

*November 22, 2006*

# Thank Goodness Not God on Thanksgiving

What it means to feel thankful without acknowledging a higher authority.

*by Daniel C. Dennett*

**W**hen I gaze in wonder at a starry sky, or the waves crashing on the granite shores of Maine, I am not just thrilled to be alive on this wonderful planet; I am grateful. But to whom?

There is no *person* who created the universe, or the planet, or the biosphere, so there is really nobody to thank for that.

(A God who is not a person is not an appropriate recipient of thanks. Or should we thank the Law of Gravity and the Second Law of Thermodynamics for all they make possible? I don't think they care, do you?)

But there is a suitably responsible cause of my health, my security, my freedom from want and from fear, and it is composed of, and the achievement of, persons. I can thank *goodness* ([http://www.edge.org/3rd\\_culture/dennett06/dennett06\\_index.html](http://www.edge.org/3rd_culture/dennett06/dennett06_index.html)) — the wonderful fabric of excellence created by individuals working together in human civilization to make this planet a better place.

I can thank the creators — literally, not figuratively or symbolically — of a bounty of goods and services, arts and sciences, government and justice.

And instead of trying to repay this debt with burnt offerings, or prayers, or expensive ceremonies, I can repay it in kind, by dedicating myself to trying to add to the stock of goodness in the future, for the benefit of others. We nonbelievers have no difficulty with Thanksgiving; we just Eliminate the Middleman and give thanks directly to the real, ongoing, human project of making the world safer and better for everyone.

*Lead image courtesy of Ruocaled (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/ruocaled/>).*

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