# Free Will and Determinism

## The case for determinism

### Overview

Determinism is the doctrine that all states of the universe are caused by previous states of the universe which can be observed with the scientific method. Newtonian causality operates in this way, one actions causes another action and so on. This also accounts for thought processes and human actions. Every state of the mind is determined by previous states of the mind and so on. This means there is no freedom and no moral accountability.

**Determinist opinions**

**Baruch Spinoza**: In the mind there is no absolute or free will; but the mind is determined to wish this or that by a cause, which has also been determined by another cause…and so on to infinity.

**John B Watson**: Behaviour can be predicted and controlled. If the universe is determined, all actions…are controlled by prior causes which are in principle knowable.

**Ivan Pavlov**: Dogs can be conditioned to salivating when a bell rings for its dinner. Sophisticated behaviour is controlled by sophisticated conditioning.

**Ted Honderich**: States of the brain are, in the first place, effects, the effects of other physical states. Many states of the brain, secondly, are correlates.

### Resources

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| **Key Terms** | **Free Will**: *Noun* The belief that we have control over our actions and are morally accountable for them.  **Determinism**: *Noun* The doctrine that our actions are determined by previous causes.  **Moral accountability**: *Noun* The belief that you can be held accountable for your moral decisions. |
| **Extracts** | **Peter Van Inwagen, *Essay on Free Will***  If determinism is true, then our acts are the consequences of the laws of nature and events in the remote past. But it is not up to us what went on before we were born, and neither is it up to us what the laws of nature are. Therefore the consequences of these things (including our present acts) are not up to us. |
| **Videos** | • Crash Course Philosophy: [Determinism v Free Will](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vCGtkDzELAI).  • Sam Harris: [Free Will experiment](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UwjD4hfrDsg).  • Sam Harris: [Determinism and Fatalism](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dKv2pWZkgrI). |

### Knowledge of the argument

1. What is the difference between the positions of determinism and free will?
2. What is the difference between the positions of determinism and fatalism?
3. How are human actions determined?
4. How can human actions be conditioned and controlled?
5. What does it mean to say that human behaviour requires sophisticated conditioning?
6. What effect does a determinist model have on the notion of moral accountability?
7. What is the difference between event causation and agent causation?
8. Why is determinism a popular position among atheists?

## The case for free will

### Overview

Free will is the belief that human beings are morally accountable for their actions and, despite the world appearing deterministic, human actions are free. We all act as though we are free, we crave freedom and we cannot function if we did not accept that we were accountable for our actions.

