

# Episode Sixty-Nine - The End of Our World

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## Welcome to Episode Sixty-Nine 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. 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 this Episode 69 we will read approximately Latin line 235-323 of Book V, and we will talk about the upcoming end of our world as we know it. Now let's join Don reading today's text.

Latin Lines 235-323

Munro Notes-

235-246: first then, since earth water air and fire are all mortal, the world of which these are the parts should be deemed mortal: the world then had a beginning and will have an end.

247-260: think not I am begging the question in asserting that earth water air and fire are mortal: first as to earth: since of it you see passes away in clouds of dust ; so is carried away by floods or rivers eating their banks: again what feeds other things, is usually replenished in return ; and since earth, mother of all things, is also their tomb, the earth wastes and grows again

261-272 the same is true of water : fresh supplies are constantly coming to seas and rivers; but the sum remains the same, because as much is taken away by the winds and the sun, and by filtering through the ground, whence the water finds its way back to the river-heads.

273-280: the air too is ever changing; for whatever streams off from things, must pass into air; and thus unless the air gave back as much, all things would become air.

281-305 : and so it is with fire too; the sun continually sends out new light, as you may see when clouds intercept it; the light beneath the clouds at once disappears; and thus it is with lights on earth; lamps and the like are constantly sending forth fresh lights, so that the destruction of the old is concealed by the instantaneous production of the new: the same is the

case with sun moon and stars.

306-317 : again the hardest things, stones metals and the like are broken up by time: they had a beginning then; else they would not give way after enduring from everlasting.

318-323 : if as some say the all-environing ether begets all timings and takes them back at death, then must it be mortal; for it is thus subject to increase and decrease.

Browne 1743

And further, since the body of the earth, the water, and the light breath of the air, and the hot fire, of which this universe of things consists, had all a beginning, and are all formed of mortal seeds, the nature of the world must be the same, and must die likewise. For a body whose parts and members we know were born, and were produced from mortal principles, that being must be the same in nature with its parts; it must have a beginning, and be equally mortal. And therefore when I observe the four elements (the great limbs of the world) are continually changing, are wasted away, and then renewed; I conclude that the whole world, the earth and the heavens, had a time of beginning, and will in time fall and be destroyed.

But my Memmius, that you may not think I rashly supposed what I should have proved upon this subject, when I said that the earth and the fire were mortal, and made no doubt but the air and the water were so too, and that they began to be, and by degrees increased, you are to observe, first, that some part of the earth is burnt up by the continual strokes of the Sun, and much of it, being worn by the continual treading of the feet, rises into flying clouds of dust, which the fierce winds scatter through all the air, and part of the earth, by soaking showers, is turned into water, and the encroaching rivers eat away their banks. Besides, whatever increases another body with any of its parts, must lose so much from itself, and since the Earth is certainly the great parent and common selpulchre of all things, it must sometimes be diminished, and then increase and be renewed again.

And then the Sea, the Rivers, the fountains, abound always with sweet water, and flow with everlasting streams. There is no need of many words; the prodigious currents that flow every way to the sea prove this effectually. But less the mass of waters should flow too great, some of it is continually licked up, and wastes away; the strong winds, brushing over its surface, take off part of its flood, and a part the sun exhales and draws up into the air, and some is divided through the subterranean passages of the earth. There the saline particles are strained off, and then the waters flow back, and start up in fountains, and form themselves into rivers, which glide sweetly with their collected strength over the earth, through those channels where the streams first made their liquid way.

And now, to speak of the Air, which is changed with its whole body every moment, in various manners not to be numbered; for whatever is continually flowing off from bodies is carried into the vast ocean of the air; unless the air therefore restored again those particles to the bodies from whence they came, and renewed them as they wasted away, all things had long since

been changed into Air, and wholly dissolved. The air therefore is continually produced from bodies, and continually returns into them again, for things never remain the same, but are in a perpetual fluctuation.

The Sun likewise, that large fountain of liquid light, constantly bedews the heavens with a new brightness, and instantly supplies one ray by the succession of another; its first beams of light, as soon as they have shone out, die away. This you may collect from hence, that as soon as a cloud interposes between the sun's orb and us, and as it were breaks through the rays of light, the lower part of the beams immediately perishes, and the earth, as the clouds pass over it, is made dark. This proves that things require a constant stream of new rays, and that every first emission of light dies; nor could things otherwise be seen in the light unless the Sun (the fountain of brightness) continually sent out fresh supplies. After the same manner our nightly lights that we use here below, our hanging lustres, our lamps shining with a bright flame, and fat with oily smoke, are continually sending out new streams of light by the help of fire. They press on and discharge their trembling rays without intermission; they never cease, nor is the light ever interrupted, or leaves the place dark for a moment, so swiftly is the destruction of the first rays repaired from the constant fire of the lamps (the fountain of light) and a new beam instantly flies off as the old expires. We conclude therefore that the Sun, the Moon, and the Stars are continually throwing off new supplies of light, and that the first rays they emit perish and die away; lest you should believe these beams remained perfect and undissolved, and were eternally the same.

