

THE PRESOCRATICS IN BOOK ONE OF LUCRETIUS' *DE RERUM NATURA**

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In Book One of the *De Rerum Natura*, after Lucretius' exposition of the atomistic world view, there is a long polemic against other physical theories (1.635–920). Three Presocratic philosophers are mentioned explicitly: Heraclitus, Empedocles, and Anaxagoras. Scholars have observed that few of the criticisms made against Heraclitus and Empedocles are appropriate to their philosophies, the usual explanation being that the Stoics are the true objects of the Epicurean's scrutiny.¹ D. Furley, who argues that there is no compelling evidence that Lucretius attacks the Stoics, proposes instead that Heraclitus is simply the general representative of material monism, Empedocles of the four-element theory, and Anaxagoras of the theory of infinite divisibility.² M. Bollack, on the other hand, does not regard the passage as fundamentally polemical.³ Rather, she maintains, it demonstrates an instructive progression of advancing and developing philosophical ideas.

These explanations have done much to enhance our understanding of the general philosophic argument in this passage. Furthermore, they

* An earlier version of this paper was read at the 1982 meeting of the American Philological Association. It is my pleasure to thank Professors A. P. D. Mourelatos, D. Armstrong, and E. D. Francis for their encouragement and suggestions. I am especially indebted to Professor M. Gwyn Morgan. None of these scholars is to be blamed for whatever faults yet remain.

¹ H. A. J. Munro, *T. Lucreti Cari de rerum natura libri sex* (Cambridge 1886⁴); A. Ernout and L. Robin, *Lucrèce: De Rerum Natura* (Paris 1925); C. Bailey, *T. Lucreti de rerum natura libri sex* (Oxford 1947), whose text I follow except where noted; W. E. Leonard and S. B. Smith, *T. Lucreti Cari de rerum natura libri VI* (Madison 1965); K. Kleve, "The Philosophical Polemics in Lucretius: a Study in the History of Epicurean Criticism," in O. Gigon, ed., *Lucrèce, Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique* 24 (Genève 1978) 39–76, an important paper which provides a recent statement of this view.

² D. Furley, "Lucretius and the Stoics," *BICS* 13 (1966) 13–33; see also his response to Kleve in Kleve (above, note 1) 74–75. Other commentators are aware of this approach, e.g. Bailey (above, note 1) 709, but their emphasis is on the significance of the passage as a criticism of contemporary Stoicism.

³ "Un Désaccord de forme: Lucrèce et Héraclite," *Actes du VIII^e Congrès Association Guillaume Budé* (Paris 1969) 383–92.

suggest very plausible factors for Lucretius' selection of these specific thinkers in his polemic. Each of the three names is associated with an unquestionably important (and rival) physics and as such their choice is logical. Yet purely scientific considerations do not account for the personal characterizations of Heraclitus and Empedocles, which clearly emphasize not philosophic but literary judgments.⁴ In short, they do not provide a full solution.

My aim in this paper is to demonstrate that Lucretius singles out each of these Presocratics to highlight the problem of philosophical language and, particularly through the *exemplum* of Empedocles, to present a case for the use of poetry in Epicurean discourse. He does so, moreover, within the traditional context of the Epicurean doxography, and our poet's innovations in this rather standard feature of Epicurean writing help explain the loose connection between the Presocratics he names and the criticisms he presents.

W. Rösler has shown that Lucretius' refutation of the Presocratics does not attack the actual teachings of the philosophers, but their teachings as reported in handbooks.⁵ The objections against Heraclitus and Empedocles attempt to discredit *all* forms of monism and the four-element theory. In addition, several of the arguments have rather a standard ring. For example, two criticisms are common to the physics of all three: they deny the existence of the void and the primary substances which they propose are perishable. Both faults are regarded solely from the Epicurean point of view. This combination of blanket judgments with standard arguments, all under the rubric of a typical representative, suggests that Lucretius' approach is doxographical. The use of such a polemical doxography is hardly surprising, however, since it was a regular feature of Epicurean writing.

⁴ E. D. Kollmann, "Lucretius' Criticism of the Early Greek Philosophers," *Studii Clasice* 13 (1971) 79–93; L. Lenaghan, "Lucretius 1.921–50," *TAPA* 98 (1967) 221–51; P. H. Schrijvers, *Horror ac Divina Voluptas: Études sur la poétique et la poésie de Lucrèce* (Amsterdam 1970) 84–85. This paper owes much to these studies, especially Kollmann's.

