

Sunday, November 30 - Zoom Meeting - 12:30 PM - Topic: Session One of Book Review of Lucretius - Lines 1 - 214 (The Introduction, Up to Start of Atomism)

Post by “Cassius” of November 26, 2025 at 7:56 PM

I'll modify this post after I get it set up, but this is to set up a placeholder that starting this coming weekend we will begin a series going through the major topics of Lucretius. There's a lot to explain about this but here are initial thoughts:

1 - Lucretius is the gold standard of Epicurean Philosophy. It is the most complete summary of the philosophy left to us from the ancient world, and it was written by a fervent supporter of Epicurus. Where it speaks it can be trusted, and there is much more to be dug out even on areas such as prolepsis where it does not speak as explicitly as we would like.

2 - Lucretius gives us a model of how to explain Epicurean philosophy to a person who is not familiar with it. That is exactly what we ourselves need to do much more of.

3 - We have a good public domain selection in our side-by-side page so it will be easy to follow along and organize the topics.

4 - After we finish Tusculan Disputations and other Cicero mop-up on the Lucretius Today podcast, we will turn our attention back to going through Lucretius in the same way. This will allow us to prepare an edited "professional" presentation of the major points which will be reusable basically forever. Going through the same topics ahead of time on Sunday will allow us to build a notebook of important topics that we want to be sure to cover.

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 29, 2025 at 10:37 AM

[Cassius](#) Can you give a more specific topic description for tomorrow's Zoom? Will you be giving a presentation rather than holding a round-the-table discussion?

Post by “Cassius” of November 29, 2025 at 10:47 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4822-sunday-november-30-zoom-meeting-12-30-pm-topic-session-one-of-book-review-of-luc/>

I will post more before tomorrow but we will do this in book review format. We will go over the topics covered in this section and discuss their significance. I will point out the major topics in the text at the beginning and then I will ask for comments from everyone, with the goal of asking sure that when we produce a podcast episode and or self-teaching study guide that we have a list of points to include and consider.

Also we will refer to the outline for these lines that is present in the [Lucretius side-by side version here](#).

The goal here is going to be to increase our own understanding by making sure we have prepared the raw material to explain the system to others. We are tracking exactly what Lucretius was doing for Memmius, which Lucretius himself has copied from Epicurus.

[Markdown Side-by-Side](#)

Post by “Patrikios” of November 30, 2025 at 10:24 AM

[Cassius](#) Thanks for this topic to study Lucretius OTNOT. In looking at the first lines, it reveals much about how nature creates and sustains all life. Notice how Lucretius places the importance of sun light for all living things.

Quote

*MOTHER of the Aeneadae, darling of men and gods, increase-giving Venus, who beneath the gliding signs of heaven fillest with thy presence the ship-carrying sea, the corn-bearing lands, since through thee **every kind of living things** is conceived, rises up and **beholds the light of the sun**.*

Now modern science can explain more today just how important it is for LIFE that “**every kind of living things ... beholds the light of the sun**”. See this article:

[Sunlight as a key human energy source](#)

[Sunlight as a key human energy source](#)

Quote

Clearly, sunlight drives much of what happens on Earth, including the growth of plant life through photosynthesis. The latter process involves plants using sunlight to create nutrients, from carbon dioxide and water.

With that in mind, it stands to reason that sunlight - entering our body through our eyes and skin - interacts with the human form in multiple ways. That includes stimulating repair, detoxification and energy.

The Principle of Photochemical Activation (The Grotthuss-Draper law) dictates that only absorbed light can create photochemical/biological change.

Human bodies are capable of that light absorption. That is because we have multiple biological molecules that contain chromophores. Each of these is 'tuned' into processing different light frequencies.

