

Foedera Naturae in Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*

by

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BA, University of Victoria, 2011

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of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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Abstract

Lucretius wrote his six-book philosophical epic poem *De Rerum Natura* a few decades before the fall of the Roman Republic and the start of the principate and the reign of Augustus in 27 BC, in a time of great social and political upheaval. This thesis examines Lucretius' appropriation and correction of traditional Roman social and political rhetoric as part of his therapeutic philosophical programme, which aims to alleviate fear and anxiety through a rational understanding of nature. Specifically, this thesis examines Lucretius' innovative use of *foedus*, a charged Roman word with many powerful connotations which is generally translated as “treaty”, “pact” or “covenant”. More than just an agreement, a *foedus* represented a divinely sanctioned ritualized contract between Rome and another polity, one which could not be broken without grave spiritual and political repercussions. They were an integral part of Roman life and culture and were strongly associated with imperialism, ambition, religion and sacrifice, and so Lucretius' decision to adopt that word for the unthinking, unchanging, atheistic, necessary laws that limit and guide nature – despite his explicit condemnation of exactly those values *foedus* represents – is at first glance mystifying. As this thesis will show, however, *foedus* turns out to be an exceedingly apt choice, infusing almost every aspect of Lucretius' Epicurean work with subtle complexity and meaning and contributing strongly to his polemical, therapeutic, ethical and didactic agendas.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter examines the social, political and philosophical contexts which influenced Lucretius to adopt Epicureanism. It then delves into some of the issues surrounding his innovative use of *foedus*. Chapter Two attempts to answer the research question of why *foedus*? by comparing and contrasting the essential characteristics of Roman *foedera* against those of Lucretius' *foedera naturae*. This in turn provides a more detailed picture of Lucretius' philosophical system both in terms of its physical and ethical doctrines, and suggests some possible motivations for Lucretius' choice. Chapter Three looks at the deeper significance of Lucretius' use of *foedus* and its role in his therapeutic programme of correction. Driving this chapter is Lucretius' exploitation of the etymological connection between the noun *foedus* (‘treaty’, ‘covenant’) and the adjective *foedus*, ‘foul’. Chapter Three is divided into two sections, each focusing on Lucretius' masterful manipulation of *foedus* and its

etymological roots – as well as generic expectations and language in general –first for polemical purposes, then for therapeutic.

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Introduction

This thesis examines Lucretius' appropriation and correction of traditional Roman social and political rhetoric as part of his therapeutic philosophical programme, which aims to alleviate fear and anxiety through a rational understanding of nature. Specifically, this thesis examines Lucretius' use of *foedus*, a charged Roman word with many powerful connotations which is generally translated as "treaty", "pact" or "covenant". More than just an agreement, a *foedus* represented a divinely sanctioned ritualized contract between Rome and another polity, one which could not be broken without grave spiritual and political repercussions. They were an integral part of Roman life, controlling the interactions between Rome and her allies, as well as those between Roman citizens and their leaders. Usually heavily weighted in Rome's favour, *foedera* stood testament to Rome's *imperium* and superiority over other nations, and were a vital component of Roman expansion. They dictated trade agreements and military obligations, guaranteed the sacrosanctity of tribunes from the Roman people, and played pivotal roles in Rome's legendary past. The striking of a treaty was formally sanctioned through the ritual slaughter of a ten-day old piglet, while the rupturing of a treaty resulted in a ceremonial declaration of war; both rites fell under the provenance of the *fetiales*, a college of priests whose sole function was to oversee the making of war or peace through *foedera*. Roman *foedera* were thus strongly associated with imperialism and ambition, religion and sacrifice, and so Lucretius' decision to adopt that word for the unthinking, unchanging, necessary laws that limit and guide nature – despite his explicit condemnation of exactly those values *foedus* represents – is somewhat perplexing.

Scholars have typically viewed Lucretius' *foedera naturae* or "laws of nature" as an interesting but relatively straightforward metaphor for atomic behaviour based on the organization of Roman culture and society, consistent with his tendency to employ the socio-political vocabulary of his time (e.g., Schiesaro 2007, Cabisius 1984, Garani 2007, etc.). William Gladhill's dissertation *Foedera: A Study in Roman Poetics and Society*

(2008) is a notable exception and provides a thorough and insightful analysis of what he calls “the poetics of *foedera* – the reconstruction of a cultural phenomenon by text, the process by which reality becomes reconstituted in poetry” (18). Gladhill focuses on the literary tradition rather than the philosophical, however, conducting a comparative survey of works spanning several decades rather than focussing on one particular period of Roman history. Wilson Shearin’s *Atomic Politics: Speech Acts in Lucretius’ De rerum natura* (2007) also offers a valuable study of Lucretius’ *foedera naturae* but, since Shearin approaches from a more linguistic perspective, his discussion on *foedera* is primarily limited to speech acts and performative language. This thesis therefore fills a gap in current Lucretian scholarship by investigating the significance of Lucretius’ *foedera naturae* for his philosophical, ethical, and polemical programmes as a whole. The complexity and depth of *DRN*, as well as Lucretius’ playful mastery of language, has long been acknowledged, and Lucretius’ use of *foedus* is no exception. Indeed, a close examination of *foedus* in *DRN* and in the Latin literary corpus reveals hitherto unnoticed layers of meaning which have great significance for Lucretius’ therapeutic philosophy.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter One opens with a brief overview of the social and political climate of Lucretius’ time, which was characterized by civil war and violence sparked by ambition and competition. Not much is known about Lucretius’ actual life but he is generally accepted to have died in the mid to late 50s BC, a few decades before the end of the Roman Republic and the start of the principate and the reign of Augustus in 27 BC. Although this period saw increasing violence and great political instability, various crises of social upheaval and rebellion had been plaguing Republican Rome since around the middle of the second century BC, and it was into this tumultuous social and political environment that Lucretius was born. The confused state of affairs of the time led to a rise in popularity of two main philosophical schools, each attempting to find order and meaning in an increasingly disordered world. This chapter briefly reviews the main tenets of each. Cicero, as an outspoken supporter

of Republican values and institutions and proponent of Stoic philosophy, provides an excellent foil for Lucretius' Epicurean beliefs, which challenge the validity of traditional mores and focus on individual or private, rather than civic, salvation.

Cicero, following the Stoics, wrote at length about natural law (*lex*) and justice (*ius*) and their importance to the all-encompassing world soul or mind and reason of god, as well as to the well-being and soul of humans. His conceptualization and use of these as technical philosophical terms may therefore have influenced Lucretius to adopt *foedus* rather than reuse vocabulary already closely aligned with a rival philosophical school. *Foedus* is far from a neutral term, however, and if it is not commonly found in Stoic writings it has a plethora of other meanings highly significant to Roman public life, religion, superstition, competition and warfare. In short, *foedus* represents exactly those irrational and harmful values and institutions of Roman society which are so strongly criticized and maligned by Lucretius; so why does Lucretius use it for a concept at the foundation of his entire philosophical system? A close examination of the powerful connotations accompanying *foedus* and distracting Lucretius' Roman audience from his philosophical meaning will take up much of this chapter, which poses the question driving this entire thesis: why *foedus*? Why not some other, more neutral term? In this chapter I also look at precedents for natural law in Graeco-Roman literature and philosophy, as well as document Lucretius' use of *foedus* and *lex* in *DRN*.

Chapter Two attempts to answer the research question of this thesis by examining the surface similarities between Roman *foedera* and Lucretius' *foedera naturae*. By comparing and contrasting the essential characteristics of each type of *foedera* it turns out that Lucretius' innovative use of *foedus* may not be as illogical as it first appeared. By appropriating *foedus* from the rhetoric of Roman social and political power, Lucretius is able to capitalize on those aspects of Roman *foedera* which coincide with his *foedera naturae* with a minimum of explanation. At the same time, however, he emphasizes the

superiority of his *foedera naturae*, which truly are what Roman *foedera* merely pretend to be. Thus, where Roman *foedera* simply aspire to immortality, the *foedera naturae* really do exist and exercise power eternally. Where obedience to Roman *foedera* is achieved through empty or exaggerated threats of punishment and destruction, the transgression of *foedera naturae* really does result in instant annihilation. The pre-existing features of Roman *foedera* shared by Lucretius' *foedera naturae* – namely the emphasis of *foedera* on limits and boundaries, the intrinsic physicality of *foedera* in time and space, and the inherent dichotomy of *foedus* as both a creative and destructive force – enhance Lucretius' Epicurean variation and facilitate the reader's comprehension of how the poet-philosopher conceives of his *foedera naturae*.

The third and final chapter of this thesis looks at the deeper significance of Lucretius' use of *foedus* and its role in his therapeutic programme of correction. Driving this chapter is Lucretius' exploitation of the etymological connection between the noun *foedus* ('treaty', 'covenant') and the adjective *foedus*, 'foul'. On the one hand, Lucretius manipulates the etymological roots of *foedus* to emphasize the corrupting influence of religion and superstition, again drawing attention to the superiority of his *foedera naturae* as they transcend the limitations of flawed, human *foedera*. In the same way, Lucretius declares his *DRN* the ultimate epic, redefining the role and values of epic poetry to reveal his work as truer and more worthy than the confused fabrications of his poetic predecessors. By redefining the foundations of Roman culture and society rather than simply inventing an entirely new explanation of reality, Lucretius transfers the grandeur and inviolability of traditional Roman institutions to his Epicurean adaptations. At the same time, his rearrangement of Roman culture exposes the traditional categories of the *mos maiorum* as empty and flawed representations of truth. Because Roman values are inextricably tied to the language of social life, however, simply undermining the traditional foundations of belief would have been insufficient to convince Lucretius' Roman readers to convert to an alien (i.e., Greek) school of thought. By recasting the old

categories into truer and more meaningful representations of reality, then, Lucretius constructs a new tradition of Epicurean thought, one which allows his Roman audience to retain some aspect of their cultural values, while redirecting their thought processes and actions towards more productive patterns of life. In this section I also discuss Lucretius' treatment of an alternate etymology of *foedus*, which follows the *fides* of the fetial rite instead of its foulness.

On the other hand, the close association between *foedus* and what is foul enables Lucretius to subtly remind his reader of the inherent foulness of nature which must be acknowledged and accepted before Epicurean *ataraxia* can be achieved. Epicureanism requires a rational examination of *all* parts of nature, both the pleasant and the abhorrent, before a true understanding of nature is possible. When these things have been examined, however, it turns out that what seems foul only seems that way from an ignorant, egocentric point of view. Death, injury, and natural disasters seem calamitous from the individual's perspective but are ultimately simple physical processes that eternally recur throughout the universe on greater or lesser scales. The Epicurean universe is non-teleological, non-providential, mechanical and unthinking, so attributing moral valuations to random events is irrational and ultimately self-destructive. Instead, psychological peace comes from a rational understanding that limits exist in nature, and an honest acceptance of these limits of life. The Plague of Athens narrative that closes *DRN* acts as a final test for Lucretius' reader: can he or she stand witness to the horrors and despair of the plague and maintain his or her serenity, or must the reader return to the beginning of *DRN* and review the catechism?

Chapter 1

Titus Lucretius Carus wrote his *De Rerum Natura* during a time of great political instability in Rome and, although his death in the mid to late 50s BC preceded that of the Roman Republic by about thirty years, various crises of social upheaval and rebellion had been plaguing Republican Rome since before he was born. Like Epicurus before him, Lucretius observed the anxieties caused by rampant greed, ambition, and specious idealism (Long 1986: 72). He watched as individuals vying for power manipulated traditional Roman mores to create convenient appearances of noble intent (e.g., Caesar; see Minyard 1985: 15-22), and he recognized the inherited system of Roman practices and beliefs as a false and ultimately harmful interpretation of reality. His six-book epic poem offers an alternative understanding of nature, one which will lead to true happiness and is based solely on empirical evidence and logic. The strict materiality of the Epicurean universe meant that all phenomena could be explained in terms of mechanical causality and atomic motion, no divine intervention necessary, and thus Lucretius begins liberating his reader from the oppressive tyranny of *religio*. A vast amount of fears and anxieties stem from religion and superstition, so one would expect Lucretius to try to help his audience achieve *ataraxia* (freedom from fear and anxiety) by keeping the boundary between reason and superstition clear. Instead of using neutral terminology to emphasize the mechanical, unthinking character of his Epicurean universe, however, Lucretius creates his technical philosophical vocabulary from the rhetoric of Roman public life. Especially problematic is his use of *foedus* – a word powerfully associated with religion, sacrifice, superstition, competition, and Roman expansion – for natural law.

This chapter will begin with a brief overview of the social and political climate of Lucretius' time, which saw a rise in popularity of two main positions regarding public life, roughly corresponding to Stoicism and Epicureanism. Lucretius represents the latter position, while the former is strongly championed by Cicero (106-43 BC). As an outspoken supporter of Republican values and institutions, Cicero provides a good

indication of the typical Roman attitude of his time and therefore sets the context against which Lucretius' *DRN* can be understood. By this I mean that Cicero believed in the values of the Republic and truly seems to have stood by them, unlike other politicians or public figures who simply mouthed pious platitudes completely at odds with their actions. Cicero, following the Stoics, wrote at length about natural law (*lex*) and justice (*ius*) and their importance to the all-encompassing world soul or mind and reason of god, as well as to the well-being and soul of humans. Lucretius may have been trying to avoid having his system associated with Stoicism by choosing not to use these terms for his variety of natural law, but his innovative use of *foedus* ('treaty') instead is highly surprising. If *lex naturae* or *ius naturalis* have too many Stoic associations, *foedus naturae* recalls even more strongly the institutions of Roman public life, religion, superstition, competition and warfare, that is, the irrational and harmful values and institutions of Roman society which are so strongly criticized and maligned by Lucretius. A close examination of the powerful connotations accompanying *foedus* and distracting Lucretius' Roman audience from his philosophical meaning will take up much of this chapter, which poses the question driving this entire thesis: why *foedus*? Why not some other, more neutral term? I also look at precedents for natural law in Graeco-Roman literature and philosophy.

Historical Context

The fall of the Roman Republic was caused by a number of different factors such as problems associated with its expanding imperialism, fighting amongst the elite ruling class, and personal ambitions replacing considerations of the state as a whole.¹ Most

¹ I give only a general overview of several of the contributing factors for the decline of the Roman Republic, without arguing for any one specific cause. For a general article reviewing the major theories (Brunt, Gruen, Meier) on the causes of the fall of the Republic and problems with these theories, see Morstein-Marx & Rosenstein's "The Transformation of the Republic" (2010: 625-637) in *A Companion to the Roman Republic*. C.F. Konrad gives a good analysis of the Gracchi land reforms and consequences in his article "From the Gracchi to the First Civil War" (2010: 167-189), also from the same volume, as does Jurgen von Ungern-Sternberg's "The Crisis of the Republic" (2004: 89-109), in *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Republic*. Finally, Erich Gruen's *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic* (1974) provides a comprehensive study of the internal matters leading to the end of the Roman Republic, from the aftermath of Sulla's dictatorship to the crossing of the Rubicon.

ancient writers (e.g., Polybius 6.57; 38.21ff.; Sallust *Cat.* 10ff.; *Jug.* 41) identify the fall of Carthage in 146 BC as the starting point for the decline of the Roman Republic. The removal of the unifying threat of the Carthaginians, coupled with an enormous influx of wealth and Eastern attitudes of excess and *luxuria*, resulted in moral degeneration amongst the elite ruling class and a fracturing of the Senate into squabbling factions.

Sallust writes:

The patricians carried their authority, and the people their liberty, to excess; every man took, snatched, and seized what he could. There was a complete division into two factions, and the republic was torn in pieces between them... Thus avarice, leagued with power, disturbed, violated, and wasted everything, without moderation or restraint; disregarding alike reason and religion, and rushing headlong, as it were, to its own destruction.

(*Jug.* 41, trans. Watson 1899)

The first major split between the Senate and the People occurred after the election of Tiberius Gracchus to the office of tribune in 133 BC, and his implementation of a series of controversial land reforms which sought to distribute property more evenly between the elite ruling class and Rome's poorer citizens. Unsurprisingly, the propertied classes bitterly opposed this reform and arranged for another tribune of the plebs, Marcus Octavius, to veto it despite a large majority of the assembly being in favour of it; this in turn led to the assembly, encouraged by Tiberius Gracchus, ignoring the sacrosanctity of Octavius' position and removing him from office (Plutarch *Lives* 10.10-12). The Senate responded by withholding the funds to implement the *lex agraria*. When Tiberius then sought re-election to the tribunate for the following year – the first time in 200 years anyone had attempted re-election – he and several of his followers were killed in a mob attack led by the *pontifex maximus*, Tiberius' cousin, P. Scipio Nasica (Plutarch *Lives* 10.16.1-20.4). When Tiberius' brother Gaius Gracchus was elected to the same position ten years later and tried to reinstate similar agrarian reformations, the senatorial class again responded with violence (Sallust *Jug.* 42). The Gracchi reformations thus created a precedent for using physical force and violence to resolve Roman political conflicts and marked a major turning point in Roman political history. As one ancient historian, Velleius Paterculus (19 BC–AD 31), observes:

This was the beginning of civil bloodshed and of the free reign of swords in the city of Rome. From then on justice was overthrown by force and the strongest was preeminent. Disagreements

between citizens that in an earlier time had usually been settled through mediation were now decided by the sword. Wars were not started over the issues but according to the rewards...Once the path of justice had been abandoned, men rushed headlong into wrongdoing. No man considers a way too low for himself which has brought rewards to others. (2.3.3-4)²

Members of the Senate continued to argue about various issues and controversies, many of which were caused by Rome's imperial problems and responsibilities. The invasion of the Germanic tribes of the Cimbri and Teutones in 113 BC, the Jugurtha War from 112-106 BC, the Social War of 90-88 BC, and the Mithridatic Wars from 88-84, 83-81, and 75-63 BC all required resources and men, and frequently led to new reformations and measures being passed. In 107 BC, for example, Gaius Marius relaxed the land requirements for enrollment in the military to enable landless citizens to join the Roman army (*Jug.* 86.2-3) and, together with the tribune Lucius Appuleius Saturninus, later founded a number of veterans' colonies outside Italy, an unpopular move among the optimates (Plutarch *Lives* 9.28-29; Appian *BC* 1.4.29).³ Drawn-out wars at the outskirts of the empire and promises of land and wealth thus resulted in a gradual transference of soldiers' loyalties from the Roman Republic to their individual units and commanders (e.g., Plutarch *Lives* 9.7.1-4; Potter 2004: 81). Civil war broke out between competing Roman forces in 88-87 BC then again from 82-81 BC, Rome's allies revolted against her heavy-handed rule and demanded citizenship and a more equitable relationship during the Social War of 90-88 BC, and in 82 BC Sulla marched on Rome and seized power for himself, replacing the oligarchic government with a dictatorship and introducing new mandates and legislations that would have lasting impact on the Roman state. He severely restricted the powers of the plebeian tribunes and plebeian assembly while enlarging the Senate, for example, but since his proscriptions had considerably thinned the aristocratic population, the newly created seats were largely filled by the equestrian class, who were less inclined to the conservative and traditional views of the senatorial class.

² Translation from Harriet Flower's translation of Jurgen von Ungern-Sternberg's article (2004: 91-92).

³ For a more detailed discussion of Marius' various military reforms and their impact, see Potter's "The Roman Army and Navy" (2004), pp. 80-85.

Civil war and violence sparked by ambition and competition continued to afflict the Roman Republic until it finally ended with Octavian's victory over Antony at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC and the beginning of the principate and the reign of Augustus in 27 BC. As has been shown, however, the Roman Republic had been steadily destabilizing for over a century before it finally ended. Escalating tensions between the elite ruling class who wanted to maintain the status quo and an increasingly wealthy and powerful equestrian class allowed ambitious politicians or generals to appeal to popular opinion to gain power. Underhanded or bloody methods became commonplace and the use of force continued to escalate. External challenges to Rome's supremacy and internal conflicts over who would rule her continued to undermine the Republic's ability to effectively function. Finally, an epidemic of immorality, licentiousness and excess was seen as the root cause of the evils afflicting the Roman state (e.g., Sall. *Cat.* 5.8, 12.2; Cic. *In Cat.* 2.25; *S. Rosc.* 75.7, etc.). This, then, was the state of affairs in Rome during Lucretius' lifetime and his composition of his *DRN*.

Cicero and Stoic Philosophy

From this environment of competition, suspicion, and political upheaval emerged two main attitudes towards political participation. The first, most strongly expressed by Cicero, argued for the necessity of engaging in civic affairs at all times, and especially during such crises as those currently afflicting and endangering the Roman state. Cicero was outspoken in his support of the *mos maiorum*, literally the "morals of the elders", comprehensively defined by J.D. Minyard (1985: 6) as:

the standard to which appeal could be made, the inheritance of custom, procedure, and attitude representing the settled assumptions of shared life, the constitution of the *res publica* which gave form to a *civitas* whose constituted groups might quarrel among themselves, but which formed their judgments on the same account of reality and an agreement about the nature, purposes, and patterns of life.

In other words, the *mos maiorum* dictated appropriate behaviours and pastimes for Roman citizens and comprised the core of traditional Roman values such as *virtus*

(‘excellence’, ‘virtue’), *fides* (‘trustworthiness’), *pietas* (‘piety’), *dignitas* (‘worthiness’, ‘dignity’), and *honor* (‘honour’). Because Cicero is such a recognizable (and self-lauded) champion of the Roman Republic and the *mos maiorum* which Lucretius so vehemently criticizes, it will be useful to examine his position closely as representative of the “norm” against which Lucretius rebels. There is also the added advantage of being able to contrast Cicero’s Stoicism against Lucretius’ Epicureanism. Both philosophical schools emerged during the Hellenistic period, in the aftermath of Alexander the Great’s conquering of much of the known world and the turbulent period after his death. Their different philosophical positions can be viewed in part as a reaction against the changing social and political circumstances of their time (Long 1986: 3), and it is perhaps unsurprising that these schools of thought appealed so strongly to Lucretius and Cicero, writing as they were during a period of similar transformation and uncertainty.⁴

For Cicero, every man had a moral duty to engage in public affairs. In the first place, he argues, we owe to the country which raised and nurtured and educated us “the greater and more important part of our courage, our talents, and our wisdom,” for this was why she gave us so many advantages in the first place (*Rep.* 1.8; cf. *Leg.* 2.5; Plato, *Crito* 51a-c).⁵ Political involvement in times of peace helps prevent and prepare for more turbulent times (*Rep.* 1.10-11), while the threat of being ruled by wicked men and seeing the Republic destroyed should be motive enough for any good person to enter political life (*Rep.* 1.9). A final incentive is related by Scipio Aemilianus, Cicero’s spokesman in his *De Re Publica*. Scipio is describing a dream he had to his interlocutors, in which his grandfather Scipio Africanus appeared before him and prophesied his future. Having informed Scipio of the two paths of destiny open to him, he reassures him that “all those

⁴ Epicureanism seems to have hit the height of its popularity just before the fall of the Republic and then begins a gradual decline (Long 1986: 17).

⁵ All translations of Cicero’s *De Re Publica* and *De Legibus* unless otherwise specified come from Clinton Walker Keyes (1970), Loeb edition.

who have preserved, aided, or enlarged their fatherland have a special place prepared for them in the heavens, where they may enjoy an eternal life of happiness” (*Rep.* 6.13).

Furthermore, Cicero declares, because “man is designed by nature to safeguard and protect his fellows, it follows from this natural disposition, that the wise man should desire to engage in politics and government” (*cum autem ad tuendos conservandosque homines hominem natum esse videamus, consentaneum est huic naturae, ut sapiens velit gerere et administrare rem publicam, Fin.* 3.68).⁶ His argument rests on the premise that humans have a natural benevolence towards other humans, which comes from our innate rationality. All humans are born with a share of reason and this elevates us above other creatures and grants us citizenship along with the gods in the divine community of the *cosmopolis* or world-city (*Leg.* 1.18-23, 45; *Nat. Deor.* 2.154).⁷ For, Cicero writes:

Those who have reason in common must also have right reason (*recta ratio*) in common. And since right reason is Law (*lex*), we must believe that men have Law also in common with the gods. Further, those who share Law must also share Justice (*ius*); and those who share these are to be regarded as members of the same commonwealth...Hence we must now conceive of this whole universe as one commonwealth of which both gods and men are members. (*Leg.* 1.23)

inter quos autem ratio, inter eosdem etiam recta ratio communis est; quae cum sit lex, lege quoque consociati homines cum dis putandi sumus. inter quos porro est communio legis, inter eos communio iuris est; quibus autem haec sunt inter eos communia, et civitatis eiusdem habendi sunt...ut iam universus hic mundus sit una civitas communis deorum atque hominum existimanda.

As members of the *cosmopolis* governed by divine will, “it is a natural consequence that we should prefer the common advantage to our own” (*Fin.* 3.64). This is true because we

⁶ All translations of Cicero’s *De Finibus* unless otherwise specified come from H. Harris Rackham (1931), Loeb edition.

⁷ Scholars have credited Cicero with presenting a more inclusive version of Stoic cosmopolitanism than his predecessors (see e.g. Asmis 2008a: 9n.26; Pangle 1998: 242-44). Diogenes records Zeno as restricting membership into the polity to “the good alone” (DL 7.33), for example, while Chrysippus defines the cosmos as “a single entity of (or for?) the wise, its citizenship...being held jointly by gods and human beings” (κ[ό]σμον ἓνα τῶν φρονίμων, συνπολεῖται[όμενον θεοῖς | καὶ ἀνθρώποις] (*PHerc.* 1428 col. 7,12-8,13; Obbink 1999: 184-85). Compare this to Cicero, who conceives of the universe as “one commonwealth of which both gods and men are members” (*Leg.* 1.23), “a city or state of which both men and gods are members” (*Fin.* 3.64), and “the common dwelling-place of gods and men, or the city that belongs to both; for they alone have the use of reason and live by justice and by law” (*Nat. Deor.* 2.154, trans. H. Rackham 1933). Other first century BC Stoics such as Arius Didymus discuss the *cosmopolis* in similarly inclusive terms: “They [i.e., both gods and men] are members of a community because of their participation in reason, which is natural law” (*Praep. ev.* 15.15 = *SVF* ii.528). At the same time, however, Cicero condemns those lacking a social inclination of justice and community as unworthy to hold the title “human” (*Rep.* 2.48).

are simply parts of a greater whole which, being whole, is more perfect and worthy of care than its parts.⁸

But, humans also belong to many lesser states and countries as well. To Cicero, a state (*res publica*) – whether the *cosmopolis* or smaller groupings of humans – just is “the property of a people” (*res populi*), and a *populus* is simply “an assemblage of people in large numbers associated in an agreement with respect to justice and a partnership for the common good” (*coetus multitudinis iuris consensu ut utilitatis communione sociatus*, *Rep.* 1.39). Cicero explicitly rejects the Epicurean view that humans first came together out of weakness (e.g., *DRN* 5.1011-1023), crediting instead “a certain social spirit which nature has implanted in man” (*naturalis quaedam hominum quasi congregatio*, *Rep.* 1.39).⁹ According to Stoic doctrine, our recognition of the rationality inherent in other humans leads to the realization that they are worthy of respect, compassion, help and so on, and our natural desire for what is good (i.e., divine, rational) motivates us to form communities and live in harmony with others. Ideally these communities are governed by natural law or right reason but because humans are imperfect beings, civil law (*ius civile*) is created “for the safety of citizens, the preservation of States, and the tranquillity and happiness of human life” (*Leg.* 2.11).¹⁰ Unlike the law of nature (*naturae ius*) “which is not born of opinion, but implanted in us by a kind of innate instinct (*quaedam in natura vis insevit*)” (*Inv.* 2.161), *ius civile* is learned from tradition (*Rep.* 3.49). It consists of the written or statutory law (*lex*) of a particular nation or state, together with customary law (*consuetudine*), “which we see proceed from nature but which have been strengthened by custom, or any principle which lapse of time and public approval have made the habit and usage of the community” (*Inv.* 2.162, trans. Wood 1988: 71-72).

⁸ Cf. Marcus Aurelius (10.6): “Nothing is harmful to the part which is advantageous to the whole. For the whole contains nothing which is not advantageous to itself...As long as I remember that I am a part of such a whole I shall be well content with all that happens” (trans. Long 1986).

⁹ For further discussion on the Epicurean theory of human socialization, see Chapter Two, below.

¹⁰ Cicero rejects the possibility of a people or nation surviving ungoverned by some deliberative body (*Rep.* 1.41); for him, a state (*res publica*) just is a politically structured entity (Asmis 2004: 576-77).

Cicero's adoption of Stoic philosophy is clear in his identification of reason with natural law, justice, and god (*Leg.* 1.23, above). The Stoics conceived of the cosmos as governed by a benevolent and wise supreme being, "one and the same with reason, fate, and Zeus (Ἐν τ' εἶναι θεὸν καὶ νοῦν καὶ εἰμαρμένην καὶ Δία); he is also called by many other names" (DL 7.135; cf. 7.147)¹¹. Being divine, he is perfect, eternal, constant and complete, "but he is not of human form" (DL 7.147). God as natural law permeates every aspect of the universe, establishing and ensuring the natural order of the cosmos. The cosmos, infused as it is by divine reason, "is a living being, rational, animate and intelligent" (DL 7.142); some Stoics such as Chrysippus and Arius Didymus even accept the world as a god, "and also the all-pervading world-soul (*animi fusionem universam*), and again the guiding principle (*principatum*) of that soul, which operates in the intellect and reason, and the common and all-embracing nature of things (*communemque rerum naturam universam atque omnia continentem*)" (Cicero, *Nat. Deor.* 1.39, referring only to Chrysippus; cf. DL 7.148; Arius Didymus: fr. 29 = *SVF* ii.428; fr. 31 = *SVF* ii.527).¹² Nature is "both that which holds the world together and that which causes things on the earth to grow" (DL 7.148). Reason (*ratio*), natural law (*lex*) and justice (*ius*) are all synonymous with god and cannot be separated from one another, "For the divine mind cannot exist without reason, and divine reason cannot but have this power to establish right and wrong" (*Leg.* 2.10).¹³ Nature and natural law thus act as a standard against which we can judge human laws and actions (*Leg.* 1.42-44). When we act justly we act rationally and in accordance with nature and vice versa, and this (i.e., living in

¹¹ All translations of Diogenes Laertius unless otherwise specified come from R.D. Hicks (1972), Loeb edition.

¹² All translations of Cicero's *Nat. Deor.* unless otherwise specified come from H. Rackham's translation (1933), Loeb edition.

¹³ For the Stoics nature, god and morality were so integrated that Plutarch complains about Chrysippus' inability to separate their nature system from any other aspect of their philosophy: "For whether it is about ends or justice or goods and evils or marriage and child-rearing or law and government, he says nothing at all unless...he makes a preface of Zeus, Fate, Providence, the universe's being one and bounded and held together by a single power – of none of which anyone can be persuaded who has not been deeply immersed in the accounts of physics" (*De Sto. Rep.* 1035b-c; cf. Annas 2007: 77-78).

accordance with nature) is for Cicero and the Stoics the highest end and *telos* of life (e.g., DL 5.87-88; *Fin.* 5.26). Living in accordance with nature means living “by virtue as our law” (*velit virtute tamquam lege vivere*, *Leg.* 1.56).

The wise and virtuous man, then, will participate in politics because by doing so he can best realize his natural impulse towards bringing about the common good. Cicero writes: “Just as the laws set the safety of all above the safety of individuals, so a good, wise and law-abiding man, conscious of his duty to the state, studies the advantage of all more than that of himself or of any single individual” (*Fin.* 3.64). Virtue is living in accordance with nature, and this refers both to one’s own social and rational human nature, and the nature of the universe; “and this very thing constitutes the virtue of the happy man and the smooth current of life, when all actions promote the harmony of the spirit dwelling in the individual man with the will of him who orders the universe” (DL 7.88; cf. 7.89). Virtue is “nothing else than nature perfected and developed to its highest point” (*Leg.* 1.25), “virtue is reason completely developed (*perfecta ratio*)” (*Leg.* 1.45). For Cicero, virtue lies in a politic life, for “the existence of virtue depends entirely upon its use; and its noblest use is the government of the State (*civitatis gubernatio*)” (*Rep.* 1.2; cf. 1.12: “For there is really no other occupation in which human virtue approaches more closely the august function of the gods than that of founding new States or preserving those already in existence”).¹⁴

Diogenes, recording Chrysippus’ words, writes that the wise man will engage in politics, if nothing hinders him, “since thus he will restrain vice and promote virtue” (DL 7.121). Laws and customs are established in each state to guide the behaviour and character of its people (*Rep.* 4.3; 5.1), but the well-being of the State depends on the

¹⁴ Cf. DL 7.130: “Of the three kinds of life, the contemplative, the practical, and the rational, they [i.e., the Stoics] declare that we ought to choose the last, for that a rational being is expressly produced by nature for contemplation and for action (πρὸς θεωρίαν καὶ πράξιν).”

character and behaviour of its leading men.¹⁵ If they are corrupted by vices and evil desires, the State is as well, but if they conduct themselves virtuously and honourably, the State and all its citizens prosper (*Leg.* 3.30-32). For Cicero, “It is impossible to live well except in a good commonwealth, and nothing can produce greater happiness than a well-constituted state” (*Rep.* 5.7). Laws are considered just when they align with natural law, and good laws help guide citizens towards virtue by guiding their behaviour. According to the Stoic theory of *kathekon* or appropriate action, a non-wise person through practice becomes so conditioned to choose appropriate actions (i.e., actions performed in accordance with nature, directed by nature) that such choice becomes a “fixed habit”, which in turn becomes “choice fully rationalized and in harmony with nature” (*Fin.* 3.20). Only the Stoic sage acts perfectly in accordance with nature with unfailing consistency, and this, in Schofield’s words, “is the disposition of virtue itself” (2003: 244; cf. DL 7.98). Although only perfectly performed actions (*katorthomata*) are good, appropriate actions are valuable because they help guide an agent towards virtue by allowing him or her to exercise the faculty of rational choice.¹⁶

By actively participating in the legislative process, then, a citizen both exercises his faculty of rational choice, and helps civil law approximate natural law more closely to better guide others towards virtue; good laws and bad laws are distinguished by referring them to nature as a standard (*Leg.* 1.44). This, Cicero explains, is why Rome’s constitution is the best: because, being a harmonious blending of the upper, middle, and lower classes, it has been honed and improved upon over time by many wise men acting in concert, which is “the strongest and best bond of permanent union in any commonwealth; and such concord can never be brought about without the aid of justice” (*Rep.* 2.69). It also explains why political participation is so important – it

¹⁵ Cf. DL 7.122: “the wise and good alone are fit to be magistrates, judges, or orators, whereas among the bad there is not one so qualified.”

¹⁶ The Stoic belief that humans draw nearer to virtue by correctly exercising their capacity for rational choice is shared with Plato and Aristotle (Inwood 1999: 690).

provides an opportunity to realize one's own potential for virtue and actively contribute to the well-being of others and the State. Even just participating in the assemblies is good but the higher the office one holds the more influence he will wield and the more good he might accomplish; by this logic, the political jockeying for position that occurs every election could arguably be considered a moral duty (*officium*) or appropriate action.¹⁷

Lucretius' Position

This sentiment contrasts sharply with Lucretius' Epicurean position, which urges a withdrawal from the competitive and ultimately harmful arena of political participation in favour of more productive activities such as a philosophical contemplation of nature. Although Jeffrey Fish convincingly argues that some Epicureans conceded the possibility of harmless or acceptable political participation (2011: 72-104), Epicurus himself preached "a quiet life and the retirement from the world" (*KD* 14; cf. *KD* 21, *SV* 58, *DL* 10.119)¹⁸. Lucretius, following Epicurus, turns his "prison" (δεσμοτηρίου) of public life (*SV* 58; cf. *DL* 10.119) into a hellish Acheron filled with futility and misery (3.978-1023), while Book Two opens with Lucretius extolling the pleasures of his remote, intellectual citadel. From here, he writes,

you may look down upon others and behold them all astray, wandering abroad and seeking the path of life: - the strife of wits, the fight for precedence, all labouring night and day with surpassing toil to mount upon the pinnacle of riches and to lay hold on power. O pitiable minds of men, O blind intelligences! In what gloom of life, in how great perils is passed all your poor span of time! (2.9-16)¹⁹

*despicere unde queas alios passimque videre
errare atque viam palantis quaerere vitae,
certare ingenio, contendere nobilitate,*

10

¹⁷ There are of course limits to what would be considered acceptable and unacceptable. Catiline's plotting to murder his senatorial enemies in order to seize power for himself, for example, is completely unacceptable. Cicero believes strongly that the mixed constitution is the best form of legislation, because it ensures the interests of all classes of citizens are represented fairly, over time (*Rep.* 2.65-69). Even if there was one single wise ruler, this does not ensure that the next ruler will be so (*Rep.* 2.45-48), so the most consistent and wisest legislative system is the mixed constitution of the Roman Republic.

¹⁸ All translations of Epicurus unless otherwise specified are from C. Bailey (1970).

¹⁹ All translations of Lucretius unless otherwise specified are from W.H.D. Rouse (1992), Loeb edition.

*noctes atque dies niti praestante labore
ad summas emergere opes rerumque potiri.
o miseras hominum mentes, o pectora caeca!
qualibus in tenebris vitae quantisque periculis
degitur hoc aevi quodcumquest!*

15

Lucretius thus rejects Cicero's belief that political power enables one to achieve virtue and better one's country, insisting that any benefits are illusory and lead people astray.²⁰ The "blushing purple" of senatorial robes are no more helpful in repelling fevers than a peasant's coarse blanket (2.34-36), and if they are unprofitable for the body they must be so for the mind as well (2.37-39). Similarly, in Book Five: "Then therefore pelts, now gold and purple, trouble men's life with cares and weary it with war...but we take no harm to be without a vestment of purple worked with gold and great figures, so long as there is a poor man's cloak to protect us" (5.1423-29).

Book Three takes on a more vehement tone as Lucretius condemns "avarice and the blind lust of distinction" (*avarities et honorum caeca cupido*, 3.59) as "sores of life" (*vulnera vitae*, 3.63), criticizing recognizable symbols of Roman values. *Honorum* at line 59 recalls the *cursus honorum* or hierarchical "course of offices" elite Romans progressed through during the course of their political careers (Bailey 1963: 1000). Certain positions were prerequisites to others and only a limited number of aedileships, praetorships, consulates and so on were available; aspiring politicians started young and competed fiercely with their peers to win offices that would grant them the greatest prestige (*dignitas*) and authority (*auctoritas*) (Rosenstein 2010: 371-72). Such rivalry ultimately backfires, however, "since in the struggle to climb to the summit of honour, they made their path full of danger" (*quoniam ad summum succedere honorem / certantes iter infestum fecere viai*, 5.1123-24). In Book Three, Lucretius' allegorical Sisyphus is the ambitious man whose efforts will always fail:

²⁰ Cf. Epicurus *KD* 7: "Some men wished to become famous and conspicuous, thinking that they would thus win for themselves safety from other men. Wherefore if the life of such men is safe, they have obtained the good which nature craves; but if it is not safe, they do not possess that for which they strove at first by the instinct of nature."

for to solicit power, an empty thing, which is never granted, and always to endure hard toil in the pursuit of it, this is to push laboriously up a hill the rock that still rolls down again from the very top, and in a rush recovers the levels of the open plain. (3.998-1002)

*nam petere imperium quod inanest nec datur umquam,
atque in eo semper durum sufferre laborem,
hoc est adverso nixantem trudere monte* 1000
*saxum quod tamen e summo iam vertice rursum
volvitur et plani raptim petit aequora campi.*

The *plani raptim petit aequora campi* calls to mind the image of a political candidate (*petitor*) hurrying across the Campus Martius hoping for re-election and *imperium* (West 1969: 102). The object of envy who “parades in shining pomp” (*claro qui incedit honore*, 3.77) suggests victorious generals returning to Rome in a triumphal procession; Bailey also points out that *incedit* is the formal word used for a magistrate’s official appearance (1963: 1001). Finally, the civil bloodshed, murder piled upon murder, and fratricide mentioned at lines 70-73 might refer to Rome’s founding or multiple other episodes in Rome’s history in which greed for power or land sparked unnecessary bloodshed.

Lucretius is also harshly critical of *religio*, “which has brought forth criminal and impious deeds (*scelerosa atque impia facta*)” (1.83) and oppresses humankind (1.62-65), and he accuses priests (*vates*) of fabricating tales (*fingere somnia*) to maintain control of the populace with superstition and fear (1.102-111; cf. 1.68: *fama deum*).²¹ Prayers and sacrifices to gods and deities, such a central feature of Roman culture, are dismissed as vain and wasteful (5.1194-1235) and the traditional notion of gods as benevolent omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent beings is disproved and mocked (5.156-199).²² The divine providence of the Stoic world-system has no place in the strict materiality of Lucretius’ Epicurean universe, with nature and the laws of physics instead sufficing to

²¹ Cf. Polybius, who credits religion with keeping the Roman Republic together (6.56). Fear of the gods is used “as a check upon the common people,” and the “only resource” to control a fickle and passionate multitude “is to keep them in check by mysterious terrors and scenic effects of this sort” (6.56) (trans. E. Shuckburgh, 1962). For further discussion, see Chapter 3, below.

²² Lucretius directly challenges the Stoic view that god made the universe for the sake of mankind (e.g., *Off.* 1.22; *Fin.* 3.67) at 5.198-99 (“the world was certainly not [*nequaquam*] made for us by divine power”), and the following line (“so great are the faults with which it stands endowed”) again contradicts the Stoic belief in the perfection of the world (DL 7.137-138).

explain all phenomena in terms of mechanical causality. Given Lucretius' critical attitude against typical Roman pursuits and values, then, it is curious that the images and vocabulary of Roman public life play such a central role in his work. More specifically, Lucretius in his *DRN* coins the phrase *foedera naturae* for his "laws of nature", the necessary rules of the universe which, if properly understood and accepted, can lead the rational thinker to the Epicurean goal of *ataraxia* or freedom from anxiety: why? Why *foedus*? Why not some other, more suitable term? For *foedus* is a complex and multifaceted word whose conventional Roman meanings clash dramatically with Lucretius' technical version and confuse his audience's understanding of his philosophical system.

Problems with *Foedus*

There are a number of reasons *foedus* should be viewed as an unlikely and unsuitable choice for one of the central concepts in Lucretius' atheistic Epicurean universe, but the biggest reason by far is its association with the fetial rite, a formal public ritual by which treaties (*foedera*) between Rome and other nations were struck and ratified and which drew power from the approval and cooperation of the gods. It also called down divine curses upon future transgressors of the treaty's terms and conditions and concluded with an animal sacrifice to Jupiter so gruesome that the main objective of the fetial rite itself supposedly derived its name, *foedus* ('treaty'), from its gory finale and the manner (*foede*, 'horribly', 'disgustingly') in which the sacrificial piglet was killed. The tender age of the piglet involved (ten days) and the primitive manner in which it was killed (bludgeoned to death with a stone), coupled with the invocation of Jupiter to witness and guard the sanctity of the treaty, conjures an image of precisely the kind of ignorant superstition and dogmatic belief condemned by the Epicureans. At the very least, the very active role attributed to the gods by the fetial priests and those present at the rite directly conflicts with Epicurean conceptions of the gods as dispassionate and powerless beings neither able to be affected by nor to affect anything in the world of

(Gladhill 2008: 36-39).²³ Such immediate and repugnant imagery seems at odds with the serene and distant Epicurean viewpoint so lauded by Lucretius in his proem to Book Two (2.1-19). What is “pleasant” (*suave*, 2.4, 6) about watching armies clash on a battlefield is the knowledge of security afforded by the distant vantage point, which insulates the spectator not only from the hazards of the battle and the threat of death or maiming (2.5: *tua sine parte pericli*, “with no part of yours in the peril”), but also from the carnage and attendant gore and *foeditas* of the combat zone.

Finally, *foedera* were an integral part of Roman life, controlling the interactions between Rome and her allies, as well as those between Roman citizens and their leaders. They dictated trade agreements and military obligations, guaranteed the sacrosanctity of tribunes from the Roman people (*AUC* 4.6.7: *quos foedere icto cum plebe sacrosanctos accepissent*), and played pivotal roles in Rome’s legendary past. The *foedus* between Aeneas and King Latinus laid the groundwork for the founding of Rome (*Aen.* 12.195-215), for example, and it was a *foedus* that brought the Albans under Roman rule during the reign of Tullus Hostilius (*AUC* 1.24). Unlike the *condicio* and *stipulatio* contracts amicably wrought in the Roman law courts, a *foedus* was first decided on the battlefield, with both upper and lower class Roman citizens risking death and maiming to fight to prove Rome’s supremacy and extend her borders ever further; the warfare ended only with the establishment of a *foedus*, which in general benefited Rome far more than her *foederati* and symbolized her sovereignty over others. *Foedera* can thus be seen as inextricably tied to and located within the sphere of war, competition, expansion, and empire building, and therefore as representative of all the things Lucretius considers wrong with the values and practices of Roman society. Why then would Lucretius give such a well-established word with so many pre-existing distracting associations an entirely new philosophical signification? This is especially puzzling given the value

²³ Gladhill (2008) draws his examples primarily from Celsus’ *De Medicina*; for specific examples and textual references see Gladhill (2008) p. 36-39.

Epicurus himself placed on using the conventional meanings of words, a fact that Lucretius as a devout follower would surely have been aware of.

