

# The Ethical Maxims of Democritus of Abdera

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## 1. Introduction

Well-known as a cosmologist, Democritus was roughly contemporaneous with the most famous Greek physician (Hippocrates), historian (Thucydides), and philosopher (Socrates).<sup>1</sup> Unlike Socrates, who wrote nothing, Democritus seems to have written more than anyone before him: a Hellenistic catalog of his works lists more than 100 titles, including no less than eight categorized as ethics.<sup>2</sup> But since no manuscripts of any of his works survive,<sup>3</sup> we have to reconstruct his physics from testimony (usually hostile) in various ancient sources, and his ethics from verbatim quotations mostly contained in an anthology of Greek wisdom compiled in the fifth century CE. In the areas of physics, epistemology, and anthropology, no one doubts the importance of Democritus.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Democritus' dates are disputed but c.470–399, thus roughly contemporaneous with Hippocrates (c.460–370), Thucydides (c.460–400), and Socrates (470–399). Thus the term “presocratic,” although commonly applied to him (and generally problematic) is particularly inapt.

<sup>2</sup> Democritus' works were cataloged into thirteen tetralogies (groups of four) by Thrasyllus (first c. BCE/CE). Diogenes Laertius copied Thrasyllus' list at the end of the chapter devoted to Democritus in his work *Lives and opinions of the famous philosophers*. The list begins: “The following are the ethical books: *Pythagoras; On the disposition of the wise person; On things in Hades; Tritogeneia* (so named because three things which sustain all human things come from her <sc. Athena>); *On human goodness, or, On virtue; Amaltheia's horn; Peri euthumiēs; Ethical notebooks*. For the work ‘*Wellbeing*’ is not extant. And these are the ethical works” (apud D.L. 9.7.46). On the titles, see: W. Leszl, “Democritus' Works: From Their Titles to Their Contents” [“Works”], in Brancacci, A. and P.-M. Morel, eds., *Democritus: Science, the Arts, and the Care of the Soul [Science]* (Leiden and Boston, 2007), 11–76. Thrasyllus commented on Democritus' contribution to diverse fields: “truly Democritus was versed in every department of philosophy, for he had trained himself *both in physics and in ethics*, even more in mathematics and the routine subjects of education, and he was quite an expert in the arts” (9.7.37, emphasis added).

<sup>3</sup> Beyond the fact that the vast majority of works of classical antiquity have been lost, the reasons for the total loss of Democritus' works specifically may be speculated about. One is the fact that Democritus' followers did not form a school in the sense similar to Plato's Academy or Aristotle's Lyceum, an institution which would have promoted copying, editing and commenting on his works (see I. Bodnar, “Democriteans—Democritus,” in H. Cancik, ed., *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopedia of the Ancient World Antiquity* (Leiden and Boston, 2004), volume 4, 266–70). Another is the fact that Democritus' works, along with Epicurean works and other “materialist” works considered antithetical to Christianity, were targeted for burning and censorship by Christian authorities in late antiquity (see D. Rohmann, *Christianity, Book-Burning and Censorship in Late Antiquity* (Berlin, 2016), 44–5, 78–9, 285, 300–1).

<sup>4</sup> As a result of the pioneering studies of F. W. A. Mullach, *Democriti Abderitae: Operum Fragmenta* (Berlin, 1843); F. A. Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus* (Iserlohn, 1865); Gomperz, T. *Griechische Denker* (1896); T. Cole, *Democritus and the Sources of Greek Anthropology [Anthropology]* (Cleveland, 1967); V. E. Alfieri, *Atomos Idea: l'origine del concetto dell'atomo nel pensiero Greco* (Florence, 1953, 2nd ed. 1979); and P.-M. Morel, *Democrite et la recherche des causes* (Paris, 1996). Many invaluable contributions to Democritus Studies are contained in the anthologies of: L. G. Benakis, ed., *Proceedings of the 1<sup>st</sup> International Congress on Democritus [Proceedings]* (2 vols., Xanthi, 1984); F. Romano, ed., *Democrito e l'atomismo antico, Atti del Convegno Internazionale, Siculorum Gymnasium* n.s. 33. (1980), and A. Brancacci and P.-M. Morel, eds., *Science; Brancacci and Morel also provide an excellent and concise overview of Democritus Studies in their introduction. For ethics specifically, see also the scholars mentioned in the next note.*

But in the case of ethics, despite several extensive studies,<sup>5</sup> not everyone has yet become convinced of Democritus' importance.<sup>6</sup>

The ancient evidence, however, when examined carefully and with sufficient charity, indicates that Democritus has left a permanent mark on ethical theory and moral psychology, in particular on the eudaimonistic, hedonistic, and intellectualist strains, and even more on practical ethics, in particular on the therapeutic conception of ethics. Democritus is an original source of both positive and negative moral psychology and is either the earliest author or one of the very earliest authors to advocate explicitly democracy and democratic freedom, and to focus on the decisions of the individual ethical agent, and to stress the importance of reason, instruction, persuasion, and exhortation in making people better, and to point out the limitations of external sources of ethical sanction such as prohibitions and punishments.

In the Hellenistic era, Democritus became a paradigm of the tranquil and unquestionably wise philosopher, and his work was praised, adapted, and imitated by Cynics,<sup>7</sup> Stoics,<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> These include: F. Lortzing, "Über die ethischen Fragmente Demokrits," *Progr. Sophien-Gymnasium* 8 (Berlin, 1873); R. Hirzel, "Demokrits Schrift *Περὶ εὐθυμίας*," *Hermes* 14 (1879), 345–407; P. Natorp, *Die Ethika des Demokritos: Texte und Untersuchungen [Ethika]* (Marburg, 1893); H. Langerbeck, *ΔΟΣΙΣ ΕΠΙΠΥΣΜΙΗ: Studien zu Demokrits Ethik und Erkenntnislehre [Studien]* (Berlin, 1935); G. Vlastos, "Ethics and Physics in Democritus," *Philosophical Review* 54 (1945), 578–92, and "Ethics and Physics in Democritus: Part Two," *Philosophical Review* 55 (1946), 53–64 ["Physics"]; E. A. Havelock, *The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics* (New Haven and London, 1957); J. F. Procopé, *Democritus the Moralizer and His Contemporaries [Moralist]* (Cambridge University Ph.D. Dissertation, 1971); J. C. B. Gosling, and C. C. W. Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure [Pleasure]* (Oxford, 1982); C. Kahn, "Democritus and the Origins of Moral Psychology" ["Psychology"], *American Journal of Philology* 106 (1985), 1–31; C. Farrar, *Origins of Democratic Thinking [Democratic]* (Cambridge, 1988); and J. Warren, *Epicurus and Democritean Ethics: An Archeology of Ataraxia [Ataraxia]* (Cambridge, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Examples: "however numerous are the ethical writings which are attributed to him . . . he was still far from the scientific treatment of ethics inaugurated by Socrates. His ethical doctrine in regard to its form is essentially on a par with the unscientific moral reflection of Heraclitus and the Pythagoreans" (E. Zeller, *A History of Greek Philosophy, Volume 2: From the Earliest Period to the Time of Socrates*, trans. S. F. Alleyne (London, 1881), 277–8); "the moral teaching of Democritus is not based on any profound metaphysical or ethical basis, nor is it, so far as we can judge from detached fragments, in any sense a complete system: it does not attempt to grip together the whole of life in any reasoned deductions from a single principle" (C. Bailey, *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus* (Oxford, 1928), 212); "many [fragments] are extremely commonplace and banal, and if genuine can hardly be said to enhance the philosopher's reputation" (W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy: Volume 2: The Presocratic Tradition from Parmenides to Democritus* (Cambridge, 1965), 490). The failure to incorporate Democritus into general histories of Greek ethics and specifically into the interpretation of Socrates is a most regrettable result of such views. Irwin's discussion of Socrates is refreshing in this respect by recognizing that "Socrates may not be the first to defend hedonist eudaimonism. A similar position may plausibly be ascribed to Democritus, though we do not know who influences whom" (T. Irwin, *The Development of Ethics: A Historical and Critical Study: Volume 1: from Socrates to the Reformation [Development]* (Oxford, 2007), 64) although his treatment of Democritus is very brief and essentially dismissive (see also: *Plato's Moral Theory: The Early and Middle Dialogues [Theory]* (Oxford, 1979), 32). See nn. 15, 73, 74, and 90 below for Striker's general philosophical argument against all theories of "tranquility."

<sup>7</sup> On Democritus' influence on the Cynics and the image of him as the laughing philosopher, favorably compared with Heraclitus the weeping philosopher (usually taken to be the Stoics' inspiration), see Sen. *tranq.* 15.2, *de ira* 2.10.5; cf. Cic. *de orat.* 2.58.235; Z. Stewart, "Democritus and the Cynics," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 63 (1958), 179–91, at 186.

<sup>8</sup> The Stoics accepted *εὐθυμία* as an approved positive emotion (D.L. 7.116; [Andronicus], *Pass.* 6); Panaetius of Rhodes wrote an *Περὶ εὐθυμίας* which incorporated psychagogic techniques that can be traced back to Democritus; see C. Gill, "Peace of Mind and Being Yourself: Panaetius to Plutarch," *ANRW* 36 (1994), 4599–640. Seneca expressly praises and translates from Democritus' work *Περὶ εὐθυμίας* (*tranq.* 2.3–4; cf. 6.1–7.1, and 8.1–3).

Academics,<sup>9</sup> Pythagoreans,<sup>10</sup> Pyrrhonians,<sup>11</sup> and of course Epicureans.<sup>12</sup> But given the contemporary lack of appreciation of his contribution to ethics there remains much work to be done to restore Democritus' reputation to the one he enjoyed in the Hellenistic era. My contribution to this work aims to show not only that Democritus was an important subsequent influence (a claim for which I mostly argue in the footnotes), but also that Democritus' views remain extremely attractive and viable from a philosophical point of view, offering an originaive conception of ethics consistent with democratic values, one in which it is argued that it is "up to us" to apply rational maxims to ourselves and to support the education of others to do so as well, so as to improve our own lives and the greater political community. Democritus introduces an important and hitherto absent notion of autonomy into the political, and increasingly ethical, discussions which were raging in Athens and elsewhere as he reached his acme. And, beyond that, what is even more valuable is to see how Democritus' ethics (again in stark contrast to Socrates) connects with the most sophisticated scientific—atomistic or "materialist"—account of nature and human nature available to him (his own), an enormous source of insight which flows freely into his ethical theory at the watershed of his account of education and habituation.

In order to make Democritus' accomplishment in ethics comprehensible, I need to offer a rhetorical and logical analysis of the maxim (*gnōmē, γνώμη*), which is the ancient literary form in which most of the evidence for Democritus' ethics has been transmitted to us, and which is perhaps no longer a familiar mode of writing ethics, although it has persisted as a literary form in modern times in such writers as La Rochefoucauld, Pascal, and Nietzsche, and the concept of a maxim plays a central role in the application of the categorical imperative in Kant, for whom adoptions of maxims can be described as the primary acts of freedom.<sup>13</sup>

In light of my analysis of ethics in the form of maxims, I will offer an interpretation of Democritus' work *Peri euthumiēs* (*Περὶ εὐθυμίας*). This title of this, his most famous work, is traditionally translated *On Tranquility* (following the Latin translation used by Seneca in

<sup>9</sup> Cicero cites Democritus as an approved authority on epistemological matters (*Acad.* 1.12.44; cf. 2.14, 32, 73), and almost always praises Democritus, even in highly critical dialectical contexts (e.g., *de fin.* 5.8.23 and 5.23.86–88, discussed below). He seems to imitate Democritus in some of his descriptions of the imperturbability of the wise (e.g., *Off.* 1.80–81; *Tusc.* 5.43–80). Plutarch defends Democritus against Colotes' attacks (*Adv. Col.* 1108f; cf. *Non posse* 1100a–c), and often cites Democritus approvingly, hence: A10, B146, B159, etc. His own work *Περὶ εὐθυμίας* was heavily indebted to Democritus; cf. the slightly overcautious approach of J. P. Hershbell, "Plutarch and Democritus," *Quaderni Urbinati di filologia classica*, n.s. 12 (1982), 81–111.

<sup>10</sup> This may be because he authored a work, categorized as an ethical work, entitled *Pythagoras*, which the neo-Pythagorean Thrasylus placed as the first work of the entire Democritean Corpus in his catalog of Democritean titles (see note 2). An imitation of Democritus' *Περὶ εὐθυμίας* attributed to "Hipparchus the Pythagorean" (entitled *Περὶ εὐθυμίας*) and preserved by Stobaeus (4.41.81 = C7), has been absorbed into the Pythagorean Pseudepigrapha and was probably written around the first centuries BCE/CE.

<sup>11</sup> According to Diogenes Laertius, "Philo of Athens, who was an intimate of his, said that Pyrrho most often mentioned Democritus and, after him, Homer" (9.67). Democritus' relationship to the Pyrrhonians usually focuses on epistemological issues, but the evidence relating Democritus and Pyrrho is probably better interpreted by taking it to refer primarily to Democritus' ethics; see: R. Bett, *Pyrrho, His Antecedents, and His Legacy* (Oxford, 2000), 152–60.

