LUCRETIUS II

AN ETHICS OF MOTION

Thomas Nail

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A Note on the Translation and Text

All quotations and citations from *De Rerum Natura* are cited from the Latin by book and line number. For English translations of the Latin I have followed Walter Englert's translation, *Lucretius: On the Nature of Things* (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2003), sometimes modifying it slightly, and in some cases I have left the Latin words entirely untranslated. For example, in most places I keep the Latin word *corpora* instead of using the English translation 'atom'. For the Latin text I used the online edition at the Perseus Digital Library and the Loeb edition, Carus T. Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

In my own translations and commentary I have followed P. G. Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), and Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary: Founded on Andrews' Edition of Freund's Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879).

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Preface

A new Lucretius is coming into view today. Every great historical epoch returns to him like bees returning to their flower fields in search of nourishment. Each time, though, our return is different – like the expanding arc of a spiral. We bring new questions, find new answers, and make Lucretius speak to us again as if for the first time. We make Lucretius' epic poem *De Rerum Natura* into the mellifluous honey of a liquid antiquity that has always coursed through the veins of modernity like a spring of fresh meaning and inspiration.[1]

We thus return to Lucretius not as though he were an unchanging figure carved in stone but as if he were a rush of new life at the cutting edge of the twenty-first century. We stand in front of Lucretius' breathtaking and revolutionary poem not as passive students of unchanging relics in a museum but as active participants in a history of our present. Today, we are asking Lucretius again to tell us something about *nature*.[2]

I first returned to Lucretius in 2014, when I taught Book II of *De Rerum Natura* for a class on the philosophy of movement. I added Lucretius to the syllabus because he was an overlooked figure in the history of philosophy who wrote about motion. I was excited about the text, but I was also sceptical that anyone who believed in 'eternal unchanging atoms' could have *motion* as their philosophical starting point. What I encountered, however, absolutely shocked me.

There were no atoms. I scoured the whole Latin text. Lucretius never used the word 'atom' or a Latinised version of this word – not even once. Translators added the word 'atom'. Just as shockingly, I could not find the great isolated swerve in the rain of atoms, for which he is so well known. In Book II, Lucretius says instead that matter is *always* 'in the habit of swerving' [*declinare solerent*] (2.221) and *if it were not* [*nisi*], 'all would fall like raindrops' [*caderent*] (2.222). The solitary swerve and the rain of matter are *counterfactual claims*. Lucretius never said there was

a rain and then one atom swerved. He says that matter is in the 'habit' [*solerent*] of swerving, meaning that swerving happens regularly. This, he says, is the only way to avoid the problem of assuming that something comes from nothing: matter must have always been swerving.

This small but significant discrepancy made me wonder what else had been left out of translations and interpretations. Could it be possible that there was a whole hidden Lucretius buried beneath the paving stones of Greek atomism? If there are no solid atoms and no solitary swerve in Lucretius, can we still make sense of the rest of the book? In 2016 I decided to find out. I dedicated a whole seminar just to Book I of *De Rerum Natura* read in Latin. To my delight a whole new view on this foundational text emerged that year. I published the results of this study in 2018 as *Lucretius I: An Ontology of Motion*.

Around this time I also began to notice an increasing number of major differences between Lucretius and Epicurus. One of the reasons I thought I would find atoms and isolated swerves in Lucretius was because of a long history of interpretation that conflated the two thinkers, just as earlier scholars had errantly done with Democritus and Epicurus.[3] There is no doubt that Lucretius studied and followed Epicurus, just as Epicurus had followed Democritus.[4] However, between the three thinkers there are worlds of difference that have not been sufficiently understood. Not all students *merely* imitate their masters. Sometimes imitation functions as a mask for a student to put forward her or his own ideas – which is what Lucretius did.[5] I thus began to unravel the 'Epicurean myth of Lucretius'.[6]

Lucretius did something very strange. He wrote Epicurean philosophy in the style and method of Homeric poetry and in doing so ended up completely changing the meaning of both.[7] Just like an ancient satyr play, Lucretius' poem has numerous invocations of bacchanalian intoxication,[8] sexual imagery, desire,[9] and deceptive invocations of gods he does not believe in (Venus and Mars), all affirmed joyfully alongside the destructive power of nature itself: death. This is in stark contrast with the contemplative, serious, pessimistic, and aloof style of Epicurus and his followers.

