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# CONTINUITY OF DEISM

## EPICUREAN THEMES IN VOLTAIRE'S THINKING

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### Abstract

Academician Gheorghe Vlăduțescu wisely noted that a 'filiationist' perspective cannot explain completely and consistently the logical and historical common denominators of specific thinking systems. Moreover, he pointed out that in philosophy chronology becomes somewhat marginal in relation to the concept and mechanisms of reason, which, taking lead, triggers similarities and identities, with the impact of 'returns' to the historical scales as Hegel said. Therefore, we believe that the similarities - quite significant, at times – evinced by a series of philosophical theses (and/or theological connotations) professed over the centuries by Voltaire and Epicurus, shall not be explained unilaterally, by attending by the young François-Marie Arouet of the Epicurian society of Duke Philippe de Bourbon-Vendome – the aristocratic 'Cerc de la Temple'. Instead, a more appropriate perspective is the one in which the two envisaged the trinity: divinity-Cosmos-man, an approach completely distant from the norms accepted and consecrated by our own contemporaries.

*Keywords:* garden, deism, theism, circle, temple

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### 1. Introduction

If only in terms of his literary work, without speaking of his philosophical writings themselves, the concern of François-Marie Arouet – Voltaire, the preoccupation for the redefinition and restructuring of faith and religious practice, for their return to bases other than those of traditional theology, emerges clearly.

This approach leads Voltaire to a conflict with the cardinal and tutor of the future King Louis XV, André-Hercule de Fleury (1653-1743). He distanced himself from the *theism* of his contemporaries, a theism that he did not hesitate to regard as the major cause of the crisis of religious thought that has strained the Catholic and Protestant West of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

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The theological content of his religious option, the *deism* – because Voltaire, far from being an atheist, is firm in reporting to the divinity –, the unrevealed *natural religion*, the religion of the completely transcendent divinity, to which the cult brought by man is strange and useless, is the one which approaches him, to Epicurus of Samos (341-270 BC), the philosopher of the Garden – Κεποϋ, who, in his turn, 'avoids' the Homeric world through his teachings about gods and their 'indifference' towards people's world.

In relation to the divinity and the Cosmos, Voltaire and Epicurus, their thinking and belief, meet beyond time, become convergent, suppressing a two-millennium temporal distance. Or perhaps, in 'the Illuminist spirit' with which Ernest Stere endowed him [1], Epicurus 'anticipated' somehow the thinking of the eighteenth century, when the interest on man would not necessarily be made from what God has reserved before bringing him into existence.

## 2. The possibility of convergence

But what makes it possible, how can be explained, philosophically speaking, the reality of these philosophical and theological similarities? Because the philosophical perennality of epicureism, cannot, only it, ensure that the problem is exhausted. Not even through the 'filiationist' perspective – as Gheorghe Vlăduțescu calls the confluence of philosophical ideas through derivation and succession [2] – we cannot offer him a fully comprehensible explanation, even if, when he was a student at the 'Louis le Grand' College, Voltaire used to frequent 'The Circle of the Temple', 'society of aristocrat libertines', Epicurean and freethinkers, of Duke Philippe de Bourbon-Vendôme [3]. As a matter of fact, as Victor Brochard observed, and, for example, the ontologies proposed by Spinoza and Parmenides, in their turn, find enough analogies, *The Theological and Political Treaty* and *The Ethics* of the philosopher in Amsterdam, being available to be read as a projection over time of the Eleatics' teachings. Then, comparable situations can also be identified - as it is shown by Gheorghe Vlăduțescu - regarding Francis Bacon and Empedocles from Akragas, René Descartes and Socrates [2].

So, seeking through the history (of Philosophy), it can be found, at least to some degree, concepts, theses, ideas that acquire their own universalism. They appear 'dislodged' from the coordinates of space and time, "unloading their eventful charge" and placing in its own logic, one that ensures the identity between "logical and historical" [2, p. 77-78].

It is precisely by virtue of this universalism that we will remember that, beyond any connection and interference, Voltaire and Epicurus think, philosophize the same or even the same. And when, inevitably, they break apart, they do not make it into indestructible contradictions, but leaving out the primacy of convergence, so that disparities – real ones too – do not obscure the analogies of their thought.

