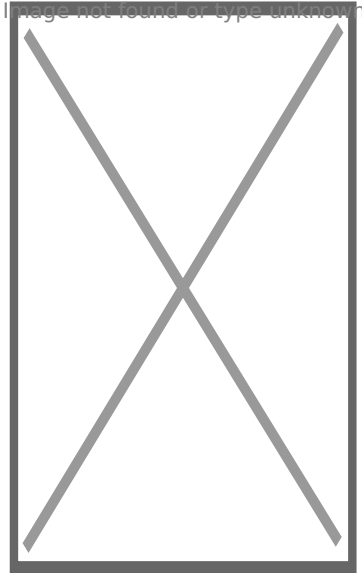


# Joseph Thompson - "Lucretius Or Paul?" 1875

Post by "Don" of February 12, 2024 at 7:20 PM



[Lucretius or Paul: Materialism and theism tested by the nature and the needs ... : Joseph Parrish Thompson : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

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**Post by "Cassius" of February 12, 2024 at 7:45 PM**

Thank you Don! that looks to be fascinating! i am not going to be able to read it tonight so if others get a chance before I do please let us know if you think it is a worthwhile read!

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**Post by "Cassius" of February 12, 2024 at 7:57 PM**

Ok I cannot resist getting started. Thompson seems very admiring of Lucretius, and his extended discussion of how Lucretius is using the deductive method about atoms that have

been and never will be seen by the unaided eye emphasizes the point that DeWitt makes, that Epicurus and Lucretius were not strict "*empiricists*" as that term is often used.

#### Quote

Now, the point I make, and would insist upon, is, that these were not lucky guesses or coincidences of Lucretius, but results of the deductive method to which scientific materialism is compelled to do homage by its own discoveries. But remarkable as are these correspondences of experimental physics and chemistry with the atomic theory, the atom itself is simply assumed. It never has been, and never can be, brought within the range of the senses.

The atomic theory is evidenced by experiments as to atomic weights, volume, heat, and combining capacity, and as to isomerism, and chemical molecules and homogeneity; but the theory is still stoutly contested by some, and the very existence of the atom is disputed by others.<sup>3</sup>) Yet we are called upon to accept the materialistic doctrine of the universe, and to receive nothing as knowledge which does not come to us through the senses, while forsooth the foundation of this sensible universe lies utterly beyond the senses, is not at all a physical fact that any one has seen or handled, but a theoretical deduction, an assumption of the mind to explain facts that are seen. Let the atomic theory have all due acceptance as an ingenious and subtile theory, but let it not be thrust upon us as a dogma by a hierarchy of physicists — which, in the name of human freedom, is as much to be resisted and detested as an ecclesiastical hierarchy. Most heartily and gratefully do I welcome all facts ascertained by physical science; nor do I see, upon theistic grounds, any solid objection to the nebular hypothesis, the atomic theory, the doctrine of the correlation of forces, or of natural selection. But should all these be established upon the physical basis of experimental observation, I pray men of science to be honest enough to own that it was not physics but Metaphysics that first suggested and sought to demonstrate them, each and all. Materialism can not repudiate its own parentage; can not steal the name of Lucretius and scorn his method. Materialism was begotten not of Nature, but of Mind through metaphysics.

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### Post by “Cassius” of February 12, 2024 at 8:15 PM

Lot's could be said about this following paragraph - most of it negative. This is what Frances Wright attacks under the name "imagination" -

#### Quote

For the constitution of a material universe, it is true that matter and space or body and void are alike essential, and so far as we know are all; but the question is, whether the material universe is all; and that question cannot be settled by purely physical observation upon the nature of bodies or the contents of space. That incessant striving of man's nature after something above and beyond, a striving that grows the more impatient with his mastery over nature and his accumulating stores of knowledge;— that mighty unrest in which a Prometheus, a Lucifer, a Faust are but projected types of our inner selves—the unrest that urges man on to think the unthinkable and to know the unknowable — that makes poetry, philosophy, music so much higher and worthier representations of humanity than the recorded observation of phenomena - what is this but an attestation of that “third thing” that Lucretius could not feel nor see, but that Paul had attained to when he spoke of “body, soul and spirit,” and found not only a third element in the constitution of man and of the universe, but also a “third heaven” in which spirit might abide?

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## Post by “Cassius” of February 12, 2024 at 8:19 PM

This is why Epicureans can't ignore canonics and can't rely solely on superficial statements about "the senses" without explaining how reasoning based on the senses works:

### Quote

We must now keep in mind how strongly Lucretius insists that “from the senses first proceeded the knowledge of the true, and the senses can not be refuted.” Yet he here assumes several successive stages of motion by the impact of bodies before either body or motion becomes cognizable by the senses. That is, for the foundation of his atomic theory he reasons back from the seen to the unseen: — the reasoning may be valid, but the existence of the atom is not attested by the senses. Yet now-a-days, to reason from the seen to the unseen, from phenomena to cause, from adaptation to intelligence, is forsooth made an offense in the metaphysician, though Lucretius arrived at his atom by deduction, and then assumed the atom as the basis of his materialistic universe! Next, having inferred the motion of invisible atoms from the perceived motion of visible particles, he makes the bold assumption of self-originated motion for the first-beginnings. This is sheer assertion, since his senses had shown him only motion by impact, and neither the senses nor logic could derive from this motion without “blows” to start it.

