

Best Way to Introduce Teachings?

Post by “Daniel Van Orman” of March 7, 2019 at 3:04 PM

Greetings, everyone!

I was wondering, what materials or ways do we have for presenting our teachings to others who have never seen them before? How effective are they? How much do they draw interest? How much understanding do they provide? How well do they motivate others to learn more?

Would it be useful to compile a list of these materials? Are there any gaps we could fill or materials to be improved?

Among our materials, I find intermediate and rich depth for those already interested in Epicureanism, but not much for someone with only a little curiosity or just trying to make philosophy seem a little less foreign.

Here are a few materials and my opinions on them.

Memes and Graphics:

<http://societyofepicurus.com/shareable-epicurean-memes/>

These are very simple, great for social media, and summarize Epicureanism well. However, I am not sure how much interest they generate nor how much depth they carry. How well are these working and how are we using them?

Elli's Memes / Graphics

-



ΜΗΤΡΩΔΩΡΟΣ Ο ΛΑΜΨΑΚΗΝΟΣ


Ε.Π. XIV.(14) Γεγόναμεν ἅπασι, δις δὲ οὐκ ἔστι γενέσθαι• δεῖ δὲ τὸν αἰῶνα μηκέτι εἶναι• σὺ δὲ οὐκ ὦν τῆς αὔριον κύριος ἀναβάλλῃ τὸ χαῖρον• ὁ δὲ βίος μελλησιμῶ παραπόλλυται καὶ εἰς ἕκαστος ἡμῶν ἀσχολούμενος ἀποθνήσκει.

Γεννιόμαστε μια φορά, δεύτερη δεν είναι δυνατόν να γεννηθούμε και ούτε πρόκειται αυτό να συμβεί στον αιώνα των αιώνων. Εσύ δε δίχως να είσαι κύριος της αυριανής ημέρας, αναβάλεις το να χαίρεσαι. Ο δε βίος περνάει και ο καθένας μας πεθαίνει απασχολούμενος.










Ε.Σ 14: We have been born once and cannot be born a second time; for all eternity we shall no longer exist. But you, although you are not in control of tomorrow, are postponing your happiness. Life is wasted by delaying, and each one of us dies occupied.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/803-best-way-to-introduce-teachings/>

Vatican Saying 14 - "We have been born once..."




EPICURUS

		
SELF-SUFFICIENCY	PLEASURE	FRANKNESS OF SPEECH
		
NOBILITY	JUSTICE	PRUDENCE
		
COMMON BENEFIT	BRAVERY	TRUST/SECURITY


VS 78. The noble man is chiefly concerned with wisdom and friendship; of these, the former is a mortal good, the latter an immortal one.

Elli 6/6/15


Vatican Saying 78



EPICURUS : THIS IS MY VASE made by bronze
Full of water and flowers (pleasures)
... and unbreakable !
"For the discovery of truth (the EPICUREAN CANON), your one and only sure or well-founded hope is the possession of this power : you must be able to judge and sift truth from falsehood; you must have the assayer's sense for sound and true or forged coin; if you could have come to your examination of doctrines equipped with a technical skill like that, I should have nothing to say; but without it there is nothing to prevent their severally leading you by the nose; you will follow a dangled bunch of carrots like a donkey; or, better still, you will be water spill on a table, trained whichever way one chooses with a finger-tip; or again, a reed growing on a river's bank, bending to every breath, however gentle the breeze that shakes it in its passage".
(LUCIAN - "HERMOTIMUS" or RIVAL PHILOSOPHIES")



The stoic vases



APATHY DETERMINISM FATE

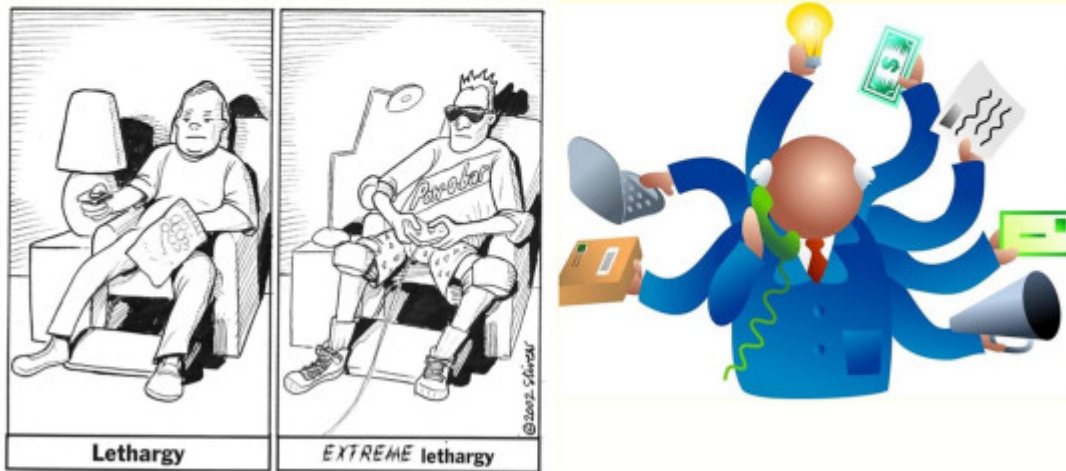
In everything that pleases your soul, or supplies a want, or that you are fond of, remember to add this to your thoughts: what is the nature of this thing? If you are fond of a vase, say that it is a vase that you like, and nothing more — for when it has been broken you will not be disturbed. If you are kissing your child or wife, say that it is a human being whom you are kissing and nothing more — for when the wife or child dies, you will not be disturbed.
Epictetus, Enchiridion III

Graphics made by Elli 3/8/15

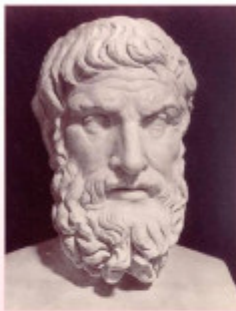
Vases - Epicurean v Stoic

Epicurus VS 11 : For most men rest is “lethargy” and activity is “mania”.

11. Τῶν πλείστων ἀνθρώπων τὸ μὲν ἡσύχαζον ναρκῆ, τὸ δὲ κινούμενον λῦττα.
(Ἐπίκουρος)



VS11 - Lethargy vs Mania



εἰμί, ἐὰν μὴ ὑμεῖς πρὸς με
ἀφίκησθε, αὐτὸς
τρικύλιστος, ὅπου ἂν
ὑμεῖς καὶ Θεμίστα
παρακαλῆτε, ὠθειέσθαι.

“If you don’t come to me,
I am capable of being
persuade to rush on my
own to wherever you and
Themista summon me”.

Wanna find out who your true friends
are?

Move away
and see who
comes to visit.

You'll quickly see
true colors.

someecards
user card



True friendship isn't about being there
when it's convenient; it's about being there
when it's not.

Friendship And Being There

Seikilos placed me here
as an everlasting sign of immortal
remembrance".

ΟΣΟΝ ΖΗΣ ΦΑΙΝΟΥ,
ΜΗΔΕΝ ΟΛΩΣ ΣΥ ΛΥΠΟΥ.
ΠΡΟΣ ΟΛΙΓΟΝ ΕΣΤΙ ΤΟ ΖΗΝ,
ΤΟ ΤΕΛΟΣ Ο ΧΡΟΝΟΣ ΑΠΑΙΤΕΙ.

**“While you live shine,
have no grief at all.
Life lasts only for a short while,
time determines the end (goal)”.**



Seikilos Poem

Ο ΣΟΦΟΣ ΞΕΡΕΙ ΠΩΣ Η ΜΕΓΑΛΗ ΔΥΝΑΜΗ
ΤΗΣ ΑΠΟΦΑΣΗΣ ΕΙΝΑΙ ΣΤΗ ΔΙΚΑΙΟΔΟΣΙΑ
ΤΟΥ ΙΔΙΟΥ.

«ΑΠΟ ΤΑ ΠΡΑΓΜΑΤΑ ΚΑΠΟΙΑ ΓΙΝΟΝΤΑΙ
ΑΠΟ ΑΝΑΓΚΗ ΚΑΠΟΙΑ ΑΛΛΑ ΑΠΟ ΤΥΧΗ
ΚΑΙ ΚΑΠΟΙΑ ΑΛΛΑ ΤΕΛΟΣ ΑΠΟ ΤΗΝ ΔΙΚΗ
ΜΑΣ ΒΟΥΛΗΣΗ. ΚΑΙ Η ΜΕΝ ΑΝΑΓΚΗ ΔΕΝ
ΥΠΟΚΕΙΤΑΙ ΣΕ ΕΥΘΥΝΗ, Η ΤΥΧΗ ΑΠΟ ΤΗΝ
ΑΛΛΗ ΕΙΝΑΙ ΑΣΤΑΤΗ, ΑΛΛΑ Η ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΙΑ
ΜΑΣ ΔΕΝ ΕΞΟΥΣΙΑΖΕΤΑΙ ΑΠΟ ΚΑΝΕΝΑΝ
ΑΛΛΟΝ ΚΑΙ ΦΥΣΙΚΑ ΕΠΙΔΕΧΕΤΑΙ ΤΟΝ
ΨΟΓΟ ΟΣΟ ΚΑΙ ΤΟΝ ΕΠΑΙΝΟ».
ΕΠΙΚΟΥΡΟΣ

One who is wise knows that the great
power of decision lies within oneself.

“While some things are caused by fate,
other things happen by chance and other
by our own will. He sees that fate is irre-
proachable and chance unreliable, but
choices deserve either praise or blame
because what is decided by choice is not
subject to any external power”.

EPICURUS

Epicurus on Free Will (Letter to Menoecus)

- Epicurus VS 62. If parents are justly angry with their children, it is certainly useless to fight against it and not to ask for pardon; but if their anger is unjust and irrational, it is quite ridiculous to add fuel to their irrational passion by nursing one's own indignation, and not to attempt to turn aside their wrath in other ways by gentleness.



ΕΠΙΚΟΥΡΟΥ ΠΡΟΣΦΩΝΗΣΙΣ 62. Εάν οι γονείς οργίζονται δίκαιολογημένα με τα παιδιά τους, είναι ανόητο αυτά να τους εναντιώνονται και να μην τους παρακαλούν να τα συγχωρήσουν. Αν, όμως, οργίζονται αδικαιολόγητα και παράλογα, είναι εντελώς γελοίο να ερεθίζει κάποιος με το θυμό του αυτόν που είναι παράλογος, και να μην προσπαθεί να του αλλάξει την παράλογη συμπεριφορά και να τον ηρεμήσει με άλλους τρόπους.

ΕΠΙ 06/05/15

VS62 - Anger and Children

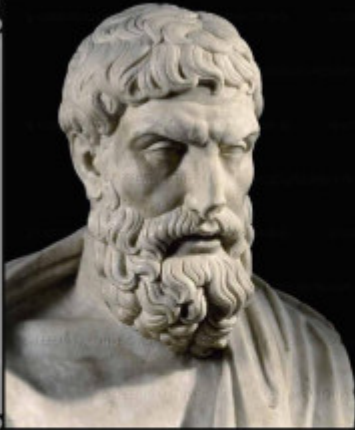
- IN GREEK, THE WORD "ATARAXIA" CAN MEAN "REST"
IN MUSIC "REST" MEANS "REST"
BUT THAT DOES NOT MEAN THAT
THERE IS NOT A MELODY

Name	Note	Rest
Whole Note		
Half Note		
Quarter Note		
Eighth Note		
Sixteenth Note		

The notes I handle no better than many pianists. But the pauses between the notes - ah, that is where the art resides.

