

Ten (10) commandments

Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of November 17, 2022 at 6:55 PM

Trying to bridge a gap between EP and modern organized religion. It seems that the 10 commandments or some sort of simple list of rules to follow with the aim of achieving well-being is something ubiquitous in the major religions. I see the convenience to know them, as they can serve as guidelines to teach from a young age, in a very simple manner, what things are most likely to produce painful results if you do them, but some of them clearly are disaligned with Epicurean teachings, and could be more harmful than not; additionally, one way to make Epicurean Philosophy more known and accepted is to meet people half way. So I wished for a list that was in line with Epicurean teachings, bridges said gap, allows for a quick address whenever the traditional commandments arise, and keeps the characteristic of being simple enough to aid younger ones towards the objective of living a pleasurable life in society, without getting lost neither in the woods of superstition nor in the whole extent of EP, that can be learnt in time. I found two versions of the traditional ten commandments in wikipedia that I used as basis for a third one, as a draft of a list that could achieve these objectives. Please share what you think and whatever improvements can be made to it:

First Commandment	Do not associate others with God	Do not put other gods before me	1. Be self-sufficient.	1
Second Commandment	Honour your parents	Honour thy father and thy mother	2. Honour your parents.	5, 6, 17, 27, 39, 40.
Third Commandment	Do not kill your children for fear of poverty	Do not murder	3. Don't kill.	5, 14, 16, 17, 21, 25, 27, 28, 31-39.
Fourth Commandment	Do not come near indecencies, openly or secretly.	Do not covet thy neighbour's wife, Do not commit adultery	4. Fulfill the natural and necessary desires of life, that are within the natural limit of pleasure. 5. Indulge in natural and unnecessary desires when they don't produce painful consequences. 6. Avoid unnatural and unnecessary desires.	3, 5, 7-10, 17, 18, 21, 25, 26, 29, 30, 39.

Fifth Commandment	Do not take a life except justly	Do not murder	Repeated, see the third.	Repeated, see the third.
Sixth Commandment	Do not come near the property of the orphan except to enhance it	Do not covet his slaves, or his animals, or anything of thy neighbour	7. Respect the things of others.	5, 7, 15-17, 25-27, 31, 32, 35, 36.
Seventh Commandment	Give full measure and weigh with justice	Doesn't exist, instead there is Remember the sabbath day	8. Treat others as you'd want to be treated yourself.	5, 16-17, 21-25, 27, 28, 31-38.
Eighth Commandment	Whenever you testify, maintain justice even regarding a close relative	Do not bear false witness against thy neighbour	Repeated, see 8 above.	Repeated, see the seventh.
Ninth Commandment	Fulfil your covenant with God	Do not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain	9. Cultivate real friendship.	14, 21, 27, 28, 39, 40.
Tenth Commandment	Follow God's path and not any other	Do not make unto thee any graven image or idols neither kneel before them nor worship them	10. Learn to live by your senses, feelings and anticipations.	1, 2, 6, 10-13, 16, 19, 22-25, 39.

Post by “Cassius” of November 17, 2022 at 7:15 PM

Hey that is very creative! I have only just begun to think about further comments but i do think this is very creative and even if it proves impossible to find a set that pleases everyone the exercise should be very worthwhile!

Post by “Cassius” of November 17, 2022 at 7:51 PM

I suppose one issue to cross is whether it makes sense to talk about "commandments" vs "advice" or "good ideas."

I could see someone arguing that ultimately there is only the natural test of pleasure and pain, but even then we do are not always to follow the one or the other without reference to ultimate results. So it's hard to translate many of the doctrines into specific dos and donts without always hedging that context is in the end going to control at least in most cases.

So perhaps there is a framing issue that requires preliminary explanation.

Again at this point just thinking out loud.

Post by “Cassius” of November 17, 2022 at 7:54 PM

If we were looking for ten "good ideas" then it would be pretty easy to go through the PDs and generalize them into 10 sections. And certainly there are at least ten ways to generalize many of the comments Epicurus made on aspects of life.

But it looks like you are going through the biblical list and looking for rough equivalents and that raises the conceptual issues of the major differences of approach to life.

Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of November 17, 2022 at 8:25 PM

Well, the motivation behind this is teaching a kid (who's not going to be raised in a religious context, but lives in a religious immediate-society, and that is expected to hear about the commandments sooner or later), that there is something called the commandments, but that they are not as relevant now as they were before, thus, instead of learning those, learn these equivalents. Like I said before, bridging a gap.

Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of November 17, 2022 at 8:26 PM

She'll be exposed to the rest of the philosophy afterwards.

