



You have downloaded a document from  
**RE-BUŚ**  
repository of the University of Silesia in Katowice

**Title:** Philosophy as art of life and therapy: the epicurean-stoic model of ethics in the face of contemporary holistic views of human being in coaching

**Author:** Anna Musioł

**Citation style:** Musioł Anna. (2021). Philosophy as art of life and therapy: the epicurean-stoic model of ethics in the face of contemporary holistic views of human being in coaching. „Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Śląskiej. Organizacja i Zarządzanie” (Z. 151, 2021, s. 455-463), DOI:10.29119/1641-3466.2021.151.30



Uznanie autorstwa - Licencja ta pozwala na kopiowanie, zmienianie, rozprowadzanie, przedstawianie i wykonywanie utworu jedynie pod warunkiem oznaczenia autorstwa.

## PHILOSOPHY AS ART OF LIFE AND THERAPY: THE EPICUREAN-STOIC MODEL OF ETHICS IN THE FACE OF CONTEMPORARY HOLISTIC VIEWS OF HUMAN BEING IN COACHING

Anna MUSIOŁ

University of Silesia in Katowice, Faculty of Humanities, Institute of Philosophy, Poland;  
anna.musiol@us.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0001-7325-4456

**Purpose:** The purpose of the article is an attempt to show philosophy as an art of living and therapy by referring to the ancient philosophical schools founded by Epicurus of Samos and Zeno of Citium. Drawing on the ethical postulates of the systems indicated, the author proves their validity. Author argues that ethical assumptions of the distinguished schools are also revealed in many contemporary concepts of sustainable development; this could lead to further research.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The article uses the method of comparative analysis (method), showing the way of possible adaptation of the ancient ideal of aretaic ethics to the contemporary, holistic views of human being in the 21st century.

**Findings:** The analyses undertaken confirm the theses about the therapeutic role of philosophy, especially in its practical dimension. Classical philosophy as an art of living and therapy can also today become a source of inspiration referring us to a permanent and objective hierarchy of values, providing us with an inner sense of security, teaching understanding and distance to the world and to ourselves.

**Research limitations/implications:** The author deliberately limits her research solely to characterizing the two leading philosophical schools of the ancient Hellas. Thus, she paves the way for further research on the role and significance of practical philosophy in shaping the condition of contemporary men (human being) and their environment.

**Practical implications:** The issues raised in the article emphasize the practical dimension of philosophy. The domain of ancient systems of philosophy lies in their therapeutic, healing and strictly practical character. Ancient philosophy is an art of living focused on the realization of the ideal of eudaimonia (full/complete life). It is in such a handy and not only speculative-theoretical approach that its proper goal is expressed (results/conclusion).

**Social implications:** The thematic scope of the thesis presented in the article includes both elements of value ethics, philosophical anthropology, philosophy of civilization and social philosophy. The author focuses her attention on the description of human condition and recognized forms of striving for its improvement, both in the dimension of individual and social life (results/conclusion).

**Originality/value:** The article shows the possible use of classical humanistic knowledge, in particular philosophical knowledge, in combination with contemporary concepts of self-development that are part of a wide range of support professions developing rapidly in the 21st century: psychology, psychotherapy, therapy, counseling and coaching (discussions).

**Keywords:** philosophy as an art of life, epicureanism (Epicurus), stoicism (Zeno of Citium), coaching, holism.

**Category of the paper:** research and viewpoint paper.

## 1. Introduction

Various circumstances of life today make us try to consider the value of philosophy and philosophical reflection from the perspective of its practical meaning. Practice, especially the philosophical one, links a certain behaviour with life and preferential value within it. The freedom of valuing makes life an art and philosophy, especially the one that is not speculative but practical. It becomes a therapy – a specific remedy for the psycho-physical ailments, worries, distress and everyday concerns that torment people.