Besides, don't we observe how stones are worn away by time? That lofty towers fall to ruin, and rocks moulder to dust? That the temples and images of the gods are tired with standing, and are forced to give way? Nor can the gods themselves extend the bounds of fate, or strive against the laws of nature. Don't you see the monuments of men burst asunder at last, to grow old, and suddenly break in pieces? That the rocks are torn, and tumble from the high mountains, and are unable to bear or resist the mighty force even of a finite time? For they would never have fallen with this sudden ruin had they from all eternity endured the strokes of time secure and unshaken.

And then look up to those surrounding heavens that above and below embrace this body of the earth; those heavens which, some say, produce all things out of themselves, and to which all things are at last resolved. They surely had a beginning, are formed of mortal seeds, and must have an end, for whatever seeds and contributes to the increase of other bodies must lose some of its parts and must again be repaired by those bodies when they are dissolved.

Munro 1886

First of all, since the body of the earth and water and the light breath of air and burning heats, out of which this sum of things is seen to be formed, do all consist of a body that had a birth and is mortal, the whole nature of the world must be reckoned of a like body. For those things whose parts and members we see to be of a body that had a birth and of forms that are mortal,

we perceive to be likewise without exception mortal, and at the same time to have had a birth. Since therefore I see that the chiefest members and parts of the world are destroyed and begotten anew, I may be sure that for heaven and earth as well there has been a time of beginning and there will be a time of destruction.

And herein that you may not think I have unfairly seized on this point for myself, because I have assumed that earth and fire are mortal and have not doubted that water and air perish, and have said that these are likewise begotten and grow afresh, mark the proofs: First of all some portion of the earth, burnt up by constant suns, trampled by a multitude of feet, sends forth a cloud and flying eddies of dust, which the strong winds disperse over the whole air. Part too of the soil is put underwater by rains, and rivers graze against and eat into the banks. Again whatever increases something else is in its turn replenished; and since beyond a doubt earth the universal mother is found at the same time to be the general tomb of things, therefore you see she is lessened and increases and grows again.

Furthermore, that sea rivers fountains always stream over with new moisture and that waters well up without ceasing, it needs no words to prove: the great flow of waters from all sides clearly shows it. But then the water on the surface is always taken off, and thus it is that on the whole there is no overflow, partly because the seas are lessened by the strong winds sweeping over them and by the ethereal sun decomposing them with his rays; partly because the water is diffused below the surface over all lands; for the salt is strained off and the matter of liquid streams back again to the source and all meets together at the river-heads, and then flows over the lands in a fresh current, where a channel once scooped out has carried down the waters with liquid foot.

And next I will speak of the air which is changed over its whole body every hour in countless ways. For whatever ebbs from things, is all borne always into the great sea of air; and unless it in return were to give back bodies to things and to recruit them as they ebb, all things ere now would have been dissolved and changed into air. It therefore ceases not to be begotten from things and to go back into things, since it is a fact that all things constantly ebb.

Likewise, the abundant source of clear light, the ethereal sun, constantly floods heaven with fresh brightness and supplies the place of light on the instant by new light; for every previous emission of brightness is quite lost to it, wherever it falls. This you may know from the following examples: as soon as ever clouds begin to pass below the sun and to break off so to say the rays of light, forthwith their lower part is wholly lost, and the earth is overshadowed wherever the clouds pass over; so that you may know that things constantly require new irradiation and that all the preceding emissions of light are lost, and in no other way can things be seen in the sun, unless the fountain head of light itself send a supply. Moreover, you see, nightly lights which belong to earth, such as hanging lamps and torches bright with darting flames, hasten in like fashion amid great darkness with ministering heat to supply new light; are eager to bicker with fires, are eager; nor is the light ever broken off nor does it quit the spots illuminated: with such suddenness is its destruction concealed by the swift birth of flame from all the fires at

once. In the same way then we must believe that sun moon and stars emit light from fresh and ever fresh supplies rising up, and always lose every previous discharge of flames; that you may not haply believe that these flourish indestructible.

Again see you not that even stones are conquered by time, that high towers fall and rocks molder away, that shrines and idols of gods are worn out with decay, and that the holy divinity cannot prolong the bounds of fate or struggle against the fixed laws of nature? Then see we not the monuments of men, fallen to ruin, ask for themselves as well whether you'd believe that they decay with years? See we not basalt rocks tumble down riven away from high mountains and unable to endure and suffer the strong might of finite age? Surely they would never fall suddenly thus riven away, if for infinite time past they had held out against all the batteries of age without a crash.

