

Criticisms against Principle of Maximal Utility

Post by “Daniel Van Orman” of May 14, 2018 at 2:14 PM

"The said truth is that it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong." - Jeremy Bentham

As with any philosophy theory, the Principle of Maximal Utility may be criticized and defended in numerous ways - connections to ideas, example scenarios, emotional or logical reasoning, and so forth. This is the thread for that.

Below are quick summaries of very common arguments concerning this principle and responses to them. Please note that many of these arguments also apply to Epicureanism.

Before Continuing

Please understand the deciding factor for most of these arguments is simply one's personal opinion. Please remain respectful of each others' beliefs and understand people are trying to do their best, even if they are misguided.

Many of the arguments below concern four foundational principles of utilitarianism. These principles uphold the maximal utility principle and seek to help one apply it. Be sure you understand these principles to best communicate:

Hedonism

Pleasure (anything which creates pleasant, nice, or good feelings) is the only good and pain (anything which creates unpleasant, nasty, or bad feelings) is the only evil in life. Every decision one makes, whether consciously or unconsciously, is made to pursue pleasure or avoid pain. It is everyone's moral responsibility to be the happiest they can by maximizing their pleasure while minimizing their pain.

Simplification: "What matters is that you are happy"

Consequentialism

The moral correctness of an action depends on its predicted and actual results (consequences). A good action produces good and uplifting outcomes, whatever they are defined to be. An action which produces bad outcomes, even if done with good intentions, is still immoral.

Simplification, in the Extreme: "The ends justify the means"

Impartiality

When determining the most morally correct action, one should use objective criteria - never prejudice, hatred, bias, or other non-objective reasoning. Every person's interests should be considered as equally, even though individuals are not equal because of talents, skills, personalities, and other attributes.

Simplification: Do not judge others based on prejudice and/or bias.

Commensurability

The morality of an action or set of actions can be determined through combining their outcomes, through using some consistent system to compare, total, average, or otherwise combine outcomes. The best actions produce the most good.

Simplification: "Please, let me make it up to you"

Table of Contents

- Robert Nozick's Utility Monster: What if One Person Loves Something more than Others? Can They Take Away Others' Property?

o Sadism

o Love of Destruction

o Teachings on Higher Pleasures

- Hypothetical Acceptance of Unequal Distribution of Happiness: Are slave societies justifiable?

- Possible Exceptions for Everything

o Nothing Forbidden

o Do Rights Matter?

- Bernard Williams' Jim and the Indians

o Jim and the Indians

o Negative Responsibility

o Integrity

- Distastefulness: I don't Like your Ethics

o General Distastefulness

o Common Criticisms

- Blind Obedience: Your Ethics are simply Rules to Follow Robotically

o Ethics \neq Mathematics

o Does Consequentialism Care about Character?

Robert Nozick's Utility Monster

What if One Person Loves Something more than Others? Can They Take Away Others' Property?

Utility Monster

Theoretically, a person (a "utility monster") who loves resources of any kind with such exceedingly gargantuan love could justify taking resources from all other people. After all, those resources would create more utility if the utility monster used them than if anyone else used them. Note: this argument applies to all consequentialist ethics which focus on maximizing a variable.

The most common response to this is: why is that such a bad thing? Nozick never explains why a utility monster would be a bad thing, he just creates a bad-sounding scenario with no point.

Examining why one would think the utility monster is bad, it is easy to see it built purely on emotion (it is simply demonizing some scenario) and fails entirely if put into any realistic scenario. One such realistic scenario could be numerous people across the world donating their resources to help those in Africa and other impoverished nations. This is good as the impoverished enjoy the resources more than those donating the resources. The impoverished would be similar to utility monsters, who take resources from numerous others for their own pleasure. While in theory, this sounds bad, it clearly is not as it helps the impoverished greatly while requiring only relatively minor sacrifices from those who donated the resources.

Additionally, a utility monster which always gains immense pleasure from taking resources from others and never decreases in the pleasure they gain would never exist in reality. While there may be some who gain immense pleasure from resources, diminishing marginal utility (a concept from economics) would cause the pleasure generated to decrease until it is equal to the pleasure it would generate for everyone else - making it unnecessary to sacrifice to give resources to what used to be the utility monster. To give an example for this, if a poor, hungry, homeless person lived in a wealthy country, the wealthy should help the person as the person would appreciate the resources far more than the wealthy. As the person is cared for, diminishing marginal utility would take effect and the benefit they would gain from the wealthy's donations would decrease until it would no longer be worth donating to the person (since the person would be well taken care of). The point when the donations stop would likely be when the person is nearing the wealthy's own standard of living.

