

Episode Eight - Step Two: Nothing Goes To Nothing

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Welcome to Episode Eight of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who lived in the age of Julius Caesar and 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 my panelists from the EpicureanFriends.com forum, we'll walk you line by line through the six books of Lucretius' poem, and discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. Be aware that none of us are professional philosophers, and everyone here is a self-taught Epicurean. 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.

Before we start with today's episode let me remind you of our three ground rules.

First: Our aim is to bring you an accurate presentation of [classical Epicurean philosophy](#) as the ancient Epicureans understood it, not to put our own opinions into the word of the poem.

Second: In this podcast we won't be talking about modern political issues. Over at the Epicureanfriends.com web forum, we call this approach "Not Neo-Epicurean, But Epicurean." Epicurean philosophy is not Stoicism, Humanism, Buddhism, Taoism, Atheism, or Marxism - it is a unique philosophy of its own, to be understood on its own terms, not in terms of conventional modern morality.

Third: Lucretius will show that Epicurus was not focused on over-the-top luxury, like some people say, but neither did he teach a minimalist lifestyle, as other people say. Epicurus taught that feeling - pleasure and pain - are the guides that Nature gave us to live by, not gods, idealism, or virtue ethics. More than anything else, Epicurus taught that the universe is not supernatural in any way, and that means there's no life after death, and any happiness we'll ever have comes in THIS life, which is why it is so important not to waste time in confusion.

Remember that our home page is LucretiusToday.com, and there you can find a free copy of the version of the poem from which we are reading, and links to where you can discuss the poem between episodes at Epicureanfriends.com.

In the episodes so far here are the major topics we have covered:

- That Pleasure, using the allegory of Venus, is the driving force of all life;
- That the way to rid ourselves of pain is to replace pain with pleasure, using the allegory of Venus entertaining Mars, the god of war;

- That Epicurus was the great philosophic leader who stood up to supernatural religion, opened the gates to a proper understanding of nature, , and thereby showed us how we too can emulate the life of gods;
- That it is not Epicurean philosophy, but supernatural religion, which is truly unholy and prompts men to commit evil deeds;
- That false priests and philosophers will try to scare you away from Epicurean philosophy with threats of punishment after death, which is why you must understand that those threats cannot be true;
- That the key to freeing yourself from false religion and false philosophy is found in the study of nature;
- And that the first observation which underlies all the rest of Epicurean philosophy is that we observe that **nothing is ever generated from nothing.**

Now that we are up to date let's start today's discussion!

This is the text that will be covered in Episode Eight. The Latin version of Book One has this as beginning at approximately line 137 which can be found in the [Munro Latin Edition here.](#)

[1743 Daniel Browne Edition \(click link for English and Latin\):](#)

Add, here, that Nature dissolves all bodies into their principles again, nor can reduce things into nothing.

For if every being was liable to death through all its substance, snatched from our eyes, it would directly perish; no need of violence to make a breach in all its parts, and loose the vital bands. But now, since things are formed from eternal seeds, Nature wills that nothing be destroyed unless some force prevails, which beats with blows its outward form, or pierces through the pores, with subtle art, and so dissolves the frame.

Besides, such things as are removed by age, if time destroys them quite in all its parts, whence does the Power of Love restore to light the several races of beings? Whence the Earth, with nicest art, does nourish them when born, and makes them grow, and feeds with proper food each its kind? Whence do the bounteous springs and rivers, with their wandering streams from far, supply the sea? The air whence feed the stars? For that vast tract of time already past had long ago consumed things that were formed from mortal seed. But if those bodies which compose this universe of things were still supplied through all that space and periods of time that passed long since, they must surely consist of an immortal nature, and, from death secure, can never into nothing fall.

Again, the same violence would everywhere destroy all beings, if the eternal power of matter did not hold fast their close compacted frame in bonds more strong or weak; a single touch would surely be the cause of death, for things formed out of mortal seed by any force must perish, and their frame be quite dissolved; but now, because the union of seeds of bodies differs, which consist of matter eternal in its nature, every being is safe from danger 'til some proper force, proportioned to its texture, makes the assault. So nothing can return to nothing;

every thing resolves by separation of its parts into its principles from whence it sprung.

Lastly, the rains that Father Aether pours into the womb of mother earth do seem to perish there, but strait fair fruits spring up; the boughs grow green upon the trees, their limbs increase, and bend beneath a load of fruit; hence all living race of men and beasts are fed, our gallant cities filled with youth, our leafy woods resound with songs of birds new fledged; the weary flocks grow fat, repose their bodies on the fertile plains, while the white milky humour from their dugs distended flows; and hence their sprightly young, in wanton play, frisk with their tender limbs over the soft grass, cheering their little hearts with the pure milk; and therefore things we see do not entirely die. Nature still renews one being by another, nor does she suffer one thing to be, unless supplied with matter from something else that was dissolved before.

