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Physics and Therapy

Meditative elements in Lucretius' *De rerum natura*

1. After the Punic Wars, the Romans began to ask *quid Sophocles et Thespis et Aeschylus utile ferrent* (Hor. *Ep.* II.1.163). What Horace mentions here with reference to tragedy may be regarded as an important condition for the reception of Greek literature and philosophy in Rome, namely, the use of and, connected with that, the function of literature.[1] When Horace turns to philosophy, he expects to receive help and happiness for his life (*Ep.* I.1.10 f.). Key words like *recte vivere, nil admirari* or *aequus animus* characterize his *Epistles*. Especially the letter to young Lollius (*Ep.* I.2), but also the letter to Maecenas show that Horace wants to revitalize himself (*Ep.* I.1.37 *recreare*) with the help of basic elements of philosophical teachings (*elementa*) and of charms (*Ep.* I.1.36 *piacula*), together with his repeated studying of philosophical *libelli* (*Ep.* I.1.37), his memorizing of *sententiae* or his reading of classical literature — of which he expects *exempla* of vices and virtues (*Ep.* I.2.1-30) and 'starting points' thereof for moral reflections. Lollius, the addressee, obviously knows about the purposes and means of learning these philosophical teachings from ethic classes in school.[2]

Philosophical instruction as an aid for managing life and the wish to make these reflections practical also characterize the image and the curriculum of the two schools which were first favoured in Rome: the *Kêpos* and the Stoics. Despite dogmatic differences, both schools met the expectation that philosophy proves its value in life. Philosophy is understood as a science of real life, as *ars vitae*, which integrates other sciences and assigns to them the role of a preparatory course. A philosopher has not only the mere knowledge of philosophical teachings, but also the ability to turn the acquired *dogmata* into maxims of practical action in every conceivable situation. Apart from inner coherence and a thorough system, it was the ability to offer practical use that first made Epicureism and Stoicism attractive for the Romans.[3]

To make philosophical instruction practicable at any time and in any situation, it has to become a part of a person. It has to be dyed, as it were, by repetition — a metaphor for meditation and an image used by Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, but already by Plato.[4] After all, that is what philosophical pondering and repeated reading of

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[1] On this see Zintzen (1986).
[2] See MacLeod (1979), and with regard to *Ep.* I.2, see Luschnat (1963).
[3] This is suggested by Cotta's words in Cic. *Fin.* III.74; for philosophy as *ars vitae*, cf. Kidd (1978); Dihle (1986) and (1990); P. Hadot (1991).
[4] Cf. Plat. *Rep.* 430b; Sen. *Ep.* 71.31; Marc. Aurel. *Med.* V.16, see Newman (1989) 1507.

philosophical texts are there for; that is why the achievements of traditional education are prepared for use; that is the purpose of offering exercises for assimilating the teachings.[5] Epictetus' remarks on the function of philosophical texts and of literature, in general, back up Horace's verses: writing and reading texts is supposed to help one make the right decision in certain situations (*Diss.* I.1.25) by applying general principles (*Diss.* IV.4.29 f.). Not the simple accumulation of knowledge is to be encouraged, but the opportunity to test oneself (ἔλεγχος: *Diss.* II.1.32-33), and any reading as well as any writing of philosophical books should be a preparation for one's life. Epictetus refers to Socrates who — Epictetus claims — had written a lot exactly for that reason: to test himself as well as other people. This legitimizes Epictetus' *Dissertationes* as exercise books for other people and also Marcus Aurelius' *Meditationes* as material for one's self-test (*Med.* III.11; IX.3;5).[6]

Epictetus' words might remind us of the end of Epicurus' *Letter to Herodotus*, where Epicurus promises that the reader will be able to solve particular problems by keeping to the theoretical principles of his physiology. Helping to help yourself (βοηθεῖν αὐτοῖς) — that is the purpose of philosophical texts also from Epicurus' point of view (*Ep. Hdt.* 35). In his inscription, even Diogenes of Oenoanda offers help (3.III.4 Smith) for those affected by the plague of false opinions of things (3.IV.5 Smith). In addition to instruction in *dogmata* he gives advice on how to take advantage of those dogmas in certain situations of daily life. In fr. 74 Smith, for example, we find a soliloquy on general topics (προσομιλεῖν ἑαυτῷ). It demonstrates how to recall at any time the naturalness of certain emotions and how to discriminate between those which are natural and those which are not. By using the general phrase 'this or that' (τόδε καὶ τόδε), he allows the reader to insert for himself what is burdening him at that moment, and to check its naturalness. We are hence dealing with one of those patterns for personal use and practical application that we can find in Epictetus and Marcus, but also in Seneca. The connection to daily life turns these patterns of reflection into meditations.[7] When creating these patterns, the authors use rhetorical and philosophical argumentation as well as literary *topoi*. With their help, the reader's permanent reflection is supposed to be enhanced and, consequently, they offer help in life. Therefore, the result is a link between the instruction by the content and meditative elements, which is a characteristic particularly of Roman philosophical literature in imperial times.

