

VS23 - Epicurus Reader Version

Post by "Cassius" of November 2, 2019 at 3:02 AM

not harm [us], but sharply rejecting the harmful ones.

23. Every friendship is worth choosing²² for its own sake, though it takes its origin from the benefits [it confers on us].

24. Dreams have neither a divine nature

Footnote 22 says:

22. This is an emendation for the mss' 'a virtue'; we regard the emendation as virtually certain, though the transmitted text has been defended.

Post by "Cassius" of November 2, 2019 at 3:05 AM

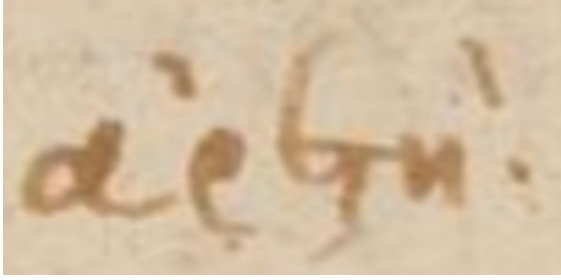
These are notes that Elli added in a discussion of Michele Pinto's article on Friendship:

I have only one observation to add that I think is important. The ES XXIII.(23) has not been translated correctly in english. Words as "need" and "help" do not exist in the ancient greek text which says : "Πᾶσα φιλία δι' ἑαυτὴν αἰρετὴ ἀρχὴν δὲ εἴληφεν ἀπὸ τῆς ὠφελείας".

Every friendship is to be chosen for its own sake, but has taken its starting point from the benefit.

And why Epicurus says that ? Because in this phrase "is chosen for its own sake" some would say that this sounds idealistic, but Epicurus brings friendship, in reality, saying that its first principle and its basis is the common benefit. And that means that there are persons/friends that measure within the common experiences their choices and their avoidance on whatever is pleasant/benefit and whatever is painful/harmful for them.

Post by "Don" of April 5, 2026 at 8:05 AM



The word in question in the manuscript is this above.

To my eye, it is clearly *αρετη* with a soft breathing mark at the α and an accent over the η at the end with a punctuation mark following.

πάσα φιλία δι' ἑαυτὴν ἀρετὴ· ἀρχὴν δὲ εἴληφεν ἀπὸ τῆς ὠφελείας.

Every friendship is an excellence (virtue) in itself, even though it begins in mutual advantage.

The scholars want "Every friendship is **choiceworthy** in itself; for it has its origins in benefit" (πάσα φιλία δι' ἑαυτὴν **αἰρετὴ**· ἀρχὴν δὲ εἴληφε ἀπὸ τῆς ὠφελείας).

I'm still convinced the manuscript reading should be kept.

I discovered a great article on JSTOR that addresses this exact issue:

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1215547>

Epicurus on the Value of Friendship ("Sententia Vaticana" 23) by Eric Brown: *Classical Philology*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (Jan., 2002), pp. 68-80 (13 pages)

The author does a thorough job in laying out an arguments for and against the manuscript reading and the scholarly emendation. From those, I continue to prefer the reading transmitted in the manuscript itself. I recommend reading the paper.

Two short excerpts:

Another way of seeing this problem is to compare friendship to the virtues. Despite the fact that friendship is praised as even more valuable than the virtues (*RS 27, Sent. Vat. 78*), the Epicureans appeal to the value of the virtues to explain the value of friendship (e.g., *Cic. Fin. 1.66*). In fact, Torquatus tells us that "the very things that have been said about the virtues, how they are always attached to pleasures, should be said about friendship" (*Cic. Fin. 1.68*), and he backs up (*enim*) this claim by quoting Epicurus himself. So it is not surprising to find that Epicurus describes the virtues as inseparable from pleasure. The virtues, like friendship, "bring" pleasure "directly" and "in themselves."¹⁷ But the doxographers also attribute to Epicurus the explicit denial that virtues are chosen for their own sake (ἀἰρεῖσθαι δι' αὐτῶν).¹⁸ If we take seriously the suggestion that the same account of value should be given to both the virtues and friendship, then we should reject the emendation of *Sententia Vaticana 23*.

