

Episode Twelve - Nothing But Combinations Of Matter And Void

Post by "Cassius" of March 22, 2020 at 6:46 PM

Welcome to Episode Twelve of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, the author of "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 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: 1: Our focus is on [Classical Epicurean Philosophy](#) as the ancient Epicureans understood it, not on how modern commentators interpret it today. 2. Our approach is "Not Neo-Epicurean, But Epicurean," and we aren't going to try to sell you Stoicism, Humanism, Buddhism, or Marxism. Epicurus was unique and we aren't going to put him in a box of conventional modern morality. 3. We don't approach Epicurus as either a minimalist or as a hedonist or an atheist as those terms are commonly used. We're going to study Epicurean philosophy exactly as Lucretius taught it, and that means that feeling - pleasure and pain - are the guides that Nature gave us to live by, not gods, idealism, or virtue ethics, and it also means that supernatural does not exist, which 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.

In episode twelve we will continue our discussion of the void, and introduce the issue of the properties and qualities of material things, and what that means for issues such as time, and for existence and non-existence. We will be discussing this over several episodes, and we hope you'll join us as we continue through Book One.

Now let's get started with today's discussion, with Charles reading the first part of today's text, followed by Elayne with the second part:

Here is the text that will be covered in Episode Twelve. The Latin version of Book One has this as beginning at approximately line 330 of the [Munro Latin Edition here](#).

[Review the prior sections of Book 1 of Daniel Browne by clicking here.](#)

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

[401] I could by many arguments confirm this system of a void, and fix your faith to what I say, but these small tracks I have drawn, to such a searching mind, will be enough; the rest you may find out without a guide. For as staunch hounds, once put upon the foot, will by nose soon rouse the mountain game from their thick covers, so you, in things like these, will one thing by another trace, will hunt for truth in every dark recess, and draw her thence.

[411] But if you doubt, or in the least object to what I say, I freely promise this, my Memmius, my tuneful tongue shall, from the mighty store that fills my heart, pour out such plenteous draughts from the deep springs, that tardy age I fear will first creep through my limbs, and quite break down the gates of life, before I can explain in verse the many arguments that give a light to one particular. But now I shall go on to finish regularly what I begun.

[420] All nature therefore, in itself considered, is one of these, is body or is space, in which all things are placed, and from which the various motions of all beings spring. That there is body common sense will show, this as a fundamental truth must be allowed, or there is nothing we can fix as certain in our pursuit of hidden things, by which to find the Truth, or prove it when 'tis found. Then if there were no place or space, we call it void, bodies would have no where to be, nor could they move at all, as we have fully proved to you before.

[431] Besides, there is nothing you can strictly say, "It is neither body nor void," which you may call a third degree of things distinct from these. For every being must in quantity be more or less; and if it can be touched, though ne'er so small or light, it must be body, and so esteemed; but if it can't be touched, and has not in itself a power to stop the course of other bodies as they pass, this is the void we call an empty space.

[439] Again, whatever is must either act itself, or be by other agents acted on; or must be something in which other bodies must have a place and move; but nothing without body can act, or be acted on; and where can this be done, but in a vacuum or empty space? Therefore, beside what body is or space, no third degree in nature can be found, nothing that ever can affect our sense, or by the power of thought can be conceived. All other things you'll find essential conjuncts, or else the events or accidents of these. I call essential conjunct what's so joined to a thing that it cannot, without fatal violence, be forced or parted from it; is weight to stones, to fire heat, moisture to the Sea, touch to all bodies, and not to be touched essential is to void. But, on the contrary, Bondage, Liberty, Riches, Poverty, War, Concord, or the like, which not affect the nature of the thing, but when they come or go, the thing remains entire; these, as it is fit we should, we call Events.

[460] Time likewise of itself is nothing; our sense collects from things themselves what has been done long since, the thing that present is, and what's to come. For no one, we must own, ever thought of Time distinct from things in motion or at rest.

