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Week 2: Epicurus

Reading

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Epicurus

Overview of Epicurean Philosophy

- The goal of human life is happiness
- Consequentialism – something is morally good if it results in pleasure
- Happiness results from an absence of physical pain and mental disturbance
- Knowledge is acquired through the senses – empiricism
- Physicalism - belief that all is material and has evolved
 - o There is no soul after death or punishment in afterlife
- Anxiety is primarily due to fear of death and punishment
 - o Anxiety drives irrationality
 - o Elimination of anxiety allows for pursuit of physical and mental pleasures

Psychology and Ethics

- The soul, as with everything, is made of atoms and void
 - o Something incorporeal (or without physical nature) cannot move anything physical, so the soul must be physical
- As there is no life after death, there is no punishment nor regret for a lost life
- Pleasure and pain are guides to what is good or bad, as all organisms strive for pleasure and avoid pain
- Not all pleasures should be pursued as some pleasure leads to long-term pain
- Positive and negative states of mind are separate from pleasure and pain. Pleasure and pain are non-rational states that's essence cannot be altered
- *Eudaimonia* is Aristotelian happiness – Epicurus says it is a *catemetic* or *static* pleasure and not a *kinetic* pleasure
 - o Static Pleasure – Non-necessary; agreeable (e.g. pleasant odours or sounds)
 - o Kinetic Pleasure – Necessary; replenishing; state of well-being (e.g. gratifying hunger or thirst)
- **Types of Desire:**
 - o Natural – Necessary: looks to happiness, physical well-being, life
 - o Natural – Unnecessary: looks to pleasant stimuli, enjoyment
 - o Empty: looks to objects of desire that cannot bring satisfaction, e.g. wealth, immortality

Social Theory

- One should follow law, even in secret, since the anxiety of being discovered prevents happiness from flourishing
- Someone who cannot live honourably is not capable of living pleasurably
- Someone who pursues natural desires (as opposed to empty ones) would have no motive to violate another's rights. That person may not act out of virtue, but their acts would nonetheless be virtuous
- Friendship cultivates happiness

Lecture: Epicurean Ethics

- In Greek ethics, rational reflection is to reflect on our nature and how we should live. The goal of rational reflection is Eudaimonia
- Influenced by Democritus (atomism) and Plato

General Philosophy

- Theory of Reality
 - o Materialist Atomism: Reality is made of matter (atoms) moving through a void
 - o 'Swerving' (clinamen) of atoms allows for random trajectory
 - o Clinamen results in atom collision, which creates the bodies of material that we see around us
- Ethical Ideals
 - o Gods exist but are indifferent to humans
 - o No life after death; no punishment or reward in the afterlife
 - o Ethics does not rely on deity
 - o Ethical Hedonism: Pleasure defines good, pain defines bad
 - o Egoistic Hedonism: All goods are pursued for one's own pleasure
 - o Consequentialist
- Epistemology
 - o Empiricist: Knowledge stems from experience
 - o Science is important for reflection on reality
- Philosophy of Mind
 - o Physicalism: Mind and body are the same
 - o The mind is an arrangement of atoms located in the chest
 - o When consciousness ceases to exist when the body disintegrates at death

Happiness

- Happiness is obtaining pleasure, avoiding pain
- The Good Life is one of tranquillity (ataraxia)
- **Argument from psychological hedonism:** We are naturally driven by pleasure and pain, therefore it defines our goals
- **Argument from introspection** (observation of subjective states): Our experience of pleasure or pain is evident from experience. Knowledge is based on perception and sensation. Therefore, pain and pleasure are only criteria for knowledge of good and bad
 - o As our introspection is not always reliable, reason is needed. *Rationality* is why certain pleasure should not be pursued, and certain methods of pursuit should be avoided
- Happiness defined according to **Consequentialism**

- Happiness is the *rational* pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain
- Right and wrong is determined by consequences. Goodness is determined by overall pleasurable consequence. Rationality informs us of consequences

Epicurean Desires

1. Natural-Necessary: Innate, essential to life – harmful experience if unfulfilled
 - Notably *Friendship, Freedom, and Thought*
 2. Natural-Unnecessary: Innate, inessential – neutral experience if unfulfilled. Satisfaction of natural-unnecessary desires may have harmful consequences
 3. Unnatural-Unnecessary: Not innate, inessential – do not naturally cause pain when unsatisfied, but can be conditioned to experience pain
 - Notably *Fame, Power, and Wealth*
- We should avoid *unnatural-unnecessary*, limit *natural-unnecessary*, and satisfy *natural-necessary*

Argument against Fearing Death

- We fear death as a future event that is painful
- Conscious only exists only if the body exists
- Therefore, our conscious cannot be present in death: we are not present for our death or able to experience pain