

Has the meaning of friendship changed since the times of Epicurus

Post by “waterholic” of February 1, 2023 at 1:03 PM

I am reading Living for Pleasure by Emily Austin. A lot of thought has gone into structuring Epicurean ideas into a more comprehensible format. So far a very rewarding experience.

Two somewhat disturbing observations though:

1. On friendship: the kind of tranquility or safety in friendship may actually no longer exist at least in the Western society. I had the fortune to live in a more traditional society with under-developed institutions. Friendship there was necessary, all-consuming and omnipotent. You want to find a good dentist, parking spot, decent job, a cemetery plot, resolution to a business conflict, even a legal dispute - you simply need friends. And your friends know this. This means your daily routine is to collect and dish out favours.

I have also lived in (North) Western Europe for several decades. Institutions have by now replaced the need for friends: from insurance to therapy, from life coaching to moving houses - everything is regimented, itemised and priced to perfection. "Friends" are reserved for idle chitchat on inoffensive topics with a very clear understanding that anything else is outside "the scope".

The question is, is it even possible to have a living experience of friendship in the Epicurean sense these days?

2. On virtue: the only other discontent I have about the book is the distinct impression that it is written as a "justification of Epicurus" for stoics. The detailed analysis why living an Epicurean lifestyle is not selfish and can be virtuous at times misses the point, sounding nearly apologetic.