

Episode Forty-Three - The Mind is Born, Grows Old, and Dies With the Body

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Welcome to Episode Forty-Three 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.

For anyone who is not familiar with our podcast, please check back to [Episode One](#) for a discussion of our goals and our ground rules. If you have any question about that, please be sure to contact us at Epicureanfriends.com for more information.

In today's episode, we will cover roughly lines 445 - 547 from Book 3 of the Latin Text. The topic will be how the mind is born, grows old, and dies with the body.

Munro Notes:

445-458: again the mind is born with the body, grows with it, decays with it : in the child it is weak, in the man strong, in the aged again childish: it is natural then it should die also with the body.

459— 525: again, as the body is liable to disease, so is the mind to cares and fears ; therefore it should partake with the other of death: again when the body is ill, the mind often wanders and is senseless before death ; it ought then to die, since disease reaches it ; for that which feels disease must die : again in drunkenness the mind shares in the disorder of the body ; but if it can thus be disordered, it may be killed by a more powerful cause : again in a fit of epilepsy, the sinews stiffen, the man foams at the mouth and the like; his mind is at the same time disordered by the attack ; then when the fit is over he rises up reeling and gradually comes to his senses : when the mind then is thus tempest-tost in bodily disease, how could it battle for ever with storms in the open air? again the mind may be healed like the body; it is therefore mortal; for that which is immortal allows not of any changing or shifting of parts: the healing therefore of the mind by medicine and its suffering from disease both alike prove it to be mortal.

526-547: again a man often loses sense and life limb by limb ; the soul then thus severed and lost must be mortal : or if you say it draws itself together from all the limbs, then the spot in

which it is thus gathered ought to have a livelier sense; but this is not so; it therefore disperses, that is dies: nay grant that it can contract itself, you must admit it to be mortal, for equally in this case it gradually deadens, and sense and life quit the man.

Browne:

Besides, we perceive the soul is born with the body, grows up with it, and both wax old together. For as children are of a weak and tender body, their mind likewise is of the same frail complexion. As their age improves, and their strength is more confirmed, their judgment ripens more, and the powers of their mind are more enlarged. But when the body is shaking by the irresistible stroke of time, and the limbs fail without strength, the understanding grows lame, the tongue and the mind lose their vigor, all the faculties fail, and go away together. The whole nature of the soul therefore must needs be dissolved, and scattered like smoke into the air, since we see it is born with the body, increases together with it, and with it, as I said before, becomes feeble by age, and decays.

Add to this, that the body is subject to violent diseases and tormenting pains, so the mind is affected by sharp cares, by griefs and fear, and therefore must equally partake of death and dissolution with it. And then, in great disorders of the body, the mind frequently grows mad, raves, and talks wildly; sometimes it is sunk into such a profound and never-ending sleep by a heavy lethargy, the eyes shut, and the head nodding, so that neither hears the words, nor is able to distinguish the face of those who stand about bedewing their cheeks with tears, and striving to recall the departing breath. Wherefore you must needs allow that the mind may be dissolved, since the infection of the disease pierces through it; for grief and diseases are both the causes of death, as we are taught by experience in a thousand instances. And again, why is it, when the quick force of wine strikes through a man, and the insinuating heat works in all his veins, why follows a heaviness of the limbs? The legs no longer support the reeling body, the tongue falters, the mind is drowned, the eyes swim; noise, hiccups, brawlings deafen your ears, and many other evils, the consequence of such debauches; how could this be, did not the impetuous force of the wine distract the soul as it lies diffused through the body?