Artur Schnabel

Ataraxia and Rest



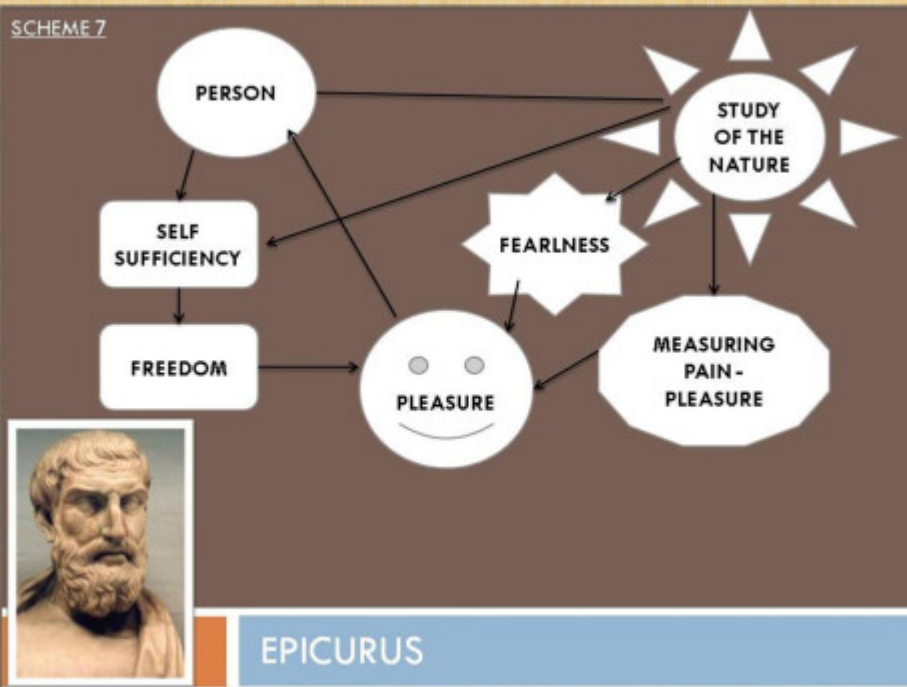
EPICURUS

In the time when people felt the weight of religion,
wallowing upon the ground and—a ghastly spectacle—
heaven scowled down upon them and showed no mercy,
a Greek man was the first to raise his eyes,
daring to make a stand against it.
He took no notice at all of the thunder and lightning,
religious recitations merely incited him;
He said he would expose the secrets of Nature
and so, by force of intelligence, and no other,
he pierced beyond the flaming walls of the world,
paraded up and down the whole immensity
and returned victoriously with explanations for everything
—what could happen, what not, and what were the limits,
all fixed and measured, of every nature and thing.
And so he had religion under his feet.
He won, and as a result we have no superiors.

On the Nature of Things (De Rerum Natura)
by Titus Lucretius Carus

Lucretius - At A Time When Human Life...

THE MULTIVALENT LOGIC OF EPICURUS



Epicurus - Multivalent Logic



EPICURUS

Ε.Π. 64. Ακολουθεῖν δεῖ τὸν παρὰ τῶν ἄλλων ἔπαινον αὐτόματον, ἡμᾶς δὲ γενέσθαι περὶ τὴν ἡμῶν ἰατρείαν.

Ο ἔπαινος τῶν ἄλλων πρέπει νὰ ἔρχεται χωρὶς νὰ τὸν ἐπιδιώκουμε. Τὸ μόνον ποὺ πρέπει νὰ κάνουμε εμεῖς εἶναι νὰ προσπαθοῦμε νὰ θεραπεύσουμε τὰ δικά μας ελαττώματα.

E.S. 64. Praise from others must come unasked, and the only thing that we have concern ourselves is the healing of our character's defects.

Bravo!



Vatican Saving 64



EPICURUS

ΕΠΙΚΟΥΡΟΥ ΠΡΟΣΦΩΝΗΣΙΣ XXIX (29)

Παρρησία γάρ ἐγωγε χρώμενος φυσιολογῶν χρησιμωδεῖν τὰ συμφέροντα πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις μᾶλλον ἢ βουλοίμην, κἄν μηδεὶς μέλλη συνήσειν, ἢ συγκατατιθέμενος τοῖς δόξαις καρποῦσθαι τὸν πυκνὸν παραπίπτοντα παρὰ τὸν πολλῶν ἔπαινον. [Ancient Greek]

Διότι ἐγὼ βεβαίως θὰ προτιμούσα μελετώντας τὴ Φύση νὰ ἀνακοινώσω με παρρησία αὐτὰ ποὺ εἶναι ωφέλιμα σὲ ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἀκόμη καὶ ἂν δὲν συμφωνήσῃ κανεὶς μαζί μου, παρὰ νὰ συμβιβάζομαι με τὶς κοινότητες δοξασίης καὶ νὰ καρπώνομαι τὸν συχνὸ ἔπαινο τῶν πολλῶν. [New Greek]

For I would certainly prefer as I study Nature to announce frankly what is beneficial to all people, even if none agrees with me, rather than to compromise with common opinions and thus reap the frequent praise of the many. [English]

Rendition/translation from ancient greek to new greek and english, by Christos Yapijakis, founder member of the Epicurean Garden of Athens.

Vatican Saving 29

THREE (3) MONOLITHS APPEAR IN THE MOVIE "2001 A SPACE ODYSSEY" AND THESE ARE :

1 EPICURUS LETTER TO PYTHOCLES

2001: a space odyssey Monolith

2 EPICURUS LETTER TO MENOCEUS

3 EPICURUS LETTER TO HERODOTUS

WHAT IS THE MAIN & WELL PROFOUND POINT THAT IS WRITTEN ON THE MONOLITHS ?

"And for this cause we call pleasure the beginning and end of the blessed life. For we recognize pleasure as the first good innate in us, and from pleasure we begin every act of choice and avoidance, and to pleasure we return again, using the feeling as the standard by which we judge every good".

Graphics by EB 26/7/2017

Letter to Menoecus - "Pleasure the beginning and end of the blessed life"

Do you know what I'm feeling now ? That the SWERVE IS IN THE NATURE OF ALL THINGS. One day it will work, through my child, for me too... And Epicurus will be confirmed once again.

— Humanity, at any rate, does have free will, and in a most ingenious way Epicurus derived free will from the doctrine of the swerve of the atom, saying in effect that the power to make a deliberate choice of action was inherent in the atom itself, which demonstrated that power by unaccountably swerving from its "normal" path.

— Titus Lucretius Carus, On the Nature of Things

• Epicurus on living wisely and honorably and justly

"It is impossible to live a pleasant life without living wisely and honorably and justly, and it is impossible to live wisely and honorably and justly without living pleasantly. Whenever any one of these is lacking, when, for instance, the man is not able to live wisely, though he lives honorably and justly, it is impossible for him to live a pleasant life."

- Epicurus (Principal Doctrines, 5)

• Epicurus On Living Wisely, Honestly, and Justly

LUCIAN - "HERMOTIMUS, or RIVAL PHILOSOPHIES"

"For the discovery of truth (the EPICUREAN CANON), your one and only sure or well-founded hope is the possession of this power : you must be able to judge and sift truth from falsehood; you must have the assayer's sense for sound and true or forged coin; if you could have come to your examination of doctrines equipped with a technical skill like that, I should have nothing to say; but without it there is nothing to prevent their severally leading you by the nose; you will follow a dangled bunch of carrots like a donkey; or, better still, you will be water spilt on a table, trained whichever way one chooses with a finger-tip; or again, a reed growing on a river's bank, bending to every breath, however gentle the breeze that shakes it in its passage".

Lucian - Hermotimus Quote

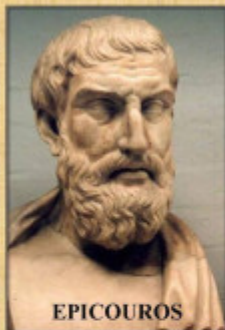
300

Stoics and Epicureans. – The Epicurean seeks out the situation, the persons, and even the events that suit his extremely sensitive intellectual constitution; he forgoes the rest – that is, almost everything – because it would be too strong and heavy a diet. The Stoic, by contrast, trains himself to swallow stones and worms, glass shards and scorpions without nausea; he wants his stomach to be ultimately insensible to everything the chance of existence pours into him – he brings to mind the Arabian sect of the Assua that one encounters in Algiers.¹⁴ like these insensitive people, he likes to act out his insensitivity before an invited audience, which is precisely what the Epicurean gladly eschews – for he has his ‘garden’!¹⁵ Stoicism may well be advisable for those with whom fate improvises and who live in violent times and depend on impulsive and changeable people. But someone who more or less *expects* fate to allow him to spin *a long thread* does well to take an Epicurean orientation; people engaged in work of the spirit have always done so! For it would be the loss of all losses, for them, to forfeit their subtle sensitivity in exchange for a hard Stoic skin with porcupine spines.

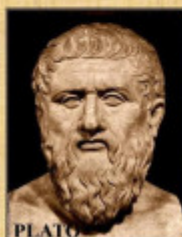
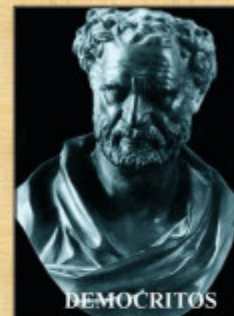


FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

Nietzsche - On Stoicism And Porcupine Skins



Black-figure pottery, Attic amphora by Exekias, detail, Achilles and Ajax play dice.

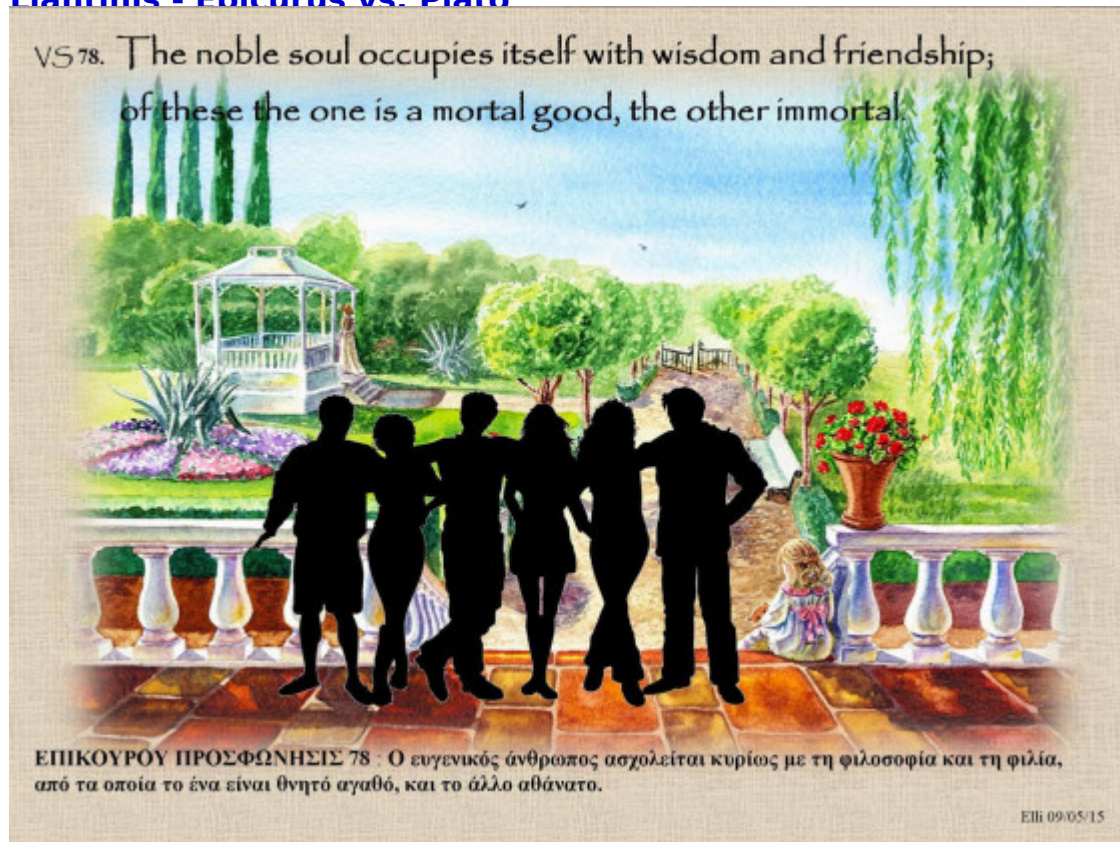


Epicouros, may somebody will declare at a proclamation in advance, in terms of size is next to Democritus. And he stands by his fenced opponent Plato which the war between them was livelong and undeclared. We see the two thinkers to debate like on the famous vase of Exekias we look Ajax and Achilles as they play dice. (Dimitris Liantinis –Stoa & Rome)



Liantinis - Epicurus vs. Plato

- VS 78. The noble soul occupies itself with wisdom and friendship; of these the one is a mortal good, the other immortal.



ΕΠΙΚΟΥΡΟΥ ΠΡΟΣΦΩΝΗΣΙΣ 78 : Ο ευγενικός άνθρωπος ασχολείται κυρίως με τη φιλοσοφία και τη φιλία, από τα οποία το ένα είναι θνητό αγαθό, και το άλλο αθάνατο.

ΕΠΙ 09/05/15

VS 78 - The Noble Soul And Immortal Goods

Other memes more directly connected to sources seem to be too in-depth or too strong for introductions.

Catius' Cat: <https://epicureanfriends.com/houseofcatius/>

These are fun and correlate strongly with sources. They seem great for Epicureans to teach their children (a very useful niche!), but I am not sure how effective they would be for other purposes.

