

“then truly the life of the gods will pass to men”: Contemplating Diogenes of Oenoanda’s Golden Age

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EPICUREANS are well known for their preoccupation with the present and their avoidance of the anxieties that may be caused by fretting over the uncontrollable future. Since one can only exert direct influence over the present, the only viable strategy to enhance *ataraxia* and increase one’s happiness is to enjoy the present moment to the fullest by living it in accordance with the principles of Epicurean doctrine.

1. *Thinking about the present, but keeping one eye on the future?*

When Diogenes of Oenoanda in Lycia, a wealthy citizen as well as an Epicurean philosopher, decided that, before he died,¹ he wanted to share the benefits of Epicurean doctrine with present and future citizens and visitors of Oenoanda, he had stonemasons cover a stoa’s wall with a monumental inscription containing treatises on ethics, physics, and old age. Although this wall is no longer standing and the stone blocks of the inscription have been re-used elsewhere in the city, many fragments of the text have been recovered and reassembled, gradually enabling us to gain some insight in Diogenes’ philosophical legacy.

One of these recovered fragments, NF 184, shows that Diogenes was no exception with regard to the typically Epicurean orientation towards the present, rather than to the uncertain

¹ As far as Diogenes’ life and death are concerned, we know only that he probably lived during the first half of the second century A.D. and that he commissioned the work on the inscription as an old man. Cf. M. F. Smith, *Diogenes of Oinoanda. The Epicurean Inscription* (Naples 1993) 35–48.

future:²

- τὸ παρὸν δε[.]ῖ
 ποιεῖν τέλε[.]ι-
 [ο]ν, οὐ πρὸς τὸ ἀ-
 πολειπόμενον
 4 ζῆν λέγοντα· ἔ[ως]
 ἂν ἔτι μοι γένηται
 τόδε καὶ τόδε.

One must make the present perfect, and not live with an orientation to the future, saying: Until such and such a thing still happens to me.

Nevertheless, this same Diogenes has also produced the extraordinary fr.56, describing what seems to be a future Golden Age of Epicureanism, when the life of the gods will pass to men. Being unparalleled in any other Epicurean writing we know of, this apparent *Fremdkörper* continues to puzzle scholars with its at first sight seemingly un-Epicurean interest in the future.

In this article I will try to determine whether Diogenes' Golden Age should be read as a plausible scenario for a yet undefined period in the future, or as a mere hypothesis with no plausibility whatsoever. Then I will attempt to determine how fr.56 could have been conceptualized as a functional part within the framework of orthodox Epicurean ethics. To do so I will focus on fr.56, col. I.1–12, which deals with the conditions for the Golden Age as well as its general characteristics:

- [τὴν μὲν οὖν σοφίαν οὐ πανταχοῦ κομι]-
 οὔμεν, ἐπεὶ πάντες μὴ
 δύνανται. δυνατὴν δὲ
 αὐτὴν ἂν ὑποθώμεθα,
 4 τότε ὡς ἀληθῶς ὁ τῶν
 θεῶν βίος εἰς ἀνθρώπους
 μεταβήσεται. δικαιο-
 σύνης γὰρ ἔσται μεστὰ

² Text and translation provided by Smith in J. Hammerstaedt and M. F. Smith, *The Epicurean Inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda. Ten Years of New Discoveries and Research* (Bonn 2014) 125–126.

- 8 πάντα καὶ φιλαλληλίας,
καὶ οὐ γενήσεται τειχῶν
ἢ νόμων χρεία καὶ πάν-
των ὅσα δι' ἀλλήλους
12 σκευωρούμεθα.

[So we shall not achieve wisdom universally], since not all are capable of it. But if we assume it to be possible, then truly the life of the gods will pass to men. For everything will be full of justice and mutual love, and there will come to be no need of fortifications or laws and all the things which we contrive on account of one another.

If we contrast NF 184 with fr.56, at first sight the latter's orientation to the future does not seem to be compatible with the Epicurean's explicit focus on the present. Why does Diogenes ask his reader not to look to the future, while at the same time enthusiastically depicting an idealized future? G. Roskam and more recently P.-M. Morel³ have offered a possible solution to this apparent discrepancy. According to them, we should not read fr.56 as an actual description of a time to come, but rather as a strictly hypothetical future, possibly even an *obiter dictum* following an explicit confirmation of the hypothesis' unreality. Morel argues that, although the future tense does indeed seem to suggest a description of a time to come, the construction of a subjunctive with ἄν rather expresses eventuality, while τότε does not necessarily refer to a point in time. Furthermore, Morel points out that Hermarchus also writes about the possibility of a universal grasp of Epicurean wisdom as a distinct unreality.⁴

If we follow this line of thought, fr.56 can indeed be read as a hypothesis with strong protreptic qualities, rather than as a prediction of a realistic future. Diogenes invites his readers as it were

³ G. Roskam, *Live unnoticed (Λάθε βιώσας). On the Vicissitudes of an Epicurean Doctrine* (Leiden/Boston 2007) 134–135; P.-M. Morel, “La terre entière, une seule patrie. Diogène d’Oenanda et la politique,” in J. Hammerstaedt et al. (eds.), *Diogenes of Oenoanda. Epicureanism and Philosophical Debates / Diogène d’Oenoanda. Épicurisme et controverses* (Leuven 2017) 236–240.

