

Episode One Hundred Twenty-Four - Letter to Herodotus 13 - Life On Other Worlds, Development of Language, And the Regular Motion of the Stars

Post by "Cassius" of May 29, 2022 at 8:19 AM

Corresponding Sections of Lucretius:

1 - Life on Other Worlds -- Book One:

[1023] Now turn your mind, I pray, to a true reasoning. For a truth wondrously new is struggling to fall upon your ears, and a new face of things to reveal itself. Yet neither is anything so easy, but that at first it is more difficult to believe, and likewise nothing is so great or so marvelous but that little by little all decrease their wonder at it. First of all the bright clear color of the sky, and all it holds within it, the stars that wander here and there, and the moon and the sheen of the sun with its brilliant light; all these, if now they had come to being for the first time for mortals, if all unforeseen they were in a moment placed before their eyes, what story could be told more marvelous than these things, or what that the nations would less dare to believe beforehand? Nothing, I trow: so worthy of wonder would this sight have been. Yet think how no one now, wearied with satiety of seeing, deigns to gaze up at the shining quarters of the sky! Wherefore cease to spew out reason from your mind, struck with terror at mere newness, but rather with eager judgement weigh things, and, if you see them true, lift your hands and yield, or, if it is false, gird yourself to battle.

For our mind now seeks to reason, since the sum of space is boundless out beyond the walls of this world, what there is far out there, whither the spirit desires always to look forward, and whither the unfettered projection of our mind flies on unchecked.

[1048] First of all, we find that in every direction everywhere, and on either side, above and below, through all the universe, there is no limit, as I have shown, and indeed the truth cries out for itself and the nature of the deep shines clear. Now in no way must we think it likely, since towards every side is infinite empty space, and seeds in unnumbered numbers in the deep universe fly about in many ways driven on in everlasting motion, that this one world and sky was brought to birth, but that beyond it all those bodies of matter do naught; above all, since this world was so made by nature, as the seeds of things themselves of their own accord, jostling from time to time, were driven together in many ways, rashly, idly, and in vain, and at last those united, which, suddenly cast together, might become ever and anon the beginnings of great things, of earth and sea and sky, and the race of living things. Wherefore, again and again, you must needs confess that there are here and there other gatherings of matter, such as is this, which the ether holds in its greedy grip.

[1067] Moreover, when there is much matter ready to hand, when space is there, and no thing, no cause delays, things must, we may be sure, be carried on and completed. As it is, if there is so great a store of seeds as the whole life of living things could not number, and if the same force and nature abides which could throw together the seeds of things, each into their place in like manner as they are thrown together here, it must needs be that you confess that there are other worlds in other regions, and diverse races of men and tribes of wild beasts.

[1077] This there is too that in the universe there is nothing single, nothing born unique and growing unique and alone, but it is always of some tribe, and there are many things in the same race. First of all turn your mind to living creatures; you will find that in this wise is begotten the race of wild beasts that haunts the mountains, in this wise the stock of men, in this wise again the dumb herds of scaly fishes, and all the bodies of flying fowls. Wherefore you must confess in the same way that sky and earth and sun, moon, sea, and all else that exists, are not unique, but rather of number numberless; inasmuch as the deep-fixed boundary-stone of life awaits these as surely, and they are just as much of a body that has birth, as every race which is here on earth, abounding in things after its kind.

2. Development of Language - Book Five:

[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.

[1028] But the diverse sounds of the tongue nature constrained men to utter, and use shaped the names of things, in a manner not far other than the very speechlessness of their tongue is seen to lead children on to gesture, when it makes them point out with the finger the things that are before their eyes. For every one feels to what purpose he can use his own powers. Before the horns of a calf appear and sprout from his forehead, he butts with them when angry, and pushes passionately. But the whelps of panthers and lion-cubs already fight with claws and feet and biting, when their teeth and claws are scarce yet formed. Further, we see all the tribe of winged fowls trusting to their wings, and seeking an unsteady aid from their pinions.

[1041] Again, to think that any one then parcelled out names to things, and that from him men learnt their first words, is mere folly. For why should he be able to mark off all things by words, and to utter the diverse sounds of the tongue, and at the same time others be thought unable to do this? Moreover, if others too had not used words to one another, whence was implanted in

him the concept of their use; whence was he given the first power to know and see in his mind what he wanted to do? Likewise one man could not avail to constrain many, and vanquish them to his will, that they should be willing to learn all his names for things; nor indeed is it easy in any way to teach and persuade the deaf what it is needful to do; for they would not endure it, nor in any way suffer the sounds of words unheard before to batter on their ears any more to no purpose.

[1056] Lastly, what is there so marvellous in this, if the human race, with strong voice and tongue, should mark off things with diverse sounds for diverse feelings? When the dumb cattle, yea and the races of wild beasts are wont to give forth diverse unlike sounds, when they are in fear or pain, or again when their joys grow strong. Yea verily, this we may learn from things clear to see.

