

Episode Forty-Two - The Mind works through the senses; it is a relatively small part of the body; the Mind has more power than the "spirit," but both mind and spirit are mortal

Post by "Cassius" of October 24, 2020 at 2:48 PM

Welcome to Episode Forty-Two 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 358 through line 444 from the Latin text, and we will discuss **how the Mind works through the senses; it is a relatively small part of the body; the Mind has more power than the "spirit," but both mind and spirit are mortal.**

Now lets join the discussion with Elayne reading today's text:

Latin Text Location 358 - 444

Munro Notes:

358 - 369 the body loses sense, you say : yes, certainly, it loses sense, a mere accident ; just as during lift it loses many other things, strength, beauty, etc. before the anima is expelled; the assertion that the eyes cannot see, but that the mind sees through them, as through a door, is contradicted by their sense: nay bright objects often hinder the eyes from seeing them; but this could not happen to doors; nay if eyes act as doors, we ought to see better by entirely taking away these doors.

370-395: you must not believe what Democritus teaches, that the atoms of the soul alternate one by one with those of the body, and are therefore as many in number: they are in fact not

only much smaller, but also much fewer; not enough to awaken sense through the body, which often therefore does not feel very small things that come in contact with it; they not exciting any part of the soul.

396-416: the animus has more power over life than the anima: without the animus the anima cannot remain one instant in the body, but if the former is safe, much of the latter may be cut off without destroying life: the animus is like the pupil of the eye, the least hurt to which destroys the sight; the anima is like the rest of the eyeball, much of which, not all, may be cut away and sight continue.

417-444: this soul and mind (we may now use the terms indifferently) have a birth and are mortal; for they are of the smallest and finest atoms, being more easily moved than anything else, even by images of the rarest things, smoke mist and the like ; as these things then melt into air, so must the soul when severed from the body dissolve even more quickly : how indeed, when the body cannot keep it, could the air which is much rarer hold it together

Browne 1743::

To say likewise, that the eyes can see nothing of themselves, but the mind looks through them as through doors laid open, this is ridiculous, when sense itself tells them the contrary, and sets it full in their view; especially when we are unable to look upon objects that dazzle the eyes, because our site is confounded by too great a lustre. This could not be, if they were mere doors, nor are open doors that we look through capable of pain. Besides, if our eyes were no more than doors, the mind would see clearer when the eyes were pulled out, and the whole frame taken away.

In this case it is vain to take shelter under the sacred opinion of Democritus, who says that as many parts as there are of the body, so many parts too of the soul are answerable, and are contained in them; for since the principles of the soul are not only much smaller than those of which the body and its parts consist, but are fewer in number, and are spread thinly in distant Spaces all over the limbs, you may affirm so far, that the principles of the Soul take up only so many different spaces and intervals, as may be sufficient for those little seeds that are in us to incite those motions that produce Sensation. That this sense does not affect every minute part of the body is plain; for we seldom feel the dust that sticks upon us, nor the particles of chalk that drop upon our limbs; nor do we perceive the dew by night, or the fine threads of the spider meeting us, when we are entangled by the subtle net as we pass along; nor the decaying web lighting upon our heads, nor are we sensible of the soft feathers of birds, nor of the flying down of thistles, which from their natural levity are scarce able to descend upon us; nor do we feel the motion of every creeping insect, nor the little traces of the feet which gnats and such animals make upon us. So that the many seeds which are diffused over all the limbs, must be first put into motion before the principles of the soul are agitated and made capable to feel, and before its seeds, by striking upon each other through so many distance spaces, can meet, unite, and part again, and be so variously moved as to produce sense and perception in us.

But the mind it is that keeps up the defences of life, and has a more sovereign power to preserve our beings, than all the faculties of the soul; for, without the mind, the least part of the soul cannot secure its residence in the body for a moment, but follows it readily as a close companion, and vanishes into air along with it, and leaves the cold limbs in the frozen arms of death. But the man whose mind is whole and entire, remains alive, though he be mangled and all his limbs lopped-off; yet his trunk, though his soul be so far gone, and his members separated from him, still lives and breathes the vital air; the trunk, if not spoiled of the whole, yet of a great part of the soul, still continues alive and holds fast its being. So, if you tear the eye all round, if the pupil remains safe, the power of sight continues entire, so long as you do no injury to the Apple, but cut the white all around, and leave that hole, this may be done without any danger or lost to the sight; but if ever so little of the middle of the eye be pricked through, though the ball otherwise looks bright and sound, the light instantly dies away, and darkness follows. This is the case of the mind and soul, and by such bonds are they always held together.

