

Episode Forty-Five - Further Arguments For the Mortality of the Soul

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Welcome to Episode Forty-Five 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 634-740 from Book 3 of the Latin Text. The topic will be further arguments for the mortality of the soul.

Charles reads today's text:

Munro Notes:

634-669: since life and sense pervade the whole body, if it be cut in two by a sudden stroke, the soul must also be divided ; but what is divided cannot be immortal : a soldier's arm or foot or head cut off in the heat of battle will shew for a time remains of sense and motion; a serpent chopped in pieces will writhe and with the severed mouth seek to reach the other pieces of the body : now you cannot say that in each part there is an entire soul ; therefore the soul has been divided, and therefore is as mortal as the body.

670-678: if the soul is immortal, why cannot we recollect what happened before our birth ? if the mind is so changed as to forget every-thing, that is very like death; so that even thus you must admit that the soul which then was, has perished, and that the one which now is, is newly made.

679-712: If the soul enters the body after it is fully formed, it should not seem to be so mixed up in it, but should have a hole to live apart in it; whereas in fact it so penetrates the whole frame that the very teeth have feeling; it therefore has birth and dies; else it could not be so united with the body, nor, being so united, leave it entire. But if it can so enter and then spread

itself over the whole body, then must it perish thus diffused, even as food transmitted into the body perishes and then furnishes out of itself another nature; thus the soul that entered will die, and another will be formed out of it; thus the soul will be mortal.

713-740: are atoms of the soul left behind in the dead body or not? if they are left, it cannot be immortal, since it has left parts of itself behind ; if it goes out entire, whence come worms and other living things into the carcase? but if souls come from without into these myriads of creatures, do they each create a body for itself, or enter bodies already formed? then why make a body, when they are better without? disease and cold and hunger come from the body : but were it ever so useful, they could not make it: if again they entered it already made, they could not unite with it so closely as to have sensation in common.

Browne:

And since the vital sense, we perceive, is diffused through the body, and we see the whole body animated throughout, if any weapon cuts it in two in the middle of a sudden stroke, and divides the parts asunder, the powers of the soul, without doubt, being separated and disunited, will follow the fate of the body; but whatever is cut asunder and falls into parts can have nothing immortal in its nature. Chariots, we read, armed with Scythes, and reeking with confused slaughter, would cut off a limb with so quick a force that the divided part that fell off from the body might be seen trembling upon the ground when the mind and heart of the man feel nothing of the pain, so sudden was the wound. His whole soul is so taken up with the heat of action that he pursues the fight and the intended slaughter with the remainder of his body, nor does he imagine that the wheels and mangling hooks have torn off among the horses his left hand, or that he has lost his shield. Another knows nothing that his right hand is lopped off, as he scales the wall, and presses eagerly forward. Another attempts to rise with one leg, while the dying foot moves the toes as it lies by him upon the ground; and the head cut off, the trunk yet warm and heaving preserves the same fierce look in the face, and keeps the eyes open, til it has lost all remains of the soul within it. And so divide with a sword, if you please, into many parts, the tail of a long snake, threatening, and brandishing his tongue, and you'll see every divided part wiggling with the fresh wound, and staining the ground with blood. You'll perceive the serpent turning his head about to find his divided body and bite it with his teeth, from the anguish of the pain he suffers. Shall we say that a proper soul belongs severally to all these parts? By this rule it will follow that the same creature is animated by many souls at the same time. 'Tis plain therefore that the soul before was one, and diffused through the whole body, is divided, and consequently they are both mortal, because they are both equally divided into many parts.

Further, if the nature of the soul be immortal, and is infused into the body when a child is born, why do we remember nothing of the life we led before? Nor retain any traces of things done long ago? For if the power of the soul be so utterly changed that all recollection of past actions is entirely gone, this kind of oblivion is (I think) not far removed from death itself. We must needs allow therefore that the soul that was before utterly perished, and that which now is was newly created.

