

Albert Einstein, "Foreword to Lucretius"

Post by "Joshua" of March 5, 2021 at 7:28 PM

Quote

For anyone who is not completely submerged in the spirit of our age, who feels instead like a spectator as the world goes past him, especially, from time to time, vis-à-vis the intellectual attitudes of his contemporaries — on him will Lucretius's poem work its magic

I don't know anything more about this quote than can be found [here](#), but it might be worth looking in to!

Post by "Cassius" of March 5, 2021 at 7:42 PM

Great find! We need that full intro, eventually in English, but I guess the German is the place to start

3. EINSTEIN AND EPICURUS

I. ATOMS AND SPACE

In 1923 a new edition of Lucretius's poem, *De rerum natura*, was published in Germany. A foreword by Einstein was included in the second volume, which contains a German translation of the poem (Lucretius 1923–24). In it Einstein writes: "For anyone who is not completely submerged in the spirit of our age, who feels instead like a spectator as the world goes past him, especially, from time to time, vis-à-vis the intellectual attitudes of his contemporaries — on him will Lucretius's poem work its magic" (Lucretius 1923–24, 2, p. VIa).¹

Why, in fact, is it necessary not to submerge oneself in the spirit of the modern age and to look at it from the sidelines? Apparently, Einstein considers all this an incidental advantage, perhaps even a characteristic demand of the modern age itself. And so it is. As we mentioned in our Introduction, nonclassical science requires an analysis of the contemporary situation in science from the point of view of its dynamics that is, there must be some prediction, a conjecture as to the future of contemporary conceptions, as well as some excursions into the past, some re-evaluation from an historical perspective. The theory of relativity could not have emerged without a re-evaluation of conceptions that were deeply rooted in the past and seemed independent of time, unchangeable. In searching for what he called the "inner perfection" of the theory (its natural derivation from the most general assumptions), Einstein returned to the cosmocritics of classical physics, which he transformed and generalized so that they acquired new meaning. At the same time, Einstein saw the open character of the theory of relativity itself and sought more general solutions, which had still not acquired "external confirmation," that is, they could not be compared with the results of observation.

Post by "Don" of March 5, 2021 at 8:04 PM

<https://einsteinpapers.press.princeton.edu/vol14-doc/497?...tText=Lucretius>

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1910-albert-einstein-foreword-to-lucretius/>

Post by “Cassius” of March 5, 2021 at 9:17 PM

Thanks Don - not very long! Maybe [Martin](#) can let us know whether the full document is interesting enough to pursue further.

Clip of the English notes:

398 DOC. 260 INTRODUCTION LUCRETIVS

Published in *Diels 1924*, Vol. 2, pp. via–vib.

^[1]Hermann Diels (1848–1922), a classical philologist, died on 4 June 1922, before completing his edition of Lucretius. Einstein attended his funeral (see Otto Gradenwitz to Einstein, 1 July 1922, [Vol. 13, Doc. 259]). Diels’s annotated Latin edition and translation of Lucretius’s *De rerum natura* was published posthumously in two volumes, edited by Johannes Mewaldt. The first volume, published in 1923, contains the Latin text, a preface by Diels, a note by Mewaldt, and various supplements. The second volume, published in 1924, contains Diels’s translation of Lucretius’s text into German and a foreword by Mewaldt, completed in March 1924. Mewaldt (1880–1964) was a classical philologist and historian of medicine. In 1923 he was professor at the University of Greifswald, while by 1924 he had moved to the University of Königsberg.

The pagination to Einstein’s foreword (pp. via–vib) suggests that it was inserted into the volume in the later stages of production. Mewaldt’s foreword (pp. v–vi) makes no mention of Einstein. *Rösler 1999* speculates that Walther Nernst, who published a book review of the German edition (see *Nernst 1924*) in *Deutsche Literaturzeitung*, may have suggested that Einstein write the foreword.

^[2]For a most recent expression of Einstein’s deep conviction in the correctness of causal interconnection of natural phenomena, see Docs. 256 and 240. See also Doc. 247, note 4.

^[3]For a recent published expression by Einstein on religion, superstition, and the liberating effect of the development of science, see “Answer to Questions on Religion” [Vol. 13, Doc. 398], and also Doc. 479.

