

# The Living in Lucretius' *De rerum natura* Animals' *ataraxia* and Humans' Distress

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## ABSTRACT

*In trying to comprehend the human role among other living beings from an antispeciesist point of view it is possible to look back to those thinkers who, far before our times, had already considered other living beings from a non-anthropocentric perspective. In this sense, a dialogue with the Ancients could be a useful way to identify a more solid ground on which to build a new relationship with the world of nature. For this reason in the following pages I suggest reading Lucretius' "De rerum natura" giving emphasis to the role of animals in order to understand the poet's pluralistic view. In the first part of my paper I will briefly focus on the poet's own Epicureanism while, in the second part, I will address two notable passages of Lucretius' poem – those of Iphigenia's sacrifice and of the bereaved cow – where it emerges both the guilt of human beings, who are compromised by an impious religion ("religio"), and the correct devotion (the true "pietas") of animals to the laws of nature. Eventually, as I will try to outline, Lucretius presents animals as models for human serenity and, as I will point out, he suggests that our opportunity to find happiness also depends upon them.*

*Keywords:* Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ethics, animal ethics, cruel sacrifice, contractualism, Epicureanism, *ataraxia*, nature, civilization.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Almost two millennia ago, a Latin poet, Lucretius, wrote his masterpiece, *De rerum natura*, wondering what the source of all human sorrows is and what humans should do in order to achieve the only goal of their lives, that is *serenity* (II 55-61, III 1070-5; Epicurus, *Principal Doctrines*, 11 and *Vatican Sayings*, 14). Interestingly, throughout the whole poem several poetical references to non-human animals occur, creating a complex scenario where humans are not set apart from the rest of living creatures. As Boyancé notices, Lucretius' attentiveness for animal lives does not come only from

the poet's personal interest in living beings, but also from the doctrinal motive in his quest for human earthly serenity: "Lucretius shows interest in living beings. And this is because of both a natural sympathy towards animals and his doctrinal research for serenity" (Boyancé 1970, 155)<sup>1</sup>. In fact, by means of a reading of the poem focused on the role of animals, the poet's interest for the living emerges alongside his care in observing the non-human world, as expressed through his solicitude in front of a bereaving cow (book II); through the several attacks against cruel sacrifice (book I, II, III, IV, VI); and through the condemnation of the violent use of animals in wars (book V).

At the same time, his concern for non-human world is expressed through his use of domesticated animals as a model for human happiness. Comparing animals, especially domesticated ones, to humans, he observes the former live a happier life than the latter, and that is because, he notes, they live a life that is more adherent to the laws of nature which represent the only norms humans should follow in order to achieve serenity (I 80-135, II 1-61, III 31-93, V 43-54). Humans, he affirms, ignoring the laws of nature, spend a great part of their lives caring about things – ambition for richness and power, fear of death and of Gods – which are extraneous to the Epicurean ideal of *ataraxia* (I 80-135, II 1-61, III 31-93, V 43-54); in contrast, animals, being faithful to the laws of nature, are completely devoid of these anxieties<sup>2</sup>. On this basis he develops a system in which domesticated animals become models for human life.

Moving from Epicurus' materialistic philosophy, Lucretius develops a non-anthropocentric view of the universe, in which non-human living beings are inherently the owners of the same values generally attributed to humans. Since humans and animals share a common origin regarding their bodies and souls – both composed by the aggregation of different kinds of atoms (book III) – the poet concludes that the universe is a paratactic system of living organisms where there is no room for human superiority (Dionigi 2007, 112). Nature, that is the homogeneous nature of materialism (Dionigi 2008, 33), is the common source of vegetal, animal and human life (V 795-823). And life, in all its manifestations, both on the atomical and individual level, is made possible through the stipulation of *pacts*.

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<sup>1</sup> Translation is mine.

<sup>2</sup> See Saylor 1972, 309 where the author observes as this contrast is symbolically presented in the double passage of II 317-32: "Lucretius here is employing his usual dualism when depicting how man wrongly views (or participates in) a natural, productive process that should be free of fear, and the sheep merely supply a correction on that fearful view".