Sadism

If a terrible person gains more pleasure from causing suffering than pain is generated, then their destructive actions could be justified under utilitarianism. Would not their acts of torture and mayhem produce more pleasure than pain overall?

Sadistic pleasures could never justify the pain it inflicts. Sadistic pleasure is low level and temporary while the pain inflicted is not (see teachings on higher pleasures below).

Additionally, the pleasure gained would never in reality be more than the pain inflicted. Justifying such pain would require unrealistically massive benefits, which would never be obtainable. Sacrifice is only justified if it brings a net positive change in utility and making up for great or widespread pain would require enormous and long-lasting benefits - which sadism will never bring. Not to mention, decreases in utility are never justified under utilitarianism, thus sadistic acts are never justified as they cannot generate more overall utility.

But what if a very depressed or guilt-ridden person wants a sadist to torture them to death? I think the question becomes: what benefit would their death bring compared to therapy treatment or some other alternative? If the person is a dangerous criminal who cannot stop hurting others and thinks being tortured to death is a just punishment, then perhaps execution of some kind (electric chair, harvest for organs, etc.) is the best choice. I believe it would be very unlikely for the best option to be handing the person to a sadist. (If execution still sounds immoral, then please see the "Distastefulness" section.) If the person may learn to contribute to society, then therapy treatment is better as it makes them happier and enables them to make society happier.

Love of Destruction

Since people may gain pleasure from destructive means, pleasure cannot be the highest good.

While people may gain some pleasure from destructive actions, the actions most often lead to greater pain and a reduced capacity to gain or feel pleasure. This does not mean pleasure is not the highest good, it means people may pursue pleasure in a bad way - just as one could pursue any ethical goal poorly.

Using pleasure as the highest good still denounces destructive actions in similar ways as most other ethical systems do. Destructive actions are morally incorrect since they cause pain and can reduce pleasure for all involved, even over an extended time period.

Morally incorrect actions, which are destructive and reduce pleasure overall, tend to bring much pain to those committing the actions. They may suffer from worry, fear of being caught, shame, and low self-esteem. Also, their memories may bring frequent reminders of past wrongs and guilt.

These actions tend to reduce one's capacity to gain or feel pleasure. They imprison one with sufferings (such as addiction or lost opportunities/freedoms). They prevent one from enjoying higher pleasures (see teachings on higher pleasures below). For example, one cannot enjoy a loving family if their actions do not allow for a stable home or for family members to grow closer to one another. Immoral actions also create feelings of hatred in the actor and others, making it difficult to make restitution and work with others. Resultant feelings of revenge or a grudge (which causes pain by itself) can drive one toward making bad choices, causing more pain for all involved.

Most of the happiness which destructive actions bring (if it does bring any happiness) is very weak and temporary. It does not bring joy, only lower pleasures (see teachings on higher pleasures below)

Post by “Daniel Van Orman” of May 14, 2018 at 2:15 PM

Teachings on Higher Pleasures

"There is no known Epicurean theory of life which does not assign to the pleasures of the intellect, of the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments, a much higher value as pleasures than to those of mere sensation" - John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 2

Not all things which cause joy are equal – some, such as intellectual pursuits and charitable attributes – are so superior they are worth more than any amount of a lower pleasure.

A pleasure is superior to another if one would not trade the superior pleasure for any amount of the inferior pleasure. This is because one "can never really wish to sink into what he feels to be a lower grade of existence" (John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 2). An intelligent person would not trade their wisdom, knowledge, and ability to learn to become even the happiest animal. A kind and charitable person would not become cruel and sadistic for any amount of wealth.

Exceptions to preferring superior pleasures occur as people make mistakes and temporarily trade a superior pleasure for an inferior one. As John Stuart Mill teaches, "Men often, from infirmity of character, make their election for the nearer good, though they know it to be the less valuable; and this no less when the choice is between two bodily pleasures, than when it is between bodily and mental. They pursue sensual indulgences to the injury of health, though perfectly aware that health is the greater good." (Utilitarianism, Chapter 2)".

People can lose their desire for higher pleasures. Often, this occurs since they do not have time nor opportunity for higher pleasures. Additionally, one may addict themselves to lower pleasures.

The addiction remains as one only has access to lower pleasures or lower pleasures are the only ones they are capable of enjoying.

