

SOE20 - On mutual advantage

Post by "Hiram" of December 30, 2019 at 10:21 AM

In reply to [Cassius](#) ' feedback:

Quote

SOE20: Human relations should be based on mutual benefit.

Objection to SOE20: This one pretty well sums up what I see as the major problem with the analysis behind most of the objections above, because it has "humanism" written all over it. Epicurus did not write in terms of "human relations" but in terms of humans pursuing pleasure individually and in groups. The last ten [PD10](#)'s make absolutely clear that while "justice" is an agreement not to harm or be harmed, it is also absolutely clear that there is no way to enumerate such agreements in absolute terms, and it is also clear that such agreements are to be broken immediately when they become disadvantageous to either party's pursuit of pleasurable living. The clear point of these final PD's is that there IS NO Epicurean "Golden rule" that we must always treat others as we would want to be treated ourselves because each decision is going to be based on the circumstances of the individuals involved: there are no ideal virtues, no supernatural morals, no across-the-board rules for which there is any authority to say that we should always follow them. In this formulation, "mutual benefit" is not only hopelessly vague, but the "mutual" part has absolutely no foundation whatsoever and in fact the clear thrust of many other doctrines is the opposite. [PD10](#) emphasizes that depravity has no absolute definition; that everything must be judged by its result, and the only standard that nature has set is that we find pleasure desirable and pain undesirable. This is the same issue where Catherine Wilson is hopelessly off base when she injects her on social preferences into Epicurean philosophy. In referring to her I give her credit in the recent podcast interview that she admits that she is outside Epicurean orthodoxy in doing so, but the matter isn't just being "outside" orthodoxy -- it turns Epicurean philosophy on its head for ANYONE at ANY TIME to suggest that their own moral or ethical preferences are anything but personal to them.

This is a VERY important issue because this helps us to connect theory with practice, which is one of the purposes of the Tenets.

Mutual benefit is not "hopelessly vague". In fact, it made it to the last ten [Principal Doctrines](#), and we know from Epicurus' sermon "against empty words" that the founders were adamant about avoiding vagueness.

One of my main critiques in my review of [Wilson's last book](#) had to do with her lack of connecting policy that she calls for with mutual benefit. If she had discussed the advantages versus disadvantages for the people involved, then she would have been making a complete Epicurean case for her policy solutions. There's a whole section on mutual advantage in the book review. Here is the most relevant portion:

Quote

If Wilson had appealed to the sources while explaining the concepts of justice / morality, she would have encountered repeated references to “mutual advantage” and this would have added credibility and clarity to her arguments.

If she had relied, again, on the first principles (in this case, the last ten of the [Principal Doctrines](#)), her explanation of how Epicurean philosophy provides moral guidance would have been much more cogent and complete. The fact that [an area the size of Delaware has been declared unlivable](#) in Louisiana has economic effects, and the building of new dams there and in other coastal regions would result in the spending of billions of dollars that would have to come from the pockets of tax payers. The problems generated by climate change are not abstract. If they are discussed in concrete, measurable, observable terms as they are directly experienced, then the issues of mutual advantage and disadvantage may be addressed. This is how Epicurean morality works, and Wilson wasted an opportunity to encourage her readers to philosophize like Epicureans about these issues.

Also, in [my piece for Partially Examined Life](#) on "Applying the Epicurean Theory of Justice to Cannabis Legalization", I use mutual advantage to translate an issue that seems abstract into concrete terms: there's the disadvantage for the state of not being able to tax the revenue from illicit cannabis sales, there's the disadvantage for thousands of youth and their families when they're incarcerated at high rates for victimless crimes related to cannabis use and sale, there's the advantage of the potential small businesses that may emerge if legalized, there's the advantages for the medical use of it, etc.

Now, if someone is an armchair philosopher, this does not apply. But SoFE is meant to promote the teaching mission of the Epicurean gardens, and particularly encourages Epicurean content creators to create vlogs, essays and other content where they figure out ways to demonstrate that EP can be applied and give moral guidance in the modern world. So learning how to argue cases based on concrete instances of mutual advantage is essential for content creators who wish to demonstrate the usefulness and relevance of EP.

For this reason, I wanted a Tenet focusing on mutual advantage.