

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: LUCRETIUS: THE WONDERER  
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I seek to create a Lucretius text useful for a high school classroom including a commentary on four sections of the poem. The passages include 2.998 – 1047 which explains how the Epicurean atomic theory, 3.912—979 the famous passage that denies the underworld and its tortures, 5.855 – 923 the semi-Darwinian passage detailing the sorts of creatures that can exist in this world, and 5.1194– 1240 about the detrimental effects of humans fearing gods.

In addition to writing a commentary on these passages, I will explore the perception of Lucretius through the present day, in hopes of discovering how and why this important and influential author has been so systematically excluded from secondary Latin literary studies. My discussion will include an overview of how modern Latin textbooks do or do not mention Lucretius and how his presence in these textbooks compares to his role in university-level Latin course offerings.

LUCRETIUS: THE WONDERER

by

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## Table of Contents

Table of Contents .....	ii
Chapter 1: Lucretius through the Ages .....	1
Chapter 2: Lucretius: the Roman Wonderer .....	18
<u>Introduction</u> .....	18
<u>Selected Passages</u> .....	19
<u>Vocabulary</u> .....	20
Chapter 3: Commentary .....	21
<u>Passage 1: Book 2, lines 991-1047</u> .....	21
<u>Passage 2: Book 3, lines 912-979</u> .....	33
<u>Passage 3: Book 5, lines 855-923</u> .....	47
<u>Passage 4: Book 5, lines 1194-1240</u> .....	59
Chapter 4: Why Lucretius? .....	68
Chapter 5: Full Scansion .....	70
Bibliography .....	81

This Table of Contents is automatically generated by MS Word, linked to the Heading formats used within the Chapter text.

## Chapter 1: Lucretius through the Ages

Lucretius describes the creation of the universe without any divine intervention, as fits with Epicurean philosophy. He writes that he will explain *quibus ille modis congressus materiai / fundarit terram caelum mare sidera solem / lunaique globum...et quibus ille modis divum metus insinuarit pectora*: in what ways that clash of material established the land, the sky, the sea, the stars, the sun, and the sphere of the moon...and in what ways that fear of the gods pushed its way into our hearts. (DRN 5.67-68...73-74). A world where the gods represent a harmful fear rather than the true mystical presence that guides human lives has never been a world the majority of a society believes in. In the ancient world of Lucretius, in the middle ages, during the renaissance, and even in the modern era, society demands that its people be religious in some way. Marx and others can tell us why this is, or perhaps Zeus and Jesus are indeed staring down on us, but regardless, Lucretius would have been disagreed with by a majority of his readers regardless of when he was read. Is this why his writing appears so much less in modern textbooks than that of other famous writers of his time? His themes are complex to be sure, and some might argue they are largely a continuation of Greek thought, but this is true of Cicero's philosophy as well. His language is complex and deeply symbolic, but this can be said of Vergil. Both of those authors are considered a *sine qua non* of Latin education, whereas Lucretius is not. I will explore the perception of Lucretius throughout history in an attempt to discover whether his "subversive" themes are what have caused him to be overlooked. I hope to show how the views of Lucretius

and writings throughout history have shaped modern accessibility to and popularity of the *De Rerum Natura* in a negative way.

To search for differences in how people perceive Lucretius, one does not have to look very far beyond the dictionary. For example, Oxford's British and World dictionary defines Lucretius as follows:

Roman poet and philosopher; full name Titus Lucretius Carus. His didactic hexametric poem *On the Nature of Things* is an exposition of the materialist atomist physics of Epicurus, which aims to give peace of mind by showing that fear of the gods and of death is without foundation.

Whereas Oxford's US English dictionary's definition is different:

Roman poet and philosopher; full name Titus Lucretius Carus. His didactic epic poem *On the Nature of Things* is an exposition of the materialist atomist physics of Epicurus.

How much might it be permitted to read into this? The British version goes into more depth about the poetry and instead of merely mentioning the atomist theories of Epicurus, it adds the piece about Lucretius' theory of gods and death. It cannot be said that the definition is written with any negative connotation. In fact, by saying that Lucretius "aims to give peace of mind," the dictionary entry seems to cast this part of DRN in a rather positive light. Can we assume that the editors at Oxford assume the British are more enlightened and that the Americans are suspicious of non-monotheistic philosophies? It may seem facile, but a relevant comparison would be the changing of J.K. Rowling's book titled "The Philosopher's Stone" to "The Sorcerer's Stone" for publication in America. This indicates to me that British publishers view Americans as less willing to read complex philosophical texts not rooted in Christianity. But before discussing modern perceptions, it seems fitting to examine the roots of Lucretius' readers.

In tracing back the responses others have had to Lucretius, it makes sense to start with how he was perceived in his own times. Little is known of his life, and the hints that scholars have discovered seem questionable sometimes. In his book about the influence of Lucretius, Hadzsits (1963) wrote that

“the intelligent and eager searcher for god, in Rome, in the first century BC, must have scanned the DRN with impatience for Lucretius’ exposition of his own conception of the truth about god or gods. Unfortunately, the passages, dealing with religion, appear in various places through the course of the poem. If Lucretius had gathered all of his arguments, destructive and constructive, into one book, with full explanation, so that any reader could have seen with ease what the real nature of his gospel was, I cannot help but think that the result would have been sensational and the ultimate effect, far more profound. As it is, all of these passages are scattered and, thereby, much of their force was undoubtedly lost” (111).

It is true that the various pieces concerning “religion” are intermixed with Lucretius’ atomic theory and, indeed, with his mythological metaphors. Perhaps the most famous and overt denial of the benefits of religion is the passage about Iphigenia’s sacrifice. Though Hadzsits is certainly right about the scattered nature of Lucretius’ philosophy concerning religion, this one passage would be enough to make his disdainful views perfectly clear. I would like to examine some of the passage in depth, not only because it is masterfully written, but to show how Lucretius turns the ancients’ own mythology to prove how dangerous it is.

*hūmāna ante oculōs foedē cum vīta iacēret  
in terrīs oppressa gravī sub Rēligiōne,  
quae caput ā caelī regiōnibus ostendēbat  
horribilī super aspectū mortālibus instāns,*                      65

Lucretius begins with *humana* to draw a connection with the sacrificial victim. At the very center of the line lies the word *foede*, foul, which immediately casts the scenario in a negative light. The phrase *oppressa gravi sub Religione* leaves no doubt as to the culprit for the tragedy that is about to occur. The whole phrase gives a heavy, weighted-down feeling—and the cause of being pushed down is religion. He goes on

to describe religion further with a relative clause, saying that it shows itself from above—from the sky where the gods supposedly live and *instant*—press themselves onto mortals. That whole clause is subordinate to the following section which puts focus on Epicurus for realizing this, but it comes before and causes the reader to feel deeply oppressed by these gods.

*quārē Rēligiō pedibus subiecta vicissim                    78*  
*obteritur, nōs exaequat victoria caelō.*

The passage about Epicurus ends with the hope that he has led *nos* to trample religion under our feet. Lucretius uses competitive words (*subiecta, obteritur, victoria*) to make it sound as though humans battle religion and Epicurus leads us to conquer it. Not just defeat it—but *pedibus subiecta*—we will tread over it with our feet. Just as the Romans sowed salt into the fields of Carthage after a grueling series of wars, so Lucretius wants religion and fear of it to be trampled.

*illud in hīs rēbus vereor, nē forte reāris                    80*  
*impia tē ratiōnis inīre elementa viamque*  
*indugredī sceleris. quod contrā saepius illa*  
*Rēligiō peperit scelerōsa atque impia facta.*

Here Lucretius seeks to prepare a hesitant reader that he should not fear to question this religion which he is surrounded by. Misfortunes are not caused by his failure to obey religion, rather that religion is the cause of men's evil deeds.

*Aulide quō pactō Triviāi virginis āram*  
*lphianassāi turpārunt sanguine foedē                    85*  
*ductōrēs Danaūm dēlectī, prīma virōrum.*  
*cū simul infula virgineōs circumdata comptūs*  
*ex utrāque parī mālārum parte profūsast,*  
*et maestum simul ante ārās adstare parentem*  
*sēnsit et hunc propter ferrum cēlāre ministrōs                    90*  
*aspectūque suō lacrimās effundere cīvēs,*  
*mūta metū terram genibus summissa petēbat.*  
*nec miserae prōdesse in tālī tempore quībat,*  
*quod patriō princeps dōnārat nōmine rēgem;*  
*nam sublāta virūm manibus tremibundaque ad ārās                    95*  
*dēductast, nōn ut sollemnī mōre sacrōrum*

*perfectō posset clārō comitārī Hymenaeō,  
sed casta incestē nūbendi tempore in ipsō  
hostia concideret mactātū maesta parentis,  
exitus ut classī fēlix faustusque darētur.* 100

Thus Lucretius presents the heart-breaking episode of what religion can make men do. He repeats the word *foede* as in line 62 to remind the reader of what he believes religion to be. Lucretius describes the innocence of Iphigenia (virginis, *virgineos comptus, ante aras parentum, maestum, genibus, miserae, maesta*) to increase the feeling of pathos associated with this foul deed. Indeed the *cives* cry in line 91 at the sight of such a tragedy as Lucretius intends the reader to cry while imagining this scene. He ends with the ironic *felix* to describe the supposed outcome of her sacrifice, safe passage for the fleet. The last line is *daretur* to emphasize in the passive voice that this passage will be given by someone else—supposedly the gods. The final, unforgettable line: *tantum Rēligiō potuit suādēre malōrum* summarizes Lucretius' point that it is such devastatingly sad situations to which religion leads.

No ancient, medieval, Renaissance, or modern reader could avoid being moved by this scene. Hadzsits writes,

“as we read Lucretius' breath-taking lines of supreme contempt for this great sky-god of the Mediterranean basin, we marvel, as we wonder what effect such lines had upon his position in Rome. To be sure, religious belief was shaken in the first half of the first century before Christ by the crises of war and of bloodshed, by the terrors of proscriptions, by the commotions of civil discord; and this judgment might have found an echo in many a wandering soul” (109).

What did Romans think upon reading this? It is common knowledge that the upper class citizens did not believe the gods were involved in their every action, but this level of contempt would probably have shocked even them. In a book review written in 1887 in the New York Times, Saltus claimed that “Lucretius gave to Rome the first words of negation, and atheism became the fashion.” This claim is surely wrong on a

number of levels. Hadzsits' claim that the turmoil of the first century made Romans question their world rings true—in times of disaster, people tend to either cling to their religion or question why it would allow such things to occur. That being said, Lucretius was by no means an atheist. He never claims that gods do not exist, though he does claim that they are not involved in human life, but his main goal is to free people from their ties to religion.

A Roman whose writings and opinions became very influential in the future was Quintilian. His school of oratory and grammar was read for years to come and his opinions became valued. This is unfortunate for Lucretius, because Quintilian was by no means a fan of the Epicurean. He compares him to Vergil a great deal, and prefers Vergil every time (Hadzsits, 160). Quintilian was more concerned with style than content, however, and it is on that basis that he shunned Lucretius in favor of Vergil. This seems slightly ironic, considering the clear fact that Vergil drew some influence from Lucretius. Another Roman writer, Statius, was fond of Lucretius for that very style which Quintilian disparaged, but Statius made no comments on content either (Hadzsits, 161). Alas, we have no record of any actual Epicureans as to their opinions of Lucretius' epic (Hadzsits 196). We have no way of knowing whether his presentation of Epicurean ideas influenced them or not.

We do know, however, that this message became a problem for the Christian Fathers who make up most the written record for the next thousand years. The Church greatly frowned upon Epicureanism for a number of reasons, and “Epicureanism” died as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century, according to Hadzsits. Those who considered themselves “grammarians” did continue to read Lucretius to study his

diction and style, but “that existence became of less and less importance until Lucretius distinctly appears of minor consequence in the pages of Isidore...it was only sporadically and accidentally that he was known and it becomes an increasingly difficult task to determine the fact” (243). According to Greenblatt, some Catholics like Erasmus and More had tried to integrate Epicureanism with the Christian faith, but no one dared to do that after the 1500s (252).

Part of the problem was Lucretius’ attempted reconciliation of science and religion: his firm belief that his “science” alone could teach the truth about God (Hadzsits, 288). He tried to link his ideas about atoms with his “dangerous” ideas (Greenblatt, 251) but to the Christian fathers of medieval times, the “denial of providence, the idea of “do-nothing” gods had completely obscured the deeper significance of Lucretius’ message. The denial of divine providence had barred Lucretius from any favor that was due (Hadzsits, 202). Some men, like Lambin, read the DRN and declared it magnificent, but said its ideas should be ignored (Greenblatt, 256). Eventually, even those who tried to view the scientific view of the world separately from the denial of religion were thwarted when the church claimed that atomic theory subverted the idea of Eucharist and was therefore banned (Greenblatt, 253). In addition, the idea of seeking *voluptas* went against early Christian ideas of how life must be lived by suffering as Jesus had (Greenblatt, 105). To summarize—some Christians sought to read Lucretius and apply his ideas or simply appreciate his mastery in writing, but they were thwarted by the very kind of dogma that Lucretius tried to steer them away from.

There is not an abundance of writing about Lucretius or his text as there is about Vergil and his writing, but Robert Burton's *Anatomy* (written in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century) claims that Lucretius' text was a familiar one to all educated readers (Hadzsits, 306). A few decades later, the cardinal Melchior de Polignac wrote his *Anti-Lucretius*, the message of which is no mystery. His main argument was that the quest for *voluptas* alone subverts religion, even ignoring other Lucretian claims (Hadzsits, 320-321). Overall, Wilson Clough summarizes it well when he says that Lucretius' writing was "much maligned by Christian writers of all sects" (66). Our own Thomas Jefferson, a self-proclaimed Epicurean, wrote that Epicureanism "was bitterly attacked by Stoics and Christians, for it taught that there was no immortality, that the gods, if they existed at all, were indifferent" (Clough, 65).

As to his own beliefs, he considered "the genuine doctrines of Epicurus as containing everything rational in moral philosophy which Greece and Rome have left us." He went on to criticize writers like Epictetus for misrepresenting the Epicurean doctrine (Clough, 64). At the same time as this great American thinker was saying these words, one essayist during the Russian enlightenment warned of "dangerous effects from irreligious authors like Lucretius and Spinoza" (Walker, 384). Spinoza, like Lucretius, had subverted common beliefs that the body and soul were separate entities. The idea that the soul is not distinct and immortal caused a great deal of fear, and instead of reading Lucretius' text to learn how to avoid that fear, Christians were instructed to avoid his ideas entirely. How common were the Jeffersons—the educated men who read and whose minds were moved by Lucretius' ideas?

There does not seem to be an obvious geographical or cultural connection between those who accepted and those who rejected Lucretius. In late 17<sup>th</sup> century France, the Jesuits educated Moliere on a “diet of Terence, Lucretius, and French drama (Hadzsits, 1963).” At an oratorical conference in the US in 1878, one speaker cited only three Romans as the cause of Rome’s fall. He attributed that responsibility to Lucretius, Caesar, and Aurelian (New York Times, 1878). This certainly would have been an interesting talk to hear, not only to see how such a complex issue can be attributed to but three people, but also because it implies Lucretius was influential enough to have such a significance. Ten years later, a Dictionary of Religion was published from the standpoint of orthodox Christianity as held and taught by the Church of England which included Epicurus but omitted Lucretius (New York Times, 1887). Why one but not the other? This indicates that the writers of this reference book were not interested in writing, as much as origin of ideas. They did not consider Lucretius’ philosophy different enough from that of Epicurus to include him as an important figure in “religious” history. This brings up the question of who has the power to decide whether or not Lucretius is important and should be read.

