# Episode Ten - The Void And Its Nature

## Post by “Cassius” of March 9, 2020 at 11:11 PM

Welcome to Episode Ten 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 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 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.

Today's episode is the first of our episodes to be significantly impacted by the coronavirus episode, so we will be more brief than normal, in that Martin and I will be carrying the full show while we await several of our normal panelists to return hopefully next week.

For that reason Martin and I will begin the discussion of the void mainly by introducing the topic and its implications, and then in the next episode we'll dive more deeply into the details of the text.

So with that, Martin, please read the next section from Book One for us:

This is the text that will be covered in Episode Ten. The Latin version of Book One has this as beginning at approximately line 330 of the

Munro Latin Edition here.

1743 Daniel Browne Edition (click link for English and Latin):

And yet all beings are not formed of close and solid parts; in things there is a void, which in your searches into nature will be of use to know. This will preserve your wandering mind from doubt, prevent your constant toil by judging right of nature's laws, and make my words believed.

Wherefore there is a place we call a void, an empty space intangible, or else no bodies could be moved, or stir; the quality all bodies have to stop and to oppose does never fail, so that to move would be in vain to try, no body first by yielding would give way. But now we see before our eyes that things move various ways in seas, in Earth, and in the heaven above; but were there no void, they would not be deprived of that activity of motion only, but would not be at all; for matter wedged and crowded close on every side had ever been at rest.

Besides, though things appear of solid parts composed, yet you will find them, in some measure, formed of bodies that are rare; the liquid moisture of the water sweats through rocks and stones, and all things weep with drops abundant; the food that every creature eats disperses through the body; the trees increase and grow and in due season shew their fruit; because the juice is from the lowe roots spread through the trunk, and over all the boughs. Sounds pass through strong partitions, and fly quick through walls of houses, and the piercing cold strikes through the very bones; but were no void, no empty space, that bodies ever should pass, you'd find a thing impossible to prove.

Again, why do we see some things exceed others in weight, though of equal size? For if as much of body went to form a ball of wool as made a ball of lead, their weight would be the same; for the quality of body is to press downward: but a perfect void by nature has no weight; so that a body of equal size, but lighter in its weight, proves it has more of empty space. So again, the heavier body has more of solid parts 'tis plain, and has within it less of void. And this is doubtless what with reason's searching eye we look for, mixed with things; we call it space.

But I am forced to step before, and answer what some pretend, lest you should be seduced from truth: They say the waters yield to fish making their way, and open their liquid paths; for when the fish have left a space, that instant thither the yielding waters circling flow. By the same rule, all beings may be moved among themselves, and change their former place, though all things should be full: but this, 'tis plain, is false throughout; for how could fish advance at all, unless the waters gave them way? And whither should the waves retire, if the fish did not move, and leave a space behind? So that all bodies must be deprived of motion, or you must say a void is mixed with every thing from whence each being first derives a power to move.

Lastly, if two broad bodies meet, and instantly are separated again, the air must needs fill up the void that is between; but this air, though it should hurry with its swiftest powers, it cannot all at once fill up the space these bodies will disclose at parting; first the nearest part will be filled up, and then the more remote, until the whole be full.

If one should say when these flat bodies meet the air is condensed, but when they part the air is rarefied, 'tis a mistake; for then here must be void where there was none before, and that void that was before must now be full; in such a case, the air can't be condensed; and if it could, it can't without a void contract itself, and so reduce its parts into a closer space. Wherefore, perplex the matter as you please, you must confess in things there is a void.

**Munro:**

[330] And yet all things are not on all sides jammed together and kept in by body: there is also void in things. To have learned this will be good for you on many accounts; it will not suffer you to wander in doubt and be to seek in the sum of things and, distrustful of our words.

[335] If there were not void, things could not move at all; for that which is the property of body, to let and hinder, would be present to all things at all times; nothing therefore could go on,

since no other thing would be the first to give way. But in fact throughout seas and lands and the heights of heaven we see before our eyes many things move in many ways for various reasons, which things, if there were no void, I need not say would lack and want restless motion: they never would have been begotten at all, since matter jammed on all sides would have been at rest.

[347] Again however solid things are thought to be, you may yet learn from this that they are of rare body: in rocks and caverns the moisture of water oozes through and all things weep with abundant drops; food distributes itself through the whole body of living things; trees grow and yield fruit in season, because food is diffused through the whole from the very roots over the stem and all the boughs. Voices pass through walls and fly through houses shut, stiffening frost pierces to the bones. Now if there are no void parts, by what way can the bodies severally pass? You would see it to be quite impossible.

