

ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY • SERIES 1

Epicureanism and
Scientific Debates
*Epicurean Tradition
and its
Ancient Reception*

Volume 2

Edited by
Francesca Masi
Pierre-Marie Morel
Francesco Verde



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EPICUREANISM AND SCIENTIFIC DEBATES:
EPICUREAN TRADITION AND ITS ANCIENT RECEPTION

VOLUME II. EPISTEMOLOGY AND ETHICS

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EPICUREAN TRANSLATIONS/INTERPRETATIONS BY CICERO AND SENECA

Stefano Maso

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Both Cicero and Seneca had a very accurate knowledge of the Greek language. Cicero is the first to develop a Latin philosophical language, capable of responding to the specific needs of a discipline that only in the first century BC acquired credibility and found consensus among men of culture, rhetoricians, and politicians.

Alongside Cicero there is only one contemporary of his: Lucretius with his *De rerum natura*. This masterpiece is the reference framework for the Latin translation and knowledge of Epicurus' philosophical terminology. As we know, even Lucretius – like Cicero – is not merely a translator, that is, someone limited to rendering original Greek texts in Latin; rather he is a man of letters, a poet, who set out to introduce, collect, and explain to the Romans the fundamental topics of Epicurus' doctrine: those which, in his opinion, could earn the greatest credit in the cultural environment of Rome, and which deserved to be explained and – if necessary – perfected.

As for Seneca: in this case we are faced with an openly Stoic philosopher, able to deepen the theoretical aspects of his school with original openings devoid of any qualms (or reverence) towards tradition. Furthermore, he is – as in the case of Cicero – a personality of the highest political level, able to easily master Latin and Greek.

In this essay, starting from detailed examples taken from the texts of Cicero and Seneca, I will attempt to highlight the characteristics of their approach to Epicurus' Greek thought and language, showing – as far as possible – the peculiarities within a fundamental strategic convergence.

1. CICERO'S STRATEGY IN DEALING WITH THE GREEK LANGUAGE

Cicero, and similarly Lucretius, worked in two directions: on the one hand, they tried to find the Latin equivalents for the technical vocabulary used by Greek philosophers; they proposed, in this way, to make them linguistic 'tools' for the regular use of Roman philosophers. On the other hand, on several occasions they retained the Greek word simply transliterating it into Latin. Lucretius was not satisfied with the *patrii sermonis egestas* (RN 1.832), that is, with what the semantic panorama made available to him. Among the most interesting examples: the use of "homoeomerian" (RN 1.830-842) in reference to the Anaxagorean doctrine (Cicero will

attempt “concentio”, in its version from Plato’s *Timaeus* 14). Or we can think of “harmonia” (3.98-101) with which he transliterates something that means “verum habitum quendam vitalem corporis”.¹

As we know, the attention to the most effective Latin translation leads Lucretius to the great caution shown in the face of the Greek ἄτομος / ἄτομον, for which he uses: *rerum primordia / materies / genitalia corpora / semina rerum / exordia rerum / corpora prima / corpuscula / elementa*.² Cicero, on the other hand, will not hesitate to use the transliteration “atomus” (*fato* 23), even if he does not disdain “individuum” (*fin.* 2.75).

The same goes for εἶδωλα, for which in *De rerum natura* there are: *simulacrum / imago / figurae / effigies*. Cicero has *imago*; but he too reproduces, in one case, the Greek directly: εἶδωλα ἀπειρία (*fin.*1.21).

Like Lucretius, Cicero also underlines the limitations that the Latin language presents at his time; however, he lets us understand how he will move towards the obscurities of technical languages. So, he writes:

[1] Cic., *fin.* 3.15

Si enim Zenoni licuit, cum rem aliquam invenisset inusitatam, inauditum quoque ei rei nomen inponere, cur non liceat Catoni? nec tamen exprimi **verbum e verbo** necesse erit ut interpretes indiserti solent, cum sit verbum, quod idem declaret, magis usitatum; equidem soleo etiam quod uno Graeci, si aliter non possum, idem **pluribus verbis** exponere. Et tamen puto concedi nobis oportere ut **Graeco verbo** utamur, si quando minus occurret Latinum, ne hoc ‘ephippii’ et ‘acratophoris’ potius quam ‘proegmenis’ et ‘apoproegmenis’ concedatur. Quamquam haec quidem praeposita recte et reiecta dicere licebit.³

Thanks to this original and technical ‘testament’, we understand that Cicero contemplated three possibilities:

- a) use a word that has the same meaning in Greek and in Latin;
- b) render with a circumlocution the concept that in Greek is rendered with a single word;
- c) use the Greek term (transliterated or not).

¹ See Powell 1995; Sedley 1998; Warren 2007.

² Maso 2016.

³ “If Zeno was allowed to invent a new term to match the discovery of an unfamiliar idea, then why not Cato? None the less, there is no need for an exact **word-for-word** correspondence when a more familiar term already exists to convey the same meaning. That is the mark of an unskilled translator. My usual practice, where there is no alternative available, is to express **a single Greek word by several Latin ones**. And I still think we should be allowed to use **a Greek word** when there is no Latin equivalent. If ‘ephippia’ and ‘acratophora’ are allowed, then ‘proëgmena’ and ‘apoproëgmena’ should certainly be allowed too, even though they may correctly be rendered as ‘preferred’ and ‘rejected’”, (transl. Woolf; emphasis added. For the translations of the Latin and Greek texts I have consulted the works listed below. I have slightly modified the translations when necessary. The translations for the works not listed here are mine).

Glucker attempted a more analytic classification.⁴ Anyway, the accuracy and critical sensitivity that Cicero demonstrates leads Glucker to conclude that – despite the fact that at the time the idea that works of literature are likely to remain for many generations, or forever, is not all that common among the ancient writers – Cicero had some prospective readership in mind which went beyond his own age and country.⁵

The lucidity with which Cicero becomes aware of his work as interpreter/translator is admirable. Point (a) and point (b) have similar characteristics: it is a question of finding one or more Latin words that allow us to understand the meaning of the original word. For (a) the responsibility for the decision taken is high: any misunderstanding of the translator risks perpetuating itself for a long time. Even with (b) we are in a delicate situation: first, there is the admission that there is no Latin word capable of referring to the original concept denoted by the Greek; however, the proposed circumlocution appears less demanding because it is less definitive: it appears as a suggestion that must help the Latin reader to grasp the true meaning of the original. In the case of point (c) the situation is completely different: the corresponding Latin word is absent, and any substitutive circumlocution approximates the meaning but is not considered successful. Hence the decision to implement the Latin language by proposing a transliteration of the Greek word (in some occurrences even a simple ‘cast’) with the claim, however, that this ‘neologism’ becomes the heritage of scientific language.

I point out that for point c) there is no lack of uncertainty on Cicero’s part. An example is given by the way in which Cicero intends to translate ἐτυμολογία:

[2] Cic., *Top.* 35

Multa etiam ex notatione⁶ sumuntur. Ea est autem, cum ex vi nominis argumentum elicitur; quam Graeci ἐτυμολογίαν appellant, id est **verbum ex verbo** ‘veriloquium’; nos autem novitatem verbi non satis apti fugientes genus hoc notationem appellamus, quia sunt verba rerum notae. Itaque hoc quidem Aristoteles σύμβολον appellat, quod Latine est ‘nota’. Sed cum intellegitur quid significetur minus laborandum est de nomine.⁷

⁴ Glucker 2012: 37-96; on pp. 52-58, he distinguishes translations *verbum e verbo*, *verbum pro verbo*, *verbum quod ideam valeat*, *verbum ipsum interpretari* (“translations ad sensum”). On the passage of *De finibus* mentioned, see Glucker 2015: 40-41.

⁵ Glucker 2012: 46. The scholar even concludes, “Yet one might say that this philosophical vocabulary may well be regarded as Cicero’s abiding contribution to philosophy.” Lévy 1992, 92-106, had previously dealt with highlighting Cicero’s attitude to the philosophical schools and his attention to the technical language of each. Powell 1995: 291, goes back to underlining Cicero’s care in explaining the choices he made, especially in the case in which he had to introduce a neologism.

⁶ With “notatio” Cicero means the signifier or mark evoking the *semantema*.

