Rereading Lucretius: The Plague of Athens and Epicurean Attachment in *De Rerum Natura*

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This dissertation addresses the problem of the concluding passage of Lucretius' didactic poem *De Rerum Natura*, which famously consists of a vivid and evocative account of the Plague of Athens of 430 BCE that ends abruptly and without explanation, with no indication what lessons in Epicurean philosophy the reader is meant to learn from it. While many scholars have suggested a variety of explanations for this ending, this dissertation approaches the text from a narratological angle to examine Lucretius on the basis of first and second readings. This perspective, I conclude, offers two important insights. Foremost, it reveals that the poem's abrupt ending recontextualizes the rest of the poem, where the content of its narrative reframes the reader's understanding of earlier passages upon a second reading, confronting them with evidence of their past misconceptions. Further, a second reading of the poem with the context of the Plague offers the reader new insight into the nature of Epicurean communities and addresses the problems of proper attachment and detachment regarding the suffering of others in a hedonist system of philosophy. In short, while the first reader may conclude that Epicureanism is predicated on isolation and ignoring the suffering of others, the Plague reveals to the second reader that the opposite is true, and that Epicureanism is instead founded upon concern and care for the other members of one's community.

Over the course of this dissertation, I apply a close reading of the Plague to earlier sections of the poem, revealing how its content and context reshapes the lessons offered by Lucretius' poem into something new. I ultimately conclude that the final lesson contained within the poem is in essence an evangelical call to action, where the newly converted reader concludes that he has an obligation to spread the gospel of Epicurus to his friends and family, becoming a teacher to others just as Lucretius has been a teacher to him.

Contents

Acknowledgements

There are many wonderful people I would like to thank here, for their kind support and dedication as I have worked through this dissertation project. I'll begin by thanking my advisor, Jed Atkins, whose constant and enthusiastic support has been a fantastic aid throughout my entire graduate career. I also extend my gratitude to my dissertation committee: Gregson Davis, Micaela Janan, and James O'Hara, all of whom have had a hand in shaping this project from its very roots to its current form. I would also like to thank the entire Classical Studies department, especially Joshua Sosin and Lauren Ginsberg, whose support and guidance as Directors of Graduate Studies have been greatly appreciated.

I would like to thank my parents, Kris and Tee, for their continued support as I continued through this long period of work and research; my brother Stone, whose tireless cheer was always a welcome gift; and my grandmother Laura, for her kindness and support. My thanks also go out to my dear friends Kunal Kaistha and Mason Challinor; to my cohort, Alex Karsten and Tori Lee, whose company and camaraderie have been a wonderful constant these past seven years; and to Nick Winters, whose dedication and passion for scholarship have been an inspiration.

Finally, my deepest thanks to my constant companions throughout my graduate career, my tabletop role-playing group: to Rebecca Winters and Michael Freeman, two kindred souls, and to our other members, Danielle Vander Horst and Benjamin Moon-Black, for giving me the gift of your time, dedication, and imagination on a weekly basis. I would not have made it to this point without the joy that dreaming up worlds, characters, and stories with you has brought me.

1. Introduction

The conclusion to Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* is famously vivid, startling, and abrupt. After six books describing in poetic detail all facets of Epicurean physics, moving from the smallest particles to the greatest of celestial bodies, Lucretius ends his opus with a scientific theory regarding the transmission of disease, which then proceeds to describe the terrible Plague of Athens in 430 BCE, just at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War. Lucretius here largely adapts material right out of Thucydides' account of the same event, describing its origins in Egypt before its descent upon the Athenians leads to death, turmoil, and the collapse of society in the face of seemingly unavoidable destruction. But while Thucydides then continues his history, Lucretius' narrative ends abruptly, ending with the Athenians brawling over the unburnt bodies of their family members. There is no lesson, no direct explanation, as to why Lucretius devotes his last two hundred lines of poetry to this evocative account of physical and social disease. *De Rerum Natura* simply ends, leaving its reader to puzzle out the purpose of this ending.

This puzzling has been the dominant aspect of scholarship written on the Plague for the past century. Many have ventured theories as to why Lucretius ends his poem in this fashion. For some, the explanation is as simple as attributing the lack of moralizing to a lack of polish, adopting the view that Lucretius simply died before penning the final revisions to this part of the poem.[1] Others have noted the parallels between Lucretius' described symptoms of disease and those of love in Book IV, arguing that the Plague is consequently a depiction of the faults of non-

[1] Likely spurred on by Jerome's claim that Lucretius himself died prematurely due to ingesting a love potion, with the poem written in bursts of clarity. While there was much division over the historicity of this incident, as described in Bailey 1947, I.1-12, allegations of Lucretius' *insania* have been convincingly dismissed in Ziegler 1936, 421 and Wormell 1960. For scholarship that the poem is an unfinished draft, see Bignone 1945, II.318-322, who suggests that the description of the abode of the gods promised in 5.155 would be the intended ending, and Sedley 1998, 157-165, which I discuss in Ch. 3.3.

Epicurean living[2] or the vices of non-Epicurean society.[3] Others still have posited that the abruptness is itself a didactic device, a method for testing whether the reader can read about horrible things with a *pacata mens* and therefore has internalized the emotional self-defense that Epicureanism offers.[4]

There are a number of helpful insights that all these arguments for explanation can offer modern readers of Lucretius; however, I hold that there is a fundamental element to reading Lucretius that these arguments largely overlook or ignore. It is easy for modern readers to read Lucretius within the full context of Epicureanism and the history of the late Roman Republic, and thus we can easily note the ways in which Lucretius plays with and discusses issues of Epicurean ethics, physics, and sociology. This perspective, however, is only one way that an ancient reader might have interacted with the text. Such a reader, perhaps an already well-read Epicurean, would likely have many of the same opinions and perspectives as modern scholars. What he and modern academics lack is the perspective of the non-Epicurean: the otherwise well-read Roman nobleman whose first substantial exposure to the philosophy of Epicurus is, in fact, Lucretius.

This perspective, I hold, offers us the key to understanding the nature of Lucretius' conclusion. P. H. Schrijvers has suggested that the reader, shocked and surprised at the contrast between the horrors of the Plague and the delights of the Invocation of Venus, will begin reading the poem anew after finishing it.[5] In so doing, the reader will begin the cycle of generation and

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[2] Commager 1957
[3] e.g. Gellar-Goad 2020, 181-183, 203-206; Minyard 1985, 60-61; Schrijvers 1970 315; Segal 1990 Ch. 10
[4] Most famously Clay 1983, 257-266, but cf. Nichols 1976, 176-178. Müller [1978] 2007, 251-254 sees the lack of direct explanation in the Plague as a test of the reader's ability to extrapolate its lesson from the rest of his Epicurean education. Jope 1989 argues that the entirety of Book 6 is structured to support the reader's ability to detach themselves from the horrors depicted at the poem's end.
[5] Schrijvers 1970, 323-324

decomposition exemplified by the poem's structure,[6] only now equipped with the full knowledge of Lucretius' instruction.[7] Gale suggests that this act will provide the reader with the consolation they desire but which the Plague does not offer,[8] and Schiesaro remarks that "the *De rerum natura* renews itself as a didactic experience that the reader is programmatically enticed to repeat over and over again"[9]. But while Schrijvers, Gale, and Schiesaro all entertain the idea of a second reading, they do not proceed to interrogate the insights to the poem that this approach might offer us, instead in each case using this idea as the capstone for their larger academic arguments. So, in this dissertation I shall embark on exactly this endeavor that has been suggested but never directly addressed. I argue that, should the non-Epicurean reader decide to reread the poem from its beginning for precisely the reasons cited by these scholars, he will be confronted with direct evidence of his past misunderstandings, as supposed "contradictions" within the text reveal themselves to be artfully hidden lessons left behind for just such a reader.

Then, as this reader continues through the poem a second time, he will ultimately realize, armed with the full knowledge of the entirety of Lucretius' lessons, the further hidden truth of Lucretius' Epicureanism, which can only be discovered within this full context and which provides us with a satisfactory answer for the Plague's purpose: that Epicureanism, beyond its emphasis on hedonism and science, is a philosophy of attachment and detachment, of society and community, and that properly understanding how to regulate one's own attachment to others is the fundamental lesson Lucretius' work sets out to teach. The cornerstone of my argument lies in

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[6] Minadeo 1969
[7] While Clay 1983 devotes much attention to how subsequent passages alter the reader's understanding of earlier ones, particularly with the "Eclipse of Venus" by Cybele and later Natura in pp. 226-234, his focus is solely on the experience of a first reader, rather than my project of examining how these earlier passages are transformed upon a *second* reading.
[8] Gale 1994, 228; Gale 2004, 61-63
[9] Schiesaro 1994, 100

one particular section Book 6, where Lucretius contrasts the cowardice of those who flee their sick loved ones with the noble acceptance of those who remain to soothe and ultimately die with them (6.1239-1246)[10]:

> Nam quicumque suos fugitabant visere ad aegros,
> vitai nimium cupidos mortisque timentis
> poenibat paulo post turpi morte malaque,
> desertos, opis expertis, uncuria mactans.
> qui fuerant autem praesto, contagibus ibant
> atque labore, pudor quem tum cogebat obire
> blandaque lassorum vox mixta voce querellae.
> optimus hoc leti genus ergo quisque subibat.
>
> For whosoever fled going to see their sick family members,
> desiring too much of life and fearing too much of death,
> shortly thereafter slaughtering Neglectfulness punished them
> with a terrible, ugly death, deserted and bereft of resources.
> But those who stayed nearby, who passed due to
> the touch and the toil,
> which shame and the persuasive voice of the wearied
> mixed with the voice of complaint compelled them to meet.
> Thus did all the best undergo this manner of death.

This incident, with its emphasis on the goodness of attachment and the evils of detachment, acts in stark contrast to Lucretius' frequent praise for Epicurean detachment, especially in the famous proem to Book 2. Over the course of this dissertation, I will apply the implications of this passage to other depictions of society and connection found throughout the poem, demonstrating that, while initially contradictory, Lucretius' varied descriptions of social relationships actually form a unified argument for zealous participation in one's community and active attachment to the affairs of others. Ultimately, I will use my observations about Epicurean ethics and society to argue that the ultimate lesson Lucretius has for his second reader is an evangelical call to action: just as Lucretius has offered honey-rimmed philosophy to the reader and as the *optimi* Athenians

[10] All Latin text from Lucretius has been taken from the 1992 Rouse-Smith Loeb edition of the text. Unless otherwise noted all translations are my own.

rendered care to their sick, it now falls to the newly converted reader to assume the role of Epicurean doctor and go about the treating the sick minds of his friends and family.[11]

Over the following five chapters, I will lay out the evidence for applying a retrospective reading to Lucretius' texts and the numerous lessons this methodology imparts, ultimately pointing to the importance of altruism and community in an Epicurean lifestyle. In the rest of this introductory first chapter, I will establish the viability to this retrospective approach to begin with, first by discussing how Lucretius' work plays towards the sort of non-Epicurean reader I am proposing, and second by noting some other examples of ancient works which prompt readers with a surprising ending to reread their texts anew.

In the second chapter, I will apply this retrospective reading to the first one hundred lines of the poem, demonstrating how knowledge of the poem's conclusion shifts and alters the second reader's perspective on its beginning. This change will serve to inform the reader of his own mistaken assumptions and incentivize him to continue his rereading project.

In the third chapter, I will address the nature of scholarship on Lucretius' Plague, using this retrospective approach to expand and comment upon the major trends in scholarship on this puzzling ending. Moving from there, in the fourth chapter I will examine how the nature of social and political community displayed by Lucretius' anthropology of early humans reveal important facets of his Epicurean political theory, which emphasizes pity as much as mutual benefit as the underlying purpose of society. I will then apply those observations back to the Book 6 and Plague in the fifth chapter, where I underscore the emphasis Lucretius places upon social relationships and how this emphasis plays into the ultimate didactic purpose of the poem's conclusion: evangelism.

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[11] Cf. Gigante 1975 for context on the prevalence of the medical analogy for philosophy in Hellenistic thought.

In the sixth and final chapter, I will discuss the nature of Lucretius' evangelism and the second reader's next steps after he has finished rereading the poem. There, I will ultimately conclude that this second reader will act with his new knowledge to either join an established Epicurean community or form his own — an act which, by both the reader's informed actions and that his conversion was sparked by the indirect lessons of Lucretius via poetry, will serve to solve the fundamental problem of Epicurean conversion: that conversion by its very nature requires associating with non-Epicureans, which is a dangerous matter for individuals whose *ataraxia* could be threatened by such association.

Thus, with the context of the poem and this retrospective reading established, I hold that both the second reader and modern scholars can now fully understand the purpose of the Plague's sudden and abrupt ending. By jarring the reader into reapproaching the text anew, Lucretius confronts him with his own prior mistaken beliefs and continues his education in Epicureanism, before ultimately leaving him to continuing his studies on his own, equipped with the tools and knowledge necessary to do so. Now he, like us, can embark on a hunt like the hunting dogs of 1.402-403: we have caught the scent of truth, so now it is time for us to follow it, walking in the footsteps of Lucretius on Helicon as those tracks lead us into pursuit of scientific truth.

1.1 Background: A Brief Epitome of Lucretius' Plague and Surrounding Scholarship

Before we embark on said hunt, however, we must ensure that we have the lay of the land of our hunting grounds. Accordingly, I will first lay out the structure and synopsis of Lucretius' account of the Plague of Athens, as well as introduce the popular scholarly interpretations of its purpose, which I will discuss in greater detail in the third chapter.

After discussing the physics behind a wide array of meteorological phenomena and how they are not caused by divine action, Lucretius concludes his final Book with an Epicurean theory of disease and its origins, describing how particles of disease enter the atmosphere and spread by

entering water, crops, and air and thereby entering into the humans and animals that eat and breathe those materials (6.1090-1137). Lucretius then proceeds in his usual argumentative fashion, bolstering his argument for Epicurean physics through a specific example that supports up his points:[12] the infamous Plague of Athens of 431 BCE. Over the next 150 or so lines, Lucretius adapts in striking detail a passage from Thucydides (2.47-54), himself a survivor of that very pandemic. Lucretius by and large sticks to the same order of events and descriptions found in Thucydides, although he includes what may be some inclusions from the Hippocratic corpus[13] and edits and even omits elements from Thucydides. While some have argued that these changes might indicate that Lucretius was working with a Latin intermediary instead of the original Greek[14] or may simply have struggled with the technicalities of Thucydides' Greek,[15] I am convinced by Bright's excellent comparative analysis between Lucretius and Thucydides' texts and his conclusion that Lucretius not only was working with Thucydides' text in Greek (which would certainly make sense, given the wide familiarity with other Greek works in Lucretius I discuss later in this introduction), but also that his omissions and emendations to Thucydides are not the result of mistranslation or misunderstanding, but rather serve to support his ultimate goal

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[12] Earlier scholarship tends to disparage Lucretius' aptitude with logic: Bailey 1940 argues that Lucretius is more "visual" than "logical", and Classen 1968 portrays his arguments as more based in persuasion and rhetoric than in actual logic. More recent scholarship sees a far more discerning hand at play in his rhetoric. Asmis 1983 concludes that Lucretius maintains control over his arguments' logic, regardless of whether that consistency is immediately apparent to the reader. Markovič 2008, 34-46 argues that Lucretius' rhetorical style resembles the use of *chreia* in Hellenistic education.

[13] Specifically the symptoms described in 6.1183-1197, which have no equivalent in Thucydides. See Munro 1866, 672-673 and Ernout & Robin 1928, 351, 354-356.

[14] Ernout & Robin 1928, 359-360 suggest this based on the apparent "mistranslation" of ἀπώλλυντο in 6.1239: where Thucydides states that the *victims* died after they were abandoned, while Lucretius shifts the sense to mean that those who abandoned them were the ones who died. Bright 1971 613-614 does an excellent job summarizing this issue of translation and convincingly argues that this shift in subject is a deliberate choice of Lucretius' adaptation, rather than an instance of mistranslation.

[15] A telling example of the credit (or lack thereof) editors give Lucretius can be found in 6.1152, where in describing the disease's progression through the body Lucretius uses *cor* as a translation for καρδία, which Ernout & Robin 1928, 352; Bailey 1947, 1728; and Munro 1866, 670 all take as a mistranslation of the Greek's sense of "stomach". Leonard & Smith 1942, 858 are more charitable, observing that Lucretius appears to have deliberately changed the location of the disease for emotional impact, which has later been expanded by Bright 1971, 610 and Commager 1957, 105-106.

of emphasizing the severity of the Plague and its inescapable lethality.[16] I will return to both Bright's conclusions and the function of these edits at in my third chapter, but for the moment, I will briefly summarize the events that unfold in Lucretius' rendering of the Plague of Athens.

Lucretius begins by relating how the Plague originated in Egypt before finally arriving in the lands of Athens (6.1138-1144). He then describes the illness' physical symptoms: burning fevers, bloodshot eyes, bloody and ulcered throats and tongues, and rotting breath (6.1145-1157). Lucretius then turns from the external to the internal, describing both the individual's experience while suffering from the Plague and its impact upon their mind and sensations. The illness sapped their strength of mind and body, feeling anguish at all times and exhausted by constant retching (6.1158-1162). Though their skin would only feel lukewarm once touched, the ill felt a roaring fire deep within their bones. Only cool air and wind offered relief, and people tried in vain to quench this fire and their immense thirst by casting themselves into wells and cisterns (6.1163-1181).

Lucretius then tells us how the disease affected the mental states of the ill, as shown through their facial expressions and physical reactions. They were sleepless, with brows furrowed and face irritated, their breathing either quick or deep and infrequent. Hands clenched, limbs trembled, and their entire face grew tight and hollow (6.1182-1198). Most died on the eighth or ninth day of the illness, and any who survived past that were beset by ulcers and blackened discharge from the bowels or nostrils. The disease would also then spread into muscles, limbs, and genitals, leading some to amputate hands, feet, genitals, or eyes in futile attempts at avoiding death. Total amnesia took others (6.1199-1214).

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[16] Bright 1971. As we shall see over the course of this dissertation, while there is a great amount of insight offered by his article, I nevertheless disagree with Bright's ultimate conclusion that the terror and grotesquery of the Plague are the "anti-Lucretius" breaking through and giving into his despair instead of embracing the horror with a proper Epicurean mindset (632).

Bodies were left unburied, ignored by birds and wild beasts for fear of infection, and dogs lay dying in the streets (6.1215-1224). Funerals were hurried, and there was no certain treatment, as what aided one doomed another (6.1225-1229). The onslaught never ceased, burning through men like livestock. Some abandoned their sick to die, only to die themselves; others, whom Lucretius praises as *optimus*, instead chose to stay and care for their loved ones, despite the death sentence carried by exposure to the sick (6.1230-1246). Following a lacuna in the text, the narrative resumes with a description of Athenians brawling over burying their families, before returning home and falling into bed from grieving (6.1247-1251).[17]

Disease did not spare the countryside, with parents and children lying dead upon each other (6.1252-1258). The sick would in turn come into the city from the country, leaving buildings filled with the sick and corpses lying in the street and draped over fountains (6.1259-1271). Each temple served as a mortuary, for all abandoned the veneration of the gods in the face of this present grief. Traditional burial rites were abandoned, and men fought to the death over funerary biers for their loved ones (6.1272-1286). And so Lucretius ends his description of the Plague of Athens, offering to the reader no indication of this passage's purpose, the lessons it imparts, or rationale for its place as the poem's final section.

The lack of resolution or any explicit moralizing on Lucretius' part for the poem's ending has caused a great deal of debate amongst scholars as to what exact purpose the Plague of Athens fulfills in *De Rerum Natura*. I will delve into these interpretations in greater detail in my third chapter, where I unpack how scholars have developed their arguments through analyzing the

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[17] Bockemüller's edition transposes these lines to the end of the poem, both because their usual placement is awkward and because they offer a more unified ending to the poem than 6.1286. Bright 1971, 620-623 notes that the original placement would mark the sole time that Lucretius places his adapted material from Thucydides out of order (here, 6.1247-1248 are adapted from Thucydides 52.4, while 6.1239-1246 are from 51.5-6 and 6.1252 ff. are from 52.1), which makes this transposition even more appealing. Cf. P. Fowler [1997] 2007.

rationale behind Lucretius' choice of disease, destruction, and Athens itself as the topics and setting for his conclusion. Some have argued that the Plague is a necessary element of the poem's structure of cycles of creation and destruction: for Lucretius' poem to begin with the generation of life with the advent of Venus, it must also end with the destruction of life by the advent of a death-dealing force of nature.[18] Others have noted the clear political underpinnings of the social environment depicted in this passage, arguing that Lucretius is here using the example of physical disease to demonstrate truths about the mentally diseased nature of non-Epicurean society, with Athens acting as an allegory for the corruptions of Lucretius' own Roman society[19]. Alternately, the negative depiction of non-Epicurean society here may act not as a critique of society, but rather as a demonstration of the Epicurean obligation towards aiding one's neighbors and maintaining the mutual benefit of the social contract.[20] Others have focused instead not on the matter of Lucretius' conclusion, but its manner: these scholars have postulated that the societal and physical decay exemplified by the Plague serves foremost a didactic purpose. By this interpretation, the heightened terror and disgust the Plague description evokes allows Lucretius to impart one final lesson to his reader, which is aided further by the abrupt and unresolved ending he surprises the reader with. This lack of resolution may serve to impart to the reader a final demonstration of the inherently uncaring nature of the universe[21] or act as a final test of the

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[18] Gale 1994, 224-228; Minadeo 1969, esp. 32-33 and 98-104. Schiesaro 1994, 102-103 emphasizes how the reader's greater understanding of the cyclic nature of creation and destruction would lead them to understand that the Plague's dire focus on death will be closely followed by the pleasant generation displayed in the Invocation of Venus. P. Fowler 2007, 205-6 suggests that the transposition of 6.1247-1251 to the end of the poem would accomplish a similar sort of symmetry.

[19] e.g. Gellar-Goad 2020, 181-183, 203-206; Minyard 1985, 60-61; Segal 1990, 232-237 See further discussion in Ch. 3.2.

[20] Hammer 2014, 137-43

[21] Müller [1978] 2007, 234-235

reader's ability to maintain their Epicurean peace of mind even when presented with abject terrors like the ones detailed here.[22]

While all of these observations contain important elements that will aid in our dissection of the Plague's ultimate function within the poem, it is that last element, the lack of resolution, that I will focus on especially here. I will argue that this inconclusive conclusion functions as a prompt for the reader to start the poem anew after their first read. The invested reader, perplexed at this seemingly inexplicable ending, will pick up the first book of the poem again, hoping that they might perhaps uncover some earlier lesson that could explain Lucretius' reasoning for ending his poem this way. In so doing, this second-time reader will be confronted with new contexts with the lessons he has already learned and thus expand his Epicurean education even further. I will examine the impetus behind this second reader in greater detail in the following chapter, but before we discuss how Lucretius' pupil might reread his poem, we should first establish what sort of audience his work cultivates in the first place. For that, we can turn to how Lucretius presents his work, what assumptions he makes about his reading audience, and how those two elements inform our understanding of his readership and their initial prejudices and biases regarding Epicureanism.

1.2 The Constructed Reader

While many specifics are, naturally, impossible for modern scholars to ascertain, Lucretius does provide throughout his text many hints, both implicit and explicit, about the sort of audience to whom he is directing his didactic project. Through close analysis of the poem, as well as contextual knowledge of the state of Epicureanism in Rome during Lucretius' time, we can

[22] Clay 1983, 257-266

make certain assertions about the sort of reader that Lucretius works to construct within the poem.[23, 24] An appropriate place to begin our reconstruction of Lucretius' assumed audience, then, would naturally be the poem's addressee and the poet's would-be pupil, Memmius. By taking note of Memmius' characterization and assumed philosophical beliefs, we can observe how Lucretius presents his arguments to the Roman elite, which in turn demonstrates the philosophical and literary background Lucretius assumes of his reader. After I have discussed Memmius' depiction in the poem, I will then use his characterization as a jumping off point to observe how Lucretius Romanizes Epicureanism for the reader, making the unfamiliar philosophy more palatable to the skeptical Roman by dressing it in the familiar garb of his country's culture. Following this discussion of the nature of Lucretius' audience, I will conclude this introduction by comparing the *aporia* of the poem's conclusion with other contemporary works of Greek and Roman literature, elements of which lend support to my argument for a retrospective reading of the poem.

To begin with, we should make an effort to separate the historical Memmius from the Memmius described in *De Rerum Natura*. Gaius Memmius has been a figure of great interest in Lucretian scholarship, for a number of reasons. Foremost among these is that this Memmius is likely the same Memmius who, after a political career as tribune and praetor, planned on demolishing Epicurus' Garden (*kēpos*) in Athens.[25] This small anecdote, along with how well the

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[23] I am here breaking with Martindale 1993, who makes well-reasoned criticisms of imputing qualities or group identity to ancient readers, esp. pp. 15-18. While Martindale's critiques are sound, I argue that my project here is less all-encompassing than the sorts of practices he cautions against. Firstly, the unique nature of Roman interaction with Epicurean material (as detailed in this section as well as explored in Ch. 6.1) allows us to make more certain conjecture about a non-Epicurean's engagement with the text than we may about a more general ancient audience. But secondly, and more importantly, my analysis in this dissertation is not intended to establish an absolute "intended audience" for *De Rerum Natura*: I am instead arguing for the existence of one particular sort of reader and exploring the ways in which that particular audience might interact with the text and what lessons their second readings of it might impart.
[24] For background on the field of reader-response theory, cf. Fish 1980 and Iser 1978.
[25] Cicero, *ad fam.* 13.1

historical Memmius maps onto the Memmius we encounter in the proem, paints a fascinating story of an ambitious poet and his would-be patron. Memmius' cavalier dismissal of Epicurean doctrine as seen through his disregard for Epicurus' home makes the entire poetic project a tragic irony: a monumental work of Epicurean poetry, dedicated to a man who could not care less.[26] This conjecture, however, resides solely outside the text and is based more on appealing storytelling than actual historical evidence. Further, it ultimately does not matter whether or not Lucretius was successful in persuading the historical Memmius to become an Epicurean. In fact, Memmius' historical disregard for Epicureanism may have served to make him an even better choice as an addressee: if Lucretius thinks he can convince Memmius of all people, the first reader may think, then he must be quite confident in the veracity of his philosophy and the strength of his persuasion. Regardless, on the topic of Memmius' role in the poem, I agree most with the readings of Volk and Clay:[27] the Memmius we find within the poem is not the historical Memmius, but a framework within which Lucretius situates the reader, all while satisfying the didactic tradition of explicitly addressing the poem towards an external character. Further, as both Volk and Clay note, Memmius allows Lucretius to situate the reader in the mindset of a pupil: with Memmius characterized as a questioning and skeptical student, Lucretius in turn casts himself as an instructor, guiding his pupils on their journey into philosophy. As we shall see later, this classic didactic structure of wise poet/teacher and naïve addressee/student will not only match the dynamics of Epicurean education, but will also serve as a useful tool for Lucretius to assuage the reader's objections to Epicurean doctrine and prompt them to reconsider their philosophical positions.

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[26] Cf. Allen 1938, for discussion of Memmius' character outside the poem; Keen 1985, for the tailoring of Epicurean pedagogy to Memmius, i.e. Lucretius' contemporary Romans.
[27] Clay 1983, 212-6; Volk 2002, 73-5

Returning to the characterization of Memmius, one of the more prominent of the constructed elements of his persona is Lucretius' emphasis on Memmius' well-established *Romanitas* — an element which, I argue below, situates the reader within the familiar imagery of his own culture, so that he does not reject outright the foreign and alien ideas of Epicureanism he is about to encounter. This invocation of the familiar abounds in Lucretius' introduction of Memmius into the poem during the prayer to Venus (1.24-27, 41-43):

> te sociam studeo scribendis versibus esse
> quos ego de rerum natura pangere conor
> Memmiadae nostro, quem tu, dea, tempore in omni
> omnibus ornatum voluisti excellere rebus.
>
> I strive that you be my comrade in penning these verses,
> which I endeavor to compose about the nature of things
> for my dear Memmius, whom you, goddess, have willed
> to excel at all times, adorned with all things.
>
> nam neque nos agere hoc patriai tempore iniquo
> possumus aequo animo nec Memmi clara propago
> talibus in rebus communi desse saluti.
>
> For in our country's troubled time, neither can I carry this out
> with an untroubled mind, nor can the brilliant son of the Memmii
> be distracted from the common good by such matters.

There are a few notable elements at play here. Firstly, Lucretius introduces Memmius in 1.26-7 as a decorated member of Roman nobility, whom Venus has seen fit to excel at all times and be decorated by all manner of accolades. The choice of a Greek patronymic here for Memmius here, *Memmiadae*, extends beyond mere metrical concerns: along with the mention of Memmius' distinguished lineage in 1.42 (*Memmi clara propago*), Lucretius here recalls the claims that members of the Memmius family maintained an ancestral connection to Venus.[28] Such a distinguished heritage not only makes Memmius an appropriate addressee for Lucretius'

[28] Clay 1983, 216

dedication to Venus, but also serves to keep the reader firmly within the world of Rome, with no hint of atheism or irreligiosity — nothing out of the ordinary here, present as we are with an esteemed Roman politician and the goddess patron of his family!