<sup>12</sup> For the influence of Democritus on Epicurus, see Warren, *Democritean Ethics*. For Epicurus' adaptation of Democritus' maxims and method of using maxims in ethics, see P. von der Mühl, "Epikurs *Kuriai doxai* und Demokrit," in *Festgabe Adolf Kaegi* (Frauenfeld, 1919), 172–8.

<sup>13</sup> H. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge, 1990), 40; N. Potter, "Maxims in Kant's Moral Philosophy," *Philosophia* 23 (1994), 59–90 at 59.

his *De tranquillitate*). But, as with the well-known problems with the term “happiness” used as a translation for the philosophical and ethical concept of *eudaimonia*, the notion of “tranquility” only partially and very imperfectly captures the meaning of Democritus’ *euthumiē* (εὐθυμία), and may be misleading. At first glance, “tranquility” (like “happiness”) no doubt appears to be an insufficiently serious, complete, final, or even “ethical” candidate for the highest good or ultimate end. But Democritus himself apparently glossed the term *euthumiē* with at least six other terms, as we will see, including the general term “wellbeing” (*euestō*, εὐεστῶ),<sup>14</sup> as well as a series of negative terms, including “not being disturbed” (*ataraxia*, ἀταραξία), a term which itself has been translated “tranquility.”<sup>15</sup> Since my goal is to exhibit what Democritus himself meant by the term *euthumiē* and why he made that the defining term of his ethics, but also to explain why he supplied so many other terms, I will generally use a transliteration of the term *euthumiē* instead of a translation.

## 2. The evidence for Democritus’ ethical works

Before turning to the substance of Democritus’ ethical views, I must say a few words about the textual and evidentiary basis for a discussion of Democritus’ ethics.<sup>16</sup> Some new fragments have been added by subsequent editors, but the most important evidence was collected by Hermann Diels in *The Fragments of the Presocratics*.<sup>17</sup> Although there are problems with Diels’ conception of the role of Democritus in the history of philosophy, and his organization of the evidence, I will here follow scholarly convention by using his system of reference: a number, preceded by the letter “A” for reports, “B” for fragments, and “C” for imitations. Diels, who rightly considered his edition of Democritus as merely provisional, arranged the fragments in alphabetical order by source and work within these groups. The reports are valuable but include a variety of kinds of evidence of highly differential reliability, extent, detail, and value. They more often pertain to Democritus’ natural philosophy than his ethics; the reports pertaining to ethics are mostly concerned with describing Democritus’ account of the *telos* or end, and not the details of his views.

The fragments, by contrast, most often deal with ethics and are numerous. One kind of fragment is quotation in a later author’s own discourse. This discourse may, as in the case of Plutarch’s *Peri euthumias* or Seneca’s *De tranquillitate animi*, have been very similar in context to the original source text, i.e., Democritus’ *Περὶ εὐθυμίας*, which became a classical model of the genre of advice text. On the other hand, a fragment may be

<sup>14</sup> D.L. 9.46 (in a title of a lost work); A1; A167; B4; B257.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, G. Striker, “Ataraxia: Happiness as Tranquility” [“Happiness”], *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics*, pp. 183–95 (Cambridge, 1996); originally published in *The Monist* 73 (1990), 97–110.

<sup>16</sup> I follow the standards of evidence established in the most thoroughgoing study of Democritus’ ethics to date: J. F. Procopé, *Moralist*. Procopé discusses evidence in the preface (and summarizes their relative worth in a table on p. xx).

<sup>17</sup> H. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, vol. 2, 6th ed. rev. W. Kranz (Berlin, 1952). S. Luria, *Democritea: collegit, emendavit, interpretatus* (Leningrad, 1970), added dozens of fragments to those identified by Diels, and made a great methodological advance by arranging the fragments thematically. The most recent English translation of the fragments, C. C. W. Taylor, *The Atomists: Leucippus and Democritus. Fragments: A Text and Translation with a Commentary* (Toronto, 1999), is also arranged thematically and includes most of Diels’ testimonia and fragments, and some of the additional material identified by Luria. W. Leszl has since added further fragments in his Italian translation *I primi atomisti: Raccolta dei testi che riguardano Leucippo e Democrito* (Florence, 2009).

embedded in an alien or hostile context. Further, the mode of excerption varies from direct quotation or translation to adapted paraphrase. Another kind of evidence, and by far the most important kind of fragment, is direct quotation or excerption preserved in anthologies, such as that of Stobaeus, who included more than 150 quotations attributed to Democritus scattered throughout his immense work, ranging in length from one (B186) to twenty-five (B191) lines.

Most of the fragments are in the form of maxims.<sup>18</sup> Although there is strong evidence that Democritus himself composed maxims, it is also possible that later authors (such as the followers of Democritus known as “Democriteans,” “Abderites” or “Atomists,” or the Cynics, or the Epicureans) may have adapted longer discourses of Democritus into pithier maxims, which were then absorbed into collections of maxims (known as gnomologies); later anthologists like Stobaeus may have excerpted from such collections and not from Democritus’ own texts.<sup>19</sup> Also, as we will see, it is likely that many of Democritus’ own maxims were originally accompanied by an explanation, but in many cases the accompanying explanation seems to have dropped out in the process of excerpting and anthologizing. This seems especially to be the case for the collection of eighty-six fragments known as *The Golden Maxims of Democrates* (a title which includes a misspelling of the name “Democritus,” and thus does not inspire confidence about the excerptor’s (or copyist’s) possession of firsthand knowledge of Democritus). Although there is disagreement among scholars about the attribution of these *Golden Maxims* to Democritus, there is at the same time no a priori way to exclude this material, since thirty-one of these maxims are identical to (or abbreviations of) maxims preserved elsewhere under the correctly spelled name Democritus.<sup>20</sup>

Besides the reports and fragments, there are some ancient imitations of Democritean works. These offer valuable evidence of how the damaged and scattered fragments of Democritus may have originally been integrated into longer discourses, including the ethical treatises for which we have titles. The fictional correspondence between Democritus and Hippocrates (C2–6) and the imitation of Democritus’ *Περὶ ἐθουμίας* ascribed to an unknown Hipparchus (C7) are potentially very useful for this purpose,

<sup>18</sup> Several, however, are not in the form of maxims, including some longer and more interesting ones focused on anthropology and social-political theory (e.g., B257–66; 275–9). In the present essay, I focus on the maxims, because they comprise the bulk of the extant fragments and the ones most important for Democritus’ ethics specifically.

<sup>19</sup> Procopé regards “even our shortest fragments as having begun life in works of more or less connected prose, from which they were sooner or later extracted, and as then having undergone, in the course of transmission from one gnomology to the next, a progressive abbreviation somewhat more drastic than that inflicted on our longest fragments” (*Moralist*, xxxii–xxxiii).

<sup>20</sup> H. Laue, *De Democriti fragmentis ethicis* [*Fragmentis*] (diss. Gött., 1921), attempted to assign the “Democrates” fragments to a later writer. His thesis was ruinously criticized by R. Philippson, “Demokrits Sittensprüche” [“Sittensprüche”], *Hermes* 59 (1924), 369–419; see also Procopé, *Moralist*, xxiv–xxvii. “Democrates” may preserve in highly compressed or proverbial form evidence of a theme that was originally expounded at greater length by Democritus. On the other hand, Byzantine-era collections, although occasionally overlapping slightly with Stobaeus and the “Democrates” collection, are not reliable or accessible enough for the purposes of the present essay; this is all the more so the case for the Persian and Syriac collections of Democritean sayings. The Democritus fragments in the *Corpus Parisinum* have recently been intensively studied by J. Gerlach, *Gnomica Democritea. Studien zur gnomologischen Ueberlieferung der Ethik Demokrits und zum Corpus Parisinum mit einer Edition de Democritea des Corpus Parisinum* [*Gnomica*] (Wiesbaden, 2008), who also offers a useful conspectus of the Democritean gnomological tradition, and authenticates a handful of new fragments not present in Diels (508).

but the complexities involved in assessing this kind of evidence prevent us from making much use of them here.

This evidentiary basis may seem dauntingly complex, but it would be wrong to infer that the effort to reconstruct Democritus' ethics should not be undertaken.<sup>21</sup> After all, most scholars think that it is reasonable to speculate about and even reconstruct the ethical views of Socrates, even though Socrates wrote nothing and in his case we are entirely dependent on sources like Aristophanes, Xenophon, and Plato, authors very much with their own intellectual agendas. Again, none of the works of Heraclitus has survived intact, but scholars have not seen this as an insurmountable problem in reconstructing his views out of the testimony of later, often hostile, writers—obscure as his own views were reputed to have been even in antiquity. In fact, we are in a much better situation in the case of Democritus: we have more and lengthier reports, hundreds of fragments, and a couple of clever imitations of his ethics. In fact, we have much more to go on for Democritus than for any other early Greek writer on ethics, and indeed anyone writing before Isocrates, Xenophon, or Plato.

A quick review of the titles of "ethical works" attributed to him by Thrasylus and Diogenes Laertius shows that Democritus cannot reasonably be accused of neglecting ethics in the ancient sense.<sup>22</sup> Both *Pythagoras* and *On the Disposition of the Wise Person* may have dealt with the same topic: the "Pythagoras" being the role model for a characterological description of the "wise," which will have been, to put it in Aristotelian terms, an exhortation to that intellectual virtue.<sup>23</sup> The work *On things in Hades* evidently aimed to dispel myths and fears about the afterlife on the basis of naturalistic (atomistic) aetiology.<sup>24</sup> *Tritogeneia*, as the transmitter of the catalog explains, is "so named because three things which sustain all human things come from her <sc. Athena>" (D.L. 9.46)—these turn out to be "to reason well," "to speak beautifully," and "to do what one must"; and fragments relating to these subjects suggest that the work was an exhortation to the cultivation of virtues both intellectual (reasoning or calculating) and ethical (speaking and acting).<sup>25</sup> The topic of *On human goodness, or, on Virtue* indicates that Democritus did expressly discuss what came to be known as the moral virtues.<sup>26</sup> *Amaltheia's Horn* was likely a collection of

<sup>21</sup> A fourth kind of evidence (not grouped with Democritus by Diels), which adds even greater complexity, is the anonymous political writer excerpted in chapter 20 of Iamblichus' *Exhortation to Philosophy* (*Protrepticus epi philosophian*), who has been interpreted as Democritus or a student of Democritus. See Q. Cataudella, "L'anonymus Iamblichi e Democrito," *Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica*. n.s. 10 (1932/3), 5–22; Cole, *Greek Anthropology*, 8, 128; M. Lacore, "L'Anonyme: un palimpseste démocriteen dans le *Protreptique* de Jamblique?" *Kentron* 28 (2012), 131–58; and Horky in the present volume (chapter 13).

<sup>22</sup> See above note 2 for the list of Thrasylus in D.L. 9.45–6.

<sup>23</sup> It is notable that the work *Pythagoras* is included in the ethical tetralogy, not the physical or mathematical one. It is possible that this title was given such prominence because of the Neo-Pythagorean leanings of Thrasylus of Mendes, who tried to make the works of Democritus conform to the shape of Plato's (possibly in a quest to show their common inspiration in Pythagoras). Pythagoras is portrayed as an archetypal wise person in Aristotle's *Protrepticus* (apud Iamb. *Protr.* 9) and in later Neo-Pythagorean works, including Iamblichus' *Vita Pythagorica* and *Protrepticus epi philosophian*.

<sup>24</sup> Stob. 4.52.40 = 4.34.62 = Apostolus 7 = Arsenius 23 = B297 is probably a fragment of this work.

<sup>25</sup> B2; the sources for this include the Scholiast in Il., the Schol. Genev., Eustath., the Ety. Orionis, and Tzetzes.

<sup>26</sup> B181, discussed extensively below in section 3, is likely to be attributable to the work *On Virtue*, and may be its incipit. In a passage of *De finibus* examined below in section 8 (see n. 87), Cicero has his character Piso (who represents the views of Antiochus of Ascalon) say that "what Democritus said on the subject, however excellent, nevertheless lacks the finishing touches; for indeed about virtue he said very little, and that not clearly expressed" (5.23.87–8 = A169, trans. Rackham). The passage is sometimes invoked to show that Democritus did not contribute significantly to ethics. However, Cicero here actually confirms that Democritus did write about virtue, and that (however little) what he wrote was regarded as excellent, even if not expressed clearly by the standards of

ethical and moralizing anecdotes and examples, possibly along the lines of Aesop.<sup>27</sup> The *Peri euthumiēs* was a practical work of exhortation and advice but also, as we will see, of psychotherapy, and of social, political, and educational theory.

Due to space limitations, I cannot (outside of footnotes) discuss further the assignment of individual fragments to specific works, and most of the forthcoming discussion will focus on the topic of the *Peri euthumiēs*, by far Democritus' most famous work.<sup>28</sup> However, the points I will be making in the next section, about the rhetoric and logic of maxims, are probably of general applicability, since by all indications Democritus employed maxims heavily throughout his ethical works.

