

Lucretius (Titus Lucretius Carus), c. 55 B.C.E.:  
De Rerum Naturae ("On the Nature of Things"), excerpt from book V:

In those days the earth attempted also to produce a host of monsters,  
grotesque in build and aspect - hermaphrodites,  
halfway between the sexes yet cut off from either,  
creatures bereft of feet or dispossessed of hands, dumb, mouthless brutes,  
or eyeless and blind, or disabled by the adhesion of their limbs to the trunk,  
so that they could neither do anything nor go anywhere nor keep out of harm's way  
nor take what they needed. These and other such monstrous and misshapen births  
were created. But all in vain.

Nature debarred them from increase.

They could not gain the coveted flower of maturity nor procure food nor be  
coupled by the arts of Venus.

For it is evident that many contributory factors are essential  
to the reproduction of a species.

First, it must have a food-supply.

Then it must have some channel by which the procreative seeds can travel outward  
through the body when the limbs are relaxed.

Then, in order that male and female may couple, they must have some means of  
interchanging their mutual delight.

In those days, again, many species must have died out altogether  
and failed to reproduce their kind.

Every species that you now see drawing the breath of life  
has been protected and preserved from the beginning of the world  
either by cunning or by prowess or by speed.

In addition, there are many that survive under human protection because their  
usefulness has commended them to our care.

The surly breed of lions, for instance, in their native ferocity have been preserved  
by prowess, the fox by cunning and the stag by flight.

The dog, whose loyal heart is alert even in sleep, all beasts of burden  
of whatever breed, fleecy sheep and horned cattle,

over all these, my Memmius, man has established his protectorate.

They have gladly escaped from predatory beasts and sought peace and the lavish  
meals, procured by no effort of theirs, with which we recompense their service.

But those that were gifted with none of these natural assets,

unable either to live on their own resources or to make any contribution  
to human welfare, in return for which we might let their race feed in safety under  
our guardianship - all these, trapped in the toils of their own destiny,  
were fair game and an easy prey for others,  
till nature brought their race to extinction.

(translation by R.E. Latham)