

Episode Sixty-Six - The End of All Things (But Not Of The Universe Itself!)

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Welcome to Episode Sixty-Six 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 65 we continue our discussion of Book 5 with Don reading today's text, starting with approximately Latin Line 91:

Munro Notes

91-109: well, as to the first question: this world and all its parts had a beginning and will have an end: nay, any moment you may see it all tumbling into ruin; may fortune avert this in our time !

110-145 : but first let me declare with more than oracular certainty that this world and its parts are not immortal and divine: nay so far from its being impious to say that they are not godlike, they are the most fitting example of what is meant by inanimate and insensible : as we showed in iii, the soul and mind cannot exist away from the body; the world then being without life cannot be divine.

Browne 1743

And what remains but now, as the order of my design requires, to convince, by proper reasons, that this world is formed of mortal seeds; that it began to be, and must have an end; and to show how the seeds of matter were united and disposed to produce the Earth, the Heavens, the Sea, the Stars, the Sun and Moon; and then what creatures sprung from the Earth, and what never had a being, and how the human race, with various language, began to give names to things, and to converse together. And by what means that dread of deities above first crept into the heart, which preserves the holy things throughout the world - the Temples, the Lakes, Groves, Altars, and Images of the gods. Besides, I shall explain the course of the sun and moon, and by what over-ruling force Nature directs their motions; lest you should suppose these

luminaries travel their constant stages freely and of their own accord between Heaven and Earth, and by their kind influence promote the growth of fruits and the whole animal creation; or conceive that they are rolled about by the will of the gods. For those who well know that the gods live a life of ease, if they should wonder by what power the world is carried on, especially in the things they see over their heads in the Heavens above, they relapse again into their old superstition; they raise over themselves a set of cruel tyrants, who the wretches fancy can do all things, because they know nothing of what can or what cannot be, or by what means a finite power is fixed to every being, and a boundary immovable which it cannot pass.

And therefore, to keep you no longer in suspense in what I promised, take a view in the first place of the seas, the Earth, and the Heavens; this triple nature, these three bodies, my Memmius, these beings of so different a frame, three so wonderfully formed, one Day shall put an end to; and the whole mass and fabric of the world, that has stood for many ages, shall tumble to pieces. I know how this, this future ruin of Heaven and Earth, seems strange and surprising to your apprehensions, and how difficult it is to convince you of the truth of it. This is a common case, when you offer a subject to the ear it has been unused to, and which you cannot discover with your eyes, nor feel with your hands, the ways by which knowledge and belief generally find a passage to the breast, and affect the mind. I'll go on, however. The very nature of the things perhaps will give a credit to my words, and you may soon see the whole fabric of the world shaken grievously by terrible convulsions; but the commanding power of Chance remove that day far from us! And let reason, rather than the thing itself, convince us that all things dissolved by the last dreadful crack will fall to ruin.

But before I attempt to teach these truths, more sacred and much more worthy of belief than what the Pythoness delivers from the Tripod and Laurel of Apollo, I shall first offer some encouragements against your fears, lest, being under the check of religion, you should by chance imagine that the Earth, the Sun, the Heavens, the Sea, the Stars, the Moon, being animated by a Spirit diffused throughout the whole, were a Deity, and would remain forever; and consequently, that all those deserve justly the same punishment as the rebel giants, for their impiety, who by their arguments would assault and break down the walls of the world, and would extinguish the sun (the bright luminary of the sky) and pronounce a sentence of dissolution upon things in their own nature immortal. And yet these things are so far from having anything of divinity about them, and so unworthy of being ranked in the number of the gods, that they may be thought rather to give us a notion of something as remote from sense and vital motion as possible;

