

Episode One Hundred Twenty-Nine - Letter to Pythocles 03 - The Implications Of the Epicurean Position On The Size of the Sun

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Welcome to Episode One Hundred Twenty Nine of Lucretius Today.

This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

I am your host Cassius, and together with our panelists from the EpicureanFriends.com forum, we'll walk you through the ancient Epicurean texts, and we'll 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.

If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

Today we continue [Epicurus' Letter to Pythocles](#) and we look at the implications of the Epicurean position on the size of the sun. Now let's join Joshua reading today's text:

BAILEY:

[91] The size of sun (and moon) and the other stars is for us what it appears to be; and in reality it is either (slightly) greater than what we see or slightly less or the same size: for so too fires on earth when looked at from a distance seem to the senses. And every objection at this point will easily be dissipated, if we pay attention to the clear vision, as I show in my books about nature.

[92] The risings and settings of the sun, moon, and other heavenly bodies may be due to kindling and extinction, the composition of the surrounding matter at the places of rising and setting being such as to lead to these results: for nothing in phenomena is against it. Or again, the effect in question might be produced by their appearance over the top of the earth, and again the interposition of the earth in front of them: for once more nothing in phenomena is against it.

Their motions may not impossibly be due to the revolution of the whole heaven, or else it may remain stationary, and they may revolve owing to the natural impulse towards the east, which was produced at the beginning of the world by an excessive heat owing to a spreading of

the fire which is always moving on to the regions nearest in succession.

[93] The tropics of sun and moon may be caused owing to an obliquity of the whole heaven, which is constrained into this position in the successive seasons; or equally well by an outward impulsion of a current of air, or because the appropriate material successively catches fire, as the former fails; or again, from the beginning this particular form of revolution may have been assigned to these stars, so that they move in a kind of spiral. For all these and kindred explanations are not at variance with any clear-seen facts, if one always clings in such departments of inquiry to the possible and can refer each point to what is in agreement with phenomena without fearing the slavish artifices of the astronomers.

HICKS:

[91] "The size of the sun and the remaining stars relatively to us is just as great as it appears. This he states in the eleventh book "On Nature." For, says he, if it had diminished in size on account of the distance, it would much more have diminished its brightness; for indeed there is no distance more proportionate to this diminution of size than is the distance at which the brightness begins to diminish. But in itself and actually it may be a little larger or a little smaller, or precisely as great as it is seen to be. For so too fires of which we have experience are seen by sense when we see them at a distance. And every objection brought against this part of the theory will easily be met by anyone who attends to plain facts, as I show in my work On Nature.

[92] And the rising and setting of the sun, moon, and stars may be due to kindling and quenching, provided that the circumstances are such as to produce this result in each of the two regions, east and west: for no fact testifies against this. Or the result might be produced by their coming forward above the earth and again by its intervention to hide them: for no fact testifies against this either.

And their motions may be due to the rotation of the whole heaven, or the heaven may be at rest and they alone rotate according to some necessary impulse to rise, implanted at first when the world was made ... and this through excessive heat, due to a certain extension of the fire which always encroaches upon that which is near it.

[93] The turnings of the sun and moon in their course may be due to the obliquity of the heaven, whereby it is forced back at these times. Again, they may equally be due to the contrary pressure of the air or, it may be, to the fact that either the fuel from time to time necessary has been consumed in the vicinity or there is a dearth of it. Or even because such a whirling motion was from the first inherent in these stars so that they move in a sort of spiral. For all such explanations and the like do not conflict with any clear evidence, if only in such details we hold fast to what is possible, and can bring each of these explanations into accord with the facts, unmoved by the servile artifices of the astronomers.