

# Episode Seventy-Five - The Rise of Life On Earth, And Which Forms Were Possible And Impossible

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## Welcome to Episode Seventy-Five 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 75 we will read approximately Latin line 821-924 of Book Five. We will talk about the initial forms of life on earth, and how we can judge what was possible, and what was not possible, in their arising to life.

Now let's join \_\_\_\_\_ reading today's text:

Podcast 75

Latin Lines 821-924

Munro Notes-

821-836: thus mother earth produced in the beginning every kind of living thing, till she left off bearing from age; for she and the world change like everything else: all things have a time of vigour and decay.

837-854: at first the earth tried to produce monsters of all kinds, half-men half-women, creatures without feet or without hands or mouths, or with limbs not separated; so that they could not grow up nor continue their kind: they all therefore perished off.

855-877: many races of regularly organised creatures must have died off, because they wanted either some natural power by which to protect themselves, or could not be turned to use by man and be saved thereby: these fell a prey to others and disappeared, unable to endure the struggle for existence.

878-924: but centaurs and the like with twofold natures cannot exist : the horse has reached maturity when the boy is scarcely yet weaned ; and is worn out ere the other is grown to

manhood and so with Scyllas, half-maid half-fish : then since fire burns lions like other creatures, how can a chimera exist breathing out flame: earth in its freshness produced many things, but not these figments of poets or philosophers.—This passage is extremely well and acutely reasoned out : he covertly refutes Empedocles' notion of the XXXXX and the XXXXX which are as impossible as the centaurs Scyllas and chimeras of the poets. The man-woman or hermaphrodite is possible enough, because the natures of man and woman are not incompatible; and doubtless it and other monstrous things tried at first to continue existence; but the creatures here described never could begin to come into being.

Browne 1743

And that the earth might have some release, and not be always in labor, she at length left off, as a woman worn out and past her prime; for time changes the nature of the whole world, one body continually rises from another, no being remains long like itself, things are in a perpetual flux, one thing decays and grows weak by time, another becomes vigorous and flourishes in its strength. Thus time alters the face of the whole world; and the earth passes from one state to another. She can no more produce the creatures she once did, and now she bears what she could not do before.

The Earth, it may be supposed, was at first delivered of many monstrous births, of a wonderful shape, and of an uncommon size (and some between the two sexes, not properly of both, yet not far removed from either) some without feet, and others without hands, many without a mouth and eyes; some had their limbs growing and sticking together over all their bodies that they could do no office of life, nor move from their place, nor fly what was hurtful, nor receive food to preserve their beings. Many other monsters, and strange productions of this kind, were at first formed, but in vain! For nature was shocked, and would not suffer them to increase; they could not arrive to any maturity of age, nor could they find their food; nor taste the pleasures of love; for many circumstances, we observe, must kindly agree that creatures might be able to propagate their kind. First of all there must be proper food, and then fit organs for the genial seed to flow through from all the limbs; and that the male and female may be closely joined, they must be furnished with those parts that may promote the mutual delights of both.

And therefore many kind of animals must needs be extinct, nor could they all by propagation continue their species, for almost every race of creatures we now see living, either their cunning, or their courage, or their swiftness, have secured and preserved them from the very beginning. And there are many that, from their usefulness to mankind, have recommended themselves to our defense. And first the fierce breed of lions, and their savage race, their courage protected; craft secures the fox, and swiftness the stag. But the watchful and faithful race of dogs, all beasts of burden, the flocks and herds, all these, my Memmius, are committed to the care of man. These fly swiftly from the rage of wild beasts; they love a quiet life, and depend upon us for their fill of provision, without any labor, of their own, which we allow them plentifully, as a reward for the benefits we receive from them. But those creatures on whom Nature has bestowed no such qualities, that cannot support themselves nor afford us any advantage, why should we suffer such a race to be fed by our care, or defended by our

protection? These, by the unhappy laws of their nature being destitute of all things, became an easy prey to others till their whole species was at last destroyed.

