

FRIENDSHIP AS MOTIVATOR:  
EPICUREANISM AND ITS APPLICATIONS TO RAWLS

by

TYLER SUGGS

(Under the Direction of Daniel Kapust)

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to rectify the differences between Rawlsians and feminists over the moral education that citizens are supposed to receive. This has its roots in the Gilligan Kohlberg debate, which causes feminists to voice complaint that Rawls has essentially made relationships subservient to abstract principles. Epicureanism, with its unique focus on interpersonal relationships—particularly the relationship of friendship—is used as a bridge to attempt at a reconciliation between the two positions concluding that friendships may be used as a way to affirm and strengthen society's founding principles. This is done by identifying two problems in Rawls; the first I call the Transitional Problem, in which people transition from having close knit relationships into wider ones on a societal scale. The second problem I term the Maintenance Problem, which refers to how friendship can be used to further, maintain the motivation of the members of a society.

INDEX WORDS: John Rawls, Epicurus, Friendship, Motivation, Well-ordered Society, Stability, Gilligan-Kohlberg debates.

FRIENDSHIP AS MOTIVATOR:  
EPICUREANISM AND ITS APPLICATIONS TO RAWLS

by

Tyler Suggs

B.A. The University of Georgia, 2009

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GA

2011

© 2011

TYLER SUGGS

All Rights Reserved

FRIENDSHIP AS MOTIVATOR:  
EPICUREANISM AND ITS APPLICATIONS TO RAWLS

by

TYLER SUGGS

Major Professor: Daniel Kapust

Committee: Alexander Kaufman

Melissa Seymour-Fahmy

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso

Dean of the Graduate School

The University of Georgia

August 2011

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this time to thank my proofreaders, Laura Schwigel and Phil Marcin, for their outstanding work. I would also like to thank my other proofreader and overall content editor, Dustin Elliot, without whose constant help and support this paper probably would not have been written.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER	
1 THE MOTIVATION PROBLEM IN RAWLS.....	2
Section One: The Basis of Rawls’s Theory.....	2
Section Two: Locating the Problems.....	5
2 EPICUREANISM AND FRIENDSHIP.....	11
Section One: The Challenges of Working with Epicurean Documents.....	12
Section Two: Virtue Ethics, Moral Philosophy, and a Brief Introduction to Epicureanism.....	13
Section Three: Friendship and Virtue for Epicurus.....	16
3 A SOCIETY BUILT UPON FRIENDSHIP.....	21
Section One: The First Function of Friendship: Solving the Transitional Problem.....	21
Section Two: The Second Function of Friendship: Solving the Maintenance Problem.....	24
Section Three: Potential Problems in Applying Epicurean Friendship to Rawls’s Theory.....	28

CONCLUSION.....31

WORKS CITED.....32

## INTRODUCTION

This paper is concerned with the problems of motivation and stability in Rawls's political philosophy. These problems arise due to a core assumption about humanity that is present in Rawls's thought and modern liberal thought writ large: that we are chiefly interested in our own survival and advancement, or that others are used as tools to further these. This assumption about humanity is problematic in Rawlsian thought for two reasons: first, it raises the question of how to motivate society to realize why justice is not only desirable, but necessary in its transition from its beginnings to something resembling an ideal or "well-ordered" state in a way that is amicable to feminists; and second, within such an assumption, the level of motivation needed to maintain the ideal state is vaguely asserted.

Given these two problems, I argue in this paper that an Epicurean account of friendship provides a solution to both problems. To accomplish this, I will first give a brief summary of Rawlsian political theory, focusing on two problems of political motivation. I will also present a broad but brief account of Epicureanism, highlight the two types of friendship that are present in the system (one of which is based on virtue and the other on advantage), and explain why friendship based on advantage is applicable to the aforementioned political motivation problems. Finally, I will show the two roles that advantage friendship plays in solving the two motivation problems.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE MOTIVATION PROBLEM IN RAWLS

The purpose of this chapter is to do three things: first, to situate the problem of the political motivation of the citizenry in Rawlsian theory; second, to describe the two different variations of the problem; and third, to transition into a discussion of a proposed solution to the problems at hand.

#### Section One: The Basis of Rawls's Theory

In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls sets out to give an account of the hypothetical original agreement between people on what will constitute the principles of justice in their society. These principles are “the principles that rational and free persons concerned to further their own interests would accept in an initial position of equality as defining the fundamentals of the terms of their association.”<sup>1</sup> The chief motivating factor and primary assumption about the people in the Original Position are:

1. That the parties in the Original Position prefer more primary goods to less.
2. In their pursuit and allocation of primary goods, individuals are mutually disinterested in others.

By “primary goods,” Rawls means “rights and liberties, powers and opportunities, income and wealth.”<sup>2</sup> It is also worth noting that “mutually” disinterested does *not* entail that the parties are hostile towards each other. It means that they regard each other as

---

<sup>1</sup> John Rawls (1971), *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

being neither beneficent nor malevolent and therefore view the share of primary goods that others receive with indifference.

