

Happy Thanksgiving Thread

Post by “Cassius” of November 22, 2022 at 4:32 AM

I know we have a worldwide audience but many of us here are in the USA and this week is Thanksgiving, traditionally one of our two biggest holidays of the year. Readership in the forum may be up or down as peoples' schedules change, but so if you're traveling be safe and check in as often as you can.

I placed a short note on the front page Announcements but when I went to add a graphic here (and at Facebook) as to "Happy Thanksging" featuring the "Give Thanks to Nature" quote I could not find one. If any of our meme artists could generate one or more and label them with "Thanks" and / or "Thanksgiving" that would be appreciated. (Of course as I write that i am probably overlooking some existing ones, so apologies if they are there already, and if anyone wants to link one here we can tag them anew if they aren't already tagged.)

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 22, 2022 at 8:47 AM

[Cassius](#), I just found this article you wrote back in 2010, which has good things to say about gratitude. Reposting, the following words are by Cassius from:

[Gratitude As a Source of Strength During Times of Misfortune - NewEpicurean](#)

If you are like me, you often hear friends say (or post to Facebook) that they *“couldn’t go on if they did not have their faith in God to pull them through.”* Is there an Epicurean equivalent to that sentiment? Let me suggest that the student of Epicureanism should consider **Gratitude** in much the same light as a means of support during unfortunate times.

To once again give credit for the inspiration for another post, please refer to Norman DeWitt’s 1937 article “The Epicurean Doctrine of Gratitude” for an excellent discussion of this concept. There DeWitt wrote that Epicurus instructed us to reflect on our gratitude to Nature for our present and past blessings, on our gratitude to those who guide us in the path of wisdom, and on our gratitude to our friends. In this way, gratitude preserves our youthfulness and serves as both an inalienable treasure and a healing medicine in time of misfortune.

DeWitt cites the following that is left to us from the Epicurean texts:

Gratitude to Nature:

Fragment 67 - *"Gratitude must be vouchsafed to blessed Nature because she has made the essential things easy to procure and those things that are hard to procure non-essentials."*

Epicurus saw Nature as ready and willing to guide men in the path of wisdom: *"We must not do violence to nature but obey her."* That Nature is a teacher is assumed in another passage: *"She teaches us to regard as things of less moment the pranks of Fortune."* Again, when the body suffers, the soul cries out and Nature *"passes the word along"* that certain wants must be satisfied.

We should be mindful of our past blessings:

Letter to Menoeceus - *"Wherefore, both when young and when old, a man must devote himself to philosophy, to the end that while he is growing old he may be young in blessings through gratitude for what has been."*

"The adage 'Look to the end of a long life' betrays a lack of gratitude for past blessings."

"Forgetting the good that has been he has become an old man this very day."

"The aged man has cast anchor in old age as in a haven, having locked securely in a grateful memory the recollection of previous blessings that he had no right to count upon."

"One must heal his misfortunes by the grateful recollection of what has been and by recognizing that nothing can render undone what has been done."

We should be thankful that Nature has given us the present, and not just for the possibilities of the future:

"The life that lacks wisdom is void of gratitude and filled with apprehension; its outlook is entirely toward the future."

Gratitude to those who Guide us in the path of Wisdom

Our gratitude to those who guide us in the path of wisdom, most notably Epicurus himself, is well expressed in these words from Lucretius:

"O glory of the Greeks, the first to raise the shining light out of tremendous dark, illumining the blessings of our life - You are the one I follow. In your steps I tread, not as a rival, but for love of your example. Does the swallow vie with swans? Do wobbly-legged little goats compete in strength and speed with thoroughbreds?"

You, father, found the truth; you gave to us a Father's wisdom, and from every page, O most illustrious in renown, we take, as bees do from the flowery banks of summer, the benefit of all your golden words, the gold most worthy of eternal life.

For, once your reason, your divining sense, begins its proclamation, telling us the way things are, all terrors of the mind vanish, are gone; the barriers of the world dissolve before me, and I see things happen all through the void of empty space. I see the gods majestic, and their calm abodes winds do not shake, nor clouds befoul, nor snow violate with the knives of sleet and cold. But there the sky is purest blue, the air is almost laughter in that radiance, and nature satisfies their every need, and nothing, nothing, mars their calm of mind.

No realms of Hell are ever visible, But earth affords a view of everything, below and outward, all through space. I feel A more than mortal pleasure in all this, almost a shudder, since your power has given this revelation of all nature's ways."

Gratitude for our Friends

Principle Doctrine 27 - *"Of the blessings that wisdom assembles for the happiness of the well-rounded life, by far the greatest is the possession of friendship."*

"The wise man alone will know gratitude, consistently speaking well of his friends, alike when they are present and when they are absent."

