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Epicurean Dreams

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Abstract: Most ancient philosophers accept that dreams have prophetic powers enabling humans to relate somehow to a world beyond their own. The only philosophers known to make a clean and explicit break with that tradition are the Epicureans, beginning with Epicurus himself and reaching his last eminent follower, Diogenes of Oinoanda. They openly reject the idea that dreams mediate between the divine and the human realms, or between the world of the living and the world of the dead. They demystify the phenomenon of dreaming by explaining sleeping and dreaming in terms of their materialistic physical theory. Importantly, they examine dreams and their content from different perspectives and explore their relevance to our lives. The general aim of this paper is to offer a synthetic account of the Epicurean view about dreaming and dreams, advance certain new hypotheses that seem worthy of consideration, and show how Epicurus and his followers integrate dream theory into their philosophy as a whole.

Keywords: Epicurus, dreaming, sensation, judgement, imagination

Dreaming is a puzzling and even disturbing experience. Typically, we are exposed to it when we are asleep and, therefore, vulnerable: barely conscious of our physical environment, unable to control our body and its movements, incapable of marshalling our thoughts and of willing our actions. While we find ourselves in that condition, we are invaded by images of all sorts. We can neither summon nor hinder such images, but must contemplate them as they come. Sometimes they are woven together into a sort of narrative, other times they are fragmentary and incoherent. They represent people, things, and events, transcend physical and temporal boundaries, and have about them an eerie, quasi-real feel. Depending on their vividness and contents, they can be pleasing or frightening. Especially terrifying are dreams taken to prophesise something bad or to bring us into contact with the dead. For whether we are asleep or awake, all of us feel most comfortable in the zone of human experience. Certainly, this zone does not include glimpses into the storehouse of the future nor nocturnal excursions into the netherworld. However, introspection is part of

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our ordinary experience, and dreams have long been used for that purpose. Sigmund Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* makes only elliptical references to dream theory in classical antiquity. Nonetheless it attests to the continuities between the interests of the moderns and those of the ancients in respect of what the dreams may disclose about oneself.

In fact, the ancient authors' interest in dreams is more widespread and varied than our own.[1] Both epic and tragedy focus on the revelatory and premonitory functions of dreams. The same holds for history as well. Asclepean and Hippocratic doctors regularly rely on dreams for purposes of diagnosis and incubation, while the Roman physician and soothsayer Artemidorus engages in symbolic dream interpretation and lays the foundations of popular dream manuals for centuries to come.[2] On the philosophical front, Plato and Aristotle give different psychophysical explanations of dreaming and dream images but, although occasionally they come close to challenging the idea of a divine element in prophetic dreams, they do not entirely do away with it.[3] And while Democritus offers a materialistic account of dreams in terms of the atomic theory, nonetheless it seems that he does accept prophetic dreams (68A 77 DK = Plutarch. *Quaest. conv*. V 7, VIII 10).[4] The Stoics too recognise the prophetic power of dreams, even though they deny reality to these latter. Hence, they belong to the mainstream tradition according to which humans can relate somehow to a world beyond their own. The only philosophers known to make a clean and explicit break with that tradition are the Epicureans,[5] beginning with Epicurus himself and reaching his last eminent follower, Diogenes of Oinoanda. They openly reject the idea that dreams mediate between the divine and the human realms, or between the world of the living and the world of the dead. They completely demystify the phenomenon of dreaming by explaining sleeping and dreaming in terms of their materialistic physical theory. Importantly, they examine dreams and their content from different perspectives and explore their relevance to our lives. The general aim of this paper is to offer a synthetic account of the Epicurean view about dreaming and dreams, advance

1 A survey of ancient theories of dreaming is offered by Brillante (1991). See also Cavini (2009) and, specifically on erotic dreams, Pigeaud (1981).

2 Artemidorus' work *Oneirocritica* was printed in the sixteenth century and was quite influential in the following two centuries: see McCurdy (1947) 227 n. 4 and 227–229.

3 See Holowchak (2004) 255–256.

4 See also 68B 166 DK = Sext. Emp. *M* XI 19 and, for Leucippus, 67A 34 DK = Aët. V 25.3.

5 So Holowchak (2004). However, it is possible that earlier philosophers as well tried to demystify the traditional belief that dreams are god-sent or premonitory. Xenophanes criticised divination (21B 34 DK = Cic. *Div*. I 3.5) and Anaxagoras discussed the phenomenon of sleep (59A 103 DK = Aët. V 25.2), and also was hostile to diviners (59A 16 DK = Plutarch. *Pericl*. 6). Therefore, either of them or both may have been sceptical about the divine provenance or premonitory power of dreams.

certain new hypotheses that seem worthy of consideration, and show how Epicurus and his followers integrate dream theory into their philosophy as a whole.

Part One of this paper focuses on the physiological and psychological aspects of sleeping and dreaming: what sleep and oneiric activity consist in, the conditions under which they obtain, the nature of mental images and, in particular, dream images, and the mechanism by which dreams occur. Part Two addresses epistemological issues. On the one hand, this section discusses the Epicurean thesis that dreams are real and the intimation that human dreams are, in a certain sense, rational. On the other hand, we shall examine the deceitful character of oneiric representations and the common mistake of taking dream figures to be real people and things. Part Three focuses on the content of dreams, the role of one's daily activities and character in respect of dream content, the emotional and ethical impact of dream experiences, and the way in which true beliefs and sound values can influence the content of our dreams and protect us from whatever negative effects dreams might cause. The study concludes with some remarks about the status of Epicurean dreams: they share in sensation (*aisthesis*) as well as judgement, but are distinct from both.

1 The Physiology and Psychology of Dreams

The most detailed explanation of the physical and psychological events involved in sleeping and dreaming is found in Lucretius' poem *De Rerum Natura* (henceforth *DRN*).[6] At the beginning of Book Three, Lucretius repeats the motto that only the knowledge of natural philosophy can disperse the darkness of the mind caused by superstitious fear (III 31–93). Subsequently, he relies on the principles of the atomic theory to defend the views that the soul's nature is material, that one's soul and body are unified and interdependent, and that the soul consists of the *anima* and the *animus*, the spirit and the mind.[7] The former consists of

6 My translations are based on the translation by W. H. D. Rouse revised by M. F. Smith, with modifications. For Diogenes of Oinoanda I use the translation by M. F. Smith, with occasional minor changes.

