

Episode Forty-Six - Conclusion of the Argument That the Mind and Soul Cannot Survive Death

Post by "Cassius" of November 21, 2020 at 12:06 PM

Welcome to Episode Forty-Six 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 that living things inherit qualities of life from their parents, but they do not inherit immortal souls.

Podcast 46 - Living Things Inherit Qualities from Their Parents, but not souls that are immortal.

Latin Text Location 741- 829

Munro Notes:

741-775 : again why do animals inherit the qualities of their parents, unless the mind like the body comes from a fixed seed? if the soul is immortal and passes into different bodies, why do not dogs and stags, hawks and doves, men and beasts exchange dispositions? they say the immortal soul changes with the change of body: false; for what changes is broken up, and therefore dies : if it be urged, a human soul always passes into a human body, a horse's into a horse, why then is not the child as wise as the man, the foal as the horse? the mind grows young in the young body you say: then is it mortal, since it thus loses its former properties : or how can the soul come to maturity with the body, unless its partner from the beginning? or why does it seek to quit the aged body? it need not fear its ruin; for an immortal runs no risk.

776-783: again how absurd that immortal souls should be present at conception and fight who shall get the mortal body, unless indeed they bargain, first come first served!

784-829: again everything has its proper place assigned to it; and thus the mind cannot be out of the body away from sinews and blood : if it could be in the head or heels or any other part of the body (and this would be much more natural than that it should be out of the body altogether) there it would still be within the man : now as mind and soul not only are in our body, but have a fixed place in that body, it is still more inconceivable that they could exist wholly out of it; therefore the soul dies with the body: nay thus to join a mortal thing with an immortal is too absurd : but if you say the soul is immortal, because it is sheltered from all that would destroy it, that is not true; not only does it suffer with the body, but it has other ailments of its own, fears for the future, remorse for the past, madness and lethargy.

Browne:

Besides, why does fierce rage affect the sullen breed of lions? Why is craft derived to the fox, and flight to stags, from their sires, and paternal fear give wings to all their limbs? Whence comes other passions of this kind? Why do they belong to all creatures from their tender age, and seem born with them, if the peculiar powers of the soul were not produced from peculiar seeds in every particular kind, and did not grow up together with the whole body? But were the soul immortal and used to change her body, creatures would be strangely confused in their dispositions and qualities; the fierce dog of Hircanian breed would fly the attack of the horned stag, and the fearful hawk would tremble in the air at the approach of a dove; men would be void of reason like brutes, and the savage race of beasts might become philosophers. But what is said in this case is supported by false reasoning, that the immortal soul is changed according to the different body it is united with, for what is changed is dissolved, and therefore dies, the parts are transposed, and vary in their situation. It follows therefore that the principles of it may be dissolved through the limbs, and may all perish together with the body. But they cry that the souls always pass into bodies of the same kind, the souls of men into the bodies of men. Then I would ask why a soul from being wise should become a fool, and a child is not made a privy counselor? And why a young colt has not the paces of a full-grown horse? If the peculiar powers of the soul were not produced from peculiar seeds in every particular kind, and did they not grow up together with the whole body? They'll say perhaps that the mind becomes equally weak in a tender body; if so, they must allow the soul to be mortal because, when infused into the body it is so much changed it loses the life and sense it enjoyed before. And why should the powers of the soul desire passionately to grow and attain to a full maturity of age together with the body if it were not a companion with it from the very beginning? And why is she fond of flying away out of old decaying limbs? Is she afraid of being confined a close prisoner in a rotten body, and lest her old tabernacle, worn out by time and age, should all and crush her to pieces? But no danger can affect a nature that is immortal.

Besides, it is ridiculous to suppose that a flock of souls are ready hovering about, whilst brutes are in the act of lust, and drop their young, that they, immortal as they are, should attend upon perishing bodies, in troops without number, hurrying and coming to blows as it were, which first should get possession and enter in; unless perhaps they rather choose to agree among

themselves that the first come should be first served, and there should be no further dispute about it.

Again, there are no trees in the sky, no clouds can be in the deep sea, nor can fish live in the fields, nor can there be blood in wood nor moisture in stones. It is fixed and established where every thing should grow and subsist. The soul therefore cannot come into being alone without the body, nor can she exist separately without the nerves and the blood; if this could be, the powers of the soul you would rather feel sometimes in the head or shoulders, or even in the very bottom of the feet, or in any other part of the body, and so you would perceive it diffusing itself through the whole body, as water poured into a vessel first covers one part, then spreads over the whole. Since therefore there is a proper and determinate place in this body of ours for the mind and soul distinctly to be and increase in, we have the more reason to deny that they can continue or be born without it; and consequently when the body dies, the soul, diffused through the whole body, must be allowed to die likewise. And then to join a mortal nature to an immortal, and to think that they can agree together, and mutually unite in their operations, is folly and nonsense. For what can be conceived more absurd, what can be more impracticable in itself, more disagreeing to reason, than a mortal nature joined to one eternal and immortal, and so united as to be liable to all the pains and distresses of human life?