**Free will opinions**

**Thomas Hobbes**: Freedom is the absence of impediment. Things are free within their own natures.

**Immanuel Kant**: Without freedom we cannot be moral.

**St Thomas Aquinas**: So long as we have reason, we have freedom.

**Heisenberg**: At a quantum level, everything is uncertain, so actions cannot be determined.

### Resources

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| **Extracts** | **St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part I question 83 Article 1**  *Man has free-will: otherwise counsels, exhortations, commands, prohibitions, rewards, and punishments would be in vain. In order to make this evident, we must observe that some things act without judgment; as a stone moves downwards; and in like manner all things which lack knowledge. …But man acts from judgment, because by his apprehensive power he judges that something should be avoided or sought. But because this judgment, in the case of some particular act, is not from a natural instinct, but from some act of comparison in the reason, therefore he acts from free judgment and retains the power of being inclined to various things. For reason in contingent matters may follow opposite courses, as we see in dialectic syllogisms and rhetorical arguments. Now particular operations are contingent, and therefore in such matters the judgment of reason may follow opposite courses, and is not determinate to one. And forasmuch as man is rational is it necessary that man have a free-will.* |
| **Videos** | • Michio Kaku: [Why physics ends the fee will debate](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jint5kjoy6I).  • Jordan Peterson, [Determinism vs Free Will](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKzhRknxEYw). |
| **Further Reading** | • Immanuel Kant, [*Critique of Practical Reason*](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5683/5683-h/5683-h.htm), Book 1 Chapter 3 paragraph 45  • Thomas Hobbes,[*Liberty and Necessity*](https://www.informationphilosopher.com/solutions/philosophers/hobbes/of_liberty_and_necessity.html)*.*  • Clarence Darrow, [American History through its Greatest Speeches](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=-R6ZDQAAQBAJ&pg=RA2-PA73&lpg=RA2-PA73&dq=I+know,+Your+Honour,+that+every+atom+of+life+in+all+this+universe+is+bound+up+together.+I+know&source=bl&ots=uqvhKFiT2X&sig=ACfU3U2uI5Z-9_T7UGwb7deICvCIIQRxaw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjOpOeFyMzqAhWbVBUIHdsBA3YQ6AEwBnoECAYQAQ#v=onepage&q=I%20know%2C%20Your%20Honour%2C%20that%20every%20atom%20of%20life%20in%20all%20this%20universe%20is%20bound%20up%20together.%20I%20know&f=false), 16.  • David Hume: [An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding](https://courses.lumenlearning.com/sanjacinto-philosophy/chapter/david-hume-an-enquiry-concerning-human-understanding-part-7-of-the-idea-of-necessary-connection/), Part 7.  • William James, [The Dilemma of Determinism](https://www.uky.edu/~eushe2/Pajares/JamesDilemmaOfDeterminism.html#:~:text=The%20Dilemma%20of%20Determinism%2C%20William%20James&text=A%20common%20opinion%20prevails%20that,arguments%20which%20everyone%20has%20heard.).  • Sam Harris, [The Illusion of Free Will](https://samharris.org/the-illusion-of-free-will/). |

### Evaluation of the argument

“Human beings are morally accountable for their actions.” Discuss.

**Consider the following:**

* Is determinism a logical and sound position to hold?
* To what extend is determinism empirical?
* How convincing is determinism?
* Who can you use to support determinism?
* What part of the doctrine of determinism is being challenged by the belief in free will?
* How convincing is the challenge of free will?
* Who can you use to support free will?
* Can determinism respond to free will?

# Compatibilism

## The case for compatibilism

### Overview

Compatibilism is the thesis the determinism is compatible with free will. While some aspects of the universe and even of our own thought processes are determined by other factors, ultimately, human beings are capable of making free will decisions and so can still me morally accountable.

**Compatibilist opinions**

**Stephen Pinker**: Emotions have a biological and evolutionary basis. Man might be predisposed to violence, but reason controls that predisposition.

**Voltaire**: Pear trees cannot bear bananas. The instincts of a spaniel cannot be the instincts of an ostrich. Everything is planned, connected, limited.

**Thomas Nagel**: The sum total of a person’s experiences, desires and knowledge, his hereditary constitution, the social circumstances and the nature of the choice facing him, together with other factors…all combine to make a particular action in the circumstances inevitable.

### Resources

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| **Key Terms** | **Compatibilism**: *Noun* The belief that free will is compatible with determinism. |
| **Extracts** | **John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book II, Chapter XXI***  *…The idea of liberty is, the idea of a power in any agent to do or forbear any particular action, according to the determination or thought of the mind, whereby either of them is preferred to the other: where either of them is not in the power of the agent to be produced by him according to his volition, there he is not at liberty; that agent is under necessity. So that liberty cannot be where there is no thought, no volition, no will; but there may be thought, there may be will, there may be volition, where there is no liberty.*  **Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason***  *Reason is thus the persisting condition of all voluntary actions under which the human being appears. Even before it happens, every one of these actions is determined beforehand in the empirical character of the human being. In regard to the intelligible character, of which the empirical one is only the sensible schema, no before or after applies, and every action, irrespective of the temporal relation in which it stands to other appearances, is the immediate effect of the intelligible character of pure reason; reason therefore acts freely, without being determined dynamically by external or internal grounds temporally preceding it in the chain of natural causes…* |
| **Videos** | • Crash Course Philosophy: [Compatibilism](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KETTtiprINU). |

### Knowledge of the argument

1. Why is compatibilism called soft determinism?
2. Why is compatibilism not the same as free will?
3. Why is compatibilism not the same as determinism?
4. How does biology affect an agent’s freedom?
5. How does nature affect a person’s freedom?
6. What is meant by a person’s volition?
7. What is predetermined bin the empirical character of the human being?
8. What is it about a human being that is free?

