

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.

Post by "Cassius" of March 10, 2020 at 6:06 PM

Lots of interesting stuff there Charles.

Do I take it correctly that your main point / question is:

[Quote from Charles](#)

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?

It might help to direct the discussion if you further elaborated on what you mean by "holding each other accountable"?

It is possible that you are going in a direction that calls to my mind this excerpt from Torquatus in "On Ends":

Quote

Yet nevertheless some men indulge without limit their avarice, ambition and love of power, lust, gluttony and those other desires, which ill-gotten gains can never diminish but rather must inflame the more; inasmuch that they appear **proper subjects for**

restraint rather than for reformation.

if you are talking about "how do you prevent others with different views of pleasure from hurting us and our friends, then it seems to me that Torquatus is clearly saying that we "act to restrain" them ---

which is one reason why it is transparently wrong to suggest that Epicurus held that no Epicurean would participate in any form of public life, because there needs to be a mechanism for restraining those who would harm us, and I cannot imagine that Epicurus would have said "let someone else take care of that."

But you may not be going in that direction.....you may be thinking of something else entirely.

Post by “Don” of March 10, 2020 at 10:18 PM

[Quote from Charles](#)

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 will admit that my first reaction was "It's not my responsibility to answer for all those who call themselves 'Hedonists/Libertines/Utilitarians' If people lump us all in together!"

But, upon further reflection, it doesn't do us any good to get painted with the broad brush of prejudice and not defend ourselves. We need to have a proper reaction at the ready. I don't know what that is, but let's ponder it together.

I do think it's very important the way you phrased it: "according to the attacker's perception." They're the ones who need correcting. They're the ones with whom we have to engage. What do we need to get through to them and how?

Additionally, I don't think we can hold Hedonists/Libertines/Utilitarians accountable. We are not all part of a big tent. They don't need to listen to us and vice versa.

BUT we do need to distinguish ourselves from other "pleasure seekers" because that's just not what we are. We believe (*I think*) that pleasure is the *summum bonum* since pleasure is what stands alone. Pleasure is not a means to an end. Pleasure is! Virtue is only a means to pleasure. Why do we try to practice wisdom, to be moral, and to be just? Because we believe KD 5: "It is not possible to live a joyous life without the traits of wisdom, morality, and justice; and it is impossible to live with wisdom, morality, and justice without living joyously. When one of these is lacking, it is impossible to live a joyous life." Virtue is a means to an end: living pleasurably. Morality is a means to an end: living pleasurably. Pleasure is the end to which we're heading!

The reason that we're not libertines and decadents is that that lifestyle is not sustainable. It does not lead to living pleasurably. Sure, I can enjoy a few beers. Sure, I can enjoy a fine meal. But I don't want to stay drunk continuously and gorge myself on fine food every day. That's a recipe for pain.

The argument against Epicureans that murderers find murder pleasurable isn't necessarily easy to overcome. Murderers may truly believe that they find sadistic pleasure in their crime, and I'm not entirely convinced by that specious Epicurean argument that they will be troubled by knowledge that they cannot be sure they will go undetected. It sounds good but some people are sociopaths. BUT does it REALLY lead to a murderer *living pleasurably*. We REALLY have to define what we mean by "living pleasurably" I think. Almost by definition, someone who derives "pleasure" - and I deliberately put that in quotes - from their heinous crimes isn't living pleasurably by almost any rational societal understanding - prolepsis, if you will - of what "living pleasurably" means. That's another thing I believe that sets us Epicureans apart, knowing that "living pleasurably" has to be sustainable. We work towards maximizing sustained pleasure, not having momentary jolts of kinetic pleasures. That's what we work towards not just aponia but also ataraxia.

This is a fascinating and important thread to discuss. I hope I've added some food for thought and look forward to reading more from everyone.

Post by "Cassius" of March 11, 2020 at 5:22 AM

It's early in the morning and i don't have time to continue but i think in Eugenios' post THIS part will bear further elaboration:

[Quote from Eugenios](#)

We REALLY have to define what we mean by "living pleurably" I think. Almost by definition, someone who derives "pleasure" - and I deliberately put that in quotes - from their heinous crimes isn't living pleurably by almost any rational societal understanding - prolepsis, if you will - of what "living pleurably" means.

I hope [Elayne](#) will have a chance to see this as I suspect she will have something to say on this point too.

Post by "Joshua" of March 11, 2020 at 1:38 PM

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=dWNW-NXEudk>

Scott is not (to my knowledge) an Epicurean, but this is still the best take on morality I've seen anywhere.

Ties in Euthypro and David Hume for one powerful conclusion; regardless of your faith or philosophy, the inescapable reality is that *there are **only** rational 'oughts'*.

Does an Epicurean have trouble making sense of ethics? Certainly: but only because *everyone* has trouble making sense of ethics. What did we expect from a mammalian brain operating in a universe made of unthinking matter—perfection? The really foolish thing would be to assume perfectibility in ethics. Europe was lighted from one end to another with the burning of heretics behind *that* insanity.

Post by "Hiram" of March 11, 2020 at 1:41 PM

Mutual advantage is the key concept in Epicurean social ethics. If instead of speaking of "morality" or in abstract terms, we refer to concrete social problems and seek to evaluate the issues of mutual advantage concretely and directly and in detail, the moral problems become clearer and easier to address from an Epicurean perspective. The following essay might be

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1476-consequentialism-moral-relativism-within-the-context-of-pleasure-filled-philosop/>

worth studying in detail by the Epicureans:

Reconciling Justice and Pleasure in Epicurean Contractarianism - John J. Thrasher

<http://www.johnjthrasher.com/wp-content/upl...actarianism.pdf>

Post by “Cassius” of March 11, 2020 at 2:22 PM

Just for the record, Hiram, I continue to disagree strongly with that essay, (I would have to reread before i can remember HOW strongly, but i know we have discussed this several times before), and **in particular disagree** I strongly disagree with the statement that "**mutual advantage is the key concept in Epicurean social ethics.**"

There is nothing whatsoever that would lead to that "mutual benefit" conclusion. Yes we have to observe that generally we have to expect that people to whom we do harm will inflict harm back on us. But causing others harm, up to and including killing them) is an entirely appropriate thing to do in some circumstances (such as killing an enemy in war, or killing a criminal before he kills us, just for two examples.)

You are reading a very broad "mutual" into the equation **presumably** for reasons that we have discussed in great detail before -- humanism -- but there is no way to substantiate that through a thorough reading of the texts.

The texts are clear that it is our own pleasure, combined with the pleasure of our friends (in whom we take pleasure), and not some generic pleasure of all, or "mutual benefit" of a wider group beyond ourselves and our friends. The welfare or benefit of others who are not our friends is going to be a contextual secondary consideration that will vary entirely with circumstance -- not "the key concept in Epicurean social ethics." So it is never "mutual benefit" as an abstraction without discussing who is involved in the equation. Friendship going dancing around the world proclaiming to all the benefits of pleasure does not mean that all are going to respond to our proclamation, or that we are going to reach agreements for the mutual benefit of those who don't.

