Furthermore, all things that subsist eternally must either be composed of solid substance, so that they repel blows and are impenetrable to anything that might destroy the close cohesion of their parts from within—like the elements of matter, whose nature I have already demonstrated; or their ability to survive throughout all time must be due to their immunity from blows—as is the case with void, which is always intangible and never experiences any impact; or else the cause of their indestructibility must be the absence of any surrounding space into which their substance might disperse and dissolve—as is the case with the totality of the universe: for outside the universe there is no space into which its substance can escape, and no matter capable of striking it and shattering it with a powerful blow.\textsuperscript{53}

If by chance the preferred supposition is that the soul is to be considered immortal because it is fortified and protected by the forces of life, or because things fatal to its existence never approach it, or because those that do approach it are repulsed by some means before they can inflict any injury upon us, [it must be said that this supposition is at variance with the facts].\textsuperscript{54} Besides sharing the diseases of the body, the soul is often visited by feelings that torment it about the future, fret it with fear, and vex it with anxious cares, while consciousness of past misdeeds afflicts it with remorse. Remember also madness and loss of memory—afflictions peculiar to the mind; remember the black waves of coma into which it sinks.

Death, then, is nothing to us\textsuperscript{55} and does not affect us in the least, now that the nature of the mind is understood to be mortal. And as in time past we felt no distress when the advancing Punic hosts were threatening Rome on every side, when the whole earth, rocked by the terrifying tumult of war, shudderingly quaked beneath the coasts of high heaven, while the entire human race was doubtful into whose possession the

\textsuperscript{53. 806–818:} These lines recur, with minor alterations, at 5.351–363, where Lucr. is demonstrating the mortality of the world. It is probably a sign of lack of revision that in the present context he does not state that the soul’s failure to satisfy any of the three conditions of immortality shows that it must be mortal.

\textsuperscript{54. 819–823:} A line has been lost after 823. It is likely that Lucr. is alluding to the condition of immortality of the Epicurean gods, who, living in the intermundane spaces, continually gain new atoms to replace those which they lose.

\textsuperscript{55. 830:} “Death is nothing to us,” a translation of the first words of Epicurus \textit{PD} 2, might well serve as a title for the whole of the final section of this book (830–1094).
sovereignty of the land and the sea was destined to fall; so, when we are no more, when body and soul, upon whose union our being depends, are divorced, you may be sure that nothing at all will have the power to affect us or awaken sensation in us, who shall not then exist—not even if the earth be confounded with the sea, and the sea with the sky.

And even supposing that the mind and the spirit retain their power of sensation after they have been wrenched from our body, it is nothing to us, whose being is dependent upon the conjunction and marriage of body and soul. Furthermore, if in course of time all our component atoms should be reassembled after our death and restored again to their present positions, so that the light of life was given to us a second time, even that eventuality would not affect us in the least, once there had been a break in the chain of consciousness. Similarly at the present time we are not affected at all by any earlier existence we had, and we are not tortured with any anguish concerning it. When you survey the whole sweep of measureless time past and consider the multifariousness of the movements of matter, you can easily convince yourself that the same seeds that compose us now have often before been arranged in the same order that they occupy now. And yet we have no recollection of our earlier existence; for between that life and this lies an unbridged gap—an interval during which all the motions of our atoms strayed and scattered in all directions, far away from sensation.

If it happens that people are to suffer unhappiness and pain in the future, they themselves must exist at that future time for harm to be able to befall them; and since death takes away this possibility by preventing the existence of those who might have been visited by troubles, you may be sure that there is nothing to fear in death, that those who no longer exist cannot become miserable, and that it makes not one speck of difference whether or not they have ever been born once their mortal life has been snatched away by deathless death.

56. **832–837**: The reference is to the Punic Wars, fought between Rome and Carthage, and especially to the Second Punic War (218–201 B.C.) during which Hannibal invaded Italy and defeated the Romans in several battles.

57. **842**: That is to say, not even if the world comes to an end.

