

Epicurus

Epicurus (341–271 B.C.) was born of Athenian parents on the island of Samos, and was thus counted as an Athenian citizen. In order to fulfill his military obligations, he went to Athens in 323, the year in which Aristotle fled Athens, fearing anti-Macedonian sentiment after the death of Alexander the Great. However, even in Aristotle's absence Athens remained the center for philosophical activity, and Epicurus most certainly became familiar with Platonism and Aristotelianism. The death of Alexander brought about a good deal of political turmoil, some of which affected Epicurus directly. While he was in Athens, his family was evicted from Samos by the Macedonians, as were other Athenian colonists. It may be that Epicurus' evident antipathy to politics began with these events. In any case Epicureanism and the public life do not mix: the latter would upset the tranquillity required by the former.

Epicurus' family migrated to Colophon, in Asia Minor, and Epicurus rejoined them in 321. He spent the next ten years in Colophon, where he came under the tutelage of Nausiphanes, who espoused a version of atomism, a philosophy that had been founded by Leucippus (fifth century B.C.) and Democritus of Abdera (c. 460–c. 370 B.C.). Epicurus himself became a convert to atomism, but his atomism differed from that of his predecessors.

Epicurus' version of atomism contended that the universe is composed of only two kinds of things: bodies and the void. That bodies exist is a matter of observation. The existence of the void or empty space is necessary in order for bodies to move. Bodies of visible size are compounded out of bodies of invisible size, namely, atoms. It is impossible for anything to come into existence out of nothing, and it is impossible for anything to pass into nothingness. Therefore what exists always has existed and always will exist. Now many visible bodies are not everlasting; they can be cut up and disintegrated. But since it is impossible for anything to come out of or pass into nothingness, it must be that at least the ultimate parts or atoms of a visible body are not subject to creation, decomposition, or disintegration; that is, the atoms are everlasting. (Epicurus' arguments explaining why there should be ultimate parts at all and why, if they do exist, they are too small to be seen, are obscure.)

Epicurus' infinitely many atoms possess only three variable qualities. They can differ from each other in size, shape, and weight. Some atoms are larger than others, although none of them is big enough to be seen, and none is infinitely small. Some atoms are heavier than others, but the differences in weight do not result in differences in velocity among various atoms. In fact, all atoms move at exactly the same velocity as they fall directly downward through infinite space and infinite time. If all atoms followed parallel downward paths at the same speed, however, they would never interact with each other, and thus nothing would ever change. In order to avoid that difficulty, Epicurus claimed that the atoms occasionally swerve in a random way from their downward paths. When atoms swerve, they may strike other atoms, thus setting off whole series of collisions. Visible objects are the results of such collisions. These objects are systems of atoms which, for some time, display cohesiveness due to a kind of dynamic equilibrium. But, insisted Epicurus, such systems of atoms, no matter how large and well behaved, are the result of purely mechanical causes. There is no design or providence in the universe. Everything that exists can be explained in principle by the motions of atoms in empty space. Nor is the present world-order in which we find ourselves everlasting. It is, like every visible object in it, a collection of atoms that for the present time exists in a dynamic equilibrium, but which will eventually disperse.

Epicurus regarded his atomic theory as the key to his moral theory. The moral theory was

epitomized in antiquity as follows: the gods are not to be feared, death is not to be feared, pleasure is easy to obtain, and it is easy to endure pain. The gods, who are also nothing more than collections of atoms, are not to be feared because they have utterly no concern for the affairs of humans. To have any concern would be to spoil their divine tranquillity. Death is not to be feared because it is simply the dissolution of the atomic structure that makes up the soul, and when that happens, one ceases to exist. Thus one can be confident that no pain will be experienced after death.