John Stuart Mill explains this concept, "many who begin with youthful enthusiasm for everything noble, as they advance in years sink into indolence and selfishness. But I do not believe that those who undergo this very common change, voluntarily choose the lower description of pleasures in preference to the higher. I believe that before they devote themselves exclusively to the one, they have already become incapable of the other. Capacity for the nobler feelings is in most natures a very tender plant, easily killed, not only by hostile influences, but by mere want of sustenance Men lose their high aspirations as they lose their intellectual tastes, because they have not time or opportunity for indulging them; and they addict themselves to inferior pleasures, not because they deliberately prefer them, but because they are either the only ones to which they have access, or the only ones which they are any longer capable of enjoying" (Utilitarianism, Chapter 2).

Hypothetical Acceptance of Unequal Distribution of Happiness

Are slave societies justifiable?

Utilitarianism focuses on total happiness – not individual happiness. Focusing on total happiness does not account for an uneven distributions of happiness. What if slavery increases total happiness most?

Any action which is legitimately helpful is good under utilitarianism. Most criticisms concerning this concept are centered on unhelpful actions, which no one should approve of. For example, a slave society would never actually produce more happiness than a free society, therefore utilitarianism would never endorse it and would always oppose it.

Slavery causes more pain than pleasure as it always hurts the slave more than it benefits their masters. It also slows their country's progress towards greater happiness. John Stuart Mill teaches a sacrifice is only good if it succeeds in generating more overall happiness: "The utilitarian morality does recognise in human beings the power of sacrificing their own greatest good for the good of others. It only refuses to admit that the sacrifice is itself a good. A sacrifice which does not increase, or tend to increase, the sum total of happiness, it considers as wasted" (Utilitarianism, Chapter 2). Slavery is not a good sacrifice and never will be.

Possible Exceptions for Everything Nothing Forbidden

The maximal utility principle never strictly forbids any type of action. For the right reasons, even mass killings could be considered morally correct. Would a sadist be justified in

tormenting others? (See "Sadism" subsection under "Robert Nozick's Utility Monster".)

No type of action is strictly forbidden since it is impossible to know whether a situation exists where any action truly is the best choice possible. Exceptions to general teachings only exist when following one good moral principle violates another. These exceptions are allowed since they enable one to use rules and good judgement to find better choices, even if those choices would not be better under normal circumstances. This creates more happiness for everyone than absolutely forbidding certain actions can.

Not all actions are allowable in any given case. General rules exist to guide people toward better choices. These rules encourage or discourage actions based on whether those actions tend to have good or bad results in the long-term in the vast majority of cases. Exceptions must be made, even rarely, to help others the most, and these exceptions occur when rules prevent good decision-making instead of help it.

Most actions people believe should be forbidden are nearly impossible to justify under utilitarianism. One must have very good and clear reasons to justify doing something which is normally very bad to do. The actions are only justified if they truly are a good decision to make - if their results in their specific situation truly will help everyone become happier overall.

Do Rights Matter?

Since every action can be justified, do rights even matter?

Why are rights valuable in the first place? Rights are valuable since they contribute to happiness. Utilitarianism values them because of this fact. If a right destroys happiness, then it is not valuable but destructive and should not be supported (pseudo-rights, such as the right to own a slave, fall into this category). Actions violating rights are supported if they truly produce more happiness than following the right would (such as a policeman violating the right to private property by entering someone's home to save a life).

Bernard Williams' Jim and the Indians

Negative Responsibility (accountability for inaction when one could have prevented harm to others) and Integrity

Jim and the Indians

Below is a quick summary of Bernard Williams' Jim and the Indians.

Twenty Indians protest against their government, ending with military capturing and sentencing them to public execution. Jim, a foreigner, arrives just before the execution. Since Jim is an honored visitor, there is a special occasion. The military captain offers the opportunity for Jim to

kill one of the Indians and spare the rest. If Jim refuses, there is no special occasion and all twenty will be killed. Jim panics and is uncertain about what to do. He has never even held a gun before; he feels nervous and does not want to hurt anyone. The local villagers beg Jim to kill one of the twenty. What should Jim do?

Negative Responsibility

Utilitarianism supports negative responsibility, which states one is responsible for what they do not prevent if they could have prevented some evil action. Following this principle, utilitarianism states Jim should kill one of the Indians to prevent the captain from killing all of them; after all, one dead Indian is better than twenty dead Indians. However, does this not reduce an ethical problem into simple mathematics, essentially turning morality in equations and people into robots? (See the "Blind Obedience" section.)