## 2. PHYSICAL ORIGINS: THE UNIVERSE, HUMANS, AND ANIMALS

When explaining the genesis of both human and non-human life on earth, Lucretius says that all the life forms that have existed until now have their origin in the collision of atoms (book I, II). Atoms, the smallest particles of matter, are in motion from an infinite time moving through the infinite void (I 1021-8, II 80-141). Thanks to the *clinamen* (II 216-24), that is the unforeseeable deviation from straight motion, collisions among atoms happen and aggregations among them are, therefore, possible. The whole reality of the universe, says the poet, has originated from these collisions (V 419-31). Aggregation and separation among atoms are at the roots of life and death: union causes life while separation causes death (I 149-264). From this union, an indefinite variety of compounds comes to life from which the earth and what it holds emerges. These collisions, being unpredictable, draw a completely casual order of life, where no necessity exists. As we will see, each aggregate in order to exist needs an agreement, that is a pact, among the atoms from which they are compounded (*foedera naturae*: V 924); and when these pacts are broken, the aggregate vanishes and its atoms return to primordial chaos (II 62-5).

Living organisms are just special kinds of atomic aggregates that, alongside with the agreement among atoms, need to satisfy certain characteristics in order to be saved from extinction and assure the continuity of the species. Physiologically they need feeding and sexual organs (V 849-54) and, contemporarily, one of the following "virtues" (V 857-77): intelligence (*ingenium*), that is human ability to respond to their needs creating artificial tools; cunning (*dolus*), i.e. the fox's cunning; daring (*virtus*), as wild beasts' fierceness and strength; mobility (*mobilitas*), i.e. speed, which, for instance, lets the stag and others wild beasts escape from dangers; utility (*utilitas*), that is what lets the animals, lacking the above virtues, serve humans in return for protection.

Although Lucretius never delineates it explicitly, from the above one can divide the living world into distinct parts: humans and animals. To the first class belong the intelligence and the ability to create; the second class is, in turn, divisible in two categories: those animals which are in possession of a virtue sufficient to guarantee their survival (*dolus*, *virtus*, *mobilitas*) and who live in isolated places (V 200-2) – that is, savage beasts and wild animals –; and those animals who have decided to stipulate a collaboration pact with human beings, giving their utility (*utilitas*) in return for protection (*tutela*) (V 860-77) – that is, domesticated animals. In this sense, the relationship between human and domestic animals is set up as a *mutual exchange* (Shelton 1996) in which both parts benefit from mutual

collaboration. But those animals – savage beasts and wild animals – who did not want to take part into the contract have to be avoided because they could represent a possible threat to peace and, therefore, serenity (V 39-42; Epicurus, *Principal Doctrines*, 32-3). In this universe, divided into humans, wild beasts and domestic animals, Lucretius reserves his harshest terms for human beings, describing them as imperfect, sad, and poorly constructed when compared with animals, to whom nature supplies everything:

Then too the baby, like to a sailor cast away by the cruel waves, lies naked on the ground, speechless, wanting every furtherance of life, soon as nature by the throes of birth has shed him forth from his mother's womb into the borders of light: he fills the room with a rueful wailing, as well he may whose destiny it is to go through in life so many ills. But the different flocks, herds, and wild beasts grown up; they want no rattles; to none of them need be addressed the fond broken accents of the fostering nurse; they ask not different dresses according to the season; no nor do they want arms or lofty walls, whereby to protect their own, the earth itself and nature manifold in her works producing in plenty all things for all. (V 222-34)

If humans spend their time in this life caring for things – ambition, lust for power and wealth – completely foreign to the ideal *ataraxia* promoted by the Epicurean doctrine, on the contrary animals remain faithful to the criterion of truth which comes from the sense. In fact, following Epicurus' gnoseology, Lucretius considers reason as the main human faculty but not as the highest one. Knowledge, he says, comes from the senses (IV 469-513; Epicurus, *Principal Doctrines*, 23-4 and *Letter to Herodotus*, 38-9, 63-8 and 82), which are common both to humans and animals, while reason and imagination, possessed primarily by human beings, falsify the elements coming from sensation (IV 379-468; Epicurus, *Principal Doctrines*, 24 and *Letter to Herodotus*, 50-1). In so doing, the poem denounces the ambivalent power of reason which, thus, loses its paramount role. And with reason, also human beings lose their supposed supremacy (V 988-1142). Similarly, on the moral level, good and evil are not something fixed, concerning only reason and human beings, but come from the faithfulness to the laws of nature, which teach the search for pleasure<sup>3</sup> and the avoidance of pain. Therefore good and evil are something common to both humans and animals.

