UDK 165.6/.8
https://doi.org/10.2298/FID2304681P
Original Scientific Article
Received 19.08.2023. Accepted 16.10.2023.

PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIETY
VOL. 34, NO. 4, 523–700

To cite text:
Pavličić, Jelena; Nišavić, Ivan (2023), "Epicurean View on the Validity of Sensation: On the Contextual Reading of the Content of the Perception", *Philosophy and Society* 34 (4): 681–693.

Jelena Pavličić and Ivan Nišavić

EPICUREAN VIEW ON THE VALIDITY OF SENSATION: ON THE CONTEXTUAL READING OF THE CONTENT OF THE PERCEPTION[1]

ABSTRACT
Scholars have argued that we have good reason to defend the Epicurean view of the validity of sensation on the basis of a contextual reading of the content of perception. More specifically, it has been suggested that we can respond to skeptical challenges by acknowledging the contextual character of perceptual content and by linking its truth to the conditions under which it occurs. By examining these proposals, we identify some sources of concern and point out the limitations in providing an adequate framework for the Epicurean idea that the senses are capable of providing the ultimate criteria of truth. In particular, we argue that we should be wary of a contextual reading of perceptual content, not only because this is not a viable model for reliably distinguishing truth from falsity, but also because it is not adequately supported by the available textual evidence of Epicurean empiricist epistemology. Finally, we point out further problems for the Epicurean viewpoint by drawing on some later considerations in the history of the philosophy of perception.

KEYWORDS
eidola, perception, empiricist epistemology, context, conflicting judgments

I

A characteristic feature of Epicurus' epistemology is that it contains the radical empiricist idea that perception is an infallible method of establishing the truth about the external world. According to Epicurus, perception unfolds in such a way that external objects emit very subtle images (εἴδωλα [*eidola*]) that reach and penetrate our sensory apparatus as a constant stream with great velocity.

1 This article was realised with the support of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, according to the Agreement on the realisation and financing of scientific research.

Jelena Pavličić: Research Associate, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy, Institute of Philosophy; jelena.pavlicic@f.bg.ac.rs.
Ivan Nišavić: Research Fellow, University of Belgrade, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory; ivan.nisavic@ifdt.bg.ac.rs.

The nature of *eidola* is twofold. On the one hand, as images, they bear the appearance and form of the object from which they flow upon us. On the other hand, they are applicable and comprehensible to our sensory apparatus, that is, they are designed to be received and accepted by our senses and processed by our minds.[2] By acting as intermediaries between "internal" and "external" worlds, the *eidola* play a crucial role in enhancing our understanding of the latter. They achieve this by accurately representing the objects in our environment through appropriate causal relations.[3] The explanation of how our senses and the objects of our sensations are related is further strengthened when we move to the physical level: External objects and images they represent, on the one hand, and the sensory system, on the other, are distinct but ontologically cognate atomic arrangements. Corporeal by nature, *eidola* are released from the surfaces of objects, retaining their atomic configuration (cf. DRN 4.323–330; Ep. Hdt. 49–50) and acting as external stimuli. They rearrange the atoms within our body, which in turn leads to the reception of stimuli (Leone 2012: 1149/993 col. 38).[4] In other words: By fully reflecting the atomic structure of the objects from which they emanate, *eidola* act as their pure representation and ensure a reliable correspondence with the object from which they are released. Since nothing happens during the process of perception except the reception of information from the external world (DL 10.31), false beliefs about some facts always arise through the exercise of reason, which depends on the evidence provided to us by the senses (cf. Ep. Hdt. 32; DRN 4.483–485). Thus, while falsehood and errors are always a result of supplementary opinion (Ep. Hdt. 50) or of inferences "added by our own minds" (DRN 4.465), all sense impressions (αἴσθησις [*aistheseis*]) are an accurate reflection of what has reached us from the external world.[5] In other words, they were considered

2 This explanation encompasses three central elements: first, the object itself that we perceive; second, the images *eidola* of the given object that reach our sense organs; and finally, the conception that we form in our mind. The mind is conceived in Epicurean theory as a sixth sense organ that shares sensations with the body in addition to its other activities (belief formation and inferential propensities) (cf. DRN 3. 558–591). See (Németh, 2017 and Tutrone, 2020) for a recent discussion of Epicurus' philosophy of mind and related points.

