

THREE

DEMOCRITUS



1. His character can be seen from his writing. (DL 9.38)

δῆλον δὲ καὶ τῶν συγγραμμάτων οἷος ἦν.

2. Men remember one's mistakes rather than one's successes. . . . (fr. 265)

θρῶποι μεμνέσθαι μᾶλλον ἢ τῶν εὖ πεποιημένων.

Research into the life and work of Democritus, best known of the Greek atomists, is sadly hampered by the one-sided nature of his extant writings; a fair amount of his ethical work remains, but his scientific theories are known only from secondhand sources.¹ The relationship between his work and his biography, therefore, can only partially be recovered, although the secondary sources do, in many cases, amply reveal the biographical mind at work. We begin with his early life.

DATE, TEACHERS, AND
PHILOSOPHICAL RELATIONSHIPS

Democritus himself gives us some indication of his age and era. In his *Lesser World System*, Democritus says he was forty years younger than Anaxagoras, giving himself a birth date of about 460–57 BCE. This agrees with the Eightieth Olympiad birth date given by Apollodorus and is generally accepted.²

Democritus is almost universally regarded as a native of Abdera,³ and his father's name is given as either Hegesistratus, Athenocritus, or Damaspippus.⁴ From the biographies, we can infer that, as usual, his father was a man of wealth and influence, further said to have entertained Xerxes (DL 9.34–36). Traditionally, it was through his family friendship that Democritus received his early training; the biographers tell us that Xerxes left behind Magi and Chaldaeans who taught Democritus astronomy and theology. The story seems to have originated with Valerius Maximus for, although Diogenes Laertius in making the statement (9.34) refers his readers to Herodotus, he gives no specific citation.⁵ The passages of Herodotus generally thought germane are 7.109, which discusses Xerxes' route toward Greece, including Abdera, and 8.120, which speaks of Xerxes' possible return route to Persia, again through Abdera. Perhaps Diogenes Laertius assumes that it was during one of these marches that Xerxes left the Magi and Chaldaeans behind in the household. However, the dates are rather problematic, given that Xerxes' war on Greece is dated to 480 BCE; given Democritus' accepted birth date (460–57 BCE), the Magi and Chaldaeans would have had to linger in the household some twenty-five years for Democritus to have benefited by their presence.⁶ There is, in fact, little support for the story of Democritus' eastern tutors, especially when, as we will see, they are used to support questionable stories of Democritus' magic powers. Furthermore, the tradition of teachers from the east amounts to a general topos common in the lives of the philosophers, in which east meets west. In the life of Pythagoras, for example, Diogenes Laertius, discussing Pythagoras' travel and education (8.3), states that after a sojourn in Egypt, Pythagoras visited the Magi and Chaldaeans. This reoccurring topos, of archaic philosophers who learn from eastern wise men, is also seen in the life of Thales, Plato, and Pyrrho, among others. It should be regarded not as biographically true, but rather as anecdotally popular, part of the larger east-west topos common in the

lives of the philosophers, although more applicable for some philosophers than for others.⁷

We have little reliable information about Democritus' training or teachers, although Diogenes Laertius gives us a wealth of information on these subjects, albeit in confused and confusing fashion. Summarily put, from Diogenes Laertius we have reports that Democritus was a student of Leucippus (9.34), of Anaxagoras (9.24), of Pythagoras or of "Pythagoreans" (9.38), and of Oenopides (9.41), whom "he mentions."

Diogenes Laertius, with his vague allusion to Oenopides, immediately alerts us to the characteristic methodology of biographers and their sources, which is to invent a relationship between their subject and any person mentioned in the subject's work, as we saw for Empedocles and his "student" Pausanias.⁸ As we will see, the dangers of this method increase when forgeries and false attributions of the subject's work abound, as they do for Democritus.⁹ In the works of Democritus now considered genuine, however, there is no mention of Oenopides. The tradition of Oenopides as Democritus' teacher, therefore, may have originated with a pseudo-Democritean text that mentions Oenopides, just as the name of Plato's teacher, Dionysus, was derived from the pseudo-Platonic *Amatores*, which mentions Dionysus as a teacher.¹⁰

Conversely, the identification of Oenopides as Democritus' teacher may reflect a different direction in methodology and in the biographical tradition that exists for Democritus. In the biographies, Oenopides is frequently linked with Pythagoras, whose astronomical and mathematical theories he is said either to have stolen or to have agreed with.¹¹ One source links Pythagoras, Oenopides, and Democritus as philosophers who traveled east to gain mathematical and astronomical knowledge, particularizing the east-west topos in the lives of these three philosophers, explaining the identification of Oenopides as Democritus' teacher in Diogenes Laertius, and linking three philosophers not usually associated, by their eastern travels.¹² The other similarities in the lives of Pythagoras and Democritus that result from the use of Pythagoras' life as model for Democritus are discussed later in this chapter.

Another philosopher "mentioned" by Democritus, according to Diogenes Laertius, was Protagoras (9.41). Elsewhere, Democritus is said to be Protagoras' teacher: as the story goes, Democritus was so taken with Protagoras' skills as a porter that he adopted Protagoras as a student.¹³ The association of Democritus and Protagoras probably stems not from philosophical similarities or shared doctrines, but from shared citizenship, as

both were from Abdera.¹⁴ It was not uncommon in the biographies for the fame of one citizen to reflect upon a fellow citizen, as indeed we saw in the shared fame of the fellow Sicilians Empedocles, Hieron, and Theron.¹⁵ Otherwise, the account of a student-teacher relationship between Democritus and Protagoras has little to recommend it.

As Diogenes Laertius continues his account, he tells us that Democritus also mentions Zeno and Parmenides and their doctrine of the One. He explains that “they were the most talked about people of his day” (9.41). Typically, it is their notoriety, and not their philosophy, that Diogenes Laertius emphasizes. Such notoriety, if it did exist and was of interest to Democritus, would rest in their philosophical doctrine of the indivisible One, which neither comes into being nor changes, a belief that other philosophers, including atomists such as Democritus, would henceforth of necessity address.¹⁶ If Democritus did indeed mention Zeno and Parmenides, either personally or as the spokesman of the Eleatic school associated with them, those remarks are now lost to us. We can only posit their philosophical influence on Democritus as on other philosophers of the era. There is not, however, any necessity, other than biographical, to adduce a personal relationship between them, as does Diogenes Laertius.¹⁷

However, Diogenes Laertius’ account still functions usefully as an example of biographical method in general and of the *topos* in which philosophical influence is elaborated into a personal relationship in particular. For in the next report, we find that Anaxagoras is also mentioned as one of Democritus’ teachers and that this relationship is also complicated by a series of overlapping biographical conventions. As we begin to separate teachers and biographical traditions, we find that several variations of the student-teacher *topos* exist in the life of Democritus for several different reasons. So far, we have seen that mentioning someone (and, as we will see, not mentioning someone) was acceptable grounds for assuming personal or professional relationships (Oenopides as Democritus’ teacher, for example) that shared citizenship could be elaborated into a student-teacher relationship (Democritus as Protagoras’ teacher), and that a student-teacher relationship could be inferred from philosophical beliefs or reactions to other philosophical beliefs (e.g., Democritus’ atomic theory in reply to Parmenides and Zeno on the doctrine of the indivisible One becomes a biographical tradition of Parmenides as Democritus’ teacher).

Many of these relationships, as noted, are introduced by vague phrases, such as “others mention” or “it is said,” and here too, we find Diogenes Laertius using similar phrasing. Diogenes Laertius tells us that Democritus

“met” Anaxagoras and Leucippus, two philosophers who, again, are not usually associated by location, dates, or philosophical beliefs.¹⁸ Anaxagoras, unfortunately, is notoriously hard to date and cannot be ruled out on chronological grounds alone, although I follow Kirk and Raven¹⁹ in assigning him dates of ca. 500–428 BCE, with a floruit of ca. 480 BCE, which places his birth date roughly forty years after that of Democritus. So while it is not chronologically impossible for the two to have met, there is no real evidence for it, even if we assume, as many do, that Democritus traveled to Athens at least once (a rather dubious fragment, discussed later in this chapter, states that “I came to Athens and no one knew me.”) Furthermore, the association of Anaxagoras with Leucippus in Diogenes Laertius’ account leads us to believe that the impetus behind reports of a meeting are philosophical in nature, rather than personal, a meeting of minds rather than of persons. With this meeting, we have representatives of the philosophers and philosophies most concerned with a response to the idea of the Eleatic school. Anaxagoras, according to the extant fragments of his work we now possess, responded to Parmenides and the Eleatic school, as did atomists such as Democritus and Leucippus, but in rather stronger terms. Anaxagoras challenged the Parmidean doctrine of the indivisible One by positing an indefinite number of elemental ingredients or “numberless seeds.” Furthermore, this last phrase, if it belongs to the vocabulary of Anaxagoras himself (or to scholastic periphrasis, i.e., the scholiast on Gregorius Nazianzenus who preserved the argument²⁰), may have suggested use of the characteristic atomic vocabulary to the biographers and thus strengthened the notion of an association between Anaxagoras and Leucippus to combat the Parmenidean doctrine of the One. However, Anaxagoras’ reputed relationship with Democritus, as we will see, is not an easy one to catalogue.

In any case, Diogenes Laertius so often introduces his less credible discussions of students and their teachers by alleging that one philosopher “heard” or “met” or “followed” another that his phrasing supports the notion that such relationships should be understood as one of intellectual, rather than personal, influence. The motives behind establishing such a relationship, as we have seen, are variable.²¹ They may be purely biographical, an honest attempt to identify the subject’s teachers or students²² or they may be doxographical, an attempt to establish chronological and philosophical links between generations and schools of philosophers, to, as Fairweather has it, “replace the complications of historical reality with a semblance of order.”²³ Here, Democritus chronologically and philosophi-

cally follows Anaxagoras, as Protagoras follows him. Such reports may, however, be an attempt to exalt or diminish one philosopher at the expense of another, as the report that Democritus derived his philosophy from Pythagoras seeks to exalt Pythagoras at the expense of a diminished Democritus.²⁴ Or the report may attempt to defame both parties, often by the suggestion of a rather more intimate relationship between the two, as in the case of Plato and Aster, a student of astronomy.²⁵ Elsewhere, the report of one philosopher as the student of another is used specifically to refute some aspect of either philosopher's work.

The last motive is part of a larger biographical topos, that of the feud or contest. Feuds, literary, philosophical, or intellectual, exist as far back as the lives of Homer and Hesiod. They are often supported by false or suspicious evidence, such as the *Certamen* or Contest between Homer and Hesiod or the letters between Thales and Pherycedes;²⁶ by confrontational anecdotes,²⁷ as in the several personal scenes of confrontation recorded for Plato and Aristippus; or by the many reported instances of book burning and charges of plagiarism that occur in the biographies as, for example, in the many reports of Plato's philosophical thefts from Pythagoras, works which he then claimed as his own.²⁸ Within the framework of the feud, different schools may feud against each other, using a representational spokesman, or the feud may represent doctrinal differences between philosophers that have been elaborated into personal, hostile relationships.²⁹

This latter example seems to have occurred in the reported feud between Democritus and Anaxagoras, to which Diogenes Laertius devotes a special section (9.35). After introducing Anaxagoras as Democritus' teacher, Diogenes Laertius questions that report: How, he asks his readers, could this be the case, when Democritus criticized Anaxagoras for having a "spite" against him because Anaxagoras did not "take" to him? Philosophically speaking, Democritus' resolution of the Eleatic controversy in ways different from Anaxagoras³⁰ would, biographically, account for the feud between them, just as his reworking of Pythagorean theory to resolve that controversy would account for the tradition of his study with Pythagoras.³¹ Diogenes Laertius' hesitation to accept the tradition of Anaxagoras as Democritus' teacher rings true, even if his reason (spite) does not. The tradition is not any more convincing to the modern reader: Diogenes Laertius could not reconcile rumors of their personal enmity with a student-teacher relationship; we cannot imagine a student-teacher relationship based either upon a feud or upon a philosophical response to theory.

What we have seen, so far, is the biographical danger of one philosopher meeting or mentioning another. Democritus meets Anaxagoras and Leucippus and becomes their student; he mentions Oenopides and becomes his. As it turns out, however, not meeting or not mentioning a philosopher is an equally hazardous experience, at least in the biographical world.

For between Diogenes Laertius' discussion of Democritus' relationship with Anaxagoras in 9.34–35 and his discussion of Democritus' relationship with Oenopides, Protagoras, Parmenides, and Zeno in 9.41–42 come several anecdotes that deal with the relationship between Democritus and Plato. It quickly emerges that their relationship is one of hostility, even bitterness. Citing Aristoxenus as his source, Diogenes Laertius tells us that Plato wanted to collect all of Democritus' work to burn it. Diogenes Laertius further tells us that there is "clear evidence" for Plato's hostility, which he finds in the fact that, although Plato speaks of almost all the early philosophers, he never mentions Democritus. To clarify matters and to further emphasize his point, Diogenes Laertius (9.40) tells us that, in fact, Plato deliberately excluded any mention of Democritus so he would not have to match wits with Democritus, the "prince of philosophers."