Moving in a more modern direction, I would like to explore this issue by examining how Lucretius was included or excluded from university and high school curricula. As Latin education decreased due to various reasons such as its lack of “practical application” and association with “the elite,” there remained many advocates of including the study of Latin literature at least in translation, if not also in the original. The big push was to make sure that education was practical and “began with the interest of the student and his times” (McKeon, 301). That same author said,

“many of those interests derive from the Roman heritage...Lucretius’ *On the Nature of Things* will acquaint the student with philosophy presented in poetic formulation, and philosophy systematized as natural laws in the sense in which he accustomed to think of them...This is a universal history of the changing climates of things and of the rises and falls of civilizations of men, not a history of Rome conceived as a model city and as imposer of peace by war and of freedom by conquest”  
(McKeon, 298-301).

Professor Stevenson voiced similar thoughts when he wrote about how learning Greek and Latin was not enough as they were being taught, but that it would be if students got training in “Aristotle, Lucretius, and half a dozen other authors like them” (1910). Both of these writers encourage using Lucretius as a way to broaden students’ minds in the context of Latin study. Hadzsits said, writing in the 1960s, “the influence of the doctrine of evolution have not only released Lucretius from many of the old hatreds but have even created a new admiration for him (333). He implies that the advancement of science has allowed for Lucretius to be read without prejudice. Adler argued that no one would make time for reading ancient philosophy because the organized US education system was “turning out students chaotically informed and viciously indoctrinated with the local prejudices of professors and their textbooks...They are not being taught how to lead a good life (the aim of all liberal education), but merely how to make a good living...The first US answer...was free colleges and the elective system with heavy emphasis on “useful” subjects like science” (Fusilier, 1952) Analyzing these different statements together brings me to the conclusion that Lucretius was known to educated people like McKeon and Stevenson, but that the trend in education was denying them the opportunity to educate students according to their ideals. It is important to note that Lucretius is

mentioned by name without being paired with or compared to Vergil, which he so often was due to their similarity of style and Vergil's prominence over time.

If we turn to England and jump ahead thirty years, something called the "Education Reform Act of 1988" appears on the scene. Among its regulations, the act required "broadly Christian" acts of worship in schools. When Tony Blair's Labour government reformed this law in 1998, the wording was changed to "each pupil in attendance at a community, foundation or voluntary school shall on each school day take part in an act of collective worship of a wholly or mainly broadly Christian character" After objections by the National Muslim Education Council, the wording was changed to "the worship of the one supreme God" (New Community). Where does this leave Lucretius? Did these regulations bar an anti-religious text from the schools? It seems not. Both Oxford and Cambridge Universities offer courses on Lucretius in either their Classics or Philosophy departments. However, the high-school textbook series written in England, do not include any text by Lucretius. The Oxford series includes extracts from Caesar, Cicero, Catullus, Vergil, Livy, and Ovid, but no Lucretius. The Cambridge series does not have Lucretius in its main series, but does publish a classical anthology to potentially accompany or follow its basic textbook which includes Catullus, Horace, Martial, Ovid, Petronius, Seneca, Vergil, and Lucretius. The differences between the series include Martial, Petronius, and Lucretius who are definitely farther down on the controversy spectrum. Judging by these facts, it seems that while British universities still teach Lucretius and his ideas, those ideas are kept out of the classroom of younger children.

What about American textbook series? The newest and “most modern” series, *Latin for the New Millennium* includes Lucretius only as reference in Petrarch’s “Ode to Vergil.” The book says, “the philosophical poet defends the beliefs of Epicureanism in six books of hexameter. The only extant biographical reference... suggests that Lucretius was driven mad by a love potion, wrote his poetry between fits of insanity, and committed suicide. Note that Jerome’s description might be negatively influenced by the early Christian rejection of Epicurean thought” (Osburn, 2012). A few brief facts are present, but not one line of his writing. The second volume of the textbook “Latin for Americans” has one adapted reading of Lucretius which they call “Knowledge Produces a Tranquil Mind” (Henderson). The second book of the *Lingua Latina* series includes what they call “a wide range of classical Latin literature” which to them means Vergil, Livy, Ovid, Aulus Gellius, Nepos, Sallust, Cicero, Horace but no Lucretius. The *Ecce Romani* series, one of the most popular series in America, makes no mention of Lucretius in any of the three volumes. Considering all this evidence, we see that Lucretius barely appears in texts geared towards American high school students.

Finally, Wheelock’s *Latin*, a text mainly intended for use at the college level, does include several fragments from Lucretius’ writing. The book includes a fairly thorough and accurate introduction:

Lucretius (Titus Lucretius Carus, ca. 98-55 BC): author of *De Rerum Natura*, a powerful didactic poem on happiness achieved through the Epicurean philosophy. This philosophy was based on pleasure, or rather the absence of pain and suffering, and was buttressed by an atomic theory which made the universe a realm of natural, not divine, law and thus eliminated fear of the gods and the tyranny of religion, which Lucretius believed had shattered men’s happiness” (LaFleur, 320)

This is an objective and clear description of Lucretius' work. The book does not hide any of the facts, and does not hide behind a Christian perspective. In addition, Wheelock includes several fragments of the DRN throughout, since the book's *modus operandi* is to teach grammatical concepts using fragments of real Latin. Of the many sentences chosen from the entire Latin corpus, seven are quotes from Lucretius. The author does not seem to have tried to avoid quotes which might disagree with Christian dogma. For example, in the chapter teaching interrogative pronouns, one of the sentences is *Quae est natura animi? Est mortalis*—a line which would have made the early Christian fathers very irate. This textbook clearly gives students of Latin access to the various writings of Latin authors, no matter the content.

Regardless of what appears in Latin textbooks, it is impossible to know what various teachers around the world choose to teach their students. Perhaps those with Lucretius in their textbooks avoid him, and some might add him to their curriculum even if he does not appear in a textbook. At one school in Florida that uses *Ecce Romani*, the advanced class reads many authors in translation including Sappho, Callimachus, and Lucretius (Correlation). At an Episcopal preparatory school in Massachusetts, they offer a Latin 4 class titled "Roman Philosophy and Religion" which includes Cicero, Seneca, Lucretius, Ovid, Marcus Aurelius, and St. Augustine and fulfills the department's religion requirement. Clearly, there are students in American high schools reading Lucretius, even if only in translation.

What about at the college level? It is very easy to find college courses including or focusing on Lucretius, though they are often in translation and not the original. One professor at Middlebury College writes,

“Lucretius is never easy reading. One has to know a lot of Latin, also a lot of ancient science and be prepared to spend much time wrestling with many recalcitrant passages. But in the deserted territory of Roman philosophical questing, Lucretius stands alone, unique and totally admirable. The more you know of this strange and solitary figure, the more you respect him” (Harris).

Later, in an introduction to buying Latin textbooks, he says “For any major Latin author, any old text is good enough, and any Vergil will be virtually letter perfect. Lucretius’ text has problems but not enough to bother a literary reader” (Harris). This professor reflects a commonly held view that Lucretius is hard to read, but worth it, if only because there are so few Latin philosophers. It is hard to discern whether or not this is praise. His explanation for why Lucretius is hard may rest on the fact that a good textbook is challenging to find. This is true—Bolchazy-Carducci, the leading publisher of classical readers and texts, sells only one book dedicated to Lucretius. It is not necessary to compare that to the number of Vergil readers they sell—it goes without saying. Though Vergil was influenced by Lucretius and their format is the same, the *Aeneid* is endlessly more popular than the *De Rerum Natura*.

The popularity of Vergil over Lucretius is almost completely due to the content of the works and how the *Aeneid* was perceived politically as well as religiously. Gill writes, “Vergil produces a "prophecy" poem about the birth of Augustus as a savior of the world, bringing peace and law. Since Vergil lived so close to the birth of Christ, the Christians of medieval Europe would interpret the poem as a prophecy about the birth of Christ and give Vergil, a pagan, a kind of honorary status as a Christian poet” (Gill). This explains why the poem was so popular in ancient times—its glorification of Augustus and Rome would certainly have made it the book of choice at the time. The way it was interpreted to foretell the coming of Jesus explains why it was read among Christians, despite its constant “pagan” references.

There is no question about the *Aeneid* being a text worthy of study, but if that text is so loved, the *De Rerum Natura* should be close behind considering its similarity in style and equally impressive imagery.

In American education, the College Board, which determines the content of advanced placement tests, holds huge sway over school curricula. Since schools are rated based on their students' success on those exams, many public schools seek to do everything possible to encourage student participation and performance in those tests. The advanced placement Latin test has always involved Vergil. Formerly it contained Cicero, Horace, Catullus, and Ovid, and now it also includes Caesar. Lucretius was never given any weight in the syllabus. Barbara Boyd, who served on the AP Latin committee for many years and wrote the most essential of AP Vergil textbooks, wrote about how much influence the AP committee has in the canonization of Latin literature (Boyd). She realizes that the College Board's tests "totally control what students read." She says that she made her decisions in what sections of the *Aeneid* to include in part by thinking of who influenced Vergil. When Boyd discusses Lucretius' influence on Vergil, she says that she was thinking of the idea of the "honey on the cup" for young students and thus chose episodes with a strong narrative thread, vivid action, and extensive character development because those parts were most likely to appeal to students and make the effort of translation seem worthwhile (Boyd). All of those things she mentions, incidentally, are lacking in DRN. To be more specific, she writes that

"the connected episodes in book 7 involving Juno's arousal of Allecto, the Fury's subsequent possession of Amata and Turnus; the life and death of Silvia's stag; and the outbreak of war: this series of episodes offers the opportunity to view the natures and motives of numerous characters, both divine and human; to think

about the ancient articulation of psychological states in both men and women; to explore the relationship of nature to civilization; and to consider the value and necessity of war, a question of perennial usefulness but perhaps especially so now. In fact, I would suggest that this episode invites *in parvo* consideration of most if not all of the major contemporary approaches to the *Aeneid*, and so exhibits all the utility a Lucretius-minded teacher could want (Boyd).

The fact that Boyd kept Lucretius in mind while designing the Vergil syllabus is significant. In addition, the AP Latin handbook includes Lucretius' name among the authors whose work might be used for a sight reading passage on the exam. It seems safe to say that Lucretius, while not prominent, is more present in secondary education in America than in Britain.

Though Lucretius is clearly present in the minds of Classicists, one has to wonder whether anyone else has any experience reading Lucretius or Epicurean ideas. It is not uncommon for non-Classicalists to have heard of Vergil, Caesar, and maybe Cicero—but what about Lucretius? Currently in education there is a movement for all public schools to focus on the “Common Core” which boasts elevated standards meant to challenge students and “build knowledge, gain insights, explore possibilities, and broaden their perspective” (Common). Does that not sound like exactly what a student might gain from *De Rerum Natura*? Looking deeper into the policy, we find that “because teachers need to decide on the appropriate curriculum for their students” that they “intentionally do not offer a reading list” (Common). The Maryland department of education goes a little bit deeper into its standards for reading literature to say students should be able to

“determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh,

engaging, or beautiful (include Shakespeare as well as other authors” (Maryland).

Anyone who has taken a Latin course knows that this is precisely what goes on, and Lucretius is a particularly rich topic for such discussion. Are writers of educational law aware of Vergil or Lucretius? It seems that the trend which began early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to streamline science above all else has gone even further. There are no recommendations either at the national or state level as to specific texts which might be especially fruitful for teachers to use to meet these goals. Since current lawmakers went to school after Latin ceased to be a requirement, it is unlikely any of them would know who Lucretius is. If one examines which books are quoted by politicians in speeches, the one that overwhelmingly takes the lead is the Christian bible. Considering how politicized Christianity is in our country’s government, it is probably for the best that they remain ignorant of Lucretius’ ideas lest he is banned from schools altogether.

To return to Lucretius’ condemnation of religion in book 1 of the DRN, we can see how applicable it is to our modern society. In a time when terrorism is feared not from pirates as in Lucretius’ time, but from people following a different religion, citizens seek a pride in their own religion. Though our public schools do not require a monotheistic worship, as in Britain, there is an implicit feeling that Christian ideas should be propagated and others subjugated. There is no way to be sure whether Lucretius is left out of textbooks in favor of Vergil or Ovid for political reasons, but I found no source arguing that his language was not worth careful study. As Classics hangs onto life in this country, Lucretius does have his small place in the curriculum.

## Chapter 2: Lucretius: the Roman Wonderer

### Introduction

Do you ever question the meaning of your life? Do you ever wonder how you got here and what will happen after you die? Most of us, like the Romans did before, go through our day focusing on little troubles and pleasures and rarely stopping to wonder how best to lead our lives. The Roman philosopher-poet Lucretius, however, dedicated himself to writing an epic poem with a deeper look into how life should be lived. He questioned ideas that were accepted as truth by most: can there be an afterlife? Are the gods really that involved in our lives? What is the world made of and how did people come to be the way they are?

We think of Romans as the amazing military conquerors of Britain and North Africa, as the engineers who built the Colosseum, and the influential writers of the Twelve Tables. But we are less likely to think of them as philosophical poets who seek the right path in life by examining a ship in the distance or a calf with its mother. Titus Lucretius Carus was just such a poet—creating his epic *De Rerum Natura* about the teachings of the Greek philosopher, Epicurus.

Epicureanism provides a scientific view of the world in which there are tiny particles called *atoms* which combine in various ways to create the matter of our world. Sound familiar? While the ancient atomists, as we call them, did not quite understand the intricacies of physics, their ideas were amazingly advanced for the time. From his atomic theory, Epicurus continued his thoughts about matter and how we perceive or sense it. He determined that a human life is all about those sensations—and that avoiding bad ones and appreciating good ones would make that life a happy one.

The best way to do this was a calm approach to pleasure, lest one overdo it and end up experiencing pain. But how can pleasure lead to pain? For example, food can be a pleasure but overeating can certainly cause us pain. Focusing too much on romantic pursuits might lead one to heartbreak or excessive devotion to a woman. Lucretius provides us with several examples of how the pursuit of excessive pleasure may lead to pain or unpleasantness. Thus Epicureans glorify a thoughtful examination of life and a moderated approach to everything.

Lucretius' goal was to spread this philosophy to Romans in a pleasing way. He made this philosophy his own and used his poetic abilities to spread it to Romans. Lucretius used the same epic style and meter as Vergil in his famous *Aeneid* and filled the text with metaphors and images that make Epicurus' philosophy like a story. He referred to his own poetry as the “honey on the rim of the cup” that makes the “medicine” inside sweet. This kind of analogy, frequent in the *De Rerum Natura*, is his most powerful strategy for helping his audience visualize the explanations for complex ideas.

