

Episode Eighty-Two - The Opening Of Book Six - Restatement of the Goal of the Poem

Post by "Cassius" of July 31, 2021 at 9:35 AM

Welcome to Episode Eighty-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. 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 visit EpicureanFriends.com where you will find our goals and our ground rules. If you have any questions about those, please be sure to contact us at the forum for more information.

In this Episode 82 we will read approximately Latin lines 1 through 67 as we open Book Six.

Now let's join Don reading today's text.

Munro Notes-

1-42: Athens first gave mankind corn and laws; but better than all him who, when he saw that men had all the necessaries and refinements of life and yet were miserable, taught them true wisdom and the way to true happiness and rid them of empty cares and fears.

43-95: once more I mount my chariot, to tell what remains to be told of the things which go on above us, and to dispel the causeless fears of men who believe such things to be tokens of divine wrath : the gods will indeed plague you, if you so believe; not that they will themselves do you any hurt, but the images proceeding from their holy bodies will stir up these vain fears and poison existence. I have now therefore to sing of thunder, of tempests, of other things that take place in the sky.

Browne 1743

[01] Renowned Athens, first to wretched man gave the sweet fruits, and human life refreshed, and published laws; but comforts nobler far than these she gave, when to the world she showed great Epicurus, formed with such a soul; who from his mouth delivered sublime truths, as from an oracle, whose fame for so divine discoveries dispersed every way abroad and was raised

after death above the skies.

[09] For when he saw how little would suffice for necessary use, and by what small provisions life might be preserved; that Nature had prepared every thing ready to support mankind; that men abounded with wealth, and were loaded with honor and applause, and happy in their private concerns, in the good character of their children, and yet their minds were restless at home, complaining and lamenting the misery of their condition; he perceived the vessel itself (the mind) was the cause of the calamity, and by the corruption of that, every thing, though ever so good, that was poured into it was tainted: it was full of holes, and run out, and so could never by any means be filled; and whatever it received within, it infected with a stinking smell. And therefore he purged the mind by true philosophy, and set bounds to our desires and our fears. He laid open to us the chief good, that point of happiness we all aim at, in what it consists, and showed us the direct way that leads to it, and puts us into the straight road to obtain it. He taught what misfortunes commonly attend human life, whether they flow from the laws of nature or from chance, whether from necessity or by accident; and by what means we are to oppose those evils, and strive against them. And he has fully proved that men torment themselves in vain, and are tossed about in a tempestuous ocean of cares to no purpose. For as boys tremble and fear every thing in the dark night, so we in open day fear things as vain, and little to be dreaded, as those that children quake at in the dark. and fancy advancing towards them. This terror of the mind, this darkness then, not the Sun's beams nor the bright rays of day can scatter, but the light of nature and the rules of reason; and therefore I shall the more readily proceed to execute what I have begun.

[43] And since I taught the fabric of the world was mortal, and that the heavens are formed of corruptible seeds, and whatever they do, or ever will contain, must necessarily be dissolved; attend now to what remains, especially since the hope of carrying the prize has encouraged me to ascend the chariot and engage in so noble a race; and since the difficulties that once attended the course are removed, and the roughness of the way is made favorable and easy. The various wonders men behold in the earth and in the heavens perplex their minds, trembling and in suspense, and make them humble with the fear of the gods, and press them groveling to the ground; and being ignorant of the cause of these events, they are forced to confess the sovereignty and give up everything to the command of these deities. And the effects they are unable to account for by reason they imagine were brought about by the influence of the gods; for such as well know that the gods lead a life of tranquility and ease, if they should still wonder by what power the world is carried on, especially in the things they see over their heads in the heavens above, they relapse again into their old superstition; they raise over themselves a set of cruel tyrants who, the wretches fancy, can do all things, because they know nothing of what can or what cannot be, or by what means a finite power is fixed to every being, and a boundary immovable which it cannot pass. Such are more liable to mistakes and to be carried widely from the right way.

Munro 1886

[01] IN days of yore Athens of famous name first imparted corn-producing crops to suffering mankind, and modeled life anew and passed laws; and first too bestowed sweet solaces of existence, when she gave birth to a man who showed himself gifted with such a genius and poured forth all knowledge of old from his truth-telling mouth; whose glory, even now that he is dead, on account of his godlike discoveries confirmed by length of time is spread abroad among men and reaches high as heaven.

