

Episode One Hundred Twenty-Seven - Letter to Pythocles 02 - The Formation of "Worlds"

Post by "Cassius" of July 2, 2022 at 3:20 PM

Here's an explicit reference in Lucretius Book 2 as to the essentially positive view that the forces of destruction do not forever prevail:

[541] But still, let me grant this too, let there be, if you will, some one thing unique, alone in the body of its birth, to which there is not a fellow in the whole wide world; yet unless there is an unlimited stock of matter, from which it might be conceived and brought to birth, it will not be able to be created, nor, after that, to grow on and be nourished.

Nay, in very truth, if I were to suppose this too, that the bodies creative of one single thing were limited as they tossed about the universe, whence, where, by what force, in what manner will they meet and come together in that vast ocean, that alien turmoil of matter? They have not, I trow, a plan for union, but as, when many a great shipwreck has come to pass, the great sea is wont to cast hither and thither benches, ribs, yards, prow, masts and swimming oars, so that along all the coasts of the lands floating stern-pieces are seen, giving warning to mortals, to resolve to shun the snares of the sea and its might and guile, nor trust it at any time, when the wiles of the windless waves smile treacherous; even so, if you once suppose that the first-beginnings of a certain kind are limited, then scattered through all time they must needs be tossed hither and thither by the tides of matter, setting towards every side, so that never can they be driven together and come together in union, nor stay fixed in union, nor take increase and grow; yet that each of these things openly comes to pass, fact proves for all to see, that things can be brought to birth and being born can grow. It is manifest then that there are, in any kind of things you will, infinite first-beginnings, by which all things are supplied.

[569] And so, neither can the motions of destruction prevail for ever, and bury life in an eternal tomb, nor yet can the motions of creation and increase for ever bring things to birth and preserve them. So war waged from time everlasting is carried on by the balanced strife of the first-beginnings. Now here, now there, the vital forces of things conquer and are conquered alike. With the funeral mingles the wailing which babies raise as they come to look upon the coasts of light; nor has night ever followed on day, or dawn on night, but that it has heard mingled with the baby's sickly wailings, the lament that escorts death and the black funeral.

.....

[991] And so, we are all sprung from heavenly seed; there is the one father of us all, from whom when live-giving earth, the mother, has taken within her the watery drops of moisture, teeming she brings forth the goodly crops and the glad trees and the race of men; she brings forth too all the tribes of the wild beasts, when she furnishes the food, on which all feed their bodies and pass a pleasant life and propagate their offspring; wherefore rightly has she won the name of mother. Even so, what once sprung from earth, sinks back into the earth, and what was sent down from the coasts of the sky, returns again, and the regions of heaven receive it.

Nor does death so destroy things as to put an end to the bodies of matter, but only scatters their union. Then she joins anew one with others, and brings it to pass that all things thus alter their forms, and change their colours, and receive sensations, and in an instant of time yield them up again, so that you may know that it matters with what others the first-beginnings of things are bound up and in what position and what motions they mutually give and receive, and may not think that what we see floating on the surface of things or at times coming to birth, and on a sudden passing away, can abide in the possession of eternal first-bodies. Nay, indeed, even in my verses it is of moment with what others and in what order each letter is placed. For the same letters signify sky, sea, earth, rivers, sun, the same too crops, trees, living creatures; if not all, yet by far the greater part, are alike, but it is by position that things sound different. So in things themselves likewise when meetings, motions, order, position, shapes are changed, things too are bound to be changed.