Post by “Elli” of March 11, 2020 at 3:53 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1476-consequentialism-moral-relativism-within-the-context-of-pleasure-filled-philosop/>

Eureka !! We did find two magic words like "open sesame". It is the "mutual benefit". E.g. I have a mutual benefit with this person in the video who wants without legal papers to pass through the greek borders to Evros area, for proclaiming his purpose that is: "to f@ck up all Greeks". Before he reaches the borders, he wants to spread the pain he already has from his religious or whatever ideas he has in his mind. And me, I have to say to him : Welcome here, since friendship dances around the world due to mutual benefit.

Where on earth do you live dear sirs? Outside there are neither only revolutionists of keyboards nor books' authors and the like. Outside it is the life that is proved with the science of the natural selection on who and how is the one that is able to survive with safety. Please, take out from your labs the EP, and your imagined world of ideas, and bring it in the REALITY of life at last!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yE4GfRO3Zj4>

Post by “Hiram” of March 11, 2020 at 4:30 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

There is nothing whatsoever that would lead to that "mutual benefit" conclusion.

That's a very categorical rejection of several of the [Principal Doctrines](#) on your part.

The last ten [Principal Doctrines](#) make frequent references to mutual advantage as the defining feature of justice.

36. Taken generally, **justice is** the same for all, to wit, **something found useful in mutual association**; but in its application to particular cases of locality or conditions of whatever kind, it varies under different circumstances.

37. Among the things accounted just by conventional law, **whatever in the needs of mutual association is attested to be useful, is thereby stamped as just**, whether or not it be the same for all; and in case any law is made and does not prove suitable to the usefulness of mutual association, then this is no longer just. And should the usefulness which is expressed by the law vary and only for a time correspond with the prior conception, nevertheless for the time being it was just, so long as we do not trouble ourselves about empty words, but look simply at the facts.

38. Where without any change in circumstances the conventional laws, when judged by their consequences, were seen not to correspond with the notion of justice, such laws were not really

just; but wherever the laws have ceased to be useful in consequence of a change in circumstances, in that case **the laws were for the time being just when they were useful for the mutual association of the citizens**, and subsequently ceased to be just when they ceased to be useful.

Post by “Hiram” of March 11, 2020 at 4:33 PM

[Quote from elli](#)

Eureka !! We did find two magic words like "open sesame". It is the "mutual benefit". E.g. I have a mutual benefit with this person in the video who wants without legal papers to pass through the greek borders to Evros area, for proclaiming his purpose that is: "to f@ck up all Greeks".

Are you saying that that's an example of mutual benefit? The entry of a person who might be dangerous for a society does not benefit the members of that society.

Post by “Cassius” of March 11, 2020 at 7:13 PM

[Quote from Hiram](#)

That's a very categorical rejection of several of the [Principal Doctrines](#) on your part.

No, I don't see it that way at all. You are quoting the [principal doctrines](#) on justice, and justice is one of the "virtues," all of which are subservient to the most fundamental principle that [pleasure is the guide of life](#).

The subservience of justice to pleasure is explained thoroughly in Torquatus / On Ends:

Quote

XVI. It remains to speak of Justice, to complete the list of the virtues; but this admits of practically the same treatment as the others. Wisdom, Temperance, and Courage I have shown to be so closely linked with Pleasure that they cannot possibly be severed

or sundered from it. The same must be deemed to be the case with Justice. Not only does Justice never cause anyone harm, but on the contrary it always adds some benefit, partly owing to its essentially tranquilizing influence upon the mind, partly because of the hope that it warrants of a never-failing supply of the things that uncorrupted nature really needs. And just as Rashness, License, and Cowardice ever torment the mind, ever awakening trouble and discord, so Unrighteousness, when firmly rooted in the heart, causes restlessness by the mere fact of its presence; and if once it has found expression in some deed of wickedness, however secret the act, yet it can never feel assured that it will always remain undetected.

The usual consequences of crime are, first suspicion, next gossip and rumor, then comes the accuser, then the judge; many wrongdoers have even turned evidence against themselves, as happened in your consulship. And even if any think themselves well fenced and fortified against detection by their fellow men, they still dread the eye of heaven, and fancy that the pangs of anxiety night and day gnawing at their hearts are sent by Providence to punish them. But what can wickedness contribute towards lessening the annoyances of life, commensurate with its effect in increasing them, owing to the burden of a guilty conscience, the penalties of the law and the hatred of one's fellows?

Yet nevertheless some men indulge without limit their avarice, ambition and love of power, lust, gluttony and those other desires, which ill-gotten gains can never diminish but rather must inflame the more; inasmuch that they appear proper subjects for restraint rather than for reformation. Men of sound natures, therefore, are summoned by the voice of true reason to justice, equity, and honesty. For one without eloquence or resources dishonesty is not good policy, since it is difficult for such a man to succeed in his designs, or to make good his success when once achieved.

On the other hand, for the rich and clever generous conduct seems more in keeping, and liberality wins them affection and good will, the surest means to a life of peace; especially as there really is no motive for transgressing since the desires that spring from nature are easily gratified without doing any man wrong, while those that are imaginary ought to be resisted, for they set their affections upon nothing that is really wanted; while there is more loss inherent in Injustice itself than there is profit in the gains it brings.

Hence Justice also cannot correctly be said to be desirable in and for itself; it is so because it is so highly productive of gratification. For esteem and affection are gratifying, because they render life safer and fuller of pleasure. Hence we hold that Unrighteousness is to be avoided not simply on account of the disadvantages that result from being unrighteous, but even far more because when it dwells in a man's heart it never suffers him to breathe freely or know a moment's rest.

If then even the glory of the Virtues, on which all the other philosophers love to expatiate so eloquently, has in the last resort no meaning unless it be based on pleasure, whereas pleasure is the only thing that is intrinsically attractive and alluring, it cannot be doubted that pleasure is the one supreme and final Good and that a life of happiness is nothing else than a life of pleasure.

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The point of our disagreement is in your statement "**Mutual advantage is the key concept in Epicurean social ethics.**" I don't think that statement is saved by the "*social*" modifier to ethics. Epicurean ethics of any kind is always based on pleasure, and pleasure is something that is felt individually. There is no "group" pleasure, or else we would all be Benthamites looking for the greatest pleasure of the greatest number. By elevating "mutual advantage" to the role of "the key concept" you're doing the same thing the Stoics and Platonists do every day - you're saying that mutual advantage is an end in itself regardless of what it produces from the individual perspective.

