

**Filippo Del Lucchese, *Monstrosity and Philosophy: Radical Otherness in Greek and Latin Culture*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019. 432 pp, cloth. \$140.00.**

*Monstrosity and Philosophy* is a genealogical reconstruction of the notion of monstrosity in Graeco-Roman philosophy. The aim of Del Lucchese's analysis is to chart the development of discourses of monstrosity from myths, and expose their diverse nature up to Neoplatonism (3<sup>rd</sup> century CE).

The book primarily examines the reception of the monstrous in the ancient world, and is constituted by a foreword and eight chapters, all dealing with the reception of the monstrous in the ancient world. The foreword lays out the key topic of the book: Del Lucchese sets out to "reconstruct the concept of monstrosity in classical thought from its earliest beginnings, through pre-Platonic and Attic philosophy to the Hellenistic systems, arriving finally at Neoplatonism" (2).

Chapter 1, "The Myth and the Logos," describes monstrosity in its mythical beginning. The emergence of Logos (rationality) is predicated on the all-encompassing nature of Myth (irrationality). The two concepts necessarily go hand in hand: there cannot be monstrosity without order in the same way there cannot be order without monstrosity. The interplay of order and monstrosity was to be appreciated in Greek tragedy, especially in Aeschylus. In Del Lucchese's view, therefore, monstrosity has an ambiguous status, trapped between the benign and the violent.

Chapter 2, "The Pre-Platonic Philosophers," describes the treatment of the monstrous by Anaxagoras, Empedocles, and Democritus. Anaxagoras's materialist construal of the world stipulates that the monstrous does not originate from the action of a higher power, but it is inherent in everything. As a result, according to Anaxagoras, monstrosity is the result of how matter is moulded. Matter contains different quantities and proportions that can be shaped in diverse ways. Del Lucchese makes a very convincing case because it excludes the work of an outside agent and emphasizes the innate nature of monstrosity. Like Anaxagoras, Empedocles believes that the world is the result of the fight between two elements constantly at variance with each other, Strife or Discord and Friendship or Love. The incessant cyclical conflict between the two causes monsters to appear. Empedocles does not frown upon the cyclical nature of the world, but considers monstrosity to be necessary because, without it, the world would not exist. This second chapter ends by focussing on Democritus's philosophy. His philosophical system stands out because it is based on the notion of chance. Given the fact that the cosmos is not ruled by a general principle, then monstrosity is the result of chaos and difference. Thus, monstrosity is the result of the chance organization of the world.

Chapter 3, "Plato," describes the way monstrosity is constructed by the Athenian philosopher. The Platonic philosophical program constitutes a major challenge to the one articulated by his predecessors. In Plato's philosophy, monstrosity is unavoidably frowned upon because it is a threat to an orderly world. The demiurge creates and organizes a world dominated by the "beautiful" and the "good." The dialectic between the realm of the ideas and the world of the imperfect copies is stipulated: anything that is terrestrial is inherently disorderly and bad. And so must be monsters, the products of terrestrial existence.

Chapter 4, "Aristotle," concerns itself with the encyclopaedic thinking designed by the Stagirite, a system which was to influence Western philosophy for centuries. Aristotelianism's account of monstrosity is one that emphasises the ontology of monstrosity. If a *telos* ("aim") is to be appreciated in nature, then it means that the monstrous has a specific role to play in the make-up of the world itself. Unlike Platonism, in which there is an unbridgeable hiatus between forms and copies, Aristotelianism welcomes the presence of agents which work against the normal structure of the

world. On Aristotle's view, anything that runs counter to the pre-established order of the world shows its diversity and multiplicity. The acknowledgement of such variety is necessary because, otherwise, perfection and order would destroy the multifarious nature of the world.