## The case for incompatibilism

### Overview

Incompatibilism is the position that a deterministic universe is completely at odds with the notion that people have a free will; that there is a dichotomy between determinism and free will where philosophers must choose one or the other.

If we cannot bring together free will and determinism, then we have to either accept that the universe is deterministic or we have to accept that we have no free will and that we have no moral accountability.

### Resources

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| **Extracts** | **Robert Kane, *Reflections on fee will, determinism and indeterminism***  *I think those of us who believe in a free will that is incompatible with determinism--we incompatibilists and libertarians so-called--should simply concede this point to our compatibilist opponents. Many kinds of freedom worth wanting are indeed compatible with determinism. What we incompatibilists should be insisting upon instead is that there is at least one kind of freedom worth wanting that is incompatible with determinism. This significant further freedom, as I view it, is "free will," which I define as "the power to be the ultimate creator and sustainer of one's own ends or purposes." To say this further freedom is important is not to deny the importance of everyday compatibilist freedoms from coercion, compulsion, political oppression, and the like; it is only to say that human longings transcend them.* |
| **Videos** | • [Sam Harris on Compatibilism](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J73klyji8f8). |
| **Further Reading** | • Immanuel Kant, [Critique of Pure Reason](http://strangebeautiful.com/other-texts/kant-first-critique-cambridge.pdf),  • Robert Kane, [*Reflections on fee will, determinism and indeterminism*](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/~uctytho/dfwVariousKane.html)*.* |

### Evaluation of the argument

To what extent, if any, is free will compatible with determinism?

**Consider the following:**

* Is the case for compatibilism logical and sound?
* To what extend is the case for compatibilism *a posteriori* (based in experience)?
* How convincing is the case for compatibilism?
* Who can you use to support the case for compatibilism?
* What part of the case for compatibilism is undermined by incompatibilism?
* How convincing is the case for incompatibilism?
* Who can you use to support incompatibilism?
* Can compatibilism survive against the challenge of incompatibilism?

# God’s Omniscience and Free Will

## Boethius’ Dilemma

### Overview

Boethius was a 5th Century philosopher who was imprisoned for treason. During his time in prison, Boethius considered his fate and the extent to which he would be justly rewarded and punished for his actions.

Boethius considered the nature of God’s omniscience and how, if God’s Providence saw all human actions, past, present and future, his own actions would have been known to God all along and so he, Boethius, would not have been free to act against the all-knowing sight of Providence.

Boethius presented this dilemma in his book Consolations of Philosophy.

This is a typical dilemma regarding God’s omniscience and human free will. If God is all-knowing, how can humans have any freedom?

### Resources

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| **Key Terms** | **Omniscience**: *Noun* The belief that God knows everything.  **Limited Omniscience**: *Noun* The belief, held by Richard Swinburne, that God can only know the present and the past and not the future thus not imposing on our free will.  **Unlimited Omniscience**: *Noun* The belief, held by St Thomas Aquinas, that God has all knowledge of past present and future, but that this knowledge does not impose on our free will.  **Providence**: *Noun* God’s will and sight of all things.  **Fatalism**: *Noun* The belief that all events are predetermined and therefore inevitable. |
| **Extracts** | **Boethius, Consolations of Philosophy Book V**  *…If God foresees all things and cannot in anything be mistaken, that, which His Providence sees will happen, must result. Wherefore if it knows beforehand not only men's deeds but even their designs and wishes, there will be no freedom of judgement For there can neither be any deed done, nor wish formed, except such as the infallible Providence of God has foreseen. […]*  *In like manner we must reason of Providence and future events. For even though they are foreseen because they are about to happen, yet they do not happen because they are foreseen. None the less it is necessary that either what is about to happen should be foreseen of God, or that what has been foreseen should happen; and this alone is enough to destroy all free will.* |
| **Videos** | • Religion: Classical Theism, [God’s omniscience](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tg05Un4Y5s).  • Religion: metaphysics, [The Problem of Free Will](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSfXdNIolQA). |