As to Elli's example you are making the same presumption in talking about "dangerous for a society" and "benefits the members of that society." You are lumping all sorts of things into that analysis as if it is possible to do so, which it is not -- from a philosophical perspective there are no bright lines that establish such things as "dangerous for a society" or "benefits the members of the society." You or any other individual can certainly make that calculation for yourself, but to say that Epicurean philosophy and/or "Nature" supports it as a general rule is to turn the contextual nature of pleasure and Epicurean philosophy upside down.

Which is exactly what that essay by Thrasher does. He admits in the preamble, for good reason, that "***The pursuit of pleasure and the requirements of justice, however, have seemed to be incompatible to many commentators, both ancient and modern.***" However I would go further and say that he is understating the point when he says "many" -- the truth is that it is very clear that "the requirements of justice" are of no relevance to an Epicurean stated in the way that implies that there are absolute principles of justice. The PDs that you are quoting makes plain that justice changes with circumstance, and there is no Epicurean principle of "the best society" that can be read into the doctrines to infer that any particular society should always be defended, or always be deposed. Plenty of societies can deserve to be defended, and plenty of societies can deserve to be destroyed, but there is no standard above the individual level that answers the question as to which is which.

I don't have the time to read the full essay in detail again right now; I know I have argued against it in the past, perhaps even here in this forum. But one of the basic issues is his search for a "rule hedonism" -- in other words he is looking for a "rule" that appears to be divorced from pleasure itself, which, like the gods, has no ruler over it. He's attempting to systematize a theory of contract in which individuals secure their greatest happiness by agreeing to a mutual contract -- that is all well and good, and in practice that's pretty much what it seems like we

ought to struggle toward- -- but each in our own individual circumstances, and not by looking for universal rules which we then see, in the classic error of "virtue" - as an end in itself, rather than always looking to pleasure itself.

That's the great error of humanism and all virtue ethics, as stated in [PD25](#):

25. If on each occasion, instead of referring your actions to the end of nature, you turn to some other, nearer, standard, when you are making a choice or an avoidance, your actions will not be consistent with your principles.

Thrasher's "Epicurean Social Contract" theory is doomed for the reason all other efforts to derive an absolute best political theory is doomed. Once we go further than did Epicurus, who simply noted that any legitimate concept of "justice" turns on the pleasure of the people involved, then we slide down the slope directly to Platonism and Stoicism.

Epicurus didn't do that for reasons that ought to be clear when you start with his fundamental principles and build from the ground up.

Post by "Elli" of March 11, 2020 at 7:53 PM

Neither benefits of a society nor dangerous for a society. Since it is my **known** and **familiar** society, and that means he is neither a friend that benefits nor an enemy that is dangerous. This is the action according to (PD 39) : As much as possible to be refrained from mixing him in my known society and to expel from here, for going to his known society for living as he likes and with whomever his likes, and this was of advantage to treat thus.

In this case and according to Doctrine 32. **For all living things which have not been able to make compacts not to harm one another or be harmed, nothing ever is either just or unjust; and likewise too for all tribes of men which have been unable or unwilling to make compacts not to harm or be harmed.**

Post by "Hiram" of March 12, 2020 at 9:54 AM

| [Quote from Charles](#)

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.

I think this is the key question [Charles](#), and if you read Thrasher's essay on contractarianism and the final PD's and have any further questions about his arguments while you're writing your essay, you know where to find me.

Concerning consequentialism, Epicurus (in [Against empty words](#)) says that we think empirically concerning the actions based on the results observed from any course of action. But there is no extant elaboration of this, and your essay may actually be very useful for further ethics discussions.

Post by "Elayne" of March 13, 2020 at 10:59 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

It's early in the morning and i don't have time to continue but i think in Eugenios' post THIS part will bear further elaboration:

[Quote from Eugenios](#)

We REALLY have to define what we mean by "living pleurably" I think. Almost by definition, someone who derives "pleasure" - and I deliberately put that in quotes - from their heinous crimes isn't living pleurably by almost any rational societal understanding

Eugenios, we must remember pleasure is strictly a feeling, not a rational understanding that we define. It isn't defined other than by the feeling itself. So not only don't we need to define it

further, doing so would be counter to Epicurean philosophy. We all know what the feeling is.

Some people will have pleasure in activities that most of us would abhor. We share most of our genomes-- it shouldn't surprise us that humans agree on many pleasures and pains. We aren't clones, though, and we have unique life experiences, so we'll also have some differences in pleasure.

Because there is no absolute standard of what "should" bring pleasure, only the person having the feeling knows if they are living pleasurably or not. Pleasure cannot be measured from the outside, only subjectively.

To my mind, Epicurus was speaking of a normal, typical person, who would live in fear of being caught (and I would add for myself, in dread of the grief due to empathy for whoever I harmed).

A sociopath often does not experience the same kinds of worries we would, and certainly not empathy/remorse. If sociopaths get pleasure from acts that harm us, it's real pleasure for them. Some of them do get away with it in the long run and have pleasurable lives hurting others.

There is nothing about this philosophy that says the pleasures of people won't come into opposition. It's not a philosophy that will cause every person to adhere to the same practices. But because we care about our pleasure, we would be wise to do our best to avoid dealing with sociopaths and if necessary, we can attempt to restrain them. If we structure things wisely, we can increase the chance that a budding sociopath would realize a benefit from not murdering, etc.

As a side note, sociopaths appear to respond to rewards more than punishment. Punishment is not a highly effective deterrent for them, partly due to typically high impulsivity.. If they see a path to pleasure that involves following laws, they do sometimes take it.

Post by “Cassius” of March 14, 2020 at 5:54 AM

Thanks Elayne! Well stated.

Post by “Don” of March 14, 2020 at 9:51 AM

I sincerely found your post very thought-provoking, [Elayne](#) . Thank you for some intellectually-stimulating reading.

That being said, I'm not sure that I accept all of your premises. Let me further explain my perspective, and then I welcome your response and others'. That's what I'm here for: to share, to discuss, and to learn.

I certainly agree that pleasure is given to us by nature to serve as "the starting-point of every choice and of every aversion, and to it we come back, inasmuch as we make feeling the rule by which to judge of every good thing." (*Letter to Menoikos*). Yes! Fully onboard with that. So, my initial point was not necessarily that sociopaths or psychopaths are not feeling pleasure. I think they could be subjectively feeling pleasure. However, I think an argument could be made that their brains are "wired" differently than the majority of people. In which case, are their feelings of pleasure reliable guides for them? Why else would medications be prescribed for some?

Parallel to that, there are people who are physically unable to feel pain and are unable to tell if they are being injured. There is a literal physical impediment to their being able to use a feeling of pain to make choices and rejections. Could not there also be people who are unable to feel pleasure correctly, similar to those who can't feel pain or even whose sight may perceive the distant square tower as round? Epicurus writes to Herodotus that "Our canon is that direct observation by sense **and** direct apprehension by the mind are alone invariably true." If one is blind or visually impaired, they cannot use the sense of sight to perceive the world and to base any choices or rejections on it. If someone's mental sense of feeling pleasure or pain is impaired, can they use those as reliable standards?

