

IDYLLIC HEROISM: NIETZSCHE'S VIEW OF EPICURUS

DRAFT VERSION

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Philology and hermeneutics

Friedrich Nietzsche was a talented classical philologist, and some of his philological works are still considered essential, to mention here only his research on Laertius Diogenes. One cannot forget his educational background, because his specific, philological attitude is important for understanding his philosophy.¹

What is philology? Nietzsche himself answers this question in *Antichrist* (A, 52).² Philology is 'the art of reading well — of reading facts without falsifying them with interpretation,' it works as 'ephexis in interpretation' (*ephexis* in Greek means 'checking, stopping').³ Most readers fail in interpretation; they even lack decency and jump to conclusions. Only the few can see the proper meaning, because they are interested in knowledge, not in morality.

Let us consider the fact that in the quoted passage Nietzsche distinguishes reading the facts from falsifying them with interpretation. Nowadays, it is almost ritual to quote Nietzsche's saying that there are no facts, only interpretations. It seems that these two views on interpretation and facts are contradictory. However, if we read them carefully, we will see that this apparent contradiction is only apparent. The famous saying about nonexistence of facts can be paraphrased as following: 'there is no fact without interpretation; there are no raw facts.' Nietzsche is close to Quine: we cannot distinguish observational terms from theoretical ones. If we reject observational/theoretical distinction (facts/interpretation distinction) as useless, then we still need not accept all theories, even absurd ones. It is hardly Vaihinger's version of fictionalism; the most similar theory to Nietzsche's is Goodman's irrealism.

¹Nehamas claims that the essence of Nietzsche's philosophy is philology of the world. Some detailed comments on Nietzsche's philological works can be found in Barnes' and Most's articles (see Reference).

²Instead of making page references to *Sämtliche Werke* I use following abbreviations for the sake of simplicity: **GT** - Die Geburt der Tragödie (Birth of the Tragedy), **UB** - Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen (Untimely Meditations), **MA** - Menschliches, Allzumenschliches (Human, All-To-Human), **W** - Der Wanderer (The Wanderer), **M** - Die Morgenröte (The Dawn), **FW** - Die fröhliche Wissenschaft (The Joyous Science), **Z** - Also sprach Zarathustra (Thus Spoke Zarathustra), **JGB** - Jenseits von Gut und Böse (Beyond Good and Evil), **GM** - Zur Genealogie der Moral (Toward a Genealogy of Morals), **A** - Der Antichrist (The Antichrist). Numbers in brackets refer to paragraph numbers. Nachgelassene Fragmente (inedita) are abbreviated as two numbers, i.e. 10/599. The first number refers to the volume of the Colli edition, the second to the page number. All translations are mine, except where indicated.

³*The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 635.

Nietzsche's hermeneutics does not want to assert all too known clichés. Maybe this is the reason why some of his reinterpretations, for example of Plato, Socrates, Christianity, were shocking. 'The great philologist' has to be constantly critical: he is not satisfied with what philosophers said about themselves. However, he does not want to falsify their views, create simulacra of no value (cf. FW, 375).

We can see at least two main assumptions that Nietzsche uses in his art of interpretation. The first one has been actually formulated: what is traditional has to be treated sceptically. 'One should not be deceived: great spirits are sceptical. Zarathustra is a sceptic. Strength, *freedom* which is born of the strength and overstrength of the spirit, proves itself by scepticism.'⁴ The second assumption is more controversial: Great philosophers know that masses will not understand them, and that is why they are esoteric and wear masks. They want to deceive vulgar herd that cannot understand them. Nietzsche seems to treat this assumption as hypothetical.

Interpretation as conversation with philosophers

Nietzsche is —contrary to a popular opinion —a philosopher of strife and dialogue. He does not want to speak with everyone, as not everyone is worth speaking with, and not everyone can take part in a conversation. He wants to participate in a debate between philosophers (UB, II). Being untimely, he sought for interlocutors not in his own times. He found them in the past, when he has, as Ulysses, been to Hades, so as to listen to a few of the dead when they told him whether he had been right or wrong (W, I, 408). 'The great philologist' mentions Epicurus as one of the philosophers he esteemed highest.

