

VBSA Motto

Crescit Eundo - It Grows As It Goes

The phrase comes from an epic poem by the Roman poet and philosopher Lucretius, "De Rerum Natura". Through this poem, Lucretius introduced Epicurean philosophy to Roman society and influenced many famous Roman thinkers (e.g. Virgil & Cicero, notwithstanding that Cicero wrote critically of Epicureanism).

Epicurus was a Greek philosopher, who argued that people should seek to attain pleasure; but that true pleasure only comes from living a tranquil, fear-free life. This meant living a simple life, without pretensions, desires or anxieties; to understand and accept things, and to shun religion and superstition, as well as politics. He's regarded as the first philosopher to argue against the reign of religion.

Within this context, Lucretius' De Rerum Natura (translation "The Nature of Things") sets out to explain the nature of the universe, and the making and unmaking of worlds, both at cosmological and anthropological levels. (This poem is credited with introducing the explanation we still accept that mankind had evolved in 3 stages, from the Stone Age to Bronze Age to Iron Age.)

In Book VI of the poem, he writes about how the natural elements work, and therein explains thunderbolts (i.e. lightning). Storms, and thunderbolts in particular, had previously been understood as acts of the gods (e.g. when a god felt so inclined, he'd stir up the ocean or toss a few thunderbolts down into the world of the mortals...) Thunderbolts were also regarded as the most powerful manifestations of a storm. Lucretius offered what we'd call a (naive) scientific explanation of thunderbolts.

In the manner of friction causing heat to build on the surface of a spaceship re-entering earth's atmosphere, Lucretius understood thunderbolts as a phenomena of an object heating as a consequence of extremely rapid movement through the sky. Escalating momentum ensued.

He uses the phrase "crescit eundo" as part of a longer passage that translates as:

"Then too as it advances with a long-continued moving power, it must again and again receive new velocity which ever and ever increases as it goes on and augments its powerful might and gives vigour to its stroke."

When "crescit eundo" is used as a modern motto, it is usually explained by its literal translation: "it increases as it goes" or "it grows as it goes". It is sometimes more expansively explained as describing a thunderbolt increasing in strength as it moves through the sky. The idea of its use as a motto is to symbolise dynamic progress.

As a post-script, Epicureanism and Lucretius' poem went out of fashion and were mostly forgotten for a millennia. It regained attention during the Renaissance, but remained out of favour. In Dante's Divine Comedy, there is a special place in Hell for Epicureans (i.e. in the Sixth Circle of Hell, they are condemned to burn in coffins, eternally). Later, Shakespeare is one of those who mischaracterised epicureans as having particularly refined taste in food and drink.

Then, this line of thinking returned to favour during the Enlightenment. It heavily influenced Enlightenment thinkers and the development of humanism; and has remained influential since. Modern figures, ranging from Thomas Jefferson to Karl Marx have self-identified as Epicureans.

Credit to Warwick Loton for this fascinating piece of research.