

PART THREE

A BRIEF
PHILOSOPHICAL
CASE FOR
DIVINE DETERMINISM

In the preceding chapters I sought to demonstrate that divine determinism is the philosophical position presupposed by the Bible. When we take all the biblical data into account, divine determinism emerges as the worldview most likely to underlie all that the Bible says and teaches. For one who accepts the biblical worldview as authoritative, the preceding chapters constitute an argument for divine determinism. Nothing more need be said.

But are there good reasons to embrace divine determinism apart from the authoritative teaching of the Bible? I believe there are. In this next part of my argument, I briefly explore a few of them.

Part 3 outlines a handful of important everyday assumptions that philosophically require determinism. If no version of determinism is true, we cannot plausibly account for how and why we hold these assumptions and why we live our lives in accordance with them. Accordingly, determinism of some sort is the only way to make sense out of our everyday life and experience. Much could be said in support of this contention. Part 3 is not a thorough defense. A complete defense of this claim would require a more extended discussion. My purpose here is merely to introduce a certain way of looking at the relevant issues and to suggest where I think the evidence ultimately leads.

My goal in part 3 is to demonstrate to the reader that, not only is divine determinism the assumption that most likely underlies biblical revelation, it is also the philosophical doctrine that most satisfactorily accounts for the nature of ordinary everyday experience. Accordingly, not only is it the biblical worldview, it is also the most philosophically compelling worldview.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DIVINE DETERMINISM AND THE DICTATES OF OUR EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE

The majority of philosophers who have considered the matter have concluded that determinism is the most reasonable understanding of reality.¹⁴⁵ They disagree with respect to the form of determinism; they differ with respect to what determines all of reality. But they all agree that reality is determined. A minority of philosophers reject determinism. And in my judgment, their rejection typically results from significant confusion or flawed reasoning. They do not really understand the issues. Sound philosophical reflection inevitably leads a person to embrace some form of determinism.

Why is determinism so widespread among philosophers who have given the subject due consideration? Very simply, because determinism is the only doctrine that can make sense out of the ordinary assumptions from which we interpret our everyday experience. In this chapter I shall attempt to show why determinism (and ultimately divine determinism) is the only view that can adequately account for how we experience and think about our lives.

Given a particular human choice, there are—if I am not mistaken—only three possibilities: either, (1) it is undetermined—the product of randomness, (2) it is spontaneously self-determined—the result of the actor spontaneously making the choice from within himself with no outside factors responsible for the nature of his choice, or, (3) it is determined. By a process of elimination, I will show that a choice (any choice whatsoever) must be determined. Neither of the other alternatives can adequately account for how we view our choices the way we do.

145. Here is a PARTIAL list of philosophers and/or philosophical schools who articulate one form of determinism or another: Homeric philosophy, Stoic philosophy, Epicurean philosophy, Augustine, Aquinas, Leibniz, Spinoza, Hobbes, Calvin, Luther, Edwards, Nietzsche. These are just the FEW that come immediately to mind. At the same time, recalling a notable philosopher who rejects determinism altogether is more difficult. Even Immanuel Kant, famous for his emphasis on human freedom, allows—arguably—for an ultimate determinism underlying human freedom. It is significant that so many philosophers who have seriously explored these questions embrace some form of determinism. They may not embrace DIVINE determinism; but they do embrace some version of determinism.

I begin my argument by clarifying what it would mean for a freewill human choice to be undetermined, self-determined, or determined, respectively. Then I do the same for impersonal physical events. Finally, I construct an argument to the effect that both impersonal physical events and freewill human choices must be understood as determined. Although my argument concerns impersonal physical events as well as human freewill choices, my main focus is whether “freewill” choices are determined. The reason for such a focus should be clear: “freewill” choices pose the greatest challenge to determinism in general and divine determinism in particular. Most people can accept that impersonal physical events are determined—determined by natural law and the inherent rational structure of the cosmos. But the status of freewill human choice is another matter. With regard to any form of determinism, the freewill choices of human beings are the phenomena most likely to be disputed. Accordingly, the argument of this chapter will focus on the status of “freewill” choices.