Epicurus had many Greek and Roman followers who wrote and promoted Epicurean doctrine,[10] but Lucretius did something no one had ever done before. He espoused a version of Epicurean philosophy in a book of Latin poetry written in Homeric hexameter. Why? For pleasure. He wanted to make something new by mixing the old traditions.

Lucretius performed a bewildering hybrid of two completely opposed figures and traditions (Homer and Epicurus) and made something novel: something uniquely Roman.

However, *De Rerum Natura* has largely been treated as a Homeric poem *about* Epicurean philosophy, but in this book I argue that there is also a hidden Epicurean philosophy of Homeric myth. In the end this is where the real brilliance and originality of Lucretius lies: not in Homer or Epicurus but in their perverse and twisted entanglement. There is thus a *becoming* Homer of Epicurus. It is a genuine injustice to reduce such a radical enterprise to *mere* Epicurean 'doctrine'.

The idea of philosophical *poetry* is a satyr's slap in the face to the entire Greek tradition of philosophy from Thales to Aristotle, *including Epicurus*.[11] With few exceptions, Greek philosophers systematically reduced Homeric poetry to irrational and sensuous mythology in order to define their new abstractions and idealisms against the straw man of the oral tradition. This was a founding moment of exclusion that has stayed with the Western tradition up to the present – contributing to a perceived inferiority of oral and indigenous knowledge. It is therefore completely unsurprising that today, when Lucretius is invoked as a philosopher, he is treated as completely reducible to the *real* Greek master: Epicurus. By doing so, the Western reception of Lucretius has reproduced the same Grecocentric and idealist tradition that vilified pre-Greek and Homeric poetry and archaic materialism. This is the same Western tradition that continues to devalorise oral knowledge and non-Western mythologies today.

Most Western philosophy, even in its most materialist moments, has in one way or another hated matter and the body.[12] Lucretius was the first from within this tradition to produce a true and radical materialism of sensation and the body. However, like Homer, Lucretius also paid the ultimate price for his materialist sins and was largely exiled from the discipline of philosophy. Either Lucretius was treated as a skilled poet of the Latin tongue *or* he was treated as a slavish imitator of the great master Epicurus. Never has Lucretius been read as an *original* philosophical poet of a radical materialism that goes far beyond anything Epicurus achieved. This book and its companion volumes are the first books to show precisely this.

Even more provocatively, Lucretius refused to use Epicurus' Greek terminology when many other Epicurean and Roman authors, such as Cicero, did so often and easily. The Romans are famous for renaming

Greek gods: the Greek Aphrodite becomes the Roman Venus, Zeus becomes Jove, and so on. However, it is also well known that there is no strict equivalence between the two deities. The translation was, as translations always are, a transformation that resulted in new stories and a shifting fluidity of roles among the gods. This, I argue, is what happened with Lucretius. *De Rerum Natura* was not written as Epicurean dogma.[13] It was an original work of philosophical poetry that translated Homeric mythology and Epicurean philosophy into the Latin vernacular and thus transformed them into an original philosophy of motion. A few scholars have noted the tension between Lucretius' poetic style and Epicurean doctrine, but none has suggested that it indicated anything philosophically original as a result.[14]

The unearthing of this 'hidden Lucretius' is the subject of the present work and its companion volumes. In the first volume, *Lucretius I: An Ontology of Motion*, I located a systematic ontology of motion and a new materialism beneath the atomist and Epicurean myth of Lucretius. In the present volume, I present the reader with a unique kinetic theory of *ethics*. This second volume builds on the ontological framework developed in the first and expands it explicitly to questions of life, death, knowledge, aesthetics, sex, ecology, and ethics – as they are discussed in Books III and IV of *De Rerum Natura*.

