

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

Post by "Onenski" of February 26, 2024 at 10:23 AM

[Cassius](#), I perfectly understand your reasons and the change to a private forum. I'm sorry if my comments have been annoying or impertinent. I don't pretend to be against Epicurean philosophy, nor just discuss for winning an argument or something like that. I'm aware of the importance of frank criticism: the importance of words, arguments, and the fact that we must separate friendship from any discussion.

At the same time, I wouldn't say what I say if I wasn't convinced that my position on free will is at least reasonable and that a connexion with epicurean philosophy can be made, or that Epicurean philosophy can be developed with the arguments I share.

In any case, I respect your considerations as a moderator (which I imagine is not an easy work at all), and I'm really really thankful for your work maintaining the group and spreading epicurean philosophy. My admiration for you and our friendship are superior to my desire to keep talking about this topic. If you want we stop talking about this and talk about something else, it would be ok.

[Don](#), Mischel was not a determinist, he was just a psychologist, he worked specially on personality, but he has a study on self-control in children. He followed these children for years to see if the self-control showed in infancy was correlated to later choices in life. His discoverings are very interesting.

[Martin](#), thank you very much for your analysis, I appreciate it. I hope the next comments make sense to you.

[Quote from Martin](#)

Anyone trying to reproduce a chemical reaction can tell you that it is sometimes not like that because in addition to the known A, B, C, there may be unknown events D, E, F, which combined with A, B, C give a different result because D, E, F have changed while A, B, C have not.

In this observation, I'd like to point out that the premise is not about *what we know*, but about *what it is*. I'd appreciate if you tell us if the premise is correct by doing this observation.

Probably we don't know D, E, F, but they are part of the circumstances to make that A, B and C cause the phenomenon. Do you agree that if we had different circumstances or different causes we have a distinct phenomenon or, even, we don't have that phenomenon at all. (For example,

if we don't have B either the phenomenon doesn't occur or occur another one.)

[Quote from Martin](#)

"16. The swerve doesn't permit to explain regularities in nature (for 14 and 15). (From this we can conclude that human behavior is impossible, but let's consider more things.)"

This statement is wrong. We can arrange apparent irregularities in a systematic way and find and explain regularities. In the quantum physical analog, this is expressed in the Ehrenfest theorem: The laws of classical physics for classical quantities are usually valid for expectation values of the corresponding quantum mechanical quantities. (This is my dumbed down version.)

I forgot to make explicit that 16 is about regularities in macroscopic nature (for 8, if I remember well). According to the argument, we have new events and new circumstances all the time (we don't have the same phenomena because for this we need the same causes (if I'm ok with the last observation), but new causes (the swerves) produce different phenomena). So regularities in the macroscopic level should be less, much less, than those we see. Irregularities should be more than regularities.

[Quote from Martin](#)

The argument in 17 is mixing and blurring different perspectives. Free will and moral responsibility are words of idealism meant for an I identified as a supernatural soul different from the body with which it is only temporarily associated. In Epicurus' philosophy, the soul is not an independent entity on its own but an organ of the living being. In the materialistic context, the meaning of free will and moral responsibility is different. If we do not change the words, we hide the change in definition. With the change in definition, the logic becomes invalid.

We can try to reformulate 17 with the analog words. For free will, agency is an established choice. For moral responsibility, we might choose accountability. With the new words, we might state:

17'. Agency is the basis for accountability (if a person acts, she's responsible for her action). A person can't be responsible for something beyond her control.

E.g., I usually do not cause outbreaks of volcanoes. An outbreak of a volcano will not give me remorse, and no one can reasonably hold me accountable for it.

However, an action which I carry out and which results in unpleasant consequences may give me remorse, and I may be held accountable for it, irrespective of how much leeway I had to do otherwise.

Possibly you missed one of the comments in which I made a difference between leeway freedom (the capacity to do otherwise) and source freedom (the capacity to act intentionally) in the free will debate. By reading your analysis of the argument I observed that you took the

source sense instead of the leeway sense. The argument is directed to the second one (as I stated in the assumption, 1).

Agency and accountability are compatibilist concepts (this means, that they are compatible with a deterministic scenario, even if we are not in a deterministic scenario). I understand why if we take them, the argument gets invalid and your observations are precise in this aspect. But there would be a change in terms in the middle of the argument, because I started with the incompatibilist free will (leeway sense). (I hope you see that if we introduce the swerve as the basis for free will we are trying to defend the leeway sense, not the source sense.)

I don't see a problem if we take the compatibilist approach for epicurean philosophy, I even suggested it. However, that would do the swerve an unnecessary concept for free will basis. It would be a concept just to talk about the formation of compounds, as you pointed out.

[Quote from Martin](#)

The swerve may increase the options James has to choose from. It is his choice which option he chooses and not merely a random outcome.

Another observation is that if we part from agency and accountability, more options (introduced by a very limited and specific swerve) don't add something relevant for moral evaluation. That is, the swerve is unnecessary and irrelevant for accountability. (If this part sounds obscure I can explain more.)

But let's think, as the argument goes in this part, that the swerve occur (and it has macroscopic effects and occurs continually) and we want leeway freedom. The idea is that we need a lot of luck to be successful in our purposes. First, we may have intentions that were formed by uncaused causes; intentions that have nothing to do with you and your life. We will need luck to have the intentions that are according to our personal identity, that is, we need luck in order to the swerves don't produce random intentions.

Second, we may have an intention and not being able to put them in practice in circumstances that permit to do it (because there are new intentions formed by uncaused causes). We need luck in order to the swerves don't produce something that precludes the intentions that are according to you.

Third, we may have an intention to act, do the action and have outcomes (because there are new events caused by the swerves) that would be unreasonable to attribute to the person. We need luck, so that our actions have the intended outcomes.

With these observations in mind, do you think the argument is valid?

Again, thanks for your observations!