Every philosopher Nietzsche speaks with becomes an exemplar; Epicurus became an exemplar, too. He was the model of a misinterpreted philosopher. It was not easy to get acquainted with him, so it took some time (FW, 370), and the view of the philosopher of the Garden, presented by Nietzsche, is completely original (FW, 45; A, 30). Therefore, it is worthwhile to reconstruct this view, especially because this is usually, unfortunately, omitted in rendering Nietzsche's view of history of philosophy.⁵

The formula that Nietzsche employs to describe Epicurus is: 'the inventor of heroic-idyllic mode of philosophizing' (W, II, 295; cf. 13/276 f.). Idyllic heroism or even 'refined heroism' (*verfeinerter Heroismus*) (8/506) is an oxymoron, which describes the mask of Epicurus and Epicurus himself. Epicurean philosophy is usually conceived as idyllic but it so happens only because Epicurus was an esoteric philosopher. He was a hero and only a few can see that.

Let us begin with a riddle describing Epicurean philosophy. In *The Wanderer* (W, II, 227) Nietzsche writes:

'Eternal Epicurus.' — Epicurus has always lived and still lives today, unknown to those who called and call themselves Epicureans, and of no renown among philosophers. He has his own name forgotten: that was the heaviest burden that he has ever thrown away.

⁴*The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 638.

⁵As far as I know, the only comprehensive analysis of Nietzsche's view of Epicurus is found in Lampert, p. 432 ff.

Epicurus' real face has been unknown and that is why Nietzsche is eager to discover it.

An idyllic mask

What can we see on the surface? A hedonist, a man of idyllic charm, that is, a decadent. Let us trace the way Nietzsche sees Epicurus' mask, so as to look at the one that hides underneath. Nietzsche's attitude to the plebeian version of Epicureanism is univocally negative. The radical aristocrat abhors it. Epicurean ideals are praised by men 'of the times of decay' (JGB, 200). In his notes from the period Spring 1884 — July 1885 (11/72) Nietzsche considers the future — 20th century. It turns out that, according to him, 20th century has two sides. One of them is the decadence of weak souls, which can be characterised as 'sui generis European Chinese with a delicate Buddhist-Christian faith, in the practical sphere — Epicurean-clever one'. The majority of the people will be weak and reduced. For Nietzsche, of course, this process is not outrageous nor strange. It is even desirable. In the earlier note (1880-1881) his stance is clear (9/337). He writes that workers should be taught to 'enjoy life, have petty needs, be satisfied, take smallest burdens (no women nor children)' — in other words, to be Epicurean. Nietzsche wants to weaken the weak, so as to their resentment create no danger for the noble.

However, general acceptance of Epicurean lifestyle can preserve the masses from decay. Epicureanism is not destructive for its followers and may take pattern by Christianity. That is why Nietzsche seems to ponder the question whether popularity of Epicurus is desirable or not. In the note from the period Spring 1884 - July 1885 (11/456) he claims that democratic movements will surely gain acceptance in the future but this process may become slower or faster.

Generally, Nietzsche thinks that Epicureanism as a worker's lifestyle is safer for the aristocrats of the spirit than any other way of life, especially the one that lets the proletariat retain some hope. We can conclude that Epicureanism for the masses is only the lesser of two evils. As popular it can become dominant and oppressive. That is why Nietzsche wants to slow down the process of spreading this cultural pattern but at the same time he prefers workers' having petty needs rather than establishing trade unions.

Such attitude to the plebeian Epicureanism will become more intelligible, if we realize that its hedonist anthropology can be identified with utilitarian one. It is clear that Bentham's utilitarianism is based on some simplified version of Epicureanism. No wonder that Nietzsche uses identical arguments against utilitarianism and popular Epicureanism.

