

Fate, determinism and the practice of astrology

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Foundations Module MACAA

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Aims of this Lecture:

- To introduce you to the different notions of fate from the classical period.
- To show you how different astrologers have used different forms of classical fate.
- To introduce you to the philosophical positions on the nature of free will and determinism.
- To show you some ethnographical evidence of the presence of fate in contemporary astrological thought.

By the end of this lecture you should have a basic understanding of fate and its contrast to determinism. The terms used in contemporary philosophy around the free will problem. Plus an insight of how a person's belief in fate alters their expectations of their astrology.

The Essay Question:

‘The stars incline; they do not compel.’
Discuss this statement in relation to the
theory and practice of astrology, using
the work of two astrologers.

Reference: Available in the MA CAA Online Library

Brady, Bernadette. "Theories of Fate among Present-Day Astrologers ", University of Wales
Trinity Saint David, 2012.

Classical terms concerned with fate

Classical Terms

- *Moirae*
- *Ananke*
- Necessity
- *Heimarmene*
- *Tyche* /
- Contingencies



Part 1 – Terms

The *Moirae*

For the Greeks, fate or the Fates were the personification of the *Moirae*. Mircea Eliade argued that the *Moirae* were goddesses of both destiny and birth. Normally the explanation offered is that *Moira* or the *Moirae* appear to bring luck or bear gifts to the new born infant.

Richard Onians also talked of the idea of *moira* as weaving or spinning concept which was a 'binding process on the part of the powers determining man's fate.'

M. Eliade, *Traité d'Histoire des Religions* (Paris 1949), p.163.

B. C. Dietrich, "The Spinning of Fate in Homer," *Phoenix* 16, no. 2 (1962): p.94.

Richard Broxton Onians, *The Origins of European Thought About the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time and Fate* (London: Cambridge University Press, [1951] 1954), p.349.



Clotho (spinner) Lachesis (allotter) and Atropos (the cutter - inevitable)

Ananke

Additional to the idea of *moira* was the concept of *ananke* which was also known as **necessity** and it had a variety of meanings.

Both Plato and Aristotle used it not only as the **logical and necessary result of earlier actions** — Plato, *Timaeus*, 40d and Aristotle *Prior Analytics* 24b 18 — but also to denote both the necessity of the compulsion of a force and the necessity of the consequences of how the world was constructed.

Heimarmene



Menzel, Adolf Friedrich Erdmann von: Kronos (Saturn) und der Genius der Kunst Menzels

There was also the later word *heimarmene*, defined in the second century C.E. text by Pseudo-Plutarch, *De Fato*, as

‘a law because it has laid down the consequences which follow upon occurrences, as in the legislation of a state.’

R. Sklenář, defines *heimarmene* as ‘the Stoic notion of *heimarmene* the all-pervading network of causation.’

J. B. McMinn writes, ‘*Heimarmene* is like a fine thread running through the whole of existence; it is the logos of the cosmos, the mind of God.’

Ps-Plutarch, *De Fato*, vol. VII, Moralia (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1959), 570B.

R. Sklenář, "Seneca, Oedipus 980-94: How Stoic a Chorus?," *The Classical Journal* 103, no. 2 (2007): p.193.

J. B. McMinn, "Fusion of the Gods: A Religio-Astrological Study of the Interpenetration of the East and the West in Asia Minor," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 15, no. 4 (1956): p.203

Tyche and Contingencies

There was also the notion of *tyche*, which was different from *heimarmene* in that one wished to free oneself 'from the bondage of *Ananke* and the caprice of *Tyche*.'¹

Tyche is similar to 'chance' or 'fortune'.

Thus *Tyche* was similar to what was later discussed by the middle Platonist as 'contingencies'. Contingencies were the events outside of workings of fate.²



1. McMinn, "Fusion of the Gods: A Religio-Astrological Study of the Interpenetration of the East and the West in Asia Minor," p.204.

