

Episode One Hundred Twenty-Four - Letter to Herodotus 13 - Life On Other Worlds, Development of Language, And the Regular Motion of the Stars

Post by "Cassius" of May 28, 2022 at 1:16 PM

Welcome to Episode One Hundred Twenty Four of Lucretius Today.

This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

I am your host Cassius, and together with our panelists from the EpicureanFriends.com forum, we'll walk you through the ancient Epicurean texts, and we'll 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.

If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

Today we continue in [Epicurus' letter to Herodotus](#), and address some difficult material about the properties and qualities of atoms and bodies and what it means to exist. We probably raise more issues than we answer in this episode, so please review the show notes and we will come back to these issues in the next show.

Now let's join Joshua reading today's text:

Bailey

And in addition to what we have already said we must believe that worlds, and indeed every limited compound body which continuously exhibits a similar appearance to the things we see, were created from the infinite, and that all such things, greater and less alike, were separated off from individual agglomerations of matter; and that all are again dissolved, some more quickly, some more slowly, some suffering from one set of causes, others from another.

[74] And further we must believe that these worlds were neither created all of necessity with one configuration nor yet with every kind of shape. Furthermore, we must believe that in all worlds there are living creatures and plants and other things we see in this world; for indeed no one could prove that in a world of one kind there might or might not have been included the kinds of seeds from which living things and plants and all the rest of the things we see are

composed, and that in a world of another kind they could not have been.

[75] Moreover, we must suppose that human nature too was taught and constrained to do many things of every kind merely by circumstances; and that later on reasoning elaborated what had been suggested by nature and made further inventions, in some matters quickly, in others slowly, at some epochs and times making great advances, and lesser again at others. And so names too were not at first deliberately given to things, but men's natures according to their different nationalities had their own peculiar feelings and received their peculiar impressions, and so each in their own way emitted air formed into shape by each of these feelings and impressions, according to the differences made in the different nations by the places of their abode as well.

[76] And then later on by common consent in each nationality special names were deliberately given in order to make their meanings less ambiguous to one another and more briefly demonstrated. And sometimes those who were acquainted with them brought in things hitherto unknown and introduced sounds for them, on some occasions being naturally constrained to utter them, and on others choosing them by reasoning in accordance with the prevailing mode of formation, and thus making their meaning clear.

[77] Furthermore, the motions of the heavenly bodies and their turnings and eclipses and risings and settings, and kindred phenomena to these, must not be thought to be due to any being who controls and ordains or has ordained them and at the same time enjoys perfect bliss together with immortality (for trouble and care and anger and kindness are not consistent with a life of blessedness, but these things come to pass where there is weakness and fear and dependence on neighbors). Nor again must we believe that they, which are but fire agglomerated in a mass, possess blessedness, and voluntarily take upon themselves these movements. But we must preserve their full majestic significance in all expressions which we apply to such conceptions, in order that there may not arise out of them opinions contrary to this notion of majesty. Otherwise this very contradiction will cause the greatest disturbance in men's souls. Therefore we must believe that it is due to the original inclusion of matter in such agglomerations during the birth-process of the world that this law of regular succession is also brought about.

HICKS

After the foregoing we have next to consider that the worlds and every finite aggregate which bears a strong resemblance to things we commonly see have arisen out of the infinite. For all these, whether small or great, have been separated off from special conglomerations of atoms; and all things are again dissolved, some faster, some slower, some through the action of one set of causes, others through the action of another. It is clear, then, that he also makes the worlds perishable, as their parts are subject to change. Elsewhere he says the earth is supported on the air.

[74] And further, we must not suppose that the worlds have necessarily one and the same shape. On the contrary, in the twelfth book "On Nature" he himself says that the shapes of the worlds differ, some being spherical, some oval, others again of shapes different from these. They do not, however, admit of every shape. Nor are they living beings which have been separated from the infinite. For nobody can prove that in one sort of world there might not be contained, whereas in another sort of world there could not possibly be, the seeds out of which animals and plants arise and all the rest of the things we see. And the same holds good for their nurture in a world after they have arisen. And so too we must think it happens upon the earth also.

