

Mystery of free will and moral responsibility

[Experience](#), [Responsibility](#)



We all seem to think that we make decisions on our own and have the ability to choose from making different decisions. We do what we want to do because it seems as if we have many options to choose from to be in control of our own destiny. The basic question of the mystery of free will is that, "Are we able to really make our own decisions or are the decisions we make already predetermined (with it being inevitable of us making that certain decision)? Our futures seem to be undetermined and have an infinite amount of possibilities of which we are able to choose freely among. Think of your life as a garden of forking paths with each path being a certain decision you make that affects your future. However, many philosophers believe that the thesis of determinism threatens this model of free will. If you may know, determinism is the theory that the universe at any point in time is entirely fixed by the state of the universe at a prior time, in combination with the laws of nature.

So the reason why this threatens the 'garden of forking paths' model of free will is that how can we have so many options to choose when determinism has already chosen one for us? This leads us to another central issue, which is: "Can free will and determinism co-exist?" The two ways philosophers go about considering this question is either with a 'yes, they can co-exist' or 'no, they cannot.' If you were to believe that, yes, free will and determinism can co-exist, then you would be considered a compatibilist.

Answering no, free will and determinism cannot co-exist, you would be considered an incompatibilist. Peter Van Inwagen, a prominent figure in the philosophy world, created the consequence argument. In his argument, Van Inwagen explains that if determinism is true, then our acts are just a

consequence of the laws of nature and events in the remote past. And since it's not up to us what went on before we were born nor what the laws of nature are, the consequences of these things (including our present acts) are not up to us (PowerPoint 1, Slide 23).

In short, he explains that if determinism were to be true then no one would ever or has ever made a choice on their own about anything. So if no one has power over the facts of the past and the laws of nature and that no one has the power of the fact that the facts of the past and laws of nature entail that only future is possible, therefore, no one has power over the facts of the future. To further demonstrate his reasoning of the consequence argument, Van Inwagen created the No Choice Principle (NCP). In this example, let ' p ' = " Plato died long before I was born. " Let ' q ' = " I never met Plato. Now, if I have no choice about ' p ' and no choice about the fact that (if ' p ' is true, then ' q ' is necessarily true. Therefore, I have no choice about ' q ' (PowerPoint 1, Slide 26). How can one have a choice about something that is inevitably going to happen if one has no choice about it happening? Van Inwagen's consequence argument is based on the NCP. Now, if determinism and free will can co-exist (Compatibilism is true) then the No Choice Principle must be false (Remember, you would have no free will and no choice of ' q ' happening because it was never in your control to choose so).

But, the NCP is not false, therefore the Compatibilism theory is not true and with this being said the free will thesis and theory of determinism cannot co-exist. I believe that free will is incompatible with determinism, but free will exists because the thesis of determinism is false. I choose this opinion because, going to back to the ' garden of forking paths ' model, if I come

across a path with three forks in it I have the ability to not take one or two of those paths and have the ability to freely choose which path I would prefer to take.

I know that I have the ability to choose because I can take either 3 paths, but I only choose to take the one which I desire most. Determinists may say that I took that path because it was inevitable. Whichever of the 3 paths I took, it would be inevitable that I took it. The reason why I believe in free will and not the coexistence of both free will and determinism, and determinism itself is because there is no way to prove something of happening inevitably in every occasion. Determinists could say that just about anything was inevitable of happening, what's their proof?