

What Are The Best Epicurean Alternatives to These Common Phrases?

Post by "Cassius" of July 9, 2019 at 7:50 AM

As a help in clarifying key issues, I remember that DeWitt talks about how Epicurus used the rhetorical technique of contrasting false opinion vs true opinions. For example, I am convinced that one of the worst "false opinions" that we are up against in differentiating Epicurus from common viewpoints is "the greatest good for the greatest number" as a method for evaluating pleasure.

The final PDs make clear that our goal is not the pleasure of everyone, or the world in general, but of ourselves and our friends. For those who are unfriendly, or our enemies, we separate ourselves from them, and we know from other doctrines that this would include by any means necessary.

PD6. In order to obtain protection from other men, any means for attaining this end is a natural good.

PD39. 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.

PD40. Those who possess the power to defend themselves against threats by their neighbors, being thus in possession of the surest guarantee of security, live the most pleasant life with one another; and their enjoyment of the fullest intimacy is such that if one of them dies prematurely, the others do not lament his death as though it called for pity.

So is there a phrase or summary that serves as a good contrast for that, in forms such as: (1) In evaluating pleasure, not "the greatest good for the greatest number" but _____ or (2) "____X_____," not "the greatest good for the greatest number."

I'd like to explore expanding this discussion to consider a whole series of opposing viewpoints, such as in this following list:

1. Not "the greatest good for the greatest number," but _____
2. Not "humanism" but _____

3. Not "hard determinism" but _____

4. Not "hedonism" but _____

5. Not "absence of pain" as a full statement of the goal of life, but _____

6. Not "living unknown" as best way to organize one's life, but "_____" (shorter version of this text following text: "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. Those who possess the power to defend themselves against threats by their neighbors, being thus in possession of the surest guarantee of security, live the most pleasant life with one another")

7. Not "creation" but "materialism" ????

8. Not "faith" but "knowledge based on our natural faculties" (needs major rewording)

9. Not "individualism" or "collectivism" but _____

10. Not "egoism" or "altruism" but _____

11. Not "idealism" but _____

12. Not "atheism" but _____

If you have suggestions, please make them in the comments below. If particular items gets lots of comments, we can split off that discussion into a separate threads.

Note: To hopefully make this easier to follow, I will keep the original list unchanged above for reference, but as time goes by, make interim edits in the list below:

1. Not "the greatest good for the greatest number," but _____

2. Not "humanism" but _____

3. Not "hard determinism" but _____

4. Not "hedonism" but _____

5. Not "absence of pain" as a full statement of the goal of life, but _____

6. Not "living unknown" as best way to organize one's life, but "_____" (shorter version of this text following text: "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. Those who possess the power to defend themselves against threats by their neighbors, being thus in possession of the

surest guarantee of security, live the most pleasant life with one another")

7. Not "creation" but "materialism" ????

8. Not "faith" but "knowledge based on our natural faculties" (needs major rewording)

9. Not "individualism" or "collectivism" but _____

10. Not "egoism" or "altruism" but _____

11. Not "idealism" but _____

12. Not "atheism" but _____

Post by "Elayne" of July 10, 2019 at 1:50 PM

Here are some ideas. The atheist one bothers me somewhat, because the current meaning of this is absence of belief in supernatural gods. So here again I feel we are getting into issues of mistranslation into modern English because of attachment to older language. I would prefer that we use the modern meaning of atheist, a label I do apply to myself.

1. Not "the greatest good for the greatest number," but "to all desires must be applied this question: What will be the result for me if the object of this desire is attained and what if it will not?"

2. Not "humanism", "individualism", "collectivism", "egoism" or "altruism", but "the tie of friendship knits itself through reciprocity of favors among those who have come to enjoy pleasures to the full."

3. Not "hard determinism" but "some things happen from necessity, some from chance, and others through our own choice." (see paper on Agency)

4. Not "short term hedonism" but "it is to continuous pleasures that I invite you."

5. Not "absence of pain" as a full statement of the goal of life, but "the Feelings are two, pleasure and pain" and "Pleasure is the beginning and the end of a happy life."

6. Not "living unknown" as best way to organize one's life, but "friendship dances around the world summoning us all to awaken to the recognition of happiness."

7. Not "creation by a supernatural being", but matter which is uncreatable and indestructible. In modern physics, this takes the form of the First Law of Thermodynamics: energy is neither

created not destroyed but only changes form. One form of energy is matter. It seems unlikely Epicurus would disagree.

8. Not "faith" but "constant activity in the study of Nature"

9. Not "individualism" or "collectivism" but (I combined these in 2)

10. Not "egoism" or "altruism" but (combined in #2)

11. Not "idealism" based on reason, but "not even reason can refute the sensations, for reason depends wholly upon them."

12. Not "atheism" or "supernaturalism", but a fully material universe with the possibility of continuously happy beings, and "for those men for whom wisdom is possible, and who do seek it, such men may truly live as gods." My preference would be: Not belief in supernatural gods but... and the rest the same. Leave atheism out of it, and accept that living people who use that word are referring to supernatural gods only.

Post by "Cassius" of July 10, 2019 at 2:34 PM

Given that definitions are so important in many of these issues (such as atheism),

maybe we in fact need to plan a preface that addresses the "definitions" issue that runs through so many of these questions.

In fact that may be a good way to start it regardless - to point out that because many of the important words are so ambiguous, we want to define exactly what we mean in as clear terms as possible.

Post by "Elayne" of July 10, 2019 at 2:42 PM

I think I would avoid trying to revert to a former or esoteric meaning of atheism, personally. I don't think Epicurus would go for that, because it would create confusion. But we may need more discussion to come to a consensus.

I would stick to defining words which have a current conflicting opinion. I think there are two main terms that need defining-- eudaemonia, which is what I really think most normal people imagine when they hear the word happiness in English, even if they don't say so-- and agency/

free will. I suspect we need actually to have brief articles on those two terms.

Post by “Hiram” of July 10, 2019 at 4:27 PM

1. Not "the greatest good for the greatest number," but the greatest pleasure for me and my friends and close ones

2. Not "humanism" but _____ -- I personally don't mind humanism as long as it is understood to be very generic and not very concise. It in itself stands as better than supernaturalism and dehumanization. But if humanism was to be replaced with a more concise doctrine, it would be Epicureanism

3. Not "hard determinism" but compatibilism? Or whatever ism says some things happen by chance, others by necessity and others by our action

4. Not "hedonism" but Pleasure ethics

5. Not "absence of pain" as a full statement of the goal of life, but constant pleasures

6. Not "living unknown" as best way to organize one's life, but living surrounded by great friends

7. Not "creation" but evolution by natural selection

8. Not "faith" but empirical knowledge

9. Not "individualism" or "collectivism" but natural community

10. Not "egoism"/objectivism or "altruism" but mutual advantage

11. Not "idealism" but naturalism / study of nature

12. Not monotheism but "atheism" or humanism (it is we who should live like gods)

Not logic, but empirical reasoning

Not consumerism but moderation

Not flattery but frankness

Polystratus would have added:

Not moral relativity but moral realism

Metrodorus would have added:

Not vulnerability but self sufficiency

Post by “Cassius” of July 12, 2019 at 1:31 PM

Another possibility for this list: "Not minimal total pain, but maximal net pleasure."