3 These arguments were, in fact, first grouped by Sextus' predecessor (1st century AD) and restorer of the Pyrrhonian school, Aenesidemus. More on this Pyrrhonian thinker: Brochard 1969; Hankinson, 2010.

4 *Epoche* (ἐποχή) is seen above all as an indispensable companion to *ataraxia* (ἀταραξία) and as essential for the elimination of tensions in thinkers prone to dogmatism (cf. Striker 1983: 116). Indeed, there have been many attempts to show that the modes cannot be understood as merely employing a rhetorical strategy, but that there are good reasons to understand them as demonstrations. One such view can be found in (Woodruff 2010).

5 Indeed, such a conclusion, even if formulated as a negation, would be dogmatic in nature. Therefore, Sextus explicitly states that his rhetorical strategies are not aimed at refuting the existence of the above truth criterion, cf.: Sext. Emp. *Pyr.* 2.79, Sext. Emp. *Math*. VII 443. For a more in-depth discussion on how Sextus can refrain from making a judgment on certain topics such as the standard for determining truth and consistently challenge different theories proposed on these matters, see (Palmer 2020).

from the Epicurean point of view as fundamental criteria for establishing the truth of all our knowledge claims. In what follows, we examine the viability of the Epicurean perspective on the trustworthiness of sensation. In §II, we begin by exploring the conceptual connections between Epicurean tenets and related skeptical claims, as well as the role of the objections raised by the ancient skeptics (Pyrrhonist objections) to the claim regarding the dependability of the perceptual process. Subsequently, in §III, we identify and assess some defences against these objections, particularly those grounded in a contextualistic interpretation of the content of sensory impressions. Finally, in §IV, we contend that adopting a contextual reading of the content of perception should be approached with caution. In §V, we conclude with some insights that underscore the necessity for a more refined understanding of the influence of context on perceptual content.

II

There are numerous examples cited by skeptics to problematize the thesis of the reliability of the perceptual process. The most significant among them have been systematized as The Ten Modes of Aenesidemus (DL 9.78–88, 9.107; Sext. Emp. *Pyr*. I.36–163)[6], which are most often associated with the examples of alleged conflicts in appearances and, consequently, contradictory but equally credible perceptual judgments. They refer in part to cases in which the same thing appears to possess perceptual properties – from different angles, under different conditions, and for different human and animal perceivers – that cannot be true of the same object (DL 9.82). For example, a single object such as a tower that appears to be rectangular up close may lose some of the sharpness of its edges when viewed from a distance and appear circular (Sext. Emp. *Pyr*. I 118; DL 9.85–86). Moreover, the perceptual reports of our various sense organs may be in direct contradiction: An oar submerged in water appears visually to be curved. Yet if we tried to reach for it, it would appear straight (DL 9.81; Sext. Emp. *Math*. VII 206). Similarly, contradictory situations may arise in which the same thing appears to different observers in opposite but equally credible ways (Sext. Emp. *Math*. I 79; DL 9.80–81). For example, whereas most healthy people would tend to attribute aromatic properties to certain foods, persons with anosmia would not be able to agree on these attributions. For them, unlike for us, a bouquet of roses would not be fragrant. And for people with the visual disorder pronotopy, the same bouquet would not appear red.

Using numerous examples such as the one above, the Pyrrhonian skeptic will easily find that we are unable to give a definite answer to the question of which of the aforementioned conflicting perceptual accounts is trustworthy. Healthy people are in a state that is natural for the healthy and unnatural for

6 These arguments were, in fact, first grouped by Sextus' predecessor (1st century AD) and restorer of the Pyrrhonian school, Aenesidemus. More on this Pyrrhonian thinker: Brochard 1969; Hankinson 2010.

