ON THE DEMOCRITEAN CONCEPT OF POETIC INSPIRATION

BY

LEON A. WASH

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Classics
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2012

Urbana, Illinois

Advisers:

Assistant Professor Kirk Sanders
Associate Professor Antonios Augoustakis

ABSTRACT

The concept of poetic inspiration as a species of madness has usually been traced back to Democritus of Abdera, who is believed to have been the first to use the vocabulary of ecstatic possession for the characteristic activity of the talented poet, in implicit contrast with that of the philosopher. This essay reconsiders the Democritean fragments on poets and poetry in light of those pertaining to divinity, mind, and perception, concluding that later suppositions about the irrational inspiration of poets cannot be applied to Democritus, who seems instead to have looked to the inspired poet as a paradigm for his own conception of the optimally perceptive mind.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ON THE DEMOCRITEAN CONCEPT OF POETIC INSPIRATION

In the history of philosophical poetics among the Presocratics, preeminence has always been granted to Democritus of Abdera, whose legacy was cemented by Horace when he penned,

> *Ingenium misera quia fortunatius arte*
> *credit et excludit sanos Helicone poetas*
> *Democritus, bona pars non unguis ponere curat,*
> *non barbam, secreta petit loca, balnea vitat.*
> *... o ego laevus,*
> *qui purgor bilem sub verni temporis horam!*
> *non alius faceret meliora poemata.*[1]
>
> Since native wits are more fortunate far than forlorn art,
> or so thought ol' Democritus, barring from Helicon poets
> sane, now a good part care not for any clipping o' long nails,
> nor o' their beards, but, seeking seclusion, abhor every bathhouse.
> … How ill-omened am I then,
> Who purge my bile well, as the doctors prescribe, in the springtime!
> No one else e'er would write superior poems.

And thus we are told that the very inception of philosophical poetics was betokened by an observation on the poet's unique and requisite psychosis. Horace's claim finds some corroboration both from Cicero, who twice speaks of Democritus in the same breath as the *furor* that became a by-word for *litterateurs*,[2] and from the Greek authors Clement of Alexandria and Dio Chrysostom. These latter furnish two of the most striking Democritean fragments. The one from Clement contains a bold generalization: "Whatever a poet writes with a god in him (ἐνθουσιασμός) and holy breath (ἱερὸν πνεῦμα) is very beautiful."[3] In the other, Dio quotes him as writing, with more focus, "Homer, alotted a divinizing nature,

---

[1] *Ad Pisones*, 295-98, 301-3. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
[2] *De orat.* II 46, 194, *De div.* I 38, 80. It was, of course, not through Cicero alone that *furor* became a favored term – cf. also e.g. Statius on Lucretius, Silvae 2.7.76, which is a curious contrast to modern pronouncements on the tediousness of the philosopher's verse.
[3] *Strom.* 6.168, DK B18, G 160: ποιητὴς δὲ ἅσσα μὲν ἂν γράφῃ μετ᾽ ἐνθουσιασμοῦ καὶ ἱεροῦ πνεύματος, καλὰ κάρτα ἐστίν.

built a κόσμος of manifold words."[4] Not surprisingly, such curious sentiments from such a hard-nosed materialist have given rise to much discussion.

Attempts to coordinate these sparse poetics with the likewise fragmentary Democritean psychology, epistemology, and theology have been, however, very few. In what is far the most concerted effort, a 1934 monograph entitled *Les conceptions de l'enthousiasme chez les philosophes présocratiques*, A. Delatte offers a reconstruction of Democritus' conception of ἐνθουσιασμός,[5] at the end of which he concludes, "Il a parfaitement aperçu l'antinomie qui existe entre ce genre d'activité [viz. poesy] et la raison; il a même deviné l'affinité qui unit le génie et la folie, mais les lacunes de notre information nous empêchent de voir nettement quelle solution il a donnée à ce difficile problème."[6] In so casting his views, Delatte affirms Democritus as a predecessor of the eager modern (and ancient) spokespersons for the *antinomie*, drawing heavily upon the venerably old association—hints of which we just saw—of Democritus and Plato, who was without a doubt the antinomy's most vociferous advocate among the ancients.[7] Indeed, the alignment of the two philosophers marks most of the relevant testimonia, and the rich and dramatic articulations of the idea of inspiration found *passim* in Plato are certainly the most inviting comparanda when one faces "les lacunes de notre information" on

---

[4] Dio Chrysostom 36.1, DK B21, G 161: Ὅμηρος φύσεως λαχὼν θεαζούσης ἐπέων κόσμον ἐτεκτήνατο παντοίων. My translation of θεαζούσης is meant to parallel the etymology of the Greek word and to retain the strangeness of this *hapax*. Further discussion of the meaning of θεαζούσης and of κόσμος in this fragment will be provided below.

[5] Despite the general dismissal of Delatte's argument (cf. Tigerstedt [1969] 74 n. 9; also Ferwerda [1972] 343 n. 2), I find it well worth going through once more. As will become clear, I am compelled to follow him on certain issues, but hope to compel my own reader toward different and more credible conclusions.

[6] Delatte (1934) 78.

[7] Whatever one thinks about the "ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy", it is undeniable that Plato was the first to make it so explicit.

Democritus. Consequently one can readily understand the temptation to assume that Plato's writings may give us a good idea of what his contemporary, Democritus, meant.[8]

Of course, it was Socrates who, being born in 469, was the closer contemporary of Democritus, also born sometime between 470 and 460.[9] As for any interaction between them, we have no good evidence. The same holds true for Democritus and Plato, who was born c.429. While some biographers and one Democritean fragment put the Abderite in Athens for a time, the fragment in fact asserts that he found no reception whatsoever among the Athenians, and yet other biographers insist that he was, quite the contrary, far too proud to go to meet them.[10] Nonetheless, his fame makes it quite likely that at least some word of the man and his ideas had floated into Athens in Plato's and even Socrates' lifetime, and Aristotle's keen engagement with his thought attests to a wide circulation and favorable reception not long after. But as for Socrates and Plato, there is no mention of either in the fragments of Democritus, and *pari passu* there is only the complete silence of Plato on Democritus. Since antiquity, Plato's silence has often been suspect, and accounts of some antagonism between Democritus and Plato – but really just on the part of Plato, never after all a paragon of εὐθυμία – have multiplied over the millenia, the most hilarious story being that of Plato's endeavor to collect and burn all of Democritus' writings,

---

[8] The fragments of Democritus have also been promoted as evidence in the opposite direction: cf. Kahn (1985) 1, "They provide us with our best evidence for the level that had been reached by moral reflection in the lifetime of Socrates. They permit us to imagine the kind of thing Socrates himself might have said; hence their study will be useful for reconstructing the background for Plato's own work."

[9] If we accept the records of Diogenes Laertius, then he was forty years younger than Anaxagoras, who was born probably 500; but as the figure of forty years is a common and often inaccurate one in such calculations, some have more cautiously suggested 470-460, thus Graham (2010) I.616.

[10] For the biographical reports, see DL IX.36, where he is quoting from Demetrius and others; the fragment is DK B116, which also appears in Diogenes.

forestalled by the suasions of none other than two conciliatory Pythagoreans.[11]

In stark contrast to such apocryphal tales of vicious philosophical rivalry, there is, again, a repeated assocation of the views of Democritus and Plato on poets and their inspiration. Yet—since those farthest apart are often also the closest—this is not so strange a development within the doxographical tradition. In fact, the two were persistently paired on a wide array of other considerations, ranging from superficial comparisons of style to consequential theoretical claims.[12] By the same token, it should not be altogether surprising if, as Rein Ferwerda has observed of their views on poets and several other points, "on closer scrutiny we discovered that the references have often been misunderstood and that the similarity of certain words cannot conceal a yawning chasm between the philosophies of Democritus and Plato."[13]

On the other hand, most everyone else has been more accepting of the superficial likeness, and so, following the fragments and testimonia, the modern treatments of the concept of inspiration among the Greeks have typically suggested a compellingly tidy narrative of a Socratico-Platonic extension of the radical Democritus' ostensibly novel doctrine.[14] The story was probably endorsed most influentially by E. R. Dodds, who, in that landmark *The Greeks and the Irrational*, claimed that "the first writer whom we know

---

[11] Diogenes Laertius (*Vit. phil.* 9.40) claims to be repeating a story taken from Aristoxenus. In its every detail, it is ultimately accepted by Ferwerda (1972), who in the very last words of his article "Democritus and Plato" concludes that Aristoxenus' story "proves to be true".
[12] On the affiliation of their style, see e.g. Dionysius *De comp. verb.* 24; Cicero *Orator* 20, 67; see also *De oratore* II. 11, 49 on Democritus alone. For more substantive comparisons, see the following note.
[13] Ferwerda (1972) 351. For the pairings, see *ibid*. 339ff.
[14] Indeed, if the quotation by Clement is genuine, then Democritus provides our first attested use of the term ἐνθουσιασμός, although one need hardly add that that itself is no proof of a coinage on his part. See e.g. Brancacci (2007) 202 n. 81, Keuls (1978) 134. Mansfeld rightly notes that Plato's one usage of it () is the one more safely regarded as the earliest recorded usage.

to have talked about poetic ecstasy is Democritus … [who] denied that anyone could be a great poet *sine furore*."[15] Thereupon, without offering any examination whatsoever of the sources, Dodds concluded that "it is to Democritus, rather than to Plato, that we must assign the doubtful credit of having introduced into literary theory this conception of the poet as a man set apart from common humanity by an abnormal inner experience, and of poetry as a revelation apart from reason and above reason."[16]

This interpretation has taken hold of others before and after Dodds, and the essential story has remained current enough. Glenn Most, for instance, has recently glossed ἐνθουσιασμός in Democritus as "a temporary state of divine possession ... [the] prime historical importance [of which] lies in the fact that Plato was able to take it up once again in his own poetics and combine it with the view that the poets were not able to give an account of what they seemed to claim to know – thereby condemning the poets for some readers as ignorant and elevating them for others as inspired."[17] There is a subtle but significant difference between the claims of Dodds and Most, for the latter's careful avoidance of the favorite Roman testimony, together with his remark about Plato's new insistence upon the poets' own incognizance, is representative of another and growing trend. In response, it would seem, to some long-standing and hard-hitting criticism,[18] the consensus regarding Democritean ἐνθουσιασμός seems at last to be swinging away from

[15] Dodds (1951) 82. In the footnote to that sentence, Dodds cites only DK 17 and 18, which without the Ciceronian quotes do not justify his use of *furor*.
[16] Dodds (1951) 82.
[17] Most (1999) 339.
[18] Principally Müller (1834), Tigerstedt (1969); cf. also the rarely mentioned but useful Ferwerda (1972), all mentioned in the following paragraph. This backlash is connected to a more general one, contending that the likes of Dodds and Bruno Snell before him "had gone too far in emphasizing the irrational features of Greek thinking" Miller (2009) 44; see Miller (2009) esp. 43-44, for a brief account of the crux of the matter and some references.

the erstwhile fascination with the Greeks and the irrational, and the shamanic ecstasy which Dodds was perhaps too eager to witness, and Plato too keen to expose. Indeed, the reasons for reading Democritus as an irrationalist are not so strong as the Romans and the majority of more recent scholars would have us think, and such a reading is, above all, far too dependent upon impressions derived from the *corpus Platonicum*.

