

Friendship discussion (moved from 20th conversation)

Post by "Kalosyni" of April 29, 2025 at 9:24 AM

Lots of interesting ideas coming up ([AxA](#) [Don](#) [Godfrey](#) [Cassius](#) and so copied over what was said in that conversation so that we can continue as usual with further discussion (will likely rename the thread at some point).

Here are the posts - copied from that conversation:

Kalosyni wrote:

"...it occurred to me that **Vatican Saying 28** is relevant to what [AxA](#) brought up last night.

"We must not approve either those who are always ready for friendship, or those who hang back, but for friendship's sake we must run risks." - Bailey translation

and

"Those who grasp after friendship and those who shrink from it are not worthy of approval; on the other hand, it is necessary to risk some pleasure for the pleasures of friendship." - Saint Andre translation

...and also VS 23 - "Every friendship is worth choosing for its own sake, though it takes its origin from the benefits." - Inwood / Gerson translation

Axa wrote:

I believe the biggest "gap" in the Epicurean system is the practical details of how to build and maintain our circles of friends. There's enough there in the philosophy to study for the rest of our lives, no hurry, and enjoy it along the way. But there seems to be a little more "urgency" in getting at least our first few good friendships started, and beyond these few words of advice it seems to be a matter of trial and error.

Quote



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[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Thank you to all who attended last night, and it occurred to me that **Vatican Saying 28** is relevant to what [AxA](#) brought up last night.

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Kalosyni wrote:

Quote



[Quote from AxA](#)

I believe the biggest "gap" in the Epicurean system is the practical details of how to build and maintain our circles of friends.

They didn't have all the modern distractions that we do, and potentially much more commonality (less diverse interests and lifestyles)...so perhaps friendship was easier back then.

Godfrey wrote:

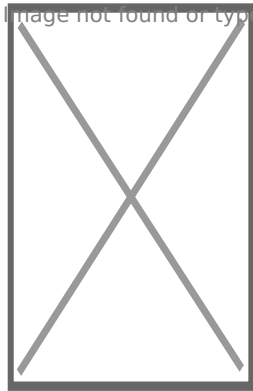
Also they were living in a much smaller area than we are, and there were fewer philosophies to explore in that area. So it would have been much easier to meet with and get to know fellow Epicureans.

Don wrote:

I always feel the need in these threads to bring up that Epicurus didn't use the words "friendship/friend." His usual term was φιλιᾶ (philia) which can, of course, be translated into

English as "friendship." But both "friendship/friends" and φιλία/φίλοι have their own semantic baggage they carry with them that often goes unquestioned.

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Aristotelian Philia Modern Friendship

What are we to make of a treatise on moral philosophy so much of which appears to be a discussion of friendship? What does friendship have to do with...

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This extensive article delves deep into what Aristotle wrote about φιλία, its various kinds, and the implications of it. I don't expect anyone to read every word, but I think (skimming through as I did myself) it lays out the ideas that Epicurus would have been familiar with in using his native language.

I found this excerpt near the beginning of the paper interesting enough to continue reading through it:

Quote

□

Quote

The range of relationships Aristotle examines in books 8 and 9 of the Nicomachean Ethics is extraordinary. He considers philia necessary to everyone, rich and poor, young and old, human and animal. Philia unites families and species, and holds political parties, social and religious organizations, and even whole cities together. It joins people who are equal in age or in social, financial, intellectual, or moral standing as well as others whose relationships are hierarchical—parents and children, men and women, rulers and ruled, humans and gods.¹⁰ It connects the ignorant to the wise and the beautiful to the ugly. Erotic love is one of its kinds. It arises among travellers, soldiers, and members of a tribe. It governs the relations between host and guest and,

perhaps most surprisingly, between buyer and seller. Could this immense variety of relationships correspond to friendship, which, despite its own complexities, we tend to distinguish sharply from the ties that bind family members, lovers, and commercial agents to one another today? And what, if anything, holds these seemingly disparate bonds together?

This hit me that when Epicurus uses φιλία, he may very well have a much broader concept in mind than when we use "friend."

I found myself considering this about fragment 266:

266. From the perspective of the infinite time that has passed, nothing novel occurs in the universe. οὐδὲν ξένον ἐν τῷ παντὶ ἀποτελεῖται παρὰ τὸν ἤδη γεγενημένον χρόνον ἄπειρον.

ξένος there is translated as "novel," but that's the word meaning "strange, foreign, unusual;" but is also the basis of ξένια which is the obligation to greet strangers with hospitality. So I would take a more thought-provoking translation of 266 as:

Nothing strange or foreign happens in the universe from the perspective of infinite time.

That change from "novel" to "strange" or "foreign" makes that fragment more intriguing to me. The source of U266 per Attalus' site is:

Pseudo-Plutarch, *Miscellanies*, Fragment 8 from Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*, 1.8.24B, *Greek Doxography*, [p. 581, 19 Diels.]: Epicurus asserts that nothing new happens in the universe when compared to the infinite time already passed.

I realize I've strayed away from the discussion of friendship. Mea culpa. My overall point is that we sometimes say that Epicurus insisted on using the basic meaning of words. I feel it's always important to remember that he used *Greek* words and not English words.

PS. I honestly don't do this to be difficult. I want us to question ANY translation, especially mine.

Kalosyni wrote:

Thank you [Don](#) 👍👍😊

AxA wrote:

Quote



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[Quote from Don](#)

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Good point. This seems to be always be a hazard when working with translations. The philosophy encourages applying "common sense" and using "basic meanings" of words, but that can lead to projecting back an imaginary "English Epicurus" when we apply all the connotations of English translation words back to the original philosophy. "Edward Curris" lol

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Quote



[Quote from AxA](#)

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I love the last line! Mr. Curris' philosophy.

