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DID EPICURUS DISCOVER THE FREE WILL PROBLEM?

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1. Introduction

In 1967 Epicurus was credited with the discovery of the problem of free will and determinism.[1] Among the contestants were Aristotle and the early Stoics. Epicurus emerged victorious, because—so the argument went—Aristotle did not yet have the problem, and the Stoics inherited it from Epicurus. In the same year David Furley published his essay 'Aristotle and Epicurus on Voluntary Action', in which he argued that Epicurus' problem was not the free will problem.[2] In the thirty-odd years since then, a lot has been published about Epicurus on freedom and determinism.[3] But it has

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[1] By Pamela Huby in 'The First Discovery of the Freewill Problem' ['Freewill Problem'], *Philosophy*, 42 (1967), 353–62.

[2] D. Furley, 'Aristotle and Epicurus on Voluntary Action' ['Voluntary Action'], in his *Two Studies in the Greek Atomists* (Princeton, 1967).

[3] e.g. J. Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind* [*Mind*] (Berkeley, 1992), ch. 8; E. Asmis, *The Epicurean Theory of Free Will and its Origins in Aristotle* (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1970); ead., 'Free Action and the Swerve: Review of Walter G. Englert, *Epicurus on the Swerve and Voluntary Action*' ['Free Action'], *OSAP* 8 (1990), 275–91; I. Avotins, 'The Question of *Mens* in Lucretius 2. 289', *Classical Quarterly*, NS 29 (1979), 95–100; id., 'Notes on Lucretius 2. 251–293', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 84 (1980), 75–9; P. Conway, 'Epicurus' Theory of Freedom of Action' ['Epicurus' Theory'], *Prudentia*, 13 (1981), 81–9; W. G. Englert, *Epicurus on the Swerve and Voluntary Action* [*Epicurus*] (Atlanta, Ga., 1987); D. Fowler, 'Lucretius on the *Clinamen* and "Free Will" (II 251–93)', in *Συζήτησις: Studi sull'epicureismo greco e romano offerti a Marcello Gigante* [*Συζήτησις*] (Naples, 1983), 329–52; N. Gulley, 'Lucretius on Free Will' ['Free Will'], *Symbolae Osloenses*, 65 (1990), 37–52; P. Huby, 'The Epicureans, Animals, and Freewill', *Apeiron*, 3 (1969), 17–19; K. Kleve, 'Id Facit Exiguum Clinamen', *Symbolae Osloenses*, 55 (1980), 27–31; S. Laursen, 'Epicurus *On Nature* Book XXV', *Cronache ercolanesi*,

only rarely been questioned again whether Epicurus, in one way or another, found himself face to face with some version of the free will problem.[4] In this paper I intend to take up the case for those who have questioned the point, combining a fresh perspective on the debate with a selection of new arguments and a detailed textual analysis of the relevant passages. Let me begin with a brief sketch of the problem of freedom and determinism which Epicurus is widely taken to have been concerned with.

The *determinism* Epicurus defends himself against is usually understood as *causal* determinism: every event is fully determined in all its details by preceding causes. These causes are commonly pictured as forming an uninterrupted chain or network, reaching back infinitely into the past, and as governed by an all-embracing set of laws of nature, or as manifestations of such a set of laws of nature.

On the side of *freedom*, Epicurus is generally understood to have been concerned with freedom of decision (the freedom to decide *whether or not* to do some action) or freedom of choice (the freedom to choose *between* doing and not doing some action)[5] or freedom of the will (where the freedom to will to do something entails the freedom to will not to do it, and vice versa; I call this *two-sided* freedom of the will). Epicurus is taken to have introduced an *indeterminist* conception of free decision or free choice or two-sided free will:

18 (1988), 7–18; id., 'Against Democritus—Towards the End', in M.Capasso *et al.*, *Miscellanea Papyrologica* (Florence, 1990), 3–22 at 21–2; id., 'The Summary of Epicurus' *On Nature* Book 25', *Papiri letterari greci e latini* (1992), 143–54; id., 'The Early Parts of Epicurus, *On Nature*, 25th Book' ['Early Parts'], *Cronache ercolanesi* (1995), 5–109; id., 'The Later Parts of Epicurus, *On Nature*, 25th Book' ['Later Parts'], *Cronache ercolanesi* (1998), 5–82; A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy* (New York, 1974), 56–61; A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* [Long–Sedley; LS] (Cambridge, 1987), i. 102–12; ii. 104–113; P. Mitsis, *Epicurus' Ethical Theory* (Ithaca, 1988), ch. 4; J. S. Purinton, 'Epicurus on "Free Volition" and the Atomic Swerve' ['Free Volition'], *Phronesis*, 44 (1999), 253–99; T. Saunders, 'Free Will and the Atomic Swerve in Lucretius', *Symbolae Osloenses*, 59 (1984), 37–59; D. N. Sedley, 'Epicurus' Refutation of Determinism' ['Determinism'], in *Συζήτησις*, 11–51; id., 'Epicurean Anti-Reductionism', ['Anti-Reductionism'], in J. Barnes and M. Mignucci (eds.), *Matter and Metaphysics* (Naples, 1988), 295–327; R. W. Sharples, *Cicero* On Fate *and Boethius* The Consolation of Philosophy *IV. 5–7, V* (Warminster, 1991), 172–7, 195; id., 'Epicurus, Carneades and the Atomic Swerve' ['Epicurus'], *BICS* (1991–3), 174–90.

[4] Besides Furley there is Conway, 'Epicurus' Theory'. Authors have, however, become more careful on this point: see e.g. Mitsis, *Epicurus' Ethical Theory*, and Laursen's publications (see n. 3).

[5] Or alternatively to choose between doing one action or another.

agents are free in this sense only if they are causally undetermined (or not fully causally determined) in their decision whether or not to act or their choice between alternative courses of action; undetermined, that is, by external and internal causal factors alike. There is assumed to be a gap in the causal chain immediately before, or simultaneously with, the decision or choice, a gap which allows the coming into being of a spontaneous motion. In this way every human decision or choice is directly linked with causal indeterminism. The assumption of such indeterminist free decision, free choice, or two-sided free will does not presuppose that one specifies an independent mental faculty, like e.g. a will, and indeed it is not usually assumed that Epicurus' theory involved such a faculty.

The 'free will problem' that Epicurus is assumed to have faced is then roughly as follows: If determinism is true, every decision or choice of an agent between alternative courses of actions is fully determined by preceding causes, and forms part of an uninterrupted causal chain. On the other hand, if an agent has (two-sided) freedom of the will, it seems that the agent's decision or choice must not be fully determined by preceding causes. Hence, it appears, determinism and freedom of the will (freedom of decision, freedom of choice) are incompatible.[6]

I do not believe that Epicurus ever considered a problem along the lines of the one just described. In particular, I am sceptical about the assumption that he shared in a conception of free decision or free choice akin to the one I have sketched. (I also have my doubts that he ever conceived of a determinism characterized by a comprehensive set of laws of nature; but this is a point I only mention in passing.) To avoid misunderstandings, I should stress that I do believe that Epicurus was an indeterminist of sorts—only that he did not advocate indeterminist free decision or indeterminist free choice.

Why do I surmise that Epicurus did not deal with a concept of free decision or choice? I have first an external reason, as it were: it is my view that neither Aristotle nor the early Stoics nor any contemporaries of Epicurus were concerned with such a concept.

[6] This is the kind of free will problem C. Giussani (*Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex*, i (Turin, 1896), 125–69) and C. Bailey (*The Greek Atomists and Epicurus* [*Greek Atomists*] (New York, 1928), 318–23, 433–7) connected with Epicurus, and which the majority of more recent scholars take him to have dealt with: so e.g. Asmis, 'Free Action'; Gulley, 'Free Will'; Huby, 'Freewill Problem'; Purinton, 'Free Volition'; Sedley, 'Determinism'; Sharples, 'Epicurus'.

However, in this paper I want to focus exclusively on Epicurean philosophy.[7] I argue—negatively—that nothing in Epicurus' extant writings and in our other sources for Epicurus' philosophy provides any unambiguous evidence that Epicurus ever discussed a free will problem as just described;[8] and—positively—I suggest that Epicurus was caught in a related, but different, set of problems, for which we do have some direct evidence. One can best understand *why* Epicurus was concerned with a different problem if one realizes that he worked with different models of agency and moral responsibility from those attributed to him by many modern scholars who see him as a proponent of indeterminist freedom of decision or choice.

The concept of indeterminist freedom that has been attributed to Epicurus presupposes that agents are free only if they are undetermined (or not fully determined) *in their decision or choice* by external and internal factors alike. The stipulation of the absence of these determining factors is typically linked with a model of agency that is based on the following distinction: on the one hand, there are the possible causal influence factors, some external to me (the agent), like the environment, some internal to me, such as my character dispositions. On the other hand, there is myself, the one who decides, causally detached not only from external impacts, but also from my past experiences, from my present character and dispositions, from my desires and inclinations, perhaps even from my memories and factual beliefs. I, the one who decides, am thus identified with some sort of a decision-making faculty which is detached from the rest of 'me', where this rest includes my character and my present mental dispositions. This decision-making faculty has control over all the other factors and can in principle decide against any one of them. Thus the entity that makes decisions is not identified with

[7] For the Stoics see my *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy* [*Determinism*], (Oxford, 1998), ch. 6. For Aristotle, the Peripatetics, the Middle Platonists, and the general development of the problem of free decision and causal determinism see my 'The Inadvertent Conception and Late Birth of the Free-Will Problem' ['Inadvertent Conception'], *Phronesis*, 43 (1998), 133–75.

[8] Whether Epicurus discussed free will depends on what one means by 'free will'. For example, if one intends 'free will' to render Lucretius' 'libera voluntas' (see below, sect. 4), and to mean whatever element of Epicurus' doctrine Lucretius meant to capture by this phrase, then Epicurus evidently was concerned with free will. My concern is only to show that he did not discuss a problem of free will that involves a conception of freedom of decision or choice as adumbrated in the main text.

the whole person (body, soul, and mind), nor even the whole mind, but is causally independent of large parts of that person or of that mind. I call this the independent-decision-faculty model of agency. It is often, and sometimes explicitly, taken to underlie Epicurus' philosophy.[9]

This model and the concept of free decision or choice on which it is based are commonly linked with the following conception of moral responsibility: I can be held morally responsible for an action of mine only if I could have decided or chosen to act otherwise, or if I was free to decide or choose otherwise. This conception of responsibility is typically backed up with the fact that people are generally convinced that they could decide and act otherwise than they do, and with suggestions that moral emotions like regret or guilt indicate that we are free to decide and act otherwise.

Epicurus, I suggest, operated with a different conception of moral responsibility and with a different model of agency; a model which does not causally sever a person's present character and mental dispositions from that person *qua decision-maker*. Rather, Epicurus identified the agent with the person's mind (or large parts thereof), including the person's system of beliefs, memories, character dispositions, desires, and emotions. In this model, what volition a person forms, and what action they perform, fully depends on the overall disposition of the person's mind at the time of forming the volition. It is considered essential for the causal attribution of an action to me as a person that it is the person as I *am* when I form the volition who is (at least in the main)[10] causally responsible for what action is performed. I call this the whole-person model of agency.[11]

In this model, moral responsibility for an action is typically *not* based on the causal undeterminedness of the agent's *decision*, but, on the contrary, on the fact that the action is dependent on the person's present overall disposition of their mind. What makes an agent morally responsible, and an action voluntary, is what for

[9] Explicitly e.g. in Asmis, 'Free Action', 283; Sharples, 'Epicurus', 178, 187–8; it is implicit in e.g. Bailey, *Greek Atomism*, 435, and in Sedley 'Determinism', at 49 and before.

[10] Epicurus allowed for a multiplicity of causes for human behaviour; see below, p. 317 with n. 64.

[11] Two Lucretius passages could perhaps be adduced as providing some support for the assumption that Epicurus worked with the whole-person model of agency: '. . . that is still nothing to us, who are constituted by the conjunction of body and spirit' (Lucr. 3. 845–6, trans. Long–Sedley) and 'the mind and the spirit are firmly interlinked and constitute a single nature' (Lucr. 3. 136–7, trans. Long–Sedley).

convenience I shall call the *autonomy* of the agent. By 'autonomy' I intend to indicate nothing but the fact that the agent, *and not something else*, causes the action (or is at least its main cause), and that the agent is not compelled or forced to act. This second concept of moral responsibility is thus not grounded on a concept of freedom to decide or choose otherwise, but on a notion of agent autonomy.[12]

Characteristically, in the whole-person model of agency agents can influence their ways of acting and behaving only *indirectly*, by changing the basis of their actions, i.e. their mental dispositions (since their volitions and actions are a function of these dispositions). There is in this model no space for indeterminist freedom of decision. For the fact that agents act in accordance with their overall mental disposition is considered a *necessary condition* for attributing the action to them, whereas indeterminist freedom of decision takes the *detachment* of the decision-making faculty from (most of) the rest of the person's mind as a necessary condition. The concept of an internally undetermined decision *made by the agent* would be difficult to incorporate in this conceptual framework; and so would be the free will problem in the form sketched above.

In the whole-person model of agency the main problem that arises from a deterministic assumption is how, if everything, including my actions, were necessitated by something other than me, I, the agent, could still rightfully be considered as being myself causally and hence morally responsible for my actions. I call this the problem of necessitation and agent autonomy.

In the following I aim to show that all the surviving texts which have been adduced as evidence that Epicurus dealt with a free will problem as set out above are in fact compatible with the assumption that Epicurus did not work with an independent-decision-faculty model of agency or a concept of moral responsibility based on freedom to decide otherwise; and that there is a reasonable amount of evidence that Epicurus worked with a whole-person model of agency and a concept of moral responsibility based on the idea of agent autonomy as just described; and accordingly, that his problem was not the one commonly assumed, but a problem of necessitation and agent autonomy.

Why, then, is it such a popular view among philosophers that Epicurus dealt with a free will problem as described above, or at

[12] Evidence that Epicurus had this concept of moral responsibility is provided in sect. 3 below.

least with some of its main aspects? Apart from less relevant factors such as that it would be nice if Epicurus had anticipated the modern discussion of causal determinism and free decision-making, and even nicer if he had anticipated, with his swerve, the 'solution' some modern libertarians squeezed out of the theory of quantum mechanics—apart from such factors, there is one important reason: many of the key expressions used in those Epicurean passages that are commonly held to be about indeterminist choice appear to be ambiguous in such a way that—although they never state the problem of free decision and causal determinism directly—they *can* be read as alluding to it. These are, in particular, phrases and terms like 'free volition', 'freedom', 'being without master', 'beginning of motion', 'moving oneself', and 'that which depends on us' (*τὸ παρ' ἡμᾶς*). When, in the following pages, I analyse those passages that have been adduced as evidence that Epicurus dealt with indeterminist freedom of decision or choice, I shall, on the way, also spell out the ambiguities and vagueness in the key expressions involved.

