

Updated FAQ Entry: Why Should I Care About Epicurean Physics When So Much Science Has Changed In The Last 2000 Years?

Post by “Peter Konstans” of June 17, 2026 at 6:01 AM

Yes, accepting materialism and atomism entails abandoning both the weak and the strong variations of emergence.

As I see it, Epicurean physics is based on the rejection of Democritean compatibilism. Democritus thought free will is compatible with atomic determinism, Epicurus argued rightly that the two are not compatible, so he was what we call an anti-compatibilist.

When it comes to humans the acquisition of pleasure and the avoidance of pain are the only true determinant forces of human behavior and all other motivations are illusory. This is determinism. But Epicurus rejected fatalism because he saw human behavior as reformable to a substantial degree. The reform process involves re-orienting humans from fear to pleasure though intensive therapy and the study of physics is part of it.

Epicurus' concern with necessity was not about preserving a modern notion of "contra-causal free will," but about preserving the practical efficacy of deliberation, education, therapy, and self-cultivation. In that reading, the real target is not determinism but fatalism — the idea that human effort cannot make a difference.