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Love and Love-making in Lucretius' *De rerum natura*

ABSTRACT: Lucretius famously concludes the fourth book of *De rerum natura* with an account of love; reading that finale as the analysis of an emotion, rather than a diatribe against it, shows that what Lucretius offers is not a cure for love, but a path to experiencing *amor* in a way that is both Roman and Epicurean. To that end, challenging the traditional interpretation of *DRN* 4, 1263-1277 – namely, that wives have no need to please their husbands sexually and take little or no pleasure in sex themselves, this study argues that according to Lucretius there can and should be mutuality and reciprocity in love and its pleasures. Male or female, human or (other) animal, the position adopted by a mating pair during sexual intercourse reflects and embodies their emotions, and thus illuminates the complex neurophysiological processes and ethical choices behind them. Love, sex and marriage can coexist; when that happens, love and the pleasures of love-making are mutual, natural and necessary and 'doggie style' is the natural choice for coupling – or so Lucretius teaches.

KEYWORDS: Lucretius, Epicureanism, emotion, love, women, (non-human) animals.

'I wonder why Lucretius seems to reject the "doggie" position, given that other animals, including dogs, naturally adopt it'. David Konstan had a way of asking questions. A few months before his passing, he kindly took the time to read some of my thoughts on human-animal emotions in Lucretius' *De rerum natura* and as soon as I read that question (*per litteras*), I knew – as he did – it needed answering. This study is that answer.

Lucretius famously concludes the fourth book of *DRN* with an account of love (*amor*). It is often regarded as a diatribe against love and the excesses that love drives one to¹. In it, Lucretius engages with traditions as diverse as Roman

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¹ This trend may go back as far as St Jerome and his claim that Lucretius went mad as the result of drinking a love potion, wrote *DRN* during moments of clarity and committed suicide. For this and the range of views on the diatribe question (sometimes excepting the physiologically-oriented sections of the finale), see Betensky 1980 (including for an overview of earlier bibliography); Brown 1987, pp. 70, 112, 137-139; Caston 2006; Pope 2020, pp. 47-48.

comedy, satiric invective, Alexandrian poetry, Hippocratic medicine, myths about Venus and Cupid, and conventional Roman norms around gender and sexuality. His primary aim is to show the reader that love is not some divinely sent blessing or curse, but an emotion with natural causes. While many interesting and important scholarly contributions furthering that scholarly consensus have been made in recent years, not least by Brown and Landolfi, somewhat less attention has been paid to the nature and workings of the emotion of love per se². This is a bit surprising, given the surge of interest in the emotions in ancient philosophy more generally over the past three decades or so, including in conjunction with the sensory turn³. Naturally there are some noteworthy exceptions, and thanks particularly to the work of scholars such as Annas, Asmis, Fowler, Gill, Konstan, Landolfi, Nussbaum and Procopé⁴, it has been possible to begin answering Fowler's call to analyse the relationship between the physiological and psychological when it comes to the emotions, as well as the dialogue between such ideas and their context – including with respect to love⁵.

The finale of *DRN* IV is not a diatribe against love per se, but in fact a case study of an emotion, not unlike Philodemus' *On Anger*. In it, Lucretius analyses the emotion of love in several related ways. He explains the nature of love, i.e. its underlying physiological and psychological causes and their phenomenal manifestations; he also uses the ontology and aetiology of love to shed light on common (mis)conceptions about love, as well as to explain love's role in emotionally charged experiences ranging from sexual intercourse to procreation to marriage. Lucretius thus shows that, like all emotions, love is a feeling that emerges from certain internal bodily motions and manifests at the level of consciousness, such that we experience love in and from our whole body and being – and particularly our hearts and minds, as it were. All creatures are capable of love. The potential for love is inherent to our natures; it cannot be uprooted, but it also does not need to be. That is not just because love is within our control. There is a version of love which is conducive to one's equanimity and consistent with the nature of things. Therefore, what Lucretius offers is not a cure for the emotion, but rather a path to experiencing love – and even to engaging in acts of love – in a way that is both Roman and Epicurean. Or so I have argued⁶.

² Brown 1987; Landolfi 2013.

³ Braund-Gill 1997; Sihvola-Engberg-Pedersen 1998; Konstan 2006a; Nelis 2017; Cairns 2019.

⁴ Annas 1989; Annas 1992; Procopé 1993; Nussbaum 1994; Fowler 1997; Gill 2006; Konstan (e.g.) 2006b; Konstan 2008; Gill 2009; Asmis 2011; Landolfi 2013; Asmis 2020.

⁵ Important inroads to this end were made, e.g., in Landolfi 2013, pp. 23-58.

⁶ *Lucr. DRN* 3, 94-322; 4, 1030-1287. Zinn forthcoming, cap. 3.

Building on that, this study argues, according to Lucretius, the position that a mating pair adopts during sexual intercourse reflects and embodies their emotions; the individuals' underlying neurophysiology, psychological experiences and bodily movements are all interrelated phenomena. In the process, it also challenges the traditional interpretation of Lucretius' views on particular sexual positions. Lucretius does not reject the 'doggie' position, as has been conventionally supposed; rather, quite the opposite⁷. Lucretius represents 'doggie style' as the natural choice for coupling, especially in cases of what we today might call 'true love'⁸.

1. Love and/or Sex, and Marriage

When is sex 'just sex', and when is it 'making love'? Is it natural to feel love? Can we help it if we do? Should we? The ancient Greeks and Romans were no more immune to such questions than we are, and perhaps even less so. At the risk of overgeneralisation, in a society where marriages were often arranged, and arranged for the benefit of the families rather than the couple, one which placed so great a value on the production of legitimate heirs that insofar as possible women were scarcely allowed out of the house without the supervision of a male chaperon, one which at the same time countenanced a certain amount of male promiscuity outside of marital relations (as long they did not stray too far beyond a range of normative limits) – it is hardly surprising that its cultural production frequently represents the relationship between love and sexual intercourse as somewhat fraught, that indeed some preferred to keep the two mutually exclusive so as to better engage in each without the complications of the other, or even preferred to forego love altogether. As Lyne argues, there is good reason to suppose that that by the mid-first century B.C.E. many of the Roman elite may well have been asking themselves if sex, love and marriage could actually coincide, and if so under what circumstances⁹.

Love was no less complicated for those trying to approach it philosophically, such as the Epicureans¹⁰. Epicurus wrote a treatise *On Love* (Περὶ ἔρωτος) – which may have been of some note, judging among other things by its prom-

⁷ That Lucr. *DRN* 4, 1264-1267 refers to sexual intercourse wherein a woman is more or less down on all fours and being entered from behind by the male, i.e. 'doggie-style', cfr. e.g. Brown 1987, pp. 360-361.

⁸ This and similar expressions are presented in quotations when first introduced; the same qualified apparent similarity between ancient and modern conceptions also applies to their subsequent use unless otherwise specified.

⁹ Lyne 1980, pp. 1-18.

