

## Epicurean Ethics in the Pragmatist Philosophical Counsel

ALEKSANDAR FATIĆ

*University of Belgrade*

fatic@instifdt.bg.ac.rs, aleksandar.fatic@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

This article explores the extent to which Epicurean ethics as a general philosophy of life can be integrated in a composite pragmatist approach to philosophical counseling. Epicureanism emerged in a historical era that was very different from the modern time and addressed a different philosophical ethos of the time. This alone makes it difficult for Epicureanism to satisfy all of the normative criteria for a modern ethics. On the other hand, the article discusses aspects of the modern “external”—duty- and demand-driven ethics that may contribute to the emergence of some of the main issues for modern philosophical counseling. The author points out aspects of Epicurean ethics that are potentially powerful tools to address the issues of mood and meaning in philosophical counseling, and thus serve as a contemporary complement to a complex duty-bound, yet pragmatist view of ethics.

### KEYWORDS

Epicurean ethics, pragmatist counsel, philosophical practice, the good life

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

This article discusses the Epicurean ethics as a contemporarily relevant context for philosophical practice, specifically for counseling. To that end the article seeks, in the first section, to address common prejudice with regard to Epicurus and the Epicureans, namely that this was a philosophical doctrine advo-

1. The initial pages of this article draw to some extent on my recent publication “Epicureanism as a foundation for philosophical counseling.” *Philosophical Practice*, March 2013, 8(1): 1127–1141. However this text builds on a different aspect of Epicurean counsel that explores its relationship with deontological, consequentialist and virtue ethics and the compatibility of Epicureanism with an eclectic model of pragmatist philosophical counsel.

cating a life entirely devoted to an uncritical quest of “base” pleasures. Upon pinpointing key aspects of Epicurus’ simple moral philosophy, the article moves to introducing the ethics context of modern counseling and discusses two contemporary philosophical models of philosophical intervention: (i) the Stoic IDEA method, and (ii) the use of a pragmatist proposed by John Alexander. The argument proceeds to examining the extent to which these modern models are compatible with Epicurean ethics and, in the concluding chapter, showing that Epicureanism is highly useful for supporting various modern ethical models specifically tailored for counseling. Furthermore, the article argues that Epicurean ethics is capable of acting as a general value framework on which to base a pragmatist approach to philosophical counseling.

### Philosophical practice and mass neurosis

The return to philosophical practice in the modern age has met various responses by the counseling and consulting professions, most notably by psychology and psychiatry. While the more philosophically educated psychologists and psychiatrists have tended to support applied philosophy as a counseling method, and some have even joined in the philosophical exercise, those threatened by philosophy have initiated, in some countries, what is in effect a “turf war” with practicing philosophers. The war rages mainly around the terminology used. One of the strategic strongholds of the medical and paramedical professions in counseling is the concept of “therapy,” which is widely banned for philosophers. While “therapy” in the modern sense has admittedly been appropriated by medicine, generically it is as philosophical as it is medical:

Empty is that philosopher’s discourse which offers therapy for no human passion. Just as there is no use in medical expertise if it does not expel the sickness of bodies, so there is no use in philosophy if it does not expel the passions of the soul.<sup>2</sup>

Since Antiquity the task of practical philosophy has been seen to “expel passions of the soul” by providing precepts for a balanced, happy life (eudaimonia). Such life has been thought to include moderate pleasures and a wisdom that allows virtue to flourish and thus conscience to rest at ease. Perhaps the best formulation of this perception of ethics was Epicurus’ 5th Principal Doctrine (or Sovran Doctrine), which reads:

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

---

2. Porphyry, Letter to his wife Marcella. In *Pros Markellian*. Edited and Translated by Walter Pötscher (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 31.

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.

