

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

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[Interview: Richard Dawkins](#)

QUESTION: Now, if we are gene machines, presumably then our behavior is also programmed by genes -- you have made that case. But Christians would say that there is a thing called [free will](#), and that free will gives us a genuine choice about our actions, that effectively free will allows us to override biology. What is your response to that as a scientist?

MR. DAWKINS: I am very comfortable with the idea that we can override biology with free will. Indeed, I encourage people all the time to do it. Much of the message of my first book, "The Selfish Gene," was that we must understand what it means to be a gene machine, what it means to be programmed by genes, so that we are better equipped to escape, so that we are better equipped to use our big brains, use our conscience intelligence, to depart from the dictates of the selfish genes and to build for ourselves a new kind of life which as far as I am concerned the more un-Darwinian it is the better, because the Darwinian world in which our ancestors were selected is a very unpleasant world. Nature really is red in tooth and claw. And when we sit down together to argue out and discuss and decide upon how we want to run our societies, I think we should hold up Darwinism as an awful warning for how we should not organize our societies.

QUESTION: So you are not saying then that our genetic programming is fully [deterministic](#)?

MR. DAWKINS: It's an important point to realize that the genetic programming of our lives is not fully deterministic. It is statistical -- it is in any animal merely statistical -- not deterministic. Even if you are in some sense a determinist -- and philosophically speaking many of us may be -- that doesn't mean we have to behave as if we are determinists, because the world is so complicated, and especially human brains are so complicated, that we behave as if we are not deterministic, and we feel as if we are not deterministic -- and that's all that matters. In any case, adding the word "genetic" to deterministic doesn't make it any more deterministic. If you are a philosophical determinist, then adding the word "gene" doesn't increase the effect.