Abstract: This article presents a brief survey of the Epicurean doctrine, its general purpose, and its different aspects, and argues that, for all the historical differences involved, it still remains useful, relevant, and even necessary, in many respects for us today: the wholly immanent nature of Epicurean ideals (“the fourfold remedy”) and the materialism for which it provides a convincing model, even with its paradoxical “theology,” can serve as a means of resistance to the current “return of the religious” and the growth of irrationalism, as a support for a contemporary atheism which attempts to safeguard purely human values, and for the emphatic recognition that human beings form part of and belong to nature and its processes. The demand for human freedom within this perspective, symbolised by the doctrine of the “clinamen,” the immanent character of the Epicurean criteria for choosing and evaluating acts and decisions with reference to pleasure and pain, the self-limitation of the pursuit of pleasure by eliminating all desires that are neither natural nor necessary, all this can help to counter the anxieties, reactions and rejections produced today by the damage inflicted by supposed “development,” especially its catastrophic ecological consequences, and by the growth of artificially generated needs that serve nothing but the demand for commercial profit.

The Historical Doctrine

If we are to relate “Epicureanism” specifically to the realities and demands of our own present, it might be helpful to present a brief review of the principal Epicurean doctrines, to the extent that they can now be reconstructed from the sources available to us.1

And it would be best to begin by recalling Epicurus’ own conception of philosophy:

Epicurus used to say that philosophy is an activity which by arguments and discussions brings about the happy life.2

But this essentially practical perspective cannot be described in purely pragmatist terms. For it is certainly not enough for Epicurus that the claims propounded by his philosophy should be useful. They must also be true if we are actually to rely upon them, as we can clearly see from what his Epicurean followers, probably echoing Epicurus himself, called the “fourfold remedy” (tetrapharmakos):

God presents no fears, death no worries. And while the good is readily attainable, evil is readily endurable.3

The priority accorded to the practical perspective is entirely characteristic of Epicureanism, and it is this feature which is the principal focus of our interest here. But as we can clearly see from the formulation we have just cited (“by arguments and discussions”), it also forms part of a more comprehensive theoretical edifice which resembles what, in the case of the rival schools, is or could certainly be called a philosophical “system.” It is true, nonetheless, that this term seems alien to the general spirit of Epicureanism. For while we certainly find that Epicureanism, like these other schools, also exhibits a triadic structure (that of “Canonic,” “Physics,” and “Ethics”), we cannot strictly speak here of three “parts” of philosophy. These dimensions rather resemble three aspects or moments of the doctrine precisely because Epicureanism characteristically subordinates the first two of them entirely to the third.

“Canonic” is the dimension of Epicurean doctrine which has come down to us in the most fragmentary form of all, but it can nonetheless be reconstructed from the account provided by Diogenes Laertius in his Lives of Eminent Philosophers (X, 31-34), where he furnishes an excerpt, of uncertain length, from The Canon (“The Rule”) of Epicurus himself (Diogenes Laertius, 1-32); from the few remarks in the Epicurean texts which have survived at least in part;4 and from the accounts and discussions to be found in other writers.5

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3 Philodemus, To the Friends of the School [Pros tous hetairous]; the Herculaneum Papyri 1005 (Long-Sedley 25).
4 In particular the Letter to Herodotus, especially 37-38, Maxims XXIII-XXIV, and the papyrus fragments from Book XVIII of On Nature [Peri physeos].
The Epicurean approach contrasts radically both with the Platonic exaltation of the *logos* and with the characteristic approach of earlier “logics,” such as the “Analytic” of Aristotle or the “Dialectic” of the Stoics. Epicurus refuses to seek the conditions and the foundation of truth and scientific knowledge in a theory of the *logos* – whether it be a reason or discourse which affirms its own pre-eminence and/or a homogeneity of structure between itself and reality, as in Aristotle’s theory of form (**eidos**) as a *logos* which constitutes the essence of things; or whether it be the Stoic theory of a universal *logos* which constitutes the world and encompasses the human *logos* which is an aspect or emanation of itself. For Epicureanism, on the contrary, the *logos* is always something secondary and derivative. Between reality and the words which in the best case – that of the “natural” words – express reality directly, there is no need to introduce any further signifying or discursive structures that would require theoretical justification in their own right.

