

# Episode 214 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 21 - Cicero Argues For An Ideal View of Friendship and Happiness Which Epicureans Reject

Post by "Cassius" of February 6, 2024 at 5:06 AM

Welcome to Episode 214 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the most complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world. Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at [EpicureanFriends.com](http://EpicureanFriends.com), where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

This week we continue our discussion of Book Two of Cicero's On Ends, which is largely devoted Cicero's attack on Epicurean Philosophy. Going through this book gives us the opportunity to review those attacks, take them apart, and respond to them as an ancient Epicurean might have done, and much more fully than Cicero allowed Torquatus, his Epicurean spokesman, to do.

Follow along with us here: [Cicero's On Ends - Complete Reid Edition](#). Check any typos or other questions against the original PDF which can be found [here](#).

This week we move further into Section XXV:

REID EDITION

XXV. You, Torquatus, would do all this; for there is, I think, no action meriting the highest approbation, which I believe you likely to omit through fear either of death or of pain. But the question is not what consists with your disposition, but what consists with your philosophy. The principles which you maintain, the maxims which you have been taught and accept are utterly subversive of friendship, even though Epicurus should laud it to the skies, as indeed he does. Oh, but he himself cultivated friendships. Pray, who denies that he was not only a good man, but a kindly and a gentle man? In these discussions the point at issue concerns his ability, and not his character. Let us leave such aberrations to the light-minded Greeks, who persecute with their abuse those with whom they disagree about the truth. But whatever his kindness in supporting his friends, yet if what you say of him is true (for I make no confident statements) he was deficient in penetration. But he won the assent of many. Perhaps deservedly too, but the evidence of the crowd is not of the highest importance; since in every art or pursuit, or in any kind of knowledge whatever, the highest excellence is always very scarce. And to my mind, the fact that Epicurus was himself a good man and that many Epicureans have been and many are to-day true in their friendships and strong and serious in the conduct of their whole life, not

governing their plans by pleasure but by duty,—this fact makes the power of morality seem greater and that of pleasure less. Some men indeed so live that their language is refuted by their life. And while the rest of men are supposed to be better in their words than in their deeds, these men's deeds seem to me better than their words.

XXVI. But this, I allow, is nothing to the purpose; let us look into your assertions about friendship. One of these I thought I recognized as a saying of Epicurus himself, that friendship cannot be divorced from pleasure, and deserves to be cultivated on that account, because our lives cannot be secure or free from apprehension without it, and so cannot be agreeable either. To such arguments I have made a sufficient answer. You have quoted another and more cultured maxim of the modern school, to which he himself never gave utterance, so far as I know, namely that the friend is desired with a view to advantage in the first instance, but that when familiarity has been established, then he is loved for his own sake, even if the expectation of pleasure be disregarded. Although this utterance may be criticized in many ways, I still welcome the concession they make; since it is enough for my purposes, though not for theirs. For they say that right action is sometimes possible without hope of or seeking after pleasure.

Others also, as you insisted, maintain that wise men enter into a sort of league with each other, binding them to entertain for their friends the very same feelings that they entertain for themselves; that such a league is not only possible but has often been made, and is of especial importance for the attainment of pleasures. If they have found it possible to establish this league, let them also establish another, namely to feel regard for equity, temperance, and all the virtues from pure love of them apart from interest. Or if we mean to cultivate friendships with an eye to gains and benefits and advantages, if there is to be no feeling of affection which renders friendship inherently from its own nature and its own power, through and for itself desirable, can there really be any: doubt that we shall prefer our estates and our house-rents to our friends?