¹⁰ For what follows, see also Brown 1987, pp. 108-122; Nussbaum 1994, pp. 140-191.

inence in Diogenes Laertius' catalogue of his best works; regrettably, it has since been lost¹¹. Some of the surviving evidence suggests Epicurus believed that the emotion of love (ἔρως) was tantamount to what we might call lust and viewed it in a rather negative light, but thought that sex itself was not inherently problematic¹². While that evidence is consistent with the views of some later Epicureans, like Philodemus, it cannot be the whole picture¹³. After all, marriage was not unheard of within the Garden, at least under Epicurus, nor was having children; Epicurus even makes provisions for the children of his friends in his will¹⁴. And Demetrius of Laconia attests that Epicurus also used ἔρως with reference to children¹⁵. Moreover, *DRN* does not neatly map onto that picture. For example, Lucretius almost exclusively uses the word *amor* when referring to the emotion that we today might call 'romantic love', i.e. love with a distinctive sexual component; it is never used in the sense of one's feeling of affection towards biological kin¹⁶. Lucretius also refers to children (*gnatis dulcibus* 4, 1234) and their kisses as sweet and speaks of the charms (*blanditiis* 5, 1018) they hold for their parents¹⁷. Finally, as we shall see, Lucretius offers a path to enjoying romantic love within the context of a conventional Roman marriage, sexual intercourse included.

That path and possibility have often been neglected, debated or dismissed, in part due to the way that scholars have traditionally read the penultimate passage of book four, *DRN* 4, 1263-1277. That reading, reflected in David Konstan's question, is perhaps best epitomised by the translation of Rouse and Smith's 1992 edition:

Another thing of very great importance is the position in which the soothing pleasure itself is taken; for wives are thought generally to conceive better after the manner of wild beasts and quadrupeds, because in that position, breast

¹¹ Laertius places *On Love* third in the catalogue, just behind Epicurus' magnum opus *On Nature* and another whose title suggests its importance, given Epicurus' atomist philosophy – namely, *On Atoms and Void*; *Diog. Laert.* 10, 27.

¹² Usener 483, cfr. 67, 464. Cfr. e.g. Bailey 1947 vol. 3, p. 1303; Rist 1980, p. 126; Brown 1987, p. 217.

¹³ *Phld. D.* 3.76.6 ff in Brown 1987, p. 217.

¹⁴ *Diog. Laert.* 10, 19-22. However 10, 119 suggests marriage and children were also not standard practice in the school; cfr. e.g. Bailey 1947 vol. 3, p. 1316; Godwin 1986, pp. 169-170; Pope 2020: 47-48.

¹⁵ Cfr. Procopé 1993, pp. 372-373.

¹⁶ The other uses occur in the context of depicting devotion and certain strong non-sexual desires; it is also never used of what we today often call 'Platonic love', such as non-sexual affection for close friends; Zinn forthcoming, cap. 3. Cfr. Dover 1973, p. 59; Adams 1982, pp. 57, 188-189; Osborne 1994; Konstan 2006b, pp. 169-184.

¹⁷ With *Lucr. DRN* 4, 1234, cfr. e.g. 3, 894-896.

down and loins up, the seeds can occupy the proper places. Lascivious movements are of no use whatever to wives. For a woman forbids herself to conceive and fights against it, if in her delight she thrusts against the man's penis with her buttocks, making undulating movements with all her body limp; for she turns the share clean away from the furrow and makes the seed fail of its place. Whores indulge in such motions for their own purposes, that they may not often conceive and lie pregnant, and at the same time that their intercourse may be more pleasing to men; which our wives evidently have no need for¹⁸.

This interpretation suggests that 'our wives', the wives of Lucretius' intended readership (*coniugibus nostris* 4, 1277), have no need to please their husbands sexually and possibly take little or no pleasure in sex themselves¹⁹. Possibly even that Lucretius intended the expression to mean 'Roman wives' and was himself unmarried²⁰. It also reinforces an idea that Roman moralists of the late Republic often railed against, namely that for sexual intercourse which they would really enjoy and – increasingly – for the possibility of romantic love, mature aristocratic Roman men generally had to look elsewhere than their virtuous, monogamous and largely chaste wives²¹. Nussbaum was the first to challenge this reading, and rightly so²². In fact, according to Lucretius, they actually have to look no further.

2. What is Love?

Love is a complex psychophysiological phenomenon, for Lucretius, as are one's emotions more generally. In Epicureanism there is no mind-body dualism; what we today would call the mind and/or soul, the Epicureans believe are bodily, parts of the rest of one's body and only exist within the context of and for as long as the whole. As Lucretius represents it, each living creature is an interdependent system which is more than the sum of its parts; those parts include, at minimum, the flesh, sinews, veins and something rather like a central nervous system centred in the heart rather than the head – namely, the *animus-anima* complex. While properties like the capacity for emotions emerge from the integral whole as such and exist at the level of experience,

¹⁸ For the Latin text, see below.

¹⁹ Cfr. e.g. Godwin 1986, p. 169; Brown 1987, pp. 360-371.

²⁰ Cfr. e.g. Bailey 1947 vol. 3, p. 1319. For other views, cfr. e.g. Brown 1987, p. 371; Rouse-Smith 1992, p. xvi.

²¹ Cfr. e.g. *ps.-Dem.* 59, 122 in and with Brown 1987, p. 371. See also Edwards 1993, pp. 5, 9-12, 78-82.

²² Nussbaum 1994, pp. 182-186; cfr. Betensky 1980 with regards to the finale of *DRN* IV writ large.

they are also powers particularly of the *animus-anima* complex – not least as the mechanisms underlying their manifestations necessarily involve the motions of its constituent matter. The *animus-anima* complex is comprised of four primary constituents: assemblages (not unlike what we might call molecules) of fire, assemblages of wind, assemblages of air and the so-called ‘nameless fourth’; there are many others as well, but these are the main sorts – and this is true of all living creatures alike. Like all matter, these constituents are in constant motion, however both their flux and their relative proportions are both generally stable; i.e. they are typically in a state of equilibrium. The balance can also vary. When one feels an emotion, for example, that feeling will entail a surge of one sort of constituent of the *animus-anima* complex relative to the others. That surge is both a microlevel manifestation of the emotion and to some extent accounts for the macrolevel experience, but not entirely²³. As scholars like Fowler and Gill have rightly underscored, when it comes to Lucretius’ philosophy of mind – the macro and micro levels are two sides of the same coin, two ways of looking at the same phenomenon; neither the psychological nor the physiological can be completely understood or reductively explained in terms of the other²⁴. To put it another way, on the one hand, an emotion is an instance of feeling; on the other, that feeling is itself a process and also involves underlying processes and mechanisms, with many causes working together in concert on many levels. Love is no exception.

As Lucretius represents it, love is a fiery emotion. Moreover, that conventional metaphor speaks to a literal truth²⁵. As with other such emotions, like anger, love entails a surge of the fiery constituents of one’s *animus-anima* complex. Love also entails sexual arousal. Both love and sexual arousal are typically catalysed by the perception of a potential partner whom one finds attractive. Sexual arousal manifests in ways ranging from the gathering of seed in one’s genitals to the desire to copulate with the attractive individual, often simultaneously. The whole body thus engages in the experience of love, with the feeling proceeding from the heart (including in its capacity as the seat of our consciousness) to the rest; and, at least insofar as the processes governed by the autonomic nervous system go, the entire body embodies the emotion²⁶. In

²³ Lucr. *DRN* 3, 94-160, 231-257, 288-322; 4, 1192-1208 (on which, see below). Zinn forthcoming: capp. 1, 3.

²⁴ Fowler 1997; Gill 2006; Gill 2009.

²⁵ Cfr. e.g. καίω *LSJ* II.4; Sappho 31; Pl. *Phdr.* 251a-252b; Catull. 51. See also n. 16 (above).

