

TWO OBSERVATIONS ON LUCRETIUS 2.251–2.257

I

It has been observed that in lines 251–252 and 254–255 Lucretius uses phraseology which can be paralleled from the many extant definitions in Greek and Latin of the Stoic fate and necessity¹). As far as we can judge from the extant sources, all these definitions are modeled chiefly on those attributed to Chrysippus. We read in Gellius (*N. A.* 7.2): *In libro enim περι προνοίας quarto είμαρμένην esse dicit (sc. Chrysippus) φυσικήν τινα σύνταξιν τών όλων έξ αίδίου τών έτέρων τοίς έτέροις έπακολουθούντων και μεταπολουμένων άπαραβάτου ούσης τής τοιαύτης έπιπλοκής*. Gellius also adjoins his Latin version: *Chrysippus . . . "Fatum est" inquit "sempiterna quaedam et indeclinabilis series rerum et catena volvens semetipsa sese et implicans per aeternos consequentiae ordines, ex quibus apta nexaque est.*" Another definition is found in Theodoretus 6.14 (*SVF* II, 916): *και Χρύσιππος δέ ό Στωικός . . . είπε . . . είναι τήν είμαρμένην κίνησιν αίδιον συνεχή και τεταγμένην*.

Chrysippus, in turn, must have inherited the notion of strict causality from Zeno, the founder of Stoicism. The latter states, for instance: *τό μέντοι πρώτον πύρ είναι καθαπερεί τι σπέρμα, τών άπάντων έχον τούς λόγους και τας αίτίας τών γεγονότων και τών γιγνομένων και τών έσομένων τήν δέ τούτων έπιπλοκήν και άλήθειαν και νόμον είναι τών όντων άδιάδραστόν τινα και άφυκτον* (*SVF* I, 98). Even some of the language of Chrysippus resembles that of Zeno: to the *άπαραβάτου . . . έπιπλοκής* of Chrysippus corresponds the *έπιπλοκήν . . . άδιάδραστόν τινα και άφυκτον* of Zeno.

1) For instance by Robin in A. Ernout and L. Robin (editors), *Lucrece. De Rerum Natura*, I (Paris, 1925) 249–250, by M. Pohlenz, *Die Stoa*³, II (Göttingen, 1964) 59 and by D. J. Furley in *Two Studies in Greek Atomists* (Princeton, 1967) 174. Most of these definitions are given in Hans (Ioannes) von Arnim's *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, II (Leipzig, 1902) 264–298, Nos. 912–1007 (henceforth given as *SVF*); some additional references can be found in A. S. Pease (ed.), *M. Tulli Ciceronis De Natura Deorum*, I (Cambridge, 1955) 339–341, notes to 1.55

Although agreeing on the Stoic phraseology in the lines of Lucretius, scholars have not agreed on its implications. Pohlenz asserted that Lucretius was arguing here against the Stoic *heimarmene* and that this argument had been formed by Epicurus in his reaction against the teachings of Zeno²). The majority of scholars, on the other hand, for instance Bailey and Boyancé, have held that Lucretius in 2.251 ff. reflects the attack of Epicurus on the determinism implicit in the system of Democritus³). This latter position has been refined by Furley, who points out that because of our ignorance of the precise opinion of Democritus on this question we cannot exclude the possibility that the attack was directed against a later atomist, e. g., Nausiphanes⁴).

It seems to me that the evidence definitely is against the position of Pohlenz. His view is incompatible with some of the language of Lucretius. Line 2.253 indicates that the attack of Lucretius in 2.251–255 is directed not against the Stoics but rather against an atomist refusing to believe in the Epicurean *swerve*. It seems very unlikely that Lucretius, or his source, would have elected to attack here the Stoic system for its lack of declining atoms. This conclusion is strengthened by lines 284 ff. They, too, take the atomic universe for granted. The opponent under attack is not asked to agree to the existence of the *semina*. He is requested to assent (*fateare*) only to the *swerve*.

On the other hand, the presence of the Stoic terminology in Lucretius has not been adequately dealt with by those who hold, in my opinion correctly, that the attack of Lucretius was directed against a non-Epicurean atomist. There are two possibilities. Lucretius may have, in transposing his atomist sources into Latin, elected here to use Latin derived from the Stoic definitions of fate rather than to translate the atomists' Greek into faithful Latin. Alternatively, the Stoic language was present already in the source of Lucretius and he put it into Latin hexameters.

The first possibility seems to me much less plausible. It is difficult to think of any reason that could have induced Lucretius to render of his own volition the terminology of the atomists into the Latin equivalent of the Greek of the Stoics. It seems far easier to assume that the Stoic terminology was present already in the

2) Above, n. 1, Pohlenz.

