

# The Phenomenology of Determinism and Fatalism

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**Abstract:** In recent years, the issue of the compatibility of free will and determinism has been studied by philosophers by methods of experimental philosophy among ordinary people. The results of these experiments led to new disputes about the definition of determinism and fatalism. I propose that to get valid results from experiments, one should first study the perception of ordinary people about what determinism and fatalism are. The research aims to study (non-expert) human perception of determinism as well as people's views regarding fatalism. The goal of this background research was to change the playing field of further debates on free will and determinism. The results have been summarized and compared with previous literature along with consequent inference on common grounds between determinism and fatalism.

**Keywords:** free will, fatalism, destiny, foreknowledge, determinism, phenomenology

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## Introduction

Philosophical literature on free will and determinism usually distinguishes between fatalism and determinism by noting several major differences between these two positions. Although in common speech, the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they are in fact not even logical extensions of one another. Fatalism is, most generally, the belief that each person has a fate, a destiny that cannot be escaped. One may take different paths to that destiny, but the outcome is fixed. This is usually linked to a belief that fate is determined by some deity. Determinism, in contrast, holds that everything we do is determined by what happened before, by the past. Strictly speaking, this is nomological determinism (which in the following we call simply ‘determinism’) and one can contrast it with theological determinism, a position that a deity determines everything that happens in this world (in the following, we call it ‘fatalism’). Fatalism is then usually relegated to the metaphysical realm. These differences are especially relevant to experimental philosophy which investigates the compatibility, or absence thereof, of determinism and free will. A position which holds that determinism is compatible with free will is then called compatibilism, while its counterpart, which holds that it is not, is known as incompatibilism. This issue has also serious implications on assumption of moral responsibility for own actions. Not surprisingly, it is a subject that has been investigated not only on a theoretical but also on an experimental level.

In recent years, philosophers have been conducting experiments to prove whether ordinary people have compatibilist or incompatibilist intuitions about free will and determinism. Within these experiments, ordinary people have been asked to read scenarios of deterministic universes and then answer to what extent free will and moral responsibility are possible under such universes. The results of these experiments often contradicted each other and were criticised by opponents using error theories.<sup>2</sup> These error theories focused on questioning the accuracy of the depicted (nomological) determinism in the scenarios of opponents. Although years of experiments resulted in valuable contributions to the debate of compatibilism and incompatibilism, one of the most hotly contended points remains the issue of how accurately the scenarios presented in those experiments depict (nomological) determinism. For example, Nahmias<sup>3</sup> expresses a concern about mixing fatalism with determinism in incompatibility experiments and notes that unlike determinism, fatalism (as well as coercion, reductionism, and epiphenomenalism) intuitively ‘suggest that our behavior is caused by forces that bypass our conscious mental life’.<sup>4</sup> The wording of vignettes which refer to some sort of predeterminism are, in his view, misleading: they present an inaccurate description of determinism and that affects their results. Nahmias and colleagues<sup>5</sup> also criticised Nichols and Knobe<sup>6</sup>, who showed

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<sup>2</sup> Error theory is a method of disproving the results of previous studies. Philosophers develop error theories to explain why the results of previous experiments are not valid and to reveal the type of error that occurred, they create new studies.

<sup>3</sup> Eddy Nahmias, Stephen G. Morris, Thomas Nadelhoffer, Jason Turner, “Is Incompatibilism Intuitive?”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 73 (2006) 1, pp. 28–53. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2006.tb00603.x>.

<sup>4</sup> Eddy Nahmias, “Folk Fears about Freedom and Responsibility: Determinism vs. Reductionism”, *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 6 (2006) 1–2, pp. 215–237. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853706776931295>, p. 227.

<sup>5</sup> Eddy Nahmias, David J. Coates, Trevor Kvaran, “Free Will, Moral Responsibility, and Mechanism: Experiments on Folk Intuitions”, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 31 (2007) 1, pp. 214–242. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4975.2007.00158.x>.

<sup>6</sup> Shaun Nichols, Joshua Knobe, “Moral Responsibility and Determinism: The Cognitive Science of Folk Intuitions”, *Nous* 41 (2007) 4, pp. 663–685. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0068.2007.00666.x>

that ordinary people tend to be incompatibilists when faced with abstract scenarios but compatibilists when responding to scenarios that trigger emotions, for providing description of human feelings and acts within a determinist universe in mechanistic terms, which creates a sense of impending threat.

