CHAPTER 6

WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

Epicureanism and Friends with Benefits

Epicureans and Pleasure

The ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus and his followers believed that the good, the ultimate goal of all our actions, is pleasure. By nature all animals pursue pleasure and avoid pain and behave appropriately in doing so. Since human beings are animals too, and particularly intelligent ones at that, the good life for human beings is, the Epicureans argued, the pleasant life. This conception of the good life has an obvious appeal, and not only for college students. But the best strategy for achieving this pleasant life may not be quite so obvious. It may seem safe to suppose that Epicureans would consider all kinds of gratification, including sex, to be worth pursuing, but in fact they rejected the idea that all pleasures should be sought equally. Epicurus writes: "No pleasure is a bad thing in itself. But the things which produce certain pleasures bring troubles many times greater than the pleasures."[2]

Epicurus and his followers also rejected the common opinion that the more pleasant something is, the more vigorously one should go for it. The Epicureans believed that the best kind of pleasure is the purest kind, and the purest kind of pleasure results in no pain at all. They argued that happiness consists in freedom from pain and in particular from pain caused by unfulfilled desires. Consequently, we need to understand the nature of different kinds of desires and use reason to

distinguish among them in order to lead a happy life. Epicurean ethical philosophy thereby provides a conceptual framework that enables us to fulfill those desires that need to be fulfilled, to avoid pursuing those desires that are difficult to satisfy, to avoid pursuing those desires which tend to result in greater pains than pleasures, and to eliminate altogether those desires that are impossible to fulfill or that always result in more pain than pleasure.

What did the Epicureans think about sex? In this essay I will explore how Epicurean philosophy applies to sex and the idea of friends with benefits among college students. I will argue that Epicureans regard good friends to be much more reliable than good sex, and so college students ought to keep their friends by avoiding having sex with them.

Freedom from Anxiety and Types of Desires

The Epicureans distinguished between two kinds of pain that our natural powers of reason can remove: physical pain and mental distress. Physical pains afflict us only in the present. Mental distress includes present unpleasant memories, present regrets about the past, present fears, and present worries about the future. Whereas present pangs are ever transient, the scope of past and anticipated future pains is much broader. Consequently, the Epicureans believed that mental suffering threatens a pleasant life much more than physical pains do. Physical pains, they argued, tend to be either mild (and so easy to bear) if they are chronic, or relatively short if they are intense. Mental distress includes all kinds of emotional upset and perturbation, including fear, frustration, anxiety, and grief. So the Epicureans offered a set of principles from which they derived arguments designed as therapy for the mental afflictions that ruin peace of mind and painless living. To rid oneself of all those desires which disrupt mental tranquility is to attain what the Greeks called *ataraxia*, that is, the ideal state of freedom from anxiety. The fear of death, fear of a future harm, the Epicureans considered to be the greatest obstacle to this life free of anxiety. So the Epicureans developed strategies for eliminating false beliefs that occasion worries about the future and for dispelling false beliefs that generate painful thoughts about the past.

If pleasure results from getting what you want and displeasure results from failing to get what you want, then two strategies suggest themselves

for dealing with any desire that arises. You can try to satisfy the desire or you can work to get rid of it.[3] If a certain kind of desire cannot be eliminated because it arises from the natural constitution of human beings, then that desire counts as natural for the Epicureans. Natural desires may be either natural and necessary or natural but non-necessary. Of natural and necessary desires some are necessary for life itself, some for freeing the body from troubles, and some for happiness. When one is hungry or thirsty, it is because one's body lacks food or drink necessary for its healthy operation. All animals require food and water. Consequently, desires to eat and to drink are natural and necessary for life itself. Eating eliminates the lack of food, thereby removing the pain of hunger and satisfying the desire to eat. Eating thus has a natural limit. Drinking water eliminates the lack that is dehydration, thereby removing the pain of thirst and satisfying the desire to drink. Drinking, too, has a natural limit. Similarly, wearing clothing and inhabiting shelter to protect oneself from the elements satisfy desires natural and necessary for freeing the body from troubles. But so long as one's clothing and shelter remove the troubles of being too hot, too cold, or too wet, these desires are satisfied, since they too have a natural limit.[4]

