

Is There A "Paradox of Hedonism"?

Post by "Cassius" of April 4, 2026 at 8:10 AM

Good to have you Lamar.

Couple of points:

1 - This is why I don't care to refer to "hedonism" very often. Epicurean philosophy gets placed into that box with certain other groups, but Epicurus is far more subtle than most, and so "hedonism" gets used as a way to dismiss what Epicurus had to say.

2 - You're basically asking the "friendship" question which is discussed by Torquatus in Cicero's On Ends at the following link. I recommend you read through the full Torquatus section to get a feel for the general approach to all such ethical questions, but friendship in particular starts at 65:

[EpicureanFriends Side-By-Side Torquatus](#)

Torquatus himself doesn't take the most aggressive approach, but the most straightforward is the most logical: There is no need to cower in the face of claims that "altruism" or "putting others first" is a categorical imperative. Nature gives us only feelings of pleasure and pain. We take an interest and desire anything only because it brings us pleasure. Once we value a friend or lover highly enough, it brings us pleasure to see their interests fulfilled even if certain interests of ours suffer. And that goes so far that we will at times even die for a friend.

So i wouldn't trouble myself at ALL thinking that you need to live by "hedonism." The standard that applies here at Epicureanfriends and that Epicurus taught is not "hedonism" at all but the entire core of Epicurean philosophy. The fact that you are concerned about this shows that you haven't explored these issues enough -- which is absolutely fine.

[Quote from LAMAR 44](#)

but doing this inside of relationships seems to make them feel shallow and transactional, at least for me.

Not to psychologize in your personal situation, but most people pick up this idea from society and general culture, and that's the kind of cultural conditioning that Epicurus warns against when it doesn't make sense when compared to Nature. There is no cosmic or transcendent duty of one human being to another human being - bonds of friendship and affection form naturally from community of interest, not because some ideal form exists that compels us in that direction. Examples of this is the discussion of "justice" in the last ten of the [Principal Doctrines](#), and in the discussion of the development of civilization in Lucretius Book 5.

None of us get a deeper understanding of Epicurus without study, and the more we rely on wikipedia or superficial treatments of "hedonism" the more we have to unlearn.

And there's no more complete statement of all this in the ancient record than the full presentation by Torquatus in On Ends.

Glad to have you with us.