7 It is controversial whether the distinction between *animus* and *anima* originates with Epicurus or is a development belonging to later Epicurean traditions. Notably, compare Epicurus, *Hrdt*. 66, which, according to some interpreters, suggests a unitary view of the soul, with the Scholium on *Hrdt*. 66, which points in a different direction. On the origins of the aforementioned distinction, see, most recently, Verde (2017a). Also, Francesco Verde discusses the philosophical debate within the Garden concerning the canonical Epicurean doctrine of the soul in Verde (2017b) and, moreover, provides an incisive discussion of the so-called 'perceptual residual' in Epicurus and the Aristotelian tradition in Verde (2017c).

atoms dispersed throughout one's frame and is responsible for sensation, while the latter is composed of exceedingly small and agile particles (III 187–190), is located in the middle of the breast (III 140), interacts with the spirit as well as the body, but is also capable of functioning independently of them. In fact, the mind is the preeminent element in every living person (III 138–140) and the one more powerful in holding together the barriers of life and more dominant over life than the force of the spirit (III 396–397). So long as people retain their noetic faculty they remain alive, even if a great part of their spirit has departed (III 402–416). The privileged physical and psychological rôle of the mind over the spirit, as well as their inextricable relation and interaction, jointly account, among other things, for the phenomenon of falling asleep and also for our capacity to wake up.

Lucretius' preface to the analysis of sleep puts us on guard. "Do lend me a keen ear and a sagacious mind, so that you may not deny what I shall say to be possible and leave me with your breast repelling words of truth, while you yourself are at fault but cannot discern it" (IV 912–915). Why does Lucretius ask Memmius to pay special attention to what he has to say? Why does he choose to speak in sweet verses about sleep (IV 909)? Why does he fear that otherwise Memmius might want to run away from the truth? The reason is, I suggest, that Lucretius' audience will soon be brought to realise that sleep is akin to death. And the factors that cause sleep, and thus contribute to the restoration and maintenance of our powers, are the very same factors ultimately responsible for our complete extinction.

According to Lucretius, sleep is a sort of collapse resulting from the disorder of the particles of which our body and soul are composed. This disorder is the necessary outcome of the constant bombardment that we are subject to from the outside as well as the inside.[8] Outside, because the surrounding air administers blows on the surface of one's body. Inside, because this same air beats the inner parts of the body. As one inhales or exhales, it penetrates through the pores to the primary particles, buffets them, disorganises their arrangement, and weakens the connection between the atoms of the soul and those of the body (IV 932–949). On the one hand, the *anima*, spirit, is dislodged and partially decomposed. Some of the atoms of the *anima* are dispersed (*distracta*: IV 916), others are expelled from the body (*eiecta*: IV 917), others are withdrawn into the inmost recesses of the body (*concessit*: IV 918). Thus the power of sensation retreats from our members, our limbs weaken, and we fall asleep. Part of the *anima* remains in its place, however, so that life is preserved and sleepers are able to sense and move again when they wake up (cf. IV 924–928).

8 Thus, "the body is beaten on both parts": IV 939.

However, the preservation of life and the capacity to retrieve and rearrange the *anima* in its totality is chiefly ensured through the other part of the soul, namely the *animus*. Although the extant remains of Epicurean texts do not state exactly how the atoms of the spirit dislocated during sleep are recalled and reorganised to perform their wakeful functions, Lucretius makes clear that the *animus* is the part of the soul somehow responsible for retaining the spirit within the body and for holding on to life.[9] Arguably, the mind's vigilance and activity during sleep is a necessary condition for the preservation of life and for reassembling and rearranging the spirit in its totality. In fact, Lucretius and other Epicurean authors draw a multifold contrast between the spirit and the mind during sleep. The former is fragmented and dispersed, whereas the latter retains its integrity. The powers of the spirit are incapacitated, whereas the *mens animi* remains active. More specifically, sensation stops functioning, whereas judgement keeps operating. Lucretius underscores the rôle of the *animus* by means of an analogy. Just as when the eye is lacerated but the pupil is unhurt we preserve the power of seeing, so when the body is mutilated or otherwise harmed but the *animus* still abides in it we are alive. But when the pupil is destroyed we get blinded. And likewise, when the *animus* is decomposed, we die (cf. III 396–416). The *animus* guarantees not only the sleepers' life, but also our temporal identity[10] in at least two senses: metaphysically, it keeps us together as a particular aggregate of body atoms and soul atoms; psychologically and ethically, it is *we* who are sleeping and it is *our* dreams that we are having. More on this topic below, in connection to our dreams' content.

For the moment, it is important to stress that Lucretius' account of sleep crucially depends on atomic physics and the Epicurean doctrine of the mortality of the soul. And because of that fact, it is now possible for us to understand the poet's exhortation to his addressee to listen carefully and not give way to an inclination of rejecting the truth. For it is indeed hard to accept that, because of the temporary dispersion of the *anima* and the disconnection between the soul and the body, sleep is a sort of temporary death: we sense nothing, crave

9 Exactly how the *animus* is responsible for recalling and reordering the atoms of the *anima* that have been expelled or dislocated during sleep is a controversial matter. Compare, for instance, the views defended by Schrijvers (1976), Holowchak (2004), and Gigandet (2015).

10 This is an important difference between sleep and death: the dispersion of atoms during sleep does not destroy the continuity of the self, whereas the dispersion of atoms in death does destroy it. The hypothetical case of rebirth in *DRN* III 670–679 and 847–861 highlights this point. Death destroys perception and memory so that, even if the atoms that have constituted the person who is now dead get reassembled sometime in the future into the same aggregate, the memory of that person's experiences cannot be retrieved. Nothing like this is caused by sleep. When one wakes up, one perceives and remembers. One is still the same person as before. Sleep is not death, but rather a "quasi-death" (Cic. *ND* I 19.49).

nothing, fear nothing. It is even harder to get used to the further thought that, since it is necessary for us to sleep, it is also probably necessary for us to die. For since our constitution is subject to a relentless bombardment of atoms even when we are asleep, it is natural to infer that we shall eventually be destroyed. But while the dispersion of the soul in sleep is temporary and to a certain extent remediable, in death the dispersion is permanent and irreversible. "In death, a greater dispersion of the matter that has been disturbed takes place, and no one awakens and rises once the cold pause of life has overtaken him" (III 928–930). Dreaming, then, is an irrefutable sign of life: one's soul still dwells, if partially, in one's body and will be reconstituted and reordered in one's wake.

Probably following the canonical writings (cf. *SV* 24), Lucretius undertakes to explain what oneiric activity consists in and how dreams are formed. This topic has received much attention in the secondary literature,[11] even though several aspects of it are still under debate. So I shall be brief. Lucretius as well as other Epicurean sources treat dreaming as closely analogous to sensing or perceiving. Like sensation or perception (*aisthesis*), dreaming depends on the atomic structure of living organisms and of everything that surrounds them. And like sensation, it occurs as a result of the interaction between the dreamer and the external world. Namely, both sensation and dreaming are caused by images (*eidola, simulacra*) that constantly stream off the surface of things and, in normal circumstances, preserve the morphological features of their source. They are formed very easily and quickly, are indescribably thin, travel with unimaginable velocity through the air, and impinge, respectively and through corresponding pores, the senses or the mind. Given that the senses can only operate when we are awake but not when we are asleep, sensation or perception (*aisthesis*) occurs when we are in the former state but not in the latter. On the other hand, since the mind is vigilant and operative in sleep, it receives *simulacra* at all times. Lucretius emphasises the extreme fineness and mobility of the images directed towards the mind in comparison to those that enter the eyes (IV 728–731), and this constitutes the grounds for the suggestion that he distinguishes two kinds of *simulacra*, one involved in sensation, the other involved in thinking and in dreaming.[12] On my view, however, the claim that mental images are finer and more agile than sensory images does not entail that these are images of two different sorts. The difference is

11 See, notably, Asmis (1981), Clay (1980), Corti (2015), Gigandet (2015), Leone (2012), Long–Sedley (1987), Masi (2015) and Masi in this volume. Related studies include Güremen (2017), Leone (2002), Masi (forthcoming), Masi and Maso (2012), Schrijvers (1999) and Verde (2015).

