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NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

LUCRETIVS—PRIMITIVIST OR PROGRESSIVIST?

BY PHILIP MERLAN

The "primitivism" of Lucretius is still a problem.¹ This paper proposes to attack the problem from the flank rather than frontally: by an analysis of the composition of the second part (vv. 925–1459) of *De rerum natura*, Book V. Lucretius left his poem unfinished and it was in all likelihood edited by someone else;² therefore an assumption that much in it is in the character of a draft or disconnected jottings³ is a priori much more probable than would be with other ancient authors.

We anticipate the three main results of our analysis.

I. One draft of the history of civilization ended in vv. 1388/9.⁴ It is a complete history, though perhaps containing digressions and insertions, not quite consistent with their context.

II. Another draft contained instead of the vv. 1105–1389, the vv. 1440–1457. In other words, the history of civilization, from the founding of cities on, is presented in *De rer. nat.* twice. The editor concluded the

¹ The most recent contribution is: Margaret Taylor, "Progress and Primitivism in Lucretius," *American Journal of Philology*, LXVIII (1947), 180–194. To the literature mentioned by her I should like to add: E. Norden, "Beiträge zur Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie," *Jahrbücher für klassische Philologie*, Suppl. XIX (1893), 365–462, esp. 411–428; C. Giussani, *T. Lucretii Cari De rer. nat. libri sex*, Vol. IV (1898), esp. 114f; M. Pohlenz, "Die hellenistische Poesie und die Philosophie," *Χάρτες* F. Leo . . . dargebracht (1911), 76–112, esp. 85; W. Meyer, *Laudes inopiae* (1915), esp. 44f; O. Immisch, *Agatharchidea* (1919), 106–108; W. Uxkull-Gyllenband, *Griechische Kulturentstehungslehren* (1924); K. Mras, "Macrobius' Kommentar zu Ciceros *Somnium*," *Sitzungsber. d. preuss. Ak. d. Wiss.*, phil.-hist. Kl. 1933, VI, 232–286, esp. 270f; D. Haussleiter, *Der Vegetarismus in der Antike* (1935), 54–78; A. P. Sinker, *Introduction to Lucretius* (1937), esp. 61–64; 75f; F. Wehrli, *Dikaiarchos* (1944), esp. 57; F. Heinemann, *Nomos and Physis* (1945), 147–152; C. Bailey, *Titi Lucretii Cari De rer. nat.* (1947), III, 1472–1474; L. Perelli, "Il piano originario del poema lucreziano alla luce del suo svolgimento ideale," *Rivista di filologia classica*, LXXV (1947), 18–43.

² On this problem see e.g.: Fritz Mehrbach, *Bericht über die Lukrezliteratur der Jahre 1904–1921* (*Bursians Jahresberichte* 195 [1923], 1924, p. 58); Schanz-Hosius I (1927), 272–274; K. Büchner, *Beobachtungen über Vers und Gedankengang bei Lukrez* (1936), 1–4.

³ Thus, I am returning to the views of K. Lachman, *In T. Lucretii Cari de rer. nat. commentarius*⁴ (1882), 62, 84, 284f. See also A. Balsamo, "Sul poema di Lucrezio," *Rivista di filologia classica*, XXXV (1907), 500–505.

⁴ See C. Lenz, *Die wiederholten Verse bei Lukrez* (1937) 22; A. Raubitschek, "Zu einigen Wiederholungen bei Lukrez," *AJP*, LIX (1938), 218–223.

whole book with the latter passage and did not indicate that this was an alternative to 1105–1389. The main difference between the two versions is their length, 284 against 17 verses, but there can be hardly a doubt that the seventeen verses cover in a very condensed form much of the same territory as is covered in the two hundred and eighty four.

III. The vv. 1379–1435 (history of music and general reflections on the change of values caused by changes in taste and the pernicious desire of the superfluous) and the vv. 1436–1439 (history of the calendar) are two jottings.⁵ The editor did not want to discard them, therefore he appended them to the end of one of the drafts. Afterwards he appended the other, alternative draft of the history of civilization, thus creating the impression of a certain unity.