Lou Marinoff has a modern formulation of this practical role of philosophy:

We all practice philosophy. The only question is whether we do so self-consciously and well, or unconsciously and poorly. Our beliefs shape the course of our actions, policies forge the future of business, and a culture's philosophy determines the character of its civilization. As long as these remain unconscious and unexamined, they control us. By becoming aware of them, their origins, nature, conflicts and consequences, we gain control of them and thereby our lives. (2002, xvi)

The practice of philosophical counsel is firmly embedded in an appropriate philosophical context for each individual client. I will argue here that Epicurean views of pleasure are a sound foundation on which to build an essentially pragmatist approach to counseling for many clients. The argument rests on the idea that many of the cognitive, emotional and volitional problems for which people seek counseling today are caused, or at least exacerbated, by the dominant duty-bound culture of bonds with others, and by a corresponding "external," duty-driven morality that has long been accepted as dominant. While Epicureanism is not capable of replacing external morality in the sense of providing precepts for what is morally right and wrong (nor does it purport to do this), it is practically useful for helping clients find a balance between external pressures and "hedonistic" duties to themselves.

Epicurean ethics treats hedonistic duties to oneself as equal with any external duties to others: an aspect of ethics as philosophy of life that has long been forgotten. The absence of this "internal" element of "duty of indulgence" may account for the normative perspectives in which it appears perfectly consistent to claim that a person can be highly moral, and highly valued by her community, yet utterly unhappy. The idea that one can be a morally perfect agent, and yet commit suicide out of misery is one that should not be so easily accepted. On a theoretical level, it is consistent with duty-bound morality. In practice, and especially in philosophical practice, it is unacceptable and needs serious "philosophical intervention."

Epicurean Tetracharmakos (the four key doctrines that serve as a mnemonic device for everyday rehearsal), suggests:

1. Do not fear gods, they do not care about human affairs;
2. Do not fear death, because it is merely a disappearance from being, and as such does not bring any new threatening experience;

3. Know that all things necessary for happiness (in the minimalist sense of absence of pain and want (*aponia*) and of anxiety (*ataraxia*) are easy to procure;
4. Be aware that all inevitable pains tend to be outweighed by pleasures.

If one swaps “fear of gods” with “fear of life,” “anxiety” or “uncertainty,” one gets a fairly contemporary advice on the approach to take to addressing the mass neurosis of today. Part of the neurosis is caused by the rampant fabrication of needs that are increasingly difficult to satisfy, yet:

Insatiable is not the stomach, as the many say, but false opinion about the stomach’s boundless need to be filled.<sup>3</sup>

In any situation where subjective feelings of deprivation are caused by the unavailability of something that we perceive as necessary, “false opinion” is likely at work. Epicureans believed that philosophy’s therapeutic task was primarily to dispel false opinions and liberate the “student” (client) from subjective deprivation, usually not by procuring what is missing, but by removing the conviction that what is missing is necessary.

Wherever intense seriousness is present in those natural desires which do not lead to pain if they are unfulfilled, these come about because of empty opinion; and it is not because of their own nature that they are not relaxed, but because of the empty opinion of the person.<sup>4</sup>

It is easy to see how these Epicurean views negate the currently prevalent, originally Marxist, idea that “man’s richness is a richness of needs” and its industrial perversion through the marketing of happiness through consumption (Marx 2007). The concept of richness of needs has even entered modern left wing criminology as that of “relative deprivation” (Webber 2007). Social expectations dictate one’s perceptions of one’s own needs, thus relative deprivation will differ for people from different social strata. For someone, relative deprivation is a lack of food and shelter compared to one’s peers who don’t suffer such predicament. For others, however, relative deprivation will arise from not owning designer clothes, a custom made car or a ballroom, where other members of the same social stratum possess all these things. The concept of relative deprivation has been designed to explain why crimes have been committed as a pattern conforming to the motive of deprivation in substantively dramatically different contexts of possession of wealth.

3. *Sententiae Vaticanae*, 39, in Cyril Bailey, *Epicurus: The Extant Remains* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1926).

4. Principal Doctrine 30, in Bailey, *Epicurus*.

Epicureanism, like Stoicism, suggests that the cure for the ills arising from inauthentic needs, induced by the society, which cause anxiety and feelings of deprivation because they are difficult to satisfy, is the development of self-discipline.

