

Indivisibility And Its Significance

Post by "Cassius" of December 28, 2019 at 8:25 AM

This is a placeholder to start the discussion of indivisibility, by first going back to why it was an issue for Epicurus in the first place. What questions or positions was he addressing?

Here are some starting points, first from David Sedley's "Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom":

3. ATOMIC VOCABULARY

Similarly with individual technical terms within his chosen discipline, Lucretius' constant practice is to render Greek technicality neither with Latin technicality nor with mere transliteration, but with a range of his own live metaphors. Take the case of 'atoms'.⁴ Of the earlier Latin prose writers on Epicureanism, we know only that Amafinius had rendered the term *corpuscula*,⁵ although Lucilius' reference to *atomus* . . . *Epicuri* (753 Marx) shows that simple transliteration had long been another available expedient. Cicero, for his part, actually shows a strong preference for this transliterated form, with occasional resort to *corpuscula*⁶ or to his own probable coinage *individua*, 'indivisibles'. None of these is ideal. Transliteration of a term from within a discipline – as distinct from the name of the discipline itself – is a rare resort for Cicero, and savours of defeat. *Corpuscula* captures the minuteness of the atoms but not their all-important indivisibility. And *individua* suffers in Cicero's philosophical prose from having to stand in for too many different Greek originals: he had already, in his paraphrase of Plato's *Timaeus* (21, 25, 27), used it to represent ἀμέριστος, ἀμερής and ἄσχιστος, all terms with importantly different technical connotations both from each other and from 'atom'.

Lucretius introduces his own set of terms for atoms in the proem to book 1, 54–61, more than 400 lines before his first proof of their existence:⁷ *rerum primordia*, *materies*, *genitalia corpora*, *semina rerum*, *corpora prima*. Unlike *corpuscula*, all these concentrate not on the smallness of atoms but on their role as the primitive starting-points from which other entities are built up. In introducing them, he places the chief emphasis on their dynamic generative powers, already indicated in the procreative implications of *materies* (a derivative of *mater*), *genitalia* and *semina*. These implications he then exploits in his first set of arguments, those against generation *ex nihilo*, in the course of which he seeks to persuade us that the biological regularities which are evident at the macroscopic level