### 3. The silent divinity and the autonomy of the world

The similarities of the concepts of Voltaire and Epicurus are manifested predominantly in the area of the concepts of divinity, the way in which they conceive it, and especially when they 'separate' it from the world, describing it as existing 'above' and beyond it.

a) Even though, in the spirit of the century, metaphysics seems to be more like 'an imprecise area of the fabulous' than an object amenable to systematic intellectual exploration, Voltaire operationalizes enough philosophical positions and interpretations (such as Isaac Newton's view on the rigorous 'mathematical' consistency of the 'corpuscular' ontology of the Universe), among them *deism* being, of course, defining.

For beyond ontology and gnoseology, beyond anthropology and morality, *deism* is Voltaire's preferential philosophical and theological theme, philosophical and theological simultaneously, as the *deists* intend to build a theology with the means specific to philosophy, a perspective on God which defines as theological and which relies on its own theology, lacking any openness vertically, which isolates man from his Creator. Thus, *deism* is, simultaneously, a philosophy, even if one 'at the edge of religion' and a religion but a religion without *revelation* and a doctrinal *corpus* of divine inspiration, lacking mythological, referential dogmatic structures and liturgical practices [4], a *natural religion* in which man, can 'identify', the creative work of God in the perfect harmony of the Cosmos.

Voltaire calls himself *theist* – even if in an inadequate way, *theists* being of course only Jewish, Christians and Muslim believers – his option, *deism*, consisting of cumulating of the following theses [5]:

- The firm conviction in the existence of divinity – *the Supreme Being*, a single God, absolutely good in His essence: "the theist [*that is* the deist] is a man firmly convinced of the existence of a Supreme Being, as good as He is strong";
- Disregarding any 'cataphatic' theogony, since regarding God and His work we can have only vague ideas; we can only know that the divinity is responsible for the existence of beings and things, that it will reward the virtuous after death just as it will punish those who do evil: "the theist [*that is* the deist] does not know how God punishes, how He favours, how He forgives [...]; but he knows God acts [in the sense that He forgives and punishes] and that He is just";
- Putting into circulation the assumption that deism must have been the first form of religious belief in humanity, "...the oldest and most extensive, because the simple love of God preceded all the systems in the world" and found today only sporadically in the thinking of the 'great sages', regardless of the culture and civilization to which they belong; including here Confucius, Solon, Socrates, Epictetus.s.o.;
- The exclusion of ritual as the divine cult implies a limited number of practices: honouring divinity, justice and, especially, doing good, love for

others; at the same time, the theoretical expression of faith requires the maximum limitation of speculation, of metaphysics, which are inoperative, even reprehensible: “religion does not consist of unintelligible metaphysical views, nor in pompous ceremonies, but in worship and justice”.

Thus, Voltairian deism is gaining contour: “God has withdrawn from history; He maybe reigns but does not govern intervening” [6], positioning divinity towards the world, excluding any interference with it, so there is no “divine plan and intention” [7] in relation to man and the Cosmos.

In his philosophical construction, Voltaire sets man as the starting point and imposes a completely empirical perspective: “I will try, by searching the man, to place myself [...] out of his [existential] sphere, disengaging me from all prejudices” [8]. Starting from here, he will first denounce the ‘knowledge of God’ as *an innate idea*, in the sense of the gnoseological theses of the time. Then he will presume that Christianity, the *theistic* solutions revealed in general, that is, they do not lead man to the “discovery” of God, this role falling exclusively to reason, which alone perceives the existence of the *Supreme Being*, observing and deducting both “the order that is in the Universe” and “... the finality to which every thing seems to tend” [8, p. 346]. It is true, however, that reason can be mistaken, for at the end of its enterprises can be found *materialism* and *evolutionism*, unsustainable systems because “... one cannot conceive of one being to give life to another if it does not have the power to create” or *pantheism*, equally unacceptable because “...if every part of [the world] does not exist from an absolute necessity, it is impossible that the whole exists by itself” [5, p. 212].