Accordingly, attention has to be drawn to the fact that this can be correspondingly observed in the case of Lucretius. Of course, the topic of his work is Epicurean physics. Despite the interdependence of ethics and physics in Epicureanism, there are in Lucretius' poem not too many passages with ethical instruction. So far, important interpreters like W.Y. Sellar, C. Bailey, or W. Schmid have pointed to the moral

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[5] On how Epicureans used texts see Angeli (1986) 53 ff.; I. Hadot (1969a) 347 ff.; Erler (1993) 281 ff. On the therapeutic aspect of philosophical argument and philosophical texts see Gigante (1975); Nussbaum (1986) and (1994) (on Lucretius, see 140 ff.).

[6] See Rutherford (1989) 26 ff.

[7] On the meditative aspect of this passage see Erler (1997b); very helpful on meditation in antiquity are: Rabbow (1954) (perhaps too much stress on Christian parallels). P. Hadot (1991); I. Hadot (1969b) (for Seneca); Hijmans (1959) (for Epictetus) and Voelke (1993); see also Newman (1989), who deals with the Stoic tradition only.

teaching of the author with reference to passages with diatribe-like character, but they have focussed mainly on aspects relating to literary history.[8] I, however, would like to emphasize the functional aspect of certain passages for the reader. Lucretius organized numerous passages of his poem in a way that not only illustrates the philosophical method or artistic ability of a *poeta doctus*, but at the same time appeals to the reader to examine with reflection the knowledge won by reading. As is the case with later authors, the content goes together with the formal exercise. The meditative character of the above-mentioned passages is revealed if you take into account discussions in contemporary Epicureism on the role of the *artes* and if you keep an eye on Roman expectations and later, meditative literature.

By using the example of the depiction of the plague, of a part of Lucretius' analysis of love in Book IV, and the hymn to Venus, I shall show that Lucretius wants to give the reader an opportunity for examining and applying gained knowledge, and how he did it. I will gratefully attempt to build upon the findings of other scholars and highlight some new aspects.[9]

2. Horace, a reader interested in philosophy, expects from reading philosophical texts that he can use them to control his emotions and to manage life, which is what Lucretius' educational poem *De rerum natura* claims to do. Lucretius wants to offer what Horace hopes for: his reader — the implied and the real one — is to undergo his *recreare* (I.942); he offers *elementa* of Epicurean physics (I.81); and he permanently asks that *nil admirari*. When Lucretius regards the content of his poem as 'medicine' and the poetic organisation as a means to lead man to happiness (I.921-950; IV.1-25), his yearning for the *utile* becomes apparent, which on the one hand follows in the wake of Epicurus' description of exercises for philosophical texts and, on the other hand, complies with Horace's expectation regarding philosophical texts. In contrast to the Hellenistic educational poem, then, Lucretius combines his work with a serious educational intention.[10] If you look at Lucretius' remarks on the implied reader in his poem — with whom the real reader is supposed to identify — it becomes clear that Lucretius addresses some beginner who is confronted with a new subject (II.1024 f.), who does not have any experience with the instructions of Epicurus (I.50 ff.) and who, consequently, is susceptible to *religio* and myths (I.102-103) and also to the fear of death, and who is in danger due to erroneous ideas of the gods. That kind of reader has to be freed from an almost child-like fear (II.55-58; III.87-90; VI.35-38). To do this, Lucretius takes on the role of Socrates, because he picks up a comparison which Cebes uses asking for Socrates' instructions in the *Phaedo* (77e). Platonic dialectic *epode*, however, is replaced by the teaching of Epicurus, cast into the shape of a poem.[11] Lucretius, then, aims at a Roman reader who

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[8] Sellar (1889) 280-407; Bailey (1947) 1 ff.; Schmid (1978).
[9] Meditative aspects in Lucretius are discussed by Schrijvers (1969) and (1970), esp.128 ff., on the reader and function of the text, see Clay (1983b), esp. chap. 5 (169 ff.).
[10] See Pöhlmann (1973); Effe (1977) 66 ff.
[11] On different kinds of readers, see Clay (1983b) 212 ff. I would like to add the category of the *lector doctus et philosophus* (see below); Mitsis (1993), who however does not consider the Platonic parallel and Conte (1991), who stresses the aspect of *megalophrosyne* which comes close to what I am arguing for here.

is a beginner in Epicurean philosophy. Therefore it becomes obvious why Lucretius restricts himself almost exclusively to physics. In doing so, he might be following the curriculum of Epicurean philosophy, as Diogenes and other sources suggest. First, atomistic physics should abolish the fear of god and of death, then ethics will follow (*Ep. Hdt.* 35, 83).[12]

However, Lucretius does not want to instruct only a beginner in Epicurean philosophy, but also a Roman reader familiar with Greek and Roman *paideia*. In contrast to the attempts of his predecessors — which are unavailable to us — Lucretius uses the *artes* in his effort to propagate Epicurean philosophy in Rome. It is not only at the beginning, by means of the hymn, that he appeals to the *lector doctus* to take an interest in problems of Epicurean atomism, psychology, cosmology, and meteorology; but in the course of the poem, too, the *poeta doctus* refers to the literary tradition, which reaches from Homer, Hesiod, and Empedocles via Thucydides and Euripides to Hellenistic poetry and which includes, for example, Ennius and the Neoterics within the Roman sphere.[13] He wants to offer *lucida carmina* on a *res obscura* and, in doing so, he wants to employ the *musaeus lepos* as means of supporting the utility of his verses (I.933 ff.). He thus appears to take sides in a discussion within the Epicurean school, which we can witness in hints thanks to fragments of Philodemus' *Ad contubernales*. According to them, the value of the *paideia* is to be defended within their own ranks against enemies of books, because it gives a chance to understand other works better and to propagate their own teachings. Philodemus believes restraint in dealing with books to be harmful (*Ad cont.* XIV, 15 ff. Angeli: ἐν τοῖς βυβλίοις ἀνεργησία).[14] In Philodemus' opinion, reading classical literature seems to have a positive effect concerning moral instruction. As we can see in his work *De bono rege*, some passages in Homer are rather helpful when taken as 'starting points' for reflections on acceptable behaviour.[15]