⁷ “Many elements are derived from *notatio*. It occurs when the argument is deduced from the signifying power of a word. The Greeks call this ‘etymology’, and this translates in Latin (**word for word**) ‘veriloquence’. But we, reluctant as we are to improper neologisms, we call this genus notation, because words are *notae* (tokens) of things. Aristotle moreover uses in this case the term *sumbolon*,

More interesting still, in general, is to try to understand the particular attention that Cicero shows when the philosophical vocabulary appears in all its complexity. Exemplary is the case of *voluntas*, an important word in Stoic philosophy, but not only: it is also connected to the Aristotelian conception of deliberation and choice, in addition to the Epicurean tradition. In the latter case, κατὰ βούλησις constitutes the way in which, something happens by a spontaneous act of will. It is exactly the opposite of what happens with regard to the regular movements that are observed in the agglomerations constituting the celestial bodies (and also the gods who – for the Epicureans – are nothing more than a little agglomerated fire): these one move as needed (τὴν ἀνάγκην), *Hrd.* 77. In § 81, Epicurus reiterates that we must not believe that blessed and immortal creatures can have will (βουλήσεις), perform actions (πράξεις), and be the cause (αἰτίας) of something that is contrary (ὑπεναντίας) to their nature.

We then observe that in *KD XXXII* the verb “to want” is compared to the verb “to be able to”: μὴ ἐδύνατο ἢ μὴ ἐβούλετο; as well as in an occurrence from *D.L.* 10.11: “Send me a cheese casserole so I can (δύνωμαι), when I want (βούλομαι), squander a little (πολυτεύσασθαι).”

Yet here is now the important passage in which Cicero questions himself on the way to translate βούλησις:

[3] *Cic., Tusc.* 4.12

Natura enim omnes ea, quae bona videntur, secuntur fugiuntque contraria; quam ob rem simul obiecta species est cuiuspiam, quod bonum videatur, ad id adipiscendum impellit ipsa natura. Id cum constanter prudenterque fit, eius modi adpetitionem Stoici βούλησιν appellant, nos appellemus **voluntatem**, eam illi putant in solo esse sapiente; quam sic definiunt: voluntas est, quae quid cum ratione desiderat. quae autem ratione adversante incitata est vehementius, ea libido est vel cupiditas effrenata, quae in omnibus stultis invenitur.⁸

It is a particularly intriguing passage for several reasons. First, Cicero declares that he is referring to the Stoics. In fact, what he writes is also influenced by the Epicurean perspective: the juxtaposition of *voluntas* with *adpetitio* and *desiderium* (and the subsequent reference “per differentiam” to *libido* and *cupiditas*) lead directly to the Epicurean theoretical framework and the connected theory of pleasure.

which corresponds in Latin *nota*. But when the meaning is understood, the commitment to the word which expresses it is less.”

⁸ “By nature, all people pursue those things which they think to be good and avoid their opposites. Therefore, as soon as a person receives an impression of something which he thinks is good, nature itself urges him to reach out after it. When this is done prudently and in accordance with consistency, it is the sort of reaching which the Stoics call a *boulēsis*, and which I shall term a ‘volition.’ They think that a volition, which they define as ‘a wish for some object in accordance with reason,’ is found only in the wise person. But the sort of reaching which is aroused too vigorously and in a manner opposed to reason is called ‘desire’ or ‘unbridled longing,’ and this is what is found in all who are foolish” (transl. Graver).

Also of particular interest is the use of the subjunctive “appellemus”, which signals Cicero’s uncertainty. This usage is because, according to Cicero, the word *voluntas* has a wider spectrum of meaning than βούλησις.⁹ It is not a pure form of tension or *adpetitio* as for the Stoics, though remaining distinguishable from *desiderium*; it is not exclusively dependent on judgment or opinion but not even radically opposed to reason; it should not be perceived as πάθος. In opposition to the Stoic doctrine, βούλησις can be determined as a result of a perfectly thought-out decision or, in any case, deemed convenient: a subjective decision that argues in favour of the thesis of ‘free will’, undoubtedly supported by the Epicureans.¹⁰

Yet here is also the case of ἡδονή, the key word of Epicurean ethics, for which certainly Cicero – like Lucretius – has *voluptas* at his disposal and, with this word, he can re-propose the central concept (i.e., the limit of pleasure: the “catastematic pleasure”) of the *KD XIX*: cf. *fin.* 1.63; 2.87. I report this last passage alongside an Epicurean sentence:

[4] a) Cic., *fin.* 2.87-88

Negat Epicurus diuturnitatem quidem temporis ad beate vivendum aliquid afferre, nec minorem voluptatem percipi in brevitate temporis, quam si illa sit sempiterna. (...) Cum enim summum bonum in voluptate ponat, negat infinito tempore aetatis voluptatem fieri maiorem quam finito atque modico. (...) Negat enim summo bono afferre incrementum diem.¹¹

[4] b) Epic., *KD XIX*

‘Ο ἀπειρος χρόνος ἴσχει τὴν ἡδονὴν καὶ ὁ πεπερασμένος, ἐάν τις αὐτῆς τὰ πέρατα καταμετρήσῃ τῷ λογισμῷ¹².

In *fin.* 2.12 Cicero gets angry with the Epicurean Torquatus because he does not accept being accused of misunderstanding as to the pleasure of Epicurus. And so, Cicero reflects on the possible translation:

[5] Cic., *fin.* 2.12-13

Itaque hoc frequenter dici solet a vobis, non intellegere nos, quam dicat Epicurus voluptatem. Quod quidem mihi si quando dictum est (est autem dictum non parum

⁹ See Maso 2021: 73-84.

¹⁰ Cic., *fato* 25: *Ad animorum motus voluntarios non est requirenda externa causa; motus enim voluntarius eam naturam in se ipse continet ut sit in nostra potestate nobisque pareat*, “We don’t need to look for an external cause for the voluntary motions of the mind. Since such is the nature of voluntary motion, that it must needs be in our own power and obey us.”

¹¹ “(Epicurus denies) that temporal duration adds nothing to the happiness of a life, and that no less pleasure is enjoyed in a short space of time than in the whole of time. (...) Epicurus holds that pleasure is the supreme good, and yet claims that there is no greater pleasure to be had in an infinite period than in a brief and limited one. (...) Here it is denied that time adds anything to the supreme good” (transl. Woolf).

¹² “Infinite time and finite time contain equal pleasure, if one measure the limits of pleasure with reasoning” (transl. L&S).

saepe), etsi satis clemens sum in disputando, tamen interdum soleo sub irasci. Egone non intellego, quid sit ἡδονήν Graece, Latine voluptas? utram tandem linguam nescio? deinde qui fit, ut ego nesciam, sciant omnes, quicumque Epicurei esse voluerunt? (...) Ut scias me intellegere, primum idem esse dico voluptatem, quod ille ἡδονήν. Et quidem saepe quaerimus verbum Latinum par Graeco et quod idem valeat; hic nihil fuit, quod quaereremus. Nullum inveniri verbum potest quod magis idem declarat Latine, quod Graece, quam declarat voluptas. Huic verbo omnes, qui ubique sunt, qui Latine sciunt, duas res subiciunt, laetitiam in animo, commotionem suavem iucunditatis in corpore.¹³

There is almost a sort of impatience on the part of Cicero towards those who doubt his ability to understand and interpret.¹⁴ His linguistic and philosophical competence is confirmed by the fact that, on other occasions, he has the opportunity to specify further nuances relating to the meaning of ἡδονή.

- See the word *laetitia*: *fin.* 2.13-14; and 3.35, which contains a clarification on the translation alluding to “ἡδονή *animi*”.
- See *delectatio* opposed to *obscena voluptas* (*fin.* 2.7).
- See the adverb *iucunde* (*fin.* 2.82), where Cicero recalls how friendship cannot be distinguished from pleasure, because, if it is true that without friendship we cannot live safely and without fear, then, without friendship, we could not even live pleasantly (i.e., *iucunde*).
- See *fin.* 2.11: *voluptas* is made corresponding to *indolentia* (= ἀναλγησία).

As far as *voluptas* is concerned, though, Cicero also engages in the direct translation of three Epicurean maxims: [6] *Tusc.* 3.47; [7] *Tusc.* 5.26; [8] *fin.* 1.57-58:

[6] a) Cic., *Tusc.* 3.47

At idem ait non crescere voluptatem dolore detracto, summamque esse voluptatem nihil dolere.¹⁵

¹³ “That is why you Epicureans resort so often to saying that the rest of us do not understand what Epicurus meant by pleasure. This is a claim that tends to make my hackles rise whenever it is made (and it is not infrequently made), however good-natured I may be in debate. It is as if I did not know what *hēdonē* is in Greek, or *voluptas* in Latin. Which language is it that I do not understand? And how come that I do not understand it, whereas anyone you like who has chosen to be an Epicurean does?” (...) “Let me show you that I do. Firstly, what I mean by *voluptas* is exactly what he means by *hēdonē*. We often have to search for a Latin equivalent to a Greek word with the same sense. No search is called for in this case. No Latin word can be found which captures a Greek word more exactly than *voluptas* does. Everyone in the world who knows Latin takes this word to convey two notions: elation in the mind, and a delightfully sweet arousal in the body” (transl. Woolf).