Besides, whatever is immortal must be so either because it is solid, and cannot be affected by blows, so that nothing can pierce it, and break through the close union of its parts (such are the first seeds of matter, as we proved before) or it is eternal, and lasts forever, because it is free from stroke, as a void is, which is not liable to touch, nor affected by the force of blows; or lastly, because there is no space any way about it into which its broken parts can be dispersed, (in this sense the universe is eternal; beyond which there is no place where its parts may retire, nor any bodies to fall upon it, and dissolve and break it to pieces by mighty blows from without). But, as I said, the nature of the mind is not solid, because there is empty space in all compound beings; nor yet is it a void, nor are there wanting bodies forever beating upon it from without, and driving the whole frame of this mind by impetuous force into utter dissolution, or to distress it any other way with extremest danger; nor is there any want of place or space where the seeds of the soul may be dispersed, or where they may be dissolved by any violence whatsoever. The gate of death therefore is not barred against the soul.

But if you think she may rather be pronounced immortal, because she is placed secure from things that may destroy her being, or that things opposite to her safety never come out of her, or if they do, they are diverted by some cause before you perceive they have done her any signal injury, this is a great mistake, and far from the truth. For, not to mention how she sickens with the diseases of the body, how something happens that torments her about future events, how she is disordered by fear, and vexed by cares, and how the conscience of crimes past, many years ago, pierces her through; consider the peculiar distraction that affects the mind, how she forgets everything, and is overwhelmed by the black waves of a lethargy.

Munro:

Again, why does untamed fierceness go along with the sullen brood of lions, cunning with foxes and proneness to flight with stags? And to take any other instance of the kind, why are all qualities engendered in the limbs and temper from the very commencement of life, if not because a fixed power of mind derived from its proper seed and breed grows up together with the whole body? If it were immortal and wont to pass into different bodies, living creatures would be of interchangeable dispositions; a dog of Hyrcanian breed would often fly before the attack of an antlered stag, a hawk would cower in mid air as it fled at the approach of a dove, men would be without reason, the savage races of wild beasts would have reason. For the assertion that an immortal soul is altered by a change of body is advanced on a false principle. What is changed is dissolved, and therefore dies: the parts are transposed and quit their former order; therefore they must admit of being dissolved too throughout the frame, in order at last to die one and all together with the body. But if they shall say that souls of men always go into human bodies, I yet will ask how it is a soul can change from wise to foolish, and no child has discretion, and why the mare's foal is not so well trained as the powerful strength of the horse. You may be sure they will fly to the subterfuge that the mind grows weakly in a weakly body. But granting this is so, you must admit the soul to be mortal, since changed so completely throughout the frame it loses its former life and sense. Then too in what way will it be able to grow in strength uniformly with its allotted body and reach the coveted flower of age, unless it shall be its partner at its first beginning? Or what means it by passing out from the limbs when decayed with age? Does it fear to remain shut up in a crumbling body, fear that its tenement, worn out by protracted length of days, bury it in its ruins? Why, an immortal being incurs no risks.

Again for souls to stand by at the unions of Venus and the birth-throes of beasts seems to be passing absurd, for them the immortals to wait for mortal limbs in number numberless and struggle with one another in forward rivalry, which shall first and by preference have entrance in; unless haply bargains are struck among the souls on these terms, that whichever in its flight shall first come up, shall first have right of entry, and that they shall make no trial at all of each other's strength.

Again a tree cannot exist in the ether, nor clouds in the deep sea nor can fishes live in the fields nor blood exist in woods nor sap in stones. Where each thing can grow and abide is fixed and ordained. Thus the nature of the mind cannot come into being alone without the body nor exist far away from the sinews and blood. But if (for this would be much more likely to happen than that) the force itself of the mind might be in the head or shoulders or heels or might be born in any other part of the body, it would after all be wont to abide in one and the same man or vessel. But since in our body even it is fixed and seen to be ordained where the soul and the mind can severally be and grow, it must still more strenuously be denied that it can abide and be born out of the body altogether. Therefore when the body has died, we must admit that the soul has perished, wrenched away throughout the body. To link forsooth a mortal thing with an everlasting and suppose that they can have sense in common and can be reciprocally acted upon, is sheer folly; for what can be conceived more incongruous, more discordant and

inconsistent with itself, than a thing which is mortal, linked with an immortal and everlasting thing, trying in such union to weather furious storms?

