

Responding To Catherine Wilson's Chart Comparing Epicurus To The Stoics

Post by "Cassius" of November 5, 2019 at 8:56 AM

This thread will be devoted to preparing a chart of responses to the Summary Table which Catherine Wilson included in both "The Pleasure Principle" and "How To Be An Epicurean." This chart renames Wilson's column on Epicurus as "Epicureans According to the Catherine Wilson / Academic View" and adds a column for "Epicureans According To the Norman Dewitt / Alternate View" which is intended to represent at least generally the view of the admins of this Epicureanfriends website.

This chart is a work in progress, especially as to the notes which are included on each item for clarification. Please comment in this thread on your thoughts about all aspects of this chart, especially as to how you think that the "Alternate View" column can be improved, either in the summary form included in the table, or as to the Notes which explain each item in detail. As the discussion evolves I will update the chart and notes in this opening post. This discussion should be interesting - thanks for your help with this!

	Stoics According to the Catherine Wilson View	Epicureans According to the Catherine Wilson / Academic View	Epicureans According to the Norman DeWitt / Alternate View	Notes
Ontology	Pneuma	Atoms and Void	Atoms And Void Combining Into Bodies With Qualities Which Are Intelligible	1
Causality	Determinism, Fate	Chance, Free Will	Probabilistic Determinism In Inanimate Matter / Agency in Higher Forms of Intelligent Life	2
Purpose of Ethics	Virtue	Freedom from Harm	Pleasure	3
Source of Moral Authority	Natural Law	Human Agreement	"Moral Authority" Does Not Exist Supernaturally or As Ideals; A Useful Concept Only As Derived From Individual Local Circumstances	4
Orientation	Universalist	Relativist	Relative to Circumstance But With The Feelings of Pleasure and Pain Of The Observer Constituting the Guide For All Choice and Avoidance	5
Emotions	Generally Bad	Generally Good	Emotions Are Deeply Felt And Are Not Only No Hindrance to Wisdom, But They Are An Essential and Integral Part of Prudent Decisionmaking	6
Family Life	Important	Inessential	Important, And As With Friendship, Grounded in Desire for Pleasure And Security	7
Suicide	Recommended in Difficult Circumstances	Not Recommended	Approved Or Disapproved According to Circumstance	8
Suffering (Pain)	Inevitable	Minimizable	To Be Minimized But Chosen When Greater Pleasure Results, As Judged By The Individual; Pain Is Always Bad in Itself	9
Pleasure	Generally Bad	Generally Good	To Be Maximized But Avoided When Greater Pain Results, As Judged By The Individual; Pleasure Is Always Good In Itself	10
Happiness	Freedom From All Emotional Disturbance	Freedom From Anxiety and Fear	Grounded In Pleasure As A State of Mind; Judged By the Individual According to Circumstances	11
Education	Develops Human Curiosity And Capability	Undermines Superstition	Tool for the Maximization of Pleasure, Which Means Also The Minimization of Pain	12
Warfare	Opportunity To Display Virtue	Motivated By Greed And Ambition	Desirable or Undesirable According to Circumstances	13

Notes:

Note 1: (A) One definition of "Ontology" is "Ontology is the philosophical study of being. More broadly, it studies concepts that directly relate to being, in particular becoming, existence, reality, as well as the basic categories of being and their relations. Traditionally listed as a part of the major branch of philosophy known as metaphysics, ontology often deals with questions concerning what entities exist or may be said to exist and how such entities may be grouped, related within a hierarchy, and subdivided according to similarities and differences." (B) It is

important here to not leave the impression that because the universe is ultimately made up of atoms and void, which cannot be sensed directly, that the universe is unknowable. Unknowability is the implication and the direction to which most academic philosophers / skeptics seek to take us, and Epicurus rejected that.

Note 2: What is meant by “Causality?”

Note 3: Catherine Wilson calls this category “Purpose of Ethics” but it might be more clear to refer to it as “the goal of life” or “the highest good”

Note 4: What is meant by “Source of Moral Authority?” To the extent this refers to some supernatural standard, or universal ideal standard, such things do not exist in the Epicurean worldview.

Note 5: What is meant by “Orientation”? Here we presume what is meant is.....

Note 6:

Note 7:

Note 8:

Note 9:

Note 10:

Note 11: What is “happiness?” Here we are presuming that happiness is a mental attitude - a feeling -

Note 12: What is meant by “Education?” Here we are presuming that what is referred to is the proper goal of education, not the actual functioning of education to perpetuate the transmission of ideas that Epicureans would consider to be erroneous.

Note 13: What is meant by “Warfare?” Is Wilson suggesting that there is no distinction between offensive and defensive warfare?