

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

Post by "Onenski" of February 23, 2024 at 11:01 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

1. Well then Onenski what is your definition of "free will?"

There two main ways to understand free will on the debate: leeway freedom (for incompatibilism: deterministic and libertarian) and source freedom (for compatibilists).

Leeway freedom: it's the capacity to have acted otherwise. Suppose, for a moment, that there are a chain of events caused by other events. That chain leads to the event that I will choose a strawberry ice cream. If I had leeway freedom, I'd be able to choose strawberry, chocolate, vanilla or any other, or doing something else. That is, prior events don't determine what I'm going to do.

Source freedom. I think it's more related to agency. The idea is that from the fact that people is the source of their intentional actions, we can attribute responsibility to them. The best way to understand it is with the famous Frankfurt cases.

Imagine that there's a scientific who implants a chip in my brain. He knows that I want to kill James, but to be sure the chip will activate if I stop in the last moment. So if I don't shoot, the chip will activate and I will shoot anyway. It results that I kill James, so the chip wasn't activated. The argument is that I couldn't do otherwise, but I'm responsible for my action, because I intentionally did it.

The majority of philosophers think that leeway freedom is very hard to defend, so they prefer compatibilism and a kind of source freedom.

Sapolsky's book, by the way, doesn't touch compatibilism. That's why so many philosophers think it's not a serious objection to moral responsibility.

Is I said, Epicurus is usually considered a libertarian, so it can be interpreted that he was in favor of leeway freedom.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

2. What is your view of the word "agency?"

I share a very broad concept from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy:

Quote

In very general terms, an agent is a being with the capacity to act, and 'agency' denotes the exercise or manifestation of this capacity. The philosophy of action provides us with a standard conception and a standard theory of action. The former construes action in terms of intentionality, the latter explains the intentionality of action in terms of causation by the agent's mental states and events.

So, I understand that an agent is a subject who can act intentionally. There's not a contradiction with Free Will Skepticism.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

3. Though it appears to be a scholium, what is your view of the passage "with us lies the chief power in determining events, some of which happen by necessity and some by chance, and some are within our control..."?

I think that, as [TauPhi](#) sometimes recalls, there are aspects of the ancient thought that we can, and will never be able to, understand. We don't know exactly how Epicurus understood the debate and arguments on determinism and freedom. Possibly he thought it in terms of Fate (like in ancient tragedies). Fatalism is not the same that determinism and if he thought they were the same, I'd understand why he was so against it. (I doubt about this possibility because, supposedly, he knew very well Democritus' philosophy.)

In any case, my personal opinion on that passage of the Letter to Menoecus, is that he's talking superficially (because is just a letter and it's about ethics).

He recognizes the distinction that it's present in other philosophers, including the Stoics: there are things in my control, and things beyond my control. Those beyond my control include necessity and chance (this one make sense with the introduction of the swerve).

I hope I answered clearly. Free will Skepticism can be a very sophisticated and interesting point of view, and I'm thankful that there's a thread on how epicureanism can be reconciled with it. I wish I can make a better contribution later.