Sex, Shoes, and the Needs of College Students

Now the ordinary college undergraduate won't worry much (or at all) about suffering from lacking the clothing, shelter, food, and drink needed to survive. Yet she may still have a host of concerns about certain *kinds* of food, certain *kinds* of drink, certain *kinds* of clothing, and various kinds of fun possessions and entertainments. Moreover, the ordinary college student is likely to have urgent concerns about whether, when, and with whom to engage in sexual activity of one kind or another. Is having sex with a friend a good idea? Other concerns may include grades, papers, lab reports, deciding on a major, roommates, friends, drinking alcohol, and how to behave at parties. All these concerns and associated desires can easily generate many serious worries and thereby threaten her tranquility.

Are all these desires on the same footing? The Epicureans hold that vain and empty desires are not natural desires because they do not arise from any depletion of the body and so have no natural limit. Consequently, desires for political power, fame, wealth, luxuries, jewelry, toys, art

works, and the like count as "vain and empty" for the Epicureans. All too often the more of these things one gets, the more one wants. Consider an example. A person can wear only one pair of shoes at a time, so wanting to own many pairs of fashionable shoes is vain and empty, from the Epicurean perspective. A pair of feet does not hunger for more than one pair of shoes at a time for shelter, yet one can be fooled by advertisers and fashionistas in our materialistic society into falsely believing that getting more shoes will make one happier. But in fact wanting more shoes than one's feet need endangers one's *ataraxia*. Fancy, trendy, expensive clothing keeps one's body no more comfortable than basic, cheap, readily available clothing. Jewelry, iPods, gaming stations, stereo systems, and plasma TV sets provide neither calories nor nutrients for, and remove no pains from, the body. Therefore, desires for such things are neither natural nor, Epicureans would argue, necessary for happiness. Since inability to satisfy desires for these kinds of things frustrates and perturbs us, the Epicureans urge us to eliminate all such vain and empty desires and limit ourselves entirely to natural desires and mostly to necessary desires.

To maximize our chances of achieving *ataraxia*, wouldn't the Epicureans advise us to limit our desires *entirely* to the natural and necessary ones? Here they make modest room for natural but non-necessary desires. These include expensive, gourmet foods and beverages: truffles, caviar, filet mignon, lobster, fine wines, elegant desserts, pricey chocolates, and the like. After all, champagne, espresso, and milkshakes fail to quench thirst better than water. One can enjoy these delicacies if they happen to be available, since as food and drink they do remove the physical pains of hunger and thirst by replenishing the body.[5] But to foster a habitual desire for extravagant goodies so as to make one's happiness depend on getting them inevitably causes mental distress whenever such treats are unavailable. Consequently, harboring such a psychological dependency is wildly imprudent because it considerably and unnecessarily risks one's *ataraxia*. So the Epicureans recommend that we be wise and cautious about our natural and non-necessary desires. The pleasures they afford are real, but they are necessary neither for our survival nor for our peace of mind. Being ever mindful of this reality enables us to be happy in both plentiful times and lean times. We must not allow occasional indulgence in a special treat to undermine our habituated satisfaction with simple food and drink. To believe that we ever *need* rich foods or costly beverages is to be deluded.

The Dangers of Sex

The Epicureans considered sexual appetite to belong in the class of natural but non-necessary desires. Sexual appetite arises from the body and its hormonal activity, and so it is natural. But one can live serenely without satisfying sexual desires, the Epicureans believed, so they are not necessary. Orgasms are undeniably pleasant, but in order to preserve one's *ataraxia* one must be careful and selective about satisfying one's sexual desires. Epicurus writes:

> I understand from you that your natural disposition is too much inclined toward sexual passion. Follow your inclination as you will provided only that you neither violate the laws, disturb well-established customs, harm any one of your neighbors, injure your own body, nor waste your possessions. That you be not checked by some one of these provisos is impossible; for a man never gets any good from sexual passion, and he is fortunate if he does not receive harm.[6]