3) Cyril Bailey, *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus* (New York, 1928) 318 and F. Boyancé, *Lucrèce et l'Épicurisme* (Paris, 1963) 115–116.

4) Furley, above, n. 1, p. 175.

atomist sources of Lucretius. If so, Democritus could not have been the atomist attacked in 2.251–255. If Lucretius, or his Epicurean source, were attacking the determinism of Democritus, they would surely present it not in Stoic language but in that of Democritus himself. However, if we assume with Furley that the target could be a later Democritean, then a hypothesis explaining the Stoic terminology can be attempted. The following explanation seems to account for the evidence: Lucretius in lines 251–255 is refuting an atomist who opposed the swerve yet made use of Stoic philosophy and language. I am assuming here, as I explained above, that in refuting this atomist Lucretius has presented the atomist's views in the atomist's own Stoic terminology. If so, this atomist must have written after the first appearance of the Stoic views and language on *fatum* used by Lucretius in 2.251–255. In consequence, we must date the atomist to the period of Zeno or later. This atomist must have noticed that the Stoic doctrine of the chain of causes was compatible with the implications of the motion of the Democritean atoms but destructive of the Epicurean dogma of the unpredictable swerve. He consequently borrowed this anti-Epicurean weapon, Stoic language and all. When the source of Lucretius later attacked this anti-swerve atomist, or his school, he not unnaturally saw no need to expend any effort on converting the Stoic language into that of the Epicureans.

Because of the dispute between those who believe that Epicurus was the only source of Lucretius and those who think that he used the writings of later Epicureans⁵) it would be useful to inquire whether or not Epicurus could have been the source of lines 2.251–255. The solution turns on the decision whether Zeno or Chrysippus is responsible for the language of the various Stoic definitions of fate mentioned above. If we follow the impression conveyed by the great majority of our sources, then we have to attribute the authorship to Chrysippus, at least with respect to linguistic expression. Now, Chrysippus without any doubt started writing after the death of Epicurus in 271–270 B.C.⁶) because he died during the 143rd Olympiad (208–204 B.C.) at the age of 73⁷). Therefore, if the wording of the Stoic definitions of fate

5) A useful survey of scholarly opinion is now available in Jürgen Schmidt, *Lukrez und die Stoiker* (Diss. Marburg/Lahn, 1975) 3–17.

6) He died during the Athenian archonship of Pytharatus in 271–270 B.C. (Diog. of Laert. 10.15). On the date see B. D. Meritt, "Athenian Archons 347/6–48/7 B.C.," *Historia* 26 (1977) 174.

7) Diog. of Laert. 7.184.

originated with Chrysippus, the Stoic colouring of the lines of Lucretius could not have been derived from an attack of Epicurus himself on a post-Democritean atomist.

If, however, the language of the Stoic definitions is partly or wholly that of Zeno, a contemporary of Epicurus, then, of course, Lucretius may have derived lines 251–255 from a work of Epicurus. This work would have contained Epicurus's refutation of a Democritean atomist who was making use of the argumentation of Zeno.

To sum up, lines 2.251–255 in Lucretius are directed not against a Stoic but rather against an atomist attacking the Epicurean swerve in Stoic terminology. This terminology dates the atomist to a period no earlier than the end of the fourth century B.C.; therefore, he cannot have been Democritus. Whether or not Epicurus was the source of Lucretius here cannot be determined with certainty. If the language of the extant Stoic definitions of *heimarmene* originated with Chrysippus, then Epicurus is excluded because of chronology.

II

In 2.257–2.258 the manuscripts read:

unde est haec, inquam, fatis avolsa voluptas
per quam progredimur quo ducit quemque voluntas

The meaning of the phrase *libera . . . voluptas* has always seemed obscure to the majority of scholars, who have preferred with Lambinus and Francesco Medici⁸⁾ to exchange the *voluptas* and *voluntas*. However, in more recent years MacKay, Barra, and Mayotte Bollack have attempted by different arguments to defend the *voluptas* of the *mss.*

Since the thought of Lucretius is still imperfectly elucidated, one must certainly try especially hard to make sense of the transmitted text. Nevertheless, it seems to me that in this instance the reading of the *mss.* cannot be successfully defended and *voluptas* cannot stand in 257. The reading *voluntas* has been defended against the readings *voluptas* and *potestas* by Büchner⁹⁾. I shall

8) The priority of Medici is mentioned in K. Lachmann's commentary to Lucretius 2.257 (Berlin, 4th edit., 1882).