Plato's fuller (extant) description and critique of poets depends upon a very rigid division, one expressed in the relevant dialogues in terms of various oppositions, but, for my purposes here, most notably as those between the rational and irrational parts of the soul, knowledge and appearance, τέχνη and μανία. Such hard lines are not drawn in the philosophy of Democritus,[19] and this alone suggests that he did not share Plato's convictions concerning the poets' own incognizance and the categorical illegitimacy of their claims to telling the truth. Equally, this difference adverts to the anachronism which our own post-Socratic assumptions about rationality must have when applied to Democritus, who merely "came *nearer* to having a notion of reason … as we find it from Socrates onwards."[20] Moreover, as many have noted, there is absolutely none of Plato's censorious tone in Democritus' admiring sentiment about the wordsmith's marvelous *kosmos*.[21] His sentiment, I submit, even hints at the very opposite: namely, that the great poet was, in Democritus' eyes, exceptionally knowledgeable and conscious, and that his godliness was the result of a natural endowment sometimes, perhaps, augmented by the

[19] However much one may try to drive a wedge between the two types of γνώμη which Sextus reports, ἡ μὲν γνησίη ἡ δὲ σκοτίη, the fact remains that they are both types of γνώμη. Sextus Adv. M. vii.139.

[20] Frede (1996) 21-22. Emphasis added. This has, of course, been noted before by e.g. Bailey (1928) 161, and even Delatte, but in my opinion not sufficiently kept in mind by most commentators.

[21] Most recently, Porter (2010) passim, preceded by Ferwerda (1972) 343ff., Tigerstedt (1969) 75, and well before them Müller (1834) 20ff.

"divine" (whatever it may prove to be) – but not supplanted or possessed, nor rendered irrational.

So much has been suggested by Penelope Murray, who at the conclusion of her excellent and otherwise thorough survey, "Poetic Inspiration in Early Greece", finally comments on the subject at hand: "It was Plato who, so far as we know, first opposed the concepts of poetic inspiration and technique when he described inspiration as ἐνθουσιασμός. Even Democritus, who is often considered a precursor to Plato, evidently did not consider inspiration and technique as incompatible."[22] While I agree entirely, her treatment of Democritus is, as scholarship, even more superficial than that of Dodds, since she cites only f. 21, pivotally ignoring the ἐνθουσιασμός which appears, as we saw, in f. 18. But Murray does pinpoint the heart of the matter, and the worthy remainder of her conclusion will help me better to frame my own project, and so I quote it in full:

> In fact throughout early Greek poetry there seems to be an equal emphasis on craft and inspiration. If we are unable to accept this fact, it must be because we have certain preconceived notions about the concept of poetic inspiration and its relation to the idea of poetry as a craft. Doubtless the notion of inspiration originated from the poet's feeling of dependence on the divine. And this feeling corresponds to the belief of many poets throughout history that, as Dodds put it, "creative thinking is not the work of the ego." But the idea of poetic inspiration in early Greece differs in a number of important ways from subsequent conceptions. It was particularly associated with knowledge, with memory and with performance; it did not involve ecstasy or possession, and it was balanced by a belief in the importance of craft. But although it therefore laid far more emphasis on the technical aspects of poetic creativity, it was nevertheless an idea essentially connected with the phenomenon of inspiration as we know it.[23]

The reader will have discerned by now the basic historical inquiry of this essay: whether Democritus, assuming that he did articulate a materialistic psychology of the poet and his inspiration of which we have only two of the most pointed and memorable sentences, had offered up one which was more consonant with the imposing poetics of the

[22] Murray (1981) 99-100.
[23] Murray (1981) 100, citing Dodds (1951) 81.

archaic "Masters of Truth,"[24] or one which chimes rather with Plato's "ancient quarrel". In the lacunose historical record, Democritus' poetics themselves lie in an abyss between the better substantiated ideas, and while so many would look for him climbing up to the heights of Plato's cogitations, there are good reasons for overlooking those heights as we attempt to espy him.

This anti-Platonic program notwithstanding, any reconstruction of Democritean doctrine more attuned to this perspective will have a noteworthy parallel in certain scholarship on the δαιμόνιον of Socrates, which has sought to reconcile Socrates' celebrated rationality with his reliance upon "the customary divine sign."[25] In both circumstances, the same traditional assumptions must be dispelled by re-examining the historically situated conceptions of divinity and of mind and reason, and explicating a form of revelation which does not at all diminish the recipient's rationality and wisdom as understood by the original proponents of these ideas of divine communion with human minds. Secondly, the comparison is all the more pointed for the usefulness of some of the evidence adduced by the scholars writing on Socrates, both for the present task of interpreting Democritus and also for relating him and the Platonic Socrates within a broader historical narrative.[26] Finally, in attributing to Democritus such a positive assessment of the poet's psychology, I am building, just as the Socratic apologists,[27] upon the steadily increasing, critical response to earlier, less sympathetic readings.

---

[24] cf. Marcel Detienne (1996) *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece.*
[25] e.g. *Euthyd.* 272e4; *Phaedr.* 242b9.
[26] One piece, from Plutarch, has also been used by Delatte for his discussion of Democritean ἐνθουσιασμός – but again I hope to put it to new and better use.
[27] A label at which the moderns in question would doubtlessly balk – But their status as such is indisputable, however lacking they may be in the single-minded devotion and frank religiosity of their ancient colleagues.

There is good evidence that Democritus, too, attempted something similar for Homer, who stood in need of some allegorical rehabilitation after an onslaught of excoriation from the monists and other camps.[28] Yet the possible significance of Homeric allegoresis for Democritus' thought on poets, and indeed his thought as a whole, has, to my mind, barely been countenanced. Instead it is widely assumed that the radical materialist and borderline skeptic did not share the usual allegorist's assumption of a visionary sage concealing philosophical truths in more fanciful garb, and that his pronouncements on Homer's κόσμος and enthusiastic verses speak rather to a pure aestheticism, and indeed the sort of subjectivist aesthetics then nascent among the sophists.[29] Thus Aldo Brancacci, while implicitly affirming Democritus' acceptance of a materialist reworking of the traditional attitude toward poetic inspiration, nonetheless goes on to write, "For Democritus, however, divine inspiration no longer assured, as with the *poets* Homer and Hesiod, the *truth* of the poetic work, but its *beauty*: beautiful—not true—are all the things that the poet may write, driven by enthusiasm and divine breath."[30] Brancacci's claim, suffice it (for now) to say, is based on an implausibly subjectivist reading of καλά in f. 18, and ignores the implications of any allegorist's interpretations, even the minimally charitable. I shall return to this point later, but for the time being any further conclusions about Democritus and allegoresis must be postponed.

Also ranking among the most sympathetic scholars now working on Democritus, James Porter has recently published some relevant if passing remarks which anticipate

[28] On allegoresis and philosophy, see e.g. Most (1999), Naddaf (2009).
[29] But see Naddaf (2009) 116.
[30] Brancacci (2007) 204; emphasis in the original.

certain aspects of my argument, yet also overshoot the mark that I have in sight.[31] Thus, while he writes approvingly of Democritus' "comments on the inspirational sources of poets (which he doubtless would have traced to physiological causes),"[32] he adds in a footnote the following idea: "In this light, Democritus' fragment on enthusiasm … could be understood not as a sign of his embracing the traditional poetics of inspiration but as paralleling his critique of religion, or at least as his acknowledgment that the sources of inspiration are purely phantasmal, entirely lacking in any material reality … Democritus' theory might thus be best called a *poetics of the phantasmal.*"[33] Porter's own taste for the poetical and fantastic has here led him to abandon the solid ground of the "distinctively non-subjective material origins."[34] Despite Guthrie's support for this interpretation,[35]

---

[31] Porter's relevant sympathy for Democritus is evident from his studies of Democritus *versus* Plato *et al.* (esp. in the admittedly polemical, anti-idealist exploration of materialist aesthetics that constitutes his *The Origins of Aesthetic Thought in Ancient Greece*), and from his self-identification with the laughing philosopher (see his personal website for the clearest demonstration).

[32] Porter (2010) 210.

[33] Porter (2010) 212 n.116; emphasis in original.

[34] Porter (2010) 213. Similarly in a previous work he wrote, "Democritus conceived of time in purely phenomenal terms. 'Time is an appearance [*phantasma*], " a mere [!] simulacrum, "*resembling* day and night," hence unreal: it is a sensation generated epiphenomenally from configured bits of material reality, a *synthesis* with only a psychological reality." Porter (2002) 132; emphasis in original (save the exclamation point!). In this regard, one may note that although Porter does not reference it, his account is significantly anticipated by Marx in his doctoral dissertation, Part II Chapter 4. It is also preceded by similar but more cautious remarks from Guthrie, whom he cites here but not in Porter (2010). But this is shameless exaggeration: in the passage from which he quotes, Sextus does not purport to be citing Democritus directly, but writes, "There seems to be ascribed to the scientists of the school of Epicurus and Democritus some such conception of time as this: 'Time is an appearance in the form of night and day.'"(trans. Taylor, DK A72, T 65) When one considers Aristotle's remark that according to Democritus "time did not come into being," but is in fact infinite, *Phys.* 251b17, one must conclude that for Democritus time was not "epiphenomenal," however contingent any given experience of it must be. Guthrie (1965) 430 also cites this, concluding that "if Democritus made this remark of time in general, it could only have been as an analogy."

[35] cf. Guthrie (1965) II 427-30 on the subjectivity of time; *ibid*. 476 on that of gods.

Porter's arch encapsulation of the "poetics of the phantasmal" is certainly dubious: assuming that Democritus' critique of religion relegated all divinity to the purely subjective and conventional fiction, Porter then infers from the pious terms of Clement's quote that Democritus had his tongue unbelievably well imbedded in his cheek.[36] If we cannot glimpse anything else in this fragment, then we have lost all of our clues as to the physiology of inspiration. When we combine this interpretation of f. 18 with f. 21, then, as with Brancacci's understanding of καλά, we are left with the distastefully subjectivist and all-too-modern suggestion that Homer was a successful poet just because he was prone to magnificent hallucinations.

Now that some lines have been drawn, and in order to stake out a firmer position in this broad field of scholarly contention, I will turn to a more scrupulous *Quellenkritik*. To begin with a blanket condemnation: one can gain little hope from the superficiality of the famous remarks from Cicero and Horace, disappointingly equalled by those from Dio and Clement. Cicero, first of all, reveals himself to be wholly ignorant of the place that such *furor* could have in Democritus' thought, first admitting that he has merely "often heard that which they say has been left behind by Democritus and Plato in their writings, that no one can be a good poet without an inflammation of the spirits, and without a certain inspiration (*afflatus*) as if of madness (*furor*),"[37] and in the second place proclaiming, "Let him [viz. Democritus] call it *furor*, provided that this *furor* is thus praised as it is in Plato's

[36] Admittedly, one might suggest that an ironical tone could have been clear from an original context.

