

# The "Non-Aggression Principle" And Its Relationship To Epicurean Philosophy

Post by "Cassius" of July 19, 2021 at 11:26 AM

Glad you saw this Jack as I was going to bring it to your attention to be sure you did, as no doubt this is an area where you have much more expertise than most of us do. Here are my comments:

Quote

First, a basic definition of my Non-Aggression Principle that can and should be Universalized:

Already I would have a concern about the "can and should be universalized." I do not see what basis that can be provided within Epicurean theory that any "principle" "can and should be universalized." We know from observing the young of all species that:

*"Every animal, as soon as it is born, seeks for pleasure, and delights in it as the Chief Good, while it recoils from pain as the Chief Evil, and so far as possible avoids it. This it does as long as it remains unperverted, at the prompting of Nature's own unbiased and honest verdict. Hence Epicurus refuses to admit any necessity for argument or discussion to prove that pleasure is desirable and pain to be avoided. These facts, he thinks, are perceived by the senses, as that fire is hot, snow white, honey sweet, none of which things need be proved by elaborate argument: it is enough merely to draw attention to them. (For there is a difference, he holds, between formal syllogistic proof of a thing and a mere notice or reminder: the former is the method for discovering abstruse and recondite truths, the latter for indicating facts that are obvious and evident.) Strip mankind of sensation, and nothing remains; it follows that Nature herself is the judge of that which is in accordance with or contrary to nature."*

It therefore appears to me that there is nothing "universal" established by nature other than pleasure and pain, and that any attempt to "universalize" an ethical decision is going to run afoul of the fact that Nature herself does not so ordain.

So on what basis do you argue the "should"?

Quote

The FIRST use of PHYSICAL force by one human being against another including his voluntarily acquired property, is the ONLY Human Action that must be prohibited,

considered immoral, wrong, evil in all circumstances except to save that person's physical life in the moment (e.g., physically stopping a child, a blind or mentally disabled person from wandering out into traffic).

This is going to be subject to the same analysis as stated above, but provides us another way to ask the question: By what authority do you segment out "to save that person's physical life in the moment" as something that is an exception to your otherwise universal rule?

Now of course please understand that I do agree that as a practical matter in most circumstances it is desirable to come to agreements not to harm each other, but since we are talking philosophy and trying to get to the most articulate and precise description of the issue and the conclusions to be drawn from it that we can, it appears to me that Epicurus has drilled down to the essence of the issue, while the "NAP" is simply one ethical choice or tool that may be helpful in many circumstances, but which is certainly not prescribed by Nature (and therefore not by any other higher or equivalent authority) as a universal rule.

I don't think we should first argue about the "can be universalized" part yet, even though there would be many practicalities involved - we probably first need to deal with the "should it be universalized?" aspect because I don't see that it is going to be anyone to argue that there is any valid authority for the universalizing of any ethical or moral value at all. To my reading Epicurus did not attempt to do so, and in every case in his doctrines and writings it appears to me that he was very clear that all choices and avoidances - including / especially in ethics and morality - are subservient to the greater question of whether they lead to pain or pleasure in practice.

From the letter to Menoeceus:

Quote

And for this cause we call pleasure the beginning and end of the blessed life. For we recognize pleasure as the first good innate in us, and from pleasure we begin every act of choice and avoidance, and to pleasure we return again, using the feeling as the standard by which we judge every good. And since pleasure is the first good and natural to us, for this very reason we do not choose every pleasure, but sometimes we pass over many pleasures, when greater discomfort accrues to us as the result of them: and similarly we think many pains better than pleasures, since a greater pleasure comes to us when we have endured pains for a long time. Every pleasure then because of its natural kinship to us is good, yet not every pleasure is to be chosen: even as every pain also is an evil, yet not all are always of a nature to be avoided. Yet by a scale of comparison and by the consideration of advantages and disadvantages we must form our judgment on all these matters. For the good on certain occasions we treat as bad, and conversely the bad as good.