This is an attitude reminiscent of Horace's reading of the Homeric poems in Praeneste and also, in many ways, of Epictetus' postulates. Literature serves as a reservoir of such 'starting points' or reflections, which are not simply bound to the area of grammarians, but lead to philosophy. A merely philological approach has already left the young Epicurus unsatisfied and is rejected by the later Epicureans as well (D.L. X.2). The 'starting points' rather have to meet with philosophical interest that tends to establish a link with life. Philological considerations are accepted only as help for, and as a first stage of, philosophy as related to life.[16]

3. It seems to me that against this background the much discussed depiction of the plague in Lucretius[17] can be better understood, and that its function, as intended by

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[12] Kleve (1979) regards the poem as a course for beginners because of its physical content.

[13] See Kenney (1970).

[14] See Angeli (1988) 61 ff.; Erler (1993) and the essays in Obbink (1995b), cf. the summary by Clay in Obbink (1995b) 3 ff.

[15] Cf. col. XLIII 15-20, p. 109 Dorandi; for the concept of 'starting points', see Asmis (1991) 30 f.; Obbink (1995a) 191 and n. 8, and Erler (1997b) for later testimonies.

[16] Cf. S.E. *M.* I.46 ff., 270 ff.; Sen. *Ep.* 108.23; Epict. *Diss.* I.11.39; Marc. Aurel. *Med.* I.16.4; see Dihle (1986) 207; Blank (1995) 184 f.

[17] On lit. see Erler (1994) 429; Gale (1994) 112 f., 225 ff.

the author, becomes clearer. The 'plague' is one of the numerous passages, where Lucretius refers to examples from classical literature and where he reveals just that to his educated reader. However he does not simply play an esoteric game with literature that would only appeal in a Hellenistic manner to the philological perspicacity and literary competence of the reader. In fact, the actual purpose of the passage is disclosed only by a philological analysis. It reveals 'starting points' supposed to prompt to philosophical reflections that are based on the qualifications achieved by the reader during the course of reading. With the depiction of the plague, Lucretius demonstrates the 'moral' reading of a 'classic' and expects the reader, who is educated through literature and now, having read the work, instructed philosophically as well, to use the stimulus and to take advantage of his philosophical knowledge to interpret the philosophical observations. By doing so, the author's instruction of the reader becomes a self-examination by the reader himself, which is exactly what Epictetus and Epicurus want. The plague (VI.1138 ff.), described because of its effect on human behaviour, is to be regarded in the context of Lucretius' consistent demand of *mitte mirari* from the reader, and of his advice to strip irritating incidents of their disquieting character by means of a reference to the atomic basis of things. The didactic intention of the passage is already suggested by the proem of Book VI, according to which the arbitrary spreading of disaster by nature is to be shown and rules for what to do in the chaos of this disaster are to be exemplified (VI.29-32). The plague is one of those terrifying phenomena. The reader is therefore put to the test. Having made his way through the arguments to the 'white finishing-pillar' (VI.92 f.), he has to prove that he has understood the essential implications and intentions of Epicurus' teachings.[18]

Again, the educated reader is being appealed to, because Lucretius' intention becomes completely clear only against the background of the Thucydidean description of the plague. In Lucretius, the committed and rather subjective description emphasizes emotions, while in Thucydides (II.49-50) it appears to be objective almost with a clinical distance.[19] Stylistic devices giving that impression are used for the sake of a psychagogic function. In contrast with Thucydides, Lucretius sums up desperate and amoral behaviour under the headword 'result of fear of death' (*anxius angor*). Lucretius is not so much interested in the terrible disaster itself as in human behaviour in the face of the disease. The reader, so to speak, finds himself in Athens as an observer of the atrocious events, as a player helplessly exposed to the circumstances (VI.1206). While in Thucydides we have a neutral description of the situation, in Lucretius it is filled with moral connotations.[20] When, for example, Thucydides talks of the despair of the victims and regards it as the major evil of the disease (II.51.3), we find the same in Lucretius, but there it is connected with psychological analyses which exceed by far what can be found in Thucydides. When Lucretius talks of people quarrelling in front of their relatives' funeral pyres or of losing the fear of god and neglecting the rites — in short, when he talks of the collapse of

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[18] See Clay (1983b) 260 ff.
[19] Commager (1957); Bright (1971); Gale (1994) 227.
[20] Cf. e. g. VI.1239-1242, 1152; Thuc. II.49.4, VI.11.58; see the discussion by Commager (1957).

civilization, Lucretius sums it all up under the headword 'result of fear of death', which has shown its effect on human behaviour. And when Thucydides talks analytically of the loss of extremities as the second stage of the disease while Lucretius describes it as a result of fear, it becomes clear that his intention is not so much to depict the disease itself as to depict human behaviour in the face of the disease.