Additionally, Principal Doctrine 25 instructs that "If at all critical times you do not connect each of your actions to the natural goal of life, but instead turn too soon to some other kind of goal in thinking whether to avoid or pursue something, then your thoughts and your actions will not be in harmony." (St-Andre translation) Is the psychopath or sociopath doing this? Are they "turning too soon to some other kind of goal" and so keeping their thoughts and actions out of tune? I would interpret the "natural goal of life" to be "living pleurably." I would further interpret "living pleurably" as defined by Principal Doctrine 5 (emphasis added): "**It is not possible** to live pleurably without the traits of wisdom, morality, and justice; and **it is impossible** to live with wisdom, morality, and justice without living pleurably. **When one of these is lacking, it is impossible to live a pleurable life.**"

It is my contention that we can decide if someone is living a pleurable life or if they're living with a delusion by applying this standard. Similarly, from my perspective, Epicurus also tells us that we can see famous and rich people thinking that they are going to be living pleurably but they're just swapping one set of pains for another (Fragment 479). We could say they believe they're living pleurably but they're delusional in the general sense of the word.

Living pleurably is not the same as feeling pleasure. A prisoner (who is not an Epicurean) can feel pleasure intermittently, but I would contend that they aren't living pleurably. Someone living in abject poverty (who is not an Epicurean) can feel pleasure intermittently, but I would contend that they aren't living pleurably. The feeling of pleasure alone is not a sufficient reason to contend that someone is living a pleurable life.

Post by “Cassius” of March 14, 2020 at 11:30 AM

Eugenios you have stated your view very clearly and summarized it well in that last sentence

"The feeling of pleasure alone is not a sufficient reason to contend that someone is living a pleasurable life."

Unfortunately I am out and going to be delayed in responding in full but my understanding of Epicurus is that he would completely disagree with that statement. I believe Epicurus would say that feeling itself is the ultimate standard, and there is no outside authority which can second guess it - which I believe to be the clear implication of [PD10](#) and many other sayings, all of which provide the context for interpreting PD5 in a consistent way.

More soon.....

Post by “Don” of March 14, 2020 at 11:40 AM

I look forward to reading your thoughts, [Cassius](#) ! Thanks!

Post by “Cassius” of March 14, 2020 at 12:44 PM

Ok now I am back. We could start with all the statements in the letter to Menoeceus about "pleasure" being the alpha and omega, but I think the place to focus at the moment is on the point that feeling is the ultimate guide, beyond which there is no other, and nothing else to make a thing worth choosing and avoiding. I like to look to two places for this explanation:

(1) PD2: "2. [Death is nothing to us](#), for that which is dissolved is without sensation; and that which lacks sensation is nothing to us." This is a statement that nothing which is no a subject of sensation is of any relevance to us. That would take out of the argument any abstraction which does not ultimately resolve back to a positive or negative sensation, which means pleasure and pain. I do not believe there is any more fundamental proposition in Epicurean philosophy, even PD1 as to the nature of the gods, than this one that all good and evil comes to us through sensation, which I believe translates into "feeling" in the context in which we are discussing

things. If a thing cannot ultimately be "felt" in some way, then that thing is of no relevance to us. Even the issue of the gods in PD1 is relevant to us only because of the feelings that the issue of gods generates in our lives.

(1) The most clear explanation of this issue is in the opening of the Torquatus section in On Ends, which even hints at the objection which I think you are making, Eugenios, and indicates that some Epicureans ("some members of our school) fell away from Epicurus on this point, which I believe was fatal to Epicurean development (and DeWitt talks about the danger of this divergence too):

"We are inquiring, then, what is the final and ultimate Good, which as all philosophers are agreed must be of such a nature as to be the End to which all other things are means, while it is not itself a means to anything else. This Epicurus finds in pleasure; pleasure he holds to be the Chief Good, pain the Chief Evil. This he sets out to prove as follows: Every animal, as soon as it is born, seeks for pleasure, and delights in it as the Chief Good, while it recoils from pain as the Chief Evil, and so far as possible avoids it. This it does as long as it remains unperverted, at the prompting of Nature's own unbiased and honest verdict.

Hence Epicurus refuses to admit any necessity for argument or discussion to prove that pleasure is desirable and pain to be avoided. **These facts, be thinks, are perceived by the senses, as that fire is hot, snow white, honey sweet, none of which things need be proved by elaborate argument: it is enough merely to draw attention to them.** (For there is a difference, he holds, between formal syllogistic proof of a thing and a mere notice or reminder: the former is the method for discovering abstruse and recondite truths, the latter for indicating facts that are obvious and evident.) **Strip mankind of sensation, and nothing remains; it follows that Nature herself is the judge of that which is in accordance with or contrary to nature. What does Nature perceive or what does she judge of, beside pleasure and pain, to guide her actions of desire and of avoidance?**

Some members of our school however would refine upon this doctrine; these say that it is not enough for the judgment of good and evil to rest with the senses; the facts that pleasure is in and for itself desirable and pain in and for itself to be avoided can also be grasped by the intellect and the reason. Accordingly they declare that the perception that the one is to be sought after and the other avoided is a notion naturally implanted in our minds. Others again, with whom I agree, observing that a great many philosophers do advance a vast array of reasons to prove why pleasure should not be counted as a good nor pain as an evil, consider that we had better not be too confident of our case; in their view it requires elaborate and reasoned argument, and abstruse theoretical discussion of the nature of pleasure and pain."

For now I will focus only on the part in bold, but I included the "some members of our school" to point out how acute the danger is.

Ultimately the issue comes down to sensation (feeling of pleasure and pain, as shown by the equation of those things in the sentence structure) being the only judge that Nature gives us as to what is our guide for choice and avoidance.

Now the common objection here is that we choose unwisely at times, and we end up suffering more pain and pleasure. (That too is set out by Torquatus as the issue.) The answer to that issue is not that there is a god, or that there is an ideal form of pleasure which is always preferable to other forms of pleasure. The answer to that question is "Whether you like it or not, this is the way Nature operates, so you can choose to accept the natural order, or you can rebel against Nature and set up some other standard. If you do, good luck, because there is no god, no ideal form, and no outside sanction or authority whatsoever for your decision in doing that. You're on your own."

Now you Eugenios are framing the question in terms of people who are insane or "psychopathic" or "sociopathic" and asking about the apparent problems with those situations. The answer there is that NATURE has no problems with those situations whatsoever - Nature doesn't care. It's only real living people who have feelings and sensations, and it is up to them to pursue their lives with whatever circumstances they are given. Calling people psychopathic or sociopathic or using whatever terms of medicine or politics or religion or culture that we want to use as branding someone as depraved does not in any way invoke special authority from gods or Platos realms of ideals or any absolute standard of virtue whatsoever. Those people are as they are, just like cats are like cats and dogs are like dogs and rarely see things eye to eye - to the point of killing each other in many cases. That is simply the way nature operates.