From the above it follows that in the poem the subdivision of the "living" does not imply a hierarchy of earthly species, rather Lucretius affirms the equality of all living beings. In doing so he opposes the anthro-

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<sup>3</sup> Regarding the Epicurean classification of pleasure see Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*, 129-32; *Principal Doctrines*, III, IV, VIII-XI, XV, XVI, XVIII-XXI, XXVI and *Vatican Sayings*, 4, 17, 21, 42, 68-9, 71, 80-1.

pocentric idea – widely held by his contemporaries – of human beings as the undisputed kings of the universe (V 738-820, 925-1010). In order to corroborate his horizontal view he confronts the reader with a series of examples showing how animals resemble humankind. Animals, he says, especially those who have been domesticated, are subject to the same emotions of human beings, as pleasure (I 1-49), love (IV 1192-208), affection, sadness, distress (II 352-66), and fear (V 1056-61); like humans, animals display willingness (II 263-71, IV 883-4); their sleep includes the dream state (IV 916-1036); and, though speechless, they are able to express their feelings and emotions vocally (V 1062-91).

Furthermore, adds the poet, the same tripartition – spirit, soul, and body (*animus, anima, corpus*) – is at the base of the possibilities of human and different animal species life (book III); knowledge comes from sensation for every creature (I 398-417); and all living beings must follow the same laws of nature (the *foedera natura*: V 924). Hence, corporeal differences – which allow us to perceive the various species as different from each other – are nothing more than the multiple variations that the identical common base can assume – just as atoms, equivalent according to the being, are different according to the shape.

### 3. PACTS: HISTORICAL ROOTS

In the same way the earth needs an agreement among atoms in order to exist (*foedera natura*: V 924), living beings need pacts to reach stability (*communia foedera pacis*: V 1155). At the roots of human evolution there are, in fact, the relations that each human has with his/her neighbours. In telling the history of human life, Lucretius explains that human beings, in their primitive state, led a lonely and wild life, bound to the law of survival of the fittest (V 988-1010). Only later, when humans started to engage in non-aggression and mutual collaboration pacts with each other and with other living beings with whom they shared the planet, did their life become less isolated (V 1011-27). At some point in their evolution human beings formed alliances: first with their partners, then with their offspring, then with neighbours, and, finally, with those animals that could be domesticated. It is thanks to these non-aggression and collaboration pacts that a short Golden Age started, in which humans were faithful to pacts (V 1105-12). But this idyllic state ended precisely when “ambition was invented” and “gold was discovered” (V 1113-60), that is, when the bases of the corrupted civilization were founded and human beings were condemned to a life of troubles.

Lucretius contrasts humans' anxious, unstoppable, and aimless search for power (V 1430-4) with the simplicity of animal life. For the latter, in fact, the lack of intelligence, initially seen as a disadvantage because it condemns them not to experience the great comfort which follows from progress, changes into a tool necessary to reach a serene existence. Like animals, the poet claims, humans of the Golden Age judged things according to "beauty and strength" (V 1105-12), until ambition got the upper hand. Therefore animals represent the precise embodiment of the possibility of conducting a serene life on this earth even today. Nature, a generous mother (II 991-8), provides everything to animals, who, in turn, remain faithful to the sensitive criterion of truth and follow only natural pleasures – as Epicureanism teaches us – as they do not care about the foolish opinion of others and are completely unfamiliar with ambitions and lust for power.

