Classical Quarterly **51.2** 499–508 (2001) *Printed in Great Britain*

LUCRETIAN *PALINGENESIS* RECYCLED

I

There are a number of striking arguments made during the course of Lucretius' great Epicurean poem *De Rerum Natura.* Here I focus on only one, but one that not only displays Lucretius' ability to offer subtle and ingenious philosophical argumentation in support of his overall therapeutic programme, but also has in various forms found echoes throughout the later history of philosophy. The argument is found in the third book, and goes as follows:[1]

et si iam nostro sentit de corpore postquam
distractast animi natura animaeque potestas,
nil tamen est ad nos qui comptu coniugioque
corporis atque animae consistimus uniter apti.
nec, si materiem nostram collegerit aetas
post obitum rursumque redegerit ut sita nunc est
atque iterum nobis fuerint data lumina vitae,
pertineat quicquam tamen ad nos id quoque factum,
interrupta semel cum sit repetentia nostri.
et nunc nil ad nos de nobis attinet, ante
qui fuimus, <nil> iam de illis nos adficit angor.
nam cum respicias immensi temporis omne
praeteritum spatium, tum motus materiai
multimodis quam sint, facile hoc accredere possis,
semina saepe in eodem,ut nunc sunt, ordine posta
haec eadem, quibus e nunc nos sumus, ante fuisse.
nec memori tamen id quimus reprehendere mente;
inter enim iectast vitai pausa vageque
deerrarunt passim motus ab sensibus omnes.

And if, suppose, after the nature and power of soul and mind have been pulled away from our body, the soul does perceive, then this too is nothing to us—we who are formed and constituted as a whole by the joining and union of body and soul. Nor, even if time should gather our matter after death and should rearrange it once more as it is now placed, and once again the light of life should be given to us, should it matter to us in the slightest that even this had happened, when the recollection of our selves has once been broken? Moreover, we now feel no concern over those we have been in the past, nor does any pain now afflict us from them. For when you look back at the whole vast expanse of past time and at how varied the motions of matter are, then you may easily understand that these very same atoms—the ones of which we are now composed—have often before been placed in the order in which they now are. But we cannot recall that in our mind's memory, for a break in life has been cast in between, and all the motions have wandered here and there, far and wide, away from the senses.

I would like to thank David Sedley and Dominic Scott for their comments on this piece. A version was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Classical Association at the University of Bristol in May 2000. My thanks go to my fellow panellists, Lucy Grig and Jason König, our chairperson, Gillian Clark, and to the audience on that occasion, especially Monica Gale, Gillian King, and Malcolm Schofield.

[1] For textual discussion, see C. Bailey, *Titi Lucreti Cari De rerum natura libri sex*, 3 vols (Oxford, 1947), ad loc. A. Schiesaro, 'The palingenesis of *De Rerum Natura*', *PCPhS* 40 (1994), 81–107 uses these lines as a motif for his interpretation of the *DRN* as a whole.

This is a thought experiment. Imagine that some time in the future, after your death, the material which at present constitutes you returns to exactly the same arrangement as it is in right now. Will you have come back to life? If not, why not?

Unsurprisingly, this astounding thought has offered a starting point for those commentators who wish to look in Lucretius' poem for answers to what is now called the problem of personal identity. By what criterion or criteria are we entitled to say that I am a single individual persisting through time, who constantly undergoes various changes but nevertheless came to be at one particular moment and will cease to be at another? Lucretius has perhaps become more of a touchstone for some of these questions than other ancient authors since, as an orthodox Epicurean, he conceives of matter in terms of atoms and void, and also thinks of the soul as a collection of some of these atoms, albeit of a particular kind. These two physical assumptions seem to bring Lucretius close to the starting premises of most modern thinkers, who would not hold that there is an immaterial soul which might guarantee some form of *post mortem* immortality. In that case, perhaps what Lucretius says here in his thought experiment will have some bearing on what we might think about personal identity.

