

Has the meaning of friendship changed since the times of Epicurus

Post by “Pacatus” of May 22, 2023 at 6:19 PM

Thinking about this, it struck me that – like ripples spreading out on a pond – there might be a notion beyond a core circle of like-minded friends, but before the idea of community or society (a community of communities?) sustained by social contracts of mutual benefit.

I’ll call it ***neighborliness***.

We are not close friends with our neighbors in our apartment building. We have seldom shared meals or entertainments. We seldom know their religion, if any (though our neighbors across the hall are Hindu) – or their personal or social philosophies. But we respect one another’s presence: e.g., keeping the noise volume down – whilst, at the same time, tolerating the running feet of our upstairs neighbors’ small children; as well as the occasional Saturday night party (which we also had in our youth). We help one another with doors, and carrying garbage bags to the dumpster.

We greet one another. We are a bit like Rilke’s ***“solitudes that border and greet and protect one another.”***

Our closest neighbor was a young woman who lived in the apartment next to ours for a few years. She is a staff sergeant in the Army (who relocated to Washington, D.C. – where she now has some classified position). Once she was locked out of her apartment, and spent some hours with us, talking and sipping wine, while waiting for the locksmith. She helped us move some heavy items (we’re in our 70s and I have a bad back; she was incredibly physically fit: one of her passions). My wife looked after her cats when she had to go on some training missions. She was always on call if we needed anything. She still texts my wife once in awhile, just to keep touch.

Were we friends, in Epicurus’ sense? Not like our few close friends; not like Epicurus’ circle as I understand it.

But we were good neighbors for one another. ***“Solitudes that border and greet and protect one another.”*** I have known others.