⁵ *Hermes* 101 (1973) 48–64. This does not imply that Lucretius did not know the works of these philosophers at first hand. Certainly he knew Empedocles. See W. Kranz, "Lukrez und Empedokles," *Philologus* 50 (1943) 68–107. Numerous studies have attempted (without equal success) to establish specific Lucretian imitations of and allusions to Empedocles. See L. Mackay, "DRN 1.717sqq.," *Latinitas* 3 (1955) 210; O. B. Niccolini, "De T. Lucretio Caro," *Latinitas* 3 (1955) 280–86; J. Bollack, "Lukrez und Empedokles," *Die Neue Rundschau* 70 (1957) 658–86, and by the same author, "Lukrez 1.1114–17 und Empedokles fr. 110," *Philologus* 104 (1960) 295–98; M. Bollack, "La Chaîne aimantine: Lucrèce et ses modèles grecs," *REL* 41 (1963) 165–85; D. Furley, "Variations on Themes from Empedocles in Lucretius' Proem," *BICS* 17 (1970) 55–64; J. M. Snyder, "Lucretius' Empedoclean Sicily," *CW* 65 (1972) 217–18. I have been unable to see F. Jobst, *Ueber das Verhältnis zwischen Lukrez und Empedokles* (Diss. Erlangen, Munich 1907).

The use of critical doxographies goes back to Aristotle and his pupil Theophrastus. Aristotle employs such doxographical catalogues in *Met.* 983B–984A17, *GC* 328B32–329B6, and *de Anima* 405A–B. All these passages present historical surveys oriented toward a single problem or theme. Theophrastus' work, *Opinions of the Physicists*, similarly treated the theories of various philosophers under various topics.⁶ Doxographies became quite popular in lieu of the large library the writings of the Presocratics could easily fill. Even Epicurus had recourse to handbooks.⁷

Epicurus, as is well-known, was highly critical of philosophers other than himself (Diog. Laert. 10.7–8). Several of his works were exclusively polemical, both specific (e.g. *Against Democritus*) and general (e.g. *Against the Physicists*) in scope.⁸ In his *magnum opus*, *On Nature*, he appears to have dealt with previous thinkers in the fashion of a critical doxography. The Epicureans followed their master's lead. In time they developed their own massive doxography, the remnants of which include the speech of Velleius in Cicero's *ND* 1.25–41 and the inscriptions of Diogenes of Oenoanda.⁹

This tremendous concern for the history of philosophy on the part of the Epicureans has several explanations. A critical doxography provides a structuring principle for the explication of one's own theories.¹⁰ It permits, among other things, the author to reinterpret the ideas of previous thinkers as if they were all moving toward his own views.¹¹ Because Epicurus had established the true doctrine his followers had little to do in the way of original speculation. As Cicero puts it (*Fin.* 1.6) the Epicureans never stopped writing on the same topics as their master. They had, moreover, a mission to administer the true philosophy to a sick and needy world,¹² and this involved the use of polemic. As the Epicureans looked back in time to the teachings of their founder so they might

⁶ G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge 1957, repr. 1977) 1–7 provide a succinct discussion of the doxographic tradition.

⁷ H. Usener, *Epicurea* (1887 = Stuttgart 1966) XLf.; Rösler (above, note 5) 63.

⁸ Kleve 43–47; much of the following discussion relies on Kleve's paper. D. Sedley, "Epicurus and his Professional Rivals," in J. Bollack and A. Laks, eds., *Cahiers de Philologie 1: Études sur l'Epicurisme antique* (Lille 1976) 119–59, argues against the prevalent view that Epicurus was hypercritical of other philosophers. (For this and several references I am grateful to TAPA's anonymous readers and its editor.)

⁹ See Kleve for details. For Epicurus' *On Nature* see D. Sedley, "The Structure of Epicurus' *On Nature*," *Chronache Ercolanesi* 4 (1974) 89–92. He concludes that the first thirteen books expounded Epicurus' chief doctrine on physics and cosmology, "then set out systematically to refute rival physical theories" (p. 89). The likeness to Book One of Lucretius is apparent.

¹⁰ M. Bollack, *La Raison de Lucrèce* (Paris 1978) xxviii (hereafter Bollack); G. P. Eckman, *Controversial Elements in Lucretius* (Diss. NYU 1899) 19.

¹¹ H. Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Presocratic Philosophy* (Baltimore 1935) xii and 347f.

¹² For the image see fr. 221 Usener; Diog. Oen. fr. 2 IV Chilton.

expect others to look back to relevant philosophers. Hence the need for a historical philosophical polemic. Furthermore, since there was little opportunity to enhance the doctrine, the widest creative avenues open to the disciple of Epicurus were exposition of the Garden and criticism of its opponents. The use of a critical doxography allowed that creativity to be expressed in a form sanctioned both by philosophic writing in general (e.g. Aristotle) and by Epicurus' own method.¹³

Let us now consider the relationship between Lucretius' doxography and the tradition of Epicurean criticism. Comparison of other Epicurean doxographies, those of Epicurus, Philodemus, Cicero, and Diogenes of Oenoanda, with the one offered by Lucretius reveals a significant difference. The former aim either at completeness or near-completeness in their treatments of previous philosophers;¹⁴ not so our poet. He refutes all Presocratic physics, yet he names only three philosophers. The peculiarity suggests that he is indeed exercising his creativity within this traditional feature of Epicurean discourse, and the emphasis placed on these particular philosophers demands our attention.

