition be realized without reaching out into reality. This, finally, brings us back to Plato, i.e. to the relevance of true politics of παιδεία and of the need to include reflection, i.e. the knowledge of truth, in the εὐδαιμονία concept. If εὐδαιμονία is to include pleasure, there is an absolute need for distinction between the true pleasures and the false ones. The first ones are founded upon true judgment about the nature of pleasures, the capability of object to provide pleasure, the subjective dispositions, etc. The latter ones are characterized by Plato as the mixed type of pleasures, involving some amount of suffering, whereas the true pleasures are, for him, the pure, unmixed ones – having to do primarily with measure and proportion [Pl.*Phlb.* 46 d ff., particularly 51 b ff.]. Thus, when it comes to the seek for pleasure, Plato is often criticized as proposing his readers the dry and bloodless, dis-

²⁷ In his *La Vraie Vie*, Badiou observes the phenomenon, which he calls “the perverted body.” He describes it as a condition wherein the body of a subject bears the stigmata of the end of dialectic. The body becomes a projection and a symptom of this fact. “Piercing the body, drugging it, deadening it with earsplitting music, tattooing it” – it all creates a “construction of a body without ideas,” “diverted from its normal purpose, which is to be the repository for a subject.” Cf. Badiou 2017: 37, 38.

appointing satisfaction [Marcuse 2009: 130]. However, Plato is not seeking satisfaction, but truth. He is searching for paradigm. Therefore, if one regards the unmixed pleasures as the paradigm, an ideal pointing to the importance of integrating the reason, truth and measure in particular ἡδοναί, this difficulty may be avoided.

On the other hand, the significance of Plato's distinction between true and false pleasures, from the *Philebus*, cannot be overemphasized. As already mentioned, the true pleasures are founded upon true judgments about their nature, the capability of object to provide pleasure, etc., whereas we may call the false pleasures the "substitutive" ones. The second relevant point consists in Plato's introducing a clear distinction between reality and truth of pleasure. All pleasures, insofar they are felt, are real, but not all are true [Pl.*Phlb.* 40 d7–9]. (It becomes evident that the Cyrenaic statement that "all pleasures are equal and equally worthy" parasitizes precisely on the lack of insight into this distinction.)

Finally, Plato points out that without dialectic, the notion of pleasure cannot be integrated into the concept of εὐδαιμονία [Phlb. 58 a ff; cf. 63 b1–65 d, particularly 65 d]. What is pleasure and in which manner does it partake of, or contribute to the realization of a happy and fulfilled life, is a matter of dialectics, i.e. philosophy to investigate. In order to determine what is a happy and fulfilled life, one firstly needs true and clear knowledge of what it is not. It is neither the life of secluded scientific security, nor the negating life of over-sensitizing. In contrast, it posits an uncomfortable and often horrific question: Is the type of life I am living truly worth living, and it demands the courage to give an uncompromising answer. Last, but not least, it yields acknowledgment that there is not and cannot ever be a happy and fulfilled life without the constant questioning of what this life truly amounts to and without the respective action in the projected direction.

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