The significance of the everyday meanings of *foedus* has been for the most part overlooked or underappreciated by scholars.²⁴ Although many have briefly commented on Lucretius' use of *foedus* as part of his tendency to employ the socio-political vocabulary of his time (e.g., Schiesaro 2007, Cabisius 1984, Garani 2007, etc.), I think that even more attention can be drawn to the impact such a word would have had on his Roman elite audience. While I agree that care must be taken not to place undue importance on the customary meanings of *foedus*, I also believe that it would be a disservice to Lucretius not to at least consider the impact the use of such a marked word has on his philosophical system and, simultaneously, the effect – if any – his appropriation of such a widespread term has on the everyday socio-political vocabulary of Republican Rome. At the very least, Lucretius is generally accepted to have introduced the phrase *foedera naturae* into the philosophical vocabulary of Roman literature (Fowler 2002: 381), and to have provided a model for subsequent Roman writers either to imitate or correct.²⁵ Furthermore, if we take the conventional meanings of *foedus* into proper consideration, Lucretius' decision to adopt the term to refer to the driving force of nature may turn out not to be such an odd move after all. *Foedus* has many problematic associations contradictory to the values of a rational and unintentional

²⁴ William Gladhill's dissertation *Foedera: A Study in Roman Poetics and Society* (2008) is a notable exception and provides a thorough and insightful analysis of what he calls "the poetics of *foedera* – the reconstruction of a cultural phenomenon by text, the process by which reality becomes reconstituted in poetry" (18). Gladhill focuses on the literary tradition rather than the philosophical, however, conducting a survey of works spanning several decades rather than focusing on one particular period of Roman history.

²⁵ Variations of the phrase *foedera naturae* appear in several works after Lucretius' *DRN* (e.g., Virgil *Georg.* 1.6061; Lucan *BC* 2.2; Manilius *Astron.* 2.48). One other example occurs in Cicero's *Pro Scauro* (see p. 24n. 27, below), which, Asconius reports, was delivered around 54 BC (*In Scaur.*); unfortunately, the exact date of *DRN* is unknown (Lucretius died between 54-49 BC) so all we can say is that the two works were written around the same time (Shearin 2007: 96n.243). It is also possible that Cicero borrowed the phrase from Lucretius' unpublished manuscript. He praises Lucretius' poetry in a letter to his brother Quintus (*QFr.* 2.9) dated February 54, so either Lucretius was already dead at that point or he had shared his incomplete poem with the brothers (Smith 1992:x-xii).

Epicurean universe, but it also possesses some distinctive features particularly suited to Nature's domain. Finally, Lucretius can be interpreted as subverting the political rhetoric of Republican Rome by redirecting its focus away from the empty and self-serving goals of *ambitio*, towards more positive and meaningful activities, namely, Epicurean philosophical contemplation.

Foedera in DRN

The phrase *foedera naturae* occurs only five times in full throughout *DRN* (1.586; 2.302; 5.310, 924; 6.906-907), although *foedera* is sometimes used on its own with *natura* implied (e.g. 3.416, 5.57; Long 2006: 171). Each case identifies the *foedera naturae* as setting limits on the lifetime and power of all things in the world, while guaranteeing the regularity of species. The passages containing the full phrase *foedera naturae* are as follows:

1.584-594:

Again, since a limit has been fixed (*reddita finis*) for the growth of things after their kind and for their tenure of life, and since it stands decreed what each can do by the ordinances of nature (*per foedera naturai*), and also what each cannot do, and since nothing changes, but all things are constant to such a degree that all the different birds show in succession marks upon their bodies to distinguish their kind, they must also have beyond a doubt a body of immutable matter.

<i>denique iam quoniam generatim reddita finis</i>	
<i>crescendi rebus constat vitamque tenendi,</i>	585
<i>et quid quaeque queant per foedera naturai,</i>	
<i>quid porro nequeant, sancitum quandoquidem extat,</i>	
<i>nec commutatur quicquam, quin omnia constant</i>	
<i>usque adeo variae volucres ut in ordine cunctae</i>	
<i>ostendant maculas generalis corpore inesse,</i>	590
<i>inmutabili materiae quoque corpus habere</i>	
<i>debent nimirum...</i>	

2.297-302:

Therefore in whatsoever motion the bodies of first-beginnings are now, in that same motion they were in ages gone by, and hereafter they will always be carried along in the same way, and the things which have been accustomed to be born will be born under the same conditions; they will be and will grow and will be strong with their strength as much as is granted to each by the laws of nature (*per foedera naturai*).

<i>quapropter quo nunc in motu principiorum</i>	
<i>corpora sunt, in eodem anteacta aetate fuere</i>	
<i>et post haec semper simili ratione ferentur,</i>	
<i>et quae consuerint gigni gignentur eadem</i>	300
<i>condicione et erunt et crescent vique valebunt,</i>	
<i>quantum cuique datum est per foedera naturai.</i>	

5.306-310:

Again, do you not see that even stones are conquered by time, that tall turrets fall and rocks crumble, that the gods' temples and their images wear out and crack, nor can their holy divinity carry forward the boundaries of fate (*fati finis*), or strive against nature's laws (*naturae foedera*)?

5.920-924:

...the various kinds of plants and the corn and the luxuriant trees, which even now spring in abundance from the earth, nevertheless cannot be produced interwoven together (*complexa creari*), but each thing proceeds after its own fashion, and all by fixed law of nature preserve their distinctions (*sed res quaeque suo ritu procedit, et omnes / foedere naturae certo discrimina servant*).

6.906-907:

To pass on, I will begin to discuss by what law of nature (*quo foedere naturae*) it comes about that iron can be attracted by that stone which the Greeks call magnet.

In addition to the *foedera naturae*, Lucretius mentions the *fati foedera* ('treaties of fate, destiny': 2.254) which are broken (*rumpere*) by the minute swerve (*clinamen*) of the atoms (2.251-262), the *foedus* "by which spirit and mind are for ever bound" (*hoc anima atque animus vincti sunt foedere semper*, 3.416), and, mockingly, the imaginary *foedera* between "immortal spirits awaiting mortal frames in number numberless...that the spirit which comes flying up first may creep in first, and they need not come to blows one whit" (3.781-83).²⁶ It is significant that although Roman writers predating Lucretius used *foedus* to refer almost exclusively to human covenants and alliances, it mostly appears in *DRN* in discussions of animate and inanimate life in general, with humans notably absent from the discussion.²⁷ Thus we see the *foedera naturae* guiding the lives of different species of birds (1.584-94), "various kinds of plants and the corn and the luxuriant trees" (5.920), and even types of rocks or stone structures (5.306-310, 6.906-907), while

²⁶ Shearin divides these into two types: "literal compacts" or "genuine interpersonal agreements," and "metaphorical agreements" such as those between spirits and mind (2007: 95).

²⁷ *Foedus* does appear concomitantly with *naturae* in Cicero's *Pro Scauro* (5: *contra foedus fieri dicant legemque naturae*), which is roughly contemporaneous with Lucretius' *DRN* (see n.25, above). Shearin rightly points out, however, that Lucretius' usage is "distinctly more radical" than Cicero's, which alludes to a discussion about suicide in Plato's *Phaedo* (2007: 96). Socrates explains to his interlocutor Cebes that suicide is impermissible because the gods are our guardians and we are their chattel, so the responsibility of our death falls to them (61c-62e). Nature in this context, then, is understood as an anthropomorphic deity capable of striking treaties (*foedera*) and making laws – not at all like Lucretius' conception of *natura* as an impersonal force of the universe (Shearin 2007: 96-97).

it is left to the reader to infer that the same types of laws also apply to human beings. It is not until about two-thirds of the way through Book Five that human *foedera* are mentioned, and then only three times (5.1025, 1155, 1443).

Lucretius seems to want to emphasize the unthinking nature of the Epicurean universe, so it is strange that he uses a word with strong connotations of choice and assent. Roman *foedera* could be *aequum* or *iniquum* depending on whether equality between both parties was acknowledged or not (Baronowski 1990: 345-47), but even when an imbalance of power forced the weaker side to agree to the terms set by the stronger, a public declaration of assent from both factions was required. Furthermore, *foedera* struck without the assent or knowledge of the community lack coercive force and are denied validity. In *AUC* 21.18, for example, Livy records the Carthaginians' response to the Roman ambassadors sent to rebuke them for attacking the Saguntines, despite their protected status as Rome's allies:

But in fact the Saguntines are exempt from that treaty that had been struck with Hasdrubal. I will say nothing contrary to this except what I learned from you. All of you, seeing that the consul C. Lutatius first struck the treaty with us, have denied that you are bound by this treaty because it was struck without the authority of the senate and the command of the people; therefore another compact was struck according to a fresh public deliberation. If you are not bound to your treaties unless they have been struck according to your authority and behest, not even the treaty Hasdrubal struck could have obligated us, because we did not know about it (trans. Gladhill 2008: 27).²⁸

In the Epicurean universe, however, there is no element of choice or assent for the atoms, which combine together by chance and have no say in the terms and conditions of the *foedera naturae* to which they are subject. Lucretius repeatedly insists on the aimless and unintentional nature of atomic *concilia*, stressing that it is neither design (*consilio*)

²⁸ *at enim eo foedere quod cum Hasdrubale ictum est Saguntini excipiuntur. adversus quod ego nihil dicturus sum nisi quod a vobis didici. vos enim, quod C. Lutatius consul primo nobiscum foedus icit, quia neque auctoritate patrum nec populi iussu ictum erat, negastis vos eo teneri; itaque aliud de integro foedus publico consilio ictum est. si vos non tenent foedera vestra nisi ex auctoritate aut iussu vestro icta, ne nos quidem Hasdrubalis foedus quod nobis insciis icit obligare potuit.*

Cf. also Livy 9.5.1-2: "The victor proposed a treaty (*foedus*), but they denied that a treaty could be made without the command of the people, and without the fetials and the rest of the solemn ceremonial. Thus, the Caudine peace was not, as is commonly believed, entered into by a treaty, but was made by a guarantee (*sponsio*)" (Watson *International Law in Archaic Rome*, 1993: 34-35). In this example, not only do the consuls require authorization from the Roman people in order to make a *foedus*, but specific rituals must also be conducted by the appropriate officials (the *fetiales*) (discussed below).

nor “keen intelligence” (*sagaci mente*) nor mutual agreement (*darent motus pepigere*) that brings atoms together into compounds (1.1021-23 = 5.419-21). Atoms, lacking parts, also lack any capacity for sensation and are therefore incapable of thought and decision-making, the notion of which is, in Lucretius’ opinion, completely and utterly ludicrous anyway (2.967-82). Instead, atoms are carried through the void “either by their own weight or by a chance (*forte*) blow from another atom” (2.84-85), “now this way, now that way, in all directions” (2.131: *nunc huc nunc illuc, in cunctas undique partis*), until they are thrown together “into convenient motions” (1.1030: *in motus coniectast convenientis*). While recounting the birth of a planet (2.1058-63), Lucretius is insistent to the point of heavy-handedness in his denials of any sort of intentionality in nature:

...this world was made by nature, and the seeds of things themselves of their own accord, knocking together by chance, clashed in all sorts of ways, heedless, without aim, without intention, until at length those combined which, suddenly thrown together, could become in each case the beginnings of mighty things, of earth and sea and sky and the generation of living creatures.

...hic sit natura factus, et ipsa
sponte sua forte offensando semina rerum
 multimodis *temere incassum frustra*que coacta 1060
 tandem coluerunt ea quae coniecta *repente*
 magnarum rerum fierent exordia semper,
 terrai maris et caeli generisque animantum.

At 5.187-194 he similarly denies that things are created intentionally by the gods, crediting nature instead for providing a “model of creation” (*specimen creandi*). Not even nature, however, creates purposefully; random movements of many atoms eventually result in compatible atoms latching on to one another to form whatever compounds they might (5.187-194):

For so many first-beginnings of things in so many ways, smitten with blows and carried by their own weight from infinite time up to the present, have been accustomed to move and meet together in all manner of ways, and to try all combinations, whatsoever they could produce by coming together, that it is no wonder if they fell also into such arrangements, and came into such movements, as this sum of things now shows in its course of perpetual renovation.

namque ita multa modis multis primordia rerum
 ex infinito iam tempore percita plagis
 ponderibusque suis consuerunt concita ferri
 omnimodisque coire atque omnia pertemptare, 190
 quaecumque inter se possent congressa creare,
 ut non sit mirum si in talis disposituras
 deciderunt quoque et in talis venere meatus,
 qualibus haec rerum geritur nunc summa novando.

Even the aimless wandering of the atoms is unpredictable. Instead of falling straight through void until a chance blow from another body changes its trajectory, an atom will minutely swerve “at no fixed place and at no fixed time” (*nec regione loci certa nec tempore certo*, 2.293; cf. 2.218-19: *incerto tempore ferme / incertisque locis spatio depellere paulum*).²⁹ This *clinamen* (‘swerve’) rescues the Epicurean universe from the strict determinism of Democritus and the Atomists by introducing an element of spontaneity into nature (Bailey 1963: 839-41). Lucretius is careful, however, to restrict the variation of the swerve to “not more than the least possible” (*nec plus quam minimum*, 2.244). The atomic *clinamen* accounts for freedom of will (2.256-57; cf. 2.289-91: “keeps the mind itself from having necessity within it in all actions, and from being as it were mastered and forced to endure and to suffer”), providing just enough deviation from its path to “break the decrees of fate, that cause may not follow cause from infinity” (*fati foedera rumpat, / ex infinito ne causam causa sequatur*, 2.254-55). Bailey takes Lucretius to mean the Democritean ἀνάγκη (1963: 847), but I would also include the Stoics and their causal determinism. Compare Cicero’s definition of Stoic fate (*fatum*, εἰμαρμένη): “an orderly succession of causes wherein cause is linked to cause and each cause of itself produces an effect. That is an immortal truth having its source in all eternity” (*id est ordinem seriemque causarum, cum causae causa nexa rem ex se gignat. ea est ex omni aeternitate fluens veritas sempiterna*, Div. 125).³⁰ Both passages refer to similar concepts and both mention a chain of causality linking cause to cause (DRN 2.251: *motus conectitur omnis*; Div. 127: *conligationem causarum omnium*) “in order invariable” (DRN 2.252: *ordine certo*; Div. 127: *nihil eum profecto fallat*).

The inexplicability of the swerve – how is it possible for a particle in a vacuum to spontaneously change course with no external assistance? – has the added benefit of further expelling divine providence from Lucretius’ universe. The Stoics repeatedly

²⁹ No extant writings of Epicurus explicitly discuss the swerve, although he does criticize the “merciless necessity” of the natural philosophers (*Ep. Men.* 134) (Long 1986: 57-58).

³⁰ All translations of Cicero’s *De Divinatione* come from William Armistead Falconer (1923), Loeb edition.

insist that there is no uncaused motion in the universe and that all events occur with divine coordination and harmony. The universe as imbued with perfect rationality must make sense and every action must have a cause, even if humans are unable to perceive it (*Div.* 126-27). God as divine providence is perfectly rational and only performs perfectly rational actions, so a slight spontaneous swerving of atoms falling through void at random intervals with no external blow seems unlikely to have been god's work (cf. *SVF* ii.945). The slight swerving of an atom's trajectory is an uncaused action, and surely if divine providence truly were directing the world, it would have come up with a better system. Even Stoic attempts to save free will from teleological determinism reject the notion of uncaused actions (e.g., Cic. *Fat.* 41ff.), but the *clinamen* seems to be exactly this.³¹

Clearly, Lucretius wishes to remove any traces of providence and intentionality from his Epicurean world-system. He firmly rejects the Stoics' faith in the divine *logos* "taking providential care of the world" and artfully shaping the earth for the benefit of man (DL 7.147; cf. Cic. *Nat. Deor.* 2.58, 71-167), insisting that such claims are based on "perverted reasoning" (*perversa ratione*) (4.832; cf. 2.167-85, 5.156-94). The world's obvious imperfection clearly disproves any divine origin (5.195-199). Things happen by chance, within the logical boundaries of the physical Epicurean universe. "Nothing is born in us simply in order that we may use it, but that which is born creates the use" (*nil ideo quoniam natumst in corpore ut uti / possemus, sed quod natumst id procreat usum*, 4.833-35; cf. *Ep. Her.* 75). Lucretius' *natura*, like its constituent atomic particles, neither thinks, reasons, or decides. It has no intentionality and the only deities it contains are impenetrable in their serenity. Atomic *concilia* are governed by *foedera naturae* automatically and necessarily and the *foedera naturae* limit the powers and behaviours of objects in the world eternally. The term *foedera* seems to be an unusual innovation, but

³¹ For a detailed analysis of problems of free will and Stoic determinism and Stoic attempts to preserve free will, see Dorothea Frede's article "Stoic Determinism" in *The Cambridge Companion to Stoicism* (2003: 179-205). Also, A.A. Long "Freedom and Determinism in the Stoic Theory of Human Action" in *Problems in Stoicism* (1971) (ch.8), and pp.163-170 in *Hellenistic Philosophy* (1986).

perhaps Lucretius simply wanted to distinguish his Epicurean laws of nature from the divine, all-encompassing, teleological world soul of Stoic philosophy. It is true that thanks in large part to Cicero the phrases *lex naturae* ('law of nature') and *ius naturae* (either 'law of nature' or 'justice of nature') became closely associated with a Stoic conception of natural law³², but even these Stoic connotations are less problematic than the religious and superstitious undertones of *foedus*. Besides, Lucretius seems to have had no problem incorporating other predominantly Stoic words, such as the Greek term σπέρμα ('seed'), into his philosophical vocabulary (*semina*) (Keen 1979: 67; cf. *SVF* iv), so some other reason must exist.

Precedents for "laws of nature"

Lex is also the closest Latin translation to νόμος ('law'), with "law of nature" most commonly appearing in the Greek sources as νόμος φύσεως (Fowler 2002: 379, Gladhill 2008: 139). The phrase first occurs in Plato's *Gorgias* as Callicles explains why men such as Xerxes and Xerxes' father are justified in trying to conquer others: "Why, surely these men follow nature – the nature of right – in acting thus; yes, on my soul, and follow the law of nature (κατὰ νόμον γε τὸν τῆς φύσεως) – though not that, I dare say, which is made by us (κατὰ τοῦτον ὃν ἡμεῖς τιθέμεθα)" (483e; trans. W.R.M. Lamb 1967).³³ According to Callicles, conventional laws were established by the weak majority to prevent the strong from gaining an advantage over them (483b-c), which is clearly opposite from the "might makes right" rule found in nature (483d; cf. Plato *Rep.* 1, 2). A similarly negative view of conventional law is expressed in Plato's *Protagoras* by Hippias, who declares that "law, despot of mankind, often constrains us against nature" (ὁ δὲ νόμος, τύραννος ὢν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, πολλὰ παρὰ τὴν φύσιν βιάζεται,

³² This is especially true in *De Legibus*, which revolves around a recognizably Stoic understanding of natural law; accordingly, although *lex naturae* denotes a specialized Stoic usage in Cicero's other works, the addition of *naturae* to *lex* is unnecessary in *De Legibus* (Asmis 2008a: 3). As in the Stoic world-system, 'law' just is the law of nature.

³³ 438e: ἀλλ' οἶμαι οὗτοι κατὰ φύσιν τὴν τοῦ δικαίου ταῦτα πράττουσιν, καὶ ναὶ μὰ Δία κατὰ νόμον γε τὸν τῆς φύσεως, οὐ μέντοι ἴσως κατὰ τοῦτον ὃν ἡμεῖς τιθέμεθα.

337d)³⁴. The juxtaposition of the two types of *nomoi* emphasizes their differences and reflects the widespread debate in antiquity on nature (*physis*) versus convention (*nomos*), where *physis* indicated the divinely established eternal and unwritten laws of conduct common to all humans, while *nomos* referred to the arbitrary traditions and customs of humans, which varied according to place or time.

Although *nomos* and *physis* were frequently set in direct opposition against one another, as in Sophocles' *Antigone* where the "unwritten and unfailing statutes given us by the gods" (ἄγραπτα κάσφαλῇ θεῶν / νόμιμα, 454-55)³⁵ demand what has been expressly forbidden by King Creon, they do not always appear as competing systems of authority. The Chorus in Euripides' *Bacchae*, for example, seems to imply that long-lasting conventional laws originate in nature and enjoy the same eternal status as natural laws (895-96: "that which has been law for a long time is eternal and has its origin in nature," τό τ' ἐν χρόνῳ μακρῷ νόμιμον / ἀεὶ φύσει τε πεφυκός)³⁶. Demosthenes' two orations against Aristogiton similarly downplay the *nomos-physis* distinction. In the first speech, it is announced that *physis* and *nomos* together govern a man's entire life, but whereas (*In Aristogitonem* 1.15-16)³⁷:

Of these, nature is something irregular and incalculable, and peculiar to each individual; but the laws are something universal, definite, and the same for all...But the laws desire what is just and honorable and salutary; they seek for it, and when they find it, they set it forth as a general commandment, equal and identical for all. The law is that which all men ought to obey for many reasons, but above all because every law is an invention and gift of the gods, a tenet of wise men, a corrective of errors voluntary and involuntary, and a general covenant of the whole State, in accordance with which all men in that State ought to regulate their lives.

τούτων δ' ἡ μὲν φύσις ἐστὶν ἄτακτον καὶ κατ' ἄνδρ' ἴδιον τοῦ ἔχοντος, οἱ δὲ νόμοι κοινὸν καὶ τεταγμένον καὶ ταῦτ' ὅσιν...οἱ δὲ νόμοι τὸ δίκαιον καὶ τὸ καλὸν καὶ τὸ συμφέρον βούλονται, καὶ τοῦτο ζητοῦσιν, καὶ ἐπειδὴν εὑρεθῇ, κοινὸν τοῦτο πρόσταγμα ἁπεδείχθη, ὅσιν ἴσον καὶ ὅμοιον, καὶ τοῦτ' ἐστὶ νόμος. ὃ πάντας πείθεσθαι προσήκει διὰ πολλὰ, καὶ μάλιστα ὅτι πᾶς ἐστὶ νόμος εὖρημα μὲν καὶ δῶρον θεῶν, δόγμα δ' ἀνθρώπων φρονίμων, ἐπανόρθωμα δὲ τῶν ἐκουσίων καὶ ἀκουσίων ἀμαρτημάτων, πόλεως δὲ συνθήκη κοινή, καθ' ἣν πᾶσι προσήκει ζῆν τοῖς ἐν τῇ πόλει.

³⁴ All translations of Plato's *Protagoras* unless other specified come from W.R.M. Lamb (1967), Loeb edition.

³⁵ All translations of Sophocles' *Antigone* unless other specified come from Sir Richard Jebb (1891).

³⁶ All translations of Euripides' *Bacchae* unless otherwise specified come from T.A. Buckley (1850).

³⁷ All translations of Demosthenes' *In Aristogitonem* I and II unless other specified come from A.T. Murray (1939), Loeb edition.

Later in the same oration the phrase τὸν τῆς φύσεως νόμον again occurs, this time referring to “the great law of nature, which is laid down alike for man and beast, that all should love their parents” (*In Aristog.* 1.65-66). Then, in his second speech against Aristogiton, Demosthenes completely conflates natural or divine law with human law. He ends with an exhortation to the Athenians to defend their laws against dishonour, “since the whole round world, the heavenly bodies and what we call the seasons are plainly, if we can trust our senses, controlled by law and order” (ἐπεὶ καὶ τὸν ὅλον κόσμον καὶ τὰ θεῖα καὶ τὰς καλουμένας ὥρας νόμος καὶ τάξις, εἰ χρὴ τοῖς ὀρωμένοις πιστεύειν, διοικεῖν φαίνεται, *In Aristog.* 2.27).

In Plato’s *Timaeus* we see the expression νόμος φύσεως “used more casually already” (Fowler 2002: 379) to explain why sickness occurs, namely, because the bodily processes become reversed or proceed “contrary to Nature’s laws” (παρὰ τοὺς τῆς φύσεως νόμους, 83e5). Health and well-being, on the other hand, occur when the proper bodily substances are produced in the correct order and all bodily functioning progresses naturally, according to the divine Craftsman’s plan (81c-83e). Unlike in the previous examples, natural law dictates what is physically, not just morally, good, which turns out to be the same for both humans and the universe. Aristotle uses the phrase while discussing the beliefs of the Pythagoreans in his *De Caelo* (268a14)³⁸, and it appears in Cleanthes’ *Hymn to Zeus* (frag. 1.2)³⁹, which praises the omnipotence of the Lord of

³⁸ καθάπερ γὰρ φασὶ καὶ οἱ Πυθαγόρειοι, τὸ πᾶν καὶ τὰ πάντα τοῖς τρισὶν ὄρισται· τελευτὴ γὰρ καὶ μέσσον καὶ ἀρχὴ τὸν ἀριθμὸν ἔχει τὸν τοῦ παντός, ταῦτα δὲ τὸν τῆς τριάδος. Διὸ παρὰ τῆς φύσεως εἰληφότες ὥσπερ νόμους ἐκείνης, καὶ πρὸς τὰς ἀγιστείαςχρώμεθα τῶν θεῶν τῷ ἀριθμῷ τούτῳ (“For, as the Pythagoreans say, the world and all that is in it is determined by the number three, since beginning and middle and end give the number of ‘all’, and the number they give is the triad. And so, having taken these three from nature as (so to speak) laws of it, we make further use of the number three in the worship of the Gods.”) (trans. J.L. Stocks, 1922).

³⁹ κύδιστ’ ἀθανάτων, πολυνύμε παγκρατὲς αἰεὶ / Ζεῦ, φύσεως ἀρχηγέ, νόμου μέτα πάντα κυβερνῶν, / χαῖρε· σὲ γὰρ πάντεσσι θέμις θνητοῖσι προσαυδᾶν. (“Lord of the immortals, with many names, all-powerful, eternal Zeus, the source of nature, guiding all things with law, greetings; for it is right for all mortals to address you,” my translation).

immortals who is responsible for all things in the world – “except what evil men do in their folly.”

The cosmos described in Cleanthes’ *Hymn* is typical of the Stoic world-system which is permeated by and exists because of the divine ruler who guides the world with benevolent justice. The ignorance and foolishness of humans lead to suffering, but intelligent contemplation of the divine can help mortals live well, in accordance with nature. Living in accordance with nature for the Stoics meant living in communities with other humans. As Chrysippus writes, “Fellowship begins with one another through the sharing of a *logos*, which is a law of nature (ὅς ἐστι φύσει νόμος); all the rest has come about because of these things” (frag. 528.17 in *Fragmenta logica et physica*, my translation)^{40, 41}. As Stoicism became more popular, the universal law of nature became the model for human law, which ideally imitated nature such that the good of nature and the good of humans aligned (e.g. DL 7.88). Natural law, divine law, natural justice and right reason all referred to the same thing, and the good for all things and all people consisted in acting in accordance with nature and right reason.

Stoic Natural Law

Cicero wrote prolifically during the Late Republic and is one of our best extant sources of Stoic philosophy from that time. His primary works dealing with Stoic thought are the incomplete texts of *De Re Publica* and *De Legibus*, with *De Finibus*, *De Officiis*, *De Natura Deorum*, and *De Inventione* acting as important sources as well. Unlike Lucretius, who leaves his reader to extrapolate the meaning of his *foedera naturae* from somewhat oblique comments, Cicero provides several straightforward definitions of natural law (*lex*). It is “right reason, in agreement with nature; it is of universal application, unchanging and everlasting,” which “summons to duty by its commands,”

⁴⁰ κοινωνίαν δ’ ὑπάρχειν πρὸς ἀλλήλους διὰ τὸ λόγου μετέχειν, ὅς ἐστι φύσει νόμος· τὰ δ’ ἄλλα πάντα γεγονέναι τούτων ἕνεκα.

⁴¹ Gladhill 2008: 139 provides this list and further sources; see also Fowler 2002: 379-81.

“averts from wrongdoing by its prohibitions,” and binds with equal and unchanging force “all nations and all times” (*Rep.* 3.33). A similar definition of law is found at *Leg.*

1.18-19:

Law is the highest reason, implanted in nature, which commands what ought to be done and forbids the opposite. This reason, when firmly fixed and fully developed in the human mind, is law...the origin of justice is to be found in law, for law is a natural force; it is the mind and reason of the intelligent man, the standard by which justice and injustice are measured.

lex est ratio summa insita in natura, quae iubet ea, quae facienda sunt, prohibetque contraria. eadem ratio cum est in hominis mente confirmata et confecta, lex est...a lege ducendum est iuris exordium; ea est enim naturae vis, ea mens ratioque prudentis, ea iuris atque iniuriae regula.

Nature, natural law, justice and right reason are all the same thing, viewed from different perspectives. Asmis explains these different aspects as follows: “law is reason viewed as a commanding and prohibiting force; nature is reason viewed as a creative force, and god is reason viewed as ruler of the world. Viewed as a (the) “force of nature,” law is the force that orders the creative processes of nature by its commands and prohibitions” (2008a: 8).

For both Cicero and the Stoics, the idea of justice (*ius*) was inseparable from the idea of law (*lex*). “Law is the distinction between things just and unjust, made in agreement with that primal and most ancient of all things, nature” (*ergo est lex iustorum iniustorumque distinctio ad illam antiquissimam et rerum omnium principem expressa naturam*, *Leg.* 2.13). Human laws are just which are “in conformity to nature’s standard” (*Leg.* 2.13), and the perfectly rational man is also perfectly just; it is not possible to act rationally and unjustly. Thus, Cicero writes, “justice is inherent in nature” (*ius in natura esse positum*, *Leg.* 1.34), “nature is the source of justice” (*lex natura ortum esse ius*, *Leg.* 1.35), and “we are so constituted by nature as to share the sense of justice (*ius*) with one another and to pass it on to all men” (*sequitur igitur ad participandum alium alio communicandumque inter omnes ius nos natura esse factos*, *Leg.* 1.33).

The Epicureans, by contrast, strongly rejected the idea of an underlying *ius* or global morality of the universe. Epicurus writes: “The justice (*dikaion*) which arises

from nature is a pledge of mutual advantage to restrain men from harming one another and save them from being harmed” (*KD* 31; cf. *DRN* 5.1019-1023). “Justice never is anything in itself, but in the dealings of men with one another in any place whatever and at any time it is a kind of compact not to harm or be harmed” (*KD* 33). Again, at *KD* 36, Epicurus writes:

in its general aspect justice is the same for all, for it is a kind of mutual advantage (*sumpheron*) in the dealings of men with one another: but with reference to the individual peculiarities of a country or any other circumstances the same thing does not turn out to be just for all (cf. *KD* 37).

Justice for the Epicureans is a kind of expediency or compact made with others, which varies from person to person or between communities of people. It is based on nothing other than mutual advantage and a desire to live in peace. If one wants to live a happy life free from anxieties and fears among other people then justice is indeed necessary for happiness (e.g., *DRN* 5.1117-60; Epicurus frg. 80, 81), but there is no absolute justice or law with divine origins that must be followed to achieve virtue.

The good life, for the Epicureans, is one in which nature is observed and interpreted through reason, without adding unsupported opinions. This careful observation of the world leads to the recognition that all things have limits, and this is the “prize” Epicurus discovered and shared with humankind: “the knowledge what can come into being, what can not, in a word, how each thing has its powers limited and its deep-set boundary mark” (*quid nequeat, finita potestas denique cuique / quanam sit ratione atque alte terminus haerens*, 1.76-77 = 595-95, 5.89-90, 6.65-66). When we understand this principle and live by it, we are content and free from the fear and anxiety caused by irrational expectations and beliefs (e.g., 5.1117-19, *SV* 25, Usener 135). Some universal cosmic justice, for the Epicureans, has nothing to do with happiness and is just one more of those irrational beliefs that lead people astray.

Foedus versus Lex

As the above examples demonstrate, by the time Lucretius began composing his *DRN*, the practice of using the Latin phrase *lex naturae* or the Greek phrase νόμος φύσεως for “law of nature” was already well-established. The Greek phrase is absent from Epicurus’ extant writings on his physical system, but so is anything resembling a Greek equivalent of Lucretius’ *foedus naturae*. The few times *nomos* or *syntheke* (‘compact’, ‘treaty’) do appear in Epicurus (respectively, *KD* 37, frg. 2, 57, 81; and *KD* 32, 33, 35), they refer only to human agreements. The closest equivalent in Epicurus’ physical doctrines appears at *Ep. Her.* 77, translated by Bailey (1970) as follows: “we must believe that it is due to the original inclusion of matter in such agglomerations during the birth-process of the world that this law of regular succession is also brought about (καὶ τὴν ἀνάγκην ταύτην καὶ περίοδον συντελεῖσθαι).” For Epicurus, *anagke*, ‘necessity’, suffices to explain constancy in the world. Epicurus actually cautions against elevating a single explanation over other equally plausible ones, warning that the person who does such a thing “altogether leaves the path of scientific inquiry and has recourse to myth” (*Ep. Pyth.* 87). So long as our theories harmonize with our sensations, Epicurus holds, “all goes on without disturbance” (*Ep. Pyth.* 87).

Both the Greek and Latin versions of “law of nature” were flexible and could indicate the moral and/or physical rules of a universe, whether it was spiritual, corporeal, or both, and although the expression appeared most frequently in discussions of Stoic philosophy, it was used in non-Stoic contexts as well. The phrase *lex naturae* (‘law of nature’) is more neutral than both *ius naturae* (‘justice of nature’) and *foedus naturae* (‘treaty of nature’) and already belonged to the philosophical vocabulary as a recognizable technical term. Although *lex* and *foedus* are not metrically the same, the adjustments required to preserve the epic metre should have been a fairly simple matter for a poet of Lucretius’ calibre. Logistically speaking, then, there was no reason for Lucretius not to use *lex*, and certainly no reason for him to prefer *foedus* instead. The only way to make sense of Lucretius’ perplexingly stubborn fixation with *foedus* is to

assume that he has discovered some essential character or quality embedded in the nature of *foedera* that is relevant enough and important enough to his philosophical project to outweigh the many challenges and difficulties surrounding his task. In other words, there must be some fundamental feature unique to *foedus* that *lex* and other less problematic terms lack.

***Lex naturae* in Lucretius**

Before discussing *foedus* in detail, however, I will briefly examine the few times Lucretius does mention *lex* in the context of natural law. The first instance (2.718-19) refers to “these laws” (*legibus hisce*), which govern all things whether animate or inanimate according to the same rule, which “holds all things apart by their limits” (*eadem ratio disternat omnia*). Every type of thing has its particular types of atoms combining in a specific type of way, and it is not possible for all to join with all (cf. 2.700-701); for, Lucretius writes, “just as all things made are in their whole nature different one from another, so each must consist of first-beginnings differently shaped” (*nam veluti tota natura dissimiles sunt / inter se genitae res quaeque, ita quamque necessest / dissimili constare figura principiorum*, 2.720-22). The way atoms combine is just as important as the shapes and sizes of the atoms involved, and atoms which are not suited to one another (*aliena*) are “thrown back by nature upon the earth... not able to combine with any part nor within the body to feel the life-giving motions with it and imitate them” (*reicere in terras naturam... / quae neque conecti quoquam potuere neque intus / vitalis motus consentire atque imitari*, 2.714-17). Atoms which are suited to one another, however, and which combine in the correct order and in the correct way will always create the same kind of thing; and it is the *foedera naturae* that define that kind of thing’s parameters of existence (e.g., 2.294-302, quoted above).

Lucretius then uses *lex* to reiterate the inevitability of birth and death for all created things, as follows: “Therefore again and again I say that spirits (*animas*) must not

be considered to be without beginning or free from the law of death” (*quare etiam atque etiam neque originis esse putandumst / expertis animas nec leti lege solutas*, 3.686-87; see also 3.711-12). Nothing that is made of parts, including the soul, is immortal; only the *primordia rerum*, literally the “first-beginnings of things”, persist eternally, and this is only because their “solid singleness” (e.g. 1.789-91) makes further dissolution impossible. “Death” here does not just refer to the absolute destruction of a compound into its constituent parts, however; it also denotes a change from one state of being to another. The point of this passage is to challenge the idea of an immortal spirit that “creeps into the body as we are born” (3.671) for, either (a) both the body and the spirit are already complete and so they would not grow together nor would the spirit permeate the body (which contradicts experience) (3.679-97), or (b) spirits, “accustomed to creep in from without and so to ooze through our frame” (3.698-99) do in fact permeate the body and thus “in permeating it are dissolved, while the particles are being dispersed through all the pores” (*in manando dissoluuntur, / dum quasi per caulas omnis*, 3.706-707). Change in a thing’s atomic organization is not just a *kind* of death, it *is* death, and all created things will eventually die and be born again. In Lucretius’ words, “that which changes is dissolved, therefore perishes” (*quod mutatur enim dissolvitur, interit ergo*, 3.756).

Lucretius’ final mention of *lex naturae* occurs during his recapitulation of his mission at the beginning of Book Five and closely connects *lex* to *foedus*: “His steps I trace, his doctrines I follow, teaching in my poem how all things are bound to abide in that law (*foedere*) by which they were made, and how they are impotent to annul the strong statutes (*leges*) of time (*quo quaeque creata / foedere sint, in eo quam sit durare necessum / nec validas valeant aevi rescindere leges*)” (5.55-58). Bailey explains *foedere* as “the ‘pact’ or ‘law’, which governs the universe” and *aevi...leges* as “the ‘laws’ or ‘limits of life’” (1963: 1331). A more helpful way of understanding the distinction between *lex* and *foedus* might be to accept both the *leges naturae* and the *foedera naturae*

as denoting necessary and abiding truths, but whereas the *leges* impose on all things the ultimate limits of existence – that is, the coming to be and the passing away of all created things – the *foedera* dictate the actual conditions of a thing’s lifetime, specific to its particular kind. In other words, the *leges naturae* decree simply *that* all things are born and die in the unique manner of their kind, whereas the *foedera naturae* define *what* that existence entails. Each particular kind of atomic aggregate will be governed by its own particular *foedera naturae*, which will obtain only as long as that particular union or *concilium* holds; once the composite breaks apart either through contact with another body or because of the natural process of decay, it ceases to be that kind of thing. “New” limitations and conditions replace the old, but the same *types* of atomic constructions are eternally and necessarily governed by the same *set* of *foedera*. The underlying fixed laws (*leges*) of nature, on the other hand, as the final limits of all things, are always in place for everything equally at all times.

This systematic comparing and contrasting between the *leges* and the *foedera naturae* confirms that they are indeed different, but it is a subtle distinction and does not satisfactorily explain Lucretius’ clear preference for the specific metaphor of the *foedus*. The *leges naturae*, on the other hand, exhibit some characteristics that should be familiar from the Stoic discussion above. Like Cicero’s *lex* or *ius naturae*, Lucretius’ *leges* are necessary, eternal, and universal.⁴² They will always govern all created things in the world for all time, at all times, and the truth of this is irrefutably demonstrated by a rational interpretation of our observations of the world. Unlike the Stoic *ius naturae*, however, the Epicurean *leges naturae* lack intentionality, morality, and are completely distinct from the gods. The powers of Lucretius’ *leges* are also quite limited compared to the generative and benevolent nature of the Stoic divine providence, which is right reason and law and justice. Lucretius’ *leges naturae* are more like the parameters of existence. They do not seem to actually *do* anything active, they simply are. The *leges naturae* are

⁴² For the sake of clarity in this comparison of Stoic and Epicurean natural law, from this point on I will use *ius naturae* to refer to Stoic natural law and *lex* or *leges naturae* to indicate the Epicurean position.

limits pared down to the barest possible minimum, similar to atoms, which are the smallest discrete unit possible.

The Stoic *ius naturae* is far more involved in running the world than the Epicurean *lex* and so in this way fulfills a role more like the *foedera naturae*, which define more thoroughly the conditions surrounding a thing's growth, life, and characteristics. Again, however, the Stoic *ius naturae* does these things with intention and for a higher purpose (to achieve the highest good), and so is not quite a proper analogue to Lucretius' *foedera naturae*; this may partially explain his decision not to simply use the established Latin philosophical terminology that was available, in fact, but as argued earlier, there must be a stronger reason. Myrto Garani explains Lucretius' partiality towards *foedus* over *lex* as follows: "Still, as the Stoic notion of law presupposes a lawgiver, by and large Lucretius gives preference to the more democratic metaphor of the treaty (*foedera*) in order to tone down any teleological implications and stress the mechanistic nature of the Epicurean system" (2007: 59). We cannot reject *lex* as an inappropriate metaphor without also rejecting *foedus* for the same reasons as well, however, since if *lex* "presupposes a lawgiver," then *foedus* presupposes two consenting parties.

To summarize: Lucretius' epic poem *DRN* was a product of the social, political, and intellectual transformations of his time. An influx of Hellenistic literature and philosophical thought into Roman culture provided Lucretius with a meaningful system of interpretation he could apply to the world around him, one based on reason and empirical observation. It rejected the inherited values and institutions of Republican Rome as empty and harmful impediments to happiness, based on irrational assumptions, with no place in the unthinking, unintentional, material world of the Epicureans. Yet, Lucretius stubbornly persists in using the charged Roman word *foedus* with all its troubling associations to religion, sacrifice, competition and imperialism for his

inexorable laws of nature which govern all things. Other Latin terms such as *lex* and *ius* were available in the philosophical vocabulary, or Lucretius could have invented an entirely new term with no troubling associations. The only logical conclusion is to assume that *foedus* has some inherent quality or characteristic crucial to Lucretius' philosophical position, which outweighs the disadvantages to using such a distracting, unusual term.

Chapter 2

In Chapter One I discussed some of the disadvantages of Lucretius' innovative use of *foedus*, the chief problem being the sacrifice of philosophical clarity, which was caused by the use of a word strongly evocative of Roman practices and values which conflicted with *DRN*'s Epicurean context. Lucretius nominally addresses his *DRN* to a young Roman aristocrat named Memmius but his desire to "loose the mind from the close knots of superstition" (1.931-32), his "high hope for renown" (1.924), his pride in the majesty and originality of his achievement (e.g., 1.925, 4.1-25) and the scope and length of his poem all make it unlikely he wrote *DRN* as a private document.⁴³ The historical Memmius was a disreputable politician of questionable morals whose ambition, corruption and licentiousness made him both a fitting target for conversion to Epicureanism, and unworthy of the honour of being the sole beneficiary of such immense labour.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Memmius is mentioned by name only eleven times (1.26, 42, 411, 1052; 2.143, 182; 5.8, 93, 164, 867, 1282) compared to the 411 addresses to the reader using the second person singular pronoun or corresponding verb form (77 times in Book One, 105 in Book Two, 47 in Book Three, 84 in Book Four, 39 in Book Five, and 59 in Book Six) (Keen 1985: 1), suggesting that Memmius the actual person was less important than Memmius the literary device and symbolic reader.⁴⁵

Another possibility of course is that Memmius, who patronized the poets Catullus and Helvius Cinna and composed poetry himself (Smith 1992: xvii), was also patron to Lucretius. Lucretius' dedication of his work to Memmius is thus seen as the publicized

⁴³ Writing open letters or poems to a real or fictional character was a common literary practice in antiquity, especially in elegiac poetry. Catullus famously writes poetry to Lesbia, Propertius to Cynthia, and Tibullus to Delia. In terms of philosophical works, Cicero composes his *De Officiis* in the form of a letter addressed to his son Marcus.

⁴⁴ For more information about the historical Memmius as a fitting symbolic reader for Lucretius, see §3 of M.F. Smith's Introduction to the Loeb edition of *DRN* (1992: xliii-liv).

⁴⁵ Shearin offers an alternative explanation for Memmius' absence from the text of *DRN*: "Lucretius' general reluctance to point (deictically, that is) to his addressee forms part of a larger project of rendering the space in which his text operates nebulous and indistinct, a project of anonymity..." (2007: 128).

honour a poet pays his patron to immortalize him in poetry to thank him for his *amicitia*.⁴⁶ At any rate, we can reasonably assume Lucretius' actual intended audience was much wider, composed of educated, aristocratic Romans with the leisure to read and discuss philosophical poetry, and the learning to understand the literary allusions and follow the philosophical arguments. As part of the elite class, they would have fought in wars to extend Rome's boundaries, frequently serving as officers in the Roman army. When conducting business in the law courts or public sector they would have passed the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill where the records of *foedera* were stored, they would have witnessed the fetial ceremony, and the terms and conditions of the *foedus* struck would have been a popular topic of discussion among friends or associates. In short, Lucretius' Roman audience's understanding of his *foedera naturae* would have been coloured by these more conventional conceptions of *foedus*, an effect he easily could have avoided by using the established terminology or inventing a more neutral term.

Modern scholars often see Lucretius' frequent presentations of the aimless wanderings and chance combinations of atoms in terms of intentional human interactions and behaviours as an attempt to highlight our shared status as things in the world. Gail Cabisius, for example, writes (1984: 110):

Lucretius' human metaphors enable us to see, behind the logical construct of Epicurean physical theory, another reality in which human beings and the atoms have common characteristics. As *De Rerum Natura* progresses, metaphors force the reader to see the atoms in terms of human life and to view human life as a reflection of the creative and destructive cycle of atomic activity.

Presenting intentional human behaviour as a macrocosm to atomic combinations and vice versa helps the reader metaphorically bridge the conceptual gap between the random nature of atomic creation and the intentionality of everyday human activities.⁴⁷ At the same time, it subtly reminds the reader that, *contra* the Stoics, humans have no divinely-

⁴⁶ For parallel examples of poets immortalizing their patrons in text, see Horace to Maecenas (*Carm.* 1.1, 20, 2.17; *Ep.* 1.1, 1.7; *Sat.* 1.1, etc.). See also Horace *Ep.* 2.1 to Augustus.

⁴⁷ On the difficulty caused by the dichotomy of subjective human experience and objective, unthinking nature, see Phillip De Lacy, "Process and Value: An Epicurean Dilemma" (1957: 114-126), discussed below.

conferred special status (e.g., Cic. *Leg.* 1.18-23, 45) in the Epicurean universe and we, along with the atoms and the dumb beasts, are all just cogs in an unthinking, mechanistic world.⁴⁸ Just because Lucretius represents atoms as miniature humans engaging in social relationships and activities, however, does not mean we should take him literally; atomic combination and movement through space might appear similar to intentional human behaviour but it would be “delirium and lunacy” (2.985) to believe that atoms “shake trembling with laughter” (*risu tremulo concussa cachinnant*, 2.976), “bedew face and cheeks with tears” (*lacrimis spargunt rorantibus ora genasque*, 2.977), and discourse or philosophize on the nature of things (2.978-79). Metaphorical language can be extremely effective in conveying information or ideas in a non-linear way, but only so long as we remain aware of what is real (cf. 2.655-60).

