

# On humanism and determinism

[Philosophy](#)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Am I Free? I. INTRODUCTION Before my first year in college started, Mama and I went to the mall to buy school-related things, including notebooks, pens, and a bag. When we arrived at the shoes-section, I found myself stuck in deciding which pair I should choose. Well, it's not because I don't like any—actually, I've found what kind of pair I want, but my mother kept on insisting another pair. It ended up that I bought what she liked for me because the pair that I liked didn't have a size appropriate for my feet. From this situation, I wondered if I had any sense of freedom at all. It is inevitably true that the topic about freedom has always shaken the world of human beings since time immemorial. I wonder, too, if I am really a free being. For me to be able to know if I am really free, I would need to answer some questions that might fulfill my inquiry: What is freedom? What does it mean to be free? Are we free beings? To help me with my questions, I read about an argument between determinism and freedom. Also, I read Baruch Spinoza's (a determinist and one of the most important modern philosophers) claim on freedom. Determinism is the thesis of universal causation: in simple terms, it claims that everything in this world is caused. On the other hand, freedom is the state of being free from restraints. As a doctrine, it maintains that some of our actions are free. These are both paradoxical—something inconsistent and contradictory. This is because if everything is caused, then so are the actions that we claim to be free. But they (actions) are the result of some causes which made us perform actions, so we are not free. How is that? Baruch Spinoza, as a determinist, also stated that we are “not free agents but parts of a divine machine which thinks and acts in accordance with the eternal laws of nature”, in short we are not free. Why? I will answer my own questions by defining what freedom is. II. PRESENTATION Freedom is the <https://assignbuster.com/on-humanism-and-determinism/>

exemption or liberty from slavery or imprisonment. It is the liberty of choice or action. It is also the state of the will as the first cause of human actions, or self-determination in human beings [1]. To be free is to enable one to do what s/he wanted to do. To start the argument, let us first take a look at the Holy Bible. Another blessing that God gave us when He made us in His image is the gift of freewill or the freedom to choose. Through this gift we are given the power to act and not to act, and so, to perform deliberate acts of our own. Man is rational and therefore, like God, he is created with free will and is master over his acts. In this statement, it is given that we are given the freedom to do what we wanted to do. But, according to the determinist Baruch Spinoza, it might go the other way: that we are not really as free as we think. Spinoza had an inquiry on the following things: (1) What sort of world do we live in? (2) Who put us here? (3) Why? I would like to focus on question number 3, but first there must be answers on numbers 1 and 2. What sort of world do we live in? Spinoza answers that the world is infinite and eternal—it has no beginning and end in the space and time. It was never created and destroyed, and is just simply, profoundly and eternally is. For the next question on “ Who put us here”, Spinoza answered that it's God. God, Spinoza asserts, is the world. Each of us is a definite and an important part of Him—a cell in His body, a segment of him. Every human body, therefore, is a part of God's body. Everything that happens in the world—our faith, destiny and actions—are in accordance with God's plan. In the third question, it was asked, “ Why? “. The answer to this question, according to Spinoza, is that we have been born in order to be happy. But, what is “ happiness”? [2]It is the presence of pleasure and the absence of pain. To be able to attain this, we must first try to find our limitations—for example, that

