Lucretius, Book 5: Questions for Study and Discussion

How does the gift of Epicurus surpass that of the gods Ceres and Bacchus? of Hercules?

What subject matter does L. summarize, and what subject matter does he announce, on pp. 138-9?

What flaws prove that the world is not of divine origin?

What is the nature of the gods and why are they not involved in our world?

What examples illustrate Lucretius’ theory of cosmic equilibrium?

What force was responsible for setting cosmogony into motion?

What are the main phases in Lucretius’ cosmogony?

How does L. account for the stability of the earth?

How does L. explain stellar motion? night? dawn? solar eclipses? lunar eclipses?

What is responsible for the origin of plant and animal life?

What sorts of creatures were unfit to survive? What creatures never existed?

In what ways was the life of primitive man better than contemporary man? worse?

What fears afflicted primitive man? From what fears was he exempt?

What were the first advances of civilization? What is Lucretius’ theory of the origin of human language?

What does L. think is the origin of religious belief?

What process leads to human progress?
Lucretius, Book 6: Questions for Study and Discussion  
(S. Mace)

1-95 (Epicurus; banishment of superstition; invocation):

What new elements occur in this passage in praise of Epicurus?

96-534 (Meteorology):

Why does L. go to such lengths to explain thunder, lightning, and thunderbolt?

What are the two causes of rain?

535-1089 (Miscellaneous phenomena on earth):

What are the principal causes of earthquakes?

By what mechanism does the sea remain constant in size?

How does L. approach the question of the flooding of the Nile?

What is the traditional explanation for the swooning of birds at Avernus? How does L. explain the phenomenon?

Can you summarize Lucretius’ explanation for the properties of magnets? (Good luck.)

1090-1286 (Plague; Athens):

Is there anything earlier in Book 6 that prepares for Lucretius’ long digression (in imitation of the Greek historian Thucydides) on the plague in Athens in 430 B.C. (i.e. material on either Athens or disease)?

What, according to L., was the psychological toll of the plague?

What image does he leave us with at the end of the poem?

Do you think that L. intended to finish his poem this way or not? Why?