The plebeian Epicureanism is not only similar to utilitarianism, but also to Christianity (W, I, 96) in its delicate flavour, where moral perfectionism is not demanded. Such Christianity is contented with what men can achieve — 'small happiness.' In a note dated Autumn 1885 Nietzsche writes that François de Sales belongs to the Epicurean type of Christianity. Nietzsche not only recognizes the Epicurean type of Christianity, but also thinks that Christianity itself can be described as a kind of Epicureanism — 'I gradually learned to understand Epicurus, the opposite of a Dionysian Greek; also the Christian, who is, in fact, only a kind of Epicurean' (FW,

V, 370).⁶

As we made Nietzsche's attitude to misinterpreted Epicureanism clear, it is time to consider why Epicurus has not been understood. Nietzsche thinks that this misunderstanding has begun during the lifetime of the Greek philosopher (cf. a letter to Köselitz dated 3 VIII 1883).

Epicurus is characterised as very modest. This is how Nietzsche describes him (W, II, 192):
The philosopher of abundance. — A garden, figs, a small piece of cheese, and three or four good friends, — that was the abundance for Epicurus.

Nothing in the above aphorism proves that the radical aristocrat held the philosopher of the Garden in contempt. Nietzsche did not hide his negative opinions. The picturesque description of Epicurean modesty in *The Joyous Science* (FW, 45; cf. also ia. 8/423; 8/527; 8/566; 9/72) cannot be associated with negative views. Why did Nietzsche distinguish plebeian Epicureanism from the aristocratic, since the modesty of pleasure and needs is characteristic not only for Epicurus, but also for the epicure? The genealogy of modesty is essential here to understand why Epicurus' teaching could be simultaneously a philosopher's mask and the only face of the vulgar (*schlecht*). The modesty of pleasure is a symptom (or, to use a term belonging to Nietzschean 'semeiotics,' — *semeion*) of the hidden, of the forgotten: The phenomenon refers to its own genesis.

The modesty is a condition for the peace of mind, painlessness, or Epicurean ἀταραξία. This is negative happiness (9/151). To achieve this *ataraxia* it is necessary to possess φρόνησις (practical understanding): ability to assess pleasures and pains. Epicureanism is thus a teaching that can be classified under the label 'ethical intellectualism'. Moreover, sensual pleasures are only means to emancipation from needs and desires, which perturb the soul and make ἀταραξία impossible to achieve. Passive happiness becomes the goal in life — and the concept of the goal in life was criticised by Nietzsche (10/307). Excess, surplus and abundance are to be avoided as they include activity. The avoidance of excess is the essence of the Epicurean modesty. It has its root in contempt for greatness, plethora, and great forms of life.

The modesty of pleasure results from the desire of avoiding pains, or from the yearning for painlessness. What is the fount of the craving for the smoothed sea of existence (FW, 45), for tranquillity (8/405)? Nietzsche answers this question when takes a course towards a genealogy of morals (GM, V, 17) — it is namely the value of 'clear, cold, Greek-cold but suffering Epicurus: the hypnotic sense of nothingness, the peace of the deepest dream, shortly *painlessness*. — This can pass for the highest good among sufferers [...], they *must* assess it positively, perceive it as positiveness itself [...].'⁶ This ideal provides cure for the sufferers tired of strife (JGB, 200). Epicureanism plays here a therapeutic role, offers peace, justification and sanctification of pain (JGB, 61). It is based on a hope that pain can be avoided. Like Christianity, Epicureanism is a doctrine of redemption. It is unequivocally stated in *The Antichrist* (A, 30). In such a context, Epicurus must pass for a decadent. Nietzsche treats Epicurus' Garden as identical with the Christian Paradise: there are no grounds for setting a goal, e.g. to have children (13/161). *Ataraxia* is a paralysis of will: everything has been achieved. In the project for *The Immoralist* Nietzsche describes 'a good man as a parasite.' A good man is 'an Epicurean in his small happiness, rejecting the great form of happiness as *immoral*.'