Such rivalry between philosophers, explicit in the later statement about matching of wits, is a common topos in the biographies, and Plato is quite often at the heart of them. The feud between Plato and Democritus, in truth, greatly resembles that between Plato and Xenophon and is a common feature of both their biographies. In Diogenes Laertius, the two are characterized as bitter rivals, and, as here, evidence for their feud is found in the fact that neither philosopher mentions the other. The report of their rivalry and hostility was treated so seriously that some of each man's work was taken as a critical, philosophical response to the other. Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, for example, was considered to have been written to criticize Plato's *Republic*.³²

Should we find it odd or telling that Plato fails to mention Democritus? Not at all, according to Riginos, given the different interests of the two philosophers.³³ Riginos attributes the report of their rivalry in Diogenes Laertius to the "malicious fabrications" of Diogenes Laertius' source, Aristoxenus, a malice that traces back to the feud between Plato and Aristippus and their rival theories on the highest good.³⁴ Their feud, then, originates in intellectual or philosophical differences that were then elaborated into personal quarrels and vendettas. Plato's desire to burn Democritus' books is a striking example of a further elaboration of the

topos, an attempt to give it concrete, physical form. However it is by no means unusual in feuds of this sort. For although few books, if any, were actually burned, the biographers give us a wealth of philosophers reputedly driven to this extreme: Aristotle wanted to burn Plato's works, Protagoras wanted to burn Plato's and Democritus' work, and the Athenians wanted to burn his.³⁵

In the life of Democritus, Plato is thwarted in his desire for a book burning by the Pythagorean philosophers Cliteas and Amyclas, who argue not in terms of right and wrong, but of utility. There is no use in burning the works, they declare, because they have already been widely disseminated and discussed. Their intervention and the fact that it is Pythagoreans who intervene introduce a further, doxographical, almost genealogical, aspect to the feud. Democritus' use of Pythagorean theory (which amounts to a biographical vindication of Pythagoras, if a slight diminishing of Democritus) perhaps led later Pythagorean writers to anecdotally claim and defend Democritus while addressing the famous feud between Plato and Pythagoras. Plato was often accused of stealing Pythagorean theory and presenting it as his own. Their rivalry often led to anecdotal confrontations between the two schools, usually informed by later literary and philosophical attempts to prove Plato as good or as competent a philosopher as Pythagoras.³⁶ Plato's desire to burn Democritus' work emphasizes the tradition of Plato's jealousy of Democritus, as does the "evidence" found in the fact that Plato never mentions him.³⁷

In short: in biographical terms, Democritus could not have been Anaxagoras' student because he criticized Anaxagoras, but he could have been a Pythagorean, because he admired Pythagoras. In fact, another source, Thrasyllus, rather wistfully remarks that, had it not been for chronological differences, Democritus could have been Pythagoras' student. (Apparently, there were some chronological problems that not even the biographers could explain away.) In the case of Oenopides and Plato, we find reasoning of a similar sort: Democritus could have been the student of Oenopides because he mentions Oenopides; he engaged in rivalry with Plato, because Plato does not mention him. So bitter was their rivalry, so intense was Plato's jealousy, in fact, that Plato had to be restrained from burning Democritus' work by certain Pythagoreans, who may have been defending Pythagoras or at least attacking Pythagoras' rival (Plato) by defending Plato's enemy (Democritus). Protagoras, sometimes presented as Democritus' student, at other times wished to burn Democritus' work too, for reasons as yet unknown. In conclusion, we may simply say that, in

discussions of philosophical succession and relationships between philosophers, the more sensational the account, the better, as far as the biographers were concerned. The most we can hope for as readers is a hint here and there of the philosophical influence one philosopher's theories had upon another, and even that is too often colored by sensationalism to be truly helpful. But it does make for a good read.³⁸

Having finished the reports of Democritus as the student of Anaxagoras, Pythagoras, Pythagoreans, and Oenopides, we are left only with the tradition of Leucippus, whom Democritus is also said to have met, as his teacher. Given what we know of the work and chronology of these two early atomists, this is the only tradition that makes sense, and only if, once again, we understand "teacher" to mean intellectual and philosophic influence. Leucippus, a slightly older contemporary of Democritus, whose floruit we date to ca. 440 BCE, is almost universally regarded as the originator of atomic theory, expounded in the work known as the *Greater World System* and perhaps elaborated by Democritus in his own *Lesser World System*. Leucippus too was forced to respond to the Eleatic question, specifically on the existence of change and movement, which he found in the arrangement and rearrangement of atoms, and which accounts for change in the greater world. Leucippus and Democritus are mentioned almost in the same breath by ancient writers, and it is hard indeed to distinguish between the two in terms of their contributions to atomic theory. It is perhaps only by chronology that Leucippus, as the elder, is thought to be Democritus' teacher. The relationship between the two, if indeed it existed, is now impossible to comment on.

TRAVEL AND FAMILY

Democritus, according to Diogenes Laertius, purposefully continued his education through travel.³⁹ By tradition and according to Diogenes Laertius, Democritus traveled extensively: to Egypt, to learn geometry; to the Red Sea and Persia, to learn from the Chaldaeans; to India, to learn from the gymnosophists; perhaps even to Ethiopia, for studies unspecified. Although travel, especially to the east, is a standard part of the biographical scheme for philosophers, Democritus' travel is unusual in its extent.⁴⁰ When one turns to Democritus for work that might reflect his travel, we predictably find several statements, or at least titles, to support his characterization as world traveler.

3. I, of all the men during my time, have traveled most on earth, and inquired into things most distant, and have seen the greatest number of climates and lands, and listened to the greatest number of learned men, and in compositions to display my findings, no one has ever surpassed me, not even those called Arpedonaptae in Egypt. With these, I lived some eighty years on foreign soil. (fr. 299)

ἐγὼ δὲ τῶν κατ' ἑμαυτὸν ἀνθρώπων γῆν πλείστην ἐπεπλανησάμην ἱστορέων τὰ μήκιστα καὶ ἀέρας τε καὶ γέας πλείστας εἶδον καὶ λογίων ἀνδρῶν πλείστων ἐπήκουσα καὶ γραμμέων συνθέσιος μετὰ ἀποδείξεως οὐδεὶς κώ με παρήλλαξεν οὐδ' οἱ Αἰγυπτίων καλεόμενοι Ἀρπεδονάπται· σὺν τοῖς δ' ἐπὶ πάσιν ἐπ' ἔτεα † ὀγδώκοντα ἐπὶ ξείνης ἐγενήθην'.

4. On Meroe. (fr. 299a)

Περὶ τῶν Μερῶη

5. Circumnavigation of the ocean. (fr. 299b)

Ὠκεανοῦ περίπλους

6. An account of Chaldaea. (fr. 299d)

Χαλδαϊκὸς λόγος

7. An account of Phrygia. (fr. 299e)

Φρύγιος λόγος

Here, one thinks, is proof of Democritus' extended travel, although Diogenes Laertius (9.49) is oddly hesitant in introducing it, remarking, "Some include as separate items in the list of his works the following (citations 3–7) from his notes." In fact, these particular fragments come to us from work now considered doubtful if not downright spurious and are not part of the work considered genuine.⁴¹ Of the entire (genuine) Democritean corpus, a collection of some 298 fragments, only two speak of travel to foreign lands and only in the most general, axiomatic manner.

8. Life in a foreign land teaches self-sufficiency, for bread and a mattress of straw are the sweetest cures for hunger and fatigue. (fr. 246)

Ξενιτεῖη βίου αὐτάροκειαν διδάσκει· μᾶζα γὰρ καὶ στιβὰς λιμοῦ καὶ κόπου γλυκύτατα ἰάματα.

9. To a wise man, the whole earth is open. For a good soul, the entire cosmos is his native land. (fr. 247)

ἄνδρῖ σοφῶι πᾶσα γῆ βατή· ψυχῆς γὰρ ἀγαθῆς πατρις ὁ ξύμπας κόσμος.

Citations 8 and 9 are, as stated, considered genuine; need they, however, speak of or from personal experience? An argument might be made for the personal validity of citation 8 although its moral, like that of citation 9, is gnomic in nature, a universal and timeless reflection not tied to specific location, time, or event. However, the evidence of the spurious fragments, taken with the genuine ones, suggests a different conclusion, that statements and fragments had to be found (or produced) as evidence for Democritus' travel since it did not exist in his genuine work. We could, of course, accept all the fragments as genuine proof for the tradition of extensive travel, although few scholars have been willing to do so. If we reject the fragments, may we not also reject the tradition that they support?⁴² To my mind, the tradition of extensive travel is as doubtful as the spurious fragments and exists only as examples of biographical and methodological elaboration of the biographical tradition for Democritus, couched anecdotally and by *topoi* such as travel to the east.

The *topos* of travel, especially that of travel to the east, surfaces here in the life of Democritus in the form of concrete anecdotes, those that give body and substance to some facet of the subject's work. Such anecdotes are by no means uncommon and often function in just this circular manner, as we see in the life of Solon. First, biographical inferences are drawn from Solon's extant work, for example, when Solon speaks of himself as a defender of Athens. This statement and its inferences then establish and strengthen the tradition of Solon as a democratic reformer. Next, the biographers attribute to Solon specific political actions and reforms. Finally, they support those attributions by reference to the original work from which the statement and the inferences were drawn.⁴³

My argument here, concerning Democritus' travel and the false fragments that support it, is that the biographical process may also function in reverse. That is, the tradition may generate the text, rather than the text the tradition, as usually happens. We have seen at least one instance of

the phenomenon, in the life of Heraclitus.⁴⁴ There, the biographers began with a strongly established tradition of Heraclitus' misanthropy inferred from the genuine fragments, a few of which specifically mentioned the Ephesians. So strong and accepted was that tradition that a pseudo-Heraclitean fragment scolding the Ephesians crept into the accepted text and was, for many years, accepted as genuine.

This is the case also for Democritus and the false fragments that speak of his travel. The fragments are used to support the tradition of that travel. The methodology is the same, but a part of the puzzle, the origin for the tradition of the philosopher's extensive travel, is missing. A topos, after all, cannot be inserted into a life at random. The explanation, as always, is to be found in the subject's (genuine) work.

Turning to those genuine extant fragments of Democritus' work, we are immediately struck by a paradoxical contrast between our view of the work and that of ancient authors'. While modern scholars accepted Democritus as the author of the *Lesser World System*, Leucippus is considered the author of the slightly earlier *Greater World System*. The exact opposite, however, was true in the ancient world; Diogenes Laertius and Antisthenes both speak of Democritus as the author of the *Greater World System*.⁴⁵ The ancient attribution results from another tendency of biography, which is to make the elaborator or perfecter of a system or theory its inventor. Since Democritus perfected and elaborated Leucippus' atomic theory as set forth in the earlier *Greater World System*, he was credited with its authorship as well.⁴⁶

At this point, a further pre-existing and well-established topos of biography comes into play, the philosopher who travels to pursue his education and training. The tradition of the travelling philosopher had become a standard part of the philosophical biography and could be drawn upon at will to round out a subject's life. Given this topos and the titles of the *Greater* and *Lesser World System*, the biographical conclusion was obvious. Biographers and commentators began with the attribution of the *Greater World System* to Democritus, an attribution which rests upon the topos of perfecter as inventor. Then, since according to the biographical mind, a philosopher's work always reflects personal experience, Democritus must have had experience with the greater world and then, like all philosophers, according to another topos, he must have traveled. In fact, he must have traveled more and indeed traveled the known world, as the title of his work implies. (One cannot, of course, write a work called the *Greater* or even the *Lesser World System* unless one has traveled that world.) And

surely there must be more statements or titles to support the notion of travel. These are indeed found in citations 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. Where do these spurious fragments come from? Simply from the biographical desire to give concrete form to philosophical theory, so often observed in the anecdotes, characterizations, and even text. In short, the tradition and the spurious fragments illustrate, quite wonderfully, the circular thought and logic of biographical methodology: the transformation of philosophical thought into physical reality has occurred by transforming the “author” of the *Greater World System* into a world traveler, with works and an autobiographical statement to prove it.

From travel, we turn to Democritus’ family background. From Diogenes Laertius’ account, we learn that the philosopher comes from a well-to-do, politically prominent family, as is usual in the biographies.⁴⁷ What is unusual is his account of the division of Democritus’ paternal estate.

10. Being the third son, Democritus possessed his share of the family property. Most say he chose the smaller fortune, which was in money, for travel; besides, his brothers were crafty enough to see that this would be his choice. Demetrius estimates Democritus’ share at over one hundred talents, the whole of which he spent. (DL 9.35–36).⁴⁸

τρίτον τε ὄντα ἀδελφὸν νείμασθαι τὴν οὐσίαν· καὶ οἱ μὲν πλείους φασὶ τὴν ἐλάττω μοῖραν ἐλέσθαι τὴν ἐν ἀργυρίῳ, χρεῖαν ἔχοντα ἀποδημησαί, τοῦτο κακείνων δολίως ὑποπτευσάντων. ὁ δὲ Δημήτριος ὑπερῶς ἑκατὸν τάλαντά φησιν εἶναι αὐτῷ τὸ μέρος, ἃ πάντα καταναλώσαι.

