

Best Way to Introduce Teachings?

Post by "Daniel Van Orman" of March 14, 2019 at 7:14 PM

Quick summary, since I went overboard on details in my response below.

Central to Utilitarianism:

- Principle of Maximal Utility: "the greatest happiness for the greatest number", love others as much as yourself
- Consequentialism: Actions are central to morality, morality of action = results of action and tendencies of results from action
- Impartiality: Don't use bias - value others' interests equally.
- Commensurability: Sum consequences of actions to determine whether its good or bad.

Most differences between utilitarianism and Epicureanism I see are where utilitarian philosophers expand/extend Epicurean teachings. As an example:

Epicurus: Law are made to kept people from being wronged --> Jeremy Bentham: Laws are made to make everyone happier --> John Stuart Mill: Laws allow one to predict others' actions and know consequences; helps people work better with each other (ex: stop signs on roads, fines for speeding)

Here is a list of what I consider central to utilitarianism:

- Long-term Happiness (Hedonism) & Principle of Maximal Utility

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 the pleasure of every person (including themselves) while relieving their pain.

- Consequentialism

The moral correctness of an action depends on its predicted and actual results (consequences). A good action produces good and uplifting outcomes, whatever they are defined to be. An action which produces bad outcomes, even if done with good intentions, is still immoral.

- Impartiality

When determining the most morally correct action, one should use objective criteria - never prejudice, hatred, bias, or other non-objective reasoning. Every person's interests should be

considered as equally, even though individuals are not equal because of talents, skills, personalities, and other attributes.

- Commensurability

The morality of an action or set of actions can be determined through combining their outcomes, through using some consistent system to compare, total, average, or otherwise combine outcomes. The best actions produce the most good.

Together, these doctrines give meaning to "the greatest happiness for the greatest number". These quotes might also help explain things:

the feeling of duty, when associated with utility, . . . would make us feel it congenial, and incline us not only to foster it in others . . . , but also to cherish it in ourselves

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 3

To do as you would be done by, and to love your neighbour as yourself, constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 2

once the general happiness is recognised as the ethical standard, will constitute the strength of the utilitarian morality. This firm foundation is that of the social feelings of mankind; the desire to be in unity with our fellow creatures, which is already a powerful principle in human nature, and happily one of those which tend to become stronger, even without express inculcation, from the influences of advancing civilisation

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 3

When people who are tolerably fortunate in their outward lot do not find in life sufficient enjoyment to make it valuable to them, the cause generally is, caring for nobody but themselves

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 2

The largest difference I see between Epicureanism and utilitarianism is the Principle of Maximal Utility and its connecting sentiments and logic. Most of the other differences I see are where utilitarian philosophers expand/extend Epicurean teachings. I am unsure whether Epicurus would approve of these extensions, but (other than connections to maximal utility) I see no reason why he would not.

Here are a few examples of what I perceive to be utilitarian philosophers describing Epicurean doctrines in greater detail:

It is impossible for someone to dispel his fears about the most important matters if he doesn't know the nature of the universe but still gives some credence to myths. So without the study of nature there is no enjoyment of pure pleasure.

Epicurus, [Principal Doctrines](#), 12 ; Vatican Sayings, 49

education and opinion, which have so vast a power over human character, should so use that power as to establish in the mind of every individual an indissoluble association between his own happiness and the good of the whole

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 2

Laws are made for the wise: not to keep them from doing wrong, but to keep them from being wronged.

Epicurus, Selected Fragments, 530

The general object which all laws have, or ought to have, in common, is to augment the total happiness of the community

Jeremy Bentham, An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, Chapter 13.1

In the conduct of human beings towards one another, it is necessary that general rules should for the most part be observed, in order that people may know what they have to expect; but in each person's own concerns, his individual spontaneity is entitled to free exercise.

John Stuart Mill, On Liberty, Chapter 4

The man who best knows how to meet external threats makes into one family all the creatures he can; and those he can not, he at any rate does not treat as aliens; and where he finds even this impossible, he avoids all dealings, and, so far as is advantageous, excludes them from his life.

Epicurus, [Principal Doctrines](#), 39

The deeply rooted conception which every individual even now has of himself as a social being, tends to make him feel it one of his natural wants that there should be harmony between his feelings and aims and those of his fellow creatures. If differences of opinion and of mental culture make it impossible for him to share many of their actual feelings- perhaps make him denounce and defy those feelings- he still needs to be conscious that his real aim and theirs do not conflict; that he is not opposing himself to what they really wish for, namely their own good, but is, on the contrary, promoting it

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 3

If every pleasure had been capable of accumulation, not only over time but also over the entire body or at least over the principal parts of our nature, then pleasures would never differ from one another.

Epicurus, [Principal Doctrines](#), 9

Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure. If one of the two is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing ...

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 2

Don't avoid doing small favors, lest you seem to be the same with regard to greater things.

Epicurus, Selected Fragments, 214

if it may possibly be doubted whether a noble character is always the happier for its nobleness, there can be no doubt that it makes other people happier, and that the world in general is immensely a gainer by it

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 2

[Addressing 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

many who are capable of the higher pleasures, occasionally, under the influence of temptation, postpone them to the lower. But this is quite compatible with a full appreciation of the intrinsic superiority of the higher. Men often, from infirmity of character, make their election for the nearer good, though they know it to be the less valuable; and this no less when the choice is between two bodily pleasures, than when it is between bodily and mental. They pursue sensual indulgences to the injury of health, though perfectly aware that health is the greater good.

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 2