

Episode Thirty-Six - No Single Thing of A Kind: Earth Not The Only Home of Life

Post by "Cassius" of September 12, 2020 at 9:00 AM

Welcome to Episode Thirty-Six of Lucretius Today.

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, here are three ground rules.

First: Our aim is to bring you an accurate presentation of [classical Epicurean philosophy](#) as the ancient Epicureans understood it, which may or may not agree with what you here about Epicurus at other places today.

Second: We aren't talking about Lucretius with the goal of promoting any modern political perspective. Epicurus must be understood on his own, and not in terms of competitive schools which may seem similar to Epicurus, but are fundamentally different and incompatible, such as Stoicism, Humanism, Buddhism, Taoism, Atheism, and Marxism.

Third: The essential base of Epicurean philosophy is a fundamental view of the nature of the universe. When you read the words of Lucretius you will find that Epicurus did not teach the pursuit of virtue or of luxury or of simple living. or science, as ends in themselves, but rather the pursuit of pleasure. From this perspective it is **feeling** which is the guide to life, and not supernatural gods, idealism, or virtue ethics. And as important as anything else, Epicurus taught that there is no life after death, and that any happiness we will ever have must come in THIS life, which is why it is so important not to waste time in confusion.

Now let's join the discussion with today's text:

Latin Text Location 1048-1104

[Munro Notes](#)

Munro Summary:

1048-1066: space then being unlimited on all sides and atoms infinite in number, it is not likely this world should be the only one in being, since it was formed by a mere chance combination

of atoms: there are then in other parts of space other like combinations of matter.

1077-1089: again there is nothing that is sole in its kind, man beast bird or fish ; and so is it also with heavens earths seas suns and moons; they are all without number; since they have all birth and death on the same conditions as each thing here on earth.

1090-1104: the knowledge of these things will rid you of fear of the gods; for how could any being rule these numberless heavens and earths ? how could he hurl his bolts at once in so many places, bolts which often destroy the innocent and miss the wicked ?

Browne:

Now turn your mind, I pray, to a true reasoning. For a truth wondrously new is struggling to fall upon your ears, and a new face of things to reveal itself. Yet neither is anything so easy, but that at first it is more difficult to believe, and likewise nothing is so great or so marvelous but that little by little all decrease their wonder at it. First of all the bright clear colour of the sky, and all it holds within it, the stars that wander here and there, and the moon and the sheen of the sun with its brilliant light; all these, if now they had come to being for the first time for mortals, if all unforeseen they were in a moment placed before their eyes, what story could be told more marvelous than these things, or what that the nations would less dare to believe beforehand? Nothing, I trow: so worthy of wonder would this sight have been. Yet think how no one now, wearied with satiety of seeing, deigns to gaze up at the shining quarters of the sky! Wherefore cease to spew out reason from your mind, struck with terror at mere newness, but rather with eager judgement weigh things, and, if you see them true, lift your hands and yield, or, if it is false, gird yourself to battle

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. 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.

These things, if you rightly apprehend, Nature will appear free in her operations, wholly from under the power of domineering deities, and to act all things voluntarily, and of herself, without the assistance of gods. For Oh - the undisturbed bosoms of the powers above, blessed with sacred peace! How they live in everlasting ease, a life void of care! Who can rule this infinite Universe? Who has the power to hold the mighty reigns of government in his hands over this whole mass? Who likewise can turn about all these heavens? And cherish all these fruitful globes of Earth with celestial heat? Who can be present at all times, and in all places? To darken the world with clouds, to shake the vast expansion of the serene heavens with noise; to dart the thunder, and often overturn his own temples, to fly into the wilderness, and furiously brandish that fiery bolt, which often passes by the guilty, and strikes dead the innocent and undeserving?

Munro:

For since the sum of space is unlimited outside beyond these walls of the world, the mind seeks to apprehend what there is yonder there, to which the spirit ever yearns to look forward, and to which the mind's emission reaches in free and unembarrassed flight. In the first place we see that round in all directions, about above and underneath, throughout the universe there is no bound, as I have shown and as the thing of itself proclaims with loud voice and as clearly shines out in the nature of bottomless space. In no wise then can it be deemed probable, when space yawns illimitable towards all points and seeds in number numberless and sum unfathomable fly about in manifold ways driven on in ceaseless motion, that this single earth and heaven have been brought into being, that those bodies of matter so many in number do nothing outside them; the more so that this world has been made by nature, just as the seeds of things have chanced spontaneously to clash, after being brought together in manifold wise without purpose, without foresight, without result, and at last have filtered through such seeds as, suddenly thrown together, were fitted to become on each occasion the rudiments of great things, of earth sea and heaven and the race of living things. Wherefore again and again I say you must admit that there are elsewhere other combinations of matter like to this with ether holds in its greedy grasp. Again when much matter is at hand, when room is there and there is no thing, no

cause to hinder, things sure enough must go on and be completed. Well, then, if on the one hand there is so great a store of seeds as the whole life of living creatures cannot reckon up, and if the same force and nature abide in them and have the power to throw the seeds of things together into their several places in the same way as they are thrown together into our world, you must admit that in other parts of space there -are other earths and various races of men and kinds of wild beasts.