First, notice that Epicurus' friend's natural inclination toward sexual passion is *excessive*. Passions are dangerous because of their extreme intensity, and this extremity usually creates trouble. One kind of trouble would be violating the law, since excessive sexual passion could lead one to commit adultery, incest, or other illegal acts like date rape. Another kind of trouble is disturbing those well-established customs that facilitate harmonious, cooperative, and pleasant social living. The pursuit of sexual passion could also result in harm to one's neighbor, either physical harm through a minor sexually transmitted disease, or emotional damage, or both, say through a serious STD or an unwanted pregnancy. Indulging one's sexual passion could also result in injury to oneself. This could take the form of an STD, an unwanted pregnancy, or emotional anguish when one is spurned or betrayed by one's lover, or physical injury at the hands of one's lover's jealous ex-lover, or even an assault by a lover one has jilted. Finally, Epicurus warns that excessive inclination to sexual passion could result in squandering your possessions and money in wooing the person(s) you lust after. Epicurus thinks it impossible to avoid every single one of these possible harmful consequences. Sooner or later, at least one of these harms will afflict the person who gives in to his excessive erotic inclination. Though the *appetite* for sex in itself is natural, according to the Epicureans, sexual *passion* is fraught with many dangerous

consequences. So not only is it not necessary to satisfy sexual passion to live a happy, untroubled, peaceful life, it is wiser still to *eliminate* this hazardous disposition. Epicurus concludes that a person never gets any good from sexual passion, and is lucky not to receive harm from it. In short, sexual passion is of no benefit.

The Roman poet Lucretius, inspired by the wisdom of Epicurus, elaborates on this topic in his magnificent poem *De Rerum Natura (On the Nature of Things)*. The third book of this monumental work includes an account of the annihilation of the mind in death and an extended attack on the superstitious fear of death and the afterlife as anathema to rational living. At the end of Book Four, Lucretius' exploration of the inexhaustible human capacity for delusion leads him to target what he takes to be the most debilitating of desires, sexual passion.[7]

Lucretius begins the finale of Book Four with an account of how images received in dreams cause sleepers to groan, struggle, speak, and wet their bed clothes. Adolescent boys whose bodies are beginning to produce semen receive images of fair faces with beautiful complexions that trigger ejaculations in wet dreams. Lucretius describes how "the desire arises to emit the seed toward the object of our dire craving" (line 1048),[8] and "the body seeks the object that has wounded the mind with love" (line 1049). So while sexual arousal and climax are harmless, pleasant biological events, Lucretius considers love to be a wound injurious to the mind. He compares a body pierced by a weapon gushing blood in the direction from which the wound was inflicted to the man "wounded by the darts of Venus" moving toward the beautiful (male or female) body that fired those darts into him. Love is not a benign pleasure unmixed with pain; rather, love lacerates the mind. Though love might seem sweet at first, it is in reality pernicious because even when your loved one is absent, images of her continue to invade your thoughts, and her name rings incessantly in your ears. These relentless stimuli plague the mind with emotional turbulence, robbing it of peace. They are so aggravating, so disruptive of mental calm that Lucretius urges the afflicted lover to shun these images and to abstain from all that feeds the affliction. The treatment he prescribes is drastic:

> ... turn your attention elsewhere: you should ejaculate the accumulated fluid into any woman's body rather than reserve it for a single lover who monopolizes you and thus involve yourself in inevitable anxiety and anguish. The fact is that feeding the ulcer increases its strength and renders it inveterate: day by day the frenzy grows and the misery is intensified, unless you obliterate the old wounds with new blows and heal them while still fresh by taking at random some random-roaming Venus, or unless you divert the motions of your mind into some other channel. (Lines 1064–73)

Lucretius sees love as a psychological obsession that must not be fueled. Feeding the obsession makes it grow into a frenzied madness. Lucretius prescribes two possible cures for the lovesick lover: either have intercourse with any woman *except* the object of his monomania, or think about something other than passionate love and sex.

