

LUCRETIUS AND THE EPICUREAN TRADITION OF PIETY

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EPICURUS' PARADOXICAL ATTITUDE toward religious observances has fascinated scholars for a long time now.¹ Although he dismissed most of the popular notions about the gods and their involvement in human affairs, he still encouraged his followers to participate in the traditional cults of their countries. He believed that, by engaging in popular religious activities, they would strengthen their own mental conception of the gods and thereby be better able to imitate and experience the divine blessedness.² Yet, even when keeping this doctrine of imitation in view, one formidable inconsistency remains: How can an Epicurean maintain his ἀταραξία while praying, sacrificing, and making vows to gods who neither heed such ritualistic expressions nor are moved by them? In other words, would not the constant exposure to incorrect views about the gods and involvement in wrongheaded rituals corrupt the Epicurean's purified conception of the gods?

Many find a resolution to the problem in Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* 5.1198–1203. Since there Lucretius sharply criticizes specific procedures of religious observance, some infer that Epicurus must have encouraged his followers to take part in cults in general terms, but discouraged participation in certain rituals. Numerous passages in Philodemus' *Περὶ εὐσεβείας*,

I owe thanks to the many scholars who read this article and made suggestions in various stages of its development: J. K. Newman, John Bateman, Maryline Parca, Elizabeth Asmis, Bernard Frischer, Anastasia T. Summers, and the anonymous referees of *CP*.

1. For work on Epicurus' views on religious observance, see A. J. Festugière, *Epicurus and His Gods*, trans. C. W. Chilton (Oxford, 1955), chap. 4, "The Religion of Epicurus"; Benjamin Farrington, "The Gods of Epicurus and the Roman State," in *Head and Hand in Ancient Greece* (London, 1947), 88–113; Wolfgang Schmid, "Götter und Menschen in der Theologie Epikurs," *RM* 94 (1951): 97–156; John Rist, *Epicurus: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 1972); Dietrich Lemke, *Die Theologie Epikurs* (Munich, 1973) and the review by Bernard Frischer, *CP* 72 (1977): 356–60; Dirk Obbink, "POxy. 215 and Epicurean Religious Θεωρία," *Atti del XVII Congresso Internazionale di Papirologia* 2 (Naples, 1984), 607–14; Marek Winiarczyk, "Wer galt im Alterum als Atheist?" *Philologus* 128 (1984): 168–79; Dirk Obbink, "The Atheism of Epicurus," *GRBS* 30 (1989): 187–223; Elizabeth Asmis, "Philodemus' Epicureanism," *ANRW* II.36.4 (1990): 2369–406, esp. 2381–84; Marek Winiarczyk, "Wer galt im Altertum als Atheist? 2. Teil," *Philologus* 136 (1992): 306–10.

2. See, e.g., Philodemus *De Pietate* 1.765–72 ἐν δ[ε] ταῖς ἑορταῖς μ[ά]λιστ' εἰς ἐπίνοιαν αὐτῆς βαδίζοντα διὰ τὸ τοῦνομα πάντα ἀνὰ στόμ' ἔχειν π[ι]σ[τ]εῖ σφοδ[ρ]ο[τέ]ρωσ κατα[σ]χεῖν τῇ[ν] . . . For the text see Dirk Obbink, ed., *Philodemus on Piety: Critical Text with Commentary* (Oxford, 1995) (hereafter = Obbink). I am grateful to Professor Obbink for providing me with the relevant passages before his edition reached press. See also Diogenes of Oenoanda, 19 (NF 115) II. 6–11 (in M. F. Smith, ed., *Diogenes of Oenoanda: "The Epicurean Inscription"* [Naples, 1993]): Δεῖ δ' ἰλαρὰ τῶν θεῶν ποιεῖν ξόανα καὶ μειδιῶντα ἴν' ἀντιμεδιάσωμεν μᾶλλον αὐτοῖς ἢ φοβηθῶμεν.

however, disprove this inference. Philodemus draws heavily upon the words and actions of Epicurus, Hermarchus, Polyaenus, and Metrodorus to argue for full participation in traditional cults, thus presenting the school's orthodox position.³ Lucretius, on the other hand, by criticizing the specific details of religious practice, particularly Roman religious practice, represents a deviation from his master's original intent on the matter. It will be argued here that the religious ideas of Epicurus, especially as expressed by Philodemus, cannot be harmonized with the more revolutionary ones of Lucretius.

LUCRETIVS 5.1198–1203

For Lucretius' contemporary Cicero, *superstitio* is the groundless fear of the gods, while *religio* is the pious worship of them (*Nat. D.* 1.117). Elsewhere he defines *religio* in practical terms by *cultus deorum* instead of a set of doctrinal statements. Whereas the exact nature of the gods remained nebulous, every Roman knew his or her duty regarding the traditional rituals that constituted *religio*. *Religio* meant fulfilling an understood contractual relationship with the gods. It involved acts, rather than beliefs; it centered on cult, instead of theology.⁴

Therefore, when in the following passage Lucretius inveighed against the outward modes of worship, he struck at the heart of religion as the Romans knew it: few could have appreciated, as their primary expression of religion, the emphasis he was putting on meditation (5.1198–1203):

nec pietas ullast velatum saepe videri
vertier ad lapidem atque omnis accedere ad aras,
nec procumbere humi prostratum et pandere palmas
ante deum delubra, nec aras sanguine multo
spargere quadrupedum, nec votis nectere vota,
sed mage placata posse omnia mente tueri.

Cyril Bailey's comments on this passage exemplify the perplexity Lucretius' brief diatribe against religion has aroused.⁵ He remarks that Epicurus observed religious ceremonies and performed blood sacrifices and called on others to do likewise to prove their piety; he adds, "it is not the act of worship which the Epicurean thinks wrong, but its motive." It is important to note, however, that Bailey generalizes about Epicureans rather than attributes the view to Lucretius, since the passage at hand would contradict his assertion. The rest of his arguments exhibit the same unwarranted blending of

3. In addition to the passages cited in n. 5 below, see 1.730–37 (Obbink): ὁ δ' Ἰπικουρος φανή[σεται] καὶ τετρηκῶς [ἄπαν]τα καὶ τοῖς φί[λοις] τ[η]ρεῖν παρεγ[γυνη]κῶς, οὐ μόνον [διὰ] τῶς νόμους ἀλλὰ διὰ φυσικῶς [αἰτίας].

4. See especially Alan Wardman, *Religion and Statecraft among the Romans* (London, 1982), 57–58; Jean Salem, "Comment traduire *religio* chez Lucrèce: Notes sur la constitution d'un vocabulaire philosophique latin à l'époque de Cicéron et Lucrèce," *Les études classiques* 62 (1994): 3–26.

5. Cyril Bailey, ed., *Titi Lucreti Cari De rerum natura libri sex* (Oxford, 1947), ad loc. In line 1203 Bailey reads *pacata* for *placata*, but the manuscripts attest the latter reading (although in either case the sense is unchanged); on the textual problem see M. F. Smith, "Three Textual Notes on Lucretius," *CR* 16 (1966): 265–66.

Epicurean and Lucretian ideas. Lucretius is pious, he thinks, like Epicurus, and not at all against the worship of the gods; Lucretius only resents sacrifices and religious ceremonies, since they derive from superstition, that is, false fears stemming from false beliefs about the gods. Yet it cannot be, as Bailey says, that Lucretius is pious *like* Epicurus if Lucretius disparages the very sacrifices and ceremonies that Epicurus encouraged.⁶ Still he continues this train of thought: true piety for the Epicurean, he says, is the blissful contemplation of divine mental images. But does Lucretius' *placata posse omnia mente tueri* really have a parallel in Epicurus? Is "true piety" for Epicurus the same as for Lucretius? The texts suggest otherwise.

In analyzing this passage (5.1198–1203) and others of the *De rerum natura* in detail I want to show that Lucretius writes about current Roman religious practice, and that the Romans who read (or heard) his poem would have recognized the elements of their own religion in it.⁷ Furthermore, Lucretius' attack on Roman cult is comprehensive; he attacks the totality of the Roman religious experience, including both *publica sacra* and personal acts of piety. Although Lucretius never explicitly forbids participation in cult, the hostility he shows throughout his poem to specific acts of traditional Roman piety and the confidence he places in reason suggest that he envisioned a religious experience different from that of Epicurus. He gives no indication, as Epicurus often did, that participation in standing cultic rituals offered benefits to one with a right attitude. Instead, Lucretius emphasizes that religion has its origin in fear and intimidation, and that many of its cultic acts still depend on those ideas. Accordingly he derides current religious practice, with all of its browbeating and contractual requirements.⁸

Lines 5.1198–1203 belong to the larger context of Lucretius' discussion of the origins of religious beliefs and rites among mankind (5.1161–67):

6. Likewise I cannot agree with Leonard and Smith's view, that "In his attack he [Lucretius] follows the teaching of Epicurus, who held that, while we should worship the Gods, we should not observe an elaborate ritual but should worship only with pure and noble thoughts. See Philodemus (*De piet.* VH², II.108.9)" (*T. Lucreti Cari De rerum natura libri sex* [Madison, 1942], ad 1198–1202). This would seem to be the prevailing interpretation of 5.1198–1203. Even so, Leonard and Smith have read into Philodemus' words more than is actually there: "ἡμ[εῖς] θεοῖς] θύομεν" φησιν "[ὅσι]ως καὶ καλῶς, οὐ [καθ]ήκει, καὶ κ[αλῶς] πάντα πράττωμεν [κατὰ τοὺς νόμους, μ[η]θ[ε]ν] ταῖς δόξαις αὐ[τῶ]ν τοὺς [perhaps αὐτοὺς, as Gomperz, Philippson] ἐν τοῖς περὶ τῶν ἀρίστον κ[αί] σεμνοτάτων διαταράττοντε[ς]" (1.879–89 Obbink). As the text stands, then, I do not read a rejection of "elaborate ritual" by Epicurus, as Leonard and Smith do. To the contrary, Epicurus encourages his readers to sacrifice to the gods "devoutly and fittingly on proper days," and he adds that they should do everything "in accordance with the laws." Furthermore, at 1.790–804 Philodemus reports that Epicurus not only taught his readers to comply with the religious laws, he himself took part in all the traditional festivals and sacrifices (πάσαις ταῖς πατρίοις ἑορταῖς καὶ θυσίαις κε[χ]ρ[η]μ[έ]νος; cf. 1.730–51), including the Anthesteria (cf. 1.867) and Attic Dionysia.

7. The question of whether Lucretius was read at all by his contemporaries is an interesting one. Cf. G. C. Pucci's "Echi lucreziani in Cicerone," *SIFC* 38 (1966): 70–132; Knut Kleve, "Lucretius in Herculeaneum," *BCPE* 19 (1989): 5–27, has recently found evidence that Lucretius was central to the Epicureans in Herculeaneum, and H. H. Howe, "Amatinius, Lucretius, and Cicero," *AJP* 72 (1951): 57–62, has argued that he was read among the *municipia*. See also Jean-Marie André, "Cicéron et Lucrèce: loi du silence et allusions polémiques," in *Mélanges de philosophie de littérature et d'histoire ancienne offerts à Pierre Boyancé* (Rome, 1974), 21–38.

