

Episode Sixty-Eight - This World Was Not Made By The Gods For Humanity

Post by "Cassius" of April 19, 2021 at 11:32 AM

Welcome to Episode Sixty-Eight 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 68 we will continue with a passage we originally planned for last week, start at approximately Latin line 195 of Book 5, with Martin reading today's text. Now let's join the discussion:

Munro Notes

195-234: nay, if I did not know the first-beginnings of things, the imperfection of this world would prove to me the gods did not make it for man's use: see after all how small a part of the whole earth he can bring under tillage, and that with the sweat of his brow; and then his labour is often thrown away: look at all the miseries he suffers, dangers by sea and land, diseases, untimely death; compare the helpless baby with the young of other animals.

Browne 1743

For were I wholly ignorant of the origin of things, yet I could prove this truth from the heavens, and by many other reasons, that the frame of the world was by no means raised by the gods for the use of man, so faulty it is, and contrived so ill. And first, the Earth, covered over by the violent whirl of the heavens, huge mountains and woods, the harbor of wild beasts, and rocks and vast lakes, and the sea, which widely separates the distant shores, take up a great part of it; and then the torrid heat, and continual cold, rob mankind almost of two parts, and make them uninhabitable. The fruitful fields that remain, nature of herself would spread over with thorns if the labor of man did not prevent it; if he did not, to preserve life, force the earth by constant toil with strong tools, and cut it through with the plough; if we did not turn up the fruitful clods with the crooked share, and compel the soil to exert its strength, of its own accord

it would produce nothing. And yet, when the fruits are raised with great labor, when they look green upon the ground, and all things flourish; either the sun's rays burn everything up with their fierce heat, or sudden showers, or piercing frosts, destroy our hopes; or the blasts of wind, with terrible hurricanes, blow them away. And then, why does Nature nourish and increase the dreadful race of wild beasts, by sea and land, the professed enemies to humankind? Why do the seasons of the year bring disease with them? Why does untimely death wander every way abroad?

Besides, a child, like a shipwrecked mariner on shore by the cruel tide, lies naked upon the ground; a wretched infant, destitute of every help of life, as soon as Nature, by the mother's pangs, has thrown him from the womb into light; and then he fills the air with mournful cries, as he has reason to do, since in the course of life he has such a series of evils to pass through. But cattle of every kind, and herds, and wild beasts, grow up with ease. They have no need of rattles to divert them; they have no occasion for the kind nurse, by her fond and broken words, to keep them in humor; they require no difference of dress for the several seasons of the year; they have no need of arms, nor high walls, to secure their property; for the Earth, with curious contrivance, of herself produces everything in abundance for the whole variety of creatures to feed and support them.

Munro 1886

But if I did not know what first-beginnings of things are, yet this judging by the very arrangements of heaven I would venture to affirm, and led by many other facts to maintain, that the nature of things has by no means been made for us by divine power: so great are the defects with which it is encumbered. In the first place of all, the space which the vast reach of heaven covers, a portion greedy mountains and forests of wild beasts have occupied, rocks and wasteful pools take up and the sea which holds wide apart the coasts of different lands. Next, of nearly two thirds burning heat and the constant fall of frost rob mortals. What is left for tillage, even that nature by its power would overrun with thorns, unless the force of man made head against it, accustomed for the sake of a livelihood to groan beneath the strong hoe and to cut through the earth by pressing down the plow. Unless by turning up the fruitful clods with the share and laboring the soil of the earth we stimulate things to rise, they could not spontaneously come up into the clear air; and even then sometimes when things earned with great toil now put forth their leaves over the lands and are all in blossom, either the ethereal sun bums them up with excessive heats or sudden rains and cold frosts cut them off, and the blasts of the winds waste them by a furious hurricane. Again, why does nature give food and increase to the frightful race of wild beasts dangerous to mankind both by sea and land? Why do the seasons of the year bring diseases in their train? Why stalks abroad untimely death?

Then, too the baby, like to a sailor cast away by the cruel waves, lies naked on the ground, speechless, wanting every furtherance of life, soon as nature by the throes of birth has shed him forth from his mother's womb into the borders of light: he fills the room with a rueful wading, as well he may whose destiny it is to go through in life so many ills. But the different flocks herds and wild beasts grow up; they want no rattles; to none of them need be addressed

the fond broken accents of the fostering nurse; they ask not different dresses according to the season; no nor do they want arms or lofty walls, whereby to protect their own, the earth itself and nature manifold in her works producing in plenty all things for all.

Bailey 1921

But even if I knew not what are the first-beginnings of things, yet this I would dare to affirm from the very workings of heaven, and to prove from many other things as well, that by no means has the nature of things been fashioned for us by divine grace: so great are the flaws with which it stands beset. First, of all that the huge expanse of heaven covers, half thereof mountains and forests of wild beasts have greedily seized; rocks possess it, and waste pools and the sea, which holds far apart the shores of the lands. Besides, two-thirds almost burning heat and the ceaseless fall of frost steal from mortals. Of all the field-land that remains, yet nature would by her force cover it up with thorns, were it not that the force of man resisted her, ever wont for his livelihood to groan over the strong mattock and to furrow the earth with the deep-pressed plow. But that by turning the fertile clods with the share, and subduing the soil of the earth we summon them to birth, of their own accord the crops could not spring up into the liquid air; and even now sometimes, when won by great toil things grow leafy throughout the land, and are all in flower, either the sun in heaven burns them with too much heat, or sudden rains destroy them and chill frosts, and the blasts of the winds harry them with headstrong hurricane. Moreover, why does nature foster and increase the awesome tribe of wild beasts to do harm to the race of man by land and sea? Why do the seasons of the year bring maladies? Why does death stalk abroad before her time?

Then again, the child, like a sailor tossed ashore by the cruel waves, lies naked on the ground, dumb, lacking all help for life, when first nature has cast him forth by travail from his mother's womb into the coasts of light, and he fills the place with woful wailing, as is but right for one for whom it remains in life to pass through so much trouble. But the diverse flocks and herds grow up and the wild beasts, nor have they need of rattles, nor must there be spoken to any of them the fond and broken prattle of the fostering nurse, nor do they seek diverse garments to suit the season of heaven, nay, and they have no need of weapons or lofty walls, whereby to protect their own, since for all of them the earth itself brings forth all things bounteously, and nature, the quaint artificer of things.