

Episode Thirteen - Properties, Qualities, And the Trojan War

Post by “Cassius” of March 29, 2020 at 11:05 AM

Welcome to Episode Thirteen of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, author of "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 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. Find out more about the nature and goals of our podcast at Lucretiustoday.com, where you can download a copy of the text that we read from each week.

In previous episodes we have discussed:

- (1) **Venus / Pleasure As Guide of Life:** 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;
- (2) **The Achievement of Epicurus:** 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;
- (3-4) **So Great Is The Power of Religion To Inspire Evil Deeds!** That it is not Epicurean philosophy, but supernatural religion, which is truly unholy and prompts men to commit evil deeds;
- (5) **On Resisting The Threats of Priests And Poets:** 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;
- (6-7) **Step One: Nothing Comes From Nothing.** The first major observation which underlies all the rest of Epicurean philosophy is that we observe that **nothing is ever generated from nothing.**
- (8) **Step Two: Nothing Goes To Nothing.** The second major observation is that **nothing is ever destroyed completely to nothing.**

- (9) **The Evidence That Atoms Exist, Even Though They Are Unseen.** The next observation is that we know elemental particles exist, even though we cannot see them just like we know that wind and other things exist by observing their effects.
- (10-11) **The Void And Its Nature.** We also know that the void exists, because things must have space in which to move, as we see they do move.
- (12) **Everything We Experience Is Composed Of A Combination of Matter And Void.** Everything around us that we experience is a natural combination of atoms and void.

In this Episode 13, we move to a discussion of Epicurus' view on whether reality is objective or subjective, and we explore how Epicurus categorized the things we experience around us as being either (1) the **properties** (also called essential conjuncts, which are essential and unchanging) or (2) **qualities** (also called events, which are inessential and changing depending on context) of the bodies that make them up. Whether properties or qualities, all our experiences arise from the nature, movement, and combinations of the atoms, and cease to exist when the atoms which compose the bodies disperse. Today we will discuss Epicurus' views on this issue, and apply it to the example that Lucretius gave us: the story of the Trojan war.

Our text today begins at approximately [line 439 of the Daniel Brown Edition](#).

Let's now join our discussion, with Elayne reading the text:

[Review the prior sections of Book 1 of Daniel Browne by clicking here.](#)

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

[439] Again, whatever is must either act itself, or be by other agents acted on; or must be something in which other bodies must have a place and move; but nothing without body can act, or be acted on; and where can this be done, but in a vacuum or empty space? Therefore, beside what body is or space, no third degree in nature can be found, nothing that ever can affect our sense, or by the power of thought can be conceived. All other things you'll find essential conjuncts, or else the events or accidents of these. I call essential conjunct what's so joined to a thing that it cannot, without fatal violence, be forced or parted from it; is weight to stones, to fire heat, moisture to the Sea, touch to all bodies, and not to be touched essential is to void. But, on the contrary, Bondage, Liberty, Riches, Poverty, War, Concord, or the like, which not affect the nature of the thing, but when they come or go, the thing remains entire; these, as it is fit we should, we call Events.

[460] Time likewise of itself is nothing; our sense collects from things themselves what has been done long since, the thing that present is, and what's to come. For no one, we must own, ever thought of Time distinct from things in motion or at rest.

[465] For when the poets sing of Helen's rape, or of the Trojan State subdued by war, we must not say that these things do exist now in themselves, since Time, irrevocably past, has long since swept away that race of men that were the cause of those events; for every act is either properly the event of things, or of the places where those things are done.

[472] Further, if things were not of matter formed, were there no place or space where things might act, the fire that burned in Paris' heart, blown up by love of Helen's beauty, had never raised the famous contests of a cruel war; nor had the wooden horse set Troy on fire, discharging from his belly in the night the armed Greeks: from whence you plainly see that actions do not of themselves subsist, as bodies do, nor are in nature such as is a void, but rather are more justly called the events of body, and of space, where things are carried on.