58. **869**: The paradoxical idea of “deathless death” goes back to the Greek comic poet Amphim (fourth century B.C.), quoted by Athenaeus 8.336c: “Drink and have fun! Life is mortal, and time on earth is short. Death is deathless, once one is dead.” Although Lucr. agrees with Amphim about the deathlessness of death, he disagrees with the advice “eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die,” as he makes clear in 912–918.
So, when you see people indignant at the thought that after death they will either rot in the grave or be devoured by flames or the jaws of wild beasts, you may be sure that, however emphatically they themselves deny belief that they will retain any feeling in death, their words do not ring true, and that deep in their hearts they are pricked by some secret fear. In my judgment, they grant neither the conclusion they profess to grant, nor the premise\(^59\) from which it is derived; they do not completely uproot and detach themselves from life, but unconsciously suppose that something of themselves survives. Whenever people in life imagine that in death their body will be torn to pieces by birds and beasts of prey, they feel sorry for themselves. This is because they do not separate themselves from the body or dissociate themselves sufficiently from the outcast corpse; they identify themselves with it and, as they stand by, impregnate it with their own feelings. Hence their indignation at having been created mortal; hence their failure to see that in real death there will be no second self alive to lament their own end, and to stand by and grieve at the sight of them lying there, being torn to pieces or burned. I mention being burned, because, if in death it is disastrous to be mauled by the devouring jaws of wild beasts, I cannot see why it is not calamitous to be laid upon a funeral pyre and consumed by scorching flames, or to be embalmed in stifling honey, or to grow stiff with cold, reclining on the smooth surface of an icy slab of stone,\(^60\) or to be pulverized by a crushing weight of earth above one.

“Never again,” mourners say, “will your household receive you with joy; never again will the best of wives welcome you home; never again will your dear children race for the prize of your first kisses and touch your heart with pleasure too profound for words.\(^61\) Never again can you enjoy prosperous circumstances or be a bulwark to your dependants. Wretched man,” they cry, “one wretched, damnable day has dispossessed you of every one of life’s many precious gifts.” They omit to

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59. \(876\): The premise is that the soul does not survive after death; the conclusion is that there is no feeling after death.

60. \(892\): E. J. Kenney well remarks that “the chilly discomfort of this situation, in which the body has no covering, is ironically contrasted with that of the buried body, which has too much.”

61. \(894–896\): These lines influenced Virgil (\textit{Georgics} 2.523–524) and inspired a famous stanza in Thomas Gray’s \textit{Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard} (21–24): “For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn, / Or busy housewife ply her evening care: / No children run to lisp their sire’s return, / Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.”
add: “No craving for these things remains with you any longer.” If only they fully grasped this fact and expressed their feelings accordingly, they would relieve their minds of great anguish and fear.

I imagine another saying: “You, for your part, are wrapped in the sleep of death and will remain so for the rest of time, exempt from all painful sufferings. But we, as we stood near the dreadful pyre upon which you were reduced to ashes, wept and wept for you insatiably; our sorrow is undying: the day will never dawn that will banish it from our hearts.”

The person who takes this attitude should be asked how a happening that involves a return to sleep and repose can be so bitter that anyone should pine away in undying grief.

It often happens too that people reclining at a banquet, drinking-cup in hand and garlands shadowing their brows, earnestly declare: “All too short-lived is the enjoyment of these things for us puny humans; soon it will be gone, and we will never be able to recall it.” As if the most miserable misfortune awaiting them in death was to be consumed and parched by a burning thirst or indeed to be afflicted with any other craving! In fact, people never feel the want of themselves or their life, when mind and body alike are sunk in sound sleep: as far as we are concerned, this sleep might continue for ever without any craving for ourselves affecting us. And yet, at the moment when people jerk themselves out of sleep and gather themselves together, the primary elements of the spirit scattered throughout their limbs cannot be straying far from the motions that produce sensation. It follows that death should be considered to be of much less concern to us than sleep—that is, if anything can be less than what we perceive to be nothing. For at death a greater disturbance and dispersion of matter takes place, and no one wakes and rises once overtaken by life’s cold stoppage.

Furthermore, suppose that nature suddenly burst into speech, and personally addressed the following rebuke to one of us:62 “What distresses you so deeply, mortal creature, that you abandon yourself to these piling lamentations? Why do you bemoan and beweep death? If your past life has been a boon, and if not all your blessings have flowed straight through you and run to waste like water poured into a riddled vessel,63

62. 931–932: The device of personifying nature and putting an address into her mouth is dramatically effective and also enables Lucr. to say some harsh things without giving offense. The same is true of the device, employed in 1024–1052, of making Memmius and us address ourselves.

