

Thomas Carnes - Keeping the Friend in Epicurean Friendship

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Hello everyone. I am not sure if this is the correct place to upload the file below, but I hope so. The author argues that Epicurean ethics provides genuine room for other-concern, by valuing someone for their unique contribution to our happiness. Here is the abstract and some excerpts from it:

Abstract: There seems to be universal agreement among Epicurean scholars that friendship characterized by other-concern is conceptually incompatible with Epicureanism understood as a directly egoistic theory. I reject this view. I argue that once we properly understand the nature of friendship and the Epicurean conception of our final end, we are in a position to demonstrate friendship's compatibility with, and centrality within, Epicureanism's direct egoism."

"So there are three possibilities regarding how something might be valued: something can be only intrinsically valuable, that is, valued for its own sake only (which is how we just defined the final good); something can be only instrumentally valuable, that is, valued only for the sake of something else; or it can be simultaneously instrumentally and intrinsically valued. Of course, for Epicureanism only pleasure can be of the first type since pleasure is our final good and our only final good. All other valuable things, then, must either be only instrumentally valuable or simultaneously instrumentally and intrinsically valuable."

"To demonstrate briefly how something might be simultaneously intrinsically and instrumentally valuable within Epicureanism, consider the following examples. A hammer is only instrumentally valuable: it is valuable only insofar as it contributes to our pleasure by enabling us to build things. But this is the only way

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in which it is valuable: we value hammers purely for the sake of something else, namely, the pleasure we might derive from building things. If I have nothing to build, I will not value the hammer in front of me. Appreciating beauty, on the other hand, seems both intrinsically and instrumentally valuable. The beauty of what I am looking at is valued for its own sake insofar as there is nothing external to it that imbues it with value for me, as in the case of the hammer. I seek out the beautiful foliage on my campus in autumn, for example, just because of what it is: beautiful foliage. But it is also valued instrumentally insofar as taking in beautiful foliage provides me with pleasure. In this way beauty, and other things valuable both intrinsically and instrumentally, are partially constitutive of my pleasure. Hammers are not constitutive of my pleasure in this way. Perhaps building something can be, especially if I am a carpenter, but it is not the hammer itself that partially constitutes my pleasure, for the hammer is purely instrumentally valuable to me."

"In their own ways, then, the unconditionality criterion and the responsiveness account force onto their proponents too thin a conception of friendship, and we therefore need something more. They both neglect two key facts about genuine friends that are relevant to Epicurean doctrine (to which neither Annas nor Mitsis seems sensitive) and which form the basis of my more plausible conception of friendship. Drawing from Stump, and by extension ultimately Aquinas, we can understand these two facts as conditions of genuine friendship. 51 First, there is presumably something in it for the agent whose genuine friend is imposing long stretches of purportedly taxing and unrewarding time on the agent. And whatever that something is connects uniquely both to the intrinsic features that render a given friend unique and irreplaceable to the agent, as well as the unique substantive character of the particular friendship in question. Call this the desire for the friend's company.⁵² Second, both friends who value each other for each

other's sake, including the one in significant need as in Annas's example, are invested in the other's ability to achieve what each views as a good life, and this investment is unique to each specific friend in the same way the desire for one's company is unique. Call this the desire for the friend's good. These two key facts of genuine friends constitute what Stump takes to be two necessary and interconnected conditions for love. These conditions form the basis of a more robust conception of friendship capable of avoiding the problems associated with the unconditionality criterion, and capable of filling out what the responsiveness account fails to capture. But most importantly, each condition illuminates what goes wrong in Annas's and Mitsis's accounts, respectively."

"Moreover, the sense in which an

Epicurean's friend is at once valuable for the friend's own sake and instrumentally valuable is the sense in which the Epicurean's friends and friendships are inseparable from pleasure, for they are constitutive of his pleasure.

To claim otherwise, I think, is to misunderstand friendship. When I value my friend for her sake, I am recognizing her unique conduciveness to my own happiness. I am not valuing her any more than this, nor am I valuing her any less than this. To value her more would be to place her and her good above, or in some other sense independent of, my own good. We might say this also involves other-concern, but this kind of other-concern would mean that I value her unconditionally, and I have already shown both the problems with doing this and the fact that this is not the only way, or even the most plausible way, to value a friend. This, furthermore, would clearly be in violation of my direct egoism as an Epicurean agent. Now, if I were to value my friend less than I am suggesting, I would be valuing her purely, or at least primarily, instrumentally, as merely a source of

pleasure, and this is equally problematic, although it could at least be consistent with my direct egoism. The challenge for me is to show that valuing my friend in the way I am suggesting does not fall short of genuine friendship by allowing too much instrumental valuing."