

# Lucretius EpicureanFriends PDF Reference Edition - General Comments

**Post by "Cassius" of October 5, 2019 at 12:24 PM**

I am glad you brought this up Todd because it is a subject I think is important. If I recall the story goes that Epicurus originally got interested in philosophy because of his rejection of common understanding about "chaos" in relation to the origin of the universe, and it is my view that most "regular" people have been thoroughly indoctrinated to the view that there are only two options: Either (1) "God" created the universe, or (2) that the universe arose "accidentally" from "chaos" and that therefore everything is essentially chaotic and totally unpredictable.

It is also my view that Epicurus saw the remedy to this false dilemma in the atomic theory: that the properties of the elements provide the "natural laws" by which all things occur according to those properties. These properties are perhaps boundless in number but not "infinite" or "unlimited" in number -- only a certain number of combinations (boundless though they may be) are possible. This is why centaurs and other impossibilities are impossible. In this context, the regularity that arises from the properties of the elements is actually a far more important matter in most contexts than the swerve. The swerve establishes how we can have free will, and perhaps how the atoms came together originally instead of falling downward, but in the end the regularity which the uniform properties of the atoms establishes is our main bulwark against false religion - this is how the universe operates with gods.

(Also I remember being impressed when I read for the first time in the Long article how it is obvious that the swerve, if Epicurus had held it to override the regularity of the properties of the atoms, would have totally destroyed the Epicurean / atomic theory. Why is there ANY regularity if all atoms are constantly swerving in dramatic ways? But we know that it is likely that Epicurus did not teach that the swerve "breaks through" except in limited circumstances because otherwise Cicero would have used the swerve to point out the obvious inconsistency -- which (as far as we know) is an argument that Cicero never made. If Cicero had thought that Epicurus had opened himself to that inconsistency it is almost certain that Cicero would have featured that argument prominently.

So that is why I think that in discussing the basic nature of the universe to nonprofessionals, which is exactly what Epicureans like Lucretius were doing, the issue is to emphasize that there is regularity without the action of a supernatural god, and to show how that regularity arises from the nature of the atoms themselves.

In that context, words that imply that "luck" "fortune" or "chaos" that imply that \*anything\* is possible are exactly incorrect.

Obviously we can define words anyway we want to, and there is in fact a technical definition of

"accident" that is acceptable. But if the first or one of the primary meanings that word will evoke in regular people is going to call up a damaging message, it seems to me that that word should be avoided, which I sense (but cannot prove) is exactly what the 1743 translator thought as well.