



Venus As Guide of Life

11:58 AM

Here is the text that we have covered in Episode One. More posting about this episode will happen as we release it, hopefully over the next several days. It has been recorded and is in final editing stages.

This text is the [1743 Daniel Browne edition](#). It starts with line one of Book one and goes approximately to Latin line 60.

MOTHER of Rome, Delight of Men and Gods, Sweet Venus; who with vital power does fill the sea bearing the ships, the fruitful Earth, all things beneath the rolling signs of Heaven; for it is by Thee that creatures of every kind conceive, rise into life, and view the Sun's bright beams. Thee, Goddess, Thee

the winds avoid; the clouds fly Thee and Thy approach. With various art the Earth, for Thee, affords her sweetest flowers; for Thee the sea's rough waves put on their smiles, and the smooth sky shines with diffused light. For when the buxom Spring leads on the year, and genial gales of western winds blow fresh, unlocked from Winter's cold, the airy birds first feel Thee, Goddess, and express thy power. Thy active flame strikes through their very souls. And then the savage beasts, with wanton play, frisk over the cheerful fields, and swim the rapid streams. So pleased with thy sweetness, so transported by thy soft charms, all living Nature strives, with sharp desire, to follow Thee, her Guide, where Thou art pleased to lead. In short, Thy power, inspiring every breast with tender love, drives every creature on with eager heat, in seas, in mountains, in swiftest floods, in leafy forests, and in verdant plains, to propagate their kind from age to age.

Since Thou, alone, doest govern Nature's laws, and nothing, without Thee, can rise to light, without Thee nothing can look gay or lovely; I beg Thee a companion to my lays, which now I

sing of Nature, and I devote to my dear Memmius, whom Thou art ever pleased, sweet Goddess, to adorn with every grace. For him, kind Deity, inspire my song, and give immortal beauty to my verse. Meantime, the bloody tumults of the war, by sea and land, compose, and lay asleep. For Thou, alone, mankind, with quiet peace, canst bless; because it is Mars Armipotent that rules the bloody tumults of the war, and He, by everlasting pains of love, bound fast, tastes in Thy lap most sweet repose, turns back his smooth long neck, and views thy charms, and greedily sucks love at both his eyes. Supinely, as he rests, his very soul hangs on thy lips. This God, dissolved in ease, in the soft moments when thy heavenly limbs cling round him, melting with eloquence, caress, great Goddess, and implore a peace for Rome.

For neither can I write with cheerful strains, in times so sad, nor can the noble House of Memmius desert the common good in such distress of things. The hours you spare, apply with close attention to my verse, and, free from care, receive true reason's rules; nor these my gifts, prepared with faithful pains, reject with scorn before they are understood. For I begin to write of lofty themes, of Gods, and of the motions of the sky, the rise of things, how all things Nature forms, and how they grow, and to perfection rise, and into what, by the same Nature's laws, those things resolve and die; which as I write I call by various names; sometimes it is matter, or the first principles, or seeds of things, or first of bodies, whence all else proceed.

For the whole nature of the Gods must spend an Immortality in softest peace, removed from our affairs, and separated by distance infinite; from sorrow free; secure from danger; in its own happiness sufficient, and nothing of ours can want, is neither pleased with good, nor vexed with evil.

Post by "Cassius" of January 13, 2020 at 12:53 PM

<https://soundcloud.com/user-509726839/lucretiustoday-podcast-episode-one>

The first episode of the LucretiusToday podcast is now available for download [here](#). The home page of the podcast will be here, but discussion will take place here at Epicureanfriends.com in this thread. Lots of work went into preparing this episode, so please let us know your thoughts and suggestions.

If you have questions you would like us to cover in the next episode, please place them here, or if you like, submit an audio file and we will try to incorporate into a future show.

Post by “Godfrey” of January 13, 2020 at 9:05 PM

Loved it! Great discussion, and the amount of text covered was just right in that I was able to review the material in several translations afterwards.

