

Episode Seventy-Six - The Rise of Humans and Early Human Society

Post by “Cassius” of June 18, 2021 at 6:25 AM

Welcome to Episode Seventy-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 questions about those, please be sure to contact us at EpicureanFriends.com for more information.

In this Episode 76 we will read approximately Latin line 925-1027 of Book Five. We will talk about the initial forms of human life, and the early stages of human society. Now let's join Martin reading today's text:

Podcast 75

Latin Lines 925 - 1027

Munro Notes-

925-987: but men were then much hardier than they are now: they lived like the beasts of the field; ignorant of tillage, they fed on what the earth supplied of itself, acorns and berries ; and drank of the running waters: they were without fire or clothes or houses, without law government or marriage : they slept on the ground, not fearing the dark, to which they had been used from childhood; they rather dreaded real danger from the fiercest beasts.

988-1010: men then died much about the same as now : here and there they were mangled by wild beasts and perished from want of help; but then many thousands did not fall in battle in a single day; ships too and therefore shipwrecks were unknown; want and ignorance then caused some deaths ; as now do luxury and malice.

1011-1027: next the use of huts and skins and fire softened their bodies, marriage and the ties of family their tempers; then neighbors made treaties of friendship and alliance, which mostly they observed, though not always.

Browne 1743

[907] And therefore those who pretend that this new Earth and vigorous Aether could produce such creatures as these, and support their fictions only upon the empty argument of their being new, may with the same reason put upon us other fables. They may as well tell us that golden rivers flow through the earth, that trees blossom with diamonds, that men were made with such mighty strength and bulk of limbs that they could stride with their feet over wide seas, and whirl about the body of the heavens with their hands. For though there were many seeds of things in the womb of the earth when she first began the production of living creatures, this is no rule that animals could be formed of a mixed nature, and compounded of different bodies. The various products of the earth, which are in great abundance – the herbs, the fruits, and pleasant trees – never blended in such confusion together; every thing proceeds in its own proper order, and preserves its distinct kind by the established laws of Nature.

[925] And the first race of men were much hardier upon the earth, as 'twas fit they should, for the hard earth bore them. They were built within upon larger and more solid bones, and their limbs were strained with stronger nerves, nor did they easily feel the inclemency of heat and cold, or were affected with the strangeness of their food or any weakness of body. They led a long life of many rolling years, and wandered about like wild beasts. There was no husbandman to guide the plow, or that knew how to cultivate the fields; none to plant young stocks in the ground, or with pruning-hooks to lop the old branches from the high trees. What the sun, the rain, and the earth voluntarily produced, that bounty satisfied their grateful hearts. They commonly refreshed their bodies with acorns among the oaks, and with those wild apples which you see ripen in winter, of a red color, which the earth then bore in abundance, and of a larger size. Many other excellent fruits the new earth, fresh and in her prime, produced in great plenty for her wretched offspring.

[945] But the rivers and springs invited them to cool their thirst, as the fall of waters from the high hills call now upon the thirsty race of beasts; and wandering in the night, they rested in hollow caves, the Sylvan temples of the nymphs, when flowed a running stream that washed the slippery stones with its large current; among the slippery stones, covered with mossy green, it found its way, and some of its little tide broke out and spread into the plain below.

[953] As yet they knew nothing of fire to dress their foods, nor the use of skins, or how to cover their bodies with the spoils of beasts; but inhabited the groves, the hollow mountains and the woods, and hid their naked bodies among the shrubs; this they did to avoid the rains and the blasts of wind.

[958] They had no regard for the common good; they had no order among them; or the use of laws; every man seized for his own what fortune gave into his power; every one consulted his own safety, and took care of himself.

[962] Their amours were consummated in the woods; either the ladies were urged on by their mutual heat, or they were overcome by the superior force and raging fire of their gallants, or were softened by presents, a dish of acorns, of apples, or of choice pears.

[966] These unpolished mortals, relying on the mighty strength of their arms and the swiftness of their feet, pursued the wild beasts through the woods, with missive stones and heavy clubs.