[09] For when he saw that the things which their needs imperiously demand for subsistence had all without exception been already provided for men, and that life, so far as was possible, was placed on a sure footing, that men were great in affluence of riches and honors and glory and swelled with pride in the high reputation of their children, and yet that none of them at home for all that had a heart the less disquieted, and that this heart in despite of the understanding plagued life without any respite and was constrained to rave with distressful complainings, he then perceived that the vessel itself did cause the corruption and that by its corruption all the things that came into it and were gathered from abroad, however salutary were spoilt within it; partly because he saw it to be leaky and full of holes so that it could never by any means be filled full; partly because he perceived that it befouled so to say with a nauseous flavor everything within it which it had taken in.

He therefore cleansed men's breasts with truth-telling precepts and fixed a limit to lust and fear and explained what was the chief good which we all strive to reach, and pointed out the road along which by a short cross-track we might arrive at it in a straightforward course; he showed too what evils existed in mortal affairs throughout, rising up and manifoldly flying about by a natural -call it chance or force, because nature had so brought it about - and from what gates you must sally out duly to encounter each; and he proved that mankind mostly without cause arouse in their breast the melancholy tumbling billows of cares. For even as children are flurried and dread all things in the thick darkness, thus we in the daylight fear at times things not a whit more to be dreaded than what children shudder at in the dark and fancy sure to be. This terror therefore and darkness of mind must be dispelled, not by the rays of the sun and glittering shafts of day, but by the aspect and law of nature. Wherefore the more readily I will go on in my verses to complete the web of my design.

[43] And since I have shown that the quarters of ether are mortal and that heaven is formed of a body that had a birth, and since of all the things which go on and must go on in it, I have unraveled most, hear further what remains to be told; since once for all \[I have willed\] to mount the illustrious chariot \[of the muses, and ascending to heaven to explain the true law of winds and storms, which men foolishly lay to the charge of the gods, telling how, when they are angry, they raise fierce tempests; and, when there is a lull in the fury\] of the winds, how that anger is appeased, how the omens which have been are again changed, when their fury has thus been appeased: \[I have willed at the same time\] to explain all the other things which mortals observe to go on upon earth and in heaven, when often they are in anxious suspense of mind, and which abase their souls with fear of the gods and weigh and press them down to

earth, because ignorance of the causes constrains them to submit things to the empire of the gods and to make over to them the kingdom. For they who have been rightly taught that the gods lead a life without care, if nevertheless they wonder on what plan all things can be carried on, above all in regard to those things which are seen overhead in the ethereal borders, are borne back again into their old religious scruples and take unto themselves hard taskmasters, whom they poor wretches believe to be almighty, not knowing what can, what cannot be, in short on what principle each thing has its powers defined, its deep set boundary mark; and therefore they are led all the farther astray by blind reason.

Bailey 1921

[01] IN time gone by Athens, of glorious name, first spread among struggling mortals the fruits that bear corn, and fashioned life afresh, and enacted laws; she, too, first gave sweet solace for life, when she gave birth to the man gifted with the great mind, who once poured forth all wisdom from his truthful lips; yea, even when his light was quenched, thanks to his divine discoveries his glory, noised abroad of old, is now lifted to the sky.

[09] For when he saw that mortals had by now attained well-nigh all things which their needs crave for subsistence, and that, as far as they could, their life was established in safety, that men abounded in power through wealth and honours and renown, and were haughty in the good name of their children, and yet not one of them for all that had at home a heart less anguished, but with torture of mind lived a fretful life without any respite, and was constrained to rage with savage complaining, he then did understand that it was the vessel itself which wrought the disease, and that by its disease all things were corrupted within, whatsoever came into it gathered from without, yea even blessings; in part because he saw that it was leaking and full of holes, so that by no means could it ever be filled; in part because he perceived that it tainted as with a foul savor all things within it, which it had taken in. And so with his discourse of truthful words he purged the heart and set a limit to its desire and fear, and set forth what is the highest good, towards which we all strive, and pointed out the path, whereby along a narrow track we may strain on towards it in a straight course; he showed what there is of ill in the affairs of mortals everywhere, coming to being and flying abroad in diverse forms, be it by the chance or the force of nature, because nature had so brought it to pass; he showed from what gates it is meet to sally out against each ill, and he proved that 'tis in vain for the most part that the race of men set tossing in their hearts the gloomy billows of care. For even as children tremble and fear everything in blinding darkness, so we sometimes dread in the light things that are no whit more to be feared than what children shudder at in the dark and imagine will come to pass. This terror then, this darkness of the mind, must needs be scattered not by the rays and the gleaming shafts of day, but by the outer view and the inner law of nature. Wherefore I will hasten the more to weave the thread of my task in my discourse.

