The poetics of anthropogony: men, women, and children in Lucretius, book five

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Gail Hareven's short story 'The Slows' unfolds through a trick of focalization[2]. The first-person narrator is an anthropologist who has been living with a deviant population – the 'Slows' of the story's title – for some fifteen years. He has just learned that his field study is about to come to end with the closing of the 'Preserves' and, we can infer, the destruction of his research subjects. After a night of hard drinking, he arrives early in the office the next morning in search of coffee only to find a Slow waiting for him, a female. Instead of buzzing the security guards, he decides to see if

1 — This article is a slightly modified version of "The Poetic Logic of Negative Exceptionalism: From a State of Nature to Social Life in Lucretius, Book Five", in *Lucretius: Poetry, Philosophy, Science*, Daryn Lehoux, A. D. Morrison and Alison Sharrock (eds.), 153-91 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). I thank OUP and *Eugesta*, and especially Jacqueline Fabre-Serris, for the opportunity to reprint it here. I am also grateful to the other participants at the "Lucretius: Poetry, Philosophy, Science" conference in Manchester, especially David Konstan, as well as to David Armstrong, Joy Connolly, Denis Feeney, Bob Kaster, Joshua Katz, Daryn Lehoux, Andrew Morrison, Jerry Passannante, Alison Sharrock, John Van Sickle, and Katharina Volk for stimulating criticisms, comments, and encouragement; Jake Mackey, as usual, offered useful leads and original insights.

2 — Hareven (2009).

he can get some final data out of the intruder. He immediately questions the wisdom of his decision when she reaches behind the desk for what he suspects is a weapon. What she lifts up, to his surprise, is a 'human larva' or, in the language of the Slows, a 'baby'.

It is this larva that turns out to divide our narrator from his savage guest. Indeed, it is what shocks us out of our identification with him. For the Slows, we find out, are defined by their refusal to submit their infants to A.O.G.: Accelerated Offspring Growth, which turns newborns into autonomous, productive adults in less than three months. And what defines the narrator through whose posthuman eyes we view the 'squirming pinkish creature' is sheer disgust. There are times in a person's life that are meant to be private, he observes, and the state of infancy certainly ranks among the most important. He cannot fathom why the Slows are so attached to the helplessness of their larvae, the 'deplorable fervor' of the little creatures, their long-term dependence on the mother and her 'milk bulges'. The story leaves us with a question. Does our naked vulnerability contribute in some significant way to our definition as human?

Lucretius had no doubt that the human condition could be summed up by the image of the defenseless infant. Toward the beginning of Book 5 of the *De Rerum Natura*, as he is preparing to discuss the origins of our world, he introduces the figure of the newborn in lines that enjoyed a robust afterlife as a recognizably Lucretian *topos*[3].

> Tum porro puer, ut saevis proiectus ab undis
> navita, nudus humi iacet, infans, indigus omni
> vitali auxilio, cum primum in luminis oras
> nixibus ex alvo matris natura profudit,
> vagituque locum lugubri complet, ut aequumst
> cui tantum in vita restet transire malorum (Lucr. 5.222-7).

> Then further the child, like a sailor cast forth by the cruel waves, lies naked upon the ground, speechless, in need of every kind of vital support, as soon as nature has spilt him forth with throes from his mother's womb into the regions of light, and he fills all around with doleful wailings – as is but just, seeing that so much trouble awaits him in life to pass through[4].

The idea that we are born into such great unhappiness that it is better not to be born at all has well-known parallels in earlier Greek authors[5].

3 — See Goulon (1972) 14-26; Rochette (1992); Sacré (1992).

4 — Translations from Lucretius are adapted from M. F. Smith, whose text I have used unless otherwise noted.

5 — See, e.g., Emped. (DK31) B124; Hdt. V 4.2; Soph. *OC* 1224-38. For Latin authors, see, e.g., Cic. *Tusc*. I 115; Plin. *HN* VII 1.3. For the specific motif of the hapless newborn, see August. *Contra Iulianum Pelag*. IV 12.60 (paraphrasing the beginning of Cic. *Rep*. III 1, now lost); [Pl.] *Ax*. 366d; Plut. *Mor*. 496B-C. See further Goulon (1972), esp. 3-8 and *infra*, n.7.

But Lucretius is not primarily after the grim pessimism familiar from archaic poetry (and condemned by Epicurus himself [*Ep. Men*. 126]). He is engaged, rather, in a polemic, first launched in Book 2, against the idea that the world was created providentially for us. The naked infant is the crowning proof in a series of arguments designed to show how very inhospitable the world is to human beings. In fact, what distinguishes us from other species is that we are *least* at home here:

> At variae crescunt pecudes armenta feraeque,
> nec crepitacillis opus est, nec cuiquam adhibendast
> almae nutricis blanda atque infracta loquella,
> nec varias quaerunt vestes pro tempore caeli,
> denique non armis opus est, non moenibus altis,
> qui sua tutentur, quando omnibus omnia large
> tellus ipsa parit naturaque daedala rerum (Lucr. 5.228-34).

> But the diverse flocks and herds grow, and wild creatures; they need no rattles, none of them wants to hear the coaxing and broken baby-talk of the foster-nurse, they seek no change of raiment according to the season, lastly they need no weapons, no lofty walls to protect their own, since for them all the earth herself brings forth all they want in abundance, and nature the cunning fashioner of things.

The human race, in short, seems to be the only species shut out of nature's spontaneous bounty[6].

The idea that humans alone have needs that are unmet by the natural world can be traced back to Greek rationalist prehistory, and not least of all to the fragments of Democritus[7]. But from the later fourth century BCE on, it gained a polemical edge in response to the growing traction of the opposing claim that the world was created for the sake of people (*hominum causa*). By the time Lucretius was writing his poem, anthropocentric teleology was flourishing, no doubt thanks in large part to the Stoics'

6 — Does this mean that animals are beneficiaries of a providential Nature? Technically no (so Costa 1984, 68 *ad* 228 ff., followed by Konstan (2013) 207-8). But I think that Lucretius' language here (*tellus ipsa parit naturaque daedala rerum*) rhetorically flirts with that claim to sharpen the lack of providence for human beings.

7 — On Democritus, see Cole 1990. See also [Hippoc.], *VM* 3 (Littré 1.576=121,5-10 Jouanna), where all animals gain sufficient nourishment from what the earth provides with the exception of humans (ἐκτὸς ἀνθρώπου); Pl. *Prt*. 321c-322a; *Plt*. 274b-d. In these authors, the vulnerability of humans leads to the emergence (or gifting) of *tekhnē*. In later authors, a similar idea is expressed through the idea that Nature is not a mother but a stepmother – a predictably wicked character – for humans: see esp. August. *Contra Iulianum Pelag*. IV 12.60 (paraphrasing Cic. *Rep*. III 1); Philo, *Post. Caini* 46-7; Plin. *HN* VII 1.1-5, with Goulon (1972) 8-11. For pointed rejoinders (usually stressing reason as the highest good), see Arist. *PA* 690b; Sen. *Ben*. II 29; *Ep*. 74.15-21; 90.18.

enthusiasm for teleology (their anthropocentrism is more complicated)[8]. He was most certainly not alone in trying to refute it. We have evidence of criticisms by others – not only Epicureans, but also Academics and Sceptics – and often for reasons similar to those introduced by Lucretius (such as the abundance of creatures deadly to humans and the vast swaths of uninhabitable regions)[9]. Still, Lucretius expends considerable rhetorical energy on dismissing the idea that nature bestows providential care on humankind. Moreover, the further criticism that humans are far worse off than all the other species appears to be a particularly Lucretian preoccupation, more at home in the poetic and moralizing tradition than in philosophical and scientific debates about teleology[10]. However much Lucretius's approach to anthropogony and anthropology must cleave to Epicurus's own (lost) account, then, it shows signs of being marked by his

8 — The earliest extant version of the idea that the world was made for the sake of humans (ἀνθρώπων ἕνεκα) is attributed to Socrates at Xen. *Mem*. IV 3, esp. 3.8-12 (see also I 4.11-14, on the special care shown to humans by the gods). For its association with the Stoics, see, e.g., Cic. *Nat. D*. I 23; II 154-67; but cf. Sen. *Ira* II 27.2, where the universe is divinely ordered but not *for* the sake of humans (I thank Bob Kaster for bringing this passage to my attention). The Stoics were long thought to be the targets of Lucretius's attack at 2.177-82 and 5.195-234: see Bailey (1947) 3.1338-9, 1344-5; Munro (1886) 3.130, 296; Ernout and Robin (1925-8) 3.18-21; De Lacy (1948) 15-19; Solmsen (1951) 3-5. But cf. Furley (1966) 27-30, arguing that the targets must be Epicurus's enemies (namely, Plato and Aristotle) on the grounds that Lucretius did not adapt his master's polemics to contemporary opponents. The argument for 'Lucretius the fundamentalist' is developed further at Sedley (1998) 62-93: see esp. 75-78 and 152-53 on this passage. See also Sedley (2007) 140n.15, 143, and his arguments in favor of locating a providential reading of the *Timaeus* as early as Polemo's Academy at Sedley (2002) 65. For a defense of the traditional view, see Schmidt (1990), esp. 152-211. I find most plausible the position that the anti-teleological arguments Epicurus may have aimed at Plato would have been seen as arguments against the Stoics in first-century Italy: see esp. Fowler (2000) 140, astutely framing the question in terms of reception; see also Kleve (1978) 66; Smith (1986) 201; Campbell (2003) 57; Smith (2003) 83; and Johnson (2013), esp. 109n.15. Gale (2013) argues that Hesiod is another opponent targeted by Lucretius's anti-providential polemic.

9 — For the pest argument, see Cic. *Acad*. II 120, with Reid (1885) 318; Philo *Prov*. II 56-65; Plut. fr. 193 (Sandbach) [=Porph. *Abst*. III 20]. Lactant. *De ira Dei* 13 suggests the argument was associated with the Academics. De Lacy (1948) 19 attributes it more specifically to Carneades and suggests that the Epicureans later appropriated it; see also Bailey (1947) 3.1353; Schmidt (1990) 200-1; cf. Sedley (1998) 74n.60. On the inhospitable nature of the world, see Diog. Oen. frr. 20-2 (Smith), notes in Smith (1976) 284-95, and Diog. Oen. NF126-7, with Smith (1998) 131-46; *id*. (2003) 74-84. On the ancient arguments against anthropocentric teleology more generally, see Schmidt (1990), esp. 152-211; Schmidt also includes Stoic counter-arguments, on which see also Sedley (2007) 231-8.

10 — Sedley (1998) 74n.60 notes that the idea that other species have it better than us is absent from the Academic rebuttal of providentialism. The claim does not appear in Diogenes (who often parallels Lucretius, almost certainly reflecting Epicurus as a common source rather than direct influence: see Smith (1986)). The fragmentary *On Providence* (*PHerc*. 1670) tentatively ascribed to Philodemus seems to argue against Stoic providence by pointing to the ills and diseases that trouble humans, without mentioning, as far as we can tell, our unique disadvantage in relationship to other species: on the text, see Ferrario (1972). Velleius is vague about the ills that assail us at Cic. *Nat. D*. I 2 but does not mention the exceptional vulnerability of humans. For the motif of negative exceptionalism in other contexts, see *supra*, nn.5, 7. Goulon (1972) 11 speculates that Lucretius was the first to adopt the theme of nature as a stepmother to Epicureanism, a claim that I find very plausible.

acute awareness of the unusual vulnerability of human beings within an indifferent natural world[11]. I refer to an approach to the human condition in these terms as 'negative exceptionalism'.

