

Episode Sixteen - The Atoms Are Un-Destroyable And Provide Continuity To All Nature

Post by "Cassius" of April 26, 2020 at 6:09 AM

Welcome to Episode Sixteen 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 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.

First: Our aim is to go back to the original text to bring you an accurate presentation of [classical Epicurean philosophy](#) as the ancient Epicureans understood it, not simply repeat for you what modern commentators teach about it today.

Second: We won't be talking about modern political issues in this podcast. Epicurean philosophy is very different from Stoicism, Humanism, Buddhism, Taoism, Atheism, and Marxism - it must be understood on its own, not in terms of any conventional modern morality.

Third: The physics presented by Lucretius is the essential base of Epicurean philosophy. When you study this, you will see that Epicurus taught neither luxury nor minimalism, but that feeling - pleasure and pain - are the guides that Nature gave us to live by rather than supernatural gods, idealism, or virtue ethics. More than anything else, Epicurus taught that there is nothing supernatural whatsoever, and that means there's no life after death, and any happiness we will ever have must come in THIS life, which is why it is so important not to waste time in confusion.

Remember that our home page is LucretiusToday.com, and there you can find a free copy of the versions of the poem we are reading.

In this Episode 16, we will discuss how The Atoms Are Never Destroyed, that the Atoms Provide Continuity To All Nature, and that there is a strict limit on Divisibility of All Things.

Now let's join the discussion with Martin reading today's text.

Note: In previous episodes we have discussed:

- (1) **Venus / Pleasure As Guide of Life:** That Pleasure, using the allegory of Venus, is the driving force of all life; That the way to rid ourselves of pain is to replace pain with pleasure, using the allegory of Venus entertaining Mars, the god of war;
- (2) **The Achievement of Epicurus:** That Epicurus was the great philosophic leader who stood up to supernatural religion, opened the gates to a proper understanding of nature, and thereby showed us how we too can emulate the life of gods;
- (3-4) **So Great Is The Power of Religion To Inspire Evil Deeds!** That it is not Epicurean philosophy, but supernatural religion, which is truly unholy and prompts men to commit evil deeds;
- (5) **On Resisting The Threats of Priests And Poets:** That false priests and philosophers will try to scare you away from Epicurean philosophy with threats of punishment after death, which is why you must understand that those threats cannot be true; That the key to freeing yourself from false religion and false philosophy is found in the study of nature;
- (6-7) **Step One: Nothing Comes From Nothing.** The first major observation which underlies all the rest of Epicurean philosophy is that we observe that **nothing is ever generated from nothing.**
- (8) **Step Two: Nothing Goes To Nothing.** The second major observation is that **nothing is ever destroyed completely to nothing.**
- (9) **The Evidence That Atoms Exist, Even Though They Are Unseen.** The next observation is that we know elemental particles exist, even though we cannot see them just like we know that wind and other things exist by observing their effects.
- (10-11) **The Void And Its Nature.** We also know that the void exists, because things must have space in which to move, as we see they do move.
- (12) **Everything We Experience Is Composed Of A Combination of Matter And Void.** Everything around us that we experience is a natural combination of atoms and void.
- (13) **The Things We Experience Are Properties and Qualities Of Atoms And Void And Cease To Exist When Their Atoms Disperse.** All things we experience around us are either (1) the **properties** (essential conjuncts; essential and unchanging) or **qualities** (events; inessential and changing depending on context) of bodies. All these arise from the nature, movement, and combinations of the atoms, and cease to exist when the atoms which compose the bodies disperse. Therefore it is incorrect to think that ideas or stories such as that of the Trojan war have any permanent existence.
- (14-15) **Atoms Are Solid And Indestructible, And Therefore Eternal.** The argument that atoms are solid and indestructible and therefore eternal.

Here is the text that will be covered in Episode Sixteen. The Latin version of Book One has this as beginning at approximately line 550 of the [Daniel Brown Edition](#) and of the [Munro Latin Edition here](#).

There are a total of about 1115 lines in book one, so we approximately halfway through.

[Daniel Brown 1743 Edition:](#)

But still, if nature had prefixed no bounds in breaking things to pieces, the parts of matter, broken by every passing age, had been reduced so small that nothing could of them be formed that would in any time become mature; for things we see much sooner are dissolved than are again restored; and therefore what an infinite tract of ages past has broken, and separated and dissolved, in future time can never be repaired; so that certain bounds of breaking and dividing must be set, because we see each being is repaired, and stated times are fixed to every thing in which it feels the flower of its age.

