



## **The Nature and Fate of the Soul**

Lucretius

### **On the Nature of Things — Book III**

**T**HOU, who out of deep darkness didst first avail to raise a torch so clear, shedding light upon the true joys of life, 'tis thee I follow, bright star of the Greek race, and in thy deepset prints firmly now I plant my footsteps, not in eager emulation, but rather because for love I long to copy thee; for how could a swallow rival swans, or what might kids with trembling limbs accomplish in a race to compare with the stout strength of a horse? Thou art our father, thou discoverer of truth, thou dost vouchsafe to us a father's precepts, and from thy pages, our hero, even as bees in flowery glades sip every plant, we in like manner browse on all thy sayings of gold, yea, of gold, and always most worthy of life for evermore. For as soon as thy philosophy, springing from thy godlike soul, begins to proclaim aloud the nature of things, the terrors of the mind fly away, the walls of the world part asunder, I see things moving on through all the void. The majesty of the gods is revealed, and their peaceful abodes, which neither the winds shaken nor clouds soak with showers, nor does the snow congealed with biting frost besmirch them with its white fall, but an ever cloudless sky vaults them over, and smiles with light bounteously spread abroad. Moreover, nature supplies all they need, nor does anything gnaw at their peace of mind at any time. But on the other hand, the quarters of Acheron are nowhere to be seen, nor yet is earth a barrier to prevent all things being descried, which are carried on underneath through the void below our feet. At these things, as it were, some godlike pleasure and a thrill of awe seizes on me, to think that thus by thy power nature is made so clear and manifest, laid bare to sight on every side.

And since I have shown of what kind are the beginnings of all things, with what diverse shapes they differ, and how of their own accord they fly on, impelled by everlasting motion, and in what manner each several thing can be created out of them; next after this it seems that the nature of the mind and the soul must now be displayed in my verses, and the old fear of Acheron driven headlong away, which utterly confounds the life of men from the very root, clouding all things with the blackness of death, and suffering no pleasure to be pure and unalloyed. For, although men often declare that disease and a life of disgrace are more to be feared than the lower realm of death, and that they know that the soul's nature is of blood, or else of wind, if by chance their whim so wills it, and that so they have no need at all of our philosophy, you may be sure by this that all is idly vaunted to win praise, and not because the truth is itself accepted. These same men, exiled from their country and banished far from the sight of men, stained with some foul crime, beset with every kind of

care, live on all the same, and, spite of all, to whatever place they come in their misery, they make sacrifice to the dead, and slaughter black cattle and despatch offerings to the gods of the dead, and in their bitter plight far more keenly turn their hearts to religion. Wherefore it is more fitting to watch a man in doubt and [108] danger, and to learn of what manner he is in adversity; for then at last a real cry is wrung from the bottom of his heart: the mask is torn off, and the truth remains behind. Moreover, avarice and the blind craving for honours, which constrain wretched men to overleap the boundaries of right, and sometimes as comrades or accomplices in crime to struggle night and day with surpassing toil to rise up to the height of power—these sores in life are fostered in no small degree by the fear of death. For most often scorned disgrace and biting poverty are seen to be far removed from pleasant settled life, and are, as it were, a present dallying before the gates of death; and while men, spurred by a false fear, desire to flee far from them, and to drive them far away, they amass substance by civil bloodshed and greedily multiply their riches, heaping slaughter on slaughter. Hardening their heart they revel in a brother's bitter death, and hate and fear their kinsmen's board. In like manner, often through the same fear, they waste with envy that he is powerful, he is regarded, who walks clothed with bright renown; while they complain that they themselves are wrapped in darkness and the mire. Some of them come to ruin to win statues and a name; and often through fear of death so deeply does the hatred of life and the sight of the light possess men, that with sorrowing heart they compass their own death, forgetting that it is this fear which is the source of their woes, which assails their honour, which bursts the bonds of friendship, and overturns affection from its lofty throne.<sup>1</sup> For often ere now men have betrayed country and beloved parents, [109] seeking to shun the realms of Acheron. For even as children tremble and fear everything in blinding darkness, so we sometimes dread in the light things that are no whit more to be feared than what children shudder at in the dark, and imagine will come to pass. This terror then, this darkness of the mind, must needs be scattered, not by the rays of the sun and the gleaming shafts of day, but by the outer view and the inner law of nature.

## **A. Nature and Formation of the Soul**

First I say that the mind, which we often call the understanding, in which is placed the reasoning and guiding power of life, is a part of a man no whit the less than hand and foot and eyes are created parts of the whole living being. Yet many wise men have thought that the sensation of the mind is not placed in any part determined, but is a certain vital habit of the body, which the Greeks call a harmony, in that it makes us live with sensation, although in no part does an understanding exist: as when often good health is said to belong to the body, and yet it is not itself any part of a healthy man. In this wise they do not set the sensation of the mind in any part determined; and in this they seem to me to wander very far astray. Thus often the body, which is clear to see, is sick, when, all the same we feel pleasure in some other hidden part; and contrariwise it happens that the reverse often comes to be in turn, when one wretched in mind feels pleasure in all his body; in no other wise than if, when a sick man's foot is painful, all the while, may be, his head is in no pain. Moreover, when the limbs are given up to soft sleep and the heavy body lies slack and senseless, yet there is something else in us, which at that very time is stirred in many ways, and admits within itself all the motions of joy and baseless cares of heart. Now that you may be able to learn that the soul too is in the limbs, and that it is not by a harmony

that the body is wont to feel, first of all it comes to pass that when a great part of the body is removed yet often the life lingers on in our limbs; and then again, when a few bodies of heat are scattered abroad and some air has been driven out through the mouth, that same life of a sudden abandons the veins and leaves the bones; so that you may be able to know from this that not all kinds of bodies have an equal part to play, nor do all equally support existence, but that rather those, which are the seeds of wind and burning heat, are the cause that life lingers in the limbs. There is then heat and a life-giving wind in the very body, which abandons our dying frame. Wherefore, since the nature of mind and soul has been revealed as a part of man, give up the name of harmony, was handed down to musicians from high Helicon: or else they themselves have dragged it forth from some other source, and brought it over to this thing, which then was without a name of its own. Whatever it is, let them keep it: do you listen to the rest of my discourse.

