

Episode Forty-Four - The Mind Cannot Continue to Exist Separately From The Body After Death

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Welcome to Episode Forty-Four 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 548-633 from Book 3 of the Latin Text. The topic will be how additional evidence from which we conclude that the mind cannot continue to exist separate from the body after death.

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

Latin Text Location 548-633

Munro Notes:

548-557: the mind is as much part of the man, as the ear or eye or any other sense: none of these can exist alone, but decay at once : so it is with the mind, which is as closely connected with the body as these are.

558-594: again body and soul depend for life one on the other: without the body the soul cannot give birth to vital motion, nor can the body without the soul continue and feel : mind and soul produce their sense-giving motions, because their atoms are kept in by the bodily frame : this they cannot do in the air; or else the air will be a body and an animal, if the soul can move in it as it moved in the body : often again in life the soul seems to fail and to be on the point of going : it is so shattered together with the body that a more violent shock would destroy it ; how then could it exist a moment, not to say an eternity in the open air? therefore when the body dies, mind and soul die.

595-614: when the soul leaves it the body rots away: a proof that the soul has come out of its inmost depths, to cause such utter ruin ; the soul then must have been torn in pieces itself, ere it got out of the body: again a dying man feels not the soul escaping entire from him, but failing in this spot or that: if the mind were immortal, it would not mourn its dissolution, but its having to quit the cover of the body.

615-623: why too is the mind never born in the head or foot, but in one fixed spot, if not because it is only a part of the body; and the body, like other things has its own fixed organism, so that every member has in it its proper place? effect ever follows cause, nor can fire arise in water, frost in fire.

624-633: again if the soul is immortal and can exist alone, it must have the five senses, as imagined by writers and painters; but none of the senses can exist alone away from the body.

Browne:

And since the mind is a part of man fixed in one certain place, as the ears, eyes, and other senses that preside over life, and as the hands, and eyes, and nose, when separated from the body, are incapable of sense, or even to be, but must in a very short time corrupt and putrefy; for the Mind cannot subsist of itself without the body, (or even be in the man) which is as it were a vessel to the soul, or anything else you can conceive more closely united to it; for it sticks inseparably to the body, and cannot be divided from it.

Further, the vital powers of the body and mind exert themselves together, and live united by the strongest bonds; neither can the nature of the Mind alone dispense the vital motions of itself without the body, nor can the body, void of soul, continue or use the faculties of sense. For as the eye, torn out by the roots and separated from the body, can see nothing, so the soul and mind cannot act of themselves, because they are spread over all the body by the veins, the bowels, the nerves, and bones. Nor could the seeds of the soul exercise those vibrations that produce sense, were they disposed at wide intervals, and enclosed by no solid body. They show those sensible motions because they are shut up close, which they cannot exert when they are forced out of the body into the wide air after death, because they are not under the same restraint as they are within the enclosure of the body; for the air would be an animal, if the soul could be confined within it, and maintain those motions of sense which before it exercised in the nerves and through the limbs.

You must confess therefore, over and over, that the mind and soul (for they both make up but one substance) must needs be dissolved, as soon as they are stripped of the covering of the body, and their vital powers thrown out into the thin air. Again, since the body cannot bear the separation of the soul, but it soon putrifies and stinks, how can you doubt but that the principles of the soul diffused through the whole body, and raised from the very inmost parts of it, flow out like smoke, and therefore the rotten body thus changed falls to pieces in so ruinous a manner, because the seeds of the soul, which preserved the whole, are moved widely from their place, and flow through the limbs, and all the winding passages of the body. And hence

you are fully satisfied that the nature of the soul is spread over all the limbs, and is first broken and divided in the body itself, before it flies out into the air abroad.

Nay more! whilst the man is still living, the soul seems often to receive a violent shock, so that the limbs are dissolving all over, the face looking pale, as if it were real death, and all the members of the body wan and ghastly, falling to pieces. This happens in a swooning fit, when the soul is going, and trembles upon the verge of life, and all the faculties strive to hold fast the chain that binds up soul and body together. The mind and all the powers of the soul are then shaken, and are so staggered with the body, that a force a little stronger would drive it to utter dissolution. Do you doubt now whether this soul thrown out of the body, abroad, destitute, into the open air, stripped naked, be so far from remaining entire to eternal ages, that it cannot subsist so much as for the least moment? And then no dying man ever perceived his soul go out whole from all parts of the body at once, nor felt it first creeping up his throat, and then rising up to his jaws; but he finds it fail in that part of the body wherein it is placed, as he knows that every sense expires in its proper organ. But if this mind were immortal, it would not, when dying, complain of its being dissolved, but rather rejoice that it was going freely abroad, that it had thrown off his coat as a snake, or as an old stag that casts his heavy antlers.