12 Notably, Masi (2015) rejects that suggestion. If I understand her correctly, she argues that, in fact, all *simulacra* are equally fine, but some of them, i.e. the images giving rise to dreams, go through a process of refinement as they enter the body and travel through it to reach the mind.

quantitative rather than qualitative, and mere quantitative variations need not mark metaphysically different kinds.

Be this as it may, the point to retain is that we sense, think, and dream through one and the same mechanism. Nonetheless, because of their extreme fineness and velocity, the *simulacra* bestirring the mind have a peculiar behaviour in certain respects. "Thus it is that we see Centaurs and the frames of Scyllas, and faces of dogs like Cerberus, and images of those for whom death is past, whose bones rest in the earth's embrace. For images of all kinds are being carried about everywhere, some that arise spontaneously in the air itself, others that are thrown off from all sorts of things, others that are made of a combination of these shapes. Certainly, no image of a Centaur comes from one living, since there never was a living being of this nature. But when the images of man and horse meet by accident, they easily combine at once, as I said before, on account of their fine nature and thin texture" (IV 732–743). Here Lucretius offers an objectivist explanation of the origins and formation of mental images, including of course dream images. Because of their extreme tenuousness and velocity, they arise from everywhere and in all manner of ways. They are pealed off from the outer surface of objects or are formed, as it were, automatically. Moreover, sometimes they preserve the morphological characteristics of the corresponding objects, while other times they combine in the surrounding air into new shapes that do not correspond to natural kinds.[13]

Lucretius makes another important remark as well. The texture of mental images is akin to the mind's texture, for this latter too is exceedingly tenuous and easy to move (IV 748). Therefore, while the senses cannot perceive a single *simulacrum* but rather perceive the accumulative effect of a stream of *simulacra* from the same source, the mind can easily be stirred by a single mental image (IV 745–748). And this holds both when we are awake and when we are asleep. In the former case, "seeing" images with the eye of the mind presumably bears on imagistic thought and perhaps "lucid" dreams as well.[14] In the latter, the mind "sees" images in dreaming, without the involvement of sensation and memory (IV 765). By what path do these images reach the mind? While it is clear that the sensory images impinge on one's senses and reach the soul (Diogenes, fr. 9 II 1–III 6), it is less clear whether the *simulacra* directed exclusively to the mind follow the same road. According to Lucretius, they penetrate through the interstices of the body and stir the mind (IV 730–731),

13 For the moment the question whether, e.g. the combination of horse and man must only occur outside or, alternatively, can also occur in the *animus* of the dreamer remains open. It will be addressed later, in connection with the content of dreams and the subjective aspects of dreaming.
14 However, the Epicurean sources say very little about "lucid" dreams and daydreaming.

but we are not told whether these openings are located in the sense organs or somewhere else. According to Diogenes, in his *Letter to Mother*, Epicurus says that dream visions are not perceptible but are registered by the mind alone (fr. 52 II 3–4).[15] But again, it is not clear exactly how this happens. In my view, the extant remains of the Epicureans allow for the possibility that dream images reach the mind in some direct way, not through pores in the sense-organs. If so, then dream images constitute a peculiar sort of intelligible object that, as I shall suggest later, is comparable in certain ways to the gods.

Given that we are constantly surrounded by an abundance of images of all sorts, how is the mind receptive of certain images but not others? Part of the explanation is physiological. Regarding perception, the repeated reception of the same kind of sensory images from the outside determines the shape of the relevant passages so as to predispose the senses to select such images over others. As Diogenes suggests, the impacts of the images that we receive when we are awake open up pores from the sensory organs to the mind. Thus "the mind is capable of receiving images similar to those it contemplated first, even when the objects it contemplated first are no longer present" (fr. 9 III 6–14). It seems that something similar holds for mental images and, specifically, for dream images. The dreamer's repeated exposure to his daily occupations and concerns shapes the pores through which the corresponding *simulacra* reach his mind and predispose the latter to attract and receive these *simulacra* to the exclusion of others. Even so, it still appears to be problematic how we are able to call to mind one image after another. Moreover, it is puzzling how the dreamer has the impression that dream figures move in a smooth and coordinated manner (cf. IV 768).

Lucretius addresses these two problems in turn.[16] Regarding the former, his answer is that in every single moment of perceptible time (*tempore in uno cum sentimus*: IV 794–795) there are many intelligible but imperceptible subdivisions in which all sorts of images are present and ready to be registered by the mind. Because of their extremely tenuous and agile nature, they succeed to each other with such enormous speed. Thus, in the first place, the images that are contemplated by the mind are only the ones that the mind fixes its attention upon. In the second place, because the images spotted by the mind succeed to each other with unimaginable rapidity, they create the impression of being one, temporally continuous, image. Again, the analogy between sensory functions and mental functions is at work. For a key idea in Lucretius' account is that the mind has the disposition to focus on certain images but disregard others, just as the senses are prepared to perceive certain sorts of things but not others (IV

15 See Gigandet (2017).

16 See the reconstruction of the argument in *DRN* IV 768–822 by Asmis (1981).

807–815). This is true of all mental images, not just dream images. In the case of these latter, the dreamer dreams of moving figures precisely because of the cinematographic effect described above. Namely, the succession of *simulacra* is so unimaginably rapid and the mind fixes its attention so rapidly upon one image after another that the dreamer receives the impression of a single moving image (cf. IV 768–776).[17] Thus, the unity of experience is preserved in dreaming as well as in other aspects of mental life.

In sum, the Epicureans present dreams as physiological and psychological events with representational content. They explain dreaming and dreams in terms of the atomic theory and in close symmetry to *aisthesis*. Therefore they show that there is nothing wondrous or metaphysical about dreaming and dreams. They are natural phenomena, like everything else.

2 Epistemological Issues

Even though sensing and dreaming are explicable by reference to the same physio-psychological mechanism, there is an all-important epistemological difference between them: sensation (*aisthesis*) is always true, whereas dreaming always involves error and deception. The *prima facie* tension between the thesis that dreams are real and the fact that they are invariably untrue can be traced back to Epicurus.