#### 4. THE MEANING OF PACTS

Before going on to analyze the previously mentioned passages about the practice of cruel sacrifices, it is worth noting something more on the idea of pact. As we saw above, Lucretius says it is the event which, in the history of the universe, permits the whole of reality to start existing. Similarly, in the history of humanity, it is the event from which human beings developed from an initial indigence to a fully civilized state and, at the same time, permits some animals to become domesticated. Therefore, in the same way the earth needs an agreement between atoms (*foedera natura*), in order to reach an equilibrium, so human beings need an agreement between them in order to live a serene life (*communia foedera pacis*). Hence, we can say that, at the roots of evolution, the poet identifies the relations that each human being maintains with their fellow beings and domestic animals, in each of these relations there is always the idea of a reciprocity based on an agreement stipulated in a non defined time of the past. And as *foedera natura* could not be broken without provoking a regression to chaos and undifferentiated existence, civilized humans cannot break pacts with other living beings without causing a regression to their primordial fierceness and loneliness. It is worth noting that as there exists no necessity in the genesis of the physical world (*clinamen*), similarly it does not exist in the formation of the civil life. Pacts come, in fact, from the free will of each individual to share a life in communion with others. Hence in this perspective there is no room for a speciesist order since each individual, human and animal, has the opportunity to choose what they prefer (Shelton 1996, 50).

## 5. "DE RERUM NATURA" PLURALISTIC VIEW

From the above it is possible to understand the *De rerum natura* pluralistic view that is, that human beings are just a particular kind of animal species, and their own features do not make them superior to other living beings. It also follows Lucretius' "morality of respect". Respect, firstly, for the living because of their sentience – sensibility is the attribute common to all animals, humans and non-humans –, secondly, respect for those rules, norms, pacts, which are at the roots of our society. However the poet does not only propose the respect for these differences but adds the reproof of those who, by means of a presumed superiority, think to hold the right to break the pacts stipulated and to abuse the others. As we will see, the poet presents us with two situations in which the said duty is transgressed, when humans do not keep their promise, they cause their allies to suffer and in turn, suffer themselves. For this reason, the poet morally condemns everything that leads human beings to break the aforementioned pacts driving them to their primordial condition of indigence.

As a result, Lucretian teaching is set up as a message of freedom, anti-anthropocentrism, and of respect of other living beings who together with humans constitute nature, regulated by the unique universal law of aggregation and destruction. From an understanding of the co-originality of humans with all other forms of lives comes the possibility to drive away those tormentors of human lives – religion, war lust, ambition, and greediness – whose dangers lie in the fact that they fool humans into thinking they will guarantee serenity when, in fact, they feed some of the anxiety they try to run from. Lucretius contrasts the human being who ignores the serene laws of nature with the domesticated animal who already has this serenity and is perturbed only by the evil actions of that human who frequently chooses to break contracts.

In particular, his critique is set against the *source of all evils*, that is the fear of death (III 59-86; cf. Segal 1970, 118), which leads human to break those pacts essential in gaining serenity. When this fear gains the upper hand, the condition of the civilized human beings leave space for a bloody scenario where humans, overwhelmed by fear and ambitions, waste their energy in fighting (V 1308-49) and in the worship of a *religio* which is mixed up with the *superstitio* (I 80-101). To this fear, Lucretius opposes the universal and positive force of love the *lepos, voluptas* inspired by Venus (I 1-23), guarantor of peace and of the continuity of the species that is the aggregative force of nature, the source of life.

Essentially Lucretius critiques human *religio* – identified with the *superstitio* – because of its amoral character which prompts humans to

break pacts. The poet contrasts traditional religion with the true epicurean *pietas*: while the first consists in the wrong opinion about gods and therefore is a monster to be defeated (I 62-5) and the highest expression of human impiety, the latter consists in the serene contemplation of nature (V 1203), and is already possessed by domesticated animals (I 14-23).

## 6. TWO PASSAGES

In the light of the above, we can proceed to analyze two notable passages of *De rerum natura* where Lucretius' deep interest in animal lives clearly emerges. As we will see, the Iphigenia's sacrifice passage (I 80-101) is not set apart from the rest of the poem; rather, it is the first of five Lucretian attacks against cruel sacrificial practices (I 80-101, II 352-66, III 51-3, IV 1233-8, V 1198-203); in particular, it is recalled in and completed by the bereaved cow episode (II 352-66)<sup>4</sup>. It is noteworthy to identify both parallels and differences between these two passages because they express Lucretius' ethical message.

