

ON LUCRETIVS 2.1-19

ERLING B. HOLTSMARK

University of Iowa

Perusal¹ of the literature on the proemium to Book 2 of the *De rerum natura* leaves the uncomfortable impression that those interpretations which attack the poet's flirting with "egoism and even cruelty" have long commanded serious attention.² If Lucretius is here guilty of calculated sadism (Bailey reports an interpretation of the poet as a possible neuro-psychotic³), one might recoil and feel compelled to protest. Since, however, those putative fantasies which paraded through his mind during the lucid intervals of composition will never be known, it would perhaps prove more profitable to avoid the quicksands of biographical bias and deal with the poetic text on its own merit.

¹ I wish to thank Professor Roger Hornsby for his valuable criticism of this paper in manuscript.

² The typical attitude is eloquently expressed, only to be denied, by Francesco Giannotti, *L'Ottimismo Relativo nel 'De Rerum Natura' di Lucrezio* (Torino 1961) 40. Cf. also the apologetic extenuation of Cyril Bailey, *Titi Lucreti Cari De rerum natura libri sex* (Oxford 1947) vol. 2, p. 797 (hereafter cited simply *ad loc.* or by volume and page). Nor are these lines without interest for the biographically curious, as is pointed out by Marc Rozelaar, *Lukrez: Versuch einer Deutung* (Amsterdam 1941) 9. Giovanni Barra, *Struttura e Composizione del 'De Rerum Natura' di Lucrezio* (Naples 1952) 73-74, dismisses the entire proemium with the information that it "assume . . . un carattere di intermezzo." A refreshing contrast to the negative views was briefly formulated by George Sullwold in his unpublished dissertation, *Lucretius' Imagery, A Poetic Reading of the De Rerum Natura* (University of Washington 1957; microfilm 58-1096) 159-60; he initiates, but does not pursue, a fruitful approach to the passage on imagistic grounds. Also sane is the comment of Alfred Ernout in his Budé edition, *Lucrèce: De la Nature* (Paris 1955) 1.71, note 1.

³ 1.8-12. In general scholars seem to have been obsessively fascinated with the idea that Lucretius was mad (as though it would explain anything about the poem to know that he was!). W. A. Merrill, *T. Lucreti Cari De rerum natura libri sex* (New York 1907) 15-17, gives a brief survey of the opinions on the matter of the poet's madness. Marc Rozelaar (above, note 2) 130-36 has rather pointlessly elaborated this biographical tradition; he finds a key to understanding Lucretius in the examination of those passages which supposedly point up Lucretius' psychopathology. Also familiar are the views of J. Logre, *L'Anxiété de Lucrèce* (Paris 1946).

My intention in this essay is to explore Lucretius' use of structure and language in order to arrive at some contextually warranted conclusions on his particular purpose in 2.1-19.

The organization of the opening lines (1-13)⁴ relies on a very common structural device in classical literature, the so-called priamel. Basically the priamel establishes a series of elements, functioning as foils, against the background of which a final term, phrase, or idea is viewed with enhanced importance. Each element of the priamel can itself be expanded by relevant amplification. In the opening of Book 2 the form of the device is sketched by *suave* (1) . . . *suave* (5) . . . *sed nil dulcius* (7),⁵ and each unit contains its own amplificatory material. Attention must be directed to that material in order to appreciate the specific use which Lucretius makes of the traditional device.

It is immediately apparent that the initial term (1-4) of the priamel presents an argument whose conclusion returns to its beginning (*suave* in lines 1 and 4). Further, the two final lines state a general principle which emerges from the more specific situation of the first two: "it is pleasant to perceive what distress one lacks oneself." The pleasure is one based on comparison. But is the comparison prompted by the poet's sadistic fancy? Or is it merely a piece of fortuitous ornamentation inserted in an otherwise mechanically conceived structure? It is not so much a matter of pressing the literal meaning of lines 1 and 2 that will elucidate the comparison, as it is of observing how, in the extracted generalization of lines 3-4, Lucretius characterizes *alterius* . . . *laborem* on a storm-tossed sea: *vexari quemquam*. The verb *vexari* in Lucretius most commonly designates some type of violent physical commotion (e.g. 1.275, 2.99, 5.217), especially of wind and often with reference to the sea (cf. 6.430: *navigia in summum veniant*

⁴ The text is that of Cyril Bailey, *Lucreti De rerum natura libri sex*² (Oxford 1959).