As you read Lucretius, remember to wonder. Let Lucretius inspire you to think about things that you've taken for granted. Try to visualize the images he creates to fully understand the ideas he conveys. Ponder how these ideas would have sounded to an ancient Roman or Greek. Consider your own beliefs about how the world works all around you. Wonder

### Selected Passages

In this Lucretius unit, only four passages are selected. While all six books of the *De Rerum Natura* are necessary to truly appreciate the details of the philosophy, this unit has a particular goal in mind: to inspire the modern student to wonder about the world around him or her as Lucretius wondered about his with no tools beyond his own mind.

#### Passage 1: Book 2, lines 991-1047

This passage describes how the earth's matter came into being and the tiny atoms that make that matter up. Lucretius tries to impress upon his audience that all matter started with atoms and after something dies, these atoms go on to create other matter. According to Lucretius, the same atoms create different compounds which look to our eye like brand new creatures or objects. This is something we are taught in schools and feels irrefutable, but was by no means part of the educated Roman boy's curriculum.

#### Passage 2: Book 3, lines 912-979

Lucretius tackles the fear of death in this passage—something all humans feels whether they are ancient Roman philosophers or modern Americans. He seeks to make his audience unafraid of the underworld by comparing being dead with being asleep, or thinking about the world before you existed. Are you afraid or unhappy when you're sleeping? Were you afraid before you existed on this earth? The speaker of the poem changes from Lucretius to Nature herself—personified and angry with someone who is afraid to die.

#### Passage 3: Book 5, lines 855-923

Here Lucretius describes how, during the creation the earth, various creatures came into being. He describes how some survived due to superior characteristics, whereas others simply because they were domesticated by humans. Then, Lucretius seeks to change this belief in mythological stories by explaining why creatures like a Centaur could not have ever existed. He does this by appealing to human reason, and asking his audience to imagine reality in an analytical way.

#### Passage 4: Book 5, lines 1194-1240

This last passage is a very powerful one, in which Lucretius proclaims that it is foolish to fear gods. He believes they exist in some far off plane and do not meddle in the affairs of the world. Lucretius describes different people and the different causes of their fear of divinity, but berates them all the same. He wants all of his readers to be able to live their lives without fear of what might happen after.

It is my hope that each of these passages will impress you with the depth of thought achieved by such an ancient civilization. More importantly, I hope it will make you wonder about the world around you and be as amazed as Lucretius was.



### **Chapter 3: Commentary**

*Passage 1: Book 2, lines 991-1047*

Denique caelesti sumus omnes semine oriundi;	991
omnibus ille idem pater est, unde alma liquentes	
umoris guttas mater cum terra recepit,	
feta parit nitidas fruges arbustaque laeta	
et genus humanum, parit omnia saecula ferarum,	995

*Almus* –a –um – nourishing, nurturing  
*Arbustum, abusti* (n) – (plural) trees, orchards  
*Caelestis, caeleste* (adj) – coming from heaven, celestial  
*Denique* (adv) –indeed, and then  
*Fera, ferae* (f) – wild beast or animal  
*Fetus* –a –um – fertile, fruitful  
*Frux, frugis* (f) – (plural) crops  
*Gutta, guttae* (f) – drop  
*Idem, eadem, idem* – same, the same  
*Laetus* –a –um – fertile, productive (origin of the later “happy” meaning)  
*Liquens, liquentis* (adj) – liquid, flowing  
*Nitidus* –a –um – bright, shining, gleaming  
*Oriundus* –a –um (+abl) – descended, originating from  
*Pario, parere, peperit, partus* – give birth to, produce, create  
*Semen, seminis* (n) – seed  
*Umor, umoris* (m) – moisture, liquid  
*Unde* (adv) – from where, whence

991. *denique* – and then, indeed  
 991. *caelesti semine* – ablative of origin with *oriundi*  
 992. *omnibus* – dative of possession  
 992-3. *alma mater* – how do we use this term in modern English?  
 993. *terra* – appositive to *alma mater*  
 993. *cum* – temporal *cum* clause  
 994. *feta* – still describing the *alma mater*, implying that she is fertile as a result of all the rain

Leading up to this section, Lucretius has been describing some elements of his atomic theory. Here, he begins to discuss how different parts of our world are related in creating life. In focusing on the water, Lucretius hints at a mythological metaphor wherein the sky *pater* sends his *semen* down to the earth *mater* in the form of water, after which she is *feta*. What were the names of the Greek personifications of father sky and mother earth? Why might Lucretius reference them?

Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* Book 2, lines 996-1003

<p>pabula cum praebet, quibus omnes corpora pascunt  et dulcem ducunt vitam prolemque propagant;  quapropter merito maternum nomen adepta est.  cedit item retro, de terra quod fuit ante,  in terras, et quod missumst ex aetheris orīs,  id rursus caeli rellatum templa receptant.  nec sic interimit mors res ut materiai  corpora conficiat, sed coetum dissipat ollīs.</p>	<p>996     1000  1003</p>
<p><i>Adipiscor, adipisci, adeptus sum</i> – obtain, arrive at  <i>Aether, aetheris</i> (n) – sky, upper air  <i>Ante</i> (ante) – before, previously  <i>Cedo, cedere, cessi, cessus</i> – go, come  <i>Coetus, coetūs</i> (m) – union, combination  <i>Conficio, conficere, confeci, confectus</i> – consume, collect  <i>Dissipo, dissipare, dissipavi, dissipatus</i> – scatter, disperse, destroy  <i>Interimo, interimere, interemi, interemptus</i> – destroy  <i>Item</i> (adv) – likewise, besides, also  <i>Merito</i> (adv) – deservedly, rightly  <i>Ora, orae</i> (f) – outside edge, border, edge  <i>Pabulum, pabuli</i> (n) – forage, food  <i>Pasco, pascere, pavi, pastus</i> – feed, feed on, graze  <i>Praebeo, praebere, praebui, praebitus</i> – show, put forward, offer  <i>Proles, prolis</i> (f) – offspring, descendant  <i>Propago, progare, propagavi, propagatus</i> – to produce, propagate  <i>Quapropter</i> (adv) – therefore, because of which  <i>Recepto, receptare</i> – take back, receive  <i>Refero, referre, retuli, rel(l)atus</i> – bring back  <i>Retro</i> (adv) – back  <i>Rursus</i> (adv) – back again</p>	
<p>996. <i>cum</i> – temporal <i>cum</i> clause  996. <i>quibus</i> – ablative of means with <i>pascunt</i>; antecedent is <i>pabula</i>  998. <i>adepta est</i> – subject is still <i>terra</i> from line 993  999. <i>de terra quod fuit ante</i> – rel. clause as subj. of <i>cedit</i>; antecedent is <i>id</i> (1001)  999. <i>retro, ante</i> – <i>retro</i> is subsequent to <i>ante</i>, but placed first to emphasize the cycle of atoms being reused as different matter making up the earth  1000. <i>missumst</i> = <i>missum est</i>  1001. <i>caeli</i> – genitive of possession with <i>templa</i>  1002-3. <i>materiai corpora</i> – atoms; literally “bodies of matter”  1003. <i>ollīs</i> = <i>illīs</i> (archaic Latin form), dative of possession</p> <p>How does this section relate to the modern understanding of the water cycle? What about the precept that “matter is neither created nor destroyed,” discovered by the French chemist Lavoisier in the 19<sup>th</sup> century?  Why does Lucretius continue the Mother Earth / Father Sky metaphor?</p>	

inde aliis aliud coniungit et efficit omnes	
res ita convertant formas mutantque colores	1005
et capiant sensūs et puncto tempore reddant,	
ut noscas referre eadem primordia rerum	
cum quibus et quali positurā contineantur	
et quos inter se dent motus accipiantque,	1009

*Alius...alius* – one...another  
*Coniungo, coniungere, coniunxi, coniunctus* – connect, join, unite  
*Contineo, continēre, continui, contentus* – fasten, hold together  
*Converto, convertere, converti, conversus* – change, alter, transform  
*Inde* (adv) – from there, then  
*Motus, motūs* (m) – motion  
*Muto, mutare, mutavi, mutatus* – shift, change  
*Nosco, noscere, novi, notus* – learn  
*Positura, positurae* (f) – position, arrangement  
*Primordium, primordii* (n) – first beginning  
*Qualis, quale* (adj) – what kind, what sort  
*Reddo, reddere, reddidi, redditus* – return, give back  
*Refero, referre, retuli, relatus* – matter  
*Sensus, sensūs* (m) – feeling, sense

1004. *coniungit, efficit* – subject is still *mors* (line 1002)  
 1004-6. [*ut*] *omnes...reddant* – substantive result clause after *efficit*  
 1006. *puncto tempore* – “in a moment,” (literally: *in a pricked in time*)  
 1007. *referre* – verb of indirect statement, “that it matters”  
 1007. *eadem primordia* – nom. pl. subject of following indirect questions  
 1007. *ut* --  
 1008. *cum quibus* – referring to other atoms  
 1009. *quos motūs* – direct object of *dent* and *accipiant*

This section describes what would call **molecules**—how slightly different combination of atoms create very different elements of matter.

How do you think Lucretius was able to come to such conclusions without experiments or data? What is dangerous about this practice?

<p>neve putes aeterna penes residere potesse corpora prima quod in summīs fluitare videmus rebus et interdum nasci subitoque perire. quin etiam refert nostris in versibus ipsis cum quibus et quali sint ordine quaeque locata;</p>	<p>1010        1014</p>
<p><i>Aeternus</i> –a –um – eternal, everlasting <i>Fluito, fluitare, fluitavi, fluitatus</i> – float <i>Interdum</i> (adv) – sometimes, now and then <i>Loquor, loqui, locutus sum</i> – speak, utter <i>Nascor, nasci, natus sum</i> – be born, rise <i>Neve</i> (conj) – and not, nor <i>penes</i> (prep +acc) – beonging to, in the power of <i>Pereo, perire, perivi, peritus</i> – die, be ruined <i>Quin</i> (adv) – in fact, but <i>Quique, quaeque, quodque</i> – each <i>Resideo, residēre, resedi, resessus</i> – remain, be left over <i>Vesus, versūs</i> (m) – verse, line</p>	
<p>1010. <i>penes aeterna</i> – “in the power of eternal atoms” 1010. <i>potesse</i> = <i>posse</i> 1011. <i>corpora prima</i> – “first impression”, accusative subject of <i>potesse</i> 1013. <i>refert</i> – impersonal, “it matters” 1013. <i>nostrīs in versibus ipsīs</i> – the two adjectives emphasize that Lucretius is talking about these very words which he is writing 1014. This indirect question is meant to echo line 1008 and thereby make Lucretius’ comparison stronger 1014. <i>locata sint</i> – remember, poetry would often have been read aloud and listened to by an audience rather than read silently</p> <p>Lucretius’ convoluted indirect statement in 1010-12 states that atoms are more complex than what we can see. He then transitions into a metaphor to make these <i>corpora</i> less abstract. How do you think letters can be compared to atoms?</p>	

namque eadem caelum mare terras flumina solem 1015  
significant, eadem fruges arbusta animantes;  
si non omnia sunt, at multo maxima pars est  
consimilis; verum positurā discrepitant res.

*Animans, animantis* (m/f) – living being, animal

*Arbustum, arbusti* (n) – grove, orchard

*Consimilis, consimile* (adj) – like, very similar

*Discrepito, discrepitare* – be different, differ

*Frux, frugis* (f) – (plural) crops

*Idem, eadem, idem* – the same

*Mare, maris* (n) – sea

*Multo* (adv) – very, by much

*Positura, positurae* (f) – position

*Significo, significare, significavi, significatus* – signify, show, indicate

*Sol, solis* (m) – sun

*Verum* (adv) – but

1015. asyndeton emphasizes how connected all earth's elements truly are

1015-16. *eadem* – referring to the atoms, subject of *significant*

1017. *omnia* – “all alike;” looking forward to *consimilis* (1018)

Was your prediction of how Lucretius would compare letters to atoms correct?

Is his comparison effective?

Does he draw attention to his own work out of narcissism?

sic ipsīs in rebus item iam materiai	1019
concursum motus ordo positura figurae	1021
cum permutantur, mutari res quoque debent.	
Nunc animum nobis adhibe veram ad rationem.	

*Adhibeo, adhibēre, adhibui, adhibitus* – apply, direct  
*Concursum, concursus* (m) – meeting, collision  
*Figura, figurae* (f) – shape, form  
*Item* (adv) – likewise, also  
*Ordo, ordinis* (m) – order, succession  
*Permuto, permutare, permutavi, permutatus* – change completely  
*Positura, positurae* (f) – position  
*Ratio, rationis* (f) – reason, philosophy  
*Verus –a –um* -- true, real

1019. *sic, item, iam* – adverbs serve to emphasize how close he thinks his comparison between atoms and letters is

1019. *materiai* = *materiae*, objective genitive with nouns in 1021

1020. This line is omitted by editors

1021. Asyndeton conveys that truly all the qualities of atoms are changed

1022. *res* – the things or matter made up of atoms

1023. *nobis* – pointing to Lucretius and Epicurus or just poetic plural?

1023. *veram ad rationem* – a phrase repeated from earlier, pointing to Epicureanism

Line 1023 acts as a sort of transition between topics. Do you think Lucretius has convinced you yet, or do you need more proof?

What about the Roman man from the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC?

nam tibi vehementer nova res molitur ad auris  
 accidere et nova se species ostendere rerum. 1025  
 sed neque tam facilis res ulla est, quin ea primum  
 difficilis magis ad credendum constet, itemque  
 nil adeo magnum neque tam mirabile quicquam,  
 quod non paulatim minuant mirarier omnes, 1029

*Accido, accidere, accidi* – to strike, occur  
*Adeo* (adv) – to such a degree, thus far  
*Auris, auris* (f) – ear  
*Constat* – it is agreed  
*Item* (adv) – likewise, besides  
*Minuo, minuere, minui, minutus* – lessen, diminish  
*Miror, mirari, miratus sum* – wonder at, be amazed about  
*Molior, moliri, molitus* – strive, struggle, try  
*Ostendo, ostendere, ostendi, ostensus* – show, reveal  
*Paulatim* (adv) – little by little, gradually  
*Primum* (adv) – at first  
*Quicquam* (pronoun) – anything, anything whatsoever  
*Quin* (conj) – but that, except that  
*Species, speciei* (f) – sight, appearance  
*Tam* (adv) – so (much)  
*Ullus -a -um* – any  
*Vehementer* (adv) – exceedingly, very much

1024. *vehementer* = *vehementer* (shortened due to meter)  
 1025. The repetition of *nova* shows that Lucretius understands his audience's confusion at these strange concepts  
 1027. *ad credendum* – *ad* + gerund expresses purpose  
 1028. *nil* = *nihil*  
 1028. supply *est* for *nil* and *quicquam*  
 1029. *mirarier* = *mirari*, (archaic Latin ending)  
 1029. *omnes* – supply *homines*

Do you agree that new things take a while for people to get used to? Can you think of a time when a new idea wasn't scary?

But on the other hand, how many new ideas have there been that, after a while of trying, you were unable to understand? Do you agree with Lucretius about new ideas?

principio caeli clarum purumque colorem	1030
quaeque in se cohibet, palantia sidera passim,	
lunamque et solis praeclara luce nitorem;	
omnia quae nunc si primum mortalibus essent	
ex improvise si sint obiecta repente,	
quid magis hīs rebus poterat mirabile dici,	1035
aut minus ante quod auderent fore credere gentes?	