II

Before examining the argument in greater detail, this particular passage must be placed in context. Of course, we should not assume that Lucretius found the 'problem of personal identity' one of the major questions of metaphysics, as we do now (although we might retrospectively assign to him a conception of personal identity). Rather, the argument occurs in Lucretius' poem within a different and much larger frame, in which the poet is setting out to show that the fear of death is irrational and pernicious. Immediately prior to this passage he has opened his account with a rousing statement of Epicurus' renowned second *Kyria Doxa*: *nil igitur mors est ad nos neque pertinet hilum* (3.830). His support for this striking statement is then provided. Death is nothing to us since after death we can no longer perceive pleasure or pain, and therefore in Epicurean terms we can no longer be affected either positively or negatively in any way whatsoever. More forcefully still, death is nothing to us since after death we are no longer; death is the end of our existence. There is simply nothing left after death to be affected at all.

This last point leads straight into the passage I will go on to discuss. Immediately prior to it, however, Lucretius offers this statement, which comes fairly close to a description of what personal identity, for an Epicurean, might consist in.

> nil tamen [sc. mors] est ad nos qui comptu coniugioque
> corporis atque animae consistimus uniter apti. (3.845–6)

At least part of what it is for me to be me, then, is for me to be composed of a body and a soul. Not *any* body and soul, presumably, because in that respect I do not differ at all from any other member of my species. Rather, I am me because I am constituted by *this* soul in *this* body. When that union is dissolved, as happens when I die, then I am no longer.

III

Having offered us this opening statement of one condition for my identity, Lucretius goes on to give his thought experiment. What if all my atoms, the atoms of my body

and soul, were to he brought back together in just the same arrangement? Would I then be resurrected? If so, should I now care about my past and future selves? Also, does each period of 'death', which would now be the period between my two incarnations, rob me of something? If this possibility of multiple selves is allowed, does it threaten Lucretius' insistence that death is 'nothing to us'?

There are two related observations to be made here. First, it is worth noting that Lucretius offers this as a hypothetical situation, and casts his argument in terms of a remote conditional (*si collegerit aetas . . . nec pertineat quicquam*). However, by the principles of Epicurean cosmology, this sort of *palingenesis* is not only possible, it is inevitable.[2] Given an infinity of time, the atoms which now constitute me will arrange and rearrange themselves into an unlimited number of forms, and will go on to repeat those same forms over and over again.[3] It does not matter that it is extremely unlikely that after any one particular stretch of time these atoms will have come back into exactly the same arrangement. There is no limit to the time they might take. So eventually the situation envisaged will be realized; this turns out not merely to be a thought experiment after all. Indeed this possibility has already been realized; my atoms have, at some time in the distant past, been arranged just as they are now.[4] Moreover, Lucretius himself goes on to point out this inevitable realization only a few lines later (853–8).[5] Why, in that case, originally cast the possibility of resurrection in these hypothetical terms?

Second, Lucretius himself appears to concede during this argument that, if this hypothetical possibility is realized, it is *we* who will indeed have been brought back to life: *[si] iterum nobis fuerint data lumina vitae* (3.849). Also in 3.850 he says that if this happens, nothing of consequence will have happened to *us* (*ad nos*). This is not often

[2] A. Ernout and L. Robin, *Lucrèce De Rerum Natura*[2] (Paris, 1963), ad loc.: 'l'emploi du parfait du sobjonctif d'une part, et du présent de l'autre indique que l'hypothèse irréelle est envisagée dans l'avenir'. Cf. E. J. Kenney, *Lucretius De Rerum Natura Book III* (Cambridge, 1971), ad 3.847–51.

[3] Cf. Ps.-Justin, *De Resurrectione* 592b2–9 (Us. 283a): *Καὶ κατὰ τὸν 'Επίκουρον δέ, τῶν ἀτόμων ἀφθάρτων οὐσῶν καὶ τοῦ κενοῦ, παρὰ τὴν ποιὰν τάξιν καὶ θέσιν τῶν ἀτόμων συντεθειμένων γίνεται τά τε ἄλλα συγκρίματα καὶ τὸ σῶμα, χρόνῳ δὲ διαλυόμενον διαλύεται πάλιν εἰς τὰς ἀτόμους, ἐξ ὧν καὶ ἐγένετο. Τούτων μὲν οὐσῶν ἀφθάρτων, οὐδὲν ἀδύνατόν ἐστι, συνελθουσῶν πάλιν καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν θέσιν καὶ τάξιν λαβουσῶν, ποιῆσαι ὃ πρότερον ἐγεγόνει ἐξ αὐτῶν σῶμα καὶ ὅμοιον.* This is part of an argument against those who deny the possibility of bodily resurrection. The author claims that in all major cosmological systems (Platonic, Epicurean, and Stoic) *palingenesis* can and does occur. The date of this text is uncertain. Justin himself was martyred in A.D. 165, and this text had been attributed to him by the early fourth century.

