

Sunday Zoom - August 17, 2025 - 12:30 PM ET - Topic: "All Sensations Are True"

Post by "Cassius" of August 20, 2025 at 7:20 PM

[Quote from Rolf](#)

Thanks for the reply Cassius. I feel I may be a bit lost in the weeds... From the way you describe things, it doesn't seem like the observable and verifiable aspects of quantum physics and modern physics in general contradict Epicurean physics at all, beyond some changing terminology (eg. "atom" referring to the smallest indivisible substance). Quantum indeterminacy seems to align well with the idea that some things happen by chance rather than necessity or choice.

I think that's generally correct. As long as we are all devoted to finding the explanations for all phenomena in Nature, and we are not implying that there is something "non-natural" behind what we see, then all is well.

And I will be happy to agree that most scientists are approaching things in that way. But we're not able here to become specialists ourselves, and the real issue is not the legitimate debate between competing natural theories, it's the "uses" to which the scientific theories are put by non-specialists who do not admit the limitations of the existing science that causes most of the problems.

There are definitely differing interpretations of the Heisenberg "uncertainty" principles and the issues surrounding Schroediger's cat. But in the field we are in (practical philosophy for living life) those become slogans that can be used to intimidate nonspecialists into believing that "of course" nothing is really knowable or predictable, or "of course" we make our own realities through our observation of it. Again, no one is doing that here, but part of our job in understanding (and promoting) Epicurean philosophy is to talk about how it responds to challenges.

Really the "swerve" in Epicurean philosophy is open to exactly this same kind of misuse. We've discussed before that if you took "the swerve" to its possible logical extreme, then the swerve would consume the rest of the physics and make all the rest of the system fall apart. This is discussed in AA Long's article "Chance and Natural Law in Epicureanism." But neither Cicero nor the other enemies of Epicurus recorded an attack like that, obvious as it would have been to make it, because it seems the Epicureans were careful to limit the operation of the swerve to prevent that kind of application.

It's definitely a constant challenge to keep things in line, but I think it begins to come into focus when - for example - you realize that to Epicurus "atom" just meant "indivisible" and that it

makes no difference at all where that level is found -- whether it is found what we call today at the molecular, atomic, subatomic, quantum, or whatever other level. The argument to swat down is the essentially mystical argument that the divisibility "never" stops, because that would compel the conclusion that there is ultimately nothing (except a supernatural force) that can be counted on as a basis for the predictable reality that we do see to exist.