Forums: [FAQ Answers And Discussion](#)

There are some excellent links and discussions here, but they are either not very compiled/organized/accessible or seem to be at an intermediate level. One would need a decent amount of interest already to dive through threads to learn.

NewEpicurean.com: <https://newepicurean.com/>

This is a fantastic resource for those serious about learning about Epicureanism. Not so great for first introductions, other than the motivation and knowledge reading the original sources can give.

Dense Writings: <http://societyofepicurus.com/writings/>

Education:

Self-Guided Study: <http://societyofepicurus.com/self-guided-study-curriculum/>

Courses: <https://epicuruscollege.com/>

In my personal efforts, I wrote a few fun stories which carefully present neat lessons. They are meant for to be enjoyed (so people will want to read them) as well as focus heavily on one topic or lesson. These stories could be shared with friends without them feeling you are forcing anything onto them and could help others feel more comfortable with philosophy in general.

I am a utilitarian (I believe utilitarianism is directly based on Epicureanism), so these stories have both Epicurean and utilitarian elements.

My Cat's Terrible Roommate

A month ago, my cat, Magni, vented about some roommate of his yet again to another feline - which is strange since I do not know of anyone who shares his room with him (excluding myself, of course).

Magni complains his roommate does not respect his privacy.

This creep periodically checks his food and water for no apparent reason - and sometimes even goes so far as to mess with it!

Magni does not even want to know why his roommate keeps peeking at his personal litterbox....

He also grumbles about how this roommate does not respect his property.

So many times, the roommate has borrowed a dead mouse of his. Even after months, Magni has yet to get a single mouse back. When confronting him about it, his roommate always changes the subject: "Aww, that's such a cute meow you have!", he says, or "Did you want a treat, Little Prettypaws?".

Not to mention, his roommate occasionally rearranges Magni's cat toys. He tries to excuse this behavior by saying my cat will enjoy them more if they are switched out or moved. Pff, as if Magni wanted his favorite ball taken from the closet floor, where Magni rolled it under and stored it so neatly, and thrown randomly into the hall.

Perhaps worst of all, this lousy roommate has no concept of personal space.

Magni does not know how many countless times his roommate has randomly - and viciously - hugged him without warning.

However, things got better.

Magni is proud to report the roommate left about a month ago. Strangely, around the time the new college semester started, the creepy roommate whom I oddly seem to have never met left for another state.

Reflecting over why my cat was upset, it is clear he was not angry with this roommate, he was angry with the assumptions he made about what the roommate was doing.

My cat doesn't know why the roommate repeatedly checked his food and water, but whatever reason he had, it was strong enough in his mind to warrant doing it. Perhaps the decision was based on poor reasoning. Perhaps it was supported by great good reasons my cat is unaware of.

Instead of becoming irritated with roommates or anyone around us, stop to consider: why might they have done that action?

There may be something you do not understand about the situation or the offense may have been unintentional. If so, then anger over the action is unhelpful and perhaps even harmful.

If someone does make a poor decision, remember, no one wants to choose poorly.

Often, one makes a bad choice when they feel an overwhelming urge it will make things better (even if only temporarily) or experiences weakness or a lapse in judgment.

Whatever the cause, they chose poorly since, at the time, something made them feel it was a good decision.

Sources:

He who knows only his own side of the case, knows little of that. His reasons may be good, and no one may have been able to refute them. But if he is equally unable to refute the reasons on

the opposite side; if he does not so much as know what they are, he has no ground for preferring either opinion. . . . He must be able to hear them from persons who actually believe them; who defend them in earnest, and do their very utmost for them. He must know them in their most plausible and persuasive form

John Stuart Mill, On Liberty, Chapter 2

Those who desire virtue for its own sake, desire it either because the consciousness of it is a pleasure, or because the consciousness of being without it is a pain, or for both reasons united; as in truth the pleasure and pain seldom exist separately, but almost always together, the same person feeling pleasure in the degree of virtue attained, and pain in not having attained more. If one of these gave him no pleasure, and the other no pain, he would not love or desire virtue, or would desire it only for the other benefits which it might produce to himself or to persons whom he cared for

Utilitarianism, Chapter 4

John Stuart Mill

The man who best knows how to meet external threats makes into one family all the creatures he can; and those he can not, he at any rate does not treat as aliens; and where he finds even this impossible, he avoids all dealings, and, so far as is advantageous, excludes them from his life.

Epicurus, [Principal Doctrines](#), 39

No one chooses a thing seeing that it is evil; but being lured by it when it appears good in comparison to a greater evil, he is caught.

Epicurus, Vatican Sayings, 16

many who are capable of the higher pleasures, occasionally, under the influence of temptation, postpone them to the lower. But this is quite compatible with a full appreciation of the intrinsic superiority of the higher. Men often, from infirmity of character, make their election for the nearer good, though they know it to be the less valuable; and this no less when the choice is between two bodily pleasures, than when it is between bodily and mental. They pursue sensual indulgences to the injury of health, though perfectly aware that health is the greater good.

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 2

Post by “Daniel Van Orman” of March 7, 2019 at 3:05 PM

The Forgetful Computer

As a computer science major, I understand how difficult interpreting error messages is. For example, my computer once said, "Error: Need more memory".

I replied, "But you remember things just fine! See, you even remember those files I copied over and forgot about fifteen years ago. Besides, the doctor is absolutely sure you don't have memory problems, even to the point where he said to stop calling entirely. The MRI scans did not show anything wrong either. Well, at first, I mean.... Before the magnets kind of, uhm...."

"Error: User incompetence. Need more space."

"You cannot share your room with the other computers? I guess it is a little crowded, with a printer, a router, and two other-"

"Error: User incompetence. Need more virtual space."

"Oh, I get it! You need some fresh air, don't you? Why don't you spend some time outside in the rain? With your pet ram? Before the zoo takes it away?"

"Error: User incompetence."

"You seem to get that error a lot."

Eventually, I solved that error. It took many days and countless hours, but once the AI pointed out the solution the sixth time, I discovered I could gain space by uninstalling the AI - thus solving the problem forever.

It just goes to show you any problem may be solved with thinking and hard work.

Sometimes, solving a problem may require a perspective or skills one does not have. Without that AI, I never would have thought to nor figured out how to uninstall it. Getting help and helping others may make everyone happier.

Other times, a problem simply needs more time and effort - the solution is clear, but one has to apply a strong work ethic to reach it.

If something frequently bothers you in life, whether it be a roommate, a computer complaining of user incompetence, a missing talent, or even yourself, seek to improve the situation. Although difficult, it will lead to a happier and better life over time.

Sources:

All the grand sources, in short, of human suffering are in a great degree, many of them almost entirely, conquerable by human care and effort; and though their removal is grievously slow—though a long succession of generations will perish in the breach before the conquest is completed

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 2

The wise man holds that friendship is first brought about due to practical need, just as we sow the earth for crops, but it is formed and maintained by means of a community of life among those who find mutual pleasure in it.

Epicurus, Sayings about the Wise Man, 41

Of our desires some are natural and necessary, others are natural but not necessary; and others are neither natural nor necessary, but are due to groundless opinion.

Epicurus, [Principal Doctrines](#), 29 ; Vatican Sayings, 20

These stories are fairly flexible with doctrine, but get ideas across in a friendly, understandable way.

So, how do you share your personal beliefs with others? If one were to ask or show interest, but not want to spend much time learning Epicureanism, how would you help them? Should we spend time improving our materials or making new ones? Are there materials I am completely overlooking which should be made more noticeable?

Post by “Daniel Van Orman” of March 7, 2019 at 3:06 PM

One way to help people learn something new is to categorize and summarize pieces of a whole.

This could be an outline of how to do so with Epicureanism:

- Pursuit of Intrinsic Goods (Hedonism)

- Friendship

Nature

Physics

- Atomism?
- Reasoning?

Superstition & Fear

However, we must organize those categories into Canon, Physics, and Ethics. I don't know enough to do that correctly.

Here are some quotes to help explain those categories.

Long-term Happiness (Hedonism)

No pleasure is a bad thing in itself, but the things which produce certain pleasures entail disturbances many times greater than the pleasures themselves.

[Principal Doctrines](#), 8 ; Vatican Sayings, 50

Pleasure is our first and kindred good. It is 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 Menoecus

Beauty and virtue and such are worthy of honor, if they bring joy; but if not then bid them farewell!

Selected Fragments, 70

Friendship

Of all the means to insure happiness throughout the whole life, by far the most important is the acquisition of friends.

[Principal Doctrines](#), 27

Every friendship in itself is to be desired; but the initial cause of friendship is from its advantages.

Vatican Sayings, 23

We do not so much need the help of our friends as we do the confidence of their help in need.

Vatican Sayings, 34

The man who best knows how to meet external threats makes into one family all the creatures he can; and those he can not, he at any rate does not treat as aliens; and where he finds even

this impossible, he avoids all dealings, and, so far as is advantageous, excludes them from his life.

[Principal Doctrines](#), 39

We show our feeling for our friends' suffering, not with laments, but with thoughtful concern.

Sayings about the Wise Man, 41

Nature

If you do not on every occasion refer each of your actions to the ultimate end prescribed by nature, but instead of this in the act of choice or avoidance turn to some other end, your actions will not be consistent with your theories.

[Principal Doctrines](#), 25

The wealth required by nature is limited and is easy to procure; but the wealth required by vain ideals extends to infinity.

[Principal Doctrines](#), 15 ; Vatican Sayings, 8

Insofar as you forget nature, you will find yourself in trouble and create for yourself endless fears and desires.

Selected Fragments, 203

All desires that do not lead to pain when they remain unsatisfied are unnecessary, but the desire is easily got rid of, when the thing desired is difficult to obtain or the desires seem likely to produce harm.

[Principal Doctrines](#), 26

Don't think it unnatural that when the body cries out, the soul cries also. The body says don't be hungry, don't be thirsty, don't be cold. It is difficult for the soul to prevent these cries, and dangerous for it to ignore the commands of nature because of attachment to its usual independence.

Selected Fragments, 200

Physics

If we had never been troubled by celestial and atmospheric phenomena, nor by fears about death, nor by our ignorance of the limits of pains and desires, we should have had no need of natural science.

[Principal Doctrines](#), 11

nothing is created out of that which does not exist: for if it were, everything would be created out of everything with no need of seeds. And again, if that which disappears were destroyed into that which did not exist, all things would have perished, since that into which they were dissolved would not exist.

Letter to Herodotus

Only superstition must be excluded, as it will, if one successfully follows the lead of seen phenomena [nature] to gain indications about the invisible.

Letter to Pythocles

It is impossible for someone to dispel his fears about the most important matters if he doesn't know the nature of the universe but still gives some credence to myths. So without the study of nature there is no enjoyment of pure pleasure.

[Principal Doctrines](#), 12 ; Vatican Sayings, 49

the universe is bodies and space: for that bodies exist, sense itself witnesses in the experience of all men, and in accordance with the evidence of sense we must of necessity judge of the imperceptible by reasoning

Letter to Herodotus

For every quality changes; but the atoms do not change at all, since there must needs be something which remains solid and indissoluble at the dissolution of compounds, which can cause changes; not changes into the nonexistent or from the non-existent, but changes effected by the shifting of position of some particles, and by the addition or departure of others.

Letter to Herodotus

Superstition & Fear

Dreams have neither a divine nature nor a prophetic power, but they are the result of images that impact on us.

Vatican Sayings, 24

Prophecy is impossible, but even if it were possible we would consider what transpires as meaningless to us.

Selected Fragments, 27

The signs of the weather which are given by certain animals result from mere coincidence of occasion. For the animals do not exert any compulsion for winter to come to an end, nor is there some divine nature which sits and watches the outgoings of these animals and then fulfills the signs they give.

Letter to Pythocles

[Death is nothing to us](#); for that which has been dissolved into its elements experiences no sensations, and that which has no sensation is nothing to us.

[Principal Doctrines](#), 2 ; Vatican Sayings, 2

Are the categories missing anything or are there important subcategories missing?

Post by “Cassius” of March 7, 2019 at 4:57 PM

Daniel I have only started reading your posts but first -- it is good to see you again after such a long absence!!

Post by “Cassius” of March 7, 2019 at 5:00 PM

Also:

- How did you get the forum post to provide only the title and hide the body til clicked? That is very useful?

- I don't have time to read the full essays at this moment but of course I applaud your efforts and hope you will expand them -- I certainly don't think there is only one approach and any efforts in any new direction are always appreciated.!

