

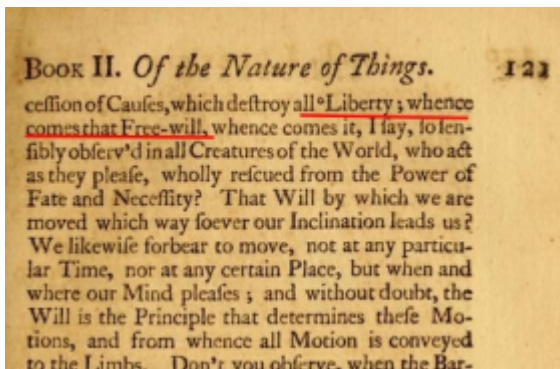
On Terminology In Discussing "Free Will"

Post by "Cassius" of July 10, 2019 at 9:16 AM

It has been called to my attention that in many circles the term "free will" carries some kind of supernatural or religious implications, and that in those circles the terms generally used are "hard determinism" or "soft determinism" to indicate that no choices are entirely without preceding influences. I agree that it is important to be clear about what we mean in any context.

For comparative reference, I pulled out four translations of Lucretius Book 2 where this wording generally becomes an issue:

1. Daniel Browne edition of 1743:



2. Hugh Munro translation, late 1800's:

44 ON THE NATURE OF THINGS [Book II
and yet not more than the least possible; lest we be found to be imagining oblique motions and this the reality should refute. For this we see to be plain and evident, that weights, so far as in them is, cannot travel obliquely, when they fall from above, at least so far as you can perceive; but that nothing can swerve in any case from the straight course, who is there that can perceive? Again if all motion is ever linked together and a new motion ever springs from another in a fixed order and first-beginnings do not by swerving make some commencement of motion to break through the decrees of fate, that cause follow not cause from everlasting, whence have all living creatures here on earth, whence, I ask, has been wrested from the fates the power by which we go forward whether the will leads each, by which likewise we change the direction of our motions neither at a fixed time nor fixed place, but where and when the mind itself has prompted? For beyond a doubt in these things his own will makes for each a beginning and from this beginning motions are willed through the limbs. See you not too, when the barriers are thrown open at a given moment, that yet the eager powers of the horses cannot start forward so instantaneously as the mind itself desires? the whole store of

3. Cyril Bailey translation, 1930's

so that cause may not follow cause from infinite time ; whence comes this free will for living things all over the earth, whence, I ask, is it wrested from fate, this will whereby we move forward, where pleasure leads each one of us, and swerve likewise in our motions neither at determined times nor in a determined direction of place, but just where our mind has carried us ? For without doubt it is his own will which gives to each one a start for this movement, and from the will the motions pass flooding through the limbs. Do you not see too how, when the barriers are flung open, yet for an instant of time the eager might of the horses cannot burst out so suddenly as their mind itself desires ? For the whole store of matter throughout the whole body must be roused to movement, that then aroused through every limb it may strain and follow the eager longing of the mind ; so that you see a start of movement ^{is} brought to pass from the heart, and comes forth first

4. Martin Ferguson Smith translation, Hackett publishing (current edition):

Moreover, if all movements are invariably interlinked, if new movement arises from the old in unalterable succession, if there is no atomic swerve to initiate movement that can annul the decrees of destiny and prevent the existence of an endless chain of causation, what is the source of this free will possessed by living creatures all over the earth? What, I ask, is the source of this power of will wrested from destiny, which enables each of us to advance where pleasure leads us, and to alter our movements not at a fixed time or place, but at the direction of our own [260] minds? For undoubtedly in each case it is the individual will that gives the initial impulse to such actions and channels the movements through the limbs.

Have you not observed too that, at the very moment when the starting gates are opened,¹⁶ the horses, despite their strength and impotence, cannot burst forward as suddenly as their minds desire? The reason is that the whole mass of matter throughout the whole body must be actuated: only when the whole frame has been actuated can it respond with energy to the eagerness of the mind. So you can see that the initial movement is produced by the mind: it originates from the act of mental [270] will, and is then diffused through every part of the body.