Munro:

[439] Again whatever shall exist by itself, will either do something or will itself suffer by the action of other things, or will be of such a nature as things are able to exist and go on in. But no thing can do and suffer without body, nor ought furnish room except void and vacancy. Therefore beside void and bodies no third nature taken by itself can be left in the number of things, either such as to fall at any time under the ken of our senses or such as any one can grasp by the reason of his mind. For whatever things are named, you will either find to be properties linked to these two things or you will see to be accidents of these things. That is a property which can in no case be disjoined and separated without utter destruction accompanying the severance, such as the weight of a stone, the heat of fire, the fluidity of water. Slavery on the other hand, poverty and riches, liberty war concord and all other things which may come and go while the nature of the thing remains unharmed, these we are wont, as it is right we should, to call accidents.

[460] Time also exists not by itself, but simply from the things which happen the sense apprehends what has been done in time past, as well as what is present and what is to follow after. And we must admit that no one feels time by itself abstracted from the motion and calm rest of things.

[465] So when they say that the daughter of Tyndarus was ravished and the Trojan nations were subdued in war, we must mind that they do not force us to admit that these things are by themselves, since those generations of men, of whom these things were accidents, time now gone by has irrevocably swept away. For whatever shall have been done may be termed an accident in one case of the Teucran people, in another of the countries simply.

[472] Yes for if there had been no matter of things and no room and space in which things severally go on, never had the fire, kindled by love of the beauty of Tyndarus' daughter, blazed beneath the Phrygian breast of Alexander and lighted up the famous struggles of cruel war, nor had the timber horse unknown to the Trojans wrapt Pergama in flames by its night-issuing brood of sons of the Greeks; so that you may clearly perceive that all actions from first to last exist not by themselves and are not by themselves in the way that body is, nor are terms of the

same kind as void is, but are rather of such a kind that you may fairly call them accidents of body and of the room in which they severally go on.

Bailey:

[439] Or again, whatsoever exists by itself, will either do something or suffer itself while other things act upon it, or it will be such that things may exist and go on in it. But nothing can do or suffer without body, nor afford room again, unless it be void and empty space. And so besides void and bodies no third nature by itself can be left in the list of things, which might either at any time fall within the purview of our senses, or be grasped by any one through reasoning of the mind. For all things that have a name, you will find either properties linked to these two things or you will see them to be their accidents. That is a property which in no case can be sundered or separated without the fatal disunion of the thing, as is weight to rocks, heat to fire, moisture to water, touch to all bodies, intangibility to the void. On the other hand, slavery, poverty, riches, liberty, war, concord, and other things by whose coming and going the nature of things abides untouched, these we are used, as is natural, to call accidents.

[460] Even so time exists not by itself, but from actual things comes a feeling, what was brought to a close in time past, then what is present now, and further what is going to be hereafter. And it must be avowed that no man feels time by itself apart from the motion or quiet rest of things.

[465] Then again, when men say that ‘the rape of Tyndarus’s daughter’, or ‘the vanquishing of the Trojan tribes in war’ are things, beware that they do not perchance constrain us to avow that these things exist in themselves, just because the past ages have carried off beyond recall those races of men, of whom, in truth, these were the accidents. For firstly, we might well say that whatsoever has happened is an accident in one case of the countries, in another even of the regions of space.

[472] Or again, if there had been no substance of things nor place and space, in which all things are carried on, never would the flame of love have been fired by the beauty of Tyndaris, nor swelling deep in the Phrygian heart of Alexander have kindled the burning battles of savage war, nor unknown of the Trojans would the timber horse have set Pergama aflame at dead of night, when the sons of the Greeks issued from its womb. So that you may see clearly that all events from first to last do not exist, and are not by themselves like body, nor can they be spoken of in the same way as the being of the void, but rather so that you might justly call them the accidents of body and place, in which they are carried on, one and all.