"Friendship likewise has its beginnings in a calculation of needs; it is certainly necessary to take the preliminary steps, for we also plant seed in the ground, but it perfects itself through reciprocity of favors among those who have attained to the full enjoyment of pleasures."

The Necessity of Incorporating Gratitude Into Our Reflections

To close with additional words from Lucretius:

Our terrors and our darkneses of mind must be dispelled,

Not by the sunshine's rays, not by those shining arrows of the light,

But by insight into nature, and **a scheme of systematic contemplation.**

It would seem likely that among the things which students of Epicurus should include within that *scheme of systematic contemplation*, one of the most important for a healthy mind and attitude is **Gratitude**.

Post by "Kalosyni" of November 22, 2022 at 9:14 AM

Our terrors and our darkneses of mind must be dispelled, not by the sunshine's rays, not by those shining arrows of the light, but by insight into nature, and a scheme of systematic contemplation. --Lucretius



Fragment 67 – “Gratitude must be vouchsafed to blessed Nature because she has made the essential things easy to procure and those things that are hard to procure non-essentials.”

Post by “Cassius” of November 22, 2022 at 9:25 AM

Thank you Kalosyni! I posted that to my Twitter feed and Facebook and other accounts and would encourage others to do the same. And if others come up with graphics please post them here, or to the gallery (and please add a link to this thread so we can find them)

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 22, 2022 at 9:49 AM

Happy Thanksgiving!



“Gratitude must be vouchsafed to blessed Nature because she has made the essential things easy to procure and those things that are hard to procure non-essentials.” - Fragment 67

Here is a simpler version 😊

Post by “Don” of November 22, 2022 at 12:12 PM

I've always been partial to

VS35 Don't ruin the things you have by wanting what you don't have, but realize that they too are things you once did wish for.

οὐ δεῖ λυμαίνεσθαι τὰ παρόντα τῶν ἀπόντων ἐπιθυμία, ἀλλ' ἐπιλογίζεσθαι ὅτι καὶ ταῦτα τῶν εὐκταίων ἦν.

Post by “Don” of November 23, 2022 at 7:51 AM

Happy Thanksgiving Eve. [Kalosyni](#) inspired me to go back and pull out some more favorite "gratitude" quotes:

χάρις

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, χάρις](#)

Remember that Epicurus wrote a whole book entitled Περὶ δώρων καὶ χάριτος "Concerning Gifts and Gratitude"

VS 17 It is not the young man who is most happy, but the old man who has lived beautifully; for despite being at his very peak the young man stumbles around as if he were of many minds, whereas the old man has settled into old age as if in a harbor, secure in his gratitude for the good things he was once unsure of.

οὐ νέος μακαριστὸς ἀλλὰ γέρων βεβιωκῶς καλῶς· ὁ γὰρ νέος ἀκμῇ πολὺς ὑπὸ τῆς τύχης ἑτεροφρονῶν πλάζεται· ὁ δὲ γέρων καθάπερ ἐν λιμένι τῷ γήρα καθώρμικεν, τὰ πρότερον δυσελπιστούμενα τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἀσφαλεῖ κατακλείσας χάριτι.

VS 19 He who forgets the good things he had yesterday becomes an old man today.

τοῦ γεγονότος ἀμνήμων ἀγαθοῦ γέρων τήμερον γεγένηται.

VS35 (My paraphrase) Don't spoil your enjoyment of the things you presently have by craving things that are absent, but remember that what you have here and now were also things you were once devoted to getting.

VS69 (My paraphrase) The ingratitude of the soul makes a creature gluttonous for limitless variation in one's lifestyle.

τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀχάριστον λίχνον ἐποίησε τὸ ζῶον εἰς ἄπειρον τῶν ἐν διαίτῃ ποικιλιμάτων.

Note: ποικιλιμάτων refers literally to fancy embroidery or needlework, and so the colloquial meaning of "variety, diversity" comes from the intricate patterns and ornaments of that craft. To me, this VS again gets at not being able to take pleasure in or to be grateful for what's right in front of you.

Plutarch, Against Colotes, 17, p. 1117A: But what epithet do they deserve - with your "roars" of ecstasy and "cries of thanksgiving" and tumultuous "bursts of applause" and "reverential demonstrations," and the whole apparatus of adoration that you people resort to in supplicating and hymning the man who summons you to sustained and frequent pleasures?

U183 Plutarch, That Epicurus actually makes a pleasant life impossible, 15, p. 1097C: One cannot ignore the man's absurd inconsistency: he treads under foot and belittles the actions of Themistocles and Miltiades and yet writes this to his friends about himself: "The way in which you have provided for me in the matter of sending the grain was godlike and magnificent, and you have given tokens of your regard from me that reach to high heaven." So if someone had taken that corn ration of his bread-stuff from our philosopher's letter, the expressions of gratitude would have conveyed the impression that it was written in thanksgiving for the freedom or deliverance of the whole Greek nation or of the Athenian state.

