

# Episode Thirty-Seven: End of Book Two - The Earth Too Was Born, and It Will One Day Die

Post by “Cassius” of September 14, 2020 at 9:33 AM

## Welcome to Episode Thirty-Seven 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 1105 - End (1174)

Munro Notes:

1104 - 1174 And after our world was born, many elements were ever added to it so as to increase all its parts, until it attained its full growth : even thus things which you see growing take in more elements as food than they give forth, until they reach their maturity; then they gradually decay, and exhale more than they take into their veins; until from inward rarefaction and outward blows they perish completely : even thus will our world perish : already our earth has begun to fail, and can no longer produce what mice it did; tillers and vinedressers spend their labour in vain and regret the olden time, not knowing that the earth like everything else must come to an end.

Browne

Besides, after this world was formed, and the birthday of the Sea, the Earth, and the Sun was over, there were many particles of matter added to them from without, many seeds were received every way, which the infinite mass of universe constantly discharged; from whence the Sea and the Earth grew more strong and vigorous; from when the mansions of the heavens were enlarged, and raised their lofty arches higher from the Earth, and new air was produced. For from all the parts of the universe the proper seeds are distributed, and retire severally in all places to their proper kinds; the watery to the water, the Earth increases by earthy particles, the fiery produce fire, the airy air, til Nature, the parent and perfectress of all things, improves all beings to the utmost extent of growth they are capable of. This comes to pass, when no more is received into the vital passages, than what is perspired, and flies off; then it is that the growth of the creature is at a full stand, and nature restrains it from further increase.

For whatever creature you observe to thrive and grow lively and large, and by degrees climb up to a mature age, receives more particles into itself than it emits, because all the nourishment is easily distributed into the veins, and there confined, and the particles are not so widely scattered as in any proportion to fly off, and so receive a loss faster than they are supplied. For we must allow that many particles certainly fly off from bodies, but many others ought to be coming on, til the thing arrives to its utmost pitch of bulk. Then, by degrees, its strength and maturity of vigor decays, its age melts away and dissolves; for the larger any body is, the greater it is in size, when its growth is over, it wastes the more every way, and sends out more particles from itself; nor is the nourishment easily distributed into the veins, or nature sufficient to renew and supply those effluvia it throws off in such abundance, in proportion as the defect and the loss require. The animal therefore must necessarily perish when it is made thin by continual perspiration, and all things must at length fall by constant strokes from without; for the supplies from food must fail in old age, nor do bodies from without ever cease to batter and break to pieces all things with strokes not to be resisted.

By the same rule, the visible heavens, the surrounding walls of this great world, must tumble down by continual attacks, and fall to ruin. It is the nourishment that preserves things in being by constant supplies, but 'tis all to no purpose: For neither are the veins capable to receive what is sufficient, nor can nature afford a proper and needful recruit. Even now, the age of the world is broken, and the Earth so feeble and worn out, that it scarce produces a puny kind of

creatures, when it bore formerly a lusty race, and brought forth such prodigious bodies of wild beasts. Or I cannot think all species of creatures descended from the sky by a Golden Chain upon the Earth, nor were they by the Sea created, nor by the waves that beat the Rocks, but the same Earth which now supports them, at first gave them being. At first she kindly, of her own accord, raised the rich fruits and delightful vines for the benefit of men. She freely of herself offered her sweet produce, the corn and tender grass, which now scarce rise to perfection with all our labor.

We wear out our oxen, and the strength of our husbandmen; we can scarce find plowshares sufficient to till the fields, things are so averse to grow, and our labors are forever increasing. And now the lusty plowman shakes his head, and laments the pains he took was oft in vain; and when he compares the present times with the glorious days that are past, he blesses the good fortune of those that were before him; he talks loudly how the old race of men, filled with piety, no doubt spent their happy days within the narrow bounds of their own field, (for then every man's share of ground was much less than it is now) but has no notion, fond fool! that things by degrees decay, and, worn out by old age, hasten to ruin to the utmost period of their duration.

Munro:

And since the birth-time of the world and first day of being to sea and earth and the formation of the sun many bodies have been added from without, many seeds added all round, which the great universe in tossing to and fro has contributed; that from them the sea and lands might increase and from them heaven's mansion might enlarge its expanse and raise its high vaults far above earth, and that air might rise up around. For all bodies from all quarters are assigned by blows each to its appropriate thing and all withdraw to their proper classes; moisture passes to moisture, from an earthy body earth increases and fires forge fires and ether ether, until nature parent of things with finishing hand has brought all things on to their utmost limit of growth. And this comes to pass when that which is infused into the life-arteries is no more than that which ebbs from them and withdraws: at this point the life-growth in all things must stop, at this point nature by her powers checks further increase.

For whatever things you see grow in size with joyous increase and mount by successive steps to mature age, take to themselves more bodies than they discharge from themselves, while food is readily infused into all the arteries and the things are not so widely spread out as to throw off many particles and occasion more waste than their age can take in as nourishment. For no doubt it must be conceded that many bodies ebb away and withdraw from things; but still more must join them, until they have touched the utmost point of growth. Then piece by piece age breaks their powers and matured strength and wastes away on the side of decay. For the larger a thing is and the wider, as soon as its growth is stopped, at once it sheds abroad and discharges from it more bodies in all directions round; and its food is not readily transmitted into all its arteries and is not enough, in proportion to the copious exhalations which the thing throws off, to enable a like amount to rise up and be supplied. For food must keep all things entire by renewing them, food must uphold, food sustain all things: all in vain,

since the arteries refuse to hold what is sufficient, and nature does not furnish the needful amount. With good reason therefore all things perish, when they have been rarefied by the ebb of particles and succumb to blows without, since food sooner or later fails advanced age, and bodies never cease to destroy a thing by thumping it from without and to overpower it by aggressive blows.