Post by “Cassius” of March 29, 2020 at 11:06 AM

Today's discussion of Lucretius (Episode 12) contains a couple of really deep issues worth noting before we start:

1) The difference between the PROPERTIES of atoms that are unchanging, and The QUALITIES of BODIES that do change and vary by situation. We are going to have to look closely at whether ATOMS have qualities, or whether only BODIES (combinations of atoms) have qualities, which I think is the case. We also need to look at the terminology because I personally think that EVENTS which is used by Daniel Brown (and closer to the Latin) is much better than ACCIDENTS as used by Munro and Bailey and many others.

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2) this section contains the very interesting discussion of the Helen / Trojan war reference, and gathering what it means is not easy. I think he is using this to again get at the issue of "Existence" and what that word means. I think he is saying that we need to be careful to make sure we do not think that the story of the Trojan war "exists" as some archetype or in another dimension, and he argues that by saying that the events of the Trojan war are long gone and no longer "exist" in real form.

3) Last point maybe is to point out that he says that TIME does not exist except as a function of the movement of bodies. That one may actually be easier, and this is mentioned in the letter to Herodotus that we can compare.

Quote

Quote Moreover, you must firmly grasp this point as well; we must not look for time, as we do for all other things which we look for in an object, by referring them to the general conceptions which we perceive in our own minds, but we must take the direct intuition, in accordance with which we speak of "a long time" or "a short time," and examine it, applying our intuition to time as we do to other things. Neither must we search for expressions as likely to be better, but employ just those which are in common use about it. Nor again must we predicate of time anything else as having the same essential nature as this special perception, as some people do, but we must turn our thoughts particularly to that only with which we associate this peculiar perception and by which we measure it. For indeed this requires no demonstration, but only reflection, to show that it is with days and nights and their divisions that we associate it and likewise also with internal feelings or absence of feeling, and with movements and states of rest; in connection with these last again we think of this very perception as a peculiar kind of accident, and in virtue of this we call it time.

There are lots of aspects of all this to consider but one is "Who would argue that 'actions of themselves subsist, as bodies do, or are in nature (such as is a void)?"

Is that a reference to Platonism?

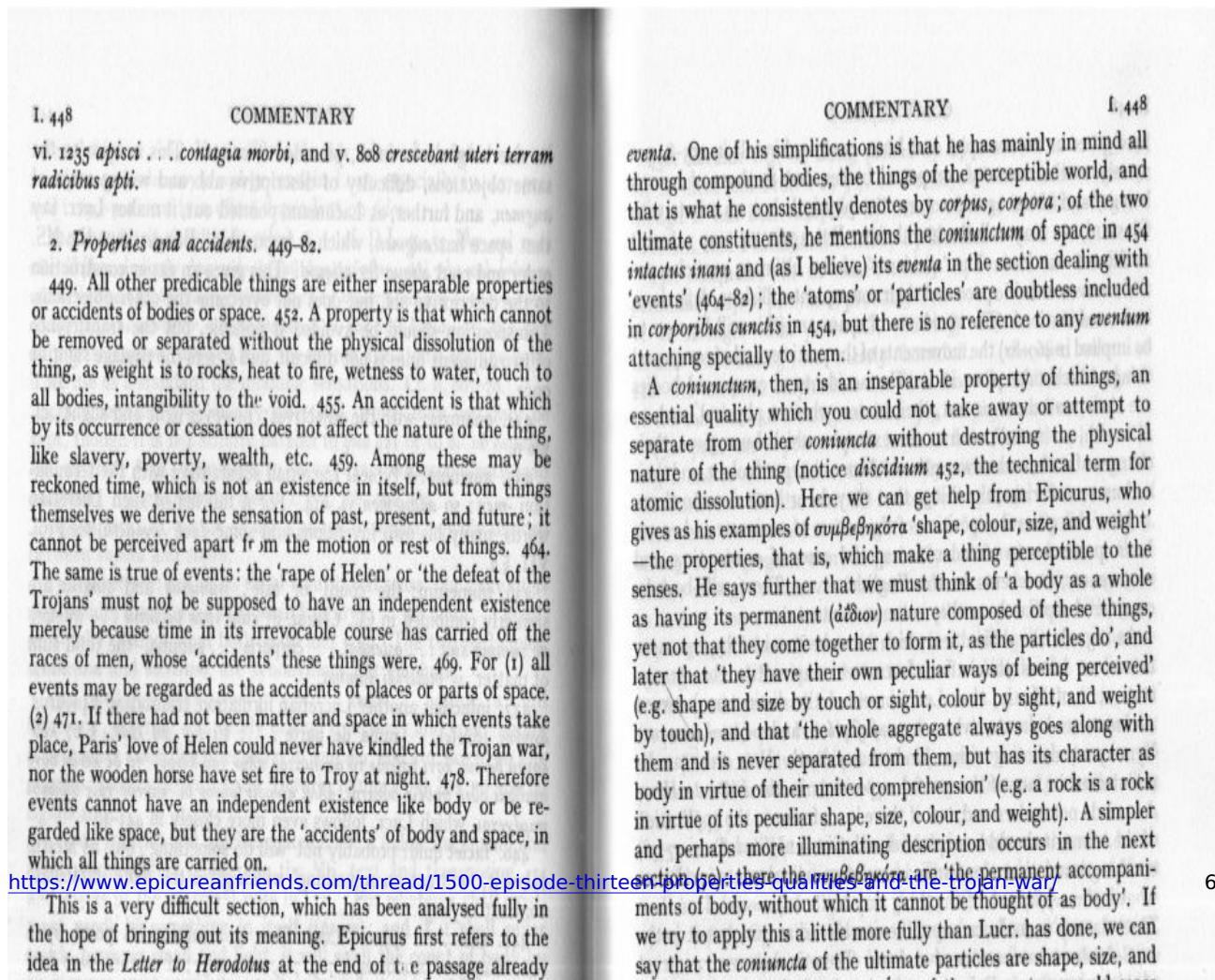
Then there is the background of monism: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monism>

