

# Episode One Hundred Seven - The Epicurean Emphasis on Natural Science

Post by "Cassius" of January 28, 2022 at 3:32 PM

Welcome to Episode One Hundred Seven of Lucretius Today.

This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who 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 our panelists from the EpicureanFriends.com forum, we'll walk you through the six books of Lucretius' poem, and we'll discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. 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.

If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

At this point in our podcast we have completed our first line-by-line review of the poem, and we have turned to the presentation of Epicurean ethics found in Cicero's On Ends. Last week we started section 63, but only got through the first two sentences. Today we return to section 63 and discuss the Epicurean emphasis on natural science.

Now let's join Martin reading today's text:

[63] ~~It was indeed excellently said by Epicurus that fortune only in a small degree crosses the wise man's path, and that his greatest and most important undertakings are executed in accordance with his own design and his own principles, and that no greater pleasure can be reaped from a life which is without end in time, than is reaped from this which we know to have its allotted end. He judged that the logic of your school possesses no efficacy either for the amelioration of life or for the facilitation of debate. He laid the greatest stress on natural science. That branch of knowledge enables us to realize clearly the force of words and the natural conditions of speech and the theory of consistent and contradictory expressions; and when we have learned the constitution of the universe we are relieved of superstition, are emancipated from the dread of death, are not agitated through ignorance of phenomena, from which ignorance, more than any thing else, terrible panics often arise; finally, our characters will also be improved when we have learned what it is that nature craves. Then again if we grasp a firm knowledge of phenomena, and uphold that canon, which almost fell from heaven into human ken, that test to which we are to bring all our judgments concerning things, we shall~~

never succumb to any man's eloquence and abandon our opinions.

[64] Moreover, unless the constitution of the world is thoroughly understood, we shall by no means be able to justify the verdicts of our senses. Further, our mental perceptions all arise from our sensations; and if these are all to be true, as the system of Epicurus proves to us, then only will cognition and perception become possible. Now those who invalidate sensations and say that perception is altogether impossible, cannot even clear the way for this very argument of theirs when they have thrust the senses aside. Moreover, when cognition and knowledge have been invalidated, every principle concerning the conduct of life and the performance of its business becomes invalidated. So from natural science we borrow courage to withstand the fear of death, and firmness to face superstitious dread, and tranquillity of mind, through the removal of ignorance concerning the mysteries of the world, and self-control, arising from the elucidation of the nature of the passions and their different classes, and as I shewed just now, our leader again has established the canon and criterion of knowledge and thus has imparted to us a method for marking off falsehood

from truth.

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## Post by "Joshua" of January 30, 2022 at 5:25 AM

### Letter to Herodotus

Wherefore since the method I have described is valuable to all those who are accustomed to the investigation of nature, I who urge upon others the constant occupation in the investigation of nature, and find my own peace chiefly in a life so occupied, have composed for you another epitome on these lines, summing up the first principles of the whole doctrine.

***First of all, Herodotus, we must grasp the ideas attached to words, in order that we may be able to refer to them and so to judge the inferences of opinion or problems of investigation or reflection, so that we may not either leave everything uncertain and go on explaining to infinity or use words devoid of meaning.***

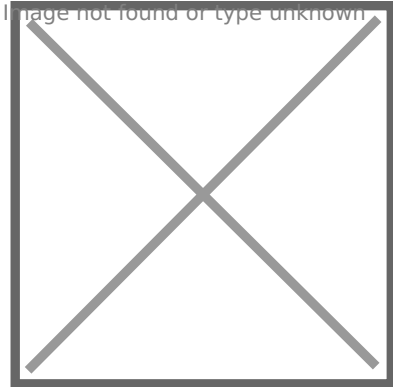
For this purpose it is essential that the first mental image associated with each word should be regarded, and that there should be no need of explanation, if we are really to have a standard to which to refer a problem of investigation or reflection or a mental inference. (*translated by Cyril Bailey*)

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## Post by "Don" of January 30, 2022 at 8:53 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2365-episode-one-hundred-seven-the-epicurean-emphasis-on-natural-science/>

If you're bringing up words, David Sedley's examination of language and definitions in Epicurus's *On Nature*, Book 28, may be interesting:



[Epicurus, On nature, book 28](#)

Epicurus, On nature, book 28

[www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu)

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## Post by “Joshua” of January 30, 2022 at 11:50 AM

Show Notes:

Thank you to [Marco](#) for supplying my deficiency last week in reference to the story about the wild horse!

Lucretius in the context of Roman Handbooks

--*De Rerum Natura*, On the Nature of Things, compared with;

--*De Aquaeductu*, on the Roman Water Supply

By [Frontinus](#)

--*De Agri Cultura*, on Agriculture

By [Cato the Elder](#)

--*De Rei Militari*, on Military Matters

By [Vegetius](#)

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2365-episode-one-hundred-seven-the-epicurean-emphasis-on-natural-science/>

--*De Medicina*, on Medicine

By [Cornelius Celsus](#)

--*De Architectura*, on Architecture

By [Vitruvius](#)

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Lucian's [Alexander the Oracle-Monger](#)

Epicurus' [Letter to Herodotus](#)

Epicurus' [Letter to Menoecus](#)

[Meditations](#) by Marcus Aurelius

---(I have searched in vain for a more even-handed [i.e. non-Epicurean] account of how Marcus Aurelius fell into Alexander's trap, and can find none. Perhaps our listeners can do better. Add to the comments!)

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### **Post by “Joshua” of January 30, 2022 at 11:52 AM**

[Don](#), I was not able to read that in time for recording, but thank you for posting it! I still need to read Sedley.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 30, 2022 at 3:29 PM**

In addition to what Joshua said, we only finished 63, so the Sedley article should be still applicable for next week!

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### **Post by “Don” of January 30, 2022 at 3:33 PM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2365-episode-one-hundred-seven-the-epicurean-emphasis-on-natural-science/>

Sedley's paper isn't an easy read but worthwhile. One of my favorite parts of Book XXVIII is still Epicurus's self-deprecation at the end about prattling on long enough.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 30, 2022 at 4:35 PM**

I have never found anything from Sedley that isn't worthwhile to read. I wish he'd done his own translations or his own equivalent to DeWitt's task of setting out the whole philosophy in one place. At this point he's the only academic I am aware of who could really attack that and do it justice.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of February 3, 2022 at 4:10 PM**

Episode 107 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. This week we continue with Torquatus' summary of some of the Key Doctrines of Epicurus, with a discussion of the Epicurean emphasis on natural science.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/48578575>