

Can Determinism Be Reconciled With Epicureanism? (Admin Edit - No, But Let's Talk About Why Not)

Post by "waterholic" of September 28, 2022 at 3:52 AM

[Quote from Onenski](#)

Now, by the way, I've never understood how the swerve can give us freedom. How random and subtle movements of the atoms can make macro-organisms to have the power of decision and action? Maybe you've discussed this in another thread, but I don't find it 😊

As [Cassius](#) said, this field is very confusing, but also very relevant and interesting not just for understanding the ancient thought but also for having an Epicurean approach to every day life.

My understanding is that Epicurus introduced the concept of swerve to avoid adopting full determinism (or fatalism, to be honest I still don't follow the intricacy of the difference). A key part of the philosophy is absence of anything non-material in the body, including our thoughts, feelings and decisions. These are all driven by material non-divisible particles that are in motion. But since, the logic goes, their movements are geometric and predictable (no movement comes from "outside the system"), the consequence is that every decision one makes, every thought one has, every event that happens, is in theory pre-determined (imagine a super computer that calculates the position of every atom at every moment). This is why Epicurus introduced the "swerve" - a randomness in the system that is unpredictable.

With the modern vantage point "the swerve" combined with the idea of the void are remarkable achievements of pure deductive reasoning. Although quantum mechanics does not exactly work as imagined by Epicurus, the introduction of chance/randomness is essential for understanding how the world works.