Lucretius' treatments of Heraclitus and Empedocles are very similar in format: general theory, name of its champion, personal characterization, list of critical arguments. The discussion of Anaxagoras diverges: the personal characterization is replaced by an explanation of *homoeomeria*. The remarks about Heraclitus are openly hostile, those concerning Empedocles admiring, while Anaxagoras' treatment, while I hope to show it is critical, is not so explicit as the others'.¹⁵ It is important to notice that Lucretius' attitude is determined not on philosophical but on linguistic grounds. The Ephesian is *clarus ob obscuram linguam*, while the Sicilian is praised for his *carmina*, which *exponunt praeclara reperta*. Even the introduction of Anaxagoras is attended by linguistic concerns: the famous *patrii sermonis egestas* and an explication of the Greek word *homoeomeria*. The interest in language is pronounced and requires further comment.¹⁶

Lucretius, like his contemporary Cicero, was preoccupied with the task of presenting Greek philosophy in Latin. While the Romans had by the first century been exposed to Greek thought for some time, philosophy

¹³ On the Epicureans' creativity in re-evaluating their positions see Bollack xxv-xxx. Cf. Kleve 47-48.

¹⁴ Kleve distinguishes the doxographies of both Lucretius and Diogenes from the rest (Kleve 65). This is inaccurate; fr. 5 (Chilton) presents a much fuller list than Lucretius': Heraclitus, Thales, Diogenes of Apollonia, Anaximenes, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, "those of the Stoa," and Democritus. He goes on to criticize Heraclitus and, we may suppose, the others, as col. III promises.

¹⁵ This analysis is a development of Kollmann's (above, note 4) 92.

¹⁶ For previous scholarship on this point see note 4 above.

had not yet transcended the Greek language.¹⁷ This is most clearly revealed by the attitude of Varro, the most learned of the Romans, in Cicero's *Academica*:

Nam cum philosophiam viderem diligentissime Graecis litteris explicatum, existimavi, si qui de nostris eius studio tenerentur, si essent Graecis doctrinis eruditi, Graeca potius quam nostra lecturos; sin a Graecorum artibus et disciplinis abhorrent, ne haec quidem curaturos, *quae sine eruditione Graeca intellegi non possunt*; itaque ea nolui scribere, quae nec indocti intellegere possent nec docti legere curarent. (1.4)

Yet Cicero, at leisure from his political efforts, grappled with the adaptation of Greek ideas to the Roman tongue.¹⁸ Lucretius also recognized this need and this challenge,¹⁹ and explicitly confronted the task:

Nec me animi fallit Graiorum obscura reperta
difficile inlustrare Latinis versibus esse,
multa novis verbis praesertim cum sit agendum
propter egestatem linguae et rerum novitatem. (1.136–39)

Here Lucretius sets himself a double task: not only to create a new philosophical vocabulary but to do so within the constraints of hexameter verse.

The verb in line 137, *inlustrare*, is also the word used by Cicero to describe his rendering of Greek philosophy into Latin (*Acad.* 1.3 and *Tusc. Disp.* 1.5). However, in the *De rerum natura* the word has special significance. Its only other occurrence in the poem is at 3.2, where the poet is addressing to Epicurus his famous eulogy:²⁰

O tenebris tantis tam clarum extollere lumen
qui primus potuisti inlustrans commoda vitae.

The parallels between the two passages have been well discussed by G. Cabisius.²¹ *Inlustrare* likens the accomplishments of master and disciple. It should be read with its full force, not simply as a term for translation.

¹⁷ One might propose certain exceptions, e.g. the *Epicharmus* or the *Euhemerus* of Ennius. Also, we gather from Cicero (*Tusc. Disp.* 1.6) that quite a number of Latin philosophical tracts of dubious quality were being churned out, yet they apparently did not solve the problem of creating a Latin philosophical vocabulary as both Cicero and Lucretius did. A convenient account of the Epicurean writers of Lucretius' day is provided by Eckman (above, note 10) 8–10.

¹⁸ *Tusc. Disp.* 1.5–6; *Acad.* 1.25; *Fin.* 3.3.

¹⁹ Katherine C. Reiley, *Studies in the Philosophical Terminology of Lucretius and Cicero* (New York 1909) 23–24 compares the achievements of the two writers.