Sexual activity with any partner satisfies the desire for orgasm, but sexual activity with the individual who inflames one's erotic passion only serves to intensify that agitating, passionate love without extinguishing or even diminishing it. By hooking up with any random partner, Lucretius thinks the lovesick lover can divert his mind from its obsession and heal the old erotic wounds of that obsession with "new blows." Alternatively, the fixated lover can divert his mind from its obsession by simply thinking about any subject other than sex. He can watch sports, play sports, walk in the park, do manual labor, play video games, listen to tame music, do laundry, or, what should be a daily priority for college students, work on one of his classes. This second strategy seems quite sensible.

Regarding the first strategy, however, we may wonder how getting new wounds could help old ones heal. How can casual sex with random-roaming partners quell an erotic obsession with one lover? Epicureans sharply distinguish the desire for physical gratification through orgasm from the passionate desire to fuse with one special mate. Since this fusion is both physically and psychologically impossible, such a desire is futile. The biological desire for orgasm is simple to satisfy and fully satisfiable since it has a natural limit. Any comely body can satisfy it equally well. It can even be satisfied solo. But I think it would be a mistake to derive from Lucretius' comments an Epicurean policy recommending to college students a series of meaningless sexual encounters with random strangers. Lucretius suggests this *only* for the lovesick and only as a means of diverting the mind *away* from its obsessive, lustful fixation. One-night stands with passersby would be particularly reckless today because of the much greater likelihood that they would run afoul of most of the troubles Epicurus detailed. Ignorance about most facts about one's unloved sex-partner greatly increases the chances of laws being violated (e.g., unwittingly committing statutory rape), or beneficial customs being disturbed,

or the parties involved (or their future sex-partners) getting harmed, especially by STDs. I argue that Epicureans today would reject sex with strangers as far too risky to be compatible with *ataraxia*.

Sex and Sensibility

Perhaps erotic obsession with a special individual stems from the opinion that *only* one person is a fully satisfactory sex-partner. The problem is that this fixated passion cannot be satisfied by any sex act because it is a stubborn, disordered condition of the *mind*, a delusion, not an innocuous, transient impulse of the *body*. Psychological obsession cannot be healed by sex with that body that is the very object of fixation. Sex satisfies the body and is a natural pleasure. Love crazes the mind and leads to heartache. So Lucretius thinks the lover's impassioned mind can be distracted by means of physically gratifying sex with persons that do not make it lovesick. This prescription aims to disabuse the mind of a fantasy, namely, the false belief that sex with she who monopolizes he who is love-crazed is a good thing because it heals the lovesickness and returns his mind to a calm, unfrustrated, happy state.

Indeed, Lucretius believes that sexual activity untainted by passionate love is better than passionate lovemaking. He says "it is undeniable that the pleasure of intercourse is purer for the healthy-minded than for the lovesick" (line 1075). So when college students embroiled in passionate affairs suffer heartache, would an Epicurean advise them to hook up with one (or more) of their friends for casual, loveless sex? Isn't this precisely a pitch for the convenience of no-strings-attached friends with benefits? Don't Epicureans believe that Tina Turner's 1984 single "What's Love Got to Do with It?" is right insofar as it claims that loveless sex is far better than erotic love, which is inevitably bittersweet and often agony? As tempting as it is to interpret Lucretius to condone loveless sex with pals, I will argue that, from the Epicurean perspective, this is not, in fact, wise for most college students in most situations. Before making that argument, however, further study of the Lucretian pathology of erotic love is needed.

In contrast to the unpenalized sex of non-lovers, Lucretius describes how impassioned lovers rush and fumble in frenzied, clumsy lovemaking, uncertain of what to squeeze and roughly kiss first, often hurting each other, spurred by their erotic madness. Lovers vainly hope that the same body that enflamed their passion can also extinguish it, but the reverse

happens. The more ardent sexplay they have, the more fiercely their hearts crave more. Food and drink replenish physiological voids in the body, but the visual image of a beautiful face is an impalpable image, Lucretius explains; it fills no emptiness in the body and quenches no longing in the heart. Rather, "lovers are deluded by Venus with images: no matter how intently they gaze at the beloved body, they cannot sate their eyes; nor can they remove anything from the velvety limbs that they explore with roving, uncertain hands" (lines 1101–5). But their gazing and groping "is all in vain, since they cannot take away anything from their lover's body or wholly penetrate it and merge into it" (lines 1110–11). Even after their orgasms, the escape of the deranged lovers from their raging passion is all too brief:

> Then the same madness returns, and they have another fit of frenzy: they seek to attain what they desire, but fail to find an effective antidote to their suffering: in such deep doubt do they pine away with an invisible wound. (Lines 1118–21)

Sexual activity only satisfies sexual desire of the body, but passionate love is an invisible wound, a gash in the mind, for which there is no bodily remedy.

Many other ills multiply from love, according to Lucretius. Love consumes and exhausts the lover's strength. His life is ruled by his beloved. Love makes him neglect his duties and ruins his reputation. Love gobbles away his wealth as he buys for her lovely slippers, jewels, gowns, tiaras, imported cloaks, draperies, dainties, banquets, entertainments, drinks, perfumes, and flowers. Notice that with the exception of the fancy foods and drinks that count as objects of natural but non-necessary desires, all these other gifts are objects of vain and empty desires. Consequently, there is no natural limit for purchasing, owning, or wearing such superfluous items. They are entirely for show. Neither does gifting them promote the lover's *ataraxia* in any way, nor does receiving them enhance his beloved's *ataraxia* at all. They are not real benefits. In fact, showering the mistress who has mastered his heart with lavish gifts likely reveals rather than eases his feelings of doubt, regret, and insecurity. As Lucretius writes:

> Perhaps his conscience experiences a twinge of remorse at the thought of a life spent in sloth and squandered in debauchery; perhaps his mistress has thrown out an ambiguous word and left it embedded in his passionate heart, where it burns like living fire; or perhaps he fancies that her eyes are

> wandering too freely, or that she is ogling some other man, while he detects in her face the trace of a smile. (Lines 1135–41)

Jealousies and anxieties like these undoubtedly flare up among college student couples, too.

Romance, Beautiful Illusions, and Sound Minds

So if a college Joey O'Montague finds himself falling passionately in love with a Julie Capulet in his entomology class, what advice would Joey's Epicurean advisor give him? I suggest that Joey would be sternly cautioned against being seduced by the bewitching fairy tales of romance peddled relentlessly by Hollywood and the popular media. Joey ought to rein in his wild-running imagination from insidious fantasies about how he and Julie will crash together in ecstatic union, serenaded by a swooning soundtrack, to become the Brangelina of their campus, self-heroized in their omnipotent, triumphant love. Such is the stuff that dreams are made of,[9] by the movie, television, and music industries that so richly profit by perpetuating these delusions on celluloid and compact discs for mass consumption. Commercialized, fairy tale romance is big business and a monstrous myth. Lucretius warns that images of idyllic, beatified, electrified, passionate love are ephemeral *images*, mirages, incapable of feeding our real, earthly, embodied human relationships but fully capable of poisoning them. Hollywood stars make horrible models for personal relationships among college students (or any other couples, for that matter). To fall prey to the delusion, the vaunted fantasy, that Julie will be for Joey O. what Angelina Jolie is (portrayed by Hollywood to be) for Brad Pitt and vice versa is to bury what could be a healthy, pleasant relationship under an avalanche of utterly unrealistic and ultimately impossible expectations. She is no Aphrodite, even if she is a Homecoming Queen. He is no godlike superhunk, even if he is a Homecoming King.

