

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

Post by "Cassius" of June 17, 2026 at 10:12 AM

In my view everything posted in the thread so far has been valuable for setting the stage of the debate. It is good for people to know where Tim O'Keefe stands and how he disagrees with Sedley on emergence.

Also, Don has focused on some very important issues such as the levels of jargon that are involved in discussing determinism and fatalism and compatibilism and the like. In my view 97% of the normal people in the world are never going to drill down into this debate and care about how to chase these rabbits, and it's normal people to whom Epicurean philosophy has always most appealed. The professional rabbit-chasers have always preferred some version of Pythagorus, Plato, or Stoicism.

What they need answers to are questions like:

- (1) Do we have any control over the future course of our lives?
- (2) Are we as humans no different from "chemical scum"?

The answers to those questions in my view have emphatic answers under the clear thrust of Epicurus' overall philosophy. Yes we have some control over the future course of our lives, and yes we are very different from chemical scum. I recall zero references in any Epicurean text which contain the psychological advice under which we should think of ourselves as "chemical scum." That's very different from saying that all things are composed of matter and void. Rhetorically equating humanity to *chemical scum* is every bit as damaging to human happiness on the "down" side as thinking that *we are divine beings set over and apart from the rest of the universe* is on the "up" side.

Likewise on determinism and Fate, Epicurus made very clear that some things are under our control, some are not, and some happen by accident. And there is no supernatural force spinning a web of Fate that would allow for forces working intelligently to thwart some small degree of free-play that we might have under some other point of view.

It sounds like Peter is familiar with Tim O'Keefe and other arguments that he probably thinks would lead someone to answer my two questions differently under an Epicurean framework, so it will be good to discuss those.

But this is one of those areas where we really need to focus on the practical results and not our ability to chase rabbits. I'm glad to know that quote from Hawking as he certainly has a sterling

reputation in "science." But in my view Hawking has no Epicurean credentials and he's clearly treading into philosophy and ethics by using inflammatory references to the human race as chemical scum. Hawking knew how he would be interpreted when he said that, and he apparently saw that as consistent with his own view of human life, whatever that was. What we are doing in studying and promoting Epicurus entails a very different attitude toward human life.