It is also key to note for Rawls that the person in this Original Position is not aware of his place in society, his class position or social status...his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence, strength, and the like...conceptions of the good or their special psychological propensities. The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance.<sup>3</sup>

This lack of awareness provides the basis for a system of justice and equality for actually existing societies. Rawls does not assume that the initial system agreed upon and entered into is perfect; he merely gives guidelines to go by in determining its acceptability and uses the ideas of the “liberty principle,” the “difference principle,” and fair equality of opportunity to do so. The “liberty principle” holds that each individual should be afforded the maximum amount of liberty provided that his or her liberty does not encroach upon the liberty of others to whom the same amount of liberty has been given.<sup>4</sup> The “difference principle” holds that inequalities resulting from the consensus reached in the Original Position are acceptable provided that they better the condition of the least advantaged members of society. Finally, fair equality of opportunity is contingent upon the difference principle and holds that any inequalities that emerge must be in public offices and positions that are open to every member of society.

Rawls's later work, *Political Liberalism*, builds on *Theory of Justice*. A key purpose of *Political Liberalism* is to begin a discussion of how stability can exist in a pluralistic society once the initial contract has been established. Rawls's term for such a

---

<sup>3</sup> Rawls (1971).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

society is the “well-ordered society.” It is important to note that Rawls's conception of justice here, and in *Theory*, is not considered to be a conception of the good. Rather, he calls it a “conception of the right.” This is because a conception of the good is something about which rational people can disagree. Yet justice, as Rawls conceives it, would be met with virtually universal approval provided that the society in question was of a liberal democratic background. This is because Rawls assumes that liberal democrats share many of the same considered judgments regarding justice, such as: the impartiality of justice or an acknowledgement of the inviolability of the person.

The goal of *Political Liberalism*, then, is to discuss how to build a stable society of the type that Rawls describes in *Theory*, despite the fact that modern liberal societies are pluralistic and a minority could advance controversial ideas in public debate. Stability in a pluralistic society is thereby achieved by what Rawls labels an “overlapping consensus.” This refers to a judgment that two or more people can agree upon even if they have reached their respective conclusions regarding justice for completely different reasons. For example, suppose that an atheist and a Christian could both agree on what the principles of justice were. The Christian's reasons for believing in justice might be that God established justice and that she should therefore live up to the principles of justice. The atheist, however, might arrive at the same principles through a reading of philosophy that stresses the importance of respect for humanity. An overlapping consensus has therefore been reached because, while the two people can reasonably disagree about where the principles of justice originate, they ultimately agree on the same end. However, suppose that the same Christian believes that following God's will is a principle of justice and that God said that all nonbelievers should be either

converted or killed if they refuse to convert. An overlapping consensus here is impossible because the Christian has a view regarding justice that does not respect the inviolability of the person. As such, her view has no weight at the bar of public reason.

### Section Two: Locating the Problems

I will now discuss the problems that Rawls runs into with respect to political motivation. In Chapter Nine of *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls returns to his earlier assertion that people in the Original Position are mutually disinterested in each other. Yet, once people have removed the Veil of Ignorance and the principles of justice they have agreed upon are in place, they are now operating in accordance with the shared ends of society. Rawls is very vague as to how this occurred and attempts to explain this by using what he will later call the idea of “complementarity,” which basically means that people realize that the gains they can accrue and the positive activities that can be done are greater when they act collectively than alone, because “we need one another as partners in ways of life that are engaged in for their own sake, and the successes and enjoyments of other are necessary for and complimentary to our own good.”<sup>5</sup>

This statement sounds immediately appealing and on a basic level (at least) seems universally agreeable, but Rawls does not mean mere material benefits, rather he asserts that complementarity is our ability to realize our nature as moral humans. This argument is made explicit in Rawls’s 1963 essay *The Sense of Justice*, in which one of Rawls’s central questions is how to explain why men might act justly in the first place. Rawls’s short answer is that “if men did not do what justice requires, not only would they not regard themselves as bound by the principles of justice, but they would

---

<sup>5</sup> Rawls (1971).

be incapable of feeling resentment and indignation and they would be without ties of friendship and mutual trust.”<sup>6</sup> Essentially, failing to act in accordance with the principles of justice results in instability for the whole system; thus, it is in man’s advantage to act in accordance with justice to fully recognize his humanity as a moral person and to acquire the benefits that a society confers upon its citizens.

The first problem that I deal with regarding political motivation in Rawls concerns his conception of interpersonal relationships and how they relate to his conception of justice. If complementarity is being advanced to give a clearer picture of how a society transitions into a fully moral people, in the manner that Rawls suggests, then I will claim that Rawls essentially falls prey to the same criticisms that Lawrence Kohlberg does in his own theory of moral development. Briefly, Carol Gilligan accuses that Kohlberg fails to address moral development from the standpoint of women, in that he over-emphasizes abstract principles, which Gilligan asserts as being more male-focused, as being at the height of his moral development. Gilligan asserts that this is unacceptable from a female perspective, and instead claims that feminine morality, one that includes interpersonal relationships, should be included as well.<sup>7</sup> I assert that Rawls is guilty of making the same mistake as well, because saying that “participants in a joint enterprise regularly act with evident intention in accordance with their duty of fair play, they will tend to acquire ties of friendship and mutual trust” makes interpersonal relationships dependent upon and subservient to abstract principles.<sup>8</sup>

If the only way that humanity is to fully realize its nature as moral beings is through the adherence to abstract principles, then the place of interpersonal

---

<sup>6</sup> John Rawls (1963), *The Sense of Justice*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

<sup>7</sup> Carol Gilligan (1982), *In a Different Voice*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

<sup>8</sup> Rawls (1963).

relationships is cast into doubt. Yes, Rawls does acknowledge that “joint-activity” is necessary, but this is only in the pursuit of abstract principles rather in the furthering of relationships and trust as being valuable in themselves. I will refer to this problem as the “transitional problem” because, according to Rawls, one cannot form these relationships until one is first acting in accordance with the abstract principles of justice. I will argue that this problem must be addressed for three reasons: first, because Rawls’s theory is enriched and made more palatable to a feminist audience by this discussion; second, because the morality of the individual members of a well-ordered society is dependent on the moral developmental process which occurred at earlier stages which can be made stronger by interpersonal relationships; and finally, that the stability of society is dependent upon this moral development.