Hollywood filmmakers and Madison Avenue magazine moguls enlist armies of make-up artists and post-production wizards to erase all blemishes and tiny wrinkles from the complexions and sculpted bodies digitally perfected to bedazzle us. The media-bloated imagination of a college student can do as much for him when he finds a mortal to idolize and enshrine on his pedestal of love. The benighted, lovesick dreamer will be bitterly disappointed when his zealously constructed fantasy of a perfect goddess is dissolved by the flaws and frailties of what was all along a mere mortal. This is why Lucretius thinks it is easier to avoid being ensnared by erotic love than to free oneself from its nets once entangled. But he believes the dangers of love's mania can still be escaped unless you prevent yourself by deliberately overlooking

> all the mental and physical imperfections of the woman for whom you yearn and long. For men who are blinded by passion generally do this and attribute to their mistresses virtues that in reality they do not possess. Thus we find women with numerous defects of body and behavior being fondly loved and held in high esteem. (Lines 1151–6)

To the poor fool deranged by passion, her swarthy skin is "honey-brown," if she is sloppy and smelly, to him she is "beauty unadorned," if she is gray-eyed (considered a defect by the ancients), to him she is "a little Athena," if she is wiry and woody, "a gazelle," if she's a dumpy dwarf, "one of the Graces, a charmer," if a giantess, "a marvel of majesty." If she stammers, she "has a lisp," if dumb, she's "modest," if a chattering, spiteful spitfire, she's "a sparkler," if she's wasting away, she's "slender and willowy," if she's half-dead coughing, she's "delicate." The bulging and big-breasted is "Ceres suckling Iacchus," the snub-nosed is "a she-satyr," the thick-lipped is "kissy-faced" (lines 1159–69). Lovesickness so distorts the manic lover's perception that his beloved's obvious flaws are hallucinated into traits so lovely that they approach godlike ideals. Love steals the lover away from reality, according to Lucretius.

Contemporary American culture sells different therapies for dissatisfaction with our looks. Today, college students pay for tanning treatments and painful hair removal and bleaching procedures. If Julie C. had more to spend, would she buy Botox injections, skin bleaching, liposuction, or plastic surgeries to alter her breasts, tummy, nose, chin, and eyes, and invest in whatever bodily "corrections" modern medicine sells? Ubiquitous stereotypes of "perfect" physical beauty, especially concerning body shape, brainwash many students into dangerous eating disorders and self-destructive behaviors, including smoking to control weight. Lucretius' message for us, I suggest, is that for our mental health, we *accept* our bodies and safeguard our physical health rather than worry about our looks.

What about Brangelina and other hyper-beautiful people? Lucretius insists that even if your beloved is totally gorgeous from head to toe, she isn't so special for the following reasons: first, there are others like her; second, you have lived without her until now; and third, she behaves no

better than an ugly woman. New beauties, supermodels too, crop up like weeds, and you didn't and don't need any of them to live happily. Moreover, since supercouples divorce with the seasons (or faster), their outward beauty fails to reflect their inner characters. The Epicurean lesson is plain. Obsession with physical beauty is a pathological fixation with mere appearance, and such a psychological fixation is a debilitating disease. Planet Hollywood proclaims: image is everything. Lucretius wants to dispel this delusion with the sober wake-up call: image is illusion.

Skip the Sex and Keep the Friend

Lucretius claims that the many ills catalogued are experienced even in steadfast, successful love. But "when love is frustrated and unrequited, the miseries you can spot with your eyes shut are countless" (lines 1142–4). For college students, who generally are less emotionally experienced and under considerable academic, social, and sometimes athletic pressures, these miseries can include depression, drinking problems, drug abuse, eating disorders, crippling driving accidents, attempted suicide, and suicide.[10] These troubles ruin one's academic progress and worse. Therefore, the wise Epicurean advice is for Joey O. and Julie C. to cool it, to stay focused on their studies, to prepare for and attend every class, to take notes attentively and participate in class, and to complete and turn in their assignments on time. Better for them to remain study buddies, at least until the semester ends.

What if they really like each other a lot? I propose that the Epicureans would consider wanting friends to be in the class of natural desires necessary for happiness. Friendship is hugely important for achieving *ataraxia*. Epicurus beams about it: "Friendship dances through the world bidding us all to awaken to the recognition of happiness."[11] But friends are not just for happy times. When college students are distraught, to whom do they turn? When they need a sympathetic ear or a shoulder to lean on, on whom do they rely? When they are in conflict with their parents or siblings or bosses or co-workers, who provides emotional support? Amid romantic disasters so devastating that they may even consider suicide, who is there to help them regain perspective? Their friends, naturally. As Epicurus advises, "Of the things which wisdom provides for the blessedness of one's whole life, by far the greatest is the possession of friendship."[12]

