

The End of the De Rerum Natura

Post by “jnamiotka” of August 8, 2018 at 11:02 AM

Hi, folks.

I'd be very interested to hear your thoughts on the rather curious conclusion of Lucretius' didactic epic. Some have gone so far as to assert that the poem must have been unfinished upon the poet's death, given how dark its conclusion is. (For those unfamiliar with the poem, it ends with an extended translation of Thucydides' detailed description of the plague that ravaged Athens during the Peloponnesian War.) Others maintain on the contrary that the conclusion is quite apt, insofar as it serves to underscore Lucretius'/Epicurus' contention that existence is ephemeral and there will be no divine intervention on our behalf. I tend to go back and forth on this question, but, again, I'd be very interested to hear others' thoughts on this.

Post by “Cassius” of August 9, 2018 at 7:41 AM

That's a great question that I am far from resolving to my own satisfaction.

Both the way it ends as the end of the chapter, and as the end of the book, seems questionable, but not so stark that the issue is clear. I'd have to go back and compare the details of the way the first five chapters close, but the way the details of the plague of Athens are recited without quite as much commentary seems to me to indicated it might have been intended to have a special impact fitting for the end.

On the other hand there seem to be references sprinkled in the poem to more discussion of the gods to come, which never seems to appear.

So at the moment I personally tend to think that while the chapter ends well enough as a chapter (in comparison with the way the other chapters end), I'm not convinced that Lucretius planned it to be the end of the book as a whole.

I too would be very interested in the reactions of others.

Post by “Hiram” of August 9, 2018 at 12:10 PM

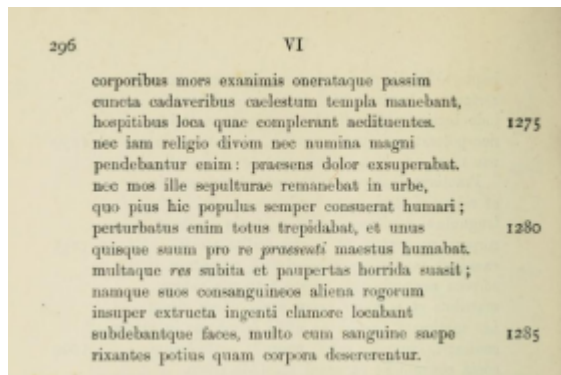
French hedonist philosopher Michel Onfray appears to think the work is complete.

In my [reasonings on his counter-history](#), I cite a piece of trivia that he shares:

- While many have argued that *De Rerum Natura* is an incomplete work, acute observers will notice that Lucretius starts *De Rerum Natura* with the word “mother”, and ends it with the word “corpse”

Post by “Cassius” of August 9, 2018 at 1:15 PM

Interesting thought to look for parallels like that. Here is the Munro edition of the final passage of Book VI



Along with the opening:

