What's the Difference Between Chance and Fate to an Epicurean?

Post by “C. Florius Lupus” of January 23, 2019 at 2:21 PM

I see you really have an intuitive aversion against Stoicism.  This is the true Epicurean spirit!

However I see that both philosophies have a lot in common, more than either side would admit. Even Seneca and M. Aurelius cannot avoid quoting Epicurus from time to time. The difference between both is that Stoic physics has become obsolete, Epicurean physics has not.

Re: 1a: One of the major obstacles to *ataraxia* (ΑΤΑΡΑΞΙΑ / happiness) these days is worrying about things that we do not need to worry about. Even science is concerned too much about irrelevant issues (like your example the "far side of the moon") .

As Epicurus stated in PD11: "If fears relating to the heavens did not disturb us, and if the terrors of death did not concern us, and if we had the courage to contemplate the natural limits of pain and of desire, we would have no need to study the nature of things."

Why do we need unverifiable theories about black holes, if we have never encountered one?

And regarding ethics: Why do we need to demand social justice for workers in India or China, if we never met one? A lot of unnecessary conflict and suffering is caused by getting involved in things that do not affect us and that we therefore cannot understand in their complexity.

This is what I would call "things indifferent". It is helpful to understand the concept in order to achieve *ataraxia*.

Re: 2: Randomness applies to microscopic details. This is where our freedom lies. On a statistical level, the deterministic laws of cause and effect apply.

It is impossible to predict how an individual will act. But it is quite easy to predict how a large group of people will act. It is impossible to tell, if a particular man is taller than a particular woman without specific data about their height. But it is easy to say that a large group of men will be taller than a large group of women.

Determinism applies to statistics and macroscopic scales. Randomness and probability apply to individual instances.

As individuals we have free will, as a group our behavior is predictable.

This is why the **swerve** is important on a quantum scale, while macroscopic events obey strict causality.