Additionally, people should not be held responsible for what they did not do. Why should Jim be responsible for the deaths of nineteen Indians if he refuses to kill one? The captain is the one who gave the order to execute - he is responsible for the deaths of all twenty. In fact, the only power Jim has to prevent the deaths is the power the captain gives Jim. It is entirely up to the captain to decide who lives and who dies.

If a parent neglects their child, leading to the child suffering from hunger and severe weather despite the parent having surplus food and a good house, does it make sense to say the parent is not responsible for the easily preventable and terrible things happening to their own child? This why negative responsibility is important; it states one should be held responsible for how they did not help and uplift others when they could have. If one is held accountable not to do evil, then why not to do good or prevent evil? It seems ridiculous to claim one is ethical when they would actively refuse to sacrifice to uplift and support others. Negative responsibility is enforcing that one should actively help others the best one can.

Post by "Daniel Van Orman" of May 14, 2018 at 2:17 PM

Integrity

If Jim killed one of the Indians, wouldn't he be a murderer? Why should Jim be morally obligated to do something evil? Also, if murder is acceptable in certain cases, is everything acceptable? (see the "Possible Exceptions for Everything" section)

Jim feels stressed and worried about killing, since he feels it is wrong, doesn't that mean he would be violating his personal integrity if he killed one of the Indians? No moral system should

ask one to violate their integrity (see the "Distastefulness" section).

Jim's uneasiness to do something difficult to help the villagers and the Indians is not what forms his integrity. Refusing to act whenever challenges arise is the opposite of integrity as it means one would not hold to any moral principles except when life is easy. Jim's integrity would not be violated if he held to the foundational principles he believes in. If those were utilitarian principles, he would be holding to moral principles which ask him to do what he can to best help others, even if it causes some pain (including Jim's own uneasiness) for the benefit of great, long-lasting happiness.

If Jim's uneasy feelings were the basis of the ethics he followed, then what value are those ethics which would be based on whatever he felt like? If ethics did not require one to change their personal beliefs to pursue higher moral ends, then what value does ethics have? If one's personal opinions about ethics are flawed, it is their responsibility to change their opinions (see the "Distastefulness" section).

Distastefulness

I don't Like your Ethics

General Distastefulness

Most criticisms are caused by how utilitarianism ethics do not match one's current thinking. This is not a problem with utilitarianism, this is a problem with ethics – ethics asks people to change their thinking and actions for the sake of doing what is right. It would be concerning for an ethical system to base itself on one's individual impressions and judgements.

Other criticisms seem to be caused by complete misunderstandings – misinterpretations of utilitarianism principles which no one should ever approve of. Every ethical system experiences this and the solution is to calmly and rationally listen to what that ethical system actually teaches. Remember, utilitarianism's goal is to help everyone be the happiest they can be. Is an honest, wholesome pursuit of happiness a bad thing?

Common Criticisms

Criticism: Emotion is required to make good judgements. Impartiality seems to make people emotionless and therefore causes bad judgements. A common example, helping someone in great need over helping family in some need.

My response: Is it not concerning to prefer not helping people in the greatest need? Utilitarianism does rely on emotion, it relies on pure love for all others. This pure love has been integral to utilitarianism since its foundation: "to do as you would be done by, and to love your neighbour as yourself, constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality" (John Stuart Mill,

Utilitarianism, Chapter 2).

Criticism: Consequentialism seems to encourage people to choose morally unthinkable actions.

My response: Most example criticisms are complaining about making the best of a bad situation and not about how utilitarianism does so. A common example is choosing not to try to save someone in danger when the danger is still present since it means abandoning someone in their time of need. Such an example often ignores how saving them is more likely to end up injuring one's self, causing the would-be rescuer and the other person to both require rescuing - worsening the problem. Unfortunately, a bad situation generally means bad things will happen. Consequentialism just tries to minimize the damage. Is that not what anyone should do?

Criticism: Hedonism seems to not care about rights. It should support deontological ideals.

My response: Why are rights, freedoms, etc. good? Because they provide happiness? Since they give pleasure and lessen pain in the world? Those reasons are why hedonism supports rights, freedoms, etc. (see the "Do Rights Matter?" subsection of "Possible Exceptions for Everything").

Blind Obedience

Your Ethics are simply Rules to Follow Robotically

Ethics \neq Mathematics

Trying to calculate or estimate the moral correctness of an action is trying to turn ethics into mathematics.