In essence, the dogmatic content of faith proposed by Christianity, implies accepting “contradictory and impossible things” [5, p. 212], which generates cultural practices and practices that are “absurd” [7]. However, Voltaire supports the pragmatic utility of Christian religion, “necessary support of moral life”, because, unlike the contemporary atheist materialists, he “does not believe that social life would be possible without religion, perspective from which he can say that: “Si Dieu n’existait pas, il faudrait l’inventer” [1, vol. 2, p. 206-208].

**b)** Until discussing the gods, Epicurus, like Voltaire, rises the problem of man and does it in an acute way, because, outside man’s “happiness”, “Philosophy itself would lose its meaning” [9]. At a declarative level, Epicurus, and the philosophy of the Garden “seek for the salvation of man”, aiming to render him “balance and peace”, the only ones which could raise him above the precariousness of his condition, despite the accusations (formulated also by the Holy Fathers) concerning the exacerbation of pleasure seeking – *voluptas in motu* or to the unilateral reduction of happiness to the sensuous pleasure, even if Epicurean hedonism was targeting the inner peace, calmness, serenity – *ataraxia* [1, vol. 2, p. 380-389].

It is precisely this ‘descent’ of philosophical thinking that makes Epicurus seek the explanation of unhappiness, suffering and implicitly use reason to find the necessary answers. And because *fear* is the one that causes unhappiness, fear of gods and death – this is because “people imagine that the gods observe them,

they are lurking from the sky, punish their disobedience, neglect to their sovereign authority” [10] –, “a *Physics* [in the sense of an explanatory system of the world as a whole] was to be developed on the basis of which we overcome the fear of the gods and the fear of death” [11]. And this physics is precisely the ontological conception by which any contact point between gods and men is completely suppressed. In fact, Epicurus is convinced that the gods do not intervene in human life either for good or for evil, so that “...it is useless to address them” [12]. In order to preserve their own happiness (human desiderate endowed, here, with the attribute of universality), the gods exist “without bothering themselves of people” [13] in certain areas of the cosmic space – *intermundia*, metacosmia, far from the world and totally independent of it. Separated from the world and refusing to “interfere with human affairs”, the gods cease to be a genuine cause for fear, because they cannot cause the fear of men and, implicitly, they can no longer be a cause of their unhappiness [11, p. 65].

c) We have seen that Epicurus of Samos completely abandons the classical thesis of the permanence of the interaction of gods with men, completely eliminating them “... from human life” [10, p. 297]. In their undisturbed existence, the gods “have no other preoccupation than their own happiness”, so that any discussion “about punishments and rewards in the beyond world is useless”, this being just “a simple dream” [10, p. 297-298]. In the same sense, Epicurus breaks down any teleology, any gods’ intervention in human existence, man having to break away from the ‘irrational’ presumptions of the dependence of myths, destiny or of luck.

d) As H.-R. Patapievici observed, *deism* postulates “the separation between the origin of the world and its current development” [14], separation which is presumed to be of ontological nature and which leads to the autonomy of the Cosmos, and implicitly of man, in relation to divinity.

In fact, seen as a system, *deism* is not characterized by homogeneity, integrating a broad spectrum of anthropological interpretations, including the theme of providence [4]. So, from the perspective of his preoccupations with the autonomy of the world in relation to creation, Voltaire would connect, only to a moderate epicureism (if we can say so), whereas intimates to man the fact that, at the end of observing the moral law, there is the divine reward, unlike Epicurus, who finds in happiness – founded in its turn on the practice of virtue – the very purpose of existence.

We will notice that, from the point of view of Christianity (and of Christian philosophy), the separation of deity from the world [15], be it totally - as in Epicurus, either leaving room for reward and punishment - as in Voltaire, is a direct and significant consequence of *rationalism* and the course towards desacralization of the world it brings. Even though - as Hegel showed - *deism* implies, imperatively, “the necessary idea of [a] divine self-consciousness”, the premise of searching (and finding) rationally the divinity, the God [16], *the deist man* limits himself to his own condition, to his own perspective on life and death and to his own existential horizon. He self-restrains - precisely because he

refuses revelation, divine discovery, over-rational knowledge that is. Even though, “the active tension toward God relates to the ontological status of the creature” [16, p. 63], the rejection of revelation will always chant the norm of faith into immanence, it will strip it miraculously of “mysterious and supernatural” as Pascal says [17] and, significantly, will “impair” it of the very dogmatic and liturgical content of faith, making it peripheral, bordered, incomplete [17, p. 76].

