

INTRODUCTION

1. THE DOCTRINE

Ab Epicuro principium: Lucretius utters his allegiance in unambiguous terms (Comm. 1–4n. *primus*). Yet this allegiance was perhaps to an idea as much as to a man. Epicurus (341–271 BC) was no Socrates; and he lacked both the poetic gifts and the humour to be his own Plato. What excited Lucretius to produce the most passionate didactic poem ever written was the Epicurean philosophy itself. Diogenes Laertius (10.9) speaks of the ‘siren-charms’ of Epicurean doctrine; to Lucretius it seems to have come as a revelation, the only philosophical system which, by abolishing fear of the gods and of death, allowed mankind to achieve release from spiritual bondage. However, much of the appeal of the system must have derived from the character and personality of its founder. In the first place he was self-taught (D.L. 10.13), a fact which perhaps helps to explain the originality of his doctrines taken as a whole and their essentially practical nature.¹ He was also a man of blameless life and singular sweetness of disposition, as his letters to his disciples testify; it is small wonder that they venerated him. The Homeric heroes were honoured by their peoples ‘as gods’ (Hom. *Il.* 5.78, 10.33, 12.312, etc.); divine honours were on occasion paid to earthly rulers even before the Hellenistic period; and Empedocles had claimed that he walked among men ‘as an immortal god, no longer mortal’.² Such were the precedents according to which it was natural that the followers of Epicurus should acclaim him as the true, the only Saviour, σωτήρ:³ greater than the powers which, through sheer force of mind, he had vanquished: *deus ille fuit*, *deus* proclaims Lucretius (5.3); and the evangelistic fervour and single-minded impetus of the *De Rerum Natura* make it singularly tempting to see in the poem the document of a conversion. Certainly it is hardly an exaggeration to say that this self-styled enemy of religion was ‘in the profounder sense that transcends creeds and

¹ Festugière 1968: 27–8; Martha (1867: 9) remarks that the Epicurean philosophy represents an attempt to systematize the temperament of a single individual: ‘S’il est vrai que les doctrines font les mœurs, n’est-il pas vrai aussi que les mœurs font les doctrines?’ The point is valid for most, if not all, ancient philosophies, but particularly so for the Epicurean. Cf. Boyancé 1963: 301.

² ἐγὼ δ’ ὑμῖν θεὸς ἀμβροτος, οὐκέτι θνητὸς | πωλεῦμαι (31 B 112.4–5 D–K).

³ Cf. Festugière 1968: 63 n. 1; for the growth of ‘individual’ religion and the quest for personal salvation in post-classical Greece see *ibid.*, ch. 1 ‘Le fait religieux au seuil de l’ère hellénistique’; Tarn and Griffith 1952: ch. x ‘Philosophy and Religion’; Dodds 1951: ch. viii ‘The fear of freedom’; Murray 1935: ch. iv ‘The failure of nerve’.

forms, the greatest religious mind of pagan Rome',⁴ as he contemplated the revelation achieved by reason with an awe that can only be called religious, *divina uoluptas atque horror* (cf. Comm. 28–30n.). It has often been remarked that the Epicurean school of philosophy (and the same is true of the Stoic) had many of the characteristics of a church: 'a sacred founder, and sacred books, and a credo of memory verses from those books',⁵ congregations of the faithful, and a tradition that was more concerned to preserve and gloss than to build upon and develop the founder's doctrine.⁶ Dogma and orthodoxy pervade the *DRN*. Lucretius' purpose was to help men to attain happiness, which he describes (3.322) as *dignam dis degere uitam*; but the godlike existence to which he encourages his readers to aspire is closer to that of Epicurus than to the detached and ineffectual gods of the *intermundia*. To those gods he owed of necessity a duty of formal piety as exemplified by Epicurus himself (6.67–79),⁷ but no more; their appearance in Book III (18–24) serves not to introduce the contemplation of their virtues, but to lend force (by way of contrast to the non-existence of Hell) to the idea that inspires the poet's true religious feelings – the operation of the laws of Nature, dictating inexorably the motions of the atoms in the void, *quaecumque infra per inane geruntur* (27). The vehicle of this revelation is the Epicurean doctrine, sprung – the analogy with the mythical birth of Athena from the head of Zeus is unmistakably hinted at – from the divine mind of Epicurus (3.14–15); and it is Epicurus, not the gods of the *intermundia*, whom Lucretius invokes throughout the poem in terms borrowed from, and clearly intended to recall, the conventional invocation of deity. Here, not in the anthropomorphic figments of priests and poets, was the true divinity.