Much of our distress, both individually and collectively, is not amenable to medical intervention, and time does not appear actually to heal *all* wounds or solve all problems (unless, of course, all problems are, as Stalin quipped, solved by death...). ... When we do not know our own minds and proclivities, we may be unable to discover why sleep does not come easily, or why a career no longer seems fulfilling, or why the general sense of dissatisfaction will not lift, or anxiety will not pass into peace and calm. ... The Stoic sage does not make demands on the external world, but instead develops self-discipline so as to deal reasonably with the world as it presents itself. (Ferraiolo 2010, 629–630)

However, Epicureanism sees this self-discipline in a slightly different light than Stoicism. Stoic counsel is almost exclusively *rationalist*. The rational explanation of the need to develop self-discipline sufficient to “deal with the world as it presents itself” while making no demands on that world is theoretically coherent: it is capable of supporting any type of rational self-discipline from that of a hermit to that of a business owner wisely refraining from expanding too much. However, the Stoic does not effectively address the affective side of the deprivation arising from self-denial: for him the forfeiture of satisfaction for the sake of peace and calm is sufficient for a wise life, and the quest of positive pleasure is not necessary for the balance such life requires. Acting wisely by accepting the external limitations and resigning oneself to restrictive circumstances ought to lead to as much happiness as can reasonably be expected in life. For many people today, this is insufficient, as the element of positive affect is missing. At least on the surface of things, the “Stoic sage” of today could fit in the common clinical picture of depression. The Stoic call for a rejection of passion in a world where virtually nothing can be achieved without a passion is a difficult proposition, to say the least. The original form of Stoicism emerged in a world where, for example, most “free” Greeks and Romans did not have to work. Theirs was a very different world from the present one, where work is often equal to social identity and industriousness to the individual’s value for the community. This is part of the reason the “rationalism” of the Stoic counsel today could consistently be Prozac-assisted in its actual application.

Psychotherapy, on the other hand, tends to subscribe to the opposite strategy: most psychotherapeutic approaches focus predominantly on the *affective* side and on the resulting suffering of the client, without sufficiently addressing

the rational side of the need to devise a life plan that is based on one's authentic *values*. More often than not such psychotherapy collapses into a strategy of "supporting the client" rather uncritically, and, as a result, develops into quasi-friendships, misplaced commiseration and "the taking of the client's side" in concrete life situations. This is usually damaging to the client in the long term.

Sometimes the exaggerated emphasis on the affective side results in protracted therapy, with no clear structure based on a foreseen outcome or "exit strategy." This involves a high cost for the client over time, tends to cause the counselee's long-term dependency on the counselor, and, usually, a lack of the client's self-confidence in decision-making. Psychotherapists who fall in this trap are difficult to detect, because they can be very popular and highly recommended. Few questions are usually asked about therapists who have many of the same clients for years, although this should raise issues about the methodology, aims, and effectiveness of the counseling that they provide.

Epicurean counsel appears to integrate the rational and affective side in "talk therapy" by essentially agreeing with the Stoic understanding of minimalism, which Epicureans understand as the safest way to avoid disturbance. When a Stoic suggests that one ought to "return to the small place one belongs to" as a general strategy of self-denial that is "in accordance with nature," an Epicurean would agree, not necessarily because this is a way of nature, but because it is a way least likely to cause disturbance in the future (Marcus Aurelius. 2002). Disturbance is a form of pain, which by definition is an evil. Epicureanism goes a step further and suggests that virtue, rather than being "an end in itself"—a moral standard, is merely a means to attain the greatest safe level of pleasure. Living wisely means maximising pleasure while minimising pain, including that pain which is caused by certain pleasures, in which case one must abstain from such pleasures. Consequently, the most innocent pleasures, those that involve peace and quiet, such as conversations with friends, intellectual work and moderate care for one's body, are the preferred ones for Epicureans. Unlike the Stoics, Epicureans insist on practice aimed to develop a sensibility to enjoy such pleasures, to turn them into positive, affirmative affect of satisfaction and joy, even if the pleasures themselves arise from little more than the absence of pain. This is where Epicureanism provides a potent tool for philosophical counseling for anxiety, guilt and the pervasive issues with self-fulfillment that dominate many clients' problems.

### **The modern pragmatist philosophical counsel**

The complexity of many situations in modern society requires philosophical counseling to address an array of issues simultaneously, and some arise from

multi-level internal questions, such as moral dilemmas relating to responsibilities, learned responses to failure, or feeling of guilt. Unlike in earlier organic communities, life in modern society makes it increasingly important for ordinary people to have a moral “yard stick” that is sufficiently rationally and socially elaborate and tested, which they will use in making decisions amid a multitude of variables, potential outcomes and numerous involved parties’ concerns. This is the context of ethics in the modern sense that lies at the heart of modern philosophical counseling. In this context, ethics is far more specific and more restrictive than the Ancient philosophy of life.