Memmius' status as a Roman politician further allows Lucretius to invoke other elements of Roman iconography in his appeals to the reader elsewhere, albeit much more implicitly than in the proem.[29] The language of Book 2's proem communicates the Memmius persona again by reiterating his relationship with warfare as he looks upon his troops arrayed in the field, though now he sees through the distant eyes of an observer, as opposed to an active participant: *suave etiam belli certamina magna tueri/ per campos instructa tua sine parte pericli* (2.5-6).[30] Memmius now occupies the secure fortress of Epicureanism alongside his tutor. Similarly, when Lucretius discusses how the body lacks sensation after death, he relates the commonplace woes of the bereaved (3.894-899):

> "Iam iam non domus accipiet te laeta neque uxor
> optima, nec dulces occurrent oscula nati
> praeripere et tacita pectus dulcedine tangent.
> non poteris factis florentibus esse, tuisque
> praesidium. misero misere," aiunt, "omnia ademit
> una dies infesta tibi tot praemia vitae."
>
> "Now, now, no longer shall your house welcome you,
> nor shall your happy, most wonderful wife,
> nor shall your sweet children rush up to steal kisses
> and touch your heart with silent pleasantness.
> You will be unable to provide protection for your
> flourishing affairs, or your family.
> Poor, poor man;" they say, "a single, inimical day
> has stolen away all your many prizes of life.

[29] Note however Townend 1978, who argues for a "fading Memmius" that appears most prominently in the proem and proceeds to gradually fade out of view into a more impersonal, generalized reader persona. Volk 2002, 74-5 maintains that this "fading" is more a choice of Lucretius' methods of engaging with the reader than an intentional fading of the reader persona.
[30] Clay 1983, 220

Notably, Lucretius frames the deceased in terms of the Roman man: he will no longer see his wife, nor his children, nor be able to provide any of them protection.[31]

These and many other examples of Roman iconography placed throughout the poem establish Lucretius' constructed reader in the persona of an upper-class Roman man, who is intimately familiar with the imagery of Roman society and religion. The first introduction of the not-yet-named Epicurus in 1.62-79 is suffused with the imagery of a triumphant Roman general on a procession, rendering in distinctly Roman terms the conquest of the abstract fear of the gods and the booty of knowledge of the universe.[32] The traditional image of the *paterfamilias* is present also in the characterization of Epicurus in the proem to Book 3, where Lucretius hails him as a *pater* whose golden words (*aurea dicta*) provide sustenance to those who follow him.

Elsewhere, Lucretius similarly strives to present ostensibly foreign ideas and figures in the vocabulary of Roman life. The sacrifice of Iphianassa in 1.80-100 is a cruel parody of traditional Roman bridal imagery, where the victim receives an *infula*, a headdress meant for animal sacrifices, in place of the Roman bridal *vitta*.[33] The figure who communicates to the Romans the fear of Orcus and the *Acherusia templa* in 1.113-126 is the forefather of Roman epic, Ennius, and the description of Cybele's procession in 2.600-660 is distinctly Roman in character.[34] In other places, Lucretius uses distinct Roman imagery to communicate ideas about physics, such as in 1.977-983, where he utilizes the imagery of fetial priests declaring war with a

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[31] *Praesidium* is an interesting word choice, as this appears to be the common Latin translation of the Greek *aspheleia*, which is one of the central benefits granted by a proper Epicurean lifestyle. See Cicero *De Finibus* 1.68, where Torquatus uses this word in his translation of *Kuriai Doxai* 27 and 28. Cf. Gardner 2019, 83-4, where Gardner observes that Lucretius' rendering of the Athenian Plague closely emphasizes how the dissolution of society impacts the social bonds of the traditional Roman family unit.
[32] Buchheit [1971] 2007, 105-7; Clay 1983, 217; Regenbogen 1932, 53-4
[33] Bailey 1947, 614. Cf. also Rider 2019, 2-7, who discusses the Empedoclean connotations of this incident.
[34] Summers 1996

spear throw to illustrate the classic philosophical question of what occurs when one attempts to cross beyond the edge of the universe.[35]

These and many other examples indicate that Lucretius' constructed reader is one familiar and comfortable with the iconography of Republican Rome, especially at the poem's opening.[36] Further, Lucretius also treats his reader as someone quite familiar with the wider canon of Greek and Roman literature and intellectual thought, as demonstrated by his frequent usage of literary allusion throughout the poem. The large number of these allusions found within the text indicates that Lucretius' intended audience was composed of well-educated elites, rather than a general uneducated audience.[37] This distinguishes Lucretius' work from the earlier Epicurean pamphlets of Amafinius and others that were distributed during the early 1st century BCE, which Cicero claims were primarily aimed at uneducated villagers in the Italian countryside.[38] The most obvious example of this is the poet's choice of genre, didactic, as Lucretius makes frequent reference to the works of two of the foremost figures of ancient didactic, Hesiod and Empedocles. The Hesiodic references are quite explicit: through the repeated simile of wandering the Pierian mountains and drinking from the springs of the Muses, Lucretius invokes Hesiod to establish himself (and, possibly, Epicurus)[39] as a worthy successor to the didactic tradition. One can argue too that the honeyed-cup simile in 1.936-950/4.11-25 is a nod to Hesiod's description of the Muses coating princes' tongues with "sweetness" (γλυκερὴ),[40] as well as how Hesiod's description of the pre-lapsarian Golden Age informs Lucretius' own rendering of prehistoric

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[35] Clay 1983, 138-40; Dalzell 1996, 59
[36] Clay 1983, 85-95 and Strauss 1968, 82-4 both posit that the *De Rerum Natura* exists on a spectrum, beginning with sweet Roman falsehoods and ending with the bitter truth of reality. I will expand on these arguments in my retrospective analysis of Book 1's opening in section 3.
[37] Conte 1994, 148 ft. 25; Dalzell 1996, 49-50. Gale 2007 provides a wide-ranging view of the various genres and poetic traditions Lucretius invokes throughout the poem.
[38] Asmis 2001, 212 (*Tusc. Dis.* 4.6-7, *De Finibus* 2.12)
[39] Volk 2002, 106-7
[40] *Theogony* 81-83

humanity in Book 5.[41] Likewise, Lucretius openly praises the poetic ability of Empedocles even as he critiques his physics in 1.716-733, and the proem in particular makes heavy use of Empedoclean imagery, particularly in the forms of Venus and Mavors, who stand in for the universal Empedoclean concepts of Love and Strife.[42]

Lucretius continues to indicate a strong understanding of literary matters in his reader beyond the realm of didactic poetry as well. The regular mentions of Ennius in the poem's opening, as well as more explicit allusions such as the sacrifice of Iphianassa, indicate engagement with the wider literary world. Said engagement is also implied in Lucretius' more subtle allusions, such as in translations of Euripides' *Chrysippus* and *Xerxes* in 2.991-1022[43] and 3.1029-32,[44] respectively. The various punishments in the Underworld described in 3. 978-1044 fuse together a number of Greek and Roman exempla,[45] and the vivid adaptation of Thucydides 2.47-51 in the Plague narrative indicates a level of engagement with Greek historiography.[46]

From the evidence above, we can fairly confidently say that one of Lucretius' intended audiences for his epic was composed of well-educated and culturally Roman elites. Importantly, however, the reader's assumed education does not include any substantial knowledge of Epicurean physics or dogma. In fact, Lucretius frequently addresses the potential concerns that the reader, skeptical of Epicureanism, might have, even and especially at the poem's opening. These two elements — the reader's lack of Epicurean education and his assumed skepticism of

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[41] Campbell 2003, 12-3, though he argues on p. 11 for a basis in Epicurean and Platonic tradition as well.
[42] Observed in Furley 1970 and developed further in Sedley 1998, esp. Ch. 1
[43] Clay 1983, 241-2
[44] Segal 1990, 171
[45] Bailey 1947, 988
[46] Cf. Bright 1971

Epicureanism as a whole — greatly inform the manner in which Lucretius introduces new concepts to his would-be student.[47]

These concerns, appropriately, appear first and most prominently when Lucretius begins to lead his student into his Epicurean education, shortly after the invocation of Venus (1.50-53):

> Quod superest, vacuas auris animumque sagacem
> semotum a curis adhibe veram ad rationem,
> ne mea dona tibi studio disposta fideli,
> intellecta prius quam sint, contempta relinquas.
>
> Moreover, apply empty ears and a keen mind
> removed from worries to true knowledge,
> lest you abandon my gifts, set out for you with faithful
> effort, before they have been understood.

Now that Lucretius has begun his educational project, he addresses the reader's possible concerns over the ostensibly dangerous or even blasphemous tenets of Epicureanism, while at the same time establishing himself as a kind, patient, and understanding tutor. On the one hand, we have the poet, who presents his poetry as benevolent gifts for the reader's benefit. On the other, we have the implicit concerns of the reader, whom Lucretius requests not to turn away from the education in front of him before he properly understands it. Likewise, Lucretius requests that his reader remain steadfast and not think he is embarking on a dark path directly before Lucretius begins telling the tragedy of Iphianassa (1.80-3):

[47] Cf. Solomon 2004, 267-269 for the first reader's assumed recalcitrance and Wiltshire 1974 regarding Lucretius' role as teacher and tendencies in admonishing and empathizing with the reader.

Illud in his rebus vereor, ne forte rearis
inpia te rationis inire elementa viamque
indugredi sceleris. quod contra saepius illa
religio peperit scelerosa atque inpia facta.

I fear something in this endeavor: that you will suppose
that you are accidentally entering the foundations
of unholy philosophy and are embarking upon the road to sin.
In actuality, more often are those deeds religion has produced
sinful and impious.

Here again, Lucretius portrays his reader as distrusting and skeptical of Epicureanism, reassuring him that the diatribe against religion he is about read is not a work of evil, but is itself evidence of the evils of religiosity and fear of the gods.

Lucretius' concern for the reader to keep on reading extends to how he first introduces the figure of Epicurus. While the *Graius homo* praised in 1.62-79 is to modern readers and the informed Epicurean clearly Epicurus, Clay argues that the neophyte reader at first might not even realize that this *inventor* is named Epicurus: this intentional obfuscation of the *inventor's* name could dissuade the skeptic from immediately closing his scroll and walking away from the poem without properly learning its teachings.[48] In a way, the *Graius Homo* is the honey that masks the bitter taste of Epicurus' wormwood: to the reader who has not yet become acclimated to the truths of Epicureanism, the very mention of Epicurus could provoke revulsion, so Lucretius must mask the true identity of his teacher for now.

This pattern of Lucretius emphasizing the reader's skepticism has primarily been observed in the context of his rhetorical style and didactic strategy;[49] however, the pattern itself also implies both the potential lack of interest and definite lack of experience the reader already

[48] Clay 1983, 97-8
[49] Mitsis 1993, 123-8; Schiesaro 1987, 47-8; Volk 2002, 80-81. Mitsis in particular presents an interesting alternative that Lucretius' characterization of Memmius is intentionally infantilizing, treating him as a constantly trepidatious and misunderstanding student. Mitsis argues that this is a rhetorical strategy that causes the reader to ally with the Epicurean master over the childish concerns of the Memmius persona.

has in Epicurean philosophy. This characterization contrasts quite strongly with the similar situation we find in Epicurus' various letters, preserved in Diogenes' *Vita Epicuri*. These texts are invariably summaries of Epicurus' thoughts on both physics and ethics and are aimed at both neophytes and advanced learners.[50] In contrast to Lucretius' reader, Epicurus never doubts his addressee's devotion to the task of learning his philosophy, particularly because each of these epistles was written in response to questions and requests from already-converted Epicureans. Epicurus in *Herodotus* 10.35 makes clear that the work is aimed at those who are otherwise unable to delve into the more esoteric and advanced of his works. Similarly, the *Epistle to Pythocles* expressly aims to help the addressee better understand Epicurus' complex writings on celestial phenomena (DL 10.84). Considering also the fact that these letters appear to have been intended to work as encyclicals circulated amongst Epicurean communities,[51] the manner in which Epicurus and Lucretius depict the character of their readers is quite different: Epicurus never doubts his student's dedication to their present education, while Lucretius often makes overtures to ensure that his student does not reject his teachings outright.[52]

The peculiar nature of Epicurean education also informs Lucretius' decision in framing his reader as a neophyte to the philosophical school — though the reader, unaware of Epicureanism as he is, may not know it, Lucretius has turned his poem into a traditional Epicurean classroom. As it appears that Epicureans on the whole preferred to recruit new members solely from their immediate friends and families and largely eschewed more "evangelical" methods of conversion to the school,[53] Lucretius' constructed reader persona lacking familiarity with Epicurean philosophical tenets would indicate that the reader similarly

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[50] Clay 1983, 61-66
[51] Clay 2009, 18-20
[52] Clay 1983, 111-2
[53] Frischer 1982, 46-7

lacks an established Epicurean community within which he might properly learn these concepts. Lucretius appears to be acting in his role as didactic instructor as a stand-in for a proper, more personalized Epicurean education. We can see this particularly in how Lucretius closely matches the model of Epicurean tutor established by Philodemus' *On Frank Criticism* (Περὶ Παρρησίας). As Elizabeth Asmis demonstrates in her chapter on the nature of Epicurean education, this philosophical treatise laying out the proper relationship between an Epicurean mentor and their student with regards to discourse also provides us with a model of Epicurean tutelage in general. Though Asmis only briefly relates her study of Philodemus to Lucretius at the article's end, her comments demonstrate that Lucretius' mentor persona strives to emulate the experience of in-person teaching as closely as possible. As Philodemus suggests, Lucretius assumes a variety of affects and positions throughout the text, ranging from the harsh diatribes against the fear of death in Book 3 to the more understanding admissions of their student's justified but misguided skepticism of Epicureanism.[54]

Lucretius' emulation of the Epicurean teacher here further underscores the characterization of his own persona, both in how it functions in the text and how it adopts the usual practices of actual Epicurean tutors. For example, refer to the ways in which Epicurus is discussed in the poem. Throughout the poem, Epicurus maintains the highest level of perfection and represents a model for the student to emulate, just as Philodemus stresses in fr. 45.7-10. Similarly, prominent followers of Epicurus should also be emulated, though they lack Epicurus' place as the foremost example of proper Epicurean lifestyle.[55] Lucretius strongly fits this model of the Epicurean disciple: while he frames himself as more knowledgeable than his student, and

[54] Asmis 2001, 237
[55] Asmis 2001, 226

thus an appropriate mentor for his Epicurean education, Lucretius nevertheless always places Epicurus above himself, stressing the master's place as the foremost example of a proper lifestyle worthy of emulation. While Lucretius is assuredly the reader persona's mentor with regards to his present didactic project, in the larger picture both poet and reader remain equal disciples of the same glorious philosopher. In short, Lucretius' teacher persona closely matches Philodemus' model of the Epicurean tutor, suggesting that Lucretius is intentionally providing the reader with a specifically Epicurean education, rather than a more general approach to his didactic program.

If Lucretius' intended audience was indeed understood to be unfamiliar with Epicureanism before their reading of the poem, we must then ask how the reader would interact with the shocking ending of the poem. Unlike in other situations where Lucretius has made long and elaborate *ecphraseis*, here, after over one hundred lines of evocative description of the suffering of the Athenians, he offers no contextualization for the reader to properly understand what he has just read. As we shall explore in the third chapter, there have been a variety of proposed explanations for the lack of moralizing present at the poem's conclusion, many of which offer compelling insights and arguments its purpose. Here, however, I will advocate using a different approach to the text and its reception, informed by our understanding of the constructed reader and offering an alternative explanation: that the shocking ending to the poem is intended to jolt the reader into reconsidering how the previous readings he has just finished change in light of the Plague of Athens.[56]

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[56] Solomon 2004 discusses at length a retrospective reading of 1.149-502, arguing that the context of the rest of the poem reframes this section as an extension of the proem, rather than a distinct unit within the book, as Clay 1983, 111-130 suggests. While Solomon's work explores the text through the same lens I am, our conclusions are different, as Solomon explores this topic primarily on the basis of pedagogical strategy and largely focuses on passages following the ones I deal with in the next section of this chapter. Further, Solomon does not consider the impact of the Plague on the retrospective reader's disposition towards the proem.

Firstly, on a purely logistical level, the reader is in the unique situation where he is largely reliant on the text itself to learn about Epicureanism. Lacking Epicurean communities or friends to directly guide him, as well as lacking any other exposure to Epicurean ideas, as by all indications Epicurean works were not widely read outside their own communities,[57] the reader can only find answers to the questions posed by the poem by reading the poem itself.[58]

Indeed, some of Lucretius' frequent addresses to the reader can be seen as a call for the reader to embark on just this sort of retrospective reading. Take the numerous analogies of Lucretius stepping in the footsteps (*vestigia*) of Epicurus, and how in turn the reader, taking the role of a hunting dog, will follow Lucretius' own footsteps on their path to making their own discoveries as an Epicurean scientist (1.398-409):

> Quapropter, quamvis causando multa moreris,
> esse in rebus inane tamen fateare necessest.
> multaque praeterea tibi possum commemorando
> argumenta fidem dictis corradere nostris.
> verum animo satis haec vestigia parva sagaci
> sunt, per quae possis cognoscere cetera tute.
> namque canes ut montivagae persaepe ferai
> naribus inveniunt intectas fronde quietes,
> cum semel institerunt vestigia certa viai,
> sic alid ex alio per te tute ipse videre
> talibus in rebus poteris caecasque latebras
> insinuare omnis et verum protrahere inde.

[57] Frischer 1982, 50. For further discussion on the availability of Epicurean writings, see discussion in Ch. 6.1
[58] One should also consider the importance of memorization in Epicurean pedagogy as an explanation for this strategy: cf. D. Fowler 2000, 211, who briefly examines how the *Epistle to Meneoceus*' concluding instruction for the reader to regularly consider Epicurus' teachings could mirror the experience of the reader rereading Lucretius in order to commit his lessons to memory.

Therefore, however much you delay by objecting,
You must confess nevertheless that there is void in things.
Moreover, I can by recalling many arguments scrape together
for you evidence for my words.
But truly, these light tracks are enough for a keen-scented mind,
through which you can discover the rest for yourself.
For just as dogs very often with their noses come upon
the leaf-hidden lairs of a wild mountain beast
once they have stood upon the sure tracks of its path,
so also will you yourself, on your own, be able to see
one thing after another in such matters and steal into
every concealed place and thereupon drag forth the truth.

Now that his student has learned the basics of scientific inquiry, Lucretius declares that he is now capable of discovering further truths for himself. Line 1.407 emphasizes the reader's independence ("so also will you yourself, on your own, be able to see"), with the percussive consonance of *per te tute ipse* driving home that his future state is that of an Epicurean scientist. With an object of observation as dense as Lucretius' poetry, it would be unsurprising for the enterprising reader, seeking understanding of the poem's end, to resume following Lucretius' *vestigia* anew from its opening and making his own observations of the lessons detailed there.

Further, there is evidence that other works of classical literature, both directly and distantly related to Lucretius, also follow this model of ending their work with distinct *aporia* — in this case, a shocking twist that throws the previous entirety of the work into a new light.[59] The strongest parallel to this shocking ending argument can be found in a work roughly contemporaneous with the *De Rerum Natura*'s accepted publication date of ca. 55 BCE, Cicero's *De Re Publica*. James Zetzel has convincingly suggested that Cicero's political treatise is in dialogue with Lucretius, though primarily on a structural and artistic level instead of as a directed and focused diatribe against Epicureanism in particular. Zetzel notes that Cicero's original

[59] Galzerano 2017 48-50 offers a few examples of other violent "apocalypses" in the manner of Lucretius' destructive conclusions, namely the Theomachic opening to *Iliad* 20, *Prometheus Bound* 1080-1090, and a number of Platonic dialogues, which I examine in further detail below.

revision of *De Re publica* from nine books into six in October 54 BCE causes it to closely resemble the structure of the *De Rerum Natura*. Interestingly, Cicero also pairs his books by subject matter, but unlike Lucretius, whose pairs represent a rising ascent in scale from atoms to human bodies to natural phenomena, Cicero's pairs represent both a motion downward in scale (state administration to institutions to individual statesmen) and a Lucretian scaling upward (artificial institutions to natural law to cosmic rewards for the good statesman).

Continuing with this note of the dual motion of *De Re Publica*'s structure, Zetzel also suggests that the dialogue's conclusion, the famous *Somnium Scipionis*, reflects strongly upon the opening discussion of Book 1, wherein there is a great deal of discussion about astronomical matters, which, on first glance, has little relevance to the remainder of the work.[60] In Jed Atkins' later expansion on this interpretation of the *Somnium*, he argues that the evocative description of Scipio's vision of his grandfather Scipio Aemilianus provides Cicero with the opportunity to frame political science within the realm of astronomical physics and thus establish it as able to be explored with a scientific methodology. Most relevant for our study, however, is the argument that the unexpected and unprecedented cosmic perspective provided by Scipio's dream intentionally disorients the reader,[61] provoking them to reconsider in a new context the previous discussions of political matters. This reconsideration is predicated by the text itself, as in 6.10.3 Scipio introduces his account of his dream by noting that it likely emerged due to his prior meeting with the Numidian king Masinissa, as dreams often result from the events of one's waking life:

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[60] Zetzel 1998, 245-6
[61] Though see the following page for parallels with the structures of Platonic dialogues.

> Credo equidem ex hoc, quod eramus locuti; fit enim fere, ut cogitationes sermonesque nostri pariant aliquid in somno tale, quale de Homero scribit Ennius, de quo videlicet saepissime vigilans solebat cogitare et loqui…
>
> In any event, I believe that it was from this, because we had spoken: for as it generally happens that our conversations and thoughts create something in a dream like the one Ennius writes about Homer, it is apparent that quite often we dream about that which we are accustomed to think and discuss while awake…

This aside, Atkins argues, suggests to the reader that the same process could have occurred within the dialogue itself: since six books of political dialogue are concluded with an unprecedented depiction of cosmological affairs, could elements of those earlier discussions be more related to the cosmic vision of the universe than they might have appeared in the first place? Atkins concludes that they do, surveying how the vision of Scipio reframes and relates back to the seemingly off-topic discussion of astronomical science in the opening to the work.[62]

Of course, we must also note that the *Somnium Scipionis* is in large part modeled on similar endings in Platonic dialogues, in particular the Myth of Er that concludes Plato's *Republic*. Diskin Clay has noted that a number of Plato's dialogues end inconclusively and aporetically, which he interprets to have the effect of imparting to the reader the need to continue the exploration of the relevant philosophical discourse on their own.[63] Further, in similar fashion to how the *Somnium Scipionis* reflects back on the astronomical discussion of *De Re Publica* Book 1, Socrates' account of Er's journey into the afterlife reframes the events of the dialogue's opening. Firstly, by invoking the iconography of mortals journeying to and returning from the underworld/afterlife at the end of the dialogue, Socrates own *katabasis* down to the Piraeus at the *Republic'*s opening reframes the entire dialogue as a descent into the world of political science.

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[62] Atkins 2013, 44-6, Ch. 2
[63] Clay 2000, 165-175

Similarly, the Myth of Er reflects back on the seemingly irrelevant discussion of Kephalos' concerns with the afterlife that prompt the discussion of justice in the first place. In light of these reflections, Clay argues that the Myth of Er brings the dialogue full circle back to its beginning, establishing the first and tenth books as "pillars" surrounding the rest of the text, which moves from the state of the soul, to the state itself, until it finally returns to the state of the soul at its very end.[64]

Now, one could argue that, because of the Platonic model here, Cicero's own concluding description of the afterlife has a stronger connection to Plato than it does with any element of Lucretian structure reflected in *De Re Publica*. This objection has merit, but Cicero's inclusion of two Lucretian intertexts within Scipio's testimony strongly suggests a more explicit connection between the *De Re Publica* and the *De Rerum Natura*. Firstly, as Zetzel notes, Scipio's example of Ennius' dreams regarding Homer here is in parallel both to Ennius' own account of this event in *Annales* I and Lucretius' own description of it in 1.120-126:

> Etsi praetera tamen esse Acherusia templa
> Ennius aeternis exponit versibus edens,
> quo neque permaneant animae neque corpora nostra
> sed quaedam simulacra modis pallentia miris.
> unde sibi exortam semper florentis Homeri
> commemorat speciem lacrimas ecfundere salsas
> coepisse et rerum naturam expandere dictis.
>
> And though Ennius nevertheless sets out that there
> are regions of Acheron in his eternal verses,
> where neither our souls nor our bodies shall abide,
> but certain shades, paling in wondrous ways.
> He recollects that a vision of ever living Homer,
> having arisen thence, began to pour out salt tears
> and explain with his words the nature of things.

[64] Clay 2000, 244-248

Secondly, Scipio's sentiment that one's dreams are often informed by events in one's waking life closely resembles Lucretius' own description of this phenomenon in 4.962-972:[65]

> et quo quisque fere studio devinctus adhaeret,
> aut quibus in rebus multum sumus ante morati,
> atque in ea ratione fuit contenta magis mens,
> in somnis eadem plerumque videmur obire;
> causidici causas agere et componere leges,
> induperatores pugnare ac proelia obire,
> nautae contractum cum ventis degere bellum,
> nos agere hoc autem et naturam quaerere rerum
> semper et inventam patriis exponere chartis.
> Cetera sic studia atque artes plerumque videntur
> in somnis animos hominum frustrata tenere.
>
> And often to whichever pursuit someone devotedly clings,
> or on whatever affairs we have lingered on earlier,
> and on the concern the mind has been more preoccupied with,
> frequently in dreams we seem to encounter the same things;
> advocates plead cases and gather laws,
> commanders brawl and engage in battles,
> sailors wage a war brought against the winds,
> I go about this project and ever seek the nature of things
> and, once it's found, lay it out in our own language.
> Thus all other pursuits and arts, having deceived them,
> frequently seem to hold fast the minds of men.[66]

These two intertexts strongly suggest that Scipio's rationale for his vision's content is informed by Cicero's reading of this passage in Lucretius. Consequently, as this is the same aside which Atkins suggests is meant to prompt the reader into retroactively evaluating their earlier reading of the text, we should consider that Cicero's characterization of the *Somnium* is evocative not only of the Platonic model of the Myth of Er, but perhaps also Lucretius' own structural predisposition towards a retrospective reading.[67]

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[65] Zetzel 1998, 233-5
[66] cf. 4.1011-1019 for more discussion of how waking life impacts the experience of dreams.
[67] P. Fowler [1997] 2007, 229-233 suggests just this sort of Platonic *aporia* is at play in the Plague, but functions not to cause the reader to return to the poem's beginning, but rather to emphasize lack of resolution present in life and the need for the student to form their own arguments when confronted with novel stimuli.

Besides these two examples of unexpected endings from Cicero and Plato, there are a number of other examples of this same model in Latin literature, both contemporary and far removed from Lucretius' own time, which indicate that, while Lucretius' ending may have been shocking, such an intentional lack of closure may have been a more common device amongst classical literature than we might otherwise expect.[68] For example, one might, upon finishing Vergil's *Aeneid* with the cliffhanger ending of Aeneas' slaying of Turnus, return back to the poem's opening, where he would find that Vergil uses the same word, *condere*, to describe both Aeneas' fated foundation of the Roman race and the fatal blow dealt to Turnus, thus associating in the reader's mind the violent process of the foundation of Rome.[69] Similarly, the final bargain between Juno and Jupiter in *Aeneid* 12.791-842, wherein the Trojans lose their culture in exchange for their continued survival in the form of Rome: with this context, Vergil shifts Juno's relationship with Aeneas away from explicit adversity of the poem's beginning.[70] Likewise, a much more explicit example of the reframing ending device can be found in an altogether separate genre and period from Lucretius: Apuleius' *Metamorphosis*.

In his compelling monograph on the novel, John Winkler makes the case that the ass narrative of Lucius is expressly designed to prompt the reader to reconsider the entirety of the novel in a new light due to the events of its eleventh and final book. In brief, one of the central developments of the eleventh book is that, after Lucius has been returned to human form by the grace of Isis, the Isiac priest Mithras reframes Lucius' account of his past misadventures as all products of Isis' will, intended to direct him towards eventually joining her priesthood. This reframing, Winkler holds, also causes the reader to reexamine the previous ten books in light of

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[68] Cf. Slater 1990 for an in-depth application of reader-response theory and rereading to Petronius' *Satyricon*.
[69] Putnam 1999, 226; cf. James 1995
[70] This observation was pointed out to me by Jim O'Hara.

this new Isiac context, as the so-called "first reader" would not have anticipated this religious outcome based on the novelistic tropes of the rest of the text.[71] Winkler later proceeds to examine the whole text of Apuleius in two methods: first, from the perspective of the new reader, who is experiencing the text for the first time and has no expectations of the Isiac or even the ass-narrative elements that will ultimately conclude the work; and second, from the perspective of the "second reader", who actively reexamines the rest of the work in light of Mithras' recontextualization.