Defining Terms

Any particular choice must be either undetermined, self-determined, or determined. The precise meaning of each of these terms will not be obvious. I must define what I mean by them. I will first define each term with respect to human freewill choices, then I will define each of them with respect to impersonal physical events.

AN UNDETERMINED FREEWILL CHOICE

To maintain that a human freewill choice is undetermined is to maintain that it is radically random, that it is not explicable in terms of any cause or reason whatsoever. The choice is entirely happenstance. No cause and no reason determined that it should be THAT choice rather than some other.

Consider a person reaching down and picking up an agate off the beach. If the freewill choice to stoop down and pick up just THAT agate is an undetermined choice, then the choice to do so is not explicable in terms of any reason or cause. It just happened. It could have not happened at all, or the person could have chosen a different agate. Anything else the person might have done would have been equally consistent with any of the pre-existing causes or conditions. Nothing — absolutely nothing — explains why the person picked up THAT agate.

One could object that the person wanted to pick up the agate and that his desire to do so serves to explain his action. But even if we grant that, if his choice is undetermined, then his “desire” to pick up the agate is inexplicable. The desire may serve to explain the action, but nothing explains the desire. The desire was just there, out of the blue. There is no reason, no cause, and no explanation for the existence of his desire.

AN UNDETERMINED PHYSICAL EVENT

By analogy, to maintain that an impersonal physical event is undetermined suggests that it is radically random—not explicable in terms of any cause or reason whatsoever.

Consider a rock coming loose and rolling down the face of a cliff. If this event is undetermined, then there is no reason for the event; no cause can explain it. It just happened. It was possible for it not to have occurred at all. Or, something entirely different could have happened, and nothing that might have happened would have been inconsistent with any pre-existing causes or conditions. Nothing—absolutely nothing—explains why the rock fell down the cliff just then. The suggestion here is that we cannot even appeal to natural physical laws to explain the event. Nothing whatsoever explains the rock’s behavior. The event is completely and truly random.

By random—or radically random—I mean more than the illusion of randomness. A random number generator on your computer is not a truly random process. If you were to type exactly the same key on your keyboard under exactly the same conditions one thousand times, your “random” number generator would give you exactly the same result one thousand times. We call it a random number generator only because the causal conditions that generate the number are so complex and so inaccessible to us that the result is utterly unpredictable. The program will generate a result that is beyond my ability to know and control. Therefore, while we can reasonably call it a “random number generator,” observe that it is not “radically random” in the sense in which I am using that term. The “random” number produced by a random number generator is completely determined by the programming and hardware of the computer. The radical randomness I am referring to is far more radical. Randomness, as I am defining it, is where an event has absolutely no causes whatsoever. It is not merely that the causes cannot be known and the result predicted. There exist no causes determining the event at all. Even in principle, there is no accounting for why the event occurred as it did.

A SELF-DETERMINED FREEWILL CHOICE

To maintain that a human freewill choice is self-determined is to maintain that it is solely the product of the human chooser's individual will. It is to maintain that the particular choices made by a person are the spontaneous output of his particular will and that nothing outside his will can be said to cause or explain the choices that he makes. The will is sovereign over its own choices, generating them *ex nihilo* out of its own intrinsic nature. Nothing outside the will determines its function or output.

Consider the earlier example of a person reaching down and picking up an agate off the beach. If the choice to pick up just THAT agate is a self-determined choice, then the choice to do so is explicable solely and exhaustively in terms of the particular will of that person and in terms of the intrinsic nature of that will. No further reason can be given for why the person's particular will functioned just as it did and chose what it did. Nothing outside his human will is the cause or explanation for the operations of his particular will. Each particular human—with regard to his freewill choices—must serve as his own cause and his own explanation. So, with respect to our example, the particular human will of our beachcomber generated within itself the desire to pick up THAT particular agate, and absolutely nothing outside his will can explain why it generated that particular desire rather than another. Genetics cannot explain it, diet cannot explain it; not the environment, not childhood experience, not economic conditions—nothing whatsoever can explain the generation of such a desire by that particular human will at that time. Nothing other than the sovereign, spontaneous, *ex nihilo* free choice of that will itself.¹⁴⁶