The second problem that this paper deals with is a type of outgrowth of the transitional problem. If Rawls is devaluing interpersonal relationships, and I have asserted that he is, then the relationships that people have in a well-ordered society will be stunted as well. This is problematic because of the lexical ordering of relationships as coming after the principles of justice because it presupposes that relationships cannot be valued in of themselves in that they are chiefly used by Rawls to “reinforce the scheme of co-operation.”<sup>9</sup> The concern here is that relationships are solely being used to further the principles of justice or are, at best, dependent on justice first and foremost. The maintenance problem regarding motivation, therefore, refers to how a society's motivation is to be maintained when it is considered to be well-ordered. As it stands, people in a well-ordered society are acting in accordance with the principles of

---

<sup>9</sup> Rawls (1963).

justice, but I assert that their relationships have been devalued to an extent that they lack the motivation to continue reaffirming the principles of justice.

These problems arise if one tries to apply Rawls's ideal theory in a real-world setting. In the real world, a transition must occur between the initial establishment of a society and society's attainment of stability. Rawls does not focus on providing a clear route to the well-ordered society; he instead concerns himself with providing a sound account for a theory of justice. Yet, if society is supposed to be able to attain the ideal that is established upon the principles of justice, we need a clearer path to accomplish this goal. One solution would be to argue that if citizens truly *are* motivated by wanting to fully realize morality and acquiring the benefits of society, then they would realize that they are better off acting collectively than alone. Yet, a society that is composed of people who value association with their fellow citizens as means to an end does not sound like a type of society consistent with Rawls's broader goals, and brings us back to the motivation and stability problems. This is because the stability of Rawls's society partially depends on the morality of citizens who recognize and value intrinsic worth in other people. If a person did not value other citizens as intrinsically good at the beginning, then she would not be motivated to correct any injustices done to that other person, as Rawls *necessarily* suggests she should do for stability to be maintained. This can start becoming detrimental on the societal level if an increasingly large number of people also do not regard their relationships with fellow citizens as being intrinsically valuable because the stability of Rawlsian society would be impossible to maintain because this disregard could trickle up to the institutional level.

Rawls is not ignorant of this problem, however, and suggests that to attain this state, the citizens in the Original Position decide on the governing principles of justice that are agreeable to all. He continues by tracing the moral development of a person who eventually comes to understand the principles of justice as an explanation for her motivation to act.<sup>10</sup> This moral education “itself has been regulated by the principles of right and justice to which he would consent in an initial situation in which all have equal representation as moral persons.”<sup>11</sup> At first glance, this moral education might seem appealing, but Rawls does not say what *specifically* is occurring here because moral education “foreshadows in its teaching and explanations the conception of right and justice at which it aims and by reference to which we will later recognize that the moral standards presented to us are justified.”<sup>12</sup> So Rawls’s account of the moral education of a person lacks the mechanism that describes both how a person is morally educated to value their relationships with other people and the principles of justice, and how the motivation for her action based on these values is maintained. Rawls is vague regarding the further development of this process and asserts that the individual will only come to see the principles of justice as justified at the end of her moral education.

I assert first, that the feminist critique of Rawls’s moral education is valid and that his position will require tweaking; and second that the devalued status of relationships inherent in Rawlsian moral education must be addressed because the stability of society is dependent on the ability of its citizens to act to correct injustices. The Epicurean conception of friendship that I will describe in the following chapter can, I

---

<sup>10</sup> Rawls (1971).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

believe, play a role in an individual's moral education to such an extent that it can solve both the transitional problem and the motivation problem.

## CHAPTER 2

### EPICUREANISM AND FRIENDSHIP

Prior to turning to my account of Epicureanism and friendship, it is worth briefly recapitulating my two concerns from the prior chapter, that Rawls devalues interpersonal relationships by placing them before the understanding and acceptance of abstract principles in the state of a well-ordered society; and, once this state is achieved, how the motivation of citizens to reaffirm the governing principles is to be maintained given these weakened friendships. Given these concerns. I am proposing a type of political education that begins at the level of the individual and that is based on a reconstruction of an Epicurean conception of friendship. This education will begin with teaching individuals to value other people as equal and valid members groups on whose well-being society is necessarily dependent. This type of education leads to the social cohesion that any stable society must have. To do this, I will argue for a specific Epicurean view of friendship, but first I must introduce the whole system in order to clearly situate a discussion of friendship. I am not seeking to change or replace the entirety of Rawls's theory however. This paper merely suggests two things: that Rawls has not adequately addressed the political motivation of the citizenry and attempts to correct for it, and asserts that Epicureanism can enrich modern discussions of civic society.