In Iphigenia's story, the poet presents Agamemnon, the Danaï's king, who is going to sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia, in order to achieve victory for his fleet. The princess is depicted at the very moment in which she realizes that she is the sacrificial victim. This story portrays the worst side of religion which leads people to madness, convincing them to break the pacts which bind parents to their offspring<sup>5</sup>. As the poet points out neither Iphigenia's terror nor people's greed succeed in making the king halt his horrible project:

This is what I fear herein, lest haply you should fancy that you are entering on unholy grounds of reason and treading the path of sin; whereas on the contrary often and often that very religion has given birth to sinful and unholy deeds. Thus in Aulis the chosen chieftains of the Danaï, foremost of men, foully polluted with Iphianassas's blood the altar of the Trivian maid. Soon as the fillet encircling her maiden tresses shed itself in equal lengths adown each cheek, and soon as she saw her father standing sorrowful before the altars and beside him ministering priests hiding the knife and her countrymen at sight of her shedding tears, speechless in terror she dropped down on her knees and sank on the ground. Nor aught in such a moment could it avail the luckless girl that she had first bestowed the name of father on the king. For lifted up in the hands of men she was carried shivering to the altars, not after due performance of the customary rites to be escorted by the

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<sup>4</sup> This episode is recalled by Ovid, *Fasti*, IV 459-82 and Virgil, *Ecloques*, VIII 85 ss.

<sup>5</sup> See Empedocles, *Purifications*, fr. 430 DK.

clear-ringing bridal song, but in the very season of marriage, stainless maid mid the stain blood, to fall a sad victim by the sacrificing stroke of a father, that thus a happy and prosperous departure might be granted to the fleet. So great the evils to which religion could prompt! (I 80-101)

In the bereaved cow passage, the poet presents another cruel sacrifice, now a calf takes Iphigenia's place. While the calf lies on an altar, a warm flow of blood running off its breast, its mother is looking for it. And since she cannot find it, she runs through the woodland, yearning; she stops mooing and then she restarts her search:

Thus often in front of the beauteous shrines of the gods a calf falls sacrificed beside the incense-burning altars, and spirits from its breast a warm stream of blood; but the bereaved mother as she ranges over the green lawns knows the footprints stamped on the ground by cloven hoofs, scanning with her eyes every spot to see if she can anywhere behold her lost youngling; then she fills with her moanings the leafy wood each time she desists from her search and again and again goes back to the stall pierced to the heart by the loss of her calf; nor can the soft willows and grass quickened with dew and yon rivers gliding level with their banks comfort her mind and put away the care that has entered her, nor can other forms of calves throughout the glad pasturer divert her mind and ease it of its care: so persistently she seeks something special and known. (II 352-66)

The correlations between the two scenes are so strong that there is no doubt that Lucretius, in this last passage, wants to continue the invective against the insensate human terror – of death, of lacking power – he started in the first book. However, if the parallels are strong and numerous, the different parents' behaviours show the reader the guilt of human beings, who are so compromised by the impious religion that they become the unnatural executioners of their own offspring. They also demonstrate the correct devotion (the true *pietas*) of animals to the law of nature.

## 7. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

It is worth recalling Sobrino's analysis of these two passages (Sobrino 1993, 193-8). As he notices, the setting of the action and the occasion are similar: an altar on which a ritual slaughter is about to take place or has already been performed. The subjects who enact the parent-child roles are different: the heifer takes Agamemnon's place, the calf Iphigenia's one. The focus of attention is similar, the distress as a result of an unjust action, but the subject who feels these feelings is different, firstly the victim of book I – the princess – then the parent – the cow of book II.

The reader's reactions, though, are the same. On the one side feeling pity for the unjust destiny of the two victims and condemning the practice of cruel sacrifice; on the other doubting a religion which prescribes this rite. Lucretius strikingly creates a chiasmic comparison between the father's obstinate will to bring his wicked action to an end in order to gain the gods' favour, and the passionate race against time of a heifer who, unreasonably aware of her calf's destiny, still tries, even if in vain, to find a sign of her calf to deny her ominous premonition.