⁵ Very ornate is the extended priamel which organizes the central digression of Book 1, where earlier speculators (Monists, Pluralists, and Anaxagoras) on the nature of the universe are set up as foil to Lucretius himself, the most important "element" of his survey: *Heraclitus* . . . *primus* . . . *clarus* (638-39), *nil tamen hoc* (sc. Empedocles) . . . *viro praeclarior* (729), *et Anaxagorae scrutemur homoeomerian* (830), *nunc age* . . . *clarius audi* (921; i.e. "a more renowned theory" than those of the listed predecessors—see Bailey *ad loc.*). Within this basic structure is a priamel that organizes the introduction to Empedocles as the most important element in the context of the immediately preceding foil-terms of marvels found on Sicily (summarized in 726-27: *quae* . . . *miranda* . . . *regio*).

vexata periculum); the word is, however, also used by Lucretius in the derived sense of causing mental commotion and anguish.⁶ Moreover, although a storm on the sea is indeed a storm on the sea, it is also a rather common image of those turbulent storms which assail the inner life of man.⁷ It is therefore not inconceivable that these lines are to be read not only as a description of stereotyped impiety that sails the seas, but also as a statement on a prevalent spiritual condition of man. This latter possibility would seem to be suggested by a careful examination of the rest of the passage.

In the next term (5-6) of the priamel, not only does the word *tua* (6) pick up the second person in *careas* (4), as Bailey points out, but the whole phrase *tua sine parte pericli* recalls *quibus ipse malis careas*. The sweetness derived from watching battles lies not so much in the hypothetical beholder's avoidance of danger as a participant, but in his lack of participation; since Lucretius' spectator is uninvolved, the attendant risks implicit in the chaotic and destructive activity of others in *belli certamina magna* (5) are a cause of no direct personal concern to him. In the climactic term (7-13), the description of men's lives as a laborious struggle for wealth and power (11-13: *certare, contendere, niti praestante labore, opes, rerum*) underscores the meaning of *laborem* (2) and *belli certamina*: the great mass of men live lives devoted to anxious and warlike toil.⁸ And such toil always annihilates, it never integrates.

⁶ Cf. 5.1180: *mortis timor haud quemquam vexaret*; 6.15: *animi igratis vitam vexare* (sc. *anxia corda*; see Bailey *ad loc.*). And cf. W. E. Leonard and S. B. Smith, *T. Lucreti Cari De rerum natura libri sex* (Madison 1942), who quote on 1.275 from Aulus Gellius (N.A. 2.6.5): *qui . . . huc atque illuc distrahitur, is vexari proprie dicitur*; they further quote a meaning of *labor* (which *vexari* glosses) from Cicero, *Tusc.* 2.15.35: *labor est functio quaedam vel animi vel corporis gravioris operis et muneris*. Observe, moreover, that *laborem* (2) is picked up in *laboret* (54), where *in tenebris* points to a meaning of mental rather than physical labor.

⁷ The point has already been made in this connection by Sullwold (above, note 2) 159-64. In classical literature the image of storm in nature as reflecting unresolved confusion in man is as old as Homer, *Od.* 5, and few if any instances are as striking as that in Vergil, *A.* 1.81-123. Further, see Aeschylus, *Supp.* 468-71, Horace, *C.* 1.5, and Ovid, *Met.* 11.474-572.

