

Episode 325 - EATAQ 07 - The False Platonic Division of The Universe Into A Force Which Causes And That Which The Force Acts Upon

Post by "Cassius" of March 14, 2026 at 9:38 PM

Welcome to Episode 325 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the most complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world. Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where we discuss this and all of our podcast episodes.

This week we start are continuing our series reviewing Cicero's "Academic Questions" from an Epicurean perspective. We are focusing first on what is referred to as Book One, which provides an overview of the issues that split Plato's Academy and gives us an overview of the philosophical issues being dealt with at the time of Epicurus. This week will will continue in [Section 6](#)

Our text will come from

[Cicero - Academic Questions - Yonge](#) We'll likely stick with Yonge primarily, but we'll also refer to the Rackam translation here:

- [Cicero On Nature Of Gods Academica Loeb Rackham : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

And these are those three kinds which most people believe the Peripatetics speak of: and so far they are not wrong; for this division is the work of that school. But they are mistaken if they think that the Academicians — those at least who bore this name at that time — are different from the Peripatetics. The principle, and the chief good asserted by both appeared to be the same — namely, to attain those things which were in the first class by nature, and which were intrinsically desirable; the whole of them, if possible, or, at all events, the most important of them. But those are the most important which exist in the mind itself, and are conversant about virtue itself. Therefore, all that ancient philosophy perceived that a happy life was placed in virtue alone; and yet that it was not the happiest life possible, unless the good qualities of the body were added to it, and all the other things which have been already mentioned, which are serviceable towards acquiring a habit of virtue. From this definition of theirs, a certain principle

of action in life, and of duty itself, was discovered, which consisted in the preservation of those things which nature might prescribe. Hence arose the avoidance of sloth, and contempt of pleasures; from which proceeded the willingness to encounter many and great labours and pains, for the sake of what was right and honourable, and of those things which are conformable to the objects of nature. Hence was generated friendship, and justice, and equity; and these things were preferred to pleasure and to many of the advantages of life. This was the system of morals recommended in their school, and the method and design of that division which I have placed first.

But concerning nature (for that came next), they spoke in such a manner that they divided it into two parts,— making one efficient, and the other lending itself, as it were, to the first, as subject matter to be worked upon. For that part which was efficient they thought there was power; and in that which was made something by it they thought there was some matter; and something of both in each. For they considered that matter itself could have no cohesion, unless it were held together by some power; and that power could have none without some matter to work upon; for that is nothing which is not necessarily somewhere. But that which exists from a combination of the two they called at once body, and a sort of quality, as it were. For you will give me leave, in speaking of subjects which have not previously been in fashion, to use at times words which have never been heard of (which, indeed, is no more than the Greeks themselves do, who have been long in the habit of discussing these subjects).

Post by “Joshua” of March 15, 2026 at 1:42 PM

Quote

First, I must distinguish between that which always is and never becomes and which is apprehended by reason and reflection, and that which always becomes and never is and is conceived by opinion with the help of sense. All that becomes and is created is the work of a cause, and that is fair which the artificer makes after an eternal pattern, but whatever is fashioned after a created pattern is not fair. Is the world created or uncreated?—that is the first question. Created, I reply, being visible and tangible and having a body, and therefore sensible; and if sensible, then created; and if created, made by a cause, and the cause is the ineffable father of all things, who had before him an eternal archetype. For to imagine that the archetype was created would be blasphemy, seeing that the world is the noblest of creations, and God is the best of causes. And the world being thus created according to the eternal pattern is the copy of something; and we may assume that words are akin to the matter of which they speak. What is spoken of the unchanging or intelligible must be certain and true; but

what is spoken of the created image can only be probable; being is to becoming what truth is to belief. And amid the variety of opinions which have arisen about God and the nature of the world we must be content to take probability for our rule, considering that I, who am the speaker, and you, who are the judges, are only men; to probability we may attain but no further.

-Timaeus from [Timaeus](#), Plato

Post by “Cassius” of March 20, 2026 at 4:37 PM

This podcast will be released either tonight or first thing in the morning.

One comment while editing is that as we go forward we'll try to focus in on what is meant by "efficient cause" in this text. The word cause tends to get lots of modifiers on it in general conversation, such as "ultimate cause," or - in the legal world - "proximate cause" or "legal cause."

As with the title assigned to this episode, the major issue seems to be the Platonic division of nature into "that which acts" and "that which is acted upon." The implication and danger is that "that which acts" gets endowed with some kind of superior or supernatural or divine nature, such as is implied in discussing a "Prime Mover."

We'll dig further into that but you might want to keep it in mind while listening.

Post by “Cassius” of March 20, 2026 at 6:46 PM

Episode 325 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. This week our episode is entitled: "The False Platonic Division Of The Universe Into A Force Which Causes And That Which Is Acted Upon."

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