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Post by "Cassius" of March 29, 2020 at 11:10 AM

What follows are notes from Cyril Bailey in his most extensive edition of *De Rerum Natura*. I tend to discount Bailey's interpretations as much less reliable than Munro, but the notes may still contain helpful elements. If others know of commentaries on this section I would appreciate your adding references to the thread. For MUNRO, who is much more sympathetic to Epicurus and therefore more likely to be correct, see the next post.



here gives us no examples and Lucr. confines himself in 455-8, not merely to the *eventa* of compound bodies, but to those of human beings, and there again, not on the physical, but on what, with Giussani, we may call the moral side. But again we may attempt to fill out the idea. The 'accidents' of the ultimate particles are their movements in space and their consequent collisions, deflexions, and combinations. The accidents of space are (this will be seen to be implied in 469-82) the movements of the particles and of compound things which take place in it. The accidents of compound bodies are their movement or rest, their states, whether physical, such as ill health, or 'moral', such as the examples which Lucr. gives, their changes of state, such as warmth or cold or a change of colour, and their actions or sufferings, the things that they do or have done to them.

After this general exposition of the nature of *coniuncta* and *eventa* Lucr. passes on to consider two special cases of *eventa*, time and occurrences, or events in the English sense. These will best be considered separately as they come in the text.

As regards the difficulties which have been raised by commentators, so far as they affect Lucr., we may notice the strange statement of Munro, that Lucr. invented the distinction between *coniuncta* and *eventa*, whereas *συμβεβηκότα* and *συμπτώματα* are 'synonyms, denoting either kind of accident'. How this can be maintained in face of the careful exposition in the *Letter to Herodotus* I do not understand, but if there is confusion in the application of the terms, it should be explained with Giussani (*Stud. Lucr.* 27-38) on the ground that the terms are relative not absolute, and that what is the *συμβεβηκός* of one thing may be the *σύμπτωμα* of another. Thus slavery is, as Lucr. says, the *eventum* of a man, but it is the *συμβεβηκός* or *coniunctum* of a slave. There is, however, no trace of this conception in Epicurus and it is exceedingly improbable that the difficulty even occurred to Lucr. I cannot myself find any confusion or ambiguity in the use of the terms either in Epicurus or Lucr., or any discrepancy between them, except that Lucr.'s account is greatly simplified. A full discussion of difficulties and criticisms will be found in Giussani (loc. cit.); see also the notes of Robin and Pascal.