Post by “Joshua” of March 5, 2021 at 9:28 PM

<https://einsteinpapers.press.princeton.edu/vol14-trans/285>

Actually we seem to have it in English at the same website.

Post by “Don” of March 5, 2021 at 9:48 PM

I need to take some time and look where I'm getting things from. 😊 Thanks for catching that, [Joshua](#) !

Post by “Cassius” of March 5, 2021 at 11:53 PM

Hmmm not quite as interesting as I had hoped....I wonder what that note [3] references?

Not sure I follow his reasoning why he thought that Lucretius seems more motivated by the physics than the stated purpose of freeing from religious oppression, or why the practical minded Roman would not appreciate that. From a "practical" point of view very little would be more efficient toward happiness than overthrowing religious oppression. Maybe he's saying the Roman would be looking for information to use for better farming or the like, but if there is one thing the poem is devoid of it's "practical" application like mechanics or hydraulics.

Post by “Godfrey” of March 6, 2021 at 3:33 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Maybe he's saying the Roman would be looking for information to use for better farming or the like, but if there is one thing the poem is devoid of it's "practical" application like mechanics or hydraulics.

I think that's what he's saying, that Lucretius is pushing atomism even though it doesn't seem practical to the typical Roman of his time. But he seems to be missing or ignoring how the understanding of atomism can free people from religious oppression. I read into this the idea of

a spoonful of honey to help the wormwood go down but I don't see him saying this.

Interesting find!

Post by “Eikadistes” of January 28, 2023 at 2:51 PM

“The work of Lucretius will work its magic on anyone who does not completely wrap himself in the spirit of our time and, in particular, occasionally feels like a spectator of the intellectual attitude of his contemporaries. One sees here how an independent man equipped with lively senses and reasoning, endowed with scientific and speculative curiosity, a man who has not even the faintest notion of the results of today’s science that we are taught in childhood, before we can consciously, much less critically, confront them, imagines the world.

The firm confidence that Lucretius, as a faithful disciple of Democritus and Epicurus, places in the intelligibility, in other words, in the casual connectedness of everything that happens in the world, must make a profound impression. He is firmly convinced, he even believes he can prove, that everything is based on the regular motion of immutable atoms, ascribing to atoms no qualities other than geometric-mechanical ones. The sensual qualities warmth, coldness, color, odor, taste, are to be attributed to the movements of atoms, likewise all phenomena of life. He conceives of the soul and mind as formed from especially light atoms, by assigning (in an inconsistent way) particular qualities of matter to particular characteristics of experience.

He states as the primary objective of his work the liberation of humanity from the slavish fear, induced by religion and superstition, that he sees as nourished and exploited by priests for their own purposes. This certainly is a serious issue for him. Nonetheless, he does seem to have been guided mostly by the need to persuade his readers of the necessity for the atomistic-mechanical worldview, although he dare not say this openly to his much more practically oriented Roman readers. His reverence for Epicurus, Greek culture and language, which he considers greatly superior to Latin culture and language, is altogether moving. It redounds to the glory of the Romans that this could be said to them. Where is the modern nation that holds and expresses such noble sentiments with regard to one of its contemporary nations?

Diels’s verses read so naturally that one forget it is a translation.”

(Albert **Einstein**, Foreword in T. Lucretius Carus, *De rerum natura*, Vol. 2, Lukrez, *Von der Natur*, trans. by Hermann Diels, Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1924, pp. vii-viii)

Post by “Titus” of January 31, 2023 at 10:02 AM

[Quote from Nate](#)

Diels's verses read so naturally that one forget it is a translation.”

In my opinion it's still the best translation to German and it is still used in academia (as it is also in public domain). Diels did a great job. Especially Lucretius' hymns proclaiming Epicurus as saviour and his philosophy as the path to light sound impressive. Diels was definitively a friend of Epicurean Philosophy.

Post by “Cassius” of January 31, 2023 at 11:46 AM

[Quote from Titus](#)

Diels was definitively a friend of Epicurean Philosophy.

Presuming you are right about that (and I have no reason to doubt!) then it would be really interesting to read Diels' commentaries on Lucretius in particular or Epicurus in general. Anyone who spends the time to translate the entire poem has to be dedicated. There's a great deal of interesting commentary in Munro's translation, and the same thing for Bailey (although I don't trust Bailey's views as much as I trust Monroe's).