¹⁴ An illuminating question is Cicero’s *instrumental* use of his own linguistic competence, in order to discredit the ethical conception of Epicureanism. Cicero confirms himself as an excellent reader and translator. However, this facility does not automatically make him a reliable interpreter. See Maso 2017: 25-46.

¹⁵ “But Epicurus also says that once pain is gone, pleasure does not increase; and that the summit of pleasure is to have no pain at all” (transl. Graver).

[6] b) *Epic., KD XVIII*

Οὐκ ἐπαύξεται ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ ἢ ἡδονῇ, ἐπειδὴν ἅπαξ τὸ κατ' ἐνδειαν ἀλοῦν ἐξαίρεθῆ, [ἀλλὰ μόνον ποικίλλεται.] (κτλ.).¹⁶

[6] c) *Epic., KD III*

“Ορος τοῦ μεγέθους τῶν ἡδονῶν ἢ παντός τοῦ ἀλοῦντος ὑπεξαίρεισι.”¹⁷

On this first occurrence we observe that the Ciceronian text only partially translates the ‘first’ part of *KD xviii* (this maxim continued evoking the theme of the ‘limit’ of pleasure connected to the mental capacity to recognize its characteristic). The second part of the Ciceronian text seems to come from the initial part of *KD iii* where the incompatibility of pleasure and pain is emphasized – going back once again to the theme of ‘limit’.

Cicero knows very well this clear assumption of the alternative ‘pleasure vs pain’. He clearly illustrates it in *fin.* 1.38, recalling that for Epicurus there is no intermediate state between pleasure and pain: “non placuit Epicuro medium esse quiddam inter dolorem et voluptatem”; hence, “doloris omnis privatio recte nominata est voluptas.”

It is precisely against this thesis that Cicero lashes out, recovering the thought of the peripatetic Hieronymus of Rhodes (*fin.* 2.8; 16; 18; 32; 35; 41; 4.49; 5.14; 20; 73) that distinguishes “voluptas” from “do not hurt” and who maintains that the latter is the ‘highest good’.

[7] a) *Cic., Tusc. 5.26*

Fortunam exiguam intervenire sapienti.¹⁸

[7] b) *Epic., KD XVI*

Βραχέα σοφῷ τύχη παρεμπίπτει (...)¹⁹

[7] c) *Cic., Tusc. 5.27* (= *Metrod. fr.* 49 Körte)

Occupavi te ... Fortuna, atque cepi omnisque aditus tuos interclusi, ut ad me aspirare non posses.²⁰

The translation of *KD XVI* is literal, but even on this occasion Cicero is limited only to the initial part. The original maxim went on to explain that reason (ὁ λογισμός)

¹⁶ “The pleasure in the flesh does not increase when once the pain of need has been removed, [but it is only varied]” (transl. L&S).

¹⁷ “The removal of all pain is the limit of the magnitude of pleasures” (transl. L&S).

¹⁸ “Fortune makes little impact on the wise man” (transl. Douglas). See *infra* p. 210, with reference to Seneca’s interpretation.

¹⁹ “Fortune is of little importance to the wise.” This maxim continues: “Reason (λογισμός) has already preordained (διώκηκε) the greatest and most important things (μέγιστα καὶ κυριώτατα), and for the whole course of life (κατὰ τὸν συνεχῆ χρόνον) it preorders (διοικεῖ) and will preorder (διοικήσει) them.”

²⁰ “I have beaten you to it, Fortune, and seized and blocked your lines of approach, so that you cannot come near me” (transl. Douglas).

comes into play for really great and important things: it rules now and always. Cicero instead uses the quote from Epicurus to question the seriousness of those scholars who have only pleasure in mind while they speak of “honesty”, “wisdom”, and “justice”. This use of the brief quotation from Epicurus is, in the next § 27, reinforced by a parallel quotation, this time from the Epicurean Metrodorus, in which the wise man’s victory over luck is emphasized (*occupavi te, Fortuna*). Then Cicero again warns against pleasure as an end in itself and concludes by denouncing the impossibility of giving credit to those who have put the goods in bowels and marrow: *qui omne bonum in visceribus medullisque condideris*.

[8] a) Cic., *Fin.* 1.57-58

Clamat Epicurus, is quem vos nimis voluptatibus esse deditum dicitis, non posse iucunde vivi, nisi sapienter, honeste iusteque vivatur, nec sapienter, honeste, iuste, nisi iucunde.²¹

[8] b) Epic., *KD V*

Οὐκ ἔστιν ἡδέως ζῆν ἄνευ τοῦ φρονίμως καὶ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως <οὐδὲ φρονίμως καὶ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως> ἄνευ τοῦ ἡδέως· ὅτω δὲ τοῦτο μὴ ὑπάρχει, οὐκ ἔστι τοῦτον ἡδέως ζῆν.²²

Here, in addition to the integration present in Cicero, which Diogenes of Oinoanda will later confirm (fr. 37 Smith, “lower margin”), note how Cicero uses *iucunde* to translate ἡδέως, and that, moreover, he brings everything back to the theme of “voluptas”.

As already stated, Cicero is aware of his role as a ‘mediator’ of Greek culture and philosophical language. As for Epicureanism, Cicero deals with its physical doctrine (*De finibus, De divinatione, De fato*), theological doctrine (*De natura deorum*), and ethical doctrine (*De finibus, Tusculanae disputationes*). He shows that he knows the doctrine’s foundations correctly, since he had Phaedrus and then Zeno of Sidon as his masters. He had direct knowledge of Lucretius’ *De rerum natura*.²³ Finally, he seems to directly know some texts of Epicurus handed down and evidently circulating at the time. Cicero accurately quotes some works. First he cites the *Ratae sententiae* (Κύρια δόξα), in *fin.* 1.16; 2.20; *ND* 1.45; 1.85; 1.113; *off.* 3.116; *fam.* 15.19.2. Then he quotes the *Ep. ad Idomeneum*, in *fin.* 2.99; the *Testamentum*, in *fin.* 2.103;

²¹ “Epicurus, the man whom you accuse of being excessively devoted to pleasure, in fact proclaims that one cannot live pleasantly unless one lives wisely, honourably and justly; and that one cannot live wisely, honourably and justly without living pleasantly” (transl. Woolf).

²² “It is not possible to live happily if you do not live a wise and beautiful and just life, nor to live a wise and beautiful and just life without living happily; those who lack this cannot live happily.”

²³ See *ad Quint. Fr.* 2.9.3.

De fine (Περὶ τέλους), in *Tusc.* 3.41 and 44;²⁴ *De voluptate* (Περὶ ἡδονῆς), in *div.* 2.59;²⁵ *De pietate* (Περὶ εὐσεβείας), in *ND* 1.115; *De sanctitate* (Περὶ ὁσιότητος), in *ND* 1.115 and 122;²⁶ and *De regula et iudicio* (that probably corresponds to Περὶ κριτηρίου ἢ Κανῶν), in *ND* 1.43-44. Obviously, we cannot determine whether Cicero knew all these works directly or if he used doxographical collections, subjects, and maxims that were available at the time.²⁷ The fact remains, though, that these are accurate citations and that they almost always refer to specific works.

