

Episode Eighty-One - Development of the Arts - The End of Book Five

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Welcome to Episode Eighty-One 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.

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In this Episode 81 we will start at approximately Latin line 1350 and we'll go through the end of Book Five.

Now let's join Martin reading today's text.

Munro Notes- 1350-

1350-1360: weaving came into use after iron which is needed for the instruments employed in it: men first practised it, afterwards women.

1361-1378: nature first taught to sow plant and graft: then one kind of culture after another was discovered, and more and more ground brought under tillage.

1379-1435: birds taught men song ; from the whistling of the zephyr through reeds they learnt to blow through stalks; next the pipe came into use, with which they amused themselves mid other kinds of rustic jollity; with such music watchers would while away the time, and derive no less pleasure than now is gotten from elaborate tunes : then acorns skins and beds of leaves were given up; though fought for once as eagerly as men now strive for purple and gold; lust of gain and cares came next to vex life.

1436 -1439 : the sun and moon taught men the seasons of the year.

1440 - 1447 : then came walled towns, division of lands, ships, treaties between states; and, when letters were invented, poetry.

1448 - 1457: thus by degrees experience taught men all the useful and graceful arts, one advance suggesting another, till perfection was attained.

Browne 1743

[1350] Their garments were skins of beasts, pinned together with thorns, before they had learned to weave. The art of weaving came in after the discovery of iron, for their tools were made of that metal; nor could the smooth treadles, the spindles, the shittles, and the ratching beams be formed any other way. But nature at first compelled the men to card and spin, before the women undertook the trade; for men by far exceed the other sex in the invention of arts, and work with greater skill. The sturdy peasants at length reproached these male spinsters, and obliged them to give up the business into the women's hands; and then they betook themselves to more laborious employments and hardened their limbs and their hands with rougher work.

[1361] But Nature herself (the great mother of all things) first taught men to sow and to graft, for the berries and the acorns that fell from the trees, the observed, produced young shoots underneath in a proper season of the year. And hence they began to graft fruitful slips into boughs, and to plant young stocks over all the fields. Then they tried every other art to improve the kindly soil, and they found the wild fruits grew sweet and large by enriching the earth, and dressing it with greater care. They employed themselves continually in reducing the woods to narrower bounds upon the hills, and to cultivate the lower places for corn and fruits. Thus they had the benefit of meadows, of lakes, of rivers, of corn fields, and pleasant vineyards upon the side of the hills, and in the dales, and of green rows of olives regularly running between upon the rising grounds, and in the valleys, and spread all over the plains. As you see our country farms now laid out in all the variety of beauty, where the sweet apples are intermixed and adorn the scene, and fruitful trees are delightfully planted round all the fields.

[1379] And men attempted to imitate by the mouth the charming voice of birds, before they tried to sing, or to delight the ear with tuneful verse: and the soft murmurs of the reeds, moved by a gentle gale, first taught them how to blow the hollow reed, and by degrees to learn the tender notes: such as the pipe, by nimble fingers pressed, sends out when sweetly sung to; the pipe, that now is heard in all the woods and groves, and all the lawns, where shepherds take their solitary walks, and spend their days in innocence and ease. Thus time by degrees draws everything into use, and skill and ingenuity raise it to perfection.

[1390] Thus music softened and relieved the minds of these rude swains, after their rural feasts; for then the heart's at ease; and then they sweetly indulge their bodies, as they lie together on the soft grass, hard by a river's side, under the boughs of some high tree, without a heap of wealth. Chiefly when the spring smiles, and the season of the year sprinkles the verdant herbs with flowery pride; then jests, and smart conceits, and the loud laugh went round; and then the rustic music sung out, and, gay and jocund in their sports, they crowned their heads, and on their shoulders hung garlands of flowers and leaves, and with unequal steps they rudely moved their limbs, and shook their mother earth with their hard feet; and then the laugh began, and pleasant grin, at these strange gambols, never seen before. And thus they

kept awake; and, as refreshed by comfortable sleep, they spent the night in trolling country songs, and making mouths to many an awkward tune, and running over the reeds with crooked lip. These are the pleasures now our wanton youth pursue, who sit up all the night; they learn to dance in measure, but receive no more delight than did that rustic race of earthborn swains so long ago.