But if haply the soul is to be accounted immortal for this reason rather, because it is kept sheltered from death-bringing things, either because things hostile to its existence do not approach at all, or because those which do approach, in some way or other retreat discomfited before we can feel the harm they do, [manifest experience proves that this can not be true]. For besides that it sickens in sympathy with the maladies of the body, it is often attacked by that which frets it on the score of the future and keeps it on the rack of suspense and wears it out with cares; and when ill deeds are in the past, remorse for sins yet gnaws: then there is madness peculiar to the mind and forgetfulness of all things; then too it often sinks into the black waters of lethargy.

Bailey:

Again, why does fiery passion go along with the grim brood of lions and cunning with foxes; why is the habit of flight handed on to deer from their sires, so that their father's fear spurs their limbs? And indeed all other habits of this sort, why are they always implanted in the limbs and temper from the first moment of life, if it be not because a power of mind determined by its own seed and breed grows along with the body of each animal? But if the soul were immortal and were wont to change its bodies, then living creatures would have characters intermingled; the dog of Hyrcanian seed would often flee the onset of the horned hart, and the hawk would fly fearful through the breezes of air at the coming of the dove; men would be witless, and wise the fierce tribes of wild beasts. For it is argued on false reasoning, when men say that an immortal soul is altered, when it changes its body: for what is changed, is dissolved, and so passes away. For the parts are transferred and shift from their order; wherefore they must be able to be dissolved too throughout the limbs, so that at last they may all pass away together with the body. But if they say that the souls of men always pass into human bodies, still I will ask why a soul can become foolish after being wise, why no child has reason, why the mare's foal is not as well trained as the bold strength of a horse. We may be sure they will be driven to say that in a weak body the mind too is weak. But if that indeed comes to pass, you must needs admit that the soul is mortal, since it changes so much throughout the frame, and loses its former life and sense. Or in what manner will the force of mind be able along with each several body to wax strong and attain the coveted bloom of life, unless it be partner too with the body at its earliest birth? Or why does it desire to issue forth abroad from the aged limbs? does it fear to remain shut up in a decaying body, lest its home, worn out with the long spell of years, fall on it? But an immortal thing knows no dangers.

Again, that the souls should be present at the wedlock of Venus and the birth of wild beasts, seems to be but laughable; that immortal souls should stand waiting for mortal limbs in numbers numberless, and should wrangle one with another in hot haste, which first before the others may find an entrance; unless by chance the souls have a compact sealed, that whichever arrives first on its wings, shall first have entrance, so that they strive not forcibly at

all with one another.

Again, a tree cannot exist in the sky, nor clouds in the deep waters, nor can fishes live in the fields, nor blood be present in wood, nor sap in stones. It is determined and ordained where each thing can grow and have its place. So the nature of the mind cannot come to birth alone without body, nor exist far apart from sinews and blood. But if this could be, far sooner might the force of mind itself exist in head or shoulders, or right down in the heels, and be wont to be born in any part you will, but at least remain in the same man or the same vessel. But since even within our body it is determined and seen to be ordained where soul and mind can dwell apart and grow, all the more must we deny that it could continue or be begotten outside the whole body. Wherefore, when the body has perished, you must needs confess that the soul too has passed away, rent asunder in the whole body. Nay, indeed, to link the mortal with the everlasting, and to think that they can feel together and act one upon the other, is but foolishness. For what can be pictured more at variance, more estranged within itself and inharmonious, than that what is mortal should be linked in union with the immortal and everlasting to brave raging storms?

Moreover, if ever things abide for everlasting, it must needs be either that, because they are of solid body, they beat back assaults, nor suffer anything to come within them which might unloose the close-locked parts within, such as are the bodies of matter whose nature we have declared before; or that they are able to continue throughout all time, because they are exempt from blows, as is the void, which abides untouched, nor suffers a whit from assault; or else because there is no supply of room all around, into which, as it were, things might part asunder and be broken up—even as the sum of sums is eternal—nor is there any room without into which they may scatter, nor are there bodies which might fall upon them and break them up with stout blow. But if by chance the soul is rather to be held immortal for this reason, because it is fortified and protected from things fatal to life, or because things harmful to its life come not at all, or because such as come in some way depart defeated before we can feel what harm they do us [clear facts show us that this is not so]. For besides that it falls sick along with the diseases of the body, there comes to it that which often torments it about things that are to be, and makes it ill at ease with fear, and wears it out with care; and when its evil deeds are past and gone, yet sin brings remorse. There is too the peculiar frenzy of the mind and forgetfulness of the past, yes, and it is plunged into the dark waters of lethargy.

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