In so doing, Winkler demonstrates that the novel's introduction contains a multitude of references to the rest of the work, many of which only register to someone familiar with its entirety. Some of these are merely minor hints at the events to come, such as the mention that the novel is written on Egyptian papyrus, but others are more substantial: take, for example, the anticipatory description of the transformations that will follow (Apuleius 1.1):

> …figuras fortunasque hominum in alias imagines conversas et in se rursum mutuo nexu refectas ut mireris. Exordior.
>
> …forms and fortunes of men converted into other likenesses, and restored into themselves by a mutual bond for you to marvel at. I begin.

On its face, Winkler argues, the phrase *mutuo nexu* adds little to the overall sense of the passage, but its strong economic associations come into play once the returning reader, now familiar with the events of Lucius' time as an ass, playfully hint at the fact that Lucius himself will endure all manner of bondage and enslavement (*nexus*) over the course of his journeys. Likewise, early puns that went over the first reader's head now cause the second reader to slap his forehead in frustration that he missed the now-obvious joke. In 1.22, the slave Photis asks Lucius, "sub qua

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[71] Winkler 1985, 8-11

specie mutuari cupis?", in which *species* carries the double entendre of both a kind of loan and Lucius' later transformation into a different form.[72] Similarly, Winkler convincingly argues that Lucius' admission that his manner of speaking may be inadequate, apologizing in advance if he should be a *rudis locutor*, is an explicit sign to the second reader of Lucius' future transformation into an ass: in Latin in general and in Apuleius in particular, the braying of a donkey is often rendered as *rudere.* Essentially, here the author is apologizing if, in the telling of his story, he should ever start braying and thus be misunderstood by the reader. This is, of course, a joke as to how Lucius' inability to speak except through brays throughout the novel constantly poses challenges to him in his attempts to regain his human form.[73]

From these examples of intentionally retrospective writing strategies in other works of classical literature, the idea that Lucretius is also working with such a strategy becomes less unexpected and more understandable, especially in the context of Lucretius' self-appointed role as Epicurean mentor and guide (notably, the idiosyncratic Epicurean terms for a mentor are *kathēgētai* and *kathēgoumenoi*, both hewing closely to the concept of the teacher as a personal guide to the student).[74] As we will see in the chapter that follows, a retrospective reproach to the poem's opening helps answer many of the pressing questions that have long plagued Lucretian scholarship.

For the purpose of clarity, I will be making use of Winkler's terminology of "first reader" and "second reader" throughout this dissertation to differentiate between our two prospective readers. The first reader largely fits the model of the reader persona reconstructed in this chapter's opening section: a well-educated Roman nobleman with little exposure to Epicurean dogma, who

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[72] Winkler 1985, 186-190
[73] Winkler 1985, 196-198
[74] Asmis 2001, 224-5

is consequently both more susceptible to Lucretius' "deceptive" usage of Roman iconography and inherently skeptical of the more unfamiliar and objectionable concepts of Epicureanism. The second reader is the reader who has finished reading the entire text and is now rereading it with the greater context of the whole poem and Lucretius' presentation of Epicureanism after being "mentored" via the text by Lucretius.

In a way, we too are embarking on a voyage of discovery into the text alongside this second reader, ourselves having also been mentored by Lucretius and following with the reader at his side as he seeks out the tracks left for him and observing the revelations he uncovers in the process. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate what revelations our second reader might uncover while rereading the first one hundred lines of the poem in light of the greater context of the entire work.

2. Plague in the Proem

The Invocation of Venus is a famously puzzling and apparently contradictory opening for an Epicurean poem like *De Rerum Natura*. In spite of the Epicurean sentiments of divine aloofness (which Lucretius naturally reminds us of in 1.44-49), Lucretius devotes the opening of his opus to beseeching aid from a goddess who, by his own reckoning, can and will in no way help him.

Now, as I discussed in the introduction, a great many of the problematic "contradictions" and idiosyncrasies found within Lucretius' rendering of Epicurean philosophy can be rationalized as components of his didactic strategy aimed at an educated Roman audience that is nevertheless relatively uninformed in matters of Epicureanism. To such a reader, these issues — chiefly the choice of the medium of epic poetry, the decidedly non-Epicurean invocation of Venus, the Romanizing of Epicurus, and so on[1] — do not even register as issues. To the uninformed, Epicurus' objections to the medium of poetry are unknown, so Lucretius' project is in no way problematic. As a work of didactic epic, invoking a divinity is a more than appropriate opening. While choosing Venus over a Muse (at least until Book 4's proem) might raise an eyebrow, the proem's clear relationship with Empedocles' *On Nature* makes this goddess similarly appropriate[2] — especially if the reader is familiar with the *Empedoclea* of Sallustius which Cicero mentions just after he remarks on Lucretius in *Ad. Q. fr.* 2.9.3, which are presumably a Latin translation of Empedocles' poetry.[3] Likewise, while Lucretius' aside clarifying the nature of

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[1] In other words, this approach helps to resolve the dissonant voices of "Lucretius and Anti-Lucretius", an observation popularized by Patin 1883 that Lucretius possesses non-Epicurean sentiments that occasionally break through his otherwise orthodox philophy, but which has largely fallen out of favor. For historical background on this topic, see Johnson 2000, 103-133.
[2] Furley 1970, Sedley 1998, Ch. 1
[3] Sedley 1998, 22

the divine in 1.44-49 does begin his education in Epicurean theology, the first reader otherwise lacks the knowledge to properly understand the problems with Lucretius' characterization of Venus. As we shall see, there are many elements of the Invocation of Venus which reveal new insights to the second reader with the context of the rest of the poem. It is telling that we, as modern readers of Lucretius, have so greatly focused on these and other "problems" within the text. It is precisely because we ourselves are second readers that these passages register as problematic.

As I will address later on in this chapter, several of these contradictory elements glide away as the poem moves along, gradually abandoning the safe, familiar, and disguised description of things for the true and unbridled nature of existence. I argue that this transition has a jarring effect on the conscientious reader who reexamines the text after a first read: now that the second reader has a full understanding of Lucretius' brand of Epicureanism, the presentation of his philosophy at the poem's beginning is blatantly deceptive. From the description of the gods in Book V and the full condemnation of divine interaction with the mundane in Book VI, the discerning second reader will balk at this glowing invocation of Venus, as so many modern scholars have. But while we may look at this and observe the impact this has on Lucretius' argument, we must consider the potential perspective our discerning second reader might have and how it might differ from our modern perspective.

To the modern scholar, invocations of deities are to a degree a taxonomic indicator of a work's genre. They are a distinct element of an important genre of antiquity, but they are also largely divorced from the standard forms of art that we in the 21st century normally encounter. For this reason, the actual emotional impact that the recontextualization of the proem might have will likely fall short of how they would register for an ancient reader.

Consider the following analogy: While in the ancient world the foremost forms of art were live performances of theater and poetry, alongside the written word, the most widespread artistic language of the modern age is the motion picture. As such, the degree of intuitive understanding of the language of cinema can in this metaphor stand-in for the educated Roman audience I am arguing for. To stick with the openings of these respective works, consider that, ever since the birth of the film industry in the early 20th century, the majority of films produced and distributed by American film studios begin with a series of studio logos for all the financiers and production companies behind the film's production. These logos are immediately familiar to moviegoing audiences, both in imagery and in sound: the 20th Century Fox fanfare, the golden shield of Warner Bros. accompanied by "As Time Goes By", and the Disney castle alongside "When You Wish Upon A Star" are just a few of the many distinct logos audiences have been exposed to for their entire movie-watching lives. There are even notable examples of logos and accompanying music being slightly altered to fit the themes or imagery of the movie they precede, signaling to the audience how the following picture may play out differently.[4]

Now, let us imagine a movie with a similar didactic purpose as Lucretius'. Our hypothetical filmmaker is someone vehemently opposed to the studio system and wishes their audience to feel the same, so they set their film in Los Angeles, muckraking the vices and failures of movie studios and ultimately calling for a rejection of studio films entirely in favor of independent work. At a screening of this film before release, the test audience does not initially share or know of his feelings, nor do they understand that the film they are about to watch contains these themes. Should the filmmaker begin his film with familiar studio logos, the

[4] A compelling example is the variation on the 20th Century Fox fanfare at the beginning of *Alien 3*, which alters the fanfare's ending into an ominous and prolonged note, signaling to the audience the film's emphasis on horror over its more action-focused 1986 predecessor.

audience will be totally unsurprised by this staple of the film industry and will more than likely continue eating their popcorn and whispering amongst themselves as they wait for the movie to start. For this audience, this is simply how a movie starts, and while certainly some might take note of distinct artistry in their presentation, for most this is an expected preamble to the start of the show itself.

Imagine that this hypothetical film ends with on a puzzling and abrupt note, perhaps with a twist ending and in any case with an utter condemnation of the studio system and its flaws. At the end of the screening the audience will now fully understand the filmmaker's position and, if he has convinced them with his exposé, will find disdain at the thought of the studios themselves. Finally, suppose that this test audience is given the option of attending a free screening of the same film the following night. Some of the audience members might jump at this opportunity, eager to untangle the film's mystery with a second viewing. What reaction, then, would those same viewers have upon witnessing these same studio logos a second time? The answer, in my view, is quite clear: they would immediately register the contradiction between the film's opening logos and the overall message of the film. This very well could intensify the feelings of the moviegoers towards the filmmaker's platform — they have just been given direct evidence that, before the filmmaker's intervention, they were perfectly content to sit idly by and accept the false narratives praising movie studios they had held their whole lives.

It is just such an experience that I maintain grabs ahold of this specific sort of reader of Lucretius: the well-educated Epicurean neophyte who has fully accepted the gospel of Epicurus and is now himself confronted with direct evidence of his own past foibles — to continue the familiar Epicurean metaphor, the reader had not even realized he was sick, and the doctor has shown him the past evidence of his symptoms. The power of this realization is quite remarkable: while beforehand the reader had been able to join Lucretius in mocking the trepidations and silly

objections of Memmius,[5] he has now been shown that *he* had been Memmius all along. He had been the child needing the honey to mask the wormwood of Epicureanism, and now that he has become inoculated to its bitterness, he can recognize its taste where once he naively found only honey.

The powerful impact of this revelation is precisely the subject I will tackle in this chapter, exploring how the greater context of the poem will specifically differ between its first and second readings. Like the hunting dogs of 1.398-409, Lucretius has shown his student the path: now he must follow its tracks without the direct guidance of his teacher: what truths will he uncover as he retraces Lucretius' steps and begins to read the poem anew?

The most appropriate place to begin this study would be, of course, at its beginning, with the Invocation to Venus and its place in Lucretius' varying depictions of divinity. The problem of Lucretius' Invocation of Venus has longed puzzled readers of the poem. The idea of praying for divine intervention is quite clearly irreconcilable with Epicurean theology, as we (and the second reader) are well aware. I suggest, however, that there is no need for reconciliation here, because the intent of this passage is to create a familiar and traditional beginning to a work of didactic epic for the first reader, acting as the honey to lure him into reading more of the poem. Then, once the second reader comes across this passage again, he is confronted by the dissonance between the Venus here and the truths of Epicurean theology he has internalized elsewhere. In effect, the second reader can now taste the wormwood of Epicurean truth that was once masked by Lucretius' pleasant poetic imagery.

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[5] Mitsis 1993, especially 119-8, and Volk 2002, 77-83, where she briefly examines and agrees with Mitsis' conclusions regarding the didactic function of Memmius' characterization as a thickheaded pupil.

As others have noted, the reader's understanding of the nature of divinity shifts greatly over the length of the poem.[6] Clay offers an excellent summary of this process, noting especially how the examples of Cybele in Book 2 and the Venus of lust depicted at the end of Book 4 serve to educate the reader that the Venus of the proem is, in fact, not Venus at all, as the real Venus would have no concern with mortal affairs and would not in any way work to answer Lucretius' plea to bring peace to Rome.[7] Take, for example, lines 1.6-9. Here, Lucretius vividly describes how the natural world responds to Venus' advent:

> Te, dea, te fugiunt venti, te nubila caeli 6
> adventumque tuum, tibi suavis daedala tellus
> summittit flores, tibi rident aequora ponti
> placatumque nitet diffuso lumino caelum.
>
> You, goddess, you the winds flee, you and your advent 6
> the clouds of the sky flee, for you the crafty earth
> sends up sweet flowers, the expanses of the sea smile,
> and the calmed sky shines with outpoured light.

These lines are, of course, an obvious contradiction of the Epicurean understanding of the gods as distant and far removed from affairs in our world. Further, the reader now understands that, though Lucretius depicts the natural world as responding to Venus' influence by various acts of creation and beauty, natural phenomena are in no way tied to divine influence. This is in fact the entire thesis of the poem's final book, which is devoted to exploring the natural explanations for celestial phenomena and disproving that they are caused by divine influence. The reader now understands that attributing these phenomena to Venus is a mistake, one caused by one's own ignorance of the causes of things (6.83-91)[8]:

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[6] Solomon 2004, 265-266
[7] Clay 1983, 85-95
[8] Cf. 6.379-422

…est ratio caeli speciesque tenenda,
sunt tempestates et fulmina clara canenda,
quid faciant et qua de causa cumque ferantur;
ne trepides caeli divisis partibus amens,
unde volans ignis pervenerit aut in utram se
verterit hinc partim, quo pacto per loca saepta
insinuarit, et hinc dominatus ut extulerit se.
[quorum operum causas nulla ratione videre
possunt ac fieri divino numine rentur][9]

The logic of the sky and its appearance must be grasped,
the storms and bright lightning must be sung of,
what they do and due to what cause are they at all times
set in motion,
so you do not, mindless, with the sky's parts
divided into quarters,
tremble over whence the flying flame has come,
or into which side
it has turned itself, in what fashion it has passed
into walled spaces,
and hence having won has taken itself back out.
[Without reason, they cannot see the causes of these works
and think that they occur by divine might.]

But, we must consider that this reaction is predicated on the reader's understanding of Epicurean theology, and thus Lucretius' intended audience would expressly *not* have this reaction. To the uninitiated, there are no contradictions here; in fact, the rendering of Venus here is exactly appropriate for Lucretius' overall project. Given the text's genre of didactic epic and the examples of invocations of goddesses in Hesiod and Empedocles in particular and in general, our erudite non-Epicurean will nod along with no objections to this non-Epicurean depiction of Venus. In fact, Lucretius' rendering of Venus here might actively prevent skeptical readers from immediately turning away from the text: given the numerous accusations of atheism levied

[9] 6.90-91 are repeated from 1.153-154 and 6.56-7 (Leonard & Smith 1942, 776)

against Epicureanism in the ancient world,[10] our reader might well be reassured to read an Epicurean text that begins with such an obvious example of a traditional conception of divinity.

The second reader continues on through the invocation of Venus, very likely noting the strong parallels in language used to describe her advent and the arrival of disease in Athens. Just as Venus' arrival comes on the wings of a *genitabilis aura* from the west (i.e. the Favonius) in 1.11, disease occurs when unfamiliar air flows into new atmospheres (6.1119-24), and the Plague of Athens in particular originates from Egypt (*Aegypti finibus*, 6.1141), flowing in from the southeast, which associates the disease with Favonius' counterpart, Eurus. Further, the forces which herald Venus' arrival, the winds and the clouds, both act as vectors for disease in 6.1098-1100. While Venus causes the land to teem with life in 1.18 (*frondiferasque domos avium camposque virentis*), the Plague renders the *agros funestos* (6.1139). While Venus prompts living beings to propogate themselves *generatim* (1.20), the Plague gives over the people to death *catervatim* (6.1144). And finally, the Plague produces the exact opposite effect in wildlife that Venus' advent does: while the birds signal Venus with song in 1.12-3, not a bird appears in Athens following the Plague in 6.1219-20; and while Venus calls beasts out of their forest haunts in search of mates in 1.14-16, no *saecla ferarum* exit the forests for fear of the disease in 6.1220-1.[11]

Then, the second reader arrives at the figure of Memmius in 1.26-7, and thus at the ostensible motivation for Lucretius' initial plea to the goddess: that the Roman Republic might be at peace so that Memmius and Lucretius can commit themselves to the tutelage of Epicureanism. Interestingly, Lucretius' initial display of his reader persona is essentially a panegyric: Memmius

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[10] See Philodemus' defense against accusations of atheism in *De Pietate* cols. 18-20 (2.520-559)
[11] Gale 1994, 226

is characterized as one blessed by divine fortune, a man who excels in all things and is decorated accordingly. We should take note that Memmius' depiction here is purely positive, as opposed to his later appearances in the poem, wherein he rendered with a more skeptical, nervous, and misunderstanding demeanor. Expanding from the work on persona theory discussed in the previous chapter, we can observe that, while in those later cases Memmius acts as the foolish student needing to be corrected by his teacher,[12] here there is no such characterization: Memmius is instead destined by Venus' will "to excel at all times, adorned in all things" (1.26-27).

Our second reader, then, will balk at this characterization of Memmius as much as he has at Lucretius' prayer to Venus. Further, as the reader is now well aware, the political lifestyle for which Memmius is praised is in no way laudable: to the second reader, who now knows well the lack of fulfillment and risks of danger brought about by political activity, should scoff at Lucretius' lauding of Memmius' political achievements. The one possible exception that Lucretius' description of Memmius' politics our second reader might find is in 1.41-43, which I will repeat here:

> nam neque nos agere hoc patriai tempore iniquo 41
> possumus aequo animo nec Memmi clara propago
> talibus in rebus communi desse saluti.
>
> For in our country's troubled time, neither can I carry this out 41
> with an untroubled mind, nor can the brilliant son of the Memmii
> be distracted from the common good by such matters.

While elsewhere in the poem Lucretius derides the folly of political action,[13] those cases all focus on the non-Epicurean motivations for such follies, as they are based on incorrectly alleviating the stresses of life or the fear of death. This case is different, for it is a time of crisis that demands

[12] Mitsis 1993
[13] (e.g. the proem to Book 2, the suffering of the politicians in living Tartarus in Book 3)

Memmius' attention and dedication, not his desire for prizes or inappropriate fear of death.[14] With the Plague's absolute crisis fresh in his mind, the second reader could easily connect the obligations Memmius has towards Rome with the obligations that the *optimi* Athenians had towards caring for their sick loved ones in 6.1239-1246. Without the Plague's context, the second reader has no way of reconciling why Memmius' political action here is good and elsewhere is bad.

Thus, here we have our Epicurean poet, invoking a goddess whom he knows will in no way answer his request, in order to help a man living a decidedly un-Epicurean life. One could not ask for a more un-Epicurean opening to a work of Epicurean didactic. And yet, this, I argue, is an important element of the opening's nature. What the first reader saw as a standard opening to epic, with a familiar characterization of a Roman goddess and a dedication to an upstanding member of the Memmii family, the second reader now fully recognizes as incompatible with Epicureanism proper. Further, because the reader has learned his knowledge of Epicureanism from Lucretius himself, the reader also knows that *Lucretius himself must also be aware of the contradictions present in the poem's opening*. In effect, Lucretius has pulled the wool out from in front of the reader's eyes, and he is confronted, without comment from the author, with evidence of his own past misunderstanding of the universe, society, and the proper method of living a happy life. If there is an *anti-Lucrèce*, it is here, but not by merit of Lucretius' conflict over his

[14] D. Fowler [1989] 2007, 405-407 connects 1.41-43 with the justification within Epicureanism for "emergency political action" that the philosophy allows, citing Cicero *De Re Publica* 1.10 (extra quam si eum tempus et necessitas coegerit = except when the times and necessity compel him) and Seneca *De Otio* 3.2 (nisi si quid intervenerit = unless something should intervene). Cf. especially Roskam 2007 and Fish 2011, who cites Philodemus' *On the Good King* to argue that Epicureans (and even Lucretius, in his estimation) were far less absolute with their rejection of political action and instead allowed for a degree of discernment and hedonistic calculus, to borrow Roskam's terminology, when deciding whether to involve themselves in politics.

poetic mission. Instead, the final test of whether the reader has encapsulated the message of the poem is found not at the poem's close, as Clay suggests, but back at its beginning.

The proem's contradictions of Epicurean dogma only continue as the reader approaches the next element of Lucretius' opening: the seduction of Mars by Venus. If Lucretius' appeal to Venus were not already evidence enough that the world of the proem is at odds with the rest of the poem, the characterization of Mars found here makes doubly certain the second reader recognizes this fact. Mars, like Venus, is in no way disconnected from the material world, yet Lucretius' description of the gods here would to the non-Epicurean suggest otherwise (1.29-40):

> Effice ut interea fera moenera militiai
> per maria ac terras omnis sopita quiescant.
> nam tu sola potes transquilla pace iuvare
> mortalis, quoniam belli fera moenera Mavors
> armipotens regit, in gremium qui saepe tuum se
> reiicit aeterno devictus volnere amoris,
> atque ita, suspiciens teriti cervice reposta,
> pascit amore avidos, inhians in te, dea, visus
> eque tuo pendet resupini spiritus ore.
> hunc tu, diva, tuo recubantem corpore sancto
> circumfusa super, suavis ex ore loquellas
> funde petens placidam Romanis, incluta, pacem.
>
> In the meantime, make it that the savage works of warfare,
> driven to sleep, grow quiet throughout each sea and land.
> For you alone can aid mortals with tranquil peace,
> because Mavors powerful in arms reigns over
> the savage works of war, who often casts himself
> back into your lap, conquered by an eternal wound of love,
> and so, looking from below, his smooth neck cast back,
> he feasts his eyes eager with love, gazing upon you, goddess,
> and, as he lies back, his breath hangs upon your lips.
> To him, goddess, having wrapped him as he lies back
> with your blessed body, pour out sweet coaxings
> from your lips,
> seeking a gentle peace for the Romans, o glorious one.

There are a number of notable elements that the second reader will observe in this passage, now that he has the full context of Lucretius' education. Firstly, of course, there is Lucretius' request itself: as the reader knows by now, the gods are in no way invested in the affairs of humans,[15] yet here we have the teacher himself apparently breaking away from his own teachings by praying to a goddess and expecting aid in return. Secondly, the characterization of Mars here is doubly complicated by other lessons in the poem. To begin with, the idea that the gods are in any way present in or have influence over mortal affairs has been roundly rejected, both in 1.44-49[16] and in 2.646-651, where those lines are repeated and supplemented by the declaration that the gods do not inhabit material objects (e.g. Magna Mater and the earth, Neptune and the sea, etc.). As should be clear to the educated Epicurean, Mars does not actually reign over instruments of war, simply because of his peaceful respite removed from the anxieties of human life.

Further, the portrayal of Venus and Mars here is intimately tied up in the Epicurean sentiments about love and lust found at the end of Book 4. The second reader now knows the Epicurean sense of "Venus", and sees here that Mars, a god who should be free of all the concerns of mortals, is as enraptured by Venus as any of the myriad examples of lovestruck men in Book 4. The usage of *aeterno volnere amoris* in 1.35 makes this comparison especially explicit: this non-Epicurean Mars' suffering from lovesickness is no more curable than that of mortal men, despite the clear fact that, according to Epicurean theology, he should be unable to suffer any such condition. Further, as we have noted in the prior chapter, Lucretius' usage of the archaizing *Mavors* here creates a link of wordplay to the personified *Mors* that empties Athens in

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[15] Cf. 6.68-79

[16] For which, see discussion on pp. 47-48 regarding Isaac Vossius' suggestion that this passage is a later insertion by an editor making just this kind of observation of apparent contradiction.

Book 6.[17] Just as the windswept advent of disease heralds death in the ending, here at the beginning Venus' windswept arrival is answered by this decidedly non-Epicurean god succumbing to human passion in the manner of a Homeric god – a characterization certainly appropriate for an epic, and thus only problematic to the reader who has learned the poem's lessons regarding the nature of the divine.

After the invocation of Venus and a final appeal for Memmius' peace in the tempestuous times of the late Republic, our manuscripts of *De Rerum Natura* then display a lacuna,[18] followed by the famous maxim of 1.44-9, wherein Lucretius almost hastily clarifies that the non-Epicurean depiction of divinity he has just finished describing is not *actually* an accurate summation of how the gods live:

> Omnis enim per se divum natura necessest
> immortali aevo summa cum pace fruatur
> semota ab nostris rebus seiunctaque longe
> nam privata dolore omni privata periclis,
> ipsa suis pollens opibus, nihil indiga nostri,
> nec bene promeritis capitur nec tangitur ira.
>
> For it is necessary that, on its own account,
> the whole nature of the divine
> enjoy eternal life with the highest peace,
> far removed and separated from our affairs,
> for free from every grief, free from dangers,
> powerful itself in its own resources and
> in need of nothing of ours,
> neither is it won by deeds well done nor touched by anger.

As others have noted before, the placement of these lines here is curious.[19] Certainly, this is Lucretius' Latin rendering of the first of Epicurus' *Kuriai Doxai*, which is also found in

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[17] Wormell 1960, 61-2
[18] Leonard and Smith 1942, 204
[19] Bailey 1947, 602-605 argues strongly against removing these lines or considering a lacuna between them and the earlier sections of the proem. Cf. O'Hara 2007, 57-62 for background on the debate as to whether or not these lines should be emended.

Lucretius' discussion of Cybele in 2.646-651. Some maintain that the placement of these lines here is a necessity, as it makes sense for the Epicurean poet to offer an explanation for divinity right after he has made his non-Epicurean opening.[20] Admittedly, this argument is bolstered by the presence of *semotum a curis* in 1.51, describing Memmius' attentiveness when removed from political life in the same language as the distanced peace of the gods. This reasoning, however, assumes two important things: firstly, that Lucretius' reader is as familiar with Epicurean theology as we are and will thus immediately recognize the contradictions inherent in the invocation; and secondly, that the reader's misunderstanding of the gods is something that Lucretius feels the need to immediately correct.

Alternatively, one might entertain the suggestion of Isaac Vossius, who suggests that the placement of 1.44-9 is the result of a zealous editor early on in the manuscript tradition, who recognized just as we do the clear contradictions between the proem's depictions of Venus and Mars and the rest of the work's stance of divine nature. This editor, Vossius suggests, then appended this section from its original place in Book 2 into its current placement here, intending to ensure that readers do not become confused as to Lucretius' ultimate stance on divinity. While we obviously can in no way prove that such an editorial decision took place, Vossius' suggestion, as Clay observes, would serve as an excellent example of a retrospective reader: someone who recognized the intentional contradictions found within Lucretius' opening lines and consequently attempted to "correct" the "mistakes" he came across.[21] Regardless of whether or not one is in favor of this theory of emendation, the very dispute over the placement of these lines here demonstrates that this passage, at face value, represents expressly contradictory notions of

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[20] Cf. Bailey 1947, 602-605 for background on scholarly debate over these lines.
[21] Clay 1983, 227, 231. Cf. Regenbogen 1932, 69-70 for criticism of Voss' hypothesis.

divinity from those of the invocation.[22] Given the second reader's understanding of the nuances of Epicurean theology from later books, this contradictory clarification becomes all the more noteworthy, as it draws explicit attention to the tension between this opening and the rest of the poem. Additionally, Lucretius' explicit statement of how the gods function differently in the Epicurean system anticipates possible objections the first reader may have to the following sections, where Epicureanism's opposition to improper beliefs of the gods comes to the forefront.

Following this clarifying passage, the reader then comes to 1.54-61, where Lucretius makes the first of his many appeals to the reader to stay the course in his study of the text; further, he also first lays out the overall project of the work:

> Nam tibi de summa caeli ratione deumque
> disserere incipiam, et rerum primordia pandam,
> unde omnis natura creet res auctet alatque
> quove eadem rursum natura perempta resolvat,
> quae nos materiem et genitalia corpora rebus
> reddunda in ratione vocare et semina rerum
> appellare suemus et haec eadem usurpare
> corpora prima, quod ex illis sunt omnia primis.
>
> For I shall begin to set out for you regarding
> the most high system of the sky and the gods,
> and I will lay out the first beginnings of things,
> from which Nature creates things, increases and nourishes them,
> and into which Nature again disperses things once dissolved;
> these things, which must be relayed in discussing philosophy,
> we are accustomed to calling matter, the generative bodies,
> and the seeds of things,
> and to call these same things first bodies,
> because all things are from those first things.

Lucretius here informs the reader of his poem's subjects: the rest of Book 1 will be spent "lay[ing] out the first beginnings of things", and the final book will relate "the most high system of the sky and the gods". At the same time, Lucretius also makes clear that his work will

[22] O'Hara 2007 60-61

encompass the entirety of physical processes, both in creation and destruction, establishing the eventual contrast between the generation in the Invocation of Venus and the dissolution in the Plague narrative. Notably absent here, however, is any mention the subject matter of the middle two books, despite their relevancy to Epicurean life: how the fear of death (Book 3) and insatiable sexual desire (Book 4) inevitably lead to human suffering. It is noteworthy, then, that when Lucretius establishes the primary topics of his poem, he makes no mention of that most essential element of Epicurean doctrine: that death is nothing to us.