[4] Compare Aetius 2.1.3 (Diels, *Doxographi Graeci*, 327) and Ps.-Hippoc. *Epist.* 10, Littré vol. 9, p. 322 (the Abderites are writing to Hippocrates): *καὶ ἀποδημεῖν ἐνίοτε* [sc. *Δημοκρίτος*] *λέγει ἐς τὴν ἀπειρίην καὶ Δημοκρίτους εἶναι ὁμοίους ἑαυτῷ ἀναριθμήτους.* Of course, here the claim is that there are simultaneously innumerably many individuals similar to Democritus. These would fail Lucretius' physical criterion for identity. Nevertheless, it is a consequence of a similar kind of reasoning: given sufficient space and matter (not time, in this case), there must be many more individuals arranged just like me.

[5] Cf. Schiesaro (n. 1), 101, and A. Schiesaro, 'La "palingenesi" nel *De Rerum Natura*', in G. Giannantoni and M. Gigante (edd.), *L'epicureismo greco e romano* (Naples, 1996), 2.795–804, at 800, who insists above all on contrasting this Lucretian argument with the Stoic doctrine of eternal recurrence. On this latter, see J. Barnes, 'La théorie stoïcienne du retour éternel', in J. Brunschwig (ed.), *Les Stoiciens et leur logique* (Paris, 1978) 3–20; A. A. Long, 'The Stoics on world-conflagration and everlasting recurrence', in R. H. Epp (ed.), *Spindell Conference 1984: Recovering the Stoics, Southern Journal of Philosophy* 23, Suppl. (1985), 13–37. The thesis that Lucretius is reacting here to the Stoics is vigorously opposed by D. J. Furley, 'Lucretius and the Stoics', *BICS* 13 (1966), 13–33, at 27.

remarked upon, since it is generally assumed that Lucretius' concern here is to deny that we can be resurrected by the return of our atoms to their current position. Perhaps we should allow that although Lucretius does write *as if* we are being resurrected, this is not at all what his argument wishes to conclude. It is generally thought that whatever line 851 actually means, its concern is to point to a necessary condition of personal identity which this thought experiment violates. So this new reconstituted person will not be me since there is no *repetentia nostri*. We could further argue that *nos* in 850 refers to us in the present, not to any 'future selves',[6] but this still leaves the problem of line 849 which does indeed at least entertain the possibility that we will be resurrected as a result of this atomic recycling.

We might solve this problem without resorting to thinking that Lucretius has been rather loose in his expression. Further, we might in the process help to explain why Lucretius has retained a conditional form for the argument, despite his Epicurean cosmology. The solution is the following:

Lucretius casts this argument in the form of a *complex* conditional. There are two components to the protasis, which are not tautologous. Nevertheless, the relationship between them needs to be examined. The whole argument may be expressed as follows:

If	(a)	the atoms which now constitute us were to be brought together once again
and	(b)	we were to be thereby brought back to life
then	(c)	this would not affect us in any way
since	(d)	*interrupta sit repetentia nostri.*

In one construal both conditions (a) and (b) are necessary and independent parts of the protasis. While (a) might be a necessary consequence of Epicurean cosmology, (b) most certainly is not, and the whole argument is therefore rightly cast as a remote condition. Nevertheless, Lucretius argues that even on this model, 'death', the period between the two identical atomic arrangements, does not affect us in any way. So this is an *a fortiori* argument. If, even if both (a) and (b), then nevertheless (c), then *a fortiori* if only (a) then (c). An Epicurean is therefore not at all forced, even by his adherence to a cosmology which has (a) as a consequence, to deny (c).

