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The Proem of Lucretius

By Edward Courtney, Virginia

Of the numerous problems raised by Lucretius' opening address to Venus, the central one is highlighted by the following quotation:

"The most enigmatic feature of the proem lies in the first three subdivisions, 1–43. How can Lucretius, as an Epicurean, praise Venus as a controlling force in nature, and even beg her to intervene in human affairs? In Epicureanism, the gods emphatically do not intervene in any way in human affairs ... To respond that the proem's treatment of Venus is allegorical is not in itself a solution to the puzzle. As Lucretius himself warns at 2.655–660, allegorical use of divinities, e.g. 'Neptune' for the sea and 'Ceres' for corn, is permissible only if one avoids any false religious implications. Although Venus might, on this principle, get away with symbolising nature, or even perhaps Epicurean pleasure (the suggestion of E. Bignone, *Storia della letteratura latina* II (Florence 1945) 137–144 ...), the opening address to her as ancestress of the Romans can hardly be judged equally innocent, nor can the prayers to her to intervene in Roman affairs and to inspire Lucretius' poetry. It is not that these allegorical explanations do not carry any weight at all. I think there is much truth in them. But the most they can do, for readers who have read on and been surprised to learn that this is an Epicurean poem, is mitigate their bafflement. The question remains, what can have impelled Lucretius to start out so misleadingly, totally disavowing the attitude to the gods that the rest of the poem will so energetically promote? It is hardly an exaggeration to say that he spends the remainder of the poem undoing the damage done by the first forty-three lines."

This quotation is from an article by D. N. Sedley, "The Proems of Empedocles and Lucretius", *GRBS* 30 (1989) 281, now reproduced in his book *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom* (Cambridge 1998) 16. He is by profession a student of philosophy, and the quotation admirably encapsulates the puzzled reaction expressed by many who have approached the poem concentrating on its philosophical content. The interesting thing is that it shows a glimmer of recognition that the poem also needs to be judged as a literary artefact (Lucretius himself makes it plain that the poetry was hardly less important to him than the philosophy), and even, in the phrase "for readers who have read on and been surprised to learn that this is an Epicurean poem", a sense of the way to approach the problem.

This way is indicated in some remarks by M. R. Gale, *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius* (Cambridge 1994) 3 n. 8, which may usefully be contrasted with Sedley's approach: "Any reading of the poem must be both diachronic and synchronic, and the recurrence of an image forces the reader to reassess earlier passages in which it has occurred, as well as affecting the interpretation of the immediate context"; 57 "Lucretius' proem, when taken in isolation, is to all appearances a perfectly conventional opening invocation ... the illusion is maintained for forty-three lines. Lucretius is playing a kind of elaborate game with his readers ... Lucretius ... manipulates the literary expectations of his reader, who is to be 'deceived but not harmed' [1.941; E. C.]. Only once he has been tempted into the poem by the poetic *tour de force* of the proem does the symbolic meaning ... become clear"; 211 "When the reader looks back at the proem from the vantage-point of the *edita doctrina sapientum templa,* he is forced to reassess its meaning". Essentially the rest of this paper will be drawing out the implications of these comments.

Imagine yourself walking through the streets of Rome in the late 60's or early 50's B.C., and seeing on the bookstalls a new work *De Rerum Natura* by a writer T. Lucretius Carus, of whom you have never heard anything. You buy a copy, take it home and begin to peruse it.

Aeneadum genetrix, hominum diuomque uoluptas,
alma Venus, caeli subter labentia signa
quae mare nauigerum, quae terras frugiferentis
concelebras, per te quoniam genus omne animantum
concipitur uisitque exortum lumina solis –
(te, dea, te fugiunt uenti, te nubila caeli
aduentumque tuum, tibi suauis daedala tellus
summittit flores, tibi rident aequora ponti
placatumque nitet diffuso lumine caelum.
nam simul ac species patefactast uerna diei
et reserata uiget genitabilis aura fauoni,
aeriae primum uolucres te, diua, tuumque
significant initum perculsae corda tua ui;
inde ferae, pecudes persultant pabula laeta
et rapidos tranant amnis: ita capta lepore
te sequitur cupide quo quamque inducere pergis;
denique per maria ac montis fluuiosque rapacis
frondiferasque domos auium camposque uirentis
omnibus incutiens blandum per pectora amorem
efficis ut cupide generatim saecla propagent) –
quae quoniam rerum naturam sola gubernas
nec sine te quicquam dias in luminis oras
exoritur neque fit laetum neque amabile quicquam,

te sociam studeo scribendis uersibus esse
quos ego de rerum natura pangere conor
Memmiadae nostro, quem tu, dea, tempore in omni
omnibus ornatum uoluisti excellere rebus.
quo magis aeternum da dictis, diua, leporem.