Now we can as humans of course observe and recognize and take steps to deal with the consequences of those problems. We can keep rabid dogs on leashes and we can identify and restrain (restraint being another reference in Torquatus) those who would kill us either because they are in some way "-pathic" or because they just don't like the color of our skin or the way we cut our hair. If we don't act to prevent harm from those sources, then often we will suffer from that harm and pay the consequence of our failure to observe and to act.

But I am now very far downstream into the consequences. The real answer to your question is in Epicurus' **"What does Nature perceive or what does she judge of, beside pleasure and pain, to guide her actions of desire and of avoidance?"**

For those people who experience pleasure at things that we consider -pathic in some way, they are experiencing the feeling of pleasure just as we are. They are not likely to succeed at their path for very long, because the NORMAL part of the universe generally outnumbers them in any context, and the normal part is not likely to take kindly to their -pathic behavior for very long. It is correct for you to point out that ultimately they will fail to live pleurably for very long, but you have to remember that LENGTH OF TIME is not the standard for living pleurably. That is stated explicitly in the letter to Menoeceus a there is no reason from any other passage to infer

that length of time is the overriding factor in judging pleasure. You would be right to say that "neither is intensity the overriding factor either" but the real answer is that there IS no absolute standard in Nature for how to judge pleasure. Nature is not going to smile on you because you gathered flowers in fields for 50 years instead of living for 30 years as a mountain-climber and downhill skier. There IS no absolute standard for pleasant living - no external standard at all that is sanctioned by Nature. We each get to make our own decisions as to what life will bring us the most pleasure, because only we are the ones feeling the result.

No matter how dramatically we illustrate the horrific results of what we see as depravity in the world, if you accept that Nature gives no standard other than pleasure and pain for how to live, then the result is the same, and the dramatizations may be colorful, but they all lead to the same conclusion:

10. If the things that produce the pleasures of profligates could dispel the fears of the mind about the phenomena of the sky, and death, and its pains, and also teach the limits of desires (and of pains), ***we should never have cause to blame them: for they would be filling themselves full, with pleasures from every source, and never have pain of body or mind, which is the evil of life.***

Post by "Cassius" of March 14, 2020 at 12:50 PM

Some comments on specific points from your post Eugenios:

[Quote from Eugenios](#)

However, I think an argument could be made that their brains are "wired" differently than the majority of people. In which case, are their feelings of pleasure reliable guides for them? Why else would medications be prescribed for some?

Yes indeed their brains are wired differently, and yes indeed we try to treat them with medication, but that does not change the fact of nature as to what they are experiencing. (I understand that you agree with this point.) Yes we are substituting our judgment for theirs in how they should live, and yes I understand that we think we are doing so for their own best interest. But that is not something that Nature gives us an absolute sanction to do, and there are neither gods nor ideal forms to sanction it either. We do so because we choose to do so, and we do so for good or bad result at our own peril, and so we should be clear as to why we are doing it.

Post by “Cassius” of March 14, 2020 at 12:56 PM

[Quote from Eugenios](#)

Living pleurably is not the same as feeling pleasure. A prisoner (who is not an Epicurean) can feel pleasure intermittently, but I would contend that they aren't living pleurably. Someone living in abject poverty (who is not an Epicurean) can feel pleasure intermittently, but I would contend that they aren't living pleurably. The feeling of pleasure alone is not a sufficient reason to contend that someone is living a pleurable life.

As I reread your post I don't know that we really have much disagreement on the fundamental points as much as we are on that conclusion and the implications of it. On this "Living pleurably is not the same as feeling pleasure." I would say that clearly seems to be a problem, maybe mostly because of the implications it raises without answering them. Because this sentence "The feeling of pleasure alone is not a sufficient reason to contend that someone is living a pleurable life" can hardly mean anything other than that there is some reason OTHER than the feeling of pleasure to contend that someone is living a pleurable life. Clearly the person asserting such a position has something OTHER than the feeling of pleasure to assert as the standard of a pleurable life.

Maybe it would help if you would explain what that standard might be, but I cannot imagine that asserting that "the standard of a pleurable life is something other than pleasure" could lead to much that would be consistent with Epicurus.

But I am all ears 🙄

Post by “Elayne” of March 14, 2020 at 1:14 PM

I agree with everything Cassius has said, Eugenios, and I think this is an extremely important issue to understand, in order to thoroughly grasp this philosophy. Once you have fully gotten it, you won't have trouble recognizing when people aren't understanding it.

One way people can accidentally slip into idealism on this subject is through using personifying language about nature. Epicurus did do that, but I am sure he made certain his students knew what he was doing. If that is tripping you up, you might want to avoid using metaphorical language and see if it is easier to avoid this trouble.

The actual way we got to develop both the capacity for pleasure and specific preferences is through evolution. Humans who followed their desires to pursue pleasure and avoid pain survived and reproduced-- but it is not that the sweet fruit which was life-supporting was designed for us and the poisonous fruit not. We evolved together. The sweet fruit propagated by having us eat it and evacuate its seeds, so those fruits which matched our tastes most closely were propagated more, and we learned to continue to eat them-- humans who had a taste for them and could get those calories survived. The poisonous fruit which does not spread that way survived humans eating it by mutations which killed or repelled through taste --- the fruit without that taste and/or poison mutation didn't survive, if our eating it killed it off. The humans who ate food tasting that way didn't make it. None of this was according to any kind of design.

The typically shared pleasures of our species were evolved, such as a tendency to empathy and cooperativeness... but the "cheater" niche, which includes sociopaths, is a consistently filled niche in most if not all species. It isn't unnatural. It has advantages and disadvantages, and a member of the cheater niche is going to feel pleasure and pain from different stimuli than the rest of us. Their subjective pleasure can only be sensed by them. Species with cheaters also evolve ways among the typical members to detect and contain cheater activity within a certain range-- or else that population tends to die off. Unchecked cheating is not a successful evolutionary event.

In the last two paragraphs, I have gone beyond what Epicurus said, because he did not have all the evolutionary science available to him which we have now. But I think what I have said is coherent with the philosophy. I have not yet found any observable material phenomena to conflict with his philosophy, because it is based in reality.

Post by “Elayne” of March 14, 2020 at 1:24 PM

And let me be clear-- just because our specific pleasures and pains developed through survival and reproduction advantages does not make survival/ reproduction our primary goal. There is no absolute good in survival and reproduction. I was just giving the descriptive background. Once a species has evolved the capacity for pleasure and can make choices, pleasure itself is the goal of life.

