

# Episode One Hundred Thirty-Three - Letter to Pythocles 07 - Conclusion Of The Letter

**Post by "Cassius" of July 30, 2022 at 6:59 AM**

Welcome to Episode One Hundred Thirty-Three 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 complete our discussion of [Epicurus' Letter to Pythocles](#). Now let's join Joshua reading today's text:

BAILEY:

Comets occur either when fire is collected together in certain regions at certain intervals of time in the upper air because some gathering of matter takes place, or when at certain intervals the heaven above us has some peculiar movement, so that stars of this nature are revealed, or when they themselves at certain seasons start to move on account of some gathering of matter and come into the regions within our ken and appear visible. And their disappearance occurs owing to the opposite causes to these.

[112] Some stars 'revolve in their place'(as Homer says), which comes to pass not only because this part of the world is stationary and round it the rest revolves, as some say, but also because a whirl of air is formed in a ring round it, which prevents their moving about as do the other stars: or else it is because there is not a succession of appropriate fuel for them, but only in this place in which they are seen fixed. And there are many other ways in which this may be brought about, if one is able to infer what is in agreement with phenomena.

[113] That some of the stars should wander in their course, if indeed it is the case that their movements are such, while others do not move in this manner, may be due to the reason that

from the first as they moved in their circles they were so constrained by necessity that some of them move along the same regular orbit, and others along one which is associated with certain irregularities: or it may be that among the regions to which they are carried in some places there are regular tracts of air which urge them on successively in the same direction and provide flame for them regularly, while in other places the tracts are irregular, so that the aberrations which we observe result.

But to assign a single cause for these occurrences, when phenomena demand several explanations, is madness, and is quite wrongly practiced by persons who are partisans of the foolish notions of astrology, by which they give futile explanations of the causes of certain occurrences, and all the time do not by any means free the divine nature from the burden of responsibilities.

[114] That some stars should be seen to be left behind by others is caused because though they move round in the same orbit they are carried along more slowly, and also because they really move in the opposite direction though they are dragged back by the same revolution: also because some are carried round through a greater space and some through a lesser, though all perform the same revolution. But to give a single explanation of these occurrences is only suitable to those who wish to make a show to the many.

[115] What are called falling stars may be produced in part by the rubbing of star against star, and by the falling out of the fragments wherever an outburst of wind occurs, as we explained in the case of lightning-flashes: or else by the meeting of atoms productive of fire, when a gathering of kindred material occurs to cause this, and a movement in the direction of the impulse which results from the original meeting; or else by a gathering of wind in certain dense and misty formations, and its ignition as it whirls round, and then its bursting out of what encloses it and its rush towards the spot to which the impulse of its flight tends. And there are other ways in which this result may be brought about, quite free from superstition.

The signs of the weather which are given by certain animals result from mere coincidence of occasion. For the animals do not exert any compulsion for winter to come to an end, nor is there some divine nature which sits and watches the outgoings of these animals and then fulfills the signs they give.

[116] For not even the lowest animal, although 'a small thing gives the greater pleasure,' would be seized by such foolishness, much less one who was possessed of perfect happiness.

All these things, Pythocles, you must bear in mind; for thus you will escape in most things from superstition and will be enabled to understand what is akin to them. And most of all give yourself up to the study of the beginnings and of infinity and of the things akin to them, and also of the criteria of truth and of the feelings, and of the purpose for which we reason out these things. For these points when they are thoroughly studied will most easily enable you to understand the causes of the details. But those who have not thoroughly taken these things to heart could not rightly study them in themselves, nor have they made their own the reason for

observing them.

## HICKS

Comets arise either because fire is nourished in certain places at certain intervals in the heavens, if circumstances are favourable; or because at times the heaven has a particular motion above us so that such stars appear; or because the stars themselves are set in motion under certain conditions and come to our neighbourhood and show themselves. And their disappearance is due to the causes which are the opposite of these.

[112] Certain stars may revolve without setting not only for the reason alleged by some, because this is the part of the world round which, itself unmoved, the rest revolves, but it may also be because a circular eddy of air surrounds this part, which prevents them from travelling out of sight like other stars; or because there is a dearth of necessary fuel farther on, while there is abundance in that part where they are seen to be. Moreover there are several other ways in which this might be brought about, as may be seen by anyone capable of reasoning in accordance with the facts.

[113] The wanderings of certain stars, if such wandering is their actual motion, and the regular movement of certain other stars, may be accounted for by saying that they originally moved in a circle and were constrained, some of them to be whirled round with the same uniform rotation and others with a whirling motion which varied; but it may also be that according to the diversity of the regions traversed in some places there are uniform tracts of air, forcing them forward in one direction and burning uniformly, in others these tracts present such irregularities as cause the motions observed.

To assign a single cause for these effects when the facts suggest several causes is madness and a strange inconsistency; yet it is done by adherents of rash astronomy, who assign meaningless causes for the stars whenever they persist in saddling the divinity with burdensome tasks.