*Audeo, audēre, ausus* – dare, have courage  
*Cohibeo, cohibēre, cohibui, cohibitus* -- contain  
*Nitor, nitoris* (m) – brilliance, splendor, brightness  
*Obicio, obicere, ociece, obiectus* – put before, present  
*Palor, palari, palatus sum* – wander, scatter  
*Passim* (adv) – here and there, everywhere  
*Praeclarus -a -um* – very clear, splendid, bright  
*Principio* (adv) – first, to begin  
*Repente* (adv) – suddenly, unexpectedly  
*Sidus, sideris* (n) – star, constellation

1030-1032. A list of wondrous things in the accusative; referred to by the *omnia quae* (1033)

1031. *quae* – antecedent is *sidera* (1031)

1031. *cohibet* – subject is *caeli*

1033. *essent* – impf. subjunc. in present contrary-to-fact condition: “were to be”

1034. *ex improvise* – without warning, unexpectedly

1034. *ex improvise* and *repente* are synonymous, to emphasize how surprised mankind would be if such things appeared suddenly. Is Epicureanism as shocking a revelation?

1035. *magis mirabile* – a kind of predicate nominative to *quid*

1035. *hīs rebus* – ablative of comparison with *magis mirabile*

1036. reorder line: *quod [thing] gentes ante auderent minus credere fore*

1036. *fore* = *futurum esse*

Can you imagine something as suprising as seeing the sun and stars for the first time?

Lucretius believes Epicureanism should be as shocking to the mind as this sight would be to the eyes. Do you find this analogy convincing? Why or why not?

nil, ut opinor: ita haec species miranda fuisset.  
quam tibi iam nemo fessus satiate videndi,  
susplicere in caeli dignatur lucida templa.

1039

*Dignor, dignari, dignatus sum* + infin. – codescend, deign  
*Fessus –a –um* – tired, weary  
*Lucidus –a –um* – bright, shining  
*Mirandus –a –um* – wonderful, amazing, marvelous  
*Opinor, opinari, opinatus sum* – suppose, think  
*Quam* (adv) – how  
*Satias, satiatis* (f) – sufficiency, abundance, satiety  
*Species, speciei* (f) – appearance, spectacle  
*Suspicio, suspicere, suspexi, suspectus* – look up to/at  
*Templum, templi* (n) – (here) region, zone

1037. This line answers the question posed previously, of what would humans expected to see in the sky before the sun, moon, and stars.

1037. *fuisset* – conclusion of the condition posed in 1023 in the past since the sentence refers to a hypothetical past situation

1038. *videndi* – gerund

Lucretius says that no one doubts what they see above, just as eventually no one will doubt the philosophy he will prove true.

Describe your image of *in caeli lucida templa*

Desine quapropter novitate exterritus ipsā                      1040  
exspuere ex animo rationem, sed magis acri  
iudicio perpende et, si tibi vera videntur,  
dede manus, aut, si falsum est, accingere contra.

*Accingo, accingere, accinxi, accinctus* – provide, prepare, arm yourself  
*Contra* (adv) – in opposition, otherwise  
*Dedo, dedere, dedidi, deditus* – give up, surrender  
*Desino, desinere, desivi, desitus* – stop, desist, cease  
*Exspuo, exspuere, exspui, exspuitus* – spit out  
*Exterritus –a –um* -- scared, terrified  
*Iudicium, iudicii* (n) – judgement  
*Novitas, novitatis* (f) – newness, strangeness  
*Perpendo, perpendere, perpendi, perpensus* – examine closely, weigh carefully  
*Quapropter* (adv) – for what, why

1042. *videntur* – the subject is the understood things Lucretius is discussing  
1043. *dedere manūs* – (literally: to throw up one’s hands); “surrender”  
1044. *est* – the subject changed to singular, but still refers to Lucretius’ argument

Lucretius weighs this section heavily with imperative verbs. Does this feel impassioned or rude?

Why might Lucretius be frustrated?

quaerit enim rationem animus, cum summa loci sit  
infinita foris haec extra moenia mundi, 1045  
quid sit ibi porro, quo prospicere usque velit mens  
atque animi iactus liber quo pervolet ipse.

*Animus, animi* (m) – mind, intelligence  
*Extra* (prep + acc) – outside, beyond  
*Foris* (adv) – outside  
*Iactus, iactūs* (m) – throwing, hurling  
*Liber, libera, liberum* – free, unrestrained  
*Moenia, moenium* (nt, plural) – walls, fortifications  
*Mundus, mundi* (m) – world, universe  
*Pervolo, pervolare, pervolavi, pervolatus* – fly through  
*Porro* (adv) – further, beyond  
*Quaero, quaerere, quaesivi, quaesitus* – search for, seek, strive for  
*Ratio, rationis* (f) – reason, explanation  
*Summa, summae* (f) – essence, totality, sum

1044-5. *cum...mundi* – causal *cum* clause  
1044. *summa loci* – “totality of space”  
1046. *quid sit ibi porro* – indirect question governed by *rationem* (1044)  
1046. *quo usque* – “as far as”  
1046. *velit* – pres. subjunc. of *volo, velle*  
1046. *velit, pervolet* – subjunctive by attraction, translate as indicative  
1047. *quo* – delayed from beginning of line

It is intimidating to think about the whole universe. Do you wonder about how far it goes, what’s out there, or how the world was created?

You have more information than the Romans did, but is it ever enough?

What philosophy do you have to guide your thinking?

Passage 2: Book 3, lines 912-979

Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* Book 3, lines 912-915

Hōc etiam faciunt ubi discubūere tenentque  
pocula saepe homines et inumbrant ora coronīs,  
ex animo ut dicant, “Brevis hīc est fructus homullīs;  
iam fuerit neque post umquam revocare licebit.” 915

*Corona, coronae* (f) – garland, wreath  
*Discumbo, discumbere, discubui, discubiturus* – recline, lie down (at the table)  
*Fructus, fructūs* (m) – enjoyment, pleasure  
*Hīc* (adv) – here  
*Homullus, homulli* (m) – little man, poor little person  
*Inumbro, inumbrare, inumbravi, inumbratus* – cover, shade  
*Licet, licēre, licuit, licitus* – it is permitted, one may  
*Os, oris* (n) – face  
*Poculum, poculi* (n) – cup, drink  
*Post* (adv) – afterwards, after  
*Revoco, revocare, revocavi, revocatus* – call back, revive  
*Umquam* (adv) – ever, at any time

912. *hōc* – this will be explained by the *ut dicant* (914)  
912. *faciunt* – subject is *homines* (913)  
912. *discubere* = *discubuerunt*  
914. *ex animo* – heartily, sincerely  
914. *ut dicant* – substantive noun clause; “that they would say...”  
914. *fructus* – referring to the enjoyment of life, also the subject of *fuerit* (915)  
915. *revocare* – the direct object is understood to be *fructus*

Life is short! When do men think about most, according to Lucretius?

When might modern people think about it?

Tamquam in morte mali cum primīs hōc sit eorum,  
quod sitis exurat miseros atque arida torrat,  
aut aliae cuius desiderium insideat rei.  
Nec sibi enim quisquam tum se vitamque requiret,  
cum pariter mens et corpus sopita quiescunt. 920

*Aridus-a-um* – dry

*Cum...tum* – when...then

*Desiderium, desiderii* (n) – desire, want

*Exuro, exuere, exussi, exustus* – parch, dry up

*Insideo, insidēre, insidi, insessus* (+ dative)– trouble, occupy

*Pariter* (adv) – equally, at the same time

*Quiesco, quiescere, quievi, quietus* –sleep, be at rest, rest

*Quisquam, quicquam* – anyone, anything

*Requiro, requirere, requisivi, requisitus* – seek, miss, pine for

*Sitis, sitis* (f) – thirst

*Sopitus -a -um* – lulled to sleep, asleep

*Tamquam* (adv) – just as, as if

*Torreo, torrēre, torrui, tostus* – scorch, burn

916. *sit* – subjunctive with *tamquam*

916. *mali* – partitive genitive with *hoc*; “by this evil”

916. *cum primīs* – “especially,” “the greatest”

916. *eorum* – objective genitive with *morte*, referring to the drinkers

917. *quod* – antecedent is *hoc*; relative clause of characteristic

918. *aliae* – atypical genitive feminine singular, modifying *rei*

918. *cuius* = *alicuius*, “any”

919. *sibi* – redundant in translation, considering *se* as one of the direct objects, but emphasizes each reader as an individual

What is it like when you're sleeping?

How aware are you?

What do you think about?

Nam licet aeternum per nos sic esse soporem,  
nec desiderium nostri nos adfcit ullum.  
Et tamen haudquaquam nostros tunc illa per artūs  
longe ab sensiferīs primordia motibus errant,  
cum correptus homo ex somno se colligit ipse. 925

*Afficio, afficere, affeci, affectus* – cause, influence  
*Artus, artūs (m)* – limb  
*Colligo, colligere, collegi, collectus* – gather together, recover, pick up  
*Desiderium, desiderii (n)* – (+genitive) desire, want  
*Haudquamquam (adv)* – by no means, not at all  
*Licet, licēre, licuit, licitus* – it is permitted, one may  
*Longe (adv)* – far, a long way  
*Sensifer, sensifera, sensiferum* – sentient, sense-bearing  
*Sopor, soporis (m)* – deep sleep  
*Tunc (adv)* – then, at that time  
*Ullus -a -um* – any, any at all

921. *per nos* – with *licet*, “by us”  
922. *desiderium nostri* – “desire for consciousness” (literally, “a desire of ourselves”)  
922. *adfcit = afficit*  
923-4. *illa primordia* – “those atoms,” that is, the ones in deep sleep  
924. *longe ab sensiferīs primordia motibus errant* – this refers to a specific Epicurean believe about atoms “wandering” away from a person’s body while he or she is sleeping  
925. *corripio, corripere, corripui, correptus* – seize, snatch

We know now that none of our atoms wander away when we sleep. How well can you explain what happens to a slumbering human body?

multo igitur mortem minus ad nos esse putandumst,  
si minus esse potest quam quod nihil esse videmus;  
maior enim turba et disiectus materiai  
consequitur leto nec quisquam expergitus extat,  
frigida quem semel est vitae pausa secuta. 930

*Consequor, consequi, consecutus sum* – follow, ensue, happen subsequently  
*Disiectus, disiectus* (m) – scattering  
*Expergo, expergere, expergi, expersus* – rouse, awaken  
*Extor, extare, extiti* – stand up, exist  
*Frigidus-a-um* – cold, cool  
*Letum, leti* (n) – death  
*Pausa, pausa* (f) – pause, end  
*Puto, putare, putavi, putatus* – think, suppose  
*Quam* (conj) – than  
*Quisquam, quicquam* – anyone, anything  
*Semel* (adv) – once  
*Sequor, sequi, secutus sum* – follow, overtake  
*Turba, turbae* (f) – commotion, disturbance

926. *multo minus* – emphasizes the comparative degree of adverb  
926. *mortem* – acc. subject of indirect statement governed by *putandumst*  
926. *putandumst* = *putandum est*; impersonal subject “it”  
927. *potest* – impersonal, “there is able, there can”  
927. *quod* – refers to the earlier state of deep sleep  
928. *materiai* = *materiae*; “atoms”  
930. *quem* – antecedent is *quisquam* (929)  
930. *est...secuta* = *secuta est*

Do you believe that one can live or be resurrected after death?

Lucretius does not—what reason does he give for believing this to be impossible?

Denique si vocem rerum natura repente 931  
mittat et hōc alicui nostrum sic increpet ipsa:  
“Quid tibi tanto operest, mortalis, quod nimis aegrīs  
luctibus indulges? Quid mortem congemis ac fles?”

*Aeger, aegra, aegrum* – painful, sorrowful  
*Aliquis, aliquid* – anyone, anything  
*Congemo, congemere, congemui, congemitus* – bewail, lament  
*Denique* (adv) – finally  
*Fleo, flēre, flevi, fletus* – cry for, weep for  
*Increpo, increpare, increpui, increpitus* – rebuke, blame  
*Indulgeo, indulgēre, indulsi, indulturus* (+dat) – to indulge  
*Luctus, luctūs* (m) – grief, lamentation  
*Nimis* (adv) – exceedingly, very much  
*Repente* (adv) – suddenly, unexpectedly  
*Tanto opere* (adv) – to such a great degree, so very

931. *rerum natura...ipsa* – dramatic use of Lucretius’ subject of the poem as the grammatical subject of this sentence.  
931-2. *vocem mittat* – a dramatic version of *dicat*  
932. *hōc* – “in this way” referring to the quote which follows  
932. *alicui* – dative object of *increpet*  
932. *nostrum* – partitive genitive with *alicui*  
933. *Quid tibi tanto operest* = “What is so very troubling to you?”  
933. *quod* – “that”, functioning like the *ut* of a result clause  
934. *quid* – “why” this time

Why does Lucretius choose to have nature speak to the audience herself?

Is that more or less powerful than his own authorial voice?

Is she addressing the audience respectfully or critically?

“Nam si grata fuit tibi vita anteacta priorque 935  
et non omnia pertusum congesta quasi in vas  
commoda perfluxere atque ingrata interiere,  
cur non ut plenus vitae conviva recedis  
aequo animoque capis securam, stulte, quietem? 939

*Anteactus* –a –um – past, what has gone before  
*Commodum, commodi* (n) – advantage, benefit, pleasure  
*Congestus* –a –um – crowded together, piled up  
*Conviva, convivae* (M) – guest, table companion (at a banquet)  
*Ingratus* –a –um – ungrateful, thanksless  
*Intereo, interire, interii, interiturus* – perish, be destroyed  
*Perfluo, perfluere, perfluxi* – flow through, run  
*Pertusus* –a –um – perforated, leaky  
*Prior, prius* (adj) – previous, former  
*Recedo, recedere, recessi, recessurus* – withdraw, recede  
*Securus* –a –um – secure, untroubled  
*Vas, vasis* (n) – vessel, vase

935. *tibi* – dative with adjective *grata*  
937. *perfluxere* = *perfluxerunt*  
937. *interier* = *interierunt*  
938. *vitae* – genitive with adjective *plenus*  
939. *aequo animo* – “tranquil mind;” this phrase represents the goal of an Epicurean to have a peaceful and tranquil mind  
939. *stulte* – vocative, referring to audience  
939. *securam quietem* – the ultimate “untroubled quiet” is death

Do you think if a person has had a full and joyful life, he will feel satisfied upon death or long for more life?

Why does Lucretius choose nature to rebuke the man crying at his death?

Why is this conversation happening at a banquet?

“Sin ea quae fructus cumque es periēre profusa 940  
vitaque in offensast, cur amplius addere quaeris,  
rursum quod pereat male et ingratum occidat omne,  
non potius vitae finem facis atque laboris?”

*Amplius* (adv) – further, more, beyond

*Fruor, frui, fructus sum* – enjoy

*Occido, occidere, occidi, occisus* – fall, be ruined, end

*Offensa, offensae* (f) – displeasure, resentment

*Pereo, perire, perivi, peritus* – die, pass away

*Potius* (adv) – rather

*Profundo, profundere, profudi, profusus* – pour out, spill, squander

*Quaero, quaerere, quaesivi, quaesitus* – seek, ask

*Quicumque, quaecumque, quodcumque* – whoever, whatever

*Rursum* (adv) – again, in turn

*Sin* (conj) – but if, if on the contrary

940. *quae fructus cumque es* = tmesis/interlocking word order of entire relative clause. Treat as: *quaecumque fructus es*

940. *periēre* = *periverunt*

941. *offensast* = *offensā est*

942. *quod...omne* – relative clause of characteristic

943. *vitae, laboris* – objective genitives with *finem*

Based on this passage, how would Lucretius vote in a modern debate about euthanasia?