In light of all this emphasis on the importance of gratitude χάρις, PD1 appears problematic:

PD1 Τὸ μακάριον καὶ ἄφθαρτον οὔτε αὐτὸ πράγματα ἔχει οὔτε ἄλλω παρέχει· ὥστε οὔτε ὀργαῖς οὔτε χάρισι συνέχεται· ἐν ἀσθενεῖ γὰρ πᾶν τὸ τοιοῦτον.

One who is blissful and incorruptible has no troubles oneself nor causes troubles for others; as a consequence, they are affected by neither anger nor *gratitude*; because all this would be an indication of weakness.

Woodhouse's (1910) English-Greek Dictionary: A Vocabulary of the Attic Language (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1910) provides a long list of synonyms for χάρις that includes:

attraction, benefaction, bias, boon, elegance, fascination, favour, grace, gratefulness, gratitude, kindness, niceness, obligation, offering, pleasantness, and more than two dozen more!

With all those shades of meaning, I would offer this translation/paraphrase of PD1:

One who is incorruptible and is feeling undiluted bliss is self-sufficient, secure in themselves, and has no troubles oneself nor feels any need to cause trouble for others. So, they are affected by neither anger nor obligation because all that comes about through frailty.

I think the idea of "obligation" better conveys the self-sufficiency and self-assuredness of a completely blissful, indestructible being.

Happy Thanksgiving to all my Epicurean friends! Εὐχᾶριστέω! I am grateful!

Post by “Cassius” of November 23, 2022 at 7:58 AM

Wow it's possible to assemble quite a list!

Post by “Don” of November 23, 2022 at 8:17 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Wow it's possible to assemble quite a list!

And I don't think that's an exhaustive list either 😊

Post by “Godfrey” of November 23, 2022 at 1:23 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

PD1:

One who is incorruptible and is feeling undiluted bliss is self-sufficient, secure in themselves, and has no troubles oneself nor feels any need to cause trouble for others. So, they are affected by neither anger nor obligation because all that comes about through frailty.

Although I'm ignorant of Greek nuance, I agree that this is the best translation in light of my overall understanding of EP, and a review of the various versions in @Nate 's compilation.

Post by “Pacatus” of November 23, 2022 at 3:29 PM

A pleasurable and peaceful Thanksgiving to all! 😊

Post by “Don” of November 23, 2022 at 5:36 PM

It seems to me that Thanksgiving is the most Epicurean of modern holidays with its emphasis (at least nominally) on gratitude.

This led me to think about how other holidays could be reinterpreted (at least in one's mind and motivation) in an Epicurean context:

- Easter - This is an easy one. Just take it back to its pagan roots as a celebration of Spring, new life, renewed fertility of the Earth. Read the hymn to Venus by Lucretius on the day.
- Halloween - This one's easy, too, in tying it to El Dia de Los Muertos that comes the day after. This is a chance to remember those who have passed, to relive pleasurable memories of those who have died.
- Christmas - This one's tougher. The Christian context is the birth of Christ, the "bringer of light to the world." Well, we already have Epicurus's birthday in Jan/Feb to celebrate the birth of the founder. So, what to do with Christmas? There's gift giving. Maybe something to do with that?

Anyway, consider this an invitation to offer ideas. Include other holidays. We can always move it to a new thread of it elicits responses 😊

Post by “Pacatus” of November 23, 2022 at 5:52 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

Christmas - This one's tougher. The Christian context is the birth of Christ, the "bringer of light to the world." Well, we already have Epicurus's birthday in Jan/Feb to celebrate the birth of the founder. So, what to do with Christmas? There's gift giving. Maybe something to do with that?

The winter solstice: when the days (daylight) start lengthening again.

And Thanksgiving comes at the end of the fall harvest (and stomping the grapes -- and Nouveau Beaujolais wine!) 😊

Post by "Don" of November 23, 2022 at 6:34 PM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

The winter solstice: when the days (daylight) start lengthening again.

Ah! A celebration of the regularity of the cosmos, that we do not live at the whim of the gods. The cosmos is knowable and not capricious. The lengthening days is a metaphor for our gradual understanding of the cosmos, celebrate Epicurus's triumph over the darkness of ignorance (especially if you're compelled to attend a midnight mass where the lights are extinguished then relit at midnight to announce "the birth of the Savior").

Quote from Lucretius, Proem of Book 3 DRN

O thou who first uplifted in such dark
So clear a torch aloft, who first shed light
Upon the profitable ends of man,
O thee I follow, glory of the Greeks,
And set my footsteps squarely planted now
Even in the impress and the marks of thine-
Less like one eager to dispute the palm,
More as one craving out of very love
That I may copy thee!-

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How's that? 😄