However, at least for the West, *deism* is a religion, one among many other religions, having its own elements of doctrine, moral and ‘cult’. For his promoters, deism as a religion is, as Hegel observes, “what is true, the most excellent and divine religion [...], historically the first”, even if, in itself and from a rigorous Christian perspective, it is but an inappropriate and deformed form of religious consciousness, “...the lowest, most unauthentic stage” [16] of religion. We can say that by dislodging faith into a God Who always returns to history and man revealing Himself more and more evident to the supreme revelation – the incarnation of the Word, *deism* opens the way of rationalist insertions in Christian theology, going to the *theological liberalism* and its contemporary versions.

#### 4. The world in itself - matter and movement

By proposing the separation between the world and the divinity, Voltaire and Epicurus must have thought in a somewhat comparable way also in the philosophical problems of matter and movement. And indeed, similarities can be located, and there are - on this level - enough elements of convergence.

a) For Voltaire, the Judeo-Christian vision of creation (and especially the thesis of creation *ex nihilo*), was a pertinent sample of the intrusion of human speculation in case of theological difficulties listed as insurmountable and whose attempt to decrypt would be completely inopportune, at least as long as the *Genesis* would only regroup old Oriental myths in a castrated marked by serious equivocations. If the biblical account could not provide a sustainable solution to the problem of the emergence of the world, Voltaire preferred, at least during the period in which he elaborated *Traité de métaphysique* (at the level of 1734), to be in an *agnostic* position, admitting that “God [...] was able to create spirit and matter”, without being able to say how: “I do not know [...] how; I’d rather stop here than wander...” [8, p. 353] However, even if the creation act escapes him, Voltaire cuts off the pantheistic visions of the Cosmos, with direct reference to Spinoza, as well as the evolutionary interpretations advanced by a Joseph-Louis Lagrange or Paul-Henri d’Holbach, points of view they consider to be “a real curse” [18].

But with *Dictionnaire philosophique portatif* (1764), the creation gets a whole new meaning, the previous position being abandoned. So if, indeed, Voltaire is the author of the article *Matier – Matter* (for in the Preface, he explains that he used for writing the work the contributions of other authors, and the takeovers are not always recorded as such [5, p. 15]) or if, using the material

of another author and publishing it, implicitly accepted it from the point of view of what can be presumed, this time he thinks in terms of an etheric, co-eternal matter with God, Who, implicitly, can no longer be the Creator *ex nihilo* of the *Holy Scriptures*. The God of this last interpretation is, therefore, (only) a Demiurge who, from eternity, has leaned upon an unorganized, amorphous matter, to order it and to sequentially enliven it, make it alive. In the context in which he cannot explain (and represent) the factual content of the creation *ex nihilo* and rejecting Spinoza's *pantheism*, Voltaire (or the author used by him) finds extra rationality in the supposed eternity of matter, because its very present state seems somewhat more comprehensible when it would constitute the goal of a demiurgical action, than when it emerged from an a priori nothing. It's just the original nothing that frustrates Voltaire (and/or the author of the article *Matier*): "Nothing is made of nothing [...]. Chaos [...] preceded the order that a divine hand put into the world" [5, p. 299-300]. Primary, either indefinite, is more acceptable to Voltaire's rational exercise not only because, in its absence, God would have somehow been forced to create the world from its own – which would be Spinoza's unacceptable *pantheism*, but also because, from a conceptual point of view, it is a constant throughout history: "The idea of chaos disentangled by God is found in all the old theogonies" [5, p. 299]. On the other hand, this pattern of reasoning is also subjected to the presumption of the eternity of the movement. Thus, Voltaire believed that being eternal, "the matter must have had eternal properties/qualities", movement being one of them [5, p. 300]. Implicitly, movement is considered to be inherent in matter, its essential property, its defining attribute; matter and movement co-exist with necessity, unable to survive but in an indestructible unit. We cannot fail to notice that, in this matter, Voltaire thinks practically identical to his contemporary materialists "the movement is an irresistible force [...], an universal necessity [...], a consequence of the nature of things, by virtue of which everything acts without stopping..." [19]

Finally, we will observe that, as matter is eternal, the Universe must also be eternal to the same extent. From here, Voltaire draws the conclusion that God - the Demiurge created the Universe by organizing pre-existing matter from eternity; under these conditions, the Voltairian Universe is temporally unlimited, even if it is bounded in space [20].