I do agree with this interpretation of Lucretius’ use of atomic metaphors, but I also argue that his invention of the phrase *foedera naturae* is especially deliberate and contains a deeper signification than his portrayals of atoms interacting with one another in a co-operative process of giving and receiving (*inter se dent motus accipiantque*, 1.819), forming *concilia*, coming together in meetings and partings, and wandering through void (*per inane vagantur*, 2.83, 105, 109). None of these depictions, despite also being borrowed from the rhetoric of Roman public life, seem as complex or controversial as Lucretius’ use of *foedus*, possibly because the term itself has a wider and more powerful variety of connotations than the others used to describe atomic interaction. I also agree that the metaphor of the *foedus* helps underscore the similarities between humans and atoms and introduces a unique approach to understanding Epicurean cosmology. As I will argue in the remainder of this chapter, however, both the cultural and etymological associations imbedded within the very concept of a *foedus* are crucial components of Lucretius’ philosophical programme. I will begin with the more superficial characteristics shared by Roman *foedera* and the *foedera naturae*, then discuss

⁴⁸ For descriptions of humans as beastlike, see e.g. 5.969 (*saetigerisque pares subus*) and 5.932 (*more ferarum*), and for animals mimicking human behaviour (or vice versa), see e.g. 2.349-70 and 5.1056-90.

specifically how Lucretius employs etymological word-play to emphasize key aspects of Epicurean cosmology and ethics.

I. Limits and Boundaries

Domains of Power and Roman *Foedera*

The most obvious similarity between Lucretius' *foedera naturae* and the *foedera* normally associated with Rome is the preoccupation of limits and boundaries. A human *foedus* is a treaty or covenant whose main function is to define the limits of power (cf. 1.76. 595; 5.89; 6.65: *finita potestas*) permitted to each group or individual bound by the *foedus*. This includes demarcating territorial boundaries, specifying what behaviour is allowed and what is not, and binding not only each individual member of the group but also each future member to the conditions of the *foedus*, for as long as they belong to that group. Roman *foedera* could also demand hostages, tributes, fighters and supplies, and terms could be quite harsh for nations and tribes who had especially aggravated Rome. Some of the conditions of the treaty with King Antiochus (188 BC), for example, demanded he pay a yearly tribute to both Rome and King Eumenes, give up all his elephants and warships forever, and refrain from sailing west of the river Calcadnus and the promontory of Sarpedon, except to convey tribute, ambassadors or hostages (Polyb. 21.45; cf. *AUC* 38.38). Other *foedera* such as the *Foedus Cassianum* between Rome and the Latin League (493 BC) prohibited each side from making war on one another or aiding each other's enemies in making war against them, and obligated each party to come to the other's aid if attacked (Baronowski 1990: 355-56).⁴⁹ Terms such as these were quite common for the type of mutual defensive alliance that was frequently struck

⁴⁹ Dionysius of Halicarnassus gives the full terms of the treaty as follows: "Let there be peace between the Romans and all the Latin cities as long as the heavens and the earth shall remain where they are. Let them neither make war upon another themselves nor bring in foreign enemies nor grant a safe passage to those who shall make war upon either. Let them assist one another, when warred upon, with all their forces, and let each have an equal share of the spoils and booty taken in their common wars. Let suits relating to private contracts be determined within ten days, and in the nation where the contract was made. And let it not be permitted to add anything to, or take anything away from these treaties except by the consent both of the Romans and of all the Latins." (*Ant. Rom.* 6.95.2, trans. Earnest Cary, 1950, Loeb edition).

between Rome and its *foederati*, and ensured that rebellious provinces would remain more or less under control. Some tribes were further prohibited from arming themselves without permission from Rome, even in self-defence (e.g., *AUC* 2.30.8-9, 42.23.3-4).

The delineation of geographical regions and domains of power was a prominent part of treaty-making. Polybius, for example, records a series of treaties between Rome and Carthage prior to the Punic Wars dedicated to exactly this (3.21-27; cf. Asmis 2008b: 143). Sometimes a treaty stated simply that a people was forbidden to bear arms outside their own boundaries (e.g., *AUC* 42.23.3-4: *prohiberi enim extra fines efferre arma*), while other times more specific actions and places were defined. One of the treaties with the Carthaginians prior to the Punic Wars (c.306 BC), for example, bans Romans from doing anything in Sardinia and Libya except for taking on provisions or refitting a ship; even if a storm blows a Roman off course into these regions, the treaty demands his departure within five days (Polyb. 3.24). In Carthage and the Carthaginian province of Sicily, on the other hand, Romans may conduct the same business transactions as Carthaginian citizens, and Carthaginians may do the same in Rome (*ibid.*). Knowing where one's boundaries were, both geographically and in terms of permissible actions, was therefore of crucial importance for the Romans and their allies; failure to abide by the terms and conditions of a ratified *foedus* was an invitation for war and grounds for annihilation.

Limits in Epicurean Philosophy

Fines (limits) are similarly central to the notion of *foedera naturae*: “a limit has been fixed (*reddita finis*) for the growth of things (*crescendi rebus*) after their kind and for their tenure of life (*vitamque tenendi*)” (1.584-85), “each thing has its power limited (*finita potestas*) and its deep-set boundary mark (*alte terminus haerens*)” (1.76-77, 595-56; 5.89-90; 6.65-66), there is a fixed limit for the breaking-up of things (*fragendi reddita finis / certa*, 1.560-61; cf. 1.551-52, 577), and “it is fixed and arranged (*certum ac*

dispositumst) where each thing is to grow and have its being (*crescat et insit*)” (3.787). Everything that exists does so within the boundaries of its natural limits, and these boundaries are the *foedera naturae*. Even more importantly, however, limits are the foundation of Epicurean philosophy, the unifying principle behind its ethical, physical, and epistemic doctrines (De Lacy 1969: 104-105, 113). Limits define the universe and differentiate one object or species from another, so knowing “the nature of things” just is knowing the natural boundaries of things. Simply put, we know things by their limits. Thus, atoms are the smallest possible constituents of matter, eternal, unchanging, and infinite in number (1.503-634, 958-1051; *Ep. Her.* 41-42). The number of possible atomic sizes, shapes, and combinations is finite, though unimaginably large (limit to atomic size: 2.498-99, *Ep. Her.* 55-56; shape: 2.478-521, *Ep. Her.* 42; combination: 2.700-729, 1077-1089). The universe “has no extremity, and therefore it is without end or limit” (*non habet extremum, caret ergo fine modoque*, 1.964; cf. 1.958-1051; *Ep. Her.* 41-42; Cic. *Div.* 2.50.103-104), but void, which extends infinitely throughout the universe, is limited to where matter is not (1.507-508: *nam quacumque vacat spatium, quod inane vocamus, / corpus ea non est*).

Understanding the limits of truth leads to knowledge, which for the Epicureans was founded on clear and vivid sense-perceptions, and whatever logically derives from and harmonizes with them. According to Epicurus, our sense-perceptions are the only true (i.e., trustworthy) representations of how things in the world appear to us, since their veracity cannot be refuted or confirmed by anything else and, unless we accept them as true, we cannot justifiably accept anything else as true either (DL 10.31-32; *Ep. Her.* 38-39, *SV* 23; cf. *DRN* 1.422-25, 699-700; 4.478-521; Cic. *Fin.* 1.7.22, 1.19.64).⁵⁰ Sense-perceptions thus act as the standard against which we judge what is unknown and

⁵⁰ Epicurus simply assumes that sensations are caused by something other than ourselves, taking it as self-evident that “we see or think of the outer form of a thing when something comes to us from its surface” (*Ep. Her.* 49; cf. DL 10.31-32; Long 1986: 21-22). For the Epicureans, all objects in the world constantly emanate a thin film of atoms or effluences (*simulacra*, εἰδωλα) from their outer surfaces, which travel through void and, when they strike a sense-organ, cause the appropriate sense-perception to occur in the perceiver (*DRN* 4.26ff.; *Ep. Her.* 46-52).

uncertain, and error comes from mistakenly attaching unsupported or irrational opinions to our sensations. Thus, when we see a square building that looks round from far away, our sight-perception of a round building is true, but our assumption that the building itself is round as well is an unjustified and false opinion (4.353-63). Whatever is outside the boundaries of truth, i.e., unclear or unsupported opinion, must be rejected as false if it contradicts what is known to be (i.e., what must be) true, or it must be investigated further against the criterion of truth.

Ethical Ends in Epicurean Philosophy

Epicurean ethics, no less than Epicurean physics or epistemology, revolves around understanding the natural limits of things. The Epicurean *telos* – literally the “end” – of life is to live without pain and anxiety (*Ep. Men.* 128; De Lacy 1969: 106). In order to achieve this, however, we must recognize first that there is a limit to both pain and pleasure (*KD* 18, 19; *Ep. Her.* 81), then identify what these limits are, then live within these limits. In De Lacy’s words, “The limits of good and evil constitute a rigid framework within which we make our choices and pursue our goals” (1969: 106). In the case of the Epicureans, “good” and “evil” denote what causes pleasure and what causes pain, rather than some universal, objective standard of morality. Pleasure for them is “the beginning and the end of the blessed life,” “the first and natural good,” and the standard against which everything else is judged (*Ep. Men.* 128-29).

The Epicureans based their position on the fact that from birth, all creatures instinctively seek out pleasure and avoid pain (*DL* 10.137; cf. Aristotle *EN* 10.1172b9). As infants, we simply follow our innate natural impulse to avoid pain and seek out pleasure but as we grow older we start to employ our faculty of reason in a kind of hedonistic calculation. Contrast this with the Stoic theory of *oikeiosis*, which argues that our first impulse is towards self-preservation, not pleasure (*Fin.* 1.30, 3.16-17, 5.24; *DL* 7.85-86). According to the Stoics, every living creature “immediately upon birth (*simul*

atque natum sit)...feels an attachment for itself (*ipsum sibi conciliari*) and an impulse to preserve itself (*commendari ad se conservandum*) and to feel affection for its own constitution (*suum statum*) and for those things which tend to preserve that constitution; while on the other hand it conceives an antipathy to destruction and to those things which appear to threaten destruction” (*Fin.* 3.16; cf. *Nat. Deor.* 2.120-29). When we are first born, then, we are in a pre-rational state and resemble animals, capable only of self-awareness, self-love, and an instinctual seeking out of things advantageous to us. As we mature and develop our innate faculty of reason, however, we come to value things other than what is immediately tied to self-preservation. We begin to recognize the true good behind all the things we had previously sought, and these things become less important or even completely indifferent to us in comparison to this good (Pembroke 1971: 117-18; cf. *Fin.* 3.33).⁵¹ It is important to note that although the Epicureans were motivated by a desire for pleasure rather than the Stoic concept of the good, they considered some kinds of pleasure more worthy of pursuit than others. For them, not every pleasure is worth pursuing because some pleasures lead to pain, while some pains lead to greater pleasure; for this reason, Epicurus writes, “Yet by a scale of comparison and by the consideration of advantages and disadvantages we must form our judgement on all these matters. For the good on certain occasions we treat as bad, and conversely the bad as good” (*Ep. Men.* 130; cf. *KD* 8).

Consequences of Trespassing Limits

All the pain and anxiety experienced by humans – much of which, in Lucretius’ opinion, are caused by traditional Roman values and expectations – stem from ignorance regarding the proper limits of things (5.1430-33):

Therefore mankind labours always in vain and to no purpose, consuming its days in empty cares, plainly because it does not know the limit of possession, and how far it is ever possible for real pleasure to grow.

ergo hominum genus incassum frustra laborat

1430

⁵¹ See also J. Brunschwig, “The Cradle Argument in Epicureanism and Stoicism” in M. Schofield and G. Striker (eds.), *The Norms of Nature* (Cambridge, 1986), 113-44.

*semper et in curis consumit inanibus aevom,
nimirum quia non cognovit quae sit habendi
finis et omnino quoad crescat vera voluptas.*

In particular, Lucretius thinks, humans deny the inevitability of death in their fear of the unknown and so waste their days vainly trying to avoid poverty and disease, which are perceived as “a lingering as it were before the gates of death” (*quasi iam leti portas cunctarier ante*, 3.67). Men will “cruelly rejoice at the mournful death of a brother” (*crudeles gaudent in tristi funere fratris*, 3.72), betray their fatherland and their “dear parents” (3.85-86), and “strive night and day with exceeding toil to climb the pinnacle of power” (*noctes atque dies niti praestante labore / ad summas emergere opes*, 3.62-63), all in a fruitless attempt to avoid death and the regions of Acheron (3.37-40, 63-65, 86). Fear of the gods and fear of death are closely related and it is natural for humans to dread the unknown. In this we are like fearful children huddling in the dark, hiding from imagined bogeymen (3.87-90 = 2.55-58, 6.35-38). Only the “aspect and law of nature” (*naturae species ratioque*) can disperse the dark terror of our minds (3.91-93 = 1.146-48), but this can only happen if we apply our powers of reason to our perceptions of the world. Lucretius sympathizes with the psychological desire to believe in divine salvation and guidance (5.1226-40: *quid mirum si...*), but such beliefs are *nequiquam*, “all in vain,” “fruitless,” “for nothing” (5.1229). Furthermore, there is also a limit to pleasure, and when we comprehend this we will be satisfied with what is sufficient, rather than wasting energy and resources striving for more (*KD* 21). Happiness depends, therefore, on recognizing that there is a limit to the power of the gods (*Ep. Men.* 123-24; cf. *KD* 1), a limit to our lifetime (*Ep. Men.* 124-27, *KD* 2), and a limit to pleasure (*Ep. Men.* 131-32, *KD* 3, 11) (Asmis 2008b: 150-51). Ignorance regarding these limits leads to unfulfillable expectations, misguided and wasteful actions or worrying, and disappointment. Even worse, ignorance of limits causes one’s life to become a “hell on earth,” with the fool’s fearful trepidation of divine punishment after death turning into self-inflicted anguish (3.978-1023; cf. *Ep. Her.* 81; *Ep. Men.* 125).

Transgressing the boundaries of Roman *foedera* also had dire consequences. Fetial priests invoking Jupiter during the ritual striking of a *foedus* charged him to punish, immediately and harshly, transgressors of the *foedus*. As they ritually killed the sacrificial pig they would intone: “So smite [the transgressors] as I shall here to-day smite this pig: and so much the harder smite them as thy power and thy strength are greater” (*AUC* 1.24.8). The implication here is that Jupiter’s vengeance on violators of the treaty will be infinitely more brutal and devastating (*foedissima*) than the ritual sacrifice, just as Jupiter himself is infinitely more powerful and destructive than the mortal priest overseeing the rite. In the case of one broken treaty, envoys urged the trespassers to relent and beg clemency rather than rejoicing in their perjury, lest they end up warring “more against the angered gods (*dis iratis*) than against earthly foes” (*AUC* 3.2.4-6).⁵² In actuality, the violation of treaties (*ruptum foedus*) was met with a declaration of war and the threat of annihilation. For example, when the Aequi broke the terms of the *foedus* with Rome by invading the protected territories of Labici and Tusculum in 457 BC, Rome responded by sending one of its consuls to attack the Aequi army at its camp, and instructing the other to ravage their territory (*AUC* 3.25: *senatus iussit alterum consulem contra Gracchum in Algidum exercitum ducere, alteri populationem finium Aequorum provinciam dedit*). An earlier violation of peace by the Aequi (466-465 BC) had also resulted in the destruction of the Aequi army, with the victorious consul returning to Rome “with immense glory and immense spoil” “after repeatedly marching through length and breadth of the enemies’ territory and carrying destruction everywhere” (*aliquotiens per omnem hostium agrum infesto agmine populabundus isset*, *AUC* 3.3.10).

⁵² Interestingly, breaking a treaty was grounds for divine retribution and punishment even when the breaking of the treaty was directly caused by divine interference. Both the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* contain pivotal scenes in which a deity manipulates a mortal and drives him to break the peace. In the *Iliad* Athena, on Hera’s orders (4.67, 72: ὑπὲρ ὄρκια δηλήσασθαι), disguises herself as Laodocus and convinces Pandarus to shoot an arrow at Menelaus (4.65-140). By making the Trojans responsible for breaking the treaty, she thus gives the Achaeans an excuse to fight, and ensures that divine justice is on their side. In Book 12 of the *Aeneid*, Juno incites Turnus’ sister Juturna to agitate the Latins (12.158: *aut tu bella cie conceptumque excute foedus*) against Aeneas and his people, until one of the Latin soldiers finally hurls his spear into the Trojan crowd and kills a young soldier (12.134-160).

Challenges against the *foedera naturae* likewise result in the destruction of the transgressive body as a whole. When a thing crosses these boundaries and passes outside of what is permitted by the *foedera naturae*, Lucretius writes, it ceases to exist, “for whatever by being changed passes outside its own boundaries, at once this is the death of that which it was before” (*nam quodcumque suis mutatum finibus exit, / continuo hoc mors est illius quod fuit ante*, 1.670-71, 792-93; 2.753-54; 2.519-20). Unlike in the case of Roman *foedera*, however, the inviolability of Epicurean *foedera naturae* does not come from the favour or will of the gods. The Epicurean gods are wholly absorbed in their own untouchable peace, “far removed and separated from our affairs” (*semota ab nostris rebus seiunctaque longe*, 1.46). Contrary to what priests and religious leaders would like us to believe, Lucretius assures his audience, the gods are not watching our every movement, ready to punish any transgressions or sins. Rather, the *foedera naturae* are necessary laws of nature that dictate the conditions of existence for each type of thing, for as long as it exists as that kind. These *foedera naturae* simply are and must be, and nothing can violate the *foedera* which bind it without being destroyed.

In the Epicurean world-system, however, destruction refers only to the reordering or dissolution of atomic compounds into their smallest atomic parts; matter itself, “which consists of solid body, may be everlasting, though all else be dissolved” (*materies igitur, solido quae corpore constat, / esse aeterna potest, cum cetera dissoluantur*, 1.518-19). Furthermore, death comes to all things, “for the old order always passes, thrust out by the new, and one thing has to be made fresh from others” (*cedit enim rerum novitate extrusa vetustas / semper, et ex aliis aliud reparare necessest*, 3.964-65). The destruction caused by the violation of the *foedera naturae* is an automatic process of nature that has nothing to do with divine malice or retribution. It has no moral value attached to it and no intentionality is involved, either on the part of the transgressive body or its destruction. In fact, Lucretius tries to comfort his reader with the knowledge that although everyone

must eventually die, the matter which makes us up will persist and become the material for something else (3.964-65, above). Destruction is never really absolute and, although the subjective agent ceases to exist, nature in all its magnificence endures eternally in an unceasing process of continuous transformation.⁵³

Knowing the *foedera naturae* is therefore crucial for happiness, not so we can avoid angering vengeful gods, but because of the internal peace that comes from the satisfaction of our subjective desire for a rational explanation of natural phenomena (Long 2006: 205-211). By positing the existence of necessary laws of nature based on physics rather than the will of a divine mind, Lucretius is able to offer a plausible alternative to the Stoic notion of divine providence, one which rationally accounts for the order and regularity of nature (Long 2006: 210). Unlike in the Stoic cosmos, natural events in the Epicurean universe have no purpose or intentionality. Things happen randomly and by chance but, because of the *foedera naturae* and the laws of physics, everything is rationally explicable in terms of mechanical causality. Instead of trying to discover the cosmic purpose behind natural phenomena and act accordingly as the Stoics do, then, the Epicurean philosopher must find his own meaning to life (De Lacy 1957: 114-15).

De Lacy takes a more narrow view than is necessary, arguing that the Epicurean moral agent must view the world objectively as process in order to achieve tranquillity, yet he must also enter into the world of immediate experiences as subject in order to find any value in it at all (1957: 118).⁵⁴ There is thus an essential “cleavage” in Epicurean

⁵³ Cf. Long, commenting on 3.931-49: “If this is consolatory, as it is intended to be, the basis of the consolation is the universality of nature’s causal laws in regard to life and death. None of us can escape those laws, because we are all tied to nature as products of its generative and destructive motions (*motus genitales* and *exitiales*). We are *parts* of nature” (2006: 211-12). See below (this chapter) for further discussion on the duality of birth and death in Epicureanism. For the consolation of nature and its processes, see Ch. 3, below.

⁵⁴ For an excellent response to De Lacy’s article, see Long, “Lucretius and the Epicurean Self” in *From Epicurus to Epictetus* (2006: 202-220, esp. 203-215).

philosophy “between the sentient being, or evaluator, and the valueless processes of the physical world” (114). It is not clear, however, that the Epicurean moral agent must choose to live *either* as spectator *or* as subject. Lucretius famously extolls the pleasures of spectating from afar in the proem to Book Two, but he also declares that it is pleasant (*suave*) to gaze upon another’s tribulation, “not because any man’s troubles are a delectable joy, but because to perceive what ills you are free from yourself is pleasant” (*non quia vexari quemquamst iucunda voluptas, / sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere suave est*, 2.3-4). The detachment Lucretius urges is not between the Epicurean moral agent and the world of immediate experiences, therefore, but between the Epicurean moral agent and the world of immediate experiences *guided by irrational and false beliefs*. We can still find pleasure as subjective agents without, as De Lacy supposes, imperiling the tranquillity we achieve by viewing the world as process (1957: 118). We can experience things subjectively as having value for us and still understand that it has no intrinsic value *per se*, without being absurd or irrational. Thus, although nature has no objective value in itself, it can still have value *for* human understanding and goals (Long 2006: 206). It is only by recognizing the objectively valueless nature of the world and its processes that we are free to construct our own meaning of life, instead of wasting time propitiating false gods or trying to make our conception of nature fit erroneous accounts of the world.

The prize Epicurus won for humankind is the knowledge “what can come into being, what can not, in a word, how each thing has its powers limited and its deep-set boundary mark” (1.75-77). This knowledge frees us from the shackles of superstition and enables us to live peacefully, untroubled by inconsistencies between our understanding of the world and how the world appears (cf. 1.151-54: “For assuredly a dread holds all mortals thus in bond...”). The Stoics, for example, had to account for the existence of evil and imperfection in a world providentially governed by a benevolent, omniscient and omnipotent god, whereas the Epicureans frequently used this very point

as evidence against a divine cosmic purpose.⁵⁵ By revealing the power of the *foedera naturae*, Epicurus “proved that mankind had no reason for the most part to roll the sad waves of trouble within their breasts” (*et genus humanum frustra plerumque probavit / volvere curarum tristis in pectore fluctus*, 6.33-34).⁵⁶ Recognizing the inviolability of the *foedera naturae* allows us to focus our energies towards what we can change, instead of vainly trying to avoid the inevitable (Asmis 2008b: 152). At the same time, we see that there is no need to appeal to a divine cosmic plan or standard of morality and so become free to find our own meaning in life, emancipated from the tyranny of superstition.

Elizabeth Asmis writes (2008b: 152-53):

Drawing boundaries around our lifetime, Lucretius does not simply show that death is nothing to us: he insists, above all, that our life is everything to us. Nature presides over this domain; the gods are left wholly out of it, except as models of our own self-fashioning. Unlike the gods of myth, nature is not a tyrant. It is nothing but things themselves, operating with certain finite powers.

Understanding the world as operating within the framework of *foedera naturae* thus empowers humans to live a meaningful and rationally ordered life, one in which we recognize and respect our natural limitations, without allowing them to suppress or overshadow our powers and capabilities. Lucretius is certainly very interested in the relationship between power (*posse*) and being (*esse*), with *posse* occurring more than five hundred times in various forms throughout *DRN* (Shearin 2007: 56).⁵⁷ To give just a few examples: he lies awake at night “seeking by what words and what poetry at last I may be able to (*possim*) display clear lights before your mind, whereby you may see (*convisere*

⁵⁵ Cf. Cicero *Nat. Deor.* 2.93-94, in which Lucilius expresses amazement at the Epicureans’ belief in a fortuitous and mechanistic universe. Seneca makes similar comments, although not explicitly directed against the Epicureans, in *Prov.* 2-4 (Long 2006: 210n.9).

⁵⁶ For an different view, see James Warren (“Ancient Atomists on the Plurality of Worlds”, 2004: 354-365), who suggests that “Epicurean ethical theory is not, so to speak, deduced from Epicurean physics or cosmology...How we should view our lives and what counts as a good life are therefore questions that can be settled to a large degree independently of the particular atomist cosmological background against which those lives are viewed and led” (358).

⁵⁷ *Posse* (‘to be able, can, have power’) appears 517 times and is the eighth most common word in the poem, *queo* (‘to be able, can’) appears 84 times, and *nequeo* (‘to be unable, cannot’) appears 56 times (Shearin 2007: 57n.149). Compare this to the 222 times *ratio* occurs throughout the poem (Bailey 1963: 605).

possis) into the heart of things hidden” (1.142-45). Atoms as the smallest unit of matter must persist eternally, for if they could be changed (*commutari aliqua possent*),

it would also now remain uncertain what could rise (*possit oriri*) and what could not (*nequeat*), in a word in what way each thing has its power limited (*finita potestas*) and its deep-set boundary mark, nor could (*possent*) the generations so often repeat after their kind the nature, manners, living, and movements of their parents (1.594-98).

Nature cannot (*non potuit*) produce gigantic humans,

because a fixed material (*materies certast*) is assigned for making things, from which what can arise (*possit oriri*) is fixed[.] Therefore we must confess that nothing can (*posse*) come from nothing, since all things must have seed, from which each being created may (*possint*) be brought forth into the soft breezes of air (1.199-207).

For Lucretius, knowing the nature of things means knowing what they can or cannot do. We thus come to understand the nature of things by mapping out the natural boundaries of the world and learning a thing’s powers and limitations, so discovering the “deep-set boundary marks” of nature becomes a crucial prerequisite for achieving the good Epicurean life.

Alte Terminus Haerens

This image of the “deep-set boundary mark” or *terminus alte* recurs six times throughout the *DRN* (1.77, 596; 2.1087; 3.1020; 5.90; 6.66)⁵⁸ and, like the metaphor of the *foedus*, held especial importance for the Romans and was closely associated with superstition, religion, and blood sacrifices (e.g., Ovid’s *Fasti* 2.686: “Terminus, with the entrails of a wool-bearing sheep”).⁵⁹ Stone *termini* dotted the Roman landscape and marked out the spatial limits of a particular territory or property and were thought to be protected by the god Terminus, who was celebrated during the annual festival of the Terminalia. A person who ploughed up a boundary stone or otherwise trespassed could be killed with impunity (Festus 505.19-21 [Lindsay]; Shearin 2007: 171); importantly,

⁵⁸ 1.76-77 = 595-96, 5.89-90, 6.65-66: *quid nequeat, finita potestas denique cuique / quam sit ratione atque alte terminus haerens*; 2.1087-88: “since there is a deep-set limit of life (*vitae depactus terminus alte*) equally awaiting them”; 3.1020-21: “[the guilty conscience] does not see where can be the end to its miseries (*terminus malorum*) or the final limit to its punishment (*poenarum denique finis*).”

⁵⁹ According to Plutarch, Terminus was apparently originally honoured without blood sacrifice, but why is uncertain (*QR* 15 [*Moralia* 267c]).

Ovid, describing the temple of Jove being erected on the Capitoline hill, depicts Terminus as standing strong even against the might of Jupiter (*Fasti* 2.667-680; cf. *DRN* 5.306-310). The practice of using *termini* to divide up the land and the legal and religious respect assigned to them stretches as far back as the rule of Numa, the legendary law-giver king of the Romans. The ancient connotations of sanctity and inviolability associated with Roman *termini* thus get transferred to Lucretius' *termini* of nature (Cabisius 1984: 112), in the same way his use of the more formal archaic *-i* ending instead of the usual *-ae* diphthong ending of the genitive singular of *natura* confers an air of solemn dignity onto his *foedera (naturai*: 1.586, 2.302; *naturae*: 5.310, 924, 6.907).⁶⁰ In the inaugural presentation of the phrase *foedera naturai* this suggestion of *gravitas* is further reinforced by *sancitum* ('it is solemnly decreed', 'it has been ordained') in the following line (1.587, see above) (Asmis 2008b: 145). As sacred, ancient and inviolable as Roman *termini* are, however, natural *termini* are far more so. Each of the passages containing the image of the *alte terminus haerens* is concerned with the finite powers, growth, and lifespan of created things⁶¹ as incontrovertible facts of life, and the failure to recognize or accept this results in anxiety and distress (e.g., 3.1014-23, 5.83-90, 6.59-67). These *termini* mark out the boundaries of the *foedera naturae*, which nothing, neither mountains nor temples nor planets can stand against (5.306-17).

⁶⁰ Lucretius uses the archaic form in his first two mentions of the phrase *foedera naturai* (1.586, 2.302) to draw his reader's attention and to emphasize the importance of this concept. The formal archaic *-i* ending lengthens out the possessive form into four long syllables (compared to the three syllables of the more modern *naturae*), just slightly interrupting the steady cadence of the verse and forcing the reader to linger just a beat longer than normal. Lucretius also marks these first two occurrences as introducing a significant concept with his unusual use of the preposition *per* ('by, through, on account of, by means of') followed by *foedera*; Livy for example uses this pairing only once at *AUC* 21.18, preferring the more common collocation of *ex foedere* ('according to, in conformity with, on account of'; used 27 times) (Fowler 2002: 377). Most Roman writers such as Cicero and Tacitus do not use *per foedera* even once but do make use of *ex foedere* whereas Lucretius, shunning conventionality, does not employ the latter conjunction at all. Cf. Fowler: "The more general and less formulaic *per* suits the complexity of meaning in *foedera naturai*" (ibid.).

⁶¹ 3.1020-21 discussing a limit to human misery is a possible exception, but still deals with the finite quality of human experience.

Solon, Epicurus and Lucretius⁶²

The metaphor of the deep-set boundary stone has another significance, however, which comes from archaic Greek literature. As far as I know no one else has made the connection between Lucretius' deep-set boundary stones and Solon's ὄρους πολλαχῇ πεπηγότας ("boundary-stones stuck fast into the earth in many places," 24.6), but striking parallels can be found between the two poems.⁶³ Solon was a sixth-century Athenian statesman and poet whose innovative and controversial reforms, as well as his legendary self-imposed ten-year exile from Athens, made him a well-known figure in antiquity. One of his most famous reforms was the cancellation or "shaking-off" of all public and private debts (*Seisachtheia*), which he discusses in Poem 24:

She would bear witness to these things in the justice of time,
The greatest and best mother of the Olympian gods,
Black Gaia, whose boundary stones, 5
stuck fast in the earth in many places, I once removed
A slave before, now she is free. (24.3-7)

Συμμαρτυροῖη ταῦτ' ἂν ἐν δίκῃ χρόνου
Μήτηρ μεγίστη δαιμόνων Ὀλυμπίων
ἄριστα, Γῇ μέλαινα, τῆς ἐγὼ ποτε 5
ὄρους ἀνεῖλον πολλαχῇ πεπηγότας·
πρόσθεν δὲ δουλεύουσα, νῦν ἔλευθέρα.

These *horoi* differ somewhat from Roman *termini* in that they were public markers indicating property that had been offered up as security against loans incurred by poor land-holders (Fine 1951: 43). These landholders were called *hektemoroi* ('sixth-parters') because they were obliged to pay a sixth of their harvests to wealthier landowners in exchange for protection or loans; when they were unable to make their tithe, the *hektemoroi* were sold into slavery (Hansen 1991: 28-29). Solon abolished debt-slavery

⁶² For Solon's poems I adopt the numerical designations from Campbell's *Greek Lyric Poetry* (1967). Campbell Poem 24 = West fr.36. Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. The text for Solon Poem 24 can also be found in Aristotle's *Ath. Pol.* 12.4.

⁶³ Fowler references Solon in Herodotus (1.32; cf. Hdt. 1.216) setting a limit (seventy years) to a man's life (οὄρον τῆς ζῆς), and he draws attention to a passage of Critolaus ap. Philo *De aet. Mundi* 59 in which the phrase τοὺς ἐξ ἀρχῆς παγέντας ὄρους appears and offers a "striking parallel to the *alte terminus haerens* of 1.77) (2002: 378), but that is as close as anyone seems to get. Asmis comments that Lucretius' expulsion of the gods from the domain of nature recalls the expulsion of the tyrant Tarquinius (509 BC) which marked the beginning of the Roman Republic and their political liberty (2008b: 147), but says nothing about Solon and his *Seisachtheia*.

(Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 6.1) and freed those who had remained in Athens “in shameful slavery” (δουλίην αἰκία), as well as those who had been sold into slavery abroad (24.8-15). He also freed the *hektemoroi* from their sixth-parts obligation and enacted a general cancellation of debts (*Ath. Pol.* 6.1).

Both Solon and Epicurus rescue their people from slavery and oppression. Lucretius praises Epicurus, “a man of Greece” (1.66), for freeing humankind from a “foul life” (*foede vita*), “crushed (*oppressa*) beneath the weight of Superstition” (1.62-63). Epicureanism liberates the earth from the rule of divine providence and the chains of necessity (2.251-62, 1090-92; *Ep. Pyth.* 97). Solon also frees (ἐλευθέρα, ἐλευθέρους ἔθηκα, 24.7, 15) both the earth and his subjugated people from “shameful slavery” (δουλίην αἰκία, 24.13), while his charges cower, “trembling before their masters” (δεσποτῶν τρομευμένους, 24.14), just as the unenlightened person, like a child trembling (*trepidant*) in the dark, fearfully cringes from the unknown (2.55-61, 3.87-93, 6.35-41; cf. 5.1218-25). Lucretius himself aims “to set free the mind from the close knots of superstition” (*et artis / religionum animum nodis exsolvere pergo*, 4.6-7); the verb *exsolvere* (‘to set loose, release, free, throw off, discharge’) is a technical term for discharging or paying a debt or obligation (*Lewis & Short*). Epicurus “pointed the way” (*viam monstravit*, 6.27) to the good life, Solon “led up” or “conducted” (ἀνήγαγον, 24.9) those who had been sold abroad back home to Athens (24.8-12). Neither Solon nor Epicurus nor Lucretius was dissuaded by the obstacles in their way or the difficulties of their tasks. Solon, besieged on all sides “like a wolf among many dogs” (24.26-27) withstood opposition from both the wealthy landowners who profited from the old feudal system, and the *hektemoroi* who wanted him to redistribute the land equally (*Ath. Pol.* 6.3, 12.3). Epicurus was quelled by neither fables of the gods, “nor thunderbolts, nor heaven with menacing roar, but all the more they goaded the eager courage of his soul, so that he should desire, first of all men, to shatter the confining bars of nature’s gates” (1.68-71). Lucretius famously comments on the difficulties of rendering Greek

thoughts into Latin words but judges the results as well worth the labour (1.136-46; cf. 1.921-34, 4.1-9). Finally, Solon is worthy of honour for succeeding where lesser men would have failed (24.21-23; also, Solon 3.5-25, 23.8-12), while Epicurus is a god, more illustrious and notable than Ceres, Liber and Hercules because his discoveries have freed mankind from fears (5.1-54).

There is no evidence that Lucretius was familiar with Solon's poetry, but the ideological similarities between the two poems are highly suggestive. Lucretius often mimics the imagery, language or style of his poetic predecessors, and Solon was well-known in antiquity as an uncommonly wise lawgiver.⁶⁴ His status as one of the Seven Sages (Pausanias 10.24.1; Plato, *Prot.* 342e-343b) and his self-imposed ten-year exile after his reformation of the Athenian constitution would have made him an attractive model. Like Solon, Epicurus liberated humankind by establishing new laws of nature, and then "left" his disciples to follow his teachings without him when he died. Again like Solon, Epicurus removed the boundary stones of oppression from the earth and humankind. He did this by setting new boundary-markers in place and "shaking-off" the superstitious and irrational beliefs that humans erroneously attach to nature. Epicurus' boundary-stones, the *alte terminus haerens*, are the natural boundaries of the world which exist eternally and cannot be overturned or avoided.

***Horoi* in Epicurus**

In his extant writings, Epicurus himself uses the term ὅρος only twice, both in ethical contexts. In *KD* 3 he defines the limit (ὅρος) of pleasure as "the removal of all that is painful," while in *KD* 11 he comments that science would be unnecessary if we were unafraid of death and natural phenomena, and if we did not fail to grasp "the limits of pains and desires" (τοὺς ὅρους τῶν ἀλγηδόνων καὶ τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν). This last phrase is repeated from *KD* 10 and replaces πέρας ('end', 'limit', 'boundary') with ὅρος,

⁶⁴ For Lucretius' imitation and correction of epic poetry, see Ch. 3, below.

suggesting that the two terms were interchangeable (De Lacy 1969: 105), although the former appears far more often in physical as well as ethical contexts. Cognates of the latter such as the verb ὀρίζω ('to divide or separate from', 'limit', 'mark out by boundaries') or the adjective ἀόριστος ('without boundaries', 'limitless') are less common but appear more frequently than ὅρος, also typically in ethical discussions. Unlimited (ἀόριστους) desires cause even the greatest wealth to become poverty (Frg. 45 = Usener 202; cf. *SV* 25), whereas "the wealth demanded by nature is both limited (ὥρισται) and easily procured" (*KD* 15). Unlimited (ἀόριστους) fears and desires lead to difficulties and unhappiness (*SV* 81, Frg. 45 = Usener 202, Frg. 74 = Usener 485) and occur because we forget nature (Frg. 46 = Usener 203), but happiness comes from "freedom from pain and moderation in feelings and an attitude of mind which imposes the limits ordained by nature" (ἀλυπία καὶ πραότης παθῶν καὶ διάθεσις ψυχῆς τὸ κατὰ φύσιν ὀρίζουσα, Frg. 85 = Usener 551). We have a limited (ὥρισμένεν) time to live (*SV* 10) but there is a limit to evils as well (*KD* 28) and the wise man drives whatever he cannot reconcile with himself and *ataraxia* "beyond the borders of his life" (ἐξωρίσατο) (*KD* 39) (Bailey 1970: 372).

For Epicurus, then, the image of the boundary-stone is even more deeply embedded within the concept of ethical attitudes towards life than it is for Lucretius. Setting limits on life is crucial for achieving peace of mind and freedom from fear and anxiety, and it is intriguing that for Epicurus this seems to involve an active process of delimitation – ὅρος appears far more often as a verb ('to mark out by boundaries') or verbal adjective ('having limited', 'having been limited') than as an inert noun ('limit', 'boundary-mark') – whereas Lucretius represents these boundaries (*termini*) as having already been fixed and set (e.g., 1.76-77, 595-96; 5.82-90 = 6.58-66). Lucretius' creative task consists rather of conveying the essence and importance of these limits set by Epicurus to his Roman audience in terms they can understand (1.136-45). This translation and invention of a new Latin philosophical vocabulary, however, is also an act

of discovery and redefinition of the limits of life; by illuminating (*inlustrare*) “the dark discoveries (*obscura reperta*) of the Greeks” (1.136-37), Lucretius improves or corrects the knowledge of the past to free his people from the excesses of false beliefs.

Of the three times Lucretius uses the verb *termino* (‘to set bounds to’, ‘limit’, ‘define’), it occurs twice (*terminat*, 1.1000, 1012) to show how “one thing is seen before our eyes to be the limit of another” (*postremo ante oculos res rem finire videtur*, 1.998) (1.1000: earth and sea; 1.1010-13: body and void), and once (*determinat*, 2.719) in reference to the *foedera naturae*: “But do not think that animals only are held by these laws (*legibus*), for the same principle holds all things apart by their limits (*eadem ratio determinat omnia*)” (2.718-19).⁶⁵ In general then, the *termini* seem to correspond grammatically more closely with Epicurus’ πέρας (sg.) or πέρατα (pl.), those set limits which must be taught (e.g. *KD* 10), grasped (e.g. *KD* 11, 18, 20, 21) or weighed by reason (e.g. *KD* 19) – and Epicurus is the one who marks these limits out (ὀρίζω) from the false and excessive *horoi* that mislead the common man.⁶⁶ These syntactical variations might stem simply from the translation of ideas from Greek into Latin, or from cultural differences in the conceptualization of boundary-stones as temporary versus immovable. Even if this is the case, however, it is still true that Epicurus’ own language facilitates casting him into the benevolent lawgiver/saviour role envisioned by both Solon and Lucretius. Epicurus, by defining the true *horoi* of nature, liberates humankind from the tyranny of excessive fears, desires and pains, and illuminates a path for others to follow (5.55-58: “His steps I trace, his doctrines I follow, teaching in my poem how all things are bound to abide in that law by which they were made...”; cf. 3.1-6), free from the false *horoi* of irrational beliefs.

⁶⁵ The MSS. have *legibus his quaedam ratio determinat omnis*, which is supported by Cicero *Aratea* 94, but Bailey rejects this reading on the evidence of Lambinus (*eadem ratio res terminat omnis*) in combination with Lucretius’ earlier use of *terminat* at 1.1000 and 1.1012 (1963: 916).

⁶⁶ Clay notes that Lucretius uses *finis* in the sense of boundary most frequently for πέρας, but the lines he uses as evidence (1.976, 978, 979, 1007) indicate a more physical rather than ethical meaning (1983: 319).

II. *Foedera* in Space and Time

Lucretius' *Foedera Naturae* vs. Plato's Forms

The occasional representation of the *foedera naturae* as deep-set boundary-markers is a more physical metaphor than the abstract concept of a natural law or treaty and is a fitting image for the materialist Epicurean universe consisting solely of matter and void. The *foedera naturae* impose order on the world by defining the parameters of existence for things in the world, ensuring the regularity of species in nature and acting as generic markers to differentiate one created kind from another. Things are what they are because of the *foedera naturae* but, unlike Stoic providence, the *foedera naturae* neither actively create beings in the world, nor exert teleological force over them. A slightly closer analogue to Lucretius' *foedera naturae* might be Plato's ideal Forms, which are eternal, unchanging, perfectly representative concepts or universals, in virtue of which mortal things are what they are. Because Plato's theory of Forms is notoriously problematic and different variations of it appear throughout his works, for the sake of simplicity I primarily refer to the version of his theory found in his *Phaedo*, the dialogue dramatizing Socrates' last hours of life. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates explains to his interlocutors that "all beautiful things are beautiful by the Beautiful" (ἀλλ' ὅτι τῷ καλῷ πάντα τὰ καλὰ γίγνεται καλά) through some kind of "presence of, or the sharing in (παρουσία εἴτε κοινωνία), or however you may describe its relationship to that Beautiful we mentioned" (100d; cf. *Parmenides* 131a-132e).⁶⁷ Many things can be beautiful but they are beautiful in virtue of a single Beauty, which persists eternally, unaffected by and tolerating no change (*Phaedo* 78d-79a; cf. *Rep.* 10.596a-597e, *Symposium* 211b). Lucretius' *foedera naturae* fulfil a similar explanatory function: 'x is f because of F'. In the passage introducing his *foedera naturae* Lucretius explains that "all the different birds show in succession marks upon their bodies to distinguish their kind" (*variae volucres ut in ordine cunctae / ostendant maculas generalis corpore inesse*, 1.589-90). Many sparrows have existed, do exist and will exist, but all of these particulars belong to the

⁶⁷ All translations of Plato's *Phaedo* are from G.M.A. Grube (2002), unless indicated otherwise.

same avian species “sparrow” because they are all somehow subject to the same *foedera naturae*, which are eternal, necessary and unchanging (1.584-98). All members of this species will be born and grow and live and die under the same conditions for all eternity, because of and according to the *foedera naturae* (e.g., 2.297-302).

Both the Forms and the *foedera naturae* thus answer the question “what is x?” or “what does it mean to be x?” (e.g. *Phaedo* 75c-d). They can be thought of as logical definitions or the type of thing which “never can tolerate the coming to be from” something different from itself (*Phaedo* 103b-c; cf. *DRN* 2.700-729). The Forms, however, are universals which can be nothing other than what they are; to borrow Socrates’ example in the *Phaedo*, “Tallness, being tall, cannot venture to be small” because the Form of Tallness must perfectly embody all it means to be tall, and cannot be deficient or lacking tallness in any way (102e-103a; cf. 74a-75b).⁶⁸ The *foedera naturae*, on the other hand, although marking one generic kind off from another (*determinat*, 2.719) by encompassing all the essential or inseparable qualities of that type, allow for variation within their defined boundaries. De Lacy identifies this as a “serious difficulty” for Epicureanism, pointing out that “The fixed boundaries have become limits of variation” and hence far more difficult to identify (1969:110). The Epicureans were quite emphatic that centaurs and chimaera and mythical beasts are quite impossible (e.g., 4.739-40: “for certainly [*nam certe*] no image of a Centaur comes from one living...”; cf. 2.700-710), yet Lucretius seems to accept that *portenta* such as hermaphrodites or creatures without mouths or eyes emerged from the earth in her early days (5.837-48; De Lacy 1969: 110); such deviations failed to survive, however, “since nature banned their growth” (*quoniam natura absterruit auctum*, 5.846). In other words, their creation may have fallen within the boundaries of the conditions of birth dictated by the *foedera naturae*, but they failed to meet the minimum requirements of life (5.849-54). De Lacy’s question, which he is right to ask, is: how do we determine what does or does not fall

⁶⁸ Socrates is here rejecting his earlier conclusion that things come from their opposites, such that beauty comes from what is ugly and shortness comes from tallness (*Phaedo* 70d-71a).

within the boundaries of acceptable variation? Extremes on either end of the spectrum are easy enough – men as tall as mountains are outside of the possible, as are horses the size of a thumbnail – but it is possible that the precise boundary separating what can and cannot be requires an objective point of view unavailable to us.

One or Many?

Lucretius is unclear whether a single *foedus naturae* or several *foedera naturae* are responsible for the conditions of birth, growth, and decay that define a single species, referring to his laws of nature in both the singular and plural forms.⁶⁹ In Book Six, for example, he announces his intention to discuss “by what law of nature” (*quo foedere naturae*) magnets attract iron (6.906-907), whereas in Book Two things “will be and will grow and will be strong with their strength as much as is granted to each by the laws of nature (*per foedera naturai*)” (2.300-302). According to Gabriel Droz-Vincent, “the creation of each category of things matches a *foedus*” (1996: 204; my translation).⁷⁰ This interpretation assigns a single *foedus naturae* to each particular kind and is supported by 5.923-24: “each thing proceeds after its own fashion, and all by fixed law of nature (*foedere naturae certo*) preserve their distinctions.” Lucretius is here denying the possibility of hybrids made from the parts of several different creatures, insisting that a “fixed law of nature” ensures that one type of thing can only ever engender more of that same kind of thing, in the same way and under the same conditions that members of that species have always or will always come about. By analogy, then, disparate atoms of different sizes and shapes come together and “agree” to act together to create *concilia* (Cabisius 1984: 111). Lucretius repeatedly insists that “it is often of great importance with what and in what position these same first-beginnings are held together, and what motions they impart and receive mutually” (*atque eadem magni refert primordia saepe /*

⁶⁹ Lucretius mentions his laws of nature in the plural (*foedera*) at 1.586, 2.302, 5.310, and in the singular (*foedere*, ablative of cause or manner) at 5.924 and 6.906. At 5.87 *naturae* is implied by “that law (*foedere*) by which they were made.”