Do you think any of that is available?

I wonder if it would be worth going from German to English to pick up any twists that Diels might have seen in some of the key passages, such as around line 62 in book one. Is it worth a look to try to track things like this down:

Humana ante oculos foede cum vita iaceret 62

in terris oppressa gravi sub religione,

quae caput a caeli regionibus ostendebat

horribili super aspectu mortalibus instans, 65

primum Graius homo mortalis tollere contra

est oculos ausus primusque obsistere contra;

quem neque fama deum nec fulmina nec minitanti
murmure compressit caelum, sed eo magis acrem
inirrat animi virtutem, effringere ut arta 70
naturae primus portarum claustra cupiret.
ergo vivida vis animi pervicit et extra
processit longe flammantia moenia mundi
atque omne immensum peragravit mente animoque,
unde refert nobis victor quid possit oriri, 75
quid nequeat, finita potestas denique cuique
qua nam sit ratione atque alte terminus haerens.
quare religio pedibus subiecta vicissim
opteritur, nos exaequat victoria caelo.

Post by “Titus” of February 1, 2023 at 12:34 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Presuming you are right about that (and I have no reason to doubt!) then it would be really interesting to read Diels' commentaries on Lucretius in particular or Epicurus in general.

I just decided to do so because I really appreciate Diels colourful and powerful art of writing 😊 . I cannot imagine to do so without a positive attitude. My edition doesn't include any commentary by him and there may be none as he passed away before publication. I checked Wikipedia for further information and it seems he exchanged letters with Usener (!) and did a university lecture on Greek philosophy. Both were published some years ago and might be of interest.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I wonder if it would be worth going from German to English to pick up any twists that Diels might have seen in some of the key passages, such as around line 62 in book one.

For detailed discussions it might be of interest listening to another voice. One could use translation software to translate foreign translations into English. On the other hand, there are already many professional English translations available (Bailey, Munro etc.). The translation of a translation (especially by software) also may have some issues. For your passage, Diels sounds this way:

*When, before the eyes of men, life was ignominious on earth
Bowed down by the burden of heavy-weighted religion,
That stretched out its head from the lofty heights of heaven
And with a hideous grimace dreadfully afflicts mankind,
Then first a Greek dared to turn the mortal eye
Against the monster, and boldly to oppose it.
Not the fable of the gods, not the lightning and thunder of the sky
Scared him with their threat. No, only the stronger rose
Higher and higher his courage. So first he dared the locked doors.
the closed gates of Mother Nature in a mighty storm.
And so it happened. His courageous spirit remained victorious, and boldly
He set foot far above the flaming walls of the universe
And he penetrated the infinite universe with an inquiring spirit.
From there he brought back the truth as the spoils of victory:
What can become, what cannot? And how is everyone surrounded
Its working power and the fundamentally resting landmark?
Thus, as if in retaliation, religion lies at our feet
Completely defeated, but us, triumph lifts us to heaven.*

Traducido con DeepL

Post by “Don” of February 1, 2023 at 5:34 AM

These links could be of interest:

[Internet Archive: Digital Library of Free & Borrowable Books, Movies, Music & Wayback Machine](#)

[Google Scholar](#)

PS: The links are to Diels' works on Internet Archive and Google Scholar. Just realized there was no automatic description on those.

Post by “Joshua” of March 14, 2024 at 12:19 AM

I felt I should bump this thread in honor of Albert Einstein's 145th birthday! See @Nate's post above for the English text of Einstein's introduction to a German edition of Lucretius.

Post by “Godfrey” of March 14, 2024 at 12:42 AM

Happy Pi Day! 😊

Post by “Don” of March 14, 2024 at 4:00 AM

<https://www.angio.net/pi/bigpi.cgi>

Epicurus (Ἐπίκουρος Epikouros): 341–270 BC

The string 341270 occurs at position 1,860,579 counting from the first digit after the decimal point. The 3. is not counted.

