

Feedback From A User

Post by “Joshua” of January 19, 2020 at 1:04 AM

Good evening, Lee.

Regarding your question about indeterminacy and free will, I'll offer an explanation. But Caveat Emptor—I do consider myself to be less well-versed in the technical side of the philosophy than most who post here. I've read all the really relevant literature, but sadly the better part of learning is trying to remember what you already know 😊

It can be difficult to approach Epicurus without an understanding of the mental universe of the Greeks with whom he argued. Cassius, and by no means he alone, has observed the degree to which the philosophy of Epicurus is simply a systematic dismantling of Platonism. It's not much different here.

In the case of free will, the necessary thing to engage with is the *objection* to free will that was current in Epicurus' time. There are two that come to mind. First, in Greek religion and literature the idea of fate was well-entrenched. The Oedipus Cycle, known to secondary school students everywhere, presents the case memorably.

The second objection was philosophical and metaphysical. If you take the view as Democritus did that the cosmos was perfectly material and mechanical, then the mechanical universe would push you around like clockwork. In an ancient metaphor, your mind would jostle about in the chariot of your body with no one at the reins.

Epicurus dismisses the first objection as a corollary to dismissing fate and the participation of the gods. He dismisses the second objection by proposing the Swerve. An indeterminate cosmos is to that extent non-mechanical. Instead of lifting your arm against the full tide and current of atomic motion, there is enough 'play' in the system to allow you to lift your arms through the atomic matrix.

This doesn't exactly answer your question. Nor have I explored modern objections to free will. But my eyelids are drooping, and this much will be enough to get things started.

Josh