

PRACTICING *ATARAXIA* AT LUCRETIUS' DE RERUM NATURA 2.7–8

Abstract: I offer a new interpretation of the phrase *tenere ... templa serena* at De rerum natura 2.7–8. I suggest that the phrase refers to the Epicurean practice of keeping the mind peaceful, *ataraxia*.

Keywords: Lucretius, metaphor, *ataraxia*, Epicureanism

The proem of book 2 of Lucretius' *De rerum natura* (hereafter *DRN*) has captured the minds of countless readers, with its image of a sailor at storm upon the sea, with its image of soldiers upon the plains, and with its presumed image of a 'temple of philosophy.' Having noted joys that derive from recognizing one's own well-being,¹ the narrator asserts that the greatest joy is: *tenere ... templa serena* (7–8). The lines in question are the following: *sed nil dulcius est, bene quam munita tenere / edita doctrina sapientum templa serena*. I suggest that *tenere ... templa serena* means 'to hold serene (mental) realm(s).'

Scholars offer several interpretations for Lucretius' *templa serena*. They suggest that the *templa* are heights / high places;² that they are literal temples (whether real or imagined);³ that they are sanctuar-

1) On the causes of the narrator's joy, see D. Konstan, *A Life Worthy of the Gods: The Materialist Psychology of Epicurus* (Las Vegas 2008) 29–42, D. Fowler, *Lucretius on Atomic Motion: A Commentary on De rerum natura 2.1–332* (Oxford 2002) 38–40, J. Lienhard, *The Prooemia of De Rerum Natura*, *CJ* 64 (1969) 346–353, at 352, E. Holtsmark, *On Lucretius 2.1–19*, *TAPA* 98 (1967) 193–204. All offer reference to further bibliography.

2) Konstan (n. 1) 31, M. Smith, *Lucretius. On the Nature of Things* (Indianapolis 2001) 35, A. Long / D. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge 1987) 120, D. Clay, *Lucretius and Epicurus* (Ithaca, NY 1983) 65 ('peaceful high places'), A. Cox, *Lucretius and His Message: A Study in the Prologues of the De rerum natura*, *G&R* 18 (1971) 1–16, at 7, P. De Lacy, *Distant Views: the Imagery of Lucretius 2*, *CJ* 60 (1964) 49–55, at 49, W. Merrill, *Lucretius. De rerum natura* (New York 1907) 399; H. Munro, *T. Lucreti Cari. De Rerum Natura. Libri Sex, Volume II* (Cambridge 1928) 118.

3) V. Prosperi, *The Reception of Lucretius' Second Proem: The Topos That Never Was*, *Lingue antiche e moderne* 4 (2015) 5–37, at 11, S. Roy, *Homeric Con-*

ies;⁴ that they are celestial realms;⁵ that they are quarters / dwellings;⁶ and that they are plateaus.⁷ Scholars do not suggest that they are mental realms. According to previous scholars, the passage is to be interpreted symbolically: the *templa serena* are the ‘serene heights of philosophy’ vel sim.⁸ I suggest that phrases such as ‘of philosophy,’ added in order to make sense of *templa serena*, are unwarranted.⁹

I propose that Lucretius references mental realms as *templa* because minds are sacred spaces for Epicureans. A *templum* is a sacred space from which an augur took the auspices.¹⁰ Accord-

cerns: A Metapoetic Reading of Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 2.1–19, CQ 63 (2013) 780–784, at 780, A. Sharrock, Introduction, in: D. Lehoux / A. Morrison / A. Sharrock (Hrsg.), *Lucretius: Poetry, Philosophy, Science* (Oxford 2013) 1–24, at 18, C. Newlands, *Stattius’ Silvae and the Poetics of Empire* (Cambridge 2002) 171, W. Race, *The Classical Priamel from Homer to Boethius* (Leiden 1982) 118, L. Maselli, *Divina voluptas: Dal de rerum natura* (Florence 1961) 60, C. Giussani, *T. lucreti cari, De rerum natura, libri sex* (Turin 1896) 156.

4) A. Morrison, *Nil igitur mors est ad nos?* Iphianassa, the Athenian Plague, and Epicurean Views of Death, in: Lehoux / Morrison / Sharrock (n. 3) 212–32, at 223 (following Rouse-Smith); Roy (n. 3) 782, D. Marković, *The Rhetoric of Explanation in Lucretius’ De rerum natura* (Leiden 2008) 128, W. Englert, *Lucretius. On the Nature of Things* (Newburyport, MA 2003) 31.