But when the body is completely formed, when we are born, and enter within the door of life, if then the vital power of the soul were infused, it would have nothing to do to grow up together with the body and the limbs, and be united with the very blood, but, as it were in a cage, it would live entire of itself, and so diffuse the faculties of sense all through the body. Again then and again it must be said that the soul is neither without beginning, nor exempt from the laws of death; for we cannot conceive that the soul, were it infused from without into the body, could be so nicely and closely united to the several parts of it, as the thing itself evidently proves she is. She is indeed so diffused through the veins, the bowels, the nerves, and bones, that even the teeth are not without sense, This appears from the acute pain we feel from the chillness of cold water, or the grinding of a rough stone when we eat. The soul therefore being so closely connected with the several parts cannot be supposed to depart whole, or deliver herself entire from the bones and nerves and joints of the body. But if you think the soul is infused from without, and so spread over all the limbs, she is for this reason still more liable to perish with the body; for a thing that flows through so many passages is dissolved, and therefore dies, for she must be thus divided through all the pores. And as the food, when it is distributed through the members and the limbs, loses its first form, and take up another quite different, so the soul, though it enters whole and fresh into the body, yet, in passing through, its parts are dissolved, because the particles of soul which now rules and governs the body is produced from that which perished, and was dissolved in passing through into the limbs. The nature of the soul therefore is neither without beginning nor free from death and dissolution.

Besides, in a dead body some particles of the soul remain, or they do not. If they do remain and abide in it, you can by no means properly say she is immortal, because she withdrew with her seeds divided, and with some of them left behind. But if she retired from the body with all her parts whole, how comes the carcass to breed so many worms in the corrupted bowels? And whence do such abundance of creatures without bones and blood swarm over the bloated limbs? But if you fancy that souls formed without creep into these worms, and every single worm has a particular soul, nor think it strange that so many thousand should flow together from without to the place from whence one departed, yet it is proper to inquire into and to examine this, whether every particular soul searches into the several seeds of the worms, and chooses for itself what seeds are most proper to make itself a body, or whether she enters into a body already formed.

But there is no reason to be given why she should build a dwelling for herself, and go through such fatigue, especially since, disentangled from matter, she cannot be tormented with diseases, with cold and hunger, for body only can labor under these calamities, and the soul suffers many such distresses only by her conjunction with it. But allow it inconvenient for souls to fashion out bodies for themselves to dwell in, yet there is no way possible for them to do this. They do not therefore make up bodies and limbs for themselves, nor are they infused into bodies ready made, for they could not be so nicely united as to inform every part of the body, nor could the vital motions be mutually carried on between them.

Munro:

And since we perceive that vital sense is in the whole body and we see that it is all endowed with life, if on a sudden any force with swift blow shall have cut it in twain so as quite to dissever the two halves, the power of the soul will without doubt at the same time be cleft and cut asunder and dashed in twain together with the body. But that which is cut and divides into any parts, you are to know disclaims for itself an everlasting nature. Stories are told how scythed chariots reeking with indiscriminate slaughter often lop off limbs so instantaneously that that which has fallen down lopped off from the frame is seen to quiver on the ground, while yet the mind and faculty of the man from the suddenness of the mischief cannot feel the pain; and because his mind once for all is wholly given to the business of fighting, with what remains of his body he mingles in the fray and carnage, and often perceives not that the wheels and devouring scythes have carried off among the horses' feet his left arm shield and all; another sees not that his right arm has dropped from him, while he mounts and presses forward. Another tries to get up after he has lost his leg, while the dying foot quivers with its toes on the ground close by. The head too when cut off from the warm and living trunk retains on the ground the expression of life and open eyes, until it has yielded up all the remnants of soul. To take another case, if, as a serpent's tongue is quivering, as its tail is darting out from its long body, you choose to chop with an axe into many pieces both [tail and body], you will see all the separate portions thus cut off writhing under the fresh wound and bespattering the earth with gore, the fore part with the mouth making for its own hinder part, to allay with burning bite the pain of the wound with which it has been smitten. Shall we say then that there are entire souls in all those pieces? Why from that argument it will follow that one living creature had many souls in its body; and this being absurd, therefore the soul which was one has been divided together with the body; therefore each alike must be reckoned mortal, since each is alike chopped up into many pieces.

