

Comparing "Pleasure = Absence of Pain" to "Body = Absence of Void;" A Cite to Lucretius 1:503

Post by "Cassius" of August 25, 2023 at 8:47 PM

My thoughts on this are spurred by what I did this afternoon. For years I have been kicking myself that I did not have a better "topical index" or "table of contents" for finding things in Lucretius. I have had a rough outline, but it wasn't keyed to line numbers and was not much help in finding things. And it really bugs me to have to say that "I remember that's in Lucretius but I can't remember where!"

So to help burn this in my memory and create a better reference for everyone, I am going to go through as quickly as I can an update my existing index with line references and better summaries. Today I completed Book One. I hope to spend this weekend getting as far as possible with the rest.

[Lucretius - Editions And Topical Finding Aid](#)

From this review of the explanation of how Epicurus derives the existence of matter and void, it's clear that he's using what Dewitt calls "chain reasoning." He's making observations about how things work, such as nothing is seen to come from nothing, and using those observations of what IS visible to make deductions about what IS NOT visible, and then carrying forward the reasoning from there all the way to "no supernatural gods" and "no eternal soul surviving death" and of course many other things. And by the time he reaches those conclusions, he considers them iron-clad and no longer open to doubt, so he asserts them firmly and without equivocation. I would expect that Epicurus saw [PD01](#) as complimentary and supporting of the physics reasoning about no supernatural gods, rather than that PD01 stands on its own as sufficient proof of the position. Likewise the physics point would not stand alone to establish that there are no higher beings that are capable of meddling in our affairs (like we are meddling in the affairs of the Moon and Mars), but the anticipation/prolepsis point would establish that any beings that do meddle don't merit being considered truly blessed and imperishable beings (regardless of whether they are natural or not).

It seems to me to be super important to observe that he's not starting with a conclusion ("there are no supernatural gods"). Rather, he's starting with evidence from observation from which he makes deductions and then builds those deductions as they naturally flow to a conclusion that is compelled not by desire or arbitrary assumption but by sound reasoning.

I would expect him to do exactly the same thing as to pleasure and pain. He would not assert that pleasure and pain are mutually exclusive unless he had some kind of framework of reasoning to support the contention. We can observe how we feel about pleasure and pain, but we can't directly observe the mechanism of action any more than we can directly observe the

atoms and the void. So we can deduce how pleasure and pain "must" operate, just like we can deduce how the atoms "must" operate, in order to create the world as we live it.

The same reasoning that would make Epicurus comfortable to state dogmatically that matter and void never mix would make him comfortable stating that pain and pleasure never mix. The experience of the world dictates what we conclude about atoms and void, even though we can't see them directly, and the experience of living dictates what we conclude about pleasure and pain, even though we don't see atoms of pleasure or pain at work. That experience combined with "true reasoning" is the best standard of proof we can hope to obtain.

So a preliminary way of stating where this might lead would be to say that the same knowledge that tells us all bodies are composed of combinations of atoms and void tells us also that all feelings are composed of combinations of pleasure and pain, with each element always remaining discrete and true to its own nature, but moving and combining in different ways to produce something new. The mix of atoms and void produces bodies, the mix of pleasure and pain produces our overall experience (including happiness or unhappiness).

But the first point that would seem clear is that if we can use our reasoning to conclude that all of the universe is composed of atoms and void, and of nothing but atoms and void, then we can use similar reasoning to conclude that all of human experience is composed of pleasure and pain, and of nothing but pleasure and pain.

With the result that we can be dogmatically certain and insistent that just like where there is an atom there is no void and where there is void there is no atom, we can say that where there is pleasure there is no pain, and where there is pain there is no pleasure. And if Torquatus and the Epicureans were approaching the issue that way, then no matter how many ridiculous examples that Chrysippus or Cicero constructed to try to prove that there are more feelings than pleasure or pain, the Epicureans would ****never**** agree to such a suggestion.

There are only two components to the universe, atoms and void, and there are only two feelings, pleasure and pain. From basically that starting point, combined with the commitment to following the evidence of the senses/anticipations/feelings, you can deduce the rest of the physics and deduce the rest of the ethics.

