

To What Extent, If Any, Does Modern Physics Invalidate Epicurean Philosophy?

Post by “Cassius” of August 15, 2020 at 11:56 AM

From Alan:

[Cassius](#) Okay, yes, we are getting closer to a mutual understanding. I understand the utility of retaining some position rather than nothing when it comes to dealing with the largest questions and not giving in to Pyrrhonism or ultimate skepticism. For this we can rigorously employ polyvalent logic/the simultaneity of sound hypotheses principle, and have a variety of explanations that are consistent with empirical experience (e.g., the universe is literally both infinite and finite, until one or the other is contradicted by the evidence, much like a quantum state can be a superposition of many until observed and the wave function is collapsed).

If Epicurus would ask me how would I defend our conclusions from a modern perspective, I would say the following:

Conclusion 1) There are no supernatural gods which intervene because if they exist it would fly in the face of everything we understand from modern physics about nature. If there are gods, they could be biologically immortal or even post-biological and so advanced and concerned with themselves to the point that they need not bother with us. They could even be aware of us but not interested in us, like an advanced Kardashev civilization in a Matrioshka brain.

Conclusion 2) There are no ideal forms because abstractions are not the things in themselves. Nowhere in nature will you find something supernatural. Just because we imagine it does not mean it is real.

Conclusion 3) There are no compulsory virtues. We evolved Darwinistically as social and communal beings, and it was conducive to our survival fitness to contribute to the group and be altruistic. However, there is no mandate to be altruistic/virtuous, it is just a useful tool/accessory that helped us to survive (e.g. in Pleistocene Africa and during the Ice age, etc.)

Conclusion 4) There is no fatalism because we do have (at the very least the appearance of) agency. Even in a mostly causally deterministic universe, we have these minds that are simultaneously reductionist (traceable to electroneurochemical brain firings) and emergent (coming about as more than the sum than its parts), and it is also very clear to us that we have the appearance of free-will. An evolutionary argument could also be made that agency is necessary to facilitate interactions within the group (what Epicurus would call natural justice), because otherwise we could not give accountability or praise for actions. We do not need the swerve to defend free will.

Conclusion 5) There is no afterlife. We have to take this one on faith because if we are being truly honest, we don't know for sure whether there is one or not. The best we can say is that there has never been compelling evidence to believe that an afterlife exists, and it is not useful for this life to place our hopes in an afterlife (and by doing so may lead to many real repercussions in this life). To say that our consciousness goes on in any meaningful way in this naturalistic universe violates entropy and thermodynamics and cannot be. The only way for there to be an afterlife would be for it to be necessarily supernatural, in which case we would be wrong.