

Episode Fifty-Nine - The Uses Of The Body Were Not Designed Before They Arose

Post by “Cassius” of February 19, 2021 at 10:26 AM

Welcome to Episode Fifty-Nine of Lucretius Today.

I am your host Cassius, and together with my panelists from the EpicureanFriends.com forum, we'll walk you through the six books of Lucretius' poem, and discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. We encourage you to study Epicurus for yourself, and we suggest the best place to start is the book, "Epicurus and His Philosophy" by Canadian professor Norman DeWitt.

For anyone who is not familiar with our podcast, please check back to [Episode One](#) for a discussion of our goals and our ground rules. If you have any question about that, please be sure to contact us at Epicureanfriends.com for more information.

In this episode 59 - we will discuss how the uses of the body were not designed before the body arose, and we will continue on the minds use of images.

Our text comes from Latin Lines 823-906 of Book Four.

Now let's join the discussion with Martin reading today's text.

Munro Notes

823 (822)-857: pray do not think that the parts of the body have been given us in order to be used; in truth their use arose long after their first existence: before the eyes there was no seeing, before the tongue no speaking; on the other hand the instruments of peace and war we know to have been invented after their use was known; not so the senses and the limbs, which you must not believe to have had a final cause, as swords and shields, cups and beds had.

858-876: the body requires food, because it loses many particles constantly, and thus an aching void is produced, which has to be filled up and the pain allayed; liquid too is taken into the body and quenches the particles of heat in the stomach; thus both thirst and hunger are appeased.—These vss, too, as Lach. p. 959 shews, are well adapted to the general subject of iv, but here interrupt the connexion of the argument and are manifestly an after-thought of the poet's.

877-906: this is how we walk: idols of walking strike the mind, and rouse the will; next the soul throughout the body is stirred by the mind, and then the body by the soul; the body too is then

rarefied, and the outer air at once enters into all the opened pores; so that the body is pushed on as a ship by the wind; the mass of the body being moved and steered by a few small particles, just as a big ship by the rare wind and by the hand of the pilot: thus too a machine will easily lift a heavy weight.

Browne 1743

But in subjects of this nature, guard yourself to the utmost of your power against that error, that gross mistake, and never believe that those bright orbs, the eyes, were made that we might see; of that our legs were made upright, and things fixed upon them, and were supported by feet, that we might walk and take large strides; that our arms were braced with strong sinews, and that our hands hung on both sides, to assist us in those offices that are necessary to the support of life. And whatever constructions they put upon other parts of the body, they are all absurd and against reason; for no member of the body was made for any particular use, but after it was made each member found out a use proper to itself; for there was no such thing as to see before the eyes were made, nor to speak before the tongue was formed, but the tongue was rather in being before there was speech, and the ears were made long before any sound was heard. In short, all the members, in my opinion, were in being before their particular uses were set out.

This is so true that, to engage in battle, to mangle the limbs, and to stain the body over with blood, these were in being before any shining darts flew through the air, and nature taught us to avoid a wound before the left hand learnt to oppose a shield in our defense; and so, to commit the body to rest was long before the invention of soft beds, and to quench the thirst was practiced before the use of cups. All these things, we may believe, were invented for common benefit, as they were found proper and convenient for the occasions of life. All things therefore that were in being before the use of them was determined applied themselves afterwards to the office that was most suitable and serviceable to them. Of this kind principally are the senses and members of our bodies, and therefore you are to avoid, upon all accounts, so much as to think that they were at first formed for any particular design or use.

Nor is it wonderful at all that it is the nature of every animal to require meat; for I have told you that a train of effluvia are ever flowing from all bodies, in various manners, but most are discharged from those animals that are most used to motion; many particles forced from within are carried off by sweat, and many exhale through the mouth, when we are fatigued and pant for breath. The body, therefore, by these discharges becomes rarefied, and all nature is falling to pieces, which is attended with great pain. Food therefore is taken to prop up the limbs, and being given from time to time, it renews the strength, and satisfies that gaping desire of eating through the limbs and veins. The cooling drink likewise descends into all the parts that require moisture, and the flowing liquor scatters all that heap of hot particles that set our stomach in a flame, and extinguishes them as fire, so that the heat has no longer power to scorch our bowels, and thus is panting thirst washed away from our bodies, thus our craving hunger is

satisfied.