If (a) by itself constituted a sufficient condition for my own resurrection, then (b) here would be doing no additional argumentative work. That is to say, if material identity were a sufficient condition of personal identity, then this atomic recombination would indeed produce a case of resurrection, and (b) would be redundant; it would merely make explicit a consequence of (a). Most commentators have been quick to say that Lucretius would wish to resist endorsing the claim 'if (a) then (b)', and pass on to the psychological condition of personal identity which appears to be introduced by the reference to *repetentia nostri*. Alberti construes the above argument differently, recognizing that at least initially in the *palingenesis* argument Lucretius does talk of us being brought back to life, but argues that Lucretius goes on to contradict this original expression. Rather than accuse Lucretius of being loose in his expression, she argues that line 849 expresses what would be the case if the only criterion of personal identity were the identity of material, but that Lucretius goes on to show how this is not the only criterion.[7]

On this interpretation the argument goes as follows. Lucretius hypothesizes that our

[6] As Kenney (n. 2), ad 3.850.

[7] A. Alberti, 'Paura della morte e identità personale nell'epicureismo', in A. Alberti (ed.), *Logica, mente, persona* (Florence, 1990), 151–206, at 197–8; i.e. (a→b)→c, but ¬(a→b); *a fortiori* a→c.

material might be reconstituted and we might be brought back to life. Then he says that if so, nothing would have happened to us because of this lack of *repetentia.* Next, he tells us that in fact our material *will* be so reconstituted, indeed it has been so constituted before, but we cannot remember this occurrence (859–61). Alberti then argues that in what follows, in which Lucretius tells us that for some good or bad to be done to a subject, there must be a subject present at the time of the good or harm, we might find support for the claim that he denies that these past and future individuals of identical atomic make-up are us.[8] So for Alberti, in the first section of the argument, (b) is a consequence of a misunderstanding of (a) as a sufficient criterion for personal identity. This misunderstanding is then diagnosed in the subsequent text, and Lucretius therefore retracts his original suggestion that 'we' may be resurrected as a consequence of material reconstitution.

IV

Alberti's interpretation is powerfully argued, but I find it lacks explicit support in the text. The *demonstrandum* in this argument is not that the past and future individuals are not 'us', but rather that whatever happens after my death (and has happened before my birth) does not matter to me. It is this proposition which the *pausa vitae*, or lack of *repetentia*, or absence of *memoria* is intended to prove. Moreover, Lucretius only offers two explicit statements in this section about matters of personal identity. The first, as we have seen, is that *comptu coniugioque corporis atque animae consistimus uniter apti* (845–6)—what we might call 'the physical criterion'. The next is contained within the conditional already discussed, where Lucretius shows that if our matter were to be reconstituted, and if we were to be resurrected, then this still is of no concern to us.

I am not convinced that Lucretius ever makes an explicit denial of the claim that the past and future identical atomic arrangements are 'us'. That is to say, I do not think that he ever gives a further condition of personal identity over and above that included in 845–6. His major concern is to show that death is of no concern to us, and this is unaffected by the realization that by 'death' he might well mean here the periods of time between the existence of identical atomic arrangements. If these past and future individuals are not identical to me, then what happens to them does not *directly* concern my well-being.[9] However, even if these future individuals are identical with me, the fact that no memory is retained from one instantiation to the next ensures that none of these identical individuals should be concerned about what has happened or will happen to the others.

Let me pursue this alternative interpretation for a while. What sense does it make of these references to memory? The usual view has it that these references constitute a 'psychological criterion' of personal identity. The continuity of consciousness is broken between atomic configurations, and therefore although materially identical, these past and future individuals are not identical to me. So what happens to them is 'nothing to us'.

The first appearance of any sort of reference to psychology comes in 851, where Lucretius uses the following as a justification for his denial that if we were to be

[8] Alberti (n. 7), 197.

[9] My well-being can be indirectly affected by the well-being of others, if they are appropriately related to me as friends or family—but in order for me to be affected I would have to exist simultaneously with them and perceive their well-being.

resurrected, these new persons should concern us (i.e. on my division of the argument above, (c) since (d)):

interrupta cum sit repetentia nostri.

