BOOK THREE

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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.

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]

To be sure, people often claim that they dread illness or a life of infamy more than Tartarus[8] and death, and that they know the mind to be composed of blood, or even of wind if that happens to catch their fancy; they claim too that they have absolutely no need of our philosophy. But you may see from what follows that all these claims are a display of bravado to win applause rather than prompted by true conviction. For the same people, though banished from their homeland, driven far from the sight of other human beings, branded with the stigma of some foul crime, and afflicted, in a word, with every kind of tribulation, continue to live. Wherever they bring their troubles, they offer sacrifices to their ancestors, immolate black victims,[9] dispatch oblations to the infernal deities, and in their bitter plight turn their minds much more zealously to superstition. The lesson is this: it is advisable to appraise people in doubt and danger and to discover how they behave in adversity; for then and only then is the truth elicited from the bottom of their hearts: the mask is ripped off; the reality remains.

Furthermore, avarice and blind lust for status, which drive wretched people to encroach beyond the boundaries of right and sometimes, as accomplices and abettors of crime, to strive night and day with prodigious effort to scale the summit of wealth[10]—these sores of life are nourished in no small degree by dread of death.[11] For as a rule the ignominy of humble position and the sting of penury are considered to be incompatible with a life of enjoyment and security, and are thought to imply a sort of premature loitering before the portals of death from which people, under the impulse of unfounded terror, desire to flee far away and be far removed. To this end, they swell their fortune through the bloodshed of civil war[12] and greedily multiply their wealth, heaping up murder

6. **35–36:** On the distinction between the mind and the spirit, the two components of the soul, see p. xxviii and what Lucr. says in 136–160.

7. **38–40:** The image is of clouding water by disturbing the mud at the bottom of a pool or spring.

8. **42:** Hell.

9. **52:** Black victims were regularly sacrificed to chthonian deities.

10. **62–63:** Repeated from 2.12–13.

11. **59–64:** See p. xxviii.

12. **70:** For the disturbed times through which Lucr. lived, see p. ix.

on murder; they take cruel delight in a brother's death that should be mourned, and their relatives' tables are objects of abhorrence and fear.[13]

Similarly it is often the same fear that makes them fret with envy that before their eyes another person possesses power and, parading in the brilliant array of office, attracts the gaze of all, while they complain that their own lot is to wallow in murk and mire. Some throw away their lives in an effort to gain statues and renown. And often, in consequence of dread of death, people are affected by such an intense loathing of life and the sight of the light that with mournful hearts they sentence themselves to death, forgetting that the source of their sorrows is this very fear, which prompts one person to outrage decency, another to break bonds of friendship, and, in short, to overthrow all sense of natural duty: often in the past people have betrayed their country and beloved parents in attempting to avoid the precincts of Acheron.

Just as children tremble and fear everything in blinding darkness, so we even in daylight sometimes dread things that are no more terrible than the imaginary dangers that cause children to quake in the dark. This terrifying darkness that enshrouds the mind must be dispelled not by the sun's rays and the dazzling darts of day, but by study of the superficial aspect and underlying principle of nature.[14]

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 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.

Next I declare that, although mind and spirit are intimately connected and together form a single substance, the head, so to speak, and supreme ruler of the whole body is the reason, which we term the mind or intelligence; and this has its seat fixed in the middle region of the breast. Here we feel the palpitation of throbbing fear, here the soothing touch of joy: here, then, is the intelligence and mind. The rest of the soul is disseminated through all the body and moves in obedience to the will and impulse of the mind. The mind quite independently possesses intelligence and experiences joy at times when no stimulus affects either the body or the spirit. And in the same way that the head or eye can smart under a painful attack without our whole body being agonized as well, so our mind sometimes by itself suffers pain or is animated with joy, when

the rest of the soul, scattered through the limbs of the body, is not roused by any new stimulus. But when the mind is disturbed by a more intense fear, we observe that the whole spirit throughout the limbs sympathizes with it: sweating and pallor break out all over the body; the tongue stutters and the voice falters; the eyes grow blear, the ears buzz, and the limbs give way:[17] in fact we often see people collapse in consequence of the mind's terror. It is a simple matter for anyone to infer from this that the spirit is intimately linked with the mind, and that the spirit, once shaken by the mind's force, in its turn strikes the body and sets it in motion.

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.

However, we must not suppose that the substance of the soul is simple. At death a sort of light breath impregnated with heat leaves the body, and heat draws air with it; indeed there is no heat that is not impregnated with air, because the rarity of its substance means that it must be interpenetrated by many primary particles of air. Already, then, the substance of the soul has been found to consist of three elements. But a combination of these three is not sufficient to produce sensibility, since the mind refuses to accept that any one of them is capable of producing sensory

motions and the thoughts that it itself revolves. Therefore a fourth element must be added to their number. This is entirely nameless;[20] it surpasses every existing thing in its mobility, in its subtlety, and in the smallness and smoothness of its atoms; this it is that initiates the channeling of the sensory motions through the limbs. It is the first to be stirred, because of the smallness of its component atoms; then the heat and the invisible power of the wind take up the motions, then the air; then everything is put in motion: the blood is actuated, and every part of the flesh is pervaded by the sensation; the bones and marrow are the last to be affected, whether it be by pleasure or by the opposite emotion. But pain cannot penetrate so far, and intense agony cannot pierce so deep, with impunity: if they succeed, they cause general commotion of such violence that no place is left for life, and the particles of the spirit disperse through every pore of the body. For the most part, however, these motions are checked virtually on the surface of the body; and this is why we are able to preserve life.

