BOOK THREE

Book 3 argues for three theses:

(1) the soul (mind and spirit) is material
(2) the soul is mortal
(3) because of (1) and (2), we should not fear death

The book begins with a poetic eulogy to the Greek philosopher Epicurus from whom Lucretius took most of his atomistic philosophy.

You, who out of such deep darkness first found a way to raise such a brilliant light and illumine life's comforts, you, glory of the Greek

people,[1] I follow, and in your footsteps I now tread boldly[2]—less from a desire to rival you than because of love, which inspires me to imitate you. In any case, how could a swallow compete with a swan? Or how could an unsteady-legged kid match in a race the strength of a mettlesome horse? You are our father and the discoverer of truth: you supply us with fatherly precepts; and from your pages, illustrious master, like the bees which in flowerful vales sip each bloom, we feed on each golden saying—golden and ever most worthy of eternal life.

As soon as your philosophy begins to proclaim the true nature of things revealed by your divine mind, the terrors of the mind are dispelled, the walls of the world dispart, and I see what happens throughout the whole void.[3] Plainly visible are the gods in their majesty, and their calm realms which, buffeted by no wind, sprinkled by no storm cloud's shower, sullied with no white fall of snow crystallized by biting frost, are ever pavilioned by a cloudless ether that smiles with widespread flood of radiance.[4] All the needs of the gods are supplied by nature, and nothing at any time detracts from their peace of mind. On the other hand, nowhere are the precincts of Acheron[5] visible, even though the earth does not prevent me from discerning all that happens down in the expanse of space beneath our feet. At this experience, at this realization that by your power nature has been so completely exposed and unveiled on every side, I am thrilled by a kind of divine ecstasy and quaking awe.

The book then states its aim: eliminate fear of death

Well, now that I have demonstrated the nature of the primary elements of all things, the diversity of their forms, the spontaneous manner in which they fly about under the impulse of incessant movement, and their ability to create everything, it is obvious that my next task is to illuminate

1. **3:** Epicurus. For similarities between this eulogy of Lucr.'s master (1–30) and the invocation to Venus at the beginning of the poem, see note on 1.2.

2. **3–4:** Cf. 5.55–56.

3. **14–17:** Epicurus enables Lucr. to follow where his master pioneered the way: see 1.62–79, especially 72–77.

4. **18–22:** This description of the abodes of the gods is in imitation of Homer's description of Olympus in *Odyssey* 6.42–46, and is in turn imitated by Tennyson in his poem *Lucretius* 104–110: "The gods, who haunt / The lucid interspace of world and world, / Where never creeps a cloud, or moves a wind, / Nor ever falls the least white star of snow, / Nor ever lowest roll of thunder moans, / Nor sound of human sorrow mounts to mar / Their sacred everlasting calm!" See also *The Passing of Arthur* 427–429. Lucr. explains in 5.146–155 why the gods cannot live in our world.

5. **25:** The underworld.

in my verses the nature of the mind and the spirit,[6] and send packing that fear of Acheron which disturbs human life from its deepest depths, suffusing all with the darkness of death, and allows no pleasure to remain unclouded and pure.[7]

Here is one argument for the FIRST thesis that the soul (mind and spirit) is material in the sense that the soul is part of a person just like foot and eyes are. Lucretius here also argues against the theory of the soul as "harmony"

In the first place, I declare that the mind, or the intelligence as we often term it, in which the reasoning and governing principle of life resides, is part of a person no less than the hand and foot and eyes are seen to be parts of a whole living creature.

[Some theorists imagine][15] that the sensibility of the mind is not located in any specific part, but that it is a sort of vital condition of the
100 body —a "harmony"[16] as the Greeks call it; this, they suppose, endows us with life and sensation, without the mind residing in any part of the body, in the same way that one commonly speaks of the good health of the body,

13. **73:** Fear of poison.

14. **87–93:** Identical to 2.55–61, 6.35–41. Lines 91–93 are also identical to 1.146–148.

15. **97:** At least one line has been lost after 97.