But never have there been any such things as centaurs, nor could a creature at any time be formed from a doubtful nature, from two bodies, and out of members so different and disagreeable. The limbs and faculties of a man and a horse could never act uniformly together, with all their power; and this is obvious to a very mean apprehension. For a horse at three years old is strong and active; a child is far from being so, at that age he is commonly feeling for the mother's breast in his sleep; and when the horse's strength decays by old age, and his feeble limbs fail him at the end of life, then the boy flourishes in the prime of youth, and the beginnings of a beard appear upon his cheeks. Never think, therefore, that there is or ever can be such a creature as a centaur, made up of a human nature and the servile seed of a horse; or that there are any such things as Scyllas, having their loins surrounded with the ravenous bodies of half sea-dogs. Believe nothing of other monsters like these, whose members we observe so opposite and disagreeing, which neither live to the same age, nor grow strong or decay together, which are neither inflamed with the same sort of love, nor have the same dispositions, nor preserve their bodies by the same food; for goats, we see, often grow fat with hemlock, which to men is sharp poison. And since fire will scorch and burn the yellow body of a lion, as well as the bowels of any other creature living with blood in its veins, how could a chimera, with his body of three kinds, with a lion's head, a dragon's tail, and the middle like a goat, blow abroad a fierce flame out of his body?

Munro 1886

But because she must have some limit set to her bearing, she ceased like a woman worn out by length of days. For time changes the nature of the whole world and all things must pass on from one condition to another, and nothing continues like to itself: all things quit their bounds, all things nature changes and compels to alter. One thing crumbles away and is worn and enfeebled with age, then another comes unto honor and issues out of its state of contempt. In this way then time changes the nature of the whole world and the earth passes out of one condition into another: what once it could, it can bear no more, in order to be able to bear what before it did not bear.

And many monsters too the earth at that time essayed to produce, things coming up with strange face and limbs, the man-woman, a thing between the two and neither the one sex nor the other, widely differing from both; some things deprived of feet, others again destitute of hands, others too proving dumb without mouth, or blind without eyes, and things bound fast by the adhesion of their limbs overall the body, so that they could not do anything nor go anywhere nor avoid the evil nor take what their needs required. Every other monster and portent of this kind she would produce, but all in vain, since nature set a ban on their increase and they could not reach the coveted flower of age nor find food nor be united in marriage. For we see that many conditions must meet together in things in order that they may beget and continue their kinds; first a supply of food, then a way by which the birth-producing seeds throughout the frame may stream from the relaxed limbs; also in order that the woman may be

united with the male, the possession of organs whereby they may each interchange mutual joys.

And many races of living things must then have died out and been unable to beget and continue their breed. For in the case of all things which you see breathing the breath of life, either craft or courage or else speed has from the beginning of its existence protected and preserved each particular race. And there are many things which, recommended to us by their useful services, continue to exist consigned to our protection.

In the first place the fierce breed of lions and the savage races their courage has protected, foxes their craft and stags their proneness to flight. But light-sleeping dogs with faithful heart in breast and every kind which is born of the seed of beasts of burden and at the same time the woolly flocks and the horned herds are all consigned, Memmius, to the protection of man. For they have ever fled with eagerness from wild beasts and have ensued peace and plenty of food obtained without their own labor, as we give it in requital of their useful services.

But those to whom nature has granted none of these qualities, so that they could neither live by their own means nor perform for us any useful service in return for which we should suffer their kind to feed and be safe under our protection, those, you are to know, would lie exposed as a prey and booty of others, hampered all in their own death-bringing shackles, until nature brought that kind to utter destruction.

But Centaurs never have existed, and at no time can there exist things of twofold nature and double body formed into one frame out of limbs of alien kinds, such that the faculties and powers of this and that portion cannot be sufficiently like. This however dull of understanding you may learn from what follows:

To begin, a horse when three years have gone round is in the prime of his vigor, far different the boy: often even at that age he will call in his sleep for the milk of the breast. Afterwards when in advanced age his lusty strength and limbs now faint with ebbing life fail the horse, then and not till then youth in the flower of age commences for that boy and clothes his cheeks in soft down; that you may not haply believe that out of a man and the burden-carrying seed of horses Centaurs can be formed and have being; or that Scyllas with bodies half those of fishes girdled round with raving dogs can exist, and all other things of the kind, whose limbs we see cannot harmonize together; as they neither come to their flower at the same time nor reach the fulness of their bodily strength nor lose it in advanced old age, nor burn with similar passions nor have compatible manners, nor feel the same things give pleasure throughout their frames. Thus we may see bearded goats often fatten on hemlock which for man is rank poison.