²⁶ See Lucr. *DRN* 4, 1030-1120, n. 23 (above) and further discussion below. All of these interrelated phenomena are themselves also processes, with their own corresponding and inter-entailing underlying mechanisms; belief also plays an important role in them. Cfr. Zinn forthcoming.

every possible sense, then, one becomes inflamed in love, and burning with love has a distinctively sexual dimension²⁷.

3. When to Love

Love is not the goal of life in Epicureanism, nor does it guarantee a happy ending, so to speak. Not all love is even choice-worthy, and sometimes love is downright destructive – as Lucretius shows in 4, 1076-1191, the part of the finale of *DRN* IV which *does* qualify as a diatribe against (counterproductive) love. There, having demystified and demythologised the nature of love at 4, 1030-1075, Lucretius proceeds to lambast the false beliefs associated with love and the foolish things people do in the name of love, and to shed a searing light on the ways in which those false beliefs and foolish choices are linked. He reserves a particularly satiric invective, for instance, for the delusions men have about their respective beloveds. It is bad enough that they are obsessed with their mistresses and treat these women as goddesses whose favour they cannot live without, squandering upon them undue attention and even the hard-won family estate; but they are also blinded by love to the actual qualities of the women themselves²⁸. 'This is our Venus' (*haec Venus est nobis* 4, 1058), or so he reveals, in every possible sense of the word *Venus*; by the end of the first half of the finale, Lucretius has subverted or corrected all of the conventions and motifs surrounding the traditional notions and representations of love, ranging from a form of warfare (*militia amoris*) and of slavery (*servitium amoris*), to an illness, affliction and/or irrational madness, to a divine force over which one has no control – and sent, perhaps, by the mythical arrows of Cupid, in order to humiliate them viz traditional gender norms, family values and views of excess as depravity²⁹. Having read this traditional, highly rhetorical moralising discourse, the reader might well be wondering if it might not indeed be better – both healthier and more useful – to let off his steam, as it were, with a prostitute or 'wide-wandering Venus' (*volveriva Venere* 4, 1071),

²⁷ That sexual dimension is part of what distinguishes love, both mechanistically and experientially, from other fiery emotions.

²⁸ Being blinded by love may well be more than metaphorical; the neurophysiological mechanism likely entails the *animus-anima* complex's surge of fire instantiating in the eyes as well as in the heart, as happens, for example, in instances of anger; *Lucr. DRN* 3, 288-298.

²⁹ Lucretius employs a range of meanings for *Venus*, including via euphemism and metonymy; the valences at play in any given instance both reflect and play an important role in his broader didactic programme as well as his more specific arguments about love. Cfr. e.g. Betensky 1980, pp. 295-297; Asmis 1982; Brown 1987; Gale 1994 *passim* and pp. 208-223; Caston 2006. See also Adams 1982, pp. 57, 188-189; Landolfi 2013; Gellar-Goad 2020, pp. 125, 197-198.

than to indulge in the emotion of love, much less to pursue it³⁰. Then, in the second half of the diptych, Lucretius flips the script and offers the reader a better alternative – namely, love (*amor*) that meets the standards of both Epicurean ethics and Roman morality.

To start from the end – immediately after the passage that allegedly rejects the possibility that wives might enjoy sex, Lucretius continues:

nec divinitus interdum Venerisque sagittis
deteriore fit ut forma muliercula ametur;
nam facit ipsa suis interdum femina factis
morigerisque modis et munde corpore culto,
ut facile insuescat te secum degere vitam.
quod superest, consuetudo concinnat amorem;
nam leviter quamvis quod crebro tunditur ictu,
vincitur in longo spatio tamen atque labascit.
nonne vides etiam guttas in saxa cadentis
umoris longo in spatio pertundere saxa?

Nor, meanwhile, does it happen by divine-will and by means of the arrows of Venus that a dear wife with lesser beauty is loved; for a woman sometimes brings it about herself, through her own deeds and accommodating ways (*morigeris modis*) and genteelly cultivated body – with the result that she easily accustoms you to spend your life with her. What is more, habit inculcates³¹ love. For what is struck by a frequent blow, however lightly, nevertheless in the long run is conquered and yields. Do you not see that even drops of water falling upon stones in the long run bore through them?

DRN 4, 1278-1287³²

These lines serve several important functions, as indicated – among other things – by their position in the text. In addition to concluding both book four of *DRN* and its account of love, they also close a circle construction begun at 4, 1192; the subject of that kuklos is love without false beliefs³³. In the process of discussing its phenomenal manifestations and functions, Lucretius shows that love, properly understood, is universal; in turn, the fact that all living creatures

³⁰ Cfr. Lucr. *DRN* 4, 1058-1072. On the traditional discourse and its equation of excesses and of excess itself with immorality, cfr. e.g. Edwards 1993, pp. 5, 9-12, 78-92, 178-180, 188-204.

³¹ For this interpretation of *concinno* in context, cfr. *OLD* §4 and n. 78 (below).

³² Latin quotations of the text of Lucretius' *DRN* are drawn from Rouse-Smith 1992 (occasionally with minor adaptations), in consultation particularly with Bailey 1947 and Deufert 2019. All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

³³ The segue into it, Lucr. *DRN* 4, 1190-1191, is also not without relevance.

are capable of love, and experience and express it in more or less the same ways and for essentially the same reasons, irrespective of gender or species, shows that love can occur in a way that is both natural and necessary³⁴. Such instances of the emotion may thus be called true love. In 4, 1192-1208, Lucretius treats the mutuality and reciprocity of love, and also of sex in the context thereof. In 4, 1209-1277 he analyses how heredity works; from 4, 1209-1262 he focuses on the contributions of both partners to successful procreation, from 4, 1263-1277, as seen above, on the importance of position to their chances of conception. Finally, though much scholarly debate argues to the contrary, in these concluding lines of *DRN* IV Lucretius describes romantic love arising within the context of marriage – where it can lead to the production of legitimate offspring³⁵.

Many details of *DRN* 4, 1278-1287 support reading it as an account of love within marriage³⁶. Some have rightly pointed to the expression *morigeris modis*, which cannot be fully captured in a single translation; it signifies 'wifely ways' as well as accommodating and obedient ones – and in fact suggests all of these ideas simultaneously³⁷. To this we might add the wordplay in the diminutive *muliercula*; coming as it does on the heels of *coniugibus nostris* (4, 1277) and sexual reproduction, *muliercula* suggests one's dear wife, as well as the complementary and often preferred interpretation of a 'mere woman' – i.e. one who seems less than goddess-like, as well as less goddess-like than the women men tend to fall for³⁸. Lucretius' joint emphasis on the habitual and the long term further indicate that he is discussing a married couple. Harkening back to his account of the physics and metaphysics of love (4, 1030-1075), Lucretius here argues that the emotion can develop and the feeling can be deepened, reinforced and refined through the habitual – i.e. repeated and frequent, virtually constant – interactions that characterise married life. This is the woman with whom one is spending one's life, and she can actually make that state of affairs quite a pleasant experience, pleasant indeed to the point where one begins to rather enjoy it (*insuescat*) and even, eventually, to feel love. Earlier Lucretius

³⁴ Zinn forthcoming, capp. 3.

³⁵ The (non-human) animal equivalent seems to be mated pairs propagating *generatim*, i.e. each according to their own species and kind; cfr. e.g. *Lucr. DRN* 1, 19-20; 4, 1192-1208 (both discussed below).

³⁶ For similar readings, cfr. e.g. Betensky 1980, pp. 293-294; Godwin 1986, pp. 169-170.