Now I say that mind and soul are held in union one with the other, and form of themselves a single nature, but that the head, as it were, and lord in the whole body is the reason, which we call mind or understanding, and it is firmly seated in the middle region of the breast. For here it is that fear and terror throb, around these parts are soothing joys; here then is the understanding and the mind. The rest of the soul, spread abroad throughout the body, obeys and is moved at the will and inclination of the understanding. The mind alone by itself has understanding for itself and rejoices for itself, when no single thing stirs either soul or body. And just as, when head or eye hurts within us at the attack of pain, we are not tortured at the same time in all our body; so the mind sometimes feels pain by itself or waxes strong with joy, when all the rest of the soul through the limbs and frame is not roused by any fresh feeling. Nevertheless, when the understanding is stirred by some stronger fear, we see that the whole soul feels with it throughout the limbs, and then sweat and pallor break out over all the body, and the tongue is crippled and the voice is choked, the eyes grow misty, the ears ring, the limbs give way beneath us, and indeed we often see men fall down through the terror in their mind; so that any one may easily learn from this that the soul is linked in union with the mind; for when it is smitten by the force of the mind, straightway it strikes the body and pushes it on.

This same reasoning shows that the nature of mind and soul is bodily. For when it is seen to push on the limbs, to pluck the body from sleep, to change the countenance, and to guide and turn the whole man—none of which things we see can come to pass without touch, nor touch in its turn without body—must we not allow that mind and soul are formed of bodily nature? Moreover, you see that our mind suffers along with the body, and shares its feelings together in the body. If the shuddering shock of a weapon, driven within and laying bare bones and sinews, does not reach the life, yet faintness follows, and a pleasant swooning to the ground, and a turmoil of mind which comes to pass on the ground, and from time to time, as it were, a hesitating will to rise. Therefore it must needs be that the nature of the mind is bodily, since it is distressed by the blow of bodily weapons.

Now of what kind of body this mind is, and of what parts it is formed, I will go on to give account to you in my discourse. First of all I say that it is very fine in texture, and is made and formed of very tiny particles. That this is so, if you give attention, you may be able to learn from this. Nothing is seen to come to pass so swiftly as what the mind pictures to itself coming to pass and starts to do itself. Therefore the mind bestirs itself more quickly than any of the things whose nature is manifest for all to see. But because it is so very nimble, it is bound to be formed of exceeding round and exceeding tiny seeds, so that its particles

may be able to move when smitten by a little impulse. For so water moves and oscillates at the slightest impulse, seeing it is formed of little particles, quick to roll. But, on the other hand, the nature of honey is more stable, its fluid more sluggish, and its movement more hesitating; for the whole mass of its matter clings more together, because, we may be sure, it is not formed of bodies so smooth, nor so fine and round. For a light trembling breath can constrain a high heap of poppy-seed to scatter from top to bottom before your eyes: but, on the other hand, a pile of stones or corn-ears it can by no means separate. Therefore, in proportion as bodies are tinier and smoother, so they are gifted with nimbleness. But, on the other hand, all things that are found to be of greater weight or more spiky, the more firm set they are. Now, therefore, since the nature of the mind has been found nimble beyond the rest, it must needs be formed of bodies exceeding small and smooth and round. And this truth, when known to you, will in many things, good friend, prove useful, and will be reckoned of service. This fact, too, declares the nature of the mind, of how thin a texture it is formed, and in how small a place it might be contained, could it be gathered in a mass; that as soon as the unruffled peace of death has laid hold on a man, and the nature of mind and soul has passed away, you could discern nothing there, that sight or weight can test, stolen from the entire body; death preserves all save the feeling of life, and some warm heat. And so it must needs be that the whole soul is made of very tiny seeds, and is linked on throughout veins, flesh, and sinews; inasmuch as, when it is all already gone from the whole body, yet the outer contour of the limbs is preserved unbroken, nor is a jot of weight wanting. Even so it is, when the flavour of wine has passed away or when the sweet breath of a perfume is scattered to the air, or when its savour is gone from some body; still the thing itself seems not a whit smaller to the eyes on that account, nor does anything seem withdrawn from its weight, because, we may be sure, many tiny seeds go to make flavours and scent in the whole body of things. Wherefore once and again you may know that the nature of the understanding and the soul is formed of exceeding tiny seeds, since when it flees away it carries with it no jot of weight.

Nevertheless we must not think that this nature is simple. For it is a certain thin breath that deserts the dying, mingled with heat, and heat moreover draws air with it; nor indeed is there any heat, that has not air too mixed with it. For because its nature is rare, it must needs be that many first-beginnings of air move about in it. Already then we have found the nature of the soul to be triple; and yet all these things are not enough to create sensation, since the mind does not admit that any of these can create the motions that bring sensation <or the thoughts of the mind. It must needs be then that some fourth nature too be added to these. But it is altogether without name; than it there exists nothing more nimble, nothing more fine, nor made of smaller or smoother particles. It first sends abroad the motions that bring sensation among the limbs: for it is first stirred, being made up of small shapes; then heat receives the motions and the hidden power of wind, and then air; then all things are set moving, the blood receives the shock and all the flesh feels the thrill; last of all it passes to the bones and marrow, be it pleasure or the heat of opposite kind. Yet not for naught can pain pierce thus far within, nor any biting ill pass through, but that all things are so disordered that there is no more place for life, and the parts of the soul scatter abroad through all the pores of the body. But for the most part a limit is set to these motions, as it were, on the surface of the body: and by this means we avail to keep our life.