⁴ Herm. ap. Porph. *Abst.* I 8.4 (= fr.34 Longo Auricchio): εἰ δὲ πάντες ἐδύναντο βλέπειν ὁμοίως καὶ μνημονεύειν τὸ συμφέρον, οὐδὲν ἄν προσεδέοντο νόμων.

to join him in the intellectual exercise of envisioning an Epicurean Golden Age, starting with the premise that in this hypothetical time universal wisdom is possible. Since philosophical practice in the Epicurean Garden probably consisted of the application of Epicurean doctrine to all kinds of practical situations, it is safe to assume that for an Epicurean thinker Diogenes' Golden Age would be a marvellous intellectual playground where all facets of Epicurean doctrine could be explored without being hampered by the limitations of real life.

2. *Diogenes' garrulity: the Golden Age as an obiter dictum?*

Yet I believe that the purpose of fr.56 entails more than just being an interesting philosophical exercise. In light of the Epicurean focus on living the good life in the present, it is highly unlikely Diogenes would have aimed to encourage his readers to actively look forward to the coming of a Golden Age. Not only would such an encouragement be rather unusual for an Epicurean, but it could even be counterproductive to Diogenes' overall project, since his intended readers, neophytes who have only just started to take their first steps toward Epicureanism, could very well be distracted from the doctrinal preoccupation with the present, as expressed by Diogenes' own words in NF 184.

Nonetheless, I will argue Diogenes can have considered the Golden Age of fr.56 to be plausible without diverging from the orthodox position or undermining his own project. First I must confront Roskam's suggestion that the hypothesis of fr.56 may be an *obiter dictum* after the explicit negation of its plausibility.

The conjecture that Smith provides for the words preceding col. I.1 certainly supports this reading. In line 1 Diogenes clearly indicates that something is (at least in the present) impossible for us, "since not all are capable of it." Although the exact nature of this impossible feat was presumably specified in the preceding lines that are lost to us, the surviving lines strongly suggest that the aforesaid impossibility concerns a necessary condition for the Epicurean good life.

If we follow Smith, this currently unattainable good is a state of universal wisdom, *condicio sine qua non* for the realisation of the Golden Age. Smith also completes the remaining part of the

verb form -οὔμεν to [κομι]οὔμεν, which would indeed imply that the necessary conditions for the Golden Age will not be reached in the future either. However, this conjecture is the only factor that definitively excludes the possibility of a plausible, albeit not *per se* real future of universal Epicureanism. If we change Smith's restoration so that it more or less retains its meaning, replacing [κομι]οὔμεν however with a verb in the present tense rather than the future, fr.56 will no longer rule out the possibility of universal Epicureanism in the future, but will only state that nowadays not all people are capable of reaching such wisdom, making a kind of Golden Age impossible in the present, but not necessarily in the future.⁵

As mentioned above, fr.56 is perfectly compatible with Epicurean thought and practice by reading it as nothing more than an intellectual exercise, which would fit well with the daily practice of philosophical conversation in the Athenian Garden or any other Epicurean circle of friends. However, this fragment is not part of a conversation with like-minded friends: instead, it is part of Diogenes' grand project of making Epicurean doctrine accessible to anyone passing the inscription, Greeks and barbarians alike, so long as they have the right disposition towards a philosophical lifestyle. If Diogenes' aim is to provide potential students of Epicureanism with a representative overview of Epicurean doctrine, the topics covered in his inscription should be representative and relevant. An *obiter dictum* about a hypothetical Golden Age would definitely not be an ideal way to contribute to the reader's understanding of Epicureanism, as it would also entail a very real risk of distracting the reader from Epicurean core values. Even supposing that the elaborate non-essential information provided in such an *obiter dictum* would in some way successfully meet the criteria of relevance and representative-

⁵ An alternative restoration could be [ὀλίγους γὰρ κοινωνίαν / ποιούντας ἀνθρώπων / σοφῶν κατανο]οὔμεν, ἐπεὶ πάντες μὴ / δύνανται. This is based on the conjecture offered by A. Barigazzi, "Un pensiero avveniristico nel Giardino di Epicuro," *Prometheus* 4 (1978) 1–17, and retains the general sense of Smith, but does exclude the possibility of achieving universal wisdom in the future.

ness, it still seems very doubtful that Diogenes would incorporate it in his inscription at the risk of confusing potential new students of Epicureanism on vital points of its doctrine.

Moreover, the fact that we are dealing with an inscription in stone that was designed to be publicly accessible probably means that, at least to a certain extent, Diogenes had to adopt an economical approach to the selection of the text, taking into account the available space and the amount of labour required to finish the inscription. This being so, it could be argued that Diogenes does not always write as succinctly as one might expect of the author of an inscription on a wall, which could lead us to read fr.56 as an example of Diogenes' garrulity. However, Smith points out that Diogenes' chattiness is a functional one, which serves the purpose of stylistically adapting the text to the intended reader, mimicking the manner of speech that one would adopt when actually talking to a person in the street.⁶ We may well wonder whether fr.56 should be read as a mere example of amiable chattiness for the intended reader's sake, given that with this passage Diogenes is dedicating a significant amount of text to the description of his Golden Age and the agricultural activities of that time to come.