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 17, 2022 at 9:14 PM

This a very good project. Brings up Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development, and I think I posted about this before (but don't remember for sure), Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development.

Quote

Kohlberg identified three distinct levels of moral reasoning: [preconventional](#), [conventional](#), and [postconventional](#). Each level has two sub-stages.

People can only pass through these levels in the order listed. Each new stage replaces the reasoning typical of the earlier stage. Not everyone achieves all the stages. The 3 levels of moral reasoning include:

Level 1 - Preconventional morality

Preconventional morality is the first stage of moral development, and lasts until approximately age 9. At the preconventional level children don't have a personal code of morality, and instead moral decisions are shaped by the standards of adults and the consequences of following or breaking their rules.

For example, if an action leads to punishment is must be bad, and if it leads to a reward is must be good.

Authority is outside the individual and children often make moral decisions based on the physical consequences of actions.

- **Stage 1. Obedience and Punishment Orientation.** The child/individual is good in order to avoid being punished. If a person is punished, they must have done wrong.
- **Stage 2. Individualism and Exchange.** At this stage, children recognize that there is not just one right view that is handed down by the authorities. Different individuals have different viewpoints.

Level 2 - Conventional morality

Conventional morality is the second stage of moral development, and is characterized by an acceptance of social rules concerning right and wrong. At the conventional level (most adolescents and adults), we begin to internalize the moral standards of valued

adult role models.

Authority is internalized but not questioned, and reasoning is based on the norms of the group to which the person belongs.

A social system that stresses the responsibilities of relationships as well as social order is seen as desirable and must, therefore, influence our view of what is right and wrong.

- **Stage 3. Good Interpersonal Relationships.** The child/individual is good in order to be seen as being a good person by others. Therefore, answers relate to the approval of others.

- **Stage 4. Maintaining the Social Order.** The child/individual becomes aware of the wider rules of society, so judgments concern obeying the rules in order to uphold the law and to avoid guilt.

Level 3 - Postconventional morality

Postconventional morality is the third stage of moral development, and is characterized by an individuals' understanding of universal ethical principles. These are abstract and ill-defined, but might include: the preservation of life at all costs, and the importance of human dignity.

Individual judgment is based on self-chosen principles, and moral reasoning is based on individual rights and justice. According to Kohlberg this level of moral reasoning is as far as most people get.

Only 10-15% are capable of the kind of abstract thinking necessary for stage 5 or 6 (post-conventional morality). That is to say, most people take their moral views from those around them and only a minority think through ethical principles for themselves.

- **Stage 5. Social Contract and Individual Rights.** The child/individual becomes aware that while rules/laws might exist for the good of the greatest number, there are times when they will work against the interest of particular individuals.

The issues are not always clear-cut. For example, in Heinz's dilemma, the protection of life is more important than breaking the law against stealing.

- **Stage 6. Universal Principles.** People at this stage have developed their own set of moral guidelines which may or may not fit the law. The principles apply to everyone.

E.g., human rights, justice, and equality. The person will be prepared to act to defend these principles even if it means going against the rest of society in the process and having to pay the consequences of disapproval and or imprisonment. Kohlberg doubted

few people reached this stage.

<https://www.simplypsychology.org/kohlberg.html>

Display More

Understanding the morals of the Christian Ten Commandments would depend on the age of an individual -- a child would view the 10 Commandments with Level 1, Stage 1 and an adult would view them within Level 2 thinking.

Now I look over this and seems that Epicurean ethics would be at Level 3, Stage 5 -- so this is able to look at exceptions depending on unique circumstances.

Post by “Joshua” of November 17, 2022 at 10:45 PM

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=v-63cTYJDCA>

May not be helpful, but always worth a watch. He addresses Cassiu's question of 'framing'.

Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of November 18, 2022 at 12:07 AM

Like always, great stuff comes to those who ask something in this forum ☺ thanks for your responses ☺☺☺

I didn't know that Kohlberg scale [Kalosyni](#) thanks. I agree and it is sort of the point that this exercise is to arrive at a basic level moral code, and also with the constraint of being framed around the 10 commandments not for lack of better options of summarizing the philosophy of Epicurus, but because it's the actual problem I'm looking to tackle.

Thanks for the video [Joshua](#) - I hadn't seen it and I liked it, despite of Hitchens.

In the list I made, I feel like I'm covering all the 10 commandments (whether they ended up in the final list or not), but, are there any doctrines of Epicurus you'd think I'm missing and that would be worth including explicitly as an entry in this basic level code; which of the entries I arrived to would you remove and why?