Epicureanism, when compared to other schools of its time such as Stoicism and the Peripatetics, is frequently overlooked or studied in a cursory manner. It is also

frequently misunderstood as being a sensually hedonistic school devoted solely to the pleasures of the body. This is partially because of misrepresentation by certain authors, and partly because of the bias against general hedonistic thought that comes about after the rise of Christianity. Because of these concerns, I will begin by dispelling the misconceptions surrounding Epicureanism. I will then, in Section Two, introduce Epicureanism, explain its difficulties and its views on friendship; and I will conclude in Section Three by separating Epicurean friendship into two types and to clearly demarcate its applicability to a Rawlsian society

### Section One: The Challenges of Working with Epicurean Documents

As noted above, before proceeding further with an introduction of Epicureanism, I must touch on a few problems one encounters when working on Epicurean documents. I do this for two reasons: first to clarify this paper's focus on documents written by Epicurus himself; and second to make the reader aware that there are many misconceptions about Epicureanism. Epicurus wrote extensively during the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BCE, yet all we have of his preserved works are three letters written to various followers and two collections of quotes named "Vatican Sayings" and "Principle Doctrines." Diogenes Laertius in his Life of Epicurus collected the latter, while the "Vatican Sayings" come from a collection of fragments that are preserved in the Vatican Libraries. Because of the sheer lack of primary documents, one is forced to look elsewhere to other Epicureans for further insight into the system.

In addition to the problem of source material, there are two further problems involved in generating an accurate account of Epicureanism. First, it is considerably

difficult to give an accurate picture of the whole of Epicurean doctrine when there is a time gap of two hundred years between the founding of the school and the composition of its next major preserved work. It is reasonable to expect that there would have been at least some development of thought between Epicurus and Lucretius. The second problem involved in generating an accurate account of Epicureanism involves the accuracy and fairness of other writers' (e.g. Cicero, Plutarch) treatments of Epicureanism. The common consensus among many scholars is that Cicero either misunderstood Epicureanism, or used it as a straw man.<sup>13</sup> So effective was Cicero's portrayal of Epicurus that, for example, many of America's Founding Fathers were "completely persuaded by Cicero's misrepresentation of Epicureanism."<sup>14</sup>

To account for these problems, I am going to primarily rely on the original documents written by Epicurus himself to provide an overall account for his system, and later to discuss friendship. This account will be partially supplemented with Lucretius and Philodemus where appropriate, provided that what is being advanced regarding friendship is compatible with what I am asserting. I will also use Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* to provide further insight into the two types of friendship that Epicurus mentions.

## Section Two: Virtue Ethics, Moral Philosophy, and a Brief Introduction to Epicureanism

Considerable debate among 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century ethical philosophers centers around the split between deontological and consequentialist ethics. Yet, since at least the 1980s it has become increasingly common to reassert the ideas of Aristotle and the

---

<sup>13</sup> Carl Richard (1995) *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Hellenistic philosophers into contemporary debates. Virtue ethics, contrary to the “traditional” schism of deontology and consequentialism, does not focus on “obligation, duty, and rule-following; instead of these 'imperative' notions it uses 'attractive' notions like those of goodness and worth.”<sup>15</sup> Virtue ethics seeks to develop the person as a whole, rather than have the person constantly obey a categorical imperative or engage in an endless utilitarian calculus. The final outgrowth of the person's holistic development centers on the way she behaves around other people, how she acts in society at large, and teaches her to focus on the ills of society.

Epicureanism is a Hellenistic system of philosophy that is atomistic, *eudaimonistic*, and hedonistic in its worldview. “Atomism” refers to the belief, first asserted by Democritus, that all matter is composed of smaller particles, or “atoms,” and these atoms give rise to substance and form. Epicureanism is also *eudaimonistic* in nature. *Eudaimonia* literally translates to the idea of having “good spiritedness,” and although it is commonly translated as “happiness,” some contemporary scholars believe the translation that most accurately reflects the original meaning is “human flourishing.”<sup>16</sup> The classic debate regarding *eudaimonia*, and virtue in general, is centered on whether external goods are necessary for the attainment of *eudaimonia* (the position of Aristotle) or if *eudaimonia* is wholly dependent on the internal state of the moral agent (the position advanced by the Stoics). The *eudaimonia* conceived of by Epicurus is different from both of these conceptions. Because Epicurus is a kind of hedonist, he views pleasure as synonymous with the good. By “pleasure” Epicurus means, freedom from bodily pain and mental anguish. For it is not in continuous drinking

<sup>15</sup> Julia Annas (1993), *The Morality of Happiness*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

<sup>16</sup> Annas (1993), and Martha Nussbaum (1996) *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

and revels, nor the enjoyment of women and young boys, nor of fish and other viands...which make for the pleasant life, but sober reasoning, which examines the motives for every choice and avoidance.<sup>17</sup>

The word that Epicurus uses to describe the state free from anguish is *ataraxia*, which means “tranquility” or “undisturbedness.” The word that he uses for the removal of bodily pain that partially characterizes *ataraxia* is *aponia*.

It is also important to note that Epicurus divides pleasure into two types, kinetic and katastematic. Kinetic pleasures are, roughly speaking, the pleasures that come from the *active* enjoyment of a good, such as eating lobster.<sup>18</sup> Katastematic pleasures are, on the other hand, the *passive* enjoyment of having hunger satiated by the lobster. Epicurus regards the latter as being superior to the former, because katastematic pleasure causes one to reach a state of contentment to which nothing can be added. This can become problematic, according to Epicurus, if one has a great desire for lobster *in particular* to the extent that *not* having lobster would breed mental anguish. Epicurus refers to this as an “empty desire”— which is an object that one is not able to easily procure for oneself, so an individual should not be upset in her not having it.<sup>19</sup>

While every pleasure is good for Epicurus and every pain is evil, not every pleasure is to be chosen and not every pain is to be avoided. The importance of this prudential decision-making, then, is emphasized in order to minimize the potential for disturbance in an agent.<sup>20</sup> For example, the sensations that result from the act of having sex are pleasurable, but there are certain unforeseen harmful consequences

---

<sup>17</sup> Epicurus. *Letter to Menoeceus*, 132-37.