In his pragmatist proposal for a model of counseling focused on ethics, John K. Alexander proposes that the most practically useful questions to be asked in the modern context, ones capable of integrating many different concerns, are those relating to *the type of person one wishes to be or to become*:

What kind of person should I be? How should I live my life? These are important practical questions because we find ourselves situated in a world not of our choosing, but one where we try to develop the knowledge and skills necessary for leading lives that we find interesting and worthwhile, or, to paraphrase William James, living a life that we find significant. (Alexander 2011, 777)

The quest of a “life one finds significant” goes back to Socrates’ idea that a life not properly understood, not philosophically interpreted and directed, “the unexamined life,” is not worth living. Such a life is victim to chance, source of constant disappointments, and is a continuous struggle linking one day of fear and toil to another. Only a life endowed with meaning, realistic goals and a rational perspective on chance and disappointment is potentially enjoyable in the long term. This is the point of Epicurus’ idea that one ought to follow pleasure subject to what modern philosophy would call a utilitarian calculus of potential effects, within the limits of the externalities imposed by circumstances one cannot control. According to Epicureans, within such a perspective, regardless of how much actual pleasure one might be able to obtain, one’s life could be considered a “good life”—one based on a strategy or life plan that is sound, natural and based on seemingly indubitable inclinations of human nature: to seek pleasure and avoid pain.

The more complex the circumstances, the more difficult it is to orient one’s life-plan between the various claims and counterclaims of moral justification, social acceptability, others’ rights and interests, and one’s direct and indirect responsibilities. In such complex social circumstances, the question of “what kind of a person do I want to be” appears to integrate the natural inclinations and social concerns in what seems as a projection of one’s ego amongst the values and choices that make up the mindscape of any decision we make.



Alexander (2011, 782) spells out three sub-questions that constitute this general question of what type of person one wants to be, namely:

1. Can one live with the consequences of what one contemplates doing (or does one like the type of person one appears to be if one does what one contemplates)?
2. Is one able and willing to defend one's actions before one's peers?
3. If everybody performed the same action in the same circumstances, what type of society would this lead to, good or bad?

Alexander suggests that each question entails the employment of a distinct methodology of ethical reasoning. The first one lends itself to virtue ethics, namely to the exploration of what virtues one considers the most important and would therefore wish to have dominate one's actions. The second one is suitably answered by utilitarian reasoning, by examining the consequences the action is likely to reach within the realistic limitations that apply to the decision. One might, thus, justify one's actions by pointing to their direct consequences, and to the potential (less favourable) consequences for oneself and others of acting otherwise. The third question is best answered through the deontological ethical model: the action is justified deontologically if it is subject to universalization, namely if one could wish others to act in the same way in similar circumstances, where one would be exposed to the consequences of such action as a member of the same community.

*“Can one like the type of person one becomes by acting in a certain way?”*

The first question deals with self-value; it suggests directions for the development of virtue, but not happiness or satisfaction. One might “live with the consequences of one's actions” in numerous situations where the actions make everybody happy but the actor. The onus of the first question is on what Freud would call the “super-ego,” namely on one's own and the community's expectations of the individual, more or less regardless of the individual's wishes or choices of what is pleasurable. One may decide to donate an organ to save another although one likes sports and outdoor living, and giving up an organ would mean living a sedentary lifestyle for the rest of one's life. The sacrifice would be noble and would by all means receive social praise, but at the same time it would make one's life totally unhappy. One would certainly be able to like the sort of person one would appear to be after giving away an organ, however this question is not necessarily synonymous with whether one would be able to live with one's decision from the point of view of one's own desires and needs in the future. One could consist-



ently give away an organ and thus change one's life forever, and be able to like the type of person one (socially) appears to be by doing so (thus satisfying the deontic criterion of universalization), only to commit suicide several years later out of dissatisfaction with life. From a realistic point of view, the first question seems "defective," because the essentially duty- and virtue-driven view of ethics that the question is couched in appears to omit the perspective of *necessary pleasure* to make life worth living.

