

Munro Translation of Lucretius

Post by “Godfrey” of September 4, 2021 at 8:57 PM

From Richard McKirahan's Philosophy Before Socrates:

"Aristotle reports that Thales believed magnets possess soul because they move iron, and infers that he judged the soul to be a thing that causes motion.¹⁸ [Aristotle, On the Soul 1.2 405a19 = DK 11A22] Thales also held that amber (which has magnetic properties when rubbed or heated) possesses soul.¹⁹ [Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Philosophers 1.24 = DK 11A1]

It is hard to know what to make of these statements. The idea that the soul is the principle of life was widespread in Greek thought. The presence of soul makes a thing alive; when a living thing dies, it no longer has a soul. Thus, Aristotle held that plants and animals possess souls. He held further that motion is characteristic of life, especially in his broad sense of “motion,” which includes growth and changes in quality—“motions” which even plants possess. Thus, the presence of soul, and therefore of life, implies motion.

Thales attributes soul to things not normally thought to be alive. Is he proposing a version of hylozoism, the view that matter has life, so that life is found in all things whatever? Also, since magnets and amber cause other things to move, is Thales’ point that the notion of soul should be extended to include things that themselves are motionless but make other things move?"