A SELF-DETERMINED PHYSICAL EVENT

To maintain that an impersonal physical event is self-determined is to maintain that each particular, impersonal object has its own intrinsic nature that is uncaused and undetermined by anything outside of itself. Any action of that impersonal physical object, therefore, will be caused and explained solely by its own individual nature, and nothing outside that

146. This is the philosophical viewpoint typically advocated by the Bible-believing Christian who rejects divine determinism. As I shall demonstrate, it is a problematic position. He must reconcile his doctrine that God is the creator of the human will with his doctrine that the particular human will is radically sovereign over its own choices—such that nothing, not even God, causes or determines those choices. How can God create a will and not, thereby, determine how it will function? I discuss this problem later in this chapter.

particular object can explain why it acted as it did or responded to its environment as it did.

Consider our example of a rock falling down the face of a cliff. If this event is a self-determined event, then it is explicable solely in terms of the particular nature of the particular rock that fell. No further reason can be given for why the rock fell as it did. Nothing outside the nature of that particular rock is a cause or explanation for its action. That particular rock's own nature generated within itself the action of falling down the cliff, and absolutely nothing outside the rock can explain why it spontaneously generated that particular action. If it was self-determined, then we cannot resort to natural laws of physics—not the law of gravity—to find an explanation. Nothing whatsoever outside the rock can explain the spontaneous generation of such an event.

This is a rather absurd position. No one today would even begin to seriously suggest it. But this is what this category of explanation would mean when applied to a physical, impersonal event.

A DETERMINED FREEWILL CHOICE

To maintain that a human freewill choice is determined is *not* to deny that the choice is the product of the particular, individual will of the chooser. Yet, at the same time, it is to maintain that something outside the person's particular will ultimately determines the operations and output of that will.

Consider once again the person picking up an agate. If the freewill choice to pick up just that agate is a determined choice, then the person's choice to do so is ultimately explicable in terms of something outside the particular will of the beachcomber. Granted, the particular human will generated within itself the desire to pick up that particular agate. But if the choice was determined, then something outside that will explains why it generated just that desire in particular. Some might suggest that human genes explain why the will chose as it did. Others might suggest that diet, body chemistry, environment, childhood experiences, economic conditions, or some combination of these things explain why the will chose as it did. The divine determinist, of course, is suggesting that God—the transcendent author of all things—determines why the will chooses as it does. Whatever the cause might be, if a human choice is determined, we are saying that something beyond the particular will itself ultimately explains the particular choice made by that will.

A DETERMINED PHYSICAL EVENT

To maintain—as almost everyone does—that an impersonal physical event is determined, is to suggest that each particular, impersonal object is subject to natural laws that dictate or determine how it will respond to its environment. Hence, any action of an impersonal physical object will finally be caused and explained by the laws of the cosmos to which it is subject.

Take our falling rock example—if that event is a determined event, then it is explicable in terms of physical laws that strictly dictate how the rock responds to its environment. The rock fell because gravity pulled it and—due to a variety of physical causes—there were no longer any countervailing forces to keep it from accelerating down the hill in accordance with Newton’s laws of gravity. In other words, the wind, rain, and other physical factors made the rock “come loose” so that gravity pulled it down the cliff. This is, of course, the position held by any educated person today with respect to impersonal physical events.