Now, as I long to give account in what way these parts are mingled one with another, and in what manner bound together so that they can act, against my will the poverty of

my country's tongue holds me back; yet, despite that, I will touch the theme, as best I can in brief. For the first-beginnings course to and fro among themselves with the motions of first-beginnings, so that no single one can be put apart, nor can its powers be set in play divided from others by empty space, but they are, as it were, the many forces of a single body. Even as in the flesh of any living creature anywhere there is smell and a certain heat and savour, and yet of all these is made up the bulk of a single body. Thus heat and air and the hidden power of wind mingled create one nature together with that nimble force, which sends among them from itself the beginning of motion, whence the motion that brings sensation first arises throughout the flesh. For right deep within this nature lies hid far below, nor is there anything further beneath than this in our bodies, and it is moreover the very soul of the whole soul. Even as in our limbs and our whole body the force of the mind and the power of the soul is secretly immingled, because it is formed of small and rare bodies. So, you see, this force without a name, made of tiny bodies, lies concealed, and is moreover, as it were, the very soul of the whole soul and holds sway in the whole body. In like manner it must needs be that wind and air and heat act mingled together throughout the limbs, and one is more above or below the rest, yet so that one single thing is seen to be composed of all; lest heat and wind apart, and apart from them the power of air, should put an end to sensation, and by their separation break it up. Moreover the mind possesses that heat, which it dons when it boils with rage, and the fire flashes more keenly from the eyes. Much cold breath too it has, which goes along with fear, and starts a shuddering in the limbs and stirs the whole frame. And it has too that condition of air lulled to rest, which comes to pass when the breast is calm and the face unruffled. But those creatures have more of heat, whose fiery heart and passionate mind easily boils up in anger. Foremost in this class is the fierce force of lions, who often as they groan break their hearts with roaring, and cannot contain in their breast the billows of their wrath. But the cold heart of deer is more full of wind, and more quickly it rouses the chilly breath in its flesh, which makes a shuddering motion start in the limbs. But the nature of oxen draws its life rather from calm air, nor ever is the smoking torch of anger set to it to rouse it overmuch, drenching it with the shadow of murky mist, nor is it pierced and frozen by the chill shafts of fear: it has its place midway between the two, the deer and the raging lions. So is it with the race of men. However much training gives some of them an equal culture, yet it leaves those first traces of the nature of the mind of each. Nor must we think that such maladies can be plucked out by the roots, but that one man will more swiftly fall into bitter anger, another be a little sooner assailed by fear, while a third will take some things more gently than is right. And in many other things it must needs be that the diverse natures of men differ, and the habits that follow thereon; but I cannot now set forth the secret causes of these, nor discover names for all the shapes of the first atoms, whence arises this variety in things. One thing herein I see that I can affirm, that so small are the traces of these natures left, which reason could not dispel for us, that nothing hinders us from living a life worthy of the gods.

This nature then of the soul is protected by the whole body, and is itself the guardian of the body, and the cause of its life; for the two cling together by common roots, and it is seen that they cannot be torn asunder without destruction. Even as it is not easy to tear out the scent from lumps of frankincense, but that its nature too passes away. So it is not easy to draw out the nature of mind and soul from the whole body, but that all alike is dissolved. With first-beginnings so closely interlaced from their very birth are they begotten, endowed with a life shared in common, nor, as is clear to see, can the power of body or mind feel

apart, either for itself without the force of the other, but by the common motions of the two on this side and on that is sensation kindled and fanned throughout our flesh. Moreover, the body is never begotten by itself, nor grows alone, nor is seen to last on after death. For never, as the moisture of water often gives off the heat, which has been lent to it, and is not for that reason torn asunder itself, but remains unharmed, never, I say, in this way can the abandoned frame bear the separation of the soul, but it utterly perishes torn asunder and rots away. So from the beginning of existence body and soul, in mutual union, learn the motions that give life, yea, even when hidden in the mother's limbs and womb, so that separation cannot come to pass without hurt and ruin; so that you can see, since the cause of their life is linked together, that their natures too must be linked in one.

For the rest, if any one is for proving that the body does not feel, and believes that it is the soul mingled with the whole body that takes up this motion, which we call sensation, he is fighting even against plain and true facts. For who will ever tell us what the feeling of the body is, if it be not what the clear fact itself has shown and taught us? 'But when the soul has passed away the body is utterly deprived of sensation.' Yes, for it loses that which was not its own in life, and many other things besides it loses, when it is driven out of life.

To say, moreover, that the eyes can see nothing, but that the mind looks out through them as when doors are opened, is hard, seeing that the feeling in the eyes leads us the other way; for that feeling drags us on and forces us to the very pupils; yea, for often we cannot see bright things, because our sight is thwarted by the light. But that does not happen with doors; for the doors, through which we see, do not suffer any pain when they are opened. Moreover, if our eyes are as doors, then the mind, it is clear, ought to discern things better if the eyes were taken out and removed, door-posts and all.

Herein you could by no means accept the teaching, which the judgement of the holy man, Democritus, sets before us, that the first-beginnings of soul and body alternate, set each next each, first one and then the other, and so weave the web of our limbs. For, as the particles of soul are far smaller than those of which our body and flesh are composed, so too they are less in number, and only here and there are scattered through our frame; so that you may warrant this: that the first-beginnings of soul preserve distances apart as great as are the smallest bodies which, when cast upon us, can first start the motions of sensation in the body. For sometimes we do not feel the clinging of dust on the body, nor know that chalk has been shaken on us and settled on our limbs, nor do we feel a mist at night, nor the slender threads of the spider that strike against us, when we are caught in its meshes as we move, nor know that his twisted web has fallen on our head, or the feathers of birds or the flying down from plants, which from its exceeding lightness, for the most part falls not lightly; nor do we feel the passage of every kind of crawling creature nor each single footstep, which gnats and other insects plant upon our body. Indeed, so many things must first be stirred in us, before the seeds of soul mingled with our bodies throughout our frame feel that the first-beginnings have been shaken, and before they can by jostling in these spaces set between, rush together, unite and leap back in turn.

Now the mind is more the keeper of the fastnesses of life, more the monarch of life than the power of the soul. For without the mind and understanding no part of the soul can hold out in the frame for a tiny moment of time, but follows in its train without demur, and scatters into air, and deserts the chill frame in the frost of death. Yet one, whose mind and understanding have abode firm, abides in life. However much the trunk is mangled with the limbs hewn all around, though the soul be rent from him all around and wrested from

his limbs, he lives and draws in the breath of heaven to give him life. Robbed, if not of all, yet of a great part of his soul, still he lingers on and clings to life. Even as, when the eye is mangled all around, if the pupil has abode unharmed, then the living power of sight stands firm, if only you do not destroy the whole ball of the eye, and cut all round the pupil, and leave it by itself: for that will not be done without the destruction of the eyes too. But if that tiny part in the middle of the eye is eaten away, at once light is gone, and darkness follows on, however much the bright ball is in other places unharmed. In such a compact are soul and mind ever bound together.

