

Retire with Thanks: Rethinking Lucretius 3.962^{*†}

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Abstract

This article aims at proposing a solution to one of the well-known textual cruces in Lucretius' De rerum natura. After a brief survey of the suggested emendations, the author will shed some fresh light on Manning's gratus, which recent editors have curiously neglected. The idea that the old man should retire from life with thanks is not uncommon among classical writers. In addition, parallel expressions are also found in Epicurus' own words. This article concludes that gratus is what we would expect in the last line of Nature's admonition in De rerum natura and, therefore, the most probable emendation.

Keywords: Lucretius; Epicurus; old age; philosophy; gratitude; ideal attitude towards death

nunc aliena tua tamen aetate omnia mitte

aequo animoque agedum †magnis† concede: necessest. (Lucr. 3.961–2)

This is one of the well-known cruces in Lucretius' *De rerum natura*. Since the sixteenth century many scholars have proposed a variety of conjectures, which have been collected by Papanghelis,¹ but none of them has won general approval.

A comprehensive chronological survey of the suggested emendations of the transmitted *magnis* is certainly needless; however, it would be pertinent to revisit and reference some noteworthy conjectures. The bulk of emendations can be divided into two categories: first, a dative form to go with *concede*; second, a nominative or an adverb that modifies the subject. The earliest emendation belonging to the first category is attributed to Marullus: *iam aliis*. As Bailey noted,² however, it is 'metrically awkward and feeble in sense'. Inge's *humanis* ('yield to the common lot') merits consideration,³ but the term *humanus* is usually opposed to *diuinus* ('the divine') or *animalis*, a word that alludes to living

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¹ Th.D. Papanghelis, 'Lucretius III. 961–2 once more', *Δημοσιεύματα τῆς Ἐταιρείας Μακεδονικῶν Σπουδῶν* 31 (1979), 342–9.

² C. Bailey (ed.), *Lucretius: De rerum natura*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1947), 2.1155.

³ W.R. Inge, 'Lucretius iii. 962', *CR* 62 (1948), 62.

creatures of a type other than human;⁴ such a contrast is not contextually apt. Brandt's *gnauis* is by no means ludicrous,⁵ but the dynamism of the next generation is relatively incongruous in the current context. In addition, Deufert justifiably questions whether *gnauis* can, on its own, have the connotation of youthfulness.⁶ The most feasible emendation in the first group is Bernays's *gnatis*, which not only is palaeographically acceptable but also corresponds with *nouitate* in line 964. However, since this is the last line of Nature's long admonition, we expect something that summarizes it, rather than something which anticipates the next passage.

^{p.896} Papanghelis himself made great progress by proposing the emendation *dignus*, which belongs to the second category. He analysed the whole passage of Nature's accusation against the old man and pointed out that there is a key concept of dignity in this part of the poem. Nature's words convey an indignant tone, and she seems to claim that 'if you didn't live with dignity, at least die with dignity, for die you must'.⁷ Dignity plays a vital role in Lucretius' ethical conception and *dignus* occurs several times in this book.⁸ However, the passages he cites as support are somewhat removed from the line under investigation, and appear in different sections of the poem. Therefore, we have to concentrate on the precise words of Nature from line 933 to line 962 and interpret them using a different perspective.

What we need here is something which can match *aequo animo*, and the correct text must speak about the ideal attitude towards death. Hence, the best solution is C.E. Manning's *gratus*, which deserves due consideration but has been curiously neglected by recent editors.⁹ Manning renders the passage as follows: 'Give way gratefully and with equanimity: You'll have to go in any case.'¹⁰ Although the image of a banquet (*plenus uitae conuiuia recedis*, 938), as Manning points out, strongly favours this emendation, I will add further examples that make it more certain.

First, human gratitude is clearly of great importance here since *gratus* and *ingratus* repeatedly occur in previous lines. Nature censures people who are not grateful for her gifts:

⁴ See *OLD* s.v. *humanus* 2a, b.