[114] That certain stars are seen to be left behind by others may be because they travel more slowly, though they go the same round as the others; or it may be that they are drawn back by the same whirling motion and move in the opposite direction; or again it may be that some travel over a larger and others over a smaller space in making the same revolution. But to lay down as assured a single explanation of these phenomena is worthy of those who seek to dazzle the multitude with marvels.

[115] Falling stars, as they are called, may in some cases be due to the mutual friction of the stars themselves, in other cases to the expulsion of certain parts when that mixture of fire and air takes place which was mentioned when we were discussing lightning; or it may be due to the meeting of atoms capable of generating fire, which accord so well as to produce this result,

and their subsequent motion wherever the impulse which brought them together at first leads them; or it may be that wind collects in certain dense mist-like masses and, since it is imprisoned, ignites and then bursts forth upon whatever is round about it, and is carried to that place to which its motion impels it. And there are other ways in which this can be brought about without recourse to myths.

The fact that the weather is sometimes foretold from the behaviour of certain animals is a mere coincidence in time. For the animals offer no necessary reason why a storm should be produced; and no divine being sits observing when these animals go out and afterwards fulfilling the signs which they have given.

[116] For such folly as this would not possess the most ordinary being if ever so little enlightened, much less one who enjoys perfect felicity.

All this, Pythocles, you should keep in mind; for then you will escape a long way from myth, and you will be able to view in their connection the instances which are similar to these. But above all give yourself up to the study of first principles and of infinity and of kindred subjects, and further of the standards and of the feelings and of the end for which we choose between them. For to study these subjects together will easily enable you to understand the causes of the particular phenomena. And those who have not fully accepted this, in proportion as they have not done so, will be ill acquainted with these very subjects, nor have they secured the end for which they ought to be studied.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of July 30, 2022 at 7:03 AM**

In putting together this week's episode, for the first time today I see that Bailey has a significant extra clause in line 116 that does not appear in Hicks. Here's the difference:

BAILEY: [116] For not even the lowest animal, although 'a small thing gives the greater pleasure,' would be seized by such foolishness, much less one who was possessed of perfect happiness.

HICKS: [116] For such folly as this would not possess the most ordinary being if ever so little enlightened, much less one who enjoys perfect felicity.

I see Bailey's footnote says this:

116 I (ἀν) supplevit Cobet      2 (εἰ) adiecit Usener      μικρὸν  
 F : μικρῶ cett.      3 ἐμπέσοι Usener : ἐκπέση libri : ἐκπέσοι Cobet  
 6 ἀπόδος εἰς BP<sup>2</sup>QCo : ἀποδώσεις P<sup>1</sup>?FZ      9 ῥαδίως BF : ῥαδίας  
 HP<sup>3</sup>Q      11 ῥ Kuhn : ῥ libri      οὐτ' (ἀν) Usener : οὐτε BHPQ :  
 ῥ F

I am not sure what is going on there, and I don't have time as I write this to track it down, but something seems weird here.

Inwood & Gerson "Epicurus Reader":

then fulfils these signs. 116. For such foolishness would not afflict any ordinary animal, even if it were a little more sophisticated, let alone one who possessed complete happiness.

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form of clouds, that they then take fire in consequence of their rotatory motion, and that, bursting the obstacles which surround them, they proceed towards the places whither the force by which they are animated drags them. In short, this phænomenon also may admit of a great number of explanations.

“ The presages which are drawn from certain animals arise from a fortuitous concourse of circumstances ; for there is no necessary connection between certain animals and winter. They do not produce it ; nor is there any divine nature sitting aloft watching the exits of these animals, and then accomplishing signs of this kind. Nor can such folly as this occur to any being who is even moderately comfortable, much less to one which is possessed of perfect happiness.

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### Post by “Don” of July 30, 2022 at 10:49 AM

The only difference between the Greek of Hicks and Bailey appears to be αν:

[116] οὐδὲ γὰρ εἰς τὸ τυχὸν ζῶον, κἂν (εἰ) μικρὸν χαριέστερον εἴη, ἢ τοιαύτη μωρία ἐμπέσοι, μὴ ὅτι εἰς παντελῆ εὐδαιμονίαν κεκτημένον.

Hicks

[116] οὐδὲ γὰρ (ἄν) εἰς τὸ τυχὸν ζῶον, κἂν (εἰ) μικρὸν χαριέστερον εἴη, ἢ τοιαύτη μωρία ἐμπέσοι, μὴ ὅτι εἰς παντελεῖ εὐδαιμονίαν κεκτημένον.

Bailey

Here's Bailey's commentary on those lines:

and thus bringing the prediction to pass. The irony of the passage is in rather marked distinction to the general matter-of-fact style of the letter, and reminds us of passages in Lucretius. In his amused scorn the writer seems to have forgotten the explanation that it is the approach of a new season which causes the animals to appear.