⁸ Lucretius has already established military imagery as a basis for describing the life of man. In the introduction to Epicurus (1.62-79), the master is clearly a victorious general for the forces of man's life (62: *humana . . . vita*) in the battle against the forces of *caelum* and their general, *religio*. The passage fairly bristles with military language: *oppressa* (63), *instans* (65), *obsistere* (67), *minitanti* (68), *compressit* (69), *vis animi pervicit* (72), *refert . . . victor* (75), *pedibus subiecta* (78), *victoria* (79). The passage in Book 2, then,

The points on which Lucretius ostensibly seems to insist are two: (1) that the battle of life is waged by men who are not equipped with full awareness of what it is they are engaged in (cf. especially lines 9-10⁹), and therefore are destined to pervert the true objectives of life; and (2) that the pleasure of the philosopher derives not from any active sadistic delight in the difficulties faced by struggling humanity, but from the uninvolved serenity which his own awareness and knowledge of the true workings of the world enable him to embrace. These points are developed through comparison and contrast. The latter mode juxtaposes unaware mankind against the philosopher's awareness. The former utilizes the conventional structure of the priamel as a vehicle to underscore the superiority of the point of view expressed in the phrase *bene quam . . . templa serena* (7-8); that, in the last analysis, is the essence of philosophical *suavitas* or *dulcedo*, and not the negative formulations of the parallel phrases in the first two terms: *quibus . . . careas* (4) and *tua . . . pericli* (6). In these opening lines, finally, Lucretius is commenting on the place of human knowledge in the scheme of things and how it can most fruitfully serve men in their quest for the "way of life." To raise objections because individual phrases or ideas appear morally or ethically improper when considered outside the context betrays an unawareness of the conventionally unifying structure which informs the entire passage.

Let us, then, enlarging our scope, examine the fuller context to ascertain if it in any way illuminates or reinforces the interpretation adumbrated above. In lines 14-19, which comment on the preceding section, the poet presents his point of view on the situation in which man finds himself. The two initial lines set the tone (14-15):

o miseras hominum mentis, o pectora caeca!
qualibus in tenebris vitae quantisque periclis. . .

continues the image of man's life as a toilsome battlefield, and the most important criterion for survival on it is the requisite power of understanding (cf. 1.72, *vis animi pervicit*, and 2.8, *edita doctrina sapientum templa*) the workings of the universe.

⁹ The journey, or the road, has in Book 1 been fully established as imagistic pattern for the (right or wrong) pursuit of knowledge. The instances are numerous, and the following should make the use of the image self-evident: 74, 81-82, 332, 370, 402, 404-10, 637, 638, 711, 846, 926-27, 1052, 1114, and 1116. See also Giancotti (above, note 2) on 1.144 and 2.10.

The important words are *mentis*, *caeca*, *tenebris*, and *periclis*. It is, first, the mental attitude of men which concerns Lucretius, for he finds it wretchedly wanting. Secondly, *caeca* and *tenebris* have for Lucretius strong imagistic connotations. Throughout Book 1 he has made it very clear that words of darkness signify the darkness of ignorance, of things incompletely understood, while those of light and vision suggest the opposite, mental or intellectual enlightenment. Thus, for example, in the conclusion to the proemium of Book 1 (136-45) Lucretius announces that he will shed light on the dim findings of the Greeks (136-37: *obscura reperta . . . inlustrare*); that he is persuaded to do so at night (142), i.e. in the midst of man's general ignorance; and that he would spread before Memmius' mind the clear lights (144: *clara . . . lumina*) which will enable him fully and completely to see (understand) what is hidden (145: *res . . . occultas penitus convisere*).¹⁰ And finally, the word *periclis*, the dangers and risks which dog the life that is spent in dark ignorance, offers a control on the meaning of the metrically identical *pericli* in line 6. There the observer does not participate in that blind unawareness which leads men to wage their battles.

In Lucretius' opinion the difficulty which taints and distorts the life of man is that he does not understand what should motivate him in order to live happily; as a consequence he is unable to enjoy that *tranquillitas*, the securing of which should be his main preoccupation. The rhetorical question (16-19) which concludes this section asks why men do not understand (16: *videre*) the demands of nature. This use of *videre* perhaps casts light on the meaning of lines 1-13, where a number of such verbs of perception occur: *spectare* (2), *cernere* (4), *tueri* (5), and *videre* (9). In line 16 *videre* clearly must denote intellectual perception.