Now, eager though I am to explain the way in which these elements[21] are intermingled, and the manner in which their functions are coordinated, I am hampered by the inadequacy of our native tongue.[22] Nevertheless, I will touch upon the subject briefly to the best of my ability.

The atoms of the elements interpenetrate one another in their motions in such a way that it is impossible for any single element to be isolated or for its function to be separated spatially from that of the others; rather, all are, one might say, the many qualities of a single body. Compare how, although every part of a living creature's flesh has a distinct smell, color,[23] and taste, these qualities together constitute the bulk of a single body. In the same way, a single substance is formed by a mixture of the heat and the air and the invisible power of the wind, together with that mobile force that gives rise to the initial motion and imparts it to the other elements and that is the ultimate source of sensory motion in every

20. **241–242:** Cf. Aëtius 4.3.11 (Us. *fr.* 315): "Epicurus regards the soul as a mixture of four things—something fiery, something airy, something windy, and a fourth nameless element." As Lucr. makes clear, the nameless element, an element more subtle than any element of our experience, was added in order to account for the extraordinarily subtle processes of thought and sensation. The idea of the fourth element may owe something to Aristotle's concept of the fifth element or quintessence.

21. **258:** The four elements of the soul.

22. **260:** Cf. 1.136–139, 832.

23. **267:** Reading *color* (Lambinus) rather than *calor*.

part of the flesh. This fourth element is deep-buried and deep-hidden;[24] indeed there is nothing in our body more impalpable: it is the very soul of the whole soul. Just as the force of the mind and the power of the spirit, owing to the smallness and fewness of their constituent particles, imperceptibly interpenetrate our limbs and every part of our body, so this nameless force, by reason of the minuteness of its component atoms, lies hidden; it is, one might say, the very soul of the whole soul, and it is the supreme ruler of the whole body.

Similarly the wind and the air and the heat must function in an intermixture throughout the limbs and, although a particular element is bound to be more or less prominent than the others, all must be so intermixed that they are seen to form a unity: otherwise the heat and the wind and the power of the air would destroy sensation by their independent action and dissolve it by their divorce.

The mind contains as well the element of heat, which it displays when it seethes with anger and fire flashes fiercely from the eyes. It also contains an abundance of that chill breath, the attendant of fear, which provokes shuddering in the limbs and makes the frame tremble. It contains too that still, calm air, which is in evidence when the breast is tranquil and the countenance unclouded. But heat is the element that predominates in those creatures whose hearts are fierce and whose irascible minds readily seethe with anger. First and foremost in this class are lions, so strong and ferocious: often they growl and roar until they burst their bellies, since they are unable to repress their tempestuous rage. On the other hand, the chill minds of deer contain more wind and are quicker to send icy currents of air blowing through the flesh, thus inducing a trembling motion in the limbs. Again, the predominant element in the vital principle of cows is placid air: these beasts are never unduly inflamed and impassioned by the smoky torch of anger or blinded by its murky shadow; nor are they pierced and paralyzed by icy shafts of fear: they stand midway between deer and savage lions.

It is the same with human beings. Although education may give certain people equal refinement, it cannot obliterate the original traces of each individual's natural disposition. We must not suppose that faults of character can be extirpated, and that it is possible to stop one person from being excessively prone to sudden fits of rage, another from succumbing a little too readily to fear, and a third from accepting certain situations more meekly than one should. And in many other respects people must

24. **273:** In this context "deep-buried" and "deep-hidden" do not express remoteness from the surface of the body, but, as P. M. Brown, in his edition of Book 3 (Aris and Phillips: Warminster, 1997), puts it, "remoteness from perceptibility."

differ in character and consequently in behavior. But for the moment I cannot explain the secret causes of this variety or find names for all the atomic conformations that give rise to it. What I see that I can affirm in this connection is that the surviving traces of our natural dispositions, which philosophy is unable to erase, are so very faint that there is nothing to prevent us from living a life worthy of the gods.[25]

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.

Furthermore, anyone who tries to refute the notion that the body has sensation, and believes that only the spirit in its interpenetration of the

25. **322:** See p. xxxi.

