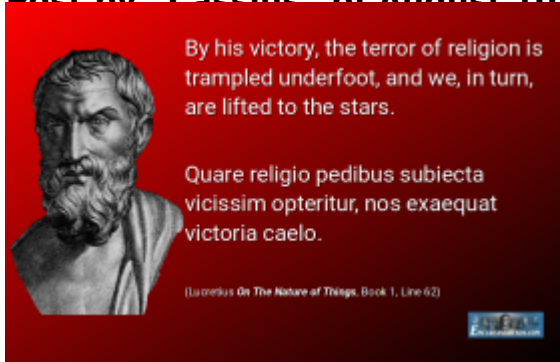


# Foundations 005 - By His Victory Religion Is Trampled Underfoot

Post by "Cassius" of August 10, 2021 at 9:40 PM



**By his victory, the terror of religion is trampled underfoot, and we, in turn, are lifted to the stars.**

Quare religio pedibus subiecta vicissim operitur, nos exaequat victoria caelo.

This highly memorable line is a good one to review the Latin and alternate translations.

Here are several renditions in English, and all of them make much the same point.

It appears to me that Munro might be the most strictly literal, with Brown and Humphries emphasizing the terror / fear of religion, while Bailey inserts "in revenge." Humphries' and Munro's "trampled" would seem to be a good rendition of "subjected to the feet."

However Loeb and Smith are particularly disappointing in choosing to deflect the blow against "religion" by inserting "superstition" in its place. While I think that is probably a defensible choice if one takes the position that the Epicureans considered their view of the gods to be "true religion" and the standard views of the majority as "superstition" - that editorial choice really does not seem warranted given that the Latin is "religio" and in our modern context the clear indictment by Lucretius and Epicurus was against what we today regard as "religion."

At any rate, anyone who seeks to soft-pedal Epicurus' views on the harm caused by standard supernatural religious viewpoints will be hard-pressed to deal with this passage.

**Brown:** *And so Religion, which we feared before, by him subdued, we tread upon in turn. His conquest makes us equal to the Gods.*

**Munro:** *Therefore religion is put underfoot and trampled upon in turn; us his victory brings level with heaven.*

**Bailey:** *And so religion in revenge is cast beneath men's feet and trampled, and victory raises us to heaven.*

**Loeb:** *Therefore superstition is now in her turn cast down and trampled underfoot, whilst we by the victory are exalted high as heaven.*

**Smith:** *So now the situation is reversed: superstition is flung down and trampled underfoot; we are raised to heaven by victory.*

**Humphries:** *Religion, so, is trampled underfoot, And by his victory we reach the stars.*

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## **Post by “Don” of August 10, 2021 at 10:06 PM**

You're right, [Cassius](#) , that is a good line!

FYI: I noticed in the [Perseus Latin edition, it's line 78-79.](#)

I fully agree with your take on religion vs superstition.

Those translations of various permutations of "we are raised to heaven by victory" or, worse, "His conquest makes us equal to the Gods" bother me. It smacks of the supernatural. Lucretius's "*caelo*" is just the dative of *caelum* which is the ["the sky, heaven, the heavens, the vault of heaven \(in Lucr alone more than 150 times\)."](#)

I don't think it can be anything to do with the Gods because the [Epicurean gods](#) "reside" in the Intermundia, not the heavens. They are beyond the "vault of the heavens." The "vault of heaven" is just the sphere/bowl that surrounds/covers the Earth that has the stars, planets, etc.

Leonard's translation at Perseus reads:

*Wherefore Religion now is under foot,*

*And us his victory now exalts to heaven.*

If you exalt someone to "high heaven" it's just a metaphor for "raising the roof" as it were. Those translation seem to imply a supernatural connotation. I think Lucretius is just saying "Let the bells rings out and the banners fly! Woohoo!! We are victorious! Religion has no power over us!!"

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## **Post by “Cassius” of August 10, 2021 at 10:20 PM**

Yes I agree that some form of "to the skies" is a good non-religious metaphor that makes the most sense.

As for the line numbers i will probably go to my grave never being happy with a numbering system. I've taken lately to using the Loeb numbers and I kept all this designated at under line 62 because Loeb doesn't give another line number until 80. I presume that these are just discretionary paragraph divisions so I think as a compromise from here on out I am going to make all my digital versions conform to Loeb paragraph numbering for the sake of some kind of ability to cross-reference.

Thanks for the commentary!

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 10, 2021 at 10:22 PM**

Don what do you think about the "terror" / "fear" versions? Is there anything in the Latin to justify that or is that just more translator editorializing ?