[1412] For while we know no better, and enjoy a present good, it wonderfully pleases and delights us above all things; but when we discover something more agreeable, this destroys and changes the relish of what went before. So acorns became odious to the palate, and the beds of grass and leaves were laid aside; and skins when out of use, and that savage sort of clothing was despised; and yet, I think, he that first wore it raised such envy to himself that he was treacherously slain, he was torn to pieces, and his leathern garment stained with his own blood, nor was he suffered to enjoy the fruit of his own invention. At that time men fought for skins, but now gold and purple employs their cares, and set them together by the ears. And, I think, we are much more to blame of the two, for without the use of skins, the cold would have been very grievous to those earth-born wretches, but we suffer nothing if we go without purple or cloth of gold, embroidered in the richest figures, since a meaner dress would as well secure us against the cold. Wretched therefore, and vain, are the troubles of mankind; they spend their whole life in the pursuit of empty cares, and no wonder, since they fix no limit to what they possess, and know nothing how far the bounds of true pleasure may extend. And this ignorance carries them by degrees into a sea of evils, and raises the most violent storms of war throughout the world.

[1436] But the wakeful sun and moon, surveying with their light the great and rolling skies, have taught men that the seasons of the year are turned about, and that things are carried on by certain rules and in a fixed order.

[1440] And now mankind enclosed themselves and lived in castles; the lands were parted out, and each enjoyed his own; the sea was sailed over by crooked ships, and men joined together for defense, and formed alliances by certain bonds. The poets then began to celebrate in verse the great exploits, and letters were not long before discovered. What was transacted many ages past, those times knew nothing of, but what their reason darkly traced out.

[1448] Use therefore, and the experience of an inquiring mind, led men by degrees into the knowledge of navigation, of agriculture; taught them to build walls, to make laws, arms, public ways, garments, and other things of the same nature; made them acquainted with poetry, painting, and statuary. Thus time gradually produces every thing into use, and reason shows it in a clear light. One art, we observe, is refined and polished by another, till they arrive at the highest point of perfection.

Munro 1886

[1350] A garment tied on the body was in use before a dress of woven stuff. Woven stuff comes after iron, because iron is needed for weaving a web; and in no other way can such finely polished things be made as heddles and spindles, shuttles and ringing yarn-beams. And nature impelled men to work up the wool before womankind: for the male sex in general far excels the other in skill and is much more ingenious: until the rugged countrymen so upbraided them with it, that they were glad to give it over into the hands of the women and take their share in supporting hard toil, and in such hard work hardened body and hands.

[1361] But nature parent of things was herself the first model of sowing and first gave rise to grafting, since berries and acorns dropping from the trees would put forth in due season swarms of young shoots underneath; and hence also came the fashion of inserting grafts in their stocks and planting in the ground young saplings over the fields. Next they would try another and yet another kind of tillage for their loved piece of land and would see the earth better the wild fruits through genial fostering and kindly cultivation. And they would force the forests to recede every day higher and higher up the hill-side and yield, the ground below to tith, in order to have on the uplands and plains meadows tanks runnels cornfields and glad vineyards, and allow a grey-green strip of olives to run between and mark the divisions, spreading itself over hillocks and valleys and plains; just as you now see richly dight with varied beauty all the ground which they lay out and plant with rows of sweet fruit-trees and enclose all round with plantations of other goodly trees.

[1379] But imitating with the mouth the clear notes of birds was in use long before men were able to sing in tune smooth-running verses and give pleasure to the ear. And the whistlings of the zephyr through the hollows of reeds first taught peasants to blow into hollow stalks. Then step by step they learned sweet plaintive ditties, which the pipe pours forth pressed by the fingers of the players, heard through pathless woods and forests and lawns, through the unfrequented haunts of shepherds and abodes of unearthly calm.