Again, if the nature of the soul is immortal and makes its way into our body at the time of birth, why are we unable to remember besides the time already gone, and why do we retain no traces of past actions? If the power of the mind has been so completely changed that all remembrance of past things is lost, that methinks differs not widely from death; therefore you must admit that the soul which was before has perished and that which now is has now been formed.

Again if the quickened power of the mind is wont to be put into us after our body is fully formed, at the instant of our birth and our crossing the threshold of life, it ought agreeably to this to live not in such a way as to seem to have grown with the body and together with its members within the blood, but as in a den apart by and to itself: the very contrary to what undoubted fact teaches; for it is so closely united with the body throughout the veins, flesh, sinews, and bones, that the very teeth have a share of sense; as their aching proves and the sharp twinge of cold water and the crunching of a rough stone when it has got into them out of bread. Wherefore, again and again I say, we must believe souls to be neither without a birth nor exempted from the law of death; for we must not believe that they could have been so completely united with our bodies, if they found their way into them from without, nor since they are so closely interwoven with them, does it appear that they can get out unharmed and unloose themselves unscathed from all the sinews and bones and joints. But if haply you

believe that the soul finds its way in from without and is wont to ooze through all our limbs, so much the more it will perish thus blended with the body; for what oozes through another is dissolved, and therefore dies. As food distributed throughout the cavities of the body, while it is transmitted into the limbs and the whole frame, is destroyed and furnishes out of itself the matter of another nature, thus the soul and mind, though they pass entire into a fresh body, yet in oozing through it are dissolved, whilst there are transmitted, so to say, into the frame through all the cavities those particles of which this nature of mind is formed, which now is sovereign in our body, being born out of that soul which then perished when dispersed through the frame. Wherefore the nature of the soul is seen to be neither without a birthday nor exempt from death.

Again, are seeds of the soul left in the dead body or not? If they are left and remain in it, the soul cannot fairly be deemed immortal, since it has withdrawn lessened by the loss of some parts; but if when taken away from the yet untainted limbs it has fled so entirely away as to leave in the body no parts of itself, whence do carcasses exude worms from the now rank flesh and whence does such a swarm of living things, boneless and bloodless, surge through the heaving frame? But if haply you believe that souls find their way into worms from without and can severally pass each into a body and you make no account of why many thousands of souls meet together in a place from which one has withdrawn, this question at least must, it seems, be raised and brought to a decisive test, whether souls hunt out the several seeds of worms and build for themselves a place to dwell in, or find their way into bodies fully formed so to say.

But why they should on their part make a body or take such trouble, cannot be explained; since being without a body they are not plagued as they flit about with diseases and cold and hunger, the body being more akin to, more troubled by such infirmities, and by its contact with it the mind suffering many ills. Nevertheless be it ever so expedient for them to make a body, when they are going to enter, yet clearly there is no way by which they can do so. Therefore souls do not make for themselves bodies and limbs; no: nor can they by any method find their way into bodies after they are full formed; for they will neither be able to unite themselves with a nice precision nor will any connection of mutual sensation be formed between them.

Bailey:

And since we feel that the sensation of life is present in the whole body, and we see that the whole is a living thing, if some force suddenly hew it in the middle with swift blow, so that it severs each half apart, beyond all doubt the force of the soul too will be cleft in twain, torn asunder and riven together with the body. But what is cleft and separates into any parts, disclaims, assuredly, that its nature is everlasting. They tell how often scythe-bearing chariots, glowing in the mellay of slaughter, so suddenly lop off limbs, that the part which falls lopped off from the frame is seen to shiver on the ground, while in spite of all the mind and spirit of the man cannot feel the pain, through the suddenness of the stroke, and at the same time, because his mind is swallowed up in the fervour of the fight; with the body that is left him he makes for the fight and the slaughter, and often knows not that his left arm with its shield is gone, carried away by the wheels among the horses and the ravening scythes; and another sees not that his