The text here is disputable (*repetentia* and *retinentia* are both possibilities) but *repetentia* seems to be the correct word.[10] The *re-* prefix, which all the possibilities share, connotes a sense of continuity, of linkage with what has preceded. Lucretius' point is that our concern should not spill over beyond the limits of this *repetentia nostri*. But of itself that does not help very far in assessing Lucretius' criteria of personal identity. Moreover, it cannot stand as a *definiens* of a further criterion, since it contains within itself the term *nostri*—which would be the *definiendum*.[11] All this line means is, in effect, 'once the psychological continuity of our selves is broken'.

More help appears later, at 859–61. Lucretius has now passed to asserting that in fact this material *palingenesis* has happened in the past. But we cannot remember such instances: *inter enim iectast vitai pausa vageque / deerrarunt passim motus ab sensibus omnes*. Again, I do not see that this makes memory a criterion of personal identity. It merely points to a lack of recollection of these periods as proof that they do not concern us. Nothing in the text forces us to think that Lucretius is using these references to memory as a criterion of personal identity.

So let me step back a few lines, and look at the whole argument again. At 850–1 Lucretius claims that if *palingenesis* were to occur it would be of no concern that it has happened to us. I noted earlier that the *nos* in 850 is generally taken to refer to our present selves, probably on the assumption that the future individuals are *not* identical to us. But what if *nos* were to refer to the same people as *nobis* in 849, namely the future selves? Working solely with the physical criterion of identity outlined in 845–6, these are, of course, identical to us. In this case Lucretius does endorse and will continue to endorse the physical criterion as a sufficient condition of personal identity. This respects his use of *nobis* and *nos* in this section. The overall argument still works if this identification is granted. Lucretius is still able to argue that even if we are resurrected in this manner, nevertheless the fact that this happens to us is of no concern. He gives two reasons for this conclusion.

First, we should not be concerned by the periods between instantiations, since at that time we do not exist, and therefore can be the subject of no harm (862–4). Second, we should not feel any concern about these future instantiations, since they will have no recollection of our present conditions, or rather, when we come to be once again, we will have no recollection of our present life. This second point, I think, also helps to account for an asymmetry between the terms of the *palingenesis* as expressed in the conditional of 847–851, and that which is described in indicative terms as a con-

[10] 851 *repetentia* in Q is supported by Arnobius' use of the word on two occasions. Bailey compares Cic. *Pro Arch.* 1, citing the text as: *quousque anteacti temporis spatium repetere possumus*. However, the text at that point reads: *nam quoad longissime potest mea respicere spatium praeteriti temporis at pueritiae memoriam recordari ultimam, inde usque repetens hunc video mihi* . . . For *repetere* in this sense (with or without *memoriam* or *animo vel sim.*) cf. *OLD* s.v. (6).

[11] Compare Butler's objection to Locke's sufficiency of memory as a criterion of personal identity, on which see D. Wiggins, 'Locke, Butler, and the stream of consciousness: and men as a natural kind', in A. O. Rorty (ed.), *The Identities of Persons* (Berkeley, 1976), 139–73, esp. 139–43. H. A. J. Munro, *T. Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura libri sex*[4] (Cambridge, 1886), ad 851: '*repetentia nostri* naturally enough indicates that continued consciousness of our personal identity which is broken only by death.'

sequence of atomic cosmology at 852–8. The second of these refers to the fact that this must have happened in the past, and so is able to point out that *as a matter of fact* we cannot remember these previous lives. So it is therefore able to function as a justification for one of the premises of the previous argument, namely premise (d). Just as we cannot remember past lives, so we will not be able to remember our present life once our atoms come together once again.[12] Even if, therefore, I am assured that one of these future selves will suffer terribly, each instantiation is psychologically insulated from all the others and therefore no concern could rationally be felt for the well-being of any instantiation besides the present one.[13] This strategy of pointing to a fact about our attitude to the past and then insisting that the same attitude should be taken when considering the future is also the central feature of the so-called 'Symmetry arguments' which Lucretius uses at 3.832–42 and 972–7, and therefore seems to be a favoured argumentative move. It relies upon two claims: first, that our attitudes to the past are robust and justifiable and therefore can be used to construct symmetrical attitudes to the future, and second, that the future and past are sufficiently and relevantly similar that one's attitude in one temporal direction can and should be used to construct an analogous attitude in the other direction.