Each of the three volumes in this trilogy has been written so that it may be read either on its own or with the others. The themes of each of the volumes of the trilogy overlap with one another just as the content of the books in the poem do. However, each volume also focuses on distinct domains of philosophical inquiry: Volume I covers Lucretius' ontology and cosmology; Volume II covers his ethics, epistemology, and aesthetics; and Volume III, his theory of history. Together, these three volumes compose an original and nearly line-by-line reading of the entirety of *De Rerum Natura*.

Notes

1. Brooke Holmes, Dakis Joannou, and Karen Marta (eds), *Liquid Antiquity* (Cologne: König Books, 2017).
2. Pierre Vesperini, *Lucrèce: archéologie d'un classique européen* (Paris: Fayard, 2017), 13.
3. See Karl Marx, *The First Writings of Karl Marx*, trans. Paul M. Schafer (New York: Ig Publishing, 2006).

4. David Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
5. See Vesperini, *Lucrèce*. Epicureanism was one of the most popular philosophical schools.
6. See Vesperini, *Lucrèce*, chs 12 and 13.
7. See Vesperini, *Lucrèce*.
8. See Thomas Nail, *Lucretius I: An Ontology of Motion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), ch. 8.
9. Nail, *Lucretius I*, 43–50.
10. The most famous Roman Epicurean was Philodemus of Gadara (c. 110–c. 40 or 35 BCE).
11. Rare exceptions include the Greek philosophical poets Xenophanes, Parmenides, and Empedocles.
12. Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008).
13. For an extremely well-argued defence of this point, see Vesperini, *Lucrèce*.
14. See Monica Gale, *Oxford Readings in Lucretius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3; Vesperini, *Lucrèce*; Gale, 'Lucretius and Previous Poetic Traditions', in Stuart Gillespie and Philip Hardie (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 59–75; James Warren, 'Lucretius and Greek Philosophy', in Gillespie and Hardie (eds), *Cambridge Companion to Lucretius*, 19–32.

Introduction

We are entering a century of motion. More than at any other time in history, people and things move longer distances, more frequently, more unequally, and more quickly than ever before. All that was solid has melted into air, and we are now all adrift like motes of dust on turbulent winds. In the world of the twenty-first century, movement and mobility increasingly define every major area of human activity, from society, science, and the arts to nature itself.

We know now, for example, that the entire universe is accelerating away from us in every direction, driven by a mysterious 'dark matter', and that all of reality consists of continuously fluctuating quantum fields. Digital images stream across the globe along these same fluctuating fields through mobile devices that connect the whole world in beautiful and precarious ways. These same flows also allow more people to move around the world than ever before in human history. We are living in an age of mass migration, when there are more than 1 billion migrants. As carbon dioxide levels and global temperatures rise, the Earth itself is now becoming more mobile. Even glaciers are on the move,[1] alongside half of all flora and fauna, migrating north at unprecedented rates.[2] Rising sea levels threaten to displace millions more people in the coming years.[3]

This *hyperkinetic modernity* poses new ethical questions that require new ethical frameworks and responses appropriate to our century. We need a new ethics that takes seriously the real historical primacy of motion and mobility that defines our age. If motion and mobility increasingly define our arts and sciences, why shouldn't ethics respond to this situation as well? We need an ethics that is responsive to our mobile lives and that takes human migration as a constitutive and foundational aspect of all social reality. As the entire biosphere changes, we need an ethics that is sensitive to the agency of matters both living and non-living.

It seems that everything is on the move today except our ethical theories and ways of thinking about the world. It is time for *new* ideas, even if those new ideas come from *old* books. The argument of this book is that we can find precisely such new ethical ideas in an unlikely source: an ancient volume of Roman poetry.

