

LUCRETIVS AND THE FEARS OF DEATH

A Dissertation

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Doctor of Philosophy

by

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Although he likes to pretend that he is the all-American kid from New York City, Peter Aronoff was actually born in Columbia, South Carolina. Mrs. Hunter taught him to read in kindergarten at P.S. #4, Inwood, NY, for which he will be forever grateful. Around the same time, his parents taught him to be a decent human being, to have the courage of his convictions, and, when appropriate, to raise his voice. These lessons and how to read were probably all he ever really needed to know, but the remaining twenty-three years of schooling were nevertheless entertaining. He cannot think of anything more stupid than the autobiography of a twenty-eight year old.

for Ithaca

such weather  
one cannot say, here, why  
one is still so happy.

Amy Clampitt 'Grasmere' *Archaic Figure*

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The thesis is dedicated to a place, which may seem odd. But as much as anything, a place is the people who live there and the life they live. I was lucky to have spent the last five years here, with these people, living this life. The work is a result of that time in this place. No other dedication seemed right.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Biographical Sketch	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgments	v
List of Abbreviations	viii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Emotions and the fears of death	6
Chapter 2: The nature of the soul and the fear of Hades	36
Chapter 3: The destruction of the soul and non-existence	78
Chapter 4: The destruction of the soul and non-existence: objections	136
Conclusion	170
Appendix 1: Materialism and the emotions	176
Appendix 2: <i>Letter to Herodotus</i> 81	181
Appendix 3: The two thought experiments in III 843-861	190
Bibliography	201

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAG	<i>Commentarium Aristotelicum Graecum</i>
CAH	<i>Cambridge Ancient History</i>
CHCL	<i>Cambridge History of Classical Literature</i>
<i>De An</i>	Aristotle, <i>De Anima</i>
<i>De Fin</i>	Cicero, <i>De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum</i>
DK	<i>Fragmente der Vorsokratiker</i> edd. H. Diels and W. Kranz
DL	Diogenes Laertius, <i>Vitae Philosophorum</i>
DO	Diogenes of Oenoanda, <i>The Epicurean Inscription</i>
DRN	Lucretius, <i>De Rerum Natura</i>
DVB	Seneca, <i>De Vita Beata</i>
EE	Aristotle, <i>Eudemian Ethics</i>
EET	P. Mitsis, <i>Epicurus' Ethical Theory</i>
EF	Philodemus, <i>De Electionibus et Fugis</i>
EHEE	G. Striker, <i>Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics</i>
<i>EpH</i>	Epicurus, <i>Epistula ad Herodotum</i>
<i>EpM</i>	Epicurus, <i>Epistula ad Menoeceum</i>
HPM	J. Annas, <i>Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind</i>
G	<i>Socraticorum Reliquae</i> ed. G. Giannantoni
KD	<i>Kuriai Doxai</i>
<i>Non posse</i>	Plutarch, <i>Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum</i>
L & S	<i>The Hellenistic Philosophers</i> edd. A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley
MoD	<i>Metaphysics of Death</i> ed. J. Fischer
MoH	J. Annas, <i>The Morality of Happiness</i>
ND	Cicero, <i>De Natura Deorum</i>
NE	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
<i>Rhet</i>	Aristotle, <i>Ars Rhetorica</i>
SVF	<i>Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta</i>
TD	Cicero, <i>Tusculanae Disputationes</i>
ToD	M. Nussbaum, <i>The Therapy of Desire</i>
U	<i>Epicurea</i> ed. H. Usener
VS	<i>Vaticanae Sententiae</i>



## INTRODUCTION

Start this way. Everyone wants to be happy (*DRN* VI 26, *EpM* 122). What people want, when they want this, is to live well, to have a good life, to succeed in their lives (*NE* 1095a18-20). These phrases are not identical, nor is their meaning perfectly clear, but neither point nullifies the substantial truth here. Over and above all the specific things that people want and pursue, they want, quite in general, to be happy.

This desire naturally produces two questions. First, what is happiness? Second, how can we get it, whatever it is?<sup>1</sup> The second question arises in an obvious way: if we want something, then we want to know how to get it – since we want happiness, we want to know how to get it. The first question arises, as Aristotle points out (*NE* 1095a17-22, 1097b22-24), because to say that everyone wants happiness is not yet to say anything very definite about what happiness is. Everyone can agree that they want to live well, precisely because ‘living well’ is left somewhat vague. But since we will be more likely to achieve happiness if we have a clear notion of what it is, we will very much want to have such a clear notion.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *DRN* VI 26-28, ‘*exposuitque* [Epicurus] *bonum summum quo tendimus omnes/quid foret, atque viam monstravit, tramite parvo/qua possemus ad id recto contendere cursu,*’ Seneca *DVB* I 1, and Aristotle *EE* 1214a14-15, ‘*πρῶτον δὲ σκεπετὸν ἐν τίνι τὸ εὖ ζῆν καὶ πῶς κτητόν,*’ but as emerges from his following remarks, Aristotle’s *πῶς κτητόν* is not as immediately practical as the statements Seneca or Lucretius. See also Mitsis *EET* 11, and Striker *EHEE* 169-173.

If we consider the Epicurean response to these questions, it will put the subject matter of the rest of the thesis into better perspective. Happiness, according to the Epicureans, consists in the absence of bodily pain (ἀπονία) and the freedom from mental disturbance (ἀταραξία). The characterization here is essentially negative, and Epicurus's language bears ample witness to this fact.<sup>2</sup> At least two things are odd here. First, even if we understand this to mean that happiness is *a life* of physical and mental painlessness, rather than just a momentary condition, nevertheless the Epicurean position seems too passive. Lack of pain, even a whole life of it, does not appear to have enough positive content to make up a truly happy life. As the Cyrenaics put it, this life seems like the condition of a sleeper or even of a corpse (DL II 89, U 451). Second, and still odder, the Epicureans identified painlessness with the greatest pleasure (*EpM* 131, *De Fin* I 37-38). Even if happiness is painlessness, however, it looks like sheer perversity to pass off lack of pain as any pleasure – much less the height of pleasure. These are genuine and serious problems for the Epicureans, but I am not going to answer them.

In order to consider the Epicurean answer to the second question – how can we achieve happiness, whatever it is? – I will simply take it to be true, for the sake of argument, that happiness is the conjunction of ἀπονία and ἀταραξία. Given that this is so, how can we get it? Put short, the Epicureans thought that we could achieve physical painlessness by satisfying, at a minimal level, our need for food, drink, clothing, and shelter. As Epicurus says, 'The cry of the flesh is not to be hungry, not to be

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. ἀλυπία U 458, 520, 526; ἀοχλησία *EpM* 127, U 526 and ἀνοχλησία U 450; ἀπονία U 2, 431, 450; and, last but not least, ἀταραξία *EpH* 82, *EpM* 128, U 2, 519, 520.

thirsty, not to be cold' (*VS* 33, and cf. *EpM* 130-132, *KD* 18, *DRN* II 20-21). Apparently they took our natural physical needs to be quite meager – bread and water would suffice for food and drink (*EpM* 131).<sup>3</sup> As for the other side of happiness – lack of mental disturbance – the Epicureans believed that people can achieve this only if they learn about the nature of the world and of themselves (*EpH* 81-82, *KD* 11, 12, 21, 22). Only in this way can people free themselves from the most common sources of anxiety and disturbance, namely fears about the gods and celestial and meteorological phenomena, fears about death, and excessive desires. Knowledge of the world and of oneself will bring peace of mind.

It may not be immediately apparent how knowledge could affect emotions and desires, but the Epicureans can answer this doubt. They explained that a person's emotions and desires take root in that person's thoughts. If, for example, a person believes that the gods are omnipotent and evil, she will fear them. Accordingly, the Epicureans can change her feelings, if they can show her the truth – namely that the gods take no trouble over her and that they pose no threat to her happiness. In such a way a gain in knowledge and understanding can lead to a change in emotion or desire. The Epicureans believed that most people lead troubled lives because of false beliefs which make them anxious, afraid, and eager for the wrong things. Once people learn the truth, their disturbing emotions and desires will give way to calm and to simple, easily satisfied desires.

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<sup>3</sup> Good health was important too, but little is said about it. Perhaps because it is, relatively, out of our control?

In the *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius provides some of the necessary knowledge. In particular, he offers lessons on the gods, celestial and meteorological phenomena, and death. Since his work covers physics in such great detail, his ethical concerns can become lost in the shuffle. E.J. Kenney, for example, claims that 'in the *D.R.N.* the traditional subordination of Canonics...and Physics...to Ethics...is reversed' (10, n.1). But the account that I have offered so far shows this to be a misunderstanding. Knowledge of physics is needed in order to achieve tranquillity, so all along, the lessons in physics are, in a sense, ethics by other means. Physics remains firmly subordinated to ethics. Ultimately, his physics lessons amount to a course of emotional therapy.<sup>4</sup> We may find such a means of treatment odd, but not if we remember that he means to alter our feelings *by means of* changing our thoughts.

In what follows, I examine the treatment that Lucretius offers of the fears of death in book III. His arguments, in particular those concerned with non-existence,<sup>5</sup> have received a great deal of attention recently. As an example, nearly every essay in a recent book of philosophical essays on death<sup>6</sup> takes up the Epicurean arguments about non-existence. For the most part, respondents have started from the provocative claim that 'death is nothing to us' (*DRN* III 830, *EpM* 124-125). But, as Stephen Rosenbaum

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<sup>4</sup> The therapeutic character of much of Hellenistic, and especially Epicurean, philosophy, has been the focus of much recent attention. See especially, J.-A. Voelke *La philosophie comme thérapie de l'âme: études de philosophie hellénistique* (Paris: Cerf, 1993) and M. Nussbaum *The Therapy of Desire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> See Chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>6</sup> *The Metaphysics of Death* ed. J. Fischer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

makes clear,<sup>7</sup> this is not the best way into the problem since the Epicureans used this claim in a number of ways all at the same time and it is easily misunderstood if taken too literally.<sup>8</sup> The approach I take here is somewhat different. I have tried to build up the Epicurean case by following the structure that I find in Lucretius. The goal is to lay out Lucretius's argument as clearly as possible, and to evaluate it primarily on its own terms.

The large scale structure is as follows. As I said, the bulk of the thesis tracks the course of Lucretius's therapy of the fears of death. As a necessary preliminary, however, the first chapter lays out in more detail the Epicurean theory of emotions and their treatment. In particular the chapter centers on fear and, even more narrowly, the fears of death. I argue that Lucretius groups the fears of death under two main headings: fears if the soul survives death, and fears if the soul is destroyed at death. The next two chapters take up these worries in this order: chapter two considers the fear of Hades, and chapter three the fears about annihilation. Since Lucretius's argument about annihilation has always attracted controversy and criticism, chapter four is devoted solely to reviewing objections to his argument. After a brief conclusion, the thesis ends with three appendixes which discuss tangential matters at greater length than would otherwise be possible.

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<sup>7</sup> I take him to make this clear, but I doubt that he takes the point this way himself. He is merely concerned to point out, against Steven Luper-Foy (see next note), that the claim is ambiguous and should not be taken too literally ('Epicurus and Annihilation' *MoD* 297).

<sup>8</sup> For example, it is obviously nonsense if it is taken to mean that we should never think about death at all, since the Epicureans spend plenty of time arguing, and hence thinking, about death. Plutarch, with characteristic lack of sympathy, tries to use this against the Epicureans (*Non posse* 1092c), as does Steven Luper-Foy 'Annihilation' *MoD* 272-273.

## CHAPTER ONE EMOTIONS AND THEIR CURE

### I

According to Lucretius, people's fears are often as foolish as the childish fear of the dark. He clearly finds the analogy compelling since he repeats it three times (II 55-61, III 87-93, VI 35-41). On each occasion, the verses round off a book's prologue in which Lucretius describes the miseries that men cause themselves through false fears and empty desires. Such fears, he tells us, are no more justified than those of children, and such childish adults need reason and knowledge, both of which Lucretius provides in his poetry. In this way, the comparison provides a smooth transition from a vividly described unhappiness to an Epicurean lesson – where the instruction is meant to cure the misery that Lucretius has just described.

Since this thesis follows the path of one such lesson, the analogy provides a helpful introduction to Lucretius's conception of emotion and reason. At the end of the proem to Book III, Lucretius writes:

nam ueluti pueri trepidant atque omnia caecis  
in tenebris metuunt, sic nos in luce timemus  
interdum nilo quae sunt metuenda magis quam  
quae pueri in tenebris pavitant finguntque futura.  
hunc igitur terrorem animi tenebrasque necessest  
non radii solis neque lucida tela diei  
discutiant, sed naturae species ratioque (87-93).

Just as boys tremble and fear everything in dark shadows, thus sometimes we are afraid in broad daylight of things which are no more fearful than those which boys in shadows quake at and imagine will happen. Hence, the vision and understanding of nature rather than the sun's rays or the clear shafts of the day must scatter this terror of mind and these shadows.

Lucretius has just described the horrors that the fear of death causes, and these transitional verses lead into his accounts of the soul's nature and of post-mortem non-existence (94-829, 830-1094). The analogy deserves attention since it should indicate how the fears are related to the accounts.

First off, it is significant that the analogy is with children. Children's thoughts are proverbially weak and unclear, and their fears are correspondingly unjustified and vague. Children presumably don't know much about the world and how it works; it takes time and experience, at the very least, to learn and absorb such knowledge. Thus, to compare adults with children already implies that the adults are less than properly rational or knowledgeable.

Obviously, the rest of what Lucretius says about the boys' fears only reinforces this suggestion. The boys are afraid in the dark – this point is twice repeated (88, 90) – presumably of things that they only half see, if even that.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Lucretius links their fear to imagination about the future. This too suggests that there is something vague and insubstantial about the boys' thoughts. Even more strongly, I take there to be an implication of error and falsity. Perhaps the children hear a sound or see a shadow, and they have some vague notion of a monster coming to get them. But of course, there is no monster. Their ideas are, in all these ways, both false and confused. If the analogy holds true, then adult fears about death are similarly confused and false.

For the children, the cure is daylight, but adults require knowledge and understanding. So long as people are in the dark about the soul's nature, they will continue to be afraid, whether for its destruction or for its

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. '*caecis/ in tenebris*' (87-88), for the mention of blind darkness.

survival.<sup>2</sup> Lack of knowledge leads to fervid imagination about what may happen after death, just as the darkness allows the boys' terror to run wild. In order to scatter the adults' fears, Lucretius proposes to explain the nature of the soul, and he compares this to the effect of daylight on the boys' fear. In the light of day, it becomes clear that there is no monster, and once a person learns the nature of the soul, it becomes clear that, say, there is no hideous afterlife.

These features of the analogy suggest quite a lot about Lucretius's understanding of fear. It seems clear that people are afraid because of what they think. The child thinks that the sound is a monster, and so he is afraid; the adult thinks that his soul will undergo hideous punishment after death, and so he is afraid. Since ignorance produces false and confused ideas and these ideas in turn produce fears, in a manner of speaking ignorance produces false and confused fears. What you don't know, emphatically can harm you. At the same time, however, emotions shift in response to changes in people's ideas. Once the child stops imagining that there is a monster, the fear disappears, and once our ideas about death change, so will our emotional attitude towards it. Hence if Lucretius can change what we think, he can change how we feel.

But if the analogy illuminates how Lucretius views fear and its cure, it also creates a number of problems. First off, is it really appropriate to say that children are afraid because of what they think, or does this attribute too much rationality to the process? To put it another way, if Lucretius finds adults so confused and ignorant, why does he blame their thoughts at all? Perhaps the real culprit is that they *don't* think enough. The second

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. I 102-135.



feature of the comparison may break down as well. Reason and knowledge should dispel adult fears just as daylight dispels the children's fears. But if the adult fear is so unreasonable and stupid, it is not clear how reason could do this work. Even more strongly, we may wonder already at the point about children. We all know, after all, that when evening returns, so do the monsters: the light does not really cure the fear since it only offers temporary relief. By now the analogy is likely to seem false or radically flawed.

There are two serious criticisms to consider here. The first is that Lucretius has no coherent conception of emotion. He appears to say, all at the same time, that the fear is rational and irrational, that it is the result of what people think but also the result of their ignorance. The second problem is intimately related to the first: will his arguments really be as effective as he imagines? If fear is so overwhelmingly irrational, how can reason be of any use? Lucretius appears much too optimistic, given his very pessimistic ideas about most people's cognitive maturity. If the fear of death is really like a child's fear of the dark, then it has little or nothing to do with reasonable thought and hence knowledge will have little or no effect on the fear. His own analogy shows up the flaws in Lucretius's conception of emotions.

Lucretius has answers to both problems, but it is necessary to look at more than just the analogy. An adequate answer to these puzzles calls for a fuller analysis of the theory of emotions that Lucretius presupposes, and in particular his conception of fear and the fear of death. The analogy suggests that fear is connected to thought and reason, but also to ignorance, without addressing the apparent conflict. Similarly the analogy insists that

reason is the cure for troubling emotions, but it does not explain how reason fills this rôle. Once we step back a bit and consider the psychology of the emotions, we will be in a better position to answer such puzzles.

I proceed, then, as follows. In the next section, I consider the emotions generally, and I try to show where, according to Lucretius and the Epicureans, thought fits into emotions. After that, I look more specifically at fear and the fear of death. Then, I consider Lucretius's assessment and treatment of the emotions, with special attention to the fear of death. In the conclusion, I return to the puzzles in order to consider what solutions the fuller analysis provides.

One final point. In many ways other ancient theories of the emotions are easier to study than the Epicurean theory. We have more straightforward accounts for other ancients, especially Aristotle and the Stoics,<sup>3</sup> and there has been a great deal of excellent research on Aristotelian and Stoic emotions.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the Aristotelian and the Stoic theory form a useful contrast, since they are, in many ways, polar opposites. Hence, in my account of the emotions in Epicurean authors, I will often refer to Aristotle and the Stoics by way of comparison, example, and contrast.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Rhet* II 1-11, *NE* III 6-9, IV 5; and *SVF* III *Ethica* VII, DL VII 110-118, *TD* III-IV.

<sup>4</sup> The bibliography is immense, but for a start see, in A. Rorty *Essays on Aristotle's Rhetoric* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), the essays of S. Leighton, J. Cooper, G. Striker, D. Frede, and M. Nussbaum; and, for the Stoics, M. Frede 'The Stoic doctrine of the affections of the soul' and G. Striker *EHEE* 270-280.

II<sup>5</sup>

Lucretius's primary conception of the emotions has three parts<sup>6</sup> – an emotion is (1) a mode of feeling which mediates between (2) a way of seeing the world and (3) action. How a person views the world determines the emotional state of that person, and the emotional state, in turn, leads to certain actions or inclinations. So, for example, if I find something threatening and dangerous, I will feel fear, and my fear will incline me to flight or, more generally, avoidance (cf. *DRN* I 102-135). This tri-partite picture of emotion as cognition, feeling, and action is familiar from Aristotle.<sup>7</sup> To take one emotion, he defines anger as 'a painful desire for what one takes to be revenge because of what one takes to be a slight' (*Rhet* 1378a30-31).<sup>8</sup> This definition also contains the three elements: (1) a perception, here of insult, (2) a feeling, here of pain, and (3) an inclination to action, here to revenge.

But this is much too vague. Although theories as diverse as those of Aristotle and the Stoa can *involve* these three elements,<sup>9</sup> the interesting

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<sup>5</sup> In reconstructing Lucretius's views on the emotions, I have learned a great deal from the following works: J. Annas 'Epicurean Emotions' *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 30 (1989), 145-164 and *HPM* Chapter 9; P. Mitsis *EET*; M. Nussbaum *ToD*; and J. Procopé 'Epicureans on Anger' *Philanthropia kai Eusebeia* (Göttingen: Vanderhoek & Ruprecht, 1993), 363-386.

<sup>6</sup> In this chapter I deal exclusively with the psychology of the emotions. But the Epicureans also provided a physical analysis of the passions. See Appendix 1: Materialism and the emotions.

<sup>7</sup> For Aristotle's theory in its historical, especially its Platonic, context, see William Fortenbaugh 'Aristotle's *Rhetoric* on Emotions' in *Articles on Aristotle* ed. Jonathan Barnes (London: Duckworth, 1979), 133-153.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *De An* 403a29-403b1 and *Top* 127b33-34, 151a15-16, 156a31-34.

<sup>9</sup> I should say that I am returning to a somewhat earlier understanding of the Stoic theory, as found in, say, Michael Frede 'The Stoic doctrine of the affections of the soul' in *The Norms of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 93-110 and A.C. Lloyd 'Emotion and Decision in Stoic Psychology' in *The Stoics* ed. John Rist (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 233-246. Some more recent interpreters, especially Martha Nussbaum, have focused so narrowly on the cognitive side of the emotions that it may seem that this is all there is to the Stoic account.

questions are more specific. How are the three items themselves understood? How are they related? And which ones are given pride of place in the account of emotions as a whole? For example, two things strongly distinguish the Stoics from Aristotle. First, the Stoics are much more concerned with cognition and action than they are with feeling, whereas Aristotle has a real interest in studying the phenomenology of emotions.<sup>10</sup> Second, the Stoics conceive of the cognitive element as an actual judgment whereas Aristotle believes that it can be something weaker, perhaps an appearance.<sup>11</sup> In order to say something truly informative about Lucretius and the Epicureans, it is necessary to say more, first about which features of the emotions they emphasize and second, about how they conceive of those elements.

Like the Stoics, Lucretius is especially concerned with cognition and action. Although Lucretius mentions various phenomenological aspects of different emotions, e.g. that anger feels warm (III 288-289), he does not study phenomenology in detail. Solely on the basis of what Lucretius says about the feel of emotions, we could not even distinguish some very distinct emotions. For instance, both fear and love are 'frigida' (fear: III 290-291; love: IV 1060). What will adequately distinguish these two emotions are their characteristic attitudes and actions. A lover takes someone to be highly desirous and pursues that person, but someone in the grip of fear perceives a threat and tends to avoid it (love: IV 1052-1057; fear: III 65-68). Lucretius does not spend much time carefully analyzing the feel of

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<sup>10</sup> See Dorothea Frede 'Mixed Feelings in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*' in *Essays on Aristotle's Rhetoric* ed. A. Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 258-285.

<sup>11</sup> Compare SVF III 380, 456 with *Rhet* 1377a31-32, 1382a21-22. See also the commentary of Aspasius on the *Nicomachean Ethics* in CAG 19, pages 44.33-45.10.

different emotions, but he does lavish attention on their cognitive causes and the behavior that they typically produce.

This may seem odd since Lucretius is a hedonist, and thus we might expect him to be very concerned with felt qualities of emotion; but the specifics of Epicurean hedonism make it reasonable that Lucretius lack detailed concern with feelings.<sup>12</sup> In brief, Epicureans took our ethical goal, the highest pleasure, to be a state of physical and mental painlessness.<sup>13</sup> Once this state is reached, pleasure can be varied but not increased. These variations, however, add nothing to our happiness, and so they are not of great intrinsic interest. Since what matters is a negatively defined state, the positive felt qualities of specific pleasures drop out as unimportant. Hence it makes good sense that Lucretius is unconcerned with the intricacies of how emotions feel. Insofar as they disturb our painless state, they are bad, but beyond that, subtle distinctions in how they feel bad are not relevant to happiness. So Lucretius can call both love and fear ‘*frigidae curae*’ without more careful discrimination, because all that concerns him is that they are painful *curae*.

Actions, on the other hand, matter a great deal to Epicurean ethics. In fact, the Epicureans sometimes describe ethics as the part of philosophy concerned with choice and avoidance, where these polar terms exhaust the field of action at a general level.<sup>14</sup> Lucretius and other Epicureans consider not merely individual actions but also larger patterns of behavior. Fear of the gods drives men not just to single acts of devotion but towards an

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<sup>12</sup> For support of my interpretation of Epicurean hedonism, see Mitsis *EET* Chapter 1.

<sup>13</sup> See *DRN* II 16-19, *EpM* 131-132, and *De Fin* I 37-38.

<sup>14</sup> *DL* X 117, 129, *De Fin* I 29-30, and G. Striker *EHEE* 30-31. Also see Aristotle *Rhet* 1360b4-6.

entire lifestyle of (futile) piety (V 1161-1168, 1194-1203). Similarly, love and fear can infect the whole of a person's life (IV 1121-1140, III 37-40). Lucretius spends, by far, the greater part of his time on patterns and groups of action rather than on individual, one-off cases. Again, this makes good sense since, as a eudaimonist, his concern is with the shape of an entire life.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, we come to the cognitive aspect of emotion. According to the Epicureans, how a person sees matters determines the person's emotional attitudes. So if a person thinks that the gods are all-powerful, all-knowing, and vindictive, that person will fear the gods (*EpH* 76-77, 81, *EpM* 123-124, *DRN* V1161-1225, VI 68-78). Similarly, if a person thinks that someone has deliberately harmed him, he will be angry (Philodemus *De Ira* XXVII 32-39, XL 32-35, XLVI 28-35). And in the case that most concerns us, when a person views death as harmful, that person will fear death (*EpM* 124-127, *EpH* 81, *DRN* 101-135). In all these cases, the emotions flow from the person's view of how things are. In general, it seems, what a person thinks about a given situation or fact motivates specific attitudes towards that situation or fact.

We should avoid the overly simple idea that an emotion results from a single, isolated thought. Our everyday way of speaking might suggest this simplistic idea, as when someone says, 'I saw the dog coming at me, and I became afraid.' This suggests that the mere thought of the dog approaching was enough to incite the fear. In fact, such statements are elliptical, and the thoughts which give rise to emotion are more complex.

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<sup>15</sup> See my introduction, as well as G. Striker *EHEE* 170-173 and J. Annas *MoH* 27-46, entitled 'Making Sense of My Life as a Whole.'

Here, for instance, the fear derives from the thought that the dog is approaching and angry, that angry dogs are likely to bite, and that such bites are painful and therefore bad. Thus the emotion results from a complex mix of thoughts, and this mix contains both factual elements, e.g. that angry dogs bite, as well as evaluative elements, e.g. that pain is bad. Some of the thought is specific, e.g. that this dog is approaching and angry, and some of the thought is quite general, e.g. that angry dogs often bite and that pain is bad. Naturally, not all of this information consciously occurs to the person at the time.

The Epicureans appear to have been well aware of the complexity of the thoughts which produce emotion. In the case of anger, Philodemus makes it abundantly clear that the emotion requires more than the bare thought that one has been harmed. Anger follows from the thought of harm combined with the thought that the harm was intentional (*De Ira* XLVI 28-30, cf. XL 32-33, XLI 31-34, XLVI 18-22, XLVIII 5-11). Moreover the intensity of anger varies according to how great a harm is perceived (XLVII 32-41).<sup>16</sup> Lucretius gives similar indications in the case of fear of the gods. Briefly put, he argues that certain features of men's visions of the gods lead them to hypothesize (correctly) that the gods are blessed, immortal, and exceedingly powerful. And then men (incorrectly) attribute the workings of the heavens to the gods since they can find no other explanation for such phenomena. After that, every case of bad weather becomes a portent of divine anger – a limitless supply of baseless fears. The point here is simply that the chain of ideas which leads to the fears is somewhat long and tangled.

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<sup>16</sup> On this point, see J.F. Procopé 'Epicureans on Anger' 375-376.

In sum, the Epicurean view of emotions is roughly this. A person forms various views of the world, and these views result in varied emotional states and tendencies. For example, my views on death may lead me either to desire it or to fear it – fear it, if I take it to be an impending evil, but desire it if I take it to be a great benefit. The resultant emotions possess intrinsic characters that are pleasant or painful – they feel a certain way and affect us, just by our having them. Moreover, emotions and emotional dispositions lead to various actions and patterns of action. Anger motivates revenge just as love motivates pursuit. Where the emotion is strong and general enough, it can dominate the entire character of a life – think of how love or anger can be the most important thing in a person’s life.

### III

It should be possible to carry over the tri-partite analysis from emotion to fear and from fear to the fear of death. Emotions are feelings which result from cognition and lead to action. So we can ask, for the particular emotion fear, How does it feel?, What kind of cognition does it result from?, and What kinds of action does it lead to? In the same manner we can move from fear to its species, the fear of death. Although Epicurean authors rarely pose and answer these questions explicitly, their answers are easy to infer from what they do say.

First and foremost, fear is painful and disturbing. Lucretius and Epicurus both link fear with distress and anxiety (*DRN* II 19, 48, III 461, 826, 903, VI 645; *EpH* 81-82). Diogenes of Oenoanda offers fears first among the disturbances which trouble the soul (34 VI 6-VII 4). Most strikingly,



Lucretius uses an extreme case of fear to demonstrate how much the mind can affect the body:

verum ubi vementi magis est commota metu mens,  
 consentire animam totam per membra videmus  
 sudoresque ita palloremque existere toto  
 corpore et infringi linguam vocemque aboriri;  
 caligare oculos, sonere auris, succidere artus,  
 denique concidere ex animi terrore videmus  
 saepe homines (III 152-158).

But when the mind has been struck by a very strong fear, we see that the entire soul throughout the limbs shares the feeling, and sweat and pallor arise on the whole body, and the voice cracks, and speech fails; the eyes grow dark, the ears ring, the limbs buckle, and finally we often see men collapse as a result of the mind's terror.

Lucretius also characterizes fear as cold: it is perceived as a chill, and he connects this with the trembling which often accompanies fear (III 290-291, 299-301).

The thought which produces fear is that of a future evil. A person is afraid when she perceives something as an impending threat. Epicurus implies this in a principle which he offers about fear and rationality: it is unreasonable to fear something which won't really be harmful when it occurs (*EpM* 125). His language makes it clear that the evil which fear is directed at is in the future: ὥστε μάταιος ὁ λέγων δεδιέναι τὸν θάνατον οὐχ ὅτι λυπήσει παρών, ἀλλ' ὅτι λυπεῖ μέλλων. ὁ γὰρ παρὸν οὐκ ἐνοχλεῖ, προσδοκώμενον κενῶς λυπεῖ.<sup>17</sup> We can see the same point in Diogenes of Oenoanda, who describes those who avoid a fire fearing that they will die because of it (φοβούμενοι δι' αὐτοῦ τῷ θανάτῳ περιπεσεῖσθαι 35 II).

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<sup>17</sup> Stupid is the person who says that he fears death not because it *will hurt* when it occurs, but because it hurts *in anticipation*. For whatever is not troubling when it occurs gives only empty pains *when it is expected to occur*.

The action which naturally results from fear is flight or avoidance. In the case of a clear and distinct fear, Diogenes of Oenoanda tells us, we flee some obvious evil, as when we avoid a fire (35 II 4-7). Lucretius explains that so long as men are driven by fear they long to have fled and gotten themselves clear of the perceived threat (III 68-69). This would have been axiomatic for the Epicureans since fear is itself painful and it is the perception of an impending pain or evil. Since the natural response to pain is avoidance,<sup>18</sup> and fear is painful twice over – intrinsically and as the expectation of something painful – the natural response to fear is also avoidance.

So far this is all highly traditional and non-controversial. Both Plato and Aristotle agreed that fear was painful (*Phlb* 47e1-3, *Rhet* 1382a21). Philosophers of all stripes believed that fear was directed at a (perceived) future evil.<sup>19</sup> To judge from the ease with which Socrates and Laches agree, common sense also saw fear as a προσδοκία μέλλοντος κακοῦ (*Laches* 198b7-c1; cf. the *Suda* s.v. φόβος). Aristotle considers fear to be a process of chilling (*PA* 692a25-27, *Rhet* 1389b29-32), a conception which he shares with the ancient medical tradition.<sup>20</sup> Both the Greek and Latin languages presuppose the connection between fright and trembling – think for example of the words φρίκη and **horror**. Homer uses the later word for fear, φόβος, to mean ‘flight’, and Aristotle would have essentially agreed with Epicurus that fear was naturally suited to flight and avoidance,

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *EpM* 127-131, *DRN* II 16-21, *De Fin* I 30.

<sup>19</sup> *Laches* 198b7-c1, *Protagoras* 358d5-7, *NE* 1115a9, *DL* VII 112, *SVF* III 388, Alcinoos XXXII, pseudo-Andronicus of Rhodes I β' 14-15.

<sup>20</sup> See the extremely informative article of Helmut Flashar ‘Die medizinischen Grundlagen der Lehre von der Wirkung der Dichtung in der griechischen Poetik’ *Hermes* 84 (1956), 12-48.

insofar as it was a perception of pain (*De An* 431a8-16). Very likely, we too will find this conception of fear uncontroversial, since this conception is, in essence, ours as well.<sup>21</sup>

The fear of death feels no different than any other fear, except that the feeling is stronger than most other cases. The fear of death is very, very painful. It seems that the strength of a fear is a function of the size and severity of the perceived evil.<sup>22</sup> And the fear of death frequently stands, with the fear of the gods, as one of the strongest fears in human life – τὸ φρικωδέστατον οὖν τῶν κακῶν ὁ θάνατος οὐθὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς (*EpM* 125).<sup>23</sup> Death is seen as one of the worst things that we face, and as a result, the fear of death is one of the most painful and disturbing fears. The other point worth noting, in this regard, is that since it is so common and so vehement, the fear of death becomes exemplary of disturbing painful fear.<sup>24</sup>

Fear leads to avoidance, and so does the fear of death, but in a complicated fashion. The Epicureans were aware that if a person thought something was likely to kill him, he would avoid that thing. Diogenes of Oenoanda describes people who avoid a fire since they fear it might kill them (35 II 5-10). But from such a simple origin the fear of death blossoms and grows more complex. Both Cicero and Lucretius explain that the fear of death can pollute and destroy a person's whole life (*De Fin* I 49, *DRN* III 37-40). As Lucretius puts it the fear 'leaves no pleasure clear and pure' (40).

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21 My *Random House Webster's College Dictionary* s.v. 'fear' offers 'a distressing emotion aroused by impending danger, evil, pain, etc., whether the threat is real or imagined.'

22 Philodemus makes the same point about anger: *De Ira* XLVII 32-41.

23 Cf. *NE* 1115a26 φοβερῶτατον δ' ὁ θάνατος.

24 *EpH* 81-82, *DO* 34 VI 14-VII 3, 35 II 5-10, *De Fin* I 49.

Men who fear death become greedy and power-hungry, apparently in an effort to secure protection from the attacks of nature and other men (*De Fin* I 49, *DRN* III 69-77). Philodemus adds, however, that such men do not even enjoy their riches: they become miserly and ungrateful, fearing that they may outlive their resources (*EF* XVII-XX). The fear of death squeezes happiness from both ends – it increases the desire for wealth and power, but it decreases the enjoyment and secure use of these very things. In this way, many people wreck their entire lives because they seek to avoid death.

This analysis shows that the Epicureans did not limit themselves to individual actions when considering the effects of emotion. Because they take a wider view, they can offer a richer explanation of just how harmful the fear of death is. Not only is it extremely painful in its own right, but it also leads to a lifestyle that is laborious and destructive of peace of mind – both for the individual and for the larger community. Both Cicero and Lucretius connect civil strife with the desires which the fear of death causes (*De Fin* I 49, *DRN* III 70-86). With a limited amount of influence and riches available, inordinate desires lead very naturally to political instability and unrest. The fears of death infect whole cultures as well as entire lives of individuals.

The spread of the fear of death produces one startling paradox: as a result of their fear of death, people sometimes come to commit suicide. Epicurus hints at this idea, when he writes, ‘As for the many, sometimes they flee death as the greatest of evils, but other times they choose it as the cessation of life’s evils’ (*EpM* 125-126). Cicero, Lucretius, and Seneca, however, give the paradox its full force.<sup>25</sup> Lucretius puts it thus.

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<sup>25</sup> *De Fin* I 49, *DRN* III 78-82, U 496-498 (Seneca reporting Epicurus’s views).

intereunt partim statuarum et nominis ergo;  
 et saepe usque adeo mortis formidine vitae  
 percipit humanos odium lucisque videndae  
 ut sibi consciscant maerenti pectore letum  
 obliti fontem curarum hunc esse timorem (III 78-82).

Sometimes men perish on account of statues and prominence; and often, because of the fear of death, hatred of life and the sight of light takes hold of people to such a degree that they kill themselves with a grieving heart – they forget that the source of their troubles is *this* fear.

Initially people pursue power and wealth as means – they seek such things in order to protect themselves from death – but over time riches and fame come to seem intrinsically valuable. As a result, a person without them appears to have no reason to go on living. Thus, in a roundabout fashion, the fear of death leads to a desire for death.

We need to consider, finally, the cognitive roots of the fear of death. In general fear results from the expectation of something bad. Now it should be overwhelmingly obvious that people do fear death and that the fear does stem from their thought that death will, somehow, harm them. All of this is likely to seem so obvious that it is easy to miss a crucial point, namely that there is not simply one reason to fear death. Fear results from the thought of future evil, but there is no limit on what a person takes to be evil and there is little limit on how people understand death. One person may fear death because she takes it to involve a painful process of dying, while another may fear it because of his belief that he will lose his friends and loved ones. It is more appropriate, therefore, to speak of the fears of death rather than the fear of death.

This plurality, however, poses a problem for the Epicureans. They wish to consider the fears at a more general level, and so they need a way

to organize them into larger groups. As one solution, they sometimes employed a Socratic arrangement. In the *Apology*, Socrates considers whether death is bad, and he organizes his inquiry around two options: after death, the person who dies either survives in some form or the person is entirely destroyed (40c5-9). This dilemma provides a useful way of arranging our thoughts about death, and the Epicureans take it up for just this purpose. In the *Letter to Herodotus* Epicurus explains the fear of death as resulting from belief in myths or lack of sensation (81).<sup>26</sup> These are Socrates's two options: the myths offer an afterlife, and lack of sensation is another way of describing total destruction.<sup>27</sup> Lucretius organizes *De Rerum Natura* III around the same dichotomy. After he explains the nature of the soul (94-416), he first takes up the issue of the afterlife (417-829), and then he considers the total destruction of the soul (830-1094). The division provides the Epicureans with a natural and general vantage point from which to view the fears of death.

This arrangement does not cover every possible reason to fear death, but it is by no means trivial. Fears remain which are not easy to place in either category, for instance the fear that comes from the thought of a painful death. Nevertheless, the dilemma does highlight thoughts which are perennial reasons to fear death. In particular, we will fear death, on the one hand, if we think that it is the transition to Hades and eternal torture, and on the other hand, if we think that at death we cease to exist and lose all the benefits of life. Hence, the organization encompasses and delineates

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<sup>26</sup> For discussion of this difficult paragraph, see Appendix 2: *Letter to Herodotus* 81.

<sup>27</sup> Socrates himself presents annihilation as the complete lack of sensation. Compare Epicurus's use of ἀναισθησία (*EpH* 81) with Socrates's statement μηδὲ αἴσθησιν μηδενὸς ἔχειν τὸν τεθνεῶτα...μηδεμία αἴσθησις ἐστίν (40c6-7...9).

important considerations about death, even if it is not absolutely exhaustive.