2. *τὸ παρ' ἡμᾶς*

There is, in the extant Epicurean texts, no Greek term for freedom of decision, freedom to do otherwise or free will.[13] The Greek expression in Epicurean sources which is most often regarded as an indication that some such freedom is at issue is *παρ' ἡμᾶς*. This expression occurs in Epicurus' *Letter to Menoeceus* 133–4, and we find it twice in one sentence in Epicurus' *On Nature* 25. (It also appears in some later Epicurean texts. The related expression *ἐφ' ἡμῖν* does not occur in surviving passages by Epicurus.) Both passages from Epicurus have been understood as dealing with freedom of choice. However, I believe that this interpretation is based on an inadequate understanding of the expression *παρ' ἡμᾶς*. For the expression could be taken either as what I call 'causative one-sided' or as what I call 'potestative two-sided', and only the former does the passages justice, whereas only the latter could provide support for the view that Epicurus was concerned with free choice. Let me explain the difference between these two ways of understanding the phrase *παρ' ἡμᾶς*.

[13] *ἐλευθερία*, in *Gnom. Vat.* 77 (*τῆς αὐταρκείας καρπὸς μέγιστος ἐλευθερία*) does not denote freedom of decision, or—two-sided—freedom of the will.

The interpretation of παρ' ἡμᾶς as two-sided potestative commonly assumes a verb of being (rather than of happening or becoming) to go with the phrase: something *is* παρ' ἡμᾶς. When I call παρ' ἡμᾶς 'two-sided', I mean that if some action, e.g. walking, is said to be παρὰ σέ, this can be read as short for 'it is παρὰ σέ *whether or not* you walk'. On this understanding of the expression, the class of things that are παρ' ἡμᾶς includes precisely 50 per cent unrealized possibilities. Thus, when at a certain time it is παρὰ σέ whether you walk, then it is παρὰ σέ whether you don't walk, too; but you will be able only either to walk or not to walk at that time—not both. Hence either one or the other will remain unrealized. By 'potestative' I mean that if some action or occurrence is understood as παρ' ἡμᾶς, we are taken to have some sort of *power* to bring it about or not bring it about. A good translation of παρ' ἡμᾶς in its two-sided, potestative reading is 'up to us'.

This two-sided potestative understanding of παρ' ἡμᾶς entails neither determinism nor indeterminism.[14] But it is often understood as indeterminist, in the following way: it is assumed that walking is up to me at a certain time if at that time *whether or not* I will walk is causally undetermined (not fully determined) and depends on my free decision. Epicurus is commonly interpreted as using the expression παρ' ἡμᾶς both as two-sided potestative and as indeterminist.[15] When the expression is understood in this manner, the 'we' or 'us' (ἡμᾶς) in it is given the status of an active decision-maker. We can *decide* freely *whether or not* we walk (or choose freely between walking and not walking).

This is quite different in the case of what I call the one-sided causative παρ' ἡμᾶς. This interpretation of παρ' ἡμᾶς usually assumes a verb of happening or becoming (rather than of being) to go with the phrase: something *happens* or *comes to be* παρ' ἡμᾶς. By 'causative' I mean to indicate the fact that the prepositional phrase 'παρὰ *y*' in '*x* happens παρὰ *y*' refers to something which is a (main) cause or reason of *x*. Thus here translations such as 'because of us' or 'due to us' are preferable. When I call the phrase 'one-sided', I mean that if an action happens (comes to be) παρ' ἡμᾶς then its opposite does not happen (come to be) παρ' ἡμᾶς. If at a certain time my walking happens because of me, then it is not the case that my not walking happens because of me, too; for in that case my not walking does not happen at all. Here the natural understanding of the phrase is that it expresses who has the *causal responsibility* for the action in question. 'The walking happens παρὰ σέ (because of you)' can be paraphrased as 'you are the *cause* of your walking'. When understood as one-sided causative, 'whether-or-not' paraphrases of παρ' ἡμᾶς are impossible. The general idea is that, when sifting through the things *that actually happen* one distinguishes: well, this came to be by necessity, and that happened because of you, and so forth.

The one-sided causative παρ' ἡμᾶς, too, can be made use of in an indeterminist as well as a determinist theory. However, whereas the two-sided παρ' ἡμᾶς can be used to express an element of undeterminedness, by implying that we, *qua* decision-makers, can freely decide between alternative options, the one-sided παρ' ἡμᾶς cannot be so used. Its function is rather to indicate who bears the causal responsibility for an event. It does not imply the possibility of free choice. (The one-sided causative παρ' ἡμᾶς is, however, compatible with the assumptions that *we* can be the cause of our actions only if, say, we are not forced in our action, or if we have a general two-sided capacity for acting and not acting, or if it is in some sense possible for us—or up to us, ἐφ' ἡμῖν—both to act and not to act. I return to this point at the end of Section 3.)

Now, it is my view that in Epicurus, and quite generally in Hellenistic philosophy in the context of determinism and moral responsibility, the phrase παρ' ἡμᾶς was generally understood as one-sided and causative. There are several good reasons for assuming this.

First, in all the Epicurean (and related) texts in which παρ' ἡμᾶς is connected with a verb, this verb is always γίγνεσθαι, never εἶναι, and thus fits the causative understanding better. It is true that γίγνεσθαι can mean 'to be'. However, 'to come to be' or 'to happen' usually fits the context better (see below), and the consistency in the use of γίγνεσθαι rather than εἶναι also suggests this latter meaning. (It is also, I believe, a more common use of παρά with personal accusative.)

Second, παρ' ἡμᾶς occurs repeatedly as one of a triad of expres-

[14] For a determinist reading compare what I say about the related expression ἐφ' ἡμῖν in 'Inadvertent Conception', 143–4, or in *Determinism*, 281–2.

[15] For a two-sided potestative reading see Long–Sedley, vol. i, 20 C 1 (trans.) 'that which we develop is up to us' (γίνεσθαι παρ' ἡμᾶς), interpreted as 'it is up to us whether or not we develop a particular characteristic *c*' or 'whether or not we develop *c* or not *c*'; further Annas, *Mind*, 129 n. 18; Englert, *Epicurus*, 129, who assumes that τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν and τὸ παρ' ἡμᾶς are equivalent; similarly Purinton, 'Free Volition', 261–2.

sions for kinds of causal factors. Take first the above-mentioned passage from the *Letter to Menoeceus*:

Whom do you believe to be better than the one . . . who would denounce ⟨fate), which some introduce as mistress of all things, ⟨saying that some things happen by necessity,⟩ others by chance, and others again because of us, since necessity is not accountable to anyone, and chance is an unstable thing to watch, whereas that because of us is without master, and culpability and its opposite are naturally attached to it; for it would be better to follow the myths of the gods than to be enslaved by the fate of the natural philosophers. For the one indicates some hope for pardon from the gods if we honour them, but the other comes with inexorable necessity.[16] (Epic. *Men.* 133–4)

In this passage παρ' ἡμᾶς is contrasted with the expressions 'by necessity' (κατ' ἀνάγκην) and 'by chance' (ἀπὸ τύχης). These latter two expressions are both used to refer to causes (i.e. to that *because of which* some things happen), and as one-sided: if something happens by necessity, then its opposite does not happen; and again, if something happens by chance, then its opposite does not happen. Since παρ' ἡμᾶς is co-ordinated and treated as on a par with these two expressions, it is natural to infer that it has the same function of establishing the cause of an actual event. And this implies that it, too, is used as causative and one-sided.[17]

This finds support in the fact that in Stobaeus' report of Epicurus' tripartition παρ' ἡμᾶς has been substituted by the Peripatetic expression κατὰ προαίρεσιν and the three expressions are taken to denote so many kinds of being caused:

. . . αἰτιῶν ποικίλων προαιρέσεως, τύχης καὶ ἀνάγκης. Ἐπίκουρος κατ' ἀνάγκην, κατὰ προαίρεσιν, κατὰ τύχην. (Stob. *Ecl.* 1. 4–5 = Diels *Doxogr.* 326. 1–4)

[16] ἐπεὶ τίνα νομίζεις εἶναι κρείττονα τοῦ . . . τὴν . . . ὑπό τινων δεσπότιν εἰσαγομένην πάντων ⟨κατ⟩αγγέλλοντος ⟨εἱμαρμένην καὶ μᾶλλον ἃ μὲν κατ' ἀνάγκην γίνεσθαι λέγοντος,⟩ ἃ δὲ ἀπὸ τύχης, ἃ δὲ παρ' ἡμᾶς, διὰ τὸ τὴν μὲν ἀνάγκην ἀνυπεύθυνον εἶναι, τὴν δὲ τύχην ἄστατον ὁρᾶν, τὸ δὲ παρ' ἡμᾶς ἀδέσποτον ᾧ καὶ τὸ μεμπτὸν καὶ τὸ ἐναντίον παρακολουθεῖν πέφυκεν; ἐπεὶ κρεῖττον ἦν τῷ περὶ θεῶν μύθῳ κατακολουθεῖν ἢ τῇ τῶν φυσικῶν εἱμαρμένῃ δουλεύειν· ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἐλπίδα παραιτήσεως ὑπογράφει θεῶν διὰ τιμῆς, ἡ δὲ ἀπαραίτητον ἔχει τὴν ἀνάγκην.

⟨κατ⟩αγγέλλοντος: cf. Hdn. 5. 2. 2 δοῦλοι ὅσοι δεσπότας κατήγγελον; ἂν γελῶντος Long–Sedley; διαγελῶντος Usener. ⟨εἱμαρμένην . . . λέγοντος,⟩: Usener (cf. also *Gnom. Vat.* 40, where γίνεσθαι κατ' ἀνάγκην occurs three times); ⟨εἱμαρμένην ἀλλ' ἃ μὲν κατ' ἀνάγκην ὄντα συνορῶντος⟩ Long–Sedley.

[17] The tripartition is also found in S.E. *M.* 5. 46: τῶν γινομένων τὰ μὲν κατ' ἀνάγκην γίνεται τὰ δὲ κατὰ τύχην, τὰ δὲ παρ' ἡμᾶς . . . The passage *M.* 5. 46–8 may well be an argument put forward by later Epicureans.

Moreover, in *On Nature* 25 we find Epicurus talking about τὴν καθ' ἡμ[ᾶς] . . . αἰ[τίαν].[18] Similarly, the later Epicurean Diogenianus speaks about τὴν παρ' ἡμᾶς αἰτίαν,[19] and he uses the phrase παρ' ἡμᾶς as one-sided causative throughout.[20]

A strong reason for the assumption that Epicurus used παρ' ἡμᾶς as one-sided causative is finally provided by the way it occurs in Epicurus' *On Nature* 25:

Consequently, that which we develop (characteristics of this or that kind) comes to be at some point absolutely because of [παρά] us; and the things which of necessity flow in through our passages from that which surrounds us, at one point come to be because of [παρά] us and because of [παρά] the beliefs of ours which are from us ourselves.[21] (Epic. *Nat.* 25; Arr. 34. 26; Laursen, 'Later Parts', 33)

In its last part this sentence contains the following parallel construction:

. . . the things which of necessity flow in . . . from our surroundings come to be because of [παρά] us and because of [παρά] the beliefs of ours which are from us ourselves.

I take it that παρά (with accusative) has the same meaning in both phrases, since they are syntactically co-ordinated. But in the phrase 'παρὰ our beliefs' we cannot construe παρά as two-sided potestative. We cannot understand our beliefs as a decision-maker in the way we can see ourselves; we cannot paraphrase 'our beliefs make a decision as to *whether or not* we develop characteristic *c*'. Our beliefs cannot actively decide anything. They are specific beliefs which we actually have, and if something depends on them, that can here only mean that they determine *that* we develop one way *and not* the other—not *whether* we develop one way *or* the other. But if παρά is one-sided causative in the case

[18] Laursen, 'Early Parts', 99. 1056 corn. 1 pz. 3 z. 1 col.2 = Arr. 34. 7. This is Laursen's reading of the papyrus.

[19] *Praep. Evang.* 6. 8. 34. Cf. also [Plut.] *Epit.* 27. 3 (Diels, *Doxogr.* 322. 5–8) for Plato: τὴν παρ' ἡμᾶς αἰτίαν.

[20] *Praep. Evang.* 6. 8. 2, 6, 23, 30 (with γίνεσθαι), 6. 8. 32 (with συμβαίνειν). A passage in pseudo-Plutarch (*Epit.* 27. 4; Diels, *Doxogr.* 322. 9–14) suggests that the Stoics used παρ' ἡμᾶς as one-sided causative. The formulation in Philod. *Sign.* 36 is neutral with respect to a one-sided or two-sided reading.

[21] ὥστε παρ' ἡμας ποτε ἁπλῶς τὸ ἀπογεγεννημένον ἤδη γείνεσθαι, τοῖα ἢ τοῖα, καὶ τὰ ἐκ τοῦ περιέχοντος κατ' ἀνάγκην διὰ τοὺς πόρους εἰσρέοντα παρ' ἡμᾶς π[ο]τε γε[ίνε]σθαι καὶ παρὰ τὰς ἡμετέρας ἐξ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν δόξ[ας . . . (Epic. *Nat.* 25; Laursen, 'Later Parts', 33)

of our beliefs, it should also be one-sided causative in the case of παρ' ἡμᾶς.[22]

The interpretation of παρ' ἡμᾶς as one-sided causative obtains additional confirmation from the context in which the sentence in *On Nature* 25 belongs. It is the last sentence before a gap in the papyrus. The question discussed by Epicurus that leads up to the sentence (Arr. 34. 24–5; Laursen, 'Later Parts', 29–31) is whether we are morally responsible for our bad actions, if there is a correlating badness in our original constitution (i.e. the one we are born with). Epicurus' answer is that if we act through our initial disposition, we cannot be held responsible; but if, when pursuing the bad actions, we ourselves as we developed (presumably once we reached adulthood) are the cause, then we can be morally criticized, even if what we do is in line with our initial constitution. I assume that in the above-quoted sentence that contains the expression παρ' ἡμᾶς Epicurus is still in some way concerned with this same question. Thus the surrounding context of our sentence does not deal with alternative choices, or with a decision-making power of any sort (nor do any other passages from *On Nature* 25, as far as I can see). Rather, the context is human mental and especially moral development, and the general question is what or who is causally responsible for our dispositions and actions.

The occurrence of the phrase παρ' ἡμᾶς in Epicurean writings is, then, no evidence for the claim that Epicurus discussed the free will question as set out in Section 1, since the phrase is used by him not as two-sided and potestative, but as one-sided and causative.

3. The digression in *On Nature* 25

Next I consider the so-called digression in Epicurus' *On Nature* 25 (34. 27–30 Arr.; LS 20 C 2–15; Laursen, 'Later Parts', 35–42; I follow Laursen's edition of the text). In it Epicurus digresses from the book's main topic of human psychological development in order to refute the necessitarian views of an opponent. This passage has sometimes been taken to be concerned with the topic of the compatibility of determinism with free choice. It contains a series

[22] Contrast Long and Sedley, who translate παρ' ἡμᾶς as 'up to us' and παρὰ τ[ὰς] ἡμε[τέρα]ς [ἐ]ξ ἡμῶν αὐτ[ῶν] δόξ[ας . . . as 'dependent on beliefs of our own making' (Long–Sedley, vol. i, 20 C 1).

of arguments against a philosophical view that is incompatible with Epicurus' own. The structure and philosophical strength of these arguments have been analysed in detail by David Sedley.[23] Here I primarily intend to follow up the question of what philosophical problems Epicurus is concerned with in the passage, and what information it provides on his concepts of action and of moral responsibility.

