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THE SPEECH OF NATURE IN LUCRETIUS' *DE RERUM NATURA* 3.931–71*

I

For an Epicurean, what stands between us and a happy life is the fear of death, *τὸ φρικωδέστατον τῶν κακῶν* (Epic. *Ep. ad Men.* 125), as well as the other types of fear or worries which the Epicureans construe as dependent on the fear of death, among those in particular the fear of the gods.

It is clear from treatises like Philodemus' *De morte* or *Pap. Herc.* 1251, very probably a work of Philodemus too, as well as from the second part of *D.R.N.* 3, that the Epicureans were acutely aware of the fact that fear of death is a rather complex phenomenon, and that arguments suitable to convince us that one particular type of fear of death is irrational may be completely irrelevant to curing another type of fear of death.

For the convenience of the reader, I provide a survey of the various types of fear of death which one should distinguish, and I briefly indicate how the Epicurean sage would cope with them. First, there is the fear of being dead, which manifests itself in worries about what might happen to our bodies after our death, or in the idea that we might have to undergo a punishment in the underworld, for instance for the sins we have committed while alive, or that we might have to lead an otherwise unappealing continued existence in Hades. Second, there is the fear of death *qua* curtailment of pleasures. In order to have pleasant experiences and, in particular, to be able to have in a more narrow sense pleasant sensations, we have to be alive. Consequently, many people fear death because it means the end to a pleasant life. This attitude eventually leads to the wish to live as long as possible, ideally for ever. Third, there is the fear of death *qua* frustration of plans or projects. Both in planning our life and in judging the success of a life, we intuitively rely on the notion of a complete life. In retrospect, we call a life complete when the plans and projects that the person in question had, like bringing up a child or having a particular career, have been successfully completed. And, correspondingly, we fear a death which interrupts such projects, in particular one that is 'premature'; from this point of view, death after a long and fulfilled life seems less dreadful.[1]

The Epicurean sage would cope with each of these fears in a different way. As to the fear of being dead, he would tell himself what is summarized in *KΔ* 2: *'Ο θάνατος οὐδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς· τὸ γὰρ διαλυθὲν ἀναισθητεῖ· τὸ δ' ἀναισθητοῦν οὐδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς.* Nothing remains of us after our death which could be harmed in any way. The fear of death *qua* curtailment of pleasures is tackled in a different way, namely via the Epicurean theory of *ἡδονή*. Because for an Epicurean pleasure first and foremost is identified with an untroubled state of the soul which allows us to be, in a disinterested way, open for pleasant experiences,[2] duration of life becomes irrelevant; for this

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[1] On this third variety of fear of death, see especially G. Striker, 'Commentary on Mitsis', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium for Ancient Philosophy* 4 (1988), 323–8.

[2] See G. Striker, 'Epicurean hedonism', in *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge, 1996), 196–208.

untroubled state cannot, on the Epicurean theory, be enhanced by persisting longer. As Philodemus says in *De morte* (c. 38 Gigante): ‘*Ο δὲ νοῦν ἔχων ἀπειληφὼς ὅτι δύναται πᾶν περιποιῆσαι τὸ πρὸς εὐδαίμονα βίον αὔταρκες, εὐθὺς ἤδη τὸ λοιπὸν ἐντεταφισμένος περιπατεῖ καὶ τὴν μίαν ἡμέραν ὡς αἰῶνα κερδαίνει . . . .* Finally, the Epicurean sage would not experience fear of death *qua* frustration of plans. Partly, this would be a consequence of the fact that he exploits the fuzziness of the notion of a complete life, and interprets some of the things in our life that structure it and thus might be called projects (like bringing up a child or having a particular career), as sources of pleasant experiences; he can then apply the Epicurean theory of pleasure to them. But, more importantly, his life is unlikely to be such that a distinctive structure would emerge in it whose integrity could be endangered. For the Epicurean sage would stay away from the traditional education and the arts (which might make him wish to complete, say, a book or finish a painting), he would avoid all situations in which he could develop ambition, and he would not fall in love, have children, or get involved in public life.[3]

We can see that in order to cope with fear of death in all its varieties, one already has to be an Epicurean sage. One needs to have fully accepted the Epicurean theory of pleasure and must be able to bring it to bear on the way in which one lives. And, ideally, one must have structured one’s life in the way outlined above.

A consequence of the fact that only the Epicurean sage is fully equipped to cope with fear of death is that Epicurean treatises tend to juxtapose the unreformed layman, with all his fears and neurotic behavioural patterns, and the sage who leads the perfect Epicurean life. Clearly, the wonders of Epicurean therapy are only to be found in full operation in the Epicurean sage. And only when manifested in him can they exhibit their full persuasive strength.

Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* cannot to the same extent afford such literary strategies. It not only presupposes a reader who is a complete novice in Epicurean philosophy,[4] but it also, in order to achieve its didactic purpose, needs to pick up the reader from where he stands. That is, while much of what Lucretius says may be consistent with, inspired by, or straightforwardly exhibiting Epicurean doctrine, he will normally assume that the reader subscribes to certain Epicurean doctrines or is able to bring them to bear on a certain problem only when these doctrines have been introduced at length and hence may count as proven.[5] The difference in purpose between Epicurean treatises and *D.R.N.* mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph accounts for the structure of Book 3 which, as is well known, contains an account of Epicurean psychology in its first part which is intended to prove the mortality of the soul, and the so-called diatribe against the fear of death in its second part. The relationship of these two parts is less straightforward than it might seem. There are, on the one hand, passages where Lucretius simply tries to connect the result established in the first part of the book—that the soul is mortal—with the particular fears and worries the reader might have. As Lucretius says on one occasion (3.870–93), it is possible to grasp the

[3] See M. Jufresa, ‘Il tempo e il sapiente Epicureo’, in G. Giannantoni and M. Gigante (edd.), *Epicureismo Greco e Romano* 1 (Naples, 1996), 287–98.

