

Can Determinism Be Reconciled With Epicureanism? (Admin Edit - No, But Let's Talk About Why Not)

Post by “waterholic” of September 28, 2022 at 1:46 PM

[Onenski](#) absolutely no reason to apologise, introducing this distinction only means we (I) have to read and discover more, which is one of the reasons we are here! Besides, not understanding is my natural state, it's nobody's fault 😊

[Quote from Onenski](#)

In other words, if some random (even subtle) things happen, we have less control than we think we have.

I am not very well versed in philosophy, so my take on this comes from everyday life observations. There is a range of different types of outcomes that populate the "control axis".

(Let's call these Type A) There are outcomes we can control nearly 100%. In front of me there is a paper cup that I can smash. I control this outcome with a probability of nearly 100%, since barring a small (but not null) chance of me having a heart attack before I smash it, I can definitely do it.

(Type B) Then there are outcomes that we can **learn to control**. Consider me with a basketball at the 3-point line. The probability of scoring is maybe 1 in 30. However, I know for a fact that if I dedicate my effort to it for a year or two, I will increase that probability to 20-30% (still a far cry from Stephen Curry, who hits 50% with the opposing team defending). The key here is that the controlled, repetitive environment of the game renders itself to learning and having an impact on the end outcome.

(Type C) Finally, at the extreme end of the scale are events that no matter how hard I try I cannot control. Flip of a coin is a simple example, but more interesting examples are economic forecasts, the performance of mutual fund investments or political analysis. No matter how hard I try, there is no benefit from learning (monkeys throughing darts have the same or better results).

These observations are very much aligned with my understanding of Epicurean/Lucretian position on chance. There are things that are outside our control indeed. Even in the paper cup case, some subtle things as you say may have an impact on the end result, but with very small probability. More complex situations will be impacted by endless permutations of events, which makes them hard to predict with any probability.

The key aspect of (in)determinism, in my view, is that we have agency, meaning that it was **not pre-determined** that I would want to smash that cup. This still does not mean that absolutely everything is unpredictable.

A final observation: somehow, we are much better at predicting the weather patterns (a complex system) and not so good at predicting social phenomena (wars, economic growth etc.) Is this because components of weather do not have agency?