449. *quaecumque* *cluent*: 'all things that have a name', 'all predicable things'. *cluent* is not merely a synonym of *sunt*, but is not 'all things said to exist' (Merrill), for Lucr. does not doubt their existence, nor 'all things known' (Pascal). It is, as Castiglione suggests, equivalent to *πάντα τὰ ὀνομαζόμενα*. Smith, following Duff, translates 'whatever qualities are predicated (of body and soul)'; this reads too much into the words. *coniuncta* is regarded by Lucr. as a participle and constructed with a dat. both here and in 453-4; *eventa* has the gen. here, but dat. in 469.

(*G.L.K.* ii. 291) speaks also of a *divisio* (sc. disyllabic form) in the dat. termination, though again all the examples which he quotes (284) are gen. On the other hand, Quintilian i. 7. 18 expressly states that the *-ai* termination was used for the dat. and there are undoubted examples of it in inscriptions, e.g. *C.I.L.* xiv. 2863 *DIOVOS FILIA(I) PRIMOGENIA(I) OF I. TER. MENENOS & LOUAINOS. xiv. 570. Disnai*. There remains the question whether, even if the *-ai* termination were used for the dat., it would be scanned as two long syllables. Priscian regards it as a disyllable, but Nigidius in *Aul. Gell.* xiii.

450. *horum*: OQ, *res* being picked up by a neuter as in i. 56-7; see n. there and *Prol. V B*, § 7. 2. Bernays's *harum* is unnecessary, though it has been adopted by many editors, including Brieger, Giussani, and Pascal, and recently by Martin.

451. *nusquam*: 'in no case', nearly equivalent to *numquam*. *pernitiali*, adj. of *pernities*, probably from root of *minuo*, *minus*, etc. It is stronger than *perniciāli*, which Q¹ and L read here, and means 'annihilating', not merely 'harmful'. *discidio*: see n. on 220. Its use here emphasizes the idea that the withdrawal of one of the *coniuncta* of a thing would imply its physical disruption.

452. *potis est* = *potest*. *potis* is an archaic formation, like *satis*, *magis*, and is used by Lucr. indifferently with masc., fem., or neuter substantives. He also uses the neuter form *pote* in iii. 1079 and, if Lachmann's emendation be right, in v. 836. See *Prol. V A*, § 9. *seiuungi seque gregari*: there is probably a difference between these verbs; *seiuungi* to remove the *coniunctum* from the thing, *segregari* to isolate one *coniunctum* from the others: see *Prol. VII*, § 14. *seque gregari*: Lucr.'s use of tmesis lies midway between the extravagances of Ennius and the restraint of Virgil, who confines it to the prefix *in-* used in either of its senses. In Lucr. it is most frequent with *-que*, but the parts of a verb are also separated by *enim* (iii. 262, 860, iv. 948), *quasi* (v. 287, 299); more violent are iv. 388 *praeter creditur ire* and iv. 832 *inter quaecumque pretantur*. See *Prol. VI*, § 9.