8. Many Romans, who were convinced that religion required they do something to appease the gods' anger or win their favor, would have seen Lucretius' definition of *pietas* as revolutionary. Thus Lactantius

Nunc quae causa deum per magnas numina gentis
 pervulgarit et ararum compleverit urbis
 suspiciendaque curarit sollemnia sacra,
 quae nunc in magnis florent sacra rebus locisque,
 unde etiam nunc est mortalibus insitus horror
 qui delubra deum nova toto suscitatur orbi
 terrarum et festis cogit celebrare diebus.

Nations have filled their cities with temples, he says, and have instituted sacred rites for holy days (1161–68), because they have ascribed to the anthropomorphic images of the gods, which come to them intuitively⁹ both when awake and in dreams (1169–71), human attributes that do not belong to them (1172–74). Furthermore, since these mental images of the gods appear nobler, stronger, and happier, and since these gods seem to accomplish many miracles, people suppose that they control the events in the heavens (1174–93).

Several points are worth noting from this larger context, 5.1161–93, before analyzing 5.1198–1203. Despite the broad historical (*pervulgarit*, *compleverit*, and *curarit*) and universal (*toto orbi*) scope applied to the discussion of *religio*, Lucretius' real interest in the here and now—contemporary Rome—permeates the passage. Thus he quickly dismisses the past tenses (1162–63) for the present tenses in the lines that follow: *florent*, *est*, *suscitat*, and *cogit*. He reiterates the *nunc* of 1164 in 1165 to emphasize the present, and then adds *nova* in 1166 to show that these habits persist. The phrases *sollemnia sacra* (1163), *delubra suscitatur* (1166), and *festis diebus* (1167) are general enough that no Roman would have pictured, say, Egyptian or Jewish practices, but rather his own religion.

Regarding the next section (lines 1169–93), Bailey rightly notes that Epicureans viewed the initial cause of religious feeling in man, that is, the constant stream of divine images, as legitimate and pure. Religion became distorted only when mankind misinterpreted those images by attaching to them limitless power and the will to intervene in human affairs. Bailey recognizes that lines 1198–1203 (*nec pietas ullast . . .*) relate to this later distortion, but he does not carry the point through to its conclusion. Lucretius transforms the idea of what piety is for a Roman by rejecting rituals that perpetuate a belief in a reciprocal contract between gods and men. He opts instead for a rational meditation of the workings of nature, which alone can ease fears. Clearly, Lucretius thinks that the implied threats and anxiety inherent within traditional Roman religion inhibit the attainment of this goal.

accuses Lucretius of undermining pagan worship without intending to replace it (*Div. Inst.* 2.3–4): *Denique alio loco religiones deorum et cultus inane esse officium confitetur: "Nec pietas ullast . . ."* Lactantius further remarks that it would have been better if Lucretius had allowed his readers to continue in their pagan rituals, because at least then he would have left them with the impression that *some* religion is true. Similarly, at *Nat. D.* 1.121, written just a few years after Cicero had seen the *De rerum natura* (see *QFr.* 2.10.3), Cicero has Cotta argue that Epicureanism is tearing up religion by the roots.

9. This refers to the ἐπιβολὴ τῆς διανοίας (the immediate apprehension by the mind of the subtle, but constant stream of rarefied divine atoms).

In 1198–99, *velatum saepe videri / vertier ad lapidem*, the word *velatum* connotes a specific Roman custom, as opposed to a Greek one.¹⁰ Pierre Boyancé has suggested that *velatum* refers not to the subject of *vertier*, as commonly taken, but to *lapidem*, which were sometimes garlanded.¹¹ He bases his argument on the grounds that veiling the head is, according to him, properly *ritu Graeco*; however, exactly the opposite is true. Whether an official priest or priestess acting on behalf of the State, or a private citizen sacrificing for his own purposes, the Roman commonly worshipped *capite velato*.¹² Commentators have drawn the parallel with Vergil *Aeneid* 3.405–7, where Helenus tells Aeneas and his companions,

purpureo velare comas adopertus amictu
ne qua inter sanctos ignis in honore deorum
hostilis facies occurrat et omina turbet . . .

Helenus then bids Aeneas to make this a traditional part of their religion.¹³ Ovid mentions Numa *caput niveo velatus amictu* (*Fast.* 3.363).¹⁴ The purpose of the veil, according to Virgil's Helenus, is to keep the worshiper from seeing *hostilis facies* lest they disturb the *omina*.¹⁵ Various Roman coins and statues, however, show that the eyes were not covered during the ceremony (see discussion below). On the *Ara Pacis* (voted 13 B.C., completed 9 B.C.), erected by Augustus, Aeneas (together with Vestal Virgins, priests, and magistrates) is represented in the act of sacrificing with his head veiled, yet eyes uncovered.¹⁶ Perhaps the veil only demonstrates the readiness to cover the eyes if evil visages should appear in the sacred flames and therefore was not always pulled over the eyes.¹⁷

10. Plutarch expresses fascination over the custom at *Quaest. Rom.* 10: Διὰ τί τοὺς θεοὺς προσκυνοῦντες ἐπικαλύπτονται τὴν κεφαλὴν; cf. Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Ant. Rom.* 12.16), concerning Aeneas and Camillus (396 B.C.); for the latter see Livy 5.21.16. The Romans were very conscious of the fact that their rites were different from those of the Greeks; see K. J. Marquardt, *Römische Staatsverwaltung*, vol. 3: *Sacralwesen*, Handbuch der römischen Alterthümer, 6 (Leipzig, 1885²), 186–87; K.-H. Roloff, "Ritus," *Glotta* 33 (1954): 35–65; I. S. Ryberg, *Rites of the State Religion in Roman Art*, Memoirs of the American Academy at Rome, 22 (Rome, 1955), 27, 43, 97, 136, 176–77; Macrobi. *Sat.* 1.8.2, 3.6.17, 3.12.1; Varro *Ling.* 5.84.130; Kurt Latte, *Römische Religionsgeschichte* (Munich, 1960), 392.

11. Pierre Boyancé, *Lucrèce et l'Épicurisme* (Paris, 1963), p. 254, n. 1. Boyancé has defended his reading in "Velatum . . . ad lapidem," *Latomus* 35 (1976): 550–54. There he mentions several articles written to contradict him.

12. On the origin of the rite see Georg Appel, *De Romanorum precationibus*, Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten, 7.2 (Giessen, 1909), 190. For the prevalence of this devotional veiling among the Romans see *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, vol. 3 (Leipzig, 1900), 387–88; Giulio Cressedi, "Caput Velatum e Cinctus Gabinus," *Rend. Linc.* 5 (1950): 450–56; Henri Graillot, "Velamen, Velamentum," *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines*, vol. 5, ed. Charles Daremberg and Edmond Saglio (Paris, 1919), 670–71. Plautus implies that wearing the veil was an integral part of all worship (*Amph.* 1091–94); Vergil's references to the practice show its importance (see below). See also Livy 8.9.6–7, 10.7.9–10, Varro *Ling.* 5.15.84, 5.29.130, Cic. *Dom.* 124, Val. Flac. *Arg.* 5.95–97. Veiling the head was also practiced by the Arval Brethren; see *ILS* 5036.6 and 5039. The veiling of Septimius Severus and Julia Domna while sacrificing on the *Arcus Argentariorum* (A.D. 204, now next to the Church of S. Giorgio in Velabro; Ernest Nash, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome* [New York, 1961–62], 1.90) illustrates the persistence of the practice. See also H. Freier, *Caput Velare* (Diss., Tübingen, 1966).

13. The Trojans perform the rite at *Aen.* 3.545 *et capita ante aras Phrygio velamur amictu*. See the discussion at Marquardt, *Staatsverwaltung*, 3:186.

14. Cf. Livy 1.18.7 and Plut. *Num.* 7.2.

15. For this interpretation of *Aen.* 3.406 see Cyril Bailey, *Religion in Virgil* (Oxford, 1935), 16.

16. See Giuseppe Moretti, *The Ara Pacis Augustae*, Series of Itineraries of the Museums, Galleries, and Monuments in Italy, 67 (Rome, 1948), pl. 15.

17. Plutarch (*Quaest. Rom.* 10) suggests that the veil was meant to keep the worshiper from hearing evil omens, which he relates to the clashing that accompanied many Roman ceremonies.

In particular, coins depict the head of *Pietas* herself wearing a veil (Herennius, Caesar, Hirtius, Tiberius)¹⁸ or her full figure with veiled head and in the act of sacrificing (Caligula, Galba, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius). Specifically, Caligula's coin shows a veiled *Pietas* seated and holding out a patera on the verse; the obverse portrays a veiled Caligula sacrificing a bull in the temple of *Divus Augustus* and holding out a patera.¹⁹ The extended patera, as well as the veiled head, connects Caligula with the *Pietas* on the reverse, suggesting both the piety of his sacrifice and the piety he offers to his subjects.²⁰ On Galba's coin *Pietas* stands veiled at an altar on which is a relief with Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius; the legend around *Pietas* reads *Pietas Augusti, S.C.*²¹ The coin of Hadrian shows a standing, veiled *Pietas* on the reverse, holding her hands upward with an offering or in a praying gesture. On the reverse of Antoninus Pius' coin, *Pietas*, her head veiled, scatters grains of incense on an altar.²² These numismatic types derive from the numerous Roman statues, from all periods, of *Pietas* and similar goddesses wearing a veil.²³

Although the personification of *Pietas* most often signifies the devotion of child to parent, it also signifies the devotion of the citizen to the gods, as the many depictions of *Pietas* before the altar make clear. In the same way, Aeneas is *pious* both because he rescued his father from Troy and because he brought with him the household gods.²⁴ I mention these depictions of *Pietas*, not because I think Lucretius refers here to the personified deity (he does not), but to demonstrate the wide gulf between his concept of piety and the prevailing Roman view: in the latter view, piety entailed most certainly worshipping the gods at the altar with veiled head; the

18. Herennius: E. A. Sydenham, *The Coinage of the Roman Republic* (London, 1952), p. 77, pl. 19.567; Theodor Mommsen, *Über das Römische Münzwesen* (Leipzig, 1950), 566.315. Caesar, Hirtius: Sydenham, *Coinage*, 167–69, considers the veiled female to be *Pietas*, but S. E. Casano, "Le monete di Cesare," *RPAA* 23/24 (1947/49): 103–51, esp. 125–27, Andreas Alföldi, "Die Geburt der kaiserlichen Bildsymbolik," *MH* 10 (1953): 110, pls. 3.1 and 3.3, and Konrad Kraft, "Der goldene Kranz Caesars und der Kampf um die Entlarvung des 'Tyrannen,'" *JNG* 3/4 (1952–53), identify her with *Clementia*. Tiberius: Harold Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum* (London, 1932), 1:133; see also Michael Grant, *Aspects of the Principate of Tiberius* (New York, 1950), 113–15, pl. 4.10; and Antonio Vives, *La Moneda Hispánica* (Madrid, 1926), 4.80.37, pl. 50.3, including a temple. See also Josef Liegle, "Pietas," *ZfN* 42 (1932–35): 59–100, and the discussion of *Pietas*-coins in Harold Mattingly, *BMC III*, xl–xliii.