[1390] These things would soothe and gratify their minds when sated with food; for then all things of this kind are welcome. Often therefore stretched ingroups on the soft grass beside a stream of water under the boughs of a high tree at no great cost they would pleasantly refresh their bodies, above all when the weather smiled and the seasons of the year painted the green grass with flowers. Then went round the jest, the tale, the peals of merry laughter; for the peasant muse was then in its glory; then frolick mirth would prompt to entwine head and shoulders with garlands plaited with flowers and leaves, and to advance in the dance out of step and move the limbs clumsily and with clumsy foot beat mother earth; which would occasion smiles and peals of merry laughter, because all these things then from their greater novelty and strangeness were in high repute. And the wakeful found a solace for want of sleep in this, in drawing out a variety of notes and going through tunes and running over the reeds with curving lip; whence even at the present day watchmen observe these traditions and have lately learned to keep the proper tune; and yet for all this receive not a jot more of enjoyment, than erst the rugged race of sons of earth received.

[1412] For that which we have in our hands, if we have known before nothing pleasanter, pleases above all and is thought to be the best; and as a rule the later discovery of something better spoils the taste for the former things and changes the feelings in regard to all that has gone before. Thus began distaste for the acorn, thus were abandoned those sleeping-places strewn with grass and enriched with leaves. The dress too of wild beasts' skin fell into neglect; though I can fancy that in those days it was found to arouse such jealousy that he who first wore it met his death by an ambushade, and after all it was tom in pieces among them and drenched in blood was utterly destroyed and could not be turned to any use. In those times therefore skins, now gold and purple plague men's lives with cares and wear them out with war. And in this methinks the greater blame rests with us; for cold would torture the naked sons of earth without, but us it harms not in the least to do without a robe of purple, spangled with gold and large figures, if only we have a dress of the people to protect us. Mankind therefore ever toils vainly and to no purpose and wastes life in groundless cares because sure enough they have not learnt what is the true end of getting and up to what point genuine pleasure goes on increasing: this by slow degrees has carried life out into the deep sea and stirred up from their lowest depths the mighty billows of war.

[1436] But those watchful guardians sun and moon traversing with their light all round the great revolving sphere of heaven taught men that the seasons of the year came round and that the system was carried on after a fixed plan and fixed order.

[1440] Already they would pass their life fenced about with strong towers, and the land, portioned out and marked off by boundaries, be tilled; the sea would be filled with ships scudding under sail; towns have auxiliaries and allies as stipulated by treaty, when poets began to consign the deeds of men to verse; and letters had not been invented long before. For this reason our age cannot look back to what has gone before save where reason points out any traces.

[1448] Ships and tillage, walls, laws, arms, roads, dress, and all such like things, all the prizes, all the elegancies too of life without exception, poems, pictures, and the chiseling of fine-wrought statues, all these things practice together with the acquired knowledge of the untiring mind taught men by slow degrees as they advanced on the way step by step. Thus time by degrees brings each several thing forth before men's eyes and reason raises it up into the borders of light; for things must be brought to light one after the other and in due order in the different arts until these have reached their highest point of development.

Bailey 1921

[1350] A garment tied together came before woven raiment. Woven fabric comes after iron, for by iron the loom is fashioned, nor in any other way can such smooth treadles be made, or spindles or shuttles and ringing rods. And nature constrained men to work wool before the race of women; for all the race of men far excels in skill and is much more cunning; until the sturdy husbandman made scorn of it, so that they were glad to leave it to women's hands, and themselves share in enduring hard toil, and in hard work to harden limbs and hands.