The source of a long passage, *ND* 1.49-50, in which Epicurus deals with physics, cannot be identified with certainty.²⁸ In this passage we find peculiar words of the Epicurean language:

[9] a) Cic., *ND* 1.49-50

Epicurus autem, qui **res occultas et penitus abditas** (i.e. ἄδηλα) non modo **videat animo** (i.e. πρόληψις) sed etiam sic tractet ut manu, docet eam esse vim et naturam deorum, ut primum non sensu sed **mente cernatur** (i.e. λόγῳ θεωρητούς), nec **soliditate** (i.e. στερέμνια) quadam nec **ad numerum** (καθ' ἀριθμόν), ut ea quae ille propter **firmitatem** στερέμνια appellat, sed **imaginibus similitudine et transitione** perceptis (i.e. εἶδωλα and ἀναλογία / ὁμοειδεῖα and ὑπέρβασις; see μετάβασις καθ' ὁμοίωτα), cum infinita simillarum imaginum species ex innumerabilibus individuis existat et *ad nos adfluat²⁹ (i.e. ἐκ τῆς συνεχοῦς ἐπιρροῦσεως), cum maximis **voluptatibus** (i.e. ἡδονή) in eas **imagines** (εἶδωλα) mentem intentam infixamque nostram intelligentiam capere quae sit et beata natura et aeterna. Summa vero vis infinitatis et magna ac diligenti contemplatione dignissima est. In qua intellegi necesse est eam esse naturam ut omnia omnibus paribus paria respondeant; hanc ἰσονομίαν appellat Epicurus id est **aequabilem tributionem**.³⁰

²⁴ See Usener 1887: 119-23.

²⁵ It is the only quotation from this book, which, moreover, is not present in the catalog of Diog. Laert., X 27-28. See Usener 1887: 101.

²⁶ Cic., *ND* 1.115: *At etiam de sanctitate, de pietate adversos deos libros scripsit Epicurus*. In Diog. Laert. X 27 there is a Περὶ ὁσιότητος and a Περὶ θεῶν, but not a Περὶ εὐσεβείας. Similarly in Plutarch., *Non posse suaviter*, 1102c. Pease 1955: I 506-07 believes that in Cicero's case we are dealing with a simple synonymy. According to Pease, *De pietate* would not be among the works Epicurus would have written.

²⁷ The collection consisting of the Κύρια δόξαι is but one example. It is difficult to establish when it was compiled. A later collection, as is well known, is made up of the *Gnomologium Vaticanum*. As for secondhand citations, D'Anna 1965: 38 believes that Cicero's knowledge of the *Epistula ad Menoeceum* – given the way he refers to this text in the catalog of desires – in *fin.* 2.26 might constitute such a case.

²⁸ See Usener [1887]: 232-38.

²⁹ The manuscript tradition hesitates between *ad deos adfluat* (Leydensis Vossianus 84) and *ad eos adfluat* (Leydensis Vossianus 86). Following Lambinus (ed. 1565-1566), we can assume *ade [oadn] os* > *ad eos* (Vossianus 86) and therefore the correction *ad nos* which allows not to prejudice the canonical interpretation of the atomic movement. For an update of the debate on this point, see Maso 2017, 98-100.

³⁰ "Epicurus then, as he not merely **discerns abstruse and recondite things** (ἄδηλα) **with his mind's eye** (πρόληψις), but handles them as tangible realities, teaches that the substance and nature of **the gods** (τοὺς θεοὺς) is such that, in the first place, it is **perceived** not by the senses but **by the mind** (λόγῳ θεωρητούς); and that not **for their physical solidity or for their singularity** (καθ' ἀριθμόν), as in the case of those bodies, which Epicurus in virtue of their **substantiality** entitles στερέμνια, but, thanks to the perceived **images** (εἶδωλα) according to their **similarities** (ἀναλογία / ὁμοειδεῖα) and **succession**

The first part of this passage was related to a scholium at *KD* i, see 139 Us. p. 71:

[9] b) Epic., Schol. ad *KD* i = Fr. 355 Usener (= § 139 p. 71)

ἐν ἄλλοις δέ φησι τοὺς θεοὺς λόγῳ θεωρητοῦς (i.e. *mente cernatur*), οὓς μὲν κατ' ἀριθμὸν (*ad numerum*) ὑφεστώτας, οὓς δὲ κατὰ ὁμοειδειαν (i.e. *imaginibus similitudine*) ἐκ τῆς συνεχοῦς ἐπιρρύσεως (*adfulat*) τῶν ὁμοίων εἰδῶλων (*simillarum imaginum*) ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ἀποτελεσθένους ἀνθρωποειδεῖς.³¹

The textual comparisons with the Epicurean language are evident and help to understand, in Latin, the interpretative line of Cicero. Some details are worth mentioning:

- *soliditas* / *firmitas* clearly are useful to translate στερέμνια (see *ND* 1.49 = [194] Arrighetti);
- the locution “*imaginibus similitudine et transitione perceptis*”, in addition to including the translation of the words εἰδῶλα and ἀναλογία / ὁμοειδεια and ὑπέρβασις, refers to the specific doctrine of μετάβασις καθ' ὁμοιότητα which appears immediately afterwards: the arrival of images made up of atoms, characterized by their extreme similarity (ἀναλογία) and, as such, perceived. If we accept that *transitio* is a technical translation of ὑπέρβασις, we point to a mechanistic interpretation;³² if it is rather inclined to suggest μετάβασις, the interpretation would be of a logicist type.³³
- *ex innumerabilibus individuis existat et ad nos adfluat*: in evidence is the reference to the countless number of images that flow from an object. It is so great that Epicurus, in the second book of *Peri phuseos*, speaks of ἀπειρία (“infinite quantity”, coll. 101-102), to the point that the “emanations” (ἀποστάσεις) from the bodies (στερέμνια) have unsurpassed speed (ταχυτήτα τινα ἀνυπέρβλητον, col. 111) and become “continuous effluvium” (συνεχῆς

(ὑπέρβασις) [see μετάβασις καθ' ὁμοιότητα] – since an endless form of similar images arises from the innumerable atoms and **streams** to us [see ἐκ τῆς συνεχοῦς ἐπιρρύσεως], our mind – concentrated with great **pleasure** (ἡδονή) and having fixed our attention on these **images** (εἰδῶλα) – understands what constitutes a blessed and eternal nature. Moreover, there is the supremely potent principle of infinity, which claims the closest and most careful study; we must understand that it has the following property, that in the sum of things everything has its exact match and counterpart. This property is termed by Epicurus ἰσονομίαν, or the principle of **uniform distribution**.” For the exegesis of this passage and for Cicero's underlying critique of the Epicurean doctrine, see Maso 2017: 50-52.

³¹ “In other (*scil.* works) Epicurus says that the gods are **understandable with reason**: both those subsisting **in their individuality**, and those – who are endowed with human form – produced by **similarity** from the continuous **flow of similar images** to obtain the same object.”

³² See Purinton 2001: 203-09.

³³ See Bailey 1928: 447-49. DeWitt 1942: 46: “Shapes apprehended by method of analogy and inference by induction”. According to Bailey, it is essential to remember that *similitudo* is a translation of ἀναλογία, see *Hrd.* 58-59. Philippson 1916: 602, believed instead that it was decisive to recall the expression κατ' ὁμοειδιαν.

ἀπόρροια) towards our sense organs and our mind (coll. 94.2-25 and 38-75).³⁴

On other occasions, less appreciably contextualized in arguments or insights on Epicurean issues, we can find further examples of the translation of single words, generally attributable to the epistemological scientific side. Here are some examples:

- *simulacrum* / *species* translates εικόν (ND 105; 107 = [194-195] Arr.)
- *anticipatio* / *praenotio* translate πρόληψις (ND 1.4-44 = [174-175] Arr.)
- *aequalis distributio*, *aequilibritas* translate ἰσονομία (ND 1.50; 1.109 = [176] Arr.)
- *morbi* translates νοσήματα (*fin.* 1.59)
- *fortuna* translates τύχη (*fin.* 1.63, see KD XVI)

As for σωφροσύνη, Cicero shows great awareness of the importance of this concept. It refers to the four general virtues (justice, wisdom, fortitude, temperance) that Stoics and Epicureans know, but which the Epicureans then lead back to pleasure, not honesty.³⁵ For translation Cicero evokes *temperantia*, *moderatio*, *modestia*; he even proposes *frugalitas*. And so, he explains:

[10] Cic., *Tusc.* 3.16

Haud scio an recte ea virtus frugalitas appellari possit, quod angustius apud Graecos valet, qui frugi homines χρησίμους appellant, id est tantum modo utilis; at illud est latius; omnis enim abstinentia, omnis innocentia (quae apud Graecos usitatum nomen nullum habet, sed habere potest ἀβλάβειαν; nam est innocentia adfectio talis animi quae noceat nemini) ...³⁶ reliquas etiam virtutes frugalitas continent.³⁷

Once again Cicero shows his linguistic sensitivity: can we translate σωφροσύνη also with *frugalitas*? The problem is that, in Greek, the correspondent for *homines frugi* is χρησίμους: a word with a very limited range of meaning compared to “frugi”, and which refers precisely to *utilitas*, that is, to the concepts of “useful”, “beneficial”, more than that of “wisdom”, “fairness”. *Frugalitas* is a virtue that – like temperance – also includes others: for example, “restraint” (*abstinentia*) and “innocence” (*innocentia*). Even regarding this latter virtue, Cicero allows a linguistic observation:

³⁴ For the interpretation of the surviving columns of *Peri phuseos*' second book, see the recent critical edition by Giuliana Leone (2015) and the clarifications on the effluvium of images in Leone 2015: 47-49.