The pursuit of pleasure is natural in humans, according to Epicurus, and in fact, a person ought always to seek pleasure. But an Epicurean is not an epicure, one devoted to pleasing the senses. The pursuit of excessive or violent pleasures can only result in pain; thus, such pleasures should be avoided. Rather, the pleasure to be sought is best characterized as the absence of pain of any kind. The most pleasant condition, according to Epicurus, is that in which one is neither hungry, thirsty, nor apprehensive, yet confident that one will remain in that condition. In this condition, one's atomic structure is unperturbed. Thus, true pleasure for Epicurus does not require extravagance. (On the time Epicurus began teaching in Athens in 306 until his death, he and his followers lived an abstemious life together, but one which they regarded as approaching perfect pleasure. From the Epicureans' concept of pleasure is understood, one can see why they thought that pleasure is easy to obtain.

Epicurus' attitude toward his own painful terminal illness illustrates the thesis that it is easy to endure pain. In a letter written to a disciple shortly before his death, he said that "there is set over these pains the joy of my heart at the memory of our happy conversations in the past."

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Although Epicurus was a prolific writer, few of his writings survive. His *Letter to Menoeceus* and *Principal Doctrines*, reprinted here, give us the rudiments of his moral theory. An important source of information about Epicureanism is the Roman poet Lucretius (c. 99–c. 55 B.C.), in *On the Nature of Things* translated by Martin F. Smith (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001). Important material, along with ancient commentary (some of it hostile), is contained in Brad Inwood and J. M. Rist, eds., *Hellenistic Philosophy*, second edition (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997). Some of this material is topically arranged in A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, eds., *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), two volumes (English translations of the original Greek texts). J. M. Rist, *Epicurus: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972) is a good account. David J. Furley, *Two Studies in the Greek Atomists* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967) is a more specialized but provocative work.

William E. Mann

Letter to Menoecus

Epicurus to Menoecus, greetings:

Let no one delay the study of philosophy while young nor weary of it when old. For no one is either too young or too old for the health of the soul. He who says either that the time for philosophy has not yet come or that it has passed is like someone who says that the time for happiness has not yet come or that it has passed. Therefore, both young and old must philosophize, the latter so that although old he may stay young in good things owing to gratitude for what has occurred, the former so that although young he too may be like an old man owing to his lack of fear of what is to come. Therefore, one must practise the things which produce happiness, since if that is present we have everything and if it is absent we do everything in order to have it.

Do and practise what I constantly told you to do, believing these to be the elements of living well. First, believe that god is an indestructible and blessed animal, in accordance with the general conception of god commonly held, and do not ascribe to god anything foreign to his indestructibility or repugnant to his blessedness. Believe of him everything which is able to preserve his blessedness and indestructibility. For gods do exist, since we have clear knowledge of them. But they are not such as the many believe them to be. For they do not adhere to their own views about the gods. The man who denies the gods of the many is not impious, but rather he who ascribes to the gods the opinions of the many. For the pronouncements of the many about the gods are not basic grasps but false suppositions. Hence come the greatest harm from the gods to bad men and the greatest benefits [to the good]. For the gods always welcome men who are like themselves, being congenial to their own virtues and considering that whatever is not such is uncongenial.

Get used to believing that death is nothing to us.

Reprinted from *Hellenistic Philosophy*, translated and edited by Brad Inwood and L. P. Gerson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988), by permission of the publisher.

For all good and bad consists in sense-experience, and death is the privation of sense-experience. Hence, a correct knowledge of the fact that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life a matter for contentment, not by adding a limitless time [to life] but by removing the longing for immortality. For there is nothing fearful in life for one who has grasped that there is nothing fearful in the absence of life. Thus, he is a fool who says that he fears death not because it will be painful when present but because it is painful when it is still to come. For that which while present causes no distress causes unnecessary pain when merely anticipated. So death, the most frightening of bad things, is nothing to us; since when we exist, death is not yet present, and when death is present, then we do not exist. Therefore, it is relevant neither to the living nor to the dead, since it does not affect the former, and the latter do not exist. But the many sometimes flee death as the greatest of bad things, and sometimes choose it as a relief from the bad things of life. But the wise man neither rejects life nor fears death. For living does not offend him, nor does he believe not living to be something bad. And just as he does not unconditionally choose the largest amount of food but the most pleasant food, so he savours not the longest time but the most pleasant. He who advises the young man to live well and the old man to die well is simple-minded, not just because of the pleasing aspects of life but because the same kind of practice produces a good life and a good death. Much worse is he who says that it is good not to be born, "but when born to pass through the gates of Hades as quickly as possible."¹ For if he really believes what he says, why doesn't he leave life? For it is easy for him to do, if he has firmly decided on it. But if he is joking, he is wasting his time among men who don't welcome it. We must remember that what will happen is neither unconditionally within our power nor unconditionally outside our power, so