⁶*The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 670.

Let us conclude: Idyllic Epicurus is, according to Nietzsche, the precursor of utilitarianism and modern democratic movements, the spiritual affinity of Christianity and the preacher of salvation — freedom from suffering. Such tenets result from hypersensitivity, touchiness, irritability, and contempt for greatness, leading to the modesty of pleasure.

Under the mask

The Epicurean modesty can indicate hypersensitivity and fear of pain. Is this the only possible genealogy? Certainly not. The modesty is the mask of a noble sufferer; moreover, it is the mask one should not be deprived of (JGB, 270). Nietzsche assesses the modesty on the ground of its origin. The modesty can result from contempt for greatness, but someone may merely use the mask of a modest man. It can be seen clearly if discover Epicurus in the most famous Nietzsche's work. Epicurus is described in *Zarathustra* as a clever jester (*Narr*). Nietzsche, making one of the projects for the fourth part of *Zarathustra*, planned to portray Epicurus as a jester (10/599).⁷ In the chapter 'At noon' (*Mittags*) Zarathustra says (Z, IV, 10): 'O happiness, how little is sufficient for happiness!' Thus I spoke once and seemed clever to myself. But it was a blasphemy: *that* I have learned now. Clever jesters (*Narrn*) speak better. Precisely the least, the softest, lightest, a lizard's rustling, a breath, a breeze, a moment's glance — it is *little* that makes the *best* happiness.⁸

We have an interesting piece of evidence here: the jesters know that the happiness is not a matter of modesty. They know that best happiness depends on the softest, smallest things. Maybe we reach Epicurus without his mask here. However, what we say is purely hypothetical because of the mask Nietzsche himself wears in *Zarathustra*.

Fortunately, Nietzsche wrote about Epicurus not only in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he mentions the most venomous philosophical joke against Plato. I shall quote the whole passage as it is necessary for our interpretation:

How spiteful philosophers can be! I know of nothing more venomous than the joke Epicurus permitted himself against Plato and the Platonists; he called them *Dionysiokolakes*. That means literally — and this is the foreground meaning — 'flatterers of Dionysius,' in other words, tyrant's baggage and lickspittles; but in addition to this he also wants to say, 'there are all actors, there is nothing genuine about them' (for *Dionysokolax* was a popular name for an actor). And the latter is really the malice that Epicurus aimed at Plato: he was peeved by the grandiose manner, the mise en scene at which Plato and his disciples were so expert — at which Epicurus was not expert — he, that old schoolmaster from Samos who sat, hidden away, in his little garden at Athens and wrote three hundred books — who knows? perhaps from rage and ambition against Plato? — It took a hundred years until Greece found out who this garden god,

7Let me quote this passage in full:

21[3] [...] 12. *die lange Jugend und die Verwandlungen. Darauf die großen Reden Zarathustra's, gleich Gebeten.*

einige absonderliche Heilige kommen auch also Junger; auch ein Narr (Epicur?)

13. *Die Heiligung des Lachens. Zukunft des Tanzes. Sieg über den Geist der Schwere. [...]*

8*The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 389. As a translation of *Narrn* I prefer 'jesters' to Kaufmann's (and Common's) 'fools'.

Epicurus, had been. — Did they found out?

