

# Episode Seven - The Evidence That Nothing Comes From Nothing

**Post by "Cassius" of February 19, 2020 at 5:23 PM**

Welcome to Episode Seven 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 Seven. The Latin version of Book One has this as beginning at approximately line 175 which can be found in the [Munro Latin Edition here](#).

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

Why do we see the rose adorn the Spring, the fruits in Summer, and the sweaty Autumn pressing the vine, unless the fixed seeds of things, uniting in their proper times, give life to beings, each in its stated season, while Mother Earth can trust her tender offspring with safety to the air. But if things proceed from nothing, in a moment they might spring at times uncertain, at quarters of the year unfit, and there would be no proper seeds, whose kindly influence might check their growth at seasons that would kill them in the bud.

Again, if things could spring from nought, what need of time for bodies to fulfill their growth by accession of new matter? An infant then might instantly become a youth, and trees start up in full perfection from the Earth. But 'tis not so, 'tis plain; for things, we know, grow by degrees from certain seeds, and still, as they grow, keep their kind; and thus you find each being rise into bulk, and thrives from seed and matter proper to itself.

Nor, likewise, can the Earth produce her fruits to cheer the heart, unless with timely showers impregnated; nor can creatures, blessed with life, deprived of food, ever propagate their kind, or save their own lives; and so you safer say that certain fixed principles belong to certain things, as letters form our words, than that from nothing any thing can rise.

Further, whence is it that Nature cannot shew men so gigantic as, on foot, to wade through seas, or with their hands to tear up mighty hills, or to surpass the common bounds of life, by many ages, but that certain seeds are fixed to all things, whence they must arise? And so we

must confess that nothing springs from nothing, since each kind must proceed from seed, the principle whence every creature derives its life, and feels the gentle air.

Besides, we find the Earth, improved by care, exceeds the uncultivated soil, and by turning up the fruitful clods, by ploughing, and, by breaking up the ground, we force to spring. But then, if no such seeds lay there, the fruits, without our labor, would of their own accord improve, and of themselves prevent our care.

### Munro:

Again, why do we see the rose put forth in spring, corn in the season of heat, vines yielding at the call of autumn, if not because, when the fixed seeds of things have streamed together at the proper time, whatever is born discloses itself, while the due seasons are there and the quickened earth brings its weakly products in safety forth into the borders of light? But if they came from nothing, they would rise up suddenly at uncertain periods and unsuitable times of year, inasmuch as there would be no first-beginnings to be kept from a begetting union by the unpropitious season.

[185] No nor would time be required for the growth of things after the meeting of the seed, if they could increase out of nothing. Little babies would at once grow into men and trees in a moment would rise and spring out of the ground. But none of these events it is plain ever comes to pass, since all things grow step by step [at a fixed time], as is natural, [since they all grow] from a fixed seed and in growing preserve their kind; so that you may be sure that all things increase in size and are fed out of their own matter.

[193] Furthermore without fixed seasons of rain the earth is unable to put forth its gladdening produce, nor again if kept from food could the nature of living things continue its kind and sustain life; so that you may hold with greater truth that many bodies are common to many things, as we see letters common to different words, than that anything could come into being without first-beginnings. Again why could not nature have produced men of such a size and strength as to be able to wade on foot across the sea and rend great mountains with their hands and outlive many generations of living men, if not because an unchanging matter has been assigned for begetting things and what can arise out of this matter is fixed? We must admit therefore that nothing can come from nothing, since things ,require seed before they can severally be born and be brought out into the buxom fields of air.

[208] Lastly, since we see that tilled grounds surpass untilled and yield a better produce by the labor of hands, we may infer that there are in the earth first-beginnings of things which by turning up the fruitful clods with the share and laboring the soil of the earth we stimulate to rise. But if there were not such, you would see all things without any labor of ours spontaneously come forth in much greater perfection.

## **Bailey:**

Or again, why do we see the roses in spring, and the corn in summer's heat, and the vines bursting out when autumn summons them, if it be not that when, in their own time, the fixed seeds of things have flowed together, then is disclosed each thing that comes to birth, while the season is at hand, and the lively earth in safety brings forth the fragile things into the coasts of light? But if they sprang from nothing, suddenly would they arise at uncertain intervals and in hostile times of year, since indeed there would be no first-beginnings which might be kept apart from creative union at an ill-starred season.