³⁷ Cfr. *Lucr. DRN* 4, 1090-1091. The expression *morigerus* could have sexual connotations as well; Williams 1958, pp. 19-22; Adams 1982, p. 164. Lucretius often chooses expressions which encompass and thereby convey several related concepts at once; cfr. n. 29 (above).

³⁸ For the range of interpretations of this diminutive, some more consistent with the traditional interpretation of *Lucr. DRN* 4, 1263-1277, see Leonard-Smith 1942, p. 638; Bailey 1947 vol. 3, p. 1319; Godwin 1986, p. 170. Landolfi 2013, pp. 192-193; *OLD*.

suggests a happy home (*domus laeta*), a great wife (*uxor | optima*) and sweet children (*dulces nati*) are among life's treasures, entirely possible – and even normal³⁹. At 4, 1278-1287 he explains the way that comes about. This love arises and grows slowly, over time, with none of the false beliefs or deleterious effects of the amours or love-affairs in fashion with many of his contemporaries that he satires earlier; it is thus not contrary to the readers' peace of mind, but conducive to it – not unlike friendship⁴⁰. There is a love worth having, then: this one.

4. It takes two to tango

The evidence presented thus far points to another important way in which the traditional reading of 4, 1263-1277 is peculiar⁴¹. According to Lucretius, pleasure (*voluptas*) – properly understood – is the guide of life for all living creatures, and all actively pursue it from birth, untaught and of their own freewill⁴². Why should wives be any different, then? Or women more generally? Indeed, they are not, as Lucretius demonstrates by way of beginning the second half of his account of love.

nec mulier semper ficto suspirat amore,
 quae complexa viri corpus cum corpore iungit
 et tenet adsuctis umectans oscula labris;
 nam facit ex animo saepe et, communia quaerens
 gaudia, sollicitat spatium decurrere amoris.
 nec ratione alia volucres armenta feraeque
 et pecudes et equae maribus subsidere possent,
 si non ipsa quod illarum subat ardet abundans
 natura et Venerem salientum laeta retractat.

A woman does not always sigh with feigned *amor* – who, when she has embraced the body of a man, joins it and holds it with her own – moistening kisses with sucked lips. For she often does this from the heart, and, seeking shared joys, incites him to 'go the distance' of *amor*. Nor for any other reason would

³⁹ Lucr. *DRN* 3, 894-899; cfr. 4, 1234.

⁴⁰ Lucretius' word choice surrounding the mechanisms by which true love is inculcated is reminiscent of the language used of the pleasures of Roman friendship. Brunt 1965; Nussbaum 1994, pp. 140-191; Konstan 2006b, pp. 169-184; Zinn forthcoming, cap. 6. For a qualified take on this view, cfr. Brown 1987, pp. 89-91.

⁴¹ Cfr. e.g. Brown 1987, pp. 366-367.

⁴² Lucr. *DRN* 2, 251-293; cfr. Cic. *Fin.* 1, 29-30; *Diog. Laert.* 10, 137; Brunschwig 1986; Sedley 1998.

female birds, cattle and beasts, and herds and horses be able to submit to the males, if it were not for the fact that their very nature – because it is on fire – blazes up, overflowing and glad, and draws in and out of itself the ‘Venus’ of the mounting ones.

DRN 4, 1192-1200

These lines show that love and love-making are universal; Lucretius introduces the possibility that a woman's *amor* may be sincere and genuine, then emphasises that often her engagement in sexual intercourse is related to that emotion. The expression Lucretius chooses, *ex animo*, is significant; with it, Lucretius encompasses several meanings, and shows how they are related. For one, it conveys that the woman is acting sincerely, i.e. on the basis of heart-felt emotion; it also speaks to the mechanism underlying that feeling. Her choices to engage in sexual intercourse and her actions during them are to some extent a manifestation of the surge of fire underlying and coordinate with her love. And, as *ex animo* confirms, that surge proceeds from her *animus-anima* complex – specifically from the part localised in her heart and seat of consciousness – to the rest of her body⁴³. The same is true of non-human female animals; their very nature (*ipsa illarum natura*) burns with love, the same as any man's or males', and not for any other reason (*nec ratione alia*) – i.e. according to the same processes at both the micro and macro levels⁴⁴. In other words, it is on the basis of that feeling, the emotion of love, that animals too – genuinely willing and glad – retract the ‘Venus’ (i.e. penis) of those mounting them (*salientum*). In the process, Lucretius also shows that, across the species, female sexual intercourse on the basis of love is no passive reception of penetration, as it was so often portrayed⁴⁵. These females have agency in their sexual acts, even at the level of syntax. The woman is the subject of all the active verbs of 4, 1192-1196, she is the one pursuing the shared joys (*communia gaudia*) of sexual intercourse, she the one stimulating (*sollicitat*) her partner to go the distance sexually (*spatium decurrere amoris*) – i.e. to achieve orgasm⁴⁶. Similarly,

⁴³ Cfr. Lucr. DRN 3, 57 *pectore ab imo*; with both, see Catull. 109, 4. Cfr. Bailey 1947 vol. 3, p. 1312; Brown 1987, p. 311. For this and what follows, cfr. also Betensky 1980, p. 293.

⁴⁴ The conjecture of *illarum* advanced by Bockemüller and Winckelmann has become the standard reading, and Bailey (1947 vol. 3, p. 1312) makes a powerful argument for it. Deufert, however, has recently made a case for returning to the manuscript reading of *illorum*; Deufert 2018, pp. 278-279 and Deufert 2019, p. 183. While this reading would affect the emphasis of the lines, it would not substantially impact their sense as interpreted here; cfr. n. 47 (below).

⁴⁵ Cfr. Edwards 1993, pp. 63-97, especially pp. 70-73; Pope 2020.

⁴⁶ On Lucretius' euphemisms and other wordplay in these lines, cfr. e.g. Bailey 1947 *ad loc.*; Adams 1982, pp. 57, 144, 166, 184-189, 206-208; Godwin 1986, pp. 165-166 and, throughout the second half of the finale, Brown 1987, pp. 360-371. Context shows that *retractat* should be read

and echoing the polyvalent signification of *ex animo*, the nature of the female animals is the subject of *retractat*⁴⁷. Therefore, not only can sexual intercourse be enjoyable for a woman, or indeed any female, it can also coincide with and be an expression of love. Accordingly, such sexual intercourse as Lucretius describes here can indeed be called ‘making love’. Two other complementary details are also worthy of note. First, Lucretius’ choice of *mulier* includes the possibility that the woman in question may be one’s wife⁴⁸. Second, *subsidere* not only refers to females sinking or crouching down before their male mates for the purposes of sexual intercourse, it further suggests that the females are also settling down with them – i.e. mating for life, a permanent coupling⁴⁹.

Building on those ideas, Lucretius then proceeds to establish that love is not inherently one-sided, and neither is sexual intercourse; making love takes two.

nonne vides etiam quos mutua saepe voluptas
vinxit, ut in vinclis communibus excrucientur,
in triviis cum saepe canes discedere aventes
divorsi cupide summis ex viribu’ tendunt,
quom interea validis Veneris compagibus haerent,
quod facerent numquam, nisi mutua gaudia nossent,
quae lacere in fraudem possent vinctosque tenere?
quare etiam atque etiam, ut dico, est communi’ voluptas.

Do you not often see also that there are those whom mutual pleasure has bound, with the result that they torture themselves in their common chains? That often at the crossroads, when dogs are desiring to pull apart – facing opposite, they strive eagerly with their utmost strength, while in the meantime they cleave to one another in the strong couplings of Venus? Do you not see they would never have done that, if they had not known that that the joys are mutual – joys which can lure them into the trap and keep them chained? Therefore again and again, as I say, the pleasure is shared.

