

# Lucretius - Essential and most important texts

**Post by “Hiram” of January 26, 2020 at 3:56 PM**

Hi.

I have been contacted re: an opportunity to add passages from Lucretius' De Rerum Natura to a collection of foundational Epicurean texts for an audiobook.

So my question is, what passages or portions do others consider ESSENTIAL MUST-READ portions of Lucretius for an introductory collection of Epicurean literature, that you think should be included in an anthology?

---

**Post by “Cassius” of January 26, 2020 at 4:43 PM**

On first thought - the introductory sections of each of the six books, all of which refer to Epicurus and/or general ethics issues

The section reconciling us to death (end of book three)

The section in book four discussing the primacy of the senses over reason.

---

**Post by “Hiram” of January 27, 2020 at 9:52 AM**

Thank you. I will try to get those included.

---

**Post by “Cassius” of January 27, 2020 at 9:57 AM**

I know that the standard list would include the section on romantic love, and some of the discussion on atoms and void, but really the most interesting sections are the beginnings of the six books. Those are much more lively than a lot of the details, and they explain the

significance of what is being discussed. That kind of context is missing from many discussions of Lucretius and without them it's easy to take some of the details and think that it's all a waste of time.

---

### **Post by “Joshua” of January 27, 2020 at 10:24 AM**

A little thought experiment for the day:

Suppose you were tasked with abridging *De Rerum Natura*; what criteria would you use to decide what gets left on the cutting floor?

Would you abridge based on the force and power of his poetry, and leave off some of the duller sections on heat and wind and magnets?

Would you select for the finest summary of Epicurean thought?

Would you opt for pith? Or for the choicest Latin? For the Synoptic view, and skip the details?

In another life I once loved the *Tao Te Ching*. I've heard it described as a book that can be read in an afternoon, or a lifetime. Could you cut Lucretius in such way that you have such a book, but without losing anything essential?

On a personal note, I generally dislike abridgments. I recall how crestfallen I was one high school summer when I had fought my way through *The Count of Monte Cristo*, only to discover after I read it that, in those lazy afternoons, I had been reading an abridged text.

But the question might give insight into how we all read the text in different ways. To paraphrase Stephen Greenblatt, books always run into the particular fissures of one's psychic life.

---

### **Post by “Joshua” of January 27, 2020 at 12:41 PM**

Interesting! I had not read this thread before I posted the other one.

Cassius already covered it, but I consider the proem to Book IV (repeated from book I) to be essential. It contains the essence of his missionary zeal, the pride and pleasure of his work, an encapsulation of the pioneering spirit of the philosophy, his sense of the therapeutic quality of

his verse, and the finest indication of what he might have achieved in lyrical (rather than Epic) poetry had he applied himself to it.

Some of the most influential lines are rather pithy, and may not work well in this format;

"Life is one long struggle in the dark."

"So potent was religion [or superstition] in persuading to evil deeds."

An infant thrown up onto the shores of light, etc.

---

### **Post by "Hiram" of January 27, 2020 at 1:09 PM**

Many of these initial verses of books, plus on reason and senses will likely be included.

Also, porphyry's Epistle to Marcella.

He mentioned Plutarchus but am trying to talk him out of that due to his being a hostile and unreliable source. As well as too long. Instead I'm attempting to see if he can get a hold of several Herculaneum sources to include.

---

### **Post by "Cassius" of January 27, 2020 at 1:17 PM**

This is similar to Hiram's question on what is the most important sections. I know personally that I would never want to abridge the "introductory" sections of each of the six books, and there are some key sections on "epistemology" and on death and romantic love and on the development of the world over time.... gee as I list them there is a lot I would want to see kept in as is. But no doubt there is a lot of repetition of some of the proofs which could be "abridged" pretty easily.

---

### **Post by "Cassius" of January 27, 2020 at 1:19 PM**

There is so much good in the primary sources that it would be a shame to include too much secondary material.

And I wouldn't dream of putting the letter to Marcella or any plutarch ahead of the Torquatus or even Vellius material that Cicero has preserved.

The Torquatus material in particular is very hard to match, and probably a direct copy from an Epicurean work anyway even though it has Cicero's name on it.

---

**Post by “Hiram” of January 27, 2020 at 1:22 PM**

Torquatus will likely appear. What is the central point of Vellius?

---

**Post by “Joshua” of January 27, 2020 at 1:23 PM**

Yes, Cassius, I hadn't seen that thread. That probably makes this one redundant!

---

**Post by “Cassius” of January 27, 2020 at 1:44 PM**

velleius would have some spicy language about religion.

I was about to ask you because I cannot recall what is the point of the letter to Marcella?

---

**Post by “Cassius” of January 27, 2020 at 1:44 PM**

i will combine them!

---

## Post by “Hiram” of January 27, 2020 at 2:18 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I was about to ask you because I cannot recall what is the point of the letter to Marcella?

It's an elaboration of PD 15, VS 33 and Epicurean Fragment 207:

<http://societyofepicurus.com/porphyrys-epistle-to-marcella/>

---

## Post by “Godfrey” of January 27, 2020 at 3:09 PM

[Joshua](#) what you're describing sounds like a modern little epitome, in verse. Intriguing!

---

## Post by “Cassius” of January 27, 2020 at 3:54 PM

### [Quote from Hiram](#)

t's an elaboration of PD 15, VS 33 and Epicurean Fragment 207:

<http://societyofepicurus.com/porphyrys-epistle-to-marcella/>

Yes I was thinking that it probably was something fairly mild about mild pleasure and reconciling ourselves to little, since that is what so many people seem to be interested in reading. And I see he was a NeoPlatonist so his interpretations are suspect ---- does he even cite Epicurus as his source? Looks to me like this is perhaps just another Seneca- like or Marcus-Aurelius-like mashup of totally untrustworthy conclusions, but I haven't had time to read back into the detail, just scanned your page.

GEEZ why can't people just focus and cite Epicureans rather than going for Neo-Platonists, especially for "foundational texts for an audiobook"? But I know the answer - they aren't targeting Epicurean views, they are targeting their views of what they would LIKE Epicurus to have stood for, which is pretty much Stoicism lite --

On the other hand he can't be all bad in my book even if he was a neoPlatonist if this is true:

## ***Against the Christians (Adversus Christianos)***

See also: [Celsus](#)

Porphyry, a detail of the *Tree of Jesse*, 1535, [Sucevița Monastery](#).

During his retirement in Sicily, Porphyry wrote *Against the Christians* (Κατὰ Χριστιανῶν; *Adversus Christianos*) which consisted of fifteen books. Some thirty Christian apologists, such as Methodius, Eusebius, Apollinaris, Augustine, Jerome, etc., responded to his challenge. In fact, everything known about Porphyry's arguments is found in these refutations, largely because Theodosius II ordered every copy burned in A.D. 435 and again in 448.[\[10\]](#)[\[11\]](#)[\[12\]](#)[\[13\]](#)

Porphyry became one of the most able pagan adversaries of Christianity of his day. His aim was not to disprove the substance of Christianity's teachings but rather the records within which the teachings are communicated.[\[14\]](#)