[75] Again, we must suppose that nature too has been taught and forced to learn many various lessons by the facts themselves, that reason subsequently develops what it has thus received and makes fresh discoveries, among some tribes more quickly, among others more slowly, the progress thus made being at certain times and seasons greater, at others less.

Hence even the names of things were not originally due to convention, but in the several tribes under the impulse of special feelings and special presentations of sense primitive man uttered special cries. The air thus emitted was moulded by their individual feelings or sense-presentations, and differently according to the difference of the regions which the tribes inhabited.

[76] Subsequently whole tribes adopted their own special names, in order that their communications might be less ambiguous to each other and more briefly expressed. And as for things not visible, so far as those who were conscious of them tried to introduce any such notion, they put in circulation certain names for them, either sounds which they were instinctively compelled to utter or which they selected by reason on analogy according to the most general cause there can be for expressing oneself in such a way.

[77] Nay more: we are bound to believe that in the sky revolutions, solstices, eclipses, risings and settings, and the like, take place without the ministrations or command, either now or in the future, of any being who at the same time enjoys perfect bliss along with immortality. For troubles and anxieties and feelings of anger and partiality do not accord with bliss, but always imply weakness and fear and dependence upon one's neighbours. Nor, again, must we hold that things which are no more than globular masses of fire, being at the same time endowed with bliss, assume these motions at will. Nay, in every term we use we must hold fast to all the majesty which attaches to such notions as bliss and immortality, lest the terms should generate opinions inconsistent with this majesty. Otherwise such inconsistency will of itself suffice to produce the worst disturbance in our minds. Hence, where we find phenomena invariably recurring, the invariableness of the recurrence must be ascribed to the original interception and conglomeration of atoms whereby the world was formed.

Post by "Joshua" of May 28, 2022 at 1:53 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2538-episode-one-hundred-twenty-four-letter-to-herodotus-13-life-on-other-worlds-deve/>

[Don](#) I'm warning you, if you have anything to say about Thales today just keep it to yourself!



Post by “Cassius” of May 29, 2022 at 8:19 AM

Corresponding Sections of Lucretius:

1 - Life on Other Worlds -- Book One:

[1023] Now turn your mind, I pray, to a true reasoning. For a truth wondrously new is struggling to fall upon your ears, and a new face of things to reveal itself. Yet neither is anything so easy, but that at first it is more difficult to believe, and likewise nothing is so great or so marvelous but that little by little all decrease their wonder at it. First of all the bright clear color of the sky, and all it holds within it, the stars that wander here and there, and the moon and the sheen of the sun with its brilliant light; all these, if now they had come to being for the first time for mortals, if all unforeseen they were in a moment placed before their eyes, what story could be told more marvelous than these things, or what that the nations would less dare to believe beforehand? Nothing, I trow: so worthy of wonder would this sight have been. Yet think how no one now, wearied with satiety of seeing, deigns to gaze up at the shining quarters of the sky! Wherefore cease to spew out reason from your mind, struck with terror at mere newness, but rather with eager judgement weigh things, and, if you see them true, lift your hands and yield, or, if it is false, gird yourself to battle.

For our mind now seeks to reason, since the sum of space is boundless out beyond the walls of this world, what there is far out there, whither the spirit desires always to look forward, and whither the unfettered projection of our mind flies on unchecked.

[1048] First of all, we find that in every direction everywhere, and on either side, above and below, through all the universe, there is no limit, as I have shown, and indeed the truth cries out for itself and the nature of the deep shines clear. Now in no way must we think it likely, since towards every side is infinite empty space, and seeds in unnumbered numbers in the deep universe fly about in many ways driven on in everlasting motion, that this one world and sky was brought to birth, but that beyond it all those bodies of matter do naught; above all, since this world was so made by nature, as the seeds of things themselves of their own accord, jostling from time to time, were driven together in many ways, rashly, idly, and in vain, and at last those united, which, suddenly cast together, might become ever and anon the beginnings of great things, of earth and sea and sky, and the race of living things. Wherefore, again and again, you must needs confess that there are here and there other gatherings of matter, such

as is this, which the ether holds in its greedy grip.

