

The "Daily" Lucretian

Post by "Cassius" of October 9, 2019 at 8:39 AM



Mankind's Place In the Universe

Now, I should be glad to know - since, without the walls of this world, the visible heavens - there lies an infinite space, what is contained there. This the Mind desires eagerly to search into, and, by its own vigor, to range over freely, and without obstruction.

And first, since there is no bound space in any part of it, on no side of it, neither above or below it, as I have proved, and the thing itself proclaims it, and the very nature of space confirms it; we are not to suppose, (since this space is infinitely extended every way, and the seeds innumerable fly about this mighty void in various manners, urged on by an eternal motion) that this one globe of Earth, and the visible heavens only, were created, and that so many seeds of matter that lie beyond do nothing; especially since this world was made naturally, and without design, and the seeds of things of their own accord, jostling together by variety of motions, rashly sometimes, in vain often, and to no purpose, at length suddenly agreed and united, and became the beginning of mighty productions, of the Earth, the Sea, and the Heavens, and the whole animal creation. Wherefore, it needs must be allowed, there were in many other places agreements and unions of the seeds of the same nature with this world of ours, surrounded as it is with the fast embraces of the heavens above.

Besides, since there is a large stock of matter already, and a place suitable, nor is there anything or cause to hinder and delay, things must necessarily be produced, and come into being. Now, since there is so great a plenty of seeds, that all the ages of men would not be sufficient to number them, and the same power, the same nature remains, that can dispose the seeds of things in any other place, by the same rule as that united in this world of ours, we must needs confess, that there are other worlds in other parts of the universe, possessed by other kinds of inhabitants, both of men and beasts.

Add to this, that in the universe there is no species that has but one of a sort, that is produced alone, that remain single, and grows up by itself; but whatever species things are of, there are many more individuals of the same kind. This you may observe in the animal creation, this you will find to be the state of the wild beasts, of the human race, of the silent fish, and the whole brood of birds. By the same reason you must own, that the heavens, the Earth, the Sun, the moon, the Sea, and all other beings that are, do not exist singly, but are rather innumerable in their kind; for every one of these have a proper limit fixed to their beings, and are equally bound by the general laws of nature, with all those whose species include a numerous train of individuals under them.

- Lucretius Book Two, line 1080

That graphic came at the end of my typing for today. Here's more of the context:

Again, since you allow that all bodies do not emit sound and smell, and not attribute sound and smell to every body; so, since we cannot discover every thing by our eyes, you may conclude there are some bodies as much void of color, as there are others without smell or sound; and a judicious mind can properly form a notion of such bodies void of color, as it can of others that are without smell or sound, or any other qualities whatsoever.

But lest you should conceive the first seeds are void only of color, you must know that they are without warmth, are altogether free from cold or heat, they emit no sound, are without moisture, nor do they send out any smell from their several bodies; so when you propose to compound a pleasant ointment of sweet marjoram, myrrh, and flowers of spikenard, that send out the richest odor up to the nose, the first thing you are to do is to choose, as far as it lies in your power, an oil that has no smell, that it may, as little as possible, infect and corrupt those few sweet ingredients, being mixed and digested with them, with its native rankness.

Lastly, the seeds do not bestow any smell upon the bodies they produce, nor any sound, for they can exhale nothing from themselves; and, for the same reason, they can communicate no taste, nor cold, nor any vapor hot or warm. You must separate all qualities from the seeds that render them liable to dissolution, such as viscous, brittle, hollow, which proceeded from qualities that are soft, putrid, and rare, the seeds must have nothing of these properties if you would fix them upon an eternal foundation, upon which alone depends the security of beings, lest all things should fall to nothing, and perish beyond recovery.

Now farther, those beings we see indued with sense, you must needs own are produced from insensible seeds; nor is there anything we perceive by common experience, which refutes or opposes this opinion. Everything rather leads us on, and compels us to believe that animals, I say, proceed from principles that are void of sense; for we observe living worms come into being from stinking dung, when the earth, moistened by unseasonable showers, grows putrid and rotten.