At this point you may quote once more what Epicurus said in most excellent language on the merits of friendship. I am not inquiring what he says, but what it is open to him to say consistently with his own system and doctrines. Friendship has ever been sought for the sake of advantage. Do you imagine then that Triarius here can bring you more advantage than the granaries at Puteoli would if they belonged to you? Bring together all the points common in your school: the protection friends afford. Enough protection is already afforded you by yourself, by the laws, by ordinary friendships; already it will not be possible to treat you with neglect, while you will find it easy to escape from unpopularity and dislike; since it is with reference to such things that Epicurus lays down his maxims. And, apart from this, with such revenues at your command for the display of generosity, you will defend and fortify yourself excellently by means of the goodwill of many, without this friendship of the Pyladean order. But for a friend to share jest and earnest, as the saying is, your secrets, all your hidden thoughts? You may best of all keep them to yourself, next you may share them with a friend of the ordinary stamp. But allowing all these privileges to be far from odious, what are they compared with the advantages of such great wealth? You see then that if you gauge friendship by

disinterested affection there is nothing more excellent, but if by profit, that the closest intimacies are less valuable than the returns from productive property. You ought to love me myself, and not my possessions, if we are to be true friends.

XXVII. But we dwell too long upon very simple matters. When we have once concluded and demonstrated that if everything is judged by the standard of pleasure, no room is left for either virtues or friendships, there is nothing besides on which we need greatly insist. And yet, lest it should be thought that any passage is left without reply, I will now also say a few words in answer to the remainder of your speech. Well then, whereas the whole importance of philosophy lies in its bearing on happiness, and it is from a desire for happiness alone that men have devoted themselves to this pursuit, and whereas some place happiness in one thing, some in another, while you place it in pleasure, and similarly on the other side all wretchedness you place in pain, let us first examine the nature of happiness as you conceive it.

Now you will grant me this, I suppose, that happiness, if only it exists at all, ought to lie entirely within the wise man's own control. For if the life of happiness may cease to be so, then it cannot be really happy. Who indeed has any faith that a thing which is perishable and fleeting will in his own case always continue solid and strong? But he who feels no confidence in the permanence of the blessings he possesses, must needs apprehend that he will some time or other be wretched, if he loses them. Now no one can be happy while in alarm about his most important possessions; no one then can possibly be happy. For happiness is usually spoken of not with reference to some period of time, but to permanence, nor do we talk of the life of happiness at all, unless that life be rounded off and complete, nor can a man be happy at one time, and wretched at another; since any man who judges that he can become wretched will never be happy. For when happiness has been once entered on, it is as durable as wisdom herself, who is the creator of the life of happiness, nor does it await the last days of life, as Herodotus writes that Solon enjoined upon Croesus. But I shall be reminded (as you said yourself) that Epicurus will not admit that continuance of time contributes anything to happiness, or that less pleasure is realized in a short period of time than if the pleasure were eternal. These statements are most inconsistent ; for while he places his supreme good in pleasure, he refuses to allow that pleasure can reach a greater height in a life of boundless extent, than in one limited and moderate in length. He who places good entirely in virtue can say that happiness is consummated by the consummation of virtue, since he denies that time brings additions to his supreme good; but when a man supposes that happiness is caused by pleasure, how are his doctrines to be reconciled, if he means to affirm that pleasure is not heightened by duration? In that case, neither is pain. Or, though all the most enduring pains are also the most wretched, does length of time not render pleasure more enviable? What reason then has Epicurus for calling a god, as he does, both happy and eternal? If you take away his eternity, Jupiter will be not a whit happier than Epicurus, since both of them are in the enjoyment of the supreme good, which is pleasure. Oh, but our philosopher is subject to pain as well. Yes, but he sets it at nought; for he says that, if he were being roasted, he would call out how sweet this is! In what respect then is he inferior to the god, if not in respect of eternity? And what good does eternity bring but the highest form of pleasure, and that prolonged for

ever? What boots it then to use high sounding language unless your language be consistent ? On bodily pleasure (I will add mental, if you like, on the understanding that it also springs, as you believe, from the body) depends the life of happiness. Well, who can guarantee the wise man that this pleasure will be permanent? For the circumstances that give rise to pleasures are not within the control of the wise man, since your happiness is not dependent on wisdom herself, but on the objects which wisdom procures with a view to pleasure. Now all such objects are external to us, and what is external is in the power of chance. Thus fortune becomes lady paramount over happiness, though Epicurus says she to a small extent only crosses the path of the wise man.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/58679533>