¹⁰ This observation on the image cluster of light-darkness is almost a commonplace of Lucretian criticism. Cf. Leonard and Smith (above, note 6) on 1.136-37, 3.1-2; Bailey on 3.1; Sullwold (above, note 2) 96-111; W. S. Anderson, "Discontinuity in Lucretian Symbolism," *TAPA* 91 (1960) 2-5; Sister Frances, "The Light of Reason and the Darkness of Unbelief," *CJ* 58 (1963) 170-72; and, with a slightly different emphasis, J. P. Elder, "Lucretius 1.1-49," *TAPA* 85 (1954) 95, note 12. Indeed, the image is in all likelihood a universal one, as has been recently suggested in a different context by Sister Sylvia Mary in Chapter 3 ("Light and Darkness") of her book *Nostalgia for Paradise* (Desclee Co., New York 1965). At any rate, in view of scholars' awareness that the image is pervasive in Lucretius, it is all the more surprising that its functional import in lines 14-15 for the interpretation of 2.1-19 has been ignored.

Can it (and does it) denote intellectual rather than physical perception also in line 9, where it stands in a metrically identical position?

I suggest that the received translations and interpretations here fail to consider a rather important distinction in the grammatical usage of such *verba sentiendi* as *videre*. I shall treat the phrase *queas . . . videre / errare* (9–10) with the tacit understanding that what applies to the grammatical construction of *errare* will apply equally to the other infinitives dependent on *videre* (*quaerere*, *certare*, *contendere*, and *niti*). Bailey offers the following translation: “you can . . . see them wandering;” the Penguin edition of R. E. Latham¹¹ has: “to gaze . . . on others wandering.” Others also translate *errare* in the participial form.¹² The question is whether *errare* is an infinitive of indirect statement or represents the participle. After a verb of perception one would expect that if the infinitive is active, it is the infinitive of indirect statement, but that if it is a true passive (not deponent), it can in addition represent the non-existent present passive participle.¹³ It is therefore perfectly reasonable to take *errare* as the infinitive of indirect statement. Indeed, the fact that Lucretius does use the infinitives after *videre* in conjunction with the participle *palantis* (10) would seem to argue for a reading of the infinitives as infinitives of indirect statement. I translate in the following manner: “you can see (understand) that they wander and, straying about (*palantis*), seek the road.” This general formulation of the perverseness of men’s lives is then immediately specified in lines 11–13: “(namely), that they vie in wits.”¹⁴ What is *dulcius*, therefore, is not that you, from your “ivory tower,” physically behold men’s strivings, but that you, because you are equipped with the teachings of the philosophers, intellectually appreciate the fact that mankind is on the wrong path, namely that its total commitment is nothing more than

¹¹ Lucretius: *On the Nature of the Universe* (London and Tonbridge 1958) 60.

¹² E.g., E. E. Sikes, *Lucretius: Poet and Philosopher* (Cambridge 1936) 17; Russel M. Geer, *On Nature: Lucretius* (Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1965) 40.

¹³ On the admittedly tenuous distinction between, for example, *audivi eum loquentem* and *audivi eum loqui*, see Leumann-Hofmann-Szantyr, *Lateinische Grammatik* (Muenchen 1965) 387c; also E. C. Woodcock, *A New Latin Syntax* (London 1960) 75.

¹⁴ *Atque* (10), closely connecting *errare* and *quaerere*, initiates a process of ever greater specification. *Errare* (most general) is more narrowly defined by *viam palantis quaerere vitae*, and line 10 as a whole is again further specified by the following infinitives through *niti*; it, in turn, is referred explicitly to the pursuit of wealth and power (13). And that this is men’s mistake is what the philosopher understands.

an eternally vain struggle. You are consequently in a position to rectify and ameliorate man's benighted state by teaching him your understanding of the world.

Can this reading be placed in harmony with or supported by anything in the first two terms of the priamel? It has already been observed that in the initial term (1-4) the conclusion (3-4) restates more generally the specific situation at the beginning (1-2). The specific *suave . . . spectare laborem* becomes, in chiasitic order, the general explanation (cf. *quia*) *quibus ipse malis careas . . . cernere . . . suave*. The latter phrase, glossing the former, indicates that *spectare laborem* is not to be taken literally (cf. Ernout [above, note 2] 71 note 1) to mean that pleasure derives from physical observation of another's difficulty. The subjunctive *careas*, as a verb of indirect question, urges the meaning "to perceive (understand) what evils you are yourself free from."¹⁵ Again, the pleasure lies not in looking at another's *labor*, but in understanding it;¹⁶ so, too, is there pleasure in a mental contemplation (5: *tueri*) of *certamina*.¹⁷ The greater pleasure, however, consists of the particular understanding which is explicitly based on philosophical *doctrina* (8), as is made clear by the expression in the final term (7-13) of the priamel.¹⁸