DRN 4,1201-1208

The textual difficulties with these lines notwithstanding, a number of impor-

medially; the females are engaging in an action upon their own bodies and also doing so for their own benefit; cfr. n. 47 (below).

⁴⁷ The expression *ipsa illarum natura* is synecdoche and periphrasis for the agency of the female animals themselves, emphasising that their actions are rooted in and consistent with their psychophysiological natures; cfr. n. 46 (above).

⁴⁸ Compare Lucretius’ usage of *mulier* (cfr. OLD §1, 3), *uxor* and *coniunx* at Lucr. DRN 4, 1263-1277; on which, see below.

⁴⁹ OLD §1c, 3.

tant things are clear⁵⁰. Lucretius believes that the sexual intercourse he is describing is mutual in every respect – from the shared pleasure of a mating pair, to the joint nature of the coupling actions, to the fact that both are willing and eager participants⁵¹. Lucretius also emphasises this mutuality by continuing several trends from the preceding lines, like his use of the middle voice (here with a plural subject) and of expressions very like *communia gaudia*. Perhaps in the event that his readers might have not personally experienced this mutuality in their own love lives, Lucretius offers an example from the animal world that he believes *DRN*'s readers will have seen for themselves, as per the emphatic rhetorical question *nonne vides* – namely, the example of dogs coupling in the streets⁵². He evidently expects the readers will take their empirical observations of dogs' love-making as convincing evidence for his arguments. The expression *validis Veneris compagibus* is not only 'in the strong embraces of Venus', with Venus as metonymy for both love and sexual intercourse; it also has the sense of 'by means of the joining structures of the penis', referring to the way the penis of a dog changes shape upon ejaculation to ensure successful procreation, resulting in the painful process of physical separation to which *excrucientur* alludes. Similarly, the 'trap' (*fraudem*) in which mutual joys can hold them chained, encompasses both the pair's love-based relationship (cfr. *nec ficto amore ... ex animo* above), as well as, as Godwin notes, 'the post-coital lock' – i.e. both their parallel emotional and physical interlocking bonds during sexual intercourse; it also evokes the female's anatomy in counterpart to the male's and as her contribution to their physical joining. In both senses, as Garani rightly observes, said bonds are not unlike those of magnets (*DRN* 6, 1002-1089)⁵³. But perhaps the most telling confirmation that love

⁵⁰ On the state of the text of *DRN* 4, 1201-1210 see e.g. Bailey 1947 vol. 3, pp. 1312-1314. Some, recently Deufert (2019 *ad loc.*), prefer the manuscript reading of *iacere* to Lambinus' conjecture of *lacere* at 4, 1207; *lacere*, however, is more consistent with the nature of pleasure and creatures' natural inclination to actively pursue it.

⁵¹ Lucretius' juxtaposition of *aves* and *cupide*, for instance and particularly in the context of this pursuit of *voluptas*, echoes that of *cupidam ... avet* at *DRN* 2, 265 and with it his whole account of freewill (2, 216-293). For similar interpretations of the mutuality depicted at 4, 1192-1208, cfr. Nussbaum 1994, pp. 182-185, 260 n. 26; Pope 2020, pp. 138, 153-154. See also n. 52 (below).

⁵² *In trivii* carries both senses; cfr. e.g. *Hecate Trivia*, Catull. 58. The mating of these dogs, then, is up to them, not guided by humans' dog-breeding practices. See also n. 51 (above).

⁵³ Left to their own devices, canines tend to mate for life and, in sexually competitive environments, the copulatory lock (by deployment of the baculum, swelling and inflating) plays an important role in ensuring that their procreation reflects this; Asa-Valdespino 1998. For discussion of Lucr. *DRN* 4, 1200-1208, with particular emphasis on the mechanics of canine coupling, many thanks to Gracie Singleton. See Godwin 1986, p. 166; Nussbaum 1994, pp. 183-184 n. 79; Garani 2007, pp. 174-175 (also on potential Empedoclean resonances). Pope (2020, pp. 138-139), interprets 'trap' in a negative light. Others – e.g. Flores 2004, p. 103 – tend to read *fraudem* as

and love-making take two Lucretius saves for the last line. There he illustrates the inherent physical and emotional entanglement of love and love-making in discussing the shared pleasure they engender – by embodying them in the metrical structure: *quare etiam atque etiam ut dico est communi' voluptas*. In other words, by using four instances of elision and then one of prodelision, Lucretius crafts an auditory mirror of the phenomena – one which drives home his point to *DRN*'s readers as they read the line aloud⁵⁴. There is no doubt, then, at least as far as Lucretius is concerned. True love is mutual and interactive, not an active-passive power dynamic, and so is the sex that occurs as an expression of it.

The mechanics of procreation are also inherently interactive, in Lucretius' view. Contra, e.g., Aristotle, according to Lucretius, both parents contribute seed to the mix during sexual intercourse and the seed from both parents materially and meaningfully contributes to the nature of their progeny – 'for the offspring always consists of two-fold seed' (*semper enim partus duplici de semine constat*)⁵⁵. But this joint contribution is no battle between the sexes, as Pope would have it, whereby the female is masculated and the man effeminised⁵⁶. The complementarity between the seeds of both partners is a key factor in whether or not a couple will conceive, and there are many dimensions to that. Moreover, in ways ranging from context to word choice, Lucretius makes clear his focus is on sexual intercourse within the context of marriage⁵⁷. Indeed, perhaps lest the reader harbour any lingering doubt, Lucretius states that, to be sure of protecting one's old age with children, men must find for themselves a wife who is an equal and mate in nature (*compar | natura*)⁵⁸. Coming as it does at the end of a chiasitic construction which makes clear that women and men alike have better chances of conception with some spouses than with others,

deception or error (*vel sim*), but that would be inconsistent with Lucretius' focus throughout *DRN* 4, 1192-1287 on love that is both sincere and not coloured by false beliefs. With the echo of 4, 1205 with 4, 1113 (cfr. Landolfi 2013, p. 143), the variation of *quom interea validis for usque adeo cupidine* speaks to the fact that the animals, unlike the humans, are not cleaving to one another from excessive *amor*. On Lucretius' potential targets, sources and intertexts at 4, 1192-1208, cfr. Tutrone 2012, p. 300; Landolfi 2013, pp. 135-145.

⁵⁴ As was typical of reading practices at the time; Zinn 2019, pp. 138-139. Classic treatments of the full range of wordplay and its functions in *DRN* include Friedländer 1941; West 1969; Synder 1980.

⁵⁵ Lucr. *DRN* 4, 1229. On Lucretius' potential targets, sources and intertexts at 4, 1209-1262, cfr. Bailey 1947 vol. 3, pp. 1313-1318; Brown 1987, pp. 320-323; Tutrone 2012, pp. 299-301; Landolfi 2013, pp. 147-181 and now Pope 2020, pp. 35-56.

⁵⁶ Pope 2020, pp. 35-56 – a point he later (pp. 177-178) softens to similar effect as what follows.

⁵⁷ Cfr. e.g. Lucretius' juxtaposition of *sterili Venere* (*DRN* 4, 1235), *multum harmoniae Veneris* (4, 1248) and *multae steriles Hymenaeis* (4, 1251) together with his use, at key points in the discussion, of *uxores: gravidas uxores* (4, 1238), *domi fecundae uxores* (4, 1254-1255).