By the way, not that this is my intention with this exercise, but this basic level/stage introduction to Epicurean Philosophy Ethics is very needed in my opinion. As brief as they are,

and as great as they are at summarizing the philosophy: the tetrapharmakos, the 40 doctrines and the other such condensed EP material is not at all digestible without much more study and guidance. Let alone if one has some unlearning to do.

Like I said before: using elements already part of a people's culture (including religion), can be very effective, if your concern is, like mine in this case, to help certain ones learn this useful stuff as early as possible, avoiding learning the useless stuff, and being able to navigate unavoidable social situations where talking in terms of EP would be not feasible, impractical, undesirable. Since the time of Epicurus we know some people, even able to, won't see if they don't want to.

Thanks!

Edit: Removed references to Kohlberg's scale as I don't think they truly applied.

Post by “Don” of November 18, 2022 at 7:18 AM

I debated whether to weigh in here, but, in the end, I'll err on the side of friendly, respectful, frank speech. I hope this is conveyed and received with that framing. And, I'm fully aware, you'll do what you feel you need to do in your situation.

I would agree that the Ten Commandments is ubiquitous in Western culture. Everyone will inevitably hear about it, probably sooner than later. Plus, kids will have questions. Boy howdy, do they have questions sometimes!

That said, the idea of feeling that one is constrained to come up with 10 "good ideas" to compete with this outdated list of 10 divine commands is fraught with potential frustration. That said, the Wikipedia article on alternatives does show it's a common exercise:

[Alternatives to the Ten Commandments - Wikipedia](#)

although even those lists range from 3 to 11 but simply go through the exercise to demonstrate the outdated-ness of the traditional list (actually at least 2 slightly different lists in the Bible... Evidently "God" couldn't make up "His" mind!).

My suggestion, if/when the question arises, is to use it as an opportunity to talk about...

"Some/all religions try to give instructions to people on how to live together. In Christianity and Judaism, their book gives them 10 instructions they are supposed to follow. Buddhists have 4 important things to say then give 8 ways to get there then have 5 important things to say on how to act (Buddhists really like lists!!). Lists are a way to make it easy to remember things.

Some things on all these lists are basically good ideas for everyone. Others keep people in line and punish them for goofy things that don't exist. The 10 Commandments include things that make "God" jealous and mad. That's just silly! How could the "Master of the Universe" care about little things like that!? All of the lists mostly say something like we shouldn't hurt people and people shouldn't hurt us. That's a good idea, isn't it? But what would be in your list? Let's talk about what kind of list of good ideas you'd come up with? Would you like to think about that together?"

Raising kids is hard!! No argument there! But trying to pound an Epicurean peg into a Judeo-Christian hole seems fraught with frustration and pitfalls. Plus, I think it doesn't do religion or Epicureanism any favors. Get rid of the oppressive religion. Don't play on its field. Set sail in your own little boat, free of indoctrination!

Post by "Cassius" of November 18, 2022 at 7:50 AM

(1) As to Joshua's Hitchens video, that reminds me that there is also a George Carlin video that takes on a similar project that despite its much spicier language is probably significantly more consistent even than Hitchens' video with a mature Epicurean approach 😊
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CE8ooMBlyC8>

(2) Don's post and several of the other comments (and listening to Hitchens in the background) reminds me as I wake up today too reminds me that I definitely don't think that Epicurus would accept the ten commandments as a positive or even a neutral social construct. The entire thing is built on accepting a supernatural order of things (and all sorts of other negative presumptions) is which probably the number one source of evil in the world. So in discussing them with even a child I would think it would be very basic to plant the Epicurean seeds that would eventually show how damaging this construct has been in history. Of course what you've suggested in the beginning is a replacement set, so obviously you're looking for something positive as a replacement for a negative thing, but I would think that one of the most basic aspects of any childhood education approach would be not only to set them on the right path but warn them about the hazards they will encounter, so that plays into the project as well.

Post by "Don" of November 18, 2022 at 9:00 AM

| [Quote from camotero](#)

Trying to bridge a gap between EP and modern organized religion.

The chasm between organized religion/superstition and Epicurean philosophy is wide, deep, and filled with alligators. In some ways, it's best to turn away from the gap and beat a path in the opposite direction. As Lucretius says, religion is prone to many evils. *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum!!*

I'm slowly trying to emulate Epicurus in his observance of the rites and holidays. Taking joy in family gatherings. Appreciating the art and celebrating with an internal realignment of what it all means.