From the perspective of negative exceptionalism, we can see more easily that the image of the naked child, for all the work it does in the anti-providentialist argument, poses one of the greatest challenges to the story that Lucretius will tell about the origins of humankind. For if the defenselessness so starkly on display at birth makes it difficult to argue for a benevolent creator, how can we explain the survival of the species at all? Here, too, the problem does not originate with Lucretius. The infancy of the human race is a puzzle that goes back at least to Anaximander, who seems to have believed that our first ancestors were nourished inside fish-like creatures until they reached puberty, at which point they emerged, self-sufficient, into the world[12]. Yet it is a puzzle, like that of negative exceptionalism more generally, that holds an uncommonly powerful charge for Lucretius in Book 5, where he aims to give an account of the success of human evolution while respecting the anti-teleology that is so foundational to Epicurean doctrine.

In this paper, I argue that the problem of nakedness, both literal and figurative, exerts considerable pressure on Lucretius's anthropogony and his reconstruction of early human life. The vulnerability spectacularly expressed by the infant can help us better understand, in particular, Lucretius's opaque and much-discussed explanation of the origins of the family and what has variously been called justice, altruism, pity, and friendship at 5.1011-27. What is more, recognizing the sudden appearance of children in Lucretius's story of early human life makes us aware of their puzzling absence from the more primitive stages of that story and the problem posed by infancy to the survival of the human race after the very literal maternal function of the earth is exhausted and only mothers remain. The emergence of the nuclear family entrusts children to fathers, who take over the protective role once exercised by nature. Yet by taking on the paternal role, men recognize their own vulnerability. They are thus compelled to form a community of equals, thereby completing the transition from nature to a human nature that is nevertheless deeply gendered, a fact that has been largely ignored by scholars. The success of human

11 — On vulnerability in Lucretius more generally, see Kenney (1972) 13-14; Segal (1990); Nussbaum (1994) 239-79, esp. 254-9, focusing on this passage.

12 — See Censorinus *DN* IV.7; Hippol. *Haer*. I.6.6; Plut. *Mor*. 730E; [Plut.] *Strom*. 2. The need for a theory of early childcare to account for the survival of the species is underscored by the Peripatetic Critolaus (*apud* Philo, *Aet. Mundi*. 66-7), who goes on to reject an explanation of human origins in these terms (on the grounds that the idea the earth provided such care is implausible). Theories of autochthony circumvent the problem by seeing humans as first springing full-grown from the ground.

nature will be, of course, mixed. However much social life realizes human nature it also creates abundant conditions for its perversion, a problem Lucretius faces not just within his narrative but as a poet seeking to undo the damage caused by society to his readers and enable their flourishing. And whether he achieves his aim has much to do with how well he can account for our survival – or rather what Lucretius describes at 5.1027 as the propagation of the species to the present day – in the absence of providential care.

I have adopted an interpretive strategy that attends to the 'poetic logic' of Lucretius's account as it responds to philosophical and scientific problems – namely, the problems of, first, reconciling the exceptional vulnerability of humans with their survival as a species in a world without providence; and, second, explaining the role of communities in this evolutionary success. Or, to put it another way, I inquire into how Lucretius confronts specific problems within the tradition of natural history through the conceptual idiom of Book 5. In pursuing the poetic logic of negative exceptionalism, I hope not only to shed light on the difficult excursus at 5.1011-27 and the prehistory more generally but also to contribute to our understanding of how poetry, philosophy, and science work together in the *De Rerum Natura*.

The paper falls into two uneven halves. In the first part, I concentrate on how Lucretius handles vulnerability in the earliest stages of human life both as a poetic theme and as a plot device that drives human evolution. In recent years, scholars have succeeded in advancing discussion of the prehistory beyond the debate about progressivism versus primitivism towards a more nuanced and incisive look at its competing elements[13]. They have enriched our understanding of how Lucretius engages with his major sources, including Golden Age myths, the 'rationalist' pre-histories that start to appear in the fifth century BCE, and Epicurus's own *On Nature*, a text largely lost to us. Building on this work, I argue that the well-known ambivalence of the prehistory serves a specific purpose in that it enables Lucretius to keep humans alive while mounting the necessary pressure to split them off from the natural world.

In the second, longer part of the paper, I inquire into the ways in which the unresolved problem of the prehistory – namely, the uncertain future of the human race – shapes Lucretius's description of the origins of sociality. If the early history of humans has been approached in pre-

13 — The primitivist/progressivist debate goes back over a century to the progressivist reading of Guyau (1878) 154-71 and the counter-reading of Robin (1916). See also Lovejoy and Boas (1935); Taylor (1947); Merlan (1950); Farrington (1953); Borle (1962); Ruch (1969); Furley (1978); Blundell (1986) 190-201; Blickman (1989); Gale (1994) 174-7. Many of these scholars ascribe elements of both primitivism and progressivism to Lucretius. For some recent attempts to move past these terms altogether, see Farrell (1994); Campbell (2003) 10-12, 181-2; *id*. (2006) 39-60.

dominantly poetic terms, 5.1011-27 has been seen largely in terms of doctrinal Epicurean positions. It is often read in isolation from the rest of the poem, paired instead with other sources on the social dimension of Epicurean ethics. While such an approach has fleshed out the philosophical background to the passage, it has not succeeded in accounting for all the details of Lucretius's story. I cannot claim to have solved all the difficulties either. But I do hope to show that we can make better sense of the passage by taking it as part of Lucretius's larger attempt to manage the exceptional status of the human race, an attempt that must be understood not simply in analytical and philosophical terms, but also in poetic and narrative ones.

I. The State of Nature

Despite the lack of consensus regarding the targets of Lucretius's argument against anthropocentric teleology, we can easily conclude he saw it as an important one in his arsenal[14]. The argument first appears in Book 2, as I noted above, where Lucretius attacks the belief that the gods are responsible for the fixity of the seasons, the resulting success of human agriculture, and, most important, the propagation of the species. It is obvious to anyone, he declares, even if they lack knowledge of atomic reality, that the world was not created on our behalf:

> Nam quamvis rerum ignorem primordia quae sint,
> hoc tamen ex ipsis caeli rationibus ausim
> confirmare aliisque ex rebus reddere multis,
> nequaquam nobis divinitus esse creatam
> naturam mundi: tanta stat praedita culpa.
> quae tibi posterius, Memmi, faciemus aperta (Lucr. 2.177-82).

> For although I might not know what first-beginnings of things are, this nevertheless I would make bold to maintain from the ways of heaven itself, and to demonstrate from many another source, that the nature of the universe has by no means been made for us through divine power: so great are the faults it stands endowed with. All this, Memmius, I will make clear to you later.

Lucretius promises to come back to the flaws that vitiate the argument for a providential creator. In Book 5, he fulfills that promise. The argument is again introduced with the claim, repeated almost verbatim from the earlier version, that one need not have a grasp of the first-beginnings to see that the world was not made for us (5.195-9). Lucretius once more blames its flaws, but now he goes on to list them: wild animals, lands

14 — See *supra*, n.8.

made uninhabitable by extremes of heat and cold, grudging soil that forces men to work hard for their sustenance, and untimely death. It is at this point that we reach the newborn.

The invocation of the child concludes the argument against providentialism, and Lucretius moves on to a demonstration of the mortality of the earth. But the indictment of cosmic benevolence continues to be felt when Lucretius deals with our place in the natural world more directly in his account of the origins of the human race. It is felt, more specifically, as a tension between the harsh state of affairs in the present and the primeval conditions of human existence. For what is so remarkable about the story of early human life is that it flies in the face, at least initially, of the idea that the earth is indifferent or hostile to people. In the beginning, we, too, were provided for by a very mother-like nature. Lucretius is thus under obligation to explain how the break in our harmonious relationship with the earth came about without destroying the human race.

The first human young gain access to the care of the earth by being lumped together with the other species in the phrase *mortalia saecla* (5.791, 805)[15]. Yet if the specificity of the human is suppressed at this point, it resurfaces in the surprisingly anthropomorphic image of the earth in its youth. The spontaneous emergence of animal life is due first and foremost to the abundance of heat and moisture, crucial factors for organic development in virtually all our early medical and biological texts[16]. But these factors alone are not sufficient for viable life forms. Rather than arising directly from the earth, the first animals gestate in disembodied wombs that take root in suitable places, forcing their way out into the world only once they have reached an appropriate age[17]. The earth sends forth a milk-like liquid to nourish the newborns (*pueris*), who are clothed in the warmth of the young earth and sleep on beds of downy grass[18]. Even if, then, the earth was not created *for us*, the fact that it created us seems to entail, at least initially, the provision of vital

15 — Munro (1886) 3.324 takes *mortalia saecla* at 5.805 to refer only to human beings, in keeping with standard usage (although he sees the words at 5.793 as referring to all living things). Cf. Bailey (1947) 3.1453, 1456, arguing that it must include 'terrestrial animals including men' (excluding birds); see also Ernout and Robin (1925-8) 3.110. West (1964) 100 suggests that the phrase in both instances is more expansive; see also Schrijvers (1999) 1-3. The most convincing interpretations understand the phrase to encompass human beings in both instances: see Waszinck (1964) 48-51; Farrell (1994) 87-8; Grilli (1995) 20-1; Campbell (2003) 55-6. The lines at 5.805-20 must, then, be an account of the origins of human life.

16 — For the role of these factors in Presocratic anthropogony, see Blundell (1986) 24-53; Campbell (2003) 63-4, 332; *id.* (2006) 21-6. On medical writing, see, e.g., [Hippocr.] *Carn.* 2 (Littré 8.584=188,12-21 Joly), where heat is privileged in the formation of the cosmos and organic life. On spontaneous generation in Lucretius, see further Johnson (2013).

17 — Reading Marullus's emendation *aetas* at 809 (*aestas* OQ: *aestus* Lachmann).

18 — As Bailey (1947) 3.1457 observes, the use of *pueris* and *vestem* suggests that Lucretius has the human child foremost in his mind. See also Farrell (1994) 88.

support, just as, Lucretius says, nature directs milk to the breasts of a new mother to nourish the infant (5.813-15)[19]. The language of provision, admittedly, does not seem appropriate to an orthodox Epicurean. The care received by the first animals should be the outcome of contingent processes[20]. Yet the earth's assimilation to a mother carries with it a cluster of ideas that resist disentanglement.

