

"Faith" And Confidence In Epicurean Philosophy

Post by "Cassius" of August 27, 2025 at 10:09 AM

I don't recall that we've discussed in depth the word "faith" especially since it has a disreputable connotation of "belief without evidence." However we see "confidence" discussed regularly, and at least in the English/Latin the root of the word implies a use of a variation of "faith" that is indeed based on strong evidence. We don't say that we have "faith" when we get on an airplane, we say we have "confidence," and that would seem to be a fully legitimate use of such a term.

I want to build out a forum structure which addresses "Epicurean virtues" so this thread will start that discussion as to "Faith" (used appropriately) or "Confidence," and that will require looking for relevant texts. Here's part of what DeWitt has to say about this. I wonder if each of these cites he makes isn't better translated as "confidence," but on the other hand that doesn't make the issue go away that confidence means "with faith" - so as part of the answer to skepticism there must be legitimate uses of "faith" just as with "gods" and "virtue."

Quote

While this conjunction of faith in doctrine with faith in the leader introduces a dynamic emotional element, it still falls short of making a complete picture. The disciple cannot live to himself. Epicurus thought of his oracular teachings as "beneficial for all men," and he planned coherence for all the local brotherhoods in which his disciples were enrolled. All members depended upon one another for what St. Paul referred to as Peace and Safety. This means that the Epicurean must not only feel faith in doctrine and leader but also in friends and friendship. The authority for this is Vatican Saying 34, which exhibits a play upon words that is characteristic of the master's style: "We do not so much have need of help from friends in time of need as faith in help in time of need." [omit gratuitous Christianity reference]

There is a difference, however; Epicurus was more restrained and stopped short of fanatical trust in his creed. Friendship was subject to planning and began with advantage even if developing into affection and faith. Authorized Doctrine 40: "All those who have best succeeded in building up the ability to feel secure from the attacks of those around them have lived the happiest lives with one another, as having the firmest faith." Thus even faith is in part the result of planning.

Epicurus was aware nevertheless of the saving function of faith. He assures his disciples that his account of the soul will result in "the firmest faith,"⁸³⁴ and the sole objective of the study of celestial phenomena is to acquire "tranquility and a firm faith."⁸³⁵ His account of the soul would result in emancipating the disciple from the fear of

death, and his account of celestial phenomena on a physical basis would spare men the fear of Plato's astral divinities.⁸³⁶The supreme function of faith was to banish fears and uncertainties from life.