Epicurus maintains that "it is by the entrance (into our eyes and minds) of something deriving from external objects that we see and think" (*Hrdt*. 49; cf. 46–51). Moreover, he contends that "the similarity of the appearances that we receive like an image and that arise in sleep, or in certain other focusings of the mind, or in the other criteria, would never have existed with regard to everything that we call real and true, if there were not some real things of that sort with which we compare them (*sc*. the image-like appearances)" (*Hrdt*. 51). In short, dreams are real because they are corporeal: they derive from the impact of *eidola* and have the capacity to move the dreaming subject (DL X 32). Moreover, they are real in the way in which sensations are real: they arise from direct contact with peals of reality, i.e., films of atoms ejected from objects outside the perceiver. Dreams present to the mind the form and shape of the corresponding *simulacra* in the way in which sensation receives and represents the form and shape of the images impinging the sense-organs. In both cases the *simulacra* preserve the form and shape of the compounds that they derive from.

17 See Asmis (1981) 140–141.

Lucretius highlights also another sense in which dreams are real: they have causal efficiency both during the time that they occur and after one wakes up. Dreams cause us to fear or hope, feel pleasure or pain, shake and shudder, cry, shout, or speak. Dreams that we take to be prophetic can influence our plans and actions. And so on. Conversely, as we shall see, we too can influence our dreams in certain ways. We shall return to this matter later but, here, it is important to stress that only real or corporeal things can act or be acted upon. Since dreams both have causal power on the dreamer and can be influenced by him/her, it follows that they must be real. And of course, in the context of the Epicurean system, 'real' means 'corporeal', and 'corporeal' must be understood in terms of the atomic theory, i.e. specifically, as effluences reaching the mind and interacting with it in certain ways.

However, Epicurus and his followers also stress that dreams are illusory and misleading. For they point out that dreamers take dead people in their dreams to be alive, monsters to be existing, gods to be revealing themselves one way or another, and so on. The question is, then, just how are dreams real and yet untrue. How do dreams derive from *simulacra* of real things, but invariably mislead us about the nature of these latter?

According to Lucretius' account, when we are asleep, the *anima* is inoperative. The atoms of both body and mind are disordered, the *anima* partly disperses and partly retreats within, the paths of communication between the body, the spirit, and the mind are shut off (*DRN* IV 948) and, therefore, the senses are obstructed and stop functioning. Recall, however, that the Epicureans defend a radical sort of empiricism whose central thesis is, precisely, that all *aistheseis* are true and, therefore, are the basic criterion of truth on which are grounded all the other criteria of truth and all the operations of reason. The evidence indicates that *aistheseis* derive their unqualified criterial power from the fact that they arise from unmediated contact with reality. Something similar, if derivative, holds for preconceptions (*prolepseis*) as well, namely a category of fundamental concepts automatically formed from repeated experiences of the same kind of thing and especially important for scientific and philosophical thinking. On the other hand, although belief and reasoning cannot arise independently of sensation, they do not enjoy the infallibility of sensation, because they are not directly and immediately exposed to reality in the way in which sensation is. So long as opinion stays close to *aisthesis* it will be veridical. Otherwise it is likely to be false (e.g. Epicurus, *KD* XXII–XXIV).

Epicurus specifies that the veridicality of opinion can be ensured by reference to sensation, through the methodological procedures of confirmation (*epimartyresis*) or disconfirmation (*antimartyresis*). "Error would not have occurred if we hadn't experienced some other movement in ourselves conjoined with mental

focusing but distinct from it. Error occurs according to this movement, if it is not confirmed or disconfirmed (by sensation). But if it is confirmed or disconfirmed truth follows" (*Hrdt*. 51). And again: "If, in the conceptions that are based upon opinion, you assert as true everything that still awaits confirmation as well as everything that does not, you will not escape error; you will have maintained complete ambiguity regarding right and wrong in respect of every judgement" (*KD* XXIV part). Lucretius applies this view to the case of dreams. He argues that, since the dreamer's sensation is lulled throughout his bodily frame, the dreamer is unable to confront falsehood with truth and refute the former by the latter (*DRN* IV 771–764). Memory might have been able to help, since it keeps in store past experiences that would enable the dreamer to assess the truth of the images that he is presented with in his sleep. But since memory depends on sensation and sensation is paralysed, memory is paralysed as well (cf. IV 765–766). There can be no confirmation or disconfirmation of the dreamer's imaginary experiences by reference to the memory of related events that occurred in the past.

Since these epistemological criteria are inoperative in sleep, the mind is left to its own devices and, naturally, falls prey to falsehood and illusion. Lucretius' account of moving figures constitutes an example of the errors involved in dreams. But he has more to say on the topic. As mentioned, the illusion of moving dream figures is due to the fact that the mind has prepared itself to focus on some of the images succeeding each other at enormous speed and somehow cohering with one another (cf. *DRN* IV 794–806). "When the first image perishes and a second is then produced in another position, the former seems to have altered its pose" (IV 800–801). Lucretius adds that the sleeper's mind can be misled also when the succeeding image does *not* cohere with the one preceding it. Sometimes a woman dream figure changes into a man, a shorter person gets transformed into a taller one, a younger person into an older one, and so on (IV 818–821). In such cases, the dreamer's error appears greater and more irrational. While moving dream figures do have counterparts in reality (i.e. real people do move), dream figures that change their sex, shape, or age from one moment to the next do not have any counterparts in our three-dimensional world. So far as we know, people simply do not undergo such sudden and radical changes. If one were presented with a change of that sort, one's natural reaction would be to feel amazed and wonder how such a thing could have happened. Dreamers do not react in that way, however. "Sleep and oblivion make sure that we do not wonder (*ne miremur*: IV 822)". The *animus* of the sleeper has no reflective capacity at all.

In the aforementioned cases, dreamers invariably mistake something that is not for something that is. They take the moving figures in their dreams to be real people that move. And they accept unquestionably that the figure that was

a man is now a woman, without wondering why this has occurred or how it could be possible. An even more disturbing mistake is this: "Nor is there any other reason why, when sleep has loosened the limbs, the mind's intelligence (*mens animi*) is vigilant except that the same images (*simulacra*) assail our minds as when we are awake to such a degree that it seems certain to us that we see him who has left life and of whom death and dust are now masters" (IV 757–761). Here too dreamers take dead people to be alive for an epistemological reason: they have no sensation and no memory while they are asleep; hence their *animus* has no basis on which it can question such presentations and contradict falsehood with truth (762–767). More specifically, the mind cannot remember that the figure that moves and talks in the dream belongs to a person who has been dead for some time. And hence the mind is not in a position to correct the impression caused by the dream, i.e., the impression that the person represented in the dream is alive. The absence of memory is important for another reason as well: not only the dreamers cannot compare the content of their dream experiences with events in their past, but also they have no sense of time. Space limits are blurred as well: a person sleeps in one place but dreams of himself in another; one lives away from one's grandparents, but dreams of being with them in the same room; we dream of ourselves trying to escape, running away fast, and yet remaining in the same spot; etc.