The main thesis of Epicurus' opponent was that everything is caused by necessity, or that everything is necessitated (LS 20 C 5 and 13; Laursen, 'Later Parts', 36, 41). Thus his is a position of universal necessitation. The repeated use of phrases such as ἡ κατὰ τὸ αὐτόματον ἀνάγκη (LS 20 C 2, 3; Laursen, 'Later Parts', 35, cf. 41) makes it clear that the mechanical necessitation of the atomists is at issue, and not teleological predetermination. Necessity is not some mysterious divine power; it is broken down into various *causal* factors. In the case of human behaviour, the two factors that are explicitly mentioned are our initial congenital constitution (ἡ ἐξ ἀρχῆς σύστασις), as necessitating us internally, and the mechanical external necessity of that which happens to surround us and which we perceive (LS 20 C 2–3; Laursen, 'Later Parts', 33, 35). Epicurus' opponent believes that our actions are a function of necessitating hereditary and environmental factors.

By contrast, Epicurus concedes that *some* occurrences are necessary,[24] but maintains that we are the cause of our actions and that they are not necessary. He takes it for granted that the same action cannot be caused both by necessity and by ourselves. The reason for this seems to be that he construes necessity in terms of compulsion or force (e.g. LS 20 C 10), and considers it a necessary condition for *us* to be the cause of our actions that we are not compelled. Epicurus believes that his opponent faces the problem that in his theory he cannot guarantee the *causal* responsibility of the agents for their actions. In all the arguments of the digression the underlying question is *who* or *what* is the cause of, or causally responsible for, human action. Epicurus considers two candidates: necessity on the one hand, us ourselves on the other (LS 20 C 2, 5; Laursen, 'Later Parts', 35, 37).

Where Epicurus uses the terms αἰτία, αἴτιος, and αἰτιᾶσθαι, they have sometimes been taken as denoting moral responsibility. How-

[23] Sedley, 'Determinism'.

[24] See also Epic. *Men.* 133–4 (quoted above); *Nat* 25, Arr. 34. 24 (discussed below).

ever, the surviving parts of Epicurus' *On Nature* 25 (Laursen, 'Early Parts', 'Later Parts') suggest that Epicurus used the expressions *αἰτία*, *αἴτιος*, and *αἰτιᾶσθαι* indistinguishably in order to express the *causal* responsibility of something, or its being a cause. For example, they are all also used of things such as atoms, the environment, our nature, etc. This suggests strongly that their meaning is not that of having *moral* responsibility.[25] Epicurus talks of moral responsibility in terms of praise and blame and similar *evaluative* expressions (see below).

The opponent's problem, as Epicurus presents it, is, then, not that he is unable to accommodate in his theory that our actions and decisions must be *causally undetermined*, or that we can *choose freely* between alternative courses of actions. Rather, Epicurus and his opponent seem to share the assumption that my actions are caused and in that sense determined. The opponent's problem is that on his theory it is difficult to see how I myself can be causally responsible for my behaviour, since he claims that *something else*, i.e. necessity in the form of hereditary and environmental factors, is fully causally responsible for it.

I quote the text in chunks, with some comments interspersed, in order to make it apparent that it does not deal with free choice or free decision, but with the question of whether we, the agents, or necessity cause our actions. (Suspension points indicate lacunae in the text; all italics are mine; the Greek text is Laursen's, but I have kept Long–Sedley's numbering for convenience.)

(2) ⟨And we can invoke against the argument that our behaviour must be caused by our initial constitution or by environmental factors⟩[26] by which we never cease to be affected, ⟨the fact that⟩ we rebuke, oppose, and reform each other *as if we have the cause also in ourselves*, and not only in our initial constitution and in the mechanical necessity of that which surrounds and penetrates us.[27] (3) For if someone were to attribute to the very processes of rebuking and being rebuked the mechanical necessity and always . . .

[25] e.g. *τὴν ἀνάγκην . . . πάντα αἰτιᾶσθαι* (Laursen, 'Later Parts', 41; Long–Sedley 20 C 13); *καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν ἀμφότερα κέκτηται μὲν αἰτίαν . . . ἡ ἀρχὴ εἶχε τὴν αἰτίαν, εἴχομεν δὲ καὶ ἡμεῖς* (Laursen, 'Later Parts, 43); *διὰ τὴν ἐξ ἡμῶν γεινομένην αἰτίαν . . . διὰ τὴν φυσικὴν αἰτίαν* (Laursen, 'Later Parts', 46–7).

[26] Long–Sedley add '⟨And we can invoke, against the argument that our eventual *choice between these alternatives* must be physically caused either by our initial make-up or by those environmental influences⟩' (my italics). But nothing in the text suggests that choice is at issue.

[27] Namely by means of perception; cf. Epic. *Nat.* 25 (Laursen, 'Later Parts', 33; LS 20 C 1), quoted above.

understand . . . (4) . . . when he blames or praises. But if he were to act in this way, he would be leaving intact the very same behaviour ⟨i.e. praising and blaming⟩ which we think of as concerning ourselves, in accordance with our preconception of the cause;[28] and he would have changed the name ⟨only⟩. (5) . . . so great an error. For this sort of account is self-refuting, and can never prove that everything is of the kind which we call 'by necessity'; but he debates this very question on the assumption that his opponent talks nonsense on account of himself. (6) And even if he goes on to infinity saying that, again, he does *this* action of his by necessity, always appealing to arguments, he is not reasoning it empirically *so long as he goes on imputing to himself the cause for having reasoned correctly and to his opponent that for having reasoned incorrectly*. (7) But unless he were to stop attributing his actions to himself, and to pin it on necessity instead, he would not even . . .[29] (Epic. *Nat.* 25; Arr. 34. 27–8; Laursen, 'Later Parts', 35–7)[30]

In this section the opponent faces the charge that he pragmatically refutes himself when he argues his position of universal necessitation. Epicurus provides him with the alternatives of either attributing causal responsibility to himself and his interlocutor and not to necessity—because the opponent in fact attributes evaluative criticism to his and his interlocutor's verbal acts—or giving up his argument. Epicurus' main argumentative step is this: when someone evaluates a person's acts morally or veridically, they implicitly attribute causal responsibility to that person for that act. Freedom

[28] I follow Laursen's reading (cf. next footnote, sentence (4)). However, I do not quite understand what it means. I hope it still means the same as what David Sedley (in 'Determinism') suggested, viz. that our observation of blaming and praising produces our preconception of us as causes of our actions.

[29] (2) *ἐστήκει, ὧν οὐ . . . ἀπολείπει τὰ πάθη τοῦ γίνεσθαι, . . . νουθετεῖν τε ἀλλήλους καὶ μάχεσθαι καὶ μεταρυθμίζειν ὡς ἔχοντας καὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς τὴν αἰτίαν καὶ οὐχὶ ἐν τῇ ἐξ ἀρχῆς μόνον συστάσει καὶ ἐν τῇ τοῦ περιέχοντος καὶ ἐπεισιόντος κατὰ τὸ αὐτόματον ἀνάγκῃ* (3) *εἰ γάρ τις καὶ τῷ νουθετεῖν καὶ τῷ νουθετεῖσθαι τὴν κατὰ τὸ αὐτόματον ἀνάγκην προστιθείη καὶ ἀεὶ τοῦ ποθ' ἑαυτῷ ὑπάρχοντος, . . . συνιέναι . . .* (4) *μεμφόμενος ἢ ἐπαινῶν· ἀλλ' εἰ μὲν τοῦτο πράττοι, τὸ μὲν ἔργον ἂν εἴη καταλεῖπον ὃ ἐφ' ἡμῶν αὐτῶν κατὰ τὴν τῆς αἰτίας πρόληψιν ἐννοοῦμεν, τὸ δ' ὄνομα μετατεθειμένος . . .* (5) *τοσαύτης πλάνης. περικάτω γὰρ ὁ τοιοῦτος λόγος τρέπεται, καὶ οὐδέποτε δύναται βεβαιῶσαι ὡς ἔστιν τοιαῦτα πάντα οἷα τὰ κατ' ἀνάγκην καλοῦμεν ἀλλὰ μάχεταί τινι περὶ αὐτοῦ τούτου ὡς δι' ἑαυτὸν ἀβελτερευομένῳ.* (6) *κἂν εἰς ἄπειρον φῇ πάλιν κατ' ἀνάγκην τοῦτο πράττειν ἀπὸ λόγων ἀεί, οὐκ ἐπιλογίζεται ἐν τῷ εἰς ἑαυτὸν τὴν αἰτίαν ἀνάπτειν τοῦ κατὰ τρόπον λελογίσθαι εἰς δὲ τὸν ἀμφισβητοῦντα τοῦ μὴ κατὰ τρόπον.* (7) *εἰ δὲ μὴ ἃ ποιεῖ ἀπολήγοι εἰς ἑαυτόν ἀλλ' εἰς τὴν ἀνάγκην τιθείη, οὐδ' ἄν . . .*

[30] In my rendering of the digression I have made use freely of Long–Sedley's excellent translation, but have modified it in line with Laursen's new readings of the text, and in some other places in order to bring out my understanding of the text more clearly.

of decision or free choice is not involved in the argument; nor is freedom to do otherwise anywhere explicitly mentioned.

This passage also provides important insight into *Epicurus' concept of moral responsibility*. Epicurus takes the fact that we blame each other, and try to reform each other, as an *indication* that the cause of our actions lies in ourselves, or that the actions happen through ourselves (LS 20 C 2, cf. C 8). The concept of blame presupposes that the beings that are blamed were themselves causally responsible for their behaviour. It *makes no sense* to blame individuals for certain events, if those events came about through necessity (LS 20 C 3). There are several other passages that confirm that Epicurus based his concept of moral responsibility for an action on that of our causal responsibility for it: (1) Epic. *Nat.* 25, Arr. 34. 25 (Laursen, 'Later Parts', 29) implies that if an action of a certain kind is caused by the initial constitution of a person, in response to the environment, then the person is not to be blamed. However, if an action *of the same kind* is caused by the person herself, and thus not (exclusively) by the initial constitution, then the person is to be blamed for it. (2) In Epic. *Men.* 133 the things that happen because of us are said 'to have praise and blame naturally attached to them'. With the above interpretation of that which happens because of us (*παρ' ἡμᾶς*), this suggests that when I am *causally* responsible for something happening, then I can be held *morally* responsible for it. (3) Similarly, Epic. *Nat.* 25, Arr. 34. 21 (Laursen, 'Later Parts', 19–20; LS 20 B 1–4) suggests that if a person (or their 'developments') is causally responsible for something, then they can be held morally responsible for it.

Back to Epicurus' 'digression':

(8) . . . using the word 'necessity' of that which we call '. . . by ourselves', he is merely changing a name; but he must prove that we have a preconception of a kind which has faulty delineations *when we call that which ⟨comes⟩ through ourselves causally responsible* . . .[31] (Epic. *Nat.* 25, Arr. 34. 28; Laursen, 'Later Parts', 37)

Epicurus' point in (8) is that we have a preconception that we are causally responsible for our actions by means of that which comes through ourselves, i.e. presumably our own beliefs (*δόξαι*, LS 20 C 1) and impulses (*ὁρμήματα, ὁρμαί*) or desires (*προθυμίαι*, LS 20 C 9–11); and that his opponent is unable to show that we are mistaken about having this preconception. This argumentation is *not* a version of the modern one that we have the intuition, or know by introspection, that we *could have acted or decided otherwise*. The preconception is not that we have an ability to act or to decide otherwise, but that we (by means of our beliefs, impulses, and desires), and not something else, are causally responsible for what we do.

(9) . . . but to call necessity ⟨empty⟩ as a result of your claim. If someone won't show this, and has no auxiliary element or impulse in us which he might dissuade from those actions which we perform *calling the cause of them 'through ourselves'*, but is giving the name of necessity to all the things that we desire to do in accordance with our position, *calling the cause of them 'through ourselves'*, he will be merely changing a name. (10) He will not be modifying any of our actions in the way in which in some cases the one who sees what sort of things are necessitated usually dissuades those who desire to do something in the face of compulsion. (11) And the mind will be inquisitive to learn what sort of action it should then consider that one to be which is performed in some way *out of ourselves through our desire to act*. For he has nothing else to do but to say . . .[32] (Epic. *Nat.* 25, Arr. 34. 29; Laursen, 'Later Parts', 39)

The point of the argument (9)–(11) is in short this: if saying 'our actions happen by necessity' is to be more than just another way of saying 'our actions happen through ourselves', then our recognition of their necessity would have to change our behaviour, as our behaviour is generally changed when it is pointed out to us that something must necessarily occur. For then we will not desire and endeavour to do anything to prevent the necessitated thing from occurring, because there is no point in doing so. Similarly, if our actions were necessitated, there would be no point in doing anything about them; in particular, there would be no point in making an effort to bring them about. Thus Epicurus seems to envisage necessity as some kind of compulsion, and to presuppose that if

[31] (8) . . .]φ ἡμῶν αὐτῶγ καλούμενον τῶι τῆς ἀνάγκης ὀνόματι προσαγορεύειν ὄνομα μόνομ μετατίθεται. δεῖ δ' ἐπιδίξ[α]ι ὅτι τοιοῦτό τι ᾧ μοχθηρ[οί εἰσι τύ]ποι προειληφότες τὸ δι' ἡμῶν αὐτῶν αἴτιογ καλούμεν, οὐτιδ[. . .

[32] (9) ἀλλὰ κενὸν καὶ τὸ δι' ἀνάγκην καλεῖν πρὸς ὧν φάτε. ἂν δὲ μή τις τοῦτο ἀποδείξει, μηδ' ἔχει ἡμῶν τι συνεργὸν μηδ' ὅρμημα ἀποτρέπειν ὧν καλοῦντες δι' ἡμῶν αὐτῶν τὴν αἰτίαν συντελούμεν, ἀλλὰ πάντα ὅσα νῦν δι' ἡμῶν αὐτῶν ὀνομάζοντες τὴν αἰτίαν πως προθυμούμεθα πράττειν κατὰ χώραν ἀνάγκην προσαγορεύων, ὄνομα μόνον ἀμεύψει; (10) ἔργον δ' οὐδὲν ἡμῶν μετακοσμήσει, ὥσπερ ἐπ' ἐνίων ὁ συνορῶν τὰ ποῖα κατ' ἀνάγκην ἐστὶν ἀποτρέπειν εἴωθε τοὺς προθυμουμένους παρὰ βίαν τι πράττειν. (11) ζητήσει δ' ἡ διάνοια εὑρεῖν τὸ ποῖον οὖν τι δεῖ νομίζειν τὸ ἐξ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν πως πραττόμενον τῇ προθυμίαι τοῦ πράττειν. οὐ γὰρ ἔχει ἀλλ' οὐθὲν πράττειν ἢ φάναι . . .

our actions are necessitated, they will happen even if we do not desire to bring them about; by contrast, if we are the causes of our actions, our desiring to act will be causally connected with the action itself.[33] Freedom of decision, free choice between alternatives, or freedom to do otherwise are not part of the argument.

