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*The Influence of Aristotelianism,  
Epicureanism, Cynicism,  
and Stoicism on Human Life  
in the Early Church*

**ABSTRACT:**

This article deals with the issue of ancient Greek models of life proposed by Aristotle, Epicurus and the Stoics. The author tries to describe how and which of these models were assimilated by Christian society during the first centuries and which were rejected. The purpose of this article is to show how important Aristotle's, the Stoics and Epicurus' philosophy was for Christians in the advancement of the Christian lifestyle among the Greek societies. Understanding the development of theology in the early Greek Church requires knowledge of the ideals and values that shaped the thinking and behavior of people before they heard about the Gospel of Jesus.

**KEYWORDS**

Aristotle, Stoics, Epicurus, Plato, ancient Greek and Christian models of human life

## INTRODUCTION

In the article *Greek Models of Life up to Plato's Philosophy and its Influence on the Christian Life in the Early Church* I presented a brief account of the ancient Greek models of life up to the time of Plato's philosophy as well as their importance for the lifestyle of the first Christian generations. In the present article, I will search Aristotle's, Epicurus' and the Stoic's writings to find the ideals they contained regarding the human person and I will attempt to show their influence on Christian writings in the firsts centuries. This type of research will help to better understand the novelty brought to the world by Jesus Christ. Only a well-based knowledge of the ideals proclaimed in the society that the Gospel reached in the first century will allow the ability to distinguish what really had priority in the Christian life. In such a brief study it is impossible to completely elaborate on this problem, instead our aim is limited to draw attention only to its main directions.

### I. ARISTOTELIANISM

The concept of human virtue (ἀρετή) is the key to the ethics of Aristotle (384–322 BC),<sup>1</sup> which is included in his works over 700 times in these combinations ἡ φυσικὴ ἀρετὴ or ἡ ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ. They are characterized by the ethical virtues of man and are based on the domination of reason over the sphere of emotions and sensations. Related to these virtues are dianoetic, or the virtues of reason. The phrase „heroic virtue” (ἀρετὴ ἡρωικὴ καὶ θεία)<sup>2</sup> appears in the works of Aristotle. It transcends ordinary human moral behavior. This expression became a technical term in the processes of canonization in the Roman Catholic Church during the fifteenth century. In his work *Nicomachean Ethics*,

<sup>1</sup> Aristotelianism, Epicureans, Cynicism and Stoicism – cf. my article *Cultura animi w mysli greckiej (platonizm, arystotelizm, epikureizm, stoicyzm, medio- i neoplatonizm)*, in: *Prace Komisji Filologii Klasycznej PAU*, nr 46, ed. S. Stabryła, PAU, Wydział Filologiczny, Kraków 2015, p. 107–118. Aristotle was born 384/383 BC in Stagira, Greece; in 366/365, at age 18, he came to Athens to study at Plato's school, where he was a student for twenty years until Plato's death. For a discussion on Aristotle's views see: G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytnej*, Lublin 1997, t. II, p. 371–590.

<sup>2</sup> *NE* II45a 15ff: μάλιστα ἄν ἀρμόττοι λέγειν τὴν ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς ἀρετὴν, ἡρωικὴν τινα καὶ θείαν.

Aristotle presents virtue as a disposition (*hexis*), but understands it as a potential. He names it as a permanent disposition, which man applies to the passions properly or improperly.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of virtue (*arete*) is based on Plato's concept of *dynamis* as a power,<sup>4</sup> but according to Aristotle, virtue is the faculty (δύναμις) for providing and preserving the good, and the faculty (δύναμις) used to produce many and great benefits in everything and in every situation.<sup>5</sup> By virtue man is rendered good and is able to perform his functions well.<sup>6</sup> Aristotle recognized virtue of as a quality proper to every being. The expression ὁμοίωσις θεῷ never appears in Aristotle's works.

Aristotle, like Plato distinguishes three basic powers of the soul, but does it very differently. The vegetative soul is responsible for nutrition, growth, reproduction, the sensual senses, movement and perception, as well as intellectual cognition and the ability to make a choice (cf. *On the Soul* B3, 414 b20). The vegetative soul, as an inner principle of life, is the reason for growth and not heat or water. Because heat and water exist outside the vegetative soul they destroy form when they encounter matter. The sensual life is something more than the vegetative life, which boils down to nutrition, and is based on the act of sensory perception associated with the body. The rational soul determines intellectual knowledge and represents the element of the divine in man (cf. *On the Soul* G-4, 429-b10 a10; EN κ 7, 1178 A2-3).

According to Aristotle, man always strives for what is believed to be good, because good is the goal of all endeavors (cf. *NE* A1, 1094 a1-3). The highest good is happiness (*eudamonia*) (cf. *NE* A4, 1095 a17-20) this

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *NE* 1105 b 25.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Greek Models of Life up to Plato's Philosophy and its Influence on the Christian Life in the Early Church*, n. 4 (Platonism); P. Makowski, *Dynamis. Metafizyczne pojęcie możliwości i jego rola w filozofii praktycznej Arystotelesa, An Online Journal of Philosophy*, Demetrios nr 33 (September 2012) p. 92. The sense of *dynamis* – cf. M. Krąpiec, *Struktura bytu. Charakterystyczne elementy systemu Arystotelesa i Tomasza z Akwinu*, [in:] idem, *Dzieła*, t. v, RW KUL, Lublin 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Rhetoric* 1366 a 36 – 1366 b 1: ἀρετὴ δ' ἐστὶ μὲν δύναμις ὡς δοκεῖ ποριστικὴ ἀγαθῶν καὶ φυλακτικὴ, καὶ δύναμις εὐεργετικὴ πολλῶν καὶ μεγάλων, καὶ πάντων περὶ πάντα.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *NE* 1106 a 22-23: εἰ δὴ τοῦτ' ἐπὶ πάντων οὕτως ἔχει, καὶ ἡ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀρετὴ εἴη ἂν ἡ ἕξις ἀφ' ἧς ἀγαθὸς ἄνθρωπος γίνεται καὶ ἀφ' ἧς εὐδὸν τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ἔργον ἀποδώσει.