### 3. Ethics in the Form of Maxims

Democritus was famous in antiquity as a composer of maxims, although he had illustrious predecessors, including Hesiod, the "Seven" Sages, the Delphic Oracle, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, the Hippocratic medical writers and others.<sup>29</sup> Democritus, however, stands out as the earliest writer on record to refer to and explicitly theorize the technical notion of a "maxim" (γνώμη).<sup>30</sup> The "Democrates" collection opens with the following statement of purpose:<sup>31</sup> "If someone attends to these maxims of mine (γνωμέων μεν τῶνδε) with sense, he will do many deeds worthy of a good person, and will not do many bad things."<sup>32</sup> And

later professors of philosophy. This is confirmed by fragments such as B213–15 (on courage) and numerous fragments on prudence and temperance to be discussed below in section 5.

<sup>27</sup> This is to judge from what is known of other works by other authors with similar titles. Alternatively, *Amalthea's Horn*, which means something like "cornucopia," may have been a work about on wealth and poverty. As we will see below in section 6, there are abundant fragments on this topic.

<sup>28</sup> Limitation of space also precludes me from discussing some of the most important fragments and suites of fragments on ethical topics, such as the fragments on why one should not have children (B170, B275–8), even though these fragments probably originated in the *Περὶ εὐθυμίας*.

<sup>29</sup> M. L. West, "The Sayings of Democritus," *The Classical Review* 19 (1969), 142. Maxims with ethical import appear throughout Hesiod's *Works and Days*. Maxims are also attributed to the legendary ("Seven") Sages; see R. P. Martin, "The Seven Sages as Performers of Wisdom," in C. Dougherty and L. Kurke, eds., *Cultural Poetics in Archaic Greece: Cult, Performance, Politics* (Cambridge, 1993), 108–28. The Delphic oracle expressed what Aristotle considered to be ethical maxims: see below and H. W. Parke and D. E. W. Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1956). The Pythagorean *symbola*, such as those commented upon by Iamblichus of Chalcis in chapter 21 of his *Protrepticus* (but which originated much earlier), are also a kind of ethical maxim. The Hippocratic work *Aphorisms* shows how the technique of writing ethical maxims was profitably adapted by early medical writers. Heraclitus' use of maxims and aphorisms, which seem to offer the most proximate precedent for Democritus' ethical maxims, is discussed by U. Hölscher, "Paradox, Simile, and Gnomic Utterance in Heraclitus," in A. P. D. Mourelatos, ed., *The Pre-Socratics: a collection of critical essays* (Princeton, 1974), 229–38, esp. at 237; see also chapter 3 in this volume.

<sup>30</sup> The Greek term is γνώμη (Latin: *sententia*). The noun is related to the verb γιγνώσκω (meaning: to come to know through perception or observation; to judge or think) and can thus also be translated "judgment," "observation," "thought," or "mind," as in B11, B215, B223; see Procopé, *Moralist*, xxxi; Imhoof, S. "Le vocabulaire du savoir et de la connaissance chez Démocrite," *BOYKOAEIA: Mélanges offerts à Bertrand Bouvier*, A. D. Lazaridis et al., eds. (Geneva, 1995), 31–40, at 32. The term is given a technical definition and analysis in Arist. *Rh.* 2.22. I argue below in section 5 that Democritus' usage in B191 (and B35) corresponds to what Aristotle and the whole later tradition calls a "maxim," and so it is not anachronistic to translate Democritus' γνώμη as "maxim."

<sup>31</sup> This single fragment involves the rhetorical techniques of prolepsis, hyperbaton, anaphora, and chiasmus. See Gerlach, *Gnomica*, 52.

<sup>32</sup> B35 = Democrates 1. In this form, the sentence appears to be the incipit of a work. A good candidate, given the content of the maxim, would be *On human goodness, or On virtue* (title #5 in Thrasyllus' catalog; see Natorp, *Ethika*, 57m5, and Langerbeck, *Studien*, 11). Since B3 is likely to be the incipit of *Περὶ εὐθυμίας*, it is not likely that B35 was the incipit of that work. At the same time B191.e, which no doubt was part of *Περὶ εὐθυμίας*, contains a

near the end of the longest and most secure fragment, Democritus says: “by holding fast to this maxim (γνώμη) you will go through life with more *euthumiē* (εὐθυμότερόν), and will drive away defects in your life that are not slight: envy, jealousy, and ill-will” (B191.v.).

Democritus considers it to be a direct effect of his maxims that the person taking them to heart will be morally improved. He thus pioneered the art of what will later be called *psychagogy* (offering moral and psychological guidance) and, as we will see, *psychotherapy* (offering to treat psychological suffering in a way supposedly parallel to the way a doctor treats bodily suffering). He has enormous confidence in the power of training, teaching, persuasion, and exhortation: “More people become good out of training than from nature” (B242); “Nature and teaching are nearly like. For teaching is transforming the human being, and by transforming, teaching creates a nature” (ἡ φύσις καὶ ἡ διδαχὴ παραπλήσιόν ἐστι. καὶ γὰρ ἡ διδαχὴ μεταρυσμοὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπον, μεταρυσμοῦσα δὲ φυσιοποιεῖ, B33); “People without sense are formed (ῥυσμοῦνται) by the gains of luck, but those who are experienced in these sorts of things by the gains of wisdom” (B197). His views about the power of moral exhortation are summarized in the following maxim:

For the sake of virtue, utilizing exhortation (προτροπή) and persuasion by reason is evidently stronger than by laws and necessity. For he who is kept from injustice by law will likely do wrong in secret, but he who is led to what must be done by persuasion will not likely do anything outrageous whether in secret or in broad daylight. That is why with conscience and also with knowledge of acting uprightly one becomes courageous and right-thinking. (B181)<sup>33</sup>

This view about the use of non-coercive and non-legalistic means to produce virtue was controversial, as we shall see (it was pointedly rejected by Aristotle). But it provides a solution to one of the leading problems of early Greek ethics: how to discourage unethical activity that goes undetected.<sup>34</sup> And the solution, as we will see, innovatively stresses the importance of an autonomous as opposed to heteronomous source of moral sanction.

We will return to the problem and solution in due course, but first let us consider the general logic of maxims, since much of Democritus’ ethics, and indeed of early Greek ethics generally, is presented in that form. The definitive account of maxims is given by Aristotle in *Rhetoric* 2.21.<sup>35</sup> Aristotle was very interested in maxims and frequently employs them in his ethics and elsewhere; he reportedly compiled collections of maxims, though these have been lost.<sup>36</sup> Aristotle shows how maxims may be employed in persuasive

very similar explanation (see below in section 5); in fact, B35 may actually be an excerpt or abbreviation of B191.e. At any rate, B191.e shows that an argument about the practical value of the maxims need not come at the incipit of a work containing maxims.

<sup>33</sup> B181; cf. B41, B248, and B268.

<sup>34</sup> Discussed by, among others, Antiphon (87B44a) and Socrates (in “the ring of Gyges” passage in *Pl. R.* 2.359c–360d). See Procopé, *Moralist*, 318–19.

<sup>35</sup> I do not here have the space to discuss the approach to maxims in the *Rhetoric to Alexander*, which differs slightly from the account in Aristotle.

<sup>36</sup> D. M. Searby, *Aristotle in the Greek Gnomological Tradition* (Uppsala, 1998), offers a brief but excellent overview of the Greek gnomological tradition, including Aristotle’s use of maxims in extant works, his efforts at collecting and analyzing the logic of maxims, and the attribution to him of various maxims in later sources, including Stobaeus. In several cases, maxims attributable to Democritus (e.g., B222), have been falsely attributed to Aristotle (Aristotle #97.i–x; Searby 239–41). In another case, a fragment attributed to Democritus (B180) should



arguments or speeches, an art he calls *γνωμολογία* (argument by maxim, or the collection of maxims for the sake of persuasive speeches). He defines a maxim as an assertion of a general (not particular) kind about things that involve action to be pursued or avoided, constituting either a part or the whole of an enthymeme. Aristotle cites an example from Euripides' *Medea*: "A man who is sensible must not ever have his children educated to become excessively wise."<sup>37</sup> This, then, is a maxim. But if a "cause" or "reason" are added as a "supplement," the whole can be called an enthymeme: "A man who is sensible must not ever have his children educated to become excessively wise. For, apart from being idle in other ways, they bring on hostile envy from fellow-citizens."<sup>38</sup>

Now Aristotle distinguishes between four kinds of maxim, based on two distinctions. First, a maxim may be stated either without or with a supplement. Those that can be given without a supplement include (1) those that are self-evident (such as "Health is a great good") and (2) those that are immediately evident upon brief reflection by the audience themselves (such as "No one truly loves who does not always love"). Those requiring an explicit argumentative supplement include (3) those that form the conclusion of an enthymeme (such as "A man who is sensible must not ever have his children educated to become excessively wise") and (4) those that are themselves enthymematic (such as "Being a mortal, do not harbor immortal anger").

Enthymemes are arguments employed in rhetorical contexts in order to encourage (or discourage) action; in Aristotle's view they are the substance of the rhetorical art. They are complete arguments, but arguments in which the conclusion is a likelihood (not a necessity), because they are based on premises that state likelihoods (not necessities). As complete arguments (or syllogisms in the non-technical sense) they constitute "demonstration of a kind," but do not produce knowledge (*ἐπιστήμη*) in the strict sense, according to Aristotle.<sup>39</sup> They are considerations that people use to make a decision when action is required but knowledge in the strict sense is not available (i.e., in practical contexts).<sup>40</sup> This account is very relevant to Democritus who, as we saw, does not suggest that following his maxims produces knowledge, but rather that the maxims enable one to "do many deeds worthy of a good person" (B35), "act uprightly" (B181), and "go through life with more *euthumiē*" (B191).

A maxim of the first or second group identified by Aristotle can be a premise (the major premise) in an enthymeme; since it is self-evident, it can play the role of an axiom or indemonstrable premise in a syllogism (i.e., a "practical" syllogism). Thus if it is assumed that "Health is a great good" and then taken into consideration that "Walking is for the most part conducive to health," then one can draw the conclusion that one should walk.

probably be reassigned to Aristotle (Aristotle #24; Searby 177–8). And in another case, there is a pair of non-identical but highly parallel maxims (Democritus B214; Aristotle #93; Searby 236–7).

<sup>37</sup> Arist. *Rh.* 2.21, 1394a29–30 = Eur. *Med.* 294–5.

<sup>38</sup> Arist. *Rh.* 2.21, 1394a29–33 = Eur. *Med.* 294–7.

<sup>39</sup> According to Aristotle in *APo.* 1.6, scientific knowledge in the strict sense requires an account in which the truth of the propositions—both of the premises and of the conclusion—is necessary and not merely likely.

<sup>40</sup> This interpretation of enthymeme follows M. Burnyeat, "Enthymeme: Aristotle on the Rationality of Rhetoric," in A. O. Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle's Rhetoric* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1996), 88–115. Burnyeat does not mention Democritus; rather he is focused on Aristotle's account and refuting the traditional account according to which an enthymeme is an abbreviated syllogism that omits one of the premises or a conclusion.

A maxim of the other kinds can be comprehended by an audience without an explicit supplement but can also play the role of a conclusion in an enthymeme. Since such maxims are not strictly speaking self-evident, they generally require a supplement in the form of a reason or cause, whether provided by the reflection of the audience themselves or by the speaker. In the most compressed and elegant maxims, this is barely detectable, as in the maxim: "A mortal should think mortal, not immortal, thoughts." The reason that one should not think immortal thoughts is that one is a mortal (and, for the same reason, according to an earlier example given by Aristotle, one should not harbor divine rage). But usually the reason or cause is introduced in a supplement by the inferential particle "for" ( $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$ ). Consider another example from Euripides:

There is no one among men who is free; for he is a slave to money or luck.<sup>41</sup>

The first part is the maxim; taken with the supplement it is an enthymeme. The supplement is necessary because the maxim is not self-evident but, as Aristotle puts it, either paradoxical or disputable. One normally thinks that some men are free while others are slaves; the maxim asserts that no one is free; but this statement makes no sense without the explanation (introduced by the word "for"). With the explanation it becomes a striking piece of wisdom, encouraging one not to depend on money or luck.

Aristotle recommends using "even trite and common maxims, if they are applicable, for because they are common, they seem to be true, as though everyone agreed"; but he also recommends creating "maxims that are contrary to popular wisdom," giving as examples contradictions of the Delphic maxims: "Know thyself" and "Nothing in excess." A contrarian might argue, for example: "Had this man known himself, he would not have thought himself worthy of command." Thus, depending on the argument, the gnomologist might deploy and develop well-known maxims, or might contradict them (1395a).