Let me underline the fact that my interpretation of this argument agrees with Alberti's and similar treatments in as much as I too point to this break in memory as a reason why we should not care about future atomic arrangements identical with that by which I am currently composed. That, after all, is the major conclusion which Lucretius wishes to reach. However, my interpretation differs in that it does not see Lucretius as pointing to a psychological criterion of personal identity, at least not in this passage. For all that he says in this section, Lucretius can remain committed solely to a material criterion of identity, as outlined in 845–6.

This is a particularly striking result, given that Lucretius could have blocked the idea that we should care about these past and future persons by simply denying that they are identical with us. Yet, if I am right, he does not do that. This becomes more surprising still when it is realized that there is an Epicurean *Vatican Saying* which explicitly denies the very possibility which is on my account allowed in Lucretius' *palingenesis* argument, namely the possibility that 'we' may be reconstituted and come to be at some later date.

Γεγόναμεν ἅπαξ, δὶς δὲ οὐκ ἔστι γενέσθαι· δεῖ δὲ τὸν αἰῶνα μηκέτι εἶναι· σὺ δὲ οὐκ ὢν τῆς αὔριον κύριος ἀναβάλλῃ τὸ χαῖρον· ὁ δὲ βίος μελλησμῷ παραπόλλυται καὶ εἷς ἕκαστος ἡμῶν ἀσχολούμενος ἀποθνῄσκει. (*SV* 14)

This brief saying has the air of an injunction to 'seize the day'. By insisting that we

[12] Kenney (n. 2) ad 852 *ad nos de nobis*: 'the present "us" is the only one that we are interested in; the former "us" might just as well not have existed'. This can be true without the need to deny any identity between the two instantiations of 'us'.

[13] Cf. B. Williams, 'The self and the future', in his *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge, 1973), 46–63, (originally printed in *PR* 79 [1970]), at 52–3, who imagines a situation in which I am told that I will be tortured in the future, but when that torture occurs I will not remember being told that it would occur, and indeed will be given an entirely different set of memories from those which I now possess. Would it be rational still to feel distress at this prospect? Williams concludes that even if that prospect does now cause distress, perhaps it should not, since that very distress may be dependent on factors which will be removed by the very psychological changes in question. 53: 'It is an important fact that not everything I would, as things are, regard as an evil would be something that I should rationally regard as an evil if it were predicted that it would happen to me in the future and also predicted that I should undergo significant psychological changes in the meantime.'

'only live once', it recommends a life which takes pleasure in the present rather than constantly deferring pleasure until a later time.[14] In a sense the final sentence identifies 'living' with 'living pleasantly'—which is perhaps not a surprising move for a hedonist to make. From this normative identification it follows that living without pleasure is not really living at all.[15] To waste this opportunity, then, is to waste the only opportunity we have to 'live a life'. Lucretius himself seems to imply that death is everlasting by calling it *immortalis* (3.869) and *aeterna* (3.1091). Also, and perhaps more striking, earlier in Book 3 Lucretius himself comes close to using the notion that a persistence of memory is an important component of personal survival. Here he is still arguing against the claim that the soul is immortal and existed before incarnation (3.670–6).

> Praeterea si inmortalis natura animai
> constat et in corpus nascentibus insinuatur,
> cur super anteactam aetatem meminisse nequimus
> nec vestigia gestarum rerum ulla tenemus?
> nam si tanto operest animi mutata potestas,
> omnis ut actarum exciderit retinentia rerum,
> non, ut opinor, id ab leto iam longius errat;