is the objective of the actions of every man. Hence the ideal of man combines practice with the understanding of happiness, that is, that which one should strive for and that which is worth achieving in life. According to Aristotle, the majority of people think that to live well (to be healthy and rich) and to live the good life are synonymous with being happy. Happiness comes down to the rational soul acting in accordance with excellence, that is, virtue. That is, regarding „life, what is most essential is exercising clear reason.” (cf. EN A7, 1097 b22 – 1098 a20). Therefore, for a human to be happy it is not enough to act in accordance with the vegetative soul, which is concerned only with the functions of life, something man shares with plants, or the sensory impressions, something he shares with animals.

Man possesses potentiality in virtues and strives to achieve them by working toward achieving them, which depends on the potentiality in the state of action. By repeating acts of justice man achieves *habitus* the virtue of justice, that is, the ability to be just; by repeating brave acts man has the ability to be brave. Virtue represents the correct balance, the golden mean (μέτρον, μεσότης) between excess emotions and actions, or the lack of them, which are defects (cf. NE B6, 1106 b18–28).

In *Eudemian Ethics* B3 1220b – 1221a Aristotle lists virtues and vices. According to him, good temper (πραότης) is the golden mean between irascibility (ὀργιλότης) and lack of spirit (ἀναληγσία). Similarly, courage (ἀνδρεία) is the golden mean between rashness (θρασύτης) and cowardice (δειλία); modesty (αἰδώς) between shamelessness (ἀναισχυντία) and bashfulness (κατάπληξις); temperance (σωφροσύνη) between intemperance (ἀκολασία) and insensibility (ἀναισθησία); righteous indignation (δίκαιον) between envy (κέρδος) and spitefulness (ζημία); magnificence (ἐλευθεριότης) between vulgarity (ἀσωτία) and stinginess (ἀνελευθερία); truthfulness (ἀλήθεια) between boastfulness (ἀλαζονεία) and mock modesty (εἰρωνεία); friendliness (φιλία) between obsequiousness (κολακεία) and surliness (ἀπέχθεια); right ambition (καρτερία) between over ambition (τρυφερότης) and want of ambition (κακοπάθεια); magnanimity (μεγαλοψυχία) between vanity (χαυνότης) and pusillanimity (μικροψυχία); liberality (μεγαλοπρέπεια) between prodigality (δαπανηρία) and meanness (μικροπρέπεια); wit-tiness (φρόνησις) between buffoonery (πανουργία) and boorishness (εὐήθεια).

Most of the virtues listed here Aristotle explains in *De virtutibus et vitiis* (Virtues and Vices). Virtue in his opinion always appears in an

equitable manner, the golden mean, which is determined by reason. In fact, it comes to avoiding both excess as well as insufficiency, because they are both, in relation to virtue, a mistake. Courage is a virtue, but its excess is rashness, and its lack is evidenced by cowardice and so on. In relation to that which is good, virtue represents a boundary, the peak and the highest value.<sup>7</sup> The most important virtue is justice, to which Aristotle devotes book E of *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Dianoetic virtues, which relate to the practical reason and theoretical reason, are two parts of the rational mind. Aristotle does not propose a strict definition, but tries to show them in relation to each other.<sup>8</sup> For example, common sense (φρόνησις) refers to the practical reason and wisdom (σοφία) to the theoretical reason. Dianoetic virtues are interrelated: you cannot be a man of courage, having no reason, and vice versa – you cannot be a reasonable man without courage.

Fortunately, according to Aristotle, we cannot live without external goods,<sup>9</sup> despite the fact that the only goal is a virtuous life. „And he regarded virtue as not of itself sufficient to ensure happiness;” – Diogenes Laertius writes – „bodily goods and external goods were also necessary, for the wise man would be miserable if he lived in the midst of pains, poverty, and similar circumstances.”<sup>10</sup> According to Aristotle, the most important good is spiritual, then physical (health, strength, beauty) and external (wealth, noble birth, fame).

As much as Plato encouraged the controlling of desires, authority over them and the power to transform them into good, Aristotle encouraged the pursuit of their abilities and their own good, especially the possibility of the intellectual soul. But not in the sense of selfishness as something negative (cf. EN Iota, b23 1168 – 1169 a6), but in the sense of a balance between the excess and insufficiency of love itself. Complete selflessness and caring exclusively for the good of the other is not the spirit of Aristotelianism. He is no different in this respect from Plato, but it boils down to the horizon of the ideal man in a more intellectual aspect, of course, remaining on the ethical plain.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. NE 1107 a 6–8: διὸ κατὰ μὲν τὴν οὐσίαν καὶ τὸν λόγον τὸν τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι λέγοντα μεσότης ἐστὶν ἡ ἀρετή, κατὰ δὲ τὸ ἄριστον καὶ τὸ εὖ ἀκρότης.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. V. Boland OP, *Wiedza, rozum oraz mądrość: cnoty intelektualne, edukacja i dary Duchy Świętego*, Teofil 1(30) (2012) p. 211–212.

