

# Charles Darwin

**Post by "Cassius" of March 31, 2019 at 6:48 AM**

Here, I think this excerpt from Wiker's "Moral Darwinism" book FAR overstates the case as to Darwin being a "disciple" of Epicurus. Darwin is "the most potent formulation of that philosophy [Epicurus] to date?" That is way overstated.

Do we actually know that Darwin was either an explicit fan of, or quoted, Epicurus? We do know that Nietzsche was at least in certain respects a fan of Epicurus, but that Nietzsche was not a fan of Darwin. I have not read deeply into Darwin but my gut tells me that Nietzsche is right on this, and that Darwin probably does not deserve a lot of study by an Epicurean except to note Darwin's development of theories of nature that are not guided by supernatural beings, which is only one aspect of Epicurus.

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**Post by "Cassius" of March 31, 2019 at 7:03 AM**

This page purportedly contains the complete works of Darwin. A search for Epicurus turns up very little, and even less by Darwin himself. Maybe i am searching wrong-

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<http://darwin-online.org.uk/co...results?freetext=Epicurus>

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**Post by "Joshua" of February 12, 2024 at 5:53 PM**

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[Charles Darwin's complete library has been reassembled for the first time | CNN](https://www.cnn.com/2018/01/24/science/charles-darwin-library/index.html)  
amp.cnn.com

Since Darwin's recompiled Library is in the news, it's a good time to reconsider the question.

Let me quote first from prof. Ian Johnston's [lecture](#) on Lucretius;

#### Quote

The poem's influence, according to Stuart Gillespie and Donald Mackenzie, can be linked to a range of twentieth-century poets and philosophers. So pervasive is its presence in the intellectual climate that for one critic at least (Stuart Gillespie) Charles Darwin's claim that he had not read Lucretius is rather like Milton's claiming that he had not read Genesis.

I believe he is referencing the *Cambridge Companion to Lucretius*, and as Stuart Gillespie's quote makes clear, whether Darwin even read the early atomists is far from certain. The catalogue of his reconstructed library contains over seven thousand titles, and only six of these titles relate to materialism. Lucretius' poem is absent, but one of the texts (in good DeWittian style) is an address contrasting the systems of Epicureanism and Christianity;

Thompson, Joseph Parrish. 1875. "Lucretius or Paul: materialism and theism tested by the nature and needs of man" . Berlin: A. Asher and Co.

Since this address was published 16 years after *The Origin of Species*, it cannot be construed to establish even an interest in Epicureanism on Darwin's part; it's possibly he picked this volume up just to see what all of the chatter was about after he had been more or less accused of plagiarism.

And as I've said before, if Epicurus was right about nature, if the universe was, in fact, a well ordered cosmos, if the laws governing both mundane and celestial mechanics were predictable in their operations, then there is no obstacle for a Darwin to rediscover what a Greek thinker or Roman poet had already learned.

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### Post by “Eikadistes” of February 13, 2024 at 1:23 PM

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Do we actually know that Darwin was either an explicit fan of, or quoted, Epicurus?

His grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, was **positively** *Lucretian* in his allegiances. Charles seems to have adopted a number of Epicurean propositions from his grandfather, but he did not identify as an explicit Epicurean or Lucretian in the tradition of the Garden.

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### Post by “Don” of February 13, 2024 at 1:40 PM

Thanks, Nate. I was completely unaware of this link. Just found online:

[Epic Poetry and the Origins of Evolutionary Theory - Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net](#)

An article from Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net, on Érudit.

[www.erudit.org](http://www.erudit.org)

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### Post by “Cassius” of February 13, 2024 at 2:58 PM

### [Quote from Nate](#)

His grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, was positively Lucretian in his allegiances. Charles seems to have adopted a number of Epicurean propositions from his grandfather, but he did not identify as an explicit Epicurean or Lucretian in the tradition of the Garden.

So Charles Darwin's grandfather was heavily engaged with Lucretius but Charles Darwin himself stated that he had not read Lucretius. Ok so he didn't sit down and "read" the book but presumably he was aware of his grandfather's activities? Or is it possible they were estranged? Not sure that this makes much difference but kind of weird nonetheless.

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### **Post by "DavidN" of February 13, 2024 at 7:51 PM**

Darwin doesn't have to be a plagiarist to have been influenced by epicureanism. For instance Voltaire came to Epicureanism through his godmother and benefactor, Ninon DeLenclos, a modern day Leontion. Throughout his life Voltaire was associated with Mademoiselle L'Enclos, there isn't a doubt in my mind that her salon had some influence on his mind and philosophy.

[Lenclos, Ninon de | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)

As Nate already pointed out Darwin's grandfather was a Libertine, however "IF" Charles had plagiarized anyone it had been his grandfather, who had worked extensively on the subject of evolution already. Though in Charles defense it was Erasmus' Epicurean poetry that doomed his scientific career, leaving an opening for Charles to pick up where he had left off.

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/1d8e/9446252ddb7c5f2b2938dc03e85269e38c53.pdf>