9) K. Büchner, "Präludien zu einer Lukrezausgabe," *Hermes* 84 (1956) 227–229 or in his *Lukrez und Vorklassik* (Wiesbaden, 1964) 152–155.

attempt to show by a different argument why the meaning of lines 2.251–293 indicates that in 2.257 *voluntas* is the best reading. I shall also adduce in favour of *voluntas* as passage of Cicero apparently previously overlooked and, finally, oppose the arguments of M. Bollack, MacKay, and Barra in favour of *voluptas* in 2.257.

The first argument in favour of *voluntas* is derived from the content of 2.251–293. In lines 2.251–257 Lucretius asks: *si . . . nec declinando faciunt primordia motus principium . . . libera . . . unde . . . animantibus exstat . . . voluptas* (or *voluntas* or *potestas*)? The presence of *unde* indicates that the poet assumes a causal relationship, direct or indirect, between the atomic swerve, the cause, and the *libera voluptas, voluntas, or potestas*, the effect. The same relationship is asserted again in 2.284–287. There Lucretius states that something in the lines preceding 2.284 forces us to admit that in atoms, too, there must be an additional cause of motion, one distinct from the *plagae* and the *pondera: quare in seminibus quoque . . .* In 2.286 he refers to this something as *innata potestas*. This additional cause of motion in the atom is, of course, the swerve. He also states that this swerve is in an unspecified way the cause of this *innata potestas*. Now, the context indicates that this *innata potestas* is the same as the *quiddam in pectore nostro* (2.279–280) and more generally that faculty in us which allows us to move *nec tempore certo nec regione loci certa* (2.259–260). As stated by Lucretius (2.261), this faculty is, or resides in, the *voluntas*. In consequence, he has stated in 2.284–287 that the atomic swerve is, whether directly or indirectly, the cause of this *voluntas*. In lines 2.251–257 the atomic swerve was said by the poet to be the cause of the word at issue here: of the *voluptas*, the *voluntas*, or the *potestas* in 2.257. Since in 2.284–287 the swerve was shown beyond dispute to be the cause of *voluntas*, the structure of section 2.251–293 suggests that in 2.257, too, the swerve should be causally connected with *voluntas* rather than with *voluptas*. That there is correspondence between 2.251–257 and 2.284–287 cannot be denied. In lines 2.251–254 the poet states that observable phenomena postulate the existence of the atomic swerve. In lines 2.284–287 he asserts that he has at this point proved that this postulated swerve does indeed exist. Another argument against *voluptas*: If we accepted the reading *voluptas* in 2.257 the swerve would within the compass of a unified passage (2.251–293) be the cause now of *voluptas*, now of *voluntas*. Moreover, the reading *voluptas* in 2.257 would also lead to internal contradiction in 2.258–262. On that reading the phrase *per quam* states that the

actions *progredimur quo ducit quemque voluntas* and *declinamus item motus nec tempore certo nec regione loci certa* depend on the freedom of our *voluptas* (*libera . . . voluptas*). In other words, the unpredictability, hence freedom, of our motions would somehow be derived from the *libera voluptas*. However, in lines 2.261–262 it is clearly stated that this same freedom of motion depends on our *voluntas*: *nam dubio procul his rebus sua cuique voluntas principium dat . . .* The phrase *his rebus* is glossed in 2.262 by *motus*. In other words, the *his rebus* in 2.261 ought to encompass all references to movement of *animantes* in the immediately preceding context. Such movement is found in 2.258–259: *progredimur* and *declinamus*. In consequence, both *progredimur* and *declinamus* will now have derived their *principium* from the *sua cuique voluntas* rather than from *voluptas*. These difficulties disappear if *voluntas* is read in 2.257.

An additional argument in favour of *voluntas* in 2.257 is derived from Cicero, *De Fato* 20, a passage apparently not before adduced in the present context. It offers strong support for the emendation *voluntas*. In *De Fato* 9.20 we read: *at qui introducunt causarum seriem sempiternam, ii mentem hominis voluntate libera spoliata necessitate fati devinciunt*. The phrase *voluntate libera* in Cicero is identical with the *libera . . . voluntas* postulated by Medici and Lambinus for lines 256–257. Of course, by itself this similarity could easily be accidental and of little support to the conjecture of Medici and Lambinus. However, the contexts of the phrase *libera voluntas* in Cicero and Lucretius are also the same. The phrases *causarum seriem sempiternam* and *necessitate fati* in Cicero correspond to the Lucretian *ex infinito ne causam causa sequatur* (2.255) and *fati foedera* (254). Cicero, like Lucretius, is referring here to the Stoic *fatum* presented in the language of Chrysippus¹⁰). Cicero, when mentioning this *fatum*, also introduces the stock consequence of determinism: the impossibility of free will. This opposition between the infinite succession of causes and free will is also predominant in lines 2.251–293 in Lucretius.

