

Holmes, B. (2014) “The Poetics of Anthropogony: Men, Women, and Children in Lucretius, Book Five.” *Eugesta: Journal of Gender Studies in Antiquity* 4 (2014), (slightly revised version of “The Poetic Logic of Negative Exceptionalism: From a State of Nature to Social Life in Lucretius, Book Five”, in D. Lehoux, A. D. Morrison, and A. Sharrock (eds.), *Lucretius: Poetry, Philosophy, Science*, 153-91. Oxford: Oxford University Press.)

This article analyzes Lucretius’ account of the early social life of human beings in a world not made for them through the frame of “negative exceptionalism”: namely, the idea that humans are specially disadvantaged by a lack of fit with the natural world compared to other species. It notes that previous interpretations of the account have fallen short by failing to put it in the context of the bigger problem for anti-providential Epicurean in Book 5 of *On the Nature of Things*: How did humans survive, given their exceptional vulnerability, in a hostile world? More specifically, the article argues, Lucretius understands this problem in terms of the special vulnerability of young humans and the inadequacy of maternal care. It thus reads Lucretius’ response to the problem through a “poetic logic” that brings the resources of philosophy and poetry together to describe how the first human communities were formed through men’s recognition of paternity alongside their own vulnerability. This recognition paves the way for the creation of patriarchal societies committed to mutual defense and the collective care of women and children—an evolutionary development on which, Lucretius claims, the survival of the species depended.