²⁰ I give the reading of the archetype ("o tenebris") following S. Timpanaro, "Lucrezio III 1" *Philologus* 104 (1960) 147–49 = *Contributi di filologia e di storia della lingua latina* (Rome 1978) 135–39. See the keen remarks of D. West, *The Imagery and Poetry of Lucretius* (Edinburgh 1969) 80.

²¹ "Lucretius' Statement of Poetic Intent," in *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History*, ed. C. Deroux (Brussels 1979) 242.

But the difference between Lucretius' act of illumination and that of Epicurus must not be overlooked. Lucretius illustrates *Latinis versibus*; his poetry is the agent which clarifies the *obscura* of his master.²² For Lucretius the task of translating Epicurean thought into Latin was a major one; more important for our purpose, so far as he was concerned poetry was the proper vehicle for that thought. It is in this light that we should consider his attitude toward the three Presocratics, colored as it is by linguistic concerns.

We can begin with Lucretius' judgment of Heraclitus:

Heraclitus init quorum dux proelia primus,
clarus ob obscuram linguam magis inter inanis
quamde gravis inter Graios qui vera requirunt.
omnia enim stolidi magis admirantur amantque,
inversis quae sub verbis latitantia cernunt,
veraue constituunt quae belle tangere possunt
auris et lepido quae sunt fucata sonore. (1.638–44)

Heraclitus is *clarus ob obscuram linguam*, and so in fact he was known in antiquity; Cicero (*Fin.* 2.15) informs us that he was called the "dark one" (*skoteinos*). This is no compliment, especially when we recall that Lucretius' self-imposed task is to elucidate (*inlustrare*). The play is on *clarus*, which means "clear" as well as "famous," and the phrase, a keen oxymoron, is itself a parody of the Ephesian's twisted use of language.²³

Recent critics have discussed the passage carefully and fruitfully, so that a complete analysis is unnecessary.²⁴ The Presocratic is patently criticized for his obfuscating use of language. Important in this regard is Lucretius' attack on the fools (*stolidi*) who mistake titillating expression for truthful reasoning. The warning is clear: Heraclitus' riddles are more likely to mislead and deceive than to enlighten. Puns (*clarus*, *inanis*, *stolidi*), oxymora (e.g. *latitantia cernunt*), the jingle-like quality of the poet's rhymes (e.g. *inversis . . . sub verbis*), as well as the outrageous imagery which closes the passage all serve to create a travesty of "the

²² On light imagery in Lucretius see, above all, West (above, note 20) 79–93; Lenaghan (above, note 4); Cabisius (above, note 21) 242; Sister Frances, "The Light of Reason and the Darkness of Unbelief," *CJ* 58 (1962/63) 170–72; W. S. Anderson, "Discontinuity in Lucretian Symbolism," *TAPA* 91 (1960) 1–29.

²³ What J. Marouzeau called "la leçon par l'exemple" in a series of articles with that title in *RPh* 52 (1926) 110–11; *REL* 14 (1936) 58–64, *REL* 26 (1948) 105–8. See also Schrijvers (above, note 4) 44f.

²⁴ Kollmann (above, note 4) 81–85 provides a detailed and sensitive treatment of this passage. See also Lenaghan (above, note 4); West (above, note 20); E. B. Holtsmark, "Lucretius and the Fools," *CJ* 63 (1963) 260–61; J. M. Snyder, "The Significant Name in Lucretius," *CW* 72 (1978) 227–30, and *Puns and Poetry in Lucretius' De Rerum Natura* (Amsterdam 1980) 117–18.

specious tortuosities of Heraclitus' style."²⁵ Thus Lucretius condemns the Ephesian's obscurity.

Anaxagoras poses a rather different case.²⁶ Lucretius does not comment explicitly on his style, but he does emphasize his technical terminology: the term *homoeomeria*.²⁷ He does so, in fact, instead of offering a personal characterization of the philosopher, as he does for Heraclitus and Empedocles. Indeed, the word takes priority over the man:

nunc et Anaxagorae scrutemur homoeomerian
quam Grai memorant nec nostra dicere lingua
concedit nobis patrii sermonis egestas,
sed tamen ipsam rem facilest exponere verbis. (1.830–33)

The special force of *scrutemur* is well-explained by West: "This word implies a search into the hidden details of something, a search beneath the surface."²⁸ If any word ever required such scrutiny it is *homoeomeria*, for it is a difficult expression whose philosophical implications are not immediately clear despite its ostensibly descriptive function.²⁹ The verb, *scrutemur*, for all its appropriateness, is rather homely, and Brown calls attention to the grotesque effect produced when this word is sandwiched between the philosopher's name and the ponderous Greek noun.³⁰ Further attention is drawn to *homoeomeria* by its placement, which gives line 830 (as well as 834) an unusual end rhythm.³¹

Homoeomeria is one of only three Greek words used in Lucretius' philosophical exposition, the other two being *harmonia* (3.98–103) and *prester* (6.423–30), both specifically tagged as Greek imports.³² In lines 830–34 our author laments that the term cannot be translated into Latin. This is, of course, untrue; since Cicero succinctly translates the idea in

²⁵ West (above, note 20) 26.