the sick. Consequently, the sick is in a state that is unnatural to the healthy, that is, natural to the sick (Sext. Emp. *Pyr*. I. 103). Moreover, an appeal to the majority opinion is not possible, because to determine what the majority opinion is, one would have to question each individual observer (Sext. Emp. *Pyr*. I 89; II 45; Sext. Emp. *Math*. VII 327–334). If, on the other hand, one switches from the collective to the individual level and asks for the opinion of the wise man or philosopher, the problem remains, for philosophers disagree among themselves on how to identify one person as wiser than all others (Sext. Emp. Pyr. I.88). Similarly, reason cannot be the instrumental criterion because, as we learn from Lucretius, it depends on sense impressions (reason cannot be "in opposition to the senses" because "if they are not true, all reason is false" (DRN 4.483–485). Ultimately, there is no way to settle disagreements, since every point of view can be seen as a source of distortion, and it is impossible to draw conclusions without belonging to a group that is always in a certain state of mind or body.

Given that sense-impressions seem equally credible to those involved and that disagreements cannot be resolved based on authority, it seems impossible to determine which perspective is the correct one. Sextus' elementary strategy, which he readily combines with the arguments in the modes mentioned above, is an appeal to the equipollence (ἰσοσθένεια [isostheneia]) (DL 10.31-2), i.e., to the problem of undecidable conflict arising from equally plausible points of view, which in turn should lead us to a state of suspension of judgment (ἐποχή [*epoche*]) on the question of which point of view is the correct one (Sext. Emp. *Pyr*. I 8, 10).[7] Given the absence of reasons that could shift the balance decisively in favor of one of the two conflicting positions, the goal of *epoche* is the complete absence of belief (being ἀδόξαστος [*adoxastos*]) (Sext. Emp. *Pyr*. I 226) and thus of belief in the impossibility of determining the criterion for truth (Sext. Emp. *Pyr*. I 13, 226 and II 79).[8] This should not be surprising, for from the dogmatic perspective that includes that of the Epicureans, it was common to point out that skepticism necessarily refutes itself when it leads to such a negative epistemological conclusion. If we cannot know anything, this means that we cannot know the proposition that we cannot know anything, as well as the claim that it is beyond our epistemological capacities to find a rigorous criterion for knowledge. Nevertheless, these insights might have had the required destructive force under the condition that skeptics claim that some of

7 *Epoche* is seen above all as an indispensable companion to *ataraxia* and as essential for the elimination of tensions in thinkers prone to dogmatism (cf. Striker 1983: 116). Indeed, there have been many attempts to show that the modes cannot be understood as merely employing a rhetorical strategy, but that there are good reasons to understand them as demonstrations. One such view can be found in (Woodruff 2010).

8 Indeed, such a conclusion, even if formulated as a negation, would be dogmatic in nature. Therefore, Sextus explicitly states that his rhetorical strategies are not aimed at refuting the existence of the above truth criterion, cf. Sext. Emp. *Pyr.* 2.79, Sext. Emp. *Math*. VII 443. For a more in-depth discussion on how Sextus can refrain from making a judgment on certain topics such as the standard for determining truth and consistently challenge different theories proposed on these matters, see (Palmer 2020).

those perceptual reports were false, which, as Tim O'Keefe notes, no cautious skeptic would ever do (O'Keefe 2010: 88). Affirming a negative conclusion, or determining which of the conflicting judgments is false, is not at all something that Pyrrhonists should be concerned with, nor is it something they are least interested in since the mere existence of conflicts in appearances would be sufficient to show that the thesis of the truthfulness of all sense impressions is untenable (cf. Striker 1983: 117; Warren 2019: 10). Thus, if we allow that the Pyrrhonist asserts the existence of two contradictory sense impressions, it cannot be that both are true, which calls into question the thesis that was a constitutive part of Epicurus' defense of the criteria of knowledge in a rather obvious way (see also: Pavličić and Nišavić, 2023: 134). So how can Epicurus deal with these proposed counterexamples in his theory?

