

# Episode Fifty - Opening of Book Four - Beginning the Discussion of Images

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## Welcome to Episode Fifty 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. Be aware that none of us are professional philosophers, and everyone here is a self-taught Epicurean. 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 today's episode, we begin Book Four with Latin lines 1-109:

### Munro Notes

1-26 (repeat of Book 1, lines 921-950): listen now: inspired by the muses I enter on an untrodden path to cull a wreath yet worn by none : I am going to burst the bonds of religion; and clear up a dark subject by lucid verses, verses o'erlaid with the honey of the muses, in order to beguile my readers to their own profit, even as the rim of the cup is smeared with honey to entice children to drink the bitter but wholesome draught of wormwood.

26-41 : having explained the nature of the soul, I now go on to an important question, that of idols or images, which like small films constantly proceed from the surface of all things and float in the air, and often frighten us when sick or asleep : these we must not think to be souls from hell, which have survived the dissolution of the body.

42-109: that such films or images may be discharged from the surface of things, you may learn in many ways: smoke and heat are emitted in a state of solution; the coats of cicades, the slough of serpents in a state of cohesion: much more then may very thin films from their outermost surface leave things and keep their shape; just so colour is emitted, as you may see, when all things in a theatre take the hue of the awnings overhead: these images are so small as not to be visible separately; coming too from the very surface of things there is nothing to rend them : such images invisible singly, when often repeated may be seen reflected from the surface of mirrors.

### Browne 1743

Inspired, I wander over the Muses seats, of difficult access, and yet untrod; I love to approach the purest springs, and thence to draw large draughts; I love to crop fresh flowers and make a noble garland for my head from thence, where yet the Muses never bound another's temples with a crown like mine. And first I write of lofty things, and strive to free the mind from the severest bonds of what men call religion; then my verse I frame so clear, although my theme be dark; seasoning my lines with the poetic sweets of fancy, and reason justifies the method; for as physicians when they would prevail on children to take down a bitter draught of wormwood, first tinge the edges of the cup with sweet and yellow honey, that so the children's unsuspecting age, at least their lips, may be deceived, and take the bitter juice; thus harmlessly betrayed, but not abused, by tasting thus they rather have their health restored: So I, because this system seems severe and harsh to such who have not yet discerned its truth, and the common herd are utterly averse to this philosophy, I thought it fit to show these rigid principles in verse, smooth and alluring, and tinge them, as it were, with sweet poetic honey, thus to charm your mind with my soft numbers till you view the nature of all things clearly, and perceive the usefulness and order they display.

Now since I taught what are the first principles of all things, and how they differ in their figures, and wander of their own accord, urged on by an eternal motion, and how of them all beings are first formed, and I have shown the nature of the mind, of what seeds composed, and how it exerts itself united with the body, and separated from it, how it returns to its first principles again: I shall now begin to explain what is of the nearest concern to these inquiries, and prove that there are what we call the images of things, which, like membranes, or films, flowing from the surface of bodies, fly every way abroad through the air. These, while we are awake, often rush upon our minds and terrify us, and likewise sleeping, when we think we see strange phantoms and specters of the dead, which shake us horribly when fast asleep. For sure we are not to imagine that the souls are broke loose out of Hell, or that the ghosts hover and play about the living, or that any part of us remains after death; since the soul and body, once dissolved, return severally to their first seeds from whence they were produced.

I say then that images or tenuous figures are always flowing, or sent out from the surface of bodies, which may be called the membranes of the bark of things; and these several images bear the same shape and form as the particular body from whence they flow. This requires no extraordinary apprehension to conceive, for to give a plain instance, many things emit bodies from themselves, some more rare and diffused, as wood discharges smoke and fire a vapour; others more dense and compact, as when grasshoppers in summer cast their old coats, and calves new-born drop the pellicules in which they are enclosed; or as the winding snake leaves his skin among the thorns, for the briars we often see adorned with their light spoils. This being so, it follows that a very subtle image may fly off from the utmost surface of bodies; for there can be no reason given why these, and not others more thin than these, may not fall off and be discharged; especially since in every surface there are many minute corpuscles that may be cast off in the very same order they are ranged in the body, and so preserve their old form and figure; and they are the readier to fly off because they are small, and not so liable to be stopped, and are placed likewise upon the utmost surface.