16. **100:** The Greek *harmonia* means "attunement" rather than what we call "harmony." The origin of the theory that the soul is an attunement of the bodily constituents, a theory presented by Simmias and refuted by Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo* (85e–86d, 91c–95a), is uncertain. It is likely to have been influenced both by Pythagoreanism and by Sicilian medical theory. It was developed in the fourth century B.C. by two pupils of Aristotle, Aristoxenus and Dicaearchus, the former of whom began his philosophical studies with Pythagoreanism and was a musician as well as a philosopher.

even though this health is not an organ of the strong person. Thus they do not locate the sensibility of the mind in any specific part; and here I consider that they go far astray. Often, although the plainly perceptible parts of the body are sick, elsewhere in some hidden part we feel pleasure; often too quite the opposite happens: a person who is miserable in mind may feel pleasure throughout the body. The situation is no different from that when a sick person has a painful foot, but happens to have no pain in the head at the same time. Moreover, even when we have resigned our limbs to gentle slumber and our sprawling body lies heavy and insensible, there is something within us that at that time is stirred by many kinds of emotion, experiencing all the movements of pleasure and the heart's unreal anxieties.

Now, what follows will enable you to grasp that the spirit too resides in the limbs, and that the body does not owe its power of sensation to a "harmony." In the first place, even when a considerable portion of the body has been removed, it is a common occurrence for life to linger in our limbs. On the other hand, when a few particles of heat have escaped from the body and a little air has been exhaled through the mouth, this same life at once abandons the veins and quits the bones. You may gather from this that not all particles have equal functions or safeguard the body to an equal degree; it is mainly these seeds of wind and warm heat that ensure that life lingers in our limbs. The body itself, then, contains vital heat and wind, which abandon our frame at the moment of death.

So, since the mind and spirit have been found to be a natural part of the human body, repudiate this term "harmony," which was brought down to musicians from lofty Helicon — or maybe the musicians themselves borrowed it from some other source and transferred it to that quality that previously had no distinctive name. In any case, let them keep it; as for you, listen to the rest of my arguments.

Here is another argument for the materiality of the soul: the soul can cause the body to move or be affected by the body, hence it is material.

This argument is followed by an explanation that the particles constituting the soul are very small and subtle.

The same method of argument teaches us that the mind and spirit have a material nature. For it is an observable fact that they impel the limbs, wrench the body from sleep, transform the countenance, and pilot and steer the whole person; and since we perceive that all these operations imply touch, and touch in its turn implies matter, are we not bound to acknowledge that the mind and spirit consist of material substance?

Moreover, you notice that the mind suffers in concert with the body and sympathizes with it. Even if a spear fails to strike the vitals when it is driven into the body with quivering force and severs bones and sinews, it induces faintness and a blissful[18] sinking to the ground, and on the ground a dizziness of mind and now and then a vacillating inclination to rise up again. So the mind must have a material nature, since it is affected by the painful blows of material spears.

Now I will continue my discourse with an exposition of the nature of the mind's substance and its component elements.

In the first place, I declare that the mind is exceedingly subtle, being composed of the minutest particles. If you pay attention, what follows will convince you that this is true. It is an observable fact that there is nothing that happens as swiftly as the mind imagines it happening, and as it actually initiates it.[19] So the mind rouses itself to activity more rapidly than anything whose nature is patent to our sight. The component seeds of such a mobile substance are bound to be extremely round and extremely minute: otherwise they could not be set in motion by the impulse

17. **154–156:** These lines seem to have been influenced by Sappho *fr.* 31, a poem adapted by Lucr.'s contemporary Catullus in his poem 51.

18. **173:** "The epithet *suavis* [blissful], rejected by some editors, will surprise only those who have never fainted." I quote from my Loeb note, where I cite supporting evidence from other writers, including Seneca and Montaigne.

19. **182–183:** Lucr. explains in 4.877–906 how mental visualization activates the body.

of a slight stimulus. Compare how water is made to move and flow by ever such a gentle impulse, since it is formed of small particles shaped so that they can roll. On the other hand, the substance of honey is more cohesive, its fluid more viscous, and its flow more dilatory; and the reason why the whole mass of its matter has closer cohesion is undoubtedly that its constituent particles are less smooth, less subtle, and less round. Compare, too, how even a gentle, checked puff of breath can spill a high heap of poppy seed from the top downward, whereas it can make no impression on a pile of stones or ears of corn. Therefore the smaller and smoother bodies are, the more mobility they enjoy; conversely, the heavier and rougher any are found to be, the more stability they have. Now, therefore, since the substance of the mind has been discovered to be exceptionally mobile, its component particles must be extremely small, smooth, and round. If you grasp this fact, my good friend, you will find that it will stand you in good stead in many connections.