Post by “Cassius” of March 14, 2020 at 1:40 PM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

Eugenios, and I think this is an extremely important issue to understand, in order to thoroughly grasp this philosophy. Once you have fully gotten it, you won't have trouble recognizing when people aren't understanding it.

... and you will get lots of practice recognizing it! As for myself I have a harder time telling whether people don't *understand* it, or whether they just *refuse to accept it*. This I think is related to the widespread injection of "humanism" into Epicurean discussions. Everyone (me included) has personal preferences as to how we would like to see the world work, but the humanist seeks to universalize his or her conclusions into a single "best" system for everyone.

To be fair to Epicurus and to understand him, I think we need to recognize that Epicurus wasn't in the business of creating a political system.

Epicurus won't deliver a god-like pronouncement as to whether - to take a current example - the Greeks should fling open the gates to the Syrian refugees, or whether the Syrian refugees should even be trying to get into Greece. Epicurus was in the business of understanding the universe so that EVERYONE, Greek and Syrian, could - if they cared to - evaluate their personal situation according to reality and then act accordingly.

The point people don't like to hear is that the facts of nature don't take sides, and Greeks and the Syrians both could take exactly the same starting points as to philosophy and come to all sorts of different conclusions -- from coexistence to separation to all out war -- based on their own personal considerations.

And the fact of nature that we have to live with as to Epicureans is that Nature doesn't "care" about the result, and doesn't care whether the Greeks or the Syrians win or whether they all exterminate each other. There are no gods or "ideals of virtue" to look to either to tell us which side to root for, other than any we might choose to create for ourselves. We ultimately each as individuals have to look to our own feelings of pleasure and pain, and then act accordingly.

It's really hard to keep a clear distinction between our own personal preferences, and our understanding of what Nature and philosophy can answer for us. **Really** hard. But I think we can sense strongly in the surviving texts of Epicurus, especially in parts like [PD10](#) and the PD's stating that there is no absolute justice, that this individual contextual analysis is exactly what Epicurus was saying.

Post by "Cassius" of March 16, 2020 at 9:03 PM

I am coming back to this thread because I want to make a brief point, but I think this is not really the thread I am looking for. Somewhere recently I was making the argument that Epicurus was very clear that there are only two feelings, pleasure and pain, and that this is the foundation of so much else in terms of understanding that pleasure is the ultimate goal. (Very few people want to advocate pain, they simply want to advocate something else.)

But what I was looking for was a post where I was listing the cites in Epicurean texts which make this point. Until I find it I will post it here because it is relevant here too:

I generally remember to point to Diogenes Laertius for this "the feelings are two" point, and also to a passage in the letter to Herodotus, but here is a passage from Torquatus / On Ends that really needs highlighting in this context. It is said here in passing, but in very clear terms: if you are feeling ANYTHING, that feeling is either Pleasure OR Pain:

"A man who is conscious of his condition at all must necessarily feel either pleasure

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38 place. Epicurus consequently maintained that there is no such thing as a neutral state of feeling intermediate between pleasure and pain; for the state supposed by some thinkers to be neutral, being characterized as it is by entire absence of pain, is itself, he held, a pleasure, and, what is more, a pleasure of the highest order. A man who is conscious of his condition at all must necessarily feel either pleasure or pain. But complete absence of pain Epicurus

Here is the Latin:

CICERO DE FINIBUS

38 voluptatis. Itaque non placuit Epicuro medium esse quiddam inter dolorem et voluptatem; illud enim ipsum quod quibusdam medium videretur, cum omni dolore careret, non modo voluptatem esse verum etiam summam voluptatem. Quisquis enim sentit quemadmodum sit affectus, eum necesse est aut in voluptate esse aut in dolore. Omnis autem privatione doloris putat Epicurus terminari summam voluptatem, ut postea variari voluptas distinguique possit, augeri 39 amplificarique non possit. At etiam Athenis, ut a

Post by "Elli" of March 17, 2020 at 5:12 AM

Of course survival and reproduction it is not an absolute good that is ordered by any god or any leader, but it is a relative good according to the relative circumstances of the relative experiences as measured (in time and space) with senses and among pleasure and pain whilst we might see clearly evidential that survival and reproduction it was not an absolute good but a kind of a necessity for the survival of a society.

An example based on experiences: There is, as we call it in western societies : "the social security system". This system is not an ideal and absolute invention, it has been evolved as we human beings have been evolved and still evolving on the basis to help each other when there is a great need and as it is called also as solidarity of a society which keeps its coherence, because at the same time we have seen clearly that in time and space there are not only situations as "milk and honey" in a society. And this happens according to the experiences that have been measured that to maintain whatever you have acquired and to provide for the future is something that is pleasant and not painful. Isn't it ?

So it becomes clear that the social security system is that financial deposit account that pays in some percent: Our lovely Doctors and nurses and all the medical staff for providing to our health in hospitals when we got ill e.g. from coronavirus, medicines in pharmacies, and mainly this : for paying the pensioners' pensions. However, there is also a crucial question that has to be answered: When this social security system would fall down and be collapsed? It is when we insist that when there are almost 5 old pensioners who take their pensions monthly, without

being worried and enjoying their leisure, for maintaining hospitals with medical staff, providing medicines, doing researches in the laboratories and the like, (to not mention the schools, universities and education issues) and when we see clearly that: Oh, gee there are only one and half young man that is able to work for those five old pensioners, as well as these ones and half young men are working for themselves too when they would confront a situation of a great need.

And what is doing a society when its social security system falls down and being collapsed due to the above ? Do not worry, dear ladies and gentlemen, there are others that are intruding for holding the situation firmly bonded to the "demands" of Nature on what it can be done and not can't be done by us, since those that are intruding, have already born 6/7 children in one family. So, then, here I want to see this society/societies that include both old and young men, if they have those **GUTS** for making social contracts with others (that may have NOT the same idea what is just and what is unjust) and on the basis to not harm and not be harmed each other.

What on earth does Epicurus say here? Does he maybe describe societies of jungles ? **Doctrine 32. For all living things which have not been able to make compacts not to harm one another or be harmed, nothing ever is either just or unjust; and likewise too for all tribes of men which have been unable or unwilling to make compacts not to harm or be harmed.**

Did you were unable or unwilling to born new babies according to a relative/and prudently measured good that is the safety and the coherence of your society? Do not worry about what is just and what is unjust ! Nature that does not care at all, will point out to you clearly -in time and space - what is just/ pleasant and what is unjust/painful.