By presenting these theses in the article, I combine them with a historical and philosophical analysis focusing on the ancient Epicurean-Stoic models of ethics, and then associate them with contemporary concepts that capture man *in toto*: in his totality, completeness and fullness. In other words, referring to the words of Urszula Wolska, author of the book *Terapeutyczne aspekty filozofii...*, I want to show that „philosophy can be a therapy, and the result of such a philosophical therapy can be the recovery of spiritual harmony and a sense of happiness” (Wolska, 2017, p. 7). Experiencing happiness is a holistic feeling of fullness of life as a possibility of realizing values important for oneself, both in the area of physical life (health and vitality, care for one’s own body), spiritual life (self-reflection, self-cognition, meditation), as well as intellectual life (mental activity, intellectual creativity, insight, prudence or erudition), which translate into the quality of single (individual) and community (social) life.

## 2. Epicurean school ethics

The first of the great schools of the ancient Hellas, to which I want to refer by dividing philosophy into canonic, physics and ethics – three coherent, complementary areas – gives ethics the status of knowledge „about what to choose and what to avoid, how to live and what is the purpose of life” (Laertios, 2004, p. 599). Its intellectual inducement is the system of philosophy of Epicurus of Samos.

According to Epicurus, the aim of life of every person is to experience pleasure. This pleasure, as the highest value of life, means sober reason (*νήφων λογισμός*). This is because the proper understanding of the value of pleasure, associated with reasoning, is both the absence of physical suffering of the body and the absence of anxiety of the soul. In a qualitative way,

the absence of anxiety of the soul means much more than experiencing physical distress, because the body is only affected by the present suffering, while the soul is constrained by the past, present and future suffering. Likewise, experiencing spiritual pleasures is more precious than experiencing physical ones. Epicurus expresses this conviction by saying: "It is not continuous drinkings and revelings, nor the satisfaction of lusts, nor the enjoyment of fish and other luxuries of the wealthy table, which produce a pleasant life, but sober reasoning, searching out the motives for all choice and avoidance" (Laertios, 2004, p. 648).

The consequence of this position, maintained in a climate of aretaic ethics, is the recognition of wisdom as the most precious of all virtues. It teaches us that „It is impossible to live a pleasant life without living wisely and well and justly. And it is impossible to live wisely and well and justly without living a pleasant life" (Laertios, 2004, p. 648). Thus, Hedonism permeating the Epicurus system makes pleasure a superior value which, based on prudent behaviour, makes one happy.

Prudence, in turn, as a rational action, makes us concentrate on satisfying natural and necessary pleasures – those that are necessary for us to preserve and strengthen life. They are a kind of models. The Ancient Sage convinces us that all other types of pleasures, for example, natural and unnecessary or unnatural and unnecessary (the so-called delusional ones) should be rejected, because they constitute a superfluous element testifying to superfluity (Fabjański, 2020, pp. 25-27). Meanwhile, lavishness, splendour and overload, especially with unnatural and unnecessary needs, become a source of negative emotions, internal tensions, fears, anxieties, inner confusion, suffering and the experienced mess (Reale, 1999, pp. 257-260).

Negative feelings, however, can easily be overcome, as the sources of their appearance and their impact often originate from unreasonable fears, unfounded anxiety and unjustified concern. „We suffer because we fear gods, death and pain. Needlessly" (Fabjański, 2020, p. 23). An effective remedy in the fight against oppressive anxiety is the Epicurean Tetracharmakos (four-part cure) covering four principles: 1) what is terrible is easy to endure; in other words, the evil that happens to us is bearable and acceptable (Wolska, 2017, p. 72); 2) what is good is achievable; it is easy to acquire and work out (Wolska, 2017, p. 70). For example, joy is easy to gain, because it is enough for a person to realize the fact of his own existence; 3) death should not be feared, because one does not feel it; 4) judgments of higher forces should not be feared of either; deities or actions of higher powers should not frighten us, because one can only see them with the mind. „Gods are not dreadful, it was man who made them like this in his own image" (Wolska, 2017, p. 68).

According to Epicurus, man needs little for happiness. In his choices, he should be guided by reason, striving only to satisfy necessary and absolutely basic needs. Self-limitation in his needs as a kind of asceticism should mean his way of life, because „the less needs, the less suffering" (Wolska, 2017, p. 62).