[4] See K. Kleve, ‘What kind of work did Lucretius write?’, *Symbolae Osloenses* 54 (1979), 81–5; D. Clay, *Lucretius and Epicurus* (Ithaca, 1983), 212ff.; P. Mitsis, ‘Committing philosophy on the reader: didactic coercion and reader autonomy in *De rerum natura*’, in *Mega Nepios. Il destinatario nell’ epos didascalico*, *MD* 31 (1993), 111–28.

[5] In his proofs, Lucretius may at times rely on premisses which are to be established only later; this has to do with the ‘mode of absorption’ he envisages for his poem (see below, n. 37) and is compatible with the statement made above.

import of the first part of the book, and yet to retain—inconsistently—concerns about what might happen after death to the body through the various forms of burial.

On the other hand, there are more complex cases, like this one (3.894–903):

> 'Iam iam non domus accipiet te laeta neque uxor
> optima, nec dulces occurrent oscula nati
> praeripere et tacita pectus dulcedine tangent.
> non poteris factis florentibus esse tuisque
> praesidium. misero misere' aiunt 'omnia ademit
> una dies infesta tibi tot praemia uitae.'
> illud in his rebus non addunt 'nec tibi earum
> iam desiderium rerum super insidet una.'
> quod bene si uideant animo dictisque sequantur,
> dissoluant animi magno se angore metuque.

Here mourners of a young father complain that premature death prevents him from experiencing the joys of a parent and husband, and does not allow him to continue as the *praesidium* of his family. This is countered by the objection that after his death the deceased could not possibly worry about the loss of these *praemia uitae*.

On the face of it, the passage is directed against mourning someone else's death. But surely the overall context of *D.R.N.* 3, the allusion to Hector's famous speech in the *Iliad* (6.450–65) in which he contemplates his own death, and the fact that Lucretius' observation in lines 900–1 is meant to rid the mourners of *metus* as well as of *angor* (903), all suggest that it is meant equally to apply to fear of one's own premature death. (I shall shortly return to the question of why Lucretius runs the two together.)

In terms of argument, two things seem to be going on in this passage. First, there is the interpretation of frustration of plans (here: not seeing one's children grow up, being unable to support and protect one's family) as curtailment of pleasures (this shift is obvious, for instance, in the term *praemia uitae*, which denotes pleasant experiences; cf. 3.956).[6] Second, mourning a premature death—or fearing it—is presented as misguided because, when a person is dead, the loss of these things could not possibly cause him any grief. There is something odd about this, on both the level of grief and that of fear: Lucretius' point will impress the family only to an extent (their grief is primarily *their* sense of loss; cf. 3.904–8),[7] and the possibility of premature death troubles us *in life*—which is compatible with it being of no concern to us *when we are dead*.

I do not think that Lucretius was really interested in soothing grief, and I suggest that the shift of focus from fear of one's own death to mourning someone else's is a device that is meant to facilitate the attack on the reader's fear of premature death.[8] What Lucretius is doing is trading one argument for the other, offering us an argument that is actually pertinent only to a particular kind of grief and to the fear of *being dead*.

[6] Lucretius has chosen a way to look at the losses incurred by premature death that makes it less implausible to view them as loss of pleasant experiences; this assists the argumentative aim he pursues in the passage. If he had said: 'He won't see his children have an impressive political career' (a possible thing to say, given his addressee Memmius), it would have been less plausible to call failure to watch the children's success a forfeit of pleasant experiences.

[7] Cf. E. J. Kenney, *Lucretius—De Rerum Natura Book 3* (Cambridge, 1971), who remarks on 3.898: 'L.'s answer, that these things do not trouble a man *when he is dead*, is totally beside the point.' The other commentaries used here are: R. Heinze, *T. Lucretius Carus—De Rerum Natura Buch III* (Leipzig, 1897); C. Bailey, *Titi Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri sex* (Oxford, 1947), who remarks on 3.911: 'But Lucr.'s consolation is inadequate: it does not soothe the mourners' sense of loss to know that the dead is in a peaceful sleep.'

[8] I am indebted to the referee of *CQ* for clarifying my mind about this point.

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And that the argument is not strictly applicable to fear of premature death is glossed over by the fact that Lucretius, rather than having the young father himself voice his fear of premature death, has the mourners bewail the death of someone who is already dead; for the dead man does not indeed worry about the frustration of his plans.

It seems that the reason for this elaborate strategy is the *D.R.N.*'s being geared to a novice reader. Lucretius cannot count on the reader's life having the structure of an Epicurean life or on his subscribing to the Epicurean theory of pleasure. Therefore, what he does is steer the issue away from fear of death *qua* frustration of projects, because this is the most difficult fear to eradicate, but also steer the issue away from fear of death *qua* curtailment of pleasure, because his reader cannot be expected to have at his disposal the Epicurean remedy against it. After these two moves, he tries to tackle the problem with an argument that is suitable only for curing us of the fear of being dead; this seems the most promising line of attack because only for this type of argument is there sufficient back-up in the form of the first half of the book. And the change of perspective from fearing one's own death to mourning someone else's is there to obfuscate the fact that there may be something dubious about this. Needless to say, all this is not satisfactorily explained by the suggestion that Lucretius was just confused about these issues; rather, we are dealing with a clever attempt to overcome the obstacles of the particular didactic project Lucretius is engaged in. Likewise, needless to say, parallels for this kind of rhetorical strategy in forensic contexts are legion.

