

Free Will Again

Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of August 18, 2021 at 11:32 PM

I write this a bit humorously, because there's some paradox play (it may be frowned upon but it's not prohibited yet 😊) and because it's not completely thought through, but it's something that just came to mind and I don't want to forget it.

The more I think about it, the more I'm aware that the debate about free will versus determinism is just nonsense. I really think we don't need more proof or explanation about our ability to live with free will, but just to accept it and experience it. I think this is so evident that we actually use our free will to try an approach/achieve whatever determinism we can get a hold of.

Perhaps this is an anticipation in and of itself. Formed by centuries of wanting to abide to something outside of oneself to find safety (to allow yourself to feel pleasure).

But let me explain this point of view: The platonists seek this determinism in idealizations, the stoics and religious in providence, and we try to do so the most real and natural way, by trying to be aware of what feels good for us (which is undeniably determined by our bodies, and probably anticipations).

I think our way is the best because the authority we abide to is put within ourselves, and what we do is try to understand it, polish it, and let it reign for our own tangible happiness. Whereas the other "leaders, sages" even psychologists advocate for a "losing of the self", "transcendence of the self" for all the wrong reasons, among them subjecting themselves to a will outside of them, we actually can let go of the "ideal" self to embrace the material, real self.

To round up with a little politics, all of this may sound pretty much tending towards authoritarianism, but it's actually rather anarchist, in that anarchism espouses the view that an authority figure is not bad in an of itself as long as its authority is justified by the benefits it provides to the ones it's leading. Which we know is our case.

Post by “Cassius” of August 19, 2021 at 5:28 AM

1. I think you are on the right track comparing this with something derived from an anticipation. It is something we experience as true even almost like pleasure and pain. It is part of our

natural experience of life and therefore it's a given that we take it and use it regardless of how it works.

2. I did not completely follow your final comment about anarchism. Perhaps you meant authoritarianism in the last sentence? The next to last paragraph about the problems with "losing the self" I think is very good. I do think it is permissible under our forum rules (and even necessary) to talk about systems in general, so as to discuss the last ten or so PDs. One point I would make among systems however is that I think just like we sometimes choose pain in the short term, and just as there is no absolute justice, it is probably the case that depending on circumstance it can be necessary to move from system to system as required by "temporary" facts. Even the Romans of the republican period apparently recognized that despite their traditional laws it might be necessary on occasion to have a dictator if survival of the community required it. So in my view the fundamental premise would be that there is no "one size fits all" system endorsed by nature. I say that of course as being someone who is personally in favor of the maximum personal freedom possible. But who acknowledges that there are times when survival demands otherwise.

For example, we are living through such a period today. In my view it is a fact question in which I don't think we should take a side here on the forum lest we get too political on exactly what response to Covid-19 is appropriate. But surely if we considered a hypothetical example like some kind of science fiction Andromeda Strain movie, or discovery of a huge meteor about to impact and destroy the earth, it is easier to make a case for extreme central authority to deal with that absolutely clear contingency..

I think discussions of hypotheticals like that are valuable and are fair game here, but I do think that it would be dangerous for everyone to start stating personal positions on (for example) Covid-19 responses. We all can and should have those positions. But here it is very likely best to use either a science fiction example or something from long ago history as the best way to discuss those issues unemotionally.

Post by "Cassius" of August 19, 2021 at 5:50 AM

I think @EricR may have some thoughts on this thread so I will tag him to be sure he sees it.

Post by "Mathitis Kipouros" of August 19, 2021 at 9:42 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I think you are on the right track comparing this with something derived from an anticipation. It is something we experience as true even almost like pleasure and pain. It is part of our natural experience of life and therefore it's a given that we take it and use it regardless of how it works

I goy a bit confused about what is it that you're referring yo here.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Perhaps you meant authoritarianism in the last sentence?

No, I did mean anarchism. As in: "a [political philosophy](#) and [movement](#) that is sceptical of [authority](#) and rejects all involuntary, coercive forms of [hierarchy](#)." It's pretty idealized, but thus are all forms of government and political systems; it's just that this one I find more in line with Epicurean Philosophy. The "skeptical about authority part" is what I'm alluding to when I reference it in the post. It means that an authority has to prove its value, it's not to be accepted automatically (rings a bell?) and the test is one of materialism, where there should be a clear benefit (rings another bell) for the ones who are "being ruled".