[1361] But nature herself, creatress of things, was first a pattern for sowing and the beginning of grafting, since berries and acorns fallen from the trees in due time put forth swarms of shoots beneath; from nature, too, they learnt to insert grafts into branches, and to plant young saplings in the ground over the fields. Then one after another they essayed ways of tilling their smiling plot, and saw the earth tame wild fruits with tender care and fond tilling. And day by day they would constrain the woods more and more to retire up the mountains, and to give up the land beneath to tilth, that on hills and plains they might have meadows, pools, streams, crops, and glad vineyards, and the grey belt of olives might run between with its clear line, spreading over hillocks and hollows and plains; even as now you see all the land clear marked with diverse beauties, where men make it bright by planting it here and there with sweet fruit-trees, and fence it by planting it all round with fruitful shrubs.

[1379] But imitating with the mouth the liquid notes of birds came long before men were able to sing in melody right through smooth songs and please the ear. And the whistling of the zephyr through the hollows of reeds first taught the men of the countryside to breathe into hollowed hemlock-stalks. Then little by little they learned the sweet lament, which the pipe pours forth, stopped by the players' fingers, the pipe invented amid the pathless woods and forests and glades, among the desolate haunts of shepherds, and the divine places of their rest.

[1390] These tunes would soothe their minds and please them when sated with food; for then all things win the heart. And so often, lying in friendly groups on the soft grass near some stream of water under the branches of a tall tree, at no great cost they would give pleasure to their bodies, above all when the weather smiled and the season of the year painted the green grass with flowers. Then were there wont to be jests, and talk, and merry laughter. For then the rustic muse was at its best; then glad mirth would prompt to wreath head and shoulders with garlands twined of flowers and foliage, and to dance all out of step, moving their limbs heavily, and with heavy foot to strike mother earth; whence arose smiles and merry laughter, for all these things then were strong in freshness and wonder. And hence came to the wakeful a solace for lost sleep, to guide their voices through many notes, and follow the windings of a song, and to run over the reeds with curling lip; whence even now the watchmen preserve these traditions, and have learnt to keep to the rhythm of the song, nor yet for all that do they gain a whit greater enjoyment from the pleasure, than the woodland race of earthborn men of old.

[1412] For what is here at hand, unless we have learnt anything sweeter before, pleases us above all, and is thought to excel, but for the most part the better thing found later on destroys or changes our feeling for all the old things. So hatred for their acorns set in, and the old couches strewn with grass and piled with leaves were deserted. Likewise the garment of wild beasts' skin fell into contempt; yet I suppose that of old it was so envied when found, that he who first wore it was waylaid and put to death, though after all it was torn to pieces among them, and was spoiled with much blood, and could be turned to no profit. It was skins then in those days, and now gold and purple that vex men's life with cares and weary them out with war; and for this, I think, the greater fault lies with us. For cold used to torture the earth-born, as they lay naked without skins; but it does us no hurt to go without our purple robes, set with

gold and massy figures, if only there be some common garment to protect us. And so the race of men toils fruitlessly and in vain for ever, and wastes its life in idle cares, because, we may be sure, it has not learned what are the limits of possession, nor at all how far true pleasure can increase. And this, little by little, has advanced life to its high plane, and has stirred up from the lowest depths the great seething tide of war.

[1436] But sun and moon, like watchmen, traversing with their light all round the great turning vault of the world, taught men that the seasons of the year come round, and that the work goes on after a sure plan and a sure order.

[1440] Now fenced in with strong towers they would live their life, and the land was parcelled out and marked off: then the sea was gay with the flying sails of ships: now treaties were drawn up, and they had auxiliaries and allies, when poets first began to hand down men's deeds in songs; yet not much before that were letters discovered. Therefore our age cannot look back to see what was done before, unless in any way reason points out traces.

[1448] Ships and the tilling of the land, walls, laws, weapons, roads, dress, and all things of this kind, all the prizes, and the luxuries of life, one and all, songs and pictures, and the polishing of quaintly-wrought statues, practice and therewith the experience of the eager mind taught them little by little, as they went forward step by step. So, little by little, time brings out each several thing into view, and reason raises it up into the coasts of light. For they saw one thing after another grow clear in their mind, until by their arts they reached the topmost pinnacle.