²⁶ For a detailed and persuasive study of 1.830–920 see R. D. Brown, "Lucretian Ridicule of Anaxagoras," *CQ* 33 (1983) 146–60.

²⁷ Most scholars doubt that Anaxagoras himself used the term; however, it is plain that Lucretius attaches the word to Anaxagoras' theory regardless of its historical background. The confusion may lie in the doxographical origins of Lucretius' criticism. For a brief yet thorough summary of the problem see Brown (above, note 26) 153, note 46.

²⁸ West (above, note 20) 125. Cf. Lenaghan (above, note 4) 233.

²⁹ A remark in Kirk and Raven (above, note 6) 388 is of interest here: "... it seems very probable that many of those who used it [the word *homoeomeria*] did so without understanding its exact significance." See also G. Vlastos, "The Physical Theory of Anaxagoras," in *The Pre-Socratics*, ed. A. P. D. Mourelatos (New York 1974) 476, note 64, for a sample of modern difficulty due to the word's ambiguity.

³⁰ Brown (above, note 26) 153. The verb is related to *scruta*: trash.

³¹ West (above, note 20) 125. See also W. Ott, *Metrische Analysen zu Lukrez De Rerum Natura Buch I* (Tübingen 1974) 92.

³² Reiley (above, note 19) 23; D. S. Swanson, *A Formal Analysis of Lucretius' Vocabulary* (Minneapolis 1962); C. J. Classen, "Poetry and Rhetoric in Lucretius," *TAPA* 99 (1968) 97–98.

Acad. 2.118 as *particulas, similes inter se, minutas*, it was hardly beyond the poet's ingenuity to turn the Greek into a Latin hexameter.³³ Instead Lucretius chooses to exploit the opportunity to comment yet again on the difficulty of good philosophic discourse.

Although *homoeomeria* is perplexing and never translated by Lucretius, his explanation of the theory which underlies the term is clarity itself:

ossa videlicet e pauxillis atque minutis
ossibus hic et de pauxillis atque minutis
visceribus viscus gigni sanguenque creari
sanguinis inter se multis coeuntibu' guttis
ex aurique putat micis consistere posse
aurum et de terris terram conrescere parvis,
ignibus ex ignis, umorem umoribus esse. (1.834–41)

Bollack suggests that *homoeomeria* is left untranslated to permit this elucidating circumlocution.³⁴ Lucretius is indeed concerned that his terms be understood. Previously in Book One he has provided definitions for much of his "technical" vocabulary, although it is noteworthy that most of that vocabulary is simple Latin.³⁵ The juxtaposition in this passage of Anaxagoras' jargon and Lucretius' perfectly comprehensible exposition is sharp.

The passage is also good poetry. As West has observed, the strikingly similar shape of lines 834 and 835 reinforces the content of those lines, that as bones are composed of minute bits of bone so is flesh in the same way composed of minute bits of flesh.³⁶ Here the effect of the poet's verbal artistry is to inform, in contradistinction to the obfuscating word play of Heraclitus.

Lucretius' refusal to translate Anaxagoras' terminology and his lengthy definition are an implied criticism. That Lucretius wishes to avoid Greek is clear from 1.136f.: his goal is to translate into Latin the *obscura*

³³ Bollack 175 interprets *nostra lingua* as "la langue Epicurienne du poème," wrongly, I think. It is an interesting coincidence (though only that) that *homoeomeria* is the only Greek philosophical term which Cicero turns into Latin, never using Greek, for which Lucretius uses only the Greek. See Reiley (above, note 19) 23–24.

³⁴ Bollack 176.

³⁵ Cf. 1.55–61, 329–34; see Schrijvers (above, note 4) 173–74. Reiley (above, note 19) 24 observes: "Lucretius . . . has shown himself to be his own best argument in disproof of the *patrii sermonis egestas*, since with simple Latin he has succeeded, in the main, as well as Cicero in turning Greek ideas."

