

XI. Process and Value: An Epicurean Dilemma

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Epicurean ethics rests on the view that natural events have no value in themselves and can be termed good or bad only to the extent that they are causes of pleasure or pain to sentient beings;¹ it recognizes further that the values arising from natural processes may be to some extent controlled by sentient beings, in part by their influencing the course of events through their own actions, in part by their seeking out and treasuring up the sources of pleasure, and avoiding pain. Epicurean ethics is optimistic in the sense that it is possible for the philosopher to see to it that the sources of pleasure in his experience are at all times greater than the sources of pain,² and it is possible for all men to become philosophers.³

In working out the implications of this view the Epicureans sometimes arrived at positions which seemed to involve inconsistencies. It is not clear how Epicurus himself reconciled these divergent tendencies, and in general his disciples appear not to have been disturbed by them; but to Lucretius, who pushed them to extremes, they posed an inescapable dilemma. Inasmuch as the resultant "contradictions" in Lucretius are to some extent implicit in the Epicurean system, they should not be assigned entirely to some inner conflict between "Lucretius the philosopher" and "Lucretius the poet"⁴ or "Lucretius the intermittent psychotic".⁵

An essential feature of the Epicurean view is the cleavage it creates between the sentient being, or evaluator, and the valueless processes of the physical world. Unlike the Platonist or Stoic, the Epicurean does not find in nature any purposes or ends comparable to his own. Natural events are neither the temporal image of an eternal model, nor the con-

¹ Cf. Philod. *Rhet.* 1.218 Sudhaus: οὐ μὴν ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ πρᾶγμα καθ' ἑαυτὸ τοῖς ὅλοις οὐθ[έ]ν [ἐσ]τιν ἐπαι[νε]τὸν ἢ ψεκτὸν ἀλλὰ [γε]ίνεται τὸ μέν, καθόσον ὁμολογεῖ τῷ τέλει τῶν ἀγαθῶν, τὸ δέ, καθόσον τῷ τῶν κακῶν. . . .

² Cf. Cic. *Fin.* 1.62: neque enim tempus est ullum, quo non plus voluptatum habeat quam dolorum.

³ Cf. Lucr. 3. 319–22.

⁴ E.g. by O. Regenbogen, *Lucrez, seine Gestalt in seinem Gedicht*, and many others.

⁵ Cf. Dr. Logre, *L'Anxiété de Lucrèce* (Paris 1946). E. J. Boerwinkel, *Burgerschap en individuele Autonomie* (Amsterdam 1956) finds even in Epicurus a psychological conflict between intellectual autonomy and emotional dependence (e.g. p. 23).

stituent parts of a divinely ordered whole. There is neither harmony nor conflict between nature's ends and man's, as nature has no ends.⁶ The ever-moving atoms strive for no goals and realize no values. The ethical agent, therefore, cannot identify himself with the natural world. He cannot accept and promote the cosmic order. He must stand apart, examining and testing all that comes his way, accepting little and rejecting much.

The sphere in which values do exist is limited by the fact that experience of pleasure and pain, the Epicurean ethical poles, is an immediate experience, a *pathos*, which requires simultaneous presence of the sentient being and that which affects him. The Epicurean treatment of death illustrates this principle. Death as a natural process has the indifference to value that characterizes all atomic movements; and there can be no immediate experience of it, for death lies outside the limits of sentience. It therefore does not enter into the world of values.⁷ In order to have meaning, events must happen at a time when the perceiving subject is capable of experiencing them; all else is valueless.

In this restricted area there is in a sense a tie between the atomic world and our feelings, for experience of pleasure and pain can be described in terms of the shape, combination, and movement of the atoms that constitute the sense organs and the sense data. But this does not mean that the perceiving subject can attach himself even to this limited sector of the "objective" world; for the very processes which give meaning to his existence are, when viewed in themselves, found to be meaningless. Nor do those atomic structures which cause pleasure and pain provide (to that extent at least) an objective ground for ethics. Some pleasures must be rejected, as they are inseparable from greater pains;⁸ the pursuit of the good life, therefore, is not an indiscriminate attachment to pleasures, but a selection and ordering of experiences so as to ensure a stable and lasting pleasure.⁹ The ethical agent must create his own moral order from the experiences that the atoms produce in him.