26. **323–324:** Cf. Diogenes of Oinoanda *fr.* 37.I. "The soul furnishes nature with [the ultimate] cause [both of life and of] death. It is true that the number of its constituent atoms, both its rational and irrational parts being taken into account, does not equal that of the body; yet it girdles the whole person and, while being itself confined, in its turn binds the person, just as the minutest quantity of acid juice binds a huge quantity of milk."

whole body experiences this motion that we term sensation, is challenging a patent truth. For who will ever explain what bodily sensation is, if it is not what the actual facts of experience have shown and taught us? It is true that, once the spirit is released, the body is utterly destitute of sensation; but then what it loses was not its peculiar property in life, but one of many accidents[27] that it loses when it is expelled from life.

Moreover, to affirm that the eyes cannot perceive anything, but are the means through which the mind sees, as though through open doors, is no easy matter when the sensory experience of our eyes leads us to the opposite conclusion, dragging and driving us to the pupils themselves; especially so, since we often fail to perceive glittering objects because our eyes are dazzled by their brightness. This does not happen to doors: those through which we really do see experience no pain when they are opened wide. Moreover, if our eyes act as doors, obviously the mind ought to have a clearer view when they are removed and doorposts and all have been taken up.[28]

In this connection, you certainly cannot accept the revered hypothesis of the great Democritus,[29] that the elements of body and spirit are placed in juxtaposition, succeed one another alternately, and so weave the fabric of our frame. For the component atoms of the spirit are not only much smaller than those of our body and flesh; they are also outnumbered by them[30] and are scattered thinly through our limbs. So at least you may confidently assert that the intervals separating the primary particles of the spirit correspond to the size of the smallest objects whose impact is able to awaken sensory motions in our bodies.[31] Sometimes we are not conscious of dust clinging to our bodies, or of a sprinkling of chalk that

27. **358:** Including color, heat, motion.

28. **359–369:** The theory that the eyes, ears, and nose are "doors" or "windows," through which the soul sees, hears, or smells, is described by Cicero *Tusc. Disp.* 1.46. It may have originated with Heraclitus and was adopted by the Stoics. For the characteristic reductio ad absurdum with which Lucr. concludes his refutation, compare 1.915–920.

29. **371:** Democritus (c.460–c.370 B.C.) developed the atomic theory invented by Leucippus. Despite important differences between his system and the Epicurean one, Lucr. respected him: see also 1039–1041, 5.622 (identical to 3.371).

30. **376:** The same point is made by Diogenes of Oinoanda in the passage quoted in the note on 323–324.

31. **377–380:** I quote my note in the Loeb: "An object that impinges on us and is not felt is smaller than the interval between two soul-particles. However, there is a problem below; for, among the examples of objects whose impingement we do

settles on our limbs; we do not feel a mist at night, or the spider's filmy threads in our path that ensnare us as we move, or the same creature's withered vesture[32] alighting on our heads, or birds' feathers, or floating thistle down whose exceptional lightness often makes falling a heavy task; nor do we feel the tread of each and every creeping creature, nor each separate footstep that gnats and suchlike insects plant upon our bodies. It all goes to show that many particles must be stirred up within us before the seeds of spirit that interpenetrate every part of our bodies begin to feel that the elements have been disturbed, and before they can buffet their way across such great intervals, dash together, unite, and spring apart again.

Powerful though the spirit is, the mind does more to keep secure the vital fastenings and exercises more dominance over life. For without the intellect and mind not one particle of the spirit can remain in the body for the briefest moment of time; rather the spirit obediently follows the mind's lead, dispersing into the air and leaving the limbs in the icy grip of chill death. But, if a person's intellect and mind are preserved, life is preserved. It does not matter how much the trunk is mutilated: even if all the limbs have been amputated, so that the spirit that occupied those members has been removed and separated from the body, the amputee lives and draws in the ethereal breath of life. Though deprived, admittedly not of all, but still of a considerable portion of the spirit, the person lingers in life and clings to it.[33] Here is a parallel: even though an eye is lacerated all around, so long as the pupil has survived unimpaired, the living power of sight is preserved provided that you do not mutilate the whole orb of the eye and so pare around the pupil as to leave it isolated; for if you do that, the destruction of both orb and pupil is inevitable. But once that central spot of the eye, minute as it is, suffers damage, the light sets and gives way to darkness, no matter how sound the rest of the shining orb may be. Such is the compact whereby spirit and mind are ever conjoined.

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not feel, Lucr. mentions cobwebs, feathers, and thistle-down all of which obviously extend over more space than the interval between two soul-particles, and are not felt because of their lightness rather than because of their smallness. Either, as Bailey suggests, Lucr. failed to see any difference between his examples; or, as Giussani thinks, he may have believed that there are no soul-particles on the absolute surface of the body."

32. **385–386:** The spider's molt.

33. **403–407:** The same point is made by Diogenes of Oinoanda *fr.* 37.I.13 III.10.

Now then, to enable you to grasp that the minds and light spirits of living creatures are subject to birth and death, I will proceed to set forth verses that are the product of long research and the fruit of joyful labor[34]—verses worthy of your[35] manner of life. See to it that you couple spirit and mind together under one name, and when, for example, I proceed to speak of the spirit and demonstrate its mortality, assume that my words apply to the mind as well, since the two are identical in structure and constitute a unity.