Nietzsche considers the joke very spiteful. But as all spiteful jokes this one can derive its origin from some petty desire to harm. Therefore, there is nothing new in this passage: Epicurus is just a petty and malicious schoolmaster. However, it is not that simple. We know the joke from Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the eminent Philosophers*. This book was criticized thoroughly by young Nietzsche.⁹ Diogenes wrote, `Plato's school he [scil. Epicurus — MM] called "the toadies of Dionysius," their master himself the "golden;" [...]' (['Επίκουρος ἐκάλει] τούς τε περί Πλάτωνα Διονυσοκόλακας και Πλάτωνα χρυσοῦν).¹⁰ As we can see, Epicurus *did not* call Plato the toady of Dionysius, he reserved for him the name of the `golden', which is probably an allusion to *Republic* 415 A (a myth of a golden caste). But Nietzsche does not mention it. Maybe he did not remember Laertius or quoted him from memory? Maybe.

However, the most important thing is that Diogenes Laertius does not seem to regard information on Epicurus' jokes as absolutely true (X, 9): `But these people are stark mad.' (Μεμήνησσι δ' οὗτοι).¹¹ `These people' refers here to Epicurus' opponents, and especially Timocrates, who hated Epicureans. It is hard to say whether Diogenes wanted to describe the eighth paragraph of the tenth chapter of his book as containing false opinions (including the alleged Epicurean jokes against Plato, Aristotle, Protagoras and Democritus), or to characterise Timocrates as a madman. If the first option is true, then Nietzsche comments on a mask that Timocrates put on Epicurus, while commenting Platonists' masquerade. Actually, it seems that the philologist prefers the latter hypothesis to the first one. He constantly repeats that Epicurus hated playacting. He mentioned several times that Epicurus and Thymon, a friend of Pyrron's, judged Plato to be Cagliostro (13/293, 13/312, 13/276 f.). Epicureans' aversion to buffoonery distinguishes them

⁹Nietzsche wrote **De Laertii Diogenis fontibus** (On the founts for Laertios Diogenes), **Analecta Laertiana** (Laertian Analyses), and finally **Beiträge zur Quellenkunde und Kritik des Laertius Diogenes** (Attempt on Knowledge of the Sources and Critique of Laertius Diogenes' [book]). They are contained in *Nietzsche's Werke, Band XVII* (see *Reference*). In the first article he claimed i.a. that Laertius had copied many passages uncritically from Diocles' of Magnesia works confusing the context of Diocles' work and the times of Epicurus. `Quem [scil. Dioclem] Laertius tanta fide, quanta stupiditate descripsit.' (Whom [Dioclem] Laertius copies with as much faith as stupidity.; p. 80). Moreover, we do not even know whether Diocles knew the real Epicurus' doctrine: `Qui [scil. Diocles] an merus fuerit Epicureus, haud scio: id est certissimum eum Epicuri et discipulorum vitam victumque laudavisse.' (Whether this one [ie. Diocles] was a pure Epicurean, I do not know: with no doubt he praised Epicurus' life and the lifestyle of his disciples, p. 79).

In the second article Nietzsche considered the connexion between works written by Theodorus Atheist, a cynic, and Epicurus' books. This connexion is not easy to establish but one cannot deny it — it is likely that Epicurus had known Theodorus' work on Greek gods; Epicurean critique of religion is similar to the cynical one. It is, however, possible that in the second book of Diogenes Laertius (II, 97) Epicurus' name is mentioned only by accident, mistaken with a name of Euhemeros, a famous greek atheist (p. 170).

In the third article Nietzsche concludes that Laertios was not an Epicurean; the evidence is an epigram relating the death of Epicurus (Diog. Laert. X, 15) — the epigram sounds rather ironical than as a requiem (p. 177).

¹⁰Επίκουρος, p. 40. Translation by Robert Drew Hicks.

¹¹Ibidem, p. 42. Hicks' translation.

also from stoics (FW, 306):

The Epicurean selects the situations, the persons, and even the events which suit his extremely sensitive, intellectual constitution; he renounces the rest — that is to say, by far the greater part of experience — because it would be too strong and too heavy fare for him. The Stoic, on the contrary, accustoms himself to swallow stones and vermin, glass--splinters and scorpions, without feeling any disgust [...], he also likes well to have an invited public at the exhibition of his insensibility, the very thing the Epicurean willingly dispenses with — he has of course his "garden"!