Thucydides, too, pursues a didactic course.[21] By describing the symptoms he intends to take remedial action for similar cases in the future. He hopes to prevent the plague and to change the situation with his instructions. In Lucretius, however, the focus is not so much on analyzing the medical phenomenon, as on human behaviour in the face of that phenomenon. It is not about defeating a disease, but about educating the reader. Man has to change with respect to his behaviour when confronted with the immutable. This is what Epicurus demands over and over again: what is bad are not the strange phenomena but the wrong opinions about them.[22] This is what the implied reader in the text is repeatedly asked to do, and this is also what the real reader and interpreter of the text is obliged to do. By textual nuances Lucretius prompts us to read the text with a keen eye towards the problem of confronting a phenomenon, i. e. the plague, and man's assessment of it, and to see the effects of a wrong evaluation of the phenomenon. In short, Lucretius shows what makes reading the classics acceptable for contemporary Epicureanism, the way it is acceptable for Epictetus. You could say that the depiction of the plague is a rewarding area for philologists, who would point out the above-mentioned differences. However, the actual intention of the passage and its relevance for daily life become clear only on philosophical reflection: it illustrates what Demetrius of Laeconia and other Epicureans practise as *philologia medicans,* namely, that philology is only acceptable if it allows itself to be guided by philosophical intentions: reading a classic for moral instruction.[23] If fear of death is the reason for the collapse of civilization, then it has to be shunned. To show that this is possible was the topic of many examinations carried out in Lucretius' earlier books, which teach the reader how to judge death. The recognition that the soul is mortal, that death is meaningless, and that we should be cheerful even in the face of disaster, now proves its worth — if this knowledge is internalized and if the therapeutical aids works for self-therapy as well. In his depiction of the plague, Lucretius is not interested in merely illustrating the *conditio humana.*[24] Neither plague nor death are disasters, but — to speak with Diogenes of Oenoanda — the plague within man, which consists of an improper attitude towards this catastrophe.[25] The nuances brought into the original text by Lucretius are, and should be, a stimulus for personal considerations. A literary game in the sense of Hellenism is being functionalized by setting a moral goal. It is supposed to create a

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[21] Cf. II.48.3; compare I.22.3, Thucydides' intention is well discussed by Rechenauer (1991) 226d ff.

[22] Cf. IV.465: *propter opinatus animi, quos addimus ipsi,* cf. IV.816; Epicur. *Ep. Hdt.* 50, 70: ψεῦδος ... ἐν τῷ προσδοξαζομένῳ ἀεὶ ἔστι, Schrijvers (1969) 134 ff.; (1970) 145 ff., following Rabbow (1954) 145 ff. See also P. Hadot (1991) 69 ff.

[23] See Erler (1993).

[24] Here I disagree with Segal (1990) 228 ff.

[25] See Commager (1957); for the 'plague within man' see also Diogenes of Oenoanda (fr. 3.IV.3 ff. Smith) and Marc. Aurel. (*Med.* IX.2.3).

certain habit and to make philosophy practical. Hence, the depiction of the plague has a meditative character.

4. Direct references to the practice of meditation, which could serve as an example for, as well as an appeal to the reader, can also be found in other parts of Lucretius' work. The repetitions in the text, for instance, may be viewed in this way, the demand to memorize certain truths (II.581-585) or the suggestion to use patterns of argument for personal *exercitium* appear to fit in here, too; and so does the catalogue of dead, important figures from philosophy and politics, which gives evidence of the triviality of death.[26] From a literary point of view, the content of the catalogue is the traditional *topos* of consolation: *non tibi soli*. Lucretius' demand at the beginning of the passage 'this you might say to yourself from time to time' (III.1024: *hoc etiam tibi tute interdum dicere possis*), however, brings to mind the short meditation in Diogenes mentioned above: the *dicere* corresponds to προσομιλεῖν — Epictetus uses ἐπιλέγειν (e.g. *Ench*. 9) — *interdum* reminds of κατὰ πάντα καιρόν. Here we also have the offering of exemplary meditation which the reader can use as a pattern. Marcus Aurelius has evidently picked up this example. Marcus most probably consulted Lucretius, whom he knew through Fronto, when compiling his consolation catalogues on famous, dead people, which were exercise-texts for his personal use.[27]

Marcus gives us a better understanding of Lucretius' practical intentions also from another perspective.