To be sure, Epicurus recognized as "natural" and "necessary" those ethical choices which have to do with the needs of the body. But the "voice of the flesh"¹⁰ does not summon us to an involvement in physical processes; quite the contrary, it demands not to be hungry, not to be

⁶ Epicurus, *Ad Her.* 81.

⁷ Epic. *Ad Men.* 124; K. Δ. 2; cf. *Axiochus* 369 B-C and P. Merlan, "Epicureanism and Horace," *Journ. Hist. Ideas* 10 (1949) 445-51.

⁸ *Ad Men.* 129.

⁹ Cf. Sen. *De Otio* 7.2: nec ille tertius, de quo male existimare consensimus, voluptatem inertem probat, sed eam quam ratione efficit firmam sibi.

¹⁰ Epic. fr. 200 Usener; cf. Lucr. 2.16-19; Cic. *Fin.* 1.71.

thirsty, not to be cold. In other words, the body, which is itself a part of a physical universe that is almost Heraclitean in its restlessness, seeks to escape from the causes of disturbance and agitation. This escape brings with it "catastematic" pleasure which, in Epicurus' view, is far more important than the "kinetic" (a mere embellishment)¹¹ and which finds its upper limit in the complete removal of pain. The good of the body therefore does not lie in an affirmation of its physical nature but in a confinement of that nature within strictly prescribed limits.¹²

The mind, like the body, is an aggregate of endlessly moving atoms. Thus viewed, the processes of the mind, like those of the body, are aimless and meaningless. But they are capable of producing the greatest pleasures and pains; therefore they must be subjected to the closest possible scrutiny and control. Thus even at this stage the ethical agent sets himself apart from the atomic processes with which he must contend.

It is evident that the "order" of the natural world does not satisfy the requirements of an ethical order. Natural order exists for the Epicureans only as a limit to variation. Their science tells them the kinds of things that can and cannot happen, but does not explain why a given thing happens at a given time in a given way. The Epicurean limits of variation are equivalent to definitions, setting forth the differentiae of genera and species;¹³ thus they substitute for Platonic or Aristotelian universals, circumscribing the limits of the possible.¹⁴ The actual temporal succession of events remains unaccounted for and therefore, from the point of view of the perceiving subject, unordered.¹⁵

The absence of an ethical order in nature is further indicated by the characterization of the atomic realm as one of continual agitation.¹⁶ The

¹¹ Cf. Cic. *Fin.* 2.10: quod ais, cum dolore careamus, tum in summa voluptate nos esse, cum autem vescamur iis rebus, quae dulcem motum afferant sensibus, tum esse in motu voluptatem, qui faciat varietatem voluptatum, sed non augeri illam non dolendi voluptatem. . . .

¹² Cf. Epic. fr. 548 Usener: διάθεσις ψυχῆς τὸ κατὰ φύσιν ὀρίζουσα.

¹³ Cf. Lucr. 3.519–20:

Nam quodcumque suis mutatum finibus exit,
continuo hoc mors est illius quod fuit ante.

¹⁴ Cf. Lucr. 5.526–29:

Nam quid in hoc mundo sit eorum ponere certum
difficile est; sed quid possit fiatque per omne
in variis mundis varia ratione creatis,
id doceo . . .

¹⁵ Cf. Lucr. 2.1058–63. In *Phaedo* 98B–99A Plato criticizes Anaxagoras on similar grounds: that he failed to establish any connection between the moral and natural realms.

¹⁶ Cf. Lucr. 1.992 f., 1025; 2.95 f., 118 ff., 573 f.; Cic. *Fin.* 1.20; Epic. fr. 269, 286 Usener.

tarachê of the atoms contrasts with the *ataraxia* of the gods, who appear rather to possess the imperturbability of empty space.¹⁷ Thus the ethical order that we construct requires withdrawal from those aspects of external reality that appear to us arbitrary, whether from chance or from necessity (Epic. *Ad Men.* 133; K. Δ. 16; fr. 489 Usener), and which afford us neither confidence nor stability (K. Δ. 39). We escape from the fleeting present by projecting our pleasures into both past and future through memory and anticipation;¹⁸ and thus we acquire a stability that is our chief resource against pain and disease and permits us to separate ourselves from the causes of *tarachê* (*Ad Her.* 82; cf. fr. 445 Usener). Those who fail to construct such an order of their own live subject to all the vicissitudes of fortune and find nothing worth living for.

