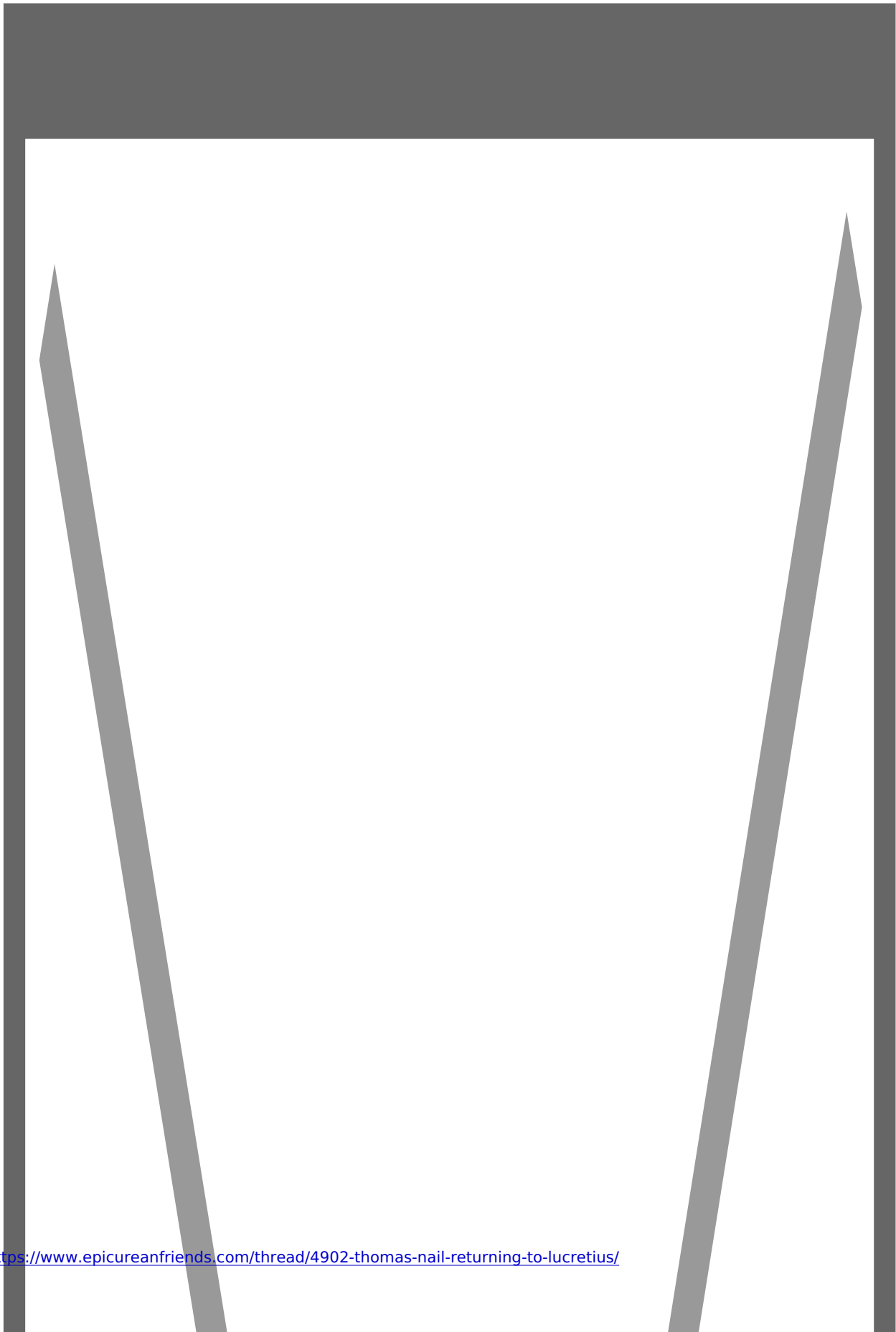


# Thomas Nail - Returning to Lucretius

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 13, 2026 at 9:49 PM

The following page contains a long explanation by the author Thomas Nail (*Professor of Philosophy at the University of Denver*) of his ideas regarding Lucretius, including his stance that Lucretius never used the word "atoms".