The end of Book IV offers the depreciation of the passion of love, which makes a mere *voluptas* in the sense of Epicurus impossible. This happens within the main theme of Book IV — how to deal with images and how to evaluate them correctly.[28] Images do have an essential role in the act of love, but they are also responsible for wrongly assuming that, for instance, you could become one with the person sending out the *simulacra* (IV.1111). You ought to keep clear of such an erroneous evaluation. The attack on the passion of love begins with reducing love to a physiological process (IV.1037-1057). Based on this, the actual rejection of passionate love comes next, because such love is a disadvantage both in the presence (IV.1073-1120) and in the absence (IV.1058-1072) of the beloved person. In connection with this, *remedia amoris* are offered, which include meditative elements in this part of the text.[29] As a defence against the tortures of love Lucretius proposes, for example, 'to scare away from you what feeds your love and to turn your love some other way' (IV.1064: *alio convertere mentem*) and to 'turn the movements of the mind elsewhere' (IV.1072: *aut alio possis animi traducere motus*). The evidence of Cicero's *De finibus* shows that this is an appeal to the Epicurean method of meditation, the *avocatio*.[30] However, I would like to comment upon the verses in which love is being reduced to its

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[26] See Schrijvers (1970) 231 ff.
[27] See *Med*. III.3; IV.48; VI.47; for Marcus' knowledge of Lucretius' poem argues Dalfen (1967) 194 ff.
[28] See Brown (1987) 60 ff., 180 ff.
[29] Cf. IV.1073-1120, 1121-1140, 1141-1191; Schrijvers (1970) 133 ff.
[30] See Cic. *Tusc*. III.28, 32, 34; cf. Rabbow (1954) 145 ff.; Schrijvers (1969); P. Hadot (1991) 18 ff.

physical purpose (IV.1037 ff.) and which — like the depiction of the plague — were the reason for conclusions about the author's mental condition. Love is indeed reduced quite drastically to a mechanical process of seeing and ejaculating, while the element of the participants' individuality is completely left out. Just like in the case of blood gushing in the direction from which the wound had been inflicted, the beauty of a body causes an emotion that leads to an accumulation of *semen* wishing to discharge. The depiction of love and its reduction to physical processes ends with the remark (IV.1058): 'this is Venus for us; this is where love derives its name from' (*haec Venus est nobis; hinc autemst nomen amoris*). According to Lucretius, *Venus* stands for nothing but sexual desire. This conception of *amor* plays with the similarity of *amor* and *umor* (humidity), which is being used in the physiological description of love several times.[31] The physiological analysis serves as a basis for criticizing faulty evaluations of love and for giving advice concerning how to deal with this passion. It is true that there is some disagreement on the question if there really is an argumentative relationship between the remark on 'the true nature of Venus' in verses IV. 1058-1060 and the preceding verses; the hypothesis[32] however that the final passage does not start with the definition of love in verse IV.1058 but already in IV.1037 f., can be supported. It is helpful to show that this passage illustrates Epicurean method and that later authors like Marcus used this method as a meditative exercise.

The definition of love on a physiological basis is a rather sketchy description of love in the sense of sex. One cannot regard that definition to be the result of dialectical examination (ὅρος), but this is just what is interesting: this procedure suits the Epicureans' general rejection of definitions, which they consider useless for their analyses. Discussions should begin not with definitions but with an outline account based on empiricism.[33] Epicurus himself demonstrates such outline accounts (ὑπογραφαί) for example in his treatment of the gods in the *Letter to Menoeceus* (123; cf. also *Ep. Pyth.* 88). He lists features and general ideas connected with the matter; however, not every idea is to be accepted, but only those which focus on the natural observation of things. In that way, wrong opinions are prevented.[34] This is exactly what Lucretius demonstrates when depicting his idea of love on a natural basis. By reducing love to physical processes and by emphasizing some features, he outlines what the word 'love' in the sense of sexual desire conveys with regard to right ideas. Of course, the purpose of this method is not simply a definition for its own sake. The outline account has a therapeutic purpose: the correct understanding of *amor* is a basis for rejecting wrong ideas concerning the 'passion of love,' and it helps to avoid irritations resulting from misunderstanding.

It seems to me that this interpretation of the passage can be supported by considering a parallel procedure recommended and demonstrated by Marcus Aurelius as a meditative means to free oneself from irritations. A passage in his *Meditationes* looks

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[31] Cf. IV.1051,1056,1065 f.; on 1058, see Friedländer (1941) 338 (= 1986, 292 f.).
[32] See Brown (1987) 64 and comm. *ad loc.*
[33] See Anonym. *In Theaet.* col. XXII 39 Bastianini & Sedley, and *id.* (1995) 512 (*ad loc.*). For 'definition' in Epicureanism see Asmis (1984) 39 ff. and Long & Sedley (1987) vol. I. 190-195.
[34] See Obbink (1992) 199 ff.

like an explanation of our passage in Lucretius: Marcus provides the following instruction as an important stand-by for meditation (*Med.* III.11):

> to the stand-bys mentioned add yet another, that a definition or delineation should be made of every object that presents itself, so that we may see what sort of thing it is in its essence stripped of its adjuncts ... and tell over with ourselves both its particular designation and the names of elements, that compose it and into which it will be disintegrated.[35]

This exercise should result in an attitude of mind, viz. megalophrosyne (*Med.* III.11):

> for nothing is so able to create greatness of mind as is the power methodically and truthfully to test each thing that meets one in life.