[359] Once more, why do we see one thing surpass another in weight though not larger in size? For if there is just as much body in a ball of wool as there is in a lump of lead, it is natural it should weigh the same, since the property of body is to weigh all things downwards, while on the contrary the nature of void is ever without weight. Therefore when a thing is just as large, yet is found to be void in it; while on the other hand that which is lighter, it proves sure enough that it has more of ‘heavier shows that there is in it more of body and that it contains within it much less of void. Therefore that which we are seeking with keen reason exists sure enough, mixed up in things; and we call it void.

[371] And herein I am obliged to forestall this point which some raise, lest it draw you away from the truth. The waters they say make way for the scaly creatures as they press on, and open liquid paths, because the fish leave room behind them, into which the yielding waters may stream; thus other things too may move and change place among themselves, although the whole sum be full. This you are to know has been taken up on grounds wholly false. For on what side I ask can the scaly creatures move forwards, unless the waters have first made room? Again on what side can the waters give place, so long as the fish are unable to go on? Therefore you must either strip all bodies of motion or admit that in things void is mixed up from which every thing gets its first start in moving.

[385] Lastly if two broad bodies after contact quickly spring asunder, the air must surely fill all the void which is formed between the bodies. Well however rapidly it stream together with swift-circling currents, yet the whole space will not be able to be filled up in one moment for it must occupy first one spot and then another, until the whole is taken up.

[391] But if haply any one supposes that, when the bodies have started asunder, that result follows because the air condenses, he is mistaken; for a void is then formed which was not before, and a void also is filled which existed before; nor can the air condense in such a way, nor supposing it could, could it methinks without void draw into itself and bring its parts together. Wherefore however long you hold out by urging many objections, you must needs in the end admit that there is a void in things.

**Bailey:**

[330] And yet all things are not held close pressed on every side by the nature of body; for there is void in things. To have learnt this will be of profit to you in dealing with many things; it will save you from wandering in doubt and always questioning about the sum of things, and distrusting my words.

[335] There is then a void, mere space untouchable and empty. For if there were not, by no means could things move; for that which is the office of body, to offend and hinder, would at every moment be present to all things; nothing, therefore, could advance, since nothing could give the example of yielding place. But as it is, through seas and lands and the high tracts of heaven, we descry many things by many means moving in diverse ways before our eyes, which, if there were not void, would not so much be robbed and baulked of restless motion, but rather could in no way have been born at all, since matter would on every side be in close-packed stillness.

[347] Again, however solid things may be thought to be, yet from this you can discern that they are of rare body. In rocky caverns the liquid moisture of water trickles through, and all weeps with copious dripping: food spreads itself this way and that into the body of every living thing: trees grow and thrust forth their fruit in due season, because the food is dispersed into every part of them from the lowest roots through the stems and all the branches. Noises creep through walls and fly through the shut places in the house, stiffening cold works its way to the bones: but were there no empty spaces, along which each of these bodies might pass, you would not see this come to pass by any means.

[359] Again, why do we see one thing surpass another in weight, when its size is no whit bigger? For if there is as much body in a bale of wool as in lead, it is natural it should weigh as much, since ’tis the office of body to press all things downwards, but on the other hand the nature of void remains without weight. So because it is just as big, yet seems lighter, it tells us, we may be sure, that it has more void; but on the other hand the heavier thing avows that there is more body in it and that it contains far less empty space within. Therefore, we may be sure, that which we are seeking with keen reasoning, does exist mingled in things—that which we call void.

[371] Herein lest that which some vainly imagine should avail to lead you astray from the truth, I am constrained to forestall it. They say that the waters give place to the scaly creatures as they press forward and open up a liquid path, because the fishes leave places behind, to which the waters may flow together as they yield: and that even so other things too can move among themselves and change place, albeit the whole is solid. In very truth this is all believed on false reasoning. For whither, I ask, will the scaly creatures be able to move forward, unless the waters have left an empty space? again, whither will the waters be able to give place, when the fishes cannot go forward? either then we must deny motion to every body, or we must say that void is mixed with things, from which each thing can receive the first start of movement.

[385] Lastly, if two broad bodies leap asunder quickly from a meeting, surely it must needs be that air seizes upon all the void, which comes to be between the bodies. Still, however rapid the rush with which it streams together as its currents hasten round, yet in one instant the whole empty space cannot be filled: for it must needs be that it fills each place as it comes, and then at last all the room is taken up.

[391] But if by chance any one thinks that when bodies have leapt apart, then this comes to be because the air condenses, he goes astray; for in that case that becomes empty which was not so before, and again that is filled which was empty before, nor can air condense in such a way, nor, if indeed it could, could it, I trow, without void draw into itself and gather into one all its parts.

[401] Wherefore, however long you hang back with much objection, you must needs confess at last that there is void in things