And now, for your sake, my Memmius, and to let you know that the mind and soul are born in us and die with us, I will go on to write lines worthy of thy genius, and which I have been long preparing, and have at last by sweet labor happily perfected. Observe only that you apply both names indifferently, or, more plainly, when I offered to say the soul is mortal, you are to understand I mean the mind likewise, since they are both so united together, that in this respect, they make but one and the same thing. First then, since I have proved that the soul consists of very minute seeds, and is formed of principles much less than clear water, or mist, or smoke, because it is more apt to move, and is set a-going by a much lighter stroke (for it is moved by the very images of mist and smoke) as when, by sleep overcome, in dreams we see the lofty altars exhale a vapor, and send up smoke into the air, the images of these things no doubt produce these phantasms in us. And since you see, when the vessel is broken to pieces, the water breaks loose and flows away in a stream; and since mist and smoke vanish into air, conclude the soul likewise to be poured out, and that its principles much sooner perish, and its seeds are more easily dissolved, when it is separated and retires from all the limbs; for since the body, which is, as it were, a vessel to it, when it is bruised to pieces by any outward force, or rarefied by the blood being drawn out of the veins, cannot keep it in, how can you suppose it can be contained by subtle air? How can that which is more rare than this body of ours preserve it entire?

Munro:

Again to say that the eyes can see no object, but that the soul discerns through them as through an open door, is far from easy, since their sense contradicts this; for this sense even draws it and forces it out to the pupil: nay, often we are unable to perceive shining things because our eyes are embarrassed by the lights. But this is not the case with doors; for because we ourselves see, the open doors do not therefore undergo any fatigue. Again, if our eyes are in the place of doors, in that case when the eyes are removed the mind ought it would

seem to have more power of seeing things, after doors, jambs and all, have been taken out of the way.

And herein you must by no means adopt the opinion which the revered judgment of the worthy man Democritus lays down, that the first-beginnings of body and mind placed together in successive layers come in alternate order and so weave the tissue of our limbs. For not only are the elements of the soul much smaller than those of which our body and flesh are formed, but they are also much fewer in number and are disseminated merely in scanty number through the frame, so that you can warrant no more than this: the first-beginnings of the soul keep spaces between them at least as great as are the smallest bodies which, if thrown upon it, are first able to excite in our body the sense-giving motions. Thus at times we do not feel the adhesion of dust when it settles on our body, nor the impact of chalk when it rests on our limbs, nor do we feel a mist at night nor a spider's slender threads as they come against us, when we are caught in its meshes in moving along, nor the same insect's flimsy web when it has fallen on our head, nor the feathers of birds and down of plants as it flies about, which commonly from exceeding lightness does not lightly fall, nor do we feel the tread of every creeping creature whatsoever nor each particular foot-print which gnats and the like stamp on our body. So very many first-beginnings must be stirred in us, before the seeds of the soul mixed up in our bodies feel that these have been disturbed, and by thumping with such spaces between can clash unite and in turn recoil.

The mind has more to do with holding the fastnesses of life and has more sovereign sway over it than the power of the soul. For without the understanding and the mind no part of the soul can maintain itself in the frame the smallest fraction of time, but follows at once in the other's train and passes away into the air and leaves the cold limbs in the chill of death. But he abides in life whose mind and understanding continue to stay with him: though the trunk is mangled with its limbs shorn all roundabout it, after the soul has been taken away on all sides and been severed from the limbs the trunk yet lives and inhales the ethereal airs of life. When robbed, if not of the whole, yet of a large portion of the soul, it still lingers in and cleaves to life just as, after the eye has been lacerated if the pupil has continued uninjured, the living power of sight remains, provided always you do not destroy the whole ball of the eye and pare close round the pupil and leave only it; for that will not be done even to the ball without the entire destruction of the eye. But if that middle portion of the eye, small as it is, is eaten into, the sight is gone at once and darkness ensues, though a man have the bright ball quite unimpaired. On such terms of union soul and mind are ever bound to each other. Now mark me: that you may know that the minds and light souls of living creatures have birth and are mortal, I will go on to set forth verses worthy of your attention, got together by long study and invented with welcome effort.