Lots of great insights. One comment I enjoyed was the idea that Lucretius had experience with people giving short shrift to the philosophy: a personal touch that I never would have picked up on.

Kudos for all the hard work 👍

Post by “Hiram” of January 14, 2020 at 8:44 AM

Will there be a public-facing podcast page with an intro and subscribe button?

Post by “Cassius” of January 14, 2020 at 9:07 AM

Yes, that is Lucretiustoday.com and I definitely want it to be a full podcast-type page with RSS feed and the ability for podcast apps on smartphones to subscribe to it.

I listen to podcasts on my telephone all the time so I definitely will make sure we have that feature.

Right now the wordpress site may have a subscribe function but I am not sure it is working to allow a podcast app to subscribe and get new episodes. I am going to have to decide whether to host the mp3 files on one of the dedicated podcast sites (like blogtalkradio.com or speaker.com) or try to self-host. I think it probably makes sense to do a couple of episodes and then figure out the best way to host it.

I really want to be aggressive with technology and self-host, because I think we have enough talent in technology that we can do that. On related track I intend to take down "epicureanradio.com" from its current host and self-host that as well rather than paying a monthly fee. I feel sure right now it is essentially not being used, but if we can get an accumulation of podcasts to add into a rotation then it will make sense to gear that up again as a 24/7 stream.

Post by “Cassius” of January 14, 2020 at 9:08 AM

Also, I doubt it will make sense to try to record these in full video for a while, but it would be very easy and helpful, before posting it to youtube, to make some "slides" to add as a video component to each episode. At the very least the text we are reading from ought to be visible as the video component, even if the podcast is mostly audio.

Post by “Hiram” of January 16, 2020 at 1:08 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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Would also help to add links to blogs and commentaries on the portions read, since there is a lot out there in our various blogs and, say, the Cauter (Unitarian) blog, Partially Examined Life, and other places.

So I finally had the time to listen to the podcast, and enjoyed it 😊 Thank you [Cassius](#) [Elayne Martin](#) [Charles](#) for putting this together. Are you guys going to go through the WHOLE DRN book cover-to-cover, or only select passages?

Post by “Cassius” of January 16, 2020 at 1:12 PM

The plan is to do the whole book cover to cover, even knowing what a huge project that will be.

I'd like to do more podcasts in addition to this one, but going through cover to cover gives a unifying thread from episode to episode. No doubt some episodes will be longer and shorter than others, and no doubt also as the discussion gets really technical we'll spend as much time talking about the methodology and the context as we will the details of the passage.

To me the methodology of the book is what is so important, so we can hit on that week after week after week and never run out of material as to how to apply that methodology.

Post by “Godfrey” of June 7, 2020 at 12:20 PM

I'm glad that you mentioned the A.E. Stallings translation in the podcast. I just finished reading it and highly recommend it to anyone who's having/had trouble getting through other versions. The poetry reads quite well and it nicely conveys the aspect of "honey to help the medicine go down" that both Lucretius and Stallings intended.

(This seems like a good place to post this since it's the first podcast. Might be helpful for anyone just beginning the podcast series....)

Post by “Cassius” of June 7, 2020 at 1:16 PM

Thanks and that is very good advice Godfrey. Comparing the translations may be tedious but it is a great way to check yourself. it's also a constant reminder how hazardous it is to try to tease too much meaning out of a particular translator's precise choice of words. When you constantly see how different people use different words it really helps me remember to focus on the general meaning and not try to read too much subtlety into things unless it's clearly warranted.

Post by “Joshua” of June 7, 2020 at 9:25 PM

Stallings' was the first version I read myself. I ordered it not long after reading Greenblatt. It's certainly a unique take; I find that with all of these old epics I prefer a prose translation, but it's always beneficial to look at it from another angle.

Post by “Jo.” of July 22, 2021 at 8:07 AM

I started listening to this podcast yesterday (have only heard this episode so far) and think I'm going to enjoy it very much! It's nice to hear other people's thoughts on such things (especially if they're more educated on this stuff than I am), I appreciated the comparison of different translations and the atmosphere is sympathetic.