The motif of maternity is, of course, a live wire in the poem. When Lucretius remarks at 5.795-6 that the earth, by virtue of having created all things, merits the title of 'mother', we are probably meant to recall the extended *Magna Mater* passage in Book 2 (2.586-660) and, more distantly, the figure of Venus that opens the poem in its most famous allegorical excursus[21]. Those passages, like the discussion in Book 5, build on a longstanding analogy between the earth and a mother[22]. Yet whereas calling the earth 'mother' in Book 2 is fraught with the risks of mistaking something lacking even sensation for a personified figure and failing to understand the true nature of the gods, the surreal maternity of the earth in Book 5 has a crucial pragmatic function in that it subtly resolves the problem of caring for the first living creatures. Lucretius borrows the spontaneous wombs and the lactating earth not from the poets or religious cult but from early biological writing and, presumably, from Epicurus himself, if we are to trust Censorinus's account of his beliefs[23]. To the extent that it solves a pressing logistical difficulty, the earth presumably acquires the name of 'mother' legitimately. That is not to say that Lucretius's language and imagery here, and especially the extent to which he personifies the earth, do not test the limits of poetic artifice, threatening to implicate Lucretius's own account in the myths he sets out to counteract. Nevertheless, from a pragmatic perspective, the pressure on earth's function *qua* mother has to do with time. For the earth, like a woman, eventually grows old and can no longer give birth, at least not

19 — In fact, parturition and lactation are so closely bound together for ancient writers that the woman's production of milk is often taken as the proof that she has given birth, providing a model of certainty that will be relevant later in this paper. See esp. Pl. *Menex*. 237e1-238a6; Arist. *Rh*. 1357b15-17.

20 — Note that for Cicero's Stoic Balbus, the mother's production of milk is a sign of providential design: *Nat. D*. II 128. See also Plut. *Mor*. 495D-E.

21 — On these passages and the figure of the mother more generally in the poem, see Asmis (1982); Schiesaro (1990) 120-22; Nugent (1994); Fowler (1996); Clayton (1999).

22 — For the comparison in early Greek texts, see duBois (1988). On the imitation of the earth by human mothers, see esp. Pl. *Menex*. 238a4-5, with Loraux (2000) 83-110.

23 — See Censorinus, *DN* IV.9. Waszinck (1964) argues on the basis of verbal echoes that Censorinus takes the idea from Lucretius, but see Campbell (2003) 75-76, pointing to Diog. Oen. fr. 11 (Smith), which suggests an Epicurean provenance for the idea, Schiesaro (1990) 104-105 rightly points out that even if Lucretius is Censorinus's main source, the idea could go back to Epicurus. On precedents for a lactating earth, see Archelaus (DK60) A1 (=Diog. Laert. II 16-17) and the analogies between sap and milk discussed at Schrijvers (1999) 11-14.

so prodigiously (5.826-33). The name of 'mother' thus points primarily toward an earlier phase of natural history rather than to a different register of representation within the poem.

Even before the exaggerated fecundity of the earth disappears, however, we run into the problem of how the different species that have been created spontaneously will be perpetuated. For while the care furnished by the earth looks suspiciously providential, the principle of randomness flagrantly rules the actual production of living beings, preventing the earth from producing the same types of creatures with any regularity. Under these conditions, it is up to the creatures themselves to reproduce in kind. Lucretius signals the shift from spontaneous generation towards sexual reproduction succinctly:

> Sic igitur mundi naturam totius aetas
> mutat, et ex alio terram status excipit alter,
> quod tulit ut nequeat, possit quod non tulit ante (Lucr. 5.834-6).

> So therefore time changes the nature of the whole world, and one state of the earth gives place to another, so that which bore cannot, and what could not bear can[24].

Yet the transition is not, in truth, so straightforward, as we learn when Lucretius narrates what happened in the experimental period between the earth-wombs and regularized sexual procreation. He dwells, first, on those creatures that make it out of the first phase without crossing into the second, that is, the 'monsters' (*portenta*) randomly generated by the young earth, of which some are almost immediately doomed, while others fail to feed themselves or reproduce. The failure of these types throws into relief what it takes to become a viable species: the capacity to gain nourishment independently; the successful transport of seed to the genitals; and the sexual congress of male and female (5.851-4)[25].

But even these attributes do not guarantee the success of a species. In the next phase, Lucretius turns from the mechanics of survival to the survival of the fittest. He points first to those qualities that enabled different species to avoid extinction: the courage of the lion, the cunning of the fox, the speed of the stag. He then creates a special class of animals who owe their survival to the protection of human beings, who happened to find them useful: dogs, horses, sheep, and cattle. Those animals that fall into neither of these categories – that is, animals who are neither endowed with special qualities nor taken under the wing of humans – are doomed

24 — The translation here follows the suggestion of West (1964) 102 that we should read the relative clauses in 5.836 as the subjects of the verbs *nequeat* and *possit*.

25 — On the construction of these lines, see Winterbottom (2000); Campbell (2003) 116-19.

to disappear from the earth. They disappear because they are unable to propagate (*multaque tum interiisse animantum saecla necessest* / *nec potuisse propagando procudere prolem*, 5.855-6; see also 5.850). It is not that they lack the physical capacity for sexual reproduction, but rather that they lack the skills and the strength to survive to an age when they would be capable of reproducing.

It is worth pausing here to survey what at first glance appears to be a disruption in the chronology of the prehistory. Lucretius presents, as if on the same plane, the survival of animals in the wild and the survival of animals that owe their existence to human beings. What is missing from this picture is an account of how humans not only survived but also acquired a position in the natural order that allowed them to extend protection to other species. Indeed, the people in question seem to be at a settled level of domesticity – among the animals to be protected are 'load-bearing' horses, cattle, and sheep – that is notably out of place here. When Lucretius focuses on humans directly a little less than a hundred lines later, they are still at a primitive stage of development, isolated from one another and dependent on nature for their own survival.

It is possible to chalk up the intrusion of this later stage to the chronological fuzziness of the prehistory[26]. The displacement, however, is not simply temporal but, I would argue, calculated. For what Lucretius has done is effectively shift human beings into the position properly occupied by *natura* by making them capable of determining the survival of *other* species[27]. It is true that humans are not exactly like nature. They bestow security in exchange for the utility the animals provide (*utilitas*: 5.860, 870, 873), in contrast to the bounty freely provided by nature[28]. Nevertheless, it is humans who are primarily responsible for feeding these species and keeping them safe, bestowing (*damus*) these rewards on them just as nature grants (*tribuit*) certain qualities to animals who survive in the wild. More important still, even if humans are technically *inside* the world of competitive survival, they remain apart from the other species for the simple reason that their own existence is never called into question (the utility of domestic animals is not represented as a prerequisite

26 — So Campbell (2003) 130, noting how the didactic need to treat topics separately may trump historical 'accuracy'. On the uneven chronology, see also Farrell (1994); Gale (1994) 169-70.

27 — Although the agency of *natura* is still faintly at work when Lucretius speaks of animals 'commended to us' (*nobis... commendata*, 5.860-1) and 'entrusted to our protection' (*tutelae tradita nostrae*, 5.861; see also 5.867).

28 — The language of mutual advantage in Lucretius's discussion suggests a quasi-compact between domestic animals and early humans, centered on the exchange of protection for utility. See further Shelton (1996), esp. 48-54 and Gale (2013). Hermarchus explains the preservation of domestic animals in similar terms: see Vander Waerdt (1988) 98. More distant is the idea, suggested at Epic. *KD* 32, that animals and humans can enter into 'contracts' (συνθήκας) not to harm one another; see also *KD* 39.

of survival)[29]. Rather, by establishing humans here as protectors instead of a species in need of protection, Lucretius deftly exempts them from the struggle for survival in which they should, at this very moment, be engaged. People are invested with the evolutionary advantages of the community before it has taken shape.

Lucretius's sleight of hand is strategic. For it allows him to gloss over any concerns about the competitiveness of the human race by projecting a more 'advanced' stage of the anthropology back into the primordial contest for survival. Yet if any hint of human weakness is muted at the level of narration, the particular vulnerability of the species is intimated obliquely in the following excursus, where Lucretius sets out to disprove the possibility that Centaurs (and a host of other mythical creatures) ever existed. He begins by observing the lag in the development of the child in relationship to that of the horse: while the horse is already in his prime at three years of age, this is not at all the case for the child who, 'even at this time will often in sleep seek his mother's milky breast' (5.884-5)[30]. It is only when the powers of the horse are beginning to fail that the child arrives at maturity. The belated maturity of the human child, together with the infantile dependence it entails, thus lingers in the background of Lucretius's account of species survival, where it exerts a quiet pressure on the logistics of his account. Acknowledging that pressure can help us understand why children and propagation become so important down the road.

There are no children at all, however, when the chronology straightens out and we pick up the thread of early human life. These first people, in fact, arrive on the scene as unusually self-reliant adults, wandering monad-like through a world that has grown markedly harsher than it was during the spring of creation. The toughness of early adult humans obviously

29 — Some commentators, sensing the problem posed by Lucretius's omissions, have speculated about the success of the human race, pointing, for example, to the toughness of early humans: see esp. Furley (1978) 14-15 (focusing on 5.925-1010); see also Blickman (1989) 162; Campbell (2003) 187, 214. Yet even if these people are hardier than we are now, that fact says nothing of their relative strength or endurance vis-à-vis other species. Gale (1994) 164-5 suggests that the toughness of early humans compensates for a lack of natural defenses such as teeth or claws, but it seems clear that such toughness offers protection only against the environment. It does not help them, at any rate, against the *saecla ferarum* at 5.982-7. The most important indication that Lucretius provides about survival during the *erramento ferino* is at 5.966, where he refers to the *virtus* of hands and feet that enable humans to hunt woodland beasts with clubs and stones. But the most important point – and one overlooked by commentators who simply fill in what they think is missing from Lucretius – is that all the factors that can explain human survival are *strategically deferred* by Lucretius.

30 — The refutation of the existence of Centaurs is found elsewhere in the rationalizing tradition: see esp. Gal. *De Us. Part*. 3.1 [3.168-75 Kühn=1.123-8 Helmreich] and Palaeph. 1, with Schrijvers (1999) 29-32. It is especially interesting that Lucretius chooses to stress the belated maturity of the human child in making his argument. By contrast, other sources (such as Galen) emphasize the incompatibility of the types of food appropriate to horses and humans and the impossibility of breeding a Centaur. I have not found a parallel for Lucretius's argument about developmental lag.

compensates for their nakedness in this new climate: thick bones and tough sinews protect against fluctuations of temperature, strange foods, and disease (5.925-8). In other respects, though, these people still rely on what is provided by the earth, which remains in its 'flowering infancy' (*novitas*... *florida*, 5.943). The land continues to produce food of its own accord (*sponte sua*, 5.938); the acorns and arbute-berries are more abundant and larger than they are now (5.940-2). Rivers and springs invite these primitive people to drink, just as they call still now to the 'thirsting generations of beasts' (*sitientia saecla ferarum*, 5.945-7).

Early humans, who 'pass their lives after the wide-wandering fashion of wild beasts' (*volgivago vitam tractabant more ferarum*, 5.932), are thus fully integrated into the natural world. Lucretius's description of their ongoing sympathetic relationship with that world, in spite of the hardening of the earth, returns us to their original inclusion in the *mortalia saecla* after the excursus on species survival and the debunking of myths about impossible hybrids. The inclusion of human beings in the natural community obviates, at least at this point, the need for social relationships, and Lucretius is clear that early people have no concern for others[31].