Compatibilist results have also have been criticised, for instance by Feltz and Milan<sup>7</sup> who claimed that if people continue to claim that they have free will and are morally responsible in the outlined imaginary universes (which were, however, fatalistic rather than deterministic), they are just expressing a ‘free-will-no-matter-what’ intuition – and that cannot be accepted as a genuinely compatibilist outcome. Moreover, according to Feltz and colleagues<sup>8</sup>, people who believe in free will are ‘convinced that they possess an immaterial soul and the kind of robust free will that is required for moral responsibility’.

These debates indicate that determinism and fatalism are not only distinct notions but in fact notions so different they should be differentiated by ordinary people as well as philosophers. But do ordinary people distinguish between these notions? To see what determinism and fatalism mean for non-specialists, one would have to prepare the right kind of vignettes and challenge both compatibilist and incompatibilist intuitions.

The aim of my research was to analyse non-specialist understanding of determinism and fatalism by linguistic and perceptual analyses, in short to investigate ordinary people’s perceptions of determinism and fatalism with the aim of shedding some light on the phenomenology of these concepts. It is a kind of basic research whose aim was to prepare better ground for further debates on free will and determinism, and in particular to challenge the descriptions of determinism and fatalism provided by philosophers.

## Problem statement

First of all, nomological or scientific determinism (the two terms are usually viewed as interchangeable) is the notion that all events in the universe are caused by natural laws. By extension, this pertains also to mental causes, which are treated as part of the physical world. Let us focus on them, since mental causes have direct bearing on human behaviour and the part of determinism which views human behaviour as part of a universal system governed by natural laws is usually viewed as the most difficult one. Humans, as biological and social beings, act under the effect of their physiology (genes, hormones, brain synapses) and the environment (culture, ecology, economy etc.). According to nomological determinism, both environmental or cultural determinism are part of description of the physical world, and they jointly lead to behavioural determinism. All actions of human beings, at any point of their lives, are thus a cumulative consequence of all previous environmental and biological factors acting upon each individual and of their mutual interaction.

Fatalism, on the other hand, refers not to natural laws but to the will of a conscious omnipotent being who plans or has already planned every single event in the universe, including the lives of human beings. Starting with ancient religious beliefs, many religions have assumed the existence of a being who more or less controls whatever happens in the world, including events in human lives. For example, in Greek mythology we find the *Morae*, three goddesses who

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<sup>7</sup> Adam Feltz, Michael Millan, “An Error Theory for Compatibilist Intuitions”, *Philosophical Psychology* 28 (2015) 4, pp. 529–555. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09515089.2013.865513>.

<sup>8</sup> Adam Feltz, Eddy Nahmias, Thomas Nadelhoffer, “Natural Compatibilism versus Natural Incompatibilism: Back to the Drawing Board”, *Mind & Language* 24 (2009) 1, pp. 1–23. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0017.2008.01351.x>, p. 16.

weave human lives and their decisions cannot be reversed even by other gods. In Abrahamic religions, the attitude to fatalism varies both between denominations and between the religions.

Although scholars distinguish between determinism and fatalism mainly by pointing to the role of natural laws, it is difficult to describe determinism without reference to some conscious plan. Philosophers would like to avoid this image of scientific determinism but various previous experiments have made reference to some conscious or semi-conscious being in order to explain determinism and challenge the compatibility of determinism and free will.

For example, Frankfurt<sup>9</sup> proposed an imaginary experiment where Jones, who has freedom of choice to take moral responsibility, is controlled by Black (another intelligent being), who represents determinism. In order to discuss the possibility of free will, Mele<sup>10</sup> also gives an example of a thought experiment: in this scenario, a subject, Erni, was created by goddess Diana and predestined to act in an appropriate way. Real-life experiments, too, tend to involve references to an intelligence which determines and sometimes controls events or human actions. For example in experiments conducted by Nahmias and colleagues<sup>11 12</sup>, respondents were asked to imagine a supercomputer that can predict future events based on the laws of nature and the current state of everything in the world. Such descriptions of determinism leave us with the impression that its intuitive understanding and metaphoric delineation do not differ from the assumptions of fatalism, where each individual event was initially determined by some conscious or semi-conscious being and can also be predicted in some way, which implies the inevitability of the predetermination of each individual event without exception.

Secondly, it is important to note that philosophers usually present determinism as rejecting the notion of predetermination (the idea that events have been decided in advance).<sup>131415</sup> However they agree that in a deterministic universe if a particular past state of the world can only result in one particular future state of the world, i.e., that certain past conditions can lead only to certain future conditions.<sup>16</sup> According to Nahmias:<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Harry G. Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility", *The Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969) 23, pp. 829–839. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2023833>.