The first point to note about this anecdote is its etiological aspect; it does not simply support the tradition of extensive travel, but explains how travel was possible from a practical point of view.⁴⁹ Next, Democritus, as noted, comes from a privileged background. In the anecdote, he properly relinquishes both money and position for the sake of his work and research through travel. However, the anecdote cannot, strictly speaking, be identified as the usual topos of the philosopher’s disdain for wealth,⁵⁰ since he does accept his share of the estate. Rather, his practical and research-oriented acceptance of the means to travel, are the concrete embodiment of sentiments expressed in his work.

11. He who chooses the values of the soul chooses things more divine, while he who chooses those of the body, chooses things more human. (fr. 37)

ὁ τὰ ψυχῆς ἀγαθὰ αἰρεόμενος τὰ θειώτερα αἰρέεται· ὁ δὲ τὰ σκίητος τὰ ἀνθρωπότηϊα.

12. Fame and wealth without understanding are not secure possessions. (fr. 77)

δόξα καὶ πλοῦτος ἄνευ ξυνέσιος οὐκ ἀσφαλῆα κτήματα.

13. Evil gains bring loss of virtue. (fr. 220)

κακὰ κέρδεα ζημίαν ἀρετῆς φέρει.

14. Hope of evil gains are the beginning of loss. (fr. 221)

ἐλπὶς κακοῦ κέρδεος ἀρχὴ ζημίας.

Another fragment speaks even more specifically to the situation at hand and further illuminates the anecdote. Here, Democritus talks about family finances and the problems entailed in settling an estate; the biographers, of course, took the statement as autobiographical.

15. For children, it is most necessary to divide property as far as possible, at the same time, to attend to them, so that they don't do some ruinous thing, from having it in their hands. For they become more miserly and more acquisitive, and compete with each other. And payments made in common don't distress as much as individual ones, nor the income cheer, but far less so. (fr. 279)

τοῖς παισὶ μάλιστα χρὴ τῶν ἀνυστῶν δατεῖσθαι τὰ χρήματα, καὶ ἅμα ἐπιμέλεσθαι αὐτῶν, μὴ τι ἀτηρὸν ποιέωσι διὰ χειρὸς ἔχοντες· ἅμα μὲν γὰρ πολλὸν φειδότεροι γίνονται ἐς τὰ χρήματα καὶ προθυμότεροι κτᾶσθαι, καὶ ἀγωνίζονται ἀλλήλοισιν. ἐν γὰρ τῷ ξυνῶι τὰ τελεύμενα οὐκ ἀνιά ὥσπερ ἰδίηι οὐδ' εὐθυμεῖ τὰ ἐπικτώμενα, ἀλλὰ πολλῶι ἦσσαν.

Democritus' father, alas, seems to have acted without the benefit of his son's advice, and Democritus' prediction has come true. In the anecdote, his brothers have become more miserly and acquisitive; their "craftiness" manifests the truth of Democritus' statements.⁵¹ The brothers' anecdotal greed was suggested to the biographers, no doubt, by those of Democritus' statements that address enmity within the family.

16. The hatred of kinsmen is far more painful than that of strangers. (fr. 90)

ἡ τῶν συγγενῶν ἔχθρη τῆς τῶν ὀθνείων χαλεπωτέρη μάλα.

17. Not all relatives are friends, only those who agree about what is advantageous. (fr. 107)

φίλοι οὐ πάντες οἱ συγγενέες, ἀλλ' οἱ συμφωνέοντες περὶ τοῦ συμφέροντος.

In the anecdote about division of the estate (citation 10), the biographers show Democritus tricked and cheated out of his fair share by his brothers. This suggests not only his brothers' guile, but a certain impractical, abstract, or vague trait in Democritus' character; he did, after all, let himself be cheated, even if for a more glorious, less mercenary, end. These traits are brought out even more strongly in the next anecdote, which is also set among his family.

18. Democritus was so industrious that, appropriating a little house in the garden, he shut himself away there. Once, although his father led in a bull for sacrifice and tied it up in that very spot, Democritus was not aware of it for a considerable time, until his father, rousing him for the sacrifice, told him about the bull. (DL 9.36)

λέγει δὲ ὅτι τοσοῦτον ἦν φιλόπρονος, ὥστε τοῦ περικλήπου δωμάτιόν τι ἀποτεμόμενος κατάκλειστος ἦν· καὶ ποτε τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ πρὸς θυσίαν βοῦν ἀγαγόντος καὶ αὐτόθι προσδήσαντος, ἱκανὸν χρόνον μὴ γνῶναι, ἕως αὐτὸν ἐκεῖνος διαναστήσας προφάσει τῆς θυσίας καὶ τὰ περὶ τὸν βοῦν διηγήσατο.

This industry or zeal for research and work is remarked upon several times in the biography. Diogenes Laertius takes the anecdote of citation 18 from Demetrius of Magnesia, and follows it with a second story from the same source.

19. It seems, Demetrius says, that Democritus went to Athens and was not eager for recognition, because he despised fame. And he knew of Socrates, but was not known to him, for as he says, "I went to Athens and no one knew me." (fr. 116 *ap.* DL 9.36)

δοκεῖ δέ, φησί, καὶ Ἀθήναζε ἐλθεῖν καὶ μὴ σπουδάσαι γνωσθῆναι δόξης καταφρονῶν. καὶ εἶδέναι μὲν Σωκράτη, ἀγνοεῖσθαι δὲ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ· ἦλλον γάρ, φησὶν, εἰς Ἀθήνας καὶ οὔτις με ἔγνωκεν.

The connection between the two anecdotes is not immediately apparent and Diogenes Laertius' pairing of them has been criticized; his life of Democritus has been singled out as rambling and disjointed. Mejer describes it as "a series of excerpts: although the Life is rather long, it does not give a continuous biography of Democritus, but goes from one self-contained section to another . . . and it is not unreasonable to assume that this life, if any, illustrates Diogenes' working method and ability as a writer."⁵² Elsewhere, unkind remarks have been made about "that scrapbook that goes by the name of Diogenes Laertius."⁵³ While it is true that Diogenes Laertius seems quite often to lump his material together without discernible connection (the pairing of citations 18 and 19 would seem to prove that point), the charges are not always justified. In this instance at least, Diogenes Laertius may have been guilty of a logical, connective lapse or, on the other hand, he may have assumed a better informed readership than he now possesses. The connection between the two anecdotes does, in fact, exist; we must simply turn to another source, Valerius Maximus, to find it. When this source speaks of Democritus' visit to Athens, he speaks not of Socrates and whether or not the two philosophers knew or knew of one another.⁵⁴ Instead, he tells us that Democritus was so busy with philosophical study and research that he forgot he was in Athens at all; the same scholarly zeal that led Democritus to overlook the bull in his garden study has led him to forget his situation in Athens as well. The point of both anecdotes, and Diogenes Laertius' joint presentation of them, is the philosophical devotion to work that precludes ordinary life and its mundane urban and rural realities. That the two anecdotes immediately follow Diogenes Laertius' story of the division of the estate further establishes Democritus' impractical or naive character. His use of them is neither random nor sloppy, but purposeful and associative; they further flesh out the character of Democritus as presented in the initial anecdote.⁵⁵

Diogenes Laertius continues his exploration of the single-minded and intellectually zealous Democritus in his next passage, which introduces material from Thrasyllus to put forth his own estimation of Democritus' scholarly traits.

20. “If the *Rivals* is the work of Plato,” Thrasyllus says, “then Democritus would be the unnamed character, different from those associates of Oenopides and Anaxagoras, when they talk with Socrates about philosophy, to whom he says that the philosopher is like the pentathlete. And he truly was a pentathlete in philosophy, for he had [trained in] not only the natural sciences and ethics, but also mathematics and the regular subjects and was an expert in arts.” (DL 9.36)

εἶπερ οἱ Ἀντερασταὶ Πλάτωνός εἰσι, φησὶ Θρασύλλος, οὗτος ἂν εἴη ὁ παραγενόμενος ἀνώνυμος, τῶν περὶ Οἰνοπίδην καὶ Ἀναξαγόραν ἕτερος, ἐν τῇ πρὸς Σωκράτην ὁμιλίᾳ διαλεγόμενος περὶ φιλοσοφίας, ὃν φησὶν, ὡς πεντάθλων ἔοικεν ὁ φιλόσοφος [Anterast. p. 136A]. καὶ ἦν ὡς ἀληθῶς ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ πένταθλος· τὰ γὰρ φυσικὰ καὶ τὰ ἠθικὰ <ἤσκητο>, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ μαθηματικὰ καὶ τοὺς ἐγκυκλίους λόγους, καὶ περὶ τεχνῶν πᾶσαν εἶχεν ἐμπειρίαν.

Democritus’ intellectual industry and training seems to have made quite an impact upon all the biographers; the last three citations and their various authors all emphasize this trait. Turning to Democritus’ work, we find several fragments that speak of the development of character, wisdom, and virtue through discipline, devotion, and application.

21. Toils undertaken willingly make the endurance of those done unwillingly easier. (fr. 240)

οἱ ἐκούσιοι πόνοι τὴν τῶν ἀκούσιων ὑπομονὴν ἐλαφροτέραν παρασκευάζουσι.

22. Continuous labor becomes easier through habit. (fr. 241)

πόνος συνεχῆς ἐλαφρότερος ἑαυτοῦ συνηθείᾳ γίνεται.

23. More men become good through practice than through nature. (fr. 242)

πλέονες ἐξ ἀσκήσιος ἀγαθοὶ γίνονται ἢ ἀπὸ φύσιος.

There is, of course, a price to be paid for the eulogy that Democritus almost universally achieves for his intellectual effort. Three of the anecdotes gently satirize his devotion to work by presenting its absurd consequences: Democritus, through his zeal to travel and study, accepts a lesser

share of the inheritance, does not notice he is sharing quarters with a bull, and forgets that he is in Athens.⁵⁶ Democritus, even for a philosopher, is unusually absentminded. His much praised intellectual zeal also allows the biographers to elaborate in their anecdotes on a favorite biographical topos, that of the absentminded philosopher.

This topos is widely used to characterize philosophers as unworldly, impractical, distracted men whose great knowledge has no practical grounding and that, in fact, often leads to absurd and sometimes dangerous situations: Thales falls into a well while gazing at the stars; engaged in the same pursuit, Anaxamines falls to his death.⁵⁷ And while the topos doubtless originates from the more hostile tradition of biography, the tone is satirical rather than condemnatory. At times it is a tone of affection or a gentle mocking, a far cry from a philosopher covered with dung.⁵⁸ Happily, these anecdotes are balanced by those of the philosopher's revenge, in which these great and impractical thinkers turn their knowledge into practical, material gain. Both Thales and Democritus are to confound their (biographical) critics by turning their abstract meteorological knowledge into concrete gain: they predict a bumper crop in olives, monopolize the presses, and corner the market in olive oil.⁵⁹ For all scholars who have fallen, at least metaphorically, into wells and over cliffs, the revenge is sweet indeed.

Democritus' absentmindedness, presented here as the result of his scholarly zeal, places him into more serious difficulties when he returns from his travels, however. As Diogenes Laertius tells us, the problems begin when Democritus returns to the family estates.

24. Antisthenes says that, returning from his travels, Democritus lived in a desperately poor way, because he had used up all his property. He was kept, during his poverty, by his brother Damasus. . . . According to existing law, no one who had squandered his inheritance could receive burial within his homeland. Antisthenes says that Democritus, hearing this, and to avoid becoming vulnerable to jealous and slanderous people, read to them the *Greater World System*, which surpassed all his other works. He was honored with five hundred talents and not only with that, but with bronze statues also and when he died, they buried him at public expense, having lived over a century. (DL 9.39–40)⁶⁰

ἐλθόντα δὴ φησιν αὐτὸν ἐκ τῆς ἀποδημίας ταπεινότατα διάγειν, ἅτε πᾶσαν τὴν οὐσίαν καταναλωκότα τρέφεσθαι τε διὰ τὴν ἀπορίαν ἀπὸ

τὰδελεφοῦ Δαμάσου . . . νόμου δὲ ὄντος τὸν ἀναλώσαντα τὴν πατρώϊαν οὐσίαν μὴ ἀξιούσθαι ταφῆς ἐν τῇ πατρίδι, φησὶν ὁ Ἀντισθένης, συνέντα, μὴ ὑπεύθυνος γενηθεῖη πρὸς τινῶν φθονούντων καὶ συκοφαντούντων, ἀναγνῶναι αὐτοῖς τὸν Μέγαν διάκοσμον, ὃς ἀπάντων αὐτοῦ τῶν συγγραμμάτων προέχει· καὶ πεντακοσίοις ταλάντοις τιμηθῆναι· μὴ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ χαλκαῖς εἰκόσι· καὶ τελευτήσαντα δημοσίαι ταφῆναι. βιώσαντα ὑπὲρ τὰ ἑκατὸν ἔτη.

