

Thomas Nail - Returning to Lucretius

Post by “Patrikios” of January 27, 2026 at 12:29 PM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

The idea of "flow" will not be found in any dictionary entry for Corpora (link for example). There is no place in Latin literature where Corpora means anything close to "flows."

Thank you [Bryan](#) for further educating us on this translation and interpretation from **Thomas Nail**. I find that your analysis is more historically accurate. But to better understand more of what Thomas Nail was attempting to convey, I consulted additional references.

Michael Bennet also takes Nail to task in his 2022 article in Parrhesia.

[***nail's lucretius: strong misreading and whig history***](#)

Bennett concludes with this assessment:

Quote

*Nothing I have said poses a challenge to the project of developing an ontology of motion adequate to the ethical, political, aesthetic and scientific realities of the present day. Nor have I called into question the consistency or originality Nail claims for the theory of motion presented in the first book of **Being and Motion** (BM 13). In fact, I have perhaps emphasized its originality—though at the expense of Lucretius's. I have, however, cast doubt on Nail's way of reading Lucretius, and so, perhaps, also on his claim that "it is fitting" for a "new materialism" today to return to De Rerum Natura, with which "the entire history of an error began" (LOM 273)—namely, the supposed error of reading it as an atomist text.*

Just for grins, I also consulted Perplexity AI:

Quote

Thomas Nail's reading is not simply "right" or "wrong"; it is a deliberately speculative, philosophical reinterpretation of Lucretius that goes well beyond what the poem itself,

or mainstream Lucretius scholarship, would warrant as historically accurate.

...

So: as **historical exegesis**, claiming that Lucretius is “really” a theorist of flows and folds anticipating quantum field theory overstates the case and conflicts with the mainstream, atomist reading. As a **philosophical reception** or creative re-appropriation, Nail’s reading is legitimate and interesting, but its success is measured by its philosophical fruitfulness, not by fidelity to Lucretius’s own conceptual world.

...

If the question is: “Is Nail offering a productive, contemporary way to read Lucretius that resonates with some features of modern physics?” then the answer is: **possibly yes**, as long as we recognize that this is a strong, creative misreading rather than a neutral historical interpretation.

The commentary provided by others on this thread are quite helpful in adjusting how best to read such interesting perspectives on Lucretius DRN from modern philosophy professors, such as Thomas Nail. However, Nail did publish his theory of motion in Lucretius in three parts from 2018 to 2022, with a further update in 2024:

[Lucretius I: An Ontology of Motion \(Edinburgh University Press, 2018\)](#)

[Lucretius II: An Ethics of Motion \(Edinburgh University Press, 2020\)](#)

[Lucretius III: A History of Motion \(Edinburgh University Press, 2022\)](#)

[The Philosophy of Movement: An Introduction \(University of Minnesota Press, 2024\)](#)

It will take me awhile to read through these other papers by Nail to more fully understand his perspective. Through this forum, it will be interesting to keep these modern views in balance with the initial historical writings of Lucretius. Thanks to all for your added knowledge, as we continue studying Lucretius.