Other examples of mistaking things that are not for things that are include visions of monsters, such as Centaurs, Scylla, and Cerberus. As Lucretius points out, there have never existed creatures having a double nature, for different animals have different powers, habits, and growth rates. Each species is governed by its own laws and cannot get combined with another species (V 878–924). On the other hand, *simulacra* from different sources can accidentally combine in the air, constitute images of such monsters, and bestir our minds (IV 732–747). If we are asleep and our *aistheseis* are lulled, the mind hastens to believe that these monstrous apparitions truly exist. Again, people dreaming of monsters have no ruler for measuring the truth of their apparitions. And so they take the unreal to be real and the false to be true. Diogenes summarises the dreamers' epistemic handicap in the following terms: "when we are asleep, with all the senses, as it were, paralysed and [again] extinguished in sleep, the soul, which is [still wide] awake [and yet unable to recognise] the predicament and condition of the senses at that time, on receiving the images that approach it, conceives an untested and false opinion concerning them, as if it were actually apprehending the solid nature of true realities; for the means of testing the opinion are asleep at that time. These are the senses; for they remain the rule and standard [of truth] with respect to [our dreams]" (fr. 9 IV 7–VI 3).

The role of preconceptions (*prolepseis*) in dreaming is more difficult to determine and, to my knowledge, it has received little or no discussion in the secondary literature. Neither Lucretius nor any other Epicurean explicitly address it in their extant remains. It seems to me that, unlike *aistheseis*, preconceptions must be somehow involved in the Epicurean account of human dreaming.[18] On the one hand, preconceptions cannot fulfill their proper epistemological function in the world of dreams: dreamers cannot apply preconceptions for purposes of theoretical reasoning and investigation. On the other hand, I submit, it seems that the dreamer's mind applies preconceptions as effortlessly and automatically as it does when the dreamer is awake. For otherwise dreamers would not be able to 'see' with the eye of the mind figures and events as the kinds of figures and events they are. Nor would they be capable of understanding what dream figures say or do. Whether we are awake or asleep, the mind applies concepts such as man, movement, strength, agency, violence, betrayal, enmity and friendship to the images appearing before it.

So, even though dreamers make false judgements about the three-dimensional reality of what they see, nonetheless they identify correctly the kind of thing they see as an item falling under a certain concept. If this is correct, then the standard description of how preconceptions work applies to some extent to dreaming and not only to our mental activities when we are awake. "What primarily falls under every name is self-evident (*enarges*). And what we enquire about we would not have enquired about, if we did not first know it. 'What stands over there is a horse or a cow'. (To say this) we must indeed at some time have come to know by way of preconception the form (*morphen*) of a horse or of a cow. Nor would we have named anything, if we had not first learnt its pattern (*typon*) by way of preconception" (DL X 33). If the dreamers' mind applies preconceptions to make sense of dream images, how is this hypothesis to be reconciled with Lucretius' claim that memory 'languishes' in sleep (cf. *languet: DRN* IV 765)? One possible answer is this: not every sort of memory is inoperative in sleep. For since preconceptions are basic concepts deriving from repeated experiences of the same kind of thing, they too may count as memories of some kind. The memory that, according to the Epicureans, is inoperative in sleep has to do with past events of which we have been conscious. It does not have to do with the acquisition of *prolepseis* or other derivative concepts, nor with their application and use. Although human dreaming involves untruth, it does not entail irrationality in the sense in which animal dreaming probably does. An alternative answer may be that, according

18 To my knowledge, this issue has not been discussed either by known Epicurean authors or by their modern interpreters.

to Lucretius, memory as a whole is not entirely paralysed in sleep, but rather operates at a very low level or in a much weaker form than when we are awake. In sleep, memory as a whole does retain the power to activate preconceptions and dreaming visions, even though it temporarily loses the full capacities that it displays when one is awake.

Taking stock, it seems that while dreaming partakes of both sensation and intellection, it is not identical with either of them. As for dreams, they are real images but not real objects, intelligible but nonetheless false, cut off from the senses but uncritically accepted by the human mind. We might think, therefore, that we cannot contribute anything to these events. They just happen to us in our sleep, and there is nothing we can do about them. However, as we shall see in the next section, this is not the whole story. For Lucretius suggests that dreams belong squarely to the realm of imagination and their contents are both affecting us and affected by us.

3 The Ethical Importance of Dreams

At the outset, I wish to draw attention at what may initially look as a digression in Lucretius' argument: a rejection of creationist teleology in favour of the natural teleology inherent in each species; and a comparison and contrast between the creative forces of nature and the goal-oriented craftsmanship of man (*DRN* IV 823–876). This section occurs immediately after Lucretius' account of mental images (722–822), but before his explanation of sleep and of the content of dreams (907–1036). But it is not at all evident how teleology might bear on one's attitude towards dreams. Nor is it clear how the Epicureans' rejection of teleology might be related to their dream theory. To address these issues we should take a closer look at the text.

"There is a fault in this regard which we vehemently desire you to escape, shunning error with the greater caution: do not suppose that the clear light of the eyes was made in order that we might be able to see before us or [...] that the forearms were fitted upon strong upper arms and ministering hands given on either side so that we can do what is indispensable for life. Explanations of this kind and of other such kinds that men give treat the effect as a cause and are grounded on perverted reasoning. For nothing is born in us just in order that we may use it; rather, that which is born creates the use" (IV 823–835). If one accepts the traditional arrangement of Lucretius' verses, this passage appears to pursue somehow a thought expressed right above (cf. *illud in his rebus vitium*: 822). Namely, although the mind of the dreamer is usually prepared to follow a coherent sequence of images (cf. 821–826), sometimes an abrupt change

happens and the sequence becomes incoherent;[19] nonetheless, the dreamer does not wonder about it (*ne miremur*: 822), precisely because he/she is asleep. While in our diurnal life changes of this sort would be considered miracles, in our dreams they are not contemplated as such. How does the passage on teleology constitute a follow-up? How does teleological thinking constitute a grave mistake "in this regard" (*ibid.*)?

The link between the two passages depends, I suggest, on the apparently miraculous nature of certain dreams. They can be so vivid and unsettling as to make us surmise that they appear to us for some purpose. They may lead us to view them not as physical events requiring a physical explanation, but as messengers intended to reveal something to us, e.g. a grand scheme of things laid out in advance by some divinity and assigning to everyone and everything a specific goal in accordance with that scheme. In sharp contrast, Lucretius argues that our eyes, ears, tongue and, generally, "all our members existed before their use; and so, they could not have come to be for the sake of their use" (839–842). It is likely that he wishes to extent this view to dreams as well. Because dreams are the sorts of apparitions they are, men are usually misled: they take them to have been sent by some god for some purpose. In fact, the opposite is true: dreams are what they are and, given their nature, men invent various uses and, especially, prophetic uses for them. As we shall see below, Lucretius' account of the origins of religion suggests that the traditional uses of dreams are mistaken and harmful, since they are connected to superstition and the irrational fear of the gods.