The Epicurean gods are better able than men to separate themselves off from "external" reality. Being spatially removed from the denser concentrations of atoms, they need not concern themselves with anything that might disturb their peace of mind. They turn their backs on the world¹⁹ and confine themselves to the enjoyment of undisturbed peace in the *intermundia*. But mortals cannot escape so easily. They must find tranquillity by detaching themselves in a different way, namely, by becoming spectators. As spectator man is not limited to the sphere of immediate experience but may with Epicurus pass through the flaming walls of the universe and see the whole of reality. As spectator he sees things not "subjectively," as values, but "objectively," as process. He discovers the nature of himself and of the universe, and their relation to each other. Yet the understanding he thus acquires of all reality is accompanied by a detachment from that limited sphere of immediate experience within which values exist. Even when the philosopher observes himself, he does so from outside, as it were, judging his own actions and desires as either aiding or hindering the pursuit of the good life (*Ad Men.* 128; cf. *Sent. Val.* 71). The philosopher, therefore, as spectator, views the whole of reality as process, and by thus removing himself from the "subjective" realm of immediate experience he finds tranquillity.

Again the Epicurean treatment of death illustrates the role of the

¹⁷ Void, as contrasted with the atoms, is *quietum* (Lucr. 2.238); on the emptiness of the life of the gods see the parody of Dionysius of Alexandria, quoted in Euseb. *Praep. Ev.* 14.27.9.

¹⁸ See the excellent discussion by V. Brochard, "La théorie du plaisir d'après Épicure," *Études de Philosophie Ancienne et de Philosophie Moderne* (Paris 1912) 279-86.

¹⁹ Cf. Sen. *De Benef.* 4.4.1: *aversus a mundo*. Opponents charged that the Epicurean gods are "nothing to us": fr. 389 Usener; cf. Plut. *Mor.* 1100f-1101a.

philosopher as spectator. We can as spectators contemplate our own death. We can know its inevitability and the nature of the atomic processes that will attend it. But since we know it at a distance, not as an immediate experience, we see it only as process, neither good nor bad.²⁰

It is this contrast between spectator and subject which produces a serious conflict in Epicurean ethics. It is necessary that we view the world as process, if we are to achieve peace of mind; yet it is necessary that we enter into the world of immediate experience if we are to find any values at all. The former course tends to make life empty; the latter imperils its tranquillity. How can the two be reconciled?

The Epicurean treatment of moral freedom illustrates this conflict. Freedom is not merely the ability to exercise choice; it is even more the ability to avoid all that interferes with the pursuit of the good life, for one who chooses under the influence of false opinions and vain desires cannot be said to be free. Moral freedom therefore requires a philosophical detachment which rejects the pursuit of wealth, fame, power, and even the more intense pleasures. It demands emancipation from hate and love and all other passions²¹ and the dissolution of desires and enthusiasms, at least so far as they are sources of unrest.²² It enables a person to resist forces from outside (Lucr. 2.277–80). Indeed the highest freedom would seem to remove the need for making any choices at all. The Epicurean, in order to free himself from false goods, anxiety, and insecurity, enslaves himself to his system;²³ and by identifying himself with the school he makes himself a part of the “objective” order that it establishes. Epicurus seems to have encouraged his followers thus to surrender to him their independence of judgment. He exhorted them to memorize the basic documents of the school, to train themselves in following them, to control all their acts by principles, to act at all times as if Epicurus were watching.²⁴ Immediate responses to situations are replaced by a sober calculation of advantage and disadvantage (*Ad Men.* 130, 132; K. Δ. 18), and the chief virtue, more important even than philosophy itself, is *phronêsis*, the faculty by which we determine what

²⁰ Philod. *Mort.* 4.22.2–4 seems to concede that persons who permit themselves to “anticipate” (προλαμβάνοντες) disagreeable aspects of death make death “something to them.” So Plutarch (*Mor.* 1106E) insists that death is “something to us” in thought. But the Epicurean argues that it is folly to anticipate death as evil, since it will not be evil when it comes, the perceiving subject no longer being present (*Ad Men.* 125).

²¹ Cf. K. Δ. 1; Lucr. 2.651; and for anger, Philod. *Ira*, col. 28.

²² Fr. 457 Usener; cf. K. Δ. 30; Philod. *Mort.* 4.14.7–8; Polystr. *Contempt.* pp. 29 f. Wilke.