19. Mattingly, *Coins*, 1.153, 1.156.58, pl. 59.3.

20. Cf. the *Clupeus Virtutis*, awarded to Augustus by the Senate in 27 B.C. for his virtue and service to the State, with its phrase *pietatis erga deos patriamque*; see *Monumentum Ancyranum* 34.2.

21. See Colin Kraay, *The Aes Coinage of Galba* (New York, 1956), p. 196, pl. 32. This coin as well as the Caligula one (above) has similarities with a Domitian type, on which the emperor is depicted sacrificing with veiled head; standing near the shrine where he worships is an unidentified goddess, perhaps *Pietas* (instead of Minerva, as commonly believed).

22. Harold Mattingly and E. A. Sydenham, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, vol. 2 (London, 1923–), 395, 454a; P. L. Strack, *Untersuchungen zur römischen Reichsprägung des zweiten Jahrhunderts*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart, 1937), 167–68, 3–5, 50–51.

23. Laura Breglia, *Roman Imperial Coins: Their Art and Technique* (London, 1968), 48.

24. The instances of unveiled *Pietas* on coins suggest devotion between people rather than gods and people. For example, a denarius of M. Herennius, dating from ca. 107 B.C., shows an unveiled head of *Pietas* on the obverse, with a youth carrying his father on the reverse; see Sydenham, *Coinage*, 77.567. Cf. also Sydenham 158.942, a denarius of D. Postumius Albinus, 48 B.C., showing clasped hands on the reverse. Sex. Pompeius issued coins with the figure of *Pietas* (45/44 B.C.), also without veil, expressing his devotion toward his dead father; see Theodore Buttrey, "The *Pietas* Denarii of Sextus Pompey," *Num. Chron.* 6.20 (1960): 83–101; Sydenham, *Coinage*, 174, pl. 27.1042f. Antony's *Pietas* coins of 41 B.C. suggest his devotion to the memory of Julius Caesar; see Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford, 1939), 157; Sydenham, *Coinage*, 190.

deity herself personified the importance of wearing the veil before the altar. The average Roman must have clearly grasped that Lucretius had made a radical departure from religious custom when he asserted *nec pietas ullast velatum saepe videri*.

The precise connotation of *lapis* in 1199 has troubled many. If we take 1198–1202 to refer to one ceremony, then Lucretius depicts a typical worshiper who veils his head, turns toward the god's statue (*lapis*), and then prostrates himself. An attractive parallel, often adduced by commentators, is Suetonius *Vitellius* 2. Here Vitellius flatters Caligula by worshipping him as he would a god: *capite velato, circumvertensque se, deinde procumbens*.²⁵ In view of this parallel, Lucretius' use of *lapis* for the image of the god would be contemptuous and derogatory. Yet two factors preclude us from taking *lapis* to mean "statue": first, Lucretius does not trace the steps of any one rite here, so that we can draw parallels to the descriptions of ceremonies in other authors; rather, he combines elements from several ceremonies to make a generalization about *pietas*. Second, he does not employ derisive imagery in the passage to represent the other cultic objects or acts that he mentions; to the contrary, he describes the rites in straightforward terms. Indeed, the passage makes perfect sense if *lapis* simply means "stone," without further connotation.

A Roman would not have considered *lapis* to be a derogatory word in the same way as someone with a Judaeo-Christian perspective.²⁶ There were many instances in which Romans revered *lapides*, probably aerolites, which they believed Jupiter hurled from heaven.²⁷ The stones represented either the divinity itself or some aspect of its personality and function. For example, the Romans considered the relocation of the black Cybele stone from Pessinus to Rome in 204 B.C. to be equivalent to transferring the goddess herself. Both Munro and Bailey think that if *lapis* is not disparaging then it probably means either the *termini* stones or stones "set up in the streets and roads, etc. occurring so often in all periods," which were said to be *sacer*.²⁸ The former did indeed involve an elaborate worship service

25. Cf. Val. Flac. 8.243–44 "sacrificas cum coniuge venit ad aras Aesonides, unaque adeunt pariterque precari incipiunt . . . dextrum pariter vertuntur in orbem." Presumably they turned toward a statue of the god.

26. On the problem of understanding Roman religion with our Judaeo-Christian assumptions see Mary Beard and M. H. Crawford, *Rome in the Late Republic* (London, 1985), 26–27. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that still today among Roman Catholics the priest kisses the altar stone before beginning Mass.

27. See for example App. *Hist.* 7.56, Livy 29.11.7, and Acts 19:35. Possibly *lapis manalis* at the altar of Jupiter Elicius, mentioned by Tert. *De Jejunio* 16 and Petron. *Sat.* 44, also belongs to this category. On the worship of stones by the Greeks see Bernard Frischer, *The Sculpted Word* (Berkeley, 1982), 112–14.

28. H. A. J. Munro, *T. Lucreti Cari de rerum natura libri sex*⁴ (London, 1900), ad loc., lists the few references to these stones in ancient literature, mainly Christian. What Propertius means by *sacer lapis* (1.4.24) is not clear: *et quicumque sacer qualis ubique lapis* ("every sort of sacred stone that anywhere there is"), but some commentators (e.g., H. E. Butler and E. A. Barber, *The Elegies of Propertius* [Oxford, 1933], 160) identify it with the "boundary stones, representing the god Terminus," like Munro and Bailey here. Recent commentators are not willing to limit it so; see Lawrence Richardson, *Propertius Elegies I–IV* (Norman, 1977), 158: "A sacred stone might be anything from the black stone of the Magna Mater to a boundary-stone; cippi were very common in Rome and the countryside, and people had often forgotten what they stood for."

(including veiling and sacrificing) out in the country.²⁹ As for the latter category of stones, I cannot find solid evidence that indicates what they were or even that they were venerated.³⁰

We have to wonder why Lucretius chose the singular over the plural (cf. the plural forms *aras* [1199], *delubra* [1201], and *vota* [1202]). One possible answer is that he intends to say *the* stone instead of *a* stone. If so, a better parallel is found in a letter of Cicero to his friend Trebatius who has recently converted to Epicureanism (*Fam.* 7.12). Cicero complains that as an Epicurean Trebatius can no longer function properly in public life, since Epicurean principles so often contradict Roman laws that promote fairness and selflessness among the community. Furthermore, Cicero implies that as an Epicurean Trebatius will not be willing to swear by the Jupiter-stone: “Quo modo autem tibi placebit ‘Iovem Lapidem iurare,’ cum scias Iovem iratum esse nemini posse?”³¹ The Romans had two ceremonies involving a stone and an oath. In one instance the stone represents the perjurer, while the priest acts as Jupiter. The participants take their oath, and then the priest casts away the stone to show what will happen to the one who breaks the oath. The *locus classicus* of this ceremony is Polybius 3.25.³² In the second instance, the stone is an extension of Jupiter, representing his thunderbolt, which the priest uses to strike a pig, the perjurer. Livy explains the details of that ceremony (1.24.7–9 and 9.5.3; cf. Varro *Rust.* 2.4.9).³³ Possibly the same stone is at issue, viewed from two different perspectives: Jupiter either cast the stone (assuming it was an aerolite) out from heaven as a perjurer, or hurled it from heaven against perjurers.³⁴ From either perspective, the stone served as a sacred symbol of Jupiter’s wrath against the practitioners of deceit.

29. W. W. Fowler, *The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic* (London, 1899), 81–82; H. H. Scullard, *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic* (London, 1981), 79–80. According to Ov. *Fast.* 2.639–84, there was a *Terminus* stone in the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline hill (originally marking off the Palatine city from the Quirinal?), but the Roman *Terminalia* was celebrated at the sixth milestone outside the city; presumably this was the ancient boundary between Roman territory and that of the Laurentians. See Fowler, *Roman Festivals*, 324–27. Cf. Sen. *Hipp.* 528.

30. Munro’s references give inconclusive evidence of their nature and religious significance. Tibullus shows more interest in worshipping the flowering garlands on the stone than the stone itself: “nam veneror, seu stipes habet desertus in agris / seu vetus in trivio florida sarta lapis” (1.1.11–12). Possibly the “garland” is his poetry; cf. Mart. 8.82.4. At any rate, the “crossroads marker” does not appear to have any more attraction than the stump. See also Apul. *Flor.* 1, Siculus Flaccus p. 141 1.4 (Lach.), Prudent. c. *Symm.* 2.1006, Luc. *Alex.* 30. Other parallels drawn by Munro do not apply here: August. *De Civ. D.* 16.38 is about an ancient Jewish practice; Clem. Al. *Strom.* 7, is addressed to Greeks; Min. Fel. *Oct.* 3 and Arn. *Adv. Nat.* 1.39 are from the perspective of Christians; Propertius 1.4.24 is ambiguous and does not mention worship anyway.

31. Cicero perhaps did not know that Epicurus encouraged the taking of oaths (though this is unlikely, since Phaedrus was his childhood tutor) or noticed that in practice many Roman Epicureans deviated from the original teaching. Cf. Philodemus *De Pietate* 1.820–40.

32. Cf. Festus *Gloss. Lat.*, ad *Lapidem* (Lindsay 102): “Lapidem silicem tenebant iuraturi per Iovem, haec verba dicentes: ‘Si sciens fallo, tum me Dispter salva urbe arceque bonis eiciat, ut ego hunc lapidem’”; and Plut. *Sull.* 10.4

33. Cf. Festus *Gloss. Lat.*, ad *Feretrius* (Lindsay 81): “Feretrius Iuppiter dictus a ferendo, quod pacem ferre putaretur; ex cuius templo sumebant sceptrum, per quod iurarent, et lapidem silicem, quo foedus ferrent”; and Serv. *ad Aen.* 8.641. We cannot know in every case of oath-taking whether veiling was required, but certainly when a pig was sacrificed Roman custom would call for it.

34. On the various interpretations of this ceremony see J. S. Reid, “Human Sacrifices at Rome and Other Notes on Roman Religion,” *JRS* 2 (1912): 49–51.

A few other stones worshipped by the Romans could be mentioned here, but it should be evident by now how uncomfortable the phrase *nec pietas ullast . . . vertier ad lapidem* must have made the average Roman, since he could immediately think of several instances in which he himself revered a stone. And perhaps Lucretius consciously intended to be vague, to leave each contemplating whatever instance came first to mind. Any Roman would have recognized himself in Lucretius' *vertier ad lapidem*, not because of the stone's intrinsic connection with statues of Jupiter and the like, but because sometimes the gods appeared as stones.