[1067] Moreover, when there is much matter ready to hand, when space is there, and no thing, no cause delays, things must, we may be sure, be carried on and completed. As it is, if there is so great a store of seeds as the whole life of living things could not number, and if the same force and nature abides which could throw together the seeds of things, each into their place in like manner as they are thrown together here, it must needs be that you confess that there are other worlds in other regions, and diverse races of men and tribes of wild beasts.

[1077] This there is too that in the universe there is nothing single, nothing born unique and growing unique and alone, but it is always of some tribe, and there are many things in the same race. First of all turn your mind to living creatures; you will find that in this wise is begotten the race of wild beasts that haunts the mountains, in this wise the stock of men, in this wise again the dumb herds of scaly fishes, and all the bodies of flying fowls. Wherefore you must confess in the same way that sky and earth and sun, moon, sea, and all else that exists, are not unique, but rather of number numberless; inasmuch as the deep-fixed boundary-stone of life awaits these as surely, and they are just as much of a body that has birth, as every race which is here on earth, abounding in things after its kind.

2. Development of Language - Book Five:

[1011] Then after they got themselves huts and skins and fire, and woman yoked with man retired to a single [home, and the laws of marriage] were learnt, and they saw children sprung from them, then first the race of man began to soften. For fire brought it about that their chilly limbs could not now so well bear cold under the roof of heaven, and Venus lessened their strength, and children, by their winning ways, easily broke down the haughty will of their parents. Then, too, neighbours began eagerly to form friendship one with another, not to hurt or be harmed, and they commended to mercy children and the race of women, when with cries and gestures they taught by broken words that 'tis right for all men to have pity on the weak. Yet not in all ways could unity be begotten, but a good part, the larger part, would keep their compacts loyally; or else the human race would even then have been all destroyed, nor could breeding have prolonged the generations until now.

[1028] But the diverse sounds of the tongue nature constrained men to utter, and use shaped the names of things, in a manner not far other than the very speechlessness of their tongue is seen to lead children on to gesture, when it makes them point out with the finger the things that are before their eyes. For every one feels to what purpose he can use his own powers. Before the horns of a calf appear and sprout from his forehead, he butts with them when angry, and pushes passionately. But the whelps of panthers and lion-cubs already fight with claws and feet and biting, when their teeth and claws are scarce yet formed. Further, we see all the tribe of winged fowls trusting to their wings, and seeking an unsteady aid from their pinions.

[1041] Again, to think that any one then parcelled out names to things, and that from him men learnt their first words, is mere folly. For why should he be able to mark off all things by words,

and to utter the diverse sounds of the tongue, and at the same time others be thought unable to do this? Moreover, if others too had not used words to one another, whence was implanted in him the concept of their use; whence was he given the first power to know and see in his mind what he wanted to do? Likewise one man could not avail to constrain many, and vanquish them to his will, that they should be willing to learn all his names for things; nor indeed is it easy in any way to teach and persuade the deaf what it is needful to do; for they would not endure it, nor in any way suffer the sounds of words unheard before to batter on their ears any more to no purpose.

[1056] Lastly, what is there so marvellous in this, if the human race, with strong voice and tongue, should mark off things with diverse sounds for diverse feelings? When the dumb cattle, yea and the races of wild beasts are wont to give forth diverse unlike sounds, when they are in fear or pain, or again when their joys grow strong. Yea verily, this we may learn from things clear to see.

[1063] When the large loose lips of Molossian dogs start to snarl in anger, baring their hard teeth, thus drawn back in rage, they threaten with a noise far other than when they bark and fill all around with their clamour. Yet when they essay fondly to lick their cubs with their tongue, or when they toss them with their feet, and making for them with open mouth, feign gently to swallow them, checking their closing teeth, they fondle them with growling voice in a way far other than when left alone in the house they bay, or when whining they shrink from a beating with cringing body.

[1073] Again, is not neighing seen to differ likewise, when a young stallion in the flower of his years rages among the mares, pricked by the spur of winged love, and from spreading nostrils snorts for the fray, and when, it may be, at other times he whinnies with trembling limbs?