63. 936–937: An allusion, as in 6.17 23, to the story of the Danaids, the fifty
why, you fool, do you not retire from the feast of life like a sated guest and with equanimity resign yourself to undisturbed rest? If, however, all your enjoyments have been poured away and lost, and if life is a thorn, why do you seek to prolong your existence, when the future, just as surely as the past, would be ruined and utterly wasted? Why not rather put an end to life and trouble? There is nothing further that I can devise and discover for your pleasure: all things are always the same. Though your body is not yet shrunk with age, and your limbs are not exhausted and enfeebled, all things remain the same —yes, even if in length of life you should outlast all generations, or indeed even if you should be destined never to die.”64 What can we say in reply, save that nature’s complaint is just, and that in her plea she sets out a true case?

And if someone older and more advanced in years should sorrowfully bewail and bemoan the approach of death to an immoderate degree, would she not be justified in rating that person still more roughly and delivering an even sharper rebuke:65 “Stop sniveling, you dolt!”66 Away with your whinings! You had full use of all the precious things of life before you reached this senile state. But because you continually crave what is not present and scorn what is, your life has slipped away from you incomplete and unenjoyed, until suddenly you have found death standing at your head before you are able to depart from the feast of life filled to repletion. Quick then, discard all behavior unsuited to your age and with equanimity yield to your years; for yield you must.” In my opinion, she would be justified in making this plea, justified in delivering this rebuke and reproof. The old is ever ousted and superseded by the new, and one thing must be repaired from others. No one is consigned to the black abyss of Tartarus: everyone’s component matter is needed to enable succeeding generations to grow—generations which, when they have completed their term of life, are all destined to follow you. The fate of the Danaids, forty-nine of whom murdered their husbands on their wedding night, and whose punishment in the underworld was to perform for eternity the futile task of pouring water into leaking containers. To Lucr. the Danaids represent those who are never satisfied with the good things of life, as he explains in 1003–1010. On the vessel metaphor, see note on 440.

64. 944–949: For the doctrine that pleasure is limited, and that infinite time could not produce any greater pleasure, see Epicurus PD 18–20.

65. 952–954: Cf. Diogenes of Oinoanda ff. 47.III.10 1V.2: “Or how can we justly bring a complaint against nature, if someone who has lived for so many years and so many months and so many days [arrives at life’s last day]?”

in store for you has already befallen past generations and will befall future generations no less surely. Thus one thing will never cease to rise out of another: life is granted to no one for permanent ownership, to all on lease. Look back now and consider how the bygone ages of eternity that elapsed before our birth were nothing to us. Here, then, is a mirror in which nature shows us the time to come after our death. Do you see anything fearful in it? Do you perceive anything grim? Does it not appear more peaceful than the deepest sleep?

Next let me assure you that all the punishments that tradition locates in the abyss of Acheron actually exist in our life.

No tormented Tantalus, as in the story, fears the huge rock suspended over him in the air, paralyzied with vain terror; but in life mortals are oppressed by groundless fear of the gods and dread the fall of the blow that chance may deal to any of them.

No Tityos lying in Acheron has his insides devoured by winged creatures. It is certain that they could not find anything for their beaks to explore throughout eternity even in the depths of that huge breast: even if the sprawling extent of his body were so enormous that his splayed-out limbs covered not merely nine acres, but the whole orb of the earth, he would not be able to endure eternal pain or furnish an inexhaustible

67. 971: A justly famous line: life is not a permanent and absolute possession, but something of which we only have temporary use.

68. 978–1023: Denials of belief in the horrors of the underworld seem, not surprisingly, to have been common in Epicurean teaching. So says Seneca Epistulae Morales 24.18, and Diogenes of Oinoanda (fr. 73.1.1–8) writes: “[I follow you (Epicurus)] when you make these statements about death, and you have persuaded me to laugh at it. For I have no fear on account of the Tityoses and Tantaluses whom some describe in Hades.” It is not unlikely, though not certain, that Lucr. has derived from Epicurus himself the idea that the punishments alleged to exist in hell actually exist in our life.

69. 980–983: Legendary king of Sipylus in Lydia, son of Zeus (Jupiter). He did something (it is not agreed what) to offend the gods whose society he had been privileged to share. According to Homer (Odyssey 11.582–592), his punishment was to stand up to his chin in water, with fruit-laden branches over his head: whenever he stooped to drink, the water receded; and whenever he tried to pick the fruit, the wind blew it out of reach. The version of the punishment that Lucr. adopts, because it suits his purpose better, is the one followed by the Greek lyric and tragic poets.