It is tempting to relate the phrase *omnis accedere ad aras* of 1199 to the *supplicatio*, which became an important Roman ritual around the third century B.C.³⁵ We know from Caesar (*BGall.* 7.90.8) and Cicero (*Pis.* 6, *Phil.* 2.13) that Romans practiced it during the late Republic, and Livy describes the features of the ceremony as practiced during the Punic Wars (26.9.7): "undique matronae in publicum effusae circa deum delubra discurrunt crinibus passis aras verrentes, nixae genibus, supinas manus ad caelum ad deos tendentes."³⁶ The *supplicatio* was an opportunity for the general Roman public, in times of peril and thanksgiving, to worship numerous gods at once, since images of them would be placed out on the lawn, often on couches, and there worshipped with kneeling or prostration. Lucretius' description of prostration, immediately followed by opening of the palms, along with the phrase *ante deum delubra* at 1201, resembles Livy's account. But the passage of Livy suggests that the participants of the *supplicatio* wore laurel wreaths rather than veils, although one could argue that the veiled women portrayed on the Altar of Manlius are engaged in a *supplicatio*.³⁷

The *supplicatio* afforded the opportunity for Romans to express intense piety. Latte remarks, "The participation of the people as a whole in a religious act, and the intensification of feeling produced thereby, had previously been unknown in Roman religion. Instead of formulaic prayers consisting of wishes, we now have supplication that found words in the mood of the moment."³⁸ Plautus illustrates this in the *Rudens* when he says "facilius si qui pius est a dis supplicans / quam qui scelestus invenient veniam sibi" (26–27). Thus the act of "approaching every altar," at least in the context of the *supplicatio*, was for the Romans a unique experience. No fixed ritual or formulaic prayers existed to stifle the spontaneous outpouring of feeling to the gods. The gods were exposed for all to express personal heartfelt thanksgivings or unrehearsed petitions. In the mind of the

35. For the details of the *supplicatio* see W. W. Fowler, *The Religious Experience of the Roman People* (London, 1911), 265 and 317–31; Georg Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*² (Munich, 1912), 423–26; Marquardt, *Staatsverwaltung*, 48 and 188; and Leon-Ernest Halkin, *La supplication d'actions de grâces chez les Romains* (Paris, 1953), 99–105.

36. Cf. also Livy 3.5.7–14, 3.7.7, 23.11.5, 27.37.13, 40.37.3, 43.18.8, Gell. 6.4.5; and other passages at Marquardt, *Staatsverwaltung*, p. 49, n. 4.

37. See Ryberg, *Rites*, pl. xxvi.39b and the discussion on p. 86. The crude stone on which *Concordia* (?) sits might be considered another *lapis*, but in regard to the *supplicationes* these were commonly called *pulvinaria* or *lecti*.

38. *Religionsgeschichte*, 245.

Romans the act of "approaching every altar" would have been an especially pious one; certainly Lucretius' phrase, among other things, would have made the average Roman think of the *supplicatio*, and undoubtedly in that regard he would have felt deeply the import of *nec pietas ullast*.

At 1200–1201, the phrase "*nec procumbere humi prostratum et pandere palmas / ante deum delubra*" could again have many significations. In fact, it has been argued thus far that Lucretius intended to be vague, although the *supplicatio* may have served roughly as the archetypal cultic practice. Nevertheless, some parallels shed light on how a Roman might have understood the phrase.

Stretching oneself out on the ground before the images of the gods provided the outward manifestation of the inward intensity of one's emotions. Ovid's wife falls prostrate before the Penates in an earnest plea for her husband (*Tr.* 1.3.43): *Ante Lares sparsis prostrata capillis*. Similarly in Livy, the prostrate women, sweeping the temple floors with their hair, implore mercy from the gods to stop the pestilence (3.7.8).

Cicero also sheds light on the meaning of prostration, although his example is of a nobleman before the Roman people (*Planc.* 20.50): "*ut, cum minus valuissent suffragiis quam putassent, postea prolatis comitiis prosternerent se et populo Romano fracto animo atque humili supplicarent.*" This action accords with the Roman concept of piety: there is an understanding of one's role in an implied contractual relationship, as well as the expectation of a return. In other words, piety is the humble acknowledgment of reliance on the will of another, with an offer of devotion to gain favor; prostration, as a part of that piety, expresses humility and dependence.

A passage of Tibullus will illustrate the point. While writing about troubles with a certain girl, Tibullus complains of his innocence, but concedes that, if guilty of some crime, he will beg for forgiveness: "*non ego, si merui, dubitem procumbere templis / et dare sacratis oscula liminibus, . . . supplex . . .*" (1.2.83–85). Whereas Christian theology views worship as a response to the majestic nature of the deity, Romans prostrate themselves in worship to bargain with gods, asking them either to forgive a past crime (hence the sacrifice or vow) or to procure a future benefit.³⁹ The Christian idea of glorification for its own sake was foreign to the Romans. A Roman did not prostrate himself to adore the gods, but to ask something from them.⁴⁰

Thus, since piety involved a certain amount of dealing and expectation, and since prostration was symbolic of the supplication, Lucretius rejected the prevailing concept of *pietas* by applying Epicurus' doctrine in a logical

39. See *CAH*, vol. 9 (Cambridge, 1932), 801: "*Religio* implied not so much sincere reverence at heart as scrupulous observance of prescribed ritual with a semi-timid apprehension of an incalculable Power and a semi-speculative eye on the chance of ultimate benefit. . . . Romans seldom got rid of a bargaining tendency in their *pietas*, which for Cicero himself meant justice toward the gods."

40. See Fowler's discussion of the purposes of prayer at *Religious Experience*, 186–91, esp. 188. He argues that Roman prayers, despite their formulaic nature, were not like magic incantations or spells, but petitions.

way. Epicureanism taught that the gods did not stoop to make bargains; therefore prostration was ridiculous.

Closely connected with the act of prostration is the act of praying, which Lucretius represents here through the phrase *pandere palmas*. Ovid reveals the meaning of the outstretched arms or open palms concisely when he writes *ad vatem vates orantia bracchia tendo* (*Pont.* 2.9.65). The poet as *vates* performs a religious act. Seneca, in a strange mixture of Epicureanism and Stoicism, also combats this expression of Roman piety (though unlike Lucretius he means to retain the prayerful communication with an inner god): “Non sunt ad caelum elevandae manus nec exorandus aeditus, ut nos ad aurem simulacri, quasi magis exaudiri possimus, admittat; prope est a te deus, tecum est, intus est” (*Ep.* 41.1). Aeneas prays in distress over the storm sent by Aeolus: “ingemit, et, duplicis tendens ad sidera palmas” (*Verg. Aen.* 1.93). Piety, Lucretius is saying, does not involve praying to the gods.

Little needs to be said about the act of sacrificing, since it was a common expression of piety in the ancient world (1201–2 *aras sanguine multo spargere quadrupedum*). Possibly Lucretius continues to use the model of the *supplicatio*, since Romans did sacrifice during that ceremony. He had already censured the sprinkling of altars with blood when he described the efforts of men to secure divine aid in making their wives pregnant (4.1236–38):

multo sanguine maesti
conspargunt aras adolentque altaria donis,
ut gravidas reddant uxores semine largo.

Although the term *pietas* does not appear here, the concept is as much at issue as in 5.1201–2. Line 4.1239 begins with *nequiquam*, a hint of the *nec pietas ullast* to come. Sacrificing and other modes of ritual are not impious: they are vain, if not emotionally harmful,⁴¹ because they come from a misunderstanding of the nature of things. Taken together, then, these passages constitute a forceful denunciation of the Roman’s view of reality, a conception that was reflected in the way they worshipped.

The offering and fulfilling of vows (1202 *nec votis nectere vota*) was a practice shared by most ancient Mediterranean peoples, yet for the Romans it had greater significance than for most: since they couched the language of their vows in juristic terms, which was for them “the strongest form of obligation,”⁴² the vow served as a visible sign of their *iustitia* toward the gods. The hundreds of inscriptions in the *CIL* that contain the abbreviation *v.s.l.m.* (*votum solvit libens merito*) attest to the prevalence of

41. In line 1236 *maesti* may refer to the couple’s sadness over their *orbitas*, but they might also be sad because the gods are such harsh task-masters (5.85–88 “quae supera caput aetheriis cernuntur in oris / rursus in antiquas referuntur religiones, / et dominos acris adiscunt, omnia posse / quos miseri credunt”; these lines are repeated at 6.61–64; at 5.114 one is *religione refrenatus*). The adverse psychological effects of religion are brought out clearly at 5.1238–40 “quid mirum si se temnunt mortalia saecula / atque potestates magnas mirasque relinquunt / in rebus viris divum quae cuncta gubernent?”

42. Latte, *Religionsgeschichte*, 46: “Um die Unverbrüchlichkeit sichtbar zu machen, greift man zu der stärksten Form der Verpflichtung, die man kennt, der juristischen.”

the practice. Its importance within the Roman experience is evinced by its frequent mention in a wide variety of genres, including history (e.g., Livy 22.10), myth (e.g., Verg. *Aen.* 5.235–38), poetic imagery (e.g., Hor. *Carm.* 1.5, 2.8), novel (e.g., Petron. *Sat.* 85), satire (Juv. 10.55), and autobiography (Apul. *Apol.* 54, Ov. *Tr.* 4.2.56). Cicero includes a provision for vows in his sketch of the ideal set of religious laws (*Leg.* 2.22 and 41). In contrast, Lucretius believes that people make vows in vain. Striking evidence is that all the same they are driven onto the shallows by a sudden gale (5.1229–32).

One final comment needs to be made on the idiomatic use of *necto* here. Lambin is uncharacteristically silent on the matter, whereas Munro (ad loc.) says “*vota* are here the *votivae tabulae* or *tabellae*, hung up on the wall of a temple or elsewhere,” and equivalent to *votivas*, as in Vergil *Aeneid* 3.279 (cited by Bailey; cf. Livy 23.46.5): *votisque incendimus aras*. By this Bailey has understood Munro to mean “to string votive-tablets together,” which he considers unlikely. But Munro’s interpretation of *vota* (= *votivas*) makes sense if we take the following *votis* to mean “vows,” and *nectere* to be Lucretius’ poetic way of expressing obligation. Thus the whole phrase reads in English: “It is not piety . . . to make oneself responsible for a votive-offering by making a vow.”⁴³

The next line, “sed mage placata posse omnia mente tueri,” sums up all that Lucretius has been trying to say thus far. The word *tueri* anticipates what follows in lines 1204–40, but no one to my knowledge has recognized how they link with 1198–1203.⁴⁴ Lucretius is proposing that the ignorance that he describes at 1204–40 is the reason for certain Roman religious practices, thus showing how futile they really are. In ignorance men and women veil their heads and prostrate themselves because they feel small in the face of what they presume to be the immeasurable power of the gods (1209–10 “nequae forte deum nobis immensa potestas / sit”) and their eternal natures; people sacrifice because they shiver before displays of their anger and want to win their favor (1218–19 “Praeterea cui non animus formidine divum / contrahitur”); they pray and make vows because they imagine the gods can turn storms to calm, and generally that they govern the world (1129–30 “non divom pacem votis adit ac prece quaesit / ventorum pavidus paces animasque secundas”). Again we find the word *nequiquam* (cf. 4.1239), which we may assume now sums up Lucretius’ opinion on the activity of religion.