In the *DRN* we are offered not an account of the Epicurean system (cf. §3 below), but the personal testament of the poet. For a full exposition of the Epicurean faith and of what it demanded of its adherents we must look elsewhere.⁸ However, if Book III is to be read with understanding, certain preliminary points must be made. In particular the associations that cling to the word 'Epicurean' in modern usage must be ignored. The Epicurean philosophy was materialistic: its account of the universe, based on the theories of the earlier atomists Democritus and Leucippus, taught

⁴ Leonard and Smith 1965: 76. Cf. Mill 1924: 38: 'the best among [unbelievers]... are more genuinely religious, in the best sense of the word religion, than those who exclusively arrogate to themselves the title'.

⁵ Leonard and Smith 1965: 80.

⁶ Cf. Martha 1867: 10–12, 346; Festugière 1968: 31 n. 2; and on the points of resemblance between Epicurus and St Paul *ibid.* 36 n. 3.

⁷ Cf. Festugière 1968: 74–5.

⁸ See e.g. Martha 1867; DeWitt 1954; Schmid 1962; Leonard and Smith 1965: 36–55; Farrington 1967; Festugière 1968; Rist 1972.

that all phenomena are produced by the motions, according to certain laws, of solid and indestructible bodies (atoms) in the void. Nothing is created out of nothing; nothing is resolved into nothing; everything, except the individual atoms themselves, is subject to change. The human soul, like the human body, is composed of atoms and is mortal. The gods exist but do not regulate either natural phenomena or human affairs. There is no life after death; the business of man is to achieve happiness as best he can in this life, according to the dictates of reason. Happiness is defined as well-being of body and mind, and consists fundamentally in the avoidance of pain and anxiety (ἀπονία, ἀταραξία).⁹ This bald summary may, it is hoped, assist comprehension of Lucretius, but it is totally inadequate to describe what Epicureanism really was and the part which it played in the lives of its devotees, particularly the emphasis, of which we hear little in the *DRN*, which was laid on friendship and a common life. Various features of the physical doctrines are open to criticism and were attacked in antiquity by rival schools, and in particular the self-centred gods of Epicurus were a favourite target; but the most vulnerable aspect of the system as a whole clearly lay in its emphasis on happiness and pleasure, as opposed to the Stoic insistence on virtue. It is this emphasis that, in trivialized and degraded forms, has come to be synonymous with Epicureanism in the minds of many, to whom of course ‘pleasure’ means something quite different from what it meant to Epicurus. This misunderstanding was already well established in Lucretius’ day. Nothing in fact could be more misleading than the equation of Epicurean doctrine with mere hedonism. Rather the reverse is the case: the trouble with Epicureanism, and the main reason perhaps why it never enjoyed the general success of Stoicism, was not that it was too easy, but that it was too difficult, too austere, too unworldly.¹⁰ It is hard for an ordinary man, at the same time as he is forbidden to pursue the usual goals of worldly ambition, to accept that he must live well now because there will be no other chance for him to live at all, and that the good life must be lived for its own sake without any prospect of either reward or punishment in the hereafter.¹¹ At its best the austerity and nobility of the Epicurean life as it was lived by

⁹ Cf. the *Quadruple Remedy* (*Tetrapharmakon*) of Philodemus (cit. Festugière 1968: 46 n. 1): ‘The gods are not to be feared, death is without danger, good is easy to possess, evil is easy to bear bravely.’