453-4. 'As weight is to rocks, heat to fire, wetness to water, touch to all bodies, intangibility to void.' The text and contents of these lines have been much discussed. In 453 OQ have *saxis . . . ignis . . . aquai* (*aquae* O), which Martin alone of modern editors retains, being apparently content to leave *coniunctum* (or *coniunctus*) constructed both with the dat. *saxis*, *corporibus*, *inani* and with the gen. *ignis*, *aquai* in the same sentence, which is very improbable. Lachmann, holding that *aquai* as dat. was impossible—*nam de dativis in -ai disyllabum exeuntibus nugae narrant grammatici*—read *saxist* (= *saxi est*) . . . *ignis . . . aquai*, a row of genitives. But apart from the evidence of the next line, which Lachmann expunges, 449 *his coniuncta duabus rebus* shows that Lucr. regarded *coniunctum* as a participle and constructed it with the dat. Most modern editors have therefore followed the lead of Bockemüller in reading *saxis . . . ignist* (= *igni est*) . . . *aquai* and regarding *aquai* as dat. This is not so serious a difficulty as has been supposed; though *patriai* i. 41, which has been quoted, is almost certainly gen., yet *summai* i. 953 is probably a dat. and so possibly is *fugai* in i. 1047, and the grammarians are aware of the usage. Charisius i. 19 adduces *terrai frondosai* from Ennius (*Ann.* 191) and *aulai medio* from Virgil (*Aen.* iii. 354), though both these instances are really gen. Priscian

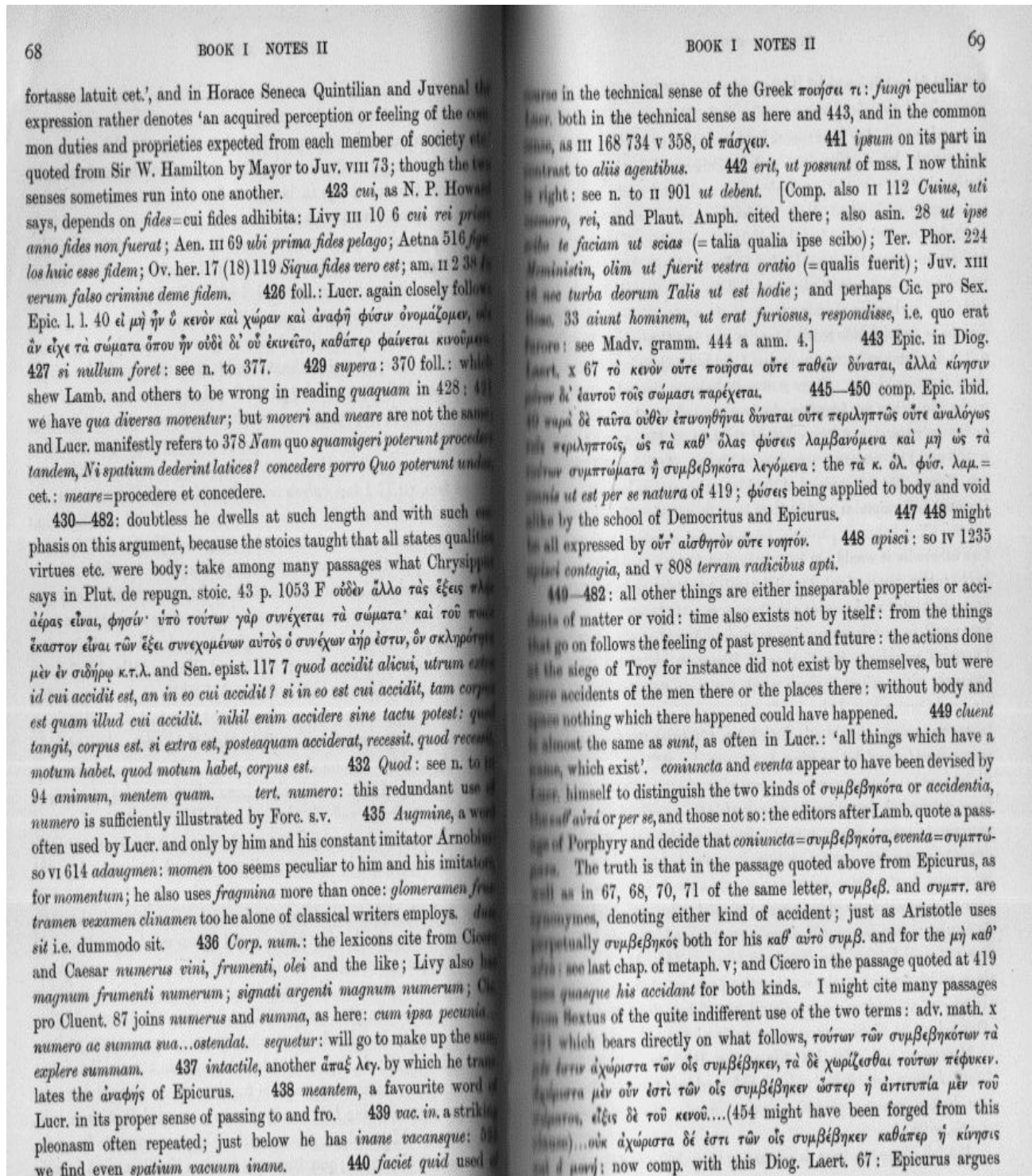
455. *servitium contra paupertas divitiaeque . . . (nom.) haec (acc.) soliti sumus . . . vocare* 458: a good example of Lucr.'s characteristic habit of anacoluthon. So in ii. 1030-3 accusatives picked up by nom. and in ii. 342-7 nominatives picked up by *quorum unum quidvis* acc. (cf. iv. 123-6). See *Prol. V B*, § 2. We may notice also how after the asyndeton *servitium . . . paupertas* Lucr. attaches the next number in the list with *-que*. Cf. i. 596. See *Prol. VII*, § 20.