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## [Returning to Lucretius](#)

Why Return to Lucretius? I think a new Lucretius is coming into view today. Every period in Western history since Lucretius has returned to him like bees...

philosophy-of-movement.com

I've read about 2/3 of this and there is a lot to unpack. Since we are currently studying Lucretius at the weekly Sunday Zoom, then this may be of interest.

Quote

### **1. First Counter-Thesis: "Lucretius was not an Atomist"**

The difference between Lucretius and the earlier Greek atomists is precisely that—the *atom*. For Leucippus, Democritus, and Epicurus atoms are always in motion, but the atom itself remains fundamentally unchanged, indivisible, and thus internally *static*—even as it moves. Instead of positing discrete atoms as ontologically primary as both ancient Greek and later modern theories do, one of Lucretius' greatest novelties was to posit the *movement or flow of matter as primary*. I think Lucretius did not simply "translate Epicurus;" he transformed him.

For example, although Lucretius could have easily Latinized the Greek word *atomos* as *atomus* [smallest particle], as Cicero did, he intentionally *did not*, nor did he use the Latin word *particula* or particle to describe matter. The English translations of "atom," "particle," and others have all been added to the text based on a certain historical interpretation of it. The idea that Lucretius subscribed to a world of discrete particles called atoms is therefore both a projection of Epicureanism and a retroaction of modern scientific theories of mechanism onto *De Rerum Natura*. As such, Lucretius' writings have been crushed by the weight of his past and future at the same time.

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## **Post by "Eikadistes" of January 13, 2026 at 9:54 PM**

That's what I found, as well. H. A. J. Munro is the only author I've found who seems to consistently stick to Lucretius' neologisms, as opposed to inserting modern scientific jargon. [I made a list](#) of the vocabulary words and phrases that Lucretius uses when referring to particles [here](#).

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## **Post by "Cassius" of January 14, 2026 at 4:10 AM**

I just read the article. I agree with some of Nail's points on ethics (especially his implicit or explicit criticism of too much focus on static / katastematic ideas) but I am not seeing the profound differences between Lucretius and Epicurus that he claims to see as to particles or the resulting nature of the universe.

In fact I don't think his article gives a clear statement of where he is going with his whole argument. He seems to think there are profound implications in Lucretius deviating from Epicurus - but so far as I can tell he is not explaining what significance there is in what he is seeing.

I gather he is focusing on implications of motion but I see no reason why what he talks about as to motion is not already in Epicurus.

The article has lots of energetic argument but at least for me I don't see why he is so worked up.

Eikadistes I know you have written recently on this. What so you see to be the implications of his argument?

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### **Post by "Cassius" of January 14, 2026 at 4:30 AM**

Also Eikadistes I just glanced back over [your recent article](#). What you wrote makes perfect sense to me in going over the many different words that were used as apparent synonyms for particles and stressing that we should pay attention to them.

But while I see you making the important point that Epicurus was significantly different from Democritus and Leucippus, I don't see you saying that there are any profound differences between Epicurus and Lucretius.

*Your* article seems very clear and helpful. This one by Nail strikes me much differently as implying profound differences between Epicurus and Lucretius which are not clearly explained. I have not generally found the contention that Lucretius differs significantly from Epicurus to be helpful or well grounded in persuasive argument, and that's how I react to this article too.

So at this moment my reaction is that I completely endorse anyone taking the time to read *your* article. On the other hand I doubt that the *Nail* article is a good use of time for most readers. Please correct me if you think i am off base!

Thread

## [Epicurus Was Not an Atomist \(...sort of\)](#)

[epicureanfriends.com/wcf/attachment/6015/](http://epicureanfriends.com/wcf/attachment/6015/)

Greetings, all! I [published some thoughts](#) about the limitations in our employment of the word "atomism" as an expression of ancient Epicurean particle physics. I'll admit that I might be splitting hairs here, and exploiting a post-structuralist position about the symbols and their context ... I read a lot of Derrida back in college. I apologize in advance. 😊

In a nutshell:

- The notions of "atomism" and "ancient Epicurean particle physics" can be contrasted

...