³⁵ See *fin.* 2.48.

³⁶ The text is incomplete, but the overall meaning is clear.

³⁷ “It may be, though, that the best term for it is ‘frugality.’ The corresponding Greek term is too narrow in its application: they call frugal people *chrēsimoī*, that is, merely ‘useful.’ But *frugalitas* is a broader term, carrying with it not only *abstinentia*, ‘restraint’ and *innocentia*, ‘harmlessness’ (for which there is no Greek term in use, though *ablabeia* or ‘non-hurtfulness’ might serve, since harmlessness is the disposition not to hurt anyone), but all the other virtues as well” (transl. Graver).

in Latin there is a word of active value. *In-nocentia* in fact indicates the disposition of the soul for which one does not harm anyone; in Greek, Cicero does not know a correspondent. It could be ἀβλάβεια, which Cicero coins deriving from ἀβλαβής (“he who does not harm”). It should be noted that the first actual attestation of ἀβλάβεια will only be later, in Plut., *Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum* 109ob, with passive value.

As a further confirmation of the scrupulousness in interpreting the technical value of the words, we observe Cicero, in *fin.* 3.32, when he defines the effect of something that results posterior and subsequent (*posterum et consequens*), using the Greek ἐπιγεννηματικόν. How can we fail to remember, on this occasion, the technical word (ἀπογεγεννημένα)³⁸ adopted by Epicurus to indicate the products of the mind, in book xxv of the *peri phuseos*?

On the other hand, the interpretations of three key words not only for Stoic philosophy but also for Epicurean philosophy are illuminating: πρόνοια, κατάληψις, and πρόληψις.

As for the first, see among other passages: *ND* 1.18; 2.73; 2.160. In particular:

[11] Cic., *ND* 2.160:

Quid multitudinem suavitatemque piscium dicam, quid avium; ex quibus tanta percipitur voluptas, ut interdum Pronoea nostra Epicurea fuisse videatur.³⁹

Obviously, the intention of comparing the Stoic Providence to the Epicurean anti-deterministic perspective is, in this passage, completely ironic; here it is only of interest to consider the linguistic aspect.

As for κατάληψις, remember that this word belongs to the technical language of the Stoa. However, Diogenes Laertius (in his book on Epicureanism, 10.33) evokes κατάληψις⁴⁰ in connection with πρόληψις. The latter would be a kind of learning/grasping (κατάληψιν) or right opinion (δόξαν ὀρθήν), or idea (ἔννοιαν), or universal notion (καθολικὴν νόησιν) inherent in us. About the Ciceronian translation, see *Luc.* 17; 31; 145. In particular:

³⁸ See Epic. xxv, Laursen 1997: 19-29 (= Arrighetti 34.2-24), and Masi 2006: 82-94.

³⁹ “Why should I speak of the teeming swarms of delicious fish? or of birds, which afford us so much pleasure that our Stoic Providence appears to have been at times a disciple of Epicurus?” (transl. Rackham). On this occasion Cicero limits himself to transliterating. Usually he translates with *providentia*, see: *ND* 2.58, 73-80, 87, 98, 127, 140; 3.78, 92; *Rep.* 2.5; *Tim.* 10. In partic. *ND* 1.18: “faticam Stoicorum Pronoeam, quam Latine licet Providentiam dicere.”

⁴⁰ Κατάληπτα is most likely to be reconstructed also in *PHerc.* 1148, [29] 26.18 (Arrighetti).

[12] a) Cic., *fin.* 3.17

Rerum autem cognitiones (quas vel comprehensiones vel perceptiones vel si haec verba aut minus placent aut minus intelleguntur, καταλήψεις appellemus licet), eas igitur ipsas propter se adsciscendas arbitramur.⁴¹

Cicero also proposes the opposite of what understanding implies: ἀκατάληπτον; in *Luc.* 18, referring to Philo's thought, he evokes the impossibility that something can be understood: *negare quicquam esse quod comprehendi posse: id enim volumus esse ἀκατάληπτον.*⁴²

Finally, see πρόληψις. This word is fundamental in the technical language of both the Stoa and the Epicurean school. See *ND* 1.37; 1.43-44; 2.7; *Luc.* 30. On these occasions Cicero translates by diversifying; respectively: *notio animi, anticipatio, praenotio, praesensio, notitia rerum.*⁴³

In *ND* 1.43-45 the Epicurean Velleius proposes *anticipatio* and *praenotio* as a translation of πρόληψις:

b) Cic., *ND* 1.43-44

quae est enim gens aut quod genus hominum quod non habeat sine doctrina anticipationem quandam deorum, quam appellat πρόληψιν Epicurus id est anteceptam animo rei quandam informationem, sine qua nec intellegi quicquam nec quaeri nec disputari potest. (...) fatemur constare illud etiam, hanc nos habere sive **anticipationem**, ut ante dixi sive **praenotionem** deorum (sunt enim rebus novis nova ponenda nomina, ut Epicurus ipse πρόληψιν appellavit, quam antea nemo eo verbo nominarat).⁴⁴

⁴¹ "Now cognitions (which we may call grasplings or perceivings, or, if these terms are disagreeable or obscure, 'catalepses' from the Greek) we consider worth attaining in their own right" (transl. Woolf). As for the possible interpretative nuances in the use of these three words proposed by Cicero, cf. Malaspina 2022: 309-323. As for *perceptio* (concerning which we must bear in mind αἴσθησις), we observe its frequent presence in Cicero (in *div.* 2.9 we find: *quid sensibus perciperentur*); Seneca, on the other hand, never uses *perceptio* but only the forms of the verb *percipere*, in particular *perceptus/a* (e.g., *ben.* 1.1.12; 3.5.1; 5.17.7; *ep.* 99.5).

⁴² Here undoubtedly Cicero favours the best adequacy of *comprehensio* in the rendering of the Greek concept. See Malaspina 2022: 311-312.

⁴³ In *Luc.* 30, he specifies that because of mental operations and memory that builds similes, we witness the formation of concepts called sometimes ἐννοιαί other times προλήψεις. See, in the present collection of essays, the contribution by J.-B. Gourinat. As for the implications related to the Stoic context, see Maso 2022: 142-147.

⁴⁴ "For what nation or what tribe of men is there but possesses untaught some 'preconception' (*anticipationem quandam*) of the gods? Such notions Epicurus designates by the word πρόληψιν, that is, a sort of preconceived (*anteceptam*) mental picture of a thing, without which nothing can be understood or investigated or discussed. [...] We must admit it as also being an accepted truth that we possess a 'preconception,' (*anticipationem*) as I called it above, or 'prior notion,' (*praenotionem*) of the gods. For we are bound to employ novel terms to denote novel ideas, just as Epicurus himself employed the word *prolepsis* in a sense in which no one had ever used it before" (transl. Rackham 1933/1967).

Anticipatio and *praenotio* are absent in almost all classical Latin literature. We find only one attestation of *anticipatio* in Servius' commentary, in *Verg. Aen.* 6,359.4; *praenotio* is, instead, a real *unicum*.

In Lucretius, 4.1057, we find an interesting *praesagire*: “Namque voluptatem praesagit muta cupido” (Silent craving presages pleasure). Cicero does not disdain this opportunity. So, for example, he writes in *Div.* 1.65: “One who has knowledge of a thing before it happens (*qui ante sagit, quam oblata res est*) is said to ‘presage’ (*praesagire*), that is, to perceive the future in advance (*futura ante sentire*).” This juxtaposition of *praesagire* and *ante sentire* leads us in the direction of *praesentire* and *praesensio*. *Praesensio* is precisely the technical term that Cicero preferably adopts, probably because the purely logical/functional aspect of *anticipatio* or *praenotio* responds less to the authentic sense of Greek.

