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In De rerum natura I 635-920, Lucretius presents and refutes the views of three Presocratic philosophers on the ultimate constituents of matter: Heraclitus (635-704), Empedocles (705-829) and Anaxagoras (830-920). The first to systematically explore the possible sources for this passage was Rösler (1973), who in an admirably concise article argued that Lucretius' description of the three theories was based on second-hand reports, ultimately deriving from Aristotle and Theophrastus. Lucretius' direct source would have been an Epicurean work in which report and criticism of Presocratic theories went hand in hand, written either by Epicurus himself or by some later Epicurean philosopher.

To this subject – the sources of Lucretius DRN I 635-920 – Francesco Montarese has now devoted an entire monograph, a revised version of his PhD thesis. The aim of this work, the author states, is twofold: first to establish the nature of Lucretius's source or sources for the 'Critique' (as Montarese calls the passage), and second to show how Lucretius adapted the material taken from his source to suit his own purposes. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 mainly deal with the first aim, while chapter 4 is concerned with the second.

In the quest for Lucretius's sources two extreme positions can be discerned: on the one hand there are those who, like Piet Schrijvers, consider Lucretius an eclectic philosopher, actively engaged in the philosophical debates of his time, on the other hand such scholars as David Sedley, who prefer to see Lucretius as an Epicurean 'fundamentalist', whose sole philosophical source was Epicurus himself. Montarese sets out from the second position, paying an homage to Sedley (p.9) not unlike Lucretius's declaration of allegiance to Epicurus (DRN III 3-13). This does not prevent him, however, from severely criticising Sedley on several accounts.

Chapter 1 reads like an updated and expanded version of Rösler's article, covering more or less the same ground and reaching roughly the same conclusions. Montarese corrects Rösler on several points. In the section on Empedocles, for instance, Lucretius presents two theories that were certainly not held by Empedocles (in lines 763-68 and 782-802). While Rösler saw such passages as signs of Lucretius's ignorance of Empedocles's actual views, Montarese argues that Lucretius intentionally aimed his arguments at other versions of the four-element theory as well, so as to rule out every conceivable variant.

In chapter 2 Montarese challenges the theory, first put forward by David Sedley, that books XIV and XV of Epicurus's Περὶ φύσεως were the principal source of Lucretius's Critique. Through a detailed analysis of the remaining fragments, most of which he re-edited for the purpose, Montarese shows (a) that book XIV was not devoted to systematic criticism of earlier views, (b) did not single out Heraclitus as the main representative of monism (if he was
mentioned at all), and (c) did not deal with Empedocles, but criticized Plato instead, and (d) that book XV was not devoted to criticism of Anaxagoras (if he was mentioned at all). Montarese concludes that books XIV and XV were not Lucretius's source. I found Montarese's argument in this chapter very convincing, although it was difficult to follow at times. One or two tables to summarize the findings would have been a great help. One wonders, moreover, if the conclusion could not have been reached on the basis of a smaller selection of fragments: some of the fragments needed so much explaining themselves that they hardly helped to support the argument. Besides, since Montarese concludes that Epicurus's Περὶ φύσεως XIV and XV were not Lucretius's source, there does not seem to be much point in lingering on the fragments.

In chapter 3 the problem of Lucretius's sources is studied from yet another angle. On the basis of internal as well as external evidence, Montarese concludes that, while most of DRN I seems to derive from Epicurus's Περὶ φύσεως I and perhaps II, the Critique itself comes from a different source. The available evidence does not, however, permit him to decide whether this source was a text by Epicurus himself or by some later Epicurean. Montarese also speculates on the reasons Lucretius might have had for placing the Critique in the middle of book I. The main reason, according to Montarese, would have been Lucretius's wish to contrast two different styles of writing philosophy – viz. those of Heraclitus (lines 639-44) and Empedocles (716-41), before making his own poetical statement in lines 921-50.

In chapter 4 Montarese goes on to identify and discuss a number of passages where Lucretius may have adapted, or added to, the material of his Greek source. The most important of these are the introductory sections to the refutations of Heraclitus and Empedocles, where Lucretius deals with the literary styles of these two Presocratics, unfavourably in the case of Heraclitus, but very favourably in the case of Empedocles, who was Lucretius's primary poetical model. In both sections, Montarese points out, Lucretius tries to capture and imitate the style of the philosopher under discussion. Although Lucretius does not formally deal with Anaxagoras's style, Montarese suggests that the repetitive and monotonous style that characterizes much of Lucretius's discussion of Anaxagoras, is meant to be a caricature of Anaxagoras's own style, which is thus implicitly criticized. Montarese also draws attention to the way many elements of the Critique recur both inside the Critique and in subsequent sections of Lucretius's work, to produce a kind of internal dialogue. I found this chapter by far the most interesting and stimulating of Montarese's book, even though I cannot agree with everything he writes. I do not believe, for instance, that Lucretius would have subscribed to some kind of 'atomology' (pp.186-90) – the belief that things (words / compound bodies) which share most of their elementa (letters / atoms), would for that reason be related: Lucretius's point is rather that the same elementa, differently combined, may constitute things that are very different.