If any surviving passage from Epicurus deals with what Lucretius renders as *voluntas* (volitional act), I suppose it is this one. In any case, we can extract from this passage what Epicurus regards as essential characteristics of human action. (1) Human action is not necessary—that is, it does not happen by force (*βία*). (2) The agent has an impulse (*ὅρμημα*) towards the action and desires (*προθυμεῖσθαι*, *προθυμία*) to perform it. Impulse (*ὅρμημα*) or desire (*προθυμία*) are the two candidates for Lucretius' *voluntas*. I assume that physically they are motions in the agent's mind that are directed at the action. They are our contribution (*συνεργόν*) to the action. They are not portrayed as choices *between* alternatives, or decisions *whether or not* to do something; they are volitions, impulses, desires *to do* something. (3) Epicurus repeatedly says that we call the cause of an action 'through ourselves' (*δι' ἡμῶν αὐτῶν*). I assume that the causes through ourselves are precisely our impulse and desire. (And they are, I take it, called 'through ourselves' because they are the result of our own beliefs and desires, which when externally triggered, produce the impulse and desire;[34] and they make us the cause of our actions.[35]

We can then also see what Epicurus meant when in the *Letter to Menoeceus* he calls that which happens because of us (*παρ' ἡμᾶς*) 'without master' (*ἀδέσποτον*: see the passage quoted above). He refers to the fact that the things which happen because of us are not forced. More precisely, that *we* are not forced when we bring them about. There is nothing that compels (us to do) them. In particular, our actions are not subordinated to fate (or necessity), which a few lines before was characterized as master (or rather

[33] This argument is reminiscent of the so-called Idle Argument (*ἀργὸς λόγος*, for which see ch. 5 of my *Determinism*); cf. the presentation and criticism of the Stoic refutation of the Idle Argument by the Epicurean Diogenianus for the emphasis on *προθυμία* and *σπουδή* (Eus. *Praep. Evang.* 6. 8. 25, 29, 30) and on us as causes (ibid. 6. 8. 34, 38).

[34] Epic. *Nat.* 25, Arr. 34. 26; Laursen, 'Later Parts', 33, LS 20 C 1, and perhaps Arr. 34. 31; Laursen, 'Later Parts, 44–5, suggest that in order to be causes ourselves, we must have beliefs, and that these beliefs must be our own beliefs.

[35] Cf. Epic. *Nat.* 25, Arr. 34. 22; Laursen, 'Later Parts, 32–3; LS 20 B 1, *τὴν . . . αἰτίαν . . . ἑαυτῶν*, and LS 20 B 5, *τὴν ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ αἰτίαν*, etc.

mistress, *δεσπότις*).[36] The contrast in this passage is thus the same as the one in the digression in Epicurus' *On Nature*.

(12) . . . supremely unthinkable. But unless someone perversely maintains this, or makes it clear what fact he is rebutting or introducing, it is merely a word that is being changed, as I keep repeating. (13) The first men to give a satisfactory account of causes, men not only much greater than their predecessors but also, many times over, than their successors, contradicted themselves unawares—although in many matters they had alleviated great ills—in this respect that they held necessity and . . . causally responsible for everything. (14) Indeed, the actual account promoting this view came to grief when it left the great man blind to the fact that in his actions he was clashing with his doctrine; and that if it were not that a certain blindness to the doctrine took hold of him while acting he would be constantly perplexing himself; and that wherever the doctrine prevailed he would be falling into desperate calamities, while wherever it did not he would be filled with conflict because of the contradiction between his actions and his doctrine.[37] (Epic. *Nat.* 25, Arr. 34. 30; Laursen, 'Later Parts', 40–2)

This last section of the digression presents again a pragmatic argument: Philosophers who hold that every event is caused by necessity 'contradict' themselves when they act. The point seems to be that one embarks on an action only if, while one acts, one thinks of oneself as not necessitated and as causally responsible for one's actions. Freedom of decision or choice is not at issue.

We can conclude that in the digression Epicurus' concern is to refute the view that our actions are necessitated, in the sense of being caused by something other than us. He does not discuss the question whether we are undetermined in our decisions. As a matter of fact, all his arguments *in this digression* could be consistently proposed by a compatibilist determinist. This does not rule out that Epicurus was an indeterminist—and I believe he was. All I suggest is that in the arguments of the digression what is at issue

[36] Cf. also *δουλεύειν* a few lines later.

[37] (12) . . . *μάλιστα ἀδιανοήτων. Ἂν δέ τις τοῦτο μὴ παραβιάζηται, μηδ' αὖ ὃ ἐξελέγχει γε ἢ ὃ εἰσφέρει πρᾶγμα ἐκτιθεῖ, φωνὴ μόνον ἀμείβεται, καθάπερ πάλαι θρυλῶ.* (13) *οἱ δ' αἰτιολογήσαντες ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἱκανῶς, καὶ οὐ μόνον τῶν πρὸ αὐτῶν πολὺ διενέγκαντες ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ὕστερον πολλαπλασίως ἔλαθον ἑαυτοῖς—καίπερ ἐν πολλοῖς μεγάλα κουφίσαντες—ἐν το⟨ὑτο ἐναντιολογοῦντες τὸ⟩ τὴν ἀνάγκην καὶ ταυτομεγ[ ]ν πάντα αἰτιᾶσθαι.* (14) *ὁ δὴ λόγος αὐτὸς ὁ τοῦτο διδάσκων κατεάγνυτο καὶ ἐλάνθανεν τὸν ἄνδρα τοῖς ἔργοις πρὸς τὴν δόξαν συνκρούοντα· καὶ εἰ μὴ λήθη τις ἐπὶ τῶν ἔργων τῆς δόξης ἐνεγείνετο, συνεχῶς ἂν ἑαυτὸν ταράττοντα· ᾗ δ' ἐκράτει τὸ τῆς δόξης κἂν τοῖς ἐσχάτοις περιπείπτοντα· ᾗ δὲ μὴ ἐκράτει στάσεως ἐμπιπλάμενον διὰ τὴν ὑπεναντιότητα τῶν ἔργων καὶ τῆς δόξης.*

⟨ὑτο ἐναντιολογοῦντες τὸ⟩ add. Laursen, 'Later Parts', 42.

is not indeterminism or free decision or choice, but agent autonomy.

A remark on freedom to do otherwise (as different from freedom of decision and freedom of choice). I have described the contrast between necessity and that which happens because of us as that between compulsion and absence of compulsion. This is a common Greek way of understanding necessity. For Epicurus, a person's behaviour happens by necessity, if the person is compelled to behave that way. If a person's behaviour (action) results from their having an impulse to act that is based on their present beliefs and desires in response to some external stimulus, then the person is not compelled in their behaviour (action). Freedom to do otherwise is not explicitly involved. It has been objected, however, that if one's action is not necessary, then this entails, or even means, that it was possible for one not to act, and consequently that one was free (in some sense) to do otherwise than one did; hence that Epicurus must have held that we are free (in some sense) to do otherwise than we do. I am unsure about how to respond to this objection. First of all, I am inclined to think that Epicurus believed that it is usually up to us (ἐφ' ἡμῖν) whether or not we act, either in the sense that if we had different beliefs or desires we would act differently, or in the sense that we have some general two-sided capacity for certain things, such as walking and not walking. And if someone wants to call either of these 'freedom to do otherwise', so be it—as long as they are aware that such kinds of freedom are in principle compatible with determinism. Second, however, I am uncertain whether Epicurus ever *de facto* drew the connection between such freedom and non-necessity;[38] although, again, it is likely that he thought it a precondition for an action to happen because of us (παρ' ἡμᾶς) that it was up to us. Third, regardless of whether he expressly drew this connection, my point is that we have *no evidence* for the assumption that he ever regarded the compatibility of such kinds of freedom with atomistic mechanical necessity or causal determinism as *problematic*. We do not know whether he did. In the surviving passages he appears to discuss different—if related—problems.

[38] At Epic. *Nat.* 25, Arr. 34. 27; Laursen, 'Later Parts, 28 'but out of itself or out of the cause out of itself being able to [*develop*] also something else' is contrasted with necessity of *development*. For the context of the passage see below, sect. 6.

4. Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 2. 251–293 and 4. 877–891

The passage 2. 251–93 of Lucretius' *De rerum natura* has traditionally been adduced as the main evidence for the claim that Epicurus was concerned with a free will problem as set out in Section 1. It is, however, generally agreed that Lucretius' immediate concern in the passage is a different one: he provides a—second—argument for the existence of the swerve. This argument very roughly follows *modus tollens*:

(A) If the swerve does not exist, neither does volition. (2. 251–60)
(B) But volition exists. (2. 261–83)
(C) Therefore the swerve exists. (2. 284–93)

Thus—on the assumption that Lucretius is sufficiently faithful as a witness of Epicurean doctrine—we can infer that Epicurus regarded the swerve as a necessary condition for the existence of volition. However, Lucretius does not tell us anywhere in the passage *in what way* the swerve is required for volition. As a consequence, scholars have with much inventiveness and subtlety produced a host of interpretations, each designed to answer this question.

Those who argue that the Lucretius passage shows that Epicurus discussed free choice or free decision generally agree on the following point: the swerve is meant to help solve the free will problem; its function is to provide the element of indeterminedness that Epicurus thought is needed for individual decisions or choices to be free. Most commonly the assumption is that one or more swerves are involved in the *formation* of *every* volition.[39] Since I do not believe that Epicurus was faced with a free will problem as set out in Section 1, I also do not believe that it is the role of the swerve to preserve free choice or decision. Nor do I believe that it has to feature in every act of volition.

Before I say anything more about the swerve, I want to present what I hope to be a consistent alternative interpretation of the Lucretius passage. (It will be easier to follow the suggested interpretation if the reader assumes at least hypothetically that Lucretius has at the back of his mind the disposition-dependency

[39] Asmis, 'Free Action'; So for Bailey, *Greek Atomists*; Gulley, 'Free Will'; Huby, 'Freewill Problem'; Purinton, 'Free Volition'; Sedley, 'Determinism'; Sharples, 'Epicurus'.

model of agency, and the problem of autonomous agency, and not the independent-decision-faculty model and a free will problem as set out in Section 1.) At the same time, I shall point out a number of those ambiguities in the text which I have mentioned above and which may have furthered the view that Lucretius was concerned with freedom of decision or choice.

One possible ambiguity should be mentioned at the beginning, since it stretches through the whole passage: this is the fact that *voluntas* can be used equally for an act of volition and for a capacity or power of volition. It seems to me that *voluntas* is always used for volitional acts, and that when Lucretius refers to a power of volition, he uses different phrases. But this is not very important. What matters—and will be argued in this section—is that volitions are not acts of choosing-between or deciding-whether, but our willing (or impulse or desiring) to perform an action; and that accordingly our power of volition is not a power of choice-between, or a decision-making faculty, but our ability to form in response to external stimuli volitions in accordance with our own beliefs and desires.

Let me begin, then, with section (A). In this section Lucretius does more than just state, in a somewhat passionate way, that the swerve is a prerequisite for volition. He also provides us with information about the determinism he attacks, and with an implicit account of volition (*voluntas*):

> (1) Moreover, if all motion is always linked, and new motion arises out of old in a fixed order, and atoms do not by swerving make some beginning of motion to break the decrees of fate, so that cause should not follow cause from infinity, (2) from where does this free volition exist for animals throughout the world? (3) From where, I ask, comes this volition wrested away from the fates, through which we proceed wherever each of us is guided by their pleasure and likewise swerve off our motions at no fixed time or fixed region of space, but wherever the mind itself carries us?[40] (Lucr. 2. 251–60)

(1) describes the predetermination of all events which the swerve is said to prevent. The theory is one of causal determinism. There

[40] '(1) denique si semper motus conectitur omnis | et vetere exoritur ⟨motu⟩ novus ordine certo | nec declinando faciunt primordia motus | principium quoddam quod fati foedera rumpat, | ex infinito ne causam causa sequatur, | (2) libera per terras unde haec animantibus exstat, | (3) unde est haec, inquam, fatis avulsa voluntas | per quam progredimur quo ducit quemque voluptas, | declinamus item motus nec tempore certo | nec regione loci certa, sed ubi ipsa tulit mens?'

is a sequence of causes which reaches back infinitely into the past; there is a fixed order of all motion; this order is in accordance with the 'decrees of fate'.[41] We can infer that this fixed order and those 'decrees of fate' also go back infinitely into the past, and that all motions are understood as being in this way eternally predetermined. (3) contains the implicit account of volition as that 'through which we proceed wherever each of us is guided by their pleasure and likewise swerve off our motions at no fixed time or fixed region of space, but wherever the mind itself carries us'.

I take this account in two parts. First, 'this volition . . . through which we proceed wherever each of us is guided by their pleasure' (2. 257–8). This phrase suggests that volition is the vehicle by means of which we pursue or realize the satisfaction of our desires. If I find smoking cigarettes pleasant, then an act of volition directed at my smoking will be a necessary step to get me to smoke. Volition is here described as the consequence of our pleasure directing us somewhere: if—in a situation of possible smoking—I find smoking pleasant, then, it seems, by means of a volition a motion towards getting a cigarette *will* be started.

For the second part of the sentence (2. 259–60) it is important to take it in its entirety and not to cut it off before the 'but'. We are presented with a contrast: we swerve off our motions through volition *not* at a fixed time or space, *but* wherever the mind itself carries us. Two things are unclear here.

First, what does mind (*mens*) mean in this sentence? Proponents of the view that Lucretius discusses free choice or decision have repeatedly suggested that when Lucretius says 'mind' here and later in the passage, what he actually means is volition, and that he is only speaking loosely.[42] I prefer to think that when Lucretius says 'mind' in our passage, what he means is actually mind. That is, he means the central part of the soul, which is located in the heart and which elsewhere he calls *animus* or *mens*.[43]

Second, the phrase 'neither at a fixed time, nor in a fixed space' can mean two things. It can mean '(spatio-temporally) at random'.

[41] 'Decrees of fate' in quotes, since (as in *Men.* 133–4) the reference should be to the 'fate of the natural philosophers', i.e. to mechanistic necessity, not to a theory of teleological determinism.

[42] e.g. Sedley, 'Determinism', 47 n. 65; Long–Sedley, ii. 111–12; Gulley, 'Free Will', 42.

[43] e.g. 2. 270 'animi . . . voluntate', and 3.1 39, 'consilium quod nos animum mentemque vocamus'. The Greek would be *διάνοια*, or something similar.

The opposite is 'not at random', implying 'with some order'. Or else, it can mean 'not at a *pre*determined time or space'. Here the opposite is 'at a predetermined time or space'. These two options differ: logically, the second does not require that the motion is random. I believe that Lucretius intended this second reading, i.e. that time and space of the motions are not fixed in advance, from eternity (cf. 2. 255 *ex infinito*).[44] For the *contrast* in our sentence is between 'swerving off a motion at a fixed time or space' and 'swerving off a motion wherever the mind carries us'. But if, as I take it, 'mind' means 'mind', and we 'swerve off' our motions[45] *where our mind carries us*, this cannot properly be described as a random motion. For our mind carries us wherever it carries us *in accordance with* our pleasure—as is implied by the first part of the sentence; and this is not at random: for without pleasure the mind would not carry us there.[46]

Lucretius' contrast is this: either our mind is the cause of our motion (by means of a volition), or something *else* (fate, necessity, our initial constitution, etc.) predetermines time and location at which our motion occurs (and thus is its true cause). This is a variation of a point we encountered earlier, in the digression of Epicurus' *On Nature* 25. To sum up, the implicit account of volition in (A) can be read as saying that it is an essential characteristic of a volition that it is initiated directly by the mind, in accordance with our desire, and that it is not predetermined by something else.