## Post by "Cassius" of February 12, 2024 at 8:23 PM

Oh give me a break - this is why Epicurus warned against poets and he probably should have warned explicitly against hallucinogenic drugs too!

### Quote

There is a certain grandeur and beauty in these conceptions, and I confess that when first I had mastered Lucretius, I felt a touch of awe at the majesty of a soul thus blindly bowing to its fate, and Samson-like dragging down men and gods together in its own destruction. But as I looked upon such a universe, in which destruction is the ever-recurring law, and death alone is immortal, from this background of darkness and despair, I saw rise before me that marvelous vision of Wordsworth;

"In my mind's eye a temple, like a cloud  
Slowly surmounting some invidious hill  
Rose out of darkness: the bright work stood still;  
And might of its own beauty have been proud,  
But it was fashioned, and to God was vowed  
By virtues that diffused, in every part,  
Spirit divine through forms of human art;  
Faith had her arch - her arch when winds blow loud,  
Into the consciousness of safety thrilled;  
And Love her towers of dread foundation laid  
Under the grave of things; Hope had her spire  
Star-high, and pointing still to something higher;  
Trembling I gazed, but heard a voice,—it said,  
Hell-gates are powerless Phantoms when we build."

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## Post by "Cassius" of February 12, 2024 at 8:31 PM

Thompson goes on at length on pages 25 - 30 about gratitude, and alleges that it would have no part in a Lucretian view of things. It is interesting to consider that Epicurus wrote to the effect that we should be grateful to nature and had other things to say about gratitude, as if Epicurus understood that gratitude was an issue that had to be addressed.

He then mentions patriotism as being impossible, even though Epicurus mentioned those who were "enemies of Hellas" and his whole system of "friendship" can be extended to social groups.

He then mentions philanthropy, and even mention's the opening of book 2 of the poem as totally inconsistent with philanthropy! We've dealt with that before and this shows the need to be uncompromising on it 😊

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### **Post by “Cassius” of February 12, 2024 at 8:40 PM**

He closes mentioning lack of "feeling" and then lack of "hope"

#### Quote

We come now to the final test of these systems in their application to that feeling of Hope which is native and imperishable in man, and to that cheerful and beneficent working that should realize the hopes of Humanity. It may fitly characterize the system of Lucretius to say, there is no hope in it; and it was a fitting commentary on such a system that he who framed it, seeing nothing to live for and nothing to hope for, should end his life by his own hand. Not that I would charge the suicide of Lucretius as a crime upon his system or himself. So far from being put under the ban of priestly superstition, or the more mercenary ban of Life Insurance companies, the suicide should be looked upon with a tender, even sacred pity, as the victim of mental or moral disease. Yet when Lucretius was so tempted, we find in his system nothing of the hope that could have restrained the hand which had written “alter death there will remain no self”—that is no conscious personality—and “no one wakes up upon whom the chill cessation of life has once come..” Thus we see this proud master of the material universe succumbing to the fate that befalls his atoms.

And then winds up for the close:

#### Quote

But the scheme of Lucretius admits of no expansion. It is shut down within its own horizon—rather it is shut up within a cavern of endless gloom, where those who enter

must bid farewell to Hope. The scheme of Paul has made peoples wiser and better in the degree that they have accepted it; it wants but to be accepted in its completeness, to fill the world with light and peace and joy. It carries in itself the future of all poetry and prophecy, and they who teach it are messengers of gladness and joy. But how can the followers of Lucretius exult in such a system? Does the physician put on airs of mirth and exultation when he tells his patient there is no hope? Yet this message of despair is what the priests of Materialism bring from the arcana of nature. One would think they would go forth in sackcloth and ashes, with inverted torches, to the grave of all things. Against a nature of such origin and end, I pit my own manhood, and do not fear the issue. Would I cherish the tender, graceful sentiment of gratitude? then must I follow Paul, and not Lucretius. Would I yield to the noble impulses of patriotism? then must I follow Paul, and not Lucretius. Would I rise to the magnanimous heights of philanthropy? then must I follow Paul, and not Lucretius. Would I help Mankind in their sorrows, deliver them from their superstitions, raise them from their sins? then must I follow Paul, and not Lucretius. Would I lift myself and my race to immortal hopes? then must I drop Lucretius, and follow Paul to the life everlasting.