⁵⁸ Lucr. *DRN* 4, 1255-1256.

due to issues of physiological complementarity, Lucretius' emphasis on the importance of total equivalence and fit between sexual life partners is quite striking⁵⁹.

While the fundamental complementarity between the seed and nature of a married couple is of crucial importance to their chances of conception (*usque adeo magni refert* 4, 1257), and even the food they eat is important (*in eo refert* 4, 1260) insofar as it can temporarily influence that complementarity, perhaps the most important factor of all (*permagni refert* 4, 1264) is the position that they adopt during sexual intercourse.

5. Passion and Position

Drawing together the preceding threads, it is now possible to take another look at 4, 1263-1277 and venture an answer to David Konstan's question.

et quibus ipsa modis tractetur blanda voluptas,
 id quoque permagni refert; nam more ferarum
 quadrupedumque magis ritu plerumque putantur
 concipere uxores, quia sic loca sumere possunt
 pectoribus positis sublatis semina lumbis.
 nec molles opu' sunt motus uxoribus hilum.
 nam mulier prohibet se concipere atque repugnat
 clunibus ipsa viri Venerem si laeta retractat
 atque exossato ciet omni corpore fluctus;
 eicit enim sulcum recta regione viaque
 vomeris atque locis avertit seminis ictum.
 idque sua causa consuerunt scorta moveri,
 ne complerentur crebro gravidaeque iacerent,
 et simul ipsa viris Venus ut concinnior esset;
 coniugibus quod nil nostris opus esse videtur.

And in what ways the charming pleasure itself is performed is also of very great importance; for wives are thought to conceive for the most part in the manner of animals and particularly by the rite of quadrupeds – since, in this way, with their chests having been placed down and their loins having been raised up, their 'places' are able to take up the seeds. Wives have no need at all for sinuous movements. For a woman prevents herself from conceiving and fights against it with her hips, if she herself, glad, draws the 'Venus' of the man in and out *and* having made her entire body flexible, moves herself in wave-like motions;

⁵⁹ Lucr. *DRN* 4, 1248-59, especially 4, 1249-1256.

for she throws off the plow's furrow from the right region and direct path and turns the thrust of the seed away from her places. And prostitutes accustomed themselves to move that way for their own motive – namely, in order that they might not often be filled and lie pregnant and in order that the sex itself might, at the same time, be more refined for the men. For our spouses, it is seen that there is no need of that.

DRN 4, 1263-1277 (emphasis mine)

As is now evident, a nexus of verbal and conceptual intratextual echoes link both 4, 1263-1277 and 4, 1278-1287 back to 4, 1192-1208; they must be read in light of it, as well as the intervening lines.

Lucretius imbues these lines with a quality that is at once clinically detached, almost impersonal and simultaneously quite evocative. There is considerable wordplay, for example, in *blanda voluptas*. Context suggests the expression means more than just charming pleasure; it is also a euphemism signifying sexual intercourse, its pleasures and possibly the penis. The verb *tracto* has the potential for sexual innuendo, related to handling of and penetration by the *membrum virile*⁶⁰. That sense is reinforced here by hearkening back to *Venerem laeta retractat* at 4, 1200 – words which Lucretius echoes (with some important variations) a few lines later. But *tractetur* already primes the reader to think of his description of females gladly and actively engaging in sexual intercourse, seeking shared joys and mutual pleasure, on the basis of genuine heartfelt love. Even the adjective *blandus* has sexual connotations; it signifies charming in the sense of coaxing, with the physical and the psychological as two sides of the same coin. Charming entails the smooth stroking motion of one body against another – whether one is speaking of the body in whole or part, and/or their microscopic corporeal constituents; such motions are pleasurable to the perceiver and thereby potentially enticing and/or persuasive⁶¹. But Lucretius is not trying to be salacious in all this; his aim, rather, is to bring forward and correct several related ideas. While *blandus* occurs most frequently in *DRN* as an epithet of *voluptas*, Lucretius first introduces it in the proem to book one – as an epithet of *amor*; indeed, he introduces love here too. The charming love (*blandum amorem*) of all living creatures, and animals in particular, inspire them to procreate – each according to their own kind. The paradigm from which the reader begins in *DRN*, then, is of love as

⁶⁰ Cfr. Adams 1982, pp. 149, 186, 208.

⁶¹ On the sexual valences, cfr. Adams 1982, pp. 183-187; Brown 1987, p. 362. On the mechanism, compare, for example, the blandishments or charms (*blanditiae*) of the first children, and their effect on the first parents (p. 114 above); cfr. Zinn 2021, pp. 180-181, 191-192.

something naturally charming, pleasurable and procreative – and animals' love and love-making embody that⁶². His point, then, is that there must be a way in which love, sex and pleasure are compatible for humans as well – and that this compatibility (or not) is embodied by and reflected in the position they adopt during sexual intercourse.

As the readers know from their own experience as well as from 4, 1192–1208, many animals procreate 'doggie style'. Not coincidentally, as Lucretius continues, wives (*uxores*) conceive best in this position. The position is useful because it allows the generative seeds to flow to where the mutual 'fit' of seed and place may lead to conception⁶³. In the 'doggie' position, then, love, sexual intercourse and mutual pleasure can coincide – and be useful for procreation.

The usefulness of love and love-making is well worth underscoring; the Epicureans placed great stock in utility and – as noted above – both Lucretius and the Romans more generally placed a premium on procreation, specifically on propagating one's lineage. Now, the last line of this passage, *coniugibus quod nil nostris opus esse videtur*, seems really to have been key to the conventional interpretation that wives have no need to please their husbands and take little or no pleasure in sex. But what if Lucretius is using *opus esse* here (and throughout this passage) in relation to the Epicurean hierarchy of desires? What if he is speaking of utility in that sense?⁶⁴

According to the Epicureans, there are natural and necessary pleasures, natural but unnecessary pleasures, and unnatural unnecessary pleasures. One should pursue one's desires for natural, necessary pleasures like simple food, clothing and shelter; our nature requires it and thus our survival depends on it. One may indulge in natural but unnecessary pleasures, like fancy food, clothing and shelter when they are on offer, as long as they are unlikely to result in pain in the longer term. But the best that excess can do is vary pleasure, not increase it. As for fame, power, glory and the like, the desire for such things have no basis in one's nature; they arise rather from false beliefs. Pursuing one's desire for such things is typically counterproductive for one's peace of mind and sometimes even for one's survival. Ideally one should limit one's desires to those which are natural and necessary; everything else is superfluous and should be of no concern to us⁶⁵. So, where does sex fit in? Where do love and love-making?

⁶² Lucr. *DRN* 1, 19–20. For similar views, cfr. e.g. Betensky 1980, p. 298; Landolfi 2013, p. 141; Pope 2020, p. 56.

⁶³ Lucretius' *loca sumere possunt ... semina* is polyvalent; the places in question must take up the seeds and the seeds must occupy those places.

⁶⁴ For another view, see Bailey 1947 vol. 3, p. 1318.

⁶⁵ Cfr. n. 42 (above).

The schema that Lucretius presents at 4, 1263-1277 is telling. He proceeds from sexual intercourse between husband and wife with the aim of procreation, to a man and woman having extramarital sex that the woman is actively pursuing and enjoying, to a man having sex with a prostitute who is trying to avoid conception and to make the sex pleasing to him. As Lucretius presents it, each of these representative examples of sexual intercourse involves pleasure, but each does so differently and with different emotional states.

