

Episode Sixty - Dreams and the Mind's Use of Images

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Welcome to Episode Sixty 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 60 - we will discuss dreams, and the mind's use of images.

Our text comes from Latin Lines 907-1036 of Book Four.

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

Munro Notes

907-928: sleep takes place, when the soul is scattered in the body, and part of it has gone out, part withdrawn into the depths of the body: only part however can go forth; else death would ensue; enough must stay behind to let sense be rekindled, as fire is rekindled when buried under the ashes.

929-961: sleep is thus produced: the body is constantly beaten upon by the outer air as well as by that which is inhaled by breathing; thus assailed within and without the body gives way, and the soul is disordered, part of it as has been said leaving the body, part withdrawing into its recesses, while the rest cannot perform its functions: thus the body too becomes languid and powerless: again sleep follows eating, because the food in passing into the system acts on it as the air does; and the disorder of the soul is then greater than ever.

962-1036: the dreams of men generally turn on what has chiefly occupied their waking thoughts, whether business or pleasure: it is the same with brutes too: again the passions which are strongest in men often display themselves in dreams, as well as other mental states.

Browne 1743

Next, how soft sleep dissolves the limbs in rest, and frees the mind from anxious care, I choose in few but sweetest numbers to explain; as the swan's short song is more melodious than the

harsh noise of cranes scattered by winds through all the air. Hear me, my Memmius, with attentive ears and a discerning mind, lest what I shall prove, you think impossible to be; and so your mind refusing to admit the truth I shall relate, you make no progress in philosophy, when the fault is in yourself, that you will not see. And first, sleep comes on when the power of the soul, diffused through the limbs, part of it is thrown out and fled abroad, and part being squeezed more close retires further within; then are the limbs dissolved and grow weak. For without doubt the business of the soul is to stir up sense in us, which since sleep removes, we must conclude that the soul then is disturbed and driven abroad: Not the whole soul, for then the body would lie in the cold arms of eternal death; then no part of the soul would lie retired within the limbs, as a fire remains covered under a heap of ashes; from whence the senses might be kindled again through the body, as a flame is soon raised from hidden fire. But by what means this wonderful change is brought about, how the soul is thus disordered and the body languishes, I shall now explain. Do you see that I do not scatter my words unto the wind.

And first, the outward surface of bodies which are always touched by the adjacent air, must of necessity be struck by it and beaten with frequent blows; and for this reason all things almost are covered either with skin, or bristles, or shells, or buff, or bark. This air then, as it is drawn in and breathed out by respiration, strikes upon the inward parts of the body. Since therefore the body is beat upon from within and without, and since the strokes pierce through the little pores into the seeds and first principles of it, this cause a kind of ruin and destruction through all the limbs; the situation of the seeds, both of the body and mind, are disordered, so that part of the soul is forced out, and part retires and lurks close within, and the part that is diffused through the limbs is so broken and divided, that the seeds cannot unite to perform their mutual operations, for nature stops up all the passages of communication between them, and therefore the regular motions being exceedingly changed, the sense is entirely gone. Since therefore there is not power sufficient to support the limbs, the body becomes weak; all the members languish; the arms, the eyelids fall, and the knees sink under the weight of the body. Thus sleep follows when the belly is full, because food, when it is distributed through all the veins, has the same effect upon the soul as the air had; and that sleep is by much the soundest which you take when you are weary or full, because then more of the seeds being agitated and put into motion by the hard labour, mutually disturb and disorder one another. And for this reason the soul retires further within, and a greater part of it is thrown out, and the parts that remain within are the more separated and the further disjoined.

And then the business we more particularly follow, the affairs we are chiefly employed in, and what our mind is principally delighted with when we are awake, the same we are commonly conversant about when we are asleep. The lawyer is pleading of causes and making of statutes, the soldier is fighting and engaging in battles, the sailor is warring against the winds; for myself, I am always searching into the nature of things, and writing my discoveries in Latin verse; and so, many other arts and employments are commonly the empty entertainments of the minds of men when they are asleep. And they who spend their time in seeing plays for many days together, when those representations are no longer present to the waking senses, there still remain some open traces left in the mind, through which the images of those things

find a passage, so that for many days after the whole performance is acting over again before their eyes; and even while they are awake they fancy they see the dancers leaping, and moving their active limbs, and hear the speaking strings; they see the same audience, the same variety of the scenes and decorations of the stage. So strong impressions do use and custom make upon us; such effects do the common business of life produce in the minds of men, and beasts likewise.