The proof is comparatively easy. The vv. 1388/9 are repeated as vv. 1454/5. This can not be explained by a copyist's error as the two double liners are far apart from each other. When Lucretius made his second draft (which of the two was later does not concern us here), he remade the first completely but he took over the two sonorous verses from his first to his second draft as a fitting concluding sentence or part of such a concluding sentence—adding or omitting in one of the drafts the vv. 1456/7.⁶ Following Lachmann,⁷ most modern editors (Bailey, Diels, Ernout-Robin, Leonard-Smith, Merrill, Petrovski, Bailey 1947) exclude the vv. 1388/9, regarding the repetition as impossible. But to exclude these verses is a somewhat naive attempt to make the book more perfect. This won't do. The repetitious double liner was written by Lucretius twice and should be left where it is, twice, as is done now by Martin, the only modern editor who does not exclude it. Thus they would prove clearly that we can not treat the section vv. 1105–1457 as one whole. What would we say of a modern editor who would "correct" the Aristotle mss. by excluding one of the two passages in Met. A 990b2–991b8 and Met. M 1078b32–35 and 1080a11 because they are identical? The other way round is correct: this identity proves that these two passages were never meant by Aristotle to become parts of one and the same book; a clear proof that Aristotle treated the same problem twice, utilizing part of his wording but considering, of course, the two treatments as alternatives and not two "chapters" in one and the same book.⁸ The same principle should be applied to Book V of *De rer. nat.*—and, as already mentioned, with much greater confidence, considering what we know about the conditions under which Lucretius left his manuscript.

⁵ Cf. e.g., Giussani, *loc. cit.*, 162.

⁶ Giussani's explanation (*ibid.*) seems rather complicated.

⁷ *Loc. cit.*, 346.

⁸ Cf. W. Jaeger, *Studien zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Metaphysik* (1912), 28–37; *idem*, *Aristoteles* (1923), 175 and R. Shute, *On the History of the Process by Which the Aristotelian Writings Arrived at Their Present Form* (1888), 138f.

A second proof. Most of the achievements of civilization mentioned in the vv. 1440–1457 can be found described in some other place. Thus vv. 1440/1 (the mighty turrets behind which men live and the distribution of soil) correspond with the vv. 1108 and 1110. The origin of agriculture (v. 1448) is described in the vv. 1289–1295 and 1361–1378. The origin of weapons (v. 1449) we find also in 1266 and 1283–1292; of garments (1449) in 1350; of poetry (1444 and 1451) in 1380/1; of laws (1448) in 1143–1150. These coincidences are too numerous to be explained otherwise than by repetition.

Once I and III are proved, II becomes obvious. In other words, we assert that the editor⁹ faced the following task:

A. He found two drafts of the history of civilization and decided to keep both.

B. He found two digressions without clear indication where they should be inserted.¹⁰

Piously, he decided not to discard anything. The result was Book V in its present shape.

There will probably always be scholars who will try to retain the repeated double liner (I think the time to exclude it should be definitely over by now) and still to insist that Lucretius wanted to repeat it in one and the same context. Indeed, we can not exclude the possibility that Lucretius intended to repeat not only phrases but whole lines; there are many repeated verses in *De rer. nat.* and each case of repetition must be investigated separately.¹¹ But it seems that no intrinsic reason can be found for our case. Or shall we say that Lucretius attacked the same problem (the history of civilization from the moment of city founding) twice and therefore let it culminate twice in the same words? Shall we assume an archaic form of logic in Lucretius in which progress of thought is replaced by repeated returns to the starting point to depart from here

⁹ On the problem of his identity see, e.g., O. Tescari, *Lucretiana* (1935), 19–12; G. della Valle, "Tito Lucrezio Caro e l'Epicureismo Campano," *Atti della Accademia Pontaniana*, LXII (1933), 195f. and particularly *idem*, "Marco Tullio Cicerone editore e critico del poema di Lucrezio," *Atti della R. Accademia d'Italia, Memorie della classe di scienze morali e storiche*, Ser. VII, v. I, fasc. 3 (1941), p. 399; D. van Berchem, "La publication lu DE RERUM NATURA et la VIe Eglogue de Virgile," *Museum Helveticum* III (1946), 26–39, esp. 26ff.

¹⁰ Possibly he found other digressions on loose "leaves" which he incorporated in the longer draft of the history of civilization. But the problem of the unity of the section vv. 925–1389 does not concern us here. See on it G. Jelenko, "Die Komposition der Kulturgeschichte des Lucretius," *Wiener Studien*, LIV (1936), 59–69 (cf. A. Raubitschek, *op. cit.*, 221f.); Büchner, *op. cit.*, 7–21; Perelli, *op. cit.*, 39f.

¹¹ As done, e.g., by Lenz, *op. cit.*; Cf. C. Bailey, "The Mind of Lucretius," *AJP*, LXI (1940), 278–291, esp. 283.

for a second time in a somewhat different direction?¹² This is hardly believable in our case because we can not see that Lucretius approached the same problem twice from different angles. Thus, we can assume no intention of repetition.