5) Fowler (n. 1) 54 (who suggests that *templa* both denotes celestial realms and connotes a literal temple), G. Conte, *Ἦπος ε* diatribe nello stile di Lucrezio (de rer. nat. II 1–61), *MAIA* 18 (1966) 338–368, at 341.

6) J. Godwin, *Lucretius. Selections from the De rerum natura* (London 2000) 46, B. Catto, *Lucretius. Selections from De rerum natura* (Wauconda, IL 1998) 76, A. Ernout / L. Robin, *Lucrèce. De rerum natura. Commentaire exégétique et critique* (Paris 1962) 205, C. Bailey, *T. Lucreti Cari. De Rerum Natura. Libri Sex* (Oxford 1947), 798.

7) W. Leonard / S. Smith, *T. Lucreti Cari. De Rerum Natura. Libri Sex* (Madison 1942) 312.

8) The phrase is taken from De Lacy (n. 2) 49, cf. Roy (n. 3) 784: ‘lofty sanctuary of philosophy’, Newlands (n. 3) 170: ‘high temples of wisdom’, Clay (n. 2) 186: ‘high ground of philosophy’, Race (n. 3) 118: ‘lofty citadel’, Cox (n. 2) 7: ‘lofty heights of happiness’, Holtsmark (n. 1) 198: ‘ivory tower’. See too e.g. Konstan (n. 1) 37, Fowler (n. 1) 17, 49, M. Gale, *Lucretius and the Didactic Epic* (London 2001) 25, 60, Bailey (n. 6) 795, Merrill (n. 2) 398, Munro (n. 2) 118.

9) Lucretius’ presumed temple of philosophy has had a rather famed after-life. It was commemorated in the construction of Mussenden temple, built in 1785, which overlooks the Atlantic Ocean in Northern Ireland. For literary references, see Merrill (n. 2) 399.

10) Cf. OLD s. v. 1, J. Mynott, *Birds in the Ancient World: Winged Words* (Oxford 2018) 261–2, with reference to primary sources.

ingly, as a term for a sacred region, *templum* is a good term for a sacred mental region. At 5.1198–1203, Lucretius famously asserts, ‘no piety exists ... except for being able to observe all things with a peaceful mind’ (*nec pietas ullast ... sed ... pacata posse omnia mente tueri*), thereby explicitly connecting the sacred with mental practice. I suggest that Lucretius, by referring to mental realms as *templa*, does the same at 2.7.¹¹

Elsewhere in the *DRN*, Lucretius uses language that corroborates the suggestion that *templa serena* are mental realms. At 5.97–103, Lucretius is discussing the inevitable destruction of worlds, and at line 103 he refers to *templa ... mentis*:¹²

*nec me animi fallit quam res nova miraque menti
accidat exitium caeli terraeque futurum,
et quam difficile id mihi sit pervincere dictis;
ut fit ubi insolitam rem apportes auribus ante* 100
*nec tamen hanc possis oculorum subdere visu
nec iacere indu manus, via qua munita fidei
proxima fert humanum in pectus templaque mentis.*

Nor does it escape me in my mind how strangely and wonderfully this strikes upon the understanding, the destruction of heaven and earth that is to be, and how hard it is for me to prove it surely in my discourse; even as always happens, when you bring to men's ears something unknown before, and yet you cannot place it before the sight of their eyes, nor lay hands upon it; for by this way the paved path of belief leads straightest into the heart of man and the quarters of his mind.

As I propose is the case at 2.8, Lucretius here uses *templa* to reference mental realms. Lucretius adds *mentis* to clarify that the *templum* in question is mental, and I suggest that he does the same by adding *serena* to *templa* at 2.8. The *DRN* offers further nominal comparanda in favor of the suggestion that *templa* refers to mental realms at 2.8.¹³

11) For discussion of *templa* in Lucretius, see Fowler (n. 1) 54, with reference to further bibliography.

12) Text and translation are those of Bailey (n. 6), unless otherwise noted.

13) At 1.737, Lucretius refers to ‘the shrine (*adyton*) of the *cor*’; here too a term that denotes a sacred space is used to reference a bodily organ. At 4.624, Lucretius references *linguae ... templa*.

Returning to the proem of Book 2, I suggest that the *templa* are well fortified (*bene munita*) because the *templa* are minds that are fortified by the doctrine of Epicurean sages (*doctrina sapientum*). Although not specific when referencing the sages, Lucretius may have the Epicurean famed four in mind (Epicurus, Hermarchus, Metrodorus, and Polydorus); however, the phrase is capacious enough to reference all Epicurean sages.¹⁴ Care for the self is a hallmark of Epicurean philosophy specifically and Hellenistic philosophy generally,¹⁵ and care for one's mind state provides means to one's fortification.¹⁶ As D. Clay observes (although he interprets it differently),¹⁷ Lucretius' fortification-imagery resonates with that of Epicurus:

Πρὸς μὲν τᾶλλα δυνατὸν ἀσφάλειαν πορίσασθαι, χάριν δὲ θανάτου
πάντες ἄνθρωποι πόλιν ἀτείχιστον οἰκοῦμεν.