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 10, 2021 at 10:23 PM**

I guess the vicissim operitur is what I haven't drilled into far enough

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### **Post by "Don" of August 10, 2021 at 10:42 PM**

vicissim seems to be just "on that other hand, in turn, etc."  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...:entry=vicissim>

operitur appears to be "wear away, to tread upon, etc."  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...%3Aentry%3Dtero>

I see no terror or fear in those specific lines. That seems to be editorializing. Understandable editorializing, but not in the Latin.

## Post by “Don” of August 10, 2021 at 10:45 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

As for the line numbers i will probably go to my grave never being happy with a numbering system. I've taken lately to using the Loeb numbers and I kept all this designated at under line 62 because Loeb doesn't give another line number until 80.

I hear you! And I didn't mean to be pedantic 😊 Just in case someone was looking at their own copy and thinking "Hmm, why don't I see that on line 62???"

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## Post by “Joshua” of August 11, 2021 at 7:17 AM

[Cassius](#) , are you certain you have the translation right?

I just received a copy of the Humphries translation in the mail this week, and my version has it;

### Quote

Religion, so, is trampled underfoot,

And by his victory we reach the stars.

I remember the audible version vividly enough to know it is the same there. And I would have remembered it anyway, as his is my favored translation of this passage!

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## Post by “Don” of August 11, 2021 at 7:51 AM

[nos exaequat victoria caelo.](#)

Exaequat is an interesting verb and had some intriguing connotations.

Perseus parses it as a "verb 3rd sg pres ind act" which would be "it X's"

Nos can be nominative (subject) or accusative (direct object), so we or us. Since the verb is 3rd person singular, it almost has to be "us" here, doesn't it? Wouldn't "we are raised/equal" be "nos exaequamus"?

The verb had the basic definition of "*To make even or level or equal with any thing*"

So, I'm getting (with my literal rudimentary Latin):

"By (the) victory, it makes us level to/with the sky." ?

Aequo = level, equal

PS:

If my parsing is right, I'm slightly annoyed by translators changing the active to a passive construction. It seems to take the importance or agency away from the victory of trampling religion underfoot. Consider the different feeling of:

It makes us equal...

We are made equal...

The second takes the emphasis away from the trampling; however, should the emphasis be on the trampling (it) or on the beneficiary of the trampling (us)? Maybe it's just poetic license as to what the translator wants to highlight? Does it make a significant difference in interpretation in English?

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### **Post by "Joshua" of August 11, 2021 at 8:29 AM**

Quote

Aequo = level, equal

And also "plane" or "plain". In the Hymn to Venus "Aequora Ponti" is usually translated "waves [i.e. surface] of the sea". In English another word for this would be "reach", as a noun. "Sailing over a broad reach", and so forth.

Perhaps "reach the stars" is not so far out of place?

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### **Post by "Don" of August 11, 2021 at 8:38 AM**

And since Lucretius puts nos first, maybe the emphasis should be on us, accusative or not. My understanding is that the first word is used to denote emphasis.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 11, 2021 at 9:23 AM**

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

Cassius , are you certain you have the translation right?

Thank you for catching that Joshua -- I am not sure where that came from! I will correct. As I write this I can't remember if I had a source for that particular version or just mashed them together in a way that seemed logical at the time.

That's part of the reason for my exercise in doing this because I'd like to check each one of the "slides" in this presentation and then use it for a systematic presentation of the philosophy.

So thank you!

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### **Post by “Joshua” of August 11, 2021 at 9:41 AM**

Quote

As I write this I can't remember if I had a source for that particular version or just mashed them together in a way that seemed logical at the time

I suspect it was this! When I searched for the exact wording of the quote the only two results are this thread and NewEpicurean.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 11, 2021 at 9:46 AM**

[142-foundations-005-by-his-victory-religion-is-trampled-underfoot/](#)

### [Quote from Don](#)

And since Lucretius puts nos first, maybe the emphasis should be on us, accusative or not. My understanding is that the first word is used to denote emphasis.

That is an example of the kind of homespun rules of construction that I think MUST be correct, and have to be important to follow.

My reasoning for that is that the Romans were not any better mind-readers than we are. They HAD to be able to make sense of a spoken sentence AS THEY WERE HEARING IT, and they could not wait until the end of some monumentally long line to find the "verb" and then reorient everything and understand it only after they had heard the last word, like we are taught to do today.

So i agree -- it may be helpful in some cases to move the words around so that we are more comfortable, but I think there is a good argument that we should leave them where they are and insert mentally whatever pronouns or gender or tense or filler concepts or whatever is necessary to make sense as written / as read.