It is important that this passage be punctuated as above, since otherwise its structure, which brings with it generic significance, will be lost. The point is that the long parenthesis causes an anacoluthon; 4–5 are resumed with *quoniam* in 21–23, as is corroborated by the recall of *exortum lumina* 5 in *luminis ... exoritur* 22–23, and 1–2 get a verb only in 24.

The first two words point you, the new reader whom I have described above, to the traditional Venus of mythology; so does *alma Venus*, about which see Munro's note and G. Appel, *De Romanorum precationibus* (Giessen 1909) 99–100. In 2–4 we begin to recognise the traditional form of a hymn with 'Relativ-Prädikation' in address (E. Norden, *Agnostos Theos*, Leipzig/Berlin 1913, 172), which is followed in 4–22 by the equally traditional 'Du-Prädikation' in listing the powers of the deity (Norden 150); the latter takes up the former in chiastic order (sky, sea, earth 2–3; earth, sea, sky 7–9, with the three key words placed prominently at the line-ends, as my colleague Prof. J. F. Miller points out). When we get to 22, which (as already remarked) is part of the resumption of 4–5, we recognise another hymn-feature in the antithetic converse *per te – sine te*; see Norden 157 n. 3. 159 n. 1 with *Nachträge* 391. 349–350, Fraenkel on Aesch. *Ag.* 1485. If we punctuate e.g. as recommended by W. Kranz, "Lukrez und Empedokles", *Philol.* 96 (1943) 87 n. 33 and not as above, we obscure this antithesis. Before that, in 6–20 we have recognised yet another traditional feature in the recital of ἀρεταὶ τῆς θεοῦ (Norden 150). *Sola* 21 keeps us in the same sacral sphere (Norden 350 n. 1), and finally in 28 comes the third of the regular structural features of the hymn, the request *da* (see my remarks on the hymn of Tiberianus in *Fragmentary Latin Poets* (Oxford 1993) 433 with further references, including Appel 133); H. Diels, *Lukrezstudien I*, SBBerlin, Phil.-hist. 1918. 922–923 = *Kl. Schr. zur Gesch. der antiken Philos.* (Hildesheim 1969) 322–323 compares the structure of *Homeric hymn* 24 to Hestia, vocative, relative clause, asyndetic statement of her appearance, request to come and give χάρις to the poet's song. There is too a strong emphasis on the part that the goddess of sexual love has to play in propagation (4–5, 19–20 [with which compare *Homeric hymn* 5 to Aphrodite 73–74], 22), and she is linked with desire (*cupide* 16, 20) and love (*amor* 19, *amabile* 23).

One other quality of the goddess which has been introduced is *lepos* 15 'attractiveness' (for the connotations of this word in Lucretius see C. J. Classen, "Poetry and Rhetoric in Lucretius", *TAPA* 99, 1968, 101 = *Probleme der Lucrez-Forschung*, ed. Classen, Hildesheim 1986, 356 and addendum 373), a quality which Lucretius hopes to incorporate in his own poem too (28) and

which motivates him to ask Venus for her aid (24), as the Muses and other deities traditionally inspire poets; we may compare how "in *HHom.* 10, Aphrodite is asked as the goddess of desire (ἵμερος) to grant the poet a 'desirable' (ἱμερόεσσαν) song" (Gale 209). She is also the appropriate deity because she supervises *rerum natura* (21), which in the context, after the references to propagation listed above, must at least hint at the derivation from *nascor* (cf. 5.331 and D. Clay, *Lucretius and Epicurus*, Ithaca 1983, 85), and his poem is to be *de rerum natura* (25; the words in the same metrical position, as Prof. Miller stresses).