Such a simple and ascetic form of functioning in everyday life is to be accompanied by *λάθη βιώσας!*: conscious evasion of life in the hustle and bustle of the city, voluntary resignation from living in a public center; also deliberate and unforced isolation. This attitude is intended to strengthen the inner/spiritual life. Its aim should be to balance, control, calmness and ataraxia, that is – as Marcin Fabjański writes – what we „often overshoot in everyday life, chasing intense experiences and collecting objects” (Fabjański, 2020, p. 30). According to the ancient Greeks, ataraxia is the achievement of complete peace of mind. In the feeling of ataraxia, man experiences joy from the very fact of existence. This joy is a pleasure – the flagship value of Epicurean ethics.

### 3. Stoic school ethics

Quoting the words of the Polish psychologist and philosophy historian Władysław Heinrich<sup>1</sup>: „Stoicism arises contemporarily with Epicureanism. Its creator is Zeno, brought up in a school of Cynics and his teaching of morality refers to their views” (Heinrich, 1925, p. 150).

The School of Stoics is the second great center of ethical reflection of the ancient Hellas, where the philosophical art of life is taught by Zeno of Citium. He teaches stoic doctrine by strolling through the Painted Porch called the Porch of Peisianax (Laertios, 2004, p. 371). By his very nature, he is a kind, modest and reticent man.

This Ancient Sage, consistent with the characteristic of being reticent, convinces us that: „nature has given us one tongue and two ears to listen twice as much as we say” (Laertios, 2004, p. 380). Criticizing human vanity, Zeno calls us to live in harmony with nature, to act wisely, and at the same time to exercise our mind systematically. He calls us to follow the path of composure and seek unity with the world. The search for this unity is considered to be a good in itself, in which Zeno sees a special value (*ἀζία*) as „help for a rational life” (Laertios, 2004, p. 417).

According to Stoic doctrine, human nature is a particle of the rational universe (Heinrich, 1925, p. 153). Thus, life according to nature becomes life according to the laws of the universe – this is the motto of Stoic ethics. According to the Stoics, man is not the opposite of the world. „He is in it and with it an inseparable part of the universe” (Heinrich, 1925, p. 159). „Therefore our goal is to live according to nature, i.e. to live according to our own [individual – A.M.] nature and the nature of the universe, i.e. not to do what is forbidden by the common law, which is all penetrating healthy mind” (Laertios 2004, p. 410; Fabjański, 2020, pp. 105-107).

---

<sup>1</sup> Władysław Heinrich (1869-1957) – Polish psychologist-behaviorist and historian of philosophy associated with Krakow scientific institutions: the Jagiellonian University and the Polish Academy of Learning.

Living in accordance with nature means specifically living in accordance with reason, and living in accordance with reason is living in accordance with virtue, including the virtue of preserving one's system as strengthening oneself by taking care of those dimensions of life that serve/assist us and at the same time eliminating from life those elements that harm us (Laertios, 2004, p. 408). Such realization in virtue is an exercise in becoming a good person. Good, in the conviction of the Stoics, that is, nurturing the value of nature and harmony within it. In the ethical doctrine of the Stoics, harmony is identified with symmetry and balance. Improvement in this harmony of nature, as well as its maintenance, allows one to accept with dignity all the horrors that fate brings (De Botton, 2000, p. 86.).

As Allan De Botton writes when analysing the thought of Seneca Stoic, „regardless of how vast an area of our life's frustrations may be [...], all its characters share a basic structure: a conflict of desire with an unremitting reality” (De Botton, 2000, p. 88). This conflict is related to the impossibility of obtaining a sense of satisfaction because „the sources of satisfaction are beyond our control” (De Botton, 2000, p. 88). On the other hand, according to Stoic ethics, man can only learn what to do so that the world is not „even more tenacious because of our reactions: bursts of rage, self-pity, anxiety, self-righteousness and paranoia” (De Botton, 2000, p. 89). Only those frustrations for which we manage to prepare and understand them properly in advance turn out to be bearable. The greatest troubles in turn are those of our sorrows and grievances that we do not expect and cannot understand (De Botton, 2000, p. 89). So what remains for man to do with the unpredictable? In the conviction of the Stoics then there is nothing left to do but to accept with dignity what is involuntary and inevitable.