But the opinion of the crowds is false piety and I have no desire to go down that road again (at least at the time of this writing. Humans can be fickle creatures). Being concerned by their rules, their traditions, their playing field is not required. As George Carlin says in that video, there's 10 because 10 sounds official. That, in itself, to me is a reason to come up with a different number.

Post by “Cassius” of November 18, 2022 at 10:05 AM

Does this seem like a ping pong game? It's a terrible idea to try to "translate" the ten commandments but at the same time it's a great exercise!

I do think both perspectives are true and this highlights how central "context" is to the Epicurean worldview. You've picked a particular context and within that context we can work toward something that's helpful, but at the same time we have to realize that out of its context it could actually be harmful.

I really do think this is why the PDs read as they do. They are sort of "principles" that don't necessarily lead TO a particular direction for a particular life, but they lead AWAY from major pitfalls that are pitfalls for everyone.

I didn't finish listening to the Hitchens talk but I think from past observation that he is subject to a major danger that people have to take an approach that is something like "I too believe that there are absolute rules for being a good person - but those guys got the rules wrong and I can give you the correct list."

The Epicurus approach is more like "You've got to understand that there is NO single list of rules that apply to everyone at all times and all places to tell them affirmatively what to do in every circumstance. But I can tell you how the universe works (the physics) and how to use your head (the canonic) and then I can also tell you the major pitfalls that everyone confronts

and how to avoid them. Then after that you're as equipped as anyone can be to use your life in your context to pursue the general goal that everything else points to."

Post by "Cassius" of November 18, 2022 at 10:10 AM

"As to Joshua's Hitchens video, that reminds me that there is also a George Carlin video that takes on a similar project that despite its much spicier language is probably significantly more consistent even than Hitchens' video with a mature Epicurean approach."

This comment reminds me that I wanted to say that some of us have observed some concern at a mention of Epicurus likened to a "court jester" of the ancient world. Those words convey implications that I don't think are accurate or flattering.

But as for George Carlin --- I would not be quite so concerned if someone decided to smile and draw some comparisons between Epicurus and George Carlin. 😊 I am no expert on Carlin but he's always struck me as someone who is an expert at using humor in a deadly serious way.

Post by "Kalosyni" of November 18, 2022 at 10:14 AM

[Quote from camotero](#)

Well, the motivation behind this is teaching a kid (who's not going to be raised in a religious context, but lives in a religious immediate-society, and that is expected to hear about the commandments sooner or later)

Also, you want to teach the virtues as a tool that leads to a happy life.

It will really depend on the age of the child. And also I think the main issues are about teaching not to steal or lie -- and how to teach choices and avoidances that will lead to a happy life and good relationships with people. Once a child has an understanding of others and self, then gradually increasing the complexity of the why to not steal or lie.

About stealing, there is a very good phrasing that Buddhists use in their precepts: To not take what is not given.

Also in addition to not lying, they add in to not spread gossip, and so there is the understanding that doing certain things tend to cause problems in the future (so to do them is to cause yourself trouble, in addition to the harm it causes others and the loss of trust that will result).

So the 10 commandments don't adequately teach these nuances.

But if you think of ways that people cause harm, then you get:

- 1) to refrain from killing or injuring
- 2) to refrain from lying or spreading gossip
- 3) to refrain from taking what is not given

Then add in both of these:

The Golden Rule: Treat others the way you would want to be treated

The Platinum Rule: Treat others as they would want you to treat them

Post by "Joshua" of November 18, 2022 at 11:13 AM

It strikes me that there are several passages in Diogenes Laertius beginning with words like "the wise man will....", or "the wise man will not..."

Where does that kind of framing fit in here?

Post by "Don" of November 18, 2022 at 11:29 AM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

It strikes me that there are several passages in Diogenes Laertius beginning with words like "the wise man will....", or "the wise man will not..."

Where does that kind of framing fit in here?

[Epicurean Sage](#)

My goal in this translation of Diogenes Laertius's Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book X.117-121, was to be as literal as possible to preserve the flavor of...

Post by “Charles” of November 18, 2022 at 12:22 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Does this seem like a ping pong game? It's a terrible idea to try to "translate" the ten commandments but at the same time it's a great exercise!

I do think both perspectives are true and this highlights how central "context" is to the Epicurean worldview. You've picked a particular context and within that context we can work toward something that's helpful, but at the same time we have to realize that out of its context it could actually be harmful.

I really do think this is why the PDs read as they do. They are sort of "principles" that don't necessarily lead TO a particular direction for a particular life, but they lead AWAY from major pitfalls that are pitfalls for everyone.