It is against this background, I believe, that we should read the text I shall be concerned with for the rest of this article, the celebrated 'Speech of Nature'.

II

Although in some sense a conspicuous climax to the *D.R.N.*, the 'Speech of Nature' has not received much attention in the recent past, which is remarkable, given that the second part of the third book has otherwise been at the centre of Lucretian studies. Surely one reason why the speech may have been suspected of being somewhat low on philosophical content is that it draws heavily on non-Epicurean source material. And while the commentators extensively quote parallels from diatribe and consolatory literature,[9] connections with extant Epicurean texts are comparatively loose.[10] One of the claims I should like to defend here is that this state of affairs is somewhat misleading, and that Lucretius, for all his relying on non-Epicurean sources, is pursuing a distinctly Epicurean aim.

At this point it is necessary to quote the relevant text in full (3.931–77 Bailey):

Denique si uocem rerum natura repente
mittat et hoc alicui nostrum sic increpet ipsa

'quid tibi tanto operest, mortalis, quod nimis aegris
luctibus indulges? quid mortem congemis ac fles?

935 *nam si grata fuit tibi uita anteacta priorque* 1. Right attitude
et non omnia pertusum congesta quasi in uas
commoda perfluxere atque ingrata interiere,
cur non ut plenus uitae conuiua recedis
aequo animoque capis securam, stulte, quietem?

[9] See also T. Stork, *Nil igitur mors est ad nos—Der Schlußteil des dritten Lukrezbuchs und sein Verhältnis zur Konsolationsliteratur* (Bonn, 1970).

[10] Cf. Bailey (n. 7), vol. 2, at 1149ff.

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	940	*sin ea quae fructus cumque es periere profusa*	
		uitaque in offensast, cur amplius addere quaeris,	2. Wrong attitude
		rursum quod pereat male et ingratum occidat omne,	
		non potius uitae finem facis atque laboris?	
		nam tibi praeterea quod machiner inueniamque,	
	945	*quod placeat, nil est: eadem sunt omnia semper.*	
		si tibi non annis corpus iam marcet et artus	
		confecti languent, eadem tamen omnia restant,	2.1. of young people
		omnia si pergas uiuendo uincere saecla,	
		atque etiam potius, si numquam sis moriturus,'	
	950	quid respondemus, nisi iustam intendere litem	
		naturam et veram verbis exponere causam?	
	[955]	grandior hic uero si iam seniorque queratur	
	[952]	atque obitum lamentetur miser amplius aequo,	
	[953]	non merito inclamet magis et uoce increpet acri?	
955	[954]	*'aufer abhinc lacrimas, balatro, et compesce querelas.*	
		omnia perfunctus uitai praemia marces.	2.2. of old people
		sed quia semper aues quod abest, praesentia temnis,	
		imperfecta tibi elapsast ingrataque uita	
		et nec opinanti mors ad caput adstitit ante	
	960	*quam satur ac plenus possis discedere rerum.*	
		nunc aliena tua tamen aetate omnia mitte	
		aequo animoque agedum †magnis† concede: necessest.'	
		iure, ut opinor, agat, iure increpet inciletque.	
		cedit enim rerum nouitate extrusa uetustas	
	965	semper, et ex aliis aliud reparare necessest:	
		nec quisquam in barathrum nec Tartara deditur atra.	
		materies opus est ut crescant postera saecla;	
		quae tamen omnia te uita perfuncta sequentur;	
		nec minus ergo ante haec quam tu cecidere, cadentque.	
	970	sic alid ex alio numquam desistet oriri	
		uitaque mancipio nulli datur, omnibus usu.	

Before considering the question of how the speech fits into the larger context of the arguments against the fear of death, I shall provide a brief survey of the text, highlighting some ambiguities and introducing the most important models, philosophical and non-philosophical, for particular ideas or lines of thought.

As to the literary device of *prosopopoeia*, a formal resemblance to the speech of *Πενία* in Bion of Borysthenes has been noted,[11] though critics have been hesitant to assume Bion an actual model. Whether model or not, it is remarkable that the similarities include not only the manner in which the speaking character is introduced,[12] or the analogous roles poverty and nature play in Cynic and Epicurean contexts respectively; for instance, both Nature and Poverty radiate in their speeches an air of self-evidence, and charge the addressee with an inappropriate interpretation of reality.

Denique in 931 stands at the beginning of the paragraph. It may have various

[11] Preserved in Teles, *Περὶ αὐταρκείας* ap. Stobaeum, *Florilegium* 3.1.98. I quote Bion from the edition with commentary by J. F. Kindstrand, *Bion of Borysthenes* (Uppsala, 1976); the speech of *Πενία* is fr. 17 Kindstrand. A very detailed study of the section's points of contact with the diatribal tradition and Bion in particular is B. Price Wallach, *Lucretius and the Diatribe Against the Fear of Death* (Leiden, 1976), 61–83.

[12] Cf. Wallach (n. 11), at 63.

meanings in Lucretius (and elsewhere), like 'further' or 'then again', etc.,[13] and it is usually only through the context that its exact meaning can be determined. Here, after a comparison of death with dreamless sleep at the end of the previous paragraph (3.923–30), that is, after the mentioning of dreamless sleep as the Epicurean idea of a near-death experience, it is natural to suspect yet another use of the conjunction, namely in the sense of 'finally'.[14] 'Finally' itself is ambiguous, and I shall later return to the question of how far Nature's words are suitably introduced by *denique* in this sense.