2. See J. den Boeft, *Calcidius on Fate* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1970)

Fate, early medieval terms

- Fate
- Destiny / Fatalism / Providence
- Chance/Fortune



Fatalism

Fatalism in philosophy is inevitable teleology, and thus a 'pulling' concept defined by Pascal Massie as a belief that '...what will be will be no matter what causal path brings it about.'

Evander Bradley McGilvary characterises this as the **inevitability of an event** placed in our future in which 'our wills have no part in determining the outcome.'

Fatalism, Destiny and Providence are all the same concept.

Massie, *Contingency, Time and Possibility, an essay on Aristotle and Duns Scotus*: p.52.

Evander Bradley McGilvary, "Freedom and Necessity in Human Affairs," *International Journal of Ethics* 45, no. 4 (1935): p.382.

Fatalism is not necessitarianism

Necessity, and its modern counterpart **determinism**, is solely based in the past and makes no comment on the future. Your actions create the future but your actions are the consequences of previous events – **antecedent causation**.

Massie, *Contingency, Time and Possibility, an essay on Aristotle and Duns Scotus*: p.52.

Evander Bradley McGilvary, "Freedom and Necessity in Human Affairs," *International Journal of Ethics* 45, no. 4 (1935): p.382.

Solutions to the questions about Free Will

- If the world is full of necessity – is humanity also subject to its laws?
- Can our wills be free of necessity/determinism?
- Is humanity different and not subject to the laws of the material world which is subject to necessity?
- Is the location of our 'will' which we sense is free, made of some other non-material world stuff and hence not subject to determinism?



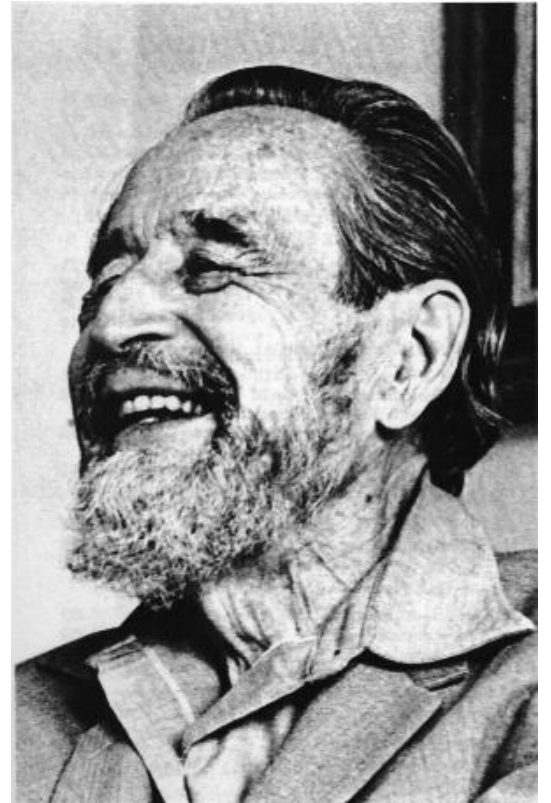
If the will (Plato consider this the soul) is deemed to be off-world then this solution to the free will problem is known as **dualism**.

To reject this solution and consider that the will is a part of the natural world is known as a **monism**



Alan Leo (1860–1917)

Three influential 20th
century astrologers
And three different views on
fate and free will.



Dane Rudhyar, (1895- 1985)



Margaret Hone (1892–1969)

Three primary sources

Alan Leo's Theory of Fate



...the spirit and the body (or “matter”), man's soul is at some times bound, at others free — never wholly free, nor wholly bound, but linked to both states of existence by subtle bonds and thus ever harnessed to the Circle or “Wheel” of Necessity.

‘The weak-willed are constantly being affected by all desires and forces outside of themselves, and these forces being too strong for their inherent will to overcome they eventually succumb to what is called fate, responding blindly to the major portion of the planetary influences.’