The “Canonic” therefore furnishes a body of rules and precepts which should be followed if we are effectively to use the natural means of judgement (*kriteria*) which nature has placed at our disposal so that we can know nature itself: namely our sensations which “are all true” (as long as we know how to treat them appropriately), and those “preconceptions” or “anticipations” (*prolepseis*), which are connected to language but nonetheless correspond to, or derive from, those sensations. This is the only approach that can yield a secure method for comparing, directly or indirectly, our judgements, and especially those necessary and essential inferences concerning things that cannot be perceived, either with the immediate evidence of the senses, or with the evidence, also ultimately sensible in kind or origin, which belongs to the “anticipations.” This involves processes and procedures of confirmation and falsification which are intermediary in character and are operations of the mind, a mind which according to Epicurean doctrine is itself ultimately material in nature. It is these operations and procedures which make “physics,” as the scientific study of nature, possible.

This physics or “physiology” (discourse on nature) repeats the atomistic doctrines of Democritus as far as general principles are concerned: nothing new is created, nothing is ever simply lost, the universe is infinite and eternal, and is composed of atoms and the void; and it is the movements of atoms in the void, in their various combinations and separations, which give rise to and in turn destroy things, worlds, phenomena, and all the qualities and processes which are encountered in experience.

Ancient atomism was subject to constant modifications in order, on the one hand, to respond in all likelihood to Plato’s, and certainly to Aristotle’s, criticisms of Democritus, and, on the other, to avoid the sceptical and fatalistic consequences that Epicurus himself drew from this doctrine.
Epicurus had already introduced a modification to the physical doctrines of Democritus with regard to the weight of the atoms which, in contrast with the disorderly movements into any direction which his predecessor had attributed to them, was supposed to explain the natural downward process of falling in an infinite universe. And in support of this contention the Epicureans, if not Epicurus himself⁶, specifically invoked the “swerve” – the *clinamen* of Lucretius and Cicero or the *parenklisis* of Diogenes of Oenoanda and the Greek tradition which indirectly derives from him – or that tiny deviation through which, at some indeterminate moment, and some indeterminate place, a single atom or a number of atoms abandon their vertical trajectory to make interactions and combinations possible, and thus help also us to understand (if not precisely explain) how some place might be found for human freedom in the universe as a whole.

In opposition to the scepticism with regard to the sensuously given which seemed to be implied by the reductionist mechanism of Democritus, Epicurus appropriates the Aristotelian theory of permanent and transitory qualities (*symbebekota* and *symptomata*), with the former characterising atoms themselves, and both kinds characterising groups of atoms, and thus develops his own correlative theory of images or simulacra (*eidola*): atomistically conceived emanations of objects which reproduce their various properties and account for our sensations and the “truth” which attaches to them.

The “ethics” of Epicurus, which as we have seen was the most important part of his doctrine, was expounded in several of the works that have not survived. As far as we are concerned, it can best be reconstructed from the *Letter to Menoeceus* and the *Key Doctrines* (or *Principal Maxims*), from Book One of Cicero’s *De finibus*, and from several key passages of the poem *De rerum natura* by Lucretius.

We have already suggested that the primacy of the practical in Epicureanism should not be understood in a narrowly pragmatic sense, but rather in the sense that “physics” is required *from the perspective of morality*, which is equally true of Canonic itself, as it is the means and condition of physics. And this is precisely how the “fourfold remedy” is presented in the *Key Doctrines*:

> Were we not upset by the worries that celestial phenomena and death might matter to us, and also by failure to appreciate the limits of pains and desires, we would have no need for natural philosophy.⁷

And further:

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⁶ No trace of this doctrine has ever been discovered in any of his surviving writings.

There is no way to dispel the fear about matters of supreme importance, for someone who does not know what the nature of the universe is but retains some of the fears based on mythology. Hence without natural philosophy there is no way of securing the purity of our pleasures.8

Thus the purpose of “physics,” as we can see amongst other things from the *Letter to Herodotus* and the *Letter to Pythocles* (Diogenes Laertius, 81–83 and 85–86), is to secure peace of the soul by eliminating the anxiety which is typically produced by our mythological notions of the Gods, of death, and so forth. This liberation can only be achieved through a conception of nature which permits sure and specific judgements with regard to the entirely natural and explicable character of the phenomena of the universe as a whole (*Letter to Herodotus*, in Diogenes Laertius, 35–37), and these judgements are facilitated in turn by the precepts of the Canonic.