III

James Warren has proposed a solution to resolve the conundrum related to sense-impressions. He distinguished between sense-impressions that are different and those that are mutually inconsistent. When the contents of Φ1 and Φ2 are different, these sense-impressions are not necessarily mutually inconsistent (Warren, 2019: §2). The contents of such sense-impressions are context-dependent and are a result of an internally consistent set of causal factors (Warren 2019: 20; see also: Striker 1983: 121; Vogt 2016: 175–176). Therefore, what may appear to be two conflicting sense-impressions may not be so once the context has been considered. Many other epistemologists also believe that the problem of contrary appearances should not affect the foundation of Epicurean empiricist philosophy. They take the conflict between mutually inconsistent judgments about perceived facts to be only apparent, not real (Long, Sedley 1987: 85; Gavran Miloš 2015: 175; Everson 1990: 177). In summary, by indexing the truth of sense-impressions to the conditions under which they occur, the apparent conflict in sense-impressions can be resolved (see also: Aikin 2020: 194).

Such a view is supported by the fact that Epicureans try to give a coherent explanation for the differing phenomenon by explaining how it can lead us to think that sensations are in conflict. As we learn from Lucretius, the Epicureans hold that two main factors can cause objects to exert different effects on the senses: (a) atomic forms and (b) the response or reaction of the subject of perception (DRN 2.398–407; 4.668–671; cf. Plutarch Adv. Col. 1109D). This explains why some people enjoy spicy foods while others prefer to avoid them, or why the same bottle of wine tastes sweet to one consumer and sour to another. Just as the atomic structure manifests itself as the temperature and texture of a wine, so too the sense organs and the mind endowed with pores (see: DRN 2.381–477; Ep. Hdt. 47) cause different perceivers not to have the same, equally intense, or uniform experience of its taste. Both factors must be considered to explain why we are drawn to describe different perceptual appearances as if they were in conflict with each other. And from an Epicurean point of view, this is precisely why it is important to include physical investigation

in the effort to explain the supposed conflict between different perceptual impressions. When wine is perceived as sweet and sour simultaneously, our sensations depend entirely on how the atomic dispositions of the various wine tasters are mediated in the act of observing. Similarly, in the case of the different appearances of the rudder (or the tower), our sense impressions inform us only about the dispositions of the perceived objects to appear one way or another in light of the given circumstances (i.e., position and location of the receivers). False beliefs, as Lucretius puts it, are usually the result of "inferences added by our own minds" (DRN 4.465) and arise as soon as we move from the evidence provided by the senses to judgment. Accordingly, it can be stated that the mistaken belief that the sensory impressions of the tower contradict each other is a consequence of our hasty assumption that the tower would appear identical from any angle or point of view. To complement this, we can say that the mistaken belief that the sensory impressions of wine contradict each other is a consequence of the expectation that all wine tasters would experience wine in exactly the same way. And, as James Warren points out:

> A full understanding of the mechanism involved in the complex interaction between the properties of the wine and the states of respective perceivers should be able to mitigate the chances of my making a similar mistake in the future. (Warren 2019: 26)

This point is worth elaborating on because the task of explaining the basic features of the perceptual process in the Epicurean tradition has two aspects. First, it is a physical explanation, already discussed above. Second, it could be understood in terms of a distinction between the primary and secondary qualities of the objects with which we come into contact. Primary qualities are those qualities of a body that things possess at the physical level, such as 'tangibility, shape, size, and weight, which are essential to it qua body,' i.e., by virtue of their atomic nature (see also: Long, Sedley 1987: 36). Secondary properties are those that exist only at the phenomenal level, such as the temperature or color of the body, and are in some way related to various dispositions (perceptual constitution) of sentient beings. Certainly, relational predicates or secondary qualities play a role in explaining how false beliefs – that sense impressions are incompatible – are formed. But while disagreements about the properties of wine can be explained as a consequence of the mistaken belief that perceived predicates-sweetness or acidity-apply to the thing perceived in an absolute sense (as intrinsic or non-relational predicates), this kind of explanation is inadequate to explain the diversity of accounts in the case of the tower, given that shape was not conceived of as a non-relational property in the Epicurean tradition. The question, then, is: to what extent is the variability of the Tower's (or the Rudder's) sensations susceptible to the same, contextualist explanation? As we will see in the next section, if one is to pursue a contextualist argument for the case of the rower, one needs a different notion of how perceptual content is influenced by contextual factors and what would explain the object of contextual variation well.