As Diogenes seems to have tailored his inscription to the needs of a heterogenous group of readers, providing them a clear and digestible introduction to Epicureanism, it seems unlikely that he would have indulged himself in an *obiter dictum* offering non-essential information at the risk of seriously distracting neophyte readers from a core value of Epicurean doctrine.⁷ Therefore, I seriously doubt that in this open library of Epicureanism Diogenes would include the depiction of a Golden Age that is held

⁶ Smith, *The Epicurean Inscription* (1996) 112–113, also notes that Diogenes' talkativeness is mostly confined to the introductory passages, where addressing the reader as a direct interlocutor would best serve the inscription's missionary project.

⁷ See G. Roskam, "Epicurean Philosophy in Open Access: The Intended Reader and the Authorial Approach of Diogenes of Oenoanda," *EpiGAnat* 48 (2015) 151–174, for an extensive study of Diogenes' open access project and the way he adapts his message to his intended readers.

to be a priori and straightforwardly unrealistic.

One could argue that this Golden Age might be part of a polemical refutation of such idealistic futures, but if that were the case, one would expect Diogenes to depict and refute the Golden Age of non-Epicureans who in their ignorance look to the future. Instead he clearly describes an ideal future in which all live in accordance with Epicurean doctrine. This makes it unlikely that an attack against the impossibility of such a Golden Age could in any way be polemically beneficial to Diogenes' Epicurean position.

Describing a plausible, albeit not necessarily real, Epicurean Golden Age, on the contrary, may indeed have been part of a polemical attack against authors of a different type of Golden Age, such as Hesiod, but also against philosophers like Plato and Posidonius.⁸

Furthermore, the interpretation of the Golden Age as a strictly hypothetical scenario fails to do justice to the *futuralis* construction of line 3. If we read the text closely Diogenes does not really invite us to assume that the achievement of universal wisdom is possible, subsequently summing up the ramifications of this assumption. Instead he tells us that if we will in the future have assumed⁹ that wisdom is attainable, the life of the gods will pass to men.¹⁰ Grammatically the assumption of the attainability of wisdom as a premise is depicted as a possible event in the future, which will lead to the Golden Age scenario described with a series of verbs in the future tense.¹¹ Here Diogenes appears to

⁸ Cf. Morel, in *Diogenes/Diogenè* 235–236.

⁹ Provided of course that Smith, *The Epicurean Inscription* 242, is right to decipher the damaged letters as ὄν ὑποθώμεθα (line 3). For A. Casanova, *I frammenti di Diogene d'Enoanda* (Florence 1984) 277, this specific part of the text remains a *locus desperatus*.

¹⁰ Smith, *The Epicurean Inscription* 504, has pointed out this subtle distinction, but it appears that its possible ramifications have been largely ignored.

¹¹ Kühner/Gerth, *Ausführliche Grammatik* II 474–475, describe this type of construction: “In futurischem Sinne entspricht im allgemeinen ἔάν c. conj. Praes. der lat. *si c. Fut.*, und ἔάν c. conj. Aor. dem lat. *si c. Fut. exact.*” For a more recent approach see A. Rijksbaron, *The Syntax and Semantics of the Verb in*

take a leap in his reasoning: while the assumption that wisdom can be achieved is presented as a future possibility, the coming of a Golden Age of Epicureanism is described in terms of a certain consequence of this possible future assumption. In other words: assuming that universal wisdom is achievable will certainly lead to a situation in which the life of the gods will pass to men.

Diogenes, however, does not explain the modalities of the causal relation between merely assuming that universal wisdom is attainable, on the one hand, and the dawn of a Golden Age on the other. If he indeed sees a causal relation between these two events, without deeming it necessary to add an explanation of this step in his reasoning, this could mean that the theoretical underpinnings of his line of reasoning have already been dealt with in a part of the text that is lost to us. In any case, Diogenes wrote his inscription at an introductory level and with special attention to the specific needs of his readers, which makes it unlikely that he would take a considerable leap in his reasoning without having provided his neophyte readers with the theoretical background necessary to comprehend such a leap.

3. *Bridging the gap in Diogenes' reasoning: a possible solution*

3.1. *Enter diathesis*

How then, is it possible that the mere assumption of achievability would certainly lead to a situation of universal wisdom? Although what is left of Diogenes' text does not offer us many clues, and all attempts to explain this problematic causality can only be hypothetical, I will try to offer at least a possible solution.

What Diogenes' position, as it is phrased here, implies is that the condition for the realisation of the Golden Age consists in a change of our way of thinking about the attainability of wisdom

Classical Greek (Amsterdam 2002) 69, who describes the construction ἐάν (ἤν, ἄν) + subjunctive with a future indicative in the apodosis in terms of a condition referring to the future of which the fulfilment is considered very well possible. The aorist subjunctive (ὑποθέμεθα) indicates that the state of affairs of the *protasis* (in this case the assumption that wisdom is attainable) is anterior to that of the *apodosis* (the life of the gods passing to men).