Perhaps a similar analogous transfer of reasoning from one branch of the philosophy to another one in [PD28](#)?

[PD28](#). The same knowledge that makes one confident that nothing dreadful is eternal or long-lasting also recognizes, in the face of these limited evils, the security afforded by friendship.

And potentially another transfer from physics to ethics in [PD09](#) (the parallel being that in the same way that atoms cannot be unlimited in quantity or size, or else one or more atoms would fill up the universe and nothing could move, individual pleasures must be limited in experience, or else there would be no room for other pleasures to be experienced):

[PD09](#). If every pleasure could be intensified so that it lasted, and influenced the whole organism or the most essential parts of our nature, pleasures would never differ from one another.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3288-comparing-pleasure-absence-of-pain-to-body-absence-of-void-a-cite-to-lucretius-1/?postID=25696#post25696>

As another example, could we not compare these two similar statements:

(1) "Atoms come in numberless varieties, but we have the capacity through our senses to recognize the qualities of the bodies which they come together to form."

(2) "Experiences come in numberless varieties, but we have the capacity through our feelings of pleasure and pain to recognize the qualities of the lives which they come together to form."

In both cases, we are accepting the validity of our faculty of perceiving (the senses as to atoms and void and the feelings as to pleasure and pain) because these are the only faculties given to us by nature for use in these areas. (With the anticipations being the faculty which allows us to integrate all this into words, without which we could not be having this discussion.) We aren't claiming to understand every detail about how the five senses or the feelings of pleasure and pain operate, but the atomic theory gives us a framework for understanding how the things we sense around us (the qualities of the bodies) and the things we feel (pleasure and pain) operate naturally and not supernaturally.

For now those are almost random thoughts to consider.

Here's the summary of Book One. It's pretty long in itself, but I think can be used to construct some ways to make things easier to find across the many translations. Now I need to do the other five.

2.1. Book I

Book One

- [01] Venus / Nature / Pleasure is the motivating force of all life.
- [62] Humanity has long been oppressed under the grim weight of religion, but Epicurus was the first man with the force of mind to discover the truth of the way things really are, showing us the limits, boundaries, and benchmarks set by nature; in so doing he broke religion's oppressive hold over the minds of men, raising us equal to the heavens.
- [80] The sacrifice of Iphannessa illustrates that it is religion that is the true mother of wickedness in the world.
- [102] Religion oppresses men by causing them to fear punishment by the gods both in this life and in eternal hell hereafter.
- [105] The true nature of the soul is not obvious to us, so if we are to free ourselves from religious fears we must study nature and determine whether religion is correct when it alleges that we have eternal souls that are subject to the dictates of god here on earth and to eternal damnation after death.
- [127] The remedy to the terrors of the spirit manufactured by religion is to study and uncover the true nature of the universe.
- [146] Our starting point in this study of nature is this primary observation: nothing ever comes from nothing -- neither gods nor any other forces are observed to create anything

from nothing. Once we see that nothing comes from nothing, but that all things come into being in accord with their basic nature, we will see that all things occur without any intervention from the gods.

- [159] The proof that nothing comes from nothing is to look around and see that all things are not born of all things, but from fixed seeds.
- [174] And things are not only born from fixed seeds, but after they are born they grow at a fixed rate.
- [199] And not only do they grow at a fix rate but they stop growing according to fixed limits.
- [208] We also see that it takes working the land to produce specific results; unless we work the land specific crops do not grow.
- [215] Our second primary observation is that all things pass away and change back into the essential material from which they are made, but nothing is ever absolutely destroyed to nothing.
- [225] Another reason we know that nothing passes away to nothing is that otherwise in the eternity of time past all things would have passed away and nothing would be left in the universe.
- [238] Further, if things could be destroyed to nothing, it would be easy to destroy anything by force, but rather we see that many things are hard to break up.
- [250] We also see that nature nourishes one thing out of the other, and that the living are born from the dead.
- [265] Do not doubt that matter is indestructible simply because the atoms are too small to see - unseen things like wind are seen to be very powerful and to rival streams of water (which all can see) in their force.
- [298] You cannot see odors or voices either and yet you know they exist.
- [305] We know from hanging up wet garments that the water in them is dispersed, as they dry, into tiny particles that no one can see.
- [311] And we see over the years that rings wear away on fingers, and dripping water hollows stone, even though we cannot see it happening.
- [322] We therefore conclude that Nature's work is done by particles so small that they are unseen
- [329] We also know that these particles are not tight-packed, and that around them is "void". We know this because we see the particles move, and therefore there must be void within which they can move.
- [346] No matter how hard things are, they still contain void, which we know from the examples of water seeping through the rocks of caverns, and the roots of trees bringing up water to their branches, and noise travelling through walls.
- [358] We also know that some things weigh more than others of the same size, and the difference is the amount of void they contain.
- [370] Fish do not swim because the water compresses to allow them to pass, but because there is void in the water.
- [384] We also know that when things collide and spring apart the air rushes in to fill the spaces, and that this does not happen instantly but gradually.