²³ Fr. 199 Usener: philosophiae servias oportet, ut tibi contingat vera libertas.

²⁴ *Ad Men.* 135; K. Δ. 25; fr. 210, 211 Usener.

contributes to pleasure and what does not (*Ad Men.* 132). Thus Epicurean freedom militates against the subjective features of experience which alone contain the values toward which moral choices are directed.

The Epicurean view of music, poetry, and rhetoric similarly reflects the ascendancy of spectator over participant. The immediate values which these arts present are overshadowed by the threat they pose to philosophical objectivity. The Epicureans did not permit poetry to become even the handmaid of philosophy, much less did they find in it an independent approach to truth and reality.²⁵ They were closer to Plato's *Republic*, in this respect, than to Aristotle's *Poetics*; and even Lucretius' metaphor of the honeyed cup sets up no more than an external relation between poetry and philosophy, by virtue of which poetry might as easily be used to promote falsity as truth. The authentic spectator is not the poet, but the philosopher.

The Epicurean's double role of spectator and subject appears in his relation to other persons. As spectator he observes their behavior, profiting from what he sees and at the same time avoiding involvement in their concerns, that he may preserve peace of mind;²⁶ but as subject he recognizes that they have ends and purposes which may either further or counter his own, and he must therefore relate himself to them in such a way as to profit from concurring aims and protect himself from conflicts.

Now it is evident that the majority of men, those whose aims are not in accord with philosophical principles, are remote from the philosopher in both his roles. He observes at a distance their misguided behavior and finds little or no occasion to make common cause with them. They are the *ochlos*, the *stulti*, with whom he forms no attachments, from whom he withdraws, whose applause and notice he avoids.²⁷ From the observation of their misery he strengthens his commitment to his own philosophy;²⁸ and he secures himself against them by means of laws and governments, the sole purpose of which is to prevent acts of injustice.²⁹

Toward those who share his ends, however, the Epicurean stands in the same relation as to himself. They are like him (*Ad Men.* 135); they

²⁵ Cf. J. H. Waszink, *Lucretius and Poetry* (Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, afd. Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks, Deel 17, No. 8), Amsterdam 1954.

²⁶ Cf. Philod. *Mort.* 4.25.35-37: $\mu[\acute{\alpha}] \tau α ι \acute{o} ν \epsilon \sigma \tau \iota \tau \acute{\alpha} \varsigma \iota \delta \iota \alpha \varsigma \phi \upsilon [\gamma] \acute{o} ν \tau α \kappa [\alpha] \kappa \omicron \pi \alpha \theta \epsilon \iota \alpha \varsigma \xi \epsilon \rho [\iota] \tau \acute{\alpha} [\varsigma] \epsilon \rho \epsilon \rho [\omega] \nu \sigma \upsilon \mu \phi \omicron \rho [\acute{\alpha}] \xi [\epsilon \iota] \nu$.

²⁷ Fr. 187, 556 Usener; *Sent. Vat.* 45, 67; Philod. *Oec.* 23.11-18 (p. 64 Jensen).

²⁸ Cic. *Fin.* 1.62: cum stultorum vitam cum sua comparat, magna afficitur voluptate.

²⁹ On the need for safety see K. Δ. 7, 14; and on the prevention of injustice, K. Δ. 31, 32, 33, 37; Plut. *Mor.* 1124D.

feel pleasure and pain at the same things (Cic. *Fin.* 1.67); and he is united to them by love and friendship (Cic. *Fin.* 1.65). This friendship, in turn, provides a solid basis for the good life (K. Δ. 28); indeed, without friends one could not hope to attain it.³⁰ But while sharing his interests and activities with others the Epicurean observes, as spectator, that friendship is a relation of mutual advantage, in which two or more persons have discovered how to enlist each other's help in achieving their ends. Hence the paradox: subjectively, friendship is a sharing of experiences; objectively, a matter of expediency. It is not surprising that opponents, stressing the expediency, accuse the Epicureans of being self-seekers even in friendship; but actually the criticism is not a valid one, for when the Epicurean views friendship as a detached spectator he withdraws from his own ends as much as from those of his friends and is not in any real sense setting his interests against theirs.

