

Four Translations of the Opening of Book Six

Post by “Cassius” of June 30, 2018 at 5:05 PM

<p>T. LUCRETII LIB. VI.</p> <p>PRIMÆ frugiferus satus mortaliū agris Dididerunt quondam præclaro nomine Athena: Et recæperunt vitam, Legisque regarunt: At prima dederunt flatu dulcia vitæ, Cùm genere VIRUM tali cum corde repletum, 5 Omnia veridico qui quondam ex ore profudit: Coniū & extitit propter divina reperta Divulgata vetus, jam ad celum Gloria fertur. Nam cùm videri Hic, ad vitam qua flagitat usus, “ Et per qua possent vitam confistere vitam, 10 Omnia jam forme Mortalibus esse parata: Divitiis homines, & Honore, & Laude potentes Affluere, atque bona Notarum excellere fama: Nec minus esse domi cuiquam tamen Arxia corda, Atque animam infelix cogi ferreæ querelis: 15 Intellexit, in vitam Vas efflicere istum, Omniaque illius vitio corrumpier istum, Qua curata foris, & commoda cuique venirent, Partim quod fœcunda, pertulimque esse videtur, Ut nulla possit ratione explerier unquam: 20 Partim quod tæro quasi conjurare sapere Omnia cernebat quocunque recuperat istum. Veridicis igitur purgavit pœctora dicitis, Et suam statuit Cuppeditis atque Timoris, Euphiquique Deorum Summam, quò tendimus omnes, 25 Quid foret, atque viam monstravit tramite prono, Quò possent ad id recto contendere cursum: Quidæ stæceri Natura vi, varièque volaret, Sen Capis, seu Vi, quòd sic Natura parafisset: 30 Et quibus è portis occerri cuique deceret: Et genus Humanam frustra plerumque probaret Volvere curarum trilicis in pœctore fluitum.</p>	<p>Browne 1743: Renowned Athens first to wretched man gave the sweet fruits, and human life refreshed, and published laws; but comforts nobler far than these she gave, when to the world she showed great Epicurus, formed with such a soul; who from his mouth delivered sublime truths, as from an oracle, whose fame for so divine discoveries dispersed every way abroad and was raised after death above the skies. For when he saw how little would suffice for necessary use, and by what small provisions life might be preserved; that Nature had prepared every thing ready to support mankind; that men abounded with wealth, and were loaded with honor and applause, and happy in their private concerns, in the good character of their children, and yet their minds were restless at home, complaining and lamenting the misery of their condition; he perceived the vessel itself (the mind) was the cause of the calamity, and by the corruption of that, every thing, though ever so good, that was poured into it was tainted: it was full of holes, and run out, and so could never by any means be filled; and whatever it received within, it infected with a stinking smell. And therefore he purged the mind by true philosophy, and set bounds to our desires and our fears. He laid open to us the chief good, that point of happiness we all aim at, in what it consists, and showed us the direct way that leads to it, and puts us into the straight road to obtain it. He taught what misfortunes commonly attend human life, whether they flow from the laws of nature or from chance, whether from necessity or by accident; and by what means we are to oppose those evils, and strive against them. And he has fully proved that mankind torment themselves in vain, and are tossed about in a tempestuous ocean of cares to no purpose.</p>	<p>Munro 1886: In days of yore Athens of famous name first imparted corn-producing crops to suffering mankind, and modeled life anew and passed laws; and first too bestowed sweet solaces of existence, when she gave birth to a man who showed himself gifted with such a genius and poured forth all knowledge of old from his truth-telling mouth; whose glory, even now that he is dead, on account of his godlike discoveries confirmed by length of time is spread abroad among men and reaches high as heaven. For when he saw that the things which their needs imperiously demand for subsistence had all without exception been already provided for men, and that life, so far as was possible, was placed on a sure footing, that men were great in affluence of riches and honors and glory and swelled with pride in the high reputation of their children, and yet that none of them at home for all that had a heart the less disquieted, and that this heart in despite of the understanding plagued life without any respite and was constrained to rave with distressful complainings, he then perceived that the vessel itself did cause the corruption and that by its corruption all the things that came into it and were gathered from abroad, however salutary were spoiled within it; partly because he saw it to be leaky and full of holes so that it could never by any means be filled full; partly because he perceived that it befouled so to say with a nauseous flavor everything within it which it had taken in. He therefore cleansed men's breasts with truth-telling precepts and fixed a limit to lust and fear and explained what was the chief good which we all strive to reach, and pointed out the road along which by a short cross-track we might arrive at it in a straightforward course; he showed too what evils existed in mortal affairs throughout, rising up and manifoldly flying about by a natural—call it chance or force, because nature had so brought it to pass—and from what gates you must sally out duly to encounter each; and he proved that mankind mostly without cause arouse in their breast the melancholy tumbling billows of cares.