An Ethics of Motion

What new ethical idea can help us navigate the turbulent waters of the twenty-first century? I think Lucretius provides us with a least one answer to this question: an ethics *of motion*. What kind of ethics does this give us, and what problems does it solve in current ethical theory? I think it gives us four things:

1. It provides a strikingly contemporary and naturalistic foundation for all hitherto existing ethical theories. Ethics, like most of Western philosophy, has tended to locate its ground in human minds or human bodies, but has failed to explain how these so-called special ethical minds and bodies are the result of supposedly *unethical* natural processes in the first place. Lucretius' ethics of motion helps us better understand and reinterpret the material and naturalistic foundations of ethical practice.

2. It shows in detail several major errors in ethical thinking. For Lucretius, these errors all stem from the same source: the fear of death and the belief in transcendent sources of value. The purpose of the demystification of normative ethics is to help us to avoid falling prey to the unnecessary suffering that such sources produce, and instead direct us towards the realisation of our own immanent and collective desires within and alongside the natural world.

3. The materialist ethics of this book also provides us with a badly needed ethical theory that is *not centred* on human beings and biological life. Ethics, for Lucretius, is not something that originates with life or with the human intellect and is then applied to other types of beings. Lucretius argues, quite radically, that ethics is something that humans share with the rest of nature because we are all in motion. Lucretius thus offers us a non-chauvinistic ethics much better suited to responding to climate change and ecological crisis than our current anthropocentric models, including those that 'extend rights' to or find 'intrinsic values' in nature.

4. Finally, Lucretius' kinetic ethics provides us with a user's guide (rather than moral commandments) to managing our collective desires.

Ethical habits, for Lucretius, are not fixed in stone but require us to continuously reproduce them. Therefore we can, in principle, always produce something new. Lucretius also offers us several thermodynamic lessons about the energetic precarity of beings-in-motion and the material risks associated with energetic accumulation and expenditure.

This is, in short summary, an introduction to what I think Lucretius can offer us today.

Lucretian Ethics

But is there such a thing as a 'Lucretian ethics'? The almost universal answer to this question has historically been 'no': there is only an Epicurean ethics that Lucretius ventriloquised. One of the main arguments of this book is that there is a distinct Lucretian ethics – different from Epicurus and from other contemporary ethicists as well. The argument for this spans the length of this book and must be proven in textual detail. Below is only a brief introduction to some of the main differences.

Against Stasis, Against *ataraxia*

First of all, Lucretius' ethics is different from hedonism and asceticism – both attributed to Epicurus. Oddly enough, the most frequent interpretations of Epicurus' ethics seem completely opposed to one another. Epicurus sounds like a hedonist because he says pleasure is the highest good, but he is also sounds like an ascetic because he says that the maximum amount of pleasure one can obtain can be achieved only by detaching oneself from pleasure through self-discipline. More precisely, however, Epicurus called this highest ethical ideal ἀταραξία (*ataraxía*), meaning 'untroubled' or 'undisturbed', from the Greek word ταράσσω (*tarássō*, 'trouble, disturb'). The highest good, for Epicurus, is therefore to have no pain and no pleasure. This is achieved through a simple life of individual contemplation.

For Epicurus there are two kinds of pleasures: *katastematic* pleasures and kinetic pleasures. *Katastematic* pleasures are those that occur in the absence of pain [*aponia*] and in an undisturbed mind [*ataraxia*]. Kinetic pleasures, however, are those that occur through movement and action. The aim of Epicurean ethics is to attain the former and try one's best to steer clear of the latter. For Epicurus, only the gods exist in perfect *ataraxia*.

There are without doubt similarities between Lucretian and Epicurean

ethics, but let's focus on two important differences. First and most important, for Lucretius there are only kinetic sensations because all of matter is in motion, including the mind. The interconnected, unceasing, and continuous movement of the mind, body, and soul is the main thesis of Book III. Lucretius is explicit in numerous places that there is nothing static in nature.[4] The mind cannot escape movement through egoistic contemplation. Thus one never will find Lucretius saying, as Epicurus does, that one should try and avoid all kinetic pleasures.