In this attitude there is a spiritual-physical aspect of our growth, of updating ourselves in the typical human *physis*, as well as an aspect of strengthening our own *psyche* in order to shape the virtue of a harmonious disposition. This virtue is referred to by the Stoic philosopher Cleanthes, suggesting that it is this very virtue – the virtue of a harmonious disposition – does the happiness of the soul lie. As in the book *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, the Greek chronicler of philosophers, Diogenes Laertios reports: „There is happiness in virtue as in the soul created to harmonize all life” (Laertios, 2004, p. 410).

This harmonisation does not only apply to the human-individual. The Stoics do not only mean the individual. The domain of individual life is that we also go beyond our own individuality by entering the sphere of social life. The rational drive, which obliges us to strengthen ourselves, „forces us also to take care of our closest family, and further on, of relatives and fellow citizens, in order to ultimately extend ourselves to the whole of humanity. We feel that we are made to live together with others” (Heinrich, 1925, p. 164).

Both the ancient Epicurean and Stoic systems – with a strong emphasis on the practical aspect of philosophy – refer to a life consistent with the proclaimed science. The call to live according to the principles that one learns means „to live according to the content of one's science” (Hadot, 2000, p. 334). It is a kind of focus on the practical dimension of philosophy, the role of which, according to the ancient wise men, is not played out in acts of vain speculation

and vain theorizing, but should be fulfilled in the therapeutic disposition: the attitude of character shaping, in acts of strengthening the strength of the spirit and care and systematic concern for maintaining the balance of life by fulfilling oneself in the virtue of concentration, rational action and constant striving to maintain the peace of mind (inner life). Also in the awareness of the individual and – as I have already mentioned – social, even communal range of our existence. The sciences promoted in both ancient schools may, to a various extent, be seen in many contemporary development programmes.

#### **4. Holistic views of a man in coaching on the example of selected models, tools and techniques**

Currently, an excellent, holistic form of taking care of the balance is carried out through coaching – a method of work focused on the growth and development of potential, efficiency and resources of a person as an individual, as well as a group or team ([icf.org.pl](http://icf.org.pl)). So far, this method has developed a number of tools, models and techniques of work; the original ways of striving for holistic human development, whose sources lie in the social-humanistic sciences: philosophy, sociology or psychology.

Development trends in coaching are often signed by psychological knowledge supported by scientific evidence. Coaching most often uses the cognitive behavioural trend (Watson, Rayner, 1920; Wolp, Lazarus, 1966), cognitive psychology, positive psychology, as well as many therapeutic concepts, e.g.: rational emotive behaviour therapy cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and solution focused brief therapy (SFBT).

Therapeutic sources include the holistic SPACE model used in coaching developed by Nick Edgerton and Stephen Palmer (Edgerton, Palmer, 2005, p. 25-31). As Anna Syrek-Kosowska, trainer, coach and lecturer in MBA Executives programmes, writes: „The literature on the subject describes a wide range of possibilities of applying the SPACE model – both in development processes, stress management training programmes, and in business and life coaching. In the Polish adaptation, the English acronym SPACE<sup>2</sup> [...] replaced by the SFERA abbreviation meaning successively: social context or social situation, physiology, emotions, reactions and thought analysis” (Syrek-Kosowska, 2014, p. 62). The distinguished contexts of human life are assumed by the ethical doctrine of Epicureans and Stoics. Therefore, it is worth mentioning at this point that the humanistic foundations of psychological and psychological-coaching tools and work models often lie precisely in philosophy, for example, in the Epicurean-Stoic idea of holism (Ziemacki, 2014).

---

<sup>2</sup> The acronym SPACE stands for: Social context (or Situation), Physiology (Physical), Actions, Cognitions, Emotions.