Now whatever can be thus disturbed, and hindered in its operations, would (were the force to grow more violent) be destroyed and utterly deprived of future being. Besides, a person surprised with a sudden fit of a disease drops down before our eyes as if he were thunderstruck. He foams, he groans and trembles all over, he is distracted, stretches his nerves, is distorted; he pants, he tosses and tires his limbs with strange and unnatural postures. The reason is because the force of the disease, driven violently through the limbs, agitates and disturbs the mind, as the foaming waves of the sea are enraged by the strong blast of winds. And then groans are forced from the wretch, because the limbs are tormented with pain, and the seeds of the voice are thrown out from the bottom of the breast, and hurried in confusion, without any distinct accent through the mouth. The man raves, because the powers of the mind and soul are distracted, and their principles, as I said, broken, disjointed, and divided by the violence of the distemper. But when the cause of the disease gives way, and the black humor of the corrupt body retires into some convenient vessel, then the patient

begins to rise, feeble and staggering; and by degrees returns to all his senses, and recovers life. Since therefore this soul is so tossed about with such strange disorders, and labors with such agonies in so miserable a manner, as it is enclosed in the body, how do you think it can subsist without the body in the open air, and exposed forever to the raging fury of all the winds?

And since we see the mind can be made sound, and be affected by the powers of medicine, as well as a disordered body, this is a strong evidence that the mind is mortal; for whoever attempts to make any alteration in the mind, or offers to change the nature of any other thing, must either add some new parts to it, or take off some of the old, or else transpose the former order and situation; but what is immortal can have nothing added to it, or taken from it, nor will admit of any change in the order of its parts: for whatever is so altered as to leave the limits of its first nature, is no more what it was, but instantly dies. The mind, therefore, whether it be distempered, or relieved by medicine, shows (as I observed) strong symptoms of its mortality. So evidently does the true matter of fact overthrow all false reasoning, that there is no possibility to escape its force; and the contrary opinion is either way fully refuted.

Besides, we often seen men perish by degrees, and lose their vital sense limb by limb; first, the nails and toes grow black, then the feet and legs rot; at length the traces of cold death proceed on, step by step, over the other parts of the body. Since therefore the soul is divided, and does not at such a time continue whole and entire, you must pronounce it mortal. But if you think the soul retires out of the dying members into the more inward parts of the body, and contracts its seeds into one place, and so withdraws the sense from the rest of the limbs, yet that place to which the soul retreats, and where so much of it is crowded together, ought to enjoy a more lively and brisker sense; but, since there is no such place, it is plain, as we said before, it is scattered piecemeal through the air, and therefore perishes. But suppose we grant which is false in itself, and allow that the soul may be huddled up together in the bodies of those who die one limb after another, yet then the soul must be confessed to be by Nature mortal. For it signifies not whether the soul dies scattered through the air, or perishes with its parts contracted into one place, while the senses steal away from the whole body more and more, and the powers of life by degrees appear less and less.

Munro:

Again we perceive that the mind is begotten along with the body and grows up together with it and becomes old along with it. For even as children go about with a tottering and weakly body, so slender sagacity of mind follows along with it; then when their life has reached the maturity of confirmed strength, the judgment too is greater and the power of the mind more developed. Afterwards when the body has been shattered by the mastering might of time and the frame has drooped with its forces dulled, then the intellect halts, the tongue dotes, the mind gives way, all faculties fail and are found wanting at the same time. It naturally follows then that the whole nature of the soul is dissolved, like smoke, into the high air; since we see it is begotten along with the body and grows up along with it and, as I have shown, breaks down at the same time worn out with age.

Moreover we see that even as the body is liable to violent diseases and severe pain, so is the mind to sharp cares and grief and fear; it naturally follows therefore that it is its partner in death as well. Again in diseases of the body the mind often wanders and goes astray; for it loses its reason and drives in its speech and often in a profound lethargy is carried into deep and never-ending sleep with drooping eyes and head; out of which it neither hears the voices nor can recognize the faces of those who stand round calling it back to life and bedewing with tears face and cheeks. Therefore you must admit that the mind too dissolves, since the infection of disease reaches to it; for pain and disease are both forgers of death: a truth we have fully learned ere now by the death of many. Again, when the pungent strength of wine has entered into a man and its spirit has been infused into and transmitted through his veins, why is it that a heaviness of the limbs follows along with this, his legs are hampered as he reels about, his tongue falters, his mind is besotted, his eyes swim, shouting hiccupping, wranglings are rife, together with all the other usual concomitants, why is all this, if not because the overpowering violence of the wine is wont to disorder the soul within the body?