Note that even in this passage, however, Lucretius shies away from saying that the absence of memory is equivalent to death, commenting only that it is 'not very far from it'. Despite the difference in focus of these two passages and the *palingenesis* argument, all three share the same overall concern. In the *palingenesis* argument, Lucretius did not disallow the possibility that the future identical instantiations might be 'me', but is nevertheless adamant that even so it should not matter to me what will happen to them—just as what happened to all the identical past instantiations does not now matter to me. Just so, in these last two quotations the Epicureans express this idea in terms of personal continuity. If I cannot remember the time before this soul, immortal as it is, entered my body, how is that different from saying that 'I' did not exist previously? Nothing relevant to my person, that is *the person living this life*, is altered by the prenatal existence of the soul. Of course, Plato famously insisted that the soul did remember various things learned before incarnation (and in the *Phaedo* makes this one of his reasons for claiming that the soul is immortal), but these are precisely not details about previous lives and incarnations[16]—they are not personal memories in the sense Lucretius thinks would make this immortal soul something which concerns us. If we are to agree that the soul is immortal, Lucretius might ask how this is of itself supposed to be a comfort against the fear of death.[17]

Similarly, the *Vatican Saying* makes clear that what matters is my present life by asserting the strong claim that 'I', in the sense relevant to any decision-making, planning, and any other concerns, will only live once. Even so, there is no explicit

[14] The reading χαῖρον, rather than Stobaeus' καιρόν, is supported by the Vatican manuscript and a version of the saying found on a mosaic floor at Autun. See for further discussion and bibliography: J. Warren, 'Epicurean immortality', *OSAPh* 18 (2000), 231–61, at 237, n. 17.

[15] There is a Democritean antecedent for this idea: DK B160 (= Porph. *De Abst.* 4.21); cf. B200, 201.

[16] See Kenney (n. 2), ad 670–8.

[17] Note that even at the end of the *Phaedo* Socrates the individual is said to have come to an end (*Ph.* 118a). Of course, Platonists will have a response, and it seems to me that one of the intentions of the Ps.-Platonic *Axiochus* is to respond critically to Epicurean thanatology from a Platonic background.

assertion in these texts that memory is a necessary condition of personal identity—only that memory is an important constituent of a human life, and the implicit claim that only past and future stages of a life linked to the present through ties of recollection can be proper objects of my concern.[18] In short, it is this consideration—what should be of present concern to me—which drives all these Epicurean discussions, not the question of personal identity *per se*. Of course, there is a real question whether there is in ancient philosophy a concept of a 'person' in the sense in which it appears in modern philosophical discussion.[19] Given those uncertainties, it is perhaps better to point out the distinction between the Lucretian *palingenesis* argument, and the other Epicurean texts which I have just introduced without attempting to press the question of what sort of conception of a 'person', if any, they involve. More important than the differences between the texts is their shared concern to convince us that only my present life should be of any moral relevance, and only that life should therefore be an object of my concern.

V

It has often been pointed out that this passage of Lucretius shows striking similarities to a passage of John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (first published in 1689), where what is perhaps the first 'modern' discussion of personal identity is to be found (*Essay* 2.27). There Locke introduces a psychological criterion of personal identity, and eventually concludes that this is a sufficient, not merely a necessary condition. It is intriguing to speculate that Locke perhaps had the Lucretian passage in mind when he was formulating his ideas. Both Locke and Lucretius reject the idea that our selves are constituted by immaterial and immortal souls. Locke also uses thought experiments which are remarkably like those found in the *De Rerum Natura*. For example:

> Let any one reflect upon himself, and conclude that he has in himself an immaterial spirit, which is that which thinks in him, and in the constant change of his body keeps him the same; and is that which he calls himself: Let him also suppose it to be the same soul that was in Nestor or Thersites, at the siege of Troy . . . which it may have been, as well as it is now the soul of any other man: but he, now having no consciousness of any of the actions either of Nestor or Thersites, does or can he conceive himself the same person with either of them? Can he be concerned in either of their actions? . . . So that this consciousness not reaching to any of the actions of either of these men, he is no more one self with either of them than if the soul or immaterial spirit that now informs him, had been created and began to exist when it began to inhabit his present body. (*Essay* 2.27.14)

Here Locke imagines that a soul has passed from Nestor to someone in the present. This does not suffice for us to say that this person and Nestor are identical, however, since no recollection or consciousness of Nestor's deeds have passed into this new incarnation. Later, Locke moves from this negative point, which makes psychological continuity a necessary condition of identity, to a stronger claim that it is a sufficient condition (2.27.16).