If you've read *the Aeneid*, think about how Aeneas would feel about this passage in *De Rerum Natura* during various moments throughout books 1, 2, and 6.

“Nam tibi praeterea quod machiner inveniamque,  
quod placeat, nil est: eadem sunt omnia semper. 945

Si tibi non annīs corpus iam marcet et artūs  
confecti languent, eadem tamen omnia restant,  
omnia si pergas vivendo vincere saecla,  
atque etiam potius, si numquam sis moriturus,” 949

*Artus, artūs* (m) – limb

*Conficio, conficere, confeci, confectus* – weaken, wear out, exhaust

*Idem, eadem, idem* – same, the very same

*Languedo, languēre* – be tired, wilt

*Machinor, machinari, machinatus sum* – invent, devise

*Marceo, marcēre* – be enfeebled, weak, faint

*Pergo, pergere, perrexi, perrectus* – proceed, continue, go on

*Potius* (adv) – more

*Praeterea* (adv) – besides, in addition

*Restat, restare, -----, restatus* – remain

*Saeclum, saeculi* (n) – age, generation

944. *quod machiner inveniamque* – relative clause with unstated antecedent *id*

945. *quod placeat* – relative clause of characteristic

946. *annīs* – not an expression of time. Rather, an ablative of cause or means

948. *vivendo* – ablative gerund

949. *moriturus sis* – future active periphrastic, subjunctive; “you should/would die”

How does line 947 echo line 945, and how does that strengthen Lucretius’ point?

Why do people seek immortality even though there will not be new “pleasures” to experience?

How have people’s reasons for living changed since Lucretius’ time? Are there truly new “pleasures” to be had in modern times? Is there more to live for?



“Aufer abhinc lacrimas, baratre, et compesce querelas.  
 Omnia perfunctus vitai praemia marces. 956  
 Sed quia semper aves quod abest, praesentia temnis,  
 imperfecta tibi elapsast ingrataque vita,  
 et nec opinanti mors ad caput adstitit ante  
 quam satur ac plenus possis discedere rerum. 960

*Abhinc* (adv) – from this place, from here  
*Adso, adstare, adstiti, adstatus* – stand at/by/near  
*Aufero, auferre, abstuli, ablatus* – carry/take away, withdraw  
*Aveo, avēre* – desire, wish for, long for  
*Baratrus, baratri* (m) – scoundrel, villain, dead man  
*Compesco, compesce, compescui* – stop, quench  
*Discedo, discedere, discessi, discessus* – depart, withdraw, go/march off  
*Elabor, elabi, elapsus sum* – slip away, pass away  
*Imperfectus –a –um* – unfinished, incomplete  
*Ingratus –a –um* – ungrateful, thankless  
*Lacrima, lacrimae* (f) – tear, (plural) weeping  
*Marceo, marcēre* – be enfeebled, weak, faint  
*Opinor, opinari, opinatus* – think, believe, suppose  
*Perfungor, perfungi, perfunctus sum* – thoroughly enjoy, experience  
*Praesens, (gen) praesentis* (adj) – present, at hand, existing  
*Querela, querelae* (f) – complaint, lament  
*Satur, satura, saturum* – well-fed, rich, sated  
*Temno, temnere* – scorn, despise

955. *aufer* – imperative singular. Nature addresses the sad, old man  
 956. *vitai = vitae*  
 957. *quod abest* – relative clause with unstated antecedent *id*  
 958. *tibi* – dative of separation  
 958. *elapsast = elapsa est*  
 959. *opinanti* – modifying *tibi*  
 959-60. *ante...quam = antequam*; tmesis and enjambment  
 960. *satur, plenus* remind the audience of the banquet setting

Nature angrily berrates a man unsatisfied about his impending death—what specifically makes him unhappy about death? How does Lucretius’ syntax emphasize Nature’s displeasure?

Why might Lucretius have chosen to use the word *rerum* in line 960?

“Nunc aliena tuā tamen aetate omnia mitte 961  
 aequo animoque, agedum, gnātīs concede! Necessest.”  
 Iure, ut opinor, agat, iure increpet inciletque.  
 Cedit enim rerum novitate extrusa vetustas  
 semper, et ex aliīs aliud reparare necessest. 965

*Aetas, aetatis* (f) – time, age  
*Agedum* (interjection) – come! Well!  
*Ago, agere, egi, actus* – act, deliver, conduct  
*Alienus –a –um* – unsuitable, inappropriate  
*Alius, alia, aliud...alius, alia, aliud* – one...another  
*Concedo, concedere, concessi, concessus* (+dat) – yield, allow  
*Extrudo, extrudere, extrusi, extrusus* – thrust out, expel, force out  
*Gnatus, gnati* (m) – son, child  
*Incilo, incilare, incilavi, incilatus* – blame, scold, abuse  
*Increpo, increpare, increpui, increpitus* – rebuke, blame  
*Ius, iuris* (n) – right, oath  
*Novitas, novitatis* (f) – newness,  
*Opinor, opinari, opinatus sum* – think, believe, suppose  
*Reparo, reparare, reparavi, reparatus* – renew, restore, revive  
*Vetustas, vetustatis* (f) – old age

961. *aequo animo* – another reference to the tranquil Epicurean mind  
 961. *necessest* = *necesse est*  
 962. *agat* – may be “deliver/plead her case,” *natura* is the subject  
 964. *rerum* – objective genitive with *novitate*  
 965. *semper* – enjambment emphasizes the eternal implications  
 965. *necessest* = *necesse est*, introduces indirect statement  
 965. *ex aliīs...necessest* – returns the audience to the idea of atoms being recycled when something dies into a new birth

Nature’s final argument urges the old man to stop complaining and die so that there can be new life afterwards. Where does old yielding to young happen besides recycling of matter?

Examine the structure of line 963, in which Lucretius wraps up Nature’s quote. Explain his diction and syntax and analyze whether it is an appropriate transition back to Lucretius’ narration.

Nec quisquam in barathrum nec Tartara deditur atra.  
Materies opus est, ut crescant postera saecla; 967  
quae tamen omnia te vitā perfunctā sequentur;  
nec minus ergo ante haec quam tu cecidere, cadentque.

*Ater, atra, atrum* – dark, black, gloomy  
*Barathrum, barathri* (n) – infernal regions, the pit  
*cado, cadere, cecidi, casus* – fall, die, cease  
*cresco, crescere, crevi, cretus* – come forth, grow  
*materies, materiei* (f) – matter  
*opus est* – is needed/necessary  
*perfungor, perfungi, perfunctus sum* – perform, enjoy, finish  
*posterus -a -um* – coming after, following, next  
*Quisquam, quidquam* – any, anyone  
*saeclum, saecli* (n) – age, generation  
*Tartarum, Tartari* (n) – Tartarus, the underworld

967. *ut...saecla* – purpose clause  
968. *quae...sequentur* – relative clause; antecedent is *saecla*  
968. *vitā perfunctā* – ablative absolute  
968. *ante...quam* – tmesis of *antequam*  
968. *antequam tu* – take separately, allowing *haec* to be the subject of *cecidere*  
968. *cecidere = ceciderunt*

What is Lucretius' scientific explanation for why there can be no Underworld for the dead to be in?

How does the juxtaposition of *cecidere* and *cadent* emphasize the cycle of matter?

Sic alid ex alio numquam desistet oriri 970  
vitaque mancipio nulli datur, omnibus usu.  
Respice item quam nil ad nos anteacta vetustas  
temporis aeterni fuerit, quam nascimur ante.

*Alius, alia, aliud...alius, alia, aliud* – one...another  
*Anteactus –a –um* – past, what has gone before  
*Desisto, desistere, destiti, destitus* – stop, cease, desist (from)  
*Item* (adj) – likewise, similarly  
*Mancipium, mancipii* (n) – full possession  
*Nascor, nasci, natus sum* – be born, live  
*Nil* (indeclinable) – nothing, no concern  
*Nullus –a –um* – no, none  
*Orior, oriri, ortus sum* – rise, be born  
*Quam* (conj) – how  
*Respicio, respicere, respexi, respectus* – look back at  
*Usus, usūs* (m) – use, experience  
*Vetustas, vetustatis* (f) – old age, antiquity

970. *alid* = *aliud*  
971, *mancipio* – ablative of purpose, in contrast with *usu*  
971. *nulli* – dative indirect object, in contrast with *omnibus*  
972. *nil* – predicate nominative after *fuerit*  
973. *temporis aeterni* – genitive with *vetustas*; redundancy to emphasize eternity of time gone before  
973. *quam...ante* = *antequam*; reversed to emphasize looking backwards before one was born

This passage is somewhat ironic for us to read, since, by reading Lucretius, we show that we are indeed concerned about the past before we were born. But what is it about this text or the *Aeneid* that makes it worth reading these texts even though they are from the distant past?

Hōc igitur speculum nobis natura futuri  
temporis exponit post mortem denique nostram. 975

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

Atque ea nimirum quaecumque Acherunte profundo  
prodita sunt esse, in vitā sunt omnia nobis. 979

*Acheruns, Acheruntis* (m/f) – the river Acheron, the underworld

*Denique* (adv) – finally, at last

*Expono, exponere, exposui, expositus* – put forth, expose

*Exsto, exstare* – stand out, be found

*Nimirum* (adv) – without doubt, certainly

*Num, Numquid* (adv) – surely...not, can it be that (question expecting negative)

*Prodo, prodere, prodidi, proditus* – report, hand down

*Profundus -a -um* – deep, boundless

*Quicquam* (pronoun) – any, anything

*Quicumque, quaecumque, quodcumque* – whoever, whatever

*Securus -a -um* – safe, untroubled

*Speculum, speculi* (n) – mirror

*Tristis, triste* (adj) – sad, sorrowful, gloomy

974-5. *futuri temporis* – objective genitive with *speculum*

976. *ibi* – referring to the place after death

976. *apparet* – the subject is death, or what happens after death

976. *horribile, triste* – predicate nominatives describing our perception of death

977. *omni somno* – ablative of comparison with *securius*

978. *Acherunte profundo* – ablative of place where, contrasted with by *in vitā*

Lucretius goes on to reference several popular myths about the underworld including Tantalus, Tityos, Sisyphus, and Cerberus. Obviously these were not real, so what does Lucretius mean when he says those stories are in our lives?

When people fear the afterlife in modern times, what do they fear? Could you illustrate a modern hell? How would it differ from an ancient Roman one?

Passage 3: Book 5, lines 855-923

Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* Book 5, lines 855-859

Multaque tum interiisse animantum saecla necessest  
nec potuisse propagando procudere prolem.  
nam quaecumque vides vesci vitalibus aurīs,  
aut dolus aut virtus aut denique mobilitas est  
ex ineunte aevo genus id tuta reservans. 859

*Animans, animantis* (m/f/n) – a living thing or creature, an animal  
*Intereo, interire, interii, interitus* – to die out, become extinct  
*Mobilitas, mobilitatis* (f) – quickness, nimbleness, agility  
*Procudo, procudere* – (fig.) forge, fashion  
*Proles, prolis* (f) – progeny, offspring  
*Propago, propagare, propagavi, propagatus* – continue by procreation, reproduce  
*Quicumque, quaecumque, quodcumque* – whoever, whatever  
*Reservo, reservare, reservavi, reservatus* – preserve, keep alive or intact  
*Saeclum, saeculi* (n) – breed, race  
*Tutus –a –um* – safe  
*Vescor, vesci* (+abl) – make use of, put to use, enjoy  
*Vitalis, vitale* (adj) – that which sustains life, life-giving

855. *animantum* -- partitive genitive with *saecla*  
855. *saecla* – accusative subject of *interiisse, potuisse*  
855. *necessest* = *necesse est*  
856. alliteration of P sound draws attention to the importance of progeny  
859. *tuta* – pred. nom. of subjects in 858; gender attracted by *mobilitas*  
859. *ex ineunte aevo* – *from the beginning of time*  
859. *genus id* – direct object of *reservans*

This section begins part of something one might believe was written by Charles Darwin in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Lucretius philosophizes on the development of the world's creatures in a way that sounds like an early theory of evolution. Think about how he may have come to these conclusions without any fossils or geological evidence.

multaque sunt, nobis ex utilitate suā quae 860  
commendata manent, tutelae tradita nostrae.  
principio genus acre leonum saevaue saecla  
tutatast virtus, volpes dolus et fuga cervos.

*Acer, acris, acre* (adj) – fierce  
*Cervus, cervi* (m) – deer (archaic form *cervos*)  
*Commendatus -a -um* – entrusted, committed  
*Fuga, fugae* (f) – running, flight, speed  
*Leo, leonis* (m) – lion  
*Principio* (adv) – first of all, at first, to start with  
*Trado, tradere, tradidi, traditus* – hand down  
*Tutela, tutelae* (f) – protection, guardianship  
*Tutor, tutari, tutatus sum* – preserve from harm, protect  
*Utilitas, utilitatis* (f) – usefulness, advantage  
*Vulpes, vulpis* (f) – fox (archaic form *uolpes*)

860. *multaque* – same beginning as last sentence; a kind of anaphora still describing different creatures and animals

860. *nobis* – dative with *commendata*

860. *quae* – delayed relative pronoun

863. *tutatast* = *tutata est*, apply this verb to *virtus*, *dolus*, and *cervos*

Lucretius names three animals that have prospered due to their superior characteristics, but he says some have only survived due to man's protection. Which animals do you think that applies to?

at levisomna canum fido cum pectore corda,  
et genus omne quod est veterino semine partum 865  
lanigeraeque simul pecudes et bucera saecla  
omnia sunt hominum tutelae tradita, Memmi;  
nam cupide fugere feras pacemque secuta  
sunt et larga suo sine pabula parta labore,  
quae damus utilitatis eorum praemia causā. 870

*Bucerus-a-um* – horned (as cattle or oxen)  
*Cor, cordis* (n) – heart, soul  
*Fidus -a -um* – faithful, loyal  
*Laniger, lanigera, lanigerum* – wool-bearing, woolly, fleecy  
*Levisomnus -a -um* – sleeping lightly, easily awakened  
*Pario, parere, peperit, partus* – bear, give birth to  
*Pecus, pecudis* (f) – flock  
*Semen, seminis* (n) – seed  
*Tutela, tutelae* (f) – protection, guardianship  
*Veterinus -a -um* – that of draft animals or beasts of burden  
*Fera, ferae* (f) – wild animal  
*Largus -a -um* – bountiful, lavish, generous  
*Pabulum, pabuli* (n) – pasture, fodder  
*Utilitas, utilitatis* (f) – interest, advantage, convenience

864. *levisomna* – this is the only known use of this word. What two Latin words were compounded to create it?

867. *tradita sunt* – the verb for *corda*, *genus*, *pecudes*, and *saecla*

867. *Memmi* – vocative referring to Memmius, Lucretius' patron

868. *fugere* – governed by *cupide*

869. interlocking word order

870. *causā* – *for the sake of* + *genitive*

Why does Lucretius use the words *genus omne*, *tutela*, *trado* again so soon?