But whenever things can be disordered and hampered, they give token that if a somewhat more potent cause gained an entrance, they would perish and be robbed of all further existence. Moreover it often happens that someone constrained by the violence of disease suddenly drops down before our eyes, as by a stroke of lightning, and foams at the mouth, moans and shivers through his frame, loses his reason, stiffens his muscles, is racked, gasps for breath fitfully, and wearies his limbs with tossing. Sure enough, because the violence of the disease spreads itself through his frame and disorders him, he foams as he tries to eject his soul, just as in the salt sea the waters boil with the mastering might of the winds. A moan too is forced out, because the limbs are seized with pain, and mainly because seeds of voice are driven forth and are carried in a close mass out by the mouth, the road which they are accustomed to take and where they have a well-paved way. Loss of reason follows, because the powers of the mind and soul are disordered and, as I have shown, are riven and forced asunder, torn to pieces by the same baneful malady. Then after the cause of the disease has bent its course back and the acrid humors of the distempered body return to their hiding-places, then he first gets up like one reeling, and by little and little, comes back into full possession of his senses and regains his soul. Since therefore even within the body mind and soul are harassed by such violent distempers and so miserably racked by sufferings, why believe that they without the body in the open air can continue existence battling with fierce winds?

And since we perceive that the mind is healed like the sick body, and we see that it can be altered by medicine, this too gives warning that the mind has a mortal existence. For it is natural that whosoever essays and attempts to change the mind or seeks to alter any other nature you like, should add new parts or change the arrangement of the present, or withdraw in short some tittle from the sum. But that which is immortal wills not to have its parts transposed nor any addition to be made nor one tittle to ebb away; for whenever a thing changes and quits its proper limits, this change is at once the death of that which was before. Therefore the mind, whether it is sick or whether it is altered by medicine alike, as I have shown, gives forth mortal symptoms. So invariably is truth found to make head against false reason and to cut off all

retreat from the assailant, and by a two-fold refutation to put falsehood to rout.

Again we often see a man pass gradually away and limb by limb lose vital sense; first the toes of his feet and the nails turn livid, then the feet and shanks die, then next the steps of chilly death creep with slow pace over the other members. Therefore since the nature of the soul is rent and passes away and does not at one time stand forth in its entirety, it must be reckoned mortal. But if haply you suppose that it can draw itself in through the whole frame and mass its parts together and in this way withdraw sense from all the limbs, yet then that spot into which so great a store of soul is gathered ought to show itself in possession of a greater amount of sense. But as this is nowhere found, sure enough as we said before, it is torn in pieces and scattered abroad, and therefore dies. Moreover if I were pleased for the moment to grant what is false and admit that the soul might be collected in one mass in the body of those who leave the light dying piecemeal, even then you must admit the soul to be mortal; and it makes no difference whether it perish dispersed in air, or gathered into one lump out of all its parts lose all feeling, since sense ever more and more fails the whole man throughout and less and less of life remains throughout.

Bailey:

Moreover, we feel that the understanding is begotten along with the body, and grows together with it, and along with it comes to old age. For as children totter with feeble and tender body, so a weak judgement of mind goes with it. Then when their years are ripe and their strength hardened, greater is their sense and increased their force of mind. Afterward, when now the body is shattered by the stern strength of time, and the frame has sunk with its force dulled, then the reason is maimed, the tongue raves, the mind stumbles, all things give way and fail at once. And so it is natural that all the nature of the mind should also be dissolved, even as is smoke, into the high breezes of the air; inasmuch as we see that it is born with the body, grows with it, and, as I have shown, at the same time becomes weary and worn with age.