[970] Many they hunted down, some secured themselves in the thick brakes; when night overtook them, like bristly hogs, they through their rough bodies naked upon the ground, and rolled themselves up in leaves and grass; nor did they run howling about the fields, frightened that the day was gone and the sun was set, or wandered about in the darkness of the night, but they waited without complaint, and lay buried in soft sleep, till the sun with his rosy beams should again spread light over the heavens. For, from their very infancy, they had been used to observe that there was a regular succession of light and darkness, and therefore they did not think it possible, they never feared or distrusted, that an eternal night could cover the earth, or that the light of the sun would never more return. But what disturbed them most was that the wild beasts often surprised and destroyed them when they were asleep. They were forced to quit their haunts, and fly out of the caverns of the rocks at the approach of the rough boar or the strong lion; and trembling, in the dead of night, to give up their beds of leaves to their cruel guests.

[988] And yet in those times fewer died than do now, for then the one unhappy wretch that was seized was sure to be devoured alive between their cruel teeth, and therefore he filled the groves, the mountains, and the woods with his cries, as he saw his reeking bowels buried in a living grave. But those who saved themselves by flight, with their bodies torn and covering their smarting wounds with trembling hands, called upon death in dreadful accents, till gnawing worms put an end to their life, for they were unskilled in medicine, and ignorant what to apply to their gaping sores. But then many thousands did not fall in battle in one day; no boisterous waves dashed ships and men against the rocks. The sea then, and its swelling tides, raged in vain, and to no purpose, and laid aside its empty threats, and grew calm again; nor could the deceitful flattery of its smooth waters cheat any one into the deceit, or tempt him to venture upon the smiling surface. The dangerous art of sailing was then unknown. Many then languished and died wretchedly for want of food, but now plenty is the destruction of mankind. Some then, through ignorance, would mix poison for themselves; now they study the art, and give it to others.

[1011] But when they began to build huts, and provide themselves with skins and fire; when one to one was joined for life together, and the chaste sweet delights of constant love were now first felt, and they saw a lovely train of children of their own; then this hardy race first began to soften, for being used to fire, their tender bodies could not bear so well the cold of the open air; and love impaired their strength, and children, by their little acts of fondness, easily softened the haughty temper of their parents. Then those who lived together began to cultivate a friendship, and agreed not to hurt or injure one another. They undertook the protection of children and women, and declared, by signs and broken words, that the weaker should be understood as proper objects of compassion. This mutual amity, though it did not prevail among them all, yet the greater and better part kept their faith, and lived peaceably together; otherwise the whole race of men had been soon destroyed, and the species could never have been preserved to this time.

Munro 1886

[907] Wherefore also he who fables that in the new time of the earth and the fresh youth of heaven such living creatures could have been begotten, resting upon this one futile term new, may babble out many things in like fashion, may say that rivers then ran with gold over all parts of the earth and that trees were wont to blossom with precious stones, or that man was born with such giant force of frame that he could wade on foot across deep seas and whirl the whole heaven about him with his hands. For the fact that there were many seeds of things in the earth what time it first shed forth living creatures, is yet no proof that there could have been produced beasts of different kinds mixed together, and limbs of different living things formed into a single frame, because the kinds of herbage and corn and joyous trees which even now spring in plenty out of the earth yet cannot be produced with the several sorts plaited into one, but each thing goes on after its own fashion, and all preserve their distinctive differences according to a fixed law of nature.

[925] But the race of man then in the fields was much hardier, as beseemed it to be, since the hard earth had produced it; and built on a groundwork of larger and more solid bones within, knit with powerful sinews throughout the frame of flesh; not lightly to be disabled by heat or cold or strange kinds of food or any malady of body. And during the revolution of many lusters of the sun through heaven they led a life after the roving fashion of wild beasts. No one then was a sturdy guider of the bent plow or knew how to labor the fields with iron or plant in the ground young saplings or lop with pruning-hooks old boughs from the high trees. What the sun and rains had given, what the earth had produced spontaneously, was guerdon sufficient to content their hearts. Among acorn-bearing oaks they would refresh their bodies for the most part; and the arbuter-berries which you now see in the winter-time ripen with a bright scarlet hue, the earth would then bear in greatest plenty and of a larger size; and many coarse kinds of food besides the teeming freshness of the world then bare, more than enough for poor wretched men.

[945] But rivers and springs invited to slake thirst, even as now a rush of water down from the great hills summons with clear plash far and wide the thirsty races of wild beasts. Then too as they ranged about they would occupy the well-known woodland haunts of the nymphs, out of which they knew that smooth-gliding streams of water with a copious gush bathed the dripping rocks, the dripping rocks, trickling down over the green moss; and in parts welled and bubbled out over the level plain.

