

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

Post by "Onenski" of February 25, 2024 at 1:39 PM

Hi, [Don](#), thank you very much for your comments and for being caritative in your interpretation of my comments.

## [Quote from Don](#)

The word Metaphysical

I'm sorry for using the word without explain what I meant. Metaphysics, in effect, is a branch of philosophy that goes beyond physics. The idea is that its theses cannot be proven or falsified by empirical data. Empirical information is consistent with two opposite theses. Some examples of metaphysical objects of study are God (whether exist a supernatural entity with certain properties or not), soul, time (what is its nature or even if it exists), free will, universals, personal identity, the existence of a self, etc.

Everyone has an assumption on any of these objects. Some people believe that a God exists, that they have a soul, that time exists and has certain properties and so on. If they reflect about these assumptions they may find arguments to sustain them, or to change their minds.

You may think that no matter what people assume, they will live their lifes anyway. But I've insisted that these assumptions give form to our practices. People who believe in a God usually prey, those who believe in soul are afraid of their luck after death (or they trust in a Paradise), people who believe that humans have a telos will try to improve their virtue in order to be excellent human beings.

Some people change their metaphysical commitments in a moment of their lives: they discover that a God is not necessary for their lives, or they think that humans don't have a telos and they don't need to be virtuous just by itself.

So this debate is metaphysical, all the empirical information works for both conclusions, the arguments need to be metaphysical and reasonable. Sometimes people use a reduction to absurd (like in the argument I've just posted), for example.

Ontology, in other hand, can be thought as a list of things a theory or a person consider that exist. Metaphysical commitments use to have implications in ontology. For example, Epicurus considered that gods exist, but his metaphysical commitment with materialism implied that those gods should be material. This commitment also implies that ghosts don't exist.

Now, on the issue of control. You think that free will skepticism imply that we lack control over our actions. Not exactly, we lack leeway freedom, but we have control over our actions. The capacity, for example, for self control can be explained as the outcome of your personal history under certain circumstances, I invite you to read Walter Mischel's "The Marshmallow Test" to have an idea of what I mean, or Sapolsky's "Behave".

In other words, the notion of agency (as source freedom) is compatible with determinism. But, as you found in the characterisation of free will skepticism, that notion is not the one that permit to attribute moral responsibility (for these skeptics).

If you also take the conclusion that we can't have too much indeterminism (or not having it at all), almost all the time we are not free. If we need leeway freedom to exercise epicurean philosophy, then the libertarians would have just a little degree of freedom to exercise epicurean philosophy. Their situation wouldn't be so different that the one of the free will skeptic.