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1, 1099b.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum*, v, 30.

## 2. EPICUREANS AND LUCRETIUS

Epicurus<sup>11</sup> (c. 341 – c. 270 BCE) created an entirely different life of man, when he founded his school in the suburbs of Athens in approx. 306 BC at a house with a vegetable garden to experience the peace of nature and enjoy the surrounding landscape of fields and trees. It was called the Garden, to which Epicurus invited all, because in his opinion, all are equal in nature.

Epicurus was fascinated by the material world and the world of the senses and engaged in polemics with Plato and Aristotle. He did not share the views of Plato because, in his opinion, he only dealt with the transcendent, extrasensory, intangible and not the physical, and also he identified man with a national idealized city-state. The concept of the Greek *polis*, had always been exposed to crisis by conflicts and wars, and finally collapsed as a result of changes associated with the conquests of Alexander the Great. Epicurus also disagreed with Aristotle, who he treated as a disciple of Plato, as a Platonist.

In *The Canon* Epicurus affirms that our sensations and preconceptions and our feelings are the standards of truth (κριτήρια τῆς ἀληθείας εἶναι τὰς αἰσθήσεις καὶ προλήψεις καὶ τὰ πάθη).<sup>12</sup> Every sensation, he says, is devoid of reason and incapable of memory.<sup>13</sup> A sort of apprehension or a right opinion or notion, or universal idea stored in the mind is meant by preconception.<sup>14</sup> He affirms that there are two states of feeling, pleasure and pain, which arise in every animate being, and

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<sup>11</sup> On the topic of Epicurus – cf. Michael Erler, *Epicureanism in the Roman Empire*, in: J. Warren (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism*, Cambridge University Press 2009, p. 46–84. And in the same collection: T. O’Keefe, *Action and responsibility*, p. 142–157; *Epicurus: His Continuing Influence and Contemporary Relevance*, (pub.) D. R. Gordon, D. B. Suits, C. Graphic Arts Press 2003; J. Warren, *Facing Death: Epicurus and His Critics*, Oxford 2006; A. J. Festugière, *Epicure et ses dieux*, Paris 1946, chapter IV *La religion d’Epicure*. Poglądy Epikura. For a broader study see: G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytnej*, t. III, Lublin 1999, t. III, p. 177–281. cf. p. 285nn. For an entire book devoted to Diogenes Laertius see: *Vitae philosophorum*, x; see also: T. Sinko, *Zarys historii literatury greckiej*, Warszawa 1959, t. II, p. 38–51; St. Zegarliński, *Nauka moralna Epikura a chrześcijańskie zapatrywanie się na najwyższe dobro człowieka*, Kraków 1917; A. Krokiewicz, *Nauka Epikura*, Kraków, PAU 1929.

<sup>12</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* x, 31.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* x, 31.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* x, 33.

that the one is favorable and the other hostile to that being.<sup>15</sup> „For the end of all our actions is to be free from pain and fear, [...] When we are pained because of the absence of pleasure, then, and then only, do we feel the need for pleasure. Wherefore we call pleasure the alpha and omega of a blessed life. Pleasure is our first and kindred good. It is the starting-point of every choice and of every aversion, and to it we come back, inasmuch as we make feeling the rule by which to judge of every good thing.”<sup>16</sup> And he continues: „While therefore all pleasure because it is naturally akin to us is good, not all pleasure is should be chosen, just as all pain is an evil and yet not all pain is to be shunned.”<sup>17</sup> „While bread and water confer the highest possible pleasure when they are brought to hungry lips.”<sup>18</sup>

Concerning the essence of his thinking and understanding of pleasure, which does not consist in the newfound sensual sensations, Epicurus expresses these words:

„When we say, then, that pleasure is the end and aim, we do not mean the pleasures of the prodigal or the pleasures of sensuality, as we are understood to do by some through ignorance, prejudice, or willful misrepresentation. By pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul. It is not an unbroken succession of drinking-bouts and of revelry, not sexual lust, not the enjoyment of the fish and other delicacies of a luxurious table, which produce a pleasant life; it is sober reasoning, searching out the grounds of every choice and avoidance, and banishing those beliefs through which the greatest tumults take possession of the soul. Of all this, the beginning and the greatest good is wisdom. Therefore wisdom is a more precious thing even than philosophy; from it spring all the other virtues, for it teaches that we cannot live pleasantly without living wisely, honorably, and justly; nor live wisely, honorably, and justly without living pleasantly. [...] Who, then, is superior in your judgment to such a man? He holds a holy belief concerning the gods, and is altogether free from the fear of death. He has diligently considered the end fixed by nature, [...]. Fate, which some introduce as sovereign over all things, he scorns, affirming rather that some things happen of necessity, others by chance,

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* x, 34.

<sup>16</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* x, 128

<sup>17</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* x, 129.

