

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

Post by "Martin" of February 26, 2024 at 9:19 PM

[Onenski](#)

Quote

"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."

If the premise is about what it is, then the premise is correct by definition.

What it does not matter if we do not know it. This might inject a flaw into the logic because we are talking about something in the real world, and logic is notoriously shaky with propositions regarding reality instead of just an idealistic realm of thought.

Quote

"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."

No! Epicurus was careful to let the swerve just do a minimal change each time. This allows for almost deterministic regularity at the macroscopic level.

In the quantum mechanical analogon, this shows up in the difficulty of observing macroscopic quantum effects. Almost all of the indeterminacies at the microscopic level average out at the macroscopic level. This scales with the size of objects and the simplicity of the applicable laws of nature: We can calculate the path of Earth for millions of years ahead but not where I will be in one hour.

Quote

"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."

I do aim at leeway freedom. Even though the swerve might not be necessary for the original concept of agency, leeway freedom does considerably strengthen agency beyond the not fully convincing argument for it within hard determinism.

There is no issue in applying agency and accountability beyond compatibilism. (By contrast, applying idealistic concepts in a materialistic philosophy is a guarantee for contradictions.)

"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."

We can force the luck by taking more time to think. If we expect to find the solution to a problem within 10 milliseconds, then we are strongly dependent on luck. By taking hours, days

or weeks, we give the swerve a lot more opportunities to inject new options for consideration. This may very well make the swerve relevant for moral evaluation (if we want to go that path at all).

Quote

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

No, partly because of the preceding responses in this comment. There are other, more fundamental issues than the itemized statements in this discussion between you and me: Epicurus' philosophy does make some use of logic, but it should not be mistaken for a logical system. Going from axioms and definitions to increasingly sophisticated conclusions works reasonably well within mathematics and maybe some other variants of idealistic philosophy. However, with the exception of mathematical models skillfully chosen to describe reality, concepts of idealism are typically meaningless in materialism. Any proposition containing a meaningless concept is meaningless and has no logical value of true or false. This reminds me Wolfgang Pauli's comment on an inadequate theory that it is not even wrong. Moral responsibility is such a meaningless concept. Its prominent occurrence in the argument is already enough to render the argument invalid. If a materialist accepts the definitions of idealists, his materialistic philosophy can most likely be refuted with logic by deriving contradictions.