The beginning of the speech comes unexpectedly (931: *repente*). Nature addresses 'one of us' (*aliquis nostrum*). Her tone is described as strident (932: *increpet*). Two impatient direct questions stand at the beginning of her speech, asking the addressee why he mourns about death; these questions work towards building up the air of self-evidence I mentioned above.

There follows, as the first horn of a rhetorical dilemma, a section describing the attitude towards death Nature regards as desirable: if you have enjoyed life and pleasures have not been poured into you (or your soul) as into a leaking vessel, why not withdraw from it like a contented and satiated participant of a *conuiuium*? Two points need to be made about this sentence: first, it has recently been shown that the metaphor of the soul as a vessel is not to be found in any other Epicurean text, but that nevertheless it seems to be ideally suited to describe the state of katastematic pleasure, that is, the state of calm and detached unperturbedness of the soul in which the Epicurean experiences ἀταραξία.[15] Apparently, Nature suggests to us to adopt, provided we have enjoyed our lives, an attitude of contented freedom from worries which resembles katastematic pleasure, and Lucretius has tried to encapsulate this idea in a non-Epicurean metaphor. My second point is about the *conuiuium*-comparison: what exactly is the meaning of *ut plenus conuiua recedere*?[16] Are we supposed to withdraw from life *like* a contented guest from a banquet, that is, at its 'natural' end when guests typically withdraw if they are to withdraw contented? On this interpretation the phrase implies that our life has a structure analogous to that of *convivium* (which consists, for example, of starter, main course, dessert, etc.). Consequently, on this interpretation Nature's advice would make sense only for someone who has grown to old age, that is, towards the point of natural closure of a human life. By contrast, someone who is young or middle-aged and—like the addressee and implied first reader of the *D.R.N.*—not yet an Epicurean, would find Nature's advice somewhat counterintuitive. He may be expected to reply: How am I to part with life contentedly if a dreadful disease kills me in my early thirties, without having 'completed' my human life (by having a career, growing old, seeing my grandchildren, etc.)? That would be, as one interpreter wrote, like having been invited to dinner and then being sent home after the starter.[17] But a second interpretation of *ut plenus conuiua*

[13] Cf. H. A. J. Munro, *T. Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri sex*[4] 2 (London, 1928), 25 on 1.17.

[14] On this sense of *denique* see *TLL* 5.1.528.18 and the note on Verg. *Georg.* 1.461 in R. A. B. Mynors, *Virgil—Georgics* (Oxford, 1990).

[15] See W. Görler, 'Storing up past pleasures', in K. A. Algra, M. H. Koenen, and P. H. Schrijvers (edd.), *Lucretius and his Intellectual Background* (Amsterdam, Oxford, New York, and Tokyo, 1997), 193–207.

[16] Note that Lucretius, in talking about *plenus uitae conuiua*, artfully intertwines the level of the *illustrans* and the *illustrandum*.

[17] See M. C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire—Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, 1994), at 211.

recedere is possible that creates none of these problems. On this second interpretation, *ut* would be read in a different way, so that we would be invited to withdraw from life at any time (regardless whether at thirty-five or eighty) *as if* we were a contented guest. On this reading, there would be no implication that the structure of a life is analogous to that of a *conuiuium*; rather, the comparison would just be used to illustrate the state of contentment with which we are supposed to accept death. This second reading is thus compatible with the notion that it does not matter whether we die young or old (which is the drift of the rest of the speech). Readers who prefer coherence to tension will therefore be drawn to the second alternative.[18]

After that Nature moves on to the second horn of the dilemma, clearly the attitude she regards as undesirable: if you have not enjoyed life, and if you are evidently not able to enjoy it, why not end it without complaints? Here *finem facere* (943) might be taken to mean 'to end it actively', that is, to commit suicide. Alternatively, it could mean 'to accept the end' when the need to do so arises, and in that sense to make an end. I shall look at the arguments for either interpretation below. In any case, given the envisaged circumstances, *finem facere* would be advisable, because Nature could not possibly come up with anything the addressee has not seen or experienced before: *eadem sunt omnia semper*. This is a strangely negative view of what the Epicurean would call kinetic pleasures,[19] referring to the type of sensory pleasure people typically call pleasure (cf. Plut. *Adv. Col.* 1122E = fr. 411 Usener: '. . . these beautiful, smooth and gentle motions of the soul . . .'). And although the Epicureans assigned priority to katastematic pleasure, they did not normally reject these kinetic pleasures; rather, they probably took the view that what made experiencing katastematic pleasure a pleasant state (as opposed to a neutral one) was precisely the fact that it made us free to enjoy kinetic pleasures (sc. under certain conditions).[20] In consolatory literature, in contrast, there are arguments directed at those who are about to die; to them one would say something along the lines of *nihil sub sole nouum* (for example Sen. *Ep.* 77.6) and that consequently they do not miss anything by not continuing their life. But it is obvious that this kind of pessimism is very much *ad hoc*: if life is to end anyway, one will be better off without the desire to live on. So how are we to account for what looks—in the context of the speech—like a strangely implausible and apparently un-Epicurean view?

Eadem sunt omnia semper, as is emphasized by an almost exact repetition (947), holds for young people who have lived for but a fraction of their potential lifespan, and would not change if they lived superhumanly long or indeed for ever. That Lucretius is now focusing on a young person suggests that the speech up to 945 was directed at human beings in general, regardless of their age (I have anticipated this observation in the comments to the right of the speech above).