Besides, beings of all kinds undergo continual changes; the waters, the leaves, and the sweet grass turn themselves into beasts; the beasts convert their nature into human bodies; and the bodies of wild beasts and birds increase and grow strong by these bodies of ours. Nature therefore changes all sorts of food into living bodies; and hence she forms the senses of all creatures, much after the same manner as she quickens dry wood into fire, and sets everything in a blaze. You see now it is of the utmost importance in what order these first seeds are ranged, and, when mingled together, what motions they give, and receive among themselves.

But tell me, what is it that lays a force upon your mind? What moves you? What drives you into another opinion, that you should not believe a thing sensible can be formed from insensible seeds? Perhaps you observe that stones, and wood, and earth, when mingled together, can produce no creature indued with sense; but you will do well to remember, upon this occasion, that I did not say things sensible, or sense, could instantly proceed from all seeds in general, which go to the production of beings, but that it was of great consequence of what size the

seeds are that created a being of sense, with what figures, motions, order, and position they are distinguished. Nothing of which we observe in wood, or clods of Earth. Yet these, when they are made rotten by moisture, produce worms, because the particles of matter, being changed from their former course by some new cause, are so united and disposed, that living creatures are formed, and creep into being.

Besides, those who contend that a sensible being may be raised from sensible seeds, (and this you are taught by some philosophers), must needs allow those seeds to be soft; for all sense is joined to bowels, nerves, and veins, all which, we know, are soft, and consequently liable to change and dissolution.

But grant their seeds to be eternal, yet if they are sensible, each seed must be endued with sense, either as a part or a whole, and be like a complete animal of itself; but no single part can perceive or exist of itself, for each part requires a union with the other parts, to make it capable of sense, nor can the hand feel any more, or any other part retain its sense, when separated from the body. These seeds therefore must be perfect animals, and so unite together in a vital sensibility; but how then can be seeds be said to be eternal, and secure from death, when they have the nature of animals, and are one and the same with them in all respects, and therefore are mortal, and must die?

But allow these seeds to be sensible and Incorruptible too, yet, by their union and agreement, they can produce nothing but animals and things sensible; that is, mankind, and cattle, and wild beasts, can produce nothing but men, and cattle, and wild beasts. (How then could things insensible, such as trees, metals, have a being?)

If you say these seeds, in mingling together, lose their own proper sense, and assume another, what need you impute any sense at all to them, when they must lose it again? Besides, as we have proved before, since we perceive the eggs of birds are changing into living young, and that worms break out of the earth, when it is made rotten by unseasonable showers, we may conclude, that things sensible may arise from insensible seeds.

If anyone will assert here that sense indeed may proceed from insensible seeds, by sort of change made in the seeds, by virtue of the thing that generates, before the animal is formed, it will be sufficient plainly to show him, that no animal can be formed but by a union, first of the seeds, nor can anything be changed but by agreement of the seeds, so that there can be no such thing as sense in any body before the animal is completely formed. And for this reason: because the seeds lie scattered in the air, the water, the earth, the fire, nor have they yet united together, after a proper manner, into any vital motions by which the senses of any animal may be produced, in order to guide and preserve it.

Besides, a blow falling upon any animal, heavier than its nature can endure, immediately torments it, and confounds all its senses both of body and mind; for the connection of the seeds is dissolved, and the vital motions are wholly obstructed, till the force of the blow being agitated violently through the limbs dissolves the vital ties of the soul from the body, and compels her, scattered and broken to pieces, to fly out through every pore. For what can we

conceive to be the effect of such a stroke but to separate and dissolve the seeds that were united before?

And then it happens, when the blow falls with less violence, that the remains of vital motion often get the better, they recover and calm the great disorders of the blow, and recall everything again into its proper channel. They rescue the body, as it were, from the jaws of death, and give new life to the senses that were almost destroyed; else why should creatures rather return to life from the very gates of death with new spirits, than when they were just entering in, proceed on, and utterly perish?

Further, since we feel pain when the seeds are shaken from their natural state and situation within, and are disordered through all the bowels and limbs by any outward force, and when they return again into their proper place, a quiet pleasure immediately succeeds, you may conclude that simple seeds cannot be tormented with pain, nor of themselves be affected with pleasure; because they do not consist of principles or other seeds by whose violent motions they may be disturbed, or be delighted with any pleasure they can give; and therefore they cannot possibly be endued with any sense at all.