[37] *De orat.* II, 46, 194: *Saepe enim audivi poetam bonum neminem—id quod a Democrito et Platone in scriptis relictum esse dicunt—sine inflammatione animorum exsistere posse, et sine quodam afflatu quasi furoris.*

Phaedrus."[38] Thus a confident but uninformed association of Democritus and Plato, deriving from some uncertain mixture of relative popularity and Cicero's own biases, had already made a Platonizing interpretation the only one available, or had anyway rendered it satisfactory on its own. Next, the *bilem* of Horace's polemic demonstrates a potentially distorting absorption of Democritean doctrine (where bile and its Greek equivalent, χολή, have no place), into the related principles of Aristotelian physiology and humoral theory, and therewith of the conjunction giving rise to a still familiar platitude about the melancholy (or atrabiliousness) of any brooding creator.[39] So, while their remarks may yet shed some light on the far-reaching historical transmission and distortion of Democritus' own theory, and thus allow us to see however muddily *ex pede Herculem*, Cicero and Horace are of very little help in reconstructing it, as it were, *ab incunabulis*.

Clement and Dio similarly make no attempt to explain the fragments, save the simplest glosses.[40] Worse still, Jaap Mansfeld would have it that the words from Clement are in fact a misleading paraphrase of the quotation from Dio, who himself is probably trustworthy enough, although he exhibits no really superior philosophical aim.[41] Mansfeld's argument and the two sources demand closer scrutiny, and I will start with Clement: the following opens the final chapter of Book 6 of his *Stromata*:

> Εἶτα περὶ μὲν ποιητικῆς Πλάτων "κοῦφον γάρ τι χρῆμα καὶ ἱερὸν ποιητής" γράφει "καὶ οὐχ οἷός τε ποιεῖν, πρὶν ἂν ἔνθεός τε καὶ ἔκφρων γένηται." καὶ ὁ Δημόκριτος ὁμοίως "ποιητὴς δὲ ἅσσα μὲν ἂν γράφῃ μετ᾽ ἐνθουσιασμοῦ καὶ ἱεροῦ πνεύματος καλὰ κάρτα ἐστίν." ἴσμεν δὲ οἷα ποιηταὶ λέγουσιν. τοὺς δὲ τοῦ παντοκράτορος προφήτας θεοῦ οὐκ

[38] *De div.* I, 80: *Quem, si placet, appellet furorem, dum modo is furor ita laudetur ut in Phaedro Platonis laudatus est.*
[39] First expressed, it seems, in the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problems* (perhaps authentic in the relevant section – see Forster [1928]), which will be mentioned again toward the end of this paper.
[40] Dio, as will be seen below, unmistakably provides his own gloss, whereas Clement may or may not, depending on how one interprets the text.
[41] Mansfeld (2004) 487.

ἄν τις καταπλαγείη ὄργανα θείας γενομένης φωνῆς;[42]

> Therefore while concerning poetry Plato writes, "For the poet is some light and sacred thing and is not able to poetize until he should become possessed (ἐνθεός) and out of his mind (ἔκφρων)." And Democritus likewise, "Whatever things, on the one hand, a poet should write with a god in him (ἐνθουσιασμός) and holy breath (ἱερὸν πνεῦμα) are very beautiful." But we on the other hand know what sort of things the poets say. Then should one not be in awe of the prophets of the almighty beeoming organs of the divine voice?

The quotation from Plato, as Mansfeld has noted, is truly butchered: some words have been transposed, others omitted, one added.[43] Such recklessness with a text of the revered and oft-quoted Plato must be taken as an unintended *caveat* for the quote which follows. Yet, except for a questioning tone in Guthrie's description of Clement's "ostensibly quoting Democritus's own words",[44] Mansfeld's 2004 note marks the first and only argument against its authenticity of which I am aware. His basic points are compelling enough: that Clement's text adds little to Dio's except a vocabulary that smacks of later usage, and that his demonstrable unreliability concerning the quotation from Plato give a careful reader good reason to suspect the author's exactitude. So, although I do not share his confidence on every point (for instance, I do not see the strangeness of ποιητής, nor the obviousness of such points as that the "term ἐνθουσιασμοῦ is clearly inspired by the original θεαζούσης"), I am inclined to follow his lead, having myself a few considerations to add in favor of a less trusting employment of the text.

But first it is necessary to weigh an argument in favor of the fragment, from Delatte and, well after him, Brancacci, who disagrees with Mansfeld and treats the fragment as

---

[42] *Strom.* 6.168 (827 P. 46-9). I print Dindorf's (1869) Oxford text, unaltered by Stählers (1906) and Descourtieux (1999), save a *kolon* before the quote from Democritus, and those charming continental quotation marks.
[43] The original text, from *Ion* 534b: κοῦφον γὰρ χρῆμα ποιητής ἐστιν καὶ πτηνὸν καὶ ἱερόν, καὶ οὐ πρότερον οἷός τε ποιεῖν πρὶν ἂν ἔνθεός τε γένηται καὶ ἔκφρων.
[44] Guthrie (1965) 477.

genuine. Apparently unaware of Delatte's prior discussion,[45] Brancacci presents an argument for its authenticity that is nearly identical to his predecessor's, namely that the "presence of μέν in the expression ποιητὴς δὲ ἅσσα μὲν ἂν γράφῃ … leads us to believe that the Democritus fragment contained an antithesis, and that, after the expression καλὰ κάρτα ἐστίν, it continued with a reference to the works of poets that had not been written μετ᾽ ἐνθουσιασμοῦ and thus were not 'truly beautiful', i.e. were not poetic works."[46] Mansfeld did not weigh in on the μέν, and it is a persuasive exegesis which Brancacci and Delatte have offered, so I must concede their point: the μέν to which they refer, along with the preceding first words of the quotation, does seem unlikely as the stuff of a careless paraphrase, and one must ask, above all, why he would write the μέν but not follow it with a clearly corresponding particle.[47]

It must also be granted that what the purported fragment contains is not (*pace* Mansfeld) so thoroughly inconceivable a description in the context of the remaining Democritea, although none of the three terms on the table, ἐνθουσιασμός, ἱερός, or πνεῦμα, appears again. Indeed, the explication of ἐνθουσιασμός "the state of having god within one" and with it ἱερὸν πνεῦμα "holy breath" is not so unimaginable when according to Democritus to breathe is to inhale soul atoms, the very stuff of anything divine as well.[48] The combination therefore must seem somewhat redundant, but the second phrase may seem, *prima facie,* to be an explanatory afterthought in an alluring blend of conventional and quasi-physiological terms. For that, valid parallels are given in Mansfeld's citations of

[45] Delatte's work appears in the Bibliography of the collection (*Democritus: Science, The Arts, and the Care of the Soul*), but is not cited by Brancacci.
[46] Brancacci (2007) 201; see also ibid. 197, and Delatte (1934) 32.
[47] I owe my good sense in this entirely to the guidance of Profs. Sanders and Augoustakis.
[48] Sources to be discussed below.

Aristotle, Plutarch, and Cassius Dio, who use ἱερὸν πνεῦμα for the superstitiously-labelled sneeze, "the holy and divine πνεῦμα among the muses" which was Homer,[49] and the Pythia's mythical vapors, respectively.[50] Yet the conventionally religious tone of each of those, not to mention the usual application of ἱερός (one thinks of ἱερὰ νόσος),[51] must render the irreligious Democritus' use of it a smidge less plausible.

At the same time, Guthrie's and Mansfeld's assumption of a need to "de-Christianize" these words,[52] if it derives from the most obvious assumption, is entirely baseless, because the collocation occurs nowhere else in the early Christian authors, πνεῦμα ἅγιον instead being the conventional phrase for their Holy Spirit.[53] Yet a less obvious possibility remains which could make his allegiances significant. When Clement was writing, πνεῦμα was a popular term among Christian authors for that by means of which any prophet spoke, along with all those speaking in tongues, and even for "*the divine influence* exercised on the thoughts and sentiments of men generally."[54] As for ἱερόν, it is noteworthy that Clement elsewhere shows himself willing to use ἱερός of

[49] It is not exactly, as Mansfeld (2004) 486 suggests, the breath which "caused Homer (him again) to be fought over by the cities who claimed him as their own" – the more proximate cause to which Plutarch there refers is the fact that he was not the praiser of one city alone, while the phrase τὸ δ' ἱερὸν καὶ δαιμόνιον ἐν μούσαις πνεῦμα is simply in apposition to Ὅμηρον (*Exil.* 605a).
[50] For citations see Mansfeld (2004) 486. Cf. also Philo Judaeus *De virtutibus* 135.7, who writes of τὴν ἱερωτάτην πνεύματος φύσιν, hypothesizing that it would prevent a flame from touching an unholy sacrifice made of a mother animal and its offspring.
[51] See *LSJ* s.v. – and of course the Hippocratic *De morbo sacro.*
[52] Guthrie (1965) n. 2, whose slight skepticism was noted above. For Guthrie, writing prior to the convenience of digital databases, and therefore (I assume) being unable to locate even the instance which Mansfeld cites from Aristotle, this oversight too is rather forgivable.
[53] See Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. 1958, s.v. πνεῦμα.
[54] The quotation is taken from *LSJ*. For fuller discussion and references, see Arndt and Gingrich *op. cit.*

pagans and their own revered objects, whereas ἁγιός seems to be reserved for the more properly christened. Ergo, for an author who so regularly refers to the πνεῦμα ἁγιόν, the mention of a ἱερὸν πνεῦμα would undoubtedly recall the usual solemn utterance, and accordingly there could not be a more perfect phrase for strengthening the contrast at hand.[55]

As to what remains in the ostensible fragment, there is another and deeper motive for suspecting the occurence of ἐνθουσιασμός as well. After all, as Mansfeld has suggested, with the dismissal of the fragment we really lose nothing but a bias toward an extravagant and Platonizing interpretation, a bias revealed most clearly in the conclusions reached by Delatte in his emphasis upon f. 18 and Platonic assistance. This tendency derives from the impression of an occasional and overwhelming passivity given most strongly by f. 18, and principally as a result of its momentous use of ἐνθουσιασμός, a word which (along with its cognates from ἔνθεος) is not found elsewhere in the fragments, and is otherwise first attested in Plato, who noticeably reveals a greater tendency toward such denominative verbs and their cognate nouns.[56] The term must be significantly stranger in Democritus, since the etymological relation to ἔνθεος is plain, and with it the implication of a separate and possessing θεός, which Plato makes all too explicit in his discussions.[57] The term and its cognate verb were moreover so popularized by the

[55] A cursory search revealed over thirty instances of the phrase.
[56] The word ἐνθουσιασμός occurs once in Plato, *Tim.* 71e6, and cognate forms some thirteen times. On the denominative verbs and nouns, my judgement rests on the basis of simple searches for –αζ- and –ασμ- in both authors. Of course, given the highly fragmentary nature of Democritus' writings, this can be of little weight. Yet perhaps Plato's essentialism would support this line of thought.
[57] cf. e.g. *Meno* 99d3.