Then at 950 the narrator comes in. He identifies himself with the addressee by asking *quid respondemus . . . ?*, and thereby clarifies the scope of the expression *aliquis nostrum*; in principle, Nature is addressing all human beings. Then Lucretius makes a

[18] There is a parallel in Bion (Teles, *Περὶ αὐταρκείας* ap. Stobaeum, *Florilegium* 3.1.98 = fr. 68 Kindstrand; cf. Wallach [n. 11], 65–6), but it is concerned with something slightly different: if our body becomes too faulty (through illness or old age, we may supply), we are advised to leave it as a contented guest would leave a banquet.

[19] It seems therefore *prima facie* inappropriate to quote as Epicurean parallels passages which talk about pleasure not being increased by duration with reference to *katastematic* pleasure (cf. Kenney on 945).

[20] Cf. Striker (n. 2), at 207.

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comment in a markedly legal language: the case Nature brings against us is a just one. This type of language, I feel, needs to have a purpose, too. That it is in Bion (or in diatribal literature in general) already seems not be a satisfactory explanation of why it is preserved here, nor would be the reference to the fact that in philosophical contexts there can be no personification of abstract entities without an implicit reference to the laws in Plato's *Crito*. I shall later return to the question of whether the legal stylization can be viewed as assisting the overall purpose of the speech.

Then (at 955) Lucretius envisages the case of an old person who laments about his death, and evidently treats his case with less patience and understanding than that of the young person. What Nature has to say to the old person lamenting his death is that he has wasted his life by the continued desire to experience more (or something new), so that he, being always uncontented, is now not ready to part with life. But this he should do, because it is appropriate to his age and inevitable (3.962 *necessest*). Again, the narrator stresses that Nature's is a just case. Then he continues that, for the world to exist, things and living beings which exist now must cease to exist, thereby passing on their material constituents to their successors; otherwise nothing new could arise, with no material being available. And he ends on the famous line: *uitaque mancipio nulli datur*, *omnibus usu* (971); life is given us for use, but it is not our property.

If we now look back to the issues discussed in the first part of the paper, we can see that the speech, in a way yet to be clarified, primarily addresses the fear of death *qua* curtailment of pleasures; this is an obvious implication of the soul–vessel metaphor, and expressions like *commoda* (937), *fructus* (940), or *uitai praemia* (956). By extension, however, given the instance cited above of trading one argument for the other (3.894–901), the speech may equally address the fear of death *qua* frustration of plans or projects. The distinction between young and old may be read in both ways. What is crucial is that the speech is first and foremost concerned with the type of fear of death which the Epicurean sage would counter with his theory of pleasure, a theory that is not covered in *D.R.N.* in detail and which consequently the reader cannot be expected to accept.[21]

III

There is more to the situation in which Nature speaks than I could point out in my initial survey. It may be useful to begin by clarifying a particular expression in the speech. For someone who is afraid of dying, because it implies the loss of all pleasures he can experience while alive, Nature's advice would be to withdraw from life if one has enjoyed it, like a contented guest at a banquet, or else, if one has not enjoyed it, *finem uitae facere* (3.943). Much depends on how we interpret the expression *finem uitae facere*. If we read this as a suggestion to commit suicide, as do the commentators Bailey and Kenney, then suicide would appear as the way to end a life now which has been unpleasant, and to get rid of our present fear of death (cf. 3.933ff.). But *finem uitae facere* cannot have this meaning here. It is not only that Epicurean doctrine does not allow suicide in a situation like the one under discussion;[22] Lucretius himself, in the prooemium of *D.R.N.* 3, had singled out

[21] Passages where the Epicurean view of pleasure is touched are 2.1–61 and 6.1–28; both passages form part of *prooemia* where no exposition of doctrines is to be expected anyway. Of course we do not know what Lucretius would have done in any further revision.

[22] The Epicureans allow suicide only in cases where it becomes impossible to guarantee one's ἀταραξία (cf. Cic. *Fin.* 1.49). On the Epicurean attitude about suicide, see J. Cooper, 'Greek

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suicide as an extreme consequence of fear of death (3.79–84). So it would be bizarre if Nature herself suggested suicide as a cure for it.

What, then, does *finem uitae facere* mean? It must mean 'to accept the end of one's life' (sc. when it actually comes),[23] a meaning for which there are parallels, in other authors as well as in Lucretius (3.1093, where it seems clear that suicide is not the issue; see also Heinze's note ad loc.).[24] But if the phrase means 'to accept the end of one's life' or 'to give in to death', then this has major consequences for the situation in which Nature speaks. I can only give in to death or, for that matter, withdraw like a contented guest from the banquet of life (in a non-suicidal sense of 'to withdraw'), if death is actually imminent, if continuing life is not an option, if I am at all in a position to accept that my life is ending.[25]

Let us now go through the whole speech and see in what way we can read it as presupposing imminent death of the addressee. There is, for instance, the tense-pattern in the conditional beginning 935 (see above). Perfect tense in the subordinate clause ('If you have enjoyed life . . .') and present tense in the main clause suggest that, at the moment this sentence is spoken, willingly retiring from life is the choice the addressee has. However, an alternative interpretation is possible, which takes this statement to apply to a time in the future; this use of the tense-pattern perfect/present tense would be colloquial, and the context obviously is colloquial. (In less colloquial Latin prose we would have the tense-pattern future perfect/future.) In any case, this would alter the picture only inasmuch as on this second reading the speech would provide advice for a time *in the future* when the addressee faces death, that is, for a time in the future when continuing life will not be an option. This 'temporal ambiguity' may well be deliberate, because through it the reader is able to apply the dilemma to himself: the *aliquis nostrum* addressed may well be facing death right now and may be receiving advice for this situation, while the reader is free to take Nature's words as advice applying for a time when he himself faces death. The latter reading is attractive also because it neatly shows in what sense Nature is addressing the human race in general (rather than the quite exclusive club of people who at any given time are about to die).