There remains, however, the paradox that since the spectator as such commits himself to no ends, it is necessary to leave this calm and tranquil state if he is to participate at all in the striving for goals. To be completely detached, to have only "catastematic" pleasures, would not only lead to quietism; it is open also to the charge of inhumanity and insensitivity. It is better, Epicurus says (fr. 120 Usener), to give way to feelings of grief and distress at the sufferings of friends than to incur the charge of inhumanity; and Plutarch observes³¹ that the great pleasure which Epicurus claimed to have found in the company of his friends was attended by much solicitude and sorrow at their illnesses and untimely deaths. But even more: Epicurus was not indifferent even to the feelings and fortunes of mankind in general;³² else why did he undertake to "save"³³ them by disseminating his teaching "to all men and all women" (cf. Plut. *Mor.* 1129A) and by recruiting followers (fr. 107, 523 Usener)? In permitting himself to become involved in the affairs of others Epicurus was surely departing from the example of the gods; he thus recognized that on the human level at least a good life is not consistent with complete detachment.

It is just this conflict between detachment and engagement which attains such proportions in Lucretius. Lucretius recognizes, of course, that we must view all things objectively, the universe, other persons,

³⁰ K. Δ. 27; A. J. Festugière, *Epicurus and his Gods*, trans. C. W. Chilton (Oxford 1955) 37-42.

³¹ *Mor.* 1103A; cf. P. Herc. 1027, col. 16, in W. Crönert, *Kolotes und Menedemos* (Leipzig 1906) 71; Philod. *Mort.* 4.25.2-10.

³² Cf. E. Bignone, *Storia della Letteratura Latina* 2 (Florence 1945) 183.

³³ Cf. Diog. Oen. fr. 2, col. 5.14 f.: [ἐ]ν κοινῷ τὰ τῆς σωτηρίας προθε[ῖναι φάρμα]κα.

even ourselves. We must be able to see ourselves as atomic compounds, and look upon death as a natural process. A clear understanding frees us from attachments (Lucret. 3.1071), from fear (3.903) and wonder (6.647–57), and enables us to avoid anxiety and pain.³⁴ The exhortation to assume the role of spectator is a dominant theme of the *De Rerum Natura*; but along with it is a persistent tendency to portray the subjective side of experience, the pleasures and pains — especially the pains — that various kinds of events might produce in a sentient being. It is appropriate that Lucretius should do this, in order to point out the advantages of philosophical detachment; yet he does so at the risk of losing his own tranquillity.

The duality of the subjective and objective points of view comes out clearly in Lucretius' treatment of free will. Viewed from without, acts of free will are indeterminate and random, hence comparable to the atomic swerve, which is of course non-purposive.³⁵ But viewed from within, the moral order that free will makes possible is anything but random; it is determined by one's purposes and goals (2.257 f.), and becomes the more clearly defined the clearer one's goals are. The non-philosopher fails to achieve a good life because he is bound by false opinions and religious fears, whereas the philosopher succeeds. But just as the subjective order established by free choice appears as disorder from the point of view of natural science, the atomic order appears to be one of chance events to the moral agent (see note 14, above).

The duality also appears in our relation to other persons. Lucretius follows Epicurus in advocating detachment from the mass of mankind, in recognizing law and government as primarily a means of protection against acts of injustice (5.1143–50), and in prizing safety (1.43). As spectator, he sees in the conduct of other men an important object-lesson for one who would escape their evils.³⁶ Over against this is the ideal of friendship,³⁷ to which Lucretius assigns an important role in human history (5.1019), and the family (3.894 ff.; 4.1234, 1253). Yet Lucretius has no visible companion on the narrow path (6.27) to the highest good. He does not draw on pleasant memories of conversations with his friends, as Epicurus did, to offset life's ills. He appeals instead to the fairly remote ideal of the Epicurean gods and the portrayal of pastoral felicity.

³⁴ E.g. of love; cf. especially 4.1159: *nec sua respiciunt miseri mala maxima saepe*.

³⁵ 2.251–93; cf. 3.44 [46]: *si fert ita forte voluntas*.

³⁶ 2.1 ff.; 3.1057 ff.; 4.1121 ff.; 5.1194 ff.

³⁷ 1.141 (cf. B. Farrington, "The Meaning of *Voluptas* in Lucretius," *Hermathena* 80 [1952] 26–31); 2.29, 5.1392 (inter se).