At the end of his account of maxims in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle names two advantages of incorporating maxims into arguments. The first is that they are very well adapted to general audiences, because people take pleasure in hearing stated generally that which they perceive to apply to themselves in particular. The second, more important, advantage is that a maxim "makes the arguments ethical" ( $\eta\thetaικου\delta\varsigma \gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho \piοιει \tauου\varsigma \lambda\omicron\gammaου\varsigma$ , 1395b12–13): arguments (or speeches) have an ethical character ( $\eta\thetaο\varsigma \delta\epsilon \epsilon\chiου\sigmaιν ο\iota \lambda\omicron\gammaοι$ , 1395b13), he argues, insofar as in them deliberate choice is made clear. But maxims make clear a general statement about choice or preference, and so if the maxims are morally good, then the arguments (and not just the people speaking them—notice that Aristotle refers to the arguments themselves) will seem to have a good "character."

#### 4. Democritus' Use of Maxims

The implication of Aristotle's account of maxims for the interpretation and estimation of Democritus' moral fragments are important. First, those maxims of Democritus that can be given an enthymematic analysis would fit the Aristotelian standard for an argument to

<sup>41</sup> Arist. *Rh.* 2.12, 1394b3,5 = Eur. *Hec.* 864–5.

be "ethical." Second, the conformity of Democritus' ethics to Aristotle's rhetorical analysis of enthymenes suggests that his maxims were aimed at a general audience, and not at a relatively technically proficient audience (as, for example, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* evidently was).

In the fragments of Democritus, we find maxims of each of the kinds that Aristotle identifies. Here are several examples (chosen at random) beginning with a self-evident maxim followed by one evident upon brief reflection: "Imperturbable wisdom is worth everything" (B216); "If one were to exceed the moderate amount, the most enjoyable things would become most unenjoyable" (B233). The first is an axiom of intellectualist ethics. The second is *prima facie* paradoxical, to think of the most enjoyable things being the most unenjoyable. But when they reflect briefly on the effects of eating or drinking excessively, the audience may immediately affirm the maxim without further explicit argumentation.

The following maxim, however, is enthymematic: "The man of justice and virtue gets the greatest share" (B263). It is disputable whether "the man of justice" gets the greatest share: one might think that the unjust man, by getting more than his fair share, can get the greatest share; but when they reflect on the fact that justice is conjoined with virtue, the audience comes to see that he who pursues justice in fact gets the greatest "share." The following maxim is also paradoxical or disputable but requires an explicit supplement: "There is understanding among the young, and lack of understanding among the aged. For it is not time that teaches wisdom, but nurture and nature" (B183). One usually thinks that the young lack understanding, while the aged possess it; the maxim paradoxically denies this. The reason must then be given: because wisdom is a function not of time, but of ability and learning.

Many fragments of Democritus, and by far the most important ones, I will argue, can be interpreted as maxims of this kind: general assertions on matters related to what should be pursued or avoided about ethical matters, which are disputable or paradoxical, and so require an explanatory supplement. Hence many of Democritus' fragments have precisely the logical form of an enthymeme described above by Aristotle. Consider these two (again random) examples: "Appetite for possessions, unless limited by satisfaction, is far harder to bear than extreme poverty; for greater appetites produce greater wants" (B219); "All rivalry is senseless. For by dwelling on what is harmful to an enemy, it does not keep its eye on what is to one's own advantage" (B237). Again, it is paradoxical to think that having strong appetites is worse than extreme poverty, or that (from an archaic Greek perspective) rivalry and competitiveness is not good. The explanatory supplements, however, indicate the reasons why someone should believe these things. In so doing, these maxims have the potential to change one's mind about what things should be pursued or avoided, and so might change one's behavior and one's feelings, so that one "will do many deeds worthy of a good person and will not do many bad things" (B35), as it is put in the *Golden Sayings*.

Many of the shorter maxims of Democritus may have originally been longer. A very important case is the following:

No one should have a sense of shame before other people more than before himself, nor be more prepared to work a bad deed if no one witnesses it than if everyone does; but he should have a sense of shame before himself most of all and impose this law on his soul so that he will do nothing mischievous. (B264)

The core imperative of B264 is repeated in two progressively more abbreviated fragments:<sup>42</sup> "Do nothing base, whether in speech or in deed; and do not have a sense of shame much more before others than before oneself" (B244); and "The man doing shameful things needs first of all to feel shame before himself" (B84). We do not know whether these abbreviations were due to Democritus himself or to a compiler. But the phenomenon of abbreviation—which, incidentally, is obscured in Diels' arrangement of the fragments—shows how a pithy, proverbial maxim may have originally been part of a longer, more discursive maxim and enthymeme. In this case, the longer version contains a very important and original idea missing from the shorter versions: the idea that the maxim can be imposed on oneself, autonomously.<sup>43</sup>

### 5. Democritus, *Peri euthumiēs*

In due course we will examine the momentous ethical and political implications of the longer version of the above maxim. But let us first examine the two most important and influential fragments of Democritus' ethics, beginning with B3, which was probably the incipit of Democritus' work *Peri euthumiēs*:

The man trying to enjoy *euthumiē* (τὸν εὐθυμεῖσθαι μέλλοντα) should not do much—whether in public or private—nor, whatever he does, choose beyond his capabilities and nature; but he should be so much on guard that even when luck falls upon and leads him to thinking about getting more, he puts it aside and does not undertake more than he is capable of. For a good load is safer than a large load. (B3)

The fact that Democritus immediately launches into an account of how to enjoy tranquility rather than a definition of the abstract noun *euthumiē* reinforces the impression that the *Peri euthumiēs* had a primarily practical rather than analytical scope. The maxim contains three interconnected and progressively specified pieces of advice, followed by an extremely brief explanatory supplement: (1) one must not do much, whether in private or public affairs; (2) one must determine what is too much on the basis of one's capability and nature; and (3) one must not overestimate one's natural capabilities by counting on the effects of luck.

The maxim is paradoxical or disputable because it is usually supposed that the person who is going to enjoy life *must* do many things in both public and private: the fact that this is disputable is clear from the subsequent record of vehement disagreement about whether the advice amounts to encouraging withdrawal from all public affairs (as Epicurus later

<sup>42</sup> On the process of successive abbreviation, see Philippon, "Sittensprüche," 383–4; and Procopé, *Moralist*, 314, and n. 43 below.

<sup>43</sup> E. A. Havelock observes that much "presocratic" philosophy can be understood to have built up larger prose units out of smaller, more aphoristic units ("The Linguistic Task of the Presocratics," in K. Robb, ed., *Language and Thought in Early Greek Philosophy* (La Salle, 1983), 7–82 at 11/40) with reference to Zeno, Melissus, Anaxagoras, Diogenes, and Parmenides. More research is needed into what extent the shorter fragments of Democritus might be said to correspond to the kind of "earlier," more aphoristic prose units that Havelock refers to, as opposed to "later" abbreviations of originally larger, more complex texts. But it is extremely difficult to say, since Democritus himself may have composed his own longer texts out of shorter units, and also abbreviated his own longer texts into shorter aphoristic prose—nothing in the evidence base seems to preclude either mode of composition.

supposedly advocated), or something less than this.<sup>44</sup> Since it is disputable, the maxim requires an explanatory supplement in order to constitute a proper enthymeme. Accordingly, the very last sentence provides a supplementary “cause” for all three prescriptions, serving as a kind of general principle for decision or action.<sup>45</sup> But the explanation as it stands is excessively brief, being only a highly suggestive proverb, itself a kind of maxim: “For a good load is safer than a large load.”

But further reasoning supporting the same argument comes in another fragment, the longest and most secure of all, B191. This fragment begins, like the last sentence of B3, with the inferential particle “for” (γὰρ), indicating that it was a piece of argumentation and not mere “aphorism,”<sup>46</sup> and that the fragment was preceded by some other text. It is not clear what text, but it is possible that B191 followed B3 either immediately or after only a small gap. B191 can be read as offering in its first paragraph further support for the explanation that concludes B3, and thus as explaining why “a good load is safer than a large load”:

<a> For *euthumiē* comes about for people through moderate enjoyment and a way of life that is commensurate;<sup>47</sup> things that are deficient and excessive tend to fluctuate and induce great changes in the soul; and those souls that change in accordance with great intervals are neither well-balanced (εὐσταθές) nor enjoy *euthumiē* (εὐθυμοί).

<b> Therefore: one should (1) keep in mind one’s capabilities, and (2) be content with what one has, having few memories or thoughts of those who are objects of jealousy and admiration, by not focusing on them; but one should (3) observe the lives of those who are enduring hardship, concentrating on how immense their sufferings are. In this way the things one has and already possesses will seem great and enviable. And no longer would you suffer distress in your soul because of desiring for more.

<c> For the man who dwells in his thought and memory at all hours on those who are objects of admiration, and who are deemed blessed by other people, is always compelled to find new opportunities and, because of desire, to overshoot by doing desperate things which the laws prohibit.

<d> That is why one must not be in doubt about what needs to be, but enjoy *euthumiē* with respect to what needs to be (ἐπι δὲ τοῖς εὐθυμέσθαι χρεών), by comparing one’s own

<sup>44</sup> Plu. *Περὶ εὐθυμίας*, Sen. *tranq.*, argue at length that the maxim should not be interpreted advocating withdrawing entirely from public engagement.

<sup>45</sup> This principle can in turn be related to several other maxims. For example: “Luck provides a lavish table; self-control a sufficient one” (B210; q.v. Procopé, *Moralist*, 31–9); “Luck is lavish with her gifts, but uncertain; nature is sufficient on her own; that is why she prevails with a little, which is certain, over the large amount of hope” (B176; note that this maxim brings us back to the original point in B3 about seeking the right amount instead of being misled by luck into seeking a lot).

<sup>46</sup> The presence of sentential connectives and inferential particles such as *gar* is considered critical in judging whether Heraclitus’ prose is best interpreted as a mere collection of aphorisms or as genuine philosophical argumentation (J. Barnes, “Aphorism and Argument,” in K. Robb, ed., *Language and Thought in Early Greek Philosophy* (La Salle, 1983), 91–109; and H. Granger, “Argumentation and Heraclitus’ Book,” *OSAP* 26 (2004), 1–17). Applying this criterion to the fragments of Democritus, we do in fact find abundant sentential connectives and inferential particles, and thus relatively complex argumentation and not mere aphorism; this fact also seems to support the case that our smaller fragments are abbreviations from originally longer, more continuous prose texts.

<sup>47</sup> It is not clear whether Democritus means that the way of life is “commensurate” (συμμετρῆν) with the “moderate enjoyment” (μετριότητα τέρψις) just mentioned, or with the people (ἀνθρώποισι) themselves, i.e., with their capability and nature. The second interpretation (which follows Procopé, *Morality*, 74–5) has the advantage of fitting well with the other parts of both B191 and B3.

life with those who do worse. One must deem oneself blessed, keeping in mind the things those worse off suffer, and how much better than them one does going through life.

<e> For by holding fast to this maxim, you will go through <life> with more *euthumiē* (εὐθυμότερόν) and will drive away defects in your life that are not slight: envy, jealousy, and ill-will. (B191)

I have divided B191 into five sections and interpreted the overall structure as consisting of three enthymemes. I have just suggested that section <a> is a continuation of the explanation of the maxim in B3 (“the man trying to enjoy *euthumiē* should not do much, whether in public or private”). Recognizing this allows us to interpret B3+B191.i as a single enthymematic argument. Section <b> then seems to state another complex maxim: in order not to suffer distress in your soul, one should keep in mind one’s capabilities, pay no attention to those better off, and focus instead on those worse off. This complex maxim is then followed in section <c> by yet another explanation (again introduced by the inferential particle “for”): if you dwell on those better instead of worse off, then you will be tormented by desires for what they have, and even compelled to commit crime for the sake of getting it. Sections <b–c> thus constitute another single enthymeme. This is then followed in section <d> by yet another maxim, or a slightly different formulation of the two just stated (in B3 and B191.b): in order to do and fare well, one must be content with what one has and consider oneself well off compared to those who do worse. In the final section <e>, this last maxim is then given an additional explanation (again introduced by the particle “for”): by doing so you will live with more *euthumiē*, which is exactly what “the man trying to enjoy *euthumiē*” addressed in B3 wants and needs to hear. Between B3 and B191, then, we have three maxims, amounting to three complete enthymemes as defined by Aristotle.

B191 begins by explaining that *euthumiē* is produced by “moderate enjoyment” and by living a way of life that is “commensurate” with one’s nature and capabilities. So far B191, like B3, focuses on a subject’s relation to external things (objects of enjoyment, undertakings in private or public). But when it is explained what is meant by way of contrasting “things that are deficient and excessive,” Democritus refers to “fluctuations” and “changes in the soul.” Democritus then shifts the focus from an “objective” focus to a “subjective” one.