> Nec commune bonum poterant spectare, neque ullis
> moribus inter se scibant nec legibus uti.
> quod cuique obtulerat praedae fortuna, ferebat
> sponte sua sibi quisque valere et vivere doctus (Lucr. 5.958-61).

> They could not look to the common good, they did not know how to govern their intercourse by custom and law. Whatever prize fortune gave to each, that he carried off, every man taught to live and be strong for himself at his own will.

The repetition of *sponte sua* at 5.961 complements the description of the earth's spontaneous abundance, enforcing a vision of natural harmony. At the same time, the picture we are left with privileges not so much the dependence of people on the earth but, rather, self-sufficiency.

What is the relationship of this tough species to the first autochthonous humans we encountered at 5.791 and 5.805? It is possible to see the abrupt shift from earth-nurtured infants to autarchic adults as reflecting the life cycle of a single generation. Lucretius himself supplies some evidence for this interpretation when he declares that early humans survived

31 — The representation of early human life as bestial (θηριώδης) is usually negative in the Greek rationalist prehistory tradition: see, e.g., Crit. (DK88) B25.2; Eur. *Supp*. 201-2; Diod. Sic. I 8.1, with further references at Campbell (2003) 339-40. For Colotes (*apud* Plut. *Adv. Col.* 1124D), to return to 'the life of brutes' (θηρίων βίον) would clearly be a negative outcome. On the positive coloring of 5.937-52, see Blickman (1989) 162-6.

without clothing or shelter because they were 'harder' (*durius*) than men are now, as is appropriate for the products of the hard earth (5.925-6). His explanation explicitly recalls the emergence of the species from the earth.

And yet, such an interpretation comes at the cost of an apparent contradiction: the earth that produced the first humans was soft, not hard. The conflict has been explained in various ways. Gordon Campbell points to the tension created by Lucretius's adaptation of different traditions of human origin, one with its roots in myths of a tough race born from earth, trees, or stone, the other based on lush Golden Age motifs[32]. Joseph Farrell has drawn attention even more forcefully to the 'text's pointed ambivalence' in presenting both 'hard' and 'soft' aspects of early human life, arguing that we should read this tension not simply in chronological terms but also in synchronic ones representing the two sides of the human condition at any point in history[33].

But while I agree with Farrell that the poetic charge of such ambivalence has not been sufficiently recognized, I see the diachronic aspect of the hard/soft distinction as indispensable to an understanding of the prehistory. It is admittedly difficult to get around the conflict between the soft earth and the hard earth if we take the *creasset* at 5.926 literally. But P. H. Schrijvers has offered another, more palatable strategy of interpretation. We can take the sense of *creasset* more loosely to mean that a hard environment and hard food give rise to a hard species. The idea that climate and terrain shape the character of a land's inhabitants, fleshed out in the Hippocratic treatise *Airs, Waters, Places*, is popular in both Greece and Rome and plays a crucial role in Epicurean linguistic theory (Epic. *Ep*. *Hdt*. 75). We then end up with two phases of correspondence between the earth and human beings, each supporting a scenario where the earth provides for these people, as it does for other animals[34]. One way of understanding these phases is in terms of different stages in human life, infancy and maturity. In the beginning, soft children are cared for by a soft earth. Later, the now hardened earth does not simply sustain but actively gives rise to the hardness of the adults[35].

32 — Campbell (2003) 185-8. But Campbell also argues that the broader traditions of the Golden Age and rationalist prehistory are not mutually exclusive and 'may both be said to form a single block of *Bildungsgut*' (183).

33 — Farrell (1994) 94-5.

34 — Schrijvers (1999), 83-4. But the environmental explanation is not wholly satisfactory, and I would accept that something of Farrell's 'synchronic' axis is operating at 5.925-6.

35 — Farrell (1994) 88n.23, aiming to downplay the diachronic logic of Lucretius' 'anthropology', finds this a 'rigid distinction' that does not account for 'the pointed contrasts that Lucretius draws in his depiction of human experience in the two passages', presumably the mixture of pastoral and brutal details at 5.925-1011. I explain these contrasts in terms of the pressure Lucretius is building up in order to separate humans off from the natural world after their initial survival has been

Yet if we do pursue this reading, we arrive at a crucial question. If, as we have been led to expect by the image of the naked child and the proleptic reference to humans as guarantors of other species' survival, the human race is somehow an exceptional species, what will trigger the break between such a race and everything else sustained by the earth? What will put an end to the symbiosis, both soft and hard, of humans with the natural world?

Lucretius offers us two unresolved problems capable of triggering the separation of humans from the natural world. The first has been recognized by a number of commentators. As the 'hard' stage of the prehistory wears on, Lucretius begins to introduce a gap between humans and the world around them that leaves them increasingly vulnerable; at the same time, he embeds them in the contest for survival from which they had earlier been exempted. The dangers of wild animals, in particular, loom larger (5.982-7, 990-8)[36]. The defenses outlined earlier are systematically inverted. Before, the lack of fire or clothing had been dealt with by having early humans shelter in woods and caves. These makeshift homes are now invaded by boars and lions, making sleep impossible. Whereas solitude had earlier signaled a life of autarchy, isolation here means that people die alone, eaten alive by wild animals or dying of their wounds with no comrade or companion to lend aid. If earlier the rough fare (*pabula dura*, 5.944) provided by nature had been sufficient, the threat of starvation is now acute, and the once nourishing earth turns out to harbor poisons. These dangers, especially the roving beasts and the threat of untimely death, recall Lucretius's earlier attack on the idea that the earth was made for the sake of humans. The abrupt resurgence of that hostile world strands primitive humans in a precarious state, extending the vulnerability of the newborn to the race as a whole. It is at this moment that Lucretius, as if on cue, shifts to the origins of family and community. By recognizing his exquisite timing, we can see the excursus at 5.1011-27 as a response to the problem of vulnerability.

The second trigger for the breaking off of humans from the natural world is less visible, with the result that it has not been adequately recognized by commentators. It is, however, no less significant. For while the self-sufficiency of the adult human can temporarily explain the survival of the species, it does little to solve the problem of the defenseless newborn. The first generation of humans must, at some point, give way to a second and a third. The succession of generations may be implied by 5.931, where people are said to live *more ferarum* 'for many rolling cycles

secured. For a similar position, see Campbell (2003) 214.

36 — On the particular threat posed in the poem by wild animals, not only to life but also to peace of mind, see Feeney (1978).

of the sun through the heavens' (*multaque per caelum solis volventia lustra*). Yet the continuity of the human race also requires a solution to a problem, namely, the problem of human infancy[37]. For what happens to the newborn baby after the surreally maternal earth is no longer there to provide care? It is unimaginable that the infant fends for itself (if the 'hard earth' produced a race of baby Hercules, Lucretius probably would have mentioned this). Its utter defenselessness was a problem recognized by the philosophical tradition from Anaximander onwards, and it is of course Lucretius himself who provides us with the powerful image of the newborn naked on the ground, 'in need of every kind of vital support' (*indigus omni vitali auxilio*)[38]. What this means is that the question of who will care for children in the absence of a soft earth eventually has to be dealt with. In the end, if Lucretius is vague about whether there are multiple generations, it is likely because he has not yet dealt with the problem of how to fill the function of nurture and protection exercised by the maternal earth. A newborn child will, of course, have its mother. But for reasons I discuss further below, the mother is an inadequate substitute for the earth's maternal function: fathers, too, are required, not just as biological actors but as social ones.

For Lucretius does, in fact, deal with the problem of infantile vulnerability. What makes his narrative so elegantly economical is that in the excursus at 5.1011-27, he nests the response to the first problem (the vulnerability of the human race) in the second (the vulnerability of the infant). That is, as we will see, he implicates the vulnerability of children in the process by which men come to acknowledge their own vulnerability and forge societies organized by justice in place of a state of nature. The origins of the family and society are thus deeply bound to the preceding narrative insofar as they address two kinds of nakedness that, by the end of the prehistory, call out to be clothed: that of the newborn and that of a race lacking in adequate defenses, especially against the threat of wild animals. The apocalyptic but puzzling reference to narrowly averted extinction at the end of the excursus lends support to an interpretation of these lines as a response to the problems posed – but also cannily sidestepped – by the preceding account of early human life.

The passage at 5.1011-27, however, is far from lucid, and, as a result, it has been read in very different ways. In particular, it has often been used to shore up reconstructions of Epicurean views on the nature of social relationships, about which we know relatively little. Before analyzing the

37 — See Gale (1994) 165n.35, who observes that no children are mentioned until 5.1017 and suggests that the first phase lasts only one generation; she also notes the conflict with *multa lustra* at 5.931 though. Schrijvers (1999) 81 seems to see just one generation before 5.1010.

38 — See *supra*, n.12 and esp. the remarks of Critolaus at Philo, *Aet. Mundi*. 66-7.

passage within the framework I have been establishing, then, I want to sketch some of the approaches to these lines that have privileged philosophical and doctrinal frameworks over poetic, narrative, and conceptual context. My aim in doing so is to indicate some of the problems these readings run into and to suggest other ways of conceptualizing the logic of Lucretius's account. Only then can we tackle that account on its own terms.

II. Social Life

1. The State of the Problem

The passage in question runs as follows:

> Inde casas postquam ac pellis ignemque pararunt,
> et mulier coniuncta viro concessit in unum
> ……[39].
> cognita sunt, prolemque ex se videre creatam,
> tum genus humanum primum mollescere coepit.
> ignis enim curavit ut alsia corpora frigus
> non ita iam possent caeli sub tegmine ferre,
> et Venus inminuit viris, puerique parentum
> blanditiis facile ingenium fregere superbum.
> tunc et amicitiem coeperunt iungere aventes
> finitimi inter se nec laedere nec violari,
> et pueros commendarunt muliebreque saeclum,
> vocibus et gestu cum balbe significarent
> imbecillorum esse aequum misererier omnis.
> nec tamen omnimodis poterat concordia gigni,
> sed bona magnaque pars servabat foedera caste;
> aut genus humanum iam tum foret omne peremptum,
> nec potuisset adhuc perducere saecla propago (Lucr. 5.1011-27).

> Next, when they had got themselves huts and skins and fire, and woman mated with man moved into one [home, and the laws of wedlock] became known, and they saw offspring born of them, then first the human race began to grow soft. For the fire saw to it that their shivering bodies were less able to endure cold under the canopy of heaven, and Venus sapped their strength, and children easily broke their parents' proud spirit by coaxings.

39 — There is almost certainly a lacuna after 5.1012. Lachmann proposed *conubium* for *cognita sunt*, which would eliminate the need to mark a loss, but *concessit in unum* on its own is possible. I prefer to mark a lacuna in order to keep *cognita sunt*, which has some support from the *cognitus* at Ov. *Am*. II 476, where Ovid seems to be imitating Lucretius (on Ovid and Lucretius, see Garani [2013]). The stress on recognition implied by *cognita sunt* is attractive for reasons that I outline shortly.

> Then also neighbors began to join friendship pacts amongst themselves neither to harm nor to be harmed, and they asked protection for their children and womankind, signifying by voice and gesture with stammering tongue that it was right for all to pity the weak. Nevertheless concord could not altogether be produced, but a good part, indeed the most, kept the covenant unblemished, or else the human race would have been even then wholly destroyed, nor would birth and begetting have been able to prolong their posterity to the present day.