Because there is also - the fifth in line - Principal Doctrine which says: **It is not possible to live pleasantly without living prudently and honorably and justly, [nor again to live a life of prudence, honor, and Justice] without living pleasantly. And the man who does not possess the pleasant life, is not living prudently and honorably and justly, [and the man who does not possess the virtuous life], cannot possibly live pleasantly.**

For this Epicurus maybe he had said: **Prudence is higher than philosophy.** Prudence is that kind of capacity of those societies for making clear that there is and the need to keep safe of whatever you have been acquired and to provide for the future. Because if this society will act otherwise, it would fall to the stoic apathetic "suggestion" which does say : **Has your estate was taken from you ? It was given back. He who took it from you is wicked. What does it matter to you through whom the Giver asked it back? As long as the giver gives you, take care of it, but not as your own; treat is as the passers-by treat an inn !** Thus, according to the stoics' "suggestions: treat our societies like an inn, or better as the Americans ask: **What is this, Grand Central Station???" that means a) there are too many people around here, or b) people seem to think that they can come and go as**

they please. OR as we Greeks say with another idiom : "edo einai bate skyloi aleste & alestika min dinete", which means : " **Here is the place where everyone does whatever one wants, open to all, free to all, anything goes, come one come all**".

Yes indeed, the wise man will marry and have children, as Epicurus says in treatises On Problems and On Nature, but only in accord with the circumstances of his life and IF these circumstances point out to him clearly that he has to take care of his property and provide for the future.

Post by "Cassius" of March 17, 2020 at 5:33 AM

Excellent post Elli. Since we are talking about something similar here, let me post this assertion that I think applies here too:

So what we're talking about ... comes down to "Is there an 'OBJECTIVE' ranking of Pleasures and Pains to which we can refer to as absolute standards to be embraced and rejected in all situations?"

And the answer to that which is dictated by Epicurean understanding of the nature of the universe would presumably be "No such standard exists so no absolute ranking is possible."

link: [Commentary on KD 10'](#)

Post by "Charles" of October 7, 2020 at 11:51 AM

Picking up from some ruminations on this [thread](#) months ago.

There's a single paragraph within On Ends where Torquatus is discussing Justice that I will quote below. I have underlined some important aspects in which I will raise some questions and discussions.

[Quote from Toquatus On Ends](#)

Yet nevertheless **some men indulge without limit** their avarice, ambition and love of power, lust, gluttony and those other desires, which ill-gotten gains can never diminish but rather must inflame the more; inasmuch that **they appear proper subjects for restraint rather than for reformation**. Men of sound natures, therefore, are summoned by the voice of true reason to justice, equity, and honesty. For one without

eloquence or resources dishonesty is not good policy, since **it is difficult for such a man to succeed in his designs, or to make good his success when once achieved.**

Back in March I wrote a vaguely worded thread, ruminating on the concept of Consequentialism, specifically the variations of "Motive Consequentialism" and, to a lesser extent, "Negative Consequentialism".

The former judges strictly based on the current state after an act has been made, compared with other possible decisions and their potential outcomes, justifying different acts and holding that certain acts, despite a negative outcome cannot be reprimanded or called out due to the circumstances which led to the course of action from the agent making the decision, for their motivations regardless were in a good, or justifiable place.

The latter in that the best moral outcome is one that seeks to reduce as many negatives as possible, or the least damaging outcome. An easy comparison to explain this is to compare it to "Negative Utilitarianism" or "Negative Hedonism" in that the highest good is found through reducing the pain or suffering of the greatest number.

Not to get onto the absence of pain debacle, but nonetheless, removing pain is an important concept and a key aspect of Epicurean Philosophy. However, context and individual interpretations and approaches to this are a necessity, since there is no sole universal pleasure which unequivocally works for each person, despite common instances such as food, and desires play the chief role in all this.

For desires are something we act upon for the sake of pleasure. Sometimes those desires require self-reflection and the philosophizing about whether or not they are worth it, but even in these instances the end goal is for our pleasure, even if that means enduring a small amount of pain in the present, something established by many Epicurean sources.

How this all comes back full circle, we must first establish a few points for clarity and context: (I promise to not use formal logic, this is just a very layered issue)

1. Epicurean Philosophy has no universal or absolute moral principles, neither duty or virtue are held to such standards, as they are subject to the all-encompassing axis of pleasure & pain.
2. The Canon, or the Epicurean Epistemology is directly tied to everything in which we interact with, and is responsible for much more, as for this point, our senses and feelings are the important part for confirming the first statement above.
3. Third, and perhaps above all, pleasure *is* the good, and pain *is* evil. It is to this end that we actively and passively (moving/static) pursue pleasure, and avoid pain. This truth is self-evident, and to be as bold as to claim that this is a universal truth, well, by that I would say it is our natural inclination as evidenced by our sensations and reactions to both.

Here's where things can get tricky, as actions done in the name of removing pain are viewed as a good thing.

Quote from Principal Doctrines 6 & 7

6. Whatever you can provide yourself with to secure protection from men is a natural good.

7. Some men wished to become famous and conspicuous, thinking that they would thus win for themselves safety from other men. Wherefore if the life of such men is safe, they have obtained the good which nature craves; but if it is not safe, they do not possess that for which they strove at first by the instinct of nature.

Likewise, must we assume that actions done in the name of pleasure are in themselves good? That certainly seems to be something we can get behind.

The question remains then: what is to be done about those, Epicurean, hedonist, Cyrenaic, whose actions can be related to Torquatus and what Epicurus termed and referred to as [pleasures of] "the profligates".

Quote from Principal Doctrine 10

10. If the **things that produce the pleasures of profligates** could dispel the fears of the mind about the phenomena of the sky, and death, and its pains, and also teach the limits of desires (and of pains), we should **never** have **cause to blame them:** for they would be filling themselves full, with pleasures from every source, and never have **pain of body or mind, which is the evil of life.**

These profligates, or, the ones who may require restraint as worded by Torquatus, or, to be put in another manner, those whose actions done in the name of pleasure, who cannot be reconciled, for their pleasure incidentally reflects (and effects) poorly and negatively among others. They are the target of both Epicurus and Torquatus.

Now, before we discuss Justice, I would like to pull a quote from Epicurus' On Nature, Book 18, translated from French to English (by Hiram.) *If only there were more available subject matter regarding these French books.*

Quote from On Nature, Book 18

One must rely on sharpness of perception to separate the notions of nature from those that are designed with difficulty or obscurity ... Pay full attention to the power of the empirical reasoning. – Epicurus

While the above quote is used within the context of "empty words", I believe that it provides a good and consistent foundation from which we can reasonably proceed, in that judging the words and actions of others, is done primarily through our senses (ie the canon). Therefore, taking an empirical, or rather canonical approach to the aftereffects of an action is the only feasible method in which to judge something as justifiable.

There are many, numerous quotations, fragments, sayings, and paragraphs detailing the extent of law and justice from an Epicurean perspective. I firmly disagree in that its sole foundation is the concept of **mutual benefit**. Instead, its notions and anticipations of contractarianism and Social Contract theory, refer instead to a mutual accountability on the basis of allowing individuals to pursue their pleasure and avoid pain caused by others. Let's take a look at some of these sources, namely the last 9 PD's.

