

Four Translations of A Key Selection from Lucretius - Gods Did Not Design the World for Men, and Pleasure is the Guide of Life

Post by "Cassius" of June 30, 2018 at 9:55 AM

Four translations of a key selection from Lucretius, from which we can be sure about these three foundations of Epicurean thought:

- 1 - That in "physics," the universe came together from natural elements without a supernatural god organizing them;
- 2 - That in "ethics," [pleasure is the guide of life](#) for all living things;
- 3 - That in "canonics" we can be confident in our conclusions about the nature of the universe by reasoning based on what we are able to observe through our senses.

<p style="text-align: center;">T. LUCRETII LIB. II.</p> <p><i>At quidam contra hoc, IGNARI Materiæ Naturam non posse Deam sine numine rentur Tantopere humanis rationibus, ac moderatis Tempora mutare annorum, frugisque creare: 170</i></p> <p><i>Nec jam cætera, mortaleis quæ suadet adire, Ipsaque deducit dux vitæ DIA VOLUPTAS, Ut res per Veneris blanditum sacra propagent, Ne genus occidat Humanum: Quorum omnia causa Constituisse Deos fingunt, sed in omnibus rebus 175 Magnopere à vera lapsi ratione videntur. Nam quamvis rerum ignorem Primordia quæ sunt, Hoc tamen ex ipsi Cæli rationibus ausum Confirmare, aliisque ex rebus reddere multis, Nequaquam nobis Divinitus esse creatam 180 Naturam mundi, quæ tanta sit prædita culpa: Quæ tibi posteriùs, MEMMI, faciemus aperta;</i></p>	<p>Browne 1743: But some object to this, fools as they are, and conceive that simple matter cannot of itself, without the assistance of the gods, act so agreeably to the advantage and convenience of mankind, as to change the seasons of the year, to produce the fruits, and do other things which Pleasure, the deity and great guide of life, persuades men to value and esteem. It could not induce us to propagate our race, by the blandishments of tender love, lest the species of mankind should be extinct, for whose sake they pretend the gods made all the beings of the world; but all conceits like these fall greatly from the dictates of true reason - For though I were entirely ignorant of the rise of things, yet from the very nature of the heavens, and the frame of many other bodies, I dare affirm and insist that the nature of the world was by no means created by the gods upon our account, it is so very faulty and imperfect; which, my Memmius, I shall fully explain.</p>	<p>Munro 1886: But some in opposition to this, ignorant of matter, believe that nature cannot without the providence of the gods, in such nice conformity to the ways of men, vary the seasons of the year and bring forth crops, ay and all the other things, which divine pleasure, the guide of life, prompts men to approach, escorting them in person and enticing them by her fondlings to continue their races through the arts of Venus, that mankind may not come to an end. Now when they suppose that the gods designed all things for the sake of men, they seem to me in all respects to have strayed most widely from true reason. For even if I did not know what first-beginnings are, yet this, judging by the very arrangements of heaven, I would venture to maintain, that the nature of the world has by no means been made for us by divine power: so great are the defects with which it stands encumbered. All which, Memmius, we will hereafter make clear to you.</p>	<p>Bailey 1936: Yet a certain sect, against all this, ignorant [that the bodies] of matter [fly on of their own accord, unvanquished through the ages,] believe that nature cannot without the power of the gods, in ways so nicely tempered to the needs of men, change the seasons of the year, and create the crops, and all else besides, which divine pleasure wins men to approach, while she herself, the leader of life, leads on and entices them by the arts of Venus to renew their races, that the tribe of mankind may not perish. But when they suppose that the gods have appointed all things for the sake of men, they are seen in all things to fall exceeding far away from true reason. For however little I know what the first-beginnings of things are, yet this I would dare to affirm from the very workings of heaven, and to prove from many other things as well, that the nature of the world is by no means made by divine grace for us: so great are the flaws with which it stands beset. And this, Memmius, I will make clear to you hereafter.</p>	<p>Smith 2001: And yet, in defiance of these facts, certain theorists, ignorant of the properties of matter, believe that, in the absence of divine direction, nature could not conform so obligingly to human requirements by changing the seasons of the year, by producing crops and indeed all the other gifts to which mortals are beckoned by divine pleasure, the leader of their life, their escort, who entices them through the acts of Venus to reproduce their kind so that the human race may be saved from extinction. In supposing that the gods have arranged everything for the benefit of humanity, these thinkers have obviously deviated far from the path of sound judgment in every respect. For even if I had no knowledge of the primary elements of things, I would venture to deduce from the actual behavior of the sky, and from many other facts, evidence and proof that the world was by no means created for us by divine agency: it is marked by such serious flaws. Later, Memmius, I will make this plain to you.</p>
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