**b)** Epicurus defines as the founding principle of the world *the binomial* constituted by the pair represented by the atom and the void, both components "...having the same ontological dignity" [9, p. 189-190]. *The binomial* atom-void being the principle, are, such as Thales' *water* or the *fire* of Heraclitus, and is therefore constitutive of the world, must be recognizable everywhere, in men and in gods, in things, and in living beings, generating and sustaining an ontological unity that only through itself and by itself can be achieved. Then, since the atoms are not created, it cannot be an act of bringing the world into existence or of a cause of it, the world simply existing, with the gods, but independent of them, the Universe being thus eternal as the principle that establishes it. Besides being uncreated and eternal, the atoms are indestructible

and immutable, so they cannot be transformed, modified or destroyed, their particularities of organization, shape, size and weight are those which determine the qualitative distinctions and observable variations [9, p. 189-190].

Adopting a modern philosophical expression, we can say that Epicurus interprets matter as eternal. From the same perspective, the movement shapes itself as eternal to a totally identical degree, a “no beginning” movement of nothing outside caused “since both the atoms and the void exist from eternity” [21], a “spontaneous, autogenous movement” [1, p. 203], a spontaneous, autogenous, a fundamental quality printed in them ontologically as long as they “have it with necessity” [9, p. 195]. Being the form/mode of existence of matter, its cause can be found in the mass of atoms, in the matter itself, which possesses a ‘something’ that makes it not possible but necessary. That ‘something’ is - and could not be anything else - than the atom-void binomial, so that “the atoms are incessant in eternal motion [...] because the void gives [them] space [...]” [21]. Thus, at the level of the small infinite of the substance, in the invisible atom, “the void alone makes possible and explains the movement...” [1, p. 200]

Endowed with the intrinsic ability to move, the Epicurean matter has no limits, it extends infinitely “both because of the mass of atoms, and the expansion of the void [...]; if the void was finite, the infinity of atoms would have no place to stand” [21]. Thus, the unlimited character of the mass of atoms, its immeasurability in space, but also in time, configures the image of an infinite Universe without space-time barriers, possessing in itself the ability to undergo qualitative mutations, capable of “giving birth” by itself to both immortal gods and mortal men.

**c)** If we suppose (with a probability of error that we think is low) that defining the true position of Voltaire is his vision of 1770 (when *Dictionnaire philosophique portative* remains definitive), then he thinks of matter and movement in the spirit of Epicurus. In fact, Voltaire from 1770 (as opposed to that of 1734) is completely epicurean in the matter of movement, as long as he sees it as intrinsic to matter. Similarity is also preserved in terms of the eternity of matter, but ceases when, unlike Epicurus, Voltaire thinks of a limited, bounded Cosmos – which could mean either a spatial (de)limitation of the scope of demiurgic action of God (in which case the amorphous, chaotic matter would be infinite), or the existence of a limited, non-infinite quantity of matter, which implicitly constitutes (only) an Universe on its own, that is, finite.

**d)** By defining divinity and matter as co-eternal, Voltaire admits that he can easily be accused of the following: “A theologian [...] will tell you: Believing in the eternity of matter, you admit two principles, God and matter, you fall into the fault of Zoroaster and Manes”, standpoint that he rejects: “...By what am I, a Manichaeist? [...] I do not accept the existence of two architects; the rough stones [the chaotic matter, the unorganized matter] obeyed the power and the genius [God saw as the Demiurge].” [5, p. 300-301]

In itself, the potential accusation would come to cast a shadow on the theological and philosophical sustainability of the presumptions of Voltaire’s ontology. Which can be easily exposed – when it sees divinity and matter as

being simultaneously in eternity – to the observation that two founding ‘principles’ at the same time cannot be joined in eternity (because they either would be confused or would be ‘limited’ by each other, ceasing, at the same time, to be principles). Suspicion that skirts Epicurus, who, considering gods only as an ‘accident’ of eternal corpuscular matter, ‘subordinates’ them to the only principle – arce, the *binomial* atom-void, the material substrate of all existence.

