
David Sedley (hereafter S) has been best known hitherto for his collaboration with A.A. Long on *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge, 1987). The present volume revises and expands a series of articles drawing on his work dating back to the 1970s on the Herculaneum papyrus remains of Epicurus' *Peri Phuseos* (Ep. *Ph.*) (see ch.4), together with more recent publications on Lucretius' literary debt to Empedocles (ch.1) and the linguistic and poetic method of his latinization of Epicureanism (chs.2 and 5-7). The overall design of the book aims at a genetic interpretation of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* (L. *RN*), applying the results of discovery of a significant new Empedocles papyrus (see A. Martin and O. Primavesi, *L'Empédocle de Strasbourg* [Strasbourg, 1998]), and of S's own determination of the order of contents in Ep. *Ph.*, to what he describes as a literary goal: 'to use philosophy to illuminate poetry' (xv). The real work done is a form of literary and intellectual history, and there is no independent elucidation of Epicurean philosophy as such. The book will be of use, nevertheless, both to students of Lucretius as poet and to connoisseurs of the Epicurean corpus and school, for its detailed account of the Herculaneum finds from Ep. *Ph.* in the library of the Epicurean Philodemus, and the history of their excruciatingly slow decipherment, not to mention S's own analysis of these.

The main claim of ch.1 is that the long proem to L. *RN* Bk 1 is meant as a recognisable imitation of that of Empedocles' philosophical poem in hexameters, *Peri Phuseos* (Emp. *Ph.*)—not to be confused with Epicurus' identically titled thirty-seven books in prose (Ep. *Ph.*). S here uses the new Empedocles papyrus to confirm the view of David Furley (*Cosmic Problems* [Cambridge, 1989]) regarding Lucretius' poetic model in what the Roman poet claims as the origination of Latin didactic epic (*RN* 1.926-34//4.1-9)—at least according to S (46 with n.38)—but without mention of Cicero's *Aratea*. One might also quibble when S calls Empedocles the 'founder of the genre' of philosophical poetry (46): no reason is given for his own or Lucretius' neglect of Parmenides (and Xenophanes).
Readers will probably be convinced of the imitation, but S differs from Furley in denying that RN 1.732-33 praises Empedocles' thought as well as his poetry (13-20). Admittedly RN 1.740-41 is critical of Empedocles' first principles (the four elements and love and strife, as contrasted with Lucretius' own Epicurean atomism), yet (i) this is another materialist theory, (ii) with finite elements, (iii) appealing to combination and separation to explain generation. S's subsequent admission (21) that Empedocles' 'physicalism' is indeed included in the praise sits awkwardly with his attempt to portray him as a non-mechanist (20). Thereafter he argues that Lucretius in his proem gradually diverges from Empedocles' doctrine, while still paralleling his organisation of topics, leading eventually to contradiction and explicit refutation (30-34; cf. 28).

Both here and in the second chapter S displays considerable comparative-literary and philological skills—see for instance his solution to the problem of the relation Lucretius' initial appeal to Venus has to the philosophy of the poem (26-27), or his fascinating discussion of the poet's witty adaptation of syntax to mirror meaning (46-48), and use of deliberate Hellenisms for evocative purposes (48-49: to alienate, compare cultures, and, ultimately, to show that the philosophy transcends such barriers, 59). The quality of the discussion here placates somewhat the suspicion that this literary analysis is 'grafted on' in order to justify presenting the subsequent comparison of Lucretius' and Epicurus' contents as a contribution to understanding the poet as poet.

Moreover one important result of the attention to Lucretius' philosophical vocabulary is the identification at 39-42 of the relation between RN 4.26-44 and 45-53, the former being the revised version of this terminological doublet in the introduction of the topic of perception. The indication here of incomplete revision plays an important evidential role in the subsequent genetic explanation of the differing states of completion in which the books of RN were left (cf. 137-38). By comparison with his reconstruction of Ep. Ph., S confirms the view of Mewaldt (Hermes 1908) that Lucretius has shifted Bk 4 from an initial position before Bk 3, for which the earlier introduction was written.

Ch.3 presents S's argument, not elsewhere published (although, a colleague reports, central to S's Lucretius lectures at Cambridge since the seventies), that Lucretius was a 'fundamentalist', oblivious to
developments in philosophy and science subsequent to Epicurus himself—for instance, the discovery of the nervous system in Alexandria, with the implication that the soul must be in the brain, not the heart (68-72 with n.51). S again defends the view of Furley (Cosmic Problems), that Lucretius nowhere recognises or attacks the Stoics, yet his sophisticated arguments (at 75-76 and 78-82) for denying that Stoic cosmology is the target of RN 5.156-234 and RN 1.1052-1113 are very speculative, and confessedly incomplete (77 n.74), based on a reconstruction of a late Old Academic interpretation of the Timaeus as the target, from fragments and reports of Theophrastus and Polemon.

