

Thoughts about Humean Compatibilism

Post by "Cassius" of January 28, 2022 at 6:37 PM

Simon it's been my observations that extremely deep conversations about free will rarely lead many people to change their minds, but I do think it is useful to be clear about Epicurus' position and I think we can help there:

[Quote from SimonC](#)

- In a universe with a strong, perhaps dualistic, free will, a moral person could commit a crime and still remain a moral person. To claim otherwise is to claim that a moral person has something in him that prevents him from being immoral or that a person that has committed a crime is no longer a moral person, which is conceding that actions are in some sense deterministic.

I think Epicurus would disagree with this, because I think this implies that "crime" and the definition of a "moral person" are somehow absolute. I have no difficulty thinking that people who commit crimes can still be a moral person. I consider myself a moral person, and I speed on the highway on a fairly regular basis. It's simply not consistent with the Epicurean perspective on justice or on the nature of the universe to get hung up on moral absolutes.

[Quote from SimonC](#)

I guess I don't see what is so bad about determinism.

I think a large part of the answer here is that Epicurus was a very practical person and not as concerned about satisfying logicians as he was in helping ordinary people. He seems to have thought (and I would agree) that it is extremely damaging to a normal person's hope for happiness for them to come to believe that they are the slaves of any kind of fate whatsoever and that they can have no effect on their futures no matter what they do. Of course there are indeed things that cannot be changed: death, and the fact of no life after death. But there are plenty of things that normal people can do during their lives to live more happily, and hamstringing them with complicated philosophical views that - despite what they perceive - they have no control over their futures is not a very constructive way to go, from that perspective.

[Quote from SimonC](#)

The swerve does get rid of the predictability of the universe. Perhaps this is what Epicurus was worried about? That it would be difficult to insist we have free will if "fate"

is true.

I would say "not at all." Epicurus held that most of the universe is indeed deterministic, and that it is in only limited circumstances relevant to us, such as in the existence of agency in higher animals, that it "breaks through" so as to effect us. I highly recommend the AA Long article "Chance and Natural Law in Epicureanism" for a discussion of this aspect of the swerve.