The following fact too is indicative of the subtle texture of the mind's substance and the smallness of the space that it would occupy if it could be gathered into a compact mass. As soon as a person is wrapped in the peaceful sleep of death and the substance of the mind and spirit has withdrawn, the body suffers no perceptible loss either in appearance or in weight: death leaves all intact, save the vital sensibility and heat. Therefore the entire soul is composed of very small seeds, which form a chain throughout the veins, flesh, and sinews; this must be so, because, even when all the soul has quit the whole body, the external contour of the frame is preserved in its integrity, and not one grain of weight is wanting. It is like the case of a wine whose bouquet has evaporated, or of a perfume whose exquisite scent has dispersed into the air, or of some object whose flavor has departed: the substance itself suffers no visible diminution of size or loss of weight, undoubtedly because the flavors and odors that permeate the bodies of things are produced by many minute seeds. So I insist that the substance of the mind and spirit evidently is composed of extremely tiny seeds, since in its flight it carries off not one grain of weight.

3

Here Lucretius explains that soul and body are interconnected

Now, the substance of the soul is encased by the whole body and is in its turn the custodian of the body and the cause of its safety;[26] for the two are twined together by common roots and evidently cannot be disentangled without being destroyed. It is no easier matter to extricate the substance of the mind and spirit from the whole body without causing general disintegration than it is to extract the scent from lumps of incense without destroying the substance in the process. Having their constituent atoms inextricably intertwined from the moment of their creation, body and soul are copartners in life; and it is evident that neither of them is capable of experiencing sensation independently, without the help of the other: rather it is by the united motions of both together that sensation is kindled and fanned into flame in every part of our flesh. Besides, the body is never born without the soul, never grows up without it, and manifestly never lives on without it after death. For, unlike water, which often releases the heat that has been imparted to it without undergoing dissolution or diminution in consequence, never, I say, never can the limbs survive when they are divorced from the spirit and abandoned by it: they suffer decomposition, dissolution, and total destruction. So from the beginning of their existence, even when they are nestling in the mother's womb, body and spirit in mutual association learn the motions necessary to life; and this is why they cannot be divorced without meeting with disaster and destruction. You may see then that, since their lives are bound up together, their substances also are firmly bound together.

Now Lucretius turns to his SECOND thesis of Book 2, namely that the soul is mortal. Below is one of his arguments for the soul's mortality. The key idea is that the soul, like the body, can be sick and be cured by physical medicine.

There is the further point that, just as the body suffers dreadful diseases and pitiless pain, so the mind manifestly experiences the gripe of cares, grief, and fear; so the natural inference is that it has an equal share in death.[39]

Even during the body's sicknesses the mind often wanders from the path of reason: patients are demented and mutter deliriously and sometimes, severely comatose, sink with drooping eyelids and nodding head into a deep and endless sleep, from which they do not hear the voices and cannot recognize the features of those who, with faces and cheeks bedewed with tears, stand around and implore them to return to life. Therefore, seeing that the mind is susceptible to the infection of disease, you are bound to admit that it suffers dissolution like the body. For pain and disease are the architects of death—a lesson that the fate of millions in the past has inculcated upon us.

Again, when the piercing potency of wine has penetrated into people, and its warmth has been distributed and channeled into the veins, the limbs become heavy; they reel about with staggering steps; the tongue drawls, the mind is sodden, and the eyes swim; they bawl, belch, and brawl more and more violently. What is the reason for these and all the other similar symptoms of drunkenness,[40] if it is not that the potent punch of the wine invariably has the effect of confounding the spirit within the body? And the very fact that things can be confounded and crippled always signifies that, if a slightly stronger force were to insinu-

39. **459–462:** The Stoic Panaetius (c.185–109 B.C.) is another who argued that the soul's susceptibility to pain is evidence of its mortality: see Cicero *Tusc. Disp.* 1.79. The argument is an interesting one. No less interesting is Lucr.'s contention below (510–525) that another indication of the soul's mortality is that it responds to medical treatment.