The anecdote continues to elaborate on the theme of absentmindedness introduced by Diogenes Laertius earlier, for Democritus' devotion to work, travel, and study have once again led him into a perilous, and this time potentially humiliating, position. This anecdote introduces another variant of the topos, in which the consequences of the philosopher's ideas rebound against him to devastating effect. Not only is Democritus reduced to depending upon his brother, he may even be denied proper burial for having wasted or squandered his inheritance, which mocks Democritus' words of warning (citation 15) on the perils of inheritance. Other fragments warned of the evils of money for its own sake and advised the laying up of spiritual, rather than material, gain. Democritus' words have now rebounded upon him with a vengeance.⁶¹ Other of his fragments tell of the danger good men encounter from lesser, envious men and the proper response to them.

25. When lesser men find fault, the good man makes no reply. (fr. 48)
 μωμεομένων φλαύρων ὁ ἀγαθὸς οὐ ποιεῖται λόγον.

26. It is better to question one's own mistakes than those of others. (fr. 60)
 κρέσσον τὰ οἰκήϊα ἐλέγχειν ἁμαρτήματα ἢ τὰ ὀθνεῖα.

27. The law would not prevent each man from living according to his inclination, unless individuals harmed each other; for envy creates the beginnings of strife. (fr. 245)

οὐκ ἂν ἐκώλυον οἱ νόμοι ζῆν ἕκαστον κατ' ἰδίην ἐξουσίην, εἰ μὴ ἕτερος ἕτερον ἐλυμαίνετο· φθόνος γὰρ στάσιος ἀρχὴν ἀπεργάζεται.

Democritus' strictures against the envious and the unjust have obviously come home to roost. Worse, he is made to betray his own notion of

the good man (citation 25) by responding to the threat. He does manage, however, to act in accordance with his notion of the intelligent man, as the following shows.

28. It is the work of intelligence to guard against a threatened injustice, but the mark of insensibility not to avenge it when it has occurred. (fr. 193)

φρονήσιος ἔργον μέλλουσας ἀδικίην φυλάξασθαι, ἀναληγίης δὲ [τὸ] γενομένην μὴ ἀμύνασθαι.

Democritus manages to defeat the unjust, the unscrupulous, and the jealous, yet in a way that negates much of his ethical code, not least his philosophical insistence upon the spiritual and ethical, rather than the material, world. Much that is negative is implied here: Democritus' squandering of his inheritance (itself a standard topos of abuse⁶²), his panic at the possibility of prosecution, the "selling" of his greatest work in return for legal and material considerations, and, as we will see, an unseemly concern for the disposition of his physical remains. Yet, in another sense, we see again that the absentminded and impractical philosopher has managed to turn his abstract thought into concrete gain, with here even a promise of posthumous honors.⁶³ This latest anecdote, then, falls ultimately into the larger, more favorable tradition of biography and the tradition of the philosopher's revenge. But here too we must note the unusual emphasis on financial details that plague all these anecdotes and Democritus' biography in general.⁶⁴

No other early philosopher is so burdened with anecdotes that revolve around his financial state; certainly, no other philosopher accepts money in return for his philosophy, as does Democritus for the reading of "his" work.⁶⁵ The biographers might be able to accept Democritus' inherited wealth as an explanation for his extended travel (a squalid means to a noble end) and he does, after all, mention estates and their division in his work in statements that beg for autobiographical interpretation. What the biographers cannot accept, however, is a philosopher openly concerned with finance, a concern indicated in the fragments previously mentioned. Democritus' practical and, to us quite proper, concern for finance, inheritance, and income, runs counter to the well-established biographical notion of noble poverty (rendered even more noble since it occurs by choice and not necessity, as in the life of Heraclitus and Empedocles). Democritus, in his work, does not

display the traditional contempt for money the biographers demanded from their philosophers, but a rather more commonsense approach to the matter, which apparently the biographers found both notable and impossible to forgive. In citation 24, therefore, he is punished by threats of ostracism and public disgrace, a pariah's death, an expatriate burial, and prostitution of his philosophical work. It is a minor triumph, indeed, when the favorable tradition buys him rescue, when his abstract knowledge turns practical and allows him revenge over his enemies.

The next anecdote reveals more about Democritus' reputation as a philosopher than his family, although it too takes place in connection with his brother Damasus. While reporting Antisthenes' account of Democritus' life after traveling, Diogenes Laertius interrupts his account to include certain other events that took place at or about the same time.

29. Because Democritus foretold certain future events, his estimation rose, and finally he was held by the people as worthy of the honors of a god. (DL 9.39)

ὡς δὲ προειπὼν τινα τῶν μελλόντων εὐδοκίμησε, λοιπὸν ἐνθέου δόξης παρὰ τοῖς πλείστοις ἤξιώθη.

Diogenes Laertius does not, at this point, tell us what those predictions were, but we may assume that they were of benefit to the whole community, since it was the whole community who honored him. Hicks suggests that "future events" were weather or seasonal predictions, in which case they could then be those same predictions that allowed Democritus to corner the olive market.⁶⁶ On the other hand, a similar group of stories, not mentioned by Diogenes Laertius, suggests other predictions and other reasons for honor.⁶⁷

In the first, Democritus (once again) resides with his brother Damasus as the time for harvest approaches. Noting the unusually hot and heavy wind, Democritus urges Damasus to harvest his crops immediately. Damasus follows his advice and saves his harvest just before a terrible storm breaks. In a second story, Democritus' hometown of Abdera is beset with plague and Democritus, by charming the wind, cleanses the city.

While the predictions made in either story could be enough to increase Democritus' reputation and therefore lead to public honor, the first story refers to benefits conferred only upon his brother, while the second speaks of benefits for the community. Predictions such as these, while common

in the biographies,⁶⁸ are unusual in their implications; the ability to control the elements suggests contact or control of higher, more divine spheres. When such actions benefit an entire community, as here, they elevate their subject to divine status.

Such status is clearly implied in the second story. By charming the winds and averting plague, Democritus saves the townsfolk and receives divine honors from them in return.⁶⁹ Two almost identical stories occur in the life of Empedocles. In one he stops the winds destroying the harvest and saves the crop, receiving the title “wind-stayer” for his actions;⁷⁰ in the other, he averts plague from the town and is worshipped as a god for his actions.

Both Empedocles and Democritus receive their honors in very like circumstances and after very similar feats, the redirection of natural elements. Those who control the elements by their knowledge of the elements were regarded as having contact with suprahuman forces. By their suprahuman powers they were a step closer to the divine than were other members of the community. The transformation of the philosopher into the semidivine prophet or magician appears early and often in the lives; their meteorological knowledge is translated by popular imagination into control of divine forces, the philosophers themselves into suprahuman beings possessed of divine wisdom and power.⁷¹ In the lives, they are described as wizards, magicians, or wind-stayers; the latter was a sect thought to possess the power to stay, lull, and redirect the winds. Men in this sect were thought to often use their powers to avert plagues.⁷² The divine honors the philosophers receive indicate both the power associated with their study of the elements and their own power over them.

These latter two anecdotes form the background of posthumous honors as reported by Diogenes Laertius, associated by its placement with Democritus’ threatened status brought on by the squandering of his inheritance and with his ultimate triumph over the envious and unjust. All these anecdotes, then, indicate the topos of the philosopher’s revenge, in which Democritus turns his intellectual labors to practical advantage, and are related to concrete displays of alleged impractical wisdom. Due to his remarks on finance and especially inheritance, they have a familial and economic setting; we see the production of standard biographical topoi in a particularly Democritean light.

With this story, and hints of Democritus’ divine or magical status, we leave behind his financial and family life and turn to other aspects of the philosopher, beginning with his biographical character. Yet, since

character, like so much else in life, is defined by death, we must first see how Democritus' biographical character led, inevitably, to his biographical death.

DEMOCRITUS' ATOMIC CHARACTER

Up to this point, we have reviewed incidents that, while recording Democritus' zeal for work, were intended primarily as examples of his attendant absent-mindedness. Now, however, we come to a set of stories in which his biographical character is made to illustrate different facets of atomic theory. We begin with two curious anecdotes in Diogenes Laertius, taken from Athenodorus.

Democritus the Visionary Philosopher

30. Athenodorus in the eighth of his *Walks* relates that, when Hippocrates came to see him, Democritus ordered milk to be brought and, having inspected it, pronounced it to be the milk of a black she-goat which had produced her first kid; which made Hippocrates marvel at the accuracy of his observation. (DL 9.42)

φησὶ δ' Ἀθηνόδωρος [Zeller IIIa 6302] ἐν ἡ Περιπάτων, ἐλθόντος Ἱπποκράτους πρὸς αὐτόν, κελεῦσαι κομισθῆναι γάλα· καὶ θεασάμενον τὸ γάλα εἰπεῖν εἶναι αἰγὸς πρωτοτόκου καὶ μελαίνης· ὅθεν τὴν ἀκριβειαν αὐτοῦ θαυμάσαι τὸν Ἱπποκράτην.

31. On the first day, Democritus greeted a maid servant who was in Hippocrates' company with, 'Good morning, maiden,' but on the second day with, 'Good morning, woman.' As a matter of fact, the girl had been seduced in the night. (DL 9.42)

ἀλλὰ καὶ κόρης ἀκολουθούσης τῷ Ἱπποκράτει τῇ μὲν πρώτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἀπάσασθαι οὕτω ἄχαϊρε κόρη, τῇ δ' ἐχομένῃ ἄχαϊρε γύναι. καὶ ἦν ἡ κόρη τῆς νυκτὸς διεφθαμένη.

In the first anecdote, Democritus' pronouncement is the result of his perceptive powers; it is his careful, visual inspection of the milk that leads to his analysis. In the second, no particular sense is singled out for his perception. While we can hypothesize that a single glance sufficed for his statement or that some unspecified sense was at work, we can safely

conclude that it was his extraordinarily acute perception that fascinated the biographers. Specifically, Democritus' theory of vision fascinated the biographers and led to several anecdotes that display or discuss it, for it was the single most controversial and discussed aspect of atomic theory generally. Democritus' theory of vision does not now exist, save in various summaries and commentaries, the most detailed of which occurs in Theophrastus.⁷³ Briefly, we may say that, for Democritus, vision consists of a flowing-in of atomic particles that interact with the eye and is, like other atomic sense perceptions, subjective.⁷⁴

The atomic theory of vision, whatever its origin, is almost completely identified with Democritus. It should not surprise us, then, when we find several anecdotes that refer to Democritus' vision, as in the anecdotes mentioned here. However, vision is not the only aspect of Democritus' work involved here. Equally important is Democritus' reputation for research in anatomy and, in particular, in physiology; his work in reproduction and embryology were perhaps as well known as his theory of vision.⁷⁵ Although these works also no longer exist, they are known to us in some detail, again through commentaries.⁷⁶ The most impressive aspect of his work, to his biographers, was the great amount of close and careful observation Democritus devoted to his scientific works. His powers of observation, combined with his legendary zeal for work and his theory of vision, have become concretized in the anecdotes here, in greatly simplified and comic form. It is hardly surprising, then, that one anecdote revolves around the reproductive system of a goat and in the other, that of a woman, that both result (perhaps) from visual observation in the presence of the physician/scientist Hippocrates.⁷⁷

Another anecdote, which Diogenes Laertius does not include, comes to us from Plutarch and brings together Democritus' fascination with natural phenomena and its causes, another woman, and honey, in which Athenaeus⁷⁸ says Democritus, "ever delighted."

32. It seemed that Democritus was nibbling a cucumber and because its juice seemed like honey, he asked the serving woman where she had purchased it. When she replied that it came from, 'some garden,' Democritus, rising up, commanded her to lead him there and to point out the place. The woman was amazed and asked why he wanted to do this. 'I must find out,' he said, 'the cause of its sweetness and I will find out by observing the spot.' The woman, smiling, said, 'Sit down. I accidentally put the cucumber in a honey-pot.' And he, aggrieved, said, 'Go away. I

will apply myself to the problem nonetheless, and seek its cause' as though there existed some native and innate sweetness to the cucumber. (Plutarch *quaest. conv.* 11.10.2 = DK 68A17a)

ταῦτὸ πεισόμα Δημοκρίτῳ τῷ σοφῷ διὰ φιλολογίαν. καὶ γὰρ ἐκεῖνος ὡς ἔοικε τρώγων σίκκυν, ὡς ἐφάνη μελιτώδης ὁ χυμός, ἠρώτησε τὴν διακονοῦσαν, ὅπόθεν πρίατο· τῆς δὲ κῆπόν τινα φραζούσης, ἐκέλευσεν ἔξαναστὰς ἠγγεῖσθαι καὶ δεικνύναι τὸν τόπον· θαυμάζοντος δὲ τοῦ γυναιίου καὶ πυνθανομένου τί βούλεται ἴτην αἰτίαν ἔφη ἴδει με τῆς γλυκύτητος εὐρεῖν, εὐρήσω δὲ τοῦ χωρίου γενόμενος θεατῆς· “κατάκεισο δὴ” τὸ γύναιον εἶπε μειδιῶν, “ἐγὼ γὰρ ἀγνοήσασα τὸ σίκκυν εἰς ἀγγεῖον ἐθέμην μεμελιτωμένον.” ὁ δ' ὥσπερ ἀχθεσθεὶς ἄπέκναισας εἶπε ἰκαί οὐδὲν ἦπτον ἐπιθήσομαι τῷ λόγῳ καὶ ζητήσω τὴν αἰτίαν, ὡς ἂν οἰκείου καὶ συγγενοῦς οὔσης τῷ σικύῳ τῆς γλυκύτητος.