Post by “Hiram” of March 8, 2019 at 1:30 PM

I wish we had answers to all your questions. No one has done marketing research on EP, I try to see trends and have only found that reddit brings in huge traffic to the SoFE webpage and others. How much of that traffic = steady interest, it's hard to tell. It seems to me that very few people develop a sustained interest in EP.

Pamphlets and Brochures here:

<http://societyofepicurus.com/shareable-epicurean-memes/>

Post by “Daniel Van Orman” of March 8, 2019 at 2:36 PM

[Cassius](#)

It is good to be back! I have been busy with college and other priorities, so I would only check in rarely and update the Dropbox link to the topical guide every few months.

To make hide content like this:

In the formatting options (bold, italicize, etc.), click on the eye with a diagonal slash through it. It is one of the last options. It creates a box you can fill with content and you can click on the top of the box to set a title.

The point of my post is we need to evaluate what approaches we are using and make them better and find new ones. Currently, I cannot find very much for a person with only a small interest in learning. This may be a missing approach. We might also want to create a list of all of the approaches and what they could be best used for (ex: "If you are new, click here for an introduction! If you are looking for original sources.... If you are looking for new discussions....").

Post by “Cassius” of March 9, 2019 at 10:47 AM

Daniel have you put up a blog or website anywhere to organize the work you are producing?

Post by “Daniel Van Orman” of March 9, 2019 at 6:09 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/803-best-way-to-introduce-teachings/>

[Cassius](#)

No.

I am not sure how much of it would be ready or useful for public showcasing and I am not sure where I would post it. I have been keeping everything on my computer, very rarely sharing it when the situation seems right.

So far, I have the topical guide (posted on EpicureanFriends), a large document half composed of notes describing basics of utilitarianism (hedonism, consequentialism, utility, etc.) and common criticisms of it (the criticisms are posted on EpicureanFriends), several stories such as the ones shown in the initial post, sections of quotes/passages I organized to be easier to make into lessons or documents if needed, a small collection of pictures of utilitarian leaders, and organized notes of mine from studying act, strong and weak rule, and ideal utilitarianism.

Most of these are oriented more toward utilitarianism than Epicureanism and are good for introductions.

Post by “Cassius” of March 10, 2019 at 11:59 AM

Ok thanks Daniel!

Post by “Daniel Van Orman” of March 13, 2019 at 1:40 PM

Are there any simple, neat summaries of Epicurean core beliefs to help introduce people to philosophy? I think it would be fantastic if we had a document full of quick summaries of our core beliefs and, within easy access of that document, more detail explained plainly.

As an example, I wrote some descriptions (seen below) to help describe hedonism in Epicureanism (please correct me if I am wrong - I may have misinterpreted things or accidentally thrown in utilitarian beliefs).

Hedonism: Quick Summary

Many people read hedonism is about happiness and immediately assume it is about sex and drugs. This is a terrible misconception!

That is not happiness! Sex, drugs, and other destructive actions will never bring long-term, true happiness. It would be seriously concerning – and against Epicureanism and its hedonistic beliefs – for anyone to think otherwise.

Just as numerous others' perceptions of happiness are not about sex and drugs, hedonism as part of Epicureanism is not about sex and drugs.

[I wrote the above notes simply because of common misconceptions. I think those misconceptions must be eased before people are ready to hear the truth.]

Pleasure and pain are the only good and evil in life. They motivate every decision one makes and it is everyone's moral responsibility to increase their own pleasure while relieving their own pain in the long-term.

Simplification: "What matters is that you are happy"

Hedonism: Details in Plain English

Hedonism means pleasure and pain are the only important things in life. This includes both physical and mental pleasures and pains (ex: enjoying a good book and savoring chocolate would both be pleasures while worrying about others and injuring an arm would both be pains). Furthermore, all pleasure and only pleasure is intrinsically valuable (valuable for its own sake) and all pain and only pain is intrinsically disvaluable (not valuable for its own sake). Happiness comes down to one's pleasure minus one's pain (this is called prudential hedonism).

These are some of what Hedonism Entails

- Pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain influences every decision one makes, whether consciously or unconsciously (motivational/psychological hedonism).

"Pleasure is our first and kindred good. It is 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." - Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus

"For the end of all our actions is to be free from pain and fear, and, when once we have attained all this, the tempest of the soul is laid; seeing that the living creature has no need to go in search of something that is lacking, nor to look for anything else by which the good of the soul and of the body will be fulfilled." - Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus

- What makes an action important is the amount of pleasure or pain it creates (value hedonism).

"So we must exercise ourselves in the things which bring happiness, since, if that be present, we have everything, and, if that be absent, all our actions are directed towards attaining it." - Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus

- Pleasure and pain make one's life better or worse (prudential hedonism).

- Choosing short-term actions to quickly gain pleasure or avoid pain generally, over an extended period of time, reduces one's pleasure and causes more pain (prudential hedonism).

"No pleasure is a bad thing in itself, but the things which produce certain pleasures entail disturbances many times greater than the pleasures themselves." - Epicurus, [Principal Doctrines](#), 8 and Vatican Sayings, 50

- It is morally correct to pursue or increase pleasure and avoid or decrease pain (normative/ethical hedonism).

Common Misconceptions

Hedonism is not a philosophy which encourages sex, drugs, and impulsive behavior performed at the expense of one's self as well as others. This misconception is called "Folk Hedonism", as it only exists in the mind of the common people (the folk). Hedonism teaches most short-term, impulsive actions cause far more pain than pleasure and can reduce one's access and ability to feel pleasure – these destructive actions should never be done.

As an example of how impulsive and destructive behavior is against Epicurean standards, listen to this advice Epicurus gave to a young man: "I understand from you that your natural disposition is too much inclined toward sexual passion. Follow your inclination as you will, provided only that you neither violate the laws, disturb well-established customs, harm any one of your neighbors, injure your own body, nor waste your possessions. That you be not checked by one or more of these provisos is impossible; for a man never gets any good from sexual passion, and he is fortunate if he does not receive harm" (Epicurus, Vatican Sayings, 51).

Post by “Cassius” of March 13, 2019 at 2:27 PM

Daniel just time for a quick comment, but in my own discussions I do not like to use the word hedonism. I don't think the texts of Epicurus indicate that the ancient Epicureans referred to their philosophy as hedonism, as Epicurean philosophy is much more complex than that. I'm not saying that to be critical of what you just wrote, because I know many people in philosophy

approach the subject that way, and there are many approaches that can be productive. Just personally for me I don't find talking about hedonism particularly effective.

Post by “Daniel Van Orman” of March 13, 2019 at 3:48 PM

I was using the word hedonism to describe one part of Epicureanism. There are many other parts (ex; Physics, Friendship/Social Creature, etc.) which could be described in detail to help people understand the whole of Epicureanism.

I thought Epicureanism was a hedonistic philosophy. Is there something wrong with my understanding or saying it is?

Post by “Cassius” of March 13, 2019 at 7:38 PM

Daniel to repeat I don't mean to be critical of you for calling it that, because I know many people fluent in philosophy do so. Categories can be useful things and I understand why they want to put Epicurus in that box. However my personal preference is dealing in a world of non-professional philosophers who are looking for practical ways to organize their lives. You are right that the "pleasure" focus is only a part, but an important part, of Epicurus, but what distinguishes him almost as much are his positions on the universe being natural/non theistic (atomism) and his views on the role of reason and the senses in his epistemology.

I'm mainly just saying that in the circles I come into contact with it is confusing to use the term hedonism, especially since its connotation in English is so negative. The word carries no positive connotations whatsoever in my mind, or in the minds of people I generally deal with. That's unfortunate, but since there is no evidence that the ancient Epicureans used the word to describe themselves, I see no reason to fight a battle over that word when there are so many other battles to fight.

Beyond the rhetorical considerations, I really don't think that Epicurus himself would approve of it. The role of pleasure in ethics is certainly an important conclusion, but I feel sure that he considered his conclusions on how to think, and how the universe operates, to come before his contributions on ethics. I gather that the experts think that the letter to Herodotus was the first in time that he wrote, and the letter to Menoeceus probably among the latter. Herodotus, like Lucretius' poem, certainly mentions the role of pleasure, but places at least as much emphasis on the physics and epistemology.

But you're attacking an area I think is super-important: how to approach new people, and it seems to me the best way to start off with them is not to allow them to be distracted by a word that might turn them off before they've understood the other fundamentals of the philosophy.

Now I will be the first to admit that you may operate in different circles, and the new people you are talking to may have no issues with the word "hedonism" at all. So if you think that is true, you should definitely proceed in the way you think best, using hedonism.

One thing I firmly believe is true is that there is no single "best" way to pursue the promotion of Epicurean philosophy, so it is good to have alternative approaches.

Post by "Cassius" of March 13, 2019 at 7:46 PM

More on the same topic as background, Daniel:

It's no simple coincidence that my icon is a Roman soldier putting on a helmet. I consider the rivalries and disputes between the philosophies and intellectual war, and I firmly believe that not everyone in the world has the best interests of Epicureans at heart. I think people like Cicero and Plutarch did everything they could, while maintaining their credibility, to place Epicurean philosophy in a bad light. I think the great majority of commentators since then have done the same, because they deeply disapprove of Epicurus.

That means that we have to take a fresh look at EVERYTHING, and accept none of the commentary (and even many of the translations) at face value. I don't think I would be here in the forum today, or even interested in Epicurus at all, if I had not come across the Norman DeWitt book that I promote so much, and seen how Epicurus stands apart and reacted against the earlier Greeks like Plato and Aristotle. There are so many modern presumptions about Epicurus (ie the interpretation of "absence of pain"!!!) that seem so wrong when viewed through the DeWitt perspective, that like I said it's necessary to start from scratch to really scrutinize what Epicurus really taught.

If you've read any of the DeWitt book you probably know what I mean, if you haven't yet, I urge you to take a look at it, because his perspective is truly different from OKeefe and Warren and most modern perspectives.

Post by "Cassius" of March 13, 2019 at 7:47 PM

Also, good to talk to you right now, because as I type this Facebook is totally down! 😊

Post by “Daniel Van Orman” of March 13, 2019 at 8:17 PM

Don't worry, I'm not taking anything you are saying as "critical" or "negative". It is helpful advice and I appreciate it.

I use the word hedonism since it seems to be the most precise word to describe the main ethical part of Epicureanism. It does have a strong negative connotation, but I thought it might be worth trying to battle over that word for the sake of accurate, precise language. Now I see not everyone is a science major like I am. 😊 What word(s) would you use to describe it instead?

I think one useful way to introduce new concepts to people is to represent neat categories or "boxes" which fit together to create most of Epicureanism. I was wondering if you had descriptions for any categories already and whether we should write them. I started with hedonism as an example since I care most about the ethical part of utilitarianism (which is centered on hedonism/utility).

To help non-philosophical people understand Epicureanism, should we work on neat, nice descriptions for atomism, logical reasoning and the senses (any better name?), superstition (including fear of death), and any other categories which seem necessary? Currently, I see numerous concepts, with various connections to each other, without much of a starting point or order of importance. It might help people understand them if those concepts were grouped together and those groups summarized.

Are there any other methods or ways you think we should pursue? There are definitely other ways, each with pluses and minuses, which will appeal to different audiences/individuals.

Post by “Cassius” of March 13, 2019 at 8:39 PM

1- What kind of science major are you?

2 - " for the sake of accurate, precise language" << On this I am not so sure. [Elli](#) here likes to remind us that Epicurean philosophy doesn't fit neatly under an "ism" heading, and especially if

what is meant by "hedonism" is "pleasure-ism." If we were looking for a larger umbrella term "Nature-ism" or something that is wider would probably be more appropriate, but I bet that is why the ancient followers of Epicurus were just called "Epicureans" since the philosophy has so many facets.

3 - i agree with all you wrote about formulating the categories in clear and appealing ways, but it goes through my mind a lot that there are profound implications of Epicurus demoting "reason" as not one of the elements of the canon, and talking so much instead about "Feeling." I think in the end we are persuaded of anything not so much by a dialectical reasoning exercise but by our personal "Feeling" that a thing is true. Of course that includes our observations through our senses, and also the "feelings" and the "Anticipations" that are part of the canonical faculties. The basic point I am making is that as we approach how best to introduce others to Epicurean thought, we ought to keep in mind that Epicurean thought is NOT a form of dialectical reasoning. Epicurus emphasized the importance of "feeling" (in a very broad sense) so I think we need to give at least as much thought to reaching people through a good "feeling" about the philosophy as we do chopping it up into logical parts. Remember how Lucretius talks about "rimming the cup with honey" as a means of getting across what is in some cases a bitter set of truths? I think that we ought to think about the implications of that perspective.