Peripatetics and the later Platonists,[58] that of the two possibilities, a later paraphrase appears so far to be the more probable.

Clement's authority on Democritus may be doubted further still, on the grounds that he gives a more obviously distorted account of the atomist's doctrine elsewhere, writing of the "εἴδωλα falling upon humans and irrational animals from the divine being (ἀπὸ τῆς θείας οὐσίας)."[59] Democritus, it must be noted, would not have used οὐσία for anything but an atom, to say nothing of the distinction between humans and irrational animals, a distinction which by all accounts is not made before Aristotle.[60]

Coincidentally, the same anachronism mars another testimonium around which much debate and also Delatte's reconstruction revolve, where Aëtius relates that "Democritus [says] that there are more senses [i.e. than the regular five] for irrational animals, for wise men, and for gods."[61] Given the problem of ἄλογα alone, I am inclined to set this testimonium aside, too, in the pursuit of Democritean psychology of the poet. Thus I will proceed for now without recourse either to Clement's text or this sixth sense.

Happily juxtaposed with that mess, we have the quote from Dio Chrysostom, provided at the very beginning of his oration *On Homer*:

---

[58] The word is used four times by Aristotle, and appears in the fragments of Theophrastus; its further doctrinal significance is indicated by e.g. the title Περὶ ἐνθουισασμοῦ found in Diogenes' lists for both Theophrastus (DL V.43) and Strato (DL V.59). As for the Platonists, the term appears all of forty times in Plutarch, to cite only one example.

[59] DK A79: εἰδωλα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις προσπίπτοντα καὶ τοῖς ἀλόγοις ζώιοις ἀπὸ τῆς θείας οὐσίας.

[60] In one of the fragments attributed to "Demokrates" (taken to be a garbled "Democritus," though the authenticity of the sayings is highly doubtful), DK 68 B82, οὐσία is used in an ethical application in the more idiomatic sense of personal "substance." Otherwise, on οὐσία in Democritus and Clement's fragment, cf. Guthrie (1965) 481, Hershbell (1982) 91 n. 36. On the anachronism of ζώια ἄλογα, see e.g. Sorabji (1996).

[61] Aët. IV 10, 4 (DK 68 A116): Δ. πλείους εἶναι αἰσθήσεις περὶ τὰ ἄλογα ζῷα καὶ περὶ τοὺς σοφούς καὶ περὶ τοὺς θεούς. cf. Guthrie (1965) 449 & 478 n.1.

῾Ο μὲν Δημόκριτος περὶ ῾Ομήρου φησὶν οὕτως· ῞Ομηρος φύσως λαχὼν θεαζούσης ἐπέων κόσμον ἐτεκτήνατο παντοίων· ὡς οὐκ ἐνὸν ἄνευ θείας καὶ δαιμονίας φύσεως οὕτως καλὰ καὶ σοφὰ ἔπη ἐργάσασθαι.[62]

Now Democritus concerning Homer speaks thus: "Homer, alotted a divinizing nature, built a κόσμος of manifold words;" as though it is not possible without a divine and demonic nature to fashion such beautiful and wise words.

The context, while also devoid of doxographical purpose, is nevertheless enormously preferable. To repeat, at the very outset of this panegyric on the Hellenes' greatest poet, Dio appeals to the authority of none other than Democritus! The language of the fragment is almost entirely that of the most dignified descriptions of a poet's activity: in the opening ascription of Homer's grandeur to his φύσις, in the proud metaphor of monumental construction, and in the phrase ἐπέων κόσμον which echoes Solon perhaps and most likely Parmenides.[63] The only exception is the *hapax* θεαζούσης, which according to the *Etymologicum Gudianum* is synonymous with μαινομένης.[64] While that gloss has satisfied most interpreters (even the cautious Mansfeld!),[65] I doubt whether it is really apt, and whether Heraclitus' remark about the Sybil "with raving mouth" (μαινομένῳ στόματι) is a good comparandum;[66] whatever a Greek might say about the Sybil, not even Plato in the *Ion* dared to ascribe actual madness, divine or otherwise, *directly* to Homer, who although some others called him ignorant and deceptive was not yet the *vinosus Homerus* whom one encounters in Horace.[67] And it is surely significant that Dio himself glosses the peculiar wording with the phrase "as though it is not possible without a divine

---

[62] *Or.* 53.1.
[63] Parmenides DK B8.52. (I will have more to say later on this possible allusion and Democritus' allegorical rehabilitation of Homer following the attacks of Parmenides and others.) Solon fr. 1.2 West *ap.* Plu. *Sol.* 8; citation from Mansfeld (2004) 484, who notes other and only later occurrences of the phrase.
[64] Although it appears there as θεαζόντων, glossed as μαινομένων.
[65] Mansfeld (2004) 485. cf. Delatte (1934) 32-3.
[66] Heraclitus DK B92. cf. Mansfeld (2004) 485.
[67] *Ep.* 19.6.

and demonic nature to fashion such beautiful and wise words", rather than some mention of divine inspiration such as he makes later on in the oration.[68] Furthermore, the participle strikes me as a neologism too deliberate be a mere equivalent of θεῖος, devoid of theoretical commitments. As our own modern lexicographers have appropriately defined it, this denominative verb must mean "to be (a) god", or, what they do not suggest, "to make (a) god".[69] Lacking the prefix which would bring it in line with the terms used by Plato (including ἐνθεάζω "to be ἔνθεος"), θεαζούσης would seem to indicate very deliberately that no separate agency had used Homer as its mouthpiece. Thus, if the text is correct, Democritus must be making a point about Homer's nature being itself divine and/or making him divine. This is a far cry from the implications of forceful possession so easily extracted from f. 18, and thus puts us on safer ground.

For all that, we may now seem to be faced *vis-à-vis* f. 21 with little more than an old-fashioned bit of high praise, albeit couched in Democritean coinage and, one hopes, not uninformed by nor incompatible with the atomist's other teachings. It will be my ultimate contention that it is just that. With the avoidance of f. 18, the tension which so many have seen between a belief in divine inspiration and his materialist philosophy vanishes. Still, there remain some very intriguing connections to be drawn between f. 21 and other aspects of his thought. So that fragment together with the remaining material still gives us plenty to chew on, and on the basis of this I will attempt to give an account of the psychology of the poet, and a reconstruction which may satisfy these opening conclusions,

---

[68] At 53.6 he writes "Indeed, without divine favour, without inspiration (ἐπιπνοίας) of the Muses and Apollo, it i ssimply impossible for poetry to be created which is so lofty and magnificent, and withal so sweet…" I print Crosby's Loeb translation, and must disagree with him when he notes that "Dio here reverts to the doctrine of Democritus."

[69] *LSJ* s.v. On denominative verbs, see Smyth 866.

and may also explain the readiness with which Democritus' views were confused by the later tradition. The analysis will lead us back, finally, to a more cautious reconsideration of Clement's words, the sixth sense, and certain aspects of the relation of Democritean doctrine to those before and after.

It seems best to begin with the grandest issue just raised, that of the divine and its place in the κόσμος, which also remains one of the most hotly contested in Democritean studies. To be fair to Porter, others have argued forcefully enough that Democritus dismissed all notions of divinity as misbegotten fictions. Although certain testimonia do suggest this, the assumption that Democritus was willing to grant divinity to some forms of existence better prepares us to take into account all of the relevant material. I will frame my discussion again with a muddled transmission, in the ideas which Cicero, through the mouth of the character Cotta, imputes to Democritus and mocks as worthier of the famously dull Abderites than of their philosophical fellow citizen. While the description is slightly confused, the confusion is one endemic to commentaries on Democritus, and so it provides a solid cornerstone for this discussion.

> *Mihi quidem etiam Democritus, vir magnus in primis, cuius fontibus Epicurus hortulos suos inrigavit, nutare videtur in natura deorum. tum enim censet imagines divinitate praeditas inesse in universitate rerum, tum principia mentis, quae sunt in eodem universo, deos esse dicit, tum animantes imagines, quae vel prodesse nobis solent vel nocere, tum ingentis quasdam imagines tantasque, ut universum mundum conplectantur extrinsecus; quae quidem omnia sunt patria Democriti quam Democrito digniora; quis enim istas imagines comprehendere animo potest, quis admirari, quis aut cultu aut religione dignas iudicare?*[70]
>
> For my own part I believe that even that very eminent man Democritus, the fountain-head from which Epicurus derived the streams that watered his little garden, has no fixed opinion about the nature of the gods. At one moment he holds the view that the universe includes images endowed with divinity; at another he says that there exist in this same universe the elements from which the mind is compounded, and that these are gods; at another, that they are animate images, which are wont to exercise a beneficent or harmful influence over us; and again that they are certain vast images of such as size as to envelop and enfold the entire world. All these fancies are more worthy of Democritus's native city than of himself; for who could form a mental

[70] *De natura deorum* 1.43.120, G 182. Trans. Rackham in the Loeb.

picture of such images? who could adore them and deem them worthy of worship or reverence?

As Guthrie has shown, easy confusions arise in such facile synopses of Democritean doctrine, because the closely related phenomena of fire and soul are more often than not completely and incorrectly equated by the commentators, misled by the trend among other philosophers. Aristotle himself relates that soul (ψυχή) and fire (πῦρ) are identical for Democritus,[71] but elsewhere gives us reason to doubt that simple picture, saying that the soul is rather "a kind of fire and heat" (πῦρ τι καὶ θερμόν),[72] and then that "soul and heat (τὸ θερμόν) are the same thing, the primary figures of spherical shape."[73] The implication of the latter two quotations combined is perhaps clear enough: soul and heat and fire are related but discernible phenomena produced by the same type of atom, namely the smallest, roundest, and most mobile.[74] According to Atomist cosmology, these very atoms were expelled, owing to their fineness and mobility, out from among the larger and heavier atoms and into the upper reaches of the κόσμος, still filling the atmosphere but largely gathering around the fiery heavenly bodies (some of which were previously composed of cold earth),[75] which together with the inflamed outer membrane (ὑμήν or χιτών) of the κόσμος, "embrace the entire world extrinsically" (*universum mundum complectantur extrinsecus*).[76] The easy identification of fire and soul would encourage the assumption that these bodies, if anything, are divine, and perhaps Democritus even called them "gods"

[71] *De an.* 405a5-13, DK A101, G 115.
[72] *De an.* 403b31, found in DK A28, G 113.
[73] *De respir.* 471b30-472a18, DK A106, G 114: λέγει δ' ὡς ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ θερμὸν ταὐτόν…
[74] Ar. *De an.* 405a5-13, DK A101, G 115.
[75] [Plutarch] *Misc.* 7, DK A39, G62.
[76] Aët. 2.7.2, DK 67 A23; cf. Guthrie (1965) II 408-10, who compares, *inter alia*, the Orphic (!) account of the order of the universe as an egg.

accordingly: Aëtius tells us that Democritus held god to be "mind in spherical fire".[77] Yet there is apparently no complete identification of soul and fire, since we are told that the stars are not living things (ζῶια),[78] and that the κόσμος as a whole is "neither ensouled (ἔμψυχον) nor ordered by providence (προνοίᾳ διακεῖσθαι)."[79] Certain principles, then, must have prevented Democritus from considering all forms of fire and heat to be also ψυχή. A clue is given by Theophrastus, who writes, "Concerning thinking he has said this much: it occurs when the soul is in a balanced state amid the movement."[80] One may extrapolate from this that the same atoms under certain conditions would produce only minimal warmth, and under the opposite such intense heat as to preclude any semblance of mind. So perhaps it is right to conceive of a spectrum of phenomena produced by these fine, spherical atoms, at one end of which is the most minimal movement and warmth—at the other, astronomical conflagrations. Still, in the sublunary realm, to borrow a phrase, there exists a plethora of perceptive animals: is it possible that among them are clouds of atoms, endowed with mind, resembling somewhat the old gods of tradition?