Democritus' scholarly industry, already the focus of several earlier anecdotes, is once again emphasized here, but the primary aim is to mock the philosopher, and especially his powers of observation and the theory of vision generally, by a rebound anecdote, a popular form that ironically illustrates what happens when a philosopher follows his own theories too strictly.⁷⁹ Democritus' childish insistence on pursuing his inquiry without cause satirizes his character and his scholarly practices and theories. His desire to “observe” the garden emphasizes the primacy of the theory of vision while it mocks Democritus for his failure to see the obvious. The object of his inquiry, the sweetness of the cucumber, recalls his interest in natural science; the presence and answer of the serving woman underscores the ludicrous manner in which he acts.⁸⁰ His obsession with causality perhaps originates in scholarly discussion, such as we find in Theophrastus. In a discussion on Democritean causes, Theophrastus' frustration becomes increasingly evident and finally erupts into questions such as why bitter juices become sweet.⁸¹ Democritus' theories on taste were, after vision, perhaps the most widely discussed of all theories of sense perception. A controversial fragment suggests that

33. Sweet exists by convention, bitter by convention, heat by convention, cold by convention, color by convention; but atoms and the void exist in truth. (fr. 9)

ἴνομῳ γὰρ φησι ἴγλυκύ, [καὶ] νόμῳ πικρόν, νόμῳ θερμόν, νόμῳ ψυχρόν, νόμῳ χροίη, ἐτεῆι δὲ ἄτομα καὶ κενόν.

The biographers, given Democritus' theories of subjectivity in sense perception generally and on taste specifically, transform the theory into concrete form in citation 33.⁸² Equally important to Democritus' biographical tradition was citation 34, in which the senses threaten their revenge for an existence ruled by intellect and theory.

34. Wretched mind, after receiving your knowledge from us, do you try to overthrow us? The overthrow will be your downfall. (fr. 125)

τάλαινα φρήν, παρ' ἡμέων λαβοῦσα τὰς πίστεις ἡμέας καταβάλλεις;
πτῶμά τοι τὸ κατάβλημα.

This revenge of the senses, along with atomic theory of vision, is responsible for another anecdote, one that seems to have been widely known in the ancient world, that Democritus blinded himself. Although again not included by Diogenes Laertius, it occurs in Cicero, Aulus Gellius, Himerius, Tertullian, and Plutarch.⁸³

All sources agree that the blinding was voluntary and self-performed. Aulus Gellius reports that Democritus set up a bronze mirror and reflected the sun into his eyes, thereby destroying his sight. Plutarch disagrees with the method, although he gives none himself, but agrees with Aulus Gellius' imputed motive, that Democritus wanted to free himself from the snares of the body as a further step towards pure knowledge. Cicero seems to agree with this motive, as does Himerius; neither mention method. Tertullian, without discussing method, expands upon motive: Democritus could not look upon women without experiencing a disturbing desire. He thereby acknowledged the weakness, and corrected it.

In view of the great interest and discussion accorded Democritus' theory of vision, we must expect an anecdote which refers so specifically to eyes and to sight. That Democritus' scholarly devotion reoccurs is only to be expected. However, the brutality of the act comes as a surprise, especially given the usually positive, even affectionate tone that informs Democritus' life. The anecdote, while reported by authors in various tones of humor or admiration,⁸⁴ still is punitive in motive and hostile in origin, uncommon in the life of Democritus although not in the lives of the philosophers generally.⁸⁵ This particular example of the use of the punitive anecdote probably stems from Democritus' claim to have understood the mechanics of sight; his devotion to work, carried to an absurd, obsessive extreme, is also

ridiculed and rebounds upon him. The denial of physical satisfaction is the biographical correlation of those fragments that refer to the importance of intellectual rather than physical satisfactions and of the importance of moderation in all things.

35. Coition is a slight apoplexy. For human gushes forth from human and is separated by having torn apart with a kind of blow. (fr. 32)

ξυνουσίη ἀποπληξίη σμικρή· ἐξέσσυται γὰρ ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἀνθρώπου καὶ ἀποσπᾶται πληγῆι τινι μεριζόμενος.

36. People get pleasure from scratching themselves, the same sort of pleasure people get from love making. (fr. 127)

ξυόμενοι ἄνθρωποι ἥδονται καὶ σφιν γίνεται ἄπερ τοῖς ἀφροδισιάζουσιν’.

37. It is hard to fight desire; control is the sign of a reasonable man. (fr. 236)

θυμῶι μάχεσθαι μὲν χαλεπὸν ἄνδρὸς δὲ τὸ κρατέειν εὐλογίστου.

38. It is characteristic of a child, not a man, to desire without measure. (fr. 70)

παιδός, οὐκ ἄνδρὸς τὸ ἀμέτρως ἐπιθυμεῖν.

39. Violent desire for one thing blinds the soul to all others. (fr. 72)

αἱ περὶ τι σφοδραὶ ὀρέξεις τυφλοῦσιν εἰς τᾶλλα τὴν ψυχὴν.

The “violent desire” of which Democritus speaks in the last fragment was taken quite literally by the (hostile) biographers; the idea of blinding and of uncontrollable desire and its sexual expression suggested to the biographers a philosopher who blinded himself to do away with temptation and to further his spiritual or intellectual, rather than carnal, knowledge.⁸⁶

Women in this anecdote, as in so many others, are the embodiment of physical desires against which the wise man must fight a never ending battle. They symbolize, like excessive eating or drinking, a potential lack of moderation necessary to the pursuit of pure wisdom and serenity.⁸⁷ And Democritus, by such a wildly immoderate act, is paid back for all his

comments on the subject,⁸⁸ and his physical senses, ignored, invalidated, and despised by him, according to popular interpretation, here take their revenge. We have, then, a distinct example of the hostile tradition of biography, in which the philosopher's theories and statement violently rebound upon him. Happily, the favorable tradition offers at least a partial rescue, and Democritus' act of self-mutilation, by his apologists, is given an admirable, even honorable, motivation.

Democritus the Mad Philosopher

We have, in preceding sections, examined anecdotes that characterized Democritus as an absentminded, intellectual zealot; in them, his intellectual devotion led him to overlook a bull sharing his quarters, to forget being in Athens, and to squander his inheritance. In the following anecdotes, intellectual zeal is again emphasized, but given a rather different twist, one that suggests madness.

The tradition of Democritus' zeal and training, which so impressed the biographers, is explicitly commented on in that anecdote (citation 20) that compares Democritus to a pentathlete. In it, Thrasyllus' characterization comments upon Democritus' prowess in all fields of philosophy and knowledge (in the natural sciences, in ethics, and mathematics, in the arts, and so on.) Thrasyllus describes Democritus' program as *ἀσχεῖν*, which most often indicates athletic training, but which can also be used for the development of intellectual skills. Democritus himself is one of the first authors to use *ἀσχεῖν* in this manner in those fragments that speak of the importance of discipline and application, and it is used at least twice in descriptions of Democritus himself.⁸⁹ It also introduces Antisthenes' description of Democritus, in a brief excerpt given in Diogenes Laertius.

40. He would train himself, says Antisthenes, by a variety of means to test his sense-impressions, by going off into solitude and frequenting tombs. (DL 9.38)

ἤσκει δέ, φησὶν ὁ Ἀντισθένης [FHG III 173 n.], καὶ ποικίλως δοκιμάζειν τὰς φαντασίας, ἐρημιάζων ἐνίοτε καὶ τοῖς τάφοις ἐνδιατρίβων.

In the anecdote, as in the earlier one that speaks of Democritus as pentathlete, the characterization of Democritus as absentminded (a characterization which usually occurs in connection with a family member) is

lacking. Instead, we read of a solitary Democritus who frequents tombs (ἐρημάζων ἐνίοτε καὶ τοῖς τάφοις ἐνδιατρίβων) to test his sense perceptions (δοκιμάζειν τὰς φαντασίας).⁹⁰ Hicks' translation in citation 20, however, depends first upon his sense of φαντασία and, more important, upon an overly generous interpretation of Antisthenes and the biographical tradition that underlies the anecdote.

To properly understand the anecdote, we must, then, begin with φαντασία and its wide range of meanings. Generally, a φαντασία is an appearance or presentation to consciousness, whether immediate or in the memory, whether true or false. In its most technical use, φαντασία means simply a visual image (Aristotle *de anim.* 492a2); φαντασία thus denotes the representation of appearance or images primarily derived from sensation, almost the equivalent of αἴσθησις, perception (428a6), or more simply, the faculty of imaginations (425a5). Less scientific meanings were, however, popular and widely used also; φαντασία often simply means appearance and/or ghost or apparition (Aristotle *Mir.* 846a37; Lucian *Demon.* 25).⁹¹ If we follow Hicks in the citation here, the anecdote simply refers once more to Democritus' intellectual zeal and rigorous training program. Democritus trains himself to test his sense impressions (his φαντασία) or perception (his αἴσθησις). In this interpretation, the tombs and solitude become mere incidental details. Details such as this, however, are never incidental and when explored, reveal more fully the biographical mind and tradition at work. When, for example, we turn to Democritus' text, we find the following explanatory remarks made by Sextus in his commentary on Democritus and atomic theory, and in particular on fragment 166, in which he says:

41. [Democritus states that] certain images visit men [some beneficial, some harmful. He prayed] to meet with fortunate images. (fr. 166)

Δ. δὲ εἰδωλά τινά φησιν ἐμπελάζειν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ τούτων τὰ μὲν εἶναι ἀγαθοποιὰ τὰ δὲ κακοποιὰ ἔνθεν καὶ εὐχετο εὐλόγων τυχεῖν εἰδώλων.

Sextus continues his commentary with the following explanation:

42. These images are large, extraordinarily so, and they are destroyed with difficulty but not indestructible, and they foretell the future to men, coming to them as visual images and as voices. For this reason, the

ancients, taking this visible manifestation of the god, (thought it to be a god,) when it is rather, that that (which has an indestructible nature, is divine.) (Sextus *adv. math.* 9.19 = DK 68B166)

εἶναι δὲ ταῦτα μεγάλα τε καὶ ὑπερφυῆ καὶ δύσφθαρτα μὲν, οὐκ ἄφθαρτα δέ, προσημᾶναιεν τε τὰ μέλλοντα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις θεωρούμενα καὶ φωνὰς ἀφιέντα. ὅθεν τούτων αὐτῶν φαντασίαν λαβόντες οἱ παλαιοὶ ὑπενόησαν εἶναι θεόν, μηδενὸς ἄλλου παρὰ ταῦτα ὄντος θεοῦ [τοῦ] ἄφθαρτον φύσιν ἔχοντος.

In the first citation then, Democritus, according to Sextus, believed that images (εἰδῶλα) visit men. Some were harmful, some helpful, and Democritus prayed to meet the helpful kind only.⁹² In the following citation, Sextus further explains that, because of the way these images manifested themselves to humans (in visual images or as voices) and because of their perceived mission (to foretell the future), ancients such as Democritus confused appearance and reality, confusing manifestations or appearances of the gods with the gods themselves (ὅθεν τούτων αὐτῶν φαντασίαν λαβόντες οἱ παλαιοὶ ὑπενόησαν εἶναι θεόν).

The setting of the anecdote, and the statement that Democritus went to tombs to test his sense perceptions cannot, then, be incidental, especially when compared with earlier, more typical anecdotes, in which the setting is social or familial. And although we have seen allusion to Democritus' theory of vision in these other anecdotes, the specific mention of tombs here suggests a different, although perhaps related, biographical reference to Democritus' work, according to the principles of biographical invention outlined so far.