<sup>18</sup> To borrow Annas' (1993) Example.

<sup>19</sup> Epicurus. *Vatican Sayings*, 30.

<sup>20</sup> Epicurus. *Letter to Menoeceus*, 127-130.

that could result from the sex-act, such as unwanted pregnancies or STDs. Therefore, choosing to have sex, or to pursue any other pleasure for that matter, should only be done if it is unlikely to cause harm. The same is true of an action that causes pain such as surgery, for example, which should only be done if it is to prevent a greater harm from occurring or to repair a previous injury.

To a reader unfamiliar with Epicureanism, the relationship between pleasure, *eudaimonia*, and virtue may seem unclear. However, the concepts are significantly interrelated. Epicurus writes that

it is impossible to live pleasantly without living wisely, virtuously, and justly, just as we cannot live wisely, virtuously, and justly without living pleasantly. For the virtues arise naturally with the pleasant life; indeed, the pleasant life cannot be separated from them.<sup>21</sup>

Here we see the role of virtue as both a part of *ataraxia* and a prerequisite for it at the same time. As with Aristotle, one is living the good life if living virtuously, but this virtue is also produced as a *result* of living the good life; each is codependent on the other.

### Section Three: Friendship and Virtue for Epicurus

Having given a broad overview of Epicureanism and its place within contemporary discussions of virtue ethics, I now turn to Epicurus' account of friendship and its place in the good life. Friendship's place among the virtues, for the Epicurean, is rather odd. Friendship necessarily produces pleasure to such an extent that "the very things that have been said about the virtues, how they are always attached to

---

<sup>21</sup> Epicurus. *Letter to Menoeceus*, 128-133

pleasures, should be said about friendship.”<sup>22</sup> Under this view it would seem that friendship, if not outright labeled a virtue, certainly seems to produce the same benefits. Yet Epicurus places friendship on a level that is seemingly *higher* than the virtues, writing, “Of all the things that wisdom provides for living one’s entire life in happiness, the greatest by far is the possession of friendship.”<sup>23</sup>

It is necessary, before moving further, to point out that there is a debate about what Epicurus meant when referring to friendship. This debate originates in how one reads the 23<sup>rd</sup> *Vatican Saying*: “Every friendship in itself is to be desired; but the initial cause of friendship is from its advantages.” The point of contention is whether this statement can generate concern for others. Taken literally, *Vatican Saying* XXIII implies that friendships are entered into strictly for the reasons of pleasure. Friendship might, on an Epicurean account, seem to be very selfish, in that “It seems to imply that in every act of friendship I should be asking myself not about the welfare of my friend, but directly about my own final end, pleasure.”<sup>24</sup> On the other side of the debate, a reader might ask, “How can I get pleasure from genuine concern for my friend, unless I can regard my friend’s good as an intrinsic good, regardless of any pleasure that I get out of it.”<sup>25</sup> The latter interpretation answers the orthodox complaint, which states that Epicureanism’s view of friendship is unstable, but still reconcilable with the overall goal of living pleasantly.<sup>26</sup> The less common view is that *Vatican Saying* XXIII is either mistranslated or should be ascribed to a later Epicurean such as Philodemus.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Cicero. *De Finibus*, 1.68.

<sup>23</sup> Epicurus. *Principle Doctrines*, 27.

<sup>24</sup> Annas (1993).

<sup>25</sup> Annas (1993).

<sup>26</sup> This view is advanced by scholars such as Annas (1993), Armstrong (1997), O’Keefe (2001), Cooper (1998), Nussbaum (1996), and Mitsis (1998)

<sup>27</sup> Eric Brown (2002), “Epicurus on the Value of Friendship (Sententia Vaticana XXIII),” *Classical*

For the purposes of this paper, I will not assert that one reading of this passage is more persuasive than the other. I will suggest, however, that Epicurus' views on friendship should be split into two different categories in order to shed more light on the Epicurean conception of friendship itself, while also looking ahead to address the political motivation problem with Rawls. I will refer to these two types of friendship as "Friendship of the Sages" and "Friendship of the Commons." I do this to clarify that I am *not* advancing a conception of the good that is latent in Epicureanism, which "Friendship of the Sages" necessarily advances. Rather, I will be focusing on "Friendship of the Commons," which does not include a thick conception of the good.

By "Friendship of the Sages," I refer to what Aristotle might call a friendship based upon mutual recognition of virtue as he does in Book VIII of *Nicomachean Ethics*. This type of friendship, for Epicurus, would be limited "only to those who are unconcerned about death and are especially able to call to mind the pleasures of a friendship in order to overcome any pains that it will bring."<sup>28</sup> A friendship of this type is a condition of the soul that is not immediately available to a large number of people because they have not yet attained *ataraxia*.

The other type of friendship is what I referred to as "Friendship of the Commons." This type of friendship is a developmental step in one's attainment of *ataraxia* since not all Epicureans were able to achieve tranquility in or through their friendships. A friendship that is based in advantage serves two purposes well: it is weak enough to satisfy objections that a Rawlsian would have regarding its advancement of a conception of the good, yet it still leaves open the possibility that people could further

---

*Philology*, 97.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

develop their friendships into something resembling the “Friendship of the Sages.”