Do you mind to link to one name both of them alike, and when for instance I shall choose to speak of the soul, showing it to be mortal, believe that I speak of the mind as well, inasmuch as both make up one thing and are one united substance. First of all then since I have shown the soul to be fine and to be formed of minute bodies and made up of much smaller first-beginnings

than is the liquid of water or mist or smoke: for it far surpasses these in nimbleness and is moved, when struck by a far slenderer cause; inasmuch as it is moved by images of smoke and mist; as when for instance sunk in sleep we see altars steam forth their heat and send up their smoke on high; for beyond a doubt images are begotten for us from these things: well then since you see on the vessels being shattered the water flow away on all sides, and since mist and smoke pass away into air, believe that the soul too is shed abroad and perishes much more quickly and dissolves sooner into its first bodies, when once it has been taken out of the limbs of a man and has withdrawn. For, when the body that serves for its vessel cannot hold it, if shattered from any cause and rarefied by the withdrawal of blood from the veins, how can you believe that this soul can be held by any air? How can that air which is rarer than our body hold it in?

Bailey:

To say, moreover, that the eyes can see nothing, but that the mind looks out through them as when doors are opened, is hard, seeing that the feeling in the eyes leads us the other way; for that feeling drags us on and forces us to the very pupils; yea, for often we cannot see bright things, because our sight is thwarted by the light. But that does not happen with doors; for the doors, through which we see, do not suffer any pain when they are opened. Moreover, if our eyes are as doors, then the mind, it is clear, ought to discern things better if the eyes were taken out and removed, door-posts and all.

Herein you could by no means accept the teaching, which the judgement of the holy man, Democritus, sets before us, that the first-beginnings of soul and body alternate, set each next each, first one and then the other, and so weave the web of our limbs. For, as the particles of soul are far smaller than those of which our body and flesh are composed, so too they are less in number, and only here and there are scattered through our frame; so that you may warrant this: that the first-beginnings of soul preserve distances apart as great as are the smallest bodies which, when cast upon us, can first start the motions of sensation in the body. For sometimes we do not feel the clinging of dust on the body, nor know that chalk has been shaken on us and settled on our limbs, nor do we feel a mist at night, nor the slender threads of the spider that strike against us, when we are caught in its meshes as we move, nor know that his twisted web has fallen on our head, or the feathers of birds or the flying down from plants, which from its exceeding lightness, for the most part falls not lightly; nor do we feel the passage of every kind of crawling creature nor each single footstep, which gnats and other insects plant upon our body. Indeed, so many things must first be stirred in us, before the seeds of soul mingled with our bodies throughout our frame feel that the first-beginnings have been shaken, and before they can by jostling in these spaces set between, rush together, unite and leap back in turn.

Now the mind is more the keeper of the fastnesses of life, more the monarch of life than the power of the soul. For without the mind and understanding no part of the soul can hold out in the frame for a tiny moment of time, but follows in its train without demur, and scatters into air,

and deserts the chill frame in the frost of death. Yet one, whose mind and understanding have abode firm, abides in life. However much the trunk is mangled with the limbs hewn all around, though the soul be rent from him all around and wrested from his limbs, he lives and draws in the breath of heaven to give him life. Robbed, if not of all, yet of a great part of his soul, still he lingers on and clings to life. Even as, when the eye is mangled all around, if the pupil has abode unharmed, then the living power of sight stands firm, if only you do not destroy the whole ball of the eye, and cut all round the pupil, and leave it by itself: for that will not be done without the destruction of the eyes too. But if that tiny part in the middle of the eye is eaten away, at once light is gone, and darkness follows on, however much the bright ball is in other places unharmed. In such a compact are soul and mind ever bound together.

Come now, that you may be able to learn that the minds and the light souls of living things have birth and death, I will hasten to set forth verses long sought out and found with glad effort, worthy to guide your life. Be it yours to link both of these in a single name, and when, to choose a case, I continue to speak of the soul, proving that it is mortal, suppose that I speak of mind as well, inasmuch as they are at one each with the other and compose a single thing. First of all, since I have shown that it is finely made of tiny bodies and of first-beginnings far smaller than the liquid moisture of water or cloud or smoke—for it far surpasses them in speed of motion, and is more prone to move when smitten by some slender cause; for indeed it is moved by images of smoke and cloud: even as when slumbering in sleep we see altars breathing steam on high, and sending up their smoke; for beyond all doubt these are idols that are borne to us:—now therefore, since, when vessels are shattered, you behold the water flowing away on every side, and the liquid parting this way and that, and since cloud and smoke part asunder into air, you must believe that the soul too is scattered and passes away far more swiftly, and is dissolved more quickly into its first-bodies, when once it is withdrawn from a man's limbs, and has departed. For indeed, since the body, which was, as it were, the vessel of the soul, cannot hold it together, when by some chance it is shattered and made rare, since the blood is withdrawn from the veins, how could you believe that the soul could be held together by any air, which is more rare than our body [and can contain it less]?

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