Thus, in stark contrast to Epicurus’ tack, Lucretius has undermined theologically and rationally the reasons for performing customary rituals. And lest any Roman still not recognize his own religion in all of this, Lucretius adds (1233–35),

43. For *nectere* meaning “to oblige” see Just. *Epit.* 20.4, *Digesta (Libri Pandectarum)* 49.14.22.1. Bailey believes this passage simply means to string prayer on prayer, but prayer is suggested better by the outstretched hands, whereas vowing, while it involved prayer at the beginning, could not properly be called a pious act until the votive offering was accomplished.

44. Most editors consider 1198–1203 to be parenthetical, and take the *nam* of 1204 to refer back in thought to 1194–97. Bailey, *De rerum natura*, 3.1514–15, discusses the problem.

usque adeo res humanas vis abdita quaedam
obterit, et pulchros fascis saevasque secures
proculcare ac ludibrio sibi habere videtur.

It is none other than Roman glory that religion diminishes.

As a final argument showing that Lucretius is attacking current religious practice in this passage, I adduce Lucretius' own anticipation of this passage at 5.73–75. Lines 55–90 serve as a unit in which Lucretius outlines the order of his arguments in book 5. He sums up 5.1193–1203 with the following:

et quibus ille modis divom metus insinuarit
pectora, terrarum qui in orbi sancta tuetur
fana lacus lucos aras simulacraque divom.
[5.73–75]

Clearly Lucretius has taken his criticism of specific ritualistic procedures further than Epicurus ever did.⁴⁵ Rather than stressing the possibility of compromising with current practices, as Epicurus did, Lucretius points out in the strongest terms that mankind created the holy shrines, pools, groves, altars, and statues out of a false fear of the gods; his subsequent call to a "peaceful contemplation of the true nature of things" might take place in a holy place, such as a temple, but Lucretius never says so.

In analyzing this passage I have been attempting to reconstruct what a Roman would have thought when he read it. In some sense Lucretius' passage is general enough that it could have affected other peoples similarly, especially the Greeks, but not so thoroughly. A Greek, for example, would have agreed that veiling the head and prostrating oneself did not signify piety, since Greek religious practice did not entail either one. The fact is, Lucretius has aimed his attack on piety specifically at Romans and the way they practice religion. Nor should we underrate the force of Lucretius' passage: he hits right at the heart of Roman religion and everyday expressions of Roman piety.

Undoubtedly a contemporary Roman reader would have had a much different reaction to what Lucretius writes than we do today. He or she would have perceived much more of their own religious life in the very words and phrases that we now consider well-justified attacks on paganism. Yet because Lucretius' attacks seem less harsh today, many have resisted seeing the anti-religious elements of his poem. Lines 5.1198–1203 are the most open censure of Roman religion, but the poem is full of echoes of ordinary piety in late republican Rome and contains a redefinition of the conception of piety.⁴⁶

Lucretius considered his task to be one of liberation (1.931–32; cf. 4.6–7): "primum quod magnis doceo de rebus et artis / religionum animum nodis exsolvere pergo." He wanted to free his captive compatriots from their

45. Ivano Donigi, "Lucr. 5.1198–1203 e POxy. 215 col. 1.7–24: L'epicureismo e la venerazione degli dèi," *SIFC* 48 (1976): 118–39, has noted the striking contrast between the typical Epicurean conception of piety as described in POxy. 215 and that found at Lucretius 5.1198–1203.

46. See G. D. Hadzsits, "Lucretius as a Student of Roman Religion," *TAPA* 49 (1918): 145–60.

own religion, which functioned for them as an ordering of life at home, in public, and in the individual heart. When they learned the ways of nature, he thought, they would see that there was no need for elaborate burial rites, because the self dies with the body (3.879–89). This, of course, has negative implications for the *Lar familiaris* (4.760–61): “certe ut videamur cernere eum quem / relicta vita iam mors et terra potitast.” No longer will the happy home and wife and children receive the father, because he feels nothing and craves nothing; he cannot even be a *praesidium* for his own (3.894–903).⁴⁷

Exposing false fears about death also removes the need for the *Parentalia* (3.51–54):

et quocumque tamen miseri venere parentant
et nigras mactant pecudes et manibu' divis
inferias mittunt multoque in rebus acerbis
acrius advertunt animos ad religionem.

But this worship of the dead was one of the oldest of the Roman rites, with both communal and private expressions. It was based on the notion that the ancestors continued to be a part of the family with a new life outside the walls of the city. For Lucretius these concerns over death and the dead were ridiculous misunderstandings of nature (2.44–61) and a major cause of evil among men (3.85).⁴⁸

Lucretius does not only attempt to alter the way Romans think about themselves; he also challenges the way they think about divine activity. The gods do not rule the universe (2.1090–1104), nor do they involve themselves in its development or destruction (1.155–58). The crops grow and creatures reproduce without them (2.167–74); and even the calendar itself precludes their interest in us (1.174–83). The gods do not send birds or lightning as omens of their will (6.86–88, 6.379–422). To all such interpretations of reality, so deeply rooted in the Roman way of life and so much a basis of Roman religion, Lucretius throws down the gauntlet of his challenge. Death, crops, animals, seasons, weather, all have natural explanations and causes; the best religion is not traditional religion at all, but a contemplation of how the various phenomena of life and death fit into nature's great mechanism without divine involvement. It is a revolutionary proposition that no conservative Roman could have taken lightly.

THE RELIGIOUS IN LUCRETIVS

Lucretius' derisive stance toward cult at 5.1198–1203 diverges so starkly from Epicurus' attitude about religion that many consider it a temporary aberration. Other passages in *De rerum natura* seem to reveal the poet's

47. Contrast R. M. Ogilvie, *The Romans and Their Gods* (London, 1969), 101: “The Lares were the deified spirits of dead ancestors, who still took an interest in the family and were capable, if roused, of violent emotion. . . . Members of the family used to pray to their Lares every day and, perhaps, offer them some small gift, such as incense or wine (Plautus *Aulularia* Prologue).”

48. See also H. D. Jocelyn, “Lucretius, His Copyists and the Horrors of the Underworld (*De rerum natura* 3.978–1023),” *AC* 29 (1986): 43–56.

admiration for those same rites and ceremonies that he elsewhere despises, or, as Bailey said, to indicate “something like a personal affection for their details.”⁴⁹ Nevertheless, I will argue that none of those so-called religious passages provide evidence that Lucretius encourages his readers to continue participating in the traditional worship of the gods; instead, in each case the poet either follows his description of a religious practice with some qualification, or contrasts the fear that marks the practice to the *pax* that comes through the rational contemplation of nature.

Those who want to see in Lucretius a religious sensitivity most often turn to 6.68–79:

quae nisi respuis ex animo longeque remittis
dis indigna putare alienaque pacis eorum,
delibata deum per te tibi numina sancta
saepe oberunt; non quo violari summa deum vis
possit, ut ex ira poenas petere imbibat acris,
sed quia tute tibi placida cum pace quietos
constitues magnos irarum volvere fluctus,
nec delubra deum placido cum pectore adibis,
nec de corpore quae sancto simulacra feruntur
in mentis hominum divinae nuntia formae
suscipere haec animi tranquilla pace valebis.

H. Scullard relies on this single passage to support his view of Lucretius: “Lucretius seems to envisage some continuation of traditional worship when he says (6.68ff.) that unless you reject all erroneous ideas from your mind, ‘you will not be able to approach the shrines of the gods with quiet heart.’”⁵⁰ Since Lucretius specifically refers to our state of mind when approaching shrines, it seems *prima facie* that Lucretius not only condones approaching the shrines, but encourages it.⁵¹ Yet the context cautions against such a conclusion, since the emphasis of the entire passage is on how religious fear disturbs mental tranquility (*pax*), not on the specific details of worship. In the immediately preceding lines Lucretius discusses how the events in the ethereal regions cause people to be afraid and to engage in old modes of worship (*rursus in antiquas referuntur religionis*, 6.62; cf. 3.54), that is, to appease the gods and win their favor, which is the core of Roman religious practice (as at 5.1161–1204). All such activity is based on the mistaken notion that the gods have regard for people and exercise an active sovereignty over the universe. Furthermore, the phrases *placido cum pectore adibis* (75) and *suscipere haec animi tranquilla pace valebis* (79) recall Lucretius’ redefinition of *pietas* at 5.1203 (*sed mage placata posse omnia mente tueri*), which follows immediately upon his expression of scorn for specific rites. *Pax* and its cognates in these two passages are equivalent to Epicurus’ concept of ἀταραξία,⁵²

49. Bailey, *De rerum natura*, 1:70.

50. *Festivals and Ceremonies*, 34–35.

51. That is the opinion, for example, of Schmid, “Götter und Menschen,” 97–156, esp. 97.

52. On the equivalency of these terms see the discussion in Albert Cook, “The Angling of Poetry to Philosophy: The Nature of Lucretius,” *Arethusa* 27 (1994): 196–98.

something the gods possess (*pacis eorum*, 6.69; *placida cum pace quietos*, 6.73), and Epicureans desire. Lucretius wants his readers to understand that they can never achieve the *pax* of the gods if they continue to harbor and act on false notions about them. One of the false notions that causes the most harm, according to Lucretius, is the belief that the gods “roll forth great waves of anger” and are eager to exact punishment (72–74). After undermining the intent behind religious practice, he cannot then in line 75 be encouraging his readers to carry on their religion as before. Thus he must be underscoring the impossibility of approaching the *delubra deum* with ἀταραξία, since the rites to be performed there have their basis in fear.

Even if Lucretius advocates approaching the shrines here, he does not advocate prayer, repentance, or sacrifice. I do not think, however, that Lucretius imagines his followers will need to continue going to the shrines. He has argued already that *pax* is achieved through a correct understanding of physical laws (first and foremost of which is that the gods do not control them), which is hardly promoted by the rites in the *delubra*. In 5.1203, he envisions a kind of mental focusing (*omnia mente tueri*) as the surest means to *pax*. Likewise, the emphasis in 6.68–79 is on the peace that the mind itself can secure, even in respect to the gods. The *simulacra* of line 76 are not the solid images or statues of the gods inside the *delubra* of 75, which would create visual images directly affecting the outer senses of the worshippers. The *simulacra* spoken of here are brought directly *in mentes hominum* (77), a notion that mirrors Epicurus’ ἐπιβολὴ τῆς διανοίας, that is, the idea of a direct, mental apprehension of certain fine or subtle images, which in the case of the gods come to us directly from the intermundane regions during dreams or moments of meditation.⁵³ This accords with an earlier statement of Lucretius, that the gods do not visit their own temples anyway (5.146–54).