If the Romans thought it was perfectly adequate in the order they used then we can make sense of it too.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 11, 2021 at 10:00 AM**

Does anyone have an opinion as to how the [Latin Library text](#) stacks up against Perseus or other online sources of the Latin Lucretius?

I don't think I have the resources to retype the whole thing so I will probably use the [Latin Library text](#) in my materials unless someone has a much better source?

Back to the issue of paragraph numbering, I've always wanted to be able to swap back and forth from section to section (almost like Joshua's interlinear) so that means that I may take the Loeb paragraph numbers and eventually find a way to get them into my text of the Latin Library edition so at least we can crossreference passages.

Any comment on that idea?

Note: I see that the Latin Library has line numbers every five lines.

1. Is there a way to consider that authoritative?

2. I presume that goes with one particular exemplar of the poem but that the others don't follow that?
  3. So the Loeb is just making judgment calls on paragraphs and dividing the numbering that way?
  4. I think for readability purposes it IS necessary to divide up by "paragraphs" but that surely leads to problems with line numbers. That's why I am currently with the Loeb system and will probably stay there, but any comments on alternatives would be appreciated.
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### Post by “Joshua” of August 11, 2021 at 12:33 PM

Quote

1. compare
2. equal
3. level, make even/straight
4. reach as high or deep as

[Don](#) Latin-Dictionary.net has these four variants under *aequo*. The poet in me rather likes number 4, for the 'reach' double-entendre I mentioned above.

Edit;

I had a long-suffering English professor in college who I think grew somewhat tired of my etymological leaps (reaches? 😎); but even he was impressed when he put me on the spot in a close reading of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and I was able to furnish a connection extemporaneously between "malice" and "apple" in the scene in the Garden of Eden.

*Malus* is the Latin word, and still the scientific name for the "malicious" fruit.

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### Post by “Don” of August 11, 2021 at 12:49 PM

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

In the Hymn to Venus "Aequora Ponti" is usually translated "waves [i.e. surface] of the sea

That looks to be a separate but related word: aequor  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...Aentry%3Daequor>

#### Quote

Esp., the even surface of the sea in its quiet state, the calm. smooth sea ("aequor mare appellatum, quod aequatum, cum commotum vento non est," Varr. L. L. 7, § 23 Müll.: quid tam planum videtur quam mare? ex quo etiam aequor illud poëtae vocant, Cic. Ac. Fragm. ap. Non. 65, 2 (cf. πόντου πλάξ, Pind. P. 1, 24).— Also, in gen., the sea, even when agitated by storms, Lucr. 1, 719: "turbantibus aequora ventis,"

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### Post by "Joshua" of August 11, 2021 at 1:05 PM

#### Quote

That looks to be a separate but related word: aequor

Aequor would be a noun adapted by metonymy from the adjective aequus, no? And aequo the same word as a verb.

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### Post by "Joshua" of August 11, 2021 at 1:11 PM

This would be sort of like the word "level" in English:

Noun; "a smooth, even surface"

Verb; "level the playing field"

Adjective; "a level, easy stroll"

## Post by “Don” of August 11, 2021 at 1:40 PM

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

Quote

That looks to be a separate but related word: aequor

Aequor would be a noun adapted by metonymy from the adjective aequus, no? And aequo the same word as a verb.

That's my take. All related but distinct words with their own connotations. Sorry. I love digging in the weeds of language!

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## Post by “Cassius” of August 11, 2021 at 1:50 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

Sorry. I love digging in the weeds of language!

No reason for apology at all. As we have AMPLY seen, the translators - even in narrative form - cannot be trusted not to do their own editorializing by omitting or adding words/concepts. The only way to be confident in the final result is to check them.

I do think that we can form a generalized impression of a particular writer -- such as my own views which I constantly revise but that I will list here:

**Munro** tends to be highly literal but can be awkward to read; **Bailey** is a more polished version of Munro but is much less to be trusted in his interpretations because he is not ultimately a fan of Epicurus' views; **Brown** editorializes but frequently seems most trustworthy in interpreting Epicurus; **Smith** has access to the latest and best scholarship but regularly editorializes and may be less trustworthy than Brown; **Stallings** has a good feel for the poetry but is probably not a reliable indicator on deep philosophy; **Humphries** has a good feel for the poetry but probably goes too far in some of his poetic flights ("the way things are").

Might actually be a good idea to set up a table of our impressions of the various translators. There will never be a way to judge them "objectively" but might be helpful to compare subjective opinions.

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## Post by “Don” of August 11, 2021 at 2:30 PM

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

Aequor would be a noun adapted by metonymy from the adjective aequus, no?