Plato openly admitted that he was an actor who concealed the authentic meaning of his philosophy from the common herd. This is what he wrote in his all too known *Letter 7th*. He is just a playactor, a jester — because he admits that he is. But if Nietzsche called Epicurus a jester, then the relation between Plato and the philosopher of Samos gets complicated. The latter was more naive than Thimon, more severe than Plato, but he did not manage to retain the sense of distance (10/285-6).

There is therefore some evidence that Nietzsche thought that all Greek philosophers were jesters. But there are jesters and jesters. The German philosopher does not write this explicitly, but jester virtues, that Plato practices, are *social* virtues of the *public sphere*; and Epicureanism is a philosophy of the *private sphere*. That makes a big difference between plebeian and noble Epicureanism. The first one is connected with utilitarianism and democracy, because it allows participating in political struggles.

The vulgar Epicureanism gets sometimes associated with atheism, if not theoretical, then practical one. However, an idiosyncratic theology is the core of the properly understood Epicurean doctrine. This theology is for Nietzsche a noble opposite of a Christian Comedy. The concept of Epicurean gods is mentioned by Nietzsche in his early works (UB, III, 4). The Epicurean gods are aristocratic and there are many. It is by no means monotonous-theism that Nietzsche could not tolerate.

Epicurus' theology makes question whether gods exist, or not, superfluous. Thus it yields practical benefits (W, II, 7). Even if gods exist, they do not care about us, Epicurus claims. Nietzsche himself does not profess any faith here. He is too critical to believe (cf. eg. A, 54).

The Epicurean gods make fear of god an absurdity. They are noble and beautiful from the Grecian-classical point of view. In *The Dawn* (M, III, 150), pondering the contingency of matrimony, Nietzsche maintains that those gods — tired of human beings and human love affairs — preferred quiet happiness. They do not arouse fear: they do not care about people, so death of sympathy for a man is not imminent for them. In *The Joyous Science* (FW, IV, 277) Nietzsche asks:

Is there a more dangerous temptation to rid ourselves of the belief in the Gods of Epicurus, those careless, unknown Gods, and believe in some anxious and mean Divinity, who knows person ally every little hair on our heads, and feels no disgust in rendering the most wretched services?

There is an elective affinity between the author of *Zarathustra* and the Epicurean gods. Thus the projected 'higher man' resembles those gods in his attitude towards human beings (10/244). This affinity with gods is natural for every Epicurean; Epicurus wrote to Menoeceus: `[you - MM]

will live as a god among people. For people lose all appearance of mortality by living in the midst of immortal blessings.¹² Those gods are not callous to humanity; what Nietzsche writes in *Beyond Good and Evil* (JGB, 62) proves that he views them as impartial, though sarcastic. The European Christian comedy and the man which it made to be some lofty freak, would make those gods laugh. Even such gods could not be totally indifferent to Christianity.¹³ Such distance and sarcasm retained by the Epicurean gods in their attitude towards people is also the earmark of the noble man.

The denial of provident gods is the essential component of the Epicurean theology. Nietzsche treated Epicurus and Lucretius as allies in his struggle with Christianity, with 'the burden put on humanity' (UB, I, 4). What Epicurus fought with (A, 58) was a religion based on fear, or a preexistent form of Christianity. Nietzsche many times repeats that Epicurus was fighting with plebeian religion of fear (11/101, 12/430, 13/108, 13/324). The fact that Christianity had at first won does not prove its truth (MA, 68). Christianity had won over Epicureanism because of the moral decay of Romans (W, I, 244; M, I, 72). Nowadays, says Nietzsche, science refers to Epicureanism and refutes Christianity step by step. Epicurus as a sceptic, critically disposed to traditional truths and prejudices, is akin to 'the great philologist' (FW, 375).