1. [Theognis 425, 427.—B.I. and L.P.G.]

that we will not unconditionally expect that it will occur nor despair of it as unconditionally not going to occur.

One must reckon that of desires some are natural, some groundless; and of the natural desires some are necessary and some merely natural; and of the necessary, some are necessary for happiness and some for freeing the body from troubles and some for life itself. The unwavering contemplation of these enables one to refer every choice and avoidance to the health of the body and the freedom of the soul from disturbance, since this is the goal of a blessed life. For we do everything for the sake of being neither in pain nor in terror. As soon as we achieve this state every storm in the soul is dispelled, since the animal is not in a passion to go after some need nor to seek something else to complete the good of the body and the soul. For we are in need of pleasure only when we are in pain because of the absence of pleasure, and when we are not in pain, then we no longer need pleasure.

And this is why we say that pleasure is the starting-point and goal of living blessedly. For we recognized this as our first innate good, and this is our starting point for every choice and avoidance and we come to this by judging every good by the criterion of feeling. And it is just because this is the first innate good, that we do not choose every pleasure; but sometimes we pass up many pleasures when we get a larger amount of what is uncongenial from them. And we believe many pains to be better than pleasures when a greater pleasure follows for a long while if we endure the pains. So every pleasure is a good thing, since it has a nature congenial [to us], but not every one is to be chosen. Just as every pain too is a bad thing, but not every one is such as to be always avoided. It is, however, appropriate to make all these decisions by comparative measurement and an examination of the advantages and disadvantages. For at some times we treat the good things as bad and conversely, the bad things as good.

And we believe that self-sufficiency is a great good, not in order that we might make do with few things under all circumstances, but so that if we do not have a lot we can make do with few, being genuinely convinced that those who least need extravagance enjoy it most; and that everything natural is easy to obtain and whatever is groundless is hard to obtain;

and that simple flavours provide a pleasure equal to that of an extravagant life-style when all pain from want is removed, and barley cakes and water provide the highest pleasure when someone in want takes them. Therefore, becoming accustomed to simple, not extravagant, ways of life makes one completely healthy, makes man unhesitant in the face of life's necessary duties, puts us in a better condition for the times of extravagance which occasionally come along, and makes us fearless in the face of chance. So when we say that pleasure is the goal we do not mean the pleasures of the profligate or the pleasures of consumption, as some believe, either from ignorance and disagreement or from deliberate misinterpretation, but rather the lack of pain in the body and disturbance in the soul. For it is not drinking bouts and continuous partying and enjoying boys and women, or consuming fish and the other dainties of an extravagant table, which produce the pleasant life, but sober calculation which searches out the reasons for every choice and avoidance and drives out the opinions which are the source of the greatest turmoil for men's souls.

Prudence is the principle of all these things and is the greatest good. That is why prudence is a more valuable thing than philosophy. For prudence is the source of all the other virtues, teaching that it is impossible to live pleasantly without living prudently, honourably, and justly, and impossible to live prudently, honourably, and justly without living pleasantly. For the virtues are natural adjuncts of the pleasant life and the pleasant life is inseparable from them.

For who do you believe is better than a man who has pious opinions about the gods, is always fearless about death, has reasoned out the natural goal of life and understands that the limit of good things is easy to achieve completely and easy to provide, and that the limit of bad things either has a short duration or causes little trouble?