SUMMARY

To better understand my definition of terms in this argument, I need to make a distinction. Consider once again the question of whether the freewill choice of a human being is self-determining. We must distinguish between a claim that the human will is *absolutely* self-determining and a claim that the human will is *derivatively* self-determining. If the human will directly determines its own choice X (*e.g.*, to pick up a particular agate on the beach) according to the structure of its own individual nature and operation, but the structure of its own nature and the character of its own operation is, in turn, explicable in terms of some other cause or causes (*e.g.*, its transcendent creator), then the human will could be said to be DERIVATIVELY self-determining. But if the human will directly determines its own choice X according to the structure of its own individual nature and the character of its own operation, and if the structure of its own nature and the character of its own operation is just a raw fact that is not, in turn, explainable in terms of any other cause or causes outside of itself (*e.g.*, a transcendent creator), then the human will could be said to be ABSOLUTELY self-determining. For the purposes of my argument in this chapter, we must take ‘self-determining’ to mean ABSOLUTELY self-determining. If one wants to claim merely that the human will is derivatively self-determining, then—as one can see from the above definitions—he is not denying the reality of determinism. A will that is deriva-

tively self-determining is, in fact, being determined by some other cause outside of itself (*e.g.*, its creator). That being so, it is not really a philosophical alternative to determinism, it is just a particular version of deterministic theory.

Accordingly, the definitions discussed above can be summarized as they are in the following table:

	Impersonal Physical Event	Human Freewill Choice
<i>Undetermined</i>	Such an event is random; it is not explicable in terms of any causes or reasons whatsoever; it is completely and radically happenstance.	Such a choice is random; it is not explicable in terms of any causes or reasons whatsoever; it is completely and radically happenstance.
<i>Self-Determined</i>	Such an event is a product of the particular nature of a particular physical object; and each particular impersonal physical object is understood to have its own intrinsic nature, uncaused and undetermined by anything outside of itself. Its own particular nature functions as the sole cause and explanation for its response to its environment. (Under this view, the nature of a particular rock is not the nature of “a rock”; rather, it is the nature of “that rock in particular.”)	Such a choice is a product of a particular human will; and each particular human will is understood to have its own particular nature, uncaused and undetermined by anything outside of itself. A person’s own particular human will functions as the sole cause and explanation for the choices that he makes.
<i>Determined</i>	Such an event is caused by natural causes in conformity to natural laws inherent within the physical cosmos.	Such a choice is caused by something—either a natural, ordinary cause or a transcendent cause—that lies outside of the particular human will and ultimately determines what that particular human will shall choose.

The Argument

I will now examine both impersonal physical events and freewill choices. My task is to determine whether either could reasonably be understood to be undetermined, or alternatively, to be self-determined. I will argue that neither alternative makes any sense. Neither can reasonably be construed as undetermined, and neither can reasonably be construed as self-determined. I will argue that both alternatives—construing these events as undetermined and construing these events as self-determined—bring us into conflict with various everyday ordinary assumptions according to which we live our lives. By a process of elimination, therefore, we find that the only way we can make sense out of both impersonal physical events and freewill choices is by understanding them to be determined.

IMPERSONAL PHYSICAL EVENTS

ARE PHYSICAL EVENTS UNDETERMINED?

The first possibility to consider is whether impersonal physical events are undetermined—that is to say, radically random. After a little reflection, it should be clear that this makes no sense. We could never bring ourselves to assume that any event whatsoever is random and undetermined. We could never make any sense out of our experience if we were ever to allow for such a possibility. To see this, consider the following points:

1. *If the impersonal events in the physical universe are undetermined (random), then knowledge of the physical universe (i.e., science) is impossible.*

In our ordinary perception of things, science is a meaningful enterprise. But science is based on the assumption that occurrences in the physical universe are determined.¹⁴⁷ If physical occurrences are not determined, then no physical science is possible. Accordingly, our ordinary belief in the possibility of science presupposes that the physical events of the universe are determined.

One cannot discern laws of nature at work in physical events if those events do not, in fact, conform to such laws. If physical events are not

147. The increasingly popular appeal to Heisenberg's uncertainty principle as a defense of indeterminacy is unsound. It merely betrays the prejudices of the modern trend toward irrationalism. In truth, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle does not prove indeterminacy in natural events. For a brief discussion of this, see appendix B.

determined in accordance with some sort of rational ordering principle, then no knowledge of physical reality is possible, for knowledge of physical reality (science) is nothing else but a discovery of the rational ordering principles to which it conforms. Natural science, therefore, assumes the existence of rational principles that are the determinative causes and explanations of natural events. Science is impossible if events are not so determined.