right arm has dropped, while he climbs up and presses onward. Then another struggles to rise when his leg is lost, while at his side on the ground his dying foot twitches its toes. And the head lopped off from the warm living trunk keeps on the ground the look of life and the wide-open eyes, until it has yielded up all the last vestiges of soul. Nay more, if you should choose to chop into many parts with an axe the body of a snake with quivering tongue, angry tail, and long body, you will then perceive all the hewn parts severally writhing under the fresh blow, and scattering the ground with gore, and the fore part making open-mouthed for its own hinder part, in order that, smitten by the burning pain of the wound, it may quench it with its bite. Shall we say then that there is a whole soul in all those little parts? But by that reasoning it will follow that one living creature had many souls in its body. And so that soul which was one together with the body has been severed; wherefore both body and soul must be thought mortal, since each alike is cleft into many parts.

Moreover, if the nature of the soul is immortal, and it enters into the body at our birth, why can we not remember also the part of our life already gone, why do we not preserve traces of things done before? For if the power of the mind is so much changed that all remembrance of things past is lost to it, that state is not, I trow, a far step from death; wherefore you must needs admit that the soul, which was before, has passed away, and that that which now is, has now been created.

Moreover, if when our body is already formed the living power of the mind is wont to be put in just when we are born, and when we are crossing the threshold into life, it would not then be natural that it should be seen to grow with the body, yea, together with the limbs in the very blood, but 'tis natural that it should live all alone by itself as in a den, yet so that the whole body nevertheless is rich in sensation. Wherefore, again and again, we must not think that souls are without a birth, or released from the law of death. For neither can we think that they could be so closely linked to our bodies if they were grafted in them from without—but that all this is so, plain fact on the other hand declares: for the soul is so interlaced through veins, flesh, sinews, and bones that the teeth, too, have their share in sensation; as toothache shows and the twinge of cold water, and the biting on a sharp stone if it be hid in a piece of bread—nor, when they are so interwoven, can they, it is clear, issue forth entire, and unravel themselves intact from all the sinews and bones and joints. But if by chance you think that the soul is wont to be grafted in us from without, and then permeate through our limbs, all the more will it perish as it fuses with the body. For that which permeates dissolves, and so passes away. For even as food parceled out among all the pores of the body, when it is sent about into all the limbs and members, perishes and furnishes a new nature out of itself, so soul and mind, however whole they may pass into the fresh-made body, still are dissolved as they permeate, while through all the pores there are sent abroad into the limbs the particles, whereof this nature of the mind is formed, which now holds sway in our body, born from that which then perished, parceled out among the limbs. Wherefore it is seen that the nature of the soul is neither without a birthday nor exempt from death.

Moreover, are seeds of soul left or not in the lifeless body? For if they are left and are still there, it will follow that it cannot rightly be held immortal, since it has left the body maimed by the

loss of some parts. But if it has been removed and fled from the limbs while still entire, so that it has left no part of itself in the body, how is it that corpses, when the flesh is now putrid, teem with worms, and how does so great a store of living creatures, boneless and bloodless, swarm over the heaving frame? But if by chance you believe that the souls are grafted in the worms from without, and can pass severally into their bodies, and do not consider why many thousands of souls should gather together, whence one only has departed, yet there is this that seems worth asking and putting to the test, whether after all those souls go hunting for all the seeds of the little worms, and themselves build up a home to live in, or whether they are, as it were, grafted in bodies already quite formed.

But there is no ready reason why they should make the bodies themselves, why they should be at such pains. For indeed, when they are without a body, they do not flit about harassed by disease and cold and hunger. For the body is more prone to suffer by these maladies, and 'tis through contact with the body that the mind suffers many ills. But still grant that it be ever so profitable for them to fashion a body wherein to enter; yet there seems to be no way whereby they could. Souls then do not fashion for themselves bodies and frames. Nor yet can it be that they are grafted in bodies already made; for neither will they be able to be closely interwoven, nor will contact be made by a sharing of sensation.