

Question From Chapter 1 on "Altruism"

Post by "Mathitis Kipouros" of July 5, 2020 at 10:27 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

There's a huge difference between social utilitarianism and individual utilitarianism ?. We are definitely not social utilitarians in this philosophy.

This makes me feel uncomfortable on a very deep level. Perhaps it is because I have accepted for a long time as true the concept that universal well-being is achievable. I am of course suspicious of its idealism, since I don't know how it could happen, and I recognize that very quickly when trying to lay a concrete pathway towards it, things start to require a lot of wishful thinking and even perhaps a little fantasy. I *would like to believe* that a universal utopia is achievable. But I guess, a more realistic view of the world could show that this doesn't happen anywhere.

As a side note, and related to the question of how people new to Epicureanism take to it: I'm entertaining this deep feeling of discomfort right now trying to come to terms with what's more likely real, rather than what is desirable but less likely. Possibly this discomfort, and our willingness/capacity to be with it, is what helps people find a relief in religion, and what causes a lower adherence to Epicureanism.

Getting back on track, one of the reasons for this discomfort is, I think, the realization that there are people in the world that don't meet the basic needs to relieve pain or to achieve pleasure (shelter, nutrition, etc...), and the possibility (rather slim in some cases) that anyone of us could find ourselves in it at some point in our lives; I guess it is matter of just living in the moment versus having a longer term view. How could we not attend to social utilitarianism when we think of this? How can we not see that as long as we have people who can't relieve these basic pains, or achieve these basic pleasures, any equilibrium we think we have in our self sufficiency is rather unstable, because these people either some day will try to achieve them without the sophistication that comfort allows, or because they will fall prey of others for manipulation, perhaps even against us. So individual utilitarianism seems rather short-sighted for me.

Perhaps if we see that, in nature, survival and well-being happen in larger groups, and that these groups always have some sort of **justified** hierarchy, we could say that a structure of society is needed to guarantee my well-being, and that for it to be stable for the longest time, this structure should have social utilitarianism in mind to guarantee the well-being of others who for whom I'm not able to look after; the hierarchy is constantly revised in order for it to keep its justified character.

We could call this a larger group "friends", but that would be rather idealistic. The problem with calling it friends, is that it could get confusing when we remember the tightly related (to friendship) concept of loyalty, which could be defined as "I don't have to doubt you'll be there for me, and thus, you do't have to doubt it either", as, I guess more likely than not, happens with siblings (at least until a certain age where we haven't been corrupted). In such a big group, I won't always be there particularly for you, if you're not one of my true/close friends; that's just reality. It is not physically possible. My standing there shouldn't be on a basis of loyalty, but rather on a basis of how active you are in producing this society as a provider of pleasure and an eliminator of pains for the most. And what if I decide to change to another society because I think here I'm not providing, or am not being provided for, in terms of pleasure/pain. I couldn't be called disloyal, I'm just attending to my individual utilitarianism, as well as the social utilitarianism of the society I'm leaving and perhaps the one I will be joining.

Also, to further delve into friendship; as stated before, it is a concept that can also very easily slip into the realm of idealism. To keep it real, we will quickly realize that true friends are those that we feel the need and pleasure to keep in our lives as we would our siblings, hence I don't believe in *universal* brotherly love, but I do think that with our friends, our love should be brotherly. And these people can't be many, just by the fact that we're not able to correspond or reciprocate in a convenient fashion to more than just a few. If we then try to say our friends are people who "are like us" in "this or that way", we slip into idealism. And how could our self-sufficiency be stable if we can only depend for it on such a small group of people? It's a bit of wishful thinking again.