The times of the narrations are also noteworthy, the inertia of the first passage expresses the unavoidability of the evil which comes from the belief in a false *religio*; similarly Iphigenia's distress is reflected in the crying of those people who assist the cruel scene. What follows is the impression of a slow procession: Men carry the "trembling girl" to the altar, where the father is waiting with the sword guiltily hidden in his garments, while the crowd is attending in tears. On the contrary, the second scene is dynamic. Warm blood comes out of the calf's chest "in waves" (II 354) while the mother is desperately running in search of her child, she stops at the view of the "cloven hoofs" (II 356), and she turns to look, but, not seeing the calf, she starts to run again.

Another important difference is the gap between the mother-heifer's natural aphasia and the father-king's voluntary and ominous silence. The king, as a human being, by virtues of his reason and speech, could have pronounced a word to stop the criminal gesture, instead, he permitted his daughter to become the victim of an impious and wicked act. Therefore the innocent animal's inarticulate shout is contrasted with man's consciously guilty silence. The king, putting his desire for war above his parental duties, breaks pacts; on the contrary, the cow's willingness to be faithful to that union is total. Desperation is the reaction of one who endures the violation of the pact, anguish and pain are, in fact, Iphigenia's and the cow's answers.

The final reason for condemning the father is the deception he plotted against his daughter who is shown in the exact moment she realizes what is happening. Until that moment she had, in fact, believed it was to be her wedding day and people were looking at her because she was the bride. The blame of this machinated deceit is amplified by the distance between the fate of a victim and that of a spouse.

Notwithstanding the differences in the events dynamics, Lucretius demonstrates the analogue gravity and atrocity between these two situations. Thanks to the poet's narrative strategies, which bestows the same dignity to both the subjects of these passages and confers an identical value to the two ways of suffering, the reader does not feel more compassion for the wretched princess than for the cow's crying. Furthermore, attesting the

analogy between human and animal sacrifice, we find that the bereaved cow's passage creates a temporal bridge between the *religio's* crimes which happened in a remote time – compared with the poet's epoch – and those which are still perpetuated in contemporary time, as at that time, and whose consequences are impious and opposed to the course of life.

## 8. ANIMAL FAITHFULNESS AND HUMAN UNFAITHFULNESS

Eventually these two passages clearly state that humans are led by their own fears to perform destructive and against-nature actions. As we have seen these fears come from the distorted consideration of the source of true pleasure and cause, therefore, the unfaithfulness to pacts. Not understanding the security which comes from the knowledge of the law of nature, human beings are perturbed by fear of death, and therefore by fear of gods, and that leads them to break the pacts stipulated both among themselves and with animals. And that is because humans do not understand the nexus existing between pleasure and the willingness to be faithful to pacts (Shelton 1996, 57).

As Jo-Ann Shelton suggests, by comparing Agamennon's and the cow's attitudes, it is possible to talk of an "instructive contrast" between two different ways of being faithful to parent-offspring pacts:

[...] the sacrifice of one's own daughter to satisfy the demands of religion is a shocking violation of the bond between parent and child, between protector and dependent [...]. In contrast, the bereaved cow [...] who, of course, has no understanding of gods and religion, is desperately trying to fulfil the role of parent assigned to her by nature, that is, to keep her calf alive and safe from harm, but she is frustrated by humans who have invented for themselves a perverted and unnatural sense of obligation which overrides all beneficial obligations [...]. Thus the bereaved cow passage is a foil for the Iphigenia story, reinforcing its condemnation of religion, which demands the abuse of those in our guardianship. (Shelton 1996, 56)

Considering the sacrifice as "the mythical archetype of violating the natural rhythms of life" (Segal 1970, 111-2), Lucretius suggests that both sacrifices – of the young girl and the calf – are similar crimes against the *alma Venus*. In particular, the cow is not just a victim of *religio*, but gains a moral superiority on her tormentors by means of her associations with the beauty and serenity of nature (Segal 1970, 107). It is not by accident that both Venus and the cow embody the creative process of nature, just like the goddess, even the cow is *mater* and guarantor of life, but the animal assumes the role of mother in a universal way since she represents the mothers of

all species, the human one included. As Paratore points out, her cry has a “universal resonance” (cit. in Segal 1970, 107-08) <sup>6</sup>.