#### IV

Ideally, people come to have true views of the world and the emotions which result from such views are appropriate. Since evaluative thought, our ideas about what is good and bad, play such a crucial rôle in our emotions, it is essential that we learn what really is good and bad. But it is also essential that we come to have a solid grasp on factual matters, that is on the nature of things, in order to understand the situations that we encounter during our lives. So for example, in the case of fear, we want, ideally, only to fear what really is a potential harm. And thus we need to learn what really is bad – for the Epicureans pain – and what things in the world are potential sources of pain – e.g. fire or hunger. Finally, a person's emotion should correspond in size to the object of the emotion. Fear should correspond in intensity with the severity of the potential harm. So there are three ways in which an emotion can be correct and appropriate: first, if it stems from a proper sense of good and bad, second, if it possesses accurate factual support, and, third, if it fits its object in size or intensity.

Although the Epicureans are much more interested in wrongheaded and harmful emotions, that is not to say that they have no interest in more positive cases of emotion. According to Diogenes Laertius, the Epicurean wise man 'will be especially susceptible to certain passions – that would not impede his wisdom' (πάθειςί <τισι><sup>28</sup> μᾶλλον συσχεθήσεσθαι· οὐκ ἂν

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<sup>28</sup> I accept here, as H.S. Long does not, Bignone's addition of *τισι*. The parallel in Philodemus – *συσχεθήσεταιί τισιν ὀργαῖς ὁ σοφός* (*De Ira* XLI 30-31) – makes the addition hard to resist. Cf. J. Annas 'Epicurean Emotions' 158, n.26 for this parallel.

ἐμποδίσει πρὸς τὴν σοφίαν). The fullest description of such emotions comes from Philodemus in his *De Ira*. He contrasts ‘natural’ anger with ‘empty’ anger.<sup>29</sup> His most significant characterization of natural anger is this:

συνίσταται γὰρ ἀπὸ το[ῦ] βλέπειν, ὡς ἡ φύσις ἔχει τῶν πραγμάτων, καὶ μηδὲν ψευδοδοξεῖν ἐν ταῖς σ[υ]μμετρήσεσι τῶν ἐλα[ττ]ωμάτων καὶ ταῖς κολάσεσι τῶν βλαπτόντων (XXXVIII 32-39)

It comes about from seeing the nature of things and from having no false beliefs about the correlation of damages and about the punishments of harmful people.

Here we find the key points: an emotion is appropriate when it results from a true view of how things are<sup>30</sup> and corresponds in intensity with its object. Although Lucretius does not discuss ‘natural’ emotions as such, he does imply that some emotions are appropriate. When he says that a person can become angry *too easily* or become afraid *too quickly* (311-313), he suggests that it is also possible to become angry and afraid justifiably – that is with appropriate ease and speed. He does not state what these justifiable emotions would be like, but it is reasonable to assume that he is thinking along the same lines as Philodemus: an emotion is justified insofar as it relies on a true view of matters.

It may seem, however, that fear can never be positive for an Epicurean. Fear is painful and disturbing – it is a form of *ταραχή* (*Rhet* 1382a21) – and the Epicureans think that our goal is to be entirely without pain and disturbance: they want *ἀταραξία*. Although an emotion like fear may be based on a true view of matters, so this argument goes,

<sup>29</sup> For the contrast, see J. Annas ‘Epicurean Emotions’ 147-159 and J.F. Procopé ‘Epicureans on Anger’ 368-377.

<sup>30</sup> Clearly ἡ φύσις τῶν πραγμάτων is the perfect calque of *natura rerum*, which is exactly what Lucretius sets out to teach his readers.



nevertheless an Epicurean would reject it since the emotion is painful and thus bad. This is a serious objection to the claim that the Epicureans could endorse any painful emotion.<sup>31</sup> It turns out that the Epicureans considered the matter themselves, and they defend their acceptance of certain painful emotions.<sup>32</sup>

A first, and somewhat weak, rationale is that painful emotions are an inescapable part of human life. Epicurus explains that the gods are entirely without anger or gratitude, 'for all that sort of thing relies on weakness' (*KD* 1). Since nothing can harm or benefit the gods, they have no impetus to be angry or grateful. But Philodemus uses this to make the converse point: unfortunately, human beings *are* subject to harm and benefit, and also susceptible to the emotions which result from such treatment, namely anger and gratitude (*De Ira* XLIII 14-41, XL 6-22). Lucretius makes a similar point, somewhat more generally. All human beings have natural inclinations to one emotion or another, and 'one should not think that such evils can be entirely torn out' (III 310).<sup>33</sup> The weakness in this argument is that emotion may be inescapable, but that does not show that it is at all good. Some features of human nature are regrettable, even if they are unavoidable.

But Philodemus also offers a more cogent defense of certain painful emotions. He starts from a distinction: anger may be painful and thus bad,

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<sup>31</sup> Phillip Mitsis first brought this objection to my attention.

<sup>32</sup> In what follows, I rely very heavily on J.F. Procopé 'Epicureans on Anger', but the application of the arguments about anger to the case of fear is my innovation – for which he should not be blamed.

<sup>33</sup> Note that the 'evils' here are not the emotions *per se* but rather the tendency towards an emotion regardless of whether the emotion is justified. Lucretius does not say that fear is unconditionally bad; he says that it is bad, e.g., always to incline to fear, even when fear is not warranted.

in one sense, but it helps to secure safety and security,<sup>34</sup> and thus it is good in another sense. Anger is beneficial overall insofar as the good gained is greater than the pain of anger. This argument relies on an important Epicurean point about happiness. Epicurus argues that since our goal is maximum painlessness *overall*, it is sometimes in our interest to reject pleasure or choose pain. When a pain can produce or lead to a greater overall pleasure, e.g. taking a shot to cure a debilitating illness, then it is well worth undergoing the pain. Conversely, when a pleasure now will cause greater pain later, then it is unreasonable to choose the immediate pleasure despite the eventual pain (*EpM* 128-130). So the mere fact that an emotion like anger is painful, does not make it unconditionally bad. Since it helps to secure a lasting benefit, namely safety, it is beneficial overall. A parallel argument could be made about fear: it is disturbing and hence, in a sense, bad, but since it leads people to avoid pain and disturbance, it helps to secure a life of painlessness, and hence it is a net good. Thus, it is possible to support even painful emotions on basic Epicurean grounds

In a way, the second defense leads back to the first. If we were all-powerful, then there would be no question of weighing goods against evils in this manner. Since nothing could harm us, there would never be reason for a disturbing emotion. But since we are susceptible to harm in countless ways, then even painful emotions may be beneficial overall, provided that they increase net ἀταραξία. So it seems that the Epicureans have good reason to welcome even some painful emotions, and they have no reason to reject all painful emotions out of hand. In the ideal case, an

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<sup>34</sup> Presumably he thinks that anger serves to scare off attacks and mistreatments. We may doubt this specific claim, but that doesn't affect the overall thrust of his argument.

emotion will reflect a correct assessment of how things are and it will lead to appropriate action. Even if it is somewhat disturbing, its overall effect can be positive if it leads to actions which yield greater painlessness, on the whole, than would occur without the emotion. It is no doubt disturbing to fear an approaching, angry dog, but the fear will lead to hurried flight, and that is certainly better than the alternative.

The Epicureans believe that the fears of death fall far short of this ideal. First off, the fears originate in false ideas about death. Using the Socratic dichotomy – death is either the absolute end, or it is not – we can give a rough organization to some of the more important ideas behind the fears of death. If death is the end, many people think that this utter nothingness is a horrible shadowy state, and they fear for the loss of the goods of life. If death is not the end, then many people anticipate an afterlife of eternal suffering. All of these notions, say the Epicureans, are wrong, and so the fears they give rise to are correspondingly flawed.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the fears lead to a host of actions meant to fend off death, e.g. the hoarding of money and power. Such aversion is doubly bad: first, it is pointless since there is not good reason to be anxious about death; second, it leads to lifestyles which are themselves difficult and disturbing. Hence the fears of death are, like any fear, intrinsically disturbing, but in addition they depend on false ideas and they lead to pointless and harmful behavior. The fears are bad not just because they are intrinsically painful, but because they are painful, false, and detrimental to life as a whole. Since

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<sup>35</sup> It would be premature for me to justify this now. I take up the arguments which Lucretius offers for these claims in the following chapters.

these fears are so wrongheaded and harmful, the Epicureans take great pains to cure people of them.

In one sense, then, the task before Lucretius is clear and his response is correspondingly straightforward. He wants to stop people from fearing death. Because emotions result from our view of things, the obvious way to change a person's emotions is to change that person's views. Just as obviously, the most straightforward way to do *that* is by means of argument. We find, for the most part, Lucretius doing just this in Book III: he argues that death is the end, so we should not fear any afterlife, but that non-existence is not bad, so we should not fear it either. These are certainly large, complex, and controversial subjects, and thus Lucretius faces great obstacles if he is to carry his case. But there is nothing especially remarkable about these difficulties, that is they are the ordinary kinds of problems that anyone faces when arguing for a complex and controversial thesis. In this sense, the only limitations on Lucretius are the limitations of his own arguments.

But there is another, less straightforward tangle of difficulties for Lucretius. Many people's attitudes towards death are not just wrong, they are also seriously confused. People often fear death, but deny their fear or underestimate its effect on their lives (41-93), or they fail to see clearly what they think about death (870-893), or they do not realize that they are miserable *because* of their fears of death (1049-1075). Such people certainly have false ideas about death, but their problems go deeper than that: they also have false ideas about themselves. They are likely to reject Lucretius's arguments as unnecessary, and this adds an entirely new level of problems. No matter how good an argument Lucretius offers, it will do no good if

people fail to listen or only listen half-heartedly. Those who can not, or will not, face their own problems squarely are hard for Lucretius to reach much less help.

At first glance, Lucretius's tone does not seem well-suited to this difficulty. Bluntly put, Lucretius rarely misses an opportunity to remind his readers how stupid and miserable most people are – apparently his readers included.<sup>36</sup> It is unclear why this abuse should help his readers rather than simply infuriate them. When Lucretius compares adults to frightened, foolish children, how will this increase his readers' desire or willingness to learn?<sup>37</sup> The answer, I believe, is that such abuse helps by forcing the reader to look more closely at the misery of his or her life. Lack of reflection and self-awareness leads to complacency and errors about one's own motivations, and the abuse is meant to help in this regard.

Lucretius is certainly abusive and hostile, but there is a method to his madness, so to speak. He paints a picture so ugly that you cannot tear yourself away: it is like watching a train wreck. Since the lives which Lucretius describes are so glaringly awful, a person cannot help but want to avoid them. The sense of horror which such images produce should serve as an impetus to reflection. Such vivid, even lurid, images cannot be brushed aside, and it is only natural to compare one's life with such awful pictures.<sup>38</sup> So one way this method can lead to self-awareness is by

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<sup>36</sup> Contrast Phillip Mitsis 'Committing Philosophy on the Reader' *Materiali e discussioni per l' analisi dei testi classici* 31 (1993), 111-128. He suggests that Lucretius employs rhetoric to make the reader sympathize with the all-knowing persona of the poet rather than with the miserable mass of mankind.

<sup>37</sup> Note that at least formally Lucretius includes himself in this analogy, since it is cast in the first-person plural 'sic nos in luce timemus' (III 88).

<sup>38</sup> The idea that one could improve oneself, ethically, by comparing one's life to that of others is a Democritean inheritance. See *DRN* II 1-13 and *DK* 68 B91 with the discussion of David Konstan *Some Aspects of Epicurean Psychology* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), 4-10.

showing people that they need help. Only once they admit this, will they begin to consider what really drives them.

But the vivid depictions serve another function beyond causing reflection: they actually contribute to the much-needed analysis. Consider two cases. First, fears of death impel men to pursue money and power. The fear itself, which they will not acknowledge, fills their mind with anxiety and distress. Worse still, in a misguided and unreflective attempt to flee death they heap up money and power. These pursuits are laborious and bound to cause only further misery, both directly and because of their harmful consequences: a greedy person is always longing for more, even to the point of betraying family or country. Second, even if they deny that they worry about an afterlife, people often show a suspiciously vehement concern for the fate of their corpse. How can this be so, unless they harbor some notion, however confused, that the corpse is them?<sup>39</sup>

By means of such portrayals, Lucretius actually articulates our motivations for us. We either will not or cannot get clear about our own lives. Lucretius helps to move this process along by providing the tracks along which self-inquiry should run. We should wonder why money and glory seem so desirable, and why the fate of our dead bodies nags at us so. If we turn our attention in these directions, we will be pursuing the right connections, the connections which habit and confusion leave us blind to.<sup>40</sup> If he has hit upon an impression that we hold, say that it will hurt to be cremated, then his method helps us become better aware that we hold

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<sup>39</sup> These examples are paraphrases of III 41-93, 870-893.

<sup>40</sup> Note that, for the moment, I simply assume that Lucretius offers the right connections. For now I want only to show how the therapy is meant to work. Whether or not he is articulating the impressions that are really acting on us, he is *articulating* something.

such a thought and also better aware of how the thought disturbs us. Once a person has a better grasp of his thought, he can consider how the impression fits in with his more reflective and stable beliefs, say that dead bodies feel nothing at all. First the person must see the contradiction, then he can remove it.

This method should be understood in the light of what Philodemus says about the treatment of anger. In his *De Ira* Philodemus is engaged in a number of controversies, against common sense, other schools, and against other Epicureans. The debate which concerns us was aimed at a certain Epicurean named Timasagoras,<sup>41</sup> who appears to have claimed that there was little point in arguing with angry people since they were incapable of reasoning about their emotions (*De Ira* VII 6-9). Even more specifically, Timasagoras denied the usefulness of the practice of rebuke (τὸ ψέγειν), and Philodemus defends the method against his criticism (*De Ira* I 7-11). Philodemus argues that it is precisely because emotional people are unreasonable that rebuke is beneficial.

Philodemus describes rebuke as the practice of placing the evils of an emotion in clear sight. His most informative description is this:

[ἀναγράφ]ων τὰ μὲν ἀ[γ]νοο[ύμεν]α τελέως, τ[ὰ] δ' εἰς λήθην ἀφιγμένα, τὰ δ' ἀνεπιλογιστούμενα τοῖς γε μεγέθεσιν, εἰ μὴθὲν ἕτερον, τὰ δ' οὐκ ἀθρόως γε θεωρούμενα, καὶ τιθεῖς ἐν ὄψει μεγάλ[ην] ἐνποιεῖ φρίκην, ὥ[σ]τε τοῦ παρ' αὐτὸν εἶναι προσυπομνησθέντος ἀποφυγεῖν ῥαιδίως

By writing out those things which are utterly unknown, or those which have become forgotten, or those which have not been properly considered – in size at least, if nothing else – or those which are not contemplated together, and by placing these in view one introduces a great fright, so that a

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<sup>41</sup> For more on this whole issue, see John Procopé 'Epicureans on Anger' 377-381, whose account I follow closely.

person will easily flee these things, if it is brought home to him that it is in his power (sc. to do so) (*De Ira* III 5-18).

According to Philodemus, rebuke can shock an emotional person, and this shock can lead to reflection. If the evils of an emotion are laid out clearly to view, rebuke will function as a rhetorical slap in the face. In particular, the method focuses attention on those matters that emotional people don't see, or have forgotten, or underestimated, or have not considered in the proper context.

These are exactly the kinds of matters which Lucretius is concerned with. People deny or diminish the importance of the fears of death (41-93) – these are cases of not seeing or underestimating emotional troubles. Others fail to understand the emptiness of their lives in the light of their fears of death (1049-1075) – such people don't make the right connections. Finally, even once people agree that there is no sensation in death, they continue to fear for their corpses (870-893) – in such a situation, a person has a correct understanding in one area, but does not apply that understanding elsewhere. This is another example of a failure to integrate one's knowledge.

Lucretius employs vivid depictions of misery in just the manner Philodemus recommends. As I said earlier, no matter how good his arguments, Lucretius will make no headway with people who ignore him. Although Lucretius never explicitly mentions the practice of rebuke, the discussion in Philodemus is bound to remind us of the *De Rerum Natura*. Philodemus alludes to the use of rebuke in discussions of erotic desire (*De Ira* VII), and in this connection, Julia Annas has already suggested that Lucretius provides the practice that goes along with the theory we find in



Philodemus's.<sup>42</sup> This seems clearly right, and I would add that rebuke also pays a major rôle in book III as well. Just as Philodemus suggests, Lucretius makes use of abusive, hyperbolic portraits in order to bring home the suffering that the fears of death cause, and by doing so he hopes to make the reader take real stock of himself and his emotions.

## V

By way of conclusion, I want to return to the problems I found in Lucretius's analogy between the fear of adults and children who are afraid of the dark. The first problem was that Lucretius implied that emotions were both reasonable and irrational. The second problem was to explain Lucretius's expectation that reason could cure a person of such unreasonable passions.

The first problem turns out to be a sophism, although a very attractive one. Emotion can be rational *and* irrational because the words are being used to mark two different contrasts. An emotion is rational insofar as it is the result of some kind of thought, as opposed to something mechanical, like the operation of a person's autonomic nervous system. Here 'rational' contrasts not with 'irrational' but with 'arational'. An emotion that is rational in this sense can also be irrational if the thoughts which underlie it are weak, unwarranted, and false. The contrast to irrationality is *good* reason. There is a sense in which nothing can be irrational *unless* it is rational, that is based on some kind of reason. Even

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<sup>42</sup> 'Philodemus' remark in VII that "we are used to doing this" for erotic desire recalls Lucretius' theatrical display in Book IV' (146, n. 3).

the worst, most irrational thought is still a thought; only a reason can be a bad reason.

We can apply this more specifically to Lucretius's understanding of the fears of death. These fears, like all fears, are rational in the sense that they result from what people think about death. The fears of death, however, are massively irrational in another sense: they result from a false and confused view of death, and they lead to disturbing and harmful action. Thus, there is no inconsistency if Lucretius implies, in the analogy of adult and childish terrors, that the fears of death stem from people's thoughts *and* that people's thoughts on the matter are false and disturbing.

But irrational emotions can be rational in another sense, and this leads to the second problem. To say that an emotion is rational may be to say that it is the kind of thing that can become reasonable – it is amenable to reason, even if, at the moment, it is hopelessly confused.<sup>43</sup> Since every emotion results from a person's view of matters, even if the view is massively wrong or incoherent, every emotion can at least become reasonable – provided that the view improves. Through learning and reflective scrutiny, our thoughts can move towards truth and coherence, no matter how bad they are. Hence an emotion which stems from a wrongheaded viewpoint can be improved by reflecting on the thoughts

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. *NE* 1098a4-5, where Aristotle points out that something can 'have reason' in two ways: τὸ μὲν ὡς ἐπιπειθὲς λόγῳ, τὸ δ' ὡς ἔχον καὶ διανοούμενον. So even Plato's appetitive part of the soul would be 'rational' in this first, and weaker, sense. This is the sense in which 'rational' or 'having reason' contrast with 'mechanical' or 'arational'. The more ordinary contrast is between the two things Aristotle describes in the passage quoted above, where the first is irrational, since it cannot really think for itself, and the second is rational because it has the capacity to do so. But, and this is the crucial point, both of them are 'rational' in the first, weaker sense.

which it stems from. In this way, reason can change and improve emotions.

This helps to explain Lucretius's optimism, even in the face of all the ignorance and confusion he so vividly describes. He can improve matters by showing people the truth about death. The bulk of Book III attempts to do just this. Emotions based on false thoughts can be terribly confused, but they can always improve, provided that the false thoughts change for the better. Lucretius obviously believes that he has the truth, and he thinks that by argument he can bring other people to see it as well. If he does so, their fears will dissipate. So, as wrongheaded as they may be, the fears of death are rational insofar as they can improve under the guidance of reason.

But this does not answer for everything, and there is a way in which the analogy *is* potentially misleading: it suggests that reason *alone* can bring a person around. As Lucretius says, what adult fears need is the 'ratio naturae' – a knowledge of the truth about the nature of things. But in some cases, people need more than knowledge, at least in the beginning. People who deny their fear or who underestimate its importance will not even listen to reason, and so Lucretius's arguments may fall on deaf ears. Lucretius *can* deal with this problem by using the method that Philodemus calls 'rebuke', and so I don't mean to suggest that the problem is insoluble. The point is that the analogy which Lucretius makes, although basically sound, simplifies the issue somewhat. Reason cures fears like the light of day, but in some cases reason cannot even get started until after Lucretius shocks his readers into paying attention. In such cases, Lucretius employs rebuke in order to drag people to the light of reason.

## CHAPTER TWO THE NATURE OF THE SOUL AND THE FEAR OF HADES

### I

Lucretius breaks down the fears of death into two main groups – fear that the soul survives death, and fear that the soul does not survive death. This chapter examines his case against the first fear, the fear of an afterlife. Of course, not every afterlife is terrifying. The idea of an eternal paradise after death is actually appealing, and many people may even look forward to it. The afterlife that people fear, however, is Hades – a place of judgment and, very likely, eternal punishment. Lucretius believes that he can cure us of the fear of Hades if he can convince us that the soul is mortal. In order to prove the mortality of the soul, he lays out a detailed theory of the soul's physiology. In addition, he offers a psychological account of the origin of anxiety about Hades; this account allows him to give a non-supernatural explanation for the fear, but it also gives him an opportunity to consider various ideas about happiness and the good life.

### II

As a preliminary, however, we need to deal with an initial obstacle. Many critics, both ancient<sup>1</sup> and modern,<sup>2</sup> suggest that Lucretius should not have

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., Cicero *TD* I 11 & 1.48, and *ND* II 5; Seneca *Ep* 24.18. More generally see Juvenal 2.149-153 and Propertius II 34.53-54.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Bailey II 993-995; R.M. Ogilvie *The Romans and their Gods in the Age of Augustus* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1969), 86; Charles Segal *Lucretius on Death and Anxiety* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 17-19. More generally, see Franz Cumont *Afterlife in Roman Paganism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922), especially chapter II 'The Nether World', and Richmond Lattimore *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), especially chapter II and chapter VII.

treated the fear of Hades at all since that fear was not a real concern in his time. Cicero, for example, writes:

Quae est anus tam delira quae timeat ista quae vos [sc. Epicurei] videlicet, si physica non didicissetis, timeretis, "Acherunsia templa alta Orci, pallida leti, nubila tenebris loca"?

What old woman is so crazy that she fears those things which you [Epicureans] would obviously fear if you had not learned physics, 'Orcus's deep regions of Acheron, pale places of death, clouded in shadows'?' (*TD* I 48).

Perhaps Lucretius's attack on the fear of Hades is a simple irrelevancy.

Lucretius himself anticipates and answers this charge (41-93). At the beginning of book III he offers up hypothetical objectors who claim not to need any Epicurean wisdom. These people don't need help, they say, since they know the nature of the soul. In fact, replies Lucretius, these people are all bluster: they have no knowledge about the soul, and thus they are subject to false beliefs, fear, and misery. Such people are deeply in need of Epicurean teaching no matter what they may say. Moreover, the fear of death fills their lives with distress in ways that they have never even considered. According to Lucretius troubling desires for things like money and political power stem, in large part, from the fear of death. These lines are a clear attempt to answer the charge of irrelevancy, even if it is less clear how adequate a response they are.

But scholars and commentators have not made much use of these verses when they address the problem. Instead they have offered hypotheses based on Lucretius's social position, on his intended audience, or on his relationship to his sources. It would be a near-endless task to go through all the views which have been put forth, and I will not do so since

it would not be very profitable.<sup>3</sup> But two prominent types of response are particularly important.

Cyril Bailey presents a clear version of the first type of view. In his commentary, and in an earlier work on Roman religion,<sup>4</sup> Bailey takes the line that Lucretius has mistaken the contemporary scene. According to Bailey, the Greeks of Epicurus's time did believe in Hades, but Lucretius's Roman contemporaries did not. Lucretius takes over his teacher's arguments wholesale, and he does not adjust or remove the treatment of the fear of Hades, even though his contemporaries had no concern for such ideas. Thus, Lucretius has not, in this instance, sufficiently adjusted his Epicurean lessons for his Roman audience. It should be stressed that if this view is correct, then Lucretius's arguments *are* irrelevant – at least for his Roman audience.

Now there are some things that might be said for this response. It is true that Lucretius declares his devotion to Epicurus's philosophy in elaborate and fulsome language; in particular, at the beginning of book III he declares his desire to follow Epicurus rather than to compete with him (3-8). According to Lucretius, Epicurus is in an entirely different league from himself. Such a declaration could induce us to see Lucretius as an overly devoted follower. We could further hypothesize that as a bookish intellectual, Lucretius developed his view of human psychology more by

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to the discussions of Bailey and Segal mentioned above, I have found the following to be especially useful or insightful: E.J. Kenney *Lucretius De Rerum Natura Book III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 4-5 and commentary ad loc.; Benjamin Farrington *Science and Politics in the Ancient World* (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1965), 179-212 & 'The Meaning of *Persona* in *De Rerum Natura* III 58' *Hermathena* 85 (1955), 3-12; Monica Gale *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), chapter 2 'The cultural background: myth and belief in late republican Rome'.

<sup>4</sup> Bailey II 993-995, and *Phases in the Religion of Ancient Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1932), 218-221.

reading Epicurus than by looking at the people around him. Such a story could account for a gap between the fears which Lucretius attacks and the fears which his contemporaries actually held.

Nevertheless, on consideration, this response seems very unsatisfying. First of all, Bailey's answer, if correct, may explain Lucretius, but it does nothing to justify him. To put it another way around Bailey gives a reason for Lucretius's behavior, but it is not a reason that Lucretius could offer in his own defense. In fact, it makes him out to be a bit stupid; he simply misunderstands contemporary beliefs about death. An explanation that can give Lucretius *good* reason for doing what he does would be, to this extent at least, more compelling than Bailey's. Secondly, the answer fails on its own terms. Bailey claims that such beliefs as Lucretius attacks were more prevalent in Epicurus's Greek world; but Plutarch, speaking as a Greek to Greeks,<sup>5</sup> makes exactly the same argument against Epicurus as Cicero does against Roman Epicureans (*Non posse* 1104b-d and 1106d-f). Thus, the problem is only pushed a step back: we explain Lucretius by Epicurus, but now we need some justification for Epicurus. In view of these problems it is reasonable to look for another explanation.

Benjamin Farrington advances a type of view that is starkly opposed to Bailey's. He contends that Lucretius is attacking a real fear, but not a fear of the educated elite. On Farrington's interpretation, Lucretius is writing for the common man, and the common man *was* in the grip of the fears which Lucretius attacks. Hence Lucretius is perfectly on target, and the

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<sup>5</sup> See Charles Segal, 'Within the Greek world the lightness with which men treat such fears of the afterlife forms another of Plutarch's objections to the efficacy of Epicurus's philosophy' (18, my emphasis).

mistake is that of modern scholars, who have supposed that the Ciceros and Senecas speak for everyone.

This view has some intrinsic merit, and in addition it has one distinct advantage over an approach such as Bailey's. Farrington properly recognizes the Epicurean desire to help all people – regardless of educational or social status.<sup>6</sup> If Farrington is correct, then Lucretius composes his poem in a manner consistent with this larger Epicurean policy. Moreover, Farrington's answer is superior to Bailey's insofar as it saves Lucretius from the charge of misunderstanding or misrepresenting his audience. As I said before, this is a point in favor of a proposed interpretation.

Neither of these advantages, however, should compel us to accept Farrington's interpretation without further argument. On the one hand, it needs to be shown that Lucretius does, in fact, compose his poem for 'the common man', whoever that may be. On the other hand, we cannot give Lucretius an argument or interpretation *merely* because it makes him look better. Interpretative charity is only one consideration, and we must temper it with a respect for the texts. The first issue is a notorious crux, and unfortunately Farrington does not defend his view. In addition, his view does a poor job of explaining what Lucretius says in his own defense.

Once we ask for whom the *De Rerum Natura* was intended and who would, or could, have had access to its teachings, we open up a nest of problems – none of which will allow clear answers. We do not have

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<sup>6</sup> For this feature of Epicurean philosophy see especially Martha Nussbaum *ToD* Chapter 4 'Epicurean Surgery'. In the preface to an introductory reader in Epicurean philosophy, D.S. Hutchinson offers a sympathetic portrait of the Epicurean desire to address audiences with varying levels of sophistication and education: *The Epicurus Reader* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), xii.



anywhere near enough positive evidence to make useful assessments about even so basic a matter as literacy in the late Roman Republic.<sup>7</sup> Even if we could answer this question, however, it is not obvious that the poem is intended for a large, non-elite audience.<sup>8</sup> No less a Latinist than Quintilian described Lucretius as 'difficilis' (XI 187). Hence even if there were a sizeable number of people who could read in late Republican Rome, it is unclear that the tone and style of the *De Rerum Natura* were meant to attract them. Worst of all, we do not have clear and independent evidence that a large number of non-elite Romans did harbor the fears and beliefs in question.<sup>9</sup>

It must be said that Farrington does not even begin to address, much less answer, these concerns. His style is essentially assertive and general. While this accounts for the provocative and often stimulating quality of his work, it does little to put these larger worries to rest. Since the presumptive weight of tradition sees the poem as a piece of high culture, aimed at an educated elite,<sup>10</sup> a contrary view would have to carry a heavy burden. Unfortunately, Farrington never acknowledges such difficulties;

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<sup>7</sup> This view is by no means uncontroversial. My opinion has the support of, among others, E.J. Kenney, 'No quantitative estimate of the extent of literacy at any period in the Roman world is possible' *CHCL* II 10 and Miriam Griffin, who is sceptical of our ability to gauge the level of Roman literacy, *CAH* IX<sup>2</sup> 689. For a lengthy statement from the other side see W.V. Harris *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 149-284; Harris argues that the level of Roman literacy was quite low, overall less than 15%, in the Late Republic and Imperial Period. See also A.-M. Guillemin *Le public et la vie littéraire à Rome* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1937), 1-37.

<sup>8</sup> Contrast, e.g., Monica Gale 89, T.P. Wiseman 'The Two Worlds of Titus Lucretius' in *Cinna the Poet and other Roman Essays* (Surrey: Leicester University Press, 1974), and Alexander Dalzell 'Lucretius' in *CHCL* II.

<sup>9</sup> For this problem, see especially F. Cumont and R. Lattimore. Both authors draw hesitant but, nevertheless, low estimates of a common belief in the afterlife.

<sup>10</sup> See M. Gale 89, A. Dalzell 208-209, and E.J. Kenney 5. But again contrast T.P. Wiseman.

worse still, it appears that we do not have the evidence to answer such questions, even once they have emerged.<sup>11</sup>

Even if we pass over these problems, a more serious objection to Farrington still remains, namely that his answer concedes much too much to Cicero and his ilk. Farrington essentially takes such people at their word: they do not believe in Hades, and, thus, they do not need any help from the Epicureans. But, as we will see, Lucretius rejects the second half of this claim explicitly, and his argument, once properly understood, casts doubt on whether he would accept the first half. Thus, Farrington, however sympathetic he may be to Lucretius, does not do justice to what Lucretius says in his own defense. In view of this, I think that we do Lucretius no favors if we construe this part of the poem as narrowly directed at the unwashed masses.

There is, however, another strand in Farrington's argument. Farrington briefly mentions that even the Ciceros of the world could use some Epicurean teaching insofar as they harbored a belief in *an afterlife* – even if not the horrible Hades associated with such figures as Tantalus and Sisyphus. Speaking of the Epicureans in general, he writes:

They further<sup>[12]</sup> had the ambition to sweep out of the minds of men like Cicero himself the Pythagorean and Platonic belief in the immortality of the soul which Cicero, in the same passage of the *Tusculans*, immediately goes on to avow (186).

For Lucretius the belief in immortality, with or without an accompanying belief in Hades, is itself a huge mistake. Thus, men prey to this confusion

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<sup>11</sup> For what it is worth, I do not think that we can answer such questions with the evidence that we possess, and so I suspend judgment on the matter.

<sup>12</sup> I.e., in addition to the goal of curing common people of the fear of Hades.

still require Epicurean treatment. Farrington goes on to make another crucial point, 'And, said the Epicureans, where error still lurked, there terror might easily raise its head' (186). The point, I take it, is that if people lack knowledge, they are still susceptible to the fears which they disavow; their beliefs and emotions are liable to wobble irrationally. Monica Gale also alludes to this idea.<sup>13</sup> This position is the one which Lucretius offers on his own behalf. Neither author, however, shows that this was explicitly Lucretius's answer, nor do they deal with the larger philosophical issues which this answer raises. Thus, there is still room for a more detailed statement of this position.

Lucretius makes a stronger case in his own defense than his scholarly defenders have done. He acknowledges that people often *say* that they don't fear death and that their lives are fine, but he offers two compelling reasons to doubt their boasts.<sup>14</sup> First, what these people do belies what they say. And, second, their lives display a pervasive misery which Lucretius traces back to the fear of death. Thus, Lucretius argues, first, that people don't see their own fear, and, second, that they don't see how awful their lives really are. People do need Epicurean teaching, and they need it more than they can imagine.

Before he sets down to explain the nature of the soul, Lucretius justifies his account. He readily admits that people often deny that they

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<sup>13</sup> See especially page 93.

<sup>14</sup> The structure of Lucretius's argument is crystal clear in D.P. Fowler's 'Lucretius and Politics' *Philosophia Togata* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 135-140, and I have found his analysis very helpful. Also good is Martha Nussbaum's account of the 'diagnostic' part of the treatment of the fear of death in Lucretius – *ToD* 195-201.

need any of his help, but he thinks that he can show their self-satisfaction to be mistaken. First, we can consider what such men say:

nam quod saepe homines morbos magis esse timendos  
 infamemque ferunt vitam quam Tartara leti  
 et se scire animi naturam sanguinis esse  
 aut etiam venti, si fert ita forte voluntas, [46]  
 nec prorsum quicquam nostrae rationis egere, [44] 45

Often men claim that diseases and a life without glory are more fearful than death's Tartarus, and that they know that the nature of the mind is composed of blood or even of wind, if by chance this is how things strike them, and they say that they need our teaching not at all.

Lucretius's opponents claim to know that the soul is a physical thing, and as a result of this, they say that they do not need any Epicurean teaching. In the context of this debate, the soul's corporeality must be tantamount to its mortality.<sup>15</sup> Thus, these men should not believe, on pain of inconsistency, in an afterlife *of any sort*. This would make sense of their boasts as a whole: they know that the soul is physical and mortal, and thus they do not fear death nor do they require any Epicurean therapy.

Lucretius presents these men with a practical refutation. I call it 'practical' since the refutation hones in on their actions rather than their avowals. Lucretius does not explicitly show that these men have two opposed beliefs. Instead he shows that some of their actions conflict with their professed beliefs. They *say* that they do not believe in an afterlife, but when their lives go to ruin, they *show*, by their behavior, that this cannot

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<sup>15</sup> Strictly speaking, of course, these two claims are not identical nor does the former entail the latter. A person could consistently believe that the soul was physical, but because of his view of physics, still find it to be immortal. If we interpret these lines, however, in this very strict way, then we leave Lucretius with no argument at all. Therefore I take it that by 'animi naturam sanguinis esse/aut etiam venti' (43-44), Lucretius must have understood not only (1) that the soul is physical but (2) that the soul is mortal.

be true – at least not straightforwardly so. In order to make his point, Lucretius imagines the same men in bad straits:

extorres idem patria longeque fugati  
 conspectu ex hominum, foedati crimine turpi,  
 omnibus aerumnis adfecti denique vivunt  
 et quocumque tamen miseri venere parentant  
 et nigras mactant pecudes et manibu' divis  
 inferias mittunt multoque in rebus acerbis  
 acrius advertunt animos ad religionem (48-54).

These same men, exiles from their country and driven far from men's sight, tainted by a shameful accusation, they live overcome by every misfortune, and still wherever these miserable men come to, they sacrifice to their ancestors and slaughter black cattle and make offerings to the Di Manes. In trying times, they turn their minds far more keenly to religion.

From the standpoint of logic, actions do not conflict with beliefs, but nevertheless there remains an obvious enough inconsistency in this picture. For the logician it is beliefs, or even more strictly their propositional content, which can contradict one another or be inconsistent.<sup>16</sup> Actions, however, do not enter into logical relations, although of course beliefs or propositions about action can do so. Nevertheless if someone says, 'I don't believe that there is a beer in the refrigerator,' but still he goes to the refrigerator to get a beer, something has obviously gone wrong. In this way we often describe actions as conflicting with beliefs or with other actions. Thus there is an intuitive, albeit informal, sense in which Lucretius challenges his opponents.

In fact, we can produce an even stricter conflict. If we believe, as many have and do,<sup>17</sup> that a person's beliefs play a causal rôle in his

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, the brief comments on consistency in Wilfred Hodges *Logic* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), 13-16.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Aristotle *De Motu Animalium* 7, with Nussbaum's essay 4 in *Aristotle's De Motu Animalium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). See also Colin McGinn *The*

actions,<sup>18</sup> then we can ask how the relevant beliefs in Lucretius's example hang together. On the one hand, these people claim to know that the soul is mortal. Since knowledge trivially implies belief, they should also believe that the soul is mortal. On the other hand, they sacrifice to the deified dead, who *are* immortal souls. But this action appears to require the belief that (at least some) immortal souls *do* exist - that is, at least those to which these men sacrifice. Without such a belief, the action of sacrifice to the deified dead, who are immortal souls, seems obviously irrational. Why would anyone sacrifice to an entity whose very existence he denies? Since knowledge that the soul is mortal is incompatible with belief in the deified dead, Lucretius can offer his opponents a pointed dilemma. Either (a) their action relies on a belief that is inconsistent with their claim to knowledge, or (b) their action is missing a belief without which it is irrational.<sup>19</sup>

If, as it seems, this dilemma is exhaustive, then the objectors are in an impossible position. Either they give up their claim to knowledge, or they admit to being irrational, at least locally. Presumably no one chooses to be or to stay irrational; hence, it is hardly a live option for Lucretius's opponents to declare their own irrationality. As a result, they have no real choice but to give up their claim to knowledge. But it was this (alleged)

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*Character of Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) Chapter 5 'Action' and also Donald Davidson 'Actions, Reasons, and Causes' in *Essays on Actions & Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 3-19.

<sup>18</sup> E.g., if I am cold and I believe that this is a coat and I believe that coats warm people, then, other things being equal, I am likely to go for this coat; and it seems clear that my beliefs about coats and cold were at least a partial cause of my action.