The specifically Roman side of the goddess, which in 1 was introduced by a patronymic, is revived in 26 with another patronymic *Memmiades*. The identity of the dedicatee provides yet another reason for choosing Venus; the coins of the Memmii show this goddess (S. Weinstock, *Divus Julius*, Oxford 1971, 23 and pl. 3.3–4 [after p. 44]; M. H. Crawford, *Roman Republican Coinage*, London 1974, 1.320–321 no. 313; R. Schilling, *La religion romaine de Vénus*, Paris 1954, 272 and pl. 29.1 after p. 366). We will notice that Memmius is given the epithet *noster*, i.e. 'yours, Venus, and mine'; thus three personages are linked. And, if I may anticipate a little, there is another link between them all, for Venus 'propagates' (20) living things, Lucretius 'propagates' verses (25), a horticultural metaphor (see Munro's note, and to his quotation from Paul. Fest. p. 212 M add ibid. 108 s.v. *impages*), and Memmius is the *propago* of his ancestors (42).

effice ut interea fera moenera militiai
per maria ac terras omnis sopita quiescant;
nam tu sola potes tranquilla pace iuuare
mortalis, quoniam belli fera moenera Mauors
armipotens regit, in gremium qui saepe tuum se
reicit aeterno deuictus uulnere amoris
atque ita suspiciens, tereti ceruice reposta,
pascit amore auidos inhians in te, dea, uisus
eque tuo pendet resupini spiritus ore.
hunc tu, diua, tuo recubantem corpore sancto
circum fusa super suauis ex ore loquellas
funde petens placidam Romanis, incluta, pacem;
nam neque nos agere hoc patriai tempore iniquo
possumus aequo animo nec Memmi clara propago
talibus in rebus communi desse saluti.
* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
quod superest, vacuas auris animumque sagacem
semotum a curis adhibe ueram ad rationem,
ne mea dona tibi studio disposta fideli
intellecta prius quam sint contempta relinquas.
nam tibi de summa caeli ratione deumque

disserere incipiam et rerum primordia pandam,
unde omnis natura creet res auctet alatque,
quoue eadem rursus natura perempta resoluat;
quae nos materiem et genitalia corpora rebus
reddunda in ratione uocare et semina rerum
appellare suëmus et haec eadem usurpare
corpora prima, quod ex illis sunt omnia primis.

Before we begin to consider this passage a textual problem must be dealt with. The last two words of 50 are not in the manuscripts of Lucretius, but are recovered from a quotation in the Veronese scholia on *Georgics* 3.3; they are certainly genuine, and closely parallelled by 4.912 *tenuis aures animumque sagacem*, as well as *animum sagacem* 2.840, *animo sagaci* 1.402. But who is being addressed? Before this line the manuscripts offer six lines which recur at 2.646–651. They make perfect nonsense of this passage and were deleted by Pontanus and Marullus, rightly (see my discussion in "Quotation, Interpolation, Transposition", *Hermathena* 143, 1987, 11). They deal with the lack of concern for men on the part of the Epicurean gods, and were originally added in the margin as a sarcastic comment on Lucretius' request for Venus' involvement by a reader who felt precisely the same difficulty about the proem of Lucretius as Sedley (see my initial quotation) and others. This reader was probably identical with the famous *interpolator philosophus* of Lucretius, who is not to be regarded, as many commentators would like to do, as just a figment; he may have been the same person who added *tituli* showing knowledge of the text of Epicurus. I do not propose here to waste time on proving something so obvious as the interpolation of these lines; Gale 215–217 rather hesitantly comes to the same conclusion, and so does M. Deufert, *Pseudo-lukrezisches im Lukrez* (Berlin 1996) 36, though instead of postulating a lacuna he prefers to reject the reading of the Veronese scholia and emend 50 otherwise. Others who also believe in the interpolation of the lines are e.g. Schilling 347–348, W. Schmid, "Altes und Neues zu einer Lukrezfrage" *Philol.* 93 (1938–1939) 346, P. M. Brown in his commentary (Bristol 1984). It is however worth while to ask why so many scholars continue to accept them. To leave out of consideration the low quality of many editions of Lucretius, a weighty reason is that such scholars are in many cases professional students of philosophy (to name a few, Sedley ll.cc. 290 = 26; K. Kleve, "Lukrez und Venus", *Symb. Osl.* 41, 1966, 86; Clay 94 and 109), and they like to devise ingenious solutions to philosophical problems. Now there is hardly anything which requires so much ingenuity as the defence of textual corruptions. Quite a few of what are currently regarded as problems giving scope to philosophical ingenuity are simply corruptions like this; see e.g. the futile (because the sentence deals with our means of perceiving the gods, not their substance) retention of *ad deos* in Cic. *De nat. deor.* 1.49 as presented by Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge 1987) 1.142; 2.148–149, a

book which in a number of cases errs in the retention of indefensible readings (I hope that Mr Sedley is not by now feeling himself the victim of a persecution). Philosophers must really learn to think seriously about textual criticism; of course they can retort that textual critics should learn more about philosophy.