Lines 16-19 call for a further observation. One can hardly fail to be struck by the metaphor in *latrare* (17). Even if the verb is a mere poetic piece of *variatio* for the more prosaic *poscere*, and even if it has antecedents as august and authoritative as Homer (*Od.* 20.13, *ὐλάκτει*,

¹⁵ In this note *ad loc.*, H. A. J. Munro, *T. Lucreti Cari De rerum natura libri sex*⁴ (Cambridge 1886), clearly takes *careas* as a subjunctive in a relative clause of characteristic: "*quibus malis careas = ea mala quibus careas*." This is certainly not impossible, but with *cernere* it is perhaps more plausible to take *quibus* as an interrogative rather than relative adjective, or relative pronoun with its antecedent *mala* incorporated as *malis*.

¹⁶ *Spectare* in the non-physical, contemplative sense is found elsewhere in Lucretius: 5.958. At 3.55 the same idea is probably uppermost, since *spectare* (in fact its whole phrase) is glossed in line 56 by *noscere*; in 3.360 (*animum . . . spectare*), because of the previous line (359), the verb probably indicates physical perception, even if it is the *animus* which *spectat*.

¹⁷ *Tueri* is so used at 5.1203: *pacata posse omnia mente tueri*.

¹⁸ The extended metaphor of the philosopher's viewing, or rather understanding, men's errors from the vantage of his "ivory tower" is lent further emphasis by *unde* (9); that is, his *templa* are not only the *place* from which he sees, but the *source* from which he, strengthened by his *doctrina*, derives his ability to understand the fact that men err. On *despicere* in a contemplative sense, see Cicero *De rep.* 1.17.28 (quoted by Leonard and Smith, *ad loc.*).

and 15, ὑλάει) or Ennius (*Ann.* 584, *animus . . . latrat*), one might well inquire into the reason why Lucretius elected to use such *variatio* or hark back to Homeric or Ennean phraseology.¹⁹ In short, does the word have any significance which justifies its striking application here? It is immediately apparent that the use of *latrare* suggests that *natura* is to be regarded as a bitch (*canis*), and the translation might read: "that (man's) nature, dog-like, barks out demands for nothing else than that. . . ."

The conception of *natura* as dog-like finds support in an important passage from Book 1 (402-9). There Lucretius has concluded his argument on the existence of void; he pauses briefly (398-417) before recapitulating the first 400 lines and moving on to the discussion of *coniuncta* and *eventa* (449-82). In the following citation of lines 402-9 the words important for our purpose are italicized:

verum animo satis haec *vestigia* parva *sagaci*
 sunt per quae possis cognoscere cetera tute.
 namque *canes* ut *montivagae* persaepe *ferarum*²⁰
naribus inveniunt *intectas fronde quietes*,
 cum semel institerunt *vestigia* certa *viai*,
 sic alid ex alio per te tute ipse videre
 talibus in rebus poteris *caecasque latebras*
 insinuare omnis et *verum protrahere* inde.

Lucretius, the disciple of Epicurus and hence a dweller in *munita . . . doctrina sapientum templa* (2.7-8), has in the first 400 lines of Book 1 presented the reader with the basic elements of the master's philosophy. These elements he calls *vestigia*, "tracks." They can be recognized by the reader who is *animo . . . sagaci*. *Vestigia* and *sagaci* (1.402)

¹⁹ Bailey quotes from Paul.-Fest. 121: *latrare Ennius pro poscere posuit*. In Homer the verb is used absolutely, apparently to connote angry excitement; and in Ennius, as far as we can gather from the citation of Varro (*L.L.* 7.103), the meaning seems to be similar. In Lucretius, however, the verb has an object (*nil aliud*) and, as will presently be demonstrated, would appear to convey quite a broader meaning.