For we are not to imagine that the Powers, mind and Soul, can be united with all sorts of bodies. As there are no trees in the sky, no clouds can be in the deep sea, nor can fish live in the fields, nor can there be blood in wood, or moisture in stones. The soul therefore cannot come into being alone, without the body, nor can she exist separately, without the nerves and the blood. If this could be, the powers of the soul you would feel sometimes in the head or shoulders, or even in the very bottom of the feet, or in any other part of the body, and so you would perceive it diffusing itself through the whole body. As water poured into a vessel first covers one part, and then spreads over the whole. Since therefore there is a proper and determinate place in

the body for the mind and soul to be and increase in, we have the more reason to deny that they can continue or be born without it, or that the form of life can reside in rotten clods of earth, or in the fire of the sun, or in the water, or in the lofty regions of the sky. These therefore are so far from being endued with a divine understanding that they are incapable even of being animated with common life.

Munro 1886

To continue, the order of my design has now brought me to this point, where I must proceed to show that the world is formed of a mortal body and at the same time had birth; to show too in what way that union of matter founded earth, heaven, sea, stars, sun, and the ball of the moon; also what living creatures sprang out of the earth, as well as those which never at any time were born; in what way too mankind began to use with one another varied speech by the names conferred on things; and also in what ways yon fear of the gods gained an entry into men's breasts, and now throughout the world maintains as holy fanes, lakes, groves, altars, and idols of the gods. Furthermore, I shall make clear by what force piloting nature guides the courses of the sun and the wanderings of the moon; lest haply we imagine that these of their own free will between heaven and earth traverse their everlasting orbits, graciously furthering the increase of crops and living creatures, or we think they roll on by any forethought of the gods. For they who have been rightly taught that the gods lead a life without care, if nevertheless they wonder by what plan all things can be carried on, above all in regard to those things which are seen overhead in the ethereal borders, are borne back again into their old religious scruples and take unto themselves hard taskmasters, whom they poor wretches believe to be almighty, not knowing what can, what cannot be, in short by what system each thing has its powers defined, its deep-set boundary mark.

Well then not to detain you any longer by mere promises, look before all on seas and lands and heaven: their threefold nature, their three bodies, Memmius, three forms so unlike, three such wondrous textures a single day shall give over to destruction; and the mass and fabric of the world upheld for many years shall tumble to ruin. Nor can I fail to perceive with what a novel and strange effect it falls upon the mind, this destruction of heaven and earth that is to be, and how hard it is for me to produce a full conviction of it by words; as is the case when you bring to the ears a thing hitherto unexampled, and yet you cannot submit it to the eyesight nor put it into the hands; through which the straightest highway of belief leads into the human breast and quarters of the mind. But yet I will speak out: it well may be that the reality itself will bring credit to my words and that you will see earthquakes arise and all things grievously shattered to pieces in a short time. But this may pilot fortune guide far away from us, and may reason rather than the reality convince that all things may be overpowered and tumble in with a frightful crash.

But before I shall begin on this question to pour forth decrees of fate with more sanctity and much more certainty than the Pythia who speaks out from the tripod and laurel of Phoebus, I will clearly set forth to you many comforting topics in learned language; lest held in the yoke of religion you haply suppose that earth and sun and heaven, sea, stars and moon must last for

ever with divine body; and therefore think it right that they after the fashion of the giants should all suffer punishment for their monstrous guilt, who by their reasoning displace the walls of the world and seek to quench the glorious sun of heaven, branding immortal things in mortal speech; though in truth these things are so far from possessing divinity and are so unworthy of being reckoned in the number of gods, that they may be thought to afford a notable instance of what is quite without vital motion and sense.

For it is quite impossible to suppose that the nature and judgment of the mind can exist with any body whatever; even as a tree cannot exist in the ether nor clouds in the salt sea, nor can fishes live in the fields nor blood exist in woods nor sap in stones. Where each thing can grow and abide is fixed and ordained. Thus the nature of the mind cannot come into being alone without the body nor exist far away from the sinews and blood. But if (for this would be much more likely to happen than that) the force itself of the mind might be in the head or shoulders or heels or might be born in any other part of the body, it would after all be wont to abide in one and the same man or vessel. But since in our body even it is fixed and seen to be ordained where the soul and the mind can severally be and grow, it must still more strenuously be denied that it can abide out of the body and the living form altogether in crumbling clods of earth or in the fire of the sun or in water or in the high borders of ether. These things therefore are not possessed of divine sense, since they cannot be quickened with the vital feeling.