## **B. Proofs of the Mortality of the Soul**

Come now, that you may be able to learn that the minds and the light souls of living things have birth and death, I will hasten to set forth verses long sought out and found with glad effort, worthy to guide your life. Be it yours to link both of these in a single name, and when, to choose a case, I continue to speak of the soul, proving that it is mortal, suppose that I speak of mind as well, inasmuch as they are at one each with the other and compose a single thing.

First of all, since I have shown that it is finely made of tiny bodies and of first-beginnings far smaller than the liquid moisture of water or cloud or smoke—for it far surpasses them in speed of motion, and is more prone to move when smitten by some slender cause; for indeed it is moved by images of smoke and cloud: even as when slumbering in sleep we see altars breathing steam on high, and sending up their smoke; for beyond all doubt these are idols that are borne to us:—now therefore, since, when vessels are shattered, you behold the water flowing away on every side, and the liquid parting this way and that, and since cloud and smoke part asunder into air, you must believe that the soul too is scattered and passes away far more swiftly, and is dissolved more quickly into its first-bodies, when once it is withdrawn from a man's limbs, and has departed. For indeed, since the body, which was, as it were, the vessel of the soul, cannot hold it together, when by some chance it is shattered and made rare, since the blood is withdrawn from the veins, how could you believe that the soul could be held together by any air, which is more rare than our body and can contain it less,

Moreover, we feel that the understanding is begotten along with the body, and grows together with it, and along with it comes to old age. For as children totter with feeble and tender body, so a weak judgement of mind goes with it. Then when their years are ripe and their strength hardened, greater is their sense and increased their force of mind. Afterward, when now the body is shattered by the stern strength of time, and the frame has sunk with its force dulled, then the reason is maimed, the tongue raves, the mind stumbles, all things give way and fail at once. And so it is natural that all the nature of the mind should also be dissolved, even as is smoke, into the high breezes of the air; inasmuch as we see that it is born with the body, grows with it, and, as I have shown, at the same time becomes weary and worn with age.

Then follows this that we see that, just as the body itself suffers wasting diseases and poignant pain, so the mind too has its biting cares and grief and fear; wherefore it is natural that it should also share in death. Nay more, during the diseases of the body the mind often wanders astray; for it loses its reason and speaks raving words, and sometimes in a heavy lethargy is carried off into a deep unending sleep, when eyes and head fall nodding, in

which it hears not voices, nor can know the faces of those who stand round, summoning it back to life, bedewing face and cheeks with their tears. Therefore you must needs admit that the mind too is dissolved, inasmuch as the contagion of disease pierces into it. For both pain and disease are alike fashioners of death, as we have been taught ere now by many a man's decease. Again, when the stinging strength of wine has entered into a man, and its heat has spread abroad throughout his veins, why is it that there follows a heaviness in the limbs, his legs are entangled as he staggers, his tongue is sluggish, and his mind heavy, his eyes swim, shouting, sobbing, quarrelling grows apace, and then all the other signs of this sort that go along with them; why does this come to pass, except that the mastering might of the wine is wont to confound the soul even within the body? But whenever things can be so confounded and entangled, they testify that, if a cause a whit stronger shall have made its way within, they must needs perish, robbed of any further life. Nay more, some man, often before our very eyes, seized suddenly by violent disease, falls, as though by a lightning-stroke, and foams at the mouth; he groans and shivers throughout his frame, he loses his wits, his muscles grow taut, he writhes, he breathes in gasps, and tossing to and fro wearies his limbs. Because, you may be sure, his soul rent asunder by the violence of disease throughout his frame, is confounded, and gathers foam, as on the salt sea the waters boil beneath the stern strength of the winds. Further, the groaning is wrung from him, because his limbs are racked with pain, and more than all because the particles of voice are driven out, and are carried crowding forth from his mouth, along the way they are wont, where is their paved path. Loss of wits comes to pass, because the force of mind and soul is confounded, and, as I have shown, is torn apart and tossed to and fro, rent asunder by that same poison. Thereafter, when by now the cause of malady has ebbed, and the biting humours of the distempered body return to their hiding-places, then, as it were staggering, he first rises, and little by little returns to all his senses, and regains his soul. When mind and soul then even within the body are tossed by such great maladies, and in wretched plight [123] are rent asunder and distressed, why do you believe that without the body in the open air they can continue life amid the warring winds? And since we perceive that the mind is cured, just like the sick body, and we see that it can be changed by medicine, this too forewarns us that the mind has a mortal life. For whosoever attempts and essays to alter the mind, or seeks to change any other nature, must indeed add parts to it or transfer them from their order, or take away some small whit at least from the whole. But what is immortal does not permit its parts to be transposed, nor that any whit should be added or depart from it. For whenever a thing changes and passes out of its own limits, straightway this is the death of that which was before. And so whether the mind is sick, it gives signs of its mortality, as I have proved, or whether it is changed by medicine. So surely is true fact seen to run counter to false reasoning, and to shut off retreat from him who flees, and with double-edged refutation to prove the falsehood.

Again, we often behold a man pass away little by little and limb by limb lose the sensation of life; first of all the toes and nails on his feet grow livid, then the feet and legs die, thereafter through the rest of his frame, step by step, pass the traces of chill death. Since this nature of the soul is severed nor does it come forth all intact at one moment, it must be counted mortal. But if by chance you think that it could of its own power draw itself inwards through the frame, and contract its parts into one place, and so withdraw sensation from all the limbs, yet nevertheless that place, to which so great abundance of soul is gathered together, must needs be seen possessed of greater sensation; but since such



place is nowhere found, you may be sure, as we said before, it is rent in pieces and scattered abroad, and so perishes. Nay more, if it were our wish to grant what is false, and allow that the soul could be massed together in the body of those, who as they die leave the light of day part by part, still you must needs confess that the soul is mortal, nor does it matter whether it passes away scattered through the air, or is drawn into one out of all its various parts and grows sottish, since sense more and more in every part fails the whole man, and in every part less and less of life remains.