This trend of Lucretius obscuring in the proem the proper, complete teachings of Epicureanism extends into the next section, where the reader first encounters the figure of Epicurus. Here again, we should examine these lines (1.62-79) from the perspectives of both the first and second readers. For the first reader, this section is rather self-explanatory: as discussed above, Lucretius goes to great lengths to wrap Epicurus in the trappings of Roman culture and present him as a triumphant Roman general returning home from conquest. At the same time, Lucretius obfuscates the actual identity of Epicurus here, referring to him only as the *Graius homo* who dared to stand against superstition and the would-be punishment of the gods. In contrast, our second reader can recognize in this *Graius homo* the same hero whom Lucretius follows as his mentor and praises in the proems to Books 3, 5, and 6. Further, the second reader now has a name to identify this *Graius homo*: while the name Epicurus is mentioned explicitly only once, in 3.1042-4, the final entry in Lucretius' catalogue of great men, Lucretius' description of him there makes clear that this man and the *Graius homo* are one and the same:

> Ipse Epicurus obit, decurso lumine vitae, 1042
> qui genus humanum ingenio superavit et omnis
> restinxit, stellas exortus ut aetherius sol.
>
> Epicurus himself died, once life's light had run its course, 1042
> he who surpassed the human race with his ingenuity
> and quenched all like the arisen heavenly sun quenches the stars.

So, our second reader now has the full context of the entirety of the *De Rerum Natura* with which to understand the figure of the *Graius homo*. Interestingly, however, Lucretius centers his depiction of Epicurus entirely around the issues of gods and atoms. Epicurus is defined here by his willingness to stand against the *fama deum* (1.68) and bring his proper understanding of physics to bear for the benefit of humanity. Yet nowhere in Lucretius' introductory panegyric does he mention Epicurus' defeat of the fear of death; instead, he only demonstrates that Epicurus had no fear of death by the hands of the *gods*, which, while related, carries a different sort of connotation for our first reader than our second, quite possibly due to the particular nature of Roman cult activity regarding death.

In an article discussing the peculiarities of Lucretius' fervent anti-religious stance demonstrated in the *De Rerum Natura*, Kirk Summers argues that among the consequences of a Roman accepting the Epicurean stance against the afterlife is the acceptance that significant cultural rituals and festivals such as the *Parentalia* are essentially meaningless: if the dead do not feel any concern for the living, then consequently there is no reason to participate in rituals venerating them, no matter how culturally important those rituals may be.[23] This concern may be why Lucretius does not introduce the impossibility of the afterlife here but only after the Iphianassa passage: while Lucretius deals more fully with the falsehoods of the fear of death in Book 3, here those concerns are absent, likely with the first reader's interests in mind. Though Epicurus' battle against *Superstitio* might otherwise be viewed as blasphemous, the comforting familiarity of the Venus of the proem and the *Romanitas* of the *Graius homo* here serve to soften the blow to the uninitiated, and the digression regarding the mortality of the soul only comes after the evocative lambasting of religion in the Iphianassa passage, which I will discuss below. But

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[23] Summers 1995, 45

where the first reader tasted only the honey of his familiar cultural imagery, the second reader's metaphorical palate is developed enough by now to taste the philosophy. Consequently, the second reader will likewise note that absent from Lucretius' characterization of Epicurus' heroic deeds is the conquest of the fear of death: instead, there is only the fear of the gods in specific. At this point, the first reader is unaware of how fear of the gods is in fact tied to the fear of punishment after death; Lucretius explains this explicitly later in 1.107-126, where he states that this belief is reliant on the false idea that the soul does not perish alongside the body. But while the fear of divine punishment is certainly one of the false beliefs that Epicureanism addresses, it is striking that here Lucretius presents the master of the school purely in relationship to his conquest of the fear of the gods, not in his defeat of the more general fear of death. After the extended diatribes against death in Book 3, as well as the criticisms of Ennius and his *Acherusia templa* that shortly follow the praise of Epicurus the second reader is now quite aware that Epicurus' triumphant victory extends beyond merely overcoming the fear of the divine.

Lucretius' depiction of Epicureanism as chiefly concerned with religious fears continues into the vivid description of the sacrifice of Iphianassa. As we have already noted, this rendering of the myth portrays the sacrificial rite as a perversion of Roman marriage ceremonies, allowing the Roman reader a clear point of reference for the crime; however, the mythological and Greek origins of the account allow them to maintain a certain mental distance from the criminal actions[24] (the story would be much more directly offensive to the Roman reader if Lucretius had used instead a similar example from Roman history, such as the sacrifice of two pairs of Greeks and Gauls in the Forum Boarium ca. 213 BCE, as described in Livy 22.57.4-6). Again, Lucretius emphasizes to the reader that the belief in the agency of the gods leads to horrid crimes, and by

[24] Strauss 1968, 79

framing this tragic event in the trappings of a foreign but familiar culture, the first reader will at least begin to entertain the idea that religion itself may be a thing best avoided.

It is at this point, however, that our second reader might especially give pause to Lucretius' introduction of Epicurean dogma. While the fear of the gods is assuredly an important aspect of Epicureanism, the second reader now has sufficient background in the philosophical school to recognize that fear of the gods is itself rooted in the fear of death, which is otherwise absent from Lucretius' initial introduction of Epicurus. Further, and even more importantly, it is here that the reader may cast his mind back to the Plague, to the shocking conclusion which prompted this retrospective reading, and then himself make a shocking observation: for all Lucretius' emphasis on Epicurus' defeat of divine fear and the inherent evils found in false beliefs in the gods, religion and fear of the gods are remarkably absent from the Plague of Athens.

2.1 Religion in Proem and Plague

As we shall see expanded in the following chapter, Lucretius' Plague narrative is in many respects framed as an allegory for the suffering of human society without the proper guidance of Epicureanism. Lucretius reapplies the diction of human emotional suffering to the symptoms of those suffering from the Plague,[25] and the individual reactions of Athenians to their woeful situation evokes the core concepts of Epicurean justice.[26] Given this evocative backdrop of societal ills, one could easily expect Lucretius to include some examples of negative religious reactions to the Plague, yet the opposite is the case. Religion and the gods are almost entirely absent from the Plague narrative, with their only mention being the near the conclusion to the text (6.1272-7):

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[25] Commager 1957
[26] Hammer 2014, 137-43

Omnia denique sancta deum delubra replat
corporibus Mors exanimis, onerataque passim
cuncta cadaveribus caelestum templa manebant,
hospitibus loca quae complerant aedituentes.
nec iam religio divom nec numina magni
pendebantur enim: praesens dolor exsuperabat.

Finally, all the holy shrines of the gods Death filled
with dead bodies, and all the temples of gods above
everywhere remained burdened with corpses,
places which the sacristans had crowded with guests.
No longer was religion or the might of the gods
thought to be worth much: the present grief was overpowering.

The role of religion in this section serves to emphasize its absence in the poem's conclusion: in the face of the overwhelming grief of the Plague and its resulting societal collapse, the Athenians have lost all will to venerate the gods, abandoning their worship and treating their temples as mortuaries. Meanwhile, the Athenians quite clearly still fear death, demonstrated both by their numerous failed attempts at finding cures, their selfish flight from the sick (6.1239-1246), and their willingness to fight to the death over funerary biers for their deceased loved ones (6.1247-1251, 1278-1286).

The absence of religious fear or belief in the agency of the gods is quite striking, for two primary reasons. Firstly, it is surprising that Lucretius largely ignores the religious component of plagues in his rendering of the Plague of Athens, as religious explanations and cures for disease are a prevalent element within Greek and Roman literature and society. There are many examples of Greek literature in which divine displeasure is the root cause of a disease's outbreak, and it is only by satisfying a god's desires that the disease may be averted. In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, a plague besets Thebes due to Oedipus' unpunished murder of his father Laius, and as Creon reports from the Delphic Oracle, the only remedy for this disease is the exile or death of the unknown

murderer.[27] Likewise, the inciting incident of the *Iliad* is an outbreak of disease in the Achaian camp, spread by Apollo at the behest of the priest Calchas as retribution for Agamemnon's refusal to ransom his daughter Chryseis back to him.[28] Even if an individual's misdeeds are not identified as the root cause of a plague, a common resort was to appeal to a specific god to directly intercede and solve the problem. For example, in 293 BCE, during a particularly virulent outbreak in Rome, a consultation of the Sibylline Books indicated that the Romans should transport Aesculapius from his temple at Epidauros back to Rome.[29]

Even more significantly, the lack of religious response in Lucretius' Athens marks one of the few times that the poet diverges from his primary source on the Plague, Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*. As David F. Bright has observed, Lucretius for the most part hews quite closely to the structure of Thucydides' description in 2.47-53, omitting only those elements that either were superfluous to or detracted from his intention to portray the plague as hopeless and inescapable. For example, Lucretius omits Thucydides' descriptions of individuals recovering from the disease (2.51.6) as well as the note that that year otherwise lacked significant outbreaks of other disease (2.49.1).[30] Most important for our purposes, however, is the omission of Thucydides 2.47.4, in which the Greek historian describes the how doctors and priests both failed to provide remedies for the Plague:

> οὔτε γὰρ ἰατροὶ ἤρκουν τὸ πρῶτον θεραπεύοντες ἀγνοίᾳ, ἀλλ' αὐτοὶ μάλιστα ἔθνῃσκον ὅσῳ καὶ μάλιστα προσῇσαν, οὔτε ἄλλη ἀνθρωπεία τέχνη οὐδεμία· ὅσα τε πρὸς ἱεροῖς ἱκέτευσαν ἢ μαντείοις καὶ τοῖς τοιούτοις ἐχρήσαντο, πάντα ἀνωφελῆ ἦν, τελευτῶντές τε αὐτῶν ἀπέστησαν ὑπὸ τοῦ κακοῦ νικώμενοι.

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[27] *Oedipus Tyrannus* 100-101
[28] *Iliad* 1.8-12, 33-52
[29] Livy 10.47.6-7, *Metamorphoses* 15.622-744. Cf. Renberg 2006/7
[30] Bright 1971, 608-610

> Neither were the doctors any help at first, treating out of ignorance, but they themselves died the most, as they were the amongst [the sick] the most, and not one human art was worth nothing. They found supplicating the shrines, the seers, and similar things to be just as worthless: all things were unhelpful, and defeated by the disaster they ceased doing such things.

Thucydides' description of the Athenians losing all faith in divine aid matches perfectly the Epicurean sentiment of divine aloofness, yet Lucretius largely omits it from his Plague narrative. Instead, he displays only its aftermath, in the form of the abandoned temples-turned-mortuaries.

Further, given how often Lucretius reimplements the imagery of the rest of the poem to depict the senseless suffering of the Athenians during the Plague, it is striking that he nowhere reuses the imagery of the sacrifice of Iphianassa within these final few hundred lines. There is only a single example where the poet comes close to emulating the image of sacrifice: in 6.1242, Lucretius uses the word *mactans* to describe how the nearly personified force of Neglectfulness leads those who abandon their own to in turn be abandoned to die[31]:

> Nam quicumque suos fugitabant visere ad aegros,
> vitai nimium cupidos mortisque timentis
> poenibat paulo post turpi morte malaque,
> desertos, opis expertis, uncuria mactans.
>
> For whosoever fled going to see their sick family members,
> desiring too much of life and fearing too much of death,
> shortly thereafter slaughtering Neglectfulness punished them
> with a terrible, ugly death, deserted and bereft of resources.

Mactare also appears in Lucretius' two vivid descriptions of the evils of sacrifice: *mactatu* in 1.99 for Iphianassa and *mactatus* in 2.353 for the sacrifice young of the bereft mother sheep. But while both of those participles are passive in mood and religious in context, here at the poem's end the participle is instead active and related not to religion, but to social relationships. As we shall see in the next chapter, this new emphasis on social relationship over religious ones is no

[31] Cf. Rider 2019, esp. 11-15

coincidence, but rather an example of Lucretius' instruction of the reader's budding Epicureanism at work.

Returning to the lack of religion in the poem's conclusion: despite the poem's opening emphasizing the boundless cruelty of religion, not a single Athenian attempts to find a remedy for the Plague through prayer or attempted human sacrifice. Instead, they turn to more physical means, attempting to cure themselves through over-imbibing water (6.1172-1177) or amputating limbs, eyes, and genitals (1205-1212). While the Athenians appear to suffer under every other human failing that non-Epicureans possess, Lucretius omits any example of a non-Epicurean understanding of the gods as intercessors from his otherwise fairly comprehensive catalogue of non-Epicurean human failings.

We, much like the second reader, must now reckon with this contradiction between the poem's beginning and ending. Why does Lucretius emphasize so strongly the cruelty of religion in his first hundred lines, only to abandon this critique of non-Epicurean society by his final hundred? The answer, I postulate, lies in the same explanation we have come to with regards to the non-Epicurean nature of the proem's Venus: that, on its surface this introductory section of Lucretius is aimed at the neophyte and is constructed expressly to make Epicureanism more acceptable in his perspective. The omission of Thucydides' account of Athenians turning to incorrect religious beliefs during the Plague both evokes Epicurean theological beliefs and allows for this very comparison between the poem's beginning and conclusion. If Lucretius had included this historical note, it would have distracted from his descriptions of social disintegration and human suffering, while by excluding it, he makes the contrasting importance and unimportance of religion in the poem's beginning and conclusion even more pronounced.

Ultimately, the strong emphasis of religion in the proem and its near-complete absence from the conclusion make two things clear to the second reader. Firstly, it demonstrates that

Epicureanism's opposition to fear of divine punishment is rooted in the same sentiments as its opposition to insatiable desires and the fear of death: religion and fear of the gods are yet another example of humanity suffering due to their common misunderstanding of the truth of the natural world. Here, back at the poem's beginning, Lucretius implicitly demonstrates the explicit sentiments of Epicurean theology found in 5.1161-1240 and Epicurus' *Epistle to Menoeceus* 123-4: belief in the gods is innate, while fear of them is based entirely on a misunderstanding of divinity. The removal of just one of these elements of human suffering will not solve a person's problems; instead, one must address the core issue of properly understanding the nature of the world.

Secondly, though their initial reading of the text is finished, the reader's overall engagement with the *De Rerum Natura* is far from over. As Clay and Strauss have argued, there is a transition over the course of the poem from familiar falsehoods to the universal and difficult truths of the universe.[32] However, this transition only impacts those readers who return to the text's opening and realize plainly the contradictions they once took at face value. Confronted with the true Epicurean sentiments towards religion, the reader must now proceed down the well-worn tracks of the poem again to uncover the other truths hidden in plain sight. In my next chapter, we will encounter these revelations the second reader will uncover, all the while addressing how these revelations expand and refine important observations from prior scholarship on the Plague in *De Rerum Natura*.

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[32] Clay 1983, 85-95 and Strauss 1968, 82-4; see Ch.1 fts. 29 and 30.

3. Diagnosing Lucretius: Scholarship on the Purpose and Function of the Plague of Athens

Now that I have demonstrated the possible insights a retrospective approach to reading *De Rerum Natura* offers, I will next address the important elements of scholarship on the Plague and their relevance to this dissertation project. For while my previous chapter focused on the disconnect between Lucretius' apparent religiosity in the Invocation of Venus and lack thereof in the Plague, this is far from the only observation we can glean by applying the imagery and ideas depicted in Lucretius' Plague passage to the rest of his poem. In the following chapter, I will begin just such a process by observing a few certain cases where applying the lessons of the Plague to the text reveals new Epicurean lessons in earlier passages, while at the same time covering the many explanations offered by scholars for the poem's conclusion — which will prove necessary for us to have the proper background to discuss the Plague's significance for the rest of the poem. Specifically, I will be organizing the wide breadth of Plague scholarship into three loose categories based upon the nature of their observations: why does Lucretius end his poem 1) with destruction and 2) with disease and the Plague of Athens, and 3) whether or not the poem's conclusion is an intentional one. As I detail scholarship on these topics, I will apply my retrospective approach to other passages beyond the Invocation of Venus, demonstrating how my approach can expand upon or diverge from prominent work on Lucretius' Plague.

3.1 Destruction

The first of these questions — why Lucretius ends his poem with destruction — is perhaps more easily answered than the other two. There is much scholarship on the nature of the poem's structure, from both stylistic and didactic viewpoints, and many have observed how Lucretius replicates the constant process of generation and degeneration present in the Epicurean universe through the structure of his individual books. All but one of Lucretius' proems begin

with an expressly generative theme, while all but one of his conclusions offer impressive displays of dissolution and decay.[1] In this view, Lucretius' conclusion of his epic with a detailed description of a destructive event is entirely to be expected, given how he has structured the rest of his work. In light of Lucretius' reapplication of the imagery and motifs of the advent of Venus in the Plague passage,[2] one could even view the Plague as a symmetrical necessity, providing a destructive counterweight to the poem's generative opening. Similarly, as noted above, there is one exception to the trend of destructive conclusions in Lucretius: Book V, during which Lucretius describes the constant technological and cultural evolution of humanity to almost a crescendo, leaving off any hint of destruction. Lucretius then begins Book VI with his praise of Athens and its gifts to humanity, most of all Epicurus. As others have observed,[3] this editorial decision allows Lucretius to simultaneously connect the evolution of society to the glory of Athens (which will be ironically brought low by the Plague at the book's conclusion) and unite Books V and VI as a cohesive unit, with the Plague of Athens acting as a destructive conclusion for both books.[4]

I have observed a similar example of opposing parallels of creation and destruction that has thus far eluded Lucretian scholarship, perhaps due to its placement directly before the description of the Plague of Athens proper[5], where it is often overlooked in favor of focusing upon the purple passage that is Lucretius' Athenian disaster. Within Lucretius' general theory of

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[1] Minadeo 1969, 47-8. Minadeo's analysis of cycles of creation and destruction goes even further, as he observes a rhythm alternating between these two modes throughout each individual book. cf. Chapter 3.
[2] Bright 1971, 624-628; Gale, 1994 226
[3] Schiesaro 1994, 92-94; P. Fowler [1997] 2007, 209-214; Clay 1983, 257-9
[4] The other exception Minadeo 1969 notes is that the proem to Book II, while it lacks express imagery of generation, does introduce a book primarily concerned with generation.
[5] I presented an earlier version of this observation at the 2021 SCS Annual Meeting in a paper entitled "Crops of Destruction".

disease, he describes in 6.1090-1137 how particles of disease, having been beaten out of the ground by rainfall, then descend upon crops, through which they infect those who eat them.

atque ea vis omnis morborum pestilitasque
aut extrinsecus, ut nubes nebulaeque, superne
per caelum veniunt, aut ipsa saepe coorta
de terra surgunt, ubi putorem umida nactast
intempestivis pluviisque et solibus icta.
…
haec igitur subito clades nova pestilitasque
aut in aquas cadit aut fruges persidit in ipsas
aut alios hominum pastus pecudumque cibatus,
aut etiam suspensa manet vis aere in ipso,
et, cum spirantes mixtas hinc ducimus auras,
illa quoque in corpus pariter sorbere necessest.
consimili ratione venit bubus quoque saepe
pestilitas et iam pigris balantibus aegror.

And this entire force of diseases and pestilence
comes either from beyond, as clouds and mists do,
through the sky from above, or driven up leaps
from the very earth, when dampened it creates muddiness
and is stricken by unseasonable rain and sunbeams.
….
Then this novel disaster of plague suddenly
either falls upon the waters, or seeps into the very crops
or other food for humans or feed for beasts,
or even remains suspended as a force in the air itself,
and, when breathing we draw in from this mixed airs,
it is necessary that we also equally absorb these things
into the body.
By a similar logic plague often comes to cattle also,
and sickness even to lazy sheep.

This directly parallels Lucretius' description of how life is sustained via rainfall in 1.250-261, where the same process of rainfall causes crops to "leap from the earth" (*de terra surgunt*) in the same manner that particles of disease do in 6.1101[6]:

[6] Gale 2001, 39 does discuss this passage in relation to the poem's opening and conclusion, and Solomon 2004, 271-274 discusses it with an eye towards retrospective insights, though neither connects it to 6.1090 ff.

postremo pereunt imbres, ubi eos pater aether
in gremium matris terrai praecipitavit;
at nitidae surgunt fruges ramique virescunt
arboribus, crescunt ipsae fetuque gravantur;
hinc alitur porro nostrum genus atque ferarum;
hinc laetas urbes pueris florere videmus
frondiferasque novis avibus canere undique silvas;
hinc fessae pecudes pingui per pabula laeta
corpora deponunt, et candens lacteus umor
uberibus manat distentis; hinc nova proles
artubus infirmis teneras lasciva per herbas
ludit lacte mero mentes perculsa novellas.

Finally, raindrops disappear, when Father Aether
has poured them headlong into the lap of Mother Earth;
but bright crops leap up, and branches grow green on trees,
which themselves grow and grow heavy with fruit;
hence our race and those of beasts are in turn nourished;
hence we perceive happy cities flower with children
and leaf-bearing forests resound everywhere
with newborn birds;
hence beasts, worn out from their plumpness,
lay down their bodies upon the happy grasses,
and white milky fluid flows from swelling udders;
hence playful newborn young frolic upon feeble limbs
through the tender grasses,
stricken in their young minds by undiluted milk.

In these two passages, Lucretius sets up the origins of life and death as parallels, where the same process (rainfall) prompts particles that nourish and particles that harm to rise from the earth and enter the bodies of the living. Similarly, in both passages this event begins a chain reaction: these particles rise from the earth, enter living creatures, and eventually impact the offspring of beasts and the cities of humanity.

If the parallels between these two passages were not already clear from the text itself, recall that Lucretius himself introduces his theory of disease by reminding the reader of the necessity of diametrically-opposed particles of life and death:

Nunc ratio quae sit morbis, aut unde repente
mortiferam possit cladem conflare coorta
morbida vis hominum generi pecudumque catervis,
expediam. Primum multarum semina rerum
esse supra docui quae sint vitalia nobis,
et contra quae sint morbo mortique necessest
multa volare.

Now, what reason there is for diseases, or how suddenly
an arisen force of disease can cause death-bringing disaster
for the race of humans and the herds of beasts,
I will explain. First, I have taught above that
there are seeds of many things which are life-giving to us,
and conversely there must also be many seeds flying about
which give disease and death.

While this reference to Lucretius' prior discussion of *vitalia semina* is likely aimed at his prior discussion of the same in 6.769-680,[7] the parallels between the ensuing description of rain birthing disease and Book I's of rain birthing nourishment demonstrates that this parallel extends beyond Book VI into the rest of the poem. This passage becomes even more intriguing when one compares the different framing of these two physically similar processes. In Book I, Lucretius describes this natural phenomenon in terms of the divine, presenting the reader with an example of a union between two gods and the resultant dispersal of life-bearing particles. Conversely, he depicts the parallel distribution of death-dealing particles in Book VI without any reference to the divine. As I shall discuss in the last section of this chapter, this divergence is indicative of Lucretius' didactic strategy and how his relation of Epicurean material to the reader shifts over the course of the poem, transitioning from the familiar, agreeable religion of the Romans to the universal and alien world of materialist physics.

Further, because the passage in Book 1 depicts a union between two deities that is purely generative, I would suggest that Lucretius is inviting us to see in Book VI a similar union, albeit

[7] Bailey 1947, 1719, ad 6.1094

one lacking divine imagery, that is purely destructive. Thus, Lucretius has provided to us a pair of generative and destructive unions, matching the imagery of the proem, wherein Love (Venus) conquers Strife (Mars).[8] Now, with this parallel I have observed, we see that Lucretius offers an inverse example of this union in his poem's conclusion without having to resort to the overly religious imagery of the proem, which the reader at this point realized is unaligned with the Epicurean understanding of the universe. In Book I, Love conquers Strife, and consequently in I.250-261 a similar divine union creates only Life, i.e. the conglomeration of atoms into living beings. By Book VI, that same sort of union is stripped of its divinity and offers Strife and dissolution. One can even see a hint of the *Mavors* of the proem in the almost personified *Mors* in Plague, heaping up bodies now that its turn as the dominant force of the cycle has begun.[9]

It would appear that an understanding of Lucretius' poetic structure as firmly rooted in cycles of generation and degeneration is generally accepted within Lucretian scholarship. However, these readings do not go far enough in their application of a cyclical approach to the poem. To be more specific: if the Plague marks the conclusion of a cycle, does it not then provoke the reader to continue this cycle on his own, by returning to the poem's beginning to witness the great act of Venusian generation anew? As I have already argued, I believe that this aspect of the text, along with other significant elements of the Plague, would have the effect of prompting in the reader a desire to reread and reexamine the poem, especially the Hymn to Venus.

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[8] Thus, echoing the Empedoclean elements noted in the proem in Furley 1970 and later in Sedley 1998, Ch. 1.
[9] Wormell 1960, 61-2 connects Lucretius' archaizing *Mavors* with *mors*, albeit not in connection with the personification of *Mors* in 6.1273.

3.2 Disease

As for the specificity of Lucretius' destructive finale, there is less exact consensus amongst scholars, though there is a trend of many interpretations coming to a similar conclusion: that the Plague is in some manner reflective of a society without Epicureanism, demonstrating the failures of humanity without the guidance of Athens' greatest son. The city praised as the peak of humanity at the final book's opening is brought low and dissolved from within at its close. What purpose that critique has, however, differs between readings.

First, we should note one of the seminal early works of scholarship on the Plague: Commager's 1957 article examining the pathological language of Lucretius. Commager's central thesis is that the words and imagery Lucretius uses to describe the symptoms of the disease are elsewhere used to describe the emotional suffering of humans. For example, the first emotional side effect of the disease Lucretius describes is the *anxius angor* that besets the sick in 6.1158. These are the same words that Lucretius uses to describe Tityos' tortured discord in Acheron in 3.993, and in Book IV *angat* describes the sufferings of one in love.[10] Similar parallels with the Plague's symptoms can also be observed, like the fevers with Book IV's description of carnal desire[11] and the insatiable thirst with both Book III's Sisyphus and Book IV's metaphors for lust as thirst.[12] Despite the social setting of the Plague, however, Commager does not believe that Lucretius is putting forth doctrine in this passage. Instead, he posits that the poet is working here on a purely symbolic level, concluding that Lucretius simply found in Thucydides a fitting

[10] Commager 1957, 105-6
[11] Gale 2001, 40
[12] Commager 1957, 112

analogy for the emotional suffering of the non-Epicurean individual, which provided him an appropriate moral culmination for his poem's conclusion.[13]

But while Commager views the Plague solely as an expression of non-Epicurean emotional suffering, others have found within it the poet's derision and disdain for civic life. Minyard sees the Plague as a diatribe against Athenian social life, the discord of the citizenry dismantling the unstable harmony of a non-Epicurean society.[14] Segal feels similarly to Minyard, noting how the proem to Book VI, where Athens gives birth to Epicurus, sets up the inevitable failing of pre-Epicurean Athenian society without the philosopher's guidance.[15] Gellar-Goad echoes this conclusion, further arguing that Lucretius does not display the suffering of the Athenians for the reader's sympathy, but for the reader's mocking. Gellar-Goad's conclusion is that the Plague functions as a darkly humorous satire, with the reader, safe in the *ataraxia* of the Epicurean ethos, looking down upon the foolish Athenians alongside Lucretius, much like he did in the proem to Book II. As the Athenians' inability to deal with their suffering is a byproduct of their lack of an Epicurean mindset, their suffering is worthy of derision and mockery, rather than sympathy.[16]

I am less inclined towards these readings of the Plague as condescending, where the secure philosopher sneers down at those foolish enough not to join him in the philosophic fortress. While such a reading is in keeping with the proem to Book II and its attitude towards non-Epicureans, I believe that an important element of the Plague demonstrates that Lucretius' feelings towards the suffering Athenians is not detachment, but empathy. To expand on this, we

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[13] Commager 1957, 113-114
[14] Minyard 1985, 60-61
[15] Segal 1990, 232-237
[16] Gellar-Goad 2020, 181-183, 203-206

will address another conclusion that more aligns with my argument: that of Hammer, who proposes a reading of the Plague that focuses on Epicurean political theory.

In his brief treatment, Hammer focuses in on the frequently overlooked passage of 6.1239-1246, which details the divergent reactions of Athenian citizens to their sick relatives[17]:

> Nam quicumque suos fugitabant visere ad aegros,
> vitai nimium cupidos mortisque timentis
> poenibat paulo post turpi morte malaque,
> desertos, opis expertis, uncuria mactans.
> qui fuerant autem praesto, contagibus ibant
> atque labore, pudor quem tum cogebat obire
> blandaque lassorum vox mixta voce querellae.
> optimus hoc leti genus ergo quisque subibat.
>
> For whosoever fled going to see their sick family members,
> desiring too much of life and fearing too much of death,
> shortly thereafter slaughtering Neglectfulness punished them
> with a terrible, ugly death, deserted and bereft of resources.
> But those who stayed nearby, who passed due to
> the touch and the toil,
> which shame and the persuasive voice of the wearied
> mixed with the voice of complaint compelled them to meet.
> Thus did all the best undergo this manner of death.