Against other things it is possible to provide security, but on account of death all of us humans inhabit an unwallled polis. (SV 31)

Although we cannot fortify our bodies against death, we can fortify our minds: contemplative practice brings mental security.¹⁸ That Epicurus asserts that we can fortify ourselves except in relation to death corroborates my argument that Lucretius references mental self-fortification at DRN 2.7–8.¹⁹

The reader may interpret *edita* (8) in multiple manners. The *templa* may be *edita* because Epicurean mental realms may be 'el-

14) For *sapientum* as Epicurean sages, cf. Leonard / Smith (n. 7) 312. Newlands, commenting on the proem of Book 2 of the *DRN* (n. 3) 171, suggests, "the image of the fortified citadel ... represents the teaching of Epicureanism" (so too Konstan [n. 1] 37, Race [n. 3] 118). This is incorrect since the *templa* at 2.8 are fortified by the teaching of the wise (i. e. they are not the teaching of the wise).

15) See M. Erler, *Physics and Therapy: Meditative Elements in Lucretius' De rerum natura*, in: K. Algra / M. Koenen / P. Schrijvers (Hrsg.), *Lucretius and His Intellectual Background* (Amsterdam 1997), 79–92, with further bibliography, cf. J. Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus* (Princeton 2012), P. Hadot, *The Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* (Cambridge, MA 2001), P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Malden, MA 1995).

16) For citations, see Fowler (n. 1) 53.

17) Clay (n. 2) 186.

18) Cf. De Lacy (n. 2) 51.

19) On Epicurean self-fortification, see too SV 47, an aphorism attributed to Metrodorus.

evated' by the teachings of Epicurean sages. By using the imagery of heights, Lucretius may employ the *topos* that philosophical lives are 'higher' than common lives and suggest that the Epicurean life is 'higher' than the lives of others.²⁰ *edita* too, then, would be metaphorical. Alternatively, the reader may prefer to interpret *edita* as 'distinguished'²¹ or as 'produced'²². Epicurean serene mental realms may be distinguished or produced due to familiarity with the doctrine of the wise. Regardless, *edita* celebrates the mental realms of Epicurean practitioners: the mental realms being 'raised aloft,' 'distinguished,' or 'produced' due to mastery of Epicurus' teachings.²³

Lucretius calls the '*templa serena*' at 2.8 because the mental realm of the idealized Epicurean viewer is serene. I suggest that Lucretius' use of *serena* mirrors Epicurus' use of *γαληνισμός* (peace of mind); *γαληνισμός* arises in practitioners who put their Epicurean worldview into a practice of living.²⁴ Furthermore, Lucretius elsewhere uses *serena* to reference mental tranquility. As P. Brown remarks, commenting on *noctes ... serenas* at 1.142, "figurative, not meteorological ... The allusion is to mental calm (*ἀταραξία*) which is not only a prerequisite for the philosophical study in which L is engaged, but is in its turn fostered and deepened by the contemplation of the true nature of the universe, in which his project involves him."²⁵ Thus, the qualifying adjective *serena* at 2.8 provides direction for Lucretius' reader to interpret the *templa* as mental realms.²⁶

Scholars observe that it would make little sense for an Epicurean literally 'to hold' *templa*; thus, they offer a metaphorical meaning for *tenere*, assuming that *tenere* means 'dwell in' vel sim.²⁷ Scholars choose such translations due to the 'temple of philosophy'

20) For discussion of such *topoi*, see Fowler (n. 1) 49–51.

21) Cf. OLD s.v. 2.

22) Cf. OLD s.v. 3, 4.

23) Thus Bailey (n. 6) 798 is incorrect to assert that "it is impossible to construe *doctrina sapientum* with *edita*."

24) Cf. Epicurus' Letter to Herodotus 83. Therewith, see Clay (n. 2) 174–5, Fowler (n. 1) 31–2, with further bibliography, C. Bailey, Epicurus. The Extant Remains (Oxford 1926) 258.

25) Lucretius. *De Rerum Natura* I (London 1984) 72. See too 2.1094 (*vitam ... serenam*).

26) For *serena* referencing *ἀταραξία* at DRN 2.8, see too Godwin (n. 6) 47, though Godwin does not interpret *templa* in relation to mental realms.