[1078] Lastly, the tribe of winged fowls and the diverse birds, hawks and ospreys and gulls amid the sea-waves, seeking in the salt waters for life and livelihood, utter at other times cries far other than when they are struggling for their food and fighting for their prey. And some of them change their harsh notes with the weather, as the long-lived tribes of crows and flocks of rooks, when they are said to cry for water and rains, and anon to summon the winds and breezes.

[1087] And so, if diverse feelings constrain animals, though they are dumb, to utter diverse sounds, how much more likely is it that mortals should then have been able to mark off things unlike with one sound and another.

3. Universe works without control of Gods (Book One):

[1090] And if you learn this surely, and cling to it, nature is seen, free at once, and quit of her proud rulers, doing all things of her own accord alone, without control of gods. For by the holy

hearts of the gods, which in their tranquil peace pass placid years, and a life of calm, who can avail to rule the whole sum of the boundless, who to hold in his guiding hand the mighty reins of the deep, who to turn round all firmaments at once, and warm all fruitful lands with heavenly fires, or to be at all times present in all places, so as to make darkness with clouds, and shake the calm tracts of heaven with thunder, and then shoot thunderbolts, and often make havoc of his own temples, or moving away into deserts rage furiously there, plying the bolt, which often passes by the guilty and does to death the innocent and undeserving?

[1105] And since the time of the world's birth, and the first birthday of sea and earth, and the rising of the sun, many bodies have been added from without, and seeds added all around, which the great universe in its tossing has brought together; that from them sea and lands might be able to increase, and from them too the mansion of the sky might gain new room and lift its high vault far away from the lands, and the air might rise up. For from all places all bodies are separated by blows each to its own kind, and they pass on to their own tribes; moisture goes to moisture, with earthy substance earth grows, fires forge fires, and sky sky, until nature, parent of all, with perfecting hand has brought all things on to the last end of growing; as it comes to pass, when there is now no whit more which is sent within the veins of life, than what flows out and passes away. Here the growth of all things must stop, here nature by her powers curbs increase.

For whatsoever things you see waxing large with joyful increase, and little by little climbing the steps to full-grown years, take more into themselves than they send out from their body, so long as food is passed easily into all their veins, and so long as the things are not so widely spread that they throw off much, and cause waste greater than that on which their growth feeds. For of a surety you must throw up your hands and grant that many bodies flow away and pass from things; but more must needs be added to them, until they have reached the topmost point of increase. Then little by little age breaks their powers and their full-grown strength, and wastes away on the downhill path.

For verily the huger a thing is and the wider it is, when once its bulk begins to go, the more bodies now does it scatter abroad and throw off from itself, nor is its food easily dispersed into all its veins, nor is there store enough, whence matter may arise and be supplied to equal the vast ebb which it gives out. With reason then they perish, when all things have been made rare by the ebb, and yield before the blows from without, inasmuch as at last food fails the aged life, nor do bodies from without cease to thump upon it, and wear it away, and to overcome it with hostile blows.

[1144] Thus then even the walls of the wide world all round will be stormed and fall into decay and crumbling ruin. For it is food which must needs repair all things and renew them, food must support them, and food sustain all things; yet all is vain, since neither the veins can bear to receive what is enough, nor does nature furnish all that is needful. Yea, even now its life is broken, and the worn-out earth scarce creates tiny animals, though once it created all the tribes, and brought to birth huge bodies of wild beasts.

For it was no golden rope, I trow, which let down the races of living things from heaven above on to the fields, nor did the sea or the waves, that lash the rocks, create them, but the same earth conceived them, which now nourishes them of her substance. Moreover, at first by herself of her own accord she created for mortals the smiling crops and glad vine-plants, herself brought forth sweet fruits and glad pastures; which now scarce wax great, though aided by our toil: we wear out our oxen and the strength of our husbandmen: we exhaust the iron ploughshare, though scarce supplied by the fields so much do they grudge their produce and increase our toil.

