

CHAPTER ELEVEN

INDIRECT EVIDENCE

§ 1. ARISTOTLE 'ON DEMOCRITUS'

(i)

At this point, I should perhaps conclude the argumentative part of my study directly, for all the obvious sources have been ransacked, and the argument, such as it is, has a certain conceptual simplicity, which any further and more speculative considerations may serve only to blur and to weaken.

However, to do so would not be altogether honest.

In argument, there is often a temptation to deploy only those factors which, one hopes, will stand up well to criticism, even though they may not in fact have been the most fertile influences on the formation of one's conviction or opinion.

So it is in this case. There remains one piece of evidence which a sceptical opponent could easily dismiss, but which I find myself, at least in the light of the more formal argument which has preceded, particularly persuasive.

(ii)

So far I have said scarcely anything of Aristotle's work on Democritus, other than that a fairly lengthy extract from it is copied out by Simplicius.

This extract, however, deals precisely with the nature and behaviour of the atoms, and the manner of their movement in the void. Clearly, this is precisely the kind of context which would have provided Simplicius with his notion of atoms moving in the void 'according to weight', if that conjunction of ideas is not wholly the product of his own reflection.

Needless to say, there is no specific mention of weight in the extract which Simplicius quotes.¹ If there had been, the extract

¹ Contrast Cherniss, *ACP* 211 n.253, *cf.* p.17 n.1 above.

would have been given pride of place in our earlier analysis. But I think it possible that the notion of weight, and even of movement in some way ‘according to weight’, is in fact implicit in the following lines, and was perhaps known to be so by Simplicius.

De caelo 294.33-295.24 (fr. 208 Rose = DK 68A37): ὀλίγα δὲ ἐκ τῶν Ἀριστοτέλους περὶ Δημοκρίτου παραγραφέντα δηλώσει τὴν τῶν ἀνδρῶν ἐκείνων διάνοιαν. ‘Δημόκριτος ἡγεῖται τὴν τῶν αἰδίων φύσιν εἶναι μικρὰς οὐσίας τὸ πλῆθος ἀπείρους· ταύταις δὲ τόπον ἄλλον ὑποτίθησιν ἄπειρον τῷ μεγέθει... νομίζει δὲ εἶναι οὕτω μικρὰς τὰς οὐσίας, ὥστε ἐκφυγεῖν τὰς ἡμετέρας αἰσθήσεις. ὑπάρχειν δὲ αὐταῖς παντοίας μορφᾶς καὶ σχήματα παντοῖα καὶ κατὰ μέγεθος διαφορᾶς. ἐκ τούτων οὖν ἤδη καθάπερ ἐκ στοιχείων γεννᾶσθαι καὶ συγκρίνεσθαι τοὺς ὀφθαλμοφανεῖς καὶ τοὺς αἰσθητοὺς ὄγκους. στασιάζειν δὲ καὶ φέρεσθαι ἐν τῷ κενῷ διὰ τε τὴν ἀνομοιότητα καὶ τὰς ἄλλας τὰς εἰρημένας διαφορᾶς, φερομένας δὲ ἐμπίπτειν καὶ περιπλέκεσθαι περιπλοκὴν τοιαύτην, ἣ συμψαύειν μὲν αὐτὰ καὶ πλησίον ἀλλήλων εἶναι ποιεῖ. ... ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον οὖν χρόνον σφῶν αὐτῶν ἀντέχεσθαι νομίζει καὶ συμμένειν, ἕως ἰσχυροτέρα τις ἐκ τοῦ περιέχοντος ἀνάγκη παραγενομένη διασείση καὶ χωρὶς αὐτὰς διασπείρη.’ λέγει δὲ τὴν γένεσιν καὶ τὴν ἐναντίαν αὐτῇ διάκρισιν οὐ μόνον περὶ ζώων, ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ φυτῶν καὶ περὶ κόσμων καὶ συλλήβδην περὶ τῶν αἰσθητῶν σωμάτων ἀπάντων. εἰ τοίνυν ἡ μὲν γένεσις σύγκρισις τῶν ἀτόμων ἐστίν, ἡ δὲ φθορὰ διάκρισις, καὶ κατὰ Δημοκρίτον ἀλλοίωσις ἂν εἴη ἡ γένεσις.

‘The transcription of a few sentences from Aristotle’s treatise *On Democritus* will give us an idea of how these people thought.

“Democritus considers that the identity of things everlasting is such as to make them tiny substances, infinite in number, and he then supposes <that> for these <substances is needed> a place, other <than themselves>, which is infinite in extent. ...

“These substances he reckons are so tiny that they fall wholly below the range of our sensible perceptions. They have all kinds of shapes and all kinds of figures and also differences in size.

“Objects which we can and do see, and <in general>