³⁶ West (above, note 20) 118–19. The clarity of the passage is noted also by Ernout-Robin ad 835; Schrijvers (above, note 4) 236–37; E. Paratore and U. Pizzani, *Lucreti De Rerum Natura* (Rome 1960) 182–83. Brown (above, note 26) 154–55, finds in these lines "incipient mockery" of Anaxagoras' theory, which may be so, but that line of thought should not obscure the stylistic point Lucretius is making.

reperita couched in Greek.³⁷ Moreover, he desires to avoid anything which smacks of difficult terminology. That is evident not only from his own choice of terms, but from the simple explanation he provides for Anaxagoras' difficult word.

For Lucretius there is a mean between the obscurity of Heraclitus and the jargon he associates with Anaxagoras, between the dark and the drab, and that mean is presented through the person of Empedocles. It is to the panegyric of the Sicilian we now turn.

Empedocles is introduced as the foremost of the philosophers who adhere to the four-element theory. His introduction is followed by a description of Sicily and Mount Aetna, a justly celebrated purple passage whose grandeur pays homage to the author of the *Peri Phuseôs*. For, awesome and wonderful though Sicily may be,

nil tamen hoc habuisse viro praeclarius in se
nec sanctum magis et mirum carumque videtur.
carmina quin etiam divini pectoris eius
vociferantur et exponunt praeclara reperta,
ut vix humana videatur stirpe creatus. (1.729–33)

The passage compliments Empedocles in a manner quite similar to the laudation of Epicurus in Book Five. There Epicurus is spoken of as divine (5.8: *dicendum est, deus ille fuit, deus, inclute Memmi*). Comparison with the master is the highest praise Lucretius can bestow, praise sought, in fact, by our poet himself.³⁸ And Empedocles is addressed not only with admiration but even in terms of personal affection (*carus*).³⁹

³⁷ Brown (above, note 26) 153 mentions an apparent contradiction between 1.833 and 1.136–39. In the former passage there is an assertion of ease in expression (*ipsam rem facilest exponere verbis*) while the latter stresses difficulty. Upon closer examination the conflict vanishes. In 1.138–39 Lucretius emphasizes the problem of neologism due in part to the poverty of the language (*propter egestatem linguae*). The complaint in 1.833 is the same: the *patrii sermonis egestas* prevents the poet from coining a Latin equivalent to *homoeomeria* (as Cicero does, albeit in a brief phrase). That the idea is easy enough to expound is not relevant; in fact, since the point of this passage is to criticize "such pretentious Greek formations" as Brown correctly argues, Lucretius seems to suggest that Anaxagoras could have made himself plain with equal ease had he been more attentive to clear expression.

³⁸ Cabisius (above, note 21) 240–44 discusses Lucretius' comparisons of himself to Epicurus.

³⁹ *Contra* Bailey ad 730, who remarks: "certainly 'precious' and not, as Giussani takes it, an expression of Lucretius' personal affection for Empedocles." Kollmann (above, note 4) 89, note 46, also disagrees with Bailey. Without employing the term he suggests *carum* may be a *sphragis* ("... does not the use of the adjective *carum* by T. Lucretius *Carus* suggest some special importance for the Roman poet?"), a possibility made more likely thanks to the insightful paper by E. J. Kenney, "Doctus Lucretius," *Mnemosyne* 23 (1970) 366–92. It is perhaps worth noting that the only other occurrence of *carus* in the *De Rerum Natura* (3.85) is the most common of its personal uses, to describe family members, in this case parents.

Admiration for Empedocles is rather surprising, since the tradition of Epicurean polemic was quite hostile to the Sicilian.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, while Lucretius must conform to the traditional doxography in refuting Empedocles' physics, he makes no personal attack on the philosopher himself.

The Presocratic is *praeclarus* and his glory is his *carmina*. Many qualities of Empedocles' verses are of course praiseworthy,⁴¹ yet it is their role as philosophic discourse which Lucretius highlights: they expound illustrious discoveries (*exponunt praeclara reperta*). The word *praeclarus* is chosen both times to reflect the genuine fame which Empedocles and his doctrine enjoy. Moreover, the vocabulary recalls Lucretius' own efforts to *inlustrare* the *obscura reperta* of the Greeks (1.136–39). The contrast is to Heraclitus, *clarus ob obscuram linguam*. For the Roman, as for the Sicilian, the elucidating medium for philosophy is poetry.

Light, as we have seen, is the image for clarity and elucidation, not unnaturally. J. H. Waszink compares the *Peri Phuseôs* of Parmenides, where light and truth are identical.⁴² Relevant also are the closing lines of Book One which comment on the student's advancement in understanding:

haec sic pernosces parva perductus opella;
namque alid ex alio clarescet nec tibi caeca
nox iter eripiet quin ultima naturai
pervideas: ita res accendent lumina rebus. (1.1114–17)

The image, one light kindling another, is borrowed from Ennius.⁴³ The *caeca nox* is the darkness of ignorance, the light is the true light of reason, as suggested in 1.146–49:

hunc igitur terrorem animi tenebrasque necesest
non radii solis neque lucida tela diei
discutiant, sed naturae species ratioque.

