

How Is Epicurean Philosophy Used To Deal With Difficult Or Unsolvable Problems?

Post by "Cassius" of March 11, 2017 at 5:45 PM

Shana HT March 6 at 5:35pm

How do you use Epicurian philosophy? How do you apy it to difficult situatuon? Any examples?

For instance, my kids are now ripping the cushions of my expensive leather sofa. They are little, I tried to explain, but they think its hillarious, as they found a hidden zipper.

Jason Baker It has been my experience that wanting nice furniture when having children or animals is a desire that will lead to suffering. My wife and I have leather furniture too. Two sofas, a loveseat and chair, all bought before we had dogs. All of them are dog seats now except for the chair which is too small for either dog to find it comfortable. Buying dog beds didn't help and we didn't have the willpower to keep them off the furniture. We now have covers for them when company comes over. What can you do, besides train them from the get-go to not be destructive?

Alexander Rios As Epicurus said: "Do not desire the impossible."

Jason Baker "If you want Pythocles to have nice furniture, do not give him children or animals..."

Cassius Amicus Same with cats.....

Shana HT so dont desire and youll be happy? so how do I stop desiring?

Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus This is probably a case where the desire is impossible to achieve, such as to live forever and never die, and those have to be recognized as impossible

Jason Baker Desiring luxury furniture when your living circumstances don't allow for it is an unnatural and unnecessary desire. You're setting yourself up for failure by pursuing it anyway.

I've put the desire for nice furniture away for when I no longer have any pets, since punishing them retroactively by limiting their access now is cruel. Once my circumstances allow for it, I'll likely refurnish my living room. Until then, my dogs bring me more joy than my formerly nice couches do.

I don't need nice furniture to be happy, the fact that I don't have nice furniture now is a small price to pay for cohabiting with little monsters.

Alexander Rios Ha! Seriously though. You are harmed by their actions? Rightfully so, because you have finite resources to share with them, and so if they spend their resources on this zipper exploration, you'll all have less resources for future situations. Think about the consequences of these current actions on future freedom, to enjoy. Money misspent here, means less money to have for future fun, and future needs.

Mish Taylor The kids, cats and dogs are more important than than the sofa's. There will come a time when you are glad to see the back of your sofa's, that won't (or shouldn't) be the case for the kids, cats & dogs.

Jason Baker Absolutely! Every animal I've had to bury has brought me to my knees with tears. Not so my furniture! Commodity items can be easily replaced.

Joe Balbontin Jr I agree with Jason Baker. Living things have far more importance than non-living things.

Mish Taylor Loose covers until they grow out of messing with the zip, or, alternatively, get the kids a zip each of their own and utilize it as a learning tool. As with all minor annoyances, this phase will pass. I had a relative who kept her new sofa covered in a clear plastic cover for protection, it looked silly and was terrible to sit on.

Shana HT I was hoping for a general idea of how to apply the philosophy...

I've pretty much decided the sofa is just their toy now and the destruction a measure of their enjoyment

Alexander Rios Distract them. Tell them an Epicurean story. Tell them that they can tear it apart, but that the eternal elementary particles will never be destroyed, and they will always reside in our universe. Tell them that the wood particles will be eaten and dispersed by the wood eating insects and bacteria, and decomposed to molecules and carried far away by the birds who eat those. Some might fall, by poop, into rivers and be carried away to oceans, some will feed fish, who feed people, and that maybe their grandchildren will eat some of those molecules one day. Tell them that one day, the sun will vaporize the steel in the zipper, but that those chemical atoms (iron and carbon) will still exist, until our Sun falls into a giant star that explodes by supernova, fusing those into heavier chemical atoms, until one day a black hole tears those chemical atoms into quarks, leptons and photons. But that no matter what, they do to the sofa, those elementary particles will exist.

Alexander Rios How old are your children? What ages?

Cassius Amicus But these examples do illustrate the general rule. I suspect we're not communicating if you think otherwise. What do you think is missing and we can answer further?

Cassius Amicus Shana HT given your comments earlier I think it would be helpful to say this: One of the BIG differences between Epicurean philosophy and what you are probably reading

in modern stoicism is that you are probably presuming that both of them are telling you that the goal is to be happy and thus they are going to show you how to live happily.

That may or may not be true as to modern stoicism (I know there are those who take the traditional stoic route, and say that the goal is not to be happy but to be virtuous). Some will then say that happiness comes as a byproduct of virtue, but that is where you begin to see the lack of clarity, because that is not at all what the ancient stoics who started the philosophy said. They followed their logic consistently to conclude that the goal of life was to be virtuous, and happiness (especially pleasure of any kind) was essentially a distraction, acceptable only if it does not get in the way of virtue.

Epicurean philosophy is all about establishing from the beginning what the goal of life is. It starts with specific observations about the nature of the universe (atoms, void, nothing comes from nothing, nothing goes to nothing, eternal and infinite universe). It then explains to you how these observations lead one to conclude that the universe is not supernatural, and that you are not bound by fate or determinism - that you have at least some control over your own life (at least if you are a normal healthy person) and that you should have no fear of death because there is no life after death. [All of these conclusions are very different from traditional Stoicism.]