As to [Fate], introduced by some as the mistress of all, [he is scornful, saying rather that some things happen of necessity,] others by chance and others by our own agency, and that he sees that necessity is not answerable [to anyone], that chance is unstable, while what occurs by our own agency is autonomous, and that it is to this that praise and blame are attached. For it would be better to follow the stories told about the gods than to be a slave to the fate of the natural

1 sense-experience, experience. Hence, at death is nothing matter for content-ime [to life] but by rtality. For there is o has grasped that sence of life. Thus, death not because it because it is painful which while present cessary pain when most frightening of nce when we exist, en death is present, it is relevant neither ce it does not affect exist. But the many eatest of bad things relief from the bad 1 neither rejects life not offend him, nor something bad. And lly choose the largest pleasant food, so he it the most pleasant. to live well and the ided, not just because ut because the same ood life and a good ays that it is good not ass through the gates le."1 For if he really n't he leave life? For as firmly decided on sting his time among : must remember that nconditionally within outside our power, so

philosophers. For the former suggests a hope of escaping bad things by honouring the gods, but the latter involves an inescapable and merciless necessity. And he [the wise man] believes that chance is not a god, as the many think, for nothing is done in a disorderly way by god; nor that it is an uncertain cause. For he does not think that anything good or bad with respect to living blessedly is given by chance to men, although it does provide the starting points of great good and bad things. And he thinks it better to be unlucky in

a rational way than lucky in a senseless way; for it is better for a good decision not to turn out right in action than for a bad decision to turn out right because of chance.

Practise these and the related precepts day and night, by yourself and with a like-minded friend, and you will never be disturbed either when awake or in sleep, and you will live as a god among men. For a man who lives among immortal goods is in no respect like a mere mortal animal.

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The Principal Doctrines

I. What is blessed and indestructible has no troubles itself, nor does it give trouble to anyone else, so that it is not affected by feelings of anger or gratitude. For all such things are a sign of weakness.¹

II. Death is nothing to us. For what has been dissolved has no sense-experience, and what has no sense-experience is nothing to us.

III. The removal of all feeling of pain is the limit of the magnitude of pleasures. Wherever a pleasurable feeling is present, for as long as it is present, there is neither a feeling of pain nor a feeling of distress, nor both together.

IV. The feeling of pain does not linger continuously in the flesh; rather, the sharpest is present for the shortest time, while what merely exceeds the feeling of pleasure in the flesh lasts only a few days. And diseases which last a long time involve feelings of pleasure which exceed feelings of pain.

V. It is impossible to live pleasantly without living prudently, honourably, and justly and impossible to live prudently, honourably, and justly without living pleasantly. And whoever lacks this cannot live pleasantly.

VI. The natural good of public office and kingship is for the sake of getting confidence from [other] men, [at least] from those from whom one is able to provide this.

VII. Some men want to become famous and respected, believing that this is the way to acquire security against [other] men. Thus if the life of such men is secure, they acquire the natural good; but if it is not secure, they do not have that for the sake of which they strove from the beginning according to what is naturally congenial.

VIII. No pleasure is a bad thing in itself. But the

1. [Scholiast: "Elsewhere he says that the gods are contemplated by reason, and that some exist 'numerically' (i.e., are numerically distinct, each being unique in kind) while others are similar in form, because of a continuous flow of similar images to the same place; and that they are anthropomorphic." — B.I. and L.P.C.]

things which produce certain pleasures bring troubles many times greater than the pleasures.

IX. If every pleasure were condensed and were present, both in time and in the whole compound [body and soul] or in the most important parts of our nature, then pleasures would never differ from one another.

X. If the things which produce the pleasures of profligate men dissolved the intellect's fears about the phenomena of the heavens and about death and pains and, moreover, if they taught us the limit of our desires, then we would not have reason to criticize them, since they would be filled with pleasures from every source and would contain no feeling of pain or distress from any source—and that is what is bad.

XI. If our suspicions about heavenly phenomena and about death did not trouble us at all and were never anything to us, and, moreover, if not knowing the limits of pains and desires did not trouble us, then we would have no need of natural science.