Why not vary his diction in this section?

<p>871</p> <p>875</p>	<p>at quis nil horum tribuit naturā, nec ipsā          sponte sua possent ut vivere nec dare nobis          utilitatem aliquam, quare pateremur eorum          praesidio nostro pasci genus esseque tutum,          scilicet haec aliis praedae lucroque iacebant          indupedita suīs fatalibus omnia vinclīs,          donec ad interitum genus id natura redegit.</p>
<p><i>Donec</i> (conj) – until  <i>Iaceo, iacēre, iacui, iacitus</i> – lie, be situated  <i>Indupedio, indupedere, indupedivi, indupeditus</i> – hinder, impede  <i>Interitus, interitūs</i> (m) – extinction  <i>Lucrum, lucri</i> (n) – gain, profit  <i>Pasco, pascere, pavi, pastus</i> – feed on, graze  <i>Pator, pati, passus sum</i> – allow, permit  <i>Praeda, praedae</i> (f) – plunder, spoils  <i>Praesidium, praesidii</i> (n) – protection  <i>Quare</i> (adv) – because of which, for which reason, why  <i>Redigo, redigere, redegi, redactus</i> – drive, drive back, return  <i>Scilicet</i> – certainly  <i>Tribuo, tribuere, tribui, tributus</i> – assign, grant  <i>Utilitas, utilitatis</i> (f) – interest, advantage, convenience  <i>Vinclum, vincli</i> (n) – chain, fetter</p>	
<p>871. <i>nil</i> = <i>nihil</i>          871. <i>horum</i> – of these; referring to the animals’ traits discussed previously (speed, strength, value to humans)          872. <i>sponte suā</i> – by one’s own agency, alone          872. <i>ut</i> – delayed beginning of result clause          872. <i>vivere</i> – here, survive due to a lack of useful traits from nature          873. <i>eorum</i> – objective genitive with <i>praesidio</i>          875. <i>aliīs praedae lucroque</i> – double dative (purpose and reference)          876. <i>suīs fatalibus vinclīs</i> – ablative of means with <i>indupediate</i>          876-877. <i>haec indupedita omnia</i> – subject of <i>iacebant</i></p> <p><i>Natura</i> is situated in the same metrical place in lines 871 and 877—what is it responsible for in each line? Does this paint nature as kind or cruel?</p> <p>How does that fit in with Lucretius’ philosophy of life and death?</p>	

Sed neque Centauri fuerunt nec tempore in ullo  
esse queunt duplici naturā et corpore bino  
ex alienigenīs membrīs compacta, potestas                    880  
hinc illinc par, vis ut sat par esse potis sit.

*Alienigenus* –a –um –of different origin, alien  
*Binus* –a –um – double, twofold  
*Centaurus, Centauri* (m) – a race of half-man and half-horse creatures  
*Compactus* –a –um – joined, fastened together, united  
*Duplex, duplicis* (adj) – double, twofold  
*Hinc ...illinc* (adv) – from here...from there, one one side...on the other  
*Pars, partis* (f) – part, side  
*Potestas, potestatis* (f) – power, ability  
*Potis* (undeclined adj.) – able, possible, capable  
*Queo, quire, quivi, quitus* – be able  
*Sat* (adv) – enough, sufficiently

878. *duplici naturā...corpore bino* – chiasmus with synonymous adjectives emphasizes that these “double” things must actually be separate  
879. supply *animalia* as the subject of *queunt* and *compacta esse*  
881. *ut* – beginning of result clause, delayed placement from before *potestas*  
881. supply *sit* to *potestas hinc illinc par* clause

Where would an ancient Roman have heard of a Centaur? What other mythical creatures might Lucretius have in mind to deny the existence of?

id licet hinc quamvis hebeti cognoscere corde.  
principio circum tribus actīs impiger annīs  
floret equus, puer haudquaquam; nam saepe etiam nunc  
ubera mammaram in somnīs lactantia quaeret. 885

*Ago, agere, egi, actus* – live, to be ( \_\_\_ number of years \_\_\_ ) old  
*Cognosco, cognoscere, cognovi, cognotus* – understand  
*Cor, cordis (n)* – mind, intellect  
*Floreo, florēre, florui* – flourish, be in one’s prime  
*Haudquaquam* (adv) – by no means, not at all, in no way  
*Hebes, hebetis* (adj) – stupid, dull-witted, lacking intelligence  
*Hinc* (adv) – from here, from this point  
*Impiger, impigra, impigrum* – active, energetic  
*Lactans, lactantis* (adj) – giving milk, lactating  
*Licet* – it is permitted  
*Mamma, mammae (f)* – mommy  
*Principio* (adv) – first, at first  
*Quaero, quaerere, quaesivi, quaesitus* – search for, seek  
*Quamvis* (adv) – however much, no matter how  
*Uber, uberis (n)* – breast, teat

882. *quamvis hebeti corde* – in (anyone’s) mind, no matter how dull-witted  
882. *id...corde* – basically, Lucretius claims that the proof he’s about to lay out should make sense to even a fool who doesn’t study philosophy  
884. *puer* – here, little boy  
884. *etiam nunc* – that is, when he also is three years old

How does this section compare a young horse to a young human?

Why does Lucretius use the word *mamma* instead of *mater*?

post ubi equum validae vires aetate senecta  
membraque deficiunt fugienti languidā vitā,  
tum demum puerili aevo florente iuventas  
occipit et molli vestit lanugine malas. 889

*Aetas, aetatis* (f) – age  
*Aevum, aevi* (n) – time of life, age  
*Deficio, deficere, defeci, defectus* – fail, let down  
*Demum* (adv) – finally, at last  
*Florens, florentis* (adj) – blooming, flowering  
*Iuventas, iuventatis* (f) – youth  
*Languidus -a -um* – weak, exhausted, weary  
*Lanugo, lanuginis* (f) – down, the first hair which appears on the face  
*Mala, malae* (f) – cheeks, jaws  
*Mollis, molle* (adj) – soft, tender  
*Occipio, occipere, occepi, occeptus* – begin  
*Puerilis, puerile* (adj) – boyish, of a boy  
*Senectus -a -um* – old, aged  
*Validus -a -um* – strong, powerful  
*Vestio, vestire, vestivi, vestitus* – clothe, wear  
*Vis, vis* (f) – (when plural) force, might

886-7. *ubi...vita* – temporal clause  
887. *fugienti languidā vitā* – ablative absolute  
888. *puerili aevo florente* – ablative absolute  
889. (no, the word *mala* for cheek is not related to *malus* meaning evil)

Lucretius referred to his poetry as the “honey on the rim of the cup of philosophy.”  
How does that relate to his use of imagery and metaphor in this passage?

ne forte ex homine et veterino semine equorum 890  
confieri credas Centauros posse neque esse,  
aut rabidīs canibus succinctas semimarinis  
corporibus Scyllas et cetera de genere horum,  
inter se quorum discordiā membra videmus; 894

*Canis, canis* (m) – dog

*Confio, confieri, confactus* – be made, come about

*Discordia, discordiae* (f) – disagreement, discord

*Forte* (adv) – perhaps, perchance

*Membrum, membri* (n) – limb

*Rabidus -a -um* – mad, raging, frenzied

*Scylla, Scyllae* (f) – a half-human sea monster located in the Straits of Messina with dogs' heads encircling her waist, known for devouring passing sailors

*Semen, seminis* (n) – seed

*Semimarinus -a -um* – half belonging to the sea

*Succingo, succingere, succinxi, succinctus* – gather up with a belt, surround

*Veterinus -a -um* – draft animal, beast of burden

890-1. *ne credas* – negative jussive subjunctive

891. *confieri* – complementary infinitive to *posse*

892-3. These lines are very dactylic (fast and bouncy), creating the effect that he's bouncing through a long list of such impossible characteristics

894. *quorum* – relative pronoun, delayed from beginning of the line

894. *inter se* – translate with *discordia*

894. *membra* – referring to such different body parts or limbs of the same mythical creature

Lucretius questions the existence of creatures from stories of the Greek/Roman religion by applying what he knows about what is possible the world he observes. Can you think of something from another religion which might be questioned in the same way?

quae neque florescunt pariter nec robora sumunt      895  
 corporibus neque proiciunt aetate senecta  
 nec simili Venere ardescunt nec moribus unī  
 conveniunt neque sunt eadem iucunda per artūs.  
 quippe videre licet pinguescere saepe cicutā  
 barbigeras pecudes, homini quae est acre venenum.      900

*Aetas, aetatis* (f) – age  
*Ardesco, ardescere, arsi* – become hot or excited  
*Artus, artūs* (m) – (plural) body, sexual organs  
*Barbiger, barbigerā, barbigerum* – bearded (like a goat)  
*Cicuta, cicutae* (f) – hemlock  
*Convenio, convenire, conveni, conventus* – have sex  
*Eadem* (adv) – likewise, by the same way, at the same time  
*Floresco, florescere* – begin to blossom, increase in vigor  
*Iucundus –a –um* – delighted, pleased  
*Mos, moris* (m) – (plural) behavior, morals  
*Pariter* (adv) – together, at the same time  
*Pecus, pecudis* (f) – flock (here, of goats)  
*Pinguesco, pinguescere* – grow fat  
*Proicio, proicere, proieci, proiectus* – throw down, abandon  
*Quippe* (adv) – of course, as you see, obviously  
*Robor, roboris* (n) – physical strength, vigor, robustness  
*Senectus –a –um* – old, aged  
*Sumo, sumere, sumpsi, sumptus* – assume, obtain, take up  
*Unus –a –um* – (plural) one set of  
*Venenum, veneni* (n) – poison

895. *quae* – this refers to the different kinds of animals discussed earlier  
 896. supply *se* as direct object of *proiciunt*  
 897. *Venere* – Venus, here, is personification for sexual love  
 898. *iucunda* – neuter nominative plural, referring back to *quae*  
 899-900. *pinguescere...pecudes* – indirect statement governed by *videre*  
 900. *quae* – delayed, translate before *homini*

Why does Lucretius focus so intently on how people differ when it comes to sexual matters?

How might that topic make his point easier to understand for a variety of people?

flamma quidem [vero] cum corpora fulva leonum  
tam soleat torrere atque urere quam genus omne  
visceris in terris quodcumque et sanguinis extet,  
qui fieri potuit, triplici cum corpore ut una,  
prima leo, postrema draco, media ipsa, Chimaera 905  
ore foras acrem flaret de corpore flammam?

*Chimaera, Chimaerae* (f) – the mythological monster thought to be part lion, part fire-breathing serpent, and sometimes part goat

*Fio, fieri, factus* – happen, be made

*Flo, flare, flavi, flatus* – breathe, blow

*Foras* (adv) – forth, out

*Fulvus –a –um* – tawny, reddish yellow

*Leo, leonis* (m) – lion

*Os, oris* (n) – mouth

*Postremus –a –um* – last, final

*Quicumque, quaecumque, quodcumque* – whoever, whatever

*Sanguis, sanguinis* (m) – blood

*Soleo, solēre, solitus* – become accustomed (to...)

*Tamquam* (adv) – as, just as

*Torreo, torrēre, torrui, tostus* – roast, scorch, burn

*Triplex, triplicis* (adj) – triple

*Uro, urere, ussi, ustus* – burn

*Viscer, visceris* (n) – entrails

901. *vero* – added by some editors, left out by others...your choice!

901. *cum* – delayed beginning of temporal *cum* clause

902. *tamquam* – separated into *tam* and *quam* to connect the infinitives

903. *visceris, sanguinis* – partitive genitive with *quodcumque*

903. *extet* – syncopated form of *existet*

905. *ipsa* – referring to the previously mentioned goat

Restate in your own words Lucretius' explanation for why a Chimera could not ever exist.

Is this argument more or less convincing than that of the Centaur or Scylla?

quare etiam tellure novā caeloque recenti  
 talia qui fingit potuisse animalia gigni,  
 nixus in hoc uno novitatis nomine inani,  
 multa licet simili ratione effutiat ore, 910  
 aurea tum dicat per terras flumina vulgo  
 fluxisse et gemmis florere arbusta suesse  
 aut hominem tanto membrorum esse impete natum,  
 trans maria alta pedum nisus ut ponere posset  
 et manibus totum circum se vertere caelum. 915

*Arbustum, arbusti* (n) – orchard, grove of trees  
*Aureus –a –um* – golden, of gold  
*Effutio, effutire, effutivi, effutitus* – blurt out, babble  
*Fingo, fingere, finxi, fictus* – imagine, contrive  
*Floreo, florēre, florui* – flourish, bloom  
*Flumen, fluminis* (n) – river  
*Fluo, fluere, fluxi, fluxus* – flow, stream  
*Gemma, gemmae* (f) – gem, jewel  
*Gigno, gignere, genui, genitus* – (passive) be born  
*Impete* (abl. masc. sg.) – extent, stretch, sweep  
*Inanis, inane* (adj) – empty, void, hollow  
*Nitor, niti, nixus/nisus sum* – lean, press, depend on (with abl.)  
*Novitas, novitatis* (f) – newness  
*Os, oris* (n) – mouth  
*Quare* (adv) – therefore, hence  
*Ratio, rationis* (f) – reason, reckoning  
*Recens, recentis* (adj) – fresh, recent  
*Sueo, suere, suevi* – to be accustomed  
*Tellus, telluris* (f) – earth  
*Verto, vertere, verti, versus* -- turn  
*Vulgo* (adv) – generally, usually

907. *tellure novā caeloque recenti* – ablative absolute  
 909. *nixus* – modifying this hypothetical person (*qui...gigni*) who believes the mythic creatures might actually exist  
 910. provide *si* before *licet* (will balance out the upcoming *tum*)  
 912. *suesse* = *suevisse* – verb of indirect statement governed by *dicat*; *fluxisse* and *florere* are completementary infinitives to *suesse*  
 913. *membrorum* – objective genitive with *impete*  
 914-5. *ut...caelum* – result clause

Lucretius provides increasingly ridiculous possibilities that would contradict his opinion until he almost sounds frustrated that everyone doesn't accept what he said initially. Do you agree? Why might this be?

nam quod multa fuere in terrīs semina rerum,  
 tempore quo primum tellus animalia fudit,  
 nil tamen est signi mixtas potuisse creari 918  
 inter se pecudes compactaque membra animantum,  
 propterea quia quae de terrīs nunc quoque abundant  
 herbarum genera ac fruges arbustaque laeta  
 non tamen inter se possunt complexa creari,  
 sed res quaeque suo ritu procedit et omnes  
 foedere naturae certo discrimina servant. 924

*Abundo, abundare, abundavi, abundatus* – flow or ooze (out of), spring forth

*Animal, animalis* (n) – animal

*Animans, animantis* (m/f) – living being, creature, animal

*Arbustum, arbusti* (n) – orchard, grove of trees

*Compactus* –a –um – joined, united, fastened together

*Complector, complecti, complexus sum* – encompass, include, join

*Creo, creare, creavi, creatus* – create, bring into being

*Discrimen, discriminis* (n) – difference, division, distinction

*Foedus, foederis* (n) – agreement, limit

*Frux, frugis* (f) – (plural) crops

*Fundo, fundere, fudi, fusus* – pour, cast

*Genus, generis* (n) – race, kind, sort, variety

*Herba, herbae* (f) – herb, grass

*Membrum, membri* (n) – limb

*Pecus, pecudis* (f) – animal

*Procedo, procedere, processi, processus* – proceed, advance

*Propterea quia* (adv) –because

*Quique, quaeque, quodque* – each

*Ritus, ritūs* (m) – custom

*Tellus, telluris* (f) – earth

916. *fuere* = *fuere* (syncope)

916. *semina rerum* – atoms (literally *seeds of things*)

918. *nil signi* – literally, *nothing of a sign* but can be translated *no sign* due to *nil*'s occasional similarity to the adjective *nullus*

918-9. *mixtas...animantum* – indirect statement

919. supply *esse* to go with *compacta*

920. *quae...abundant* – relative clause describing *genera* and *fruges*

924. *naturae* – zeugma: this genitive could be construed with either *foedere* or *discrimina*. Which will you choose for your translation?