<sup>19</sup> Ultimately I think that this kind of theory of action is what underlies the initial intuition that actions can conflict with beliefs. We may not theorize about it, but most of us, I believe, already think that we act, at least partially, on the basis of our beliefs. Hence, I doubt that anything of substance hangs on whether we classify the refutation in one manner or the other.

knowledge which supported their boast not to need any Epicuran *ratio*; hence if they lose the one, the other becomes vulnerable. Lucretius has rather neatly shown that his opponents are not in the strong position that they claim for themselves.

Although these men claim knowledge, they fall short even of stable, clear beliefs. When they initially profess to know about the soul, they say 'that it is composed of blood or even of wind, if by chance this is how things strike them' (43-44). These people do not have a clear grasp on what they think, nor do they hold their views very strongly. They speak as the mood strikes them, and their opinions vary. Even more obviously, they are in a muddle later, when they make sacrifices to the deified dead. On the one hand, they have a notion that souls don't survive death, but, on the other hand, they also have a notion that when things go badly, they must have offended their dead ancestors. Apparently, they fail to see that *if* their dead ancestors exist, then (at least some) souls do survive death. Their thoughts on this matter are impressionistic rather than clear and distinct. They wobble incoherently back and forth among a group of thoughts which they do not fully understand and which they are only weakly committed to.

In the second part of his response, Lucretius challenges his opponents at an even deeper level. He points out that their lives are filled with miserable and destructive pursuits, and he argues that the fear of death is a leading cause of these pursuits. He lays it on rather thick here, and I will offer only a brief sample.

homines dum se falso terrore coacti  
effugisse volunt longe longaque remosse,  
sanguine civili rem conflant divitiasque

conduplicant avidi, caedem caede accumulantes,  
 crudeles gaudent in tristi funere fratris  
 et consanguineum mensas odere timentque (68-73).

So long as men are driven by a false terror and they wish to have escaped and to have gotten themselves far clear, they disturb the republic with civil bloodshed, and they greedily increase their riches – heaping slaughter upon slaughter; cruelly they rejoice in the sad funeral of a brother, and they hate and fear the tables of their relatives.

These verses employ the method of rebuke that I discussed in Chapter 1. Lucretius paints a deliberately hyperbolic portrait of the horrors of civil war in order to stun his readers and force them to look more closely at their lives. The images are certainly horrible, and nobody would willingly choose the world that Lucretius describes. Moreover, Roman readers would have found the descriptions distressingly familiar. As commentators have noticed, these verses are reminiscent of the historical and political writings of Cicero and Sallust, and they reflect the very real horrors that Rome underwent in the later part of the first century.<sup>20</sup>

Most importantly, Lucretius suggests an aetiology of the ‘greed and blind lust for political power’ (59) – ‘they are nourished, to no small degree, by the fear of death’ (64). This thought, which can be traced back to Epicurus (*KD* 7, U 458),<sup>21</sup> runs as follows. People fear death, and so they wish to avoid it. Since poverty and powerlessness leave one vulnerable to the whims of nature and those with power, people seek money and influence so that they may be more secure.<sup>22</sup> Over time, however, this

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<sup>20</sup> For example, C. Martha, quoted in Kenney, writes, ‘C’est du Salluste en vers.’ See also Kenney and Heinze *ad loc.*, and D.P. Fowler ‘Lucretius and Politics’ 135-140.

<sup>21</sup> So Kenney and Fowler.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. ‘dulci vita stabilique’ (66), and ἀσφάλεια and ἀσφαλῆς βίος (*KD* 7).



reason for seeking wealth and honor is forgotten, and the desires take on a life of their own.

It is hard to assess this aetiology. It would be unreasonable if Lucretius claimed that the fear of death was the only cause of these desires, but he does not claim this. He only claims that the fear of death is not insignificant in this regard. This claim has a much better chance at acceptance. At the very least, if Lucretius is wrong, then he is owed an account of the vehemence of these desires. If the fear of death is a partial cause, then we could have such an account. The vehemence of the desires would be a result of their having *two* underlying causes. First, we want money and power because we find them attractive on their own, and, second, we want them because we think that they will protect us from death.<sup>23</sup>

If we gather his two responses together, we can see the full force of Lucretius's defense. The original complaint was that Lucretius spent too much time and effort on a fear, the fear of Hades, which few or no contemporary Romans held. Lucretius answers his critics first by shifting focus from belief to knowledge and from the narrow question of Hades to the broader issue of post-mortem survival. He argues that people do not have real knowledge of the nature of the soul and that although they deny a belief in Hades, they cling to some notion of an afterlife – as their actions demonstrate.<sup>24</sup> Second, he argues more generally that something is very wrong with people's lives and that the popular cry of 'All fine' is just plain false. He traces the problems in part to the fear of death. And he suggests

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<sup>23</sup> Martha Nussbaum *ToD* suggests something like this line of thought (196, 198).

<sup>24</sup> Cicero, for example, argues for the immortality of the soul, on Platonic and Pythagorean grounds, in the same work in which he mocks belief in Hades – *TD I*.

that greater self-awareness and a better knowledge of the soul's nature will improve matters.

This defense as a whole seems to me very strong. In particular, there is no call for Kenney's assertion that Lucretius was making the dogmatic point that 'salvation was only to be found within the "faith"' (81). Lucretius does believe that the Epicurean position is correct, but he certainly does not simply assert that here. He considers a serious objection, and he rejects it with arguments. His behavior is precisely the opposite of the religious dogmatism that Kenney implies by his talk of Epicurean 'salvation' and 'faith'. An ancient Epicurean takes a more sympathetic view, and he makes the right connections between knowledge and fears – especially the fear of Hades - and happiness:

felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas  
atque metus omnis et inexorabile fatum  
subiecit pedibus strepitumque Acherontis avari  
(*Georgics* II 490-492).<sup>25</sup>

### III

Now that I have shown that Lucretius has justification for his discussion of the soul's nature and the fear of Hades, we can consider his case. It consists of two main parts.<sup>26</sup> First, Lucretius lays out the Epicurean theory of the soul and the relationship of the soul and body. Much of this theory is directed specifically against two beliefs: (1) that the soul could exist and function without a body, and (2) that it could suffer the torments of Hades.

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<sup>25</sup> 'Happy is he who was able to learn the causes of things, and he trampled under foot all fears, and inexorable doom, and the roar of greedy Acheron.'

<sup>26</sup> Farrington (1955) notes that Lucretius argues in this two-stage manner (7).

Secondly, Lucretius gives a psychological explanation of how the (erroneous) beliefs and fears concerning Hades arise in the first place.

Lucretius devotes most of book III, lines 94-829, to a detailed exposition of the Epicurean theory of the soul. In one way or another, all of this material is relevant to our questions concerning the soul's post-mortem survival and its afterlife. But in order to make matters more manageable, I have selected two strands of argument - one meant to show that the soul cannot survive without the body, and the other meant to show that the standard picture of Hades is impossible. Obviously, if Lucretius can prove the first point - that souls cannot exist or function without bodies, then he has already shown *a fortiori* that disembodied souls do not exist in Hades. Nevertheless, it is worth considering the latter arguments separately since they involve a fascinating debate concerning the nature of perception.

In order to prove the first thesis - that the soul cannot function or even exist without a body - Lucretius argues as follows. First he uses the axioms of his atomic theory to demonstrate that the soul is a composite, material body. He then uses other axioms of the atomist system to prove that the soul is mortal, since in Epicurean physics no composite body is immortal. In addition to this he argues that the soul is so intimately connected to its body that it cannot survive, even for a brief time, the separation of soul from body that occurs at death. This last point does not merely restate his other claims: when Lucretius proves that the soul is not immortal, he shows only that it must suffer destruction at some time or other, but so far we do not know when. This leaves open the possibility

that the soul survives – for some indeterminate time – without its body. Lucretius makes it his business also to deny this possibility.<sup>27</sup>

Lucretius's argument that the soul is material is brief and straightforward. He presents his case in lines 161-176 thus:

- (1) The soul affects physical things and is affected by physical things (161-164, 168-174).
- (2) Affecting and being affected cannot occur without touch (165).
- (3) Touch cannot occur without body (166).
- (4) Therefore, the soul must be (some kind of) body (166-167, 175-176).

This argument is extremely forceful and plausible. The first premise appears very strong; Lucretius offers perfectly obvious examples of such interaction: the mind directs the body to move about as it wishes (162-164), and when we are struck by external blows the mind suffers with the body (170-174). The third premise also seems uncontroversial, and the conclusion does follow. Furthermore, the second premise is an axiom of the atomic physics which Lucretius has set forth in books I and II.

The claim in the second premise concerns causality. Lucretius asserts that all doing or being affected – i.e. all causal interaction – is ultimately reducible to bodily interaction. Only bodies can do or experience anything. At a gross observable level, this should seem intuitive. In order to move a book or a chair, we must lay hands on it. Even such phenomena as sight and hearing, which at first do not seem to be physical, can be explained in such a way that they are physical events. Such physical

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<sup>27</sup> It may seem odd that Lucretius would bother himself over such an unlikely possibility, but we know that at least some ancients, especially the Stoics, took the idea of a brief post-mortem existence seriously. See *SVF* I 522 for Cleanthes and II 809 for Chrysippus.

interactions surely do hold a very primitive place in our conception of causality.<sup>28</sup> All of this lends conviction to the second premise .

Nevertheless, Lucretius's argument is not by itself an air-tight proof that the soul is material. The second premise, although plausible and intuitive, is by no means uncontroversial. Plato, for example, would vehemently deny that all causal interaction takes place between bodies. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates argues that beautiful things are beautiful and big things are big *because* they participate in the respective Forms of beauty and bigness (100b-101b2). Now this passage is notoriously opaque and its precise meaning correspondingly controversial, but this much is clear: Socrates describes here some form of causal interaction which is non-bodily.<sup>29</sup> In addition, the soul for Plato is non-material, and it too is involved in such non-bodily causation. In the face of such views, it must be said that Lucretius does not so much prove that only bodies enter into causal relations as assert a world view in which this is the case. On the other side, however, much the same can be said of Plato: Socrates opens his account in the *Phaedo* by hypothesizing the Forms (100b5). Both Lucretius and Plato can offer arguments against the other side's position, but it is

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<sup>28</sup> See P.F. Strawson, 'I am suggesting, then, that we should regard mechanical transactions as fundamental in our examination of the notion of causality in general. They are fundamental to our own interventions in the world, to our bringing about purposed changes: we put our shoulders to the wheel, our hands to the plough, push a pen or a button, pull a lever or a trigger,' in *Analysis and Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 118.

<sup>29</sup> For more details, see the comments of R. Hackforth *Plato's Phaedo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955) and David Gallop *Plato: Phaedo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983). Among articles especially worth mentioning are Gregory Vlastos 'Reasons and Causes in the *Phaedo*' *Philosophical Review* 78 (1969), 291-325 and Gail Fine 'Forms as Causes: Plato and Aristotle,' in Andreas Graeser ed. *Mathematics and Metaphysics in Aristotle* (Bern: Haupt, 1987), 69-112.

obviously much harder to prove one view or the other conclusively. This appears to leave us with a tense standoff.

From a historical point of view, however, we can say something more in favor of Lucretius. The Platonic view has it that the soul is an entirely different type of substance from matter. This view is commonly known as 'substantial dualism', and its most famous modern exponent is Descartes. This theory faces many obstacles, but most relevant to our inquiry, it owes us an explanation of how the soul and body interact. If the soul and body are such radically different types of thing, one material and the other immaterial, then how are we to explain the manifest fact that our minds and bodies enjoy such close connections? Nothing is so common as a physical phenomenon causing a mental one – say a cut causing a pain – or conversely a mental phenomenon triggering a physical reaction – say a fear causing a shiver. It is one thing to assert that not all causes are physical, but it is quite another thing to explain *how* bodies and non-material substances do, or for that matter could, affect one another so intimately. Obviously the medium of touch is ruled out since the whole point about non-material substances is that they are intangible. But it remains deeply mysterious what other causal mechanism could explain the interaction of the physical and the mental.<sup>30</sup>

Lucretius directs his reader's attention to exactly this problem, both in this argument and throughout the book. In the passage at hand, he offers two obvious examples of the close connection of the mental and the

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<sup>30</sup> This point is not in any way original; my goal is simply to show how Lucretius fits into a well-known debate. In *The Character of Mind*, Colin McGinn offers a good discussion of these worries about dualism (24-25). His chapter is a clear introduction to the debate and its standard moves.

physical. On the one hand, we move our bodies as we choose and our facial features often reflect our mental state (162-164). On the other hand, when a weapon strikes a person, that person is liable to swoon, pass out, or become extremely disoriented (170-174). It seems impossible to deny such occurrences as well as other, parallel cases, and in this way Lucretius forces his dualist opponents to address the question of interaction. This is still less than an a demonstration of materialism, but it does put a very heavy burden of proof on the dualist's side.<sup>31</sup>

If we take Lucretius to have shown that the soul is corporeal, it is a short path to his proof of its mortality. His explanation of the soul's nature provides the transition between these two theses. In brief, Lucretius explains that the soul is an extremely fine body, composed of four types of atoms – fire-like, air-like, breath-like, and a fourth, nameless type (177-257). These elements combine and make up the soul, which divides its functions between two parts. The *anima*, or non-rational part, is responsible for sensation; it is spread throughout our entire frame (143-144). It takes in sensory data and passes it along to the *animus*, or rational part, which is centrally located in the chest (138-140). This part of the soul is responsible for our higher mental functions, and it transmits its commands, e.g. for movement, to the limbs via the *anima*. For our immediate purpose, the crucial part in all this is that Lucretius shows the soul to be a composite body – i.e. one made up of numerous individual

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<sup>31</sup> In fairness, I should say that I have only offered further arguments on behalf of the materialist. For the other side, see Dominic O'Meara 'Plotinus on How Soul Acts on Body' in *Platonic Investigations* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1985), for the ancient world; R. Richardson 'The "Scandal" of Cartesian Interactionism' *Mind* 91 (1982), 20-37, for Descartes; and E.J. Lowe *Subjects of Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Chapter 3, 'Mental Causation,' for a contemporary dualist.

atoms. This proves to be the linchpin for his proof of the soul's mortality.<sup>32</sup>

In order for anything to be immortal, according to Epicurean physics, it must meet (at least) one of three conditions.<sup>33</sup> It must either (a) be entirely solid and indivisible, or (b) not be such as to suffer blows, i.e. be intangible, or (c) be entirely enclosed on all sides so that it has no space into which it could break up. No composite body can meet the first condition; only the individual atoms are entirely solid. All composite bodies contain void in them, and thus they are liable to the damage produced by blows. Only the void is intangible; hence, no body of any kind can meet the second condition. Finally, only the *summa summarum*, the universe as a whole, meets the third condition; the universe *is* everything, and there is nothing else, not even empty space, outside of it. Everything else is within the world, and thus it has room into which to break down.<sup>34</sup>

The upshot is simple, direct, and forceful. The soul is a composite body in the world. It cannot, therefore, meet any of the three conditions for immortality. Insofar as the soul is composite, it cannot satisfy the first condition; it is not entirely solid. Insofar as the soul is a body, it cannot satisfy the second condition; it is not intangible. Insofar as the soul is in

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<sup>32</sup> For more detail on Epicurean theory about the soul, see the texts and commentary in Long and Sedley §14. Good secondary discussion can be found in G.B. Kerferd 'Epicurus' doctrine of the soul' *Phronesis* 16 (1971), 80-96; J. Annas *HPM* 137-151; and R. Sharples 'Lucretius' account of the composition of the soul' *Liverpool Classical Monthly* 5 (1980), 117-120.

<sup>33</sup> I derive this argument from 806-818. These lines also occur, with minor changes, at V 351-363 in the course of an argument that the world is not eternal. The repetition of this argument is in keeping with its *a priori* character, and it does nothing to cast doubt on the genuineness of either occurrence of the verses.

<sup>34</sup> For this last condition, which is somewhat odd, it is useful to look at the material and commentary in Long and Sedley §4. Don't get your hopes up, however, since the point remains stubbornly weird.



the world, it cannot satisfy the third condition; it is not without room to dissolve into. If the soul is immortal, then it fulfills (at least) one of the three conditions. But it does not fulfill any of the conditions. Hence, it is not immortal. There it is.

At this stage, Lucretius has shown that the soul is mortal, but he also offers us reason to believe that the soul perishes specifically when we die.<sup>35</sup> His argument, lines 323-330, is as follows. He accepts the traditional definition of death as the separation of soul from body.<sup>36</sup> By way of example, however, Lucretius advances an analogy which suggests that the soul cannot survive its separation from the body: to take the soul out of the body is like trying to take the odor out of incense (327-328). This latter separation seems obviously impossible; just so, Lucretius argues, it is impossible to drag the soul out of the body intact (*animi atque animae naturam corpore toto/extrahere haud facile est quin omnia dissoluantur* 329-330).

He can support this analogy by reference to the soul's fragility and its very intimate relationship with the body. Lucretius has explained that the soul's nature is extremely fine and tenuous (179-180, 199-200); this makes it reasonable to expect it to be fragile.<sup>37</sup> In addition, Lucretius understands the intimacy shared by soul and body to be physical and not merely

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<sup>35</sup> As I said, the soul's being mortal does not, all by itself, determine when the soul dies. Lucretius needs further argument if he wishes to maintain that it dies at some specific time.

<sup>36</sup> This way of understanding death shows up first, and pre-theoretically, in Homer; see *Il* 14.518-519, 16.856-857, and 22.362 and *Od* 10.560 and 11.65. It is also a common philosophical belief: see Plato *Phaedo* 61c, Democritus *DK* 68 A 106.12-14, and *SVF* II 790. The last one is especially cute: Chrysippus uses the definition as a premise in an argument designed to prove that the soul is corporeal. For his argument, see Julia Annas *HPM* 40-41.

<sup>37</sup> Although this part of the theory is at a distance from the later proof, Lucretius flags the earlier point and warns his reader of its general importance: *quae tibi cognita res in multis, o bone, rebus/utilis invenietur et opportuna cluebit* (205-206).

metaphorical. Body and soul affect each other so deeply and are so co-responsive *because* they are physically interwoven. These considerations support Lucretius's use of the incense analogy since they shore up the claim that the soul cannot be removed from the body without suffering destruction.<sup>38</sup>

With these arguments, Lucretius has made the bulk of his case. He has given his readers good, if not absolutely final, reason to believe that the soul is corporeal. He has demonstrated that if it is a composite body, it cannot be immortal. And, even more specifically, he has contended that the soul does not survive death – i.e. its separation from the body. From all of this a reader could already easily deduce that disembodied souls do not suffer torments in Hades. All Lucretius need do is nudge the reader towards this natural inference: if souls do not survive death, then *a fortiori* they do not survive death and then suffer torments in Hades. In fact, however, Lucretius offers an additional, independent argument against the belief in Hades. This argument is well-worth reviewing since it sheds light on a fascinating ancient debate about the nature of perception.

Lucretius attacks a very general picture of Hades, the elements of which are neither unusual nor surprising. When a person dies, her body ceases to function, but her soul continues to function without a body. The soul makes a journey to Hades where it is judged for its previous

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<sup>38</sup> Later in the book there is a similar, but much weaker argument (425-444). In that argument, Lucretius compares the soul and body relationship to that of a liquid and its container. This analogy, however, works against his larger point that the soul is not in this way a discrete thing that could be poured into or out of a body: the atoms of a functional soul are fully woven into the atomic fabric of a living, functional body. The image of water and container is thus seriously misleading, as Julia Annas notes *HPM* 147-151. I have focused on the stronger analogy. For other expressions of the idea that body and soul are thoroughly interrelated, see Epicurus *EpH* 64-66 - as tortuous a piece of writing as you could want - and Diogenes of Oenoanda 37.

embodied life. If the soul is given a positive judgment, it is rewarded. If it receives a negative judgment, then it pays the penalty – these punishments are a recurrent focus of attention.

For our purposes, the most important feature of this picture is its depiction of disembodied souls performing or undergoing activities that are similar to those which people undergo and perform when alive, i.e. when they have bodies. The souls in Hades speak, see, listen, walk, and, what is most important, they suffer pain. Lucretius directs his attack against these features of the imagined post-mortem survival, in particular against the idea that disembodied souls can have sensory experiences.

Lucretius uses his theory of the soul and sensory perception to show that the standard picture of Hades is impossible. A disembodied soul cannot have sensation alone, since in order to enjoy sensation, it would need the sense organs. But of course, the whole point about disembodied souls is that they don't have bodily organs anymore. He argues as follows:

- (1) Praeterea si immortalis natura animaist  
et sentire potest secreta a corpore nostro,  
quinque, ut opinor, eam faciundum est sensibus auctam
- (2) nec ratione alia nosmet proponere nobis  
possumus infernas animas Acherunte vagari.  
pictores itaque et scriptorum saecula priora  
sic animas introduxerunt sensibus auctas.
- (3) at neque sorsum oculi neque nares nec manus ipsa  
esse potest animae neque sorsum lingua neque aures:
- (4) haud igitur per se possunt sentire neque esse (624-633).

- (1) Moreover if the nature of the soul is immortal and it is able to perceive after it is separated from our body, then we must bestow it, I suppose, with the five sensory organs. (2) Nor can we conceive in any other manner of infernal spirits wandering around in Acheron. Thus, painters and previous generations of writers have brought souls forth equipped with sensory organs in this manner. (3) But a soul cannot separately possess eyes nor nose nor even a

hand, nor a tongue nor ears. (4) Therefore, it is in no way possible that a soul perceive on its own nor exist.

The structure of the argument is complex, but relatively clear. In the first step, Lucretius claims that if disembodied souls have sensation, then they must have the five sense organs. In the second step, he directs this thought to the afterlife. His point, I take it, is that, since the standard idea of the afterlife includes sensory activities, the souls in Hades must have the sense organs – as he has argued more generally in the first step. He supports his claim by reference to the poets and painters, who depict the souls in Hades performing such activities *and* with sense organs. Thirdly, Lucretius argues that it is impossible for disembodied souls to have the sense organs, and thus, in the fourth step, he concludes that disembodied souls cannot have sense perception or even exist – at least as this existence in Hades is standardly represented.

This argument is initially quite compelling. The first premise – that sensation requires bodily organs of sense – is, no doubt, intuitive. The second step is not hard to justify.<sup>39</sup> If we think of Homer or Horace's *Odes*, it seems uncontroversial that the poets attribute sensation and sense organs to the souls of the dead.<sup>40</sup> Homer imagines Odysseus talking with the souls of the dead in Hades (*Od* 11), and Horace imagines the souls of the dead gathering to listen to Sappho and, even more, Alcaeus (*Odes* II 13.24-32). When Lucretius mentions *pictores*, he is probably thinking of such images as those referred to in the *Captivi*: 'vidi ego multa saepe picta quae

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<sup>39</sup> Lucretius could have also added philosophers to his list of those who 'sic animas introduxerunt'. Socrates, for example, in the *Apology* imagines himself conversing with the souls of the dead and going about his business pretty much as he had in Athens (41a1 ff.).

<sup>40</sup> Cicero, who gives a version of this same argument, also refers to the poets in this context, most specifically to the underworld scene in the *Odyssey* (TD I 36).

Acherunti fierent cruciamenta' (998).<sup>41</sup> The third step – that a soul without a body cannot have its own hands or eyes or what not – seems to be just a given. Finally, the conclusion does follow.

Nevertheless the argument is by no means entirely secure. The problem is the first premise. However intuitive it may be, and however appealing it may be to us now, Cicero denies it outright during a debate about post-mortem survival (*TD* I 46). He argues that the soul can enjoy perception (of some kinds)<sup>42</sup> without a body. In fact, he argues that all along, even when the soul is embodied, it is the soul alone which is responsible for sensation (of some kinds). The organs of sense merely provide the pathways for the transmission of sensory information. Lucretius was aware of this vulnerability in his argument, and he was also familiar with the theory about sensation that Cicero advances. Earlier in the book, Lucretius offers arguments against this theory and in support of his own position. Although neither author makes explicit mention of the other,<sup>43</sup> this issue does offer an excellent opportunity for a real dialectic.

The doctrine about sensation that Cicero advances and Lucretius denies had numerous ancient supporters, and it is often known as the 'window' theory of perception because the eyes and other organs were described as 'windows' through which information travelled to the mind. According to Sextus Empiricus, Heraclitus was an advocate of such a theory: he claimed that the mind looked out through the sensory pathways

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<sup>41</sup> Both Bailey and Kenney refer (*ad loc.*) to this bit of Plautus and also to Polygnotus's Delphic painting of the underworld scene from the *Odyssey*.

<sup>42</sup> He limits his claims to sight, smell, and hearing; for whatever reasons he leaves out touch and taste.

<sup>43</sup> We know, however, that Cicero had read Lucretius (*adQ* II 10.3), and I cannot bring myself to believe that he did not have him in mind throughout the first book of the *Tusculans*. Nevertheless there is no real way of proving this.

as if through windows (*Adv Math* VII 129).<sup>44</sup> Sextus also attributes this theory to Strato and Aenesidemus (*Adv Math* VII 350). The Stoics also held such a theory (*SVF* II 857-858, 861-862, but all of 850-862 is relevant). Most famously, Socrates proposes a view in the *Theaetetus* according to which we perceive not *with* but *through* the senses.<sup>45</sup>

It is only in Cicero's *Tusculans*, however, that this theory is used specifically to argue that perception can continue after the soul and body separate;<sup>46</sup> and this purpose greatly affects the character of the window theory. This use of the theory reveals that it admits a stronger and a weaker interpretation.<sup>47</sup> On the stronger view, the sense organs play no active rôle whatsoever in the process of sensation. They are merely the openings to tunnels through which the world gets to the soul, and the soul will continue to have sensory experiences even after it is separated from the body. On the weaker view, however, the sense organs are necessary means for the perceptions that embodied souls have; here the claim is only that the significant work in perception gets done in the rational soul once the sensory data has been transmitted from the sense organs. Most importantly, on such a view a disembodied soul could not continue to

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<sup>44</sup> διὰ τῶν αἰσθητικῶν πόρων ὡσπερ διὰ τινῶν θυρίδων προκύψας (sc. ὁ ἐν ἡμῖν νοῦς).

<sup>45</sup> For the *Theaetetus* passage see the article of Myles Burnyeat 'Plato on the Grammar of Perceiving' *Classical Quarterly* 26 (1976), 29-51. In what follows, I focus mainly on the physiology of the theory. Readers who are more, or also, interested in the epistemological implications should consult Myles Burnyeat 'Conflicting Appearances' *Proceedings of the British Academy* 65 (1979), 69-111.

<sup>46</sup> Unless Heraclitus believed that αἱ ψυχὰὶ ὀσμῶνται καθ' Ἄιδην (*DK* 22 B98) because of his belief in the theory which Sextus attributes to him. Our evidence, however, is much too thin to make such a leap.

<sup>47</sup> Burnyeat (1976) sketches out, although not in so many words, these two positions, and he argues that Plato held the weaker version (37-38 and 51). It seems to me that the Stoics also advanced the weaker version; see *SVF* II 854, 859. Our evidence for the other proponents of the theory is too meager to make any judgment.

have sensory experiences since the bodily organs provide necessary means for the acquisition of such experiences.<sup>48</sup>

In the debate between Cicero and Lucretius, therefore, only the stronger interpretation is at issue. Only this version will provide the ammunition necessary to prove that the soul can enjoy sight and so forth without a body. Hence Cicero must prove or maintain the strong version of the window analogy, and correspondingly Lucretius need only refute this version. The other interpretation, although intrinsically interesting,<sup>49</sup> is not a significant player in *this* argument. I will first look at two Lucretian arguments against the idea that the soul alone perceives, and then I will consider two Ciceronian arguments in favor of this thesis.

Lucretius argues at length against the strong window theory and its denial of bodily perception (350-369). His first argument (350-355) is that the phenomenology of sensation makes it clear that our bodies do feel: if we consider a normal case of touch it seems just obvious that we do feel things on our bodies. And what else, he asks impatiently, does it mean to say 'bodies feel'? This argument is clearly forceful – we do in the normal course of affairs take it to be obvious that our bodies feel things, indeed our normal use of words seems to demand this. Nevertheless the argument has a serious drawback. In the face of a theoretical argument, like Cicero's,

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<sup>48</sup> See Plotinus *En* IV 4.23-32, εἰ δὴ τι νῦν ὑγιᾶς λέγομεν, δι' ὀργάνων δεῖ σωματικῶν τὰς αἰσθήσεις γίνεσθαι. καὶ γὰρ τοῦτο ἀκόλουθον τῷ τὴν ψυχὴν πάντη σώματος ἔξω γενομένην μήδεος ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι αἰσθητοῦ.

<sup>49</sup> Indeed, as a theory of perception, it has a lot more to say for it than the version that Cicero and Lucretius argue over. One point that often goes unnoticed: once properly spelt out, the weak version turns out to be very close to Lucretius's own theory. The difference is more terminological than substantive: what a Stoic calls 'perception', an Epicurean calls 'opinion'; but both believe that this activity, call it what you will, takes place not in the sensory organs, but rather in the mind, which processes and centralizes the sensory information from the various organs. Hence the strong contrast which Aëtius draws between the Stoics and Epicureans (*Doxographi Graeci*, ed. Diels, p. 414) is seriously misleading.

that bodies do not actually or really or in fact perceive, it is no good for Lucretius merely to assert that it certainly feels like they do. The whole point of Cicero's theory, and of those like it, is to explain that sensation is not what we normally take it to be. Yes, it feels like we perceive a cut on a finger right there *on* the cut finger. The theorist, however, will claim that this is merely the appearance that the process gives, but that the reality is quite different.<sup>50</sup> At best Lucretius's first argument is going to produce a stand-off: the phenomenology of sensation suggests that bodies feel, but many theorists deny this and offer an alternative explanation of the phenomena.

Lucretius turns the next part of his attack on the analogy that Cicero and others used to explain their theory. Since the phenomenon of sensation does seem to imply Lucretius's view, the theorists owed some other account of the facts, and the window analogy served this purpose. No great surprise - Lucretius was not amused.

dicere porro oculos nullam rem cernere posse  
 sed per eos animum ut foribus spectare reclusis,  
 difficilest, contra cum sensus ducat eorum:  
 sensus enim trahit atque acies detrudit ad ipsas,  
 fulgida praesertim cum cernere saepe nequimus,  
 lumina luminibus quia nobis praepediuntur.  
 quod foribus non fit; neque enim, qua cernimus ipsi,  
 ostia suspiciunt ullum reclusa laborem.  
 praeterea si pro foribus sunt lumina nostra,  
 iam magis exemptis oculis debere videtur  
 cernere res animus sublatis postibus ipsis (359-369).

It is difficult to maintain that the eyes can perceive nothing but that the mind looks out through them as if through open doors, since the feeling of the eyes inclines us otherwise. For the feeling of the eyes drags and pushes toward the eyes themselves, especially when,

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<sup>50</sup> See SVF II 854, 862.



as often, we are unable to make out flashing objects since our lights<sup>51</sup> are impeded by the lights. But this does not happen to doors, for the open doorways through which we see have no difficulty. Moreover, if our lights are like doorways, then the mind ought to perceive matters even better with the eyes torn out – posts and all.

Lucretius uses a door instead of a window,<sup>52</sup> but nevertheless he is clearly referring to the same analogy.

His first argument against the analogy, 363-366, points out that bright lights affect our eyes and can, temporarily, blind us. This suggests that our corporeal natures are not entirely passive in the process of perception, since it is specifically the organs which are troubled – they blink and tear up. In the case of our looking through open doors, however, it seems obviously absurd to say that the doors are given trouble by the bright light. But this is what we would expect if the analogy were correct and our eyes were like the open doors. There is, however, an answer open to a supporter of the analogy.

Cicero explains that although these pathways to the mind exist, nevertheless, there can be problems with the transmission of sensory perception because of the corporeality of the sense organs and our bodies:

quamquam foramina illa, quae patent ad animum a corpore, callidissimo artificio natura fabricata est, tamen terrenis concretisque corporibus sunt intersaepta quodam modo (TD I 47).

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<sup>51</sup> Lucretius in this passage repeatedly puns on a common idiom: 'lights' here equals 'eyes'.

<sup>52</sup> Cicero's 'fenestras' and Lucretius's 'fores' both seem to stand for the Greek 'θυρίδες', which properly means 'windows'. I do not understand why Kenney says 'Cicero's *fenestras*, which are properly window-openings, blurs the image' (124 on line 360). It seems rather that Cicero's translation is more accurate in this instance. No substantive matter, however, hangs on whether one uses a door or a window in the analogy.

Although nature crafted with surpassing artistry these pathways which stretch from our body to our mind, nevertheless they are blocked in a way by earthy and congealed matter.

Thus although our eyes may have problems transmitting the information of certain sensations, e.g. glaring lights, this sort of problem can be explained as a legacy of the body's corporeal nature.<sup>53</sup> This amounts to a slight modification of the original analogy: the eyes are like a window or door with a screen, and sometimes the screen, i.e. the corporeal organ, can block things from entering. But the overall thrust of the analogy is preserved, and Lucretius's first pass does not show that the eyes play a necessary rôle in perception nor does it refute the claim that the soul does all the work in perception. At best it shows that the corporeal organs can play a negative rôle in the process of perception.

But Lucretius offers another argument that is more successful (367-369). Lucretius claims that if the doorway analogy is the correct account, then the soul ought to see even better with the eyes removed, i.e. with the path to the soul less obstructed. But obviously this is not the case: without eyes, we go blind. There does not seem to be any good answer to this problem available to the proponent of the doorway analogy.

Even worse, the proponent's answer to the first argument only increases the force of the second argument. The first answer explained some problems in perception, when the soul is embodied, by recourse to the corporeal nature of the body, which was said to obstruct certain sensory

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<sup>53</sup> See Plato *Phaedo* 82d9-e5, 'Lovers of knowledge know that philosophy takes hold of their souls once they [the souls] have been utterly bound and glued into the body, and that the souls are forced to look at what exists through the bodies as if through a prison rather than look itself through itself, and that the souls are whirled around in total ignorance.' This sort of passage also helps to show that the answer Cicero employs is not merely *ad hoc*; there was a general tendency to blame the corporeal body for the ills of the soul in general, not only the defects of perception.

impressions. On this account, however, the soul should perceive *better* with such obstructions removed. Cicero himself goes on in the passage which I quoted above, 'cum autem nihil erit praeter animum, nulla res obiecta impedit, quo minus percipiat, quale quidque sit'<sup>54</sup> (I 47). But if we remove the bodily organs, that is, on Cicero's strong window theory, the obstructions, far from sensation improving – it disappears.

Cicero, of course, has his own objections from the other side. To begin with, he points out that when the mind is sick or distracted, even if the sensory organs are functional and healthy, we do not see or hear,

saepe aut cogitatione aut aliqua vi morbi impediti apertis atque integris et oculis et auribus nec videmus nec audimus (I 46).

Often when we are impeded by thought or by some kind of illness, we neither see nor hear although both eyes and ears are open and healthy.

I take it that this argument refers to such phenomena as so-called 'blinding headaches' and to situations where a person does not notice what he sees because he is thinking or otherwise distracted.<sup>55</sup> Cicero claims that these sorts of cases imply that the soul is what really perceives, but this does not follow.

The Epicurean account of mind-body relations is perfectly compatible with the sorts of cases that Cicero mentions. In fact, Lucretius even (partially) bases his theory on such cases. So, for example, early on in his description of the soul, Lucretius explains that if the rational soul

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<sup>54</sup> 'When, however, there is nothing except the soul, no hindrance will prevent it from perceiving each thing's nature.'

<sup>55</sup> In fact even in the case of such headaches or lapses in attention, it is not true that the person in question literally loses all sight. But I will waive this objection in order to consider Cicero's deeper point, namely that the state of our mind can affect the state of our sensory perceptions.

(*animus*) is extremely disturbed, then it can disrupt the proper functioning of the senses (152-160). But this does not show that the soul does all the perceiving, it only shows that the state of a person's mind can affect the state of that person's senses. Since Lucretius believes that the soul as a whole is closely interconnected, this is no obstacle to his theory.

Cicero's complaint would only work against this theory if Lucretius had argued that the body had perception independently of the soul. But the whole point of the Epicurean theory is that the *compound* of the body and the soul has certain capacities that neither of the individual parts possesses alone.<sup>56</sup> Although the strong doorway theorist does believe that the soul alone perceives and can perceive even without a body, Lucretius does not claim, nor does he need to claim, that the body alone perceives and can perceive even without a healthy soul. Thus, it is no evidence against Lucretius that the state of the soul can affect the process of perception. Indeed, it would count against the theory which Lucretius offers if this were not this case.

Cicero's second objection attempts to use the unity of consciousness to show that the soul alone perceives. He points out that we perceive dissimilar features with the same mind:

quid, quod eadem mente res dissimillimas comprehendimus, ut colorem, saporem, calorem, odorem, sonum? quae numquam quinque nuntiis animus cognosceret, nisi ad eum omnia referrentur et is omnium iudex solus esset (*TD I 46*).

What of the fact that we grasp the most varied features with the same mind, as, e.g., color, taste, heat, odor, and sound? The mind would never know any of these things by means

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<sup>56</sup> See Epicurus *EpH* 63-64 and *DRN* III 333-336; for discussion, see Julia Annas *HPM* 148-151.

of its five messengers unless everything were relayed to it and it was the sole judge of all.

If the various senses each did their own perceiving, then it would be a mystery how these varied perceptions could come to be the perceptions of some one person. When I see and smell a flower, it seems that there is some one subject of both sensations. But if all the senses operate independently, what unifies the various perceptions?

Cicero's argument recalls a line of thought from Plato's *Theaetetus*. Socrates uses a similar argument to convince Theaetetus that the soul is the subject of all our perceptions, and that it merely uses the senses as equipment. As Socrates puts it, 'It would certainly be bizarre, child, if many specific senses sat in us, as in wooden horses,<sup>57</sup> but all these things did not converge to a single type [of thing], either the soul or whatever it should be called' (184d1-4).<sup>58</sup> Just like Cicero, Socrates is searching for an explanation of how the various senses come to be the senses of some one person.

Once again, however, the objection fails because the Epicurean theory can guarantee for the unity that the objection desires. On the detailed Epicurean account of perception, one part of the soul, the irrational or sentient part (*anima*, τὸ ἄλογον μέρος) is spread throughout the entire frame and another part, the rational part (*animus*, τὸ λογικὸν μέρος) is centrally located in the chest. The two parts, however are intimately connected, and they form a unity (III 136-144 and U 311-312). The rational part receives the sensory information from the individual sense organs and unifies this information so that it forms the sensory state

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<sup>57</sup> This extremely compressed simile refers to the Trojan horse: the senses are the soldiers and our bodies are the horses. If this is how sensation worked, it would indeed be an awfully bizarre process.

<sup>58</sup> For everything about this argument, see M. Burnyeat (1976).

of one mind.<sup>59</sup> As Diogenes of Oeneonda puts it, 'the soul inherits the things which are seen by the eyes' (DO 9III3-6). Thus, the unity of consciousness does not pose a problem for the Epicurean theory of the soul.