IV

Indeed, when we think about the perceptions of 'sour wine' vs. 'sweet wine', it seems that we do not face the problem when we read the content in context. There seems to be no contradiction in the judgment of the senses since both the impression of sour wine and the impression of sweet wine are true insofar as they are consistent with a sour and sweet constitution of atoms configured according to the tendency of perceivers to selectively take them in. We are in error if we expect our impression of 'sweet wine' to be accompanied by the same perceptual judgment. What we fail to recognize is, to quote James Warren again, "[...] how the state of the perceiver in part determines which aspects of the perceptible object are registered" (Warren 2019: 22). According to this reading, sensory reports are fully consistent with the underlying atomic structures of perceived objects, while our mistaken belief that they are in contradiction is the result of our inability to grasp that, as Fabio Tutrone succinctly explains, "[...] different perceptive possibilities are inherent in the material constituents of things, but the task of actualizing them is entrusted to sentient atomic beings" (Tutrone 2020: 88).

So far, so good. But before we conclude that the Epicurean program is plausible enough to overcome the problem of conflicting appearances, we must examine whether the other examples of the variability of sensations can fit into the contextual reading. Perhaps just as in the case of wine, it may be necessary to consider how the atomic dispositions in the perceiver's body affect the perception of the wine, so in the case of the tower, it may be necessary to understand how the environmental conditions (i.e., different kinds of atomic configurations of different media) affect the way the perceivable object is registered. From this point of view, the conflict between the perceptions 'round tower' and 'square tower' could be explained as an apparent one, since the former is an accurate representation of a 'round' formation of atoms of a distant tower, while the same is true for the latter since it conveys information about a 'square' formation of a tower from a moderate distance. However, much it may appear that the explanation given below does indeed apply to the problem of the opposite appearances of the tower, it should be noted that it differs in some important respects from the explanation proposed for dealing with the variety of appearances of wine. In the case of wine, the mistaken belief that sensory impressions contradict each other is based on the false assumption that wine is generally sweet (or sour), whereas in the case of the tower, as Gisela Striker vividly emphasizes, "error arises only from the mistaken assumption that the same object has been perceived in different cases" (Striker 1996: 90). This idea is neatly elucidated by Long and Sedley, who point out the following:

> So too, since the vision's province is to report not actual bodily shape, but "shape at a distance", we feel no conflict between the far-off and close-up views of the same square tower: naturally we expect a far-off tower to look different from a near-by tower since they constitute different objects of sensation. (Long, Sedley 1987: 85)

Once we realize this, we can see how both the impression of a 'square-tower' and the impression of a 'round-tower' can be correct. And in order to provide a proper basis for an indexical reading of the tower case (i.e., to reconcile it with a notion of the rightness of sensation), numerous commentators (including Sextus Empiricus) have suggested that the Epicurean point of view may have been that the proper objects of sensation – which they must correspond to in order to be true – are not external, solid things, but rather the atomic images or *eidola* (cf. Sext. Emp. *Math*. VII 206–210; Everson, 1990: 177). In other words, according to this line of thought, the proper objects of our perception are not the objects themselves and their actual forms, but their configurations of forms from a particular perspective or distance. Indeed, to uphold the notion that the contents of sensory impressions of the tower are distinct yet non-contradictory in the sense of Warren's argument (§II), we must assert that the objects of perception consist of atomic images or *eidola*. As a result, this approach appears to elucidate the persuasive power of the mistaken conviction that the sensory impressions of the tower are contradictory.

Acceptable as it may seem at first glance, this interpretation is not without considerable difficulties. Whether one regards the proper objects of sensation as *eidola* or as external entities, it is expected that any proposed explanation acknowledges the notion that sense perceptions serve as a reliable way of knowing the world. However, given that we have the impression of a 'round tower' when in fact the tower is rectangular and that Lucretius tells his readers that atomic images do not look like the objects in question, "but vaguely resemble them in a shadowy fashion" (DRN 4.363) there seems to be a good reason to agree with Scott Aikin that the information about the external object in the Epicurean theory is only selectively captured by sense impressions (cf. Aikin 2020: 195). Given that the *eidola* did not retain the contours of the object, many scholars agree that the Epicurean theory falls far short of supporting the claim that sense impressions provide us with information that is true and reliable (cf. Irwin 1989: 151; Striker 1989: 85). Call this the 'reduced content of sensations' objection.