In the major religious passages Lucretius continually shifts the focal point of truly pious activity away from the holy temples of the gods into a mental sphere. Other passages in Lucretius progressively reveal a similar contempt for the temples and statues of the gods. At 5.306–10 he tells how, like the wearing away of stones with time, *delubra deum simulacraque fessa fatisci*. At 6.417–20 he challenges the notion that the gods send thunderbolts since these bolts often smash the *bene facta deum* . . . *simulacra* and shatter the *sancta deum delubra*. Finally, in his description of the Athenian plague at 6.1272–77, he describes how people hope for salvation from the gods, but in vain. The telltale sign of the impotency of their shrines and statues was when the reality of nature forced people to stop worshipping at the *caelestum templa* and crowd them instead with dying bodies, because *praesens dolor exsuperabat*. Rather than being a haven for life and health, they became, fittingly, a place of decay and suffering.

53. For discussion of this concept see Cyril Bailey, *Epicurus: The Extant Remains* (Oxford, 1926), 259–74.

Lastly, Diskin Clay has made an interesting observation on 6.68–79 that supports the thesis that Lucretius does not encourage his followers to approach the shrines and altars.⁵⁴ The *tute tibi* of 6.73 strongly indicates a self-sufficient piety consisting of the contemplation of nature. This, I would add, to Lucretius' mind is best achieved apart from the gloomy and intimidating atmosphere of his native country's religious rites. The rites either foster fear or stem from it, thereby disturbing the mind and preventing it from discovering the true nature of the universe.⁵⁵

VENUS AND CYBELE

Two other connected passages must be treated here, because they seem to indicate a use for traditional religious rites: 1.1–43 about Venus, and 2.600–660 about Cybele. The former passage especially has generated much debate.⁵⁶ Most arguments reveal a reluctance on the part of scholars to accept that Lucretius could advocate a form of εὐσέβεια that deviated from what Epicurus recommended.⁵⁷ Indeed, Lucretius appears to be striking a religious chord from the prologue of his poem. Nevertheless, nothing in the invocation to Venus calls the reader to traditional religion, nor does the passage itself contradict Lucretius' overall teaching on piety.

Recently Diskin Clay has asserted that Lucretius introduces the goddess only to reject her later. Lucretius is, according to Clay, entering into the world of his audience and taking them on a journey from an incorrect conception of the universe to a right contemplation of nature. He points out that an uninitiated reader, reading the poem from start to finish, would need to be immersed in doctrines so unfamiliar gradually. Thus it makes sense for Lucretius to meet his audience where they are.⁵⁸

54. *Lucretius and Epicurus* (Ithaca, 1983), 255–56.

55. The contemplation of the nature of things replaces traditional expressions of piety in 5.1198–1204. Also, 1.107–9 “nam si certam finem esse viderent / aerumnarum homines, aliqua ratione valerent / religionibus atque minis obsistere vatium.”

56. For a survey of the problem with bibliography see Knut Kleve, “Lukrez und Venus,” *SO* 41 (1966): 86–94 and Wolfgang Schmid, s.v. “Lukrez” in *Lexikon der alten Welt* (Zurich and Stuttgart, 1965), coll. 1782–83. See also G. D. Hadzsits, “The Lucretian Invocation of Venus,” *CP* 2 (1907): 187–92 (Venus = one of the gods in the *intermundia*); Paul Friedländer, “The Epicurean Theology in Lucretius' First Prooemium (Lucr. 1.44–49),” *TAPA* 70 (1939): 368–79 (the prayer to Venus is in keeping with Epicurean theology); Ettore Bignone, *Storia della letteratura latina*, vol. 2 (Firenze, 1945) (Venus = Epicurean kinetic and static pleasure principles; partially followed by Cyril Bailey and J. P. Elder); Clyde Murley, “Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, Viewed as Epic,” *TAPA* 78 (1947): 336–46 (Venus hymn = convention of epic poetry); J. P. Elder, “Lucretius 1.1–49,” *TAPA* 85 (1954): 88–120 (Venus = static, harmless kinetic, and harmful pleasure all at once); E. A. Hahn, “The First Prooemion of Lucretius in the Light of the Rest of the Poem,” *TAPA* 72 (1941): xxxii–xxxiii (Venus, as goddess of fertility is a counterpart to Epicurus, creator of ideas); Elizabeth Asmis, “Lucretius' Venus and Stoic Zeus,” *Hermes* 110 (1982): 458–70 (Venus, who rules by allurements, substitutes for the Stoic Zeus, who rules by providence). For an overview of the various interpretations see also Ettore Paratore, “La problematica sull'epicureismo a Roma,” *ANRW* 1.4 (Berlin, 1973), 116–204, esp. 170–73.

57. For example, Kleve, “Lukrez und Venus,” p. 94, writes: “Lucretius' hymn to Venus has the function of awakening religious sentiments in his Roman readers. From the Epicurean point of view these sentiments are completely linked to the traditional cults. Therefore, this hymn must be traditional in form as well as content, and could not ‘agree’ pedantically with highly developed Epicurean echoes. This hymn can be interpreted as an assurance on the part of Lucretius to his Roman countrymen that he does not wish to attack their religious sentiments. With the hymn he only wants to invite them to follow him on the way to a better understanding of the nature of the gods.”

58. Clay, *Epicurus and Lucretius*, 82–110.

I agree with Clay's argument that Lucretius does not really reject Venus, but rather treats the same topic later in technical, atomistic terms. He couches his invocation in strikingly religious terms because that is what a Roman expects to hear. Religious language retains its value for Lucretius as a kind of vernacular observation on reality; it is simply the way a Roman communicates about the universe, and it is too deeply a part of the Romans' shared cognitive experience to disregard. Occasionally throughout the poem, Lucretius lifts the veil of this metaphorical, religious language to reveal certain truths about the nature of the universe that underlie it. In the end the language can remain the same, but the words must take on new significations.

In his invocation to Venus Lucretius is primarily concerned with Venus and Mars as symbols for constructive (or conservative) and destructive forces of the universe, respectively.⁵⁹ The underlying Epicurean doctrine that informs Lucretius' representation of these creative and destructive forces through Venus and Mars is that of *ισονομία* or equilibrium, a doctrine that Lucretius discusses at 2.569–80. There Lucretius calls the destructive forces *motus exitiales* and the conservative and constructive forces *genitales auctificae*. Usually the two forces balance each other, although in their war, as it were, sometimes one obtains the upper hand, sometimes the other. They do not influence the gods, but only the *creata*.

In 2.569–80 Lucretius shows that there are natural creative and destructive forces within the universe, but he is unwilling to attribute the activities to personal beings. Whenever he speaks of the forces of growth and decay, or conservation and destruction, he quickly adds that the immortal gods are free from such concerns. The gods are not responsible for the action of *servare*; the law of equilibrium is. The Venus whom Lucretius invokes can be no goddess at all since the gods are not influential forces. They are anti-social, inactive, and motionless; they do not engage in love affairs, nor is there any contention among them; they do not grow angry, they do not protect or give aid, nor do they respond to prayers (1.44–49). When the poet invokes a Venus able to do all these things, some poetic personification of an insentient force must be at work. Lucretius hopes that the creative and conservative forces of the universe will predominate long enough for him to explain the teachings of Epicurus. In other words, in a time of civil strife, he prays for peace.

Certain parallels between Lucretius' opening invocation and his description of equilibrium further indicate that Venus stands as a symbol for the positive aspect of this principle. In the first 20 lines of the invocation Lucretius alludes to new life, creativity, and fertility in nearly every other

59. Kleve, "Lukrez und Venus," lists relevant bibliography on p. 89 (yet most of his references do not support this view). This theory has been around for some time, but not held by many at any given time because, it seems to me, no one has fully argued the many facets of the case. W.Y. Sellars, *The Roman Poets of the Republic* (Oxford, 1889), 351–55, may have originated the idea. For the latest case that Venus is equivalent to *natura* see now M. W. Edwards, "Aeternus Lepos: Venus, Lucretius, and the Fear of Death," *G&R* 40 (1993): 68–78, written in response to Charles Segal, "Poetic Immortality and the Fear of Death: The Second Proem of the *De rerum natura*," *HSCP* 92 (1989): 193–212, and idem, *Lucretius on Death and Anxiety* (Princeton, 1990), esp. 180–86.

word. Venus herself is called *genetrix*, *voluptas*, and *alma*. She fills (*concelebras*) the world with her presence, and by her “genus omne animantum concipitur visitque exortum lumina solis.” Similarly at 2.571 the constructive forces are said to be *rerum genitales*, and at 2.576–77 the creative influence likewise brings children to the light of day: “miscetur funere vago / quem pueri tollunt visentes luminis oras.” The imagery of productivity is hinted at again in *navigerum* and *frugiferentis*, followed later by *frondiferas* in line 18. Lucretius pictures the world responding to the advancing Venus with light, warmth, and regeneration: the world basks again in the sunlight (“tibi ridet aequora ponti / placatumque nitet diffuso lumine caelum”), as the life-giving springtime (*species . . . verna diei*) returns and the productive (*genitabilis*) breeze of the west wind grows strong (*viget*). Likewise at 2.575 Lucretius says that a certain vitality takes hold of the world in the cycle of the constructive and destructive forces: “nunc hic nunc illic superant vitalia rerum.” Finally, in the invocation we are presented with a string of sexually suggestive words and phrases: *capta lepore* (15), *cupide* (16, 20), *virentis* (18), *incutiens blandum . . . amorem* (19), and *propagant* (20), all of which are summed up at 2.571 in the one word *auctifici*.⁶⁰

From this beautiful personification of the productive forces, Lucretius can turn in the next verses (21–28) to appeal for a measure of poetic creativity. Significantly he uses the word *gubernas* in line 21 to describe Venus’ activity, a word that he will later apply to the productive activity of nature contrasted with the inactivity of the gods (5.76–81):

praeterea solis cursus lunaeque meatus
expediam qua vi flectat natura gubernans,
ne forte haec inter caelum terramque reamur
libera sponte sua cursus lustrare perennis,
morigera ad fruges augendas atque animantis,
neve aliqua divom volvi ratione putemus.

Crops grow and animals reproduce apart from some plan of the gods, because the gods pass their time without caring for our reality: *deos securum agere aevom* (5.82). The correspondence with 1.44–49 is close. A failure to understand this law of how “heaven and earth traverse their yearly courses” and how things grow and animals reproduce, leads one to return again in *antiquas . . . religiones* (86) and to take to oneself *dominos acris*, that is, to look for help in the forms and gods of traditional religion.

To Lucretius, myths reflect a popular wisdom and owe their origin to ignorance of the nature of reality (6.50–55):

cetera, quae fieri in terris caeloque tumentur
mortales, pavidis cum pendent mentibu’ saepe,
et faciunt animos humilis formidine divum
depressosque premunt ad terram propterea quod
ignorantia causarum conferre deorum
cogit ad imperium res et concedere regnum.