To begin with, I have demonstrated[36] that the spirit is subtle, being composed of minute particles. Its constituent atoms are much smaller than those of the clear moisture of water or those of mist or smoke, for it far surpasses them in mobility and a much slighter impulse suffices to set it in motion: indeed even images of smoke and mist set it in motion. Compare how, when we are wrapped in sleep, we perceive altars exhaling columns of steam and giving off smoke; for unquestionably such perceptions are caused by images that are carried to us.[37] Now therefore, since, when vessels containing water are shattered, you perceive that the liquid flows out on all sides and disperses, and since mist and smoke dissolve into the breezy air, you must assume that the spirit too is dissipated, perishing much more quickly and being resolved more speedily into its ultimate particles, once it has been dislodged from the limbs and has withdrawn. For if the body, which is, as it were, the vessel of the spirit,[38] is shattered by some force and made porous by the withdrawal of blood from the veins, so that it is no longer able to retain it, how can you believe that the spirit can ever be retained by air, which is a more porous container than our body?

Moreover, we are aware that the mind is born with the body, develops with it, and declines with it. A toddling child possesses a feeble intellect

34. **419:** Cf. 2.730–731.

35. **420:** "Your" = Memmius'.

36. **425:** 177–230.

37. **428–433:** The theory of images is explained in Book 4. See also pp. xxvii–xxviii. Lucr. mentions steam and smoke, because these, being fine substances, would discharge particularly fine images.

38. **440:** For the idea that the body is the "vessel" of the soul, cf. 555, 793 (identical to 5.137). For the idea that the mind itself is a vessel, see 936–937, 1003–1010, 6.17–21. On the vessel metaphor, especially, but not only, in reference to the mind or soul, see W. Görler, "Storing up Past Pleasures: The Soul-Vessel-Metaphor in Lucretius and in His Greek Models," in K. A. Algra et al. (eds.), *Lucretius and His Intellectual Background* 193–207.

that matches the weakness and delicacy of its body. Then, when maturity is attained and strength is robust, judgment and mental power are correspondingly more fully developed. Later, when the body is shaken by the stern strength of time and the frame droops with forces dulled, the intellect halts, the tongue raves, the mind staggers; everything fades and fails at once. So it is natural to infer that the substance of the spirit too is all dissolved, like smoke, into the breezy air aloft, since we observe that it is born with the body, develops with it, and, as I have shown, succumbs with it to the stress and strain of age.

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.

Again, we often watch a person pass away by slow degrees, and limb by limb lose the vital sensibility; first the toes and toenails grow livid; then the feet and legs mortify; and then with stealing steps chill death

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

creeps over the rest of the frame. And seeing that in this case the substance of the spirit is split up and does not issue from the body all at one time in its integrity, it must be reckoned mortal. You may perhaps imagine that it could retreat inward throughout the frame, concentrate its parts into one place, and so drain the sensibility from every limb. But in that case the place where such a large quantity of spirit is collected ought to show itself to be endowed with acuter sensibility; and since no such place is to be found, doubtless the position is as I have already stated it: the spirit is divided piecemeal and dispersed and therefore perishes. In fact, even if I were prepared to concede the untrue and grant that the soul can mass itself together in the bodies of those who leave the light of life limb by limb, you would still have to acknowledge that it is mortal. It makes no difference whether it perishes through being dispersed into the air, or whether its sensibility is deadened by the contraction of its constituent parts, since in either case the whole person more and more loses sensation on every side, and on every side less and less of life remains.

Moreover, the mind is a distinct part of a person and is firmly fixed in a definite place, just like the ears and eyes and all the other organs of sense that pilot our lives; and just as the hand or eye or nose, once detached from us, cannot experience sensation or truly exist, but quickly decomposes, so the mind cannot exist independently of the body and the actual person; for the body may be regarded as a vessel[42] for the mind, or as anything else you care to imagine that implies a more intimate relationship with it, since the two are closely interlinked.

Furthermore, the body and mind as vital forces owe their energy and enjoyment of life to their interconnection: divorced from the body, the substance of the mind cannot by itself produce vital motions; and the body, once abandoned by the spirit, cannot live on and experience sensation. The fact is that, just as an eye, ripped from its roots and detached from the rest of the body, is unable to see anything, so the spirit and mind evidently have no power by themselves. Doubtless the reason is that, in their interpenetration of the veins and flesh and sinews and bones, their elements are confined by the whole body and are unable to spring apart freely to considerable distances; and because they are thus pent in, they perform sensory motions –motions that, after death and their expulsion from the body into the breezy air, they cannot perform, since they are not then confined in the same manner. Indeed air would be an animate body, if the spirit could maintain its cohesion and restrict itself to those motions

42. **555:** See note on 440.

that it performed previously in the sinews and in the body itself. So I insist that, when the whole bodily encasement has disintegrated and the vital breath has been expelled, you must acknowledge that the mind and the spirit with their powers of sensation suffer dissolution, since body and soul are interdependent.

