

Epicurean Similarities With Early Christianity

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Regarding the usefulness of *prayer*:

“[P]etitionary prayer to the gods is obviously, for an Epicurean, of no avail; and, indeed, as Epicurus says in his Vatican sayings 65, it is pointless to pray for happiness which a man can provide for himself. If the gods paid attention to human prayers the human race would long since have become extinct since men are continually praying for calamities to fall upon their enemies [...] Yet Epicurus recommend prayer, on the grounds that it is a natural act and that one should also participate in the religious life of one’s country, and it seems that he himself, led the way by taking part, and urging his followers to take part, in the sacrifices of the gods, without worrying too much about popular superstitious beliefs.” (Thrower, *The Alternative Tradition: Religion and the Rejection of Religion in the Ancient World* 184)

“...already been pointed out by the Epicurean Hermocrates — does one have to pray to be able to pray properly? — by using Epicurean ideas of prayer as meditation, when the good is not a result generated from outside, but consists in the act of the prayer itself and, consequently, in looking after the self.” (*The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism*, 60)

“[T]he Epicurean school encouraged prayer representing a disinterested, high-minded admiration and adoration of an ideal. Pray (in its genesis and in its employment, doubtless representing, at once, for some an individual, emotional need, and for others a social habit) became through the Epicurean rationalization of religion, theoretically at least, an intellectual matter, conducted, according to the Epicurean conception, truly *pie* and *sancte*. The higher aspiration of the Epicureans for an ideal that might be worshiped because of its perfection, found expression in prayer, that necessarily involved the religion of poetry, of mythology, of cultus, and of dogma, while at the same time, it gave to gods and goddesses a new function and character. It is inconceivable that prayer among the Epicureans was wholly or even in large part the result of a concessionary or cowardly spirit; it was rather a psychological necessity and at the same time, as conceived by Epicureans, not inconsistent with the entire Epicurean philosophy of religion. Sincerity in the matter of prayer would necessarily among the Epicureans be a variable matter, as also the degree of attachment to the old religion of which the Epicurean theology was an out-growth, a purification, and a reconstruction.” (*Classical Philology: Volume 2* 188)

“It is true that Epicurus saw little value in prayer but he did declare that continuous happiness was possible and he exalted the virtue of gratitude to first rank as a factor of happiness. Verse 16 is therefore partly Epicurean, partly exclusively Pauline: ‘Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks under all circumstances.’” (*St. Paul and Epicurus* 51)