

Serenity Has Symptoms Too: Lucretian Physiology of Pleasure

Disgust, anger, love sickness, etc. have specific physiologies in classical literature. From the beginning of the Iliad, certain stimuli cause excess liquids to form in the body which then cause various symptoms (Smith, 1966). Lucretius refers to anger and other emotions with the same language and implied physiology as preceding authors. I propose that he uses medical knowledge (Kilpatrick, 1996) to add a physiology of pleasure to this repertoire. Lucretius describes various kinds of kinetic pleasures such as taste and sex, but his real innovation is his description of ἀταραξία, or serenity. He portrays serenity as having its own associated bodily liquids, causes, and symptoms. Furthermore, all of the causes, liquids, and symptoms are positive, not corrupting (Kuriyama, 2008). Therefore, serenity is not disease, but his ideal of emotional health. Finally I will begin to explore the implications this medical understanding has on his philosophy.

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