Hammer takes special note of how Lucretius characterizes these two categories of people. Those who flee from the sick do so because they fear death and are too desirous of life (6.1240); then, after they run away, they then die by themselves, bereft of their resources. In contrast, Lucretius actively praises those who remain with the sick and care for them, despite the inevitability that they too will also die of the illness. Specifically, they remain due to *pudor* and the moans of both those dying and those weary caretakers looking after them[18]. Hammer observes that the fate of those who abandon their loved ones is essentially that of one who has violated the Epicurean

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[17] Cf. Rider 2019, especially 11-15

[18] Godwin 1991, 182 and Bailey 1947, 1739 disagree with reading *lassorum* as referring to the sick, supporting instead Giussani's suggestion that *lassorum* here refers to the caretakers and not the sick, citing a parallel in Thucydides' account.

social contract, as expressed in *Kuriai Doxai* 34 and 35. Because they as individuals have neglected their social duties, they too will be neglected when they are the ones in need. Hammer's ultimate conclusion, then, is that the Plague demonstrates the positive nature of Epicurean attachment, praising those who maintain the social contract of mutual advantage despite the ostensible danger that action places them in.[19,20]

Gellar-Goad and Hammer's conclusions are diametrically opposed to one another, primarily because they are each reliant on one section of the text over the other. Gellar-Goad's pessimistic and misanthropic take on the Plague of Athens is rooted primarily in the pronounced detachment in the proem to Book II, not without good reason. As Gellar-Goad has well demonstrated, Lucretius' usage of shipwreck imagery here and later in Book V is closely tied up in the common tropes of Roman satire,[21] and he has made a strong case for reading the more dramatic episodes of the Plague in the satiric mode.[22] However, Gellar-Goad does not address the *optimus* passage in his discussion of the Plague, leaving unanswered how Lucretius' praise of these particular Athenians might play into his overall reading of the Plague as a diatribe against non-Epicurean society. Similarly, while Hammer does bring up the proem to Book II in his discussion of other Plague scholarship,[23] he notes only the *serena templa* section following the shipwreck imagery. He thus leaves undemonstrated how his application of social contract theory in the Plague supersedes the decidedly Epicurean detachment extolled by that passage.

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[19] Hammer 2014, 137-143.
[20] This further indicates the circumstances for "emergency political action" that Epicureans find acceptable: when the motivations for doing so are based on pity and aid for others, not on hopes for glory or prizes. See Ch. 2 ft. 14 for sources of this tenet.
[21] Gellar-Goad 2018; 2020, 109-124
[22] Gellar-Goad 2020, 203-208
[23] Hammer 2014, 141

The solution that reconciles these two diverging interpretations of Lucretius' Plague, I maintain, lies in the passage that Gellar-Goad cites as a model of Epicurean detachment: the proem to Book 2. I will deal with this specific passage and the insights into Epicurean concepts of community in much greater detail in the following two chapters, but now I will note primarily how a retrospective approach to the second proem reveals to the second reader new connections to the ideas and imagery of the Plague. For that, let us look at the second proem (2.1-19):

Suave mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis,
E terra magnum alterius spectare laborem;
Non quia vexari quemquamst iucunda voluptas,
Sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere suave est.
Suave etiam belli certamina magna tueri
Per campos instructa tua sine parte pericli.
Sed nil dulcius est bene quam munita tenere
Edita doctrina sapientum templa serena,
Despicere unde queas alios passimque videre
Errare atque viam palantis quaerere vitae,
Certare ingenio, contendere nobilitate,
Noctes atque dies niti praestante labore
ad summas emergere opes rerum potiri.
O miseras hominum mentes, o pectora caeca!
Qualibus in tenebris vitae quantisque periclis
Degitur hoc aevi quodcumquest! Nonne videre
Nil aliud sibi naturam latrare, nisi utqui
Corpore seiunctus dolor absit, mensque fruatur
iucundo sensu cura semota metuque?

Sweet, to watch the great toil of another on the great sea
from land, the winds whirling the waves;
not because it is a delightful pleasure that anyone be distressed,
but because it is sweet to see harms which you are free from.
Sweet too it is to look upon the great struggles of war
drawn up in the fields with no part of yours in danger.
But nothing is sweeter than to hold well the temples
secure and serene, fortified by the teaching of the wise,
from which you may look down upon others and watch
them wander in every direction and flitting about seek the path of life,
compete in character, contend in nobility,
wear away nights and days with extraordinary labor
to bring out the highest riches and take control of matters.
O miserable minds of men, o blind hearts!
In such shadows of life, in so many perils

is this short measure of time spent! Not to see
that nature cries out for nothing else for itself except that
pain be separated from the body, and that the mind delight
in pleasant feeling, removed from worry and fear?

Note the specific relationship to the reader of the three examples Lucretius gives of appropriate detachment: watching a shipwreck, viewing distant military skirmishes, and looking down on others suffering for their political and social goals from above. In each of these instances, the suffering is that of a stranger, a *laborem alterius*. The reader is, as Lucretius presents him, aloof and distant from these toils and troubles, safe as he is in the temples of Philosophy. The same cannot be said of the reader in the Plague narrative, where Lucretius directly places him into Athens and confronts him with the very sight and touch of the sick and dying (VI.1163-1167, 1170-1171):

Nec nimio cuiquam posses ardore tueri
corporis in summo summam fervescere partem,
sed potius tepidum manibus proponere tactum
rt simul ulceribus quasi inustis omne rubere
corpus.

Nor could you see that the outermost part of their body
burned with excessive heat on its surface,
but more that it gave off a lukewarm feeling to the hand,
and at the same time the entire body was reddened by ulcers
that were almost burnt in.

Nil adeo posses cuiquam leve tenueque membris
vertere in utilitatem, at ventum et frigora semper.

Nothing was light or thin enough you could turn for use
on their limbs, instead always wind and cold.

This second excerpt, I argue, is instrumental in connecting the second proem to the Plague, as Lucretius' description of the follies of relying on wealth instead of the simple pleasures of community gives a description of illness very much like that of the Plague — only this time it is the reader who is suffering from the disease, not beholding it (2.34-36):

Nec calidae citius decedunt corpore febres
textilibus si in picturis ostroque rubenti
iacteris, quam si in plebeia veste cubandum est.

Nor do hot fevers depart the body more quickly
if you lie in pictured fabrics and reddened purple
than if you must recline in a poor man's coverings.

Here, then, the second reader may pause and wonder at how he can reconcile the detachment exemplified here and the clear praise of attachment in the poem's conclusion. For the moment, he will likely be puzzled, although he has the beginnings of understanding through observing the different contexts of social relationship depicted in each of these passages. For more, he will need to proceed on to Book 5 and its account of the creation of human society — but like him, we will need to cover some more ground before proceeding to my discussion of that topic in the next chapter.

3.3 Denouement?

Of course, much scholarship on the Plague is impacted by the last question I will address in this chapter: is the poem's *aporia* a didactic device, or is its lack of conclusion simply indicative that the work is unfinished? The latter suggestion is not entirely without merit, considering St. Jerome's statement that Lucretius' works were emended and published by Cicero after his death in c.55 BCE, pseudo-historical though it may be. Similarly, there exist within the text a few instances where Lucretius fails to provide the reader with promised material, most specifically in the case of the domiciles of the gods in 5.155, which he promised to return to at a later date. But while some have argued that this passage, not the Plague, would have been the

proper conclusion,[24] such an ending, which would invariably describe in glowing terms the invulnerability and *ataraxia* of the divine, would not align with the cycles of destruction and generation present throughout the poem, nor would it provide as symmetrical an ending to the Hymn to Venus as the Plague does. As such, the argument that some unwritten section would be the *true* ending, rather than the Plague, is quite unsatisfactory.

But one need not reject the Plague itself as a conclusion to argue that its inconclusiveness is an indication of an unfinished product. This is the argument of David Sedley, in his reconstruction of the poem's initial structure and its basis in the order of topics in Epicurus' *Peri Phuseos*. While Sedley provides a variety of interesting analyses of how Lucretius' text emulates and alters the order of argumentation in Epicurus, his most relevant conclusion is that, while the proems to Books 1-3 are refined and specific to the content their respective books, the latter three proems lack a similar level of specificity and contain references to topics not actually covered in the books they introduce.[25]

Based upon this understanding of the text's construction, Sedley then argues that the Plague lacks a conclusive moralizing ending simply because Lucretius was never able to revise it to have one. In particular, Sedley posits that, in its finished form, the poem as a whole would contain elements explicitly teaching the four tenets of the *tetrapharmakos*: "don't fear god, don't fear death, what is good is easy to obtain, and what is painful is easy to endure." While the first three tenets are readily introduced in the rest of the poem (the proems to I and VI; Book III; and the proem to Book II, respectively), Sedley notes that, while the Plague would be a most appropriate place to foreground the Epicurean concept of enduring pain with a *pacata mens*

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[24] e.g. Bignone 1945, II.318-322. Cf. Kenney 1977, 20-23 for further discussion on the poem's incomplete state.
[25] Sedley 1998, 134-156 (cf. 39-42)

(especially given the famous story of Epicurus' own happy demise while bedridden),[26] Lucretius does not offer his reader an explicit explanation for his decision to end with the Plague and what lesson it is meant to impart. Thus, Sedley concludes that the Plague lacks a satisfactory resolution precisely because Lucretius did not live to give it one.[27]

Sedley makes some intriguing points in his monograph, though in this case, I must strongly disagree with Sedley's argument on a few fundamental grounds. Firstly, while the suggestion that Lucretius' poetry is organized around the *tetrapharmakos* is certainly appealing, Sedley does not adequately demonstrate that these Lucretius' emphasis on these points could not also simply be a byproduct of his Epicurean source material, rather than an intentional impetus for his plans for organizing the poem. As the *tetrapharmakos* is an encapsulation of Epicurean thinking, it should be hardly surprising for its sentiments to occur naturally within Lucretius' lessons. Secondly, even if Lucretius did model his work around the *tetrapharmakos* and did intend the Plague to answer the fourth tenet, Sedley's suggestion is reliant on his own thesis: Lucretius intended his work to end with the fourth tenet, but it doesn't; ergo, the work is unfinished. This point disregards the demonstrable work Lucretius did in adapting Thucydides' description of the Plague of Athens: as Bright has aptly demonstrated, Lucretius makes a variety of editorial decisions with his repurposing of the historical events, the majority of which appear to be aimed at emphasizing the inescapable terror of the Plague.[28] Lucretius' rigorous revisions to Thucydides' text, as well as his apparent insertion of an adapted section from the Hippocratic

[26] Epistle to Idomeneus, D.L. 10.22
[27] Sedley 1998, 157-165
[28] Bright 1971

corpus,[29] would indicate that, even if Sedley's proposed incompleteness were accurate, the Plague passage would nevertheless contain sufficient "refinement" to pass muster as a finished product.

Regardless of its state of refinement, scholars must still reckon with the fact that Lucretius does not provide an explicit reasoning for ending his poem with this horrific account of the Plague. Given this lack of conclusion, many have posited that the poem's ending serves a primarily didactic purpose, with the poem's shocking and unresolved ending serving as a final lesson for the reader that reaches beyond the text itself. Of course, what specific lesson that is depends on the individual scholar's argument. Some, like Strauss, argue simply that the poem's conclusion represents the culmination of Lucretius' didactic project, as exemplified by the metaphor of the honey-rimmed cups of I.926-950 and IV.1-25. In this view, the beginning of the poem with the decidedly non-Epicurean Invocation of Venus represents the honey of Lucretius' poetry overpowering the bitter philosophy: Lucretius begins teaching his student with the sweet falsehoods of traditional Roman religion and imagery, and as the poem continues he gradually replaces the honey with the wormwood of philosophy, until by the poem's end Lucretius feels that the reader can withstand the undistilled and harsh truths of the Epicurean universe.[30] Likewise, the course of the poem can also be viewed as a transition from the familiar and Roman to the unfamiliar and universal, especially given the mythologized account of actual history Lucretius provides in the Plague passage.[31] The argument that Lucretius frontloads his work with distinctly Roman imagery which he begins to eschew later on in the poem is quite appealing, especially with regards to the distinct presentation of the Plague; however, like many other

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[29] See Ch. 1 ft. 13
[30] Strauss 1968, 82-85
[31] Clay 1983, 85-95. For the mythologizing of the Plague of Athens, cf. 257-8. As a counterpoint, cf. P. Fowler [1997] 2007, 199, who remarks that the Plague is dramatically focused on a particular geographic location rather than the universal.

scholars writing on the Plague, Strauss only examines this transition on a spectrum beginning with the poem's opening and ending with its conclusion, without any discussion of how the second reader, now fully exposed to the wormwood of Epicureanism, might react upon tasting the sweet honey of the poem's beginning a second time.

Other interpretations align more with the socio-political readings discussed in the prior section, viewing the Plague primarily as a final demonstration of the foolishness of non-Epicurean lifestyle. An excellent example of this is Müller's analysis of the trends in Lucretius' endings. Each of the six books ends with examples of the failures of human life without Epicureanism, demonstrating to the reader the necessity of Epicurean doctrines to deal with the stresses and challenges of everyday life. In this view, Müller argues that the Plague functions primarily as an example to the reader of how the uncaring universe can easily threaten the lives of anyone with pain and death, since Lucretius' introduction of disease makes clear that the arrival of a disease like the Plague of Athens can occur anywhere, at any time, for no other reason than the uncertain but understandable processes of weather. Thus, Müller argues that the Plague functions as a final "test" for the reader, where he is meant to connect the dots and conclude based upon his earlier encounters with Epicureanism in the text how the reactions of the Athenians fail to withstand the horrors of disaster and how Epicureanism represents a cure for their ills.[32] Much like with Strauss, Müller's argument is well-made and enlightening, but his view of the poem's ending likewise fails to consider the effect it would have on a second reading.

Perhaps the most influential of the "test" arguments for the poem's conclusion is that of Diskin Clay, who argues quite convincingly that the dramatic circumstances of the Plague

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[32] Müller [1978] 2007, 234-235, 251-254. Cf. P. Fowler [1997] 2007, 232-233 for how Lucretius' conclusion primes the reader to independently make the "right" (i.e. Epicurean) conclusions regarding the poem's ending.

passage are intended to place the reader within Athens in his mind's eye, as a final test for whether or not he has internalized the maxims of Epicureanism and can withstand viewing the horrors of the world with a *pacata mens*. Clay bolsters his argument in several ways. Firstly, he supplements Commager's observations of how the Plague reflects in physical suffering the emotional and mental suffering of non-Epicureans with his own observation of how the very flow of disease from person to person and within individuals themselves reflects the everchanging flow of atoms within the Epicurean system of physics.[33] Clay thus couches the reader's reaction to the suffering of the Plague in terms of how he should react to non-Epicurean behavior.

Further, Clay draws attention to how Lucretius uses the direct address to situate the reader within the walls of Athens during the Plague. I have already discussed two of Clay's examples of this above (VI.116311-67,1170-1171), where Lucretius relates how the reader could not have found any blanket light enough for the afflicted person's sensitive skin. The other examples have a similar bent to them (VI.1256-1258, 1267-1271):[34]

> Exanimis pueris super exanimata parentum
> corpora nonnumquam posses retroque videre
> matribus et patribus natos super edere vitam.
>
> At times you could see the bodies of parents dead upon
> their dead children, and in turn children breathe their last
> upon their mothers and fathers.
>
> Multaque per populi passim loca prompta viasque
> languida semanimo cum corpore membra videres
> horrida paedore et pannis cooperta perire
> corporis inluvie, pelli super ossibus una,
> ulceribus taetris prope iam sordeque sepulta.

[33] Clay 1983, 259-262
[34] Clay 1983, 262-263

You could see many [bodies] throughout the public places and streets, limbs weak with half-alive body,
covered in horrid filth and rags, dying in the body's squalor,
with skin alone on their bones,
then nearly buried under foul ulcers and filth.

In each of Clay's examples, the reader is placed within the city purely as a spectator: he can clearly see each and every example of people suffering under the symptoms of non-Epicurean life. Clay's ultimate conclusion is that these elements, combined with the emotional suffering of the plague-stricken, the inconclusive nature of the ending, and the didactic methodology Lucretius has provided in the rest of the poem, ultimately frame the Plague as a final test of the reader's ability to maintain a removed and tranquil existence, even in the presence of such horror and suffering that drives non-Epicureans to self-mutilation, despair, abandonment of loved ones, and fruitless struggles over funeral biers.[35]

Clay's conclusion is certainly an appealing one: it tidily explains the function of the Plague through close examination of its form. However, Clay's reading is lacking in a few regards. Firstly, he does not note the socio-political elements of the Plague passage discussed in the previous chapter, nor does he recognize the connection between his characterization of the reader as a spectator in this section with its predecessor in the proem to Book II. In both cases, the reader is presented with the suffering of others; while the suffering in the Plague is far more elaborate and pronounced than the shipwrecks and political sufferings of that earlier section, the similarities in Lucretius' placement of the reader within the text are striking. Clay's conclusion, then, is that the ultimate lesson of the Plague is really a test to see whether the reader has internalized the lesson of the *suave mari magno* passage, rather than a new lesson that sheds further light on that earlier proem. This is reflective of Clay's overall approach to his analysis:

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[35] Clay 1983, 266

while he often examines the journey of the reader throughout the text and how later lessons reshape earlier ones, especially with regards to the changing nature of Venus, he limits his analysis to a single, individual reading of the poem and does not discuss how a second reader may directly reexamine earlier passages in the context of the entire poem. In effect, Clay's reading is an examination of how the text looks forward towards its end, rather than how its end looks backward on the rest of the text.

As I have examined, the landscape of scholarship on the conclusion of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* contains a great deal of depth, with myriad interesting and illuminating interpretations for just why the poet ends his account of Epicurean physics with an unresolved and vivid account of the Plague of Athens. These readings each provide important context for the rest of my analysis, as they demonstrate the intensive level of craft and care that Lucretius took in preparing this passage as his work's finale. However, these examples of scholarship by and large approach the poem from the same singular perspective: that of modern scholars, looking back through history at one of the dominant surviving works of Epicurean philosophy. With my application of retrospective analysis to earlier elements of the poem, I have demonstrated that there are new avenues to explore this text, which may indeed better reflect the experience of the ancient reader and, just as importantly, offer new explanations for Lucretius' decision to end his work on a sudden and apparently unsatisfying ending. I will continue this endeavor into the next chapter, as I focus on a specific insight I believe retrospective reading can bring to light in *De Rerum Natura*: how the Plague refocuses earlier examples of proper and improper social relationships, exemplified through the detachment of the second proem and the intense attachment in Lucretius' anthropology in Book 5.

4. Anthropology and Attachment

Now that I have demonstrated the reasoning and merits of a narratological approach to the *De Rerum Natura*, as well as how application of that methodology offers new insights to previous academic work on the Plague, I will expand my exploration of the text beyond its opening lines. As I have noted before, I agree with Dean Hammer's reading of the Plague as a political metaphor, emblematizing the Epicurean sentiments of contract theory and injustice through the varying reactions of the Athenians to the Plague of 430 BCE. However, I also agree with the varied readings of the poem's conclusion which center on the emotional reaction it provokes in the reader, though I disagree on the actual outcome of this reaction: rather than a test of one's Epicurean mental state or an evocative indictment of contemporary society, I hold that the jarring conclusion to the poem provokes the reader into beginning their reading anew, in the process discovering hidden truths throughout the poem that had previously eluded them due to their lack of knowledge about Epicureanism.

My previous analysis has largely centered on the poem's opening lines, demonstrating how the immediate context of the Plague draws attention to the poet's invocation of Venus, his portrayal of Epicurus, and his description of Iphigenia. Now that I have established the merits of my approach, I will progress to the next section of my argument: the nature of social relationships in Lucretius' depiction of Epicureanism. By applying the lessons learned in the Plague passage and elsewhere to significant passages found earlier in the text, I demonstrate that Lucretius' rendition of Epicurean social theory is more nuanced and complex than it may first appear.[1]

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[1] For further discussion of Epicurean engagement with politics, cf. Roskam 2007 for a comprehensive analysis of Epicurean political engagement. Interestingly, while Roskam concludes that Lucretius' universal rejection of any participation in political activity, his analysis of politics in *De Rerum Natura* includes no discussion of the intense political imagery of the Plague or its ramifications on interpreting the rest of the poem.

In this chapter, I will focus on the nature of social relationships in Books 2 and 5 and show how reading these sections in light of the Plague can unveil new observations about the Epicurean sentiments towards community, friendship, and altruism. I will first examine perhaps the most famous (or infamous) depiction of social relationships in Lucretius: the proem to Book 2, wherein the poet praises the ability to look at others' suffering and be satisfied at one's own lack of misfortune, thanks to the security granted by Epicurean philosophy and the avoidance and endurance of ills its teachings offer. Then, by comparing how that passage resembles and differs from other depictions of social relationships in Lucretius' anthropology of early humans, I will demonstrate that the context of the entire poem reveals that, much like the Invocation of Venus, the proem to Book 2 also contains an oversimplification of complex Epicurean ideas about society and community. Along the way, I will also observe how Lucretius' anthropology breaks from Epicurus' by making pity a necessary motivating factor in the formation of society, as well as note how certain elements of Lucretius' account of early lawgivers indicates further nuances about the Epicurean understanding of legal theory. After I have concluded my analysis, I will then in the following chapter apply the arguments I have developed here back to Book 6 and the Plague, interrogating how revisiting these earlier books can in turn recontextualize the political and social elements of the Plague of Athens.

4.1 *Suave Spectare*, Sailors, and Proper Attachment

To begin, let us return to the opening to the second book of the *De Rerum Natura* and how it functions in a vacuum, then within the greater context of the work (2.1-19):

Suave mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis,
e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem;
non quia vexari quemquamst iucunda voluptas,
sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere suave est.
Suave etiam belli certamina magna tueri
per campos instructa tua sine parte pericli.
Sed nil dulcius est bene quam munita tenere

edita doctrina sapientum templa serena,
despicere unde queas alios passimque videre
errare atque viam palantis quaerere vitae,
certare ingenio, contendere nobilitate,
noctes atque dies niti praestante labore
ad summas emergere opes rerum potiri.
O miseras hominum mentes, o pectora caeca!
Qualibus in tenebris vitae quantisque periclis
degitur hoc aevi quodcumquest! Nonne videre
nil aliud sibi naturam latrare, nisi utqui
corpore seiunctus dolor absit, mensque fruatur
iucundo sensu cura semota metuque?

Sweet, to watch the great toil of another on the great sea
from land, the winds whirling the waves;
not because it is a delightful pleasure that anyone be distressed,
but because it is sweet to see harms which you are free from.
Sweet too it is to look upon the great struggles of war
drawn up in the fields with no part of yours in danger.
But nothing is sweeter than to hold well the temples
secure and serene, fortified by the teaching of the wise,
from which you may look down upon others and watch
them wander in every direction and flitting about seek the
path of life,
compete in character, contend in nobility,
wear away nights and days with extraordinary labor
to bring out the highest riches and take control of matters.
O miserable minds of men, o blind hearts!
In such shadows of life, in so many perils
is this short measure of time spent! Not to see
that nature cries out for nothing else for itself except that
pain be separated from the body, and that the mind delight
in pleasant feeling, removed from worry and fear?

To the first reader, this proem is surprising, evocative, and likely a bit off-putting to the compassionate as misanthropic and cruel. Lucretius lists off a series of negative examples of non-Epicurean life, many of which he introduces here and expands upon later in the work. The poet begins with the evocative description of a distant shipwreck. This is certainly a familiar motif to our Roman first reader, especially given the argument that Lucretius is here invoking the same

satiric imagery later emulated by Horace, Persius, and Juvenal.[2] Beyond the context of satire and the larger cultural context of ancient feelings towards the dangers of sailing,[3] it should be noted that this depiction of the sea is an immediate departure from the proem of the previous book. Whereas in Book 2 the seas are whirling and dangerous, in Book 1 the waters are peaceful and calm at Venus' approach: she makes the sea *navigerum* (1.3), i.e. safe to sail ships upon, and her advent causes the ocean to smile (1.7). This circumstance distinguishes this proem from its predecessor, establishing a far different tone from the reverence for Venus found at the poem's beginning.

The parallels with the first proem continue, as Lucretius then moves along to describe the pleasantness of watching the warfare of others at a distance. We have moved from the disastrous sea to the perils of warfare, which naturally evokes the seduction of Mars in the first proem. Where Lucretius once appealed to Venus to intercede and make calm the instruments of war, now those weapons are being used — at a distance from the reader. Indeed, Lucretius then proceeds to emphasize that spatial relationship with the observed disasters, placing himself and his readers in the high and secure edifices of philosophy, from which they may look down up the foolhardy citizens vying with each other for wealth and power. While the cause behind these actions, worry and fear, have been explored in the poem's first book, only now does Lucretius introduce his reader to the criticisms of an active political life, which he will continue to emphasize at length in Books 3 and 5.

In the mind of the first reader, we can observe a few elements of these opening twenty lines. Firstly, they are in clear dialogue with the previous proem, but present negative

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[2] Cf. Gellar-Goad 2018 and 2020 Ch. 3, especially 109-124.
[3] Rouse-Smith's edition lists notable examples such as Plautus' *Rudens* 485-6, *Georgics* 1.254-5, and Propertius 3.7.37.

counterparts to the positive and generative elements found there. Secondly, the situations the poet describes are always at a distance to the reader. He himself is not being shipwrecked, or caught in the midst of battle, or wound up in the panicked search for political and financial power. Instead, these situations are all happening to some unnamed parties, separated in these metaphors by distance either literal (in the case of shipwrecks and battle) or allegorical (in the case of the hustle and bustle of the city). In all cases, they are unknown persons — *alii*, whom the reader has no past acquaintance with.

Given this introduction, the first reader likely has a few questions for the poet. To begin with, if this is how Epicureans view other people, are they then uncaring hermits, holed up in their fortresses and looking down on the rest of the world as it suffers? Further, while the Roman reader of the civil-war torn 1st century will certainly appreciate the appeal of avoiding shipwreck or battle, the condemnation of political pursuits is likely to ring hollow. What possible problem could there be with going into politics, demonstrating one's honor and character, and reaping the rewards?

Appropriately, then, Lucretius answers both of these questions in the following section of the proem — though, as we shall see, their full meaning only comes to light in the greater context of the rest of the poem. In these lines, the poet tells us both of the hollow sorrow of wealthy living and the simple pleasures of an Epicurean community (2.20-33):

Ergo corpoream ad naturam pauca videmus
esse opus omnino, quae demant cumque dolorem,
delicias quoque uti multas substernere possint;
gratius interdum neque natura ipsa requirit,
si non aurea sunt iuvenum simulacra per aedes
lampadas igniferas manibus retinentia dextris,
lumina nocturnis epulis ut suppeditentur,
nec domus argento fulget auroque renidet
nec citharae reboant laqueata aurataque templa,
cum tamen inter se prostrati in gramine molli
propter aquae rivum sub ramis arboris altae
non magnis opibus iucunde corpora curant,
praesertim cum tempestas adridet et anni
tempora conspergunt viridantis floribus herbas.

Therefore, we see that there are few things necessary
for one's physical nature, which may remove pain in general
and also are able to surrender many pleasures;
nor does Nature herself require anything more pleasurable,
if there are not golden likenesses of youths throughout the house
holding flame-bearing torches in their right hands,
so that lights may be supplied for nocturnal feasts,
nor if the house does not gleam with silver and shine with gold,
nor if citharas do not make paneled and gilded crossbeams resound,
when still those laid out amongst themselves on soft grass
near a stream of water, under the branches of a lofty tree
pleasantly nourish their bodies without great wealth,
especially when the weather is smiling and the season
sprinkles the fields with verdant flowers.

Lucretius presents two answers to the reader's questions just as they are raised. To begin, he communicates the spirit of KD 9, 15, and 18-20: namely, that there are limits to the amount of pleasure one can attain physically, and the expensive and lavish is unnecessary to attain these pleasures. Secondly and more importantly, Lucretius demonstrates the great importance of community in Epicureanism. He accomplishes this in a number of ways. Firstly, within the immediate context of these 15 lines, Lucretius marks a divide between the empty luxury of wealth and the simple pleasures of good company through his manner of description. Lucretius' evocative description of the wealthy man's house is centered on material possessions: the golden statues, the torches, the gilded crossbeams, and the sound of the cithara. But nowhere are there

people: these halls feel empty and sorrowful, and Lucretius' vivid description tells us only what physical things are present, not how they make one feel. As a response to this foolish way of life, Lucretius now tells us of an idyllic scene, where a group of people relax and refresh themselves beneath a tree and near a brook. The poet's presentation of this scene as positive is immediately demonstrated by his description of the weather as smiling, the grass soft, and the flowers verdant. These descriptors are quite evocative of the divine happiness on display in both the Invocation of Venus and the cycle of nutrition in 1.250-261.

