

# **Stoic Challenges to Epicurean Philosophy - 3 - Epicureans Are Not Good People Because They Would Not Warn Enemies Against Hidden Hazards**

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

[Cassius Amicus](#)

[March 7 at 7:04pm](#)

**\*\*Stoic Challenges To Epicurean Philosophy\*\*** (3) An example from Cicero, also mentioned by Epictetus. Suppose that an Epicurean sees someone they have reason to view as an enemy about to sit on a woodpile with a poisonous snake. They could easily say nothing, and nobody would ever know that they'd seen the snake and could have warned him. Or they could let him sit on it, be bitten, and die. Again, I've met Epicureans who said they'd be happy to do the latter. On the other hand, for many people that will conflict with their moral preconceptions. They'd think it's wrong. So the question for them would be why, as an Epicurean, should they avoid doing it, if there are no negative consequences for their own pleasure/contentment?

One way around this would be to argue, as some ancient Epicureans did, that we're bound to be troubled by our conscience. However, that's a weak argument because we know now that "conscience" varies tremendously and many people have a negligible sense of distress in relation to things others consider unethical. (The extreme cases would be sociopaths, but many other people lack this sort of feeling or have it only to a slight degree, whereas other personality types are tortured by guilt over slight moral transgressions.) Again, this would constitute a reductio for some individuals, if they couldn't reconcile the argument that virtue is of value only as a means to "pleasure" with their moral intuition that allowing someone to die is wrong.

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**[Cassius Amicus](#) (1)** "we know now that "conscience" varies tremendously and many people have a negligible sense of distress in relation to things others consider unethical." Does this observation not gut the entire stoic construct that proper morality is an innate gift of the gods/divine fire?

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**[Cassius Amicus](#) (2)** Another major issue I have with this question is the very dialectical / idealist throwing around of words like "enemy." Is this person my mortal enemy who has sworn to kill every last member of my house? Then of course, snake, do your job! Is this person someone who I met when I was a child and pulled my hair and I have never liked for twenty years because he made me mad then, even though we are very similar in many ways? Then of course if I were fully evaluating the context and the future pain / pleasure calculation for me, I would choose to tell him about the snake and reap the reward of potentially converting an enemy to a friend. But the huge spectrum of issues that are involved in any actual situation make it impossible to derive a "one size fits all" answer to any question about what one does with an "enemy" (or a "friend," for that matter) in any particular situation.

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**[Hiram Crespo](#)** I do not think this question applies ONLY to Epicureans. Catholic priests have gotten away with predatory behavior for generations, thinking they would not be found. And they are VERY un-Epicurean, their religion is more a cult of suffering than of pleasure.

Also, sociopaths and narcissists tend to make it very difficult to relate to and associate with, and most of us tend to stay away from people (As per PD 39) who exhibit these dysfunctions, who betray friends, etc.

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