70. 984–994: A giant who attempted to rape Leto (Latona), the mother of Apollo and Artemis (Diana). Lucr.’s description of his punishment is in imitation of Homer Odyssey 11.576–581.
supply of food from his own body. However, Tityos does exist among us on earth: he is the person lying in bonds of love, who is torn by winged creatures and consumed by agonizing anxiety or rent by the anguish of some other passion.

Sisyphus too exists in this life before our eyes: he is the man who thirstily solicits from the people the rods and grim axes of high office and always comes away disappointed and despondent. For to seek power that is illusory and never granted, and to suffer continual hardship in pursuit of it, is the same as to push up a mountain with might and main a rock that, after all this effort, rolls back from the summit and in impetuous haste races down to the level plain.

Then again, to keep feeding an ungrateful mind with good things, without ever being able to fill it and satisfy its appetite as is the case with the seasons of the year, when they come around with their fruits and manifold delights and yet never satisfy our appetite for the fruits of life—this, in my opinion, is what is meant by the story of those maidens in the flower of their age pouring water into a riddled vessel that cannot possibly be filled.

But what of Cerberus and the Furies and the realm destitute of light? What of Tartarus vomiting waves of fearful fumes from its jaws? These terrors do not exist and cannot exist anywhere at all. But in life people are tortured by a fear of punishment as cruel as their crimes, and by the atonement for their offenses— the dungeon, the terrible precipita-

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72. 995–1002: Legendary king of Corinth, notorious for his robberies, cunning, and treachery. Lucr. closely follows the description of his punishment in I Homer Odyssey 11.593–600.

73. 996: A bundle of rods with an axe in the middle (fasces) was carried before the chief magistrates at Rome.

74. 1002: The stone races back down to the plain, just as the candidate for political office hurries back to the Plain of Mars (Campus Martius), where elections were held. For the possibility that a passage about the punishment of Ixion has dropped out after 1002, see especially H. D. Jocelyn, Acta Classica 29 (1986) 49–51.

75. 1008: The Danaids. See note on 936–937.

76. 1011: The monstrous dog that guarded the entrance to the lower world.

77. 1011: Chthonian goddesses of vengeance.

78. 1011–1012: It is possible that a line (or lines) has been lost after 1011 or 1012. If there is no lacuna, Marullus’ haec for qui at the beginning of 1013 should probably be accepted.
tion from the Rock,\textsuperscript{79} stripes, executioners, the execution cell, pitch, red-hot plates, torches.\textsuperscript{80} Even though these horrors are absent, the mind, conscious of its guilt and fearfully anticipating the consequences, pricks itself with goads and scars itself with scourges. It fails to see how there can be an end to its afflictions, or a limit to its punishment; indeed it is afraid that its sufferings may increase in death. In short, fools make a veritable hell of their lives on earth.\textsuperscript{81}

Now and again you might well address yourself in the following terms:\textsuperscript{82} "Shame on you! Even good Ancus closed his eyes and left the light of life,\textsuperscript{83} and he was a far, far better person than you.\textsuperscript{84} Since then, many other kings and potentates, rulers of mighty nations, have passed away. Even that famous monarch\textsuperscript{85} who once constructed a roadway over the great sea and opened a path for his legions across the deep, teaching his infantry to march over the briny gulfs while his cavalry pranced upon the ocean in defiance of its roars—yes, even he was deprived of the light of life and gasped out his soul from his dying body. Scipio,\textsuperscript{86} that thunderbolt of war, the dread of Carthage, surrendered his bones to the earth as though he were the meanest of menial slaves. Remember too the inventors of sciences and arts; remember the companions of the Heliconian maidens,\textsuperscript{87} among whom unique Homer bore the scepter and yet is wrapped in the same sound sleep as the others.

\textsuperscript{79} \textbf{1016}: The Tarpeian Rock on the Capitol at Rome from which criminals were thrown to their deaths.

\textsuperscript{80} \textbf{1017}: The execution cell is the Tullianum, the dungeon of the prison at Rome. Among those who met their end there were Jugurtha (104 B.C.) and the Catilinarian conspirators (63 B.C.). Pitch, red-hot plates, and torches are instruments of torture or death by burning.

