

Best Way to Introduce Teachings?

Post by “Daniel Van Orman” of March 13, 2019 at 1:40 PM

Are there any simple, neat summaries of Epicurean core beliefs to help introduce people to philosophy? I think it would be fantastic if we had a document full of quick summaries of our core beliefs and, within easy access of that document, more detail explained plainly.

As an example, I wrote some descriptions (seen below) to help describe hedonism in Epicureanism (please correct me if I am wrong - I may have misinterpreted things or accidentally thrown in utilitarian beliefs).

Hedonism: Quick Summary

Many people read hedonism is about happiness and immediately assume it is about sex and drugs. This is a terrible misconception!

That is not happiness! Sex, drugs, and other destructive actions will never bring long-term, true happiness. It would be seriously concerning - and against Epicureanism and its hedonistic beliefs - for anyone to think otherwise.

Just as numerous others' perceptions of happiness are not about sex and drugs, hedonism as part of Epicureanism is not about sex and drugs.

[I wrote the above notes simply because of common misconceptions. I think those misconceptions must be eased before people are ready to hear the truth.]

Pleasure and pain are the only good and evil in life. They motivate every decision one makes and it is everyone's moral responsibility to increase their own pleasure while relieving their own pain in the long-term.

Simplification: "What matters is that you are happy"

Hedonism: Details in Plain English

Hedonism means pleasure and pain are the only important things in life. This includes both physical and mental pleasures and pains (ex: enjoying a good book and savoring chocolate would both be pleasures while worrying about others and injuring an arm would both be pains). Furthermore, all pleasure and only pleasure is intrinsically valuable (valuable for its own sake)

and all pain and only pain is intrinsically disvaluable (not valuable for its own sake). Happiness comes down to one's pleasure minus one's pain (this is called prudential hedonism).

These are some of what Hedonism Entails

- Pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain influences every decision one makes, whether consciously or unconsciously (motivational/psychological hedonism).

"Pleasure is our first and kindred good. It is the starting-point of every choice and of every aversion, and to it we come back, inasmuch as we make feeling the rule by which to judge of every good thing." - Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus

"For the end of all our actions is to be free from pain and fear, and, when once we have attained all this, the tempest of the soul is laid; seeing that the living creature has no need to go in search of something that is lacking, nor to look for anything else by which the good of the soul and of the body will be fulfilled." - Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus

- What makes an action important is the amount of pleasure or pain it creates (value hedonism).

"So we must exercise ourselves in the things which bring happiness, since, if that be present, we have everything, and, if that be absent, all our actions are directed towards attaining it." - Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus

- Pleasure and pain make one's life better or worse (prudential hedonism).

- Choosing short-term actions to quickly gain pleasure or avoid pain generally, over an extended period of time, reduces one's pleasure and causes more pain (prudential hedonism).

"No pleasure is a bad thing in itself, but the things which produce certain pleasures entail disturbances many times greater than the pleasures themselves." - Epicurus, [Principal Doctrines](#), 8 and Vatican Sayings, 50

- It is morally correct to pursue or increase pleasure and avoid or decrease pain (normative/ethical hedonism).

Common Misconceptions

Hedonism is not a philosophy which encourages sex, drugs, and impulsive behavior performed at the expense of one's self as well as others. This misconception is called "Folk Hedonism", as it only exists in the mind of the common people (the folk). Hedonism teaches most short-term, impulsive actions cause far more pain than pleasure and can reduce one's access and ability to feel pleasure - these destructive actions should never be done.

As an example of how impulsive and destructive behavior is against Epicurean standards, listen to this advice Epicurus gave to a young man: "I understand from you that your natural disposition is too much inclined toward sexual passion. Follow your inclination as you will, provided only that you neither violate the laws, disturb well-established customs, harm any one

of your neighbors, injure your own body, nor waste your possessions. That you be not checked by one or more of these provisos is impossible; for a man never gets any good from sexual passion, and he is fortunate if he does not receive harm" (Epicurus, Vatican Sayings, 51).