

Empedocles, Epicurus, and the Failure of Sacrifice in Lucretius

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ABSTRACT

ZACKARY P. RIDER: Empedocles, Epicurus, and the Failure of Sacrifice in Lucretius
(Under the direction of James O'Hara.)

In this thesis, I examine sacrificial ritual as it is portrayed in Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, focusing on its role in Lucretius' polemic against religion. In the first chapter, I engage in a detailed analysis of sacrificial scenes in the *DRN*, showing that sacrifice is regularly shown to have deleterious effects on social relationships. I argue that such a representation renders sacrifice incompatible with Epicurean philosophy as practiced prior to Lucretius because of Epicurus' known approval of the practice, and that such a discrepancy suggests a rift in thought between Lucretius and his school. In the second chapter, I argue that Lucretius instead uses an Empedoclean model for his portrayal of sacrifice, presenting it and religion as the social analogues to the Empedoclean force Strife, while presenting his Epicurean philosophy as analogous to the Empedoclean force Love, co-opting the earlier poet's cosmology to his own Epicurean ends.

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INTRODUCTION

Though much has been made of the polemic against religion that Lucretius develops over the course of his *De Rerum Natura*, one aspect of this polemic, Lucretius' portrayal of sacrificial rite, has gone largely unexamined.¹ Yet the poet's presentation of the practice is a key feature of his attack against religious sentiment. After all, the exemplum that Lucretius first uses to denounce religion is a sacrifice: it is the ritual slaughter of Iphigenia at Aulis which is the ultimate proof of religion's evil (*tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*, 1.101). More broadly, the presentation of sacrifice is an important part of the text as a whole, as the practice is a recurrent feature of the *De Rerum Natura*, appearing in every book of the poem. In this thesis, I examine this feature of Lucretius' work, discussing how the poet's portrayal of sacrifice fits into larger thematic trends of his poem. As I will show, an analysis of Lucretius' treatment of sacrifice has important implications for our understanding not only of religion as it is presented in the *DRN*, but also of Lucretius' attitude towards his two major philosophical predecessors—Epicurus and Empedocles.

The first chapter of this thesis is centered on the development of a problematic aspect of Lucretian thought. As will be shown, every instance of sacrifice portrayed in the *DRN* is a negative one, accompanied by the dissolution of familial relationships. Such

¹ When this portrayal is mentioned, it is often in an aside, such as the quick notice of Gale 1994, 72, that the poet seems to have an "abhorrence for the practice." Even more comprehensive studies tend to focus on a particular instance of sacrifice in the poem, such as the analyses made by Segal 1970 and Sharrock 2006, which are concerned almost exclusively with the sacrifice of a calf depicted in book 2.

a portrayal renders sacrifice inimical to the poet's Epicurean philosophy, which considered social bonds to be of the greatest importance. Yet the portrayal also puts the poet himself at odds with his chosen philosophy, as the importance of sacrifice was a recognized tenet of Epicurean thought. I will argue that this inconsistency is the result of the influence of an alternate strand of philosophical thought—that of Lucretius' primary *poetic* predecessor, Empedocles. Tailoring the Empedoclean account of sacrifice to Epicurean ends, the poet makes a case against sacrifice which is entirely his own.

The second chapter picks up on this Empedoclean influence on Lucretius' sacrificial depictions, further exploring Lucretius' adaptation of Empedoclean philosophy. A re-examination of the sacrificial passages discussed in chapter 1 will show sacrifice in the *DRN* as not only a source of social discord, but harmful to physical creativity as well; in effect, sacrifice and its source, religion, become the antitheses of the Epicurean Venus whose invocation opens the poem. Such an opposition is directly analogous to that of the Empedoclean Love and Strife, an opposition vividly alluded to in the proem of the *DRN*. By creating this opposition, Lucretius presents Epicureanism and *religio* as the sociological counterparts to Empedocles' motive forces; whereas the oppressive force of *religio*, particularly in the guise of sacrifice, is shown to lead to discord and social collapse, the unifying power of Epicurean philosophy allows all mankind to achieve divinity.

CHAPTER 1

Lucretius and Epicurus

During his account of the Athenian plague in the sixth book of his *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius describes the panic attendant upon the sickness' spread and the dissolution of social cohesion that resulted. In many ways, the episode is a fitting companion-piece to the *Kulturgeschichte* at the end of book 5; whereas there the poet gives a lengthy account of the development of civilization, here he shows the haste with which that civilization can be overturned.² Indeed, it is a discussion of the plague's debilitating effects on society that ends the poem. Having described in detail the destruction the plague wreaked on its victims' corporeal bodies, the poet leaves his reader with an image of strife within the Athenian civic body, as mourners take to brawling violently over the corpses of the deceased (*multo cum sanguine saepe / rixantes potius quam corpora desererentur*, 6.1285-6). Such violent displays are only the most extreme examples of the civic upheaval that is presented earlier during Lucretius' discussion of the highly infectious nature of the disease. Certain individuals were so frightened of contagion, the poet claims, that they shrank from visiting sick relatives, and for this were punished by "sacrificing neglect" (1239-42):

nam quicumque suos fugitabant visere ad aegro

² Such a reversal can be detected in the overall structure of book 6 as well. The same Athens which is the height of human civilization at the beginning of the book (providing men with agriculture, laws and Epicurus himself) is in complete ruin by the end. Commager 1957, 116 n.17 tentatively points to such a structure in the book, commenting that the phrase *mortalibus aegris* (6.1) in the opening of the book hints at the plague victims of the ending. Segal 1990, 236-7 is much more emphatic, seeing in the structure of the book a cycle of creation and destruction recurrent in the *DRN*.

vitai nimium cupidos mortisque timentis
poenibat paulo post turpi morte malaque,
desertos, opis expertis, incuria mactans.

1240

This abandonment is the first indication of a social dimension to the plague's effects, and it is worth noting that it occurs in a domestic context. For Lucretius' Athenians, the dissolution of interpersonal relationships starts at home.

What makes this depiction of familial desertion all the more noteworthy is that it differs significantly from the Thucydidean account on which Lucretius' plague narrative is based.³ In his own account, Thucydides describes the Athenians' growing isolation thus (2.51.5): εἴτε γὰρ μὴ θέλοιεν δεδιότες ἀλλήλοις προσιέναι, ἀπώλλυντο ἐρῆμοι, καὶ οἰκίαι πολλαὶ ἐκενώθησαν ἀπορία τοῦ θεραπεύσοντος. Absent is the explicit claim that the Athenians avoided visiting their relations (*suos...aegros*, 6.1239). Instead, the historian only notes that people were unwilling to visit *others* (ἀλλήλοις); Thucydides here describes self-imposed quarantine, not a specific abandonment of familial obligations. To be sure, in the following sentence he uses the phrase παρὰ τοὺς φίλους, and it could be this which inspired Lucretius' *suos...ad aegros*. Yet Thucydides uses the phrase in a different context, to describe not those who avoided the ill but those who were compelled by shame to tend to the sick (αἰσχύνῃ γὰρ ἠφείδουν σφῶν αὐτῶν ἐσιόντες παρὰ τοὺς φίλους, 2.51.5).⁴ By transferring this domestic focus to his depiction of the

³ Indeed, the discrepancy between the two accounts is enough that Bailey 1947 *ad loc.* states that Lucretius here "misunderstood" the Greek original. In response to such claims, Smith 1992 *ad loc.*, citing Commager 1957, rightly notes that "Lucr. was a master of the Greek language, and it is probable that his alterations are chiefly due to his desire to emphasize the psychological aspect of the plague and moralize." One may take issue, however, with Commager's claim that "[o]nly an incorrigibly symbolic imagination appears to be at work, not a calculated mental effort" (114). Certainly the magnitude and effect of Lucretius' changes suggest just such a "calculated mental effort." As I will argue, this particular alteration also has thematic relevance.

⁴ Lucretius also refers to these individuals (6.1243-6): *qui fuerant autem praesto, contagibus ibant / atque labore, pudor quem tum cogebat obire / blandaque lassorum vox mixta voce querellae. / optimus hoc leti*

individuals frightened of contagion, Lucretius intimates a problematic social dynamic lacking in this portion of Thucydides' narrative.

Nor is this the only change to the Thucydidean account, for Lucretius also adds a sacrificial element in the figure of *incuria mactans*. As Thucydides explains it, the unwillingness of some Athenians to visit the sick led to the destruction of many households owing to a lack of caregivers (ἀπορία τοῦ θεραπεύσοντος). Lucretius too notes this lack, adequately translating the historian's phrase with the Latin *incuria*. Yet here, in a striking departure from the historian, this *incuria* is personified and portrayed as a sacrificer (*mactans*, 6.1242).⁵ Further, it is said to cause the death not of the abandoned sick themselves as in Thucydides' version, but those who refused to visit their kin. Thus in these lines Lucretius introduces two ideas—familial disunity and sacrifice—that are absent from his predecessor's account and links them, portraying a sacrificial death as the punishment for this domestic dissolution.

This is not the first time such an association is made within the text. Indeed, the first instance of sacrifice in the *DRN* emphatically makes this connection, in a passage in which the act is explicitly shown to destroy a family. Attempting to convince his addressee Memmius that Epicurean philosophy is not the impious pursuit some would

genus ergo quisque subibat. Yet here an emphasis on the relationship between these *optimi* and the individuals they visit is notably lacking.

⁵ As is noted in the OLD, the verb *mactare* is not solely sacrificial in meaning, as the verb originally had connotations of *honoring*, such as one might honor a god through sacrifice. Yet over time the sacrificial aspect became prominent, and it is certainly this meaning which is predominant in Lucretius' usage; the verb is used in explicit reference to sacrifice in four other passages in the *DRN*: 1.99, 2.353, 3.52, and 6.759. Cf. Leonard and Smith 1942 *ad* 6.1242.

claim it to be, Lucretius adduces as a counter-example the sacrifice of Iphigenia,⁶ slain by her father to provide smooth sailing for his fleet (1.83-101):

Religio peperit scelerosa atque impia facta:
Aulide quo pacto Triviai virginis aram
Iphianassai turparunt sanguine foede 85
ductores Danaum delecti, prima virorum.
cui simul infula virgineos circumdata comptus
ex utraque pari malarum parte profusast,
et maestum simul ante aras adstare parentem
sensit et hunc propter ferrum celare ministros 90
aspectuque suo lacrimas effundere civis,
muta metu terram genibus summissa petebat.
nec miserae prodesse in tali tempore quibat
quod patrio princeps donarat nomine regem;
nam sublata virum manibus tremibundaque ad aras 95
deductast, non ut sollemni more sacrorum
perfecto posset claro comitari Hymenaeo,
sed casta incestu nubendi tempore in ipso
hostia concideret mactatu maesta parentis—
exitus ut classi felix faustusque daretur. 100
tantum religio potuit suadere malorum.

Just as the *incuria mactans* passage gains clarity through comparison with Thucydides, this account too can be better understood through comparison with an earlier Greek text—in this case, Empedocles’ *Peri Phuseos*.⁷

1.1 Empedocles at Aulis

An Empedoclean influence on the *DRN* has long been recognized, as Lucretius’ knowledge of Empedocles’ work is explicitly referred to in the poem (1.705-733).

Lucretius himself describes Empedocles (c. 492-32 BCE) in terms of glowing praise,

⁶ In the *DRN*, she is referred to as Iphianassa, a name given to one of Agamemnon’s daughters in the *Iliad*. Following modern convention, I use the name Iphigenia throughout this paper.

⁷By convention, the extant fragments of Empedocles’ work have been variously attributed to one of two works—the “Physics,” or *Peri Phuseos*, and the “Purifications,” or *Katharmoi*. However, the attribution of most of these fragments is uncertain. Recently, Inwood 2001, 8-19, has made a convincing argument in favor of a single unified poem from which all our fragments derive, and in this paper I take his lead.

claiming that Empedocles' native Sicily produced "nothing more illustrious nor holy nor wondrous nor dear" than the poet (*nil tamen hoc habuisse viro praeclarius in se / nec sanctum magis et mirum carumque videtur*, 1.729-30).⁸ He also regularly portrays Empedocles in a manner similar to that reserved for himself and Epicurus, suggesting a respect lacking from his discussion of other philosophers. Such a portrayal can be detected in Lucretius' use of gigantomachic imagery. Epicurus' first great accomplishment as presented in the *DRN* is his conquest of *religio*; seeking to overcome the celestial tyrant *religio*, the philosopher is said to ascend to heaven in opposition to the gods and their lightning (1.62-79). Later, in book 5, Epicurean philosophy in general is portrayed as equivalent to gigantomachy, as Lucretius states that superstitious individuals will see in the beliefs of the Epicureans a destruction of world order similar to that attempted by the giants (5.114-121). The only other gigantomachic imagery in the poem occurs in Lucretius' discussion of Empedocles' Sicily, wherein Aetna (long associated with the earlier poet owing to tales of his death there) is said to attack heaven with thunder of its own (*hic Aetnaea minantur / murmura flammaram rursum se colligere iras / faucibus eruptos iterum vis ut vomat ignis / ad caelumque ferat flammai fulgura rursum*, 1.722-5).⁹ To be sure, the representations are not identical. Whereas Epicurus himself is said to rise to heaven and overcome *religio*, here it is only the volcano of the poet's homeland which makes such an assault; whatever his virtues, Empedocles is no Epicurus.

