

Episode 257 - There Is No Necessity To Live Under Necessity - Part 1

Post by “Cassius” of November 18, 2024 at 2:06 PM

Welcome to Episode 257 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the most complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where we discuss this and all of our podcast episodes.

This week, now that we have completed Book 1 of Cicero's "On the Nature of The Gods," we are going to move to a discussion of some of the most important doctrines of Epicurus as listed on the front page of our website.

This week we will be discussing Epicurus' refutation of determinism.

A discussion guide for this episode is here:

[Lucretius Today Episode 257 - Fate, Necessity, Determinism](#)

Post by “Cassius” of November 18, 2024 at 3:00 PM

Cute comment by Cicero:

Quote from Cicero On Fate I

The method which I pursued in other volumes, those on the Nature of the Gods, and also in those which I have published on Divination, was that of setting out a continuous discourse both for and against, to enable each student to accept for himself the view that seems to him most probable; *but I was prevented by accident* from adopting it in the present discussion on the subject of Fate.

Post by “Cassius” of November 25, 2024 at 9:24 AM

Like last week as to Idealism vs realism I will work together to put together an outline of topics to cover. In the case of "Fate," I'd like to be sure we spend enough time talking about the real-world / psychological aspects of accepting there is such a thing as "fate," rather than spend all the time on the swerve and how Epicurus rejects determinism. I think there's a lot of "connection" we need to draw in the harmful psychological aspects that we don't normally talk about as much as we should.

Here is first draft of the raw outline. I will fill it in with sources and other topics as we proceed toward Sunday's recording.

[Lucretius Today Episode 257 - Fate, Necessity, Determinism](#)

Post by “Don” of November 25, 2024 at 11:12 AM

3.2 Menoeceus 133-135: [133] Seeing that, whom do you consider is better or more powerful than one who holds pious beliefs concerning the gods; one who has absolutely no fears concerning death; one who has rationally determined the τέλος of one's natural state; and the one who grasps that, on the one hand, good things (namely pleasures) are both easily attained and easily secured, and, on the other hand, evil things (or pains) are either short in time or brief in suffering; someone who *laughs at Fate* which is introduced onto the stage of life by many as the mistress of all things? For that person, even though some things happen by necessity, some by chance, and some by our own power, for although necessity is beyond our control, they see that chance is unstable and there is no other master beyond themselves, so that praise and its opposite are inseparably connected to themselves. [134] Because of this, it is better to follow the stories of the gods than to be enslaved by the deterministic decrees of the old natural philosophers, because necessity is not moved by prayer; and such a one accepts that Fortune is not a god, as the hoi polloi understand (for a god does nothing in a disorderly or haphazardly manner); And it is not the uncertain cause of everything, for one cannot think it can grant good or evil for a person's blessed life; however, it does furnish for oneself the starting point of great goods and great evils, [135] believing that it is better to be unfortunate rationally than fortunate irrationally because it is better to have been deciding the noble way in accomplishing one's actions and to have been foiled than having decided the bad way and to succeed by means of chance.

(My translation but feel free to use the one you like for 133-135)

Post by "Cassius" of November 25, 2024 at 12:39 PM

Thank you Don! Added.

Post by "Don" of November 25, 2024 at 12:55 PM

One thing to keep in mind, regardless of the English translation, you'll want to look for τύχη (and its variants in the Greek). That gets translated a number of ways, including fate, chance, etc.

τύχη • (túkhē) f (genitive τύχης); first declension

- the act of a god
- the act of a human being
- (regarded as an agent or cause beyond human control)
- fortune, providence, fate
- chance

(regarded as a result)

- good fortune, success
- ill fortune, misfortune

(in a neutral sense, in plural) fortunes

I'll do what I can to ferret out those "hidden" ones.

Post by "Cassius" of November 25, 2024 at 2:33 PM

So "Luck" likely falls under this as well, right?

I added that to the outline and if you have recommendations as to the Latin, please do.... 😊

Post by “Don” of November 25, 2024 at 2:35 PM

PD16: Chance steals only a bit into the life of a wise person: for throughout the complete span of his life the greatest and most important matters have been, are, and will be directed by the power of reason. βραχέα σοφῶ τύχη παρεμπίπτει, τὰ δὲ μέγιστα καὶ κυριώτατα ὁ λογισμὸς διώκηκε καὶ κατὰ τὸν συνεχῆ χρόνον τοῦ βίου διοικεῖ καὶ διοικῆσει.

VS17: https://wiki.epicurism.info/Vatican_Saying_17/

It is not the young man who is most happy, but the old man who has lived beautifully; for despite being at his very peak the young man stumbles around by chance as if he were of many minds, whereas the old man has settled into old age as if in a harbor, secure in his gratitude for the good things he was once unsure of. οὐ νέος μακαριστὸς ἀλλὰ γέρων βεβιωκῶς καλῶς· ὁ γὰρ νέος ἀκμῆ πολὺς ὑπὸ τῆς τύχης ἑτεροφρονῶν πλάζεται· ὁ δὲ γέρων καθάπερ ἐν λιμένι τῷ γήρα καθώρμικεν, τὰ πρότερον δυσελπιστούμενα τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἀσφαλεῖ κατακλείσας χάριτι.

VS53

[Vatican Saying 53 - Epicurus Wiki](#)

Envy no one. For good people do not deserve envy, and the more that wicked people have good fortune, the more they ruin things for themselves. οὐδενὶ φθονητέον· ἀγαθοὶ γὰρ οὐκ ἄξιοι φθόνου, πονηροὶ δὲ ὄσω ἂν μᾶλλον εὐτυχῶσι, τοσοῦτω μᾶλλον αὐτοῖς λυμαίνονται.