²⁰ On the uncertainty of the last word in this line, see Bailey *ad loc.* Although it does not seem to be of great moment whether we read *ferarum* (with Bailey in the OCT) or *ferai* (with Bailey in his edition of 1947), the adjective *montivagae* should be taken with *canes*, not *ferai*. The former agreement would certainly make the line more cohesive with a major caesura after *montivagae* than would a major diaeresis after *ut*, by reading the adjective with *ferai*. Furthermore, the simile is concerned primarily with the relentless activity and movement of the dogs, not of the quarry.

prepare for the simile of lines 404-6, in which the mind that has been introduced to the fundamental principles of the philosophical system is compared to a pack of keen-scented bitches (*canes . . . naribus*) on the hunt. The bitches, straying about on the mountains (*montivagae*), do not at first know where the quarry lurks, but as soon as they have set foot on *vestigia certa viai* (406)²¹ they find the lairs.

I have already noted (above, note 9) that the road, or journey, is a fixed image in Lucretius for the road to knowledge and enlightenment. Just, then, as the bitches find their quarry because they are equipped (with keen scent) to do it, so too can man, as naturally equipped with mind as bitches are with spooring ability, seek out the truth once he has been given the tracks; he will slink in (409: *insinuare*) to the *caecas latebras* where it hides. In the simile the lairs of the hunted quarry are characterized as *intectas fronde*: they are covered up, hard to find, obscure. It has already been pointed out (above, note 10) that darkness is an image for ignorance, for a benighted state, while light is the light of reason and knowledge. In addition, the notion, broadly speaking, of "covering up" or "constriction" has for Lucretius assumed the value of ignorance and lack of enlightenment, while that of "unfolding," "opening up," or "discovering" comes to suggest the opposite.²² In that the bitches seek out *intectas . . . quietes* in the same fashion as the keen individual can work his way into *caecas latebras*, they are like the well-equipped mind which can "dis-cover" and drag forth the truth. Thus is knowledge hunted out of its den of darkness; thus can ignorance, when prompted by the hints and suggestions of philosophy, be turned into knowledge.

In the light of this discussion of 1.402-9, Lucretius' metaphor in *naturam latrare* (2.16) may be assessed more particularly. The simile of the bitches' hunt in Book 1 comments on what Lucretius hopes will be his reader's attitude to the application of such knowledge as he imparts.

²¹ The metrical identity of *vestigia* in lines 402 and 406 reinforces the notion that there are "tracks" which will lead equally to the discovery of the right way to reach both the quarry and the truth.

²² The following passages from Book 1 demonstrate the connotations I suggest: 55 (*pandam*), 70-71 (*effringere . . . arta naturae . . . portarum claustra*), 144 (*praepandere lumina*), 932-33 (*doceo . . . et artis . . . animum nodis exsolvere pergo*). Cf. also 2.38 (*ratione exsolvere quare*), 5.54 (*pandere*) and, possibly, of the superstitiously ignorant at 5.1198 (*velatum*).

It is not sufficient only to appreciate the existence of *vestigia*; man ought to apply himself to hunt out the truth, just as the bitches, given the tracks of their quarry, will hunt that out. In 2.17, then, Lucretius cries out against that ignorance and blindness which so perverts humanity's ability to recognize what human nature (*naturam*) requires. Human nature is undeniably appetitive; in terms of the canine imagery, it hunts, or pursues certain objectives. The point is that these pursuits in which Lucretius sees toiling man as engaged are the wrong kinds of objectives. Although human nature is like the unerring and keen-scented pack that, barking excitedly, can track its way straight to a lair, nevertheless it is the blindness of man towards his proper goal that prevents his nature from picking up the most appropriate spoor.

This fact of man's blindness is what Lucretius deplors. The failure to realize one's innate potential for happiness is due to a lack of the mental or intellectual training requisite for the successful hunt; only by a study of Lucretius' presentation of Epicurean philosophy can man be educated. Only when armed by *doctrina sapientum* will he understand that by nature he is in pursuit of a physical state that lacks pain (18: *corpore seiunctus dolor absit*) and a mental state far removed from anxiety and dread (18-19: *mente . . . cura semota metuque*). Thus, finally, will he attain the enjoyment of pleasure (18-19: *fruaturs iucundo sensu*).