¹⁰ Cf. the apology placed in the mouth of Torquatus by Cicero: *ut tollatur error omnis imperitorum intellegaturque ea quae uoluptuaria, delicata, mollis habeatur disciplina, quam grauis, quam continens, quam seuera sui* (*Fin.* 1.37).

¹¹ ‘Here we have one of the deepest implications of the Epicurean doctrine of nihilism – the moral obligation laid upon us by the brief span of our existence to live a rich and abundant life of sense and spirit, of the body and of the soul, that one might withdraw, at the appointed hour, *plenus vitae conuiva*, with equanimity, and even nobly and proudly’ (Hadzsits 1935: 138–9).

the founder and by its highest representatives compels admiration; but it was a style of life that, essentially, rejected life. ‘There is a strange shadow of sadness hanging over this wise and kindly faith, which proceeds from the essential distrust of life that lies at its heart. The best that Epicurus has really to say of the world is that if you are very wise and do not attract its notice – λάθε βιώσας – it will not hurt you. It is a philosophy not of conquest but of escape.’¹² And admirable as certain aspects of Epicurean ethics are, the connexion between the physical premisses of the system and its moral conclusions is sometimes loose.¹³ Lucretius has occasionally been criticized for expending so much moral energy in the denunciation of old wives’ tales which the educated Romans of his day – for whom, as the style of his poem shows, he must have been writing – could not conceivably have taken seriously; and, conversely, it has been regretted that he did not devote some part of the poem to expounding Epicurean ethics.¹⁴ Such criticisms rest on a misconception of the poet’s aims. In limiting himself to a negative and destructive approach (based, it should be stressed, on positive physical teaching) Lucretius was both following the promptings of his own nature and writing for the world and for posterity. He was anything but a fool, and we are bound to assume that he was aware that his enlightened contemporaries did not require to be undeceived about Hades. In attacking these popular notions he was attacking a particular manifestation of something universal and eternal, or at all events coeval with the human species: ‘the poet is not so much concerned to refute a popular belief as to point its moral, if rightly understood’.¹⁵ An intelligent reader, trained to draw general conclusions from particular cases, can see all the innumerable superstitions of the Hellenistic and Greco-Roman worlds imaged in Lucretius’ great diatribe;¹⁶ but to convey his point forcefully it was necessary for him to choose examples that would carry emotional conviction through their familiarity. Tantalus, Tityos, Sisyphus are demolished, not because Memmius and his peers believed in them, but because other men had believed in them, did believe in them – and would believe in them, or in fresh variations of them, again.¹⁷ The charge that Lucretius was

¹² Murray 1935: 110.

¹³ ‘[I]n Epicureanism (as so commonly in other naturalistic or behaviorist systems), ideals of the good life are smuggled in from without the system – as it were, even from the very folklore of ethics, those ancient notions of what is decent for a true man, recorded long ago in Hesiod and Homer, and doubtless invoked even by a Boeotian blacksmith when he praised or pummeled his neighbor’ (Leonard and Smith 1965: 44); cf. Festugière 1968: 52–3.

¹⁴ See, for instance, Hadzsits 1935: 153. ¹⁵ Sikes 1936: 127–8.

¹⁶ Cf. Murray 1935: ch. iv ‘The failure of nerve’; Leonard and Smith 1965: 73–4.