Indeed, Epicurus seems to have better specified the role and status of the πρόληψις. Firstly, it must not be confused with feeling or passion. In *Canon*, Epicurus states that there are three criteria of truth: αἱ αἰσθήσεις (sensations), αἱ προλήψεις and τὰ πάθη (passions). We must therefore distinguish its traits and first connect the πρόληψις to the memory of sensation, that is, to the persistence of the physical trace (ἐγκατάλειμμα) of what has happened, and which has been confirmed several times in subsequent experiences.⁴⁵ In fact, a very strong relationship will be established between the “notions that derive from an act of the mind” (τὰς φανταστικὰς ἐπιβολὰς τῆς διανοίας)⁴⁶ and πρόληψις. This link is essential if we want to connect the experience already acquired with the prefiguration of the future, without the latter being considered a pure and simple “hypothesis”, “presupposition” (ὑπόληψις). Προλήψεις are clear and evident by virtue of their anchoring to the original sensation and their being an instrument for the experience and comprehension of the present.

Cicero seems to refer to the scientific πρόληψις. Hence, he prefers the word *praesensio*. He uses *praesensio* mostly in *De natura deorum* and in *De divinatione*. To *praesensio* he attributes a precise scientific value, since on the one hand, with it, it would refer to the different forms and possibilities of divination;⁴⁷ on the other, *praesensio* would attest to the existence of the surrounding reality, of its becoming, and of the gods:

[13] Cic., *ND* 2.45

Sed cum talem esse deum certa notione animi praesentiamus, primum ut sit animans, deinde ut in omni natura nihil eo sit praestantius, ad hanc **praesensionem notionemque** nostram nihil video quod potius accommodem quam ut primum

⁴⁵ On this see Diog. Laert. X 33.

⁴⁶ See Diog. Laert. X 3. In L&S 17 A, Epicurus' technical expression is translated as follows: “focusing of thought into an impression”.

⁴⁷ See *div.* 1.1: *praesensionem et scientiam rerum futurarum*; 1.105: *praesensio aut scientia veritatis futurae*. Because of that: *praesensio divinatio est* (2.14).

hunc ipsum mundum, quo nihil excellentius fieri potest, animantem esse et deum iudicem.⁴⁸

However, Cicero then ends up associating the *praesensio rerum futurarum* indifferently to Stoicism (e.g., to Cleanthes, in *ND* 2.13; 3.16) and to atomism (*Div.* 1.5; 2.31–32); this connection means that the word does not seem to have, for him, any connotation of school. *Praesensio*, therefore, simply but incontrovertibly refers to the opportunity (and necessity) of overcoming the conjectural moment because of a correct interpretation of the signals and their adequate explanation.

I believe that this sample is sufficient to highlight the characteristics, in the phase of translation from the Greek,⁴⁹ of the operation theorized and realized by Cicero. Of course I concentrated on the Epicurean translations, but even in this delicate context Cicero's seriousness and correctness as an interpreter did not fail.

2. SENECA: THE TRANSLATION/INTERPRETATION OF AN OPPONENT

In the case of Seneca, we are faced with an openly Stoic philosopher, able to deepen the theoretical aspects of his school with original innovations devoid of any qualms (or reverence) towards tradition and opposing schools, as in the case of Epicureanism. Furthermore, he is – similarly to Cicero – a personality of the highest political level, able to easily master Latin and Greek.

Concerning the way of relating with Greek culture, with the language of Greek philosophy, see A. Setaioli, *Seneca e i Greci*, 1988 (as regards Epicurus, see 171–248). Epicurus is the philosopher most quoted by Seneca; at the centre of this interest are, first, some issues of a moral nature. Probably Seneca directly knew some Epicurean texts, and his knowledge does not depend only on the epitome of Philonides of Laodicea (Syria), a philosopher who lived at the court of Antiochus IV, between 200 and 130 BC, and who during his stays in Athens had access to the Garden's library.⁵⁰ Usener considered Philonides to be one of the sources available to Seneca (*contra* Setaioli 1988, 176). Of course, especially in the first 29 letters of the Senecan corre-

⁴⁸ "Assuming that we have a definite and preconceived idea (*certa notione animi praesentiamus*) of a deity as, first, a living being, and, secondly, a being unsurpassed in excellence by anything else in the whole of nature, I can see nothing that satisfies this preconception or idea (*praesensionem notionemque*) of ours more fully than, first, the judgement that this world, which must necessarily be most excellent of all things, is itself a living being and a god" (transl. Rackham).

⁴⁹ I would like to point out a recent book by Aubert-Baillet 2021; in particular, I refer to: *Épicure et les Épicuriens*, part II, chap. 3, 487–532. The scholar emphasizes the precision and subtlety of Cicero's references to classical and Hellenistic philosophy, as well as the variety in use and their function especially in the letters. This collection appears as a sort of laboratory of thought that allows us to see the genesis of bilingualism.

⁵⁰ Concerning Philonides, see Snyder 2000: 49–50; see *PHerc.* 1044, fr. 30.3–8 (ὀπομνήματα).

spondence, we can assume that the philosopher resorted to a gnomology and that he exploited the rubrics of moral matter: poverty *vs* wealth, life *vs* death, friendship.

However, the in-depth knowledge of some Epicurus' letters seems indubitable: this is true at least for *ep.* 9 where, in the name of the Stoic ideal of self-sufficiency, Seneca argues with the concept of friendship from both the Megaric Stilpo and Epicurus; see then *epp.* 21 and 22 (mentioning the letter to Idomeneus); the *ep.* 18, which refers to a group of letters sent by Epicurus to Polyaeus; *ep.* 52, in which Seneca pauses to examine the different character of his various pupils and, referring to an Epicurean schematization, distinguishes as follows: a) those who without the help of anyone manage to open the way to the truth; b) those who need a guide to trace their path and precede them; c) those who, by accepting to be guided and advised, are nevertheless unable to progress without the impulse of a *coactor*. Finally, *ep.* 79.15 on "celebrity" among posterity.

Ep. 9 is also interesting because Seneca signals the difficulty and the risk of misunderstanding inherent in the translation of ἀπάθεια:

[14] Sen. *ep.* 9.1-3

An merito reprehendat in quadam epistula Epicurus eos qui dicunt sapientem se ipso esse contentum et propter hoc amico non indigere, desideras scire. Hoc obicitur Stilboni ab Epicuro et iis quibus summum bonum visum est animus **impatiens**. In ambiguitatem incidendum est, si exprimere ἀπάθειαν uno verbo cito voluerimus et **impatientiam** dicere; poterit enim contrarium ei quod significare volumus intellegi. Nos eum volumus dicere **qui respuat omnis mali sensum**: accipietur is **qui nullum ferre possit malum**. Vide ergo num satius sit aut **invulnerabilem** animum dicere aut animum **extra omnem patientiam positum**. Hoc inter nos et illos interest: noster sapiens vincit quidem incommodum omne **sed sentit**, illorum ne sentit quidem. Illud nobis et illis commune est, sapientem se ipso esse contentum.⁵¹

As already mentioned, the reference to Epicurus is frequent. However, despite the abundance of citations present in the Senecan correspondence, we have a single text of which we have the Epicurean original:

⁵¹ "You are eager to know whether Epicurus was justified in the criticism expressed in one of his letters against those who say that the wise person is self-sufficient and for this reason has no need of a friend. It is a charge made by him against Stilpo and others who say that the highest good is an **impassive** mind. (If we choose to express the Greek word *apatheia* by a single term and say **impatientia**, we cannot help but create ambiguity, for *impatientia* can also be understood in the opposite sense to what we intend: we mean by it a **person who refuses to feel any misfortune**, but it will be taken to refer to **one who cannot bear any misfortune**. Consider, then, whether it might not be better to speak of the **invulnerable** mind or the mind **set beyond all suffering**.) Our position is different from theirs in that our wise person conquers all adversities, **but still feels them**; theirs does not even feel them. That the sage is self-sufficient is a point held in common between us" (transl. Graver).

[15] a) Sen. ep. 14.17

Nunc ad cotidianam stipem manum porrigis. Aurea te stipe implebo, et quia facta est auri mentio, accipe quemadmodum usus fructusque eius tibi esse gratior possit. **‘Is maxime divitiis fruitur qui minime divitiis indiget.’** ‘Ede’ inquis ‘auctorem.’ Ut scias quam benigni simus, propositum est aliena laudare: Epicuri est aut Metrodori aut alicuius ex illa officina.⁵²

[15] b) Epic., Men. 130

ἥδιστα πολυτελείας ἀπολαύουσιν οἱ ἥκιστα ταύτης δεόμενοι.⁵³

Note the translation of πολυτελείας with *divitiis*: the Epicurean context refers to abundance during a banquet (as Saint Ambrose will interpret in taking up, as if it were a maxim, the Epicurean text; see Ambros., *Epist. Classis* I, 63, 19: *quod ii copiiis convivii moderate utantur qui non immoderate eas quaerunt*). Seneca instead intends to refer to wealth and the lust for wealth. Is this a signal, perhaps, that the Epicurean maxim was handed down in isolation in a *gnomologium*?