[Quote from Cassius](#)

One point I would make among systems however is that I think just like we sometimes choose pain in the short term, and just as there is no absolute justice, it is probably the case that depending on circumstance it can be necessary to move from system to system as required by "temporary" facts

This is the point exactly. The examples you post are confirming of this too.

Post by “Don” of August 19, 2021 at 11:50 AM

My take has been that Epicureans would prefer, as a political system, one that assures stability and personal freedom in a society, making the personal pursuit of pleasure as readily available as possible. The specific system (monarchy, democracy, anarchism, etc) would be subject to the "not harm nor be harmed" basic contract to judge its level of just rule.

Post by "Cassius" of August 19, 2021 at 12:34 PM

[Quote from camotero](#)

is not bad in an of itself as long as its authority is justified by the benefits it provides to the ones it's leading.

Camotero, I am not familiar with this point of view - that an anarchist would not consider an authority (which I interpret to mean central authority) bad in itself. I interpret opposition to authority to be the essence of anarchism. Can you give me something to explain that?

In regard to your comment before that I thought you were analogizing free will to be something that we experience as a given, like pleasure and pain. As for the reference to an anticipation I am equating all three of the canonical faculties as things we experience as "givens" (which we then have to process in our minds)

Post by "EricR" of August 19, 2021 at 4:50 PM

I thought I'd offer some thoughts on this. There seem to be 2 topics under discussion, free will and anarchism. I will address them separately.

Free will is a topic that is so crucial that I think we need to treat it cautiously. In fact, because of its religious overtones, I don't really like the term. I prefer volition or even better, "choices and avoidances"! [Mathitis Kipouros](#), can you please clarify this sentence for me. I need some help to understand, "...we actually use our free will to try an approach/achieve whatever determinism we can get a hold of." I suspect it's something like the following, but please correct me if not.

Neuroscientists, physicists, etc. claim determinism to be the law of nature, and the evidence they recruit for this is powerful. In fact, I accept their evidence yet still have a problem with their conclusion. If I am a scientist wanting to validate or invalidate a hypothesis, I have to test it and assess the results of the experiment. If I have no free will, then whatever assessment I make is determined so I cannot actually know if it's correct. Since I had no choice in my conclusion, how can I know that conclusion is right? I suppose one can say that logical deduction itself is what tells me something is correct or not, but how do I know logic is correct? I'm still

faced with the same problem assessing logic. I know there are whole books out there that refute the notion of free will. But I still get stuck on this point. How can I know anything if I cannot make any choices about what is true or false?

As for anarchy, it is a word that means "no rulers". So I must disagree with your statement that "anarchism espouses the view that an authority figure is not bad in and of itself as long as its authority is justified by the benefits it provides to the ones it's leading." Anarchism is the rejection of rulers. I know of no political context in which a committed anarchist justifies being ruled. Yes, there are situations in which being ruled is tolerated, but the rulers have no standing in the mind of an anarchist.

"Transcending the self" is yet another important topic. But my old brain struggles to juggle multiple topics in a single thread.

Post by “Don” of August 19, 2021 at 4:59 PM

Personally, I'm coming around to agree with Daniel Dennett on free will. Just "Google" his name and "free will." There are some nice summary videos of him.

Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of August 20, 2021 at 7:38 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I interpret opposition to authority to be the essence of anarchism. Can you give me something to explain that?

I guess you're not completely wrong; I think you're right to assume that anarchism as an ideal, by definition, is an opposition to authority as a default; it's implicit in its name too; this probably has led some to believe it is an ideal that promotes full chaos and permanent rebellion without a cause; and probably has led some to act according to that interpretation of the ideal, probably not conducing to much pleasure for them or the ones around them; but, since we as Epicureans know better, we know that not all abstractions and ideals are wrong in and of themselves, but rather in their capacity to provide for us pleasure or pain; so, I don't ascribe to the ideal for the sake of it, much less ascribe to the common and caricaturized interpretation of

it, but rather, after putting it to the test, I think it has potential as being useful for our pleasure, as its main argument is not only based on material grounds, but also disposed to dismantle other commonly accepted ideals or superstitions, which I think goes in line with our disposition to learn more about nature with the final objective of dispelling false beliefs (or probably test an anticipation, like the one I wrote about lines above); in this case: that there's no supernatural/unquestionable authority of some over others.