Since flame moreover is wont to scorch and burn the tawny bodies of lions just as much as any other kind of flesh and blood existing on earth, how could it be that a single chimera with triple body, in front a lion, behind a dragon, in the middle the goat whose name it bears, could breathe out at the mouth fierce flame from its body?

Bailey 1921

[826] But because she must needs come to some end of child-bearing, she ceased, like a woman worn with the lapse of age. For time changes the nature of the whole world, and one state after another must needs overtake all things, nor does anything abide like itself: all things change their abode, nature alters all things and constrains them to turn. For one thing rots away and grows faint and feeble with age, thereon another grows up and issues from its place of scorn. So then time changes the nature of the whole world, and one state after another overtakes the earth, so that it cannot bear what it did, but can bear what it did not of old.

[837] And many monsters too earth then essayed to create, born with strange faces and strange limbs, the man-woman, between the two, yet not either, sundered from both sexes, some things bereft of feet, or in turn robbed of hands, things too found dumb without mouths, or blind without eyes, or locked through the whole body by the clinging of the limbs, so that they could not do anything or move towards any side or avoid calamity or take what they needed. All other monsters and prodigies of this sort she would create; all in vain, since nature forbade their increase, nor could they reach the coveted bloom of age nor find food nor join in the work of Venus. For we see that many happenings must be united for things, that they may be able to beget and propagate their races; first that they may have food, and then a way whereby birth-giving seeds may pass through their frames, and issue from their slackened limbs; and that woman may be joined with man, they must needs each have means whereby they can interchange mutual joys.

[855] And it must needs be that many races of living things then perished and could not beget and propagate their offspring. For whatever animals you see feeding on the breath of life, either their craft or bravery, aye or their swiftness has protected and preserved their kind from the beginning of their being. And many there are, which by their usefulness are commended to us, and so abide, trusted to our tutelage.

[862] First of all the fierce race of lions, that savage stock, their bravery has protected, foxes their cunning, and deer their fleet foot. But the lightly-sleeping minds of dogs with their loyal heart, and all the race which is born of the seed of beasts of burden, and withal the fleecy flocks and the horned herds, are all trusted to the tutelage of men, Memmius. For eagerly did they flee the wild beasts and ensue peace and bounteous fodder gained without toil of theirs, which we grant them as a reward because of their usefulness.

[871] But those to whom nature granted none of these things, neither that they might live on by themselves of their own might, nor do us any useful service, for which we might suffer their kind to feed and be kept safe under our defence, you may know that these fell a prey and spoil to others, all entangled in the fateful trammels of their own being, until nature brought their kind to destruction.

[875] But neither were there Centaurs, nor at any time can there be animals of twofold nature and double body, put together of limbs of alien birth, so that the power and strength of each, derived from this parent and that, could be equal. That we may learn, however dull be our understanding, from this.

[883] First of all, when three years have come round, the horse is in the prime of vigour, but the child by no means so; for often even now in his sleep he will clutch for the milky paps of his mother's breasts. Afterwards, when the stout strength and limbs of horses fail through old age and droop, as life flees from them, then at last youth sets in in the prime of boyish years, and clothes the cheeks with soft down; that you may not by chance believe that Centaurs can be created or exist, formed of a man and the load-laden breed of horses, or Scyllas either, with bodies half of sea-monsters, girt about with ravening dogs, or any other beasts of their kind, whose limbs we see cannot agree one with another; for they neither reach their prime together nor gain the full strength of their bodies nor let it fall away in old age, nor are they fired with a like love, nor do they agree in a single character, nor are the same things pleasant to them throughout their frame. Indeed, we may see the bearded goats often grow fat on hemlock, which to man is rank poison.

[901] Since moreover flame is wont to scorch and burn the tawny bodies of lions just as much as every kind of flesh and blood that exists on the earth, how could it have come to pass that the Chimaera, one in her threefold body, in front a lion, in the rear a dragon, in the middle, as her name shows, a goat, should breathe out at her mouth fierce flame from her body?