¹⁷ ‘Little could Lucretius... anticipate the diseased imaginations and the cruelties imposed upon later centuries by fears of everlasting punishment’ (Hadzsits 1935: 141). Perhaps not; but these things would have confirmed his worst fears of

battering at an open door could with equal justice be levelled against each and every writer who in any age has attacked folly and superstition.¹⁸

2. THE POET

Little is known about Lucretius. This is by no means a disadvantage for the interpretation of his poem, which can and should be understood without reference to the personal circumstances of the poet.¹⁹ Since however in Lucretius' case the biographical question has had a certain nuisance value it must receive some discussion. St Jerome has transmitted under the year 94 BC the following notice: *Titus Lucretius poeta nascitur, qui postea amatorio poculo in furorem uersus, cum aliquot libros per interualla insaniae conscripsisset quos postea Cicero emendauit, propria se manu interfecit anno aetatis XLIIII* (*Eusebii Pamphili Chronici Canones*, p. 231 Fotheringham). This would place Lucretius' death in 51 BC, a date which fails to square with a statement in the *Life* of Virgil ascribed to Donatus (but generally thought to be based on Suetonius' *De uiris illustribus*) that he died in the year in which Virgil, aged 17, assumed the *toga uirilis*, i.e. 53 BC. These and other inconsistencies make secure dating impossible: for the reader of the *DRN* it is enough to know that the poet was born in the 90s and died, a comparatively young man, in the late 50s of the first century BC.²⁰ A more intractable problem is posed by St Jerome's account of the love-philtre and the poet's madness and suicide. Few scholars have either accepted or rejected this tradition outright,²¹ and even those who are disinclined to trust the unsupported word of a Christian saint in such a matter as the obviously edifying death of a pagan and a blasphemer are inclined to allow that some features of the *DRN* are consistent with what St Jerome tells us. Both Santayana and Bailey use the phrase 'strange vehemence' of Lucretius' manner in certain passages, and Bailey sees evidence of actual derangement in the famous excursus in Book v on the use of animals in warfare (1308–49). This line

what men will do to themselves once they have rejected the guidance of reason and true philosophy.

¹⁸ Cf. Festugière 1968: 78 n. 1. One form of superstition (as Lucretius must have seen it) that flourished in the first century BC as it had flourished in Hellenistic Greece (cf. n. 3 above) was the romantic expectation of a political σωτήρ or Messiah: for contemporary exploitation of this idea see Norden 1966: 369 n. 26. For the period as one favourable to mysticism see also Dodds 1965: 100 n. 1. Lucretius' purpose was to declare the true Messiah: Epicurus.

¹⁹ Cf. Cherniss 1943/1962.

²⁰ For a fuller discussion see Bailey 1947: 3–5; his favourable assessment of the *Vita Borgiana* should be discounted. There is no evidence as to Lucretius' birth-place. If, as seems not improbable, it was Rome, he was one of the very few Latin poets or men of letters not to hail from the provinces; cf. Watts 1971.

²¹ See Bailey 1947: 8–12; Boyancé 1963: 18. On some of the weaknesses of the case against St Jerome's veracity see Gain 1969 (but see now Smith 1992: xix–xxvi; Kenney 1977b/1995: 4–5).

of argument, however, would hardly have been started if St Jerome's statement had not given a lead, and should be regarded sceptically.²² The 'vehemence' remarked by Santayana and Bailey is real enough, but vehemence does not necessarily connote derangement; and in the *DRN* it is, so far from being 'strange', an essential feature of the diatribe style (see §4(a) below), as also of the poet's emotional involvement in the terrible history of his country (Comm. 48–86n.). Nor is the 'high melancholy' of which Santayana speaks evident to all readers of the poem who approach it without preconceptions of the poet's manner. It is well over a century since M. Patin in his *Études sur la poésie latine* (1868) launched the theory of 'l'Antilucretèce dans Lucrèce': the idea that Lucretius is fundamentally unconvinced by what he is saying and that a deep native pessimism is constantly breaking through the doctrinaire optimism that he is committed to preaching. This theory is by no means universally discarded and still colours some assessments of Lucretius; it is based in the main on the interpretation of selected passages taken out of their context in the argument of the poem.²³