[185] Nay more, there would be no need for lapse of time for the increase of things upon the meeting of the seed, if they could grow from nothing. For little children would grow suddenly to youths, and at once trees would come forth, leaping from the earth. But of this it is well seen that nothing comes to pass, since all things grow slowly, as is natural, from a fixed seed, and as they grow preserve their kind: so that you can know that each thing grows great, and is fostered out of its own substance.

[193] There is this too, that without fixed rain-showers in the year the earth could not put forth its gladdening produce, nor again held apart from food could the nature of living things renew its kind or preserve its life; so that rather you may think that many bodies are common to many things, as we see letters are to words, than that without first-beginnings anything can come to being.

[200] Once more, why could not nature produce men so large that on their feet they might wade through the waters of ocean or rend asunder mighty mountains with their hands, or live to overpass many generations of living men, if it be not because fixed substance has been appointed for the begetting of things, from which it is ordained what can arise? Therefore, we must confess that nothing can be brought to being out of nothing, inasmuch as it needs a seed for things, from which each may be produced and brought forth into the gentle breezes of the air.

[208] Lastly, inasmuch as we see that tilled grounds are better than the untilled, and when worked by hands yield better produce, we must know that there are in the earth first-beginnings of things, which we call forth to birth by turning the teeming sods with the ploughshare and drilling the soil of the earth. But if there were none such, you would see all things without toil of ours or their own will come to be far better.

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**Post by "Cassius" of February 29, 2020 at 12:12 PM**

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/23328363>

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## Post by “Paquin” of July 22, 2021 at 3:19 AM

I thoroughly enjoyed the beauty of the language in the translations (with the exception of the word 'sweaty') and the vividness of Lucretius' images. I began to feel more aware of the text as a poem and the pleasures that type of text brings. I'm finally seeing that the choice of poetic form is a wonderful one, that promotes the reader's enjoyment of the text. I admit to a slight nose-wrinkle at the idea of combining an Epicurean textbook with poetry before setting off, but now I'm hooked.

My favourite section is the giant human able to wade through the waters of the sea. It shows how we humans love the fantastical.

I now want to listen how some of the poem sounds in Latin, even though my Latin is on a 'Caecelius est pater' level.

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## Post by “Cassius” of July 22, 2021 at 5:11 AM

Paquin your comments remind me to mention that if you have not come across the Charleston Griffin audio recording of Lucretius you might want to look that up. For me, finding the Griffin version and hearing it read to me by someone who seemed to be almost Lucretius himself was a real breakthrough - if I recall correctly, that came before I found the DeWitt book. I doubt I would have taken the time to read DeWitt had I not finally made it past the first few pages of Lucretius, and I only did that because of Griffins reading.

Griffin uses the Rolfe Humphries translation, which we actually don't talk about that much here (we stick with the public domain versions for our main readings). Like all the poetic translations Humphries takes some liberties with the text rather than being strictly literal, but I think his take on the material is generally very sound, all the way down to translating the title as "The Way Things Are."

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## Post by “Don” of July 22, 2021 at 5:47 AM

[Quote from Paquin](#)

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I know exactly what you mean. I was skeptical at first as well, but there is some wonderful wordsmithing and imaginative metaphors in both Lucretius's Latin and the various translations. I have an affinity for the Stallings translation since hers is the first one I read through completely. I have a marked-up, underlined, marginally-noted paperback copy 😊 I, too, only have the most rudimentary Latin but I've found the Perseus Digital Library to be an indispensable resource with each word of the Latin text clickable!  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...%3D1%3Acard%3D1>

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### **Post by “Paquin” of July 22, 2021 at 6:32 AM**

That looks an excellent resource. Thank you for bringing it to my attention. With all the close attention to the different translations in the Lucretius podcast, I do find myself wondering about the original Latin wording from time to time.

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### **Post by “Don” of July 22, 2021 at 6:44 AM**

#### [Quote from Paquin](#)

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I have been a BIG fan of the Perseus project for years! They also have online editions of Diogenes Laertius, Cicero, and many more. Check out the Collections link at the top of the page.

I'll be interested to read your take on the Latin if you decide to delve into that from time to time.

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**Post by “Paquin” of July 22, 2021 at 7:22 AM**

Thank you. I like the word 'delve' - if I do any delving, I will post my thoughts.