40. **481:** E. J. Kenney, in his edition of Book 3 (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1971), notes Lucr.'s "unwillingness to describe the more disgusting phenomena of drunkenness in his poetry."

ate itself into them, the result would be destruction and debarment from further life.

Often too people are seized before our very eyes by a sudden fit of epilepsy and fall to the ground as though struck by lightning. They foam at the mouth and groan; their limbs are convulsed; they lose their reason; their muscles grow rigid; they writhe, gasp fitfully, and weary their limbs with spasmic movements. The fact is that the spirit in every part of their frame is so distracted by the violence of the seizure that it surges and foams, just as the waves of the salt sea seethe beneath the furious force of the winds. The groaning is wrung from them, because their limbs are suffering pain, and in general because vocal particles are ejected and swept in a body from the mouth, using their habitual egress and what one might call their highway. Loss of reason comes about, because the mind and spirit with their powers are confounded and, as I have shown, are disparted, dispersed, and distracted by that same poison. Afterward, when the cause of the fit has withdrawn and the acrid humor of the distempered body has retired to its lairs, then and only then the patient totteringly rises, gradually recovers all the senses, and regains possession of the spirit.

Since the mind and spirit, even while encased in the body, are shaken by such serious maladies and are wretchedly distracted and distressed, how can you believe that they can continue to live outside the body in the open air, exposed to the whirling winds?

Moreover, the fact that the mind, like the body, manifestly can be cured of sickness and can respond to the influence of medicine is another intimation of its mortality. For it is fair to assume that every endeavor to transform the mind, and indeed every attempt to alter any other substance, entails the addition of parts or the transposition of the existing parts or the subtraction of at least some tittle from the sum. But an immortal substance does not allow its parts to be transposed, nor does it permit one jot to be added or to steal away. For every change that involves a thing outstepping its own limits means the instantaneous death of what previously existed.[41] Therefore, as I have shown, whether the mind falls sick or responds to the influence of medicine, it betrays its mortal nature. So firmly is true fact seen to confront false reasoning and cut off its retreat, proving the falsehood by a two-pronged refutation.

41. **519–520:** Identical to 1.670–671, 792–793, 2.753–754.

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Below is another argument for the soul's mortality. This argument is based on the observation that the soul is divisible and thus mortal

And since we feel that vital sensibility is present in the whole body, and that every part is animate, it is obvious that if some force suddenly cuts the body in two with a swift blow and separates the two halves, the
640 spirit too will be disparted, divided, and dissevered with the body. But what is severable or in any way divisible evidently disclaims an immortal nature.

Stories are told of how scythed chariots,[44] steaming with promiscuous slaughter, often shear off limbs so suddenly that the fallen member lopped from the trunk is seen to quiver on the ground; and yet the warrior's mind can feel no pain on account of the swiftness of the stroke, and also because the mind is wholly absorbed in the ardor of the battle; with the remainder of his body he seeks blood and battle,
650 often not realizing that his left arm, buckler and all, has been swept away among the horses by the wheels with their rapacious scythes. Another is unaware that his right arm has been lopped, while he menacingly mounts the chariot. A third endeavors to stand up on the leg he has lost, while on the ground nearby his dying foot twitches its toes. A head shorn from a warm and living trunk preserves on the ground its

43. **629:** "Painters": for example, Polygnotus (fifth century B.C.) at Delphi and Nicias (fourth century B.C.) at Athens. "Writers": notably Homer in *Odyssey* 11.

44. **642:** War chariots fitted with scythes were not used by the Greeks or Romans. An Eastern invention, they are first mentioned by Xenophon *Anabasis* 1.8.10. Livy 37.41.5–8 gives a detailed description of them in his account of the battle of Magnesia fought in 190 or 189 B.C. between the Romans and Antiochus III of Syria. Antiochus' scythed chariots proved useless when the Romans and their allies succeeded in frightening the horses, and he lost the battle. The war against Antiochus was narrated by Ennius, and it is possible that the present passage owes something to his account.

look of life and open eyes, until it has surrendered all the last traces of spirit.

Moreover, suppose you have a snake with darting tongue, threatening tail, and elongated body, and suppose you choose to take a hatchet and chop both parts[45] of the creature into many pieces, then, while the wound is fresh, you will see each section separately writhing and bespattering 660 the ground with gore; and you will observe the front part attempting to bite its own hinder part in order to smother the burning pain caused by the wounding blow.