Lucretius wins this debate hands down. The opposing position needs to claim that the soul alone perceives and that the bodily organs play no necessary rôle in the process. But this account cannot explain the manifest interdependence of the body and the soul in sensory processes. Lucretius's account, on the other hand, is well suited to explain this interdependence, and, in addition, it agrees with our inner experience of sensation. He argues that sensation is a capacity of a soul-body compound and that neither soul nor body can have sensation without the other. This account does quite well as an explanation of the phenomena and, more specifically, as a denial of the strong doorway theory of perception.

This concludes my analysis of the physical side of Lucretius's case. He shows that the soul's nature is corporeal and therefore mortal, and he specifically argues that the soul does not survive its separation from the body – that is, the soul does not survive death, not even briefly. Moreover Lucretius demonstrates that the idea of Hades requires an impossible combination of disembodied souls and normal sensory perception. This shows that the fear of Hades is unfounded twice over. First, souls do not survive, and thus they do not survive and go to Hades. Second, what

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<sup>59</sup> See A.A. Long *Hellenistic Philosophy*<sup>2</sup> (London: Duckworth Press, 1987), 'Epicurus had no knowledge of the nervous system, and we may most easily think of the *anima* as fulfilling the function of nerves—reporting feelings and sensations to the *animus* and transmitting movement to the limbs' (52).

people fear – judgement, punishment, and pain – cannot happen to disembodied souls. So even if souls did survive, the standard picture of Hades would be impossible.

#### IV

Lucretius goes on, however, to tackle the fear of Hades from a narrowly psychological angle. Lucretius has given his readers good reason to believe that the standard picture of Hades is impossible, but in order to make his argument, he has relied on the common representations of the afterlife: *sic animas introduxerunt* (630). As a result the reader might want an explanation of why these images are so common. It is hard to believe that so many people could be so wrong. Lucretius strengthens his case if he can explain why these beliefs arise in the first place.

Lucretius offers allegorical interpretations of the various depictions of torment in Hades (978-1023). According to his explanation, all of these images are really projections of our current fears and desires onto an imaginary afterlife – *in vita sunt omnia nobis*: all of these things are in our lives (979).<sup>60</sup> The rock which forever hangs over Tantalus represents the threat of the gods; his reaction is our terror. The incessant tortures of Tityos display the lover's anguished torments. Sisyphus and his futile labor exemplify the pointless hunger for political office. A person who pursues pleasure after pleasure, always longing for the next one, can see his life in the myth of the Danaids. Finally, the monsters, Cerberus and the

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<sup>60</sup> This is the most important claim in the entire section, and accordingly it is repeated seven times in the space of forty-five lines: 979, 982, 992, 995, 1005, 1014, and 1023. The effect is overwhelming and typically Lucretian as he returns to this crucial claim again and again.

Furies and Tantalus, signify the guilty fear of punishment for criminal deeds.

Scholars have devoted a great deal of attention to the discovery of Lucretius's sources. They are especially interested in whether Lucretius is following Epicurus here or adding something, either from some other source or on his own.<sup>61</sup> I will leave this question to one side and focus more on the rôle that these lines play in Lucretius's argument. Although most scholars are also somewhat concerned with this, they tend to underdescribe the importance of these lines. As it turns out these verses perform no less than four functions for Lucretius – two directly against the fear of death and two on behalf of Epicurean ethics more generally.

The first, and perhaps most important, rôle that these lines fulfill is that they give a clear, non-supernatural explanation of why these particular images are so common and so forceful.<sup>62</sup> This is the rôle that I alluded to above. In order to get a clearer understanding of what is required and what the lines do, it is necessary to remember Lucretius's dialectical position. Lucretius has argued that the idea of Hades and eternal punishment is incoherent: it requires that disembodied souls perform and undergo activities which require bodies. But the reader, although

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<sup>61</sup> The literature on this subject is predictably large. For a start, see Barbara Wallach *Lucretius and the diatribe against the fear of death* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), 83-90; David Konstan *Some aspects of Epicurean Psychology* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), 23-25; F. Cumont 'Lucrèce et le symbolisme pythagoricien des Enfers' *Revue de Philologie* 44 (1920), 229-240; R. Heinze *T. Lucretius Carus De Rerum Natura Buch III* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1897), 184; Bailey II 1158; and P. Boyancé *Lucrèce et l'épicurisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), page 181. Monica Gale's discussion is brief but better focused and more enlightening (93-94).

<sup>62</sup> Previous scholars have generally noticed this function of the verses. See Boyancé 181, Konstan 24-26, and Gale 93-94. Boyancé makes the crucial points, first, that Lucretius would have realized that the frequency of these images demanded an explanation and, second, that the explanation should find some real basis for the myths.



persuaded by these arguments, may still have doubts. After all, the images that Lucretius denies are omnipresent, and this seems to show something. Surely, it might be thought, they could not have come from nowhere. Worse still, the images of Hades are not just omnipresent; they also have a very strong hold on people - they affect people intensely. Again the vehemence of these fears should point to something.

By explaining these images as projections of fears that people have now onto an imagined afterlife, Lucretius can answer these doubts. These fears and images do not come from nowhere; in fact their sources are right before our eyes. To take one example, the fear of the gods is an almost universal phenomenon, according to Lucretius. And thus the image of Tantalus, which in a confused way represents this fear, is equally common, and the source of the image is a perfectly real feature of the natural world.<sup>63</sup> The strength of the image, in turn, is also easily explained: it is just a function of the vehemence of the fear that produces the image. Lucretius gives an analogous explanation of all the other images as well. Thus, Lucretius can explain, via this rationalistic interpretation of the myths, why the myths exist at all, why they are so common, and why they have such a strong grip on people's minds.

Secondly, it is sometimes thought that the fear of death is just one side of a coin, the other side of which is the love of life. E.J. Kenney cites with approval George Santayana, 'Nothing could be more futile...than to marshall arguments against that fear of death which is merely another name for the energy of life' (Kenney 32). He also quotes Cornford, 'Epicurus, it is true, abolished the terrors of hell; but he also abolished the

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<sup>63</sup> See Gale 93-94.

joys of heaven' (33). If these arguments seem appealing, then we may come to treasure the fear of death, even as represented in the terrors of Hades. It may seem that this fear is a positive force in our lives since it increases the love of life, or at least it goes along with such an increase. By means of his allegorical reading of the myths, however, Lucretius demonstrates just how wrong-headed and self-defeating such a belief would be if by the 'fear of death' we mean 'the fear of the terrors of hell'.

By graphically describing these fears and their sources, Lucretius shows what a destructive affect they have on people's lives. After reading Lucretius's descriptions, it would be awfully hard to maintain that these images can improve a person's life, or even that these images are compatible with an increased love of life. Both the fear of such tortures and the lives that these tortures represent are thoroughly miserable. To dwell on these images is not to increase the love of life. Just the opposite, a life spent thinking about such tortures would be a hideous, shrunken existence; such a life would provide a textbook case of pathological fear wrecking a person's happiness. This does not show that fear of death *simpliciter* is unhealthy, but it does show that the fear of Hades, in particular, is unhealthy and unsuited to a happy life.

The vivid portraits of the terrors serve another analogous, but more general, function. Just as some people believe that the fear of death is positive, some people also believe that the lives which the portraits represent are positive. Someone might, say, find a life of politics to be ennobling and dignified; Lucretius reminds his reader that it is a never-ending struggle to maintain the favor of a fickle public. In each case,

Lucretius demonstrates the misery of such lives by revealing their negative features.<sup>64</sup>

Lucretius stresses, again and again, that the miseries he describes are right here, before our very eyes.<sup>65</sup> As I said, the primary function of such references is to argue that these terrors are *here* and not in Hades; but they also serve to show that *these terrors* are here and not in Hades. Lucretius gives us reasons to rethink our attitudes towards each of the lifestyles that these images represent: Is piety a force for good or a crippling phobia? Is passionate love worth the attendant anxiety and disturbance? Do pleasure seekers really enjoy anything, or are they forever looking for the next good thing? Is crime worth the risk of punishment?

No doubt these representations are somewhat extreme, but Lucretius could respond that he did not create the myths. As he has already implicitly agreed, they have to come from somewhere; he merely attempts to explain the hold they have on us. We find these stories gripping, according to Lucretius, because they are so familiar. If someone objects that it is tendentious of Lucretius to claim that *these* myths represent *these* lifestyles, then they owe him an alternative explanation of the images' origin and power. On Lucretius's interpretation of the myths, however, a true understanding of these lifestyles shows that we need a better life, not a better afterlife.

Finally, these images also serve as an implicit advertisement, so to speak, for the Epicurean life. The Epicureans recommended a quiet, almost ascetic lifestyle.<sup>66</sup> They urged a withdrawal from political life and a

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<sup>64</sup> See Gale 94.

<sup>65</sup> This list bears repeating: 979, 982, 992, 995, 1005, 1014, 1023.

<sup>66</sup> See the *DRN* II 1-61, and Epicurus's *EpM* 127-133.

detachment from passionate love. Such a life would have no need for crime, and it would not trouble about the gods since they do not trouble about us. This lifestyle might not immediately appeal to most people. Lucretius's allegories act as a flanking maneuver. Rather than praise the Epicurean life, Lucretius shows the ugliness in a number of other lifestyles.

Lucretius does not merely drop in this sort of advertisement and leave it hanging without support. In various other places in the poem, he offers more extended discussions of these various fears and troubles. The fear of the gods is obviously a recurrent focus of the poem.<sup>67</sup> The dangers of love occupy Lucretius in the conclusion to book IV (1037-1287).<sup>68</sup> The drive for political power is dealt with elsewhere in book III (59-93) and in the proem to book II (37-54). Similarly, the life of a pleasure seeker is criticized in book III (912-930, 931-951) and the proem to book II (1-61 *passim*, esp. 14-36). Finally, someone who lives the simple life which Lucretius recommends in book II would have no need for crime and its attendant fear of punishment. Thus, even if it does not discuss ethical topics at great length, the poem does give the novice a clear picture of the benefits of the Epicurean life in distinction to a number of other lifestyles.

## V

In conclusion, Lucretius makes a much better case against the fear of Hades than is sometimes thought. He attacks this fear, even if some people disavow it, because he can show that people lack knowledge about the soul and hence that their actions and beliefs towards post-mortem survival are

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<sup>67</sup> See I 62-109, V 1161-1240, and VI 50-67.

<sup>68</sup> For a provocative discussion, see Martha Nussbaum *ToD* Chapter 5 'Beyond Obsession and Disgust,' 140-191.

inconsistent and unstable. This justifies his account of the nature of the soul and his attack on the fear of Hades. He makes a strong case against substantial dualism, and at the same time he gives a powerful account of the soul's interdependence with the body. Once he has done so, he uses this interdependence to show that disembodied souls cannot perform or undergo the kinds of activities that the terrors of Hades involve. Thus he removes the grounds for the fear of Hades. Finally, he gives a clear and cogent explanation of how the fear arises in the first place, and he uses the images of Hades's tortures to make a number of subtle and far-reaching points about the desirability of various lifestyles.

## CHAPTER THREE THE DESTRUCTION OF THE SOUL AND NON-EXISTENCE

### I

Lucretius cannot win. The more successful he is against the fear of Hades, the more he reinforces other fears. In order to show that the fear of Hades is empty, Lucretius explains the nature of the soul, and he demonstrates that the soul is destroyed at death, the separation of soul from body. There is no need to fear Hades because souls do not survive death, and thus they never go to Hades. But many people take no comfort in this sort of argument because they fear the soul's destruction as much as other people fear survival in Hades.<sup>1</sup> Lucretius structures the book around these two basic options: either the soul survives or it doesn't. And he attempts to show that we have nothing to worry about because it does not survive, but its destruction is not bad.

Many fears cluster around the thought that the soul is destroyed at death, just as many fears fall under the thought of death. The species is as complex as the genus. Lucretius treats four main worries about the soul's destruction, and he treats all of them with variations of one argument. The four fears are, first, that if the soul does not survive death, we are doomed to a terrible, eternal non-existence, second, that after we die our bodies will suffer various harms, third, that non-survival robs us of all the goods of life, and, fourth, that non-survival leads to the loss of future

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<sup>1</sup> See Plutarch *Non posse* 1104-1106. Nothing really relies on there being different people, some of whom fear survival and some of whom fear non-survival. I don't doubt that there could be people confused enough to fear both or, perhaps, people who shift back and forth between one or the other fear.

potentials. In answer to all these worries, Lucretius argues that nothing can harm us, once we don't exist, since harm requires an existent subject.

## II

The main argument takes up lines 830-869. This section as a whole is extremely complex, and it contains a number of hypothetical objections and responses.<sup>2</sup> In order to present Lucretius's case in as clear a manner as possible, I will first write out the argument schematically. Afterwards, I will unpack it in more detail and deal with problems. The argument, then, is this:<sup>3</sup>

- (1) A person is a compound of a body and a soul (838-839, 845-846).
- (2) [a] Death is the separation of the body and the soul. [b] In the course of this separation, the soul is destroyed and the body begins to decay. [c] Death is thus, by (1), the destruction of the person who dies (Book III *passim*, but especially [a] 838-839, [b] 425-444, 580-591, 772-775, [c] 838-840, 845-846).
- (3) Something can harm a person only if the person exists when the harm occurs (862-864).
- (4) But, by (2)[c], a person does not exist, once dead (838, 840, 864-865, 867).
- (5) Therefore, by (3) and (4), nothing can harm a person, once dead (864-865).
- [(6) It is not rational for a person to fear what that person has good reason to believe will not be harmful when it occurs (*EpM* 125).]
- (7) Therefore, there is nothing fearful about being dead (866).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> I address the unity and organization of this section briefly in Appendix 3: The two thought experiments in III 843-861.

<sup>3</sup> Since I have simplified and reorganized the argument, I include textual references.

<sup>4</sup> There have been a number of important versions of this argument. The one I offer is my own, but I have learned a great deal from D. Furley 'Nothing to us?' *The Norms of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 76; S. Rosenbaum *MoD* 121-122; and M. Nussbaum *ToD* 201-202. With this argument it is also worthwhile to compare Sextus Empiricus *PH* III 229, pseudo-Plato *Axiochus* 365c-365e, 369b3-369c, and *EpM* 125.

The overall shape of the argument is clear. On the basis of previous arguments (93-829), Lucretius asserts that death is the utter destruction of the person that dies. He then claims that nothing can harm a person when that person does not exist. From these two claims, Lucretius infers that when a person is dead *nothing* can harm that person. On the strength of this, he concludes that death, by which he means non-survival, should hold no terrors for us. The obvious, although unexpressed,<sup>5</sup> reason for this final claim is that it is irrational for a person to fear something that he has good reason to believe will not, and indeed cannot, harm him.

Although his line of thought seems clear, Julia Annas argues that Lucretius either misunderstands or misrepresents his own argument. The alleged mistake or misrepresentation is his claim that 'death is nothing to us...since the nature of the soul is found to be mortal' (830-831).<sup>6</sup> Annas points out that, according to Lucretius, this conclusion – that death is nothing to us – goes through even if the soul survives death, i.e. its separation from the body. As Lucretius argues, even if the soul survives, death still does not matter to *us* since *we* are the compound of soul *and* body and this compound is certainly destroyed at death – notwithstanding whether the soul survives alone (843-846).<sup>7</sup> Hence even if the soul were immortal, Lucretius could maintain that death was nothing to us. Annas

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<sup>5</sup> This is why I put premise (6) in brackets. Although Lucretius does not explicitly state this premise, Epicurus does and he does so in the context of an argument against the fear of death (*EpM* 125). As I will discuss below Epicurus's argument is not entirely identical to Lucretius's, but nevertheless it seems natural and appropriate to supply Lucretius with (6) from Epicurus.

<sup>6</sup> Julia Annas *HPM* 155-156 & 155 n.93.

<sup>7</sup> For more on this argument, see Appendix 3: The two thought experiments in III 843-861.



criticizes Lucretius because he employs a premise – that the soul is destroyed at death<sup>8</sup> – which his argument does not strictly require.

But this criticism is not fatal, since the premise is surely sufficient for his conclusion and Lucretius never claims that death is nothing to us *only if* our soul perishes upon separation from our bodies.<sup>9</sup> Lucretius argues that something cannot harm a person unless the person exists at the time the harm occurs. Thus, he must show that a person does not exist when dead. The first premise has it that a person is a compound of a soul and a body. Hence, Lucretius can show that a person does not exist after death in a number of ways. Any of the following would do: he can show either ( $\alpha$ ) that the soul and body are separated at death, or ( $\beta$ ) that the soul is destroyed at death, or ( $\gamma$ ) both ( $\alpha$ ) and ( $\beta$ ), that is that the soul and body are separated *and* the soul is destroyed at death.<sup>10</sup> Lucretius believes that both ( $\alpha$ ) and ( $\beta$ ) are true, and so he offers both, as (2)[a] and (2)[b] respectively. Thus, *pace* Annas, it is not ‘surprising that Lucretius prefaces his great declaration that death is nothing to us with nearly thirty arguments to prove that the soul is mortal’ (155). These arguments support a premise which is sufficient to prove that death is nothing to us, and Lucretius believes that they are true.

We should not misunderstand the force of Lucretius’s additional argument that death is nothing to us even if the soul survives its separation from the body. This hypothetical argument does not indicate that Lucretius is actually unconcerned with the soul’s mortality. It simply

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<sup>8</sup> In my schema this is (2)[b].

<sup>9</sup> That is, he never claims that the premise is necessary – only that it is sufficient.

<sup>10</sup> Another potential avenue is ( $\delta$ ) that the body is destroyed by death. The problem, however, is that – at least for a time – the body often survives death.

shows that Lucretius believes that even if some critic, say Plato, were right and a soul could survive without a body, death would still be nothing to *us* because a soul alone is not *us*. Nevertheless, Lucretius is still convinced that Plato, or whoever, is wrong to believe that the soul survives its separation from the body.<sup>11</sup> He merely makes the additional point that even this false belief would not demonstrate that being dead does matter to *us*.

Although Lucretius can answer Annas's worry, there is still a major puzzle concerning the interpretation of the argument. As I present it, the argument turns on an intuition about harm and existence – only people who exist can suffer harm. This view of the argument is not unique to me,<sup>12</sup> but it is contentious. Some interpreters believe that sensation rather than existence provides the foundation for the Epicurean argument.<sup>13</sup> In this alternative version, the key idea is that only sensations – in particular those of pleasure and pain – are good and bad. Since the dead have no sensations, nothing is good or bad for them, not even their being dead. Ultimately, it seems to me that there is something to be said for both interpretations, and at best the evidence allows only for qualified conclusions. All I will maintain is that Lucretius (even if not Epicurus) at least focuses on existence (even if he also mentions sensation).

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<sup>11</sup> Remember of course that this claim, that the soul does not survive, is crucial to his larger case, since it supports his entire argument about the fear of *ī*ades.

<sup>12</sup> See M. Nussbaum *ToD* 200-201, S. Rosenbaum *MoD* 121-122, H. Silverstein *MoD* 95-96, J. McMahan *MoD* 233-234.

<sup>13</sup> D. Furley 'Nothing to us?' 76, P. Mitsis 'Epicurus on Death and the Duration of Life' *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 4 (1988) 303-304, W. Glannon 'Epicureanism and Death' *Monist* 76 (1993) 223, O. H. Green 'Fear of Death' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 63 (1982), 99-100.

This puzzle, for better or worse, contains a number of complicating wrinkles, and interpreters on both sides have oversimplified the issue. First, there are two authors involved, and it is not obvious that they must use the same argument. Although they share a conclusion, they may use different arguments in support of the same thesis. In addition, although Lucretius is an ardent disciple of Epicurus, that shows (at most) that he should not (knowingly) contradict Epicurus, but it does not indicate that Lucretius will parrot Epicurus's every word. If the two arguments are compatible, Lucretius can use either one without contradicting his master. Another complication arises from this last point. If the two arguments are compatible, there is nothing to say that even one author may not use both. The path of greatest simplicity – one argument for both authors – may merely simplify matters. The truth may be more complex.<sup>14</sup>

The two arguments are quite distinct. The argument from sensation runs, in outline, thus: only pleasure and pain matter, and the dead feel no pleasure or pain; so nothing matters to the dead. The argument from existence, however, runs thus: harm requires an existent subject, and the dead don't exist; so the dead suffer no harm. Neither argument entails nor requires the other, and moreover they take off from different concerns. On the one hand, the argument from sensation starts from a very specific ethical position, namely hedonism. If hedonism is true, and only pleasure

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<sup>14</sup> It is often thought that considerations of economy or simplicity should, by themselves, drive us to hypothesize the minimum, but this is too crude. Bernard Williams, in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), offers a useful reminder that what considerations of simplicity demand, on any sane interpretation, is not 'Hypothesize the absolute minimum', but rather 'Hypothesize the minimum *that is sufficient to explain the phenomenon at hand.*' In some cases the sufficient minimum may be quite large (105-106). In the case we are considering, an assumption of only one argument is indeed the minimal assumption, but it does not provide a satisfactory explanation of the evidence.

and pain matter, then being dead does not matter since it involves no pleasure or pain. The argument from existence, on the other hand, is more metaphysical than ethical. Quite generally, only what exists can do anything or have anything done to it. If harm is something a person has done to him, then the non-existent dead cannot suffer harm because they cannot do or suffer anything at all. So the two arguments are logically distinct, and they appeal to different kinds of intuitions, ethical in one case but metaphysical in the other.<sup>15</sup>

These distinct arguments, however, remain compatible, and they can, in a way, support one another. They don't conflict – that is a person could reasonably believe both that hedonism is true and that only existents can do or suffer anything. The argument from existence can also support the hedonist position, if a hedonist thought that the dead don't feel pleasure and pain precisely *because* the dead don't exist. Alternatively, the existence argument can use pleasure and pain as clear examples of good and evil which require existence: one obvious way that the non-existent dead cannot be harmed is that they cannot feel pain. So far as logic goes, then, the arguments can come apart, but they do not have to; they are distinct but perfectly compatible. There are even ways in which the arguments naturally work together.

Once these logical points are clear, the obvious thing to do is to look at the texts and see who said what. Unfortunately, neither of the two most relevant texts (*DRN* III 830-969, *EpM* 125-126) is entirely univocal. It is best

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<sup>15</sup> It seems unlikely that a person could accept the sensation argument but reject the existence argument. To do so would require the person to think that pain could somehow affect a non-existent person, and I don't see how anyone could believe such a thing. But nevertheless, the sensation argument does not, directly, require or entail the existence argument. They remain logically distinct.

to admit at the start that both texts mention both considerations, sensation and existence, even if it is unclear exactly how the varied considerations are intended. At most, it seems, I can claim that Lucretius and Epicurus differ in focus; it would be too much to claim that either author has only one argument in view. But I begin with what is clear in the texts, before I turn to complications.

Lucretius states the central premise from the existence argument in lines 862-864:

debet enim, misere si forte aegreque futurumst,  
ipse quoque *esse* in eo tum tempore, cui male possit  
accidere

For it is necessary, if by chance the future is going to be miserable and painful, that the person himself, whom the evil could befall, exist at that very time.

This seems as clear as anyone could want: a person cannot be harmed unless the person exists at the time of the (putative) harm. I take 'debet' to indicate that this is a necessary condition, and what depends on 'debet' is the phrase 'ipse quoque esse'. The verb here is 'esse', and it is clearly being used existentially; that is, to say it again, the requirement is existence. When Lucretius restates the principle again, immediately following this passage, he says that death prevents the existence of the person whom the disadvantages could befall.<sup>16</sup> Again the focus is entirely on existence.

When we turn to Epicurus, we find something very different, at least initially. He argues against the fear of being dead in the following manner.

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<sup>16</sup> id quoniam mors eximit *esse*que probet/illum cui possint incommoda conciliari (864-865). (Note that 'probet' here is syncretized for 'prohibet'; see Kenney *ad loc.*).

Συνέθιζε δὲ ἐν τῷ νομίζειν μηδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς εἶναι τὸν  
θάνατον ἐπεὶ πᾶν ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακὸν ἐν αἰσθήσει.  
στέρησις δὲ ἐστὶν αἰσθήσεως ὁ θάνατος

Grow accustomed to the belief that death is nothing to us since all good and evil consist in *sensation*, and death is the removal of *sensation*.

We can reformulate this as (1) all good and evil consist in sensation, (2) the dead have no sensation, and (3) therefore, nothing, not even being dead, is good or bad for the dead. The first premise is a principle of hedonism, and it obviously centers on sensation rather than existence. No mention is even made of the fact that we do not exist once dead. This is a perfectly clear argument from sensation.

So far everything is straightforward, but there are complications. Obviously Lucretius offers the existence argument and Epicurus offers the hedonist argument: that much is clear. Moreover, neither author ever states the other's basic premise. That is, Epicurus does not say that all harm requires existence, nor does Lucretius say that good and evil consist in pleasure and pain. If this was all, there would be no problem. But this is not all. Although neither Lucretius nor Epicurus states the other's *basic premise*, nevertheless Lucretius does mention sensation and Epicurus alludes to existence. We need to consider more of the texts.

Early in his argument Lucretius refers to sensation. The relevant lines are these:

832 et, velut anteacto nil tempore *sensimus* aegri...  
838 sic, ubi non erimus, cum corporis atque animai  
discidium fuerit quibus e sumus uniter apti,  
scilicet haud nobis quicquam, qui non erimus tum,  
accidere omnino poterit *sensumque movere*

[A]nd just as we *felt no pain* in the time before we were born...thus, once we don't exist, when there has been a separation

of soul and body from which we were joined into one thing, clearly nothing whatsoever will be able to befall us or *stir our sensation* – we who will not exist then.

In this analogy, Lucretius points out twice that lack of life involves a lack of sensation, in particular the absence of pain. Before our lives began, we experienced no pain, and after we die, we will feel nothing. It is hard to deny that sensation plays some rôle in these lines.

On the other side, Epicurus at least hints at non-existence in the *Letter to Menoeceus*. After the sensation argument which I offered above, Epicurus turns to consider rationality and fear. But when he goes on to restate his conclusion, that death is nothing to us, we find something odd:

τὸ φρικωδέστατον οὖν τῶν κακῶν ὁ θάνατος οὐδὲν  
πρὸς ἡμᾶς, ἐπειδήπερ ὅταν μὲν ἡμεῖς ὦμεν, ὁ θάνατος  
οὐ πάρεστιν, ὅταν δὲ ὁ θάνατος παρῆ, τόθ' ἡμεῖς οὐκ  
ἔσμεν

Therefore, the most horrifying of evils, death, is nothing to us since when we exist, death is not present, but when death is present, then we do not exist (*EpM* 125).

The conclusion is the same as the previous one – death is nothing to us – but the supporting argument looks very different. There is no mention of sensation, and although it is oddly allusive, this appears to be a highly compressed argument from existence. When we exist, death doesn't matter because we are not dead. But when we are dead, we don't exist – and, I take it, this shows that death doesn't concern us because if we don't exist death cannot harm us.

Although matters are very complicated, we can clarify them somewhat. Each author makes some reference both to sensation and to existence, but their primary arguments are still distinct. Lucretius never states the principle of hedonism, and Epicurus never states the principle

about existence. Without these key premises, the focus stays on their explicit arguments, that is, existence for Lucretius and hedonism for Epicurus. There is additional support for this point. Even when Lucretius mentions sensation, he mentions existence at the same time; sensation is never the sole center of his attention. In this way sensation remains subordinate to existence.<sup>17</sup> On the other side, although Epicurus alludes to existence in the *Letter to Menoeceus*, nevertheless he mentions only sensation when he offers his canonical short argument that death is nothing to us.<sup>18</sup> So I think that it is fair to say that Lucretius focuses on existence and Epicurus focuses on sensation, even if they both mention the other consideration.

A distinction in focus rather than a more absolute difference is reasonable given the school's overall doctrines. Testimony from Sextus Empiricus indicates that the Epicureans employed both the argument from existence and the hedonist argument.<sup>19</sup> Obviously their ethics would make the hedonist argument appealing to them, but it also makes sense that they would connect death with non-existence. They were, of course, very concerned to show that the soul is mortal, and thus that death amounted to our utter annihilation. They argued that Hades would not harm us, since there would be no us in Hades, and this would naturally suggest the more general point that nothing would harm us because once

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<sup>17</sup> In the lines which mention sensation which I quoted above, we also find 'ubi erimus' 838, and 'qui non erimus tum' 840.

<sup>18</sup> *KD* 2, *VS* 2, and cf. *De Fin* II 100.

<sup>19</sup> Sextus attributes the hedonist argument to Epicurus, and then he shifts to the vague plural, 'they say'. This could indicate that the existence argument was a later development of the Epicureans as opposed to Epicurus. But *VS* 14 and *U* 204 show that Epicurus could make unequivocal reference to existence when he felt like it, and so I doubt that the plural is particularly significant. It is perfectly natural to start out speaking about Epicurus and then shift to talk of 'them', i.e. the Epicureans.



we are dead, there will simply be no us. Thus it is not surprising that the Epicureans cared about sensation *and* existence.

But given the character of the two works, it is also reasonable that the *De Rerum Natura* has a different focus than the *Letter to Menoecus*. Since the letter is a brief treatment of *ethics*, it makes sense that Epicurus focuses there on the hedonist argument. Pleasure and pain are much more relevant to that context than non-existence, since a proper discussion of existence would require a detailed treatment of the physics and physiology of death. The *De Rerum Natura*, however, is notoriously more concerned with physics than ethics (Kenney 9-12), and in book III, Lucretius offers precisely the details of physics and physiology that the *Letter to Menoecus* lacks. Hence it is appropriate that his main argument concerns existence and not ethics, since he does not offer arguments in support of hedonism, but he does explain the physics of the soul. Each author properly shows greater concern for the argument which is more appropriate to his current work.

Finally it is worthwhile to speculate as to why, given their primary interests, Lucretius and Epicurus nevertheless mention both considerations. It may seem odd that Lucretius speaks of sensation at all and similarly for Epicurus and existence. In each case, however, the other consideration supports the author's main argument. Lucretius wants to show that when we are dead and don't exist, nothing can harm us. Since he is a hedonist, it is natural that his example of a harm which cannot occur is pain – his point is that non-existence cannot harm us at all, and in

particular it does not hurt us.<sup>20</sup> In Epicurus's case, one sign that the dead feel no pleasure or pain is that they do not even exist – surely someone who does not exist has no sensation. Given their specific aims in these works, it makes sense for Epicurus to focus on hedonism and Lucretius to focus on existence. But given their larger commitments, it also makes sense for them to mention the other consideration as well.

Finally, although detailed objections will wait until the next chapter, what can we say about the strength of this argument? Predictably, I find it very compelling. First, it is valid. This leaves only the truth of the premises to consider. We can simplify matters since premises (4), (5), and (7) are legitimate deductions. So the only questions that remain concern the premises (1), (2), (3) and (6).

The first and second premises rely on the book's previous arguments as well as some general agreement. It was generally held, from Homer onwards, that death was the separation of the soul from the body.<sup>21</sup> And it also seems intuitive that a person's identity is bound up with his body and his soul. I don't mean to prejudge anything here. Lucretius's account in the first premise is somewhat contentious, but at the very least a reasonable account of what a person is must refer either to body or to the mind or to both.<sup>22</sup> As I tried to show in the last chapter, Lucretius offers ample argument in defense of his position, first, that we cannot make sense of people except as a conjunction of soul and body, and, second, that

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. 'scilicet haud nobis quicquam, qui non erimus tum,/accidere omnino poterit sensumque movere' (840-841). The logic, as 'omnino' shows, is that when we don't exist nothing whatsoever can happen to us, and *a fortiori* we will feel nothing.

<sup>21</sup> See David Claus *Toward the soul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) and R. Hackforth's note on *Phaedo* 64c.

<sup>22</sup> So, for example, in the *First Alcibiades*, Socrates remarks that no one could deny that a person is one of three things, the soul, the body, or the two together (130a).

the soul's fragile nature does not survive death. So far, then, I would say that the first two premises rely on some basic assumptions and that they receive very full defense and explication from Lucretius.

The third and sixth premise are also highly intuitive principles. It does not require a big-brained metaphysician to see that the statement 'I just hit somebody who does not exist' makes no sense at all.<sup>23</sup> In a standard context, it is uncontroversial that only what exists does or suffers anything. Next, the principle about fear must be understood as a claim about rationality. It puts a limit on what it is reasonable to fear, not what people can or do fear. As such, it too is reasonable. Again, in standard contexts, no one would deny that it is unreasonable to fear what does not seem bad. So both of these premises seem unproblematic.

What seems obviously wrong with the argument is its conclusion – not its logic or the truth of the premises. If we reject this piece of reasoning, as so many of us surely do, it is probably not because we find it flawed or false. We reject it because, as we say in such cases, it just cannot be right. The conclusion serves, in effect, as a *reductio* of the argument itself. Death is terrifying, if anything is, and we recoil almost automatically from any argument that says otherwise. In this sense, it is a prototypical philosophical argument: it seems innocuous all the way through, but the upshot is intolerable.

This leads, finally, to a dialectical point. If I am right, then the vehemence with which people reject this argument springs from their prior commitment to the falsity of its conclusion. This is not necessarily a

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<sup>23</sup> Big-brained metaphysicians, however, do agree with the principle that only what exists can do or experience anything. See *Sophist* 247d8-e4, *Topica* 139a4 and 146a23.

disreputable way of going about things. There *are* some things that we just know, and we will, and should, reject any argument which leads to their denial. In this case, however, there seem to be such items on both sides. The third and sixth premises, I submit, are at least as strong as the conclusion is weak. In another situation, we would surely reject any argument which led to the conclusion that anything could happen to a non-existent person. So, at the very least, we should not presume that the dialectical scale is tipped wholly against Lucretius. He has the weight of some strong intuitions on his side as well. With this in mind, we can begin to consider how Lucretius uses this argument against the four fears that I laid out above.

### III

The first two fears are opposite sides of the same coin. When we die, our souls separate from our bodies; our souls are destroyed in the process, and our bodies begin to decay. Left with nothing but a lifeless body, two thoughts may arise. On the one hand, a person might think that since the lifeless body is certainly not him, he will simply cease to exist. On the other hand, he might think that the dead body is all that is left of him, and this will lead him to identify with the corpse. The first thought can lead to the fear of non-existence, and the second thought can lead to fear about the fate of one's body after death. But both fears result from the more general notion that death is the separation of the soul and body and the destruction of the soul.

Although the first fear seems quite natural, it is surprisingly hard to characterize. If at death we cease to exist and non-existence is nothing,

then what are people so afraid of? The intuitive response is that people fear nothingness itself. A speaker in the *Tusculan Disputations* takes this line (I 11-12), and Plutarch makes the same point when he speaks of ‘the longing for existence, the oldest and greatest of all passions’ (*Non posse* 1104c). But even if it is true that what is horrible about non-existence is precisely not to exist, this is entirely uninformative. Harry Silverstein offers a richer explanation: he explains that this fear involves ‘the mistake of confusing the permanent annihilation of consciousness – i.e. death – with the permanent consciousness of nothingness, permanent solitary confinement in total darkness, as it were’ (*MoD* 98). Plutarch testifies to this view of non-existence: ‘the face of death that all men fear as terrifying, gloomy, and dark is lack of sensation, oblivion, and ignorance’ (1104e). His language suggests that Plutarch takes death to be exactly what Silverstein describes, a kind of eternal darkness which envelops the dead and which the dead somehow experience or undergo. If death were like this, it would indeed be awful.

In the main argument, Lucretius goes right at this fear. He shows that non-existence, contrary to Plutarch’s confused image, is not some awful and eternal state that we undergo. Once a person dies, that person ceases to exist. But non-existence is not some nothingness that the dead undergo: it is just nothing. And as Lucretius argues, nothing can befall a person who no longer exists. So if death is non-existence for the person who dies, as Lucretius and the fearful masses agree, then nothing can harm that person any more. And if there is no longer any possible harm, then *a fortiori* nothingness itself is not a possible harm.

The effect of this argument is more radical than in the case of Lucretius's argument about Hades. Lucretius does not merely challenge the fear of non-existence, he supplants an entire way of looking at things. If his argument is successful, we gain an entirely new conception of non-existence. In the case of Hades, our knowledge is expanded – we come to know more about our souls and their natures – and we come to see that what we fear will not come to pass – our souls will not journey to Hades. But our conception of Hades stays the same. This is not so with non-existence. Lucretius forces us to see that non-existence is not a state or condition which we experience or undergo: it really is nothing to us, precisely because we disappear from the scene. We do not stay on as spectators of our own absence. The previous way of viewing non-existence mistakenly adds another 'us' into the picture, and thus it conceives of non-existence as a darkness or some such that we are in. Lucretius abolishes this conception altogether.

With the second fear, we shift focus to the body, although the soul's destruction is still the impetus for the anxiety. A person who has this fear meets Lucretius halfway: he agrees, apparently, that the soul is destroyed at death and 'he himself denies that he believes that he will have any sensation in death' (874-875).<sup>24</sup> But instead of dwelling on his soul, this person worries over the fate of his corpse: he fears that it may be burned or eaten by animals. According to Lucretius, the conjunction of these views amounts to a contradiction.

Lucretius's case against this worry also runs through his main argument. A person is a conjunction of a body and a soul, and death is the

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<sup>24</sup> neget ipse/credere se quemquam sibi sensum in morte futurum.

breakup of that union. Although this causes the complete destruction of the soul, the body can survive the process of death – even if it too begins its inevitable decay. We should infer that death is the destruction of the person who dies: once a person dies, the person no longer exists. Although the body persists for a time, it is not me, and so whatever happens to it does not thereby happen to me.<sup>25</sup> Again since I do not exist, nothing can happen to me. In this way, the main argument also works against fears over the fate of a person's dead body.

In the course of treating this fear, Lucretius also explains a confusion that underlies it (870-893). The mistake involves the imagination and personal identity. The fearful person agrees that he will not survive death; death is his end. But when he imagines burial or cremation, he treats the corpse as if it were himself. He imagines that something of himself does survive and that this something is harmed by post-mortem events. The person believes that he will not exist after death, but he persistently fails to make use of this knowledge when he imagines the world after his death.