⁸ The lines may contain another indication of Lucretius' admiration of the earlier poet, as Empedocles is described with Lucretius' own *cognomen*, *carus*. Cf. Kollmann 1971, 89 n.46; Tatum 1984, 185; Gale 1994, 59; Garani 2007, 2-3.

⁹ Cf. Hardie 1986, 211-3, who also mentions that the association of Aetna with the monster Typhoeus adds to the gigantomachic allusions in the passage.

Yet, by associating Empedocles with this theme of gigantomachy, Lucretius at least suggests a similarity between Empedocles and Epicurus.

Such a qualified comparison can also be detected in Lucretius' assignation of near-divinity to the earlier poet, as he claims that the words emanating from Empedocles' "divine breast" are such that he hardly seems to be mortal (*carmina quin etiam divini pectoris eius / vociferantur et exponunt praeclara reperta, / ut vix humana videatur stirpe creatus*, 1.731-3). A similar ascription is made to Epicurus, who will actually be proclaimed a god at the beginning of book 5 (*deus ille fuit, deus...*, 5.8), and it could be argued that this dual reverence suggests an Empedoclean influence on Lucretius not unlike that of Epicurus.¹⁰ Certainly Lucretius portrays Empedocles as a poet kindred to himself, calling upon Empedocles' Muse, Calliope, as he nears the end of his work (6.94).¹¹ Further, Lucretius describes Empedocles' teachings (along with Empedocles' lesser pre-Socratic fellows) in the exact terms which he uses of his own writings; both poets' words are said to be holier and surer than those of the Delphic oracle (*sanctius et multo certa ratione magis quam / Pythia quae tripodi a Phoebi lauroque profatur*, 1.738-9 on Emp. = 5.111-2 on Lucr.). Again, a caveat is made in the case of Empedocles, as the Epicurean poet is quick to note that for all of the earlier philosopher's great ideas, he

¹⁰ Tatum 1984, 185-7 and Sedley 1998, 13-4 wish to see the praise of Empedocles as here centered on the poet's *praeclara reperta*, the lucidity of his argument as contrasted with the difficult language of Heraclitus (1.638-9). Yet this near attribution of divinity in a poem so concerned with man's ability to rival the divine must surely have more force than this. *Pace* Edwards 108-9, 111, who sees in these lines and the passage in full a sustained polemic against Empedocles, who erroneously (in Lucretius' view) professed himself to be a divinity.

¹¹ This is the only invocation of a Muse in the entire *DRN*, excepting Lucretius' initial invocation of Venus—itself a passage with dense Empedoclean overtones, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

was still wrong (1.740-1).¹² Yet Lucretius nevertheless portrays Empedocles in a generally positive light, and in a manner highly reminiscent of himself and Epicurus. Whatever his perceived failings, Lucretius still seems to have been heavily influenced by the earlier poet.¹³

Such an influence can be seen in Lucretius' description of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, in which scholars have detected an important allusion to an earlier Empedoclean passage.¹⁴ An ardent believer in metempsychosis, Empedocles argued vehemently against animal sacrifice; in the passage to which Lucretius alludes, Empedocles describes a father who unknowingly slays his son, whose soul has transmigrated into the body of a calf (Emp. 128.1-4 Inwood = 137.1-4 DK)¹⁵:

μορφὴν δ' ἀλλάξαντα πατὴρ φίλον υἱὸν αἰείρας
σφάζει ἐπευχόμενος μέγα νήπιος, οἱ δ' ἀπορεῖνται
λίσσόμενον θύοντες· ὁ δ' αὖ νήκουστος ὁμοκλέων

¹² It should be noted that Lucretius' criticism of Empedocles, when it comes, is still much less severe than that directed at other of his philosophical predecessors. Whereas Ennius is presented as the perfect exemplum of man's ignorance (*nunc ratio nulla est restandi, nulla facultas...ignoratur enim quae sit natura animai...*, 1.110,2) and Heraclitus is a poor thinker (*magno opere a vera lapsi ratione*, 1.637) appreciated only by dullards (*stolidi*, 1.641), Empedocles and his like are characterized by their ability to reason (*multo certa ratione magis*, 1.738).

¹³ The list of scholars who have discussed Empedoclean influence on Lucretius is extensive and I mention only a few here. For a detailed analysis of the Empedoclean allusions to be found in the proem (including the Iphigenia passage), see Furley 1970. Gale 1994, 59-75 and Garani 2007 take a much broader approach to comparing the two poets, seeing in Empedocles' teachings similarities with Epicurean doctrine which Lucretius may have found sympathetic. Opposed to such a reading is Sedley 1998, 1-34, who sees in Empedocles a solely poetic model for the *De Rerum Natura*.

¹⁴ Cf. Furley 1970, 62; Gale 1994, 72. Sedley 1998, 30 argues that "the close functional parallelism of the two pathetic scenes of sacrifice should leave little doubt that the one passage is written with the other in mind," noting that "Lucretius' description does not, incidentally, appear to be directly modeled on any of the accounts of Iphigeneia's sacrifice extant in Greek tragedy." Harrison 2002, 4-6, suggests the *Iphigenia* of Ennius as a potential model for the Lucretian passage, but the evidence is meager; though he claims "the language of these lines is highly and markedly Ennian," he is forced to admit that "there are no exact verbal parallels between 1.80-101 and the few remaining fragments of Ennius' play."

¹⁵ For Empedocles' text, I use that of Inwood 2001. As the Diels-Kranz numbering of the fragments is more widely used, I give both numberings. In using the Diels-Kranz numbering, fragment numbers are followed by a B, indicating the passage is a fragment (as opposed to testimonia, which are indicated by an A); as all the Diels-Kranz passages cited in this work are fragments of Empedocles, I have omitted the B in referring to their numbering.

σφάξας ἐν μεγάροισι κακὴν ἀλεγύνατο δαῖτα.

A father lifts up his dear son, who has changed his form, and prays and slaughters him, in great folly, and others watch on as they sacrifice the suppliant. But the father, on the other hand, deaf to the cries, slaughters him in his halls, and prepares himself an evil meal.¹⁶

The parallels between the two passages are numerous.¹⁷ In both, the victims are lifted towards the altar: in the Empedocles fragment, this action is performed by the boy's father (πατὴρ...αἰείρας, 1), while Iphigenia is carried by her father's men (*sublata virum manibus*, 1.95). Additionally, both sacrifices are watched by a crowd of spectators. Empedocles simply notes that the others participating in the rite are looking at the victim (οἱ δ' ἀπορεῦνται, 2), while Lucretius, as with his adaptation of Thucydides, adds pathos to the scene, here emphasizing the wickedness of the act by stating that those in attendance weep at the sight (*aspectuque suo lacrimas effundere civis*, 1.91). Both children also show signs of supplication: the boy as calf is said to beg (λίσσόμενον, 3) while the girl falls to her knees (*terram genibus summissa petebat*, 1.92). Yet neither child is heeded. In the case of the son, this is reasonable; able to produce only lowing, he is unable to be understood by his father, who is described as νήκουστος ὁμοκλέων (3). Such is not the case with Iphigenia. To be sure, she is also unheard by her father, as fear has rendered her mute (*muta metu*, 1.92). Yet she is still human, visibly a suppliant, and her father is able to understand the plight she is in. Unlike the son who has changed his form (μορφὴν δ' ἀλλάξαντα, 1), Iphigenia is still recognizably her father's child. With this divergence, as with the amplified description of the onlookers, Lucretius increases

¹⁶ The translations of Empedocles given in this paper are those of Inwood 2001, though revisions have been made in several places.

¹⁷ For additional analysis of these parallels, cf. Furley 1970, 62, particularly for a discussion of the spectators and the supplication.

the horror of the scene. In Empedocles' poem, the father slays his child unintentionally, as an unfortunate consequence of the evils of blood sacrifice. Lucretius' Agamemnon, on the other hand, is fully aware of his actions; compelled by *religio*, the king intentionally kills his own daughter.

This Empedoclean allusion is of major thematic import to Lucretius' text.¹⁸ After all, the sacrifice of Iphigenia is useful as an example of religion's wickedness precisely because it is shocking, a deviation from the norm; ritual filicide was certainly never a customary feature of Greco-Roman sacrificial practice. Yet by recalling the Empedoclean passage at the same time, Lucretius suggests another worldview, where the threat of kin-slaying is present in every sacrificial act.¹⁹ Indeed, the poet encourages such a reading in the lines prior, where he claims such an occurrence is not altogether uncommon (*quod contra saepius illa / religio peperit scelerosa atque impia facta*, 1.82-3). Of course, this is not to say that Lucretius here espouses Empedocles' cosmology; the Epicurean poet who will spend most of book 3 arguing for the soul's mortality certainly does not here argue for the transmigratory ability of that same soul. Immediately after lamenting Iphigenia's death, Lucretius goes on to criticize Ennius for holding just these metempsychotic beliefs, commenting on the inconsistency of a poet who believes in

¹⁸ Certainly this is not the only allusion which can be discussed as regards the Iphigenia passage; for instance, the emphasis on Iphigenia's specious nuptials certainly calls to mind Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* as well. However, as will be discussed at greater length in the following chapter, the proem of the *DRN* is particularly rich in Empedoclean imagery, and as such would make a reader more prone to note further allusion to the poet. It must be kept in mind that a reader contemporary with Lucretius would be far more familiar with Empedocles than a modern reader; as has been pointed out by Sedley 1998, 1, we have somewhat compelling evidence that Cicero directly compared the *DRN* with a translation of Empedocles: *Lucreti poemata ut scribis ita sunt, multis luminibus ingeni, multae tamen artis. sed cum veneris, virum te putabo si Sallusti Empedoclea legeris, hominem non putabo* (*Ad Q. fr.* II 9.4).

¹⁹ In the remainder of fragment 128/137, Empedocles makes clear that the father's actions are not an isolated incident, but a regular feature of sacrificial practice (128.5-6 Inwood=137.5-6 DK): ὥς δ' αὐτὼς πατέρ' υἱὸς ἐλὼν καὶ μητέρα παῖδες / θυμὸν ἀπορραΐσαντε φίλας κατὰ σάρκα ἐδουσιν. "In the same way, a son seizes his father and children their mother, and tearing out their life-breath devour their dear flesh."

both transmigration and the underworld (1.112-126).²⁰ Rather, the allusion made during Lucretius' depiction of the events at Aulis serves to form an association between domestic dissolution and sacrifice which will recur throughout the poem.²¹ This same connection is forcefully made during Lucretius' depiction of the plague in book 6 and, as I will show, occurs in every instance of sacrifice depicted in the poem. In the remainder of this chapter, I intend to examine this relationship as it appears throughout the *De Rerum Natura* and discuss how it compares to the attitude found towards sacrifice in other Epicurean sources. As will become clear, Lucretius deviates sharply from the Epicurean party line on matters of sacrifice, viewing it as an institution incompatible with his chosen philosophy. Epicurean dogma presented sacrifice as a great good which led to enlightenment and the formation of social bonds. For Lucretius, the practice had no such effects, instead leading to the destruction of those very ends which the Epicureans hoped to achieve.

1.2 Sacrifice in the *DRN*

After the happy send-off of the Greek fleet, the next example of sacrifice in the poem occurs in book 2, as Lucretius discusses the fact that atoms vary greatly in shape (2.333-80). Drawing an analogy with the real world, the poet explains how in much the same way members of any one species can vary greatly within their kind. Thus a mother

²⁰ Sedley 1998, 33, describes the placement of Lucretius' critique of transmigration here as "arbitrary," viewing it as a sign of Lucretius' adherence to the structure of Empedocles' own poem. However, as Hardie 1986, 18, notes concerning this same passage, "Lucretius is an efficient predator, who digests those parts of his victim which are beneficial to his system and ostentatiously rejects the indigestible." By juxtaposing the two passages, Lucretius is able to make the association between familial strife and sacrifice while divesting it of eschatological implications which he cannot support.

²¹ The connection is further aided by his topic; it is precisely this death which will lead to further kin-slaying by the Atreidae.

cow, whose calf has been sacrificed before the altars of the gods, will wander the countryside looking for her son, aware that the other calves in the fields are not her own (2.352-66). As Segal notes, the passage directly recalls the death of Iphigenia, as again a parent loses a child to the demands of religion;²² indeed, the same words are used to describe their deaths (*conclideret mactatu*, 1.99; *mactatus concidit*, 2.353). If anything, the latter scene is presented even more pitifully. Whereas Iphigenia's death is quickly described with the single phrase *conclideret mactatu*, Lucretius lingers on the slaughter of the calf, noting the blood it "breathes" from its chest as it lay dying (*sanguinis expirans calidum de pectore flumen*, 2.354). Further intensifying the pathos of the scene is the depiction of the heifer, who fills the woods with lamentation as she searches longingly for her lost child (2.355-60):

at mater viridis saltus orbata peragrans	355
quaerit humi pedibus vestigia pressa bisulcis	
omnia convisens oculis loca si queat usquam	
conspicere amissum fetum, completque querellis	
frondiferum nemus adsistens et crebra revisit	
ad stabulum desiderio perfixa iuveni.	360

Such activity is in stark contrast with the actions of Agamemnon; unlike the king, the heifer has lost her child through no fault of her own.