- [398] We know that void exists because otherwise movement would be impossible; but we see that things do move, so we know void exists. The examples we have provided are sufficient for you to deduce for yourself that there is a void, just like a hunting dog can sniff out its prey once it catches the scent, but if you remain unconvinced I can keep talking about this until we both get old.
- [418] We conclude that all bodies of nature are built from bodies and void. We know that bodies exist because our senses declare to us that bodies exist, and unless we hold firm to what the senses declare to us, there is nothing we can ever prove by reasoning of the mind. And we know that the void exists because bodies must have a place to exist, and through which to move.
- [430] There is nothing - no third nature - that can exist besides bodies and void, because anything that exists, if it can be touched, must be a body, and if it cannot be touched, then it must be void. Except for the void, nothing can affect something else, or be effected itself, unless it is a body. Nothing else can be sensed or reasoned to exist unless it be body or void.
- [449] Everything that we can name to exist has attributes that we consider to be properties or events/accidents of that thing. A property is something that cannot be separated from the thing without the thing being destroyed, such as you cannot separate weight from rocks, or heat from fire, or moisture from water, or touch from bodies, or emptiness from void. On the other hand, events/accident can be separated from a thing without destroying it, such as slavery, poverty, riches, freedom, war, and peace can be separated from people without destroying the person himself.
- [464] Time is an example of an event that does not exist by itself, but from our feelings about the motion or stillness of things. For example, consider the Trojan War, which does not exist in itself, but as an event of things that occurred in the past. The people involved in that war are long dead, and the Trojan War is but an event of the people and things that were involved at the time.
- [483] Bodies are therefore not only the atoms that compose them, but things that are created when the atoms combine. In the world around us everything is porous, but by reasoning we will see that the atoms themselves are not porous, and from them everything we see is created.
- [503] Since we have determined that everything is composed of only two things, atoms and void, and that nothing else can exist, we conclude that wherever there is empty space there is no body there, and where any body exists, there is no void, and from this we conclude that the atoms are solid bodies free from any void.
- [511] By the same reasoning, since all bodies are composed of nothing but atoms and void, it is atoms which hold the void within a body, and nothing can be reasoned to hold void within it but bodies made of atoms. Therefore when any body dissolves, it is the atoms which composed that body remain.
- [520] If only void existed then the whole universe would be empty; if only atoms existed then the whole universe would be solid. Since this is not the case, bodies must be composed of both atoms and void, and those must be separate from each other. Bodies cannot be destroyed unless they have void in them, and the more void. Only things which

have void in them can be destroyed, and since atoms have no void in them, atoms cannot be destroyed.