Post by “Joshua” of November 30, 2025 at 1:28 PM

Quote

This double colouring of things is supremely interesting to the philosopher; so much so that before his physical science has reached the mechanical stage, he will doubtless regard the double aspect which things present to him as a dual principle in these things themselves. So Empedocles had spoken of Love and Strife as two forces which respectively gathered and disrupted the elements, so as to carry on between them the Penelope's labour of the world, the one perpetually weaving fresh forms of life, and the other perpetually undoing them.[4]

It needed but a slight concession to traditional rhetoric in order to exchange these names, Love and Strife, which designated divine powers in Empedocles, into the names of Venus and Mars, which designated the same influences in Roman mythology. The Mars and Venus of Lucretius are not moral forces, incompatible with the mechanism of atoms; they are this mechanism itself, in so far as it now produces and now destroys life, or any precious enterprise, like this of Lucretius in composing his saving poem. Mars and Venus, linked in each other's arms, rule the universe together; nothing arises save by the death of some other thing. Yet when what arises is happier in itself, or more congenial to us, than what is destroyed, the poet says that Venus prevails, that she woos her captive lover to suspend his unprofitable raging. At such times it is spring

on earth; the storms recede (I paraphrase the opening passage),[5] the fields are covered with flowers, the sunshine floods the serene sky, and all the tribes of animals feel the mighty impulse of Venus in their hearts.

-George Santayana, [Three Philosophical Poets](#)

Post by “Cassius” of November 30, 2025 at 1:55 PM

Meeting Summary (AI - Not Proofed - May Be Inaccurate!)

This meeting focused on discussing Lucretius' poem "On the Nature of Things" (De Rerum Natura) and its relationship to Epicurean philosophy. Participants explored the opening passages of the poem, particularly the invocation to Venus, and debated its symbolic meaning within Epicurean thought. The group also discussed approaches to studying Epicurean philosophy, the relationship between Lucretius and Epicurus, and plans for systematically working through the text in future meetings.

Key Concepts or Theories:

- Lucretius as a faithful transmitter of Epicurean philosophy rather than an innovator
- The symbolic interpretation of Venus in the opening of De Rerum Natura
- The relationship between Empedocles' concepts of love and strife and Lucretius' Venus and Mars
- The distinction between popular religious understanding and philosophical interpretations of deities
- The importance of primary sources in understanding Epicurean philosophy

Important Questions Raised:

- Why does Lucretius begin his Epicurean poem with an invocation to Venus when Epicureans rejected traditional religious beliefs?
- Is Venus meant to symbolize nature, pleasure, or something else in the poem's opening?
- How did Epicureans reconcile their theological views with participation in religious ceremonies?
- What is the best approach for newcomers to begin studying Epicurean philosophy?

Key Takeaways and Summary of Learning Objectives

- Lucretius' poem "On the Nature of Things" represents a faithful attempt to communicate Epicurean philosophy rather than an extension or modification of it
- The opening invocation to Venus can be understood as a literary device, a form of flattery to Memmius (the poem's dedicatee), and a symbolic representation of natural forces
- The group plans to systematically work through Lucretius' text in future meetings, focusing on both content and the significance of its presentation order
- Different readers approach Epicurean philosophy from different starting points, with varying opinions on which introductory texts are most appropriate

Topic 1: The Venus Invocation in Lucretius

The meeting began with an extensive discussion about why Lucretius opens his Epicurean poem with an invocation to Venus, which seems contradictory to Epicurean theology. Several interpretations were offered. Tau suggested it serves dual purposes: as a poetic device and as flattery toward Memmius (the poem's dedicatee), who claimed descent from a hero in Aeneas' army. By addressing Venus as "mother of Aeneas' sons," Lucretius creates an ancestral connection that would appeal to Memmius. Raphael proposed that Venus represents a symbol of natural forces rather than a literal deity, suggesting educated Romans would understand this symbolism. Cassius noted that the specific attributes described in the opening passage might more precisely represent pleasure rather than nature in general, as there's no mention of pain or fear. Joshua contributed that Lucretius was heavily influenced by Empedocles, who described forces of love and strife in nature, which Lucretius transformed into Venus and Mars.

Relevant Q&A

Dave: Who was Lucretius writing to? Who was this Memmius pointed to?

Joshua: He dedicates the poem to Gaius Memmius, a Roman politician who was exiled to Athens and bought the derelict house that belonged to Epicurus. Cicero wrote to Memmius asking him not to tear down the house, as it was a pilgrimage site for Epicureans. The poem may have been part of a campaign to convince Memmius to preserve this important Epicurean landmark.

Dave: I thought the Greeks really considered their gods to be individuals residing somewhere.