The members of the married couple are jointly pursuing the same natural and necessary pleasure, which – if 4, 1192-1208 is anything to go by – is both shared and also an expression of mutual love; the echoes with the immediately preceding account of heredity (4, 1209-1262) support this as well. Moreover, as Lucretius has already shown, while love may not be necessary for one's personal sexual fulfilment in the form of short-term pleasure, marital sex is necessary for the long-term pleasure of having children – a pleasure which is also mutual, natural and necessary⁶⁶. Making love within the context of marriage, therefore, offers the maximal natural and necessary pleasure to a couple, individually and collectively, in both the short and long term.

The next instance is of sexual intercourse as a natural but unnecessary pleasure; by indicating that procreation is not the goal Lucretius confirms that he is speaking of extramarital love-making, at least in the first instance⁶⁷. Lucretius emphasises that the woman takes her enjoyment of sexual intercourse a step further than what is useful for conception – including by making undulating movements (*fluctus*) during the act. This mating pair recalls those lovesick individuals whom Lucretius critiques at 4, 1058-1191; their pleasure may be mutual, but it is not pure – rather mixed with unnecessary pain. Moreover, the fire of their love is, literally and figuratively, something that also moves in a wave-like manner (*fluctuat*), fluctuating and unfixed, not unlike the psychophysiological disturbances that typically accompany it⁶⁸. Such *amor* is counterproductive in part because it is in excess of what is necessary, in part because it is often mixed with false beliefs that detract from the reader's peace of mind and lead him to do foolish things, like festooning the threshold of *her* home when he, the excluded lover (*exclusus amator*), is shut out, and even immoral things, like bringing one's good name into disrepute and squandering the family estate on gifts (perhaps implicitly rather than increasing it by a wife's dowry)⁶⁹. Thus

⁶⁶ Cfr. Lucr. *DRN* 4, 1073-1076, 1141-1148, 1233-1256.

⁶⁷ See pp. 113-114 above.

⁶⁸ Cfr. especially Lucr. *DRN* 4, 1073-1083. Epicurean equanimity is often represented as a calm sea; the opposite is a sea whose surface is stirred up and rough with waves.

⁶⁹ Lucr. *DRN* 4, 1073-1191.

such couples may enjoy pleasure in the short term, and particularly when they have sex, but in the longer term their desires are unfulfillable and in vain and their love brings mainly pain and worry – i.e. the opposite of the Epicurean pleasure (*voluptas*). Therefore, as Lucretius presents it, such love is not worth having, even when the feeling is mutual and the sex is good.

Lucretius does not present a moral judgment about the not uncommon practice of his readers engaging in sexual intercourse with prostitutes – at least, not explicitly; instead, he shows them that it is an unnatural, unnecessary pleasure in a way that they can reach that conclusion themselves. As the reader will have already seen, if a man is inflamed with excessive – or, as Konstan puts it, ‘obsessive’ – love for a particular mistress, then it can be useful to quell that surge of fire by having one-off sexual intercourse with and/or temporarily turning one’s thoughts to another woman – but only as the lesser of two evils, so to speak⁷⁰. In fact, it is better to avoid love and sex altogether⁷¹.

The best of all is to pursue them exclusively within the context of marriage; only then are they both natural and necessary. Being excessively inflamed with excessive and/or delusional love does not happen in marriage; true love arises gradually, over time, through the continual experiences of a shared life⁷². By contrast, the *amor* one feels for a mistress is an emotional state that arises, to some extent, from the false beliefs that mistresses do their best to cultivate – fanning the fire as much through absence as through occasional, selective interactions. At best this *amor* is excessive and counterproductive. Moreover, there is no guarantee that a mistress is sincerely ‘in love’ or that she is faithful, whatever her feelings⁷³. Finally, sex between man and prostitute Lucretius presents as a loveless, transactional interaction. The man is engaging in the unemotional, unnecessary pursuit of pleasure for pleasure’s sake. The prostitute is engaging in sexual intercourse for her own reason (*sua causa*); context suggests she does so freely but out of necessity – i.e. her concern with the man’s pleasure is no more than a means to her own survival. For the same reason, she is also not seeking the pleasure of having children, and deliberately trying to avoid becoming pregnant. Across these three exempla, Lucretius shows that even when women willingly choose to engage in sexual intercourse and actively participate in it, only marital sex on the basis of mutual love with the aim of having children qualifies as a choice-worthy pleasure.

⁷⁰ Konstan 2008, pp. 146–148.

⁷¹ Lucr. *DRN* 4, 1063–1072, 1141–1144.

⁷² Lucr. *DRN* 4, 1278–1287.

⁷³ Lucr. *DRN* 4, 1058–71, 1171–1193; that such practices were typical of mistresses, cfr. Lyne 1980, pp. 1–18.

Each of Lucretius' representative examples of sexual intercourse also involves a different sexual position. Marital love-making is exemplified by the doggie-style position: wife on all fours (*more ferarum | quadrupedumque magis ritu*) with breasts down and loins up, husband mounting from behind; Lucretius also mirrors it here in the text⁷⁴. Animals adopt the position when coupling because they are engaging in procreative sexual intercourse as an expression of genuine mutual *amor*, burning equally but not excessively for one another; the same is thus true of human marital love-making. As for extramarital love-making and sexual intercourse with a prostitute, several variations on the intratextual echoes with 4, 1200 indicate positions other than doggie-style. For one, there is the anatomic detail of the haunches or hips, the substitution of *clunibus* for *natura et*. When a woman literally and figurative burns too hot, it manifests in the sexual intercourse; she goes too far – acts in excess of what is natural and necessary and prevents procreation. How? With the most significant variation of all, line 4, 1271: she makes her body pliant and flexible (*exossato*) and thus moves in wave-like motions (*molles motus, fluctus*) from the hips⁷⁵. Such movements, as the reader would know from experience, are not typical of the doggie position. The polyptoton linking *ipsa viri Venerem* (4, 1271) and *ipsa viris Venus* (4, 1276) indicates there is also a third position. Lucretius consistently represents extramarital love-making as a face-to-face interaction – couples hungry with love and insatiable longing, trying to devour one another in their tangled turbulent embraces; so the third must be something else. These things, taken together, suggest that extramarital love-making is exemplified by face-to-face sexual intercourse – encompassing a range of positions in which women could make undulating movements; they also suggest that sexual intercourse with prostitutes (*scorta*) is exemplified by sexual intercourse with the woman astride the man (so as to make such movements), but facing away, towards his feet⁷⁶. Wives (*uxoribus*) have no need to adopt

⁷⁴ Lucretius embodies and illustrates the phenomenon using the chiasmic structure of this expression and its placement over two lines; the form and content of 4, 1263-1266, particularly together, recall both senses of *subsistere* at 4, 1198.

⁷⁵ The word *clunes* is often used of rhythmic motions during sexual intercourse; Brown 1987, p. 366. The alliterative quality of 4, 1273-1274 may mirror both those rhythmic motions and their varied nature; cfr. Landolfi 2013, p. 188.

