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Epicurean Friendship

Epicureans famously argue that agents should pursue what is beneficial (*sumpheron*) to them and that the highest good in life is not virtue, as the other schools insist, but pleasure, understood as the state in which the agent has achieved freedom from pain, that is, tranquility or equanimity (*ataraxia*). This makes their theory of friendship all the more interesting: on the one hand, we read, for instance, in Lucretius that ‘friendship’ (*amicitia*) is an agreement (*foedus*) over not harming and not being harmed (*De rerum natura* V.1019: see also Cicero, *De finibus* I.70 and Epicurus, *Kuriai Doxai* (KD) 31, 32, 33, and 35), and that its purpose is to increase security (*asphaleia*) that will contribute to an agent’s equanimity (KD 27); this seems to accord friendship an instrumental value only. On the other hand, though, Epicureans also stress the intrinsic value of friendship (KD 27 and *Gnomologium Vaticanum* (GV) 52) and argue that friendship involves the genuine care for the friend (GV 66; see also GV 78), which seems *prima facie* problematic if an agent is supposed to care for what is beneficial to her own *ataraxia*; after all, one can imagine what is beneficial to oneself to be different from what is beneficial to one’s friend. Aware of these issues, the Epicureans in their theory of friendship try to explain how the pursuit of one’s own pleasure and *ataraxia* entails the pursuit of genuine friendships, that is, relationships that per definition do not involve the pursuit of one’s own pleasure but that of a friend. In my paper, I explore the Epicurean solution in more detail and assess whether such a consequentialist approach can be successful at explaining the phenomenon of friendship.