Post by “Cassius” of May 29, 2022 at 11:04 AM

From our discussion:

An earlier post about Lucian's "Death of Peregrine"

Thread

[Lucian: The Death of Peregrine - Epicurean Commentary on Christianity](#)

Aside from the famous "What will this babblers say?" in regard to Paul of Tarsus, which was said by an Epicurean or possibly a Stoic, there are few if any texts representing the views of an ancient Epicurean on the early Christians. The only example other than Acts 17:18 which known to me is the commentary of Lucian (who was Epicurean either in reality or in spirit) in his "Death of Peregrine":

"It was now that he came across the priests and scribes of the Christians, in Palestine, and picked...



Cassius

March 28, 2019 at 3:37 PM

Full text: <https://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/luc/wl4/wl420.htm>

The fun part (best to read the full essay to get the full context, but this is the most salient commentary on the early Christians:

Quote

It was now that he came across the priests and scribes of the 11 Christians, in Palestine, and picked up their queer creed. I can tell you, he pretty soon convinced them of his superiority; prophet, elder, ruler of the Synagogue--he was everything at once; expounded their books, commented on them, wrote books himself. They took him for a God, accepted his laws, and declared him their president. The Christians, you know, worship a *man* to this day,--the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account. Well, the end of it was that Proteus was arrested and thrown¹² into prison. This was the very thing to lend an air to his favourite arts of clap-trap and wonder-working; he was now a made man. The Christians took it all very seriously: he was no sooner in prison, than they began trying every means to get him out again,--but without success. Everything else that could be done for him they most devoutly did. They thought of nothing else. Orphans and ancient widows might be seen hanging about the prison from break of day. Their officials bribed the gaolers to let them sleep inside with him. Elegant dinners were conveyed in; their sacred writings were read; and our old friend Peregrine (as he was still called in those days) became for them "the modern Socrates." In some of the Asiatic ¹³ cities, too, the Christian communities put themselves to the expense of sending deputations, with offers of sympathy, assistance, and legal advice. The activity of these people, in dealing with any matter that affects their community, is something extraordinary; they spare no trouble, no expense. Peregrine, all this time, was making quite an income on the strength of his bondage; money came pouring in. You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then it was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws. All this they take quite on trust, with the result that they despise all worldly goods alike, regarding them merely as common property. Now an adroit, unscrupulous fellow, who has seen the world, has only to get among these simple souls, and his fortune is pretty soon made; he plays with them.

As I noted during the podcast, seems I have read commentators to say that this might be the earliest - and maybe only - example of an ancient Epicurean (if we consider Lucian to be one) commenting on Christianity.

Post by "Joshua" of May 29, 2022 at 11:25 AM

Show Notes:

Lucretius versus the Lake Poets

By Robert Frost

'Nature I loved; and next to Nature, Art.'

Dean , adult education may seem silly.

What of it, though? I got some willy-nilly

The other evening at your college deanery.

And grateful for it (let's not be facetious!)

For I thought Epicurus and Lucretius

By Nature meant the Whole Goddam Machinery.

But you say that in college nomenclature

The only meaning possible for Nature

In Landor's quatrain would be Pretty Scenery.