Section (A) also contains the one phrase which offers perhaps the main reason for the persistent assumption that Lucretius is discussing free will in the passage under consideration: *libera voluntas*. The meaning of the phrase is, however, not 'freedom of choice' or 'freedom of decision', nor does it denote or imply a faculty of the

[44] There is the parallel, with the prefixed order (*ordine certo*) from line 2. 252, and with the whole predeterministic scenario (*ex infinito*, *fatis*, etc.) from the first part of the sentence (2. 251–7). All this evokes the familiar idea of *pre*determination from infinity. Cf. Cic. *Fat.* 21 for *certo* with the sense of 'predetermined' and thus implying necessity. Similarly *certus* in Cic. *ND.* 1. 69.

[45] I agree with Sharples, 'Epicurus', 182, that Lucretius here has *our* movements in mind, not the swerving atomic movements in us.

[46] If in 2. 258 one reads *voluntas* instead of the commonly accepted emendation *voluptas*, a similar argument can be produced, by taking *voluntas* to signify individual instances of volition ('this volition . . . through which we proceed wherever each of us is guided *by it*'). For instance, if I have a volition to smoke (based on some belief of mine that it is pleasant, hence good for me), then this volition will guide me towards smoking a cigarette.

will capable of making un-predetermined choices between alternative courses of actions. Rather, an act of volition is free (*libera*), since it is *not forced* by fate, necessity, our initial constitution, etc. It is an unforced volitional act. Importantly, *libera voluntas* is pleonastic here: if the volition were not free or unforced, it would not be a volition.

Section (B) (2. 261–83) has the function of establishing the existence of volition. For this step in the argument reference to the swerve is not required, and we should not normally expect it. What Lucretius produces in this passage is an empirical argument that backs up the existence of volition by contrasting the phenomena of volitional movement of living beings with those of externally induced movement. Movement that is initiated by something external to the moving body is described as non-volitional (*invitus*: 2. 275, 2. 278) and as forced (*coactu* 2. 273, *cogat* 2. 278). Volitional motion, on the other hand, is unforced.[47] It is characterized as involving (at least) two kinds of motion in our passage (B), and as involving three kinds of motion in the passage on volition in book 4 which is often employed to illuminate our text (4. 877–91). First, there is the volition or desire of the mind (*mens avet* 2. 265; *studium mentis* 2. 268; *voluntas animi* 2. 270). It is itself a motion of the mind, and is initiated by the mind (4. 886, 2. 269–70). The mind, thus moved, then sets in motion the soul, which extends through the entire body (4. 887–8; hinted at at 2. 271). The soul, thus moved, in turn moves the body, and in this way sets in motion the whole living being (2. 266–8, 4. 890–1).[48] This enables Lucretius to say that the body follows the mind's desire (*studium mentis*, 2. 268). The phenomenological difference between volitional (and thus unforced) motion and forced motion of living beings is that in the former case there is an observable time delay between the formation of the will to act and the eventual movement of the entire body. And this—Lucretius maintains—can only be explained by the assumption of the existence of volition, which needs some time to internally mobilize the body via the soul. So far this step of the argument.[49]

[47] This is similar to the point that that which happens because of us (τὸ παρ' ἡμᾶς) is without master (ἀδέσποτον). I assume that that which happens because of us and our volitional movement are coextensional.

[48] Cf. also 3. 159–60 'facile ut quivis hinc noscere possit | esse animam cum animo coniunctam, quae cum animi vi | percussast, exim corpus propellit et icit.'

[49] Passage (B) has been used to argue that Lucretius was concerned with freedom

I have indicated above that, as regards the logical function of section (B) in the argument, we should be surprised if we found in it any discussion of the swerve. This fact has not prevented scholars from searching for traces of the swerve in virtually every line of it. Together with the parallel passage in book 4 (4. 877–91), this passage has repeatedly been exploited to back up the views that Epicurus considered the swerve as a necessary condition for free decision or choice, and that the swerve features in every instance of volition. The main reason for this, I suspect, is another characteristic ambiguity, namely that which we find in phrases like 'the beginning of motion' and 'setting oneself in motion'. For when something is said to bring about a beginning of motion, or to move itself, this can be understood in two rather different ways. First, it can refer to some *absolute beginning* of motion: something produces a motion, or causes itself to move, but is itself not fully causally determined to do so by any prior motion. There is a gap in the 'causal chain'. The motion is spontaneous.[50] Second, talk about moving oneself and producing a beginning of motion can refer to a *relative beginning* of motion: here a thing is said to move itself, or to produce a beginning of motion, if, given certain external or internal impacts, the thing will start to move because it is the sort of thing it is. For instance, two people are each offered a cigarette: one takes it and smokes it, the other does not. One is the sort of person

of action rather than freedom of the will (Conway, 'Epicurus' Theory'). Freedom of action is the freedom I have when there is nothing that prevents me from acting as I desire or choose to act. Freedom of action is lacking when I desire or have chosen to do something, but the realization of the action is prevented by physical hindrances, and my desire is thus frustrated. In this case things happen *against* my desire or will. Now it is true that (B) includes an adequate description of what we call free action. (Cf. also Lucr. 4. 877–8 'how it comes that we can step forward when we want to', where free action seems to be the topic.) However, I think that in (B) Lucretius is not primarily interested in free action. At least, his contrast is not between free action and prevention of free action, i.e. frustrated desire or choice. Rather it is between motion that has an internal beginning by means of the agent's desire and volition, and motion that has an external beginning, without the agent's desire or volition being involved. In this latter case something happens *without* my volition (2. 275, 278), but not necessarily *against* my desire. The contrast is between volitional and non-volitional motion, not between free action and thwarted intention. Lucretius makes use of the *phenomenon* of free action in order to back up his thesis that volition exists. This is how (B) starts ('for no doubt it is volition that gives these things their beginning for each of us, and it is from volition that motions are spread through the limbs') and this is how (B) ends ('So do you now see that . . . there is something in our chest capable of . . .', namely the power of volition).

[50] So e.g. Bailey, *Greek Atomists*, 435; Purinton, 'Free Volition', 255, 276.

who considers smoking pleasurable, the other is not. Here—given the external stimulus—it depends entirely on the person whether movements of taking the cigarette will be initiated.

If we look at the three relevant passages in Lucretius, we can see that none of them compels us to interpret them as postulating an absolute beginning of motion. Hence, none of them implies *direct* involvement of the swerve.

First 2. 261–2: 'his rebus sua cuique voluntas principium dat'. In this phrase *his rebus* refers to *motus* (our movements, i.e. our volitional actions) from 2. 259. We can then translate: 'volition gives our movements the beginning for each of us'. This phrase need not mean anything more than 'the motion of volition makes us move' (or 'makes our body move'), as contrasted with the case in which something external makes us (or our body) move. Nothing is said about what brings about the volition. Hence there is in this case certainly no reason to assume an absolute beginning of motion.[51]

Second 2. 269: 'initum motus a corde creari . . .', which can be translated as 'a beginning of motion is brought about by the mind'.[52] This case differs from the previous one in that, as far as the wording is concerned, the beginning in question could be absolute or relative. It could be understood as 'the mind, *qua* decision-making faculty, may, without being caused in any way to do so, produce a motion of volition'. This would mark an absolute beginning. Or, it could be understood that in a certain situation the mind, *because it is the way it is*, may produce a motion of volition. For example, in a situation of a certain kind, a smoker may start smoking a cigarette (owing to his beliefs and desires), whereas a non-smoker may do nothing (owing to her beliefs and desires). This would be a relative beginning.

The third passage, 4. 886, is similar to the second: 'ergo animus cum sese ita commovet ut velit ire . . .', in English: 'thus, when the mind sets itself in motion so that it wants to go forwards . . .'. This, too, can be easily read as being about a relative beginning of motion, e.g. in the following way: because of the mind's individual constitution, images of walking strike the mind, and presumably

[51] If *voluntas* denoted a power of volition, this could be understood as 'the capacity of volition, by producing volitions, gives animal movements their beginning of motion'. This too would be contrasted with an external beginning of motion, and need not express an absolute beginning, since it is not ruled out that there are causes that make the power of volition produce volitions.

[52] Or alternatively 'in the heart'.

appear to it as pleasant,[53] when it 'previews' them (4. 884–5). (Another mind, in the same situation, may not be struck by such images of walking as pleasant.) As a result, the mind sets itself in motion in accordance with the images. More precisely, it sets in motion its faculty of volition. But once the mind is set in motion, *that means* that it *velit ire*, wants to go forward, which I understand as 'it now has the volition to go forward'.[54]

Thus all three passages in Lucretius harmonize well with the assumption that in them Epicurus had only a relative beginning of motion in mind. Accordingly, none of them provides compelling evidence for the view that swerves are involved directly in each act of volition, or for the view that they provide the element of undeterminedness required in an act of free choice or decision.

This leaves us with the last section (C) of the Lucretius passage on the swerve (2. 284–93). In it the conclusion that the swerve exists is drawn from the premisses set out in (A) and (B); but we have again more than that. An explanation is added of why the conditional premiss is true. And here we finally obtain two valuable bits of information about the relation between volition and swerve. The first is in the first sentence:

> Therefore in the atoms too one has to admit another cause of motions besides impacts and weights from which this power is born in us, since we see that nothing can come to be from nothing.[55] (2. 284–7)

The term 'power' (*potestas*) in this sentence is another chameleon expression. *Potestas* can denote a disposition or capacity, i.e. something which is possessed continuously, both when it is actualized and when it is not. *Potestas* can also denote something like energy or force (or power as in 'power station'), i.e. the force released in an instance of volition. Such a power is something we do not have continuously. It exists only as long as the volition lasts. The phrase

[53] Remember 2. 257–8 'voluntas per quam progredimur quo ducit quemque voluptas'.

[54] It is perhaps not without interest that Epicurus seems to have considered this kind of relative beginning of motion in the context of the formation of volitional action in *On Nature* 25 (Arr. 35. 10; Laursen, 'Early Parts', 44 and 91 on P.Herc. 1420. 2. 2). There he seems to hold that an external influence may affect different people differently. Simon Laursen considers this to be a parallel to the Lucretius passage in book 4 (4. 877–91) which I have just discussed.

[55] 'quare in seminibus quoque idem fateare necessest, esse aliam praeter plagas et pondera causam motibus, unde haec est nobis innata potestas, de nilo quoniam fieri nil posse videmus.'

'from which this power *is born in us*'[56] (*nobis innata*) in the sentence suggests that Lucretius is talking about a capacity.

What capacity does Lucretius then refer to? As he calls it '*this* power', it must be a power he has talked about shortly before. No power is explicitly mentioned in the whole passage, but there is an implicit reference: with *potestas* Lucretius can only really refer to lines 2. 279–83:

> There is something in our chest that *is capable of* [*possit*] fighting and resisting at whose bidding the mass of matter is also forced at times to be turned throughout the limbs and frame . . .[57] (2. 279–82)

This something in our chest is (that aspect of our mind which is) the power of having volitions, i.e. the power which can make the body move. Again, this should be a capacity rather than some kind of energy. Thus the swerve is a necessary condition for our having this power of volition. It is then possible to understand the phrase 'from which this power is born in us' in the following way: The power of volition is a *capacity* which we acquire at some stage of our life; and the swerves are somehow responsible for the coming to be (and perhaps for the sustaining) of this capacity in us. But let us look at the next sentences:

> For weight prevents that all things come about by impact, by, as it were, external force . . .[58] (2. 288–9)

The mind's weight (presumably including its atomic structure—see below) is sufficient to warrant that the mind's movements are not completely externally forced. However, as the next sentence in Lucretius makes clear, the mind's weight is not sufficient to prevent its movements from being forced by *internal* factors:

> . . . but that the mind should not itself possess an internal necessity in all its behaviour, and be overcome and as it were forced to suffer and be acted upon, that is brought about by a tiny swerve of atoms at no fixed region of space or fixed time.[59] (2. 289–93)

[56] 'Or 'from which we have this inborn power'; it makes little difference whether one takes *innata* as attributive adjective of *potestas* or as predicative adjective belonging to *est*.'

[57] '. . . esse in pectore nostro | quiddam quod contra pugnare obstareque possit? | cuius ad arbitrium quoque copia materiai | cogitur interdum flecti per membra per artus . . .'

[58] 'Pondus enim prohibet ne plagis omnia fiant | externa quasi vi.'

[59] 'sed ne mens ipsa necessum | intestinum habeat cunctis in rebus agendis | et

Similarly to the 'digression' in Epicurus' *On Nature* 25, in these lines necessity is connected with force or coercion.[60] The crucial distinction in 2. 288–93 is that between external and internal compulsion. The swerve is said to prevent *internal* necessity of the mind,[61] and thus the mind's being 'overcome and as it were forced to suffer'. (Nothing further is said about what the internal necessity is, and how it is going to be prevented by the swerve.) One's interpretation of this internal necessity or coercion will differ depending on what one takes Epicurus' model of agency to be.

Proponents of the independent-decision-faculty model will be prone to the following reading: they will understand the internal necessity of the mind as necessitation, or coercion, of *one part* of the mind (the power of volition)[62] by *other parts* of the mind, in particular by the person's *present* character dispositions.[63] These would—if the mind's motions were internally necessitated—in the case of *each action force* the power of volition to initiate movement in accordance with them. Thus, effectively, there would be no power of volition. The swerve's role in the case of each action would naturally be somehow to sever the decision-making power from the agent's present dispositions.

devicta quasi cogatur ferre patique, | id facit exiguum clinamen principiorum | nec regione loci certa nec tempore certo.'

mens *Lambinus*: res *OQ*.

[60] In *On Nature* 25 (quoted in sect. 3) forced and necessitated actions were contrasted with actions performed with impulse (ὅρμημα) and eagerness or desire to act (προθυμία). This seems to be the closest parallel in a text by Epicurus to Lucretius' *voluntas*. (If *studium* is a translation of προθυμία, *voluntas* may be a translation of ὁρμή, ὅρμημα, or a similar term. The power of volition would then have been a δύναμις of ὁρμή or ὅρμημα, and a volition (*voluntas*) a particular impulse to act or intention a person has, e.g. the impulse or intention to smoke a cigarette.)

[61] I adopt the generally accepted emendation of *res* to *mens*. But I think (*pace* Avotins, 'The Question of *Mens*') that if the original *res* were to be kept, this would not make much of a difference for my interpretation. For I take it that *omnia fiant* in 2. 288 need not refer to *semina* from 2. 284, but that it can just as well refer generally to the things that happen on the everyday level. This might also help explain the use of *quasi*, by which Lucretius qualifies the external force. The point of lines 2. 288–9 would then be that not all things react in the same way when externally pushed, for the reason that different things have different weights, which make them react in different ways. *Sed ne res ipsa* . . . in line 2. 289 could then be translated as 'but that a thing itself should not . . .', where by 'thing' Lucretius refers in an indeterminate way to all the things on the everyday level that may not be internally necessitated, the most important of which would be human beings, or their minds. Other such things might be all those things that develop or change in a random way.