Further, Lucretius also signals the difference between this section and the previous ones by his choice of subjects. The opening of the proem, with the descriptions of shipwreck, warfare, and *negotium*, is concerned with individual action and suffering. Whether it is the singular shipwrecked sailor, the shared danger of soldiers in battle, or the collective actions of politicians striving for office, these examples of foolhardy behavior all lack any sense of greater community. Then, when Lucretius moves along to critique luxury, he offers no description of actual human activity in these places: the closest he comes to describing people actually living is the mention of nighttime feasts in 2.26. Then, Lucretius turns to those who are actually living properly, and the difference is striking.

Let us look again at the first line of this section: *Cum tamen inter se prostrati in gramine molli.* Lucretius signals that he is transitioning to a counterpoint by beginning with *cum tamen*. Then, the first descriptor the reader encounters is *inter se prostrati*. Immediately we as readers are aware that this is a community of people, much unlike the collective mania of the politicians above. These are people spread out amongst themselves, defined not by their circumstances or their surrounding wealth but by the connection they have with one another. It is after Lucretius has introduced this emphasis on shared community that he moves to the scene's settings, painting the idyllic picture of a countryside picnic so appropriate for Epicurean living.

We have now examined how a first reader, whose only context for this passage is the content of Book 1, might react to the second proem. Like many first-time readers of Lucretius, he is probably a bit put off by the seeming disregard for other people that Lucretius demonstrates in the shipwreck metaphor. Similarly, while probably accepting of the positivity of the idyllic *prostrati*, he may not agree with Lucretius' dismissal of luxurious living. In any case, now that we have explored the first-time reader's experience, we should now examine how the second reader might see this passage based upon the context of the rest of the poem. How might the entirety of these six books reshape the appearance of these lines to the reader?

Let us first address the matter of the shipwreck metaphor. Beyond the larger cultural associations of shipwrecking in the ancient Mediterranean, Lucretius himself later provides the reader with further examples of disastrous sailing that reflect back on the impression of the second proem. The first of these happens only a few hundred lines later, as Lucretius uses the analogy of flotsam to argue for the infinity of matter (2.547-566):

> Quippe etenim sumam hoc quoque uti finita per omne
> corpora iactari unius genitalia rei,
> unde, ubi, qua vi et quo pacto congressa coibunt
> materiae tanto in pelago turbaque aliena?
> Non, ut opinor, habent rationem conciliandi;
> sed quasi naufragiis magnis multisque coortis
> disiectare solet magnum mare transtra cavernas
> antemnas proram malos tonsasque natantis,
> per terrarum omnis oras fluitantia aplustra
> ut videantur et indicium mortalibus edant,
> infidi maris insidias virisque dolumque
> ut vitare velint, neve ullo tempore credant,
> subdola cum ridet placidi pellacia ponti,
> sic tibi si finita semel primordia quaedam
> constitues, aevom debebunt sparsa per omnem
> disiectare aestus diversi materiai,
> numquam in concilium ut possint compulsa coire
> nec remorari in concilio nec crescere adaucta;
> quorum utrumque palam fieri manifesta docet res,
> et res progigni et genitas procrescere posse.

For indeed, should I take it that the bodies generative of
this single thing were finite and tossed throughout the universe,
whence, where, by what force, and by what manner
will they come together
and join in such a sea of matter, such an alien crowd?
They have no method of combining, I think;
but as when great and plentiful shipwrecks have happened
the great sea is accustomed to toss about the crossbeams, the holds,
the sail yards, the prow, the masts, and the oars all swimming,
such that the floating sterns appear through the shores
of every land
and bring out a sign for mortals, that they should wish to avoid
the traps, the might, and the trickery of the fickle sea
and to trust her not at any time
when the deceptive enticement of the calm sea smiles,
thus, if you even once resolve that certain bodies are finite,
then the swells of varied matter
must toss them scattered for all time,
such that they could never be compelled to come together
in a union nor remain in a union or grow having been increased;
both of which plainly the obvious facts show do happen,
that things both grow and having been produced can grow forth.

An important element of Lucretius' choice of imagery here is that it serves a rhetorical purpose, not a rational one. The center of Lucretius' argument is that, while the number of shapes of atoms are finite, the number of each sort of atom is infinite. So, in order for a body to develop, it must be composed of the appropriate atoms, and if numbers of appropriate atoms were not infinite, there is no way that they would ever find their way together in the chaotic sea of the universe. While Lucretius finds the imagery of a shipwreck floating upon the sea similar to the ridiculous idea of finite atoms of any given type floating upon the rest of matter, he chooses this imagery not because it proves the logic of his stance, but rather because it communicates to the reader the risks of incorrectly understanding the universe. Lucretius' point is not that the parts of a ship, once torn apart, can never be placed back together, as that would be inconsistent with the fundamental precepts of Epicurean atomic theory. Instead, he chooses the image of a shipwreck here for its emotional imagery, as is shown by his vivid description of the sea's deception and subsequent treachery.

Lucretius accomplishes a few things here. Firstly, as is common in Lucretius' rhetoric, he is framing opposition to his philosophical beliefs as foolish, silly, and, especially in this case, dangerous.[4] Secondly, by utilizing the imagery of a shipwreck in particular, Lucretius communicates to the reader a further context to the proem to Book 2. Now, when the second reader returns to that section, he will recognize in the shipwreck the associations of philosophical disaster, not just a physical one. In effect, Lucretius has now primed the reader to later associate shipwrecks with incorrect reasoning, which, as Lucretius has frequently reminded the reader, will inevitably lead to suffering and dismay. Where the first reader saw in the second proem another's misfortune due to the fickle whims of the sea, the second reader can now recognize that the shipwrecked sailor's predicament is the result of his own foolish desires. The shipwrecked person is now not only a stranger, but also someone fundamentally misguided about the nature of the universe and how to properly live.[5]

Lucretius continues lambasting the foolishness of sailing in Book 5. Lucretius first makes mention of shipwreck here in 5.988-1006, while describing the ways in which prehistoric humans died. While these prehistoric humans did die to a great many things, including animal attacks, lack of medicine, and accidentally consuming poisons, generally speaking they did not die more than Lucretius' contemporary humans. Back then, no one died in great battles, nor did the "wicked art of navigation" (*improba navigii ratio*, 5.1006) lead men to foolishly entrust their lives to the deceitful sea. This lesson underscores the imagery of the later passage in Book 2. Whatever the circumstance, Lucretius associates sailing and shipwreck with incorrect thinking. The wise Epicurean should thus act like prehistoric humans and avoid sailing and warfare when

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[4] See Ch. 1 ft. 49 and Ch. 2 ft. 5.

[5] This sentiment is further communicated by the next part of Lucretius' argument, which uses the metaphor of warfare to demonstrate the constant creation and destruction of compound bodies (2.573-580). An appropriate transition, as like in the second proem, shipwreck here is also followed by warfare.

possible, especially when such pursuits are unnecessary. However, the Epicureans are distinct from prehistoric humanity in that the latter avoids sailing because they do not know of it, while the former, thanks to their proper understanding of its risks and dangers, should avoid sailing whenever possible.

So, we can see from these continued negative associations of shipwreck with disaster that Lucretius holds sailing to be a foolhardy thing that only the non-Epicurean would think is a wise idea. While Gellar-Goad has argued that this context casts the shipwrecked sailor as worthy of mockery, especially from the lofty and secure temples of Epicureanism,[6] I maintain that the detachment Lucretius displays here is not one of superiority, but rather of a careful understanding of how precisely Epicureans should interface with other individuals. In brief, I maintain that, because Lucretius casts this shipwrecked person as a stranger, not as a friend, he does not feel sympathy for him, for, like the Epicurean gods, what affects one does not impact the other.[7] In the case that the sailor was known to the spectator, however, I hold that the Epicurean would have a strong sense of sympathy towards the sailor and might even risk his own life to save him, if given the proper circumstances. The key to understanding this peculiar discernment within Epicurean communities lies in Book 5 and Lucretius' account of the development of prehistoric human society. There, we will see that established communal relationships, pity, and even altruism are natural and fundamental to the Epicurean understanding of friendship and social contract theory. These observations will then demonstrate that the Epicurean must regulate his attachments to others, and should feel entirely devoted to his own community, while needing no attachment

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[6] See Gellar-Goad 2020, particularly Chapters 4 and 5, where he argues that the proem's description of safety and isolation emulates the safety felt by the satirist and his audience, respectively, in mocking their subjects.
[7] This is further bolstered by Epicurus' own claim that, should Menoeceus follow his teachings, "you shall never be disturbed either in waking or dreaming, and you will life as a god amongst men" (οὐδέποτε οὔθ' ὕπαρ οὔτ' ὄναρ διαταραχθήσῃ, ζήσεις δὲ ὡς θεὸς ἐν ἀνθρώποις.) (Ep. Men. 135).

towards the affairs of strangers. An Epicurean in Athens has little concern for the suffering of people in Britannia or Egypt, Pontus or Hispania, as those people are strangers to him, and to have pity and compassion for another for the Epicurean requires becoming familiar with and living alongside others in a community.

4.2 Pitiful Contracts

The foundation for Lucretius' understanding of Epicurean social and political theory lies, appropriately, with his description of its foundation at the dawn of human civilization. We begin with Lucretius' characterization of human beings before the invention of society. From 5.925-1010 he describes at length how prehistoric peoples lived, surviving solely on the water of rivers and the natural crops Nature has provided — a setting reminiscent of, but distinct from similar depictions of prehistory as a Golden Age.[8] They lacked fire, clothing, and shelter, and similarly could not look to the *commune bonum* — a phrase which, as I will argue below, relates to Lucretius' understanding of society not just as a contract between equals, but a coalition founded with the intent to protect the weak (5.958-961):

> Nec commune bonum poterant spectare, neque ullis
> Moribus inter se scibant nec legibus uti.
> Quod cuique obtulerat praedae fortuna, ferebat
> Sponte sua sibi quisque valere et vivere doctus.
>
> Neither were they able to look towards the common good,
> Nor did they know how to use customs and laws amongst themselves.
> For whomever Fortune granted a prize, each man carried it off,
> Having been taught to live and be strong for himself of his own volition.

[8] See Campbell 2003, 9-15 for review of Lucretius' prehistory and Appendix B for a wide-ranging collection of sources for the Golden Age imagery present in Lucretius' account of prehistoric humans.

In the world of ancient history, men did not yet know how to form contracts or institute laws, so naturally every man lived for himself and took whatever he was able to take. While this sentiment rings of the realpolitik of the Melian Dialogue, it is certainly not Epicurean, as this way of life does nothing to assuage the concerns a man might have over the nature of the universe. But that, of course, is the distinction Lucretius draws between these Golden Age humans and their softened descendants: the former had no need for fire or shelter from the elements (5.953-957), no need to toil and work for food (5.933-952), and, assuredly because they had not been exposed to incorrect ideas about the afterlife, would willingly choose death over suffering from a wound that could not be healed (5.988-998). In short, ancient humanity lacked the stresses and concerns that trouble the people of Lucretius' time.

Similarly, ancient peoples lacked marital customs, without which sexual unions had no association with childrearing or family units. Instead, men and women coupled in the woods without contract or ceremony (5.962-965):

> Et Venus in silvis iungebat corpora amantum; 962
> conciliabat enim vel mutua quamque cupido
> vel violenta viri vis atque inpensa libido
> vel pretium, glandes atque arbita vel pira lecta. 965
>
> And Venus joined the bodies of lovers in the woods; 962
> for either mutual desire, or the man's violent power
> and great lust, or a bribe – acorns and arbute berries
> or choice pears – won over the woman. 965

Naturally, after the diatribe against Love at the end of the fourth book, we as readers are primed to understand that this is the same force that compels such suffering in Lucretius' own time. Note, however, that these ancient humans lack the emotional suffering found in the accounts of Book 4. Instead, men here simply sate their desires and then move to the next thing — in the eyes of the Epicurean, these ancient humans can treat sexual desire purely as a necessary pleasure and without any of the compunctions modern humans possess. Essentially, ancient humans lack the

worries and concerns that Lucretius attributes to sexual desire, and thus their woodland unions carry no risk of torturous pining and yearning.

The blasé nature of prehistoric relationships also reflects the fundamental difference between them and the people of Lucretius and Epicurus' time: there is no place for community or friendship in the ancient period. Lucretius' depiction of sexual relations is indicative of the lack of community or concern for others for early humans: prehistoric men had sex with women in whatever way they could, whether it be mutual desire, rape, or bribery. They had no feelings of compassion for one another, and so once the act was finished the two would then return to their solitary lives. Thus, while the desire for pleasure innate in all things[9] was absolutely present, the desire for community and feelings of pity were nonexistent while humanity possessed this solitary nature.

But this ancient state of things did not last, as men soon grew soft, both due to the comforts of fire, clothing, and shelter and, more importantly, the impact that the family had upon their demeanor (5.1011-1018):

> Inde casas postquam ac pellis ignemque pararunt, 1011
> et mulier coniuncta viro concessit in unum
> cognita sunt, prolemque ex se videre creatam,
> tum genus humanum primum mollescere coepit.
> Ignis enim curavit ut alsia corpora frigus 1015
> non ita iam possent caeli sub tegmine ferre,
> et Venus inminuit viris, puerique parentum
> blanditiis facile ingenium fregere superbum.
>
> Then, after they had furnished houses, pelts, and fire, 1011
> and woman joined with man retired into a single [home,]
> [and laws of wedlock] became known, and they saw offspring
> born from them,
> then the human race first began to grow soft.

[9] Cf. *De Finibus* 1.30, where the validity of Epicurean hedonism as a philosophy is demonstrated by the fact that all animals from birth pursue pleasure and flee pain.

For the fire aided them such that their cold bodies
could no longer endure the cold under the cover of the sky,
and Venus lessened their strength, and children easily
broke their parents' proud temperament with their pleadings.

Once "ancient" humanity abandoned the paradise of the Golden Age for the safety of these new inventions, their luxury softened him. Now that he was no longer able to endure without these resources, he could not survive purely *sponte sua sibi*, as he could before; even more importantly, thanks to the power of Venus and the pleading of children, ancient men's emotional fortitude similarly became sapped. While the earliest humans certainly had needs and desires, the comforts of fire and home and the attachment to wife and children softened them to such a degree that ancient men both required new tools to achieve security and had newfound reasons for seeking it out (5.1019-1027)[10]:

Tunc et amicitiem coeperunt iungere aventes
finitimi inter se nec laedere nec violari,
et pueros commendarunt muliebreque saeclum,
socibus et gestu cum balbe significarent
imbecillorum esse aequum misererier omnis.
Nec tamen omnimodis poterat concordia gigni,
sed bona magnaque pars servabat foedera caste;
aut genus humanum iam tum foret omne peremptum
nec potuisset adhuc perducere saecla propago.

And then did longing neighbors begin to unite friendship
amongst themselves to neither harm nor be violated,
and they committed to protection children and women,
and with voice, gesture, and stammering they would signify
that it was proper for all to take pity on the weak.
However, concord could not arise in every instance,
but rather a good portion faithfully maintained their contracts;
otherwise the human race would have been wholly destroyed
nor could their offspring have produced generations
to the present day.

[10] Cf. Campbell 2003, 252-283 for an extended discussion about the rationale for Lucretius' origins of society, including the application of game theory and the prisoner's dilemma to Epicurean contractarianism.

Thus, following the softening of humanity and the creation of family units, men first begin to create social contracts with one another. The first given reason is straight out of *Kuriai Doxai* 31: Τὸ τῆς φύσεως δίκαιόν ἐστι σύμβολον τοῦ συμφέροντος εἰς τὸ μὴ βλάπτειν ἀλλήλους μηδὲ βλάπτεσθαι — "The justice of nature is the outcome of the expediency towards neither harming others nor oneself being harmed".[11] Lucretius' including a close translation of this maxim is not surprising — what is surprising is the addition that the social contract was formed for the protection of the weak as well, which Epicurus does not include in his abbreviated definition of justice. In fact, Lucretius emphasizes this aspect of the social contract even more than the first, devoting three entire lines to detailing the rationale behind this decision.

The coupling of pity with the utilitarian promise of mutual benefit prompts an important digression into a related topic of Epicurean ethics, which has of course prompted its own heated discussion over the years: whether Epicurean hedonism is capable of creating and maintaining altruistic friendships, regardless of the utility they offer.[12] The problem within Epicurean friendship lies in the conflicting sentiments Epicurus provides to his followers regarding friendship. On one hand, Epicurus extols the utility that friendship provides to the Epicurean, while elsewhere he claims that friendship is itself choice-worthy regardless of benefit and, most controversially, that the sage should be willing to at times lay down his life for that of a friend:

[11] See the following section 4.3 on Epicurean justice for further exploration of this topic.
[12] Cf. Mtisis 1988, Ch. 3; O'Connor 1989; Rist 1972, Ch. 7

Epicurus' Descriptions of Altruistic Friendship

Kuriai Doxai 27	Ὧν ἡ σοφία παρασκευάζεται εἰς τὴν τοῦ ὅλου βίου μακαριότητα, πολὺ μέγιστόν ἐστιν ἡ τῆς φιλίας κτῆσις.	Of all things wisdom provides towards the happiness of one's entire life, by far the greatest is the acquisition of friendship.
Kuriai Doxai 28	Ἡ αὐτὴ γνώμη θαρρεῖν τε ἐποίησεν ὑπὲρ τοῦ μηθὲν αἰώνιον εἶναι δεινὸν μηδὲ πολυχρόνιον, καὶ τὴν ἐν αὐτοῖς τοῖς ὡρισμένοις ἀσφάλειαν φιλίαις μάλιστα κατεῖδε συντελουμένην.	The same judgment that makes assurance that there is nothing to fear that is eternal or long-lasting also knows that safety in our limited conditions is best brought about by friendships.
Vita Epicuri 10.120	…καὶ ὑπὲρ φίλου ποτὲ τεθνήξεσθαι.	And [the sage] will at times die for a friend.
Vatican Sayings 23	πᾶσα φιλία δι' ἑαυτὴν αἱρετή· ἀρχὴν δὲ εἴληφεν ἀπὸ τῆς ὠφελείας.	Every friendship is choice-worthy in of itself, even though each was begun out of utility.
Vatican Sayings 56-7	ἀλγεῖ μὲν ὁ σοφὸς οὐ μᾶλλον στρεβλούμενος ἢ στρεβλουμένου τοῦ φίλου, καὶ ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ τεθνήξεται· εἰ γὰρ προήσεται τὸν φίλον ὁ βίος αὐτοῦ πᾶς δι' ἀπιστίαν συγχυθήσεται καὶ ἀνακεχαιτισμένος ἔσται.	The wise man is pained no more when he is tortured than when his friend is tortured, and would die on his behalf; for if he abandons his friend, his whole life would be cast into turmoil through his faithlessness.

As one can see, Epicurus' views of friendship as both altruistic and utilitarian, while not necessarily irreconcilable, are nevertheless complicated by one another. Epicureanism is, after all, a hedonic ideology whose chief concern lies in ensuring pleasure for the individual adherent. Such an approach to friendships would seem to make the altruistic friendship Epicurus described impossible, or at the very least an inconsistent aspect of the philosophy's consideration of ethics.

There is some evidence to suggest that this inconsistency is due to Epicurus' own failure to reconcile these two elements of his philosophy.[13] The chief piece of evidence for this is found in Cicero's *De Finibus* 1.69-70, where Torquatus states that some Epicureans have offered supplementary arguments clarifying the motivations for Epicurean friendship. Some adopt an associationist approach to friendship, which Philip Mitsis compares with the associationist arguments of John Stuart Mill. For associationists, while friendship is initially pursued on a basis of utility and protection, eventually the friendship itself emerges as a primary motivator for

[13] Konstan 1986 explains this development in philosophy by distinguishing between the concerns of Epicurus' time and the worries of *parrhesia* and *kolakeia* faced by thinkers in the Hellenistic period. Cf. Sedley 1995, 102 and 107, who observes the tendency of ancient thinkers at aiming to prove the ideas of their respective school's founders.

maintaining the relationship (1.69). The other argument presented here is simply a matter of contract: as defined here, loving another as oneself is a necessary element of maintaining friendship. Thus, while to an outside observer one's behavior towards a friend may otherwise appear altruistic, in actuality such actions are purely made out of contractual self-interest (1.70).[14] Regardless of what justification later Epicureans used to reconcile this contradiction between altruism and utility, however, these thinkers nevertheless maintained the importance of friendship both as a means of gaining protection and pleasure and as a place where altruism can occur outside the normally expected bounds of a hedonistic philosophy.

The balancing of the ostensibly antithetical principles of beneficial and altruistic friendship brings us back to the twofold motivators for the creation of society: the mutual benefit of protection and the altruistic protection of the weak and innocent. These shared motivations set the sort of community-based and conscientious Epicureanism that Lucretius espouses here (and, as I will argue in the next chapter, in the social environment of the Plague) against the ostensible schadenfreude displayed in the proem to Book 2. Thus, let us return to the question of first and second readings of that passage. Like so many modern readers of Lucretius, the first reader likely balks at the apparent neutrality or even enjoyment the poet displays at describing one's separation from the pains of another. Then, as he continues along into Book 5, he discovers this theory of society, which is concerned especially with the protection of the weak and the welfare of others.

When that reader embarks on his second trek through the text, the context of Lucretius' anthropology will shed new light on this formerly objectionable passage. As I discussed above, close reading of the second proem reveals that Lucretius' primary distinction between good and

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[14] Mitsis 1988 Ch. 3, especially 101-112. O'Connor 1989, 174 disagrees with Mitsis' argument that Epicurean friendships can be altruistic, instead opting for Epicurean friendships being expressly beneficial for the purpose of maintaining tranquility, not creating it.

bad habits of living lie primarily in having a community to enjoy simple pleasures with, not surrounding oneself with wealthy trinkets and baubles. Now that the second reader has the context of the foundational motivations for society, he possesses the tools to properly unpack the puzzle that the shipwrecked sailor and his cadre of fellow misguided characters poses to him. He can now understand that the first four lines of the proem reflect not only the spectator's own philosophical standpoint, but also the nature of his relationship to the one suffering (2.1-4):

> Suave mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis, 1
> e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem;
> non quia vexari quemquamst iucunda voluptas,
> sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere suave est.
>
> Sweet, to watch the great toil of another on the great sea 1
> from land, the winds whirling the waves;
> not because it is a delightful pleasure that anyone be distressed,
> but because it is sweet to see harms which you are free from.

The situation Lucretius depicts here is one of isolated suffering, where the foibles of strangers due to their improper understanding of how to live life has doomed them to suffer. The Epicurean's life is in no way impacted by the suffering of a stranger, so he is able to detach himself from their suffering and enjoy understanding the dangers he himself has avoided. If the situation were different, however, and the sailor was a member of the spectator's community, then Lucretius' anthropology certainly indicates that a proper Epicurean would feel pity over the suffering of his neighbor, and depending on the social calculus, might even risk his own life to protect the wellbeing of a friend and neighbor, regardless of the mutual benefits he might gain by doing so.

Given the emphasis this passage has on one's concern for their loved ones, the second reader can now perceive how other, earlier examples of pity within the text play into this altruistic and pitying sentiment for other humans. As Lucretius enumerates the reasons why the earth was not divinely designed for the sake of humans, he pauses to depict this reality through the example of a newborn child (5.222-227):

Tum porro puer, ut saevis proiectus ab undis
navita, nudus humi iacet, infans, indigus omni
vitali auxilio, cum primum in luminis oras
nixibus ex alvo matris Natura profudit,
vagituque locum lugubri complet, ut aecumst
cui tantum in vita restet transire malorum.

Then also the child, like a sailor cast up from the savage waves,
lies naked on the ground, speechless, lacking every
life-giving aid, once Nature has first spilled him out
into the shores of light with throes from his mother's womb;
he fills the place with mournful wailing, as is fair
for one for whom it remains to pass through a life of miseries.

Notably, the metaphor Lucretius chooses to communicate the helplessness of this child is that of the shipwrecked sailor. While the Lucretian and satiric sources of this imagery are clear, as discussed above,[15] no study of these lines has yet connected them to the foundational virtues of society Lucretius later describes in his anthropology. Such a connection, I feel, is necessary to properly understand these lines, as they demonstrate a clear shift in pity from the second proem. In all the examples given in the proem to Book 2, the suffering of others can be attributed to their own foolish actions: the association of sailing with making money and greed, criticized both in satire and later on in Book V by Lucretius himself, as discussed above. Similarly, those who suffer at the hands of the enemy at war or who make themselves suffer in pursuing politics do so of their own accord. But here, the case of the infant is different: the child has done nothing but be born, and yet it is suffering in the same way as those earlier in the proem to 2. The child, like them, lacks the proper knowledge of Epicureanism to endure the pains and sufferings of the world. But beyond the fact that child's lack of knowledge is distinct from the willful ignorance of

[15] Gellar-Goad 2020, 55 discusses at length the intertexts between shipwrecks in Lucretius and satire, including how the imagery of the "shores of light" and the violence of this infant's expulsions are linked to the similar expressions in fragments of Ennius and Lucilius; Gellar-Goad however only notes the clear relationship between this shipwrecked infant and that of the second proem and does not examine it further. Reckford 2009, 138 connects this passage to the imagery of being shipwrecked and cast ashore in Persius 6.27-37.

the people in the second proem, Lucretius eschews the same emotional detachment he demonstrates in those cases of foolishness. The violence of the language he uses (*proiectus*, *profudit*) invites the reader to pity the child, perhaps in the same respect as he pities the forlorn mother sheep in 2.349-370. Further, to reference again the idea proposed by Strauss that the poem represents a transition from positive falsity to bleak truth,[16] compare this description of childbirth to the positive generation heralded by Venus in the first proem, especially with the reuse of *luminis oras* above (1.4-5, 21-23):

> …per te quoniam genus omne animantum
> Concipitur visitque exortum lumina solis. 5
>
> …because through you the entirety of living things
> is born and having arisen has seen the sun's light. 5
>
> Quae quoniam rerum naturam sola gubernas 21
> nec sine te quicquam dias in luminis oras
> exoritur neque fit laetum neque amabile quicquam
>
> Because you alone steer the nature of things, 21
> and without you nothing would arise into
> the shining shores of light, and there would be nothing
> happy or lovable.

There is nothing *laetum* or *amabile* about the state of the world this child finds itself in, entirely reliant on the help of others to survive. Further, this child is unable to ask for aid, as it is *infans* — it can only wail in pain and confusion at its horrible situation. In this way, the "shipwrecked" infant bears a striking resemblance to the moans of the weary and sick in Book 6, whose calls for help are one of the chief motivators for those who remain to do so. This now gives us a direct example of the sort of person Lucretius deems it acceptable to have sympathy for: though metaphorically the situation of the infant here and sailor in the second proem are the same, it is

[16] Strauss 1968, 82-85. cf. Clay 1983, particularly with the transitioning characterization of Venus in pp. 226-234.

appropriate to take pity on the weak, while acceptable to take satisfaction in avoiding the pains of others through proper detachment in an Epicurean lifestyle.

We can now fully understand why to the Epicurean the newborn child is worthy of pity, as are the numerous other sympathetic examples of children throughout the poem: Iphianassa, the cities blossoming with children in 1.150-161, the mother sheep bereft of her young in 2.349-370, the centering of the family in Lucretius' account of the things people incorrectly assume men will miss in death in 3.894-903, and now this. Of course, such expressions of pity are both quite human and quite Lucretian, but this reading now provides us with the ability to contextualize the rationale behind them in the Epicurean sense. It is good to have compassion for your loved ones, regardless of the benefits you yourself reap from them.

Given all these instances of pity in Lucretius, we fully understand that compassion, just as much as the principles of mutual benefit, is foundational to the function of society and necessary for it to exist. Otherwise, all would be like how men were before the softening of their bodies — to borrow from the Melian Dialogue, the strong doing what they can and the weak doing what they must. The second proem, them, does not communicate how an Epicurean should disregard the plight of others: rather, it signals to the second reader how he must regulate his attachments and concerns towards the communities that he is already a member of, not to strangers whose fate in no way impacts his own, and vice versa. In this way, the proem to Book 2 is actually an encapsulation of the 39th of Epicurus' *Kuriai Doxai* (DL 10.154):

> Ὁ τὸ μὴ θαρροῦν ἀπὸ τῶν ἔξωθεν ἄριστα συστησάμενος οὗτος τὰ μὲν δυνατὰ ὁμόφυλα κατεσκευάσατο· τὰ δὲ μὴ δυνατὰ οὐκ ἀλλόφυλά γε· ὅσα δὲ μηδὲ τοῦτο δυνατὸς ἦν, ἀνεπίμεικτος ἐγένετο, καὶ ἐξωρίσαθ᾽ ὅσα τούτων λυσιτελῆ πράττειν.
>
> He who was equipped best to fear nothing from those from afar gathered together all races as best he could, and those he could not were not at any rate foreign; and whichever peoples he could not do that for, he became unattached to, and kept them out of mind as much as was expedient.