Post by “Daniel Van Orman” of March 13, 2019 at 10:36 PM

1 - I'm a computer science major (I study how to program computers). In case it helps, as part of my major, I study a good amount of chemistry and physics. Neat, precise terms are valued in those fields, just as they are in computer-oriented fields.

2 - I see "hedonism" as "pleasure and pain = only good/bad" and "folk hedonism" as "pleasure-ism" or "pleasure at any cost, including self-destruction". Epicureanism does has many facets, but we can define and describe the largest and most important facets to help teach it to others. In my mind, hedonism is a facet of Epicureanism - and one of the bigger and more important ones.

3 - "Logical reasoning and the senses" was a very bad name on my part. I just don't know what umbrella or broad term describes those facets. Epicurus uses reasoning (whether emotional, logical, or otherwise), he tends to be very logical, and (at least from what I've seen) frequently relies on empirical evidence.

Is a "describe each facet" approach worth working on? Is there a better way or something we already have which could be improved?

Other than memes, I don't see much introductory material.

As I mentioned in my initial post, other ideas could be creating neat, fun stories which teach lessons or finding/composing a reading list for beginners who don't want to spend much time trying to learn what Epicureanism is.

Thank you for your responses.

Post by “Godfrey” of March 14, 2019 at 2:35 AM

Hi Daniel! Have you written an outline yet on the forum? For me the process of thinking through the overall philosophy (the more detail, the better), putting it in words and getting feedback on it was probably the most valuable way to clarify my thinking and understanding of the philosophy. It's possible that that process would be a good way for you to think about and tighten up the points you're concerned with, and could even suggest a path forward.

Post by “Cassius” of March 14, 2019 at 6:39 AM

Also Daniel, in regard to Godfrey's comment, have you sorted out in your mind whether you are primarily Epicurean or primarily "Utilitarian"? An outline of your thinking would help sort out the tension between the different labeling.

Post by “Daniel Van Orman” of March 14, 2019 at 4:57 PM

[Godfrey](#)

I completely agree that process of learning. Also, when it comes to belief systems, I think it is essential to look at its criticisms and think through them yourself.

I have no outline. I was hoping to either get help with that or pursue another idea for introducing Epicureanism.

Perhaps a rough outline could be: Long-term Happiness (Hedonism), Physics (Atomism, Nature), Friendship, and Desires & Superstitions (Limit Desires, Remove Superstitions, Don't Fear Death).

Here are some quotes to help explain those groupings.

Long-term Happiness (Hedonism)

No pleasure is a bad thing in itself, but the things which produce certain pleasures entail disturbances many times greater than the pleasures themselves.

[Principal Doctrines](#), 8 ; Vatican Sayings, 50

Pleasure is our first and kindred good. It is 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 Menoecus

Beauty and virtue and such are worthy of honor, if they bring joy; but if not then bid them farewell!

Selected Fragments, 70

Physics

nothing is created out of that which does not exist: for if it were, everything would be created out of everything with no need of seeds. And again, if that which disappears were destroyed into that which did not exist, all things would have perished, since that into which they were dissolved would not exist.

Letter to Herodotus

Only superstition must be excluded, as it will, if one successfully follows the lead of seen phenomena [nature] to gain indications about the invisible.

Letter to Pythocles

Don't think it unnatural that when the body cries out, the soul cries also. The body says don't be hungry, don't be thirsty, don't be cold. It is difficult for the soul to prevent these cries, and dangerous for it to ignore the commands of nature because of attachment to its usual independence.

Selected Fragments, 200

Friendship

Every friendship in itself is to be desired; but the initial cause of friendship is from its advantages.

Vatican Sayings, 23

We do not so much need the help of our friends as we do the confidence of their help in need.

Vatican Sayings, 34

The man who best knows how to meet external threats makes into one family all the creatures he can; and those he can not, he at any rate does not treat as aliens; and where he finds even this impossible, he avoids all dealings, and, so far as is advantageous, excludes them from his life.

[Principal Doctrines](#), 39

We show our feeling for our friends' suffering, not with laments, but with thoughtful concern.

Sayings about the Wise Man, 41

Desires & Superstitions

All desires that do not lead to pain when they remain unsatisfied are unnecessary, but the desire is easily got rid of, when the thing desired is difficult to obtain or the desires seem likely to produce harm.

[Principal Doctrines](#), 26

The wealth required by nature is limited and is easy to procure; but the wealth required by vain ideals extends to infinity.

[Principal Doctrines](#), 15 ; Vatican Sayings, 8

It is impossible for someone to dispel his fears about the most important matters if he doesn't know the nature of the universe but still gives some credence to myths. So without the study of nature there is no enjoyment of pure pleasure.

[Principal Doctrines](#), 12 ; Vatican Sayings, 49

Dreams have neither a divine nature nor a prophetic power, but they are the result of images that impact on us.

Vatican Sayings, 24

These categories overlap greatly. Friendship could be a subsection of long-term happiness:

Of all the means to insure happiness throughout the whole life, by far the most important is the acquisition of friends. - [Principal Doctrines](#), 27

and superstitions could be a subsection of nature.

Also, the categories might need to be reorganized. When explaining nature, should we group it with physics or put it be in its own category?

Insofar as you forget nature, you will find yourself in trouble and create for yourself endless fears and desires. - Selected Fragments, 203

Are the categories missing anything or are there important subcategories missing?

[Cassius](#)

I am primarily utilitarian.

So far, I love everything about that philosophy - especially the principle of maximal utility ("greatest happiness for the greatest number") and consequentialism.

Because of how frequently utilitarian leaders quote Epicurus and how utilitarianism seems to be an extension of Epicureanism, I value Epicureanism teachings.

Here are my notes for utilitarianism:
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/0hj244htwnga...0Edit.docx?dl=0>

If a popup asks you to sign into Dropbox, close it using the X in the top-right corner.

The notes about LDS theology/Christianity are there because I live in a predominantly Mormon community. It helps to be prepared to explain "non-member" beliefs, in case people ask.

Post by “Cassius” of March 14, 2019 at 5:18 PM

Daniel that is a good start on an outline.

How do **you** perceive that Utilitarianism differs from Epicurus?

In my case, I know of no positions that are central to "Utilitarianism" other than the saw "the greatest good for the greatest number" that -- without a position on physics and epistemology, is hard to pin down as meaning anything in particular.

Post by "Daniel Van Orman" of March 14, 2019 at 7:14 PM

Quick summary, since I went overboard on details in my response below.

Central to Utilitarianism:

- Principle of Maximal Utility: "the greatest happiness for the greatest number", love others as much as yourself
- Consequentialism: Actions are central to morality, morality of action = results of action and tendencies of results from action
- Impartiality: Don't use bias - value others' interests equally.
- Commensurability: Sum consequences of actions to determine whether its good or bad.

Most differences between utilitarianism and Epicureanism I see are where utilitarian philosophers expand/extend Epicurean teachings. As an example:

Epicurus: Law are made to kept people from being wronged --> Jeremy Bentham: Laws are made to make everyone happier --> John Stuart Mill: Laws allow one to predict others' actions and know consequences; helps people work better with each other (ex: stop signs on roads, fines for speeding)

Here is a list of what I consider central to utilitarianism:

- Long-term Happiness (Hedonism) & Principle of Maximal Utility

Pleasure and pain are the only good and evil in life. They motivate every decision one makes and it is everyone's moral responsibility to increase the pleasure of every person (including themselves) while relieving their pain.

- Consequentialism

The moral correctness of an action depends on its predicted and actual results (consequences). A good action produces good and uplifting outcomes, whatever they are defined to be. An action which produces bad outcomes, even if done with good intentions, is still immoral.

- Impartiality

When determining the most morally correct action, one should use objective criteria - never prejudice, hatred, bias, or other non-objective reasoning. Every person's interests should be considered as equally, even though individuals are not equal because of talents, skills, personalities, and other attributes.

- Commensurability

The morality of an action or set of actions can be determined through combining their outcomes, through using some consistent system to compare, total, average, or otherwise combine outcomes. The best actions produce the most good.

Together, these doctrines give meaning to "the greatest happiness for the greatest number". These quotes might also help explain things:

the feeling of duty, when associated with utility, . . . would make us feel it congenial, and incline us not only to foster it in others . . ., but also to cherish it in ourselves

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 3

To do as you would be done by, and to love your neighbour as yourself, constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 2

once the general happiness is recognised as the ethical standard, will constitute the strength of the utilitarian morality. This firm foundation is that of the social feelings of mankind; the desire to be in unity with our fellow creatures, which is already a powerful principle in human nature, and happily one of those which tend to become stronger, even without express inculcation, from the influences of advancing civilisation

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 3

When people who are tolerably fortunate in their outward lot do not find in life sufficient enjoyment to make it valuable to them, the cause generally is, caring for nobody but themselves

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 2

The largest difference I see between Epicureanism and utilitarianism is the Principle of Maximal Utility and its connecting sentiments and logic. Most of the other differences I see are where utilitarian philosophers expand/extend Epicurean teachings. I am unsure whether Epicurus would approve of these extensions, but (other than connections to maximal utility) I see no reason why he would not.

Here are a few examples of what I perceive to be utilitarian philosophers describing Epicurean doctrines in greater detail:

It is impossible for someone to dispel his fears about the most important matters if he doesn't know the nature of the universe but still gives some credence to myths. So without the study of nature there is no enjoyment of pure pleasure.

Epicurus, [Principal Doctrines](#), 12 ; Vatican Sayings, 49

education and opinion, which have so vast a power over human character, should so use that power as to establish in the mind of every individual an indissoluble association between his own happiness and the good of the whole

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 2

Laws are made for the wise: not to keep them from doing wrong, but to keep them from being wronged.

Epicurus, Selected Fragments, 530

The general object which all laws have, or ought to have, in common, is to augment the total happiness of the community

Jeremy Bentham, An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, Chapter 13.1

In the conduct of human beings towards one another, it is necessary that general rules should for the most part be observed, in order that people may know what they have to expect; but in each person's own concerns, his individual spontaneity is entitled to free exercise.

John Stuart Mill, On Liberty, Chapter 4

The man who best knows how to meet external threats makes into one family all the creatures he can; and those he can not, he at any rate does not treat as aliens; and where he finds even this impossible, he avoids all dealings, and, so far as is advantageous, excludes them from his life.

Epicurus, [Principal Doctrines](#), 39

The deeply rooted conception which every individual even now has of himself as a social being, tends to make him feel it one of his natural wants that there should be harmony between his feelings and aims and those of his fellow creatures. If differences of opinion and of mental culture make it impossible for him to share many of their actual feelings- perhaps make him denounce and defy those feelings- he still needs to be conscious that his real aim and theirs do not conflict; that he is not opposing himself to what they really wish for, namely their own good, but is, on the contrary, promoting it

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 3

If every pleasure had been capable of accumulation, not only over time but also over the entire body or at least over the principal parts of our nature, then pleasures would never differ from one another.

Epicurus, [Principal Doctrines](#), 9

Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure. If one of the two is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing ...

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 2

Don't avoid doing small favors, lest you seem to be the same with regard to greater things.

Epicurus, Selected Fragments, 214

if it may possibly be doubted whether a noble character is always the happier for its nobleness, there can be no doubt that it makes other people happier, and that the world in general is immensely a gainer by it

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 2

[Addressing a young man] I understand from you that your natural disposition is too much inclined toward sexual passion. Follow your inclination as you will, provided only that you neither violate the laws, disturb well-established customs, harm any one of your neighbors, injure your own body, nor waste your possessions. That you be not checked by one or more of these provisos is impossible; for a man never gets any good from sexual passion, and he is fortunate if he does not receive harm.

Epicurus, Vatican Sayings, 51

many who are capable of the higher pleasures, occasionally, under the influence of temptation, postpone them to the lower. But this is quite compatible with a full appreciation of the intrinsic superiority of the higher. Men often, from infirmity of character, make their election for the nearer good, though they know it to be the less valuable; and this no less when the choice is between two bodily pleasures, than when it is between bodily and mental. They pursue sensual indulgences to the injury of health, though perfectly aware that health is the greater good.

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 2

Post by “Godfrey” of March 14, 2019 at 9:54 PM

Wow that's a lot of information on utilitarianism, in a good way. I need to read what you've written more carefully as I'm only vaguely familiar with utilitarianism.

Regarding Epicureanism, I think that the best way to understand the overall ideas is by using the three categories of the Canon, Physics, and Ethics. As I understand it, this is the original framework. Part of outlining is fitting your categories into these categories: nature into Physics for example. To me, it's of primary importance to understand that pleasure is one of the three aspects of the Canon as that explains why it is the greatest good. So you need to understand the Canon to distinguish pleasure from good ol' hedonism.

