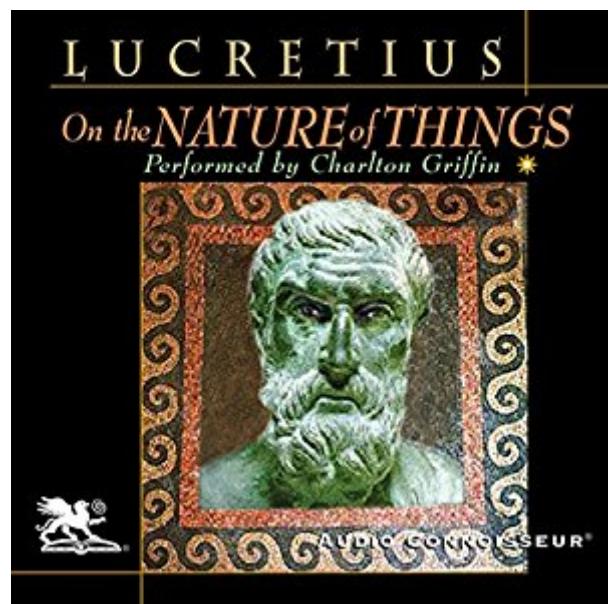


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On The Nature Of Things



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Customer Reviews

How incredible it is to read a poet and philosopher from 60 B.C. writing on the philosophical derivation of the idea that atoms must exist, that they have some spin on them, and that there is conservation of matter in nature! These thoughts about "atomism" would have been lost except for the fact that Lucretius presented them in a very good Latin poem. Although credit is given to Leucippus and Democritus for starting the idea of atomism, Epicurus and Lucretius were strong exponents of these ideas. The poem utilizes common observations to illustrate that the world about us is simply a combination of atoms and void. This had strong implications not only for the demise of the Roman and Greek gods and goddesses but also for how humans should live in the real world, and how they largely create their own misery. Lucretius loves life, looks straightly at it, speaks strongly against the fear of death, and promotes a rational calm life in which friendship is very important. The poetry is wonderful and powerful in itself. Two quotes (I,62 and I, 140) in the early

part of the poem speak clearly to the modern reader: "When before our eyes man's life lay groveling, prostrate, crushed to dust under the burden of Religion (which thrust its head from heaven, its horrible face glowering over mankind born to die) one man, a Greek, was the first mortal who dared oppose his eyes, the first to stand firm in defiance. Not the fables of the gods, nor lightning, nor the menacing rumble of heaven could daunt him, but all the more they whetted his keen mind with longing to be first to smash open the tight-barred gates of Nature"...

"On the Nature of Things" by Lucretius. A translation by Frank Copley of the famous Latin poem, written by Lucretius, who lived circa 95-50 B.C., setting forth the atomistic philosophy of Epicurus 340-270 B.C. The poem was lost with the collapse of the Roman empire and only came to light again in 1417 when a copy of a copy of a copy...was found in a German monastery by a discharged papal secretary--see "The Swerve". Astoundingly, much of this poem is consistent with scientific models today---invisible and minute atoms forever moving in a void under internal and external forces, joining together in various ways to form the visible objects of the world. The atoms themselves were eternal but the bodies came to an end and the atoms recycled into other bodies so that the mass of the world remains constant. He got it wrong about the speed of "heat atoms" being faster than the speed of "light atoms", but by and large this is the atomic theory of Maxwell and Boltzmann and later physicists, without the math of course. While not denying the existence of gods of various sorts, Lucretius' view was that the universe goes on without their aid or attention. The world as we know it was brought into being and maintained by natural forces and follows natural laws, not in any degree by divine intervention. Since the world is a conglomerate of atoms and void, it is impermanent and must someday inevitably be destroyed, including the soul upon death. Seeing things thusly, there is no room for the afterlife, no need for gods major or minor, no reason to despair of death, and certainly no reason to forgo the pleasures of this world for a reward in the afterlife. What we see in this life is all there is and we should enjoy it.

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