(“if we will think X, then Y will certainly follow”), which means first that the starting point of the process that will lead to the life of the gods passing to men lies within our own mental disposition and second that we ourselves are capable of actively altering this disposition.

The human mental disposition or *diathesis* is in fact a recurring theme in Epicurean ethics, and also features in debates on Epicurean theology and the perception of the gods.¹² For Philodemus of Gadara, for instance, a thorough understanding of someone's *diathesis* is essential for diagnosing and treating sicknesses of the soul. In Philodemian therapeutics, emotions, vices, and character traits are all described in terms of mental dispositions, which can be altered through the administration of the correct philosophical medicine.¹³ Someone with a faulty *diathesis* can for example be irascible and therefore unable to achieve a state of *ataraxia*, but if he allows his *diathesis* to be cured by Epicurean doctrine, the irascibility will eventually disappear, thus enabling him to achieve *ataraxia*.

3.2. *Diathesis in Diogenes*

There are several indications that Diogenes, whose intentions (cf. fr.3) are no less therapeutic than those of Philodemus, has also given some thought to the *diathesis* of his potential readers, which leads me to make a case for Epicurean *diathesis* as a plausible solution to the enigma presented by fr.56.

First of all, Diogenes addresses his readers in various ways, ranging from a generic ἄνθρωπε (fr.3.iii.9) all the way up to a for Epicureans far from insignificant ὦ φίλοι (fr.21.iii.14),¹⁴ a varia-

¹² For the theological debate see A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge 1987) I 144–147; J. Mansfeld, “Aspects of Epicurean Theology,” *Mnemosyne* 46 (1993) 172–210; M. Wifstrand Schiebe, “Sind die epikureischen Götter *Thought-Constructs*?” *Mnemosyne* 56 (2003) 703–727; H. Essler, *Glücklich und unsterblich. Epikureische Theologie bei Cicero und Philodem* (Basel 2011).

¹³ Cf. V. Tsouna, *The Ethics of Philodemus* (Oxford 2007) 38–39.

¹⁴ The term is strongly reminiscent of the Epicurean practice of organizing themselves in circles of like-minded friends.

tion that could, as Roskam argues,¹⁵ very well reflect Diogenes' intention to address a variegated group of readers. In the programmatic introduction to the *Physics* Diogenes twice uses εὐσύγκριτοι to indicate the intended readers of this treatise (fr.2.ii.14, 3.iii.4–5), a technical term that in atomist contexts refers to those persons who have a good atomic constitution. In the context of Diogenes' *Physics* such persons are those who by nature¹⁶ or through training¹⁷ possess the right atomic composition that enables them to read and appreciate the columns of Epicurean teachings presented to them.¹⁸ In his *Ethics* Diogenes uses the phrase στόμα κόσμοι to describe his intended readers (fr.30.i.8–12), which is in fact an uncertain reading presenting some serious grammatical difficulties. Smith offers the translation “those people who are civil-spoken,” a trait that would certainly befit the εὐσύγκριτοι named at the beginning of the *Physics*. Since Diogenes apparently intended the readers of his treatises to start with the *Physics* and read the *Ethics* afterwards,¹⁹ it is safe to say that ideally the reader of the *Ethics*, and therefore also of our fr.56, is one of the εὐσύγκριτοι addressed in the introduction to the *Physics*, i.e. a person whose atoms are arranged in the right fashion. In light of the peculiar meaning of this term it is in my opinion relatively safe to say that being one of the εὐσύγκριτοι is in fact the same thing as having the right *diathesis* or mental disposition, given that in Epicurean psychological materialism one's ψυχή is considered a body composed of atoms whose arrangement can be altered, which is also a fundamental characteristic of the Epicurean *diathesis*.

Second, in fr.112, which is part of the *Maxims* and has an ethical theme, Diogenes explicitly stresses the crucial role of

¹⁵ Roskam, *EpicAnat* 48 (2015) 151–156.

¹⁶ Cf. Plut. *Mor.* 1100A–B.

¹⁷ Cf. Lucr. 3.307–322.

¹⁸ Cf. A. Grilli, “ΔΙΑΘΕΣΙΣ in Epicuro,” in *ΣΥΖΗΤΗΣΙΣ. Studi sull'epicureismo greco e romano offerti a Marcello Gigante* (Naples 1983) 93, who points out that for Epicureans both the physical and the psychological parts of any human being are σώμα, and can therefore be described in atomist terms.