Epicurean philosophy explains these physics to you by showing you why abstract logic and religion are not the key to knowledge, and that knowledge does exist, but that it must be established through the faculties given you by nature - the five senses, the "anticipations" and the sense of pain and pleasure. It is through this course (the Epicurean canon) that you learn to see that abstract logic not based on firm evidence of the senses is dangerous, and that all true reasoning must be based on the reality revealed to you through these three faculties.

Finally there is of course an ethics based on these observations, and this is the conclusion that [pleasure is the guide of life](#), with all questions to be answered by projecting what will happen as a result of any choice, with all selections evaluated by whether they will lead to more pleasure or more pain. The sum of Epicurean ethics is really not much more complicated than that, with all the subtleties simply being extensions of this one general principle.

Epicurus held that this system provides confidence and is not open to being accused of being an arbitrary assertion - being based every step of the way on evidence that Epicureans contend is compelling. And Epicurus provided specific responses to Platonic and other attacks on the idea that pleasure can be the guide of life, which is where the details about limits of pleasure, purity of pleasure, oneness of pleasure, absence of pain, etc. all come into play. Those are details and responses to specific philosophical issues, and they in no way contradict the central point that [pleasure is the guide of life](#).

So when you ask about applications, we can definitely give answers, but the context of the question is vastly different between Epicurean and Stoic and other philosophers. Epicureans insist that living happily means living pleasurably. Other philosophies, even modern stoicism in the hands of those who follow the Stoics, have a much different definition of living happily.

Epicureans would generally contend that those non-Epicurean definitions of the goal of life are confusing at best and disastrous at worst.

Ron Warrick I would also like to know how the Stoics can make the claim that they are living in accordance with nature. That seems to me to just not fit with anything else in the philosophy.

Cassius Amicus It appears to me Ron that they are, like Donald Robertson, defining Nature as the source of the call to excellence/virtue, so they say they are living in accord with nature by pursuing excellence/virtue. (The old stoics were much more clear that this is divinity - I gather the modern stoics prefer to hedge on that.) And thus the epistemological question of how we know what excellence is. That's why Nietzsche's quote hits home:

"You desire to LIVE "according to Nature"? Oh, you noble Stoics, what fraud of words! Imagine to yourselves a being like Nature, boundlessly extravagant, boundlessly indifferent, without purpose or consideration, without pity or justice, at once fruitful and barren and uncertain: imagine to yourselves INDIFFERENCE as a power—how COULD you live in accordance with such indifference? To live—is not that just endeavouring to be otherwise than this Nature? Is not living valuing, preferring, being unjust, being limited, endeavouring to be different? And granted that your imperative, "living according to Nature," means actually the same as "living according to life"—how could you do DIFFERENTLY? Why should you make a principle out of what you yourselves are, and must be? In reality, however, it is quite otherwise with you: while you pretend to read with rapture the canon of your law in Nature, you want something quite the contrary, you extraordinary stage-players and self-deluders! In your pride you wish to dictate your morals and ideals to Nature, to Nature herself, and to incorporate them therein; you insist that it shall be Nature "according to the Stoa," and would like everything to be made after your own image, as a vast, eternal glorification and generalism of Stoicism! With all your love for truth, you have forced yourselves so long, so persistently, and with such hypnotic rigidity to see Nature FALSELY, that is to say, Stoically, that you are no longer able to see it otherwise—and to crown all, some unfathomable superciliousness gives you the Bedlamite hope that BECAUSE you are able to tyrannize over yourselves—Stoicism is self-tyranny—Nature will also allow herself to be tyrannized over: is not the Stoic a PART of Nature?... But this is an old and everlasting story: what happened in old times with the Stoics still happens today, as soon as ever a philosophy begins to believe in itself. It always creates the world in its own image; it cannot do otherwise; philosophy is this tyrannical impulse itself, the most spiritual Will to Power, the will to "creation of the world," the will to the causa prima."

Ron Warrick Cassius Amicus Exactly.

Ron Warrick Convert to stoicism. 1f603.png:-D

Matt Jackson Discipline? Lol

Theo Kouk yeap a leather couch is an unnecessary desire. let them rip up leather 1f603.png:D

Cassius Amicus Don't take this as being disagreeable, Theo, but your use of the "smiley" after the categorization of the leather couch as "unnecessary" is I think a very good example of how we have to be careful with the natural/necessary categories. Yes they are helpful, but they do not immediately lead to a conclusion on their own. They *help* us think about the quantity of pleasure and pain that we can expect to occur from a choice regarding the couch, but they only *help* - they do not answer the question fully at all. Labelling the couch as unnecessary is perhaps the start of an analysis, it is definitely not the end. There are many circumstances which might make it worthwhile to secure a particular couch from damage even from our most beloved children or pets - perhaps it has some huge market value that itself would secure the future material well-being of the children and pets, which otherwise would be jeopardized. I gather Shana HT is looking for some very specific rules on how to proceed (she comes from stoicism, after all!) so i would not want her to think that the natural/necessary categories take precedence over the general calculation of pleasure vs pain that has to take place in evaluating every decision. We can remind her what the goal of life is, and we can suggest some "rules of thumb" but it is very hard to tell specific people at specific times how they should resolve their own calculations.