<sup>10</sup> Alfred R. Mele, *Free Will and Luck*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/0195305043.001.0001>.

<sup>11</sup> Eddy Nahmias, Stephen Morris, Thomas Nadelhoffer, Jason Turner, "Surveying Freedom: Folk Intuitions about Free Will and Moral Responsibility", *Philosophical Psychology* 18 (2005) 5, pp. 561–584. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09515080500264180>.

<sup>12</sup> Eddy Nahmias, Stephen G. Morris, Thomas Nadelhoffer, Jason Turner, "Is Incompatibilism Intuitive?", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 73 (2006) 1, pp. 28–53. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2006.tb00603.x>.

<sup>13</sup> Eddy Nahmias, "Folk Fears about Freedom and Responsibility: Determinism vs. Reductionism", *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 6 (2006) 1–2, pp. 215–237. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853706776931295>.

<sup>14</sup> Eddy Nahmias, "Intuitions about Free Will, Determinism, and Bypassing", in: Robert H. Kane (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012, pp. 555–576. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195399691.003.0029>.

<sup>15</sup> Eddy Nahmias, Dylan Murray, "Experimental Philosophy on Free Will: An Error Theory for Incompatibilist Intuitions", in: Jesús H. Aguilar, Andrei A. Buckareff, Keith Frankish (eds.), *New Waves in Philosophy of Action*, Palgrave Macmillan, UK 2011, pp. 189–216. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230304253\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230304253_10).

<sup>16</sup> Jason Turner, Eddy Nahmias, "Are the Folk Agent-Causationists?", *Mind & Language* 21 (2006) 5, pp. 597–609. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0017.2006.00295.x>.

<sup>17</sup> Eddy Nahmias, "Folk Fears about Freedom and Responsibility: Determinism vs. Reductionism", *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 6 (2006) 1–2, pp. 215–237. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853706776931295>, p. 222.

‘The problem is that determinism should not be described in a way that suggests that actual events, including human choices, could not happen in any other way. This is because determinism does not entail that nothing could happen otherwise — that all actual events are necessary. The fact that an event X is completely caused (or determined) by prior events does not entail that X has to happen (necessarily happens).’

Nevertheless, according to incompatibilists, if determinism holds, there is only one possible continuation of the past. Therefore, if determinism holds, then all events in the universe have been predetermined from the beginning (i.e., since the very first event, such as the Big Bang). Moreover, this Nahmias’s claim contradicts previous experiments of Nahmias, Morris, Nadelhoffer, and Turner<sup>1819</sup>, where deterministic universe was described as a world where all events must have been predetermined in order to be predictable by a supercomputer.

It may thus seem that despite all the debates on compatibilism and interpretation of determinism, the notion of determinism and its phenomenology has not been investigated and explained from the layperson’s perspective.

According to some philosophers, fatalism does not rely on the notion of causality, while determinism does. From this perspective, while determinism holds that every event necessarily happens due to causal chains between different events, conditions, and natural laws, in fatalism events occur necessarily because it is the will of God. Fatalism thus minimises the significance of human choices, actions, and efforts,<sup>20</sup> but there is no causal chain between the events and actions in a fatalistic universe. For example Feltz and Millan,<sup>21</sup> in order to investigate whether ordinary people are genuine compatibilists or just follow their ‘free-will-no-matter-what’ intuition, prepared vignettes with fatalist scenarios based on Kane’s<sup>22</sup> and Bernstein’s<sup>23</sup> description of fatalism, which assumes divine foreknowledge and the idea that ‘whatever is going to happen, is going to happen, no matter what we do’.

According to Feltz and Millan,<sup>24</sup> genuine compatibilism could only be found in a scenario which assumes the possibility of a truly free action. Otherwise, people just hold on to their free-will-no-matter-what intuition – and that is not genuine compatibilism. The vignettes prepared by them describe a fatalist universe where God/a crystal ball/the Book have a foreknowledge that John will cheat on his taxes (or kill his wife to marry his lover). They assume that divine (or supernatural) foreknowledge should be accepted by respondents as meaning absolute control over human actions, who thus have no way of acting freely. In their view, genuine compatibilists should reject the idea that in such scenarios, where foreknowledge makes any

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<sup>18</sup> Eddy Nahmias, Stephen Morris, Thomas Nadelhoffer, Jason Turner, “Surveying Freedom: Folk Intuitions about Free Will and Moral Responsibility”, *Philosophical Psychology* 18 (2005) 5, pp. 561–584. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09515080500264180>.