Cassius has some excellent one sheet breakdowns on the forum, also his Elemental Epicureanism and Ante Oculis are quite helpful if you focus on the instructional parts before diving into all of the source material. Hiram's book Tending the Epicurean Garden is also helpful, and if you haven't seen it he has a self study course at

<http://societyofepicurus.com/self-guided-study-curriculum/>.

There's also DeWitt, although it's pretty expensive and (at least for me) takes a while to give it a proper reading.

It's a big challenge to zoom in to the core of the philosophy. That's where the Canon/ Physics/ Ethics structure is so valuable and from there you can explain the various ideas much more clearly. Not that I'm an expert by any means, but that's what has allowed me to get a grip on the philosophy. Now when I read new material or re-read material I feel like I understand it more clearly instead of getting overwhelmed.

Post by "Cassius" of March 14, 2019 at 10:18 PM

Daniel I agree with Godfrey, and would add this as a summary point:

You wrote --

"Central to Utilitarianism:

- Principle of Maximal Utility: "the greatest happiness for the greatest number", love others as much as yourself
- Consequentialism: Actions are central to morality, morality of action = results of action and tendencies of results from action
- Impartiality: Don't use bias - value others' interests equally.
- Commensurability: Sum consequences of actions to determine whether its good or bad."

I think what I am reading is that you are very focused on the conclusions of the Utilitarian ethics. But to any Utilitarian who asserted these positions to me, I would ask this:

WHY?

WHY should the greatest happiness for the greatest number be considered a good goal?

WHY should I love others as much as yourself ? (Which in general I do fully reject 😊)

WHY should I not be biased and value random people's interest as high as my own?

WHY should the SUM consequences determine whether something is good or bad? Why not just the consequences that effect me and my family and friends? Why should I care at all about someone who is neither a family nor a friend nor has any contact with me and them? By what standard is anything good or bad?

Also of those are deep philosophical questions that will vary depending on whether there is a heaven or hell, whether there is a god handing out rules, whether there is some ideal set of regulations somewhere to which I should conform, and on and on....with questions of epistemology also (how do I know any of this is true? how do I know that there is a truth?)

I don't know that "Utilitarianism" answers any of those questions for us, does it?

Post by "Godfrey" of March 15, 2019 at 12:53 AM

Daniel, a key difference between the two philosophies that jumped out at me now that I've read your above post more carefully is the concept of moral responsibility. Specifically: *"it is everyone's moral responsibility to increase the pleasure of every person (including themselves) while relieving their pain."*

To the best of my understanding, moral responsibility is excluded from Epicureanism. In it's place is PD5: *"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."*

So as Epicureans we try to live prudently, honorably and justly because living this way minimizes our pain and maximizes our pleasure. There is no moral responsibility to anybody else involved. The end result may possibly be the same, but the intention is entirely different. This might seem reprehensible to a Utilitarian, but to an Epicurean it provides clarity, and with clarity, freedom.

Post by "Cassius" of March 15, 2019 at 6:57 AM

Excellent excellent point Godfrey! for there to be "moral responsibility," philosophically speaking there has to be some source of that force --- either a creating god giving orders, or a realm of ideal forms such as Plato suggested.

That is core Epicureanism - NEITHER of those exist! But the question of their existence determines the answer to every question, because if they DO exist then they certainly would be controlling. The issue of whether they do or do not exist cannot be put aside - it must be answered FIRST (through Epicurean physics and epistemology)

Post by "Daniel Van Orman" of March 15, 2019 at 5:50 PM

Outlining

Fitting categories into Canon, Physics, and Ethics is an excellent idea! Thank you.

If we could summarize those three categories and continue with summaries and links to the categories within them.

Thanks for the advice and links. I need to find the time to go through all of that material (and more). 😊

I definitely don't know enough to summarize those categories, but hopefully the idea and/or task will benefit others.

Differences between Epicureanism and Utilitarianism

I thought Epicureanism was hedonistic.

It talks about pleasures and pains, but I guess it never fully encapsulates hedonism.

No pleasure is a bad thing in itself, but the things which produce certain pleasures entail disturbances many times greater than the pleasures themselves.

[Principal Doctrines](#), 8 ; Vatican Sayings, 50

All desires that do not lead to pain when they remain unsatisfied are unnecessary...

[Principal Doctrines](#), 26

I see philosophers frequently call Epicureanism hedonistic. For example, Henry Sidgwick refers to Epicureanism as "egoistic hedonism" (while utilitarianism is "universalistic hedonism"). Are these philosophers oversimplifying or misspeaking?

I thought Epicureanism emphasized a moral responsibility to make one's self happy:

So we must exercise ourselves in the things which bring happiness, since, if that be present, we have everything, and, if that be absent, all our actions are directed towards attaining it.

Letter to Menoecus

My interpretation of PD5 (which may be wrong) is it is an example of Epicureanism promoting consequentialism. A natural consequence of not living prudently, honorably, and justly is to not live pleasantly. I don't see how PD5 talks about responsibility - just how it gives a very important lesson.

Moral Responsibility

In utilitarianism, the "force" driving the principle of maximal utility is education and sentiments: education and opinion, which have so vast a power over human character, should so use that power as to establish in the mind of every individual an indissoluble association between his own happiness and the good of the whole

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 2

moral associations which are wholly of artificial creation, when intellectual culture goes on, yield by degrees to the dissolving force of analysis: and if the feeling of duty, when associated with utility, would appear equally arbitrary; if there were no leading department of our nature, no powerful class of sentiments, with which that association would harmonise, which would make us feel it congenial, and incline us not only to foster it in others (for which we have abundant interested motives), but also to cherish it in ourselves; if there were not, in short, a natural basis of sentiment for utilitarian morality, it might well happen that this association also, even after it had been implanted by education, might be analysed away

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 3

[Cassius](#) I assume, you are going to criticize enforcing ethical beliefs using "education and opinion". 😊 Before you do, see my opinion on emotion driving moral responsibility below and know the "force" I mention next applies to utilitarianism.

The "force" I thought was driving moral responsibility in Epicureanism was hedonism and natural consequences:

[Happiness] has not, by this alone, proved itself to be the sole criterion [of morality]. To do that, it would seem, by the same rule, necessary to show, not only that people desire happiness, but that they never desire anything else. Now it is palpable that they do desire things which, in common language, are decidedly distinguished from happiness. They desire, for example, virtue, and the absence of vice, no less really than pleasure and the absence of pain

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 4

During all [the existence of humanity], mankind [has] been learning by experience the tendencies of actions; on which experience all the prudence, as well as all the morality of life, are dependent.

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 2

Personally, I believe moral responsibility is driven by emotion. The "forces" I mentioned above simply drive or manipulate emotion.

I focus heavily on ethics - believing it to be the most important part of philosophy. That's just my opinion, though.

There are plenty of non-ethical or practical parts of utilitarianism. Impartiality helps one to become "the man who best knows how to meet external threats[, who] makes into one family all the creatures he can" ([PD39](#)). Commensurability helps one make better choices, as such to "pass over many pleasures when a greater annoyance ensues from them" (Letter to Menoecus).

Thanks for the conversations, guys. This has been great for my learning and understanding of Epicureanism. 😊

Post by "Cassius" of March 15, 2019 at 7:22 PM

Daniel:

As to "It talks about pleasures and pains, but I guess it never fully encapsulates hedonism." The issue is really "What is hedonism"? The word has no obvious clear meaning -- "Pleasurism," if that is the obvious meaning, and is ambiguous and unclear; Epicurus set out a full and detailed set of beliefs, but "hedonism" is a word to which there is no definite meaning -- that's the main issue.

"That's just my opinion, though." <<< That's really the issue. Epicurus and most Greeks start with the more basic question of "What is the good?" and they look for ways to logically prove that something is "the highest good" before they launch off in pursuit of it, You'll see that in the opening to "On Ends."

"I will start then in the manner approved by the author of the system himself, by settling what are the essence and qualities of the thing that is the object of our inquiry; not that I suppose you to be ignorant of it, but because this is the logical method of procedure. 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, he 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?"

So in this kind of chain of reasoning the Epicureans first start off and ask: "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." They give the answer "pleasure" (which is a feeling) and as proof they say "that is what all animals do at birth before there is any possibility of corruption." They also point out as a second proof that absent feeling of some kind, the organism is dead. And they point out that we know these things by feeling alone -- in the same way we know that sugar is sweet, so there is no possibility of mistaken opinion corrupting our conclusion. (Thus "logic" is deprecated as subsidiary to the canonical faculties - 5 senses, anticipations, and feeling - which operate automatically and without opinion.)

Be sure to note here that in this "canon of truth," "truth" is not something given by god or as an ideal form -- all truth is something that is "true to us" or "true to a normal human being in those same circumstances." "Truth" is not something that floats in the air (Platonic ideal forms) or given by god (religious revelation) or existing as "essences" within the things around us (Aristotle). None of those alternative means of knowledge are true, according to Epicurus. The only "truth" is that which is real to us through our sensations/anticipations/feelings.

As to "hedonism" there is no accepted "author" or authority who can answer such questions or tell us what the "right answer according to Utilitarianism" is. Of course I might be fair to say that "Utilitarianism is what Jeremy Bentham said it is" but I doubt that you mean it that way; you are thinking there is an accepted definition and I don't think there is.

Now maybe Bentham defined "the greatest good of the greatest number" as the ultimate good of Utilitarianism. If so, we would need to look to see exactly how he stated that, but even if he said that, he's not advanced the ball at all because he has not defined "good." If we are asking "what is the ultimate good?" then to answer "the greatest good of the greatest number" is circular or even nonsensical. I am pretty sure that Bentham has not said "good = pleasure" but I am not an expert on Bentham or how he might have defined "good."

That's the kind of analysis Daniel that I am suggesting needs to be made. You'll find that Epicurus had a very clear set of principles which you can outline, and based on the answers you can line up basic positions on "What am I? (physics)" "What is the good?"(ethics) and "How do I know it with confidence?"(epistemology / canonic). You can basically do that with Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics as well, but the answers are much different.

Post by “Godfrey” of March 15, 2019 at 9:42 PM

To clarify regarding PD5, my point was that PD5 doesn't talk about responsibility, moral or otherwise. Guess I wasn't very clear! Regarding consequentialism, I'm not familiar with that so I can't really comment.

And thank you for the conversation as well! I too find it a great way to clarify my understanding.

Beyond that, ditto what Cassius said. But he said it better than I can!

Post by “Daniel Van Orman” of March 15, 2019 at 10:33 PM

[Cassius](#)

Below are some responses to some of your statements. Thanks for your help.

"The issue is really 'What is hedonism'? The word has no obvious clear meaning -- 'Pleasurism'."

I thought it had a clear meaning among philosophers: the only good is pleasure and only evil is pain.

Although not a trustworthy source, Wikipedia seems to sum up its meanings well, starting with: "Hedonism is a school of thought that argues that the pursuit of pleasure and intrinsic goods are the primary or most important goals of human life".

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hedonism>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hedonism#Epicureanism>

"they look for ways to logically prove that something is 'the highest good' before they launch off in pursuit of it"

I completely agree that is the right thing to do.

I meant my opinion is the most important thing philosophy does is define "the highest good" and how to pursue it. It certainly has many other valuable aspects, I just value ethics above the other aspects.

"all truth is something that is 'true to us' or 'true to a normal human being in those same circumstances.'"

I absolutely agree. I believe this is called "universality"? The mormons call it "eternal truth" - a truth which is eternally true, no matter the circumstance, time, etc.

"As to 'hedonism' there is no accepted 'author' or authority who can answer such questions or tell us what the 'right answer according to Utilitarianism' is."

True.

However, the End is "greatest happiness for the greatest number". Other principles and definitions, such as commensurability, impartiality, etc. help one pursue that End.

"I am not an expert on Bentham or how he might have defined 'good.'"

"pleasure is in itself a good: nay, even setting aside immunity from pain, the only good: pain is in itself an evil; and, indeed, without exception, the only evil; or else the words good and evil have no meaning. And this is alike true of every sort of pain, and of every sort of pleasure." - Jeremy Bentham, An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, Chapter 10.10

"Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think" - Jeremy Bentham, An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, Chapter 1.1

"actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure." - John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 2

"Ethics at large may be defined, the art of directing men's actions to the production of the greatest possible quantity of happiness, on the part of those whose interest is in view." - Jeremy Bentham, An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, Chapter 17.2

"You'll find that Epicurus had a very clear set of principles which you can outline, and based on the answers you can line up basic positions"

I believe utilitarianism is the same way. However, one must understand a set of principles before they can use them to provide answers.