In the second part of the speech, Nature turns against an old man—or against *aliquis nostrum* conceived as being old.[26] In 3.959 we read: *nec opinanti mors ad caput*

philosophers on euthanasia and suicide', in id., *Reason and Emotion—Essays in Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory* (Princeton, 1999), 515–41; W. Englert, 'Stoics and Epicureans on the nature of suicide', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 10 (1994), 67–98.

[23] *Finem uitae facere* can also mean 'to end one's life' in an objective sense (which does not work in English, where one would rather say that one's life ended, without an implication as to how it ended); but in our passage this meaning is ruled out through the second person of *facis*.

[24] Cf. Heinze, ad loc.; Stork (n. 9), at 82. H.-T. Johann, *Trauer und Trost. Eine quellen- und strukturanalytische Untersuchung der philosophischen Trostschriften über den Tod* (Munich, 1968), at 88, n. 403, argues for the meaning 'to commit suicide' on the following grounds: '. . . Zudem hat *potius* nur Sinn, wenn *finem facis* als Steigerung von *cur amplius addere quaeris* (v. 941) verstanden wird, die aber bei einer Bedeutung wie "sterben", "den Tod akzeptieren" nicht gegeben ist'. The linguistic argument from *potius* is inconclusive, because the word (like *magis*) may just as well be contrasting.

[25] The only scholar to have suggested this so far is C. Rambaux, 'La logique de l'argumentation dans le *De Rerum Natura*, III, 830–1094', *Revue des Etudes Latines* 58 (1980), 201–19, at 204, who, however, does not prove or explain it, or draw any further consequences from it.

[26] Is Nature addressing a second person, a *senex*? Or is she still addressing a token representative of the human race, now conceived as old? The latter would make more sense; after all,

adstitit, which is not a natural way to describe the fact that death has merely come nearer; rather, death is very close, it is *there* (notice also the *nunc* in 3. 961).[27] This could mean that death is very close for him in the sense in which death is very close for *senes* in general; alternatively, and perhaps more probably, it means the *senex* addressed is actually facing death. *Concede* in 3.962, whatever it is that the *senex* is supposed to concede to (my personal favourite for the corruption *magnis* is *fatis*, which would parallel *finem uitae facere*),[28] points in the same direction.

There are two further features of the speech suggesting that it is about the problem of imminent death. First, its legal stylization, inherited from the tradition of diatribe and consistently maintained in the whole speech, would actually have a function then (rather than being a relic from a possible diatribal source which has been preserved as an embellishment): a trial culminates in a moment when a decision is made, and the legal language here assists the creation of the atmosphere of an endgame, that is, of the time when death is imminent.

Second, the *denique* which introduces the passage (3.931). Above I offered an argument from the context why the meaning 'finally' seems the most natural here.[29] And it would be an emphatic 'finally', and a 'finally' in more than one sense: finally, Nature herself makes her appearance in the narrative; finally, we are talking about how to deal with imminent death, and not with fear of death as a frightening but nevertheless remote event, as yet indiscernible in the future, as was the subject of the text leading up to the speech. So it seems to me that the attentive reader is guided to the suggested reading of the speech already by the *denique* in 3.931.

Yet there is one section that fits this situation less obviously than the rest:

946 *si tibi non annis corpus iam marcet et artus*
confecti languent, eadem tamen omnia restant,
omnia si pergas uiuendo uincere saecla,
atque etiam potius, si numquam sis moriturus,

948 *pergas* Lambinus: *perges* OQ

Editors are divided over the reading in 948; some adopt Lambinus' conjecture (Lachmann, Giussani, Munro, Ernout, Bailey in the OCT), others go for the reading

933–45 apply to human beings in general. And it would show that Lucretius has not just taken over the traditional 'butt' known from diatribal literature, but has turned this butt into a quite sophisticated construct. Are we to make something of the way in which the age descriptions are introduced? Is it meaningful that the first age description is introduced as a conditional (946ff.)? Are *grandior* and *senior* (955) used as nouns or as predicatively construed adjectives (thus allowing them to be specifications of *aliquis nostrum* in 932)?

[27] Heinze notes on 3.959: 'Der Tod *adstitit ad caput*, wie im Märchen vom Gevatter Tod: man tritt an das Kopfende des *lectus*, wenn man mit dem Liegenden zu reden hat. Zugleich ist die Gefährdung des *caput* Gefährdung der Existenz, worauf die Wendung *supra caput esse* (s. d. Ausleger zu Sall. Cat. 54, 24; Liv. III 17, 2) für die dringendste Gefahr beruht; Tib. I 8, 72 *nescius ultorem post caput esse deum*.'

[28] The conjecture *fatis* was suggested by W. Richter, *Textstudien zu Lukrez* (Munich, 1974), at 50–2; G. Kloss, 'Zum Text von Lukrez 3.962', *RhM* 139 (1996), 360–3 finds '*fatis*' implausible on palaeographical grounds—and then suggests *integris*.

[29] The argument from the context could be broadened further with respect to what follows. When I look at the sequence (i) Nature's speech, stylized like a trial (931–77), (ii) sinners in the underworld (978–1023), (iii) show of heroes (1024–52), (iv) return to the upper world (1053ff.), I cannot help seeing a virtual κατάβασις being undertaken by the reader. (i) would be the last stage before the descent to the underworld, fittingly marked by *denique* = 'finally'; to use the motif of a κατάβασις in a passage arguing against the existence of the underworld would of course be just another example of a typically Lucretian strategy.