<sup>19</sup> Eddy Nahmias, Stephen G. Morris, Thomas Nadelhoffer, Jason Turner, “Is Incompatibilism Intuitive?”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 73 (2006) 1, pp. 28–53. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2006.tb00603.x>.

<sup>20</sup> Howard Vernon Royal Wilson, “Causal Discontinuity in Fatalism and Indeterminism”, *The Journal of Philosophy* 52 (1955) 3, pp. 70–83. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2021730>.

<sup>21</sup> Adam Feltz, Michael Millan, “An Error Theory for Compatibilist Intuitions”, *Philosophical Psychology* 28 (2015) 4, pp. 529–555. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09515089.2013.865513>.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Kane, *The Significance of Free Will*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1996.

<sup>23</sup> Marcus Bernstein, “Fatalism”, in: Robert H. Kane (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, Oxford University Press, New York 2001, pp. 1–23.

<sup>24</sup> Adam Feltz, Michael Millan, “An Error Theory for Compatibilist Intuitions”, *Philosophical Psychology* 28 (2015) 4, pp. 529–555. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09515089.2013.865513>.

kind of control over their actions impossible, people have free will and can be held morally responsible for their actions, since genuine compatibilists allow some control over their actions in a determinist universe. But do the experiments whose vignettes assume foreknowledge make people actually link their fate with their actions? To make this assumption, one ought to investigate what divine foreknowledge means for the ‘ordinary fatalists’, how they understand and experience fate, and how they view the role of causality in their fatalist universe.

The basic starting point of this study is the observation that in order to resolve the debate between compatibilists and incompatibilists over error theories in experimental philosophy, researchers should first study what determinism and fatalism mean for ordinary people.

## Methodology

The main research question is whether determinism differs from fatalism. I am going to argue that regardless of both compatibilists’ and incompatibilists’ insistence on genuinely non-fatalist determinism, the concept of determinism has more in common with fatalism than most scholars tend to assume. My hypothesis is that for ordinary people, non-experts, determinism tends to imply the existence of an intelligence who is doing the determining. My second hypothesis is that ordinary fatalists do not reject the significance of causality – and in particular the role of the cause-and-effect relation between choices and events – despite their faith in divine providence and foreknowledge. This hypothesis will be examined using methods of phenomenological research: real interviews to present people’s beliefs and experiences regarding free will and determinism and, especially, their beliefs regarding the (in)compatibility of free will and determinism.

Because the goal of this study is to study the phenomenology of determinism and fatalism, I have opted for a qualitative phenomenological research design instead of a written survey and statistics (quantitative approach). The phenomenological approach as a method of qualitative research takes as its starting point the philosophy of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), the founder of phenomenology, and his insistence on the need to go ‘back to the things themselves’,<sup>25</sup> which requires the perception of phenomena via experience rather than the ‘common sense’. This approach thus aims at studying phenomena by focus on lived experiences, feelings, and thoughts in order to understand the ‘essence of the phenomena’.

To highlight the specific perception of determinism and fatalism and to identify the phenomena through actors’ experiences, I have conducted in-depth in-person interviews with open-ended questions and focus group discussions according to the methodological requirements.

The research took five months. The first month was dedicated to reviewing of relevant literature, the subsequent two months were used to prepare the interviews, formulate questions, and sample the target groups. Subsequently, I spent one month conducting interviews among native English speakers, whereby the first part of the study focused on determinism, the second then on fatalism.

For the first part of the investigation, I have selected 10 people from the target group of English native speakers and focused on investigating of their understanding of determinism. I have conducted interviews with the targets and analysed data from the interviews as well as results of philosophical experiments presented in literature. My aim was to find how native English speakers understand the term ‘determinism’ and its possible metaphorical connotations.

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<sup>25</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, edited by Dermot Moran, Routledge, London 2001, p. 168.

The second part of the study consisted of interviews with ‘ordinary fatalists’ with focus on their approach to human choice and fate. To this end, I sampled 25 people from three religious communities (Christian, Muslim, and Jewish) and interviewed them. Two of these subjects did not identify themselves as fatalists. All respondents were informed about the aims of the study and consented to their participation, including the use of their answers in writing.

Interview questions for the first part of the research were prepared with the aim to conduct semi-structured interviews. Since this part of the study focused on the semantic understanding of the term ‘determinism’, interviewees were asked:

- What does determinism mean for you?
- Could you describe determinism in your own words?
- What does determinist universe/word/life mean for you?
- Is there any difference between determinism and predeterminism?