The four chapters are followed by three appendices. In Appendix A Montarese argues against Sedley's thesis that Lucretius composed his work in two stages, in Appendix B Montarese tries to establish the original format of the scrolls containing Epicurus's Περὶ φύσεως XIV and XV, and Appendix C investigates whether Epicurus's Ad Herodotum and Ad Pythoclem reflect continuous books of his Περὶ φύσεως.

Although Montarese's book offers many new and important insights, it is not very accessible. Montarese does not always clearly identify his own contributions (especially in chapter 1), which makes it hard to assess the value of his work. He also assumes too much familiarity with Lucretius's text on the part of the reader: a brief outline of the Critique, to which the reader could refer from time to time, would have been most welcome. The argument is not
always very transparent either: in chapter 2, for instance, it is very hard to form an overall picture of the structure of Epicurus's Περὶ φύσεως XIV and XV, especially since the fragments are not always discussed in their original order. One or two tables summarizing the results would have been very helpful.

Montarese's book is also riddled with mistakes, most of which could have been easily corrected by a proofreader, which makes one wonder if the book was proofread at all. The following list offers just a selection (!), leaving aside most of the smaller and unproblematic errors (of which there must be hundreds). On p.18 the reader is referred to p.16 for the claim (in my view incorrect) that the unnamed opponents whose theory is discussed in DRN I. 1052-113 presented the world as eternal, but there no such claim is made. On p.41 Montarese fails to mention that Diogenes of Oenoanda's 'doxographical list' is part of fragment 6. On p.42, n.142, 'see pp.47-49 above' should be 'see pp.47-49 below'. On p.70 'Lucretius's should be 'Epicurus'. On p.72 'cases instances' should be either 'cases' or 'instances'. On p.86 'Schrijvers' should be 'Schrijvers' (twice!). On p.90, n.259, 'see Appendix A below n.897' appears to be wrong: n.897 is part of Appendix B, not A, and does not answer the question for which it is referred to. On p.95 'εἰδόλων' should be 'εἰδώλων'. On p.107 between 'of a wind-like quality' and 'which does not have a name', something like 'and of a fourth kind' (corresponding to Greek 'ἐκ τετάρτου τινὸς') is missing. On p.117 the word 'ἀρχῶν' in fragment 24.2-3 is not translated. On p.136 'astrology' should be 'astronomy', and the same page fails to mention that 'fragment 25' is part of book XV. On p.155, after 'the body which our sense cannot' a word like 'perceive' or 'see' seems to have fallen out. On p.156, in Montarese's paraphrase of Lucretius's argument in DRN I 599ff (with Munro's supplement), the second occurrence of 'visible' should be emended to something like 'conceptual'. On p.191 DRN 1.934 is quoted with unmetrical 'omnia' instead of 'cuncta'. On p.201, in the translation of Heraclitus fr. B92 D-K, 'the lord where is the oracle' should be 'the lord whose oracle'. On p.218, n.665, Empedocles fragment B17.2 D-K, is quoted with 'τεθηπώς' instead of 'τεθεπώς'. On p.223, n.699, 'gigantomatic' should be 'gigantomachic'. On p.228, responding to a claim made by Campbell, Montarese writes: “But Epicurus could have picked up the Empedoclean language […] – as Campbell himself grants – from Plato's discussion of Empedocles's zoogony”, but, as far as I know, no such discussion exists, nor does Campbell refer to one. On p.231, Furley is referred to without specific reference, and in n.722 on the same page 'Gower' should be 'Gowers' (as in the bibliography) and 'fiery hear' should be 'fiery heart'. On p.232, n.724, on Empedocles' use of the word 'αἰθήρ', a reference to Peter Kingsley, Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic, Oxford 1995, pp.15-23, would have been in order. On the same page the reference to n.271 should have been to n.721. On p.240 '850-52' should be '851-52', '858 and 918' should be '850 and 918', and on pp.240, 241 and 242 '917-20' should be '918-20'. On p.241 'μνηστῆρσι' should be 'μνηστῆρα' and 'eat blood-dripping meat' should be 'ate blood-dripping meat'. On pp.247, 248 & 250 'the 22 letters of the alphabet' should be 'the 21 letters of the alphabet': see Cic. ND 2.37.93 (a text which Montarese himself refers to on p.247 n.785). On p.248 Montarese states that 'versibus of line 822 shares 6 of its 7 elementa with verbis of 823': here 822 and 823 should be 823 and 824 respectively, and 'versibus' of course has 8 elementa, not 7. On p.252 Montarese states that 'ignis and lignis share four elementa': I count five. On p.281 'The chances of the roll...' should be 'The chances that the roll ...' On pp.309-313, the header should be 'General Index' instead of 'Generell Index'. Finally, on p.310 of the 'General Index' the reference to Epicurus, On nature XIV Col. LXI should be to Col. XLI, and a reference should be added to p.65. There should be a reference to Col. XLII as well, which is also mentioned on p.65.
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