The case is perhaps less implausible for the Bk 1 passage (esp. 79-80); yet even here positions S takes, e.g., that Timaeus may have been interpreted as allowing for infinite extra-cosmic space (cf. Ti. 31a-b, 33b-34a), are not convincing, particularly since this contradicts the distinctive feature of the dialogue’s theory in relation to this passage, that the earth is in the centre because it is equidistant from all extremes of space (see 80). Another possibly careless remark here is that ‘Plato himself may have lacked ... a clear notion of geometrical space’ (80)—neither explained nor defended, despite its extreme controversiality. Again, S presses Cicero, Academica 1.23 (outside our world there is ‘no part of matter and no body’) into service as evidence that later Academics believed in extra-cosmic space (81). This ignores entirely the availability of a quasi-Aristotelian view: at the boundary of the whole, space (topos) just stops. But in any case, any reader of Timaeus is aware that space (chôra) is sustained by the receptacle (52b), and, where not organised by reason as part of the cosmos, this is said to be alive with the random movements of the proto-elementary powers (52d-53b): i.e., from a post-Aristotelian perspective, it is matter.

At this point S might have considered the possibility that Lucretius deliberately leaves out technical debate with current schools because his work is primarily propaedeutic, and the intended audience would not appreciate the technicalities (but see, inconsistently, 144). The attacks on opponents, taken from Epicurus, are relatively naive, being directed against comparatively simple early philosophical positions, and one could argue that Lucretius deliberately restricts the scope of the poem so as to achieve two things: the impression of critical rationality, and a refutation of those views that Roman readers of the Greek philosophical ‘classics’ as literary works may have encountered. In contemporary Rome, close familiarity
with the Hellenistic schools would be limited to those who (on S's view too) are not the intended audience: the intellectual elite who had studied in Athens, and/or employed a Greek philosopher at home.

The central chapters of the book are 4 and 5, on Epicurus' order of topics in Ph., and Lucretius' procedure in relation to this. In the former, S makes available to English readers the results of much Italian scholarship on the Herculaneum texts. Thereafter (rejecting claims for the Letter to Herodotus transmitted in Diogenes Laertius Bk 10, and the reported 'Greater Epitome', 138-44) S aims to show that Epicurus' Ph. Bks 1-15 were the exclusive source of RN, with the exception of the proems, the poetic manifesto at 1.921-50//4.1-25, the Magna Mater passage (2.600-660), the ethical diatribes closing Bks 3 and 4, and the account of the Athenian plague (6.1138-1286).

The analysis of the relation between the two works is developed with the aid of some helpful charts (see esp. that on 136). S identifies only seven passages of RN with no parallel established in Ph., and only five which do not follow the putative order of the latter. Subsequent discussion focuses on these, and inconsistencies between the proems and contents of the latter three books of RN, which unlike the former three, he argues, are not completely revised. S makes many plausible suggestions about Lucretius' unfulfilled intentions for these books (149-57). For example, the account of the plague with which RN concludes, he argues, begs a preceding section making explicit that, as Athens' greatest gift (cf. 6.4-8), Epicurus provides the only teaching that (had it been available in time) would have sufficed to minimise the suffering arising from the plague. Although a basic Epicurean principle, the endurability of pain has not previously been established in RN.

From a long fragment in Philo S argues in ch.6 that the Peripatetic Theophrastus' collection of earlier physical theories is the source for Epicurus' refutation of opponents that finds its way into RN. Where he supplies from RN 5.324-34 a lacuna in Philo's report of an argument that mankind is not everlasting as a species (based on the recent origin of crafts, on which life depends, 169-70), we might doubt the relevance of Lucretius, who mentions only shipbuilding, music and poetry, hardly necessities. Yet S thereafter shows well that 5.338-50 answers to Theophrastus' dialectical rejection of the theory of recent origins (172-74).
In the final chapter S makes a detailed study of *RN* Bk 1 so as to conclude with a case study of how Lucretius has adapted Epicurus, and to what effect. Interestingly S is able to identify (187) the precise line at which *RN* first ‘hooks up’ with *Ph.* Bk 1 (*RN* 1.145, a translation of a sentence also transmitted in the *Letter to Herodotus*). (Note: there is one initially quite confusing printer’s error in this chapter, in the translation of *RN* 1.911-12 on 191.)

The explanation of Lucretius’ rearrangements focuses on his rhetorical motives. This enables S, for instance, to defend the addition *divinitus* at 1.150 (asserting the principle that nothing comes from nothing), as appositive to *e nilo*, i.e., as ‘forestalling one argument for the existence of a controlling god or gods’, 198-99). That is neat, as against Gottschalk (in K.A. Algra et al. [eds.], *Polyhistor* [Leiden, 1996]), who criticises *divinitus* as introducing a petitio principii. S attributes the addition to rhetorical ‘urgency’, and traces the technique of foreshadowing subsequently established principles, quite absent in Epicurus, back to Empedocles.

*Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom* thus betrays by ring composition its own rhetoricity. While the author’s primary interests seem to lie in the detection and evaluation of filiations of ideas, arguments and the ordering of topics from text to text, he does an exemplary job of arranging his own text as something useful and interesting to a much wider readership than just intellectual historians. The account of Lucretius as a poet is undoubtedly in its own terms a most useful complement in English to Segal (1990) and Gail (1994), while the comparison with Epicurus will stand well beside that of Clay (1983).

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