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of the two main manuscripts O and Q (Heinze, Diels, Bailey in the *editio maior*, Kenney). It is clear that *pergas* makes the first part of the *si*-clause hypothetical like the second part, while *perges* would result in an actual possibility being considered. So *perges* would be difficult to reconcile with the speech's being about imminent death; rather, if we read *perges*, this would result in the whole sentence being about the scope of *eadem sunt omnia semper*. Compare the translation by Rouse and Smith:[30]

> If your body is not already withering with years and your limbs worn out and languid, yet everything remains the same, even if you shall go on to outlive all generations, and even more if you should be destined never to die.

With the reading *perges*, the sentence says that *eadem sunt omnia semper* holds true regardless of whether one is young or will live very long or indeed for ever. Note that on this reading *restant* in 947 has the force of a future tense. If we read *pergas*, by contrast, the paragraph would be consistent with the speech's being about imminent death in the sense outlined above; the paragraph would then say that, if we are young, we can console ourselves with the thought that everything would remain the same, however long we lived; *restant* would thus have the force of a subjunctive.[31] On either solution, the epigrammatic quality of *eadem tamen omnia restant* would account for the indicative mood or, respectively, present tense of *restant*.

The first thing to be taken into account is that *omnia uiuendo uincere saecla* is something which is not actually possible; I therefore paraphrased the expression above as 'to live superhumanly long'. This point is, as far as I can see, uncontested,[32] and the champions of *perges* have to interpret the phrase as a strongly hyperbolical manner of speaking, amounting 'to become very old indeed'. Two considerations tip the balance in favour of *pergas*. The first one is that of coherence; anyone who accepts the earlier arguments about the situation in which Nature speaks should be prepared to favour the reading *pergas*, on the grounds that otherwise there is no longer an identifiable situation in which Nature speaks. The second one is of the broader philosophical issues involved: if we want the speech of Nature to have a decisive role in the arguments against fear of death *qua* curtailment of pleasures, then we will need to have premature death addressed as a distinct issue.[33] And, clearly, reading *perges* would blur this issue completely.

It is thus arguable that Nature's arguments are phrased and apply only for the time when human beings, young or old, actually face death and when continuing life is not an option for them.

[30] W. H. D. Rouse and M. F. Smith, *Lucretius—De Rerum Natura* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1992).

[31] On this use of the indicative for the subjunctive in the apodosis of conditionals, cf. R. Kühner and C. Stegmann, *Ausführliche Grammatik der Lateinischen Sprache* 2 (Darmstadt, 1992), §214.1b.β, and Kenney on *si* in 946, 948. Or should *restant* be emended to *restent*, as Professor Winterbottom suggests to me?

[32] 'To become very old' is *multa uiuendo uincere saecla*; cf. Serv. *In Verg. Aen.* 11.160: '. . . uiuendo vici id est superuixi: ueteres enim "uiuendo uincere" dicebant superuiuere, ut "multa uirum uoluens uiuendo saecula uincit" '. The referee points out that at 1.202 *multa uiuendo uincere saecla* is introduced as an *adynaton*, and that *omnia uiuendo uincere saecla* should be impossible *a fortiori*.

[33] The topic usually looms large in Epicurean texts concerned with this problem, e.g. Philodemus' *De morte*.

IV

It seems now possible to say more precisely what the purpose of the speech is. I suggest that the speech is meant to coerce the reader into an attitude about death (*qua* curtailment of pleasures and, by extension, *qua* frustration of projects) which is in crucial respects similar to that of the Epicurean sage, thus compensating for the fact that Lucretius cannot in his arguments rely on the reader's having already accepted the Epicurean theory of pleasure. Further, that Lucretius has carefully selected non-Epicurean source-material to serve as a partial model for his speech, because this material conveys in an oblique way attitudes and views one could otherwise arrive at only through the Epicurean theory of pleasure. Finally, that what sets this bypass in operation is the peculiar perspective of the speech which I highlighted above.

Let us look again on what might be called the argumentative core of the speech:

935	*nam si grata fuit tibi uita anteacta priorque* *et non omnia pertusum congesta quasi in uas* *commoda perfluxere atque ingrata interiere,* *cur non ut plenus uitae conuiua recedis* *aequo animoque capis securam, stulte, quietem?*	1. Right attitude
940	*sin ea quae fructus cumque es periere profusa* *uitaque in offensast, cur amplius addere quaeris,* *rursum quod pereat male et ingratum occidat omne,* *non potius uitae finem facis atque laboris?* *nam tibi praeterea quod machiner inueniamque,* 945 *quod placeat, nil est: eadem sunt omnia semper.*	2. Wrong attitude

Or:

(i) *Either you have enjoyed life or you have not enjoyed life.*
(ii) *If you have enjoyed life, and pleasant memories are securely stored in your mind, part with life gratefully and contentedly.*
(iii) *If you have not enjoyed life, part with it willingly, for nothing new is to be expected.*

It is a typical feature of this argument form that it narrows down complex situations or choices to a simple twofold alternative. Craig's study on dilemma documents this with a wealth of examples from Cicero's speeches.[34] We might, for example, be ambiguous about our lives, saying that while there was much boredom or toil or horror in it (so far), there have been a number of fine moments too. Lucretius' dilemma does not really allow for this type of ambiguity. Either we have not enjoyed our life; then there was not a single fine moment in it. Or we are able to recall some fine moments; then we have enjoyed it (sc. in terms of the choices offered). As soon as we side with the latter view, as, I take it, everyone would, we are urged to be grateful for what we have received, for appreciating that our soul is sufficiently filled (like a vessel) with pleasant memories to make us part with life contentedly. And it is the suggestive image of the filled vessel which is supposed to help us translate these memories into a state of grateful and satisfied calm that resembles katastematic