Several philosophers challenge the notion that *eidola* selectively capture external objects. They argue that *eidola* serve a greater purpose than merely presenting external objects by providing a richer and more nuanced depiction of the state of affairs (on this point, see Gavran Miloš 2015: §2). According to this view, *eidola* are reliable indicators of objective reality because they accurately portray the entirety of a perceived situation resulting from the physical rearrangement of atoms. Let us call this view 'enriched content of sensation'. However, the problem with this line of thought is that it only accounts for a portion of what we have been promised. As we learn from various sources, the senses are supposed to provide us with something more concrete – that is, information about the shapes and colors of things – as every atomic image 'bears the appearance and form of the object from whose body it falls and wanders away' (DRN 4.54) (cf. Ep. Hdt. 49–50). Yet, as Lucretius also informed us, "the image loses its sharpness before it can deliver a blow to our eyes because the images during

their long journey through the air are constantly buffeted and so become blunted" (DRN 4. 353-359). Considering this, the textual evidence favors Aikin's view of the 'reduced content of sensations' rather than that of the 'enriched content of sensations', and the former poses considerable difficulties for the Epicurean account, as noted above. But even if the 'reduced content of the sensations' interpretation is ignored and we hold to the notion of the complexity and richness of perceptual content we are confronted with the following question: What is the role of the senses in the process of knowledge acquisition? If we acknowledge the contextual nature of perceptual content and link its truth to the conditions under which it occurs, can we truly determine the true nature of things or only how they appear to us? (cf. Palmer 2020: 365–366) This reflection should make us wonder whether our perception corresponds reliably to external objects in our surroundings. Indeed, we can say that sense-impressions can serve in most cases – causally – as signposts to our environment and provide a solid basis for further inferences in the acquisition of knowledge about the objects in an external world. However, stating that they are relevant to justifying our claim to knowledge is not equivalent to asserting that they have the capacity to satisfy that claim. To obtain truth-promoting evidence and avoid skepticism, as Irwin argues, we must show that our inferences are warranted (Irwin 1989: 151).

In addition to these considerations, (for those who do not harbor doubts about the feasibility of illuminating ancient theories of knowledge by aligning them with modern debates), a comparative analysis between ancient theories and modern epistemology may give rise to new challenges for Epicurus's theory. For instance, we can see that Epicurean accounts of perceptual illusions are not available if we treat Pyrrhonean seemings and appearances in a pseudo-phenomenalistic way, like the contemporary conceptions of sense-data or sensa. In a similar manner, appearances are private, subjective, transparent, and incorrigible. Of course, Pyrrhonists did not employ any phenomenalistic descriptions of appearances involving "round red patches" or anything alike, and physical objects were nevertheless featured in the Pyrrhonean language concerning seemings or appearances. However, the idea of treating them in any protophenomenalistic way is supposed to render all the distinctions akin to the modern distinction between primary and secondary qualities unavailable. In a Berkeleyan move, all the qualities would in fact be subjective or secondary. Our accounts concerning physical objects and extramental reality become parasitic on what we say about *phantasia* (φαντασία). One might add that this suits the Pyrrhonean, because in Sextan times the term *phantasia* became synonymous with *phainomenon* (φαινόμενον) and the whole idea of making all qualities secondary would make Aenesidemus' tropes better arguments. The protophenomenalistic rendering of the skeptic's view on what appears to him to be the case makes Epicurean explanations of perceptual illusions impossible for the skeptic because there are no intrinsic properties of the objects an Epicurean might utilize in his account.