Again, since the body cannot endure divorce from the spirit, but putrefies with a foul stench, how can you doubt that the spirit, issuing from deep down within, has seeped out and dispersed like smoke, and that the reason why the body is transformed, crumbling away and collapsing in utter ruin, is that its deepest foundations have been displaced by the spirit as it seeps out right through the limbs, through all the body's sinuous channels, and through all its pores? So you have ample evidence that the substance of the spirit is already split up when it passes out through the limbs, and that it is torn apart actually within the body before it glides out into the breezy air and floats away.

In fact, even before it outsteps the confines of life, the spirit is often so shaken by some force that it seems to wish to depart and to be released from the whole body; and we see that, as in life's final hour, the face grows flaccid and all the limbs droop limply from the bloodless body. This is what happens to a person who, as we say, has had a turn or fainted: instantly the scene is one of trepidation, as everyone strives to prevent life's last link from snapping. In such a case the mind and the entire spirit receive a violent shock, and both collapse with the body itself; consequently a slightly stronger force could cause them to disintegrate. How then can you continue to doubt that the spirit, once weakened by its expulsion from the body into the open air, once stripped of its encasement, could not survive for the briefest moment of time, let alone subsist throughout eternity?

Moreover, it is evident that the dying never feel their spirit issuing in its entirety from their whole body or mounting, before its departure, to their throat and gullet; rather they feel it failing in the particular spot where it is located, just as they are aware that each of their other senses is being snuffed out in its own domain. The truth is that, if our mind were immortal, at the moment of death, far from bemoaning its dissolution, it would rejoice that it was passing out and shedding its vesture, like a snake.

Again, why is the intelligence and reasoning of the mind never born in the head or feet or hands? Why does it always reside in one fixed place, in one particular spot, if it is not because a particular place is assigned to each thing where it can be born and where it can survive after its creation,

and because the manifold members of each being are so disposed that their order is never inverted? Effect invariably follows cause: flame does not spring from streams, nor is cold born in fire.

Moreover, if the substance of the spirit is immortal and retains sentient power when separated from our body, presumably we must assume that it is provided with the five senses. In no other way can we visualize spirits roaming in the infernal realms of Acheron. That is why painters and writers[43] of generations past have represented spirits as endowed with senses. But, divorced from the body, the soul cannot have either eyes or nose or hands or tongue or ears and therefore cannot possess either sentience or life.

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 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, 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 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.

Moreover, if the substance of the spirit is immortal and stealthily enters the body at the moment of birth,[46] why do we have no recollection of our earlier existence, and why do we retain no vestiges of past actions?[47] If the faculties of the mind are so totally transformed that all memory of past events has been obliterated, such a state, in my opinion, is not far removed from death. Therefore you must admit that the previous spirit has perished, and that the present spirit is a new creation.

Furthermore, if the living power of the mind is imported into our already completed bodies at the moment of birth, when we are crossing the threshold of life, one would not then expect to see it grow with the

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.

46. **670–671:** Many of those who in the ancient world believed that the soul is immortal took the view that it must have had an eternal existence before birth, as well as be destined to have an eternal existence after death. In 670–783 Lucr. argues against this view. Part of his argument is directed against the doctrine of transmigration of souls, accepted by the Orphics, Pythagoreans, Empedocles, and Plato.

47. **672–673:** Plato in his *Meno* and *Phaedo* claims that we do have some recollection of an earlier existence: he says that the things that we see in this life remind us of the ideal forms of which we had knowledge before we were born; he asserts that "knowledge is recollection" and uses this doctrine as part of his proof of the soul's preexistence. Lucr. does not consider Plato's view, presumably because he regards it as too absurd to merit mention.

body and the limbs in the very blood; rather one would expect it to live in total isolation, as in a cage,[48] while still managing to flood the whole body with sensibility. So I insist that spirits must not be considered either uncreated or exempt from the law of death. For it must not be supposed that they could be so intimately connected with our bodies if they were insinuated into them from without; and yet the existence of this intimate connection is a patent fact: indeed the spirit's interpenetration of the body through the veins, flesh, sinews, and bones is so complete that even the teeth are given a share in sensation, as is shown by toothache, or the twinge caused by icy water, or the crunching of rough grit concealed in a piece of bread. What is more, since the spirit is so closely interwoven with the tissue of the body, it is evident that it cannot depart in its integrity and disentangle itself intact from all the sinews, bones, and joints.

But if by chance you imagine that the spirit insinuates itself into the body from without and then permeates our limbs, it is all the more certain that it will perish through fusion with the body, because permeation implies dissolution and therefore destruction. The spirit is diffused through all the pores in the body; and just as food, when it is channeled into all the members and limbs, disintegrates and converts itself into a new substance, so the mind and spirit, even if intact when they pass into the newly formed body, suffer dissolution in the process of permeation: their particles are channeled through all the pores into the limbs, and form this new mind that is the present ruler of our body and the offspring of the original mind that perished when it was diffused through the frame. It is obvious therefore that the substance of the spirit is neither without a birthday nor exempt from death.