Questions for the second part of the study focused on the thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to fate, destiny, and free will in people of deep faith. They included the following:

- What does free will mean for you?
- Do you think you have free will? (If so, how do you exercise it during your life?)
- Do you think that you can affect events in your life?
- What does fate/destiny mean for you?
- Do you think your life depends on your previous choices or on other circumstances? (If so, could you explain how your choices affect your life?)
- Do you think that events and choices in your life could be fixed by God or by past events?
- How would you describe the role of God in your life?

Based on experience from the first two interviews, I made the questions more informal and replaced the specific terms by commonly used wording. I also included more examples from real life, where they had to take decisions, in order to simplify the interview questions and to make the interview process more comfortable for the non-expert interviewees. Finally, I have changed the form of interviews from semi-structured to nonstructured, so the remaining interviews were conducted in a discussion form. Both in the first and the second part of the research, I asked additional questions to clarify and sometimes challenge the responses.

After all the interviews have been completed and recorded, the last month was spent on transcription and coding of the gathered materials, analysis to summarise the findings according to topics and to distil the key issues discussed in the Problem statement section. This paper thus presents both results of the interviews and their comparison with existing literature on the subject, along with inferences regarding similarities between determinism and fatalism.

## Study results

Although one of the purposes of the interviews was to investigate whether people have a tendency to assume that there is a conscious being behind determinism as well as behind fatalism, the interviews ultimately did not answer this question. When asked about the distinction between determinism and predeterminism, most people did not see any difference between the two. On the other hand, some respondents viewed predeterminism as mostly referring to the physical world, where natural laws have fixed consequences, while determinism was viewed as a ‘softer’ notion, where events could have different consequences depending on human choices, decisions, and actions.

Ultimately, the results show that according to respondents from the first group, determinism does not entail fixed human choices and actions. While they accept that the laws of nature do affect the human body, they reject the notion of them affecting also human psychology and the decision-making process. They do not deny that external factors can affect a person's psychology, but assume that even under the identical external and internal circumstances, people can act differently and thus exercise free will and moral responsibility.

‘...there are people who grew up dirt poor, surrounded by urban environments where almost everybody they knew were taking substances and morally wounding themselves and were the subject of moral wounding. And yet they say, well, I was poor, and I didn't do that. So, we're in a situation where the moral framework makes a difference to the action of the individual, even if the universe is determined.’

‘One of the curiosities about having a determinist universe is whether we view the universe as some kind of giant clockwork mechanism, with inevitability around it... And, therefore, we have to make our choices within that clockwork mechanism and other people have to make their choices within that clockwork mechanism.’

‘So, everything happens for a reason, it's bound to happen that way because you've got that set of DNA and you've got that set of traumas ... so obviously you're going to react that way. But then I think that's a massively flawed concept because for example, you know, the 12-step programs show how much you can change, they rewire the amount of people that go from poverty to then being rich, manifesting, et cetera, et cetera.’

This shows that even respondents who admitted a strong effect of nature and nurture thought that there are genuine choices, although they are not unlimited.

‘I think there are probabilistic effects on a larger scale too, and they are attached to small-scale probabilistic effects... If you find yourself in a particular situation and you may take a set of actions, which range very widely, and a certain probability is a sign of whether you will take these actions and that probability is the function of your past experiences. So, your senses can deceive you, but all you can act on is the information you get from them. And this informs the set of choices in front of you. The probabilities are adjusted from moment to moment.’

Ultimately, respondents thus thought that with respect to human choices, our world is not completely determined. We thus live neither in an absolutely deterministic nor an absolutely free world, but rather there is a third possibility where the causality exists but does not lead to just one particular consequence (event).

‘How should people be morally responsible for something they have not been able to think about? It's really hard to say that. And I have to think about the ordinary men and women who worked for the Nazis. For example, some of them would have thought about it and some of them wouldn't have thought about it and they would have just thought, assumed, that this is the right thing to be doing. And I don't think I can – or you can – easily say you are, all of you, a hundred percent already responsible. There's a slight difference. It's a quite bad example in some ways but, you know, in general, I don't think you can take a group approach to that because not everyone exists within the same framework or has the same opportunities for self-reflection.’

‘I suppose that there's the question whether determinism, whether free will, exists at all or whether we can simply observe that there are two theoretical extremes and we exist somewhere in the middle and we can push ourselves along between them. But we're sort

of just in the middle, somewhere between the two. We can very rarely experience both extremes.'