The referenced contexts, similarly to the ethical programmes of Epicurus and Zeno, include the human being in its entirety, taking into account the aspect of his functioning in the social environment; the physiological aspect emphasizing the dimension of physiological reactions of the body to emotions; analogously, it is also human emotionality or in other words the sphere of emotional reactions of the human being as an individual to specific situations; also the area of undertaking actions and accompanying mental analysis (Syrek-Kosowska, 2014, p. 64). As a result, the SFERA model, through its therapeutic and healing character, is effectively used in coaching practice, becoming a model tool for multidimensional work on oneself and another human being.

Man is captured in similar multidimensionality, self-knowledge and holism by Philippe Rosinski's integrated global coaching approach. Rosinski calls for the opening up of six contexts of human functioning in everyday life that emphasize various aspects of life, even those that are not even brought together. He calls these contexts perspectives. These are in turn: 1) the physical perspective related to health care, vigour and physical fitness; 2) the managerial perspective, in which a person fulfils tasks efficiently and skillfully; this is also the ability of logical-analytical analysis; 3) the psychological perspective responsible for the development of emotionality and relationships; 4) political perspective – community and social – combined with generating power and a sense of service to others; 5) it is also a community cultural perspective – promoting diversity, skilfulness and cleverness in cooperation with others; 6) and lastly, a spiritual perspective: the individual, within which the human being, striving for unity, reflexively seeks deeper meanings and universal meanings in life. The last perspective distinguished by Rosinski has philosophical-religious connotations (Rosinski, 2011, pp. 51-175; Musioł, 2018, pp. 279-290).

Another therapeutic model of the aided tool, developed today, is proposed by self-development expert Stephen Covey (1932-2012). Covey's project focuses on the values of human body, mind, heart and spirit. It is also a program of self-development and self-improvement in the dimension of individual life, which expresses concern for style and physical quality of life, intellectual development, ability to learn and acquire new mental skills. In the dimension of social life, community life it heralds a strong commitment to others through sensitivity and full and careful listening, which is a source of fulfilment and joy. The highlighted aspects are complemented by the supernatural dimension of the spirit, in which one asks for the meaning of life, discovers the meaning of life or finds arguments that give meaning to life (Covey, 2018, p. V-VI; Musioł, 2019, p. 221-229).

## 5. Conclusion

Today, in the era of man lost in liquid post-modernity, both ancient philosophical concepts, especially the architecture of the ethics of the Epicurean and Stoic virtues, as well as many contemporary – inspired by history of psychology – coaching projects, do not lose their validity and relevance. They find their application not only in – increasingly popular – coach's offices, but also in the offices of advisors, trainers, personal development specialists or therapists (Mukoid, 2017).

Such a state of affairs may result from the more and more often observed loss of man in the contemporary, changing reality, whose intellectual atmosphere can be described as philosophical irrationalism. It is a fuzzy, fragmented, liquid, blurred, incoherent reality, full of contradictions/ambiguities and semantic chaos. It is the Austrian philosopher Paul Feyerabend's inevitability, almost imposed from the outside (the rule *anything goes*); it is a demand to act in an atmosphere of a lack of cognitive/epistemological homogeneity, a deficit of values and socio-political apathy (Wolska, 2017; pp. 23-24, Feyerabend, 1975). In this mess of labile everyday life, as a result of internal tears and emotional turmoil, modern man looks for a way back to what is permanent and stable.

