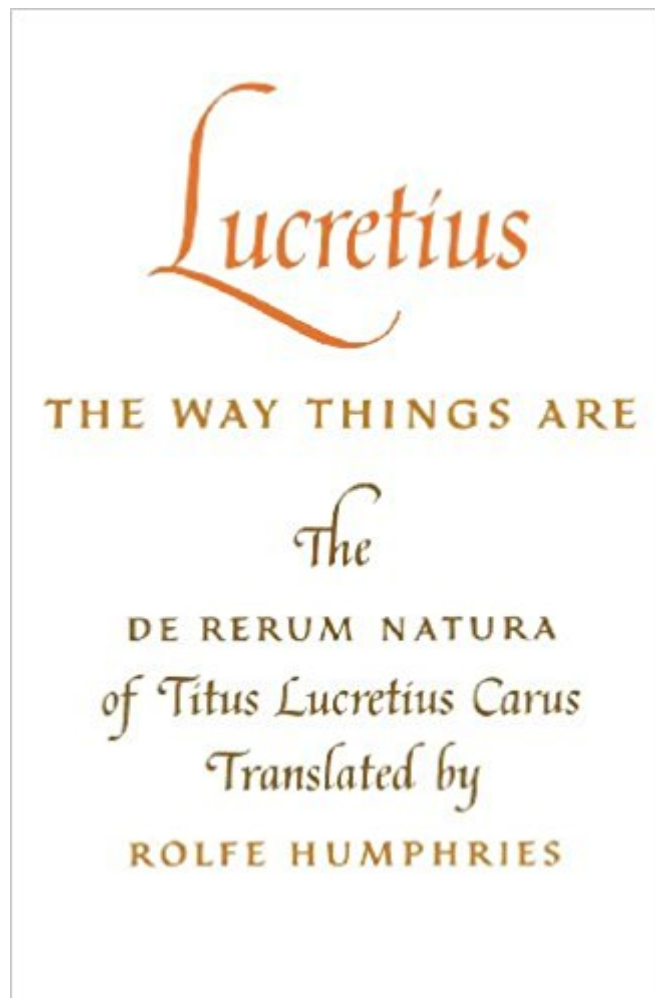




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Lucretius: The Way Things Are: The Way Things Are: The De Rerum Natura Of Titus Lucretius Carus



Synopsis

"... [captures] the relentless urgency of Lucretius's didacticism, his passionate conviction and proselytizing fervour." The Classical Review

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This was my first encounter with Lucretius, and I was reminded a bit of my first encounter with Euripides. That is to say, while both are clearly products of their time, there is also something distinctly "modern" about their works that make one easily forget they're reading works thousands (!) of years old. As I read *De Rerum Natura*, three distinct elements stood out to me--the poetry, the science, and the philosophy of the work--and so I will discuss each separately in order to better organize my thoughts in order to review this book. First off, the poetry. While it is strange to the modern reader to read a book on science and philosophy in hexameter verse, the adjustment is made quickly and there is something compelling, rhythmic, and concise about this approach. Much of this is due to Lucretius himself obviously, but much credit also goes to Humphries for his elegant yet accessible translation. Even though the translation is now 40-odd years old, it has not shown its age in the way that some older translations tend to. Then there is the atomistic science--"materialistic" in the literal sense, not the way the term is used colloquially--which at times is striking for its similarities with modern science, but more often striking for its departures. While the modern reader will have to slog through a number of assertions that seem a bit absurd when viewed with 2000 years of hindsight, the scientific foundation of "the way things are" is indispensable for the

philosophical argumentation of the way things ARE. If you are like me, you might start to ask whether the inaccuracies contained in this "foundation" weaken the philosophical structures built upon it ... but personally, the only support needed to make the grander arguments work was the general materialistic argumentation, not the specific scientific "facts" themselves. As much as I enjoy the poetic turns of phrase and the scientific musings, it is the philosophy at the heart of *De Rerum Natura* that makes this an unforgettable work, even now. The grace with which Lucretius built his own arguments and the way he reduced his philosophical rivals' arguments to absurdity is simply masterful. For me, the pinnacle of this work are the last 250 or so lines of Book III when Lucretius addresses the issue of death, having just argued for the materialistic nature of the body and soul. These are lines sure to "burn and bother" the reader, alternately inspiring fear and comfort of a type completely different from that found in religious doctrine. Materialistic, yet not nihilistic ... Lucretius will reward the reader who invests the time to dive into this fascinating and oddly captivating work.

This is your best translation. Done by a poet with access to the science of the 20th Century and the skills to understand day to day life in classical Greece and Rome. The saga of this book is recalled in another book called "Swerve", which serves perfectly as a preface to enjoying this translation. Anti- religious, actually. Pro-science. Brownian motion explained. Atomic theory posited as a function of void, space to wiggle. Do not buy other translations until you have read and wept over the beauty of this translation. University of Indiana Press classic.

Not yet reviewable as have not finished reading.

I LOVE this book....It is a philosophical poem, beautiful and profound, written over 2000 years ago. The poetic visual images are art in themselves. And it's ideas and comments on life are just as current now as they were then. I stumbled on this translation by Rolfe Humphries by accident. It was left in a hotel room by a previous occupant. This has now led me to read *The Swerve* by Stephen Greenblatt and *The Art of Happiness* by Epicurus.

Excellent

Don't be off put by verse - this has really relevant ideas and is quite engaging. Follow up with Greenblatt's '*The Swerve - or How the World became Modern*'. It seems Jefferson owned 4 copies of this, and from it comes our 'pursuit of happiness'. A major perception of how the West's

willingness to take risks has enabled exploration and thought, developing it into what we see and use today.

It is amazing to see well a talented man could see the world at a time when some of the other greats of science/philosophy were so far from an accurate interpretation. Presenting the work as poetry greatly enhances one's interest and state of excitement.

"When human life, all too conspicuous, lay foully grovelling on Earth, weighed down by grim religion..."The translator managed to replicate the rhythm and lyricism of the original text, without taking too many liberties with the semantics. Great translation!

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