Ethics requires judgement, which utilitarianism seeks to teach. Judgement (not mathematics) will always be required for any moral scenario. Jeremy Bentham did create a form of calculus (hedonistic calculus) meant to help estimate what might be better decisions. It is an optional tool one may use - nothing more. Concerning it, he taught, "it may, however, be always kept in view" (Jeremy Bentham, Of the Principle of Utility) rather than strictly applied.

Does Consequentialism Care about Character?

Consequentialism is about good actions - not good people. Your ethics seem to be creating better robots, not better people.

Good people are those who tend to do good actions with good motives. Whether a good person or an evil person does something evil, the action is still evil. The moral of the action is what consequentialism is concerned with.

Good character is essential – it is part of how one becomes happy. Utilitarianism fosters pure love for all others, teaching that a true desire to help others as best as one can is the possible attribute one may obtain (be happy by making others happy). This is not something which may be achieved through strict obedience or calculations. Remember that utilitarianism teaches, "It is impossible to live a pleasant life without living wisely and honorably and justly, and it is impossible to live wisely and honorably and justly without living pleasantly. Whenever any one of these is lacking, when, for instance, the man is not able to live wisely, though he lives honorably and justly, it is impossible for him to live a pleasant life" (Epicurus, [Principal Doctrines](#), 5).

Post by “Daniel Van Orman” of May 14, 2018 at 2:17 PM

Reserved for future updates.

Post by “Cassius” of May 14, 2018 at 3:00 PM

Wow Daniel again thank you for the effort involved in these posts. They are all so intricate and detailed, even though you have posted general guidelines about how you think the topics are best approached. Is there a way to summarize that in a thumbnail way? I gather there are FOUR separate posts (at least)? Perhaps a map or guideline as to how you think the subject might best be approached OVERALL?

Another aspect of the question: How are the two threads DIFFERENT?

Post by “Daniel Van Orman” of May 14, 2018 at 3:47 PM

Criticisms against Principle of Maximal Utility:

This thread is dedicated to arguments against the principle of maximal utility. It focuses more on theoretical and generic applications and meanings of it.

The four principles listed under "Before Continuing" in this thread are meant to quickly explain concepts discussed throughout the rest of the thread. It is not what the thread is about. Each of those concepts could have its own thread.

Daily Application of Principle of Maximum Utility:

This thread is dedicated to following the principle of maximal utility each day. It focuses on the pros and cons of applying it in realistic, day-to-day situations.

Post by “Hiram” of May 15, 2018 at 10:30 AM

[Quote from Daniel Van Orman](#)

Hedonism

Pleasure and pain are the only good and evil in life. They motivate every decision one makes and it is everyone's moral responsibility to increase their pleasure while relieving their pain. Utilitarian philosophers extend this with the Principle of Maximal Utility, saying it is everyone's duty to increase the pleasure and decrease the pain of all others.

Yes, pleasure motivates every decision we make, but I do not think that we have a "moral responsibility" or "duty" to increase it or decrease our own or others' pain. We are free. Duties are only born from the contracts we sign, willingly. Epicurus' ethics are descriptive of human nature, and what he was saying is that it is in our self-interest and better for us if we follow or go along with nature, rather than against it.

Post by “Hiram” of May 15, 2018 at 10:35 AM

On the different kinds of pleasure and the kyriotatai (chief goods), Philodemus wrote (and I commented on) this

[Reasonings About Philodemus' On Choices and Avoidances \(Part I\)](#)

[Reasonings About Philodemus' On Choices and Avoidances \(Part II\)](#)

Post by "Hiram" of May 15, 2018 at 10:37 AM

You might also be interested in my Utilitarian Reasonings

<https://theautarkist.wordpress.com/2016/04/30/uti...n-reasonings-i/>

<https://theautarkist.wordpress.com/2016/05/13/uti...gher-pleasures/>

<https://theautarkist.wordpress.com/2016/05/26/uti...ns-to-pleasure/>

<https://theautarkist.wordpress.com/2016/06/08/uti...ce-and-utility/>

Post by "Cassius" of May 15, 2018 at 12:56 PM

Daniel: You've posted two threads essentially on the issue of "maximal utility" with a lot of detailed pluses and minuses from an ETHICAL point of view. I've been wondering about how to begin to sort these out and I just realized that since you are new to the group we don't have a shared background in principles of Epicurean physics and Epicurean canonic/epistemology. Unless we have a shared foundation from which to build, which those provide, we are left largely debating ethical assertions that have no way of being resolved. The Epicurean ethical positions rest on underlying positions about the nature of the universe and the nature of knowledge that we first need to check and verify in order to sort out positions. In order to get these threads off in the right direction I will post this same post (or a variation) in both threads. We can cover these points either separately (as there may be different contexts) or we can handle them in one place, and I will then backtrack and post links to where we discuss them.