<sup>18</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* x, 131.

others through our own agency. For he sees that necessity destroys responsibility and that chance is inconstant; whereas our own actions are autonomous, and it is to them that praise and blame naturally attach. It were better, indeed, to accept the legends of the gods than to bow beneath that yoke of destiny which the natural philosophers have imposed. [...] Exercise yourself in these and related precepts day and night, both by yourself and with one who is like-minded; then never, either in waking or in dream, will you be disturbed, but will live as a god among men.”<sup>19</sup>

The quote above shows that while Epicurus was not interested in the issue of God, there are traces of the topic evident in his words.<sup>20</sup> Michael Erler takes up this issue when discussing Epicurus view on the likeness of God.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum*, x, 131–135: “Ὅταν οὖν λέγωμεν ἡδονὴν τέλος ὑπάρχειν, οὐ τὰς τῶν ἀσώτων ἡδονὰς καὶ τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας λέγομεν, ὡς τινες ἀγνοοῦντες καὶ οὐχ ὁμολογοῦντες ἢ κακῶς ἐκδεχόμενοι νομίζουσιν, ἀλλὰ τὸ μῆτε ἀλγεῖν κατὰ σῶμα μῆτε ταράττεσθαι κατὰ ψυχὴν. οὐ γὰρ πότοι καὶ κῶμοι συνείροντες οὐδ’ ἀπολαύσεις παίδων καὶ γυναικῶν οὐδ’ ἰχθύων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὅσα φέρει πολυτελὴς τράπεζα τὸν ἡδὺν γεννᾷ βίον, ἀλλὰ νήφων λογισμός καὶ τὰς αἰτίας ἐξερευνῶν πάσης αἰρέσεως καὶ φυγῆς καὶ τὰς δόξας ἐξελαύνων ἐξ ὧν πλεῖστος τὰς ψυχὰς καταλαμβάνει θόρυβος. τούτων δὲ πάντων ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν φρόνησις· διὸ καὶ φιλοσοφίας τιμιώτερον ὑπάρχει φρόνησις, ἐξ ἧς αἱ λοιπαὶ πάσαι πεφυκασιν ἀρεταί, διδάσκουσα ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν ἡδέως ζῆν ἄνευ τοῦ φρονίμου καὶ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως, «οὐδὲ φρονίμος καὶ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως» ἄνευ τοῦ ἡδέως συμπεφυκασιν γὰρ αἱ ἀρεταὶ τῷ ζῆν ἡδέως, καὶ τὸ ζῆν ἡδέως τούτων ἐστὶν ἀχώριστον. ”Ἐπεὶ τίνα νομίζεις εἶναι κρεῖττονα τοῦ καὶ περὶ θεῶν ὅσα δοξάζοντος καὶ περὶ θανάτου διὰ παντὸς ἀφόβως ἔχοντος καὶ τὸ τῆς φύσεως ἐπιλελογισμένου τέλος, καὶ τὸ μὲν τῶν ἀγαθῶν πέρας ὡς ἔστιν εὐσυμπλήρωτόν τε καὶ εὐπόριστον διαλαμβάνοντος, τὸ δὲ τῶν κακῶν ὡς ἢ χρόνους ἢ πόνους ἔχει βραχεῖς, τὴν δὲ ὑπὸ τινος δεσπότην εἰσαγομένην πάντων ἐγγελῶντος «εἰμαρμένην καὶ μᾶλλον ἢ μὲν κατ’ ἀνάγκην γίνεσθαι λέγοντος», ἢ δὲ ἀπὸ τύχης, ἢ δὲ παρ’ ἡμᾶς διὰ τὸ τὴν μὲν ἀνάγκην ἀνυπεύθυνον εἶναι, τὴν δὲ τύχην ἄστατον ὄραν, τὸ δὲ παρ’ ἡμᾶς ἀδέσποτον ᾧ καὶ τὸ μεμπτόν καὶ τὸ ἐναντίον παρακολουθεῖν πέφυκεν (ἐπεὶ κρεῖττον ἢν τῷ περὶ θεῶν μύθῳ κατακολουθεῖν ἢ τῇ τῶν φυσικῶν εἰμαρμένη δουλεύειν’ [...] Ταῦτα οὖν καὶ τὰ τούτοις συγγενῆ μελέτα πρὸς σεαυτὸν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς πρὸς «τε» τὸν ὁμοιον σεαυτῷ, καὶ οὐδέποτε οὐθ’ ὑπαρ οὐτ’ ὄναρ διαταραχθῆσθαι, ζήσεις δὲ ὡς θεὸς ἐν ἀνθρώποις.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. for example Epicurus, *Epistula ad Menoecium* 135, 7: ζῆσι δὲ ὡς θεὸς ἐν ἀνθρώποις, repeating the last quoted words of Diogenes Laertius.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. M. Erler, *Epicurus as deus mortalis: Homoiosis Theoi and Epicurean Self-cultivation*, in: D. Frede, A. Lacks (pub.), *Tradition of Theology: Studies in Hellenistic Theology, its Background and Aftermath*, Leiden–Boston–Köln 2002, p. 159–182.

Diogenes Laertius summarizes the main ideas of Epicureanism in forty points.<sup>22</sup> They show, among other things, that:

1. A blessed... being has no trouble himself and brings no trouble upon any other being; so he is free from anger and partiality... (139, 1);
2. Death is nothing to us; for that which has been dissolved into its elements experiences no sensations, and that which has no sensation is nothing to us. (139, 2);
3. The just man is most free from disturbance, while the unjust is full of the utmost disturbance (144, 17);
4. Of all the means which wisdom acquires to ensure happiness throughout the whole of life, by far the most important is friendship (148, 27) (Plato also appreciated the role of friendship, but it was a means to build an ideal state, for Epicurus it is a goal or a means for the realization of the human person, not the community).

Furthermore, Epicurus writes: „Of our desires some are natural and necessary” for example related to the preservation of life (i.e. water is a thirst quenching drink); „others are natural but not necessary” (i.e. good food and drink consumed during feasts, fashionable clothes); „and others are neither natural nor necessary” (i.e. wreaths and statues in honor of oneself) (cf. 149, 29). In his opinion natural justice is a pledge of reciprocal benefit, to prevent one man from harming or being harmed by another” (150, 31), „there never was such a thing as absolute justice, but only agreements made in mutual dealings among men” (150, 33).

