

Episode Seventy-Four - Eclipses, And The Beginnings of Life on Earth

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Welcome to Episode Seventy-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. 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 questions about those, please be sure to contact us at EpicureanFriends.com for more information.

In this Episode 74 we will read approximately Latin line 705-820 of Book Five. We will talk about the initial phases of life on earth. Now let's join Don reading today's text.

Latin Lines 705 - 820

Munro Notes-

705-750: the moon may borrow its light from the sun, increasing as it recedes from him, until, when directly opposite, it shews its full face; and again diminishing as it again approaches: in this case the moon must be a round ball moving below the sun: it may shine too with its own light, and its partial or total concealment may be caused by an opaque body invisible to us getting between it and us in various ways: or thirdly it may be a ball half bright half opaque which presents to us all these various phases, as the Chaldees assert in opposition to the first hypothesis, that of the astronomers : or lastly a new moon may be born daily, each successively presenting a different phase; thus many things, for instance the four seasons, come round in regular order.

751-770: solar eclipses may be caused by the moon intercepting the rays, as the astronomers say; but some opaque and invisible body may just as well be the cause; or the sun may lose for the time his own light in passing through spots inimical to it: lunar eclipses may similarly be explained, mutatis mutandis ; thus in the first case it will be the earth which keeps from it the sun's rays.—The three theories here offered to explain the eclipses of the sun and moon are

quite parallel to those given just above to skew how the moon may receive her light.

771-782: having thus explained how all that goes on above in the heaven may take place, the movements of sun and moon and their eclipses, I now come back to the infancy of the world and the earth and proceed to shew what then came to pass.

783-820: first herbage sprang up, then trees, then living things; in the newness of creation the earth produced the larger creatures, birds first, even as now it produces spontaneously worms and the like; then lastly man, whom it fed from its pores with a moisture resembling milk: in the perpetual spring of the new world the children needed nothing more than what the earth thus supplied.

Browne 1743

Lastly, why may not a moon be created new every day, and be distinguished by regular phases, and certain forms of light? And this new orb die, and be succeeded the next day by another, that should supply its place in the same part and quarter of the heavens? It is difficult to assign a reason, and to prove the contrary, especially since we observe so many things are formed, and succeed one another in regular order. And first the spring begins, and Venus enters, with her harbingers (the winged Zephyrs) marching by her side; then mother Flora spreads the way before with flowers of richest dye, and fills the air with sweetest odors; and next advance the scorching summer, and her companion the dusty harvest, and the Etesian Blasts of Northern Winds; and then comes autumn, and jolly Bacchus steps along; now follow ruffling storms and boisterous winds, the roaring southeast, and the sultry south full fraught with thunder; at last the cold brings on the snow and chilling frost, and then creeps winter, all benumbed, and chattering with his teeth. It is the less wonder then that the moon should be formed anew at certain times, and at fixed seasons again expire, since so many things are so regularly produced, and succeed one another.

The eclipses of the sun and moon may proceed, you may suppose, from many causes, for why should the moon deprive the earth of the sun's light, and as she shines above oppose her body to him, and stop his burning rays by thrusting her dark orb between; and not another body, wholly dark, be thought to interpose at such a time, and produce the same effect? And why may not the sun grow faint, and deaden his light at a certain time, and renew it again when he has passed certain regions of the air that are enemies to his beams, and destroy and extinguish his fires? And then again, while the moon in her monthly course passes by the rigid shadow of the earth, which is of a conic figure, why should the earth rob the moon of light, and being above the sun, hold his rays shut in; and why may not another body at the same time move below the moon, and pass above the body of the sun, that may intercept his rays and stop his spreading fires? And yet, if the moon be allowed to shine with her own beams, why may not her brightness decay in certain parts of the world, as she passes through places that are enemies to her light?

And now, since I have explained from what causes proceed the motions of all the celestial bodies, and given you a rule to know what force, what power, dries on the various courses of the sun, and the wanderings of the moon; in what manner their several rays are intercepted, and the earth is covered over with surprising darkness, as if they winked, and how again they spread open their beams, and visit the world with shining light: I now return to the new-formed earth, and her tender soil, to find what kind of beings she first raised into the light, what offspring she first ventured to commit to the faithless winds.

