

Life, the Universe and Time: Who Would Want to Live in a Predictable Universe Anyway?

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Abstract

Unpredictability, Undecidability and Uncomputability more accurately describe the universe, time and life, than the idea of a predictable universe ever could.

Doesn't the idea of undecidability, uncomputability and unpredictability more accurately describe our world than the theory of a predictable, computable and decided universe? While predictability sounded feasible at one point, pre-Einstein. Isn't unpredictability the essence of life? The difference between a boring video and a virile video is unpredictability.

While it is certain with the passing of time, human knowledge will expand to the point where the truths of our universe will be understood. The universe will be defined. It's rules and behaviors known. But to suggest that this future understanding would lead to predictability is absurd. There will always be an X factor, an unknown that will influence the system in an unpredictable way.

A mathematician looks at the world and sees math. A comedian looks at the world and sees jokes. A journalist looks at the world and sees stories. A philosopher looks at the world and sees philosophies. We see what we seek. As long as there are seekers in the world there will be something unknown. Something to seek.

It's impossible to factor in all un-knowables, the known-unknowns and the unknown-unknowns into a specific, undisputed outcome. You can predict the probabilities of a future to a pretty high degree. But it will not become certain until the present. Only the past and present are known.

Isn't it better that way? More interesting? What is life without mystery? Without surprise? We would all die of boredom in a predictable world.

Thankfully, the future will always be unknown until it is known and when it is known it is no longer the future. It is the present with an unknown future. The future will never fully be known. Predicted yes. With accuracy, perhaps. But known. No. Not until it is decided. Which happens in the present. It cannot be projected into the future with certainty. Nothing is decided in the future with certainty.

We can know the probability for outcomes in the future but the outcome is not known until the present. Each present is followed by an unpredictable future. That is the nature of time. In fact, we all know, the further one speculates into the future in any system the more unpredictable the system becomes.

While time is measured in units, the idea of time is the present, static. Our minds string

together one present moment after another to create the flow of time. Like the wind. In the present unpredictability becomes decided. If you know with certainty the outcome of a system then you are in the present. If an outcome is unknown you either do not have access to the knowledge of the outcome, like a star bursting many light years away, or the outcome is yet to happen and lies in the future.

We can predict into the future any number of outcomes but will only know for certain the outcome in the present. The only thing that is known is the present and the past. And, some don't even really know the past. But that's a different topic. The future will forever be unknown, unpredictable, incomputable and undecided.

Without a doubt, the greatest loss to science, humanity and fiction when one discredits the idea of a predictable, computable and decided universe is that ... it's easier to imagine time travel in a predictable universe. A predictable universe would be filled with knowns, different points of present time. It would collapse the existence of time, as we know it. It's fun to imagine in a predictable universe that time would become like steps. A predictable future would have many presents one could jump between. Or multiple universes. However jumping between the steps, if possible, would add more unpredictability to the system.

Because of that unpredictability, it's easier to imagine jumping into the past than into the future. Not that we can't imagine the future. We can and do. Sometimes with a high degree of accuracy, especially in fiction. We know life does tend to imitate art, and art life. Who hasn't seen a vision of the future where everybody works from home? Without knowing how that future comes into fruition. But now, today, we know. Our unpredictable future is paving the way for our vision of the future. Predictability is possible just not with complete accuracy. It's probable.

Probability is the chance in life. It's the open door. It's the breath of hope. Unpredictability is the essence of life. The surprise and the mystery.

Who would have it any other way?