Here is another problem: are any seeds of spirit left in the lifeless body or not? If some are left inside it, there cannot be any justification for regarding the spirit as immortal, since it has withdrawn diminished by the loss of some of its parts. If, on the other hand, it has retired with its constituent elements intact and has escaped without leaving any part of itself in the body, what is the source of the maggots that corpses upheave from their putrid flesh?[49] What is the source of this swarm of bloodless and boneless animate creatures that surge over the seething frame? But if by chance you believe that spirits insinuate themselves into the maggots from without, and that each of them can enter into a body, then, even if

48. **684:** The Pythagoreans and Plato believed that the soul does indeed live in a body as in a prison—a prison from which it longs to escape.

49. **719–721:** For belief in the spontaneous generation of worms, maggots, and suchlike, see note on 2.871–872.

you fail to ask yourself why many thousands of spirits should congregate in a place from which one only has withdrawn, there is a question that must be posed and resolved: do the spirits hunt out all the component seeds of the tiny maggots and construct a home for themselves, or do they steal into ready-made bodies? But no valid reason can be given why they should take the trouble to build bodies for themselves: after all, so long as they flit about bodiless, they are not distressed by disease or cold or hunger; the body is much more susceptible to these afflictions, and it is through sympathy with it that the mind suffers many maladies. And even supposing it were very much to their advantage to build a body that they could enter, it would obviously be impossible for them to do so. Spirits, then, do not make bodies and limbs for themselves. Nor is there any possibility that they insinuate themselves into ready-made bodies: for in that case body and spirit could not be intricately interwoven or establish mutual sympathy through mutual sensibility.

Again, why is cruel ferocity a permanent characteristic of the sullen breed of lions, and cunning of foxes? Why, in the case of deer, is the instinct of flight transmitted from generation to generation, so that their limbs are spurred by inherited timidity? Indeed, why are all other such qualities implanted in the constitution of body and mind from life's first dawn? Surely the explanation must be that a mind, whose nature is determined by its own seed and breed, develops along with the body of each individual animal. But if the mind were immortal and in the habit of transmigrating, the characters of living creatures would be topsy-turvy: often the hound of Hyrcanian stock[50] would flee before the onset of the antlered stag; the hawk would flee trembling through the breezy air at the swoop of the dove; human beings would be irrational, while the species of brute beasts would be rational. The argument that an immortal soul undergoes alteration when it changes its body is advanced on false grounds. For change implies dissolution and therefore destruction. The parts of the soul are subject to transposition and rearrangement, and therefore must be liable also to suffer dissolution throughout the limbs, so that ultimately they all perish with the body. If it is claimed that human souls always migrate into human bodies, I will still want to know why a wise soul can become foolish, why a child never possesses prudence, and why a foal is less well trained than a horse of powerful strength.[51] No

50. **750:** The Hyrcani, who lived on the southeast shore of the Caspian Sea, had an extremely fierce breed of dogs.

51. **764:** The case of the horse is added, because the theory that human souls always migrate into human bodies is meant to imply that the souls of other creatures always remain constant to the same species.

doubt my opponents will take refuge in the supposition that in a weak body the mind becomes weak. But if this supposition is true, you must admit that the soul is mortal, since it is so totally transformed throughout the body that it loses its former vitality and sensibility. Moreover, how will the mind be able to grow strong in concert with any particular body and attain with it the coveted bloom of maturity, if it is not its partner from the moment of conception? And what prompts it to abandon the decrepit limbs? Is it afraid of remaining cooped up in the crumbling body, in case its home, worn out by long lapse of years, collapses and crushes it? But an immortal thing has no dangers to fear.

Again, it is palpably ridiculous to suppose that the souls are present at the matings and births of wild beasts · immortal souls numberless in number waiting for mortal limbs, fiercely contesting who shall have priority and enter first. Or do the souls perhaps have an agreement stipulating that the first to come flying up shall enter first, and that there shall be no violent struggle between them?

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 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.

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.

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.

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.

If it happens that people are to suffer unhappiness and pain in the future, they themselves must exist at that future time for harm to be able to befall them; and since death takes away this possibility by preventing the existence of those who might have been visited by troubles, you may be sure that there is nothing to fear in death, that those who no longer exist cannot become miserable, and that it makes not one speck of difference whether or not they have ever been born once their mortal life has been snatched away by deathless death.[58]

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56. **832–837:** The reference is to the Punic Wars, fought between Rome and Carthage, and especially to the Second Punic War (218–201 B.C.) during which Hannibal invaded Italy and defeated the Romans in several battles.

57. **842:** That is to say, not even if the world comes to an end.

58. **869:** The paradoxical idea of "deathless death" goes back to the Greek comic poet Amphis (fourth century B.C.), quoted by Athenaeus 8.336c: "Drink and have fun! Life is mortal, and time on earth is short. Death is deathless, once one is dead." Although Lucr. agrees with Amphis about the deathlessness of death, he disagrees with the advice "eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die," as he makes clear in 912–918.