The mistake that Lucretius describes is a specific example of a more general problem about imagination and the self.<sup>26</sup> The broader issue is

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<sup>25</sup> Compare Thomas Nagel, 'When a man dies we are left with his corpse, and while a corpse can suffer the kind of mishap that may occur to an article of furniture, it is not a suitable object for pity' (7) 'Death' in *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

<sup>26</sup> The most important discussion of these issues is Bernard Williams 'Imagination and the Self' in *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 26-45. There is also a useful chapter in Anthony Flew *The Logic of Mortality* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 'Personal Identity: (i) Conceivable Differences?', 107-125. Peter Carruthers makes good use of similar arguments in *Introducing Persons* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 95-96, 154, 180, and 183. Even more general, but still very enlightening, are P.F. Strawson 'Self, Mind and Body' in *Freedom and Resentment and other essays* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1974), 169-177 and Mark Johnston 'Human Beings' *Journal of Philosophy* 84 (1987), 59-83 & 'Reasons and Reductionism' *Philosophical Review* 101 (1992), 592-597.

large, diffuse, and complicated. A proper discussion of it would take us too far from the subject at hand, but it will still be profitable at least to indicate how Lucretius's explanation is related to this topic. In order to do so, I will use an analysis of imagination that Bernard Williams offers.

Williams distinguishes between three ways in which a person might imagine something to herself (38). In the first case, the person imagines something or some scenario, and she, the imaginer, plays no rôle in the imagined scene. For example, she might imagine Socrates's trial without in any way placing herself in that imagined scenario. In the second case, the person imagines some scenario, and here she is an actor in the imagined scene. She could, say, imagine herself responding well to difficult questions after giving a lecture. Finally, in the third case, a person might imagine doing or undergoing something as someone else. She could picture herself playing basketball at the Olympics; but in the imagined scene she is Cheryl Miller rather than herself.

Williams does not claim that there are clear, hard and fast boundaries between these three types of imagination – just the opposite.<sup>27</sup> The three forms of imagination glide all too easily one into another. So, if a person sets herself the task of imagining, as fully as possible, a house, she might start by simply visualizing a house without placing herself in the scene. But this could easily and naturally shift into a visualization of herself going through the house. In such a case, the first type of imagination shifts into the second. Similarly, a case of the second type could easily shift into the third. A person begins to imagine herself playing basketball on the Olympic team, but she needs to make adjustments in her

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<sup>27</sup> In fact he describes the third type as, in effect, a special class of the first type (38).



height, leaping ability, etc. It would be so natural to do this by giving oneself the attributes of some real player. Eventually the scenario would be that of the imaginer playing basketball, but now *she* is that other player.

Crucially, these shifts can take place involuntarily and imperceptibly. The imaginer need not, and often will not, deliberately shift from one type of imagination to another. In addition, the imaginer may very well not be aware that such a shift has occurred. It is not that we don't know what we are imagining, but rather that we are not always conscious of the precise nature of the imagined scenario. This is easy to confirm by introspection. We do not standardly think in terms of explicit distinctions between types of imagining; *a fortiori* a person can imagine things in one way rather than another without consciously choosing to do so. And if the person shifts between types of imagined scenarios, this too will often occur without conscious deliberation or decision.<sup>28</sup> In the same way, when such a shift does occur, not only can it occur without the imaginer explicitly deciding to cause it, but its occurrence will often escape notice. Insofar as we do not, normally, make such distinctions between imaginary scenarios, we will not, normally, be aware of what is happening when our own imaginations shift from one type to another.

The case that Lucretius describes is a shift from the first type of scenario to the second. The person agrees that he won't exist or feel anything when he is dead. He begins to think about this state of affairs: here is his body being buried or burned or eaten by animals. So far, he

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<sup>28</sup> This is not to say that one can never explicitly attempt to imagine in one way rather than another. Even if one does not have any explicit theory such as Williams, it seems that one *could* set oneself the task of imagining something in some specific manner. My claim is merely that one *need* not do so and often one *does* not do so.

imagines a scene entirely without his presence. But as he imagines these events, he adds himself back into the scenario. He takes the misfortunes of the body to be *his* misfortunes even though he asserts that the body is not him. The imaginer does not notice the shift, but because of it, his views wobble incoherently.

In this situation, the shift is especially quick and automatic because of the common association of a person and that person's body. In the normal course of events, we identify and reidentify other people by their bodies. And surely many, many people also identify *themselves*, at least partially, with their bodies. This natural assimilation of 'me' to 'my body' facilitates the transition from 'my body will be burned' to 'I will be burned'. The latter is obviously a reasonable cause of anxiety, but cremation is not such a case. My body will burn. I will not.

Lucretius can thus offer a powerful and satisfying explanation of why people wrongly fear for their corpses. When a person imagines being dead, it is extremely easy for him to become confused. The person is likely to project himself back into the imagined world where he no longer exists. He thinks of the fate that his body will suffer, and he wrongly imagines that these misfortunes are his misfortunes. Since the identification of oneself with one's body rarely becomes explicit, it is often the case that this entire process escapes awareness. Lucretius is therefore in a good position to explain both the error and why it so often goes unnoticed.

Lastly, Lucretius's explanation of this error is geared towards worries about one's body, but it has a more general scope. The same explanation can illuminate the fear of non-existence as well. I agreed above with Harry Silverstein that such a fear is 'a mistake.' Lucretius can explain the causes

of the mistake. The person who fears for his body agrees that he perishes, but in confusion he projects himself back into the world by indentifying with his corpse. In the same way, a person who fears non-existence shifts from the thought 'I will be dead and not exist' to the thought 'I am doomed to non-existence.' The second phrase suggests that the person smuggles himself, all unawares, back into the imagined future after his death. Cicero and Plutarch suggest precisely this slide, as does Aristotle when he writes, 'Death is the most terrifying thing. For it is a limit, and there seems to be nothing further for the dead person – neither good nor evil' (*NE* 1115a26-27). Lucretius would agree with the description of death as a limit and the end of good and evil, but he believes that this will only appear terrifying if we mistakenly add ourselves back into a picture where we no longer belong.

#### IV

Unfortunately, the fear of being dead is not only the fear that being dead is itself intrinsically, or positively, awful. People also dread being dead because it appears to involve extrinsic, or negative, harms; such harms involve the absence or deprivation of goods rather than the presence of evils. The non-existent dead manifestly have nothing, and so it is easy enough to infer the converse: they lack everything. If this is so, then they lack all the goods of life. Thomas Nagel describes this as 'the natural view that death is an evil because it brings to an end all the goods that life contains' (2-3). We can take this, however, in one of two ways. If we focus on the present, then death will seem like the loss of all our current goods.

Alternatively, if we look to the future then death becomes the loss of all our potential goods.

The first fear shows up frequently in both ancient and modern authors. Aristotle explains that the virtuous person has more to fear in death than other people, 'for life is most valuable to this sort of person, and this man is knowingly deprived (*ἀποστερείται*) of the greatest goods, and this is painful' (*NE* 1117b11-13). Plutarch also describes death as a deprivation of goods (*ἡ τῶν ἀγαθῶν στέρησις* *Non posse* 1106a, see also 1106b-c). And the title character of the pseudo-Platonic *Axiochus* grieves over 'the deprivation of the goods of life' (*ἡ στέρησις τῶν ἀγαθῶν τοῦ ζῆν*: 369d4, cf. 365c5 *εἰ στερήσομαι τοῦδε τοῦ φωτὸς καὶ τῶν ἀγαθῶν*).<sup>29</sup> Among moderns, Thomas Nagel writes, 'If we are to make sense of the view that to die is bad, it must be on the ground that life is a good and death is corresponding deprivation or loss' (4). Garrett Thomson, who argues for a privational account of harm in general, also claims, 'Death deprives us of all the goods of life.'<sup>30</sup>

Lucretius clearly acknowledges this potential fear, and he treats it after he deals with the previous two fears (894-911). In brief he argues that it makes no sense to speak of a deprivation without a subject. But since the dead don't exist, they can't be the subject of anything, and so it is senseless to claim that death deprives the dead of anything. This argument relies on his earlier argument, in particular on premise three. Lucretius also makes use of his theory of imaginative error against the fear of deprivation: to

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<sup>29</sup> See also Cicero, 'Illud angit vel potius excruciat, discessus ab omnibus is quae sunt bona invita' (*TD* I 34.82), and 'Sed hoc ipsum concedatur, bonis rebus homines morte privari' (I 36.87).

<sup>30</sup> *Needs* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 38.

fear deprivation after death, one needs to reinsert oneself, when one does not exist, as the subject of the deprivation.

It is worth mentioning one route for addressing this fear that Lucretius avoids entirely. It might seem tempting to respond to the claim 'death deprives us of the goods of life' by arguing that life has few or no goods. Indeed, to take this idea even further, one could argue that life is so filled with miseries that death – so far from depriving us of goods – actually saves us from evils. This idea seems to have had some popularity in antiquity: it shows up in Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* (I 83-86) and in the pseudo-Platonic *Axiochus* (366a-369b).

In general, Epicureans appear to have no patience for this line of thought. Epicurus severely rebukes the chic nihilist who proclaims, 'Best is never to have been born, second best to die quickly' (*EpM* 126-127). To paraphrase Epicurus: If this person means it, he should die, and if he is joking, then he is wasting our time. Either way, such radical chic makes no real contribution to the debate at issue. Lucretius, as I have said, never even considers the idea that death is good because life is bad. But he does heap abuse on people who come to hate life as a result of the fear of death and then commit suicide – all unaware of the paradoxical nature of their actions (III 79-84). Neither thinker has any sympathy for the attempt to remove the fear of death by removing the love of life.

This sort of argument, which we find in Cicero and elsewhere, is self-defeating, and so Lucretius and Epicurus are right to avoid such a method. Remember that the general point of ancient ethical inquiry is, first, to discover the nature of the good life or happiness and, second, to reveal how to achieve this good, happy life. The putative harm of death

and the fear of this harm pose a great obstacle to happiness. But we cannot save the endeavor by denying that life is good, for that simply means that our search is doomed to frustration. We can't be happy; better to die quickly. Cicero himself sees the problem:

quid ego nunc lugeam vitam hominum? vere et iure  
possum; sed quid necesse est, cum id agam ne post  
mortem miseros nos putemus fore, etiam vitam efficere  
deplorando miseriozem?

Why should I now grieve over the life of mankind? I can do so truly and justly, but what need is there also to make life more miserable by lamenting when I am arguing so that we may not think that we will be miserable after death (*TD* I 83)?

But he cannot leave well enough alone. He goes on to do just what he disavows here – reducing his own insight to nothing in the process.

Lucretius, however, opens his case against the deprivation of goods argument by agreeing with his opponents on two key points. First, he believes that life contains many real goods. He himself draws a compelling picture of a valuable life ended by death (894-898).<sup>31</sup> Secondly, Lucretius does not deny that when a person is dead and does not exist, that person will not have these goods. Everyone agrees, at this point, that life contains significant goods and that the dead no longer possess those goods.

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<sup>31</sup> For the reasons I have been discussing, Kenney simplifies matters by claiming that Lucretius is being satirical here (203). It would do Lucretius no good to mock or parody the life he describes, since he wishes to show that people can and do lead happy lives even though they die. He has no reason to claim that the life he represents is not a happy one, and he has every reason not to do so. He has not proven much if all he can show is that *miserable* people lose nothing in death. Instead of this lame approach, Lucretius faces the issue squarely: he presents a touching and pathetic image of a happy life cut short, but he attempts to show that the reaction of pity and sadness is misplaced. The dead person has lost nothing. Lucretius may mock his opponents insofar as they mistake death for a real loss, but he does not deny that life is good. The satire is not global.

Nevertheless, Lucretius vehemently denies that it follows from these two claims that being dead is a deprivation of goods. He takes 'X is harmed because he is deprived of Y' to have as a necessary precondition that X *needs* Y (900-901, 916-918). If, say, a person is harmed by a lack or deprivation of food, then that person is without the food that he needs. A dead person fails to meet this requirement: he has no needs. Thus, a dead person may lack food, in some sense, but he does not *need* food. This is what stops the move from (a) life contains real goods and (b) the dead don't have these goods to (c) the dead are deprived of these goods.

Lucretius seems to be on strong ground here. In general, X does not have Y is not equivalent to X needs Y. I don't have five cars, but I also don't need them, and I am certainly not harmed by any lack or deprivation of five cars. The problem is that a need indicates a lack, but a lack does not necessarily indicate a need. Thus, Lucretius is right: we cannot infer a deprivation for every lack.

The dead do not need anything because they do not even exist. What does not exist is in no condition, and thus it has no needs. While it is true, in a sense, that the dead do not have the goods of life, this does not really mean what it sounds like. Normally, if we say that someone does not have some good, we mean that he is undergoing a lack of that good. So, for example, a person's life may be miserable because of a lack of friends, and someone may say, 'He has no friends, so he is miserable.' This is more than the merely negative claim that, say, Santa Claus has no friends. Even if we agree that friends are a necessary part of a happy life, Santa Claus is not somehow deprived by his lack of friends. Santa Claus

does not exist, and thus his not having friends is not some harm he experiences. He doesn't have friends because he *is not*.

One feature of Lucretius's argument is potentially misleading. The word which Lucretius uses that I have been translating as 'need' is 'desiderium'. This word would more naturally be translated as 'desire'. If we take the word this way, however, then Lucretius's argument appears to collapse into a much weaker idea about desire. He would then be saying that the dead don't want anything or long for anything. But wants are generally less significant than needs. After all, someone might not *want* something good for her – as a result of false beliefs – but this person could still *need* this item. Does Lucretius conflate needs and desires? I think that he does not, but in order to show this, I need first to consider the Epicurean attitude towards desires and needs and second to consider the Latin that Lucretius uses.

Epicurus does not make a clear *verbal* distinction between desire and need.<sup>32</sup> For example in the *Letter to Menoecus* 127-128, he gives his famous classification of desires (ἐπιθυμῖαι), but he quickly shifts to the language of need (ἐνδέον, δεόμεθα). There is, however, no indication that Epicurus intends any distinction; to all appearances, he simply uses these words as synonyms, i.e. he equates need and desire. This would set a precedent for Lucretius, but it would by no means justify the conflation: Lucretius would simply be guilty of the same error as his master. The distinction between need and desire is absolutely essential, and Epicurus appears to ignore it.

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<sup>32</sup> My initial sense of this problem comes from the discussion of Phillip Mitsis *EET* 36 ff.



But this conclusion is too quick. Epicurus and Lucretius can make the distinction that we want even if their use of words is not identical to ours. I take it that the most important feature of the distinction between need and desire is to separate what an agent may happen to long for from what is really good for the agent. It seems obvious enough that people often want things that are not beneficial for them, and this is the most immediate case in which we say, 'He *wants* this or that, but he doesn't *need* it.'<sup>33</sup> Since they divide desires into three classes – first, natural and necessary, second, natural and unnecessary, and, third, unnatural and unnecessary, Epicurus and Lucretius can make just such a separation. So, for example, Lucretius points out that we don't *need* an elaborately decorated house in order to be happy (II 24 ff.), however much people may want such things.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to this philosophical argument, there is reason to believe that 'desiderium' is not necessarily inappropriate Latin to express 'need'. In the *De Finibus* (II 26-27), Cicero discusses Epicurus's division of desires (ἐπιθυμῖαι) – which word Cicero translates as 'cupiditates'. He has a number of complaints about the division, but in particular Cicero demands that Epicurus clarify his position by distinguishing between 'desideria naturae' and 'cupiditas'. Since Cicero has been translating 'ἐπιθυμῖα' (desire) as 'cupiditas', it seems clear that 'desiderium' must do duty for

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<sup>33</sup> Of course, this can go the other way as well: a person may need something that he does not want.

<sup>34</sup> It is difficult to be certain, but I suspect that Epicurus blithely joins words for desire and words for need because of his theory as a whole: in the case of the sage, the ideal agent, desire and need are identical. The connection here between knowledge and the identity of desire and need should be drawn out.

'need'.<sup>35</sup> Now surely Cicero, if anyone, was in a position to understand the potential nuances of Latin vocabulary. Therefore, if he suggests, as he does, the word 'desiderium' as the Latin to signify 'need', then I take it that the word can do this work. Thus, although the word's more standard signification is 'desire', it need not always mean this. In the proper circumstances 'desiderium' can mean 'need'.

Moreover, Cicero's criticism supports my earlier claim about the Epicurean division of desires. What Cicero says is, 'quamquam in hac divisione rem ipsam prorsus probo, elegantiam desidero' [although I entirely approve of the substance of this division, I need<sup>36</sup> clarity] (II 27). I take it that Cicero and I are largely in agreement here. He sees that Epicurus can distinguish between need and desire ('rem ipsam prorsus probo'), but he wishes that Epicurus had made his language clearer ('elegantiam desidero'). Thus, when he criticizes Epicurus, Cicero simultaneously indicates that the Epicurean position was flawed only in presentation and that 'desiderium' was, in fact, a proper way to express 'need' in Latin.

It would be wrong, then, to condemn Lucretius for confusing what we want with what we need. First of all, even if they don't always make the verbal divisions clear, Epicurean philosophers can and do make the conceptual distinction between the two. Secondly, the word 'desiderium'

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<sup>35</sup> Lewis and Short, s.v. 'desiderium' III A, offer 'Want, need, necessity' (556-557). This is already troubling, since it appears to misunderstand the English distinction. In any event, the point appears to be that they recognize a use of 'desiderium' that covers what I am calling 'needs'. They write, however, that this usage is rare and not ante-Augustan. The Cicero passage that I am discussing belies the latter claim. The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* also lumps together want and need in its entry on 'desiderium'.

<sup>36</sup> This is surely Cicero's little joke: he is about to suggest that Epicurus use 'desiderium' to express the concept of need, and so he says that clarity is what he needs, desires, wants ('desidero').

can be used in Latin for 'need', and indeed Cicero himself suggests this word for exactly this purpose in his critique of Epicurean ethics. For both reasons, Lucretius's wording should not mislead us: he cares about needs rather than mere desires.

Once we clear away this potential confusion, Lucretius's argument is quite strong. He argues that the harm of a deprivation consists in the occurrent lack of what one needs. There has to be a subject of this need, and this subject must exist. As the main argument shows, the dead don't exist, and thus they cannot need anything. There is no subject for the deprivation or harm. Lucretius's explanation of harm is compelling as well. It appears uncontroversial, except in the putative case of death, that needs have subjects and that these subjects must exist.

Moreover, Lucretius is in a good position to explain why the fear of deprivation is so compelling to people. In the first place, he can appeal to his previous explanation concerning imagination and the self. In the second place, there is a common way of speaking that encourages confusion. I will briefly touch on each of these explanations.

This fear of post-mortem deprivation partly stems from the same sort of error which underlies the fears concerning one's body after death. In the latter case, we add another us to the time that we don't exist, and we attach the physical suffering to this illusory after-image of ourselves. So also in the case of deprivation, it seems that one imagines death as a time when one is deprived of this or that good. But to think this is simply to project oneself beyond death. Since death really is the absolute end, however, this projection is wrong and extremely misleading. It fosters the fear that after death we will not have this, that, or the other thing. But of

course there will not be some us after death with no goods. There will just be no us.

Second, a very ordinary and natural way of speaking may foster the confusion. It is true to say of a dead person, 'He doesn't have x or y.' This is obviously something that we might also say of a living person who lacked and needed x or y. But the meaning and significance of the phrase 'He doesn't have x or y' differs greatly in the two cases. For the living person, the phrase describes an occurrent lack and very likely a need as well. But for the dead person, the phrase merely expresses one specific example of the general fact that the dead person has nothing. And this more general fact is perfectly trivial; it does not express an occurrent lack or need. It is analogous to the statement that the (imaginary) continent Atlantis has no latitude or longitude: it's true, but not especially significant. It certainly does not mean that there is some magical continent that sits somewhere on the globe at no precise latitude or longitude.<sup>37</sup>

Lucretius provides examples of this linguistic confusion. He displays people telling someone, 'Soon, soon now your prosperous home will not receive you nor will your excellent wife, nor will your sweet children run up to get the first kiss' (894-896). The speaker means these statements to be pathetic and expressive of great loss.<sup>38</sup> But for Lucretius such declarations are true but trivial. It is not that the person will go home, but his wife and children won't be there. The family man will not see his family any more, and although that statement can describe a real

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<sup>37</sup> The author, whoever it was, of the pseudo-Platonic *Axiochus* makes use of imaginary characters from mythology to make the same point as I do here (369c).

<sup>38</sup> This is where irony does enter the picture: Lucretius doesn't doubt that such a life is good, but he does scorn the idea that the dead person somehow suffers from the lack of this life.

misery, in this case it is just an example of the general point that he will not do anything.

Once these two explanations are laid out, a deprivational account of the harm of death loses much of its intuitive force. It sounds so reasonable – so right – to say that the dead lose, lack, or are deprived of all the goods of life. But we must avoid the two errors. First, we must not project another self beyond death who would be harmed by such a lack. Secondly, we must not assume that every negative statement of the form ‘X does not have (or, soon will not have) this or that’ expresses a genuine harm. It may be true that the person does not have the item, and the item may be a real good, but the negative statement is, in the case of a dead person, not significant. Of course the dead person does not have the item: he doesn’t have anything. But unless we have already made the first error, this general statement will not trouble us. Thus, if we avoid the two errors the deprivation account will become less compelling.

There is, however, another way of viewing being dead as a deprivation, not of present goods but rather of future, possible or potential goods. Obviously this view of being dead is structurally similar to the last: in both cases being dead is taken to be a deprivation or a loss of some kind. And in both cases, being dead is allegedly bad or harmful because it is such a deprivation or loss. But just as obviously the two views are importantly different; they offer quite distinct accounts of the content of the deprivation or loss. In the one case, we lose or are deprived of what we have now, but

in the other we lose or are deprived of goods that we may have achieved.<sup>39</sup> My response to this second type of deprivation will be parallel to my previous response.

Thomas Nagel provides a good introduction to this fear. He suggests that death be taken as 'an evil that depends on a contrast between the reality and the possible alternatives' (6), and he continues:

A man is the subject of good and evil as much because he has hopes which may or may not be realized, or possibilities which may or may not be realized, as because of his capacity to suffer and enjoy. If death is an evil, it must be accounted for in these terms (6-7).

Even more strongly, he writes:

Given an identifiable individual, countless possibilities for his continued existence are imaginable, and we can clearly conceive of what it would be for him to go on existing indefinitely. However inevitable it is that this will not come about, its possibility is still that of the continuation of a good for him, if life is the good that we take it to be (8).

The idea here is not hard to understand. When a person is alive, she appears to have many potential goods before her in addition to whatever goods she actually possesses. She might advance in her career, meet new friends, watch her children grow up, and so forth. When she dies, her life ends and all of these possibilities go unfulfilled. What Nagel and others claim is that death harms us insofar as it robs or deprives us of these possible goods.

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<sup>39</sup> Phillip Mitsis has suggested to me that there may be some things, e.g. long term projects, that straddle this divide. I do not wish to deny that there may be such things, but I will focus on the cases that fall more clearly on one side or the other.

A number of contemporary authors have explained this claim in terms of possible worlds.<sup>40</sup> Roughly put, these authors argue that when we say, 'Death deprives us of possible goods' we mean that for some person P, there is some possible world W, such that P lives longer in W than he does in the actual world and P has more goods in that world than he does in the actual world. Since contemporary philosophers can provide a very rich account of potentials in terms of possible worlds, this way of setting up the problem is attractive. Using possible worlds these philosophers can formalize and perhaps even quantify how death harms us by depriving us of future goods.

I believe, however, that the problem is better studied without the apparatus of possible worlds. First of all, the possible worlds theory, in its contemporary form, is utterly alien to Epicurean philosophy. Thus, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to apply Epicurean arguments to the deprivation thesis in this form. Secondly, the possible worlds machinery adds nothing essential to the original, informal complaint. The core of the complaint is well-represented by Thomas Nagel's common-sense version which I offered above. Since the Epicureans have arguments that apply directly to the Nagel-style complaint, it seems best to treat the problem in this version and to leave aside the possible worlds formulations.

Lucretius considers this fear by reflecting on the life of symposiasts. Such people pass their lives drinking and feasting, and they make many heart-felt proclamations about the brevity of it all: 'brevis hic est fructus homullis;/iam fuerit neque post umquam revocare licebit' [brief is this

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<sup>40</sup> See Jeff McMahan and Fred Feldman in *MoD*. Also see Walter Glannon 'Epicurus and Death' *Monist* 76 (1993), 222-234.

enjoyment for (we) poor men – soon it will be gone nor will it ever be possible to call it back] (914-915). Apparently, these men justify their current excesses by reference to their future death. Life is short, but death is eternal. Since we will forever be without the goods that we might have had, we should grab as much as we can get now. These symposiasts are like people in a panic before a hurricane: when the storm hits, they will be unable to acquire food and other necessities, so they scramble to stockpile now.<sup>41</sup>

By this point Lucretius can be brief and so can I. He simply repeats his previous claim that once the revelers are dead, they will be entirely gone (919). If they grasped this, they would also see that they will not suffer from hunger or thirst when they are dead. They will not miss out on an infinite number of feasts that they could have enjoyed. They will not miss out on anything since that would require that they exist, and they will not exist.

This argument is obviously parallel to the previous one, and it relies on a similar paradox. In both cases, Lucretius suggests that there is no time at which the loss occurs. We cannot say that the loss takes place when we are alive, because death causes the loss and death has yet to happen. But neither can we say that the loss takes place once we are dead since once we have died, we cease to exist and there can be no loss without an existent subject. The paradox is that we either have a subject with no loss (yet), or we have a loss with no subject (anymore). Since either option is intolerable, we are forced to admit that there is no such loss. Whether we worry about the loss of what we have or the loss of what we might have,

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Philodemus *EF* XVII.



the fear is misplaced. The destruction of our souls amounts to our non-existence, but non-existence does not harm us. It makes harm impossible.

## V

In addition to his main argument, Lucretius offers two analogies in support of his case. Lucretius compares being dead to sleep and to the time before we existed. Since the comparison of death to sleep is common and straightforward, I will address it first and more briefly. The analogy of being dead to past non-existence is, although not unique to Lucretius,<sup>42</sup> especially associated with him, and its significance is less clear than that of the sleep analogy. After giving an interpretation of this second comparison, I will try to show why a recent interpretation of it fails both as exegesis of Lucretius and on philosophical grounds.

The purpose of both analogies is to cure a peculiar anxiety. I have already discussed the common imaginative error that leads people to fear for themselves, notwithstanding that they think that they will no longer exist in the fearful scenario. But even if people overcome this problem, there is another psychological hurdle to consider. In one sense, the very thought of one's death seems paradoxical or incoherent. Grant that the soul and the person perish at death: when a person dies that person ceases to exist. We want to evaluate what this means for us, whether it will be good or bad for us, whether the fear that is so common is reasonable. But the most obvious way to pose the question appears to be a contradiction:

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<sup>42</sup> See, e.g. Cicero *TD* I 13, 'ita, qui nondum nati sunt, miseri iam sunt, quia non sunt, et nos, si post mortem miseri futuri sumus, miseri fuimus ante quam nati.' Stephen Rosenbaum offers a list of parallels in 'The Symmetry Argument: Lucretius Against the Fear of Death' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 50 (1989), 354 n. 5.

How will it be for me, when there is no me? The very question seems incoherent, and this incoherence produces a kind of intellectual vertigo, a feeling which is itself troubling. Hence the difficulty in examining one's own demise can produce anxiety. Lucretius introduces the two analogies in order to ease this difficulty and to remove the attendant anxiety. The analogies are meant to help us into the thought of our non-existence.<sup>43</sup>

This psychological hurdle is at least partly responsible, I believe, for the common assertion that death is inescapably mysterious or unknowable. I say 'in part' because this assertion is ambiguous and, perhaps, overdetermined. On the one hand, it often merely means that no one can really know whether death leads to non-existence or to post-mortem survival of some sort. And often, no doubt, the ground for this belief is the facile and uninteresting idea that only direct experience can produce knowledge: none of us has, yet, experienced death, and thus, the argument goes, knowledge of death is out of our reach. But there is another, more serious, idea that 'death is mysterious' can express. The idea is that death, *qua* non-existence, is something we cannot get at because we cannot make sense of what it is *for us* not to exist. This is the problem that we started with. On this interpretation, there is at least something to be said for the claim that death is mysterious – although it is still necessary to consider the issue carefully before deciding whether death *is* hopelessly mysterious. What I am claiming is that, in part, the sense of mystery that attaches to death just is the intellectual vertigo which I mentioned above.

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<sup>43</sup> Two good, brief considerations of the problems associated with imagining one's own death are Paul Edwards 'My Death' *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), 416-419 and Roger Scruton *Modern Philosophy* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 310-316.

It is important that Lucretius deal with the claim that death is simply mysterious or unknowable since the claim can cause anxiety and lead to confusion. Remember that the question that apparently cannot be answered is, 'How will it be for me, when there is no me?' This question matters in a way that, say, 'What is the square circle like?' does not. The idea of a square circle is, apparently, one we cannot entertain insofar as it is a flat and obvious contradiction. But nothing hangs on our having such an idea. The case of death, however, is not like this. We will all die, and that's a fact. And if Lucretius is correct and death amounts to non-existence, then we need an answer to the question of how non-existence will be for us. Our happiness seems to hang in the balance.

As a result, the intellectual vertigo is both intrinsically unsettling and persistent. The mind seems to recoil from the thought of non-existence or to push the idea away; combine this with the urgency of the question, and the result can be serious anxiety. By an easy confusion this anxiety shifts from the question concerning our non-existence to what the question is about, namely non-existence itself. The psychological hurdle itself produces anxiety about being dead. Lucretius thus has overabundant reason to treat the psychological obstacle. His goal is to help us achieve lack of anxiety as far as possible, so he would automatically be concerned with the intellectual vertigo. Moreover, since the vertigo spreads anxiety over onto our idea of death, it only reinforces the common anxiety about death. Again, Lucretius obviously wants to treat that anxiety, so he will want to help us through the aporia.

The connection of death and sleep is quite natural and, historically, quite common. In poetry, Homer immortalizes the connection in the famous description of the twins, Sleep and Death, taking away the body of Sarpedon for burial (*Iliad* 16.677 ff., esp. 681-683). In philosophy, Socrates uses the analogy when he argues against a negative view of death (*Apology* 40d-e4).<sup>44</sup> The naturalness of the analogy is very likely a result of two ideas: first, death is often taken as a (final) rest from the toils of life,<sup>45</sup> and, second, deep, dreamless sleep is for us an experiential blank, and this is similar to the conception of death as non-existence. Lucretius uses both of these ideas in his argument, although his primary focus is the second.

The first analogy appears in the two arguments about deprivation (904-911, 919-930). In the first case, Lucretius puts the analogy in the mouth of an imagined mourner. Wracked with misery, a mourner complains that he is left to eternal grief, but that the deceased is asleep in death and free from all cares – *tu quidem ut es leto sopitus, sic eris aevi/quod superest cunctis privatu' doloribus aegris* (904-905).<sup>46</sup> Lucretius pointedly asks why eternal grief is called for if the deceased is at rest and free from troubles. The rhetorical effect of putting the analogy in the mouth of the mourner is to remind readers that they already have a way of understanding death – it is like sleep – and, moreover, that on this picture death is essentially innocuous. In the second case, Lucretius uses the analogy *in propria persona*. He chastises symposiasts and he reminds

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<sup>44</sup> For inscriptional evidence, see Richmond Lattimore *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), 82-83 & 164-165.

<sup>45</sup> It may be that in this case I have got cause and effect backwards. That is, we may take death to be a rest from toils because we antecedently take it to be like sleep. I don't have particularly strong intuitions one way or the other, and I wouldn't press the point.

<sup>46</sup> There is a sharp insight here: when we mourn, we are often bitter and resentful of the person whose loss we lament.

them that death will not leave them hungry and thirsty (919-930). Instead it will be like a deep, dreamless sleep. Since we already know that such a sleep is untroubled and without needs, the image should help us to conceive of death without anxiety.

I have mentioned twice that Lucretius compares death specifically to deep or dreamless sleep, and the qualification is not idle. Lucretius wants us to think of sleep, insofar as it is an experiential blank. But when a person is just dozing, or when a person is dreaming, he can go through all sorts of emotional and psychological states. In addition, during dreams the mind is aware of and responsive to certain bodily needs. In book IV, Lucretius explicitly discusses such phenomena as a thirsty man dreaming of water (IV 962-1036, esp. 1024-1036). Lucretius does not mean, however, to compare sleep and death indiscriminately. In his second use of the analogy, he explicitly says, 'cum pariter mens et corpus sopita quiescunt', and this reference to the equal calm of mind *and* body makes it clear that Lucretius is thinking of deep, dreamless sleep. The qualification is crucial since without it the force of the analogy is blunted. Socrates makes this same qualification in his use of the analogy.<sup>47</sup>

There is another aspect of Socrates's use of the sleep analogy, however, that is importantly different from Lucretius's. Socrates not only uses the analogy to argue that death is not bad, he actually urges his audience to compare the value of a night of dreamless sleep with that of other days and nights. He claims that even the King of Persia would find few days or nights preferable to a peaceful night of deep sleep (40d-e).

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<sup>47</sup> He refers to ὕπνος ἐπειδὴν τις καθεύδων μὴδ' ὄναρ μὴδὲν ὀρᾶ (40d1), and he repeats the qualification at 40d3-4.

Lucretius, on the other hand, does not suggest that the state of sleep is an actual good. He only points out that it is not bad.

Socrates's additional claim might be a development of the picture of sleep, and by analogy death, as a refuge from troubles. If life is inherently troublesome, then sleep will always be a relief. Such a claim, however, strikes me as gilding the lily, and Lucretius is wise to avoid it. Critics often say that if one does not hate death, then it is impossible to love life. I doubt that this is true, but Socrates plays into this objection by claiming that sleep, and by analogy death, is better than most of life. It is natural for Lucretius to steer clear of such a claim since Epicurus explicitly rebukes those who praise death no less than those who fear it (*EpM* 126-127). For the Epicurean, being dead, and by a reverse analogy being asleep, is not bad *or* good: it is nothing to us.

It should be clear how the analogy of sleep can help Lucretius address the psychological hurdle that his readers may face. The problem was to come up with a way to answer the question, 'How would non-existence be for us?' Although sleep, even quite deep, dreamless sleep, is not quite non-existence, it is a state which seems to have no positive features or character; it is difficult to say anything positive about it.<sup>48</sup> But what we can say, and this is where the analogy serves Lucretius's needs, is that it does not appear bad or harmful or disturbing to us. We willingly undergo it every night, and nothing about sleep gives any reason for worry

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<sup>48</sup> Throughout this section when I talk of 'positive' vs. 'negative' features or character or descriptions, I do not mean 'good' vs. 'bad.' The distinction I mean to draw is that between, e.g., saying of someone, 'He's 6 feet,' and saying, 'He's certainly not short.' In the first case, the description is positive, but in the second it is merely negative.

or fear. If non-existence is like this, then it seems that it too will not be bad or harmful or disturbing for us.

One potential objection to the comparison is that in the case of sleep, unlike the case of death, we wake up. This is indeed a difference between sleep and non-existence, but it is not a relevant one. Lucretius points out that the *state* of deep sleep is like that of non-existence. This objection does not show that being dead and being asleep differ as states, but only that they have different lengths and positions in relation to a person's life.

The objection would count against Lucretius if people normally found deep sleep to be a harm or evil, but they took comfort in the thought that they would wake up in the morning. But that is clearly not the case. Most people find the state of deep sleep to be essentially neutral and sometimes even beneficial. If people fear sleep, it is often because they fear not waking up, i.e. death. But what they fear then is precisely not the state of being asleep, but the state of being dead. Thus, Lucretius does make a fair comparison, even if being awake (normally) follows being asleep.

Lucretius also invites his readers to reflect on being dead by considering the time before they were born.<sup>49</sup> He refers to the Punic wars, before any of his readers were alive, and he argues that they felt no pain, and in general suffered no harm, during these wars.<sup>50</sup> And since the time after they die is, in all relevant aspects, the same for them as their previous non-existence, that time too will not be bad for them (832-842). In the same

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<sup>49</sup> Although I have avoided the common locution 'pre-natal non-existence', I have allowed myself occasionally to refer to 'the time before birth'. It is an easy way of talking, but I do not mean to imply any position, for myself or for the Epicureans, concerning the personhood of unborn fetuses. I have more than enough to deal with, and I will entirely avoid the questions of abortion, miscarriage, etc.

<sup>50</sup> For a similar use of historical examples, cf. *Axiochus* 365d7-365e2.

vein, he later (972-977) describes the time before life as a mirror image of the time after death, and he concludes (976-977):

numquid ibi horribile apparet, num triste videtur  
quicquam, non omni somno securius exstat?

Surely nothing awful appears there? Nothing seems miserable, does it? Doesn't it emerge (as something) more peaceful than any sleep?<sup>51</sup>

The comparison should help readers to see that there is nothing awful about non-existence after death, since there was nothing awful about past non-existence.

The claim that death is like a mirror-image of the time before life may be a problem. Lucretius can use the word 'mirror-image' because the comparison is so close, but this extreme similarity may actually work against him. The two terms of the comparison – past non-existence and future non-existence – are so similar that it is not clear that the former can shed any light on the latter. After all, if someone tries to conjure up how it was for him before he was born, no real picture seems to come forth.<sup>52</sup> This suggests that a person's past non-existence creates the same, or a similar, psychic hurdle as the time after death. But if this is the case, then how can the analogy help?

First, there is one important difference between the two cases: their temporal location. For a living person, one case is obviously in the past and one in the future. And this fact is not insignificant. Since past non-existence is already behind us, so to speak, we can make *some* evaluation

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<sup>51</sup> Note that in this last question, Lucretius actually combines the two analogies.

<sup>52</sup> As Kenney points out (221) this is the paradox of calling past non-existence a 'speculum' of our deaths. The image in the face of the mirror is nothing, and we see a blank, which is what past and future non-existence really are.



of it, even if we can't give it a positive description. A living person has reason to suppose that past non-existence was not bad since he presumably has no memories of it being bad nor any psychic or physical effects from that time.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the temporal location of past non-existence makes it possible to get at least some handle on it.

Secondly, the negative quality of the analogy is not accidental nor contrary to Lucretius's purpose. I described the original problem as an inability to answer the question, 'How will being dead be for us?'; but it is now possible to distinguish two ways that the question could be meant.

- (a) What positive elaboration or description is there for our being dead?
- (b) What can we say about our being dead?

It turns out that the answer to (a) is 'Nothing.' Death is not anyway for us, and thus there is no positive description to give it. But in answer to (b), Lucretius argues that the answer is, 'It won't be bad for us.' And ultimately, this is his goal. He wants to show that non-existence is not bad in order to rid us of a fear that is, in his opinion, baseless. He uses the analogy to show that this is so.

The comparison of being dead and past non-existence does, therefore, add to Lucretius's case, even if its contribution is primarily negative. Just as the sleep analogy, past non-existence suggests that there is nothing intrinsically bad about non-existence. Being dead has no positive features, and, as I pointed out, this makes it difficult to evaluate. This difficulty may even cause anxiety. But the comparison to past non-existence can help to overcome the difficulty and relieve the anxiety. It

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<sup>53</sup> Cicero makes this same point, 'ego autem non commemini, ante sum natus, me miserum; tu si meliore memoria es, velim scire, ecquid de te recordere' (TD I 13).

reveals that non-existence is not intrinsically bad; and this is a relief, even if it is not the fuller answer that we may have wanted.