And first the Earth produced the herbs, and spread a gay verdure over all the hills, and the gaudy fields shone all around with green; and nature gave the several trees a power to raise themselves, and grow up with their spreading branches into the air. As feathers, and hair, and bristles, were at first produced from the limbs of beasts and the bodies of birds, so the new earth first bore the herbs and the trees, and then she formed many kinds of living creatures, for various ends, and after a different manner: For the race of animals did not originally fall down from the skies, nor could terrestrial beings rise out of the salt sea; and therefore we say that the Earth justly obtained the name of Mother, because out of her all things were formed. Even no many animals rise from the earth, and are produced by moisture and the heat of the sun; and therefore the wonder is the less that many more should have been created in the beginning of the world, and of a larger size, when the earth was fresh as a young bride, and her husband Aether in the flower of his age. Of all the animal creation, the feathered kind, and various breeds of birds, first broke through the prison of the egg in time of spring; as grasshoppers in the summer now burst their curious little bags, and of themselves know how to seek their food and preserve their life. And the earth next produced the race of men and beasts, for then there was abundance of vital heat and moisture in the soil, and where the place was proper, a sort of womb group up, fixed and sticking in the earth by their roots. These the infants ripe for birth broke through they left their moist enclosure, and sprung out into the air. In those places nature prepared the pores of the earth, and forced her to pour from her open veins a liquor like milk; as a woman after delivery is full of sweet milk, because the principal juices of her food fly into her breasts. The earth gives nourishment to the infant, the warmth of the sun is instead of clothes, and the grass abounding with plenty of soft down affords the bed. But this new world produced no chilling cold, nor too much heat, nor force of rushing winds, for things increased and grew violent by degrees. And therefore by the strictest laws of justice does the Earth claim the name of Mother, because in this manner, for some time, she herself produced mankind, and formed every savage beast that wildly roars upon the mountaintops, and the great variety of birds, distinguished by the beauty of their feathers.

Munro 1886

Again, why a new moon should not be born every day after a regular succession of forms and regular phases, and each day the one which is born perish and another be produced in its room and stead, it is not easy to teach by reasoning or prove by words, since so many things can be born in such a regular succession. Spring and Venus go their way, and the winged harbinger of

Venus steps on before; and close on Zephyr's footsteps mother Flora straws all the way before them and covers it over with the choicest colors and odors. Next in order follows parching heat, and in its company dusty Ceres and the etesian blasts of the north winds. Next autumn advances and Euhus Euan steps on together. Then other seasons and winds follow, loud-roaring Volturnus and the south wind stored with lightning. At last midwinter brings with it snows and gives back benumbing cold; after it follows winter with teeth chattering with cold. It is therefore the less strange that a moon is begotten at a fixed time and at a fixed time is destroyed again, since many things may take place at a time so surely fixed.

The eclipses of the sun likewise and the obscurations of the moon you may suppose to take place from many different causes. For why should the moon be able to shut the earth out from the sun's light and on the earthward side put in his way her high exalted head, placing her dark orb before his burning rays; and yet at the same time it be thought that another body gliding on ever without light cannot do the same? Why too should not the sun be able, quite exhausted, to lose his fires at a fixed time, and again reproduce his light when in his journey through the air he has passed by spots fatal to his flames, which cause his fires to be quenched and to perish? And why should the earth be able in turn to rob the moon of light and moreover herself to keep the sun suppressed, while in her monthly course she glides through the well-defined shadows of the cone; and yet at the same time another body not be able to pass under the moon or glide above the sun's orb, breaking off its rays and the light it sheds forth? Yes, and if the moon shines with her own brightness, why should she not be able to grow faint in a certain part of the world, while she is passing through spots hostile to her own light?

And now further since I have explained in what way every thing might take place throughout the blue of the great heaven; how we might know what force and cause set in motion the varied courses of the sun and wanderings of the moon; and in what way their light might be intercepted and they be lost to us and spread darkness over the earth little expecting if when so to speak they close their eye of light and opening it again survey all places shining in bright radiance, I now go back to the infancy of the world and the tender age of the fields of earth and show what first in their early essays of production they resolved to raise into the borders of light and give in charge to the wayward winds.

In the beginning the earth gave forth all kinds of herbage and verdant sheen about the hills and overall the plains; the flowery meadows glittered with the bright green hue, and next in order to the different trees was given a strong and emulous desire of growing up into the air with full unbridled powers. As feathers and hairs and bristles are first born on the limbs of four-footed beasts and the body of the strong of wing, thus the new earth then first put forth grass and bushes, and next gave birth to the races of mortal creatures springing up many in number in many ways after divers fashions. For no living creatures can have dropped from heaven nor can those belonging to the land have come out of the salt pools. It follows that with good reason the earth has gotten the name of mother, since all things have been produced out of the earth. And many living creatures even now spring out of the earth taking form by rains and the heat of the

sun. It is therefore the less strange if at that time they sprang up more in number and larger in size, having come to maturity in the freshness of earth and ether. First of all the race of fowls and the various birds would leave their eggs, hatched in the springtime, just as now in summer the cicades leave spontaneously their gossamer coats in quest of a living and life. Then you must know did the earth first give forth races of mortal men. For much heat and moisture would then abound in the fields; and therefore wherever a suitable spot offered, wombs would grow attached to the earth by roots; and when the warmth of the infants, flying the wet and craving the air, had opened these in the fulness of time, nature would turn to that spot the pores of the earth and constrain it to yield from its opened veins a liquid most like to milk, even as now-a-days every woman when she has borne, is filled with sweet milk, because all that current of nutriment streams towards the breasts. To the children the earth would furnish food, the heat raiment, the grass a bed rich in abundance of soft down. Then the fresh youth of the world would give forth neither severe colds nor excessive heats nor gales of great violence; for all things grow and acquire strength in a like proportion.