And yet, though the first seeds of things are solid, all beings that are compounded, such as air and water, earth and fire, may be soft, (however made, or by what power formed) and from them be produced, because there is a void still mixed with things; and, on the contrary, if these first seeds were soft, what reason can there be assigned whence hardened flints and iron could be formed, for nature would want the proper principles to work upon; and therefore these first seeds must simple solids be, by whose union close and compact all things are bound up firm, and so display their strength and hardy force.

Again, because each being in its kind has certain bounds prefixed to its increase, and to the preservation of its life, and since by nature's laws it is ordained to each how far their powers to act or not extend; since nothing changes, and every thing goes on as it began, each kind of birds, most steady in their course, shew the same colors painted on their wings, the principles of matter whence they spring must be fixed and unchangeable; if the seeds of things could change by any means, it would be unknown what could be formed, what not; by what means every being is limited, and stops short within the bounds it cannot break; nor could the course of time in every age, the nature, motion, diet, and the manners of the old sire impress upon the young.

Besides, because the utmost point or the extreme of every body something is the eye cannot discern, it is not made of parts, but is in nature what we call the least; which never exists of itself, divided from body, nor ever can, because it is the very first and last of something else. For 'tis by heaping up such parts as these, one by another, that complete the being of every body. Since then they can't subsist apart, and separate, they must needs stick close, nor be divided by the utmost force. These seeds therefore are in their nature solid, and simple, formed of smallest parts bound close; not tied together by united seeds of various kinds, but in themselves entire, eternally unmixed and pure, from which nature will suffer nothing to be

forced or lessened, reserving them as first seeds, to form and to repair those things that die.

Again, suppose there was no least, the smallest bodies must be composed of parts boundless and infinite; the half of every being must then contain another half, so there would be no end of still dividing; and where would be the difference between the smallest and the largest bodies? None in the least; for though the whole be entirely infinite, yet bodies that are smallest would contain infinite parts alike, which, since true reason exclaims against, nor will allow the mind to give assent, you must, convinced, profess that there are bodies which are void of parts, and are by nature least; since such there are, you must admit them solid and eternal.

Munro:

[552] Again if nature had set no limit to the breaking of things, by this time the bodies of matter would have been so far reduced by the breaking of past ages that nothing could within a fixed time be conceived out of them and reach its utmost growth of being. For we see that anything is more quickly destroyed than again renewed; and therefore that which the long, the infinite duration of all bygone time had broken up demolished and destroyed, could never be reproduced in all remaining time. But now sure enough a fixed limit to their breaking has been set, since we see each thing renewed, and at the same time definite periods fixed for things each after its kind to reach the flower of their age.

[566] Moreover while the bodies of matter are most solid, it may yet be explained in what way all things which are formed soft, as air water earth fires, are so formed and by what force they severally go on, since once for all there is void mixed up in things. But on the other hand if the first-beginnings of things be soft, it cannot be explained out of what enduring basalt and iron can be produced; for their whole nature will utterly lack a first foundation to begin with. First-beginnings therefore are strong in solid singleness, and by a denser combination of these all things can be closely packed and exhibit enduring strength.

[?] Again if no limit has been set to the breaking of bodies, nevertheless the several bodies which go to things must survive from eternity up to the present time, not yet assailed by any danger. But since they are possessed of a frail nature, it is not consistent with this that they could have continued through eternity harassed through ages by countless blows.

[578] Again too since a limit of growing and sustaining life has been assigned to things each after its kind, and since by the laws of nature it stands decreed what they can each do and what they cannot do, and since nothing is changed, but all things are so constant that the different birds all in succession exhibit in their body the distinctive marks of their kind, they must sure enough have a body of unchangeable matter also. For if the first-beginnings of things could in any way be vanquished and changed, it would then be uncertain too what could and what could not rise into being, in short on what principle each thing has its powers defined, its deep-set boundary mark; nor could the generations reproduce so often each after its kind the nature habits, way of life and motions of the parents.

[593] Then again since there is ever a bounding point [to bodies, which appears to us to be a least, there ought in the same way to be a bounding point the least conceivable to that first body] which already is beyond what our senses can perceive: that point sure enough is without parts and consists of a least nature and never has existed apart by itself and will not be able in future so to exist, since it is in itself a part of that other; and so a first and single part and then other and other similar parts in succession fill up in close serried mass the nature of the first body; and since these cannot exist by themselves, they must cleave to that from which they cannot in any way be torn.