¹⁹ Cf. fr.43.i.8–10.

one's *diathesis* as the most important factor in the achievement of happiness:

- τὸ κεφάλαιον τῆς εὐ-
 δαιμονίας ἢ διάθε-
 σις, ἧς ἡμεῖς κύριοι.
 4 χαλεπὸν στρατεία
 κὰν ἐτέρων ἀρχῆ. ^{vacat}
 τὸ ῥητορεύειν σφυγμοῦ
 καὶ ταραχῆς γέμον,
 8 εἰ πεῖσαι δύναται. τί οὖν
 μεταδιώκομεν πρᾶ-
 γμα τοιοῦτον, οὐ τὴν
 [ἐ]ξουσίαν ἔχουσιν ἄλλοι;

The sum of happiness consists in our disposition, of which we are master. Military service is dangerous and one is subordinate to others. Public speaking is full of agitation and nervousness as to whether one can convince. Why then do we pursue an occupation like this, which is under the control of others?

As this fragment specifies *diathesis* as a core mechanism in an ethical context, it could very well play an important role in many other parts of the Ethics as well, including fr.56.

The fact that Diogenes uses the term εὐσύγκριτοι twice, combined with the fact that in fr.112 he stresses the importance of one's *diathesis* in an ethical context, makes for very good grounds to take Epicurean *diathesis* into consideration as a possible mechanism underlying the leap in Diogenes' reasoning.

3.3. "...then truly the life of the gods will pass to men"

According to Frischer²⁰ the Epicureans' view on the human mental disposition is a crucial part of the theoretical underpinnings of their recruitment of new students. Essentially, this theoretical basis entails that in order to attain Epicurean wisdom, our intellectual or cultural background is of little importance (cf. fr.111.7–11). The only, but also essential, condition is

²⁰ B. Frischer, *The Sculpted Word: Epicureanism and Philosophical Recruitment in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley 1982) 82–86.

that we possess a correct *diathesis* or mental disposition. We are all constantly attracted to the good life of the sage through the reception of images that are automatically and continuously emitted by sages and gods.²¹

However, if our *diathesis* is incorrect, it interferes with these streams of images, contaminating our impressions and preventing us from living the good life of the sage.²² An incorrect *diathesis* is one that has been contaminated by false presuppositions, such as the belief that the gods could punish us and that death should be feared. However, everyone has control over his own *diathesis*, so that an incorrect mental disposition can in fact be improved (Diogenes fr.112). Since the false presuppositions can be cured by means of a successful administration of the Epicurean *tetrapharmakos*, and the contaminated *diathesis* can thus be corrected, the divulgation of Epicurean doctrine could theoretically lead to a widespread correction of *diatheses*, eventually resulting in a universal receptiveness to the images emitted by the sages and gods.

When Diogenes writes that the life of the gods will pass to men if we will assume that wisdom is achievable, he may in fact mean that this will happen when we will all have acquired a correct

²¹ In Epicureanism exposure to role-models is instrumental in the achievement of wisdom. See M. Erler, “La sacralizzazione di Socrate e di Epicuro,” in M. Beretta et al. (eds.), *Il culto di Epicuro. Testi, iconografia e paesaggio* (Florence 2014) 1–13, on the ‘deification’ of great sages such as Epicurus and Socrates. Another illustration of the importance of role-models is found in Phld. *De bono rege*, col. XXIII.17–35, according to whom Telemachus’ journey to Pylos and Sparta plays an important role in his education, as it enables him to meet role-models like Nestor, Menelaus, and Helen. The educational function of these Homeric heroes would strike the treatise’s reader as very similar to Philodemus’ own practices as an Epicurean teacher; cf. J. Fish, “Philodemus’ *On the Good King according to Homer*. Columns 21–31,” *CronErcol* 32 (2002) 210–215. Frischer, *The Sculpted Word* 82–86, and “Ripensando *The Sculpted Word*. Come ricostruire e interpretare la statua di Epicuro oggi,” in *Il culto di Epicuro* 177–192, arguing that a similar mechanism may also underlie the Garden’s recruitment of new students by means of strategically positioned statues of the School’s founding fathers.

²² Phld. *Περὶ κακίων* col. v.18–24 (Jensen).

diathesis that enables us to receive the images of divine perfection. As long as our disposition is contaminated by false presuppositions, we simply cannot assume that wisdom is achievable, because we do not even know what wisdom or the good life looks like.

Acquiring a correct concept of the good life, free of false presuppositions, equals taking the achievability of wisdom and the good life as a fundament in all our endeavours. If we believe that the gods are the fickle and meddling Olympians we know from mythology, imitating their lifestyle would be a sure way to achieve the exact opposite of a good and happy life.

However, if this false presupposition is taken away, enabling us to perceive the life of the gods as a sober and tranquil one, full of mutual friendship,²³ attaining their lifestyle seems a feasible and worthwhile goal. Essentially we thus only need to cure our *diathesis*, which means eliminating erroneous notions and re-arranging our *diathesis*' layout, restoring it to a state that can be