### Knowledge of the argument

1. What does it mean to say that God is omniscient?
2. What does it mean to say that God’s Providence sees all human actions?
3. Why is there a conflict between God’s Providence and human free will?
4. Why was Boethius preoccupied with judgement?
5. Why is God’s omniscience a problem for judgement?
6. How does Providence destroy free will for Boethius?
7. How might Limited Omniscience resolve the problem of omniscience and free will?
8. What is the difference between God’s omniscience and fatalism?

## Lady Philosophy’s Response

### Overview

In Book V of Consolations of Philosophy, Boethius records the response to his dilemma through the voice of Lady Philosophy, a manifestation of philosophy itself sent to console him.

Through her voice, Boethius realises that the cause of his problem is because his own reasoning cannot approach the directness of divine foreknowledge, God’s nature is completely beyond all human comprehension and understanding.

1. **Eternity**: God exists outside of time and space seeing everything in a simultaneous present.
2. **Knowledge**: knowledge of any subject is determined not by the knower, not the subject; God has a unique perspective of all things which we can’t possess as we are limited in time.
3. **Judgement**: God’s peculiar nature means that He can see every moral decision in its present, meaning that God alone has the right to reward and punish fairly.
4. **Prayer**: Prayer will not change God as God is immutable, however, it does align us with the will of God, so prayer is not in vain.

### Resources

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| **Extracts** | **Boethius, Consolations of Philosophy Book V - The Nature of Eternity**  *God is eternal. Eternity is the simultaneous and complete possession of infinite life. All that lives under the conditions of time moves through the present from the past to the future; there is nothing set in time which can at one moment grasp the whole space of its lifetime. It cannot yet comprehend to-morrow; yesterday it has already lost. And in this life of to-day your life is no more than a changing, passing moment. For though it apprehends and grasps a space of infinite lifetime, it does not embrace the whole simultaneously; it has not yet experienced the future. What we should rightly call eternal is that which grasps and possesses wholly and simultaneously the fullness of unending life, which lacks naught of the future, and has lost naught of the fleeting past; and such an existence must be ever present in itself to control and aid itself, and also must keep present with itself the infinity of changing time.* |
| **Videos** | • Boethius, [Consolations of Philosophy](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMUP48stXDc).  • William Lane Craig, [God’s omniscience and Free Will](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYoWhxOK8dE). |
| **Further Reading** | • Boethius, [Consolations of Philosophy](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/14328/14328-h/14328-h.htm), Chapter V.  • St Augustine of Hippo, [Confessions](https://www.ling.upenn.edu/courses/hum100/augustinconf.pdf), XI. xiii (15)  • St Thomas Aquinas, [*Summa Theologica*](https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1225-1274,_Thomas_Aquinas,_Summa_Theologiae_%5b1%5d,_EN.pdf), Part 1 Question 10 Article 1 |

### Evaluation of the argument

“God can reward and punish fairly.” Discuss.

**Consider the following:**

* Is Boethius’ argument logical and sound?
* To what extend is Boethius’ argument rational?
* How convincing is Boethius’ argument?
* Who can you use to support Boethius?
* What part of Boethius’ argument is resolved by Lady Philosophy?
* How convincing is Lady Philosophy’s resolution?
* Who can you use to support Lady Philosophy?
* Are there any aspects of Boethius’ problem that are left unresolved by Lady Philosophy?

# Predestination

## Calvin’s Predestination

### Overview

Predestination is the Christian doctrine that God has predetermined who will be saved and who will be damned at the end of time.

