

# The Ethics of Epicurus and its Relation to Contemporary Doctrines by Jean-Marie Guyau. Edited by Testa and Ansell-Pearson, translated by Testa

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Twenty-odd years ago, a philosopher friend of mine suggested that I read Kant’s *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (though my friend was thoroughly Aristotelian). In the attempt, I had such a strong, negative emotional reaction that I kept throwing the book on the floor and (literally) kicking it across the room. I never got close to finishing it.

Kant claimed a kind of axiomatic “self-evidence” for **duty** as the basis for all morality and moral agency. The book hit me in the face with the very “Pavlovian” social programming that informed my childhood and formative years – and remained locked in my subconscious, to be triggered (most often with anguishing guilt, sometimes nightmares) by whatever “post-hypnotic” triggers were embedded. (Some therapy helped alleviate that – but, likely due to my own failings on follow-through, did not eliminate it.)

Even after discovering Epicurus, I have not been adept at putting together all the “clues” to complete the puzzle in a therapeutic way (again, my failings). But Guyau takes on that debilitating Stoic/Kantian virtue/duty driven morality (calling Kantianism a “new Stoicism) *mano y mano* – in a way that just toggled all the right switches in my slow-to-learn brain.

I can honestly say that, had I read Guyau 20 years ago, I would have become an Epicurean 20 years ago. (This is not to in any way deprecate all that I have read on Epicureanism in recent years – including the wonderful stuff on here: Guyau simply hits me **directly** where I have lived.) Fortunately, as Epicurus said (in other words), it is never too late.

So, [Godfrey](#), I am profoundly grateful! ☐☐