It is easy to see here that Lucretius is describing the beginnings of something. It is much harder to say what this something is. The excursus is sometimes said to describe the origins of justice, sometimes the origins of friendship, sometimes the origins of altruism or sympathy or pity. The difficulty can be traced in part to the brachylogy and elided transitions of Lucretius's account. But the proliferation of interpretations is due, as well, to the different expectations that scholars have about how Epicurus viewed the relationship between the individual and a larger community. The commentary on the passage is, accordingly, a microcosm of larger debates about the relationship between narrow self-interest and a richer, Other-oriented ethics in Epicureanism[40].

For the Other and, more specifically, the Other as an object of care turns out to be unavoidable in the excursus. Lucretius moves abruptly from a description of how the human race 'softened', in part through caring for children, to the negotiation of contracts 'to neither harm nor be harmed' among neighbors. In the same breath he adds that the negotiators entrusted women and children to one another on the grounds that 'it is right that all should pity the weak' (*imbecillorum esse aequum misererier omnis*, 5.1023). In his commentary, Bailey speculates that, in making provisions for the weak, Lucretius was 'humanizing' and 'softening' Epicurus's austere utilitarianism[41]. Yet many scholars, unsatisfied with these charges of rogue sentimentalism, have tried to reconcile these lines, and the passage more generally, with broader Epicurean tenets.

Two basic strategies, each with its own permutations, are evident. For some readers, all the aspects of the description conform to the demands of utility, making the passage consistent with the traditional reading of

40 — The importance of Other-concern in Epicurean ethics is defended by Mitsis (1988) 98-128; Annas (1993) 236-44; Nussbaum (1994) 276-7; Konstan (1997) 110; *id.* (2003). See also Algra (1997) 144, whose interpretation of 5.1011-27 aims to 'qualify' the common reading of Epicurean hedonism as purely egoistic. For recent attempts to recuperate the utilitarian perspective in Epicurean ethics (esp. in relationship to friendship), see O'Keefe (2001a); Brown (2002); Evans (2004); Brown (2009), 182-7.

41 — Bailey (1947) 3.1484. See also Ernout and Robin (1925-8) 3.139 ('cet aspect sentimental de la doctrine de L.'); Goldschmidt (1982) 315 ('la motivation sentimentale'); Costa (1984) 118 ('the vivid details about pity and protection for women and children seem to be L's own').

Epicurean hedonism. From this perspective, the word *amicitiem* at 5.1019 designates a pact based on self-interest rather than affection, and pity has some benefit for the community[42]. For others, the passage indicates the genuine importance of Other-care within Epicurean ethics. They have thus argued that it refers to non-utilitarian friendship and emphasized the affective nature of pity[43].

Keimpe Algra has offered a defense of this latter position, arguing that Lucretius is describing the growth of social bonds that do not involve utility[44]. In place of utility he appeals to a concept more closely associated with the Stoics, namely that of 'fellow-feeling' (οἰκείωσις)[45]. But whereas for the Stoic, 'fellow-feeling' signifies an innate human disposition to care for others, for the Epicurean, Algra argues, it arises from the familiarity that develops when people live in close proximity to one another[46]. The process of familiarization begins in the family, but it also leads neighbors to negotiate 'friendship pacts' with one another. What makes such a reading attractive to Algra is that, on his view, Lucretius fails to give sufficient utilitarian motivation for the contracts. For despite the apparent gain from these pacts – namely, security – they seem to arise without reflection or deliberation regarding the advantages they would provide. Rather, coming close on the heels of the softening process, the contracts seem less like a calculation and more like the outcome of a physical transformation in human nature[47]. Algra, in other words, presents the process described by Lucretius as a spontaneous response to circumstances that exceeds any utilitarian calculation: 'It appears that people no longer act as isolated individuals who have merely their own interests in mind; instead there is room for mutual bonds... and a certain degree of unity or concord is established'[48].

It is difficult, however, to fit this reading to our text. It is one thing to say that people got used to one another, quite another to say that they sought to join together in quasi-formal pacts. It is surely important,

42 — See esp. Mitsis (1988) 106: 'Unfortunately, although this passage has been the source of many fertile misunderstandings, it provides evidence for neither the history nor the anthropology of friendship. Clearly, Lucretius is describing only the foundation of justice, the basis of which is a contract for avoiding mutual harm'. See also Müller (1969) 312-15; Konstan (1973) 43; Grilli (1995) 31n.36; Armstrong (1997), 327n.8.

43 — See Farrington (1954) 13; Long (1986) 310; Nussbaum (1994) 266n.33; Algra (1997); Konstan (1996) 392-3; *id*. (1997) 111; *id*. (2008) 90-3. Konstan (2003) argues that the anomalous form *amicitiem* signals that Lucretius is referring to a specific capacity for affection towards other human beings (parallel to the Epicurean φιλία), rather than to the narrower concept of friendship.

44 — Algra (1997).

45 — See also Campbell (2003) 277-8, who relates οἰκείωσις to pity. On οἰκείωσις in the formation of family ties, see also *infra*, n.84.

46 — Algra (1997) 148.

47 — *Ibid*. 142. On the physical transformation, see *infra* n.65.

48 — Algra (1997) 142.

moreover, that these pacts, later described as *foedera*, are devised for the purpose of protecting people from each other and, presumably, from other threats – that is, for gaining security, which is the motivation behind the formation of virtually all social relationships in Epicureanism[49]. In fact, it is here that we have the most obvious kernel of Epicurus's own teachings. Lucretius's Latin (*nec laedere nec violari*) translates his master's definition of justice: 'neither to harm nor to be harmed' (μὴ βλάπτειν μηδὲ βλάπτεσθαι)[50]. Algra aims to dismiss this objection by arguing that Epicurus recognized different degrees of friendship[51]. But why would a contract that fits the definition of justice be a form of friendship at all, especially when friendship is defined, as it is by Algra, in non-utilitarian terms[52]?

It would make more sense to use 'fellow-feeling' to account for the growth of family bonds or the pledge to 'pity the weak', where utility more obviously falls short as a motivation. Yet Algra is largely uninterested in the problem of women and children[53]. And although the softening process is one of the reasons that he gives for pursuing a non-utilitarian explanation of the excursus at 5.1011-27, the relationship between this process and the men's predisposition to form friendships is left vague. The concept of 'appropriation' ends up doing most of the work at the level of the larger community. The reading advocated by Algra leaves us, then, with an explanation in terms of Other-care where we do not seem to need it. At the same time, the explanatory force of the 'softening' remains untapped and the Others most in need of care – women and children – are left on the sidelines.

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49 — On the importance of ἀσφάλεια, see Epic. *KD* 7, 13, 14, 28. For ἀσφάλεια as a goal of early societies, see, e.g., Philod. *Piet*. col. 75, 2152 (Obbink); Plut. *Adv. Col*. 1124D. On security as a motivation in friendship, see Long (1986) 305; Konstan (1996), 389-90; O'Keefe (2001a) 276-8; Evans (2004) 416-18.

50 — E.g., Epic. *KD* 33: οὐκ ἦν τι καθ' ἑαυτὸ δικαιοσύνη, ἀλλ' ἐν ταῖς μετ' ἀλλήλων συστροφαῖς καθ' ὁπηλίκους δή ποτε ἀεὶ τόπους συνθήκη τις ὑπὲρ τοῦ μὴ βλάπτειν ἢ βλάπτεσθαι. (Justice was not something in itself, but a contract, arising in people's interactions with one another at some time and at some place or other, over neither harming nor being harmed).

51 — Algra (1997) 149n.29.

52 — Brown (2009) 194n.47 also argues that the pacts are useful in the sense of benefiting the community as a whole and thus closer to friendship. But for Brown, friendship is itself always utilitarian in a way that it is not for Algra; see Long (1985) 310 for a position similar to Brown's.

53 — He also presents what happens in the family as ultimately a different process than what happens among neighbors. In the family, appropriation is preceded by the pleasure that Algra believes (not unreasonably) is implied by Lucretius's reference to the children's *blanditiae*; by contrast, in the wider social context it works on its own, without any relationship to pleasure: see Algra (1997) 149-50. The concept of 'pure' appropriation relies on Algra's reading of Cic. *Fin*. I 69, where the idea of friendship understood in terms of familiarization is attributed to later, 'more timid' (*timidiores*) Epicureans. But if, as Algra argues, Lucretius does not depart from strictly Epicurean material (1997, 148-9), we would expect that he would not incorporate these later modifications. Algra sidesteps the problem by attributing the familiarization model to Epicurus himself, but such an attribution sits uncomfortably with the evidence from Cicero.

Before considering readings that address pity more directly, I would like to take a look at readings that see the justice contracts in terms of utility. Such an approach seems relatively straightforward. For if, as John Armstrong has observed, 'the contracting situation arose in the first place because each party saw the other as a potential threat', then a mutual non-interference agreement is obviously useful for acquiring peace of mind[54].

But the situation is not so straightforward. For, as Phillip Mitsis has argued, Lucretius gives us no good reason why people suddenly become dangerous to one another. Before greed and envy took hold, Mitsis points out, there were no conflicts of interest to speak of[55]. It is indeed interesting that at almost no point in the prehistory does Lucretius mention human-on-human violence (rape is a notable exception: see 5.964). Even though such violence will be projected back into the story later on (5.1418-22), we have to acknowledge Lucretius's 'whitewashing' of the prehistory[56]. Moreover, as Armstrong himself recognizes, 'threats of harm or retaliation are, at this stage of social development, nowhere offered as reasons for abiding by the contract'[57]. We might also wonder why people become more dangerous to each other at the very moment their 'proud spirit' has been broken down[58].

Mitsis nevertheless remains committed to a reading of the excursus in terms of 'justice' rather than 'friendship', concluding that 'these early covenants serve more to coordinate common familial interests and to facilitate the creation of offspring than to solve conflicts of interest'[59]. He is almost certainly right to point to mutual benefit. Nevertheless, the apocalyptic reference that Lucretius makes to the averted extinction of the human race suggests that a serious threat motivates the formation of these pacts and the negotiations concerning the obligation to pity the

54 — Armstrong (1997) 327.

55 — See Mitsis (1988) 83: 'Individuals have no natural need to engage in troubling competitive pursuits and have no reason for harming others. Desires for harming others arise only from a mistaken estimate of the nature and limits of human desire'. The problem framed in these terms is similar to the problem posed by the question of whether there is justice in a community that comprises only Epicurean sages, on which see Vander Waerdt (1987); Annas (1993) 293-302; Armstrong (1997); and esp. O'Keefe (2001b), stressing justice as the pursuit of mutual benefit in a community; see also Morel (2000), adopting a similar strategy of binding justice to the community.

56 — 'Whitewash': Blickman (1989) 166. Cf. O'Keefe (2001b) 140, for whom the lack of violence indicates it did not exist. Asmis (1996) 770 argues that the reason for looming extinction was the human-on-human violence that is recalled later in Book 5, but she does not remark on Lucretius's silence about strife in the earlier description.

57 — Armstrong (1997) 327.