Quote from Principal Doctrines 31-40

31. The justice which arises from nature is a pledge of mutual advantage, **to restrain men from harming one another, and save them from being harmed.**

32. For all living things which have **not been able to make compacts not to harm one another, or be harmed, nothing ever is either just or unjust;** and likewise, too, for all tribes of men which have been unable, or unwilling, to make compacts not to harm or be harmed.

33. Justice never is anything in itself, but in the dealings of men with one another, in any place whatever, and at any time, **it is a kind of compact not to harm or be harmed.**

34. **Injustice is not an evil in itself, but only in consequence of the fear** which attaches to the apprehension **of being unable to escape those appointed to punish** such actions.

35. It is not possible for one who acts in secret contravention of the terms of the compact not to harm or be harmed to be confident that he will escape detection, even if, at present, he escapes a thousand times. For up to the time of death it cannot be certain that he will indeed escape.

36. In its general aspect, **justice is the same for all, for it is a kind of mutual advantage in the dealings of men with one another;** but **with reference to the individual peculiarities** of a country, or any other circumstances, **the same thing does not turn out to be just for all.**

37. **Among actions which are sanctioned as just by law, that which is proved, on examination, to be of advantage, in the requirements of men's dealings with one another, has the guarantee of justice, whether it is the same for all or not. But if a man makes a law, and it does not turn out to lead to**

advantage in men's dealings with each other, then it no longer has the essential nature of justice. And even if the advantage in the matter of justice shifts from one side to the other, but for a while accords with the general concept, it is nonetheless just for that period, in the eyes of those who do not confound themselves with empty sounds, but look to the actual facts.

38. Where, provided the circumstances have not been altered, actions which were considered just have been shown not to accord with the general concept, in actual practice, then they are not just. But where, when circumstances have changed, the same actions which were sanctioned as just no longer lead to advantage, they were just at the time, when they were of advantage for the dealings of fellow-citizens with one another, but subsequently they are no longer just, when no longer of advantage.

39. The man who has best ordered the element of disquiet arising from external circumstances has made those things that he could akin to himself, and the rest at least not alien; but with all to which he could not do even this, he has refrained from mixing, and has expelled from his life all which it was of advantage to treat thus.

40. As many as possess the power to procure complete immunity from their neighbours, these also live most pleasantly with one another, since they have the most certain pledge of security, and, after they have enjoyed the fullest intimacy, they do not lament the previous departure of a dead friend, as though he were to be pitied.

Display More

In regards to the application of Epicurean Justice, I will refrain from inviting discussion onto the implications of an Epicurean state, society, or civilization, I will instead broadly refer to culture and law as if these were commonly accepted. But first, I will refer to three paragraphs from Torquatus about Choice & Avoidance and how they pertain to consequence, which includes the law and thus fear of punishment.

Quote from Torquatus On Ends

If then we observe that ignorance and error reduce the whole of life to confusion, while Wisdom alone is able to protect us from the onslaughts of appetite and the menaces of fear, teaching us to bear even the affronts of fortune with moderation, **and showing us all the paths that lead to calmness and to peace, why should we hesitate to avow that Wisdom is to be desired for the sake of the pleasures it brings and Folly to be avoided because of its injurious consequences?**

The same principle will lead us to pronounce that Temperance also is not desirable for its own sake, but because it bestows peace of mind, and soothes the heart with a tranquilizing sense of harmony. For it is **temperance that warns us to be guided by**

reason in what we desire and avoid. Nor is it enough to judge what it is right to do or to leave undone; we also need to abide by our judgment. Most men however lack tenacity of purpose; their resolution weakens and succumbs as soon as the fair form of pleasure meets their gaze, and they surrender themselves prisoners to their passions, failing to foresee the inevitable result. Thus for the sake of a pleasure at once small in amount and unnecessary, and one which they might have procured by other means or even denied themselves altogether without pain, they incur serious disease, or loss of fortune, or disgrace, **and not infrequently become liable to the penalties of the law and of the courts of justice.**

Those on the other hand who are resolved so to enjoy their pleasures as to avoid all painful consequences therefrom, and who retain their faculty of judgment and avoid being seduced by pleasure into courses that they perceive to be wrong, reap the very highest pleasure by forgoing pleasure. Similarly also they often voluntarily endure pain, to avoid incurring greater pain by not doing so. This clearly proves that Intemperance is not undesirable for its own sake, while Temperance is desirable not because it renounces pleasures, but because it procures greater pleasures.

Now, if we are to suppose that these laws were commonly accepted or put into practice, we would see instances in which those who harm others intentionally or unintentionally, would be subject to some form of punishment, for they have committed an unjust act via harming another person. Though depending on the severity, since this must all be on a case by case basis (see circumstance in PD 38), and per Torquatus, the hand of the law could either include restraint (punitive) or reformation (restorative) means. To say nothing of having the law dictate and subsequently act upon what is *considered* good and evil or unjust and establishing a precedence, but instead by acting upon empirical, observable effects of an individual or even a collective efforts that are deemed as unjust for violating the mutual agreement.

Side note: I've read in a few instances in Usener's Epicurea, a story or account in which Epicurus & Metrodorus (or perhaps Hermarchus) attempted to free a friend of their who had been imprisoned, which required visiting local authorities. Despite this I recall the account ending in their friend remaining imprisoned. Another instance similar to this via interacting within the constraints of the law, is when Zeno of Sidon eventually had Diotimus the Stoic sentenced to death for the latter's crude and excessive defamation against Epicurus. Additionally, Epicurus being forced to sail during the winter seasons during his exile from Lesbos (or Mytilene) because he had angered the local authorities on various charges also comes to mind.

So what does this all mean?

Well, given the various sources and taking into account the many nuances that go into formulating a specific position such as this in regards to Epicurean Philosophy. I propose here that it's safe and reasonable to assume that Epicurean moral theory is the following:

A consequentialist, relative, and hedonist theory that does not outright declare any action or intent as inherently morally good or evil, rather that all morality stems from pleasure and pain, since pleasure is the good and pain being the evil in life. Where unseemly actions may be justified and perhaps even lauded (as good).

Morality as a whole stems from this as well, so just as Epicurus put it in PD 10, we cannot blame and punish other hedonists but rather express condemnation at shortsighted behavior, likewise we cannot fault others who act only on their behalf for the purpose of securing a safe future for themselves, whether financially or physically. However, we can use our standing with the law and a willingness to preserve the integrity that is the mutual advantage and compact of Justice to be allowed the means to sanction or punish those who cause pain unto others, even if its done in the name of pleasure.

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I know this was sort of a rambling mess, but a structured one at that, as I wrote this over a span of time in which I had to constantly revisit my desk after being taken out of focus due to errands and other obligations. Generally this topic has been of major interest to me, and its nice to actually have an idea of what to post on the forums.

Let me know what you think!