Therefore the cow, and with her all other animals, results in being morally superior to human beings, she does not lose sight of the source of *vera voluptas* and, hence, she keeps faith to those pacts which are at the roots of order and peace. Conscious of being part of the universal force of nature, she does not break her promise of guaranteeing safety to her offspring and to offer her *utilitas* for human service, even if human beings are not faithful to the pact. Failing to comprehend the law of nature and, therefore, the source of true pleasure, the human being looks for serenity in behaviours that are the opposite of what he is looking for, which increase, and not decrease, the amount of anguish and suffering in his life.

Ultimately in the *De rerum natura* animal's simplicity becomes the model for the right behaviours opposed to human sophisticated culture which leads to transgress the fundamental bond of our society. If the goodness of actions depends on the sensation of pleasure and pain, their righteousness depends on fidelity to pacts since faithfulness is necessary to serenity. Human beings, in fact, belong to an all-embracing whole that is called nature; and what they have to do in order to reach serenity is to follow the law of nature. The failure in comprehending this reality is the cause of human evils. Therefore *religio* belongs to a deeper discomfort, that is the “marring of nature's restorative beauty by those faulty, artificial desires which results in death, not in life, in the ‘hot rivers’ of blood and not in the cool streams of bucolic serenity” (Segal 1970, 117). If the incomprehension of the source of true pleasure is at the roots of all the discontent, then only the understanding of the *vera ratio* will heal these forms of rupture between human and natural world <sup>7</sup>. Serene contemplation of nature is, hence, the only tool useful in defeating the terrors of *religio*.

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<sup>6</sup> Translation is mine. See Segal 1970, 107-8: “Man's superstition, ignorance, and susceptibility to corruptive excess interfere with that peace which nature ought to be able to confer. They confuse the ordering of the pleasures which forms the heart of Epicurean moral philosophy. The unnecessary and ‘unnatural’ pleasures of luxury supplant those which are ‘necessary and natural’. The cow cannot ‘delight her mind’ [in the text, *oblectare animum*: II 363] in the proper objects of pleasures”.

<sup>7</sup> See Segal 1970, 118: “[...] blind to his participation in the universal processes of creation and dissolution and ignorant of the principles behind these movements, man does not see that the pleasures he creates in opposition to those simpler offerings of nature only drive him deeper in his anxieties. Tormented by the fear of death himself, he fails to acknowledge the ebb and flow of life and death in nature's rhythms”.

## 9. CONCLUSION

As we have seen, human beings belong to nature's all-embracing set – they are, in fact, formed from the union of the same atoms which compose the rest of life – and, consequently, the only thing they have to do in order to reach serenity is to follow nature. In order to do that, they need to follow the sensitive criterion of truth – as other living beings already do – and try to satisfy only those desires which are “natural” – as Epicureanism teaches. But not realizing they belong to the all-embracing nature, humans lose sight of the source of true pleasure and are worried by those fears which drive them to perform destructive and anti-nature actions, increasing the accumulation of anxiety and suffering in their life. In this sense the cow like all other animals is morally superior to human beings, she does not lose sight of the source of true pleasure (*vera voluptas*).

By acknowledging herself to be a part of the unique universal force of nature, the cow violates neither the promise of protection she has made to her offspring, nor to the utility covenant she has made with humans – not even after their incessant violations – and, consequently, she is faithful to all of her pacts. In so doing, domestic animals – similar to the Epicurean sage – lead a serene life, disturbed just by wild animals' aggressions and human breaking of the pact. As Boyancé says “it is noteworthy and paradoxical how this philosophy [Epicureanism], which makes pleasure supreme without distinguishing between humans and other existing beings [...] demands on the other hand for happiness that everyone [...] receives teaching physics, and thus can enjoy, thanks to knowledge, of the whole well-being which is given to animals” (Boyancé 1963, 194) <sup>8</sup>.

As I have previously pointed out, it is important to regain understanding of the philosophy of those authors who, like Lucretius, started to inquire about the animal world in ancient times. In this way, we will have the opportunity to combine ancient wisdom with modern scientific achievements. The non-temporality of this openness of Lucretian thought to the rest of the living, other than human and to which set man belongs, is a specific peculiarity which deserves to be re-evaluated and examined. The fact that animals are speechless does not give us the right to ignore them, after all we should now understand that, as Lucretius suggests, our opportunity to find happiness depends also upon them.

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<sup>8</sup> Translation is mine.

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