It is not exactly clear how the expression “souls that change over great intervals” should be interpreted. Perhaps Democritus has in mind something similar to the psychological disorder of severe mood swings, or even what we now describe with terms like “bipolar disorder” and “manic-depressive disorder.” Democritus would thus be pointing out the fact that subjects who experience, for example, great mood swings, tend not to be tranquil; to the present day we continue to use terms like “unbalanced,” “unsettled,” “unstable,” or even “disturbed” with reference to people who suffer from certain psychological ailments. All such terms, including the still in use technical medical terms “euthymia” and “cyclothymia,” show the persistence of a conceptual scheme whose *locus classicus* is Democritus. Thus, Democritus in B191.a may have something similar in mind, so that there is no point in pressing for a deeper understanding of the notion of “souls that change over great intervals.”

But some scholars have interpreted Democritus as referring here to a physical description of how material particles move spatially over greater physical distances (“intervals”) in

the complex of atoms that comprises the psyche of the person who lacks wellbeing or *euthumiē*.<sup>48</sup> Certainly there are other parts of Democritus' psychology, in particular his theory of sensation, that invite such an interpretation.<sup>49</sup> For example, we might take Democritus to be saying that deficiencies or excesses of certain things (like food, drink, sex) actually induce changes in the body (e.g., the brain); in terms of his atomistic physics this might involve a distension of the interstitial voids between the alternating soul and body atoms that make up the living body, resulting in a less balanced or structurally stable psyche. That is all purely speculative, but according to such an account, actions originating in the psyche would induce changes in the body, changes which in turn affect the living person's subjective feeling of wellbeing or tranquility. Such an interpretation might be supported by a fragment in Plutarch's essay *Are Desire and Grief Psychical or Bodily Phenomena?*:

Democritus, ascribing unhappiness (*κακοδαιμονίας*) to the soul, says that if the body were to bring a suit against the soul for all the pain it felt and bad things it had suffered (*πέπονθεν*) while alive, and one were to become a judge of the complaint, one would happily vote against the soul, on the grounds that the soul had destroyed part of the body through negligence, and dissolved others with strong drinks, and corrupted and ripped it up through the love of pleasures, just as if holding responsible the careless user of an instrument or tool in a bad condition. (B159)

B159 is striking because it reverses the Platonic idea so familiar to us, but possibly unfamiliar to Democritus, that the body is the cause of the soul's corruption and our unhappiness, not vice versa. Democritus is focused on how the psyche and its condition affects the overall person, including the body, and so informs us that "it is fitting for people to produce more reasoning about the soul than about the body; for perfection of soul corrects bad condition of the bodily dwelling,<sup>50</sup> but strength of bodily dwelling without reasoning does not make the soul any better" (B187). Thus in B191.a, Democritus follows this advice and offers reasoning about the soul and how it can cause harm to the body, resulting in "disturbance," "being unbalanced," and hence a failure to experience moderate enjoyment and tranquility or wellbeing.

A third possible interpretation of the phrase "souls that change over great intervals" arises in connection with the following fragment:

Those whose pleasures are produced out of their stomach, exceeding fitness in food, drink, or sex, all produce brief and minor pleasures, lasting as long as they are eating or drinking, but also many pains. For, because this always remains their desire, and when they get that which they desire the pleasure quickly disappears, they have nothing themselves except a brief feeling of joy, and they need the same things again. (B235)

<sup>48</sup> Vlastos, "Physics," 582–3.

<sup>49</sup> Democritus describes subjective affects in sensation as traceable or reducible to certain atomic motions, for example, colors, sounds, tastes, smells, cold, and heat (A135, etc.; see Procopé, *Moralist*, 199–200). Presumably the same analysis applies to the affects associated with "good spirits" and its opposite.

<sup>50</sup> Democritus uses the term *σκήνος* (literally hut, tent, dwelling) in contrast to the soul in the second sentence of this passage, but the first part makes it clear that this is synonymous with "body" and so I translate *σκήνος* as "bodily dwelling."

B235 follows the typical structure of a Democritean enthymeme: maxim plus explanation. People who pursue the most common kinds of pleasures (pleasures of the body, which Democritus elsewhere refers to as “mortal” pleasures), end up causing themselves pain. In giving the reason, Democritus presents us with the most ancient account of addiction: intense bursts of short-term pleasure caused by over-indulgence in food, drink, or sex lead to increasingly unpleasant feelings of desire and need, and thus greater periods of time between feelings of pleasure. Perhaps the “intervals” in the phrase “souls that change over great intervals” should accordingly be interpreted not in a spatial but a temporal sense. Those who find their enjoyments in food, drink, and sex experience only short bursts of pleasure, after which time they are quickly returned to an unpleasant state of desire. Their souls, instead of steadily and consistently experiencing “moderate enjoyment,” can only experience short bursts of pleasure after greater and greater intervals and thus have, on balance, more unpleasantness, less stability and less tranquility.

These three interpretations of “souls that change over great intervals” are not mutually exclusive, but space prevents me here from further integrating them. But how we interpret Democritus’ negative account of psychological disturbance should at any rate be informed by an interpretation of that somewhat less obscure phrase of positive psychology in B191.a, just mentioned: “moderate enjoyment.” Tropes related to the theme of moderation persist from the earliest Greek “wisdom” traditions through to and beyond Aristotle’s own elaborate doctrine of virtue, where every moral virtue is defined as a mean relative to both an excess and deficiency. We saw that Aristotle cited the maxims “know thyself” and “nothing in excess” as classical expressions of popular wisdom.<sup>51</sup> Both maxims are subtly invoked by Democritus in B3+B191: one must know one’s capabilities and nature, and one must limit one’s actions and ambitions accordingly; to put it in psychological terms, one must avoid both excesses and deficiencies, since these cause disturbances and instability in one’s soul. Democritus in this way adapted these most ancient and entrenched maxims in his own ethics, and he attempted to provide a basis for them in the language of contemporary scientific aetiology, just as Aristotle later tried to do.

The exhortation to moderation in B191 is put in entirely self-regarding terms. Control of one’s desire for and experience of pleasures is prescribed because the enjoyment of *euthumiē* requires self-control on the basis of feelings. Similarly, “The landmark of things suitable and unsuitable is enjoyment and lack of enjoyment” (B188). Pains indicate what is bad and what interrupts *euthumiē*: “Democritus says there is one end of everything and *euthumiē* is the most dominant, and that pains are the indicators of what is bad” (A166). One must accordingly discriminate between desires and pleasures on the basis of those that will allow one to enjoy the most *euthumiē*:<sup>52</sup> “It is best for a person to go through their life being with as much *euthumiē* as possible (ὡς πλεῖστα εὐθυμηθέντι) and distressed as little as possible. And this could happen if one would not get one’s pleasures from the mortal things” (B189). “Mortal things” refers to the traditional triad of food, drink, and sex mentioned above in B235. Democritus distinguishes pleasures that are beautiful and

<sup>51</sup> Arist. *Rh.* 2.21, 1395a20.

<sup>52</sup> D. McGibbon, “Pleasure as the ‘Criterion’ in Democritus,” *Phronesis* 5 (1960), 75–7, resolves a long-standing confusion about how to interpret the idea of “pleasure” as the criterion in Democritus. Irwin, *Theory*, 32, briefly sketches an argument, improved by M. Nill, *Morality and Self-Interest in Protagoras, Antiphon, and Democritus [Self-Interest]* (Leiden, 1985), 85, that shows how Democritus can hold pursuit of *eὐθυμία* compatible with virtue (i.e., justice and temperance).



rare.<sup>53</sup> He argues that self-control enhances enjoyment, while immoderation destroys it: “Self-control increases the joyful things and makes pleasure still greater” (B211); “If one were to exceed the moderate, the most enjoyable things would become most unenjoyable” (B233). He argues that intense desires undermine not only temperance, but other virtues like courage.<sup>54</sup> Democritus thus encourages moderation of the desire for possessions by being content with what one already has, thus avoiding unlimited desires and appetites, as well as greed, jealousy, envy: “Fortunate is he who enjoys *euthumiē* (εὐθυμέομενος) with respect to his moderate possessions, and unfortunate is he who does not enjoy *euthumiē* and feels upset (δυσθυμέομενος) with respect to his many possessions” (B286); “Well-thinking is the man not pained by what he does not have, but who rejoices in what he does have” (B231)<sup>55</sup>; “Without sense they yearn for what is absent but neglect what they have, even when it is more valuable than what has gone” (B202). Democritus thus discusses pleasures and desires, including their objects, their quantity, and their intensity, as well as the means of their control and modulation. The innovativeness and importance of his ideas has thus been recognized in comprehensive studies of Greek theories of pleasure.<sup>56</sup>

## 6. Social-Political dimensions of Democritus’ ethics

Democritus extends these ethical maxims about self-control and the limitation of desires into a radical reevaluation of the concepts of poverty and wealth. Consider the following maxims: “Appetite for possessions, unless limited by satisfaction, is far harder to bear than extreme poverty; for greater appetites produce greater wants” (B219); “If your desires are not many, the few things you have will seem to be many; for small desires make poverty equivalent to wealth” (B284); “Poverty and wealth are names for need and satisfaction, so that he who lacks is not wealthy, and he who does not need is not poor” (B283). These maxims, especially when considered in their historical context, come across as extremely paradoxical, taking an apparently objective phenomenon (whether one is poor or rich) and interpreting them as a subjective phenomenon, which can be affected by how one thinks about them. In this context,<sup>57</sup> Democritus authored the following political maxim:

Poverty in a state in which the people have the power (δημοκρατίη) is as much more to be chosen than so-called “prosperity” (εὐδαιμονίης) under elites as freedom (ἐλευθερίη) is than slavery. (B251)

This astounding maxim likely contains the earliest extant reference to “democracy,” as well as the earliest or one of the earliest references to a substantive notion of “freedom” (earlier uses of the term are adjectival, meaning “free”—but now we are talking, possibly for the

<sup>53</sup> B194: “Great feelings of joy come from the observation of beautiful works”; cf. B232: “Of the pleasures, those produced most rarely are enjoyed most of all”; and B207: “Not every pleasure, but only that related to the beautiful must be chosen.”

<sup>54</sup> B214: “Courageous is not only the man who bests his enemies, but also the one who bests his pleasures; but some men are masters of cities while enslaved to women.”

<sup>55</sup> B231. Cf. B224: “The desire for more loses what one has, like the dog in Aesop.”

<sup>56</sup> Gosling and Taylor, *Pleasure*, 27–37 and D. Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2013), 13–17 offer insightful interpretations of Democritus’ theory of pleasure in relation to *eὐθυμίη*.

<sup>57</sup> See also J. Mejer, “Democritus and Democracy,” *Apeiron* 37 (2004), 1–9.

first time, about “freedom”); and what is more, the fragment contains one of the earliest and most paradoxical references to the most important term of all later Greek ethics: *eudaimonia* (εὐδαιμονία in the Ionic dialect), meaning “prosperity” or “happiness.” The maxim is incredibly precious for being one of the vanishingly few direct pieces of pro-democratic rhetoric to survive from the classical period, contrasting sharply with the anti-democratic views of Democritus’ contemporary Socrates, who is portrayed by Plato as attacking not only democracy but the very concept of political freedom as antithetical to *eudaimonia*.<sup>58</sup>

This remarkable “democratic” aspect of Democritus’ ethics brings us back to B191. After the psychological account of *euthumiē* in section <a>, Democritus offers in section <b> of that fragment a maxim designed to avoid emotions like envy and jealousy that are particularly inimical to *euthumiē*. The first prescription is to keep in mind one’s capabilities, as was also exhorted in B3. The second and third prescriptions are like two sides of the same coin: one should not compare oneself to others who have greater capabilities or resources, for that will produce the negative emotions of jealousy, admiration, and in general psychological disturbance; instead one should focus on those who are less fortunate and less capable, for that will produce emotions opposite of jealousy and will reduce one’s desires, resulting in psychological stability and balance. We are thus advised to perceive ourselves as members of some kind of middle class, and not to compare ourselves to the upper classes, which will cause us to feel relative deprivation and envy; but we are encouraged to compare ourselves to the lower classes, which will cause us to feel contentment with our own condition and pity towards those deprived relative to ourselves.

In B191, all of this is encouraged for the self-regarding reason of enjoying *euthumiē*. But in connection with these maxims, Democritus develops his ethical-therapeutic technique into a social-political revaluation which provides self-regarding reasons to be altruistic and to help the less fortunate. Dwelling on the many cases of people whose lives go worse, as Democritus prescribes, inculcates appreciation of the fact that life is short and difficult, and that things considered goods are difficult to obtain, but bad things occur spontaneously: “It needs to be realized (γινώσκειν χρεών) that human life is powerless and short-lived and for most mixed up with having been confused and without means, in order that one may care only for moderate acquisitions, and that hardship may be measured by the necessities” (B285). The realization that hardship and misfortune is common to all human beings causes pity, leading one to mourn for the misfortunes of others: “Those who feel pleasure at their neighbors’ misfortunes fail to understand that the results of luck are common to all and that they lack a cause for their own joy” (B293). This in turn motivates one to help others for their own sake, such as by protecting the innocent or giving money to the poor: “Those to whom something unjust is being done one must lend aid as much as one can and not look away (ἀδικουμένοισι τιμωρεῖν κατὰ δύναμιν χρῆ καὶ μὴ παρίεναι); for to do this kind of thing is just and good, and not to do this kind of thing is unjust and bad” (B261); “When those who have means undertake to contribute to those who do not, and to assist and benefit them, herein at last is having pity and not being solitary, and they become

<sup>58</sup> I am thinking of the portrayal of Socrates in Plato’s *Gorgias* and *Republic* 8; J. Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule* (Princeton, 1998), 48–50, interprets Socrates as an immanent (i.e., reformist) critic of Athenian democracy as opposed to a “rejectionist” critic, as Plato evidently is.

comrades and defend one another, and the citizens are of one mind; and there are other good things, so many no one could enumerate them" (B255).