Epicurus' views of these ideas show that he recognized man and his individual and social life primarily in terms of ethics.<sup>23</sup> He is best known for voicing the hedonistic ethics mentioned above. In ancient times, some described it as „vulgar and disgusting hedonism”, and today some people believe that it is necessary in general „to deny the legitimacy of talking about epicurean hedonism.”<sup>24</sup> It should be added that Epicurus did not understand pleasure and pain as being only in relation to the body, „Epicurus admits both; also pleasure of mind as well as of body.”<sup>25</sup> Diogenes Laertius writes: „at any rate the flesh en-

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Diogenes Laertius,  *Lives X*, 139–154.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. J. Bollack,  *La pensée du Plaisir, Épicure: textes moraux, commentaires*, Paris 1975, p. 9ff.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. G. Reale,  *Historia filozofii starożytnej*, Lublin 1999, t. III, p. 247.

<sup>25</sup> Diogenes Laertius,  *Lives X*, 136.

dures the storms of the present alone, the mind those of the past and future as well as the present. In this way also he holds mental pleasures to be greater than those of the body.<sup>26</sup> However they are bound, it is the entire man who dies.

Epicurus did not teach political virtue and this distinguishes him from Plato and Aristotle, who saw in man a citizen, but he spoke about private virtue, improving the individual man, regardless of his nationality and ethnicity. Epicurus rejected politics completely, because in his opinion, „there are no social bonds between people: everyone thinks only about himself.”<sup>27</sup> This is why he promoted the phrase *λάθε βιώσας* (live hidden),<sup>28</sup> and the ideal of life came down to freedom from all troubles (*ataraxia*).

According to Clement of Alexandria, for Epicurus, human life came down to satisfying hunger, thirst, finding shelter from adverse weather conditions, and happiness as the most important good for man, according to him, that was, pleasure and delight.<sup>29</sup> The hedonistic ethics were not subject to sensation and sexual abuse, because these do not bring man benefits, and happiness should come from doing no harm.<sup>30</sup>

The popularity of the Epicurean philosophy in the first centuries after Christ, writes Giovanni Reale, depends on the source.<sup>31</sup> Athens, Pont, Asia Minor and Italy, where Lucretius was Epicurus eulogist, were strong centers of influence<sup>32</sup> (c. 98 BCE; 55 BCE.)

Epicureanism was a religion of immanence,<sup>33</sup> absolutely dogmatic in its thinking, so much so that it did not undergo any development. Christianity, also very dogmatic but in a different sense, rejected Epicureanism from the beginning because of its materialism, belief in the mortality of the soul and the resulting concerns with temporality. It almost disappeared completely in the fourth century but began to re-

<sup>26</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* X, 137.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Laktancjusz, *Divinae institutiones* 3, 17, 42 (CSEL 19 of 1890; Usener, Fr. 523); cf. Epiktet, *Diatryby* 2, 20, 6 (trans. L. Joachimowicz, in: *Epiktet. Diatryby, Encheiridion, z dodaniem Fragmentów oraz Gnomologium Epiktetowego*, BKF, Warszawa 1961)

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *De latenter vivendo* 1128; 1129.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *The Stomata*, 11, 127, 1 – 128, 2.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* x, 118

<sup>31</sup> Cf. G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytnej*, Lublin 1999, t. IV, p. 75–91.

<sup>32</sup> For a general look at Lucretius see: G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytnej*, Lublin 1999, t. III, p. 290–311.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytnej*, Lublin 1999, t. IV, p. 81.

surface in the modern age. Tadeusz Sinko,<sup>34</sup> briefly but vividly describes, among other things, that Epicureanism was instrumental in twentieth century fascism and communism.

### 3. CYNICISM AND STOICISM

The Cynics and Stoics understood the ideal and goal of human life in yet another way. Diogenes Laertius writes that, „the Cynics believed that perfection was in living according to virtue; such is the formula of Antisthenes in Hercules. The Stoics believed similarly, both of these schools held many beliefs in common. That is why it is said that the doctrine of the Cynics is the shortest path to virtue... The Cynics believed that one must live a simple life, eating simple foods and being content with only one robe, and to despise riches, fame and noble birth. Some even had the habit of eating only vegetables, drinking cold water and living in abandoned shelters or even a barrel, like Diogenes, who used to say that the characteristic of the gods is that they do not need anything, and the characteristic of the people who are striving to be like god is that they only need a little. They also believed that virtue can be taught... and once obtained cannot be lost.”<sup>35</sup> Diogenes Laertius placed these words at the end of the sixth book, which was dedicated to the Cynics, after discussing the lives of individuals in the group he discussed the principles common to all authors. They emphasized the pursuit of virtue, simplicity and voluntary poverty. Still other principles of the Cynic life (κυνικός βίος) can be seen by looking at their lives:

<sup>34</sup> Cf. T. Sinko, *Zarys historii literatury greckiej*, Warszawa 1959, t. II, p. 48–51. For a more specific look at this topic see: A. Baron, *Świętość a ideały człowieka*, Kraków 2013, p. 148–149.

