

**“THE GOOD” GRIEF:
PITY AND SELF-SACRIFICE IN
EPICUREANISM**

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SENECA, *EPISTULAE* 9.1

An merito reprehendat in quadam epistula Epicurus eos, qui dicunt sapientem se ipso esse contentum et propter hoc amico non indigere, desideras scire. Hoc obicitur Stilboni ab Epicuro et iis quibus summum bonum visum est animus inpatiens.

You desire to know whether Epicurus evaluates well in a certain letter those who say that the wise man is sufficient through himself and therefore does not require friendship. This is argued against Stilbo by Epicurus and against those for whom the highest good seems to be an unfeeling soul.

PROPOSED SCHEMA

the good Epicurean

- Faithful follower in an Epicurean community
- Has reached *ataraxia*
- ✗ not a selfish jerk

the Good Epicurean

- Actively works to convert others
- Has reached *ataraxia*, but steps out of their bliss to help others out of pity
- ✗ not a rebellious saint

PRESENTATION OUTLINE

- Focus Text: Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* (DRN).
 - Specifically Book 5, ll. 1011-1023
- Children // parental figures
- Return to the good Epicurean // the Good Epicurean

DRN 5.1011 – 1023

THE FOUNDATION OF SOCIETY

Inde casas postquam ac pellis ignemque pararunt
et mulier coniuncta viro concessit in unum

cognita sunt, prolemque ex se videre creatam,
tum genus humanum primum mollescere coepit.
ignis enim curavit, ut alia corpora frigus
non ita iam possent caeli sub tegmine ferre,
et Venus inminuit viris puerique parentum
blanditiis facile ingenium fregere superbum.

tunc et amicitiam coeperunt iungere aventes
finitimi inter se nec laedere nec violari,
et pueros commendarunt muliebrique saeculum,
vocibus et gestu cum balbe significarent
imbecillorum esse aequum misererier omnis.

Then after they acquired huts and skins and fire, and
woman having been joined with man withdrew into one
--- these things were learned, and they saw children
produced from themselves, then the human race first
began to grow softer.

For fire invigorated them so that now their chilly limbs
were not so well able to bear the cold under the cover
of the sky, and Venus weakened their strength, and
children easily broke the innate, haughty nature of
parents with their charms.

**Then desirously the men even began to form
friendships among their neighbors to not harm
nor to be injured, and they distinguished the
children and the womanly race, with voices and
babbling gestures they indicated that it is right
for all to pity the weak.**

DRN 1.146-8, 2.59-61, 3.91-3, 6.39-41:
THE NEED OF EPICUREANISM FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

hunc igitur terrorem animi tenebrasque
necessesit
non radii solis neque lucida tela diei
discutiant, sed naturae species ratioque.

Therefore, this terror and the darkness of
the mind must be dispelled, not rays of the
sun nor the gleaming shafts of the day, but
by the outer and inner workings of nature.

DRN 2.55-58, 3.87-90, 6.35-8
THE READER COMPARED TO SCARED CHILDREN

nam vel uti pueri trepidant atque omnia
caecis
in tenebris metuunt, sic nos in luce timemus
inter dum, nihilo quae sunt metuenda magis
quam
quae pueri in tenebris pavitant finguntque
futura.

For even as children tremble with terror
and fear everything in blind darkness,
similarly we in the light are afraid
sometimes, things which are to be feared no
more than the things which children
tremble at in the shadows and imagine will
come.

DRN 1.936 – 42, 4.11-17
WORMWOOD PASSAGE

sed vel uti pueris absinthia taetra medentes
cum dare conantur, prius oras pocula
circum
contingunt mellis dulci flavoque liquore,
ut puerorum aetas improvida ludificetur
labrorum tenus, interea perpotet amarum
absinthii laticem deceptaque non capiatur,
sed potius tali facto recreata valescat.

But even as doctors, when they try to give
repulsive wormwood to children, first they
touch the rim all around the cup with the
sweet and golden juice of honey so that the
unguarded youth of the children may be
deceived as far as the lips, and meanwhile,
may drink the pungent draught of
wormwood, and though tricked, may not be
harmed, but rather by such means, is
revitalized and may return to good health.

***DRN* I.136-45**
THE ARDUOUS TASK OF COMPOSING THE *DRN*

Nec me animi fallit Graiorum obscura reperta
difficile inlustrare Latinis versibus esse,
multa novis verbis praesertim cum sit
agendum
propter egestatem linguae et rerum
novitatem;
sed tua me virtus tamen et sperata voluptas
suavis amicitiae quemvis efferre laborem
suadet et inducit noctes vigilare serenas
quaerentem dictis quibus et quo carmine
demum
clara tuae possim praepandere lumina menti,
res quibus occultas penitus convisere possis.

Nor does it elude me that illuminating the
dark discoveries of the Greeks is difficult in
Latin verse, especially since many things need
to be treated with new words due to the
poverty of the language and the novelty of the
findings; but nevertheless, your excellence and
my desirous hope for your sweet friendship
persuade me to undertake this labor and
spend quiet nights vigilantly seeking with
which words and in what measures I am able,
at last, to unveil a bright light to your mind,
with which you are able to investigate
thoroughly the inmost hidden things.

DRN 3.1-17

LUCRETIUS' ATARAXIA

E tenebris tantis tam clarum extollere lumen
qui primus potuisti inlustrans commoda vitae,
te sequor, o Graiae gentis decus, inque tuis nunc
ficta pedum pono pressis vestigia signis,
non ita certandi cupidus quam propter amorem
quod te imitari aveo; quid enim contendat hirundo
cycnis, aut quid nam tremulis facere artibus haedi
consimile in cursu possint et fortis equi vis?
tu, pater, es rerum inventor, tu patria nobis
suppeditas praecepta, tuisque ex, inclute, chartis,
floriferis ut apes in saltibus omnia libant,
omnia nos itidem depascimur aurea dicta,
aurea, perpetua semper dignissima vita.
nam simul ac ratio tua coepit vociferari
naturam rerum divina mente coorta
diffugiunt animi terrores, moenia mundi
discedunt. totum video per inane geri res.

From such shadows you who were first able to raise
such a clarifying light illuminating the joys of life, I follow
you, O glory of the Grecian race, and now in your
marked prints I place the firm weight of my foot, not
due to a competitive drive, rather, because of love I
crave to imitate you. For how could a swallow wrangle
with a swan, or how could kids with trembling limbs vie
in a race against the strong strength of a horse? You,
father, are the discoverer of nature, you provide your
paternal precepts to us from your pages, Glorious one,
like bees in flowery glades we taste everything, again and
again we feed upon all your golden words, golden and
most worthy of eternal life for evermore. For as soon as
your philosophy, rising from a divine mind, begins to
speak about the nature of things, the terrors of the mind
scatter and the walls of the world divide.

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