Again gaze on this, which about and above holds in its embrace all the earth: if it begets all things out of itself, as some say, and takes them back when they are destroyed, then the whole of it has had a birth and is of a mortal body; for whatever gives increase and food out of itself to other things must be lessened; and must be replenished, when it takes things back.

Bailey 1921

First of all, since the body of earth and moisture, and the light breath of the winds and burning heat, of which this sum of things is seen to be made up, are all created of a body that has birth and death, of such, too, must we think that the whole nature of the world is fashioned. For verily things whose parts and limbs we see to be of a body that has birth and of mortal shapes, themselves too we perceive always to have death and birth likewise. Wherefore, when we see the mighty members and parts of the world consumed away and brought to birth again, we may know that sky too likewise and earth had some time of first-beginning, and will suffer destruction.

Herein, lest you should think that I have snatched at this proof for myself, because I have assumed that earth and fire are mortal things, nor have hesitated to say that moisture and breezes perish, and have maintained that they too are born again and increase, first of all, some part of earth, when baked by ceaseless suns, trodden by the force of many feet, gives off a mist and flying clouds of dust, which stormy winds scatter through all the air. Part too of its sods is summoned back to swamp by the rains, and streams graze and gnaw their banks. Moreover, whatever the earth nourishes and increases, is, in its own proportion, restored; and since without doubt the parent of all is seen herself to be the universal tomb of things, therefore you may see that the earth is eaten away, and again increases and grows.

For the rest, that sea, streams, and springs are ever filling with new moisture, and that waters are ceaselessly oozing forth, there is no need of words to prove: the great downrush of waters on every side shows this forth. But the water which is foremost is ever taken away, and so it comes to pass that there is never overmuch moisture in the sum, partly because the strong winds as they sweep the seas, diminish them, and so does the sun in heaven, as he unravels

their fabric with his rays, partly because it is sent hither and thither under every land. For the brine is strained through, and the substance of the moisture oozes back, and all streams together at the fountain-head of rivers, and thence comes back over the lands with freshened current, where the channel once cleft has brought down the waters in their liquid march.

Next then I will speak of air, which changes in its whole body in countless ways each single hour. For always, whatever flows off from things, is all carried into the great sea of air; and unless in turn it were to give back bodies to things, and replenish them as they flow away, all things would by now have been dissolved and turned into air. Air then ceases not to be created from things, and to pass back into things, since it is sure that all things are constantly flowing away.

Likewise that bounteous source of liquid light, the sun in heaven, ceaselessly floods the sky with fresh brightness, and at once supplies the place of light with new light. For that which is foremost of its brightness, ever perishes, on whatever spot it falls. That you may learn from this: that as soon as clouds have begun for an instant to pass beneath the sun, and, as it were, to break off the rays of light, straightway all the part of the rays beneath perishes, and the earth is overshadowed, wherever the clouds are carried; so that you may learn that things ever have need of fresh brilliance, and that the foremost shaft of light ever perishes, nor in any other way can things be seen in the sunlight, except that the very fountain-head of light gives supply for ever.

Nay more, lights at night, which are on the earth, hanging lamps and oily torches, bright with their flashing fires and thick smoke, in like manner hasten by aid of their heat to supply new light; they are quick to flicker with their fires, yea quick, nor is the light, as it were, broken off, nor does it quit the spot. In such eager haste is its destruction hidden by the quick birth of flame from all the fires. So then we must think that sun, moon, and stars throw out their light from new supplies, rising again and again, and lose ever what is foremost of their flames; lest you should by chance believe that they are strong with a strength inviolable.

Again, do you not behold stones too vanquished by time, high towers falling in ruins, and rocks crumbling away, shrines and images of the gods growing weary and worn, while the sacred presence cannot prolong the boundaries of fate nor struggle against the laws of nature? Again, do we not see the monuments of men fallen to bits, and inquiring moreover whether you believe that they grow old? And stones torn up from high mountains rushing headlong, unable to brook or bear the stern strength of a limited time? For indeed they would not be suddenly torn up and fall headlong, if from time everlasting they had held out against all the siege of age without breaking.

Now once again gaze on this sky, which above and all around holds the whole earth in its embrace: if it begets all things out of itself, as some tell, and receives them again when they perish, it is made altogether of a body that has birth and death. For whatsoever increases and nourishes other things out of itself, must needs be lessened, and replenished when it receives things back.

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Episode 69 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. In today's episode, we continue into book five and discuss the eventual end of our world. As always let us know if you have any questions or comments

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