

what did epicurean actually mean by free will ? i think the article on the main page is confusing determinism with fatalism

Post by “UnPaid_Landlord” of December 14, 2024 at 8:28 AM

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There Is No Necessity To Live Under The Control Of Necessity.

There Is No Necessity To Live Under the Control Of Necessity

During the brief span of life that is available to us there are no supernatural commandments to follow, and it is necessary for us to act wisely to identify the best life available to us. Therefore Epicurus held that there could be nothing more demoralizing than to think that we have no power over our actions and our future. Epicurus therefore singled out two belief systems as particularly false and harmful. The first falsehood is "Determinism" - the view that due to fate, supernatural forces, or even a purely mechanistic understanding of nature of atoms, we have no control whatsoever over our lives.

Epicurus realized that Determinism is not only damaging, but demonstrably false. Against such mechanistic views of the universe Epicurus advanced not only the physics of "the swerve of the atom," but he also pointed out the self-contradictory nature Determinism. Epicurus cited this self-contradiction when he wrote: "The man who says that all things come to pass by necessity cannot criticize one who denies that all things come to pass by necessity: for he admits that this too happens of necessity." (VS 40) And as a practical matter, Epicurus pointed out that we do clearly have control over the supreme choice in life: we have the ability to end our lives at any time, so nothing can compel us to *continue* to live under necessity.

Epicurus held that if we have the power to make this most important decision in life, we also have the power to control many other lesser aspects of life. Deterministic or fatalistic beliefs are poisons that must be avoided at all costs, so Epicurus wrote "For, indeed, it were better to follow the myths about the gods than to become a slave to the destiny of the natural philosophers: for the former suggests a hope of placating the gods by worship, whereas the latter involves a necessity which knows no placation."

Find out more in our [Physics Forum](#), our [Wiki](#), and our [Discussion Guide](#) ↗.

help in drafting your own, click here.

"I know not how to conceive the good, apart from the pleasures of taste, of sex, of sound, and the pleasures of beautiful form."
- Epicurus

But the issue is not, "what is the means of happiness?"
The issue is, "what is happiness?"
Or, in other words, "What is the ultimate goal of our existence?"

I say both one, and always, always and truly, to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that pleasure is the highest and the best.

The pleasures which are termed "quies" (quiet) are by other philosophers, who transfer the status from "the means" to "the end," "the means to the end" (the end). The status is not in the means themselves, but only the means to the end that might be used for it.

The highest pleasure is true in the strongest possible terms, and is the most desirable good for how one should live.

Ex Epicureto gaudium

Conversations

18°C 18:57 14-12-2024

Post by "Cassius" of December 14, 2024 at 8:32 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4184-what-did-epicurean-actually-mean-by-free-will-i-think-the-article-on-the-main-pa/>

Hello [UnPaid_Landlord](#). How so? Happy to hear your thoughts.

You might find some at least partial response in our recent podcast and notes for Episodes 257 and 258.

Thread

[Episode 257 - There Is No Necessity To Live Under Necessity - Part 1](#)

Welcome to Episode 257 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the most complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at [EpicureanFriends.com](#), where we discuss this and all of our...



Cassius

November 18, 2024 at 2:06 PM

Post by “UnPaid_Landlord” of December 14, 2024 at 8:40 AM

i mean causal determination doesn't necessarily mean that we have no control over our lives or that our life is somehow fated, that's more like fatalism ?

Post by “UnPaid_Landlord” of December 14, 2024 at 8:41 AM

anyways i will watch that podcast you suggested first and then talk later

Post by “Cassius” of December 14, 2024 at 10:00 AM

In the meantime:

[Wikipedia](#):

Determinism is the [philosophical](#) view that all events in the [universe](#), including human decisions and actions, are causally inevitable.

And of course much much more which we can't hope to dissect in detail in the opening article. The practical affect of the issue is whether a human being has any control over his or future at all, and I would say that that is what Epicurus was addressing by referring mostly to the term "necessity" but also dealing with "fortune" and "fate" as well.

Post by “UnPaid_Landlord” of December 16, 2024 at 5:43 AM

[Cassius](#) after listening to the podcast of part 2, i guess basically what they are saying is our lives are in our control, that's basically what epicurus meant, and we don't have to go too deep into it to understand that because its a maze with no clear way out, so just having a reasonable explanation is good enough. it makes sense i guess. after all there is no emphirical scientific evidence on either side so we don't really know for sure, there are only arguements, better to think you are in control and honestly try and then give up and be passive.