⁵ S. Brandt, 'Ad Lucretium', *Neue Jahrbücher für Philologie und Paedagogik* 121 (1880), 773.

⁶ M. Deufert, *Kritische Kommentar zu Lukrezens 'De rerum natura'* (Berlin and Boston, 2018), 189–90. Deufert proposed *iuueni* and printed it in his text, but the abruptly introduced singular form seems rather clumsy despite the Greek parallels cited by him.

⁷ ^{p.896} Papanghelis (n. 1), 347.

⁸ E.g. *Lucr.* 3.12 *dignissima uita*, 3.322 *dignam ... uitam*, 3.420 *digna ... carmina*. See also Papanghelis (n. 1), 347–8. He cites the following lines: *Lucr.* 3.884 *hinc indignatur se mortalem esse creatum*, 3.870–1 *proinde ubi se uideas hominem indignarier ipsum, | post mortem fore ut aut putescat corpore posto ...*, 3.1045 *tu uero dubitabis et indignabere obire?* The difference between *indignitas* and *indignatio* does not matter, because Lucretius often uses near-synonyms or (pseudo-)etymologically connected words. I limit myself to two examples: *amarus/amor* (4.1134) and *mel/melos (musaeo ... melle* [1.947]; *musaea mele* [2.412]). J.M. Snyder, *Puns and Poetry in Lucretius' De rerum natura* (Amsterdam, 1980) provides a general description of Lucretius' wordplay.

⁹ C.E. Manning, 'Lucretius III 962, again', *Mnemosyne* 40 (1987), 152–4. Neither the second edition of Kenney's commentary (E.J. Kenney [ed.], *Lucretius: De rerum natura Book III* [Cambridge, 2014²]) nor the latest Teubner edition (M. Deufert [ed.], *Titus Lucretius Carus: De rerum natura* [Berlin and Boston, 2019]) records this emendation.

¹⁰ Manning (n. 9), 153.

nam si **grata** fuit tibi uita ante acta priorque
 et non omnia pertusum congesta quasi in uas
 commoda perfluxere atque **ingrata** interiere,
 cur non ut plenus uitae conuiuia recedis
 aequo animoque capis securam, stulte, quietem? (935–9)

sed quia semper aues quod abest, praesentia temnis
 imperfecta tibi elapsast **ingrataque** uita,
 et necopinanti mors ad caput adstitit ante
 quam satur ac plenus possis discedere rerum. (957–60)

After a long tirade, Nature declares that the old man, who is at the very end of his life, should change his attitude.¹¹

¹¹ Second, the idea that the old man should appreciate his age and retire from life with thanks is not uncommon among classical writers.¹² We can find similar expressions in Epicurus' own words. Before his death, the philosopher articulated his appreciation towards his friends for past conversations with them.¹³ In another passage, he also asserts that only the wise man can be happy and grateful in the midst of great suffering.¹⁴ However, the most striking example is the following passage (Diog. Laert. 10.122):

ὥστε φιλοσοφητέον καὶ νέω καὶ γέροντι, τῷ μὲν ὅπως γηράσκων νεάζῃ τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς διὰ τὴν χάριν τῶν γεγονότων, τῷ δὲ ὅπως νέος ἅμα καὶ παλαιὸς ἦ διὰ τὴν ἀφοβίαν τῶν μελλόντων·

According to Epicurus, philosophy makes a person both young and old at the same time; in other words, he becomes young by having no fear (ἀφοβία, *aequo animo*) and old by being thankful for things which

¹¹ *gratus* and *ingratus* also appear as important ethical terms in the previous book: 2.23, 2.615, 2.622. In addition, the facts that a long life was very unusual in antiquity and that only a few Romans lived to old age must be considered.

