



Crespo, H. (2014). Naturalist reasoning and friendship. *Society of Friends of Epicurus Journal*, 7, pp. 31-32.

Naturalist Reasoning on Friendship

By Hiram Crespo, editor.

*And when they saw an offspring born
From out themselves, then first the human race
Began to soften. For 'twas now that fire
Rendered their shivering frames less staunch to bear,
Under the canopy of the sky, the cold;
And Love reduced their shaggy hardiness;
And children, with the prattle and the kiss,
Soon broke the parents' haughty temper down.
Then, too, did neighbours 'gin to league as friends,
Eager to wrong no more or suffer wrong,
And urged for children and the womankind
Mercy, of fathers, whilst with cries and gestures
They stammered hints how meet it was that all
Should have compassion on the weak. And still,
Though concord not in every wise could then
Begotten be, a good, a goodly part
Kept faith inviolate- or else mankind
Long since had been unutterably cut off,
And propagation never could have brought
The species down the ages.*

Lucretius, in *De Rerum Natura* 5:1015-27

Lucretius' account of how friendship emerged in the human race as a result of its softening and civilizing reminds me of comparative behavioral studies concerning the two species of chimpanzee. The better known species of chimpanzee is aggressive and its tribes and clans are governed by strong, feared alpha males who compete and fight over resources, over the right to mate, and over domination. The other species, the affable bonobos, like to make love instead of war. They solve all their conflicts through sexual exchanges, prefer to cooperate and share resources (again, always using sex as the social lubricant), and their societies are more egalitarian. It has

been noted that the bonobos evolved in parts of the African forests where there were plenty of resources to share, whereas the evolution of the traditional chimp saw more scarcity, ergo their more violent nature.

Some of the most violent species of baboons, by way of contrast, experience so much stress during their short lifetimes that they're in constant state of alert and their health suffers greatly as a result. Humans in overpopulated cities, and those in areas with high levels of poverty, tend also to exhibit higher rates of violent crime whereas wealthier societies exhibit lower rates of violence.

Because examples of both war and cooperation exist among our closest relatives, it's difficult to discern whether our instances of war and cooperation are the result of nurture or nature. But it can not be denied that similar behavioral patterns are found among humans and chimpanzees. We also have our authoritarian alpha males with their docile clans, and elsewhere our open and egalitarian bonobo-like societies.

It should perhaps be asked whether the fact that Abrahamic religions emerged from the desert (no doubt one of the most inhospitable and unfruitful places on Earth) may help to explain the authoritarian and patriarchal alpha-male tendencies in Abrahamic religions. But then, what are we to make of our philosophy of the Garden, a place of fruitfulness and greenery, particularly in contrast with spiritualities of the desert? It's interesting to note that our Garden tradition emerged in glorification of the pleasures of friendship, the most egalitarian model of human interaction and that its most outstanding cultural expression, the gathering on the 20th, is an exuberant display of plenty, of abundance.

In light of this, we can understand why a Garden philosophy must be a philosophy of autarchy (self-sufficiency), and how self-sufficiency produces friendly humans just as plenty in the African bush produces affectionate bonobos. Without autarchy, we must either depend on others (and build hierarchies based on production and exploitation) or steal from them (engage in pillaging, plunder and violence). With self-sufficiency, we are free from the anxieties that arise when we can't provide our natural needs and we can easily relate to others affectionately and as trusting equals.

Lucretius said it well: Philo reduced our shaggy hardness and neighbors began to league as friends eager to wrong no more or be wronged.

The above article first appeared in the May 2014 issue of Happy 20th!