

Consequentialism & Moral Relativism within the context of Pleasure-filled Philosophy

Post by “Charles” of March 10, 2020 at 5:22 PM

One critique or reservation that I've noticed fairly consistently, both an attack on Hedonism in general and also towards Epicurean(ism) Philosophy, are the positions we take on morality. This often shows up phrased as such: "How do I know if I'm doing the right thing?" or "Are actions taken in the name of pleasure always good?", the latter used to strawman pleasure ethics as a whole, when extrapolated to say such things as “Well a murderer takes pleasure in killing” and so on.

But it got me thinking, since we stress that there is no proper and objective *good* in the sense of morals (Religiously sanctioned, etc.), ideals/forms (Platonic), behaviors or mannerisms (asceticism/stoic indifference), or even certain instances like Kant's Categorical Imperatives, the list goes on, while also maintaining that pleasure is one such case of these "goods" or the sole or highest “good”. We also know that attempting to distinguish certain hierarchies or elevations of pleasure results in a circular measuring game of sophistry as established in Plato's [Philebus](#), hence why we focus solely on pleasure and not katastematic pleasure over kinetic or vice versa (what I call the bread & water fallacy).

So when it comes to pleasure and the desires of people and their conquest in fulfilling that goal, where does morality fit? Clearly we wouldn't agree with the Charvakan maxim "Let a man feed on ghee even if he runs into debt" as such an action would be far from prudent, and has financial liabilities that are potentially very painful and pleasure-inhibiting. Nor would we endorse La Mettrie eating himself to death or the directly-inspired Marquis de Sade torturing his maids despite these actions done in the name of pleasure.

Sure we may always distance ourselves and say "No true Epicurean would engage in such dangerous pleasures!" and point to PD's 1, 17, 26, 29, 30 & VS 1, 20, 69, 70, 71 as well as many sections of L to M, namely the line:

"And since pleasure is the first good and natural to us, for this very reason we do not choose every pleasure, but sometimes we pass over many pleasures, when greater discomfort accrues to us as the result of them: and similarly we think many pains better than pleasures, since a greater pleasure comes to us when we have endured pains for a long time." (Bailey, 41st line from bottom)

Whether or not we choose to label Epicurean Philosophy as hedonistic is another debate, but what is shared between Epicureans and Hedonists/Libertines/Utilitarian Ethics is both; our recognition of pleasure as *good* and choosing actions that result in pleasure for ourselves and

sometimes our close ones if it benefits us. This is ultimately where the title of the thread becomes relevant as no matter what those who critique us & pleasure will group us in with other pleasure seekers or isolate us and then choose to attack, with issues of morality being a formidable argument according to the attacker's perception.

But what does everyone here think? How exactly do we hold each other accountable, including pleasure seekers who wouldn't label themselves Epicurean and aren't familiar with our concepts of frankness and justice, but otherwise share many of our values?

I have another paragraph written on this topic about consequentialist thinking and how it can transform itself into an ethical system for hedonists and Epicureans, that disregards morality as it's conventionally recognized and utilized, but I'd like to hear some thoughts on this before I delve into it any further. I also recognize that this isn't really an "Epicurean" topic, but I feel that it's answers do encompass Epicurean Philosophy.