

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

Post by "Cassius" of February 26, 2024 at 4:12 AM

We can go round and round quoting Richard Dawkins vs Sam Harris til the end of time, but if doing so causes us to lose sight of the larger goal of living happily through Epicurean philosophy, then we are not doing justice to the reason we are here in the first place.

Not everyone is going to agree with the way we implement that balance, but I think the best we can do is to try to accommodate "privately" those who have the time and interest to pursue the Harris road, while at the same time acknowledging that the Harris view is contrary to Epicurus and therefore not something to be promoted in public on this website.

As Dawkins says "we feel as if we are not deterministic -- and that's all that matters."

Now if someone wants to argue that that is not the position Epicurus took, or that he was wrong to do so, then *that also, or in fact even more* would be a point of productive discussion, because that would implicate the feelings anticipations and senses as the canon of truth. As Sedley says, the swerve itself may well have been an afterthought, as it certainly did not even make the letter to Menoeceus. We aren't required to ground the significance and importance of freedom of will on the swerve by a long shot, any more than we are tied to supporting every one of Epicurus' multiple possibilities for eclipses.

Which leads me to repeat again - if these discussions lead someone to think that Epicurus was so far off on basic issues that they want to drop major parts of his philosophy and refrain from representing themselves to be Epicurean, then we are all better off if that person pursues that result to their satisfaction. But those deviations aren't proper for extended development on this forum.

We do allow people here at the forum - even as Level 3 - who are clearly stating that they do not consider themselves to be "fully Epicurean." We can work with that so long as we do not have long and regular and unbalanced campaigns in public against core Epicurean positions. People who have agency can in fact change their minds, and working through defenses against attacks on Epicurean positions has extremely helpful results, exactly as we are doing in going through Book 2 of Cicero's On Ends in the Lucretius Today podcast.

But I think we owe it to those who are here to study Epicurus to keep the focus on explaining and defending Epicurean positions, and to conduct plank-walking episodes as privately as possible. In general and for the public, we should provide an Epicurean support group and not just another general philosophy forum where the only firm position is that all firm positions are wrong. There are plenty of those on the internet where hard determinism is welcome. The "articles of faith" at such places are that all knowledge is impossible and that no one has any

freedom of will whatsoever. That's exactly the kind of thing that Epicurus fought against, and we need to continue that tradition here if we expect to have an "Epicurean" community.