Shall we then say that there is an entire spirit in each of those little parts? But on that supposition it will follow that a single living creature had many spirits in its body. So the position is this: that spirit which formed a single unity has been divided with the body; and since both alike can be severed into many parts, both must be considered mortal.

45. **658:** Comparison with 668–669 strongly suggests that by "both parts" Lucr. means "both the body and the spirit," though it is just possible that he is referring to the front and back parts of the snake's body.

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Lucretius continues by saying that the union of a material body and an immortal soul is impossible and thus the soul cannot be immortal

Again, a tree cannot exist in the sky,[52] or clouds in the depths of the sea; fish cannot live in fields; blood is not found in timber, or sap in stones. The place where each thing may grow and exist is fixed and determined. Thus the substance of the mind cannot come to birth alone
790 without the body or exist separated from sinews and blood. But even if this were possible, the mind could far more easily reside in the head or the shoulders or the base of the heels, or be born in any other part of the body, and so at least remain within the same person, within the same vessel. However, since even within our body it is evident that a special place is firmly fixed and reserved for the existence and growth of the spirit and mind, it is all the more necessary for us to deny that they could survive or come to birth wholly outside the body. Therefore, when the body has died, you must acknowledge that the soul too has perished, torn to pieces all through the body.

800 Moreover, to yoke together the mortal and the everlasting, and to imagine that they can share one another's feelings and experiences, is fatuous. What notion can be more preposterous, incongruous, and inharmonious than that of a mortal thing being united with something immortal and imperishable, and of the two together weathering pitiless storms?

52. **784–797:** These lines are repeated, with minor alterations, at 5.128–141, as part of Lucr.'s argument that the parts of the world are not animate, let alone divine.

He also adds that the soul lacks all the properties that one typically attributes to immortal entities

Furthermore, all things that subsist eternally must either be composed of solid substance, so that they repel blows and are impenetrable to anything that might destroy the close cohesion of their parts from within—like the elements of matter, whose nature I have already demonstrated; or their ability to survive throughout all time must be due to their immunity from blows—as is the case with void, which is always intangible and never experiences any impact; or else the cause of their indestructibility must be the absence of any surrounding space into which their substance might disperse and dissolve—as is the case with the totality of the universe: for outside the universe there is no space into which its substance can escape, and no matter capable of striking it and shattering it with a powerful blow.[53]

If by chance the preferred supposition is that the soul is to be considered immortal because it is fortified and protected by the forces of life, or because things fatal to its existence never approach it, or because those that do approach it are repulsed by some means before they can inflict any injury upon us, [it must be said that this supposition is at variance with the facts].[54] Besides sharing the diseases of the body, the soul is often visited by feelings that torment it about the future, fret it with fear, and vex it with anxious cares, while consciousness of past misdeeds afflicts it with remorse. Remember also madness and loss of memory—afflictions peculiar to the mind; remember the black waves of coma into which it sinks.

Finally, Lucretius turns to the THIRD thesis, i.e. fear of death is unjustified

Death, then, is nothing to us[55] and does not affect us in the least, now that the nature of the mind is understood to be mortal. And as in time past we felt no distress when the advancing Punic hosts were threatening Rome on every side, when the whole earth, rocked by the terrifying tumult of war, shudderingly quaked beneath the coasts of high heaven, while the entire human race was doubtful into whose possession the

53. **806–818:** These lines recur, with minor alterations, at 5.351–363, where Lucr. is demonstrating the mortality of the world. It is probably a sign of lack of revision that in the present context he does not state that the soul's failure to satisfy any of the three conditions of immortality shows that it must be mortal.

54. **819–823:** A line has been lost after 823. It is likely that Lucr. is alluding to the condition of immortality of the Epicurean gods, who, living in the intermundane spaces, continually gain new atoms to replace those which they lose.