*"Is one able to defend one's actions before others?"*

The second question is subject to similar critique. Acting altruistically and selflessly means being able to easily explain one's actions to others; at the same time, however, it fundamentally neglects the need to honor one's own desires to the extent necessary for a happy life. A person with exceptional sexual desires may be unable to satisfy such desires with one person, and may embark on sexual experimentation with multiple partners. In a conservative community such behavior might be very difficult to justify, especially in the consequentialist manner: if one had acted differently, arguably no serious consequences would have arisen for one's physical and mental well-being, while perhaps many beneficial consequences would have been made possible for others. One's sexual promiscuity or extreme sexual behavior could hurt, socially compromise, or morally confuse others. It is unclear how values such as "necessary pleasure" or "optimum quality of life" would be convincingly expressed in such a situation. Here again the concept of morality taken by the pragmatist approach is the modern restrictive morality, rather than the philosophy of life model of ethics characteristic of the ancient philosophical schools. This appears the greatest problem of the modern normative ethics in a practical context, because it is socially focused and leaves the individual and her needs "out in the cold" as long as external expectations are satisfied.

*"If everybody acted the same, would this lead to a good society?"*

The third question is more argumentatively challenging than the first two. At first sight, it appears to be a classical Kantian question arising from an ethics of duty: the good society, by these lights, is one where one's duties to others and to one's own "noumenal," rational nature, are adequately represented. According to Kantian morality the justifying aspect of decision-making is duty as the external link between motivation and expectations. This clearly means that a society of selfless individuals would be morally desirable. To take this to the extreme, the ethics of duty would be able to portray a society of unhappy selfless people as morally preferable to a society of happy selfish

people who habitually encroach on the needs of others. For example, the latter community could be happy because they would rather have what they want when they want it than control their desires in exchange for others' controlling their, potentially expansive and threatening desires. The latter society would embody a kind of extremist mentality in the pursuit of immediate desires that implies accepting the risk of being victimized by the same behavior in others.

Epicurean ethics avoids advocating the latter option. However it does not shy away from that option on principle, but contingently: any pleasure is good, and any pain is bad. Experientially (contingently) Epicureans believed that extreme pursuits of desires tend to cause more pain than pleasure in the long term, hence they argued that moderation is the most conducive to pleasure not visited by subsequent pain. However, if it was possible to pursue pleasure recklessly without having to endure painful consequences in the future, such extremism of desire would be *in principle* entirely compatible with Epicureanism.

The quest of eudaimonia naturally yields contingent precepts: circumstance and experience largely dictate what actions are likely to support a good life plan. At the same time, deontological moral norms based on principled visions of a morally right society often stand in contrast with experiential conclusions about what is likely to lead to eudaimonia for particular people. In the case of Epicurean ethics there is no such apparent contrast. The types of pleasures recommended by Epicureans arise from moderation; they do not jeopardize the needs and pursuits of others, and are thus compatible with most visions of a good society, founded on general interest and the mutual respect of rights and interests. Epicureans advised those pursuing a happy life to withdraw from public affairs, live in a community of friends who share the same values (brought to life in the Epicurean "Society of the Garden"), not be involved in politics, and generally, live a "life unknown" (Algra *et al.* eds. 2005, 669–674). Such a lifestyle does not militate against the rights and interests of others. However, even hedonism so conceived is not likely acceptable for an absolutist view of the good society such as that characteristic of Kant's rationalist ethics.

On the one hand, the deontic claim of *universalizability* is logically capable of sustaining moderate Epicurean hedonism: if everybody lived a withdrawn life of moderate pleasures such a society would be sustainable and low in conflict potential, with everybody's rights able to be optimally protected. On the other hand, the *absolutist* side of deontological ethics in its Kantian form arises from a claim of morally rational human nature that permeates Kantian ethics (Fishkin 1984). This claim, when pursued to its final consequences, paints the "good society" in extreme duty-bound terms that potentially militate against

any intuitive concept of a “good life.” This is particularly visible in the deontologists’ typically retributive views of justice and punishment, where “just desert” is seen as the sole criterion for the meting out of penalties, and the actual execution of punishments a rational moral duty of government:

Punishment by a court (*poena forensis*)...can never be inflicted merely as a means to promote some other good for the criminal himself or for civil society. It must always be inflicted on him only *because he has committed a crime*... He must previously have been found *punishable* before any thought can be given to drawing from his punishment something of use for himself or his fellow citizens. The law of punishment is a categorical imperative. (Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 6: 33, 105)

