

Thomas Nail - Returning to Lucretius

Post by "Cassius" of January 27, 2026 at 7:57 PM

Great catches Joshua. This is one of the ways going through Academic Questions and then to Philodemus "On Signs" is going to help us.

E-V-E-R-Y-T-H-I-N-G depends upon this intersection of canonicity / epistemology and physics.

Is the universe (1) natural as arising solely through the interplay of atoms moving through void - and nothing else, or (2) is the universe caused by an interplay of a supernatural force projecting itself outward and onto something else?

If (2), then everything depends on study and understanding of that supernatural force, which is impenetrable to the senses, and for which knowledge we must depend on geometry and math and reliance on propositional logical formulas.

All of our discussion of pleasure and pain and natural and necessary desires and everything else involving ethics is out the window if we cannot be confident in answer (1). That's because answer (2) exposes us to eternal punishment or reward. It should go without saying that eternal punishment and reward totally trumps all local and short-term considerations of pleasure or pain or good and bad or any other word you want to throw at the problem.

Quote

You know our system of natural philosophy, *which depends upon the two principles, the efficient cause, and the subject matter out of which the efficient cause forms and produces what it does produce*. For we must have recourse to geometry, since, if we do not, in what words will any one be able to enunciate the principles he wishes, or whom will he be able to cause to comprehend those assertions about life, and manners, and desiring and avoiding such and such things?

Those who blew up the Platonic school from within were right to challenge the orthodoxy largely pioneered by Pythagoras but continued by Plato and also Aristotle. Their selection of a prime mover/fantasy god in the sky Option (2) based on speculation with no real sensory evidence makes no sense if we take the evidence of the senses given to us by Nature as what we are going to follow.

Thomas Nail appears to be an example of someone looking to bend the simplicity of atomic nothing-comes-from-nothing physics to allow for the existence and control of supernatural otherworldly forces.

There's no way to stand up to fantasizing except to insist on real evidence given to us by nature as self-evident, and that's what Epicurus' canonics is all about.

It's worth pointing out that there is a healthy skepticism embedded within Epicurean philosophy with which all of us will agree, in that we will challenge conclusions that we believe to be false based on a combination of sensory evidence and deductive reasoning based on that evidence.

But we need to be frank that everyone is not going to be willing to go along with Epicurus for the full ride. Frances Wright herself was not willing to go along with Epicurus and make deductive conclusions about the implications of nothing coming from nothing and nature never creating only a single thing of a kind.

Cicero does an excellent job of lending respectability to arguments that we can never go any further than to say that some things are "probable" and some are not. Other than those of us who were taught to have faith in "GOD" and say that if God said it, it must be true, all the rest of us have had it beaten into our heads to "never say never" and to avoid "dogmatism" as the worst sin possible.

That's what we're going to explore next on the podcast -- how to understand what the professionals disparage as "dogmatism" in Epicurean philosophy in the way that Epicurus himself understood it.

And maybe for those who are least comfortable with getting anywhere near confidence about anything, we can point out that it's here that the rubber meets the road. You can't have it both ways. Either you're going to heaven or hell after you die, and you damn well better live accordingly, or your not. Most of us here who study Epicurus are comfortable saying that the answer is "not."

And core to that position is that we stick with what Epicurus clearly had to say about the "uncuttable" nature of matter moving through the void, and stop trying to invest it Nail-like with mysterious properties that open the door to a supernatural realm.