So, when you see people indignant at the thought that after death they will either rot in the grave or be devoured by flames or the jaws of wild beasts, you may be sure that, however emphatically they themselves deny belief that they will retain any feeling in death, their words do not ring true, and that deep in their hearts they are pricked by some secret fear. In my judgment, they grant neither the conclusion they profess to grant, nor the premise[59] from which it is derived; they do not completely uproot and detach themselves from life, but unconsciously suppose that something of themselves survives. Whenever people in life imagine that in death their body will be torn to pieces by birds and beasts of prey, they feel sorry for themselves. This is because they do not separate themselves from the body or dissociate themselves sufficiently from the outcast corpse; they identify themselves with it and, as they stand by, impregnate it with their own feelings. Hence their indignation at having been created mortal; hence their failure to see that in real death there will be no second self alive to lament their own end, and to stand by and grieve at the sight of them lying there, being torn to pieces or burned. I mention being burned, because, if in death it is disastrous to be mauled by the devouring jaws of wild beasts, I cannot see why it is not calamitous to be laid upon a funeral pyre and consumed by scorching flames, or to be embalmed in stifling honey, or to grow stiff with cold, reclining on the smooth surface of an icy slab of stone,[60] or to be pulverized by a crushing weight of earth above one.

"Never again," mourners say, "will your household receive you with joy; never again will the best of wives welcome you home; never again will your dear children race for the prize of your first kisses and touch your heart with pleasure too profound for words.[61] Never again can you enjoy prosperous circumstances or be a bulwark to your dependants. Wretched man," they cry, "one wretched, damnable day has dispossessed you of every one of life's many precious gifts." They omit to

59. **876:** The premise is that the soul does not survive after death; the conclusion is that there is no feeling after death.

60. **892:** E. J. Kenney well remarks that "the chilly discomfort of this situation, in which the body has no covering, is ironically contrasted with that of the buried body, which has too much."

61. **894–896:** These lines influenced Virgil (*Georgics* 2.523–524) and inspired a famous stanza in Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (21–24): "For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn, / Or busy housewife ply her evening care: / No children run to lisp their sire's return, / Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share."

add: "No craving for these things remains with you any longer." If only they fully grasped this fact and expressed their feelings accordingly, they would relieve their minds of great anguish and fear.

I imagine another saying: "You, for your part, are wrapped in the sleep of death and will remain so for the rest of time, exempt from all painful sufferings. But we, as we stood near the dreadful pyre upon which you were reduced to ashes, wept and wept for you insatiably; our sorrow is undying: the day will never dawn that will banish it from our hearts." The person who takes this attitude should be asked how a happening that involves a return to sleep and repose can be so bitter that anyone should pine away in undying grief.

It often happens too that people reclining at a banquet, drinking-cup in hand and garlands shadowing their brows, earnestly declare: "All too short-lived is the enjoyment of these things for us puny humans; soon it will be gone, and we will never be able to recall it." As if the most miserable misfortune awaiting them in death was to be consumed and parched by a burning thirst or indeed to be afflicted with any other craving! In fact, people never feel the want of themselves or their life, when mind and body alike are sunk in sound sleep: as far as we are concerned, this sleep might continue for ever without any craving for ourselves affecting us. And yet, at the moment when people jerk themselves out of sleep and gather themselves together, the primary elements of the spirit scattered throughout their limbs cannot be straying far from the motions that produce sensation. It follows that death should be considered to be of much less concern to us than sleep—that is, if anything can be less than what we perceive to be nothing. For at death a greater disturbance and dispersion of matter takes place, and no one wakes and rises once overtaken by life's cold stoppage.

Furthermore, suppose that nature suddenly burst into speech, and personally addressed the following rebuke to one of us:[62] "What distresses you so deeply, mortal creature, that you abandon yourself to these puling lamentations? Why do you bemoan and beweep death? If your past life has been a boon, and if not all your blessings have flowed straight through you and run to waste like water poured into a riddled vessel,[63]

62. **931–932:** The device of personifying nature and putting an address into her mouth is dramatically effective and also enables Lucr. to say some harsh things without giving offense. The same is true of the device, employed in 1024–1052, of making Memmius and us address ourselves.

63. **936–937:** An allusion, as in 6.17–23, to the story of the Danaids, the fifty

why, you fool, do you not retire from the feast of life like a satisfied guest and with equanimity resign yourself to undisturbed rest? If, however, all your enjoyments have been poured away and lost, and if life is a thorn, why do you seek to prolong your existence, when the future, just as surely as the past, would be ruined and utterly wasted? Why not rather put an end to life and trouble? There is nothing further that I can devise and discover for your pleasure: all things are always the same. Though your body is not yet shrunk with age, and your limbs are not exhausted and enfeebled, all things remain the same · yes, even if in length of life you should outlast all generations, or indeed even if you should be destined never to die."[64] What can we say in reply, save that nature's complaint is just, and that in her plea she sets out a true case?