In his *Meditationes* Marcus applies this method repeatedly. The search for a correct definition on physiological grounds, which is practised by Marcus, leads to rather drastic descriptions of otherwise admired and valued phenomena (*Med.* XI.17): delicacies become cadavers of fishes, Falernian wine becomes grape juice, a purple garment becomes wool soaked in snails' blood and finally, even the love act is described as a merely physiological action, in a way reminiscent of Lucretius. In fact a connection with later parts of the diatribe against love can be established.[36]

However, it seems to me that especially verses IV.1037 ff. are to be viewed against this background. Even if we do not want to speak of 'Verekelung', it is clear that the reduction to a physical process does serve to unmask love as a misleading passion and to show its true nature. Lucretius' procedure becomes clear when we consider this method. It becomes also clear that verses IV.1058 ff. in fact belong to the preceding part as an element of the whole chain of arguments. Lucretius offers an outline with a list of features (ὑπογραφή) in a way demanded by Marcus. In contrast to Epictetus, the reduction of phenomena to their true physical status plays the central part in Marcus' *Meditationes* as well (*Med.* X.9: οὐκ ἀφυσιολογήτως). His aim is to assess phenomena correctly, to end irritations and to abolish the 'plague' in thinking (*Med.* IX.2.3). The Epicurean, however, will not accept his request for a definition; but Marcus' alternative proposal to offer an outline list of features on a natural ground should find the consent of a Stoic as well as an Epicurean.[37] This comparison, of course, is not supposed to blur the dogmatic differences between the platonizing Stoic Marcus and Lucretius, but the methodical parallels are remarkable indeed. Moreover, Marcus, too, has no qualms in considering atomic physics as something that might cause freedom from mental disturbance (*Med.* VI.10).[38] He has the same goal as Lucretius, and, considering this mutual goal, the convergence in the meditative method is not surprising. Like Lucretius, Marcus wants to ban a 'child-like fear of man' (*Med.* II.12) by pointing to the naturalness of certain pro-

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[35] Translation by Haines (1916). Rutherford (1989) 144 takes this passage as an example of 'outspokenness', but we are also dealing with a meditative device; see P. Hadot (1991) 73.

[36] Rabbow (1954) 42-44 has pointed to this method, referring to it as an unmasking or 'Verekelung', cf. Schrijvers (1969) 370 ff.; *id.* (1970) 134 ff.

[37] For the Stoics, see D.L. VII.60 ff. Long & Sedley (1989) point out (Stoics p. 194, Epicureans p. 101) that the 'outline account' is an Aristotelian concept, which both Stoics and Epicureans inherited.

[38] Cf. IV.3, 5; VI.10; XI.11, see Asmis (1989) esp. 2235 f.

cesses; like Lucretius and Horace, Marcus wants the meditating person to restore himself (*Med.* IV.3.3: ἀνανέου σεαυτόν). But above all, Marcus foresees a special attitude of mind of the meditating person as the actual effect of the proposed method: the *megalophrosyne* or *magnitudo animi,* which allows him to overview things and to assess phenomena correctly (*Med.* III.11). That is just what the Epicureans expect from an appropriate observation of natural processes. We can gather this from a remark by Metrodorus; Lucretius announces this attitude in the proemium of the third book (III.14 ff.); and it is this condition which the meditation on the physiological status of love is meant to support: an attitude of mind free from wonder (*nec mirum*) and manifesting itself in a special way of living.[39]

It is now clear how Lucretius tries to achieve the third aim of his philosophical reading, an aim hoped for by Horace, and how he tries to foster *recte vivere.* He uses a meditative method that is obviously traditional and that fits well into the context of describing physics: both Lucretius and Marcus expect that from such meditative exercises there will grow a proper attitude, that is, that philosophy will be practical. Something else becomes clear as well. Passages that appear rather drastic because of the meditative method under discussion have led interpreters of Marcus' *Meditationes* to biographical conclusions similar to those drawn after reading Lucretius' poem. What was considered a sign of madness or at least of deep pessimism in Lucretius, was to confirm reports on a stomach ulcer in Marcus and to allow conjectures about his *psyche.* In the case of Marcus, it has been proven that this view is groundless by pointing at the meditative function of the passages used as evidence.[40] What works for Marcus can also work for Lucretius. The depiction of the plague, the analysis of love and further passages obviously serve the more important purpose of internalizing Epicurean teachings and hence of making them practical for the reader. For this reason they do not allow any conclusion concerning the author's mental condition. Like the depiction of the plague, the analysis of love is more than a literary game.

5. In addition to dogmatic and methodical instruction, the reader receives guidance and an opportunity to test the knowledge gained through reading. There are often passages that enhance the picture of the pessimistic poet and philosopher. The hymn to Venus at the beginning belongs among these passages. The problem of the proemium is rather complex and does not need to be discussed here once again.[41] What is interesting for us is the question of whether and how the hymn can be used as an aid to help oneself.

It has rightfully been remarked that the hymn is conventional in structure and content: the goddess Venus is called on and her power over the world is described (I.6-20). The hymn closes with a plea for creative strength for Lucretius' work (I.24-28) and for peace. This has confused some interpreters, who refer to Epicurus' theology

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[39] Cf. Metrodorus SV 10 = Metr. fr. 37 Körte; on the relation of *magnitudo animi* and physics, see P. Hadot (1991) 77 ff. and with regard to the reader, Conte (1991) 1 ff.
[40] P. Hadot (1992) 261 ff.
[41] See Erler (1994) 416, 469 ff.; Gale (1994) 208 ff. On the relation of the hymn to the end of the poem, see Müller (1978) 218-220.

according to which the gods lead a blissful life without contact with man. Why, then, has a goddess been called upon for peace and help and has she been portrayed as working actively in the world? Does Lucretius the poet contradict the Epicurean philosopher here?