We may, therefore, conjecture that both Lucretius and Cicero have drawn here on a topos of Hellenistic philosophy and have rendered similar or identical Greek into very similar Latin, including the term *libera voluntas*. We may even have here direct

10) For definitions see references above in n. 1.

dependence of Cicero on Lucretius. The poem of Lucretius preceded *De Fato*, composed in 44 B.C.¹¹), by some ten years.

As I mentioned previously, the manuscript reading *voluptas* has been recently defended by L. A. MacKay¹²), G. Barra¹³), and Mayotte Bollack¹⁴). It seems to me that their defence is not strong enough to overcome the arguments just derived from 2.251–293 and from Cicero.

MacKay defends the manuscript reading *libera . . . voluptas* by this argument: "But Lucretius is attempting to demonstrate free will (sc. in 2.257–258), not to assume it. The proof lies in the observable fact that we are free to pursue pleasure – at least, so he thinks and, as an Epicurean, must think. Whatever may be fated, enjoyment is not fated, but chosen. It is then *voluptas* which is properly described as *fatis avolsa*; *voluptas* is the general principle whose autonomy validates the free operation of *voluntas*; in particular actions *voluntas principium dat* (261–62). *Quo ducit quemque voluntas* (258) is explicitly picked up by *ubi ipsa tulit mens* (260)."

If I understand MacKay correctly, he is stating that the phrase *libera . . . fatis avolsa voluptas* is a circumlocution expressing the observable fact that we can freely decide to pursue *voluptas*. In other words, the phrase *libera . . . fatis avolsa* does not really qualify *voluptas*, the goal of our actions, but rather applies to the freedom of action the *animantes* enjoy when in pursuit of *voluptas*. MacKay's suggestion is certainly attractive because his explanation would allow us to keep the reading of the manuscripts without the need to understand and explain the obscure concept *libera voluptas* in the sense of an unfettered or unpredictable *voluptas*.

However, even if we accept as likely his interpretation, a difficulty remains. The freedom to pursue pleasure (MacKay's *libera voluptas*) is surely the same freedom that we find mentioned in 2.258–2.260: *progredi quo ducit quemque voluntas* and *declinare motus* unpredictably. This latter freedom is under the control of the *voluntas* and the *mens* (2.258 and 260). The former freedom (the *libera voluptas*) can obviously be under no other control. Yet,

11) M. Schanz and C. Hosius, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur*⁴, I (Munich, 1927), 517.

12) "Notes on Lucretius," *CP* 56 (1961) 104.

13) "Fatis Avolsa Voluptas," *RAAN* 39 (1964) 160–161.

14) "Momen mutatum, la déviation et le plaisir (Lucrece, II, 184–293)" *Cahiers de Philologie* I (1976) 163–189.

as determined by the phrase *per quam* the *libera voluptas* would be the cause or explanation of the free movements in 2.258–2.260: *libera . . . voluptas per quam progredimur . . . declinamus . . .* In other words, MacKay's interpretation of *libera voluptas* in combination with the normal meaning of *per quam* seems to force Lucretius into a tautology: the freedom of our will causes or explains the freedom of our will.

Perhaps the difficulties involved in MacKay's interpretation are no greater than the benefit of retaining the reading of the manuscripts. However, the additional weight of Cicero's testimony seems to tip the scales in favour of *voluntas* in 2.257.

Barra's defence of *voluptas* in 2.257 is not derived from a logical argument. He states that the combined evidence of Lucretius and Epicurus indicates that *voluptas* (sc. Venus) is at the beginning of both physical and moral life. The *clinamen*, too, he writes, to an extent initiates physical creation and, because of its connection with free will, is at the root of our moral life. In a word, writes Barra, "the reading of the manuscripts, *fatis avolsa voluptas*, corresponds perfectly to the Lucretian symbolism of Venus in which the goddess can appear, without forcing the Epicurean doctrine, truly the *ἀρχή*, the principle of physical life and, simultaneously, the presupposition of our moral life" (*op. cit.* 161).

