

Episode Seventy-Seven - Formation of Language and Early Societies

Post by “Cassius” of June 25, 2021 at 8:38 PM

Welcome to Episode Seventy-Seven 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 questions about those, please be sure to contact us at EpicureanFriends.com for more information.

In this Episode 77 we will read approximately Latin line 1028 - of Book Five. We will talk about how nature prompted humans to form languages and the beginnings of organized society.

Now let's join Don reading today's text:

Podcast 77

Latin Lines 1028-1116

Munro Notes-

1028-1090: nature and need prompted men to the use of speech; for all creatures feel their natural power; the calf will butt before his horns protrude; and so with other beasts birds etc.: it is absurd to suppose that one man could have invented speech; for how could he himself know what he wanted to teach, or persuade others to learn? and why should not man take to applying different sounds to denote different things, when brute beasts use different cries to express different passions? as we see in the case of dogs horses seagulls crows and other creatures.—

1091-1104: lightning first gave fire to men; or else the friction of trees rubbing together: cooking they would learn from the sun, which they would see softening and ripening things.

1105-1116: every day men of genius invented improved methods of life : cities were built, lands and cattle allotted at first according to merit ; but soon the discovery of gold gave all power to the wealthy

Browne 1743

[1028] Nature compelled them to use the various sounds of the tongue, and convenience taught them to express the names of things, like children, before they can well speak are forced to make use of signs, and are obliged to point with their finger to the objects that lie before them, for every creature is sensible what faculties it has, and how to use them. So calves, before the horns appear upon their foreheads, will butt fiercely, and push with them, when they are enraged; and the whelps of panthers and lions will defend themselves with their claws and feet and teeth when their claws and teeth are scarce to be seen; and all kind of birds, we observe, trust to their wings and rely upon the fluttering support of their pinions.

[1041] But to think that one man gave names to all things, and that men from thence learnt the first elements of speech, is absurd and ridiculous; for why should one man distinguish every thing by a name, and use the various accents of the tongue, and at the same time another not be as capable of doing this as he? Besides, if others had not the use of words among them as soon, how could they be made acquainted with the use of them? Or by what art would this one man make them known and understand what he designed? One alone could not compel the rest, and by force make them learn the catalogue of his names. He could not prevail by reason, or persuade men so unfit to hear, to do so as he directed; nor would they bear with patience, or by any means endure, to have the strange sounds of unintelligible words any longer rattling in their ears to no purpose.

[1056] And then, what is there so very wonderful in this, that men, to whom nature has given a voice and a tongue, should, according to the various knowledge they had conceived of the great variety of things, distinguish each of them by a proper name; when mute cattle, and the several kinds of wild beasts, express their passions by different voices and sounds, when their fear, their grief, or their joys are strong upon them? And that they do so you may observe from evident examples.

[1063] For when fierce mastiffs are at first provoked, they snarl, and grin, and shew their hard white teeth, and threaten, in their rage, with lower sounds than those they read the air with when they bark and roar aloud; but when they gently lick their whelps, with their soft tongue, or toss them with their feet, or seem to bite, and fondly gape as if to eat them up, but never touch them with their teeth, they show their pleasure with a whining voice. Not so as when they howl, left by themselves at home; or when they whimper, with their crouching bodies, to shun the coming blow.

[1073] And does not the horse with different neighings fill the air when, hot in blood and in the prime of youth, he is sorely galled with the spurs of winged love, and rages in his lust among the mares, and, eager to engage, with open nostrils snuffs the scent? Does he not shake his trembling limbs and neigh, for other reasons, with far other sounds?

[1078] And then, the feathered race, the various kinds of birds, the hawk, the osprey, and sea gulls, that live and seek their food in the salt waves, they throw out other notes at other times, than when they strive for food and fight for prey; and some will change their hoarse voice according to the different qualities of the air, as the long-lived ravens, and the flocks of crows,

when they are said to call for rain and showers, and sometimes to cry for wind and storms.

[1087] If therefore the different perception of things will compel these creatures, mute as they are, to send out different sounds, how much more reasonable is it that men should be able to mark out different things by different names?

[1091] You may desire, perhaps, to be satisfied in other inquiries. Know then that thunder first brought down fire to the earth. All the fire in this lower world is in a great measure derived from thence; for many things, we observe, are set on fire by lightning, when the vapors fly out from certain quarters of the heavens, and the branches of trees, pressing hard upon one another, when they are driven backward and forward by the winds, grow hot, and by the violent agitation burst out into a rapid flame; and sometimes the boughs and bodies of trees, by rubbing together, will kindle and fly out into a blaze. And thus fire might be produced from either cause. But the sun first taught mankind to dress their food, and soften it by heat; for they observed the fruits in the fields grew tender and ripe by the warmth and power of his rays.