■

Eikadistes

December 22, 2025 at 2:24 PM

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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 14, 2026 at 4:56 AM**

One more comment:

If what Nail is saying is that he sees much more emphasis on *motion* in Lucretius than he does in Epicurus, and that this is why we should not be overly focused on anything that is *static*, then I completely agree. I think motion is a critical component of Epicurean thought that deserves emphasis.

But I don't think that Epicurus failed to emphasize motion if he is perceived by some to do so, it is because people are obsessed with the discussion of katastematic vs static pleasure, as Nail discusses in his ethics section. If Nail is making the point that there are more profound implications of motion in ethics than people appreciate due to modern over-focus on ataraxia, then I agree with him.

But as I read the article he is more focused on something else, presumably elated to the universe being something other than discrete particles. (Is he arguing for a "plenum"?) I don't see Lucretius doing that at all nor do I think looking in that direction leads to anything helpful.

## Post by “Bryan” of January 14, 2026 at 10:50 AM

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Lucretius never used the word "atoms"

At every turn Lucretius is trying to translate, not transliterate, Epicurus. There are only a few exceptions (Such as homoeomeria, for which he apologizes for using only the transliteration.) To consider this translation a transformation is of course *in part* true, but Lucretius at every point, *where we have Epicurus' words on the same topic*, succeeded in producing very close translations of Epicurus' wording.

### [Quote from Eikadistes](#)

H. A. J. Munro is the only author I've found who seems to consistently stick to Lucretius' neologisms

I agree it is good to follow Lucretius very closely. Otherwise it seems surprising to learn that Lucretius did not use the word "atom." For example, I use "primary-beginnings" for *přimřrdia* and "first-beginnings " for *principia*.... *but they do both mean "atom."*

### [Quote from Eikadistes](#)

I made a list

This is very helpful! Thank you!

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## Post by “Cassius” of January 14, 2026 at 2:08 PM

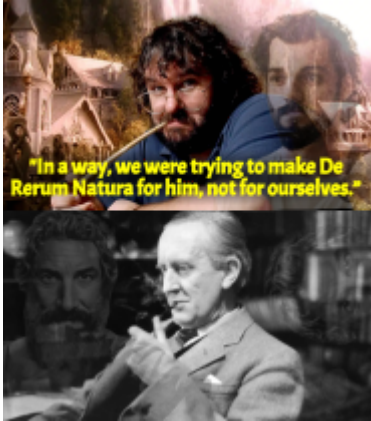
Thanks for those comments Bryan. I suppose to nail down another aspect of this discussion, would you or anyone else here advocate for Lucretius taking off in a bold new direction from Epicurus as to the nature of atoms? I suppose an interesting case could be made that Lucretius differed from Epicurus on the advisability of writing poetry, but i bet even there would could find a way to reconcile them.

But before we move past this topic we probably ought to address whether there's a persuasive argument that Lucretius tried to modify any core Epicurean doctrine, which seems to be the point Nail is arguing.

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## Post by “Eikadistes” of January 16, 2026 at 9:19 PM

Overwhelmingly, I find that Lucretius' neologisms compliment the insight of Epicurus. Referring to particles as "firstlings" is a great example. I actually think that he could have even added a few others, but, in general, I think his translation is a true homage to the source.



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## Post by “Patrikios” of January 24, 2026 at 2:18 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I just read the article. I agree with some of Nail's points on ethics (especially his implicit or explicit criticism of too much focus on static / katastematic ideas) but I am not seeing the profound differences between Lucretius and Epicurus that he claims to see as to particles or the resulting nature of the universe.

In fact I don't think his article gives a clear statement of where he is going with his whole argument. He seems to think there are profound implications in Lucretius deviating from Epicurus - but so far as I can tell he is not explaining what significance there is in what he is seeing.

I gather he is focusing on implications of motion but I see no reason why what he talks about as to motion is not already in Epicurus.

The article has lots of energetic argument but at least for me I don't see why he is so worked up.

[Kalosyni](#) ,

Thanks for posting this paper by Nail. I am finding some profound enlightenment from the perspective presented.