Which makes opposing it to Art absurd

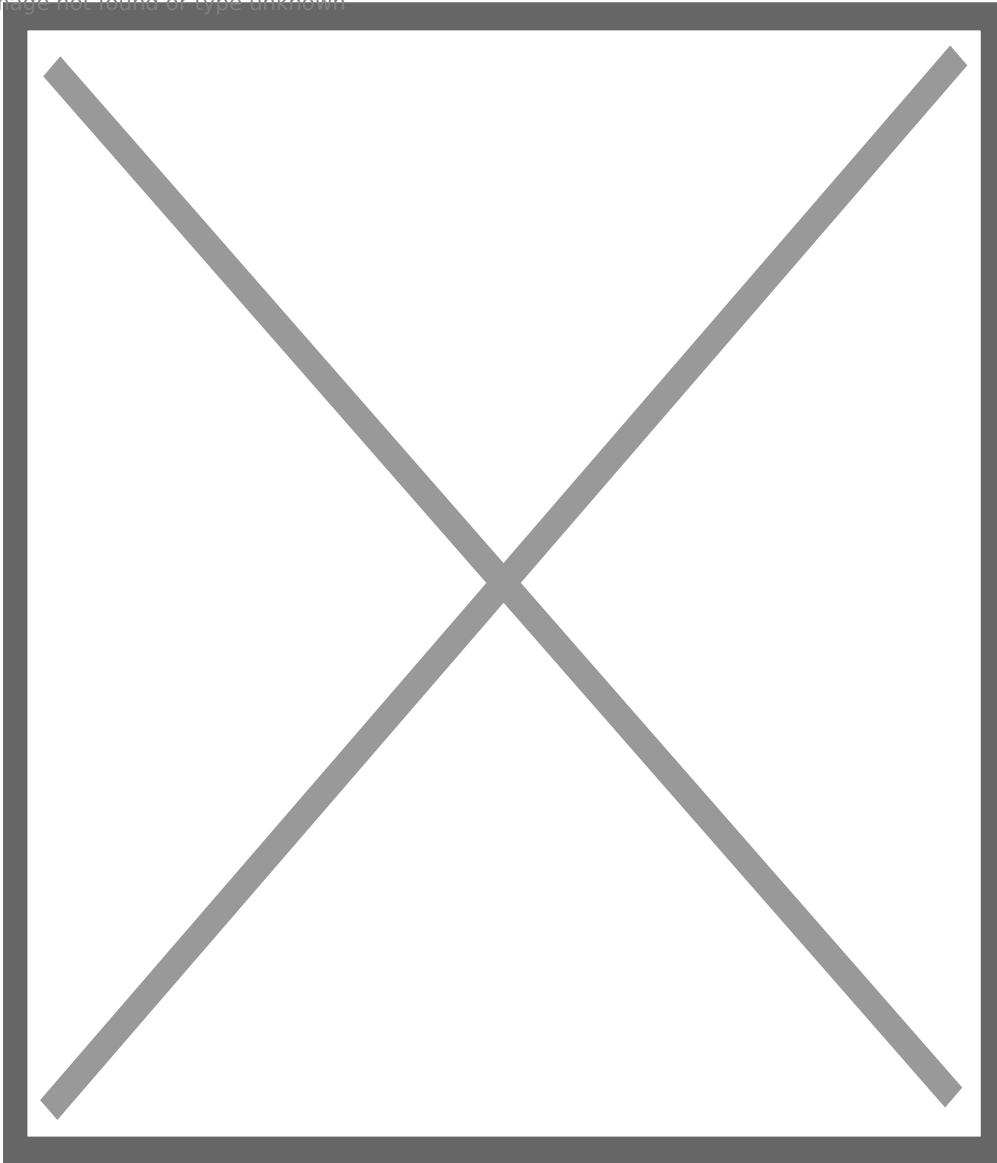
I grant you—if you're sure about the word.

God bless the Dean and make his deanship plenary.

Thales and the Eclipse of 585 BC

The anniversary of this eclipse was yesterday, May 28th (sorry Don!)

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[Eclipse of Thales - Wikipedia](#)

en.m.wikipedia.org

Lucretius and Natural Selection

[Evolution and Paleontology in the Ancient World](#)