THEORY: Alan Leo (1860–1917) working with the teachings of Blavatsky held that the soul (the holder of the free will) was entangled with the fate of matter. This is a **Platonist** version of fate and is **dualist**.

Plato's dualist theory of fate:

- It was **dualist** as Plato located 'what is up to us' to divine reason — **outside the world of matter**. **Reason** was also allocated power over necessity, the laws of physical matter.
- Moral responsibility was maintained by **reincarnation** where individuals were held responsible, via their immortal character, for the condition of their immortal soul and thus for the quality of their future lives.
- It contained the **causality of necessity** – Plato's view of the laws of matter and the structure of a divine cosmos but these were not universal.
- It contained Plato's version of **telos** as the immortal soul was drawn to reunite with the World Soul – theological telos.



However, Plato had a limited definition of 'what was up to us'. The individual **soul could choose its own future**. However, this choice was limited due to **coercion**, as one's choice was between righteousness or the threat of future lives of hardship (see the *Myth of Er*).

Dane Rudhyar

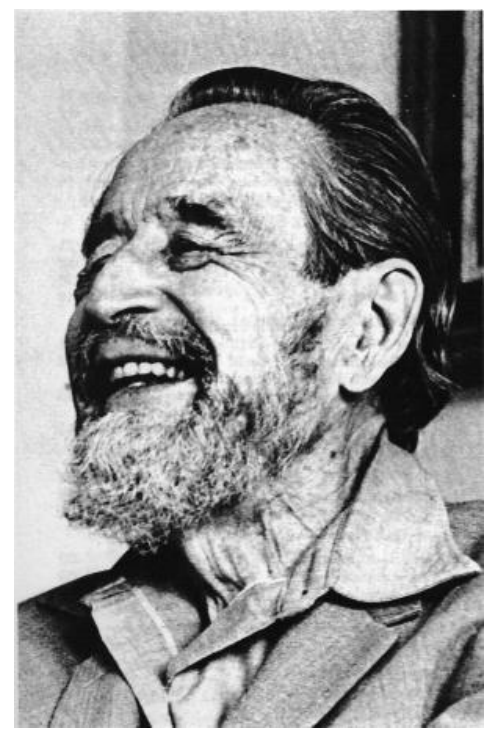
Humanistic astrology and Aristotelianism

Rudhyar developed the idea of **humanistic astrology** (promoted by Michael Meyer) in that he saw the horoscope as a **seed of the self**, or as a potential into which one could grow.

In this way Rudhyar was reflecting **Aristotle's world view** that perfection could exist in the material realm.

For Rudhyar, in contrast to Alan Leo, the horoscope represented an image of the **perfect self in its physical life**. However he was still a dualist as he considered that the soul could act independently of fate.

Rudhyar also used Plato's views - *Timaeus* - of the need to attune ourselves to the harmonies of the heavens, for when we have achieved this, wrote Plato: 'we shall have achieved our goal: that most excellent life offered to humankind by the gods, both now and forevermore.' Plato, *Timaeus*: 90d.



Margaret Hone's Theory of Fate

Margaret Hone (1892–1969)

Hone adopted a **monist** theory of fate, seeing the will/soul/psyche all being contained in the horoscope.



Hone used the term 'psyche', which she defined as body, mind, spirit, soul, personality, individuality and the will, and argued that:

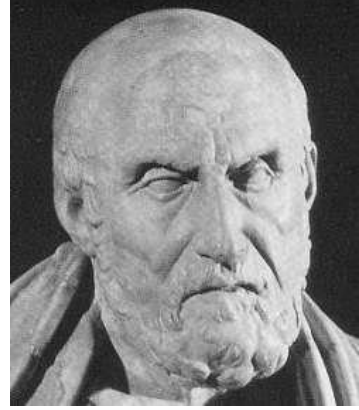
‘the entire psyche of a person cannot be dissected into such divisions, but that **all combine to form the whole**. The art of Astro-analysis is in blending the indications given by these pointers [horoscopic points].’