[62] Or perhaps rather that which would be the power of volition if it were not necessitated in its activity.

[63] e.g. Asmis, 'Free Action', 283.

The whole-person model of agency suggests a different interpretation of the internal necessity. In it, it is *presupposed* that a person's volitions to act (in response to environmental stimuli) are always fully determined by the person's *present* overall mental disposition as it is while the person forms the volition. The decision-making is understood as a 'function' of the mind as the mind is when it decides, and external circumstances. Since in this model there is no independent decision-making faculty, *mens* (2. 289) refers to the mind *qua* conglomerate of atoms in which are manifested a set of dispositions. The mind's internal force is distinguished *temporally* from a person's present overall mental disposition: internal coercion is coercion of someone's *present* overall mental state by *temporally prior* mental states or dispositions, which in turn were necessitated by temporally prior mental states, etc. back to a time at which the individual is thought not yet to be responsible for their actions. The necessitation thus concerns the *development* of the mind, not its decision-making. The difference between internal necessity and its absence concerns the point whether the person was internally forced to become, or develop into, the person they are when they set out to act. In the case of force, the action cannot be attributed to the agent, since the agent is not truly causally responsible, but some other factors which predate adult agenthood and which necessitate the agents in their action by necessitating their mental dispositions.

This raises the question what, in this interpretation, the internal factors would be that necessitate the agents in their action, if there were no swerves; or, in other words, what the internal necessity is. The answer, I believe, can be gauged from a passage from Epicurus' *On Nature* 25 which I have already quoted above in Section 3. In this passage Epicurus critically assesses the case for holding that all our actions are determined by a combination of internal and external necessity:

> ⟨And we can invoke against the argument that our behaviour must be caused either by our initial make-up, or by those environmental influences⟩ by which we never cease to be affected, the fact that we rebuke, oppose, and reform each other as if the cause lay also[64] in ourselves, and not just

[64] That is, we are a co-cause, presumably the main causes, but not necessarily the only cause. There are other passages to this effect in *On Nature* 25, e.g. Arr. 34. 31; Laursen, 'Later Parts', 43 *ὅθεν καὶ τὸ τοῦ τέλους αὐτοῦ ἐπιλόγισμα εἶχε μὲν καὶ ἡ ἀρχὴ τὴν αἰτίαν· εἴχομεν δὲ καὶ ἡμεῖς*.

in our congenital make-up and in the accidental necessity of that which surrounds and penetrates us (Arr. 34. 27; Laursen, 'Later Parts', 35; LS 20 C 2; Greek text above, n. 25)

A person's behavioural response to the environment thus seems *internally* necessitated, inasmuch as the cause of the behavioural response to the environment lies in the person's initial constitution, instead of in the person herself.[65] This is consistent with the assumption of the whole-person model that a person's behavioural responses to the environment are determined by the person's overall disposition of the mind when the person sets out to act. It can be interpreted as suggesting that if the person herself is not the cause of the action, this means that the person's overall disposition at that time is internally necessitated by the person's initial constitution (and thus by something that is temporally prior to the person's formation of a volition—or any volition, for that matter).

Returning to Lucretius 2. 288–93, it would then be the initial constitution that internally necessitates the mind in all its behaviour, and it would be the swerve's function to prevent this necessitation. Internal necessity corresponds to the weight of the atoms (see above). The internal necessity of the mind should thus correspond to the weight—and composition—of the mind atoms. And this is exactly what we can imagine the initial constitution to be: it is a collection of atoms, the precise composition and structure of which vary from person to person. This atomic composition and structure make up a person's mental dispositions, and are as such relatively firm; and they determine which of the impinging images the mind takes in and acts upon, and which not.[66] The mere penetration of the mind by individual atoms or groups of atoms (e.g. εἴδωλα) coming from outside will not usually lead to a change of the mental structure. However, swerves may lead to a new structure of these atoms, perhaps to the integration of incoming atoms into this structure, and it will be the partial change of atomic structure (or the development of structure) which prevents internal necessitation of our behaviour by our initial constitution. The swerve leads to changes in the structure of the mind. Hence the mind is not necessitated or compelled in its movements by its original structure. And our

[65] Note also Epic. *Nat.* 25, Arr. 34. 33; Laursen, 'Later Parts, 48, the contrast between δι' ἡμᾶς, διὰ τὴν φύσιν, καὶ τὸ περιέχον.

[66] Cf. Epic. *Nat.* 25, Laursen, 'Later Parts', 33; LS 20 C 1, quoted above in sect. 2.

decisions and actions with which we respond to our environment depend (at least to a major extent) on the new structural elements of the mind, and are hence not internally necessitated.

I conclude, then, that the Lucretius passage on swerve and volition can be consistently read as based on the whole-person model of agency, and as treating internal necessity as necessitation of the *development* of the mind, as opposed to necessitation of its individual decisions. Individual decisions are generally fully determined by the person's mind as it is when the decision is made. *If* a swerve comes in at this point, it will usually have no effect on what decision is made, in the same sense in which a swerve that occurs in the mind in the process of perception will usually have no effect on the reliability of perception. In both cases the mental structure can be conceived of as so firm that a single swerve does not easily make a difference to our decision or perception. If it ever did, the result would be chance events; this possibility could have been used by Epicureans in order to explain the occasional apparent malfunction of our volitional or perceptual apparatus.

Proponents of the view that Lucretius discussed a free will problem as set out in Section 1, however, may not yet be satisfied. They have repeatedly objected that mind- or character-formation interpretations cannot satisfactorily explain Lucretius' phrase 'we swerve off our motions' (2. 259), which they take as strong evidence that there is a swerve involved in every act of volition. I shall attempt to show that Lucretius' analogy between the three types of atomic motions and the three types of motions on the everyday level is not as close as this. Rather, for all three types of motion the primary point of the analogy is that the atomic motion is a necessary condition for the corresponding type on the everyday level. First, *collision*: if atoms did not collide, everyday objects could not collide. However, the collision of objects is qualitatively different from atomic collision; it can involve penetration of a complex of atoms by one or more atoms, and the destruction of a complex or aggregate of atoms. Second, *weight*: if atoms had no weight internally directing their downward movements (their default movements), then objects would have no weight (and atomic structure) internally directing their movements and changes (their default movements). What is analogous to the necessary downward movement of an atom is the necessary movement or change of an object in accordance with its internal physical properties, which

are determined by certain stable combinations of atoms. Again, the analogous movements are clearly much more complex than the atomic ones; they are also qualitatively different, as they need not be 'downward' movements at all. Third, the *swerve*: if atoms didn't swerve, there would be no volitions (and no chance movements). There are a number of corresponding elements: If there were no atomic swerves, all atomic movement would be a function of weight and collision of atoms. If there were no volitions, all movements of the mind would be a function of the mind's atomic composition and its collision with external things (e.g. 'images'). With atomic swerves, the mind can develop in such a way that its movements are no longer a function of the mind's weight and collision with external things. Like the swerves, and because of them, the volitional movements of the mind are not eternally predetermined. As it is the nature of the atoms to swerve, so it is our (mind's) nature to have volitions; and as the atoms swerve from their downward path, so do we, with our volitions, swerve from our path of hereditary development.

5. Cicero, *On Fate* 23, and Diogenes of Oenoanda 32. 1. 14–3. 14

A sentence from Cicero, *On Fate* 23, has been plausibly suggested as a parallel to lines 2. 288–93 in Lucretius:[67]

> Epicurus introduced this theory (i.e. of the swerve) because he was afraid that, if the atom was always carried along by its weight in a natural and necessary way, there would be nothing free for us, since our mind would be moved in such a way as the movement of the atoms would compel it.[68]

The parallels to Lucretius are obvious. In addition, there are two elements in this sentence which we do not find in the *De rerum natura*. Cicero implies that we have some sort of freedom, which is contrasted with our mind being compelled; and he mentions explicitly what it is that would force our mind if there were no swerve, viz. the movement of the atoms. This sentence has been adduced as a proof that Epicurus used the swerve to save freedom

[67] Long–Sedley, ii. 112.

[68] 'hanc Epicurus rationem induxit ob eam rem, quod veritus est ne, si semper atomus gravitate ferretur naturali ac necessaria, nihil liberum nobis esset, cum ita moveretur animus ut atomorum motu cogeretur.'

of choice or decision, and not for the 'freedom' of the development of dispositions. However, just like the verses in Lucretius, this sentence is *compatible* with the view that the swerve secures the non-necessity of the development of our mental dispositions on the basis of the whole-person model of agency. This model here leads to the following interpretation: Cicero's emphasis is on the contrast between internal compulsion by the atoms and freedom from such compulsion. The argument works from the atomic level to the everyday level.

If there were no swerve, all atomic movement would be necessary. Whether movements at the everyday level are necessary depends on whether all movements at the atomic level are necessary. In particular, if all the atomic movements that 'make up' an everyday-level movement were necessary, so would be the corresponding everyday-level movement. (In this way atomic movement, since necessary, would transmit its necessity to the everyday-level movement and thus in a sense 'compel' it.) In particular, 'our mind would be moved in such a way as the movement of the atoms would compel it'. That is, combinations of collision and weight would fully determine the way the structure of the mind changes or develops and accordingly how the mind reacts to external influences. At any time our mental dispositions would be a function of our initial constitution and external influences, and so would, accordingly, our behaviour.

On the other hand, as there are swerves, we have freedom from compulsion and it is not the case that 'our mind would be moved in such a way as the movement of the atoms would compel it'. The reason is that, as a result of the swerving movements, not all atomic motions are necessary, and hence that they no longer convey necessity to all change at the everyday level. In particular—as swerves occur in our mind—our mental dispositions are not the result of compulsion by the atoms, and nor, accordingly, will be the volitions and actions that flow from it. Rather, they are free, i.e. uncompelled. (The phrase 'cum ita moveretur animus' could refer either to what would otherwise be our volitions or to the change of our mental dispositions. In the latter case the translation 'be changed' would be preferable to 'be moved'. For my point it is immaterial which way one reads the text. For when the swerve prevents necessitation of our mental dispositions, neither the mind's development nor its

volitional movements are compelled or necessary.) Hence the passage is consistent with my proposed interpretation of Lucretius.

Almost immediately after the quoted passage, still in *On Fate* 23, a couple of sentences lend further support to the interpretation that Epicurus connected the swerves with the development of a person's mental dispositions rather than directly with every act of volition: after a remark that Democritus' position is superior to Epicurus', because he can do without the swerve, Cicero continues:

> More astutely, Carneades taught that the Epicureans could have maintained their position without this fictitious swerve. For, seeing that they taught that there could be some volitional movement of the mind, it would have been better to defend that than to introduce the swerve . . .[69] (Cic. *Fat.* 23)

Here the introduction of the swerve is *contrasted* with the existence of volitions of the mind. But if the swerve really was needed in the formation or execution of every volition, we would expect not a contrast, but rather the claim that a volition can exist *without* involving a swerve. For the sentence implies that the Epicureans believed that the volitional movements of the mind were at least not directly dependent on their introduction of the swerve. On the other hand, if, as I suggest, the swerve is *not* concerned with the formation or execution of volition directly, the text as it stands poses no problems.

It has also been claimed that a passage in Diogenes of Oenoanda (32. 1. 14–3. 14) is evidence that Epicurus introduced the swerve in order to preserve free will and freedom to do otherwise than we do.[70] Again, I disagree. Here is the passage:

> (1) Once prophecy is eliminated, how can there be any other evidence for fate? (2) For if someone uses Democritus' account, saying that because of their collisions with each other atoms have no free movement, and that as a result it appears that all motions are necessitated, we will reply to him: (3) 'Don't you know, whoever you are, that there is also a free movement in atoms, which Democritus failed to discover but Epicurus brought to light, a swerving movement, as he demonstrates from evident facts?' (4) But the chief point is this: if fate is believed in, that is the end of all censure and admonition, and even the wicked (will not be open to blame.)[71] (Diogenes of Oenoanda 32. 1. 14–3. 14, trans. Long–Sedley)

[69] 'acutius Carneades, qui docebat posse Epicureos suam causam sine hac commenticia declinatione defendere. nam cum docerent esse posse quendam animi motum voluntarium, id fuit defendi melius quam introducere declinationem . . .'

[70] Purinton, 'Free Volition', 265–6, 299.

In this passage Diogenes gives two *independent* reasons for why not everything is compelled by necessity or fate: The first, in (3), implies that Epicurus introduced the swerve in order to prevent universal necessitation—nothing more, and I assume it to go back to the same arguments of Epicurus' which Lucretius reports. The second reason, in (4), is that universal necessitation is incompatible with praise and blame—nothing more, and I assume it to go back to Epicurean arguments such as those in the digression of *On Nature* 25.[72] Thus the passage corroborates neither the thesis that Epicurus introduced the swerve in order to preserve freedom to do otherwise, nor the thesis that swerves were involved directly in every volitional act.[73]

6. Epicurus on internal necessity and character development

Before I add the inevitable speculation about how the swerve was thought to prevent the internal necessity of the mind, I want to present some further evidence in support of the suggestion that both Epicurus and Lucretius are concerned with the internal necessitation of the *development* of the mind, and generally with the question of the autonomy of the agent, and—as far as our evidence goes—not with the free will problem as set out in Section 1.

We have a second passage in Epicurus' *On Nature* 25 (Arr. 34. 24; Laursen, 'Later Parts', 28) which is concerned with internal

[71] [πῶς ἀνῃρημέ]νης οὖν | μαντικῆς σημεῖ|ον εἱμαρμένης ἔστιν | ἄλλο; ἂν γὰ[ρ] τῷ Δημο|κρίτου τι⟨ς⟩ χ[ρ]ήσηται|λόγῳ, μηδεμίαν μὲν ἐλευθέραν [φ]άσκων | ταῖς ἀτόμο[ι]ς κείνη|σιν εἶναι δι[ὰ] τὴν πρὸς | ἀλλήλας σ[ύν]κρουσιν | αὐτῶν, ἔν⟨θ⟩[ε]ν δὲ φαί|νεσθαι κατ[η]ναγκασ|μένως π[άντ]α κειν[εῖσ|θαι, φή[σομε]ν πρὸς | αὐτόν· "[οὔκουν] οἶδας, ὅσ|τις ποτ' εἶ, καὶ ἐλευθέ|ραν τινὰ ἐν ταῖς ἀτό|μοις κείνησιν εἶναι, ἣ[ν] Δημόκριτος μὲν οὐ|χ εὗρεν, Ἐπίκουρος δὲ | εἰς φῶ[ς] ἤγαγεν, παρεν|κλιτικὴν ὑπάρχουσαν, ὡς ἐκ τῶν φαι|νομέ|νων δείκνυσιν;" τὸ δὲ | μέγιστον· πιστευθεί|σης γὰρ εἱμαρμένης | αἱρεται πᾶσα νουθεσ[ί]α καὶ ἐπιτείμησις καὶ | οὐδὲ τοὺς πονηροὺς [

The adjective ἐλεύθερος seems to be used in the context of physical determinism not before the 1st cent. AD. (see my 'Inadvertent Conception').