58 — Nussbaum (1994) 267 does relate softening to the 'complex and dangerous attitudes' that lead to aggression. But while she is right in an abstract sense, there is no hint at 5.1011-27 that softening leads to violence – rather, the opposite is implied. Indeed, Lucretius needs his men to become less violent and aggressive if he is to make the pity of women and children a requirement. I thank an anonymous reader for *Eugesta* for emphasizing this point.

59 — Mitsis (1988) 84.

weak. We may wonder further about how, exactly, the men making these pacts understand what Mitsis calls 'familial interests' and the importance of creating offspring.

One way around the problem of explaining sudden human-on-human violence is to locate the threats that drive the formation of contracts outside the community itself. The dangers of wild animals and starvation become increasingly acute in the final phase of the prehistory, as we saw above, suggesting that these pressures have some causal power in the next stage of Lucretius's account. In fact, in a number of sources, both Epicurean and non-Epicurean, the first human communities form precisely to defend against attack by wild beasts[60]. The most relevant evidence in this context is the account of justice developed by Epicurus's successor Hermarchus, paraphrased at length by Porphyry in his *On Abstinence*. The account is unambiguous on the point that the threat of animal attacks drove primitive men to band together, securing the survival of the species[61]. This passage, read together with the threat of beasts in Lucretius, suggests that we should understand Epicurean justice not simply in terms of a mutual non-aggression pact but in terms of a commitment to protect other members of the community against external threats such as wild animals, as Tim O'Keefe has argued[62].

Such a reading is not, however, without difficulties for our understanding of Lucretius. For while he does dwell on the vulnerability of primitive humans in the wild just before making the transition to early social arrangements, he does not draw a direct line, as Hermarchus apparently did, from these unresolved dangers to the justice contracts or the negotiation of protection for the weak. The shift from the isolated suffering of the individual to the formation of communities around contracts is interrupted by the softening of the human race by fire and domestic life[63]. Moreover, even if we do recognize the dangers posed by wild animals, we will not yet have determined how women and children

60 — Pl. *Prt.* 322a-b; Diod. Sic. I 8.2-3.

61 — See esp. Porph. *Abst.* I 10.1: οὐ γὰρ δυνατὸν ἦν σῴζεσθαι μὴ πειρωμένους ἀμύνεσθαι αὐτὰ συντρεφομένους μετ' ἀλλήλων. Long and Sedley take the participle συντρεφομένους as circumstantial (agreeing with the accusative subject of ἀμύνεσθαι) and translate: 'For man would not have been able to survive without taking steps to defend himself against animals by living a social life' (1987, 1.130). Other translators take συντρεφομένους as agreeing with the object of ἀμύνεσθαι ('without taking steps to defend those sharing in nurture against animals'). I prefer the former translation, but both work for the point I make above.

62 — See O'Keefe (2001b), followed, e.g., by Brown (2009) 194.

63 — O'Keefe (2001b) 140 exaggerates the relationship in Lucretius between the threat of wild animals and the justice contracts. Brown (2009) 194n.46 goes further astray in lumping Lucretius together with Hermarchus and stating that he 'emphasize[s] the threats wild animals pose and the need for peaceful community to ward them off'. The second part of the claim finds no direct substantiation in Lucretius. Cf. Campbell (2003) 259, who notes Lucretius's distance from accounts that stress the threat of animal attack as motivating the formation of human communities.

are perceived as integral to the benefit of the community and, hence, worthy of protection.

Some defenders of a reading of 5.1011-27 in terms of utility have approached the softening process head on, seeing it as a modification in human nature that is due to a change of lifestyle and bears a direct relationship to the development of pity (as well as to the negotiation of friendship pacts)[64]. Instead of understanding compassion and affection as superfluous emotions or touches of Lucretian sentimentality, they have pegged them to a game-changing evolutionary shift within the species, responsible for nothing less than the survival of the species, as the last line of the excursus implies[65]. The position has been defended in the most detail by Gordon Campbell, who has drawn on research on altruism in contemporary evolutionary theory to vindicate the view that he ascribes to Lucretius – namely, 'for humans it was their ability to co-operate, form friendship pacts, and pity the weak that were the particular abilities that enabled them to survive'[66].

But what makes pity (or compassion or affection) so useful to the survival of the species? Here we have to be careful about conflating the two types of social relationships – justice pacts and pity for the weak – under the rubric of cooperation. There are good reasons to respect the differences between the genealogy of the family and the genealogy of society in Lucretius's account[67]. For one thing, if we lay too much weight on generalized feelings of affection towards others, we have to wonder what happens to the function of utility, a problem I raised earlier in response to Algra.

One could respond that utility is at work in *all* the developments at 5.1011-27, given that each development, in its own way, enables the species to survive. But utility in this context, if it is to apply to the emergence of the family, would have to be understood as the happy outcome of a spontaneous development towards cooperation and compassion, rather than as a good consciously or rationally sought by those entering into social relationships. There is some support for such an interpretation

64 — E.g., Algra (1997); Armstrong (1997) 326-7, for whom sympathy motivates both the justice pact and the pity clause.

65 — Ernout and Robin (1925-8) 3.141; Konstan (1997) 111; Campbell (2000) 155; *id.* (2002); *id.* (2003) 254-62, 279-81, 283; Schiesaro (2007) 47; Konstan (2008) 91-3. See also Nussbaum (1994) 162, 267-8 (where evolution is understood more loosely as 'becoming more human'). The claim that the human race evolved or mutated is difficult to reconcile with Lucretius's claim, consistent with the views of other ancient thinkers, that species do not evolve or mutate: for discussion, see Campbell (2003) 59-60, 108-9, 261.

66 — Campbell (2003) 283. Campbell is building on Denyer (1983), who first applied the Prisoner's Dilemma to an analysis of the passage before the iterated version of the game had produced striking evidence of the evolutionary benefits of cooperation.

67 — The need for different genealogies is well emphasized by Müller (1969) 312-13.

from a basic principle of Epicurean prehistory – namely, people stumble across what is useful before pursuing it in a reasoned manner, as we see in the origins of language[68].

But if taking this line of interpretation makes it easier to explain the origins of the family and the care that it makes possible, as I argue further below, we cannot overlook the fact that 5.1019 looks like the beginning of a process whereby people begin to seek their security with at least a vague perception of its utility[69]. Moreover – and even more important – the negotiation of justice pacts is simply not the same as the appeal to pity. Whereas men have something to offer each other by way of security, women and children cannot barter their power to protect in exchange for protection. Lucretius acknowledges this when he emphasizes that it is men working on behalf of women and children who secure their safety[70]. To ignore the asymmetries created by gender is fatal to any intepretation of these lines.

I have stressed these points in order to show that we must approach the utility of social relations and any motivations for undertaking them at 5.1011-27 through a fine-grained analysis that is attentive to a persistent difference between the origins of the family, the formation of justice pacts, and pity for the weak. The desideratum for readers of 5.1011-27 is an account capable of identifying the relationship between first, the end of the prehistory; second, the softening process; and, finally, the negotiation of contracts that are evidently useful for those undertaking them. Such an account should also aim to explain the motivations behind the emergence of the nuclear family and the integration of women and children into a community formed primarily by men guaranteeing each other's security.

The difficulties of meeting these requirements should be, by this point, apparent. Lucretius elucidates causal relations only sparingly, despite the seeming complexity of causes at work in the transition at 5.1011-27. Moreover, he is giving a historical account of the emergence of social relationships that has no direct parallel in Epicurus's limited writings on

68 — On this principle, see esp. Epic. *Ep. Hdt*. 75-6, with Manuwald (1980). But cf. Müller (1969), stressing the differences between the origins of justice and the origins of language.

69 — Campbell (2003) 274, 277 suggests that they are indeed working with a perception of the utility gained from cooperation within the household but, as I point out above, it is hard to explain why protecting women and children is a useful form of cooperation at all. What happens in domestic space is simply not a straightforward template for forming communities of men committed to each other's protection and mutual non-interference: see further Holmes (2005).

70 — *Pace* Bailey (1947) 3.1485, the men have to be the subjects of both *commendarunt* and *significarent*. Mitsis (1988) 84n.56 also sees a change of subject and uses this to reject a reading of the scene in terms of the Prisoner's Dilemma. The fact that the subject is the same means that we have to understand why fathers negotiate on behalf of their families, that is, how the father functions *as the pivot* between affection and utility. I tackle this problem above.

the subject[71]. Nor does his account mirror that of Hermarchus, our other major Epicurean source[72].

Yet for all the apparent gaps in Lucretius's logic at 5.1011-27, we also have the poetic and narrative resources outlined earlier in this paper to guide us. Indeed, if we intend to grasp what Lucretius is doing here, we cannot avoid taking account of the conceptual momentum built up in the prehistory and the overarching themes of the anthropology. One of the central tenets of the story Lucretius tells is his decision to take the survival of the human race out of the hands of a providential creator and embed it in a non-teleological context where our survival is not guaranteed in advance. That decision entails accounting for how the species survived in a state of nature. But it also forces Lucretius to explain why our survival ultimately required us to exit that state. It is precisely at 5.1011-27 that humans first splinter off from the natural world. That splintering should play as much of a role in our interpretation of the passage as our expectations about Epicurean justice and views on the Other, not because Lucretius is a poet (rather than a philosopher) but because he sees our need to become social creatures as arising in part from the lack of care provided to us by nature.

Nevertheless, Lucretius is working in poetry. We should not be surprised, then, if the lack of care and what it entails are problems expressed not through a series of propositions but through conceptual and verbal correspondences that bind the different parts of the story together. Let us return, then, to the two kinds of vulnerability left unresolved by the prehistory: the nakedness of the newborn and the nakedness of primitive people exposed to predators and food shortages. I have suggested that the bipartite excursus at 5.1011-27, introducing, first, the origins of the nuclear family, then a social community organized around the desire for security, addresses just these two aspects – related, yet distinct – of human vulnerability. But in order to understand how these developments are related to each other, we need to turn to the origins of the family and the softening process it entails.

2. The Poetic Logic of Negative Exceptionalism

The domesticating sequence is triggered when people first acquire huts, skins, and fire, developments that appear without Lucretius indi-

71 — Morel (2000) 397, 405 stresses the differences between Epicurus's maxims and the historical accounts.

72 — For other Epicurean sources on law and justice in early society, see Plut. *Adv. Col.* 1124D-1125A; Philod. *Piet.* col. 74, 2145-75, 2182 (Obbink), with Obbink (1996) 572-81 and van den Steen (2009). Diog. Oen. fr. 56 (Smith) looks to a future state of society where everything is 'full of justice'.

cating how they came about[73]. Men and women, having previously met only in chance couplings, settled down together, at which point 'they saw the offspring created from them' (*prolemque ex se videre creatam*, 5.1013)[74]. Lucretius goes on to describe the softening of the human race that these changes precipitate: fire makes them less resistant to the cold; sex drains their strength; and the children break the proud spirit of their parents with coaxing. Each of these factors – fire, sex, and parenthood – plays an important role in what is often described as a transformation of the species. Yet they also create a crescendo of sorts, making the recognition of children by their fathers a culminating – and, I suggest, crucial – moment.