'I believe more in the symbiotic niche world. So, it's not chaos – it's symbiosis.'

Respondents from the second group, who believed in fate/destiny and were interviewed with the aim of clarifying what fatalism means in their view, described fate roughly in two ways:

First of all, there were those who claimed that fate is not absolute. These people believe that fate is what God planned (predestined) for each person in advance or during their lifetime. But even when something is predestined by God, a person still has a choice to go down that path or not. In other words, people can choose not only the path that God has predestined as the best for them, but also the path that God does not prefer for them. For example, God can predestine good luck for a person in relation to some undertakings, but it is that person's choice whether he or she uses that chance, goes down that path.

'I am here in order to correct the parts of my soul, of me, that didn't work before. And so, my destiny to me is that correction of the soul... I believe that once we've chosen to be incarnated at a certain time, we would've been given the opportunity to correct something, which in a way is predestined. Because if there are aspects of my being, let's say I am realising more and more aspects of myself that have been very lazy. Therefore, maybe before I came, the predestiny is okay, you need to work on that, but because we have free will, at every turn I can say yes, I want to work on it, or no, I don't.'

'I feel like there is something that God made me do and be a part of, but that could happen in so many different ways. Like it doesn't necessarily have to happen in one way but the sense of destiny I feel is related to knowing Him and being loved by Him.'

'I think in the Bible, we see examples of God working in people's lives to fulfil His purposes in a way that kind of, you know, talks about this, like predestined, those whom He calls and He's going to work things out for. But I do believe that we then have a choice whether we want to partner with God and join Him with what He's doing. And so, I think this is what for me distinguishes Christianity because it dignifies our value and worth as created beings. It's not saying we're like robots. God wants a real relationship and a real relationship where He changes our heart's desire so that we want the things that He wants.'

'I'm a Christian and I believe that God knows the story before we do. I also do believe that we have free will. So I have felt that my life, in terms of my education and the countries that I've worked in or moved to, I made the choice, but I went with a feeling of peace. So, it was like the predestined choice. But I made it. I could have chosen anything else. But I feel whenever I make a decision, I look for one where I feel a peace come over me and I feel that that's the choice to make. But I'm welcome to make any choice. But in my heart, I think I always know where to go.'

'He knows if I'm going to choose one way or another, but still, we are given free will. Certainly. So, you can choose, and He'll always take care of you and possibly bring you back to that destiny but in a roundabout way... I think you always get there in the end, but you can choose a more straight path to get there.'

'I do believe it was written for me. Yes. So, like the people I meet along the way, or the family that I maybe end up having one day, I believe they were all written, but as long as I keep seeking God, then it's His will that will happen instead of mine. But I'll make those choices to follow Him.'

Secondly, there were those who claimed that fate is absolute and what is fated must come about. People with this belief think that some events are inevitable for them. Crucially, though, the predestined events do not include their personal decisions, but rather the more external events, such as getting sick, dying, or losing someone or something. They believe that what happens to them is beyond their control but their own decisions are the result of their own choice, their free will. For example, they can decide to act in some particular way, but if God does not predestine that an event would occur, then God will make it so and the event will not take place.

‘I think there’s wisdom behind everything, or reason behind everything, that will with happen in your life. Fate means that you don’t know when you are born. You don’t know when you die. You don’t know what you get in your life. You don’t know who you will marry. You don’t know if you’ll get children and how your children and how your family will be. You don’t have a choice to choose your mom, to choose your family. Something like this... We think I’m going to marry this man but maybe something will happen, and I won’t marry this man. And at that point, we say this is fate, because something happened to make me avoid marrying this one.’

The interviews also show that for respondents, omniscience does not mean that God makes decisions instead of human beings, but rather that God knows their decisions because God, who is not bound by time and space, has the ability to know beforehand. Ultimately, God knows and allows every decision but does not control the decision-making process.

‘I think that He eternally knows it and He’s not waiting for it to happen. And therefore, because He is not limited by the dimension of time, He’s not waiting for it to happen. And therefore the fact that He eternally knows it, but we still have free will is, I think, in the idea that we can’t really know how He eternally knows it because we just can’t, and therefore there’s something that will kind of be outside our mental capacity to understand how this happens... He could know everything that could happen to us in the future, because to Him, there’s no future ... And you know, the past and the present tense is not something that actually could be attributed to God.’