First-beginnings therefore are of solid singleness, massed together and cohering closely by means of least parts, not compounded out of a union of those parts, but, rather, strong in everlasting singleness.

From them nature allows nothing to be torn, nothing further to be worn away, reserving them as seeds for things.

[609] Again unless there shall be a least, the very smallest bodies will consist of infinite parts, inasmuch as the half of the half will always have a half and nothing will set bounds to the division. Therefore between the sum of things and the least of things what difference will there be? There will be no distinction at all; for how absolutely infinite soever the whole sum is, yet the things which are smallest will equally consist of infinite parts. Now since on this head true reason protests and denies that the mind can believe it, you must yield and admit that there exist such things as are possessed of no parts and are of a least nature. And since these exist, those first bodies also you must admit to be solid and everlasting.

Bailey:

Again, if nature had ordained no limit to the breaking of things, by now the bodies of matter would have been so far brought low by the breaking of ages past, that nothing could be conceived out of them within a fixed time, and pass on to the full measure of its life; for we see that anything you will is more easily broken up than put together again. Wherefore what the long limitless age of days, the age of all time that is gone by, had broken ere now, disordering and dissolving, could never be renewed in all time that remains. But as it is, a set limit to breaking has, we may be sure, been appointed, since we see each thing put together again, and at the same time fixed seasons ordained for all things after their kind, in the which they may be able to reach the flower of their life.

[566] There is this too that, though the first-bodies of matter are quite solid, yet we can give account of all the soft things that come to be, air, water, earth, fires, by what means they come to being, and by what force each goes on its way, when once void has been mingled in things. But on the other hand, if the first-beginnings of things were to be soft, it will not be possible to give account whence hard flints and iron can be created; for from the first all nature will lack a first-beginning of foundation. There are then bodies that prevail in their solid singleness, by whose more close-packed union all things can be riveted and reveal their stalwart strength.

Moreover, if no limit has been appointed to the breaking of things, still it must needs be that all the bodies of things survive even now from time everlasting, such that they cannot yet have been assailed by any danger. But since they exist endowed with a frail nature, it is not in harmony with this that they have been able to abide for everlasting time harried through all the ages by countless blows.

[578] Once again, since there has been appointed for all things after their kind a limit of growing and of maintaining life, and inasmuch as it stands ordained what all things severally can do by the laws of nature, and what too they cannot, nor is anything so changed, but that all things stand so fast that the diverse birds all in their due order show that the marks of their kind are on their body, they must also, we may be sure, have a body of unchanging substance. For if the first-beginnings of things could be vanquished in any way and changed, then, too, would it be doubtful what might come to being, what might not, yea, in what way each thing has its power limited and its deepest boundary-stone, nor could the tribes each after their kind so often recall the nature, habits, manner of life and movements of the parents.

[593] Then, further, since there are extreme points, one after another [on bodies, which are the least things we can see, likewise, too, there must be a least point] on that body, which our senses can no longer descry; that point, we may be sure, exists without parts and is endowed with the least nature, nor was it ever sundered apart by itself nor can it so be hereafter, since it is itself but a part of another and that the first single part: then other like parts and again others in order in close array make up the nature of the first body, and since they cannot exist by themselves, it must needs be that they stay fast there whence they cannot by any means be torn away. The first-beginnings then are of solid singleness; for they are a close dense mass of least parts, never put together out of a union of those parts, but rather prevailing in everlasting singleness; from them nature, keeping safe the seeds of things, suffers not anything to be torn away, nor ever to be removed.

[609] Moreover, if there be not a least thing, all the tiniest bodies will be composed of infinite parts, since indeed the half of a half will always have a half, nor will anything set a limit. What difference then will there be between the sum of things and the least of things? There will be no difference; for however completely the whole sum be infinite, yet things that are tiniest will be composed of infinite parts just the same. And since true reasoning cries out against this, and denies that the mind can believe it, you must be vanquished and confess that there are those things which consist of no parts at all and are of the least nature. And since these exist, those first-beginnings too you must needs own are solid and everlasting.

Post by “Cassius” of April 27, 2020 at 10:32 AM

Episode 16 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. In this episode, we discuss the indestructibility of atoms and how they provide continuity to nature. In the second half of this episode, we revisit the subject of [Epicurean gods](#), and discuss how the "Organians" in the episode "Errand of Mercy" from the Star Trek original series may provide a useful analogy to thinking about the non-supernatural Epicurean "gods." As always we invite you to leave us your comments and suggestions in the thread below.

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