I must confess I haven't really gotten around to reading or listening to On The Nature Of Things, since that sort of heavy wordy stuff can be hard to understand for me (I'll read it eventually tho). The discussion helped me understand the text a bit better, much appreciated.

Post by “Cassius” of July 22, 2021 at 8:45 AM

The great majority of my life I kept trying and trying and trying to read Lucretius and never made any headway, so I never suggest that anyone start with it at the beginning. Much better is to get a fundamental grounding in the philosophy like DeWitt gives, and then you are equipped to understand what you are hearing.

I know I am not the sharpest knife in the drawer, so I am sure some people can pick up Lucretius and immediately get into it. For me it was largely gibberish until I heard Charlton Griffin read it to me, and then (if I recall - sort of simultaneously) read DeWitt.

Having someone read it who knows where to pause, to stop, to emphasize, and how to change tone with the subject -- that makes SO much difference!

And then on top of the reading, being given a framework for putting it all together - which is what DeWitt does -- for me that was the key.

Now that I have finally slogged through it I think I see that the best thing - generally - to recommend is to start reading DeWitt first, and then pick up Lucretius after you've at least read chapter one of Dewitt, and preferably the whole thing.

Post by “Don” of July 22, 2021 at 10:06 AM

I'll put in a plug for Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Eminent Philosophers, Book X. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...0%3Achapter%3D1> As far as I'm concerned, it's never too early to delve into the ancient sources themselves. And Diogenes is accessible for the most part (and kind of fun and gossipy) and includes the actual writings of Epicurus.

Post by “Cassius” of July 22, 2021 at 10:16 AM

Yes I absolutely agree. When I was first starting I did not know Diogenes Laertius was available.

As I think about it now I do think that - ironically - the history part written by DL is the part I would focus on. When you get to the actual letters and the list of doctrines, you're again thrown into the context that Epicurus was writing to people who had access to his context and wider teachings, and these summaries can also seem overwhelming if you read them out of context.

Because DL is explaining from a generalist perspective, his own commentary part is easier to understand (though even that runs into issues such as [Nikolsky](#) explains in his "Epicurus on Pleasure" article.) As [Nikolsky](#) explains DL was often following a formula and trying to cover much the same group of topics for everyone he was writing about. Therefore the patterns in his presentation are helpful to know about - and if you don't know why he considers something to be important, it's easy to be confused.

One example is how he at the beginning of the book divides the schools by geographic regions rather than in the ways we're familiar with, so that even what appears to be straightforward can be confusing, such as labelling Epicurus part of the "Italian" school (I bet our friend [Elli](#) from Greece probably doesn't care for that 😊)

[From wikipedia:](#)

Diogenes divides his subjects into two "schools" which he describes as the Ionian/Ionic and the Italian/Italic; the division is somewhat dubious and appears to be drawn from the lost [doxography](#) of [Sotion](#). The biographies of the "Ionian school" begin with [Anaximander](#) and end with [Clitomachus](#), [Theophrastus](#) and [Chrysippus](#); the "Italian" begins with [Pythagoras](#) and ends with [Epicurus](#). The [Socratic](#) school, with its various branches, is classed with the Ionic, while the [Eleatics](#) and [Pyrrhonists](#) are treated under the Italic.

BUT ALSO FROM THE SAME ARTICLE:

He also frequently focuses on trivial or insignificant details of his subjects' lives while ignoring important details of their philosophical teachings and he sometimes fails to distinguish between earlier and later teachings of specific philosophical schools. However, unlike many other ancient secondary sources, Diogenes Laërtius generally reports philosophical teachings without attempting to reinterpret or expand on them, which means his accounts are often closer to the primary sources.

(And of course that is open to dispute as to what is trivial vs what is important, and it presumes that we are in a position to judge his accuracy better than he was, which is very debatable given that he presumably had direct access to the materials and we don't)

Post by “Don” of July 22, 2021 at 10:59 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

He also frequently focuses on trivial or insignificant details of his subjects' lives

That's what makes him fun to read 😊