First, we have to go back to the implied reader: he is a beginner in philosophy and educated in literature. And he has to be instructed and freed from wrong ideas about, for example, the gods. Therefore he has to undergo a philosophical *exercitium*. For such a *lector doctus,* the hymn, which in form reminds one of Empedocles,[42] creates no problem as an *exordium* of an educational poem.[43] The reader might find it irritating, however, when the *lector doctus* has become a *lector philosophus*. Then he will understand that, for an Epicurean, the world follows the laws of atomism, that divine interference is neither necessary nor existent, and that the gods do not take care of man. It is only at that point that the existence and the content of the hymn might lead to confusion. If you recall the exercise-like character of other passages, though, this confusion might well be a provocation for the reader, planned by the author as a stimulus to heal oneself with the help of the newly won material. Also in this case, then, a *philologia medicans* would be asked for; like the one practised by Demetrius and others with the professed goal to provide the interpreters' quietness of soul with the right understanding of important passages.[44]

We have to keep in mind that in *De pietate*, Philodemus does not include the genre of the hymn in his criticism of poetry.[45] An appropriate statement about the deity to which one refers is required. One must not associate wrong names or wrong ideas with it, but should have a pure idea of the deity. The criterion is to say what is appropriate (πρέπον) for the gods with respect to what is put forward by *Kyria Doxa* 1 and other passages about the gods' existence.[46] Cult and hymn are legitimate means of worship, but they get a new task, since they can fulfill a useful purpose for Epicureans, too. Although there is an impassible barrier between them, man can connect with god by taking god's existence as a norm and as a model for moral emulation (*homoiôsis*) for his own behaviour. This emulation is the decisive factor for the condition of man and his *eudaimonia*, as happiness can only be achieved by those who follow the right ideas about the world and the gods (*Ep. Men.* 135). Epicurus (*Ep. Men.* 123 f.) and Lucretius (VI.68 ff.) warn us that disquieting ideas are a punishment for those who do not reject what is unworthy and alien to the gods (*dis indigna putare alienaque pacis eorum*). In this case, superstition and unhappiness are the results (V.1161 ff.).

It becomes obvious that praying does not simply mean talking to the god anymore, but visualizing his nature; the goal is not so much the object of worship as the praying person and his disposition. A sentence of the *Gnomologium Vaticanum* (*SV* 32), it seems to me, makes this clear: 'worshipping the wise man is a great good for the

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[42] See Sedley (1989c).
[43] On this, see Classen (1968)102-109; Schrijvers (1970) 260 n. 31; Gale (1994) 46 ff.
[44] See Erler (1993).
[45] *PHerc.* 1428 cols X I5-XII 10, Henrichs (1974) 21-22, well discussed by Obbink (1995a) 206 ff.
[46] On hymns within Epicurean contexts, see Obbink (1995a) 204 f, who refers to *Ep. Men.* 123 f.; but see also Lucr. V.1161 ff.

worshipper' (ὁ τοῦ σοφοῦ σεβασμὸς ἀγαθὸν μέγα τῷ σεβομένῳ). This applies to the philosophical wise man — like Epicurus — as well as to the gods. Appropriate prayer and hymn, then, support the care for one's own disposition and self-therapy and by that they serve the general purpose of philosophy; they are not a precondition of philosophical effort but become part of it. With the therapeutic function of hymn and prayer for the praying person and with the warning of projecting wrong ideas, the frame has been set for the comprehension and the purpose of the hymn to Venus. The *lector doctus et philosophus* might recognize that the hymn is a test as well. He will then try to overcome his confusion by interpreting the hymn properly.

That this could happen is shown by Philodemus in *De pietate*.[47] There he gives an interpretation of numerous poetic passages offering accounts of gods, and he criticizes what does not fit the Epicurean *prepon*. With this negative list, though, Philodemus at the same time provides *e contrario* a list of features essential for the existence and the understanding of the Epicurean gods. They ought to be picked up as starting points and could lead to philosophy. An interpretation of this kind would show what the Venus of the hymn is *not*. Lucretius himself points out another means of interpretation: the contrast between mythological-allegorical depiction and Epicurean truth (II.646-651) is shown in the second book (II.600 ff.) by his criticism of an allegoric interpretation of tales about the Great Mother Earth, written by learned poets from the old days.[48] Like Philodemus in his interpretation of poetic passages, Lucretius offers a negative catalogue of ideas that contradict the *prepon* of Epicurean ideas of the gods and that are therefore not to be related to the deity (II.645: *longe sunt tamen a vera ratione repulsa*). Additionally, he gives a methodically important hint concerning the usage of metonymy and allegory (II.655-660). According to him, both may be used, as long as this is done with the knowledge of truth, i.e. Epicurean physics (II.659: *vera re*).[49] The myths of the old poets are accordingly contrasted with Epicurean physics.