[Cassius](#) ,

I may be misinterpreting Nail's views but these are his statements that show a difference in approach to understanding how Lucretius describes the flow & folding.

Quote

Lucretius also prefigured quantum theory's understanding of entanglement and indeterminacy.

...

Instead of talking about discrete particles, Lucretius talks endlessly about flows and folds. These are the core tenets of what I call Lucretius' "kinetic materialism." If matter does not flow it cannot fold; if it folds it must also flow. However, if we interpret Lucretius' concept of *corpora* as 'discrete particles' or 'atoms' instead of flows, his whole conceptual edifice of folding [*plex*] (*simplex*, *duplex*, *complex*, *amplex*) completely unravels. Atoms simply cannot fold.

...

Since the soul and body come into being with their matters "woven" [*inplexis*] (3.331) together and "roots" [*radicibus*] (3.325) growing together, they are also "unwoven" or "untied" [*dissolu-antur*] (3.330) together as well. Since the soul and body are in constant motion, then it follows that the soul is always weaving.

Modern quantum field theory describes "atomic particles" as emergent from wave functions when observed—which aligns precisely with what Nail's arguing about flows producing folds, not vice versa. Thus, I do see a difference between Epicurus and Lucretius describing the differing approaches of their physics. Sometimes artists, poets can interpret nature and reality in 'flowing' texts, or flowing brush strokes that provides a different perspective from a particle-driven viewpoint.

I also find that this perspective of flows and weaving folds is reflected in how some indigenous cultures describe their connection with Nature (e.g. Mother Nature). They see the flows of

nature, even in their own souls. In some indigenous cultures, the women (the creative life bearers) are the only ones allowed to weave, as that is their spiritual way of connecting to Mother Nature.

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### Post by “Bryan” of January 24, 2026 at 7:06 PM

#### Quote

However, if we interpret Lucretius’ concept of *corpora* as ‘discrete particles’ or ‘atoms’ instead of flows, his whole conceptual edifice of folding [*plex*] (*simplex*, *duplex*, *complex*, *amplex*) completely unravels. Atoms simply cannot fold.

I do believe that Nail is alone in interpreting *corpora* as "flows." *Corpora* is a common and simple word that means "bodies." It is used by Lucretius, among many other terms, to refer to the *primary particles* ("*atoms*" in the literal sense of *fundamental uncuttable units*).

The idea of "flow" will not be found in any dictionary entry for *Corpora* ([link for example](#)). There is no place in Latin literature where *Corpora* means anything close to "flows."

Similarly, although the [-plex](#) ending in *simplex*, *duplex*, etc. does indeed etymologically come from “-fold”, nevertheless *simplex*, and *duplex* are the standard Latin words for "single and double" -- and forcing an actual and literal "fold" into the idea -- *beyond* "single-fold" meaning "single" and "two-fold" meaning "double" -- is another unique interpretation of Thomas Nail.

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### Post by “Patrikios” of January 27, 2026 at 12:29 PM

#### [Quote from Bryan](#)

The idea of "flow" will not be found in any dictionary entry for *Corpora* ([link for example](#)). There is no place in Latin literature where *Corpora* means anything close to "flows."

Thank you [Bryan](#) for further educating us on this translation and interpretation from **Thomas Nail**. I find that your analysis is more historically accurate. But to better understand more of

what Thomas Nail was attempting to convey, I consulted additional references.

Michael Bennet also takes Nail to task in his 2022 article in Parrhesia.

### [nail's lucretius: strong misreading and whig history](#)

Bennett concludes with this assessment:

Quote

*Nothing I have said poses a challenge to the project of developing an ontology of motion adequate to the ethical, political, aesthetic and scientific realities of the present day. Nor have I called into question the consistency or originality Nail claims for the theory of motion presented in the first book of **Being and Motion** (BM 13). In fact, I have perhaps emphasized its originality—though at the expense of Lucretius's. I have, however, cast doubt on Nail's way of reading Lucretius, and so, perhaps, also on his claim that "it is fitting" for a "new materialism" today to return to *De Rerum Natura*, with which "the entire history of an error began" (LOM 273)—namely, the supposed error of reading it as an atomist text.*

Just for grins, I also consulted Perplexity AI:

Quote

*Thomas Nail's reading is not simply "right" or "wrong"; it is a deliberately speculative, philosophical reinterpretation of Lucretius that goes well beyond what the poem itself, or mainstream Lucretius scholarship, would warrant as historically accurate.*

...

