

# Wilson (Catherine) - "The Pleasure Principle"

Post by "Joshua" of June 8, 2019 at 7:58 PM

I certainly recognize what you're saying about the emotive nature of slavery as a concept, and the tendency to get mushy in our thinking about it.

I agree with you that just using the word 'moral' is a problem, and that there is no "outside moral standard"--what in philosophy is often called a *Transcendental Moral 'Ought'*. This relates to David Hume's famous formulation, afterward called "Hume's Guillotine"; *There is no possible account of how things are that can tell us how things ought to be*. There are no Transcendental Moral Oughts, but there are what we call "Rational Oughts"; this is usually an "if-then" statement. *If you want a society that recognizes private property, then you ought to criminalize theft*. That's not a moral argument, but a rational one.

So perhaps I would reformulate that sentence. An Epicurean can make a rational case against slavery by citing the non-willingness of the slave as an impediment to justice, by definition.

Could the thief make the same defense as the slave? "That may be your convention, but I didn't agree to it. My convention says I can take what I want." I don't believe so; the thief is pleading himself *out* of the pact, and therefore forfeits its protection. The slave is trying to plead himself *into* the pact, and is therefore worthy of it.

Another way to put it; if a man takes as his mantra that line from Achilles--that there are no pacts between lions (himself) and men (society)--then he can't very well complain when society treats him like they would a man-eating lion, can he? This is again a rational rather than a moral conclusion.

Good points! It always helps to clarify one's thinking.