XII. It was impossible for someone ignorant about the nature of the universe but still suspicious about the subjects of the myths to dissolve his feelings of fear about the most important matters. So it was impossible to receive unmixed pleasures without knowing natural science.

XIII. It was useless to obtain security from men while the things above and below the earth and, generally, the things in the unbounded remained as objects of suspicion.

XIV. The purest security is that which comes from a quiet life and withdrawal from the many, although a certain degree of security from other men does come by means of the power to repel [attacks] and by means of prosperity.

XV. Natural wealth is both limited and easy to acquire. But wealth [as defined by] groundless opinions extends without limit.

XVI. Chance has a small impact on the wise man, while reasoning has arranged for, is arranging for, and will arrange for the greatest and most important matters throughout the whole of his life.

XVII. The just life is most free from disturbance, but the unjust life is full of the greatest disturbance.

XVIII. As soon as the feeling of pain produced by want is removed, pleasure in the flesh will not increase but is only varied. But the limit of mental pleasures is produced by a reasoning out of these very pleasures [of the flesh] and of the things related to these, which used to cause the greatest fears in the intellect.

XIX. Unlimited time and limited time contain equal [amounts of] pleasure, if one measures its limits by reasoning.

XX. The flesh took the limits of pleasure to be unlimited, and [only] an unlimited time would have provided it. But the intellect, reasoning out the goal and limit of the flesh and dissolving the fears of eternity, provided us with the perfect way of life and had no further need of unlimited time. But it [the intellect] did not flee pleasure, and even when circumstances caused an exit from life it did not die as though it were lacking any aspect of the best life.

XXI. He who has learned the limits of life knows that it is easy to provide that which removes the feeling of pain owing to want and makes one's whole life perfect. So there is no need for things which involve struggle.

XXII. One must reason about the real goal and every clear fact, to which we refer mere opinions. If not, everything will be full of indecision and disturbance.

XXIII. If you quarrel with all your sense-perceptions you will have nothing to refer to in judging even those sense-perceptions which you claim are false.

XXIV. If you reject unqualifiedly any sense-perception and do not distinguish the opinion about what awaits confirmation, and what is already present in the sense-perception, and the feelings, and every application of the intellect to presentations, you will also disturb the rest of your sense-perceptions with your pointless opinions; as a result you will reject every criterion. If, on the other hand, in your conceptions formed by opinion, you affirm everything that awaits confirmation as well as what does not, you will not avoid falsehood, so that you will be in the position of maintaining every disputable point in every decision about what is and is not correct.

XXV. If you do not, on every occasion, refer each of your actions to the goal of nature, but instead turn prematurely to some other [criterion] in avoiding or

pursuing [things], your actions will not be consistent with your reasoning.

XXVI. The desires which do not bring a feeling of pain when not fulfilled are not necessary, but the desire for them is easy to dispel when they seem to be hard to achieve or to produce harm.

XXVII. Of the things which wisdom provides for the blessedness of one's whole life, by far the greatest is the possession of friendship.

XXVIII. The same understanding produces confidence about there being nothing terrible which is eternal or [even] long-lasting and has also realized that security amid even these limited [bad things] is most easily achieved through friendship.

XXIX. Of desires, some are natural and necessary, some natural and not necessary, and some neither natural nor necessary but occurring as a result of a groundless opinion.²

XXX. Among natural desires, those which do not lead to a feeling of pain if not fulfilled and about which there is an intense effort, these are produced by an groundless opinion and they fail to be dissolved not because of their own nature but because of the groundless opinions of mankind.

XXXI. The justice of nature is a pledge of reciprocal usefulness, [i.e.,] neither to harm one another nor be harmed.

XXXII. There was no justice or injustice with respect to all those animals which were unable to make pacts about neither harming one another nor being harmed. Similarly, [there was no justice or injustice] for all those nations which were unable or unwilling to make pacts about neither harming one another nor being harmed.

XXXIII. Justice was not a thing in its own right, but [exists] in mutual dealings in whatever places there [is] a pact about neither harming one another nor being harmed.