⁷⁰ Gabriel Droz-Vincent (1996: 204): “la création de chaque catégorie de choses correspond à un *foedus*” (“Les *Foedera Naturae* chez Lucrèce” in *Le Concept de Nature à Rome: La Physique*).

cum quibus et quali positura contineantur / et quos inter se dent motus accipiantque, 1.817-19; cf. 1.907-14). Like Roman *foedera*, the precise conditions that must be met if a union is to work are specified by the *foedus naturae* and, if the atoms do not abide by these terms and conditions, they are cast out as alien elements, “which were not able to combine with any part nor within the body to feel the life-giving motions with it and imitate them” (*quae neque coniecti quoquam potuere neque intus / vitalis motus consentire atque imitari*, 2.716-17). Wherever the appropriate shapes, sizes and numbers of atoms do come together in the order dictated by the *foedus naturae*, on the other hand, members of that species are born.

If this interpretation is correct, it might help explain why Lucretius uses *foedus* instead of the more typical *lex*, which would imply one overarching universal law applying equally to all things. Instead, *foedus* suggests a “horizontal”, non-hierarchical bind which promotes pacts among equals while implying no superior lawgiver” (Schiesaro 2007: 48). Different actions or behaviours are decreed for different types of people or atoms and, if these conditions are not met or carried out, the whole cooperative union is dissolved. In contrast if a human *lex* is broken, the community may suffer from the actions of the transgressor, but it is the individual who bears the brunt of the punishment meted out by the law. The *foedus naturae* thus defines how the atoms must relate to each other in order for the union to exist and survive, and the same *foedus naturae* governs the same kind of union, wherever and whenever the right combinations should occur.

***Foedera Naturae* and Matter**

Whether it is one or many *foedera naturae* which govern a single species in nature is unknowable and ultimately unimportant, however, and Epicurus explicitly warns against making arbitrary decisions between two or more equally plausible explanations (*Ep. Pyth.* 86-87; *Ep. Her.* 79-80). He considers our careful observation and

rational investigation of natural phenomena to provide sufficient knowledge of the nature of things for peace of mind and happiness, even if we remain unsure of the exact causes of some things (*Ep. Her.* 78-82).⁷¹ What is important, rather, is that the *foedera naturae* govern matter eternally and are co-existent with matter. This is where Lucretius' *foedera naturae* and Plato's Forms crucially diverge. For Plato, although particulars in the world are ontologically dependent on the Forms for their existence (e.g., *Phaedo* 100c: "if there is anything beautiful besides the Beautiful itself, it is beautiful for no other reason than that it shares in that Beautiful"), the Forms themselves are metaphysically independent entities that exist only in the realm of Forms, "itself by itself (αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ)" (*Phaedo* 100b; cf. 79a, *Symp.* 211b). And, as Plato argues in his famous Allegory of the Cave (*Rep.* 7.514a-518b), the Forms, as pure ideas, are "far more real" than corporeal objects (515d). Socrates relates the Allegory of the Cave to Glaucon at the beginning of Book 7 of Plato's *Republic*, and asks him to imagine "a sort of subterranean cave" in which men, chained in the same spot since childhood, passively watch the distorted play of shadows on the wall of the cave. These shadows constitute these men's only reality but bear little resemblance to the objects causing the shadows themselves. In Platonic philosophy, the distorted shadow world corresponds to the corporeal world of particulars, which is an imperfect echo of the true or intelligible world. Sensible objects that somehow partake of the form of Beauty or Equal become beautiful or equal things but always fall short of Beauty or Equal because the latter encompass all instances of what is beautiful or what is equal, perfectly and completely (*Phaedo* 74c-75b).

For the Epicureans, on the other hand, the material world is the *only* world. Although each individual member of a species provides only an example of what it means to be that type whereas the *foedera naturae* define the absolute generic boundaries between things, both are equally real. Lucretius writes (1.445-48; cf. *Ep. Her.* 39-40):

⁷¹ For Epicurus, peace of mind consists of a harmonious understanding of the world – several equally plausible explanations for the same phenomenon can conflict with one another as long as they cohere with our overall understanding of nature – free from the anxieties and disappointments resulting from irrational beliefs (*Ep. Her.* 81-82).

Therefore besides void and bodies no third nature can be left self-existing in the sum of things – neither one that can ever at any time come within our senses, nor one that any man can grasp by the reasoning of the mind.

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*ergo, praeter inane et corpora, tertia per se
nulla potest rerum in numero natura relinqui,
nec quae sub sensus cadat ullo tempore nostros
nec ratione animi quam quisquam possit apisci.*

Lucretius explicitly rejects the existence of an intelligible realm separate from the material world (cf. *Ep. Her.* 67: “those who say that the soul is incorporeal are talking idly...”). Only body and void exists, and whatever is neither body nor void is either a property (*coniuncta*) or accident (*eventa*) of these (1.449-50; *Ep. Her.* 68-72), with ‘property’ referring to “that which without destructive dissolution can never be separated and disjoined” (*coniunctum est id quod nusquam sine perituali / discidio potis est seiungi seque gregari*, 1.451-52), and ‘accident’ denoting “all else which may come and go while the nature of things remains intact” (*cetera quorum / adventu manet incolumis natura abituque*, 1.456-57). The *foedera naturae* must fall under the category of properties, which permanently attach to body and cannot be separated from it unless the body is destroyed; Bailey points out that *discidium* at 1.452 (see above) is the technical term for atomic dissolution (1963: 671). Epicurus recommends thinking of the body as a whole owing its permanent (αἰδιον) existence or nature to its composition of properties (συμβεβηκότα), which always exist in it but “not in the sense that it is composed of properties brought together to form it” (*Ep. Her.* 69; cf. Bailey 1963: 671). The properties are perceptible physical constituents rather than material parts of body (Bailey 1970: 236-37) and so depend on body for their existence. In the same way, body depends on its properties for its continued existence as body; as Bailey observes, “the perception of a body is the aggregate perception of its properties” (1970: 235).

The *foedera naturae* dictate the conditions of birth, growth, decline and dissolution for particular kinds and so encompass the essential properties belonging to each type of thing. These properties include primary qualities such as weight and size, as well as secondary qualities like colour or smell. Because the *foedera naturae* define not

only how a body appears but also how it comes into being and grows and exerts its powers, however, the types of conditions or states of affairs required for that body's existence, although typically classified as *eventa*, must in this case be considered *coniuncta*. *Eventa* and *coniuncta* are thus relative rather than absolute terms, and the deciding factor is whether the body can survive separated from that quality (Bailey 1970: 235). Certain fixed conditions must obtain for fixed things to come about in a fixed way and the absence of these conditions negates or prohibits the existence of that object. The *foedera naturae* always necessarily accompany classes of objects and are thus anchored to particulars in time and space, defining the parameters of existence for each object automatically, necessarily, and completely without intention. Things come to be randomly, when the right conditions are fulfilled, and "the things which have been accustomed to be born will be born under the same conditions; they will be and will grow and will be strong with their strength as much as is granted to each by the laws of nature" (2.300-302, quoted in Ch. 1, above). Specific *foedera naturae* govern particular kinds of things and when an atomic *concilium* breaks apart into its constitutive particles and ceases to be that kind of thing, it also ceases to be governed by that particular *foedus naturae*. Instead, other *foedera naturae* specific to its new forms take over.

Many Worlds

The *foedera naturae* are intrinsically tied to the physical world and matter and do not exist outside of the physical world as anything in and of themselves. Without matter, then, there can be no *foedera naturae*, but since an infinite number of atoms persists and at any given moment a multiplicity of atomic compounds exists, there will never be a time when the *foedera naturae* do not also exist. Lucretius does not explicitly address what happens to the *foedera naturae* that govern a particular species when that species becomes extinct, but his assertion that "there is no one thing in the whole sum which is produced unique, and grows up unique and alone" (*huc accedit ut in summa res nulla sit una, / unica quae gignatur et unica solaque crescat*, 2.1077-78), suggests that he

did not consider universal extinction a likely possibility. If animals that are rare or unknown in one kind of climate flourish in another (2.532-40), then surely things that are rare or unknown on this planet might be prolific on another. Both Lucretius and Epicurus accepted the existence of an innumerable number of other worlds as a logical consequence of abundant matter flying randomly through space (2.1048-89; *Ep. Her.* 45, 73-74; *Ep. Pyth.* 88-90), so it is quite conceivable that at any given moment every possible combination of atoms exists, and each type is governed by its particular *foedera naturae*. This is also known as the Epicurean principle of *ισονομία*, ‘equal distribution’ or ‘equilibrium’, which states that the aimless movement of the atoms gives more or less equal odds that a more or less equal number of each kind of thing will be created (Bailey 1963: 888; 2.1048-76).⁷²

Thus, atoms aimlessly wandering the void come together by chance in random arrangements and proportions. When a viable combination occurs, a *concilium* is created and the *foedus naturae* specific to that particular grouping of atomic parts guides it along its fixed path of life. Cabisius emphasizes that the *foedera naturae* apply only to atoms which have formed a *concilium*; “Then,” she writes, “like men who have bonded together in a society, the atoms are bound to specific aims and interests that result from the identity of the group as a whole” (1984: 113). To reiterate: the *foedera naturae* are eternal and unchanging but exist only in relation to atomic aggregates in the world; they are thus specific to time and space and, although they govern the limits of life of each created kind, they also lack the providential or teleological force that appears in Stoicism or other philosophies. Atoms attach to one another by chance, and then the *foedera naturae* specific to that atomic arrangement “take over” to ensure regularity in nature. In Schiesaro’s words, “‘Natural laws’ crystallise *post factum* the workings of nature, and embody a ‘deeply fixed’ (1.77) *terminus* for each creature, a limitation of possibilities

⁷² Cf. Cicero *Nat. Deor.* 1.19.50: *summa vero vis infinitatis...in qua intellegi necesse est eam esse naturam ut omnia omnibus paribus paria respondeant; hanc ἰσωνομίαν appellat Epicurus id est aequabilem tributionem.*

which prevents anarchy in the physical world” (2007: 48). Finally, trying to understand or gain knowledge of these *foedera naturae* through a rational interpretation of nature in order to dispel fears that arise from ignorance is the goal of Epicureanism, and this project is conducted solely based in and on the material world.

The Physicality of Roman *Foedera*

Roman *foedera* were also inextricably tied to a specific time, place, and type of people. From the moment a treaty was struck and ratified, it bound all the members of that group in perpetuity (e.g. Cic. *Balb.* 35: *pia et aeterna pax*), although there is also mention of treaties being renewed or renegotiated (e.g. *Balb.* 34: *tum est cum Gaditanis foedus vel renovatum vel ictum*; *AUC* 42.25.4-5: *foedus cum Philippo ictum esse, cum ipso eo post mortem patris renovatum*).⁷³ Each treaty struck identified the populaces involved, specified the permitted or expected behaviours of each, and stated the domains of power in which these actions were to occur. Many treaties shared common features such as a mutual defence pact but each individual treaty was customized for and tied to a particular set of people in a particular time and place. The *foedus* between Rome and the Aetolians (189 BC), for example, begins: “The people of the Aetolians shall in good faith maintain the empire and majesty of the people of Rome” (Polyb. 21.32; cf. *AUC* 38.11). A number of conditions follow, including the explicit exclusion of the island of Cephallenia from the treaty (Polyb. 21.32.12; 21.30.5; *AUC* 38.9.10, 38.11.7).⁷⁴ The *foedus* between Rome and Antiochus opens with the declaration: “Let there be friendship (*amicitia*) between king Antiochus and the Roman people, on the following terms and

⁷³ Cf. Louise Matthaei on the permanence of Roman *foedera*: “But a *foedus* could not be terminated at will: it was in its very nature everlasting, and woe betide either side, who attempted to alter a tittle of it: they would incur the special enmity of the gods, who, according to the really sincere belief of the Romans, would infallibly bring defeat on the *foedifragi* or breakers of the *foedus*. A declaration of war then does not amount to the wilful dissolution of the *foedus*: it is merely an announcement that the other side has infringed some condition of the *foedus*, and an appeal to the arbitrament of the gods, to give victory to the side which has kept the *foedus* unimpaired” (1907: 190).

⁷⁴ Gruen notes that the island and strait of Cephallenia held much strategic importance to the Romans, who excluded it from treaty arrangements to prevent Aetolia or any other major Greek power from making later claims to it (Polyb. 21.30.5, 21.32.12; *AUC* 37.50.5, 38.9.10, 38.11.7, 38.28.5-38.30.1) (1984: 470-71).

conditions (*his legibus et condicionibus*)” (*AUC* 38.38.2; Polyb. 21.45), and the *foedera* between Rome and Carthage, as well as all other *foedera*, follow the same pattern (Polyb. 3.22-25). This kind of precision and exactness in language is according to Elizabeth Meyer one of the defining characteristics of treaty inscriptions (2004: 48).

Roman *foedera* did not just exert force over and direct the behaviour of people in the world; they physically existed and took up space in the world as well. The terms and conditions of every *foedus* struck were inscribed onto wax, wood or bronze tablets (*tabulae*), and a *foedus* was not considered valid until it was written down.⁷⁵ Four of the nine epigraphically preserved Roman treaties even contain explicit instructions to be inscribed in bronze (Meyer 2004: 96)⁷⁶; the remaining five treaties, with Methymna, Aetolia, the Thyrriensens, Cnidos, and Mytilene, are incomplete at the very end, where this provision occurs in the others (Meyer 2004: 96n. 16). Of these nine surviving treaties, four stipulate further that in order for later changes to be valid, they must also be written down (Meyer 2004: 96). Simply being recorded was not enough to validate treaties, however. Once the terms and conditions of the treaty were inscribed on the *tabula*, they had to be ritually read aloud by the fetial priest to formally confirm the *foedus* (*AUC* 1.24.7: *ut illa palam prima postrema ex illis tabulis cerave recitata sunt...*). The *tabula* was then set up in the Treasury of the Aediles on the Capitoline hill in the Temple of Jupiter, one of the most important civic and religious centres in Rome.⁷⁷ Replicas were

⁷⁵ Livy tells us that the first known treaty was inscribed on a wax *tabula* (1.24.7: *tabulis cerave*) but by the Republic it was more common to inscribe them in bronze. Tablets were used for legal documents, senatorial decrees, prayers or dedications, and *foedera*, and were intended as monuments and “long-enduring, ceremonial displays of law” (Williamson 1987: 165). Although the earliest surviving bronze *tabulae* are from the second century BC, ancient writers also mention treaties inscribed in bronze from before the beginning of the Republic (Williamson 1987: 161).

⁷⁶ These are the treaties with Astypalaea, Callaris, Cibyra and Maroneia.

⁷⁷ E.g., the treaty between Antiochus and Rome in 189 BC: “This treaty was engraved on bronze tablets and deposited in the Capitol (where it was customary to deposit such treaties)...” (App. *Syr.* 39: ταῦτα συγγράμμενοί τε καὶ ἐς τὸ Καπιτώλιον ἐς δέλτους χαλκᾶς ἀναθέντες, οὐ καὶ τὰς ἄλλας συνθήκας ἀνατιθέασιν) (trans. White 1899) (Meyer 2004: 26n28). See also Polyb. 3.26: “Seeing that such treaties exist and are preserved to this day, engraved on brass in the treasury of the Aediles in the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus.”

often erected in similarly prominent areas in the corresponding regions, such as the copy of the *foedus* between the Romans and Cibrates (188 BC) inscribed on the base of the statue of Roma in Cibra (OGIS 762; Gladhill 2008: 73-75), or the copy of the treaty between the Romans and the Jews in 161 BC preserved on bronze tablets in Jerusalem “to be for them there a memorial of peace and alliance” (*I Mac.* 8.22, trans. Johnson, Coleman-Norton, Bourne 2003).

Philinus and Polybius

In the case of some legal *tabulae*, removal from the Capitoline hill effectively voided its terms, as when Caesar cancelled several grants of Roman citizenship simply by taking down a hanging *tabula* (Cic. *Fam.* 13.36; Williamson 1987: 167). Polybius famously dismisses the historian Philinus’ assertion that the Romans broke the treaty with Carthage by crossing over to Sicily, on the grounds that “there does not exist, nor ever has existed, any such written compact at all” (3.26).⁷⁸ He then declares that he has no problem with people attacking the Romans for crossing into Sicily on other grounds, “but if any one supposes that in so crossing they broke oaths or treaties, he is manifestly ignorant of the truth” (*ibid.*). Polybius is emphatic that because no *tabula* corresponding to the terms Philinus records seems to exist, no *foedus* containing these terms possibly could have existed either. The *novae tabulae* (“new tablets”) that enabled debtors to start anew rested on a similar principle: “with a new tablet the previous debt, because not recorded, simply did not exist” (Meyer 2004: 36). The reverse also held: if something was written down it was true and known. Thus Cicero dramatically uses the bronze pillar on the Comitium recording Rome’s early treaty with the Latins as evidence that “everyone knew” about that treaty (e.g., Cic. *Balb.* 23.53; Williamson 1987: 168). The treaty is real, i.e., exists, because it actually physically exists. It is literally embodied,

⁷⁸ Despite Polybius’ scathing dismissal of Philinus’ histories as written as if through the eyes of a man in love blind to the faults of his lover (1.14; cf. 1.15), modern historians have tended to accept the veracity of Philinus’ version. The *tabula* corresponding to the *foedus* mentioned by Philinus may well have been hidden or destroyed by embarrassed Roman officials who wanted to deny Rome’s role in instigating the First Punic War (Hoyos 1985: 93-94). For further discussion of this controversy, see B.D. Hoyos’ “Treaties True and False: The Error of Philinus of Agrigentum” (1985) in *The Classical Quarterly*, pp. 92-109.

both by the Romans and the Latins acting out its terms and conditions, but also by the pillar which (literally) stands as proof of its real existence in the world.

That Polybius does not even entertain the possibility that such a *tabula* might have been destroyed attests to the inviolability of *tabulae* in the ancient world. Cicero for example expresses outrage at detecting “fresh wounds” and marks of erasure on some wax *tabulae* detailing the financial transactions of a company owned by Carpinatius⁷⁹ (2 *Verr.* 2.187), and although some of his indignation is surely rhetorical, much of it does stem from the blatant falsification of legal documents. Several Greek treaties explicitly forbid the destruction of or harm against their physical records. The last clause of one of the earliest known Greek treaties dating to the sixth century BC threatens a sacred penalty (ἐπιῴποι) against anyone, “whether clansman or official or community,” who injures its inscription (τὰ γράφεα) (*SVA* 2.110.7-11; *ML* 17.7-10; see Bolmarcich 2007: 479). As well, a passage from Plutarch’s *Life of Pericles* suggests the existence of “a certain law” (νόμον τινά) in Athens that forbade the taking down of tablets on which decrees were inscribed (30.1; Bolmarcich 2007: 479-80). This would help explain how Pausanias, travelling to Olympia over 500 years after the treaty between the Athenians, Argives, Mantineans and Eleans was supposed to have ended, was able to record the terms of the treaty from the still standing Elean copy (5.12.8) (Bolmarcich 2007: 477-78). It also explains how he was able to make note of the bronze stela commemorating the terms of the Thirty Years’ Peace between the Lacedaemonians and the Athenians (5.23.4), which Thucydides claims was broken even before the Archidamian War (Thuc. 1.53, 1.68-71, 1.87) (*ibid.*). The Greeks clearly did not make a habit of destroying or removing the stelae of violated or obsolete treaties even when such stelae testified to their own city-

⁷⁹ Carpinatius was a money-lender from Sicily who helped fund Verres and then tried to obscure the records documenting this (Gurd 2010: 96-99).

state's faithlessness and shame, and they seem to have shared this reluctance to deface these legal monuments with the Romans.⁸⁰

Both the *foedera naturae* and Roman treaties, then, are fundamentally rooted in the physical world. Neither can truly be said to exist unless physically manifested somehow in the world. The *foedera naturae* coexist with created kinds in the world as essential properties informing matter and providing a framework within which things can come to be, grow, flourish and decay. Roman *foedera* existed abstractly as states of affairs or events defining the relationship between different groupings of people, but they also existed as physical monuments testifying to a moment of power in time where promises were bound. Neither Roman *foedera* nor the *foedera naturae* truly exist or exert force in the world unless in conjunction with matter for, Lucretius writes, only body and void truly exist (1.445-48); “For whatsoever things have a name, either you will find to be properties of these two or you will see them to be accidents of the same” (*nam quaecumque cluent, aut his coniuncta duabus / rebus ea invenies aut horum eventa videbis*, 1.449-50). The *foedera naturae* encompass the essential properties of created kinds, “that which without destructive dissolution can never be separated and disjoined” (1.451-52, quoted above p. 63), whereas Roman *foedera* are mere “accidents of body, and of the place in which the things are severally done” (*sed magis ut merito possis eventa vocare / corporis atque loci, res in quo quaeque gerantur*, 1.481-82). Both kinds of *foedera* depend on matter for their existence but, in the case of the *foedera naturae*, this dependence goes both ways. Roman *foedera* on the other hand, based on trivial human concerns and misdirected priorities, are fleeting and inconsequential.

⁸⁰ Some exceptions do exist. Demosthenes exhorts the Megalopolitans to destroy the stelae recording the terms of their treaty with Thebes (16.27), but this demand was most likely made for rhetorical effect. For stelae that were emended or destroyed, see Bolmarcich 2007, pp. 480-84.

III. Dual Roles in Destruction/Creation

Birth and Death in Nature

Birth and death are two sides of the same coin in the Epicurean universe, and nature is both creator and destroyer.⁸¹ *Natura* is the “maker of all things” (*rerum natura creatrix*, 1.629, 2.1117, 5.1362) who “creates” (*creet*, 1.56), “produces” (*procreat*, 2.880), and “brings forth” (*profudit*, 5.225), but she also “dissolves” (*resolvat*, 1.57) and “destroys” (*dissolvat*, 6.598). This can be understood in two ways. In the first place, nature destroys at the same moment it creates, because the birth of one thing requires “the death of that which it was before” (*continuo hoc mors est illius quod fuit ante*, 1.671, 793; 2.754; 3.520).⁸² Things change *from* one thing *into* something new, as when rocks are ground into sand over the years, or seeds grow into plants. This is the first axiom of Epicureanism: *nullam rem e nilo gigni*, nothing can arise from nothing (1.150). Everything that exists either always existed or was created from already existing things, and nothing ever completely perishes, instead breaking up into its constituent parts (1.215-64; 2.1002-1012). In the materialist Epicurean universe, the laws of physics reign supreme and equilibrium of motion and material must be maintained. Fire needs fuel to continue to burn, animals need food to continue to grow, and all atomic *concilia* require a constant influx of atoms to replace what streams or breaks away (2.879-82). “For whatever increases and nourishes other things from itself must be diminished, and remade when it receives things back” (*nam quodcumque alias ex se res auget alitque, / deminui debet, recreari, cum recipit res*, 5.322-23). All created things have a limit to life which cannot be overturned (e.g., 1.551-64, 584-85; 5.654), but the *primordia* are eternal because of their “solid singleness” (*solida simplicitate*) (1.483-550). “Therefore no visible object utterly passes away, since nature makes up again one thing from another,

⁸¹ Fowler identifies seven roles belonging to nature, each fulfilling a traditional function of the gods: (1) *creatix*, (2) provider, (3) permitter/forbidder, (4) demander, (5) forcer, (6) governor, and (7) destroyer (2002: 242-43).

⁸² See also 2.1019-22: *iam materiai / concursus motus ordo positura figurae / cum permutantur, mutari res quoque debent* (“when the combinations of matter, when its motions, order, position, shapes are changed, the thing also must be changed”).

and does not permit anything to be born unless aided by another's death" (*haud igitur penitus pereunt quaecumque videntur, / quando alid ex alio reficit natura, nec ullam / rem gigni patitur nisi morte adiuta aliena*, 1.262-64).

In this case, the destruction of one thing is the creation of another, but this can also be thought of as part of the more gradual process of birth, growth, decay, and death. In his proem to Book One Lucretius promises to disclose "the first-beginnings of things, from which nature makes all things and increases and nourishes them, and into which the same nature again reduces them when dissolved" (*et rerum primordia pandam, / unde omnis natura creet res auctet alatque / quove eadem rursum natura perempta resolvat*, 1.55-57). Death is imbedded into the lives of all created things from the moment of creation and is a necessary condition of being alive or existing (cf. *SV* 30: "the draught swallowed by all of us at birth is a draught of death"). Everything that is born will die, but the underlying material – the atoms – will persist eternally, and will provide the material for future creations. "For," Lucretius writes, "the old order always passes, thrust out by the new, and one thing has to be made afresh from others" (*cedit enim rerum novitate extrusa vetustas / semper, et ex aliis aliud reparare necessest*, 3.964-65). A particularly striking image occurs at 2.576-80:

With the funeral dirge is mingled the wail that children raise when they first see the borders of light; and no night ever followed day, or dawn followed night, that has not heard mingled with their sickly wailings the lamentations that attend upon death and the black funeral.

*miscetur funere vagor
quem pueri tollunt visentes luminis oras;
nec nox ulla diem neque noctem aurora secutast
quae non audierit mixtos vagitibus aegris
ploratus mortis comites et funeris atri.* 580

These lines remind the reader that the cycle of birth and death is an ongoing and inevitable process of nature that affects all created things and recurs constantly throughout the universe. When one thing dies, another is born, and equilibrium is maintained. At the same time, death is superimposed over life. Living is dying viewed from another perspective and every second we grow, we grow closer to death. "All things gradually decay, and go to the reef of destruction, outworn by the ancient lapse of

years” (*omnia paulatim tabescere et ire / ad scopulum, spatio aetatis defessa vetusto*, 2.1173-74).

War and Peace

The atomic harmony that eventually disintegrates upon the death of the *concilium* is under siege from external forces and internal weaknesses from the moment of its inception. The frequent depictions in *DRN* of the atoms warring with one another and engaging in political intrigue emphasize the chaotic nature of the universe. Atoms, “driven by incessant and varied motions” (*adsiduo varioque exercita motu*, 2.97), strike one another and sometimes combine, then turn and attack (*laccessunt*) other *concilia* (2.134-37). In Lucretius’ famous description of dust motes dancing in sunlight the particles mimic human behaviour, “as it were in everlasting conflict struggling, fighting, battling in troops without any pause, driven about with frequent meetings and partings” (*et velut aeterno certamine proelia pugnas / edere turmatim certantia nec dare pausam, / conciliis et discidiis exercita crebris*, 2.118-20). This “war of first-beginnings waged from infinity” (*sic aequo geritur certamine principiorum / ex infinito contractum tempore bellum*) lacks a clear winner or loser, but “is carried on with doubtful issue: now here, now there the vital elements gain the mastery (*superant*), and in like manner are mastered (*superantur*)” (2.573-76). This turbulent motion is necessary for creation, however, and nothing can exist without it. Atoms colliding with one another “harmonize their motions” (*consociare motus*, 2.111) or “meet and combine” (*congressa coibunt*, 2.549), creating objects in the world. Effluences streaming from these atomic aggregates strike (*feriant*, *laccessunt*) our eyes or ears or noses and in doing so cause perception (4.217-18). External atoms battering a united whole will sometimes “subdue with fatal blows” (*plagis infesta domare*, 2.1143) and destroy it, or they might add to the compound and so help conserve it from the onslaught of inimical blows (1.1042-45). Thus, although atoms are constantly battering one another they exist in harmony as well, and enough instances of peace exist to create an infinite number of worlds. The incessant

motion of atoms, however, means that internal tension and conflict afflict even the most harmonious *concilia* in a kind of atomic civil war.

Atomic Versus Human Violence

It is important that although Lucretius describes atomic motion in terms of human political behaviour, there is a key difference between the two. Atoms neither think nor will, they simply exist. They are mindless, purposeless particles randomly and ceaselessly moving through the universe, and their trajectories are determined by tiny, spontaneous swerves or accidental collisions with other haphazardly moving atoms. Their behaviour is thus empty of ethical value or judgement, and in this they differ from humans very much indeed. Atomic war is “destructive” in that it causes the dissolution of atomic *concilia*, but the blows (*plagae, ictus*) themselves are not destructive because atoms are invincible (*invicta*, 1.952) (Anderson 1960: 12). In fact, as we have already observed, atomic warfare is *creative* because it brings wandering atoms together into harmonious motions. Even when it does result in the dissolution of compounds this simply frees up material for future combinations.

When we examine human warfare on the other hand, we see greed and spite as the main motivating factors, with people engaging in violence for the sake of violence and causing mass suffering and destruction. After recounting in graphic detail the bloody stampedes that occurred after animals trained for war went berserk mid-battle, for example, Lucretius offers a bland justification for the attempt (5.1347-49):

But they did this not so much with a hope to conquer, as wishing to give their enemies cause to mourn, and to perish themselves, when they mistrusted their numbers and were without arms.

*sed facere id non tam vincendi spe voluerunt,
quam dare quod gement hostes, ipsique perire,
qui numero diffidebant armisque vacabant.*

In other words, men were driven to force wild beasts into human battles by a desire to wreak as much havoc and damage as possible. Lucretius’ sketch of human fickleness at 5.1412-33 expresses a similarly negative opinion of humanity. He is making the point

that humans derive pleasure from their possessions only until something new and superior is discovered (5.1414-15). Thus the garment of pelt is now scorned, whereas when it first appeared, Lucretius imagines, it excited such envy that whoever first wore it was killed (*letum insidiis obiret*), “and even then that it was torn to pieces amongst them with much bloodshed and was lost and could not be turned to use” (*et tamen inter eos distractam sanguine multo / disperiisse neque in fructum convertere quisse*, 5.1421-22). Human greed was such that men destroyed the very thing they coveted in the struggle for possession. One cannot help but feel that Lucretius is making a very strong statement of warning here to his audience.

The disparity between human and atomic behaviour is emphasized when we compare Lucretius’ account of martial technological advancements (5.1289-96) to 2.573-76, above. The later passage repeats the imagery of atomic motion in Book Two but subverts the balanced cycle of creation and destruction it describes. He relates how bronze was once used to conquer and steal land and cattle until those wielding iron came and conquered in turn. Once the use of iron became widespread, however, “the struggles of war now become doubtful were made equal” (*exaequataque sunt creperi certamina belli*, 5.1296). Unlike the atoms, whose creative powers are affirmed even as the permanence of atomic compounds is denied (“nor further can motions that generate and give increase to things for ever preserve them when made”, *nec porro rerum genitales auctificique / motus perpetuo possunt servare creata*, 2.571-72), humans are capable only of destruction. They lack any true generative power, instead “creating” war and “sowing devastating wounds” (*belli / miscebant fluctus et vulnera vasta serebant*, 5.1289-90). Even their productive behaviour (i.e., farming) is described in terms of violence and assault, as “with iron they began to break the soil of the earth” (*ferro coepere solum proscindere terrae*, 5.1295). Bailey takes *proscindere* as “to plough” (1963: 1526), but we can read it in its more figurative meaning as “to revile” as well. Once again, humans

are set in opposition against *natura*. At the same time, however, humans are a part of nature, comprised of atoms and void no less than wild beasts or forests or fields.

Thematic Balance in *DRN*

The Epicurean cosmic cycle requires both conflict and cooperation, and this duality is one of the key motifs in *DRN*. Each book begins with images of peace, light, tranquility, and pleasure, and ends with images of death, decay and destruction (Gale 2000b: 20-21). Book One opens with an invocation to Venus in her creative aspect (1.1-49) and ends with an image of the destruction of the world (1.1083-1117). In the proem to Book Two Lucretius extols the serenity and pleasure experienced by the philosopher as he contemplates the world, secure in his lofty citadel of knowledge (2.1-19). This book then ends with the image of the ancient ploughman struggling to eke out a meager living from a worn out and exhausted earth, bitterly comparing his lot in life with that of his ancestors, not comprehending that “all things gradually decay, and go to the reef of destruction, outworn by the ancient lapse of years” (2.1173-74, quoted above) (2.1164-74). Book Three follows with a praise to Epicurus, “glory of the Grecian race,” who won for his followers “a sort of divine delight...because nature thus by your power has been so manifestly laid open and uncovered in every part” (*quaedam divina voluptas / ...quod sic natura tua vi / tam manifesta patens ex omni parte resecta est*, 3.28-30) (3.1-30). Book Three then closes with an image of everlasting death which comes for all things (3.1076-94), which leads into an assertion of Lucretius’ poetic talent and its importance to his philosophical project (4.6-7: “to set free the mind from the close knots of superstition”) in Book Four (4.1-25). This image of everlasting fame is tempered at the end of Book Four with the image of water wearing away stone (4.1286-87).

Book Five opens with the divine discoveries of Epicurus and his superiority to the gods and heroes of myth (5.1-54) but the closing image of the book, which ends with a

summary of mankind's technological and artistic achievements (5.1440-1457), is a possible exception to this pattern of starting the book with images of life and growth and ending with decay (e.g., Farrell 1991: 200). Read in the light of Lucretius' lamentation of mankind's ignorance of the limits of possession and pleasure just prior (5.1430-33), however, it is possible to detect a hint of sarcasm behind this catalogue of accomplishments. Compared to the prize Epicurus won for humankind, "all life's prizes, its luxuries also from first to last" (*praemia, delicias quoque vitae funditus omnis*, 5.1450), seem more like the empty cares (*curis inanibus*) that consume the lives of ignorant men (5.1430-33) than "the highest pinnacle of the arts" (*artibus ad summum donec venere cacumen*, 5.1457). At the same time, these words recall the "pinnacle of growth" (*alescendi summum cacumen*) all things reach before melting into decay (2.1129-32; cf. Clay 1983: 258-59). Book Six continues the theme of Athens as the highest civilization, the birthplace of law and Epicurus (6.1-42), but this great city is brought low at the close of the book by the Plague of Athens (6.1090-1286), and the graphic images of sickness, death, and the collapse of society give *DRN* a disturbing and abrupt finish.⁸³

The proem to Book One, on the other hand, sets the tone of the work as a whole with the image of "nurturing Venus" who inspires all creatures to reproduce and who alone governs the nature of things (*rerum naturam sola gubernas*, 1.21) twining her body around destructive Mars, "bending around him from above" (*circumfusa super*) while he reclines with his head in her lap (1.38-39). Mention of Venus and Mars also recalls the Empedoclean motivating principles of Love and Strife, which variously bring things together or separate them into their constitutive elements; according to Empedocles, the universe alternates between periods of increasing Love and increasing Strife and this is an eternal continuous cycle.⁸⁴ This same equilibrium between opposing powers is later

⁸³ I discuss the Plague of Athens at length in Ch. 3, below.

⁸⁴ For an in-depth review and analysis of Empedoclean influences in Lucretius, see Garani (2007).

depicted as an eternal war waged by atoms which are equally matched (*aequo certamine*) (2.569-74); fittingly, either representation is equally appropriate (Gale 2001b: 37).

Understanding that destruction and creation simultaneously depend on one another and are often just different perspectives of the same process is crucial for achieving *ataraxia*, and it is perhaps partially to emphasize this point that Lucretius chooses to use *foedus*. Roman *foedera* acted as peace treaties that signalled the end of warfare and destruction, but they could also induce wars through an obligation of martial alliance or if violated. Lucretius' *foedera naturae* similarly impose order over the chaotic motion of the *primordia* as they attach onto one another and form *concilia*. Atoms war with one another until the bodies "form a small combination" (*inde ea quae parvo sunt corpora conciliatu*, 2.134) which then attacks other compounds, until "by successive degrees" (*proporro paulo*) an atomic aggregate large enough for humans to observe comes into being (2.133-41). Things come to be *per foedera naturae* and continue to exist *per foedera naturae* but, as soon as the atoms stop acting together as a cohesive unit and the *concilium* begins to disintegrate, the *foedus naturae* binding them breaks apart and releases them back to their solitary wandering. This can happen when external hostile objects force the atoms apart to such a degree that the whole is unable to recover (2.1140-43), or from some inner turmoil or decay. The result is the same whatever the cause: atomic clashings and warfare replace harmonious movements and "the everlasting conflict" continues until a new peace is struck.

The *Fetiales*

Like Lucretius, the Romans recognized the fragile balance that lay between war and peace, and they indicated their acknowledgment of this fact by assigning a single priesthood the responsibilities of both. Roman *foedera* were thus formally established by the college of *fetiales* or fetial priests, the same organization that was responsible for ceremonially declaring war (*Leg.* 2.21; Varro *De Ling. Lat.* 5.86; Dion. Hal. 2.72). Cicero describes their duties as follows: "The fetial priests shall be judges and

messengers for treaties, peace and war, truces and embassies; they shall make the decisions in regard to war” (*Leg. 2.21: foederum pacis belli indotiarum oratorum fetiales iudices nontii sunt; bella disceptanto*). Varro, repeating this sentiment, explains that they are called *fetiales*:

because they were in charge of the state’s word of honour in matters between peoples; for by them it was brought about that a war that was declared should be a just war, and by them the war was stopped, that by a *foedus* the *fides* of the peace might be established. (*De Ling. Lat.* 5.86)⁸⁵

quod fidei publicae inter populos praeerant: nam per hos fiebat ut iustum conciperetur bellum, et inde desitum ut f<o>edere fides pacis constitueretur).

Like the striking of a *foedus*, a formal declaration of war required that certain procedures were followed and special artifacts were employed. Livy 1.32 describes the ritual of *rerum repetitio*, the ritual used to declare war.⁸⁶ First, he writes, a fetial priest (the *pater patratus*) acting as an envoy was sent to the edges of the territory of the people against whom redress was sought. Standing at the boundary, the envoy would loudly summon Jupiter and the people to hear his demands, which were then recited. The envoy would then repeat these demands as he stepped over the border, again to the first man he met, again upon entering the city gates, and for a final time having arrived in the marketplace. If after thirty-three days the demands had still not been met, he returned to Rome to consult the Senate, which then voted for war. The fetial priest then carried a wooden spear back to the border, announced his formal declaration of war before “not less than three grown men,” and hurled his spear into their territory. The ritual requirements of the *rerum repetitio* demonstrate that the striking of war, no less than the striking of a peace treaty, was an event very much situated in time and space.

⁸⁵ All translations of Varro’s *De Lingua Latina* unless otherwise specified come from Roland Kent (1938), Loeb edition.

⁸⁶ Livy here credits Ancus Marcius with introducing this ritual to the Romans (1.31), despite previously linking it to the earlier king, Tullus Hostilius (1.24). Cicero concurs with this latter attribution to Tullus (*Rep.* 2.31), whereas both Dionysius of Halicarnassus (2.72) and Plutarch (*Numa* 12, *Cam.* 18) identify Numa Pompilius as the founder of the *fetiales*. For a more detailed discussion of the origins of the fetial priesthood, particularly in Livy, see Robert Penella (1987), “War, Peace, and the *ius fetiale* in Livy 1” in *Classical Philology*, pp. 233-237.

Both territorial and temporal boundaries played an important role in the ritual; a fifth-century AD commentator of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Servius Auctus, explains how in the time of Pyrrhus the Romans, wishing to declare war overseas, captured one of the enemy soldiers and forced him to buy a spot in the Circus Flaminius, "so that they could declare war legitimately, as though in a place belonging to the enemy" (note on 'Principium pugnae' at 9.52; cf. Wiedemann 1986: 480). Again as with the fetial rite, the *rerum repetitio* places great emphasis on the importance of witnesses to word and deed. A declaration of war, like a declaration of peace, is a public promise whose performative function is to record, create or make real that declaration and, the more people who hear or see the performative act, the more "real" it is. In contrast the *foedera naturae* have already been inscribed onto the universe by nature and exist whether humans are aware of them or not. The power in Lucretius' naming them and his description of atomic motion is more a kind of guiding power over our lives, with psychological efficacy.

Lucretius actually alludes to the ritual of *rerum repetitio* while arguing for the infinity of the universe (1.968-84). He invites his reader to stand at "the very extremest edge and cast a flying lance" (*siquis procurrat ad oras / ultimus extremas iaciatque volatile telum*, 1.969-70), just as the fetial priest would in the *rerum repetitio*. The lance either keeps going, in which case the universe extends into the space beyond, or it hits something, in which case there is an even farther point from which the experiment can be repeated *ad infinitum* (1.971-83). The image of a spear falling endlessly through space helps illustrate the boundlessness of space but there is also a slightly combative tone. Lucretius models his argument after the *rerum repetitio* as a symbolic declaration of Epicurus' victory over *religio*. In his proem to Book One Lucretius praises Epicurus for being the first to stand up against superstition and free mankind from the shackles of ignorance and fear. According to Lucretius, Epicurus "marched far beyond the flaming walls of the world, as he traversed the immeasurable universe in thought and imagination; whence victorious he returns..." (*et extra / processit longe flammantia moenia mundi /*

atque omne immensum peragravit mente animoque, / unde refert nobis victor, 1.72-75).

The entire universe thus becomes his and his followers' domain, and nothing exists which does not belong to nature. No place in the world is hostile territory for the Epicurean, because reason and nature together combine to expel fear and uncertainty. Lucretius' Epicurean reality is shown as superior to Roman society, which only strives to become what the Epicurean universe is, namely, an empire "without end or limit" (*non habet extremum, caret ergo fine modoque, 1.964; cf. Virgil Aen. 1.278-79: his ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono; imperium sine fine dedi*). As Shearin writes, "just as we have seen that the *fetiales* were the "heralds of the Roman people" (*nuntii populi Romani*), through whom war was created and peace made, so Lucretius is the crier through whom the *natura rerum*, specifically the atoms, are made to be at peace or at war" (2007: 100). Both human and atomic warfare and peace are arbitrary and temporary, but human conflicts, being accidents of time and space, are less real or important than the coming together or breaking apart of the atoms which provide a canvas for these fleeting events. Furthermore, where the function of Roman *fetiales* was to wage righteous or just wars (Dion. Hal. 2.724-9) and to confer religious value to political decisions and place the gods firmly on Rome's side, for the Epicureans, the wars waged in nature lack moral valuation. All conflict and harmony in nature is necessary and natural; the only moral war is that with *religio* and *superstitio*.

Lucretius' Anthropology

The natural oscillation between conflict and cooperation and the role of *foedera* in achieving equilibrium and peace is a prominent theme in Book Five of *DRN*, where Lucretius relates the history of mankind starting from the earliest, pre-social humans. Many scholars have commented on the "atomization of humans" in *DRN* (e.g., Cabisius 1984; Schiesaro 2007; Gladhill 2008; Shearin 2007), referring to Lucretius' tendency to describe human social behaviour in terms of atomic motion. Pre-social man especially resembles the solitary atoms aimlessly wandering through the void, acting without

thought or planning and simply reacting to his environment (5.925-1010). Both the *primordia* and the first humans are resistant to external forces because of the solidity of their bodies (1.485-86; 5.927-30).⁸⁷ Primitive man “could not look to the common good, they did not know how to govern their intercourse by custom and law” (*nec commune bonum poterant spectare, neque ullis / moribus inter se scibant nec legibus uti*, 5.958-59), instead living *sponte sua sibi*, “by his own will, for himself” (5.961; cf. 2.1059). The only contact pre-social man has with other humans is sexual and, as with the atoms, mutual attraction or the joining (*iungebat*) of *corpora* is indicated by the verb *concilio*, ‘to unite’ or ‘to bring together’ (5.962-63; cf. 2.551: *conciliandi*; cf. Shearin 2007: 81-84). Order gradually emerges from the transitory and chaotic existence of pre-social man as small familial units are formed and band together with one another through a mutual desire to “do no hurt and suffer no violence” (*nec laedere nec violari*, 5.1020), and Lucretius calls these initial pacts of non-aggression and community *foedera* (5.1025).⁸⁸

These primitive societies eventually became cities and kingdoms ruled by leaders who rewarded talent and ability, but with the invention of money came the end of the meritocracy and the beginning of a futile striving for excess: “all in vain, since in the struggle to climb to the summit of honour, they made their path full of danger” (*nequiquam, quoniam ad summum succedere honorem / certantes iter infestum fecere viai*, 5.1123-24). Human civilization degenerates into chaos, kings are slain, the

⁸⁷ 1.485-86: “But those which are the first-beginnings of things no power can quench: they conquer after all by their solid body” (*sed quae sunt rerum primordia, nulla potest vis / stinguere; nam solido vincunt ea corpore demum*).

5.925-30: “And the race of men at that time was much hardier (*multo durius*)...built up within with bones larger and more solid (*maioribus et solidis magis ossibus intus*), fitted with strong sinews throughout the flesh, not such as easily to be mastered (*nec facile caperetur*) by heat or cold or strange food or any ailment of their body.”

The solidness of atoms ensures their immortality, as only things with parts can be broken up (i.e. are mortal). Solidity is for Lucretius the defining characteristic of the *primordia*, which “are mighty by their solid singleness” (*solida pollentia simplicitate*, 1.574), “perfectly solid” (*solidissima*, 1.951, etc.), and “perfectly hard in their solid weight” (*durissima quae sint / ponderibus solidis*, 2.87-88).

⁸⁸ For further discussion of the significance of this denotation, see Ch. 3 below.

traditional trappings of power are trampled into the ground, and “things came to the uttermost dregs of confusion, when each man for himself sought dominion and exaltation” (*res itaque ad summam faecem turbasque redibat, / imperium sibi cum ac summatum quisque petebat*, 5.1141-42) (5.1136-42). Before mankind is completely destroyed, however, law and statutes (*iuraque legibus*) are created by emerging magistrates and communally assented to to bring order out of chaos (5.1143-1160). Once again “the bonds of the common peace” (*communia foedera pacis*, 5.1155) rescue human civilization from a state of anarchy and confusion, and this pattern continues on throughout the rest of Lucretius’ anthropology.

