

Eric's personal outline

Post by “Eric” of September 23, 2024 at 7:44 AM

Continuation of my outline:

My thoughts on the nature of the universe

NOTE: I am aware that this post does not go with Epicurus' ideas about the nature of the universe and gods. The continuing post on ethics will be much more in line with Epicurus' words.

I have only experienced a material universe through my senses and feelings, and there is nothing I have experienced which felt spiritual/supernatural that couldn't be explained by materialism to my satisfaction. Therefore, I believe that it is best to make my life choices as if the universe is fully material.

As far as I can observe and reason, the universe consists of atoms, void, energy and forces.

Things that exist in reality, be they emergent properties of atoms or even the atoms themselves, only exist because they have properties that make them exist. If they don't have such properties or lose them over time, they stop existing. I don't know why atoms exist and am likely limited by my human intellect to understand “how things really work”. I can only get to a certain level of understanding of reality with a level of confidence that is not a hindrance for the good life, a life of pleasure/happiness and minimal pain, and am thus okay with not knowing everything.

Life exists due to its property of self-replication. Any properties hindering this self-replication are pressured to be removed by competition of properties that promote self-replication. I am a living being and thus I am influenced by this self-replication of properties that promote the self-replication and thus existence of life. I am wired to action that promotes the self-replication of life. The wired action **statistically** aims to promote the spread of the genes contained in me or assists the spread of the genes of my family/tribe/country/world (life).

A significant mechanism in the wiring of life is the experience of pleasure and pain. Pleasure and pain are life's “GO” and “STOP” signals respectively. All lifeforms naturally seek pleasure and avoid pain. Thus, I (my body and soul) also naturally seek and value pleasure, and avoid pain. Because of this life's restriction, there is no way around this. I may be fooled by others or my genes to think that something else transcends pleasure and pain in value (like virtue or preservation of life). Yet, the only reason I would naturally remain to think like so is if I gain pleasure from thinking that these are valuable to pursue over pleasure (and/or if I experience pain from the thought that these are not valuable in of themselves over pleasure). As I stated in my “My thoughts on knowledge” post, when there are spikes of neurotransmitter (including at

least dopamine in a prominent role) activity (at least strongly associated with the feeling of pleasure) accompanying a thought that we have, our confidence that the thought is correct increases, and it will influence our actions to that direction. Our brains cannot make conscious decisions, memories, or beliefs without going through our reward system.

I believe in causal determinism. Epicurus' "swerve" of atoms or the modern theory of quantum uncertainty do not convince me that there is something that is the "real me" guiding this body and soul through some other means than what is dented into my body by my environment since my consciousness emerged or by my genetic code. However, it is highly beneficial from the perspective of pleasure and pain to conduct one's life as if determinism is false in some cases such as to avoid the pain and pleasure-inhibiting stopping power of fatalism. "Some things happen out of chance, some out of necessity (pre-determined) and others by our own volition" is useful and I will cover this and others in the ethics section.

Short note about gods and death: I don't believe they are physically real as I've never seen/felt them other than under conditions where my brain is demonstrably highly prone to making errors (yet these states are highly pleasurable. More on this in the continuing post). If supernatural gods/creators exist, I doubt they have the same faculties as we do. Therefore, the idea that they would use the same criteria for reward/punishment as we do based on moral properties we evolved as social species seems unlikely to me. Therefore, I don't fear the gods or aim to control any reward or punishment given after death or anticipate it. For me it is reasonable to expect that my sensory experience ends when I die as my body, including its reward system (which governs pleasure and pain) stops working.

Again, I am sure I could be more clear but I feel this is good enough for posting. Comments and questions are welcome!