In this way then the walls too of the great world around shall be stormed and fall to decay and crumbling ruin. Yes and even now the age is enfeebled and the earth exhausted by bearing scarce produces little living creatures, she who produced all races and gave birth to the huge bodies of wild beasts. For methinks no golden chain let down to earth from heaven above the races of mortal beings, nor did the sea and waves which lash the rocks produce them, but the same earth bare them which now feeds them out of herself. Moreover she first spontaneously of herself produced for mortals goodly corn-crops and joyous vineyards; of herself gave sweet fruits and glad pastures; which now-a-days scarce attain any size when furthered by our labor:

We exhaust the oxen and the strength of the husbandmen; we wear out our iron, scarcely fed after all by the tilled fields; so niggardly are they of their produce and after so much labor do they let it grow. And now the aged plowman shakes his head and sighs again and again to think that the labors of his hands have come to nothing; and when he compares present times with times past, he often praises the fortunes of his sire and harps on the theme, how the men of old rich in piety comfortably supported life on a scanty plot of ground, since the allotment of land to each man was far less of yore than now. The sorrowful planter too of the exhausted and shriveled vine impeaches the march of time and wearies heaven, and comprehends not that all things are gradually wasting away and passing to the grave, quite forspent by age and length of days.

Bailey:

And since the time of the world's birth, and the first birthday of sea and earth, and the rising of the sun, many bodies have been added from without, and seeds added all around, which the great universe in its tossing has brought together; that from them sea and lands might be able to increase, and from them too the mansion of the sky might gain new room and lift its high vault far away from the lands, and the air might rise up. For from all places all bodies are separated by blows each to its own kind, and they pass on to their own tribes; moisture goes to moisture, with earthy substance earth grows, fires forge fires, and sky sky, until nature, parent of all, with perfecting hand has brought all things on to the last end of growing; as it comes to pass, when there is now no whit more which is sent within the veins of life, than what flows out and passes away. Here the growth of all things must stop, here nature by her powers curbs increase.

For whatsoever things you see waxing large with joyful increase, and little by little climbing the steps to full-grown years, take more into themselves than they send out from their body, so long as food is passed easily into all their veins, and so long as the things are not so widely

spread that they throw off much, and cause waste greater than that on which their growth feeds.

For of a surety you must throw up your hands and grant that many bodies flow away and pass from things; but more must needs be added to them, until they have reached the topmost point of increase. Then little by little age breaks their powers and their full-grown strength, and wastes away on the downhill path. For verily the huger a thing is and the wider it is, when once its bulk begins to go, the more bodies now does it scatter abroad and throw off from itself, nor is its food easily dispersed into all its veins, nor is there store enough, whence matter may arise and be supplied to equal the vast ebb which it gives out. With reason then they perish, when all things have been made rare by the ebb, and yield before the blows from without, inasmuch as at last food fails the aged life, nor do bodies from without cease to thump upon it, and wear it away, and to overcome it with hostile blows.

Thus then even the walls of the wide world all round will be stormed and fall into decay and crumbling ruin. For it is food which must needs repair all things and renew them, food must support them, and food sustain all things; yet all is vain, since neither the veins can bear to receive what is enough, nor does nature furnish all that is needful. Yea, even now its life is broken, and the worn-out earth scarce creates tiny animals, though once it created all the tribes, and brought to birth huge bodies of wild beasts. For it was no golden rope, I trow, which let down the races of living things from heaven above on to the fields, nor did the sea or the waves, that lash the rocks, create them, but the same earth conceived them, which now nourishes them of her substance. Moreover, at first by herself of her own accord she created for mortals the smiling crops and glad vine-plants, herself brought forth sweet fruits and glad pastures; which now scarce wax great, though aided by our toil:

We wear out our oxen and the strength of our husbandmen: we exhaust the iron ploughshare, though scarce supplied by the fields so much do they grudge their produce and increase our toil. And now the aged ploughman shaking his head sighs ever and again that the toil of his hands has perished all for naught, and when he matches the present days against the days of the past, he often praises the fortunes of his father. So too gloomily the planter of the worn-out, wrinkled vine rails at the trend of the times, and wearies heaven, and grumbles to think how the generations of old, rich in piety, easily supported life on a narrow plot, since aforetime the limit of land was far less to each man. Nor does he grasp that all things waste away little by little and pass to the grave foredone by age and the lapse of life.

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## Post by “Cassius” of September 26, 2020 at 8:26 PM

Episode 37 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. This week we are missing Elayne, but we finish Book 2 and set the stage to begin discussing the nature of the soul and the non-

existence of life after death in the coming weeks. As always, let us know if you have any comments or questions about the program, and subscribe to us on iTunes or another other podcast source so you don't miss an episode. Thanks to all who have stuck with us through the first two books of the poem, and please stay with us as we plow ahead to discovery the nature of things with Lucretius and Epicurus.

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