More specifically:

In punishments, a physical evil is coupled to moral badness. That this link is a necessary one, and physical evil a direct consequence of moral badness, or that the latter consists in a *malum physicum, quod moraliter necessarium est*, cannot be discerned through reason, nor proved either, and yet it is contained in the concept of punishment, that it is an immediately necessary consequence of breaking the law... the judicial office, by virtue of its law-giving power, is called upon by reason to repay, to visit a proportionate evil upon the transgression of moral laws. ... Now from this it is evident that an essential requisitum of any punishment is that it be just, i.e. that it is an immediately necessary consequence of the morally bad act; and this, indeed, is what its quality consists in, that it is an *actus justitiae*, that the physical evil is imparted on account of the moral badness.

(Kant, *Lectures on Ethics* 1997, 308–309)

Finally, Kant makes it very clear what he means by categorical retribution: “Woe unto him who crawls through the windings of eudaimonism in order to discover something that releases the criminal from punishment” (Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals* 6: 331a).

Clearly the absolutist morality that makes up the “hard” version of deontological ethics sees the good society in terms embedded in a metaphysical concept of morality: man’s moral identity, arising from categorical moral axioms, is constitutive of his nature; the good society is a realization of the moral threads in human nature, and is not subject to consequentialist considerations. While this “hard” type of deontology certainly satisfies the criterion that, should everybody act the same (in accordance with the Kantian precepts) this would lead to a good society in the described sense, it is by no means the only or necessarily the most intuitive view of the good society. Contingently and experientially, it is doubtful to what extent a Kantian morally absolutist society would be “good” from the point of view of practical life, or how conducive it would be for the design of productive life plans.

A good society that allows the possibility of all the morally good members living miserable lives is of little value from the point of view of philosophical practice, and especially so for philosophical counseling.

To conclude this section, Epicureanism is clearly capable of supporting the virtue-based and consequentialist perspectives of the eclectic pragmatist model of philosophical counseling. These are the perspectives embodied in the first two questions discussed. As far as the third, deontological moral perspective is concerned, Epicurean ethics is compatible with the requirement of universalization characteristic of deontological ethical methodology, however it does not support the stronger, “absolutist” version of deontic morality, which requires the execution of metaphysically conceived moral duties regardless of the circumstances. The fact that Epicurean ethics does not function in light of the last normative context, to my mind, does not make it less attractive for philosophical counseling, not least because the absolutist deontological context for ethics is of little use for counseling.

From the point of view of applied philosophy there appears something fundamentally defective with moral doctrines that allow the unhappiness of most to constitute a morally desirable social environment as long as external duties and largely formally defined expectations are fulfilled. The assumption that this is part of a “rational human nature” appears little more convincing here than the equally plausible Epicurean claim that ‘humans naturally desire pleasure and avoid pain’. The practical value of Alexander’s model is in its pragmatic side: moral expectations (though expressed in duty-bound terms of restrictive morality) are seen as guiding lights for adaptation in challenging circumstances, and thus, ultimately, have a functionalist role: the moral justifiability of actions helps the agent make better practical choices without the attendant negative phenomena such as guilt or reproach by others. It is this aspect of the pragmatist model of ethics that I wish to turn to next and place it in a specifically Epicurean context.

### **The pragmatist sense of duty-bound morality in the context of counseling**

The eclectic model of restrictive ethics proposed by Alexander, when it is understood in its decidedly pragmatic context, as a means to orient one’s decisions in circumstances that are challenging for adaptation of behavior (in complex modern societies), while very Spartan in its emphasis of external expectations and no or very limited room for “pleasures” or “happiness,” still plays an important soothing role. The duty-driven moral zombie that inhabits the rationalist mindscape of modern ethics suffers from guilt; the pro-active pragmatic directions provided by the three questions proposed by

Alexander leave no room for his pursuit of “selfish pleasure,” however they help him *alleviate the fear of guilt*. These are simple directions, three manageable moral tests that lead to a “way of life...respected and admired: or at least the minimum features of a respectable way of life...” (Hampshire 1978, 11). Such a respectful way of life is free of blame, and thus of internalized and learned guilt. In ultimate consequence, sticking to the three questions that summarize the traditional virtue-based, consequentialist and deontic formulations of repressive morality practically liberates the agent from fear of guilt. It is appropriate to remember here that Epicureans also considered fear of reproach arising from transgressions of socially imposed values (“fear of gods” at the time) one of the main reasons for unhappiness, and that they ardently argued to dispel fear of gods and fear of death.