In fact, listed among Democritus' works is a treatise entitled, "On the Next World," that Athenaeus mentions as one of the works that Democritus read to escape persecution.⁹³ A pseudo-Hippocratic letter also says that Democritus wrote a work on the next world which was, according to this author, "full of images."⁹⁴ Philodemus says that the book was about death, specifically that corruption and decay destroy even beauty and strength; his moral is that one should not grieve at the thought of a poor tomb, since death destroys all. Proclus, on the other hand, tells us that the book discusses those who appear to be dead and who come to life again, people who have fainted or had seizures, and so on.⁹⁵

We have, then, not one but several references to Democritus, death, and tombs. The letter makes explicit reference to Democritus' active

investigation into the “other world.” Antisthenes tells us that Democritus goes off in solitude to investigate among the tombs.⁹⁶ Sextus suggests that Democritus mistakenly believed the images to be truly divine, charged with foretelling the future.⁹⁷ Divine or not, they were certainly from another world, and Antisthenes tells us that Democritus was investigating it. Democritus is in the tomb, in short, proving his atomic theory, but as it pertains to death, by attempting to see and to investigate the ghost, φαντασία or εἶδωλα, of those who have died. Antisthenes’ aim, in fact, is not to praise Democritus for his intellectual zeal, but to satirize him by suggesting he was mad.⁹⁸

In the Greek world, then as now, a preference for solitude is a sign of eccentricity.⁹⁹ In the biographical tradition specifically, only poets and philosophers seek out the solitary state, and their solitude defines and characterizes their intellectual and social alienation or otherness, their eccentricity and sometimes madness a requisite of creativity.¹⁰⁰ The grave or tomb is a literary symbol that clearly indicates madness, as is a preoccupation with death. Democritus, then, is depicted by Antisthenes in the anecdote as more than eccentric, he is clearly mad.¹⁰¹

With this, the anecdote as a whole makes sense, even to its details. We find the usual allusion to Democritus’ training,¹⁰² but in a context that allows for specific biographical reference to Democritus’ work and the works and beliefs traditionally attributed to him. Democritus wrote about the next world, about tombs and deaths; he is in a graveyard, among the tombs. He wrote that the air was full of images and prayed to see benevolent ones, which he investigates and actively seeks out as part of his intellectual program. Like other (mad or eccentric) philosophers, Democritus chooses to be alone; his solitude emphasizes both his alienation from the mundane human world and his link with the divine and creative one. Like other philosophers, and like the poets, he is touched with a divine madness.

In short, Hicks, as I have argued, was misled in his interpretation and translation of the anecdote by an overgenerous view of Antisthenes and the biographical tradition and so views the anecdote as a scientific or neutral commentary. A less objective and more accurate translation would be “Democritus trained himself to make tests about ghosts, sometimes going off by himself and hanging around in tombs.” Solitude and tombs, to Diogenes Laertius and to Antisthenes, have no neutral, much less positive, connotation.¹⁰³ In later times, of course, the image of the philosopher and the tomb or its symbols has a slightly different force,

although it remains a favorite topos of pagan and Christian writers alike: acceptance of death through close contemplation of its symbols, the motif of *memento mori*. But for Antisthenes, as for the biographers, Democritus' solitude in the tomb, looking for ghosts, is the mark of a madman.

Antisthenes' and Diogenes Laertius' original readers would, no doubt, have caught the allusion to this madness, although it has nearly been lost for us. In the next anecdote, however, the allusion is impossible to miss. Not contained in the life by Diogenes Laertius, it too survives in a series of pseudo-Hippocratic letters.¹⁰⁴

The anecdote begins with a desperate request from the people of Abdera to Hippocrates. Democritus, they say, is mad and only Hippocrates, greatest of all physicians, can cure them. The people of Abdera insist that Democritus' madness is the result of his too great wisdom and detail his symptoms, which include indiscriminate laughter, insomnia, and solitary habits, strange ideas such as investigations into the other world, and a belief that the air is full of images.¹⁰⁵ Hippocrates is quite doubtful about their conclusions, yet, after an exchange of letters, comes to Abdera and a meeting between physician and philosopher takes place.

The meeting shakes Hippocrates profoundly. He finds Democritus alone in a clearing, surrounded by the dismembered limbs of dissected animals, barefoot, dirty, pale and unshaven, dressed in coarse and filthy clothing.¹⁰⁶ Hippocrates, however, can rationalize all these symptoms of insanity as the result not of madness but of genius: the need for solitude springs from a dedication to research and scholarly investigation precludes all other concerns.¹⁰⁷

All symptoms except the disquieting laughter, that is, for Democritus' laughter, besides being indiscriminate, also suggests sadism, moral depravity, and pure madness, and this Hippocrates cannot rationalize or explain away. Democritus, however, explains to Hippocrates that the physician's analysis is based upon an erroneous assumption, which he explains as follows. Democritus' laughter does not arise from two categories of things as Hippocrates believes, things that are good and bad as they affect the human condition, such as a wedding or a death, but from a single thing, human nature itself. When Hippocrates then resists this pessimistic view of human nature and life, Democritus becomes furious and bursts into a condemnation of them. When his tirade ends, Hippocrates is convinced not only of Democritus' sanity, but of the moral rightness of his view, and even thanks Democritus for having taught him the truth.

Democritus' bitter and misanthropic tirade has long been recognized as

a Cynic diatribe; the views expressed are but a reworking of Cynic philosophy and have nothing to do with the ethical system as preserved in Democritus' work.¹⁰⁸ The meeting itself is representational, one that brings together representatives of famous schools or contrasting views, ways of life, or characters, such as the meeting between Solon and Croesus.¹⁰⁹ As far as Democritus' characterization is concerned, the salient point of the meeting is that his devotion to work (his intellectual zealotry, in fact) has driven him crazy. His madness is expressed in his belief that the air is full of images, his investigation into the other world (he is once more surrounded by death), and his solitude.

The madness engendered by his study was alluded to in the previous anecdote; here it is made explicit. The more favorable tradition presents Democritus as absentminded as the result of his studies; the more hostile one says that they have driven him mad. That both traditions draw upon the same text and the same type of interpretation (an autobiographical reading of philosophical statements) is made obvious in the small details of the conversation between philosopher and physician. For while they talk, Hippocrates complains to Democritus that the mundane world has deprived him of the peace and tranquility necessary to the scholar; specifically, he has had to waste his time with land problems, children, money troubles, diseases, and death. Democritus, of course, has triumphed over these trivial problems: he chooses travel over property, advocates adoption, scorns (or squanders) money, and is soon to triumph over death itself.¹¹⁰ Hippocrates admits that, even before he met Democritus, he had believed a lack of concern for the practical world to be the sign of a genius, when it denotes devotion to one's work, and he departs convinced that Democritus' course has been the wiser one.¹¹¹

The investigations into the other world, here specifically called the nether world of life after death, and Democritus' preoccupation with death, afterlife, and their symbols, present in both anecdotes, offer further proof of Democritus' madness. Like the tradition of that madness, they develop, in part, from the atomic theory of death. The emphasis on tombs resurfaces in the next anecdote, in which the Democritean or atomic theory of death, which makes mourning a laughable convention, paves the way for a story of reanimation.

43. Democritus of Abdera, when Darius was grieved at the death of his beautiful wife, could say nothing to console him. He promised that he

would bring the departed woman back to life, if Darius were willing to undertake the means necessary for the purpose. Darius commanded him to spare no expense, but to take whatever he had to make good his promise. Democritus, waiting a little while, said that everything he needed he had obtained, except for one thing that he himself could not obtain, but which would, perhaps, not be hard for Darius, the king of all Asia, to find. Darius asked him, what is this great thing that would yield itself to be known only to a king? In reply, Democritus said that if he, Darius, would write the names of three people who had never grieved on the tomb of his wife, she then would be constrained, by the law of ritual, to return. Darius then was at a loss, finding no one to whom it had not befallen to suffer some grief, whereupon Democritus, laughing in his customary way, said, ‘Why, then do you, oh strangest of men, weep without restraint, as if you were the only one to have suffered, you who cannot find a single person, of all those who ever lived, who are without their share of sorrow?’ (Julian *Ep.* 201 b–c = DK 68A20)

φασὶ γὰρ Δημόκριτον τὸν Ἀβδηρίτην, ἐπειδὴ Δαρείωι γυναικὸς καλῆς ἀλγοῦντι θάνατον οὐκ εἶχεν ὅτι ἂν εἰπὼν εἰς παραμυθίαν ἀρκέσειεν, ὑποσχέσθαι οἱ τὴν ἀπελθοῦσαν εἰς φῶς ἀνάξειν, ἣν ἐθελήσῃ τῶν εἰς τὴν χρείαν ἠκόντων ὑποστῆναι τὴν χορηγίαν. κελεύσαντος δ’ ἐκείνου μὴ φείσασθαι μηδενὸς ὅτι ἂν ἐξῆι λαβόντα τὴν ὑπόσχεσιν ἐμπεδώσαι, μικρὸν ἐπισχόντα χρόνον εἰπεῖν, ὅτι τὰ μὲν ἄλλα αὐτῷ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ ἔργου πρᾶξιν συμπορισθείη, μόνου δὲ ἐνὸς προσδέοιτο ὃ δὴ αὐτὸν μὲν οὐκ ἔχειν ὅπως ἂν λάβοι, Δαρεῖον δὲ ὡς βασιλέα τῆς ὅλης Ἀσίας οὐ χαλεπὸν ἂν ἴσως εὐρεῖν. ἐρομένου δ’ ἐκείνου, τί ἂν εἴη τοσοῦτον ὃ μόνωι βασιλεῖ γνωσθῆναι συγχωρεῖται, ὑπολαβόντα φῆσαι τὸν Δημόκριτον, εἰ τριῶν ἀπενθήτων ὀνόματα τῷ τάφωι τῆς γυναικὸς ἐπιγράψαιεν, εὐθὺς αὐτὴν ἀναβιώσεσθαι τῷ τῆς τελετῆς νόμωι δυσωπουμένην. ἀπορήσαντος δὲ ἐπὶ πολὺ τοῦ Δαρείου καὶ μηδένα ἄνδρα δυνηθέντος εὐρεῖν, ὅτωι μὴ καὶ παθεῖν λυπηρὸν τι συνηνέχθη, γέλασαντα συνήθως τὸν Δημόκριτον εἰπεῖν ἴτι οὖν, ὦ πάντων ἀτοπώτατε, θρηγεῖς ἀνέδην ὡς μόνος ἀλγεινῶι τοσοῦτῳ συμπλακεῖς ὃ μηδὲ ἓνα τῶν πώποτε γεγόντων ἄμοιρον οἰκείου πάθους ἔχων εὐρεῖν;.

The anecdote contains a mass of detail helpful in tracking the biographical mind at work. Democritus’ propensity for tombs returns here as a leitmotif to the larger theme of death and the afterlife. According to

Philodemus, Democritus wrote about tombs, and more specifically that, since death was a great void, it was foolish to concern one's self with the richness of beauty of one's tomb. This, Philodemus explains, was partly because physical strength and beauty died also.¹¹²

A telling remark, as is the fact that Darius' wife has no name in the story and is referred to simply as beautiful or "the beauty."¹¹³ Significant, too, is the use of *δυσωπεῖν* by both Philodemus and Julian. In Philodemus, it refers only to the state of distress brought about by the sight of decay and putrefaction; in Julian, to the constraint laid upon the dead person's shade to return when properly summoned.¹¹⁴ Darius' faith in Democritus' power to return the dead further alludes to the reputation of Democritus' work on the next world. Philodemus tells us it discusses the manifestations of physical death, while Proclus states that it was a discussion of counterfeit death and means of revival from them. Proclus' description is the more rational counterpart of the biographical tradition that speaks of restoration of the dead by philosophers. He explains such cases of revival, *αναβιώναι*, as recovery from faints or from blows; in Julian's letter, Democritus promises to *αναβιώσασθαι* Darius' wife. In Democritus' case, belief in this superhuman power is strengthened by the atomic theory that underlies the issue, that the death of the soul, like that of the body, is not instantaneous.¹¹⁵ Although the theories themselves are lost, later authors comment on his belief that the body retains, for some little while, both life and perception.¹¹⁶ Life that remains dormant yet still animate in a seemingly lifeless body can be rekindled, brought back, if one understands and thereby controls the forces of life and death. Empedocles brings back the woman Pantheia; Pythagoras travels freely between our world and the next; and Democritus is asked to bring the dead back to life.¹¹⁷ Like Empedocles, Democritus was thought to control the elements and in particular the winds; his ability to control and direct the elements gives him superhuman power, translated here into the ability to control and direct the forces of life and of death.

In the last two anecdotes, a curious trait of Democritus has twice been mentioned, his tendency to laugh. The people of Abdera characterize his laughter as indiscriminate and Hippocrates as sadistic and depraved; Democritus' laughter in Julian's letter mocks the futility and absurdity of Darius' request. At best, his laughter there can be called indiscriminate or inappropriate; at worst, it partakes of the sadism and depravity noted by Hippocrates. But however we take it, that laughter is part of a larger biographical tradition, examined in the next section.

