

Episode Two - The Achievement of Epicurus

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<https://soundcloud.com/user-509726839/the-lucretius-today-podcast-episode-two>

The second episode of the LucretiusToday podcast is now available for download. Lots of work went into preparing this episode, so please let us know your comments, suggestions, criticisms, etc.

If you have questions you would like us to cover in the next episode, please place them in a comment or send us an audio file and we will try to incorporate that into a future show. Ongoing future discussion of the episode will take place here: [Episode Two - The Lucretius Today Podcast](#)

This second program covers approximately lines 62-80 (from the 1743 Edition):

Indeed mankind, in wretched bondage held, lay groveling on the ground, galled with the yoke of what is called Religion; from the sky this tyrant shewed her head, and with grim looks hung over us, poor mortals, here below; until a man of Greece, with steady eyes, dared look her in the face, and first opposed her power. Him not the fame of Gods, nor thunder's roar, kept back, nor threatening tumults of the sky; but still the more they roused the active virtue of his aspiring soul, as he pressed forward, first to break through Nature's scanty bounds. His mind's quick force prevailed; and so he passed by far the flaming limits of this world, and wandered with his comprehensive soul over all the mighty space; from thence returned, triumphant; told us what things may have a being, and what cannot; and how a finite power is fixed to each; a bound it cannot break. And so Religion, which we feared before, by him subdued, we tread upon in turn. His conquest makes us equal to the Gods.

Welcome to Episode two of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who lived in the age of Julius Caesar and wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

I am your host Cassius, and together with my panelists from the EpicureanFriends.com forum, we'll walk you line by line through the six books of Lucretius' poem, and discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. Be aware that none of us are professional philosophers, and everyone here is a self-taught Epicurean. We encourage you to study Epicurus for yourself, and we suggest the best place to start is the book, "Epicurus and His Philosophy" by Canadian professor Norman DeWitt.

Before we get started with today's episode let me remind you of our three ground rules.

First: The opinions stated on this podcast are those of the people making them. Our aim is to bring you an accurate presentation of [classical Epicurean philosophy](#) as the ancient Epicureans understood it, not to tell you what we think Epicurus might have said or should have said, in our opinions.

Second: In this podcast we won't be talking about modern political issues. How you apply Epicurus in your own life is entirely up to you. Over at the Epicureanfriends.com web forum, we apply this approach by following a set of ground rules we call "Not Neo-Epicurean, But Epicurean." Epicurean philosophy is not a religion, it's not Stoicism, it's not Humanism, it's not Libertarianism, it's not Atheism, and it's not Marxism - it is unique in the history of Western Civilization, and as we explore Lucretius's poem you'll quickly see how that is the case.

Third: Please be willing to re-examine whatever you think you already know about Epicurus. Lucretius will show that Epicurus was not focused on fine food and wine, like some people say, but neither did he teach that we should live like a hermit on bread and water, as other people say. Epicurus taught that feeling - pleasure and pain - are what Nature gave us to live by, and not gods, idealism, or virtue ethics. More than anything else, Epicurus taught that the universe is not supernatural in any way, and that means there's no life after death, and any happiness we'll ever have comes in THIS life, which is why it is so important not to waste time in confusion.

As we get started today, remember that the home page of this podcast is LucretiusToday.com, and there you can find a free copy of the version of the poem from which we are reading, and links to where you can discuss the poem between episodes at Epicureanfriends.com.

Now let me introduce you to our panelists for this episode:

[Edit: In recording this episode we only made it through the first of these two paragraphs. The second will be transferred over for coverage in Episode three.]

This is the text that will be covered in Episode Two. The Latin version of Book One has this as approximately line 61 through 101.

The [1743 Latin version is here.](#)

[1743 Daniel Browne Version:](#) Indeed mankind, in wretched bondage held, lay groveling on the ground, galled with the yoke of what is called Religion; from the sky this tyrant shewed her head, and with grim looks hung over us, poor mortals, here below; until a man of Greece, with steady eyes, dared look her in the face, and first opposed her power. Him not the fame of Gods, nor thunder's roar, kept back, nor threatening tumults of the sky; but still the more they roused the active virtue of his aspiring soul, as he pressed forward, first to break through Nature's scanty bounds. His mind's quick force prevailed; and so he passed by far the flaming limits of this world, and wandered with his comprehensive soul over all the mighty space; from thence returned, triumphant; told us what things may have a being, and what cannot; and how a finite power is fixed to each; a bound it cannot break. And so Religion, which we feared before, by him subdued, we tread upon in turn. His conquest makes us equal to the Gods.