Having now discussed the two types of friendship, I will now explain why I am asserting the desirability of one and not the other.

“Friendship of the Sages” is not suitable to address the shortcomings of Rawls’s theory for two reasons. First, it is inadmissible from a Rawlsian standpoint because a friendship that involves a condition of the soul or the attainment of mutual virtue necessarily bases itself upon a certain conception of the good. Second, not only is this type of friendship incompatible with Rawls; it is not preferable for modern societies either. Epicurus gives the followers of his school the maxim of *lathe biōsas*, which means to “live unobtrusively”, or to live without drawing attention to one’s self.<sup>29</sup> This is to prevent one from becoming too ambitious, which, due to Epicurus’ emphasis on the desires that one *can* easily obtain, is also thought to be an empty desire. Epicurus writes that “the possession of the greatest riches does not resolve the agitation of the soul or give birth to remarkable joy—nor does the honor and admiration of the crowd, nor any other of those things arising from unlimited sources.”<sup>30</sup> Ambition, and the desire for honor, is therefore not to be sought after because it is an exercise in futility because one can always become more ambitious and can desire more honor. Because Epicurus’ fear regarding ambition, he advocates a withdrawal from mass politics. This fact alone renders the “Friendship of the Sages” incompatible, from a Rawlsian standpoint, with an argument such as mine that advocates the formation of interpersonal bonds to strengthen society, en masse because “In contrast to teleological

---

<sup>29</sup> Epicurus. *Fragments of Epicurus*, 86.

<sup>30</sup> Epicurus. *Vatican Sayings*, 81.

theories, something is good only if it fits into ways of life consistent with the principles of right already on hand.”

I am asserting this conception of Friendship of the Commons, however, because it does not advance a conception of the good. This is because it teaches people to begin to value others as contributing members towards the overall stability of society. More importantly, I believe it can solve both the transitional problem and the maintenance problem in the very same way, as I will make clear in the following Chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### A SOCIETY BUILT UPON FRIENDSHIP

Having now introduced and identified the applicable Epicurean conception of friendship, which I have termed “Friendship of the Commons,” I now turn to how my reconstruction of Epicurean friendship can help solve the Rawlsian motivation problems that I identified in Chapter 1. This chapter begins with the case for friendship's potential usefulness in solving the transitional problem, and then turns to how the maintenance problem is to be solved by a turn to Epicurean friendship. I conclude by addressing few problems that could arise as a result of the implementation of this certain type of relationship.

#### Section One: The First Function of Friendship: Solving the Transitional Problem

Rawls asserts that the initial agreement on the principles of justice would be enough of a motivating factor to get people to understand that their own survival and advancement is wrapped up in the survival and advancement of their society. Yet this seems to be an abstract concept that people in the real world would have trouble embracing.

By “real world” I mean people who do not exist in an ideal or near-ideal society, but instead reside in a society that is not yet able to adhere fully to its own founding principles. I will also assume the following things about people in this scenario: there are two basic ways to motivate people, through abstracts and concretes; neither of

these methods of motivation is sufficient by itself to fully motivate every single person; and a combination of the two is required. Therefore, I will attempt to reconcile the feminist positions with the Rawlsian while still remaining true to Rawls's original theory. I also assume that reasoning is insufficient in itself to convince every member of a society of any given proposition. Therefore, some manner of moral education that incorporates relatable, concrete notions is required. For a concept to be "relatable," it must be a concept for which people have a reference point in their day-to-day lives.

"Friendship of the Commons" is therefore useful and relevant here because people need concrete relationships to motivate them, and each person (I assume) has some notion of what it means to have a "friend." Friendship is an easily and identifiable concept on which society can build. As noted earlier, the issue I am concerned with is that Rawls has devalued interpersonal relationships and that, because of this, problems begin to arise when one attempts to convince people that the stability of a just society depends upon adherence to abstract principles on which they have agreed. As stated in Chapter One, Rawls's moral education is not substantively discussed in a way that fully incorporates relationships. Ultimately, moral education is supposed to give justification to the principles of justice that were decided upon originally, but why would people need to be educated about principles on which they have already agreed? Abstract principles lack the emotional force to capture and maintain people's motivation because, while a person might initially be able to identify the principles of justice that she has agreed to, it seems unreasonable that she would be able to relate to and feel attached to the principles if she has never experienced them in practice. "Friendship of the Commons" can solve this problem by playing a role in a person's moral education,

showing her that her shared ends can be furthered by each member of society who regards his or her fellow citizens as contributing members to his or her own well-being.

Initially, this individual would only value her friends as providers of more primary goods. Yet society has a vested interest in educating this person to believe that not only are her friends contributing members of the overall group, but that she is a contributing member as well and that her survival is dependent on society's ability to maintain stability. However, this education does not begin with society, it begins at the individual level of friendship; society only encourages the development of these relationships and protects them once they become more entrenched on the level affecting group dynamics.

This is another way of thinking of the transitional problem in that it asks how we move from "friends" (of the type that I use) to citizens. This development initially occurs at the individual level in a friendship between two people and initiates their consideration of each other as contributing members in their friendship. As these two people begin to interact with others, their responsibilities to others begin to grow to such an extent that their friends can be labeled a "group" whose overall well-being is dependent upon the individual friend relationship that the members have with each other. Discussing notions of "citizenry" occurs when two or more of these groups begin intermingling with each other to such an extent that they begin to meld together. This is when society begins to have a role in the moral education of the person through a fostering and protection of friendships that were, heretofore, unnecessary because of the small amount of people and groups. The goal of this education is to eventually produce the realization that the various friendships of an individual should result in

friendships based in advantage that recognize other people as equally contributing members of society.