9 ἐπισημασίαι, 'signs of the weather' cf § 98, where in dealing with the signs given by the stars, the writer says that some of them are due to chance coincidence, καθάπερ ἐν τοῖς ἐμφανέσι παρ' ἡμῖν ζῴοις.

κατὰ συγκύρημα τοῦ καιροῦ. cf. § 98 9 κατὰ συγκυρήσεις καιρῶν.

§ 116. 2 κἄν (εἰ). the addition of Usener seems necessary, as is Cobet's ἄν just before

μικρὸν χαριέστερον εἶη. obviously an allusion to a proverb, 'the smaller the trifle, the greater the joy'.

3. ἐμπέσοι: another certain correction for the MS. ἐκπέση.

Conclusion. § 116. 4-12. The letter ends with a conclusion based more or less closely on the corresponding conclusion of the first letter. These main principles, and especially the doctrine of the origin of things and the infinity of the atoms and space, must be thoroughly grasped, together with the fundamental reason for their knowledge, the true pleasure of life: from them an understanding of the details will naturally follow.

5. τοῦ μύθου ἐκβήση, the avowed object all through this second letter, and one of the chief sources of ἀταραξία.

6. τῶν ἀρχῶν, 'the origins' of things, i.e. the atoms and space.

7. ἀπειρίας: i.e. the infinity of the two ἀρχαί and of the κόσμοι.

8. κριτηρίων here must be the criteria of truth on the intellectual side, i.e. αἴσθησις and πρόληψις.

παθῶν. the criteria of rightness on the moral side: they are usually included with the other two under the general head of κριτήρια (e.g. *D. L.* x. 31), but the separation here is quite natural, and there is no reason, with Kochalsky, to suspect the text.

οὐ ἔνεκεν i.e. the ἀταραξία, freedom from the disturbance of theological beliefs, which is the greater part of the true philosopher's ἡδονή.

9. τῶν κατὰ μέρος the detailed phenomena of nature and their explanation

10. καταγαπήσαντες: not merely understood but accepted them as a creed Bignone renders 'studied with the utmost care', which is hardly strong enough

11. ῥ: Kuhn's necessary correction for ῥ

(ἄν) an inevitable addition of Usener's.

12. περιεποιήσαντο, 'made it their own' they have not otherwise attained ἀταραξία.

## Post by “Don” of July 31, 2022 at 8:22 AM

BAILEY: [116] For not even the lowest animal, although ‘a small thing gives the greater pleasure,’ would be seized by such foolishness, much less one who was possessed of perfect happiness.

HICKS: [116] For such folly as this would not possess the most ordinary being if ever so little enlightened, much less one who enjoys perfect felicity.

INWOOD/GERSON: For such foolishness would not afflict any ordinary animal, even if it were a little more sophisticated, let alone one who possessed complete happiness.

YONGE: Nor can such folly as this occur to any being who is even moderately comfortable, much less to one which is possessed of perfect happiness.

[116] οὐδὲ γὰρ (αν) εἰς τὸ τυχὸν ζῶον, κἂν (εἰ) μικρὸν χαριέστερον εἶη, ἢ τοιαύτη μωρία ἐμπέσοι, μὴ ὅτι εἰς παντελῆ εὐδαιμονίαν κεκτημένον.

So, the major difference in translation here seems Bailey's decision to put in the proverb itself that he says the line κἂν (εἰ) μικρὸν χαριέστερον εἶη "obviously" alludes to: "The smaller the trifle, the greater the joy." While the others don't seem to necessarily accept this as alluding to a "proverb":

- if ever so little enlightened
- even if it were a little more sophisticated
- any being who is even moderately comfortable

χαριέστερον

"in Attic, freq. of persons, in relation to qualities of mind, elegant, accomplished"

[χαρίεις - Wiktionary](#)

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, χα^ρίεις](#)

Yeah, I don't get Bailey's proverb allusion there. It doesn't quite seem to fit to me and the other translations seem more on the mark.

And the "perfect happiness" παντελή εὐδαιμονίαν is our old friend eudaimonia modified by that word pantele (from pan-telos) "all-accomplishing, all-complete, absolute, etc."

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, π , παντα^χοῖ , παντελής](#)

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### **Post by "Cassius" of July 31, 2022 at 8:57 AM**

I agree Don -

What does "the smaller the trifle the greater the joy" even supposed to mean?

Makes little sense to me, although I scent a whiff of Bailey's minimalism interpretation and/or outright hostility to various parts of Epicurean ethics.

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### **Post by "Don" of July 31, 2022 at 9:03 AM**

Yeah, I mostly agree with you.

I could accept something like "Even the smallest pleasure can bring the greatest joy" but that is NOT what Bailey is saying.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 6, 2022 at 6:41 AM**

Episode 133 - The Conclusion of the Letter to Pythocles - is now available. This week we complete the second of Epicurus' letters, and next week we turn to the letter to Menoecus.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/50834043>