Hone, *The Modern Text-Book of Astrology*: p.151.

The Stoics theory of fate:

Monist in that there is no 'other place' where the 'will' could reside — any expression of freedom needed to happen in the domain of all-encompassing fate.

Chrysippus (280-207 BC)



- Fate was the consequence of the workings of a **divine cosmos**, immanent in nature and created by the actions of all things within the cosmos.
- Freedom was to be found in **mental self-agency**, in that one was free to find inner happiness and harmony in one's life.
- Moral responsibility was inherent to the system in that one was morally responsible for contributing to the **creation of the divine** and one's inner harmony contributed to the holistic health of the whole.
- Guidance was to be found in the process of **inner reflection**, in the quest for inner harmony.
- The future was understood by the past, **time was closed**. All things repeated in cosmic cycles.



Alan Leo (1860–1917)

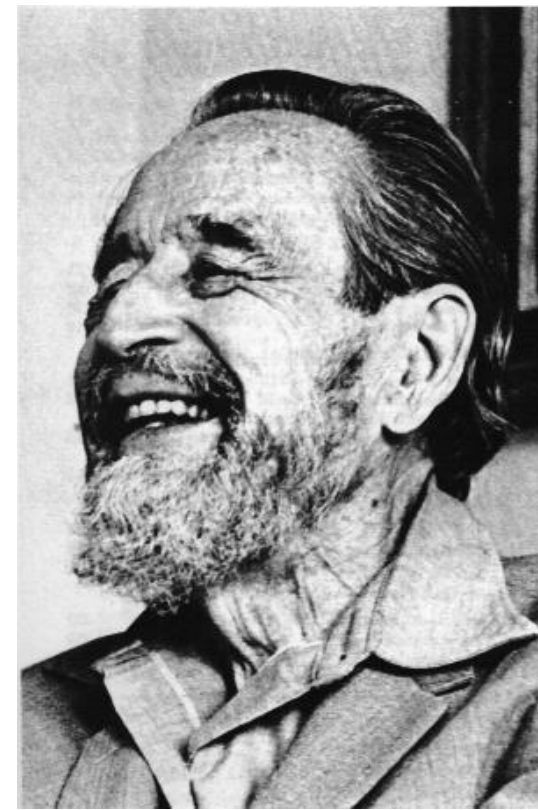
Leo view of fate, is
Platonist dualism – leave
the chart to find freedom
in the after life – soul.
The ‘stars compel’ only on
the physical body.