On the contrary, Lucretius' poem is filled with sensuous scenes of moving desire the like of which Epicurus would never have dreamed of writing, such as the erotic love scene between Venus and Mars (1.32–5), the poet's own intoxication and orgiastic penetration by the 'wand' of Bacchus (1.927–34), the auto-erotics of bodies along the riverbanks (2.29–33), and the ecstatic convulsions of reading philosophy (3.28–9). Lucretius even opens *De Rerum Natura* with a proem to Venus: the desire and pleasure of gods and men (1.1). There is perhaps no less Epicurean a way to open an Epicurean treatise than an invocation of a Venusian nature overflowing with desire, sex, war, and death, as Lucretius offers. However, Lucretius also never says that 'pleasure is the highest good'. He even explicitly warns against the dangers of romantic idealism (4.1121–40).

So Lucretius is neither a hedonist nor an ascetic, nor does he think there is any *ataraxia* in nature. This leads to a second difference with Epicurus: if there is no *ataraxia* in nature because matter is ceaselessly moving (2.97–9), then there can be no motionless and unperturbed Epicurean gods, either. Such gods are explicitly impossible for Lucretius, and so he invokes them only as ideas that 'sprung from [Epicurus'] mind' (3.14).

Against Transcendent Values

With the following simple philosophical statement, Lucretius opens up an entirely new ethical path: *everything moves*. If all of nature moves, there can be no unchanging, pregiven, or transcendent ethical values. Ethics is entirely immanent to action and sensuous practice. This means that there is no Platonic or metaphysical category of 'the good' for Lucretius. It also means that there are no Aristotelian virtues, either. Since virtues are by definition good things to do, the origin of this goodness that all virtues have in common only raises the metaphysical question of how such virtues became good in the first place. For Lucretius, there are no

virtues or even any fixed definitions of virtues that precede or exceed the human movements that produce them materially, practically, and historically.

Furthermore, if everything is in motion, then hedonism, asceticism, and utilitarianism are unable to determine in advance what will produce pleasure and what will produce pain. This is especially problematic in the case of the creation of *new* unknown pleasures. Lucretius explicitly rejects any attempt to calculate the wildly different and changing pleasures and pains of different people and creatures (3.310–15). This does not mean that there are not situations of more or less pain for certain beings; it just means that the search for pleasure cannot be the *a priori* starting point of ethics. Pleasure-oriented theories all assume the existence of rational humans capable of the pleasure calculus, rather than showing how the value of pleasure itself emerged historically and practically in the first place. For Lucretius, pleasure and happiness have to be made through movement; they do not pre-exist the practical and sensuous conditions of movement.

Finally, and for similar reasons, for Lucretius there is no such thing as a static, universal, moral duty independent of the historical and sensuous actions that are affected by moral demands and actively reproduce them. Humans might perform various duties *as if* they were universal, ahistorical, and given from a god or human reason, but duty ethics offers no explanation of its own origin in nature.

In one way or another, all these ethical theories assume the existence of a transcendent value that simply exists without any explanation or theory of how such a theory could have emerged from nature in the first place. Ethics has largely abandoned nature. Instead, ethicists tend to posit the origin of such values in an unmoving human rationality, god, or other 'non-natural' form. Ethics has thus historically subordinated matter and motion to some other value as if this value did not *come from matter and motion itself*. For Lucretius, such ethical theories obscure the real desires of those performing them. The danger of this mystification, according to Lucretius, is that we become slaves to these ideas as if they had some kind of autonomy over our collective reproduction of them.

Lucretius' brilliant move was not to deny the existence of ethical practice but to provide a material, kinetic, and naturalist theory of its emergence. Lucretius thus gave us the first truly immanent ethical philosophy. He gave us an ethics that does not assume the existence of any

transcendent value, but rather showed us how value itself emerges from nature and how new values and pleasures can be made.

