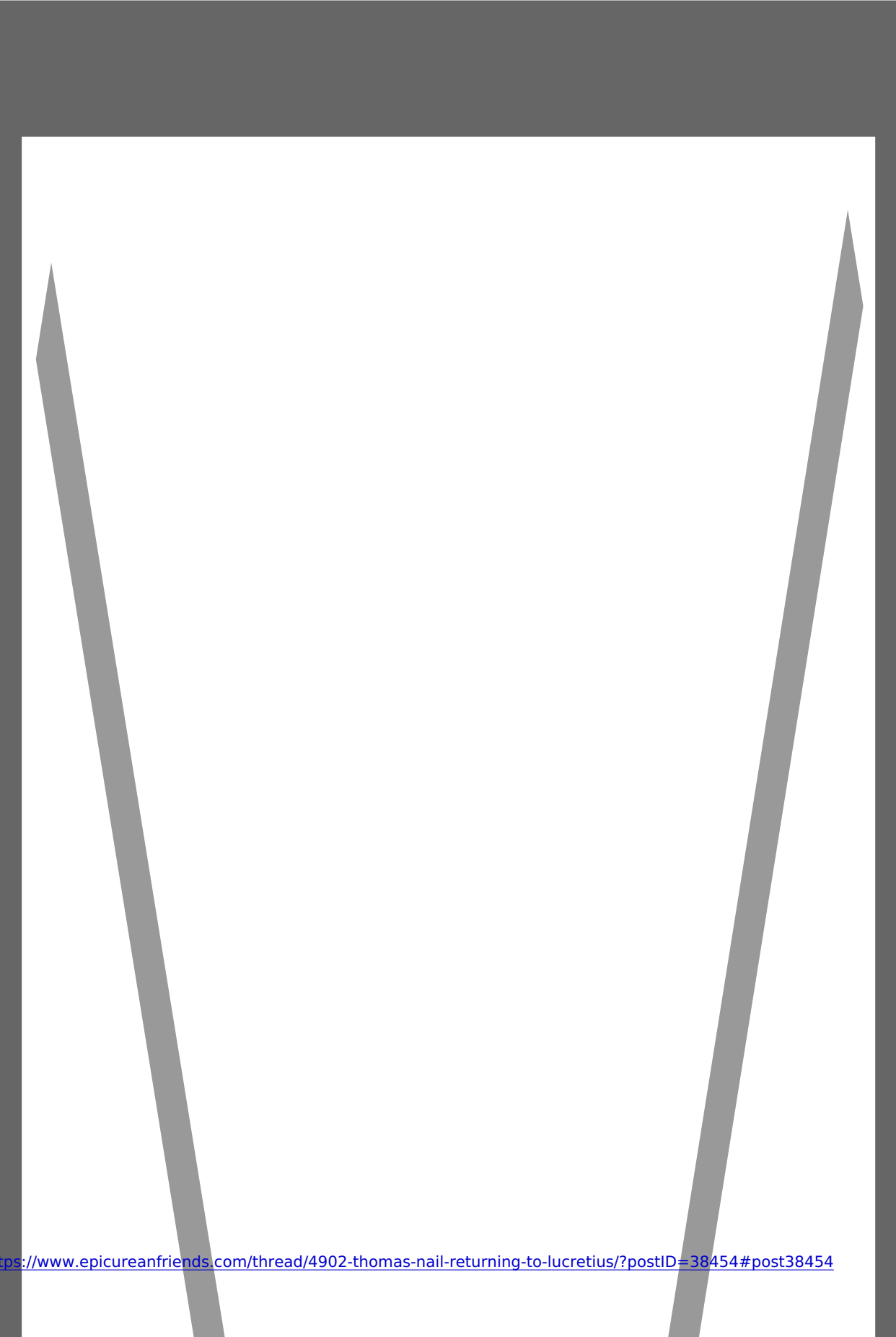


Thomas Nail - Returning to Lucretius

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 13, 2026 at 9:49 PM

The following page contains a long explanation by the author Thomas Nail (*Professor of Philosophy at the University of Denver*) of his ideas regarding Lucretius, including his stance that Lucretius never used the word "atoms".

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[Returning to Lucretius](#)

Why Return to Lucretius? I think a new Lucretius is coming into view today. Every period in Western history since Lucretius has returned to him like bees...

philosophy-of-movement.com

I've read about 2/3 of this and there is a lot to unpack. Since we are currently studying Lucretius at the weekly Sunday Zoom, then this may be of interest.

Quote

1. First Counter-Thesis: "Lucretius was not an Atomist"

The difference between Lucretius and the earlier Greek atomists is precisely that—the *atom*. For Leucippus, Democritus, and Epicurus atoms are always in motion, but the atom itself remains fundamentally unchanged, indivisible, and thus internally *static*—even as it moves. Instead of positing discrete atoms as ontologically primary as both ancient Greek and later modern theories do, one of Lucretius' greatest novelties was to posit the *movement or flow of matter as primary*. I think Lucretius did not simply "translate Epicurus;" he transformed him.

For example, although Lucretius could have easily Latinized the Greek word *atomos* as *atomus* [smallest particle], as Cicero did, he intentionally *did not*, nor did he use the Latin word *particula* or particle to describe matter. The English translations of "atom," "particle," and others have all been added to the text based on a certain historical interpretation of it. The idea that Lucretius subscribed to a world of discrete particles called atoms is therefore both a projection of Epicureanism and a retroaction of modern scientific theories of mechanism onto *De Rerum Natura*. As such, Lucretius' writings have been crushed by the weight of his past and future at the same time.