In a fragment which has suffered the most diverse interpretations, Democritus wrote, "Among the learned men (λογίων ἀνθρώπων), a few, raising their hands to the

---

[77] Aët. 1.7.16, DK A74: Δ. νοῦν τὸν θεὸν ἐν πυρὶ σφαιροειδεῖ.

[78] DK 67 B1, G 63: τοὺς ἀστέρας δὲ ζῶια εἶναι οὔτε Ἀναξαγόραι οὔτε Δημοκρίτωι ἐν τῶι Μεγάλωι διακόσμωι δοκεῖ.

[79] Aët. 2.3.2 DK 67A22: Λεύκιππος δὲ καὶ Δημόκριτος καὶ Ἐπίκουρος οὔτ' ἔμψυχον οὔτε προνοίᾳ διακεῖσθαι [sc. τὸν κόσμον], φύσει δέ τινι ἀλόγῳ ἐκ τῶν ἀτόμων συνεστῶτα.

[80] Theophrastus *De sens.* 58· περὶ δὲ τοῦ φρονεῖν ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον εἴρηκεν ὅτι γίνεται συμμέτρως ἐχούσης τῆς ψυχῆς μετὰ τὴν κίνησιν. Also found *in situ* in DK A135, G 131. Translation adapted from Graham. I have opted to follow the *codices* rather than Diels or Schneider, who emend to κατὰ τὴν κρῆσιν and κατὰ τὴν κρᾶσιν, respectively. While Theophrastus does go on to use κρᾶσις in his descriptions of Democritean theory of mind, I still think that the previous reading makes perfectly good sense and ought not to be emended. My reasons will be given below.

place which we Greeks now call air, [said] 'All things does Zeus ponder and all things does he know and give and take away and king is he of all things.'"[81] Whatever the actual tone of these words, Democritus too thought that the air is filled with the soul or fire atoms and thus with *principia mentis.*[82] These are the very atoms which, by means of respiration, sustain any mind. Aside from this intimate application, such atoms would also, it seems, necessarily form occasional conglomerates according to the atomists' principle of the aggregation of like substances.[83] It is therefore tempting to identify them as the source of the εἴδωλα which Cicero describes as *imagines divinitate praeditas*, i.e. as a sort of transient, sublunary predecessors of Epicurus' intermundial gods.[84] Yet our understanding of these εἴδωλα is complicated by the fact that Democritus seems to use the term both for the off-flowing atomic films by means of which all things are perceived, and for certain objects more persistent and extraordinary, even displaying powers of communication and intentionality, and therefore more akin to the quasi-demonic εἴδωλα or "phantoms" of Homer. However, by reference to the latter, a number of scholars have dismissed the possibility of the term εἴδωλον being used in both applications, in favor of an interpretation which would have them only be the effluences from all bodies. Homer's εἴδωλα, they note, are in two instances described as temporary creations, bearing a

[81] DK B30: τῶν λογίων ἀνθρώπων ὀλίγοι ἀνατείναντες τὰς χεῖρας ἐνταῦθα, ὃν νῦν ἠέρα καλέομεν οἱ Ἕλληνες· πάντα, εἶπαν, Ζεὺς μυθέεται καὶ πάνθ᾽ οὗτος οἶδε καὶ διδοῖ καὶ ἀφαρέεται καὶ βασιλεὺς οὗτος τῶν πάντων. Translation adapted from Guthrie (1965) 479. For discussion of the fragment, see *ibid*. I will have more to say on this fragment below, when I come to a fuller discussion of Democritus and allegoresis.
[82] *De Respir.* 471b30-472a18; DK A106, G 114.
[83] cf., e.g., DK A128, G 124; DK A165, G 86; DK A99a, G 87; DK B164, G61. cf. Guthrie (1965) 409f.
[84] DK A78, G 188 – where they fill the air; DK B166, G 187 – Sextus *Adv. Math*. 9.19 – where they are beneficial or harmful and communicate to men; see also DK A77, G 186 – Plutarch *Quaest. conviv.* 734f-735b (discussed at greater length below) – where they are emitted from all bodies.

resemblance to someone still alive but otherwise having no meaningful connection to them – and these alone, they claim, must provide the relevant conceptual background of the Democritean εἴδωλα.[85] But we would do well to keep in mind the other application of the term for the persistent spirits in Hades, one of which – that of Teiresias – still enjoys his mind (νόος).[86]

The concept of the εἴδωλον as endowed with an independent existence finds an extension in another instance of the term which has been neglected in Democritean studies, a fragment from a dirge of Pindar's:

> ὀλβίᾳ δ᾽ ἅπαντες αἴσᾳ λυσίπονον τελετὰν
> καὶ σῶμα μὲν πάντων ἔπεται θανάτῳ περισθενεῖ
> ζωὸν δ᾽ ἔτι λείπεται αἰῶνος εἴδωλον· τὸ γάρ ἐστι μόνον
> ἐκ θεῶν· εὕδει δὲ πρασσόντων μελέων, ἀτὰρ εὐδόντεσσιν ἐν πολλοῖς
> ὀνείροις
> δείκνυσι τερπνῶν ἐφέρποισαν χαλεπῶν τε κρίσιν.
>
> In happy fate all die a death
> That frees from care,
> And yet there still will linger behind
> A living image of life,
> For this alone has come from the gods.
> It sleeps while the members are active;
> But to those who sleep themselves
> It reveals in myriad visions
> The fateful approach
> Of adversities or delights. [87]

Without exploring the possible connections – already famously suggested by Aristotle and Thrasylus – between Democritean and Pythagorean doctrines (Orphic parallels of which are likely in evidence here),[88] I will only highlight the interaction of the independently existing εἴδωλον with the dreamer to whom it reveals the "oncoming issue of delights and

[85] Apollo and Aeneas (*Il.* 5.450); Athena and Penelope (*Od*. 4.796).
[86] On the εἴδωλα in Hades: *Il.* 23.72; *Od*. 11.476, 24.14.
[87] ff. 114, 115 Bowra; 131a, b Snell/Maehler. I follow Bremmer (1983) 7, in printing them together, and print his augmented text of the translation given by Jaeger (1947) 75.
[88] *De anim*. 404 a17ff; DL IX.38.

hardships," as it is further evidence of a well established conception extending well beyond that of the temporary creation of mere images.

Of the atomic εἴδωλα, according to Sextus and others, Democritus also thought that they "indicate beforehand future events to human beings."[89] While the force of this phrase may be mitigated by reference to the εἴδωλα produced by all bodies, and the "foretelling" thereby reduced to a revelation of the motions and intentions of other and sometimes distant bodies, and therefore some thoroughly un-deified forecasting of future events,[90] it is again tempting, I think, to take this as a stronger claim about at least some εἴδωλα as rather apotheosized beings capable of contemplating and communicating profound thought and foresight.

On this hypothesis, if Sextus is not merely denigrating Democritus as a superstitious old coot in saying that he εὔχετο εὐλόγχων τυχεῖν εἰδώλων, and if it is right in the first place to attribute to Democritus a belief in these "daimonic" figures, then we can make easy sense of his praying to them, and not merely "hoping" or "desiring" as others have suggested. The easy sense arises from the necessary possibility of a human being's communicating his thoughts by the same mechanism, willy-nilly, to the more "divine". The unique form εὐλόγχων, an adjective found only in the repeated paraphrases of this description of Democritus, and therefore a likely and characteristic coinage, also carries with it a mite of support for this argument, adhering from the common use of the cognate verb, λαγχάνω, for the action of tutelary deities.[91]

---

[89] DK B166, G 187: προσημαίνειν τε τὰ μέλλοντα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις.
[90] cf. DK A67, G 186 – Plutarch *Quaest. conviv.* 734f-735b.
[91] LSJ s.v. The uncompounded verb is used (in participial form) in DK B21, our fragment on Homer. Besides the passage from Sextus, εὐλόγχος only appears in Eusebius *Praeparatio evangelica* 5.17.4.4, Plutarch's life of Aemilius Paullus 1.4.2, and *De defectu*

Perhaps some of the εἴδωλα as mere effluences were assumed to accumulate more soul atoms and thus to become the large and persistent εἴδωλα which Sextus describes. Yet his persistent references to gods, his conception of εἴδωλα, and the profound significance of their activities for the lives of human beings, suggests some connection between the two. And whatever this connection may have been, it is an inescapable assumption that the divine was that which possessed soul of some remarkable degree of activity. Most important for this essay is the fact that this divine activity, while influential and prone to fluctuation, is never conceived as divine possession of human beings. The influence is rather one of an exchange of atomic films, a communication of thought and minimal matter.

Now, since the only difference between a human being and such a divinity *qua* minds, lies in the limits of the human body as a vessel of soul atoms, the looseness of Democritus' usage of θεῖος, like the loose sense of superhuman divinity which Cicero derided, is entirely apprehensible when we come to his remarks on Homer, poets, and mind, tout court.

Further considerations of the embodied soul are necessary before we explore the psychology of the poet. Again, soul or mind is a sort of fire or heat. The latter, Theophrastus tells us in his generous discussion of the Democritean theory of sensation, is increased, curiously, by the creation of empty spaces. In the body, he recounts, heat is said to be increased e.g. by "the sharp-(or hot-)tasting" (τὸν ὀξύν), which causes the contraction of things within our bodies and thus the widening of interstices.[92] One might be inclined to assume that this is because the soul or fire atoms can then enter from the

---

oraculorum 419a8,
[92] *De sens.* 65, DK XX, G131.

atmosphere or whatever surrounding spaces. But that simple picture is complicated by another passage from Theophrastus, where he relates that Democritus explained the shape of a flame by reference to the gradual cooling of the outer edges, which results in a proportional condensation toward its upper tip.[93] The increase in heat, then, is the result of the widening itself, so that we may assume that while some grouping of those atoms is necessary for the phenomena to occur at all, those same phenomena are more pronounced when there is some empty space between the constituent atoms (but, we must assume, within certain bounds).