For Lucretius poetry is the medium of that *ratio*.

This is most apparent in Lucretius' poetic credo, which follows

⁴⁰ Cicero *ND* 1.93; Diog. Laert. 10.25; Plut. *Adv. Coloten* 1123B.

⁴¹ Both Kollmann and Lenaghan (above, note 4) show how this passage imitates the style of Empedocles. They sensibly refrain from asserting quotation. Snyder (above, note 5) goes further, and I am not convinced by her reading. All three, however, demonstrate the richness of the passage.

⁴² "Lucretius and Poetry," *Mededelingen der koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen* 17 (1954) 253. See also W. J. Verdenius, "Parmenides' Conception of Light," *Mnemosyne* 4 (1949) 116–31, although he is a bit extravagant. Cf. A. P. D. Mourelatos, *The Route of Parmenides* (New Haven 1970) 241–46. On light imagery in Lucretius, see above, note 22.

⁴³ *Scaenica* 398–400 Vahlen; see West (above, note 20) 30.

immediately his Presocratic doxography (1.921–50).⁴⁴ Scholars have rightly lavished their attention on this passage and a close reading of the entire text is not needed here.⁴⁵ It is enough to remind the reader that Lucretius sets two goals for his poetry: clarity and charm. Consider, for example, lines 933–34:

. . . obscura de re tam lucida pango
carmina, musaeo contingens cuncta lepore.

Poetry is a vehicle for pellucid exposition; its purpose is to enlighten the reader:

si tibi forte animum tali ratione tenere
versibus in nostris possem, dum perspicis omnem
naturam rerum qua constet compta figura. (1.948–50)

Thus Lucretius' praise for Empedocles, motivated by his admiration for the Sicilian's verse, reflects the Roman's conscious belief, stated openly several times, that poetry is well able to communicate philosophical ideas understandably.

Clarity in philosophic discourse was an issue of some importance to Epicurus and hence to Lucretius. Epicurus taught that speech is corporeal; words are physical things which produce the sensation of hearing (Diog. Laert. 10.53). And the best way to employ words, particularly in philosophic discussion, is without ambiguity. In the *Letter to Herodotus* 38 he advises: "We must accept without explanation the first mental image brought up by each word if we are to have a standard to which to

⁴⁴ 1.926–50 = 4.1–25. There is still controversy over the correct placement of this passage. Bailey (above, note 1) 757: "The repetition has raised a number of questions, did the poet write the lines in both places? or were they transferred from one to the other by an 'editor'? if so, from which place? and if Lucr. wrote them in both places, in which did he write them first? There has been a long discussion and very various views have been expressed." And that in 1947! See Bailey for a discussion of earlier views as well as his own. Other important contributions are K. Büchner, "Die Proömien des Lukrez," *C&M* 13 (1952) 159–235; G. Müller, "Die Problematik des Lukreztextes seit Lachmann," *Philologus* 102 (1958) 247–83; F. Giancotti, *Il Preludio di Lucrezio* (Florence 1959); L. Gompf, *Die Frage der Entstehung von Lukrezens Lehrgedicht* (Diss. Köln 1960) 152; P. Boyancé, *Lucrèce et l'épicurisme* (Paris 1963) 75; Lenaghan (above, note 4); Schrijvers (above, note 4) 28–31; Bollack 26–32; L. Canfora, "I Proemi del *De Rerum Natura*," *Rivista di Filologia* 110 (1982) 63–77.

The passage works in both books, and efforts to ascribe the repetition to the work of an editor have not succeeded. It seems prudent to deal with the repetitions as the poet left them and not to speculate on the product of a never-achieved final revision. At any rate, the *Prioritätsfrage* is irrelevant here.

⁴⁵ Beside the works mentioned in note 44, see D. Parker, *Epicurean Imagery in Lucretius' De Rerum Natura* (Diss. Princeton 1952) 85–95; Schrijvers (above, note 4) 27–46; F. Giancotti, "Poetica e poesia di Lucrezio. A proposito di un recente studio," *Athenaeum* 72 (1974) 156–76 (a critical review of Schrijvers book); see especially Bollack 182–95 for a new reading of the passage.

refer a particular inquiry, problem, or opinion."⁴⁶ Clarity is, of course, one of the four virtues of style (Cicero *De Orat.* 3.49) and thus a natural goal for any writer. Yet Lucretius' strong asseveration that poetry is capable of clarity seems best understood as a function of his Epicureanism and not as a standard stylistic reflex. This seems especially likely when one considers Epicurus' attitude toward poetry, which is based upon his demand for clarity.

