

Episode Sixty-Three - The Perils of Romantic Love (Part 3)

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Welcome to Episode Sixty-Three 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 63 we will complete Book Four and our discussion of perils of romantic love.

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

Latin Lines -1209 - 1287 (end) of Book Four.

Munro Notes

1209-1232: according as the seed of the man or woman prevails at conception, the child is more like to the one or to the other; and this is so whether the child be male or female.

1233-1277: it is not the gods who grant or withhold offspring: conception depends on the due assortment of man and wife.

1278-1287: often by her own virtues, from no divine interposition, a woman without personal attractions will endear herself to her husband.

Browne 1743

If, in the mixing of the seed, the female draws in and snatches with sudden force the male seed, the child, the female seed is prevailing, is like the mother, as he is like the father if his prevails. But those who, you observe, express jointly the resemblance, and mingle the features of both parents, are formed equally from the juices of both; for then the mutual ardor of the combatants has justly tempered the conflicting seed, which, raised by the stings of Venus, is sent in due proportion through all the limbs. The success of the battle is equal, neither is victor nor vanquished. It happens sometimes that children are like their grandfathers, and resemble the persons of their remote ancestors, because the parents have frequently many seeds

concealed and variously mingled in their bodies, which preserve the features of the family, and are delivered down from one to another. These Venus forms into different figures, as the qualities of the seeds require, and represents the complexion, the voice and hair of the progenitors; for these no less arise from proper seeds than the face, the body, or any parts of it. And a female child proceeds partly from the father's seed, and a male from the mother's, for the issue always consists of the seed of both; but the greater likeness it bears to the one than to the other, it partakes of more than a just proportion of the seed of that sex, which you easily apprehend, whether the child be male or female.

Nor do divinities above ever destroy the prolific virtue of the seed, or prevent a man's being called father by a number of sweet children, or curse him all his life with unfruitful love, as some vainly think, and therefore with much concern stain the altars with the blood of many victims, and make them smoke with clouds of incense, to implore a blessing upon the showery seed and promote conception; but to no purpose they tire out the gods and fatigue the oracles, for they are frequently unfruitful because the seed is too thick or too thin. The thin seed will not stay in the parts where it was injected, but soon dissolves and flows back; and the thick has no effect, because it is sent out heavy and condensed, or it does not carry home to the mark, or it cannot rightly penetrate the passages, or if it does, it is not at all disposed to mix kindly with the female juice. For the harmony of love between the sexes is widely different; men are more prolific with some women, and women conceive more readily, and swell with their burden after the embrace of some men than with others. Many women have been barren in a first and second marriage, and been fruitful at last, have borne lusty boys and blessed the family with a sweet offspring; and men, after marrying several times without issue, have at length found out a wife of a constitution agreeable to their own, and supported their old age with many children.

Of so great concern it is that the seed of both should kindly mix and mutually glow with genial heat, that the thick and the thin should incorporate together, and that the woman, in the art of love, should engage with a man whose nature be suitable to her own. And the food we live upon is of no small importance, for the seed increases through the limbs by some meats, and it becomes watery and feeble by others. [1743 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: "I can translate no further. Dryden, in his Miscellanies, goes on in full vigor, and keeps up to the original."] If like importance is the posture, too, in which the genial feat of love we do. For, as the females of the four-foot kind receive the leapings of their males behind, so the good wives, with loins uplifted high, and leaning on their hands, the fruitful stroke may try. For in that posture they will best conceive, not when supinely laid they frisk and heave, for active motions only break the flow, and more of strumpet than of wives they show; when answering stroke with stroke, the mingled liquors flow. Endearment eager, and too brisk a bound, throw off the plow-share from the furrowed ground. But common harlots in conjunction heave, because tis less their business to conceive than to delight and to provoke the deed, a trick which honest wives but little need.

Nor is it from the gods, or the darts of Venus, that a woman of ordinary beauty is sometimes beloved. She often secures the affection by her discreet conduct, by the sweetness of her deportment, and an exactness in the decency of her person, so that a man by use, may spend his life happily with her. To sum it all up: it is custom that reconciles the delights of love, for

beat upon anything with constant blows, though ever so lightly, it is overcome at last, and crumbles to pieces. Have not you observed how drops of water falling upon a hard stone, by length of time, wear it away?

Munro 1886

And when haply in mixing her seed with the man's, the woman by sudden force has overpowered and seized for herself his force, then children are formed from the mothers' seed like to the mothers, as from the fathers' seed like to the fathers. But those whom you see with a share of both forms, blending equally the features of the parents, grow from the union of the father's body and the mother's blood, when the mutual ardor of desire working in concert has brought and clashed together the seeds roused throughout the frame by the goads of Venus; and neither of the two has gotten the mastery nor has been mastered. Sometimes too the children may spring up like their grandfathers and often resemble the forms of their grandfathers' fathers, because the parents often keep concealed in their bodies many first-beginnings mixed in many ways, which first proceeding from the original stock one father hands down to the next father; and then from these Venus produces forms after a manifold chance and repeats not only the features, but the voices and hair of their forefathers. And the female sex equally springs from the father's seed and males go forth equally formed from the mother's body; since these distinctions no more proceed from the fixed seed of one or other parent than our faces and bodies and limbs: the birth is always formed out of the two seeds; and whichever parent that which is produced more resembles of that parent it has more than an equal share; as you may equally observe, whether it is a male child or a female birth.