55. **830:** "Death is nothing to us," a translation of the first words of Epicurus *PD* 2, might well serve as a title for the whole of the final section of this book (830–1094).

sovereignty of the land and the sea was destined to fall;[56] so, when we are no more, when body and soul, upon whose union our being depends, are divorced, you may be sure that nothing at all will have the power to affect us or awaken sensation in us, who shall not then exist—not even if the earth be confounded with the sea, and the sea with the sky.[57]

And even supposing that the mind and the spirit retain their power of sensation after they have been wrenched from our body, it is nothing to us, whose being is dependent upon the conjunction and marriage of body and soul. Furthermore, if in course of time all our component atoms should be reassembled after our death and restored again to their present positions, so that the light of life was given to us a second time, even that eventuality would not affect us in the least, once there had been a break in the chain of consciousness. Similarly at the present time we are not affected at all by any earlier existence we had, and we are not tortured with any anguish concerning it. When you survey the whole sweep of measureless time past and consider the multifariousness of the movements of matter, you can easily convince yourself that the same seeds that compose us now have often before been arranged in the same order that they occupy now. And yet we have no recollection of our earlier existence; for between that life and this lies an unbridged gap—an interval during which all the motions of our atoms strayed and scattered in all directions, far away from sensation.

Here Lucretius imagines what mother Nature should tell someone who, at the end of his or her life, complains about death

And if someone older and more advanced in years should sorrowfully bewail and bemoan the approach of death to an immoderate degree, would she not be justified in rating that person still more roughly and delivering an even sharper rebuke:[65] "Stop sniveling, you dolt![66] Away with your whinings! You had full use of all the precious things of life before you reached this senile state. But because you continually crave what is not present and scorn what is, your life has slipped away from you incomplete and unenjoyed, until suddenly you have found death standing at your head before you are able to depart from the feast of life filled to repletion. Quick then, discard all behavior unsuited to your age and with equanimity yield to your years; for yield you must." In my opinion, she would be justified in making this plea, justified in delivering this rebuke and reproof. The old is ever ousted and superseded by the new, and one thing must be repaired from others. No one is consigned to the black abyss of Tartarus: everyone's component matter is needed to enable succeeding generations to grow—generations which, when they have completed their term of life, are all destined to follow you. The fate

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daughters of Danaus, forty-nine of whom murdered their husbands on their wedding night, and whose punishment in the underworld was to perform for eternity the futile task of pouring water into leaking containers. To Lucr. the Danaids represent those who are never satisfied with the good things of life, as he explains in 1003–1010. On the vessel metaphor, see note on 440.

64. **944–949:** For the doctrine that pleasure is limited, and that infinite time could not produce any greater pleasure, see Epicurus *PD* 18–20.

65. **952–954:** Cf. Diogenes of Oinoanda *fr.* 47.III.10 IV.2: "Or how can we justly bring a complaint against nature, if someone who has lived for so many years and so many months and so many days [arrives at life's last day]?"

66. **955:** Reading *barde* for *baratre.* See M. F. Smith, *Prometheus* 26 (2000) 35-40.

in store for you has already befallen past generations and will befall future generations no less surely. Thus one thing will never cease to rise out of another: life is granted to no one for permanent ownership, to all on lease.[67] Look back now and consider how the bygone ages of eternity that elapsed before our birth were nothing to us. Here, then, is a mirror in which nature shows us the time to come after our death. Do you see anything fearful in it? Do you perceive anything grim? Does it not appear more peaceful than the deepest sleep?

Here Lucretius makes a comparison between people who have done great things in life and most other people who do very little with their lives. Even the greatest have to die, so ...

Now and again you might well address yourself in the following terms:[82] "Shame on you! Even good Ancus closed his eyes and left the light of life,[83] and he was a far, far better person than you.[84] Since then, many other kings and potentates, rulers of mighty nations, have passed away. Even that famous monarch[85] who once constructed a roadway over the great sea and opened a path for his legions across the deep, teaching his infantry to march over the briny gulfs while his cavalry pranced upon the ocean in defiance of its roars —yes, even he was deprived of the light of life and gasped out his soul from his dying body. Scipio,[86] that thunderbolt of war, the dread of Carthage, surrendered his bones to the earth as though he were the meanest of menial slaves. Remember too the inventors of sciences and arts; remember the companions of the Heliconian maidens,[87] among whom unique Homer bore the scepter and yet is wrapped in the same sound sleep as the others.

79. **1016:** The Tarpeian Rock on the Capitol at Rome from which criminals were thrown to their deaths.

80. **1017:** The execution cell is the Tullianum, the dungeon of the prison at Rome. Among those who met their end there were Jugurtha (104 B.C.) and the Catilinarian conspirators (63 B.C.). Pitch, red-hot plates, and torches are instruments of torture or death by burning.