XXXIV. Injustice is not a bad thing in its own right, but [only] because of the fear produced by the

2. [Scholiast: "Epicurus thinks that those which liberate us from pains are natural and necessary, for example drinking in the case of thirst; natural and not necessary are those which merely provide variations of pleasure but do not remove the feeling of pain, for example expensive foods; neither natural nor necessary are, for example, crowns and the erection of statues."]

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suspicion that one will not escape the notice of those assigned to punish such actions.

XXXV. It is impossible for someone who secretly does something which men agreed [not to do] in order to avoid harming one another or being harmed to be confident that he will escape detection, even if in current circumstances he escapes detection ten thousand times. For until his death it will be uncertain whether he will continue to escape detection.

XXXVI. In general outline justice is the same for everyone; for it was something useful in mutual associations. But with respect to the peculiarities of a region or of other [relevant] causes, it does not follow that the same thing is just for everyone.

XXXVII. Of actions believed to be just, that whose usefulness in circumstances of mutual associations is supported by the testimony [of experience] has the attribute of serving as just whether it is the same for everyone or not. And if someone passes a law and it does not turn out to be in accord with what is useful in mutual associations, this no longer possesses the nature of justice. And if what is useful in the sense of being just changes, but for a while fits our basic grasp [of justice], nevertheless it was just for that length of time, [at least] for those who do not disturb themselves with empty words but simply look to the facts.

XXXVIII. If objective circumstances have not changed and things believed to be just have been shown in actual practice not to be in accord with our basic grasp [of justice], then those things were not just. And if objective circumstances do change and the same things which had been just turn out to be no longer useful, then those things were just as long as they were useful for the mutual associations of fellow citizens; but later, when they were not useful, they were no longer just.

XXXIX. The man who has made the best arrangements for confidence about external threats is he who has made the manageable things akin to himself, and has at least made the unmanageable things not alien to himself. But he avoided all contact with things for which not even this could be managed and he drove out of his life everything which it profited him to drive out.

XL. All those who had the power to acquire the greatest confidence from [the threats posed by] their neighbours also thereby lived together most pleasantly with the surest guarantee; and since they enjoyed the fullest sense of belonging they did not grieve the early death of the departed, as though it called for pity.

Panichas, George A.
Epicurus. New York; Twayne, 1967

Chronology

B.C.
341

Epicurus is born on the island of Samos in the early part of February, to Neocles and Chaerstrate, Athenian citizens who had settled on the island.

At the age of fourteen he becomes interested in philosophy and studies for a period of about four years under the Platonist Pamphilus.

323

Epicurus goes to Athens to begin two years of military service.

321-311

Upon the completion of his military requirements, he goes to Colophon in Asia Minor, where he rejoins his family, who had left Samos due to political persecution. For Epicurus this is a period of independent meditation and preparation. He studies for a time under Nausiphanes, an atomist teacher, and possibly under Praxiphanes, a Peripatetic teacher.

311-310

Epicurus begins his teaching career in the city of Mytilene on the island of Lesbos, but he is forced to leave because of hostility to his ideas.

310-306

He goes to Lampsacus, a city in the northwest part of Asia Minor, where he continues his teaching and begins to attract many faithful followers.

306

Returning to Athens, he purchases a house with a garden and establishes a private school of philosophy, the first such school to admit women.

Epicurus stays in Athens for the remainder of his life, except for occasional visits to his friends in Asia Minor.

The school is organized as a fellowship, the main and constant goal being the moral perfection of the students through the achievement of tranquillity of mind and freedom from pain.

As head of the school, Epicurus is venerated by his adherents.

He writes three hundred books, but of his writings only the *Letters* to Herodotus, to Pythocles, and to Menoeceus, and the forty *Principal Doctrines* survive.

271

Death comes to Epicurus after a painful illness lasting a fortnight.

Epicurus' successors carry on unaltered his teachings, which attract many followers not only in Greece and in the Greco-Oriental world (*e.g.*, in Antioch, Judaea, and Egypt) but eventually also in Italy, particularly in Rome, and in Roman Africa.