- [540] If the atoms were not everlasting, long before now everything would have passed away to nothing, and nothing that we see to have been born could have been born from nothing. This shows us that the atoms *are* everlasting, as in no other way could the universe have sustained itself through the ages.
- [551] For the same reason we also conclude that there is a limit to divisibility. For if there were not a limit, nothing could have been generated from the atoms. As we know, things are more easily broken apart than put together, and if there were no limit to divisibility what has broken down in the past could never have been regenerated. But we see that things are regenerated and do grow at their natural rates, so we know there is a limit to divisibility.
- [565] Another proof that the atoms are solid is that we can show how solid atoms can produce soft bodies by mixing them with void. The reverse is not true - if the atoms were soft, then nothing hard like flint or iron could be created.
- [577] If there were no limit to the breaking of things, nothing would survive from ages past, but bodies do exist despite their frail nature, and from this we know that it is the the atoms that compose them that are eternal.
- [584] Since Nature appoints a limit to the growth of all things, and yet the laws of nature hold fast so that birds through their generations show the same markings, and only certain things can come into being, and even the tribes can recall the nature, habits, and manner of life of their parents, it must be through the unchanging substance of the atoms that this continuity occurs.
- [599] Beyond the limit of our ability to observe there must be a least point which has no parts which exist in everlasting singleness.
- [615] If there were not a limit then the tiniest bodies would be composed of infinite numbers of parts, as any half could always be divided into another half. If that were the case, what difference would there be in anything, if everything held an infinite number of parts? Since true reasoning cries out against this, and the mind cannot accept it, we must conclude that there is a lower limit to the size of an atom, and at this lowest level that the atoms are solid and everlasting.
- [628] Also, if Nature had allowed all things to be dissolved into their least parts, and if those least parts were infinitely divisible, then nothing could be renewed from them, but this is contrary to what we see, as we see things are in fact renewed.
- [635] Those who allege that everything is made of fire are using faulty reasoning. Heraclitus is the leader of this pack, and he is famous for his hard-to-follow statements among those who are empty-headed and who love twisted sayings that tickle the ear more than they love the truth.
- [645] Things could not be as diverse as they are if they were created of fire alone, unmixed with anything else.
- [655] The advocates of fire as the only things making up all things might wish to suggest that void is mixed with fire, but they fear where that would lead, and so they lose the track of true reasoning.

- [665] The advocates of fire also know that they cannot admit that fire changes into another substance, for that which exceeds its own limits becomes something else again. The truth is that it is atoms that make up fire by changing their positions and movements, and this does not change the nature of the atoms, but explains how we can make fire and heat from the unchanging atoms.
- [690] Besides, it is crazy to suggest that there is nothing in the universe but fire. In this argument he fights against the senses by which he first came up with the idea that everything is made of fire! For he alleges that yes, the senses can recognize fire, but that they cannot recognize anything else, and this is crazy, for what else can we look to for deciding what is true and what is false except to the senses? Why would anyone choose to pick out fire and deny the existence of everything else? Why not deny the existence of fire but accept everything else? Only madness can explain choosing one over the other.
- [705] The same errors are committed by those who say that everything is made of air, or of some combination of only a few elements like earth or water. This is the error made by the otherwise majestic Empedocles.
- [734] Empedocles and the others (who were much less intelligent than he) all failed in understanding the nature of atoms and void. They believed in infinite divisibility of the material that things are made of, and thus they cannot explain what we see in nature to be the truth.
- [763] All things cannot be produced from only four elements that never lose their own nature, because the union of these four could never retain their character and yet form the things that we see around us - they could never form something of a distinctly new nature, which is what we know that atoms can do when they combine to form things with their own new characteristics.
- [782] Whenever a thing passes the limits of its own nature, that is the death of the thing that existed before, and that is the problem with those who assert that some combination of earth, air, fire, and water, which they allege to be elemental, change in nature to give rise to what we see around us.
- [803] If you argue that all things seem to grow from the earth up into the air and towards the fire of the sun and with the water of the rain, and that this means that these are the elements of all things, you should think again, for what is beyond doubt is that the growth of things is determined by nature, and that nature brings many things together to do its work, but it is of the greatest importance to decide what goes into making the earth and the water and the sun and the rain and how their components are combined together.
- [823] Think about how the words of this poem are composed of letters, and how the meaning of the words changes when the letters are moved around. The atoms have an even greater capacity than this, to make up all things by changing their positions and their motions and combining in different ways.
- [830] Let's not worry we don't have a Latin word for "homoeomeria" - the theory that all things are made up of smaller pieces of the same thing: that bones are made of tiny particles of bone, and the like.
- [834] This theory does not accept the existence of void, or that things are not infinitely divisible, so it suffers the same problems we discussed before.