Nor do the divine powers debar anybody from the power of begetting, forbidding him ever to receive the name of father from sweet children and forcing him to pass his life in a barren wedlock; as men commonly fancy when in sorrow they drench the altars with much blood and pile the raised altars with offerings, to make their wives pregnant with abundant seed. In vain they weary the divinity of the gods and the sacred lots. They are barren sometimes from the too great thickness of the seed, sometimes from its undue fluidity and thinness: because the thin is unable to get a firm hold on the right spots, it at once passes away and is repelled and withdrawn abortively: since by others again a too thick seed is discharged in a state more solid than is suitable, it either does not fly forth with so prolonged a stroke or cannot equally pass into the proper spots or when it has passed in with difficulty mixes with the woman's seed. For well-assorted matches are found to be of great importance; and some males impregnate some females more readily than others, and other females conceive and become pregnant more readily from other males. And many women have hitherto been barren during several marriages and have yet in the end found mates from whom they could conceive children and be enriched with a sweet offspring. And often even for those to whom hitherto wives however fruitful had been unable in their house to bear, has been found a compatible nature, enabling them to fortify their age with sons.

Of such great importance is it in order that seeds may agree and blend with seeds in a way to promote birth whether the thick comes into contact with the fluid and the fluid with the thick.

And on this point it matters much on what diet life is supported; for by some foods seed is thickened in the limbs, and by others again is thinned and wasted. And in what modes the intercourse goes on, is likewise of very great moment; for women are commonly thought to conceive more readily after the manner of wild beasts and quadrupeds, because the seeds in this way can find the proper spots in consequence of the position of the body. Nor have wives the least use for effeminate motions: a woman hinders and stands in the way of her own conceiving, when thus she acts; for she drives the furrow out of the direct course and path of the share and turns away from the proper spots the stroke of the seed. And thus for their own ends harlots are wont to move, in order not to conceive and lie in child-bed frequently, and at the same time to render Venus more attractive to men. This our wives have surely no need of.

Sometimes too by no divine grace and arrows of Venus a sorry woman of inferior beauty comes to be loved; for the wife sometimes by her own acts and accommodating manners and by elegant neatness of person readily habituates you to pass your life with her. Moreover custom renders love attractive; for that which is struck by oft-repeated blows however lightly, yet after long course of time is overpowered and gives way. See you not too that drops of water falling on stones after long course of time scoop a hole through these stones?

Bailey 1921

And often when in the mingling of sex the woman by sudden force has mastered the man's might and seized on it with her own, then children are borne like the mother, thanks to the mother's seed, just as the father's seed may make them like the father. But those whom you see with the form of both, mingling side by side the features of both parents, spring alike from the father's body and the mother's blood. It comes to pass too sometimes that they can be created like their grandparents, and often recall the form of their grandparents' parents, for the reason that many first-beginnings in many ways are often mingled and concealed in the body of their parents, which, starting from the stock of the race, father hands on to father; therefrom Venus unfolds forms with varying chance, and recalls the look, the voice, the hair of ancestors; since indeed these things are none the more created from a seed determined than are our faces and bodies and limbs. Again the female sex may spring from the father's seed, and males come forth formed from the mother's body. For every offspring is fashioned of the two seeds, and whichever of the two that which is created more resembles, of that parent it has more than an equal share; as you can yourself discern, whether it be a male offspring or a female birth.

Nor do powers divine deny to any man a fruitful sowing of seed, that he may never be called father by sweet children, but must live out his years in barren wedlock; as men believe for the most part, and sorrowing sprinkle the altars with streams of blood and fire the high places with their gifts, that they may make their wives pregnant with bounteous seed. Yet all in vain they weary the majesty of the gods and their sacred lots. For some of them are barren through seed overthick, and again overliquid and thin in turn. The thin seed, because it cannot fix its fastenings, suddenly trickles away and retracing its path departs abortively. Further since for others seed too thick is emitted, either it does not shoot forward with such far-reaching blow, or else it cannot equally penetrate to vital spots, or having penetrated it mingles ill with the

woman's seed. For the couplings in wedlock are seen to be very diverse. And many women have been barren in several wedlocks before, yet at length have found a mate from whom they might conceive children, and grow rich with sweet offspring. And often even for those, for whom wives fruitful ere now in the house had been unable to bear, a well-matched nature has been found, so that they might fortify their old age with children.

Of so great import is it that the one seed should be able to mingle with the other in a manner suited for generation, and that thick should unite with liquid and liquid with thick. And herein it is of import on what diet life is sustained; for on some food seeds swell within the limbs and on others they are thinned away and grow weak instead. And in what way even the enticing act of love is performed, that too is of great import; since for the most part it is thought that women conceive best after the fashion of beasts and in the manner of quadrupeds, because the seeds can thus take up their position when the breast is below and the loins are raised. Nor have wives any need at all for lascivious movements. For the woman prevents herself from conceiving and fights against it, if despite her joy she withdraws from the man's passion with her buttocks and receives the moist fluid with all her breast relaxed. For thus she drives the furrow of the plough from the true direction of the path, and turns aside the blow of seed from the vital parts. Such motions whores are wont to make for their own sake, that they be not filled with seed and lie pregnant, and also that the act of love may be more seductive to men. But nought of this is seen to be needful for our wives.

Sometimes 'tis by no divine act or through the shafts of Venus that a woman of form less fair is loved. For at times a woman may bring it about by her own doing, by her unselfish ways, and the neat adornment of her body, that she accustoms you easily to live your life with her. Nay more, habit alone can win love; for that which is struck ever and again by a blow, however light, is yet mastered in long lapse of time, and gives way. Do you not see too how drops of water falling upon rocks in long lapse of time drill through the rocks?