

# Epicurean philosophy vs. Stoicism in public popularity

Post by "Elayne" of March 21, 2021 at 11:27 AM

## [Quote from Don](#)

"Epicurus clearly tried to break sharply away from "virtue for virtue's sake." Virtue, he taught, was instrumental to pleasure and thus to leading a pleasurable life. So, it seems to me that Epicureans are still going to act virtuously to the outside observer. The inner motivation is going to be far different than the Stoic or Aristotelian, but the visible form/action is going to be similar."

and **very importantly**, you said:

"People who take pleasure in what the average human would find morally or ethically repugnant aren't living according to Epicurean principles and so we would have reason to intervene and attempt to get them to change. Just because they are feeling pleasure doesn't make their life choice-worthy. I wrestle with this, but the more I think about it, the more I'm coming to these conclusions."

[Don](#) I initially entered this conversation replying to Joshua, and you made these assertions above in your first response to me. Later, you also said there were actions that would lead to pleasurable lives for "any" organism, I disagreed, and you modified your statement to apply to "almost all"-- and that I agreed with.

For the first quote above, I would make that same adjustment-- that "almost all" Epicureans are still going to act in ways that most outside observers would label as virtuous.

And for the second paragraph, I think you are incorrect. If these people are truly taking pleasure in what most others would find repugnant (and when I say this, please be assured that I am always referring to the overall pleasure/pain consequences of decisions, not only the immediate ones), then they are living according to Epicurean principles if they make these choices. Our reason to intervene is on our own behalf. And if as a group we contribute consequences to their actions which then change their pain/pleasure outcomes, they may be wise to change their decision. However in some cases, their pleasure will outweigh any painful consequence others can devise, in the same way that I doubt any amount of torture could cause me to betray one of my children. Their lives can be choice-worthy to them and not to others.

Here I am not only speaking about psychopaths. There are people who take great pleasure in actions which their current majority culture labels repugnant but who cause no actual harm to anyone-- and this is definitely a common human social situation, especially in association with religions, not a rare or hypothetical event. For instance, in some cultures, anything other than heteroromantic love and sex is treated with disgust and in some cases still today with the death penalty. Would you say that a consenting adult same-sex couple in such a culture was not Epicurean to have a relationship even at risk of death? I certainly would not.

A majority reaction of repugnance is not a ruler to measure individual pleasure or Epicurean wisdom.

That second comment was what initiated my whole train of objections. If you no longer agree with what you said, then we have no disagreement!