How does this analysis contribute to the problem of primitivism in Lucretius? If we take the vv. 1440–1457 to be a comparatively independent idea unit, we can see much better how much in Lucretius's history of civilization is really a catalogue of inventions, a chapter in Greek heurematology.¹³ In his catalogue the point is stressed that these inventions were brought about naturally¹⁴ and gradually¹⁵—without divine intervention. In the shorter draft, no reasons are given explaining the single inventions; the four last lines contain the general principle of gradualism and naturalism. In the longer draft the single items of the catalogue are interrupted by such explanations but still we can see enough of its catalogue character and perceive that what Lucretius is primarily interested in is naturalism and gradualism versus divine intervention, and not progressivism versus primitivism. On this latter problem Lucretius is simply non-committal. Necessity,¹⁶ inventiveness,¹⁷ accident,¹⁸ fear coupled with ignorance,¹⁹ correct observation coupled with wrong interpretation,²⁰ imitation of animals,²¹ the condition of abundance,²²—all these factors are mentioned by Lucretius to explain the "achievements" of civilization—among

¹² This is one of the principles underlying the interpretation of Büchner, *op. cit.* Neither his nor Bailey's (*op. cit.*, 220) principle ("visual suspension of thought") will do.

¹³ On this literary genre see: P. Eichholtz, *De Scriptoribus ΠΕΠΙ ΕΥΡΗΜΑΤΩΝ* (1867), esp. 24–30 (Aristotle and Theophrast); M. Kremmer, *De catalogis heurematism* (1890); A. Kleingünther, *ΠΡΩΤΟΣ ΕΥΡΕΤΗΣ* (1933), esp. 1 and 95–114; F. Dirlmeier, "Peripatos und Orient," *Die Antike*, XIV (1938), 120–136.

¹⁴ Lucr. V, 1091–1101 (origin of fire); 1161–1240 (origin of religion); 1362 (origin of horti- and agriculture).

¹⁵ Lucr. V, 1105/6; 1286; 1293; 1305. Cf. Diog. Oen. fr. X, p. 16f., William.

¹⁶ Lucr. V, 1028/9; cf. Democritus fr. 5 D on *χρεία* as *διδάσκαλος*.

¹⁷ Lucr. V, 1107, reminding us of the *λόγιοι* (men of insight) in Democritus fr. 30 D and Hermarchus fr. 24, Krohn.

¹⁸ Cf. n. 14 above (origin of fire) and Lucr. V, 1241–1249.

¹⁹ I.e., the two main roots of religion. Correct observation: Lucr. V, 1169–1182; cf. Democritus fr. 166 D (on Oriental analogies see J. Bidez, *Eos ou Platon et l'Orient* [1945], 128–140); see also C. Bailey, *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus* (1928), 175–177. Fear coupled with ignorance: Lucr. V, 1183–1240; cf. Democritus fr. A 75 on *δέιμα* caused by natural events.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Lucr. V, 1379; cf. Democritus fr. 154 D.

²² Lucr. V, 1391; cf. Democritus fr. 144 D (*ἐκ τοῦ περιέντος*).

them so noxious ones as wrong religion and so useful ones as law. This is his main interest. In being a catalogue his "history" of civilization is strictly comparable to a catalogue as we find it in Aeschylus.²³ In trying to explain the origin of the heuremata, it is strictly opposed to an Aeschylean explanation (where Prometheus claims to be the originator of all skills) and akin to the one which we can find in Democritus.

Our analysis destroys the unity of composition of Book V. But it permits us to stress more the unity of thought underlying Lucretius' history of civilization. Indeed, we may assert: the more we shall attempt to read it as a history—in proper chronological order—the less satisfactory we shall find its composition. If we read it, however, mainly from the viewpoint of a heurematology, we can do so without expecting any chronological (or logical) order and will, therefore, find its composition less open to objections. Even alphabetic order would do to enumerate the most outstanding "finds" and to discuss them just to prove that they had all a natural origin and developed gradually. It would seem somewhat unfair to Lucretius to pin him down either as a progressivist or a primitivist; it seems too much even to say that his attitude towards the primitive past was ambiguous²⁴—because it does not seem that he wanted to treat the problem at all.²⁵

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²³ *Prom. vv.* 445–506.

²⁴ As is said in A. O. Lovejoy and G. Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (1935), 239. I am happy that my disagreement with them is so slight.

²⁵ Unavailable was G. della Valle, *Marco Tullio Cicerone editore a critico del poema di Lucrezio* (1941) and K. Barwick "Kompositionsprobleme in 5. Buch des Lukrez," *Philologus*, XLIX (1943), 193–229. Only after I received the galley proof of this note did two papers become available to me: M. Pohlenz, "Tierische und menschliche Intelligenz bei Poseidonios," *Hermes* 76 (1941), 1–13, and K. Barwick, "Kompositionsprobleme im 5. Buch des Lukrez," *Philologus* 95 (1943), 193–229. All I can do at this stage is to note that my interpretation of Lucretius' "history" of civilization as being essentially a catalogue of inventions resembles strikingly the treatment of the same topic in Posidonius by Pohlenz, while it completely contradicts Barwick's paper (the main weakness of which reveals itself on p. 206).