Iucundo in line 19 completes the circle which began with *suave* in line 1. The reading here presented of lines 14-19 will hopefully bear out the contention that the pleasures referred to in lines 1-4 (*suave*), 5-6 (*suave*), and 7-13 (*dulcius*) are not motivated by sadism. The concluding lines, with their emphatic juxtaposition of ignorance (14-16) and knowledge (17-19), declare that man fails to comprehend fully his true nature. As a creature of inescapable appetites he cannot fail to act on the basis of his appetitive nature, but he can, indeed he must, come to understand that appetitive nature and to what end it is best directed if he is to achieve balance in his life. He must, in short, understand what he, as a human being, needs, wants, and should properly pursue. But according to Lucretius men do not *videre* (16); if they did, or could be made to, then they would enjoy that unperurbed pleasure which arises from enlightened comprehension and so enables one to live in harmony with the natural order of things.

The final section (2.54-61) of the entire proemium, concerned as it is with dispelling ignorance in favor of knowledge, lends strong support to the above interpretation. In lines 20-53 the reader is offered the specific formulation of man's true needs,²³ and according to Lucretius is virtually forced to conclude that only *ratio* is capable of providing for them (53). *Ratio*, reason, alone illuminates the benighted lives of men. What man must do is pursue a rationally informed examination of nature not only in its workings at large but also in man himself. An investigation, then, of "the nature of things" that directs itself ultimately to the individual human being and his understanding of himself is urged by Lucretius.

To understand as a consequence of such investigation the fact that the pursuits of other men are misdirected affords pleasure precisely because it implies that, unlike the others, one does understand oneself and is in a position to teach others the error of their ways by pointing out what they in effect are pursuing. In the final term of the priamel the emphasis is not on the lengthy subordination introduced by *unde* (9), but on the predication of *dulcius* (7-8):

bene . . . munita tenere
edita doctrina sapientum templa serena.

It is that knowledge which enables one to recognize that men are traveling their journey of life in utter confusion.

The reading of 2.1-19 suggested in this essay is not so much in disagreement with the traditional views on the passage, nor is it meant to deny categorically the validity of all these views; rather, it offers the distinct possibility of a further level of meaning which does not seem to

²³ This section elaborates, in more specific detail, the two categories of needs *corpore* and *mente*, as it was stated in general terms in line 18 (see Bailey on 2.37 ff. and 39). The division is underlined by the repetition of *corpus* (20, 31, 34, and 37) in the first part (20-38); by the repetition of *animus* (39 and 45) and *pectus* (46) in the second part (39-53); and by the echo of *dolor* (18) in line 21, of *cura* . . . *metuque* (19) in lines 44-49. The substantive portion of each division is, furthermore, ushered in by *videmus* (20 and 47) in a position metrically identical to that of *videre* in the opening lines (9 and 16). The transitional *ergo* (20) points out that we come to understand (*videmus*) our specific physical and spiritual needs as a result of our recognizing first in general terms what the needs are of the man who is in harmony with his natural character. The ultimate point of his elaboration is of course to demonstrate, as if *per exempla contraria*, that the objectives listed in lines 11-13 are at odds with our true and natural needs (cf. lines 37-38 and 50-51).

have been entertained previously. This interpretation demonstrates that Lucretius displays more the altruist's solicitude for his fellow human beings than the insulated egoism of the madman. Consideration of the passage as a structural whole reveals that Lucretius ultimately transmutes the meaning of the individual statements from ostensible "egoism and even cruelty" into active sympathy for man's condition. Through his unfolding of Epicurus' system in the rest of the poem, the poet acts on that sympathy by attempting to teach men to understand their own nature within the context of the entire *rerum natura*. Thus they too can come to recognize the wrongness of their lives and may, finally, harmonize their microcosmic *naturae* with the macrocosmic *natura*. Far from sadistic, the pleasure which Lucretius speaks of is one whose roots are deeply embedded in the all too barren soil of human compassion and concern. Such pleasure might well speak to other ages than his own divided one.