Thus Lucretius again shows religion in the form of sacrifice to be inimical to familial affairs. The tension in this example is developed further by his description of diversity within various species only a few lines later (2.367-70). The poet notes that kids and lambs are able to recognize their own mothers, so that they can run to the proper udders when they are hungry, as nature demands (*ita, quod natura reposcit, / ad sua*

²² Segal 1970, 104.

quisque fere decurrunt ubera lactis, 2.369-70).²³ The heifer's bereavement of her calf, then, is shown to be contrary to nature; indeed, by killing this calf, the sacrificants have reversed the natural order by making the mother search for her young instead.

A fourth example of animal sacrifice occurs at the beginning of book 3 during Lucretius' discussion of the fear of death (3.41-58). Though men often claim that disease and infamy are more fearful than Tartarus, the poet suggests that such boasts are false; exiles, polluted by some awful crime (*foedati crimine turpi*, 3.49) and thus driven far from their families and the sight of men, become all the more concerned with religion, offering sacrifice to their ancestors and the shades of the underworld (*et quocumque tamen miseri venere parentant / et nigras mactant pecudes et manibu' divis / inferias mittunt...*, 3.51-3). At first, this image of men piously honoring their fallen forefathers could seem like the first positive depiction of a familial relationship in a sacrificial context. Yet these actions are only performed by criminals under duress, out of fear of death and Acheron. As Lucretius goes on to state, such fears are often the catalyst for domestic strife, fomenting the avarice which leads men to rejoice in their brothers' deaths and fear their relatives' tables (*crudeles gaudent in tristi funere fratris / et consanguineum mensas odere timentque*, 3.72-3). Thus these exiles' efforts come only after a life of such wickedness; as the poet notes, they are *foedati crimine turpi*. Furthermore, for the Epicurean poet, this offering of sacrifices to ancestors is an utterly meaningless endeavor. As Lucretius will spend the rest of book 3 proving, these ancestors no longer exist, as upon death their souls died with them. Though these exiles

²³ Smith 1992 *ad loc.* notes that *quisque fere* here is meant to indicate that sometimes lambs and kids will run to the wrong udder on accident. Yet, following so soon upon the sacrificial passage, there is surely the added notion that "almost" all run to their mothers because some, such as the *vitulus*, cannot.

may now be attempting to establish proper connections with their dead family members, these attempts are too late to be of any use.

One last depiction of sacrifice occurs towards the end of book 4, as Lucretius discusses the causes of infertility in men (4.1233-62). Here the poet states that often men will sacrifice to the gods in the hopes that they will provide them with children (*et multo sanguine maesti / conspergunt aras adolentque altaria donis / ut gravidas reddant uxores semine largo*, 4.1236-8). The passage bears certain verbal similarities to the Iphigenia episode. Both Agamemnon and the hopeful fathers are described as *maestus* (1.89, cf. 4.1236). Further, the infertile men are afraid they will never be called “father” (*pater agnatis ne dulcibus umquam / appelletur...*, 4.1234-5), the name first given to Agamemnon by Iphigenia (*patrio princeps donarat nomine regem*, 1.94). In this way, the poet perhaps prepares the reader to expect another instance of aberrant familial relations.

Yet at first, as with the sacrifices in book 3, such does not seem to be the case. Unlike Agamemnon, the sacrificial violence of the infertile men is not directed at their children; rather, it is aimed at helping them produce children. However, as the poet explains, such acts are in vain, for it is not the gods who render men sterile (4.1233-4), but rather an incompatibility between their seed and that of their mate (4.1240-1248). This is not to say there is no solution to their difficulties. Indeed, the poet offers several possible remedies, all provided by an understanding of Epicurean physics (4.1249-1277). Yet such treatments cannot aid those who instead trust in sacrifice and the gods to bring about change. In this instance, sacrifice does not lead to the dissolution of a family. By offering false hope to the infertile and hindering them from making use of Lucretius’ scientific solutions, it instead prevents one from being formed at all.

1.3 Sacrifice and the (un?)Epicurean Poet

Thus Lucretius repeatedly portrays familial breakdown as a necessary result of sacrificial practice. In so doing, he also presents sacrifice as inimical to Epicurean ethics. For Epicurus, interpersonal relationships were a key component to the good life, so much so that in his *Kyriai Doxai*, he explains that friendship (*philia*) is the greatest means which wisdom provides for the acquisition of happiness.²⁴ Of course, the concept of friendship is usually broader in scope than the specifically familial relationships which Lucretius problematizes in his sacrificial passages, yet Lucretius presents the two ideas as related. Both, according to the poet, were essential to the initial development of human society (5.1011-27); without the bond of friendship (*amicitiem*, 1019) and the non-aggression pacts which it enabled, the human race would have already perished (1025-7). Further, the need for such pacts was predicated on the emergence of domestic obligations.²⁵ As Lucretius explains it, friendship developed as a means to guarantee that one's wife and children were kept safe from harm (5.1017-21):

et Venus inminuit viris, puerique parentum
blanditiis facile ingenium fregere superbum.
tunc et amicitiam coeperunt iungere aventes
finitimi inter se nec laedere nec violari, 1020
et pueros commendarunt muliebreque saeculum.

Thus in Lucretius' worldview, familial bonds are the foundation of any ties of friendship, and it follows that an attack on the former would have deleterious effects on the latter. Sacrificial rite as it is presented by Lucretius would then seem to be incompatible with the fundamental tenets of Epicureanism.

²⁴ Diog. Laert. 10.148: Ὡν ἡ σοφία παρασκευάζεται εἰς τὴν τοῦ ὅλου βίου μακαριότητα, πολὺ μέγιστόν ἐστιν ἡ τῆς φιλίας κτῆσις.

²⁵ For a (perhaps excessively) negative view of this social development, see Nugent 1994, 203, who claims that here primitive man "relinquishes an original autonomy and institutionalizes a degree of impotence."

This incompatibility is emphasized by Lucretius' presentation of these sacrificial acts. As with the sacrifice/family association, the reader is prepared for this depiction of sacrifice as un-Epicurean during the initial attack on *religio* and discussion of Iphigenia. Immediately preceding his narration of the princess' slaughter, Lucretius twice establishes a dichotomy between *religio* and the teachings of Epicureanism, first presenting Epicurus and the tyrant *religio* engaged in a cosmic struggle (1.62-79), and then warning Memmius that despite popular opinion it is *religio* and its trappings, not Epicureanism, which lead to impious deeds—such as the sacrifice he goes on to describe (1.80-3).²⁶ Thus the act is presented as antithetical to the poet's philosophy from the start. A similar opposition can be detected in the passage on infertility, as the sterile are said to sacrifice in an attempt to propitiate the gods, that they may not lead a life “with barren Venus” (*sterili Venere*, 4.1235). To be sure, the connotations of Lucretius' Venus vary dramatically over the course of the *DRN* (often for the worse—*haec Venus est nobis*).²⁷ Yet in connection with progeniture, it is hard not to think of the *Venus genetrix* of the proem, the symbol of both natural fecundity and Epicurean *voluptas*. For such an entity, there could be no epithet less apt than “barren,” and the term readily establishes contrast; if it is Venus as *genetrix* who is the *voluptas* of men and gods, then a Venus who is *sterilis* would likely signify the absence of this *voluptas*, as is fitting for those unenlightened souls ignorant of Epicurean physics.²⁸ One more example of this antithesis occurs during the “sacrificial” slaughter of the plague victims, who die alone

²⁶ The opposition is pronounced by the use of the word *contra* in each instance: *tollere contra...obsistere contra* (66-7), *quod contra saepius illa / religio* (82-3).

²⁷ Cf. Clay 1983, 226-34, where he traces the goddess' “descent” from inspirational Muse to “the Venus of metonymy.”

²⁸ Cf. Brown 1987, *ad* 4.1235: “In light of the proem to Book One, where *alma Venus* is the very essence of fertility, the phrase has the ring of an oxymoron.”

and “lacking resource” (*opis expertis*, 6.1242). This time the description is somewhat reminiscent of Lucretius’ portrait of divinity, which is said to be “powerful by its own resources” (*ipsa suis pollens opibus*, 1.48=2.650). Such a divine condition is the Epicurean ideal, the state which the wise man seeks to attain (3.320-22);²⁹ here the contrast is between this serene self-sufficiency and the utter powerlessness of the plague victims, punished for their fear of death by *incuria mactans*. Though apparently presenting three separate oppositions (Epicurean philosophy/*religio*, fertility/sterility, autarchy/impotence), in each instance Lucretius makes the same distinction: the Epicurean good life vs. the perils of sacrifice.

The emotional states of the “characters” of the sacrificial scenes also stress this rift. Almost every figure portrayed in a sacrificial passage in the *DRN*, whether sacrificer or victim, is characterized as suffering due to un-Epicurean emotions. Many are the victims of excessive desire. Such is the case with those killed by *incuria* in book 6, who are described as *vitai nimium cupidos* (6.1240), as well as with the heifer of book 2, pierced with desire for her slain calf (*desiderio prefixa iuveni*, 2.360). While the exiles of book 3 are not explicitly described as overly desirous, it is suggested, as the poet notes that fear of death often leads to greed and desire (*avarities et honorum caeca cupido*, 3.59). Indeed, the fear of death is another regular feature of these passages. In addition to these exiles, it is a fear attributed to the victims of the plague (*mortisque timentis*, 6.1240) and potentially Iphigenia (*muta metu*, 1.92). More generally, all those involved are shown in a state of misery. Such a characterization is perhaps to be expected for those in the role of victims, such as Iphigenia and the plague sufferers, or for the bereft

²⁹ Cf. Obbink 1989, 199: “Since for Epicurus the gods share with men pleasure as an ethical *telos*, and since our conceptions of them embody the Epicurean ideals of blessedness and tranquillity, the gods stand in relation to the wise virtually as paradigms of moral excellence.”

heifer. Yet Lucretius is careful to note that those performing the sacrifices are wretched as well. The exiles are *omnibus aerumnis adfecti* (3.50) and *miseri* (3.51), while the adjective *maestus* is used to describe Agamemnon (1.89) and the infertile (4.1236). Notably, the same adjective is used to describe Iphigenia (*hostia...maesta*, 1.99).³⁰ On a psychological level, there is little to distinguish the sacrificer from the sacrificed; either role is that of the unhappy un-Epicurean, unable to recognize wherein lies true pleasure.³¹

At this time, it will be useful to examine the orthodox Epicurean view of sacrifice. After all, should Epicurus himself have been opposed to sacrificial rite, the preceding analysis would be interesting, but perhaps not surprising—simply more evidence of “Lucretius the fundamentalist,” transmitting his master’s teachings as he received them and making poetic use of the Empedoclean association to reinforce his point.³² However, such does not appear to be the case. Philodemus, an Epicurean scholar and contemporary of Lucretius, notes in his *On Piety* that Epicurus took part in all the ancestral festivals and sacrifices.³³ Epicurean attendance at these events is corroborated by the school’s critics, who mocked Epicurean gluttony by claiming that adherents treated the priests as their

³⁰ Commager 1957, 115, states that these three uses of *maestus* refer to fear of the gods, yet this is hard to reconcile with the text. While such may hold true in the case of Agamemnon, Iphigenia is surely more afraid of her father’s blade, while the sterile sacrificers are *maesti* due to their unfulfilled desire for children. (Pace Summers 1990, 42 n.41, who argues that these sacrificers may be *maesti* not because of their *orbitas*, but “because the gods are such harsh task-masters.”) Considering Commager himself uses these examples while discussing the phrase *maesto cum corde* (6.1233) in relation to plague-stricken individuals troubled by the thought of death, it seems more reasonable to view the adjective as indicative of a troubled mental state arising from more general un-Epicurean concerns.

³¹ Cf. Summers 1995, 42: “Sacrificing and other modes of ritual...are vain, if not emotionally harmful, because they come from a misunderstanding of the nature of things.”

³² Cf. Sedley 1998, who spends much of his book arguing for the *DRN* as a strict poetic reworking of parts of Epicurus’ *Peri Phuseos*, seeing Lucretius as “a true fundamentalist, nourished on the unmediated scriptures of his school’s revered founder” (xv).

³³ Philod. *De Piet.* 793-7 Obbink: εὐρίσκεται πάσαις ταῖς πατρίοις ἑορταῖς καὶ θυσίαις κεχρημένος.

personal chefs.³⁴ Nor was Epicurus only a participant in such rites, but also a founder of them; the philosopher's will included a provision for the continuance of funerary sacrifices to his family members, as well as the establishment of a celebratory cult on his birthday.³⁵ The defense of sacrifice became a part of Epicurean theology. Indeed, part of the Epicurean Hermarchus' treatise against Empedocles was directed at the poet's views on sacrifice; in it, Hermarchus argues that the slaughter of animals was permissible as there was no accord of justice between men and beasts.³⁶ In presenting a negative portrayal of the cult practice, particularly one informed by Empedoclean sensibilities, Lucretius deviates greatly from accepted doctrine.

In fact, the poet goes so far as to invalidate the standard Epicurean arguments for sacrifice, the foremost of which was based on contemplation of the divine. By taking part in religious rituals such as sacrifices, the Epicurean worshipper was encouraged to dwell upon the gods as they really were, ataractic and serene. In so doing, the Epicurean acquired an ideal towards which he could strive; by contemplating the gods during sacrifice, the wise man could live like a god himself.³⁷ Much the same reason is likely

³⁴ Plut. *Non posse suav.* 1102B: καὶ θύων μὲν ὡς μαγείρῳ παρέστηκε τῷ ἱερεῖ σφάττοντι. Cf. Athen. 5.179d.

