

# Nietzsche's Eternal Recurrence (Eternal Return) In Relation To Lucretius

Post by "Cassius" of July 20, 2022 at 10:09 AM

I hesitate to open this thread at the moment because I don't have time to continue it, but we'll now have this here in case someone searches for "Eternal Recurrence" or "Eternal Return" and wants to talk about how it may relate to Lucretius Book 3:

Death is nothing to us; for that which has been dissolved into its elements experiences no sensations, and that which has no sensation is nothing to us. - *Epicurus Principal Doctrine 2*



Nor, if time should gather together our substance after our decease and bring it back again as it is now placed, if once more the light of life should be vouchsafed to us, yet, even were that done, it would not concern us at all, when once the remembrance of our former selves were snapped in twain. And even now we care not at all for the selves that we once were, not at all are we touched by any torturing pain for them. For when you look back over all the lapse of immeasurable time that now is gone, and think how manifold are the motions of matter, you could easily believe this too, that these same seeds, whereof we now are made, have often been placed in the same order as they are now, and yet we cannot recall that in our mind's memory; for in between lies a break in life, and all the motions have wandered everywhere far astray from sense. For, if by chance there is to be grief and pain for a man, he must needs himself too exist at that time, that ill may befall him. Since death forestalls this, and prevents the being of him, on whom these misfortunes might crowd, we may know that we have naught to fear in death, and that he who is no more cannot be wretched, and that it were no whit different if he had never at any time been born, when once immortal death hath stolen away mortal life. - Lucretius Book 3

## Post by "Cassius" of June 22, 2026 at 8:34 PM

Today I finally made some progress in reviewing the book "Nietzsche and Epicurus." I am probably only about half way through it. While there is definitely a lot of useful information in it, at least at the present I would not recommend it.

Here's an example, which I find to be a reprehensible outlook, but also an outlook that is indicative of people who want to place "relief from pain" as the center of Epicurean philosophy rather than pleasure. Because of course if relief from pain is your main concern, you wouldn't want to live forever (because you'd just keep encountering more pain and suffering).

And you would want to experience eternal recurrence, whether you could remember yourself from lifetime to lifetime or not, because of course by golly that would mean that you or someone else was experiencing the pain and suffering of being alive.

To repeat I find this to be both profoundly inaccurate and truly reprehensible ---totally opposite to both the spirit of Epicurean philosophy and the specific statement of Epicurus in the letter to Menoeceus that life is desirable.

But this is where you get to when you analyze Epicurus from an essentially negative / Buddhist perspective and conclude that the most important thing for any Epicurean is to avoid even a moment of pain. Truly a death-wish and death-worship:

Quote from Epicurus and Nietzsche Chapter 6 - Eternal Recurrence - Epicurean Oblivion, Stoic Consolation.... - Michael Ure and Thomas Ryan

Let us sum up the Epicurean treatment of the doctrine of eternal recurrence. Lucretius claims that a proper grasp of recurrence demonstrates the irrationality of our anxiety about future recurrences. We believe that we have grounds for anxiety about our future selves because we assume that this recurrence of the same configuration of atoms means we will once again experience the same sufferings we presently endure. Yet, Lucretius argues, we ought to have no fear for the future because we are psychologically insulated from our future selves. Just as we will not be there when we die, so too Lucretius claims we will not be there when we recur. As we have seen, Lucretius' argument is flawed on two separate fronts: on an 'identity' reading, Epicurean metaphysics does not warrant the non-identity of recurrent individuals, and on a 'concern' reading, it provides non-mnemonic grounds for anticipating or fearing future recurrences

Indeed, against Lucretius, it seems that the Epicurean notion of recurrence must compound my present suffering. Epicurean physics requires that I must admit that I will suffer again, rather than sink into eternal oblivion at the moment of death. The

knowledge of my return must intensify and compound my present suffering because I know that I will experience it again and again. I cannot live tranquilly in the knowledge of eternal oblivion, but I must suffer in anticipation of the repetition of my past, present and unknowable future sufferings.

Lucretius' Epicurean therapy aims to show that death is redemption from the recurrence of life. Epicureans do not want recurrence (the return to life) or, indeed, immortality (the extension of life). To Lucretius the prospect of definitive death is preferable to immortality or recurrence because it eliminates all possibility of pain and sorrow. Since the only pleasure Epicureans value is the absence of all pain, death delivers this end definitively. Lucretius suggests that death is not terrifying since it is like a restful sleep, except it is an eternal, unbroken sleep in which 'no longing for ourselves [will] trouble us' (3.920).

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## Post by "Don" of June 22, 2026 at 11:13 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

indicative of people who want to place "relief from pain" as the center of Epicurean philosophy rather than pleasure. Because of course if relief from pain is your main concern, you wouldn't want to live forever (because you'd just keep encountering more pain and suffering.

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

conclude that the most important thing for any Epicurean is to avoid even a moment of pain. Truly a death-wish and death-worship

I'll concede that some people do want to smuggle in Buddhist or Stoic ideas into Epicurus' philosophy, and this is not the right way to go. However, I have come to see that not all whose concern or focus is "relief from pain" are doing this. To paint everyone one who says something like "Epicurus calls us to relieve ourselves of pain" with the same brush as those who say something like "Ataraxia is like Buddhist satori (or other concept)" isn't warranted.

To pursue pleasure one must alleviate pain. Pain is banished, and pleasure takes its place. Epicurus *does* write quite a bit on the need to rid ourselves of the pain caused by wrong beliefs in Gods and death and by empty desires and by imprudent choices. Not everyone whose focus is "relief" or "avoidance" of pain means "avoid even a moment of pain" because they *acknowledge* some pain is necessary for greater pleasure.

Maybe I'm being naive. Maybe I've not spent enough time on Reddit or Facebook. In fact, to be specific, I'm talking especially about Gedney's *Untroubled* Substack. His work is one place, having taken time to engage more with his articles, that is more balanced than I initially gave him credit for.

I would offer that some of these "people who want to place 'relief from pain' as the center of Epicurean philosophy" (yes, Gedney included) are potentially powerful allies in the pursuit of spreading the good news of the pleasure offered by Epicurus' philosophy.