

Happy Thanksgiving Thread

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 past 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**.