Bailey 1921

For what remains, the train of my reasoning has now brought me to this point, that I must give account how the world is made of mortal body and also came to birth; and in what ways that gathering of matter established earth, sky, sea, stars, sun, and the ball of the moon; then what living creatures sprang from the earth, and which have never been born at any time; and in what manner the race of men began to use ever-varying speech one to another by naming things; and in what ways that fear of the gods found its way into their breasts, which throughout the circle of the world keeps revered shrines, lakes, groves, altars, and images of the gods. Moreover, I will unfold by what power nature, the helmsman, steers the courses of the sun and the wanderings of the moon; lest by chance we should think that they of their own will 'twixt earth and sky fulfill their courses from year to year, with kindly favour to the increase of earth's fruits and living creatures, or should suppose that they roll on by any forethought of the gods. For those who have learnt aright that the gods lead a life free from care, yet if from time to time they wonder by what means all things can be carried on, above all among those things which are descried above our heads in the coasts of heaven, are borne back again into the old beliefs of religion, and adopt stern overlords, whom in their misery they believe have all power, knowing not what can be and what cannot, yea and in what way each thing has its power limited, and its deep-set boundary-stone.

For the rest, that I may delay you no more with promises, first of all look upon seas, and lands, and sky; their threefold nature, their three bodies, Memmius, their three forms so diverse, their three textures so vast, one single day shall hurl to ruin; and the massive form and fabric of the world, held up for many years, shall fall headlong. Nor does it escape me in my mind, how

strangely and wonderfully this strikes upon the understanding, the destruction of heaven and earth that is to be, and how hard it is for me to prove it surely in my discourse; even as it always happens, when you bring to men's ears something unknown before, and yet you cannot place it before the sight of their eyes, nor lay hands upon it; for by this way the paved path of belief leads straightest into the heart of man and the quarters of his mind. Yet still I will speak out. Maybe that the very fact will give credence to my words, that earthquakes will arise and within a little while you will behold all things shaken in mighty shock. But may fortune at the helm steer this far away from us, and may reasoning rather than the very fact make us believe that all things can fall in with a hideous rending crash.

Yet before I essay on this point to declare destiny in more holy wise, and with reasoning far more sure than the Pythian priestess, who speaks out from the tripod and laurel of Phoebus, I will unfold many a solace for you in my learned discourse; lest by chance restrained by religion you should think that earth and sun, and sky, sea, stars, and moon must needs abide for everlasting, because of their divine body, and therefore should suppose it right that after the manner of the giants all should pay penalty for their monstrous crime, who by their reasoning shake the walls of the world, and would fain quench the glorious sun in heaven, branding things immortal with mortal names; Yet these are things so far sundered from divine power, and are so unworthy to be reckoned among gods, that they are thought rather to be able to afford us the concept of what is far removed from vital motion and sense.

For verily it cannot be that we should suppose that the nature of mind and understanding can be linked with every body: even as a tree cannot exist in the sky, nor clouds in the salt waters, nor can fishes live in the fields, nor blood be present in wood nor sap in stones. It is determined and ordained where each thing can grow and have its place. So the nature of mind cannot come to birth alone without body, nor exist far apart from sinews and blood. But if this could be, far sooner might the force of mind itself exist in head or shoulders, or right down in the heels, and be wont to be born in any part you will, but at least remain in the same man or the same vessel. But since even within our body it is determined and seen to be ordained where soul and mind can dwell apart and grow, all the more must we deny that outside the whole body and the living creature's form, it could last on in the crumbling sods of earth or in the fire of the sun or in water or in the high coasts of heaven. They are not then created endowed with divine feeling, inasmuch as they cannot be quickened with the sense of life.