

Episode One Hundred Nine - The Epicurean View of Friendship

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Welcome to Episode One Hundred Nine of Lucretius Today.

This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

I am your host Cassius, and together with our panelists from the EpicureanFriends.com forum, we'll walk you through the six books of Lucretius' poem, and we'll discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. We encourage you to study Epicurus for yourself, and we suggest the best place to start is the book "Epicurus and His Philosophy" by Canadian professor Norman DeWitt.

If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

At this point in our podcast we have completed our first line-by-line review of the poem, and we have turned to the presentation of Epicurean ethics found in Cicero's On Ends. We have now completed a long but important section stressing the importance of the Epicurean emphasis on Epistemology and Natural Science, and today we turn to section 65 on Friendship, which will probably take us several sessions to complete.

Now let's join Martin reading today's text:

[65] XX. One topic remains, which is of prime importance for this discussion, that relating to friendship, which you declare will cease to exist, if pleasure be the supreme good, yet Epicurus makes this declaration concerning it, that of all the aids to happiness procured for us by wisdom, none is greater than friendship, none more fruitful, none more delightful. Nor in fact did he sanction this view by his language alone, but much more by his life and actions and character. And the greatness of friendship is made evident by the imaginary stories of the ancients, in which, numerous and diversified as they are, and reaching back to extreme antiquity, scarce three pairs of friends are mentioned, so that beginning with Theseus you end with Orestes. But in truth within the limits of a single school, and that restricted in numbers, what great flocks of friends did Epicurus secure, and how great was that harmony of affection wherein they all agreed! And his example is followed by the Epicureans in our day also. But let us return to our theme; there is no need to speak of persons.

[66] I see then that friendship has been discussed by our school in three ways. Some, denying that the pleasures which affect our friends are in themselves as desirable to us as those we desire for ourselves, a view which certain persons think shakes the foundation of friendship, still defend their position, and in my opinion easily escape from their difficulties. For they affirm that friendship, like the virtues of which we spoke already, cannot be dissociated from pleasure. Now since isolation and a life without friends abound in treacheries and alarms, reason herself advises us to procure friendships, by the acquisition of which the spirit is strengthened, and cannot then be severed from the hope of achieving pleasures.

[67] And as enmity, spitefulness, scorn, are opposed to pleasures, so friendships are not only the truest promoters, but are actually efficient causes of pleasures, as well to a man's friends as to himself; and friends not only have the immediate enjoyment of these pleasures but are elate with hope as regards future and later times. Now because we can by no means apart from friendship preserve the agreeableness of life strong and unbroken, nor further can we maintain friendship itself unless we esteem our friends in the same degree as ourselves; on that account this principle is acted on in friendship, and so friendship is linked with pleasure. Truly we both rejoice at the joy of our friends as much as at our own joy, and we are equally pained by their vexations.