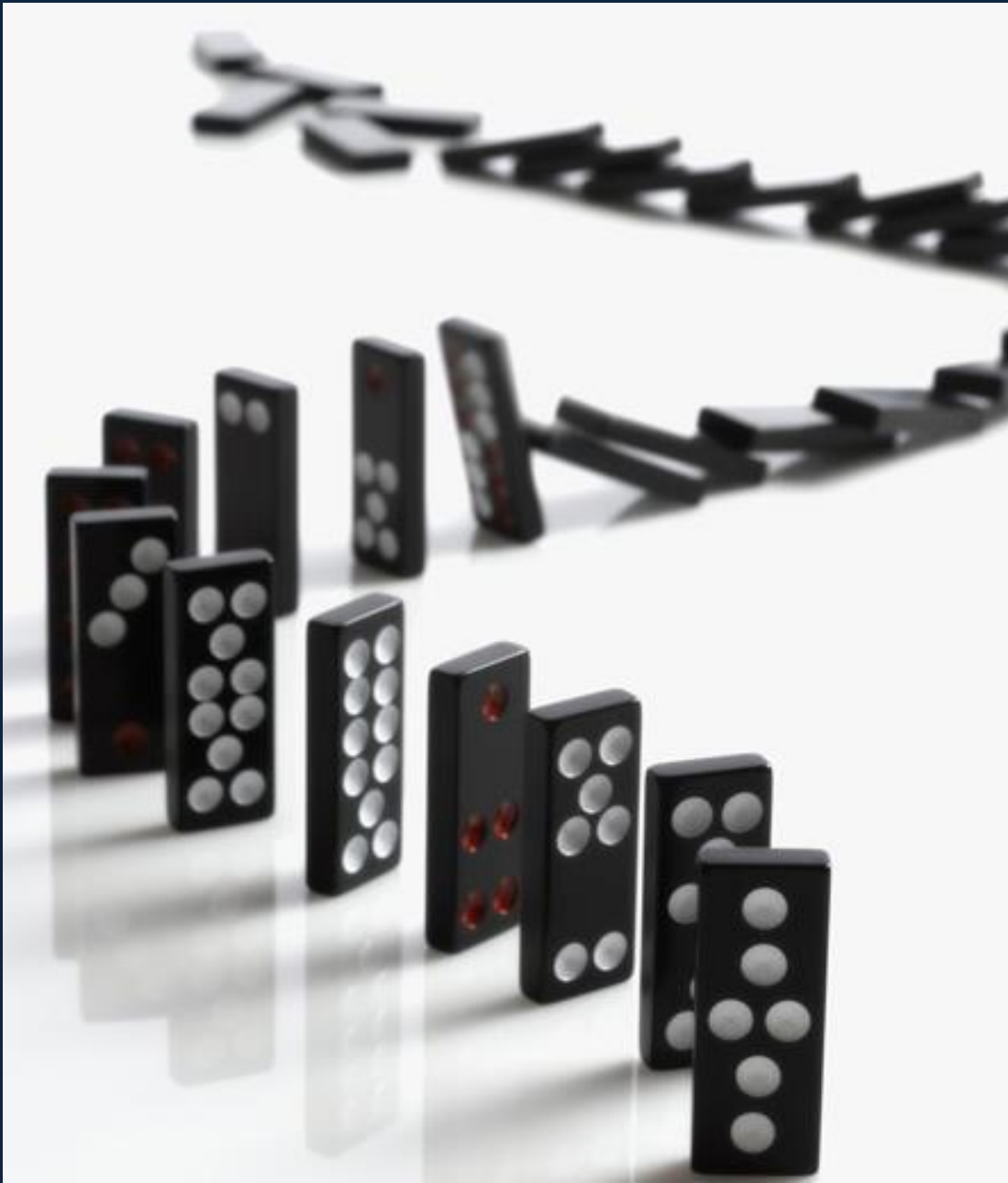
Margaret Hone (1892–1969)

Hone – **Stoicism**. The Stars compel but we
can accept this and be calm in ourselves!

Rudhyar –
Aristotelian dualism
freedom was to
chose how to make
the most of one’s
life. The ‘stars
compel’ partly!



Dane Rudhyar, (1895- 1985)



**But philosophy and
the sciences
rejected the idea of
fate and replaced it
with determinism**

Determinism

In the 17th century due to the influence of the work Galileo, Newton and the philosophy of René Descartes an anti-Aristotelian movement emerged.

- As Aristotelianism was swept to one side – so to was the notion of a **sympathetic cosmos**.
- René Descartes (1596-1650) introduced a style of **dualism** where the will (soul or mind) was independent of the material world. Descartes' dualism was different to that of Plato as it embraced **universal separatism**, that is, the body was not required for the soul.
- In contrast **monism** was reintroduced into philosophy through the work of Baruch de Spinoza (1632–1677), a student of Descartes who considered that the **will** was a part of the material world.

Spinoza's arguments ushered in the concept of determinism.



Baruch de Spinoza

Determinism

William James (1842-1910) defined determinism as:

‘It professes that those parts of the universe already laid down absolutely appoint and decree what the other parts shall be. The future has no ambiguous possibilities hidden in its womb: the part we call the present is compatible with only one totality. Any other future complement than the one fixed from eternity is impossible.’



