

Stoic Challenges To Epicurean Philosophy - 2 - Why Would An Epicurean Die For A Friend?

Post by "Cassius" of March 11, 2017 at 4:08 PM

[Cassius Amicus](#)

[March 7 at 7:03pm](#)

****Stoic Challenges To Epicurean Philosophy**** (2): Suppose someone is about to die in a moment (or just strongly believes that they are). They have a few seconds to make a decision about some important moral action. For instance, in the heat of battle they have the opportunity to give their life to save their comrades. For the sake of argument, let's suppose there's no possibility they're going to have an opportunity to actually notice any sensation of pleasure following this virtuous action. (This example is borrowed from Seneca, incidentally.) Would an Epicurean, based on his doctrines, choose to act "virtuously" in the conventional sense, by saving his comrades, despite the fact there's no opportunity for the consequent enjoyment of pleasure or contentment (or whatever)?

The Stoics argue that many people's moral preconceptions would be that the right thing is to act courageously for the welfare of one's loved ones so a doctrine that potentially leads us to believe there's no point in doing so unless it contributes to a pleasant life, would leave them in a state of contradiction. Again, for some individuals, that would constitute a *reductio ad absurdum*. So I imagine some Epicureans might respond by arguing that they do still have a motive, based on Epicurean doctrine, for self-sacrifice in this case, but I've never seen a very clear articulation of that argument. So how would that actually work? On the other hand, I've known at least one modern Epicurean who took the opposite line and said he accepted that his doctrines would provide him with no motive for self-sacrifice in this scenario and that he found that morally acceptable. That's also fine, in a sense, although I think other people are more likely to see that as a kind of extreme morality and to struggle a bit more with the apparent contradiction there.

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[Michael Carteron](#) type unknown

[Michael Carteron](#) I can only go by the example here, but the idea that friends would be harmed if an Epicurean doesn't act would by itself bring them pain. Also, the highest pleasure is considered tranquility, from how I understand it, which can be attained even in such circumstances. To repeat, some ignorance appears to be showing here.

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[Cassius Amicus](#) Wow. How rarely I confront an argument with someone focusing on pleasure as the exclusive factor in deciding what to choose and avoid. But pleasure of course is NOT the only factor - there is also PAIN, which tells us what not to do. In the example given, a soldier with an opportunity to save his comrade would be confronted with the question of whether he could live happily in the future knowing that he would be feeling the pain of having passed over the opportunity to save his friend. The calculation is the same as always. If the person in danger is really such a close friend who is so valued that to live with the pain of having passed over saving him would be unbearable, then the Epicurean would save his friend because the future pain would be unbearable, regardless of whether he lived long enough to experience any pleasure at the action of saving him. If the person in danger is some enemy or stranger, then **of course** there is no code of nature which requires us to give up our lives for a stranger or for someone who is of no importance to us personally. If we choose to adopt a "all men are children of god and every life is precious to me" attitude, and then treat strangers like close friends, then by all means knock yourself out. But I would consider no one to be a true friend of mine who valued MY life at the same level as he valued a total stranger.

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[Hiram Crespo](#) or type unknown

[Hiram Crespo](#) Epicurus, on the qualities of a Wise Man, as cited by Diogenes Laertius in Lives of Eminent Philosophers: "He will be armed against fortune and will *****never give up a friend.***** And *****he will on occasion die for a friend ****** ... and that friendship is prompted by our needs. One of the friends, however, must make the first advances (just as we have to cast seed into the earth), but it is maintained by a

partnership in the enjoyment of life's pleasures."

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Hiram Crespo

[Hiram Crespo](#) but self-sacrifice is not a virtue in itself. this is important. it's only expected if the suffering we anticipate by losing our friend is such that it is better to self-sacrifice. only THAT kind of friend would most people self-sacrifice for. ****IF**** there is a more intelligent and convenient way to SAVE our friend so that no one has to be sacrificed, that is the greatest advantage and produces the most long term pleasure.

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