A second problem is raised by St Jerome's reference to Cicero. It must be read together with a well-known passage in Cicero's letters to his brother Quintus, written in February of 54 BC: *Lucreti poemata, ut scribis, ita sunt, multis luminibus ingeni, multae tamen artis* (Q. F. 2.10(9).3). The stylistic judgement implied in this sentence is discussed below (§4(b)); it is very difficult to deduce from it any reliable chronological or biographical data. It need not imply that Lucretius was dead when the words were written,²⁴ and it certainly implies nothing about any editorial activity on the part of either Cicero or his brother. The *DRN* was clearly left in an unfinished state at the poet's death (§3 below); but the ancient practice was always to allow incomplete but publishable work to appear with the barest minimum of correction.²⁵ The term *emendo* was no doubt used by St Jerome, who was well acquainted with the details of book production, in its technical sense, which signified something not much more ambitious than proof-correcting in modern times: it amounted to little more than the elimination of copying errors. Some such process would have

²² This is not the place to expatiate on 5.1308–49; it is enough to say that the verses, if read carefully in their context, offer no foundation whatever for any suspicions as to the poet's sanity. MacKay is right to suggest (MacKay 1964: 125) that the vivid descriptions are based on Lucretius' experience of *uenationes*; but his attempt (134) to fit the passage into the argument rests on a misunderstanding of the (very carefully written) sequence 5.1341–9. See Schrijvers 1970: 296–305; Kenney 1972: 19–24.

²³ See also Wormell 1960; de Saint Denis 1963; Kinsey 1964.

²⁴ See Bailey 1947: 4, repeating the important arguments of Sandbach 1940.

²⁵ The Virgilian half-lines are a striking example: see *Vit. Donat.* 41 *edidit... auctore Augusto Varius, sed summatim emendata, ut qui uersus etiam imperfectos sicut erant reliquerit.*

had to be carried out by the person, whoever he was, who ‘published’ the *DRN* after the poet’s death, but it is unlikely to have entailed anything that a literate slave could not have managed; and in view of Cicero’s outspoken contempt for Epicureanism it seems inherently unlikely that he would have been willing to spend his own time performing the operation.²⁶ In any event it is hazardous to use these two notices as evidence for the character of the relationship between Cicero and Lucretius; they could hardly have been oblivious of each other’s existence,²⁷ but more than that one may hardly say.

The poem itself, as one might expect, offers no direct and very little indirect information about the poet. It is dedicated to a certain Memmius who, whether or not he is identical with the well-known Gaius Memmius,²⁸ was certainly an aristocrat, as is shown by the terms in which he is addressed: 1.26 *Memmiadae nostro*, 42 *Memmi clara propago*. This fact does not of course entail that the poet was Memmius’ social equal. On the other hand the *DRN* is obviously the work of a well-educated man, widely read in the literatures of both Greece and Rome, a ‘lord of language’, who used Latin masterfully and as to the manner born, and who spoke as a Roman to Romans. None of this proves anything about Lucretius’ birth or social status, but a comparison with the manner of Horace tempts one to guess that the authority with which Lucretius addressed his fellow-countrymen was rooted in something more than confidence in his role of philosopher-poet. His repeated insistence on the hazards of ambition, though a central feature of Epicurean doctrine, takes on added significance when viewed against the contemporary background of civil strife. These read as the sentiments, not of a detached observer out of the *sapientum templa serena* (2.8), but of a man who had witnessed and indeed been a party to the demoralization of a class in whose fate he was deeply interested. The agonies he describes sound like those of his own friends and kindred.²⁹

3. THE POEM

(a) *Scope*

It is important to grasp at the outset the fact, already stressed, that the *DRN* does not set out to present a complete account of the Epicurean

²⁶ It has been suggested (Giussani 1896: xvi) that Cicero accepted nominal responsibility but entrusted the actual work to a secretary or to one of the staff of copyists maintained by his friend Atticus. Why however should he have felt obliged to become involved at all?

²⁷ Cicero was not above borrowing a striking phrase from Lucretius (Comm. 99²–4n.).

²⁸ See Catull. 10.13 and Fordyce ad loc.