The Role of *Foedera*

Viewed from Lucretius’ perspective of human history and civilization, the centrality of *foedera* to humans and objects in the world is clear. *Foedera* first bring primitive humans together into a cooperative alliance, and *communia foedera pacis* inspire the “statutes and strict rules of law” (*leges artaque iura*, 5.1147) that finally impose some measure of peace and moderation onto the anarchic environment of 5.1136-50, which is characterized by excessive desires (e.g., for power, wealth and revenge). In each case the *foedera* are preceded by a condition of weakness and motivated by an eagerness shared by all parties involved to come to a mutual agreement with explicitly stated terms, in order to secure the most stable and universally beneficial conditions for living possible. Thus, the bodies of the first social humans have become soft (*mollescere*) and so are less able to endure cold (*frigus non ita iam possent ferre*) than their forebears, while their spirits are “broken” (*fregere*) by the “coaxings” (*blanditiis*) of their children (5.1014-18) and their “eagerness (*aventes*) to do no hurt and suffer no violence” is shared by their neighbours (5.1019-20). Later, with human society disintegrating into “the uttermost dregs of confusion” (5.1141, quoted above), humans “utterly weary (*pertaesum*) of living in violence” (5.1150; cf. 5.1145: “tired [*defessum*] of living in violence”) and “fainting (*languebat*) from its

feuds” (5.1146), were “readier of their own will (*quo magis ipsum / sponte sua*) to submit to statutes and strict rules of law” (5.1146-47).

The emergence of *foedera* between humans also consistently follows a state characterized by the absence of limits. Primitive humans existed independently of one another, concerned only with their own survival and desires and ignorant of any moral or social codes to lay out the limits of acceptable behaviour (5.958-61). “Whatever prize fortune gave to each, that he carried off” (*quod cuique obtulerat praedae fortuna, ferebat*, 5.960), whether it was a willing or unwilling woman (5.962-65) or a poisonous berry (5.1009-1010). As society progressed men began lusting after power and wealth, hoping for security; however, ignorance of the truth that “man’s greatest riches is to live on a little with contented mind; for a little is never lacking” (*divitiae grandes homini sunt vivere parce / aequo animo; neque enim est umquam penuria parvi*, 5.1118-19; cf. *KD* 15; *Ep. Men.* 130; *SV* 25), results in fruitless striving. And, Lucretius writes, “this folly does not succeed at the present, and will not succeed in the future, any more than it has succeeded in the past” (*nec magis id nunc est neque erit mox quam fuit ante*, 5.1135). Ignorance of natural limits leaves superstitious people vulnerable to religion and dogma (5.1161-1240) and causes others to consume their days in empty cares (5.1431-33: *ergo hominum genus incassum frustra laborat...*), so discovering and accepting these limits is crucial for freeing oneself from fear and anxiety and achieving *ataraxia*.

I have already discussed the importance of studying and accepting the *foedera naturae* for Epicurean happiness. In Lucretius’ Anthropology, we see the importance of *foedera* in human relationships as well. Like the *foedera naturae* and atomic *concilia*, human *foedera* bring about a state of harmony and cooperation out of chaos, and they help maintain stability within communities of people in the world. After his description of the earliest human covenants Lucretius quite strongly insists that the survival of the human race is contingent on the majority of people abiding by the terms of a *foedus*: “else

the race of mankind would have been even then wholly destroyed (*omne peremptum*), nor would birth and begetting have been able to prolong their posterity to the present day (*nec potuisset adhuc perducere saecula propago*)” (5.1025-27).⁸⁹ As human technology progresses and civilizations come up with better and more efficient ways to injure or kill one another, the institution of the *foedus* must also evolve. Thus, what began as a joining of friendship amongst neighbours (*amicitiem coeperunt iungere*, 5.1019) became the foundation for the creation of laws (*iura*) and magistrates (*magistratum*) and statutes (*legibus*) (5.1143-44). As humans began shaping bronze into weapons (5.1281-96) and experimenting with bringing savage animals into battle (5.1297-1349) and venturing out onto the ocean to reach foreign lands (5.1440-42), these in turn evolved into formal alliances (*pacto foedere*) with *auxilia ac socios* (5.1443).⁹⁰ Lucretius’ description of the development of human civilization shows that this concomitant evolution and progression of waging war and striking peace is an inexorable process of nature. Every created thing will reach a pinnacle of growth (*alescendi summum tetigere cacumen*, 2.1130), after which “by minute degrees age breaks the strength and mature vigor, and melts into decay” (*inde minutatim vires et robor adultum / frangit et in partem peiorem liquitur aetas*, 2.1131-32). Although we cannot escape this fact of reality, we can adjust our attitudes towards it.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the more overt characteristics Lucretius’ *foedera naturae* share with the more conventionally understood *foedera* of Roman culture and society. The close comparison of these two classes of *foedera* reveal more similarities

⁸⁹ Compare Cicero’s discussion regarding the importance of cooperation between men: “And, without the association (*coetu*) of men, cities could not have been built or peopled. In consequence of city life, laws and customs were established, and then came the equitable distribution of private rights and a definite social system...with the result that life was better supplied with all it requires, and by giving and receiving, by mutual exchange of commodities and conveniences, we succeeded in meeting all our wants” (*Off.* 2.15)

⁹⁰ For a thorough discussion on the distinct categories of Roman allies, see Louise Matthaei’s “On the Classification of Roman Allies” (1907: 182-204).

between the two conceptualizations than was initially apparent, and provide some motivation for Lucretius' use of *foedus* over the more philosophically conventional *lex*. Lucretius exploits many of those aspects of Roman *foedera* which coincide with his *foedera naturae*, namely the emphasis of *foedera* on limits and boundaries, the intrinsic physicality of *foedera* in time and space, and the inherent dichotomy of *foedus* as both a creative and destructive force. These pre-existing features of Roman *foedera* enhance Lucretius' Epicurean variation and facilitate the reader's comprehension of how the poet-philosopher conceives of his *foedera naturae*. At the same time, however, the Roman *foedera* upon which Lucretius (loosely) bases his *foedera naturae* are exposed as inferior and flawed when the two are compared; the *foedera naturae* really and necessarily are what Roman *foedera* only pretend to be. Furthermore, by providing a new version of human *foedera* in his Anthropology in Book Five, Lucretius rejects traditional *foedera* and, by proxy, the aspects of Roman culture upon which they rest. His *foedera naturae* as well as his revised human *foedera* thus pass a moral judgement on Roman values and culture while providing a true explanation of reality and an alternative model of behaviour. I delve more deeply into Lucretius' critique of Roman culture and society in the third and final chapter of this thesis, which approaches *foedera* in *DRN* from a more etymological perspective.

Chapter 3

In the last chapter, I explained how Lucretius exploits aspects of Roman *foedera* which coincide with his *foedera naturae*, namely the emphasis of *foedera* on limits and boundaries, the intrinsic physicality of *foedera* in time and space, and the inherent dichotomy of *foedus* as both a creative and destructive force. These pre-existing features of Roman *foedera* enable Lucretius' audience to grasp key characteristics of his *foedera naturae* with minimal explanation, while providing insight into how the poet-philosopher conceives of his *foedera naturae*. At the same time, however, he is offering a social critique of Roman culture and ideology, one which takes the typical Roman understanding of *foedera* and other cultural institutions and redefines or corrects them to fit with an Epicurean understanding of the world. As will be shown, Lucretius' exploitation of the etymological connection between the noun *foedus* ('treaty', 'covenant') and the adjective *foedus*, 'foul', to highlight the corrupting influence of religion and superstition is a prime example of this subversive use of the socio-political vocabulary of the time, while his recasting of epic conventions and his presentation of his *DRN* as a truer, more worthy epic than the confused fabrications of his predecessors provides a further example of his programme of correction.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first part deals with Lucretius' critique of Roman society and ideology and begins with Lucretius' treatment of *DRN* as the ultimate epic, dealing with what is truly real and worthy of commemoration. I will argue that Lucretius' goal is to destroy the flawed foundations of Roman culture and society by revealing them to be empty and false representations of the real world, which are then replaced by true Epicurean principles. He achieves this by reforming the language on which Roman culture is based. Instead of simply offering a new and alternative way of looking at the world, then, he destroys his Roman audience's faith in their perception of reality to prove that Epicureanism provides the *only* true representation of reality. I then closely examine Lucretius' manipulation of the

etymological associations of *foedus* (n.) and *foedus* (adj.) to draw attention to the detrimental effects and falseness of *religio* and *superstitio*. Finally, I discuss Lucretius' treatment of an alternate etymology of *foedus*, one which concentrates on the *fides* of the fetal rite rather than its *foeditas*.

The second part of this chapter focuses on the inherent foulness of nature which must be acknowledged and accepted before Epicurean *ataraxia* can be achieved. The *foeditas* etymologically implicit within the concept of *foedus* is as central to Epicurean world-processes as the *foedera naturae* themselves are and, although we cannot change this fact of nature, we can adjust our attitudes towards it in positive and meaningful ways. The plague of Athens in Book Six has often been seen as a challenge to Epicureanism, and this chapter will examine this statement closely in light of the discussion on the *foeditas* of nature.

Part I: *DRN* as Social Critique

***DRN* as Epic**

Before going into Lucretius' exploitation of the etymology of *foedus*, it will be helpful to examine his appropriation of the epic genre as part of his social critique against traditional Greek and Roman practices and values. His strategy of embracing certain core aspects of the epic genre while exposing other traditional key characteristics as failed attempts to discover and explain the true nature of things – and then providing the real account (*vera ratio*) by showing where his predecessors erred – parallels his more subtle manipulation of the etymological nuances of his *foedera naturae*. Lucretius' adoption of and divergence from the epic genre and the political rhetoric of his time directly challenges the Roman values traditionally praised and encouraged by these modes by exposing their illusory nature. By mentioning both Homer (1.124, 3.1037) and Ennius (1.117, 121) by name, Lucretius deliberately classifies his *DRN* as belonging to the epic

rather than (or as well as) the didactic genre of poetry (Gale 1994: 107).⁹¹ It is significant that he does not refer to the difficulties of his poetic composition (1.136-145) until after he has aligned himself with the preeminent bards of epic (Murley 1947: 340). His poem, however, is a truer epic, because it discusses the only thing that matters, namely, the true nature of things.

Lucretius and His Poetic Predecessors

Heroic deeds and legendary wars are mere accidents of matter and void (1.455ff.) and as such are less worthy subjects for high poetry than the Epicurean cosmos. Lucretius is superior to his poetic predecessors not only because his subject-matter is more real and more important than theirs, but also because their epics have actually harmed the populace by disseminating false stories about the gods and glorifying fruitless and harmful actions. This is especially true of Ennius, whose poetry incorporated Roman nationalist and political concerns far more than Homer's more heroic or martial epics, and began a Roman tradition of epic writing that focused predominantly on empire. His *Annales* covers Roman history from the fall of Troy all the way to the censorship of Cato the Elder in 184 BC, for example, while Virgil's *Aeneid* focuses on the Trojans' arrival in Italy and their victory over the Latins. The purpose of both is to glorify the Roman Empire and its values, and to establish its imperium as legitimately rooted in myth and

⁹¹ The epic genre contains a diverse set of sub-genres whose generic boundaries often overlap with one another. Ancient and modern scholars frequently argue over what exactly constitutes "epic" poetry and categories such as bucolic, didactic, heroic and historical are variously accepted or rejected as belonging to the epic genre. For an analysis of *DRN* as both a didactic and epic poem, see Monica Gale's *Lucretius and the Didactic Epic* (2001b), in which she focuses primarily on the didactic function of Lucretius' use of epic conventions. A discussion of the more polemical use of epic and epic conventions in *DRN* can be found in her earlier work, *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius* (1994), especially pp. 99-138.

Whether or not Lucretius' *DRN* is in fact an epic poem has been a topic of great debate and in order to avoid becoming bogged down in the arguments for and against, for the purposes of this chapter I simply state that *DRN* is an epic poem, as suggested by Lucretius' explicit naming of his poetic predecessors (cf. also 1.945-50: "I have chosen to set forth my doctrine to you in sweet-speaking Pierian song.."). For a more robust argument that *DRN* fulfills epic requirements and contains multiple Homeric echoes, see Clyde Murley's "Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, Viewed as Epic" in *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 78 (1947), pp. 336-346.

history.⁹² Even Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, which presents a grotesque parody and denial of traditional Roman virtues in the civil war between Julius Caesar and the Senate, does so within the context of Roman history.⁹³ Lucretius' deviation from traditional Greek and Roman epic subjects thus signals his dismissal of both heroic and imperial values as empty and unimportant, and criticizes those poets who sought to immortalize such trivial affairs. This divergence from tradition is particularly noteworthy because Lucretius writes his *DRN* from a strongly Roman perspective, yet uncompromisingly rejects the nationalism that characterizes Roman epic.

It is true that both Ennius and Homer deserve praise for the beauty of their poetry – Ennius has won “a glorious name through the nations of Italian men” (*per gentis Italas hominum quae clara clueret*, 1.119) and Homer is called the “one and only king” of the poets (3.1037-38) – but their ignorance regarding the nature of the soul and the nature of the gods undermines their success. Although childlike naiveté drives them to spread irrational beliefs (1.112ff.: *ignoratur enim...*) rather than a malicious desire to control the populace, by naming the priests who do intentionally propagate lies *vates* (1.104-110)⁹⁴, Lucretius condemns all who fall under that category – including the father of Latin poetry.⁹⁵ In this Lucretius follows Ennius himself, who used *vates* contemptuously when speaking of his own predecessors during his ‘second proem’ at the beginning of book 7 of his *Annales* (*Ann.* 214V³) (Gale 1994: 108n.44; Gale 2001b: 53). Ennius, it is implied, is just as guilty as lying priests because he too invented dreams

⁹² See for example Virgil's description of the Shield of Aeneas (*Aen.* 8.675-728).

⁹³ Lucan does not reject traditional Roman virtues in the same way Lucretius does; he simply denies that traditional virtue is possible within the context of civil war.

⁹⁴ 1.104-110: “For how many dreams can they even now invent for you...And with reason; for if men saw that a limit has been set to tribulation, somehow they would have strength to defy the superstitions and threatenings of the priests; but, as it is, there is no way of resistance and no power...” (*quippe etenim quam multa tibi iam fingere possunt / somnia... / et merito; nam si certam finem esse viderent / aerumnarum homines, aliqua ratione valerent / religionibus atque minis obsistere vatium. / nunc ratio nulla est restandi, nulla facultas...*).

⁹⁵ M.F. Smith: “*vatium* (cf. 109) refers to all professional supporters of traditional religion and mythology, both priests and poets” (1992: 11).

(1.104-105: *fingere somnia*) – Homer’s shade visits Ennius in a dream vision (*Ann.* fr. 5-7 Vahlen, fr. 1 of the *Epicharmus*) – that misled the masses (Clay 1969: 40n. 25). Indeed, the beauty of their poetry only makes Homer and Ennius more culpable, because it entices and beguiles all the more potently. For, Lucretius writes,

dolts admire and love everything more which they see hidden amid distorted words, and set down as true whatever can prettily tickle the ears and all that is varnished over with fine-sounding phrases (1.641-44).

*omnia enim stolidi magis admirantur amantque
inversis quae sub verbis latitantia cernunt,
veraue constituunt quae belle tangere possunt
auris et lepido quae sunt fucata sonore.*

Lucretius is all for using pleasing poetry to make unpalatable truths more appealing just as physicians disguise the sharp taste of wormwood with honey (1.936-50, 4.11-25); what he objects to is the glorification and dissemination of irrationality and superstitious beliefs through verse. He thus repeatedly urges his audience to look past the pleasing surface to the message conveyed, reminding them that, “But well and excellently as all this is set forth and told, yet it is far removed from true reasoning” (*quae bene et eximie quamvis disposta ferantur, / longe sunt tamen a vera ratione repulsa*, 2.644-65; cf. 5.405-406).

Lucretius’ replication of Ennius’ claim that Homer’s shade appeared before him to “unfold the nature of things” (*rerum naturam expandere dictis*, 1.126), occurring at the end of a catalogue of ignorant beliefs (1.112-26: *ignoratur enim...*) endorsed, he implies, by Ennius (*Ennius ut noster cecinit*, 1.117), only emphasizes further how misguided the two famous poets were.⁹⁶ Ennius had claimed authority from Homer, and Lucretius asserts his superiority over both. Like Empedocles, who is very highly praised –

⁹⁶ Cf. also Lucretius’ description of Epicurus’ triumph over *religio* (1.62-79) which resembles Empedocles’ ἦν δὲ τις ἐν κείνοισιν ἀνὴρ (“there was among them a man,” fr. 129.1), which most likely refers to Pythagoras (Gale 1994: 72-73). Gale writes: “By praising Epicurus in Empedocles’ words, he declares, as it were, a dual allegiance; but by emphasizing Epicurus’ primacy, he depreciates the achievements of his predecessors, including Pythagoras and Empedocles himself, particularly as Epicurus’ combat with *religio* represents a denial of the very doctrines for which Pythagoras is praised. The knowledge which Epicurus brought back from beyond the *moenia mundi* gives the lie to the mental powers with which Pythagoras is credited” (1994: 73).

according to Lucretius, Sicily “seems to have contained in it nothing more illustrious than this man, nor more sacred and wonderful and dear” (1.729-30), and his poetry is such that they “utter a loud voice and declare illustrious discoveries, so that he seems hardly to be born of mortal stock” (1.731-34) – Homer and Ennius, despite their pre-eminence and fame, have “come to a crash about the beginnings of things; great they were, and herein great was their fall” (*principiis tamen in rerum fecere ruinas / et graviter magni magno cecidere ibi casu*, 1.740-41).⁹⁷ Only the truth of Epicureanism, it is implied, is immortal and worthy of eternal veneration.

Gale writes: “Because the poets – particularly Homer – have been regarded as the teachers of mankind, Lucretius must set about correcting the view of the world which they put forward. He presents himself as the successor to Homer and Ennius both because he owes them a poetic debt and because it is incumbent upon him to correct their philosophical errors” (1994: 108-109). The passage following Ennius’ claim of partnership with Homer supports this view by emphasizing the need for Lucretius to correct the erroneous beliefs of his predecessors. Beginning with *quapropter bene*, its tone is that of the conclusion of an argument: “therefore not only must we lay down right principles considering things celestial...but also most especially we must examine with keen-scented reasoning (*ratione sagaci*), of what the spirit is made and the nature of the mind” (1.127-31). For Lucretius, only Epicureanism and *naturae species ratioque*, or “the aspect and law of nature” (1.146-48, 2.59-61, 3.91-93, 6.39-41), can help correct false representations of reality and dispel the attendant psychic anxieties. And, by adopting the epic genre as a vehicle for his Epicurean message and thus replacing the flawed accounts of his poetic predecessors, Lucretius targets those most susceptible to pleasing verse, re-educating and guiding them back to a true understanding of nature.

⁹⁷ For a closer analysis of the link between Ennius and Empedocles, see Monica Gale’s “Etymological Wordplay and Poetic Succession in Lucretius” in *Classical Philology* 96 (2001a), pp. 168-172.

Epic Allusions in *DRN*

We see Lucretius' correction of his predecessors both in his subject-matter and in how he rewrites or alludes to recognizable scenes from the epic corpus. This type of creative appropriation is typical and, just as Lucretius corrects Homer and Ennius by deviating from the epic tradition, so Virgil later systematically and forcefully corrects Lucretius by returning epic to a nationalist perspective.⁹⁸ In *DRN* Homer's *Iliad* is summarized in five short lines (1.473-77) as an example of the kinds of things that depend on matter and void for existence (1.471-72: "If there had been no material for things, and no place and space in which each thing is done..."), while the Punic Wars, the subject of Naevius' *Bellum Poenicum* and appearing in Ennius' *Annales*, is trivialized in Book Three as part of an argument against fearing death: "as in time past we felt no distress, while from all quarters the Carthaginians were coming to the conflict...so, when we shall no longer be...then sure enough nothing at all will be able to happen to us" (3.832-41). Similarly, the fall of Troy is again mentioned along with the Theban War (subject of the lost epic poem *Thebais*, Smith 1992: 404) as proof that the world has not eternally existed, else "why have not other poets also sung other things beyond [these]" (5.324-31)? The fact that both the Trojan Cycle and the Punic Wars are described using grandiose language in high epic style (compare 3.834f. with *Ann.* 310V³, *Africa terribili tremit horrida terra tumultu*, and *Ann.* 551V³, *contremuit templum magnum Iovis altitonantis*)⁹⁹ demonstrates that Lucretius is indeed capable of writing about traditional epic subjects in the traditional elevated fashion – he simply chooses not to (Gale 1994: 109-110). Other poets might fixate on these types of tales, but Lucretius' topic is far superior to theirs because he explains what underlies the transient deeds of mortals, what is truly worthy of discussion. Only body and void exist in themselves; anything else is accidental to and contingent upon them (1.478-82).

⁹⁸ For Virgil's correction of Lucretius in his *Georgics*, see Monica Gale's *Virgil on the Nature of Things* (2000) or Ch. 5 of Joseph Farrell's *Virgil's Georgics and the Traditions of Ancient Epic* (1991), pp. 169-206.

⁹⁹ Both passages are quoted in Gale 1994: 110.

Familiar scenes from the epic tradition reappear in *DRN* filtered through an Epicurean perspective. Thus, the sacrifice of Iphigenia (1.80-101) becomes for Lucretius a tragic example of the potency of *religio* in “persuading to evil deeds” (*tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*, 1.101) by duping humans into believing that heinous crimes such as murder are pious and right, rather than acting as a cautionary tale against angering the gods.¹⁰⁰ Iphigenia’s murder at the hands of her father is all the more shocking because parents are supposed to cherish and protect their children from harm. Homer’s description of the chimaera that Bellerophon slew (*Il.* 6.181-82) reappears at *DRN* 5.905-907, but as proof of the impossibility of such a creature actually existing (Gale 1994: 111). The majestic vision of the gods revealed to the Epicurean acolyte in Book Three (18-22) echoes the *Odyssey*’s description of Olympus as a sanctuary (6.42-46) to which Athena returns after meddling in the affairs of mortals (Murley 1947: 338). In Lucretius’ version, however, the gods are emphatically remote and indifferent to human concerns, “and nothing at any time impairs their peace of mind” (*neque ulla / res animi pacem delibat tempore in ullo*, 3.23-24). Likewise, Zeus’ authority over the weather, so prominent in the *Iliad*, is notably absent from the Homeric weather-similes reproduced by Lucretius at 1.280-89 (cf. *Il.* 5.87-92) and 6.191-93 (cf. *Il.* 5.522-26) (Gale 2001: 54). The destructive flooding of a river with its “sudden coming when the rain of Zeus driveth it on” (*Il.* 5.87-91)¹⁰¹ instead overflows “when a great deluge of water from the high mountains swells the flood with torrents of rain” (*et cum mollis aquae fertur natura repente / flumine abundanti, quam largis imbribus auget / montibus ex altis magnus decursus aquai*, *DRN* 1.281-83), while the clouds “that in still weather the son of Cronos setteth on the mountain-tops moveless” (*Il.* 5.522-24) are simply described as “thick and at the same time piled high one above another in a wonderful mass” (*scilicet hoc densis fit nubibus et simul alte / exstructis aliis alias super impete miro*, *DRN*

¹⁰⁰ According to mythology, the Greek fleet became stranded in Aulis after Agamemnon angered Artemis by killing a pregnant deer. Iphigenia’s sacrifice was demanded to appease the goddess and allow the Greeks to continue on to Troy (e.g., Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* 135-253).

¹⁰¹ All translations of Homer’s *Iliad* unless other specified are from A.T. Murray (1924), Loeb edition.

6.185-86). Homer has once again gotten it wrong but Lucretius, following Epicurus' example, casts aside superstition and ignorance to reveal nature as it truly is.

Myth and Lucretius

Mythology is rampant in epic poetry and although much of it is “far removed from true reasoning” (2.644-65; 5.405-406), it can be used to great effect so long as one does not mistake the literal meaning for truth or, in Lucretius' words, “provided that he forbears in reality himself to infect his mind with base superstition” (*dum vera re tamen ipse / religione animum turpi contingere parcat*, 2.659-60). As with epic poetry, mythology evokes a sense of grandeur and awe which Lucretius redirects towards his Epicurean message to immortalize and deify it (Schrijvers 1970: 82; cf. 3.1-30). In addition to elevating the subject-matter, myth in *DRN* acts as a foil for rational Epicurean truth or enhances Lucretius' Epicurean message. One of Lucretius' didactic techniques is to introduce a theory held by another poet or philosopher, and then show where it went wrong. He introduces the myth of the Magna Mater (2.600-43), for example, in order to disprove it by expounding on the true nature of divinity and the earth (2.646-54). Similarly, the myth of Phaeton (5.396-405) is held up as an example of a “tale which the old Grecian poets have sung” (*ut veteres Graium cecinere poetae*, 5.405), one which is “all very far indeed removed from true reasoning” (*procul a vera nimis est ratione repulsum*, 5.406; cf. also 1.637).

Many of these myths, however, originated from observations of the natural world and an attempt to make sense of reality (e.g., 5.1161-1240). As such, myth contains seeds of truth which can be extracted from the false assumptions surrounding them (Gale 1994: 132-33). Belief in the gods, for example, was inspired by true visions (*videbant*, 5.1169-71), but man erred in endowing them with human characteristics and magical

powers (5.1172-82).¹⁰² Humans really did hear mysterious voices in the mountains and hills, but misidentified the echoing shouts of other humans as the music of satyrs, fauns and nymphs (4.572-94). The myth of the Magna Mater provides the first example in the poem of how humans erroneously transformed real experiences of the world into religious fancy (Clay 1983: 229). Earth truly “deserves the name of mother which she possesses, since from the earth all living things have been produced” (*merito maternum nomen adepta / terra sit, e terra quoniam sunt cuncta creata*, 5.795-96; cf. 2.998, 5.821-25), Lucretius writes, but humans erred in assuming she could be pleased or swayed by gifts and sacrifices. Like Xenophanes, the earliest known criticizer of myth on the basis of impiety and irrationality (Gale 1994: 10), or Plato, who famously bans myth and poetry from his ideal state for misrepresenting the gods and encouraging various forms of moral weaknesses (*Rep.* 2.376e-3.392c), Lucretius denounces his poetic predecessors for propagating a false picture of the gods. It is not just the erroneous conclusions to which he objects, however, but the myth-making process – that is, the blind or even eager acceptance of unjustified and unsupportable assumptions – itself.

Juxtaposing mythological images with their true materialistic explanations allows Lucretius to highlight the irrationality of superstitious beliefs, while demonstrating how easily one slides from the real to the fanciful (cf. 5.1236-40). At the same time, his scientific Epicurean account of nature is enriched by and benefits from metaphorical illustrations of the phenomenon (Gale 1994: 133). In Elizabeth McLeod’s words: “Lucretius, poet-philosopher, applies doubly the technique of revelation by means of parallels between the *known* and the *unknown*; he simultaneously captures the emotions, the imagination and the intellect of his readers” (1963: 146). Lucretius has a keen understanding of human psychology and his pairing of the rational and the emotional reflects this. Humans are not always wholly rational creatures – indeed, this is why so

¹⁰² Similarly, Ennius perhaps really did see a vision of Homer but, ignorant of the true nature of body and mind, he mistook it for Homer himself instead of a combination of *simulacra* emanating from objects in the world (4.33-43, 722-76; cf. 1.132-135).

many of us have been led astray by the *vates* – and there are some things that mere scientific explanation cannot encompass or dispel. Lucretius therefore uses myth and imagery to appeal to the emotional or subconscious minds of his audience, who are frequently swayed more by pretty words than rational argument (1.641-44). Myth thus acts as the honeyed coating which makes his Epicurean message more palatable to his audience.

Epic Warfare in *DRN*

Epic poetry fixates on wars and battles and Lucretius' *DRN* is no exception. Despite the inclusion of some historical and mythological wars (e.g., 3.832-37: the Punic Wars; 5.1281ff.: the wars of early man; 1.41ff., 3.70, 5.1136: civil wars; 1.473-77: the Trojan War), however, much of the martial action in *DRN* takes place between warring atoms or as metaphorical battles between Epicurus and *religio* on the one hand (e.g., 1.62-79, 3.1-30, 5.1-54) and Lucretius and his philosophical opponents on the other (e.g., 1.875) (Gale 1994: 117). Heraclitus “opens the fray as first champion” (*init quorum dux proelia primus*, 1.638) (Murley 1947: 343) while Anaxagoras takes advantage of “some slight opportunity for evasion” (*linquitur hic quaedam latitandi copia tenvis*, 1.875). Lucretius presents an argument then invites his reader to “ponder it with keen judgement; and if it seems to be true, own yourself vanquished (*dede manus*), or, if it is false, gird up your loins to fight (*accingere contra*)” (2.1041-43; cf. 1.624, 2.748, 2.1129, 5.343, 5.735, 6.498) (Murley 1947: 344). Unattached atoms lay siege to “the walls (*moenia*) of the mighty world,” which are “stormed all around (*circum expugnata*), and shall collapse into a crumbling ruin” (2.1144-45). Dust motes in sunlight famously reveal the ceaseless battles of the atoms and, if you but look closely, Lucretius assures his reader,

you will see many minute particles mingling in many ways throughout the void in the light itself of the rays, and as it were in everlasting conflict struggling, fighting, battling in troops without any pause, driven about with frequent meetings and partings (2.116-120).

*multa minuta modis multis per inane videbis
corpora misceri radiorum lumine in ipso
et velut aeterno certamine proelia pugnas
edere turmatim certantia nec dare pausam,*

These particles “are seen to be in turmoil within the sun’s rays” (*corpora quae in solis radiis turbare videntur*, 2.126), which “indicates that there are secret and unseen motions also hidden in matter” (*quod tales turbae motus quoque materiai / significant clandestinos caecosque subesse*, 2.127-28). Gail Cabisius argues convincingly that the “secret and unseen motions” allude to the “concealed and treacherous” activity of clandestine civil strife, citing parallels in Sallust’s description of the Catilinarian conspiracy as evidence (1984: 116). The elements too “fight so hard together, stirred by most unrighteous war” (*pugnent membra, pio nequaquam concita bello*, 5.381), and “so fierce is their warlike spirit, as in well-matched contest they strive to win a decision upon a mighty cause” (*tantum spirantes aequo certamine bellum / magnis inter se de rebus cernere certant*, 5.392-93). See also 1.759-60: *deinde inimica modis multis sunt atque veneno / ipsa sibi inter se*, “these elements are at war together in many ways, and poison to one another.”

As we saw in Chapter Two, however, the atomic battles are passionless and random collisions lacking the intentionality, malevolence and spite of human warfare. Although these particles appear to struggle against one another in human-like combat they actually come together purely by chance, and their actions are completely barren of any moral valuations of good or bad. Thus, whereas for humans a “most unrighteous war” is one that is not only bereft of virtue and righteousness but is also evil and perverted, for the atoms, it is exactly as Lucretius describes: “not at all holy” (*pio nequaquam*). The elements are portrayed as engaging in a kind of epic war with one another and, for Lucretius, this is the *most* epic war, and what is most worthy of commemoration. The ceaseless movements of the atoms are far more important and interesting than the conflicts of humans because they enable the existence of those human interactions. At the same time, they are ultimately constructive and creative rather than

destructive and, like the *foedera naturae*, are empty of the harmful and irrational passions infecting human behaviour.

The clash of atoms may result in the death of what was before, but the atoms cannot be held morally accountable for this dissolution, nor is there any objective moral valuation in the process of breaking apart. Despite this, Lucretius does present this process of combination and dissolution in a positive light, offering a series of idyllic images to make the point that “no visible object utterly passes away, since nature makes up again one thing from another, and does not permit anything to be born unless aided by another’s death” (*haud igitur penitus pereunt quaecumque videntur, / quando alid ex alio reficit natura, nec ullam / rem gigni patitur nisi morte adiuta aliena*, 1.262-64). Falling rain thus produces bright crops and fruit which hangs heavy from trees and provides food to gambolling woodland beasts, which in turn provide milk for their young while they lie in leafy woods and rich pastures (1.250-61). Human warfare, in contrast, is often portrayed in *DRN* in a less positive manner (see Ch. 2, above), and Lucretius’ frequent condemnations of human greed and strife is a clear ethical proclamation. These irrational and destructive behaviours are especially heinous when we understand the true nature of things and natural limits and we see that there is no reason to act this way. Agamemnon would never have sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia had he understood that the gods’ powers are limited, for example, and so many wars would not have been fought if people only understood that there is a limit to pleasure and wealth. Lucretius thus fulfills the traditional martial requirements of epic with the infinitely more important (in his opinion) movements of atoms. On the one hand he presents their clashings using imagery familiar and appealing to his Roman audience, and on the other hand he invites comparison between atomic motion and human civic unrest. This comparison highlights the superiority of indifferent nature over human pettiness and Lucretius’ refusal to praise human warfare as traditional poets do is yet another rejection of traditional values. In

particular, Lucretius rejects the martial and imperial values driving Roman culture and provides instead an account of what is truly worthy of commemoration – atomic motion.

Old Words, New Meanings

Lucretius declares his teachings to be of high (*magnis doceo de rebus*) yet obscure (*obscura*) matters (1.921-50, 4.1-25), which because of their strangeness (*rerum novitatem*) must be expressed in “new words” (*novis verbis*) (1.136-145). However, his promise of a new philosophical vocabulary remains largely unfulfilled and existing Latin words are instead given new direction (e.g., Warren 2007: 22-23; Minyard 1985: 45-46). Minyard points out the preponderance of familiar Latin words used to express technical Epicurean concepts (e.g., *inane*, *res*, *semina*, *corpora*, *sensus*, *voluptas*, etc.), compared to new coinages or *hapax legomena* such as *frugiferentis* (1.3, ‘fruit-bearing’), *largifluum* (5.598, ‘generous flood’), or *lauricomos* (6.152, ‘covered with laurel’) which are literary rather than philosophical in character (1985: 44-45; cf. Bailey 1963: 592).¹⁰³ Greek terms are transliterated into Latin to create “new” Latin words (*homoeomeria*: 1.830, 834; *harmonia*: 3.100) more to set them apart as somehow alien and undeserving of proper corresponding Latin terms (Warren 2007: 22). When they do appear in *DRN*, Lucretius unequivocally rejects such notions as incorrect and misguided (1.880: *quod tamen a vera longe ratione repulsumst*; 3.105: *magno opere in quo mi diversi errare videntur*). As Warren astutely observes, the far-fetchedness of such theories marks out their alien nature: “it cannot be rendered naturally in Latin, let alone comprehended or accepted by Lucretius’ audience” (2007: 28). Anaxagoras’ ὁμοιομέπειαι cannot be named in Latin, Lucretius explains, “because of the poverty of our mother speech (*nobis patrii sermonis egestas*)” (1.831-32), but Lucretius’ disdain for what he considers such an obviously ludicrous theory – Anaxagoras “fancies and imagines” (*fingit putatque*, 1.842), he denies patent truths (1.843-44), his argument ends in absurdity (1.915-20) – suggests that in fact

¹⁰³ Compare Aeschylus’ penchant for using compound adjectives in his tragedies, such as πολύχρυσος (‘great in gold’) or πολύανδρος (‘great in men’) in his *Persae*.

he cannot be bothered to come up with a proper Latin term for it.¹⁰⁴ Anaxagoras' poorly formed theory of *homoeomeria*, like the Greek theory of ὁμοιομερῆα refuted in Book Three (98-135), lacks the merit (*virtus*) of the other, more worthy doctrines which drive Lucretius to labour all night seeking new words (cf. 1.140-45).¹⁰⁵

Lucretius' persistent use of common Latin words for his philosophical vocabulary stems from his desire to completely restructure his Roman audience's perception of reality by rearranging the language on which that perception is founded (Minyard 1985: 39-40). Instead of creating a completely new Latin philosophical vocabulary from brand new words with no prior conventional meanings – which would have made his philosophical project far easier in terms of clarity of meaning – Lucretius appropriates terms from the everyday speech of Roman society and changes their frames of reference. As we saw with Lucretius' *foedera naturae*, the dissonance created by the juxtaposition of the former, everyday meanings and the new, technical definition engages the reader's attention and signals the need to pay especial attention to and critically analyze the various mental images produced by the word. The reader is thus given an opportunity to practice the rational investigative method lauded by the Epicureans as he or she is forced to re-examine the original concept, challenging its validity as an accurate representation of reality. For, Epicurus writes (*Ep. Her.* 82):

we must pay attention to internal feelings and to external sensations in general and in particular... and to every immediate intuition in accordance with each of the standards of judgement. For if we pay attention to these, we shall rightly trace the causes whence arose our mental disturbance and fear...

¹⁰⁴ Bailey notes that neither the substantive nor the adjective ὁμοιομερῆ appears in the extant fragments of Anaxagoras but comments made by later doxographers and commentators, as well as by Lucretius himself (1.834), suggest Anaxagoras did use them with reference to his theory (1963: 745; see also Bailey 1928: 551-56).

¹⁰⁵ The doctrine of ὁμοιομερῆα combated here was developed by Aristotle's pupils Aristoxenus and Dicaearchus in the fourth century BC and views the soul as a "nothing beyond the condition of the body" (Sextus *Adv. Math.* 7.349), "a sort of tension of the body, just as we speak of harmony in song or playing" (Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 1.10.19) (Bailey 1963: 1004-1005). Lucretius rejects this theory on the grounds that the body may be sick while the mind is well and vice versa, and therefore the mind or spirit must be some part of the body and not simply a kind of tension or harmony of the body as a whole. Socrates uses similar points to refute Simmias' explanation of ὁμοιομερῆα (*Phaedo* 85e-86d) at *Phaedo* 91c-95a, although his conclusion, that the soul must be incorporeal and immortal, vastly differs from Lucretius' understanding of the soul as corporeal and mortal (Warren 2007: 30).

If the reader has paid proper attention to Lucretius' teachings, he or she will start from what is true and known to be true and judge what is unclear or unknown against these things (*Ep. Her.* 38, 63, 82; *KD* 22, 23, 24). Whatever fails to logically cohere with the reader's perception of the universe must be rejected as a false assumption, so that only the reality remains (*Ep. Her.* 38, 52). In Lucretius' words, "one thing will become clear by another, and blind night will not steal your path and prevent you from seeing all the uttermost recesses of nature: so clearly will truths kindle light for truths" (*namque alid ex alio clarescet, nec tibi caeca / nox iter eripiet quin ultima naturai / pervideas: ita res accendent lumina rebus*, 1.1115-17).

Lucretius therefore uses and adapts epic conventions to reflect the values of Epicureanism and replaces the flawed constructs of his predecessors with more worthy subjects. Epicurus, the first (*primus*) human who dared rebel against *religio* and thus brought salvation to mankind through "the lively power of his mind" (*ergo vivida vis animi pervicit*, 1.72), replaces Achilles and Odysseus as the paradigmatic epic hero. His weapons are "words, not swords" (*dictis, non armis*, 5.50) and his foes are the insidious fears and anxieties that plague the minds of men. Epicurus, Lucretius insists, is more worthy of commemoration than other so-called heroes because his victories benefit all of mankind for the rest of time (cf. 5.20-21: "from whom even now spreading abroad through great nations come sweet consolations of life to soothe our minds"), unlike the transient deeds of traditional champions like Hercules, which impact only a small number of people.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, although the dangers posed by the beasts Hercules killed were great they were able for the most part to be avoided (5.22-42), whereas "good life was impossible without a purged mind" (*at bene non poterat sine puro pectore vivi*, 5.18; cf.

¹⁰⁶ This is especially true in the case of the great serpent guardian of the Hesperides' golden apples, Lucretius ironically points out, for "what mischief pray could he do...whither none of our folk ever goes and even the outlander dares not (*quo neque noster adit quisquam nec barbarus audet*)?" (5.34-36; cf. 5.42).

5.43-51).¹⁰⁷ In Lucretius' *DRN* – the only *true* epic – impassive and aloof Epicurean gods replace the interfering deities of traditional poetry, mortals are called divine for the illustrious quality of their writing instead of the godly status of their parents, and the fabled regions of Acheron exist only in our imaginations and as an allegory for human suffering (3.978-1023).

To summarize: Lucretius cites Ennius and Homer as his poetic models and stubbornly retains the metrical framework and key characteristics of epic such as elevated style, narrative involving a hero or great achievement, and martial exploits (Murley 1947: 341) to ensure his work is classified as an epic poem. Lucretius' *DRN*, however, surpasses the poems of his predecessors in importance, uniqueness, and scope. They have sung about mere accidents of matter, whereas Lucretius expounds on the true nature of things. Lucretius departs from convention in order to correct it and lead his reader out of the darkness of ignorance and into the salvation offered by Epicureanism, which replaces unthinking dogma with rational deliberation. Lucretius insists on the novelty of his subject-matter at 1.926-30 (= 4.1-5) to emphasize its origin as “drawn from the inexhaustible springs of Epicurean philosophy, rather than myth or history” (Gale 1994: 141). He traverses “a pathless country of the Pierides...where no other foot has trod” (*avia Pieridum peragro loca nullius ante / trita solo*, 4.1-2),¹⁰⁸ drinks from “virgin springs” (*integros fontis*, 4.2-3), and plucks “new flowers” (*novos flores*, 4.3) for “an illustrious chaplet for my head from fields whence before this the Muses have crowned

¹⁰⁷ Hercules is often portrayed as a Stoic champion and Lucretius' assertion of Epicurus' superiority over him is a jibe against both those who lionized him in verse and mythology, and a rival philosophical school (Bailey 1963: 1324-25).

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Clay: “If there is a distance in *De rerum natura* between Pieria and Helicon and thereby a tacit distinction between Lucretius and other poets, its explanation may lie in the fact that the associations of Helicon are local and inextricably connected with the *Ascraeum carmen* of Hesiod, while Pieria is associated with the more universal Olympus. Pieria is more on a level with the ἀπειρία of Epicurus' vision of the universe than the less lofty Helicon” (1983: 45).

the brows of none (*unde prius nulli velarint tempora Musae*)” (4.3-5).¹⁰⁹ The contrast between Lucretius’ creative invention and Ennius’ reliance on Homer’s shade provides Lucretius with an opportunity to assert his superiority and independence, and to declare the realness of his topic. The values promoted by traditional epic – piety to fickle gods, martial prowess, political power, the amassing of wealth, high status and self-promotion – are illusions which can only lead to futile striving, fear and disappointment. These types of things are “ridiculous and a mere mockery” (*ridicula haec ludibriaque*, 2.47), and therefore must be rejected in favour of the infinitely more beneficial Epicurean philosophical contemplation (2.48-61). The heroes of traditional epic likewise are exposed as morally flawed and become cautionary symbols on par with Tantalus, Sisyphus and Tityos (3.978-1023); the true heroes are those who sought to rationally understand the workings of the universe and valued truth and logic over dogmatic fables.

Link to Foede

In his appropriation of epic conventions Lucretius reinforces aspects of the genre that benefit or increase the attractiveness of his philosophical message, while at the same time rejecting or correcting what is inimical to Epicurean rationality. Monica Gale calls this the ‘predatory’ nature of Lucretius’ didactic technique (1994: 128), a fitting term for his somewhat opportunistic approach of commandeering what he can and discarding or dismissing the rest.¹¹⁰ If Lucretius frequently derides the attempts of his philosophical and literary predecessors to find the truth, however, he often honours them as well for their well-meant attempts or aesthetic appeal. And, if he overturns or twists traditional epic expectations to suit his polemical and philosophical programmes – Lucretius’

¹⁰⁹ On Lucretius’ claim to originality, see 1.926-27; 3.417-20; 5.336-37. Lucretius’ insistence on his innovative philosophy follows an established literary and philosophical tradition. For an informative discussion on Epicurus’ independence and relationship with his philosophical predecessors, see Michael Erler’s “Autodictact and student: on the relationship of authority and autonomy in Epicurus and the Epicurean tradition” in *Epicurus and the Epicurean Tradition* (2011: 9-28).

¹¹⁰ Cf. Bailey *ad* 1.931-35: “to him his philosophy comes first and his real purpose is to free men’s minds from superstition by the knowledge of the truth about nature; his poetry is of secondary importance and is only an attraction to secure attention” (1963: 757).

teachings are “of high matters” (*magnis doceo de rebus*, 1.931 = 4.6), for example, but atoms and void were perhaps not what Aristotle meant when he defined epic as elevated, grand, and wide in scope (*Poetics* 23-24) – he persuades the reader, convincingly, that his divergence from the epic tradition is, rather, the fulfillment of its original purpose. This technique of, as Hardie puts it, “getting inside his opponents’ positions and then evacuating them of their prior content to refill them with Epicurean doctrine” (1986: 11) is a common tactic of Lucretius’, and an effective one. In Minyard’s words: “If...he can save many of the old categories by showing they have a true relation to reality and what that relation is, when reality is properly understood, he has much more chance of persuasion than if he attempts to void every word” (1985: 47). As will be shown, this is exactly what Lucretius does with the etymological roots of his *foedera naturae*. Like his treatment of myth and poetry, Lucretius retains key elements of the derivation from *foede* but reformulates them into a new version of reality, one that coheres with an Epicurean perspective of nature and supports his crusade against destructive and irrational human social practices.

The derivation of *foedus* (‘treaty’) from the adjective *foedus* (‘foul’) seems to have been accepted as common knowledge in the ancient world, and appears more frequently than other, alternate etymologies.^{111 112} The second century grammarian Festus explains that *foedus* (n.) was so named for the manner (*foede*, ‘horribly’, ‘disgustingly’) in which the sacrificial pig was slaughtered to formally conclude the making of a treaty, and this explanation coincides with those of other ancient

¹¹¹ The following sources for the derivation of *foedus* (‘treaty’) from *foedus* (‘foul’) are primarily borrowed from Gladhill (2008: 29-37) and Shearin (2007: 89-93), who discuss this etymology at length. Gladhill’s investigation is particularly thorough but ultimately focuses on the *foeditas* that precedes the striking of a *foedus* and that occurs after the breaking of one (2008: 35, 38-39). Shearin on the other hand concentrates on what these derivations say about the *fetiales* and their dual role as makers of peace and makers of war, finding parallels between the fetial rituals and atomic movement (2007: 94). Watson 1993 (33-34) also mentions some of these etymologies.