Up to this point, I have taken this second analogy as part of Lucretius's case that being dead is not bad; but other scholars have construed the analogy in a very different way. They believe that Lucretius argues directly against the fear of being dead by means of the analogy. The argument is supposed to be that we do not fear past non-existence and thus by parity we should not fear our future non-existence, since they are alike in all relevant aspects. I believe, however, that Lucretius does not use the analogy in this manner and, moreover, that this interpretation of the analogy produces an exceedingly poor argument.

First of all, then, Lucretius does not make such an argument unambiguously. This is generally agreed, but the point is worth demonstrating briefly. As David Furley argues, the first example of the analogy (832-842) never refers to our current attitudes; these lines refer to our past experiences, and they claim that during our past non-existence we suffered no harms.<sup>54</sup> This is consistent with the interpretation that Lucretius uses the analogy to argue that death is not bad, but it does not fit the other interpretation. On the other view, the main point of the analogy is to show that we do not now fear *past* non-existence, and thus (*sic*) we should not now fear *future* non-existence. If Lucretius did mean to argue in this manner, then he would obviously want to mention our present

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<sup>54</sup> David Furley 'Nothing to us?', in *The Norms of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, pages 75-91) at pages 76-78. See also Richard Sorabji *Time, Creation, and the Continuum* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 177 and Stephen Rosenbaum 'The Symmetry Argument: Lucretius Against the Fear of Death' 358-359.

emotional attitude towards past non-existence. In the first use of the analogy, at least, he simply does not do so.

The best hope, therefore, for the view under consideration, is to focus on the second use of the analogy. Phillip Mitsis takes this line, as does Richard Sorabji (although Sorabji is more hesitant on the matter).<sup>55</sup> I think that they are wrong to take these lines this way, but at least in this case the matter is ambiguous. Lucretius writes,

respice item quam nil ad nos anteacta vetustas  
temporis aeterni fuerit quam nascimur ante:  
hoc igitur speculum nobis natura futuri  
temporis exponit post mortem denique nostram;  
numquid ibi horribile apparet, num triste videtur  
quicquam, non omni somno securius exstat? (972-977).<sup>56</sup>

Neither Mitsis nor Sorabji explains why these lines seem different than the earlier ones, but two points seem most salient to me: the use of the perfect tense, 'fuerit', in line 972, and the rhetorical questions in the last two lines.

The way one takes the perfect 'fuerit' is closely connected to how one understands the passage's force. Mitsis, e.g., takes the perfect as a present perfect, and he translates, 'the immense expanse of past time...*has been* nothing to us' (305). This translation brings the matter forward in time; it suggests that up until now we have had no negative feelings about past non-existence. But the perfect in Latin also serves as the simple past, and I would translate the lines, 'the immense expanse of past time *was* nothing to us.' On this translation, the point of the lines is identical to that of lines 832, where Lucretius also uses the perfect but obviously for the simple past,

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<sup>55</sup> Phillip Mitsis 'Death and the Duration of Life,' in *Proceedings of The Boston Area In Ancient Philosophy* (Volume IV, 1988), 303-322, at pages 307-307, and Sorabji page 176.

<sup>56</sup> I do not translate these lines since I don't want to prejudge the issue under discussion.

'et velut anteacto nil tempore *sensimus* aegri.'<sup>57</sup> I don't see how 'sensimus' could be taken as a present perfect in this line.<sup>58</sup> This is not, of course, conclusive proof of my interpretation. For all I have said, Lucretius could use the same tense differently in the two analogies. But without some further reason to take 'fuerit' as a present perfect, I believe that the best Mitsis can do here is achieve a draw. The verb tense is ambiguous, and it cannot decide the matter.

The last two lines may seem to be better evidence, but they too are ambiguous. On the one hand, they may mean something like, 'Surely you don't (now) fear past non-existence?' But they could also mean, 'Surely you don't find past non-existence fearful?' These questions are obviously related, but they are not identical. The reason is that someone might take, say, torture to be fearful, but still not be (currently) afraid of torture, since he does not believe that he faces torture. The question of whether or not something is fearful is thus not identical to the question of whether or not someone has an occurrent fear. Normally, someone has an occurrent fear if he or she (1) takes something to be bad, and (2) believes that the something in question is going to happen. But to find something fearful, only the first condition is necessary. The lines may refer to fear, but they may also only refer to fearfulness.

In fact, in this case I am inclined to think that the second reading is more natural to the Latin. The use of 'horribile' and the verbs of appearing suggest to me that Lucretius invites us to consider whether a reaction of

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<sup>57</sup> The Cicero passage that I quoted earlier also contains a perfect in a passage that clearly does not refer to present attitudes, 'miseri fuimus ante quam nati' (I 13).

<sup>58</sup> The tense of the verb is the foundation of Furley's case that the reference is solely to the past (76), and Mitsis appears to agree about these lines (306).

fear is appropriate rather than the brute fact of what attitude we happen to have. I recognize, however, that such considerations may be subjective. It is sufficient for my purposes to say that these lines do not make an unambiguous reference to current attitudes.

There are also two features of the lines that are troublesome for the interpretation that I am challenging. First of all, if Mitsis is right, then Lucretius switches from one use of the analogy to another without any indication that he is doing so. Even worse, after he switches without warning, Lucretius expresses himself ambiguously. I find this hard to accept.<sup>59</sup> Secondly, the common interpretation makes for a very odd reading of the mirror metaphor. Lucretius says that when we look in the mirror, we see 'hoc...speculum' (974), and the demonstrative appears to point backwards to lines 972-973.<sup>60</sup> If the symmetry view is correct, those lines refer to our current attitudes, and thus what we see in the mirror are those, our current feelings. But this seems odd; surely it is more natural to take the image in the mirror to be our past non-existence itself and not our current attitudes towards it.

In sum, I would say that the texts are slightly tilted towards my interpretation. The first use of the analogy clearly refers to whether past non-existence harmed us, not whether we fear it now, and the second use does not clearly shift focus to our current attitudes, although it may contain ambiguous references to such attitudes. Even though the textual

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<sup>59</sup> I suppose that some would say that he does not switch at all. He means to use the analogy directly to remove fear in both cases. If that were so, his first pass at the argument would be a glaring example of a poorly expressed argument. I find this consideration a powerful reason to deny the claim that the first analogy also goes directly at fear.

<sup>60</sup> I take 'speculum', with Kenney, to mean 'mirror-image.' This meaning is rare, but appropriate to the context.

evidence is thus on my side, it is nevertheless worth considering the philosophical merits of the so-called symmetry argument, since it has been very influential.

In order to demonstrate what is wrong with such an argument, I will use Stephen Rosenbaum's version.<sup>61</sup> His formulation is the most explicit and clearly stated that I know, and thus it is likely to make the virtues and vices of the argument most obvious. He writes (359-360):

- (1) No one fears the time before one existed.
- (2) The time before one existed is relevantly like one's future non-existence (in that one cannot be affected negatively in either period). (This is 'the symmetry thesis').
- (3) It is reasonable for one to fear something relevantly like what one does not fear only if one justifiably believes that the two things are relevantly different.
- (4) No one justifiably believes that one's future nonexistence is relevantly different from one's past nonexistence.  
THEREFORE, it is not reasonable now for one to fear one's future nonexistence, one's being dead, one's death.<sup>62</sup>

I believe that the first and third premises are seriously flawed.<sup>63</sup> The problems are related, and these premises not only weaken the argument, but they are also inappropriate to an Epicurean treatment of emotions.

The first premise is ambiguous between a strong and a weak reading. The ambiguity lies in the use of the indicative claim that people do not fear their past non-existence. On the weak reading no one fears the time before one existed either because they never consider the matter or because they don't think that the question arises, even if they do consider it. So I might

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61 'The Symmetry Argument: Lucretius Against the Fear of Death' (359-360).

62 All emphases and parentheses are Rosenbaum's.

63 Rosenbaum also makes a heroic understatement when he writes, of premise four, 'This premise would obviously be difficult to justify' (360).

not fear torture either because I never consider it or because I consider it, but I don't think that torture is a real issue for me. In the latter case, we would often find it appropriate to say, 'I don't fear torture (right now), but I find it fearful.' On the strong reading, no one fears the time before one existed in spite of the fact that they do consider the matter and do think the question arises for them. So for example, I might not fear the long term effects of coffee in spite of the fact that I have considered the matter and I do think that the question arises for me since I drink lots of coffee.

The 'question of whether something arises' is vague, perhaps necessarily so, but its general force should be clear enough. There are two basic ways that the question of something can fail to arise. First, an agent may simply never think of the matter; this may happen for different reasons – sometimes a person's failure to think of a matter will seem reasonable and other times not. For example, it would be odd, and perhaps actually troubling, if a pilot literally never considered the chance of a crash. On the other hand, it seems perfectly appropriate that, as I assume, most New Yorkers never consider the idea that a tank might run them over at the corner of West 4th Street and 6th Avenue. Secondly, a person might think of something, but not find it to be a real or significant possibility. Again, even after I suggest the tank example, few, if any, New Yorkers are going to consider this a real or significant issue for them. So, in general, for a question of something's fearfulness to arise, a person must consider the matter and take it to be a real or significant possibility.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> This paragraph is an adaptation of a point from Aristotle's analysis of fear, *Rhet* 1382a20-1383a12. He suggests that a person who is afraid must take the object of fear to be 'near', and when he spells this out, it is clear that he uses 'near' to refer both to spatial and to temporal features. I have obviously expanded the point somewhat, and I do not mean to imply that I have Aristotle on my side in this matter.

The weak reading of the first premise is more plausible and intuitive. Probably most people never consider their past non-existence. Rosenbaum hints at this himself by dwelling on the novelty of the symmetry argument.<sup>65</sup> Even after a person does take thought of past non-existence, he is unlikely to consider it a real or significant possibility.<sup>66</sup> Thus it seems that when we say that no one fears past non-existence, we mean merely that no one fears it because no one considers it or takes it seriously.

But the argument needs the strong version of the premise in order to be compelling. If I don't fear something only because I never think about it or because I don't think that it is a real possibility, then it seems unreasonable to argue that I should consider this lack of fear to be especially significant. Imagine a person in Germany who faces the prospect of torture. It would be strange to argue that (1) the person does not fear the same torture in France, (2) the difference in place is not a relevant difference, and so forth. Even if the person agrees that the difference in place is not relevant to the evaluation of the two tortures, it is nevertheless the case that the only reason the person does not fear the French torture is that he does not think of it or take it as a real possibility. It would be silly to let a lack of fear in the weak sense affect a fear which is present in the strong sense.

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<sup>65</sup> He calls the argument 'a novel contribution' (359), 'the ingenious, novel contribution to Epicurean thanatology' (371), and 'a uniquely important argument against the reasonability of fearing death' (371 n.47). He also argues, in an odd circle, that we should not take the symmetry argument to rely on claims that death isn't bad, precisely because we would rob ourselves of this unique and novel argument. The point is that if the symmetry argument needs the other claim, it would not be novel, but it is (or should be?) novel, and thus it does not need the other claim (371).

<sup>66</sup> The reason for this, I believe, is that whatever our previous non-existence was like, it is in the past. Thus, it is not an appropriate object of fear.



The third premise is essentially a principle of rationality concerning fears, but it is not well formed. In order to get a handle on what is wrong with the principle, I suggest a better principle is this:

For any two closely similar<sup>67</sup> situations *x* and *y*, it is reasonable to fear *x* but not *y*, or to fear *y* but not *x*, only if one justifiably believes that there is a relevant difference between *x* and *y*.

What Rosenbaum's principle suggests, but mine does not, is that if (a) you have two situations, (b) you fear one but not the other, (c) you can't find a relevant difference between them, then (d) you should *eo ipso* know which emotional attitude to change. Indeed, Rosenbaum's formulation seems to imply that in all such cases one should bring the conflict into line by giving up the fear which is present. This, however, is a very implausible idea. Why should we assume that in all such cases the presence of fear is wrong rather than the absence of fear?

My premise makes the move to (d) a straight non-sequitur, which seems more reasonable. After all, the mere presence of a conflict in attitudes should not without further ado impel a person to resolve the conflict one way rather than another. We need to bring in considerations of which attitude is better justified or more reasonable or what have you. This is the basic procedure for conflicts of belief, and nothing suggests that it should be otherwise in the case of emotional attitudes, such as fear.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> It would no doubt take an enormous amount of work to specify adequately how close is close enough. But since I am not going to actually use this principle, I will forego this difficulty.

<sup>68</sup> Both Rosenbaum and Mistis appear to recognize this problem after a fashion, since they both worry that the symmetry argument might backfire and cause people to fear past non-existence rather than cure them of the fear of death. But neither seems to recognize the severity of the issue.

The general problem with the symmetry argument is that it makes too much out of what people happen not to fear. In the case of the first premise, Rosenbaum assumes that it is significant that we do not fear previous non-existence. It seems more likely, however, that this lack of fear does not show very much about our attitudes. The reason for this is precisely that we have no attitude to past non-existence. This is of course consistent with the claim that we don't fear past non-existence, but the claim is no longer worth much. The weakness of the third premise is similar, but on a larger scale. This premise also assumes that the fears which we do not have are greatly significant. But the premise suggests, in addition, that if a person fears only one of two relevantly similar situations, it is always correct to correct the conflict by losing the fear that is present. To do so, however, would be to give much too much weight to the fears we do not have.

To put the problem another way, Rosenbaum's argument does not pay enough attention to the fact that people can fear or not fear things for no good reason, or for all the wrong reasons. There is no easy move from what we do fear, or what we don't fear, to what we should fear, or what we should not fear. It seems safest to admit that the mere fact that someone does or does not have a fear cannot show that he should or should not have that fear. In order to determine whether a person should have a fear, we need to determine a number of things. First and foremost, it is necessary to determine whether the evaluation that the fear represents is true. A person who is reasonably afraid of  $x$  takes  $x$  to be bad or harmful for him. So one good way to determine whether we should fear something is to determine whether it is bad for us.

This is in fact exactly what Epicurus suggests. During his treatment of death, in the *Letter to Menoecus*, he claims that a fear of what will not be harmful is an empty fear (125). Now obviously sometimes a person fears something that will not harm him because he believes that it will harm him. And such a belief can be, depending on the circumstances, justified. There are many ways that a person could be wrong, but understandably and reasonably wrong; prominent among such reasons is that a person might have too much faith in the attitudes of those around him. It is for this reason that Epicurus believes that it is so important to discover the truth about what is good and bad for us, so that we do not make such mistakes – justifiable or otherwise. We cannot take for granted that the attitudes that we start with, when we begin to consider them, are correct. The same goes for the attitudes that we don't have.<sup>69</sup>

But this means that there is a natural order to a course of Epicurean emotional therapy. The Epicureans believed that they had discovered what was truly good and bad for humans. On the basis of these discoveries they were in a position to judge what emotional attitudes were appropriate to their objects and what attitudes were wrong about their objects. Consider the fear of death: this emotion relies on a negative evaluation of death. But the Epicureans believed that death was not bad. Thus the fear is empty, and it should be given up. But note, and this is the crucial point, when they set out to convince people of this, the therapy naturally starts from the claim that death is not bad. Even if some people did not fear death, this would not be enough to show that others should not. The

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<sup>69</sup> Think of, e.g., pleasure. According to Epicurus many people are missing the appropriate positive attitudes towards pleasure, but this does not indicate to Epicurus that pleasure is not good.

Epicureans need to show first of all why it is *correct* not to fear death. For this reason, the evaluative claim, that death is not bad, is necessarily prior to the therapeutic suggestion, that we should not fear death. This order of operations shows that the symmetry argument, as Rosenbaum presents it, is alien to the spirit of Epicurean emotional treatment.

Rosenbaum's symmetry argument attempts to move directly from the attitudes that people have to the attitudes that they should have, but this is not Epicurean practice and it is an unsound method. The Epicureans believed that there was no such high road since they were all too aware of just how corrupt and wrong common attitudes might be. The fear of death is itself an obvious example: almost everyone has the fear, but they should not since death is not bad for them. Moreover, the Epicureans were right to avoid such a high road. People can have or not have an emotion for all the wrong reasons, or for no reason at all. If we want to determine what attitudes we should have, we cannot blindly rely on the attitudes that we do have – nor on the attitudes that we do not have.

One final way that Rosenbaum might try to block my conclusion is the following. The ethical goal of the Epicureans included ἀταραξία, or freedom from mental anxiety. Fear is a form of ταραχή, or mental anxiety. Therefore, the Epicureans do have a reason always to correct conflicts by removing the fears that are present, namely they think that we should always, in whatever circumstances, abolish our fears. If this argument is correct, then we need never consider the merits of a fear: fear is painful, we don't want pain, so we should always give up fears. This strikes me as a case where the conclusion is a *reductio* of the very argument that produces it. Thankfully, neither the reasoning nor the conclusion is Epicurean.

First of all, there is good reason to believe that the conclusion is not Epicurean in spirit. The Epicureans are always concerned to show that our fears are *false*. This would be irrelevant, however, if they thought that the mere fact that fear was painful was sufficient to show that we should never be afraid. There would be no reason to challenge the correctness of a fear, if its painfulness damned it automatically. Instead of saying that we should not fear, e.g. Hades, because the fear is false, they would simply point out that the fear is distressing. Obviously, however, the Epicureans take great pains to show that this fear and others like it are *wrong* and not merely painful. Already we have a reason to doubt that they would eliminate a fear simply because it was disturbing, without any consideration for the truth of the matter.

Moreover, we have two cases where Epicureans clearly say that a thing is not to be avoided automatically, just because it is painful. In the first case, Epicurus goes out of his way to distinguish between, first, whether something is pleasurable or painful and, second, whether it should be chosen or avoided (*EpM* 129-130).<sup>70</sup> He explains that since overall pleasure is our goal, we sometimes should choose a pain in order to avoid greater pain or to acquire greater pleasure on the whole.<sup>71</sup> Second, and even closer to our case, Philodemus makes a similar point about anger. He argues that even though anger is intrinsically painful, it is not, therefore, always to be avoided (*De Ira* XXXVII). Since what Philodemus calls 'natural anger' is commensurate with its object and beneficial overall,

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. *TD* V 95, *De Fin* I 33.

<sup>71</sup> A standard example of this sort of thing is undergoing painful medical treatment in order to avoid a long, debilitating illness. Cf. Philodemus *EF* XVII (the fool) vs. XXIII (the Epicurean sage).

it is, in a sense, a good, even if, taken alone, it is painful.<sup>72</sup> A similar case could be made for what we can call, following Philodemus, 'natural fear.' A natural fear, that is, a fear of a truly impending harm, may be somewhat disturbing, but it is beneficial overall since it leads to the proper avoidance of a genuine threat.

To sum up, two of the premises of Rosenbaum's symmetry argument are deeply flawed, and the argument as a whole is in conflict with other Epicurean convictions. Thus, the argument is not very cogent in its own right, and it does not make sense in an Epicurean context. Since Lucretius does not clearly commit himself to the argument and, moreover, it is a bad argument, there is no reason to give it to him. It seems safest to stick to the standard interpretation, according to which Lucretius uses the symmetry argument to show that death is not bad rather than that we should not fear it. He did not make the second style of argument, and he is better off without it.

## VI

The four fears that I have considered may not appear very unified at first, but Lucretius has good reason to treat them together. First, although they have disparate objects, they all rely, to some extent, on the thought that death is the destruction of our souls. If the soul is the seat of our mental

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<sup>72</sup> A wrinkle here: since Philodemus is defending natural anger against another Epicurean, Nicasirates, we might think that *some* Epicureans did think that an emotion was to be avoided just because it was painful. The inference does not follow. Nicasirates rejects anger because he believes that it is painful and disturbing *overall* (XXXVIII 36-XXXIX 7); he thinks that it makes us blind and unreasonable. He and Philodemus agree that the question is not merely whether an emotion is painful but rather whether the emotion is harmful to our lives as a whole. This does not amount to the claim that something is bad and avoidable if it is painful at all.

life, then its destruction appears to cast us into some form of shadowy oblivion. Alternatively, if the soul is destroyed, then the body is all that is left, and concern naturally shifts there. Finally, if the soul's dissolution amounts to the person's end, then fear may arise over the loss of current or future goods. Even if this connection, however, appears too tenuous to unify the fears, Lucretius has another reason to group them together. They belong together because he can treat them all by means of the same argument. In this second sense, what unites these fears is not their origin, but rather their cure. Once a person sees that harm requires an existent subject, then each of these fears should fade away since in each case death removes the subject of the putative harm.

It also makes sense that he deals with the problem of conceiving one's own death here. The problem arises in relation to the thought that death is non-existence, and it is a kissing-cousin to the confusion that causes people to fear for their corpse. His treatment of the anxiety concerning the soul's destruction would be incomplete if he did nothing to help us overcome the vertigo produced by the paradox about non-existence. Hence, in the course of his arguments he offers the analogies of sleep and past non-existence as ways for his readers to get a better conception of what non-existence will mean for them.

CHAPTER FOUR  
THE DESTRUCTION OF THE SOUL AND NON-EXISTENCE:  
OBJECTIONS

I

Obviously, there is more to say. In the first place, Lucretius's entire case rests on one main argument. Since this argument has been the target of countless attacks, we need to consider at least some of these objections. Even if these objections are met, however, there remain criticisms which are fundamental, but somewhat distinct. Instead of arguing directly against the main argument, some critics have attempted to show that the Epicureans can only succeed by undermining their own goal. They offer us an invulnerable life, but only by emptying out of it much of what was worthwhile. In addition, others simply dig in their heels and insist on the most basic objection of all: death does harm us, and we know that so securely that no argument to the contrary will shake us of the conviction. In effect they argue that the conclusion of the Epicurean project is a *reductio* of the position as a whole, since any argument which proves that death is no harm *must* be wrong.

II

This section takes up four especially interesting or important objections to the main argument.<sup>1</sup> The first two, which are ancient, are fairly direct misunderstandings of the argument; I discuss them because I feel that the

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<sup>1</sup> Strictly speaking, the Aristotle bit is not a response to an Epicurean argument, since he predates Epicurus. Nevertheless, it addresses relevant issues, and other, later, authors often use Aristotle's considerations against Epicurean arguments.



mistakes that they make are easy to make and often repeated. The third response is a more complex and less obvious misunderstanding; again I discuss it because the mistake is common, but also because Epicurus anticipated this error and made a direct counter-response. Finally the fourth response attacks the correct target, but it can make headway only by revising or ignoring very basic beliefs about causality or by advancing a controversial deterministic thesis.

The first argument appears in Aristotle. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* (I 10-11), he considers Solon's dictum concerning happiness, namely that we must 'look to the end'. Aristotle suggests that Solon may have meant that one could safely call someone happy only after that person's death, since only then is the person beyond reach of harm. Aristotle tentatively proposes, however, that this may be wrong; perhaps there is good and evil for the dead. If this is correct, then Lucretius is wrong to think that nothing can harm the dead and his main argument is fatally flawed.

In order to explain his puzzling thought, Aristotle suggests an analogy. Perhaps the dead person can be harmed just as a person who doesn't perceive can suffer harm.<sup>2</sup> The idea is that a person can suffer harm without being aware of it, as, e.g., when a friend secretly betrays him or when a person dies without their loved ones' knowledge. In such cases, the people who are harmed, the person betrayed and the loved ones, are not aware of the harm, but many of us would still believe that they suffer harm – aware or not. If the analogy between these unperceived harms and harms after death can be made out, then premise three of Lucretius's

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<sup>2</sup> δοκεῖ γὰρ εἶναί τι τῷ τεθνεῶτι καὶ κακὸν καὶ ἀγαθόν, εἴπερ καὶ τῷ ζῶντι μὴ αἰσθανομένῳ δέ (1100a18-20).

argument appears to be false, and one can suffer harm when one does not exist. Before I answer this argument, I should discuss two reasons not to take this Aristotelian point as a criticism of the Epicurean position.

First, more obviously but less interestingly, Aristotle predates both Epicurus and Lucretius. Thus, this argument in the *NE* is not really a *response* to the Epicurean case at all. This is, strictly speaking, true, but on the other hand, later philosophers, e.g. Thomas Nagel and George Pitcher, have used the same analogy to attack the Epicurean position. Whatever its provenance, the analogy poses a threat to premise three; if it is necessary to be absolutely precise, we can call the Aristotelian discussion an anticipation rather than a response to the Epicurean argument. But this does not affect the philosophical question at issue.

The second point, however, is more serious: Aristotle's use of the analogy with unperceived harms is strongly qualified. Aristotle does not immediately assert that the dead can be harmed; he introduces this as a puzzle that faces his second interpretation of Solon's dictum. When he finally resolves the question of post-mortem harms and benefits, he asserts that they can occur, but that they have such a trivial effect that they do not alter happiness or unhappiness.<sup>3</sup> If you die happy, then you remain so, and if you die unhappy, you remain so. Aristotle preserves the intuition that it makes quite a difference whether harms occur before or after a person dies.

But if this is so, then Aristotle and Lucretius have no serious disagreement. Lucretius's ultimate goal is to show that being dead cannot

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<sup>3</sup> The good and evils are τοσοῦτόν γε καὶ τοιοῦτον ὥστε μὴ ποιεῖν εὐδαίμονας τοὺς μὴ ὄντας μηδὲ τοὺς ὄντας ἀφαιρεῖσθαι τὸ μακάριον (1101b3-5, and cf. 1101b5-9).

affect your *happiness*. Although he would disagree with Aristotle and deny that post-mortem events can affect a person at all, nevertheless Lucretius could be content with the admission that after death nothing will make a person who was happy unhappy. On this matter, Aristotle and Lucretius are, surprisingly, in agreement. Since this is the real, underlying issue, the remaining disagreement may appear to be unworthy of consideration.

But in fact it is still necessary to deal with Aristotle's limited objection and not to rest content with the larger harmony. Aristotle's claim that people can undergo harm or benefit after death, even if only to an infinitesimal degree, is a denial of premise three. As such, it can serve as an Archimedian point on which other critics could mount a more serious objection against Lucretius. One author has explicitly done just this. George Pitcher notices that Aristotle limits his claim, and so Pitcher argues that we should take Aristotle's idea and push it further – we should say that a happy person can become unhappy because of events which take place after his death.<sup>4</sup> Once we have admitted that the dead can be harmed, it becomes difficult to maintain that they cannot be harmed enough to affect their happiness. Therefore, it is important to respond to Aristotle's claim, even if *he* makes only limited use of it.

We can reveal the weakness in Aristotle's case if we focus on his analogy. Aristotle likens the post-mortem harms of non-existent subjects to the unperceived harms of existent subjects. In a sense, his argument is

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<sup>4</sup> 'The Misfortunes of the Dead' *MoD* 168, and cf. 163-164. I consider Pitcher's argument below.

aimed at the claim that what you don't know can't hurt you.<sup>5</sup> But his analogy loses its sting if we recall the distinction between hedonist and existence arguments. The hedonist argument claims that the dead cannot be harmed because only felt sensations can be bad and the dead feel nothing. But the argument from existence says, rather, that nothing can harm the dead because they do not exist and existence is a necessary condition of harm.

Aristotle's analogy with unperceived harms does weaken the sensation argument, but it does not touch the existence argument. Aristotle can point to cases where a person appears to be harmed even though he does not perceive the harm – either at all or as such. This makes trouble for the argument which stresses that there is no evil without perception. But Lucretius does without this claim, and he can respond to Aristotle's examples thus: Suppose I grant that those inexperienced events are real harms. Surely you must grant that those people *exist* at the time of the harm. Therefore the analogy does not clash with my claim that harm requires an existent subject.<sup>6</sup> Aristotle challenges the argument from sensation, but he gives us no reason to doubt the argument from existence.

The second objection comes from Plutarch, who attacks the first two premises of the main argument, namely that a person is a soul and body compound and that at death the soul, and thus the person, are destroyed. His complaint is not that these premises are false, although he does believe

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<sup>5</sup> Both Nagel *MoD* 64 and Pitcher *MoD* 165 believe that this claim underlies the belief that being dead is not harmful.

<sup>6</sup> See Nussbaum, *ToD* 'Mortal Immortals' 205 ff., for a similar criticism of Nagel's version of this argument.

that they are false, but rather that if they are true, they actually reinforce the fear of being dead. He argues that people will take no comfort in the knowledge that death is the physical breakdown of the person and the end of thought and sensation. In fact, says Plutarch, this is exactly what people fear.<sup>7</sup> Thus the Epicurean case, so far from being a relief from fear, actually amounts to a proof that the common anxiety is correct.<sup>8</sup> When put this way, Plutarch's objection has a superficial appeal. If someone says, 'I am afraid that being dead is non-existence,' and I respond, 'Don't be afraid; death is non-existence,' then I have done nothing to treat this person's fear.

Nevertheless, Plutarch's argument is a gross and uncharitable confusion. Lucretius does not merely inform us that death is non-existence; he also explains that non-existence is not the sort of thing that could be bad for us. Premise three, the existence requirement, claims that nothing can harm a person unless the person exists at the time of the harm. Thus, once a person is dead and does not exist, nothing can harm him – least of all non-existence itself. To revert to the imagined dialogue from above, Lucretius does not merely parrot the original fear; instead he offers a reason to give up the fear. After the person states his fear of death, Lucretius replies, 'Existence is a precondition of harm. Therefore, if you believe that death is non-existence, you should not fear death since it cannot harm you.' Plutarch's objection has no force since he has tendentiously underdescribed the Epicurean argument.

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<sup>7</sup> *Non posse* 1104c.

<sup>8</sup> *Non posse* 1105a 'τὸ γὰρ "ἀναισθητεῖν τὸ διαλυθὲν καὶ μηδὲν εἶναι πρὸς ἡμᾶς τὸ ἀναισθητοῦν" οὐκ ἀναιρεῖ τὸ τοῦ θανάτου δέος ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ἀπόδειξιν αὐτοῦ προστίθησιν.'

A more interesting challenge is that of Harry Silverstein. In a complex and wide-ranging paper,<sup>9</sup> Silverstein attempts to defend the position that death has a negative value for us, even though he agrees that it does not actually cause us any harm (109-110). He believes that death can have negative value for us, even without being a cause of harm, because 'A's death can be the object of his grief' (110). In order to defend this claim, Silverstein recommends a complex and controversial change in our attitudes to time and space.<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, however, these metaphysical considerations are not crucial to his argument. At rock bottom, he argues that being dead is of negative value for us insofar as being dead is an object of negative feelings for us. In a nutshell, death is bad because we feel bad about it or have negative feelings about it.

Silverstein does not quite understand the Epicurean position. He appears to think that Epicurus denies that we could have negative feelings about death. But this is not what Epicurus or Lucretius argues; they know perfectly well that many people have negative feelings about death. This is, after all, the impetus for the Epicurean therapy. What the Epicureans argue is that these negative feelings are unreasonable because death does not cause us any harm, and it is unreasonable to fear or grieve over what does not cause one harm. Nevertheless, a consideration of Silverstein's case and the Epicurean response will reveal much about the connection between values and feelings.

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<sup>9</sup> 'The Evil of Death', in *MoD* 95-116.

<sup>10</sup> We should, according to Silverstein, view temporally distant events just as we do spatially distant ones; i.e. we should believe that both exist. We should not discriminate between events that exist now, i.e. present ones, and those that did or will exist, i.e. past or future ones respectively. This is a hard theory to wrap one's brain around, but Silverstein does a good job of laying it out as clearly as possible.

It turns out that Epicurus had already anticipated and denied an argument very much like Silverstein's. In the *Letter to Menoeceus*, Epicurus argues that death is not bad, and then he considers someone who responds as follows:

λέγων δεδιέναι τὸν θάνατον οὐχ ὅτι λυπήσει παρών, ἀλλ' ὅτι  
λυπεῖ μέλλων

saying that he fears death not because it will pain him when it is present, but because it pains him in anticipation (125).

Like Silverstein, this objector claims that death is troubling because it upsets him now rather than because it will harm him when he is dead. Death is the object not the cause of his anxiety. Epicurus displays little patience: he describes such a person as μάταιος (stupid), and he defends his original argument by pointing out that it is empty or idle (κενῶς) to be distressed now at what will not harm one when it occurs.

However hostile his response, Epicurus relies on a reasonable principle about fear. The principle is that if a person believes that some future event won't harm him, then any fear he has is, to that extent, unreasonable. This seems quite intuitive. It appears hard to understand a person who says, 'I don't think x is bad; x terrifies me.' Such a statement begs for one of two responses. Either the person does (really) think that x is bad, and his denial is hypocritical or self-deceptive. Or, if the person really has no thought that x is bad, then the fear is not properly connected to his beliefs. We would likely call such a gap between belief and emotion 'irrational'; Epicurus calls it 'empty'. This terminological point, however, should not mislead us. Epicurus simply makes the intuitive claim that a

reasonable fear requires, at the very least, a belief that the object of the fear is bad.<sup>11</sup>

One feature of Epicurus's presentation is imprecise, and it might leave room for a serious confusion. Epicurus says, ὁ γὰρ παρὸν οὐκ ἐνοχλεῖ, προσδοκώμενον κενῶς λυπεῖ.<sup>12</sup> The imprecision is his omission, in the first clause, of any mention of belief. What Epicurus appears to say is that it is idle to fear anything that is, in fact, not harmful; but this principle is too strong to be plausible. Without a reference to belief, the principle turns every case of error into a case of irrationality. But there are many cases in which a person appears to have a reasonable fear because of justifiable, but false, beliefs. Imagine that a person walking through an alley late at night is approached by a man with a gun. It turns out that the man is a plainclothes policeman. But in the circumstances, an initial fear – before the police officer identifies himself – appears reasonable, even though the belief that the man was dangerous turns out to be false. Not every mistake is a case of irrationality.

The context of Epicurus's comment, however, makes it clear that he does not mean to lump all errors together with irrationality. The objector to whom Epicurus replies, *says* that death will not harm him when it occurs, but that he fears it anyhow. This is an avowal of belief, sincere or otherwise. Thus, the argument between Epicurus and this hypothetical objector revolves around what the objector believes, or at least what he claims to believe; belief is clearly at issue. In view of this it seems

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<sup>11</sup> Obviously it would be sheer bootstrapping to claim that x is bad because we fear it and fear is bad. The badness needs to be prior to the fear.

<sup>12</sup> 'Whatever gives no disturbance when present, produces only empty pain when anticipated.'



reasonable to construe Epicurus's principle as a principle about belief and fear. Thus, I have taken it to mean 'it is irrational to fear what you believe won't harm you' rather than 'it is irrational to fear what won't harm you.'

The principle points towards a weakness in Silverstein's argument. Silverstein claims, reasonably enough, that 'values connect with feelings', but he confuses the direction of the connection. He goes on the assumption that, at least sometimes, feelings should lead and values should follow. If we have negative feelings about something, then this shows that the thing in question is bad for us – that it has negative value for us. But this gets matters back to front since the negative feeling is only reasonable if we already have a justifiable belief that the thing is bad.

Our evaluations should precede our feelings and not the other way about. It is no good to say, 'It's bad because I fear it.' This sort of statement is unhelpful for one of two reasons. On the one hand, if the fear is reasonable, then the belief that the thing is bad is already in place. In that case we should explain the fear by the belief not the other way around. On the other hand, a fear without such a prior evaluative belief is unreasonable, and thus it gives no good reason to form an evaluative belief. I may be afraid for bad reasons, or I may just be afraid for no reason. But why should I base other judgments on a fear that I admit is unreasonable? Insofar as the fear is reasonable, it relies on a prior evaluative belief. Without such a prior belief, the fear is not something that we should base other beliefs on since it is irrational. Evaluative beliefs precede reasonable fears.

Silverstein may be relying on a commonsense view of emotions or feelings.<sup>13</sup> One aspect of common opinion about emotions appears to imply that emotions are sub-rational feelings or affects. So, for example, a person in the midst of an argument about his feelings of love might say, 'It's not about what I think; I just feel this way.' The implication appears to be that one simply has the feeling or not; there is no sense in trying to rationalize or argue over one's emotional state. One does not initially have these feelings for reasons, and reasons cannot, once one has the feelings, alter one's emotional state. This is the sense in which an emotion would be 'sub-rational', and such thoughts have suggested to some that the emotions are sub-rational in this manner.

If Silverstein does hold such a theory, he could cut off my previous criticism. He could argue that feelings, such as fear, are not amenable to analysis as 'reasonable' or otherwise. And he could argue that beliefs are not prior to feelings in the way that I sketched out above. Since one simply has feelings or not, values could follow feelings. This feelings theory of emotion suggests that I am wrong to think that feelings should follow evaluations, and it also suggests that we should not describe emotions as 'rational' or 'irrational'.

But this response won't do. Even if the feelings theory of emotions were a good theory,<sup>14</sup> it would not give Silverstein the kind of support that he needs. Suppose that feelings were simply brute, sub-rational affects –

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<sup>13</sup> In the literature, this theory is often called the 'feelings theory' of emotion. Thus, Silverstein's use of the word 'feeling' may be revealing. In and of itself, however, terminology is not enough to show that he adopts the theory that I outline here.

<sup>14</sup> In fact, I think that it is a hopelessly inadequate theory, but I waive this objection in order to give Silverstein the strongest possible case. For criticism of the feelings theory, see William Lyons *Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 2-16.

neither rational nor otherwise. If this were so, it would be entirely unclear why we should let such feelings determine our evaluations. Surely we want to hold values that are reasonable, i.e. based on reasons and alterable on the basis of reasons. Our values, one would think, ought to be rationally connected to our beliefs and life plan. If this is correct, and it seems to be a pretty minimal assumption, then we should bar feelings, understood as sub-rational affects, from the council chamber of value. Thus, even if Silverstein does hold a feeling theory of emotions and such a theory is correct, we still should not guide values by feelings since we want to keep our values reasonable. The feelings theory, if true, actually severs the connection between value and feeling that Silverstein posits.

The final objection to Lucretius's argument about non-existence also attacks the third premise, and it is a greater threat than the three previous arguments since it properly understands the challenge that premise three poses. George Pitcher, in 'The Misfortunes of the Dead', attempts to 'defend the thesis that the dead can be harmed' and 'to explain how this can be, and is, so' (159). Pitcher realizes that in order to make his case, he needs to show how something that happens after a person ceases to exist can nevertheless harm that person. Although I ultimately find his case unconvincing, he does at least face the problem squarely.

Pitcher opens his argument with a distinction (161). He separates two ways in which one could discuss a person after that person's death. In the first case, one could talk about the dead person as he was at some time during his life, i.e. as a living person. In the second case, one could discuss the dead person as he is now, i.e. as a dead person; one might, for example,

say where the corpse is buried. Pitcher calls the first case a description of an 'ante-mortem person after his death' and the second a description of a 'post-mortem person after his death'. So far, this distinction is intuitive and non-controversial, but Pitcher goes on to make surprising use of it.