For it is certain that many particles are not sent out and get loose only from the middle and inward parts, as we said before, but color itself is discharged from the surface of bodies. And so curtains, yellow, of a deep red, or blue (as they hang in lofty theatres, waving expanded on the beams, and flowing on the pillars with the wind) do this; for they stain the stage, and scenes, and audience, senators, matrons, and the images of the gods; and cause them to wave in their own gaudy dye; and the more the walls of the theatre are darkened, and the daylight shut out, every thing which is spread over and shines out with a brighter luster. Since therefore these curtains discharge their colors from the surface, all things, by the same rule, may emit subtle images, for those are thrown off from the surface as well as these. There are therefore certain images of things, of a fine and subtle contexture, that are always flying about, and are impossible severally to be discovered by the eye. Besides, all smell, smoke, vapour, and other such things fly off from bodies in a diffused and scattered manner, because as they pass to the outside of bodies from within they are broken and divided by the crooked pores they must make their way through; the road they are to take is full of windings, as they attempt to rise and fly out; but, on the contrary, when the membrane of color is thrown off, there is nothing to disorder it, because it lies disentangled upon the very surface. And then since the forms that appear to us in looking-glass, in water, and all polished bodies are exactly like the things whose images they are, they must necessarily be composed of the images that flow from the substance of the things themselves, for why those particles should fall away and be discharged from bodies which are discovered by the eye rather than these that are more thin and subtle no reason can properly be assigned.

Munro

I TRAVERSE the pathless haunts of the Pierides never yet trodden by sole of man. I love to approach the untasted springs and to quaff; I love to cull fresh flowers and gather for my head a distinguished crown from spots whence the muses have yet veiled the brows of none; first because I teach of great things and essay to release the mind from the fast bonds of religious scruples, and next because on a dark subject I pen such lucid verses, overlaying all with the muses' charm. For that too would seem to be not without good grounds: even as physicians when they propose to give nauseous wormwood to children, first smear the rim round the bowl with the sweet yellow juice of honey, that the unthinking age of children may be fooled as far as the lips, and meanwhile drink up the bitter draught of wormwood and though beguiled yet not be betrayed, but rather by such means recover health and strength: so now, since this doctrine seems generally somewhat bitter to those by whom it has not been handled, and the multitude shrinks back from it in dismay, have resolved to set forth to you our doctrine in sweet-toned Pierian verse and overlay it, as it were, with the pleasant honey of the muses, if haply by such means I might engage your mind on my verses, till such time as you apprehend all the nature of things and thoroughly feel what use it has.

And now that I have taught what the nature of the mind is and out of what things it is formed into one quickened being with the body, and how it is dissevered and returns into its first-beginnings, I will attempt to lay before you a truth which most nearly concerns these questions, the existence of things which we call idols of things: these, like films peeled from the surface of

things, fly to and fro through the air, and do likewise frighten our minds when they present themselves to us awake as well as in sleep, what time we behold strange shapes and idols of the light-bereaved, which have often startled us in appalling wise as we lay relaxed in sleep: this I will essay, that we may not haply believe that souls break loose from Acheron or that shades fly about among the living or that something of us is left behind after death, when the body and the nature of the mind destroyed together have taken their departure into their several first-beginnings.

I say then that pictures of things and thin shapes are emitted from things off their surface, to which an image serves as a kind of film, or name it if you like a rind, because such image bears an appearance and form like to the thing whatever it is from whose body it is shed and wanders forth. This you may learn, however dull of apprehension, from what follows. First of all, since among things open to sight many emit bodies, some in a state of loose diffusion, like smoke which logs of oak, heat which fires emit; some of a closer and denser texture, like the gossamer coats which at times cicades doff in summer, and the films which calves at their birth cast from the surface of their body, as well as the vesture which the slippery serpent puts off among the thorns; for often we see the brambles enriched with their flying spoils: since these cases occur, a thin image likewise must be emitted from things off their surface. For why those films should drop off and withdraw from things rather than films which are really thin, not one tittle of proof can be given; especially since there are on the surface of things many minute bodies which maybe discharged in the same order they had before and preserve the outline of the shape, and be discharged with far more velocity, inasmuch as they are less liable to get hampered being few in number and stationed in the front rank.

For without doubt we see many things discharge and freely give not only from the core and center, as we said before, but from their surfaces, besides other things, color itself. And this is commonly done by yellow and red and dark blue awnings, when they are spread over large theaters and flutter and wave as they stretch across their poles and crossbeams; for then they dye the seated assemblage below and all the show of the stage and the richly attired company of the fathers, and compel them to dance about in their color. And the more these objects are shut in all round by the walls of the theater the more do all of them within laugh on all hands, overlaid with graceful hues, the light of day being narrowed. Therefore since sheets of canvass emit color from their surface, all things will naturally emit thin pictures too, since in each case alike they discharge from the surface. There are therefore as now shown sure outlines of shapes, which fly all about possessed of an exquisitely small thickness and cannot when separate be seen one at a time. Again, all smell, smoke, heat, and other such-like things stream off things in a state of diffusion, because while they are coming from the depths of the body having arisen within it, they are torn in their winding passage, and there are no straight orifices to the paths, for them to make their way out by in a mass. But on the other hand, when a thin film of surface color is discharged, there is nothing to rend it, since it is ready to hand, stationed in front rank. Lastly, in the case of all idols which show themselves to us in mirrors, in water or any other shining object, since their outsides are possessed of an appearance like to the things they represent, they must be formed of emitted images of things. There are

therefore thin shapes and pictures like to the things, which, though no one can see them one at a time, yet when thrown off by constant and repeated reflection give back a visible image from the surface of mirrors; and in no other way it would seem can they be kept so entire that shapes are given back so exceedingly like each object.

