

Lesson 1

Theological Determinism

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

—Ephesians 1:3-6

In this first lesson, it is necessary to examine what is referred to as theological determinism. I have provided a brief definition of this perspective below.

Theological (or divine) determinism is the view that God determines every creaturely event. Loosely, we can think of this as the view that God has decreed the world to be exactly as it is, or that God controls every aspect of creation. According to theological determinism, the unfolding of the universe through time occurs exactly as God has arranged, and, given God's will, it does so infallibly.¹

Answer the following questions in consideration the statements in the previous section regarding theological determinism.

1. Is there any truth in theological determinism (yes/no)?

We will examine the doctrine of theological determinism with the following considerations:

- All things are causally inevitable.
- God has predetermined all things.
- We are actors in a play in compliance with a script.
- Salvation is chosen by God and given to the predestined few (Calvinism).

¹ Furlong, Peter and Leigh Vicens, *Theological Determinism: New Perspectives* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2022)

5. Is there truth in biologic determinism strictly as far as how organisms function?

▪ Moral Law:

6. Is there evidence of determinism in how we understand moral law? (Explain)

7. Does the human have a choice to engage moral law? (Explain)

Before moving on discuss the concepts God's perfect will and His permissive will:

Read John 3:16-21: How do these verses help to reveal the **perfect** will of God toward us as His children?

Read Genesis 2:15-17; Genesis 3:1-6 and Romans 12:1-2: Discuss the concept of the **permissive** will of God based on these verses.

- The law of sin and death: Read Romans 6:23.
8. Is there a determined penalty for refusing the gift of salvation?

11. Can we apply the theology of determinism to all aspects of creation? Are there any exceptions?

12. Can we apply the theology of determinism to salvation?

- Determinism is incompatible with free will (Deut. 30:19-20; Joshua 24:15; Mark 8:34; Romans 10:9-10; Gal. 5:16-17)

Is Salvation only for those who are chosen (this would be the understanding of strict Calvinism)?

Strict determinism opens up the argument that God programmed us with a particular sin. This particular understanding would suggest that we have no choice in how we have been created. The human would then be a slave to their design. Are we determined to be slaves to our design?

13. Are humans imbued with agency?

The Philosophy of Human Agency: “In very general terms, an agent is a being with the capacity to act, and ‘agency’ denotes the exercise or manifestation of this capacity. The philosophy of action provides us with a standard conception and a standard theory of action. The former construes action in terms of intentionality, the latter explains the intentionality of action in terms of causation by the agent’s mental states and events.”²

14. Another way to consider human agency is to ask the question, can we participate in our reality? If so in what ways?

Do we have the capacity to choose?

² “Agency,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, October 28, 2019,

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/agency/> Accessed on September 10, 2024.

15. Where is our agency as a human derived from?

16. Do we then have the ability to act according to our free will? Why?