We have seen how one reading of the Lucretian *palingenesis* argument picks out a Lockean psychological criterion of identity. Alberti provides an interesting discussion of the parallels between Locke and her version of Lucretius, pointing out that

[18] For another example of the claim that memory is an essential component of living a human life see Pl. *Phileb.* 21b–d.

[19] See e.g. C. Gill, 'Is there a concept of person in Greek philosophy?', in S. Everson (ed.), *Psychology* (Cambridge, 1991), 166–93.

Lucretius does retain a material criterion which Locke jettisons.[20] I wonder if this relationship between Locke and Lucretius is in part the result of reading Lucretius already with Locke's psychological criterion in mind. There are, of course, phrases in Lucretius which are strongly reminiscent of Locke's later theory, but I have tried to argue that they are by no means unequivocal. It is possible to read Lucretius' *palingenesis* argument as holding an exclusively material criterion of identity. It seems reasonable to me, therefore, to wonder if the alternative interpretation has come to Lucretius from a background of post-Lockean discussions of this particular problem.

It is relatively certain that Locke had read Lucretius. His library contained three copies of the poem, in addition to two copies of Diogenes Laertius' *Lives*. As one time lecturer in Greek at Christ Church, Oxford (1661–2), he would have had the ability in classical languages that would allow the close study of the original. Moreover, although in the *Essay* Locke is somewhat non-committal about his attitude to corpuscularian theories of the world (4.3.16), it is nevertheless generally agreed that he was close to Robert Boyle, and probably also influenced at least to some extent by the work of Pierre Gassendi, who in the middle of the seventeenth century revived interest in Epicureanism.

Some of the exact details of any such influence on Locke by contemporary Epicureanism remain controversial and indeed speculative.[21] But the point remains that Lucretius clearly did bequeath something to Locke, namely the technique of discussing such questions by means of thought experiments.[22] I suspect that if Locke did take Lucretius' third book of the *De Rerum Natura*, and the *palingenesis* argument in particular, as a starting-point to his thoughts then he may have overinterpreted the Lucretius passage in such a way that it did support a psychological criterion. In return, later interpreters of Lucretius have been influenced by Locke in finding Locke's criterion in Lucretius. But this is mere speculation. The lasting legacy of Lucretius' argument can nevertheless be seen in any modern discussion of personal identity. More often than not they also deal with the issue in terms of thought experiments, by telling stories of teletransportation or brain transplants or body-swaps.[23] These might seem a long way from Lucretius, but their inspiration can be found ultimately in the *De Rerum Natura*.

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[20] Alberti (n. 7), 201–3, 201: 'Anche Locke immagina che le stesse particelle materiali che un tempo componevano, ad esempio, Nestore possano in futuro comporre una nuove persona; e anch'egli conclude da ciò, 1) che non si può dire che Nestore continui a vivere nella nuova persona, se non sussiste tra l'uno e l'altra una continuità di coscienza; e 2) che pertanto l'identità personale non consiste nell'identità della sostanza materiale.' In the passage I have cited no reference is made to material particles, and Alberti seems to be making Locke's argument rather more similar to Lucretius' than is warranted. Admittedly, Locke goes on in this chapter to say that 'this [having Nestor's immaterial soul as outlined above] would no more make him the same person with Nestor, than if some of the particles of matter that were once a part of Nestor, were now part of this man'. Again, this differs from Lucretius' account in that it only refers to a partial material identity and makes no reference to identical arrangement.

[21] See H. Jones, *The Epicurean Tradition* (London, 1989), 186–213 for a good summary of English relations with Epicureanism at this period. Also see R. W. Puster, *Britische Gassendi-Rezeption am Beispiel John Lockes* (Stuttgart, 1991). L. S. Joy, *Gassendi the Atomist: Advocate of History in an Age of Science* (Cambridge, 1987), at 219–24 is keen to stress the ways in which Locke differed from Gassendi.

[22] J. L. Mackie, *Problems from Locke* (Cambridge, 1976), 173, 177.

[23] See e.g. the work of D. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford, 1984), 199ff. and Williams (n. 13).