In general terms, the purpose of life, and thus of ethics and of philosophy itself, is what the Epicureans, along with others, described as *ataraxia*, an absence of pain or trouble, a happiness achieved at the level of those criteria of choice and rejection represented by the affects (pathē). This represents the third series of “criteria” (following on from those of sensation and anticipation) which are presented by Diogenes Laertius with reference to pleasure and pain, and the desires concerned with them (as discussed in the *Letter to Menoeceus*, in Diogenes Laertius, 127–132).

On the negative side – with respect to the fear of the Gods and the fear of death which are targeted by the first two precepts of the “fourfold remedy” – Epicurean physics serves specifically to dispel such futile anxieties.

With regard to the gods themselves, Epicurus proposes a theology that is principally based on the notion (*prolepsis*) that they enjoy perfect happiness since they are entirely free from cares or needs of any kind. This is the argument presented in the first Maxim.9 Whatever the theses which might serve to support this certainty, including the claim that the Gods dwelt in the so-called *intermundia*, theses which may well have provoked significant disagreements in the “Garden” of Epicurus,10 this general image of the untroubled Gods certainly furnishes us with the perfect model of *ataraxia*, and equally ensures that the Gods could have no reason whatsoever to concern themselves with us.

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8 Ibid.
9 “A blessed and eternal being has no trouble himself and brings no trouble upon any other being; hence he is exempt from movements of anger and partiality, for every such movement implies weakness.”
As far as death is concerned, the physics of Epicurus allows him, as the second Maxim indicates, that it is absolutely nothing to us, or more precisely:

Death is nothing to us, for good and evil imply sentience, and death is the privation of all sentience […] Whatsoever causes no annoyance when it is present, causes only a groundless pain in the expectation. Death, therefore, 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. It is nothing, then, either to the living or the dead, for with the living it is not and the dead exist no longer.\(^\text{11}\)

For as long as “we are,” that is to say, as long as we can experience the sentience or sensation produced through the atomic aggregations of “soul” or “mind,” which are the integrating aspect of the human body, then death is not, and when the latter arrives, that is to say, when the aggregate composed of these three substances is dissolved, then we are no longer in being anyway.

The dissipation of these fears, as saw from Maxim XII cited above, is itself the condition for satisfying those positive aspirations which give genuine content to ataraxia. This amounts to a theory regarding the real value of pleasures, and thus of our desires, which readily allows us to attain this happiness, and to endure actual evil (i.e. pain caused by the absence of satisfaction with regard to some genuine need). This argument is expressly presented in the Letter to Menoeceus (Diogenes Laertius, 127-132), as well as in several of the Maxims (III-V, VIII-X, XVIII-XXI, XXVI, and XXIX-XXX).

To concentrate upon the essential point here, we should emphasise that true pleasure, that which should indeed lead us to happiness, lies in the elimination of all suffering, and does so to the extent that it is directed towards the satisfaction of only those desires which are natural and necessary:

We must also reflect that of desires some are natural, others are groundless; and that of the natural some are necessary as well as natural, and some natural only. And of the necessary desires some are necessary if we are to be happy, some if the body is to be rid of uneasiness, some if we are even to live. He who has a clear and certain understanding of these things will direct every preference and aversion toward securing health of body and tranquillity of mind, seeing that this is the sum and end of a blessed life. For the end of all our actions is to be free from pain and fear, and, when once we have attained all this, the tempest of the soul is laid; seeing that the living creature has no need go in search of something that is lacking, nor to look for anything else by which the good of the soul and of the body will be fulfilled. When we are pained because of the absence of pleasure, then, and then only, do we feel the need of pleasure. Wherefore we call pleasure the alpha and omega of a blessed life. Pleasure is our first and kindred good. It is

\(^\text{11}\) Letter to Menoeceus, in Diogenes Laertius, 124-125.
the starting point of every choice and of every aversion, and to it we come back, inasmuch as we make feeling the rule by which to judge of every good thing. And since pleasure is our first and native good, for that reason we do not choose every pleasure whatsoever, but often pass over many pleasures when a greater annoyance ensues from them. And often we consider pains superior to pleasures when submission to the pains for a long time brings us as a consequence a greater pleasure. While therefore all pleasure because it is naturally akin to us is good, not all pleasure is choiceworthy, just as all pain is an evil, and yet not all pain is to be shunned. It is, however, by measuring one against another, and by looking at the conveniences and inconveniences, that all these matters must be judged.\footnote{Letter to Menoeceus, in Diogenes Laertius 127-130.}

What Epicurus calls \textit{phronesis} (“wisdom” or “prudence”), employing the same word as Plato and Aristotle before him but giving it a different sense, is concerned with identifying these different sorts of desires, and distinguishing between the pleasures “at rest” which can lead to happiness, and those impure pleasures “in movement” which only threaten to prevent its attainment.