If physical occurrences were uncaused and random, there would be no point in seeking to discover an order or pattern to those occurrences, for no pattern would be there. If perchance one did discern an order in random events, it could only be the result of his subjectively imposing that order on those events. He would be “seeing” something that was not actually there. Accordingly, it would not constitute true knowledge of objective reality.¹⁴⁸ Yet science understands its goal as exactly that—the attain-

148. By “true knowledge” of objective reality I mean a set of beliefs that accurately represent the way things actually are in reality as it is in and of itself. To have “true knowledge” of the physical order would involve an understanding of an order that does in fact exist as such in physical reality. It is not an order that exists in the mind of the scientist and dictates the way the scientist perceives reality; rather it is an order that exists in reality quite apart from how any scientist perceives it. I am not discounting Kant’s insights here however. One can believe that one is acquiring true knowledge of objective reality as that reality is in itself without thereby denying that one’s experience of that reality is a uniquely and peculiarly human experience of that reality. Just because one is confined or restricted to a human WAY of knowing (a la Kant) does not mean—as Kant tends to suggest—that one’s knowledge is not a valid knowledge of THINGS IN THEMSELVES. If a computer only knows what it knows about the outside world—through sensors attached to it—in terms of digital information, does that mean that its knowledge is not of the outside world as it is in itself? Does that mean that it has not made meaningful contact with objective reality in itself? I don’t think so. Neither does the fact that a human knows what he knows in terms of peculiarly human perceptions mean that what he knows is not a kind of meaningful contact with reality as it is in itself. To put it another way, I can agree with Kant that the way I perceive things is not necessarily identical to the way things exist in themselves without inferring that the way I perceive things does not necessarily correspond to the way things exist in themselves. These are two very different claims; claims which Kant, at times, seems to confuse.

Skeptics, encouraged but not supported by Kant, have never really altogether convinced the average person to abandon his commonsensical belief that things in and of themselves really do CORRESPOND to (even if they are not identical to) the way we perceive them. In other words, common sense says that the world of our phenomenal experience really does correspond to the way things are in and of themselves. A Kantian agnosticism with respect to things in themselves is ultimately rejected by common sense. But even if we were to concede a skeptical and agnostic interpretation of Kant which claimed that none of our knowledge is in any sense knowledge of reality in itself, the point being made in the text still stands: no true knowledge is possible if events are random. The scientist is seeking to understand phenomenal reality and the events we experience in the physical universe are phenomenal events. The point here is this: phenomenal events are necessarily determined events. If in no other way, they have been determined by the scientist who experiences them. Even if there could exist a truly random event in reality in and of itself, it would have to be a determined event in the phenomenal experience of a perceiver. Hence, even under a radical agnosticism inspired by (though not encouraged by)

ment of true knowledge of the physical world as it actually is.¹⁴⁹ Therefore, to seek for order in the physical world—as science does—is to presume that such an order is actually there. But to presume that such an order is actually there, one must assume that there are, in fact, some ordering principles that determine what happens in the physical world. That is, one must assume that (1) some outside orderer (*e.g.*, a mind) determines and gives rational order to what happens in the physical world, or (2) the world itself is self-determining according to a rational orderliness inherent within its own intrinsic nature. But on either assumption the world is being ordered, shaped, caused, and determined in accordance with some sort of rational principles.

Therefore, if science is a valid means to true knowledge—and we all assume that it is—then physical events cannot be random and undetermined.

2. *If any impersonal event in any part of reality is undetermined, then no true knowledge of objective reality is possible.*

As I go about building my understanding of reality, experience-by-experience, I am forced to assume that every experience I encounter fits coherently into the order and structure of reality. If I did not make such an assumption, then no knowledge of any of reality would be possible.

