

***De Rerum Natura* Terms**

title

De Rerum Natura (Latin), abbreviated **DRN**: *About the Nature of Things*
(paraphrased in the title of Rolfe Humphries's translation as *The Way Things Are*)

background

Democritus (c. 460 – c. 370 BC, before Socrates): Greek philosopher who formulated a theory of atoms (which later became part of Epicurus's philosophy)

Epicurus (341–270 BC, after Plato and overlapping with Aristotle): Greek philosopher whose philosophy (**Epicureanism**) Lucretius follows, explains, and expands on.

didactic epic: epic that teaches

DRN is technically an epic because it is in the same meter (poetic rhythm) as narrative epics (such as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid*). Unlike *narrative epics*, which tell a story, *didactic epics* (such as *DRN*) teach something.

some unfamiliar terms and phrases

atom (from the Greek *atomos*, "indivisible"): according to classical atomism, a particle which cannot be further divided, which all matter is composed of
(Lucretius also refers to atoms with the words **seeds**, **firstlings**, **motes**, etc., although sometimes he uses these words for their usual meanings, such as dust motes, plant seeds, etc.)

"*tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*" (*DRN* 1.101 in the original Latin): literally, "Religion was able to persuade [men to do] such great [acts] of evil." Rolfe Humphries's translation renders it more loosely: "A mighty counselor, Religion stood / With all that power for wickedness" (page 21).

Acheron (from Greek): a river in the underworld, therefore a symbol of the underworld & death

Hell: not the Christian place of punishment after death (Greek *gehenna*), but the underworld; used to translate various Latin words, including *Acheron*, *inferna*, *baratrum*, and *Tartarus*

ether (Latin *aether*): upper air, sky

prester (from Greek): whirlwind, waterspout