

# Episode Six - Step One: Nothing Comes From Nothing

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Welcome to Episode Six 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 start with today's episode let me remind you of our three ground rules.

First: Our aim is to bring you an accurate presentation of [classical Epicurean philosophy](#) as the ancient Epicureans understood it, not to put our own positions into Lucretius' or Epicurus' words.

Second: In this podcast we won't be talking about modern political issues. Over at the Epicureanfriends.com web forum, we call this approach "Not Neo-Epicurean, But Epicurean." Epicurean philosophy is not a religion, it's not Stoicism, Humanism, Libertarianism, Atheism, or Marxism - it is a unique philosophy of its own, to be understood on its own terms, not in terms of conventional modern morality.

Third: Lucretius will show that Epicurus was not focused on over-the-top luxury, like some people say, but neither did he teach a minimalist lifestyle, as other people say. Epicurus taught that feeling - pleasure and pain - are the guides that Nature gave us to live by, 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.

Remember that our home page 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.

In the episodes so far here are the major topics we have covered:

- That Pleasure, using the allegory of Venus, is the driving force of all life;
- That the way to rid ourselves of pain is to replace pain with pleasure, using the allegory of Venus entertaining Mars, the god of war;

- That Epicurus was the great philosophic leader who stood up to supernatural religion, opened the gates to a proper understanding of nature, , and thereby showed us how we too can emulate the life of gods;
- That it is not Epicurean philosophy, but supernatural religion, which is truly unholy and prompts men to commit evil deeds;
- That false priests and philosophers will try to scare you away from Epicurean philosophy with threats of punishment after death, which is why you must understand that those threats cannot be true;
- That the key to freeing yourself from false religion and false philosophy is found in the study of nature;
- And that the first observation which underlies all the rest of Epicurean philosophy is that we observe that **nothing is ever generated from nothing.**

Now that we are up to date let's start today's discussion!

This is the text that will be covered in Episode Six. The Latin version of Book One has this as beginning at approximately line 137 which can be found in the [Munro Latin Edition here.](#)

### [1743 Daniel Browne Edition \(click link for English and Latin\):](#)

I know it is hard to explain in Latin verse the dark and mystic notions of the Greeks, for I have things to say that require new words, because the tongue is poor, the subject new. But your virtue, and the pleasures I expect from tender friendship, make me bear the toil, and spend the silent night with wakeful eyes, studious of words and numbers I shall use, to open to your mind such scenes of light which shew the hidden qualities of things unknown.

These terrors of the mind, this darkness then, not the Sun's beams, nor the bright rays of day, can ever dispel, but Nature's light and reason, whose first of principles shall be my guide: **Nothing was by the Gods of nothing made.**

For hence it is that fear disturbs the mind, that strange events in Earth and Heaven are seen, whose causes cannot appear by reason's eye, and then we say they were from Powers Divine. But when we rest convinced that nothing can arise from nothing, then the way is clear to our pursuit; we distinctly see whence every thing comes into being, and how things are formed, without the help and trouble of the Gods.

If things proceed from nothing, every thing might spring from any thing, and want no seed; Men from the sea might first arise, and fish and birds break from the Earth, and herds and tender flocks drop from the sky, and every kind of beast, fixed to no certain place, might find a being in deserts or in cultivated fields: Nor the same fruit on the same trees would grow, but would be changed, and all things all things bear. For had not every thing its genial seed, how is it that every thing derives its birth from causes still the same? But now, since things are formed from certain seeds, and first rise into light, where every being has its principles and matter fitly framed, from hence we see that all things cannot spring from every thing, since each has certain secret properties peculiar to itself.

### **Munro:**

Nor does my mind fail to perceive how hard it is to make clear in Latin verses the dark discoveries of the Greeks, especially as many points must be dealt with in new terms on account of the poverty of the language and the novelty of the questions. But yet your worth and the looked-for pleasure of sweet friendship prompt me to undergo any labor and lead me on to watch the clear nights through, seeking by what words and in what verse I may be able in the end to shed on your mind so clear a light that you can thoroughly scan hidden things.

This terror then and darkness of mind must be dispelled not by the rays of the sun and glittering shafts of day, but by the aspect and the law of nature; the warp of whose design we shall begin with this first principle, nothing is ever gotten out of nothing by divine power. Fear in sooth holds so in check all mortals, because they see many operations go on in earth and heaven, the causes of which they can in no way understand, believing them therefore to be done by power divine. For these reasons when we shall have seen that nothing can be produced from nothing, we shall then more correctly ascertain that which we are seeking, both the elements out of which everything can be produced and the manner in which all things are done without the hand of the gods.

If things came from nothing, any kind might be born of any thing, nothing would require seed. Men for instance might rise out of the sea, the scaly race out of the earth, and birds might burst out of the sky; horned and other herds, every kind of wild beasts would haunt with changing broad tilth and wilderness alike. Nor would the same fruits keep constant to trees, but would change; any tree might bear any fruit. For if there were not begetting bodies for each, how could things have a fixed unvarying mother? But in fact because things are all produced from fixed seeds, each thing is born and goes forth into the borders of light out of that in which resides its matter and first bodies; and for this reason all things cannot be gotten out of all things, because in particular things resides a distinct power.

### **Bailey:**

Nor does it pass unnoticed of my mind that it is a hard task in Latin verses to set clearly in the light the dark discoveries of the Greeks, above all when many things must be treated in new words, because of the poverty of our tongue and the newness of the themes; yet your merit and the pleasure of your sweet friendship, for which I hope, urge me to bear the burden of any toil, and lead me on to watch through the calm nights, searching by what words, yea and in what measures, I may avail to spread before your mind a bright light, whereby you may see to the heart of hidden things.

This terror then, this darkness of the mind, must needs be scattered not by the rays of the sun and the gleaming shafts of day, but by the outer view and the inner law of nature; whose first rule shall take its start for us from this, that nothing is ever begotten of nothing by divine

will. Fear forsooth so constrains all mortal men, because they behold many things come to pass on earth and in the sky, the cause of whose working they can by no means see, and think that a divine power brings them about. Therefore, when we have seen that nothing can be created out of nothing, then more rightly after that shall we discern that for which we search, both whence each thing can be created, and in what way all things come to be without the aid of gods.

For if things came to being from nothing, every kind might be born from all things, nought would need a seed. First men might arise from the sea, and from the land the race of scaly creatures, and birds burst forth from the sky; cattle and other herds, and all the tribe of wild beasts, with no fixed law of birth, would haunt tilth and desert. Nor would the same fruits stay constant to the trees, but all would change: all trees might avail to bear all fruits. Why, were there not bodies to bring each thing to birth, how could things have a fixed unchanging mother? But as it is, since all things are produced from fixed seeds, each thing is born and comes forth into the coasts of light, out of that which has in it the substance and first-bodies of each; and 'tis for this cause that all things cannot be begotten of all, because in fixed things there dwells a power set apart.