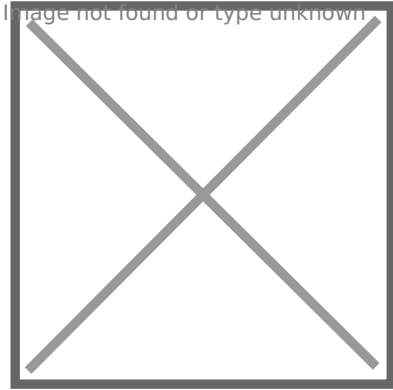


Can Determinism Be Reconciled With Epicureanism? (Admin Edit - No, But Let's Talk About Why Not)

Post by "Cassius" of February 26, 2024 at 3:55 AM



[Richard Dawkins On Free Will](#)

I posted this a couple years ago on one of my past blogs. I always find the topic worth revisiting. The following is a transcript of a question posed to and...
notesfrombabel.wordpress.com

Richard Dawkins at Politics and Prose .. The God Delusion Question and Answer

Questioner: Dr. Dawkins thank you for your comments. The thing I have appreciated most about your comments is your consistency in the things I've seen you written. One of the areas that I wanted to ask you about and the places where I think there is an inconsistency and I hoped you would clarify it is that in what I've read **you seem to take a position of a strong determinist who says that what we see around us is the product of physical laws playing themselves out but on the other hand it would seem that you would do things like taking credit for writing this book and things like that. But it would seem, and this isn't to be funny, that the consistent position would be that necessarily the authoring of this book from the initial condition of the big bang it was set that this would be the product of what we see today.** I would take it that that would be the consistent position but I wanted to know what you thought about that.

Dawkins: The philosophical question of determinism is a very difficult question. It's not one I discuss in this book, indeed in any other book that I've ever talked about. Now an extreme determinist, as the questioner says, might say that everything we do, everything we think, everything that we write, has been determined from the beginning of time in which case the very idea of taking credit for anything doesn't seem to make any sense. **Now I don't actually**

know what I actually think about that, I haven't taken up a position about that, it's not part of my remit to talk about the philosophical issue of determinism. **What I do know is that what it feels like to me, and I think to all of us, we don't feel determined. We feel like blaming people for what they do or giving people the credit for what they do. We feel like admiring people for what they do. None of us ever actually as a matter of fact says, "Oh well he couldn't help doing it, he was determined by his molecules."** Maybe we should.. I sometimes.. Um.. You probably remember many of you would have seen Fawlty Towers. The episode where Basil where his car won't start and he gives it fair warning, counts up to three, and then gets out of the car and picks up a tree branch and thrashes it within an edge of his life. Maybe that's what we all ought to... Maybe the way we laugh at Basil Fawlty, we ought to laugh in the same way at people who blame humans. I mean when we punish people for doing the most horrible murders, maybe the attitude we should take is "Oh they were just determined by their molecules." It's stupid to punish them. **What we should do is say "This unit has a faulty motherboard which needs to be replaced." I can't bring myself to do that. I actually do respond in an emotional way and I blame people, I give people credit**, or I might be more charitable and say this individual who has committed murders or child abuse of whatever it is was really abused in his own childhood. And so again I might take a ..

Questioner: But do you personally see that as an inconsistency in your views?

Dawkins: I sort of do. Yes. But it is an inconsistency that we sort of have to live with otherwise life would be intolerable. But it has nothing to do with my views on religion it is an entirely separate issue.

Questioner: Thank you.