Raphael: The educated Greeks and Romans knew that these stories (mythos) were conjured up by poets. They understood them as symbolic personifications of forces of nature.

Topic 2: Approaches to Epicurean Philosophy

The group discussed various approaches to studying and understanding Epicurean philosophy. Dave observed that most new members of the forum mention reading DeWitt as their

introduction to Epicureanism, wondering why this particular text seems to be the common starting point. Tau shared that he came to Epicureanism through other sources and only read DeWitt later, expressing criticism that DeWitt "takes too many liberties" and presents speculation as fact. Patrikios agreed that DeWitt might not be the best starting point for newcomers, suggesting that more accessible modern works might serve better as introductions. Raphael emphasized the importance of primary sources, arguing that readers should begin with Epicurus' own words before moving to interpretations. The discussion highlighted the challenge of finding appropriate entry points for people at different stages of understanding.

Relevant Q&A

Dave: I usually look at the About section of anyone that joins. It seems like every single person says their reading is DeWitt. Nobody comes in from some other material or reading background. I wonder why that is.

Cassius: People probably pick up the emphasis we place on it on the forum. They likely lurk for a while before setting up an account, see the reading list, and notice that book is included.

Tau: I joined the forum after I studied Epicureanism for some time. I only read DeWitt's book much later, and I was never impressed with it because he takes too many liberties and presents stuff as fact when he has absolutely no ground to do that.

Cassius: There are many different opinions about many different things, and that's part of what we discuss.

Topic 3: Lucretius as Transmitter of Epicurean Philosophy

Cassius established his position that Lucretius was attempting to faithfully and accurately represent Epicurus rather than extend or modify Epicurean philosophy. He suggested that Lucretius likely had Epicurus' books "On Nature" in front of him and was following not only the content but also the sequence of Epicurus' presentation. Tau agreed, noting that this would explain the heavy emphasis on physics in Lucretius' poem, as Epicurus' "On Nature" primarily dealt with physics. The group discussed the value of Lucretius as a well-preserved, extensive text from someone attempting to explain Epicureanism about 200 years after Epicurus, at a time when there had been sufficient opportunity to process and develop the philosophy. Joshua mentioned David Sedley's book "Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom," which attempts to reconstruct Epicurus' "On Nature" using Lucretius as a guide.

Relevant Q&A

Cassius: I'm coming to this with a position that Lucretius is doing everything he can to faithfully and accurately represent Epicurus. I do not think that Lucretius is trying to extend anything, or change anything, or improvise, or improve anything in Epicurus. Not everybody takes that position, and there are some articles out there that imply that Lucretius, for example, on the swerve, was improvising.

Tau: Lucretius was not really a philosopher himself, he was a brilliant poet, but he didn't try to philosophize or push Epicureanism further. He didn't try to develop the philosophy. He just tried to put the philosophy in the most beautiful words he could.

Actionable Next Steps / Assignments

- Continue reading the opening sections of Lucretius' "On the Nature of Things" for next week's discussion
- Post in the thread if you have comments or suggestions about how to better organize future discussions
- Consider reading George Santayana's essay "Three Philosophical Poets" which includes analysis of Lucretius
- Explore David Sedley's "Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom" for scholarly perspective

Supplemental Resources and Readings

- George Santayana's essay "Three Philosophical Poets" (examining Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe)
- David Sedley's "Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom"
- The Oxford Handbook chapter on Epicurean theology
- Side-by-side translations of Lucretius created by Cassius
- Multiple translations of Lucretius available on Cassius's webpage (Latin, Cyril Bailey, Samuel Dunster, H.A.J. Monroe)

Post by "TauPhi" of November 30, 2025 at 2:18 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Side-by-side translations of Lucretius created by TauPhi

This needs to be corrected. I've only created side-by-side Laertius' Book X. Lucretius was prepared by [Cassius](#) , as far as I know, and his book/intermediate/detailed views added on top

of all the translations makes this resource spectacular. Do yourself a big favour and bookmark this page if you haven't already:

[Markdown Side-by-Side](#)

Post by “Joshua” of November 30, 2025 at 2:20 PM

Corrected, thank you [TauPhi!](#) And I will echo what you have said about the importance of the side-by-side text, which I consult regularly!