[43] And now that I have shown that the quarters of the firmament are mortal, and that the heaven is fashioned of a body that has birth, and have unraveled well-nigh all that happens therein, and must needs happen, listen still to what remains; forasmuch as once \[I have made

bold\] to climb the glorious car \[I will tell how the tempests\] of the winds arise, and are appeased, and all that once was raging is changed again, when its fury is appeased; and all else which mortals see coming to pass on earth and in the sky, when often they are in suspense with panic-stricken mind—things which bring their hearts low through dread of the gods, and bow them down groveling to earth, because their ignorance of true causes constrains them to assign things to the ordinance of the gods, and to admit their domination. For those who have learnt aright that the gods lead a life free from care, yet if from time to time they wonder by what means all things can be carried on, above all among those things which are descried above our heads in the coasts of heaven, are borne back again into the old beliefs of religion, and adopt stern overlords, whom in their misery they believe have all power, knowing not what can be and what cannot, yea, and in what way each thing has its power limited, and its deepset boundary-stone: wherefore all the more they stray, borne on by a blind reasoning.

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Post by “Don” of August 1, 2021 at 12:30 PM

I get frustrated that I'm not fluent in Latin and can't parse the original text on the fly, but then I look at the different (and sometimes contradictory) translations by scholars and experts and don't feel so bad. Listeners will hear what prompts this observation from this episode.

Post by “Cassius” of August 5, 2021 at 5:22 PM

I am in the process of editing this episode and I just caught something that I wish I had expanded on. We were joking about speed limits and how there have not traditionally been speed limits on the autobahn in Germany, but I failed to ask Martin:

It's my understanding that even though there may be no formal limits, a driver who causes an accident because he is driving excessively fast, and therefore cannot keep his car under control, still does "get a ticket." My generic understanding of the theory would be that the ticket is for driving "too fast for conditions" --- and that is something that makes a lot of sense to me.

It seems very logical (and therefore very German) for the Germans to observe that if you are out in the middle of nowhere on a straight-away with no cars around, there really is no reason for you not to drive much faster than normal, and that it is therefore "conditions" that should determine whether a driver is judged to be going too fast, and not an artificially-designated

speed limit.

If that's the theory I think that frame of analysis is something that Epicurus would identify with (not saying he would come to exactly the same condition) but that in general Epicurus was always in favor of judging "right and wrong" based on local conditions and not on a priori abstract reasoning.

I wish I had asked about this in the podcast. [Martin](#) do you have any comment on this?

Post by "Martin" of August 6, 2021 at 9:49 AM

When my father crashed his car in a mass pile-up in 1970, it was reconstructed that all involved drivers went too fast for the rainy weather and got fined.

So yes, even if there is no formal speed limit or if drivers stay below an existing speed limit, they can get fined and get judged to have caused an accident because they went too fast for the circumstances.

Post by "Cassius" of August 6, 2021 at 5:16 PM

Episode 82 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. In today's episode we begin Book Six of the poem, and as always we find that the openings of each book contain some of the most important material about the significance of Epicurus and the meaning of Epicurean Philosophy. Please feel free to leave comments or suggestions in the thread below, and subscribe to us in your podcast application so you never miss any new episodes.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/45997309>

Post by "Don" of August 6, 2021 at 11:02 PM

We were talking about the word "vessel" in this episode and whether it referred to the mind. The Latin word is vas so I looked up to see if it is anywhere else in Lucretius.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2127-episode-eighty-two-the-opening-of-book-six-restatement-of-the-goal-of-the-poem/>

Sure enough, there are several places including 3:1003-1010. [Cassius](#) was also spot on in his suspicion it had to do with the Danaids. Here is the relevant passage:

[Lucretius, De Rerum Natura, Liber Tertius, line 978](#)

"Then to be always feeding an ingrate mind,
Filling with good things, satisfying never-
As do the seasons of the year for us,
When they return and bring their progenies
And varied charms, and we are never filled
With the fruits of life- O this, I fancy, 'tis
To pour, like those young virgins in the tale,

Waters into a sieve, unfilled forever."

The word used in Latin is *vas* in that next to last line, not something meaning sieve. *Pertusum* does mean perforated, so it's a perforated vessel...

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...ntry%3Dpertundo>

So this lines up with the leaky vessel "full of holes" in Book 6.