*So: as **historical exegesis**, claiming that Lucretius is "really" a theorist of flows and folds anticipating quantum field theory overstates the case and conflicts with the mainstream, atomist reading. As a **philosophical reception** or creative re-appropriation, Nail's reading is legitimate and interesting, but its success is measured by its philosophical fruitfulness, not by fidelity to Lucretius's own conceptual world.*

...

*If the question is: "Is Nail offering a productive, contemporary way to read Lucretius that resonates with some features of modern physics?" then the answer is: **possibly***

**yes**, as long as we recognize that this is a strong, creative misreading rather than a neutral historical interpretation.

The commentary provided by others on this thread are quite helpful in adjusting how best to read such interesting perspectives on Lucretius DRN from modern philosophy professors, such as Thomas Nail. However, Nail did publish his theory of motion in Lucretius in three parts from 2018 to 2022, with a further update in 2024:

**[Lucretius I: An Ontology of Motion \(Edinburgh University Press, 2018\)](#)**

**[Lucretius II: An Ethics of Motion \(Edinburgh University Press, 2020\)](#)**

**[Lucretius III: A History of Motion \(Edinburgh University Press, 2022\)](#)**

**[The Philosophy of Movement: An Introduction \(University of Minnesota Press, 2024\)](#)**

It will take me awhile to read through these other papers by Nail to more fully understand his perspective. Through this forum, it will be interesting to keep these modern views in balance with the initial historical writings of Lucretius. Thanks to all for your added knowledge, as we continue studying Lucretius.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 27, 2026 at 12:53 PM**

That's very helpful additional research Patrikios - thank you!

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### **Post by “Joshua” of January 27, 2026 at 7:18 PM**

I haven't read the article, but I notice that we are going to be encountering related ideas in *Academic Questions*, Book 1, section 2 this weekend;

Quote

[Varro speaking] But now, if I approved of the doctrines of Epicurus, that is to say, of Democritus, I could write of natural philosophy in as plain a style as Amafanius. For what is the great difficulty when you have put an end to all efficient causes, **in speaking of the fortuitous concourse of corpuscules**, for this is the name he gives to atoms. You know our system of natural philosophy, which depends upon the two principles, the efficient cause, and the subject matter out of which the efficient cause forms and produces what it does produce. For we must have recourse to geometry, since, if we do not, in what words will any one be able to enunciate the principles he wishes, or whom will he be able to cause to comprehend those assertions about life, and manners, and desiring and avoiding such and such things?

And I also recall that Alfred Tennyson in [Lucretius](#) makes reference to 'streams' of atoms;

Quote

A void was made in Nature, all her bonds  
Crack'd; and I saw the **flaring atom-streams**  
And torrents of her myriad universe,  
Ruining along the illimitable inane,  
Fly on to clash together again, and make  
Another and another frame of things  
For ever.

Display More

Apart from all of this, my own view on the matter is in agreement with [Bryan's](#). Lucretius is translating (finding Latin words with which to convey the 'dark discoveries of the Greeks') rather than innovating.

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## Post by “Cassius” of January 27, 2026 at 7:57 PM

Great catches Joshua. This is one of the ways going through Academic Questions and then to Philodemus "On Signs" is going to help us.

E-V-E-R-Y-T-H-I-N-G depends upon this intersection of canonic / epistemology and physics.

Is the universe (1) natural as arising solely through the interplay of atoms moving through void - and nothing else, or (2) is the universe caused by an interplay of a supernatural force projecting itself outward and onto something else?

If (2), then everything depends on study and understanding of that supernatural force, which is impenetrable to the senses, and for which knowledge we must depend on geometry and math and reliance on propositional logical formulas.