[953] And as yet they knew not how to apply fire to their purposes or to make use of skins and clothe their body in the spoils of wild beasts, but they would dwell in woods and mountain-caves and forests and shelter in the brushwood their squalid limbs when driven to shun the buffeting of the winds and the rains.

[958] And they were unable to look to the general weal and knew not how to make a common use of any customs or laws. Whatever prize fortune threw in his way, each man would bear off, trained at his own discretion to think of himself and live for himself alone.

[962] And Venus would join the bodies of lovers in the woods; for each woman was gained over either by mutual desire or the headstrong violence and vehement lust of the man or a bribe of some acorns and arbute-berries or choice pears.

[966] And trusting to the marvelous powers of their hands and feet they would pursue the forest-haunting races of wild beasts with showers of stones and club of ponderous weight; and many they would conquer, a few they would avoid in hiding-places;

[970] and like to bristly swine just as they were they would throw their savage limbs all naked on the ground, when overtaken by night, covering themselves up with leaves and boughs. Yet never with loud wailings would they call for the daylight and the sun, wandering terror-stricken over the fields in the shadows of night, but silent and buried in sleep they would wait, till the sun with rosy torch carried light into heaven; for accustomed as they had been from childhood always to see darkness and light begotten time about, never could any wonder come over them, nor any misgiving that never-ending night would cover the earth and the light of the sun be withdrawn for evermore. But what gave them trouble was rather the races of wild beasts which would often render repose fatal to the poor wretches. And driven from their home they would fly from their rocky shelters on the approach of a foaming bear or a strong lion, and in the dead of night they would surrender in terror to their savage guests their sleeping-places strewn with leaves.

[988] Nor then much more than now would the races of mortal men leave the sweet light of ebbing life. For then this one or that other one of them would be more likely to be seized, and torn open by their teeth would furnish to the wild beasts a living food, and would fill with his moaning woods and mountains and forests as he looked on his living flesh buried in a living grave. But those whom flight had saved with body eaten into, holding ever after their quivering palms over the noisome sores would summon death with appalling cries, until cruel gripings had rid them of life, forlorn of help, unwitting what wounds wanted. But then a single day gave not over to death many thousands of men marching with banners spread, nor did the stormy waters of the sea dash on the rocks men and ships. At this time the sea would often rise up and rage without aim, without purpose, without result, and just as lightly put off its empty threats; nor could the winning wiles of the calm sea treacherously entice any one to his ruin with laughing waters, when the reckless craft of the skipper had not yet risen into the light. Then too want of food would consign to death their fainting frames, now on the contrary tis plenty sinks into ruin. They unwittingly would often pour out poison for themselves; now with nicer skill men give it to their son's wife instead.

[1011] Next after they had got themselves huts and skins and fire, and the woman united with the man passed with him into one [domicile and the duties of wedlock were] learnt [by the two], and they saw an offspring born from them, then first mankind began to soften. For fire made their chilled bodies less able now to bear the frost beneath the canopy of heaven, and Venus impaired their strength and children with their caresses soon broke down the haughty temper of parents. Then too neighbors began to join in a league of friendship mutually desiring neither to do nor suffer harm; and asked for indulgence to children and womankind, when with

cries and gestures they declared in stammering speech that meet it is for all to have mercy on the weak. And though harmony could not be established without exception, yet a very large portion observed their agreements with good faith, or else the race of man would then have been wholly cut off, nor could breeding have continued their generations to this day.

Bailey 1921

[907] Wherefore again, he who feigns that when the earth was young and the sky new-born, such animals could have been begotten, trusting only in this one empty plea of the world's youth, may blurt out many things in like manner from his lips; he may say that then streams of gold flowed everywhere over the lands, and that trees were wont to blossom with jewels, or that a man was born with such expanse of limbs, that he could plant his footsteps right across the deep seas, and with his hands twist the whole sky about him. For because there were in the earth many seeds of things at the time when first the land brought forth animals, yet that is no proof that beasts of mingled breed could have been born, or the limbs of living creatures put together in one; because the races of herbage and the crops and fruitful trees, which even now spring forth abundantly from the earth, yet cannot be created intertwined one with another, but each of these things comes forth after its own manner, and all preserve their separate marks by a fixed law of nature.