¹² ¹¹ Cf. Cic. *Sen.* 42 *magnam habendam esse senectuti gratiam, quae efficeret ut id non liberet quod non oporteret*, 46 *habeo senectuti magnam gratiam*, 69 *quod cuique temporis ad uiuendum datur; eo debet esse contentus*; *Sen. Ep.* 12.4 *plena [sc. senectus] <est> uoluptatis, si illa scias uti. gratissima sunt poma cum fugiunt*, 26.1–2 *inter decrepitos me numera et extrema tangentis. gratias tamen mihi apud te ago*, 67.2 *ago gratias senectuti quod me lectulo adfixit*, 83.3 *minimum exercitationi corporis datum, et hoc nomine ago gratias senectuti*; M. Aur. *Med.* 2.3 ... ἵνα μὴ γογγύζων ἀποθάνης, ἀλλὰ ἴλεως ἀληθῶς καὶ ἀπὸ καρδίας εὐχάριστος τοῖς θεοῖς, 4.3 ἀποπέμψαι σε μὴ δυσχεραίνοντα ἐκείνοις ἐφ' ἃ ἐπανερχῆ, 4.48 τὸ ἀκαριαῖον οὖν τοῦτο τοῦ χρόνου κατὰ φύσιν διελεῖν καὶ ἴλεων καταλύσαι, ὡς ἂν εἰ ἐλαία πέπειρος γενομένη ἐπιπτεν, εὐφημοῦσα τὴν ἐνεγκοῦσαν καὶ χάριν εἰδυῖα τῷ φύσαντι δένδρῳ. For a more detailed discussion of old age in the ancient philosophical writings, see J.G.E. Powell (ed.), *Cicero: Cato maior de senectute* (Cambridge, 1988), 24–30.

¹³ Diog. Laert. 10.22 ἀντιπαρετάττετο δὲ πᾶσι τούτοις τὸ κατὰ ψυχὴν χαῖρον ἐπὶ τῇ τῶν γεγονότων ἡμῖν διαλογισμῶν μνήμῃ. It is also noteworthy that Seneca testifies to Epicurus' thankfulness (*Ep.* 66.48): *non potest dici hoc non esse par maximis bonum quod beatae uitae clausulam inposuit, cui Epicurus extrema uoce gratias egit*.

¹⁴ Diog. Laert. 10.118 κἂν στρεβλωθῇ δ' ὁ σοφός, εἶναι αὐτὸν εὐδαίμονα. μόνον τε χάριν ἔξιν τὸν σοφόν, καὶ ἐπὶ φίλοις καὶ παροῦσι καὶ ἀποῦσιν ὁμοίως διὰ τε λόγου <καὶ διὰ πράξεως>.

have happened (χάρης τῶν γεγονότων, *gratus*). This is nothing other than a wise man's attitude towards death and exactly what we would expect in the last line of Nature's admonition in *De rerum natura*.

Finally, I would like to add a palaeographical consideration. Manning assumes the error of *n* for *r* and suggests the process *gratus* > *gnatus* > *magnis*.¹⁵ Although there is no direct evidence of *magnis* for *gratus*, if we take into consideration some attested scribal mistakes, the corruption can be explained: first, *gn* can be substituted for *gr* (compare Housman's certain correction *gnatorum* for *gratorum* in MSS ML in Manilius 3.132);¹⁶ second, *m-* of *magnis* is caused either by the last *-m* of *agedum* or, though this is less likely, by the combination of a relatively uncommon error (*m* for *at*)¹⁷ with the transposition of letters (*gn-at-us* > *m(a)-gn-is*); third, *-us* changed to *-is* either owing to simple confusion or by a copyist who wanted a dative form.

¹⁵ Manning (n. 9), 154.

¹⁶ On the confusion of *n* and *r*, see Bailey (n. 2), 1.38. It should also be noted that the reverse error of *r* for *n* is found in Lucr. 4.143, 4.159: *genantur* (Lambinus's emendation for *gerantur* in MSS OQ).

¹⁷ *at* and *m* can be interchanged: for instance, MS D of Plautus has *ate* for *me* in *Poen.* 884. See L. Havet, *Manuel de critique verbale appliquée aux textes latins* (Paris, 1911), 164.