James W., *The Will to Believe. Essays in Popular Philosophy*, pg. 150.

Determinism

Determinism is the acceptance of the universality of a law of physics:

F (force) = *m* (mass) x *a* (acceleration)

Determinism has no moral qualities.

The acceptance of determinism denies the existence of fate and its universality leads to a return to the free will problem now renamed the '**the free will dilemma**'.



Indeterminism

A solution to the Free Will Dilemma

William James attempted to solve the free will dilemma by defining the counterpoint to determinism, by stating:

‘Indeterminism, on the contrary, says that the parts have a certain amount of loose play on one another, so that the laying down of one of them does not necessarily determine what the others shall be.’

William James, *The Will to Believe. Essays in Popular Philosophy* (London, New York: Longmans, Green and co, 1912), pg. 150.

This is now refined as the **Incompatible** and **compatible** solutions to the free will dilemma

The Incompatibilist Argument

The incompatibilist argument states that **free will and determinism are incompatible** and it divides into two further arguments.

- One argument is the acceptance of the **existence of free will** and thus denying the existence of determinism which is known as **indeterminism**.
- The second argument is the acceptance of **determinism** and therefore **denying** the existence of **free will**.

Incompatibilism

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graph TD; A[Incompatibilism] --> B[All is FREE<br/>Determinism<br/>does not<br/>exist]; A --> C[Nothing is FREE<br/>Determinism<br/>does exist]; B --> D[Libertarianism]; C --> E[Hard<br/>Incompatibilism]
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All is FREE
Determinism
does not
exist

Libertarianism

Nothing is
FREE
Determinism
does exist

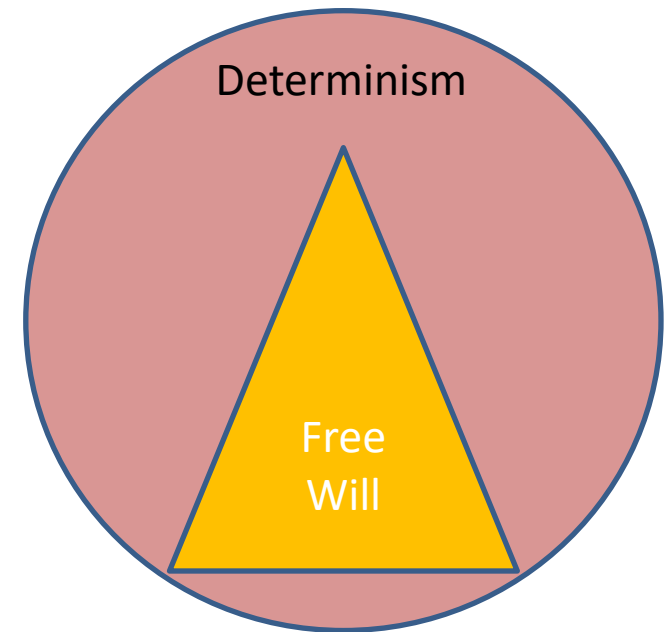
Hard
Incompatibilism

Compatibilism

Compatibilism offers a solution to *the free will problem*. *Compatibilism* is the thesis that **free will is compatible with determinism**.

Thomas Hobbes (1588 – 1679), John Locke (1632 – 1704), David Hume (1711 – 1776) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) all argued for different variations of compatibilism.

Compatibilism



The Compatibilist Argument



David Hume (1711-1776) argued that if the world was indeterminated, then all events were random and thus one's actions must also be random. Thus one's actions could not be determined by character, personal desires, preferences, or one's values. But if one's actions are not determined by character, then a person cannot be held morally responsible for the random events they perform.

Compatibilism

Fischer says of compatibilism that:

‘One of the main virtues of compatibilism is that our deepest and most basic views about our agency - our freedom and moral responsibility - are not held hostage to views in physics.’