³⁵ Diog. Laert. 10.18: μεριζέσθωσαν μεθ' Ἑρμάρχου σκοπούμενοι εἰς τε τὰ ἐναγίσματα τῷ τε πατρὶ καὶ τῇ μητρὶ καὶ τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς, καὶ ἡμῖν εἰς τὴν εἰθισμένην ἄγεσθαι γενέθλιον ἡμέραν...

³⁶ Obbink 1988, 432.

³⁷ Philod. *De Piet.* 879-896 Obbink: «ἡμεῖς θεοῖς θύωμεν» φησιν «ὁσίως καὶ καλῶς οὗ καθήκει καὶ καλῶς πάντα πράττωμεν κατὰ τοὺς νόμους, μηθὲν ταῖς δόξαις αὐτοὺς ἐν τοῖς περὶ τῶν ἀρίστων καὶ σεμνοτάτων διαταράττοντες· ἔτι δὲ καὶ δίκαιοι θύωμεν ἀφ' ἧς ἔλεγον δόξης· οὕτω γὰρ ἐνδέχεται φύσιν θνητὴν ὁμοίως τῷ Δίῃ νῆ Δία δῖάγειν, ὡς φαίνεται.» As Festugière 1956 [1946], 62 puts it, “[S]ince the gods are indescribably happy, to praise them in prayer, to draw near to them on those solemn occasions when the city offers them a sacrifice, and to rejoice with them at the annual festivals is to take part in their happiness.” Cf. Obbink 1989, 200: “Thus traditional forms of worship are regarded as a natural response to the recognition of the divine nature, and are not only tolerated by Epicurus but recommended to his followers. Numerous acts of worship by Epicurus and individual Epicureans are attested, including sacrifice...”

for Epicurus' establishment of his own cult. Though critics were quick to lambast the practice, seeing it as the most extreme example of an internally inconsistent philosophy,³⁸ sacrifice in honor of the philosopher would provide another example for contemplation.³⁹ Lucretius readily admits the benefits of such reflection upon divinity, though he tends to present it as a negative example: it is important to understand the true serenity of the gods, lest improper ideas cause you distress (6.68-79).⁴⁰ However, the poet is unwilling to concede that traditional religious practices can lead to such enlightenment. Discussing the true nature of *pietas* (5.1198-1203), Lucretius states it does not consist of "strewing the altars with the blood of beasts" (*nec pietas ullast...nec aras sanguine multo / spargere quadrupedum*, 1198, 1201-2), but *rather* to examine all things with a serene mind (*sed mage placata posse omnia mente tueri*, 1203).⁴¹ While contemplation of divinity is appropriate for the wise man, it will not be accomplished through sacrificial means.

At the same time, it has been argued that sacrificial ritual was also important for the Epicureans as a means of social unity. By participating in private cults such as those in memory of Epicurus and his relatives, the school's members would join as a cohesive whole, taking part in communal sacrifices and feasting. Indeed, Philodemus gives evidence for this social function in a fragment of his *On Epicurus*, wherein he quotes Epicurus as inviting his household and "outsiders" well-disposed towards him and his

³⁸ Cf. Cicero *De fin.* 2.101; Pliny *NH* 35.5.

³⁹ Clay 1998, 96 argues that "the memory and example of these philosophical lives were meant to benefit the worshipper in holding up to him an ideal for the conduct of his own life," citing *Vatican Saying* 32: Ὁ τοῦ σοφοῦ σεβασμὸς ἀγαθὸν μέγα τῷ σεβομένῳ ἐστί.

⁴⁰ A similar sentiment can be detected in the opening invocation of Venus. As the poet explains it in 1.44-49, the goddess can provide peace for the Roman state precisely by giving its citizens a model of peace to emulate.

⁴¹ For a fuller discussion of the passage, see Summers 1995, who argues that every aspect of cult described by Lucretius here is particularly Roman and meant to be read as such.

friends to join in feasting, while explicitly excluding anyone else.⁴² Yet, as has been discussed, it is this aspect of sacrifice which Lucretius attacks most harshly. For the poet, sacrifice breaks social bonds; it does not make them.

In his hostility towards sacrifice, then, the Epicurean poet seems to espouse an entirely un-Epicurean viewpoint, seeking to abolish a mode of ritual which his fellows took great pains to incorporate into their philosophical system. Yet he does so for Epicurean reasons. As the poet repeatedly shows, sacrifice is an enormous hindrance to the good life. Its practitioners (and its victims) are presented as emotionally disturbed individuals, unable to achieve the *ataraxia* needed for true pleasure; further, it is shown to be ruinous to the social ties which are the wise man's greatest possession. We are left with the impression of a Lucretius at odds with his chosen philosophy, exposing an apparent contradiction between Epicurean theology and the foundations of the Epicurean good life.

In the next chapter, I turn to an examination of this conflict and the view of sacrifice on which it is predicated. As will be shown, this negative portrayal of sacrifice is part of a much larger polemic against *religio* to which Lucretius returns throughout the *De Rerum Natura*. In making this assault, Lucretius turns not only to his Epicurean predecessors (with whom he has reason to disagree), but to another philosophical predecessor we have already seen him make use of in just this context—the philosopher-poet Empedocles.

⁴² Clay 1998, 81, cites *PHerc.* 1232 Fr. 8 Col. 1, a portion of Philodemus' *Peri Epikourou*: ...καλεῖν εὐωχεῖσθαι αὐτούς τε καθὼς καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους, τοὺς τε κατὰ τὴν οἰκίαν ἅπαντας καὶ τῶν ἑξωθεν μηδένα παραλείποντας, ὅσοι τὰς εὐνοίας καὶ τὰς ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τὰς τῶν ἑαυτοῦ φίλων ἔχουσιν. οὐ γὰρ δημαγωγῆσειν τοῦτο πράττοντας τὴν κενὴν καὶ ἀφυσιολόγητον δημαγωγίαν...

CHAPTER 2

Lucretius, Epicurus, and Empedocles

In this chapter, I will argue that Lucretius' negative appraisal of sacrificial practice and its deleterious effects on interpersonal relationships must be understood as part of a larger adaptation of Empedoclean ideology observable within the *De Rerum Natura*, in which Lucretius carefully sculpts his presentation of *religio*, presenting the conflict between it and Epicureanism as analogous to the conflict between the forces which dominate Empedocles' cosmology. As will be shown, this adaptation is present even in the opening lines of the poem; in a hitherto unnoticed allusion, Epicurus is directly compared to an Empedoclean divinity in his moment of triumph over *religio*, and it is with an allusion to Empedocles' own abhorrence of the practice that Lucretius' attack on sacrifice begins. Thus, a brief overview of Empedoclean cosmology will be helpful.

2.1 The Empedoclean Worldview

For Empedocles, everything that exists is composed of the four elements (or “roots”, ῥιζώματα)—fire, earth, water, and air. Much like Epicurus' atoms, these roots are eternal, able neither to be created nor destroyed, and what is commonly thought of as “creation” or “destruction” is instead the mixture or dispersal of combinations of these roots (Emp. 21 Inwood=8 DK), caused by the two motive forces Love and Strife.⁴³

⁴³ The basic idea, that neither “true” creation nor destruction are actually possible, is Parmenidean, and one for which Lucretius clearly has a great deal of approval.

Love (or Aphrodite, Emp. 25.24 Inwood=17.24 DK) is the name given to the force in nature which unites the disparate elements, while it is Strife which destroys any combination of dissimilar elements (Emp. 28.3-6 Inwood=26.3-6 DK, cf. 25.6-8 Inwood=17.6-8 DK):

αὐτὰ [The four elements] γὰρ ἔστιν ταῦτα, δι' ἀλλήλων δὲ θέοντα
γίγνοντ' ἄνθρωποι τε καὶ ἄλλων ἔθνη θηρῶν,
ἄλλοτε μὲν **φιλότῃτι** συνεργόμεν' εἰς ἓνα κόσμον,
ἄλλοτε δ' αὖ δίχ' ἕκαστα φορούμενα **νεΐκεος** ἔχθει...

For these very things are, and running through each other they become men and the tribes of other beasts, at one time coming together by **Love** into one cosmos, and at another time again borne apart separately by the hostility of **Strife**...

Thus, in general terms, Love is a generative force, while Strife is primarily destructive.

Of course, the dichotomy is not quite so well-defined as that. Since Aristotle,⁴⁴ commentators have noted that both Love and Strife are necessary for any sort of existence as we understand it.⁴⁵ For, should Love be the only force operating in the world, all would be one, as there would be no opposing force allowing for the individuation of objects.⁴⁶ Empedocles himself attests to this particular power of Strife, describing himself as an exiled divinity, separate from the elements and other divinities and so “trusting in maddening Strife” (τῶν καὶ ἐγὼ νῦν εἰμι, φυγὰς θεόθεν καὶ ἀλήτης, / νεῖκει μαινομένῳ πίσυνος, Emp. 11.13-14 Inwood=115.13-14 DK). Strife may even be seen to have a limited creative role; as Strife’s primary function is to separate disparate

⁴⁴ See Arist. *Metaphysics* 1000a18-b20, who admits that Empedocles nevertheless views Strife as an agent of destruction.

⁴⁵ For an extended discussion of the “creative” function of Strife, see Inwood 2001, 49-51.

⁴⁶ Such a state of complete union actually does occur in the Empedoclean cosmology, as will be discussed below. Yet through the advent of Strife this union is only of limited duration.

elements, it necessarily unites similar elements.⁴⁷ Thus, certain uniform bodies, such as the sun, earth, sea, and air, may be said to be composed by Strife, though they have been “born in anger” (σφισι γένναι ἐν οργῇ, Emp. 37.9 Inwood=22.9 DK).⁴⁸

Yet Empedocles’ primary emphasis seems to be on Strife as destructive force, undoing the works of Love. Such is certainly the case in the poet’s description of the composition of the human body; it is through the power of Love that the limbs come together to form a living whole, while Strife disperses them in death, “the verge of life” (Emp. 38.1-5 Inwood=20.1-5 DK):

τοῦτο μὲν ἅμ’ βροτέων μελέων ἀριδείκετον ὄγκον·
ἄλλοτε μὲν φιλότῃτι συνερχόμεθ’ εἰς ἓν ἅπαντα
γυῖα, τὰ σῶμα λέλογχε, βίου θαλέθοντος ἐν ἀκμῇ·
ἄλλοτε δ’ αὖτε κακῇσι διατμηθέντ’ ἐρίδεσσι
πλάζεται ἄνδιχ’ ἕκαστα περὶ ῥηγμῖνι βίοιο.

This is very clear in the bulk of mortal limbs:
at one time we come together into one by love,
all the limbs which have found a body, in the peak of flourishing life;
at another time again, being divided by evil quarrels,
they wander, each separately, about the verge of life.

Though Strife allows for the conditions necessary for life, it is Love which is presented as the true creatrix of this life. This is strongly suggested in an analogy made by Empedocles to clarify how elements can combine to form all living creatures (Emp. 27 Inwood=23 DK). As the poet explains, the process is similar to an artist’s use of paint, for through diverse mixtures of colors, he is able to depict any assortment of creatures. Crucially, the analogy is based on the artist’s use of *varied* colors; the act of creation is presented as one of combination, which falls under the purview of Love. The suggestion is made explicit in another fragment, where Empedocles states that all the forms of

⁴⁷ This is a necessary consequence of the lack of void in Empedocles’ system.

⁴⁸ Cf. Inwood 2001, 50.

mortals which now exist have been produced by the unifying power of Aphrodite (Emp.

74.2-4 Inwood=71.2-4 DK):

πῶς ὕδατος γαίης τε καὶ αἰθέρος ἡελίου τε
κιρναμένων εἶδη τε γενοίατο χροῖά τε θνητῶν
τόσσ' ὅσα νῦν γεγάασι συναρμοσθέντ' Ἀφροδίτῃ.⁴⁹

How from the blending of water and earth and air and sun
the forms and colours of mortals came to be,
all which have come to be, fitted together by Aphrodite.

Though both forces are needed if mortal existence is to be possible and the perceptible world may be a result of Strife's power, it is the creative power of Love which generates mortal life, while the destructive force of Strife ends it.

Thus the physical processes of the world are controlled by these dual agencies mixing and separating the roots. Yet these two forces do not always possess equal power. Instead, all of creation takes part in a cosmic cycle, as one force or the other gains more influence over things, eventually assuming complete control for a period of time. In the case of Love, this means that all things achieve complete union; everything that is, excepting Strife, becomes part of a single cosmic sphere (Emp. 33 Inwood=27 DK, cf. 34 Inwood=29&28 DK), which Empedocles viewed as a god.⁵⁰ As Strife achieves dominance, matters are much different, as the elements are separated from one another into four distinct groups. Human existence is impossible at either extreme of this

⁴⁹ For a more specific act of creation, cf. Emp. 100 Inwood=86 DK, wherein Empedocles portrays Aphrodite as the creator of the eye: ἐξ ὧν ὀμματα' ἔπηξεν ἀτειρέα δι' Ἀφροδίτῃ. "From which divine Aphrodite fashioned tireless eyes."