Subsequently, Lucretius draws two related contrasts between the paradigms set by nature and the purposeful activity of artfully replicating such paradigms (IV 843–857), and also between traditional teleology and the Epicurean explanation of how living organisms preserve themselves (858–876). These contrasts are intended to drive home the idea that nothing in nature happens by creationist design, but everything can be explained by reference to the principles of atomic physics. On the one hand, while nature did supply the model for the arts, for instance metallurgy, carpentry, and ceramics, it did not do so in a premeditated and purposeful manner. Rather, in the course of time, human experience by trial and error led to the discovery and elaboration of the paradigms found in nature in order to make artefacts useful for life.[20] On the other hand, there is a different class of things that came into being before anyone had any conception of their usefulness. These include the senses and bodily parts of living beings (853–854)

19 E.g. the *simulacrum* of a woman is immediately followed up by the *simulacrum* of a man: IV 818–821.

20 See Tsouna (forthcoming 2019).

and, I propose, include dreams as well. For contrary to the ordinary beliefs of laymen and the philosophical doctrines of the teleologists, dreams too emerge independently of any predetermined design or idea as to how they should be used.

One could retort, however, that some kind of teleological hypothesis is necessary in order to explain the natural and instinctive inclination of all living organisms towards self-preservation, growth, and the replenishment of their physical wants (cf. IV 858–859). In response, and closely following Epicurus, Lucretius outlines an alternative, materialistic account of these phenomena. Living beings constantly waste atomic matter through sweat or exhalation or some other way. The films of atoms perpetually expelled from the inner recesses of living bodies float around in the air. In truth, most of the images surrounding us are generated in that manner. As for the living beings from which these images derive, in due course they feel the need to replace the wasted matter: they starve and seek food, feel an inward parching and seek a drink to quench it. Thus they maintain themselves for a while, even though eventually they are bound to perish (858–876). Compare what happens in sleep. Some *simulacra* withdraw in the body, others are expelled, yet others are dispersed and disordered through one's frame with the result that the interaction between the soul and the body is temporarily severed. The *simulacra* that are expelled are flying everywhere, far or near. Conversely, the mind of the dreamer receives *simulacra* from everywhere and everything, and these are chiefly responsible for dreaming. As we wake up, the mind somehow attracts the *simulacra* that have been expelled back into one's frame, and reorganises within one's frame the *simulacra* that have been disordered and withdrawn in the inner parts of us.

In short, Lucretius points to a close parallelism between, on the one hand, the regular loss of atomic material and its regular replacement and, on the other hand, the dispersion of atomic material in dreaming and the retrieval and rearrangement of that material when we wake up. Both these types of processes are physical processes, and neither has any metaphysical or teleological dimension at all. Diogenes confirms that the Epicurean rejection of teleology is intended to concern dreams as well. On his account too dreams appear to the mind for no purpose. They are neither godsent nor divinatory. They just happen and then humans invest them with all kinds of interpretations, and especially metaphysical and teleological ones.[21]

After he has issued his warning against teleological thinking, and after he has explained the phenomenon of sleep (IV 907–961), Lucretius turns to the

21 The Epicurean rejection of the idea that dreams occur for teleological reasons may have an anti-Platonic edge: see Plat. *Tim*. 71a3–72d3.

final part of his analysis of dreaming and dreams: whence these latter get their content and how their content bears on our daily activities and moral character. In many ways this part of his discussion of dreams is the most important and the most likely to attract the interest of our contemporaries. Ultimately, Lucretius' analysis concerns the autonomy of the human mind, the synthetic and creative power of imagination, and the capacity of human beings to influence their dreams and improve their way of life.

We may approach the issue of dream content by revisiting the Epicurean criticism attested by Diogenes of Oinoanda, on the one hand, against Democritus and, on the other, against the Stoics.[22] On the Epicurean view, although Democritus is right to consider dream figures real, he is wrong to suppose that they are sentient and rational and speaking to us (fr. 10 IV 10–V 2); also he is wrong to claim that dreams are admonitory and godsent (fr. 9 VI 5–9).[23] Contrary to Democritus, as Diogenes states,[24] the Stoics claim that dreams are mere mental illusions or *trompe-l'oeil*.[25] The term as well as the idea probably derives from Plato: somewhat like painted figures, dreams figures are representations that give the impression of being three-dimensional whereas in fact they are not. There is nothing real to the scenery and the figures populating a dream, just as, for Plato, there is nothing real to the landscape and the people populating a painting. It is all a matter of perspective, of what we are led to see. The Stoics conclude that dreams have no causal efficiency at all. Quite typically, the Epicurean position lies somewhere in the middle: dreams are indeed corporeal, but do not have the sort of causal efficiency that Democritus lends to them, namely they are not causally efficient in the way in which three-dimensional beings are. On the other hand, despite what the Stoics claim, dreams are not mere illusionary states deprived of all causal powers: since they are real, they must have a certain causal efficacy, though not the sort of efficacy that solid creatures and things have.

What is, then, the causal power of dreams? Clearly, it must have to do with their content, that is, what the dreams represent. Lucretius illuminates the complex causal connections holding between dreams and the dreaming subject by giving several examples of what people dream of. And he suggests that dreams cannot be fully explained in an objective manner, by reference to

22 Clay (1980) discusses this criticism in detail.

23 See Smith (1993) *ad loc*. On Democritus' view, see Cic. *Div*. I 3.5 and Sext. Emp. *M* IX 19 (cited also by Smith 1993, 449 n. 11).

24 Diogenes' account could be a distortion of the Stoic view. For there is evidence that Chrysippus and other Stoics maintained that dreams have premonitory powers, if not divine origin (*SVF* III 1196–1203). In that case, it would follow that dreams must have some sort of causal efficiency as well.

25 Cf. [σ]κι[α]γραφήματα: fr. 10 I 4–5.

random combinations of *simulacra* penetrating the mind from the outside. Their content is also crucially determined by the reality inside: the dreamer's character and way of life. As his examples show, dreaming has irreducibly subjective and intensely personal aspects.[26] It is not just a matter of the passive bombardment of the *animus* by images formed in the surrounding air. Also, our dreams are importantly determined by ourselves.

One group of dreams has to do with bodily needs and their satisfaction. Thirsty people sit next to a stream and drink incessantly, others needing to urinate drench their clothes, and others experience wet dreams stirred by a lovely face or figure (1024–1036). Another group of dreams concerns one's regular activities and pursuits. "Whatever be the pursuit that one clings to with devotion (cf. *studio: DRN* IV 962), whatever the things on which we have been occupied much in the past, the mind being thus more intent upon that pursuit, it is generally the same things that we seem to encounter in dreams: pleaders to plead their cause and collate laws, generals to contend and engage in battle, sailors to engage in their ongoing war with the winds, I to apply myself to my own task, always searching the nature of things and, when it is found, endeavouring to set it forth in my own mother tongue. Thus too all other pursuits and arts (*studia atque artes*: 971) usually seem to hold fast men's minds in their sleep with their delusions" (962–972). Yet another group concerns dreams enacting expressed or suppressed desires, emotions, and passions. "The minds of men, which with great motions accomplish great feats, often do and accomplish (*faciuntque geruntque*: 1012) the same things in dreams: kings win victories, are captured, engage in battle, cry aloud as if their throats were being cut on the spot. Many struggle violently, groan with pain and, as if they were being gnawed in the jaws of a panther or cruel lion, make the place ring with their cries. Many talk in sleep of important matters and have often born witness against themselves. Many meet their death. Many are terrified at the sight of themselves being physically hurled down to earth from a high mountain and, waking up like complete madmen, can scarcely recover themselves, shaken as they are by the random motions of their body" (1011–1023).