John Martin Fischer et al., *Four Views on Free Will* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pg.81.

Moral responsibility is now the key issue in the philosophical debate. We require our wills to be free in some way in order to maintain the individual's accountability to moral responsibility.

A Comparison

Necessity,
Ananke,
Heimarmene

=

Destiny
Fatalism
Providence

=

Determinism

Tyche / Contingencies = Chance/Fortune

=

Luck, now understood by
laws of probability

Free Will =

Monist position - Compatibilism
Dualist position - Libertarianism

Highlights moral
responsibility

Fate has no modern philosophical definition

Taking an
ethnographical
approach to the
question

A Primary Source,
What do
contemporary
astrologers say...



Seeking to understand and wanting to negotiating with fate

“I struggle with the whole fate aspect. I don’t like the way that working with future planetary transits and progressions you can see tough times ahead, and **this makes you ‘dread’ them, you then start looking at difficulties and negativity — does this mean you create it as you expect it??**”

“So am I kidding myself that there’s any way of avoiding the events /energies? And should I at least go in to them with awareness? But if so how do I avoid going into it loading my belief with negativity? I am struggling with these questions massively right now.”

“Margaret” 34 years old ,
British astrology student.

Accepting the order of Fate

Yes. I would like to change events that you know are coming... **but you really can't.** And I knew that terrible things were coming for me in the past few years, and I tried to use the energies in positive ways, but in the end, it was just as bad as I thought. The difference however was that by expecting troubles, I was able to reserve more patience and understanding and not resort to anger, and limit my frustration. Maybe that in itself was "easier", BUT I now believe there is NO escaping your chart, just enduring and preparing and learning to take the high road.

‘Jane’ 51 year old USA

Overview of fate in contemporary life

- **Theories of fate** are developed in order to provide the individual with a **methodology of altering, transforming, co-creating, accepting or avoiding the workings of 'fate'**.
- The word **fate** has **many different meanings** and needs to be considered within the individual's own *theory of fate*. This theory is a set of interlinked beliefs held by the individual which contain:
 - A form of **sympathetic cosmology**. (How it works)
 - A style of **causation**. (Can I can change it?)
 - The **location** of the will or soul - in or out of the world of matter. (My relationship to it?)
 - The **nature of the physical world** and the human relationship to that world. (Will it be fair or capricious?)

Theories of fate are either **dualist or monist** in whether they locate the soul or will within or outside of the material world.

Overview of Determinism

- Determinism also has its own physics – Scientific cosmology
- It claims to be universal and can be represented by the law $f=ma$
- Philosophical debates around determinism and the potential of the will to be free can be divided into themes:
 - **Incompatibilism** – a belief that the will cannot be free if determinism is true.
 - Hard incompatibilism – rejects the existence of free will
 - Libertarianism – rejects the existence of determinism
 - **Compatibilism** - the will/mind/consciousness is seen as a part of the body and thus the will is subjected to the same physical laws of determinism as all other material things.

Fate and Determinism - some final thoughts

In my PhD I concluded that:

The term 'fate' can be employed when the user is suggesting a semi-compelling or a compelling force in their life which has intent or purpose.

Fate is a phenomena as it is the experience of living in a sympathetic cosmology – where all is interlinked – it is personal.

The term 'determinism' should be employed when the user refers to a non-personal compelling inevitable force.



*"You realize, of course, that
these imply free will?"*

Walter R. Agard, "Fate and Freedom in Greek Tragedy," *The Classical Journal* 29, no. 2 (1933)

M. Eliade, *Traité d'Histoire des Religions* (Paris 1949)

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R. Sklenář, "Seneca, Oedipus 980-94: How Stoic a Chorus?," *The Classical Journal* 103, no. 2 (2007)

Solomon, "On Fate and Fatalism," p.442; Also see Botros, "Freedom, Causality, Fatalism and Early Stoic Philosophy..

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<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/~uctytho/dfwVariousPereboom.htm>.



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