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

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?

Next let me assure you that all the punishments that tradition locates in the abysm of Acheron actually exist in our life.[68] No tormented Tantalus,[69] as in the story, fears the huge rock suspended over him in the air, paralyzed with vain terror; but in life mortals are oppressed by groundless fear of the gods and dread the fall of the blow that chance may deal to any of them.

No Tityos[70] lying in Acheron has his insides devoured by winged creatures. It is certain that they could not find anything for their beaks to explore throughout eternity even in the depths of that huge breast: even if the sprawling extent of his body were so enormous that his splayed-out limbs covered not merely nine acres, but the whole orb of the earth, he would not be able to endure eternal pain or furnish an inexhaustible

67. **971:** A justly famous line: life is not a permanent and absolute possession, but something of which we only have temporary use.

68. **978–1023:** Denials of belief in the horrors of the underworld seem, not surprisingly, to have been common in Epicurean teaching. So says Seneca *Epistulae Morales* 24.18, and Diogenes of Oinoanda (*fr.* 73.I.1–8) writes: "[I follow you (Epicurus)] when you make [these] statements about death, and you have persuaded me to laugh at it. For I have no fear on account of the Tityoses and Tantaluses whom some describe in Hades." It is not unlikely, though not certain, that Lucr. has derived from Epicurus himself the idea that the punishments alleged to exist in hell actually exist in our life.

69. **980–983:** Legendary king of Sipylus in Lydia, son of Zeus (Jupiter). He did something (it is not agreed what) to offend the gods whose society he had been privileged to share. According to Homer (*Odyssey* 11.582–592), his punishment was to stand up to his chin in water, with fruit-laden branches over his head: whenever he stooped to drink, the water receded; and whenever he tried to pick the fruit, the wind blew it out of reach. The version of the punishment that Lucr. adopts, because it suits his purpose better, is the one followed by the Greek lyric and tragic poets.

70. **984–994:** A giant who attempted to rape Leto (Latona), the mother of Apollo and Artemis (Diana). Lucr.'s description of his punishment is in imitation of Homer *Odyssey* 11.576–581.

supply of food from his own body. However, Tityos does exist among us on earth: he is the person lying in bonds of love, who is torn by winged creatures[71] and consumed by agonizing anxiety or rent by the anguish of some other passion.

Sisyphus[72] too exists in this life before our eyes: he is the man who thirstily solicits from the people the rods and grim axes[73] of high office and always comes away disappointed and despondent. For to seek power that is illusory and never granted, and to suffer continual hardship in pursuit of it, is the same as to push up a mountain with might and main a rock that, after all this effort, rolls back from the summit and in impetuous haste races down to the level plain.[74]

Then again, to keep feeding an ungrateful mind with good things, without ever being able to fill it and satisfy its appetite as is the case with the seasons of the year, when they come around with their fruits and manifold delights and yet never satisfy our appetite for the fruits of life--this, in my opinion, is what is meant by the story of those maidens[75] in the flower of their age pouring water into a riddled vessel that cannot possibly be filled.

But what of Cerberus[76] and the Furies[77] and the realm destitute of light? What of Tartarus vomiting waves of fearful fumes from its jaws?[78] These terrors do not exist and cannot exist anywhere at all. But in life people are tortured by a fear of punishment as cruel as their crimes, and by the atonement for their offenses—the dungeon, the terrible precipita-

71. **993:** Cupids. But for *volucres* perhaps read *Veneres* ("sexual passions"), as suggested by S. Allen, *Classical Review* 14 (1900) 414.

72. **995–1002:** Legendary king of Corinth, notorious for his robberies, cunning, and treachery. Lucr. closely follows the description of his punishment in Homer *Odyssey* 11.593–600.

73. **996:** A bundle of rods with an axe in the middle (*fasces*) was carried before the chief magistrates at Rome.

74. **1002:** The stone races back down to the plain, just as the candidate for political office hurries back to the Plain of Mars (Campus Martius), where elections were held. For the possibility that a passage about the punishment of Ixion has dropped out after 1002, see especially H. D. Jocelyn, *Acta Classica* 29 (1986) 49–51.

75. **1008:** The Danaids. See note on 936–937.

76. **1011:** The monstrous dog that guarded the entrance to the lower world.

77. **1011:** Chthonian goddesses of vengeance.

78. **1011–1012:** It is possible that a line (or lines) has been lost after 1011 or 1012. If there is no lacuna, Marullus' *haec* for *qui* at the beginning of 1013 should probably be accepted.

tion from the Rock,[79] stripes, executioners, the execution cell, pitch, red-hot plates, torches.[80] Even though these horrors are absent, the mind, conscious of its guilt and fearfully anticipating the consequences, pricks itself with goads and scars itself with scourges. It fails to see how there can be an end to its afflictions, or a limit to its punishment; indeed it is afraid that its sufferings may increase in death. In short, fools make a veritable hell of their lives on earth.[81]

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."

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.

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.