I say 'fathers' because it is certain here that the 'they' in question are men. Women would have no need to recognize that their children come from their bodies[75]. What makes the recognition so significant is that it responds to a question lingering in the background of the prehistory. Who will take care of the newborn after the earth has withdrawn its care? Lucretius had last dealt with *pueri* directly when he described them breaking free of their terrestrial wombs to enjoy idyllic childhoods in the bosom of the young earth. The shift to sexual reproduction leaves them virtually invisible. In effect, as we saw earlier, the problem of the exceptionally helpless human infant is suppressed during Lucretius's discussion of the inter-species competition for survival, recalled only by the image of the toddler sleepily seeking his mother's breast at an age when his equine counterpart is robustly self-sufficient.

More specifically, the problem is displaced onto just those species which, incapable of fending for themselves in the wild, survive because they are entrusted to humans on account of their utility (5.860-1). These species, I argue, are a placeholder for the absent children. In support of this reading we can look to the recurrence of the verb 'to entrust', *commendare*, at 5.1021 to describe the protection of women and children. At the very least, the repetition of the verb suggests that the process at 5.1011-27 echoes the preservation of domesticated species of animals. The process is first set in motion when men, recognizing that children are created 'from them' (*ex se*), extend care to their offspring, thereby stepping into the role vacated by the soft earth earlier in the story and remedying the problem of the infant's helplessness. It is completed with the negotiation of the protection of the weak (women and children).

73 — The discovery of fire is described in more detail at 5.1091-101.

74 — For the likely lacuna after 5.1012, see *supra*, n.39.

75 — Brown (1987) 123 observes that, like virtually all ancient authors, Lucretius is always speaking from a presumed male 'we' in writing about love and marriage.

On this occasion, then, instead of ending up with a picture where the human race protects other species, we see the race divide to occupy the roles of protector *and* protected simultaneously. The stakes involved could not be higher, as the final lines of the excursus make clear. Had the pacts not been kept for the most part, the human race 'could not have led the generations to the present day through propagation' (*nec potuisset adhuc perducere saecla propago*, 5.1026). The emphasis on propagation recalls the role of reproduction in species survival at 5.850 and 5.856. It seems to reflect Lucretius's underlying awareness of the need to protect human infants through to maturity if the race is to reproduce sexually and, hence, escape extinction[76].

Such a reading raises several questions, the most obvious of which is where mothers belong in this arrangement. If they had already had children in the wandering stage, we can infer, as I said earlier, that they had assumed the responsibility of caring for the young at that time. But even if the tough humans represent a single generation – something we cannot rule out, given Lucretius's reference to 'many cycles of the sun' (*multa... solis... lustra*) at 5.931 and the sense at 5.1013 that the recognition of paternity is a new development – the care of children would have fallen to mothers, had the shift towards domesticity and the recognition on the part of fathers not occurred.

Either way, however, we meet with a problem: women are on the wrong side of the protecting relationship as it is described by Lucretius. That is, they are the objects of the verb *commendare* at 5.1021, not its subjects. They are classed together with children rather than occupying a position where they can guarantee the children's survival. The faint split within Lucretius's account of human development, where it is men who come to recognize their children at a specific stage in history, begins to look symptomatic of a deeper asymmetry. The fissure of sexual difference was already visible in the greater strength and lust of men (5.964) that led to rape in the prehistory. Now, at the moment that women are separated off from the community to be recognized explicitly as objects of protection, sexual difference comes to the fore[77]. If we accept that women cannot guarantee security, we have to admit that the phase of early human life in which children – who, as Lucretius reminds us more than once, are

76 — Schrijvers (1999) 103-5 recognizes the importance of childcare in the survival of the species but does not recognize the differences between fathers and mothers. On the preservation of women as part of the future of the species, see below.

77 — There is a clear division of the sexes later, too, at 5.1354-6: *et facere ante viros lanam natura coegit / quam muliebre genus (nam longe praestat in arte / et sollertius est multo genus omne virile*) (And nature made men work in wool before the female sex [for the male sex as a whole is far superior in skill and more clever]). The phrase *muliebre genus* recalls *muliebre saeclum* at 5.1021 and, more distantly, Hesiod's γένος γυναικῶν (*Theog*. 590), on which see Loraux (1993) 72-110.

so dependent for so long – are under the care of their mothers alone, is precarious. It is as precarious, in fact, as the more obviously grim state of affairs that we are left with at the close of the prehistory. The point is not that mothers become irrelevant. Their nurture remains necessary. Rather, because Lucretius implies that mothers themselves require protection, we need fathers to step in. Such a need is met by the formation of the nuclear family.

The passage at 5.1011-18 raises another question – namely, how does the moment of paternal recognition lead to fathers assuming the responsibility of care, first within the family and later through the negotiation of the protection of the weak? The question requires us to reflect on what it is that men are seeing when they 'see' (*videre*) offspring created from them.

One possibility is that the men simply look upon their children for the first time. But Lucretius may mean that men realize that these children *have been created from them*. In other words, they infer, for the first time, the bonds of kinship[78]. What makes the second reading preferable is that, in presenting the recognition of paternity as an important 'evolutionary' step, it provides grounds for understanding why men take on responsibility for the care of children, thereby opening themselves up to their softening influence at 5.1017-18. But how does recognition *entail* care?

Answering this question is made more difficult by the fact that the bonds of affection within the family are a bit puzzling in Epicureanism more generally. Epicurus himself was notoriously unenthusiastic about marriage and childbearing[79]. It is not impossible to fit child-rearing into an ethics based on self-interest. At the end of Book 4, Lucretius implies that the aim of raising children is future security – that is, 'to protect one's old age with children' (*gnatis munire senectam*, 4.1256) – and Plutarch represents Epicurus's reasoning regarding progeny in similarly utilitarian terms[80]. Yet in the absence of textual cues, we are better off not reading such calculations into the scene at 5.1011-18, especially because the utility of children is, presumably, impossible to recognize at this stage.

It is precisely because of the absence of clear motivations for the affection towards and care of children that commentators have been quick to

78 — For this interpretation, see Farrington (1954) 12; Campbell (2000) 172n.35; *id.* (2003) 266.

79 — For a discussion of the spotty evidence for Epicurus's views on marriage and children, see Chilton (1960); Brown (1987) 118-22; Nussbaum (1994) 152-3; Brennan (1996). Lucretius, of course, is taking up the question from the perspective of species survival, although Nussbaum (1994) 187 argues he is generally more favorable to marriage and children than Epicurus; see also Brown (1987) 69, 87-91, 121-2, stressing the Roman commitment to marriage and children (although he also observes Lucretius's relatively neutral tone on marriage as an institution).

80 — See esp. Plut. *Mor.* 495A-B, where the view that care of children is calculated according to a return is attributed to Epicurus. But see *infra* n.83.

privilege physiological changes (that is, softening) in explaining the emergence of the family, a reading that gains support from the overtly physical role of fire and shelter in the softening process and the language Lucretius uses to describe the effects of domestic life (*inminuit viris*, *ingenium fregere superbum*). But of course, men begin to soften only after they have taken wives and recognized that their children come from them. If we are to understand the growth of domestic bonds, we need to keep in mind, too, the cognitive element(s) of 5.1013 (*videre*, and perhaps *cognita sunt*).

What would such a reading look like? I have suggested that the formation of the family is informed by and responds to the first emergence of human life from the earth and the primeval childhood of the species. In light of the correspondence between these scenes, it becomes possible to see the care that follows the recognition of paternity as an imitation of the bond between birth and care that we saw in the earth's nurturing of the creatures it had produced. Yet with paternity there is an important difference. The provision of care in the case of the earth and the mother is automatic and physical, no doubt in part because the recognition of mother and child is perceived as 'natural' and unthinking. Recall that the new mother produces milk spontaneously, a fact of much interest to ancient authors[81]. Consider, in particular, the use of the mother cow in Book 2 as the very model of 'recognizing one's own' (2.349-70)[82]. By contrast, for the father to take on the role of nature in the provision of care, we need him to infer his participation in the creation of the child. Paternity is not spontaneous but requires act of cognition (and the conditions for its performance).

We may complain that a scenario where the act of creating entails care is not particularly Epicurean, as we might have indeed complained when Lucretius described the care provided to us by the earth. Moreover, the affection widely recognized to be at work in the domestic scene veers dangerously close to the naturally 'providential' love of offspring. But despite allegations that Epicurus denied the natural affection of parents for children, there is some evidence that such affection could be justified on Epicurean grounds[83]. More important, we have already seen a precedent

81 — See *supra* nn.19-20 and the next note.

82 — See Konstan (2013) 198-201 on this scene. On the motif of representing the mother-child bond as natural and particularly powerful in antiquity, see Desilva (2006); Holmes (2008) 269. On the intimacy binding mother and child in Rome, see Bettini (1991) 106-12 (I thank John Van Sickle for this reference).

83 — For these allegations, see Plut. *Adv. Col*. 1123A; *Mor*. 495A-B. See also Gal. *Nat. Fac*. I 12 (2.29 Kühn), which seems directed at the atomists. Cf. Demetrius Lacon, *PHerc*. 1012 col. 66,3-68,5 (Puglia). Note that Lucretius often describes children as 'sweet' from the implied perspective of parents (*dulces... nati*, 3.895; *gnatis... dulcibus*, 4.1234; *partu... dulci*, 4.1253). I suspect it is this quasi-'instinctual' affection that we should see at work in the care of the child first shown by the earth, then mothers and eventually fathers. See also Arist. *EN* VIII 12, 1161b16-29, where parents

for an 'instinctive' care in the figures of the earth and the mother. Indeed, it is precisely the poetic logic that Lucretius developed earlier to negotiate the problem posed by the vulnerability of the first earthborn creatures that can shed light on what is happening at 5.1011-27. For he seems to be appropriating the mechanism invoked earlier in Book 5 whereby care is extended not because of utility but because of a bond with those created from the self[84].

Utility is very much still in play in this development. But it is operating primarily at the level of the species. These collective stakes are suggested by Lucretius's use of *prolem* (5.1013), which recalls the earlier discussion about the need to secure the sexual reproduction of the species if it is to avoid extinction (e.g., *prolem* at 5.856)[85]. The echo of that discussion suggests that Lucretius is collapsing two levels and two types of 'recognition' into one: the father's recognition of the origins of his own child, on the one hand; and a kind of recognition of how offspring are produced, that is, *how the future of the human race is secured*, on the other. The second recognition can be seen as emerging collectively and conferring a benefit on the human race as a whole.

The presence of two levels, that of the individual father and that of fathers as a collective, persists in the negotiations to safeguard women and children. On the one hand, men negotiate with each other to protect each other's families because they see their own families as extensions of themselves[86]. On the other hand, if the recognition of paternity leads to a collective understanding of how generation works, then we can better understand the community's effort to protect not only children but also women, now recognized as partners in sexual reproduction[87]. Regardless

love their children as 'other selves' and products of themselves.

84 — It is possible that Lucretius here has in mind something *like* the notion of 'fellow-feeling' (οἰκείωσις) that came to be associated with the Stoics, as Schrijvers (1999) 102-18 suggests; see also Pigeaud (1983) 138-41. It is relevant in this context that the Stoics used οἰκείωσις to explain the affection of parents for children (see, e.g., Cic. *Fin.* 3.62). The idea that Lucretius is appropriating some concept of οἰκείωσις gains support from Hermarchus's apparent adaptation of the concept to explain the origins of homicide law: see Vander Waerdt (1988). While I doubt that Lucretius needs οἰκείωσις to explain the first justice contracts, where utility is sufficient motivation, it may help explain why men extend protection to their wives and offspring. Still, I am not sure we need οἰκείωσις in view of the 'instinctive' affection for children.