And now attend, and you shall know how it is that we are able to walk when we will, that we have a power to move our limbs as we please, and what it is that thrusts the body forward with all its weight. I say then, that the images of motion first affect and strike the mind, as we observed before. This makes the Will, for we never attempt to do any thing before the mind knows what it is we desire to do, and the image of that thing which occurs to the mind must be present before it. And thus the mind, having moved itself so as to resolve to go forward, strikes immediately upon the soul, which is diffused through the whole body, and this is easily done, because they are both closely joined together. The soul then strikes the body, and so the whole bulk by degrees is thrust forward and put into motion. Besides, the body by this means is rarefied, and the air, which is ever disposed to move, enters the open passages, and pierces through the pores in great abundance, and so is dispersed through every minute part of the body. By these two therefore (by the soul laboring within, and by the air entering from without) the body is moved, as a ship is by oars and wind. Nor is this at all strange, that particles so very small should turn about the bulk of our bodies, and move so great a weight; for the driving wind, formed of so fine and subtle seeds, thrust forward a large ship with mighty force, and one hand can govern it under full sail, by turning one little helm which way it pleases; and an engine with small labor is able, by pulleys and wheels, to move many bodies of a great weight.

Munro 1886

And herein you should desire with all your might to shun the weakness, with a lively apprehension to avoid the mistake of supposing that the bright lights of the eyes were made in order that we might see; and that the tapering ends of the shanks and hams are attached to the feet as a base in order to enable us to step out with long strides; or again that the forearms were slung to the stout upper arms and ministering hands given us on each side, that we might be able to discharge the needful duties of life. Other explanations of like sort which men give, one and all put effect for cause through wrongheaded reasoning; since nothing was born in the body that we might use it, but that which is born begets itself a use: thus seeing did not exist before the eyes were born, nor the employment of speech ere the tongue was made; but rather the birth of the tongue was long anterior to language and the ears were made long before sound was heard, and all the limbs, I trow, existed before there was any employment for them: they could not therefore have grown for the purpose of being used.

But on the other hand, engaging in the strife of battle and mangling the body and staining the limbs with gore were in vogue long before glittering darts ever flew; and nature prompted to shun a wound or ever the left arm by the help of art held up before the person the defense of a shield. Yes, and consigning the tired body to rest is much older than a soft-cushioned bed, and the slaking of thirst had birth before cups. These things therefore which have been invented in accordance with the uses and wants of life, may well be believed to have been discovered for the purpose of being used. Far otherwise is it with all those things which first were born, then afterwards made known the purposes to which they might be put; at the head of which class we see the senses and the limbs. Wherefore again and again I repeat, it is quite impossible to

believe that they could have been made for the duties which they discharge.

It ought likewise to cause no wonder that the nature of the body of each living creature absolutely requires food I have shown that bodies ebb away and withdraw from things, many in number in many ways; but most numerous must be those which withdraw from living things; for because these are tried by active motion, and many particles are pressed out from the depths of the frame and carried off by sweating, many breathed out through the mouth, when they pant from exhaustion, from such causes the body becomes rarefied and the whole nature undermined; and this state is attended by pain. Food therefore is taken in order to give support to the frame and recruit the strength by its infusion, and to close up the open-mouthed craving for meat throughout limbs and veins. The moisture too passes into all the parts which call for moisture; and many accumulated bodies of heat which cause a burning in our stomach, the approach of liquid scatters and quenches as if they were fire, so that dry heat can no longer parch the frame. In this way then you see gasping thirst is drenched out of our body, in this way the hungry craving is satisfied.

Now how it comes to pass that we are able to step out when we please, and how it is given us to move about our limbs, and what cause is wont to push forward the great load of this our body I will tell: do you take in my words. I say that idols of walking first present themselves to our mind and strike on the mind, as we said before: then the will arises; for no one begins to do anything, until his mind has first determined what it wills. From the very fact that it determines such thing, there is an image of that thing. When therefore the mind bestirs itself in such a way as to will to walk and step out, it strikes at the same moment the force of the soul which is spread over the whole body throughout the limbs and frame; and this is easily done, since the whole is held in close union with the mind. Next the soul in its turn strikes the body, and thus the whole mass by degrees is pushed on and set in motion. Then again, the body becomes also rarefied, and the air, as you see its nature is, being always so nimble in moving, comes and passes in great quantity through the opened pores and is thus distributed into the most minute parts of the body. In this way then by these two causes acting in two ways the body like a ship is carried on by sails and wind. And herein it need not excite any surprise that such very minute bodies can steer so great a body and turn about the whole of this our load; for wind though fine with subtle body drives and pushes on a large ship of large moving mass and one hand directs it however great the speed at which it is going and one rudder steers it to any point you like; and by means of blocks of pulleys and tread-wheels a machine stirs many things of great weight and raises them up with slight effort.

