

THE QUESTION OF *MENS* IN LUCRETIIUS 2.289

One of the most widely accepted emendations in Lucretius has been the change by Lambinus in 2.289 of the manuscript reading *res* to *mens*. For instance, of the major editors since Lachmann only Bockemüller, Merrill in his 1917 edition, and Martin in his Teubner editions have printed *res*. Also, few emendations in Lucretius are of equal significance for Epicurean doctrine because, as will be shown, some conclusions of important recent scholarship depend on the acceptance of the reading *mens*.

Surprisingly no scholar seems to have published an adequate discussion of the respective merits of *res* v. *mens* before the appearance of Furley's widely acclaimed book.¹ After some hesitation he preferred the emendation *mens* and on the strength of it derived from Lucretius important information about the Epicurean mind. According to him the weight of the soul atoms—the *pondus* in 2.288—can offer resistance to the *externa vis* (2.289) exerted on our minds by the blows of *simulacra*. This weight serves to prevent the atoms of our mind from being knocked into totally new patterns and ensures some continuity of behaviour.² Furley's interpretation depends, of course, on the reading *mens* in 2.289.

Another novelty of Furley, also dependent on the reading *mens*, is his view on the connection of the swerve (*clinamen*) with the *necessus intestinus* mentioned in 2.289–90. He considers this 'necessity' to refer to the inborn structure of our mind and states that it is the swerve of 2.292–3 which changes this inborn constitution and, in this way, breaks the *consecutio causarum* described in 2.251–4.³

These original interpretations have now been accepted by Rist.⁴ In consequence, the question of the acceptability of this emendation is of no small philosophical significance. Without it we have no direct evidence for the thesis of Furley that the weight of the soul's atoms may contribute to the stability of our mental life. Also, without the reading *mens* we do not have direct support from any source for Furley's assumption that the *clinamen* changes the original inherited arrangement of the atoms of our minds.

In this paper I propose to demonstrate that an analysis of lines 2.251–93 in Lucretius indicates that the reading *mens* in 2.289 cannot be correct and that a return to *res* is necessary. The elimination of *mens* from the text would, of course, deprive of support those parts of the reconstruction of the Epicurean doctrine of mind which depend on this emendation.

My demonstration rests chiefly on two observations. Firstly, the syntax of lines 2.284–90 indicates that the *semina* in 2.284 must be identical with the *res* or *mens* in 2.289. Secondly, line 284 shows that Lucretius in 251–93 differentiates clearly between the mind of the *animantes* and atoms (*semina*). This is the text of 2.284–93:⁵

¹ David J. Furley, *Two Studies in the Greek Atomists* (Princeton, 1967).

² Op. cit., pp.186 and 231.

³ Op. cit., pp.194 and 231–6.

⁴ J. M. Rist, *Epicurus. An Introduction* (Cambridge, 1972), pp.92–4.

⁵ J. Martin, T. Lucreti Cari, *De Rerum Natura*, Leipzig⁵, 1969).

quare in seminibus quoque idem fateare necessest,
 esse aliam praeter plagas et pondera causam 285
 motibus, unde haec est nobis innata potestas,
 de nihilo quoniam fieri nihil posse videmus.
 pondus enim prohibet ne plagis omnia fiant
 externa quasi vi; sed ne res ipsa necessum
 intestinum habeat cunctis in rebus agendis 290
 et devicta quasi cogatur ferre patique,
 id facit exiguum clinamen principiorum
 nec regione loci certa nec tempore certo.

289 res Ω : mens *Lamb.* || 291 quasi J: quaei OQU
 quasei *Diels*: quasi id *Lachm.*: quasi hoc *Mun.* | cocatur
 O² U: cocatus Q | ferri O¹

It is not difficult to show that the *semina* in 2.284 must be identical with the *res* or *mens* in 2.289. In line 285 the *plagae* and the *pondera* are stated to belong to the atoms (*semina*) in 2.284. In line 288 the word *pondus* occurs again: *pondus enim prohibet* . . . The particle *enim* means that the ground or reason for something previously said is being introduced. It was stated in lines 285–6 that it is not correct to assume that in atoms weight and blows are the only causes of motion. The *enim* in 2.288 indicates that a reason is now being given why a third cause of motion is required. Therefore, the term *pondus* in 2.288 is obviously identical with the *pondera* in 2.285, and is a property of the *semina* in 2.284.