The fact that you just used metonymy in casual conversation thrills my heart btw 😊

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## Post by “Joshua” of August 11, 2021 at 5:53 PM

Quote

And so Religion, which we feared before, by him subdued, we tread upon in turn. His conquest makes us equal to the Gods.

It's interesting that the Brown edition alone uses 'Gods' for '*caelo*', instead of *heaven, stars, sky*, etc.

That's a highly daring translation of the most dangerous line in a hugely subversive poem. It's no great wonder the translator remained anonymous!

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## Post by “Joshua” of August 11, 2021 at 6:09 PM

[Don](#) I wonder whether you've ever seen *The Browning Version*? I love the 1994 production with Albert Finney. The film is set in an English boarding school (I think?) and the background of the main plot deals heavily with translation, as the title implies.

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## Post by “Cassius” of August 11, 2021 at 6:52 PM

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

That's a highly daring translation of the most dangerous line in a hugely subversive poem. It's no great wonder the translator remained anonymous!

Yes I agree. At first I thought daring in a negative way, but on quick second thought I think your point is that it doubles down on the as religious aspect, and I agree. I think I will have to add this to my mental list of examples where I think the Brown translator is more in tune with Epicurus and Lucretius than the later translators. I tend to think this is an example (especially compared to Smith) where we have moved further away from the meaning of Lucretius over the last 200 years rather than closer.

This is why when I come across a difficult passage my money is on Brown giving the version that is most in tune with the intended inflections.

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**Post by “Don” of August 11, 2021 at 6:56 PM**

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

[Don](#) I wonder whether you've ever seen *The Browning Version*? I love the 1994 production with Albert Finney. The film is set in an English boarding school (I think?) and the background of the main plot deals heavily with translation, as the title implies.

I have not!! Thanks for the tip!

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**Post by “Don” of August 11, 2021 at 6:58 PM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

And so Religion, which we feared before, by him subdued, we tread upon in turn

That's an interesting turn there I hadn't noticed. That is saying Epicurus subdued religion, then we tread upon it in turn. Hmmm. Not sure if that's supported in the Latin but interesting nonetheless.

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## Post by "Cassius" of August 11, 2021 at 7:48 PM

Don that "in turn" reminds me of the statement made earlier in the poem about a double-edged victory. It looks like its Book 3 around 510. Here is Bailey but I think it's more clear in some others. Maybe it's just poetic reinforcement by repetition, but this earlier passage makes me think there might be something about "doubling-down" in Epicurean thought.

### Quote

[510] And since we perceive that the mind is cured, just like the sick body, and we see that it can be changed by medicine, this too forewarns us that the mind has a mortal life. For whosoever attempts and essays to alter the mind, or seeks to change any other nature, must indeed add parts to it or transfer them from their order, or take away some small whit at least from the whole. But what is immortal does not permit its parts to be transposed, nor that any whit should be added or depart from it. For whenever a thing changes and passes out of its own limits, straightway this is the death of that which was before. And so whether the mind is sick, it gives signs of its mortality, as I have proved, or whether it is changed by medicine. So surely is true fact seen to run counter to false reasoning, **and to shut off retreat from him who flees, and with double-edged refutation** to prove the falsehood.

Munro:

### Quote

[510] And since we perceive that the mind is healed like the sick body, and we see that it can be altered by medicine, this too gives warning that the mind has a mortal existence. For it is natural that whosoever essays and attempts to change the mind or seeks to alter any other nature you like, should add new parts or change the arrangement of the present, or withdraw in short some tittle from the sum. But that which is immortal will not to have its parts transposed nor any addition to be made nor one tittle to ebb away; for whenever a thing changes and quits its proper limits, this change is at once the death of that which was before. Therefore the mind, whether it is sick or whether it is altered by medicine alike, as I have shown, gives forth mortal symptoms. **So invariably is truth found to make head against false reason and to cut off all retreat from the assailant, and by a two-fold refutation to put falsehood to rout.**

Interestingly Brown does not highlight the "doubling" or "two-fold"

## Quote

[510] And since we see the mind can be made sound, and be affected by the powers of medicine, as well as a disordered body, this is a strong evidence that the mind is mortal; for whoever attempts to make any alteration in the mind, or offers to change the nature of any other thing, must either add some new parts to it, or take off some of the old, or else transpose the former order and situation; but what is immortal can have nothing added to it, or taken from it, nor will admit of any change in the order of its parts: for whatever is so altered as to leave the limits of its first nature, is no more what it was, but instantly dies. The mind, therefore, whether it be distempered, or relieved by medicine, shows (as I observed) strong symptoms of its mortality. So evidently does the true matter of fact overthrow all false reasoning, that there is no possibility to escape its force; and the contrary opinion is either way fully refuted.

