

Virgil's "Felix Qui Potuit Rerum Cognoscere Causas.."

Post by "Cassius" of July 7, 2023 at 1:00 PM

We have two graphic entries for this phrase, but not a real thread devoted to the passage directly. I want to feature this quote on the head of the forum for a while, so this will be the page to which we can link.

[Wikipedia -](#)

"**Felix, qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas**" is verse 490 of Book 2 of the "[Georgics](#)" (29 BC), by the Latin poet [Virgil](#) (70 - 19 BC). It is literally translated as: "Fortunate, who was able to know the causes of things". ¹ Virgil may have had in mind the Roman philosopher [Lucretius](#), of the Epicurean school.

Until we come up with one that is at least as literal as this, we can go with this translation, which preserves almost the exact word order:

Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas

Atque metus omnes, et inexorabile fatum

Subjecit pedibus, strepitumque Acherontis avari

Happy was he who was able to know the causes of things,

And all fear, and inexorable fate, he trampled underfoot, along with the roar of greedy Acheron.

Because the key thoughts or so important, I would prefer not to seem them diluted in the interest of rhyme or poetry, but it would be interesting to see other translations or hear other details about the origin of the passage, so please post them.

Below are the two gallery pictures:



Post by "Joshua" of July 7, 2023 at 1:19 PM

Note the word *potuit*, used here as well as in Lucretius: *Tantum potuit religio suadere malorum.*
"So potent was religion in persuading to evil deeds."

So that the power or ability to know the causes of things--a power given by philosophy--is balanced against the power we give to superstition through fear and ignorance. The power of knowledge allows us to trample fear, fate, and the dread of death.

It is the gift of Epicurus to the world, as Lucian indicates:

"The fellow had no conception of the blessings conferred by that book upon its readers, of the peace, tranquillity, and independence of mind it produces, of the protection it gives against terrors, phantoms, and marvels, vain hopes and inordinate desires, of the judgement and

candour that it fosters, or of its true purging of the spirit, not with torches and squills and such rubbish, but with right reason, truth, and frankness."

Thoreau saw the figure of Epicurus in Lucretius as a kind of Prometheus, stealing fire from the gods and giving it to man.