



Bulgarian Comparative Education Society
Keynote Address

**The Current Business and Economics Driven
Discourse and Education: Perspectives from Around
the World**

Hannes van der Walt

2017



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
POTCHEFSTROOM CAMPUS

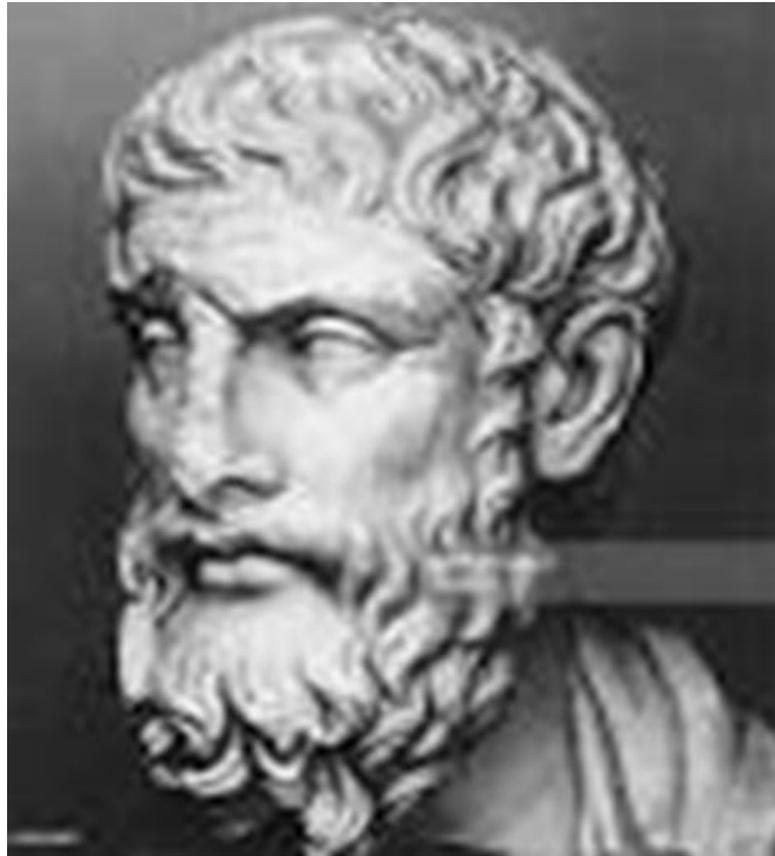
Neoliberal university culture today - characteristics

- Commercialisation
 - Corporisation – business culture – corporate interest
 - Consumerism
 - Commodification
 - Sorting and grading culture / value its ratings
 - Mechanistic and instrumentalistic modes of instruction
 - Utilitarianism – usefulness
 - Efficiency and effectiveness culture
 - Productivity
 - Market orientation (advertising)
 - Managerialism
 - Performativity
 - Education as investment
 - Student as client
-

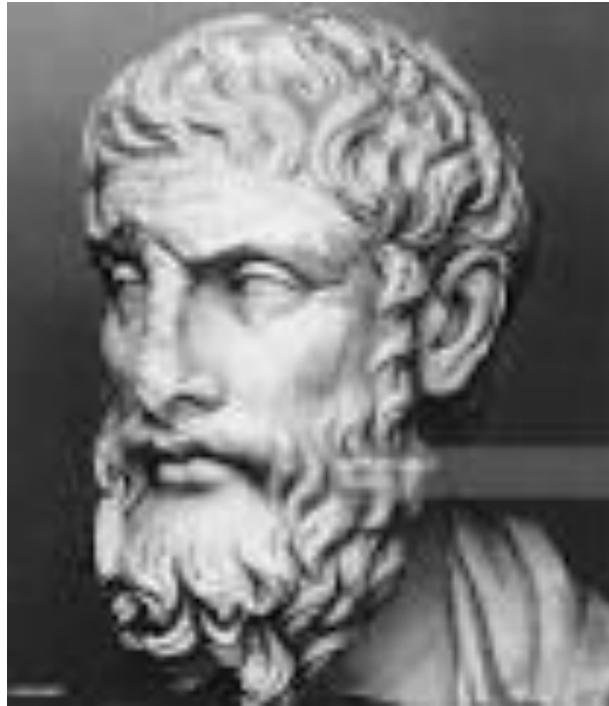
Contextual conditions

- Complex phenomenon
- No single starting point; no identifiable proponents
- Globalisation plays a role
- Internationalisation creates amenable context
- Technology transcends boundaries: money and knowledge
- Mass migration