Finally, it is necessary to add that if indeed Epicurus enjoins the truly wise man to live apart from “the multitude” (Maxim XIV), it is equally true, despite the apparently individualistic character of his moral philosophy, that he regards \textit{philia} (friendship) as a disposition, even a virtue, that is constitutive of happiness (here too he echoes the \textit{Ethics} of Aristotle in his own way):

Of all the means which are procured by wisdom to ensure happiness throughout the whole of life, by far the most important is the acquisition of friends.\footnote{Maxim XXVII.}

And equally, after the scepticism expressed in Maxim VII with regard to what we could call “political life” in general, he nonetheless dedicates all his concluding remarks (Maxims XXXI-XL) to sketching a theory of “justice in accordance with nature” that is based on an idea of contract that was subsequently elaborated by Hermarchus of Mytilene in a treatise cited at length by Porphyry.

\textbf{Epicureanism Today}

It must be conceded that the Epicurean doctrine, viewed as a whole, still represents an exemplary case of philosophical “materialism.” And this general feature of Epicureanism must clearly be recognised if we are to appreciate the different ways in which it remains relevant to contemporary problems, even
if we must also acknowledge the significant differences between its particular positions and the specific circumstances which have generated these problems.

First, and irrespective of our personal attitudes, we might consider the place of atheism in the modern world: whatever the uncertainties, obscurities and paradoxes which attend the Epicurean theory of the gods, the essential thing, as Maxim I immediately indicates, is its refusal to accord them any significant role in the universe at all. In keeping with the absolute tranquillity the gods must enjoy if they are to fulfil our image of their nature, they can take no creative or organising part in the universe, nor play any providential, rewarding or avenging role there. The theory is therefore directed both against the myths and superstitions of traditional religions and against the kind of philosophical theologies developed by Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. Since the Epicurean affirmation of the existence of the blessed and immortal gods actually serves to deny them the very functions which are generally ascribed to them, this theory has always been suspected as a substitute or equivalent to atheism (the theme of the “idle gods”) – and in this connection it is extremely instructive to consider the extensive refutation of the Epicurean doctrine which Cotta attempts to provide in Book I of Cicero’s *De natura deorum* – or indeed as an atheism disguised from opportunistic and prudential motives.14

In fact this image of the disguised atheist has never ceased to cling to Epicurus throughout succeeding history: his emphatic denunciation of what Lucretius called *religio* – a term it is foolish and misleading to try and ameliorate by translating it simply as “superstition” – functioned in the “classical age” of early modernity as a principal source and unparalleled model for its own denunciation of religious illusion mentality and its own affirmation of atheism, from the provocative claims which Cyrano de Bergerac placed in the mouth of his dramatic characters down to Holbach’s *Système de la nature*, not forgetting the brilliant manuscripts of clandestine philosophical literature such as the anonymous text of 1659 entitled *Theophrastus redivivus*15, or the *Mémoire* of Father Meslier sixty years later.16 And as a typical representative of atheism, Epicurus, along with Spinoza, has long served as a privileged example of the “honest atheist” so dear to Pierre Bayle.

The “physical” theoretical framework, itself already ethical, of this atheism – or this a-theism as one might prefer to describe it thus – and its eminently practical orientation furnishes the foundation for the autonomous and

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14 See chapters 22, 31, and 34 of Book I.


self-possessed moral outlook which it is the principal aim of Epicureanism to establish. These aspects still retain their value, indeed acquire even greater value, in our own time, marked as it is by what is often described as a “return of the religious mentality” and everything which this implies: the reinvigorated demands of the major religions to shape the character of the world, of individuals, of customs and ethical conduct in general, the encouragement of fanaticism and the crusading spirit, the proliferation of sects and irrational attachments and persuasions of every kind. Confronted with these dangers of the modern world, the Epicurean outlook at least appeals to human reason, encourages our efforts to avoid the pitfalls involved in any attempted interference between the political and the religious domains, and, more radically, bestows fresh value on affirming an atheism which is capable of respecting different opinions precisely because it has nothing to gain by attempting to impose its own opinion on others.