The Laughing Philosopher

Democritus the Laughing Philosopher was a character widely known in the ancient world, and several sources discuss Democritus' tendency to laugh on any and all occasions.¹¹⁸

44. That man laughed at everything, on the grounds that there was reason for laughter in every human affair. (Hippolytus *Refut.* 1.13.2 = DK 68A40)

οὔτος ἐγέλα πάντα, ὡς γέλωτος ἀξίων πάντων τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποις.

45. Heraclitus . . . was always weeping, miserable about everything. . . . Democritus, on the contrary would always laugh. . . . What is the source of this passion? Everything was laughable or lachrymose. (Seneca *de ira* 2.10.5)

Heraclitus . . . flebat. . . . Democritus contra auint numquam sine risu in publico fuisse. . . . ubi istic irae locus? Aut ridenda omnia aud flenda sunt?

Democritus' characterization as the Laughing Philosopher comes, of course, from his work;¹¹⁹ biographically speaking, it is a concrete and caricatured expression of his theory of εὐθυμία or "tranquility" or more popularly, "cheerfulness." Diogenes Laertius, who distinguishes Democritus' εὐθυμία from Epicurean ἡδονή defines it as a state in which:

46. The end of action is tranquility, which is not the same as pleasure, as some have mistakenly said, but a state in which the soul continues calm and even, undisturbed by any fear or superstition or other emotion. This Democritus calls well-being (εὐθυμία) and many other names. (DL 9.45)

τέλος δ' εἶναι τὴν εὐθυμίαν, οὐ τὴν αὐτὴν οὖσαν τῆι ἡδονῆι, ὡς ἔνιοι παρακούσαντες ἐξεδέξαντο, ἀλλὰ καθ' ἣν γαληνῶς καὶ εὐσταθῶς ἡ ψυχὴ διάγει, ὑπὸ μηδενὸς ταραττομένη φόβου ἢ δεισιδαμμονίας ἢ ἄλλου τινὸς πάθους. καλεῖ δ' αὐτὴν καὶ εὐεστῶ καὶ πολλοῖς ἄλλοις ὀνόμασι.

The only other name Diogenes Laertius gives us is εὐεστῶ, well-being; other sources speak of ἀθαμβία, lack of wonderment, and ἀτάραχος, tranquility or freedom from disturbance. But the doctrine of Democritean "cheerfulness" seems to have been confused by many ancient authors with

the equally misunderstood Epicurean concept of ἡδονή, in which ἀταξία, tranquility, played an important part.¹²⁰

All these terms should be taken, of course, as states of the soul rather than the body.¹²¹ However, ἡδονή, in popular terms, came to be understood as the pursuit of pleasure, as hedonism. Democritean tranquility, first misrepresented as cheerfulness, was further associated with the popular notion of Epicurean hedonism. The confusion, in light of Democritus' obvious valuation of spiritual over physical pleasure, seems absurd, until we remember the debasement of Epicurean philosophy to simple hedonism. Nor should we underemphasize the "common tendency to associate Democritus with Epicurus,"¹²² or a biographical system that equates Democritus with Epicurus, cheerfulness with hedonism. From these, it is a small step to the Laughing Philosopher, especially if the characterization is presented by the Cynic philosophers who represent the laughter as a valid philosophical response to the absurdity of human nature.¹²³

The biographical tendency for caricature and simplification helped, of course, with the confusion of philosophical terms and doctrines.¹²⁴ Cicero seems to have been the first to characterize Democritus as the Laughing Philosopher; the characterization was soon to take its sharpest form in representational anecdotes that pair and contrast Democritus and Heraclitus as Laughing and Weeping.¹²⁵ Previously we saw that Heraclitus' tears and Democritus' laughter were presented as opposite moral and philosophical responses by Sotion; the two philosophers themselves, however, were not emphatically contrasted.¹²⁶ It was Sotion's student Seneca who first presented the contrast between the two philosophers themselves and who made their tears and laughter indicative of their philosophical systems.¹²⁷ This theme was to enjoy great popularity in the Roman world, although with variable motives and implications. Seneca presents the contrast several times in his work; his sympathies, like those of his fellow Stoics, lay ultimately with Democritus and laughter, while Heraclitus is ultimately, if gently, ridiculed for his tearful response to the human condition.¹²⁸ There is a suggestion too, on Seneca's part as on Hippocrates' anecdotal one, that Democritus' laughter was sadistic since inspired by human misery and vanity, further implied in Juvenile's brief portrait of Democritus.¹²⁹ It was Lucian, however, who was to give the greatest comic expression to the theme, which by his day had become a contrast between philosophical schools, in his *Vitarum Auctio*, *the Auction of Doctrine*.¹³⁰

Here, Zeus with the help of Hermes, auctions off ten philosophers who represent ten important philosophical schools. The auction is nearly over;

Heraclitus and Democritus remain to be sold.¹³¹ Zeus then decides to sell them as a pair; their opposition, symbolized by their tears and laughter, makes them a single unit. In the excerpt that follows, both philosophers exchange words with a potential buyer:

47•

Buyer: Zeus! What a difference is here! One of them does nothing but laugh, and the other might be at a funeral, he's all tears. You there! What's the joke?

Democritus: You ask? You and your affairs are one big joke.

Buyer: So! You laugh at us? Our business is a toy?

Democritus: It is. There's no taking it seriously. All is vanity. The mere exchange of atoms in an infinite void.

Buyer: Your vanity is infinite, you mean. Stop that laughing, you fool. And you, my poor man, what are you crying about? I must see what to make of you.

Heraclitus: I am thinking, my friend, upon human affairs, and well may I weep and lament, for the doom of all is sealed. Hence my compassion and sorrow. For the present, I think not of it; for the future—the future is all bitterness, conflagration and destruction of the world. I weep to think that nothing abides. All things are whirled together in confusion. Pleasure and pain, knowledge and ignorance, great and small; up and down they go, the playthings of time.

Buyer: And what is time?

Heraclitus: A child, and plays at knuckle bones and blind man's bluff.

Buyer: And men?

Heraclitus: Are mortal gods.

Buyer: And gods?

Heraclitus: Immortal men.

Buyer: What's this? Riddles? Nuts to crack? You're a very oracle of obscurity.

(Lucian *Vit. Auct.* 13–14)¹³²

In the dialogue, two men and two entire philosophical systems are reduced to caricature and quotation; Democritus' response is incessant laughter and atomic commentary on the human state, while Heraclitus weeps without ceasing, refers to the final conflagration of the human race, and tells riddles.¹³³ The satire depends greatly on atomic and Heraclitean theory, to the point of echoing individual vocabulary and style.¹³⁴ In so

doing, it encapsulates the biographical method, using dialogue rather than anecdote to illustrate the characteristics of its subjects by the illustrative paraphrasing of their work.¹³⁵ Democritus' theory of εὐθυμία is part of his doctrine of moderation and his corresponding insistence on intellectual or spiritual pleasure, expressed in laughter. True εὐθυμία or spiritual tranquility leads one to proper conduct, intellectual, physical, and moral, not to the inappropriate and malicious laughter that the dialogue suggests. Misinterpretation of the doctrine leads to a characterization of Democritus as a contemptuous man, given to laughter and to ridicule, as Heraclitus' sober statements lead to his characterization as gloomy and weeping.¹³⁶ The tendency to simplify and to give philosophical thought concrete form and expression result in our Laughing and Weeping Philosophers; a taste for representational meeting, especially in the contrast of opposing schools of philosophical thought, leads to their meeting on the auction block.

Among the Tyrants

The philosopher-tyrant topos, as noted earlier, is a constant of philosophical biography.¹³⁷ For Democritus, we have more than a single incident that illustrates this theme, for Democritus not only advised Darius but also was educated by Xerxes' wise men. In the close of Julian's letter, discussed in citation 43, we find thoughts instructive for interpretation of the topos as a whole, although the letter is formally addressed to Julian's correspondent: "even though it was necessary to say these things to Darius, a barbarian and a man without education, you, being Greek and a man who truly honors education, must find relief in yourself." (Julian *Ep.* 201 b–c = DK 68A20).

Although this thought is not explicitly formulated elsewhere, it shapes and informs all such encounters between all philosophers and all tyrants. Tyrants, like women, children, and slaves,¹³⁸ serve as foils for the philosopher in a particularized way to contrast Greek intellectual achievement and cultural pride by the tyrants lack of intellectuality and culture. Their lavish wealth and grandeur, rejected by the philosophers to a man, are ever set in contrast to the simple intellectual life chosen by the philosophers.¹³⁹ The tyrants' very desire for knowledge is a source of ridicule, and their lavish offers to the philosophers, their promises of a life of ease and extravagance in return for wisdom, are always refused.¹⁴⁰

The biographers were irresistibly drawn to the contrast offered here:

the philosopher, unconcerned with temporal affairs with which the tyrant must, of necessity, concern himself incessantly.¹⁴¹ Tyrants often symbolize the greatest temporal authority, yet seem always to lack spiritual or intellectual authority, while the reverse is true for the philosophers. Philosophers were often characterized as vague or absentminded, with a mind above the more base and practical aspects of life, while tyrants are men of immense worldly power. The tyrant exults in unlimited power; philosophers are ardent democrats who refuse even hereditary kingships and who fight for freedom and constitutional powers. The tyrants' power extends to the power of life and death. Philosophers, who share these powers through their knowledge, use them only to restore life, never to take it away. Biographers, then, were inevitably attracted to the literary opportunities offered by such dramatic contrasts, although an even greater contrast underlies their anecdotes, that between barbarian and Greek.

The eternal, and to the biographers inherited, conflict between east and west, or barbarian and Greek, is the factor that underlies and drives these anecdotes. Greek philosophers, via the biographers, pit their intellectual powers and achievements against the wealth and temporal power of the tyrant and always win, their triumph an intellectual analogy to the Parthenon centaureomachy and amazonomachy that symbolize the triumph of the rational and civilized west over the irrational and barbarous east. The tyrants, although wealthy and possessed of great power, are foolish, uneducated, and ineffectual; the philosophers, although without power or material resources, are educated, cultured, and intellectual. The anecdotes reveal, as Stuart has it, the "advantages of sobriety over excess, simplicity over luxury, justice over injustice."¹⁴² In such anecdotes, figures like "the king of Persia" come to represent effeminate extravagance and slavery; representational meetings as early as Solon and Croesus in Herodotus show the Greek scorn and hatred for those who would enslave them.¹⁴³ The early poets and philosophers who fraternize with tyrants are censured for doing so. The archaic philosophers reject them to a man.¹⁴⁴ The anecdotes that speak of Democritus and tyrants indicate a midpoint in the tradition: he fraternizes with and educates the tyrant, as do later philosophers such as Plato, but ridicules and frustrates him as do the archaic philosophers. Democritus, because of a biographical tradition, perhaps, that speaks of greater contact with the east, becomes the personification of the philosopher who ridicules the tyrant. Or perhaps, once again, a philosophical statement paved the biographers' way.

48. [Democritus said that] he would rather discover a single cause than be the king of Persia. (fr. 118)

Δ. γοῦν αὐτός, ὥς φασιν, ἔλεγε βούλεσθαι μᾶλλον μίαν εὐρεῖν αἰτιολογίαν ἢ τὴν Περσῶν οἱ βασιλείαν γενέσθαι

Having examined the biographical evidence for Democritus' character, we now turn to that aspect of his life that best illustrates philosopher and philosophy, his death.

THE DEATH OF DEMOCRITUS

After the anecdotes that tell of the meeting between Democritus and Hippocrates, Diogenes Laertius gives us his own epigrammatic version of the death of Democritus.

49. Who, indeed, was so wise, who wrought so vast
 a work, as all-knowing Democritus achieved?
 Who, when death appeared, kept him three days,
 and with the hot steam of bread, entertained him. (DL 9.43 =
 AP 7.57)

καὶ τίς ἔφυ σοφὸς ὧδε, τίς ἔργον ἔρξε τοσοῦτον.
 ὅσον ὁ παντοδαῆς ἤνυσε Δημόκριτος;
 ὃς Θάνατον παρεόντα τριῖ ἡμέρα δώμασιν ἔσχεν
 καὶ θερμοῖς ἄρτων ἄσθμασιν ἐξένισεν.

Diogenes Laertius fleshes out these bare details with a story taken from Hermippus and Hipparchus.