²⁹ Cf. Martha 1867: 25–9; Sellar 1889: 290–1; Hadzits 1935: 5, drawing attention to 1.41, 5.36.

system. Lucretius' ultimate aim is positive, to put his readers in the way of achieving happiness: this is acknowledged, not, one feels, without a hint of irony – for such certainties were not for the poet of the *Aeneid* – in Virgil's famous apostrophe.³⁰ His immediate aim, however, is negative: to destroy the barriers that obstruct man's path to self-fulfilment, the illusions that stand between him and enlightenment – fear of the gods, fear of the after-life, fear of death. In order for these illusions to be destroyed they must be shown to be inconsistent with a correct understanding of the physical universe (cf. Comm. 38–40n. *liquidam puramque*). Thus the physical doctrines, though they are fundamental and though the exposition of them occupies most of the poem, are in the design of Lucretius' great enterprise functionally subservient to its main end: the scientific argument provides the premiss for the destructive argument which in turn provides the premiss for the final positive ethical conclusions – the statements about how men ought to live. But those final conclusions are not drawn, the statements are not made: the last link in the chain of argument Lucretius takes as read or leaves for others to provide. Thus, though the argument often takes a particular Epicurean ethical position for granted, there is very little in the poem that may be called ethical doctrine.³¹ This great omission has of course excited remark. It has been suggested that these limitations reflect a personal limitation of interest in Epicurean philosophy, which Lucretius saw less as a way of life than as the means to an end which was not precisely the end envisaged by the founder.³² That the stimulus to write the *DRN* was personal and deeply felt is extremely probable, indeed is the overwhelming impression that the poem makes on the great majority of readers; but it does not follow that Lucretius was not interested in the parts of the system which he does not choose to develop. It is important to emphasize that the *DRN* is a poem, for the fact carries certain implications. It belonged of necessity, according to ancient ways of thinking about literature, to a specific genre (εἶδος, γένος, *genus*), that of the didactic epos (see §4 (a) below), and that tradition, as represented in particular by Parmenides and Empedocles (to whom Lucretius was obviously indebted), did not offer a model for the exposition of ethical doctrine. Hesiod, who stood at the head of the

³⁰ G. 2.490–2 *felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas | atque metus omnis et inexorabile fatum | subiecit pedibus strepitumque Acherontis avari.*

³¹ Thus in the *DRN* the traditional subordination of Canonics (as the Epicureans called rational philosophy) and Physics (natural philosophy) to Ethics (moral philosophy) is reversed: cf. Hadzits 1935: 11. On the other hand, as is shown by, for instance, the famous description of the sacrifice of Iphigenia (1.80–101), Lucretius' objections to religion were moral, as have been those of James Mill and indeed of all reflective unbelievers. Cf. Robinson 1964: 130.

³² So Boyancé 1963: 301: 'Lucrèce n'a adhéré à l'épicurisme que parce que qu'il y a decouvert l'explication d'un mal dont l'importance ne pouvait lui apparaître que parce lui-même il en souffrait'.

