

Article - Lucretius on the Nature of Parental Love - McConnell

Post by "Cassius" of August 29, 2019 at 8:33 AM

I don't have time right now for anything than just to mark this as a placeholder. If the first paragraph is representative, the author is going to eventually defend Epicurus on parental love, but only after starting out by accepting the representations of a gang of anti-Epicureans. How counterproductive and tiring it is to approach Epicurus in this manner!!

<https://t.co/VmfXelzKEt?amp=1>

Epicurus denies that human parental love is natural.¹ In accordance with his hedonist ethics, he maintains that parental love is a result of the rational weighing of the advantages (pleasures) and disadvantages (pains) that might arise from loving one's child;² parental love is a matter of choice. Hostile sources promote the view that the Epicurean position is obviously unconvincing and should be dismissed out of hand. Thus, Plutarch accuses the Epicureans: 'And do you not deny the natural bonding of parents to their children, which is apparent to everyone?' (τὸ δὲ φύσει περιέχεσθαι τὰ τεκόντα τῶν γεννωμένων οὐχὶ πᾶσι φαινόμενον ἀναιρεῖτε; *Adv. Col.* 1123A); Cicero, in both his speeches (*Dom.* 97–8; *Cael.* 79–80; *S. Rosc.* 40–1, 52–5, 62–3) and his philosophical works (*Leg.* 1.42–3; *Fin.* 1.23, 3.57, 3.62–8, 4.17, 5.65, 5.68–9, 5.81–4; *Tusc.* 5.5; *Off.* 1.12, 1.54), argues that the naturalness of parental love is clear to all reasonable people, and he expects wholehearted agreement from his Roman audience (indeed, drawing on his own experience, his Epicurean friend Atticus apparently agreed with him that Epicurus was wrong on this particular issue; *Att.* 7.2.4);³ and Epictetus too offers a sustained critique of Epicurus' views on parental love (*Arr. Epict. Diss.* 1.23).⁴ However, the scattered evidence in Lucretius' *De rerum natura* suggests that Epicurean views on parental love were both nuanced and sophisticated. In this paper I gather this evidence and seek to reconstruct the details of Lucretius' treatment of parental love.

In the first section I position parental love in the context of Epicurus' ethical system and show that it fits closely with his utilitarian account of friendship. In the

¹ Demetrius of Laconia, *PHerc* 1012, cols. LXVI–LXVIII Puglia; Cic. *Att.* 7.2.4; Arr. *Epict. Diss.* 1.23; Plut. *De amore prolis* 495A–C, *Adv. Col.* 1123A; Lactant. *Div. Inst.* 3.17.5. With the exception of Demetrius of Laconia, the evidence is presented in 525–9 Usener.

² Plutarch reports that, according to Epicurus, it is for a return that a father loves his son, a mother her child, and children their parents (μισθοῦ γὰρ ἀνθρώπων τίς ἀνθρώπων φιλεῖ; καίτοι κατ' Ἐπίκουρον ὁ πατήρ τὸν υἱόν, ἡ μήτηρ τὸ τέκνον, οἱ παῖδες τοὺς τεκόντας, *De amore prolis* 495A).

³ On Cicero's treatment of parental love, see in particular Treggiari (2005) 9–36.

⁴ This discourse can be seen as a supplement to 1.11, in which Epictetus presents in detail his own views on the issue. Cf. also 2.20, 3.22.67–72, and 3.24.58–118.