In the first group of dreams, people dream of themselves as being thirsty, hungry, in lust, or in the grip of some other physical need whose fulfillment typically involves a process followed by a feeling of relief or pleasure at the end of that process. Such experiences can be sufficiently intense in our waking life to make us dream of them as well. Both in sleep and in wake the craving related to the need is painful, but its satisfaction is pleasurable. But while the process is

26 See Masi in this volume. On the causal relation between the contents of dreams and the character of dreamers, see also Cucchiarelli (1994).

real when we are awake, it is only virtual when we are asleep: we see ourselves as thirsty and we see ourselves as drinking, but in reality we do not feel thirst or hunger. Nevertheless, such dreams have the power to causally act on us: dreamers may stretch their hand to fill the glass or drench their clothes in sleep. Next, in the second group, there are examples of dreams about one's profession or other activities that one practises in waking life. Lawyers dream of courthouses and laws, military men of battles, shipmen of sailing, and so on. In such cases, it would seem that the causal relation is reversed. One's dreams are, as it were, acted upon by one's diurnal interests and experiences. It is the lawyer's pleading at court or the general's careful planning of the battle that determine the content of their dreams, rather than the other way around.

The third set of examples appears to illustrate both sorts of causal interaction mentioned above: our expressed or unexpressed desires, emotions, passions, and values act on our dreams; but also, our dreams act on us as well. Concerning the causal influence of our mental states and attitudes on our dreams, initially, it is important to notice that, even though the sorts of dreams examined in this group could be realised or realisable, they do not need to. Unlike the sailor who is dreaming of sailing because he is sailing all his life, the king's dreams of being slaughtered are unlikely to derive from his own personal experiences in real life. He may have heard of other kings who have been slaughtered and, in rare cases, may have witnessed the murder of a close relative who had been king. But his dreams of slaughter are far more likely to derive from fear than from experience. The same holds for his nightmares of being captured: of course there have been captured kings, but the king who is dreaming of his own capture in the safety of his palace is unlikely to have ever run that risk. In this case too, then, fear rather than personal experience is the factor determining the content of the king's dream. Similar remarks apply to people's nightmares of being slain, wounded, devoured alive by wild beasts, or hurled down from a mountaintop. Many people dread such things without ever having come remotely close to them. Lucretius suggests that, generically, the fear giving rise to the dreams under discussion is the fear of death (cf. IV 1020). In particular, he focuses on deaths that involve the violation of the boundaries of the body and are accompanied by mental agony and excruciating physical pain. Dreams with that content appear to enact one's deepest and most disturbing emotions. Dreamers are haunted by their own fear in their sleep as well as when they are awake.

In turn, these nightmares act on the dreamers. In their sleep, they shake and shiver, they struggle, they shout, they cry. On the one hand, none of these events is caused in such a manner as to constitute a genuine act. For each dream is a virtual, two-dimensional reality with a virtual, quasi-motivational force. And

therefore it does not act upon the dreamer in the way in which the real world acts on us. On the other hand, dreams do have sufficient causal power to provoke certain kinds of effects to those who have them. Lucretius' description of the origins of religion and of false beliefs about the gods illustrates that point.

"The truth is that even in those days the generations of men used to see with waking mind and still more in sleep gods conspicuous in beauty and of marvellous bodily stature. To these therefore they attributed sensation, because they appeared to move their limbs and utter proud speech in keeping with their splendid beauty and vast strength. And they gave them everlasting life, because there was always a succession of visions coming up in which the shape remained the same, but above all because they thought that beings endowed with such strength could not lightly be overcome by any force. Therefore they thought them to be pre-eminent in happiness, because the fear of death troubled none of them, and at the same time because in sleep they saw them perform many marvellous feats and feel no distress as a result" (V 1169–1182).

In my view, this passage explains not so much the origins of the preconception of divinity[27] as the acquisition by primitive men of a false conception of the gods.[28] According to Lucretius, the source of this latter lies in mental visions and, chiefly, in dreams. Namely, the first men contemplated images of the gods in which supremely strong and beautiful figures appeared to move, speak, and accomplish great acts. Hence they reasoned that these beings must also be immortal and blessed. The latter characteristics are true of the gods, but primitive people inferred them on the wrong grounds: they took the moving figures to be divine beings endowed with supreme capacities; in fact, the images were *simulacra* whose rapid succession created the impression of coherent motion and behaviour. While these apparitions did not have the kind of causal efficacy pertaining to living beings, they undoubtedly had a major causal effect, i.e. one

27 According to Sextus Empiricus, the Epicureans maintained that one of the sources of the first notion of god consists in the dreams caused by the *eidola* emitted by divine natures (*M* IX 25). Preconceptions, however, are criteria of truth and Lucretius' passage under discussion contains truths as well as falsehoods about the gods. It is possible that 'first notion' in Sextus does not refer to the preconception of the gods but, more generally, to whatever conception of the gods was originally formed in the minds of primitive men. Alternatively, the Epicureans may have allowed that some dreams about the gods come from *eidola* emitted by the divinities, while other dreams about the gods arise from *eidola* deriving from various other sources. In any case, the evidence from Sextus implies that his Epicurean sources do not consider dreams the only source of the 'first notion' of god.

28 See *DRN* V 1161–1240, especially 1161–1169 and 1194–1203, and Tsouna (2016) 174–181. A different view is suggested by Sedley (2011) and challenged by Konstan (2011). On the connection between Epicurean theology and the dreaming experience, see also the studies by Essler (2011) and Piergiacomi (2017).

of the greatest evils afflicting mankind: a conception of the gods according to which the gods are responsible for the natural phenomena and interfere in the affairs of men. Not only did this vision of the gods disturb the dreams of primitive people. It wrecked their peace of mind and filled with fear and superstition the generations that followed (V 1194–1203).

Thus, according to Lucretius' analysis, a complex and reciprocal causal relation obtains, as it were, between the objective factors and the subjective factors involved in dreaming: between the combinations of *simulacra* entering the dreamer's mind from the outside and the mental and psychological elements determining the inner landscape of this latter. Dreaming does not consist merely in the uncritical acceptance of images by the mind of the sleepers. Their personalities, interests, beliefs, and values also play an important role in determining the content of their oneiric experiences.