50. When he was now very old and near his end, his sister was vexed that he seemed likely to die during the festival of the Thesmophoria and that she would be prevented from paying fitting worship to the goddess. He bade her to be of good cheer and ordered hot loaves of bread to be brought to him every day. By applying these to his nostrils, he contrived to outlive the festival; and as soon as the three festival days had passed, he let go his life from him without pain, having then, according to Hipparchus, attained his one hundred and ninth year. (DL 9.43)

ἤδη ὑπέργηρων ὄντα πρὸς τῷ καταστρέφειν εἶναι. τὴν οὖν ἀδελφὴν λυπεῖσθαι ὅτι ἐν τῇ τῶν θεομοφῶρων ἑορτῇ μέλλοι τεθνήξασθαι καὶ τῇ θεῷ τὸ καθήκον αὐτῇ οὐ ποιήσιν· τὸν δὲ θαρρεῖν εἰπεῖν καὶ κελεύσαι αὐτῷ προσφέρειν ἄρτους θερμοὺς ὁσημέραι. τούτους δὴ ταῖς ῥῖσι προσφέρων διεκράτησεν αὐτὸν πῆν ἑορτήν· ἐπειδὴ δὲ παρήλθον αἱ ἡμέραι (τρεῖς δ' ἦσαν). ἀλυπότατα τὸν βίον προήκατο, ὡς φησιν ὁ Ἰππαρχος, ἐννέα πρὸς τοῖς ἑκατὸν ἔτη βιούς. ἡμεῖς τε εἰς αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ Παμμέτρῳ τοῦτον ἐποιήσαμεν τὸν τρόπον·

Democritus, like many other philosophers, achieves a ripe old age in spite of the many obstacles put before him.¹⁴⁵ Typically, for Democritus, his family is once more a limiting or destructive factor in his life: his brothers had conspired to cheat him, now his sister objects to his dying. Note that it is not his death itself that disturbs her, but only the timing of it. If Democritus dies according to his schedule rather than hers, she will be unable to attend the festival. To appease her, Democritus temporarily wards off death by inhaling hot bread vapors for the prescribed time and dies in rather boring fashion for such a colorful figure. But as usual, the details, which seem so incidental, add up to a characteristically illustrative death, in which atomic theory and even bread and women have their appointed place.

We begin with the festival of the Thesmophoria, which celebrated the mysteries of the Two Goddesses, Demeter and Kore, and which represented a rare occasion of freedom for Greek women. During the festival, a woman could legitimately, with full civic and religious sanction, escape the confines of husband, home, and children.¹⁴⁶ The ritual activities and offerings associated with the Thesmophoria suggest fertility as well as rebirth. The festival lasted for three days and excluded men and walking children. Sexual abstinence was required of the women participants for the full three days of the meeting, and other pleasures were curtailed; the women camped, without beds or tables, and the whole of the second day was spent in fasting, mourning, and prayer. A feast and sacrifice crowned the third day, which was also an occasion for women to indulge in ritual verbal abuse of each other and also, occasionally, of men. In literary representations of the festival, hostility toward men becomes the principle purpose and activity of the festival. As depicted by comic authors such as Aristophanes, men were captured and threatened with castration.¹⁴⁷ The sheer mention of the Thesmophoria, then, would be enough to conjure up

the slightly ridiculous image of hostile women, bent on some form of emasculation. Democritus' sister, by her desire to attend, is clearly a woman of that sort, as her peevish response to her brother's impending death so clearly demonstrates.

And Democritus, despite his many charms, could never be accused of an enlightened view of women. On the contrary: in his work he spoke not only of the liabilities of family relationships in general, but specifically of the problem of women in such relationships.

51. A woman must not practice argument. For this is dreadful. (fr. 110)

γυνή μὴ ἀσκέιτω λόγον· δεινὸν γάρ.

52. The brave man is not only he who overcomes the enemy, but who is stronger than pleasures. Some men are masters of cities but enslaved to women. (fr. 214)

ἀνδρεῖος οὐχ ὁ τῶν πολεμίων μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ τῶν ἡδονῶν κρέσσων.
ἔνιοι δὲ πολλίων μὲν δεσπόζουσι, γυναίξει δὲ δουλεύουσιν.

53. To be ruled by a woman is the final outrage for a man. (fr. 111)

ὑπὸ γυναικὸς ἄρχεσθαι ὕβρις εἴη ἂν ἀνδρὶ ἐσχάτη.

Indeed it is for Democritus. His sister practices her argument to some effect and even rules his life and the time of his death, although he does not suffer, or does only symbolically, the male fate generally considered worse than death. On the other hand, the three days of fasting presents no problem to the philosopher who advocated moderation.

54. Luck provides a rich table, wisdom an adequate one. (fr. 210)

τράπεζαν πολυτελέα μὲν τύχη παρατίθῃσιν, ἀταρκέα δὲ σωφροσύνη.

55. Thrift and fasting are beneficial, so too expenditure at the right time. But to recognize it is characteristic of a good person. (fr. 229)

φειδώ τοι καὶ λιμὸς χρηστή· ἐν καιρῷ δὲ καὶ δαπάνη· γινώσκειν δὲ ἀγαθοῦ.

The table, in the form of hot bread vapors, is adequate to keep Democritus alive, and perhaps it is the right time for fasting. Even so, the broad

circumstances of the anecdote suggest a classic case of death by rebound, in which the philosopher's statements have fatally come back to haunt him.¹⁴⁸ However, Democritus' cheerful acceptance of his sister's domestic tyranny is also significant; his serene acceptance of her demands echoes his remarks on proper behavior for the elderly.

56. A pleasant old person is one who is agreeable and serious of speech. (fr. 104)

γέρων εὔχαρις ὁ αἰμύλος καὶ σπουδαιώμυθος.

57. Strength and beauty are the virtues of youth, while moderation is the flower of old age. (fr. 294)¹⁴⁹

ἰσχὺς καὶ εὐμορφίη νεότητος ἀγαθά, γήραος δὲ σωφροσύνη ἄνθος.

Democritus' mildness toward his sister, like his cheery acceptance of her demands in the face of his death, stem equally from this theory of εὐθυμία as from atomic theory. Democritus gives us his own views on life and death, which we see clearly reflected in the anecdote.

58. [To live badly is] not to live badly but to spend a long time dying. (fr. 160)

οὐ κακῶς ζῆν εἶναι, ἀλλὰ πολὺν χρόνον ἀποθνήσκειν.

59. People are fools who live without enjoyment of life. (fr. 200)

ἀνοήμονες βιοῦσιν οὐ τερπόμενοι βιοτήι.

60. People fleeing death pursue it. (fr. 203)

ἄνθρωποι τὸν θάνατον φεύγοντες διώκουσιν.

61. Fools long for life because they fear death. (fr. 205)

ἀνοήμονες ζωῆς ὀρέγονται [γήραος] θάνατον δεδοικότες.

62. Fools, fearing death, want to live to be old (fr. 206)

ἀνοήμονες θάνατον δεδοικότες γηράσκειν ἐθέλουσιν.

Democritus, demonstrably not a fool, neither flees death nor pursues it; his philosophy, both physical and ethical, precludes such notions. But he

does, to appease his sister, delay it, either by recourse to hot bread vapors, as Diogenes Laertius relates, or by smelling honey, as a variant source describes.¹⁵⁰

Honey, as we have seen, played an important part in Democritus' life. Honey, synonymous with sweetness in the ancient world, was used to symbolize Democritus' theory of subjectivity in taste, a theory that moved later commentators to such fury. The importance, and controversy, of the theory is further seen in two anecdotes that connect honey and death, in the variant death described here, and in a source that says Democritus advocates not cremation of the corpse but mummification by means of honey.¹⁵¹ Interesting, all three are further linked by either the presence of women or death, and all three demonstrate biographical method, which transforms abstract philosophical thought into concrete, simplified form.

That Democritus could keep death at bay for a full three days is hardly surprising; he was, after all, another of those philosophers credited with control of the elements, especially wind or air. The significance of the vapors, whether bread or honey, however, is a point crucial to our decoding of the anecdote. For the death as presented by Diogenes Laertius is a satirical transformation of Democritus' philosophy and in particular the atomic theory of respiration. We have not, of course, any of his own words on the subject, but we do possess comments by later authors on Democritus' theories of life, breath, and soul.

63. For according to him, the spherical atoms, which from by nature can never remain still, being moved, tend to draw the whole body after them and thus set it in motion. (Arist. *de anim.* A2.406b15 = DK 68A104)
 κινουμένας γάρ φησι τὰς ἀδιδαιρέτους σφαίρας, διὰ τὸ πεφυκέναι μηδέποτε μένειν, συνεφέλκειν καὶ κινεῖν τὸ σῶμα πᾶν.

According to Aristotle, the atomists regard respiration as characteristic of life; as the surrounding air compresses the body and begins to expel those atoms that give movement. Because they themselves are never without motion, a reinforcement of these atoms coming in from outside, in the act of respiration, is required. They prevent the expulsion of interior atoms by counteracting the compressing and consolidating force of the outside, and bodies continue to maintain this resistance.¹⁵² For Democritus in particular, Aristotle further tells us that,

64. Democritus says that among animals that breathe, there is a result of their breathing, and alleges that it prevents the soul from being crushed

out . . . he identifies the soul with the heat, regarding both as first forms of spherical particles. He says, therefore, that when these particles are being crushed by the surrounding air, which is pressing them out, breathing intervenes to help them. (Arist. *de resp.* 4.471b30 = DK 68A106)

Δ. ὅθι μὲν ἐκ τῆς ἀναπνοῆς συμβαίνει τι τοῖς ἀναπνέουσι λέγει, φάσκων κωλύειν ἐκθλίβεσθαι τὴν ψυχὴν οὐ μέντοι ὡς τούτου γ' ἕνεκα ποιήσασαν τοῦτο τὴν φύσιν οὐθεν εἴρηκεν . . . λέγει δ' ὡς ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ θερμὸν ταῦτόν, τὰ πρῶτα σχήματα τῶν σφαιροειδῶν. συγκρινομένων οὖν αὐτῶ ὑπὸ τοῦ περιέχοντος ἐκθλίβοντος, βοήθειαν γίνεσθαι τὴν ἀναπνοήν.

Democritus, like other atomists, taught that life was maintained in the body by breathing.¹⁵³ In Aristotle's comments, we see that the soul atoms and "heat" (particles of air outside the body) share a spherical, similar form. The soul atoms are especially small and quick and therefore in constant danger of being breathed out. The external air, however, is also made up of soul and mind atoms that, when breathed in, create and maintain a pressure that keeps the internal soul atoms from being exhaled.

Respiration, then, is a necessary condition of life, for when respiration ceases, the tension keeping the soul atoms inside the body ebbs, and the soul atoms, without this tension, slip outside the body and scatter into the air. Death occurs when respiration ceases and the soul atoms are breathed out.¹⁵⁴ Democritus, of course, knows that he has nothing to fear from death, since his soul atoms will simply scatter on the four winds. But he also knows that as long as he can keep "feeding" these souls atoms with "hot" vapors, they will not disperse and he will not die, at least until the festival is over. Democritus uses his knowledge of the mechanics of life and death to maintain, and then to end, his life; his death, like his life, becomes an act of will.

Throughout, we have seen the enormous industry and determination that Democritus brought to both his emotional and his physical life. The biographers, if satirical in their interpretations, were accurate in their knowledge and application of Democritus' philosophy; his actions, absurd and laudable, are the product of the soul's control over the body, the intellect's control over the emotions. And this continues to the end: Democritus' death is deliberate, the result of rational thought and decision, not one of physical necessity. Democritus often spoke of the necessity of intellectual control over those of the senses; the following fragments emphasize his hierarchy of body and soul.

65. Happiness and unhappiness are the province of the soul. (fr. 170)

εὐδαιμονίη ψυχῆς καὶ κακοδαιμονίη.

66. It is right that men should value the soul rather than the body; for perfection of soul corrects the inferiority of the body, but physical strength without intelligence does nothing to improve the mind. (fr. 187)

ἄνθρωποις ἀρμόδιον ψυχῆς μᾶλλον ἢ σώματος λόγον ποιεῖσθαι ψυχῆς μὲν γὰρ τελεότης σκήνεος μοχθηρίην ὀρθοῖ, σκήνεος δὲ ἰσχύς ἄνευ λογισμοῦ ψυχὴν.

Citation 66 reminds us of the tradition that Democritus blinded himself in an effort to perfect the soul by correcting the body. Or, as Lucretius suggests, with the waning of his once dominant intellectual powers, Democritus preferred to disregard his still powerful physical body and commit suicide. As in the last anecdote, his death by suicide would be a conscious act. That the soul or mind has this directive quality¹⁵⁵ is made clear in citation 66, as in citations 37, 38, and 39, which speak of the necessity to control one's desires which if uncontrolled, blind the soul. Citation 65 expresses Democritus' belief in a higher sphere of existence, where pure thought and an inspired soul transcend the usual human boundaries, where the mind and soul guide, evil is an impossibility, and life an interpretation of the good. In death as in life, Democritus' actions are dominated by his intellectual will; his intellect, guided by the soul, remains "calm and strong, undisturbed by any fear or superstition." Truly, nothing in his life became him like the leaving of it; his death is the finest example of his philosophy.

Diogenes Laertius rounds off his life of Democritus with a discussion of his theories, a short précis for the principles of atomic theory, a bibliography of Democritus' work, and a list of other men with the same name, as is usual in his lives. Our chapter on Democritus, world traveler, madman, wondering visionary, poet, scoffer, miracle worker, blind, cheerful, and always laughing, ends also. On the third day, the festival over, the loaves no longer fragrant, Democritus happily lets go his soul and rests, free from family, money troubles, and the satire of biographers, becoming another benevolent image of which the air was full.