[1105] And so those who had more wit and sense taught their neighbors every day to leave their old diet, and their former way of life, to enter upon a new course, and use the benefit of fire. And now their kings began to build cities, and to raise castles, as a defense to themselves, and refuge in time of danger. They divided the cattle and the fields and gave to every one as he excelled in beauty, in strength, and understanding; for beauty and strength were then in great repute, and bore away the prize. At last riches and gold were found out, which soon took away the honor from the strong and beautiful; even the brave and beautiful themselves commonly follow the fashion of the rich.

Munro 1886

[1028] But nature impelled them to utter the various sounds of the tongue and use struck out the names of things, much in the same way as the inability to speak is seen in its turn to drive children to the use of gestures, when it forces them to point with the finger at the things which are before them. For everyone feels how far he can make use of his peculiar powers. Ere the horns of a calf are formed and project from his forehead, he butts with it when angry and pushes out in his rage. Then whelps of panthers and cubs of lions fight with claws and feet and teeth at a time when teeth and claws are hardly yet formed. Again we see every kind of fowl trust to wings and seek from pinions a fluttering succor.

[1041] Therefore to suppose that some one man at that time apportioned names to things and that men from him learnt their first words, is sheer folly. For why should this particular man be able to denote all things by words and to utter the various sounds of the tongue, and yet at the same time others be supposed not to have been able to do so? Again if others as well as he had not made use of words among themselves, whence was implanted in this man the previous conception of its use and whence was given to him the original faculty, to know and perceive in mind what he wanted to do? Again one man could not constrain and subdue and force many to choose to learn the names of things. It is no easy thing in anyway to teach and convince the deaf of what is needful to be done; for they never would suffer nor in anyway endure sounds of

voice hitherto unheard to continue to be dinned fruitlessly into their ears.

[1056] Lastly what is there so passing strange in this circumstance, that the race of men whose voice and tongue were in full force, should denote things by different words as different feelings prompted? Since dumb brutes, yes and the races of wild beasts are accustomed to give forth distinct and varied sounds, when they have fear or pain and when joys are rife.

[1063] This you may learn from facts plain to sense: when the large spongy open lips of Molossian dogs begin to growl enraged and bare their hard teeth, thus drawn back in rage they threaten in a tone far different from that in which they bark outright and fill with sounds all the places round. Again when they essay fondly to lick their whelps with their tongue or when they toss them with their feet and snapping at them make a feint with lightly closing teeth of swallowing though with gentle forbearance, they caress them with a yelping sound of a sort greatly differing from that which they utter when left alone in a house they bay or when they slink away howling from blows with a crouching body.

[1073] Again is not the neigh too seen to differ, when a young stallion in the flower of age rages among the mares smitten by the goads of winged love, and when with wide-stretched nostrils he snorts out the signal to arms, and when as it chances on any occasion he neighs with limbs all shaking?

[1078] Lastly, the race of fowls and various birds, hawks and osprays and gulls seeking their living in the salt water mid the waves of the sea, utter at a different time noises widely different from those they make when they are fighting for food and struggling with their prey. And some of them change together with the weather their harsh croakings, as the long-lived races of crows and flocks of rooks when they are said to be calling for water and rain and sometimes to be summoning winds and gales.

[1087] Therefore if different sensations compel creatures, dumb though they be, to utter different sounds, how much more natural it is that mortal men in those times should have been able to denote dissimilar things by many different words!

[1091] And lest haply on this head you ask in silent thought this question, it was lightning that brought fire down on earth for mortals in the beginning; thence the whole heat of flames is spread abroad. Thus we see many things shine dyed in heavenly flames when the stroke from heaven has stored them with its heat. Ay and without this when a branching tree sways to and fro and tosses about under the buffeting of the winds, pressing against the boughs of another tree, fire is forced out by the power of the violent friction, and sometimes the burning heat of flame flashes out, the boughs and stems rubbing against each other. Now either of these accidents may have given fire to men. Next the sun taught them to cook food and soften it with the heat of flame, since they would see many things grow mellow when subdued by the strokes of the rays and by heat throughout the land.