And why is not the mind, with all its reason and conduct, produced in the head, the feet, the hands, but that every part is fixed to one place, and to a certain situation? If proper places were not appointed to all beings in which to be born, and when produced where they might abide, and where every member might be so conveniently disposed, that there might be no preposterous order of the limbs throughout the whole? So regularly does one thing follow another that fire is never raised from water, nor cold from heat. Besides, if the nature of the soul be immortal, and enjoys the power of sense when separated from the body, you must, as I conceive, supply her with the use of the five senses, nor can we imagine how without them the soul can live in the shades below. The painters and the poets, many ages ago, have represented the souls indued with sense, but neither eyes nor nose, nor hands nor tongue nor ears can be separately in the soul, nor can they separately retain any sense nor even be, without it.

Munro:

And since the mind is one part of a man which remains fixed in a particular spot, just as are the ears and eyes and the other senses which guide and direct life; and just as the hand or eye or nose when separated from us cannot feel and exist apart, but in however short a time wastes away in putrefaction, thus the mind cannot exist by itself without the body and the man's self which as you see serves for the mind's vessel or any thing else you choose to imagine which implies a yet closer union with it, since the body is attached to it by the nearest ties.

Again the quickened powers of body and mind by their joint partnership enjoy health and life; for the nature of the mind cannot by itself alone without the body give forth vital motions nor

can the body again bereft of the soul continue to exist and make use of its senses: just, you are to know, as the eye, itself torn away from its roots, cannot see anything when apart from the whole body, thus the soul and, mind cannot, it is plain, do anything by themselves. Sure enough, because mixed up through veins and flesh, sinews and bones, their first-beginnings are confined by all the body and are not free to bound away leaving great spaces between, therefore thus shut in they make those sense-giving motions which they cannot make after death when forced out of the body into the air by reason that they are not then confined in a like manner; for the air will be a body and a living thing if the soul shall be able to keep itself together and to enclose in it those motions which it used before to perform in the sinews and within the body.

Moreover, even while it yet moves within the confines of life, often the soul shaken from some cause or other is seen to wish to pass out and be loosed from the whole body, the features are seen to droop as at the last hour and all the limbs to sink flaccid over the bloodless trunk: just as happens, when the phrase is used, the mind is in a bad way, or the soul is quite gone; when all is hurry and everyone is anxious to keep from parting the last tie of life; for then the mind and the power of the soul are shaken throughout and both are quite loosened together with the body; so that a cause somewhat more powerful can quite break them up. Why doubt, I would ask, that the soul when driven forth out of the body, when in the open air, feeble as it is, stripped of its covering, not only cannot continue through eternity, but is unable to hold together the smallest fraction of time?

Therefore, again and again I say, when the enveloping body has been all broken up and the vital airs have been forced out, you must admit that the senses of the mind and the soul are dissolved, since the cause of destruction is one and inseparable for both body and soul. Again since the body is unable to bear the separation of the soul without rotting away in a noisome stench, why doubt that the power of the soul gathering itself up from the inmost depths of body has oozed out and dispersed like smoke, and that the crumbling body has changed and tumbled in with so total a ruin for this reason because its foundations throughout are stirred from their places, the soul oozing out abroad through the frame, through all the winding passages which are in the body, and all openings? So that in ways manifold you may learn that the nature of the soul has been divided piecemeal and gone forth throughout the frame, and that it has been tom to shreds within the body, ere it glided forth and swam out into the air. For no one when dying appears to feel the soul go forth entire from his whole body or first mount up to the throat and gullet, but all feel it fail in that part which lies in a particular quarter; just as they know that the senses as well suffer dissolution each in its own place. But if our mind were immortal, it would not when dying complain so much of its dissolution, as of passing abroad and quitting its vesture, like a snake.