Apart from that, there are cases of perceptual illusions that are not to be found even in an exhaustive compendium like Aenesidemus' tropes and for

which Epicurean theory is not capable of accounting for how they come about. The best example is, perhaps, the infamous Müller-Lyer illusion. There has to be something at the side of the subject that explains why two lines seem to be of different lengths when the fins of their arrows point in opposite directions. Epicurean theory of perception lacks any means to describe the connection between some visual cues and what we perceive. In this case, it is the way that the perceived depth of the shafts depends on the direction of the arrows. However, there were no theoretical obstacles for Epicurus to hypothesize, in a Fodor-like manner (Fodor 1984), about some perceptual modules that process certain visual information in a peculiar way. But he did not do it. This kind of perceptual illusion did not come even to Sextus' mind. And it is a pity because a Pyrrhonist might hypothesize that people in cultures that do not entertain box-like objects do not suffer from this illusion. That would create a novel and a very interesting trope.[9]

So, the Epicurean theory, as presented, does not fully explain how certain visual cues lead to specific perceptions. We suggest that Epicurus could have, but did not, hypothesize about specialized perceptual modules that process visual information in specific ways, as later philosophers like Jerry Fodor have done. However, the deficiency in theoretical elaboration within Epicurean thought renders it less capable of elucidating certain intricate perceptual phenomena.

V

In this paper, we explore the applicability of a contextualist interpretation to the Epicurean explanation of sensation variability in response to Pyrrhonist objections challenging Epicurus' theory. The approach we consider emphasizes the role of context and contextual factors in influencing perception, suggesting that apparent conflicts in sense impressions can be reconciled by examining the conditions under which they occur. Specifically, we delve into the Epicurean explanation of knowledge creation, involving atomic films (eidōla/simulacra), external alterations, and subject-dependent selections. This exploration into the Epicurean perspective on sensation variability and its interaction with skepticism underscores the necessity for a more refined understanding of context's influence on perceptual content. In addition to addressing the complexities inherent in the contextual reading of the content of perception, the paper illuminates further challenges in explaining certain later examples within the history of the philosophy of perception debate. Our proposal asserts that Epicurus' epistemological theory remains problematic, particularly when one takes into account the role of context in shaping sensory experiences (through a comparison with ancient Pyrrhonist objections) and possible explanations of some more intricate perceptual phenomena (in light of modern phenomenological arguments).

9 We thank Mašan Bogdanovski for his assistance in shaping these final points and for providing insightful comments on the preliminary draft.

Abbreviations

Diogenes Laertius
DL = Lives of the Philosophers
Laertius, Diogenes. 1925. *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, (transl. R. D. Hicks, M.A.) [= DL]

Lucretius
DRN = On the Nature of Things (De rerum natura)

Epicurus
Ep. Hdt. = Letter to Herodotus
Ep. Men. = Letter to Menoeceus
Ep. Pyth. = Letter to Pythocles
KD = Principal Doctrines

Sextus Empiricus (Sext. Emp.)
Math. = Against the Professors
Pyr. = Outlines of Pyrrhonism