And since the mind is one part of man, which abides rooted in a place determined, just as are ears and eyes and all the other organs of sense which guide the helm of life; and, just as hand and eye or nostrils, sundered apart from us, cannot feel nor be, but in fact are in a short time melted in corruption, so the mind cannot exist by itself without the body and the very man, who seems to be, as it were, the vessel of the mind, or aught else you like to picture more closely bound to it, inasmuch as the body clings to it with binding ties.

Again, the living powers of body and mind prevail by union, one with the other, and so enjoy life; for neither without body can the nature of mind by itself alone produce the motions of life, nor yet bereft of soul can body last on and feel sensation. We must know that just as the eye by itself, if torn out by the roots, cannot discern anything apart from the whole body, so, it is clear, soul and mind by themselves have no power. Doubtless because in close mingling throughout veins and flesh, throughout sinews and bones, their first-beginnings are held close by all the body, nor can they freely leap asunder with great spaces between; and so shut in they make those sense-giving motions, which outside the body cast out into the breezes of air after death they cannot make, because they are not in the same way held together. For indeed air will be body, yea a living thing, if the soul can hold itself together, and confine itself to those motions, which before it made in the sinews and right within the body. Wherefore, again and again, when the whole protection of the body is undone and the breath of life is driven without, you must needs admit that the sensations of the mind and the soul are dissolved, since the cause of life in soul and body is closely linked.

Again, since the body cannot endure the severing of the soul, but that it decays with a foul stench, why do you doubt that the force of the soul has gathered together from deep down within, and has trickled out, scattering abroad like smoke, and that the body has changed and fallen crumbling in such great ruin, because its foundations have been utterly moved from their seat, as the soul trickles forth through the limbs, and through all the winding ways, which are in the body, and all the pores? So that in many ways you may learn that the nature of the soul issued through the frame sundered in parts, and that even within the body it was rent in pieces in itself, before it slipped forth and swam out into the breezes of air. Nay more, while it moves still within the limits of life, yet often from some cause the soul seems to be shaken and to move, and to wish to be released from the whole body; the face seems to grow flaccid, as at the hour of death, and all the limbs to fall limp on the bloodless trunk. Even so it is, when, as men say, the heart has had a shock, or the heart has failed; when all is alarm, and one and all struggle to clutch at the last link to life. For then the mind is shaken through and through, and all the power of the soul, and both fall in ruin with the body too; so that a cause a whit stronger might bring dissolution. Why do you doubt after all this but that the soul, if driven outside the body, frail as it is, without in the open air, robbed of its shelter, would not only be unable to last on through all time, but could not hold together even for a moment? For it is clear that no one, as he dies, feels

his soul going forth whole from all his body, nor coming up first to the throat and the gullet up above, but rather failing in its place in a quarter determined; just as he knows that the other senses are dissolved each in their own place. But if our mind were immortal, it would not at its death so much lament that it was dissolved, but rather that it went forth and left its slough, as does a snake.

Again, why is the understanding and judgement of the mind never begotten in head or feet or hands, but is fixed for all men in one abode in a quarter determined, except that places determined are assigned to each thing for its birth, and in which each several thing can abide when it is created, that so it may have its manifold parts arranged that never can the order of its limbs be seen reversed? So surely does one thing follow on another, nor is flame wont to be born of flowing streams, nor cold to be conceived in fire.

Moreover, if the nature of the soul is immortal and can feel when sundered from our body, we must, I trow, suppose it endowed with five senses. Nor in any other way can we picture to ourselves the souls wandering in the lower world of Acheron. And so painters and the former generations of writers have brought before us souls thus endowed with senses. Yet neither eyes nor nose nor even hand can exist for the soul apart from body, nor again tongue apart or ears; the souls cannot therefore feel by themselves or even exist.

And since we feel that the sensation of life is present in the whole body, and we see that the whole is a living thing, if some force suddenly hew it in the middle with swift blow, so that it severs each half apart, beyond all doubt the force of the soul too will be cleft in twain, torn asunder and riven together with the body. But what is cleft and separates into any parts, disclaims, assuredly, that its nature is everlasting. They tell how often scythe-bearing chariots, glowing in the mellay of slaughter, so suddenly lop off limbs, that the part which falls lopped off from the frame is seen to shiver on the ground, while in spite of all the mind and spirit of the man cannot feel the pain, through the suddenness of the stroke, and at the same time, because his mind is swallowed up in the fervour of the fight; with the body that is left him he makes for the fight and the slaughter, and often knows not that his left arm with its shield is gone, carried away by the wheels among the horses and the ravening scythes; and another sees not that his right arm has dropped, while he climbs up and presses onward. Then another struggles to rise when his leg is lost, while at his side on the ground his dying foot twitches its toes. And the head lopped off from the warm living trunk keeps on the ground the look of life and the wide-open eyes, until it has yielded up all the last vestiges of soul. Nay more, if you should choose to chop into many parts with an axe the body of a snake with quivering tongue, angry tail, and long body, you will then perceive all the hewn parts severally writhing under the fresh blow, and scattering the ground with gore, and the fore part making open-mouthed for its own hinder part, in order that, smitten by the burning pain of the wound, it may quench it with its bite. Shall we say then that there is a whole soul in all those little parts? But by that reasoning it will follow that one living creature had many souls in its body. And so that soul which was one together with the body has been severed; wherefore both body and soul must be thought mortal, since each alike is cleft into many parts.

Moreover, if the nature of the soul is immortal, and it enters into the body at our birth, why can we not remember also the part of our life already gone, why do we not preserve traces of things done before? For if the power of the mind is so much changed that all remembrance of things past is lost to it, that state is not, I trow, a far step from death; wherefore you must needs admit that the soul, which was before, has passed away, and that

that which now is, has now been created.