We will have to observe that the invocation of Persian Zoroaster is quite problematic because they do not teach the co-eternity of matter with God (or something similar), but they see in the terms of existential bipolarity the divinity itself, building up the *religious dualism* itself, the one that the Italian historian of religions, Ugo Bianchi, puts in connection with “... two principles, co-eternal or not”, simultaneous creative deities “... contributing to the creation of a determined part of the world” [22-24].

## 5. The world, worlds, the Universe

Describing a cosmos in which, as Voltaire says, “...les grands dieux habitaient loin de la terre” (*Poeme sur la Loi naturelle*, 1756), he supports the cosmological thesis, regarding the plurality of the worlds inhabited by anthropomorphic rational beings [25].

a) Voltaire proposes a distinct cosmology, specific to his *deist* faith, when describing the demiurgical work of divinity as: (i) the use of pre-existing matter for the simultaneous ‘building’ of all the worlds and beings that inhabit them, and as (ii) setting the general and particular laws governing the Universe.

At the same time, Voltaire firmly believes in the plurality of the worlds inhabited by anthropomorphic beings, beings that, even from a theological and philosophical point of view, reach different conclusions from the earthly ones, ask the same fundamental questions about life, the Universe and the divinity, as in the story *Micromegas* (1752), whose modern science fiction reek is incontestable [26].

b) Considering these positions of Voltaire and referring to the coordinates of Epicurus’ cosmology, we will be able to retain the following elements of developed disparity, but starting from a common basis - the theory of eternity of matter:

- unlike Voltaire’s cosmology, the Garden philosophy describes a Cosmos populated by infinite worlds: “There is an endless number of worlds, some the same with ours, some special. [...] There is nothing to stop the infinite worlds” [21];
- if for Voltaire, the creation of the worlds, returns to the demiurge God, Epicurus sees them “born” by the eternal movement of atoms without any external causality: the worlds “... have suddenly begun to form and grow [...] by bringing together and spinning some fine substances” [27], therefore, by merging, grouping and permanently re-placing the atoms;

- on the other hand, to the undisturbed eternity of the Universe of Voltaire, Epicurus' worlds have only temporal existence, ending inevitably by "scattering" themselves [21, p. 484], after ending the 'growth' stages.

## 6. Morality as a human imperative

And on this level between Voltaire and Epicurus there are common points, both of which teach an autonomous morality in relation to Theology, but the Greek philosopher is more radical when it completely separates it from the divinity.

a) It can be noticed that, in the matter of morality, Voltaire proceeds as in the case of the Philosophy of history, seeing it through the key of "emancipation of theological interpretation" [6, p. 133, 136], rejecting the idea that between morality and the faith of the Church there would be an interpenetration capable of conditioning the ethics to assimilation and the practice of faith. Therefore, the theses that morals can only manifest in the institutionalized religion are clearly disavowed.

This effort of 'autonomy' is, however, only relative to the Church and to the ethical discourse of the clergy, for the fundamental merits of morality preserve their divine origin, God being the One Who, by supernatural and inexplicable means, equips people with what it means the moral law: "*Dieu a donné aux hommes les idées de la justice, et la conscience pour les avertir, comme il leur a donné tout ce qui leur est nécessaire*". ("God gave people ideas of justice and conscience to warn, as He gave them everything they need." – Voltaire, *Poeme sur la loi naturelle*) In this way, man is in possession of the moral norms that are necessary, a "good and evil code" of divine origin, "bequeathed" by the divinity [18, p. 192], the authentic ethical referential as long as human lawmakers have not elaborated "... even the tenth part of the rules we need to govern our lives" [8, p. 388].