Epicureanism flourishes as an organized movement for seven centuries, three centuries before Christ and four afterward.

with the never-ending struggle between the "open society" and the "closed society." As such, this incessant struggle has particular importance and makes particular demands and imposes particular tests on those persons who are concerned with the survival of humaneness, reasonableness, and freedom in civilization.

Epicurus' own words, "I was never anxious to please the mob. I had never learnt the sort of thing they liked, and the things I knew were far removed from their perception," epitomize the impelling nature of his dissent and could serve as an epigraph to the whole of his life and thought. In the founding of his school in Athens; in his concepts of the atom and of the universe; in his feelings toward politics, toward education, toward organized religion, toward the gods, and toward death; in his treatment of the soul; in his views on ethics, on morals, on pleasure, and on happiness; and in his veneration of friendship between man and man and between man and woman, Epicurus exemplifies the strengths of nonconformity. The significance of his nonconformity must not go unnoticed: In resisting those who would enforce a "closed society," with its autocratic ways, its militarism, its contempt for sensitive spirit, Epicurus and his followers affirmed a faith not only in man's intelligence and dignity but also in an enlightened vision of the universe and of man's place in that universe.

In so far as Epicurus' nonconformity was of an extraordinary kind, it needs to be seen in a different context from the usual dimensions of nonconformity. That is to say, it was not the nonconformity that we are accustomed to associate with mass meetings, with long protest marches, with clamorous speeches, with self-inflicted death. Epicurus' temper of dissent and his holding to unpopular opinions were ultimately connected with a higher and more refined nonconformity. Vigorous, yet not violent; dogmatic, yet not coercive; uncompromising, yet not insensitive, it can perhaps be described as a marginal nonconformity: one that seeks for a manageable solitude and that refuses to conform to the outer world of organization, power, and materiality in order to secure the harmony and peace of the inner life. Yet, Epicurean nonconformity must not be viewed as being effete or immoderately esthetic. Side by side with its inspired vision of serenity are its stringent criticisms of the religious, social, economic, and political structures of society.

Precisely because of its delicacy and its nonviolence, Epicurus'

The same wisdom that permits us to be confident that no evil is eternal or even of long duration also recognizes that in our limited state the security that can be most perfectly gained is that of friendship.²⁸

Undoubtedly Epicurus based his concept of friendship on the belief that its motive arises out of self-interest: "Every friendship in itself is to be desired; but the first cause of friendship was a man's needs."²⁹ He felt that friendship strengthens one's sense of security, especially in times of emergency: "We do not so much need the help of our friends as the confidence of their help in need."³⁰ Still, one cannot be a true friend who always seeks to exploit another; neither can one be a friend who cannot be depended on for help. If, according to Epicurus, friendship is first prompted by utilitarian motives, it can transcend the egocentric and become something higher once intimacy has developed. Then "the wise man is not more pained when being tortured himself, than when seeing his friend tortured."³¹ Then, too, friendship is governed by the realization that it is better to give than to receive. "To love money unjustly gained," he writes, "is evil, and to love money justly gained is shameful; for sordid niggardliness is unseemly even when accompanied by justice."³²

V *Epicurus and His Disciples*

For Epicurus the word friendship denoted the ultimate relation between mortals. "Nor did he only commend this doctrine by his eloquence," Cicero states, "but far more by the example of his life and conduct."³³ As his several visits to Lampsacus illustrate, Epicurus never forgot his friends. His work radiates with the warmth and the affection that he had for them. "I will sit down and wait for your lovely and godlike appearance,"³⁴ we find him writing to one of his young disciples, Pythocles. His receipt of a letter from another disciple draws this response: "Lord and Saviour, my dearest Leontion, what a hurrahing you drew from us, when we read aloud your dear letter."³⁵ The absence of friends from his side causes him to exclaim: "If you two don't come to me, I am capable of arriving with a hop, skip, and jump, wherever you and Themista summon me."³⁶ His concern for the welfare of others was constant, as this fragment from a letter shows: "As I said to you when you were going away, take care also of his brother