In the words of the founder himself, the Epicurean should go about his life accepting all others and disregarding (though not jeering at) those whom he could not form a compact with. The shipwrecked sailor, then, is among those people whom one cannot form a compact with as a fellow member of his community: whether the separation is philosophical or physical, the result is that the Epicurean should simply not think about the lives of those disconnected from himself.

But beyond the insights that Lucretius' anthropology offers to the second proem, there is also another important element of his particular depiction of contract theory that, once explored in depth, will aid in shedding light on social responsibility in times of crisis, which I will apply to the Plague in the following chapter: the precise nature of how the social contract is upheld, and what occurs when it is broken. By interrogating how Lucretius depicts the creation of the social contract and subsequent creation of laws, I will demonstrate that his anthropology offers new insights to the definitions of justice and injustice offered by Epicurus in the *Kuriai Doxai*. In brief, I will conclude that Epicurean contract theory, while it offers explanation for the use of punishment to dissuade individuals from violating the contract, said punishment is not strictly speaking a *requirement* for the social contract to be maintained: rather, regardless of how many others violate the social contract or whether they are punished for doing so, the proper Epicurean reaction is to continue to maintain the social contract, both for his own sake and the sake of his fellow community members. To see how Lucretius' anthropology indicates these precepts regarding proper social action, we will return to his description of the creation of society, as well as reference Epicurus' own writings on the subject.

4.3 Justice and the Legal Apparatus

In order to keep this analysis concise and readily understandable, we should first define what exactly justice and injustice mean within Epicurean legal theory. Thankfully, Epicurus'

Kuriai Doxai provide us with a number of definitions for these terms, albeit in far more truncated form than what he likely laid out in his lost treatise, "Justice and Other Virtues".[17] Epicurus defines justice and injustice as follows:

Justice in the *Kuriai Doxai*

Kuriai Doxai 31	Τὸ τῆς φύσεως δίκαιόν ἐστι σύμβολον τοῦ συμφέροντος εἰς τὸ μὴ βλάπτειν ἀλλήλους μηδὲ βλάπτεσθαι.	Natural justice is a contract of agreeing to neither harm others nor to be harmed.
Kuriai Doxai 32	Ὅσα τῶν ζώων μὴ ἠδύνατο συνθήκας ποιεῖσθαι τὰς ὑπὲρ τοῦ μὴ βλάπτειν ἄλλα μηδὲ βλάπτεσθαι, πρὸς ταῦτα οὐθὲν ἦν δίκαιον οὐδὲ ἄδικον. ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν ὅσα μὴ ἠδύνατο ἢ μὴ ἐβούλετο τὰς συνθήκας ποιεῖσθαι τὰς ὑπὲρ τοῦ μὴ βλάπτειν μηδὲ βλάπτεσθαι.	Whichever animals were unable to create compacts regarding neither harming others nor being harmed, for them there is neither justice nor injustice – and likewise whichever peoples could not or wished not to create compacts regarding neither harming nor being harmed.
Kuriai Doxai 33	Οὐκ ἦν τι καθ᾽ ἑαυτὸ δικαιοσύνη, ἀλλ᾽ ἐν ταῖς μετ᾽ ἀλλήλων συστροφαῖς καθ᾽ ὁπηλίκους δή ποτε ἀεὶ τόπους συνθήκη τις ὑπὲρ τοῦ μὴ βλάπτειν μηδὲ βλάπτεσθαι.	There was never justice in of itself, but only an agreement regarding neither harming nor being harmed in the dealings between men in however many places from time to time.
Kuriai Doxai 34	Ἡ ἀδικία οὐ καθ᾽ ἑαυτὴν κακόν, ἀλλ᾽ ἐν τῷ κατὰ τὴν ὑποψίαν φόβῳ, εἰ μὴ λήσει τοὺς ὑπὲρ τῶν τοιούτων ἐφεστηκότας κολαστάς.	Injustice is not in of itself an evil, but in its relation to the apprehension of fear that one might not escape the notice of those appointed punishers of such things.
Kuriai Doxai 35	Οὐκ ἔστι τὸν λάθρᾳ τι κινοῦντα ὧν συνέθεντο πρὸς ἀλλήλους εἰς τὸ μὴ βλάπτειν μηδὲ βλάπτεσθαι, πιστεύειν ὅτι λήσει, κἂν μυριάκις ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος λανθάνῃ. μέχρι γὰρ καταστροφῆς ἄδηλον εἰ καὶ λήσει.	It is not possible that someone who has secretly violated any element of terms agreed upon neither to harm nor be harmed to trust that he has escaped notice, even if he has escaped notice up until then countless times; for not until the end of his life will it be clear that he has escaped notice.

To summarize: justice exists only as the result of a compact of mutual aid and protection, and cannot exist outside circumstances where people agree to such terms. Injustice itself is not evil, but the *fear of punishment* created by committing acts of injustice is in the Epicurean sense an evil, as it creates fear and anxiety for the lawbreaker.

With these precepts in mind, we can return to Lucretius' description of the first social contracts and observe an interesting note in their development: that the violation of the social contract by others who go unpunished does not itself dissolve the social contract (5.1024-27):

[17] Diogenes Laertius 10.28

Nec tamen omnimodis poterat concordia gigni,
sed bona magnaque pars servabat foedera caste;
aut genus humanum iam tum foret omne peremptum
nec potuisset adhuc perducere saecla propago.

However, concord could not arise in every instance,
but rather a good portion faithfully maintained their contracts;
otherwise the human race would have been wholly destroyed,
nor could their offspring have produced generations
to the present day.

Using the classic Epicurean logic of *modus tollens*, Lucretius indicates that a majority of early humans must have maintained the social contract, despite others breaking it, because society still exists. Interestingly, however, Lucretius fails to mention what happened to these contract-breakers: he does not account that they were rejected from society, that they were punished for their misdeeds, or even that they suffered due to the anxiety lawbreaking entails, as KD 34-35 says. Instead, Lucretius simply moves along to providing the Epicurean theory of language and decrying the concept of name-givers, with no indication of punishment for the oath-breakers.

Punishment for injustice only enters the picture later in the anthropology, as Lucretius provides an almost Polybian account of the development of political systems. First, kings arose, founded cities, and rewarded those they found appealing on account of their strength, beauty, genius, and later money (5.1105-1116). Following a discussion on how money motivates men to foolish ends, Lucretius then describes that the ancient kings were overthrown and slain by their subjects, resulting in a situation wherein men killed each other with impunity (5.1136-1142). The solution, men found, was to create magistrates to legislate restrictions on behavior:

Inde magistratum partim docuere creare
iuraque constituere, ut vellent legibus uti.
nam genus humanum, defessum vi colere aevom,
ex inimicitiis languebat; quo magis ipsum
sponte sua cecidit sub leges artaque iura.
acrius ex ira quod enim se quisque parabat
ulcisci quam nunc concessumst legibus aequis,
hanc ob rem est homines pertaesum vi colere aevom.

Thereupon some taught them to create magistracy
and established laws, so that they might wish
to employ statutes.
For the human race, tired of spending life in conflict,
was weary of hostilities; so all the more humanity
willingly submitted to statutes and strict laws.
For since each man would out of anger prepare himself for
vengeance
more severely than is now permitted through fair laws,
on this account it became weary for men to spend life
in conflict.

Lucretius then in 5.1151-1160 largely summarizes the sentiments of KD 17, 34, and 35, telling the reader how the fear of punishment over misdeeds is both inescapable and of great anxiety for the lawbreaker. Now, Lucretius' history of political systems seems here to correlate with other Epicurean theories of societal development,[18] particularly those of Hermarchus, which are preserved in Porphyry's *De Abstinentia* 1.7-12. There, Hermarchus tells us that ancient legislators decided to punish murder for the discouraging effect it would have on lawbreakers. However, Hermarchus also makes sure to distinguish between the sorts of men who are discouraged from lawbreaking by punishment and those who would not break the laws in the first place (*De Abstinentia* 1.8):[19]

εἰ δὲ πάντες ἐδύναντο βλέπειν ὁμοίως καὶ μνημονεύειν τὸ συμφέρον, οὐδὲν ἂν προσεδέοντο νόμων, ἀλλ' αὐθαιρέτως τὰ μὲν εὐλαβοῦντο [τῶν ἀπειρημένων], τὰ δὲ ἔπραττον [τῶν προστεταγμένων]. ἱκανὴ γὰρ ἡ τοῦ χρησίμου καὶ βλαβεροῦ θεωρία τῶν μὲν φυγὴν παρασκευάσαι, τῶν δὲ αἵρεσιν· ἡ δὲ τῆς ζημίας ἀνάτασις πρὸς τοὺς μὴ προορωμένους τὸ λυσιτελοῦν. ἀναγκάζει γὰρ δεσπόζειν ἐπικρεμαμένη ταῖς ἀγούσαις ἐπὶ τὰς ἀσυμφόρους πράξεις ὁρμαῖς, καὶ βίᾳ συναναγκάζει τὸ δέον ποιεῖν.

[18] Cf. Van den Steen 2009, who notes a similar development in Philodemus' *De Pietate*, where "wise men" institute punishment for injustice to incentivize the people to hew to the proper (i.e. Epicurean) way of life.
[19] See Alberti 2009 for an extensive analysis of this passage of Hermarchus, as well as an overview of Epicurean justice.

> For if everyone could similarly see and recollect what is expedient, they would need nothing of laws, but would voluntarily take caution over any of the things forbidden and would do any of the things prescribed. For the contemplation of what is useful and harmful is sufficient for providing flight from the one and choice of the other; while the threat of punishment is for those who do not consider ahead of time what is profitable. For this overhanging punishment compels those doing so to rein in their impulses towards useless actions and by force join in compelling them to do what is right.

This sentiment is echoed in Fragment 56 from the Inscription of Diogenes, which describes the unattainable paradise that would result from all humans adopting Epicureanism[20] (Fr. 56 (NF 21) I.1-12)[21]:

> [τὴν μὲν οὖν σοφίαν οὐ πανταχοῦ κομι]—
> οῦμεν, ἐπεὶ πάντες μὴ
> δύνανται. δυνατὴν δὲ
> αὐτὴν ἄν ὑποθώμεθα,
> τότε ὡς ἀληθῶς ὁ τῶν
> θεῶν βίος εἰς ἀνθρώπους
> μεταβήσεται. δικαιο-
> σύνης γὰρ ἔσται μεστὰ
> πάντα καὶ φιλαλλγλίας,
> καὶ οὐ γενήσεται τειχῶν
> ἢ νόμων χρεία καὶ πάν-
> των ὅσα δι᾽ ἀλλήλους
> σκευωρούμεθα.
>
> "[So we shall not achieve wisdom universally], since not all are capable of it. But if we assume it to be possible, then truly the life of the gods will pass to men. For everything will be full of justice and mutual love, and there will come to be no need of fortifications or laws and all the things which we contrive on account of one another."

So, we see that elsewhere in Epicurean political theory, there is a disconnect between justice and injustice: injustice exists only in that it incentivizes those who would break the social contract not

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[20] D. Fowler [1989] 2007, 408 remarks that this thinking reflects Epicurean assumptions about the minority nature of the philosophy, thus offering a rationalization for why Epicureans would submit to living under non-Epicurean rule like that of the Hellenistic kings.
[21] Transcription by Smith 1993, p. 243

to do so. That is, justice exists as a necessary quality of human society, but injustice itself is a later invention, a byproduct of laws and the strength of the state to enforce them, and thus societies can indeed function without an established mechanism for punishing misdeeds. While the Epicurean distinction between law and justice has been observed before,[22] the presence of justice expressly *without* laws has not been. Epicurus' writings on justice, though clearly applicable to these instances of lawlessness, were nevertheless written within the context of a society of laws. The fear of punishment over lawbreaking can only exist if either laws or the apparatus to enforce them also exist. Epicurus assumes that both forces are at play for his followers. Now with these examples, we can see Epicureans imagining situations where they are not — in the idealist but impossible Epicurean utopia imagined in Hermarchus and Diogenes' writings, and now here in Lucretius' anthropology, where the social contract remains in place despite others violating it without punishment.

4.4 The *Cacumen Summum*

Lucretius' fifth book is the only one which does not end with a vivid description of dissolution and destruction. Book 1 ends with an account of the possible disintegration of the universe, with the sky and earth falling away and leaving only void. Book 2 closes with the famous old *arator*, who yearns for the better times of his ancestors even while he knows nothing of the steady decay and dissolution of all things. Book 3 is, of course, entirely devoted to matters of death and ends with a reminder of the inevitability of death, and Book 4 concludes its negative account of sex and romantic yearning by comparing love to the constant erosion of a stone by drops of water.[23] The association of Book 6's finale with dissolution and death has already been

[22] Alberti 2009
[23] Minadeo 1969, 31-37

well established earlier in this dissertation. But Lucretius' anthropology does not end with disintegration, but rather an ever-growing building upwards, as men learn more and more of the world and perfect their ability to harness it (5.1452-1457):

> Usus et impigrae simul experientia mentis
> paulatim docuit pedetemptim progredientis.
> Sic unumquicquid paulatim protrahit aetas
> in medium ratioque in luminis erigit oras;
> namque alid ex alio clarescere corde videbant,
> artibus ad summum donec venere cacumen.
>
> Practice and the experimentation of the active mind
> instructed [humans] as they progressed forward, bit by bit,
> step by step.
> Thus time brings forward each thing bit by bit
> to the fore, and reason raises it upon the realms of light;
> for they saw one thing after another become clear in their minds,
> until they came to the highest pinnacle of the arts.

This continuous surging upward cannot continue forever, as Lucretius makes clear with his final book. Book 6 begins with an invocation of all the blessings which Athens has brought to humanity: agriculture, laws, and greatest of all, Epicurus. This establishes the setting that Lucretius returns to at the end of his poem and securely ties together the final two books as a distinct pair, where one is not complete without the other.[24]

It would be appropriate, then, for us too to return to the setting of Athens to conclude this exploration of Lucretian justice and friendship. In so doing, I will strive to answer the fundamental question of this dissertation: why does Lucretius praise those who risk their lives to aid the sick doomed to die, when they stand to gain no benefit from doing so? The answer, I believe, is simple: that this is simply the right, just, and proper thing for the Epicurean to do.

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[24] Schiesaro 1994, 92-94; P. Fowler [1997] 2007, 209-214; Clay 1983, 257-9, Minadeo 1969, 44-48

5. Contracting Disease

In my last chapter, I explored how the depiction of social relationships in Lucretius can impact the perspective of the second reader and offer him further insight into how precisely Epicureans understand and regulate their attachment to other members of their community. My analysis, however, has thus far mostly focused on cases of detachment from others: that is, instances where the proper Epicurean action is to distance oneself, as suggested in KD 39 and exemplified by the proem to Book 2. This chapter will shift its focus to the opposite cases, wherein selfless action and attachment are praised as the proper behavior for an Epicurean. While I will discuss other examples within the text that demonstrate this sort of attachment, in this chapter I will primarily focus on attachment within the Plague of Athens passage. Additionally, I will apply my earlier arguments regarding the Epicurean social contract to the Plague as well, arguing that the events and characters depicted therein support my claim that unpunished violations of the social contract do not invalidate the contract itself, and thus conscientious citizens will continue to maintain it without guarantee of the mutual benefits it ostensibly offers.

To begin my comparison of social relationships in the Plague, I will first return to the display of attachment and detachment shown by the Athenians in 6.1239-1246 and compare it with the second proem's approach to detachment. I maintain that this passage is central to both our understanding and the second reader's understanding of the nature of Epicurean community and, consequently, the evangelical call to action its contents portray. During his evocative description of the Plague of Athens, Lucretius pauses between descriptions of the panicked and suffering Athenians and the dissolution of their way of life to examine how some Athenians fled in cowardice from their sick loved ones, while others remained and eased their suffering despite the death sentence continued exposure to the disease carried (6.1239-1246):

Nam quicumque suos fugitabant visere ad aegros,
vitai nimium cupidos mortisque timentis
poenibat paulo post turpi morte malaque,
desertos, opis expertis, uncuria mactans.
qui fuerant autem praesto, contagibus ibant
atque labore, pudor quem tum cogebat obire
blandaque lassorum vox mixta voce querellae.
optimus hoc leti genus ergo quisque subibat.

For whosoever fled going to see their sick family members,
desiring too much of life and fearing too much of death,
shortly thereafter slaughtering Neglectfulness punished them
with a terrible, ugly death, deserted and bereft of resources.
But those who stayed nearby, who passed due to
the touch and the toil,
which shame and the persuasive voice of the wearied
mixed with the voice of complaint compelled them to meet.
Thus did all the best undergo this manner of death.

The contrast between the second proem, which makes first and second-readers grapple with detachment, and this passage is striking. In Book 2, Lucretius never entertains any pity for those suffering from disaster or incorrect outlooks on life and lauds the ability to look down on them from the secure fortress of Epicurean philosophy. Conversely, in the Plague Lucretius condemns those who leave behind their sickened loved ones and praises those who remain to care for the sick. This contradiction in attitude invites us to interrogate these passages in light of each other. Why does Lucretius praise the act of ignoring the suffering of others in one context and then condemn it in the other? The answer, I believe, is in who is doing the suffering — in particular, their relationship with those beholding their suffering.

As I have emphasized in the previous chapter, the second proem depicts those suffering calamity as entirely separate from the reader: the only component of their suffering Lucretius deems important to communicate is the fact that it exists. Their toil is a *labor alterius*, which exists only in the realm of philosophical consideration. Even more significantly, the extreme distance they have from the reader means that it is impossible for them to even develop a social bond in the first place, nor is the reader in any circumstance to help them. Imagine how the proem

to Book 2 changes if instead Lucretius replaced *alterius* with that most dear of Epicurean relationships, the *amicus*. In a philosophy so deeply concerned with altruistic friendships, where it is even encouraged to die for one's friends, such a sentiment seems ludicrous: the Epicurean would not hesitate to rush to the seashore to save his friend from shipwreck, to ride out to the battle, or to descend into the non-Epicurean masses and attempt to hoist his friend out from his foolish non-Epicurean ways. Thus, we must consider that Lucretius' lesson in the second proem is not to ignore the suffering of other people in general, but rather to communicate how the Epicurean should feel about the suffering of others. In other words, the second proem relates to us how the Epicurean should feel about the suffering of strangers.

In contrast, the situation of the Plague is quite different: the people there already possess relationships with one another, and the text relates both their feelings (i.e. their sense of pity for the sick) and their actions in acting as caretakers. Lucretius specifies that those whom the Athenians either abandon or care for are not strangers, but rather are *suos aegros* — "their own sick." These are people surrounded by their siblings and parents, friends and relatives, and Lucretius has no qualms about condemning those who abandon their social attachments out of fear of death. In fact, he has elsewhere similarly condemned such behavior as immoral and scornful (3. 68-73):

> Unde homines dum se falso terrore coacti
> effugisse volunt longe longeque remosse,
> sanguine civili rem conflant divitiasque
> conduplicant avidi, caedem caede accumulantes,
> crudeles gaudent in tristi funere fratris
> et consanguineum mensas odere timentque.
>
> And thus men when driven by a false terror desire
> to flee afar and remove themselves far away,
> raise wealth with civil bloodshed and, greedy,
> double their riches, piling murder upon murder,
> the cruel rejoice at the sad funeral of a brother
> and fear to dine at the tables of their kin.

The sort of isolation that one might conclude is appropriate from the proem to Book 2 — complete removal of oneself from society — is expressly condemned here. Unduly terrified of death, these men cannot bear interacting with their friends and kinsmen for fear of any retribution they might bear for their misdeeds. As we and the second reader well know, this feeling could not be more un-Epicurean. It is primarily motivated by fear, and it requires removing oneself from that surest bulwark against pain and harassment, friendship.[1] While the second proem would at first appear to extol the virtue of isolating oneself from others, this passage from the third proem demonstrates quite the opposite: that intentional isolation from others is a result of fear unbecoming of Epicureans.

Similarly negative is the depiction of the man who changes his horizons instead of himself, whom Lucretius portrays following his description of the Underworld (3.1053-1075):

> Si possent homines, proinde ac sentire videntur
> pondus inesse animo quod se gravitate fatiget,
> e quibus id fiat causis quoque noscere et unde
> tanta mali tamquam moles in pectore constet,
> haud ita vitam agerent, ut nunc plerumque videmus
> quid sibi quisque velit nescire et quaerere semper
> commutare locum, quasi onus deponere possit.
> exit saepe foras magnis ex aedibus ille,
> esse domi quem pertaesumst, subitoque revertit,
> quippe foris nilo melius qui sentiat esse.
> currit agens mannos ad villam praecipitanter,
> auxilium tectis quasi ferre ardentibus instans;
> oscitat extemplo, tetigit cum limina villae,
> aut abit in somnum gravis atque oblivia quaerit,
> aut etiam properans urbem petit atque revisit.
> hoc se quisque modo fugit, at quem scilicet, ut fit,
> effugere haud potis est, ingratis haeret et odit,
> propterea morbi quia causam non tenet aeger;
> quam bene si videat, iam rebus quisque relictis
> naturam primum studeat cognoscere rerum,

[1] Add to this Strauss 1968, 105, who argues that Lucretius' attribution of the fear of death to causing crime means that the abolition of the fear of death will actually lead to the abolition of crime itself, not its proliferation.

temporis aeterni quoniam, non unius horae,
ambigitur status, in quo mortalibus omnis
aetas, post mortem quae restat cumque, manenda. 1075

If men could, as they seem to feel a burden upon their mind
which exhausts them with its weight,
if it were possible for them to know from which causes and 1055
whence such a great weight of evil could remain upon the breast,
not at all would they live so, as we now see many do,
each not knowing what he wants for himself and seeking always
to change his place, as though he could set down his burden.
Often that man who grew weary at home goes outside 1060
from his great house, and suddenly returns,
for he feels that he is in no way better abroad.
he rushes, driving his ponies headlong to his villa,
as though eager to render aid to a burning house.
immediately he yawns, once he has reached the threshold, 1065
and either goes off into heavy sleep and seeks oblivion
or even hurrying heads for and sees the city again.
in this fashion each man flees himself, but as is natural
he can hardly flee himself, and unwillingly clings to and hates it,
because the sick man does not grasp his illness's cause; 1070
if he could see what the cause was, already each man would
with his affairs cast aside at once pursue
understanding the nature of things,
because the state in question is not of a single hour,
but of time eternal, in which state the entire time for mortals
must be passed, which remains after death. 1075

This passage strikes at the same point as the previous ones, albeit from a different angle. Now, the cowardly, philosophically sick cannot help but endlessly flee from his problems, always changing his horizons but never himself. Naturally, this is because he does not understand the nature of things and how to properly live — and, significantly, the greatest consequence of not understanding the nature of things is possessing a strong fear of death.

This passage is quite reminiscent of a similar message found in much of Horace's oeuvre, where he similarly critiques the incorrect ways non-Epicureans go about searching for a better life. The various workmen who envy and desire the lives of others in *Odes* 1.1 and *Satires* 1.1 present a similar idea, but the closest emulations of this passage are found in *Odes* 2.16.17-20 and *Epistles* 1.11.25-27:

Quid brevi fortes iaculamur aevo
Multa? Quid terras alio calentis
Sole mutamus? Patriae quis exsul
Se quoque fugit?

Why do we, strong though we are, cast our javelins
at so much during brief life? Why do we change our lands
for those warmed by another sun? What exile has ever
also fled from himself?

…Nam si ratio et prudentia curas,
non locus effusi late maris arbiter aufert,
caelum, non animum, mutant, qui trans mare currunt.

…For if reason and wisdom remove worries,
rather than a place, commander of a wide expanse of sea,
then those who rush across the sea change their sky,
not their mind.

In both Horace and the above excerpt from Book 3, the foolish man is doomed to repeat his senseless wandering, always in search of something that he cannot find with his present outlook on life. The issue for the non-Epicurean lies in the very fact that he does not understand the nature of his illness, the fear of death (3.1170), and without the teachings of Epicurus lacks the tools to properly treat himself.

Returning to how this passage relates to the nature of social relationships, while the Athenians abandon their own because of an explicit fear of death, the same root cause is what motivates the man here to exhaust himself, failing to find any cure for his unease because he does not know the curative medicine of Epicureanism. The former are explicitly "too desirous of life", and the latter is implicitly motivated by the same non-Epicurean failing. Note too that nowhere does Lucretius describe the friends and family of the horizon-changing man: he rides from the city to his villa purely for the change of place. If he had the sort of Epicurean community shown in the *prostrati* section of the second proem, Lucretius would understand and praise his decision to abandon city life. But his flight from the city is not an attempt to find refuge with a community of like-minded friends, but rather a simple and misguided effort to alleviate his anxiety over his

fear of death. His suffering is a lonely one, for just as he lacks the philosophical understanding to know the reasons for his unhappiness, he also lacks the philosophical community necessary to solve it. In effect, the fear of death drives men to abandon their social bonds and fearfully look only after themselves: one who fears death will prioritize his own life over all else, and in so doing break the bonds of community he should otherwise abide by. Someone concerned only with his own welfare will create an environment in which neither society nor friendship may exist.

We have now seen that Lucretius thinks that ignoring and abandoning one's community for isolated protection is an unacceptable and selfish action, and that prioritizing the security and wellbeing of the people one is attached to is paramount for the Epicurean. While we (and the first reader) may have once seen this as contradictory to the nature of Epicurean hedonism, now that we have observed the equal importance of pity alongside mutual benefit in the social contract laid out in the previous chapter, there is no such contradiction. Lucretius has created in the Plague a situation where there can be no actual benefit for these caretakers: his emendations to Thucydides' original account have removed all accounts of those who survive the Plague, thus making its infection a death sentence for the afflicted.[2] The best any of these caretakers can hope for is that they themselves will be comforted and cared for as they die, since catching the Plague is inevitable, and it is preferable to die comforted than to suffer alone. But with the context that pity is just as important to society as benefit, suddenly the praise these Athenians receive for their actions is fully understandable. The Epicurean math of mutual benefit clearly does not indicate that these Athenians should care for others with no hope of gaining anything, yet everything that Lucretius tells us here and elsewhere in the poem show us that such calculus is unnecessary. It is

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[2] Bright 1971, 608-615

purely a matter of emotion, that it feels right and just to take pity on those who suffer, and that their cries for help spur others into rendering aid as a matter of principle. This is precisely what Lucretius tells us their motivation is: they stay and work because of the pity roused by the cries and wails of their sick, not because of some philosophical stance or consideration.

Now we, like the second reader, have had our objections answered and our confusion dispelled by a close second reading of the text in context of its entirety. Why does Lucretius praise the Athenians who stay and help and condemn those who flee and die alone, when no hedonistic calculus could conclude thusly? He does so because compassion and pity, just as much as the mutual benefit of contract theory, are foundational to the function of society and necessary for its continued existence. Otherwise, all would be like how men were before the softening of their bodies: to invoke the Melian Dialogue again, the strong would do what they could, and the weak would suffer what they must.

The insights into this passage granted by our retrospective reading do not end there, however. Just as the altruism of these Athenians makes sense in light of the importance of pity in Lucretius' social contract, so too does their continued maintenance of the social contract despite its obvious dissolution. This otherwise incomprehensible action is clarified by similar violations of the social contract in that same passage. Let us recall the relevant section of Lucretius' anthropology, which I discussed towards the end of the previous chapter (5.1024-1027):

> Nec tamen omnimodis poterat concordia gigni,
> sed bona magnaque pars servabat foedera caste;
> aut genus humanum iam tum foret omne peremptum
> nec potuisset adhuc perducere saecla propago.
>
> However, concord could not arise in every instance,
> but rather a good portion faithfully maintained their contracts;
> otherwise the human race would have been wholly destroyed,
> nor could their offspring have produced generations
> to the present day.

As I noted before, Lucretius indicates that those who broke the social contract here went unpunished, as only later in history were laws and punishments for injustice instituted. In this respect, the Plague has returned Athens to its primeval state: as the dissolution of the magistracy and disrespect for law aptly demonstrate, all that remains in Athens that binds its citizenry together is the fundamental core of human society, the social contract. For a compelling distillation of this idea, we can turn to the poem's concluding lines. For this reading, I am adopting the transposition of 6.1247-51 to the end of the book suggested by Bockemüller and Martin's editions, which Peta Fowler has defended in her 1997 article on the poem's conclusion.[3]

multaque res subita et paupertas horrida suasit:
namque suos consanguineos aliena rogorum
insuper extructa ingenti clamore locabant
subdebantque faces, multo cum sanguine saepe
rixantes potius quam corpora desererentur.

inque aliis alium, populum sepelire suorum
certantes; lacrimis lassi luctuque redibant;
inde bonam partem in lectum maerore dabantur.
nec poterat quiquam reperiri, quem neque morbus
nec mors nec luctus temptaret tempore tali.