¹¹² One alternate etymology follows the *fides* of the fetial rite rather than the foulness of its ritual sacrifice and will be discussed in more detail, below.

commentators.¹¹³ Isidorus of Seville (28.11) connects *foedus* with *fides*, *pax*, and the college of *fetiales* before discussing the actual fetial rite: *alii foedera dicta putant a porca foede et crudeliter occisa, cuius mors optabatur ei qui a pace resillisset* (“Others say that treaties derive from a piglet which has been slaughtered foully and crudely, whose death was required if one should back out of peace”, trans. Gladhill 2008: 30).¹¹⁴ He then quotes Virgil’s description of the *foedus* between Romulus and Tatius on the shield of Aeneas (*Aen.* 8.641): *et caesa iungebant foedera porca* (“and they joined treaties with the slaughter of a pig”). Servius, a fifth century grammarian, similarly explains the etymology of *foedus* by reference to the fetial rite and its elements twice in his commentary to Virgil’s *Aeneid*:

Moreover *foedus* has been said to be derived from *fetiales*, that is the priests, through whom treaties come into being, or from a pig slaughtered foully (*foede*), that is with stones, as he himself says, *and they were joining their treaties with the slaughter of a pig*” (*ad Aen.* 1.62).¹¹⁵

They were joining treaties with a piglet. *Foedera*, as we said above, have been derived from a piglet slaughtered foully and crudely (*foede et crudeliter*); for although previously the piglet was transfixed with swords, it was discovered by the fetial priests that the piglet should be struck with the *silex*, because they thought that the stone *silex* was a sign of ancient Jove” (*ad Aen.* 8.641).¹¹⁶

Servius’ last comment suggests that the fetial sacrifice was particularly gruesome or *foedus* compared to other ritual sacrifices. The bludgeoning to death of the sacrificial *porcus* and the use of a crudely fashioned stone blade summons up a macabre image, especially if the *porcus* slaughtered is a ten-day old piglet, the customary sacrificial victim according to Varro’s *De Re Rustica* 2.4 (Gladhill 2008: 65-66).

Augustine offers an alternative explanation of *foedus* as derived from what it is not (i.e., a foul thing), in the same way that “grove” (*lucus*) is named because it gets little

¹¹³ Festus 75.3-5 (Lindsay): *foedus appellatum ab eo, quod in paciscendo foede hostia necaretur*, “*Foedus*: named from the fact that in making peace the victim is killed shamefully [*foede*]” (trans. Shearin 2007: 89).

¹¹⁴ I discuss the etymological link between *foedus* and *fides* in more detail, below.

¹¹⁵ *foedus autem dictum vel a fetialibus, id est sacerdotibus per quos fiunt foedera, vel a porca foede, hoc est lapidibus occisa, ut ipse et caesa iungebant foedera porca* (*In Vergilii Aeneidon libris*, 1.62; trans. Gladhill 2008: 32; cf. Watson 1993: 33-34, Shearin 2007: 93).

¹¹⁶ *iungebant foedera porca: foedera, ut diximus supra, dicta sunt a porca foede et crudeliter occisa; nam cum ante gladiis configeretur, a fetialibus inventum ut silice feriretur ea causa, quod antiqui Iovis signum lapidem silicem putaverunt esse.* (*In Vergilii Aeneidon libris*, 8.641).

light (*minime luceat*), and “war” (*bellum*) is so called because it is not beautiful (*res bella non sit*) (*De Dialectica* 6.10). He then continues:

But if it does derive from the foulness of a piglet, as some say, its derivation returns to that arena where whatever comes into existence is named from that act through which it comes into existence. For that arena is widely revealed in every way and is divided throughout its many parts: or through its efficacy, as for example treaty derives from the foulness of a pig, through which a treaty is completed (trans. Gladhill 2008: 32).¹¹⁷

His point is that etymologies are derived either from what they are or what they are not and so, contra the Stoics, there are words whose origins cannot be explained with certainty (*De Dialectica* 6.5). Regardless of which etymological technique is used, *foedus* (‘foul’) is at the centre.

Piglet sacrifice was quite prevalent for both the Greeks and Romans, with piglets being the preferred *hostiae* for initiation into the Eleusinian Mysteries, celebrating the festival of the Thesmophoria, marriage ceremonies, and, of course, the fetal rite (Gladhill 2008: 67-68; Varro, *De Re Rust.* 2.4). Both the Eleusinian Mysteries and the festival of the Thesmophoria were female ceremonies put on by the cult of Demeter and Persephone, celebrating the abduction and return of Persephone from the Underworld. According to the myth, when the ground opened up to swallow Persephone, the swineherd Euboulos’ herd of pigs was also lost; one of the distinctive features of the festival of the Thesmophoria is the excavation and reburial of the remains of the previous year’s piglet sacrifices, which are then replaced with fresh carcasses (Evans 2002: 248). This annual practice of digging up the rotting cadavers of old piglets coupled with the prevalence of piglet sacrifice in the ancient world makes the shocking nature of the fetal sacrifice all the more remarkable.

According to Gladhill, any piglet sacrifice would have been foul “precisely because the piglet is so small, pure and exposed” (2008: 67), but this squeamishness is a

¹¹⁷ *quod si a foeditate porci dictum est, ut nonnulli volunt, redit origo ad illam vicinitatem, cum id quod fit ab eo per quod fit nominatur: nam ista omnino vicinitas late patet et per multas partes secatur: aut per efficientiam, ut hoc ipsum a foeditate porci, per quem foedus efficiatur. (De Dialectica 6.10).*

modern bias alien to typical Greek and Roman sensitivities.¹¹⁸ The practice of infant exposure, frequent and close-combat warfare, primitive medical practices and the pervasiveness of animal sacrifice – it was said of pigs that “life was given them just like salt, to preserve the flesh” (Varro *De Re Rust.* 2.4)¹¹⁹ – all helped desensitize the ancients to blood and butchery. Even Lucretius, who certainly represents animals as helpless and in need of protection (5.860-71) and strongly sympathizes with the sacrificial victims (1.80-101, 2.352-70)¹²⁰, is distressed more by the irrationality motivating such needless rituals and the immorality of violating bonds of trust and protection than the goriness of the act itself. Unlike the Stoics, Lucretius does not seem to consider animals the property of humans, existing only to serve (eg. Cicero *Leg.* 1.25; *Off.* 1.22, etc.)¹²¹. Rather, they, like humans, are atomic aggregates equally existing in the world, each governed by their particular *foedera naturae*. Neither is superior nor inferior to the other, and there are several places in Lucretius’ *DRN* where the descriptions might apply equally well to man

¹¹⁸ Pythagoras famously prohibited the consumption of flesh (e.g., Ovid *Meta.* 15.60-142) but contradictory accounts make it unclear whether he meant all meat (Porphyry *VP* 7), only certain animals (DL 8.20; Aulus Gellius IV.11.6), or only certain parts of an animal (Aulus Gellius IV.11.11-12). Unlike many modern vegetarians, however, his aversion to eating meat stems from a belief in metempsychosis or the transmigration of the soul from one body to the next (Porphyry *VP* 19).

¹¹⁹ All translations of Varro’s *De Re Rustica* unless otherwise specified are from W.D. Hooper and H.B. Ash (1934), Loeb edition.

¹²⁰ Lucretius considers both the sacrificial *hostia* and its parents as victims. He demonstrates a clear sympathy for the mother cow frantically searching for her missing calf with human-like grief and intensity in a moving passage that follows her bereaved wanderings (*orbata peragrans*) throughout the woods (2.352-70) and, in the Iphigenia scene (1.80-101), he portrays Agamemnon as both contemptible for sacrificing his daughter and pitiable for his inability to recognize the enormity of his mistake.

¹²¹ *Leg.* 1.25: “For this reason [i.e., man’s possession of reason], nature has lavishly yielded such a wealth of things adapted to man’s convenience and use that what she produces seems intended as a gift to us, and not brought forth by chance; and this is true...also of the animals; for it is clear that some of them have been created to be man’s slaves, some to supply him with their products, and others to serve as his food” (*itaque ad hominum commoditates et usus tantam rerum ubertatem natura largita est, ut ea, quae gignuntur, donata consulto nobis, non fortuito nata videantur, nec solum ea...sed etiam pecudes, quod perspicuum sit, partim esse ad usum hominum, partim ad fructum, partim ad vescendum procreatas*).

Off. 1.22: “...and since, as the Stoics hold, everything that the earth produces is created for man’s use” (*atque, ut placet Stoicis, quae in terris gignantur, ad usum hominum omnia creari*).

Cf. *DRN* 5.222-234, which compares the hardness of young animals to the helplessness of human babies: “But the diverse flocks and herds grow, and wild creatures; they need no rattles, none of them wants to hear the coaxing and broken baby-talk of the foster-nurse, they seek no change of raiment according to the temperature of the season, lastly they need no weapons, no lofty walls to protect their own, since for them all the earth herself brings forth all they want in abundance (*quando omnibus omnia large / tellus ipsa parit*), and nature the cunning fashioner of things” (5.228-34).

or beast (e.g., 1.80-101, 2.352-70, 5.925-87, 1028-1040). This kinship with and sympathy for animals was for the most part unshared by other Romans of the time, however, so if we assume most Romans were untroubled by the ritual butchering of young animals, then the manner in which the fetial *porcus* was killed must have been truly *foedissimus* to merit special mention from commentators who should have been inured to the sight of a dead piglet.

Although the etymological link between *foedus* and what is foul stems from the striking of a treaty, a close connection between *foedera* and *foeditas* ('foulness', 'hideousness') can be found in its rupturing as well. This is particularly demonstrated by the rare adjective *foedifragus* ('perfidious, league-breaking'), a compound of *foedus* and *frango* ('to break, shatter, wreck') (*Lewis & Short*). Cicero, in keeping with the Roman practice of portraying the Carthaginians as untrustworthy oath-breakers, uses the term while discoursing on justice and wars: *Poeni foedifragi, crudelis Hannibal, reliqui iustiores* ("The Carthaginians violated treaties; Hannibal was cruel; the others were more merciful," *Off.* 1.38). It also appears in fragments of Laevius' (? c. 80 BC) *Carmen 9* (*oblitteram gentem / foedifragos / pudoricolorem...*, "A people consigned to oblivion, oath-breakers, coloured by shame...": 9.1-3). Aulus Gellius (c. 125-after 180 AD), commenting on Laevius' poem, calls attention to Laevius' use of *foedifragos* rather than *foederifragos* (*Noctes Atticae* 19.7.4)¹²² which, like the noun *foederati* ('allies')¹²³, would use the stem *foeder-* instead of *foed-*. Either form of *foedus* ('treaty') would convey the meaning but the use of the singular allows for a stronger intimation that *foedifragi* have been corrupted or made foul (*foedus*) by their actions. In Gladhill's words: "Cicero and

¹²² *item notavimus quod 'oblitteram' gentem pro oblitterata dixit; item quod hostis qui foedera frangerent 'foedifragos' non foederifragos dixit.* ("In the same way we noted that he said that the people were "obliterated" in place of obliterated; in the same way he said that the enemies were pact-smashers and not compact-smashers," *Noctes Atticae* 19.7.4, trans. Gladhill 2008: 36).

¹²³ For a thorough discussion on the distinct categories of Roman allies, see Louise Matthaei's "On the Classification of Roman Allies" (1907: 182-204).

Laeivius are suggesting that *foedifragi* are men who both violate *foedera* and are befouled by their violation of *foedera*” (2008: 36).

This interpretation of *foedifragi* highlights the moral dissolution associated with the adjective *foedus*, which *Lewis & Short* defines as “disgraceful, base, dishonorable, vile, shameful, infamous, foul, etc.” In the Latin corpus it frequently denotes heinous crimes or depravity, often beyond common immorality. Cicero, for example, denies that any creature is more vile or horrible than a tyrant (*quo neque taetrius neque foedius*, *Rep.* 2.48), who “surpasses the most monstrous of the wild beasts in the cruelty of his nature” (*morum tamen inmanitate vastissimas vincit beluas*, 2.48). Sallust describes the moral degeneration and lawlessness of Sulla’s army after he seized control of the State as *foeda crudeliaque in civis facinora* (“foul and unfeeling crimes against citizens,” *Cat.* 11.4; cf. *Cat.* 52.35), citing this as the beginning of licentiousness and debauchery in the Roman army (*Cat.* 11.6: *ibi primum insuevit exercitus populi Romani...*). Cicero, defending Sulla’s nephew Publius Sulla against charges of participation in the Second Catilinarian Conspiracy, declares to the judges that his client would gladly forsake the light of day “if you would release him from the foul imputation of this most odious crime” (*libenter reddiderit adempta ignominia foedissimi criminis*, *Pro Sulla* 32.90)¹²⁴. While the moral censure inherent in this adjective would most typically have referred to the foulness of breaking a treaty, Lucretius, as I show in the following section, directs it instead against the ritual striking of one.

Foede Occisa

Lucretius was almost certainly aware of the etymological link between *foedus* (n.) and *foedus* (adj.). In typical Lucretian fashion, however, he reconstructs the linguistic connection between the two words to further support his polemic against religion. In his Epicurean universe, *foedus* (n.) can still be traced to the fetial rite and the ritual slaughter

¹²⁴ Trans. Yonge 1856.

of the piglet, but what is *foede* about this sacrifice is that it was performed in the name of *religio* and *superstitio*, contrary to *vera ratio* or true reason. Recall that Lucretius is following in the footsteps of Epicurus, who saved mankind from the tyranny of religion “when man’s life lay for all to see fouly (*foede*) grovelling upon the ground, crushed beneath the weight of Superstition” (*humana ante oculos foede cum vita iaceret / in terris oppressa gravi sub religione*, 1.62-63). The true horror of the fetial rite is revealed when superimposed onto the Iphigenia passage, an identification encouraged by Lucretius’ use of *foede* for the manner in which Iphigenia’s blood defiles the altar at Aulis (1.85), and the generic nature of his depiction, which could reasonably be adapted to describe any ritual sacrifice. The sacrifice is performed by the “chosen (*delecti*) leaders of the Danaï” (1.86) just as the fetial priest and his *pater patratus* counterpart are chosen by the king (*rex*), the victim (*hostia*) is described as *casta* (‘clean’) in *DRN* and synonymously as *puri* (‘pure’) and *sacres* (‘sacred’) in *De Re Rustica* (2.4), in both situations the victim is *muta* (‘mute’, 1.92), albeit for different reasons, and prior to the actual sacrifice in each case the victim must be “uplifted by the hands of men, all trembling...brought to the altar” (*DRN* 1.95). The fetial victim is killed “fouly” (*foede*) while Iphigenia is, to use Bailey’s suggestion, “unholily massacred” (*inceste...concideret*, 1.98-99) (1963: 615). Lucretius’ emphasis on Iphigenia as a young maiden “at the very age of wedlock” (*nubendi tempore in ipso*, 1.98) and his use of ambiguous words pertaining both to wedding and sacrifice (e.g., *sublata*, *tremibunda*, *deducta*, Smith 1992: 10; Bailey 1963: 614-15), along with the standard practice of the ancients of calling human maidens of marriageable age “piglets” (χοῖρος, *porcus*)¹²⁵ (e.g., Varro, *De Re Rust.* 2.4), further blurs the line between *hostia* and human.

¹²⁵ Paradoxically, the word for a chaste young virgin doubled as crude slang for a young girl’s genitals (Henderson 1975: 131; cf. the Megarian scene at *Acharnians* 718ff.; Varro *De Re Rust.* 2.4). Prostitutes were thus called χοιροπῳλῆαι, “piggy-merchants”, and men who made use of prostitutes were nicknamed χορόλιψ, or “piggy-squeezer” (Henderson 1975: 132). The two contradictory meanings for *choeron* and *porcus* add a sense of ambiguity and dissonance, similar to the dual meanings of *foedus* (treaty) and *foedus* (foul).

Within *DRN* the identification of Iphigenia and sacrificial animals is encouraged by the repetition of *concidere* ('fall down, collapse, are slain') and *mactatus* ('slain, sacrificed') at 1.99 (*conclideret mactatu maesta parentis*, "sorrowfully slain by the hand of a parent") and 2.353 (*mactatus concidit aras*, "slain he falls before the altars"). Exiles "stained with some disgraceful charge" (*foedati crimine turpi*) sacrifice cattle (*nigras mactant pecudes*), pray to their ancestors, "and in their bitter days direct their minds far more eagerly to superstition" (*in rebus acerbis / acrius advertunt animos ad religionem*) (3.48-54). *Mactatus* also reappears at 5.1339 (*male mactae*) and connects the senselessness of animal slaughter in war with the folly of superstitious sacrifice (Segal 1990: 205-206). *Maesti* at 4.1236 ironically recalls the Iphigenia scene (1.89: *maestum simul ante aras adstare parentem*, "her father standing sorrowful before the altar"; 1.99, above), as men "sorrowfully sprinkling their altars with much blood and making them burn with offerings" (*et multo sanguine maesti / conspergunt aras adolentque altaria donis*, 4.1236-37) pray in vain (*nequiquam*, 4.1239) for children. Lucretius' Iphigenia thus becomes the fetal *porcus* (and vice versa) as *religio* and *superstitio* strip her of her humanity. This conflation of Iphigenia and the sacrificial *porca* suggests that Lucretius viewed the religiously-sanctioned murder of helpless animals, "entrusted to our protection, which remain, commended to us because of their usefulness" (*nobis ex utilitate sua quae / commendata manent, tutelae tradita nostrae*, 5.860-61), as no less dishonourable than the murder of human children.

Lucretius envisions a long-standing and mutually advantageous partnership between humans and "beasts of burden, woolly sheep also, and horned breeds of oxen" (5.865-67), in which animals ill-suited to survival in the wild barter their usefulness for care and protection (5.873-74). To sacrifice them to indifferent gods is criminal and a violation of the compact between beasts and humans, just as to sacrifice one's daughter is a violation of familial bonds and trust. It can hardly be mere coincidence that Lucretius uses the same term, *commendare* ('to commit to one for

preservation, protection; to entrust to one's care'), to describe the terms of these initial partnerships between humans and animals (5.860-61: *nobis ex utilitate sua quae / commendata manent, tutelae tradita nostrae*, "commended to us because of their usefulness"), and humans and humans (5.1021: *et pueros commendarunt muliebreque saeculum*, "and asked protection for their children and womankind").¹²⁶ The adjective attached to the sheep in Lucretius' account of the survival of species, *lanigeraeque* ('woolly'), further highlights the similarities between humans and animals: no longer able to endure the rigors of nature on their own, humans, clad in the pelts and furs of animals, have literally become "soft" and "woolly". Recall that Lucretius explicitly associates softness (*mollitia*) with created bodies in his argument against sensation in atoms (2.902-906), explaining that those who suppose atoms to have sensation "[make them mortal] in making them soft (*mollia cum faciunt*). For all sensation is bound up with flesh, sinews, veins, all of which we see to be soft (*mollia*), and therefore to be concretions consisting of mortal substance (*mortali consistere corpora creta*)" (2.904-906). Atoms, on the other hand, being perfectly solid, are immortal (see p. 80n.87, above). Animals and humans on the other hand, by virtue of their *mollitia*, share membership in a different class of things in the world.¹²⁷

Human or animal sacrifices are appalling not only because they violate the pact of protection, but because they do so needlessly and irrationally. Childless couples sacrifice animals to sway the gods to their cause (4.1233-38), Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter to placate an angry goddess (1.80-101), followers of the Magna Mater create eunuchs for her out of men "who have violated the majesty of the Mother" (*numen qui violarint / Matris*) (2.614-17). During the fetal rite the gods are called upon to witness and ratify a treaty and a piglet is sacrificed as a kind of "sympathetic magic" which expresses the

¹²⁶ Cf. *Fin.* 3.63, in which Cicero explains the Stoic process of *oikeiosis* by *commendatio*.

¹²⁷ Cf. David Konstan's astute observation regarding the bereaved cow in Book Two: "It is not that the cow, in this instance, is humanized; it is rather that she, and all advanced animals, are susceptible to a response that is common to human beings as well" (2013: 201).

hope that any violators of the treaty will be destroyed as completely as the sacrificial piglet (Wiedemann 1986: 479; cf. *AUC* 1.24.8; Isidorus *Etym.* 28.11).¹²⁸ But, “It is all vanity that they weary the gods’ power and magic lots” (*nequiquam divom numen sortisque fatigant*, 4.1239) with sacrifices and prayers, Lucretius writes, for divinity “is neither propitiated with services nor touched by wrath” (*nec bene promeritis capitur neque tangitur ira*, 1.49 = 2.651). Ritual sacrifices therefore do nothing but harm innocent victims and perpetuate futile and ultimately destructive patterns of thought and behaviour.

It is telling that *foedus* appears in its adjectival or adverbial forms in *DRN* mainly in connection with *religio* and *superstitio* or other human practices and behaviours of which Lucretius disapproves.¹²⁹ Thus the altar was “foully (*foede*) defiled by the blood of Iphigenia” (1.85), lovers are victims of a “foul love” (*foedo amore*, 4.1158), people tremble in fear during thunder and lightning storms, believing that the gods will punish them “for some base deed or proud word (*foede dictumve*)” (5.1224), and battles result in the “tearing of limbs and polluting (*foedareque*) of bodies with blood” (4.844). The swift darkening of the sky during a sudden storm is a possible exception, but the proximity of *foede* to the superstitious fancy expressed in the subsequent lines is suggestive¹³⁰:

Besides, when the weather has but now been of the clearest, all of a sudden the sky becomes ugly and turbid, so that you might think all the darkness has deserted Acheron from all sides and filled full the great caverns of the sky: so completely has the loathsome night of clouds gathered together, and black faces of fear hang over us on high. (4.168-73)

*praeterea modo cum fuerit liquidissima caeli
tempestas, perquam subito fit turbida foede,
undique uti tenebras omnis Acherunta rearis
liquisse et magnas caeli complexesse cavernas:
usque adeo taetra nimborum nocte coorta
inpendent atrae formidinis ora superne.*

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¹²⁸ Wiedemann actually uses the term “sympathetic magic” in reference to the ritual of *rerum repetitio* but it applies equally well to the fetial ceremony as well (cf. *AUC* 1.24.8).

¹²⁹ *Foedus* (foul) appears nine times in various forms throughout *DRN*, compared to *foedus* (treaty), which appears thirteen times. Of the former, seven out of the nine times it appears occur in close proximity to superstitious or harmful human beliefs and practices (1.62, 1.85, 3.49, 4.169, 4.844, 4.1158, 5.1224).

¹³⁰ Cf. Gale, who likens the *atrae formidinis ora* of 4.174 looming over us to the “demonic figure of *religio*” in 1.62ff. (1994: 186).

The repeated correlation of *foedus* ('foul') with unEpicurean attitudes or behaviours, especially within the context of sacrifice or *religio*, conditions the reader to associate *foedus* ('foul') negatively with its more psychological or moralistic, rather than physical, meanings. Then, when the etymological explanation for *foedus* ('treaty') is reconsidered, although *foede occisa* or "killed foully" can reasonably refer to either the physical goriness of the method used or to the immorality of the sacrifice in general, the latter interpretation is more immediately perceived and accepted.¹³¹ Instead of the fetial rite conferring validation and approval upon Roman *foedera*, then, it exposes them as fundamentally flawed and immoral, founded upon irrational and harmful false beliefs.

Far from representing sacredness and piety, then, Roman *foedera* profane the true nature of divinity and result in harm and waste. The gods are "far removed and separated from our affairs...neither propitiated with services nor touched by wrath" (1.46-49), and any suggestion otherwise is impious not because it offends the gods, but because it creates pain and suffering for the hapless believer (5.1194-1203). Roman *foedera*, rooted in imperialistic ambition and excessive desires, ratified through irrational and impious sacrifices, and justified through false claims of divine favour, are exposed as empty and founded on ethical delusion. The *foedera naturae*, on the other hand, existing eternally and universally valid, are by contrast inviolate and immune to moral valuation or consideration. As eternal laws of nature they were not set in place by some divine craftsman and, because atomic particles are unthinking and come together by chance, no intentional ceremony of joining like the human fetial rite occurs prior to the formation of *concilia*. Furthermore, the Epicurean universe is strictly mechanistic and amoral, with no ultimate good or evil. Unlike the Stoic cosmopolis which runs according to divine providence, the Epicurean universe simply is and exists. As Lucretius emphatically points out, "the nature of the universe has by no means been made for us through divine

¹³¹ I say "reasonably" here because although most accounts of the etymological roots of *foedus* suggest the more physical meaning of *foede* (e.g., Servius *ad Aen.* 1.62: *a porca foede, hoc est lapidibus occisa*, "treaty has been said to be derived from...a pig slaughtered foully, that is, with stones"), the addition of *crudeliter* ("cruelly") in both Isidorus (*Etym.* 28.11) and Servius (*ad Aen.* 8.641) (*foede et crudeliter occisa*) encourages a more psychological reading of *foede*.

power: so great are the faults it stands endowed with” (*nequaquam nobis divinitus esse creatam / naturam mundi: tanta stat praedita culpa*, 2.180-81; cf. 5.195-234). Piety is a human construct and describes an attitude of serenity, or *placata posse omnia mente tueri* (5.1203). Lucretius thus retains the suggestion of moral failing and corruption suggested by *foedus* discussed above, but redirects it so it applies only to faulty human rituals such as the fetial rite, and the irrational and harmful motivations behind them.

Human *Foedera* and Lucretius’ Anthropology, Revisited¹³²

Having made his point regarding the immorality of the Roman fetial sacrifice, Lucretius then presents an improved version of human *foedera* in his Anthropology in Book Five, one that has been sanitized of its destructive and irrational elements. These corrected human *foedera*, untainted by religious and superstitious influences, are practical, businesslike arrangements cooperatively established for communal benefit and security (5.1019-23, 1145-50). Interestingly, *foedus* in the context of human compacts occurs only in the most general terms in *DRN*: the majority of people “kept the covenant unblemished” (*servabat foedera caste*) or the human race would not have survived (5.1024-27), laws and the threat of punishment discourage those who “violate the bonds of the common peace” (*violat factis communia foedera pacis*, 5.1155), and “men had already allies and friends under formal treaty” (*auxilia ac socios iam pacto foedere habebant*, 5.1443). Inchoate *foedera* are never designated *foedera*; instead, “neighbours began to join friendship amongst themselves” (5.1019-20: *amicitiam coeperunt iungere...*), then magistrates were created to establish law (*iura*) and statutes (*leges*) (5.1143-44). The similarities between these sanitized human *foedera* and the *foedera naturae* – and between human and atomic behaviour – are clear: once humans have joined together (*iungere*) and built (*constituere*) or created (*creare*) a union (*concilium*) with one another, they either abide by the covenant (*servabat foedera*; *sponte sua cecidit*

¹³² This section concentrates on the relationship between *religio* and human *foedera* as reconstructed by Lucretius. For a summary of the evolution of human *foedera* in Lucretius’ Anthropology, see Chapter 2, above.

sub leges artaque iura, 5.1147) in concord (*concordia*) or violate it and are destroyed (*peremptum*, 5.1026). The terms of the *foedera* are strict (*sub leges artaque iura*, 5.1147) but fair (*legibus aequis*, 5.1149) and apply to *genus humanum* (5.1026, 1145). For the most part human *foedera* amount to the universal agreement *nec laedere nec violari* (5.1020; cf. *KD* 31-33, 36), tempered by the more altruistic sentiment that “it was right for all to pity the weak” (*imbecillorum esse aequum misererier omnis*, 5.1023). Later, as humans become more sophisticated in their technology and social hierarchy, the recognition of the necessity of limits gives rise to law and statutes.

Although these human *foedera* do not result in permanent peace and security, they are an Epicurean idealization because they reflect the true nature of humans and, more generally, the universe. There is no “happily ever after” in the Epicurean world, only the cyclical process of generation and decay. Similarly, Lucretius rejects an easy primitivist/progressivist conceptualization of history, sometimes portraying primitive man as existing in a kind of Golden Age uncorrupted by technology and greed (e.g., 5.937-52), while at other times lauding the intellectual advances of later generations (5.1448-57). Both pre-social and social life have both commendable and deplorable aspects but absolute valuations such as those demanded by the traditional primitivist/progressivist interpretations of history have no place in the anti-teleological Epicurean universe (cf. Campbell 2003: 10-12).¹³³ Schiesaro explains this point succinctly: “since it obeys no predefined plan, ‘progress’ is inherently ambivalent: over time human life on earth improves in certain respects while worsening in others; the ultimate goal of *ataraxia* is at times closer or more elusive” (2007: 43).

Likewise and importantly, although Lucretius condemns *religio* for engendering such a degree of human misery (5.1194-97), he here refrains from an easy and no doubt

¹³³ For further discussion about primitivist and progressivist elements in *DRN*, see Campbell 2003, Furley 2007, Blickman 1989, or Taylor 1947.

attractive oversimplification of organized religion as the source of *all* mankind's woes.¹³⁴ His Invocation to Venus in Book One proves that not everything connected to religion is ugly (Clay 1983: 232), and even Epicurus advised his followers to "sacrifice piously and rightly where it is customary" (Frg. 57 = Usener 387; cf. *Vit. Ep.* 10.5).¹³⁵ The invention of organized religion does not occur until relatively late in Lucretius' Anthropology (5.1183-93: religious misconceptions; 1194-1240: problems of religious misconceptions), after the section on the rise and fall of cities and the creation of law to bring order and to punish those "whose deeds violate the bonds of the common peace" (5.1155, quoted above) (5.1105-60). Even if Lucretius breaks chronology here (like he does at 5.1241-1457), his use of *urbis* (5.1162; Blickman 1989: 3n.3) and his aetiology of language as emerging from the first cooperative attempts of humans (5.1022: *vocibus et gestu cum balbe significarent*; 5.1028-90) indicate that the very first human *foedera*, at least, predate organized religion. Lucretius gives no indication that pre-social man, occupied as he was with more pragmatic concerns of survival amongst feral beasts (5.982-87), entertained religious or superstitious beliefs at all despite the fact that, as Blickman points out, "The earliest human beings ought to have been able to perceive the gods just as well as their descendants" (1989: 158). Even if they had been able to perceive the gods or engage in abstract thought, however, the lack of a common language prevented primitive man from being able to vocalize and share such thoughts with others.

Even without organized religion, *ambitio*, greed and fear plague human minds and spur them into fruitless and never-ending struggles for power and wealth (5.1120-35; cf. 3.59-86), until widespread anarchy and chaos again overcome the harmony of human

¹³⁴ The vitriol against *religio* and *superstitio* that is found elsewhere in *DRN* is slightly tempered by the order of technological advancement in the Anthropology, which allows the underlying cause of ignorance of limits to be addressed separately from religious issues. Notice that Lucretius has here reversed the order of his Book Three diatribe against *ambitio* and *superstitio*, placing the section against *religio* and *superstitio* (3.37-54) after his critique of *ambitio* (3.59-84) instead of before.

¹³⁵ Bailey suggests that Epicurus conceived of prayer for the Epicurean as a kind of communion with the *simulacra* of the gods entering the mind of the worshipper, whereby some measure of *ataraxia* might be achieved or contemplated upon (1970: 397; cf. *DRN* 6.68ff.).

foedera (5.1136-42). Lucretius describes the emergent belief in powerful gods as “a new anxious care awakening” (*cura / illa quoque expergefactum caput erigere inquit*, 5.1207-08), afflicting “hearts already crushed with other woes” (*tunc aliis oppressa malis in pectora*, 5.1207). Furley perceptively draws attention to the importance of this line. He writes (2007: 174-75):

It is not just otiose description, but states the cause of superstitious belief: if the mind is not at peace but oppressed already by other anxieties (i.e. other than superstitious fear), then this fear too begins to raise its head...For if the mind is in doubt, lack of a true philosophy of nature (*rationis egestas*) – the source of this doubt – makes one wonder whether after all the (Epicurean) theory of the mortality of the world must be wrong and the (Platonic-Aristotelian) theory of an everlasting cosmos maintained by divine powers may be right.

In other words, if the mind lacks certainty as to the true nature of things, it will be more susceptible to superstitious accounts, particularly if such accounts offer a measure of power through making sacrifices or offering prayers. It is seductive to think that if you pray to the gods and offer them sacrifices, things will go better for you. People do not want to know that they are helpless before the forces of nature, and they do not want to think that there is no divine justice in the world. It is far more appealing to believe that by saying the correct words and performing rituals you can exert positive force on the world.

Religio and *superstitio* are thus symptoms of the greater problem of ignorance. Although they are destructive and perpetuate ignorance and harmful modes of behaviour and thought, it is ultimately ignorance that nature is limited that is the root of human anxiety. As Lucretius writes, fear of natural events keeps humans “crushed to the earth, because their ignorance of causes compels them to refer events to the dominion of the gods, and to yield them the place of kings” (*depressosque premunt ad terram propterea quod / ignorantia causarum conferre deorum / cogit ad imperium res et concedere regnum*, 6.53-55; cf. 1.151-54, KD 12). When people are ignorant as to the limits of things in the world, Lucretius writes, “so they are all the more driven astray by blind reasoning” (*quo magis errantes caeca ratione feruntur*, 6.67). Epicurus saved mankind not only by putting a limit on desire and fear, but also by pointing the way, “that strait and

narrow path by which we might run thither without turning” (6.27-28). In Lucretius’ Epicurean idealization of human social history, this acknowledgment and delineation of limits is a precondition for a successful community. Thus, the creation of human *foedera* occurs only after a chaotic period of violence and excess followed by a collective weariness of competition (5.1017: *inminuit viris*; 5.1145: *defessum*; 5.1150: *pertaesum*) and a communal willingness (5.1019: *aventes*; 5.1146-47: *sponte sua cecidit*) to live by newly defined limits.¹³⁶

Foedera and Fides

Unlike the falsely conceived divinely sanctioned *foedera* of Lucretius’ Roman audience, these sanitized human *foedera*, as human inventions with no real bearing on the natural world, openly rely only on mutual faith and trust coupled with the threat of punishment. This is what Roman *foedera* also depend upon for their success, but religious accruments hide the truth. It is therefore tempting to suggest that Lucretius thus follows an alternate etymology of *foedus*, one which concentrates on the *fides* of the fetial rite rather than on the foulness of the sacrifice. *Fides* roughly translated means “faith, trust, confidence, credence, guarantee,” or “that which produces confidence or belief” (*Lewis & Short*). It belonged to the *mos maiorum*, played a crucial role in Roman social and international relations and frequently constituted a moral or sacral obligation. Catullus makes *pietas* contingent upon *nec sanctam violasse fidem, nec foedere nullo / divum ad fallendos numine abusum homines* (“he has not transgressed the sacred faith, and in no treaty has he misused the power of the gods for deceiving men,” 76.2-4)¹³⁷ and, in another poem, warns a faithless friend that the gods will make him regret his lack of

¹³⁶ It is likely that Lucretius viewed the current instability of the Roman Republic and its recent civil wars as indicative of a society on the brink of collapse. His anthropological theory thus generally anticipated Octavian’s later stabilization of society through the creation of new laws and freshly defined limits, and the even later collapse of the Roman Empire.

¹³⁷ My translation; Latin text from U.K. Vestal 2003.

fides (30.11-12).¹³⁸ To strike a *foedus* is to pledge one's *fides*, unreservedly, even to one's enemy (Cicero *Off.* 3.111), and "in undertaking, carrying on, and ending a war, justice and good faith shall be supreme (*ius ut plurimum valeret et fides*)" (Cic. *Leg.* 2.34). Ennius highlights the close connection between *foedus* and *fides* with the line: *accipe daque fidem foedusque feri bene firmum* ("Give and receive *fides*, and strike a quite-firm *foedus*," *Ann.* 32 [Skutsch])¹³⁹, as does Cicero when he states that *foedus frangere* is the inverse of *in fide manere* (*Dom.* 66; cf. Freyburger 1983: 82; Gladhill 2008: 22).¹⁴⁰

Festus traces the etymology of *foedus* as *ab eo, quod in paciscendo foede hostia necaretur...vel quia in foedere interponatur fides* ("Foedus is named from this, because the victim is killed foully during the promising...or because *fides* has been pledged in the treaty", 75.3-6 [Lindsay]; cf. Servius *ad Aen.* 8.641: *Cicero foedera a fide putat dicta*). Isidorus of Seville, just prior to explaining the *foedus/foede* etymology mentioned above, derives 'treaty' "either from *fides* or from *fetiales*, that is from the college of priests. For treaties happen through them, just as wars happen through secular agents" (28.11).¹⁴¹ Varro, on the other hand, reverses this derivation, explaining that the *fetiales* are named for their role as makers of *foedera* (*Ling. Lat.* 5.86):

... because they were in charge of the state's word of honour in matters between peoples; for by them it was brought about that a war that was declared should be a just war, and by them the war was stopped, that by a *foedus* the *fides* of the peace might be established...and by them even now is made the *foedus*, which Ennius writes was pronounced *fidus*.¹⁴²

quod fidei publicae inter populos praeerant: nam per hos fiebat ut iustum conciperetur bellum, et inde desitum, ut f<o>edere fides pacis constitueretur...et per hos etiam nunc fit foedus, quod fidus Ennius scribit dictum.

¹³⁸ See also Ariadne's lament at Catullus 64.132-201, where she calls upon the Furies and the honour of the gods (*caelestumque fidem*, 191) to avenge her and punish *perfidus* Theseus for his broken promises and perjuries (*periuria*: 135, 148).

¹³⁹ Trans. Shearin 2007: 68.

¹⁴⁰ For an extremely thorough study of the relationship between *fides* and *foedus*, see Freyburger's *Fides: Étude sémantique et religieuse depuis les origines jusqu'à l'époque augustéenne* (1983).

¹⁴¹ *Etym.* 28.11: *Foedus est pax quae fit inter dimicantes, vel a fide, vel a fetialibus, id est sacerdotibus, dictum. per ipsos enim fiebant foedera, sicut per saeculares bella. alii foedera dicta putant a porca foede et crudeliter occisa...*

¹⁴² Trans. Kent 1938, Loeb.

Lucretius does follow the *fides* etymology of *foedus* but only to a certain point. The success of his human *foedera* depends on everyone keeping faith and abiding by their word *nec laedere nec violari*, but humans are motivated by the very real threat of legal consequences, fear of being found out, and, in the event of widespread violation of the compact, violence, anarchy, and the destruction of the human race. Divine punishment or retribution have nothing to do with keeping faith and do not even figure into the decision-making process. Instead, *fides* in *DRN* is the sole provenance of the senses and sense perceptions, and whatever truths are founded on these (4.478-83, 500-10; Minyard 1985: 50-51). *Fida canum* or the faithful hounds (5.864, 6.1222) are the only exception, and their *fides* to humans results in an early death during times of pestilence (6.1222-24). All other mentions of *fides* occur within the context of *ratio* (1.52, 501; 2.479 = 523; 5.102, 104), the senses (1.423; 4.463, 480, 482, 498, 505), or nature (5.864, 1040; 6.1222). Lucretius gifts his teachings to his reader “with faithful solicitude” (*studio fideli*, 1.52), offering to provide “many another proof besides...to scrape together credit (*fidem*) for my doctrines” (*multaque praeterea tibi possum commemorando / argumenta fidem dictis conradere nostris*, 1.400-401). He expresses the hope that “my words will perhaps win credit (*fidem*) by plain facts” (*dictis dabit ipsa fidem res / forsitan*, 5.104-105), and warns his reader to guard against the many things “which all try as it were to break the credit (*fidem*) of the senses” (*quae violare fidem quasi sensibus omnia quaerunt*, 4.463). This is vanity, however, Lucretius writes, for:

You will find that it is from the senses in the first instance that the concept of truth has come, and that the senses cannot be refuted. For some standard must be found of greater credit, able of itself to refute false things by true. What, moreover, must be held to be of greater credit than the senses? (4.478-83)

*invenies primis ab sensibus esse creatam
notitiam veri neque sensus posse refelli.
nam maiore fide debet reperiri illud,
sponte sua veris quod possit vincere falsa.
quid maiore fide porro quam sensus haberi
debet?*

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Fides is still of utmost importance to living well in *DRN* but its source is no longer found in social interactions and relationships, but in nature (Minyard 1985: 50). As with his

appropriation of the epic genre, then, Lucretius corrects and reformulates the foundations of traditional Roman culture to present a more productive, truer portrayal of reality.

Part II: *Foedus* and *Foeditas*

The *Foeditas* Around Us

In Part I of this chapter I showed how Lucretius takes advantage of the etymological roots of *foedus* to challenge the morality of Roman fetial rites – and so religious rituals and beliefs in general – as part of his polemic against destructive human practices based on false and superstitious beliefs. Through skillfully woven discourse Lucretius directs the moral censure associated with the adjective *foedus* solely at *religio* and *superstitio*; his Epicurean *foedera naturae*, as necessary laws of nature in an unthinking physical universe, are impervious to such charges of immorality and irrationality. In his Epicurean interpretation of human social history Lucretius shows human *foedera* also cleansed of the *foeditas* of ritual sacrifice and false beliefs. This remaking of history provides a glimpse of a world in which *religio* and *superstitio* play only relatively minor roles in human decision-making and offers a model for Lucretius' audience to emulate. In this next section I will concentrate on the physical meaning of *foedus* (adj.) and its centrality to Epicureanism as a whole.

As we saw in Chapter 1 (p. 20) *foedus*, when referring to the physical, is an especially visceral adjective suggesting decomposition or decay and denoting that which repulses or offends the senses. It is closely associated with the adjectives *deformis* (“misshapen, deformed, unsightly, ugly, odious, disgusting, base”) and *turpis* (“ugly, unsightly, unseemly, foul, filthy”), as well as the noun *foeditas* (“foulness, filthiness, horridness, hideousness, ugliness, deformity”) (*Lewis & Short*). What is *foedus* is not necessarily bad, however; a thing might be loathsome or detestable, but useful as well. Thus, Pliny the Elder calls the bug *animalis foedissimi et dictu quoque fastidiendi*, “a most filthy creature, and one the very name of which inspires us with loathing” (29.17.61). Nonetheless, he writes, remedies derived from insects do provide

relief from poisonous snake bites and act as a preservative against many poisons (*contra venena omnia*, 29.17.61).

In the following sections I will argue that just as Lucretius exploits the moral connotations of *foedus* as part of his polemic against *religio* and *superstitio*, so he takes advantage of the physicality inherent in the term to enrich his therapeutic philosophical message. In Chapter 2 I discussed at length the constancy of birth and death in the natural world and the necessity of each in the endless cycle of growth and decay. Nothing exists forever except the atomic particles which engage in constant warfare with one another, sometimes cooperating towards a unified purpose, sometimes besieging and destroying the cooperative ventures of others. Death and decay are processes of nature as necessary and important as birth and growth are; in fact, they are simply different sides of the same coin. It is significant that the term Lucretius places at the centre of his Epicurean world-system was originally named for the violent and gory death which formalized conventional Roman *foedera*. The ritual bludgeoning to death of the sacrificial piglet – we can almost see the *pater patratus* literally breaking it up into its constituent parts – symbolically created a new union of peoples cooperating towards a common purpose and governed by certain rules and obligations.¹⁴³ In the Roman world warfare, death and destruction precede peace and harmony, which when dissolved lead again into fighting and violence and the attendant *foeditas* of the battlefield. At the atomic level as well chaos and violence precede the harmony and order established by the *foedera naturae* and, when the concord of the *concilium* breaks down, confusion and turmoil again result. Thus, by choosing *foedus* to represent the natural laws which govern and guide all atomic compounds in the world, Lucretius is also choosing a word which stands for both destruction and cooperation. The etymological link to *foede*

¹⁴³ The concept of the ritual bludgeoning to death of a piglet as necessary for peace and generation calls to mind the *bougonia* of Virgil's *Georgics* 4.281ff and 4.554ff, which frames the Aristaeus-Orpheus tales. The *bougonia* was a ritual through which bees (symbols of order) were spontaneously generated from the rotting carcass of a bullock whose nostrils and mouth were stopped up, "then he is beaten to death, and his flesh is pounded to a pulp through the unbroken hide" (*Georg.* 4.300-302). This ritual also appears in Varro (*De Re Rust.* 3.16.4), Callimachus, Philetos, Nicander, Antigonos of Korystos, and Herodotus (2.41, 5.114).

provides a subtle reminder that at the core of the *foedera naturae* and therefore of nature itself lie death and destruction. Literally, *foedus naturae* means both the “treaty of nature” and the “loathsome of nature.”

To the unenlightened person, nature contains much that is ugly and distressing. Natural disasters are alarming and frequently destructive, whereas natural bodily processes like digestion, mating or giving birth can be quite messy or even disgusting. Death and decay are particularly distressing to us and Lucretius identifies the fear of death as the source of all anxieties (3.37-86, 1076-77).¹⁴⁴ Dying offends both by providing proof of one’s mortality and by the actual decomposition process, which is smelly, maggoty and altogether unpleasant. On the one hand, we erroneously believe we can stave off death or suffering by the acquisition of power or wealth (3.59-79) and on the other hand, we waste our lives catering to the whimsies of priests and false gods for fear of everlasting punishment after death (1.107-11). It is natural to fear death, Lucretius concedes, “for whoever is born must wish to remain in life, so long as soothing pleasure shall keep him there” (*natus enim debet quicumque est velle manere / in vita, donec retinebit blanda voluptas*, 5.177-78). Ultimately, however, “there is an end fixed for the life of mortals, and death cannot be avoided, but die we must” (*certa quidem finis vitae mortalibus adstat, / nec devitari letum pote quin obeamus*, 3.1078-79). This is an incontrovertible fact of life but it need not be a cause for despair; rather, to quote one of the most famous lines of *DRN*, “death is nothing to us, it matters not one jot” (*nil igitur mors est ad nos neque pertinent hilum*, 3.830). A large part of Lucretius’ therapeutic programme attempts to alleviate fear and anxiety by proving this very point, and one cannot achieve sage status until death’s reality can be viewed with equanimity.