‘I’d say I have the free will to choose now what I’m doing, but it is not going to contradict what God wills to happen. So that’s why I have accountability because I’m choosing to do one thing or another. A person who is a Muslim has made the choice to be Muslim, a person who is a Christian has made the choice to become a Christian. Even though they might be born into certain families, there comes a point where a person has their own free mind to decide and think and choose either. I want to stay what I was brought up to be, or I would like to, or something else, for example, no one is compelling something in your heart, but what you do choose now and decide, God knew that you were decided.’

‘For example, I have two containers and I can offer them to a person. This one has honey in it and this one has poison. If I make the choice to give that honey to that person, I’ve done something good. And I deserve the reward for it because I chose that. I could have just as easily made the decision to choose that container instead. So, if I say, no, I don’t want to give him the honey, I don’t like him, for example, I will give him poison, I chose that. I carried it out with my physical actions. For example, no one forced me or compelled me, or held a gun to my head. I thought about it. I made my intention. I carried it out with my organs and my body parts. Therefore, I have to get the accountability for that as well. So, in both cases, I chose to make it happen. Even though God created it for me and enabled it for me, I was the one who made that choice out of my world.’

‘Sometimes you might say, for example, you know what your child is going to do, that you, for example, know their habits, their traits, for example. They say, “I want to jump

off that chair.” You know that they’re going to get hurt. You allow them to do it so that they know for themselves, for example, that there’s an accountability for that, there’s a consequence for that. So, I might know what’s going to happen, but they have chosen to make it happen.’

‘I believe everything is chosen by Allah, so it all comes from Allah, but we do not know what Allah has chosen for us. So, we are just fulfilling our duties every day and everything we want to, like for example if I want to pick this up right now, I can make this up right now. But before this even conversation happened, Allah willed for me to do that... I believe it’s all been written before I was born and then when I am here right now, I don’t know where I’m going to go. If I drive, I don’t know if the traffic lights are going to be red or green. Allah knows that, but I don’t know that. So, when I go, I’m going to stop at the red because I decided to stop at the red but that was already written for me 24 years ago... I think there are two things that I don’t think you can bring them together: I always have a choice, but I don’t know. I don’t know what my future choice is. I know my choice right now, but I don’t know what my future choice is. And the only one who knows this is Allah.’

‘You have choices. That’s why Allah gave human beings the brain: to think and to choose what’s right and wrong. But this is under the will of Allah, and you have the opportunity to choose to go the right path or the wrong path. There are some choices, but all this is under the will of Allah.’

‘We believe the Creator of the world is the one who specified everything to be as it is, so believing in destiny means then to believe that everything that is happening in this world was ultimately predestined and willed by God to happen as it is happening... If I choose one life decision over another, even though this was predetermined and destined by God, I’m the one who’s guiding it out now.’

‘Everything that happens, ultimately, be it good or evil, what is positive or negative, needs to have been willed and determined by God... I don’t know what God is destined. I don’t know what has been willed for me to happen. I don’t know. Am I going to stay a Muslim or leave Islam? When did I decide to stay in Islam? What good deeds or bad deeds I might choose to do?’

‘I think that we are ultimately, at the end of the day, responsible for our choices. So, I can’t blame God if I go along with something and I see it turns out to be something else that I really don’t like, or it has a cause and effect. I, no matter what choice I make, whether it’s inverted outcome is the right or the wrong one, I’m responsible for that action. That was my will at the end of the day.’

‘I think there are things that God knows are going to happen to me, but I don’t think He interferes with my choices. So that’s the difference. I think He knows what’s going to happen. He knows what my choices are going to be, but I don’t think he’s actually making choices for me.’

It is also important to note that all respondents who were interviewed for defining either determinism or fatalism stated that in both cases, there is causality at work.

‘I mean, every decision we made has affects us. I mean, you know, I can take a look back at specific decisions I made and think of what I’d done: I could have been whatever, whatever, and I could’ve decided not to fight battles. And, you know, sometimes you make a decision which makes life easier at the time, but you don’t know whether it would later on.’

‘God chose for me to live in England, but once I was born in England, I was a creature with free choices. You can make His choices. God wasn’t moving the pieces on the chessboard. He’s given us too much free will for that. So, the fact that I was born in England is the result of all the free choices of all my ancestors since the very beginning of time. And, so, they all had free choices too. So is like a cascade, a waterfall, a domino effect of free choices.’

‘I think, you know, that nearly every decision we make, we might not realise we’re making a decision. You’re making a decision. We make a decision. Whether we get up in the morning, you know, some days you don’t want to do it. But you know, you make a decision. You have to make decisions all the time. And most of those decisions run into the next decision. Would you make a decision in a minute identically? Yes. So, I do believe that everyone has free will. I believe that all my choices at this moment in time are directed by my connection with the Creator, so as long as I feel connected, then everything that I am doing, I believe, is directed by the Creator or that it is my choice to do something that is for the good of humanity.’