All of our discussion of pleasure and pain and natural and necessary desires and everything else involving ethics is out the window if we cannot be confident in answer (1). That's because answer (2) exposes us to eternal punishment or reward. It should go without saying that eternal punishment and reward totally trumps all local and short-term considerations of pleasure or pain or good and bad or any other word you want to throw at the problem.

#### Quote

You know our system of natural philosophy, *which depends upon the two principles, the efficient cause, and the subject matter out of which the efficient cause forms and produces what it does produce*. For we must have recourse to geometry, since, if we do not, in what words will any one be able to enunciate the principles he wishes, or whom will he be able to cause to comprehend those assertions about life, and manners, and desiring and avoiding such and such things?

Those who blew up the Platonic school from within were right to challenge the orthodoxy largely pioneered by Pythagorus but continued by Plato and also Aristotle. Their selection of a prime mover/fantasy god in the sky Option (2) based on speculation with no real sensory evidence makes no sense if we take the evidence of the senses given to us by Nature as what we are going to follow.

Thomas Nail appears to be an example of someone looking to bend the simplicity of atomic nothing-comes-from-nothing physics to allow for the existence and control of supernatural otherworldly forces.

There's no way to stand up to fantasizing except to insist on real evidence given to us by nature as self-evident, and that's what Epicurus' canonics is all about.

It's worth pointing out that there is a healthy skepticism embedded within Epicurean philosophy with which all of us will agree, in that we will challenge conclusions that we believe to be false based on a combination of sensory evidence and deductive reasoning based on that evidence.

But we need to be frank that everyone is not going to be willing to go along with Epicurus for the full ride. Frances Wright herself was not willing to go along with Epicurus and make deductive conclusions about the implications of nothing coming from nothing and nature never creating only a single thing of a kind.

Cicero does an excellent job of lending respectability to arguments that we can never go any further than to say that some things are "probable" and some are not. Other than those of us who were taught to have faith in "GOD" and say that if God said it, it must be true, all the rest

of us have had it beaten into our heads to "never say never" and to avoid "dogmatism" as the worst sin possible.

That's what we're going to explore next on the podcast -- how to understand what the professionals disparage as "dogmatism" in Epicurean philosophy in the way that Epicurus himself understood it.

And maybe for those who are least comfortable with getting anywhere near confidence about anything, we can point out that it's here that the rubber meets the road. You can't have it both ways. Either you're going to heaven or hell after you die, and you damn well better live accordingly, or your not. Most of us here who study Epicurus are comfortable saying that the answer is "not."

And core to that position is that we stick with what Epicurus clearly had to say about the "uncuttable" nature of matter moving through the void, and stop trying to invest it Nail-like with mysterious properties that open the door to a supernatural realm.

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## Post by "Patrikios" of January 28, 2026 at 9:19 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

*Thomas Nail appears to be an example of someone looking to bend the simplicity of atomic nothing-comes-from-nothing physics to **allow for the existence and control of supernatural otherworldly forces.***

*There's no way to stand up to fantasizing except to insist on real evidence given to us by nature as self-evident, and that's what Epicurus' canonics is all about.*

### [Cassius](#) ,

I don't quite see where you make this assumption that Thomas Nail is introducing "**supernatural otherworldly forces**". Or have I mis-read your post #14.

I read Nail's papers more as simply mis-translating [as [Bryan](#) pointed out in post #10] to infer that Lucretius understood and was trying to write about the flow and folds of nature as if Lucretius' **prefigured** Quantum wavefunctions.

*"However, in addition to these insights, my books have tried to argue that Lucretius also **prefigured** quantum theory's understanding of entanglement and indeterminacy." [Thomas Nail]*

I can see Nail's work as a "strong misreading" of DRN—philosophically productive but historically stretched. Where, Nail could have simply drawn careful **analogies** between Lucretius's atomic swerve (clinamen) and quantum indeterminacy and wave functions driving motion; Nail went further to present this as historical claim to be seen in passages of DRN.

However, I find no mention of Nail discussing "**supernatural otherworldly forces**". In fact the forces that occur from "motion" create effects which our human senses can not detect, may be better understood today by modern quantum effects.

