

Albert Einstein, "Foreword to Lucretius"

Post by "Eikadistes" of January 28, 2023 at 2:51 PM

"The work of Lucretius will work its magic on anyone who does not completely wrap himself in the spirit of our time and, in particular, occasionally feels like a spectator of the intellectual attitude of his contemporaries. One sees here how an independent man equipped with lively senses and reasoning, endowed with scientific and speculative curiosity, a man who has not even the faintest notion of the results of today's science that we are taught in childhood, before we can consciously, much less critically, confront them, imagines the world.

The firm confidence that Lucretius, as a faithful disciple of Democritus and Epicurus, places in the intelligibility, in other words, in the casual connectedness of everything that happens in the world, must make a profound impression. He is firmly convinced, he even believes he can prove, that everything is based on the regular motion of immutable atoms, ascribing to atoms no qualities other than geometric-mechanical ones. The sensual qualities warmth, coldness, color, odor, taste, are to be attributed to the movements of atoms, likewise all phenomena of life. He conceives of the soul and mind as formed from especially light atoms, by assigning (in an inconsistent way) particular qualities of matter to particular characteristics of experience.

He states as the primary objective of his work the liberation of humanity from the slavish fear, induced by religion and superstition, that he sees as nourished and exploited by priests for their own purposes. This certainly is a serious issue for him. Nonetheless, he does seem to have been guided mostly by the need to persuade his readers of the necessity for the atomistic-mechanical worldview, although he dare not say this openly to his much more practically oriented Roman readers. His reverence for Epicurus, Greek culture and language, which he considers greatly superior to Latin culture and language, is altogether moving. It redounds to the glory of the Romans that this could be said to them. Where is the modern nation that holds and expresses such noble sentiments with regard to one of its contemporary nations?

Diels's verses read so naturally that one forget it is a translation."

(Albert **Einstein**, Foreword in T. Lucretius Carus, *De rerum natura*, Vol. 2, Lukrez, *Von der Natur*, trans. by Hermann Diels, Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1924, pp. vii-viii)