Then follows this that we see that, just as the body itself suffers wasting diseases and poignant pain, so the mind too has its biting cares and grief and fear; wherefore it is natural that it should also share in death. Nay more, during the diseases of the body the mind often wanders astray; for it loses its reason and speaks raving words, and sometimes in a heavy lethargy is carried off into a deep unending sleep, when eyes and head fall nodding, in which it hears not voices, nor can know the faces of those who stand round, summoning it back to life, bedewing face and cheeks with their tears. Therefore you must needs admit that the mind too is dissolved, inasmuch as the contagion of disease pierces into it. For both pain and disease are alike fashioners of death, as we have been taught ere now by many a man's decease. Again, when the stinging strength of wine has entered into a man, and its heat has spread abroad throughout his veins, why is it that there follows a heaviness in the limbs, his legs are entangled as he staggers, his tongue is sluggish, and his mind heavy, his eyes swim, shouting, sobbing, quarrelling grows apace, and then all the other signs of this sort that go along with them; why does this come to pass, except that the mastering might of the wine is wont to confound the soul even within the body?

But whenever things can be so confounded and entangled, they testify that, if a cause a whit stronger shall have made its way within, they must needs perish, robbed of any further life. Nay more, some man, often before our very eyes, seized suddenly by violent disease, falls, as though by a lightning-stroke, and foams at the mouth; he groans and shivers throughout his frame, he loses his wits, his muscles grow taut, he writhes, he breathes in gasps, and tossing to and fro wearies his limbs. Because, you may be sure, his soul rent asunder by the violence of disease throughout his frame, is confounded, and gathers foam, as on the salt sea the waters boil beneath the stern strength of the winds. Further, the groaning is wrung from him, because his limbs are racked with pain, and more than all because the particles of voice are driven out, and are carried crowding forth from his mouth, along the way they are wont, where is their paved path. Loss of wits comes to pass, because the force of mind and soul is confounded, and, as I have shown, is torn apart and tossed to and fro, rent asunder by that same poison. Thereafter, when by now the cause of malady has ebbed, and the biting humours of the distempered body return to their hiding-places, then, as it were staggering, he first rises, and little by little returns to all his senses, and regains his soul. When mind and soul then even within the body are tossed by such great maladies, and in wretched plight are rent asunder and distressed, why do you believe that without the body in the open air they can continue life amid the warring winds?

And since we perceive that the mind is cured, just like the sick body, and we see that it can be changed by medicine, this too forewarns us that the mind has a mortal life. For whosoever attempts and essays to alter the mind, or seeks to change any other nature, must indeed add parts to it or transfer them from their order, or take away some small whit at least from the whole. But what is immortal does not permit its parts to be transposed, nor that any whit should be added or depart from it. For whenever a thing changes and passes out of its own limits, straightway this is the death of that which was before. And so whether the mind is sick, it gives signs of its mortality, as I have proved, or whether it is changed by medicine. So surely is true fact seen to run counter to false reasoning, and to shut off retreat from him who flees, and with double-edged refutation to prove the falsehood.

Again, we often behold a man pass away little by little and limb by limb lose the sensation of life; first of all the toes and nails on his feet grow livid, then the feet and legs die, thereafter through the rest of his frame, step by step, pass the traces of chill death. Since this nature of the soul is severed nor does it come forth all intact at one moment, it must be counted mortal. But if by chance you think that it could of its own power draw itself inwards through the frame, and contract its parts into one place, and so withdraw sensation from all the limbs, yet nevertheless that place, to which so great abundance of soul is gathered together, must needs be seen possessed of greater sensation; but since such place is nowhere found, you may be sure, as we said before, it is rent in pieces and scattered abroad, and so perishes. Nay more, if it were our wish to grant what is false, and allow that the soul could be massed together in the body of those, who as they die leave the light of day part by part, still you must needs confess that the soul is mortal, nor does it matter whether it passes away scattered through the air, or is drawn into one out of all its various parts and grows sottish, since sense more and more in every part fails the whole man, and in every part less and less of life remains.