²³ Epicurean theology is based on the precept that the gods are imperishable beings located in distant *intermundia* where they live in a state of perfect happiness and mutual friendship, without interfering with the lives of mortals. Their lifestyle is in fact archetypical for the state of wisdom and happiness every Epicurean should try to attain (cf. *Ep. Men.* 123–124, Lucr. 1. 44–49, 2.646–651). Philodemus also links the Epicurean ideal of circles of philosophically like-minded friends to the mutual friendship universally shared by the gods (*De dis* III fr.84.15–85.7 [pp.16–17 Diels]). It should be added that in the past the Epicurean belief in the existence of the gods has been hotly debated. From antiquity on, countless accusations of atheism have been made against the Epicureans (see D. Obbink, “The Atheism of Epicurus,” *GRBS* 30 [1989] 187–223; E. Spinelli, “Senza teodicea: critiche epicuree e argomentazioni pirroniane,” in D. De Sanctis et al. [eds.], *Questioni epicuree* [Sankt Augustin 2015] 213–234), which contributed to Long and Sedley’s hypothesis (*The Hellenistic Philosophers* I 145) that Epicurus’ gods may have been no more than “thought-constructs.” Since then, however, a number of scholars (among others Mansfeld, Wifstrand, Schiebe, and Essler, see n.12 above) have argued against the thought-construct theory, thus establishing the present dominance of the view that Epicurus really believed in the existence of perfectly happy gods living in a way that is exemplary for the good life which every Epicurean should strive to attain.

called εὐσυγκρίτη. Once our *diathesis* can again receive the continuous flow of images emitted by the gods, these will keep showing us what wisdom and the good life look like. Thus we shall also begin to recognise that such a life can indeed be realized and that we can achieve such a state by imitating the gods.

Diogenes' description of the Golden Age as a time when the life of the gods will pass to men seems reminiscent of the epilogue of Epicurus' *Letter to Menoecus*, where a similar phrase is used to describe the tranquil life of the sage, which is akin to that led by the gods themselves.²⁴ In this sense the life of the gods passing to men could merely be an elaborate way to refer to the Epicurean good life by alluding to the Master's own words. However, if we assume that fr.56 does indeed concern the Epicurean *diathesis* and its ability to receive images from the gods, a more literal interpretation of Diogenes' words would be appropriate. It is interesting to note in this context that the epilogue of Epicurus' *Letter to Menoecus* also contains a reference to images that we receive in our sleep and that may disturb us if we have not properly interiorized Epicurus' precepts.²⁵ This could have been an additional reason for Diogenes to include an allusion to the *Letter to Menoecus* in fr.56, provided that the *diathesis*-theory in fact underlies this fragment. Moreover, the inscription of Oenoanda also contains a number of fragments that explicitly deal with the images we receive in our sleep.²⁶

²⁴ *Ep.Men.* 135.2: ταῦτα οὖν καὶ τὰ τοῦτοις συγγενῇ μελέτα πρὸς σεαυτὸν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς πρὸς τε τὸν ὅμοιον σεαυτῷ, καὶ οὐδέποτε οὔθ' ὕπαρ οὔτ' ὄναρ διαταραχθήσῃ, ζήσῃ δὲ ὡς θεὸς ἐν ἀνθρώποις. οὐθὲν γὰρ ἔοικε θνητῷ ζῶν ζῶν ἄνθρωπος ἐν ἀθανάτοις ἀγαθοῖς.

²⁵ Cf. J. E. Heßler, *Epikur. Brief an Menoikeus* (Basel 2014) 326–327, who also notes that in Epicurean texts such images generally stem from the gods. Cf. Cic. *Nat.D.* 1.46, Lucr. 5.1161 ff.

²⁶ Fr.9, 10, 24, 43, 125; cf. R. Güremen, “Diogenes of Oinoanda and the Epicurean Epistemology of Dreams,” in *Diogenes of Oinoanda. Epicureanism and Philosophical Debates* 187–205, and A. Gigandet, “Diogène, Lucrèce et la théorie épicurienne de l’imaginaire. Fragment 9 – *De rerum natura* IV 971–993,” in *Diogenes of Oinoanda* 208–220.

Since Diogenes' treatises include a significant number of cross-references,²⁷ the lines preceding fr.56 col. I.1 could for all we know have contained explicit references to theological and epistemological principles that were explained in missing parts of the treatise on Physics.

Of course the hypothesis that the *diathesis*-theory might be the key to the problem presented by fr.56 cannot be proven, given the fragmentary nature of the text. But in view of the arguments presented above, it seems plausible that Diogenes would build his ethical concept of a Golden Age around what he himself calls τὸ κεφάλαιον τῆς εὐδαιμονίας (fr.112), firmly rooting his Golden Age in Epicurean physics, theology, and epistemology.

4. *Can we all become sages?*

One might argue against Diogenes' belief in the future possibility of universal wisdom, pointing out that in the inscription Diogenes does not always address any reader whatsoever, instead designating the εὐσύγκριτοι and the στόμα κόσμιοι as intended readers of respectively the physical and the ethical treatise. Nevertheless this does not necessarily mean that according to Diogenes the future achievement of wisdom should be restricted to those whose atomic constitution and level of civilisation corresponds to these terms. As Roskam puts it,²⁸ the intended reader of the inscription as a whole is πᾶς τις, with the only unavoidable limitation that they should obviously be able to read (or, as it seems to me, at least have someone read the text to them). That some more elaborate parts of the inscription, including the Golden Age fragment, are meant for a more select group of readers does not imply the impossibility of this Golden Age ever becoming reality. Diogenes himself explicitly states that the scope of his project is to cure the common disease that is affecting the majority of all people. It seems reasonable to assume that those who are already εὐσύγκριτοι are less ill than those belonging to the general group of πᾶς τις whose mental disposition is severely distorted. Therefore one would expect

²⁷ Cf. Roskam, *EpigAnat* 48 (2015) 165.