whole tradition, has something to say in the *Works and Days* about Justice and of the rules which should govern the behaviour of men to the gods and to each other, but what he says is couched in the primitive style of ‘wisdom-literature’, not as systematic and constructive exposition. Is a metrical account of Epicurean ethics (which were fundamentally very simple) imaginable?³³ Poetry, especially poetry such as Lucretius’, cannot thrive upon an unmixed diet of abstractions; it must have its roots in and be nourished by bodily images and concrete associations. On the other hand, the Epicurean cosmos, *machina mundi*, a complex but wholly material organization, provided a theme for which models already existed in the tradition and which was calculated to call forth the full force of Lucretius’ unique creative powers. Moreover, it offered a great technical challenge. The importance of this point is apt to be overlooked by a modern reader; but ancient poets were from first to last preoccupied with technique, and Lucretius, though he should certainly not be pigeonholed *tout court* as a New Poet, was fully aware of the requirements of Alexandrian *doctrina* and all that they implied.³⁴ The scope of the *DRN* must be seen as conditioned by the tradition in which it was written: Lucretius’ predecessors in that tradition – Hesiod, Parmenides, Empedocles – offered both models for didactic poetry of a certain kind, the exposition of complex cosmogonical and physical theory, and also an incentive to demonstrate superiority in this kind of writing. The Epicurean system itself, with its emphasis on phenomena and the evidence of the senses, afforded a splendid stimulus to Lucretius’ superb powers of observation and description, both of what he could see and of what he could not see but could visualize – the minute but all-potent motions of the atoms. Generic influences can be seen at work also in another profoundly important characteristic of the poem, its satire, the roots of which we may trace as far back as Hesiod. ‘We may see in the underlying moral earnestness [of Hesiod] the origins of a *mood* which pervaded the later masterpieces of didactic poetry and was perhaps an essential element in their success as works of art: for poetry seems most easily to combine with a didactic purpose when teaching rises to *preaching*.’³⁵ This potentiality for satire that was latent in the didactic and philosophical tradition had been exploited by Xenophanes, who was celebrated for the biting expression of his contempt for the views of his fellow-men, and by Democritus, known throughout antiquity as the Laughing Philosopher. Yet it was, it seems, Lucretius who first harnessed the power of satire and applied it to the systematic exposure of error, folly and superstition. The manner in which he did so will be discussed below (§4 (a)); at present

³³ Lucilius’ well-known fragment on Virtue (1326–38 M.) is as dull as ditchwater; and no writer is in general more lively and pungent.

³⁴ See Kenney 1970b/1986/2007. ³⁵ Cox 1969: 126.

it is sufficient to establish the point that the limitations in scope and intention of the *DRN* were designed by the poet, for the best, and that viewed in the light of the tradition in which Lucretius found himself called to work they make sense.³⁶ They are not necessarily to be taken, as they sometimes are, as the index of a deficiency in Lucretius.

(b) *Structure*

Though on close investigation a good many complexities can be detected the structure of the *DRN* in its broad outlines is simple:

The atoms	{	I The atoms and the void; rival theories refuted
		II The properties of atoms; their secondary qualities in combination
The soul	{	III The soul is proved to be mortal
		IV Thought and sensation
The world	{	V The creation and history of the world
		VI Celestial and terrestrial phenomena

Various correspondences, thematic and formal, underline this symmetry.³⁷ The outermost pairs of books, I–II and V–VI, are linked in so far as they demonstrate that all phenomena must be explained in material terms and that no intervention of divine or supernatural agencies may be postulated; hence these four books may be seen as directed, ultimately, against the fear of the gods. This identity of purpose is explicitly recognized by the statement, repeated at the beginning of each book, that in the Epicurean universe gods are not needed.³⁸ Books I and V, the first of their pairs, are further linked by repetition of the *leitmotiv* 1.76–7 = 5.89–90,³⁹ with which may be compared the often-remarked correspondences in Virgil's *Aeneid* between the beginnings of Books I and VII. This type of response was a standard device to articulate long poems. Within this framework the two central books III–IV are directed against fear of the afterlife; and once again the point is emphasized by correspondences at

³⁶ A qualification, however, may be admitted. These self-imposed limitations go some way to explain why the poem had more influence on the history of Latin poetry than on the history of philosophy. See Crawley 1963: 17–18.

³⁷ For further discussion of structure see Bailey 1947: 31–7; Boyancé 1963: 69–83; Minadeo 1965; Owen 1968–9; Farrell 2007. The details of these and other schemata are open to question, but there can be no quarrelling with the general conclusion that Lucretius planned and executed the poem with immense care, though he died before he could complete the revision of Books IV–VI (Sedley 1998: 134–65). On the implications for the editorial treatment of the text as it has come down to us see below, Section 6 ‘The Text’.

³⁸ 1.146–58, 2.167–81, 5.76–90, 6.50–79.

³⁹ Cf. also 1.80 *ne forte rearis* ~ 5.78 *ne forte... reamur*.