Bailey 1921

Herein you must eagerly desire to shun this fault, and with foresighted fear to avoid this error; do not think that the bright light of the eyes was created in order that we may be able to look before us, or that, in order that we may have power to plant long paces, therefore the tops of shanks and thighs, based upon the feet, are able to bend; or again, that the forearms are jointed to the strong upper arms and hands given us to serve us on either side, in order that we might be able to do what was needful for life. All other ideas of this sort, which men proclaim,

by distorted reasoning set effect for cause, since nothing at all was born in the body that we might be able to use it, but what is born creates its own use. Nor did sight exist before the light of the eyes was born, nor pleading in words before the tongue was created, but rather the birth of the tongue came long before discourse, and the ears were created much before sound was heard, and in short all the limbs, I trow, existed before their use came about: they cannot then have grown for the purpose of using them.

But, on the other side, to join hands in the strife of battle, to mangle limbs and befoul the body with gore; these things were known long before gleaming darts flew abroad, and nature constrained men to avoid a wounding blow, before the left arm, trained by art, held up the defence of a shield. And of a surety to trust the tired body to rest was a habit far older than the soft-spread bed, and the slaking of the thirst was born before cups. These things, then, which are invented to suit the needs of life, might well be thought to have been discovered for the purpose of using them. But all those other things lie apart, which were first born themselves, and thereafter revealed the concept of their usefulness. In this class first of all we see the senses and the limbs; wherefore, again and again, it cannot be that you should believe that they could have been created for the purpose of useful service.

This, likewise, is no cause for wonder, that the nature of the body of every living thing of itself seeks food. For verily I have shown that many bodies ebb and pass away from things in many ways, but most are bound to pass from living creatures. For because they are sorely tried by motion and many bodies by sweating are squeezed and pass out from deep beneath, many are breathed out through their mouths, when they pant in weariness; by these means then the body grows rare, and all the nature is undermined; and on this follows pain. Therefore food is taken to support the limbs and renew strength when it passes within, and to muzzle the gaping desire for eating through all the limbs and veins. Likewise, moisture spreads into all the spots which demand moisture; and the many gathered bodies of heat, which furnish the fires to our stomach, are scattered by the incoming moisture, and quenched like a flame, that the dry heat may no longer be able to burn our body. Thus then the panting thirst is washed away from our body, thus the hungry yearning is satisfied.

Next, how it comes to pass that we are able to plant our steps forward, when we wish, how it is granted us to move our limbs in diverse ways, and what force is wont to thrust forward this great bulk of our body, I will tell: do you hearken to my words. I say that first of all idols of walking fall upon our mind, and strike the mind, as we have said before. Then comes the will; for indeed no one begins to do anything, ere the mind has seen beforehand what it will do, and inasmuch as it sees this beforehand, an image of the thing is formed. And so, when the mind stirs itself so that it wishes to start and step forward, it straightway strikes the force of soul which is spread abroad in the whole body throughout limbs and frame. And that is easy to do, since it is held in union with it. Then the soul goes on and strikes the body, and so little by little the whole mass is thrust forward and set in movement. Moreover, at such times the body too becomes rarefied, and air (as indeed it needs must do, since it is always quick to move), comes through the opened spaces, and pierces through the passages in abundance, and so it is scattered to all the tiny parts of the body. Here then it is brought about by two causes acting

severally, that the body, like a ship, is borne on by sails and wind. Nor yet herein is this cause for wonder, that such tiny bodies can twist about a body so great, and turn round the whole mass of us. For in very truth the wind that is finely wrought of a subtle body drives and pushes on a great ship of great bulk, and a single hand steers it, with whatever speed it be moving, and twists a single helm whithersoever it will; and by means of pulleys and tread-wheels a crane can move many things of great weight, and lift them up with light poise.