[72] Purinton does not translate the δέ ('but') in (4), and runs the two reasons together: 'According to Diogenes . . . the main reason that Epicurus posited the swerve was to preserve the phenomena of "admonition and rebuke".' I do not think that the text bears this out.

[73] Plut. *Stoic. repugn.* 1050 B–C, too, gives no hint about whether the swerve was meant to come in in character formation or directly in the formation of volitions.

necessitation of the mind, and occurs a little before the previous one (Arr. 34. 27):

> And if the first constitution of the development exerts some kind of compulsion in the mind,[74] and such a thing is not developed out of necessity to the point of (developing) these specific things, but on the one hand, such a thing is developed from such conditions out of necessity to the point where there comes to be a soul or rather a soul with a disposition and movement of this particular size, on the other hand, such a thing is not developed out of necessity to the point of (developing) a soul of this or that kind, or at least such a thing is not developed with necessity once it proceeds in age, but out of itself or out of the cause out of itself being able to [develop] also something else. (trans. Laursen, 'Later Parts', 51–2, modified)[75]

This passage is not easy to make sense of, in particular since we lack the immediate context. None the less, it provides some hints as to which things Epicurus thought to be internally necessary and which not. That an individual develops a soul and that that soul has a disposition and motion of a particular size are necessary. But the specific qualities of that soul and its specific developments *when it (or the person whose soul it is) advances in age* are not internally necessitated. Rather, *when the soul (or the person whose soul it is) advances in age*, it will be able to develop from itself, or from the cause from itself. Here, again, internal necessitation and lack thereof are concerned not with individual actions or volitions, but with what a person's soul *comes to be like*. The emphasis is on the non-necessity of the development of the mind, and in particular on the fact that we ourselves (or the cause from ourselves) are *causally responsible for the changes in our soul*, and that these changes are not necessary.

The possibility of influencing the development of one's soul dispositions is all-important, if what a person's soul is like at a certain time determines how the person sets out to act at that time. For the only way of getting oneself to act differently from the ways one tends to act is by changing one's dispositions to act. This holds in

[74] David Sedley points out to me that it would fit the context much better if one rendered this phrase as 'and if by the power of thought the first constitution is forcibly separated from the development', although, as he adds, this has the drawback of taking *ἐκβιάζεσθαι* plus genitive in an uncommon way.

[75] *κἂν κατὰ διάνοιαν δέ τι ἐκβιάζηται ἡ πρώτη σύστασις τοῦ ἀπογεγεννημένου, μὴ ἐξ ἀνάγκης μέχρι τωνδί τινων ?ἐξ ἀνάγκης ?τοιοῦδε ἀπογεννωμένου ἀλλὰ μέχρι μὲν τοῦ ψυχήν γενέσθαι ἢ καὶ τοσαυτηνὶ διάθεσιν καὶ κίνησιν ἔχουσαν ψυχὴν ἐξ ἀνάγκης ?τοιοῦδε ἀπογεννωμένου ἐκ τῶν τοιουτωνί, μέχρι δὲ τοῦ τοιανδὶ ψυχὴν ἢ τοιανδὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἀνάγκης τοιοῦδε ἀπογεννωμένου ἢ οὐκ ἐπειδὰν προβῇ γε τῇ ἡλικίᾳ τοιοῦδε ἀπογεννωμένου κατ' ἀνάγκην ἀλλ' ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ δυναμένου καὶ τῆς ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ αἰτίας καὶ ἄλλο . . .*

particular for moral development.[76] We become the causes of the changes of our mental dispositions, if we receive the right moral education, and use our intellect to assimilate this education. A passage in Lucretius confirms that Epicurus had this conception of moral development; it deals with the development of the human mind and is based on the whole-person model of agency:

> . . . Likewise the human race. Even though education may produce individuals equally well turned out, it still leaves those *original traces of each mind's nature*. And we must not suppose that faults can be completely eradicated, so that one person will not plunge too hastily into bitter anger, another not be assailed too readily by fear, or the third type not be over-indulgent in tolerating certain things. There are many other respects in which the various *natures and consequently the behaviours* of human beings must differ, but I cannot now set out their hidden causes, nor can I find enough names for all the shapes of primary particles from which this variety springs. But there is one thing which I see I can state in this matter: so slight are *the traces of our natures which reason cannot expel from us*, that nothing stands in the way of our leading a life worthy of the gods.[77] (3. 307–22, trans. Long–Sedley, modified; my italics)

The relevant points in the passage are these: the initial nature of a human mind includes certain moral dispositions, which are present in different people in various strengths.[78] Through education people's minds can develop in such a way that these differences are by and large evened out. The reason is that by the use of our intellect we can modify our mental dispositions to a large extent. This passage corroborates the assumption that the Epicureans worked with a whole-person model of agency on two counts. First, it makes it clear that Lucretius took a person's mind to include that person's character dispositions. Second, it implies that Lucretius thinks that one's nature determines one's behaviour, and third, that in order

[76] Both before and after the quoted passage of *On Nature* 25 morality is at issue: pp. 23, 26, 29 Laursen.

[77] 'Sic hominum genus est. quamvis doctrina politos | constituat pariter quosdam, tamen illa relinquit | *naturae cuiusque animi vestigia prima*. | nec radicitus evelli mala posse putandumst, | quin proclivius hic iras decurrat ad acris, | ille metu citius paulo temptetur, at ille | tertius accipiat quaedam clementius aequo. | inque aliis rebus multis differre necessest | naturas hominum varias moresque sequaces; | quorum ego nunc nequeo caecas exponere causas | nec reperire figurarum tot nomina quot sunt | principiis, unde haec oritur variantia rerum. | illud in his rebus video firmare potesse, | usque adeo *naturarum vestigia* linqui | parvula *quae nequeat ratio depellere nobis*, | ut nil impediat dignam dis degere vitam.'

[78] This point has a close parallel in the talk of seeds (*σπέρματα*) in Epic. *Nat.* 25 (Arr. 34. 26).

to change one's behaviour, one has to change one's nature, i.e. the nature of one's mind, by the use of one's intellect.

The explanation on the atomic level of what happens when we modify our character (and how we become the causes of our dispositions, and consequently actions) seems to be provided by another passage from *On Nature* 25:

> In this way whenever something is developed which takes on some distinctness from the atoms in a discriminating way[79]—not in the way as from a different distance—he receives the causal responsibility which is from himself; and then he immediately imparts this to his first natures and somehow makes the whole of it into one.[80] (Epic. *Nat.* 25; Arr. 34. 22; Laursen, 'Later Parts, 22)

It seems to me that Bob Sharples is right when he says about this passage: 'the obvious, indeed inevitable way of interpreting this in the atomic context is to say that we, by thought and effort, can modify our character, and hence also the atomic structure of our minds . . . the downwards causation in the passage . . . may thus relate to the process by which we modify our characters, and not to the explanation of free choice . . .' (Sharples, 'Epicurus', 186).

This passage seems to be concerned with absolutely essential occurrences in people's mental developments: namely, how they themselves *become* causes first of their dispositions,[81] and consequently of their actions. I understand it in the following way. A person may encounter beliefs, including value beliefs, which differ from those they have adopted and developed in line with their initial constitution. These different beliefs are then transmitted to the initial 'disposition of the soul' (the 'first natures') and made part of it, and as a result the overall disposition is—slightly—changed.[82] (Thus new beliefs are adopted, and beliefs inconsistent with a new belief may be discarded.) At that point the disposition is no longer

[79] Perhaps: 'in a way that pertains to judgement'?

[80] *οὕτως ἐπειδὰν ἀπογεννηθῇ τι λαμβάνον τινὰ ἑτερότητα τῶν ἀτόμων κατά τινα τρόπον διαληπτικόν, οὐ τὸν ὡς ἀφ' ἑτέρου διαστήματος, ἰσχάνει τὴν ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ αἰτίαν, εἶτα ἀναδίδωσιν εὐθὺς μέχρι τῶν πρώτων φύσεων καὶ μίαν πῶς ἅπασαν αὐτὴν ποιεῖ.*

[81] Whether this is (1) a unique event in a person's life, or (2) a gradual process, in which a person changes or confirms their beliefs one by one upon reflection, or whether (3) such events happen all through one's adult life, is unclear.

[82] For Epicurus our dispositions to act, and our emotions, are grounded on, and perhaps partially identical with, our beliefs. Remember also that at *Nat.* 25, Arr. 34. 26, the text suggests that that which happens because of us (*παρ' ἡμᾶς*) happens because of *beliefs of ours which are from us ourselves* (*παρὰ τὰς ἡμέτερας ἐξ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν δόξας*): see above, sect. 2.

(fully) the result of internal and external necessity, but in part the result of conscious, rational, influencing. When, then, someone acts from such a disposition, *they* are the cause of the action, and no longer 'the atoms', i.e. those of their initial constitution. Again, the way things work seems to be: presumably externally induced changes in beliefs lead to changes in dispositions (which in turn lead to changes in behaviour).[83]

Thus, not only do the Lucretius and Cicero passages on the swerve allow a consistent interpretation of the swerve as having its main function in the formation of one's mental disposition—there are also several other texts that support this interpretation; in fact, Epicurus' ethics as a whole is geared to the development of one's character or mental dispositions, as opposed to a canon of right and wrong actions to choose from.[84]

7. The atomic swerve, mental development, and moral responsibility

It remains for me to provide a plausible story about the function of the swerve within the proposed interpretation. In this context I consider the following points. (A) First, I address the two main objections that have been voiced against interpretations that see the swerve as being involved in the formation of character, rather

[83] In *Nat.* 25 (Arr. 34. 31; Laursen, 'Later Parts, 44–5) Epicurus may refer to the same kind of development; but this passage is rather badly preserved.

[84] For completeness, I should mention that Cicero presents in a number of short passages in different works some information about Epicurus' treatment of the Principle of Excluded Middle for future propositions (Cic. *Fat.* 21, 28, 37; *Acad.* 2. 97, *ND* 1. 70). These passages show that Epicurus feared that arguments of the family of the 'Mower' prove that if the Principle of Excluded Middle held for future propositions, then all future events would be certain or predetermined, and hence *necessary*. In order to escape this consequence, Epicurus apparently took the step of denying universal application to the principle. (For details see my *Determinism*, 75–86). Neither the arguments nor Epicurus' reply mention action, volition, choice, or freedom of any sort; free decision or free choice are not under discussion, but the non-necessity of future events more generally. This is confirmed by the example for non-necessity Epicurus chose: 'either Hermachus will be alive tomorrow, or he will not'. What is at issue is not whether Hermachus will or won't do something tomorrow, nor whether he will or won't decide to do something tomorrow, but (assuming that he was not suicidal) whether or not something will happen to him tomorrow—human death being one of those occurrences that were paradigms of fated events which would happen in the form of 'accidents', such as drowning at sea, being struck by lightning, dying of disease, etc.

than in each volition. (B) Second, if, as I argue, Epicurus was not concerned with a free will problem as set out in Section 1, and in particular not when he introduced the swerve, I have to show that he had some other real problem, so that the introduction of the swerve does not seem gratuitous.[85] (C) Third, if such a problem can be identified, it remains to be demonstrated how the swerve could in principle be thought of as contributing to its solution—even if we do not know how Epicurus actually envisaged this to work.

(A) Here are *the two main objections* that have been levelled against the view that the swerve, as described in Lucretius, plays a role in the formation of character.[86] First, it has been repeatedly objected that if one's character can be randomly altered by the swerve, Epicurus would have problems explaining why people's characters remain relatively stable.[87] The point has been memorably illustrated thus: 'a man of good Epicurean character will live in fear of an unpredictable event which may change him into a Stoic or something worse'.[88]

It is, however, important to see that this criticism is merely a special case of a more general objection which, in slightly different forms, arises equally for interpretations that consider the swerve as necessary for forming or exerting a volition. The general problem is this: once the swerves have been furnished with a specific function, how can it be ruled out that additional swerves occur that undermine, obstruct, or undo the workings of the swerve as one has determined them? For swerves are by definition random motions and thus can in principle happen at any place at any time. For instance, the problem would manifest itself as follows in an interpretation that favours the swerve in the formation of volition in order to preserve freedom of choice: if a swerve is *correlated* with my forming a volition for performing some action, what if, at the same time, or immediately afterwards, a second swerve counteracts the first, and as a result I have a volition for its opposite, or at least have no longer a volition for that action? Alternatively, if I *utilize*

[85] As Asmis, 'Free Action', esp. at 288, has convincingly shown, Englert's interpretation suffers from this defect.

[86] I hope to have dispelled the frequently made objection that character-formation interpretations do not square with the Lucretius and Cicero passages in sects. 4 and 5 above.

[87] Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 61; Englert, *Epicurus*, 3; similarly Sharples, 'Epicurus', 187 n. 56; Purinton, 'Free Volition', 275–6.

[88] Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 61, quoted by Englert and Purinton.

one swerve for a volition towards some action, what if, whoops, another one undoes this by rechannelling the atom to produce a volition for its opposite, or to result in no volition either way?

Thus any interpretation of the function of the swerve needs to tackle this problem in the particular guise in which it each time occurs. Solutions depend—as far as I can see—mainly on inventiveness. In the case of character-formation interpretations the criticism can easily be countered as follows. Generally, single swerves go unnoticed, since they are so tiny that they do not interrupt the course of events on the everyday level. In particular, the atomic structure of someone's mental dispositions is relatively fixed and stable, so that one swerve has usually little chance of doing much damage. It is only in certain developmental situations—which will have to be described in the respective interpretations—that single swerves can contribute to the initiation of a new development in a different direction (see below).[89]

The second main objection is this: how can a *random* movement like the swerve that happens in the course of the development of one's character introduce and guarantee moral responsibility of the agents in their actions? This, again, is a specific version of a more general problem with which any interpretation of the swerve is confronted. A random motion or a number of random motions cannot by themselves warrant moral responsibility, regardless of whether they occur in the process of developing one's character, or of forming or of exerting a volition, and regardless of whether the concept of moral responsibility is based on freedom of decision or on autonomous agency. (We do not know whether Epicurus was aware of this problem in one form or other, but I would like to think that he was.) This objection can be invalidated by the observation that Epicurus—like most ancient philosophers—generally thought that moral responsibility is based on the fact that agents are beings of a certain kind, namely, rational beings who have the capacity to base their actions on their rationality, i.e. their own beliefs. Epicurus' swerve thus is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for our

[89] *Ceteris paribus*, proponents of the involvement of the swerve in the formation or execution of volition seem actually to have a harder nut to crack. For in such interpretations a swerve typically comes in at a point where whether or not a certain decision is made (or action performed) depends fully on whether a swerve occurs. Thus, if *one* swerve can determine whether or not an action is performed, *one* further swerve may suffice to counteract the first, and lead to the opposite result.

having volitions and autonomous agency. I sketch below how this could work in the case of character-formation interpretations.