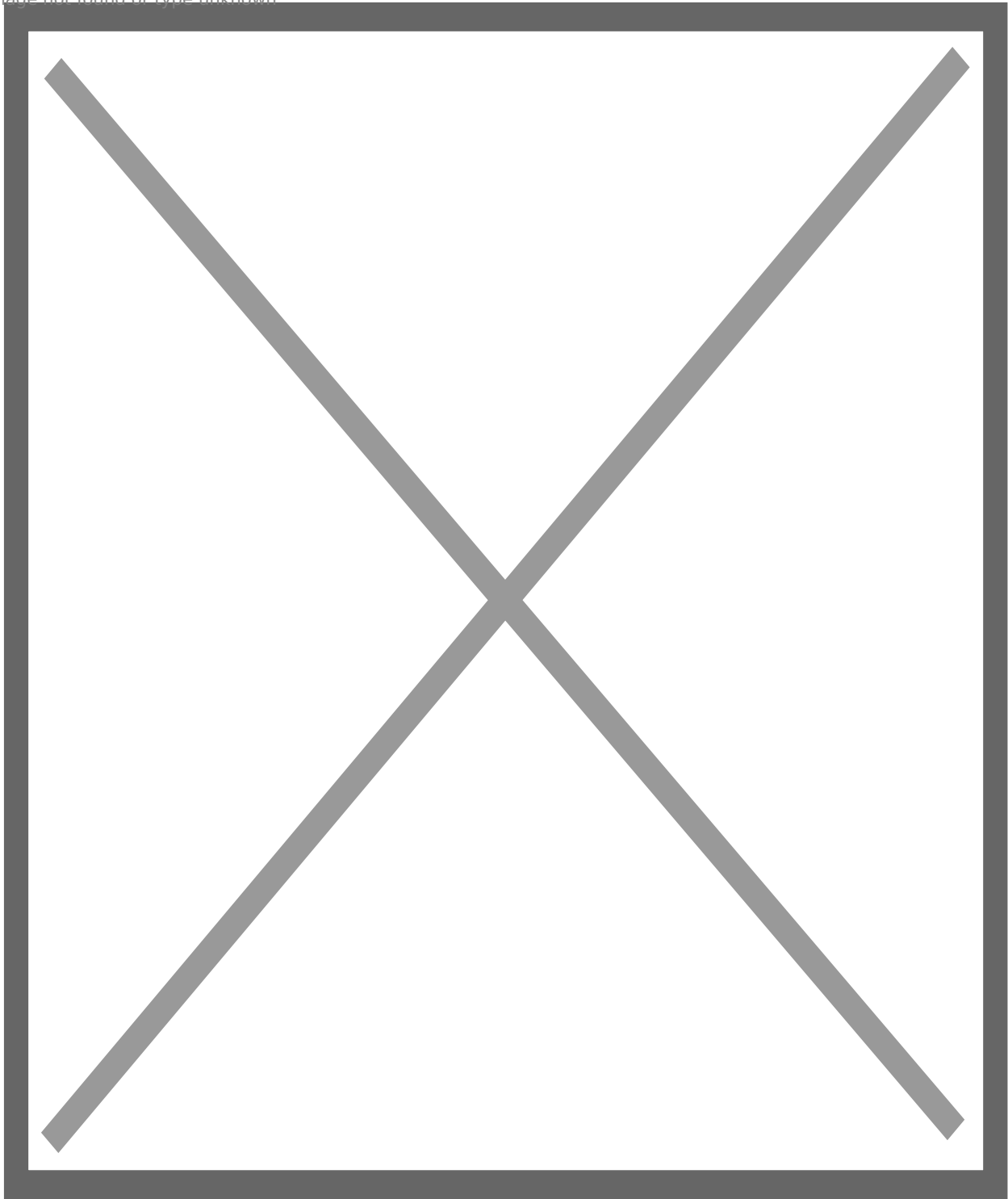
Isonomia

I think the article I mentioned may have been "Animals in War and Isonomia" by K. L. McKay, but it's behind a paywall and I won't likely read it again.

Mark Twain

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2538-episode-one-hundred-twenty-four-letter-to-herodotus-13-life-on-other-worlds-deve/>

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[A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court - Wikipedia](https://en.m.wikipedia.org)

en.m.wikipedia.org

Caustic vs Corrosive

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2538-episode-one-hundred-twenty-four-letter-to-herodotus-13-life-on-other-worlds-deve/>

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&url=https://www.thoughtco.com/definition-of-corrosive-604961%23:~:text=%3DCorrosive%2520Versus%2520Caustic%2520or%2520Irritant,chemical%2520acts%25>

Thanks to Martin for correcting me!

Post by “Cassius” of June 3, 2022 at 9:51 PM

Episode 124 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. In this episode we continue in the letter to Herodotus and discuss life on other worlds, the development of language, and the regular motion of the stars.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/50056724>