This is how the moral education of citizens begins to transition into the political realm. It is assumed that the types of laws that are enacted by a society and the types of policies that it implements have, at their core, certain presuppositions about the person; how she is valued and what her relationship is with her fellow citizens and the state. These presuppositions are therefore held by at least a majority of the society, assuming that the society in question is a democracy. But these presuppositions come from the moral education that the citizens receive; so there is a direct link between the moral education of citizens and the political action—in the form of legislation—they then take. The principles of justice, therefore, should produce an ideal Rawlsian society if they are adhered to from the beginning of the moral educatory process because the citizens would act in accordance with the principles once they begin forming laws. However, because Rawls's theory of justice is an ideal theory, this is not completely realizable in the real world; but I suggest that more moral education that members of society have regarding the necessity of others will in turn make for a more socially cohesive society and will prevent instances of injustice from occurring, which is how I assert that the maintenance problem can be solved.

### Section Two: The Second Function of Friendship: Solving the Maintenance Problem

The role of "Friendship of the Commons" does not end once the friendships are formed and are pursued; it still has a role to play once society is well-ordered and stable. This kind of friendship's ability to foster closer interpersonal bonds creates

social cohesion that adds to the overall stability of society. Rawls's problem, as I have asserted, is that he has essentially lessened the positive gains that interpersonal relationships can produce for society by placing the formation of such relationships after the principles of justice have been realized. I assert that these relationships should be valued *during* the process of acting in accordance with what justice requires in order to give people further motivation to not only act justly, but to also correct instances of injustice. I assert that "Friendship of the Commons" can thus address what I earlier termed the maintenance problem, which referred to how the motivation of the members of society is supposed to be maintained once the stability of a well-ordered society has been achieved. Rawls says that the well-ordered society is a "social union of social unions," but what types of unions are best suited to form this type of society?<sup>31</sup>

If members of society develop through a type of moral education that is based in Friendship of the Commons, then people will have a well-developed sense of the value of their fellow citizens pursuant to their belief in shared ends. Once a society has transitioned into an ideal or near-ideal state, the aforementioned motivation to value fellow citizens must be maintained if the stability of society is to be preserved. Both the institutional and individual levels should see to it that this motivation is maintained. Rawls focuses on justice from a largely institutional perspective, with little mention of the nature of justice that exists in relationships between individuals. Friendship of the Commons necessarily views justice on the individual level and is being used to supplement Rawlsian theory from a grassroots level that asserts that people are able to form stronger group associations through individual relationships. Think of it like this: an average person has many "friends," but only has the relationship of "friendship" with

---

<sup>31</sup> John Rawls (1971).

a *single* individual. Notions of justice regarding the friendship that two people have with each other are relevant to that relationship *individually*, but are also true of friendship in *general*. This is also true of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the relationships between the members of a group. As people acquire more information about each other and begin to work more closely together, trust emerges that strengthens the relationship of the group by proxy of the individual friendships in the group. This suggests that Epicurean friendships of advantage would be compatible with the Rawlsian notion of complementarity because Epicurean friendship begins with the individual friend relationship and can further be applied to “friendship” in a broader setting that includes a greater amount of people. This has already been advanced as a beginning type of moral education, but also has a role to play later in a well-ordered society.

In Rawls's case, friendships based on advantage would serve as an added “alarm” in the case of injustice. The argument works like this: if a well-ordered society is just, and justice necessarily entails advantage to the whole society, any injustice done to an individual or a group of individuals will result in the overall advantage of society's members being diminished; therefore, each member of society has a vested interest in preventing injustice from occurring. Friendship of the Commons helps to reach this point by motivating individuals to take an interest in others. This motivation first emerges on the individual level (as I described in the previous paragraph), but later applies on more of a group-based level—one that includes institutions—as well.

Suppose for example, that Smith, a person who is labeled as demographically “mainstream,” and Jones, a person is labeled as being in the “minority” for reasons such

as his race, gender, sexual preference, or religious views, have developed a friendship of the type to which I am referring in their moral education. If Jones's rights have been violated or some other injustice has been done to him, then it will be as if Smith has suffered a type of harm as well, despite the fact that injustice has not been done to Smith specifically but has instead affected him as a member of society because his benefit resulting from complementarity has been lessened. This means that, for a Rawlsian, Smith can no longer hope to act justly in full accordance with his moral nature because certain moral defects have now been inserted in the social sphere.

Friendships that are based in advantage can then be said to play a corrective role in the process. If another individual harmed Jones, then Smith has the responsibility as Jones' friend to correct the individual that caused his friend's harm. The same can be said on the institutional level; it does not matter *which* entity—such as a person, group, or institution, is committing the injustice, it only matters that the citizens who are a part of the overall society maintain the level of motivation to correct the injustice. The process that produced this motivation and continues to do so occurred during the transition from individuals, to groups, to society. On the institutional level, forming friendships based on advantage provides citizens the motivation to continuously monitor institutions for any sign of injustice. If there is an injustice committed by an institution, then it is assumed, under what I have advanced, that the members of society will be motivated to the required extent to correct the institution.