As much as I like the initiative of this thread, and the list is well-put together. I think it runs into the same issue of the Tetracharmakos. The ten commandments are backed up by numerous stories, contextual lessons, and the entire framing of the bible itself. The same can be said about the four part cure to the numerous Epicurean fragments, contextual readings of the PD's, and the entire framing of the philosophy itself. See the similarities?

In fact, the commandments seem to be more of a self-didactic reminder. Teaching blunt simplicity reinforces uncritical acceptance.

Post by “Pacatus” of November 18, 2022 at 3:18 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

The Golden Rule: Treat others the way you would want to be treated

The Platinum Rule: Treat others as they would want you to treat them

These always remind me of the conversation between the masochist and the sadist, to wit (pun intended) -

Masochist: "Beat me, torture, make me feel pain!"

Sadist: "No."

+++++

On a more serious note, I always liked this quote from the Catholic theologian Urs Von Balthsar, as a caution against willy-nilly applying simple rules:

"When it comes to shaping one's personal behavior, all the rules of morality, as precise as they may be, remain abstract in the face of the infinite complexity of the concrete."

—Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa" (from the Foreword).

+++++

I will add that there is another version of the Golden Rule, attributed to Rabbi Hillel: "What you do not like done to yourself, don't do to other." (The same Balthasarian caution applies.)

Post by "Cassius" of November 18, 2022 at 3:34 PM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

"When it comes to shaping one's personal behavior, all the rules of morality, as precise as they may be, remain abstract in the face of the infinite complexity of the concrete."

i think that's dead on right.

Post by "Mathitis Kipouros" of November 19, 2022 at 1:27 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

I debated whether to weigh in here, but, in the end, I'll err on the side of friendly, respectful, frank speech.

Thanks. I'm happy and grateful you did. I loved your suggestion on how to approach this matter. Really helpful.

[Quote from Don](#)

Set sail in your own little boat, free of indoctrination!

This I'm feeling hopeful about. Coming back to port is the issue. I guess that's why Epicurus suggested to follow the rites. Less painful at times, for sure. The problem is doing this without at the same time inadvertently teaching someone to live by double standards. A bit of a hard concept to wrap your head around at a young age, where you naturally tend towards simple, back and white, blanket rules.

However, thanks to the very insightful comments of all of you I have decided to remove the link to the ten commandments, but rather, our own list of rules to live by; that way we could review them, update them, analyze whether they work or not and why, etc.

Do we have around somewhere in the forums or in the web a simpler, children's-level-adapted, list of Epicurean teachings?

Thanks for the Carlin video [Cassius](#) - so funny.

[Quote from Don](#)

Being concerned by their rules, their traditions, their playing field is not required.

I agree. But we have to acknowledge that in some cases we're navigating "their" waters, most often than not. So I would argue in favor of trying to find common grounds for some of the most important/recurrent rites/teachings/practices. Many times there will be no common ground, like in the case of these commandments, but that's a great realization.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

You've picked a particular context and within that context we can work toward something that's helpful, but at the same time we have to realize that out of its context it could actually be harmful.

I appreciate this. I agree. I think in the particular case of the commandments is clear now that they aren't as useful and they indeed can be harmful.

Post by “Don” of November 19, 2022 at 1:34 PM

[Quote from camotero](#)

in some cases we're navigating "their" waters,

Sailing between the Scylla and Charybdis of religion and superstition. 😊

Post by “Root304” of November 22, 2022 at 1:36 AM

My kids are still quite young, but I just try to live an Epicurean life, talk about it whenever they bring up what I believe like it were any other belief system and trust they will pick it up through our house culture. When they start asking more directly about religion and philosophy later, it will be more understood why we used phrases like, "how do we ask more pleasantly?" when teaching etiquette growing up, whose that bust is that on the bookcase and when we make decisions during house meeting why we planned ways to have "the most pleasurable time" as we go about living and working.

As to the Holidays, I have them fairly often as they are fun to plan some kooky social game and/or group building ritual, and makes time stretch out longer. Doing something for Eikas which roughly falls near the Wheel of the Year holidays is a good way to celebrate with friends or to celebrate with just your family. The Atheopagan community has a few calendars built around the Wheel of the Year (solstices and equinoxes) on how to take these holidays and do something non-theist, non-supernatural with them if you can't get people to convene around Epicurean Philosophy every month, which was a problem I ran into. As I said I have fun coming up with, and allowing others to come up with, fun ceremonies or games to do, and sometimes they can be quite moving and brings our friend and family group together - almost like a religion.