

# Gleaning Information About Epicurean Friendship From Cicero's "On Friendship"

Post by "Cassius" of February 2, 2025 at 7:21 AM

I don't have time for much more than to note that there seems to be some good material in Cicero's "[Amicitia](#)" that probably refers to Epicurean views.

Most of it is criticism, from which we can infer the positive from what he views as negative, but I suspect a lot of straight-up praise of friendship is probably the kind of things the Epicureans would have embraced too.

Just a few quotes:

## Quote

Among such good men as there really are, friendship has more advantages than I can easily name. In the first place, as Ennius says: —

- *"How can life be worth living, if devoid*
- *Of the calm trust reposed by friend in friend?*
- *What sweeter joy than in the kindred soul,*
- *Whose converse differs not from self-communion?"*

How could you have full enjoyment of prosperity, unless with one whose pleasure in it was equal to your own? Nor would it be easy to bear adversity, unless with the sympathy of one on whom it rested more heavily than on your own soul. Then, too, other objects of desire are, in general, adapted, each to some specific purpose, — wealth, that you may use it; power, that you may receive the homage of those around you; posts of honor, that you may obtain reputation; sensual gratification, that you may live in pleasure; health, that you may be free from pain, and may have full exercise of your bodily powers and faculties. But friendship combines the largest number of utilities. Wherever you turn, it is at hand. No place shuts it out. It is never unseasonable, never annoying. Thus, as the proverb says, "You cannot put water or fire to more uses than friendship serves."

Apparent criticism of Epicureanism:

## Quote

For as we are beneficent and generous, not in order to exact kindnesses in return (for we do not put our kind offices to interest), but are by nature inclined to be generous, so, in my opinion, friendship is not to be sought for its wages, but because its revenue consists entirely in the love which it implies. Those, however, who, after the manner of beasts, refer everything to pleasure, I think very differently. Nor is it wonderful that they do; for men who have degraded all their thoughts to so mean and contemptible an end can rise to the contemplation of nothing lofty, nothing magnificent and divine. We may, therefore, leave them out of this discussion. But let us have it well understood that the feeling of love and the endearments of mutual affection spring from nature, in case there is a well-established assurance of moral worth in the person thus loved. Those who desire to become friends approach each other, and enter into relation with each other, that each may enjoy the society and the character of him whom he has begun to love; and they are equal in love, and on either side are more inclined to bestow obligations than to claim a return, so that in this matter there is an honorable rivalry between them. Thus will the greatest benefits be derived from friendship, and it will have a more solid and genuine foundation as tracing its origin to nature than if it proceeded from human weakness. For if it were utility that cemented friendships, an altered aspect of utility would dissolve them.

#### Quote

Now those who maintain that friendships are formed from motives of utility annul, as it seems to me, the most endearing bond of friendship; for it is not so much benefit obtained through a friend as it is the very love of the friend that gives delight. What comes from a friend confers pleasure, only in case it bears tokens of his interest in us; and so far is it from the truth that friendships are cultivated from a sense of need, that those fully endowed with wealth and resources, especially with virtue, which is the surest safeguard, and thus in no need of friends, are the very persons who are the most generous and munificent. Indeed, I hardly know whether it may not be desirable that our friends should never have need of our services. Yet in the case of Scipio and myself, what room would there have been for the active exercise of my zeal in his behalf, had he never needed my counsel or help at home or in the field? In this instance, however, the service came after the friendship, not the friendship after the service.

#### Quote

15. If these things are so, men who are given up to pleasure are not to be listened to when they express their opinions about friendship, of which they can have no knowledge either by experience or by reflection. For, by the faith of gods and men, who is there that would be willing to have a super-abundance of all objects of desire and to live in the utmost fulness of wealth and what wealth can bring, on condition of neither loving any one nor being loved by any one? This, indeed, is the life of tyrants, in which there is no good faith, no affection, no fixed confidence in kindly feeling, perpetual suspicion and anxiety, and no room for friendship; for who can love either him whom he fears, or him by whom he thinks that he is feared? Yet they receive the show of homage, but only while the occasion for it lasts.

#### Quote

23. The more blameworthy are they who are so very careless in a matter of so essential importance. Indeed, among things appertaining to human life, it is friendship alone that has the unanimous voice of all men as to its capacity of service. By many even virtue is scorned, and is said to be a mere matter of display and ostentation. Many despise wealth, and, contented with little, take pleasure in slender diet and inexpensive living. Though some are inflamed with desire for office, many there are who hold it in so low esteem that they can imagine nothing more inane or worthless. Other things, too, which seem to some admirable, very many regard as of no value. But all have the same feeling as to friendship, — alike those who devote themselves to the public service, those who take delight in learning and philosophy, those who manage their own affairs in a quiet way, and, lastly, those who are wholly given up to sensual pleasure. They all agree that without friendship life cannot be, if one only means to live in some form or measure respectably.