²⁸ Roskam, *EpigAnat* 48 (2015) 153.

that, as in all medical practices, the seriously diseased *πᾶς τις* also requires a stronger kind of medicine, which is easy to digest and works instantly. This type of addressee will certainly find such a medicine in the section of the inscription containing the Maxims, rather than in the more elaborate treatises that are meant for those whose ailments of the soul are less serious. However, the therapeutic process of *πᾶς τις* does not have to end at this point. Perhaps this same person will, after reading and absorbing the doctrine offered in the Maxims, find himself cured of a number of harmful false notions, thus taking a considerable step towards a mental state that is *εὐσύγκριτος*, which would in fact qualify him as a potential addressee of the physical and ethical treatises.²⁹

Thus a reader could make progress from being one type of addressee to becoming another in the same way in which the apostrophes *ἄνθρωπε* and *ὦ φίλοι* in the Physics may imply that through his eagerness to read a significant part of the physical treatise the reader has proven himself to be more than just any *ἄνθρωπος* (albeit one who is said to be *εὐσύγκριτος*), thus earning himself the right to be addressed as an (Epicurean) friend.³⁰

In his assumption that universal achievement of Epicurean wisdom is possible, Diogenes seems to go well beyond Epicurus' opinion on the matter, since the latter is said to have held that only Greeks could potentially become Epicureans.³¹ Diogenes

²⁹ Cf. Lucr. 3.307–322 where Lucretius explicitly states that any of our natural shortcomings that would keep us from leading the happy life can indeed all be remedied by philosophical training (*ratio*), leaving only traces of those original deficits that prevent us from living like the gods (320–322, *usque adeo naturarum vestigia linqui parvula ... ut nil impediatur dignam deo degere vitam*). Such a statement implies that even one who is by nature far from *εὐσύγκριτος* should be perfectly able to achieve the Epicurean *nec plus ultra* through the benefits of Epicurean teachings.

³⁰ Roskam, *EpicAnat* 48 (2015) 153.

³¹ Epic. fr.226 Usener: ὁ δὲ Ἐπίκουρος ἔμπαλιν ὑπολαμβάνει μόνους φιλοσοφῆσαι Ἕλληνας δύνασθαι and οὐδὲ μὴν ἐκ πάσης σώματος ἕξωως σοφὸν γενέσθαι ἂν οὐδ' ἐν παντὶ ἔθνη.

clearly diverges from this position, for in fr.30 he states that his philosophical inscription is meant for Greeks and foreigners alike.³² On a side note, we may well wonder whether the straightforward doxographic fr.226 Usener should be considered an accurate rendition of Epicurus' position on the point of Greeks and foreigners, since we know that Epicurus used to consider the Syrian Mithres a friend to whom he sent letters containing philosophical advise.³³

However that may be, Long and Sedley make a valid point when they suggest that Diogenes' more cosmopolitan position might be a reflection of the ideology of the Roman Empire and the zeitgeist of the Hellenized East.³⁴ As a witness of the unification and Romanization of almost the entire known world, Diogenes had far more reason for optimism about the plausibility of a universal divulgation of Epicurean philosophy than the Athenian city-state citizen Epicurus ever had.

³² For a more detailed study of Diogenes' systematic approach regarding different types of intended readers see again Roskam, *EpigAnat* 48 (2015) 151–174; For Grilli, in *ΣΥΖΗΤΗΣΙΣ* 50–54, the validity of fr.226 Usener must also apply to Diogenes. He therefore argues that Diogenes' category of εὐσύγκριτοι consists only of those who have been born with the right σύστασις, thus ruling out barbarians whose σύστασις would offer an inadequate basis on which to proceed towards the sage's *diathesis*. But this claim is contradicted by Diogenes' authorial approach, which seems to envisage πᾶς τις as one category of intended readers, while explicitly addressing both Greeks and barbarians.

³³ Diog. Laert. 10.4. Cf. Phld. Περὶ πλούτου (*P.Hercul.* 163 col. XXXVI.9–17 Tepedino Guerra = fr.79 Arrighetti). In a study on Epicurus' correspondence with Mithres and Idomeneus, M. Erbi, "Lettere dal *Kēpos*: l'impegno di Epicuro per i *philoï*," in *Questioni epicuree* 85, notes that Epicurus' letters to Mithres reveal "un sincero e vivo rapporto di affetto."

³⁴ *The Hellenistic Philosophers* II 143. Cf. P. Gordon, *Epicurus in Lycia. The Second-Century World of Diogenes of Oenoanda* (Ann Arbor 1996) 31–32: "Citizenship in the Greek cultural empire seems to have been open to anyone well-read enough to desire it ... In general, the enthusiasm for Hellenism seems not to have engendered xenophobia; the cities of the Greek East were remarkably open and hospitable to foreigners."

