

# Favorite Translation of Lucretius

Post by “Cassius” of January 24, 2023 at 6:19 PM

I wish I could downvote Leonard 😊 Just got into an exchange with Kalosyni this afternoon about a very important passage in Lucretius where Leonard seems to have deviated strongly from the consensus.

Here in the first "nothing from nothing" sequence in Book 1 Leonard translates:

This terror, then, this darkness of the mind,  
Not sunrise with its flaring spokes of light,  
Nor glittering arrows of morning can disperse,  
But only Nature's aspect and her law,  
Which, teaching us, hath this exordium:  
Nothing from nothing ever yet was born.

While virtually every other translator makes note that it's not just "nothing from nothing ever yet was born, but that:

Munro: [146] This terror then and darkness of mind must be dispelled not by the rays of the sun and glittering shafts of day, but by the aspect and the law of nature; the warp of whose design we shall begin with this first principle, nothing is ever gotten out of nothing by divine power.

Martin Ferguson Smith: This terrifying darkness that enshrouds the mind must be dispelled not by the sun's rays and the dazzling darts of day, but by study of the superficial aspect and underlying principle of nature.<sup>22</sup>

The first stage of this study will have this rule as its basis: nothing ever \[150\] springs miraculously out of nothing.

Brown: [146] These terrors of the mind, this darkness then, not the Sun's beams, nor the bright rays of day, can ever dispel, but Nature's light and reason, whose first of principles shall be my guide: Nothing was by the Gods of nothing made.

ETC Most everyone else (I wish i had time to check them all to see if anyone else does this but I don't) makes some reference to by the gods or divinely, because the Latin is:

Principium cuius hinc nobis exordia sumet,  
nullam rem e nihilo gigni divinitus umquam. 150

quippe ita formido mortalis continet omnis,  
quod multa in terris fieri caeloque tuentur,  
quorum operum causas nulla ratione videre  
possunt ac fieri divino numine rentur.

I mean, I know the general rule is that nothing comes from nothing FOR ANY REASON, and that in fact that's the way that Epicurus says it in Herodotus (if I recall correctly) -- no direct linking to "the will of the gods." But Lucretius here is in the middle of a long argument against divine supernatural influence, so it should have been left in by Leonard here IMHO.

If someone can show me that I am libeling Leonard without justification, I will gladly withdraw this comment. But for the time being I can't resist the suspicion that Leonard is not to be trusted on key passages -- and yet his version is almost everywhere on the internet!

[Don](#), especially given your interest in the translation details -- am I missing something here in Leonard vs the others? And Leonard is the one Perseus uses too, if I recall correctly.