The applicability of the last suggestion to the functions of those atoms as mind atoms is suggested by a passage from Plutarch, which reports that εἴδωλα which bear the impressions both of the shape of the body and of the state of its soul are transmitted more reliably in smooth, unhindering air.[94] One might reasonably wonder, then, if this would transfer over to the increased reliability of all perception within an embodied soul marked by the same properties. Although this leaves unanswered the damning question of how a mind so constituted could be coordinated despite its spatial extension, the basic idea would support a straightforward and naïve account of the more perceptive mind as one characterized by many soul atoms with much space maintained between them.

To add to this, the crudeness and naïveté of most early accounts of *mind* encourages me to draw a parallel from Seneca's *Quaestiones naturales* on the topic of *wind*, concerning which "Democritus, it seems, offered an extremely simple explanation based directly on the restless dance of the atoms:"[95]

---

[93] *De ign.* 52, DK A73, G60.
[94] *Quastione convivales* 734f735b, DK A77, G 186.
[95] Guthrie (1965) 425.

> *Democritus ait: cum in angusto inani multa sint corpuscula quae ille atomos vocat, sequi ventum. at contra quietum et placidum aeris statum esse, cum in multo inani pauca sint corpuscula. nam quemadmodum in foro aut vico, quamdiu paucitas est, sine tumultu ambulatur, ubi turba in angustum concurrit, aliorum in alios incidentium rixa fit: sic in hoc quo circumdati sumus spatio, cum exiguum locum multa corpora impleverint, necesse est alia aliis incidant et impellant ac repellantur implicenturque et comprimantur, ex quibus nascitur ventus, cum illa quae colluctubantur, incubuere et diu fluctuata ac dubia inclinavere se. at ubi in magna laxitate corpora pauca versantur, nec arietare possunt nec impelli.*[96]
>
> According to Democritus, when many particles, which he calls atoms, are confined in a narrow void space, a wind arises. And by contrast the air is calm and peaceful when few particles are found in a large void. For just as in the marketplace or a plaza, as long as there are only a few people, they circulate freely, but when a crowd enters a confined space, a commotion results as they jostle each other; so in this space in which we are surrounded, when many bodies fill a small space, they are bound to run into each other, to push and bounce off, become entangled and be squeezed together, from which arises wind, when the bodies which have struggled, stood still, and moved back and forth for a long time with uncertain direction begin to move in concert. But when a few bodies move about in a great open space, they are not able either to ram each other or to be pushed around.

The parallel cannot be unwarranted, given the relationship of soul and breath and air which we have seen, and it immediately suggests a plausibly simple picture of the calm of the soul: just as the motes may flit in the rays of light falling into our rooms when the air is still nonetheless, so the ever-moving and embodied soul atoms might maintain their activity while in sum comprising the calmest of souls. For my part, it is an apt and charming illustration of the subjective experience of even the most self-aware moments of mental calm.

This picture also recalls the line from Theophrastus quoted above in the discussion of divinity: "Concerning thinking he has said this much: it occurs when the soul is in a balanced state amid the movement."[97] To justify now the return to the *codd.* in reading μετὰ τὴν κίνησιν ("amid the movement") rather than κατὰ τὴν κρᾶσιν ("according to the mixture"), one need only point to the incessant movement of soul atoms, and the picture

[96] *Quaest. nat.* 5.2, DK A93a, G 80. Trans. Graham.
[97] Theophrastus *De sens.* 58: περὶ δὲ τοῦ φρονεῖν ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον εἴρηκεν ὅτι γίνεται συμμέτρως ἐχούσης τῆς ψυχῆς μετὰ τὴν κίνησιν. Also found *in situ* in DK A135, G 131. Translation adapted from Graham.

which has been developed here of the soul atoms balanced in their spacing, a spacing which is again definitive of the spectrum of phenomena toward the middle of which lies the full range of conscious experience.

The preceding considerations may reinforce and in turn be reinforced by one interpretation of a much-debated Democritean line well worth contemplating now: "Among souls, the ones being moved out of great intervals are neither stable nor happy."[98] I contend that the souls in question here are being moved, not "through" as many have read it, but "out of the great intervals," as James Warren has suggested,[99] i.e. out of a condition marked by the larger interstices that establish superior perceptual and mental capacities. Warren's arguments are aimed solely at assessing a view of Democritean εὐθυμία as a particular arrangement or harmony of soul atoms, and his conclusions are presented with great reservations. His principal problem is why, on any theory of the soul as harmony, the intervals should be large. Yet in addition to the foregoing suggestions as to the preferability of large intervals, another cogent piece of evidence can be added which at least validates Warren's construal of the Greek. The phrase ἐκ μεγάλων διαστημάτων, the focal point of the debate over this fragment, has a parallel in an Aristotelian passage which could hardly be more helpful: "Nor is the lung able again compressing itself from a wide interval (ἐκ πολλοῦ διαστήματος) to squeeze out the breath by force."[100] The contraction of the lungs ἐκ πολλοῦ διαστήματος, which is most naturally read as "from a wide interval", is sufficiently analagous to the soul-compression just described, so that the

[98] DK B191, G 211: αἱ δ' ἐκ μεγάλων διαστημάτων κινούμεναι τῶν ψυχέων οὔτε εὐσταθέες εἰσὶν οὔτε εὔθυμοι.
[99] Warren (2002) 44ff.
[100] *De audibilibus* 800a36-b1. οὐδὲ ὁ πνεύμων δύναται πάλιν ἐκ πολλοῦ διαστήματος συνάγων ἑαυτὸν ἐκθλίβειν βίᾳ τὸ πνεῦμα. Not cited by Warren. Hett in the Loeb translates, "after a great expansion".

Aristotelian passage is again excellent evidence for Warren's interpretation. Otherwise, too, the idea seems undeniably Democritean. In other fragments he proclaims that the lack of measure in life is accompanied by the constant alternation between states of desire and fleeting moments of gratification, the pleasure of which is diminished as a result of the frequency – that is to say, the physical intervals between which the soul moves, in its passage from states of pleasure, desire, etc., are shortened, and proportionally with the shrinking periods of time.[101] The life of moderation, consequently, is the life of a slower rhythm and of greater experiences of pleasure.[102] Lastly, whereas the pleasures of the body fill and moisten and produce those frequent changes which prevent any sustained measure in the soul, the pleasures of the mind sustain the soul's heat, and thus the desirably large intervals which constitute the optimal harmony of the soul.[103]

With this simple conjunction of Democritus' ethics and physics, one is also led to assume the identity of this state with that of the philosopher-sage. After all, εὐθυμία, if not restricted to those of ample endowment and learning, must at the very least be fully consistent with the philosopher's ideal; if we can judge from his own life, it was definitely not one of empty-mindedness. This should leave no doubt, then, as to the possible relation of such good cheer to the most fruitful intellection: the very state of the soul which establishes εὐθυμία must also render it more penetrating in its judgment, and more susceptible to all perceptions.

Yet, should doubts remain, Plutarch comes to our aid by having recorded a rather Pythagorean explanation of Socrates' δαιμόνιον, his "customary divine sign", which we

[101] DK B235, G280.
[102] DK B211, G286; DK B232, G 293.
[103] DK B146, G 285.

may tentatively connect, in its barest details, to Democritus and his εἴδωλα; as Jackson Hershbell has remarked, Plutarch himself reveals a tendency to equate Democritus' εἴδωλα with the δαίμονες of his own world-view.[104] We thus find a very illuminating connection between Democritus and Socrates, through these lingering philosophical opinions on revelation. According to the explanation offered by Plutarch's character Simmias, air imprints of the "λόγοι of δαίμονες, passing through all things, echo only in those who possess untroubled character and a calm soul."[105] Plutarch continues with a remark which hints at a connection between Democritean εὐθυμία and the theory of increased perception of εἴδωλα in dreams:

> οἱ δὲ πολλοὶ καταδαρθοῦσιν οἴονται το δαιμόνιον ἀνθρώποις ἐπιθειάζειν, εἰ δ' ἐγρηγορότας καὶ καθεστῶτας ἐν τῷ φρονεῖν ὁμοίως κινεῖ, θαυμαστὸν ἡγοῦνται καὶ ἄπιστον· ὥσπερ ἂν εἴ τις οἴοιτο τὸν μουσικὸν ἀνειμένῃ τῇ λύρᾳ χρώμενον, ὅταν συστῇ τοῖς τόνοις ἢ καθαρμοσθῇ, μὴ ἅπτεσθαι μηδὲ χρῆσθαι. τὸ γὰρ αἴτιον οὐ συνορῶσι, τὴν ἐν αὐτοῖς ἀναρμοστίαν καὶ ταραχήν…[106]
>
> Most people however believe that it is only in sleep that the 'daimonic' power inspires humans. That it should move them in the same way when awake and of sound mind they find surprising and incredible. But that is like thinking that a musician uses his lyre only when it is unstrung, and does not touch or use it when it has been adjusted and tuned. They do not see that the cause is the tunelessness and confusion within themselves.

The disharmony and tumult here contrasted with the calm of the virtuous soul are enticingly reminiscent of the slow, extended rhythm and wide intervals of Democritean εὐθυμία. Another inviting comparison comes from the concept of a communication which, far from being incompatible with reason and self-control, is in fact only perceptible for human beings who possess them. This passage alone would be suggestive enough, but for the lack of any straightforward physical details which could link these descriptions with

---

[104] Hershbell (1982) 104.
[105] *De gen. Soc.* 589D: οἱ τῶν δαιμόνων λόγοι διὰ πάντων φερόμενοι μόνοις ἐνηχοῦσι τοῖς ἀθόρυβον ἦθος καὶ νήνεμον ἔχουσι τὴν ψυχήν, οὓς δὴ καὶ ἱεροὺς καὶ δαιμονίους ἀνθρώπους καλοῦμεν. I print the text of Nesselrath.
[106] *ibid.* 588F. Text and translation are those of Nesselrath.

the wide intervals of Democritus. But one does not have to look far to find the missing link: in one of his charming *Quaestiones convivales*, entitled "Why truffles are thought to be produced by thunder, and why people believe that sleepers are never struck by thunder",[107] Plutarch provides a quotation from Democritus before proceeding to an explanation of the second problem. The solution which follows is not ascribed to Democritus, but some association is unmistakable:

> μᾶλλον γὰρ ἔρρωται καὶ συνέστηκεν καὶ ἀντερείδει τὰ σώματα τῶν ἐγρηγορότων, ἅτε δὴ πᾶσι τοῖς μέρεσι πεπληρωμένα πνεύματος· ὑφ᾽ οὗ καὶ τὰς αἰσθήσεις ἐπιστρέφοντος ὥσπερ ἐν ὀργάνῳ καὶ σφίγγοντος εὔτονον γέγονε καὶ συνεχὲς αὑτῷ ικαὶ πυκνὸν τὸ ζῷον. ἐν δὲ ὕπνοις ἐξανεῖται καὶ μανὸν καὶ ἀνώμαλον καὶ ἄτονον καὶ διακεχυμένον, καὶ πόρους ἔσχηκε πολλούς, τοῦ πνεύματος ἐνδιδόντος καὶ ἀπολείποντος…[108]
>
> The body of those awake is firmer, compacter, and more resistant, because it is filled in all its parts with vital spirit. This vital spirit tightens up and attunes the organs of sense like strings in a musical instrument, and gives the whole animal its proper tension, solidity, and compactness. In sleep, on the other hand, the body relaxes, becomes loose-textured and uneven in its consistency, and is left untensed and diffuse. The result is that many passages are opened as the vital spirit weakens and is lost.