Again, if in order to produce creatures with sense, sense must be imputed to the seeds from which they are formed, of what principles, I pray, is the human race properly composed? Of such, no doubt, as laugh, and shake their little sides, such as bedew their face and cheeks with flowing tears, such as can widely talk how things are mixed, and such as search of what first principles themselves are formed; For all things that enjoy the faculties of perfect animals must consist of other seeds like them, and these must arise from others, and thus the progression would be infinite. I urge further, whatever you observe to speak, to laugh, to be wise, must proceed from other seeds that can perform the same; but if this be ridiculous and downright madness, and things that can laugh can spring from seeds that never smile, and the wise, that learnedly dispute, are produced from foolish seeds and stupid, what hinders that sensible things may not as well be formed from seeds without any matter of sense at all?

Lastly, we all spring from ethereal seed; we have all one common parent, when the kind Earth, our mother, receives the quickening drops of moisture from above, she conceives us and brings forth shining fruits, and pleasant trees, the human race, and all the race of beasts, she yields them proper food on which they feed, and lead a pleasant life, and propagate their kind, and therefore has she justly gained the name of mother. The parts that first from Earth arose return to Earth again; what descended from the sky, those parts brought back again that heavens receive; nor does death so put an end to beings as to destroy the very seeds of them, but only disunites them, then makes new combinations, and is the cause that all things vary their forms, and change their colors, become sensible, and in a moment lose all their sense again. You may know from hence of what importance it is, with what the first seeds of things are united, and in what position they are contained, and what are the several motions they give and take among themselves. And from hence you may conclude that these first seed are not the less eternal, because you perceive them floating, as it were, upon the surface of bodies, and subject to be born, and die. It is of like concern with what the several letters are joined in these verses of

mine, and in what order each of them is disposed; for the same letters make up the words to signify the heaven, the sea, the Earth, the rivers, the sun; the same express the fruits, the trees, the creatures; if they are not all, yet by much the greater part are alike, but they differ in their situation. So, likewise, in bodies, when the intervals of the seeds, their courses, connections, weights, strokes, union, motions, order, position, figure; when these things are changed, the things themselves must be changed likewise.

Now apply your mind closely to the documents of true reason, for a new scheme of philosophy presses earnestly for your attention, a new scene of things displays itself before you. Yet there is nothing so obvious but may at first view seem difficult to be believed, and there is nothing so prodigious and wonderful at first that men do not by degrees cease to admire. For see the bright and pure color of the sky, possessed on every side by wandering stars, and the Moon's splendor, and the Sun's glorious light; these, if they now first shown to mortal eyes, and suddenly presented to our view, what could more wonderful appear than these? And what before could men less presume to expect?

Nothing surely, so surprising would be the sight have been. But now, quite tired and cloyed with the prospect, none of us vouchsafes so much as to cast our eyes up towards the bright temples of the sky. Therefore do not be frightened, and conceive an aversion to an opinion because of its novelty; but search it rather with a more piercing judgment. If it appears true to you, embrace it; if false, set yourself against it.

Now, I should be glad to know, since, without the walls of this world, the visible heavens, there lies an infinite space, what is contained there. This the Mind desires eagerly to search into, and, by its own vigor, to range over freely, and without obstruction.

And first, since there is no bound to space in any part of it, on no side of it, neither above or below it, as I have proved, and the thing itself proclaims it, and the very nature of space confirms it; we are not to suppose, (since this space is infinitely extended every way, and the seeds innumerable fly about this mighty void in various manners, urged on by an eternal motion) that this one globe of Earth, and the visible heavens only, were created, and that so many seeds of matter that lie beyond do nothing; especially since this world was made naturally, and without design, and the seeds of things of their own accord, jostling together by variety of motions, rashly sometimes, in vain often, and to no purpose, at length suddenly agreed and united, and became the beginning of mighty productions, of the Earth, the Sea, and the Heavens, and the whole animal creation. Wherefore, it needs must be allowed, there were in many other places agreements and unions of the seeds of the same nature with this world of ours, surrounded as it is with the fast embraces of the heavens above.

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must needs confess, that there are other worlds in other parts of the universe, possessed by other kinds of inhabitants, both of men and beasts.

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