It's not an ideallistic position that all authority is bad, but rather a materialistic position that tries to draw attention and create awareness of something we usually accept blindly or take for granted but that perhaps is not particularly good for us.

So, given that we can accept that authority doesn't exist, because this is an ideallization and no ideal form does exist, it follows that any and all authorities or manifestations of authority should be permanently and from the start questioned/tested (so long as this questioning/testing doesn't create an imbalance of long term pleasure/pain on the side of pain to the testers).

Now that we're talking about real, material, practical issues, we can go a bit further and talk about what the test should be, and there is where I think it can fully connect with Epicureanism: The authority should be good for you, in terms of providing for you the most pleasure, the most opportunity to achieve pleasure, the most stability for you to seek pleasure on your own (like [Don](#) said), etc.

Pragmatically speaking, it is a point of view that doesn't necessarily go against any form of government or political system as long as they've proven to be useful to your pleasure. And its useful for you to manage the common anticipation that you need to abide to some leader.

I don't have this fully formed in my head yet, but your questions [Cassius](#) have been great to think about this topic (political systems) that has always been pleasurable for me to think about.

Post by “Cassius” of August 20, 2021 at 8:12 PM

The issues I see with the term "anarchism" is sort of what I see with "autarchy" and they relate to the recent discussions with Don about the "greatest good debate."

I don't think of myself as some kind of radical reductionist, but I think it's an important point to remember that we are the ones who define words the way we choose. In the case of any generic social term like "autarchy" or "anarchy" we have the problem that there is no single point of reference as to what those words means. It can be useful to use them, just as it is useful at times to talk about the "greatest good" but the problem is that no one gets to dictate

to everyone else what the definitions are, and if you're talking with people who aren't on exactly the same page with your own definitions, it's easy to make mistakes as to what we're really talking about.

In that sense it seems to me to be a significant advantage to talk about "Epicurean" or even "Epicureanism" because that term limits the definitions to what Epicurus himself taught. Of course there are all sorts of ambiguities about that, but it's easier to agree that whatever he taught (if we could determine the details) that's what it means to be "Epicurean" -- as opposed to "autarchy" or the like where you always have to stipulate "Who's definition?"

Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of August 22, 2021 at 5:33 PM

[Quote from EricR](#)

we actually use our free will to try an approach/achieve whatever determinism we can get a hold of.

Thanks for the thoughtful post @EricR and sorry for the delayed response. What I was trying to say is that to me having free will is so true and obvious that I don't think it's needed to explain why or how it works to confirm it does work. I was offering a "paradoxical observation", just as play, not fully thought through, (as friendly-bait to see if someone saw something about it too) in which with our free will we're constantly trying to find ways of doing things that give us the sense of living deterministically, as if we're so free we actually try to renounce some of the burden of defining our own path systematically, thus our desire to have some sort of outside unavoidable guideline that would let us know what we should do.

About the anarchism part of the post, I'm going to have to side with [Cassius](#) in that we're going to get lost in clarifying the definitions we understand of the concept. I would just emphasize that authority is an idea, and as such, is something we either accept or don't, conscious or unconsciously.

Post by “Cassius” of August 22, 2021 at 5:43 PM

[Quote from camotero](#)

I don't think it's needed to explain why or how it works to confirm it does work

It seems we run into that issue regularly with these "logic" questions. "Logic" isn't the ultimate answer to life and cannot provide complete explanations so we have to understand that. For better or for worse, however, some people cannot avoid getting embroiled in logic problems, and if they do they need to be pointed clearly to the way out, lest they give up and ruin philosophy for 2000 as did the namesake of the dialogue "[Philebus](#)."