The alternatives are to assume that either (1) no event fits into any order and structure (*i.e.*, everything is random and chaotic), or (2) some things are random and other things constitute the order and structure of reality. Clearly, no true knowledge of reality would be possible under the first alternative; everything, being chaos, would be inherently unknowable. But neither would true knowledge be possible under the second alterna-

Kant, science is seeking a *true* knowledge of the phenomena of the natural world; and those phenomena must necessarily be determined in order to be knowable. As a matter of fact, Kant's whole project was to establish the phenomena as rationally ordered and determined in order that he could explain how science is possible. That is exactly my point in the text.

149. Some philosophers of science have offered an alternative explanation for the purpose and goal of science consistent with the philosophical view that true knowledge of reality is not possible. This is not the prevailing view in the practicing scientific community however. The working assumption of the working scientific community (oriented, as it is, more toward common sense than toward contemporary philosophy) is that it is seeking to understand the physical universe as it really is. Even if some philosophically-minded scientist purports to subscribe to a redefinition of his task in accordance with a modern philosophy of science, the commonsensical belief that he carries into his laboratory—the one that he shares with all his colleagues—is that true knowledge of physical reality is possible.

tive. For if some events were random and some not, knowledge could never begin. For how would I know which events to allow to inform my understanding of the rational structure of reality and which events to ignore? Without the implicit *a priori* assumption that everything can be assumed to fit coherently into the world order (and not to be random), knowledge could never get off the ground. We could never learn from our experience.

If truly random events could be assumed to exist, then—unless a child was equipped with a fairly comprehensive understanding of the structure of reality from birth—he would have no basis upon which to decide which events in his experience were a part of the structure of reality and which were random. Hence, he would be unable to learn about reality, for he could never know when an event was merely a part of the random noise of experience (and, as such, needed to be ignored) and when it was a piece of rationally-ordered objective reality that had to be incorporated into his picture of reality. Hence, if we cannot presume that every aspect of our experience fits coherently into the rational order of reality, then, logically, we can never learn anything from our experience. Or, at least, we could learn from experience only if we already possess an extensive understanding of the structure of reality. But this is not how it works. I do not possess an extensive understanding of the structure of reality before my learning begins. I begin from a minimal knowledge of reality and build a rather extensive knowledge of reality through life-experience. But as we have seen, this is possible only on the assumption that no event in all of reality can be viewed as random and undetermined.

The assumption that no event in reality is random (and, hence, that everything is determined) forms the foundation for all knowledge. This assumption is either true or false. If it is true, then true knowledge is possible. If it is false, then, while the illusion of knowledge is generated by this false assumption, in truth, there is no actual knowledge of reality. My “knowledge” is merely an order imposed on a reality that does not in fact possess any order. I am not coming to understand the world as it really, objectively, is. I am ordering it as I want. That is not true knowledge. Therefore, if reality is not in fact totally determined, then the only true knowledge is that no true knowledge of reality is possible for human beings.

Where do these two observations leave us? Just here: unless I am prepared to say that true knowledge of objective reality is impossible and that scientific knowledge of the cosmos is impossible, I am forced to conclude that all impersonal physical events are determined.

ARE PHYSICAL EVENTS SELF-DETERMINED?

If it makes no sense to construe impersonal physical events as undetermined, then they must either be self-determined or determined by something outside the physical event. No one would seriously suggest that the impersonal events in the physical universe are self-determined as I defined that above. To understand what such an assertion would mean is to reject it. To suggest that a physical event is self-determining is to suggest that each particular impersonal object involved in the event has its own intrinsic nature that is uncaused and undetermined by anything outside of itself. Hence, nothing outside the particular objects involved could serve to explain why they acted as they did or responded to their environment as they did. Their actions would be explained solely and completely by their own individual natures. To be specific, one could not resort to natural laws of the cosmos to explain the actions of particular physical objects. One would have to explain each particular object's action with respect to its own particular nature—not with respect to its generic nature (that is, its nature as a rock or a tree or a mountain), but with respect to its particular nature. This view is difficult to take seriously. It would imply, for example, that that volcano erupted yesterday because “that mountain is just like that.” Surely this view makes no sense.