For Democritus, likewise, sleep occurs when the exhalation and other release of soul atoms comes to outweigh the balancing effects of inhalation, and the obvious inference is that the intervals of soul atoms become necessarily wider in all beings, thus accounting for the greater prevalence of dream divination over waking sharp-wits.

Although these passages also recall certain Platonic descriptions of dreaming which in their rather Pythagorean and Empedoclean bent point the way toward a fundamental affiliation between Democritus and Plutarch's accounts of dreams and divine communication,[109] I would prefer to pass over them in favor of certain discussions from

---

[107] *Quaest. conviv.* IV.2, 664Bf. The translation of the title is from the Loeb, and the Greek is Διὰ τί τὰ ὕδνα δοκεῖ τῇ βροντῇ γίνεσθαι, καὶ διὰ τί τοὺς καθεύδοντας οἴονται μὴ κεραυνοῦσθαι.

[108] *ibid.* 666Af.

[109] Especially interesting are the descriptions at *Rep.* 571dff. and *Tim*. 71dff.

Aristotle which bear a more striking resemblance.

In *De divinatione per somnum*, Aristotle refers to Democritus, the εἴδωλα, the calmer air which permits a more accurate transmission of impulses, and the increased receptivity of the mind owing to its relaxation.[110] His lack of concern in that work for the relationship between such openness and the waking forms of intelligence leaves the account lacking for our purposes, but through his mention of the melancholic as also demonstrating vivid and prophetic dreams we find our connecting thread. The melancholic feature widely in the *corpus Aristotelicum*, and although the most thorough discussion of them occurs in the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata*, Philip van der Eijk has recently revealed the underlying consistency which unites the diverse statements in the genuine and the spurious work.[111] The crucial characteristic for a comparison with Democritus is, of course, the predominance of air. In the black bile, it is said, there is much air, just as there is in wine, which reveals this in its frothiness—especially when boiled.[112] In the relevant chapter of the *Problemata*, the principle thesis is that most men of genius are melancholic, and van der Eijk has proven that even within the genuine works, there is a very close association of the melancholic with the man of genius (εὐφυής). That the physiological causes to which Aristotle would attribute these dispositions are not far from those in the *Problemata* is suggested well enough by the familiar vocabulary of impetuosity and flights of fancy, but also more concretely in the *De anima*, where Aristotle says that those with soft flesh (μαλακόσαρκοι) are very intelligent (εὐφυείς).[113] Without allowing this to take us any farther afield, I would like to dwell for a moment on Aristotle's orientation toward

[110] *De div. per somn.* 464a.
[111] van der Eijk (2005) ch. 5.
[112] *Pr.* 953b
[113] *De an.* 421a23ff.

the peculiarity which unites these types. I must refer again to van der Eijk's expert analysis, in which he identifies the unifying capacity as an "intuition" (εὐστοχία) arising from a "special predisposition" (εὐφυία), and notes that "the *peritton* ["extraordinariness"] of melancholics in the areas mentioned [sc. poetry and philosophy] should be sought in a certain intuition and creativity which does not impede reason, but rather enhances it, with *phantasia* playing an important mediatory role."[114] Aristotle's εὐστοχία, being an ability to see similarities (τὸ ὅμοιον θεωρεῖν), may be compared with Democritus' γνώμη γνησίη, the "legitimate judgment", which penetrates beyond the testimony of the senses to grasp the finer truth in the hidden connections between phenomena which remain divided at the level of νόμος. In the juxtaposition of the two, (if my interpretation is correct) Democritus' γνωμή stands for a bundle of intellectual processes, and thus one senses that for Democritus there was no clear distinction between such functions of the soul as reason, imagination, and insight. With Aristotle, we have come to a vastly more sophisticated philosophy of mind, and also much clearer prejudices concerning rationality. Such prejudices, and the attendant sense of a real antinomy between reason and intuition, can only derive from the precise delineations undertaken by Plato, Aristotle, and their successors. But it is very telling that even for Aristotle the natural disposition necessary for the production of good poetry is the very same as that for philosophy. So to assume that Democritus felt even less of a push to distinguish the two activities is wholly reasonable. While he dwelt upon the passivity of all sensation and on the ineluctable fact of one's nature, he yet felt no incompatibility between this and the magnificence of individual minds.

[114] van der Eijk (2005) 165.

With that we come back to a picture rather reminiscent of that implied by the undifferentiated authority of the poet and sage, and articulated in the conventional invocations in Homer, Hesiod, Pindar and the rest, and. The majority opinion on these, represented by the quote from Murray above, must be close enough to the truth: surely ἐνθουσιασμός, as most Greeks would have conceived it, had no place in early Greek poetics. From what we have seen, it had no place in Democritus' philosophy, either.

But we have seen a willingness in him to acknowledge the material fluctuations of one's mental capacity and their dependence upon environmental influences, and to conceive of the maximal cognitive states as divine. A simple and compelling description of this dynamic is found in Guthrie's approving translation of Zeller: "He can quite well have supposed that certain more favourably constituted souls [one thinks of the φύσις θεάζουσα of Homer] absorb a greater wealth of 'images' and are by them aroused to a more lively motion than others, and this is the basis of the poetic gift and temperament."[115] But this is precisely the state desired by Democritus the philosopher as well – and thus the boundary drawn between poet and philosopher has disappeared. One might even wonder if the ποιητής of f. 18 is not in the least intended to mark out the poet alone, but plays instead on the looseness of the term just as much as Plato sometimes did.

One might object that a blatant distinction is indicated by the works grouped under the heading Μουσικὰ δὲ τάδε, especially in their concern for such purely aesthetic issues as rhythm and harmony (Περὶ ῥυθμῶν καὶ ἁρμονίης), the beauty of words (Περὶ καλλοσύνης ἐπέων), the euphony and cacophony of letters (Περὶ εὐφώνων καὶ

[115] Guthrie (1965) 477-8, translating and citing Zeller-Nestle (1920) 1164.

δυσφωὸνων γραμμάτων).[116] This line of thought was taken up recently by Brancacci, who, combatting all "irrationalist exegesis" of Democritean poetics, took one crucial step in line with mine when he insisted that ἐνθουσιασμός in Democritus indicates an "intensification of the poet's ability, and not a kind of possession or mystic rapture."[117] Yet after such a promising beginning he goes on to write, "For Democritus, however, divine inspiration no longer assured, as with the *poets* Homer and Hesiod, the *truth* of the poetic work, but its *beauty*: beautiful—not true—are all the things that the poet may write, driven by enthusiasm and divine breath."[118] True, Democritus says only that inspired writings are καλά. But in the same vein as that fragment,[119] we read that "It is of a divine mind always to think something καλόν."[120] The same label of 'divine' makes this sentence considerably less amenable to the restriction "beautiful—not true." Here, "divine" is applied not simply to the poet who writes pretty verses, but to the mind—any mind—which is ever considering something καλόν.[121] The idea becomes even more problematic for Brancacci's reading of the first fragment, when one notes the very rational connotations of the verb translated "to consider," διαλογίζεσθαι, some of the primary senses of which are "to balance accounts," "to calculate exactly," "to consider fully," "to distinguish".[122] A similar and revealing claim is made in another fragment: "The greatest pleasures come from the

[116] DL IX.48.
[117] Brancacci (2007) 202.
[118] Brancacci (2007) 204; emphasis in the original.
[119] DK B18, G 160.
[120] DK B122, G 393: θείου νοῦ τὸ ἀεί τι διαλογίζεσθαι καλόν.
[121] An excellent comparandum from Aristotle, *Met.* 1074b23ff.: πότερον οὖν διαφέρει τι ἢ οὐδὲν τὸ νοεῖν τὸ καλὸν ἢ τὸ τυχόν; ἢ καὶ ἄτοπον τὸ διανοεῖσθαι περὶ ἐνίων; δῆλον τοίνυν ὅτι τὸ θειότατον καὶ τιμιώτατον νοεῖ, καὶ οὐ μεταβάλλει.
[122] *LSJ* s.v. But cf. Taylor (2008) 3.

contemplation of the καλά among deeds."[123] It would be very odd to read these words as recommending a life of unmitigated fantasizing about beautiful things with no consideration of their truth. We may get something more down to earth out of this fragment if we note again the moral weight obvious here and in many other Democritean fragments,[124] and combine that weight with the striking dictum, "For all men the same thing is good and true: but for each another thing is pleasant."[125] This succinct statement of (what I take to be) his moral and theoretical realism militates strongly against Brancacci's interpretation, which would compel us to see Democritus and his favorite poet as a pair of starry-eyed woolgatherers.

To return to something more pertinent to Homer and the other poets, let us juxtapose with Brancacci's description Democritus' attested commitment to an allegorical reading of Homer. In his commentary on the *Odyssey*, Eustathius writes, "Some think that the sun is Zeus, others, with Democritus, that the vapour on which the sun feeds is ambrosia," and he also notes that Democritus suggested Πενία "Poverty" as the mother of the loyal Eumaeus.[126] Now, any allegorical reading, needless to say, cannot get off the ground without the assumption of underlying and interesting truths, and the truths which Democritus apparently found in Homer range, as we see here, from rather homely moral psychology to surprisingly sophisticated physical theory. Further, it is hard to imagine these two examples as illustrating anything but the generous assumption of most allegorical exegesis, that the original author was aware of the higher meaning hidden in his

[123] DK B194, G 283: αἱ μεγάλαι τέρψεις ἀπὸ τοῦ θεᾶσθαι τὰ καλὰ τῶν ἔργων γίνονται.
[124] cf., e.g., DK B63, G 351; DK B102, G 363; DK B207, G284 – which is especially noteworthy: ἡδονὴν οὐ πᾶσαν, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἐπὶ τῷ καλῷ αἱρεῖσθαι χρεών.
[125] DK B68, G 268: ἀνθρώποις πᾶσι τοὐτὸν ἀγαθὸν καὶ ἀληθές· ἡδὺ δὲ ἄλλωι ἄλλο.
[126] DK 68B24, 25.

text.