In this entire section, what point has Lucretius been trying to prove? Has he succeeded? How might a modern scientists approach the same theses?





nam cum suspicimus magni caelestia mundi  
templa super stellisque micantibus aethera fixum, 1205  
et venit in mentem solis lunaeque viarum,  
tunc aliīs oppressa malīs in pectora cura  
illa quoque expergefatum caput erigere infit,  
ne quae forte deum nobis immensa potestas  
sit, vario motu quae candida sidera verset; 1210

*Aether, aetheris* (m) – heaven, the ether  
*Caelestis, caeleste* (adj) – of the gods, heavenly  
*Candidus-a-um* – bright, radiant, clear  
*Erigo, erigere, erexi, erectus* – raise, lift  
*Expergefacio, -facere, -feci, -factus* – to stir up  
*Figo, figere, fixi, fixus* – set/fit with  
*Immensus –a –um* (or *inmensus*) – infinitely great, immense  
*Infit* – begin (with infinitive) (only form of this verb except for one use by *Varro*)  
*Mico, micare, micui* – flash, glitter  
*Super* (adv) - beyond  
*Suspicio, suspicere, suspexi, suspectus* – look up at  
*Verso, versare, versavi, versatus* – turn, drive

1205. *Aethera* – (Greek) acc. masc, sg.  
1206. *in mentem venire* – to come to one’s mind (impersonal with genitive; see note below)  
1206. *solis lunaeque viarum* – supply *sententia* or *cogitatio* as the subject of these genitives and *venit*  
1207. *oppressa* – perf. pass. part. modifying *pectora*  
1209. *ne...sit* – clause of fearing explaining *cura*  
1209. *quae = aliqua*, modifying *potestas*  
1209. *deum = deorum*  
1209. *nobis* – with *immensa*  
1210. *motus* – this word is often used by Lucretius to refer to the movements of tiny atoms, but here it refers to the movements of large, heavenly bodies  
1210. *quae...verset* – relative clause of characteristic

Lucretius claims that looking at the movements of the heavenly bodies makes people ponder the gods. Do you agree?

Has this assumption changed since ancient times?

<p>1211</p> <p>1215</p>	<p>temptat enim dubiam mentem rationis egestas,          ecquae nam fuerit mundi genitilis origo,          et simul ecquae sit finis, quoad moenia mundi          et taciti motūs hunc possint ferre laborem,          an divinitus aeternā donata salute          perpetuo possint aevi labentia tractu          immensi validas aevi contemnere virīs.</p>
<p><i>Aevum, aevi</i> (n) – time, age  <i>An</i> – or  <i>Divinitus</i> (adv) – by divine agency or inspiration  <i>Dono, -are, -avi, -atus</i> – provide, endow  <i>Ecqui, ecquae, ecquod</i> – whether any  <i>Egestas, egestatis</i> (f) – (with gen.) a shortage, need for, lack of or death.  <i>Enim</i> (adv) – for, indeed  <i>Genitilis, genitile</i> (adj) – of or concerned with creation  <i>Immensus –a –um</i> (or <i>immensus</i>) – infinitely great, immense  <i>Labor, labi, lapsus sum</i> – glide, slip  <i>Labor, laboris</i> (m) – physical stress, wear and tear  <i>Perpetuus –a –um</i> – continuous  <i>Quoad</i> – (after <i>finis</i>) up to which  <i>Salus, salutis</i> (f) – immunity from destruction, survival  <i>Simul</i> (adv) – at the same time  <i>Tempto, -are, -avi, -atus</i> – tries, troubles  <i>Tractus, tractūs</i> (m) – dragging  <i>Validus –a –um</i> – powerful, strong</p>	
<p>1211. <i>rationis</i> – objective genitive with <i>egestas</i>: “need for explanation/lack of understanding.” Lucretius believes that people’s belief in the intervention of the gods lies in a lack of understanding of the world around them.          1212. <i>ecquae</i> – introduces indirect question; modifies <i>origo</i>          1214. <i>solliciti motus</i> – genitive singular with <i>laborem</i>          1215. <i>an</i> – introduces further part of indirect question          1215. <i>aeterna salute</i> – ablative absolute          1215. <i>donata</i> – modifies <i>moenia</i>          1216. <i>aevi</i> – genitive with <i>perpetuo tractu</i>          1216. <i>labentia</i> – modifies <i>moenia</i>, subject of <i>possint contemnere</i>          1217. <i>virīs = vires</i></p> <p>Identify the <i>synchysis</i> (interlocking, convoluted word order) in lines 1216-17 and explain its purpose for describing Lucretius’ idea of the gods passing through time.</p>	

praeterea cui non animus formidine divum  
contrahitur, cui non correpunt membra pavore,  
fulminis horribili cum plagā torrida tellus           1220  
contremit et magnum percurrunt murmura caelum?

*Contra*ho, *contra*here, *contra*xi, *contra*ctus – sadden, depress  
*Contrem*o, *contrem*ere – tremble violently  
*Corre*po, *corre*pere, *corre*psi, *corre*ptus – (of the flesh) to creep  
*Formido*, *forminidis* (f) – fear, dread  
*Fulmen*, *fulminis* (n) – thunderbolt, lightning  
*Horribilis*, *horribile* (adj) – awful, horrible  
*Membrum*, *membri* (n) – limb  
*Pavor*, *pavoris* (m) – fear, panic  
*Plaga*, *plagae* (f) – a blow, stroke  
*Praeterea* (adv) – moreover, besides  
*Procurro*, *procurrere*, *procur*si, *procur*sus – more rapidly over or through  
*Tellūs*, *telluris* (f) – earth  
*Torridus* –a –um – dried, burnt, scorched

1218-19. *cui* – dative of reference: *for whom*. *Cui...cui* – anaphora of relative pronouns increases attention to each person's fear of the gods

1218. *divum* = *divorum*; objective genitive with *formidine*

1220. *cum* – introduces temporal *cum* clause; delayed from beginning of line

How is Lucretius' abundant use of adjectives necessary to the image he creates in this passage?

Why do these lines have a similar structure and so many synonyms?

What universally human feelings does he tap into?

non populi gentesque tremunt, regesque superbi  
corripiunt divum percussi membra timore,  
ne quod ob admissum foede dictumve superbe  
poenarum grave sit solvendi tempus adultum? 1225

*Adolesco, adolescere, adolui, adultus* – mature, reach its peak, grow  
*Admitto,mittere, admisi, admissus* – become guilty of, commit  
*Corripio, corripere, corripui, correptus* – contract (one’s limbs) convulsively  
*Foede* – foully, horribly  
*Gravis, grave* – grave, serious, painful  
*Membrum, membri (n)* – limb, appendage  
*Ob (+acc)* – on account of, for  
*Percutio, percutere, percussi, percussus* – beat, strike  
*Solvo, solvere, solvi, solutus* – pay a penalty or atonement  
*Tremo, tremere, tremui* – tremble, shake

1223. *divum* = *divorum*. Objective genitive with *timore*  
1223. *percussi* – referring back to *reges* (line 1222)  
1223. This meaning of *corripio* is attributed only to Lucretius  
1224. *ne...adultum* – fear clause  
1224. *quod* = *aliquid*, object of *ob* with both *admissum* and *dictum*  
1224. *solvendi* – genitive gerund with *tempus*  
1225. *adultum sit* – perfect passive subjunctive

What does Lucretius suggest all people, even kings, fear from the gods?

summa etiam cum vis violenti per mare venti 1226  
 induperatorem classis super aequora verrit  
 cum validīs pariter legionibus atque elephantis,  
 non divom pacem votis adit ac prece quaesit  
 ventorum pavidus paces animasque secundas? 1230  
 nequiquam, quoniam violento turbine saepe  
 correptus nihilo fertur minus ad vada leti.

*Adeo, adire, adi(i), aditus* – to seek (by prayer)  
*Aequor, aequoris* (n) – surface of the sea, sea  
*Classis, classis* (f) – fleet, navy  
*Corripio, corripere, corripui, correptus* – sweep off, carry away  
*Induperator, induperator* (m) – ruler, commander  
*Letum, leti* (n) – death, destruction  
*Nequiquam* (adv) – to no purpose or effect, in vain  
*Pariter* (adv) – equally, together  
*Pavidus –a –um* – frightened, terror-struck  
*Prex, precis* (f) – prayer (to a diety)  
*Secundus –a –um* – favorable  
*Turbo, turbinis* (m) – whirlwind, tornado  
*Vadum, vadi* (n) – shoals (a shallow part of the sea in which ships are liable to go around)  
*Verro, verrere, versus* – to sweep off with irresistible force  
*Vīs, vis* (f) – force, violence  
*Votum, voti* (n) – prayer

1126. *cum* – delayed beginning of a *cum* clause  
 1226. *violentī venti* – genitive with *vis*  
 1226. What kinds of thoughts are elicited by the alliteration of the “v” sound?  
 1227. The word *induperator* had been previously used only by Ennius, one of Lucretius’ main literary influences.  
 1228. *validīs legionibus atque elephantīs* - ablative of accompaniment  
 1229. *divom* (archaic) = *divum* = *divorum*  
 1230. *ventorum* – objective genitive with *pavidus*  
 1230. *secundas* -- often refers to winds blowing in the desired direction  
 1231. *turbine* – ablative with *correptus*  
 1232. *nihilo minus* – adverbial with *saepe*: *by no less often, just as often*

Why are winds such a perfect example of natural phenomena that make one fear gods?  
 Why might Lucretius use a military example to prove one of his points?  
 What is the outcome of all the prayers made by the fleet commander?

usque adeo res humanas vīs abdita quaedam  
opterit et pulchros fascīs saevasque secures  
proculcare ac ludibrio sibi habere videtur. 1235

*Abdo, abdere, abdidit, abditus* – hide, conceal

*Adeo* (adv) – to such a degree/point

*Fascis, fascis* (m) – bundle of rods

*Ludibrium, ludibrii* (n) – plaything, toy

*Opt/obtero, obterere, obtrivi, obtritus* – crush, damage or destroy with pressure

*Proculco, proculcare, proculcavi, proculcatus* – trample on, crush

*Quidam, quaedam, quoddam* -- certain

*Securis, securis* (m) – axe

*Usque* (adv) – continuously, all the time

*Vīs, vis* (f) – force

1234. *fascīs* = *fascēs*

1234. *fascēs* and *securis* together were represented the power of the magistrates in the Roman government

1235. *se habēre* – to consider oneself

1235. *ludibrio* – as a game

1235. *video* in the passive means “to seem”

Why does Lucretius suggest that a godly force treats human affairs and their government like a plaything?

How does relate to the modern expression “Men play, God laughs” ?

denique sub pedibus tellus cum tota vacillat  
concussaeque cadunt urbes dubiaeque minantur,  
quid mirum si se temnunt mortalia saecula  
atque potestatis magnas mirasque relinquunt  
in rebus viris divum, quae cuncta gubernent? 1240

*Concutio, concutere, concussi, concussus* – weaken  
*Denique* (adv) – finally, at last  
*Dubius -a -um* – uncertain, changeable  
*Guberno, gubernare, gubernavi, gubernatus* – direct, control  
*Minor, minari, minatus sum* – impend, threaten  
*Mirus-a-um* – strange, remarkable  
*Relinquo, relinquere, reliqui, relictus* – leave (as a logical conclusion)  
*Saeculum, saeculi* (n) – race, breed  
*Tellus, telluris* (f) – earth  
*Temno, temnere* – scorn, despise  
*Vacillo, vacillare, vacillavi, vacillatus* – stagger, rock

1235. *cum* – delayed beginning of *cum* clause  
1236. *concussae* – the implication of this weakening is by some kind of natural disaster, probably an earthquake  
1238. *quid mirum* – what wonder if....  
1239. *potestatis* = *potestates*  
1239. *miras* – modifying *viris* in line 1240  
1240. *viris* = *vires*, placed between *rebus* and *divum* to signify its belonging there  
1240. *divum* = *divorum*  
1240. *quae...gubernent* – relative clause of characteristic, modifying *viris*

At the end of this 45-line section, what do you think has been Lucretius' main thesis?  
What evidence has he used to prove it?

Are his examples more or less true of people in the ancient world compared with modern humans?

## Chapter 4: Why Lucretius?

Choosing a text to read is not just about content and historical placement. An important consideration should be the quality of the writing: are the ideas conveyed in an interesting way? Are the images painted effectively? Does the meter of the poetry make it sound good? Does the placement of words help convey the meaning? Are figures of speech used to make it interesting to read?

Lucretius chose to write *De Rerum Natura* in the style of an epic poem as Vergil would subsequently write the *Aeneid*. Vergil's poem became the most-read text in imperial Rome for a variety of reasons, and some influence from Lucretius is evident throughout. Lucretius' text was not nearly as popular but it is said that his writing style is equal to that of any Roman poet. One way to measure that is looking at meter and what a poet can do with it. Obtain for yourself a guide to how to figure out meter (an activity known as scansion) if you can. For now, you may consult the fully marked-up text at the end. Remember that — above a vowel means the sound is long and a little **u** means that sound is shorter.

Lucretius' meter, *dactylic hexameter*, combines two kinds of metrical feet: dactyls (long, short, short) and spondees (long, long). Their combination may be incidental or may be purposefully arranged in order to emphasize something in a particular line. The following examples will draw from the Lucretius passages chosen for this book. It is recommended that you first read and translate the passages, then come back and see how this analysis of Lucretius' meter might make you think more about his words. Following will be the full scansion of these passages which you might use to recite and see how the *De Rerum Natura* would have sounded to a Roman listener.

A line with five spondees really stands out as heavy and slow. Lucretius would only have constructed a line in such a way to draw attention to something. In Passage 1, lines 1000, 1001, 1002, and 1005 all have five spondees. These are the lines which say how humans and the atoms of our soul are all part of the world and that, when we die, those atoms are recycled back to create new matter. To Lucretius, this fact should take away any man's fear of death and help him realize how he is made up of the same matter as everything he sees around him. The heavy sound of these lines make the audience realize just how important Lucretius thinks this fact is. Try reading the lines aloud and listening to which words sound the most stressed. The final line of that section (1022) is also as spondaic—much like we might pack a punch in the last sentence of an essay's paragraph, so Lucretius uses meter to emphasize the concluding line of his passage.

