

# Guyau - Interesting Summary Essay - The Morality of Epicurus And Its Relationship To Contemporary Doctrines

**Post by "Cassius" of May 2, 2019 at 2:41 PM**

Poster: "In fact, it believes, the individual pursues only his own pleasure". Is this true? I was under the impression that Epicurus was more utilitarian than that

Cassius:

Here's the full paragraph the poster is quoting from. Guyau writes from the position that Epicurean philosophy needed to "advance" from that viewpoint. In my view the statement of the original Epicurean position is correct, and changes are not advances but regression. The point that people want to ignore in Epicurean philosophy so that they can "advance" to something else is that only if you consider other people's pleasure and pain are you going to be successful in maximizing your own.

"This principle posed, Epicurus and his continuators conclude from it that pleasure being the sole end of beings, morality for each individual must be the art of procuring for oneself the greatest amount of personal pleasure. As a Utilitarian said, morality thus understood is nothing but the regularization of egoism. Hobbes before Spinoza attempted to construct a geometry of morals, Helvetius constructed a physics of morals, d'Holbach a physiology of morals. But under various names, Epicurean morality is, in summary, nothing but the search for personal interest; it rests on the confusion between fact and duty. In fact, it believes, the individual pursues only his own pleasure. By right it is also his pleasure he should pursue, whether this pleasure finds itself by chance in opposition with that of others or if it finds itself in harmony with it. But even so, all the Epicureans, even La Mettrie, are in agreement in committing the individual to not retreating into a foolish egoism. According to them, there is harmony in most cases between the pleasure of the individual and that of others. But let us understand each other, this is not a fundamental and primitive harmony: egoisms work together like pendulums, without mixing and without uniting, and the goal of morality is not the producing of this union, since it would be impossible. On this point Epicureanism has again advanced very little in France: D'Alembert, d'Holbach, and Volney at moments give us a presentiment of the contemporary English school, but they never fail to return to personal interest as a principle of all morality. In this there is a notable divergence between the Epicureans and the contemporary English school. This divergence grows from Bentham to Stuart Mill and especially to Mr. Spencer, with whose principles we can for the first time construct a nearly complete physics or physiology of morals. The English moralists still preserve personal pleasure as the sole lever capable of setting a being in motion. It is only that instead of positing this pleasure as the legitimate end of the

moral being, they work with all their might at having it pursue the pleasure of others. Expressed in this way, their Utilitarianism seems at first glance to be of a manifest inconsistency, and we will elsewhere examine if it doesn't contain, in fact, any inconsistency. Nevertheless, there is in this doctrine something profound that we must now bring to light. "

-----Cassius again:

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<<< This is the source of the corruption in Epicurean philosophy, and again the writer appears to me to be correct in blaming it on the English.