

Good Article by Grzelak Highlighting the Ethical Components of "On The Nature of Things" - It's Not Just Physics!

Post by "Cassius" of February 7, 2020 at 11:00 AM

This is a very good article, and the information collected here on the last page is very useful. But good grief, what is that last sentence all about? It's as if the writer has been writing under the glowering scowl, not of the gods of heaven, but of the gods of the Academy, and she has to throw them a bone by suggesting that her findings indicate that Lucretius was not a good Epicurean! She is suggesting that it was a "doctrinal premise" of Epicurus that morals must be kept separate from physics? Or is it more likely that she recognizes that the Academic/orthodox interpretation of Lucretius is flawed, but doesn't want to buck the establishment too far? Possibly there is some mixture of the desire to suggest that Lucretius was not a "good Epicurean," that a lot of people seem to want to make, but I just don't see that at all, and that looks to me like just another effort to undermine the Epicurean message, rather than a point based on anything substantive.

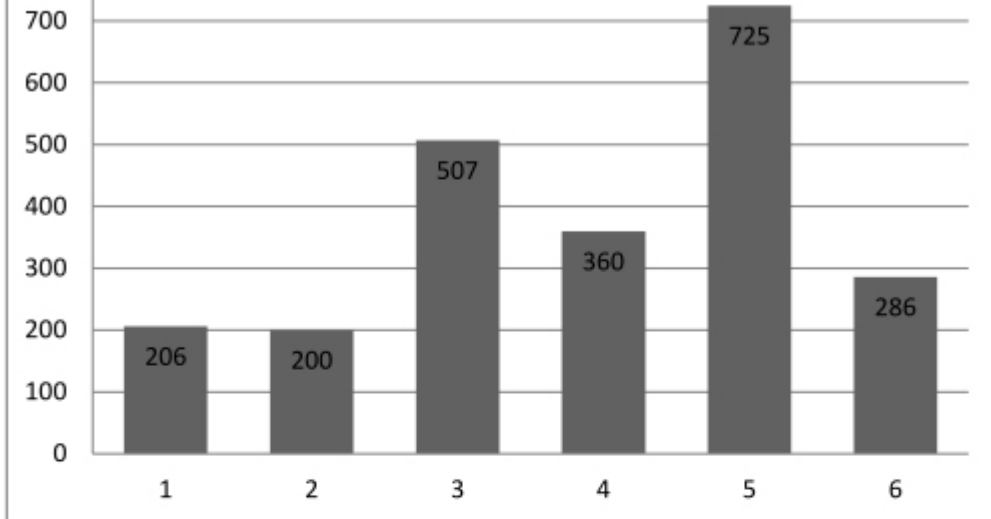


Figure 1. The number of ethical lines in each book of the *De rerum natura*

short remarks ethical in their character (e.g. I, 623–624, 657–660, 690–692, 698, 704, 711, 734–741, 758; II, 229, 308, 496, 500–506, 552–559, 676, 740, 840, 865, 886, 985, 1002; III, 94–96, 105, 116, 124, 353, 417–420, 676, 754, 776–777, 801–802; IV, 110–111, 129, 175, 209, 230–233, 370, 435, 446, 464, 627–629, 673–674, 722, 751, 754, 777–780, 816–817, 822–823, 831, 833, 883–884, 907–915, 929–931, 1232–1239; V, 97–103, 373–375, 406, 491, 590, 666, 735–736, 828–833; VI, 251–255, 534, 596–597, 639, 678–679, 762–768, 781–782, 850, 853, 917–920, 1049). These elements are completely inseparable from the form and content of the text. They apparently make an indispensable part of the poem. They are meant to show the reader an appropriate way of thinking, attract attention, add vividness to the presentation of the Epicurean physical theory, help the audience concentrate and emphasize the most important reflections of the author.

In conclusion, I would like to express my opinion that the ethical teaching, though neglected by the scholars, is apparently part of Lucretius' poem. The number of lines concerning ethical teaching in the *De rerum natura* raises questions about its form, structure and content, and it absolutely deserves thorough analysis and consideration, especially when there still remains the unsolved question of what kind of an Epicurean was Lucretius since he, in opposition to Epicurus' doctrinal premises, did not make moral values the separate part of his poetic work.