**Let us consider an
alternative approach...**



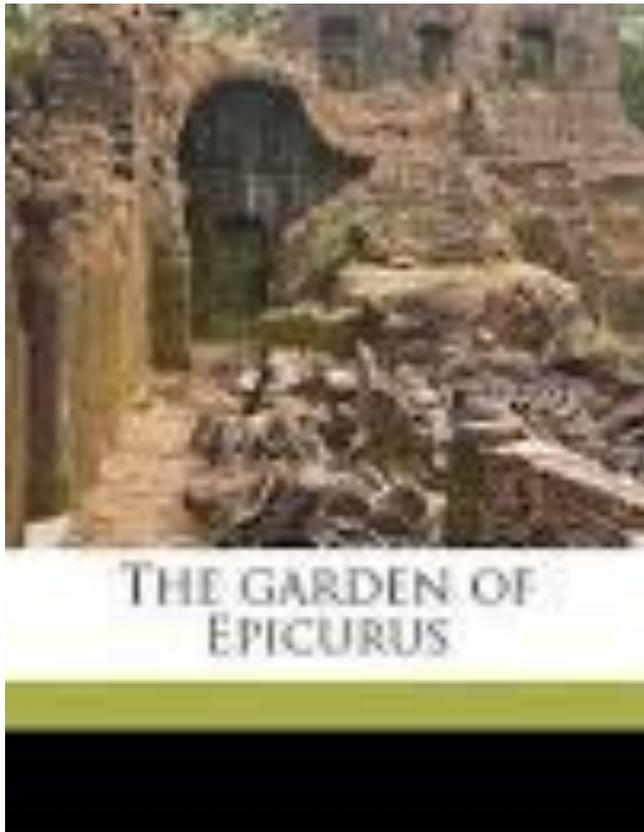
Epicurus (341-270 BCE)



Some of Epicurus's sayings

- 14. Protection from other men, secured to some extent by the power to expel and by material prosperity, in its purest form comes from a quiet life withdrawn from the multitude. (*Principal Doctrines*)
- 8. (PD 15) The wealth required by nature is limited and is easy to procure; but the wealth required by vain ideals extends to infinity.
- 25. Poverty, if measured by the natural end, is great wealth; but wealth, if not limited, is great poverty.
- 30. Some men spend their whole life furnishing for themselves the things proper to life without realizing that at our birth each of us was poured a mortal brew to drink.
- 35. Don't spoil what you have by desiring what you don't have; but remember that what you now have was once among the things only hoped for.
- 47. I have anticipated you, Fortune, and entrenched myself against all your secret attacks. And we will not give ourselves up as captives to you or to any other circumstance; but when it is time for us to go, spitting contempt on life and on those who here vainly cling to it, we will leave life crying aloud in a glorious triumph-song that we have lived well.
- 53. We must envy no one; for the good do not deserve envy and as for the bad, the more they prosper, the more they ruin it for themselves.
- 58. We must free ourselves from the prison of public education and politics.
- 81. The soul neither rids itself of disturbance nor gains a worthwhile joy through the possession of greatest wealth, nor by the honour and admiration bestowed by the crowd, or through any of the other things sought by unlimited desire. (*Vatican Sayings*)

Epicurus's “The Garden” (house bought in 307/306 BCE)



Neoliberalism embodies an age-old problem

Philosopher Daniel Klein construes Epicurus' famous saying "We must free ourselves from the prison of everyday affairs and politics" to mean the following:

Epicurus "has more on his mind than just freeing ourselves from the endless acquisition of unnecessary stuff. It is the business of dedicating our lives to business that he is warning us against, starting with the obvious restraints of having a boss who tells us what to do, how to do it, and what is wrong with the way we are currently doing it."

Klein, Daniel. 2014. *Travels with Epicurus*. London: OneWorld Publications. P. 17.

How to face the challenges of Neoliberalism?

- Criticism of basic tenets of NL based on our insight into the human being, society and education
- Criticism in terms of a worldwide backlash, not necessarily principle-based
- More principled response at the END conference next week

Criticism based on our insight into the human being, society and education

- NL = **reductionist** (norms of economics, business and trade applied to non-economic and non-business domains; life in such domains subjected to such norms [Foucault])
 - **Utilitarianist**: commercialisation of non-business activities for economic survival
 - Reductionist view of education as such. Failure to understand the **true value of education**, to value education for its own sake, as formative rather than functionalist, technician, mechanistic, instrumentalist – education only valued for its potential to contribute to economic welfare. (There should be greater appreciation for humanistic, even classical, education that is aimed at growth and formation of body, mind and spiritual values, creates space for freedom of mind through creative thinking)
 - Education is not a saleable **commodity** (for those who can afford it; everyone is entitled to education)
 - Failure to see economics as but **one aspect of reality**
 - The **status of human beings** should be restored, from *homo economicus* to fully rounded individuals
 - **Efficiency** should be more broadly defined (not as input over output only)
 - Academics should attempt to resist **managerialist tendencies**; they should insist on their professional autonomy and freedom of scholarship
-
- They should also resist the **commodification** and narrowing down of the curriculum – the softer sciences should be retained.

Concluding remarks

- Context: the metaphor of frog in hot water
- Neoliberalism has colonised our minds (?)
- In my paper tomorrow, I discuss a few other responses to Neoliberalism

Thank you to the Organisers of BCES
Conference 2017!