

Inflicting Pain

Post by “EricR” of January 23, 2018 at 10:18 AM

I was pondering this the other day. If pain is an evil, then inflicting it on others is immoral. Of course, there is also the acceptance of personal momentary pain in order to avoid later and presumably worse pain. But inflicting pain on others is questionable if it denies their option of accepting it for that later avoidance.

Post by “Cassius” of January 23, 2018 at 11:43 AM

Here's my initial thought: "If pain is an evil, then inflicting it on others is immoral." That is probably very over-broad, because, for example, shooting a burglar or injuring someone trying to kill you would not be immoral. I think there are several texts we could cite in support of that.

I think we also have to be careful with the word "evil" in this and lots of contexts. Yes our feeling of pain is always undesirable, and from that point of view we consider it evil, but "evil" often implies much more - a religious or idealistic imperative never to do it under any circumstances. And there is no religious or idealist realm or function which establishes that, so that connotation of "evil" is not valid in Epicurean terms.

So issues with that part of the comment flow through to "But inflicting pain on others is questionable if it denies their option of accepting it for that later avoidance."

Depending on the context, we often probably are not concerned whether our infliction of pain on others, in our own defense at least, limits the other person's response options.

Post by “Hiram” of January 23, 2018 at 2:22 PM

I'd argue that the same logic that applies in "On Anger" by Philodemus (see the SoFE site on this scroll) would apply here: pain can be both virtuous (if it produces long-term advantage / pleasure, for instance the ceasing of hostilities) and it can also be PRODUCTIVE.

Hiroshima, when the bomb exploded, was awful. But we have NEVER again had problems with Japan, which reformed itself as a country and is one of the most important global allies we have today. I can't say whether or not we may have gained a similar result through a different means, but in this case, hedonic calculus worked to produce security and long-term mutual benefit for both countries and the rest of the world.

Post by “EricR” of January 23, 2018 at 3:22 PM

This is great information and lots of thought food. When I post these "thinking out loud" ideas, I am aware that they are not fully developed. So I post them with the hope that those with far deeper experience than I in EP can help me (and others) gain more clarity.

With regard to Japan, it did not quite reform itself after WW2. It was occupied and rebuilt by the U.S. with Britain, China, and the Soviet Union advising. Here's the story: <https://history.state.gov/milestones/194...-reconstruction> My purpose in highlighting this is to be sure the history is correct, but it also illustrates the idea of making an enemy into a friend which I believe is an EP value.

Post by “Cassius” of January 23, 2018 at 4:01 PM

It's always complex to debate specifics, and the Japan example is no exception. Was it needed? Was it appropriate? My answer on those questions has varied over the years, but it is difficult to dispute that it did bring the Japanese warmaking regime to an end more quickly than otherwise. Not taking a position on whether that was the right thing to do under the specific case, though. Probably easier is just the hypothetical normal homeowner being invaded with intent to murder by a random burglar, with the homeowner shooting the burglar or otherwise simply inflicting pain in order to protect his / her young children. I think most would agree that in virtually all such situations the infliction of pain was "correct."

Even those situations can be analyzed further, but what Epicurus was really saying I think is that there's no absolute standard by which we can look at a situation from outside and make an absolute judgment of right or wrong. The burglar apparently thought it would enhance his pleasure to invade the home. The homeowner thought it would advance his pleasure to stop him. Each side is making choices based on their view of their best interest, and both sides have to live with the consequences.

Even looking back at Japan vs USA, same analysis. Japan's leaders saw their interest one way, the USA's leaders saw it differently. One side one, and the other lost, but neither can legitimately claim that God or ideal virtue justified their side, because those things simply don't exist.

Post by “EricR” of January 23, 2018 at 5:04 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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I imagine that is among the hardest things for anyone having been raised in a tradition that teaches "God or abstract virtue" to deal with when encountering a philosophy without those ideas. Those concepts feel so solid that to remove them is to feel adrift.

Post by “Cassius” of January 23, 2018 at 6:08 PM

Absolutely. It would help so much to get to people much younger. I always remember that line from "ON ENDS" on that topic: “Was he, I say, to study arts like these, and neglect the master art, so difficult and correspondingly so fruitful, the art of living? No! Epicurus was not uneducated: the truly uneducated are those who ask us to go on studying til old age the subjects that **we ought to be ashamed not to have learnt in boyhood!**”

Post by “EricR” of January 24, 2018 at 7:00 AM

This is a topic worth exploring. How to talk with those who've been raised in a tradition, either religious or virtuous, in a way that draws them in rather than shuts them out. Not sure which forum to start a thread on this. Advice?

Post by “Cassius” of January 24, 2018 at 7:02 AM

Possibly we ought to set up an "Epicurean Outreach" Forum, but for now probably this one:
[Special Challenges of the Modern World](#)

Post by “EricR” of January 24, 2018 at 7:03 AM

Will take a look thanks.