85 — It also recalls the mother's recognition of the child at Lucr. 2.349-50.

86 — For the idea of children as an extension of the self, see *supra* nn.83-4. As regards women, it is likely that as Venus softens human nature, the man perceives his wife as part of himself. On the role of habit in establishing love, see Lucr. 4.1278-87. Note, then, that although these negotiations build on bonds of affection, they are pursued in the interest of utility, insofar as they ensure the protection of the self in its extended form.

87 — That wives are understood first and foremost as mothers is an idea at least as old as Hesiod. For the idea in Lucretius, see 4.1268-77, where wives are advised to adopt sexual positions suitable for conception (as opposed to prostitutes, whose primary concern is pleasure), with Brown (1987) 126-7 on the Roman background.

of which perspective is privileged, however, the negotiation of 'pity' pacts is clearly a critical component of the process whereby the security of the species is transferred into the hands of men. It is important not only because it ensures the preservation of children, as we saw earlier, but also because it ensures the protection of women.

Yet men, too, require protection. The last phase of the prehistory, as we saw earlier, brings the vulnerability of early humans front and center. Their weakness in relation to other species is the other half of the problem that the developments at 5.1011-27 solve. In fact, the need to devise strategies of security becomes all the more urgent once men have started to grow softer by spending time with their families next to the fire.

The softening process has been read as a resurgence of the softness that characterized the first earthborn creatures, as well as a 'feminization' of primitive men[88]. It is sometimes also read as the primary trigger for the formation of justice pacts[89]. This last reading, however, is problematic. For if we make the softening process the trigger of the pacts, we are forced to dismiss the growing emphasis that Lucretius places on the vulnerability of primitive people in the last phase of prehistory as redundant. Such a reading betrays the taut economy of Lucretius's account. More problematic still, the erosion of the species' harshness makes fathers more like those who should be protected at the very moment we would expect them to be represented as protectors. Much as the discoveries of shelter, clothing, and fire – discoveries that should respond to pressing needs in primitive humans (the need for protection from the elements; the need for cooked, that is, *softer*, food, as at 5.1101-4) – do, the domestication process magnifies and, indeed, *exacerbates* weakness. But why should men soften just when they are emerging to fill the role of the *paterfamilias*?

We can begin to answer this question by recalling that, in the prehistory, people live in isolation, 'each taught to live and be strong for himself at his own will' (*sponte sua sibi quisque valere et vivere doctus*, 5.961). Such people have no need of a community: Lucretius says outright that, 'they could not look to the common good' (*nec commune bonum poterant spectare*, 5.958). Things begin to change during the first phase of family life as fire and sexual intimacy soften a once tough species and children break their parents' arrogant spirit (*ingenium... superbum*, 5.1018)[90]. The

88 — Softness of first children: Farrell (1994) 91. Feminization: Nussbaum (1994) 267; Campbell (2003) 267. A reading in terms of 'feminization' lends support to the argument that when Lucretius speaks of the human race here, he often is referring only to men. Beye (1963) 168 sees something of Hesiod's infantile Silver Race in the softening process. Interestingly, this is when wives and children first enter the myth of the five races.

89 — E.g., Long (1986) 309; Armstrong (1997) 326-7; O'Keefe (2001b) 140.

90 — The *parentum* at 5.1017 most likely again refers only to fathers, since women should have had their proud spirits broken down by earlier childcare.

process, however, is not simply passive, with men being transformed into the children they once were and the children whom they now nurture. It also involves, I suggest, men's recognition of their own vulnerability. We can imagine that children act as mirrors to their fathers. They offer an image that captures the softness of those from whom they were created, a softness that is increased by parent-child interactions (as if the mirror were also part of a feedback loop)[91].

It is not just the erosion of self-sufficiency, then, that motivates the formation of society. The domestication narrative, by forcing men to confront their offspring and exposing them to the cascading effects of sex and infantile coaxings, brings them face to face with their *own* vulnerability, largely latent until the very end of the prehistory and sharply exaggerated by the softening process. Of course, if I am being eaten alive, I can see my own vulnerability. That can explain why such events are sufficient to motivate the formation of communities in, say, Hermarchus. For Lucretius, however, the recognition of paternity, together with the softening process it triggers, seems to play an important role in men's recognition of their own need to seek security within social institutions. In other words, men have to see themselves in their children and become more like children in order to recognize and remedy the precarious state of the species.

It is presumably only once they have realized their own vulnerability that men form alliances with one another by negotiating pacts designed to counter their inherent weakness. Such alliances differ from the family insofar as they are negotiated with the expectation of mutual security and, thus, offer mutual benefit. Yet, like the formation of the family, they represent the forging of a community that is capable of remedying the disadvantages of humans in a state of nature. They thus respond to the dangers of life in the wild that Lucretius brought to the foreground at the end of the prehistory, countering the weakness of the individual by promising safety in numbers. Nevertheless, the formation of the first community is not simply a parallel development to the development of the family. Rather it builds on the family, emerging out of the father's encounter with the child and extending his power to protect across a population of women and children through the agreement to pity the weak.

The reading of 5.1011-27 that I have offered aims to make sense of the excursus in terms of what I earlier called Lucretius's poetic logic. We can understand that logic now as organizing an account whereby men

91 — As Guyau observes: 'D'après cette observation très-juste de Lucrèce, l'enfant aurait joué un rôle important dans la civilization, et, réaggisant sur l'homme, l'aurait modelé plus ou moins à son image comme il se modelait à la sienne' (1878, 161).

move to compensate for the inherent vulnerability of the race, first by forming families and assuming some responsibility for their children, then by negotiating accords designed to guarantee their own security and the security of their families. These developments do not simply remedy the unsettling and ultimately unsustainable vulnerability of the human race in the wild[92]. Rather, by instituting a break between humans and nature, each stage turns the negative exceptionalism exemplified by the naked child at 5.222-7 into the positive exceptionalism that is initially represented by the image of a species that preserves other species and eventually equated with the idea of a species that takes its survival into its own (male) hands. What we are witnessing is the initial process through which humans exit the state of nature for the enhanced security of social institutions created by men: families and communities.

Lucretius's foregrounding of recognition at 5.1013 and his representation of the first communities as organized around a justice compact suggest that the shift from the state of nature to the social domain conforms to a larger organizing principle in Book 5[93]:

> Sic unumquicquid paulatim protrahit aetas
> in medium ratioque in luminis erigit oras;
> namque alid ex alio clarescere corde videbant,
> artibus ad summum donec venere cacumen (Lucr. 5.1454-7).

> So by degrees time brings up before us every single thing, and reason lifts it into the precincts of light. For they saw one thing after another grow clear in their minds, until they attained the highest pinnacle of the arts.

The passage of time and the operation of reason, in other words, gradually make things clear to humans, who progress, accordingly, along the path of culture and civilization towards the *cacumen* that concludes Book 5. The movement forward is triggered, in part, by acts of recognition that lead men to take responsibility for their own safety, as well as that of women and children[94].

92 — I say ultimately unsustainable not just because even 'hard' humans may not have ended up surviving in a state of nature but also because, as I argued above, the conditions for reproduction, especially the protection of the young, are not guaranteed in this state.

93 — The lines also appear at 5.1388-9, where most editors bracket them. The repetition has fueled allegations that Lucretius left Book 5 in unfinished form: see esp. Merlan (1950) and cf. Manuwald (1980) 9-15, defending the integrity of the book's structure.

94 — These acts of recognition should be distinguished from the reasoning of the preeminent men who advance society by instituting laws, who appear only at 5.1105-7. The account in Hermarchus (Porph. *Abst*. I 10.2-4) also draws a distinction between the initial stages of society and the development of laws through the 'rational calculation' (ἐπιλογισμός) of wise men; see also Philod. *Piet*. col. 74, 2145-75, 2182 (Obbink). Nevertheless, these acts of recognition, even if they do not constitute full-fledged acts of reasoning, are more than passive softening. On this, see also Müller

The care of the young by the earth had been spontaneous, much as it still is for those species from whom humans are distinguished in the attack on anthropocentric teleology at 5.222-34. The earth's role may be taken over by the mother in the prehistory. But, even so, nurture continues to be automatic and 'natural', as we saw above, and the earth still sustains adult humans as it does other species. The seam between the human race and nature finally begins to split with the acknowledgment of paternity, enabled by an inferential act that sets the stage for men's perception of their own weakness (and, at some level, the weakness of the species), which lies behind the first contracts[95]. These contracts decisively transfer the care of the race away from nature and chance to a community of men trying to control survival, both their own survival but also that of the human race, in a hostile world. What was freely given by the earth to the first children is, in the end, brought under the management of this community of reasoning, male agents. Such an attempt to secure happiness against contingency, predicated on cognitive acts, prefigures what happens in the present day at the level of the individual, who uses reason to manage pain and pleasure in the interests of *ataraxia* in a world that is resolutely indifferent to human flourishing.

By line 1027, then, a crucial stage of transition in the story of human origins has been completed. Lucretius has led us from the earth wombs, where humans are indistinguishable from other creatures, to surrogate social formations overseen by the power of fathers. These formations cement the difference between humans and other animals that is made starkest by the human infant tossed helpless onto the shores of light. The story that Lucretius plots converts the static truth of negative exceptionalism into a historical one. It also, at least temporarily, turns a negative into a positive: the *vita prior* described at 5.1011-27 is often seen as an idyllic state[96].

But, of course, the tragic truth of Book 5 is that it is impossible to arrest the narrative here. The rise of social formations will breed new

(1969) 310-14; Asmis (1996) 767, who observes that justice 'is an object of reflection, enabling humans to devise protective measures of their own'; Konstan (2003) 3.

95 — It is interesting to compare Freud here: 'Under the influence of external conditions – which we need not follow up here and which in part are also not sufficiently known – it happened that the matriarchal structure of society was replaced by a patriarchal one. This naturally brought with it a revolution in the existing state of the law. An echo of this revolution can still be heard, I think, in the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus. This turning from the mother to the father, however, signifies above all *a victory of spirituality over the senses – that is to say, a step forward in culture, since maternity is proved by the senses whereas paternity is a surmise based on a deduction and a premiss*. This declaration in favour of the thought-process, thereby raising it above sense perception, has proved to be a step charged with serious consequences' (1955, 145-6, emphasis added). Lucretius is not speaking about a transition from matriarchy, but he is tracing, I have argued, a shift from the care of mothers (the earth and human mothers) to the protection of fathers.

96 — On the positive representation of the *vita prior*, see Farrington (1953).

kinds of vulnerability, and, in turn, novel and unhealthy defenses. In fact, if we go back to the argument against providence, we see Lucretius anticipating civilization's mad spiral out of control. The child's needs begin with human attention and care. They end with weapons and protective walls. But once we have come this far, neither the earth nor fathers can provide the care required. At this point, we need Epicurus and the security only his philosophy can afford.

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