

# The Twelve Fundamentals - Discussion on Lucretius Today Podcast

Post by “Cassius” of January 3, 2023 at 4:26 PM

While we are talking about this article I have another recurring gripe to mention and to combine with a praise:

Quote

The chasm between the providentially ordered cosmos of the Stoics and the random atomic universe of the Epicureans was deep and wide, and it could not be bridged.

This gives me the opportunity to plug one of my favorite articles, A.A. Long's "Chance and Natural Law in Epicureanism." I never like to use the word "random" and I don't think emphasis on that concept is consistent with Epicurean views of the universe. Better words would include "unordered" or anything that conveys the lack of central control, while "random" carries connotations that go beyond that and imply to many ears that some force of randomness (sort of like Fortune as a goddess). As Long argues in detail, most events in the universe operate mechanistically, and the swerve/wiggle/whatever does not 'break through" to our level of perception except in relatively rare instances (such as "free will" in higher animals. The great majority of things, and the reason science allows us to make repeatable observations, operate purely mechanistically and not subject to "random" variation.

I highly recommend the Long article for his full argument.

[Link](#)

# *Chance and natural law in Epicureanism*<sup>1</sup>

A. A. LONG

When Epicurus discharged the gods from running the world he gave new fuel to a controversy which had been raging off and on for the past hundred years and which was to continue, at least as fiercely, into the Christian era. In preferring atoms and void to gods as ultimate causes of all natural phenomena, Epicurus knew perfectly well that he was entering an arena in which Plato and Aristotle had already done battle against the mechanistic explanations of earlier thinkers.<sup>2</sup> How could a purely mechanical combination of atoms moving in empty space account for the regular movements of the heavens and the orderly structure of living things? Plato and Aristotle had inferred divine causation and inherent purposiveness in the world or goal-directed processes from the evidence of such regularities, and within Epicurus' own lifetime the Stoics took up the same fundamental position as the Academy and the

<sup>1</sup> This is a slightly expanded version of a paper read to two meetings in 1974, the Scottish Classical Association and the Southern Association for Ancient Philoso-