But in general, before we proceed further, in order for us to best understand your positions on Utilitarianism and Maximal Utility, please drop back and let us know your positions on Epicurean physics and Epicurean canonic/epistemology. And of course in the broadest of terms I am asking - What views on the nature of the universe, the existence of supernatural gods, pre-birth or post-death existence of souls, existence of "ideals" elsewhere in the universe or "essences" in this one, whether knowledge is possible, the role of reason in knowledge, the relative status of the senses, anticipations, and feelings -- things like that. All of these will have a direct influence on one's opinions about ethical issues.

(And thanks also Daniel because your posts caused me to think about the issue and add this to the "Welcome New Participants" forum - [Request For New Participants](#))

Post by “Daniel Van Orman” of May 15, 2018 at 2:04 PM

[Hiram](#)

Looking over the hedonism summary now, I see it really needs to be reworded. However, I am not sure what parts, if any, are incorrect. If you would please help me remake or fix the hedonism summary, I would appreciate it.

I created the current summary from searching online and trying to match what I learned to sources. The points I wanted to cover in the summary were:

Hedonism in General - All pleasure and only pleasure is intrinsically valuable ; all pain and only pain is intrinsically disvaluable

Motivational/Psychological Hedonism - Pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain influence every decision one makes, whether consciously or unconsciously

Normative/Ethical Hedonism - It is morally correct to pursue or increase pleasure and avoid or decrease pain

Prudential Hedonism - Happiness = Pleasure - Pain

Value Hedonism - What makes an action important is the amount of pleasure or pain it creates

Would you mind using a conversation on the website to help create a simple explanation of hedonism for newcomers?

The "Teachings on Higher Pleasures" is only based on utilitarianism. Thank you for the "Reasonings About Philodemus' On Choices and Avoidances" article. Hopefully, I will better understand what Epicurus meant by different kinds of pleasures.

Your "Utilitarian Reasonings" are interesting. I will enjoy reading more thoroughly later. Thank you.

Post by "Hiram" of May 18, 2018 at 10:08 AM

[Daniel Van Orman](#) do you mean fixing your section "Teachings on Higher Pleasures"?

My favorite summary on pleasure as the end is the one I drew from Lampe's book on the Cyrenaics, which I mention in [the Aristippus essay](#), under "Ethics":

Quote

Ethics

There is one key doctrine that both Epicureans and Cyrenaics share. To the Cyrenaics, pleasure is satisfying and ergo choice-worthy for its own sake, and pain is repellent and ergo avoidance-worthy. These truths, they argued, are directly experienced and self-evident, and require no arguments or logic. Epicurus also refused to argue about pleasure and pain, saying that these are faculties within our own nature that receive raw data from nature, and not subject to logical formulas or arguments.

This is the clearest, simplest, easiest way to put it, in my view. But in practice, this doctrine has to be qualified, and the best source for that is the middle portion of the Epistle to Menoeceus, where Epicurus discusses choices and avoidances and how sometimes, for the sake of a greater pleasure, we choose a pain, etc. You'll find that in our tradition, ethics are often framed in terms of CHOICES AND AVOIDANCES, and that we tend to move from the abstract into the concrete as much as possible for the sake of clear speech. Speaking of choices and avoidances concretizes ethical discussions.

Notice how we always refer back to the direct experience of the sentient being--and we believe every compassionate and useful system of morality should concern itself with the immediate, direct experience. The moment we start worrying about collectivities, about making everyone else happy, about happiness "for the majority" or for the mobs, our investigations become Platonized and increasingly conceptual and abstract, and the ethics of pleasure fails to satisfy and produce consistent results because this is an individualist ethics and there is great tension between the individual and the mobs / societal and cultural conventions.

Also, I'm not sure that Diogenes of Oenoanda says that pleasures of the mind are "higher" or "superior" to those of the flesh, necessarily. This is very controversial among some Epicureans. What he DOES say is that pleasures of the mind are longer-lasting, and can be both anticipated and remembered more intensely; and that when the mind is sick with depression this has psycho-somatic repercussions on the body and affects the health of the body, and may even cause suicide and self-harm in other ways.