The moral norm, also seen as a 'natural law', must be universal, so beyond human particularism and subjectivity. Even though it has never been transmitted to people in an explicit and quantifiable way (such as the *Ten Commandments* or *The Beatitudes*), it can, however, be recognizable in virtues such as "reason, goodwill to our species, needs, passions, all the means by which we have founded a society", virtues "put into men" by God, precisely because "... He did not wish [...] to interfere [...] in our affairs" [8, p. 384-386].

The imperative necessity of moral norms resides in the existence of evil. According to Voltaire, it is structurally accompanying human nature, availability, and even the predisposition for doing evil, being intrinsic to man, for "it is a chimera [the belief] that man was born without passions, and that he only received them because he did not obey God" [8, p. 381]. Good is not at the end of practicing virtues, for "... virtue is not good, it is a duty", a virtuous individual can easily be "persecuted [and] very unhappy". That's why the good coincides with pleasure: "... the greatest good is the one that delights you", even though, an "absolute good" is only "a chimera" [8, p. 381]. Similarly, although

evil is inherent to man, “absolute evil” does not exist, as it does not exist “... extreme suffering which can last for life”.

The antipodes of virtues are the passions: pride, envy, various passions, “the pleasure to command the others” [8, p. 381]. These, although exacerbated, generate evil, they “do evil”, in moderate “doses” are beneficial, they constitute the “engine” of human personality and society development, necessary factors, as long as they serve the progress of the human community and its prosperity. The “valorised” passions are “... the main cause of the order we see today on Earth”, serving the “gifts and pleasures”, and being necessary for man “... like the blood flowing through his veins” [8, p. 381].

**b)** By referring to the coordinates of Voltaire’s morals to Epicurus’s teachings, we will find the same conglomerate of convergence and disparities. Thus, speaking of the same kind of happiness and good, in fact, with pleasure, Voltaire thinks like Epicurus, who built the school of the Garden starting from the premise that “... the purpose of life is pleasure” because “... all the actions of man tend to pleasure” [1, p. 205-206]. Epicurus is convinced that man tends instinctively to pleasure, to the happy existence of the god, who “has no sorrows, nor does he annoy anyone” and he is not subjugated “... by anger or by sympathy” all these being merely “weaknesses” of human nature [27, p. 502]. The happiness, pursuit and purpose of man’s actions, consists first of all, in *ataraxia* - “an inner state of reconciliation”, a cleaning of the soul, a liberation from passions and influences. *Ataraxia* presupposes the achievement of a complete independence of the self from any external pressure, its refusal “to become the servant of indifferent what” [11, p. 62], either vice or a source of pleasure, even the pleasure in excess, leading to compromising the autonomy of the soul.

Under these conditions, when he denies the implicit happiness of the righteous, Voltaire is placed outside the sphere of the Epicurian thinking, which emphasizes that virtue must be cultivated and practiced as a “path that can lead to happiness”, the most important virtues being temperance, justice, courage and friendship [1, p. 208]. Temperance, i.e. the avoidance of excesses, is the one that conditions the achievement of the desideratum of “inner peace” [1, p. 208-209]. At the same time, if Voltaire highlights the pragmatic social utility of passions, Epicurus sees primarily the relevance of their opposite, of virtues, through which “man can rise to the level of a higher life and conform to reason” [1, p. 211].

## **7. Conclusions**

As André Bonnard, Gheorghe Vlăduțescu stressed the permanence of Epicureism, its timeless which makes it “... integrate into the phenomenology of our consciousness” [9]. The determinant fact is that it puts man in the position of thinking his own destiny beyond the interaction with other beings - the gods who are theoretically superior to him.

By contacting the Epicurean ‘Circle of the Temple’, Voltaire he could not but ‘capitalize’ on some of his theses. Whether he will abandon them, reinterpret them or integrate into his own philosophical edifice, Voltaire’s thinking will catch up over the centuries the original ‘spark’ of the Garden, its charm, its confidence in reason. Of course, Voltaire does not go as far as Pierre Gassendi - who “resumes Epicurus’ ideas in a personal form” [1, p. 196] when he creates bridges with his atomism and hedonism. In fact, Voltaire ‘filters’ Epicureism, preferring to somehow limit its impact on his own thought, and preserving what seems to him to be more rational, non-speculative, more non-metaphysical.

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