Thus, acting for the sake of others is a consequence of pursuing Democritean *euthumiē* and can be justified on the basis of self-regarding reasons.<sup>59</sup> And acting in this way in turn provides many other social benefits likely to redound to the self-interest of the agent. The way that Democritus puts this in terms of both imperatives "one must . . ." and statements of the positive or negative consequences of doing so or not doing so indicates that Democritus does not accept the theoretical possibility that an agent might enjoy *euthumiē* without coming to the realizations he describes about the necessity for mutual aid and solidarity and just behavior: as in B191, one is assumed to be comparing oneself either on those better or worse off, so that if one is not dwelling on those worse off and feeling compelled to help them, then one must not be enjoying *euthumiē*, and one must be plagued by overextension, rivalry, envy, jealousy, and even crime in pursuit of possessions and status.

In addition to offering such self-regarding reasons based on *euthumiē* for helping others, Democritus also gives self-regarding reasons along the same lines for acting justly. In B174 he argues that consciousness of one's own just acts directly produces *euthumiē*:

The man enjoying *euthumiē* (ὁ εὐθυμος), who is carried on to just and lawful deeds, rejoices day and night, and is both confident and without concern. But whosoever does not reason about justice and does not do the things that need to be done, all such things are a deprivation of enjoyment (ἀτερπείη) whenever he calls any of them to mind, so he is afraid and reproaches himself. (B174)<sup>60</sup>

Further, the political stability that results from doing just acts contributes to *euthumiē*: "The reward of justice is confidence of thought and not being perturbed, but the result of injustice is the terror of misfortune" (B215). Democritus applies this reasoning to several concrete cases, including sitting in judgment of others accused of injustice, and killing (or refraining from killing) other living things and, typically, he makes the point both negatively and positively: "Those who do something worthy of banishment or incarceration, or worthy of penalty, one must condemn and not release; but someone releasing contrary to law, deciding for profit or pleasure, does something unjust, and this necessity must be in his heart" (B262); "One must terminate in every case everything that does harm contrary to justice; and the man doing these things will share in a greater portion of *euthumiē* (εὐθυμίας) and justice and confidence and acquisition in every good order" (B258).<sup>61</sup> By framing his maxims as forced judgements ("one must condemn and not release"; "one must terminate in every case"), Democritus again precludes a neutral stance whereby one might enjoy the wanted psychological state, *euthumiē*, without deliberately and consciously acting justly and legally.

<sup>59</sup> The argument in this paragraph was developed by Nill, *Morality and Self-Interest*, 90.

<sup>60</sup> The translation follows the construal of Procopé, *the Moralists*, 188.

<sup>61</sup> B257: "Regarding killing and not killing of living things, the following holds: the man who terminates those doing something unjust or intending to do something unjust is guiltless, and to do so rather than not contributes to wellbeing (πρὸς εὐεστρούν)."

## 7. Democritus' Conception of Autonomy

The discovery of self-regarding reasons to be altruistic and to act justly and legally is important to the history of ethics because makes it possible to focus on the ethical agent and what is up to an ethical agent to do. And so in another astonishing fragment, Democritus stresses, perhaps for the first time, the importance of the autonomy of the agent.

No one should have a sense of shame before other people more than a sense of shame before himself (*αἰδεῖσθαι ἑωυτοῦ*), nor be more prepared to work a bad deed if no one witnesses it than if everyone does; rather he should have a sense of shame before himself most of all (*ἀλλ' ἑωυτὸν μάλιστα αἰδεῖσθαι*) and impose a law on his soul (*τοῦτον νόμον τῇ ψυχῇ καθεσθάναι*), so that he will do nothing mischievous. (B264)

Two highly paradoxical notions are present in this maxim: “have a sense of shame before himself most of all” and “impose a law on his soul.” Normally, shame is something felt before other people, and laws are imposed not by oneself on oneself but by a legislature on a political body. To “impose a law on his soul” for an agent is literally to act “autonomously”: literally, with a self-imposed *nomos* or law. Although it would be going too far to pretend to discover in these fragments a worked out ethical theory of autonomy as we find in Rousseau or Kant,<sup>62</sup> it is important and distinctive that Democritus favors this literally “autonomous” method for promoting virtue as opposed to one like Plato’s or Aristotle’s, focused on politically and legally imposed punishments and rewards as indispensable means for producing good citizens. This “autonomous” view is perfectly consistent with Democritus’ emphasis on exhortation and education in his maxims.

Democritus even goes so far as to call into question the purpose of laws in the following maxim: “The laws would not prevent each person living according to his own will, if one did not maltreat another. For envy prepares a source of strife” (B245).

This maxim also shows Democritus’ comprehension of a limitation of exclusively autonomy-based ethics, and he acknowledges that laws will be necessary in order to deal with those who fail to avoid envy and so threaten social or political tranquility. The supplementary explanation for this maxim thus connects the whole network of fragments to the final part of B191.e: “For by holding fast to this maxim, you will live with more *euthumiē*, and will drive away defects in your life that are not slight: envy, jealousy, and ill-will.” In combination with all of the fragments discussed, we can see the extraordinary development of both “objective” and “subjective” considerations of moral psychology, and this comprehensive aspect of Democritus’ ethics is further reflected in the fact that his social-political maxims include references to both autonomous and heteronomous sources of moral sanction.

<sup>62</sup> Natorp, *Ethika*, 102; V. F. v. Guazzoni, “Per la sistematicità interna dell’etica Democritea,” *Giornale di Metafisica* 9 (1969), 532–7, at 534; Kahn, “Psychology,” 28; M. R. Johnson, “Changing our Minds: Democritus on What is up to Us” [“Us”], in P. Destrée et al., eds., *Up to Us: Studies on Causality and Responsibility in Ancient Philosophy* (Sankt Augustin, 2014), 1–18, at 14–15. For reservations about Natorp’s attribution of a concept of moral autonomy, see Procopé, *Moralist*, 352–3.

The importance and originality of Democritus' position can be illuminated through a brief examination of Aristotle's rejection of this "autonomous" approach to ethics in general, and to Democritus' ethics in particular, in favor a view that focuses on the political dimension of externally imposed sanctions on action, for example, punishments and rewards imposed by law. Although Aristotle's views on "having a sense of shame" (*αἰδώς*) and "shame" (*αἰσχύνη*) may have developed over time, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* he rejected the proposal that shame, which he defines as "a fear of bad reputation," could be or contribute to virtue except possibly in the case of the young.<sup>63</sup> And so Democritus' exhortation to a self-imposed sense of shame and in general attempt to use reasoning to transform people into ethically good agents was thoroughly rejected by Aristotle, who quipped that, "if their arguments (*οἱ λόγοι*) were sufficient by themselves to make people good, then they would have won many great awards, and justly so" (1179b4–6).<sup>64</sup>

But as things are, though they have the power to exhort (*προτρέψασθαι*) and influence those young people who possess liberality, and perhaps to make susceptible to virtue a character that is well-bred and truly loves what is noble, they seem unable to exhort the majority in the direction of what is noble and good. For the majority by natural inclination do not obey a sense of shame (*οὐ γὰρ πεφύκασιν αἰδοῖ πειθαρχεῖν*), but fear, and abstain from shameful acts not because of the shame (*διὰ τὸ αἰσχρόν*) but because of the punishments associated with them. (EN 10.9, 1179b7–13)

Aristotle here directly contradicts at least three points we have seen emphasized by Democritus: first, that "exhortation" (*προτροπή*) and persuasion are superior to law and coercion (B181); second, that inculcating to have a sense of shame (*αἰδεῖσθαι*) is superior to acting on the fear of punishment (B264); and third, that teaching can transform one's nature (*μεταρυσμοῦσα δὲ φυσιοποιεῖ*) (B33). Aristotle then asks, incredulously, a rhetorical question, followed by an enthymematic maxim: "What argument could transform (*μεταρρυθμίσει*) people like this? For displacing by argument what has long been entrenched in people's characters is difficult if not impossible" (EN 10.9, 1179b16–18).

Although, as usual in ethical contexts, Aristotle does not name Democritus here, it is clear that the argument applies directly to Democritus,<sup>65</sup> and may even be an imitation of it. Aristotle makes it clear that he considers Democritus by far his most important

<sup>63</sup> EN 4.9.1128b11–21. In the *Topics*, Aristotle suggests that *αἰσχύνη* is part of the "reasoning faculty" (126a3–9), but in the *EE* Aristotle describes *αἰδώς* as a praiseworthy mean between "shamelessness" and "bashfulness," he considers it a "feeling," not a virtue (1221a1; 1233b26–9, 1234a24–33). In the *Rhetoric*, *αἰσχύνη* is defined as "pain or disturbance in regard to evil things, whether present, past, or future" (1383b11–19). Interestingly, in the gnomological tradition, Aristotle is credited with positive remarks about *αἰσχύνη* prima facie consistent with Democritus' views: "Aristotle declared to feel ashamed (*αἰσχύνεσθαι*) to be the goal of education" (#78, trans. Searby, 227); cf. "to be wicked and to not feel ashamed is the height of wickedness" (#94, trans. Searby, 238).

<sup>64</sup> In his own *Protrepticus*, Aristotle offers exhortation towards doing philosophy and taking a scientific approach to the good life; in the extant fragments, he does not go in for traditional exhortation to the virtues themselves, nor does he in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. See: D. S. Hutchinson, and M. R. Johnson, "Protreptic Aspects of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*," in R. Polansky, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Cambridge, 2014), 383–409.

<sup>65</sup> So Procopé, *the Moralists*, 335.

predecessor in the field of natural science.<sup>66</sup> Aristotle in his ethical works pretty openly engaged with Democritus' ethics without naming him specifically. Arguments from silence have no force in the context of authors like Aristotle whose works survive only partially, and we know for sure that Aristotle wrote several works on Democritus, and so did Theophrastus, all lost. It is reasonable to assume that if we had those works we would see more clearly what Aristotle thought about Democritus' ethics.<sup>67</sup> Thus although Aristotle does not name Democritus explicitly in the extant works on ethics, it is possible to see that on certain issues he nevertheless engages with Democritus' views.<sup>68</sup> This is clear also from general comments that Aristotle makes about ethics that I will discuss in the next section.

## 8. Democritus' Eudaimonistic and Therapeutic Ethics

The most important issue on which Aristotle and Democritus should be compared is the aim and method of ethics itself. Aristotle focuses his criticism of Democritus' ethics on how virtue is produced. In the second book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle describes and criticizes a theory that defines "the virtues as a kind of lack of suffering (*ἀπαθεία*) and a being at rest" (*τὰς ἀρετὰς ἀπαθείας τινὰς καὶ ἡρεμίας*); Democritus is likely to be a target of these remarks.<sup>69</sup> In B3 and B191, Democritus describes as an outcome of following his maxims and pursuing *euthumiē* reducing the sufferings (*πάθη*) in the soul (envy, jealousy, etc.) due to one's thought pattern and focus; pursuing *euthumiē* produces contentment, reduces the motivation to vicious action, and minimizes disturbing impacts over large psychic intervals. Thus Democritus, even on the evidence of the most secure fragment B191 alone could plausibly be described as someone who defines virtues as a kind of "lack of suffering and being at rest."

<sup>66</sup> "In general, no one except Democritus has applied himself to any of these matters in more than a superficial way" (GC 315a34–5); cf. 324b35–325a2; Ph. 252a34–b1; PA 642a26–7; *Metaph.* 1078b20; M. R. Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology* (Oxford, 2005), 104–12.

<sup>67</sup> Simplicius quotes a passage: *δλίγα δὲ ἐκ τῶν Ἀριστοτέλους Περὶ Δημόκριτου* (in *de caelo* 294,33: s. II 93, 20). See also the titles in Diogenes Laertius for Aristotle: *Προβλήματα ἐκ τῶν Δημοκρίτου β; <ἐπιστολαί> Πρὸς Δημόκριτον α'* (D.L. 5.26 and 27); also for Theophrastus: *Περὶ τῆς Δημοκρίτου ἀστρολογίας α; Περὶ Δημοκρίτου α.* (D.L. 5.43 and 49). See S. Menn, "Democritus, Aristotle, and the *Problemata*," in R. Mayhew, ed., *The Aristotelian Problemata Physica: Philosophical and Scientific Investigations* (Leiden and Boston, 2015), 10–35, at 10–11.