On the other hand, the syntax makes it clear that the *pondus* in 2.288 had the same relationship to the *res* or *mens* in 2.289 as it does to *semina* in 2.284. As was cogently pointed out by Furley¹ in his convincing criticism of the insufficiencies of Giussani and Bailey, the phrases *externa* . . . *vi* (2.289) and *necessum intestinum* must have the same point of reference, i.e. the *res* or *mens*. In consequence, *pondus* in 2.288 must inevitably be a property of the *res* or *mens ipsa*. But syntax and meaning already demonstrated that the same *pondus* was identical with the *pondera* in 2.285 and, therefore, was a part of the *semina* in 2.284.

Consequently, Lucretius intended the *semina* in 2.284 to be identical with the *res* or *mens* in 2.289. If the reading *mens* is adopted, it follows that the *semina* must be considered here as a synonym of *mens* or, in other words, that the poet was not making any firm distinction between the mind as an entity or *concilium* and its constituent atoms.

Conversely, it is clear that if Lucretius considered the *concilium* called *mens* and the atoms to be different concepts belonging to different levels of existence, then he could not use interchangeably the term *semina* and the term *mens* with reference to the mind.

Now, the form and content of lines 2.284–7 demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt that Lucretius did differentiate clearly between the mind and the atoms. In line 284 the words *quare in seminibus quoque* state that the *semina* are being contrasted with what has preceded. The context indicates that the *semina* are being contrasted more immediately with the *quiddam in pectore nostro* (lines 279–80) and more generally with that faculty in us which allows us to move *nec tempore certo nec regione loci certa* (259–60). In other words, the

¹ Op. cit., p.139.

semina are being opposed to the minds of the *animantes*. That Lucretius is viewing the mind and the *semina* as two separate entities results also from the words *unde haec est nobis innata potestas* in 2.286. This phrase logically requires at least two participants: a source and a recipient. The same need for two entities inheres in the phrase *de nihilo . . . nihil . . .* (2.287).

If, then, Lucretius clearly distinguishes between the realm of the *concilium* 'mind' and that of atoms, he could not have only a few lines farther used the terms *semina* and *mens* interchangeably. Therefore, we must abandon this emendation and recognize that any Epicurean doctrine derived from this reading lacks support in the text.¹

With *mens* eliminated, the subject of 2.289, whether expressed in the Latin by *res* or some possible future emendation, must be the atom. This was maintained by Furley² and is also an inescapable concomitant of my argument.³ It is difficult, however, to pin down the exact meaning of *res ipsa* here. It seems that nowhere in Lucretius can *res* be demonstrated to bear beyond any doubt the meaning 'atom'. However, Lucretian usage indicates that *res ipsa* may refer to the main point, the chief topic of a passage. In 6.906–1089 the poet attempts to explain magnetism. In lines 6.906–16 he announces the problem: how can

¹ Rist (op. cit., pp.92–3) thinks that the reading *mens* and Furley's interpretation of it are also supported by Cicero, *De Fato* 23: 'Hanc Epicurus rationem [sc. the swerve] induxit ob eam rem, quod veritus est ne, si semper atomus gravitate ferretur naturali ac necessaria, nihil liberum nobis esset, cum ita moveretur animus ut atomorum motu cogeretur.' Rist states (op. cit., p.92 n.3): 'Furley's position and the reading *mens* are strengthened by this passage, since Cicero is saying that the swerve is to prevent the dominance of the mind by internal necessity, that is, by weight, and that is exactly Furley's point.' Rist's defence of Furley seems to me to be open to two objections. First, he assumes that the weight of the atom in this Ciceronian passage is closely related to the internal necessity in Lucretius 2.289–90. This assumption appears to disagree with the position of Furley, who identifies the *necessus intestinus* not with the weight of the soul atoms, but rather with 'the original constitution of the psyche' (op. cit., pp.232 and 194). That this original constitution ought to be determined by the weight of the soul atoms does not seem to be supported by the sources. Lucretius attributes the different original temperaments in living beings not to the weight of the soul atoms, but rather to their shapes (3.317–18) or, perhaps, to the shapes of groups of atoms (so Furley, following Bailey, op. cit., p.200). In consequence, the Ciceronian passage does not appear to bear directly on Furley's interpretation.

Secondly, there is no need to assume that

the passage of Cicero is necessarily connected, as believed by Rist, with Lucretius 2.289 ff. Its wording fits, perhaps, even better lines 2.251–7. Cicero does not have a phrase to correspond to the *necessus intestinus* in 2.289–90, whereas the Ciceronian *liberum* corresponds to the *libera* in Lucretius 2.256. Also, the phrase *si semper* occurs both in the Ciceronian passage and in 2.251. Furthermore, in Cicero the swerve-less motion of any atom is connected with the question of the freedom of the will; precisely the same connection is present in 2.251 ff. Lines 2.289 ff. resemble less the passage of Cicero, especially if *mens* is read. Then it is not atoms in general, but rather specifically the mind, considered as an assemblage of soul atoms, that may lack the *clinamen*.