How is this sort of engagement physically possible? How do we contribute to shaping our dreams, even though we are asleep and our sensory and critical capacities are impaired? Lucretius does not address this question directly. However, he provides material for alternative ways of answering it. One alternative could be the following: as we saw, in sleep a part of the *anima* emanates from the sleeper and disperses in the air. The atoms of that part of the *anima* compose *simulacra* in the nearby space. Thus, images like, e.g. a Centaur can be formed in two different ways: either spontaneously in the air because of the random combination of atoms coming from a horse and a man (IV 732–743) or, alternatively, from *simulacra* deriving from the part of the sleeper's *anima* which has left his/her body. In the latter case, the Centaur-shaped *simulacra* that subsequently penetrate the dreamer's mind belong to him in the first place. For they are films of atoms deriving from his own soul and representing visions inhabiting this latter. An alternative hypothesis, which I favour, is this: the source of Centaur-shaped *simulacra* can only be external. But the dreamer's *animus* may or may not prepared to accept them, depending on that person's thoughts, emotions, and habits. For instance, while the beliefs and practices of a superstitious believer of myths create pores suitable for accepting Centaur-like images, the beliefs and practices of an Epicurean thinker do not dispose him to receive such images. Moreover, even assuming that Centaur-like images reach the mind of Epicurean dreamers as well as of superstitious laymen, the *animus* of the former will not be inclined to take them as real, whereas the *animus* of the latter shall. On this latter hypothesis, then, dreamers do not contribute to the material constitution of their dreams; the *simulacra* that dreams consist of always come from random external sources. Nevertheless, the dreamers' beliefs and interests do decisively affect both the selection and the interpretation of images by the *animus*. In that sense, we retain significant control of our dreams

and their contents. For, in the first place, the physical paths through which dreams can reach the mind are opened by our own regular practices and habits. In the second place, the emotional and moral effects of our dreams crucially depend on our own state of mind. I wish to say something more on these topics.

Lucretius' examples of kings dreaming of battle and capture and slaughter, of sleepers terrified by nightmares of violence and death, but also of lawyers who plead in their sleep and of writers such as himself who dream of their task, indicate that there is an unbreakable continuity between dreaming and one's waking life. This is not something peculiar to human beings. Animals too dream of what they are in the habit of doing: horses race, hunting dogs chase wild animals, watchdogs guard the house, birds take to flight pursued by hawks (IV 984–1010). Each species dreams of the things that its members are inclined towards, familiar with, or afraid of. Variations notwithstanding, dreams constitute a sort of "obsessional spectacle"[29] of the concerns and practices of every living creature through its life. Human obsessions, however, are far more complex than those of other animals and go far beyond the realm of natural inclination and instinct. For humans are rational creatures and, therefore, have a complex psychological and mental constitution. In addition to the possession of articulate thought and speech, they are endowed with cognitively based desires, emotions, and values. And they often fall prey to error in many regards.

As Lucretius suggests, kings and laymen alike live in a sort of mental chaos caused by empty desires, false convictions, and perverse values. They are driven by strong passions and fears, such as greed and ambition as well as the fear of the gods and the fear of death. And they are haunted by these latter continually, both when they are awake and when they fall asleep. In the latter circumstance, their *animus* turns, as it were, within: to its own experiences, expectations, and feelings. Unchecked by the criterial power of sensation, the vigilant mind receives the images that somehow correspond to the aforementioned dispositions and contemplates them in the light of those dispositions. Even though dreamers are not conscious of this synthetic and interpretative process, it nonetheless takes place. Thus, without the dreamers' conscious knowledge or consent, their diurnal concerns invade their sleep and determine its quality. Lucretius' dreams of his own authorial efforts were probably pleasurable, while dreams of bloodshed and destruction are disturbing and painful.

An important implication of the above account is that one's identity persists in dreaming. Although in sleep we have neither proper awareness nor memory, we remain ourselves. Physically, our *animus* holds us together (III 396–397). Psychologically and morally, we are inhabited in sleep by imaginary versions of

29 The expression belongs to Alain Gigandet (Gigandet forthcoming).

our diurnal existence. Dreams are not merely indications of how we happen to think or feel at a given time. They disclose deeply embedded features of our personality and show us for the kind of persons we are.[30] Regarding this function too, we should note that there is nothing metaphysical about our dreams. For there is nothing metaphysical or mysterious about our character: we are what we make ourselves to be.

4 Conclusions

To conclude: according to the Epicureans and especially Lucretius, dreaming is a modality of the same physiological and psychological mechanism that obtains also for sensation and thought. Nonetheless, dreaming as well as other activities involving mental images cannot be identified either with the activities of the senses or with the activities of reason and judgement. On the one hand, dreaming resembles perception on account of its physicalistic and representational aspects, but it differs from perception because it involves opinion and falsehood. On the other hand, even though dreaming entails belief in addition to the apparition, and even though it depends on the operations of the *animus*, it differs from the normal activities of reason in virtue of its peculiar object: two-dimensional images consisting of extremely fine and agile *simulacra* that penetrate the sleeper's mind. On balance, it seems plausible to surmise that the Epicureans, and in particular Lucretius, assign dreaming and dreams to a distinct if not separate faculty, namely imagination, whose powers complement the powers of sensation and judgement.

In any case, it is an undeniable fact that the Epicureans consider dreaming an activity of considerable psychological and moral significance. While dreams are not veridical, they are revealing: not of the will of the gods or the world of the dead, as tradition wants it, but of the inmost recesses of one's self. Hence dreams show the way to one's psychological therapy and moral reform. They facilitate the diagnosis of the anxieties and falsehoods wreaking havoc in human life, and they are suggestive of ways in which these latter can be overcome.

In this matter, as in every other, the Epicurean sage sets the ideal standard towards which we ought to aspire. "Study and reflect on these and other kindred doctrines day and night both by yourself and with people that are like yourself. Then you will never be disturbed either in waking life or in your dreams, but you

30 On the differences between Lucretius' account of dreaming and the Freudian theory of dreams and the unconscious, see Gladman–Mitsis (1997).

will live like a god among men" (*Men*. 135). The complete endorsement of Epicureanism entails that the wise person preserves, as much as is humanly possible, his perfect tranquillity in sleep as much as in wake (cf. DL X 121b). Unlike the gods, he sleeps and can occasionally have nightmares (cf. Philod. *De Dis*. III coll. XII 10–14, XII 30–XIII 20 Diels). Nonetheless, the latter cannot destroy his serenity, just as experiences of physical pain cannot destroy his blessedness (cf. DL X 22). For the most part, the sage's attitudes and habits ensure that the pores through which dream images pass enable the mind to select congenial *simulacra* rather than uncongenial ones. The opinions that the sage's *animus* adds to the contemplation of these images are invariably true and never false. The sage does not confuse the reality of *simulacra* with the reality of what the *simulacra* appear to represent. If he happens to dream of monsters or of people that have died long ago, he takes them for what they are: illusions created at random by *simulacra* flying in the air. If he dreams of the gods, they are not the terrifying beings of state religion, but images of blessedness and beauty. Neither the vision nor the reality of death frightens him, since he knows that death is nothing to us. As for dreams of ambition and violence, his perfect goodness precludes the selection of such images by his *animus*; they do not reach his mind at all. The sage's peaceful sleep reflects the blessed tranquillity of his inner life. There lies the key to his godlikeness.[31]

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