

The "Daily" Lucretian

Post by "Cassius" of October 8, 2019 at 8:49 AM

I need to finish the transcription of the 1743 Edition, so I am going to try to discipline myself to work on it daily to get through it. At present I am nearing the end of Book 2, so I think I will post the progress I make daily, and that may serve as a sort of daily "reading."

October 8: Book 2, Approx Line 770 - Lucretius is discussing the relationship between the properties of atoms and the qualities / events of the bodies which they compose, and he is pointing out how color is such an example:

That seeds may be void of color I have shown; I shall now prove that they actually are so. Now every color may be changed one into another; but the principles of things will by no means in admit of change, there necessarily must be something that remains immutable, lest all things should be utterly reduced to nothing; for whatsoever is changed, and breaks the bounds of its first nature, instantly dies, and is no more what first it was. Be cautious therefore, how you stain the seeds of things with color, lest all things should recur to nothing, and be utterly destroyed.

Besides, though Nature bestows no color upon seeds, yet they are endued with different figures, from which they form and vary the colors of every kind which show upon them. (For it is of great concern what seeds unite with others, and what positions they are preserved, and what motions they give and receive among themselves;) and thus you may readily account why things that just before appeared black, should suddenly look white. As the sea, when the rough winds enrage the waters, grows white with foaming waves. So you may say of what commonly appears black to us, when the seeds of which it is formed are mingled, and their order changed, when some new seeds are added, and some old ones are removed, the direct consequence is that its color is changed, and appears white. But if the water of the sea consisted essentially of blue particles, it could by no means change into a white color. Disturb the order of the seeds how you would, the principles that are blue would never pass into a white.

But if you say that the seeds which make the sea look of one uniform white are stained with different colors, as a perfect square that is one figure, is made up of several bodies that are of several figures, then it would follow that, as we perfectly see that dissimilar figures which the square contains within it, so we might discover in the water of the sea, or in any other body of one simple color, the mixed and different colors from which that simple color proceeds.

Besides, the dissimilar figures that go to make up a square do by no means hinder that the surface of the body should appear square, but a mixed variety of colors will forever prevent that the surface of any body should appear of one fixed and uniform color.

And then the very reason that would incline us sometimes to impute colors to seeds is by this means destroyed, or, in this case, white Bodies are not produced from white, or black from black, but from seeds of various colors. Now a white would much sooner proceed from seeds of no color at all, then from such as are black, or any other opposite color whatsoever.

Besides, since colors cannot appear without light, and since the seeds of things cannot appear in the light, you may thence conclude that they are covered with no colors at all. For how can any color show itself in the dark, which surround in the light itself, as it is differently struck either with a direct or oblique ray of light? After this manner, the plumes of doves, which grow about their neck, and are an ornament to it, show themselves in the sun. In one position they appear red like a fiery carbuncle, in another light, the greenness of the emerald is mixed with a sky blue. So, likewise, the tail of the peacock, all filled with light, changes its colors, as the rays strike directly or obliquely upon it. Since therefore colors are produced only by the strokes of light, we cannot suppose that they can possibly exist without it.

And since the eye receives within itself one sort of stroke with when it is said to perceive a white Color, and another contrary one, when it views an object of a black or any other color, and since it is of no moment by what color any thing you touch is distinguished, but rather of what peculiar shape and figure it is, you may conclude there is no manner of occasion that seeds should be stained with any colors, but that they should cause that variety of touch by the various figures with which they are imbued.

Besides, since there are no certain colors peculiar to certain figures, and since seeds of any figure may be of any color, whence is it that bodies that consist of such seeds are not in there several kinds imbued with all sorts of colors? It would be common to see crows, as they fly about, cast a white color from their white feathers, and black swans might be produced from black seeds, or be of any other one or more colors, as there seeds chance to be distinguished.

Further, the more any body is broken into small parts, the more you may perceive its color languishes by degrees, and dies away. This is the case of gold, when it is divided into thin shavings, its luster is extinguished, and the purple guy, by much the richest, when it is drawn out thread by thread, is quite lost. Hence you may infer that the particles of bodies discharge themselves of all color before they come to be as small as seeds.