

Article Added: A A Long's "Chance and Natural Law in Epicureanism"

Post by "Cassius" of June 28, 2019 at 8:57 AM

Over the years I have found this to be one of the best articles available on the impact of "the swerve" in human affairs, and how Epicurus likely reconciled his idea of the swerve (which if carried to an extreme would mean that nothing is predictable) with the regularity we see in the world around us.

Find "Chance and Natural Law In Epicureanism" here on the [forum at this link](#).

*Chance and natural law in Epicureanism*¹

A. A. LONG

When Epicurus discharged the gods from running the world he gave new fuel to a controversy which had been raging off and on for the past hundred years and which was to continue, at least as feverishly, into the Christian era. In preferring atoms and void to gods as ultimate causes of all natural phenomena, Epicurus knew perfectly well that he was entering an arena in which Plato and Aristotle had already done battle against the mechanistic explanations of earlier thinkers.² How could a purely mechanical combination of atoms moving in empty space account for the regular movements of the heavens and the orderly structure of living things? Plato and Aristotle had inferred divine causation and inherent purposiveness in the world or god-directed processes from the evidence of such regularities, and within Epicurus' own lifetime the Stoics took up the same fundamental positions as the Academy and the

¹ This is a slightly expanded version of a paper read to two meetings in 1974, the Scottish Classical Association and the Scottish Association for Ancient Philosophy. I am grateful to members of the audience for their comments during discussion of the paper and also to the Foundation Herald which allowed me ideal conditions for writing the first draft. Full references to the books and articles I have used or discussed are given in the bibliography at the end of the article.

² Some of the classic texts are Plato *Phaedo* 96c (Socrates' disappointment with Anaxagoras), *Leviathan* 2.109-11 (those who deny that gods, spirits and stars had any part in causing the world and living things), *Aristotle, Phys.* 2.195b-196a (his attack on Empedocles and Anaxagoras for their neglect of the final cause), *de Phys.* 196a-24-33 Aristotle challenges those who say that it is chance which was the