Again, why are the mind's understanding and judgment never begotten in the head or feet or hands, but cling in all alike to one spot and fixed quarter, if it be not that particular places are assigned for the birth of everything, and [nature has determined] where each is to continue to

exist after it is born? [Our body then must follow the same law] and have such a manifold organization of parts, that no perverted arrangement of its members shall ever show itself. So invariably effect follows cause, nor is flame wont to be born in rivers nor cold in fire. Again, if the nature of the soul is immortal and can feel when separated from our body, methinks we must suppose it to be provided with five senses; and in no other way can we picture to ourselves souls below flitting about Acheron. Painters therefore and former generations of writers have thus represented souls provided with senses. But neither eyes nor nose nor hand can exist for the soul apart from the body, nor can tongue, nor can ears perceive by the sense of hearing or exist for the soul by themselves apart from the body.

Bailey:

And since the mind is one part of man, which abides rooted in a place determined, just as are ears and eyes and all the other organs of sense which guide the helm of life; and, just as hand and eye or nostrils, sundered apart from us, cannot feel nor be, but in fact are in a short time melted in corruption, so the mind cannot exist by itself without the body and the very man, who seems to be, as it were, the vessel of the mind, or aught else you like to picture more closely bound to it, inasmuch as the body clings to it with binding ties.

Again, the living powers of body and mind prevail by union, one with the other, and so enjoy life; for neither without body can the nature of mind by itself alone produce the motions of life, nor yet bereft of soul can body last on and feel sensation. We must know that just as the eye by itself, if torn out by the roots, cannot discern anything apart from the whole body, so, it is clear, soul and mind by themselves have no power. Doubtless because in close mingling throughout veins and flesh, throughout sinews and bones, their first-beginnings are held close by all the body, nor can they freely leap asunder with great spaces between; and so shut in they make those sense-giving motions, which outside the body cast out into the breezes of air after death they cannot make, because they are not in the same way held together. For indeed air will be body, yea a living thing, if the soul can hold itself together, and confine itself to those motions, which before it made in the sinews and right within the body.

Wherefore, again and again, when the whole protection of the body is undone and the breath of life is driven without, you must needs admit that the sensations of the mind and the soul are dissolved, since the cause of life in soul and body is closely linked. Again, since the body cannot endure the severing of the soul, but that it decays with a foul stench, why do you doubt that the force of the soul has gathered together from deep down within, and has trickled out, scattering abroad like smoke, and that the body has changed and fallen crumbling in such great ruin, because its foundations have been utterly moved from their seat, as the soul trickles forth through the limbs, and through all the winding ways, which are in the body, and all the pores? So that in many ways you may learn that the nature of the soul issued through the frame sundered in parts, and that even within the body it was rent in pieces in itself, before it slipped forth and swam out into the breezes of air.

Nay more, while it moves still within the limits of life, yet often from some cause the soul seems to be shaken and to move, and to wish to be released from the whole body; the face seems to grow flaccid, as at the hour of death, and all the limbs to fall limp on the bloodless trunk. Even so it is, when, as men say, the heart has had a shock, or the heart has failed; when all is alarm, and one and all struggle to clutch at the last link to life. For then the mind is shaken through and through, and all the power of the soul, and both fall in ruin with the body too; so that a cause a whit stronger might bring dissolution. Why do you doubt after all this but that the soul, if driven outside the body, frail as it is, without in the open air, robbed of its shelter, would not only be unable to last on through all time, but could not hold together even for a moment?

For it is clear that no one, as he dies, feels his soul going forth whole from all his body, nor coming up first to the throat and the gullet up above, but rather failing in its place in a quarter determined; just as he knows that the other senses are dissolved each in their own place. But if our mind were immortal, it would not at its death so much lament that it was dissolved, but rather that it went forth and left its slough, as does a snake.

Again, why is the understanding and judgement of the mind never begotten in head or feet or hands, but is fixed for all men in one abode in a quarter determined, except that places determined are assigned to each thing for its birth, and in which each several thing can abide when it is created, that so it may have its manifold parts arranged that never can the order of its limbs be seen reversed? So surely does one thing follow on another, nor is flame wont to be born of flowing streams, nor cold to be conceived in fire. Moreover, if the nature of the soul is immortal and can feel when sundered from our body, we must, I trow, suppose it endowed with five senses. Nor in any other way can we picture to ourselves the souls wandering in the lower world of Acheron. And so painters and the former generations of writers have brought before us souls thus endowed with senses. Yet neither eyes nor nose nor even hand can exist for the soul apart from body, nor again tongue apart or ears; the souls cannot therefore feel by themselves or even exist.

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