Lest we should stop there in our analysis, we are urged on by Aristotle, who recorded Democritus' eager approval of Homer's use of the word ἀλλοφρονεῖν: the word, to his mind, grasped the very truth of the corporeality of the mind and of consciousness as an alterable state, not a simple *integer* which came and went with bouts of madness or stupor.[127] Secondly, the much-debated fragment concerning the λόγιοι and Zeus finds a new place now as a piece of allegoresis; as was noted above, the attribution of omniscience and omnipotence to the continuous source of all soul atoms finds some basis in Democritus' theory, albeit one which apparently did not allow the actual consciousness of the atmosphere *in toto*. And finally, to end on a note of playful conjecture, since our only sources which link the theory of εἴδωλα to Leucippus attribute it at once to Leucippus and Democritus, and are moreover quite late,[128] I am willing to speculate that the theory found its origin not in the founder of atomism, but in his pupil the allegorist. And even if Leucippus did establish a precedent, all of our evidence points to Democritus expanding upon it in an imaginative way which gave material reality to the Homeric εἴδωλα. Homer's pessimism about human knowledge and his recognition of the fortuitous passivity of most perception find new words in Democritus' mouth. An admiring allegorist, Democritus drew upon Homer's captivating descriptions of the poet's fully mindful inspiration and anyone's memorable dreams, creating from them a theory of knowledge, perception, precognition which substantiated the perspicuity of the poet almost as well as that of his interpreter. The value which Democritus placed on Homer's wisdom can only

[127] *Il*. 23.698; *De an.* 404a29; cf. *Met*. 1009b28. See also Guthrie (1965) 452 n. 1.
[128] Aët. IV.9.6, DK 68 A119, 126; IV.13.1, DK 67 A29, and Alexander In Arist. *De sensu* 24.14-22, 56.12-15.

indicate that the poet, too, was one of the divinely wise and calm.

That said, these considerations alone cannot afford any definite conclusions about his further theoretical commitments, as to whether the poet himself must always be considered conscious of all of the truths which he utters while so dressing them up. But it is unlikely that he was totally charitable, given Democritus' commitment to a theory of fairly recent cultural progress and invention, combined with the impression one gets of the imperfect allegoresis of the opinion of the λόγιοι. Yet the pivotal fact remains that the poet is in fact uttering truths that Democritus thinks worthy of study. Thus the *kosmos* which the poet constructs is one of beauty and, on some fundamental level at least, one of truth.

In light of these conclusions, consider the following well-known passage:

> Ἔσπετε νῦν μοι, Μοῦσαι Ὀλύμπια δώματ᾽ ἔχουσαι–
> ὑμεῖς γὰρ θεαί ἐστε, πάρεστέ τε, ἴστέ τε πάντα,
> ἡμεῖς δὲ κλέος οἷον ἀκούομεν οὐδέ τι ἴδμεν–
> οἵ τινες ἡγεμόνες Δαναῶν καὶ κοίρανοι ἦσαν·
> πληθὺν δ᾽ οὐκ ἂν ἐγὼ μυθήσομαι οὐδ᾽ ὀνομήνω,
> οὐδ᾽ εἴ μοι δέκα μὲν γλῶσσαι, δέκα δὲ στόματ᾽ εἶεν,
> φωνὴ δ᾽ ἄρρηκτος, χάλκεον δέ μοι ἦτορ ἐνείη,
> εἰ μὴ Ὀλυμπιάδες Μοῦσαι, Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο
> θυγατέρες, μνησαίαθ᾽ ὅσοι ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἦλθον·[129]
>
> Tell me now, you Muses who have your homes on Olympos.
> For you, who are goddesses, are there, and you know all things,
> and we have heard only the rumour of it and know nothing.
> Who then of those were the chief men and lords of the Danaans?
> I could not tell over the multitude of them nor name them,
> not if I had ten tongues and ten mouths, not if I had
> a voice never to be broken and a heart of bronze within me,
> not unless the Muses of Olympia, daughters
> of Zeus of the aegis, remembered all those who came beneath Ilion.

"A voice never to be broken" and "a heart of bronze" – on reflection, are the words ἐνθουσιασμός and ἱερὸν πνεῦμα not stunningly sensible now, as a very poetical

[129] *Il.* 2.484-92. Trans. Lattimore.

expression of high esteem for the poet, in words more traditionally forceful yet thoroughly reappropriated by the allegorist *cum* philosopher?[130] When we turn elsewhere in Democritus and read about the umbilical cord "as an anchorage against waves and slippage, a cable and vine for the begotten and ripening fruit", the poetical verbosity seems entirely at home. One may add the indirect but weighty precedent for ἱερὸν πνεῦμα in such words as ἐνέπνευσαν δέ μοι αὐδὴν | θέσπιν,[131] and of ἱερόν in such expressions as "the august might of Alcinous" (ἱερὸν μένος᾽ Αλκινόοιο).[132] And the vexing ἐνθουσιασμός may refer, finally, to the god within him that is his natural self, just as εὐδαιμονία denotes the good state of the δαίμων which is nothing other than the one's ψυχή.[133] It follows that ἐνθουσιασμός for Democritus may have two features, as a cognitive state marked simply by the periodically greater intake of soul atoms and thus the "divinizing of one's nature", and as the absorption of εἴδωλα, which swell the soul with atoms bearing thoughts from the divine. Possession it most certainly is not – unless it be the possession of greater thoughts and powers by the human soul in question.

[130] cf. Kahn (1985) 14: "[Democritus] relies entirely on the shifting metaphors of quasi-poetic speech."
[131] *Th*. 31-2. cf. *Th*. 97, *Od*. 1.371.
[132] *Il.* 8.419.
[133] DK B171.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bailey, Cyril (1928) *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus*. Oxford.

Beare, John I. (1906) *Greek Theories of Elementary Cognition from Alcmaeon to Aristotle*. Oxford.

Brancacci, Aldo (2007) "Democritus' *Mousika*" in Brancacci and Morel, edd., *Democritus: Science, the Arts, and the Care of the Soul,* pp. 181-205.

Brancacci, A. & P.-M. Morel. *Democritus: Science, the Arts, and the Care of the Soul.* Leiden.

Bremmer, Jan (1983) *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul*. Princeton.

Burkert, Walter (1977) "Air-Imprints or Eidola: Democritus' Aetiology of Vision" *Illinois Classical Studies* 2, pp. 97-109.

Cole, Thomas (1967) *Democritus and the Sources of Greek Anthropology.* APA.

Delatte, A. (1934) *Les Conceptions de l'Enthousiasme chez les Philosophes Présocratiques.* Paris.

Detienne, Marcel (1996) *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece*. New York.

Dodds, E. R. (1963) *The Greeks and The Irrational*. Berkeley.

English, Robert B. (1915) "Democritus' Theory of Sense Perception" *TPAPA* 46, pp. 217-227.

Ferwerda, Rein (1972) "Democritus and Plato" *Mnemosyne* 25.4, pp. 337-378.

Forster, E. S. (1928) "The Pseudo-Aristotelian *Problems*: Their Nature and Composition" *CQ* 22.3, pp. 163-165.

Frede, Michael (1996) "Introduction" in Frede and Striker, edd. *Rationality in Greek Thought.*

Frede, Michael and Gisele Striker (1996) *Rationality in Greek Thought.* Oxford.

Graham, Daniel (2010) *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*. (2 vols.) Cambridge.

Guthrie, W. K. C. (1965) *A History of Greek Philosophy*. Cambridge.

Henrichs, Albert (1975) "Two Doxographical Notes: Democritus and Prodicus on Religion" *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 79, pp. 93-123.

Hershbell, Jackson P. (1982) "Plutarch and Democritus" *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica*, New Series 10, pp. 81-111.

Jaeger, Werner (1936) *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers.* Oxford.

Kahn, Charles H. (1985) "Democritus and the Origins of Moral Psychology" *AJP* 106.1, pp. 1-31.

Keuls, Eva C. (1978) *Plato and Greek Painting*. Leiden.

Konstan, David. (2000) "Democritus the Physicist" *Apeiron* 33.2, pp. 125-144.

Long, A. A. (2006) "How Does Socrates' Divine Sign Communicate with Him?" in Ahbel-Rappe and Kamtekar, eds., *A Companion to Socrates*. pp. 63-74.

Mansfeld, Jaap (2004) "Democritus, Fragments 68B18 and B21 DK" *Mnemosyne* 57.4, pp. 484-488.

Marcovich, M. (1975) "Democritus on Gods: PHerc 1428 fr. 16 = VS 68 A 75." *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 19, p. 244.

McGibbon, Donal. (1965) "The Religious Thought of Democritus" *Hermes* 93. Bd., H. 4, pp. 385-397.

Miller, Fred D., Jr. (2009) "Homer's Challenge to Philosophical Psychology" in Wians, ed. *Logos and Muthos: Philosophical Essays in Greek Literature.* Albany.

Most, Glenn. (1999) "Poetics of Early Greek Philosophy" in Long, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy.* Cambridge.
------. (2011) "What Ancient Quarrel?" in Destrée and Herrmann, edd. *Plato and the Poets*. Leiden.
Müller, Eduard (1834) *Geschichte der Theorie der Kunst bei den Alten*. Reprinted 1970. Osnabrück.
Murray, Penelope (1981) "Poetic Inspiration in Early Greece" *JHS* 101, pp. 87-100.
Naddaf, Gerard (2009) "Allegory and the Origins of Philosophy" in Wians, ed. *Logos and Muthos: Philosophical Essays in Greek Literature*. Albany.
Porter, James (2002) *Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future.* Stanford.
-------. (2010) *The Origins of Aesthetic Thought in Ancient Greece.* Cambridge.
Sorabji, Richard (1996) "Rationality" in Frede and Striker, edd. *Rationality in Greek Thought.* pp. 311-334.
Taylor, C. C. W. (1999) *The Atomists: Leucippus and Democritus*. Toronto.
--------. (2008) *Pleasure, Mind, and Soul*. Oxford.
Tigerstedt, E. N. (1970) "Furor Poeticus: Poetic Inspiration in Greek Literature before Democritus and Plato" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 31.2, pp. 163-178.
van der Eijk, Philip. (2005) *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity: Doctors and Philosophers on Nature, Soul, Health and Disease.* Cambridge.
Vlastos, G. (1945) "Ethics and Physics in Democritus (*Part One*)" *PR*. v. 54, no. 6, pp. 578-592.
---------. (1946) ""Ethics and Physics in Democritus (*Part Two*)" *PR*. v. 55, no. 1, pp. 53-64.
Warren, James. (2002) *Epicurus and Democritean Ethics: An Archaeology of Ataraxia.* Cambridge.
Weiss, Helene. (1938) "Democritus' Theory of Cognition: (A Discussion of Two Aristotelian Passages concerning Democritus)" *CQ* 32.1, pp. 47-56.