⁷⁶ Clausen's conjecture of *corpore* for *pectore* at DRN 4, 1272 may thus be unnecessary and perhaps also distract from Lucretius' emphasis on the visibility of the breast; Lucretius often uses periphrasis and synecdoche to highlight a salient aspect of the phenomenon. Facing away is suggested by mechanics of the third position, together with the idea that taking pleasure with a wide-wandering Venus is a strategy for avoiding the *simulacra* sought by those engaging in counterproductive feelings of love and love-making; cfr. n. 29 (above); Godwin 186, p. 163 and 4, 1171-1172. For the typical sexual positions in Roman art, cfr. e.g. Marcadé 1965; pp. 90-91 may

such positions or to move with those sinuous, undulating movements during sexual intercourse; they adopt the position and direct motions consistent with their pursuit of procreation. Wives (*coniugibus*) also have no need for such things because sexual intercourse as an expression of mutual feeling is already pleasurable for both. Wives therefore do not go to excess, as mistresses do, nor do they have to compensate for lack of love, as prostitutes do. Prostitutes deliberately accustom themselves to contort their bodies in a way that makes their sexual intercourse more refined (*concinrior*) – i.e. both elegant-seeming and bespoke – in order to ensure that their clients enjoy it, for neither feels the fire. Wives, as the reader will have just seen, e.g., with *compar natura*, are already a good fit sexually – which Lucretius' word choice here both recalls and confirms. The word *coniunx* is a hapax in *DRN*; it signifies not only spouse but also yoke-mate, thus particularly connoting mutuality and partnership, a shared purpose and existence⁷⁷. Lucretius then goes on to show how true love can kindle in the context of marriage⁷⁸. In every case, then, the emotions, the physical movements and the position of a mating pair are coordinate with whether and to what extent there is a surge of fire underlying them, as well as the degree to which these things are mutual; every level embodies and mirrors the others.

6. Conclusion

One important goal of Lucretius' account of love is to show and thereby persuade the reader that love within marriage is possible, useful and the only love worth having. Also, as Nussbaum puts it, the 'goal of Lucretian therapy is to make a good marriage possible', by curing the reader of their false beliefs about love and love-making⁷⁹. All living creatures are capable of love and all experience love the same way, according to the same underlying mechanisms; all burn with the same fire, and all act accordingly. Accordingly, the emotions of women and animals are legitimate comparanda for those of men. Women,

illustrate something like what Lucretius has in mind with his first two exempla, pp. 74-76 with all three. For other views of the positions indicated by *Lucr. DRN* 4, 1270-1274, and Lucretius' targets and intertexts in 4, 1263-1277 more generally, cfr. e.g. Leonard-Smith 1942, p. 637; Bailey 1947 vol. 3, p. 1318; Jocelyn 1983; Brown 1987, pp. 361-366.

⁷⁷ It also looks forward to the first instances of voluntary coupling and marriage-like partnership: *Lucr. DRN* 5, 962-963, 1011-1027; cfr. Garani 2007, pp. 174-175. For other connotations of *coniunx*, cfr. Adams 1982, pp. 159-161, 179-180; Brown 1987, p. 371.

⁷⁸ Thus *concinnat* at 4, 1283 echoes and offers a corrective to *concinrior* in 4, 1276; cfr. Godwin 1986, p. 170; n. 31 (above).

⁷⁹ Nussbaum 1994, p. 185.

then, love as men do; women can also enjoy sexual intercourse as much as men do, especially when it is an expression of love. Love can also be mutual – not just in love affairs, but also in marriage. The love that arises within marriage is true love. True love's manifestation in sexual intercourse truly is love-making. And making love in marriage means doing it doggie-style.

Wives, like animals, typically only engage in procreative sexual intercourse which arises out of genuine mutual *amor*; for this they generally assume the 'doggie position'. Lucretius thus presents the mating of dogs and married couples as mirrors of one another; they are also two mutually illuminating exempla of the same phenomenon – namely, of true love's manifestation in love-making. 'Doggie style' simultaneously embodies and facilitates the mutuality and reciprocity of true love, love-making and their shared pleasures; it is also the most effective position for conception or procreation. This sexual intercourse is natural and necessary by Epicurean standards, and consistent with Roman norms and values. Virtuous Roman matrons and animals thus function as didactic exemplars in the second half of Lucretius' account of love; *DRN*'s readers are meant to look to them in order to evaluate their own feelings and choices.

Unlike those exemplars, human men frequently have extramarital sex for the sake of pleasure alone, absent the aim of procreation – and Lucretius thinks his intended readers are among them. Such pleasures, and the desires which motivate them, are unnecessary, even when they are natural. In such intercourse, love may be mutual, one-sided, all-together absent, or illusory – i.e. a false belief related to the extreme desire for carnal/physical pleasure or pleasure for pleasure's own sake. And this too manifests in the positions chosen by the pair. If love is present at all, however fleeting and illusory, they will couple face-to-face. If love is absent, the sex will be purely transactional, as with the female riding the male, but facing away.

The position, therefore, that one adopts for sexual intercourse is often a manifestation and embodiment of the emotions of a mating pair, as well as an ethical choice informed by their feelings. In other words, just as the underlying mechanisms of emotions involve the motions and interactions of microscopic bodies, so too the phenomenal experiences of emotions manifest in the ways we choose to move our bodies and interact with one another sexually. While all of the positions that Lucretius uses as exemplars represent the male in the sexually normative role (by Roman standards of the time) – i.e. as the one penetrating, not being penetrated, Lucretius does not represent the penetrative act as one of sexual dominance, as it was usually taken; the female is never a passive party – quite the opposite. Even soft or *mollis* movements are signs of agency, of having some power in the dynamic between partners. Sexual penetrability

in these circumstances is not, then, tantamount to weakness, effeminacy or vulnerability, as it was so often portrayed. This makes sense in light of the broader context of Lucretius' account of Epicurean philosophy; *DRN* lays great emphasis on the fact that all living creatures are assemblages of matter and thereby penetrable at some level, and that likewise, and at the same time, all are sources of matter that penetrate others⁸⁰. Just as with the collision of atoms or first-beginnings (e.g. *primordia*) in the void, then, so too in respect to sexual intercourse, Lucretius sees the joining of two bodies as a reciprocal interaction, not an active-passive power dynamic – and under the right circumstances the result is the manifestation of their fecundity.

Accordingly, it is not that 'our wives' have no need to please their husbands during sexual intercourse, they simply have no need to act like mistresses or prostitutes to do so. If the married couple are a good fit and love one another, then wives already please their husbands during sex – and vice versa. Engaging in sexual intercourse in the manner of a mistress or prostitute would at best vary the couple's pleasure, not increase it; and the process would hinder or even prevent them from reaching their shared goal. Lucretius teaches that the utility of love and love-making goes beyond personal and even mutual pleasure. Only sex in the pursuit of procreation qualifies as natural and necessary, and even then only when *both* partners desire and enjoy it; under those circumstances, it is useful to the pair, individually and collectively – useful for the pleasures of sex in the short term and for the pleasures of children in the long term. In other words, as Lucretius represents it, marital love and its pleasures – including if not especially sex – are natural and necessary, in a way very consistent with conventionally Roman morality. Lucretius might well agree with how Edwards once characterised that: '[r]eal Romans only had sex with their wives and even then not too often'⁸¹. But Lucretius also adds that when they do so, both husband and wife make love, both feel the same fiery surge of love rising within in them. Love, sex and marriage can, therefore, coexist – and should do; and when that happens, we make love as nature intended: 'doggie style'.

⁸⁰ Pope recently argued that this is both sexual and part of Lucretius' overall didactic programme; Pope 2020, pp. 26-28, 57-82, 181-183. For a non-sexualised interpretation, which also supports a non-hierarchical, non-anthropocentric worldview, cfr. Zinn forthcoming, capp. 2-3.

⁸¹ Edwards 1993, p. 92.

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