

**Fatalism** is a philosophical doctrine that stresses the subjugation of all events or actions to destiny.

Fatalism generally refers to any of the following ideas:

- The view that we are powerless to do anything other than what we actually do.<sup>[1]</sup> Included in this is that humans have no power to influence the future or indeed their own actions.<sup>[2]</sup> This belief is very similar to [predeterminism](#).
- An attitude of resignation in the face of some future event or events that are thought to be inevitable. [Friedrich Nietzsche](#) named this idea "Turkish fatalism"<sup>[3]</sup> in his book *The Wanderer and His Shadow*.<sup>[4]</sup>
- That acceptance is appropriate, rather than resistance, against inevitability. This belief is very similar to [defeatism](#).
- Some take it to mean [determinism](#).

## Determinism and predeterminism

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While the terms are often used interchangeably, fatalism, [determinism](#), and [predeterminism](#) are discrete in stressing different aspects of the futility of human will or the foreordination of destiny. However, all these doctrines share common ground.

*Determinists* generally agree that human actions affect the future but that human action is itself determined by a causal chain of prior events. Their view does not accentuate a "submission" to fate or destiny, whereas *fatalists* stress an acceptance of future events as inevitable. Determinists believe the future is fixed specifically due to [causality](#); fatalists and predeterminists believe that some or all aspects of the future are inescapable but, for fatalists, not necessarily due to causality.

Fatalism is a looser term than determinism. The presence of historical "indeterminisms" or chances, i.e. events that could not be predicted by sole knowledge of other events, is an idea still compatible with fatalism. Necessity (such as a law of nature) will happen just as inevitably as a chance—both can be imagined as sovereign.

Likewise, determinism is a broader term than predeterminism. *Predeterminists*, as a specific type of determinists, believe that every single event or effect is caused by an uninterrupted chain of events that goes back to the origin of the universe. Determinists, holding a more generic view, meanwhile, believe that each event is at least caused by recent prior events, if not also by such far-extending and unbroken events as those going back in time to the universe's very origins.

Fatalism, by referring to the personal "fate" or to "predestined events" strongly imply the existence of a *someone* or *something* that has set the "[predestination](#)." This is usually interpreted to mean a conscious,

[omniscient](#) being or force who has personally planned—and therefore knows at all times—the exact succession of every event in the past, present, and future, none of which can be altered.

## Idle argument

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One famous ancient argument regarding fatalism was the so-called *Idle Argument*. It argues that if something is fated, then it would be pointless or futile to make any effort to bring it about. The Idle Argument was described by [Origen](#) and [Cicero](#) and it went like this:

- If it is [fated](#) for you to recover from this illness, then you will recover whether you call a doctor or not.
- Likewise, if you are fated not to recover, you will not do so whether you call a doctor or not.
- But either it is fated that you will recover from this illness, or it is fated that you will not recover.
- Therefore, it is futile to consult a doctor.<sup>[5][6]</sup>

The Idle Argument was anticipated by [Aristotle](#) in his *De Interpretatione* chapter 9. The [Stoics](#) considered it to be a [sophism](#) and the Stoic [Chrysippus](#) attempted to refute it by pointing out that consulting the doctor would be as much fated as recovering. He seems to have introduced the idea that in cases like that at issue two events can be *co-fated*, so that one cannot occur without the other.<sup>[7]</sup> Which is actually always the case and the core idea of Fatalism. No event is a standalone event without a cause.

## Logical fatalism and the argument from bivalence

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Another famous argument for fatalism that goes back to antiquity is one that depends not on causation or physical circumstances but rather is based on presumed [logical truths](#). There are numerous versions of this argument, including those by [Aristotle](#)<sup>[8]</sup> and [Richard Taylor](#).<sup>[2]</sup> These have been objected to and elaborated on<sup>[1]</sup> but do not enjoy mainstream support.

The key idea of logical fatalism is that there is a body of true propositions (statements) about what is going to happen, and these are true regardless of when they are made. So, for example, if it is true today that tomorrow there will be a sea battle, then there cannot fail to be a sea battle tomorrow, since otherwise it would not be true today that such a battle will take place tomorrow.

The argument relies heavily on the [principle of bivalence](#): the idea that any proposition is either true or false. As a result of this principle, if it is not false that there will be a sea battle, then it is true; there is no in-between. However, rejecting the principle of bivalence—perhaps by saying that the truth of a proposition regarding the future is indeterminate—is a controversial view since the principle is an accepted part of [classical logic](#).

## Criticism

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# Semantic equivocation

One criticism comes from the novelist [David Foster Wallace](#), who in a 1985 paper "Richard Taylor's Fatalism and the Semantics of Physical Modality" suggests that Taylor reached his conclusion of fatalism only because his argument involved two different and inconsistent notions of impossibility.<sup>[9]</sup> Wallace did not reject fatalism *per se*, as he wrote in his closing passage, "if Taylor and the fatalists want to force upon us a metaphysical conclusion, they must do metaphysics, not semantics. And this seems entirely appropriate."<sup>[9]</sup> Willem deVries and Jay Garfield, both of whom were advisers on Wallace's thesis, expressed regret that Wallace never published his argument.<sup>[9]</sup> In 2010, the thesis was, however, published posthumously as *Time, Fate, and Language: An Essay on Free Will*.

## See also

- [Accidental necessity](#)
- [Jansenism](#)
- [Shikata ga nai](#)
- [Amor fati](#)
- [Libertarianism \(metaphysics\)](#)
- [Theological determinism](#)
- [Calvinism](#)
- [Problem of future contingents](#)
- [Theological fatalism](#)
- [Inshallah](#)
- [Probability theory](#)

## References

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2. Richard Taylor (January 1962). "Fatalism". *The Philosophical Review*. Duke University Press. **71** (1): 56–66. [JSTOR 2183681](#).
3. Stambaugh, Joan (1994). [Other Nietzsche, The](#). SUNY Press. p. 81. ISBN 9781438420929.
4. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, 1880, Türkentalismus
5. Origen *Contra Celsum* II 20
6. Cicero *De Fato* 28-9
7. Susanne Bobzien, *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy*, Oxford 1998, chapter 5
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9. Ryerson, James (12 December 2008). "[Consider the Philosopher](#)". *The New York Times*.

## External links

Look up **[fatalism](#)** in Wiktionary, the free dictionary.

- Hugh Rice. "Fatalism" . In Zalta, Edward N. (ed.). *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- [Fatalism vs. Free Will](#) from Project Worldview

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