I thought the critique given by professor Michael Bennett of Nail's work which I quoted his conclusion in my post #11 clarified that Nail was not proposing "**supernatural otherworldly forces**" in his theory of motion.

Quote

*Nothing I have said poses a challenge to the project of developing an ontology of motion adequate to the ethical, political, aesthetic and scientific realities of the present day. Nor have I called into question the consistency or originality Nail claims for the theory of motion presented in the first book of Being and Motion (BM 13). In fact, I have perhaps emphasized its originality—though at the expense of Lucretius's.*

Thanks for your commentary, as it helps me keep reading!

As I have time to read many of the other Nail papers, I'll have a better understanding. Starting with: "[THE PHILOSOPHY OF MOVEMENT - An Introduction](#)"

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## Post by “DaveT” of January 29, 2026 at 1:48 PM

I've read all the posts above. And I have a question that I'd like clarification from any/all among us.

First my question, and then my reasons for asking it.

Question: Why should anyone dwell on whether Lucretius accurately interpreted Epicurus' book Nature?

Reasons for the question: Neither Epicurus nor Lucretius had data understandable to the senses about the components of atoms and their sub-atomic particles. Neither understood that photons (light) are both particles with mass (matter), and waves (energy) with no mass. I don't see why one must believe Epicurus was right about atoms and their movement to be adherents to his ethics, canonic, etc.

Einstein's theory has demonstrated that matter and energy are interchangeable, rendering Epicurus' belief in eternally unchanging elemental particles unnecessary. Indeed, what we ought to depend upon is his mode of discovering nature by our senses and power of deduction. I think he, as well as every formal scientist today, shares a willingness to be proven wrong in the advancement of additional evidence of how the world works.

So, back to the thrust of my question above: Why should anyone dwell on whether Lucretius interpreted Epicurus wrongly or indeed intentionally declined to include Epicurus' atomism?

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### **Post by "Kalosyni" of January 29, 2026 at 2:23 PM**

#### [Quote from DaveT](#)

So, back to the thrust of my question above: Why should anyone dwell on whether Lucretius interpreted Epicurus wrongly or indeed intentionally declined to include Epicurus' atomism?

Perhaps because it is a body of writing that has transcended time, and that has given it a bit of a "special quality" that is different than just some "Joe-shmo". There is also the presentation of many ideas which are the basis for cognizing the material world, free from religion and superstition - and we still live in a world where a great many people are bound up by superstitions so this is still important for our time. Also, because much of what Epicurus wrote was lost but Lucretius has preserved his ideas.

Even if the science has now advanced on many things, what else is there that does what Lucretius does? Perhaps it is time for modern people to do what he did in a more up-to-date manner, while also still preserving the many subtle truths on things like the nature of the soul and death.

## Post by "Cassius" of January 29, 2026 at 3:16 PM

### [Quote from DaveT](#)

So, back to the thrust of my question above: Why should anyone dwell on whether Lucretius interpreted Epicurus wrongly or indeed intentionally declined to include Epicurus' atomism?

This is a very good question and being able to answer it thoroughly is what this forum is all about.

There are many aspects to it beyond those relating to whether Lucretius intentionally or accidentally deviated from Epicurus. That's important in itself, but it's not nearly as important as addressing what you wrote here:

### [Quote from DaveT](#)

I don't see why one must believe Epicurus was right about atoms and their movement to be adherents to his ethics, canonics, etc.

What does it mean in this context to say that Epicurus was "right" or "wrong" about atoms?" I would argue that questions such as whether photons are considered to be particles with mass or waves or whether matter and energy are interchangeable" does *not* render Epicurus' belief in eternally unchanging elemental particles. People can argue all day about new discoveries about details of atoms but if they remain at that level of analysis they are totally missing Epicurus' point.

The issue is not establishing the exact specifications of what we call molecules or atoms or subatomic particles. Epicurus never claimed either to do that or to explain the mechanism of the swerve. What he *did* claim is that it is incorrect to speculate that things can be divided infinitely because that creates a logical impossibility.