\textsuperscript{81} \textbf{1023}: In contrast, the wise make a heaven of their lives on earth: see 322 and p. xxxi.

\textsuperscript{82} \textbf{1024}: See note on 931–932.

\textsuperscript{83} \textbf{1025}: A quotation from Ennius. Ancus Marcius was traditionally the fourth king of Rome (642–617 B.C.).

\textsuperscript{84} \textbf{1025–1026}: Lucr. is recalling Homer \textit{Iliad} 21.107 (Achilles to the Trojan suppliant Lycaon, whom he is about to kill): "Even Patroclus died, and he was a far better man than you."

\textsuperscript{85} \textbf{1029}: The Persian king Xerxes, who invaded Greece in 480 B.C. and constructed a pontoon bridge across the Hellespont, to enable his troops to cross.

\textsuperscript{86} \textbf{1034}: Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus the Elder, who in 202 B.C. defeated Hannibal at Zama.

\textsuperscript{87} \textbf{1037}: The Muses.
Democritus, warned by ripe old age that the motions of his mind's memory were failing, voluntarily went to meet death and offered him his life. Epicurus himself died, when the light of his life had accomplished its course—he who outshone the human race in genius and obscured the luster of all as the rising of the ethereal sun extinguishes the stars. Will you, then, be hesitant and indignant, when death calls? You, even while you still have life and light, are as good as dead: you squander the greater part of your time in sleep; you snore when awake; you never stop daydreaming; you are burdened with a mind disturbed by groundless fear; and often you cannot discover what is wrong with you, when, like some drunken wretch, you are buffeted with countless cares on every side and drift along aimlessly in utter bewilderment of mind."

People evidently are aware that their minds are carrying a heavy load, which wearies them with its weight; and if only they could also understand what causes it, and why such a mass of misery occupies their breasts, they would not live in the manner in which we generally see them living, ignorant of what they want for themselves, and continually impatient to move somewhere else as if the change could relieve them of their burden. Often a man leaves his spacious mansion, because he is utterly bored with being at home, and then suddenly returns on finding that he is no better off when he is out. He races out to his country villa, driving his Gallic ponies hell-for-leather. You would think he was dashing to save a house on fire. But the moment he has set foot on the threshold, he gives a yawn or falls heavily asleep in search of oblivion or even dashes back to the city. In this way people endeavor to run away from themselves; but since they are of course unable to make good their escape, they remain firmly attached to themselves against their will, and hate themselves because they are sick and do not understand the cause of their malady. If only they perceived it distinctly, they would at once give up everything else and devote themselves first to studying the nature of things; for the issue at stake is their state not merely for one hour, but for

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88. 1039–1041: Democritus is said to have starved himself to death. Lucr. appropriately uses an atomist's language to describe the atomist's mental decline. 89. 1042–1044: This is the only place in the poem where Epicurus is named. Lucr.'s praise of his master echoes the praise of Homer in an epigram by Leonidas of Tarentum (Anthologia Palatina 9.24). 90. 1063: Noted for their speed. Matthew Arnold is recalling this passage and 912–913 in Obermann Once More 97–104: "In his cool hall, with haggard eyes, / The Roman noble lay; / He drove abroad, in furious guise, / Along the Appian Way. / He made a feast, drank fierce and fast, / And crown'd his hair with flowers— / No easier nor no quicker pass'd / The impracticable hours.”
eternity—the state in which mortals must pass all the time that remains after their death.

Finally, what is this perverse passion for life that condemns us to such a feverish existence amid doubt and danger? The fact is that a sure end of life is fixed for mortals: we cannot avoid our appointment with death. Moreover, our environment is always the same, and no new pleasure is procured by the prolongation of life. The trouble is that, so long as the object of our desire is wanting, it seems more important than anything else; but later, when it is ours, we covet some other thing; and so an insatiable thirst for life keeps us always openmouthed. Then again, we cannot tell what fortune the future will bring us, or what chance will send us, or what end is in store for us. By prolonging life we do not deduct a single moment from the time of our death, nor can we diminish its duration by subtracting anything from it. Therefore, however many generations your life may span, the same eternal death will still await you; and one who ended life with today’s light will remain dead no less long than one who perished many months and years ago.

91. **1080–1081**: Cf. 944–949 and see note there.