Sudden matters and need persuaded to many dreadful things;
for they would with great shouting place their own kin
upon piles of funerary pyres not their own
and would set down torches, often brawling
with much blood rather than abandon their bodies.

…And then one upon others, vying to bury the
multitude of their own; exhausted with tears and grief,
they return home;
then they were, for a good amount, put to bed in mourning.
No one could be found whom neither disease
nor death nor grief had tested in such a time.

[3] Cf. P. Fowler [1997] 2007

Here, at the end of the poem, Lucretius looks at the Athenians indulging in the chief symptom of non-Epicurean sickness: they are so terrified at the prospect of their loved ones suffering after death that they will resort to anything, from theft to brawls and struggle, to see them pass safely to the afterlife.[4] Not only are these men breaking one of the central tenets of Epicureanism, but they are also violating the social contract through their actions. But there is no magistracy, no legislature in place to punish them for their injustices: they simply return home and lie in bed. They are not beset by fear over punishment for their actions, as KD 34 and 35 would otherwise indicate,[5] for none will come: death and disease has destroyed the social apparatus responsible for doling out punishment for injustice. Thus, the Plague represents a society that has regressed to the elemental state of society. The social contract remains, but the institutions necessary to enforce punishment against those breaking laws do not.

With this, we now see that Lucretius both teaches us about the nature of Epicurean political theory and also makes a larger point about responsible action in society. The institutions humanity has established to enforce the legal system are subject to collapse and cannot be relied upon in emergencies. Lucretius, then, provides for us in 6.1239-1246 a model for what to do in such occasions. He does not think that the failure of society to enforce its laws destroys the social contract; rather, the foundational bonds of friendship and compassion exist as much without it as they do with it.

So, when society fails its citizens, when people are forced to find other avenues for security and protection outside the legal system, Lucretius tells us that the proper behavior is not to return to a primeval state, before the creation of the social contract, with all men taking

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[4] Cf. Pope 2016 52-53, who connects the bloodshed of this passage with the usage of phrase *sanguine sudare* in 6.1148 and 5.1129, and thus identifies a close Lucretian association of the Plague's physical symptoms with the sickness of civil bloodshed.
[5] See 4.3 for discussion of justice in the *Kuriai Doxai*.

whatever they are able to, nor should we flee society and crave isolation for what safety it provides. Both of these possibilities are impossible for the Epicurean: the former because modern humans lacks the physical hardiness of the ancients, and therefore cannot endure his hardships without the support of society like they could; and the latter because, as we have established, the safety promised by isolation from one's community is a false one, predicated on fear and lacking in the trust essential to Epicurean *ataraxia*. Thus, when the social system malfunctions and injustice cannot be punished, the proper behavior is to remain with those we care for and who care for us, regardless of the circumstances. It is not, as Hammer suggests, the case that those who break the social contract suffer and die alone as penance for their crimes; rather, such a fate is inevitable for all who live in Lucretius' Athens, and as such their death cannot be viewed as karmic justice. Instead, these individuals typify only improper behavior in times of crisis rather than examples of how the breaking the social contract leads to one being punished for it.

Here, with the selfless actions of family in the Plague, Lucretius recalls a fragment of Democritus (Fr. 261):

> ἀδικουμένοισι τιμωρεῖν κατὰ δύναμιν χρὴ καὶ μὴ παριέναι. τὸ μὲν γὰρ τοιοῦτον δίκαιον καὶ ἀγαθόν, τὸ δὲ μὴ τοιοῦτον ἄδικον καὶ κακόν.
>
> One must lend aid to those who are being wronged to the best of one's power and not allow it. For this sort of deed is just and good, while not doing so is unjust and bad.

Unlike Epicurus, Democritus does not refer to fear of punishment as a motivator for altruism; instead, he presents it as a natural extension of pity. In fact, fear of punishment cannot be a motivator in Democritean ethics, as we have seen from 68 DK B181's disagreement with KD 35 above.

In this regard, then, both Epicurus and Democritus both find validation in Lucretius' proto-Epicurean Athenians. This Athens lacks the legal apparatus to punish lawbreakers, and thus

it falls to individuals' own understanding of ethics to do the right thing. Naturally, there are those who fail to see the common good in aiding one another, just like those who refused to maintain the first social contracts during the birth of civilization. But those fools who abandon their own do not in turn persuade others to abandon their duties: for these good citizens are motivated not by the fear of punishment, but the love of and pity for their loved ones. In the face of inevitable death, the Epicurean will not abandon his post and leave those he loves to suffer and die alone. After all, doesn't continuing to live and surrounding oneself with loved ones despite the inevitability of death describe the entirety of an Epicurean life?

> Optimus hoc leti genus ergo quisque subibat.
> Thus did all the best undergo this manner of death.
> (6.1246)

6. Light Tracks for the Keen-Scented Mind

In the preceding chapters, I have laid out the justification for applying a retrospective and narratological approach to Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*. In the process, I have demonstrated the specific insights that a second reader might gain into both Lucretius' overall didactic strategy, as well as a more nuanced understanding of Epicurean sentiments towards politics, society, and friendships. Now that these arguments have been established, it is time to turn to the fundamental question they raise: why does Lucretius' poem contain such a hidden yet engaging facet for its audience, and what effect do these gained insights have on the second reader?

In the following chapter, I will argue that both the content and character of these insights point the converted reader towards a specific evangelical goal. In my estimation, if all of Lucretius' strategies go right and land upon the proper recipient, that new convert will understand that he now in turn has a duty to share the good news of Epicurus with the significant people in his life, but pointedly not towards total strangers. In this way, both Lucretius' poem and those who read it sidestep the troublesome issue of recruiting new Epicureans, as that entails interacting with the non-Epicurean world and all the possible dangers it might pose towards threatening one's pursuit of ataraxia. Lucretius has eluded this danger by proselytizing in verse, rather than in person: as those reading his poem are interacting with his work, rather than himself, he remains safe from threat within the *serena templa* of his mind. Likewise, the new convert can avoid having to preach in the streets to strangers if he instead pursues the conversion of his friends and family, with whom he can expect a more secure and safe interaction.

How, then, will the new convert go about further educating himself and spreading the gospel of Epicurus to others? In the pages that follow, I will expand my previous discussion of Lucretius' political and social theories to answer this question, arguing that Lucretius offers this reader a roadmap for his own journey into Epicurean salvation. Like the hunting dogs of 1.398-

409, Lucretius has shown his student the path: now he must follow its tracks without the direct guidance of his teacher. As the revelations given by these second readings demonstrate the importance of a community of like-minded peers and praise acts of pure altruism for one's friends and family, Lucretius' message to this reader is clear. Now that he has learned about the true nature of things, his next course of action is to find the sanctuary that only a community of Epicureans can provide and save as many of his loved ones from their own philosophical sickness as he can. To accomplish this goal, he must either find that community by joining the conclaves of Epicureans in Campania and elsewhere or, failing that, found his own *praesidium* to enjoy the protection of Epicurean friendship.

It should be noted that this conversion experience differs from comparable examples of philosophical conversion from the Late Republic in an important aspect: while other conversions focus on matters of ideology and character, the conversion of Lucretius' student necessitates a call for action. This, I maintain, is due to the unique place of community within Epicureanism, combined with Lucretius' own thoughts on association and removal from society. While Stoicism, Academic Skepticism, and the Peripatetics all share elements in common with Epicureanism — reverence for the teachings of a particular founder, well-established schools and expectations for teacher and student, etc. — these other philosophies do not place the security granted by community as paramount towards one's own pursuit of happiness. Converting to one of these other philosophies requires little except a change in perspective and ideology, while conversion to Lucretius' evangelical Epicureanism *requires* a fundamental change to one's behavior and relationship with society.

The portraits of Roman elite in Cicero's dialogues and letters offer an excellent example of how the nobility regarded and interfaced with matters of philosophical conversion. As Cicero's letters to C. Cassius Longinus make clear, at some point in the mid-40s BCE, Cassius

converted to Epicureanism. Beyond the fact that Cassius' continued political career demonstrates a relationship with Epicureanism quite different than Lucretius' firm adoption of *lathē biōsas*, the manner in which Cicero characterizes Cassius' conversion also indicates that this conversion was far more a matter of ideology than practice. Cicero remarks that Cassius has "recently begun to doubt that 'the good ought to be choice-worthy'" when discussing their mutual friend Pansa's embarkation on military service;[1] elsewhere, Cicero mocks the Epicurean theory of images as something Cassius' "new friends" uphold.[2] While it is indisputable that Cassius did in fact have a conversion to Epicureanism — particularly thanks to Cassius' pithy response to Cicero's jabs in *ad. Fam* 15.19 — his conversion is more internal than behavioral. Cassius' letter demonstrates his own familiarity with the intricacies of Epicurean doctrine and philosophical history, yet his continued participation in politics shows that his Epicureanism hews far more closely to KD 7, which states that, with the right mindset, even political office can be a source of pleasure, rather than anxiety. It certainly appears that Cassius' casual Epicureanism has far more in common with the prevalent adherents of Epicureanism active in late Republican society than with Lucretius' own rejection of the benefits of political life.[3]

Cicero's works contain other notable accounts of philosophical conversion, both to Epicureanism and towards other philosophies. Cicero describes the conversion of the lawyer C. Trebatius Testa to Epicureanism in 53 BCE while in Caesar's warcamp (*o castra praeclara*).[4] Cicero laments this conversion, wondering if this could have been avoided if he had sent him to Tarentum instead and asking how Trebatius could hope to reconcile his newfound philosophical

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[1] *Ad Fam*. 15.17.3: …"quod tu nuper dubitare coepisti, 'τὸ καλὸν δι᾽ αὐτὸ αἱρετόν esse'"
[2] *Ad Fam.* 15.16.1: …fit enim nescio qui qui ut quasi coram adesse videare cum scribo aliquid ad te, neque id κατ᾽ εἰδώλων φαντασίας ut dicunt tui amici novi, qui putant etiam διανοητικὰς φαντασίας spectris Catianis excitari…
[3] Castner 1988, xv
[4] Griffin 1989, 31, 31 ft. 50

beliefs with his duties as a lawyer and statesman: “Sed quonam modo ius civile defendes, cum omnia tua causa facias, non civium?” (“But how will you defend the civil law when you make everything for your own sake, not of the citizenry?”, *ad Fam.* 7.12.2). Evidently, Trebatius had little issue with such a reconciliation: as Castner has observed, Trebatius’ later political career demonstrates that he, like many of his fellow Epicurean statesmen, could both profess Epicurean philosophy and maintain a successful career in Roman statecraft.[5]

While these two accounts of conversion take place at a distance, a third appears directly within the course of Cicero’s *De Oratore*. Following a persuasive speech by Crassus, C. Aurelius Cotta professes that he has been convinced of the validity of the Academic argument: “apud hos quid profeceris, nescio; me quidem in Academiam totum compulisti” (3.145). Görler notes that Cotta’s subsequent statement, however, marks this conversion as less a matter of dogma and more epistemological: Cotta’s conversion is solely to the Academic methodology of interrogating questions. That is, Cotta’s conversion *in Academiam totum* does not represent a conversion towards the tenets of the Academy, but in particular the approach of Academic skepticism.[6] Again, we see that this understanding of philosophy differs from Lucretius’: Cotta’s adoption of Academic skepticism does not necessitate a full conversion to Platonism, while a comparable adoption of Epicurean epistemology would be at odds with Lucretius’ Epicureanism.

Another notable example of philosophical conversion is that of Antiochus described in the *Lucullus*. Here Cicero relates to the reader how Antiochus, once a fervent devotee of the Carneadean skepticism of Philo, suddenly shifted his beliefs and turned to embrace the tenets of

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[5] Castner 1988, 71-72
[6] Görler 1995, 98-99

the Old Academy.[7] The verbiage Cicero makes use of here suggests that this conversion experience was immediate, rather than a gradual process of changed beliefs (*Lucullus* 69):

> quisquam enim iste dies inluxerit quaero, qui illi ostenderit eam quam quam multos annos esse negitavisset veri et falsi notam. excogitavit aliquid? eadem dicit quae Stoici. paenituit illa sensisse? cur non se transtulit ad alios, et maxime ad Stoicos? eorum enim erat propria ista dissensio. quid eum Mnesarchi paenitebat, quid Dardani; qui erant Athenis tum principes Stoicorum?
>
> For I wonder what exact date came to light, which showed to him that which he had denied for so many years was the mark of the true and the false. Did he invent something? He says the same things as the Stoics. Did he become dissatisfied over the beliefs he had felt? Why did he not transfer himself to other [schools], most of all to the Stoics? For [Antiochus'] specific disagreement was theirs. What, was he dissatisfied with Mnesarchus, with Dardanus, who were then the preeminent Stoics at Athens?

Cicero himself does not know for sure the reason for Antiochus' conversion, though he does propose in *Luc.* 70 that attacks on the Academy may have played a part in motivating his dissociation from Philo. Regardless of the reason, however, Cicero's characterization of Antiochus' conversion clearly understands it as revelatory and deeply felt, especially given that he presents the conversion itself as a singular event, a specific day that could potentially be identified.

On the topic of Antiochus and Cicero, I will note the existence of some debate amongst Ciceronian scholars over whether Cicero himself experienced a conversion from Academic skepticism to Antiochus' Old Academy, then back to skepticism around 45 BCE.[8] Regardless of where one comes down on the question of Cicero's conversion, the very fact that modern scholars

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[7] For a detailed look at Antiochus and his conversion, see Barnes 1989, esp. 68-70
[8] Cf. Glucker 1988, Görler 1995

can debate Cicero's philosophical leanings demonstrates the unique nature of conversion to Lucretius' Epicureanism. This debate is centered upon Cicero's philosophical and intellectual stances, which did not impact his behavior in a clear and identifiable way. If Cicero had, say, converted to Lucretian Epicureanism, there would be no need for any such debate, as Cicero's clear rejection of political life would have indicated as much.

All of these examples demonstrate that a total conversion towards Epicureanism, in the sense that it would involve a substantial change to one's behavior and relationship with social and political matters, is markedly different from other accounts of philosophical conversion within the late Republic. As I have demonstrated above, however, a call to do just that can be found within the text of Lucretius' poetry, instructing its neophyte Epicurean reader to evangelize to others — not by venturing out, but by sharing the good news with his friends and family. With that established, we can now turn to a bit of postulation: in such a situation, what might our neophyte Epicurean do? What resources might he have available to continue his Epicurean education and further the education of those he spreads Epicureanism to?

6.1 The Convert's Next Steps

After he closes the final scroll of the *De Rerum Natura* for a second time, our second reader, so long as he has been persuaded by Lucretius' argument, now has the task of finding or creating his own Epicurean space ahead of him. The nature and difficulty of this task will, naturally, rely on the specifics of his own situation. We may postulate four possible scenarios for him, based upon our understanding of this reader and late Republican Rome.

The first of these scenarios is by far the easiest for our reader to resolve: he has already befriended an Epicurean whom he can go to for further instruction and for the protection which Epicurean friendship provides. While this reader likely has had very little exposure to Epicurean philosophy before Lucretius, as I have argued in the introduction, there is still the possibility that

he still counts a devout Epicurean amongst his friends. Such a dynamic between Epicurean and non-Epicurean has fine parallels in antiquity, not only with Cicero and Torquatus in the former's philosophical dialogues but indeed, within the very text of Lucretius — after all, the dynamic Lucretius forms between himself and Memmius is one of an Epicurean and his non-Epicurean friend, who up until this point has remained skeptical of Epicurean philosophy.

Perhaps our second reader has in the past rebuffed his friend's overtures for his philosophy on its surface, but may meekly return to said friend now that he has realized the errors of his ways. Or perhaps the comparison to Memmius is even more appropriate: the Epicurean friend may have recommended Lucretius to him, hoping that the honey-sweet poetry would be more enticing than one of Epicurus' more traditional encyclicals. Whatever the case, the convert's path is a simple one: now that he has accepted Epicureanism, his friend can adopt the role of καθηγητής, following the traditional model which Philodemus' *On Frank Criticism* has provided us,[9] and guide his new student further.

The second scenario is a bit more involved, but it is still quite attainable for the new convert. In this case, the convert lacks any personal friends or family who are Epicurean, but knows of some on the peripheries of his own social circle. He must then go about befriending these individuals and becoming a part of their communities. This scenario contains some appealing elements, based on our understanding of Epicurean conversion. Firstly, this situation mirrors precisely the Epicurean attitude towards conversion that has befuddled modern scholars: that the sage should not seek out disciples, but rather should avoid public life and attract students naturally and without effort. This sentiment comes from a combination of statements from ancient

[9] See Asmis 2001 on reading Philodemus to understand Epicurean tutelage, as well as Konstan et al.'s edition of *On Frank Criticism*.

sources, collated succinctly by Frischer in his effort to reconstruct the Epicurean policy on recruitment.[10] Beyond the clear indications in the *Kuriai Doxai* that the Epicurean should avoid public engagement and retreat from society,[11] Diogenes Laertius cites Epicurus as remarking that the sage should found a school, but to not attract a crowd in doing so, as well as only lecture publicly under duress.[12] Philodemus further demonstrates this sentiment by stating that the sage should be able to attract students without having to actually proselytize.[13]

In this situation, as I suggested at the start of this chapter, Lucretius' poem has served to solve the proselytization problem inherent in Epicureanism. On the one hand, Epicureans are incentivized, both by their philosophy's emphasis on community and the continued use of medical imagery to describe the plight of the unconverted, to share the gospel of Epicurus and thus save others from their own suffering. On the other, such actions inherently put the Epicurean evangelist at risk, as he has departed from the security of his community to interact with strangers, who do not possess the same ethical stances and may through their actions threaten his emotional safety. Lucretius' poetry can create a solution to this puzzle, as now an inanimate object can act as the middleman for Epicureans, spreading their ideas to the people who need it while maintaining the distance necessary to maintain their "lofty, serene temples".[14]

Before moving beyond this scenario, I should note that these first two scenarios provide the convert not only with the beginnings of a community, but with an equally significant resource: access to the actual writings of Epicurus and his followers. The nature of self-driven philosophical education in Republican Rome posed a peculiar problem in the case of

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[10] Frischer 1982, 46-66, especially 49-52 and 67-86.
[11] e.g. KD 6, 7, 14
[12] DL 10.120
[13] Frischer 1982, 49 ft. 92, citing Περὶ κακιῶν 1 col 3.5 in Jensen 1933, 19.
[14] Lucretius 2.8-9

Epicureanism. The first major factor of this is the nature of the circulation of books amongst the upper classes. Because of the lack of public institutions and libraries providing access to texts, the primary way in which Romans were able to find and read books was through the private libraries of other Romans, either through lending or having copies made of the books one sought out. To the average Roman intellectual, this environment for the most part posed inconvenience, not impossibility, towards the pursuit of knowledge: as Rawson has concluded from her survey of intellectual life in the late Republic, an enterprising student of philosophy in Rome would have access to a great many books, depending on their ability to strike up connections with those who owned private libraries in Rome and Campania.[15]

The problem such a situation might pose for our Epicurean convert is that, unlike other works of philosophy at that time, it appears that the writings of Epicurus and his followers were primarily circulated within Epicurean circles and not to the general reading public.[16] Cicero, as he is critiquing the poor quality of Latin Epicurean writers, notes that the writings of the Academy are read by many besides outright Platonists, but scarcely any but their adherents read the works of Epicurus and Metrodorus.[17] In contrast, the only commonly available texts espousing Epicurean philosophy were those of Rabirius, Catius, and Amafinius, the quality of whose writing is suspect: Cassius derides the latter two as "poor translators" (*mali verborum interpretes*),[18] and Cicero singles out Amafinius' writing as being particularly appealing to the masses, suggesting that its popularity lay either in its simplicity (*cognitu perfacilis*), the attractiveness of hedonism, or simply because there was no better work available (*quia nihil erat prolatum melius*).[19] While

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[15] Rawson 1985, 38-44
[16] Frischer 1982, 50
[17] *Tusculan Disputations* 2.3.7-8
[18] *ad Fam*. 15.19.2
[19] *Tusculan Disputations* 4.3.6

Cicero's comments are clearly dismissive of the value of Amafinius' work, his comment regarding the paucity of access to other Epicurean material is telling of the situation our Epicurean convert may find himself in.[20] If he cannot gain access to the private libraries of other Epicureans, he may be stuck with the tracts of these authors, who, if their work is as poor as our sources claim, would fall well short of the standard set by Lucretius' poetry.

In the third scenario, the convert is successful in his search to find fellow Epicureans, but their character and demeanor ultimately fails to live up to the standard set up by Lucretius' model of Epicurean community. As I have argued, the sort of Epicureanism Lucretius espouses is one that hews very closely to the text of Epicurus' ethical doctrines, where total withdrawal from society and immersion in an isolated Epicurean community is the surest security one can find. This sentiment was certainly not shared by all of Lucretius' contemporary Epicureans, particularly when one examines the number of prominent political figures who maintained Epicurean sympathies. While it is certain that communities of Epicureans like those that Lucretius models did exist in Italy, especially when one considers the residency of intellectuals like Philodemus and Siro within Campania, many of the Roman luminaries whom we know or suspect of being Epicureans did in fact lead lives that conflict with these essential elements of the philosophy.[21] While *Kuriai Doxai* 6 and 7 do indicate a degree of tolerance for the pursuit of political office amongst Epicureans, it is clear from Lucretius' poem that the poet considers the pursuit of office to be just as foolhardy as maintaining religious ceremony — a sentiment which conflicts with the more lax understanding of Epicurean ethics found amongst some Romans at the

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[20] The situation would be even more dire if Eckerman 2013 is correct in arguing that Amafinius and Lucretius are actually contemporaries, rather than Amafinius predating Lucretius; in such a case, the convert would have even less ready access to published Epicurean material.
[21] See Castner 1988 for a survey of known and suspected Roman Epicureans.

time.[22] It is not difficult to imagine the new convert, fierce in his newfound beliefs, reaching out to self-proclaimed Epicureans and finding their loose adherence to the tenets he has just adopted offensive and disheartening. He may well reject them as false Epicureans and dismiss their philosophical stances as mere posturing. Whatever the reason, if the new convert should find the Epicureans he seeks out lacking, he would consequently have to recognize that these men will not provide him with the community and protection he seeks.

This brings us to the fourth and final scenario. For whatever reason, the Epicurean convert has failed to find an established Epicurean community to join. It may be that he knows no Epicureans, that he cannot find any Epicureans who match his idea of what a true Epicurean ought to be, or that he simply cannot afford the financial and social cost of leaving behind his life and moving to an established community in Campania or elsewhere. He may have been able to find more resources about Epicureanism, or he may be forced to continue relying solely on the text of Lucretius for guidance. In any event, if the convert is to follow through on his new belief in the need for proper Epicurean community, there is but one option left to him: he must found his own community through converting others and attracting Epicureans on his own.

By far the simplest of the methods our Epicurean has at his disposal are those of his interpersonal relationships: simply spreading the word of this wonderful new philosophy he has discovered to his friends, family, and associates. Lucretius has already provided the reader with a model for such an endeavor in the idyllic countryside gathering of friends related in the proem to Book 2. Here, we might imagine a scene similar to that of many of Cicero's dialogues, where the elite, having retreated to their countryside villas, discuss and ponder matters of philosophy. Our

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[22] ibid. xiii-xv

Epicurean may indeed take the role of Cicero's Torquatus, albeit more fervent in his evangelistic zeal and most assuredly less approving of his own political career and that of his forebears.

Similarly, the wealthy Epicurean might use the gatherings of his clients at his own home as a starting point — another venue which bears a resemblance to that idyllic scene above. One would hope, however, that our Epicurean *patronus* would realize the financial incentive his clients have to agree with him: as we know from Philodemus and elsewhere, the Epicureans and other Hellenistic philosophical schools were particularly concerned with *parrhesia* and flattery, and such a scenario as this could easily give rise to a situation where the Epicurean *patronus* finds himself surrounded by sycophants, rather than true Epicurean friends. On the inverse, one could also have sympathy for the clients forced into this situation: it is not difficult to imagine a comparable scene to that of Encolpius' discomfort during the *cena Trimalchionis*, where instead of a will the evangelical Epicurean forces a reading of Epicurean poetry on his clients — for their own good, of course!

Another avenue the more wealthy neophyte might explore is emulating Lucretius — that is, proselytizing to the masses indirectly through great works, remaining safe all the while within his own community of friends. The Inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda is an excellent model for just this sort of proselytization: though separated by centuries and the Mediterranean, Diogenes and Lucretius shared a common goal of spreading the medicine of Epicureanism through an indirect avenue to those most ailed by life (Diogenes Fr. 116)[23]:

[23] Transcription (p.297) and translation (p.410) from Smith 1993

[ὑμεῖν τε καὶ]
τοῖς μεθ᾽ ὑμᾶς [ἐσομ]ένοις /
. ΟΤΛΤcΤΣ ΣΙΝ αίτιαΙ- - -
ΛΙΚΙC ἅτε [π]ε[ι]σομένοις ὡ[ς]
Ιοον μετὰ πάθους - -
ΓΠΙν καὶ συνεχο[ῦ]ς μελέ-
της ἀρετῶν ἐστι[ν]. τὸ
γὰρ σωτὴριο[ν] ἐνταῦ-
θά ἐστιν. ν εἰ δὲ μη[δὲν]
ἔτι ὧν ἥκ[ε]τ[ε εἰς] γνῶσιν,
τὰ τοσαῦτα ὑμεῖν ἐλιθο-
ποιήσαμεν γράμματα.

"[Both to you and] to those who [will come] after you … reason … inasmuch as [you will be persuaded that it] is … with feeling and continual exercise of virtues. For the means of salvation is there. It is in case you have not yet [attained any] knowledge of these matters that we turned so many letters to stone for you."

Further, a public-facing monument or amenity erected in the name of Epicurus could also attract new curious followers to our new Epicurean teacher, spontaneously attracting new students and potential new members of his Epicurean community without needing to expose himself to the threats of non-Epicurean society — just as his old teacher Lucretius did.

But what about our Epicurean's continued education? Without further guidance beyond Lucretius, whose work, while comprehensive, nevertheless lacks significant elements of Epicurean teachings, how is the Epicurean to continue his journey into self-improvement? This, I argue, is in fact not a point of major concern for the Epicureans, given the school's peculiar relationship with truth and scientific inquiry. As Lucretius has well communicated, the senses cannot be deceived, and if one trusts the senses and properly interrogates natural phenomena, then one will inevitably arrive at the same truths that Epicurus and his disciples have. And while our neophyte may veer off the orthodox understandings of the Epicurean school in his investigations, this in and of itself is not a bad thing — at least as far as Lucretius is concerned. For Lucretius makes clear in his work that even non-Epicureans can live an Epicurean life and come close to the truth the Epicureans have. Democritus is a model for Epicurean death in Lucretius, yet he was

not an Epicurean, and in fact his determinism goes directly against Epicurean doctrine. Likewise, Empedocles is misguided in attributing to everything the four elements and not understanding their composition of atoms. Yet these two thinkers nevertheless possess an air of respect in Lucretius' eyes, as they come close to the truth in their misguidedness. Epicurus may have been the one to cast his perception past the fiery walls of the world, but Lucretius distinguishes between those who see reflections of the truth, like the natural philosophers, from those who remain trapped by self-deception and fear through belief in the untrue.

This is all to say that our neophyte Epicurean, lacking anything but the text of Lucretius, is nevertheless capable of discovering the same truths that Epicurus did. This is foundational to the Epicurean understanding of scientific inquiry: the senses cannot be deceived, so any true discoveries about the universe will be shared amongst those properly investigating them. In this way, Epicureanism is unlike Academic skepticism, for there *is* objective truth and falsehood. If only all thinkers would embark on their path of discovery as Epicurus did, then all would surely discover the same truths across all of this and all other *cosmoi*.

7. Conclusion

Barring the unexpected uncovering of new material describing a Late Republican Roman's conversion, we can never know for certain how any ancient reader might have internalized the messaging of Lucretius' opus, much less the neophyte convert I have been discussing. But what we do have is the blueprint for that conversion, laid out in the lines of Lucretius' poetry, and the tools to accomplish it, given to the reader through Lucretius' presentation and scientific analysis of matters of physics, ethics, and society. All that this blueprint and these plans requires is the right reader to come across them, internalize them, and then set out to begin the process anew: Lucretius' student has become the teacher and proselytizer, and in turn it is now his duty to care for his own and provide them with the curative medicine of Epicurean philosophy.

> verum animo satis haec vestigia parva sagaci
> sunt per quae possis cognoscere cetera tute.
>
> But truly, these light tracks are enough for a keen-scented mind,
> through which you can discover the rest for yourself.
> (1.402-403)

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