Now to return to my question, who is being addressed in 50? The answer is of course Memmius, but as the text stands, whether 44–49 be present or absent, that cannot be; this difficulty drove P. Gimpel, "De rerum natura: proemium restitutum" *RCCM* 23 (1981) 12–13 to the desperate expedient of taking *propago* 42 to be vocative. As I explained in *Hermathena* l.c., quoting parallels, when these lines were incorporated from the margin into the text as if they had been accidentally omitted, they extruded a block of text in which Lucretius turned to address Memmius. The same thing may have happened between 1.145 and 149 (see Deufert 63).

Now for the substantive interpretation. Venus 'effects' (20) the propagation of species and 'alone' (21) controls *natura rerum*; Lucretius now asks her to 'effect' the cessation of warfare, since she 'alone' can give peace to men; i.e. he is still using the forms of traditional religion. This stylistic slant is emphasised by *nam ... potes* 31, which in prayers regularly appears after a request (Norden 152–154 and on *Aen.* 6.117; Appel 153); the turn is repeated in 41 after another request. Warfare is the province of Mars, and he is enslaved by love for Venus. He is described as reclining on her lap, and described in very precise physical terms; his neck is *teres* (in a phrase which Lucretius took from Cicero *Aratea* fr. 9.5, where it is appropriately applied to a snake; quite likely, as O. Skutsch, *Annals of Ennius*, Oxford 1985, 783 = *uestigia* ix argues, the phrase was applied in Ennius to the infant Romulus or Remus bending back to suckle on the wolf), i.e. he is like a youthful human lover (see Munro's note), his mouth hangs open with desire, etc. The whole description is so pictorial that Lucretius certainly intends us to think of artistic representations of the scene; see the gem listed in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* s.v. *Ares* 384 and illustrated ibid. II 2.413.

Venus then is entreated to ask Mars, who like her is a divine ancestor of Rome, for peace (already associated with her in 31), a request which links Lucretius and Memmius; for without peace Lucretius (*nos*) cannot 'attend to the business in hand' (*agere hoc*; cf. 4.969 *nos agere hoc autem et naturam quaerere rerum*), and Memmius has to engage in politics. When the text resumes, he is being exhorted to apply *uacuas auris animumque ... semotum a curis* to *uera ratio*, and not to dismiss what Lucretius has to offer through prejudice. This raises the question of the relationship between Lucretius and Memmius. In his youth the Epicurean Patron attempted to ingratiate himself with him (Cic. *Ad fam.* 13.1.2), from which no conclusion whatsoever can be drawn about interest or lack of interest in Epicureanism on Memmius' part; later in the same letter (dated to 51 B.C.) Cicero indicates (§ 4) that mockery of Epicureanism by Memmius would not be surprising, from which we must infer, as we could in any

case from his intention to demolish the ruins of Epicurus' house, that Lucretius did not make a convert of him. When Lucretius in 1.103 expresses the fear that Memmius may 'desert' Epicureanism, that is on the hopeful assumption that he will first have been converted to it by this poem. In short there is no good reason to suppose that Lucretius chose him as dedicatee for anything but social reasons and literary convention; in the poem he functions merely as a passive recipient at whom advice and information can be directed, just as Pausanias apparently functioned in Empedocles; with 50 cf. Empedocles B 1 Diels-Kranz = 4 M. R. Wright, *Empedocles* (New Haven 1981) = 13 B. Inwood, *The Poem of Empedocles* (Toronto 1992), and B 17 = 8 Wright = 25 Inwood. 14sqq. When in 1.141 Lucretius speaks of the *sperata uoluptas / suauis amicitiae* with Memmius, he is taking advantage of the semantic range of the word *amicitia*, which can embrace the sort of friendship so important to an Epicurean as well as various relationships in Roman society, including the type which obtained between Maecenas on the one hand and Vergil and Horace on the other. I will recall I. Hilberg's observation (*WS* 21, 1899, 299) that 4.1015–1019 form the acrostich MEMMI, but like Hilberg himself I regard this as purely accidental.