[465] For when the poets sing of Helen's rape, or of the Trojan State subdued by war, we must not say that these things do exist now in themselves, since Time, irrevocably past, has long

since swept away that race of men that were the cause of those events; for every act is either properly the event of things, or of the places where those things are done.

[472] Further, if things were not of matter formed, were there no place or space where things might act, the fire that burned in Paris' heart, blown up by love of Helen's beauty, had never raised the famous contests of a cruel war; nor had the wooden horse set Troy on fire, discharging from his belly in the night the armed Greeks: from whence you plainly see that actions do not of themselves subsist, as bodies do, nor are in nature such as is a void, but rather are more justly called the events of body, and of space, where things are carried on.

Munro:

[401] And many more arguments I may state to you in order to accumulate proof on my words; but these slight footprints are enough for a keen-searching mind to enable you by yourself to find out all the rest. For as dogs often discover by smell the lair of a mountain-ranging wild beast though covered over with leaves, when once they have got on the sure tracks, thus you in cases like this will be able by yourself alone to see one thing after another and find your way into all dark corners and draw forth the truth.

[411] But if you lag or swerve a jot from the reality, this I can promise you, Memmius, without more ado: such plenteous draughts from abundant wellsprings my sweet tongue shall pour from my richly furnished breast, that I fear slow age will steal over our limbs and break open in us the fastnesses of life, ere the whole store of reasons on any one question has by my verses been dropped into your ears. But now to resume the thread of the design which I am weaving in verse.

[420] All nature then, as it exists by itself, is founded on two things: there are bodies and there is void in which these bodies are placed and through which they move about. For that body exists by itself the general feeling of man kind declares; and unless at the very first belief in this be firmly grounded, there will be nothing to which we can appeal on hidden things in order to prove anything by reasoning of mind. Then again, if room and space which we call void did not exist, bodies could not be placed anywhere nor move about at all to any side; as we have demonstrated to you a little before.

[431] Moreover there is nothing which you can affirm to be at once separate from all body and quite distinct from void, which would so to say count as the discovery of a third nature. For whatever shall exist, this of itself must be something or other. Now if it shall admit of touch in however slight and small a measure, it will, be it with a large or be it with a little addition, provided it do exist, increase the amount of body and join the sum. But if it shall be intangible and unable to hinder any thing from passing through it on any side, this you are to know will be that which we call empty void.

[439] Again whatever shall exist by itself, will either do something or will itself suffer by the action of other things, or will be of such a nature as things are able to exist and go on in. But no thing can do and suffer without body, nor ought furnish room except void and vacancy.

Therefore beside void and bodies no third nature taken by itself can be left in the number of things, either such as to fall at any time under the ken of our senses or such as any one can grasp by the reason of his mind. For whatever things are named, you will either find to be properties linked to these two things or you will see to be accidents of these things. That is a property which can in no case be disjoined and separated without utter destruction accompanying the severance, such as the weight of a stone, the heat of fire, the fluidity of water. Slavery on the other hand, poverty and riches, liberty war concord and all other things which may come and go while the nature of the thing remains unharmed, these we are wont, as it is right we should, to call accidents.

[460] Time also exists not by itself, but simply from the things which happen the sense apprehends what has been done in time past, as well as what is present and what is to follow after. And we must admit that no one feels time by itself abstracted from the motion and calm rest of things.

[465] So when they say that the daughter of Tyndarus was ravished and the Trojan nations were subdued in war, we must mind that they do not force us to admit that these things are by themselves, since those generations of men, of whom these things were accidents, time now gone by has irrevocably swept away. For whatever shall have been done may be termed an accident in one case of the Teucran people, in another of the countries simply.

