

Methodological Naturalism

Post by “Don” of July 3, 2022 at 7:01 PM

<https://youtu.be/gCyNd6NifHQ>

Interesting. I had not heard the term "methodological naturalism."

Post by “Joshua” of July 3, 2022 at 10:21 PM

I think I mentioned that term on the first episode of the letter to Pythocles, during the discussion as to whether the ancients were really doing "science". I'd have to listen back to be sure.

But I certainly think it's applicable to what Epicurus was doing in the 4th century.

Post by “Don” of July 3, 2022 at 10:30 PM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

I think I mentioned that term on the first episode of the letter to Pythocles, during the discussion as to whether the ancients were really doing "science". I'd have to listen back to be sure.

But I certainly think it's applicable to what Epicurus was doing in the 4th century.

Sorry if I missed that! 👍

It seems to me, too, to possibly be applicable to Epicurus's outlook.

I guess that's the question.

Was Epicurus asserting that there was nothing supernatural?

Or, was he asserting that nothing supernatural would have any impact on our universe so it would be irrelevant to our lives and our happiness?

Functionally, those two could work similarly or identically, but they are two different things.

Post by “Cassius” of July 3, 2022 at 10:58 PM

Sections like this one from Lucretius Book 2 incline me strongly toward the first of those two interpretations:

Humphries version around line 1079

Holding this knowledge, you can't help but see

That nature has no tyrants over her,

But always acts of her own will; she has

No part of any godhead whatsoever.

By all that's holy in the tranquil calm

Where the gods pass serene eternal days

I ask you - which of them is strong enough

To rule the sum of things, to hold the reins

Of absolute profundity, or move the skies

To turn together? Who can warm the lands

To fruitfulness with fire sent down from heaven?

Who can be immanent in every time,

In every place - to cloud the world in dark,

To shake the quiet areas of sky

With terrible sound? Who sends the lightning's blast

Even at his own temples? Who departs

To wilderness, but as he goes, in wrath,

Lets fly the bolts that pass the guilty by
And murder undeserving innocents?

Post by “Joshua” of July 3, 2022 at 11:08 PM

I don't think that methodological naturalism asserts that there is nothing supernatural--that to my understanding would be 'philosophical naturalism'. Methodological naturalism is not so much a doctrine or belief, as it is an attitude or approach to inquiry.

But to state my own position plainly, I think that Epicurus was a philosophical naturalist, who further employed methodological naturalism in his study of nature.

By contrast, Dr. Francis Collins who is a renowned geneticist and was the the head of the Human Genome Project is *not at all* a naturalist, being a Christian, but in his scientific work he sought natural explanations for the phenomena of nature.

Post by “Joshua” of July 3, 2022 at 11:11 PM

I should have watched the video before I posted that, he explains it rather well!

Post by “Don” of July 4, 2022 at 12:31 AM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

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You are absolutely correct, [Joshua](#) . Thanks! Very good points to remember.

[Quote from Joshua](#)

But to state my own position plainly, I think that Epicurus was a philosophical naturalist, who further employed methodological naturalism in his study of nature.

I would concur as well. I think that is an excellent way to phrase it. And so I would agree with [Cassius](#) above as well in saying Epicurus did positively assert that there was nothing supernatural. As [Cassius](#) mentioned in the most recent podcast (Nicely done on the 12 Fundamentals btw), the Epicureans could be lauded for their ALWAYS looking for a material/physical explanation even when confronted by Alexander the Oracle-monger and his magic snake. So, the Epicureans would assert, as you said [Joshua](#) that there is nothing supernatural (I would add: Because I assume they believed the universe was infinite and there was nothing "outside" of the universe.) therefore, they were "philosophical naturalists" in their perspective. As such, they would (in our terminology here) be "methodological naturalists" in their day to day dealings with the world.

[Quote from Joshua](#)

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You are on fire, my friend! 😊 Excellent point there as well. That is a good illustration of the different permutations possible in the naturalist and scientist categories.

Thank you both, [Joshua](#) and [Cassius](#) !