### Section Three: Potential Problems in Applying Epicurean Friendship to Rawls's Theory

How would friendship be able to teach people to value other members of society if the people can only form a set number of relationships to begin with? The answer has already been made apparent. I am *not* suggesting that we use friendship in an effort to educate the individual to value *every* single member of society as her literal friend. If Friendship of the Commons *can*, in fact, motivate every member of society to be valued as such, then society will be all the more stable; the fulfillment of this notion is, however, beyond the scope and purpose of this paper. I am asserting that friendship should be thought of as a relatable part of moral education, the goal of which is to teach people how to value other people in an effort to form a better society. This is a possible avenue for further research that could be taken in order to test the logical conclusions of my arguments, but in the interest of time, I will have to table the issue here.

At first, it might seem like a problem to (re)introduce an ethical system of this type into a political one such as Rawls's because his "Political Conception of the Good" necessarily limits those doctrines such as Epicureanism that posit a comprehensive moral or philosophical doctrine.<sup>32</sup> Yet, as I have noted above, I am focusing on "Friendship of the Commons," not "Friendship of the Sages." For the purposes of this paper, I am not advancing the *telos* of Epicureanism (*ataraxia*) into political discussion. However, I am using one part of Epicurean doctrine to enrich and complement current theories, and as such, this should not meet with any disapproval.

---

<sup>32</sup> The entire quote is "the political conception does not presuppose accepting any particular comprehensive religious, philosophical or moral doctrine." Rawls (1993).

A possible feminist objection would be that I have essentially made interpersonal relationships just as subordinate to abstract principles as Rawls has. This is incorrect for two reasons. Firstly, the purpose of this paper is to reconcile feminists with Rawls, *not* to attempt to rewrite Rawls from a feminist perspective. I suggest that forming and encouraging deep interpersonal relationships that are valued both intrinsically and as advantageous to civic society at large can strengthen society. This does *not* mean that relationships are subordinate to abstract principles; rather it means that relationships are the *sine qua non* without which abstract principles could never be realized in the first place. The second reason this objection is incorrect is that feminists and Rawlsians essentially want the same thing: a stable society. Where they differ, again, is the mechanism that produces such stability with the feminists suggesting personal relationships and Rawlsians relying on the adherence to abstract principles. In this paper I have attempted to show that both methods are compatible and can be used to strengthen the end goal.

A problem that could arise is the question as to whether or not the application of Friendship of the Commons is acceptable in a Kantian system such as Rawls's. If one is to "act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end and never merely as a means to an end," then it would seem that friendships that are based on advantage would be guilty of violating this command.<sup>33</sup> However, one could not hope to fulfill a requirement of this sort without a conception of friendship to begin with; and, Friendship of the Commons has never been asserted as a fulfillment of any type of ideal in this paper,

---

<sup>33</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:429.

rather it attempts to supplement the progress of both the individual and society in the attainment of an ideal.

## CONCLUSION

The soundness and desirability of Rawls's theory of justice tempts one to apply it to the real world, yet the problems associated with this attempt are numerous. Ideal theorists such as Rawls are often aware of such problems, but fully addressing these problems is not the goal of ideal theory to begin with. Therefore, it falls to others to apply these theories in real world scenarios. I have claimed that Epicureanism might be able to enrich modern liberal notions of friendship by increasing both civic awareness and civic engagement through a basic notion of friendship that is rooted in advantage.

As I have argued, friendship is not sufficient in itself to *achieve* the well-ordered society; it is only a step in the process of getting there. Friendship based on advantage is being used to assist in the moral education of society to build social cohesion that serves both to move towards stability, and to maintain stability by teaching citizens that they should be on constant guard against instances of injustice.

## WORKS CITED

- Annas, Julia. *The Morality of Happiness*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1993. Print.
- Armstrong, John M., 1997. "Epicurean Justice," *Phronesis*, 42: 324–334.
- Brown, Eric, 2002. "Epicurus on the Value of Friendship (Sententia Vaticana XXIII)," *Classical Philology*, 97: 68–80.
- Cicero. *De Finibus*. Loeb Classical Library, 1914. Print.
- Cooper, John M. *Pleasure and Desire in Epicurus*. In John M. Cooper, *Reason and Emotion*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998. Print.
- Frischer, Bernard. *The Sculpted Word: Epicureanism and Philosophical Recruitment in Ancient Greece*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982. Print.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Print.
- Mitsis, Phillip. *Epicurus' Ethical Theory: The Pleasures of Invulnerability*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988. Print.
- Nussbaum, Martha. *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996. Print.
- O'Connor, D.K., 1989. "The Invulnerable Pleasures of Epicurean Friendship," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, 30: 165–86.
- O'Keefe, Tim, 2001. "Is Epicurean Friendship Altruistic?" *Apeiron*, 34: 269–305.
- Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University

Press, 1971. Print.

---. "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 14  
No. 3: 223-251.

---. *Political Liberalism. The John Dewey Essays in Philosophy*, 4. New York: Columbia  
University Press, 1993. Print.

Richard, Carl J. *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American  
Enlightenment*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1995. Print.

Rosenbaum, S., 1986. "How to be Dead and not Care: A Defense of Epicurus,"  
*American Philosophical Quarterly*, 23: 217–25.

Purinton, Jeffrey S. "Epicurus on the Telos." *Phronesis*. Vol. 38, No. 3 (1993): pages  
281-320. BRILL Publishers.

vander Waerdt, Paul, 1987. "The Justice of the Epicurean Wise Man," *Classical  
Quarterly*, n.s. 37: 402–22.