At this point you, the reader whom I have envisaged, are beginning to wonder if you have been cheated into buying a poem entitled DE RERUM NATURA, since so far this looks to be not a rationalistic poem about physics, like those entitled Περὶ φύσεως which you have read. The next lines (54–61), which outline the atomic theory that Lucretius is going to expound, begin to reassure you, but still with a tinge of ambiguity in the wording of 58–60. Who is 'we'? Is it, like *nos* in 41, just another way of saying 'I'? Or does it mean 'I and the other members of the school to which I belong'? Lucretius probably did not mean the answer to be apparent to you at this point; the singular use of the first person plural is so promiscuous in Latin that one cannot take the preceding *mea* (52) and *incipiam ... pandam* (55) as pointing to a distinction. Finally in 62 sqq. with the denunciation of religion the poem with no more ambiguity gets on a track of the general type which the title had made you expect. It is then apparent that you need to re-evaluate the proem. In such circumstances one can sometimes revise one's understanding of earlier passages in a work during the process of linear reading (an operation which we regularly perform with motion pictures), but for the sake of clarity of exposition let us suppose that in this case you read on to the end and postpone the re-evaluation.

When you come back to the proem you are now in possession of information which you did not have the first time round. This raises a point of literary theory to which sufficient weight is not always given. In *Auctor & Actor* (Berkeley 1985) John J. Winkler points out that two kinds of reading have to co-exist (see in particular pp. 10–14). One is the sequential or heuristic, in which things are revealed in stages; the other is hermeneutic, when we possess all that we need to know in order to interpret features in the text as they arise. The topic is discussed from a theoretical viewpoint, mainly focusing on prose fiction, by

Matei Calinescu in *Rereading* (New Haven 1993), from which I take two quotations. "Virtually unnoticed has been the fact that the very possibility of a poetics of reading is premised on the perspective of rereading, more precisely on the paradoxical situation that the most enjoyable ways in which a text can be read (... the conventions to be taken into account, the range of legitimate interpretations) can be fully determined only once the first reading is over" (p. 112). "Rereading and the characteristic absorption that accompanies it strive for an interpretation of the text in terms of a complete hermeneutic system in which the significance of each part is seen in the light of the whole and that of the whole in the light of each part" (p. 168). There are also a few remarks on the subject by Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago ²1983) 284–285 under the heading *Mystification*. Relevant too, especially since the discussion relates to non-narrative poetry, are some of the comments in H. R. Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (tr. T. Bahti, Minneapolis 1982) 139–148, though he is not centrally concerned with the same issue as I am.

That the Romans were acquainted with this process of re-reading can be shown from Quintilian 10.1.20–21, which I adduce in the Loeb translation:

> "Nor must we study" [the whole text] "merely in parts, but must read through the whole work from cover to cover and then read it afresh, a precept which applies more especially to speeches, whose merits are often deliberately disguised. For the orator frequently prepares his audience for what is to come, dissembles and sets a trap for them and makes remarks at the opening of his speech which will not have their full force till the conclusion. Consequently what he says will often seem comparatively ineffective where it actually occurs, since we do not realise his motive and it will be necessary to re-read the speech after we have acquainted ourselves with all that it contains".

You, my envisaged reader, with some assistance from me have just read the proem heuristically; now let us read it hermeneutically. You now know that in the Epicurean view Venus certainly exists, but that she cannot possibly be *Aeneadum genetrix* in a literal sense; as for the second half of the line, which at first seemed to be saying something as non-technical as Plato *Philebus* 12b, you have read in 2.172 *dux uitae dia uoluptas*, and from your general cultural knowledge you know the importance of ἡδονή to Epicureans. "The word 'uoluptas' identifies Venus as the personification of the chief good in the Epicurean system: Pleasure (ἡδονή)" (E. J. Kenney, *Lucretius*, Greece and Rome Surveys 11, Oxford 1977, 13). So you see that Venus in philosophical terms is a symbol of an impersonal force which governs the whole world (the phrase just quoted from 2.172 is the subject of 173 *res per Veneris blanditur saecla* (sc. *mortales*) *propagent*; with 19 *blandum amorem* compare the frequent occurrence in Lucretius of *blanda uoluptas*), and that she is 'mother of the sons of Aeneas' only for the