[1063] When the large loose lips of Molossian dogs start to snarl in anger, baring their hard teeth, thus drawn back in rage, they threaten with a noise far other than when they bark and fill all around with their clamour. Yet when they essay fondly to lick their cubs with their tongue, or when they toss them with their feet, and making for them with open mouth, feign gently to swallow them, checking their closing teeth, they fondle them with growling voice in a way far other than when left alone in the house they bay, or when whining they shrink from a beating with cringing body.

[1073] Again, is not neighing seen to differ likewise, when a young stallion in the flower of his years rages among the mares, pricked by the spur of winged love, and from spreading nostrils snorts for the fray, and when, it may be, at other times he whinnies with trembling limbs?

[1078] Lastly, the tribe of winged fowls and the diverse birds, hawks and ospreys and gulls amid the sea-waves, seeking in the salt waters for life and livelihood, utter at other times cries far other than when they are struggling for their food and fighting for their prey. And some of them change their harsh notes with the weather, as the long-lived tribes of crows and flocks of rooks, when they are said to cry for water and rains, and anon to summon the winds and breezes.

[1087] And so, if diverse feelings constrain animals, though they are dumb, to utter diverse sounds, how much more likely is it that mortals should then have been able to mark off things unlike with one sound and another.

3. Universe works without control of Gods (Book One):

[1090] And if you learn this surely, and cling to it, nature is seen, free at once, and quit of her proud rulers, doing all things of her own accord alone, without control of gods. For by the holy hearts of the gods, which in their tranquil peace pass placid years, and a life of calm, who can avail to rule the whole sum of the boundless, who to hold in his guiding hand the mighty reins of the deep, who to turn round all firmaments at once, and warm all fruitful lands with heavenly fires, or to be at all times present in all places, so as to make darkness with clouds, and shake

the calm tracts of heaven with thunder, and then shoot thunderbolts, and often make havoc of his own temples, or moving away into deserts rage furiously there, plying the bolt, which often passes by the guilty and does to death the innocent and undeserving?

[1105] And since the time of the world's birth, and the first birthday of sea and earth, and the rising of the sun, many bodies have been added from without, and seeds added all around, which the great universe in its tossing has brought together; that from them sea and lands might be able to increase, and from them too the mansion of the sky might gain new room and lift its high vault far away from the lands, and the air might rise up. For from all places all bodies are separated by blows each to its own kind, and they pass on to their own tribes; moisture goes to moisture, with earthy substance earth grows, fires forge fires, and sky sky, until nature, parent of all, with perfecting hand has brought all things on to the last end of growing; as it comes to pass, when there is now no whit more which is sent within the veins of life, than what flows out and passes away. Here the growth of all things must stop, here nature by her powers curbs increase.

For whatsoever things you see waxing large with joyful increase, and little by little climbing the steps to full-grown years, take more into themselves than they send out from their body, so long as food is passed easily into all their veins, and so long as the things are not so widely spread that they throw off much, and cause waste greater than that on which their growth feeds. For of a surety you must throw up your hands and grant that many bodies flow away and pass from things; but more must needs be added to them, until they have reached the topmost point of increase. Then little by little age breaks their powers and their full-grown strength, and wastes away on the downhill path.

For verily the huger a thing is and the wider it is, when once its bulk begins to go, the more bodies now does it scatter abroad and throw off from itself, nor is its food easily dispersed into all its veins, nor is there store enough, whence matter may arise and be supplied to equal the vast ebb which it gives out. With reason then they perish, when all things have been made rare by the ebb, and yield before the blows from without, inasmuch as at last food fails the aged life, nor do bodies from without cease to thump upon it, and wear it away, and to overcome it with hostile blows.

[1144] Thus then even the walls of the wide world all round will be stormed and fall into decay and crumbling ruin. For it is food which must needs repair all things and renew them, food must support them, and food sustain all things; yet all is vain, since neither the veins can bear to receive what is enough, nor does nature furnish all that is needful. Yea, even now its life is broken, and the worn-out earth scarce creates tiny animals, though once it created all the tribes, and brought to birth huge bodies of wild beasts.

For it was no golden rope, I trow, which let down the races of living things from heaven above on to the fields, nor did the sea or the waves, that lash the rocks, create them, but the same earth conceived them, which now nourishes them of her substance. Moreover, at first by herself of her own accord she created for mortals the smiling crops and glad vine-plants, herself brought forth sweet fruits and glad pastures; which now scarce wax great, though aided by our

toil: we wear out our oxen and the strength of our husbandmen: we exhaust the iron ploughshare, though scarce supplied by the fields so much do they grudge their produce and increase our toil.