Bailey 1921

[731] Or again, why a fresh moon could not be created every day with fixed succession of phases and fixed shapes, so that each several day the moon created would pass away, and another be supplied in its room and place, it is difficult to teach by reasoning or prove by words, since so many things can be created in fixed order. Spring goes on her way and Venus, and before them treads Venus's winged harbinger; and following close on the steps of Zephyrus, mother Flora strews and fills all the way before them with glorious colours and scents. Next after follows parching heat, and as companion at her side dusty Ceres and the etesian blasts of the north winds. Then autumn advances, and step by step with her Euhus Euan. Then follow the other seasons and their winds, Volturnus, thundering on high, and the south wind, whose strength is the lightning. Last of all the year's end brings snow, and winter renews numbing frost; it is followed by cold, with chattering teeth. Wherefore it is less wonderful if the moon is born at a fixed time, and again at a fixed time is blotted out, since so many things can come to pass at fixed times.

[751] Likewise also the eclipses of the sun and the hidings of the moon, you must think may be brought about by several causes. For why should the moon be able to shut out the earth from the sun's light, and thrust her head high before him in the line of earth, throwing her dark orb before his glorious rays; and at the same time it should not be thought that another body could do this, which glides on ever without light. And besides, why should not the sun be able at a fixed time to faint and lose his fires, and again renew his light, when, in his journey through the air, he has passed by places hostile to his flames, which cause his fires to be put out and perish?

[762] And why should the earth be able in turn to rob the moon of light, and herself on high to keep the sun hidden beneath, while the moon in her monthly journey glides through the sharp-drawn shadows of the cone; and at the same time another body be unable to run beneath the

moon or glide above the sun's orb, to break off his rays and streaming light? And indeed, if the moon shines with her own light, why should she not be able to grow faint in a certain region of the world, while she passes out through spots unfriendly to her own light?

[772] For the rest, since I have unfolded in what manner each thing could take place throughout the blue vault of the great world, so that we might learn what force and what cause started the diverse courses of the sun, and the journeyings of the moon, and in what way they might go hiding with their light obscured, and shroud the unexpecting earth in darkness, when, as it were, they wink and once again open their eye and look upon all places shining with their clear rays; now I return to the youth of the world, and the soft fields of earth, and what first with new power of creation they resolved to raise into the coasts of light and entrust to the gusty winds.

[783] First of all the earth gave birth to the tribes of herbage and bright verdure all around the hills and over all the plains, the flowering fields gleamed in their green hue, and thereafter the diverse trees were started with loose rein on their great race of growing through the air. Even as down and hair and bristles are first formed on the limbs of four-footed beasts and the body of fowls strong of wing, so then the newborn earth raised up herbage and shrubs first, and thereafter produced the races of mortal things, many races born in many ways by diverse means. For neither can living animals have fallen from the sky nor the beasts of earth have issued forth from the salt pools.

[795] It remains that rightly has the earth won the name of mother, since out of earth all things are produced. And even now many animals spring forth from the earth, formed by the rains and the warm heat of the sun; wherefore we may wonder the less, if then more animals and greater were born, reaching their full growth when earth and air were fresh. First of all the tribe of winged fowls and the diverse birds left their eggs, hatched out in the spring season, as now in the summer the grasshoppers of their own will leave their smooth shells, seeking life and livelihood. Then it was that the earth first gave birth to the race of mortal things. For much heat and moisture abounded then in the fields; thereby, wherever a suitable spot or place was afforded, there grew up wombs, clinging to the earth by their roots; and when in the fullness of time the age of the little ones, fleeing moisture and eager for air, had opened them, nature would turn to that place the pores in the earth and constrain them to give forth from their opened veins a sap, most like to milk; even as now every woman, when she has brought forth, is filled with sweet milk, because all the current of her nourishment is turned towards her paps. The earth furnished food for the young, the warmth raiment, the grass a couch rich in much soft down. But the youth of the world called not into being hard frosts nor exceeding heat nor winds of mighty violence: for all things grow and come to their strength in like degrees.

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Episode 74 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. In this episode, we will talk briefly about eclipses, and then move to discussion of the earliest phases of life on earth. As always, please let us know any comments or questions in the thread below:

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