

Stoic Challenges To Epicurean Philosophy - 7 - Are Not Epicureans Only Fair-Weather Friends?

Post by "Cassius" of March 11, 2017 at 4:10 PM

[Cassius Amicus](#)

[March 7 at 7:07pm](#)

****Stoic Challenges To Epicurean Philosophy**** (7) Both Seneca and Epictetus argue that Epicurean philosophy encouraged its followers to view all friendships as fair-weather friendships, i.e., to value others only for their utility and not for their own sake, as means and not as ends in themselves. Again, it seems to me that some modern Epicureans actually agree that Epicurus taught this and are happy with it, whereas others dispute this interpretation of his teachings. "These are the so-called "fair-weather" friendships; one who is chosen for the sake of utility will be satisfactory only so long as he is useful. [...] He who begins to be your friend because it pays will also cease because it pays." (Seneca). Again, reversing perspectives becomes problematic if we read Epicurus this way: you might want to view other people merely as a means to the end of "pleasure", or whatever, but would you want them to view you that way?

This is also closely-related to the argument that it's problematic to imagine a whole state or a whole world of people following Epicurean philosophy, rather than an individual or a small community. Suppose you don't want other people to treat you merely as a fairweather friend, and to potentially abandon you as soon as they calculate that would be in their interest, in terms of pleasure. How do you reconcile that with the doctrine that friends are only of instrumental value? (Or do you reject that interpretation of Epicurus -- if so, what do you make of other Epicureans who do interpret the philosophy that way?)

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Alexander Rios type unknown

Alexander Rios If we want to understand Epicurean friendship we should consult with Epicureans. Neither Seneca nor Epictetus were Epicureans. Here is an Epicurean's presentation on Friendship. 

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Alexander Rios

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Michael Carteron type unknown

Michael Carteron Epicurus praises friendship more highly than any person who I've ever read. The view doesn't seem to be "if the going gets tough, then abandon your friends"-much the opposite. Rather, that having friends will help you to endure the hard times (along with being a good thing in general). This necessarily would involve helping friends out.

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Cassius Amicus type unknown


Cassius Amicus The answers already given are very good. At this point the only thing I can think to add is that here, once again, the implication is being given that pleasure is limited to some spur of the moment physical stimulation. But mental pleasure is every bit as significant as bodily pleasure, and actually more intense. The pleasure that comes from a close friendship (as opposed to superficial fairweather relationships) is among the deepest in existence, and the pain of such losses is among the worst pains. There are no consistency issues here.

"But although men do experience mental pleasure that is agreeable and mental pain that is annoying, yet both of these we assert arise out of and are based upon bodily sensations. Regardless of this, we maintain that this does not preclude mental pleasures and pains from being much more intense than those of the body; since the body can feel only what is present to it at the moment, whereas the mind is also cognizant of the past and of the future. For, even granting that pain of body is equally painful, yet our sensation of pain can be enormously increased by the belief that some evil of unlimited magnitude and duration threatens to befall us hereafter. And the same consideration may be transferred to pleasure -- a pleasure is greater if

not accompanied by any apprehension of evil. It therefore clearly appears that intense mental pleasure or distress contributes more to our happiness or misery than a bodily pleasure or pain of equal duration."

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Alexander Rios

[Alexander Rios](#) All good and evil come to us by sensation. By sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and other senses. The wise man uses the present sensations and the memory of past (sensory) events prudently. 

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[Hiram Crespo](#)  or type unknown

[Hiram Crespo](#) Friends are long-term means to a life of pleasure. But they are by far the most important one, and Epicurus said that sometimes a wise man will give his life for his friends. This means that he will love his friends so much that, for their sake, he will consider that it would not be worth living if he didn't have them and if he seriously was in danger of losing them.

27. Of all the means which wisdom acquires to ensure happiness throughout the whole of life, by far the most important is friendship.

So, would I mind being seen as a means to the happiness of my friends, if those friends are the kind that would give their lives for me, and I for them, if needed? No. I would not mind. Friendship is an essential Epicurean value.

The problem of "Fair weather friends" and flatterers and other false friends is addressed in Philodemus' Peri Parrhesias.

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