He argues that the ante-mortem person can be harmed after his death, although the post-mortem person cannot. As Pitcher says, the post-mortem person is 'so much dust' (161), and he finds it absurd to claim that 'so much dust' could be harmed. Nevertheless, he does not find it absurd to argue that an ante-mortem person can be harmed after his death. This is, in fact, exactly what he sets out to demonstrate and explain. It is crucial to make clear what this claim involves: it requires that something which happens *after* a person dies can harm that person *before* he dies.

The obvious difficulty is that this appears to violate the order of cause and effect: causes precede their effects. Some philosophers have doubted that this order is always or necessarily so; they have argued for what is known as 'backward causation'.<sup>15</sup> Pitcher, however, explicitly denies that his thesis requires backward causation (164-165). He is agnostic on the larger issue of whether backward causes are possible, and he claims that this problem is irrelevant to his case.

But this puts Pitcher in a tight fix. If he does not wish to invoke backward causation, then he needs some other way of explaining what he means by 'an *ante-mortem* person can be harmed after his death' (162, his emphasis). The obvious interpretation of this sort of claim runs through backward causation, and Pitcher himself acknowledges that this is the

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<sup>15</sup> See the debate between Michael Dummett and Anthony Flew 'Can an Effect Precede its Cause?' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* XXVIII (1954), 27-62.

natural reading of the words (168). But Pitcher has another way of taking these words and explaining his thesis. It is less obvious, and rather subtle. In order to unpack it, I need to introduce one of his examples and give a second distinction that he makes.

Bishop Berkeley and the death of his son William provide Pitcher with an example to discuss (165 ff.). As Pitcher puts it, William was Berkeley's 'treasure' (165), and Berkeley took it hard when William died at the young age of fourteen. In the actual case, Berkeley was still alive when William died, and Pitcher pretty much takes it for granted that the loss of his son harmed Berkeley. But Pitcher also wants to claim that this intuition would (correctly) carry over into a slightly altered version of the case. He claims that Berkeley would be harmed even if William died after Berkeley himself did. This is obviously a specific case of the general claim that Pitcher advances.

Pitcher also distinguishes between 'William's dying young' and 'that William is going to die young' (167). Pitcher does not use this terminology, but it will clarify matters to call 'William's dying', as well as other items like it, 'states of affairs' and to call 'that William is going to die', and similar items, 'facts' or 'truths'. Obviously these two types of items are related: facts describe states of affairs; they are representations, descriptions, or, more generally, the linguistic counterparts to states of affairs.

Although Pitcher does not give much explicit discussion of these two items, it is clear that he makes a few basic assumptions about them. First, he makes the assumption, sensibly, that states of affairs occur at some time. That is, William's dying young happens or occurs at some specific, particular time. He also assumes that facts are the case, or are true, always,

even before the events they describe occur. Thus, even before he dies young, it is the case that William is going to die young. This latter assumption will turn out to be more controversial.

The temporal difference between states of affairs and facts gives Pitcher the leverage he needs. He wants to claim that William's death harms Berkeley, even if Berkeley dies first, and he does not want to invoke backward causation. Since the state of affairs, William's dying young, occurs after the putative harm, it cannot cause the harm without backward causation. But the fact, that William is going to die young, obtains, or is the case, or is true,<sup>16</sup> before Berkeley dies. Thus, it *can* cause the harm without running up against backward causation. Pitcher takes this position. As he puts it, 'the misfortune was that William was going to die young, not that William died young' (166). This is a subtle and interesting claim, but nevertheless I don't think that it can carry Pitcher's case.

The first problem is that this solution appears to rely on a form of logical determinism. As Pitcher says repeatedly, it was a fact that William was going to die young even before he did so. Actually Pitcher implies that this fact was the case when Berkeley himself was a child, long, long before William died – or even was born, for that matter. Such a claim, however, is highly controversial; it invokes what is commonly known as the problem of future contingents. Future contingents are indicative, future tensed statements like, say, that there will be a sea-battle tomorrow. The problem is that it is unclear whether these statements can be true or false. And if they can be assessed for truth value, it is unclear what this means

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<sup>16</sup> Nothing hangs on what form of words we choose here.

about pre-determination and the future.<sup>17</sup> To many it has appeared to imply that the future is already determined in advance. Pitcher unfortunately never acknowledges this problem, and thus he does not explain nor defend his position.

To make matters worse, Epicurus did explicitly discuss and deny the claim that future contingents are eternally fixed as true or false. In a nutshell, he argues (1) that if future contingents are already true or false, then determinism holds and there is no free will, (2) but we know, incorrigibly, that there is free will due to our *prolêpsis* of responsibility, (3) therefore, future contingents are neither true nor false.<sup>18</sup> Now there are many problems and difficulties surrounding this argument, but nevertheless it is an argument – and a pretty forceful one at that. If Pitcher means to reject such a position about future contingents, then he owes Epicurus, and the rest of us, an argument.

Secondly, even if we waive the problem of future contingents, Pitcher's thesis produces odd, and intolerable, consequences for cause and effect. To show that this is so, I need to introduce another example. Imagine a tremendous rainstorm. If we apply the state of affairs and fact analysis, we get, say, 'abundant raining' and 'that it rains abundantly'. If we accept Pitcher's point about future contingents, we also get a fact, before it actually rains, 'that it will rain abundantly'. Now say that this garden floods and is destroyed as a result of this storm. That is, more precisely, the

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<sup>17</sup> For a start cf. Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* 9 with John Ackrill's commentary and Dorothea Frede's 'The Sea-Battle Reconsidered: A Defence of the Traditional Interpretation' *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 3 (1985), 31-87.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Cicero *De Fato* 21-25, *EpM* 133-134, *VS* 40, *DRN* II 251-293 and the sympathetic comments of R. T. Long *Free Choice and Indeterminism in Aristotle and Later Antiquity* (Dissertation: Cornell University, 1992), 417-427.

flooding and destruction of the garden is an effect, but an effect of what? This is the question that Pitcher's analysis cannot make sense of.

It seems clear that the flooding is caused by the state of affairs not the fact, and certainly not the future contingent fact. We can see this if we consider the temporal relations. It is a fact, on Pitcher's theory, that long, long before it rains, it is going to rain abundantly. But surely the garden is not flooded and destroyed all this time? On Pitcher's analysis it was probably a fact that it is going to rain even before there was a garden. If this is correct, it seems absurd to say that the flooding is an effect of the fact or that the fact causes the flooding and destruction. The flooding and destruction follow after the state of affairs, and *only* after the state of affairs occurs.

Even if we agree with Pitcher's controversial claim that future tensed facts have truth values, this second result of his analysis seems hard to swallow. If the rain comes on March 23, we may agree that, already on March 14, it is a fact that it will rain and destroy the garden on the 23rd. But obviously, we can still go to the garden on the 14th: its destruction does not occur until it actually rains. Whatever we may say about future contingents, they cannot produce effects before the state of affairs comes to pass.

We can now return to the harm of death and the Berkeley example. Pitcher argues that what causes the harm is the fact, that William is going to die young, and since this fact obtains before Berkeley dies, the order of cause and effect is preserved. But as the garden example indicates, this analysis must be wrong. Until William actually dies, whenever that is, his death cannot cause anything. Since he does not die until after Berkeley



does, his death cannot harm Berkeley without violating the (assumed) order of cause and effect. Pitcher's case has not escaped the puzzle of backward causation after all. And since he himself does not wish to maintain the possibility of backward causation, his argument collapses.

Even though it fails, Pitcher's case is very revealing. It demonstrates just how far one must go in order to assert that the non-existent dead can be harmed. The route runs afoul of the Scylla and Charybdis of backward causation and determinism. Even if one accepts determinism, one must still argue in a way that leads to backward causation. Thus Pitcher's case can only advance by proving both the controversial thesis about future contingents *and* the controversial thesis about the order of cause and effect. It seems reasonable to wonder whether the intuition that death harms us is really so strong. If the intuition requires this defense, then perhaps we are better off without it.

### III

The next objection that I consider comes from a different angle. All the previous criticisms attempted to show that the central argument was flawed, or in Plutarch's case, pointless. But this objection does not quarrel with Lucretius's argument as such. Instead, it claims that the entire Epicurean position is self-defeating. Even if the Epicureans can prove that *some* form of life is not harmed by death, it is not a life that anyone would want. The only life that could be invulnerable to death is a life so impoverished that it is preferable to give up such grand ambitions and just admit that death may harm us. At best, we may hope that it does not do so.

More specifically, the objection is that the Epicurean good life is barren and intolerant of very basic human activities. On this view, the only desires and projects that an Epicurean can have are ones that an unexpected death cannot frustrate. But since we can die at anytime – as Epicurus puts it, ‘In the case of death all men inhabit a city without walls’ (U 339) – we cannot engage in *any* long term projects or activities. If we do, we open ourselves up to their frustration by a too early death. But much of what seems valuable about life resides in such long-term projects and activities. If the Epicureans tell us that we can be secure, but only by cutting out such interests, they they may have left us with barely a life at all. Hence, the objection concludes, we should reject the Epicurean therapy because it can only secure happiness by destroying it.<sup>19</sup>

I take this argument to be about time, especially the future. The Epicureans can guarantee us some form of happiness, but it is merely a happiness of the present moment. A life that is entirely secure from death cannot tolerate the kinds of investment in the future that we normally take a happy life to require. The Epicureans, it is said, have a blinkered attitude towards time, and they only concern themselves with the present since only the present is safe and secure. After all, it is, in a certain sense, impossible to lose the present. This is a surprising attack on the Epicureans, however, since they themselves criticized others for having such an attitude. But perhaps the Epicureans are unknowingly committed to the very view which they rebuked others for; if this is so, then their overall position is incoherent. As a way into the problem, therefore, I will

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<sup>19</sup> This criticism comes in a number of versions, each of which is slightly different in focus. Two of the more powerful are Martha Nussbaum, *ToD* 212-238 and Steven Luper Foy, ‘Annihilation’ *MoD* 269-290.

first consider the explicit versions of this attitude towards time and the Epicurean critique of it. After this, we can see whether their position is coherent.

The advice to look to the present and to be unconcerned for the future is prominent in the Cyrenaic philosophy associated with Aristippus, and it also appears in sympotic literature. Aristippus, the father of the Cyrenaic sect, was perfectly clear in his advice: our goal is pleasure, and specifically the pleasure of the moment; we should concern ourselves only with the present and not give effort or thought to the past, which is gone forever, or to the future, which is uncertain.<sup>20</sup> Athenaeus, who provides one of the main doxographical reports for this aspect of Aristippus's thought, explicitly connects the doctrine to licentious people (παραπλησίως τοῖς ἀσώτοις G 174.5-6) and luxurians (ὁποῖον καὶ οἱ τρυφῶντες πάσχουσι τὸ παρὸν εὖ ποιεῖν ἀξιοῦντες G 174.9-10). So it is no surprise that we find the same sentiment in sympotic verse, most famously in a number of Horatian odes. Best known is probably the closing injunction of *Odes* I 11, 'carpe diem quam minimum credula postero,' but the idea is common elsewhere in Horace and in other poets.<sup>21</sup>

Straightaway, we have two reasons to think that this *was* an Epicurean attitude. First, there are doxographical reports that connect Epicurus to Aristippus. In particular, Aristocles says that Epicurus took the

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. G 174. Their position is very hard to reconstruct, but for a brilliant piece of intellectual detective work, see T.H. Irwin 'Aristippus against Happiness' *Monist* 74 (1991), 55-82.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Odes* I 9.13, 'quid sit futurum cras, fuge quaerere,' II 16.25-26, 'laetus in praesens animus quod ultra est/oderit curare,' and III 29.41-43, 'ille potens sui/laetusque deget, cui licet diem dixisse 'vixi'' And also see Nisbet and Hubbard on I 11 and II 16 for further Greek and Roman parallels.

starting points of his ethics from the Cyrenaic sect.<sup>22</sup> Second, the exhortation to eat, drink, and be merry, has always reminded both lay-people and scholars alike of Epicurean ethics. Commentators both of sympotic poetry and of Epicurus testify to the common connection: Nisbet and Hubbard quote Epicurus on *Odes* I 11, and Usener quotes a number of Horatian passages on *Epicurea* 491. This suggests the following picture. Epicurus, like his ethical forerunner Aristippus and also like less theoretical poets and prodigals, believed that we should only care for the present moment because the future was insecure.

This entire picture, however, is a house of cards. In the first place, the doxographical record shows that the Epicureans and Cyrenaics were actually in bitter disagreement. Although both groups thought that the goal of life was pleasure, their accounts of pleasure were entirely distinct and utterly opposed. Most relevant to our inquiry, they fought over pleasure and time. The Epicureans felt that pleasures of the past and of the future made a great contribution to happiness, but the Cyrenaics denied that anything but present pleasures mattered (U 452-453, *De Fin* I 55). As for the second connection, we have abundant and clear evidence that the Epicureans rejected the prodigal lifestyle. As Epicurus says,

When we say that pleasure is the goal, we do not mean those pleasures of prodigals nor the pleasures of enjoyment, as some think who do not understand and who disagree or interpret uncharitably, but to lack pain in body and not to be disturbed in soul (*EpM* 131).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Σωκράτους δ' ἑταῖρος ὁ Ἀρίστιππος ἦν, ὁ τὴν καλουμένην Κυρηναϊκὴν συστησάμενος αἵρεσιν, ἀφ' ἧς τὰς ἀφορμὰς Ἐπίκουρος πρὸς τὴν τοῦ τέλους ἔκθεσιν εἴληφεν (U 449=G 173).

<sup>23</sup> This text can help clear up the previous problem as well. The doxographical reports that link Aristippus and Epicurus seem to me to have no historical merit. We already have a philosophical lineage for Epicurus, and it runs from Democritus through Nausiphanes

The Epicureans frequently criticize the intemperate lifestyle, and they are at pains to distinguish themselves from it, unfortunately to little avail.<sup>24</sup>

It is, in fact, undeniable that Epicurus and his disciples advocate a much more inclusive attitude towards time than the Cyrenaics or prodigals. They believed that the past and the future made a great difference in our lives. But since the current question is death, which is for all of us in the future, I will set aside their ideas about the past. The most important text on the future, comes from Epicurus's *Letter to Menoeceus*:

Μνημονευτέον δὲ ὡς τὸ μέλλον (οὔτε πάντως ἡμέτερον) οὔτε πάντως οὐχ ἡμέτερον, ἵνα μήτε πάντως προσμένωμεν ὡς ἐσόμενον μήτε ἀπελπίζωμεν ὡς πάντως οὐκ ἐσόμενον (127).

It must be remembered that the future is neither unconditionally ours nor unconditionally not ours, so that we neither expect unconditionally that it will come to be nor mistrust that it unconditionally won't come to be.

I will unpack this in a moment, but two quick points. First this is clearly aimed directly at the position of the Cyrenaics and their ilk. Aristippus 'said that only the present was ours (ἡμέτερον),'<sup>25</sup> and Epicurus replies that the future may not be unconditionally ours (ἡμέτερον) but neither is it unconditionally not ours (πάντως οὐχ ἡμέτερον). Second, if the objection I

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(with a smidge of Pyrrho). This lineage makes it reasonable that Epicurean pleasure is essentially negative, since this was the character of Democritean εὐθυμία (DL IX 45). If Epicurus had started from Aristippean pleasure, it becomes entirely unclear how he ever ended up where he did. The reason that some doxographers connect Epicurus with Aristippus is simply that they are both, nominally, hedonists, and hostile interpreters thought that all hedonism must be like that of Aristippus. The essentially tendentious nature of such reports emerges when we look at the context of one such comment in Diogenes Laertius (X 4). He reports that some say that Epicurus plagiarized from Democritus and Aristippus, and this gem of information comes in between a comment that Epicurus's brother was a pimp and that Epicurus was not a real Athenian citizen.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *EpM* 132, *KD* 10, *EF* XVII-XX, *DRN* II 1-61, III 912-951, 1003-1010, VI 1-41, *De Fin* I 37-39.

<sup>25</sup> μόνον γὰρ ἔφασκεν ἡμέτερον εἶναι τὸ παρόν, μήτε δὲ τὸ φθάνον μήτε τὸ προσδοκώμενον (G 174).

am considering were correct, then Epicurus should never have said this. He should have thought, like Aristippus, that the future did not matter at all to us. So even after we review Epicurus's avowed position, we will need to test its coherence with his views about death.

Epicurus and Aristippus disagree over whether the future is ours, but what does it mean to say that a period of time is 'ours'? The leading idea in the adjective ἡμέτερον is obviously possession, but this does not help since it is unclear how to apply the idea of ownership to a period of time. If we look at the debate, however, three ideas seem to be uppermost. First, to describe the future as 'ours' indicates that our current actions have some effect on the future; what we do now plays a rôle in what will be. Second, the description suggests that the future matters to us, more specifically that the future is relevant to our well-being; what will be makes a difference to our happiness. Third, the description encourages us to invest present efforts and resources in the future; we should work towards what lies ahead.

Although these three points are distinct, they nevertheless display some unity. In particular, the strength of belief in these three claims will probably vary together. So, for example, the greater the effect a person thinks that she can have on the future, the more likely she is to care about it and to devote effort to it. On the other hand, if a person is already inclined – for whatever reason – to take few pains over the future, then he may support this inclination by denying that we can affect the future or that it will matter to us anyhow. Such co-variations can be more or less rational. Most people would probably take my second example to be a clear case of self-deception or bad faith. In general, it seems that the first two

beliefs should lead and the third should follow. This probably has something to do with the character of the third thought. The first two points are descriptive, but the third is a form of practical injunction, or, at least, a strong normative belief.

Aristippus recommends that we be unconcerned with the future because 'it is unclear whether it will come to be' (G 174). Insofar as this is a justification at all, it seems to run the wrong way. If a person cannot be sure that what he works toward will succeed, that seems clearly insufficient to show that he has no idea whether it will succeed. Our knowledge of the future is never absolute, but we can have some idea of what will happen, and our ideas can be more or less reasonable. Moreover, no matter how global our ignorance of the future is, it still needs to be shown that the future does not contribute to a person's happiness. Even if I do not know, at a given time, what will happen in the future, it still seems quite likely that what will happen can affect my well-being one way or the other. If the first point is correct, then it can be more or less reasonable to invest in the future. If the second point is correct, it may be smarter to invest, at least somewhat, rather than to risk utter disaster. In either case, Aristippus is overhasty if he infers that we should ignore the future altogether just because it is uncertain.

Epicurus's position is much more reasonable. He urges us to avoid Aristippus's mistake. We should not assume that the future is unconditionally not ours. Nor should we make the contrary mistake and assume that the future unconditionally is ours. I take this to recommend a healthy mean. First, our current actions can have some affect on future events, even if we cannot entirely determine their outcome. Second, our

happiness does not entirely depend on the future, but the future does matter to our well-being. And so, third, we should devote some effort to future projects and concerns, even if we should not do so to the exclusion of the present – or the past, for that matter. This seems perfectly sane and healthy. All of our planning takes place under at least partial ignorance. We can never be entirely certain of the outcome of our actions and plans. But it would be bizarre if we let this universal uncertainty force us to abandon all hope or interest in the future.<sup>26</sup>

Although this shows that the Epicureans did not advocate a truncated life of the moment, perhaps they are not entitled to the richer view, no matter what they say. In a way we are back where we started. The original criticism was that Epicurus could only offer us a life that no sane person would accept. I showed that he did not offer this paltry life but a much richer one. Not only did he recommend the proper sort of life, he criticized those who did not. But perhaps this just shows that his doctrines are incoherent: he says we should care about the future, but if he does so, then he overturns his own claim that death is nothing to us. There is precedence for such an argument. Lactantius says that Epicurus urged the life of the moment, the life that I have shown that he actually rejected. At the end, Lactantius says, 'Although he doesn't say this in so many words, he teaches it nevertheless in actual fact.'<sup>27</sup> If this is right, then Epicurus's position is verbally appealing, but substantially unsound.

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<sup>26</sup> In these sections, I have barely scratched the surface of this question. The Epicurean attitude towards time is a large subject, and it would repay extensive study. For other relevant texts, see U 204, 490, 491, KD 19, 20, *De Fin* I 19, *EF* XVII-XX, and *DRN* III 912-977, 1003-1010, 1080-1094.

<sup>27</sup> *divin instit* III 17.38 (U 491), 'hoc ille etiamsi non dicit verbo, re tamen ipsa docet.'



This criticism, however, seems to me to miss its mark entirely. The whole objection relies on the claim that if we invest in the future and then our investments are frustrated by our death (i.e. we don't get to reap what we have sown), then death harms us. Hence, Epicurus must, on pain of inconsistency, not invest in the future if he wishes to be invulnerable to death. But the argument is a blatant *petitio principii*. It assumes that we *are harmed* if we die and don't reap what we have sown. But the whole point of Lucretius's main argument was to show that no such harm was possible. Although in the normal case, if we invest in the future and things don't work out, we think that we are worse off, death is not a normal case. Normally, the person is harmed because he has expended effort, but he gets no payoff: he lacks what he spent effort to get. But in the case of death, the person is no longer on the scene, so to speak, and so there is no way to speak of a lack at all. This puts us right back into the main argument.<sup>28</sup> Unless we have an antecedent demonstration that we can be harmed when we are dead, then this criticism of the Epicurean position makes no headway at all.

#### IV

There is a final objection which is the most primitive of all. The first four objections straightforwardly attack the main argument. The immediately preceding objection is more roundabout; it grants that the Epicurean argument is fine, as far as it goes, but it claimed that we want more out of

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<sup>28</sup> We could put this point another way: since it is only death that makes certain that the effort does not pay off, when the person is alive we cannot say that the effort has not paid off (because the future is still open); but once the effort has not paid off, there is no person (and so there is no harm).

life than the Epicureans can offer. But there is a much more direct way to deny the existence argument. A person could simply dig in her heels and refuse the conclusion that non-existence is not a harm. She might say that the existence argument cannot make us give up the fear of death because we just know that non-existence harms us, and that is that.

This criticism is more complex and substantial than it appears. What we get here does not seem like argument but rather the end of argument. There are no reasons on offer; there are only convictions. But this is not quite right. There is a principled way to justify such an objection. What is less sure cannot refute what is more sure; the conclusion of such an argument amounts to a *reductio* of its premises. This is a semi-formal complaint against the existence argument; it is no good to argue against what is overwhelmingly obvious with what is only dubiously true. The Epicureans cannot simply ignore this consideration, since they make similar noises when it suits their purposes. So however rude and unpolished the objection may seem, it merits some response.

The semi-formal complaint relies on a reasonable rule of thumb. In general, what is more sure should trump what is less sure. In this case, apparently, what is abundantly certain is that death does harm us. There are few things that will appear so sure, and, more importantly, at least some of the premises of the existence argument may be far less certain. In particular, the third premise, that harm requires an existent subject, may seem less secure than that death harms us. Hence, we should abandon this premise rather than the more secure conviction that death does harm us. If this is right, then the *reductio* shows that we need to rethink the plausibility of the principle about harm and existence.

Some philosophers, and some laypeople, might reject this objection out of hand,<sup>29</sup> but the Epicureans cannot do so. The Epicureans themselves made conspicuous use of very similar reasoning. They argued against scepticism and determinism by claiming that these two doctrines undid beliefs which were absolutely basic and certain. Without considering the details, we can discern a structure parallel to the present objection. There are some things that we just know, that are overwhelmingly certain and secure, things perhaps which we cannot rationally doubt. One such fact is that we are responsible for our actions.<sup>30</sup> Determinism denies this,<sup>31</sup> and so determinism must be false. We can know this, in a sense, even without considering the argument for determinism. Whatever the argument, it leads to an impossible conclusion, and so we have reason to deny it.

More famously, the Epicureans founded their ethics on a simple and, in their eyes, undeniable truth, and they said that this truth did not require, or even admit, argument. As Torquatus, Cicero's Epicurean spokesman, puts it,

*itaque negat opus esse ratione neque disputatione, quam ob rem voluptas expetenda, fugiendus dolor sit. sentire haec putat, ut calere ignem, nivem esse albam, dulce mel. quorum nihil oportere exquisitis rationibus confirmare, tantum satis esse admonere*

Thus, he denies that there is a need for reason and argument as to why pleasure should be pursued, pain

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<sup>29</sup> Perhaps because they have little faith in the notion that ideas can be more or less sure or that ideas wear their relative certainty on their faces. As we will see below, there may be good reason for worries about these claims, especially the latter one.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. L & S 20, especially 20c4, 8.

<sup>31</sup> There may be forms of determinism that don't deny our responsibility, in which case this argument leaves them untouched.

should be avoided. He thinks that these things are perceived, as that fire is hot, that snow is white, honey sweet; and that it is not appropriate to prove any of these things by subtle reasons: it is enough merely to suggest them (*De Fin* I 30).

It is so obvious that pleasure is to be pursued and pain avoided that it requires no argument to prove the point; all that is necessary is to point people to the truth. Even more strongly, argument would be out of place, or, as Torquatus says, it would actually be inappropriate.<sup>32</sup> I take this to mean that argument would be pointless since any premise that one could use would be less sure than the conclusion, and one cannot prove what is more sure by what is less sure.

We need to consider what we are being told here.<sup>33</sup> There are more and less certain ideas, and the surer ideas are, in some sense, superior and prior to the less sure ones. Moreover at least some ideas are so basic that they can neither be proven nor refuted by argument; these fundamental ideas form a small, but very privileged class. It also seems that one merely has to have such an idea to know it; the idea is, as some would say, self-revealing. Torquatus's use of 'sentire' (to feel, to experience) suggests this. He echoes one thing that people sometimes say about an utterly sure conviction: they say that they can feel it in their bones. Since the Epicureans have a faith in such basic ideas, they cannot ignore the objection that we just know that death harms us.

Nevertheless, the Epicureans are not entirely defenseless against this form of objection. They can deny that a given claim actually belongs to the

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<sup>32</sup> quorum nihil oportere exquisitis rationibus confirmare.

<sup>33</sup> For useful discussion, see Elizabeth Asmis *Epicurus' Scientific Method* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 35-39, 220-224.

privileged set of certain, unarguable convictions. What this would require is a wrinkle in the previous description of the special set of basic ideas. We need to distinguish the subjective sense of certainty about an idea from the fact of the idea's being certain. These can come apart in an crucial way. A person may feel just as certain of an idea that does not belong to the privileged set as she is certain of those that do belong to the set. A person will not fail to have the subjective feeling of an idea that is basic,<sup>34</sup> but it is possible to have the same sense of certainty in a case where such a feeling is not appropriate.<sup>35</sup>

A good example here is Epicurean theology. The Epicureans believed that certain beliefs about the gods were absolutely secure, but other beliefs, even if they felt equally sure, were false. There is no doubt that the gods exist and that they are entirely blessed, but they are not concerned with humans and they did not create the universe and all its inhabitants. Although many people are equally sure of both sets of theses, the Epicureans attempted to take them apart. The first set is entirely secure, but the second set is the result of persistent and hard to see errors – errors about the nature of well-being and the universe.<sup>36</sup> Psychological certainty, whether of one person or of many people, does not guarantee real or objective certainty.

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<sup>34</sup> But is even this correct? One thing is that a person may not have the right feeling because she has never noticed the point, e.g. she is not sure that she has responsibility because she never thinks about it. But isn't it also possible to become so confused that you don't have the right reaction even when you do think of the idea?

<sup>35</sup> Or perhaps we could say that the inappropriate feeling of certainty is not identical to the correct feeling but only so close that people often become confused. It is hard to know what to say here.

<sup>36</sup> See *EpM* 123-124, *KD* 1.

This helps to reveal another important point about the basic ideas. Even if we have a basic idea, and it is properly self-intimating, it does not seem to reveal its entire importance all by itself. That is, a person may have one correct idea about the gods, but still be very confused about how this one idea fits in with the rest of her beliefs and convictions. In a way, it seems that even the most basic ideas need to be clarified, not in terms of their specific content, which is already clear, but in terms of their overall significance, which requires a larger and more general understanding of one's beliefs as a whole. Clearly, the initial, very robust claim that some ideas could beat all challengers is taking on so many qualifications that it may become useless. I will take this up after dealing with the initial objection.

It should be easy to predict by now how the Epicureans will respond to this objection. Most people start with the absolute conviction that non-existence does harm us, but that is because most people are massively confused. The feeling of certainty is misleading, in this case, since it stems from misunderstanding and error. We think of non-existence as a terrible harm because we are in the grip of widespread illusions. First, we often unconsciously conceive of non-existence as if it were a state that we experience or undergo – some kind of endless darkness that we are doomed to inhabit forever. Second, we misunderstand statements like, 'The dead lack everything.' We take such statements to signify, as they ordinarily do, an occurrent (and harmful) lack that a person undergoes. But in the case of death, there is no person who lacks; the person has nothing because there is no such person anymore. These Epicurean arguments put a serious dent in the sense of utter certainty that death is a harm.

Because of such arguments, it is far from clear that the harm of death is more secure than the premise about harm and existence. We rarely have reason to reflect on the metaphysics of existence and action, and so the principle may not have an immediate psychological pull. On the other side, cultural forces constantly reinforce the notion that non-existence is the worst harm we face, and so this claim is extremely compelling. Nevertheless, the Epicureans can explain why the intuitive appeal is false, and these arguments should give us pause. In addition, once we reflect on the principle that only what exists does or suffers anything, it is likely to appear undeniable although we may never have thought of it earlier. All of this suggests a dialectical draw rather than a clear victory for either side. If this is so, then no initial conviction can settle matters.

This analysis shows how dangerous it can be to claim certainty for any conviction. What feels absolutely secure may turn out to be wrong. The psychological feeling of absolute conviction can be a misleading accident, and it is a slippery business to disentangle the more from the less sure. This suggests that the rule of thumb, that the more sure should trump the less sure, is subject to quite a bit of qualification. We should reflect very carefully before claiming such certainty. And even where we find it, perhaps it should not be the last word no matter what. Even if we are already sure that something is the case, we should still be willing to argue for the point – and at least to consider argument against it. Any reasonable humility shows that we have been wrong in the past, even where we were absolutely sure, and so although it may be reasonable to

consider some ideas more secure than others, we should always be willing to consider matters further.

Apparently, the Epicureans came to the same conclusion. After Torquatus makes his case that our convictions about pleasure and pain are certain, he adds that different groups of Epicureans made room for additional considerations. First, even if we have a feeling of certainty about a matter, it remains possible to clarify the same point by reason and argument. The additional support helps us to have a more global sense of the initial idea, and we come to understand it better. Second, as some Epicureans pointed out, it is often useful and practical to muster argument in defense of one's convictions. In the face of opposed arguments, it is useful to be able to defend one's views by force of reason. Such reasoned defense will reinforce and justify our initial convictions. In both ways, we can avoid errors and confusions. So although they remained certain that there were some things which we just knew, the Epicureans did not rely unconditionally on these brute convictions.

## V

There is something deeply confusing about the Epicureans. They often give off the appearance of being plain-speaking, straight-shooting defenders of what we all believe, but the appearance is at best only half of the picture. Yes, pleasure is the good, but it is a pleasure unlike any we would have expected. Yes, scepticism is blatantly false, but the truth of our senses is guaranteed by a theory of perception that was freakish even by the



standards of antiquity – and that is saying something. Their harmony with common notions should not blind us to their underlying complexities.<sup>37</sup>

Lucretius's main argument against the fear of non-existence is of a piece with this characteristic of Epicureanism. On the one side, he suggests that only what exists can be harmed and that it is unreasonable to fear what does not harm us, and this seems surely right. On the other side, he suggests that he can use these obvious points to demonstrate that non-existence does not harm us and thus that we should not fear it, and this seems surely wrong. At the very least, this chapter should have shown two things. First, even if he is wrong, he is not obviously wrong. Second, there is nothing at all simple about the question.

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<sup>37</sup> Julia Annas usefully makes a lot of this point; cf. *MoH* 190, 339-340, 350 and *HPM* 199.

## CONCLUSION

Death is nothing to us, or so Lucretius would have us believe. Many readers have taken this injunction in its strongest possible sense.<sup>1</sup> On such an interpretation, Lucretius means to purge his readers absolutely of every conceivable fear of death; his arguments should bring total peace of mind as far as death is concerned. On the other side, some recent readers have construed the claim that death is nothing to us in an extremely narrow manner.<sup>2</sup> According to this view, the claim applies only to one specific fear, the fear of being dead, and it is only that fear which Lucretius should remove. This thesis has aimed at a middle ground, somewhere between these two extremes – although Lucretius may not address every possible anxiety about death, he does scrutinize a number of central worries. After a brief summary of findings, I will conclude by looking at an important fear that Lucretius recognizes but leaves unanswered.

Initially, Lucretius must find some way to organize the jumble of worries about death. His solution has precedents in Epicurus and in the Platonic *Apology of Socrates*. Lucretius makes use of a dichotomy about the soul: at death, the soul of the person who dies either survives, or it perishes. Although it may seem paradoxical, many people will be afraid no matter which option they believe. Lucretius takes the possibilities in turn: first, he considers whether the soul survives death, and, second, he considers the soul's non-survival.

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<sup>1</sup> For an example of this approach, see Gisela Striker 'Commentary on Mitsis' in *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 4 (1988), 323-328.

<sup>2</sup> An especially obvious and important example of this approach is Stephen Rosenbaum 'How to Be Dead and Not Care: A Defense of Epicurus' in *MoD*, 119-134.

On the one side, if the soul does survive death, many people fear an eternity of torture in Hades. Lucretius's first line of attack here is an argument that the soul does not, in fact, survive death, and thus there is no reason to be concerned for an afterlife of any sort. Using Epicurean atomic principles, Lucretius sets forth a theory of the soul according to which the soul is a composite, material body that is born with and dies with a body. The conjunction of a body and a soul makes up a person, and the soul and body separate at death. At that time the soul is utterly destroyed, and the body begins to decay. Since the soul does not survive death, there is no possibility of any eternal afterlife. Hence, we should not fear Hades.

This first line of argument brings Lucretius to the second half of the dichotomy, namely that the soul does not survive death. The soul's annihilation produces worries of its own; these worries start from the thought that at death a person ceases to exist, and only a corpse remains. Lucretius treats four such fears: first, he answers the fear that non-existence is itself awful, second, he considers fears about the dead body's fate, third, he tackles the thought that non-existence robs the dead of all of life's goods, and, fourth, he addresses the worry that non-existence cuts off all of a person's future potentials. Lucretius challenges all these anxieties with variations on one argument. He starts from the claim that harm requires an existent subject: a person cannot be harmed unless that person exists at the time of the harm. It is agreed, at this point, that a person no longer exists once dead. Therefore, argues Lucretius, nothing can harm a dead person, and thus, none of these fears is reasonable, since in each case death removes the (putative) subject of harm from the scene.

One feature that all of these fears share, on both sides of the dilemma, is that they are first-personal. That is, they are fears that people have for themselves rather than for others. Lucretius limits himself, almost entirely, to such fears. This is not especially unusual. Most philosophers who consider death only take up the question of whether death is bad for the person who dies.<sup>3</sup> Nor is the practice pointless. Thomas Nagel may very well be correct to say that the first-person question is 'the primary case' ('Death' 62). Nevertheless, Lucretius does open himself up to serious criticism in this regard, and by way of conclusion I will take aim at one major weakness in his case.<sup>4</sup>

Lucretius trips himself up. His mistake is not that he limits his case to the first person, but that he does not limit his case to the first person thoroughly enough. As I said, Lucretius mainly targets fears about death being bad for the person who dies. If he kept strictly to such fears, then his case might be incomplete, but at least it could be sound so far as it goes. Unfortunately, Lucretius is not as careful as he might be: when he takes up the fear that death is the loss of life's goods, he opens the door to worries concerning the welfare of others. An imaginary speaker laments that when someone dies, that person loses all of life's rewards (894-911). Lucretius can handle this complaint with his argument about harm and

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<sup>3</sup> Although nearly everyone takes this limitation for granted, Thomas Nagel makes explicit mention of it ('Death' in *MoD*, 62).

<sup>4</sup> The only objection I consider is one that Lucretius explicitly asks for, and I have ignored other, perhaps equally serious, complaints. The two most popular criticisms of Lucretius are, first, that he does not answer the person who fears painful dying, and, second, he does not answer the person who fears a premature death. I have said something about the later criticism in Chapter 4. I agree that Lucretius never speaks to the fear of painful dying, but I have not taken that problem up here. For a brief, but interesting argument concerning this, see Fred Miller, Jr. 'Epicurus on the Art of Dying' *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 14 (1976), 170-171.

existence, but in addition the speaker alludes to a different kind of anxiety, an anxiety which Lucretius never sufficiently answers. The mourner complains:

non poteris factis florentibus esse tuisque  
praesidium (897-898).

You will be unable to be a protection to your affairs and your loved ones.

If Lucretius had left well enough alone, he would have been secure, but with these verses, he sets himself a challenge which he never meets.

Consider the case of Hector. After Hector dies, the victorious Greeks will rape and enslave his wife, and he will be gone and unable to protect her. These are very real harms, and it is perfectly reasonable that Andromache fear them for herself. But it seems just as reasonable that Hector fear these events on his wife's behalf. In his case, the fear is not first-personal, but the worry seems no less reasonable for that. It is just such a case that Lucretius alludes to, when his speaker points out that the dead person can no longer be a protection (*praesidium*) to the people he loves.

The only response that Lucretius offers to this fear is entirely lame. He argues that since death is non-existence, and harm requires an existent subject, the dead person cannot be harmed. This argument does a good job if it is aimed at first-personal fears, but it does nothing for fears about other people. When Hector is dead, nothing can harm him. Fine. But the Greeks certainly can, and unfortunately will, harm his wife. And there is no lack of an existent subject for *this* harm – the subject is Andromache. Hence, Lucretius's central argument about existence and harm does no

good when it comes to fears for others. Lucretius moves on, however, and he seems entirely unaware of the problem.

Nor does there seem to be any good argument available to Lucretius. He cannot reply that it won't harm Hector that Andromache is harmed because Hector won't exist when she suffers. Lucretius relies on the principle that a reasonable fear requires a real harm, and the Hector case fits this principle. Again, Andromache will suffer a very real harm. Lucretius might block this by qualifying the principle as follows: a reasonable fear requires a real harm *to the person who has the fear*. This principle, however, limits all reasonable fears to the first person, and there seems little or no justification for any such limitation. Concerns about the well being of other people appear perfectly justified, and Lucretius does nothing to suggest otherwise. Quite the contrary, Lucretius himself opens the door to concerns about one's family, and any attempt to shut out such concerns now will surely seem viciously *ad hoc*.