<sup>68</sup> Natorp, *Ethika*, 177 calls attention to the fact that Aristotle does not mention Democritus explicitly in the context of ethics, like Plato, who does not mention Democritus' physics or epistemology at all. Just as it would be erroneous to infer from Plato's silence that Democritus was not a major contributor to fourth-century physics, so it would be a mistake to infer from Aristotle's failure to mention Democritus by name in his (surviving) ethical works that Democritus was not influential on fourth-century ethics. For one thing, Plato does, without naming him, engage Democritus' views (Ferwerda, R. "Democritus and Plato," *Mnemosyne*, fourth series 25 (1972), 337–78, at 359–78 discusses their interaction in the domain of ethics and politics and presents a bibliography of earlier studies). Aristotle does not conduct a survey of his predecessors in ethics as he does in theoretical philosophy, which may be due to his conception of the methodological differences between practical and theoretical sciences, a division of philosophy unrecognized by Democritus (or Plato). At any rate, Aristotle's frequent criticisms of views of unnamed predecessors in his ethical works must be interpreted on the basis of speculative probabilities. Below I argue that in several key cases it is most likely that Democritus was the target of criticism. Dudley, "Democritus and Aristotle," made a start of accounting for the presence of Democritus in Aristotle's ethics; see also M. R. Johnson, "Spontaneity, Democritean Causality, and Freedom," *Elenchos* 30 (2009), 5–52, at 31–40; and "Us," 3–6 and 14–15.

<sup>69</sup> EN 2.3, 1104b18–28. Another possibility is Archytas of Tarentum (see Horky and Johnson, this volume). It is also possible that Democritus here influenced either Archytas himself or the neo-Pythagorean Ps.-Archytas (if we take the *On Law and Justice* to be a late Hellenistic work and not to reflect the views of the historical Archytas), since Democritus was involved with Pythagoreanism from an early date (see nn. 10 and 23 above).

To drive the point home, we must now discuss in some detail the terms reportedly used by Democritus for the end or *telos*: *euthumiē*.<sup>70</sup> Let us begin with Diogenes Laertius' description of Democritus' ethics:

An end is his *euthumia* (τέλος δ' εἶναι τὴν εὐθυμίαν), which is not the same as pleasure, as some have falsely represented it to be. Rather it is a state in which the soul goes through <life> calmly and stably (γαληνῶς καὶ εὐσταθῶς ἢ ψυχῇ διάγει), not being troubled at all by any fear or superstition or any other suffering (ὑπὸ μηδενὸς παραττομένη φόβου ἢ δεισιδαιμονίας ἢ ἄλλου τινὸς πάθους). And Democritus calls this wellbeing and many other names (εὐεστῶ καὶ πολλοῖς ἄλλοις ὀνόμασι). (A1)<sup>71</sup>

Diogenes' reference to an "end" (*telos*) is shorthand for the "ultimate aim" or "chief good" (Latin: *summum bonum*) in a teleological ethical theory, according to which all normative claims and prescriptions are justified on the basis of an ultimate aim, conventionally referred to as *eudaimonia* (for which reason such theories are often referred to as "eudaimonistic" theories). Some scholars have questioned whether or not it is anachronistic to interpret Democritus' ethics as a theory of this type.<sup>72</sup> Aristotle himself says:

In view of the fact that all knowledge and choice aims at some good, let us resume our inquiry and state what it is that we say political science aims at and what is the highest of all goods achievable by action. Verbally there is very general agreement. For both people in general and men of superior refinement say that it is *eudaimonia* and identify living well and faring well with being happy (τὴν γὰρ εὐδαιμονίαν καὶ οἱ πολλοὶ καὶ οἱ χαριέντες λέγουσιν, τὸ δ' εὖ ζῆν καὶ τὸ εὖ πράττειν ταῦτόν ὑπολαμβάνουσι τῷ εὐδαιμονεῖν). But with regard to what happiness is they differ, and the majority do not give the same account as the wise. (EN 1.4, 1095a14–22, trans. Ross, adapted)

Aristotle describes *all* his predecessors as agreeing on the name of the ultimate end or chief good, and he implies that *all* his predecessors share his view of the structure of ethical theory. He does not mention Democritus as an exception, and in fact he denies that it is necessary to examine all of the views on this point in detail: "to examine all the opinions that have been held would no doubt be somewhat fruitless" (1095a28–9, trans. Ross).<sup>73</sup> This is strong evidence that Democritus must have advanced a view about the end, exactly as Diogenes Laertius reports that he did. It seems reasonable to conclude that Democritus was an early contributor, perhaps the earliest, to what is now called "eudaimonistic" ethics.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>70</sup> The noun is spelled *εὐθυμίη* in the Ionic dialect, and *εὐθυμία* in Attic; this is why, for example, the title of Democritus' work *Περὶ εὐθυμίας* is transliterated *Peri euthumiēs* while Plutarch's *Περὶ εὐθυμίας* is *Peri euthumias*.

<sup>71</sup> D.L. 9.7.45 = DK 68A1.

<sup>72</sup> If it were anachronistic to interpret Democritus' ethics as teleological or eudaimonistic because of being earlier than Aristotle, then this should be a problem for interpreting Socrates' and even Plato's ethics this way. But this is generally not thought to be a problem for Socrates or Plato.

<sup>73</sup> Striker, "Happiness," 184, is wrong to say that "Aristotle, in his survey of predecessors, considers only one philosophical candidate—Plato," for there is no survey of predecessors in any of Aristotle's (surviving) works of ethics, and his remark that "to examine all the opinions that have been held would no doubt be somewhat fruitless" (1095a28–9) suggests both that he never intended to carry out such a survey, and yet that he believed that there were several different opinions on the matter held by his predecessors.

<sup>74</sup> The idea that Democritus' ethics is eudaimonistic was argued by Laue, *Fragmentis*, who tried to establish that the maxims in the Democritus collection defend an "idealistic" conception of ethics as opposed to the

Diogenes says that Democritus' name for the end was *euthumiē*, and that he also had several other names. The variety of terms mentioned by Diogenes is, again, reminiscent of that unnamed theory of virtue mentioned by Aristotle which defines the virtues as a kind of "lack of suffering and being at rest" (*ἀπαθείας τινὰς καὶ ἡρεμίας*). But, as we already saw above in the extraordinary social-political maxim B251, Democritus did in fact use the term *eudaimonia*. We also saw that he discussed the antonym of *eudaimonia*, *kakodaimonia*, in B159. And use of the term *eudaimonia* in two other maxims (B170–1) is also reported by an anonymous Hellenistic doxographer:

Democritus and Plato agree in placing *eudaimonia* in the soul. Democritus writes as follows: "Happiness and unhappiness belong to the soul" (*Εὐδαιμονίη ψυχῆς καὶ κακοδαιμονίη* <=B170>); "Happiness does not dwell in flocks or gold; it is the soul that is the home of a person's destiny" (*Εὐδαιμονίη οὐκ ἐν βοσκήμασι οἰκείει, οὐδὲ ἐν χρυσῶ· ψυχῇ οἰκητήριον δαίμονος*) <=B171>. He also calls it "*euthumia*," "wellbeing," "being harmonious," "being commensurate," and "not being troubled" (*εὐθυμίαν καὶ εὖεστὼ καὶ ἁρμονίαν, συμμετρίαν τε καὶ ἀταραξίαν*). He says that it consists in distinguishing and discriminating pleasures, and that this is the most beautiful and most advantageous thing for humans. (A167)<sup>75</sup>

The report affirms that, as Aristotle states of his predecessors without exception, Democritus did use the term *eudaimonia* in an ethical context. The passage also corroborates the evidence of Diogenes that Democritus used several other terms in addition to *εὐθυμίη* and *εὐδαιμονίη*, including *ἀταραξία* (this noun appears in the above testimony); and the phrase *μηδενὸς παραττομένη* appears in Diogenes Laertius (A1, quoted earlier). The terms used by Democritus break down into two groups, positive and negative. We have already mentioned *εὐδαιμονίη* (*eudaimoniē*, literally, "having a good destiny"; translated "happiness" or "prosperity")<sup>76</sup> and *εὐθυμίη* (*euthumiē* or *euthumia*, literally, "having good feeling or spirit"; also general "wellbeing" and hence "tranquility," "contentment," "serenity," "calmness," etc.).<sup>77</sup> The most general and perhaps comprehensively adequate term used by Democritus is *euestō* (*εὖεστὼ*, literally "wellbeing" or "welfare")<sup>78</sup> and *εὐσταθῶς ἢ ψυχῇ διάγει* ("the soul being well balanced while going through life"),<sup>79</sup> two more expressions formed with the prefix *εὖ-* (meaning good or well) for a total of four such terms.<sup>80</sup> On the negative side, he is said to have referred not only to *ataraxia* ("not being

"eudaimonistic" one attributable to Democritus (and are thus spurious). Stella, L. A. "Valore e posizione storica dell'etica di Democrito," *Sophia* 10 (1942), 207–58, at 245 (followed by Zeppi, S. "Significato e posizione storica dell'etica di Democrito." *Atti dell'Accademia delle Scienze di Torino*, Classe di Scienze morali, storiche e filologiche, 499–540 (Torino, 1971), at 508, 511, 525) also interpreted Democritus' ethics as eudaimonistic. J. A. Dudley, "The Ethics of Democritus and Aristotle," in Benakis, *Proceedings*, I, 371–85, at 377 argues that *eudaimonia* is the fundamental term of Democritus' ethics. Striker, "Happiness," 184, expresses doubts about the anachronism of the eudaimonistic interpretation. But Annas, J. "Democritus and Eudaimonism," in 5. Caston and D. Graham, eds., *Presocratic Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Alex Mourelatos* (Aldershot, 2002), 169–81, presents a persuasive case for reading Democritus' ethics as eudaimonistic. See also Irwin, *Development*, 35; Johnson, "Us," 5–6.

<sup>75</sup> Stob. 2.7.3i = 68A167.

<sup>76</sup> A167; B251; cf. B40; B167; and *kakodaimonia* A167; B159.

<sup>77</sup> A1; A166; A167; A169; B4; B191; B258; cf. Theodoret, *Graec. aff. cur.* 11.6; *euthumēō* B3; B189; B286; *euthumos* B174; B191; *dusthumēō*: B286.

<sup>78</sup> D.L. 9.46 (in a title of a lost work); A1; A167; B4; B257.

<sup>79</sup> A1, B191.

<sup>80</sup> Other terms made with the *εὖ-* prefix include *εὐξύνετος* (being well-trained, B119) and *εὐτακτος* (being well-ordered, B61).



troubled”),<sup>81</sup> but also to *athambei* (ἀθαμβεῖ, “not being disturbed”),<sup>82</sup> and *athaumastia* (ἀθαυμαστία, “not being amazed or admiring”),<sup>83</sup> all three terms formed with the alpha-privative prefix (meaning “not-”).<sup>84</sup> It is therefore important to keep in mind the significance of Democritus’ use of terms other than *eudaimonia*, and of his tendency to discuss psychological questions from both a positive and negative standpoint. One may even interpret him as making a point against the conventional and (as Aristotle points out) platitudinous term *eudaimonia*. He offered several alternative terms or glosses in order to bring out his own unique position.<sup>85</sup> This accounts for the fact that Aristotle does not mention his as an exception to the general pattern of calling the end *eudaimonia*, while at the same time providing details to substantiate Aristotle’s claim that there are differences of opinion about what *eudaimonia* actually means. The much later testimony of Cicero also indicates that Democritus was all along perceived to fit into the pattern of mainstream ethical theory:

The whole importance of philosophy lies, as Theophrastus says, in the attainment of happiness; since an ardent desire for happiness possesses us all . . . . Hence what we have to consider is this: can the systems of the philosophers give us happiness? They certainly profess to do so . . . . Why did Democritus do the same? . . . Even if he supposed happiness to consist in knowledge, still he designed that his study of natural philosophy should bring him cheerfulness of mind; since that is his conception of the chief good, which he entitles *euthumia* or “wellbeing” and often “not being disturbed,” that is, freedom from alarm (*Id enim ille summum bonum εὐθυμίαν et saepe ἀθαμβίαν appellat, id est animum terrore liberum*). But what he said on the subject, however excellent, nevertheless lacks the finishing touches; for indeed about virtue he said very little, and that not clearly expressed. It was later that these inquiries began to be pursued in Athens by Socrates,<sup>86</sup> first in the city, and afterwards the study was transferred to the place where we now are <in the vicinity of the Academy>; and no one doubted that all hope alike of right conduct and happiness lie in virtue. (A169)<sup>87</sup>

Although Cicero has his mouthpiece Piso express doubts about the details of Democritus’ theory of virtue, Democritus is interpreted as an earlier contributor to the debate about the chief good—defined both positively and negatively—and how this good is produced.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>81</sup> A167; A168; cf. *παραχαῖς* (anxieties, B297); *ὑπὸ μηδενὸς παραττομένη φόβου ἢ δεισιδαιμονίας ἢ ἄλλου τινὸς πάθους* (not being disturbed by any fear, superstition, or any other passion, A1).