60. Echoed later in 5.80: *morigera ad fruges augendas atque animantis*.

The fears of mankind stem from the belief that the gods are active in the universe, when in fact they are not. Lucretius' message is that people will find peace only when they attribute to the natural interchange of atoms and void what they previously imputed to divine intelligence.⁶¹ Even so, he still views myth as a colorful and even useful shorthand for talking about natural phenomena, as evidenced by his frequent reliance on it. Also, the well-known passage on the symbolic uses of names like Neptune, Ceres, and Bacchus (2.655–60) indicates that he allowed the allegorical use of myth under certain conditions.⁶²

In his poem, Lucretius slides between mythological glitter and bitter philosophical medicine with a remarkable dexterity. He has found a way to retain some of the outward linguistic trappings of religion. Lucretius may have been trying to give a temporary impression of religiosity by his invocation of Venus, as Clay suggests, but every other use of myth and every other mention of religion in the poem is either clearly allegorical or sharply negative. Since the *prooemium* corresponds so closely to Lucretius' own teachings about the creativity and destruction in the universe, it is safe to assume that he is allegorizing those principles through myth rather than promoting traditional religion.

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE MAGNA MATER CULT

The invocation to Venus has many interesting parallels with the description of the Magna Mater cult at 2.600–660. Lucretius applies the term *genetrix* to describe both Venus and the Great Mother at 1.1 and 2.599 respectively, although he does not exactly equate the two. He views Cybele as an agent or instrument of the constructive force of Venus. Mother Earth produces her fruit in response to the approach of Venus (*tuum initum*, 1.10–11) and because her body holds *primordia*, the first beginnings of things (2.653). She provides the material through which Venus works. Therefore she can be called *una genetrix*, but only in the sense that she is the parent *nostrae corporis*.

The idea of agency connects the Magna Mater passage with Lucretius' major discourse on the forces of equilibrium in the previous lines. His argument from line 522 onward has been that there must be an infinite number of any given type of atom in order to supply various objects in the universe. Without this unlimited abundance of each kind of atom, he says, there would be no chance that in this vast universe like atoms could meet and make shapes. He concludes at lines 567–68: "esse igitur genere in quovis primordia rerum / infinita palam est unde omnia suppeditantur." From this passage Lucretius will move on to argue that every object depends on a supply of atoms that is both infinite and varied. It follows, then, that a major supplier of this great variety of atoms is the earth (*tellus habet in se*

61. The theme also occurs at 3.978–1094, 4.591, 4.733, 5.880.

62. But Lucretius' symbolism differs from that of the Stoics (see Diog. Laert. 7.147), who viewed the many names of god (Zeus, Athena, Hera, etc.) as representing various aspects of the activity of the divine, rather than nature.

corpora prima), since so many different things come from her body. So while there is an infinite number of these *primordia*, the variety, so far as it is important for our existence, comes from earth herself: “terra quidem vero caret omni tempore sensu / et quia multarum potitur primordia rerum / multa modis multis effert in lumina solis” (651–53).

Lucretius interrupts these two passages on the supply of the *primordia*, in one instance infinite, in the other various, with the description of the constructive and destructive forces. These kinetic forces are distinct from mother earth in that they act to combine and dissolve *primordia*, whereas she only supplies the needed material. Earth’s role as a material supplier is clearly defined in lines 2.589–96:

Principio tellus habet in se corpora prima
unde mare immensum volventes frigora fontes
adsidue renovent, habet ignes unde oriantur;
nam multis succensa locis ardent sola terrae,
ex imis vero furit ignibus impetus Aetnae.
tum porro nitidas fruges arbustaque laeta
gentibus humanis habet unde extollere possit,
unde etiam fluvios frondes et pabula laeta
montivago generi possit praebere ferarum.

Those words and phrases, which draw their meaning from the notion that mother earth “holds in herself the first bodies (i.e., the atoms),” deserve special note. It is because she is a storehouse of different atoms that we have springs, seas, fires, crops, animals, and people (the source being indicated by the *unde*’s of 590, 591, 595, and 596). She has the ability or the means (*possit*, 595 and 597) to raise up and produce these things. However, her quality of *genetrix* rests solely in her being a “storehouse” or a “supplier.” Allegorically speaking, then, Venus, the universal *genetrix*, acts upon and through mother earth, the materialistic *genetrix* of our immediate reality, to generate the creatures and objects (*creata* of 2.572) on earth.

Other echoes between the hymn to Venus and the Magna Mater passage support their connection. In addition to the *pabula laeta*, the passages share descriptions of wild beasts (1.14 *ferae pecudes* and 2.597 *ferarum*), mountains (1.17 *montis* and 2.597 *montivago*), rivers (1.15 *rapidos amnis*, 1.17 *fluviosque rapacis* and 2.596 *fluvios*), seas (1.17 *maria* and 2.590 *mare immensum*), and green leaves (1.18 *frondiferas* and 2.596 *frondes*). Finally, line 2.654 “multa modis multis effert in lumina solis” corresponds to the words in 1.4–5: “per te quoniam genus omne animantum / concipitur vis- itque exortum lumina solis.” Taken together these parallels reveal an earth who is responsive to the constructive forces of Venus by virtue of her great variety of *primordia*.

Lucretius describes the cult of the Magna Mater in a way that the Romans would have known well. He did not simply copy from a Greek source now lost. Coins of the late Republic that depict various aspects of the Cybele cult and iconography bear a striking resemblance to his description of

the cult.⁶³ Lucretius intended to show his reader that, while the cult of Cybele that he or she observes illustrates beautifully and allegorically many of the truths about the earth that he has been discussing, it reveals nothing about the nature of the gods (“Quae bene et eximie quamvis disposta ferantur, / longe sunt tamen a vera ratione repulsa,” 644–45).⁶⁴ In fact, the cult functions primarily to terrify and coerce the crowds into, among other things, respecting their parents and defending their motherland.⁶⁵ In his description of the historical development of religion (5.1161–68) the only time that there was an ideal understanding of the nature of the gods was before religious rites started, when people depended on the gradual influx of the divine images during their sleep for their knowledge about them. The sacred rites began, and temples and altars were erected, when people could not discover the causes of certain phenomena (5.1185–93), and therefore were afraid. Likewise here Lucretius emphasizes over and over again the fearsomeness of the Cybele cult. At 610 he speaks of the dreadful nature of her procession (*horrificè fertur divinae matris imago*). He says she is accompanied by threatening music (*raucisonoque minantur cornua cantu*, 619) and by attendants who brandish weapons (*telaque praeportant, violenti signa furoris*, 621) and strike fear in the hearts of the spectators (*conterrere metu*, 623); they rejoice in the blood from the castration that their goddess demanded, and shake their helmets to add to the terror (*sanguine laeti, / terrificas capitum quatientes numine cristas*, 631–32). It is this use of intimidation, which to his mind is a main feature of all cultic practice, that invalidates religion.

The words that occurred at 1.44–49 reappear at 2.646–51 for the same reason as before. Again, the gods, who are called *semota* and *seiuncta*, could not be part of the creative activity that Mother Earth engages in, since they neither create nor provide the material of our creation. Furthermore, within the confines of their *intermundia* their needs are always met and their loss of atoms continually replaced (*ipsa suis pollens opibus and nil indiga nostri*), thus they have no need of our votive offerings, or sacrifices, or incense, inasmuch as these are seen to be *nourishment* for the gods. So, although he concedes that the mythic names of gods may be used as a colorful way of referring to natural concepts (as in the prologue he used the name “Venus” for “constructive force”), he advises his reader not

63. C. Fabius, 100 B.C.; Volteius, 76 B.C.; M. Plaetorius and Cestianus, 68–66 B.C.; Plautius, 54 B.C.; C. Norbanus and L. Cestius, 44 B.C. See F. Préhac, “Mater deum. Monnaies de la République romaine,” *RN* (1932): 119; Robert Turcan, *Numismatique romaine de culte Métroaque* (Leiden, 1983), 14.

64. See the arguments of James Jope, “Lucretius, Cybele, and Religion,” *Phoenix* 39 (1985): 250–62, who believes that Lucretius uses the description of the Magna Mater cult as a model of religious error, which he contrasts with a description of the gods as uninterested in human affairs. See also Monica Gale, *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius* (Cambridge, 1994), esp. 6–75, who argues that Lucretius developed a poetic that permitted the use of myth in philosophic poetry, not as a means of discovering *vera ratio*, but to illustrate it. Thus, the poet must juxtapose a true explanation of nature to the myth so as not to lead his reader into error.

65. R. W. Sharples, “Cybele and Loyalty to Parents,” *LCM* 10.9 (1985): 133–34.

to disturb their peace with terrifying cultic practices: "dum vera re tamen ipse religione animum turpi contingere parcat" (2.659–60).

THE PROGRAMMATIC PASSAGE: 1.62–78

The idea that fear is inherent to religion pervades, as we have seen, all Lucretius' poem. Not surprisingly, then, in the programmatic passage of the whole poem, a passage that sets the tone for the rest of the work, Lucretius treats religion as a tyrant to be deposed: "Humana ante oculos foede cum vita iaceret / in terris oppressa gravi sub religione . . ." Fundamental to the understanding of the passage is the exact sense of *religio* here: it may mean either a feeling of awe or dread, or the established routine of rituals, prayers, and sacrifices. Because Lucretius assails *religio* so vigorously and crushes it so utterly in this passage, scholars have traditionally preferred the former meaning. They emphasize that here Lucretius disparages the fear of the divine, while remaining consistent with Epicurus' views on piety, that is, the actual worship of the gods. Cyril Bailey, for example, introduces this section (1.62–78) by noting that the lines "introduce the main purpose of the poem, to free men's minds from the terrors of religion" (ital. mine). He admits that elsewhere *religio* signifies the rites of worship (e.g., 101ff.), but in this passage Lucretius means "the dread of the intervention of the gods in the affairs of the world, and the fear of death and the punishment of the soul after death."⁶⁶ Similarly H. Munro substitutes "fear of the gods and fear of death" for *religio* in his discussion of the passage.⁶⁷

These interpretations weaken the impact of the passage by separating religion from the fear it propagates. Lucretius makes no such distinction.⁶⁸ The imagery he attaches to *religio* here is that used of the original giants or monsters of primitive mythology. In a similar vein Vergil described *Fama*, the last child of Mother Earth and sister to Coeus and Enceladus, as striding the earth and burying her head among the clouds (*ingrediturque solo et caput inter nubila condit*, *Aen.* 4.177). Mother Earth bore her because she was angry at the gods for slaying her children (178). She is a *monstrum horrendum* (181), who feeds on fear (176) and *magnas territat urbes*. Lucretius, like Vergil, probably draws on Homer's description of

66. Bailey, *De rerum natura*, 2.608–9

67. H. Munro, *T. Lucreti Cari De rerum natura libri sex*,⁴ vol. 2 (London, 1928; reissued with new introduction), 35–37. D. Lambin, to whom the opinions of the former two commentators may be traced, explicitly interprets *religio* here as fear and superstition because Epicurus had encouraged piety (*T. Lucretii Cari De natura rerum libri sex*,³ [Paris, 1570], 12): "Significat, Epicurum animos hominum religione, id est, inani deorum timore, et superstitione liberasse. Nam Epicurus quidem, ut testantur Diog. Laertius, et M. Tullius, scripsit librum de pietate erga Deos; et supra diximus, Epicurum, quamvis negaret, Deos curam habere rerum humanarum; neque preces tamen, neque venerationem, et cultum deorum, tamquam praestantium naturarum, sustulisse."