Chapter 5, "Epicurus and Lucretius," analyzes the response of both philosophers to Aristotle and Plato. On account of the dualism between forms and copies and the teleological disposition of the world, Plato argues that monsters run counter to the pre-ordained structure of the cosmos. Aristotle echoes Plato by positing the exceptional and, at the same time, unavoidable nature of monsters, as they account for diversity in nature. Epicurus and Lucretius, instead, argue for the necessity of the monstrous. Monsters should not be thought of as the exception, but the norm, because such is the nature of the world. If one espouses Epicurean and Lucretian's arguments, then this means accepting the views previously held by Anaxagoras and Empedocles, which had emphasized the material and cyclical order of the world.

Chapter 6, "Stoicism," investigates Stoic attitude towards the monstrous. Stoicism negates the idea of transcendency and does so by ordering the universe according to degrees of perfection. This means that Stoicism reintroduced a new kind of teleology into the philosophical discourse, since allows for experiencing the imperfections of the world as a way to appreciate a divine plan. These very imperfections are necessary because this diversity of nature enables monstrosity to be understood. An important case, in this respect, is made by Pliny the Elder. He argues that the monstrous, the beautiful, and the good co-operate in allowing the divine to manifest in the world. Therefore, according to the Stoic argument, the monstrous is one of the facets of nature (and thus of a divine principle within the world).

In Chapter 7, "Scepticism," the author contends that Sceptic arguments question the nature of principles as important as justice or truth. Thus, such a position means that it is not possible to provide a conclusive definition of things, and it is not possible to define monstrosity because there is no clear definition of morally important concepts. Since judgements are not universal, opinions differ, and there is no such thing as an objective standard, then it is inevitable for humankind to embrace *epoché* ("suspense"). Since embracing *epoché* is the only option amidst the multifarious structure of the world, then the next step is the achievement of *ataraxia* ("quietude"). So, the argument goes, if there is no consensus on the way the world works, then one cannot establish the nature of monstrosity. A compelling example in this regard is the one of the comet. While we all know how the sun works, we are all amazed at the comet, because it is a portent of the gods.

Chapter 8, "Middle and Neoplatonism," concludes what has been a very careful and well-argued exposition. Del Lucchese prefaces his final chapter with a necessary caveat: finishing on a Neoplatonic note means acknowledging both the influence of Christianity and the wide range of African and Eastern elements that shaped a new take on the monstrous. Proclus's argument on the nature of evil makes Del Lucchese's exposition very compelling (248). Proclus contends that evil is not bad *per se* but it is necessary to cause the perfection of the Good. Ironically, the Good cannot exist without its contrary and, thus, evil is necessary for the development of the Good. Evil is a parasitic and inferior structure that creeps into the Good, in the same way that monstrosity creeps into the world to exist and show the diversity of nature. By doing so, the author acknowledges the inevitable presence of Good and Bad in the world.

Del Lucchese's argument is that the theorisation of the monstrous and otherness in the Graeco-Roman world needs tackling systematically, because every school has its own conception of what it means to be considered as Other and Monstrous. What he tries to outline is the diverse responses articulated by the Graeco-Roman world to what a monster is. The author has managed to make his

point cogently, because he has shown that the diverse treatment of monstrosity and otherness in Graeco-Roman thought coincides with our own: thinkers like Plato were suspicious of monsters, and philosophers like Pliny the Elder welcomed their presence.

If you are approaching teratology for the first time, I recommend perusing Filippo del Lucchese's text. He has written a real masterpiece for all those who intend to understand the wide range of philosophical approaches to defining the Monstrous, Otherness and Evil in the classical world. The text is well written and clearly organized to allow readers to follow the exposition of the author. Multidisciplinary scholars can benefit from *Monstrosity and Philosophy*; literary critics, classicists, philosophers, and scholars in religious studies can appreciate the diversity of the scholarship and the author's superb grasp of the subject matter. I can only hope that Del Lucchese will cover the interplay of the monstrous and philosophy from the Middle Ages up to now in future work.

Andrea Di Carlo, University College Cork