Again, Lucretius does not only ask the *lector doctus* to find literary relations between the hymn and tradition; he also appeals to the *lector philosophus* to discuss the hymn's content regarding the philosophical essence. In the poem, Lucretius gives clues as to the criterion, the method, and the purpose according to which this has to be done. Moreover, the interpreter receives help even with the outcome of his interpretation. Lucretius indicates how we should relate Venus to the basics of Epicurean physics. Venus is closely connected with nature already in the second book. By identifying the goddess' abilities in the hymn with effects of nature and pleasure, the verses II.167-177 do not simply refer to the topics of the hymn to Venus, but work like Lucretius' own interpretation of the hymn. Other passages could be mentioned as well: during the course of the poem, a *Venus gubernans* becomes a *natura gubernans,* the goddess of love becomes a physiological process, the donator of

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[47] See Obbink (1995a) 206 ff.
[48] See Gale (1994) 26 ff., 208 ff.
[49] Schrijvers (1970) 58 and n. 9 rightly, I think, argues that *vera re* is an ablative rather than to be understood adverbially (*revera*).

Physics and Therapy

lepos becomes Calliope, the muse of Epicurean philosophy, who also brings the peace asked for in the hymn.[50]

Again there is a cooperation of instruction, methodical requirements and possible applications. What is tried by the interpreter correlates with the intention of the author: namely, to relate the statements of the hymn to the truth of Epicurean physics. To do so, it is not necessary to stick to only one definite key. The interpreter has to keep in mind the *prepon* and to be aware of the role of metonymy: he must not confuse his ideas with what is the real nature of the Epicurean goddess and make it part of his *religio*. With this, the many aspects of the complex world of images remain acceptable: Venus as law of nature, *ataraxia*, katastematic pleasure, *voluptas*, spring, or love.[51] As with the plague, the reader is requested to use the text as a starting point for his own reflections, and to ask himself if the depiction of an 'Epicurean goddess' contains something unworthy.[52] With a correct evaluation on philosophical grounds, the hymn serves to visualize a principle of Epicurean philosophy dealt with in the poem: the meaning and effect of *physis*.[53] Moreover, the true nature of the goddess and her separate existence appear *e contrario*: the hymn helps to visualize the divine area. In both cases it performs the task which Epicureanism assigns to it: it asks one to consider the right attitude towards the divine and the world. It is not an address to God but becomes a meditation on him and the world. Again, the passage is an appeal to the philological interests of the *lector doctus*, who however has to relate his discoveries to philosophy. As with the plague, you could call it a test for the philosophically educated reader. When he passes the test he will gain more *magnitudo animi*, supplied with the ability to see things *aequo animo* (I.42). The hymnic prayer becomes a meditation and a part of the philosophical *exercitium* offered to the reader throughout the poem. This is not philosophy yet, but it is leading towards it. Literary hymns are aids for meditation, then: this is the function in which hymn and prayer can also be found in later meditative literature. Epictetus, for example, regards hymn and prayer as a chance to strenghten the mental condition of the praying person by visualizing the nature of the divine.[54] Prayers and hymns, like the Zeus hymn of Cleanthes (*Ench.* 53), become part of an exercise to manage life (*Diss.* III.24.95). Epictetus himself gives examples of prayers that become meditations (*Diss.* III.24-102), just like what we suspected for the Venus hymn. Marcus, too, says something similar about the psychagogic effect of the prayer (*Med.* IX.40). Of course, the Stoics are not so much interested in merely visualizing the natural way of the world as in the voluntary subordination to the divine law. What they have in common with the Epicureans is the change of direction: the actual addressee is not a god but the pray-

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[50] Like Gale (1994) 212 I would prefer to call this 'redefinement of Venus' rather than an 'eclipse of Venus' as Clay (1983b) 226 ff. suggests.

[51] A list of interpretations is offered by Hahn (1941). That the figure of Venus is complex and symbolic rather than restricted to a simple allegoric interpretation (so Gale (1994) 217) makes the description of her a meditative device. All that counts is the fact that it is possible to interpret it on a physical basis. This might remind one of the method of *pleonachos tropos* which should provide an acceptable explanation of irritating physical phenomena, not necessarily the only one.

[52] Cf. II.598 f.: *quapropter merito maternum nomen adepta est* [*sc. terra* or *dea*].

[53] Clay (1983b) 82 ff.

[54] See Rabbow (1954) 305 n. 33.

ing person, inasmuch as the prayer is supposed to help to obtain a certain attitude and thus to strengthen the soul like other meditative exercises. In both cases, interpreting becomes a part of philosophy as therapy.

6. Let me now conclude: at the beginning we pointed out that the aspect of *utile* is an important component of philosophy as it was established in Rome. Epicurean philosophy satisfies this typically Roman demand, since it tries to connect philosophical dogma to the art of leading one's life. Roman authors try to support the effort of their reader to *recte vivere, nil admirari* and *recreare*. I have given several examples from Lucretius' poem that show how Lucretius tries to demonstrate Epicurean dogmata as well as to prove their usefulness for managing one's life. The poet does this by giving methodical clues, and by a formal organisation that provides the reader with the chance to test his knowledge once gained and to make it part of an attitude towards life. In a very special — maybe Roman — way, then, Lucretius' educational poem is protreptic and it aims at making Greek philosophical theory *utile*.[55] Horace's defence against confusion in Gnatia by using Epicurean teachings in the shape of Lucretian *piacula* (*Serm.* I.5.97 ff.) illustrates what Epicurus is aiming at and what Lucretius' poem has to offer: to be an aid to help us to manage our own life.

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[55] I try to develop this approach in Erler (1997a,b).