457. *adventu . . . abituque*: cf. i. 677 *quorum abitu aut aditu*.

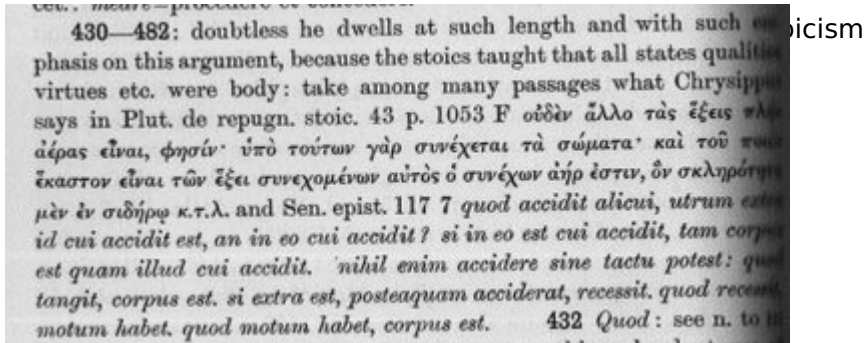
458. *soliti sumus*: not 'I, Lucretius, am in the habit of calling' but

Post by "Cassius" of March 29, 2020 at 11:24 AM

I apologize for the poor copy but it is the best I seem to be able to do. If anyone has a source that is more clear please post.



Post by “Cassius” of March 29, 2020 at 11:25 AM



Post by “Cassius” of April 9, 2020 at 8:49 PM

Episode 13 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. In this episode, we discuss how Lucretius explains the Epicurean analysis of the things we experience as either being properties or qualities of the bodies that arise from combinations of atoms. We'll discuss how we use this knowledge to come to an understanding of how human experiences are subjective, while the atoms themselves exist independently of our experience. And we'll apply this perspective to analyzing how human events such as the Trojan War, no matter how significant, do not have an eternal separate existence of their own. We hope you will enjoy this episode and that you will leave us comments, suggestions and questions in the thread below.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/25203938>

Post by “Don” of April 10, 2020 at 3:38 PM

Just finished listening to the episode and enjoyed the discussion. I did want to respond to the brief mention of Buddhism and Emptiness and Dependent Arising. From my perspective - or should I say from my subjective perception 😊 - I don't think Epicurean philosophy and

Buddhist philosophy are that far apart in this regard. They quickly diverge but on these I find echoes in each other.