As for the methods of the Seneca’s translation, not only in some cases does Seneca provide more than one version or reading of the original;⁵⁴ above all we must also remember that he, like Cicero, often uses Epicurus to reinforce the Stoic point of view.

An example – certainly limited, but no less significant for this – is *KD XVI*, which we have already partially addressed:

[16] a) *KD XVI*

Βραχέα σοφῶ τύχη παρεμπίπτει, τὰ δὲ μέγιστα καὶ κυριώτατα ὁ λογισμὸς διώκηκε καὶ κατὰ τὸν συνεχῆ χρόνον τοῦ βίου διοικεῖ καὶ διοικήσει.⁵⁵

[16] b) Cic., *fin.* 1.63

Optime vero Epicurus, quod **exiguam dixit fortunam intervenire sapienti**, maximasque ab eo et gravissimas res consilio ipsius et ratione administrari.⁵⁶

⁵² “Now you are stretching out your hand for the daily dole; I will fill you up with a golden one. And since I have mentioned gold, learn how the use and enjoyment of it may be made more pleasant for you: **He enjoys riches most who has least need of riches.** ‘Tell me the author,’ you say. Just to show you how generous I am, I am determined to praise another’s material: it is Epicurus, or Metrodorus, or somebody from that shop” (transl. Graver). Seneca’s uncertainty in attributing the translated maxim to Epicurus rather than to Metrodorus is probably due to the *gnomologium* he had in his hands; see Setaioli 1988: 184–189.

⁵³ “Those who need it less enjoy abundance with greater pleasure.”

⁵⁴ See, among others, *ep.* 97.13.

⁵⁵ “Luck has little importance for the wise, since reason has already preordained the greatest and most important things, and for the whole course of life it preorders and preorders them.” Stob. II 8.28 (p. 159, 18–19 Wach.) provides a shorter text: βραχέα σοφῶ τύχη παρεμπίπτει, τὰ δὲ μέγιστα καὶ κυριώτατα λογισμὸς διώκηκε κατὰ τὸν βίου συνεχῆ χρόνον.

⁵⁶ “Epicurus made the excellent remark that ‘**Chance hardly affects the wise**’; the really important and serious things are under the control of their own deliberation and reason” (transl. Woolf).

[16] c) Cic., *fin.* 2.89

Ita fit beatae vitae domina **fortuna**, quam Epicurus ait **exiguam intervenire sapienti**.⁵⁷

[16] d) Cic., *Tusc.* 5.26

Quid melius quam **fortunam exiguam intervenire sapienti**?⁵⁸

[16] e) Sen., *const. sap.* 15.4

Ne putes istam Stoicam esse durtitiam, Epicurus, quem uos patronum inertiae uestrae adsumitis putatisque mollia ac desidiosa praecipere et ad uoluptates ducentia, **raro** inquit **sapienti fortuna interuenit**.⁵⁹

Both Cicero and Seneca exploit only the initial part of the Epicurean maxim. Did this only belong to a gnomology which they both referred to? We do not know. However, clearly the second part of the maxim argues in favour of a rigid determinism that neither Cicero nor Seneca think about. The rationality of *sapiens* (i.e., *consilium* and *ratio*) seems important for Cicero; Seneca, rather, aims to re-evaluate the meaning of pleasure. As for the translation of the maxim: Seneca perfectly retains the order of words; Cicero does not. Cicero keeps the *iunctura* “fortunam exiguam” (i.e., noun and attribute); Seneca uses an adverb: “raro”.

Now, however, here is letter 66, which constitutes an interesting example because it is exceptionally not concentrated only on the moral side, but also addresses medical issues and thereby, inevitably, the specialized terminology of medicine. We must first assume that Seneca is able to directly read the letter written by Epicurus, on his deathbed, to Idomeneus. Writing to his friend Claranus, Seneca focuses on the meaning of virtue and a happy life, the role of reason, the tranquility of an honest man. In § 18, Seneca evokes the iconic example of the Phalaris bull and confronts Epicurus. We do not have the original of this reference, but only what is reported by Diog. Laert. X 118: “Even in torture the wise man is happy” (κἂν στρεβλωθῆ δ’ ὁ σοφόν, εἶναι αὐτὸν εὐδαίμονα). Well, Seneca reports the exclamation of Epicurus in reference to the Phalaris story: “Dulce est et ad me nihil pertinet ... dulce esse torreri”.⁶⁰ This is not the case for Seneca and for the Stoic school, which, on the other hand, distinguishes very well between pain and pleasure; thus, as Seneca will specify in the following *letter* 67, evoking the Stoic Attalus:

⁵⁷ “So the happy life turns out to be at the mercy of chance, despite Epicurus’ claim that **chance hardly affects the wise**” (transl. Woolf).

⁵⁸ “What is better than to say **‘Fortune makes little impact on the wise man?’**” (transl. Douglas).

⁵⁹ “Lest you consider it to be a hardness of the Stoics, Epicurus – whom you assume as the patron of your inertia and whom you consider the proponent of soft and lazy precepts and conducive to pleasure – says: **‘Fortune is rarely an impediment to the wise.’**”

⁶⁰ See Cic., *Tusc.* 2.17: “quam suave est, quam hoc non curo”; *Tusc.* 5.31: “quam hoc suave est”; 5.73: “quam pro nihilo puto”; *fin.* 2.88: “Quam hoc suave”; 5.80: “Quam suave est! Quam nihil curo!”; *Pison.* 42: “... dicturum tamen suave illud esse.” According to Setaioli 1988, 234, Seneca may have Cicero present.

[17] Sen., ep. 67.15-16

'Malo me fortuna in castris suis quam in delicis habeat. Torqueor, sed fortiter: bene est. Occidor, sed fortiter: bene est.' Audi Epicurum, dicet et 'dulce est'. Ego tam honestae rei ac severae numquam nomen molle inponam. Uror, sed invictus: quidni hoc potabile sit? – non quod urit me ignis, sed quod non vincit.⁶¹

Returning to *letter* 66, in the concluding part Seneca takes up the Epicurean *Letter to Idomeneus*:

[18] a) Sen., ep. 66.47

Dabo apud Epicurum tibi etiamnunc simillimam huic nostrae divisionem bonorum. Alia enim sunt apud illum quae malit contingere sibi, ut corporis quietem ab omni incommodo liberam et animi remissionem bonorum suorum contemplatione gaudentis; alia sunt quae, quamvis nolit accidere, nihilominus laudat et conprobat, tamquam illam quam paulo ante dicebam malae valetudinis et dolorum gravissimorum perpessionem, in qua Epicurus fuit illo **summo ac fortunatissimo die suo**. Ait enim se **vesicae et exulcerati ventris tormenta** tolerare ulteriorem doloris accessionem non recipientia, esse **nihilominus sibi illum beatum diem**. **Beatum autem diem agere nisi qui est in summo bono non potest.**⁶²

[18] b) Sen., ep. 92.25

Quid porro? non aequae incredibile videtur aliquem in summis cruciatibus positum dicere 'beatus sum'? Atqui haec vox in ipsa officina voluptatis audita est. **'Beatissimum' inquit 'hunc et ultimum diem ago'** Epicurus, cum illum hinc **urinae difficultas** torqueret, hinc insanabilis exulcerati dolor ventris.⁶³

[18] c) Epic., ad Idom.

τὴν μακαρίαν ἄγοντες καὶ ἅμα τελευτῶντες ἡμέραν τοῦ βίου ἐγράφομεν ὑμῖν ταυτὶ **στραγγουρικά** τε παρηκολούθει καὶ **δυσεντερικά πάθη** ὑπερβολὴν οὐκ ἀπολείποντα

⁶¹ "I would rather have fortune keep me in its encampments than in luxury. I am tortured, but courageously; it is well. I am slain, but courageously; it is well.' Listen to Epicurus; he will say also 'It is pleasant.' I, however, will never call such a stern and honorable deed by so soft a name. I am burned, but undefeated: why should this not be desirable? Not because the fire burns me but because it does not defeat me" (transl. Graver).