⁵⁰ Inwood 2001, 102, cites Simplicius' Commentary on Aristotles' *Physics*, CIAG 10, 1123.25-1125.6.

cycle; only in the transition periods, as Love and Strife compete with one another, can it occur.⁵¹

These forces need not have only cosmological agency; Empedocles portrays them as instigators of sociohistorical change as well. Such is clear in his discussion of the reign of Aphrodite when, the poet states, men's religious practices were different (Emp. 122 Inwood=128 DK). Chief among these was a taboo against animal sacrifice (Emp. 122.8-10 Inwood=128.8-10 DK):

ταύρων δ' ἀκρήτοισι φόνοις οὐ δεύετο βωμός,
ἀλλὰ μύσος τοῦτ' ἔσκεν ἐν ἀνθρώποισι μέγιστον,
θυμὸν ἀπορραΐσαντας ἐέδμεναι ἡέα γυῖα.

[Her] altar was not wetted with the unmixed blood of bulls,
but this was the greatest abomination among men,
to tear out their life-breath and eat their goodly limbs.

As Porphyry, our source for these lines, explains, this is because, during Love's reign, nothing slew anything, as all recognized the affinity between all things. With the advent of Ares/Strife, however, this state of affairs changed, and creatures became violent towards one another (Porph. *De Abst.* 2.22):

Τῆς γὰρ οἶμαι φιλίας καὶ τῆς περὶ τὸ συγγενὲς αἰσθήσεως πάντα
κατεχούσης, οὐθεὶς οὐθὲν ἐφόνευεν, οἰκεῖα εἶναι νομίζων τὰ λοιπὰ
τῶν ζώων. Ἐπεὶ δὲ Ἄρης καὶ Κυδοιμὸς καὶ πᾶσα μάχη καὶ
πολέμων ἀρχὴ κατέσχευεν, τότε πρῶτον οὐθεὶς οὐθενος ὄντως
ἐφείδετο τῶν οἰκείων.

For, I suppose, with Love and the knowledge concerning their kinship restraining everything, no one slaughtered anything, considering all other living things to be kindred. But when Ares and battle-din and all battle and the beginning of wars came upon them, then for the first time no one in truth spared any of their kindred.⁵²

⁵¹ There is much debate as to which parts of these transition periods actually allow for a stable cosmos; for a brief discussion of the different solutions posed, see Inwood 2001, 44.

⁵² The translation is my own.

Here the advent of a cosmological force, Ares/Strife, is used to explain a sociohistorical phenomenon, the development of war. Nor is such a usage of these Empedoclean motive forces limited to Empedocles' writings. Ennius too portrayed the Empedoclean Strife as a historical force in the *Annales*, while describing the beginning of the Second Punic War. Certainly a Strife is presented as a cause, as Ennius claims that it was *Discordia* which broke the gates of war (*postquam Discordia taetra / belli ferratos postes portasque refregit, Annales* 225).⁵³ The fragment has been convincingly connected to another wherein the poet describes a Fury-like entity, identified with the same *Discordia*, in distinctly Empedoclean terms (*corpore tartarino prognata Paluda virago / cui par imber et ignis, spiritus et gravis terra*, 220).⁵⁴ The comparison to all four elements leaves little doubt that an allusion to Empedocles is meant here; that *Discordia* should be identified with the Empedoclean Strife is thus equally likely. From the early stages of Latin epic, then, this Empedoclean cosmological force is presented as a potential historical agent.⁵⁵

Lucretius, following the example set by his two primary poetic predecessors, portrays Love and Strife in the same manner. One example of this has already been briefly mentioned, that of Venus in the *Kulturgeschichte* of book 5. In his discussion of the development of human society, Lucretius explains that communities developed only after Venus diminished the strength of primitive man (*Venus inminuit viris*, 5.1017) and

⁵³ All Ennius fragments given are numbered according to Skutsch 1985.

⁵⁴ See Skutsch 1985 *ad* 220, 225. Skutsch's argument rests primarily on comparison with the Vergilian *Allecto*, whose depiction alludes to both Ennian passages. Cf. Hardie 1986, 82.

⁵⁵ Such a usage can be detected in one of Lucretius' contemporaries as well. In Cicero's *De Amicitia*, written about a decade after the *De Rerum Natura*, the speaker Laelius conflates the cosmological and social functions of Love and Strife, naming Empedocles' Love *Amicitia*: *Agrigentinum quidem doctum quendam virum carminibus Graecis vaticinatum ferunt, quae in rerum natura totoque mundo constarent, quaeque moverentur, ea contrahere amicitiam, dissipare discordiam* (Cic. *Amic.* 24)

parents began to feel affection for their young. Certainly, Venus can and perhaps should be viewed here as the abstract concept of love or sexual desire.⁵⁶ Yet she can also be viewed as the Empedoclean force Love, acting as unifier in a *social* sense to coax men into joining in bonds of *amicitia* (*amicitiam coeperunt iungere*, 5.1119), whereas before they had lived apart, doing violence to one another (*nec commune bonum poterant spectare, neque ullis / moribus inter se scibant nec legibus uti*, 5.958-9). Such an interpretation can also be applied to Lucretius' portrayal of *Discordia* in book 5; here, just as Empedocles and Ennius, the Epicurean poet presents Strife as the force goading men to war (*sic alid ex alio peperit discordia tristis, / horrible humanis quod gentibus esset in armis / inque dies belli terroribus addidit augmen*, 5.1305-7). As with the earlier poets, Lucretius presents forces which were originally cosmological as historical and social.

I would argue that it is just this sort of destructive social force which Lucretius gives to sacrifice and its source, *religio*, substituting religious practice for the Strife of Empedoclean cosmology. As I hope to have shown, the religious ritual of sacrifice in the *DRN* is always portrayed as socially destructive, and, in particular, a practice tied to the dissolution of familial bonds. In some instances, this point can be pressed even further. In the case of Agamemnon and Iphigenia, it should be remembered that the Greek leader kills his daughter in order to lead the Greek fleet against the Trojan host (and that the act will set off a chain of domestic murders which will all but undo his house). The

⁵⁶ See, for example, the matter-of-fact interpretation at Farrington 1954, 12: "The meaning is that conjugal love tamed man's violence." However, as Watson 1984, 391, points out, Venus here cannot *solely* stand in for sexual desire. The goddess is represented as such fifty lines earlier, where the poet explains that Venus led primitive man to rut in the woods (*et Venus in silvis iungebat corpora amantum*, 5.962). Yet there is no indication that *these* acts of love-making lead to communal development. With Venus' reemergence at 5.1017, however, the goddess has acquired a definite social aspect.

sacrificing exiles of book 3 have been driven from their homeland precisely because they are *foedati crimine turpi* (3.49), having committed all sorts of violence against their fellows at home (3.68-73).⁵⁷ And the neglect perpetrated by *Incuria*'s victims during the plague in book 6 is the first sign of the social collapse which will almost end Athens and does end the text. Sacrifice and strife would seem to be bound together in a corollary relationship.⁵⁸

This is not to say that Lucretius views or portrays *religio* as a cosmological force of equal power or scope as Strife, or that he sees Love and Strife as actual cosmic forces at all. While I hope to have made the case that in certain matters, particularly religious ones, Lucretius' Epicurean orthodoxy is less rigid than some scholars would allow, he is still an Epicurean. Certainly, he often portrays personified forces as causing creation or destruction. Indeed, he frequently depicts these forces in Empedoclean terms, as when he claims that Venus "returns animals to the lights of life" (*unde animale genus generatim in lumina vitae / reducit Venus*, 1.227-8). Yet this is all poetic license; for the poet of the *De Rerum Natura*, there can be only one motivation for what we perceive as creation or destruction—the motion of the atoms. The processes are not separate, but one, for it is the dispersal of atoms from one object which allows for the generation of another object

⁵⁷ Indeed, it is possible to detect in this passage an allusion to Empedoclean Strife in particular. Edwards 1989, 112-114, sees in the discussion of these political exiles an allusion to Empedocles' self-presentation as an exile from the gods, a *daimon* "trusting in maddening Strife" (Emp. 11 Inwood = 115 DK); specifically, Edwards sees a similarity between the description of the political exiles as *foedati crimine turpi* and that of the Empedoclean *daimon* as "stained with blood in his sins" (ἀμπλακίησι φόνῳ φίλα γυῖα μύην, 11.3 Inwood = 115.3 DK). It should be noted that in each instance, the exiles look to a higher power for solace; whereas the *daimon* trusts in Strife, the political exiles turn to sacrifice and *religio* (*multo in rebus acerbis / acrius advertunt animos ad religionem*, 3.54).

⁵⁸ It is even strife which is required to form the thunderbolt, that most clear symbol of the power of the gods. For, according to the poet, it can only be fashioned when there is a discord of temperatures (*frigus et aestum / quorum utrumque opus est fabricanda ad fulmina nubi, / ut discordia sit rerum*, 6.364-6) which leads to a war between disparate elements (*quare pugnare necessest / dissimilis res inter se turbareque mixtas*, 5.369-70; cf. *bello turbatur*, 5.377).

(*materies opus est ut crescant postera saecula, / quae tamen omnia te vita perfuncta sequentur...vitaque mancipio nulli datur, omnibus usu*, 3.967-8, 971).

Instead, Lucretius presents *religio* as the sociohistorical counterpart to the cosmological force of Strife. After all, in the sacrificial passages examined, the emphasis is not on the physical destructiveness of *religio per se*. Certainly this element is there, as Iphigenia and the slaughtered calf well attest. Yet the important dissolution in these scenes is not physical, but rather social. Though the violence of the calf's death is vividly brought out by the poet, with his description of the stream of blood breathed out from its chest, the focus of the sacrificial passage in book 2 is not this violence, but the despair of the mother heifer who is left behind. So too in book 4, there is mention of the gory nature of sacrifice (the sacrificers are *multo sanguine maesti*, 4.1236), yet the emphasis is on the abiding sterility of those who practice such rituals. And during the plague, *Incuria mactans* visits only those who have already neglected their kin. In all these cases, the bonds broken are not just atomic, but familial.

2.2 The Death of Venus

This association of sacrifice with social dissolution is not the only means by which Lucretius equates the practice with Empedocles' Strife. This is also done through an opposition, as sacrifice is routinely shown to be opposed to generative processes in the *DRN*—that is to say, it is shown to be opposed to Love. Here it will be useful to return to Lucretius' text, starting with the depiction of the despondent heifer in book 2 (2.352-66). The passage is especially illuminating as, unlike in the initial attack on *religio* at 1.80-101, the sacrifice motif is not entirely relevant to the development of Lucretius'

argument at this point in his poem. The ritual killing of a young girl by her father is magnificently effective as an exemplum of the horrors caused by religious fervor; the distress felt by a mother at the loss of her slain calf is not so apparently useful in a discussion of the diversity of atomic shapes. This seeming incongruity between argument and exemplum is well brought out by Bailey, who claims the passage “shows how the picture in [Lucretius’] mind gets the better of him, since much of the detail is irrelevant to the argument, the point of which is contained in 364-6; no other calf could satisfy the mother.”⁵⁹ Yet while Bailey is right to argue that the specific details of the calf’s sacrificial slaughter before the altars of the gods and his mother’s subsequent lament and wandering are irrelevant to the particular bits of atomic theory for which the poet is here arguing, it is less clear that the passage should be taken as nothing more than a poetic flight of fancy. As I have already argued in the preceding chapter, these details serve to enforce the thematic association between sacrifice and familial dissolution made throughout the poem. More than that, they are crucial elements in a larger polemic against sacrifice and *religio* in general. Far from being an instance of Lucretian free-association, this passage will be shown to be an integral part of an argument developed throughout the *De Rerum Natura*.⁶⁰

The allusions in 2.352-66 to the Iphigenia passage have already been discussed—in particular, the repeated loss of a child to the demands of religion and the verbal echo of *mactatus concidit* (2.353; cf. *concideret mactatu*, 1.99). Yet the heifer passage can also

⁵⁹ Bailey 1947, *ad loc.* Cf. the hypothetical complaints raised by Sharrock 2006, 265: “[W]hy does he choose to illustrate [individual identity] with a scene of death? He could, after all, have offered a joyful, frolicking sort of image. And why use a cow? The story of the mother cow and her lost baby springs from a generalizing statement about mothers and children...He could have slipped into a pretty story of babies who recognize their mothers from the earliest days of their life. Instead he chooses loss.”

⁶⁰ For a broader overview of the thematic arguments developed in the heifer passage, see Segal 1970, to whom much of this section is indebted.

be read in comparison to an earlier moment in the poem's opening. Immediately prior to the description of the calf's death, Lucretius first attempts to prove the great diversity of atomic shapes by drawing upon the immense number of animal species and the variation within these species; should the reader take any one of these animals in their kind (*generatim*, 2.347)—be they human, fish, domesticated animal, wild beast, or bird—he will notice they differ from their fellows (2.342-8):

Praeterea genus humanum mutaeque natantes
 squamigerum pecudes et laeta armenta feraeque
 et variae volucres, laetantia quae loca aquarum
 concelebrant circum ripas fontisque lacusque, 345
 et quae pervolgant nemora avia pervolitantes—
 quorum unum quidvis generatim sumere perge:
 invenies tamen inter se differre figuris.

