Geography and Origins in Lucretius' *De rerum natura*

This paper explores the intersection between Lucretius' natural explanations for the workings of the universe and his scientific understanding of geography. The lands and their regions, place and space — these are critical to the nature of the things which are generated and conducted in them (*DRN* 1.469–72), as Lucretius tells us in his treatment of ontology. Matter also matters. This paper argues that geography contributes to both and, specifically, that geography is significant because of the particular atoms which different places contribute to the creatures which are born there. In support of these arguments, this paper presents evidence from Lucretius' rationalist critique of the Earth as Mother, his account of cosmogony and phylogenesis, and his use of place names, patronymics, and other markers of locality. This sheds light on the relationship between a species and its breeds.

The paper also develops the implications of this analysis for our understanding of how Lucretius rationalizes myth. Scholarship has focused on his treatment of the traditional understanding of the gods as allegories. The paper argues that its understanding of geography results in a way of reading mythic origins as a reliable guide to reality, if decoded correctly. For example, the traditional view of the Romans as warlike, due to their descent from Mars and Venus, is redeployed by Lucretius as indicating a verifiable reality — namely that the matter of Italy, its geographical essence, provides the conditions and substance for the coming into being of the Roman people as such.