literary purpose of linking her with 'the son of Memmius' and the contemporary political troubles which distract both poet and dedicatee; she can counteract them by providing *tranquilla pax* (31), which you have met in 2.1093 as an attribute of the blessed life of the gods and in 6.78 as an appropriate human reaction, in place of fear, to intimations of the divine. Accordingly she is to request from Mars *placida pax* (40) for the *Romani* (that is the *Aeneadae*); this too you have met as characteristic of the life of the gods in 6.73 (near one of the passages just referred to). It is of course central to Epicurean theology that the blessed life of the gods is to serve as a model for men, and you will easily recognize ἀταραξία under these phrases with *pax*. The hymn-formulae analysed above can be read as suggesting that ἡδονή and ἀταραξία have displaced the traditional gods (note the form of 'Du-Prädikation' applied to Epicurus in 3.9–10).

You will also put a new slant on 24 *te sociam studeo scribendis uersibus esse*. You have been reminded at 2.655–660 of the familiar poetic metonymy whereby e.g. *mars* can substitute for *bellum* (cf. the only occurrence of his name outside the proem in Lucretius at 5.1304), and are now moved to read this line as a wish for the poem to possess *uenus* in the sense of *uenustas* (cf. Classen ll.cc. 103 = 357 with addendum 373). Moreover you will have read in 6.94 an invocation to Calliope as *requies hominum diuumque uoluptas*, from which you will draw the retrospective inference that Venus – *uoluptas* is replacing the Muse traditionally invoked at the beginning of a poem as providing inspiration.

As you read the poem for the first time, you observed that at 1.716 sqq., despite disagreement, Empedocles was spoken of with considerable respect. You will also have been much reminded of Empedocles both in specific passages and in the general style. Now that you are alert to the fact that you must see more in the Venus of the prologue than a traditional anthropomorphic deity, a natural next step is to think of the Empedoclean Aphrodite who is also Φιλότης and Γηθοσύνη, that is *uoluptas* (B 17.20–24 Diels-Kranz = 8 Wright = 25 Inwood), the force which brings the four elements (these of course will not appear in Lucretius; I am not persuaded by D. J. Furley, "Variations on Themes from Empedocles in Lucretius' Proem" *BICS* 17, 1970, 55, to see a reference to fiery ether in 1.9, nor by Sedley 282 = 17 to see one in 5 also) together in creation (B 21 DK = 14 Wright = 26 Inwood) of trees, humans, animals, birds, fish and gods too. This is very close to the role played by Venus in Lucretius, with two differences. First, after *hominum* 1, Lucretius avoids speaking of humanity in 4–20, whereas men are present not only in Empedocles but also in a very similar (Munro on 2–3; Gale 209) invocation to Aphrodite in *Hom. hymn* 4.3–5; this is because, as I explain below, Mars is intended to fill this gap. Second, Lucretius here makes no mention of gods because he does not yet want to disclose his view of them; Empedocles' mention of them provides that philosopher with a means of incorporating the traditional gods into his system, and perhaps the alert reader of Lucretius will be prompted to think how Venus too can be interpreted in novel fashion.

When you come to 21, you are reminded of another Pre-Socratic philosopher whom you must associate with Empedocles, namely Parmenides; both are the author of a poem which (whatever name the writer gave to it) you know under the title of Περὶ Φύσεως. The phrase of which you are reminded (despite the currency of the image of god as helmsman) is B 12 δαίμων ἣ πάντα κυβερνᾷ; this daemon is she who unites male and female (Plut. *Amatorius* 13.756e suggests that Aphrodite is specifically meant). That fits the general context in Lucretius, and indeed perhaps 'Aphrodite' was a way of designating this aspect of bringing things together in Stoic theology (E. Asmis, "Lucretius' Venus and Stoic Zeus" *Hermes* 110, 1982, 460). You will also note that Venus is taking over the role allotted in the hymn of Cleanthes to Zeus, who (35) πάντα κυβερνᾷ (cf. 2 πάντα κυβερνῶν). This hymn is brought into relationship with the Lucretian prologue by D. Clay, "Greek Physis and Epicurean Physiologia" *TAPA* 100 (1969) 35 and Asmis l.c.; naturally enough it shows similarities in structure and style to the hymnodic features which I have analysed in Lucretius (see my note on the hymn of Tiberianus in *Fragmentary Latin Poets*, 1993, 433). I draw particular attention to σοῦ δίχα (15), which expresses one half of the antithesis which I have discussed above, though Cleanthes prefers to express the positive side not in a prepositional phrase. I am not certain whether the hymn was quite prominent enough in Lucretius' mind to allow us to suppose that in 4 with *per te* he was putting Venus – *uoluptas* in the place of the Zeus whose oblique cases the Stoics etymologised from διά (see again Fraenkel on Aesch. *Ag.* 1485; a hint in this direction in Asmis 466).