Moreover, if when our body is already formed the living power of the mind is wont to be put in just when we are born, and when we are crossing the threshold into life, it would not then be natural that it should be seen to grow with the body, yea, together with the limbs in the very blood, but 'tis natural that it should live all alone by itself as in a den, yet so that the whole body nevertheless is rich in sensation. Wherefore, again and again, we must not think that souls are without a birth, or released from the law of death. For neither can we think that they could be so closely linked to our bodies if they were grafted in them from without—but that all this is so, plain fact on the other hand declares: for the soul is so interlaced through veins, flesh, sinews, and bones that the teeth, too, have their share in sensation; as toothache shows and the twinge of cold water, and the biting on a sharp stone if it be hid in a piece of bread—nor, when they are so interwoven, can they, it is clear, issue forth entire, and unravel themselves intact from all the sinews and bones and joints. But if by chance you think that the soul is wont to be grafted in us from without, and then permeate through our limbs, all the more will it perish as it fuses with the body. For that which permeates dissolves, and so passes away. For even as food parcelled out among all the pores of the body, when it is sent about into all the limbs and members, perishes and furnishes a new nature out of itself, so soul and mind, however whole they may pass into the fresh-made body, still are dissolved as they permeate, while through all the pores there are sent abroad into the limbs the particles, whereof this nature of the mind is formed, which now holds sway in our body, born from that which then perished, parcelled out among the limbs. Wherefore it is seen that the nature of the soul is neither without a birthday nor exempt from death.

Moreover, are seeds of soul left or not in the lifeless body? For if they are left and are still there, it will follow that it cannot rightly be held immortal, since it has left the body maimed by the loss of some parts. But if it has been removed and fled from the limbs while still entire, so that it has left no part of itself in the body, how is it that corpses, when the flesh is now putrid, teem with worms, and how does so great a store of living creatures, boneless and bloodless, swarm over the heaving frame? But if by chance you believe that the souls are grafted in the worms from without, and can pass severally into their bodies, and do not consider why many thousands of souls should gather together, whence one only has departed, yet there is this that seems worth asking and putting to the test, whether after all those souls go hunting for all the seeds of the little worms, and themselves build up a home to live in, or whether they are, as it were, grafted in bodies already quite formed. But there is no ready reason why they should make the bodies themselves, why they should be at such pains. For indeed, when they are without a body, they do not flit about harassed by disease and cold and hunger. For the body is more prone to suffer by these maladies, and 'tis through contact with the body that the mind suffers many ills. But still grant that it be ever so profitable for them to fashion a body wherein to enter; yet there seems to be no way whereby they could. Souls then do not fashion for themselves bodies and frames. Nor yet can it be that they are grafted in bodies already made; for neither will they be able to be closely interwoven, nor will contact be made by a sharing of sensation.

Again, why does fiery passion go along with the grim brood of lions and cunning with foxes; why is the habit of flight handed on to deer from their sires, so that their father's fear spurs their limbs? And indeed all other habits of this sort, why are they always implanted in the limbs and temper from the first moment of life, if it be not because a power of mind

determined by its own seed and breed grows along with the body of each animal? But if the soul were immortal and were wont to change its bodies, then living creatures would have characters intermingled; the dog of Hyrcanian seed would often flee the onset of the horned hart, and the hawk would fly fearful through the breezes of air at the coming of the dove; men would be witless, and wise the fierce tribes of wild beasts. For it is argued on false reasoning, when men say that an immortal soul is altered, when it changes its body: for what is changed, is dissolved, and so passes away. For the parts are transferred and shift from their order; wherefore they must be able to be dissolved too throughout the limbs, so that at last they may all pass away together with the body. But if they say that the souls of men always pass into human bodies, still I will ask why a soul can become foolish after being wise, why no child has reason, why the mare's foal is not as well trained as the bold strength of a horse. We may be sure they will be driven to say that in a weak body the mind too is weak. But if that indeed comes to pass, you must needs admit that the soul is mortal, since it changes so much throughout the frame, and loses its former life and sense. Or in what manner will the force of mind be able along with each several body to wax strong and attain the coveted bloom of life, unless it be partner too with the body at its earliest birth? Or why does it desire to issue forth abroad from the aged limbs? does it fear to remain shut up in a decaying body, lest its home, worn out with the long spell of years, fall on it? But an immortal thing knows no dangers.

Again, that the souls should be present at the wedlock of Venus and the birth of wild beasts, seems to be but laughable; that immortal souls should stand waiting for mortal limbs in numbers numberless, and should wrangle one with another in hot haste, which first before the others may find an entrance; unless by chance the souls have a compact sealed, that whichever arrives first on its wings, shall first have entrance, so that they strive not forcibly at all with one another.

Again, a tree cannot exist in the sky, nor clouds in the deep waters, nor can fishes live in the fields, nor blood be present in wood, nor sap in stones. It is determined and ordained where each thing can grow and have its place. So the nature of the mind cannot come to birth alone without body, nor exist far apart from sinews and blood. But if this could be, far sooner might the force of mind itself exist in head or shoulders, or right down in the heels, and be wont to be born in any part you will, but at least remain in the same man or the same vessel. But since even within our body it is determined and seen to be ordained where soul and mind can dwell apart and grow, all the more must we deny that it could continue or be begotten outside the whole body. Wherefore, when the body has perished, you must needs confess that the soul too has passed away, rent asunder in the whole body. Nay, indeed, to link the mortal with the everlasting, and to think that they can feel together and act one upon the other, is but foolishness. For what can be pictured more at variance, more estranged within itself and inharmonious, than that what is mortal should be linked in union with the immortal and everlasting to brave raging storms? Moreover, if ever things abide for everlasting, it must needs be either that, because they are of solid body, they beat back assaults, nor suffer anything to come within them which might unloose the close-locked parts within, such as are the bodies of matter whose nature we have declared before; or that they are able to continue throughout all time, because they are exempt from blows, as is the void, which abides untouched, nor suffers a whit from assault; or else because there is no supply of room all around, into which, as it were, things might part asunder and be broken up—even as the sum of sums is eternal—nor is there any room without into which they

may scatter, nor are there bodies which might fall upon them and break them up with stout blow. But if by chance the soul is rather to be held immortal for this reason, because it is fortified and protected from things fatal to life, or because things harmful to its life come not at all, or because such as come in some way depart defeated before we can feel what harm they do us <clear facts show us that this is not so>. For besides that it falls sick along with the diseases of the body, there comes to it that which often torments it about things that are to be, and makes it ill at ease with fear, and wears it out with care; and when its evil deeds are past and gone, yet sin brings remorse. There is too the peculiar frenzy of the mind and forgetfulness of the past, yes, and it is plunged into the dark waters of lethargy.