</p>	<p>Bailey 1936: In time gone by Athens, of glorious name, first spread among struggling mortals the fruits that bear corn, and fashioned life afresh, and enacted laws; she, too, first gave sweet solace for life, when she gave birth to the man gifted with the great mind, who once poured forth all wisdom from his truthful lips; yea, even when his light was quenched, thanks to his divine discoveries his glory, noised abroad of old, is now lifted to the sky. For when he saw that mortals had by now attained to well-nigh all things which their needs crave for subsistence, and that, as far as they could, their life was established in safety, that men abounded in power through wealth and honours and renown, and were haughty in the good name of their children, and yet not one of them for all that had at home a heart less anguished, but with torture of mind lived a fretful life without any respite, and was constrained to rage with savage complaining, he then did understand that it was the vessel itself which wrought the disease, and that by its disease all things were corrupted within, whatsoever came into it gathered from without, yea even blessings; in part because he saw that it was leaking and full of holes, so that by no means could it ever be filled; in part because he perceived that it tainted as with a foul savor all things within it, which it had taken in. And so with his discourse of truthful words he purged the heart and set a limit to its desire and fear, and set forth what is the highest good, towards which we all strive, and pointed out the path, whereby along a narrow track we may strain on towards it in a straight course; he showed what there is of ill in the affairs of mortals everywhere, coming to being and flying abroad in diverse forms, be it by the chance or the force of nature, because nature had so brought it to pass; he showed from what gates it is meet to sally out against each ill, and he proved that 'tis in vain for the most part that the race of men set tossing in their hearts the gloomy billows of care.</p>	<p>Smith 2001: It was Athens of glorious name that in former days first imparted the knowledge of corn-producing crops to suffering mortals and remodeled their lives and established laws; and it was Athens that first bestowed soothing solaces when she gave birth to a man endowed with such great genius, whose lips once gave utterance to true pronouncements on every subject. And even now, though his life's light is extinguished, the godlike nature of his discoveries ensures that his fame, spread far and wide long ago, is raised to the skies. He saw that almost everything that necessity demands for subsistence had been already provided for mortals, and that their life was, so far as possible, established in security; he saw too that they possessed power, with wealth, honor, and glory, and took pride in the good reputation of their children; and yet he found that, notwithstanding this prosperity, all of them privately had hearts racked with anxiety which, contrary to their wish, tormented their lives without a pause, causing them to chafe and fret. Then he realized that the cause of the flaw was the vessel itself, which by its own flaw corrupted within it all things, even good things, that entered it from without. He became convinced of this, partly because he saw that the vessel was leaky and riddled, so that it could never possibly be filled, and partly because he observed that it contaminated with a foul flavor everything it had taken in. Therefore with words of truth he purged people's minds by laying down limits to desire and fear; he explained the nature of the supreme good that is our universal goal, and indicated the way, the short and straight path, by which we might reach it; he pointed out what evil there is everywhere in human affairs, and how the various forms of it arise and fly about from natural causes—either from chance or from necessity, according as nature has ordained; he showed from what gates one should sally out to encounter each of these ill; and he proved that human beings have no reason for the most part to arouse within their breasts the rolling billows of bitter care.</p>
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