[1105] And more and more every day men who excelled in intellect and were of vigorous understanding would kindly show them how to exchange their former way of living for new

methods. Kings began to build towns and lay out a citadel as a place of strength and of refuge for themselves, and divided cattle and lands and gave to each man in proportion to his personal beauty and strength and intellect; for beauty and vigorous strength were much esteemed. Afterwards wealth was discovered and gold found out, which soon robbed of their honors strong and beautiful alike; for men however valiant and beautiful of person generally follow in the train of the richer man.

Bailey 1921

[1028] But the diverse sounds of the tongue nature constrained men to utter, and use shaped the names of things, in a manner not far other than the very speechlessness of their tongue is seen to lead children on to gesture, when it makes them point out with the finger the things that are before their eyes. For every one feels to what purpose he can use his own powers. Before the horns of a calf appear and sprout from his forehead, he butts with them when angry, and pushes passionately. But the whelps of panthers and lion-cubs already fight with claws and feet and biting, when their teeth and claws are scarce yet formed. Further, we see all the tribe of winged fowls trusting to their wings, and seeking an unsteady aid from their pinions.

[1041] Again, to think that any one then parceled out names to things, and that from him men learnt their first words, is mere folly. For why should he be able to mark off all things by words, and to utter the diverse sounds of the tongue, and at the same time others be thought unable to do this? Moreover, if others too had not used words to one another, whence was implanted in him the concept of their use; whence was he given the first power to know and see in his mind what he wanted to do? Likewise one man could not avail to constrain many, and vanquish them to his will, that they should be willing to learn all his names for things; nor indeed is it easy in any way to teach and persuade the deaf what it is needful to do; for they would not endure it, nor in any way suffer the sounds of words unheard before to batter on their ears any more to no purpose.

[1056] Lastly, what is there so marvelous in this, if the human race, with strong voice and tongue, should mark off things with diverse sounds for diverse feelings? When the dumb cattle, yea and the races of wild beasts are wont to give forth diverse unlike sounds, when they are in fear or pain, or again when their joys grow strong. Yea verily, this we may learn from things clear to see.

[1063] When the large loose lips of Molossian dogs start to snarl in anger, baring their hard teeth, thus drawn back in rage, they threaten with a noise far other than when they bark and fill all around with their clamour. Yet when they essay fondly to lick their cubs with their tongue, or when they toss them with their feet, and making for them with open mouth, feign gently to swallow them, checking their closing teeth, they fondle them with growling voice in a way far other than when left alone in the house they bay, or when whining they shrink from a beating with cringing body.

[1073] Again, is not neighing seen to differ likewise, when a young stallion in the flower of his years rages among the mares, pricked by the spur of winged love, and from spreading nostrils

snorts for the fray, and when, it may be, at other times he whinnies with trembling limbs?

[1078] Lastly, the tribe of winged fowls and the diverse birds, hawks and ospreys and gulls amid the sea-waves, seeking in the salt waters for life and livelihood, utter at other times cries far other than when they are struggling for their food and fighting for their prey. And some of them change their harsh notes with the weather, as the long-lived tribes of crows and flocks of rooks, when they are said to cry for water and rains, and anon to summon the winds and breezes.

[1087] And so, if diverse feelings constrain animals, though they are dumb, to utter diverse sounds, how much more likely is it that mortals should then have been able to mark off things unlike with one sound and another.

[1091] Herein, lest by chance you should ask a silent question, it was the lightning that first of all brought fire to earth for mortals, and from it all the heat of flames is spread abroad. For we see many things flare up, kindled with flames from heaven, when a stroke from the sky has brought the gift of heat. Yet again, when a branching tree is lashed by the winds and sways to and fro, reeling and pressing on the branches of another tree, fire is struck out by the strong force of the rubbing, anon the fiery heat of flame sparkles out, while branches and trunks rub each against the other. Either of these happenings may have given fire to mortals. And then the sun taught them to cook food and soften it by the heat of flame, since they saw many things among the fields grow mellow, vanquished by the lashing of his rays and by the heat.

[1105] And day by day those who excelled in understanding and were strong in mind showed them more and more how to change their former life and livelihood for new habits and for fire. Kings began to build cities and to found a citadel, to be for themselves a strong-hold and a refuge; and they parceled out and gave flocks and fields to each man for his beauty or his strength or understanding; for beauty was then of much avail, and strength stood high. Thereafter property was invented and gold found, which easily robbed the strong and beautiful of honour; for, for the most part, however strong men are born, however beautiful their body, they follow the lead of the richer man.