[Godfrey](#)

I agree, PD5 doesn't talk about responsibility, moral or otherwise. However, I think that means it doesn't contribute to that argument.

If you say there is no evidence Epicurus thought there were moral responsibilities, I will respond, where is the evidence he thought there were no moral responsibilities? There seems to be an absence of evidence on this topic.

Post by "Cassius" of March 15, 2019 at 10:44 PM

OK those are good quotes from Bentham on pleasure and pain. Do you know how he then reaches "greatest good for greatest number" from that, however? I am not aware of a way to do that other than reference to some Ideal which i think Epicurus would say does not exist, because strictly speaking there are many people whom we have no contact with, or are even our enemies, such that what is good for the "greatest number" would have no necessary relationship to us purely on the basis of number.

As to this:

[Quote from Daniel Van Orman](#)

"all truth is something that is 'true to us' or 'true to a normal human being in those same circumstances.'"

I absolutely agree. I believe this is called "universality"? The mormons call it "eternal truth" - a truth which is eternally true, no matter the circumstance, time, etc.

I do not think your conclusion there is correct, and in fact it would be quite the opposite. I think Epicurus' point is that there is NO "eternal truth" apart from the nature / properties of the atoms, so "universal truth" that is true for everyone at all times is an impossibility, especially in the field of ethics.

However I am not sure we are together. Do you agree with what I have said in this post about there being NO eternal truth (especially in ethics) or no?

Post by “Daniel Van Orman” of March 16, 2019 at 12:05 AM

[Cassius](#)

"Greatest happiness for the greatest number" might be an ideal. It is enforced by "education and opinion", as mentioned earlier. Although, I think it comes partly from nature (so, maybe not an ideal?).

I am not sure exactly how he reaches that principle, but this is generally the reason he gives:

"once the general happiness is recognised as the ethical standard, will constitute the strength of the utilitarian morality. This firm foundation is that of the social feelings of mankind; the desire to be in unity with our fellow creatures, which is already a powerful principle in human nature, and happily one of those which tend to become stronger, even without express inculcation, from the influences of advancing civilisation" - John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 3

I am not sure we are in agreement on "universal truth"... I think we are not in agreement. I believe there are certain principles/facts which are always true and always will be true for all times and places, very few of which are true for all situations/environments/circumstances.

I believe those principles/facts are not deontological ideals, such "theft is always wrong" ("ideals" from nature, such as pleasure/pain, cause-and-effect, etc. are fine - they are based on sensations, real data, etc.). I think deontological ideals are wrong (ex: theft is usually wrong, but not *a/ways* wrong) or circularly correct (ex: "virtue is always good because virtue is defined to be always good - good is always good").

For example, I think certain principles, such as this one, are "universal truths": "It is impossible for someone to dispel his fears about the most important matters if he doesn't know the nature of the universe but still gives some credence to myths. So without the study of nature there is

no enjoyment of pure pleasure" ([Principal Doctrines](#), 12 ; Vatican Sayings, 49). This principle probably doesn't fit all situations/environments/circumstances, but I think is fairly close to doing so.

Another example, I think the sciences, for the most part, are in search of facts which are "universal truths". They gather, verify, and explain things, hoping to reach conclusions which are and always will be true regardless of situation/environment/circumstance.

I think a key concept of ethics is to define a set of principles which are "universal truths". Those principles may help determine ethical choices depending on the situation, regardless of time period, bias, etc. Those principles should be valid for all places and all times. If possible, some of them for all situations/environments/circumstances (ex: if dead or not alive, then dead or not alive thing feels no sensations).

Post by "Cassius" of March 16, 2019 at 7:36 AM

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[Quote from Daniel Van Orman](#)

"once the general happiness is recognised as the ethical standard

Yes this is exactly what is in contention and is not self- evident. Many people do not recognize "the general happiness" as the ethical standard, and if he is simply asserting it without some kind of proof then he is without foundation.

As to truth that applies to all places, times, and circumstances and it truly universal (throughout the infinite and eternal universe) I think we are far from being able to establish anything in those terms, especially in the field of ethics. The life of the "gods" is different from the life of "men" because of their circumstances, not because there is a universal force which makes it so. It is certainly possible to generalize within a certain set of facts, such as "all humans eventually die" and "[death is nothing to us](#)" but those general observations are based on experience rather than a force which would allow us to say that such and such "always must" be the case. That is the difference between reasoning by observation, while keeping in mind the limits of observation, vs attempting to call into existence "universal principles" which exist only in our minds and have no true existence outside our minds.

Diogenes Laertius: "They [Epicureans] affirm that there are two kinds of inquiry, the one concerned with things, the other with nothing but words."

Letter to Herodotus: "In the first place, Herodotus, you must understand what it is that words denote, in order that by reference to this we may be in a position to test opinions, inquiries, or problems, so that our proofs may not run on untested *ad infinitum*, nor the terms we use be empty of meaning. For the primary signification of every term employed must be clearly seen, and ought to need no proving; this being necessary, if we are to have something to which the point at issue or the problem or the opinion before us can be referred.

Someone wanting to research into this question could refer to Philodemus' "On Methods of Inference" for a part of the Epicurean argument on this.

Post by "Daniel Van Orman" of March 16, 2019 at 1:07 PM

His foundation: "This firm foundation is that of the social feelings of mankind; the desire to be in unity with our fellow creatures"

As far as I can tell, utilitarians don't give much more reasoning than that for why "greatest happiness for the greatest number" is universally correct. I think that foundation is based on sensations, "general observations are based on experience", but I could see an argument for otherwise.

I guess that answers the previous question of whether or not there is moral responsibility in Epicureanism. If there are no ethical standards which are universally true, then there are no moral responsibilities.

In utilitarianism, gods and mortals are held to the same, universal moral responsibilities: "If it be meant that utilitarianism does not recognise the revealed will of God as the supreme law of morals, I answer, that a utilitarian who believes in the perfect goodness and wisdom of God, necessarily believes that whatever God has thought fit to reveal on the subject of morals, must fulfil the requirements of utility in a supreme degree" (John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 2).

As far as things go, I agree the force "universalizing" them are "general observations are based on experience". Whether a god or a mortal mixed an acid and a base, the reaction would be the same.

In my mind, this is what gives importance to the practical side of both Epicureanism and utilitarianism. Consequentialism, one of the central doctrines of utilitarianism, is entirely based on "learning by experience the tendencies of actions; on which experience all the prudence, as well as all the morality of life, are dependent" (John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 2).

Post by "Cassius" of March 16, 2019 at 4:15 PM

As far as observations and consequences, it seems to me that that is so clearly of importance to be unquestionable. In fact, seeing your cites, it seems to me that probably Frances Wright incorporated some of that in her discussion of causation in A Few Days in Athens. And those influences shouldn't be surprising since she dedicated her work to Jeremy Bentham (and so she certainly shared your enthusiasm for at least some of that work).

As to holding the happiness of the entire world as equal to that of my own and my family and friends, that's equally clear - but in the reverse -- most people do not hold to that opinion at all except an abstract ideal that they know does not comport with reality. In fact, that seems to me to be much more of an artifact of Christianity or some other type of universalist religion than something that I observe to be true.

I guess you could say that because I believe in observations and in observing the consequences of actions in the real world, I could never hold the happiness of every member of the entire human race in abstract as entitled to my equal concern as the happiness of my family and friends. And of course taken to its logical conclusion, the happiness of the "greatest number" FAR outweighs the happiness of myself and my friends, in quantity.

Which is why Daniel, with all due respect to you, I have always found the idea of "the greatest good for the greatest number" to be nonsense, or worse. It seems to me that it's a prescription for the worst kind of totalitarian despotism which could only work by a small elite deciding what the "greatest good of the greatest number" is by fiat, and then enforcing that (by force) on everyone else.

But regardless of whether I am right or wrong on that, the most important part is that I do observe that not everyone agrees with that formula. So to subject ourselves to that formula while the great bulk of humanity rejects it seems to me to be foolhardy at best. But since I am sure that the originators of Utilitarianism were no fools, just like the founders of Abrahamism were no fools, I feel sure that they had another agenda -- likely the same agenda as the Abrahamists. And I think these same observations are why you won't see any sense of "greatest good of the greatest number" in Epicurus at all. You find emphasis on personal pleasure and the pleasure of your friends (which really derives from the first) but you find little

if any reference to the rest of the world in abstract, except to note that some people cannot be made friends and must be treated with distance, or as enemies.

Post by “Godfrey” of March 16, 2019 at 5:06 PM

It looks like you've already answered your question about moral responsibility. I'd like to add that it appears to me, on the basis of this discussion, that Utilitarianism is an attempt to "improve" upon Epicureanism by adding to it. As an Epicurean, to me the additions seek to bring together ideas which do not belong together. I had thought that there would be more in common between the two philosophies but they actually seem quite divergent.

Regarding the greatest good for the greatest number, there's a rather famous short story by Ursula LeGuin that I recommend reading. It's titled "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas" and I believe you can find a free copy online. It's an interesting take on the idea.

Post by “Daniel Van Orman” of March 16, 2019 at 5:59 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

As to holding the happiness of the entire world as equal to that of my own and my family and friends, that's equally clear - but in the reverse -- most people do not hold to that opinion at all except an abstract ideal that they know does not comport with reality.

Which is why Daniel, with all due respect to you, I have always found the idea of "the greatest good for the greatest number" to be nonsense, or worse.

That makes sense. 😊

It is an abstract ideal - driven by emotions rather than nature.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

I'd like to add that it appears to me, on the basis of this discussion, that Utilitarianism is an attempt to "improve" upon Epicureanism by adding to it. . . .

I had thought that there would be more in common between the two philosophies but they actually seem quite divergent.

As I have mentioned before, I believe utilitarianism is an extension to Epicureanism. I hadn't realized how much original doctrine had been changed, but it seems the vast majority of the changes have been in ethics and views on deities/superstition.

There is much they have in common - we have just been discussing what major differences they have. I think there is far more common than not.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

In fact, that seems to me to be much more of an artifact of Christianity or some other type of universalist religion than something that I observe to be true.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

the additions seek to bring together ideas which do not belong together

There is a theory utilitarianism started as a way to combine the most common beliefs of Christianity in a way which did not involve a god - a secular way to unite quarreling Christians.

I see the reasoning for this, but I think it is incorrect. Jeremy Bentham despised religion. For example, from 1809 to 1823, he spent exhaustive efforts criticizing religious beliefs - even the idea of religion itself.

In my mind, the ideas fit together perfectly. If one places "greatest happiness for the greatest number" at the center and asks, "How does X in utilitarianism help achieve that?", the answer (if you understand the concept X well enough) is usually very clear.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

It seems to me that it's a prescription for the worst kind of totalitarian despotism which could only work by a small elite deciding what the "greatest good of the greatest number" is by fiat, and then enforcing that (by force) on everyone else.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

there's a rather famous short story by Ursula LeGuin that I recommend reading. It's titled "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas"

Neither of those cases would truly create "the greatest happiness for the greatest number".

If the totalitarian despotism did truly make everyone happier, then it would be fine - it would be an exchange of freedom for happiness. However, a slave society would not be fine since the suffering of the slaves would be far greater than the suffering of the small elite.

In "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas", the small child being tortured is acceptable since it magically saves and improves numerous lives at the expense of one (a common trend - martyrs, revolutionaries, etc.). In reality, those exchanges are much less emotion-jerking than the story makes it out to be. A different example, food drives require numerous people to donate to help a few, increasing total happiness, yet aren't seen as evil. Torturing people almost always causes more pain than it saves or produces pleasure. Even the case of sadism (taking pleasure in seeing others in pain), the pleasure of sadism is brief and low-level compared to the long and terrible pain of torture. Also, I think it is worth adding, any argument primarily reinforced by magical powers is very weak when there is such emphasis on basing arguments and principles on nature and the real world.

Before deciding I was a utilitarian, I explored both of these criticisms. My perspectives on these are below and in this thread: [Criticisms against Principle of Maximal Utility](#)

Hypothetical Acceptance of Unequal Distribution of Happiness: Are slave societies justifiable?

Utilitarianism focuses on total happiness - not individual happiness. Focusing on total happiness does not account for an uneven distributions of happiness. What if slavery increases total happiness most?

Any action which is legitimately helpful is good under utilitarianism. Most criticisms concerning this concept are centered on unhelpful actions, which no one should approve of. For example, a slave society would never actually produce more happiness than a free society, therefore utilitarianism would never endorse it and would always oppose it.