(B) My second point was: what was *Epicurus' problem* that led him to introduce the swerve? I assume that this was not a 'timeless' philosophical problem such as the free will problem as set out in Section 1, but a problem specific to the ancient defence of atomistic philosophies such as Democritus' and Epicurus'. (The usefulness of the swerve is after all restricted to such theories.) Atomists have to explain the entire universe, and everything that happens in it, in terms of atoms and their movements, and the void. The problem is then this: on the one hand, atomists have the enormous task thus to account for the order and regularity in the universe;[90] on the other, they have to explain the existence of chance events, i.e. disorderly events, and how human beings can be causes or can have volitions. The function of the swerve is thus to provide an explanation of the possibility of chance events[91] and volitions *without* undermining the atomistic explanation of the order in the universe.

The nature of this problem becomes clearer when one follows the ancients in their depiction of Epicurean atomism in two stages: first atomism without the swerve; then atomism with the swerve. Whether the first stage was thought to be historically real, or fictitious and merely an explanatory device, is immaterial in this context.

Atomism without the swerve is designed to meet the challenge to give a non-teleological, mechanical explanation of the order in the universe. In atomism without the swerve every movement would be necessary, both at the atomic level and at the everyday level. There are two kinds of necessitating factors, internal and external ones. At the atomic level these are internally the weight of an atom, and externally other atoms that collide with this atom. At the everyday level, concerning the movements of everyday objects, they seem to be the weight and atomic composition and structure of the object as

[90] Cf. e.g. Plot. *Enn.* 3. 1. 3. Given a philosophical climate in which teleological views are the norm, this is one of the major challenges Epicurus has to meet. We can gather this also from the fact that Lucretius gives the point a lot of space. The readiness of many modern philosophers to believe in physicalism, mechanism, and reductionism is quite a different scene, in particular, since no empirical sciences such as modern chemistry and molecular physics were available to the ancients.

[91] This is what Philodemus, *Sign.* 36. 11–17, and Plutarch, *Soll. an.* 964 E say—and (*pace* Bailey, *Greek Atomists*, 327, and A. A. Long, 'Chance and Natural Law in Epicureanism', *Phronesis*, 22 (1977), 63–88) I cannot see why this should not be what Epicurus said.

internally necessitating factors, and atoms and things or clusters of atoms external to the object, that 'collide' with it (and might enter it), as externally necessitating factors. The order and regularity in the world are explained as the result of the co-operation of these two factors. Such explanation proves most difficult in the case of objects of complex structure like plants and animals, where phenomena such as reproduction and self-motion need to be accounted for. Plants and animals display stable properties, stable patterns of behaviour, and patterns of development that follow a fixed temporal order; for example, all animals have a soul, birds generally build nests, all boys sprout a beard when approaching manhood.[92] The *properties* are explained by the types of atoms involved and their structural combinations and patterns of movements. The *patterns of behaviour* are explained as reactions to external stimuli that are determined by the atomic structure and movement of the object. The *developmental patterns* (for the development of both properties and dispositions) require some in-built 'time-release' in the atomic base of things, which will be activated by suitable external stimuli. An atomistic theory can thus in principle explain the order and complex structure of the world.

In this swerveless atomic theory the following difficulty arises. Being entirely the result of internal and external necessitating factors, all motions—both at the atomic level and at the everyday level—are necessary. But it was generally accepted among Hellenistic philosophers that it is an essential characteristic of voluntary behaviour (and of chance events) to be non-necessary. Hence in the—swerveless—atomic system voluntary behaviour appears to be precluded.

(C) *The swerve is introduced to solve this problem* by satisfying *two* conditions: positively, it needs to make voluntary action possible by preventing internal necessitation of certain states and movements; and negatively, it must not undermine the explanation of the order and regularity in the world in terms solely of atoms and void. If one assumes that the swerve's function—as described in Lucretius and Cicero—is to remove internal necessity from the agent's mental *dispositions*, we can imagine this to work as follows.

First, a note on the *frequency of the swerves*—a point on which our sources are silent.[93] Since the swerve is a third basic motion, and

[92] Lucr. 5. 849–54.

[93] Except if one accepts Kleve's argument ('Id Facit Exiguum Clinamen', 28) that

none of the texts about the swerve mentions a particular scarcity of swerves, we may assume that swerves happen quite frequently. However, the frequency is limited by the fact that the everyday level world appears generally ordered (although arguably less so to ancient philosophers than to Newton, say). Thus we can state, as it were, an upper and a lower limit for the frequency of the swerves: on the one hand, the swerves must occur sufficiently often to guarantee the possibility of a frequency of chance events and non-necessitated character developments (especially character changes) that corresponds to the frequency of such kinds of occurrences as we can 'observe' them happening; on the other hand, relative to the size of the deviation of a swerve (the ἐλάχιστον) and the time it takes, the force of a single swerve and the number of swerves must be restricted in such a manner that they do not interfere with the order of things at the everyday level. For instance, the reliability of sense perception has to be preserved, and those kinds of developments that show great regularity must not be interfered with. (The theory of quantum leaps may give us an idea of how this could in principle be possible.)

Next, the *removal of necessity*. What the introduction of the swerve does to the modalities of the atomic movements is uncertain. We can assume the following points. (1) Swerving movements are not necessary. (I assume, however, that they are *caused* by the atom, whose nature it is to swerve randomly every now and then—within the bounds of frequency determined above, although *when* these swerves happen is not fixed in advance. Atoms may thus be conceived of as having a built-in random generator as part of their nature.) (2) Any movement that is neither itself a swerve nor in any way the close or remote effect of a swerve is necessary (but given the eternity of the universe, it is uncertain whether Epicurus assumed such movements). (3) Certain kinds of movements are impossible, e.g. swerves that exceed one minimum, and 'upward' movements if there is no collision involved. (4) This leaves the majority of atomic movements, those which are not swerves but have a swerve somewhere in their 'causal history'. I am inclined to think that at least all such movement as would not have occurred if one of the preceding swerves had not occurred would be non-necessary, assuming some sort of transitivity of non-necessity.

Lucretius' 'etiam atque etiam' (2. 243) means 'again and again' and refers to the frequency of the swerves.

What the modalities of movements at the everyday level are is equally underdetermined by our sources. I assume that they roughly correspond to those of the atomic movements. (1) All those events or changes of an object in which no swerve has been causally effective are necessary. These will include facts such as that people will die by a certain age (since the clusters of atoms that make up humans just 'give up' after a certain time, and no swervings can prevent this from happening); that, given certain circumstances, human beings desire pleasure and shun pain. (2) All those events or changes that concern an object in which one or more swerves have been causally effective somewhere in their 'causal history' are non-necessary. Thus, whenever in a person the mental dispositions have been changed as a result of a swerving, all subsequent behaviour of that person that is (internally) co-caused by the part of the overall disposition thus changed is non-necessary. (Here it does not matter whether it would also have happened without the change; what matters is what was causally effective in its coming about.[94])

We can then see why on this interpretation *the swerves that happen in the mind do not lead to chaos* and why Epicureans have little reason to fear that they may suddenly metamorphose into a Stoic or something worse. We have to imagine the mind as a relatively stable atomic structure, but with a large number of developmental 'potentials' (σπέρματα, Epic. *Nat.* 25, Arr. 34. 26), with built-in time release, which ensures that certain developments do not happen before a certain age (certain potentials are not actualized before a certain age), or before other developments have happened. We can then imagine that at a time when new developments are due to start, swervings can be effective much more easily, determining the direction the development takes (out of a number of possible directions or 'trajectories'), whereas once a new property or characteristic is fully developed, single swerves are not strong enough to make a difference; thus most swerves that occur in the mind do not affect the mind's structure, and thus a person's mental dispositions. If we postulate a sufficient number of swerves, and a sufficient number of developmentally sensitive periods for individual potentials (we could even assume that a swerve is a necessary condition for triggering a new development in such sensitive periods), most specific mental dispositions, and hence most human behaviour, will

[94] See Epic. *Nat.* 25, Arr. 34. 24–5; Laursen, 'Later Parts', 29–30.

become non-necessary, it being in part the result of a causally effective swerve.

We can also now explain *how such random modifications of the initial state of our mind could make* **us** *any more causally or morally responsible* for our movements than if they flowed directly from our initial make-up. As hinted above, the answer is roughly that the swerve is no more than one of many necessary conditions for moral responsibility. All the other necessary conditions have to be found in the nature of those beings who are to be held responsible. (This point can also be inferred from the fact that swerves serve to explain chance events, too,[95] since there must then be factors other than the swerve that account for the difference between chance events and those events for which *we* are causally and hence morally responsible.)

Swerves can lead to the development of the power of volition and to moral responsibility only in the right kind of things. My point is not that because of the fineness of the mind-atoms swerves initiate noticeable changes only in the mind, and that this explains why humans are morally responsible, but for instance plants are not. For even if the swerves can have effects in the mind more easily, this does not rule out that, at the right point in the development of a plant, or if occurring in a sufficiently large number, they could also, for example, change the constitution of a plant. Imagine that a 'cluster of swerves' in some part of a plant brings about a change in the plant's constitution. Imagine that the plant now grows an extra leaf at the wrong place. This would hardly make the plant *morally* responsible for the changes. Nor would one hold the whole plant itself *causally* responsible. Rather, for Epicurus such a change would be *by chance* (ἀπὸ τύχης).[96]

For an action that happens *because of us* (παρ' ἡμᾶς), i.e. of which we are the cause, a lot more than this is required: only those beings can become morally responsible that come with a primary constitution of a certain complexity. Human beings do—and arguably some tame animals. The initial make-up of human beings is categorically different from that of plants. We are—or so Epicurus thinks—from birth led by pleasure. Plants are not. From birth, too,

[95] Philod. *Sign.* 36. 11–17, and Plut. *Soll. an.* 964 E. Purinton's reading of the two passages as referring only to the chance existence of the cosmos ('Free Volition', 261–2) is unconvincing.

[96] See e.g. Lucr. 4. 1223–6 for random variation in heredity.

we have a large number of potentials for developments. Plants do not. It lies in our atomic structure that we will develop a mind, preconceptions, memory, the ability to speak a language, and many more things which plants do not develop. And presumably we have to develop quite a bit before the swerves can exert their catalytic function in the process that leads to the development of a capacity for fully fledged volitions by means of which we can become the cause of our actions.

I surmise that Epicurus held that we ourselves become causes and morally responsible at the point when we start changing our disposition by way of developing our own thoughts, value judgements, and so on; when we become capable of reconsidering the judgements and desires we have adopted or developed solely as a result of hereditary and environmental impacts. Such reconsideration influences what we regard as pleasant, and thus in what circumstances we have a volition for something, and thereby initiate an action. I further suspect that this is what Epicurus is concerned with in much of *On Nature* 25.[97]

There are several different ways in which one can conceive of the relation between, on the one hand, the swerves' prevention of internal necessitation of our mental dispositions, and on the other, the way we become (and remain) ourselves the causes of our actions, so that the actions happen because of us, and we are morally responsible for them. I give the two possibilities which I find most plausible; there are others. I do not maintain that either of the two *was* Epicurus'. I merely intend to show that such explanations, which are based on a character-formation interpretation, are possible and that they are no more fantastic than the ones suggested by those who think that the swerve was meant to solve the free will problem as set out in Section 1.

The first possibility is what one may call the *minimalist* approach: Epicurus' change of his conception of atomic movement to the effect that in addition to their natural downward movements atoms have swerving movements introduces an element of non-necessity into the world. This solves the problem of autonomous agency as follows: adult human beings can be called the cause of their actions because (*a*) they influence the development of their character by way of their rationality or reason; (*b*) what their character is at any time

[97] See in particular Epic. *Nat.* 25, Arr. 34. 22, quoted above in sect. 6, with my comments.

is not a function of hereditary internal and circumstantial external influences, since swerves occur in the mind in the process of its development and have at crucial developmental moments effects on the changes of the atomic structure of the mind; this development, the resulting mental dispositions, and the actions flowing from those dispositions are thus not necessary. (*c*) It therefore makes no sense to call necessity, or the atoms (at preceding times), or the initial constitution of the mind the cause of the action. The person can be called the cause of their actions, and can be held morally responsible, because of (*a*) and (*b*), which, however, are not necessarily connected.[98]

The second possibility is some kind of *correlation* approach: There is a direct correspondence between (some of the) swerving movements in a person's mind and their conscious effort to change their mental dispositions. For instance, I study Epicurean ethics and, aiming at tranquillity (ἀταραξία), I try to adopt and follow the theory, try to change my old ingrained beliefs and prejudices, etc. In this context, making a conscious effort to believe firmly that *P*, and to replace non-*P* by *P*, happens—at least occasionally—simultaneously with swerving motions of mind atoms; and when it does it leads to a change of my character dispositions (the main constituents of which are beliefs) by integrating *P* into my system of firmly held beliefs. Exactly how the randomness of the atomic level can be the foundation of change is not explained in our texts. Perhaps Epicurus could not answer this. Agents are the cause of their actions, because their mental dispositions, which determine their volitions and actions, are the result of the agents' own changing of (or confirmation of) their beliefs.[99]

8. Conclusion

My overall goal in this paper was this: to show that there is no compelling textual evidence for the assumption that Epicurus was concerned with freedom of decision or choice or with a problem

[98] This approach is close to Furley's position in his 'Voluntary Action'; it also utilizes some of Conway's suggestions in his 'Epicurus' Theory'.

[99] This is a modification, in the light of the character-formation interpretation and the whole-person model of agency, of interpretations such as those by Sharples, 'Epicurus'; Mitsis *Epicurus' Ethical Theory*, 164–6; Gulley, 'Free Will', 46–51; Asmis, 'Free Action'. 291.

of free will as set out in Section 1. There is no evidence that he discussed, or even had a conception of, freedom of decision or freedom of choice. There is no evidence that he had a concept of moral responsibility that is grounded on freedom of choice, or on freedom of decision. There is not even any direct evidence that he thought that freedom to do otherwise was jeopardized by atomistic determinism. There is further no compelling evidence that the swerve played a role in the formation of volitional acts or decision processes. I hence suggest that the whole idea that Epicurus was concerned with the free will problem as set out in Section 1 is anachronistic, and that—at least as long as no positive evidence comes to light—the view that Epicurus thought there was such a problem, and that he endeavoured to solve it, should be dropped.

I have attempted to draw an alternative picture, based on the evidence we have. This picture suggests that Epicurus—in line with philosophers before and after him (Aristotle and the Stoics)—had a different concept of human agency and of moral responsibility: human actions are fully determined by the mental disposition of the agents when they set out to act. Moral responsibility presupposes not free decision or free choice, but the absence of coercion and autonomous agency, i.e. that the person, and not something else, is causally responsible for the actions for which they are to be held morally responsible. Autonomous human agency requires the ability of the agents to influence causally, on the basis of their own beliefs, the development of their behavioural dispositions.

In the context of his mechanistic atomism, Epicurus faced the problem that he had to explain the non-necessity of human agency (and chance events), without undermining the atomistic explanation of the order in the universe. The swerve—which is of use only *within* atomism—was meant to solve this problem by making the mental dispositions of adult human beings non-necessary (perhaps by allowing a person's rational attempts at altering their dispositions to gain a foothold). This is possible without great interruptions and 'out-of-character' developments, if one assumes a certain frequency of the swerves, a generally stable atomic structure of the mind, which is susceptible to influence by single swerves only when new developments or realizations of potentials are about to start. How exactly this was meant to work in detail we do not know.

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