<sup>35</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Vita philosophorum*, VI, 9, 104–105: Ἀρέσκει δ' αὐτοῖς καὶ τέλος εἶναι τὸ κατ' ἀρετὴν ζῆν, ὡς Ἀντισθένης φησὶν ἐν τῷ Ἡρακλεῖ, ὁμοίως τοῖς στωικοῖς· ἐπεὶ καὶ κοινωνία τις ταῖς δύο ταύταις αἰρέσεσιν ἐστίν. ὅθεν καὶ τὸν κυνισμὸν εἰρήκασι σύντομον ἐπ' ἀρετὴν ὁδόν. [...]. Ἀρέσκει δ' αὐτοῖς καὶ λιτῶς βιοῦν, αὐτάρκεσι χρωμένους σιτίοις καὶ τρίβωσι μόνοις, πλούτου καὶ δόξης καὶ εὐγενείας καταφρονοῦσιν. ἔνιοι γοῦν καὶ βοτάναις καὶ παντάπασιν ὕδατι χρῶνται ψυχρῷ σκέπαις τε ταῖς τυχούσαις καὶ πίθοις, καθάπερ Διογένης, ὃς ἔφασκε θεῶν μὲν ἴδιον εἶναι μηδενὸς δεῖσθαι, τῶν δὲ θεοῖς ὁμοίων τὸ ὀλίγων χρῆζειν. Ἀρέσκει δ' αὐτοῖς καὶ τὴν ἀρετὴν διδασκὴν εἶναι, καθά φησὶν Ἀντισθένης ἐν τῷ Ἡρακλεῖ, καὶ ἀναπόβλητον ὑπάρχειν.

freedom (ἐλευθέρια)<sup>36</sup>, self-sufficiency (αὐτάρκεια)<sup>37</sup>, honest speaking (παρρησία)<sup>38</sup>, dispassion (ἀπάθεια)<sup>39</sup>, cosmopolitanism (κοσμοπολίτης)<sup>40</sup>, physical and spiritual exercise (ἄσκησις σωματική καὶ ψυχική)<sup>41</sup>, characteristic dress<sup>42</sup> and diet.<sup>43</sup> It should be mentioned that the Cynics, dubbed „the dog philosophers” promoted that all acts, even intimate ones, should be done in public.<sup>44</sup> The ideal of human life brought freedom, simplicity and poverty, expressing similarity to the gods. In English, the word „poverty” expresses the Cynics idea of perfection.

To understand the development of moral doctrine during the first centuries of Christianity it is important to have a familiarity with the views of the Cynics, some of whom were Christians at the same time and who were still very active in the second half of the fourth century.<sup>45</sup> In addition, the Stoics,<sup>46</sup> who had a baser doctrine, held and repeated some of the views of the Cynics. It was the most influential of all the philosophies in the development of the Christian ethic, both in positive and negative terms. Moreover the Cynics, who converted to Christianity, like the followers of other philosophical teachings brought with them a direct exchange of intellectual ideas.<sup>47</sup> Each philosophical current presented its own anthropology and gave specific importance to its own point of view. For example the Stoics embraced the Greek term *dynamis*, understanding it differently than Plato, who understood it as a driving force or Aristotle who understood it as a potential.<sup>48</sup> For the

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Vita philosophorum*, VI, 2, 71.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Vita philosophorum*, VI, 2, 78.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Vita philosophorum*, VI, 2, 69.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Vita philosophorum*, VI, 1, 15.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Vita philosophorum*, VI, 2, 63.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Vita philosophorum*, VI, 2, 70.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Andrzej Szoka, *Salustios z Emezy i ostatnie wzmianki o filozofach cynickich w V–VI wieku*, W: U schyłku starożytności. Studia źródłoznawcze 12 (2013) p. 105.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Vita philosophorum*, VI, 2, 76.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Augustine of Hippo, *De civitate Dei*, XIV, 20; Diogenes Laertius, *Vita philosophorum*, VI, 2, 69. 72–73; Plutarch of Chaeronea, *De Stoicorum repugnantiis* 1044.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. A. Szoka, *Salustios z Emezy i ostatnie wzmianki o filozofach cynickich w V–VI wieku*, in: U schyłku starożytności. Studia źródłoznawcze 12 (2013) p. 103–104.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytnej*, Lublin 1999, t. IV, p. 233–261.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. A. Baron, H. Pietras, *Chrześcijaństwo*, in: Religie starożytnego Bliskiego Wschodu, Kraków 2008, p. 488.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1048a27. On Plato’s understanding of the word *dynamis* see: cf. J. Souilhé, *Étude sur le terme dynamis: dans les dialogues de Platon*, thèse

Stoics, it is the power possessed by the entity, according to their understanding of ἔξις (in Latin *habitus*). The dictionary definition of the word is, state, habit, disposition, possession etc. For the Stoics ἔξις is not equivalent to the Aristotelian, because it is not an accidental quality, but is the nature of the thing, its existence and the principal of its action.<sup>49</sup> The word *arete*, is etymologically related to the word *aristos* (the best, ideal), for the Stoics this means proficiency of being. Virtue distinguished as being, belongs to the nature of the being and is the same in the gods and in humans. Virtue is what constitutes perfection in the nature of man, in his reason, is a value in itself, and is happiness. A virtuous person can perform only good deeds.<sup>50</sup>

The „definition of good which they [Stoics] give is ‘the natural perfection of a rational being *qua* rational.’ To this answers virtue and, as being partakers in virtue, virtuous acts and good men; as also its supervening accessories, joy and gladness and the like. So with evils: either they are vices, folly, cowardice, injustice, and the like.”<sup>51</sup> Virtue is therefore the highest good.<sup>52</sup> If someone possesses one virtue, according to the Stoics, he possesses all of them, because all of them possess one principle.<sup>53</sup> It should be noted that for the Stoics good is only that which is ethically (morally) good, and the ideal is to live in accordance with nature and in accordance with reason. The closer man is to his nature the closer he is to God. Hence, it is important for the Stoics

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complémentaire présentée à la Faculté des lettres de l'Université de Poitiers, Paris, Alcan, 1919, reprint L. Tarán, New York 1987; by Plato and Aristotle see: cf. Wł. Strózewski, *Wykłady o Platonie*, Uniwersytet Jagielloński 1992, p. 198ff.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. P. Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, Paris 1968, p. 228–231, zwłaszcza 230.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. G. Reale, *Mysł starożytna*, Lublin 2003, p. 414–415.