In *The Joyous Science* aphorism #375 is devoted to the question: 'Why do we seem Epicurean.' L. Lampert in his interpretation says that it is clear that we only seem Epicureans, but are not. However, even if we could make 'we' here a little bit more precise, the question whether we are Epicureans or not, would still remain unanswered. This passage does not give a ground for deciding on that we are not. It is true, though, that Epicurus, even as a hero, was dogmatic and naive (13/276f.). Nietzsche criticizes hedonism as imprecise interpretation of human actions. Pleasure and pain are only interpretation that our body makes. The will to power, the phenomenon that does not distinguish pain from pleasure, but only activity from passivity, is for Nietzsche more primordial in explaining human action. That is why Nietzsche calls Epicureanism 'the art of living, and not the art of discovering the truth' (13/197).

Hedonist psychology in the heroic version of Epicureanism has its modern followers. According to Nietzsche, Stendhal is the last great French psychologist, a strange Epicurean and a mysterious man (JGB, 254).

Let us conclude our interpretation of the heroic Epicurus. He is a philosopher opposed to the Plato's playacting and the author of a very noble theology allied with science. Epicurus is more scientific and critical than his contemporaries, inspires Stendhal, but he fails in discovering the essential facts about psychology.

Epicurus as psychologist

It is worthwhile pointing at what Nietzsche did not discern in the Epicurean philosophy. Nietzsche did not even *mention* atomism in his numerous (over 100) remarks on the Grecian

¹²Ibidem, p. 164. Hicks' translation.

¹³Nietzsche at least once considered the Epicurean gods too distant, opposing them to Homer's gods: 11/646, 11/697. Cf. also FW, IV, 302.

philosopher. He discussed atomism when speaking of Democritus (which was also important to him). However, Nietzsche always treated Epicurus as psychologist rather than atomist.

Psychology is what differs Epicurus from Nietzsche. The latter assesses Epicurean psychology higher than Christian, but considers that theory naive and too focused on attaining peace of mind. The theory of motivation is the key issue here. According to Epicurus, reason of action is (or should be; it is not clear) to avoid suffering; Nietzsche explains actions with will to power, there are rather drives for actions than reasons. If actions result from health, strength, they effectively enlarge power. Epicurus, on the other hand, is still a moralist, because he is a hedonist (12/430). What is valuable in Epicurus, is his opposition to Christianity and the fact that he understood how little makes for best happiness.

Nietzsche not only treated Epicurus as a psychologist, but also as an esoteric thinker. Did the German philologist had any evidence of it? We do not know; what we know is that there is a source which Nietzsche could have employed. Clement of Alexandria, a Christian philosopher wrote in his *Stromata, or Miscellanies* (V 58,1) 'It was not only the Pythagoreans and Plato then, that concealed many things; but the Epicureans too say that they have things that may not be uttered, and do not allow all to peruse those writings.' Clement died in 215 AD, so his work is earlier than Leartius' (that lived in 3rd and 4th century AD). We may then suppose that Nietzsche knew some similar source.

The above interpretation is only hypothetical. The idyllic-heroic distinction we used as a key to see Epicurus and his mask, is only a heuristic construct. We want to stress, however, the fact, that Nietzschean interpretations are also mainly hypothetical. Their purpose is to arise criticism. This criticism is aimed against traditional reception of interpreted works and has some limitations. The most important one is that when we try to communicate our interpretation, we have to build some model; and this model is liable to criticism, as it is only a model. This was not, however, noticed by Nietzsche; he left his remarks on many philosophers scattered around his books. This does not mean that his remarks are not consistent; there is always some way to avoid contradiction.

Nietzschean interpretation of Epicurus does not differ strongly from what we know about that Greek philosopher. The author of *Zarathustra* only poses some new questions, and, what is maybe more important, treats Epicurus as his interlocutor. That means his philosophy is inspired by Epicureanism; the criticism against it belongs to the core of his thought.

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