68. Paul Friedländer, "Pattern of Sound and Atomistic Theory," *AJP* 62 (1941): 16–35, at 18: "While the Romans sharply distinguish between *religio* and *superstitio*, Lucretius never has the second word. Both notions being one to him he has made *Religio* the bearer of all his hatred. Yet in his grandiose image of this all-oppressing daemon he has purposely fixed an etymology of *superstitio*, thus stressing the identity of both of them (I, 64ff.). Friedländer goes on to point out the word plays caelI REGIONibus (65) and SUPER . . . inSTANS (66).

Ἔπις at *Iliad* 4.440–45 Thus *religio*, which has its origin in mankind's primitive misunderstanding of the nature of the universe, is herself the terrorizing giant.

When Epicurus makes his assault on the heavens he does not do so to tame religion or a part of religion that causes fear (*superstitio*);⁶⁹ he “conquers” the mysteries of nature herself, and brings back the truth about nature as a prize. To scale the heights Epicurus had to learn to ignore (or escape from) religion altogether: He ignores the myths about the gods (*fama deum*),⁷⁰ their supposed power (*fulmina*),⁷¹ and their warnings (*minitanti murmure*), all of which in the following passage (1.80–101) lead to the sacrifice of Iphigenia (*tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*). Traditional religion, which encourages mankind to appease the gods with sacrifices, to invoke their aid through prayer, and to learn their will through signs, is challenged *in toto*. Significantly, Lucretius does not cause Epicurus to revitalize or reorganize religion upon his return: giants have to be crushed under volcanoes or chained in Tartarus. In the end Epicurus achieves victory by replacing traditional religion with the truth about nature. Therefore, Lucretius advises his readers that if they hope to contemplate rationally and calmly the workings of nature, they will have to abandon the religious rites that distort the truth.

Commentators have exerted so much effort into making *religio* mean “fear” or “superstition” in this passage that they have obscured its total annihilation. The word *vicissim* in line 78 creates a ring structure for the entire passage (62–79): the situation of lines 62–63, “Humana ante oculos foede cum vita iaceret / in terris oppressa gravi sub religione,” is reversed in 78–79, “quare religio pedibus subiecta vicissim / obteritur.” Epicurus has turned the tables, so to speak, on religion. Therefore, the key to understanding the annihilation of religion lies in the nuances of the terms used to describe the former state when religion dominated and before the situation was reversed: *ante oculos*, *foede*, *iaceret*, *oppressa*, and *gravi*.

Scholars have ignored the phrase “humana ante oculos foede cum vita iaceret,” except to point out that it means “plain for all to see” and to draw weak parallels to 3.995 and Sen. *Controv.* 1.1.16.⁷² When the phrase occurs

69. W. A. Merrill, *T. Lucreti Cari De rerum natura libri sex* (New York, 1907), 276, rightly observes that Lucretius does not distinguish between *religio* and *superstitio*; it is wishful thinking to assume that Lucretius attacks only a superstitious aspect of religion, when clearly he means all Roman religion as it then existed. Cicero's complaint at *Nat. D.* 1.117 is that the Epicureans destroy not just superstition, but religion also. As for *religio* being in the heavens, its head is in the clouds, but its feet are on the ground, like Vergil's *Fama*. In other words, *religio* is the giant ruler of this world.

70. Much of the Roman religion, like Greek religion, depended on *famae* about gods and heroes. For example, when Aeneas seems puzzled why the people of Pallantium celebrate a festival of Hercules, Evander offers him, not a theological reason, but a *fama* about Hercules: “non sollemnia nobis / has ex more dapes, hanc tanti numinis aram / vana superstitio veterumque ignara deorum / imposuit: saevis, hospes Troiane, periclis / servati facimus meritosque novamus honores” (Verg. *Aen.* 8.185–89). The rites, feasts, and sacrifices are not *vana superstitio* (cf. Cicero's definition of *superstitio* as *inanis timor deorum* at *Nat. D.* 1.117) when supported by a myth.

71. For *fulmen* in Lucretius as a sign of the gods' power, as opposed to thunder (*sonitus*, *murmur*) as a sign, see 6.379–86.

72. See Munro, *De rerum natura*, 2:36; Bailey, *De rerum natura*, 2:608–9; Merrill, *De rerum natura*, 276, 497; Leonard and Smith, *De rerum natura*, 206. *DRN* 3.995, as cited by Bailey: *Sisyphus in vita quoque*

with a form of *iacere*, as in this passage (line 62), it invariably connotes humiliating defeat and subjugation, hence, “to lie humiliated before” (Curtius Rufus *Alex.* 3.9, Cic. *Fam.* 4.5.4, cf. Verg. *Aen.* 11.310–11; Sen. *Troad.* 238, cf. Verg. *Aen.* 2.531–32). *Foede* heightens the aura of mankind’s disgrace and subjugation, while also adding irreligious undertones to the act of domination by *religio*. It signifies that *religio* herself is the impious polluter of mankind’s existence.⁷³ *Foede* at *DRN* 1.62 anticipates the impious act of pollution at lines 1.84–86:

Aulide quo pacto Triviai virginis aram
Iphianassai turparunt sanguine foede
ductores Danaum delecti, prima virorum.

The repetition of *foede* links the two passages together, so that Agamemnon’s immolation of his daughter is viewed, not as an anomaly caused by fear, but as the natural consequence of the domination of *religio*. Agamemnon performed properly what *religio* demanded of him and Diana was pleased with the sacrifice: *exitus ut classi felix faustusque daretur* (1.100). By the term *oppressa* Lucretius conjures up an image of a *religio* that threatens, pollutes, and cruelly subjugates human life like a despot lording it over his subjects.

Fittingly, Lucretius makes intimidation the *modus operandi* of tyrannous *religio*. Before Epicurus mankind feared to raise its eyes, for *religio* towered threateningly overhead with frightful visage (*horribili super aspectu mortalibus instans*, 1.65). The words of the prophets strike terror in men (*vatum / terroloquis victus dictis*, 1.102–3), and the deafening cracks of lightning make men cower and fear the gods’ anger (*fulminis horribili . . . plaga*, 5.1220). For Lucretius, what is currently believed about the gods causes fear. Never is *religio* distinct from its fear, and never is the possibility of a *religio* free from it entertained; rather, fear is a natural consequence of the tyrant *religio*. The following lines, often used to show that Lucretius is only interested in destroying fear and superstition, actually prove the opposite (1.151–58):

quippe ita formido mortalis continet omnis,
quod multa in terris fieri caeloque tuentur
quorum operum causas nulla ratione videre
possunt ac fieri divino numine rentur.
quas ob res ubi viderimus nil posse creari
de nilo, tum quod sequimur iam rectius inde
perspiciemus, et unde queat res quaeque creari
et quo quaeque modo fiant opera sine divum.

nobis ante oculos est. Sen. *Controv.* 1.1.16, as cited by Munro *stare ante oculos Fortuna videbatur*. Since the phrase occurs hundreds of times in Latin literature, there is no reason to single out those two occurrences as close parallels.

73. There are numerous examples in Latin literature where *foede* or its cognates are connected with religious pollution and impiety. For example, after the death of Polites (Verg. *Aen.* 2.531–39) Priam curses Pyrrhus because *patrios foedasti funere vultus* (sc. *nati*); Servius elucidates the word *foedasti* by *crudeles impiosque fecisti*, which is remarkably similar to Lucretius’ line *religio peperit scelerosa atque impia facta* (1.83).

Fear ends when mankind learns that *religio's* lessons are false. The gods do not really create, or become angry, or communicate through lightning (cf. 1.75–77).

Thus, when Epicurus dares to ignore the teachings of religion and to contemplate the true nature of reality, the tables are turned on *religio*, so that she is deposed and crushed the way she once crushed mankind. *Vicissim* (1.78) creates the ring structure. The phrase *religio pedibus subiecta . . . obteritur* of lines 78–79 recalls its counterpart *oppressa gravi sub religione* in line 63,⁷⁴ while *nos exaequat victoria caelo* counters the humiliation indicated by *Humana ante oculos foede cum vita iaceret / in terris* in lines 62–63.

These lines (1.62–79) are programmatic and forebode further invectives against *religio*. Nothing in them causes the reader to believe that only superstitious fear is at issue; at stake is traditional religion as practiced before the temple altars, at home before the hearth, and at the ancestral graves. Lucretius promises that this religion, deeply embedded in the Roman way of life, will be eliminated and replaced, but it must not have been clear to the average Roman what would take its place. Even so, Lucretius retains a genuine religious sensibility throughout his poem. Yet instead of capitulating in matters of practice, as Epicurus did, he directs his feelings of devotion and awe toward the knowledge of nature's workings and principles, and toward its vaunted discoverer, Epicurus. His religion, if such it can be called, is full of caveats and qualifications, and his piety characterized by redefinitions.⁷⁵ Certainly there is nothing in Lucretius to merit Cotta's taunt, *novi ego Epicureos omnia sigilla venerantes* (Cic. *Nat. D.* 1.85).⁷⁶ Lucretius has set aside Epicurus' justification of continued traditional worship and resculpted his master's piety into what may seem a more consistent call to a mystical-transcendental contemplation of the workings of atoms, void, and swerve.

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74. At 5.1234 *religio* is said to crush (*obterit*) mankind; the counterpart to *obteritur* (79) is most likely *gravi* (63).

75. Jope, "Lucretius, Cybele, and Religion," 256, remarks that the participants in the Cybele cult "are seen as advocating a conventional misconception of *pietas*, which Lucretius will afterwards correct."

76. For a discussion of the Epicurean fondness for images see Frischer, *Sculpted Word*, 91ff., and Johannes Geffcken, "Der Bilderstreit des heidnischen Altertums," *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 19 (1919): 286–315, esp. 289–90. At *Nat. D.* 1.85 the codices have *numerantes* for *venerantes*, but Pease, and most before him, emend it (A. S. Pease, ed., *M. Tulli Ciceronis De natura deorum*, vol. 1 [Cambridge, 1955], p. 429) cites a possible alternative put forward by Thomas Wopkens: *omnia sigilla deos numerantes*. He rightly notes that "Cotta here ascribes to the Epicureans themselves what Lucr. 5.1198–99 charged against others," although I do not think that *sigilla* and *lapidem* are equivalents here. A closer parallel is Lucretius' sarcastic remark at 1.316–18: "tum portas propter aena / signa manus dexteras ostendunt attenuari / saepe salutantum tactu praeterque meantum."