Munro:

[216] Moreover nature dissolves every thing back into its first bodies and does not annihilate things.

[218] For if aught were mortal in all its parts alike, the thing in a moment would be snatched away to destruction from before our eyes; since no force would be needed to produce disruption among its parts and undo their fastenings. Whereas in fact, as all things consist of an imperishable seed, nature suffers the destruction of nothing to be seen, until a force has encountered it sufficient to dash things to pieces by a blow or to pierce through the void places within them and break them up.

[226] Again if time, whenever it makes away with things through age, utterly destroys them eating up all their matter, out of what does Venus bring back into the light of life the race of living things each after its kind, or, when they are brought back, out of what does earth manifold in works give them nourishment and increase, furnishing them with food each after its kind? Out of what do its own native fountains and extraneous rivers from far and wide keep full the sea? Out of what does ether feed the stars? For infinite time gone by and lapse of days must have eaten up all things which are of mortal body. Now if in that period of time gone by those things have existed, of which this sum of things is composed and recruited, they are possessed no doubt of an imperishable body, and cannot therefore any of them return to nothing.

[239] Again the same force and cause would destroy all things without distinction, unless everlasting matter held them together, matter more or less closely linked in mutual entanglement: a touch in sooth would be sufficient cause of death, inasmuch as any amount of force must of course undo the texture of things in which no parts at all were of an everlasting body. But in fact, because the fastenings of first-beginnings one with the other are unlike and matter is everlasting, things continue with body uninjured, until a force is found to encounter them strong enough to overpower the texture of each thing therefore never returns to nothing,

but all things after disruption go back into the first bodies of matter.

[251] Lastly, rains die, when father ether has tumbled them into the lap of mother earth; but then goodly crops spring up and boughs are green with leaves upon the trees, trees themselves grow and are laden with fruit; by them in turn our race and the race of wild beasts are fed, by them we see glad towns teem with children and the leafy forests ring on all sides with the song of new birds; through them cattle wearied with their load of fat lay their bodies down about the glad pastures and the white milky stream pours from the distended udders; through them a new brood with weakly limbs frisks and gambols over the soft grass, rapt in their young hearts with the pure new milk. None of the things therefore which seem to be lost is utterly lost, since nature replenishes one thing out of another and does not suffer any thing to be begotten, before she has been recruited by the death of some other.

Bailey:

[216] Then follows this, that nature breaks up each thing again into its own first-bodies, nor does she destroy ought into nothing.

[218] For if anything were mortal in all its parts, each thing would on a sudden be snatched from our eyes, and pass away. For there would be no need of any force, such as might cause disunion in its parts and unloose its fastenings. But as it is, because all things are put together of everlasting seeds, until some force has met them to batter things asunder with its blow, or to make its way inward through the empty voids and break things up, nature suffers not the destruction of anything to be seen.

[226] Moreover, if time utterly destroys whatsoever through age it takes from sight, and devours all its substance, how is it that Venus brings back the race of living things after their kind into the light of life, or when she has, how does earth, the quaint artificer, nurse and increase them, furnishing food for them after their kind? how is it that its native springs and the rivers from without, coming from afar, keep the sea full? how is it that the sky feeds the stars? For infinite time and the days that are gone by must needs have devoured all things that are of mortal body. But if in all that while, in the ages that are gone by, those things have existed, of which this sum of things consists and is replenished, assuredly they are blessed with an immortal nature; all things cannot then be turned to nought.

[239] And again, the same force and cause would destroy all things alike, unless an eternal substance held them together, part with part interwoven closely or loosely by its fastenings. For in truth a touch would be cause enough of death, seeing that none of these things would be of everlasting body, whose texture any kind of force would be bound to break asunder. But as it is, because the fastenings of the first-elements are variously put together, and their substance is everlasting, things endure with body unharmed, until there meets them a force proved strong enough to overcome the texture of each. No single thing then passes back to nothing, but all by dissolution pass back into the first-bodies of matter.

[251] Lastly, the rains pass away, when the sky, our father, has cast them headlong into the lap of earth, our mother; but the bright crops spring up, and the branches grow green upon the

trees, the trees too grow and are laden with fruit; by them next our race and the race of beasts is nourished, through them we see glad towns alive with children, and leafy woods on every side ring with the young birds' cry; through them the cattle wearied with fatness lay their limbs to rest over the glad pastures, and the white milky stream trickles from their swollen udders; through them a new brood with tottering legs sports wanton among the soft grass, their baby hearts thrilling with the pure milk. Not utterly then perish all things that are seen, since nature renews one thing from out another, nor suffers anything to be begotten, unless she be requited by another's death.