[34] See C. P. Craig, *Form as Argument in Cicero's Speeches* (Atlanta, 1993) and the review by D. H. Berry, *JRS* 86 (1996), 201–7.

pleasure and issues in ἀταραξία.[35] To be more precise about this would require a general discussion of how Lucretius and other Epicureans thought metaphors could communicate and lead to certain states of mind.[36]

But only if we have seen nothing pleasant whatsoever (a possibility we are discouraged from envisaging for ourselves through the negative formulation of the second horn) will the second horn apply to us. And only then *eadem sunt omnia semper* indeed has a sort of subjective plausibility because, for someone who hastens from one supposedly pleasant experience to the other without appreciating a single one of them, there is little that can positively discriminate these experiences in retrospect. And as soon as one objects that it is not all the same and that some things do stand out, one is referred to the first horn.

How does the peculiar perspective of the speech, its being formulated for a time when death is imminent, come in and what does it contribute? Unlike the Epicurean sage who 'measures the limits of pleasure by reason' (*KΔ* 20) and thus becomes indifferent to the duration of his life, the reader who is implied by *D.R.N.* may be expected to have a non-philosophical view of pleasure, and thus will fear that his death will, at some time in the future, curtail his ability to experience sensory pleasure. To focus on the moment when death is imminent and to argue against its actually functioning in the way envisaged by the fearful person seems therefore a natural thing to do.

Further, the two alternative attitudes about our life considered in the dilemma can only be convincingly presented as exhaustive if the point in time when I make an assessment of my life is located immediately before my death. For otherwise I might be hesitant to settle for one horn or the other, given that much more can happen in my life. As I said above, we might be ambiguous about our life *now* that its end does not seem imminent (citing Soph. *O.T.* 1527–30), but much more inclined to make an overall assessment when we actually reach the end of our life. Likewise, we might be able to anticipate *now* that we will be able to make this assessment *when we are about to die* (the plausibility of the alternatives' being just two crucially depends on us being able to anticipate this). It is at the time when death is finally imminent that we are pushed by Nature towards the calm indifference which resembles katastematic pleasure, either by being grateful for the good we have received or by not caring about death.

But the perspective of the speech works on yet a further level: by providing us with a procedure of dealing with imminent death at some time in the future, it allows us to live an unperturbed life in the now. That is, we are meant to suspend worrying about death (*qua* curtailment of pleasures and, by extension, *qua* frustration of projects) *now*, because we can deal with the problem when it arises, by telling ourselves what Nature says *when we are about to die*.[37] In a way, we are urged to think about death while not thinking about death—which is in tune with Epicurean criticisms of the Stoic

[35] Clearly, there is also a connection with the Epicurean tenet that happiness is easily achieved.

[36] Some remarks on Philodemus' views on metaphors are in M. Wigodsky, 'The alleged impossibility of philosophical poetry', in D. Obbink (ed.), *Philodemus and Poetry* (Oxford and New York, 1995), 58–68, at 62–3.

[37] A notorious feature of Epicurean philosophy in general is an emphasis on certain mental routines. Epicurus himself encouraged memorization of the crucial tenets (*KΔ*) phrased in a suitably aphoristic way, in order to let them become second nature and to have them readily available when they are needed; similar things can be said about Epicurus' letters or about texts by other Epicureans, e.g. Diogenes of Oenoanda. The idea of memorization is very present in the *D.R.N.* itself, too. There is now almost universal agreement that repetitions of phrases, verses or complete passages should not be attributed to artistic ineptness on the part of the author; rather, they are to be taken as one in a series of measures Lucretius takes to facilitate and encourage the

meditatio mortis (Cic. *Tusc.* 3.32ff.), that is, the continous mental anticipation of the horrors of death in order to make them wear off.

Let me be clear about this: of course Nature does not provide us with an argument why it is irrational to have this type of fear of death, as Lucretius was able to provide in the case of fear of being dead. She could argue that only if the reader accepted the Epicurean theory of pleasure and yet was still afraid of death. But Lucretius did not discuss at length the Epicurean theory of pleasure, perhaps because it is highly complex, was castigated as strongly counterintuitive by anti-Epicureans, and could be deemed too esoteric, given the overall pitch of the *D.R.N*. But he nevertheless took the orthodox Epicurean view that one can be freed from certain types of fear of death only by reaching the state of ἀταραξία which the correct view about pleasure is supposed to induce. And so he shopped around in the diatribal tradition in order to find an alternative method of inducing something like unperturbedness of the soul, a method which crucially relied on the persuasive power of images like that of the soul as a filled vessel or of a man as a contented *conuiua*.

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mental absorption of the poem through the reader. It is crucial that, like its context (cf. 3.1024), the speech of Nature is to be absorbed by the reader's mind. We are to carry it with us, to have it available. Nature can thus be called upon when we need her. On this aspect of the *D.R.N.,* cf. P. H. Schrijvers, 'Eléments psychagogiques dans l'oeuvre de Lucrèce', *Actes du VIIIe Congrès de l'Assoc. G. Budé* (Paris, 1969), 370–6; D. Clay, *Lucretius and Epicurus* (Ithaca, 1983), 176–85; A. Schiesaro, 'The palingenesis of *De Rerum Natura*', *PCPhS* 40 (1994), 81–107; M. Erler, 'Einübung und Anverwandlung. Reflexe mündlicher Meditationstechnik in philosophischer Literatur der Kaiserzeit', in W. Kullmann, J. Althoff, and M. Asper (edd.), *Gattungen wissenschaftlicher Literatur in der Antike* (Tübingen, 1998), 361–81.