For you shall see the gallant Courser, when his limbs are at rest, to sweat in his sleep, to breath short, and, the barriers down, to lay himself out as it were on the full stretch for the prize. And hounds frequently in their soft sleep throw out their legs, and of a sudden yelp and snuff the air quick with their nose, as if they were full cry upon the foot of the deer; and when awake they still pursue the empty image of the game, as if they saw it run swiftly before them, till undeceived they quit the chase, and the fancied image vanishes away. And the fawning breed of house-dogs, that live at home, often rouse and shake the drowsy fit from their eyes, and start up of a sudden with their bodies, as if they saw a stranger or a face they had not been used to. The sharper the seeds are of which the images are formed, they strike in the sleep with the greater violence; so, many birds will fly about, and hide themselves in the inmost recesses of sacred groves by night, if in their soft sleep they see the hawk pursuing them upon the wing, or pouncing or engaging with his prey.

Munro 1886

Now by what means yon sleep lets a stream of repose over the limbs and dispels from the breast the cares of the mind, I will tell in sweetly worded rather than in many verses; as the short song of the swan is better than the loud noise of cranes scattered abroad amid the ethereal clouds of the south. Do you lend me a nice ear and a keen mind, that you may not deny what I say to be possible and secede with breast disdainfully rejecting the words of truth, you yourself being in fault the while and unable to discern. Sleep mainly takes place when the force of the soul has been scattered about through the frame, and in part has been forced abroad and taken its departure, and in part has been thrust back and has withdrawn into the depths of the body: after that the limbs are relaxed and droop. For there is no doubt that this sense exists in us by the agency of the soul; and when sleep obstructs the action of this sense, then we must assume that our soul has been disordered and forced abroad; not indeed all; for then the body would lie steeped in the everlasting chill of death. Where no part of the soul remained behind concealed in the limbs, as fire remains concealed when buried under much ash, whence could sense be suddenly rekindled through the limbs, as flame can spring up from hidden fire? But by what means this change of condition is accomplished and from what the soul can be disordered and the body grow faint, I will explain: do you mind that I waste not my words on the wind.

In the first place the body in its outer side, since it is next to and is touched by the air, must be thumped and beaten by its repeated blows; and for this reason all things as a rule are covered either by a hide or else by shells or by a callous skin or by bark. When creatures breathe, this air at the same time buffets the inner side also, as it is inhaled and exhaled. Therefore since the

body is beaten on both sides alike and blows arrive by means of the small apertures at the primal parts and primal elements of our body, there gradually ensues a sort of breaking up throughout our limbs, the arrangements of the first-beginnings of body and mind getting disordered. Then next a part of the soul is forced out and apart withdraws into the inner recesses; a part too scattered about through the frame cannot get united together and so act and be acted upon by motion; for nature intercepts all communication and blocks up all the passages; and therefore sense retires deep into the frame as the motions are all altered. And since there is nothing as it were to lend support to the frame, the body becomes weak and all the limbs are faint, the arms and eyelids droop and the hams even in bed often give way under you and relax their powers. Then sleep follows on food, because food produces just the same effects as air, while it is distributed into all the veins; and that sleep is much the heaviest which you take when full or tired, because then the greatest number of bodies fall into disorder, bruised by much exertion. On the same principle the soul comes in part to be forced more deeply into the frame, and there is also a more copious emission of it abroad, and at the same time it is more divided and scattered in itself within you.

And generally to whatever pursuit a man is closely tied down and strongly attached, on whatever subject we have previously much dwelt, the mind having been put to a more than usual strain in it, during sleep we for the most part fancy that we are engaged in the same; lawyers think they plead causes and draw up covenants of sale, generals that they fight and engage in battle, sailors that they wage and carry on war with the winds, we think we pursue our task and investigate the nature of things constantly and consign it when discovered to writings in our native tongue. So all other pursuits and arts are seen for the most part during sleep to occupy and mock the minds of men. And whenever men have given during many days in succession undivided attention to games, we generally see that after they have ceased to perceive these with their senses, there yet remain passages open in the mind through which the same idols of things may enter. Thus for many days those same objects present themselves to the eyes, so that even when awake they see dancers as they think moving their pliant limbs, and receive into the ears the clear music of the harp and speaking strings, and behold the same spectators and at the same time the varied decorations of the stage in all their brilliancy. So great is the influence of zeal and inclination, so great is the influence of the things in which men have been habitually engaged, and not men only but all living creatures.

Thus you will see stout horses, even when their bodies are lying down, yet in their sleep sweat and pant without ceasing and strain their powers to the utmost as if for the prize, or as if the barriers were thrown open. And often during soft repose the dogs of hunters do yet all at once throw about their legs and suddenly utter cries and repeatedly snuff the air with their nostrils, as though they had found and were on the tracks of wild beasts; and after they are awake often chase the shadowy idols of stags, as though they saw them in full flight, until they have shaken off their delusions and come to themselves again. And the fawning brood of dogs brought up tame in the house haste to shake their body and raise it up from the ground, as if they beheld unknown faces and features. And the fiercer the different breeds are, the greater rage they must display in sleep. But the various kinds of birds flee and suddenly in the night time trouble

with their wings the groves of the gods, when in gentle sleep hawks and pursuing birds have appeared to show fight and offer battle.