The string and surrounding digits 08124239256923940821 341270 10920235469290643125

Post by “Kalosyni” of March 14, 2024 at 12:40 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Happy Pi Day! 😊

Oh yay! Looked it up...today is the day to celebrate math and eat pie! 😄

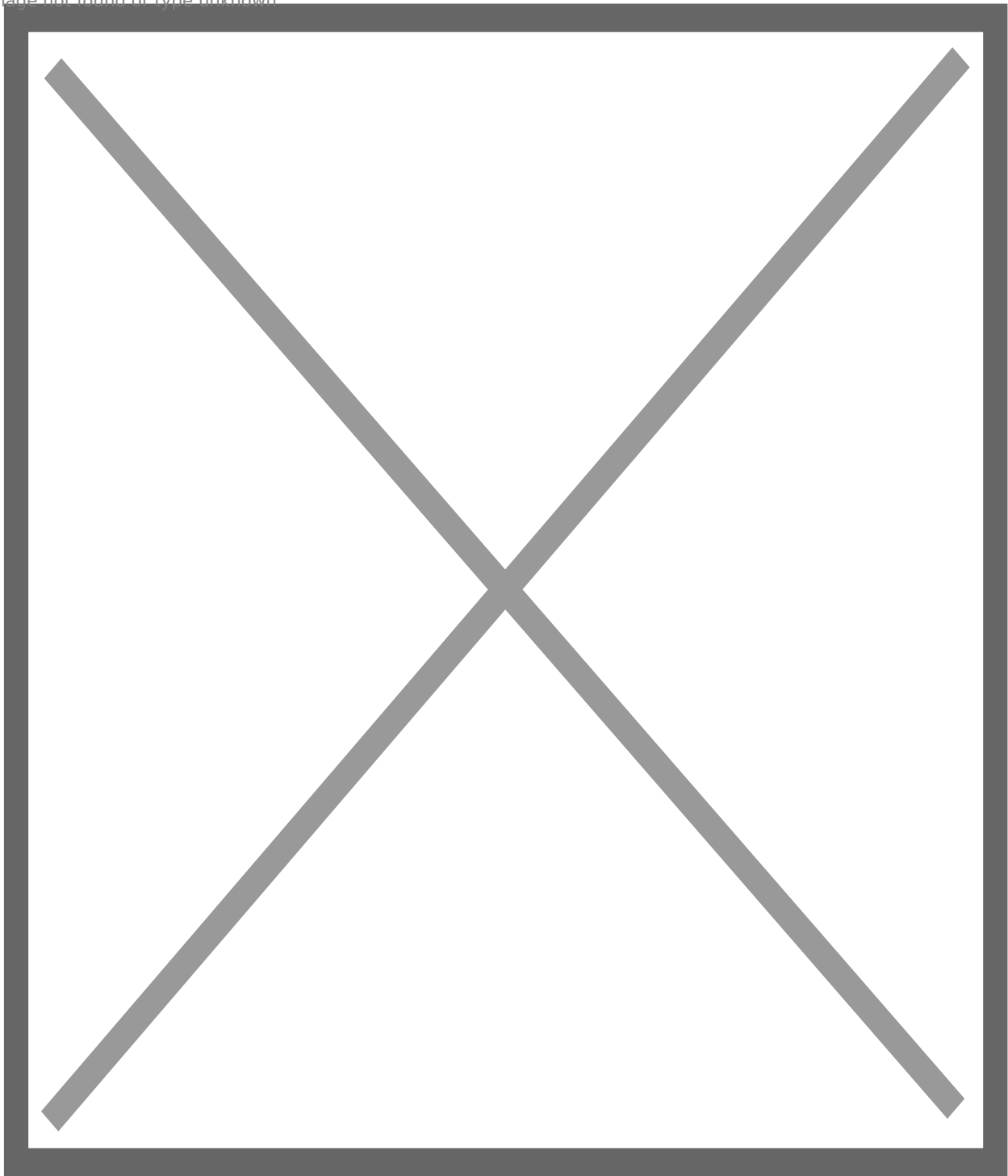
Quote

Pi Day is celebrated on March 14th (3/14) around the world. Pi (Greek letter “ π ”) is the symbol used in mathematics to represent a constant — the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter — which is approximately 3.14159. Pi Day is an annual opportunity for math enthusiasts to recite the infinite digits of Pi, talk to their friends about math, and eat pie.

[Source](#)

Here is a website with pie recipes, just in case 😄

Image not found or type unknown



[Pie Recipes and Tips | Southern Living](#)

Asking if Southerners love pies is like asking if shopping-cart wheels stick. From regional classics to specialties, these homemade pie recipes ensure a slice...

www.southernliving.com