Moreover in the sum of all there is no one thing which is begotten single in its kind and grows up single and sole of its kind; but a thing always belongs to some class and there are many other things in the same kind. First, in the case of living things, most noble Memmius, you will find that in this sort has been begotten the mountain-ranging race of wild beasts, in this sort the breed of men, in this sort too the mute shoals of scaly creatures and all bodies of fowls. Therefore on a like principle you must admit that earth, and sun, moon, sea, and all things else that are, are not single in their kind, but rather in number past numbering; since the deep-set boundary-mark of life just as much awaits these and they are just as much of a body that had birth, as any class of things which here on earth abounds in samples of its kind.

If you well apprehend and keep in mind these things, nature free at once and rid of her haughty lords is seen to do all things spontaneously of herself without the meddling of the gods. For I appeal to the holy breasts of the gods who in tranquil peace pass a calm time and an unruffled existence, who can rule the sum, who can hold in his hand with controlling force the strong reins, of the immeasurable deep? Who can at once make all the different heavens to roll and warm with ethereal fires all the fruitful earths, or be present in all places at all times, to bring darkness with clouds and shake with noise the heaven's serene expanse, to hurl lightnings and often throw down his own temples, and withdrawing into the deserts there to spend his rage in practicing his bolt which often passes the guilty by and strikes dead the innocent and unoffending?

Bailey:

For our mind now seeks to reason, since the sum of space is boundless out beyond the walls of this world, what there is far out there, whither the spirit desires always to look forward, and whither the unfettered projection of our mind flies on unchecked. First of all, we find that in every direction everywhere, and on either side, above and below, through all the universe, there is no limit, as I have shown, and indeed the truth cries out for itself and the nature of the deep shines clear. Now in no way must we think it likely, since towards every side is infinite empty space, and seeds in unnumbered numbers in the deep universe fly about in many ways driven on in everlasting motion, that this one world and sky was brought to birth, but that beyond it all those bodies of matter do naught; above all, since this world was so made by nature, as the seeds of things themselves of their own accord, jostling from time to time, were driven together in many ways, rashly, idly, and in vain, and at last those united, which, suddenly cast together, might become ever and anon the beginnings of great things, of earth and sea and sky, and the race of living things. Wherefore, again and again, you must needs confess that there are here and there other gatherings of matter, such as is this, which the

ether holds in its greedy grip. Moreover, when there is much matter ready to hand, when space is there, and no thing, no cause delays, things must, we may be sure, be carried on and completed. As it is, if there is so great a store of seeds as the whole life of living things could not number, and if the same force and nature abides which could throw together the seeds of things, each into their place in like manner as they are thrown together here, it must needs be that you confess that there are other worlds in other regions, and diverse races of men and tribes of wild beasts.

This there is too that in the universe there is nothing single, nothing born unique and growing unique and alone, but it is always of some tribe, and there are many things in the same race. First of all turn your mind to living creatures; you will find that in this wise is begotten the race of wild beasts that haunts the mountains, in this wise the stock of men, in this wise again the dumb herds of scaly fishes, and all the bodies of flying fowls. Wherefore you must confess in the same way that sky and earth and sun, moon, sea, and all else that exists, are not unique, but rather of number numberless; inasmuch as the deep-fixed boundary-stone of life awaits these as surely, and they are just as much of a body that has birth, as every race which is here on earth, abounding in things after its kind.

And if you learn this surely, and cling to it, nature is seen, free at once, and quit of her proud rulers, doing all things of her own accord alone, without control of gods. For by the holy hearts of the gods, which in their tranquil peace pass placid years, and a life of calm, who can avail to rule the whole sum of the boundless, who to hold in his guiding hand the mighty reins of the deep, who to turn round all firmaments at once, and warm all fruitful lands with heavenly fires, or to be at all times present in all places, so as to make darkness with clouds, and shake the calm tracts of heaven with thunder, and then shoot thunderbolts, and often make havoc of his own temples, or moving away into deserts rage furiously there, plying the bolt, which often passes by the guilty and does to death the innocent and undeserving?