Bailey 1921

Now in what ways this sleep floods repose over the limbs, and lets loose the cares of the mind from the breast, I will proclaim in verses of sweet discourse, rather than in many; even as the brief song of the swan is better than the clamour of cranes, which spreads abroad among the clouds of the south high in heaven. Do you lend me a fine ear and an eager mind, lest you should deny that what I say can be, and with a breast that utterly rejects the words of truth part company with me, when you are yourself in error and cannot discern. First of all sleep comes to pass when the strength of the soul is scattered about among the limbs, and in part has been cast out abroad and gone its way, and in part has been pushed back and passed inward deeper within the body. For then indeed the limbs are loosened and droop. For there is no doubt that this sense exists in us, thanks to the soul; and when sleep hinders it from being, then we must suppose that the soul is disturbed and cast out abroad: yet not all of it; for then the body would lie bathed in the eternal chill of death. For indeed, when no part of the soul stayed behind hidden in the limbs, as fire is hidden when choked beneath much ashes, whence could sense on a sudden be kindled again throughout the limbs, as flame can rise again from a secret fire?

But by what means this new state of things is brought about, and whence the soul can be disturbed and the body grow slack, I will unfold: be it your care that I do not scatter my words to the winds. First of all it must needs be that the body on the outer side, since it is touched close at hand by the breezes of air, is thumped and buffeted by its oft-repeated blows, and for this cause it is that well-nigh all things are covered either by a hide, or else by shells, or by a hard skin, or by bark. Further, as creatures breathe, the air at the same time smites on the inner side, when it is drawn in and breathed out again. Wherefore, since the body is buffeted on both sides alike, and since the blows pass on through the tiny pores to the first parts and first particles of our body, little by little there comes to be, as it were, a falling asunder throughout our limbs. For the positions of the first-beginnings of body and mind are disordered. Then it comes to pass that a portion of the soul is cast out abroad, and part retreats and hides within; part too, torn asunder through the limbs, cannot be united in itself, nor by motion act and react; for nature bars its meetings and chokes the ways; and so, when the motions are changed, sense withdraws deep within. And since there is nothing which can, as it were, support the limbs, the body grows feeble, and all the limbs are slackened; arms and eyelids droop, and the hams, even as you lie down, often give way, and relax their strength. Again, sleep follows after food, because food brings about just what air does, while it is being spread into all the veins, and the slumber which you take when full or weary, is much heavier because then more bodies than ever are disordered, bruised with the great effort. In the same manner the soul comes to be in part thrust deeper within; it is also more abundantly driven out abroad, and is more divided and torn asunder in itself within.

And for the most part to whatever pursuit each man clings and cleaves, or on whatever things we have before spent much time, so that the mind was more strained in the task than is its

wont, in our sleep we seem mostly to traffic in the same things; lawyers think that they plead their cases and confront law with law, generals that they fight and engage in battles, sailors that they pass a life of conflict waged with winds, and we that we pursue our task and seek for the nature of things for ever, and set it forth, when it is found, in writings in our country's tongue. Thus for the most part all other pursuits and arts seem to hold the minds of men in delusion during their sleep. And if ever men have for many days in succession given interest unflagging to the games, we see for the most part, that even when they have ceased to apprehend them with their senses, yet there remain open passages in their minds, whereby the same images of things may enter in. And so for many days the same sights pass before their eyes, so that even wide awake they think they see men dancing and moving their supple limbs, and drink in with their ears the clear-toned chant of the lyre, and its speaking strings, and behold the same assembly and at the same time the diverse glories of the stage all bright before them. So exceeding great is the import of zeal and pleasure, and the tasks wherein not only men are wont to spend their efforts, but even every living animal.

In truth you will see strong horses, when their limbs are lain to rest, yet sweat in their sleep, and pant for ever, and strain every nerve as though for victory, or else as though the barriers were opened [struggle to start]. And hunters' dogs often in their soft sleep yet suddenly toss their legs, and all at once give tongue, and again and again snuff the air with their nostrils, as if they had found and were following the tracks of wild beasts; yea, roused from slumber they often pursue empty images of stags, as though they saw them in eager flight, until they shake off the delusion and return to themselves. But the fawning brood of pups brought up in the house, in a moment shake their body and lift it from the ground, just as if they beheld unknown forms and faces. And the wilder any breed may be, the more must it needs rage in its sleep. But the diverse tribes of birds fly off, and on a sudden in the night time trouble the peace of the groves of the gods, if in their gentle sleep they have seen hawks, flying in pursuit, offer fight and battle.