- [847] In addition, this theory fails because none of these little bones or other miniature things can survive ultimate destruction, so they would all by now have already passed away.
- [859] Another problem for that theory is that if it were true, everything must be made of things which are alien to their own kind in order to produce what we see when smoke rises from burning logs, or plants grow up out of the earth.
- [875] Now Anaxagorus tries to save this argument by alleging that all things in miniature are hidden in all things, but this again is false reasoning, because if it were true, we ought to be able to squeeze corn until blood flows out, or blades of grass would give off animal milk. But we see this does not happen, so theory must be false. Instead, it is the atoms and the void that make up all things.
- [897] Another example is how the tops of trees can rub together in the wind to spark flames. This does not mean that fire is hidden inside trees, but that the movement and positions of the atoms is what creates the fire, just like words change their meaning when their letters are rearranged.
- [915] In the end, if you maintain that things are composed of miniatures of themselves, then you will eventually conclude that there are no true elemental particles, but instead you will find yourself deciding that you are made of little people who are laughing aloud and wetting their faces with tears at the thought of what you are suggesting.
- [921] Let's now cover what remains of these difficult questions, inspired by the Muses, and happy to think of the fame that will come in following paths never before tread by poets before us. We are talking about great things that will free the mind and free us from the bondage of religion, and we are acting as healers who, in giving wormwood to children, cover the rim of the medicine cup with honey so that they can drink the bitter medicine, charmed by the honey but not harmed by the taste, and rather be brought to health. That's the way of this philosophy - it seems bitter, and many shrink back from it, but if you stay with me you will come to see the big picture of the whole nature of things.
- [958] The universe is infinite in extent, and has no boundaries no matter how far you travel in any direction. We know this because the universe has no extreme point beyond which nothing else exists, and it makes no difference where we stand - there is boundlessness on all sides and in all directions.
- [968] A thought experiment confirms this: Consider that we throw a javelin in any direction. Either something will stop it, or it will keep on going. In neither case is the universe shown to be bounded, because if it hits something, then that something is part of the universe, and you can then move there and throw the javelin again. There is no evidence to suggest a boundary point to the universe as whole in the way that the things we see around us, such as the mountains or the sea, are bounded.
- [984] In addition, if the universe were bounded, then all the matter in the universe would have flowed from all directions through its weight toward a bottom, and everything would be piled together. But we know that there is no bottom to the universe at all, and thus there can be no final resting place for matter.
- [1002] Even the thunderbolts, as fast as they travel, could travel on indefinitely, and no matter how far they travel they have no less distance to continue to travel.

- [1008] The universe could not exist if either atoms or void did not surround each other, were limited, because if either were limited then the other would spread out to dominate the universe, which we see does not happen.
- [1021] It was not by intelligent design that the elemental particles placed themselves came together as we see them now, but rather by the unceasing movement of the atoms over the ages. Those movements created and sustain this world and all living things, which could not happen if the atoms and void were not as they are.
- [1037] All things are dissolved when their atomic material ceases to be replaced, and therefore it is necessary for the universe to survive any length of time for there to be limitless matter on all sides.
- [1052] Be sure not to accept the idea that all things press toward a center, and that this explains how the world stays together, and explains how animals can walk on the other side of the earth without falling off.
- [1067] The universe in fact infinite and has no center, so all things do not fall down toward the center of the earth. There is no place for anything to rest and stand still in the universe, and it is foolish to believe otherwise.
- [1083] Those who advocate for the earth being the center of the universe are not consistent, because they think this applies only to earth and liquid but not to air and fire, which fly upward. Instead, the truth is that there is an infinite supply of matter, and this restrains both the matter of the earth from flying outward, and the matter of the skies from crushing us down from above. Remember: on whatever side you argue that there is a limited supply of matter, that side will be the gate of death for things, because in that direction all of matter will throw itself.
- [1107] These basic lessons lead to all the rest that follows. Each spark of knowledge will lead to more knowledge, and from these you will see the truth of nature and kindle a light for others.