Today the world is in motion, but our ethics are still based on ideas of *static* values. Something is wrong with this picture. One of the core arguments of this book and of Lucretius' philosophy more generally is that these static and unchanging moral theories stem from a fear of death. If there are transcendent and ahistorical values and we can think them, we believe this allows us to participate directly in their 'immortality' in some way. By participating in and contemplating such metaphysical values, including the *a priori* valorisation of sensuous pleasure or happiness, humans feel they have discovered something unchanging and fixed about nature. We have come to think of ethical abstraction and moral obedience as weapons against death.

Even contemporary neoliberal capitalism, for all its mobility, dynamism, adaptability, and responsiveness, remains obsessed with the static metaphysical belief in economic *value*: the belief in a quality-less *abstract quantity* of human labour time. Nothing could be more contrary to the vision of nature described by Lucretius than this.[5]

In direct contrast to nature's constantly changing and dissipating flow of matter, capitalist economics is also premised on the false notion of equality of exchange or equivalence. In nature, however, there is no such thing. Nature, for Lucretius, is neither identical to itself at any point nor identical between points. Matter always flows asymmetrically, entropically, and in metastable patterns of increasing non-equilibrium. Equivalence and equilibrium are, physically speaking, for Lucretius, violations of the historical tendency of the universe to kinetically dissipate and expend itself.

By acting *as if* equivalence, equilibrium, identity, and exchange are real aspects of nature, however, economics, and capitalist economics in particular, have increasingly damaged the Earth. When we act as if nature moves in one way when it really moves in another, huge disruptions in those motions occur. Capitalist constructivists have acted as if they could simply make up or construct a set of rules or values on top of nature and live in their own reality. They are like someone swimming upstream while insisting that it is the easiest and most natural way to move in the river.

Classical, neoclassical, and orthodox economic theory also acts as if economic exchange were a *reversible* process – when physically speaking, it is not. The philosophical assumption of economics since Hume has

been that *scarcity* is the basis and starting point of economics – when, again, nothing of the sort exists in nature. The ideas of equivalence, equilibrium, reversibility, and scarcity are false – meaning that they have never been found in nature.

By acting *as if* a commodity were strictly identical to its exchange value (how much money it is exchanged for), capitalist economics have not considered the ecological impacts of deforestation, pollution, and climate change or the human impacts of social devalorisation (racism, sexism, classism) as integral and constitutive aspects of the economic process. These devalued flows of matter literally have 'no value'. As Marx rightly says, capitalists act *as if* the product is *abstracted* or independent from the process that produced it. As a counter-example, if we assigned even a modest monetary value to the energy expenditure of trees and plants, to women's domestic labour, or to migration and human displacement, profit would be impossible. In short, all economics, and capitalist economics in particular, requires the constitutive exclusion of the material kinetic conditions that support its abstract exchange process.

By privileging *life*, accumulation, conservation, and utility, capitalism devalorises and destroys everything it associates with death, expenditure, reciprocity, and non-useful waste. Hence, we have witnessed a long history of ecocide, indigenous genocide, slavery, patriarchy, forced migration, and biopolitics. Lucretius gave us the basic ontological and ethical diagnostic of this problem light-years ahead of his time.

The fear of death motivates all manner of metaphysical values and idealisms because we think death is a negativity or lack. We think that death and matter are inert and passive. The Western tradition fears nothing more than becoming 'nothing', and has invented all kinds of ideas to try and escape this fate (God, the soul, reason, and capitalism). This fear of death is also connected to the Western tradition's deep-seated hatred of matter and motion in all their manifestations (women, racial others, the poor, animals, nature, queer desires).[6] Hence, the increasing importance of recovering a new materialist and kinetic ethics today.

Even Epicurus' calm contemplation of eternal unchanging atoms falls prey to the same idealist fantasy found in Democritus' static atoms.[7] In contrast, however, I argue that Lucretius is a true materialist and an ethical naturalist. He alone embraced death because he alone believed in the active and creative power of continuously moving matter.

These are only the broad strokes of what Lucretian ethics is *not*.

But what *is* Lucretian ethics? Our answer begins in the next chapter. However, before turning to the details of Lucretius' ethical theory, a few methodological notes are in order to prepare the reader for how this book will proceed.

Method

This book is structured around four methodological axes.