Plutarch (Plut.)
Adv. Col. = Against Colotes

References

Aikin, Scott (2020), "Skeptical responses to stoics and epicureans on the criterion", in Kelly Arenson (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Hellenistic Philosophy*, New York: Routledge, pp. 191–203.
Brochard, Victor (1969), *Les skeptiques grecs*. 2nd edition, Paris: J. Vrin.
DeWitt, W. Norman (1964), *Epicurus and his philosophy*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Empiricus, Sextus (2018), *Against Those in the Disciplines*, translated with introduction and notes by Richard Bett, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Everson, Stephen (1990), "Epicurus on the Truth of the Senses", in Stephen Everson (ed.), *Companions to Ancient Thought: Epistemology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 161–183.
Fodor, Jerry (1984), "Observation Reconsidered", *Philosophy of Science* 51 (1): 23–43.
Gerson, P. Lloyd (2009), *Ancient epistemology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Hankinson, J. Robert (2010), "Aenesidemus and the Rebirth of Pyrrhonism", in Richard Bett (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 105–120.
Irwin, Terence (1989), *Classical Thought*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Leone, Giuliana (2012), *Epicuro*, Sulla Natura, *Libro II* ("La Scuola di Epicuro", 18), Napoli: Bibliopolis.
Long, Anthony A.; Sedley, N. David (eds. and tran.) (1987), *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, (vol. 1), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Németh, Attila (2017), *Epicurus on the Self. Issues in Ancient Philosophy*, London; New York: Routledge.
O'Keefe, Tim (2010), *Epicureanism*, Durham: Acumen Publishing Limited.
Palmer, A. John (2000), "Skeptical Investigation", *Ancient Philosophy* 20 (2): 351–375.
Pavličić Jelena; Nišavić Ivan (2023), „Epikurejske i skeptičke argumentativne strategije. O njihovom razvoju i uzajamnom utjecaju", *Filozofska istraživanja* 43 (1): 131–145.
Sextus Empiricus (1997), *Against the Ethicists*, in Richard Bett (ed. and trans.), *Sextus Empiricus; Against the Ethicists* (Clarendon Later Ancient Philosophers), Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Strajker, Gisel (2007), „Skeptičke strategije", in *Skeptički priručnik I, Antički skepticizam*, Beograd: Plato, pp. 181–209.
Striker, Gisela (1983), "The Ten Tropes of Aenesidemus", in Myles Burnyeat (ed.), *The Skeptical Tradition*, University of California Press, pp. 95–115.
—. (1996), *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Taylor, C. W. Christopher (1980), "All Perceptions are True", in Malcolm Schofield, Myles Burnyeat, and Jonathan Barnes (eds.), *Doubt and Dogmatism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 105–124
Thibodeau, Philip (2016), "Ancient Optics: Theories and Problems of Vision", in Georgia L. Irby (ed.), *A Companion to Science, Technology, and Medicine in Ancient Greece and Rome*, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, pp. 130–144.
Tutrone, Fabio (2020), "Coming to Know Epicurus' Truth: Distributed Cognition in Lucretius' De Rerum Natura", in Donncha O'Rourke (ed.), *Approaches to Lucretius: Traditions and Innovations in Reading the De Rerum Natura,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 80–100.
Vogt, M. Katja (2016), "All Sense-Perceptions Are True: Epicurean Responses to Skepticism and Relativism", in Lezra, J., Blake, L. (ed.) *Lucretius and Modernity. The New Antiquity*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 145–159.
Warren, James (2019), "Epicurus on the False Belief That Sense-impressions Conflict", *Philosophie antique* 19: 7–28.
Woodruff, Paul (2010), "The Pyrrhonian Modes", in R. Bett (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 208–231.

Jelena Pavličić i Ivan Nišavić

Epikurovo stanovište o verodostojnosti opažanja: o kontekstualističkoj interpretaciji sadržaja perceptivnog iskustva

Apstrakt

Pojedini teoretičari su tvrdili da postoje ubedljivi razlozi na osnovu kojih se može braniti epikurejsko stanovište o pouzdanosti čulnog svedočanstva na osnovu kontekstualističkog tumačenja sadržaja percepcije. Konkretnije, sugerisano je da možemo odgovoriti na skeptičke izazove ukazivanjem na kontekstualno osetljivu prirodu perceptivnog sadržaja i povezujući njegovu istinitost sa uslovima pod kojima se on pojavljuje. Ispitujući ove predloge, identifikovali smo neke izvore zabrinutosti i istakli izvesna ograničenja u pružanju adekvatnog okvira za epikurejsku ideju da čulno svedočanstvo može poslužiti kao kriterijum istinisti saznajnih tvrdnji. Posebno smo tvrdili da treba biti oprezan prema kontekstualističkom čitanju perceptivnog sadržaja, ne samo zato što ne predstavlja održiv model za pouzdano razlikovanje istine od neistine, već i zato što nije adekvatno podržano dostupnom tekstualnom evidencijom koja leži u osnovi epikurejske empirijske epistemologije. Konačno, ukazali smo na dalje probleme za epikurejsko stanovište koristeći se nekim kasnijim razmatranjima u istoriji filozofije percepcije.

Ključne reči: *eidola*, percepcija, empiristička epistemologija, kontekst, suprotstavljena tvrđenja