The polysyndeton of lines 2.342-4 seems designed to emphasize the teeming number of animals on display, as does their variety; these animals inhabit the land, sea, and sky. So too does the use of *concelebrant* at 2.345—the number of birds alone is enough to fill up the lakes and riverbanks. This hyperabundance of animal life is reminiscent not of the Iphigenia passage, but of the Venus proem, where the goddess is said to fill the land and sea with every sort of living thing (*concelebras*, 1.4).⁶¹ Here too the poet refers to diverse types of animal—birds (1.12), domestic animals and wild beasts (1.14)⁶²—filling every possible clime: air (1.12), earth (1.14), and water (1.15). A suggestion of the proem may also be found in the lines directly following the heifer passage; the kids who eagerly search for their mothers' milk (2.367-70) would be the direct result of the procreation fomented by Venus (1.20). Thus in the poem's opening lines are found the

⁶¹ The word's repetition is remarkable due to its relative infrequency in the poem; as Segal 1970, 111 notes, it is used in only one other place (5.1381) outside of these two passages.

⁶² I refer to lines 14 and 15 as they are numbered in all modern editions. In the manuscripts, the lines are reversed.

same abundance of life as at 2.342-8, with the added focus on the creation of this life; it is through Venus that each species propagates according to its kind (*generatim*, 1.20).

Such intratextual allusion to the proem can also be detected in the sacrificial passage itself. As Lucretius describes the wandering of the cow, the reader is informed that she wanders the same “happy fields” (*pabula laeta*, 2.364) as those animals inspired by Venus (1.14), and similar to those *laetantia loca* (2.344) frequented by the birds in the poet’s previous example.⁶³ The heifer is both literally and figuratively surrounded by happy creatures such as those found in the Venus proem, yet, due to the loss of her calf, she is unable to take part in any such pleasure (2.364-5). These allusions lead to a dramatic recontextualization of the earlier passage. Hymning the glory of Venus in the proem, Lucretius claims that the goddess’ presence fills the breasts of *all* creatures in this idyllic setting with pleasant love (*omnibus incutiens blandum per pectora amorem*, 1.19). Yet the poet’s claim is shown to be a lie. Such is not the case for the heifer; though she may feel love for her calf, it could surely not be described as *blandus*. It is certainly not the case for her calf; instead, in a haunting echo of 1.19, his breast is said to be drained of even its life-blood (*sanguinis expirans calidum de pectore flumen*, 2.354). Sacrificial practice is again portrayed as inimical to Epicurean values; not only is the heifer afflicted with un-Epicurean emotions, but she and her calf are not even able to enjoy the idyllic countryside of Venus, *voluptas* personified.

Of course, this antithesis between sacrifice and Epicureanism is not the only contrast made by the poet in alluding to the proem. For while Venus there may be viewed as the embodiment of Epicurean *voluptas*, she is also *Venus genetrix*, the

⁶³ These descriptions may also be seen as emphasizing the fecundity of the Venustian landscape, as the adjective *laetus*, particularly in agricultural situations, can carry connotations of fertility as well as happiness. See OLD *ad laetus*.

generative element in nature, and it can be argued that the calf's sacrifice is presented in opposition to this aspect of the goddess as well. On one level, the opposition is evident; the sacrifice is responsible for the heifer's loss of her offspring, and thus necessarily represents a stifling of her creative ability.⁶⁴ This certainly seems to be how one reader of Lucretius understood the passage. In his *Fasti*, Ovid closely adapts this passage to describe Ceres' wandering in search of her lost Persephone, to the extent that the goddess is compared to a heifer in search for her lost calf (*ut vitulo mugit sua mater ab ubere raptō / et quaerit fetus per nemus omne suos*, *Fasti* 4.459-60).⁶⁵ In the Ceres myth, the loss of a child is identical to the loss of generative ability; after Persephone's abduction and Ceres' mournful neglect of her duties, it is not only Ceres but the world that is rendered barren. By comparing the goddess' plight to that of the cow, Ovid suggests the same is true in both circumstances.

Such a reading is encouraged by Lucretius himself. Certainly there is a focus on procreation in lines 2.342-70; in addition to its application to the heifer (355), the term *mater* is used three other times (349, 350, 368) in the span of twenty lines.⁶⁶ Indeed, the theme of maternity is recurrent in book 2, as Lucretius, discussing the atomic processes involved in creation, repeatedly describes the earth as the mother of all things (589-99, 991-8, cf. 1150-2).⁶⁷ In keeping with the themes of the Venus proem, the poet regularly associates creative force with happiness in these passages. In the lines leading up to his

⁶⁴ Cf. Sharrock 2006, 264, who sees in the passage "a moving exposition of maternal grief at the loss of a child, a loss which negates the normative function of femininity in *DRN* (production of new life)."

⁶⁵ Bailey 1947 *ad loc.*, cf. Segal 1970, 112-13.

⁶⁶ This emphatic repetition is noted by Segal 1970, 112.

⁶⁷ Cf. Nugent 1994, 183-84: "In Lucretius' cosmology the mother earth is so copiously fertile that her youth included episodes of spontaneous generation—beings simply sprang into existence from the fecundity of the earth."

discussion of the Magna Mater cult, he explains that it is the earth, *nostrī genetrix* (599), who is responsible for the idyllic *pabula laeta* (596, cf. *arbusta...laeta*, 594)—the same fields which Venus keeps plentiful and which provide no joy for the heifer of our passage. The same attribution is made in Lucretius' depiction of the *hieros gamos*, as the earth is again said to produce *arbusta laeta* (994). In this second example, the association of fertility and happiness is even more pronounced, as the poet argues that it is through the earth's creation of *pabula* that all creatures are able to be nourished, lead a pleasant life and propagate their offspring (*pabula cum praebebat quibus omnes corpora pascunt / et dulcem ducunt vitam prolemque propagant*, 996-7). That is, the maternal fecundity of the earth is shown to be a necessary prerequisite for happiness. Further, this happiness coincides with the ability of terrestrial creatures to procreate, as it is the earth's bounty which is responsible for both. As in the Venus proem, happiness is shown to coincide directly with the capacity for generation. If such is the case, it should be no wonder that the heifer's loss of her calf and loss of her joy coincide; bereft of her child, the heifer is symbolically barren, and thus lacking in the necessary qualities for happiness. In this instance, sacrifice would then be not only opposed to Epicureanism, but the creative element in nature as well.

Of course, one could argue that such a connection is not necessary for an understanding of the passage; the heifer need not be sad owing to a loss of procreative ability, but simply because the loss of a child is an extremely sad event. Therefore it is all the more important to note that this opposition between sacrifice and fertility occurs two other times in the *DRN* (that is to say, in over half of the occurrences of sacrifice in the text). One of these instances has already been discussed in this regard—that of the

infertile sacrificers of book 4. Here the opposition is perhaps the most important part of Lucretius' argument as the poet seeks to prove that it is correct scientific knowledge, not adherence to religious ritual, which can provide a cure for sterility. The focus is not on the actual loss of creative ability, as in the heifer passage—Lucretius is quick to note that the gods have no actual power to sterilize (*nec divina satum genitalem numina cuiquam / absterrent*, 4.1233-4)—but instead on the prevention of creative ability. Trusting to sacrifice and the religious sensibilities which propagate it, these individuals fail to take the proper steps to improve their barren condition (as laid out by Lucretius) and it is for this reason they are forced to live *sterili Venere* (4.1235).

If sacrifice is merely correlative to the loss of procreative ability in the book 4 passage, it is blatantly causative to this loss in the description of Iphigenia's death. Throughout the sequence of events leading to her slaughter, Lucretius both obliquely and openly makes reference to the girl's incipient fertility; as has been remarked upon by Bailey and others, much of the ritual language of the sacrifice would be just as appropriate for a Roman marriage ceremony.⁶⁸ Thus Lucretius' comment that Iphigenia was lifted up by the men's hands and led to the altars (*sublata virum manibus tremibundaque ad aras / deductast*, 1.95-6) is reminiscent of the removal of the maiden from her father's house and her *deductio* to her new husband's home.⁶⁹ The comparison is made explicit through a contrast, as Lucretius emphatically explains these actions were *not* carried out so that she take part in her wedding procession (as would be the normal

⁶⁸ Bailey 1947 *ad loc.* Cf. Smith 1992 *ad loc.* Of course, after Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Iphigenia's marital eligibility was a well-known aspect of her myth.

⁶⁹ In her discussion of the *deductio*, Hersch 2010, 140 notes the similarity between marital and sacrificial processions: "Greek authors had long recognized the similarities in their own nuptial, funerary, and sacrificial rituals, juxtaposing and conflating the three in their portraits of young girls who died before their time...The theme of "marriage to death," most famously explored in the tragedies of Antigone and Iphigenia, was later adapted and transformed by Roman authors."

thing to do), but instead so that she be led to her death (*non ut sollemni more sacrorum / perfecto posset claro comitari Hymeneaeo...*, 1.96-7). Indeed, for the poet this seems to be the crowning outrage, that the princess fell like a slaughtered animal *at the very age appropriate for marriage* (*sed casta inceste **nubendi tempore in ipso** / hostia concideret mactatu*, 1.98-9).⁷⁰

Yet for all this, the reader is made aware that this potential fertility will never reach fruition. Indeed, before the prospect of Iphigenia's marriage is ever mentioned, Lucretius informs his reader that the girl is still a maiden (*virgineos circumdata comptus*, 1.87; cf. *casta*, 1.98). The fact is further emphasized by the poet's description of Diana/Artemis as a virgin (*Triviae virginis*, 1.84); herself chaste, Iphigenia is the perfect victim for such a goddess. The princess' potential is thus contrasted with reality. Though she is of the age to wed and reproduce, Iphigenia has not, and with her death (an act prescribed by *religio*), she never will. In sacrificing the girl, Agamemnon not only ruptures the familial bonds which exist between them and causes the death of his own progeny, but at the same time prevents the creation of any new progeny by his daughter. Again, as with the infertile folk and the heifer, sacrifice is shown as not merely destructive in its own right, but emphatically opposed to the act of creation.

To recap: blood sacrifice in Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* is repeatedly, and without exception, portrayed as an event associated with the breakdown of proper social, and particularly familial, relationships. In some instances, this association is chiefly correlative; the exiles of book 3 and the ignoble plague victims of book 6 prove detrimental to their kin before sacrifice (real or metaphorical) is ever mentioned. Yet in

⁷⁰ In context, an emphasis on Iphigenia's burgeoning womanhood should not be surprising. Certainly for a Roman reader familiar with the tales of Lucretia and Verginia, the sexualization of a female slain immediately prior to an act of war would be by no means unusual.

other cases—Iphigenia, the heifer—it is sacrifice itself which is to blame for this dissolution. Sacrifice in these latter cases, as well as in the case of the sterile sacrificers, is not only damaging to existing social ties, but is destructive to any further generative capacity of the type exemplified by Venus in the opening hymn; the same act which separates father from daughter ensures that that daughter will beget no children of her own. Further, this model of sacrifice as destructive and antithetical to creation cannot be explained by recourse to earlier Epicurean models, as no such problematization of sacrificial ritual occurs in other extant Epicurean sources. Indeed, these sources seem to argue for a view entirely opposed to that of Lucretius by suggesting that sacrifice is not only a right and pious action, but can even aid in the development of social relations. Instead, Lucretius' position in its most basic form bears resemblance to that of his other Greek predecessor, Empedocles. While the two poets' cosmological underpinnings for their views could not be more different, both portray sacrifice as an inherently destructive practice, capable of compelling family members to inflict great harm on one another. Lucretius himself suggests that he sees his views as similar to those of his predecessor by his allusion to Empedocles in his account of Iphigenia's slaughter. Thus, while alluding to Empedocles, Lucretius presents sacrifice as a destructive force opposed to the generative processes of Venus; in other words, he presents sacrifice as the Empedoclean Strife.

2.3 *Philia*-sophy and the Empedoclean Opening

This conflation of Strife and sacrifice (and by extension, *religio*) should not be entirely surprising. Lucretius makes a similar association between the Empedoclean Love

and his Epicurean philosophy, uniting both in the figure of Venus. To a certain extent, the connection between Venus and Epicureanism has already been touched upon. It is, in fact, suggested in the opening lines of the poem (*Aeneadum genetrix, hominum divomque voluptas, / alma Venus*, 1.1-2), as the goddess is here identified with *voluptas*/pleasure, the *telos* of Epicurean philosophy. A similar connection is made in the community-building of book 5, as it is Venus who provides men with *amicitia*, that all-important Epicurean good.⁷¹ As the poet portrays it, the goddess is responsible for two of the most important goals of Epicureanism; without her, the Epicurean good life, and thus the philosophy itself, would be incomprehensible.

Such an argument is strengthened through an examination of the invocation at the beginning of the poem. The poet himself gives a mythological explanation for this invocation; citing the relationship between Venus and Mars and the goddess' ability to pacify the war-god, Lucretius argues that she will allow for the peaceful state required to write poetry. Yet this gradually becomes a philosophical explanation, as the poet explains that the true reason Venus is able to teach peace is her own tranquil state (1.44-49):

omnis enim per se divom natura necessest	
immortali aevo summa cum pace fruatur	45
semota ab nostris rebus seiunctaque longe;	
nam privata dolore omni, privata periclis,	
ipsa suis pollens opibus, nil indiga nostri,	
nec bene promeritis capitur neque tangitur ira.	

⁷¹ Should the claim of Farrington 1954—that the community here envisaged is the ideal Epicurean community—be correct, this association would be felt all the more strongly. Lucretius' language in the passage perhaps supports such a claim, as the community formed by Venus is said to be held together by *foedera* (5.1025). As Fowler 1989, 147-9, notes, Lucretius regularly politicizes atomic activity, describing atomic bonds as *foedera naturai*. It is thus possible to see in the passage a correspondence between Venus' society and the natural arrangement of the atoms.