In this article, I have attempted to show that this durability and stability can be guaranteed by a kind of return to reliable humanistic and social knowledge contained in the theses originally proclaimed by the classics of philosophy: axiologies of objective values and virtues, as well as the rules of logical-rational proof, disseminated in the teachings of thinkers; also among the Ancient Sages of the Delphi formula *γνώθι σεαυτόν*: know yourself. I boldly claim that the thought they proclaim does not lose its relevance and is, in a way, a response to the needs of a modern man who, noticing the disadvantages of living in liquid postmodernity, struggles to make a turn and, as a result, strive for an effective rebuilding of his own, in a way ruined physical, mental and spiritual condition. For this purpose, he visits the offices of the representatives of the aforementioned aid professions. The current popularity of all this type of profession is a clear sign of the desire of the contemporary man seeking support to abandon everything that is changeable and at the same time, a strong pursuit of self-knowledge and an increase in self-awareness expressed by the desire to permanently renounce what is inconstant; it is also an active search for unity, cohesion, universal values, harmony, happiness and life fulfillment built on the canvas, universally applicable and guaranteeing stability, laws or norms (Wolska, 2017, pp. 25-26, 31). All of the above-mentioned elements that teach full life, originally contain the – eudaimonia oriented – classical philosophy, which is why I am in favor of a contemporary attempt to grasp it in terms of the art of life and therapy. I openly defend the thesis that the systems of classical philosophy, as if in contrast to the chaos of external reality, provide a person with an internal sense of security. It is enough to realize that philosophy is present in every, even the most banal aspect of human life. It effectively teaches

how to relive the world; indicates a multitude of strategies, gives a sense of freedom, allows you to notice your own flaws, and at the same time recommends working on yourself, teaches you to understand and distance yourself and the surrounding world.

## References

1. Covey, S.R. (2018). *Siedem nawyków skutecznego działania*. Poznań.
2. De Botton, A. (2000). *O pocieszeniach jakie daje filozofia*. Warszawa.
3. Edgerton, N., Palmer, S. (2005). *SPACE: a psychological model for use within cognitive behavioural coaching, therapy and stress management*. *The Coaching Psychologist*, 2(2), 25-31. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446279908>.
4. Fabjański, M. (2020). *Uwolnij się! Dobre życie według siedmiu filozofów – terapeutów*. Kraków.
5. Feyerabend, P. (1975). *Against Method*. London.
6. Hadot, P. (2000). *Czym jest filozofia starożytna*. Warszawa.
7. Heinrich, W. (1925). *Zarys historii filozofii. T. 1. Część pierwsza: Filozofia grecka*. Warszawa-Kraków-Lublin-Łódź-Paryż-Poznań-Wilno-Zakopane.
8. [icf.org.pl](http://icf.org.pl).
9. Laertios, D. (2004). *Żywoty i poglądy słynnych filozofów*. Warszawa.
10. Mukoid, E. (2017). *Książka dla ciebie. Kim jesteś i dokąd zmierzasz*. Poznań.
11. Musioł, A. (2018). Sześć perspektyw coachingu globalnego w paradygmacie złożoności holograficznego modelu Philippe'a Rosinskiego. *Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Śląskiej. Seria: Organizacja i Zarządzanie, nr. 123*. Gliwice, pp. 279-290.
12. Musioł, A. (2019). Principles of comprehensive self-renewal by Stephen R. Covey in the perspective of ancient Greek παιδεία and the ideal of καλοκάγαθία. *Scientific Papers of Silesian University of Technology. Organization and Management Series, no. 140*. Gliwice, pp. 221-229.
13. Reale, G. (1999). *Historia filozofii starożytnej III. Systemy epoki hellenistycznej*. Lublin.
14. Rosinski, P. (2011). *Globalny coaching. Podejście zintegrowane*. Warszawa.
15. Syrek-Kosowska, A. (2014). Coachingowe narzędzia: Model SFERA. *Coaching review, 1*, pp. 60-70.
16. Watson, J.B., Rayner, R. (1920). Conditioned emotional reactions. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 3, 1-4. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/h0069608>, 22.06.2020.
17. Wolp, J., Lazarus, A. (1966). *Behavior Therapy Techniques*. New York.
18. Wolska, U. (2017). *Człowiek rzecz czy osoba? Filozoficzne ujęcie człowieka jako osoby terapią dla zagubionych w płynnej ponowoczesności*. Warszawa, Radzymin.
19. Wolska, U. (2017). *Terapeutyczne aspekty filozofii Sokratesa i Epikura*. Radzymin.
20. Ziemacki, J. (2014). *Emocje są jak zarazki*. [https://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/1,96856,15616640,Emocje\\_sa\\_jak\\_zarazki.html](https://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/1,96856,15616640,Emocje_sa_jak_zarazki.html)drf, 08.06.2020.