Some additional suggestions

The pitfalls of the comparative assignment

Q. I’m worried the comparative assignment will distract me from creating a strong interpretative argument. I don’t want to end up using space in my paper on summarizing and tabulating comparisons and correspondences, when I ought to be focusing on making an interpretative argument about these data rather than on compiling them.

A. Yes, you should be wary of that danger. Start by developing an interesting argument about Lucretius. Then, use Empedocles (or Heraclitus) selectively to illuminate or further explore a few points that come up in your interpretation, looking at how similar ideas or situations get worked out, and then trying to articulate how this puts Lucretius into a sharper perspective. In class today (May 15), we discussed how, within the broad topics of stability and form (among many other fruitful comparative topics), interesting perspectives were bound to arise through this method.

Don’t refute Lucretius

If necessary, reread the guidelines to Paper #1 on the reasons why you don’t want your point to be the weakness of Lucretius’ arguments or ideas. If attention to comparatively weaker and stronger parts of the argument will help you develop a positive understanding and appreciation of how Lucretius’ arguments work and (more importantly) what is important to Lucretius, fine. But space devoted to no goal beyond exploding Lucretius’ obvious falsehoods is space taken away from understanding and appreciating Lucretius (which is the assignment).