But your overall point is an excellent one.

Just for the record, I don't think you have to learn Greek to be a student of Mr. Curris (couldn't resist). But it is crucial not to be fixated on one English translation any more than Christians should be focused on the King James version of the Bible.

Cassius wrote:

Quote



[Quote from AxA](#)

but that can lead to projecting back an imaginary "English Epicurus" when we apply all the connotations of English translation words back to the original philosophy.

I'll throw in my agreement on this as well. It's very easy to see something that we set out to look for. It's much harder to erase prejudices and accept things without an overlay. As Lucretius asked, the gods themselves could not have formed the universe without a pattern. That doesn't mean that knowledge is impossible, but it does mean that if insist on seeing things our way then there's no possibility of being confident of what Epicurus himself was saying.

Godfrey wrote:

Thanks [Don](#) for posting that article, I found it thought provoking. One thing (among many) that stands out is the idea of friendship as "good will", which perhaps equates to a general attitude of friendliness. I gather that this is something that Epicurus practiced, and what contributed to his being liked even by his rivals. I also find that my days have much pleasure when I move through them with this general attitude.

What immediately comes to mind is VS52: *Friendship dances around the world, announcing to each of us that we must awaken to happiness.*

Don wrote:

We'll put, [Godfrey](#) .

FYI... Checking VS52

ἡ φιλία περιχορεύει τὴν οἰκουμένην κηρύττουσα δὴ πᾶσιν ἡμῖν ἐγείρεσθαι ἐπὶ τὸν μακαρισμόν.

Yep, *philia* is the word used there.

When that one comes up, I always like to point out that περιχορεύει literally means to dance in circles or dance around in a chorus (think chorus as in chorus in a Greek drama).

Godfrey wrote:



Don wrote:

Thread

Vatican Saying 52 - Happiness or Blessedness?

(Re-quoted Kalosyni)

[Don](#) - can you help out with translation of this one (my eyes go cross-eyed when I look at Greek letters). This translation is from Peter Saint Andre. (Do we already have this someplace else?)

Friendship dances around the world,	ἡ φιλία περιχορεύει τὴν οἰκουμένην
52. announcing to each of us that we must	κηρύττουσα δὴ πᾶσιν ἡμῖν ἐγείρεσθαι
awaken to happiness.	ἐπὶ τὸν μακαρισμόν.

Should the last word be translated as "blessedness"?



Kalosyni

May 6, 2023

(End re-quote)

[Kalosyni](#) in this thread pointed out a good aspect of this that eluded me this time.

That last word μακαρισμόν is a form of the word used to describe the blessed, happy existence of the gods.

Consider VS17 that starts "It is not the young man who is *most happy*... μακαριστὸς (ie, most blessed, most blessedly happy)

Post by "Pacatus" of April 29, 2025 at 1:07 PM

From [Don](#): "I always feel the need in these threads to bring up that Epicurus didn't use the words "friendship/friend." His usual term was φιλία (philia) which can, of course, be translated into English as "friendship." But both "friendship/friends" and φιλία/φίλοι have their own semantic baggage they carry with them that often goes unquestioned." And: "I don't expect

anyone to read every word ...”

Well, now that has become my reading assignment for the day ... 😎

Post by “Pacatus” of April 29, 2025 at 3:21 PM

Just as an aside (tearing myself briefly from my reading assignment – as my hypertexting brain asserts itself 😞).

[AxA](#) said: “The philosophy encourages applying “common sense” and using “basic meanings” of words, but that can lead to projecting back an imaginary “English Epicurus” when we apply all the connotations of English translation words back to the original philosophy. “Edward Curris” lol.” 👍👍👍 on that.

I just want to add that I don’t think that even the plainest of plain speech can be reduced to some *one-meaning-for-one-word-for-all-cases* – in any non-artificial language at least. Or even for a phrase that includes, say, adjectival or adverbial modifiers and that may recur in varying contexts. All speech (and writing) is semantically dependent on context, which is the basis for Wittgenstein’s dictum: “Don’t look for the meaning, look for the use.”

And, as [AxA](#) points out, that can be even more *tricksy* in translation, where the context is not immediate, but needs itself to be searched out – as well as carrying the risk of “projecting back an imaginary ‘English Epicurus’.”

Post by “Pacatus” of April 29, 2025 at 6:01 PM

From page 219 of the Nehamas essay: “Although relationships based on benefit or pleasure are not ideal, they would still be friendships as long as they, too, involved mutual affection and, more important, wishing good things for each other’s own sake: that seems the least we should ask of them.”

For Aristotle, only friendship based on mutual appreciation of virtue is perfect or ideal. From page 220: “Aristotle’s conclusion is that only friendship that involves reciprocated love based on the virtues of another is a friendship in the proper sense of the term. He is half-tempted to say that no other relationship should even be called friendship, but, as a concession to ordinary usage, and by way of uncovering what is right about that usage, he concedes that any other

relation may be counted as a friendship, to a greater or lesser degree, to the extent that it resembles this ideal.”

It seems to me that Epicurus would accept friendship based on mutual appreciation of virtue – but *not* as the “only friendship ... in the proper sense of the term.” And, after all, such appreciation is itself surely a source of pleasure.

And there is, for example, VS23: “Every friendship is worth choosing for its own sake, though it takes its origin from the benefits.”

Post by “Pacatus” of April 29, 2025 at 6:02 PM

A main theme of Nehamas’ essay is that *φιλία* for the ancient Greeks had a public dimension that modern notions of friendship do not. Epicurus would surely have been aware of that and, although he might not have rejected it out of hand, may have treated his social-compact view of “natural justice” as more applicable to the public sphere ... ? [That’s intended as a question.]