This much for Venus; what about Mars? It is tempting to suppose that as Aphrodite represents Empedoclean Love, so Ares represented Strife, but in fact there is no evidence for this, though it is sometimes maintained (e.g. by A. Dalzell in *Cambridge History of Ancient Literature*, 1982, 2.227). G. S. Kirk/ J. E. Raven, *Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Cambridge 1957) 349 saw a hint of the idea, but in the second edition (1983, with M. Schofield) 318 tacitly abandoned the contention; some late writers, interpreting the song of Demodocus allegorically, draw an analogy with the Empedoclean conception ([Plut.] *De Homero* 2.101, p. 48 Kindstrand, and Heraclitus, *Alleg. Hom.* 69; it has become traditional, though Sedley 291 n. 64 = 27 n. 98 shows proper reserve, to refer to Eustathius on *Od.* 8.367, but he has not a word to say about Empedocles), but none states unequivocally that it was in Empedocles. It is more fruitful to compare Mars with the human lovers about whom you, my envisaged reader, have read in Book iv; so Gale 222 "He perhaps symbolizes disturbing *curae* ... This would explain why his passion for Venus is represented in terms of the romantic love condemned in the finale to book 4", with verbal parallels (especially the use of *uulnus*) in n. 65. Gale 83 n. 316 also comments on Mars' adjective *teres*, to which I have drawn attention above. Mars therefore lacks Epicurean tranquillity and can attain to it only by union with Venus – *uoluptas*. So, as Venus represents not only Empedoclean Love (and other things too) but also ἀταραξία, Mars repre-

sents two potent forces which can disturb that, war and love, and needs to be smothered by Venus (*tuo recubantem corpore sancto / circum fusa super*). Only so can Lucretius achieve an *aequus animus* 42, i.e. ἀταραξία; his desire for this indicates the detachment which the Epicurean sage should ideally possess.

As for the ambiguity about 'we' in 60, you will now have encountered first 1.458 *haec soliti sumus ... euenta uocare*, which raises exactly the same problem as here; is Lucretius employing current Epicurean terminology (so A. Dalzell, *Criticism of Didactic Poetry*, Toronto 1996, 79 and 180 n. 18 claims, though on inconclusive grounds), or introducing his own terminology? But later you will have been in no doubt about 4.30 *quae rerum simulacra uocamus*, because this renders Epicurus himself, *Ep. ad Herod.* 46 τούτους δὲ τοὺς τύπους εἴδωλα προσαγορεύομεν. So on your second reading you will understand the passage in the prologue and that at 1.458 to mean 'which the Epicurean school to which I belong denotes by these Latin equivalents of Greek terms'. There is one piece of evidence to confirm that Lucretius had at his disposal at least some Latin technical terminology to render Epicurean concepts. Cicero (*Ac. post.* 1.6) tells us that the obscure Epicurean writer Amafinius, who, as is suggested by *Tusc.*4.6–7 (see C. J. Castner, *Prosopography of Roman Epicureans*, Frankfurt a.M. 1988, 7), was doubtless earlier than Lucretius, used the word *corpuscula* to refer to atoms, as Lucretius himself does at 2.529; in the four other occurrences of the word in him it means atomic nuclei. I should perhaps mention that Deufert 228sq. wishes to delete 58–61 on grounds which seem insubstantial to me.

It is, I hope, apparent that no simplistic approach to this proem suffices. We must not come to it determined to find one all-embracing and exclusive interpretation. We must not apply to it any one method of reading. If we do either of these things we are going to deprive Lucretius of the tour de force by which he has kept the reader on tenterhooks for about (this word because we cannot quantify what he wrote after 43) fifty lines. Above all we must not fall into an error which nowadays in similar situations afflicts the practitioners of many specialisms within classical studies, that of seeing ourselves interested as students only of either philosophy or literature.