If we here briefly consider, with regard to our own concerns, the three constitutive parts of the Epicurean doctrine, it would not be an exaggeration to say that, strictly speaking, the claims of the first two parts at least are alien to many of the experiences and achievements of the modern age.

The truth value which Epicureanism accorded to sensations purely and simply in their own right, and to the “anticipations” which derive from or are analogous to the latter, and the attempt to ground all our judgements on one or the other, are clearly incompatible with the modern sciences and their methods of investigation and justification and with the logical and mathematical procedures on which they are based, and with the epistemology which has learned the lessons of these developments and is attempting to take them even further.

Nonetheless, even from this point of view, the considerations which, as far as we can tell, were raised in the “Garden” of the Epicurean School concerning the kind of “truth” to be accorded to different sensations, and concerning the nature and origin of the “anticipations,” clearly reveal that these reflections were actually far from naive, and that it is not so strange if they still speak to modern problems and questions. And again, from another perspective, the Epicureans revealed a profound distrust of the logos so eagerly invoked by rival philosophies, of empty words, of vain entities and abstractions such as the Platonic “Ideas,” or of the hollow rules, principles, formulae, and universals invoked by the Aristotelian tradition. In this respect the Epicurean perspective still retains its demystificatory value, indeed in this respect acquires an even greater value, today in relation to the vacuous language and jargon of the media and political discourse, as well as that of the specialists, or supposed specialists, in the fields of economics, political science, geopolitics, and so forth.
And we may entertain similar reflections with respect to the claims of Epicurean “physics.” It is quite clear, of course, that contemporary physics\textsuperscript{17} takes in many respects an entirely contrary view of the world in relation to many basic Epicurean claims: that everything consists of bodies and the void, that all bodies can themselves be resolved into indivisible unities precisely because there is no “empty space” within them, that these “atoms” are imbued with only one kind of movement, that of “falling,” that we must introduce the notion of the \textit{clinamen} or “swerve” in order to explain how they come into contact with one another, that the void is the pure and simple negation of body, having no qualities or properties other than the purely negative one of being an infinite and entirely penetrable space etc.; that everything has always been essentially the same as it is now, along with all the constituent elements and processes we have just enumerated – not one of these claims can be maintained as such in the light of the modern scientific understanding of the nature of matter.

And yet the spirit that animated such claims, the concern from which they sprang, and the effects they were capable of producing, still retain their undiminished value even today, a value of truth in the profound sense of the word.\textsuperscript{18} And this, in the first place, because their claims, implying the uncreated character of the universe and everything that it contains, were intended to eliminate any appeal to transcendence, and indeed effectively did so. And in this respect, it has been pointed out, the phenomenon of atheism, and the critique of religion in general,\textsuperscript{19} a particular strategy and point of reference of enormous significance in the classical phase of early modernity, are once again assuming a renewed role and importance today in the context of “the return of religion” and of all the various forms of irrationalism that spring from current fears in the face of threatening technological developments, from the uncertainty and anxiety provoked by the perverse effects of economic globalisation, from internal and international lack of security, from every type of conflict to which we are exposed, and also from the collapse of the usual “rationalist” socio-political methods which until recently were usually adopted to deal with such problems and conflicts, and finally from the stupefying influence exercised upon individuals by the mass media.

With respect to specific detail, if we might put it in this way, the fact that Epicurus refused to countenance the idea of a history or development in reality as a whole – something which contradicts all contemporary sci-

\textsuperscript{17} See, for example, the remarkable summary recently furnished by J. Reisse, \textit{La longue histoire de la matière. Une complexité croissante depuis des milliards d’années}, Paris: PUF, 2006, 2nd. ed. 2007.

\textsuperscript{18} See, for example, Reisse’s remarks on the atomists in the work cited in note 11, p. 256.

Epicureanism – Y esterday and T oday
cence – certainly did not prevent him from opening up a broadly genealogical perspective upon the specific domains which form part of the universe in general, a perspective which is particularly well illustrated by Book V of De rerum natura, where Lucretius appeals to the fortuitous play of atomic combinations and of natural selection in order to explain the origin and the nature of living beings and their specific properties, of man and human society, of language, of the institutions of right, of civilisations. This perspective retains all its value today and reassumes its full force in the light of the resistance and reactions which are still provoked by the theory, or theories, of biological evolution, by the claims of Darwinism and neo-Darwinism, in our own contemporary world.

It is in this general perspective that what may properly be described as the Epicurean anthropology should be located, with everything that this approach suggests and implies: that human beings, with all the desires, fears, hopes, and passions which move them, form part of an evolution, part of a world of other living beings, part of an immanent history which is not oriented to some predetermined end or purpose by a superior organising power of any kind whatsoever. And this perspective opens out directly onto the field of ethics, just as we have seen that Epicurus intended it should.

The essential point here is the immanent character of the criteria which allow us to choose and evaluate the actions and decisions which are conducive to pleasure or pain, with everything this immanent standard authorises: it demands, explicitly, the elimination of any fear of the beyond, whether it be the fear of death or fear of “the gods,” and, implicitly, the elimination of what would be described today as heteronomy: Epicurean man is the master of himself, of his own destiny and happiness.

In addition to this demand, which we recognise to be of inestimable value from every point of view, we must also acknowledge the reality of freedom itself which is revealed by the doctrine of the *clinamen*, as Lucretius so strongly emphasised in verses 216 to 293 in Book II of his poem.

These demands for autonomy are universal on account of the foundations on which they are based in nature, and the political domain is subject to them along with the relativity which this involves (see, particularly Maxim VII and Maxims XXXI-XL) with regard to the civil state and its laws, to the city and the institutions of right. And in this respect, the important role that is accorded to *philia* (Maxim XXVII), and the effective realisation of this principle of friendship in the Epicurean communities themselves (which accepted slaves and women as on the same level as free citizens), fully justify us in regarding Epicureanism as an authentic form of *humanism*.

One may supplement these considerations, along the lines suggested by the young Marx in his Doctoral Dissertation, by drawing attention to the moral
implications of the physical doctrines of Epicurus in their own right, and to the consequences of the Epicurean notion of *isonomia*, or “equivalence,” invoked, strangely enough, in the discourse of Cotta in Cicero (*De natura deorum*, I, 39) as an argument which the Epicureans supposedly used to prove the existence of the gods (if there is anything mortal in nature, there must be something that is immortal in nature...), a notion which is also implicit in the Epicurean argument for the infinite number of atoms involved in every body (*Letter to Herodotus*, 42, and Lucretius, II, 522 ff.): the principle of equivalence implies a lack of ontological privilege, a basic characteristic of a universe which finds the grounds of its own existence and laws entirely within itself, an idea which would ultimately seem to reflect an authentically human demand.

It seems to me that this last point, and the claims and concepts specific to Epicurean ethics, may also be developed further in the context of the era of globalisation. The egalitarianism, naturalism, and humanism which are endorsed by Epicurean ethics and its physical foundations can acquire a renewed and reinvigorated significance today in the light of the contemporary denial of these very values: namely in the growing inequality, the invasion of the artificial methods of modern technology, and the progressive dehumanisation of all human relations which are a visible feature of our contemporary world.

The Epicurean theory of happiness which promotes the enjoyment of true pleasures alone – those that are in principle easy to procure and are acquired by the satisfaction of our natural and necessary desires – offers us a means of countering the ravages inflicted by the current demands for “development,” particularly those associated with ecological disaster, with the destruction of our natural, biological, and climatic environment. It is not enough simply to deplore these things, but concepts such as those which we have attempted to outline here may well contribute to their critique and denunciation. In the field of economics itself such concepts can help us to challenge and demystify the ideals and demands of growth and development which define the idea of ceaseless technological progress that the ruling powers of the world, and their servants in the mass media, attempt to present to us as something inevitable, to resist the proliferation, for purely commercial interests, of artificial needs by the constant invention of new and useless products which turn the “consumer” into a passive agent of the quest for profit that is the only motivating factor here.

Is it still necessary to add, in a positive sense, that Epicureanism bears witness, contrary to many current prejudices, to a particular capacity to transcend the limits of the narrowly philosophical domain in the direction of

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the literary? And does the exemplary value of the poem of Lucretius not effectively demonstrate as much in revealing the possibility of incorporating a materialist perspective into the context of poetics itself – something which is surely an entirely characteristic feature of an authentic humanism?

(Translated from French by Nicholas Walker)

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