Bailey

I traverse the distant haunts of the Pierides, never trodden before by the foot of man. 'Tis my joy to approach those untasted springs and drink my fill, 'tis my joy to pluck new flowers and gather a glorious coronal for my head from spots whence before the muses have never wreathed the forehead of any man. First because I teach about great things, and hasten to free the mind from the close bondage of religion, then because on a dark theme I trace verses so full of light, touching all with the muses' charm. For that too is seen to be not without good reason; for even as healers, when they essay to give loathsome wormwood to children, first touch the rim all round the cup with the sweet golden moisture of honey, so that the unwitting age of children may be beguiled as far as the lips, and meanwhile may drink the bitter draught of wormwood, and though charmed may not be harmed, but rather by such means may be restored and come to health; so now, since this philosophy full often seems too bitter to those who have not tasted it, and the multitude shrinks back away from it, I have desired to set forth to you my reasoning in the sweet-tongued song of the muses, and as though to touch it with the pleasant honey of poetry, if perchance I might avail by such means to keep your mind set upon my verses, while you take in the whole nature of things, and are conscious of your profit.

But since I have taught of what manner are the beginnings of all things, and how, differing in their diverse forms, of their own accord they fly on, spurred by everlasting motion; and in what way each several thing can be created from them; and since I have taught what was the nature of the mind, and whereof composed it grew in due order with the body, and in what way rent asunder it passed back into its first-beginnings: now I will begin to tell you what exceeding nearly concerns this theme, that there are what we call idols of things; which, like films stripped from the outermost body of things, fly forward and backward through the air; and they too when they meet us in waking hours affright our minds, yea, and in sleep too, when we often gaze on wondrous shapes, and the idols of those who have lost the light of day, which in awful wise have often roused us, as we lay languid, from our sleep; lest by chance we should think that souls escape from Acheron, or that shades fly abroad among the living, or that something of us can be left after death, when body alike and the nature of mind have perished and parted asunder into their several first-beginnings.

I say then that likenesses of things and their shapes are given off by things from the outermost body of things, which may be called, as it were, films or even rind, because the image bears an appearance and form like to that, whatever it be, from whose body it appears to be shed, ere it wanders abroad. That we may learn from this, however dull be our wits. First of all, since among things clear to see many things give off bodies, in part scattered loosely abroad, even as wood gives off smoke and fires heat, and in part more closely knit and packed together, as when now and then the grasshoppers lay aside their smooth coats in summer, and when calves

at their birth give off a caul from their outermost body, and likewise when the slippery serpent rubs off its vesture on the thorns; for often we see the brambles laden with these wind-blown spoils from snakes. And since these things come to pass, a thin image from things too must needs be given off from the outermost body of things. For why these films should fall and part from things any more than films that are thin, none can breathe a word to prove; above all, since on the surface of things there are many tiny bodies, which could be cast off in the same order wherein they stood, and could preserve the outline of their shape, yea, and be cast the more quickly, inasmuch as they can be less entangled, in that they are few, and placed in the forefront.

For verily we see many things cast off and give out bodies in abundance, not only from deep beneath, as we said before, but often too from the surface, such as their own colour. And commonly is this done by awnings, yellow and red and steely-blue, when stretched over great theatres they flap and flutter, spread everywhere on masts and beams. For there they tinge the assembly in the tiers beneath, and all the bravery of the stage and the gay-clad company of the elders, and constrain them to flutter in their colours. And the more closely are the hoardings of the theatre shut in all around, the more does all the scene within laugh, bathed in brightness, as the light of day is straitened. Since then the canvas gives out this hue from its outermost body, each several thing also must needs give out thin likenesses, since in either case they are throwing off from the surface. There are then sure traces of forms, which fly about everywhere, endowed with slender bulk, nor can they be seen apart one by one. Moreover, all smell, smoke, heat, and other like things stream forth from things, scattering loosely, because while they arise and come forth from deep within, they are torn in their winding course, nor are there straight outlets to their paths, whereby they may hasten to issue all in one mass. But, on the other hand, when the thin film of surface-colour is cast off, there is nothing which can avail to rend it, since it is ready at hand, and placed in the forefront. Lastly, whenever idols appear to us in mirrors, in water, and in every shining surface, it must needs be, seeing that they are endowed with an appearance like the things, that they are made of the images of things given off. There are then thin shapes of things and likenesses, which, although no one can see them one by one, yet thrown back with constant and ceaseless repulse, give back a picture from the surface of the mirrors, and it is seen that they cannot by any other means be so preserved that shapes so exceeding like each several thing may be given back.