Diogenes Laertius (10.121) reports the opinion of the master on versifying: "only the wise will converse correctly about music and poetry, but the wise man would not write poetry." While some, notably Giancotti and Schmid, argue that he did allow certain types of verse, most scholars conclude that Epicurus condemned poetry, or was at least highly suspicious.⁴⁷ Whatever the precise nature of Epicurus' antipathy, it seems certain that he would have disapproved of poetry as a medium for philosophy. His strictures regarding clarity seem to disallow ornamental imagery, complicated and suggestive symbolism, in short much if not most of the stock-in-trade of the poet's craft.

Epicurus' disciples understood. Colotes attacked philosophical poetry.⁴⁸ Cicero's portrayal of the Epicureans in *Fin.* 1.71-72 indicates that in the first century they continued to keep aloof from the art. Philodemus versified, but was in Cicero's eyes quite the exceptional Epicurean (*In Pis.* 70), and even he thought little of the philosophical or educational use of poetry.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ See also Diog. Laert. 10.13 and Cicero *Fin.* 2.15. On Epicurus' theories of language see Diog. Laert. 10.52, 53, 75; P. H. DeLacy, "The Epicurean Analysis of Language," *AJP* 60 (1939) 85-92; N. H. DeWitt, *Epicurus and his Philosophy* (Minneapolis 1964) 206-7; and the very useful summary in chapter one of J. M. Snyder, *Puns and Poetry in Lucretius' De Rerum Natura* (Amsterdam 1980) 11-30, to whose bibliography I should add P. H. Schrijvers, "La Pensée de Lucrèce sur l'origine de la vie (*De rerum natura* V 780-820)," *Mnemosyne* 27 (1974) 245-61.

⁴⁷ Important bibliography includes O. Regenbogen, *Lukrez: Seine Gestalt in seinem Gedicht* (Leipzig 1932) = *Kleine Schriften* (Munich 1961) 296-386; O. Tescari, *Lucrezio* (Rome 1939) 47-64 (but see W. Schmid's review in *Gnomon* 20 [1944] 12-15); P. Giuffrida, *L'Epicureismo nella letteratura latina nel I secolo a.C.* vol. 1 (Torino 1950) 7-86; DeLacy (above, note 46); P. H. and E. A. DeLacy, *Philodemus on Methods of Inference* (Philadelphia 1941) 139-40, 149-52; P. H. DeLacy, "Lucretius and the History of Epicureanism," *TAPA* 79 (1948) 12-23; see especially the views of Boyancé (above, note 44) with a bibliography of his earlier publications and his debate with Giancotti, of whose works see Giancotti (above, note 44), and "La poetica epicurea in Lucrezio, Cicerone ed altri," *Ciceroniana* 3 (1961) 67-95, "Postille sui rapporti fra epicureismo e poesia in Epicuro e in Lucrezio," *GIF* 24 (1972) 192-223; Waszink (above, note 42); R. F. Arragon, "Poetic Art as a Philosophic Medium for Lucretius," *Essays in Criticism* 11 (1961) 371-89; DeWitt (above, note 46) 106-8; Anne Amory, "Obscura de re lucida carmina: Science and Poetry in *De Rerum Natura*," *YCS* 21 (1969) 143-68; Classen (above, note 32); Schrijvers (above, note 4) 325-40; Bollack 116-36.

⁴⁸ P. H. and E. A. DeLacy (above, note 47) 140.

⁴⁹ G. M. A. Grube, *The Greek and Roman Critics* (London 1965) 195-98.

Didactic poetry, then, was not a familiar aspect of Epicurean philosophic writing before Lucretius. Whatever his personal reasons for composing the *De rerum natura*, the point is that in using poetry to expound Epicureanism he made a conscious and significant innovation in the Garden. Our poet supports, defends if you will, that innovation by appeal to the master's views on good philosophic discourse. He illustrates poetry's value for philosophic exposition through comparison with the obscurity of Heraclitus and the technical jargon he exemplifies in the term *homoeomeria*. The pillar of his argument is Empedocles, both a great poet and, as evidenced by his notable place in the tradition of Epicurean doxography, an important philosopher. He concludes with a statement of his own poetic inspiration which demonstrates poetry's utility.

The pieces fit together. Lucretius' specific choice of Heraclitus, Empedocles, and Anaxagoras in this passage cannot be explained solely in terms of his immediate philosophic argument, as previous scholarship has attempted to do; rather their value as exponents of various sorts of philosophic discourse is another significant factor. The polemical doxography, a common feature of Epicurean writing and a traditional outlet for the Epicurean writer's creativity, is exploited by Lucretius to make his case for Epicurean philosophical poetry.