

Criticisms against Principle of Maximal Utility

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 Menoecus, 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.