The idea that entities do not have independent existence (Buddh.), I believe, echoes the idea that the only things that truly exist are atoms and void (Epic.). Buddhists assert the doctrine of the [Two Truths](#): one truth is that the conventional reality of our everyday perceptions *does* exist and this is how we interact with our world on a day-to-day basis; however, the underlying truth is that everything is dependent on everything else and is ultimately empty of its own inherent existence. The examples I've heard are that there's nothing you can point to in a "table" that is the essence of its table-ness. It relies on its component parts to function as a table. Or consider the [Greek story of the ship of Theseus](#). Additionally, I've also heard dependent arising being described as "the universe in a cup of tea": the tea in my cup is dependent on the tea grown in the fields, on the people who pick the leaves, on the sun that shines to make the tea grow, on the parents and grand-parents who gave birth to the people working in the fields, on the clouds that rain on the fields, on the lay of the land that makes the clouds form, on the Earth itself that contains that land, on the solar system, etc., etc., etc. Everything is dependent on everything else.

I find echoes then of this in Epicurean philosophy. Conventional reality exists, that's how we perceive the world. However, ultimately, we are all aggregates of atoms and void and everything reverts to atoms and void and is re-configured into other entities eventually. This is one of the reasons that "[death is nothing to us](#)." If our atoms were re-assembled into something that looked like us, it wouldn't be us. We don't ultimately exist (we are atoms and void) although we do conventionally exist and can perceive the world through the Canon and make choices and rejections and have free will (although, I would say, our choices and rejections are predicated on previous choices we've made and our choices are not infinite)... but that might be for another future post.

Keep up the great work. I do hear a much more casual, conversational tone as the group continues the podcasts... and you've made me want to get back to studying De Rerum Natura. Thanks!

Post by “Cassius” of April 10, 2020 at 3:51 PM

1. No, you can't go back to reading De Rerum Natura until you're finished reading the Norman DeWitt book! 😊
2. Based on my limited knowledge of Buddhism I do see why you draw the similarities, which I recall doing in this podcast with Elayne. As more time goes by my perception is that the big

point is not so much that there are technical similarities on these points as in the place where you end up after factoring in the details. My perception (unfair or fair as it might be) is that the Buddhists end up in a place of "Stoic-like" acceptance and resignation that becomes hard to distinguish from passivity and resignation. Whether this results from their conclusion being that they are somehow one with the universe and just want to accept their fate, or not, I leave to someone who knows better, but that is my perception of the demeanor and attitude that I associate with Buddhism.

And I see that same attitude in the "Tranquility" emphasis that some want to read in Epicurus. My own perception of Epicurus is that the tranquility angle is not correct, or at least it is by no means the majority, and that Epicurus meant what he said about (1) pleasure, and (2) the shortness of life, so that rather than passivity and resignation and acceptance of fate, an Epicurean will "seize the day" and make the best of the life that is available to him or her, seeking to fill the life that is available with the most pleasant experiences as they subjectively judge those to be valuable to them.

But I also think now that there is no way to dig in and then unravel these details without solid grounding in the physics, which if accepted totally disabuse one of any post-death existence, or any reason to live whatsoever but for pleasure, and someone who doesn't start with that orientation will happily sit round the campfire, arm in arm with a Stoic on one side and a Buddhist on the other chanting "cum-bay-ya my lord" til dawn. To each his own, but that is not how I want to spend *my* life, and I don't think that's what most ancient Epicureans understood the message to be either.

Thank you for listening and for the very helpful comments!

Post by "Don" of April 10, 2020 at 4:30 PM



LOL... Point well taken on DRN! I am working through DeWitt and hopefully will be able to share some comments/thoughts soon on Chapt 1 & 2.

I would agree with you on the Buddhist path leading to a more Stoic outlook, at least in my rudimentary understanding of both. I could also see the Buddhist saying it's not "acceptance or resignation" but transcendence of both of those positions... release from samsara and the cycle of rebirth and all that.

Luckily, we have no cycle to be released from as Epicureans! Carpe diem! [Death is nothing to us!](#)