CONCLUSION: IMPERSONAL PHYSICAL EVENTS ARE DETERMINED

It makes no sense to believe that an impersonal physical event is undetermined and random. Furthermore, it makes no sense to believe that such an event is spontaneously self-determined by the physical objects involved. By process of elimination, then, only one option remains: an impersonal physical event is determined by something in the cosmos outside of the physical objects involved. This view accords well with popular assumptions today. The impersonal physical events within the physical universe are commonly assumed to be caused by and to conform to the rational structure of the universe, the natural laws. Granted, the natural determinist wants to say that the natural laws themselves are uncaused, that they were not created; that they are just there, inherent within the cosmos. But the actual physical events themselves are determined—with this the natural determinist concurs. Impersonal physical events are determined by the natural laws of the universe. They are not undetermined and random and they are not self-determining. They are determined.

HUMAN FREEWILL CHOICES

ARE HUMAN CHOICES UNDETERMINED?

Now we turn our attention to the freewill choices of human beings (or any other free moral agents that exist). Is a freewill choice undetermined and random? To answer “yes” is to suggest that a human choice is not explicable in terms of any cause or reason whatsoever. It is to suggest that any choice made by a human being is completely and entirely happenstance and absolutely uncaused. In other words, if a freewill choice is undetermined, it is radically random as defined earlier. If a freewill choice is truly undetermined, then, by its very nature, no necessitating principle—neither one outside nor inside the chooser—causes the choice. The choice does not reflect the operation of any rational principle of any kind.

Upon a little reflection, we see that the radical randomness of human choices makes no sense. We can cite two reasons:

1. If human choices are undetermined, then we cannot adequately account for the phenomenon of human personality.

That people have personalities is axiomatic. An individual person has an orderly and structured identity that, through experience, we can come to know and understand. This is what we call “personality.” Human beings are very complex creatures. As such, their actions are not always predictable in practice. But in general terms, people behave in ways consistent with their own idiosyncratic network of choices. They are basically predictable—in the sense that the general character of their choices can be anticipated. And behind their more or less consistent network of choices is assumed to be a determinant “personality”—an individual nature that causes and accounts for the nature of the choices that that person makes.

The very concept of a personality is indicative of the fact that people’s choices, responses, attitudes, tastes, etc. operate in accordance with discernible patterns. We come to know and understand a person’s personality by observing the choices he makes. As we observe his choices, we begin to see discernible patterns. He always prefers X. He always avoids Y. He likes Z, but he doesn’t like T. He tends always to be kind. He is never arrogant.

Now here is the crucial question: can personality or character be explained in terms of undetermined (random) choices? No! The very concept of “personality” points to a discernible pattern of behavior. Where does this discernible pattern come from? If an individual’s choices are not

determined by some determinant, rationally-discernible personality functioning as the ordering principle of those choices, then how do we account for the pattern to his choices that led us to ascribe personality to him?

Randomness cannot explain the phenomenon of “personality.” Randomness can produce only chaos—the absence of any significant and meaningful patterns. And randomness involves the lack of predictability. But our ordinary concept of “personality” assumes both a significant pattern of behavior and a significant degree of predictability in human behavior. Human choices, the units of personality, if you will, cannot therefore be random. Random choices could not create those patterns within our experience that give rise to the concept of human personality. Human choices, therefore, must be either self-determined or determined, but they cannot be undetermined and random.

2. If human choices are undetermined, then it would be impossible to understand human nature.

By the same line of argument as in point (1) above, if human choices are neither determined nor self-determining, then knowledge of human nature is impossible. Granted, human nature is a very complex thing. There is much we do not understand about it. Perhaps there is much that we never will understand about human nature. But few of us are prepared to say that “human nature” is a fiction or an illusion. As complex as it is, our humanity seems to have order and structure to it. Human choices give evidence of that structure. They follow significant and meaningful patterns that show that the chooser is a human being like all other human beings.

If human choices were random or uncaused, would such a thing as human nature exist? Would a knowledge of that human nature be possible? No. It would not. Extending it further, would knowledge of the humanities and human sciences be possible? If human choices were random and uncaused, could we come to a meaningful understanding of history, psychology, sociology, economics, literature, art, or anything else involving human action? Again, the answer is no!