<sup>82</sup> A168; A169; B4; B215; cf. *ἄθαμβος* (B216).

<sup>83</sup> A168; B191; cf. A99a.

<sup>84</sup> Related terms include *ἀοχλησία* . . . *ἀλυπία* (not being annoyed . . . not being pained, A170) and *ἀκαταπληξίαν* (not being dismayed; used by Democritus’ follower Nausiphanes, B4; cf. *ἀνεκπλήκτω*, A168).

<sup>85</sup> Fritz, K. von, *Philosophie und sprachlicher Ausdruck bei Demokrit, Plato und Aristoteles* (New York, 1938), 34–5 (followed by Farrar, *Democratic*, 230) discusses the semantic differences and the strongly internalist implications *εὐθυμῆ* (literally something like “having good spirits”), in contrast to the externalist implications of *εὐτυχία* (literally good luck or fortune) and *εὐδαιμονία* (literally good destiny; prosperity, happiness, success).

<sup>86</sup> I interpret Cicero as meaning that even though these inquiries had been happening earlier (e.g., with Democritus), they only later began to happen in Athens, i.e., with Socrates; for this reason the discussion of virtue was not extensively developed, since Democritus had supposedly not said very much about virtue in his discussion of the chief good. I think it would be a misinterpretation to read Cicero as meaning that no inquiry into the chief good took place prior to Socrates initiating it in Athens.

<sup>87</sup> 68A169 = *de fin.* 5.23.86–8, trans. H. Rackham, Cicero: *De finibus bonorum et malorum* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1914), adapted; Piso is speaking to Lucius. Cicero represents the standpoint of Antiochus of Ascalon.

<sup>88</sup> In an earlier passage, Cicero is equally ambivalent about the status of Democritus’ ethics, writing: “Democritus’ freedom from care, or tranquillity of mind, which he called *euthumia*, must also be excluded

Prima facie this fits with the evidence of Democritus' fragments we have examined, e.g., B3+B191. Remarkably, Cicero states that Democritus' theoretical and natural philosophy was also designed to bring about those ethical ends. If Cicero is right, this would suggest a *maximal* level of integration of Democritus' physics and ethics, and the old debate of whether Democritus' physics and ethics were originally related by him would be resolved. But our fragmentary evidence and the testimony of Cicero does not permit more than a probabilistic demonstration of either of Cicero's claims. First, that Democritus designed his natural philosophy to bring about this ethical good: he certainly invokes notions drawn from his physics in ethical contexts, such as when in the terminology of atomic physics he mentions "motions in the soul" (B191.i), or "transforming" the nature of the person (*μεταρρυσμοῦσα*, B33). But we cannot conclude from such suggestive language that his natural philosophy was designed just to bring about *euthumiē*, although I certainly think the suggestion should be taken seriously. Second, that Democritus designed his ethics just to bring about something he identified as the "chief good": Cicero, like every other Hellenistic philosopher and doxographer, assumed that any ethical theory worth discussing must have had an account of the ultimate end or "chief good," and this may have led such authors to describe Democritus' ideas or to lay stress on certain concepts in a way he had not originally intended.

Whether or not Democritus is credited with a theoretical-teleological approach to ethics, it can be shown that Democritus did address the problem raised by Aristotle at the outset of his own ethical inquiries as to whether human goodness (whatever that may be) comes about by nature, luck, or learning.<sup>89</sup> Democritus had already taken a position on each of the possibilities discussed by Aristotle, and we have substantial fragments pertaining to each. We have already seen that Democritus considers neither nature nor luck as important as teaching and training; and he argues that more people become good by practice rather than by nature, and that human nature can be "transformed" by teaching. Aristotle expresses his own position on the relative importance of these factors, and his views are certainly different from those of Democritus—in fact they clash at key points. But Aristotle's own views in the *Nicomachean Ethics* are not expressed in an entirely new and different realm of discourse, far from it.

Diogenes Laertius, as we saw, like Cicero interprets Democritus as offering a theory of the *telos*. It is extremely important, given subsequent polemics including stubbornly

from this discussion, since that very tranquillity is actually identical with the happy life, and we are asking not what the happy life is, but what is its source (*Democriti autem securitas, quae est animi tanquam tranquillitas, quam appellant εὐθυμία, eo separanda fuit ab hac disputatione, quia ea ipsa est beata vita, quaerimus autem, non quae sit, sed unde sit.*)" (A169 = *de fin.* 5.8.23, trans. Woolf). This passage suffices to show that the ancients could easily accept *εὐθυμία* as being the meaning of *beata vita* itself and thus that Democritus' view is a contender among theories of eudaimonia. But the claim that Democritus' views may nevertheless be set aside as not relevant to the present discussion of the sources of the good life is difficult to square with all the verbatim fragments that show Democritus' extensive discussion of the causes of *εὐθυμία*. I therefore attribute Cicero's ambivalence in this and the later passage to the intricate dialectical situation of the comments, coming as they do after the extensive discussion of Epicurean ethics in *De finibus* 1–2, in which Cicero criticizes Epicurus' ethical views in enormous detail (by far the most extensive surviving account), views that Cicero suggests were essentially plagiarized or adapted by Epicurus from Democritus (see 1.17–21, 28; 2.103; 4.13). Needless to say, Cicero also summarily dismisses Epicurus from the discussion of ethical theories in *De finibus* 5.

<sup>89</sup> Arist. *EE* 1.1.1214a14–26; *EN* 1.8.1099b9–11; see M. R. Johnson, "Luck in Aristotle's Physics and Ethics," in D. Henry and K. M. Nielsen, eds., *Bridging the Gap between Aristotle's Science and Ethics* (Cambridge, 2015), 254–75.

persistent confusions, that Diogenes clarifies that Democritus' *telos* is not identical with pleasure. In his explanation, Diogenes says that Democritus focused on reducing or eliminating painful or disturbing *pathē* (πάθη: "emotional sufferings," "passions," or even "mental illnesses"), and thus producing *euthumiē*, *ataraxia*, etc. This suggests that Democritus' method in ethics was modeled as much or more on the medical art than on a theoretical science.<sup>90</sup> This therapeutic focus is evident even in B191 where, in order to produce more *euthumiē*, Democritus advises following certain maxims, which will reduce negative *pathē* like envy, jealousy, etc. Democritus throughout his maxims offers ethical prescriptions like a doctor or psychotherapist gives medical advice, and he made this comparison himself: "according to Democritus, medicine heals diseases of the body, but wisdom removes the sufferings (παθῶν) of the soul" (B31).<sup>91</sup> He issues the imperative: "drive unconstrained pain out of a numb soul by means of reasoning."<sup>92</sup> This analogy between suffering in the body and the soul (between physical and mental illness), and between medicine and "wisdom," was an analogy that originated among Democritus and his contemporaries<sup>93</sup> and continuously grew from those roots until it really flourished in Hellenistic ethics, and later in Roman philosophy.<sup>94</sup>

It is probably an accident of the meager state of our evidence that many commentators feel compelled to view Democritus as offering not primarily a theoretical "eudaimonistic" account of the chief good, but instead a primarily a practical "therapeutic" approach to ethics. No doubt a therapeutically oriented practical ethics could be combined with or adapted to—or even misinterpreted as—mainstream eudaimonistic ethics. The relevant description of Democritus' ethics may have to do more with whether one chooses to emphasize the positive or negative aspects of his moral psychology. Focusing on the positive side (especially *euthumiē*) we can definitely reconstruct a kind of "eudaimonistic" theory, one which remains a live candidate insofar as eudaimonistic theories remain

<sup>90</sup> Striker, "Happiness," argues that "tranquility was in fact not a serious contender for the position of ultimate good in ancient times" (183). Against this, see note 88 above. She also argues that "if all we need to be happy is a certain state of mind, philosophers should probably leave this concern to psychiatrists or pharmacologists" (195). Against this claim, with which Striker concludes her essay, I can only urge that we should probably be reluctant to throw out the therapeutic conception of ethics, lest we at the same time preclude much of the practical (as opposed to theoretical) side of Classical and Hellenistic ethics, where comparisons are so frequently made (or presupposed) between the effects of medicine on the body and wisdom on the soul (none apparently prior to Democritus, B31). The Epicureans, Stoics, Cynics, and Pyrrhonians certainly would not have been willing to acknowledge some practice or way of life (*bios*) other than philosophy as the true cause of tranquility (*euthumia* or *ataraxia*), and those philosophers considered it important to show how their school of philosophy was more effective at producing this end than the others. Striker's attempt to dismiss all of the relevant passages in Epicurus, Seneca, Epictetus, Sextus Empiricus, etc., although noble from the perspective of a certain conception of what ethics should be limited to, remains unconvincing from the standpoint of an account of the historical development of ethics. For example, her assertion that "only a sentence or two has remained" of Democritus' work *Περὶ εὐθυμίας* is demonstrably false: no scholar who has examined the matter in detail doubts the authenticity or attribution to the *Περὶ εὐθυμίας* of B3 and B191 (the principal fragments used to interpret Democritus' ethics); but these fragments are not even mentioned in Striker's account of "happiness as tranquility."

<sup>91</sup> Clem. Al. *Paed.* 1.2.6 = B31.

<sup>92</sup> B290. There is too little context to determine what is meant by a "numb" soul here. Two possibilities (explored by Procopé) are: (1) the psychotherapist treats the patient whose soul is numb with grief by means of reasoning (i.e., maxims); or (2) the psychotherapist induces numbness in the soul in order to make it more receptive to reasoning.

<sup>93</sup> For example, Protagoras in Pl. *Th.* 167a; Gorgias, *Helen* B11.14; Antiphon 87a6. See Procopé, *Moralist*, 216–20.

<sup>94</sup> I. Hadot, *Seneca und die griechisch-römische Tradition der Sellenleitung* (Berlin, 1969), 39–78; M. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, 1994), 3–4 and chapter 1. Both Hadot (25, 135–7) and Nussbaum (51) briefly acknowledge the importance of Democritus in this context.

important to ethics. At the same time, by focusing on the negative side (especially *ataraxia*) we can reasonably see a practical therapeutic ethics, something else that should hold a certain attraction for contemporary ethics. There does not seem to be a credible basis for ignoring his contribution to either aspect of ethics, and there may still be good reasons to adopt his views.

## 9. Conclusion

A synthesis of the available ancient evidence indicates that Democritus identified the end or chief good as *eudaimonia* (like Plato and Aristotle) but that he also presented his own account very often in terms of *euthumiē* and *ataraxia*. As an atomist, he understood *euthumiē* to be an objective, material condition of the body, probably a kind of “balance” or “stability” of the atoms whose arrangement in the body constitutes the nature of the living thing. But Democritus did not consider *euthumiē* to be a matter of an agent’s objective relation to external things, such as wealth, status, reputation, or power, but rather of a subjective attitude to these such that one is not troubled or bothered by what one is (or has or can do), but rather contented and happy with it, and so in a state of wellbeing and tranquility. The main purpose of Democritean ethics is to discover psychagogic or psychotherapeutic techniques by means of which immoderate and harmful feelings like anger, jealousy, envy, and greed may be replaced with moderate and pleasurable feelings like enjoyment and tranquility. Key to this process is avoidance of feelings of relative deprivation, limitation of desires, and discrimination of bad from good pleasures. Democritus also thought the emotions of pity and shame should be inculcated in everyone through education and exhortation, which would result in altruistic, just, and virtuous actions, producing greater social cohesion and prosperity.

Such a radically pro-Democratic view is especially interesting in the context of the Classical age given the severe underrepresentation of such views in the meager surviving evidence base, and because Democritus’ views continued to be, despite big changes in the political landscape, enormously influential in the subsequent Hellenistic age, particularly in its exhortation, advice, and consolation literature. This can be shown not only for the Epicureans and the Pyrrhonists, well-known cases, but also for Academics, Cynics, and Stoics. Among extant works, Plutarch’s *Περὶ εὐθυμίας* and Seneca’s *De tranquillitate animi* are surviving reflections of the far-reaching and school-transcending influence of Democritean practical ethics. The imitation of Democritus by later popular philosophers, such as the “Pythagorean” text *Περὶ εὐθυμίας* (C7), as well as the extensive excerption of Democritus in the gnomological and anthological literature also shows the continuation of his influence even beyond the schools of Hellenistic philosophy. In late antiquity the ongoing criticism of Democritus by early Church fathers<sup>95</sup> indicates that his views were even then still considered important and threatening (even if they were by then thoroughly conflated with Epicurean “hedonism” and “atheism”); otherwise it would not have made sense to contradict them so vehemently.

<sup>95</sup> E.g., Clement of Alexandria (2nd–3rd c. CE; B4, B30–3, B170), Eusebius of Caesarea (3rd–4th c. CE; A43, B118–19), and Lactantius (3rd–4th c. CE; A24, A70, A139).

Given the originality and viability of Democritus' views, and its enormous influence on Hellenistic ethics, Democritus' importance to the history of ethics should be seen as similar to his importance to the history of physics, cosmology, anthropology, and epistemology.<sup>96</sup>

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