

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

Post by "Cassius" of February 25, 2024 at 4:31 AM

While the anti-determinism viewpoint features prominently in the Letter to Menoeceus and the Vatican Sayings, it's interesting to think about why it is not so explicit in the [Principal Doctrines](#).

I would say that (at the very fewest) the following presume that we have the power of choice to pursue the things mentioned (prudence, honor, justice, reason) and, that Epicurus would say that holding to hard determinism is therefore detrimental to their implementation. Most of the rest (even the existence of a list in the first place) imply that the statements therein can be chosen as a basis of a happy life, which also presumes that the person seeking to implement them is not a hard determinist.

[PD05](#). It is not possible to live pleasantly without living prudently, honorably, and justly, [nor again to live a life of prudence, honor, and justice] without living pleasantly. And the man who does not possess the pleasant life is not living prudently, honorably, and justly, [and the man who does not possess the virtuous life] cannot possibly live pleasantly.

[PD16](#). In but few things chance hinders a wise man, but the greatest and most important matters, reason has ordained, and throughout the whole period of life does and will ordain.

[PD17](#). The just man is most free from trouble; the unjust most full of trouble.

I also think one of my favorite passages from Lucretius Book 2 strongly implies an anti-determinist viewpoint:

[1023] Now apply your mind closely to the documents of true reason, for a new scheme of philosophy presses earnestly for your attention, a new scene of things displays itself before you. Yet there is nothing so obvious but may at first view seem difficult to be believed, and there is nothing so prodigious and wonderful at first that men do not by degrees cease to admire. For see the bright and pure color of the sky, possessed on every side by wandering stars, and the Moon's splendor, and the Sun's glorious light; these, if they now first shown to mortal eyes, and suddenly presented to our view, what could more wonderful appear than these? And what before could men less presume to expect? Nothing surely, so surprising would the sight have been. But now, quite tired and cloyed with the prospect, none of us vouchsafes so much as to cast our eyes up towards the bright temples of the sky. Therefore do not be frightened, and conceive an aversion to an opinion because of its novelty; but search it rather

with a more piercing judgment. If it appears true to you, embrace it; if false, set yourself against it.

(The above quote is from the 1743 edition, whose "lost" translator [Joshua](#) is diligently even as we read this working on finding!)