It is perhaps because of this lack of philosophical friendship that Lucretius seems preoccupied with the plight of non-philosophers. He dwells on them at length, involving himself in their ills by entering into their subjective world, imaginatively portraying their feelings and mistaken values. This is Lucretius' pessimistic mood: wherever he looks he sees error and futility. The weary ploughman (2.1164), the backslider (3.41–54; 5.86), the pursuer of wealth and power, the lover,³⁸ the mourner, the man who is restless and bored, the evil-doer, the victim of the plague, the spectator who looks on without understanding what he sees (5.1204; 6.50), all are doomed to sorrow and distress. It is the lot of man to wander in ignorance of what ails him (3.1050 ff.). How can Lucretius preserve peace of mind in the face of all this? Where can be found enough pleasure to offset so much pain? It is imperative that the teachings of Epicurus be brought to all men, as a comfort (*solacia*, 5.113) in their distress, a medicine to be administered even by deceit if necessary (1.941). So for Lucretius the Epicurean avoidance of insensitivity has reached such proportions that it constitutes a serious obstacle to the detachment necessary for a pleasant life.

In relation to the natural world Lucretius is again caught between two diverging tendencies. He is quite orthodox in laying before the spectator the whole infinite range of being (1.74; 3.17, 26 f., 854 f.; 6.647 f.), while limiting the subjective sphere of meanings and values to immediate sensation and its extension through memory and anticipation.³⁹ Sentience has a restricted place in the universe of purposeless atomic process (3.784–89; 5.126–33), and the individual sentient being is insignificant indeed (2.16; cf. 6.652), being further limited by his own position in space and time. Things can be something to us only if we are there to feel them; events before our birth and after our death are therefore meaningless (3.832–42, 972–75), as are events remote in space.⁴⁰ As values exist only within the sphere of sentience, neither its inception nor its termination can be good or bad; hence death is “nothing to us” (3.830, 845, 850, 926), nor would it be an evil not to have been born (5.174).⁴¹

³⁸ Lucretius was probably more gloomy about the distress of love than Epicurus was; cf. J. B. Stearns, “Epicurus and Lucretius on Love,” *CJ* 31 (1935–36) 343–51. In fr. 19 Usener, Epicurus takes a rather neutral stand on marriage, but cf. fr. 525: οὐ γὰρ γαμητέον. Philodemus seems to agree with Lucretius; cf. *Mus.* 4.13.10–12: κακοῦ καὶ [με]γάλου τῆς ἐρωτικῆς[ς] ὀρέξ[εω]ς οὐσης. See A. J. Neubecker, *Die Bewertung der Musik bei Stoikern und Epikureern* (Berlin 1956) 49.

³⁹ On the role of memory see for example 3.847–51; on anticipation, 1.140; 3.1018 f. 5.32–42; on the remoteness of the gods cf. 5.148 and note 19, above.

⁴¹ Cf. *Ad Men.* 125: μηδὲν ὑπάρχειν ἐν τῷ μὴ ζῆν δεινόν.

But Lucretius finds it difficult to restrict his valuations within the prescribed limits. For instance, past events, which, objectively considered, are mere accidents of atoms in a given location (1.455–58, 471–82), seem at times to take on tremendous significance, whether bad (the sacrifice of Iphigenia) or good (the teaching of Epicurus). Similarly, things remote in space may be terrifying (the monsters at the ends of the earth) or pleasant (the life of the gods). It is possible even to have an appreciation of the joys (1.259–61) and sorrows (2.352–66) of the lower animals.⁴²

Lucretius tends to attach to the role of spectator a positive value which it does not properly have. To Epicurus knowledge is only a means; there would be no reason to seek it if a pleasant life could be secured without it (K. Δ. 11). But to Lucretius knowledge is illumination (3.1; 5.11–12); the discovery of the nature of the universe is a victory that raises man to heaven (1.79); and the contemplation of the universe inspires a kind of religious awe (3.25–30; cf. 5.1198–203).