VS67. A free person is unable to acquire great wealth, because that is not easily achieved without enslavement to the masses or to the powers that be. Instead, he already has everything he needs, and in abundance. But if by *chance* he should have great wealth, he could easily share it with his fellows to win their goodwill. [note] ἐλεύθερος βίος οὐ δύναται κτήσασθαι χρήματα πολλὰ διὰ τὸ τὸ πράγμα <μῆ> ῥάδιον εἶναι χωρὶς θητείας ὄχλων ἢ δυναστῶν, ἀλλὰ συνεχεῖ δασιλεία πάντα κέκτηται· ἂν δέ που καὶ τύχη χρημάτων πολλῶν, καὶ ταῦτα ῥαδίως ἂν εἰς τὴν τοῦ πλησίον εὐνοίαν διαμετρήσαι.

Post by “Don” of November 25, 2024 at 3:11 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

So "Luck" likely falls under this as well, right?

I added that to the outline and if you have recommendations as to the Latin, please do.... 😊

Yes. I would say there was no such thing as luck. The gods either smiled on you or not. Anywhere there's a "luck" or "chance" in English I would dig into the original for something that means fate or fortune.

Maybe fortuna?

<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/searchresults?target=la&inContent=true&q=fortuna&doc=Perseus%3>

fortūna , ae (archaic

l.gen. sing. fortunās, like familiās, escas, vias, etc., f. lengthened from fors; chance, hap, luck, fate, fortune (good or ill; synonyms: casus, fors; fatum, providentia).

Post by “Cassius” of November 27, 2024 at 2:30 PM

I have updated the discussion outline at the link below. We'll be recording this on Sunday the first of December so if anyone has any thoughts or additional cites to add, please let us know.

[Lucretius Today Episode 257 - Fate, Necessity, Determinism](#)

Post by “Cassius” of December 2, 2024 at 9:01 AM

Much of our podcast discussion of Epicurus' opposition to both Necessity and Skepticism is going to turn on Dr. Sedley's article "Epicurus' Refutation of Determinism."

I'd like to note here that one insight that I think we're going to take away from that article is that Dr. Sedley believes (with good reason I think) that Epicurus' primary grounds for objecting to determinism was not "the swerve," which is not mentioned in the letter to Menoecus.

The primary and very interesting basis that I think we'll find has lots of applications is that Epicurus was objecting to reasoning by infinite regression. This is the basis for

VS40. The man who says that all things come to pass by necessity cannot criticize one who denies that all things come to pass by necessity: for he admits that this too happens of

necessity.

... and it's implicit also in VS09. Necessity is an evil, but [there is no necessity to live under the control of necessity](#).

As Dr. Sedley it's also the basis for the defense of the senses as in Book 4 of Lucretius and in Diogenes of Oinoanda Fragment 5:

[Others do not] explicitly [stigmatise] natural science as unnecessary, being ashamed to acknowledge [this], but use another means of discarding it. For, when they assert that things are inapprehensible, what else are they saying than that there is no need for us to pursue natural science? After all, who will choose to seek what he can never find? Now Aristotle and those who hold the same Peripatetic views as Aristotle say that nothing is scientifically knowable, because things are continually in flux and, on account of the rapidity of the flux, evade our apprehension. We on the other hand acknowledge their flux, but not its being so rapid that the nature of each thing [is] at no time apprehensible by sense-perception. And indeed [in no way would the upholders of] the view under discussion have been able to say [and this is just what they do [maintain] that [at one time] this is [white] and this black, while [at another time] neither this is [white nor] that black, [if] they had not had [previous] knowledge of the nature of both white and black.

We need to discuss the implications of the infinite regression objection, but I think one of the primary take-aways is that the argument amounts to pointing out that an infinite regression proves nothing. If it proves nothing, what then are we left with? We are left with what we can observe through the senses, the feelings, and the anticipations.

We perceive through the canonical faculties that we *can* know some things, and that we *can* make some decisions that affect the future on our own. Since nothing can be more reliable than these faculties (they are the test of truth of everything) then neither arguments by infinite regression nor on any other basis which cannot be validated through them should be accepted as persuasive.

Sedley seems to me to be saying that this kind of logical argument is the real basis for Epicurus' reasoning on the critical issues of skepticism and determinism, and I think he's right. As for the swerve, it makes sense, but as Lucretius himself says, it is impossible for us to observe the swerve in action, and as Sedley says, the swerve is not really logically needed to explain how the atoms first came together to create worlds - and thus it is not included in the letter to Herodotus.

(This is not to say that the swerve isn't significant at all, but does indicate that we should not place excessive reliance on it in basic discussion, especially since Epicurus didn't mention it to either Herodotus or Pythocles.)

Post by “Cassius” of December 6, 2024 at 9:03 AM

Still working on this week's podcast but should have it out shortly.

In the meantime, I think we failed to include (so far) this citation to Virgil which is highly appropriate to a discussion of Epicurus' attitude toward "fate" --

*Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas
Atque metus omnes, et inexorabile fatum
Subjecit pedibus, strepitumque Acherontis avari*

Happy is he who is able to know the causes of things,

And who has trampled beneath his feet all fear,

Inexorable fate, and the din of the devouring underworld

-Publius Vergilius Maro

Post by “Cassius” of December 6, 2024 at 4:02 PM

Lucretius Today Episode 257 is now available:

["There Is No Necessity To Live Under the Control of Necessity"](#)

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/63194380>