But in these things, I fear, you will suspect you are learning impious rudiments of reason, and entering in a road of wickedness. So, far from this, reflect what sad flagitious deeds Religion has produced. By her inspired, the Grecian chiefs, the first of men, at Aulis, Diana's altar shamefully defiled with Iphigenia's blood; her virgin hair a fillet bound, which hung in equal length on either side of her face. She saw her father, covered with sorrow, stand before the altar; for pity to his grief the butchering priests concealed the knife. The city, at the sight, overflowed with tears; the virgin, dumb with fear; fell low upon her knees on the hard Earth; in vain the wretched princess in distress pleaded that she first gave the honored name of Father to the King; but hurried off, and dragged by wicked hands, she, trembling, stood before the altar. Alas! not as a virgin, the solemn forms being duly done, drawn with pleasing force to Hymen's noble rites, but a chaste maid, just ripe for nuptial joy, falls a sad victim, by a father's hand, only to beg a kind propitious gale for Grecian ships. Such scenes of villainy Religion could inspire!

Munro Version: When human life to view lay foully prostrate upon earth crushed down under the weight of religion, who showed her head from the quarters of heaven with hideous aspect lowering upon mortals, a man of Greece ventured first to lift up his mortal eyes to her face and first to withstand her to her face. Him neither story of gods nor thunderbolts nor heaven with threatening roar could quell: they only chafed the more the eager courage of his soul, filling him with desire to be the first to burst the fast bars of nature's portals. Therefore the living force of his soul gained the day: on he passed far beyond the flaming walls of the world and traversed throughout in mind and spirit the immeasurable universe; whence he returns a conqueror to tell us what can, what cannot come into being; in short on what principle each thing has its powers defined, its deep-set boundary mark. Therefore religion is put underfoot and trampled upon in turn; us his victory brings level with heaven.

This is what I fear herein, lest haply you should fancy that you are entering on unholy grounds of reason and treading the path of sin; whereas on the contrary often and often that very religion has given birth to sinful and unholy deeds. Thus in Aulis the chosen chieftains of the Danaï, foremost of men, foully polluted with Iphianassa's blood the altar of the Trivian maid. Soon as the fillet encircling her maiden tresses shed itself in equal lengths down each cheek, and soon as she saw her father standing sorrowful before the altars and beside him the ministering priests hiding the knife and her countrymen at sight of her shedding tears, speechless in terror she dropped down on her knees and sank to the ground. Nor aught in such a moment could it avail the luckless girl that she had first bestowed the name of father on the king. For lifted up in the hands of the men she was carried shivering to the altars, not after due performance of the customary rites to be escorted by the clear-ringing bridal song, but in the very season of marriage, stainless maid mid the stain of blood, to fall a sad victim by the sacrificing stroke of a father, that thus a happy and prosperous departure might be granted to the fleet. So great the evils to which religion could prompt!

Bailey Version: When the life of man lay foul to see and grovelling upon the earth, crushed by the weight of religion, which showed her face from the realms of heaven, lowering upon mortals with dreadful mien, 'twas a man of Greece who dared first to raise his mortal eyes to meet her,

and first to stand forth to meet her: him neither the stories of the gods nor thunderbolts checked, nor the sky with its revengeful roar, but all the more spurred the eager daring of his mind to yearn to be the first to burst through the close-set bolts upon the doors of nature. And so it was that the lively force of his mind won its way, and he passed on far beyond the fiery walls of the world, and in mind and spirit traversed the boundless whole; whence in victory he brings us tidings what can come to be and what cannot, yea and in what way each thing has its power limited, and its deepset boundary-stone. And so religion in revenge is cast beneath men's feet and trampled, and victory raises us to heaven.

Herein I have one fear, lest perchance you think that you are starting on the principles of some unholy reasoning, and setting foot upon the path of sin. Nay, but on the other hand, again and again our foe, religion, has given birth to deeds sinful and unholy. Even as at Aulis the chosen chieftains of the Danai, the first of all the host, foully stained with the blood of Iphianassa the altar of the Virgin of the Cross-Roads. For as soon as the band braided about her virgin locks streamed from her either cheek in equal lengths, as soon as she saw her sorrowing sire stand at the altar's side, and near him the attendants hiding their knives, and her countrymen shedding tears at the sight of her, tongue-tied with terror, sinking on her knees she fell to earth. Nor could it avail the luckless maid at such a time that she first had given the name of father to the king. For seized by men's hands, all trembling was she led to the altars, not that, when the ancient rite of sacrifice was fulfilled, she might be escorted by the clear cry of 'Hymen', but in the very moment of marriage, a pure victim she might foully fall, sorrowing beneath a father's slaughtering stroke, that a happy and hallowed starting might be granted to the fleet. Such evil deeds could religion prompt.