At other times Lucretius is tempted to conceive of nature as aiding or opposing man, to the extent that it helps or hinders the pursuit of his ends. Lucretius knows better, of course; it is not to aid us that nature gives us a tongue with which to talk (4.834 f.), or to harm us that the soil loses its fertility. It is not with conscious purpose that at one time nature freely supplies our needs (5.816), at another requires us to labor for them (5.207). So the weather, presumably, does not smile (2.32), and the ether does not hold the world in an eager embrace (2.1066). Were it no more than a matter of a few phrases, we could dismiss this personification of nature as “poetic”;⁴³ but it enters into his thought in a more profound way. There seems to be a real opposition between nature and the good life which we try so laboriously to construct. The world is full of faults (2.181; 5.199). The cry of the new-born babe, prophetic of the evils that await him,⁴⁴ mingles with the laments of mourners (2.576–80).⁴⁵ The natural order seems in its very nature to

⁴² Lucretius likes to illustrate purely physical processes by examples implying a value; cf. 2.142–49, 191–93.

⁴³ Cf. Epic. fr. 469 Usener: χάρις τῇ μακαρίᾳ φύσει.

⁴⁴ 5.227; nature is much kinder to the animals, 5.228–34.

⁴⁵ E. Bignone, *L'Aristotele Perduto e la Formazione Filosofica di Epicuro* 2 (Florence 1936) 433–36, and “Lucrezio come Interprete della Filosofia di Epicuro,” *Italia e Grecia* (Florence 1939) 121–39, claimed that in his stress on the evils of the world Lucretius was following Epicurus, who used arguments of this kind in his anti-Aristotelian polemic. But Bignone's evidence is very meager and not always to the point; surely he forces the meaning of *tristia* in fr. 460 Usener (cf. Lucretius' ratio . . . tristior, 1.943 f.). In any event Bignone regards this emphasis on evil as a polemical exaggeration that led Epicurus to self-contradiction (*L'Arist. Perd.* 2.434).

be antithetical to ours. The atoms are characterized by a restless agitation comparable to conflict and war (2.118, 574). The motion of the universe is both restless and toilsome (5.1213 f.). The world, as a combination of atoms, is mortal; it undergoes growth, maturity, and old age (2.1105 ff.) and is subject to disease (5.345); its parts are at war with each other (5.380 f.); and it threatens to engulf us in its own last terrible convulsion (6.603–7). Nor does Lucretius give any adequate indication how these uncongenial features of nature can be remedied. The evils of the plague are in fact intolerable, and the prospect of death is fearful.⁴⁶ Peace and freedom from care seem to belong to sleep,⁴⁷ death (3.211, 910, 920, 939, 977, 1038), the insensitive cattle (3.292 f., 302 ff.), or even the impassive void (2.238).⁴⁸ Here Lucretius is not the unimpassioned spectator of nature; he does not view all things with calm mind (5.1203), but projects into the cosmic picture the values inherent in the human struggle.

Usque adeo res humanas vis abdita quaedam
obterit et pulchros fascis saevasque securis
proculcare ac ludibrio sibi habere videtur. (5.1233–35)

But while an emphasis on the evils that confront man leads to a conception of nature as hostile, and of the good life as an escape, a more positive approach to human values causes Lucretius to impute to natural processes a subjective dimension of a far different character. In its positive aspect Epicurean ethics sets itself the task of constructing a good that is stable and secure and hence able to resist the blows of fortune (cf. fr. 68 Usener). The pleasure of the gods is of this character; and among men, those who are able to attain a pleasure of the divine sort are rightly called immortal (cf. fr. 141 Usener). The search for permanence and stability in ethics, as in physics, was forced on the Epicureans by the traditions of Greek philosophy; and as they rejected the notion of a transcendent reality, permanence had to be found in the world of space and time.

Lucretius does not discuss in any detail this aspect of Epicurean

⁴⁶ 6.1158, 1183, 1212; cf. 663 f. The plague causes both physical suffering and mental distress, and Lucretius offers no remedy for either. For the former as possibly symbolic of the latter see H. S. Commager, Jr., "Lucretius' Interpretation of the Plague," *HSCP* 62 (1957) 105–18.

⁴⁷ 4.907 f. It seems paradoxical that while sleep frees us from cares, the *anima* in sleep is physically *perturbata*, 4.922, 930, 943.