But Loeb does:

## Quote

...so completely is the truth seen to combat false reasoning, and to cut off its retreat as it flies, and to convict falsehood by a double refutation.

Latin from Perseus (not sure exactly where)

## Quote

Et quoniam mentem sanari corpus ut aegrum cernimus et flecti medicina posse videmus, id quoque praesagit mortalem vivere mentem. addere enim partis aut ordine traiecere aecumst aut aliquid prosum de summa detrahare hilum, 515commutare animum qui cumque adoritur et inquit aut aliam quamvis naturam flectere quaerit. at neque transferri sibi partis nec tribui vult immortale quod est quicquam neque defluere hilum; nam quod cumque suis mutatum finibus exit, 520continuo hoc mors est illius quod fuit ante. ergo animus sive aegrescit, mortalia signa mittit, uti docui, seu flectitur a medicina. usque adeo falsae rationi vera videtur res occurrere et effugium praeccludere eunti 525ancipitique refutatu convincere falsum. Denique saepe hominem paulatim cernimus ire et membratim vitalem deperdere sensum; in pedibus primum digitos livescere et unguis, inde pedes et crura mori, post inde per artus 530ire alios tractim gelidi vestigia leti.

## Post by “Don” of August 11, 2021 at 9:01 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

[Quote from Cassius](#)

And so Religion, which we feared before, by him subdued, we tread upon in turn

That's an interesting turn there I hadn't noticed. That is saying Epicurus subdued religion, then we tread upon it in turn. Hmmmm. Not sure if that's supported in the Latin but interesting nonetheless.

Yeah, I see no 1st person plural "we tread". All the verbs in those phrases appear to be 3rd person singular he/she/it.

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## Post by “Joshua” of August 11, 2021 at 9:39 PM

[This](#) is a link to Latin Per Diem, in the episode in which he parses this particular passage. He gives the following translation:

Quote

"(His) victory raises us to equality with heaven"

There's your 3rd person present active indicative, Don! "[His] victory raises us | *victoria exaequat nos*".

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## Post by “Joshua” of August 11, 2021 at 10:00 PM

...The trouble is that I can't find a way to keep the tense *and* the meaning, and also make it sound good in English.

"[And] his victory lifts us to heaven"

The 1st person plural packs a much better punch. In glancing over the translations, Humphries is the "worst" of the lot in keeping to the original grammar, and yet his has the better economy of language—and to my ear is more elegantly phrased.

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### **Post by “Joshua” of August 11, 2021 at 11:15 PM**

Quote

If the Romans thought it was perfectly adequate in the order they used then we can make sense of it too.

□□

For an extra treat, look up the etymology of the English word 'adequate'.

After reading the thread I spotted it at once. 😊

Also, if someone can post the Stallings translation I'd like to see how she handles it in long lines.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of August 12, 2021 at 12:46 AM**

Stallings, lines 75-79:

*In triumph he returns to us, and brings us back this prize:*

*To know what things can come about, and what cannot arise,*

*And what law limits the power of each, with deep-set boundary stone.*

*Therefore it is the turn of Superstition to lie prone,*

*Trod underfoot, while by his victory we reach the heavens.*

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 12, 2021 at 6:38 AM**

Seeing the Stallings version pushes me back in the direction of the ultimate implication being, as per Browne, that the result of the victory is that we live "as gods." That's what would be sanctioned by Epicurus suggesting we live as gods among men, and Lucretius himself comparing Epicurus to a god. I suppose I need to think generically about what it means to go "to the skies" or "to the heavens" but I am not sure I see other allusions in the Epicurean texts to "to the stars" or "to the skies" as being a reference to superior living, or excellence in general. Oops - isn't there a reference to the Canon of Truth being something that is almost fallen from heaven - maybe that's the example to look for heaven / skies?

Also, what are you guys seeing about the "victory" -- is it clearly "HIS victory" or a more generic reference to "victory over religion." It's not like he was Jesus whose work allegedly did the job for us - although he does show us the way to do it ourselves..

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### **Post by "Don" of August 12, 2021 at 6:56 AM**

[quare religio pedibus subiecta vicissim](#)

[opteritur, nos exaequat victoria caelo.](#)

My take is that Epicurus's "victory" is he is the first person (per Lucretius) to show how the superstitious fear of the gods is unnecessary and life-denying. Religion keeps us in bondage. By his victory, religion is trod underfoot and ground away (opteritur). His victory frees us from the shackles of religion, giving us the ability to be level with the heavens just as Epicurus cast his thoughts to the heavens and beyond to gain a wider perspective on the way things are