### **C. The folly of the Fear of Death**

Death, then, is naught to us, nor does it concern us a whit, inasmuch as the nature of the mind is but a mortal possession. And even as in the time gone by we felt no ill, when the Poeni came from all sides to the shock of battle, when all the world, shaken by the hurrying turmoil of war, shuddered and reeled beneath the high coasts of heaven, in doubt to which people's sway must fall all human power by land and sea; so, when we shall be no more, when there shall have come the parting of body and soul, by whose union we are made one, you may know that nothing at all will be able to happen to us, who then will be no more, or stir our feeling; no, not if earth shall be mingled with sea, and sea with sky. And even if the nature of mind and the power of soul has feeling, after it has been rent asunder from our body, yet it is naught to us, who are made one by the mating and marriage of body and soul. Nor, if time should gather together our substance after our decease and bring it back again as it is now placed, if once more the light of life should be vouchsafed to us, yet, even were that done, it would not concern us at all, when once the remembrance of our former selves were snapped in twain. And even now we care not at all for the selves that we once were, not at all are we touched by any torturing pain for them. For when you look back over all the lapse of immeasurable time that now is gone, and think how manifold are the motions of matter, you could easily believe this too, that these same seeds, whereof we now are made, have often been placed in the same order as they are now; and yet we cannot recall that in our mind's memory; for in between lies a break in life, and all the motions have wandered everywhere far astray from sense. For, if by chance there is to be grief and pain for a man, he must needs himself too exist at that time, that ill may befall him. Since death forestalls this, and prevents the being of him, on whom these misfortunes might crowd, we may know that we have naught to fear in death, and that he who is no more cannot be wretched, and that it were no whit different if he had never at any time been born, when once immortal death hath stolen away mortal life.

And so, when you see a man chafing at his lot, that after death he will either rot away with his body laid in earth, or be destroyed by flames, or the jaws of wild beasts, you may be sure that his words do not ring true, and that deep in his heart lies some secret pang, however much he deny himself that he believes that he will have any feeling in death. For he does not, I trow, grant what he professes, nor the grounds of his profession, nor does he remove and cast himself root and branch out of life, but all unwitting supposes something of himself to live on. For when in life each man pictures to himself that it will come to pass that birds and wild beasts will mangle his body in death, he pities himself; for neither does he separate himself from the corpse, nor withdraw himself enough from the outcast body,

but thinks that it is he, and, as he stands watching, taints it with his own feeling. Hence he chafes that he was born mortal, and sees not that in real death there will be no second self, to live and mourn to himself his own loss, or to stand there and be pained that he lies mangled or burning. For if it is an evil in death to be mauled by the jaws and teeth of wild beasts, I cannot see how it is not sharp pain to be laid upon hot flames and cremated, or to be placed in honey and stifled, and to grow stiff with cold, lying on the surface on the top of an icy rock, or to be crushed and ground by a weight of earth above.

‘Now no more shall thy glad home welcome thee, nor thy good wife and sweet children run up to snatch the first kisses, and touch thy heart with a silent thrill of joy. No more shalt thou have power to prosper in thy ways, or to be a sure defence to thine own. Pitiful thou art,’ men say, ‘and pitifully has one malignant day taken from thee all the many prizes of life.’ Yet to this they add not: ‘nor does there abide with thee any longer any yearning for these things.’ But if they saw this clearly in mind, and followed it out in their words, they would free themselves from great anguish and fear of mind. ‘Thou, indeed, even as thou art now fallen asleep in death, shalt so be for all time to come, released from every pain and sorrow. But ’tis we who have wept with tears unquenchable for thee, as thou wert turned to ashes hard by us on the awesome place of burning, and that unending grief no day shall take from our hearts.’ But of him who speaks thus we should ask, what there is so exceeding bitter, if it comes at the last to sleep and rest, that any one should waste away in never-ending lamentation.

This too men often do, when they are lying at the board, and hold their cups in their hands, and shade their faces with garlands: they say from the heart, ‘Brief is this enjoyment for us puny men: soon it will be past, nor ever thereafter will it be ours to call it back.’ As though in death this were to be foremost among their ills, that thirst would burn the poor wretches and parch them with its drought, or that there would abide with them a yearning for any other thing. For never does any man long for himself and life, when mind and body alike rest in slumber. For all we care sleep may then be never-ending, nor does any yearning for ourselves then beset us. And yet at that time those first-beginnings stray not at all far through our frame away from the motions that bring sense, when a man springs up from sleep and gathers himself together. Much less then should we think that death is to us, if there can be less than what we see to be nothing; for at our dying there follows a greater turmoil and scattering abroad of matter, nor does any one wake and rise again, whom the chill breach of life has once overtaken.

Again, suppose that the nature of things should of a sudden lift up her voice, and thus in these words herself rebuke some one of us: ‘Why is death so great a thing to thee, mortal, that thou dost give way overmuch to sickly lamentation? why groan and weep at death? For if the life that is past and gone has been pleasant to thee, nor have all its blessings, as though heaped in a vessel full of holes, run through and perished unenjoyed, why dost thou not retire like a guest sated with the banquet of life, and with calm mind embrace, thou fool, a rest that knows no care? But if all thou hast reaped hath been wasted and lost, and life is a stumbling-block, why seek to add more, all to be lost again foolishly and pass away unenjoyed; why not rather make an end of life and trouble? For there is naught more, which I can devise or discover to please thee: all things are ever as they were. If thy body is not yet wasted with years, nor thy limbs worn and decayed, yet all things remain as they were, even if thou shouldst live on to overpass all generations, nay rather, if thou shouldst never die.’ What answer can we make, but that nature brings a just charge against us, and

sets out in her pleading a true plaint? But if now some older man, smitten in years, should make lament, and pitifully bewail his decease more than is just, would she not rightly raise her voice and chide him in sharp tones? ‘Away with tears henceforth, thou [138] rogue, set a bridle on thy laments. Thou hast enjoyed all the prizes of life and now dost waste away. But because thou yearnest ever for what is not with thee, and despisest the gifts at hand, uncompleted and unenjoyed thy life has slipped from thee, and, ere thou didst think it, death is standing by thy head, before thou hast the heart to depart filled and sated with good things. Yet now give up all these things so ill-fitted for thy years, and with calm mind, come, yield them to thy sons: for so thou must.’ She would be right, I trow, in her plea, right in her charge and chiding. For the old ever gives place thrust out by new things, and one thing must be restored at the expense of others: nor is any one sent down to the pit and to black Tartarus. There must needs be substance that the generations to come may grow; yet all of them too will follow thee, when they have had their fill of life; yea, just as thyself, these generations have passed away before, and will pass away again. So one thing shall never cease to rise up out of another, and life is granted to none for freehold, to all on lease. Look back again to see how the past ages of everlasting time, before we are born, have been as naught to us. These then nature holds up to us as a mirror of the time that is to come, when we are dead and gone. Is there aught that looks terrible in this, aught that seems gloomy? Is it not a calmer rest than any sleep?