⁴⁸ Cf. C. Martha, *Le Poème de Lucrèce* (Paris 1869) 185. The escape into nothingness is the extreme of detachment. One need not suppose, with P. Lortie, "Crainte anxieuse des enfers chez Lucrèce: Prolegomènes," *Phoenix* 8 (1954) 47–63, that it springs from a persistent fear of the afterlife.

ethics. He hints at it, however, in his indictments of folly. Men flee contempt and poverty because these seem to them removed from a pleasant and stable life;⁴⁹ but men fail to escape the flux of events because the *vas* in which they store their goods is punctured, so that all flow away and perish *ingrata* (3.935–37). The implication is that if a person stores up his goods through “grateful recollection” (C. Bailey’s translation of the Epicurean *χάρις*), he may achieve a full satisfaction from life and depart in peace (3.938 f.); but if he lets his goods escape, it is futile constantly to seek more.⁵⁰ In 6.17–23, where the figure is further amplified, the *vas* is not only leaky but unclean.

Stability in ethics is not, as in physics, guaranteed by the changeless atoms;⁵¹ it must somehow be found in the very process of change. In the case of the gods there is apparently a kind of equilibrium which prevents any disruption of the divine felicity;⁵² but among men, where birth and death are the rule, and pleasures come and go, values, like all else, come into being and pass away. It is this feature of Epicurean thought that underlies the Hymn to Venus.⁵³ Lucretius here conceives of all process as “becoming,” and all “becoming,” under the guidance of Venus, is productive of something pleasant, that is, valuable:

Quae quoniam rerum naturam sola gubernas
nec sine te quicquam dias in luminis oras
exoritur neque fit laetum neque amabile quicquam . . . (1.21–23)

Mars, on the other hand, symbolizes the destruction of values. We may compare the imagery of 2.569–72, where atomic motions are as a whole divided into two kinds: those that bring death and those that bring birth. The former destroy, the latter preserve:

Nec superare queunt motus itaque exitiales
perpetuo neque in aeternum sepelire salutem,
nec porro rerum genitales auctificique
motus perpetuo possunt servare creata.

⁴⁹ 3.66, ab dulci vita stabilique; cf. 5.1121 f. and K. Δ. 7.

⁵⁰ 3.940–43; cf. 957–60, 1003–10, 5.1425–35; fr. 494 Usener; Philod. *Mort.* 4.12.2–15, 4.19.33–35.

⁵¹ Cf. 2.863: fundamenta quibus nitatur summa salutis.

⁵² Cf. 3.819–23, a passage which might well apply to the gods: see Giussani, *Studi Lucreziani*, pp. 224, 239.

⁵³ It is tempting to see here the influence of Plato, *Symp.* 207–8, where it is stated that perpetual generation is the closest that mortals can come to immortality. Plato (*Symp.* 209), like Lucretius (1.24 f.), includes literary productions among the examples of “generation”.

In thus assigning to all process a dimension of value Lucretius has grossly overstated the relation between them, for although the Epicureans were committed to the view that value is inseparable from process, they emphatically denied that process is inseparable from value.

Lucretius violates Epicurean principles also when he sets up a correlation between the generation of values and biological generation. Taken literally, this could only mean that life is good and death is evil, and while Lucretius seems to suggest this in more than one passage,⁵⁴ he of course recognizes that generation in the biological sense is no sure good,⁵⁵ and he argues at great length that death is not evil. The generation of values is at best only analogous to biological generation.

One may then conclude that the two opposing extremes to which Lucretius tends, one, that all process has value, the other, that the good is to be found in an escape from process, are but developments of two conflicting tendencies in Epicurus' own thought, on the one hand that the philosopher must assume the role of spectator and detach himself from the events of the moment, on the other hand that it is only by a subject, that is, by one who participates in process, that any values at all are realized. The specific expression that Lucretius gave to this dilemma one might fairly attribute to his own thought and genius as a poet; but the dilemma itself was already implicit in his master's teaching.

⁵⁴ Cf. 5.989: *dulcia . . . lumina vitae*, and 5.1151: *praemia vitae*. So growth is joyful (2.1122), old age is a deterioration (2.1132), and the end of the world is a fearful prospect (5.107-9). For death as a privation see 3.486 and *Ad Her.* 63, *Ad Men.* 124. Opponents argued that the loss of goods must be evil (cf. fr. 502 Usener), but the Epicureans stoutly maintained that as the loss is not felt, it is not evil. N. W. DeWitt's view that for Epicurus life itself is the greatest good (*Epicurus and his Philosophy*, Minneapolis 1954, 218) does not explain how it is possible for death not to be evil, if life is good.

⁵⁵ Cf. J. P. Elder, "Lucretius 1.1-49," *TAPA* 85 (1954) 88-120.