Very likely, this problem reflects a larger problem with Epicurean ethics. In general the Epicureans were hard pressed to accommodate concern for other people into their account of the happy life. On the one hand, they stress the self-sufficiency of the sage, the person who can be happy in almost any circumstances. On the other hand, they also strive to recognize that friendship and altruism are necessary parts of a truly happy life. If my happiness depends in part on the well being of another person, however, then it seems that I cannot be quite so self-sufficient as the Epicureans want.

This is precisely the case with Hector. He may have no reason to fear his death for himself, but he has ample reason to fear its effect on his

wife. If he genuinely cares about her, then he *should* fear his death insofar as it *will* cause her harm. Lucretius acknowledges such a concern for another person's suffering, and thus he opens up the potential for a fear about death: one person may fear his or her death because of its effects on other people. Lucretius seems to deny that this fear is valid, but he fails to justify the denial. His failure mirrors the larger tension in Epicurean ethics: he makes a place for concern over other people's well being, but by doing so, he weakens his own case against the fears of death. He cannot have it both ways. Either other people don't really matter, or there may be a reason to fear death. Even if we restrict ourselves to an internal evaluation of Lucretius's success, he does not answer even every fear about death which he himself acknowledges.

## APPENDIX ONE MATERIALISM AND THE EMOTIONS

In the first chapter, I outline the psychology of the emotions according to Lucretius and the Epicureans, but there is another side to their understanding of the emotions. Over and above the psychological conception, according to which an emotion is a feeling which mediates between thought and action, Lucretius offers an atomic explanation of emotions. The passage (III 288-322) is brief and, in many ways, allusive, but it merits consideration.

Lucretius picks out three emotions for physical analysis. After he shows how four elements – fire, air, wind, and a fourth, nameless element – compose the soul, he digresses and discusses the importance of the basic elements for our emotional makeup. Each of the three named elements is connected with a specific emotion. Lucretius associates anger with fire (288-289), fear with cold, moving wind (290-291), and an unnamed emotion with stable air (292-293).

It is odd that Lucretius does not name the third emotion, and it is not immediately clear what emotion he has in mind. He says, ‘there is also that state of placid air which comes about with a tranquil heart and a cheerful countenance’ (292-293), and he associates this emotion with the disposition of cattle, who are not quick to rage or fear (302-306). One thought is that Lucretius is thinking of ἀταραξία (tranquillity), the most characteristic Epicurean state of mind.<sup>1</sup> I wonder, however, if ἀταραξία is

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<sup>1</sup> I presume that this is Heinze’s thought, since he speaks of ‘Seelenruhe’.



really on a par with anger and fear; it seems more like a global emotional trend than a specific emotion. ἀταραξία is the state of a person who is undisturbed with regard to emotions, but it is not itself any single emotion.

Another possibility is πραότης, which would mean 'equanimity' or, quite generally, 'calm', but this suggestion has its own problem. The standard meaning of πραότης is simply 'gentleness' as opposed to irascibility. So, for example, Aristotle contrasts πραότης specifically with anger. In the passage from Lucretius, however, the meaning must be broader, since the context requires something contrary to anger *and* fear. What we need is something more like calm or peace of mind in general, but it needs to be shown that πραότης is used in this broader meaning.

We do have some evidence of such a use of the word. A first example comes from Plato. In the dialogue that bears his name, Crito says to Socrates:

καὶ πολλάκις μὲν δὴ σε καὶ πρότερον ἐν παντὶ τῷ βίῳ  
ἠὺδαιμόνισα τοῦ τρόπου, πολὺ δὲ μάλιστα ἐν τῇ νῦν  
παρεστώσῃ ξυμφορᾷ, ὡς ῥαδίως αὐτὴν καὶ πράως  
φέρεις (*Crito* 43b19-22).

What Crito marvels at here is the overall equanimity that Socrates exhibits, not merely his lack of anger.<sup>2</sup> Plutarch provides an even better example for what Lucretius may have had in mind. According to Plutarch, Epicurus said that it is not money or power that encompasses happiness but rather ἀλυπία καὶ πραότης παθῶν καὶ διαθέσις ψυχῆς τὸ κατὰ φύσιν ὀρίζουσα (U 548).<sup>3</sup> πραότης here certainly means something more general than 'gentleness', the contrary to anger. Epicurus must have in mind

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the pseudo-Platonic Ὅροι s.v. πραότης for a similarly broad definition: κρᾶσις ψυχῆς σύμμετρος (412d6-7).

<sup>3</sup> '[P]lainness and mildness of emotions and a disposition of soul which sets natural limits (sc. on desires).'

something like equanimity or calm. I am tentatively inclined, on this evidence, to think that Lucretius has *πρᾶότης* in mind, but it is hard to feel much conviction.

Whatever the third emotion may be, Lucretius moves rapidly from specific occurrences of the emotions to emotional dispositions. Some animal types are physically predisposed towards certain emotions. If one of the three elements predominates, then the animal species will tend to the emotion linked with that element. Lions have a great deal of the element of fire, and so they are especially given to anger (294-298). Deer have a preponderance of cold wind, which causes them to be extremely timid (299-301). Cattle, which have a large amount of stable air, are naturally moderate, neither especially irascible nor especially fearful (302-306). In a similar manner human beings are predisposed to one or another emotion by their physical makeup, but there is a subtle shift between animals and humans. Humans vary individually, while animals differ by species. One person will be more given to anger than another because the first has more fire than the second, in the same way that lions are more irascible than deer since they have more fire than deer do.<sup>4</sup>

More importantly, humans can control their natural tendencies. The faculty of reason endows humans with the ability to resist their innate dispositions and 'lead a life worthy of the gods' (322). This is no small claim, since for the Epicureans the gods exemplify freedom from the weakness that leads to harmful emotions (*KD* 1, *DRN* III 18-24). Individual humans are born with atomic natures of various types, and these types

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<sup>4</sup> For the importance of human physiology to character and thought, cf. Epicurus on happiness and the origin of language *DL* X 117, *EpH* 75.

incline them to one or another emotion – so a person with a lot of fire will tend to be irascible. Up to a point, reason can prevent, or even remove, such natural inclination. As she becomes more reasonable, the irascible person will not become angry without sufficient cause. Reason cannot entirely remove the tendency, but it can control it to a vast extent.

There is nothing peculiarly Epicurean in this theory of elemental emotions; such a theory had a broad and diverse following in antiquity. Aristotle describes the physical aspect of anger as ‘boiling of blood around the heart and warmth’ (*De An* 403a31-b1), and on the other side ‘fear is a certain type of cooling’ (*Rhet* 1389b32). This last is in a section of the *Rhetoric* where Aristotle contrasts the characters of young and old: it seems that the old are timorous since they are cooler than the young, while the young are more given to anger as a result of their hot natures (1389b31). Just like Lucretius, Aristotle associates specific emotions with particular physical components and specific characters with particular physical types. The Stoics were famously hostile to Aristotle’s theory of emotional moderation, but Seneca the Stoic has extremely similar comments about elements and character. Hot natures incline people to anger, and cold ones to fear (*De Ira* II 19). These associations are a shared heritage, probably of the medical tradition.<sup>5</sup>

Very likely, the real impetus for such connections is not theoretical at all but rather the result of crude connections. A rage is often accompanied by a flush of color, a reddening of the face, which is felt as

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<sup>5</sup> See Helmut Flashar ‘Die medizinischen Grundlagen der Lehre von der Wirkung der Dichtung in der griechischen Poetik’ *Hermes* 84 (1956), 12-48.

warmth. It is an easy, if somewhat simplistic, transition to think of fire here. Similarly, fear often causes pallor and trembling, both of which naturally lead to thoughts of cold. The theories of Aristotle, the Stoics, and the Epicureans incorporate these somewhat simpleminded associations without significant change.

None of this is to say, however, that any of this is positively un-Epicurean. The Epicurean theory of atomism was strongly taken with such crude associations. We can, for example, infer that pleasant foods are made of smooth atoms, but bitter ones are composed of rough and jagged atoms. The reason? Well, of course, the smooth atoms stroke our palates in a pleasing manner, but the hooked atoms cut and dig as they go down (*DRN* II 398-409). So there is nothing heretical in Lucretius's adoption of the element theory of emotional composition, but neither is there anything especially groundbreaking.

APPENDIX TWO  
LETTER TO HERODOTUS 81

Unsurprisingly, one of the more important texts for my interpretation of the Epicureans is maddeningly difficult. There are textual problems galore, and even where the text is sound, it is often near-impossible to comprehend. In this appendix, I offer a full text<sup>1</sup> and translation followed by a discussion of certain especially troubling issues.

Near the end of the *Letter to Herodotus*, Epicurus takes up the relationship of physics and happiness. He argues that people fall into anxiety and worries because of false beliefs about the heavens and death; and he also claims that people's attitudes are often massively irrational, and that this irrationality is itself a source of disturbance. Thus, the knowledge of physics that he has been propounding is necessary for happiness, as is greater self-awareness. Here are his words and a translation:

ἐπὶ δὲ τούτοις ὅλως<sup>2</sup> ἅπασιν ἐκείνο δεῖ κατανοεῖν, ὅτι τάραχος ὁ  
κυριώτατος ταῖς ἀνθρωπίναις ψυχαῖς γίνεται ἐν τῷ ταῦτα<sup>3</sup>  
μακάριά τε δοξάζειν <εἶναι><sup>4</sup> καὶ ἄφθαρτα, καὶ ὑπεναντίας  
ἔχειν τούτοις βουλήσεις ἅμα καὶ πράξεις καὶ αἰτίας, καὶ ἐν τῷ  
αἰώνιον τι δεινὸν ἢ<sup>5</sup> προσδοκᾶν ἢ ὑποπτεύειν κατὰ τοὺς  
μύθους εἴτε κατὰ ταύτην<sup>6</sup> τὴν ἀναισθησίαν τὴν ἐν τῷ τεθνάναι

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<sup>1</sup> In the following, I have consulted the editions of Huebner, Usener, H.S. Long, Bailey, Von der Muehll, Arrighetti, and that of Bollack Bollack and Wismann. I follow standard practice in representing the three main manuscripts as F, B, and P, and the consensus of these as Ω. For details on the manuscripts, see any of the editions mentioned above.

<sup>2</sup> ὅλοις – F; ὅλως – BP

<sup>3</sup> ταῦτα – Ω; but Von der Muehll conjectures ταῦτά, and Arrighetti follows him.

<sup>4</sup> Usener suggested this supplement, and everyone since – save Bollack, Bollack, and Wismann – has accepted it.

<sup>5</sup> καὶ – Ω; Usener conjectures ἀεὶ, and Von der Muehll conjectures ἦ.

<sup>6</sup> κατὰ ταύτην – Ω; but Causabon conjectures καὶ αὐτήν.

φοβουμένους ὡσπερ οὔσαν καὶ αὐτούς,<sup>7</sup> καὶ ἐν τῷ μὴ δόξαις ταῦτα πάσχειν ἀλλ' ἀλόγῳ γέ τιτι παραστάσει, ὅθεν μὴ ὀρίζοντας τὸ δεινὸν τὴν ἴσην ἢ καὶ ἐπιτεταμένην ταραχὴν λαμβάνειν τῷ<sup>8</sup> εἰ καὶ ἐδόξαζον ταῦτα· ἢ δὲ ἀταραξία τὸ τούτων πάντων ἀπολελύσθαι καὶ συνεχῆ μνήμην ἔχειν τῶν ὅλων καὶ κυριοτάτων.

And in addition to all of these matters generally, it is necessary to understand the following. The greatest disturbance befalls human souls, first, in believing that the heavens<sup>9</sup> are blessed and immortal and yet that they have at the same time wishes and activities and responsibilities which are contrary to these things [i.e. blessedness and immortality], and, second, in fearfully either expecting or suspecting some eternal terror because of the myths or because of that lack of sensation in death – as if that and they existed at the same time – and, third, in suffering these things not because of beliefs but because of some irrational state of mind as a result of which they set no limit on what is fearful and they experience disturbance which is equal to or greater than they would experience if they actually believed these things. But tranquillity is to be freed from all of this and to hold a continuous recollection of the general and most important truths.

My text, like that of Bollack, Bollack, and Wismann (*la lettre d'epicure*), returns to the manuscript readings in a number of key places where most other scholars emend. The two key changes which I reject go back to Issac Causabon (1829). Where my text reads εἴτε κατὰ ταύτην τὴν ἀναισθησίαν τὴν ἐν τῷ τεθνάναι φοβουμένους ὡσπερ οὔσαν καὶ αὐτούς, Causabon emends to εἴτε καὶ αὐτὴν τὴν ἀναισθησίαν τὴν ἐν τῷ τεθνάναι φοβουμένους ὡσπερ οὔσαν κατ' αὐτούς. In essence, Causabon exchanges κατά for καί and καί for κατά. His changes are accepted by Usener, Bailey, Von der Muehll, H.S. Long, Hicks, and Arrighetti. It is fair to say that Causabon formed the modern vulgate.

<sup>7</sup> καὶ αὐτούς – Ω; but Causabon conjectures κατ' αὐτούς.

<sup>8</sup> τῷ – B; τὸ – FP; Usener conjectures τῷ, and Bailey emends to ὡς.

<sup>9</sup> ταῦτα refers to what immediately precedes, namely a discussion of the celestial bodies.

Before I defend my text, I want to expand on my translation and consider what this passage amounts to. In this paragraph, Epicurus lists some basic sources of extreme mental disturbance.<sup>10</sup> False beliefs about divine beings, false fears about death, and irrationality produce and nurture our misery. First, people are disturbed when they think that the gods are perfectly happy and immortal but also that they take an active rôle in human life. In Epicurus's opinion, these beliefs are inconsistent: perfect happiness excludes anger and desire such as, say, the Homeric gods display. Second, people fear death, either because they think that they will go to Hades, as the myths foretell, or because they believe that death will be a horrible eternal nothingness, utterly without sensation or consciousness. Third, many times people have the attitudes they do for bad reasons or for no reason at all. Their ideas may be inherited from the people around them or poorly thought out. Such people often have fears and worries thoughtlessly and irrationally, and the very irrationality makes it difficult for them to improve their lives.

As tortuous as it is, this sentence does use parallelism to distinguish these three problems. Each source of disturbance has its own clause, each of which opens with ἐν plus an articular infinitive. The skeleton of this sentence is thus ταραχός γίνεται (1) ἐν τῷ...δοξάζειν...(2) ἐν τῷ ἢ προσδοκᾶν ἢ ὑποπεύειν...(3) ἐν τῷ πάσχειν – disturbance comes about (1) because of believing etc., (2) because of either expecting or suspecting etc., and (3) because of suffering etc. Since Epicurus greatly expands each ἐν clause and overfills the sentence with qualifications, this neat structure is not

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<sup>10</sup> In keeping with the topics of the letter, he omits mention of excessive desires, which are the final canonical source of ταραχή.

especially obvious. But if we hold on to the overarching arrangement, the sentence becomes far more coherent.

Causabon's changes are in the second *ἐν* clause – the one concerning the fears of death. Since he is remarkably brief, we should consider what he has to say for his emendations:

εἶτε κατὰ ταύτην τὴν ἀναισθησίαν etc.] Suspisor legendum, τοὺς καὶ αὐτὴν τὴν ἀναισθησίαν φοβουμένους τὴν ἐν τῷ τεθνάναι, ὡς περ οὔσαν καὶ αὐτούς. nisi malis κατ' αὐτούς. sed illud erit ut figura Attica pro, ὡς τῆς τε ἀναισθησίας καὶ αὐτῶν ὕπαρ ὄντων. vide infra in epistola ad Menoeceum.<sup>11</sup>

One might have expected Causabon to argue for his two changes in tandem, one gaining plausibility from the other. Some mindless scribe switched καί for κατὰ and κατὰ for καί; this may seem unsurprising given the number of times that καί and κατὰ occur in the passage. Oddly, however, Causabon does not link the two changes, and, moreover, he is rather diffident about the second. He thinks that he *can* make sense out of the manuscript reading in the second case, and it may be unfair to credit (or blame) him without qualification for this latter emendation.<sup>12</sup>

The clause makes fine sense without Causabon's first suggestion. If we keep the manuscript's κατὰ ταύτην, then the clause has an underlying balance. Picking up ταραχὸς γίνεται, it reads 'Disturbance comes about...because (people) either expect or suspect some eternal terror, afraid either in accordance with the myths or in accordance with that lack of sensation in death.' The participle φοβουμένους serves as the subject of

<sup>11</sup> It is vaguely terrifying to me that Causabon was able to change the text of this letter forever with four words 'suspisor legendum' and 'nisi malis' – and these relatively casual words at that.

<sup>12</sup> I don't know what *figura Attica* is, nor can I find any reference to it, but I basically take the words as he suggests.



both articular infinitives προσδοκᾶν and ὑποπτεύειν.<sup>13</sup> These people are afraid with greater or lesser conviction – they expect or only worry about a bad future – and their fear has two potential causes – either they fear what the myths foretell, i.e. Hades, or they fear utter nothingness. The two grounds for fear are each contained in a κατά clause, and εἴτε joins the two κατά units.<sup>14</sup> So, however clumsy the expression may be, we do find a balanced structure: people are afraid, with more or less conviction, for this reason or for that reason.

Causabon's emendation mars what little order the clause possesses. Consider Bailey's translation of Causabon's suggestion, which runs, 'disturbance...arises...because they are always expecting or imagining some everlasting misery, such as is depicted in legends, or even fear the loss of feeling in death.' This is broken-backed. It suggests that the fear is a third thing, distinct from expecting or imagining. But grammatically φοβουμένους is not on the same level as προσδοκᾶν and ὑποπτεύειν. Epicurus is trying to say too much at once, but at least he maintains some symmetry: people are afraid of death (φοβουμένους) with greater or weaker conviction (ἢ προσδοκᾶν ἢ ὑποπτεύειν), for one of two reasons (κατά this εἴτε κατά that). Causabon only makes matters worse by breaking the thought in half.

Moreover, Causabon's emendation leaves the solitary εἴτε worse off than it already is. It is rare to find the standard correlatives εἴτε...εἴτε

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<sup>13</sup> The participle modifies an understood 'people' which is easily supplied from ταῖς ἀνθρωπίναις ψυχαῖς above.

<sup>14</sup> This implies another εἴτε to proceed κατά τοὺς μύθους. The omission of the first εἴτε is rare in prose, but it does occur; cf. Denniston 507-508, section iv. The nearest parallel that I can find is in Plato: *Sophist* 217e1-2 ἀπομηκύνειν λόγον συχνὸν κατ' ἑμαυτόν, εἴτε καὶ πρὸς ἕτερον.

without the first εἴτε, but in the manuscript wording at least the lonely εἴτε joins parallel items – the two κατά clauses. In Causabon’s version, it is unclear what εἴτε connects to what. All parallelism is lost. Hence it seems best to keep the manuscript reading and to reject Causabon’s emendation.

There is a second especially hard phrase in the passage. In my version, the people who fear lack of sensation wrongly think of this condition ὡςπερ οὔσαν καὶ αὐτούς. The ὡςπερ clause clearly attributes to these people some justification, presumably a false one, which they have for their fear. But what kind of justification is the thought that ‘lack of sensation exists and they’? Epicurus is brutally brief here, but following Causabon, I take this to be a reference to an argument in the *Letter to Menoecus*. Epicurus argues there that lack of sensation occurs outside the limits of a life. There is no time during which there is ἀναισθησία and the person. Only one or the other exists at a time: when the person exists there is not ἀναισθησία, and when there is ἀναισθησία, the person does not exist. So the point in the *Letter to Herodotus* is that people (wrongly) fear lack of sensation ‘as if that ever exists when they do.’

In view of the obscurity of the manuscript’s reading, Causabon tentatively suggests the alternative ὡςπερ οὔσαν κατ’ αὐτούς. Apparently scholars take this to mean that people fear lack of sensation, ‘as if it were anything to them.’ Translators, at least, have taken the phrase in this manner. Such an idea would be perfectly consistent with Epicurean doctrine, and it would also refer to a pertinent argument in the *Letter to Menoecus* (124). The emendation, however, is not satisfying since κατ’ αὐτούς does not really mean this.

The natural way in Greek to express the idea that something does (or does not) matter to someone, is to say that it is (or is not) πρὸς that person. Consider the following two examples. Aristippus said that only present pleasures were good, 'believing that past pleasures and future pleasures were nothing πρὸς αὐτόν,' that is of no importance to him (G 174.8-9). And Epictetus says that he would welcome even deception in order to learn that external goods and things beyond our control are nothing πρὸς ἡμᾶς,' that is that they are nothing to us (*Diss.* I 4.27). Most important of all, Epicurus habitually uses this type of expression about death: ὁ θάνατος οὐθὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς (*EpM* 125), μηδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς εἶναι τὸν θάνατον (*EpM* 124), οὔτε οὖν πρὸς τοὺς ζῶντας ἐστὶν οὔτε πρὸς τοὺς τετελευτηκότας (*EpM* 125), ὁ θάνατος οὐδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς (*KD* 2 and *VS* 2).<sup>15</sup> I cannot bring myself to believe that Epicurus used an unnatural form of words in place of his perfectly natural and stereotypical phrase.

This argument may seem perverse since the paragraph under consideration is obviously full of unnatural and difficult phrases. But I would point out, first, that here we would have to imagine that he used an odd phrase instead of an easy phrase *which he used all the time*, and, second, that even if an author is difficult and odd, we do not gain the license to add unusual Greek to the text. The reading καὶ αὐτούς may be hard and obscure, but it has on its side that it is the consensus of our three best manuscripts for this letter of Epicurus.

Finally there is confusion concerning the word παράστασις. Epicurus claims that people can suffer disturbance μὴ δόξαις...ἀλλ' ἀλόγῳ γέ τινι παραστάσει, that is not because of beliefs but because of some

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<sup>15</sup> And compare Lucretius's 'nil ad nos' III 830, 845, 850, 852.

irrational παράστασις. A sampling of translations produces little agreement about the meaning of this rare word.<sup>16</sup>

Unfortunately, LSJ's entry on the noun παράστασις is unhelpful, but in any event, it is easier and better to begin with the verbal root. The word παράστασις is a verbal noun from παρίστημι, the most basic meaning of which is 'place beside, cause to stand beside' (LSJ s.v. παρίστημι A I). But the verb was commonly used in a psychological sense, meaning 'set before the mind, present' (A II). Insofar as one person presents something in one way rather than another, the person inclines others to think of the matter one way rather than another. The word, thus, naturally takes on connotations of disposing people, prompting them towards or away from certain courses of actions or trains of thought (A II 1-2). In its intransitive forms, the verb signifies the mental state of one who has an idea or thought occur to him, or the mental state of a person who comes to see things in one way or another, that is to take on a certain attitude or disposition (B III iv).

When the noun stands for this range of the verb's meanings, it generally expresses a highly specific attitude, but it need not always do so. What I mean by specific is that the word παράστασις often stands for a particular state of mind, especially for an extreme of excitement, courage, or desire (LSJ s.v. παράστασις II 7a-d). Thus, LSJ groups both appearances of the noun in Epicurus under the heading 'desire' (II 7d). But as the

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<sup>16</sup> For example, 'not by reasoned opinion, but rather by some irrational presentiment' (Bailey), 'an irrational perversity' (Hicks), 'non in seguito a proprie opinioni ma per una specie di irragionevole insania' (Arrighetti), 'un transport vraiment irrationnel' (Bollack, Bollack, and Wismann), 'non per un saldo convincimento ma per una sorta di delirio mentale' (Gigante), and 'nicht auf Grund fester Vorstellungen, sondern durch irgendeine gedanklose Einstellung in diesen Zustand gerät' (Gigon).

*Glossarium Epicureum* points out, the word can be much more general, and they gloss it as ‘mens animi (bewusstsein), intentio, vel affectus (voluntas) animi’ (516).

Some such broader meaning, e.g. ‘disposition’, ‘attitude’, ‘state of mind’ is much more appropriate to both occurrences in Epicurus. As the first instance, in his death-bed letter Epicurus asks Idomeneus to care for Metrodorus’s children ‘ἀξίως τῆς ἐκ μαιρακίου παραστάσεως πρὸς ἐμὲ καὶ φιλοσοφίαν,’ that is ‘in a manner worthy of the attitude that you have shown to me and philosophy since adolescence.’ A reference to ‘desire’ or ‘ardor’, as LSJ suggest, would be very out of place. Similarly in our passage, people suffer ‘not because of beliefs but because of some irrational attitude or state of mind.’ Again, the notion of ‘desire’ would make nonsense out of this sentence. Olaf Gigon hits the nail right on the head, when he translates, ‘nicht auf Grund fester Vorstellungen, sondern durch irgendeine gedanklose Einstellung’ – not on the basis of firm beliefs, but rather through a kind of thoughtless attitude (28).

APPENDIX THREE  
THE TWO THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS IN III 843-861

Lines 843-861 form a digression in the exposition of the main argument that non-existence is nothing to us (830-869), and they raise two questions. First, how does the digression fit into its surrounding context? Second, what do they say? Obviously the two answers will shed light on each other. If we see what the lines mean, we will better see why Lucretius places them where he does. Alternatively, once we understand the general rôle of the verses in their context, we may have a clearer start on working out their precise significance. In the case of lines 843-861, both questions are difficult, and so there is no obvious way into the problem. I should stress at the outset that my sense of the lines is provisional and open to debate.

As a start, the following should be uncontroversial. In lines 830-869, Lucretius lays out his argument that non-existence is nothing to us. Since death is our utter annihilation, nothing – not even non-existence itself – can harm us. Lucretius sketches this argument in lines 830-842, and he offers greater precision in lines 862-869. In the intervening verses, those which concern us here, he anticipates and shoots down two potential objections. In both cases, Lucretius finds that the objections don't dent his case. It may seem odd that he takes up objections before he finishes his own argument, but in a larger sense his purpose is clear: he is shoring up his case against potential objections.

More specifically, the objections that Lucretius rejects are objections to his claim that death is our complete end. His own account is that death

is the separation of the body and soul and that the soul is destroyed by the process of separation. The objections consider variants on this idea. In the first case, he imagines that the soul survives its separation from the body (843-846). In the second case, he considers a kind of atomic reincarnation (847-861). In either scenario, it may be possible that death is not our final end. Lucretius maintains, however, that his argument works even if the objections are true. In order to understand this better, we need to look at the two sets of verses more closely.

Although Lucretius has spent the earlier portion of Book III proving that the soul is mortal and perishes when it separates from the body,<sup>1</sup> he now grants that the soul survives death and continues to function.

et si iam nostro sentit de corpore postquam	843
distractast animi natura animaeque potestas	844
nil tamen est ad nos, qui comptu coniugioque	845
corporis atque animae consistimus uniter apti.	846

And if the nature of the mind and power of the soul continue to have sensation after they have been torn from our body, nevertheless that is nothing to us – we who consist, fashioned together into one thing, of the ordered union<sup>2</sup> of body and soul.

Lucretius sticks to his guns. Even if the soul survives, that does not matter to us. For, as Lucretius has already said (838-839), ‘we’ are an ordered arrangement of a body and a soul.

Earlier in the book, Lucretius considered the idea that sensation might continue after soul and body separate (624-633). He had argued that if the soul continues to enjoy sensation, it would need to be endowed with

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<sup>1</sup> For these arguments, see chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup> I take ‘comptu coniugioque’ to be a hendiadys, and I take ‘comptus’ < ‘como’ to refer to an orderly arrangement (like the Greek κόσμος). Hence my translation, ‘ordered union’.

the five sense organs. Since sensation as we know it requires the sense organs, a soul without a body can have no access to sensation as we know it. In lines 843-846 Lucretius returns to this idea.

But here we reach our first major problem: what exactly does Lucretius grant in these verses? Does he grant that a disembodied soul could have sensation qualitatively like that of an embodied soul? Or does he only grant that a soul could have some form of sensation by itself but a form unlike any we know?<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, the four lines he offers are noncommittal on this issue. He entertains the thought, for the sake of argument, that a soul continues to have sensation without a body, but he does not explicitly say what kind of sensation he is thinking of. Since his admission is only hypothetical, it is impossible to be certain. He may mean that the soul continues to enjoy sensation just like it enjoys in a body, but he might mean that a disembodied soul could have a *sui generis* form of sensation without a body. When Bailey assumes the latter (II 1134), he goes beyond what the verses explicitly say.

Whatever exactly Lucretius grants for the sake of argument, he maintains, and clearly maintains, that it does not affect his case. A person is a functional union of a soul and a body. Even if a soul could function alone, in whatever way, this would not matter to us, since we are a soul and body compound. Survival of the soul alone won't cut it.

This suggests one way to support Bailey's construal of the verses. Lucretius has a better argument if we take the point as Bailey does. If disembodied souls could have sensory experiences just like ours, it might

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<sup>3</sup> To put it another way, does he grant the direct denial of his previous argument, or does he only consider a weaker but related idea?



seem odd to deny that such souls could be us. Perhaps personal identity could survive the loss of a body. But if a soul with no body could only have sensation unlike any we have ever known, then it seems reasonable to deny that such a soul could preserve our identity at all. Since nothing positively forbids this interpretation, considerations of charity make it hard to resist. In either case, however, Lucretius considers the idea that the soul survives death and remains functional, but he insists that this would not matter since we are a soul and a body.

The next verses also consider an odd puzzle about identity, and again Lucretius digs in his heels.

nec, si materiem nostram collegerit aetas	847
post obitum rursusque redegerit ut sita nunc est	
atque iterum nobis fuerint data lumina vitae,	
pertineat quicquam tamen ad nos id quoque factum,	850
interrupta semel cum sit repetentia nostri.	
et nunc nil ad nos de nobis attinet, ante	
qui fuimus, neque iam de illis nos adficit angor.	
nam cum respicias immensi temporis omne	
praeteritum spatium, tum motus materiai	855
multimodis quam sint, facile hoc adcredere possis,	
semina saepe in eodem, ut nunc sunt, ordine posta	
haec eadem, quibus e nunc nos sumus, ante fuisse.	[865]
nec memori tamen id quimus reprehendere mente:	[858]
inter enim iectast vitai pausa, vageque	860[859]
deerrarunt passim motus ab sensibus omnes.	[860]

Nor, if time collects our matter after death and brings it back into its current state and the light of life is again given to us, would it matter at all to us that this had been done, when our recollection of ourselves had been interrupted once and for all. And now nothing reaches us from 'ourselves' before we existed, nor does difficulty from them affect us. For when you consider all the previous expanse of measureless time and the manifold motions of matter, you could easily believe this: often these same atoms from which we now are made were previously placed in the same order as they now are. Nor nevertheless are we capable of recalling this with a remembering mind, for a pause of life has

been interposed and all the motions from sensations have wandered every which way.

If in the previous verses Lucretius says too little, here he says too much. He asks us to imagine that at some time in the future our atoms may recombine and form a person just like us. But the double will not really be us because it will not have our memories. Hence even if this bizarre duplication comes to pass, death is still the utter end of us. There is an obvious incoherence here: the double is and is not us.

It is unclear what the details of this duplication should be, but one of three options seems most likely. First, there may be a kind of 'eternal recurrence of the same'. On this picture, at some point in the future, everything in this world, including ourselves, will recur in exactly the same form as now. The Stoics appear to have had some such idea (cf. L & S 52). Alternatively, perhaps the duplication is not of everything together, but just of individuals separately. At some time in the future my atoms may recombine, and there will be a new me; but this new me will exist in a very different world than the one I inhabit now. But there are two versions of this notion available. On the one hand, I might be 'born again' as an infant in the normal way, or, alternatively, I may pop into existence, just as I now am, at a more mature state of development. So the three options are, first, global recurrence of the same, second, random rebirth of individuals, or, third, random instantaneous reformation of grown individuals. Lucretius does not make clear which of these options he has in mind.

Lucretius places one clear limitation on any interpretation of this scenario. Unlike the previous idea of a functional, disembodied soul, Lucretius does not consider the doppelgänger notion to be impossible. In

fact, in lines 852-853, he states in the indicative that already in the past there have been such duplicates of us. Hence we can rule out options if we can safely say that any of them are impossible according to Epicurean theory. With this limitation in mind, I think that we can rule out one option entirely and cast severe doubt on another.

According to the Epicureans, people cannot pop into existence out of thin air, and so this construal of the verses is no good. In Book I, Lucretius argues that nothing can come from nothing, and he backs up his claim by pointing out that things come about in fixed ways. He considers a number of perverse and spontaneous births – men born from the sea, birds and fish popping from the sky – and he reminds us that such births are impossible since creation follows regular patterns (159-173). He continues by pointing out that such spontaneous generations would also allow for irregular growth – people could become adults without any time for development. But as he says, ‘It is clear that none of these things happens since everything grows little by little, as is appropriate, from a fixed seed’ (188-189). Clearly, Lucretius did not think it was possible for people to pop into existence, in an advanced state of growth, by spontaneous reformation of their atoms. They must follow the fixed cycle of human creation and development. A twenty-eight year old could not, in Lucretius’s universe, suddenly come into existence fully formed.

The most common interpretation of lines 847-861 also seems unlikely, if not impossible. Commentators generally attribute to Lucretius the Stoic idea of *παλιγγενεσία*.<sup>4</sup> They refer us to a passage of Justin in order

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<sup>4</sup> So Heinze, Bailey, and Kenney.

to make this plausible.<sup>5</sup> According to Justin (U 283a), Epicurus believes that atoms are immortal and therefore it is possible for them to reform, after death, into a body which has been previously destroyed. This is obviously the same idea that we find in Lucretius, but neither Justin nor Lucretius licenses the Stoic style interpretation. All that Justin and Lucretius say is that individuals may recombine at random in the future. They never say that the entire world may reform all together just as it is now. Although this latter idea may not be impossible, according to Epicurean physics, it would require a staggering amount of coincidence. If one body recombines, then its constituent atoms must come back together by chance. This may seem unlikely, but how much more unlikely is it that all the atoms of everything should reform just as they are now, and all at the same time? The coincidence would be almost immeasurably large.

The Stoics, who do believe in the recurrence of the whole world and its inhabitants, can support their belief by recourse to teleology and providence, but the Epicureans have no such recourse. If this is the best of all possible worlds, then it may seem reasonable that everything in it is just right and that nothing should entirely disappear into the past. Hence it may seem right that this best of all possible worlds should be repeated, just as it is. And if a rational, divine mind oversees the workings of everything, then that all-powerful mind can make sure that the repetition goes right. But the Epicureans are staunch anti-teleologists and they deny providence of any kind. It is bizarre to imagine a global recurrence of the same which takes place entirely by chance.

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<sup>5</sup> Note that it is *prima facie* unlikely that Epicureans and Stoics should share any such position, since the Stoic position relies on teleology and providence – both of which the Epicureans reject.

If these two options won't do, we seem to be left with the idea that, at random, a person's atoms may come back together and a person may be born again. These duplicates would start out like us, in some sense, but they would have no initial memory of us, since they would start out, as we did, with no memory at all. And since they would go through a different life, by the time they get to where we are now, they would not have our personality or memory. They would be formed differently by different experiences in a different world. Hence, in a deeper sense, they are not us, even if they share our atoms.

The problem with this option is that it does not seem to capture all of what Lucretius says. Lucretius seems to envisage absolute atom for atom identity: the future us has all our atoms in precisely the same positions as ours (857-858). But my interpretation cannot provide such complete identity, because in a different world with a different development, there may be large-scale duplication, but it will never be absolute and numerically identical. The other two options could guarantee total duplication, but they have other problems that make them unappealing.

This is where this thought experiment comes apart. Apparently Lucretius makes two claims. First that the duplicates are absolutely identical, and, second, that they have different memories. But without a breach in his materialism, these two claims are incompatible. Memory just is a product of atomic states, and so two creatures with numerically identical atomic states would have the same memories. Lucretius cannot have it both ways. Either the two people are utterly identical or they are not, but if they are, then they have the same memories. In order to salvage

anything of what Lucretius says here, we must weaken or qualify one of the two claims.

His overall goal shows which way we should go. Lucretius argues that the past and future twins are not really us since they don't share our memories (850-851, 859-861). This is an argument that he used earlier against the idea of reincarnation (670-678). Lucretius must maintain the thesis that the twins are not us. Otherwise his case is vulnerable because of a possible, if bizarre, form of post-mortem survival for us. Thus, it seems best to keep this claim and to give up the strong version of the identity claim. Instead of saying that the future duplicate will be like us atom for atom, we must say something weaker. Duplicates may share a great deal of atomic makeup, but the overlap is not complete. In particular the atoms that constitute memory must differ. Only if they don't share memories will they be different people.

The passage from Justin may indirectly reinforce my interpretation (U 283a). In his view, Epicurus believed that our atoms may fortuitously come to form the same body ( $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$ ) again. Since memory is a function of the soul's atoms, it may be significant that Justin says that the 'body' will be the same rather than that the person will be the same. Both bodies and souls consist of atoms. At birth we start out with a certain group of atoms, and as we develop, these atoms develop and they take on certain forms. Souls come to have certain memories by storing particular atomic configurations which can be recalled into consciousness. Perhaps Lucretius and Justin mean that duplicates start out with the same atoms in the same formations. Since their worlds and developments are different, they will become distinct over time – in particular their memories will differ. This

would explain why Justin says that the bodies are the same, since the important distinction between the two individuals is in the soul. In some sense the two people have the same body, but their souls, in particular their memories, distinguish them.

If we take this line, we get a further structural bonus. In 830-842, Lucretius argues that death does not matter to us since we are compounds of soul and body and these compounds break down at death. On my interpretation, the two thought experiments in 843-861 take up, one at time, the two components of this compound. Lines 843-846 show that a soul alone is not sufficient to maintain our identity – granting that a soul could function without a body. And, on my interpretation, lines 847-861 show that a body alone cannot preserve identity. Thus the verses as a whole should demonstrate that a person is a soul and body compound, and neither alone will do. Unfortunately, unlike Justin, Lucretius does not make his specific concern for the body clear in lines 847-861. But if such a focus is implicitly present, it would give coherence to the passage as a whole.

His argument in lines 830-869 would then run thus. Death is nothing to us since we are compounds of soul and body and these are destroyed at death. On the one hand, even if the soul survives (which it does not), the person nevertheless perishes; the only continuity between soul and body would be sensation, and perhaps even this would be different for a disembodied soul. On the other hand, a bodily duplicate is not a duplicate of the person; we know this because a bodily duplicate would lack our memories, and without our memories it could not be us. Hence, the separation of soul and body at death destroys *us* irrevocably.

Since harm requires an existent subject and death removes any such subject, death is no harm. If there is no harm in death, then we should not fear it. There are still problems about the details of 843-861, but this is at least a coherent overview of how the verses function in the larger argument. Perhaps that is all we should ask for in the end.



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<sup>4</sup> Note that this work went through a number of editions, and Mary Mothersill's article appears only in the 1971 second edition.



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