‘If I do something that would be the reason for a result, I can expect that result to take place, whether it does or not. That is, for example, not under my control because I believe that I’m not the creator of my actions and the results of my actions. So, even though I carried them out, the ultimate Creator is the one who created me. So, God created the world, created me, my thoughts, my actions, and the results of my potential actions and causes as well.’

‘I think you have to live by the consequences of your choices. So you have to sort of do whatever you choose since you have to live by the consequences. And whatever you choose then what you do next is affected by what you’ve chosen before, I think.’

Nevertheless, because that some events must happen because they are predestined, for fatalists the causality between them may occur in a reverse order:

‘I think we do have a will in every decision we make, but there’ll be blessings that come along the way, like meeting people by chance. That wasn’t our choice to meet them, it happened, but we were meant to make the choices we did in order to meet that person.’

‘I think there’s a path that I’m going to take that God knows I’m going to take, but I think is my choice to get there. That’s what I’d say. So, for example, I’d say that I was fated to marry my husband. I think there was only one person in the world for me, and it was him, and I think I knew that when I was 19 years old...’

‘I’ve had times where I’ve had these crazy interactions with people, you know, like on a bus or in a random place, and it’s felt like, wow, that God really was there in that meeting. So, you could say, oh well, that was because I didn’t have a choice, we were just forced together. But weirdly, it’s like I’ve made the choice to go to that place, but God just sort of, I don’t know, He’s like outside of it, our sense of time. So, I think He can use situations.’

‘If I decide to go to you to your house today, but my car is broken, I’m not coming to you... And at that point, we see that God made this to save me from maybe a bad accident.’

## Discussion

All of the above can be interpreted as indicating that people who were interviewed for determinism and fatalism associate these notions with surrounding events rather than with their

actions, behaviours, and decision-making. Both groups accept that there is something that is not under their control, such as the time and place where they were born, or the time and place where their life will be disrupted, for instance by events such as a war, a disaster, and the like. They also accept that they are under the influence of their surroundings. Despite this, they insist they have a choice and are responsible for their choices. It is obvious that both in connection to fatalism and in connection to determinism, they do not see their actions as part of the system.

The interviews have also shown that fatalists who assume various foreknowledge scenarios do not reject the existence of free will and moral responsibility, because they believe that the supernatural being behind their fate does not control their actions. Their actions are governed by the will of God and God's expectation rather than by divine predestination.

Although fatalists believe in causality and the cause-and-effect relation between their actions and events, they also have a contrary intuition of causality. While in determinism, events follow from previous events and decisions, in fatalism, in some cases, it is thought that events that must occur due to fate lead to a chain of previous events. These are cases of something happening not because of previous conditions, but a case of previous conditions occurring because something should happen later. For example, if God predestines that someone gets a cold, previous conditions will be appropriate for making this person catch a cold.

That's why it will be fair to say that vignettes prepared by Feltz and Milan<sup>26</sup> could be not successful to test genuine compatibilism since 1) deity foreknowledge for fatalists does not imply deity control over their actions; 2) fatalists do not think that destined event will happen regardless the prior conditions, rather the prior conditions will adapt to the event that has to happen.

## Conclusion

While the results of this research discovered the detailed perception of ordinary people on fate, foreknowledge, and free will, this study could not find out the nuanced and descriptive insights of people about determinism. Despite the fact that respondents from both groups gave compatibilists answers, it was detected that all of them do not see their decision-making process or acting process as part of the whole system of natural laws. Thus there are two kinds of events for ordinary people: those which happen to them, and those which they execute themselves. And both types of events do not intertwine in their vision of the world. Taking into account all the above, it is difficult to distinguish in this system decisions and actions taken out of free will from the rest of predestined events. To find out how fatalists see this and whether they adhere to the free-will-no-matter-what intuition, in my future research – as a continuation of the current study – I plan to prepare vignettes with a scenario that includes predestined events that should happen only after a previous decision was taken. Then I would check whether respondents would see the actors in such scenarios as having free will and moral responsibility, and how they would explain their choice in a universe of reverse causation.

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<sup>26</sup> Adam Feltz, Michael Millan, "An Error Theory for Compatibilist Intuitions", *Philosophical Psychology* 28 (2015) 4, pp. 529–555. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09515089.2013.865513>.

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