Spondees can also emphasize a specific part of a line, as in Passage 2, line 921. This line begins with a dactyl, then there are two spondees for the words *aeternum per nos* – the line slows down to emphasize the fact that what Lucretius speaks of is eternal and that it applies to us, people. The strongest part of the line is probably the last foot—which is always a spondee preceded by a dactyl. Lucretius sometimes takes advantage of this position to end with a meaningful word. In lines 1206 and 1207 in Passage 4, the last words are *nobis* and *nostris*, respectfully. This too draws the focus to all of us, Lucretius’ readers.

As for a line that has as many dactyls as possible, look at line 912 in Passage 2. This part of the passage transitions to a scene at a banquet so the fast moving pace of the line (and the one after it) might feel sing-songy and light, as a Roman would feel at a dinner party. Similarly in line 1228 of Passage 4, all the feet are dactyls just as Lucretius talks about the Roman *legionibus atque elephantis*. It could be that there are many dactyls in this line simply because the words are long, but it could also be said that it is to breeze through this standard, Roman act of war to make it feel trite and not worth slowing down for.

Lucretius also uses metrical patterns to make his analogies stronger. In Passage 4, lines 1226 and 1230 both have the word *violenti* start as the end of a dactyl in the 3<sup>rd</sup> foot of the line and end in the spondee of the 4<sup>th</sup> foot. This creates a stronger tie between both nouns modified by that adjective and strengthens to comparison. Lucretius does the same thing in lines 1003 and 1014 in Passage 1 with the word *quali* being metrically identical in both lines and thereby drawing a parallel between what it describes.

Elision can also be used to metrical effect in a number of ways. In Passage 2, line 936, there is elision between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> feet of the line which is quite rare. The words *quasi in vas* would be pronounced *quasin vas* which greatly strengthens the simile “as if in a vessel.” The following line has three words in a row that end in an elision which again connects the meanings of the words that much more closely. The lack of elision, a rare occurrence called “hiatus” occurs later in that passage in line 951. The word which does not elide is *naturam*—gee, is that a word Lucretius ever wants to draw our attention to?

All kidding aside, little word patterns like those mentioned above combine to make something sound good enough to be worth reading or listening to. Think about a poem or song that you really like—what makes you like it more than others? The combination of meaning and the rhythm? Trying to hear the same harmony in another language is certainly difficult and requires practice. Again, try to read Lucretius’ lines aloud and listen to the pauses and elisions and, when you hear something interesting, think about how it connects to wondering about the nature of things.

## Chapter 5: Full Scansion

### Passage 1 – Fully Scanned

Denique caelesti sumus omnes semine oriundi;  
omnibus ille idem pater est, unde alma liquentis  
umoris guttas mater cum terra recepit,  
feta parit nitidas fruges arbustaque laeta  
et genus humanum, parit omnia saecula ferarum, 995  
pabula cum praebet, quibus omnes corpora pascunt  
et dulcem ducunt vitam prolemque propagant;  
qua propter merito maternum nomen adepti est.  
cedit item retro, de terra quod fuit ante,  
in terras, et quod missumst ex aetheris oris, 1000  
id rursum caeli rellatum templa receptant.  
nec sic interemit mors res ut materiai  
corpora conficiat, sed coetum dissipat ollis;  
inde aliis aliud coniungit et efficit, omnis  
res ut convertant formas mutentque colores 1005  
et capiant sensus et puncto tempore reddant;  
ut noscas referre earum primordia rerum  
cum quibus et quali positura contineantur  
et quos inter se dent motus accipiantque,  
neve putes aeterna penes residere potesse 1010  
corpora prima quod in summis fluitare videmus  
rebus et interdum nasci subitoque perire.  
quin etiam refert nostris in versibus ipsis  
cum quibus et quali sint ordine quaeque locata;  
namque eadem caelum mare terras flumina solem 1015  
significant, eadem fruges arbusta animantis;  
si non omnia sunt, at multo maxima pars est  
consimilis; verum positura discrepant res.  
sic ipsis in rebus item iam materiai

[intervalla vias conexus pondera plagas] 1020  
concurſus motus ordo poſitura figurae  
cūm permutantur, mutari res quoque debent.

Nunc animum nobis adhibe veram ad rationem.  
nam tibi vehementer nova res molitur ad auris  
accedere et nova se species ostendere rerum. 1025

sed neque tam facilis res ulla est, quin eā primum  
difficilis magis ad credendum constet, itemque  
nil adeo magnum neque tam mirabile quicquam,  
quod non paulatim minuant mirarier omnes,  
principio caeli clarum purumque colorem 1030

quaeque in se cohibet, palantia sidera passim,  
lunamque et solis praedara lucē nitorem;  
omnia quae nunc si primum mortalibus essent  
ex improviso si sint obiecta repente,

quid magis his rebus poterat mirabile dici, 1035  
aut minus ante quod auderent fore credere gentes?  
nil, ut opinor; ita haec species miranda fuisset.

quam tibi iam nemo fessus satiate videndi,  
suspiciere in caeli dignatur lucida templa.  
desine qua propter novitate exterritus ipsa 1040

expuere ex animo rationem, sed magis acri  
iudicio perpende, et si tibi vera videntur,  
dede manus, aut, si falsum est, accingere contra.

quaerit enim rationem animus, cum summa loci sit  
infinita foris haec extra moenia mundi, 1045

quid sit ibi porro, quo prospicere usque velit mens  
atque animi iactus liber quo pervolet ipse.

Passage 2 – Fully Scanned

Hoc etiam faciunt ubi discubuerē tenentque  
 pocula saepe homines et inumbrant ora coronis,  
 ex animo ut dicant: 'brevis hic est fructus homullis;  
 iam fuerit neque post umquam revocare licebit.' 915  
 tam quam in morte mali cum primis hoc sit eorum,  
 quod sitis exurat miseros atque arida torrat,  
 aut aliae cuius desiderium insideat rei.

nec sibi enim quisquam tum se vitamque requiret,  
 cum pariter mens et corpus sopita quiescunt; 920  
 nam licet aeternum per nos sic esse soporem,  
 nec desiderium nostri nos adficit ullum,  
 et tamen haud quaquam nostros tunc illa per artus  
 longe ab sensiferis primordia motibus errant,  
 cum correptus homo ex somno se colligit ipse. 925

multo igitur mortem minus ad nos esse putandumst,  
 si minus esse potest quam quod nihil esse videmus;  
 maior enim turbae disiectus materiai  
 consequitur leto nec quisquam expergitus extat,  
 frigida quem semel est vitae pausa secuta. 930

Denique si vocem rerum natura repente.  
 mittat et hoc alicui nostrum sic increpet ipsa:  
 'quid tibi tanto operest, mortalis, quod nimis aegrīs  
 luctibus indulges? quid mortem congemis ac fles?  
 nam [si] grata fuit tibi vita ante acta priorque 935  
 et non omnia pertusum congesta quasi in vās  
 commoda perfluxere atque ingrata interiere;  
 cur non ut plenus vitae conviva recedis  
 aequo animoque capis securam, stulte, quietem?  
 sin ea quae fructus cumque es periere profusa 940  
 vitaeque in offensost, cur amplius addere quaeris,  
 rursum quod pereat male et ingratum occidat omne,  
 non potius vitae finem facis atque laboris?  
 nam tibi praeterea quod machiner inveniamque,  
 quod placeat, nihil est; eadem sunt omnia semper. 945  
 si tibi non annis corpus iam marcet et artus  
 confecti languent, eadem tamen omnia restant,  
 omnia si perges vivendo vincere saecula,  
 atque etiam potius, si numquam sis moriturus',  
 quid respondemus, nisi iustam intendere litem 950  
 naturam et veram verbis exponere causam?  
 grandior hic vero si iam seniorque queratur  
 atque obitum lamentetur miser amplius aequo,  
 non merito inclamet magis et voce increpet acri:  
 'aufer abhinc lacrimas, baratre, et compescere querellas. 955  
 omnia perfunctus vitae praemia marces;  
 sed quia semper aves quod abest, praesentia temnis,

inperfecta tibi elapsast ingrataque vita,  
et nec opinanti mors ad caput adstitit ante  
quam satur ac plenus possis discedere rerum. 960

nunc aliena tua tamen aetate omnia mitte  
aequo animoque, age dum, magnis concede necēsis?  
iure, ut opinor, agat, iure increpet inciletque;  
cedit enim rerum novitate extrusa vetustas  
semper, et ex aliis aliud reparare necessest. 965

Nec quisquam in baratrum nec Tartara deditur atra;  
materies opus est, ut crescant postera saecula;  
quae tamen omnia te vita perfuncta sequentur;  
nec minus ergo ante haec quam tu cecidere cadentque.  
sic alid ex alio numquam desistet oriri 970  
vitaque mancipio nulli datur, omnibus usu.

respice item quam nil ad nos ante acta vetustas  
temporis aeterni fuerit, quam nascimur ante.  
hoc igitur speculum nobis natura futuri  
temporis exponit post mortem denique nostram. 975  
numquid ibi horribile apparet, num triste videtur  
quicquam, non omni somno securius exstat?

Atque ea ni mirum quae cumque Acherunte profundo  
proditae sunt esse, in vita sunt omnia nobis.

Passage 3 – Fully Scanned

Multaque tum interisse animantum saecula necessest nec potuisse propagando prociudere prolem. nam quaecumque vides vesci vitalibus auris, aut dolus aut virtus aut denique mobilitas est ex ineunte aevo genus id tuta reservans.	855
multaque sunt, nobis ex utilitate sua quae commendata manent, tutelae tradita nostrae. principio genus acre leonum saevaque saecula tutatast virtus, volpes dolus et fuga cervos. at levis omnia canum fido cum pectore corda, et genus omne quod est veterino semine partum	860
lanigeraeque simul pecudes et bucera saecula omnia sunt hominum tutelae tradita, Memmi; nam cupide fugere feras pacemque secuta sunt et larga suo sine pabula parta labore, quae damus utilitatis eorum praemia causa.	865
at quis nil horum tribuit natura, nec ipsa sponte sua possent ut vivere nec dare nobis utilitatem aliquam, quare pateremur eorum praesidio nostro pasci genus esseque tutum, scilicet haec aliis praedae lucroque iacebant	870
indupedita suis fatalibus omnia vinculis, donec ad interitum genus id natura redegit.	875
Sed neque Centauri fuerunt nec tempore in ullo esse queunt duplici natura et corpore bino ex alienigenis membris compacta, potestas hinc illinc partis ut sat par esse potissit. id licet hinc quamvis hebeti cognoscere corde. principio circum tribus actis impiger annis	880

floret equus, puer haut quaquam; nam saepe etiam nunc  
 ubera mammarum in somnis lactantia quaeret. 885  
 post ubi equum validae vires aetate senectā  
 membraque deficiunt fugienti languida vita,  
 tum demum puerili aevo florenta iuventās  
 officit et molli vestit lanugine malas;  
 nē forte ex homine et veterino semine equorū 890  
 confieri credas Centauros posse neque esse,  
 aut rapidis canibus succinctas semimarinis  
 corporibus Scyllas et cetera de genere horū,  
 inter se quorum discordia membra videmus;  
 quae neque florescunt pariter nec roborā sumunt 895  
 corporibus neque proiciunt aetate senectā  
 nec simili Venere ardescunt nec moribus unīs  
 conveniunt neque sunt eadem iucunda per artus.  
 quippe videre licet pinguescere saepe cicuta  
 barbigeras pecudes, homini quae est acre venenum. 900

flammā quidem [verō] cum corpōra fulvā leonū  
 tam soleat torrere atque urere quam gēnū omne  
 visceris in terris quodcumque et sanguinis extet,  
 qui fieri potuit, triplici cum corpore ut una,  
 prima leo, postrema draco, media ipsa, Chimaera 905  
 ore foras acrius flaret de corpore flammam?  
 quare etiam tellure nova caeloque recenti  
 talia qui fingit potuisse animalia gigni,  
 nixus in hoc uno novitatis nomine inani,  
 multa licet simili ratione effutiat ore, 910  
 aurea tum dicat per terras flumina vulgo  
 fluxisse et gemmis florere arbusta suesse  
 aut hominem tanto membrorum esse impete natum,  
 trans maria alta pedum nisus ut ponere posset  
 et manibus totum circum se vertere caelum. 915  
 nam quod multa fuere in terris semina rerum,  
 tempore quo primum tellus animalia fudit,  
 nil tamen est signi mixtas potuisse creari  
 inter se pecudes compactaque membra animantum,  
 propterea quia quae de terris nunc quoque abundant 920  
 herbarum genera ac fruges arbustaque laeta  
 non tamen inter se possunt complexa creari,  
 sed res quaeque suo ritu procedit et omnes  
 foedere naturae certo discrimina servant.

Passage 4 – Fully Scanned

O gēnū̄ infēlix hūmānū̄, tāliā̄ dīvīs  
 cūm tribuit facta atque iras adiunxit aderbās! 1205  
 quāntos̄ tūm gēmītus̄ ipsi sibi, quāntaquē nobis  
 vōlnerā̄, quās lacrimas peperere minoribus nostris!  
 nec pietas ullast velatum saepe videri  
 vertier̄ ad lapidē̄ atque omnis accedere ad aras  
 nec procumbere humi prostratum et panderē̄ palmās 1210  
 ante deum delubra nec aras sanguine multo  
 spargere quadrupedum nec votis nectere vota,  
 sed magē̄ pācātā̄ posse omnia mentē̄ tueri.  
 nām cūm suspicimū̄s magni caelestia mundi  
 templā̄ sup̄er stellisque micantibus aetherā̄ fixūm, 1205  
 et venit in mentem solis lunaeque viarū̄,  
 tunc aliis oppressa malis in pectora curā  
 illā̄ quoque expergefatum caput erigere inquit,  
 nē̄ quaē forte deum nobis inmensa potestas  
 sit, vario motū̄ quaē candida sidera verset; 1210

temptat enim dubiam mentem rationis egestas,  
 eequae nam fuerit mundi genitalis origo,  
 et simul eequae sit finis, quoad moenia mundi  
 et taciti motus hunc possint ferre laborem,  
 an divinitus aeterna donata salute  
 perpetuo possint aevi labentia tractu  
 inmensi validas aevi contemnere viris.  
 praeterea cui non animus formidine divum  
 contrahitur, cui non correpunt membra pavore,  
 fulminis horribili cum plaga torrida tellus  
 contremit et magnum percurrunt murmura caelum?  
 non populi gentesque tremunt, regesque superbi

1215

1220

corripunt divum percussi membra timore,  
ne quod ob admissum foede dictumve superbe  
poenarum grave sit solvendi tempus adultum? 1225

summa etiam cum vis violenti per mare venti  
induperatorem classis super aequora verrit  
cum validis pariter legionibus atque elephantis,  
non divom pacem votis adit ac prece quaesit  
ventorum pavidus pacem animasque secundas? 1230

ne quiquam, quoniam violento turbine saepe  
correptus nihilo fertur minus ad vada leti.  
usque adeo res humanas vis abdita quaedam  
opterit et pulchros fascis saevasque secures  
proculcare ac ludibrio sibi habere videtur. 1235

denique sub pedibus tellus cum tota vacillat  
concussa eque cadunt urbes dubiaeque minantur,  
quid mirum si se temnunt mortalia saecula  
atque potestatis magnas mirasque relinquunt  
in rebus viris divum, quae cuncta gubernent? 1240

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