² Op. cit., p.179.

³ The reading *res* in the meaning 'atom' has recently been defended by two scholars. Lillian U. Pancheri in *Apeiron* 8.2 (1974), 49–55, states that the argument against *mens* resides in the observation that the unexpected switch from the atoms or *semina* in 2.284 to the *mens* in 289 would constitute a mixture of referents between two levels of reality not worthy of the skill of Epicurus in the use of arguments by analogy (op. cit., p.53).

Mayotte Bollack in 'Momen Mutatum', *Cahiers de Philologie* 1 (1976), 184–6 also defends *res* in the sense of 'atom'. However, I am not certain that her arguments, if I have understood them, conclusively demonstrate the superiority of the reading *res* over *mens*.

the magnet attract iron? In lines 917–20 he states that the answer cannot be given immediately; some subsidiary matters must be discussed first:

Hoc genus in rebus firmandumst multa prius quam
ipsius rei rationem reddere possis . . .
(6.917–18)

Here *ipsius rei* refers to the main topic: the explanation of the magnet's powers. The subsidiary matters are discussed in lines 921–97. In these lines Lucretius twice again uses the words *res ipsa*:

Quippe etenim, quamquam multas hoc pertinet ad res
noscere, cum primis hanc ad rem protinus ipsam,
qua de disserere adgredior, firmare necessest . . .
(6.938–40)

Hoc etiam superest, ipsa quam dicere de re
adgredior, quod dicendum prius esse videtur.
(6.979–80)

In both these passages *res ipsa* again refers to the main topic of the whole section, the magnet.

It seems to me that in 2.289, too, *res ipsa* is being used to refer to the protagonist of the whole section (2.251–93), in this case the atom with its *clinamen*. In lines 2.251–5 Lucretius states what he wants us to believe: the atoms swerve. Lines 2.256–83 do not deal directly with atoms, the chief topic. These lines correspond roughly to the subsidiary matters in the disquisition on the magnet (6.921–97). However, in 2.284 Lucretius returns to the atoms, his main topic. Just as in the section on the magnet, Lucretius may have wanted in this passage to distinguish the chief topic under discussion from subsidiary matters by referring to it by the term *res ipsa* (2.289).

As was mentioned above, the argument of this paper requires that the *res ipsa* in 2.289 refer strictly to an atom or atoms. One of the objections to this interpretation has been the observation that in that case atoms—the *res ipsa*—would be saved from internal necessity by the swerve of atoms in 2.292—an awkward expression. However, it seems to me that the awkwardness is, at the worst, very small. There is no awkwardness in the meaning itself, because no objection can be made to the statement: atoms are freed from internal necessity because of the swerve (although the swerve is that of the atoms). An objection on grounds of style could, perhaps, be justified if we said: atoms are freed from internal necessity because of the swerve of atoms. What would be offensive here, however, is only the repetition of the word 'atoms'—a stylistic point. Now, in the actual words of Lucretius no such objectionable repetition can be found: *res ipsa necessu intestino caret propter exiguum clinamen principiorum*. The objections of the critics could be justified only if a repetition had been present in the actual Latin of Lucretius: e.g. *principia necessu intestino carent propter clinamen principiorum*.

Other possible objections to *res* in 2.289 have been enumerated by Furley, who states with fairness that he is not sure whether they are wholly convincing either individually or collectively.¹ Moreover, the objection which Furley appears

¹ Op. cit., p.180.

Here Lucretius states that our motions are (or can be) unpredictable and are under the control of our mind, i.e. are not unpredictable to us but rather to outside observers. I assume that this unpredictability is one of principle, rather than one asserted by an ignorant observer. In other words, our motions may not be predictable even to an observer able to calculate all the consequences of every motion of every atom in the universe. If the mind is able to initiate such motions at will, it cannot be in the grip of a *necessus intestinus* . . . *cunctis in rebus agendis*. According to lines 2.251–62 such a *necessus* would entail the rule of an *ordo certus* and *fati foedera*, both predictable, at least in principle.

It appears, then, that Furley's major objection is not well founded. To sum up, the valid objections to *res* used to refer to an atom are superficial; the reading *mens*, on the other hand, appears to be excluded by the direct words of Lucretius.

University of Western Ontario

I. AVOTINS