John Calvin adopted this doctrine after reading the writings of St Augustine of Hippo and St Paul and interpreting the doctrine within passages in scripture such as the parable of the Sower, where some seed will always fall on the path, and the teachings of Christ where He said: “no one can come to me unless it has been granted him by the Father” (John 6:65).

Calvin emphasises that salvation was not offered to all and that at the end of time, God will elect a number to salvation and the rest will be damned, as appears in Revelation where John saw 144,000 alone saved. This is the doctrine of divine election.

### Resources

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| **Key Terms** | **Predestination**: *Noun* The doctrine that God has predetermined whether we are saved or damned.  **Divine election**: *Noun* The doctrine that God has pre-ordained some for salvation and some for damnation. |
| **Extracts** | **St Paul, *Romans 8:28-30***  *We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.*  **John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion Bk3 Ch21 s5***  *We call predestination God’s eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death.* |
| **Videos** | • This Changed Everything: [John Calvin and God’s Sovereignty and Predestination](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUdJeks7KLg). |

### Knowledge of the argument

1. What is the difference between predestination and determinism?
2. What is the difference between predestination and fatalism?
3. How does Christ’s words support the doctrine of predestination?
4. How does the parable of the sower support the doctrine of predestination?
5. How does the teaching of St Paul support the doctrine of predestination?
6. How does the passage from Revelation support the doctrine of Divine Election?
7. What did Calvin mean when he said that we are not all created in equal condition?
8. What is the problem with predestination as a Christian doctrine?

## St Augustine’s Predestination

### Overview

St Augustine of Hippo wrote about Predestination as part of his response to the Pelagian Heresy. Pelagius taught that man did not need Christ to be saved but rather could save himself. Augustine responded to this by emphasising that through Original Sin, all were damned and that it was through the sacrifice of Christ alone that God offered humanity salvation.

Augustine wanted to emphasise that while God’s perfect foreknowledge meant that he knew exactly who would be damned and saved, it was his desire that all would choose salvation. In reality not all did. In this way, when Christ says that it is only by the Father’s will that we are saved, it is not because the Father does not offer it, but rather, the Father accepts the decision made by each human being from eternity. Mainstream Christian teaching asserts God can never will anyone to hell.

### Resources

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| **Extracts** | **St Augustine of Hippo, *Enchiridion* 103**  *When we hear and read in sacred Scripture that He wills all men to be saved … we must … so understand [it] … as if it were said that no man is saved except whom He wants [to be saved] … Or certainly it was so said … not that there is no man whom He is unwilling to have saved, He who was unwilling to perform the wonders of miracles among those whom He says would have done penance it He had done them…*  **St Augustine of Hippo, *De correptione et gratia* 15, 47**  *That 'God wills all men to be saved' can be understood also in this way: that He causes us to wish [that all men be saved]…"*  **New Advent on Predestination**  *The eternal plan of God can never intend a positive reprobation to hell, but only a negative reprobation, that is to say, an exclusion from heaven. These restrictions are evidently demanded by the formulation of the concept itself, since the attributes of Divine sanctity and justice must be kept inviolate.* |
| **Videos** | • The Thomist Institute: [Predestination](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aV2GGMvpRz0) (Aquinas). |
| **Further Reading** | • John Calvin, [Instituted of the Christian Religion](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/45001/45001-pdf.pdf), Chapter XVII |

### Evaluation of the argument

“Augustine’s version of predestination is more optimistic than Calvin’s.” Discuss.

**Consider the following:**

* Is Calvin’s view of predestination and divine election consistent with scripture?
* To what extend is Calvin’s view of predestination optimistic or pessimistic?
* How convincing is Calvin’s version of predestination and divine election?
* Who can you use to support Calvin?
* What part of Calvin’s predestination is challenged by Augustine’s version?
* How optimistic is Augustine’s version of predestination?
* Who can you use to support Augustine?
* Can Calvin’s version of predestination respond to Augustine’s?