[925] But the race of man was much hardier then in the fields, as was seemly for a race born of the hard earth: it was built up on larger and more solid bones within, fastened with strong sinews traversing the flesh; not easily to be harmed by heat or cold or strange food or any taint of the body. And during many lustres of the sun rolling through the sky they prolonged their lives after the roving manner of wild beasts. Nor was there any sturdy steerer of the bent plough, nor knew any one how to work the fields with iron, or to plant young shoots in the earth, or cut down the old branches off high trees with knives. What sun and rains had brought to birth, what earth had created unasked, such gift was enough to appease their hearts. Among oaks laden with acorns they would refresh their bodies for the most part; and the arbuterries, which now you see ripening in wintertime with scarlet hue, the earth bore then in abundance, yea and larger. And besides these the flowering youth of the world then bare much other rough sustenance, enough and to spare for miserable mortals.

[945] But to slake their thirst streams and springs summoned them, even as now the downrush of water from the great mountains calls clear far and wide to the thirsting tribes of wild beasts. Or again they dwelt in the woodland haunts of the nymphs, which they had learnt in their wanderings, from which they knew that gliding streams of water washed the wet rocks with bounteous flood, yea washed the wet rocks, as they dripped down over the green moss, and here and there welled up and burst forth over the level plain.

[953] Nor as yet did they know how to serve their purposes with fire, nor to use skins and clothe their body in the spoils of wild beasts, but dwelt in woods and the caves on mountains and forests, and amid brushwood would hide their rough limbs, when constrained to shun the shock of winds and the rain-showers.

[958] Nor could they look to the common weal, nor had they knowledge to make mutual use of any customs or laws. Whatever booty chance had offered to each, he bore it off; for each was taught at his own will to live and thrive for himself alone.

[962] And Venus would unite lovers in the woods; for each woman was wooed either by mutual passion, or by the man's fierce force and reckless lust, or by a price, acorns and arbuter-berries or choice pears.

[966] And trusting in their strange strength of hand and foot they would hunt the woodland tribes of wild beasts with stones to hurl or clubs of huge weight; many they would vanquish, a few they would avoid in hiding;

[970] And like bristly boars these woodland men would lay their limbs naked on the ground, when overtaken by night time, wrapping themselves up around with leaves and foliage. Nor did they look for daylight and the sun with loud wailing, wandering fearful through the fields in the darkness of night, but silent and buried in sleep waited mindful, until the sun with rosy torch should bring the light into the sky. For, because they had been wont ever from childhood to behold darkness and light begotten, turn by turn, it could not come to pass that they should ever wonder, or feel mistrust lest the light of the sun should be withdrawn for ever, and never-ending night possess the earth. But much greater was another care, inasmuch as the tribes of wild beasts often made rest dangerous for wretched men. Driven from their home they would flee from their rocky roof at the coming of a foaming boar or a mighty lion, and in the dead of night in terror they would yield their couches spread with leaves to their cruel guests.

[988] Nor then much more than now would the races of men leave the sweet light of life with lamentation. For then more often would some one of them be caught and furnish living food to the wild beasts, devoured by their teeth, and would fill woods and mountains and forests with his groaning, as he looked on his living flesh being buried in a living tomb. And those whom flight had saved with mangled body, thereafter, holding trembling hands over their noisome sores, would summon Orcus with terrible cries, until savage griping pains had robbed them of life, all helpless and knowing not what wounds wanted. Yet never were many thousands of men led beneath the standards and done to death in a single day, nor did the stormy waters of ocean dash ships and men upon the rocks. Then rashly, idly, in vain would the sea often arise and rage, and lightly lay aside its empty threatenings, nor could the treacherous wiles of the windless waves lure any man to destruction with smiling waters; then the wanton art of sailing lay as yet unknown. Then, too, want of food would give over their drooping limbs to death, now on the other hand 'tis surfeit of good things brings them low. They all unwitting would often pour out poison for themselves, now with more skill they give it to others.

[1011] Then after they got themselves huts and skins and fire, and woman yoked with man retired to a single [home, and the laws of marriage] were learnt, and they saw children sprung from them, then first the race of man began to soften. For fire brought it about that their chilly limbs could not now so well bear cold under the roof of heaven, and Venus lessened their strength, and children, by their winning ways, easily broke down the haughty will of their parents. Then, too, neighbours began eagerly to form friendship one with another, not to hurt

or be harmed, and they commended to mercy children and the race of women, when with cries and gestures they taught by broken words that 'tis right for all men to have pity on the weak. Yet not in all ways could unity be begotten, but a good part, the larger part, would keep their compacts loyally; or else the human race would even then have been all destroyed, nor could breeding have prolonged the generations until now.