<sup>51</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Vita philosophorum*, VII, 1, 94–95: “Ἄλλως δ’ οὕτως ἰδίως ὀρίζονται τὸ ἀγαθόν, “τὸ τέλειον κατὰ φύσιν λογικοῦ [ἢ] ὡς λογικοῦ.” τοιοῦτο δ’ εἶναι τὴν ἀρετὴν, ὥσ«τε» μετέχοντα τὰς τε πράξεις τὰς κατ’ ἀρετὴν καὶ τοὺς σπουδαίους εἶναι· ἐπιγεννήματα δὲ τὴν τε χαρὰν καὶ τὴν εὐφροσύνην καὶ τὰ ἀραπλήσια. ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ τῶν κακῶν τὸ μὲν εἶναι ἀφροσύνην, δειλίαν, ἀδικίαν, καὶ τὰ παραπλήσια· μετέχοντα δὲ κακίας τὰς τε πράξεις τὰς κατὰ κακίαν καὶ τοὺς φαύλους· ἐπιγεννήματα δὲ τὴν τε δυσθυμίαν καὶ τὴν δυσφροσύνην καὶ τὰ ὅμοια. Cf. B. Wiśniewski, „*Sur les origines du ὁμολογουμένου τῆ φύσει ζῆν des Stoiciens*, CM 22 (1961) p. 106–116.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Cicero, *O przyjaźni* 8, 27–28; *De legibus*, I, 8, 25: est autem virtus nihil aliud, nisi perfecta et ad summum perducta natura.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Vita philosophorum*, VII, 1, 125: Τὰς δ’ ἀρετὰς λέγουσιν ἀντακολουθεῖν ἀλλήλαις καὶ τὸν μίαν ἔχοντα πάσας ἔχειν· εἶναι γὰρ αὐτῶν τὰ θεωρήματα κοινά.

distinguish what is good, bad and indifferent, which the Neo-Stoic Epictetus, transformed into the distinction between things that are in our power and things that are not.<sup>54</sup>

According to the Stoics, everything is rational and deliberate, and thus due to the obvious fact of the all hidden God and His providence (*pronoia*). However, the presence of the immanent God generated the notion of fate and destiny, understood as the irreversible sequence of events (causes). In this way, everything is basically pre-determined for the Stoics, despite the apotheosis of reason while defending the telling the future, which in turn deprives a man of true freedom.<sup>55</sup>

For the Stoics the element that constitutes the human being is the *logos*. It is the most important in all aspects of human life, not only in the performance of obligations to the law and social relations, but in love as well.<sup>56</sup> In second place the Stoics placed the importance of the will, of course meaning the rational will, whose task it was to adapt to the requirements of the life of reason expressed in the law and customs. Hence the Stoics in their individual ethics emphasized the aspect of volition more than emotion. This criterion later entered into Christian moral theology (if someone emotionally does not like another, what he wills is more important.) Therefore, social ethics developed around the idea of *oikeiosis*<sup>57</sup> (later in Christianity: *oecumene*; ecumenical synods; value of the family itself, because the Greek family appears differently than in Judaism), which revealed the existence of a human relationship between the person and the people and the world around him. Zeno said, that people who are not virtuous „are slaves and become strangers to those closest to them... lack of virtue destroys family ties... only virtuous people can be good citizens, friends, relatives, and they alone are truly free.”<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Cf. G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytniej*, Lublin 1999, t. IV, p. 129.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. G. Reale, *Mysl starożytna*, Lublin 2003, p. 405–407.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytniej*, Lublin 1999, t. III, p. 332–333 with reference to M. Heinze, *Die Lehre vom Logos in der griechischem Philosophie*, Oldenburg 1872 (ed. 2, Aalen 1961); G. Reale, *Mysl starożytna*, Lublin 2003, p. 409–410.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. G. Reale, *Mysl starożytna*, Lublin 2003, p. 410–411.

<sup>58</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Vita philosophorum*, VII, 1, 32–33: ἐν πολλοῖς κατηγοροῦντες τοῦ Ζήνωνος, πρῶτον μὲν τὴν ἐγκύκλιον παιδείαν ἄχρηστον ἀποφαίνειν λέγουσιν ἐν ἀρχῇ τῆς Πολιτείας, δεῦτερον ἐχθροὺς καὶ πολεμίους καὶ δούλους καὶ ἄλλοτρίους λέγειν αὐτὸν ἀλλήλων εἶναι πάντας τοὺς μὴ σπουδαίους, καὶ γονεῖς τέκνων καὶ ἀδελφοὺς ἀδελφῶν, «καί» οἰκείουσ οἰκείων. Πάλιν ἐν τῇ Πολιτεία παριστάντα

The characteristic features of stoicism, which significantly influenced the way of life and customs, and therefore also what we call culture, are the following: the deification of nature, harmony and order in the world (in the cosmos), the apotheosis of reason, the rule of virtue, inner freedom based on virtue and the universal brotherhood of man. In addition, the static recognition of man, typical of Stoicism, formed, in my opinion a calculated, but stable ideal of man.<sup>59</sup>