[472] Yes for if there had been no matter of things and no room and space in which things severally go on, never had the fire, kindled by love of the beauty of Tyndarus' daughter, blazed beneath the Phrygian breast of Alexander and lighted up the famous struggles of cruel war, nor had the timber horse unknown to the Trojans wrapt Pergama in flames by its night-issuing brood of sons of the Greeks; so that you may clearly perceive that all actions from first to last exist not by themselves and are not by themselves in the way that body is, nor are terms of the same kind as void is, but are rather of such a kind that you may fairly call them accidents of body and of the room in which they severally go on.

Bailey:

And besides by telling you many an instance, I can heap up proof for my words. But these light footprints are enough for a keen mind: by them you may detect the rest for yourself. For as dogs ranging over mountains often find by scent the lairs of wild beasts shrouded under leafage, when once they are set on sure traces of their track, so for yourself you will be able in such themes as this to see one thing after another, to win your way to all the secret places and draw out the truth thence.

[411] But if you are slack or shrink a little from my theme, this I can promise you, Memmius, on my own word: so surely will my sweet tongue pour forth to you bounteous draughts from the deep well-springs out of the treasures of my heart, that I fear lest sluggish age creep over our limbs and loosen within us the fastenings of life, before that the whole store of proofs on one single theme be launched in my verses into your ears.

[420] But now, to weave again at the web, which is the task of my discourse, all nature then, as it is of itself, is built of these two things: for there are bodies and the void, in which they are placed and where they move hither and thither. For that body exists is declared by the feeling which all share alike; and unless faith in this feeling be firmly grounded at once and prevail, there will be naught to which we can make appeal about things hidden, so as to prove aught by the reasoning of the mind. And next, were there not room and empty space, which we call void, nowhere could bodies be placed, nor could they wander at all hither and thither in any direction; and this I have above shown to you but a little while before.

[431] Besides these there is nothing which you could say is parted from all body and sundered from void, which could be discovered, as it were a third nature in the list. For whatever shall exist, must needs be something in itself; and if it suffer touch, however small and light, it will increase the count of body by a bulk great or maybe small, if it exists at all, and be added to its sum. But if it is not to be touched, inasmuch as it cannot on any side check anything from wandering through it and passing on its way, in truth it will be that which we call empty void.

[439] Or again, whatsoever exists by itself, will either do something or suffer itself while other things act upon it, or it will be such that things may exist and go on in it. But nothing can do or suffer without body, nor afford room again, unless it be void and empty space. And so besides void and bodies no third nature by itself can be left in the list of things, which might either at any time fall within the purview of our senses, or be grasped by any one through reasoning of the mind. For all things that have a name, you will find either properties linked to these two things or you will see them to be their accidents. That is a property which in no case can be sundered or separated without the fatal disunion of the thing, as is weight to rocks, heat to fire, moisture to water, touch to all bodies, intangibility to the void. On the other hand, slavery, poverty, riches, liberty, war, concord, and other things by whose coming and going the nature of things abides untouched, these we are used, as is natural, to call accidents.

[460] Even so time exists not by itself, but from actual things comes a feeling, what was brought to a close in time past, then what is present now, and further what is going to be hereafter. And it must be avowed that no man feels time by itself apart from the motion or quiet rest of things.

[465] Then again, when men say that 'the rape of Tyndarus's daughter', or 'the vanquishing of the Trojan tribes in war' are things, beware that they do not perchance constrain us to avow that these things exist in themselves, just because the past ages have carried off beyond recall those races of men, of whom, in truth, these were the accidents. For firstly, we might well say that whatsoever has happened is an accident in one case of the countries, in another even of the regions of space.

[472] Or again, if there had been no substance of things nor place and space, in which all things are carried on, never would the flame of love have been fired by the beauty of Tyndaris, nor swelling deep in the Phrygian heart of Alexander have kindled the burning battles of savage war, nor unknown of the Trojans would the timber horse have set Pergama aflame at dead of night, when the sons of the Greeks issued from its womb. So that you may see clearly that all

events from first to last do not exist, and are not by themselves like body, nor can they be spoken of in the same way as the being of the void, but rather so that you might justly call them the accidents of body and place, in which they are carried on, one and all.