The pragmatist context for duty-bound morality emphasizes its instrumental value: unlike classical deontological ethics, which starts from claims about the rational aspects of human nature that require the recognition and abidance by certain more or less “categorical” moral duties, duty-bound morality in the pragmatist context does not serve any such fundamentalist goals: it is a means to satisfy social expectations and alleviate the threat of internal sanction or fear of guilt, whilst searching for an adequate adaptation strategy in complex circumstances. This means that repressive morality has only a conditional claim on the regulation of human behavior in the pragmatist context: if it can be proven to be ultimately dysfunctional, it can be rejected consistently with pragmatist philosophy. This is a point of its sharp contrast with genuine deontic morality, which is not sensitive to functionalist criteria of assessment. Thus the three eclectic moral questions proposed by Alexander need to be treated much more charitably than the duty-bound morality *sui generis*; this is warranted by the mere positioning of the three moral questions in a pragmatist context that he makes explicit.

One may note that as early as in Hellenism the external ethics of virtue (arising from the fulfillment of moral expectations of the community), or *arête*, preceded the Epicurean ethics of the good life (eudaimonia). Epicurus in fact argued in favor of seeking a good life filled with moderate pleasures *in opposition* to the already dominant external ethics that placed pressures on the individual arising from moral expectations. The wheel seems to have turned once again since then, and the dominant modern ethics is again an external ethics of demands on the individual. They are not always phrased in the context of virtue, but as Alexander rightly points it out, the three dominant forms this pressure takes include the conceptualization of virtue, the deontologically conceived moral duty, and/or expectations arising from a prudent

utilitarian calculus of predictable consequences. None of these three criteria for moral goodness are essentially related to, or necessarily conducive to, leading a good life, or enjoying eudaimonia. Conversely, all three are capable of producing morally justified lives deprived of eudaimonia. Casting the external moral demands in a pragmatist light, in the sense of interpreting their fulfillment as a means to address guilt is an essential strategy in philosophical counseling. This strategy is fully complementary with the introduction of an Epicurean view of eudaimonia as a quest of moderate pleasure. A combination of these two strategies is a particularly effective approach to addressing the modern neurosis of guilt through philosophical counseling.

A key aspect of pragmatist philosophy as the foundation for counseling is its conceptual capacity to transcend the traditional “methodological” distinctions between the deontic, consequentialist and virtue ethics through an integrative approach that becomes a counseling project. Thus the pragmatist counsel particularly readily lends itself to narrative conceptualizations of personal and collective identity and the good society, all of which are capable of integrating the traditional Epicurean concept of the good life in what is at once an integrative approach to ethics, and an effective method of philosophical counseling.

### References

- Alexander, John K. 2011. “An Outline of a Pragmatic Method for Deciding What to Do.” *Philosophical Practice* 6(2): 777–784.
- Algra, Keimpe, et al. eds. 2005. *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bailey, Cyril. 1926. “Sententiae Vaticanae.” In *Epicurus: The Extant Remains*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Ferraiolo, William. 2010. “The IDEA Method: Stoic Counsel.” *Philosophical Practice* 5: 627–633.
- Fishkin, James S. 1984. *Beyond Subjective Morality: Ethical Reasoning and Political Philosophy*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Hampshire, Stuart, ed. 1978. *Public and Private Morality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Marcus Aurelius. 2002. *Meditations*. Edited by Gregory Hays. New York: Random House.
- . 1996. *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Translated by Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1997. *Lectures on Ethics*. Translated by Peter Heath. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Marinoff, Lou. 2002. *Philosophical Practice*. New York: Academic Press.

Marx, Karl. 2007. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Translated by Martin Milligan. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications.

Porphyrus. 1969. *Pros Markellan*. Edited by Walter Pötscher. Leiden: E. J. Brill.

Webber, Craig. 2007. "Re-evaluating Relative Deprivation Theory." *Theoretical Criminology* 11: 95–118. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1362480607072737>