81. **1023:** In contrast, the wise make a heaven of their lives on earth: see 322 and p. xxxi.

82. **1024:** See note on 931–932.

83. **1025:** A quotation from Ennius. Ancus Marcius was traditionally the fourth king of Rome (642- 617 B.C.).

84. **1025–1026:** Lucr. is recalling Homer *Iliad* 21.107 (Achilles to the Trojan suppliant Lycaon, whom he is about to kill): "Even Patroclus died, and he was a far better man than you."

85. **1029:** The Persian king Xerxes, who invaded Greece in 480 B.C. and constructed a pontoon bridge across the Hellespont, to enable his troops to cross.

86. **1034:** Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus the Elder, who in 202 B.C. defeated Hannibal at Zama.

87. **1037:** The Muses.

Democritus, warned by ripe old age that the motions of his mind's memory were failing, voluntarily went to meet death and offered him his life.[88] Epicurus himself died, when the light of his life had accomplished its course—he who outshone the human race in genius and obscured the luster of all as the rising of the ethereal sun extinguishes the stars.[89] Will *you,* then, be hesitant and indignant, when death calls? You, even while you still have life and light, are as good as dead: you squander the greater part of your time in sleep; you snore when awake; you never stop daydreaming; you are burdened with a mind disturbed by groundless fear; and often you cannot discover what is wrong with you, when, like some drunken wretch, you are buffeted with countless cares on every side and drift along aimlessly in utter bewilderment of mind."

Fear of death is only about lack of proper knowledge

People evidently are aware that their minds are carrying a heavy load, which wearies them with its weight; and if only they could also understand what causes it, and why such a mass of misery occupies their breasts, they would not live in the manner in which we generally see them living, ignorant of what they want for themselves, and continually impatient to move somewhere else as if the change could relieve them of their burden. Often a man leaves his spacious mansion, because he is utterly bored with being at home, and then suddenly returns on finding that he is no better off when he is out. He races out to his country villa, driving his Gallic ponies[90] hell-for-leather. You would think he was dashing to save a house on fire. But the moment he has set foot on the threshold, he gives a yawn or falls heavily asleep in search of oblivion or even dashes back to the city. In this way people endeavor to run away from themselves; but since they are of course unable to make good their escape, they remain firmly attached to themselves against their will, and hate themselves because they are sick and do not understand the cause of their malady. If only they perceived it distinctly, they would at once give up everything else and devote themselves first to studying the nature of things; for the issue at stake is their state not merely for one hour, but for

88. **1039–1041:** Democritus is said to have starved himself to death. Lucr. appropriately uses an atomist's language to describe the atomist's mental decline.

89. **1042–1044:** This is the only place in the poem where Epicurus is named. Lucr.'s praise of his master echoes the praise of Homer in an epigram by Leonidas of Tarentum (*Anthologia Palatina* 9.24).

90. **1063:** Noted for their speed. Matthew Arnold is recalling this passage and 912 913 in *Obermann Once More* 97–104: "In his cool hall, with haggard eyes, / The Roman noble lay; / He drove abroad, in furious guise, / Along the Appian Way. / He made a feast, drank fierce and fast, / And crown'd his hair with flowers—/ No easier nor no quicker pass'd / The impracticable hours."

eternity—the state in which mortals must pass all the time that remains after their death.

What explains our insatiable desire to keep living?

Finally, what is this perverse passion for life that condemns us to such a feverish existence amid doubt and danger? The fact is that a sure end of life is fixed for mortals: we cannot avoid our appointment with death. Moreover, our environment is always the same, and no new pleasure is procured by the prolongation of life.[91] The trouble is that, so long as the object of our desire is wanting, it seems more important than anything else; but later, when it is ours, we covet some other thing; and so an insatiable thirst for life keeps us always openmouthed. Then again, we cannot tell what fortune the future will bring us, or what chance will send us, or what end is in store for us. By prolonging life we do not deduct a single moment from the time of our death, nor can we diminish its duration by subtracting anything from it. Therefore, however many generations your life may span, the same eternal death will still await you; and one who ended life with today's light will remain dead no less long than one who perished many months and years ago.

91. **1080–1081:** Cf. 944–949 and see note there.