Historical Ontology

We always come to a text-in-motion and from our own historical and geographical trajectories. Texts are not static things with fixed meanings determined by author or reception, but as material bodies they have their own agency and changing patterns. Every reading of a text is an event or process of collective creation between a variety of processes, including author, reader, text, geography, and history – like a story told by other stories. As historical processes the author, reader, and text are never fully present to themselves but enter into new combinations. Their being is *in motion*.[8]

However, this does not mean that rereadings of texts are arbitrary, or up to the free construction of human subjects who have nothing to do with the real being of the text. Each new reading is an iteration or rewriting of the real text inside the text, as a real dimension of the text. Accordingly, this book is not an attempt to fix an absolute meaning to Lucretius forever and all time, but rather to unfold another real dimension inside or beneath the old one. Each interpretation is like a simulacral membrane peeling off the text. It is not a copy but a real piece or aspect of the text.

Thus, the method of his book is *historical* in the sense that it is situated along specific geographical and temporal trajectories, but it is also *ontological* in the sense that its intersection with the text bears directly on the moving-reality of the text itself. This book is an intersection of paths or trajectories that, when looked at from a certain position, produce a real pattern or constellation.

Close Reading

This book is structured by a close reading of Books III and IV of *De Rerum Natura*, in which Lucretius puts forward his core ethical theory. Book III is about the mortality of the mind, body, and soul and argues

against a static ethics of Epicurean contemplation. Since ethics has been largely idealist, Lucretius counters this first by providing a material and kinetic theory of the mind, body, and soul that produces such powerful abstractions in the first place. Here we get a fascinating new ethico-epistemology.

Book IV is about the powers of the mind, body, and soul. Here Lucretius argues against the existence of anything like an ideal or non-sensuous transcendent value. Lucretius gives us instead an ethics grounded in the sensuous movement of images. In other words he gives us a new ethico-aesthetics. The chapters and main headings of this book proceed sequentially, topic by topic, through the text. The purpose of this method is to show systematically and textually, not just argumentatively, that Lucretius had an ethics of motion and not an Epicurean theory of *ataraxia*.

Translation

The third methodological axis is translation. In this volume, I continue to leave untranslated the Latin word *corpora* to highlight the absence of any language of atoms, just as I did in *Lucretius I*. I also continue to stress the crucial difference between Lucretius' words for 'matter' [*corpora*, *semina*, *rerum primordia*] and his words for 'thing' [*rerum*, *rebus*, *res*], which are often conceptually and terminologically conflated in translation. Additionally, in this volume I have often translated the Latin term *primordia* as 'first-threads' in order to highlight its connection to the abundance of weaving and folding terminology used in Books III and IV: *textum*, *nexus*, *plexum*, *calathus*, *exordia*.

Perhaps more than any other books in *De Rerum Natura*, Books III and IV rely on weaving terminology and images to develop their core theories of mind, body, soul, perception, desire, and dreams. Therefore, I have also chosen to emphasise weaving terminology in order to show that instead of atoms, in Lucretius we find *flows* or *threads* of *woven matter*. If Lucretius is talking about discrete unchanging atoms then the consistent deployment of weaving images in the poem makes no sense whatsoever, because *atoms cannot fold or weave*.

Furthermore, the kinetic act of translation itself means that no one, especially not Epicurus, can be 'the last word' on the meaning of *De Rerum Natura*. Lucretius' act of translation actively makes something new and perhaps monstrous inside Epicurus that goes well beyond authorial intention and stems directly from a transfiguration particular to the

Latin language and culture. There is no translation that is not also a transformation. This is true both of Lucretius' reading of Epicurus and my reading of Lucretius, translating from Latin to English.