If infinite divisibility were accepted, you'd have no mechanism for establishing that anything is or could be eternal and therefore reliable. You would have no foundation for a natural universe rather than a completely arbitrary supernatural one. You'd have no basis for having confidence in any conclusion whatsoever. It's possible to argue all day about the difference between "confidence" and "certainty," and say that all you need is "probability." That's a very old argument and what we'll be taking it up in discussing the "Academic Questions" discussed by Cicero.

Epicurus was not a particle physicist and made no claims to be doing anything more than providing a rational basis for a non-supernatural universe. Neither Epicurus nor Lucretius nor

any other Epicurean took up careers in splitting atoms or building atomic bombs, because engineering and technical innovation is secondary to having a rational theory for living life in the here and now.

The issue is not that of being willing and able to accept and incorporate new observational discoveries. That's been going on for thousands of years and will always continue. The issue is the logical and conceptual one of whether ANY number of observational discoveries can ever be sufficient to allow us to conclude that the universe is natural and not supernatural. Or do we always have to hedge our bets and never escape the doubt that when we die we'll be tortured forever in hell?

It's at that level that I would maintain even today that Epicurus was absolutely right about his important conclusions. He was right as to "atomism" that the universe ultimately has a natural and eternal material basis. He was right as to "canonics" that knowledge is possible and radical skepticism is a fraudulent impossibility. He was right as to "ethics" that there are no absolute supernatural rules and that nature provides all the guidance we need if we simply take a wide view of pleasure as all mental and physical experience in life which is desirable.

There's going to be a wide disagreement among individuals on which pleasures to pursue because individual circumstances vary. But if we want to live happily we have to have a framework for making decisions now, that that means that everything in physics is divided between matter and space, everything in ethics is divided between pleasure and pain, and everything in canonics can be divided between true and false.

In each of those three areas you have to look very carefully at what is meant by each word:

- matter vs space
- pleasure vs pain
- true vs false

There's an Epicurean way of looking at each one of those terms and how they relate to each other. This is the analytical framework that David Sedley described in his article "The inferential Basis of Epicurean Ethics."

This analysis provides a framework in which you can have confidence because the alternatives in each category exclude all other possibilities once you see how sweeping they truly are. The details of what "observational scientists" tell you yesterday, today, or tomorrow are not nearly so important as that you have a framework within which to understand them. And that's what Lucian of Samosata was talking about in saying that Epicurus would have been confident that Alexander the Oracle Monger was a fraud, even if Epicurus were not immediately able to ascertain the precise manner in what Alexander was carrying out his trickery.

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**Post by “DaveT” of January 29, 2026 at 9:25 PM**

[Cassius](#) I understand what you are saying and completely agree with your statements. Can I conclude that Prof Nail's essay under consideration here is not relevant to whether Lucretius ignored Epicurus' atomism? I think the answer is that it is not.

P.S. I think it was Degrasse-Tyson who said something like: our universe does not need God in order to exist.

PPS Also, I recently read that Karl Marx's doctoral dissertation some time in the 1840s was a comparison of Democritus' and Epicurus' atomism, finding Epicurus' teaching was consistent with the Young Hegalians philosophical views which he favored.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 30, 2026 at 4:52 AM**

1. I read this a long time ago and was not impressed, but that was so long ago I may well have failed to appreciate its significance. Seems like this has come up a number of times and we need to find a good source for the text and start a new thread on it. If I recall correctly I saw it originally on a Marxism page, but that page seems to be gone.

#### [Quote from DaveT](#)

PPS Also, I recently read that Karl Marx's doctoral dissertation some time in the 1840s was a comparison of Democritus' and Epicurus' atomism, finding Epicurus' teaching was consistent with the Young Hegalians philosophical views which he favored.

2

#### [Quote from DaveT](#)

Can I conclude that Prof Nail's essay under consideration here is not relevant to whether Lucretius ignored Epicurus' atomism? I think the answer is that it is not.

I may be losing the thread of the discussion in my mind but if what you mean is that the Nail essay does not provide a good argument that Lucretius was deviating from Epicurus, I think you're correct that in my mind it doesn't.