<https://assignbuster.com/on-humanism-and-determinism/>

we are only parts of God's divine machine, and that we follow God's will. As for human will, it also follows the laws of necessity. There is no such thing as "free will". Why? This is because the actions that we do are determined by a cause, which is determined by another cause, and this by another, and so on to infinity. The actions that we do are dependent upon another action. This, then, follows the claim of Determinism, that every action is caused. As to the first sentence of my introduction, I had to buy things because college is starting. The cause of my action (to buy things) is because I need (necessity) those objects for school. Next is this: I had to choose the other pair of shoes because there's no appropriate size for the one that I would like to choose. There was no choice to the situation. This is what we call a "determinist position". It claims that no actions are free. Spinoza, as a determinist, states that "we think that we are free because we are ignorant of the causes of our actions"[3]. We choose only because we fail to realize that we are not free. Choosing when one has no choice-when one is not free-is founded on ignorance. But, if we are going to accept this thesis of determinism, then it would be paradoxical to itself. Why? If we accept this thesis, we are going to accept that no one is responsible to the action. For example, no one is responsible for me choosing the other pair of shoes, simply because it is not, nor my mother's fault to have a feet size larger than the available sizes for the pair of shoes that I originally wanted. Who or what will be, then, the one responsible for the size of my feet or for the unavailability of the feet size? Nothing could have been done to prevent me from having such feet size-I did not have it out of my own free will. Whatever caused my feet size must be caused by some earlier conditions and factors, which might have extend indefinitely to the past. This is the Determinist view. Does this exactly mean

<https://assignbuster.com/on-humanism-and-determinism/>

that we are not free? No, this is insufficient. In an argument we must look at the other side to see if it is valid. If there is a Determinist view, there is also a Libertarian view. If the determinist claims that we are powerless on the actions that we do and not do, the libertarian claims that it is within our power to act otherwise than we do. It means that the act depends on us whether we perform it or not. Thus, to say that an action is free is to say that “ we could have done otherwise”, “ that we were free to do otherwise”, and that “ we have the power to do otherwise”. As for my mall-case, I could have chosen to not buy my school stuff than going with my mother. I was free to buy the pair of shoes that I originally wanted, not caring much if ever the shoes are too tight on my feet. I have the power to tell my mother that I don't want to buy the suggested shoes just because I don't like it, that I want the former instead. The libertarian holds that people do have free will, that there is free action, and that the thesis of determinism is false. It denies that all human actions are caused. Personally, I don't think that nothing was done before an action occurred. No, this does not mean that I am on the determinist side, but I am also not saying that I am on the libertarian side. Either to say that “ we are not free” or to deny that “ all human actions are caused” is insufficient. I do not agree when the determinist says that we have no freedom or power to do otherwise, because given my situation above, I was able to make choices. After choices come decisions. It is up to me if I will let myself be bound by the causes, or free myself from it. Probably, if I, or we are going to “ bend” these causes to our own will, we will be able to prove that we are free and are not powerless, unlike the claim of the determinist that we are powerless in everything that we do. Thus, from supervision, I can take and have control over the decision of my actions. On <https://assignbuster.com/on-humanism-and-determinism/>

the other hand, to act freely is not to act from an uncaused mental decision, but to act from the necessity of one's own nature. Human freedom resides in the power of reason to control the emotions because reason is determined not by external causes but from within. Reason, unlike imagination, follows a logical order in ideas. Reason allows us to understand how things follow by necessity from the Divine Nature. As a person grasps the necessity of things and sees reality as a whole, s/he is free, liberated by clear understanding. In the grip of passions, we appear to be under the power of external forces; but as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of a passion, it ceases to be one and we are freed. In this way, a clear understanding that all things are necessary gives the mind power over the passions. This understanding, which liberates us from the bondage of the passions, at the same time instills in us an intellectual love of God's Nature[4].

III. CONCLUSION Am I free? Yes, I am free. But I am not completely a free being. Our freedom to act does not mean we are completely free to do whatever we want. There are certain laws, rules, and principles in this world that we need to follow. Of course, we can do whatever we want, as long as we do not affect negatively the others around us. Spinoza might have stated that we should realize our limitations because only through that we could obtain happiness. I think that being limited to a certain aspect would mean that one is not free.

----- [ 1 ]. Webster's Dictionary of the English Language

[ 2 ]. Henry Thomas, Living Biographies of Great Philosophers, Chapter 10 [ 3

]. Central Readings on Philosophy [ 4 ]. Garrett Thomson, " Spinoza: Theory of Knowledge", Introduction to Modern Philosophy (1993)