⁶² "I will show you a division of goods in Epicurus that is again very similar to this one of ours. In his works, there are some things which he prefers to have happen to him – such as 'rest for the body, free from every discomfort, and relaxation for the mind as it rejoices in contemplating its own goods' – and other things which, although he prefers them not to happen, he nonetheless praises and regards with favor, including what I was talking about a little while ago: the endurance of ill health and of very severe pain. That is what Epicurus himself went through on that **'last and most blessed day' of his life**. For he said that the torments he was experiencing from **his bladder and from stomach ulcers** were 'such as do not admit of any increase of pain,' **but that all the same that was a 'blessed day' for him**. **But one cannot spend a blessed day unless he is in possession of the highest good**" (transl. Graver).

⁶³ "But wait – don't we find it equally incredible that someone undergoing extreme torment should say, 'I am happy'? Yet those words have been heard within the very workshop of pleasure. **'This final day of my life is the happiest,'** said Epicurus when he was experiencing the double torture of **urinary blockage** and an incurable ulcer of the stomach" (transl. Graver).

τοῦ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς μεγέθους· ἀντιπαρετάττετο δὲ πᾶσι τούτοις τὸ κατὰ ψυχὴν χαῖρον ἐπὶ τῇ τῶν γεγονότων ἡμῖν διαλογισμῶν μνήμῃ.⁶⁴

[18] d) Cic., *fin.* 2.96

Audi, ne longe abeam, moriens quid dicat Epicurus, ut intellegas facta eius cum dictis discrepare: ‘Epicurus Hermarcho salutem. Cum ageremus’, inquit, ‘vitae beatum et eundem supremum diem, scribebamus haec. tanti autem aderant **vesicae et torminum morbi**, ut nihil ad eorum magnitudinem posset accedere.’ Miserum hominem! Si dolor summum malum est, dici aliter non potest. sed audiamus ipsum: ‘Compensabatur’, inquit, ‘tamen cum his omnibus animi laetitia, quam capiebam memoria rationum inventorumque nostrorum. sed tu, ut dignum est tua erga me et philosophiam voluntate ab adolescentulo suscepta, fac ut Metrodori tueare liberos.’⁶⁵

Note that Seneca does not perform a calque of *στραγγουρία* but uses *urinae difficultas*. Cicero has *vesicae et torminum morbi*, where *torminum morbi* refers to *δυσεντερία*; in *Tusc.* 2.45, we find *quamis idem forticulum se in torminibus et in stranguria sua praebeat*, “... although he is strong enough to withstand renal colic”; in *fam.* 7.26.1 Cicero reports the expression: *στραγγουρικά και δυσεντερικά πάθη*.

Seneca demonstrates in this as in other cases the intention to also render the technical terminology in an understandable Latin.

The attention for Epicurus is always present in Seneca, as in Cicero. In Seneca it appears not only in the moral field – as can be seen from the quotations reported in the first 29 letters of the *Epistolary* to Lucilius⁶⁶ – but also in the scientific field. An example among many is given by the evocation of the Epicurean thesis relating to the doctrine of earthquakes (*nat. q.* 6.20.5), where, among other things, the Senecan method of approaching and comparing different doctrines (Aristotle, Democritus, Metrodorus, Epicurus) corresponds to the way in which Epicurus dealt with the analysis of phenomena that cannot be verified by direct experience (i.e., the method of the plurality of possible causes).⁶⁷

⁶⁴ “I was spending the blessed day and, at the same time, the last of my life when I was writing you this letter. **The pains of the bladder and of the entrails** were such that they could not be greater than those. Yet all these things were opposed by the joy of the soul for the memory of our past conversations.”

⁶⁵ “So let me remind you of what Epicurus said on his deathbed, and you will see that his deeds are at odds with his words: ‘Epicurus sends Hermarchus his greetings. I am writing on the last day of my life, but a happy one. **My bladder and bowels** are so diseased that they could hardly be worse.’ Poor man! If pain really is the greatest evil, that is all one can say. He continues: ‘Yet all this is counterbalanced by the joy I feel as I recall my theories and discoveries. If you are to live up to the goodwill you have shown towards me and towards philosophy since your youth, then be sure to take care of Metrodorus’ children’” (transl. Woolf).

⁶⁶ The characteristics of the quotations from Epicurus in the first part of the Senecan Letters have been the subject of frequent investigations. See in particular: Setaioli 1988: 182-223; Maso 1999: 103-131.

⁶⁷ As for the *pleonachos tropos* (the method of the plurality of possible causes), see recently Masi 2022: 259-275.

3. SOME CONCLUSIONS

Cicero and Seneca constitute two exceptional opportunities to focus on the way in which the transmission of philosophy (and the technical philosophical language) from Greece to Rome occurred. Here we have addressed the method and intentions with which they approached the Epicurean doctrine. We are not faced with two professional translators, but with two scholars capable of grasping, interpreting, and transferring the thoughts of an original master of Greek philosophy into their native language. By focusing on some key words, we were able to detect the effort to compare two worldviews, adapting some Greek concepts to a new linguistic context not yet perfectly equipped for the requirements of philosophical reflection. Both Cicero and Seneca are aware of the risks involved in translation: the translator has the responsibility to misunderstand, thus transmitting the outcome of the misunderstanding to disciples and potential new readers. This function is especially evident when translating a single key word. In fact, *transliteration* leaves the door open to the direct appropriation of the original (and the etymological meaning it contains). However, it does not mean that we cannot intervene again at a later stage and suggest a real translation proposal. The same thing happens when a *circumlocution* constitutes the translation: meaning is approached with caution, but in a reliable way; however, the opportunity for future language choice is open. Instead, in the case of *translation with a word* already existing in the Latin language, the translator's responsibility is immediately evident. What he 'chooses' will leave its mark. This circumstance is evident when different words are proposed to translate the same concept present in Greek: think of εἰκὼν (for which there is *simulacrum*, *species*), but also of πρόληψις, for which there are: *praesagire* (Lucretius), *praesensio*, *praenotio*, *anticipatio* (Cicero), and *praesumptio* (Seneca, *ep.* 117.6, who uses this technical word to indicate the man's knowledge of the gods). In the case of the Epicurean ἐνάργεια, Cicero without hesitation proposes *perspicuitas* or *evidentia* (*Luc.* 17); Seneca never uses these nouns but only the inflected forms of the verb *perspicere* (e.g., *ep.* 109.18; *nat. q.* 3 *pr.* 1), and, on two occasions, the attribute *evidens* (*ep.* 13.12; *nat. q.* 2.32.1).

From what we have been able to ascertain, regarding the Epicurean doctrine, Cicero and Seneca both acted with the intention of not compromising the meaning of the original. Cicero probably did so as motivated by the aim to show in an unequivocal way the limits of the doctrine he opposed; Seneca, with the intent of illuminating its hidden qualities to propose them in a new theoretical context, the Stoic one.⁶⁸ We can grasp this intention also from the small details that characterize Seneca's stylistic signature. As a possible example, we can consider the Epicurean

⁶⁸ This is the well-known thesis expressed in *ep.* 33.6-7, where he compares the simple Epicurean *flosculi* to the substantial harvest of the Stoics.

maxim (unfortunately not available to us in the original) that Seneca, in *ep.* 23.9, translates in two different ways: (a) “molestum est semper vitam inchoare”, or, as he explains *si hoc modo magis semper sensus potest exprimi*, (b) “male vivunt qui semper vivere incipiunt”. Evidently the meaning of the two translations is the same, but, in the second one, we immediately grasp the mark of the Stoic Seneca in the polyptotus *vivunt / vivere*.⁶⁹

On a more general level, we can think of the way in which Seneca – after Cicero – re-elaborates the doctrine of “living unnoticed” (λάθη βιώσας) and of renouncing the tiring occupations of daily life (ἀσχολία), re-proposing it as the doctrine of *otium*.⁷⁰

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⁶⁹ Setaioli 1988, 199-200, points out this quality and suggests that the Greek original may have contained the obvious: βίου ... ζῶμεν.

⁷⁰ Concerning the λάθη βιώσας, for which see Plutarch., *lat. viv.* 1129C, refer to Roskam 2007: 33-41. In the surviving Epicurus’ texts, we find only allusions to the topic of engagement and lack of time or leisure (ἀσχολία): *Pyth.* 85; *Sent. Vat.* 14; *ep. fr.* 119 [Arrighetti]. On the relationship between Cicero’s and Seneca’s interpretation of *otium*, see Maso 2023: 182-187.

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