

Cicero, Lucretius, and the Divinity of Invention

In *Tusc.* 1.48 Cicero, as he so often does in his philosophical works, levels criticism at the Epicureans. He takes aim in particular at their celebration of Epicurus as a god, and, in doing so, makes an allusion to Lucretius' *De rerum natura* (Hardie 113, Pucci 93-95). The crux of the criticism lies in the fact that Epicureans hail as divine the man who invented a philosophy denying the immortality of humankind. In my paper I will argue that Cicero latches on to this irony in Epicureanism and in the poetry of Lucretius specifically, forming an argument for the immortality of the soul based on invention in *Tusc.* 1 that interacts and directly contradicts Lucretius' own arguments regarding invention and divinity in books 3 and 5 of *DRN*. I will ultimately suggest that Cicero appropriates and reverses Lucretius' arguments about immortality, following a pattern he (Cicero) regularly uses in the law courts (Riggsby 245-46).

According to *nonnulli philosophi* (*Tusc.* 1.48), by which Cicero seems to mean Lucretius, Epicurus was celebrated as divine because of the philosophical system he developed. Lucretius lays out this argument in some form at least twice in his poem, at 3.9-15 and 5.8-9. In the former passage he describes Epicurus as a *rerum inventor* with a *divina mente*; in the latter he identifies Epicurus as a *deus* and says that he *vitae rationem invenit*. These descriptions of Epicurus at the proems of books 3 and 5 then find reinforcement in the conclusions of those same books. The ending of book 3 features Lucretius' celebrated rejection of the fear of death, including a prominent section on his forebears, Homer, Democritus, and Epicurus, who died despite their own role as *repertores* of art and philosophy. This idea anticipates the conclusion of book 5, which elaborates on and celebrates humankind's capacity for invention.

When Cicero lays out his argument for the immortality of the soul he revisits many of the same premises used by Lucretius. He too lauds humanity's use of rational invention of the arts. But Cicero uses humankind's capacity to invent as an indication of the soul's immortality in *Tusc.* 1.62-65. In direct contradiction to Lucretius' Epicurus, who was hailed as divine because of his capacity for invention, but ultimately found, like all men, to be mortal in *DRN* 3, Cicero's soul is immortal precisely because it is capable of invention. Cicero appropriates and reverses Lucretius' argument that even an *inventor* like Epicurus is mortal to suggest that invention in fact points to immortality. The foil relies on Cicero's early introduction of Epicurus into *Tusc.* 1 at 1.48, wherein he too calls Epicurus an *inventor* and a *deus*, but does so to send up the Epicureans' belief that even figures they hail as divine are in fact mortal. With that background in place, Cicero's description of the soul as immortal because of its capacity to invent later in *Tusc.* 1 becomes a direct rejoinder to Lucretius' poem. Even more than that, the rejoinder reflects a strategy of oratory that highlights the rhetorical quality and structure of both the first *Tusculan* and the *DRN*.

Bibliography

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