

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

Post by “Godfrey” of February 25, 2024 at 12:54 AM

Thanks for the response [Onenski](#) .

Quote from Onenski

...how do an epicurean find eudaimonia?: recognizing his place in the universe, studying nature, moderating desires, looking for pleasures, avoiding pain/suffering, feeling satisfied, enjoying time with friends. Is that contradictory with free will skepticism? If you think so, you can help me in developing my understanding both of free will skepticism and of epicureanism by pointing out those contradictions.

The biggest practical contradiction, in my mind, has to do with the Canon and methods of inference. If we don't use proper reasoning based on our sensations, anticipations and feelings, then we can't form correct conclusions.

As I understand the determining of opinions to be true or false, based on Philodemus (and I'm not sure that I understand this very well) there is **confirmation** (also called attestation), and **contradiction** (also called contestation). **True** equals confirmed and not contradicted. **False** equals not confirmed and contradicted. **Conjectural** equals awaiting confirmation/contradiction. Based on this, I would say that denying free agency is false, based on our perceptions. Or at best conjectural.

From Diogenes Laertius 10.32; Mensch translation:

...the fact that our perceptions exist guarantees the truth of our sensations; for seeing and hearing are as real to us as feeling pain.” Hence, it is from phenomena that we must draw inferences about nonevident realities. For all our thoughts are derived from sensation, either by contact, analogy, resemblance, or synthesis (with some assistance from reasoning). And the delusions of madmen, as well as the visions we see in sleep, are real, since they have effects; whereas what is unreal has no effect.

From Philodemus, On signs 34.29–36.17 Long and Sedley translation 1987:

(1) Those who attack sign-inference by similarity do not notice the difference between the aforementioned [senses of 'in so far as'], and how we establish the 'in so far as' premise, such as, for instance, that man in so far as he is man is mortal.... (2) For we establish the necessary connexion of this with that from the very fact that it has been an observed concomitant of all the instances which we have encountered, especially as we have met a variety of animals

belonging to the same type which while differing from each other in all other respects all share such-and-such common characteristics. (3) Thus we say that man, in so far as and in that he is man, is mortal, because we have encountered a wide variety of men without ever finding any variation in this kind of accidental attribute, or anything that draws us towards the opposite view. (4) So this is the method on which the establishment of the premise rests, both for this issue and for the others in which we apply the 'in so far as' and 'in that' construction - the peculiar connexion being indicated by the fact that the one thing is the inseparable and necessary concomitant of the other. (5) The same is not true in the case of what is established merely by the elimination of a sign. But even in these cases, it is the fact that all the instances which we have encountered have this as their concomitant that does the job of confirmation. For it is from the fact that all familiar moving objects, while having other differences, have in common that their motion is through empty spaces, that we conclude the same to be without exception true also in things non-evident. And our reason for contending that if there is not, or has not been, fire, smoke should be eliminated, is that smoke has been seen in all cases without exception to be a secretion from fire. (6) Another error which they make is in not noticing our procedure of establishing that no obstacle arises through things evident. For the existence of chance and of that which depends on us is not sufficient ground for accepting the minimal swerves of atoms: it is necessary to show in addition that nothing else self-evident conflicts with the thesis.

[Quote from Onenski](#)

The possible practical problems that one may find in a metaphysical or physical conclusion are not reasons to deny that conclusion

I agree with this if the conclusion is true, as described above. The reason that I asked about how to live with eudaimonia if you believe in hard determinism is that I'm genuinely curious how that would work.

[Quote from Onenski](#)

Finally, how do an epicurean find eudaimonia?: recognizing his place in the universe, studying nature, moderating desires, looking for pleasures, avoiding pain/suffering, feeling satisfied, enjoying time with friends. Is that contradictory with free will skepticism?

I honestly don't understand how you can achieve eudaimonia doing these things if you believe that you have no free will. Is the answer that you just go ahead and do them, realizing that there's not really a "you" that's doing them, and find eudaimonia in that? I'll have to ponder that for a while....