27) Bailey (n. 6) 237, Maselli (n. 3) 60.

that they read into the passage. Alternatively, I suggest that *tenere* refers to mental sustainment. Lucretius uses *tenere* thusly, for example, at 1.948, where *tenere animum* refers to ‘holding mental attention.’²⁸ It is noteworthy that mind (*animum*) is the object of *tenere* at 1.948, as I suggest that serene (mental) realms are, similarly, the object of *tenere* at 2.7–8. The translation ‘dwell in’ (e. g. Bailey) is acceptable as long as we understand Lucretius’ train of thought. The Epicurean viewer does not dwell in a literal or symbolic building, or in a literal or symbolic celestial realm. The Epicurean viewer dwells in peaceful mental realms when the Epicurean activates the teachings of Epicurus and thereby sustains *ataraxia*.

Lucretius refers to Epicurean contemplative practice, wherewith one can, from a privileged perspective (*unde*, 9), ‘look down on’ (*despicere*, 9) non-Epicureans who live lives subject to unhealthful volitions. Lucretius employs *despicere* in much the same way as it may be used in the English phrase ‘the wise man looks down on the fool.’²⁹ Lucretius integrates protreptic language, for he encourages others to desire to be in a position of ‘superiority’ relative to non-Epicureans who suffer from avarice and ambition.³⁰ Thus, *despicere* need not provide evidence that Lucretius depicts a viewer watching the sufferings of others from above.³¹ Lucretius uses *despicere* in such a manner that it can be interpreted both literally and metaphorically. Lucretius’ viewer may look down on others both from a privileged physical position and from a privileged mental / philosophical position.

Stattius seems to have interpreted *templa serena* as mental realms. At *Silvae* 2.2.129–132, Stattius’ narrator says:

nos, vilis turba, caducis
deservire bonis semperque optare parati, 130
spargimur in casus: celsa tu mentis ab arce
despicias errantes, humanaque gaudia rides.

28) *Si tibi forte animum tali ratione tenere / versibus in nostris possem, dum perspicis omnem / naturam rerum qua constet compta figura* (948–950). See too e. g. 1.948, 2.582, 4.23, 4.972.

29) On the tone of contempt, cf. Fowler (n. 1) 55, Munro (n. 2) 119.

30) On Lucretius’ protreptic, cf. Fowler (n. 1) 19–22, Conte (n. 5). On ambition, cf. *certare ingenio* (2.11), with Bailey (n. 6) 798.

31) Contrast *Prosperi* (n. 3) 20, Roy (n. 3) 783, Sharrock (n. 3) 18, Godwin (n. 6) 47.

We, worthless crew, ever ready to serve perishable blessings, ever hoping for more, are scattered to the winds of chance; whereas you from your mind's high citadel look down upon our wanderings and laugh at human joys.³²

Stattius here juxtaposes the vanities of the masses with the Epicurean detachment of Pollius. In a passage replete with allusions to the proem of the second book of the *DRN*,³³ the narrator avers that Pollius 'looks down' (*despicis*) from the 'citadel of his mind' (*mentis ab arce*); this corroborates the argument that the *templa* of *DRN* 2.8 references mental realms.³⁴

I have suggested that *tenere ... templa serena* signifies cognitive practice. Lucretius idealizes the ataraxic state that one enters when one is well practicing the teachings of Epicurus. In support of my suggestion, I have offered Lucretian comparanda for *templa*, *serena*, and *tenere*, and I have referenced comparanda from Epicurus. Furthermore, I have shown how the key terms *edita*, *tenere*, *doctrina sapientum*, and *despicere* make good sense in relation to a mental interpretation of *templa serena*. Moreover, I have noted that the interpretation offered here is in accord with the argument that Lucretius proffers elsewhere in the proem and that Stattius too seems to have understood Lucretius' *templa serena* as minds. Recognition that *templa serena* are serene (mental) realms does much to explicate Lucretius' argument and imagery in the proem to Book 2 of the *DRN*.³⁵

Eugene, Oregon

Chris Eckerman

32) Text and translation: D. Shackleton Bailey, *Stattius. Silvae* (Cambridge, MA 2003) 132–3.

33) On Lucretius and Epicureanism in *Silv.* 2.2, see R. Nisbet, *Felicitas* at *Surrentum*, *JRS* 68 (1978) 1–11, at 1–2, C. Newlands, *Stattius Silvae Book II* (Cambridge 2011) 152–3.

34) For the peaceful citadel of the mind, see too Rufinus, *De bono pacis* (PL 150.1609); the relevant passage is provided by Fowler (n. 1) 53.

35) For productive comments on a previous version of this paper, I thank Sander Goldberg.