Another particularly harsh truth that the Epicurean acolyte must accept is nature’s indifference to individuals. In a recent article, Lehoux argues for a dual understanding of

¹⁴⁴ Cf. *Ep. Men.* 125: “death is the most terrifying of evils (φρικωδέστατον τῶν κακῶν).”

the adjective *caecus* as a descriptor of atoms or atomic motion (e.g., 1.1110: *primordia caeca*; 2.129: *plagis caecis*; 2.714-15: *caecis corporibus*) (2013: 147-51). He suggests that although the standard reading of *caecus* captures the quality of being unseen or invisible (see e.g., Bailey 1963: 792), translating it as “blind” as well captures a crucial moral point about atoms, namely, their moral neutrality and the “intentional and teleological emptiness of the universe” (2013: 148). Lucretius’ description of the atoms as ‘blind’ thus emphasizes, in Lehoux’s words, “the way atoms follow laws of motion unflinchingly, disinterestedly, utterly passively. Sight thus once again is a metonym for interest” (2013: 147). Lucretius recognizes that the idea of an autonomous, anti-teleological universe in which death is both inevitable for all created things and absolute for each individual is a terrifying concept for many, especially when it turns out that humans do not hold an exalted place in the universe after all, and in fact do not in any way matter in the grand scheme of things. Epicureanism lacks the comradery and sense of belonging as citizens in a divinely ordered cosmopolis that teleological systems such as Stoicism provide (e.g., *Leg.* 1.23), instead making each individual responsible for finding his or her own meaning in life. As Lucretius acknowledges, “this doctrine commonly seems somewhat harsh (*tristior*) to those who have not used it (*quibus non est tractata*), and the people shrink back from it (*volgus abhorret*)” (1.943-950). Although he prophesizes that his reader will turn back to organized religion in fear (1.102-103), he also entreats his reader to “forbear then to be dismayed by mere novelty and to spew out reason from your mind, but rather ponder it with keen judgement” (*desine quapropter novitate exterritus ipsa / expuere ex animo rationem, sed magis acri / iudicio perpende*, 2.1040-43).

Lucretius explains that Epicurus’ teachings were motivated by his discovery of man as a flawed vessel that “befouled, as one may say, with a noisome flavour everything that it received, as soon as it came in” (*partim quod taetro quasi conspurcare sapore /*

omnia cernebat, quaecumque receperat, intus, 6.22-23) (6.9-34).¹⁴⁵ This pollution originates from *superstitio* and false beliefs about the world, and causes us to view natural processes and phenomena as evil and terrifying. In such a frightening world, it is comforting to believe in a higher power we can pray to or propitiate in order to bring about changes in the world that benefit us. If physical or mental suffering is a punishment and plagues, natural disasters and injuries are attributed to divine retribution or whim, there is a possibility we can stave off such evils through prayer and sacrifice. When bad things happen, we take solace in the knowledge that it is all part of a cosmic plan and that “things happen for a reason.” People are reassured by divine providence, despite what the Epicureans consider overwhelming evidence to the contrary (2.180-81, 1101-104; 5.195-221; 6.387-422). In fact, Lucretius writes, compared to other animals, for whom “the earth herself brings forth all they want in abundance” (*quando omnibus omnia large / tellus ipsa parit*, 5.233-34), humans seem the least naturally protected and provisioned for (5.223-25) (Bailey 1963: 1354; Holmes 2013: 154-58). The helplessness of the human infant “in need of every vital support” (*indigus omni / vitali auxilio*, 5.223-24), the labour required to wrest sustenance from uncooperative fields – only a third of which contain arable soil (5.206-17) – and the infinite opportunities for untimely death (5.218-21) all reject the possibility of an anthropocentric teleological universe – and yet people persist in believing in divine providence.¹⁴⁶

It is just this conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs that causes so much distress and uncertainty; only when our beliefs of the world coincide seamlessly with our observations of the world is *ataraxia* possible. The true Epicurean, therefore, recognizes that what seems “foul” or evil is not actually so, and only looks that

¹⁴⁵ Lucretius here inverts the conventional understanding of the soul as trapped in a bodily prison which distorts and corrupts its thoughts, hiding its true form under flawed layers of matter. Instead, it is the material(ist) truth that is hidden and distorted by false beliefs.

¹⁴⁶ See Holmes 2013 (esp. pp.157ff.) for an interesting discussion on how Lucretius strategically sidesteps the question of how human evolution managed to succeed despite our unusual – even extreme – vulnerability in such an anti-teleological world.

way from an ignorant, egocentric point of view. Thus the weary farmer at the end of Book Two blames the impiety of his peers and the corruption of his time for the failing crops, not comprehending that all things gradually decay and that the earth, so fruitful in his ancestors' time, has become exhausted and worn out (2.1164-74). Similarly, Lucretius writes, "it is not the divine powers" (*nec divina numina*) that cause barrenness in men and women, it is the consistency of their seed or the incompatibility of their partner (4.1233-1262); offerings and sacrifices to the gods make no difference one way or another. The gods are separate from and untouched by human affairs, and there is no ultimate good or ultimate evil in the world.

Lucretius as Medic

Earlier in this chapter I mentioned that *foedus* ('foul') appears in *DRN* primarily in the context of questionable human practices or beliefs. The only two clear exceptions take place in Book Two (401, 421), during a discussion on sense perceptions. At 2.398-407, Lucretius explains that the loathsome nature of wormwood (*taetra absinthii natura*), unlike the pleasant tastes of honey and milk, "twists up the mouth with a foul flavour" (*foedo pertorquent ora sapore*, 2.401) because the atomic particles of bitter things are hooked, "and are therefore accustomed to tear open their way into our senses and to break the texture by their intrusion" (*haec magis hamatis inter se nexa teneri / proptereaque solere vias rescindere nostris / sensibus introituque suo perrumpere corpus*, 2.405-407). Ugly things likewise "seem terrible and vile" (*foeda specie diri turpesque videntur*, 2.421) because of the roughness of their materials, whereas pleasant things are smooth (2.422-23). Different species experience the same object differently because they have differently shaped sense organs, and what is pleasant for one species may be poisonous to another (e.g., 1.809-22; 4.677-86, 706-21; 6.773-76, 970-78). It is important to note that the atomic components of the ugly or pleasant objects do not themselves exude smell, taste, colour, or any other secondary qualities (2.730-864); such properties belong to the perishable (2.859), and arise from different combinations of

variously shaped atoms (2.760-62). Thus, importantly, wormwood and other things that appear *foedus* are, at the core, not *foedus* at all, nor do they universally appear *foedus*. Lucretius emphasizes this point by distinguishing between the foul *flavour* of the wormwood (*foedo sapore*, 2.401), and the wormwood itself, *absinthia taetra* (“noisome wormwood”: 1.936, 2.400, 4.124).¹⁴⁷

Lucretius’ use of *foedus* for the foul flavour of wormwood is highly significant. He has repeatedly warned his reader that his philosophy is a bitter medicine whose harshness must be softened by the pleasant honey of sweet-sounding verse, just as a doctor will coat the rim of a cup with honey to beguile children into drinking foul-tasting potions (1.934-50, 4.11-25). Although these children have been tricked into drinking down the bitter juice of wormwood they have not been betrayed (*deceptaque non capiatur*), Lucretius assures his reader, “but rather by such means [are] restored and regain health” (*sed potius tali pacto recreata valescat*, 4.17). It is no coincidence that wormwood, which although unpleasantly bitter imparts health and well-being, is paired with *foedus*. All parts of the universe, even what seems distasteful or repulsive, must be surveyed and considered by *naturae species ratioque*, “the aspect and law” or “appearance and explanation” of nature (1.148 = 2.61, 3.93, 6.41); otherwise, Lucretius warns, we will remain as children cowering from imaginary bogeymen in the dark, enslaved and oppressed by our irrational fears (2.55-61 = 3.87-93, 6.35-41). By placing a word etymologically linked to the foul at the center of his Epicurean world-system, Lucretius reminds his audience that where there is unity and creation there is also destruction and decay and one cannot exist without the other. To fail to recognize this is to fail at being an Epicurean, just as unjustifiably choosing one explanation over another equally reasonable one is to construct a myth for oneself as irrational and harmful as

¹⁴⁷ This is not to say, of course, that the perception of foulness is incorrect, as for the Epicureans all perceptions are true. Rather, it is incorrect to assume that because we perceive the taste of wormwood as foul, the thing itself is foul or evil as well, just as it is incorrect to assume that a square building that appears round from a distance is actually so (4.500-502). Although the Epicureans accepted all sense perceptions as true, they also strenuously warned against adding false opinions to the testimony of the senses (e.g., 4.462-68).

those offered by religion (*Ep. Pyth.* 86-87). Nature has much that is *suavis* ('sweet', 'pleasant') to behold, but it also contains much that seems *foedus* ('foul') – and both of these *must* be rationally examined and understood before *ataraxia* is possible.

Distant Views

One tactic Lucretius uses to help his reader more easily come to terms with unpleasant truths is to approach natural processes from a detached or cosmic perspective. “Stinking dung” (2.872: *stercore taetro*) and putrefying corpses (3.581: *in taetro tabescat odore*; 3.584-85: *tanta mutatum putre ruina / conciderit corpus*; 3.719-20: *cadavera racenti iam viscere vermes / expirant*) are more comfortably examined from a distance, away from the stench and slime and ooze. As revolting details such as a great mass of wriggling worms surging through the swelling limbs of a decomposing body (3.718-21) disappear into indistinctness (cf. 2.315-32) they cease to trouble us and our tranquillity is preserved. Conversely, the microscopic view also serves to create distance and de-emphasize the somatic aspects of things in the world. At the atomic level, no secondary qualities exist to offend the senses, while all objects lose meaning when reduced to atomic movements and interactions. In De Lacy’s words, “the very processes which give meaning to [the perceiving subject’s] existence are, when viewed in themselves, found to be meaningless” (1957: 115). It is only when we step back and perceive the random movements and interactions of atoms as part of a greater whole, and see how these atomic *concilia* interact with other constructs in the world, that they gain meaning with respect to our lives.

Watching from afar insulates us from discomfort but also from physical danger, “with no part of yours in peril” (*tua sine parte pericli*, 2.6). Thus with Lucretius to guide us we can watch armies fight (e.g., 2.5-6; 3.642-56; 5.1297-1340), volcanoes explode (6.639-702), or cities get swallowed up by earthquakes (6.535-607) without panicking, because the violence of the event cannot harm us in our distant vantage point. We can

thus observe and contemplate nature without falling victim to the superstitious fear and awe that afflicts those actually at nature's mercy (e.g., the doomed admiral of a fleet at 5.1226-30) and, free from these distracting concerns, we are able to come to a true understanding of nature. Furthermore, viewed from the cosmic perspective, cataclysmic events such as earthquakes and tidal waves turn out not to be as catastrophic as they first appear.¹⁴⁸ In Book Six Lucretius describes the eruption of Mount Etna as "no common devastation" (*neque enim mediocri clade*, 6.641), setting fire to "all the regions of heaven" (*caeli omnia templa*, 6.644), only to immediately urge his reader to recall the immensity of the universe and how infinitesimal a single sky is in comparison, just as one man is but a tiny part of the whole earth (6.647-52).¹⁴⁹ "If you should keep this steadily before your mind," Lucretius writes, "you would cease to wonder at many things (*mirari multa relinquas*)" (6.653-54). Instead, by viewing the world from a universal perspective, we come to understand nature as process, rather than an object of fear. De Lacy summarizes the Epicurean position succinctly as follows (1964: 51):

The wrong way to look at the universe is, for Lucretius, precisely this: to look on it not as something remote and indifferent, but as involving us in a way that makes us the helpless victims, in this life and for all we know the next, of cosmic powers whose ways we cannot understand. This view of the universe, he contends, leads only to fear and desperation.

The right approach rests on the knowledge that the natural world is irrelevant. We examine it only in order to prove that it is incapable of causing fear or anxiety; we learn about atomic processes only to dismiss them.

Studying nature is crucial for happiness because fear and anxiety, which impede happiness, can only be exorcised through a rational understanding of the world (*KD* 11-13). In Stoic philosophy, a proper understanding of nature guides one's actions to live

¹⁴⁸ We see a similar effect when Lucretius raises the Punic War to the level of universal conflict at 3.833-37 (833: *undique*; 834: *omnia*; 837: *omnibus humanis*), only to dismiss its relevance to and impact upon us except as proof that death should not be feared (3.830-42).

¹⁴⁹ Lucretius has de-mythologized the eruption of Mount Etna and replaced the traditional explanation of an imprisoned giant with a rationalistic account of wind and hot air (6.680-702). He does preserve aspects of the Gigantomachy in his *DRN* but, instead of mythical Giants rising up against the Olympian gods, we have philosophers rising up against the looming aspect of *religio*. Epicurus' gigantomachic aspirations are made especially clear in the proem to Book One, as he dares to make a stand against the gods (i.e., *religio*), shatters "the confining bars of nature's gates" (1.70-71), and "marched far beyond the flaming walls of the world" (1.72-73). See Hardie (1986: 210-12) for a more detailed comparison of *DRN* 1.62-79 and the mythical Gigantomachy.

in accordance with nature, according to a divine plan. In Epicurean philosophy, the reverse is true: a proper understanding of nature leads to the realization that there is no divine plan or ultimate meaning in the universe. This, for the Epicureans, is a good thing. It allows humans to free themselves of the shackles of religion, and live lives truly worthy of the gods (3.1-30; 5.1-54).

Images of *Foeditas* in *DRN*

Lucretius urges his reader to emulate the detachment of the gods (1.44-46, 2.646-48) but understands that, as humans, we cannot always separate ourselves from our subjective experiences and live apart from our affairs (Segal 1990: 36-38). Thus, the human world as well as the atomic and cosmic world must be examined, both the *suavis* and the *foedus*. Lucretius therefore does not shy from using grotesque images such as “a mutilated trunk dismembered all about” (*circum caesis lacer undique membris / truncus*, 3.403-04) which clings to life and breathes (3.403-07) or a mangled eyeball (*lacerato oculo circum*) with only its pupil intact which retains the power of sight (3.408-12; cf. 3.563-64) to illustrate “the alliance by which spirit and mind are for ever bound” (*hoc anima atque animus vincti sunt foedere semper*, 3.416). The horror of the dismembered limbs (*caesis membris*) is intensified by the repetition of *membris* in 404 (*membrisque remota*) and the absence of context; the dismembered trunk appears somewhat jarringly in the midst of a detached, scientific explanation, immediately after the aphoristic statement that “he remains in life to whom the mind and intelligence remains” (*at manet in vita cui mens animusque remansit*, 3.403). The intrusion of such a visceral physical image into the domain of the intellect and spirit, traditionally considered apart from and superior to the corporeal world, is a jolting reminder that for the Epicureans there is no ontological division between mind and body. The lacerated eyeball also provides a gruesome demonstration for Lucretius’ audience and it is interesting that these two images of *foeditas* or ‘hideousness’ and ‘foulness’ are explicitly cited as examples of the *foedus* between spirit and mind (3.416, above).

Lucretius returns to the image of the mutilated body at 3.548-57, arguing that “just as hand or eye or nose separated from us can neither feel nor be, but rather are soon dissolved in putrefaction, so the mind cannot be by itself without body or without the man himself” (*et veluti manus atque oculus naresve seorsum / secreta ab nobis nequeunt sentire neque esse, / sed tamen in parvo liquuntur tempore tabe, / sic animus per se non quit sine corpore et ipso / esse homine*, 3.551-55). At 3.642 he again continues this theme of amputation but depicts such an over-exaggerated spectacle of widespread dismemberment that the horror of 3.403ff. cannot be sustained. Warriors “absorbed in the ardour of battle” (*in pugnae studio quod dedita mens est*, 3.647) are so overcome by battle frenzy that one fighter fails to notice (*nec tenet*) that his left arm along with his shield has been “carried off amidst the horses by the wheels and their ravening scythes” (*amissam...inter equos abstraxe rotas falcesque rapaces*, 3.649-50), while another misses the fact that “his right arm has fallen off (*cecidisse*) while he climbs and presses on (*cum scandit et instat*)” (3.651). An amputated foot twitches beside the warrior refusing to let the loss of a leg keep him from battle (3.652-53), and “even the head shorn off from the hot and living trunk retains on the ground the look of life and its open eyes” (*et caput abscisum calido viventeque trunco / servat humi voltum vitalem oculosque patentis*, 3.654-55).¹⁵⁰ The injured warriors do not seem at all distressed or even aware of their wounds, and even their dismembered parts seem eager for battle (*agitat*, 3.653). The effect is darkly humorous, a caricature of the brave soldier refusing to go down without a fight and fighting on despite the odds.

Segal suggests that such a vivid portrayal of violence and dismemberment draws Lucretius’ audience into the scene as engaged participants (1990: 37). While I acknowledge that this passage has a compelling immediacy which Lucretius’ earlier

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Ennius *Ann.* 472: *oscitat in campis caput a cervice revolsum semianimesque micant oculi lucemque requirunt* (Bailey 1963: 1103). Segal also observes that the word order of 3.654 re-enacts the head’s removal from its trunk (1990: 138).

clinical explanations (e.g., 3.634-41) lack, I would argue that the exaggerated detail and gore actually serve to discourage Lucretius' audience from identifying too closely with the injured soldiers.¹⁵¹ ¹⁵² The warriors' imperviousness to pain or weakness and their single-minded pursuit of battle lend the scene a mythical quality which is encouraged by the use of *memorant* ("they say", "they tell", 3.642) to set the scene. The presence of the scythed war-chariots (*currus*), an oriental invention that was never adopted by the Greeks or the Romans (Smith 1992: 238; Bailey 1963: 1101-1102), creates further distance between Lucretius' member-strewn battlefield and his audience's personal experiences of war, turning them into engaged spectators rather than active participants. The warriors' very lack of distress alienates them from Lucretius' audience and enables them to pick out the point of the passage – that the twitching of suddenly severed limbs attests to the presence of spirit in these limbs, which in turn proves that spirit can be divided just like flesh and is therefore just as mortal – without projecting themselves into the situation and becoming overwhelmed with sympathetic fear and anxiety.

This detachment is again encouraged by the *quin etiam* ('indeed also,' 'moreover') that introduces the next passage, in which Lucretius invites his reader to imagine chopping up a snake into many pieces. The *quin etiam* seems to place the dismembered warriors and the chopped up serpent on the same level of importance and in fact the snake passage takes up almost as much space as the battlefield scene (13 versus 15 lines), while the description of the serpent's behaviour after being sliced up into many pieces is longer than any single vignette in the preceding passage. Interestingly, unlike

¹⁵¹ A modern parallel could be found in B-horror or slasher films, where the sheer amount of violence and gore in a single scene becomes a cause for humour rather than distress. The bloodbath in Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill Vol. 1*, for example, is so over-the-top and absurd it is almost impossible to see the ninjas as real, relatable people. Lucretius' *DRN* differs crucially in that he does not create violence for the sake of violence or entertainment; instead, it fulfills the dual role of (1) providing proofs that the soul is dispersed throughout body and can be divided like body, and (2) gradually introducing his audience to the *foeditas* of the world in safe, incremental steps.

¹⁵² Shadi Bartsch (1997) suggests we read the dismembered bodies as unheroic and therefore anti-epic. She is referring to the mangled corpses of Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, but her argument that dismembered bodies are not heroic subjects holds relevance to Lucretius' *DRN* as well.

the wounded soldiers the snake feels pain and reacts to its injuries (3.662-63: “turning back and seeking to gnaw itself, that by its bite it may assuage the burning pain of the wound which struck it”). Presumably being a snake it is already so foreign to Lucretius’ audience that no further alienation is required. Alternatively, the serpent’s suffering heightens the level of *foeditas* and violence of the scene, while at the same time forcing the reader to empathize with its struggles rather than simply observe it dispassionately.

Lucretius’ audience takes on a more active role in this passage as well; instead of simply observing the actions and reactions of others as if from afar, the reader becomes the one wielding the knife (3.657-59: *tibi...sit libitum in multas partis discidere*, “if it please you to cut up...into many pieces”) and watching (3.660: *cernes*, “you will see”) the sectioned pieces twitch. Compare this to the preceding passage, which takes place solely in the third person and frequently in the passive voice (3.644: *videatur*; 3.647: *dedita est*; 3.649: *amissam est*). The reader is completely external to the action being related (cf. *memorant*, 3.642) and, to a certain degree, so are the soldiers. Although they pursue battle (*petessit*) and fail to notice (*nec tenet*) their injuries, their role is largely passive. No amputation is caused by another human; instead, scythed chariots shear off limbs (3.642-43, 649-50), arms are carried off by the wheels of the chariots (3.649-50), or limbs simply fall off (*cecidisse*, 3.651) or are lost (*adempto crure*, 3.652). The switch in perspective from the first passage to the second reflects the progression Lucretius’ audience will follow as they become more and more indoctrinated into Epicureanism. Lucretius entices with his honey-like verses but, ultimately, it is up to the reader to actively accept and implement Epicureanism into his or her life.¹⁵³

Escalating Violence in *DRN*

Lucretius both forces his audience to confront the *foeditas* in nature and gradually increases the degree of *foeditas* as the poem progresses. Books One and Two are

¹⁵³ I discuss this point in more detail below.

concerned primarily with the atoms and nature, and any mention of death or destruction is brief or couched in unthreatening or abstract terms. War is mentioned in the proem of Book Two (2.5-6, 40-43) and elaborated upon at 2.322-30, but as a brilliant spectacle or sham of war (*belli simulacra*) in which no one is injured.¹⁵⁴ It is not until the above passages that Lucretius' audience is introduced to the visceral realities of warfare and human suffering, and even these have been expanded upon from clinical musings such as "it happens that if a great part of the body be taken away (*fit uti detracto corpore multo*), yet life often remains in our frame" (3.119-20), or "if suddenly some force with a swift blow shall cut the body through the middle so as to sever the two parts asunder..." (3.636-39).

The foolish man's fear towards the end of Book Three of his body being torn apart by animals provides another example of escalating violence and increasingly vivid and specific description (Segal 1990: 119). He worries that his corpse will "perish by fire or the jaws of wild beasts" (*aut flammis interfiat malisve ferarum*, 3.872), an anxiety that betrays his failure to grasp the true nature of life. "For when anyone in life anticipates that birds and beasts will mangle his body after death (*corpus uti volucres lacerent in morte feraeque*)," Lucretius writes, "he pities himself; for he does not distinguish himself from that thing (*neque enim se dividit illum*)" (3.879-81). This fear is again elaborated upon at 3.888-89: "For if after death it is an evil to be mauled by the jaws and teeth of wild beasts (*nam si in morte malumst malis morsuque ferarum / tractari*), I do not see how it should not be unpleasant to be laid upon the fire..."¹⁵⁵ Lucretius' point is that it is foolish to worry about the fate of our corpses because once the body dies, the soul dies as well and nothing of us remains to suffer or care about it. Anyone who professes to accept

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Virgil *Aen.* 5, in which similar phrases are used (585: *pugnaeque cient simulacra*; 674: *belli simulacra ciebat*) to describe Anchises' funeral games (Bailey 1963: 805).

¹⁵⁵ Lucretius here plays on *malum*, "evil," and *malis*, "jaws" to exaggerate the foolish man's misplaced fears (Segal 1990: 119).

this truth yet acts squeamish about his corpse's fate or prefers one burial method to another is insincere in his belief.

In Book Four this fear is re-enacted in a nightmare (4.1015-17)¹⁵⁶, while in Book Five it becomes actualized in a violent and extended description of a primitive man's prolonged suffering and eventual death by wild animals (5.990-93):

Each one was then more likely to be caught and devoured alive by wild beasts, torn by their teeth, and to fill woods and forests and mountains with groaning as he saw his own living flesh buried in a living tomb.

unus enim tum quisque magis deprensus eorum 990
pabula viva feris praebebat, dentibus haustus,
et nemora ac montis gemitu silvasque replebat,
viva videns vivo sepeliri viscera busto.

The victim is not only entombed in the beasts' bellies, he is actually watching and feeling his body being consumed. The horror of this experience is amplified by the repetition of the *vi-* sound (*viva...viva videns vivo...viscera*), emphasizing that, unlike the foolish man of Book Three, he is alive (*vivus*) and watching (*videns*) (Segal 1990: 120).¹⁵⁷ Anyone who manages to escape this fate dies a painful, lingering death, holding their mangled body (*corpore adeso*) and hideous wounds (*ulcera taetra*) with trembling hands, "calling on Orcus with horrible cries, until cruel torments put an end to their life" (*horriferis accibant vocibus Orcum, / donique eos vita privarant vermina saeva*, 5.996-97).

The final and most horrifying variation of this nightmare occurs in Book Five, with animals trained for battle suddenly turning upon their masters (5.1313-40). Bulls "tossed their own friends (*suos*) and trampled them underfoot" (5.1223), boars "tore their friends (*socios*) with strong tusks" (5.1326), and wild beasts scattered abroad "after they

¹⁵⁶ 4.1015-1017: *multi depugnant gemitusque doloribus edunt / et, quasi pantherae morsu saevive leonis / mandantur, magnis clamoribus omnia complent* ("Many struggle violently, groan with pain, and, as if they were gnawed in the jaws of a panther or cruel lion, make the place ring with their cries").

¹⁵⁷ Lucretius' criticism of the foolish man's fears at 3.885-87 also contains several *vi-* sounds: *nec videt in vera nullum fore morte alium se / qui possit vivus sibi se lugere peremptum / stansque iacentem se lacerari utive dolere* ("He does not see that in real death there will be no other self that could live to bewail his perished self, or stand by to feel pain that he lay there lacerated and burning"). The parallel sound pattern and concept of conscious awareness invites the reader to compare the men in both passages (Segal 1990: 119-20). Cf. Bailey: "Lucr. seems to like alliterative *v* for loathsome meanings" (1963: 1481).

have dealt cruel deeds to many of their own friends” (*diffugiunt, fera facta suis cum multa dedere*, 5.1340). The unexpected and savage attack of one’s friends and allies in the midst of battle exceeds the horror of even primitive man’s fate; at least in the latter situation the fearsome possibility of being mauled by wild creatures is somewhat expected and the violence has an identifiable source (i.e., the beasts’ hunger), whereas in the former, the indiscriminate and unexpected rampaging of formerly tamed beasts creates confusion and danger from all quarters, forcing one to fend off allies and enemies alike. The pitched battle of 5.1313-40 thus becomes a kind of civil war, where all order and harmony has degenerated into chaos. It is perhaps worth noting that the “hideous ruin” (*commune malum fieret foedumque*, 5.1343) that befalls them all resulted not so much from a desire to conquer, “as wishing to give their enemies cause to mourn, and to perish themselves, when they mistrusted their numbers and were without arms” (*sed facere id non tam vincendi spe voluerunt, / quam dare quod gement hostes, ipsique perire, / qui numero diffidebant armisque vacabant*, 5.1347-49). The senselessness of the carnage – Lucretius expresses doubt such ill-fated experiments actually occurred (5.1341: *si fuit ut facerent*) – only adds to its horror.

Changing Perspectives

By gradually increasing the violence and *foeditas* of death and dying throughout *DRN*, Lucretius ensures his reader does not become overwhelmed by the harsh truths of Epicureanism to such a degree that he or she actively rejects his teachings. All aspects of the universe must be examined, however, so Lucretius utilizes a number of other techniques to soften his doctrine and make his reader more receptive. We have discussed at length Lucretius’ honeyed verses and his use of mythology or figurative language to entice his audience and present his theories in a pleasing manner. The Hymn to Venus (1.1-43) which opens *DRN*, for example, draws his audience in with its beautifully depicted images and the familiarity of traditional themes, so that the refutation of divine influence on the world that immediately follows (1.44-49), with its unexpected

contradiction of the preceding passages, falls upon unguarded and receptive ears.¹⁵⁸ The proems in general fulfill the role of the *exordium* in traditional classical speeches, which prepares the audience to lend a ready ear by making them “well-disposed, attentive, ready to receive instruction” (*benevolum, attentum, docilem*, Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* 4.1.5; Cox 1971: 1-2). The grandeur of the epic form elevates Lucretius’ Epicurean subject-matter and invests it with the dignified majesty of traditional epic material, while we are encouraged to view Epicurus and his achievements as exceeding those of mythological heroes and gods (5.1-54).¹⁵⁹

Myth provides distance as in the Iphigenia scene, the violence of which is tempered by the familiar mythological setting. The universal perspective also provides distance so that terrifying events like earthquakes or volcanic eruptions can be observed with objective detachment, from a distant and safe platform (cf. 2.1-19). Lucretius frequently introduces natural phenomena from one point of view, only to switch perspectives just before his audience becomes too uncomfortable. The vivid re-enactment of primitive man’s agonizing, drawn-out death after being mauled by animals (5.988-98), for example, incites empathetic horror in Lucretius’ audience, but his suffering is immediately shown to be inconsequential compared to the large-scale destruction wreaked by modern man’s greed and technologies (5.999-1010; Segal 1990: 38). Lucretius thus addresses the reality of a painful death but does not allow his audience to dwell on the subjective experience of it, instead forcing them into a philosophical contemplation of human history and anthropology from a more objective perspective. Primitive man’s suffering, viewed from this longer perspective, actually turns out to be the more desirable state of affairs; he is only the victim of ignorance and misfortune, whereas modern man actively seeks better, more efficient ways to kill each other.

¹⁵⁸ For an excellent article discussing Venus’ role in *DRN*, see Elder 1954.

¹⁵⁹ *DRN* is thus as much a critique of epic as it is an appropriation of epic’s dignified majesty.

Lucretius switches perspectives to alleviate his audience's anxiety when discussing natural phenomena as well. When describing how the rushing power of wind enclosed in a cloud can burst it "with a most horrifying crash" (*tum perterricrepto sonitu dat scissa fragorem*, 6.129) to form thunder, for example, Lucretius emphasizes the magnitude of the event (6.123: *maxima dissiluisse capacis moenia mundi*; 6.126: *undique*) with increasing tension (*turbine versanti magis ac magis undique...*, 6.126) only to conclude, at the height of the action: "And no wonder, when a small bladder full of air often makes so loud a noise as it is suddenly burst" (*nec mirum, cum plena animae vesicula parva / saepe ita dat magnum sonitum displosa repente*, 6.130-31). The grandeur of thunder is abruptly deflated just like the bladder with which it is compared, and the irreverent and belittling image reminds the reader that thunder is a material process with material causes and as such is not an object of superstitious wonder (Jope 1989: 21; Schrijvers 1970: 266). Similarly, wind rushing through clouds to make thunder is compared to rustling leaves and creaking branches (6.135-36), tearing paper (6.111-13), and laundry flapping on a line (6.114-15), while earthquakes are likened to carts rumbling along a path (6.548-51), a moving bowl filled with water (6.555-56), and a person shivering from cold (6.594-95).

The Plague of Athens

By the end of Book Six and *DRN* the reader, if he or she has properly assimilated Lucretius' teachings, should no longer need these diffusive techniques to face the truth. By this point the reader should be not only inured to the *foeditas* in nature, but open to it and unafraid. Creation, death, the gods and nature have all been demythologized and the reader has been given all the tools needed to understand *naturae species ratioque*. The reader is no longer a child who requires the sweet coating of honey to ingest the salubrious wormwood; he or she is ready to face the world, unsoftened by Lucretius' art, on his or her own. The escalation of images of destruction and death which occurs as

DRN progresses therefore culminates in the description of the Plague of Athens at the end of the final book of *DRN* (6.1138-1287). Lucretius censors nothing as he describes in horrifying detail the devastating effects of a plague that “poisoned the country-side, made the roads a desert, and drained the city of men” (*funestos reddidit agros / vastavitque vias, exhaustit civibus urbem*, 6.1139-40). Fever, “dry thirst beyond all quenching” (*insedabiliter sitis arida*, 6.1176), ulcers and bleeding afflict the victims and corrupt the flesh such that even scavengers avoid the heaps of bodies piled on the sides of roads (6.1215-18). Lucretius’ account is all the more horrifying for being based on the historical Plague of Athens of 430 BC.

Demont, referring to traditional plagues, writes that the *miasma* or sickness “rises from corruption, and spreads corruption” (2013: 74), and this is true as much politically and morally as it is medically. Overcrowding and unsanitary living conditions resulted in the Plague of Athens and aided its rapid and deadly spread, but these conditions were in turn caused by the social and political corruption of Greece’s city-states. The Romans, who would have seen the Peloponnesian War as a kind of civil war between Greeks, would have been especially sensitive to suggestions that moral disintegration triggered it. Moral corruption and greed leading to social, political, and medical collapse is a common theme even now, and the Plague of Athens is no exception.¹⁶⁰ *DRN* thus closes not with the triumphant promise with which it opened, but with the disturbing image of the dissolution of human dignity and the triumph of irrationality in the face of death as the plague survivors squabble and compete to burn the corpses of their loved ones on others’ pyres, “often brawling with much shedding of blood rather than abandon the bodies” (*multo cum sanguine saepe / rixantes potius quam corpora desererentur*, 6.1285-86).

¹⁶⁰ The plague cast upon the Greek armies by Apollo in retribution for Agamemnon’s shameful treatment of the priest Chryses in Book One of Homer’s *Iliad* provides another example of moral corruption leading to physical illness on the one hand, and social disorder and conflict on the other, as Agamemnon’s right to rule is called into question.

The Plague's Place in *DRN*

Critics have often read this abrupt and inglorious ending as a failure of Epicureanism or a sign that Lucretius died before he could complete his work (e.g., Rozelaar 1943: 116-32; Bignone 1945: 318-22; Bailey 1963: 1724-25; cf. Gale 1994: 208n. 3). Bright summarizes the problem succinctly: “We are left staring at the collapse of society, morals and human life with no relieving note of hope, and this after six books dedicated to the proposition that nature is generous and explicable, but above all tolerable” (1971: 607). Others, such as Richard Minadeo (1969), Diskin Clay (1983) and P.H. Schrijvers (1970), argue persuasively that the end of the work provides a logical counterpoint to the proem of Book One and follows the progression of its own book and the poem as a whole (see also Jope 1989, McLeod 1963: 150ff.), and it is this position which seems far more compelling. Lucretius himself explicitly states at the beginning of Book Six that the conclusion of his work is imminent (6.92-93; Bailey 1963: 1725), and its ending *in media res* with images of death and burial follows the epic tradition (e.g., Hector’s funeral at *Il.* 24.785-803, Turnus’ death at *Aen.* 12.950-52; cf. Gale 1994: 126), just as its opening Invocation to Venus does.

The close of *DRN* mirrors and reverses the themes of its opening, highlighting the destructive side of Nature rather than its creative powers. David Bright has catalogued a number of parallels between the first proem of *DRN* and its final narrative, arguing persuasively that Lucretius exactly reverses the situations to emphasize “the polarity of life and death, creativity and destruction, nature and man” (1971: 624). Thus, instead of celebrating prolific growth, life, creation and joy in nature, the Plague of Athens showcases universal destruction, death and lamentation among men (*ibid.*). The winds which flee (*fugiunt*) the goddess’ approach in Book One (1.6-7) bring devastating pestilence in Book Six (6.1138-43; cf. 6.1128-37) (Bright 1971: 624-25; Gale 1994: 226), while the “fresh and free” west wind (*reserata viget genitabilis aura favoni*, 1.11) that ushers in the dawn and starts the joyful symphony of the birds (1.11-13) is replaced by disease-bearing winds from the east (6.1141-43). The birds and animals that in Book One were so captivated by the goddess that they flocked from all over to bask in her charm

and greedily multiplied at her command (1.12-20) have almost completely disappeared from human areas (6.1219-21: “yet it was not often in those days that any bird was to be seen at all...” by Book Six (Bright 1971: 624-25). Some fled the rank smell, Lucretius explains, but “most of them grew faint with disease and died” (*languebant pleraque morbo / et moriebantur*, 6.1221-22). The swiftest extinctions occurred in the animals with the closest contact to humans – dogs faithful to their human companions (*fida canum*) were among the first (*primis*) to fall (6.1222-23), and animals feeding on human corpses “would faint in a speedy death” (*languebat morte propinqua*, 6.1218).¹⁶¹ Mankind’s destructive effect on nature is emphasized all the more when compared to Venus’ creative influence, just as the lush fertility of the animals in Book One contrasts sharply with the diseased or amputated genitals of sick and fearful humans (6.1206-12). Finally, the loud lamentations and violent struggling of the survivors that ends Book Six is an almost exact opposite of the description of the gods’ tranquillity which completes the Invocation to Venus (1.44-49) (Bright 1971: 626). Instead of being “without any pain, without danger, itself mighty by its own resources, needing us not at all” (*nam privata dolore omni, privata periclis, / ipsa suis pollens opibus, nil indiga nostri*, 1.47-48), the poverty- and plague-stricken survivors are so desperate to care for their loved ones’ corpses that they steal the pyres of others and brawl “with much shedding of blood rather than abandon the bodies” (6.1285-86, quoted above).

This cycle of creation and destruction that frames the work as a whole repeatedly occurs on a smaller scale within *DRN* as well.¹⁶² In Chapter 2 (p. 75-76) I mentioned that each book of *DRN* opens with themes of triumph, life and hope and closes with images of death and decay. The poem can also be divided into halves or thirds dedicated to specific

¹⁶¹ Bright points out that where Thucydides merely mentions the dogs’ behaviours and deaths as more easily observable than other animals (μᾶλλον αἴσθησιν παρεῖχον τοῦ ἀποβαίνοντος) “because they are familiar with men” (ξυνδαιτᾶσθαι, 2.50), Lucretius places the blame for the dogs’ deaths on the humans for whom they hold such fidelity (1971: 625n.1).

¹⁶² For an extensive analysis of the formal unity of *DRN* and the various thematic cycles found within it, see Minadeo’s *The Lyre of Science* (1969).

topics. Books One and Two, for example, focus on the nature and behaviours of atoms and void, Books Three and Four examine the nature and powers of mind and humans, and Books Five and Six look at the nature and phenomena of the world on the one hand, and the development, progress and decline of human civilization on the other (5.1011ff.). The end of each book also cycles back to its beginning, and the proem of the subsequent book follows from the end of the book before it. Book Six thus picks up on the theme of progress and technology that closes Book Five and weaves it into a tribute to Athens, birthplace of civilization and home to Epicurus, who “put a limit to desire and fear, [and] showed what was that chief good to which we all move” (6.24-26). Book Six then closes with the destruction of Athenian society during the Plague of Athens, while the medical theme of the Plague of Athens matches the psychological illness identified and cured by Epicurus at the book’s opening (Bright 1971: 631).

Placing the Plague of Athens at the end of Book Six makes both formal and thematic sense. Plagues were traditionally viewed as manifestations of divine power or anger (e.g., Homer’s *Iliad*, Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, Virg. *Georg.* 3.478-566, Ovid *Met.* 7.516-621), so this topic fits well with the theme of demystifying nature that occupies most of Book Six (Gale 1994: 224-25). Disease, like volcanoes and thunderstorms, has material roots and causes and proceeds along rational, intelligible, mechanistic lines. Sometimes pestilence comes from the sky (6.1099-1100), sometimes from the earth (6.1100-1102), but whether it is absorbed through inhalation or ingestion or some other method, it works from within to offset the normal workings of a healthy body (6.1125-37; cf. 3.471: penetration of disease). The Plague of Athens narrative is provided to illustrate the effects of and human reactions to disease and pestilence, much as the eruption of Mount Etna is mentioned as an example of a volcanic event (6.639-46), and the destruction at Sidon and Aegium is mentioned as examples of earthquakes (6.585-90). Throughout Book Six Lucretius repeatedly draws his audience’s attention to the fear and anxiety inspired by natural events or disasters, only to provide the mechanical

explanation for the phenomenon and reassurance that “all these things are done for some natural reason, and it is clear from what source come the causes that produce them” (*omnia quae naturali ratione geruntur, / et quibus e fiant causis apparet origo*, 6.760-61).

Lucretius' Source

Lucretius models his account after Thucydides 2.47-54¹⁶³ but, as Commager (1957) has convincingly argued, whereas Thucydides remains fairly clinical and removed from the event – despite having personally experienced the plague as both witness and victim (2.48.3; Clay 1983: 262) – Lucretius emphasizes the victims' psychological perspective and so provides a more emotionally charged portrayal that draws the reader in (see also Bright 1971, Clay 1983: 262-63).¹⁶⁴ Thucydides for example simply states that the disease “left its mark on the extremities; for it settled in the privy parts, the fingers and the toes, and many escaped with the loss of these” (2.49.7-8). Lucretius, on the other hand, adds in two framing lines:

6.1208: *et graviter partim metuentes limina leti* (“and some with the strong fear they had for the threshold of death...”)

6.1212: *usque adeo mortis metus his incesserat acer* (“so deeply had the keen fear of death possessed them”)

making the mutilation self-inflicted and inspired by *metus*, rather than caused by the disease (Commager 1957: 107; Bright 1971: 612). The wrenching sight of parents and children entwined in death (6.1256-58) is a Lucretian addition, and the pitiable description of “bodies half-dead with fainting limbs caked with squalor and covered with rags, perishing in filth of body, nothing but skin on their bones, and that almost buried in foul ulcers and dirt” (6.1268-71) expands on Thucydides' “hardly alive” victims wallowing in the streets (2.52.2).

¹⁶³ All translations of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* unless otherwise specified come from Richard Crawley (1910).

¹⁶⁴ For a detailed comparison of the two accounts, see Commager 1957 or Bright 1971: 607-632.

Psychological terms such as *cor maestum* (“sorrowful mind”, 6.1151)¹⁶⁵ and *anxius angor* (“torments of anxiety”, 6.1158) replace Thucydides’ more clinical καρδιάν (“stomach”, 2.49.3) and μετὰ ταλαιμωρίας (“great distress”, 2.49.3), and it is no accident Lucretius’ replacements contain strong moral undertones (Commager 1957: 105-107). As Commager points out, *cor* in Lucretius appears as a faculty subject to fear (3.116, 874; 6.14) and desire (4.1059, 1138), while *maestus* outside of the plague narrative refers primarily to fear of the gods (1.89, 99; 4.1236) rather than physical pain (1957: 114-15). The phrase *anxius angor* occurs only one other time in *DRN*, in reference to Tityos, “devoured by agonizing anguish or rent by anxieties through some other passion” (*exest anxius angor / aut alia quavis scindunt cuppedine curae*, 3.993-94) (Commager 1957: 105-106). *Anxia corda* is the result of *cupido atque timor* (6.25) in the proem to Book Six, while *angor* often appears in the context of fear or desire (3.853, 903-905; 4.1133-34) (Commager 1957: 106).

Plague as Symbol

These alterations and additions, along with others, have led many to read the end of Book Six as an allegory or exemplum of the non-Epicurean life. Psychological or spiritual disease, as well as social or political disorder and civil war, were often referred to as a plague (*pestis*: e.g., Cic. *Cat.* I 1.2-3, *Prov. Cons.* 6.13, *Mur.* 39, 85, *Phil.* 10.5, 11; *morbus*: e.g., Cic. *Verr.* II.4.1.2, *Chuen.* 182.6, *Mur.* 47.5, 47.8; cf. Schrijvers 1970: 320-22),¹⁶⁶ and construing philosophy as medicine was a common metaphor in antiquity. Lucretius himself explicitly conceives of himself as a doctor, cloaking the harshness of

¹⁶⁵ *Cor* often refers to “heart” or “stomach”, but Commager makes an excellent case for translating it as “mind” (1957: 104-107, 114-115). Lucretius uses *cor* to imply intellect at 4.44, 5.882, 5.1456, and 6.5 (cf. Cic. *Tusc. disp.* 1.9.18); it is also portrayed as the faculty subject to fear (3.116, 874; 6.14) and desire (4.1059, 1138) (Commager 1957: 114-15).

¹⁶⁶ *Pestis* was used more figuratively than *pestilentia*, which was employed strictly in a biological sense (Cic. *Agr.* 2.26, 70; *Nat. Deor.* 2.5, 14; *Off.* 2.5, 16) (Schrijvers 1970: 321). In *DRN* Lucretius uses *pestis* synonymously with *malum* (3.347: the separation of body and spirit “cannot be without their ruin and damage [*sine peste maloque*]”; 5.26: *Lernaeaque pestis / hydra*), while *pestilitas* denotes biological illness (6.1098, 1125, 1132). The Plague of Athens is referred to only as *morbus* which, like *pestis*, often applies to political and social malady (Schrijvers 1970: 321).

his therapeutic philosophy with honeyed verses to heal his audience of their ignorance and fear (1.936-50, 4.11-25). As Gale points out, “the Athenians are the people of Cecrops and Pandion, the people of myth, not of *ratio*” (1994: 227-28). The “intolerable sufferings...ever attended by torments of anxiety” (*intolerabilibusque malis erat anxius angor / adsidue comes*, 6.1158-59) and persistent retching day and night (*singultusque frequens noctem per saepe diemque*, 6.1160) recall the drudgery of the ambitious man, “labouring night and day with surpassing toil to mount upon the pinnacle of riches” (*noctes atque dies niti praestante labore / ad summas emergere opes rerumque potiri*, 2.12-13; cf. 3.59-63) (Schiesaro 2007: 56). The insatiable thirst of the sick (6.1172-77) recalls the perpetually unfilled ambitions of Sisyphus (3.995-97) and the “unchanging thirst of life” that fills us and leaves our mouths “for ever agape” (*et sitis aequa tenet vitae semper hiantis*, 3.1084) (Commager 1957: 112), as well as the insatiable lust of passionate lovers (4.1097-1104, 1115-21; Gale 1994: 227). This unquenchable thirst drives people to throw themselves into streams and wells (6.1172-75) until they are “cut off from the breath of life by the too great sweetness of water” (*interclusa anima nimia ab dulcedine aquarum*, 6.1266), like Lucretius’ contemporaries “drowning” in abundance (*nunc rerum copia mersat*, 5.1008) or the passionate lover tormented by “a drop of bitterness” (*amari aliquid*) rising “from the very fountain of enchantment” (*in ipsis floribus*) (4.1131-40) (Segal 1990: 159). Drowning in water also recalls the fears of the foolish man, fretting about his corpse suffocating in honey (*in melle situm suffocari*, 3.891) (*ibid.*). Finally, those who fled out of fear were punished (*poenibat*) “for their too great greed of life and their fear of death, by a death foul and evil, deserted and without help” (*vitae nimium cupidos mortisque timentis / poenibat paulo post turpi morte malaque, / desertos, opis expertis, incuria mactans*, 6.1240-42).

