

The Vessel Analogy At The Opening of Lucretius Book Six

Post by "Cassius" of September 13, 2023 at 7:06 PM

I'd like to ask for input on this question about the opening of book six of Lucretius involving the "vessel" analogy. The text is below, but here's the question:

It appears that Lucretius is separating out two aspects of the defects in the "jar" - (1) the jar is leaking and cannot be filled due to leaks caused by the holes, and (2) that the jar tainted all that it took in as with a foul odor.

As to (1) It seems to me that the leaks can be pretty well identified with the analogy of the [Danaides](#), and it's pretty easy to draw a lesson that we are not able to achieve the full amount of pleasure that we otherwise could obtain without the leaks.

But what of (2) as to the jar tainting what it takes in with a foul odor. Does anyone know if this is a reference to another Greek story? Or does anyone have reasonable speculation on why Lucretius chose this second aspect of corruption to include? What does the "tainting" action of the jar add to the illustration?

Other than the opening of book one where Epicurus is breaking the chains underneath the glowering face of the gods, as was used in the artwork by [David Baldone](#) that we feature on the front page, I am thinking that this "Vessel" picture gives us a very appealing image to illustrate the limits of pleasure issues. So if indeed the vessel analogy is ripe for use in new Epicurean artwork, it would help to flesh out what references attracted Lucretius to use this illustration.

[Quote from Lucretius - Bailey](#)

[Bailey-6:09] For when he saw that mortals had by now attained 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 was tainted as with a foul savor all things within it, which it had taken in.

[Here's](#) the Munro version for comparison. And here's [Rouse](#) with the Latin.