5. *Contemplating the Golden Age: a functional reading of fr.56*

The interpretation of fr.56 presented here does not confine the Golden Age to the realm of an implausible hypothesis but places it in an undefined future as a plausible ideal scenario that may or may not become reality. Such a reading does not necessarily entail a conflict with orthodox Epicureanism. I believe the key to Diogenes' attitude towards this Golden Age lies in Epicurus' own *Letter to Menoecus* (Diog. Laert. 10.127):

μνημονευτέον δὲ ὡς τὸ μέλλον οὔτε ἡμέτερον οὔτε πάντως οὐχ ἡμέτερον, ἵνα μήτε πάντως προσμένωμεν ὡς ἐσόμενον μήτε ἀπελπίζωμεν ὡς πάντως οὐκ ἐσόμενον.

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

This passage refers to the Epicurean view that certain events in the future are beyond our control because they happen κατ' ἀνάγκην or ἀπὸ τύχης, while others happen παρ' ἡμᾶς.³⁵ It can be read in two ways: first as an admonishment not to hope or fear anything regarding the future. A second meaning lies in the phrase οὔτε πάντως οὐχ ἡμέτερον. Epicurus does not say that the future has nothing to do with us, because it is in fact not completely not ours either. He means that we can think of the future, but only if we do so in a neutral way, without hoping or fearing anything.³⁶ Likewise it does not have to be detrimental for an Epicurean to think about a plausible Golden Age, so long as he does so in a neutral way. The sage does not fear that the Golden Age might not come to be in his lifetime, nor does he feel sad because the period he lives in is far less ideal. He can muse over the depiction of the Golden Age if that pleases him,

³⁵ Cf. Heßler, *Epicur. Brief an Menoikeus* 228.

³⁶ Cf. Cic. *Fin.* 1.62: *neque enim tempus est ullum, quo non plus voluptatum habeat quam dolorum. nam et praeterita grate meminit et praesentibus ita potitur, ut animadvertat quanta sint ea quamque iucunda, neque pendet ex futuris, sed expectat illa, fruitur praesentibus.*

while taking care not to develop the kind of expectations that could lead to a disturbance of his *ataraxia*.

This brings us to what I believe to be the potentially therapeutic purpose of fr.56, for which a parallel is the Epicurean practice hinted at in Epicurus' famous last letter to his friend Idomeneus (Diog. Laert. 10. 22):

ἤδη δὲ τελευτῶν γράφει πρὸς Ἰδομενέα τήνδε ἐπιστολήν· “τὴν μακαρίαν ἄγοντες καὶ ἅμα τελευτῶντες ἡμέραν τοῦ βίου ἐγράφομεν ὑμῖν ταυτί· στραγγουρικά τε παρηκολουθήκει καὶ δυσεντερικὰ πάθη ὑπερβολὴν οὐκ ἀπολείποντα τοῦ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς μεγέθους· ἀντιπαρετάττετο δὲ πᾶσι τούτοις τὸ κατὰ ψυχὴν χαίρον ἐπὶ τῇ τῶν γεγονότων ἡμῖν διαλογισμῶν μνήμη.”

Here is the letter to Idomeneus which he [Epicurus] wrote on his death-bed: “I wrote this to you on that blessed day which was also the last. Strangury and dysentery had set in, with all the extreme intensity of which they are capable. But the joy in my soul at the memory of our past discussions was enough to counterbalance all this.”

According to Epicurus the memory of pleasant conversations in the past can have a very beneficial effect, serving even as a remedy for excruciating pains. However, these joyous moments belong to the past and although they soothe Epicurus' pains while he is dying, he cannot physically return to those times he so fondly remembers. I believe that within the framework of the Epicurean view on past, present, and future a similar function can be attributed to Diogenes' Golden Age. The sage's happiness is not increased by the certainty that someday a Golden Age will dawn (for the future is never certain), but by simply thinking about the theoretical plausibility of such a time filled with Epicurean friendship and justice. The sage does not wonder whether such a time will in fact come or not, since judging its actual feasibility would already entail an unwanted orientation towards the uncertain future. He merely thinks about a world full of wisdom, justice, and friendship in an undefined future, thus deriving happiness from it in the same way that the ailing Epicurus enjoys thinking about pleasant discussions from the past, which he knows and accepts that he will no longer be able to experience.

Diogenes does not offer the description of the Golden Age to his readers as a certain event in the future, and, as he is an orthodox Epicurean, the odds of its ever becoming reality are completely irrelevant to him, as he presumably thinks they should also be to his readers. But in my opinion the scenario of a Golden Age in an undefined future has at least some theoretical plausibility to Diogenes, making it a possible, albeit of course uncertain, culmination of the continued divulgation of Epicurean doctrine.

Abstaining then from any kind of opinion regarding the question of whether and when this plausible Golden Age will ever come, the sage takes the scenario of fr.56 as it is offered to him: as an invitation to pleasantly muse over a plausible period without any actual expectations regarding the future, concerning himself exclusively with the pleasures he is at that moment deriving from his musings.³⁷

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