

A psychologist and a functional medicine practitioner discuss happiness, eudaimonia, wellness, free will and more

Post by “Pacatus” of December 27, 2023 at 6:21 PM

Just thinking “out loud” here -

Assuming for the sake of discussion that we all have the same understanding of what “good” means, it seems the sort of “meta-ethical” questions are: (1) Why does one *want* to be good? And (2) - **more to the ethical point** - why **ought** one (anyone) **want** to be good? **All ethics is about how one gets from an “is” to an “ought.”**

From an instrumental point of view, an agent’s “good” behavior would aim at some goal: In order to achieve G, one ought (that is, one’s best course of action is) to do A. For the Hellenistic schools (e.g. the Stoics and Epicureans), following Aristotle, there is an ultimate goal (a telos, and end-value in itself) - which is eudaimonia (happy or satisfied well-being) - which all interim goals support, and toward which appropriate actions (virtues) are aimed. They disagreed on what is necessary for that telos. But both the Stoics and the Epicureans agree that some measure of social justice is entailed (I don’t think the Pyrrhonian skeptics go there).

The only non-instrumental view I am aware of is deontology: that is, moral rules are exogenously given - either in terms of some divine command theory, or some ideal categorical imperative (e.g., Kant - although that seems to be ultimately based on its own instrumentality: a universal desire to do one’s duty; but that may also be metaphysically given). But maybe there is some evolutionarily determined “given” (or givens) that dictates at least some oughts?

An Epicurean might say that any satisfaction about being/doing good (say, because one has followed Stoic virtues or obeyed some exogenous moral commands) just **is** (a) pleasure. And what are the grounds for suggesting that one would (or ought to) feel dissatisfied for doing so - in determining if one has acted ethically/morally? I would suggest that, from an Epicurean view, it is our evolutionary human nature that provides the guidance (in terms of pleasure/pain - both physical and mental - assessed by our sense, feelings and intuition;* and abetted by reason).

Again: All ethics is about getting from an “is” to an “ought.” And the Epicurean view (to my mind) readily includes a host of social justice considerations (consideration of “the other”) in the mix.

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OK: My brain is now a scrambled omelet. 🤪

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* I am using "intuition" here - as a translation of *prolepsis* - in the sense of "a: the power or faculty of attaining to direct knowledge or cognition without evident rational thought and inference; or b: immediate apprehension or cognition" (Merriam-Webster)