Post by “Cassius” of December 16, 2024 at 6:29 AM

[Quote from UnPaid_Landlord](#)

after all there is no emphirical scientific evidence on either side so we don't really know for sure, there are only arguements, better to think you are in control and honestly try and then give up and be passive.

I don't have a full and complete explanation for you but this phrasing helps emphasize to me that we need to talk more here on the forum about what it really means to "know for sure" and the relationship of that to "empirical scientific evidence."

Is everything always simply a matter of argument, or when do we shift our opinion so that we hold that we "know for sure" that something is true?

Do we wait for "empirical scientific" opinions to be issued, as if we are doctors waiting for an article from the Journal of the American Medical Association to be issued? And if fact if JAMA does issue an article, how many times have even they changed their opinions in the past? And if we in fact in our clinical fact find success with a treatment that has not yet been "approved" by the JAMA, do we stop our treatment of our patients and wait for a go-ahead from a published empirical scientific opinion journal?

I think the answer is found in the direction of "[all sensations are true](#)" in that the ultimate standard for us as humans involves trusting the senses as our ultimate tests of truth. If we sense the same thing over and over again under repeatable conditions, then we hold it to be true for us regardless of what any number of experts might say that "the science" really is.

And for example what I sense over and over again is that I can choose to eat, or not to eat, one more bite of food. I know that there are many influences that led me to be hungry and the food to be available and for me to assess what is a proper thing to eat, but in the end I sense that I have the mental ability to choose to eat one more bite or not.

And that's sufficient for me to conclude that Epicurus was correct: some things are under our control, some are not, and some happen purely by accident.

Once we agree that there's such a division then there is plenty of room for discussion about the causes that led up to a particular decision. The problem is not that past influences don't exist, but that the hard determinists deny that we as conscious organisms have any role to play in any decisionmaking. And if you conclude that to be the case, you've got a cascade of negative logical and psychological effects that follow.

Post by "Cassius" of December 16, 2024 at 7:04 AM

Let me extend my doctor / JAMA example. Do I think that there might be circumstances in which a doctor found in his clinical practice that some treatment invariably worked, but held back from prescribing it because JAMA did not approve?

Absolutely yes such circumstances could exist. Maybe the doctor, for example, is president of JAMA, and is convinced that great benefit comes from JAMA being respected, and the treatment is for a minor condition, and the patient is a news reporter trying to undermine JAMA.....

The point of this post is that I think that Epicurean philosophy cannot as a general abstraction lay down blanket rules about specific actions for all people at all times and all places. It is clear in the philosophy that sometimes we chose pain, sometimes we consider what appears to be good to be bad when we add up all the consequences.

The first and major contribution of Epicurean philosophy is that while it can give you suggestions in how to proceed in your decisionmaking, ultimately the points that are certain is that when you add up your consequences, DON'T think that you are going to be rewarded or punished after death, and DON'T think that you need to worry about appeasing or being punished by supernatural forces in this life, and DO realize that in the end there's only one thing given to you by Nature for you to take and analyze and then make your decisions based on. That one thing is the faculty of pleasure and pain, which applies to everything you experience, and it's up to you to analyze *all* the consequences of your actions and make your decisions accordingly.

There's of course a lot more, but the basic view of the universe informs how *you* will evaluate pleasure and pain, and getting that basic view of the universe right is essential.

Post by "Root304" of December 22, 2024 at 2:24 AM

I take the doctrines on Free Will more practically as you did in the last comment Cassius:

"[All sensations are true](#)" style argument...

1) I percieve myself and others to have some degree of "Free will" though obviously within what I have observed of human behavior and capabilities, as well as some things behave by chance and other things are indeed fated. My perceptions must be true and it is really the only way I can proceed with life reasonably.

And more practically and from my own experience of leaving a job that felt impossible to leave:
2) I should not use the notion of Fate, determination and destiny to refrain from altering my course in life to pursue something more pleasant or otherwise less painful. Making a big change can certainly *feel* like an overturning of everything some times when yours and others' routine and sentiments seem settled in and do not want to be disrupted. You may resign yourself to fate or God's will or what have you; but none of that is actually the case.

This may seem a bit low-brow and I suppose it is, but my Epicurean philosophizing has recently taken a huge turn towards the notion of philosophizing "relationally" or with other folks and their desires, emotions and reasoning in the mix. If their perceptions meet your perceptions and contrast, there must be a new way forward - perhaps not being attached to outcomes but rather to fulfilling mutual desires - that we can create. I only take this approach, or describing it

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as "relational" from the closing remarks in a Catherine Wilson article. Otherwise I wouldn't have gone down the rabbit track of viewing this sort of relationship reasoning as an expression of Epicurean philosophizing.