

Episode One Hundred Ten - The Epicurean View of Friendship (Part 2)

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Welcome to Episode One Hundred Ten 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. Today we complete the section on Friendship.

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

[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.

[68] Therefore the wise man will entertain the same feeling for his friend as for himself, and the very same efforts which he would undergo to procure his own pleasure, these he will undergo to procure that of his friend. And all that we said of the virtues to shew how they always have their root in pleasures, must be said over about friendship. For it was nobly declared by Epicurus, almost in these words: "It is one and the same feeling which strengthens the mind against the fear of eternal or lasting evil, and which clearly sees that in this actual span of life the protection afforded by friendship is the most powerful of all."

[69] There are however certain Epicureans who are somewhat more nervous in facing the reproaches of your school, but are still shrewd enough ; these are afraid that if we suppose friendship to be desirable with a view to our own pleasure, friendship may appear to be altogether maimed, as it were. So they say that while the earliest meetings and associations and tendencies towards the establishment of familiarity do arise on account of pleasure, yet when experience has gradually produced intimacy, then affection ripens to such a degree that though no interest be served by the friendship, yet friends are loved in themselves and for their own sake. Again, if by familiarity we get to love localities, shrines, cities, the exercise ground, the park, dogs, horses, and exhibitions either of gymnastics or of combats with beasts, how much more easily and properly may this come about when our familiarity is with human beings?

[70] Men are found to say that there is a certain treaty of alliance which binds wise men not to esteem their friends less than they do themselves. Such alliance we not only understand to be possible, but often see it realized, and it is plain that nothing can be found more conducive to pleasantness of life than union of this kind. From all these different views we may conclude that not only are the principles of friendship left unconstrained, if the supreme good be made to reside in pleasure, but that without this view it is entirely impossible to discover a basis for friendship.