Desires to engage in sex with others are natural but not necessary for life, for freeing the body from troubles, or for happiness. Desires to have friends are natural and necessary for happiness. So I argue that the Epicureans would advise college students to avoid having sex with their friends in order to protect their friendships. Epicurus writes: "Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; but remember that what you now have was once among the things only hoped for."[13] As tempting as it may be to upgrade a friend to a friend with benefits, friendships can be counted on to last much longer than either bouts of sexual passion or the flings which they punctuate. The conclusion of Book Four of *De Rerum Natura* seems to lend support to my argument. Lucretius explains that "a woman with little pretension to beauty" can, by what she does, by her obliging, gentle, and pleasing conduct, and by "the neatness of her person," accustom a man to spend his life with her (lines 1277–82). He adds that "mere habit generates love" (line 1283). I understand this kind of love not to be the tumultuous, crazed love of sexual passion, but rather the painless, soothing, abiding love of a person. This suggests that personable, amiable conduct, consistently *friendly* behavior, can sometimes create the kind of love upon which a strong, lasting marriage is founded. The best lifelong companions more often emerge from a group of good friends than from the stage of a beauty pageant. Perhaps a key insight of Epicurean philosophy is that good friends are far more reliable, and so ultimately more desirable, than good sex. If so, the wise Epicurean chooses to populate his tranquil, happy life not with friends with benefits, but with friends. Friends *are* the real benefits.

NOTES

1 I thank Tim O'Keefe, Jeffrey Hause, Al Spangler, and Berel Dov Lerner for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

2 Epicurus, *Principal Doctrine* VIII, in Brad Inwood and L. P. Gerson (eds.) *The Epicurus Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), p. 32.

3 See Tim O'Keefe, "Epicurus," *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available online at www.iep.utm.edu/e/epicur.htm (accessed July 9, 2009).

4 *Vatican Saying* 33 reads: "The cry of the flesh: not to be hungry, not to be thirsty, not to be cold. For if someone has these things and is confident of having them in the future, he might contend even with [Zeus] for happiness." In Inwood and Gerson, *The Epicurus Reader*, p. 38.

5 Epicurus says "we believe 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." *Letter to Menoeceus* 130, in Inwood and Gerson, *The Epicurus Reader*, p. 30.

6 Epicurus, *Vatican Saying* LI in R. M. Geer (ed.) *Letters, Principal Doctrines, and Vatican Sayings* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 69–70.

7 My explication of Lucretius owes much to Robert D. Brown, *Lucretius on Love and Sex: A Commentary on De Rerum Natura IV, 1030–1287* (Leiden: Brill, 1987).

8 Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, ed. M. F. Smith (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001), p. 128. All subsequent quotations of Lucretius are from this edition and are cited parenthetically.

9 Respect for director John Huston (rather than spotty memory of Shakespeare) compels me to follow Humphrey Bogart's famous last line in *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) instead of Prospero's original line: "We are such stuff / As dreams are made on" in *The Tempest*, Act 4, Scene 1, lines 156–7.

10 For a physically healthy young adult to kill himself out of depression or despair would be unwise and unwarranted, according to Epicurus: "But the many ... sometimes choose [death] as a relief from the bad things in life. But the wise man neither rejects life nor fears death. For living does not offend him." *Letter to Menoeceus* 125–6, in Inwood and Gerson, *The Epicurus Reader*, p. 29. "He is utterly small-minded for whom there are many plausible reasons for committing suicide." *Vatican Saying* XXXVIII, in Inwood and Gerson, *The Epicurus Reader*, p. 38.

11 Epicurus, *Vatican Saying* LII, in Geer, *Letters, Principal Doctrines, and Vatican Sayings*, p. 70.

12 Epicurus, *Principal Doctrine* XXVII, in Inwood and Gerson, *The Epicurus Reader*, p. 34.

13 Epicurus, *Vatican Saying* XXXV, in Geer, *Letters, Principal Doctrines, and Vatican Sayings*, p. 68.