Finally, there is some independent evidence that Epicurus identified *philia* as an *ἀρετή*. I have mentioned that Epicureans were quick to analyze the value of friendship and virtue in the same way. But the evidence says more than this. According to Diogenes Laertius (10.138), "Epicurus says that virtue alone (*τὴν ἀρετὴν μόνην*) is inseparable (*ἀγρίστητον*) from pleasure," and Cicero attributes to Epicurus the view that friendship cannot be separated from pleasure (*Fin.* 1.66 and 1.68). From the conjunction of these two claims it follows that friendship is (at least a part of) virtue.²³
I have been arguing that it makes good philosophical sense to attribute to Epicurus

NOTE: One sticking point for the scholars' emendation is that their "correction" requires a rough breathing mark curved one way, the manuscript has a soft breathing mark curved the opposite way. So it's not just that the scribe forgot to copy an iota after the initial alpha. To be honest, I'll have to dig back into the manuscript to make sure they make that distinction, but just looking at this line, I wanted to mention it for future reference.

Post by "TauPhi" of April 5, 2026 at 12:24 PM

Thank you, [Don](#).

I'm not a big fan of correcting manuscripts as it adds yet another danger of warping the original ideas. I think any corrections should be clearly marked and explained so the readers know what has been done and why.

That said, 'choiceworthy' or 'to be chosen for its own sake' option makes more sense to me in this case for very practical reasons. The act of starting a friendship doesn't make it excellent from the get go. Excellence and virtue in friendship can only be achieved by friends' good will, action and compatibility. Not all friendships end up being excellent and none start as excellent and virtuous. But that's only my personal interpretation.

Post by "Cassius" of April 5, 2026 at 4:42 PM

So regardless of the rest of the implications, one of the basic questions is apparently: Did Epicurus number friendship as being among the virtues? (Or considered under the category name "virtue.")

I am inclined to agree with the excerpts Don posted to the effect that the answer is "Yes." ("Yes - friendship is a virtue.")

Does anyone (TauPhi perhaps?) disagree with that?

I am presuming Don that you do agree?

Post by “TauPhi” of April 5, 2026 at 5:14 PM

I see virtue as excellence in something that is desirable. For me being virtuous means achieving excellence in something desirable. Friendship is pivotal in Epicurean philosophy so I completely agree with the statement that friendship is a virtue. Like with any other virtues, however, there's no free lunch. One has to work hard to achieve excellence. That's why 'Every friendship is an excellence (virtue) in itself...' translation doesn't work for me. Not because 'friendship is a virtue' part but because of 'Every'.

Post by “Don” of April 5, 2026 at 6:25 PM

I think we're understandably butting up against a Greek vs English issue here.

Granted ἀρετή is translated as "excellence" in English; however, it's not an adjective like "excellent" as in "Our friendship is excellent."

ἀρετή can be [variously translated into English](#): goodness, excellence, of any kind, in Hom. esp. of many qualities; [as well as](#) goodness, excellence; manliness, prowess, rank, valour; (not countable): virtue; (countable): a virtue, the virtues

It's like trying to shoehorn "eudaimonia" into "happiness."

Think of "arete" as the "full realization of potential or inherent function."

My take on this, from looking at various sources, is that - if we're taking the manuscript at face value - Epicurus saw friendship as one of the most important instrumental virtues leading to a happy life. I *may* even go so far as to his using the similarity of ἀρετή (virtue/excellence) and ἀρετή (choiceworthy) as part of his wordplay that I find so endearing about some of his writing. Friendship is "choiceworthy" exactly because it is a key component of living to one's full potential, of achieving "arete."

For a way deeper dive than any of us want likely, here's an open access book: [Arete in Plato and Aristotle: Selected Essays from the 6th Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Hellenic Heritage of Sicily and Southern Italy](#)

Post by “wbernys” of April 5, 2026 at 6:52 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

So regardless of the rest of the implications, one of the basic questions is apparently: Did Epicurus number friendship as being among the virtues? (Or considered under the category name "virtue.")

I also heavily lean towards saying yes as well. In large part because Philodemus himself seems to list Making Friends itself as a virtue.

*(... it is impossible for one to live pleurably) without living prudently and honourably and justly,¹⁰ and also without living courageously and temperately and magnanimously, **and without making friends** and without being philanthropic, and **in general without having all the other virtues.***

This is somewhat countered by Torquatus thinking they are separate but it's important to remember that despite it being a favorable view of Epicureanism, it is ultimately Cicero's presentation of Epicurean ethics and not ultimately a work by an Epicurean himself like with Philodemus.

"For, as in the case of the virtues which I have already mentioned, so too they deny that friendship can ever be separated from pleasure."

I myself suspect Epicurus would put making friends under the category of wisdom or honor under PD5, since Friendship is a thing a wise man would eagerly do in order to increase his own security via friends. Although i wonder if this also implies the study of natural science would also be a virtue.