That is to say, she is an Epicurean divinity, an exemplar for the life attainable through the study of Lucretius' philosophy, inasmuch as his ostensible goal is to allow men to "live lives worthy of the gods" (3.320-2). From the earliest lines of the poem, then, Venus serves as an Epicurean ideal, instructing through example. This connection between goddess and philosophy is also present in Lucretius' other explanation for the opening invocation. Calling on the goddess to be his ally (*socia*, 1.24) in writing,⁷² the poet explains that it is she who controls the *rerum natura* about which he is undertaking to write (1.21-25). In effect, Lucretius presents the reign of Venus as the subject of his poem. Initially, such a statement serves only to indicate that the poet's subject matter is the natural world, which the generative power of Venus allows to come into being. Yet, as is soon revealed, the poem is as much about Epicureanism as it is about the natural world, and our understanding of the scope of Venus' reign must change accordingly, to incorporate the poet's philosophy as well. Again, Venus is shown to be thoroughly Epicurean.

At the same time, she is highly Empedoclean. Indeed, the Empedoclean influence on the entire poem has been analyzed in great detail, and it is within this context that the invocation to Venus must be understood.⁷³ Suggestions of Empedocles' cosmology can be detected in some of the earliest lines of this invocation, as Lucretius depicts Venus' majestic effect on the features of a spring day. For at the goddess' approach, the winds

⁷² Even here we may detect a connection between Venus and Epicureanism, as the appellation *socia* is a bilingual pun, the Latin equivalent of the Greek *ἑτίκουρος*. See Gale 1994, 137; cf. O'Hara 1998, who confirms the pun by showing it to be an allusion to a passage of Simonides.

⁷³ See especially Furley 1970, who argues at great length for a correspondence between Venus and Empedocles' Love. Cf. Sedley 1998, 1-34; Clay 1983, 82-95; Clay 1994, 219-20; Garani 2007, 40-43.

and clouds flee, the earth produces flowers, the sea smiles, and all of heaven shines with light (1.6-9):

te, dea, te fugiunt venti, te nubila caeli
adventumque tuum, tibi suavis daedala tellus
summittit flores, tibi rident aequora ponti
placatumque nitet diffuso lumine caelum.

It is possible to see in the lines the traditional tripartite division of cosmos into sea, heaven, and earth.⁷⁴ However, as Furley has persuasively argued, the lines also contain reference to the four elements, Empedocles' "roots."⁷⁵ Three of these are quite easy to identify: wind and clouds represent air, earth earth, and the sea water. The fourth is somewhat more obscure, as initially Lucretius' reference to the sky shining with light seems to refer again to air. Yet of course this light must come from the fire of the sun, and it is likely this to which Lucretius refers. Indeed, both the sun (Emp. 26/21.4) and brightness (ἡλέκτωρ τε χθών τε καὶ οὐρανὸς ἡδὲ θάλασσα, 37/22.2) are used as metonymy for fire during Empedocles' discussions of the four elements—substitutions which Lucretius, the reader of Empedocles, would be sure to know. In the poem's opening lines, then, we are presented with a goddess of Love whose arrival produces wondrous effects in the four elements; intimations of an Empedoclean worldview begin to emerge.

Another connection between Venus and Love may be detected in the opening invocation, in Lucretius' use of the term *natura*.⁷⁶ The word is a direct translation of the Greek *physis*, and by using it in the title of his poem the poet recalls the works of earlier

⁷⁴ Such a division is traditional in epic poetry, as Hardie 1986, 313-25, discusses at length.

⁷⁵ Furley 1970, 55-9.

⁷⁶ The argument is that of Clay 1983, 85-7. Cf. Sedley 1998, 25-6.

physiographers, most notably Epicurus' *Peri Physeos*, but also Empedocles' poem of the same name, and its use here directly recalls its use in the earlier poem.⁷⁷ In the *DRN*, the term first occurs in the context of Venus' effect on the world; inasmuch as it is she who causes the animals to reproduce according to kind (*efficis ut cupide generatim saecula propagent*, 1.20), and she who allows things to come into being at all (*nec sine te quicquam dias in luminis oras / exoritur neque fit laetum neque amabile quicquam*, 1.22-3), it is she who may be said to govern the *natura* of things (*rerum naturam sola gubernas*, 1.21). The emphasis on the goddess' generative power in such close proximity to a statement of her control of *natura* suggests a very particular use of the word, corresponding to its original definition of "growth" or "genesis."⁷⁸ Such a meaning is by no means inherent in the word's usage, even within the *DRN*. Only 23 lines later, Lucretius uses it with the much more typical meaning of "natural state" while discussing the Epicurean conception of divinity (*omnis enim per se divom natura necessest / immortalis aevo summa cum pace fruatur...* 1.44-5). Shortly after that, the word becomes even more ambiguous, as *natura* becomes "the natural world" in its entirety, something which not only produces, but also destroys (*unde omnis natura creet res auctet alatque / quove eadem rursum natura perempta resolvat*, 1.55-6).⁷⁹ Yet in its initial use as the

⁷⁷ If the Suda is correct in giving the title of Empedocles' physical poem as *Peri Physeos Ton Onton*, the allusion would be even more explicit, as the title is an even closer translation of *De Rerum Natura* than that of Epicurus' treatise. See Sedley 1998, 21.

⁷⁸ The word is etymologically related to the verb *nascor*.

⁷⁹ As Clay 1983, 94 notes, the lines are the first indication that it is *Natura*, not *Venus*, which effects physical processes in Lucretius' world-view, and it is also these lines which first mention atomic dispersal. In Lucretius' account, *Venus* remains solely an agent of generation.

object of Venus' influence, it must have a primary sense of "genesis."⁸⁰ Empedocles uses his word for "nature" in just this original sense while discussing the creation and dissolution of compounds. As the poet explains, there is no true *physis* for mortals, just as there is no true death; instead, what we perceive to be *physis* is only a mixture and exchange of elements (Emp. 21 Inwood=8 DK):

ἄλλο δέ τοι ἔρέω· φύσις οὐδενός ἐστιν ἀπάντων
 θνητῶν, οὐδέ τις οὐλομένου θανάτοιο τελευτή,
 ἀλλὰ μόνον μίξις τε διάλλαξις τε μίγντων
 ἐστί, φύσις δ' ἐπὶ τοῖς ὀνομάζεται ἀνθρώποισιν.

And I shall tell you something else. There is no *physis* of any of all mortal things, nor any end in destructive death, but only mixture and interchange of what is mixed exist, and *physis* is the name given to them by men.

By contrasting *physis* with the "end of destructive death," Empedocles emphasizes its underlying meaning of "birth," making just the etymological association that Lucretius does with *natura*. The Epicurean again calls attention to his poetic predecessor during his discussion of Venus, portraying the goddess as a life-giving force similar to that of Love.

One final allusion to an Empedoclean Venus is made through reference to the relationship between the goddess and Mars. As has been mentioned, this is in part a mythological trope, based on an intimacy between the two divinities presented in myth since the time of Homer. Yet so soon after the earlier elemental allusion, it is hard not to take this scene as another nod to Empedocles' work, especially as the earlier poet regularly refers to the forces Love and Strife as Aphrodite and Ares, the Roman gods' Greek counterparts. Such a reading is further encouraged by the particular relationship which Lucretius' Venus and Mars enjoy. In the Lucretian account, they are presented as

⁸⁰ Cf. Ross 1987, 19, who makes the same point concerning the passage, translating this initial *rerum naturam* as "natural productiveness."

antithetical to each other. The goddess is one of peace (*tu sola potes tranquilla pace iuvare*, 1.31), asked to end civil strife by seducing, and thus placating, Mars. In effect, she is asked to make the war god unwarlike; an increase in her power would seem necessarily to reduce his. It is just this sort of relationship in which Love and Strife are engaged. The cosmological cycle of Empedocles requires them to be involved in a zero-sum game; as one gains more control in the universe, it necessitates a corresponding diminution of the other's power, much as with Lucretius' Venus and Ares. Again the Lucretian Venus is made to resemble the Empedoclean Love.⁸¹

The Venus of the proem thus becomes a nexus of philosophical conceptions, serving to unify Lucretius' Epicurean beliefs with certain aspects of Empedoclean thought. As has been seen with *Discordia*/Strife in Ennius and the later books of the *DRN*, Lucretius here presents an Empedoclean cosmological force as an agent of sociohistorical change. As Strife/Ares' counterpart and opposite, it is Venus/Love who has the power to restrain the violent civil turmoil of the Roman people, quelling their desire for war and instilling in them instead a tranquil peace. Yet in truth this is only possible because the Venus/Love of the proem is an Epicurean divinity, able to show men the way to a better life through her example of the ideal mental state. As Lucretius will spend much of the rest of his poem explaining, it is his Epicurean philosophy, not the beneficence of the gods, which can provide men with the peace they need to live the good life; in this way, it is Epicurean philosophy which fulfills the role of Empedocles' Love.

⁸¹ This would, of course, mean that the Lucretian Ares also resembles the Empedoclean Strife. Here again, as with the Ennian demon and the *discordia* of *DRN* book 5, we are confronted with Strife as a sociological, not cosmological, entity. Where those other instances involved wars between different peoples, however, this Strife is causing conflict within the Roman state, destroying existing social bonds in much the same way as Lucretius' sacrificial examples.

2.4 One Giant Leap for Mankind

As I will show, a similar association is made slightly later in the poem's opening, during Epicurus' "flight of the mind," a passage of conflict which bears resemblance to that of Venus and Mars (1.62-79):

Humana ante oculos foede cum vita iaceret
in terris oppressa gravi sub religione,
quae caput a caeli regionibus ostendebat
horribili super aspectu mortalibus instans, 65
primum Graius homo mortalis tollere contra
est oculos ausus primusque obsistere contra,
quem neque fama deum nec fulmina nec minitanti
murmure compressit caelum, sed eo magis acrem 70
inritat animi virtutem, effringere ut arta
naturae primus portarum claustra cupiret.
ergo vivida vis animi pervicit, et extra
processit longe flammantia moenia mundi
atque omne immensum peragravit mente animoque,
unde refert nobis victor quid possit oriri, 75
quid nequeat, finita potestas denique cuique
quanam sit ratione atque alte terminus haerens.
quare religio pedibus subiecta vicissim
obteritur, nos exaequat victoria caelo.

Here it is Epicurus, the *Graius homo*, who plays the part of Venus/Love, acting for the benefit of humanity by overcoming a force which makes human life miserable.⁸² Like Venus in the earlier passage, the philosopher is shown to do so by providing an example of wisdom which, if emulated, will raise humanity itself to divinity while negating the power of its oppressor (1.78-9). As I will argue further, this substitution of Epicurus for Venus/Love is not the only one which is made in this passage. At the same time, Lucretius portrays in place of Mars/Strife another force which, as has been discussed, has much the same effect on mortals: the tyrant *religio*.

⁸² The designation of Epicurus as the *Graius homo* to whom Lucretius refers is not universally accepted; Edelstein 1940 argues that the passage must instead refer to the pre-Socratic philosophers, though his argument has found little support, while Furley 1970, 63, claims that "in some respects [the passage] applies more exactly to Empedocles than to Epicurus."

As with Venus' conquest of Mars, Lucretius' depiction of Epicurus' victory over *religio* has a number of literary sources. Most obviously, and as mentioned in chapter 1, the scene is rife with gigantomachic imagery, as Epicurus makes his way against a hostile heaven to oust the traditional gods from their position of prominence (1.66-9). (Of course, the passage departs significantly from other accounts of gigantomachy in one crucial aspect: Epicurus' assault is successful, and the philosopher overcomes the dire threat of *religio*.) At the same time, the poet depicts his master in a pseudo-militaristic fashion, in some ways modeling his account after the exploits of past generals such as Alexander, who himself journeyed past the "walls of the world" (1.73), at least in a sense.⁸³ Scholars interested in discussing similarities between Lucretius and Empedocles have also noticed an Empedoclean referent in the earlier poet's praise of Pythagoras (Emp. 6 Inwood=129 DK):⁸⁴

ἦν δέ τις ἐν κείνοισιν ἀνὴρ περιώσια εἰδώς,
 ὃς δὴ μήκιστον πραπίδων ἐκτήστατο πλοῦτον.
 παντοίων τε μάλιστα σοφῶν ἐπιήρανος ἔργων·
 ὁπότε γὰρ πάσῃσιν ὀρέξαίτο πραπίδεσσιν,
 ῥεῖ' ὃ γε τῶν ὄντων πάντων λεύσσεσκεν ἕκαστον, 5
 καὶ τε δέκ' ἀνθρώπων καὶ τ' εἴκοσιν αἰώνεσσιν.

There was among them a man of exceptional knowledge,
 who indeed obtained the greatest wealth in his thinking organs,
 master of all kinds of particularly wise deeds;
 for whenever he reached out with all his thinking organs,
 he easily saw each of all the things which are
 in ten or twenty human lifetimes.

Certainly there is a marked similarity between the two passages. In each, there is an apparent reticence to name the philosophical predecessor; Lucretius' *Graius homo* (1.66)

⁸³ Cf. Gale 1994, 121. Similarities have also been detected between Epicurus in this passage and Ennius' treatment of Pyrrhus by Harrison 2002, 9-10, while Buchheit 2007 [1971] argues that Epicurus is here portrayed as a Roman *triumphator*.

