

The Ethics of Epicurus and its Relation to Contemporary Doctrines by Jean-Marie Guyau. Edited by Testa and Ansell-Pearson, translated by Testa

Post by "Cassius" of May 3, 2023 at 3:11 PM

Godfrey --

I relate this issue in my mind with a passage I read years ago in section of Wikipedia which criticized Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. I had to go back into the old versions to find this as it seems to be no longer on the current page:

Promotion and Dissemination of Psychological Procedures to determine intervention potency.^[185]

Philosophical concerns with CBT methods

The methods employed in CBT research have not been the only criticisms; some individuals have called its theory and therapy into question. For example, Fancher^[185] argues that CBT has failed to provide a framework for clear and correct thinking. He states that it is strange for CBT theorists to develop a framework for determining distorted thinking without ever developing a framework for "cognitive clarity" or what would count as "healthy, normal thinking". Additionally, he writes that irrational thinking cannot be a source of mental and emotional distress when there is no evidence of rational thinking causing psychological well-being. Or, that social psychology has proven the normal cognitive processes of the average person to be irrational, even those who are psychologically well. Fancher also says that the theory of CBT is inconsistent with basic principles and research of rationality, and even ignores many rules of logic. He argues that CBT makes something of thinking that is far less exciting and true than thinking probably is. Among his other arguments are the maintaining of the status quo promoted in CBT, the self-deception encouraged within clients and patients engaged in CBT, how poorly the research is conducted, and some of its basic tenets and norms: "The basic norm of cognitive therapy is this: except for how the patient thinks, everything is ok".^[196]

Meanwhile, Slife and Williams^[184] write that one of the hidden assumptions in CBT is that of determinism, or the absence of free will. They argue that CBT invokes a type of cause-and-effect relationship with cognition. They state that CBT holds that external stimuli from the environment enter the mind, causing different thoughts that cause emotional states: nowhere in CBT theory is agency, or free will, accounted for. According to Slife and Williams, at its most basic foundational assumptions, CBT holds that human beings have no free will and are just determined by the cognitive processes invoked by external stimuli.

Another criticism of CBT theory, especially as applied to major depressive disorder (MDD), is that it confounds the symptoms of the disorder with its causes.^[188]

To be clear, I am not now talking about CBT in any substantive sense, I just want to echo a criticism of ANY approach that it should first define and present what healthy normal human

action looks like, and THEN present diagnosis and recommendations on how to proceed from any existing current point to get to that goal.

Of course I think Epicurus does that - there are many passages remaining, and I feel sure there were many more, about how healthy normal people should spend their time while alive. I do not mean in the sense of recommendations as to careers or other specifics, but in the sense that the underlying presumption of the Greek experience to which Epicurus is in agreement is that one should live a normally active and healthy and full physical and mental life. I cannot imagine that they thought that any healthy normal person would take their statements as a prescription to go live in the proverbial cave on bread and water and stare at a candle.

Yet in the world we are in today it is my contention that the person who is normally educated and acclimated to prevailing cultural and educational advice is apt to take just that approach when hearing "the goal of life is the absence of pain." For two thousand years we've been subjected to religious absurdities that imply that our treasure is in heaven or somewhere else and that the best we can hope for is to shelter in place from pain while we wait for our Redeemer to come pick us up. In this context it's just not a good idea to expect someone who may be under the influence of such absurd views of the ideal state to take for granted that "living without pain" really means LIVING without pain in normal and healthy human ways, and not like a monk or a lama sitting cross-legged with palms up waiting to absorb the vibrations of the universe (or some such thing).

It is our lot as modern fans of Epicurus that Epicurus has been lumped in with those who preach quietism and pacifism and similar views, and that means that many people who come here, or who are alert to seeing Epicurean discussion on facebook or the internet, may think that we too here hold and promote such views.

And that presents an interesting environment in which we need to find ways to make very clear, from the beginning, that the point of Epicurean philosophy is how to LIVE, and not how to while away or time immobilized and fearing the next pin to drop while we wait for death to deliver us to some better world and away from this one which is alleged to be fated to be nasty, brutish and short.

If we aren't clear on why it is better that we have been born than that if we had not been born at all, we haven't even started to understand how to live.

And so in answer to that criticism of CBT I underlined above -- I agree with it -- we need to be sure we are being clear about the details of the goal that Epicurus was presuming - I would argue - that we would all understand. That doesn't mean that we have to get involved in every specific of life, but it means we need to find a way to be clear that living means enjoying life fully and not ascetically.