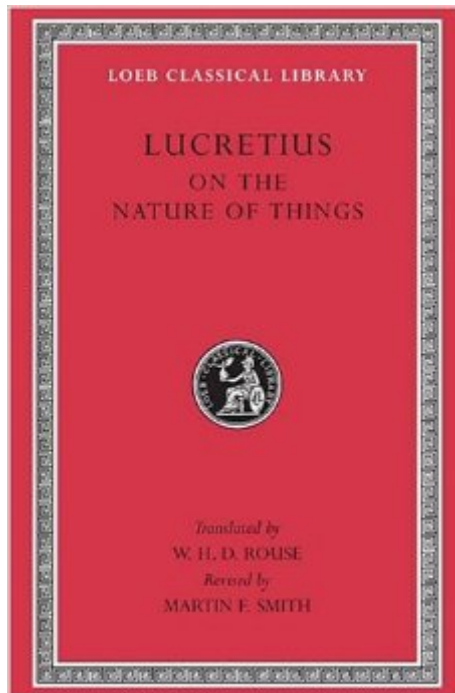


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Lucretius: On The Nature Of Things (Loeb Classical Library No. 181) (Bks. 1-6)



Synopsis

Lucretius (Titus Lucretius Carus) lived ca. 99–ca. 55 BCE, but the details of his career are unknown. He is the author of the great didactic poem in hexameters, *De Rerum Natura* (On the Nature of Things). In six books compounded of solid reasoning, brilliant imagination, and noble poetry, he expounds the scientific theories of the Greek philosopher Epicurus, with the aim of dispelling fear of the gods and fear of death and so enabling man to attain peace of mind and happiness. In Book 1 he establishes the general principles of the atomic system, refutes the views of rival physicists, and proves the infinity of the universe and of its two ultimate constituents, matter and void. In Book 2 he explains atomic movement, the variety of atomic shapes, and argues that the atoms lack colour, sensation, and other secondary qualities. In Book 3 he expounds the nature and composition of mind and spirit, proves their mortality, and argues that there is nothing to fear in death. Book 4 explains the nature of sensation and thought, and ends with an impressive account of sexual love. Book 5 describes the nature and formation of our world, astronomical phenomena, the beginnings of life on earth, and the development of civilization. In Book 6 the poet explains various atmospheric and terrestrial phenomena, including thunder, lightning, earthquakes, volcanoes, the magnet, and plagues. The work is distinguished by the fervour and poetry of the author.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The first thing that the potential buyer should know is although *De Rerum Natura* is a poem, this translation doesn't even attempt to be poetic but simply translates everything as prose. On the other

hand, this choice may aid readers who are trying to follow along in Latin as a poetic translation would have to be less faithful. Secondly, the translator seems to be trying to weaken Lucretius' arguments deliberately -- for instance, a major theme of the first book is a rebuttal of the tired assertion that religion leads to morality-- but the translator always uses "superstition" as a translation for the Latin word "religio". While it is true that "religio" can also mean "superstition", it is clear from the context that Lucretius was criticizing mainstream supernatural beliefs -- in other words religion -- rather than oddball beliefs that are termed superstition.

If you want to get the tone of poetry in the 1st century, you might be disappointed. The translation is straightforward prose. Nonetheless, I was not interested in poetry, but the philosophy and the concepts of morality regarding religion, god, etc. I was not disappointed. I believe you will appreciate this work if your cup of tea is philosophy, rather than poetry.

This is the Loeb Classical Library (parallel Latin-English) edition of Lucretius' **De Rerum Natura.** Martin Ferguson Smith has done a superb job of revising (in 1975, with further changes in 1982 and 1992) the version of W.H.D. Rouse which first appeared in 1924; Smith also adds his own valuable introduction on the life and works of Lucretius. The poem itself is diffuse, with flashes of considerable brilliance, but some awfully primitive "scientific" notions (probably unavoidable given the times in which Lucretius wrote). As far as what has been considered "atheism" on Lucretius' part (though wrongly, as Lucretius does not deny that gods exist--only that they have any bearing on human affairs), and his disbelief in any kind of afterlife, I have to agree with John Dryden that such teachings are the opposite of what is likely to instill a sense of morality in the reader, as Lucretius apparently intended to instill in Memmius, the person he addresses in the poem; said Dryden, "...to take away rewards and punishments, is only a pleasing prospect to a man, who resolves beforehand not to live morally. But on the other side, the thought of being nothing after death is insupportable to a virtuous man..." (Preface to *Sylvae*). The Loeb edition also has helpful glosses in the margins opposite the English translation, which are very helpful signposts to aid the reader in finding his way around Lucretius' often complex argumentation. Highly recommended.

Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things* is not easy Latin. If Livy is easy and Horace is hard, then Lucretius is much closer to Horace in difficulty. So, if you know a little Latin, but you're not really great at it, this compact volume with the Latin on the left-hand page and the English on the right, is the book for you. The introduction is excellent. Of course, there's no poetry in the English, but if

you're after a basic understanding of Lucretius views, the prose is fine. Lucretius is brilliant - no one is going to dispute that - but, like St. Augustine who is also brilliant, we need not agree with his views in order to enjoy his work. By the way, if you're looking for a good verse translation to read alongside this prose work, take a look at the one by A. E. Stallings. She's a poet as well as a deft translator.

This is NOT the Loeb Classics edition - with Smith's 1976 revised English translation facing the Latin text. It is Cyril Bailey's 1910 translation - and clearly a xeroxed version - delivered one paragraph or less per page. At least that's what I got when they sent me a "sample". I hope someone will take note of this fact and correct the description, which seems to be the text of the first review.

I returned this purchase to Amazon, The Kindle edition is NOT the parallel Latin English, it is a sort of PDF with pictures of the text, as far as I know this is unique in Kindle editions, you can not change the font or make highlights. It is the English text only, and I wanted the original Latin. The work *The Rerum Natura* is very good, and I am going to purchase the book, if you are interested first try the sample. I now have the small hard cover LOEB with the Latin original. Pity it is not available for Kindle, the LOEB Classical Library, red cover Latin, Green Classical Greek should be on Kindle.

I don't use a title like that lightly -- I actually mean it. I am a writer, a thinker, and a passionate, life-long reader. And if I had to choose one book to read for the rest of my life, this would be it. It never gets old, and I never stop learning from it, or marvelling at the beauty of the poetry. Definitely one of the best things ever written. If you don't know it, order it right away, and read it.

This is an acceptable, if not archaic translation. However, in my copy, pages 1-29 are in order, but then the next pages are a reprint of pages 20 and 21. Then the book skips to page 34. I need this for a class, and this is wildly unhelpful. The next part has several of the pages that were missing placed later. This is hard to read and agitating. Please consider this before buying this book.

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