⁸⁴ Furley 1970, 61-2; Sedley 1998, 29-30; Gale 1994, 73.

at least specifies the nationality of his subject, while Empedocles' τις...άνήρ gives the reader almost no information at all. Further, both make reference to an exertion of the subject's mental faculties. Lucretius' Greek conquers with the "force of his mind" (*vivida vis animi*, 1.72) and is said to wander in mind and spirit (*peragravit mente animoque*, 1.74), just as Empedocles' subject reaches out with all his mind (πάσησιν ὀρέξαιτο πραπίδεςσιν, 4). Finally, both individuals are said to have obtained an almost divine level of knowledge in return for their efforts. The knowledge of one is described in spatial terms—Epicurus' understanding of physical phenomena is such that he is said to have traveled the whole universe—while the other is described temporally as having knowledge of numerous lifetimes, in reference to Pythagoras' theory of transmigration.

Yet what scholars have failed to observe is that this is not the only Empedoclean passage which resembles Lucretius' depiction of the *Graius homo*. In another fragment, Empedocles narrates a much more literal "flight of the mind," in discussing his conception of divinity (Emp. 110 Inwood=134 DK):

οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀνδρομέη κεφαλῇ κατὰ γυῖα κέκασται,
οὐ μὲν ἀπὸ νώτοιο δύο κλάδοι αἰσσοῦσι,
οὐ πόδες, οὐ θοὰ γοῦν', οὐ μήδεα λαχνηέντα,
ἀλλὰ φρήν ἱερὴ καὶ ἀθροσφατος ἔπλετο μοῦνον,
φροντίσι κόσμον ἅπαντα καταΐσσουσα θοῇσιν. 5

For it is not fitted out in its limbs with a human head,
nor do two branches dart from its back
nor feet, nor swift knees nor shaggy genitals;
but it is only a sacred and ineffable thought organ
darting through the entire cosmos with swift thoughts.

The parallels between the Lucretian account and this passage are even more pronounced than with the passage describing Pythagoras. In the discussion of Pythagoras, the older philosopher remains the grammatical subject for the duration of the passage. His efforts

may be entirely mental, but the use of *πάσησιν...πραπίδεσσι* (Emp. 6.4 Inwood=129.4 DK) solely in the dative shows his mind as nothing more than his tool; Pythagoras himself remains a human agent. Such is not the case with Epicurus. Though he starts off as a *Gravus homo*, he is eventually portrayed as nothing more than a disembodied mind, a *vivida vis animi*, careening off through space just like the *phren* of fragment 110/134. Indeed, the actions of the *phren* (*φροντίσι κόσμον ἅπαντα κατὰίσσουσα θοῇσιν*) and the mind of Epicurus (*atque omne immensum peragravit mente animoque*) are almost exactly identical. Despite the fact that the thought organs are already presented in the nominative case, both descriptions include a seemingly extraneous restatement of the mental nature of the action, incorporating another term for thought organs in either the dative or ablative of manner (as opposed to the Pythagoras passage, where this dative use has no corresponding mental agent in the nominative). Further, both the *phren* and Epicurus' mind engage in spatial action; unlike Pythagoras with his vast temporal knowledge encompassing the events of ten or twenty generations, the Empedoclean divinity and Epicurus are physical wanderers, reaching to the ends of the cosmos. Indeed, the extent of their travels is exactly the same, as Lucretius' *omne immensum* is a near perfect translation for *κόσμον ἅπαντα*. While Lucretius' Epicurus may bear a resemblance to the Empedoclean Pythagoras, it would seem his depiction alludes to the *phren* of fragment 110/134 as well.

According to our sources for the fragment, Empedocles' description of this *phren* is his explication of the true nature of divinity.⁸⁵ Though Ammonius, our primary source, states in his commentary on Aristotle's *Peri Hermeneias* that the lines refer particularly

⁸⁵ Inwood 2001, 140-1, cites Ammonius' Commentary on Aristotle's *Peri Hermeneias* CIAG 4.5, 249.1-11, as well as Tzetzes' *Chiliades* 7.522-526.

to Apollo (about whom Empedocles is supposed to have composed a hymn), the commentator is quick to mention that the description can be applied more broadly to Empedocles' conception of the divine as a whole.⁸⁶ For the philosopher, the divine is not to be anthropomorphized at all; god has neither head nor arms nor legs nor genitals (110.1-3 Inwood=134.1-3 DK), but is instead unadulterated mind. This lack of human features is emphasized elsewhere in Empedocles' work, as the poet describes the *sphairos* in almost exactly the same terms (Emp. 34.1-2 Inwood=29 DK):

οὐ γὰρ ἀπὸ νότοιου δύο κλάδοι αἰσσονται,
οὐ πόδες, οὐ θοὰ γούν', οὐ μήδεα γεννίεντα...

As previously mentioned, the *sphairos* itself is a god in Empedocles' cosmology, and it makes sense that the poet portrays it in terms which he uses for a more generalized conception of divinity. Indeed, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Empedocles would view this god in much the same way as he does those such as Apollo—as an animated creature of thought. At the least, then, Lucretius compares the man whom he will later call a god (*deus fuit ille, deus*, 5.8) to an Empedoclean divinity. Should an identification of the description of the *phren* with that of the *sphairos* hold, Lucretius would portray Epicurus as akin to not just any divinity, but to the *sphairos* itself, the embodiment of a world ruled by Love. The outcome of Epicurus' effort, man's ascent to heaven (*nos exaequat victoria caelo*, 1.79), may aid in such an interpretation, since in the Empedoclean cosmology, the divine *sphairos* is the union of all things into one—Love's ascendance quite literally equates us with the divine. This connection between Epicurus and Love/*sphairos* would be facilitated by the association already made between Epicurean philosophy and Empedoclean Love in the invocation to Venus immediately

⁸⁶ Tzetzes, our other source for 110.4-5/131.4-5, though admittedly writing much later (12th c.) than Empedocles, simply states that the lines give Empedocles' description of "the substance of god."

prior to the praise of Epicurus, and would at the same time reinforce this association. In the moment of his gigantomachic attack against the gods, Epicurus is presented as a god himself—yet this god is one of union and growth in the mold of the Empedoclean Love.⁸⁷

The same cannot be said for the gods of the old order, nor the *religio* with which they are identified, for if Epicurus is presented as Love, then *religio* is surely presented as Strife. Lucretius suggests this parallel through another allusion—this time not to Empedocles, but to Homer. In the fourth book of the *Iliad*, Homer details the various divinities which accompanied Ares and Athena in rousing the Greeks and Trojans to resume battle. Among these are Terror, Fear, and *Strife* (*Il.* 4.440-5):

Δεῖμός τ' ἡδὲ Φόβος καὶ Ἔρις ἄμοτον μεμαυῖα, 440
 Ἄρεος ἀνδροφόνιοιο κασιγνήτη ἐτάρη τε,
 ἥ τ' ὀλίγη μὲν πρῶτα κορύσσεται, αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα
 οὐρανῷ ἐστήριξε κάρη καὶ ἐπὶ χθονὶ βαίνει·
 ἥ σφιν καὶ τότε νεῖκος ὁμοῖον ἔμβαλε μέσσω
 ἐρχομένη καθ' ὅμιλον ὀφέλλουσα στόνον ἀνδρῶν. 445

And Terror drove them, and Fear, and **Strife** whose wrath is relentless,
 She the sister and companion of murderous Ares,
 She who is only a little thing at the first, but thereafter
 Grows until she strides on the earth with her head striking heaven.
 She then hurled down bitterness equally between both sides
 As she walked through the onslaught with her head striking heaven.⁸⁸

Strife here is presented as a giant, impossibly huge, whose head is fixed in heaven (οὐρανῷ ἐστήριξε κάρη) while she herself walks on earth amongst mortals. In what has been suggested to be an allusion to the Homeric lines, Lucretius describes *religio* in much the same fashion.⁸⁹ Just like the Homeric Strife, Lucretius' *religio* is an enormous figure,

⁸⁷ This distinction between Epicurus and the gods he opposes is carefully maintained by Lucretius by his reference to the philosopher as a *Graius homo*. While Epicurus may be reminiscent of the Empedoclean divinity, he is nevertheless in fact a mortal, on the side of humanity against the established Olympian order.

⁸⁸ The translation is that of Lattimore 1951 with slight alterations.

standing amongst mortals (*horribili super aspectu mortalibus instans*, 1.65) while keeping her head firmly in the clouds (*quae caput a caeli regionibus ostendebat*, 1.64). The association suggested by the allusion is soon proved by the course of Lucretius' argument, for immediately after his account of *religio*'s defeat by Epicurus, Lucretius goes on to discuss the effects of *religio* as seen in the Iphigenia passage—familial dissolution and the beginnings of war. Through allusion, example, and opposition with Epicurus/Love, Lucretius portrays *religio* as a surrogate for Strife.

2.5 Full Circle

With the victory of Epicurus/Love over *religio*/Strife, we are returned to the slaughter of Iphigenia, better able to explain Lucretius' abhorrence not only of this act, but all acts of sacrifice and perhaps even worship in general. Indeed, Lucretius' use of an Empedoclean framework for his attack on *religio* may even explain his choice of blood sacrifice as the particular form of worship that he most often critiques. After all, Empedocles himself seems to have thoroughly encouraged most acts of religion; in his description of the golden age under Venus, he goes so far as to enumerate all of the proper acts that her worshipers performed (Emp. 122.4-7 Inwood=128.4-7 DK):

τὴν οἱ γ' εὐσεβέεσσιν ἀγάλμασιν ἱλάσκοντο
 γραπτοῖς τε ζῳοῖσι μύροισι τε δαιδαλεόδοις 5
 σμύρνης τ' ἀκρήτου θυσίαις λιβάνου τε θυώδους,
 ξανθῶν τε σπονδὰς μελίτων ῥίπτοντες ἐς οὔδας...

Her they worshipped with pious images,
 painted pictures and perfumes of varied odours,
 and sacrifices of unmixed myrrh and fragrant frankincense,
 dashing onto the ground libations of yellow honey...

⁸⁹ Summers 1995, 54-5.

Yet, as mentioned above, these did not include blood sacrifice (Emp. 122.8-10 Inwood=128.8-10 DK), as only with the advent of Strife did such worship emerge. Even for the religious philosopher, this act above all is a symbol of religion perverted; for the Epicurean poet with a penchant for Empedocles, blood sacrifice is the clearest example of the evil of all *religio*, a destabilizing act of Strife fundamentally at odds with the placating effects of Epicurean Love.

Of course, the exact implications of the Love/Strife metaphor for the role of *religio* in the *DRN* are complicated by the cyclical nature of Empedocles' cosmology. Love's dominance and the preeminence of the *sphairos* are by no means eternal; Strife always comes back to dominate in its turn before again yielding to Love. If this aspect of their relationship also characterizes that of Epicureanism and *religio*, Epicurus' victory would seem to be less stable than it first appears, a reciprocal act (*vicissim*, 1.78) which could be met in kind. Such a reversal is explicitly referred to by Lucretius, who admits that religion will overcome his philosophy someday, at least on a small scale. Immediately after the Iphigenia passage, he informs his addressee Memmius that he will one day seek to leave the Garden, frightened by the words of *priests* (*tutemet a nobis iam quovis tempore, vatum / terriloquis victus dictis, desciscere quaeres*, 1.102-3). Much like his gods, it would seem that Epicurus' teachings and their effects may be long-lasting, but they are not immortal.

These complications may be compounded by another aspect of Strife; as mentioned earlier, it is necessary for human existence. Without Strife, everything that exists is unified in the *sphairos*. Only when Love and Strife are in a more balanced state—Strife breaking down compounds as Love forms new ones—is anything like our

world possible. Such a system would likely hold some attraction for Lucretius, as the Epicurean views birth and death (the union and dissolution of atoms) in much the same way. Indeed, one of the poet's arguments against the fear of death is its necessity for the creation of new life (*sic alid ex alio numquam desistet oriri / vitaeque mancipio nulli datur, omnibus usu*, 3.970-1). Should the metaphor be pressed, one could argue that *religio* must, like Strife, be viewed as necessary, an essential counterpart to Lucretius' philosophy.

Yet this would be pressing the analogy too far, for while Lucretius may seek to present the physical dissolution of death as benign or even facilitative of new creation, such is never the case with the social dissolution brought about by *religio* and sacrifice. Certainly this was a possibility; we have seen that Epicurean doctrine promoted sacrificial cult, even encouraging it as a means of social unification. Yet Lucretius breaks from his school in denying the act this effect, instead portraying it as entirely an act of Strife, hostile to any social unity and thus to his Epicurean philosophy. In some cases, the deleterious social effects of sacrifice are shown to be immediate, as when a heifer loses her calf, or a father his daughter. Yet the act can also signify more widespread discord. Iphigenia's sacrifice at Aulis means not only her death, but that of countless Greeks—and Trojans as well, the kinsmen of the *Aeneadum genetrix*. Similarly, the cowardice which *Incuria* sacrificially punishes during the plague narrative is only the first sign of a social upheaval which will overturn all Athens. In all cases, the practice leads to that greatest of ills, a troubled outlook; whether sacrificer, victim, or outside observer, every figure in a Lucretian sacrificial passage is beset by un-Epicurean emotions—misery in the cases of Agamemnon and the infertile sacrificers, fear in cases

of Iphigenia and the plague victims of book 6, and desire in the cases of the heifer and the exiles of book 3. Be it physically, socially, or mentally, sacrifice is an utterly destructive force. *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum.*

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