The ideal of living in accordance with nature, like any other ideal, can be understood as extreme. Luigi Padovese subjected this to criticism, writing: „The influence of stoicism naturally has its positive side, however, it also has its shadows. Between extreme practices it's enough, sometimes, to think of the ridiculous use of the natural law or to comply with nature to claim that men do not shave their beards and women do not use make-up; or the concept of the body, which is a burden; the concept of sin, understood as a lack of control by 'Logic' in the instinctive realm of the human; regarding sinlessness, which is conceived as a disembodied 'apathia'; of negation of the value of human emotions regarded as incompatible with reason; the treatment of procreation as the only reason for marital relations; the conception that of virtue as created in and by oneself, a process in which the grace of God is completely absent. The history of the Church affirms the ideal of the perfect Christian as often modeled on the stoic sage.”<sup>60</sup>

With respect to the ideal in the Christian life, Stoicism's strong influence on theology should be noted as is visible in the early Church (i.e. in the letters of Paul), and not only on the ideal of the sage, but later on the understanding of human sin and sinfulness during the Pelagian controversy.<sup>61</sup>

Benedict xvi confirmed the influence of the Stoics on St. Paul when he said: „taking into account his Jewish background, his Greek tongue

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πολίτας καὶ φίλους καὶ οἰκεῖους καὶ ἐλευθέρους τοὺς σπουδαίους μόνον, ὥστε τοῖς στωικοῖς οἱ γονεῖς καὶ τὰ τέκνα ἔχθροί· οὐ γάρ εἰσι σοφοί.

<sup>59</sup> Regarding the ancient model of man in Stoicism, see: cf. A. Baron, *Spór o Pawła, spór o człowieka czy spór o Boga? Refleksje na marginesie kontrowersji pelagiańskiej*, Kraków 1999, w: *ŻMT* 15, p. 65–68.

<sup>60</sup> L. Padovese, *Wprowadzenie do teologii patrystycznej*, trans. A. Baron, Kraków 1994, p. 133.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. np. A. Paciorek, „Poznanie Boga” i „prawo wypisane w sercu” – jaśniejsze strony egzystencji świata pogan według Rz 1–2, in: *NT a religie*, Lublin 2012, p. 193–197 with notes.

and his prerogative as a „civis romanus [Roman citizen], as the name of Latin origin suggests. Particularly the Stoic philosophy dominant in Paul's time which influenced Christianity, even if only marginally, should be recalled. Concerning this, we cannot gloss over certain names of Stoic philosophers such as those of its founders, Zeno and Cleanthes, and then those closer to Paul in time such as Seneca, Musonius and Epictetus.”<sup>62</sup>

## CONCLUSION

While Plato emphasized the role of virtue in self-realization (mastering desires), for Aristotle the most important was the golden mean of fairness and justice and for the Stoics virtue is the co-creator of the nature of man himself. In Aristotelian thought the word *dynamis* describes internal possibility and potentiality (Latin *potentia*). Both Plato and Aristotle emphasized the important role of the virtue of justice. For the followers of Augustine of Hippo virtue is to master the desires and passions in the spirit of Plato and Plotinus, and for the Thomists it is the golden mean following from Aristotelian thought. It is not surprising that the Christianity of the Greco-Roman world is strongly influenced by Stoic thinking, that heroic virtue constitutes the official announcement of the holiness of man. Somewhere between the mastering of the desires and passions of Plato and golden mean of Aristotle lie the heroic virtues. Besides, the discussion on the relation between God's justice and mercy continue to this day. It is enlivened by the fact that the importance of justice is stressed not only in the Greek world, but also in Judaism.

Aristotle, as Plato similarly did earlier, recognizes the ideal of man in terms of the ethical. For Plato, it was important to master oneself and strive for one's own good and perfection, while Aristotle stressed the full realization of one's potential, especially in terms of the intellect. The Good is its own virtue, in order to achieve the good man needs to do good works and not receive them, because offering the good of self to others is one's own good and happiness.

Stoicism promoted the concept of nature (*physis*) and reason (*logos*), through which the universal brotherhood of man was promoted, smash-

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. Pope Benedict XVI general audience 2 July 2008 [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2008/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20080702.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20080702.html).

ing myths about the nobility of blood and racial superiority, and undermining the principle of slavery, even though it continued for many centuries. The concept of *physis* and *oikeiosis* in the Stoic meaning counteracted this selfishness, individualism, and a solitary life in private. The opinion that virtue constitutes the holiness of man, the discussion on the relation between *ratio* and *fides* as well as between God's justice and mercy, all of these ideas are based on Stoic thought. The idea of being close to nature will return in European history in the various aspects of life (promotion of a dignified life with nature, natural law, and the resulting environmental movement thriving in Europe, etc.) The development of science into different disciplines, natural science, social respect for teachers, universities, etc., all of this has developed the fastest and strongest in western areas of the Roman Empire where traditionally stoicism dominated. Stoic ideals spread quickly in ancient Christianity through middle- and neoplatonic philosophy. Fulfilling the will of God, as emphasized by Jesus in the Gospel and by the Judeo-Christians, will be identified with living according to natural law as propagated by the Stoics.

While Plato was enthralled with the heavens, Aristotle with the world, and the Stoics with the perfection and harmony in human life, Epicurus was fascinated by man himself and in man's experience in its ethical aspects. He accepted the valuable expression of sensuality, but promoted individualism, privacy, and care only for the earthy life because the entirety of man dies (body and soul). Today, all over the world, we see the cult of the body (fitness and the desire to look young for ever).

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