Lucretius says he is '*turning*' Epicurus' philosophy 'into my fatherly/native words' [*in patrias qui possim vertere voces*] (5.337). The Latin word *vertere*, to turn, takes on a crucial meaning here because it also refers to the unpredictable and unrepresentable 'swerve' of matter. Lucretius is not just copying Epicurus; he is twisting, turning, and swerving him in new directions. Lucretius was not deaf to the resonances of the word *ver-* in *ver-tere* in his '*Latinis ver-sibus*' (1.137; verses are things that 'turn') in which he is considering the question of 'truth' [*ver-um*] by associating it with the dynamic changes of 'spring' [*ver*].[9]

Argumentation

The fourth axis is composed of several argumentative theses directly supported by the close textual reading. These are: 1) Lucretius was not an Epicurean atomist, 2) Lucretius developed his own unique philosophical system in which movement and matter were primary, and 3) Lucretius developed a unique kinetic and materialist ethics, epistemology, and aesthetics consistent with his ontology and physics from Books I and II.

I also believe that Lucretius' ethical theory is a promising starting point for thinking about contemporary ethical issues. However, this book will not be able both to argue that such an ethics exists and then apply it to all our contemporary problems. If the reader is interested to see more precisely how the philosophy of movement contributes to thinking about the big contemporary events of our time, I refer them to my other books on these topics.[10] My hope for this book in particular is that others will find this unique movement-oriented ethical framework useful in their own ways to issues they care about.

Each chapter of this book thus uses close reading, original translation, and argumentation together to show the big picture of what is going on in the text.

Conclusion

If we are entering a century of motion, then we are going to need some new ethical and theoretical tools to think through some of the biggest events of our time. Although it might seem strange that such a new

ethics would come from such an old and apparently obscure book, I would like to remind the reader that every epoch, since the rediscovery of *De Rerum Natura* in the fifteenth century, has returned to this incredible book. Virtually all the greatest minds of Western culture, including scientists, philosophers, artists, and political thinkers, have read this book and derived new inspiration.

Importantly, however, each age has also differed significantly in its interpretations and translations.[11] Each age has made Lucretius answer *its* questions. There is thus not one Lucretius forever and for all time. Each age has its own Lucretius. This is what I think we are rediscovering today and what I hope this book can contribute to: a Lucretius for our time.

Notes

1. Samantha Page, 'World's Glaciers Melting Faster Than Ever Before Recorded, Study Finds', *Think Progress*, 5 August 2015, https://thinkprogress.org/worlds-glaciers-melting-faster-than-ever-before-recorded-study-finds-3ee73aa09038/ (accessed 10 September 2019).
2. Craig Welch, 'Half of All Species Are on the Move – And We're Feeling It'. *National Geographic*, 27 April 2017, https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/04/climate-change-species-migration-disease/ (accessed 10 September 2019).
3. Geoff Brumfiel, 'Sea Levels Rose Faster Last Century than in Previous 2,700 Years, Study Finds', National Public Radio, 23 February 2016, https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/02/23/467813673/sea-levels-rose-faster-last-century-than-in-previous-2-700-years-study-finds (accessed 10 September 2019).
4. See Thomas Nail, *Lucretius I: An Ontology of Motion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).
5. See Thomas Nail, *Marx: The Birth of Value*, unpublished manuscript, under review with Oxford University Press; Thomas Nail, *Theory of the Earth*, unpublished manuscript, under review with Oxford University Press.
6. See Mel Chen, *Animacies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).
7. See Thomas Nail, *Being and Motion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), ch. 3 and Part III for a critique of the vitalist tradition up to Gilles Deleuze. Even Baruch Spinoza's atomistic vitalism is part of the historical fear of death and inorganic materialism.

8. See Nail, *Being and Motion*.
9. Jane M. Snyder, *Puns and Poetry in Lucretius' De rerum natura* (Amsterdam: Gruner, 1980).
10. Thomas Nail, *The Figure of the Migrant* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015); Thomas Nail, *Theory of the Border* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Nail, *Being and Motion*; Thomas Nail, *Theory of the Image* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Thomas Nail, *Theory of the Object*, unpublished manuscript, under review with Oxford University Press; *Theory of the Earth*, unpublished manuscript.
11. For a study of the reception of Lucretius, see Catherine Wilson, *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008).