Slavery causes more pain than pleasure as it always hurts the slave more than it benefits their masters. It also slows their country's progress towards greater happiness. John Stuart Mill teaches a sacrifice is only good if it succeeds in generating more overall happiness: "The utilitarian morality does recognise in human beings the power of sacrificing their own greatest good for the good of others. It only refuses to admit that the sacrifice is itself a good. A sacrifice which does not increase, or tend to increase, the sum total of happiness, it considers as wasted" (Utilitarianism, Chapter 2). Slavery is not a good sacrifice and never will be.

Robert Nozick's Utility Monster: What if One Person Loves Something more than Others? Can They Take Away Others' Property?

Utility Monster

Theoretically, a person (a "utility monster") who loves resources of any kind with such exceedingly gargantuan love could justify taking resources from all other people. After all,

those resources would create more utility if the utility monster used them than if anyone else used them. Note: this argument applies to all consequentialist ethics which focus on maximizing a variable.

The most common response to this is: why is that such a bad thing? Nozick never explains why a utility monster would be a bad thing, he just creates a bad-sounding scenario with no point.

Examining why one would think the utility monster is bad, it is easy to see it built purely on emotion (it is simply demonizing some scenario) and fails entirely if put into any realistic scenario. One such realistic scenario could be numerous people across the world donating their resources to help those in Africa and other impoverished nations. This is good as the impoverished enjoy the resources more than those donating the resources. The impoverished would be similar to utility monsters, who take resources from numerous others for their own pleasure. While in theory, this sounds bad, it clearly is not as it helps the impoverished greatly while requiring only relatively minor sacrifices from those who donated the resources.

Additionally, a utility monster which always gains immense pleasure from taking resources from others and never decreases in the pleasure they gain would never exist in reality. While there may be some who gain immense pleasure from resources, diminishing marginal utility (a concept from economics) would cause the pleasure generated to decrease until it is equal to the pleasure it would generate for everyone else – making it unnecessary to sacrifice to give resources to what used to be the utility monster. To give an example for this, if a poor, hungry, homeless person lived in a wealthy country, the wealthy should help the person as the person would appreciate the resources far more than the wealthy. As the person is cared for, diminishing marginal utility would take effect and the benefit they would gain from the wealthy's donations would decrease until it would no longer be worth donating to the person (since the person would be well taken care of). The point when the donations stop would likely be when the person is nearing the wealthy's own standard of living.

Sadism

If a terrible person gains more pleasure from causing suffering than pain is generated, then their destructive actions could be justified under utilitarianism. Would not their acts of torture and mayhem produce more pleasure than pain overall?

Sadistic pleasures could never justify the pain it inflicts. Sadistic pleasure is low level and temporary while the pain inflicted is not (see teachings on higher pleasures below).

Additionally, the pleasure gained would never in reality be more than the pain inflicted. Justifying such pain would require unrealistically massive benefits, which would never be obtainable. Sacrifice is only justified if it brings a net positive change in utility and making up for great or widespread pain would require enormous and long-lasting benefits – which sadism will never bring. Not to mention, decreases in utility are never justified under utilitarianism,

thus sadistic acts are never justified as they cannot generate more overall utility.

But what if a very depressed or guilt-ridden person wants a sadist to torture them to death? I think the question becomes: what benefit would their death bring compared to therapy treatment or some other alternative? If the person is a dangerous criminal who cannot stop hurting others and thinks being tortured to death is a just punishment, then perhaps execution of some kind (electric chair, harvest for organs, etc.) is the best choice. I believe it would be very unlikely for the best option to be handing the person to a sadist. (If execution still sounds immoral, then please see the "Distastefulness" section.) If the person may learn to contribute to society, then therapy treatment is better as it makes them happier and enables them to make society happier.

Post by "Cassius" of March 16, 2019 at 6:36 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Regarding the greatest good for the greatest number, there's a rather famous short story by Ursula LeGuin that I recommend reading. It's titled "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas" and I believe you can find a free copy online. It's an interesting take on the idea.

Is it a book? Do I not also remember that Spock said something to the same effect in that movie where he "died" in the vacuum chamber?

Post by "Cassius" of March 16, 2019 at 6:43 PM

[Quote from Daniel Van Orman](#)

It is an abstract ideal - driven by emotions rather than nature.

Yes Daniel, that is a reminder of something important -- that ideas/abstractions generate emotions every much as strong (or more) than physical feelings. So it is not enough to say that something "is an abstraction so therefore it isn't real" -- Abstractions may not have physical reality independent from us, but they can certainly generate strong feelings nevertheless.

[Quote from Daniel Van Orman](#)

There is much they have in common - we have just been discussing what major differences they have. I think there is far more common than not.

I have long been an admirer of some of the work of John Stuart Mill -- I am less familiar with Bentham. But certainly in general to the extent they are both aimed after "happiness" they have much in common. The old saying "the devil is in the details" applies.

[Quote from Daniel Van Orman](#)

In my mind, the ideas fit together perfectly. If one places "greatest happiness for the greatest number" at the center

Yes, that IF in that statement is the big hurdle.... and that IF is really at the center of much of the rest of the issue. Who has the "right" to enforce their view of the greatest happiness of the greatest number on everyone else who disagrees?

Post by "Godfrey" of March 16, 2019 at 8:32 PM

I was going to make the point that you finished with, Cassius. Who determines the greatest happiness?

If I take the approach that I as an individual will act to maximize happiness for the most people, how can I do that? "The road to hell is paved with good intentions", and as you mentioned above, Daniel, (I'm quoting from memory so correct me if I'm wrong) an action can be immoral even if the intention was moral.

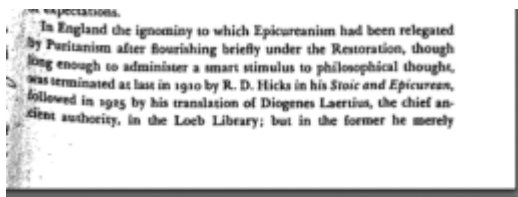
I believe the Epicurean answer to the greatest happiness for the greatest number is to get more people to follow Epicureanism 😊

Post by "Cassius" of March 16, 2019 at 8:53 PM

I've said elsewhere and this discussion of and England-based philosophy is a good place to repeat it that the British "stiff upper lip" approach seems to continually get in the way of their good sense and lead them to stoic-like views.

To be charitable, maybe they were under more pressure than other places to conform to Christianity or Christian/Humanist idealism, but for whatever the reason they do not seem to have been able to keep Epicurean views unpolluted from Stoicisms. (I do need to exempt Frances Wright from that generalization!)

Here is a comment about scholarship in England made by DeWitt in the intro to his book - I wish I could read Italian - maybe [michelepinto](#) could tell me if he has read Bignone and likes him!



EPICURUS AND HIS PHILOSOPHY

enlarged with lucidity upon Zeller's mistakes while in the latter he confirmed tradition by the benedictory *corresit Usener*. A new text and translation was made available in 1925 by Cyril Bailey, soon followed in 1928 by *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus*, the old errors and fallacies being repeated in both books and amplified in the second one with such urbanity that to dissent seems like discourtesy.

It was in Italy that new ground was first broken. This was the good fortune of Ettore Bignone, who in 1936 began to set the account straight in respect of the life of Epicurus and the development of his doctrine in his *L'Aristotele perduto e la formazione filosofica di Epicuro*.

Post by “Godfrey” of March 16, 2019 at 8:57 PM

Cassius, The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas is a short story. You can buy it for \$1.99 online or download a free PDF that pops up in a Google search. I read it in a collection of LeGuin's short fiction titled The Unreal and the Real. She was a Taoist, which sometimes comes out in her fiction.

Post by “Daniel Van Orman” of March 17, 2019 at 12:11 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Yes, that IF in that statement is the big hurdle.... and that IF is really at the center of much of the rest of the issue. Who has the "right" to enforce their view of the greatest happiness of the greatest number on everyone else who disagrees?

As I have mentioned before, that IF rests on education, opinion, and various, loose supporting evidence (such as people are social creatures, people tend to be happier when they work together, etc.). It comes down to an abstract ideal which can be accepted, rejected, or anywhere in-between by an individual.

One could ask, who has "right" to enforce any philosophy and what does that mean? Utilitarianism states laws are meant to promote total happiness; what gives police/government the "right" to enforce laws? I think this is a discussion which applies to far more than just utilitarianism.

If you mean silencing others, know that Utilitarianism is very strong about maintaining freedom of speech. John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* focuses greatly on that.

"Truth gains more even by the errors of one who, with due study and preparation, thinks for himself, than by the true opinions of those who only hold them because they do not suffer themselves to think. Not that it is solely, or chiefly, to form great thinkers, that freedom of thinking is required." - John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter 2

"First, if any opinion is compelled to silence, that opinion may, for aught we can certainly know, be true. To deny this is to assume our own infallibility. Secondly, though the silenced opinion be an error, it may, and very commonly does, contain a portion of truth; and since the general or prevailing opinion on any object is rarely or never the whole truth, it is only by the collision of adverse opinions that the remainder of the truth has any chance of being supplied." - John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter 2

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

I believe the Epicurean answer to the greatest happiness for the greatest number is to get more people to follow Epicureanism 😊

Doesn't every philosophy, religion, and belief systems more or less hold that everyone would be "better off" if more people followed their beliefs? 😊

Convincing, not compelling, people is crucial to truly making their lives better. If they honestly believe in something, they will more likely and more greatly follow, support, and benefit from it.

Post by "Cassius" of March 17, 2019 at 12:35 PM

I suppose to a certain extent it's all just a question of what you think is important enough to focus on persuading people about.

I personally think it is much more satisfying/pleasurable to me to focus on showing people the truth about how nature operates, and that based on those truths we properly (according to nature) focus on the happiness of ourselves and our friends rather than trying to "save the world" which is not a goal that is likely to be attained at any rate.

Post by “michelepinto” of March 18, 2019 at 4:21 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Here is a comment about scholarship in England made by DeWitt in the intro to his book - I wish I could read Italian - maybe [michelepinto](#) could tell me if he has read Bignone and likes him!



ETTORE
BIGNONE

L'ARISTOTELE PERDUTO
E LA FORMAZIONE FILOSOFICA DI EPICURO

Presentazione
di Vittorio Enzo Alfieri



I did not read this, still.. is very big.

I read the translation of Epicurus's writing in Italian by Ettore Bignone. They are good but too old. It is difficult to understand them now if you do not know already Epicurus.

Post by "Cassius" of March 18, 2019 at 9:16 AM

Wow thank you for that picture Michele! All sorts of nice surprises today (combined with the Italian song!)

Post by "Cassius" of March 18, 2019 at 11:00 AM

Michele:

Hiram wrote:

I found a synopsis in Italian, put it through google translate, and got this: "First published in 1936, this essay soon became a classic of Aristotelian exegesis. The basic thesis of Bignone, still persuasive, is that the philosophical formation of Epicurus unfolded through a very close comparison only with the dialogic works (now lost) of the young Aristotle, who at the time was still a Platonic all-round student. In essence, Epicurus could not know the most important Aristotelian treatises (such as the "Metaphysics", the "Physics", the "Ethics"), which would have constituted for him a far more solid and articulated dialectical shore."
<https://www.ibs.it/aristotele-perduto.../e/9788845259944>.

L' Aristotele perduto e la formazione filosofica di Epicuro - Ettore Bignone - Libro - Bompiani - Il pensiero occid

ibs.it

L' Aristotele perduto e la formazione filosofica di Epicuro - Ettore Bignone - ...

[L' Aristotele perduto e la formazione filosofica di Epicuro - Ettore Bignone - Libro - Bompiani - Il pensiero occidentale | IBS](#)

This seems hard to believe: "In essence, Epicurus could NOT know the most important Aristotelian treatises.....?" He is suggesting that Epicurus was not aware of THE MOST IMPORTANT works of Aristotle? That seems hard to understand.... Perhaps a Google translate issue?

Post by “michelepinto” of March 19, 2019 at 4:22 AM

No this is correct. The thesis of Bignone is that Epicurus knows some of Aristotele's work. And most scholars believe that.

As I said I did not read it.

Post by “Cassius” of March 19, 2019 at 8:29 AM

Thanks Michele. I guess we don't even really know the points that Bignone was making in his book, so it probably doesn't make sense to try to speculate about what his real intent in the book was without reading it. Presumably he didn't write his book just to show that Epicurus had only some of Aristotle's work -- that would be a pretty narrow topic! Presumably he was making all sorts of points about what Epicurus taught, and what Aristotle taught, for purposes of better understanding both, so I would think we'll just have to dig into the book to find out.