The brawling survivors of the plague in the final scene of *DRN* also represent those who have failed to truly incorporate Epicurean teachings into their lives. Lucretius has hinted at this in his discussion on death in Book Three, explaining that although a

person might agree that sensation cannot exist in a body after death, “deep in his heart is some hidden sting” (*subesse / caecum aliquem cordi stimulum*) that causes him to resent what he perceives as mistreatment of his corpse (3.870-93). The person may not be aware he is projecting himself into his corpse (3.878: *sed facit esse sui quiddam super inscius ipse*, “unknown to himself he makes something of himself survive”), but if he has truly accepted the premise that the soul does not survive after death, he would be completely indifferent as to whether his body were torn to pieces by wild animals, or burned on a pyre, or packed in honey, or buried. The mourning kin of the dead cannot concede that their loved ones no longer exist and that it therefore does not matter what happens to their corpses, and so “they would lay their own kindred amidst loud lamentation upon piles of wood not their own, and would set light to the fire, often brawling with much shedding of blood rather than abandon the bodies” (6.1283-86, quoted above). Unlike Thucydides’ mourners who simply go away (ἀπῆσαν, 2.52.4) after laying their dead on others’ pyres, Clay points out, Lucretius’ survivors engage in pointless and irresponsible violence, highlighting the destructive behaviour caused by irrational beliefs (1983: 266).

The fear and trepidation with which the plague victims face death contrasts sharply with Democritus’ calm acceptance as he “of his own free will himself offered his head to death” (*sponte sua leto caput obuius obtulit ipse*, 3.1041), or Epicurus’ dignified passing, surrounded by friends (DL 10.15-16).¹⁶⁷ Diogenes Laertius writes that Epicurus, dying, wrote to Idomeneus thus (10.22):

On this blissful day, which is also the last of my life, I write this to you. My continual sufferings from strangury and dysentery are so great that nothing could augment them; but over against them all I set gladness of mind at the remembrance of our past conversations.

Epicurus again defiantly celebrates a life well-lived and scorns fear of death at *SV* 47, triumphantly affirming: “but when it is time for us to go, spitting contempt on life and on those who here vainly cling to it, we will leave life crying aloud in a glorious triumph-

¹⁶⁷ Cf. 3.1023: “The fool’s life at length becomes a hell on earth” (*hic Acherusia fit stultorum denique vita*).

song that we have lived well” (ἀλλ’ ὅταν ἡμᾶς τὸ χρεὼν ἐξάγῃ, μέγα προσπύσαντες τῷ ζῆν καὶ τοῖς αὐτῷ κενῶς περιπλαττομένοις ἄπιμεν ἐκ τοῦ ζῆν μετὰ καλοῦ παιῶνος ἐπιφωνοῦντες ὡς εὖ ἡμῖν βεβίωται). Such unquenchable contentment of life and refusal to sully even a moment of it with fear in the face of death is both admirable and achievable, but only if we let go of all unnecessary fears and desires and accept the inevitability of death. As Death chides those who resent their mortality in Book Three, “why not, like a banqueter fed full of life, withdraw with contentment and rest in peace, you fool?” (*cur non ut plenus vitae conviva recedis / aequo animoque capis securam, stulte, quietem?*, 3.938-39). By following Epicurus’ example, Lucretius argues, we too can conquer our fear of death and its concomitant anxieties, and live a life worthy of the gods.

The Plague as Test

This interpretation of the Plague of Athens narrative as an exemplum of the non-Epicurean life is well-supported by the text but the end of Book Six fulfills another function as well. Schrijvers suggests that Lucretius deliberately incites his reader’s horror and fear in order to demonstrate the necessity of Epicurean solace (1970: 251).¹⁶⁸ This suggestion has merit, but a more productive interpretation of the Plague of Athens is to regard it as a final test for Lucretius’ reader: can he or she view the carnage and collapse of society caused by the plague with serenity and accept the inevitability of death in its most horrifying form, or must the reader return to the beginning of *DRN* and relearn the catechism (cf. Schrijvers 1970: 324; Gale 1994: 228)? Lucretius has hinted from the start of *DRN* that although he will point out the path and leave “these little tracks” (*haec vestigia parva*) (1.402-409; cf. 1.1114-17) for his audience to follow, the ultimate goal is for his reader to be as a hound pursuing a scent:

so will you be able for yourself to see one thing after another in such matters as these, and to penetrate all unseen hiding-places, and draw forth the truth from them (1.406-409)

cum semel institerunt vestigia certa viai,

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Clay: “The human soul must first be disturbed to find its peace: *placata mente*” (1983: 257).

*sic alid ex alio per te tute ipse videre
talibus in rebus poteris caecasque latebras
insinuare omnis et verum protrahere inde.*

Freedom from fear and anxiety ultimately depends on each person finding the truth *for* himself and *by* himself (*per te tute ipse*, 1.407; cf. 5.1282: *ipsi per te*; *Ep. Her.* 79, *Ep. Pyth.* 116; cf. Clay 1983: 225-26, 255-56, Bailey 1963: 664), and I propose taking the end of Book Six as a testing ground for the reader's carefully cultivated attitudes towards nature. Lucretius' emphatic warning at the start of Book Six to his reader (6.70: *per te tibi*; 6.73: *tute tibi*) to reject blind reasoning and irrational thoughts "unworthy of the gods and alien to their peace" (6.69-70), and his urgings to "approach their shrines with placid heart" (*delubra deum placido cum pectore adibis*, 6.75), hint at the upcoming trial. These *delubra deum* reappear at the end of *DRN* filled with corpses (6.1272-75), and it is up to the reader, acting by him- or herself, to approach them with equanimity.

Lucretius maintains a man's character cannot be truly known until he has been subjected to danger or peril, "for only then are the words of truth drawn up from the very heart, the mask is torn off, the reality remains" (*nam verae voces tum demum pectore ab imo / eliciuntur et eripitur persona, manet res*, 3.57-58). In order to properly test his reader, then, he brings *DRN* to a crescendo of violence and horror in its final scene, one which he has conscientiously been building towards throughout the whole of his work. The Plague of Athens thus shows an unvarnished image of death and suffering, one which neither medicine (6.1179-81), religion (6.1272-77), nor nobility of action (6.1243-46) could prevent. Thucydides optimistically records a heightened immunity in those who had survived their first bout of plague (2.51.6) but Lucretius omits this and any other causes of hope, instead making suffering and death absolute universals (Bright 1971: 609). Similarly, where Thucydides locates the plague primarily in the city and mentions the overcrowding of the city by country people seeking protection from the Spartans as a cause of the plague (2.52.1), Lucretius' plague sweeps over country and city indiscriminately, with the "shepherd and the herdsman and also the brawny guide of the

curved plough” all affected alike (6.1252-53) (Commager 1957: 108). “Nor does it matter,” Lucretius writes, “whether we travel to places unwholesome for us...or whether Nature of herself brings an infected sky to us” (*nec refert utrum nos in loca deveniamus / nobis adversa...an caelum nobis ultro natura corruptum / deferat*, 6.1133-36) – sickness bringing death will come inexorably (Jope 1989: 33).

Lucretius’ only concession to his reader’s horror is to impart a slight mythological quality to the account by locating the narrative “in the realms of Cecrops” (*finibus in Cecropis*, 6.1139), traditionally the first king of Athens (Bright 1971: 609; Smith 1992: 578).¹⁶⁹ Gale and others have also pointed to Lucretius’ use of *quondam* to introduce the Plague of Athens as a mythological signifier to create further distance between audience and episode. While *quondam* is used as a kind of “once upon a time” signifier in Livy (5.4.11; 24.39.8), Ovid (*Am.* 1.14.33) and Phaedrus (1.6.3),¹⁷⁰ however, Stover’s analysis of *quondam* in Lucretius (2.634; 3.1029; 5.411; 6.2, 6, 109, 1138) shows that Lucretius uses it only in connection with myths he immediately refutes as false (2.634: Magna Mater; 5.411: Phaethon and the Great Flood), or for real, historical events (1999: 71-72).¹⁷¹ Rather than signifying a departure from *vera ratio*, then, Lucretius’ use of *quondam* here instead perhaps emphasizes the reality of this plague, as a symbol of the inevitable horror of death.

Clay suggests, correctly I think, that throughout the rest of the narrative, Lucretius forces his reader into closer contact with the horror of the plague by projecting him or her directly into the scene (1983: 343; my italics):

6.1163-64: “Yet *you* could not perceive (*nec posses tueri*) the outermost part of the body of anyone to be burning with excessive heat on the surface” (compare 2.49.5: “Externally the body was not very hot to the touch”)

¹⁶⁹ Naming the two Athenian kings also allows Lucretius to acknowledge his debt to Thucydides, an Athenian, and to invite a comparison of the two accounts (Stover 1999: 72).

¹⁷⁰ The preceding references are from Gale 1994: 225.

¹⁷¹ 3.1029: Xerxes’ death; 6.2: the spread of Athenian agriculture; 6.6: Epicurus’ teachings; 6.109: the noise of thunder; 6.1138: the Plague of Athens.

6.1170-71: “There was nothing so light or thin that *you* could turn it to use (*posses...vertere in utilitatem*) for their bodies” (compare 2.49.5: “...the patient could not bear to have on him clothing or linen even of the very lightest description”)

6.1256-58: “Sometimes *you* might see (*posses videre*) the lifeless bodies of parents lying upon their lifeless children”

6.1267-68: “many in public places and roads *you* might see (*videres*) all about...”

The reader thus views the devastation of the plague not from the vantage of a detached spectator as in Thucydides’ account, but as a participant in present events.¹⁷² Bright observes that Lucretius’ omission of the war which in Thucydides plays such a key role in the spread of the disease invites the reader to imagine it happening anywhere, anytime (1971: 618-19), and lends strength to this theory. Clay suggests this sense of engagement is strengthened by Lucretius’ use of the imperfect subjunctive, which in the above examples elliptically acts as the conclusion of a contrafactual condition in present time (1983: 343n. 223).

Nothing New

Lucretius forces his reader to confront head-on the destructive, all-consuming power of nature and its considerable physical and psychological effects on man. If the reader has been properly attentive throughout *DRN*, however, he or she will recognize that as horrific the situation is, nothing that occurs during the Plague of Athens scene is appearing for the first time. Lucretius has already discussed plagues and sickness in Book Six and in fact the Plague of Athens is introduced as an example of a kind of pestilence already discussed and demythologized (6.1090-1137). Many of the plague symptoms have also already appeared in Book Three, during Lucretius’ proofs of the mortality of the soul. The memory loss experienced by plague survivors (6.1213-14) is unsurprising because the reader has already learned that “in bodily diseases the mind often wanders astray (*avius errat*)” (3.463-75), and the debilitating effect of fear which causes people to lose all heart (6.1230-34) has already been discussed at 3.152-58

¹⁷² Compare also Lucretius’ use of impersonal and passive verbs in the battle scenes of Book Three, discussed above.

(physical effects of fear), 3.398-402 (“For without the mind and intelligence no particle of the spirit can abide in the frame...”) and 3.459-62 (“just as the body itself is liable to awful diseases and harsh pain, so we see the mind liable to carking care and grief and fear...”). The “accursed fire” that “spreads abroad over the limbs” (*per membra sacer dum diditur ignis*, 6.1167) of the plague victims has appeared in an earlier passage discussing the many seeds harmful to men that earth contains; this fire appears “creeping over the body and burning each part it takes hold on, and crawls over the limbs” (*existit sacer ignis et urit corpore serpens / quamcumque arripuit partim, repitque per artus*, 6.660-61).

The flame that burns in the stomach as if in a furnace (*flamma ut fornacibus intus*, 6.1169) repeats the imagery of 6.202 (*flammam fornacibus intus*), which describes flames rushing about the hollow furnace of clouds until they break free as lightning (6.199-203). The blackened throats of the plague victims which sweat blood and are filled with ulcers which “clogged and closed the path of the voice” (6.1147-48) are reminiscent of Mount Etna’s eruption, which belches thick black smoke and flames “upwards straight through the mountain’s throat” (6.680-702). The thickened voice of the plague victim is caused by obstacles like the ulcers which, as we learned in Book Four, hamper the easy flow of words and cause them to come out confused and muffled (4.549-62). The moans and groans of the suffering (6.1158-59) are, as Lucretius explains in Book Three, “forced out, because the limbs are afflicted with pain, and in general because seeds of voice (*semina vocis*) are ejected and rush forth from the mouth in a mass, where they have been, as it were, accustomed to pass, where is the established highroad” (3.495-98). Similarly, the trembling and shaking of those on the cusp of death (6.1190-95) is caused by the spirit which, “torn asunder by the violence of the disease throughout the frame, is in turmoil and foams, just as in the salt sea the waves boil under the mighty strength of the winds” (3.487-94). The spittle expelled by the victim’s hoarse coughing (6.1182-89) is like the moisture expelled by clouds when “the force of the wind thrusts them together”

and they come into contact with heat (6.509-16), and the sweat streaming over the victim's neck (6.1182-89) oozes from the porous body just as the permeable earth oozes water (6.631-38) and "in rocks and caves the liquid moisture of waters oozes through, and the whole place weeps with plenteous drops" (1.348-49). Again, at 6.936-58: "First of all, in caverns the rocks above sweat with moisture and trickle with oozing drops. Sweat oozes also from our whole body" (cf. 6.497-502). Aside from reminding the reader how much can be taught by analogy in nature, all these things prove the first principle of Epicureanism taught in Book One, that there is nothing before us but body mixed with void (1.419-21).

Lucretius' Atomism

Lucretius' account of the Plague of Athens and his explanations of disease as a whole reflect his atomist leanings. Thucydides' description of the disease's movement throughout the body (διεξήει, 2.49.7) becomes in Lucretius a *flowing* (6.1204: *fluebat*; 6.1205: *profluvium*; 6.1152: *confluxerat*) of particles through porous matter (Clay 1983: 264-65). Thus, Lucretius translates καὶ ὅποτε ἐξ καρδίας στηρίζειεν, ἀνέστρεφέ τε αὐτήν (2.49.3: "when it fixed in the stomach, it upset it") into *inde ubi per fauces pectus complerat et ipsum / morbida vis in cor maestum confluxerat aegris* (6.1151-52: "After that, when passing through the throat the fell disease had filled the chest and had flooded into the sorrowful mind of the sufferer..."). The disease "flowed (*confluxit*) from the country into the city" (6.1259-60) and "filled (*conplebant*) all places and buildings" (*omnia conplebant loca tectaue*, 6.1262; cf. 6.1272-73: *replerat*) (cf. 1.522: *complerent*), and at no point did the disease "cease to spread from one to another" (*nullo cessabant tempore apisci / ex aliis alios*, 6.1235-36), "nor was there any rest from pain" (*nec requies erat ulla mali*, 6.1178) (cf. ceaseless movement of atoms: 2.95-96: *nulla quies est / reddita*; 2.119: *nec dare pausam*; 6.933-35: *nec mora nec requies...*).

Lucretius introduces the plague as a "death-bringing current" (*mortifer aestus*, 6.1138), a wave of deadly matter such as those that stupefy birds flying over Avernus

(*hos igitur tellus omnis exaestuatur*, 6.816; cf. 6.823, 824, 826, 830), or cause magnets to attract metals (6.1049, 1051, 1056, 1059), or stream off of living things as they age and decay (2.1122-43; 2.1137: *exaestuatur*) (Clay 1983: 261). The world is full of seeds flying around, some harmful, some helpful (6.1093-97). Different places are dangerous to different races or different body parts (6.1117-18), and what is alien (*aliena*) corrupts and harms (6.1124; cf. 2.713-17). The power of the disease penetrates (*insinuatur*) from without (6.955) through porous passages in the person's body (cf. 6.777-78), seeds of disease and death being ingested or inhaled along with seeds of life (6.1093-1102, 1125-30). Our permeability makes us vulnerable (e.g., 2.698ff.), but it also facilitates those vital processes required for life and enables us to perceive the world around us (e.g., 1.354-57, 6.921-23, 981-97; cf. Segal 1990: 108-109). Blood flowing (*profluvium*, 6.1205) from a person's nose carries off his strength and substance (*expletis naribus ibat*: / *huc hominis totae vires corpusque fluebat*, 6.1203-1204), until all that remains to the half-dead victim is skin and bones (6.1267-71; cf. 2.72-74: "whenever bodies pass away from a thing, they diminish that from which they pass"). Indeed, excretions of every kind appear throughout the plague narrative (nosebleeds: 6.1202-1203; diarrhea: 6.1200-1201; sweat: 6.1187-89; vomit: 6.1147-50, 1160), reinforcing the image of the body as a leaky vessel (Bright 1971: 629). Incessant retching broke (*dissoluebat*) the victims up from within (6.1160-61), and Bailey notes that *dissolvo* is frequently used for atomic dissolution (1963: 1729; see e.g. 1.216, 1.223, 1.764, 2.953).¹⁷³ All these things weaken the barriers of life or vital enclosures (*vitai claustra*, 6.1153) that protect the life within the body, resulting in the collapse of the body into crumbling walls or *putris ruinas* (2.1145, 3.584; cf. 2.859-63, 5.832-36) (Segal 1990: 146, 160).¹⁷⁴ All of this is according to the laws of nature learned in Book One, which

¹⁷³ If we experimentally take the last half of line 1161 with the first half of 1162 (ignoring for the moment the first half of 1161), Lucretius' description of the cramps and discomfort afflicting the victims could easily apply to the formation and disintegration of atomic *concilia*: *membra coactans / dissoluebat eos* (literally: "having collected the parts, they dissolved them"). For *coacta* in the context of atomic *concilia*, see 1.761, 2.935, and 2.1060.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. *SV* 31 (= Usener frg. 339): "against death all of us mortals alike dwell in an unfortified city" (χάρην δὲ θανάτου πάντες ἄνθρωποι πόλιν ἀτείχιστον οἰκοῦμεν).

state that nothing created can be destroyed “until a force has met it, sufficient to shatter it with a blow, or to penetrate within through the void places and break it up” (*donec vis obiit quae res diverberet ictu / aut intus penetret per inania dissoluatque*, 1.222-23).

Foedus No More

The Plague of Athens narrative acts as a final intensification of the *foeditas* that has been steadily building throughout *DRN*. By the end of the work, however, the reader should have come to realize that although there are many things in the world that appear evil or frightening or chaotic, everything has a physical cause and is intelligible in rational, mechanical terms. What appears *foedus* only appears that way from a certain, naive point of view; when examined as part of the natural world what is *foedus* simply turns out to be so many atoms. The fact that *foedus* (adj.) does not appear in Lucretius’ description of the plague in Book Six is significant, and as far as I know no one else has picked up on this important omission. Lucretius goes into great detail about the symptoms of the plague, but at no point does *foedus* appear in this context, as might be expected. Instead, *taeter* (‘foul’, ‘hideous’, ‘repulsive’) is predominantly used (6.1200, 1205, 1271), supplemented by *acer* (‘sharp’, ‘pungent’) (6.1217), *rancidus* (‘rank’, ‘rancid’, ‘disgusting’) (6.1155), or *corruptus* (‘spoiled’, ‘corrupt’) (6.1203). Compare for example the “foul ulcers and a black discharge from the bowels” of 6.1200 (*ulceribus taetris et nigra proluvie alvi*) with *Aen.* 3.216, where Aeneas and his men are attacked by harpies with “foul-flowing bellies” (*foedissima ventris proluviae*) on the island of Strophades (Bailey 1963: 1734). The rank smell (*acrem odorem*) of the heaped up corpses (6.1215-17) is rewritten in Ovid’s Plague of Aegina (*Met.* 7.523-613) as *corpora foeda iacent, vitiantur odoribus aurae* (“the loathsome bodies of the dead corrupt the heavy-hanging air,” *Met.* 7.548)¹⁷⁵, and his account as a whole closely follows Lucretius’ Plague of Athens. The foul (*taetrum*) stench of Lucretius’ victims’ breaths which rolled out “like the penetrating smell of rotting corpses thrown out unburied” (*spiritus ore foras*

¹⁷⁵ Trans. Brookes More, 1922.

taetrum volvebat odorem, / rancida quo perolent proiecta cadavera ritu, 6.1154-55) can be compared to Celsus' description of people suffering from gangrene: "the stomach begins to be affected; even the breath gets a foul odour (*fit foedi spiritus ipse odoris*)" (*Med.* 5.26.31).¹⁷⁶ ¹⁷⁷ Similarly, when discussing ulcers, Celsus writes: "It has either a livid or black colour, a foul odour, and an abundant mucus-like discharge" (*color est vel lividus vel niger, odor foetus, multus et mucis similis umor*, *Med.* 5.28.3).

Foedus was by no means the only adjective used to describe pestilence or symptoms of illness.¹⁷⁸ These examples simply show that it was common around or just after Lucretius' time to use *foedus* in this context, and Lucretius' avoidance of this word, given his pains to invest it with a moral significance, is highly suggestive. Recall again that for Lucretius, wormwood has a *taetra natura* but a *foedo sapore* (2.400-401; cf. 1.936, 4.124). The absence of *foedus* in the plague narrative, then, reflects the reader's progression from judging nature as harsh and evil from a narrow, anthropocentric view, to comprehending it as a series of intelligible, logical processes that are objectively valueless and non-teleological. This understanding of nature frees us from the fears and anxieties that arise from ignorance of limits or erroneous, irrational beliefs. If the reader has failed to properly integrate Epicurus' teachings into his perception of the world, he will become bogged down in the despair and fear that permeates the end of *DRN*. The finale thus acts as a protreptic impelling the reader to start back at the beginning and seek solace and healing from the Invocation to Venus. It also encourages the reader to go back and relearn or restudy the catechism, in hopes of finding some modicum of sense in an apparently senseless episode.

¹⁷⁶ Interestingly, the rest of Celsus' description bears close resemblance to Lucretius' plague victims: they suffer an acute fever and great thirst, delirium, stuttering and difficulty speaking, etc. (*Med.* 5.26.31).

¹⁷⁷ All translations of Celsus' *De Medicina* come from W.G. Spencer (1938), Loeb edition.

¹⁷⁸ Virgil, for example, who models his Plague of Noricum (*Georg.* 3.478-566) closely after Lucretius' Plague of Athens, does not use *foedus* in this context at all. For a closer reading of how Virgil recreates and corrects Lucretius' account, see Farrell 1991: 84ff. (also, 1983: 29-31, 119-125).

More *Foedera*

On the other hand, if the discerning reader forbears to give in to the pervasive despair and emotional turmoil of the plague narrative and maintains the distant view so encouraged by Lucretius (e.g., 2.1-19), he or she will recognize this account as part of a greater pattern of growth and decay. In addition to the familiar themes discussed above, the reader will recognize the Plague of Athens as one of those chaotic periods that herald a new round of human *foedera*, where the old gives way to the new. As in the Anthropology of Book Five, humans become “utterly weary” (6.1162: *defessos, fatigans*; 6.1178: *defessa*; 6.1248: *lassi*; cf. 5.1150: *pertaesum*, 5.1145: *defessum*), “fainting” (*languebat*) from their struggles (6.1157, 1218, 1221, 1254, etc.; cf. 5.1007) and feuds with their neighbours (5.1145-46; cf. 6.1285-86). Coaxings and shame (5.1014-18, 6.1244-45) compel neighbourly behaviour, whereas greed, fear of death or antisocial behaviour results in a “death foul and evil” (*turpi morte malaque*, 6.1241; cf. 5.988-998, 1120-35, 1141-51). Medicine and religion are helpless (5.996-98, 6.1179, 1276-77), and humans are in a state of turmoil (*perturbatus*, 6.1280; cf. 5.1141). The scene is ripe for human *foedera* to once more bring order out of chaos, until the next apex has been reached and decline again sets in.

In fact, Lucretius’ use of a historical event to demonstrate the *causa morbi* of pestilence means that his audience is itself incontrovertible proof that mankind has not only survived the bleak and hopeless circumstances of the Plague of Athens, it has flourished and surpassed the achievements of the past. Read in this light, *DRN* ends not in confusion and despair but with a promise of a new harmony rising. What ensues might be better or worse than what has occurred but the ebb and flow of nature and the cyclical character of the universe promises that order will always arise out of chaos. It is up to the reader to realize this and take the long view of history, placing everything in perspective and distancing him- or herself from the debilitating fear of death. At the same time, however, the Plague of Athens warns that an end comes to all things. “There is an end fixed for the life of mortals, and death cannot be avoided, but die we must” (*certa quidem*

finis vitae mortalibus adstat, / nec devitari letum pote quin obeamus, 3.1078-79). In this sense Epicureanism is a harsh philosophy. It is also an empowering philosophy, in that it frees us to find our own meaning and pleasure in life. Greed and fear of death can hurry the end of an individual (3.79-82: “and often it goes so far, that for fear of death men are seized by hatred of life...”) or state (5.1136-42, 1347-49), and poison the pleasure of the remaining days with doubt and anxiety (3.37-86, 1076-84; 5.1120-35). Or, the refusal to let fear and anxiety dictate one’s life can result in security and contentment: “All the noblest spirits therefore met death in this way” (*optimus hoc leti genus ergo quisque subibat*, 6.1246).

Conclusion

This thesis began with a survey of the historical and social contexts in which Lucretius wrote his *DRN*. Like Epicurus before him, Lucretius observed the destructive effects of the widespread greed, ambition and beliefs encouraged by the traditional values of his people and rejected them as inherently flawed and self-defeating. At the same time, the influx of Hellenistic literature and philosophical thought into Roman culture provided Lucretius with a more meaningful system of interpretation he could apply to the world around him, one which was rationally coherent and founded solely on logic and empirical observation. In composing his *DRN* Lucretius filters Epicurus' Greek teachings through a Roman lens, translating his ideas not only into another language, but into another culture as well. Although some recognizable symbols of traditional Roman values such as the *cursus honorum* (3.59) or the "blushing purple" of senatorial robes (2.35, 5.1243) appear only to be rejected, other identifiably Roman images such as the *alte terminus haerens* (1.77, 596, etc.) or the spear used in the ritual of the *rerum repetitio* (1.968-84) become tools Lucretius employs to explain his Epicurean universe. Furthermore, Lucretius appropriates the conventional rhetoric of Roman social and political life for his technical philosophical terms instead of following his contemporaries in simply transliterating the Greek or inventing new Latin words.

This practice of investing pre-existing words with new philosophical significance created difficulties for Lucretius in terms of clarity of meaning and audience comprehension. It also ignored Epicurus' insistence that words be used in their first meaning, lest we either "leave everything uncertain and go on explaining to infinity or use words devoid of meaning" (*Ep. Her.* 37-38). Words with markedly powerful conventional significance were particularly problematic as their pre-existing meanings and associations distracted from their new Epicurean designation, especially when they stood for concepts or values antithetical to the Epicurean doctrine. This is exactly what happens with *foedus*, which had become an emblem of Roman expansion, power, and

sovereignty. Its deep ties to religion and superstition made it even more unsuitable for the prominent role Lucretius assigns it in his atheistic explanation of the workings of the universe, so the question we posed in Chapter One was: why *foedus*? Why not some other, more neutral term?

One explanation might be that although the Latin philosophical lexicon did contain terms for “law of nature”, both *lex naturae* and *ius naturae* were already closely associated with Stoic philosophy, in large part because of Cicero’s prolific writings. We saw that Lucretius did at times retain *lex* in the context of natural law but in a far narrower capacity than Stoic *lex* or *ius naturae* or Lucretius’ *foedera naturae*. Both the *leges naturae* and *foedera naturae* are necessary and incontrovertible but, unlike the *foedera naturae* which govern the universe by dictating the conditions of a thing’s existence, specific to its particular kind, Lucretius’ *leges naturae* simply act as the final limits of all things. Stated differently, the *leges naturae* decree simply *that* all things are born and die in the unique manner of their kind (whatever that might be), whereas the *foedera naturae* define *what* that birth, existence and death entail. All this, however, only explains why Lucretius did *not* use *lex* or *ius* for the force governing all things in nature; it does not quite explain his attachment to *foedus*.

In Chapter Two we began answering this question by taking a closer look at both Roman *foedera* and Lucretius’ *foedera naturae*, which revealed important shared characteristics that helped alleviate some of the tension and confusion created by the conceptual disparities identified in Chapter One. In this chapter I identified three major areas of overlap between Roman *foedera* and Lucretius’ *foedera naturae*: the preoccupation of *foedera* on limits and boundaries, the intrinsic physicality of *foedera* in time and space, and the inherent dichotomy of *foedus* as both a creative and destructive force. The most obvious quality shared by the two types of *foedera* is the centrality for both of limits and boundaries. Roman *foedera* were treaties or covenants whose sole

function was to define the limits of power and obligation permitted to or imposed upon each group or individual bound by the *foedus*. The *foedera naturae* similarly dictate the boundaries of a thing's powers and existence from its birth to its death, and each type of created thing is governed by its own set of *foedera naturae*. These boundaries are eternal and incontrovertible; transgression of these borders results in immediate destruction and death (1.670-71, 892-93; 2.519-20, 753-54). As we also saw in Chapter Two, *fines* or limits have a deep significance for Epicurean philosophy as a whole as well, acting as the unifying principle behind its ethical, physical and epistemic doctrines (De Lacy 1969: 104-105, 113). It is particularly important to Epicurean ethics, which identifies the root of all fear and anxiety as ignorance of limits (e.g., 3.978-1023; 5.1430-33; *Ep. Her.* 81; *Ep. Men.* 125). The centrality of limits to Roman *foedera* would thus have made them an appealing model for Lucretius' Epicurean world-system.

Another important similarity between Roman *foedera* and Lucretius' *foedera naturae* was the intrinsic physicality of *foedera* in space and time. The Epicureans were materialists who believed that everything, including the soul, was composed of atoms and void. The *foedera naturae* thus coexist with created kinds in the world as essential properties informing matter and providing a framework within which things can come to be, grow, flourish and decay. Similarly, Roman *foedera* were made manifest through the actions and behaviour of the people they bound, in addition to existing as physical monuments testifying to a moment of power in time where promises were bound. A treaty is real, i.e., exists, because it actually physically exists. It is literally embodied, both by the people acting out its terms and conditions, but also by the pillar which (literally) stands as proof of its real existence in the world. Both the *foedera naturae* and Roman *foedera* thus depend on matter for their existence but, in the case of the *foedera naturae*, this dependence goes both ways. Viewing the *foedera naturae* from this perspective also helped underscore the Epicureans' departure from Platonic idealism,

which asserted the existence of independently existing ideal Forms, in virtue of which corporeal objects are what they are.

The final shared characteristic examined in Chapter Two was the inherent dichotomy of *foedus* as both a creative and destructive force. Roman *foedera* were ritually struck by the *fetiales*, a college of priests whose sole function was to oversee the making of war or peace. A *foedus* arose out of the violence of war and was ratified by a particularly vicious and gory act of sacrifice, while the breaking of a *foedus* triggered a resumption of fighting and resulted in widespread loss of life and carnage. Likewise, the *foedera naturae* bring order and peace out of violent chaos in the form of atomic *concilia*, whose constituent atoms revert back to their warlike clashings once the peace imposed by the *foedera naturae* is transgressed. Within an atomic *concilium*, tensions from within and assaults from without meant that violence underlay even the most harmonious joining. As with the Romans themselves, whose mythological origins are fraught with violence and destruction (e.g., the Fall of Troy, Romulus and Remus, etc.), war and peace and creation and destruction are inextricably joined in both Roman *foedera* and the *foedera naturae*.

The conflict and collisions of the atoms can be seen as a kind of cosmic civil war, particularly when this tension comes from within a unified whole. Cabisius draws attention to parallels between Lucretius' description of dust motes in sunlight (2.125-31) and Cicero and Sallust's accounts detailing the Catilinarian conspiracy (1984: 116). The dust motes, described in terms of clandestine civil unrest, are "in turmoil (*turbare*) within the sun's rays," which "indicates that there are secret and unseen motions (*clandestinos caecosque*) also hidden in matter" (2.126-28). These furtive movements lack the maliciousness and purpose of human conspirators, however, and are "secret and unseen" solely because atoms are too small for us to perceive; we see their movement only through the motions of larger compounds. It is the nature of atoms to ceaselessly move

throughout space, and so their constant collisions are necessary and valueless. Their motion is also essentially generative and, even when the incessant battering leads to the dissolution of an atomic compound, this simply frees up more material for future creations. Human civil war, on the other hand, is primarily malicious and destructive, and generally driven by greed for power. This greed is in turn motivated by false beliefs and ignorance of limits and so is self-defeating. As was shown in Chapter Two, although Lucretius' *foedera naturae* bear some resemblance to Roman treaties, this comparison also exposes the latter as a pale, flawed imitation of nature, one which plays at being what the *foedera naturae* truly and incontrovertibly are.

With these shared characteristics taken into consideration, Lucretius' innovative use of *foedus* seems altogether reasonable and on par with his other puns and word-play in *DRN*. This etymological play can be subtle or cheeky, and can operate on a few different levels. When Lucretius famously calls Heraclitus *clarus ob obscuram linguam* (1.639) or "illustrious for his dark speech," for example, he plays on the Latin equivalent of *kleitos*, the last half of Heraclitus' name (Snyder 1978: 228-29). Although *kleitos* and *clarus* mean "renowned", "illustrious" or "famous", *clarus* also means "bright" or "clear". Lucretius thus creates an oxymoron ("clear in his obscure speech") to poke fun at Heraclitus' incomprehensible philosophy while playing on his nickname ὁ Σκοτεινός, "the dark or obscure one" (*Fin.* 2.15; *Nat. Deor.* 1.74; *AUC* 23.39.3, etc.; see Bailey 1963: 714), suggesting that he is famous only because he is so obscure. Lucretius' word-play and linguistic virtuosity applies to ordinary words as well, with perhaps the best and most obvious example being his designation of atoms as *primordia rerum*, *semina*, *corpora prima* and *corpora genitalia*, depending on which role he wishes to emphasize.¹⁷⁹ They are *primordia rerum* or the "first-beginnings of things" when their primacy or indestructability is the focus, for example, as when Lucretius declares that "bodies are partly the first-beginnings of things, partly those which are formed by union

¹⁷⁹ See Keen 1979 for an in-depth analysis of these terms as Lucretian translations of specific phrases found in Epicurus' writings.

of the first-beginnings” (*corpora sunt porro partim primordia rerum, / partim concilio quae constant principiorum*, 1.483-84). When he wishes to underscore their generative powers, on the other hand, he uses *corpora genitalia* or *semina* (e.g., 2.62-63: *nunc age, quo motu genitalia materiai / corpora res varias gignant genitasque resolvant*, 2.62-63).

Chapter Three looked at the deeper significance of Lucretius’ use of *foedus* and its role in his therapeutic programme of correction. Driving this chapter was Lucretius’ exploitation of the etymological connection between the noun *foedus* (‘treaty’, ‘covenant’) and the adjective *foedus*, ‘foul’. This chapter was divided into two sections. The first part examined Lucretius’ critique of Roman society and its values through his manipulation of language, while the second focused on the ethical impact of the close etymological association between *foedus* and what is foul. I began Chapter Three with an examination of Lucretius’ appropriation of the epic genre as part of his social critique against traditional Greek and Roman practices and values. Epicurean emphases on natural limits and avoiding excess particularly clashed with the imperial values of Roman epic, so Lucretius’ deviation from traditional epic subject-matter can be seen as a rejection of and challenge against the social values of his time. Just as Virgil later systematically corrects Lucretius’ divergences to restore epic to its traditional form, so Lucretius systematically corrects the erroneous views of his poetic predecessors to guide his audience back to a meaningful and true understanding of nature. Lucretius thus retains the essential characteristics of epic while massaging the content and focus to represent an Epicurean view of the world. In true Lucretian fashion, he does so while claiming his *DRN* is a truer and more real epic than the literary past. Unlike Homer and Ennius, he truly writes on the nature of things. The conflict and warfare of traditional epic is translated into the passionless, random collisions of the atoms or the intellectual battles of philosophers. Epicurus and his triumph over *religio* and *superstitio* replace the flawed gods and heroes of myth and their victories over creatures which are far less monstrous or harmful than the anxieties arising from false beliefs and ignorance of limits.

Virtue and *pietas* are redefined and we are given a prescription for happiness which will actually work.

Lucretius' appropriation of epic meter and conventions reflects his wider practice of using common Latin words for his philosophical vocabulary. Both practices are at heart a criticism and rejection of the traditions on which they are based, and are an attempt to redirect his Roman audience towards a more meaningful interpretation of reality. By retaining those aspects of Roman culture which can be salvaged, Lucretius makes his doctrine more palatable and accessible to his Roman audience. At the same time, however, he redefines their foundations into concepts more acceptable to his Epicurean teachings, using familiar words and conventions to guide and retrain his audience's thought-patterns. By repeatedly linking *foedus* ('foul') with unEpicurean attitudes or behaviours, then, especially within the context of sacrifice or *religio*, Lucretius conditions his reader to associate *foedus* ('foul') with its more psychological or moralistic, rather than physical, meanings. Then, when we retro-actively consider the etymological roots of human *foedera* and the attendant ritual sacrifices, we are more likely to perceive them as morally wrong or evil. When contrasted with the *foedera naturae* on the other hand, which are exempt from the superstitions and ritual murders of human treaties – we might say that *foedera naturae* are not created *foede* or “foully” because they are not created at all; they simply are, eternally and necessarily – human *foedera* are exposed as even emptier and unjustified. This reappraisal of Roman practices and institutions in turn effects, ideally, a more meaningful and productive interaction with others and the world. What these relationships might look like is hinted at by Lucretius in his reinterpretation of human social history in Book Five, where human *foedera*, stripped of their religious significance, have simply become mutually beneficial non-aggression pacts which bring order and peace out of violence and chaos.

The second part of Chapter Three focused on how Lucretius subtly concentrates on the physical rather than moral connotations of *foedus* ('foul') to enrich his therapeutic philosophical message. The etymological link to *foede* provides a subtle reminder that at the core of the *foedera naturae* and therefore of nature itself is death and destruction. To achieve *ataraxia*, both the *suavis* and the *foeditas* of nature must be rationally examined and accepted. As the Epicurean acolyte progresses through his or her studies, however, what first appeared ugly, distressing or evil is revealed to be just so many atoms and void. It is highly suggestive that Lucretius uses *foedus* for the "foul flavour" (*foedo sapore*, 2.401) of wormwood, yet differentiates between this and its "harsh nature" (*taetra natura*). Just as children require a sweet coating of honey to mask the bitter flavour of wormwood while adults cognizant of its therapeutic powers do not, so initiates into Epicureanism are soothed by Lucretius' honeyed words and poetry, while the Epicurean sage needs only the truth. By placing a word etymologically linked to the foul at the center of his Epicurean world-system, Lucretius subtly and artfully reminds his audience that where there is unity and creation there is also destruction and decay and one cannot exist without the other. To fail to recognize this is to remain a child cowering from imaginary bogeymen in the dark, enslaved and oppressed by irrational fears (2.55-61 = 3.87-93, 6.35-41).

Lucretius does recognize that confronting reality can be painful and frightening and so he employs various techniques to soften this process of enlightenment. By the time his reader has come to the end of *DRN*, however, if he has properly assimilated Lucretius' teachings, he should be ready to face nature at its most foul and horrific on his own, unaided by Lucretius' diversionary tactics. Lucretius therefore closes his *DRN* with the Plague of Athens narrative (6.1138-1287), a disturbing portrayal of the dissolution of human dignity and the triumph of irrationality in the face of death and sickness. This abrupt and inglorious ending has often been interpreted as a failure of Epicureanism or a sign that Lucretius died before he could complete his work. As I argue in Chapter Three,

however, the horrifying ending of *DRN* makes both formal and thematic sense. Lucretius follows the epic tradition of ending *in media res* with images of death and burial, and the dissolution at the end of Book Six mirrors the creative celebration of the beginning of Book One, closing the cycle of creation and destruction that frames the work as a whole as well as the smaller cycles occurring in each book or pairing of books.

It is worth noting that for both Lucretius and Epicurus – and most other philosophers for that matter – philosophy is a lifelong commitment and a way of life. Epicurus, in his letter to Herodotus, describes himself as one “who urge[s] upon others the constant occupation in the investigation of nature, and find[s] my own peace chiefly in a life so occupied” (*Ep. Her.* 37). He is very clear that his letters are summaries and abbreviations of the elementary principles and formulae (*Ep. Her.* 35-37), whose greatest use is aiding others “to make a rapid use of observation and mental apprehension” (*Ep. Her.* 36). Similarly, Lucretius warns his reader that he will leave “these little tracks” (*haec vestigia parva*, 1.402-409; cf. 1.1114-17) for his audience to follow, but his wish is that “you will be able for yourself to see one thing after another in such matters as these, and to penetrate all unseen hiding-places, and draw forth the truth from them” (1.406-409). Lucretius’ teachings are of utmost importance, but primarily for their value in preparing his audience to achieve a contemplative and happy life. Ultimately, then, our happiness depends solely on ourselves. *Ataraxia* is possible but only if we constantly guard ourselves against making unjustified or irrational assumptions of the world around us.

The unvarnished image of death and suffering found at the end of Book Six therefore fulfills another purpose and acts as a final test for Lucretius’ reader: can he or she view the carnage and collapse of society caused by the plague with serenity and accept the inevitability of death in its most horrifying form, or must the reader return to the beginning of *DRN* and relearn the catechism? Lucretius has hinted at this test from

the start of *DRN* and has gradually increased the graphicness and violence of his work to prepare his reader for the “real” world. With his powerfully bleak finale, we can see Lucretius cutting his audience’s umbilical cord and releasing his reader into the world, equipped with the tools of logic and clear thought. How she reacts to the Plague of Athens narrative and its attendant horror determines whether she is ready to face the world on her own or not. If the reader becomes bogged down in the hopelessness and fear permeating the end of *DRN* then she can return to the beginning, seeking comfort and solace in the Invocation to Venus. This in turn encourages the reader to restudy or relearn the catechism until she can maintain this air of serenity, on her own, even in the face of abject despair and horror.

I stated earlier that the Epicurean sage recognizes that what seems evil or horrific in nature only seems that way from a narrow, egocentric point of view. Viewed from a universal perspective, catastrophic or traumatizing events diminish in importance and scope and are revealed to be mere processes in an endless cycle of creation and destruction. We see the beauty and necessity of this endless recycling of material and cease railing against cosmic injustice, because we come to understand that such a thing does not exist. Things happen for a reason – i.e., have physical causes – and although nature is fiercely inexorable, it is also rationally comprehensible. With this in mind, it is highly significant that *foedus* (‘foul’) does not appear in Lucretius’ description of the Plague of Athens, despite its common appearance in similar contexts in works contemporaneous with *DRN*. Recall again that for Lucretius, wormwood has a *taetra natura* but a *foedo sapore* (2.400-401; 1.936, 4.124). The absence of *foedus* in the plague narrative, then, reflects the reader’s progression from judging nature as harsh and evil from a narrow, anthropocentric view, to comprehending it as a series of intelligible, logical processes that are objectively valueless and non-teleological. By placing his *foedera naturae* at the heart of his mechanical world-system, Lucretius subconsciously reminds his reader to investigate all parts of nature, even what appears *foedus*. In doing

so, his reader comes to the realization that nothing in nature is *foedus*; rather, it is the irrational and harmful actions performed by humans under the influence of *religio* and *superstitio* that deserve that designation. Thus, just as the *foedera naturae* are impervious to the taint of sacrifice which clings to human *foedera*, so too are natural processes absolved of the taint of *foeditas* that clings to human actions.

To summarize: at the beginning of this thesis we asked why Lucretius uses *foedus* for the impersonal natural laws that non-providentially govern and define all things in the universe, despite its troubling associations with *religio*, *superstitio*, imperialistic ambitions, sacrifice and competition. A close comparison between the two types of *foedera* revealed several essential shared characteristics, enabling Lucretius to piggyback onto pre-existing Roman conceptions with a minimum of explanation. It also provided him with the opportunity to point out the superiority of the *foedera naturae* to human treaties, with the latter revealed as pale imitations of what the *foedera naturae* actually are. *Foedus* has the added advantage of etymologically stemming from an act of sacrifice performed *foede* or “foully”, a symbolically rich explanation which Lucretius fully capitalizes on. On the one hand he insidiously links *foedus* (‘foul’) with immoral or superstitious behaviour by repeatedly using the adjective to describe irrationally harmful or fearful actions. Then, when we re-examine the foulness of the fetial sacrifice we have been conditioned to view it as evil or immoral rather than merely gory, and this valuation carries over into sacrifice and superstitious behaviour in general. Lucretius thus exposes some of the major cultural institutions of Rome as empty and flawed, while at the same time offering more productive alternatives.

On the other hand Lucretius takes full advantage of such a visceral etymological root to subconsciously remind his audience that *all* parts of the world, both the beautiful and the ugly (*foedus*), must be rationally examined. Destruction and decay is imbedded within each created thing from the moment of its birth, and to fail to recognize this is to

fail to be an Epicurean. Epicureanism, which preaches an unswerving commitment to the truth, is like bitter wormwood with its *foedus sapor*: unpalatable and harsh at first, but infinitely beneficial to one's health. Thus, although it is difficult at first, when we finally do unflinchingly confront the world in all its glory and horror, we find that what appeared evil or horrendous from an ignorant, anthropocentric point of view turns into an austere beautiful series of physical processes that are logically intelligible and empty of moral valuation. The absence of the adjective *foedus* from Lucretius' vivid portrayal of the Plague of Athens that brings *DRN* to a close reflects his reader's progression from his narrow view of nature as foul, to his enlightened perspective of nature as process. As this thesis has shown, then, *foedus* is not an unsuitable or incomprehensible choice at all. Rather, it is a particularly apt technical term, infusing almost every aspect of Lucretius' Epicurean work with subtle complexity and meaning and contributing strongly to his polemical, therapeutic, ethical and didactic agendas.

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