This argument clearly lacks rigour. For instance, the role played by the swerve of atoms in physical creation and the role played by *voluptas* in relations between the sexes are only remotely similar. That both of them can be called *ἀρχή* does not necessarily entail identity or even close similarity. For instance, a man beginning to build a house could also be called an *ἀρχή*. Regarding the sphere of our moral life, Barra does not seem to notice that if *voluptas* is read in 2.257 then the *clinamen* in 2.253 is not connected, as postulated by him, with the *voluntas* but rather with the *voluptas*: if no swerve, then no *libera* and *fatis avolsa voluptas*! This observation does away with Barra's parallelism between *voluptas* – moral life and *clinamen* – free will – moral life because the reading *voluptas* removes the explicit connection between the swerve and *voluntas*. Moreover, even if we do not challenge Barra's parallelisms, they still are of no demonstrable value here because they do not pertain to the question whether we ought to read *voluptas* or *voluntas* in 2.257. They can coexist equally well with either reading.

It might be argued, of course, that Barra's juxtapositions,

even if lacking argumentative rigour, nevertheless correspond to some law of poetic creation. This could be true in the appropriate context. In lines 2.251–293, however, the subject matter and its treatment appear to be overwhelmingly philosophical. In such passages textual questions bearing on problems of doctrine should not be decided by arguments not valid in strictly philosophical discourse.

Mayotte Bollack's paper contains the most thorough defence of *voluptas* so far published. She appears not to have noticed, however, some of the difficulties entailed by the reading *voluptas* in 2.257. If this reading is kept then in 2.251–257 the atomic swerve is said to be connected with *libera . . . fatis avolsa voluptas*. Yet, in 2.284–287 the same swerve was found to be connected with the *innata potestas*; this *innata potestas* was, in turn, shown to be connected with *voluntas*, not *voluptas*. The parallelism between the two passages indicated that the *clinamen* in them ought to be causally related either to *voluptas* or to *voluntas* but not to both. In other words, if we read *voluptas* in 2.257 then the *innata potestas* in 2.286 must be connected not with *voluntas* but rather with *voluptas*. However, the context clearly determines that the *innata potestas* is related to *voluntas* (see, for instance, the explicit mention of *voluntas* in 2.276 and in 2.270). If so, then parallelism requires that the reading in 2.257 also be *voluntas*.

Bollack also has not noticed that if *voluptas* is read in 2.257 then both *voluptas* (by means of the phrase *per quam*) and *voluntas* would be stated within 2.257–262 to be the cause of unpredictable motion: *nam dubio procul his rebus sua cuique voluntas principium dat . . .* I discussed this contradiction in greater detail above and pointed out that it was eliminated if *voluntas* was read in 2.257. To sum up, Bollack's retention of *voluptas* leads to considerable internal contradiction. This contradiction could, perhaps, be tolerated if Bollack had presented a very strong independent argument establishing the necessity in Epicurean philosophy of the notion *libera . . . fatis avolsa voluptas*. Her account does not seem to contain such an argument. Moreover, the new evidence from Cicero adduced above constitutes another objection against *libera voluptas*.

At this point it appears that the reading *voluptas* in 2.257 cannot be successfully defended. If *voluptas* is excluded should we read *voluntas* or *potestas*, the emendation of Lachmann¹⁵)? The

15) Above, n. 8.

latter has been vigorously defended by Gerhard Müller¹⁶) and is the choice of Konrad Müller in his recent edition¹⁷). The cogency of G. Müller's arguments seems to depend on whether *voluntas*, for instance in 2.261, can by itself include the meaning free will or whether the ability to move unpredictably – *nec tempore certo nec regione loci certa* – is an *innata potestas* within the *voluntas*; in other words, does Lucretius here recognize a predictable manifestation of *voluntas* as well as an unpredictable one? It seems to me that the evidence either here, or elsewhere in Lucretius, for such a division within *voluntas* is inconclusive.

The main argument in favour of *voluntas* over *potestas* seems to be the Ciceronian parallel (*De Fato* 20) adduced above. It is also argued that the interchange of *voluptas* and *voluntas* in 2.257–258 is a more likely mistake than a scribe's writing *potestas* for *voluntas*¹⁸).

To sum up, the reading *voluntas* seems to have better external support than *potestas*; however, *potestas* would suit the thought of the passage equally well. If *voluntas* is preferred then, of course, the reading in line 2.258 will be *voluptas* rather than the *mss. voluntas*. With respect to *voluptas* in 2.257, its main, perhaps only, good defence is the manuscripts.

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16) G. Müller, *Die Darstellung der Kinetik bei Lukrez* (Berlin, 1959), 30, n. 1.

17) K. Müller, ed., *T. Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex* (Zurich, 1975).

18) For instance by Bailey in his commentary to this line.