Yea, we may be sure, all those things, of which stories tell us in the depths of Acheron, are in our life. Neither does wretched Tantalus fear the great rock that hangs over him in the air, as the tale tells, numbed with idle terror; but rather ’tis in life that the vain fear of the gods threatens mortals; they fear the fall of the blow which chance may deal to each. Nor do birds make their way into Tityos, as he lies in Acheron, nor can they verily in all the length of time find food to grope for deep in his huge breast. However vast the mass of his outstretched limbs, though he cover not only nine acres with his sprawling limbs, but the whole circle of earth, yet he will not be able to endure everlasting pain, nor for ever to supply food from his own body. But this is our Tityos, whom as he lies smitten with love the birds mangle, yea, aching anguish devours him, or care cuts him deep through some other passion. The Sisyphus in our life too is clear to see, he who open-mouthed seeks from the people the rods and cruel axes, and evermore comes back conquered and dispirited. For to seek for a power, which is but in name, and is never truly given, and for that to endure for ever grinding toil, this is to thrust uphill with great effort a stone, which after all rolls back from the topmost peak, and headlong makes for the levels of the plain beneath. Then to feed for ever the ungrateful nature of the mind, to fill it full with good things, yet never satisfy it, as the seasons of the year do for us, when they come round again, and bring their fruits and their diverse delights, though we are never filled full with the joys of life, this, I trow, is the story of the maidens in the flower of youth, who pile the water into the vessel full of holes, which yet can in no way be filled full. Cerberus and the furies, moreover, and the lack of light, Tartarus, belching forth awful vapours from his jaws, which are not anywhere, nor verily can be. But it is fear of punishment for misdeeds in life—fear notable as the deeds are notable—and the atonement for crime, the dungeon and the terrible hurling down from the rock, scourgings, executioners, the rack, pitch, the metal plate, torches; for although they are not with us, yet the conscious mind, fearing for its misdeeds, sets goads to itself, and sears itself with lashings, nor does it see meanwhile what end there can be to its ills, or what limit at last to punishment, yea, and it fears that these same things may grow

worse after death. Here after all on earth the life of fools becomes a hell.

This too you might say to yourself from time to time: 'Even Ancus the goodn closed his eyes on the light of day, he who was a thousand times thy better, thou knave. And since him many other kings and rulers of empires have fallen, who held sway over mighty nations. Even he himself, who oncen paved a way over the great sea, and made a path for his legions to pass across the deep, and taught them on foot to pass over the salt pools, and made naught of the roarings of ocean, prancing upon it with his horses, yet lost the light of day, and breathed out his soul from his dying body. The son of the Scipios, thunderbolt of war, terror of Carthage, gave his bones to earth, even as though he had been the meanest houseslave. Yes, and the inventors of sciences and delightful arts, yes and the comrades of the sisters of Helicon: among whom Homer, who sat alone, holding his sceptre, has fallen into the same sleep as the rest. Again, after a ripe old age warned Democritus that the mindful motions of his memory were waning, of his own will he met death [141] and offered her up his head. Epicurus himself died, when he had run his course in the light of life, Epicurus, who surpassed the race of men in understanding and quenched the light of all, even as the sun rising in the sky quenches the stars. Wilt thou then hesitate and chafe to meet thy doom? thou, whose life is wellnigh dead while thou still livest and lookest on the light, who dost waste in sleep the greater part of thy years, and snore when wide awake, nor ever cease to see dream-visions, who hast a mind harassed with empty fear, nor canst discover often what is amiss with thee, when like a sot thou art beset, poor wretch, with countless cares on every side, and dost wander drifting on the shifting currents of thy mind.'

If only men, even as they clearly feel a weight in their mind, which wears them out with its heaviness, could learn too from what causes that comes to be, and whence so great a mass, as it were, of ill lies upon their breast, they would not pass their lives, as now for the most part we see them; knowing not each one of them what he wants, and longing ever for change of place, as though he could thus lay aside the burden. The man who is tired of staying at home, often goes out abroad from his great mansion, and of a sudden returns again, for indeed abroad he feels no better. He races to his country home, furiously driving his ponies, as though he were hurrying to bring help to a burning house; he yawns at once, when he has set foot on the threshold of the villa, or sinks into a heavy sleep and seeks forgetfulness, or even in hot haste makes for town, eager to be back. In this way each man struggles to escape himself: yet, despite his will he clings to the self, which, we may be sure, in fact he cannot shun, and hates himself, because in his sickness he knows not the cause of his malady; but if he saw it clearly, every man would leave all else, and study first to learn the nature of things, since it is his state for all eternity, and not for a single hour, that is in question, the state in which mortals must expect all their being, that is to come after their death.

Again, what evil craving for life is this which constrains us with such force to live so restlessly in doubt and danger? Verily, a sure end of life is ordained for mortals, nor can we avoid death, but we must meet it. Moreover, we move ever, we spend our time amid the same things, nor by length of life is any new pleasure hammered out. But so long as we have not what we crave, it seems to surpass all else; afterward, when that is ours, we crave something else, and the same thirst for life besets us ever, open-mouthed. It is uncertain too what fortune time to come may carry to us, or what chance may bring us, or what issue is at hand. Nor in truth by prolonging life do we take away a jot from the time of death, nor can we subtract anything whereby we may be perchance less long dead. Therefore you may



live on to close as many generations as you will: yet no whit the less that everlasting death will await you, nor will he for a less long time be no more, who has made an end of life with to-day's light, than he who perished many months or years ago.

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Lucretius. *On the Nature of Things*. Trans. Cyril Baley. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1910.

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