Where do these two observations leave us? Just here: unless I am prepared to suggest that there is no such thing as human nature, that a knowledge of human nature is impossible, that the phenomenon of “individual personality” is not objectively real, and that there can be no such thing as knowledge of an individual person (i.e., knowledge of his personality and

character), then I am forced to conclude that freewill human choice is determined. It makes no sense to suggest that it is undetermined and random. Either human choice is determined by something outside the human chooser or by something within the human chooser—by the inner nature of that human chooser—but human choice is decidedly not random and undetermined.

ARE HUMAN CHOICES SELF-DETERMINED?

Human freewill choices must, therefore, be either determined or self-determined. We turn now to the possibility of self-causation. Can human choice be self-determined? Could human choice be the result of a human being's functioning as the cause of his own choices, independently of any outside causes?

As we saw above, no one would suggest that impersonal physical events are self-determining. Only in the arena of human choice is the possibility of self-determination seriously entertained. Human choices are what they are because each individual human will determines for and by itself what choices it will make. Nothing outside the human will shapes it or determines its operation—that is, no outside cause determines how and what it will choose. It is not determined by genetic activity, not by diet or environment, not by anything external to the actual will itself. In the final analysis, the human will, regardless of what factors may have an *influence* on it, determines its own choices. It is ultimately spontaneous and self-determining.

Why do so many people opt for such a view? Primarily because it seems to be the only theory that can account for our commonsensical belief in free will. As we have seen, it makes no sense to hold that our choices are undetermined—i.e., random. But to suggest that our choices are determined would seem to preclude human freedom. Hence, it would appear that only one option remains—self-determination. Only self-determination can account for human freedom while avoiding the absurd consequence that human choice is random.

Various forms of natural determinism have argued that human choices are determined by genetic realities, personal history, environment, or some combination of these things. No one would seriously argue that these are not important factors in human decisions. Clearly they are. But are they determinative? That is, do they control choices irresistibly? Do they *necessitate* the choices a person makes? That is the issue at question.

If one could isolate all the natural factors that serve to influence a person's choices, would that particular combination of natural influences—

and it alone—be sufficient to explain the resultant choice? The natural determinist says “yes.” He would say, “Give me such-and-such information about a person’s natural condition and environment, and I will tell you what he will choose.” At least, he would say that such a boast is valid in principle. But most people, on the basis of common sense, deny this. Although we can all agree that one’s natural condition and environment play an important role in human decision—i.e., we can all agree they are important influences—nevertheless, our common sense tells us that they do not irresistibly determine human choice. We assume that another factor lying within the human will itself ultimately determines what choice one will make. From the point of view of common sense, if you had two people with absolutely identical biological conditions, with identical personal histories, with identical present environments, being confronted by identical choices, the two could quite conceivably make different choices. The natural determinist, on the other hand, would deny this. On his account, two such people must necessarily make exactly the same choice.¹⁵⁰

But most people embrace the view that the human will is self-determining. They do so in order to reject natural determinism in favor of common sense. The decisive determiner of human choice cannot be a set of natural causes, for that would negate human freedom. What is it then? It must be something lying within the will itself. The human will must be self-determining.

Insofar as it represents a desire to avoid natural determinism and to preserve the commonsensical notion of free will, I cannot help but be sympathetic with this view. But in the end I have to reject it. One can reject natural determinism and make sense of the reality of free will without resorting to the overly grand and false claim that the human will is self-determining.¹⁵¹

What would be required for the human will to be absolutely self-determining as defined above? For the human will (or some aspect of it) to be self-determining, it would have to be UNCREATED. To create something (from nothing) necessarily involves determining the shape, structure,

150. See chapter 9 for a fuller discussion of free will and natural determinism.

151. To argue that the human will is self-determining in order to preserve the insight that natural factors alone are not adequate to explain the phenomenon of human choice is like arguing that computers are human in order to preserve the insight that computers are capable of logical operations. The concept of self-determination is too grand a claim. It is much more than is needed to preserve the modest insight that human choice is not determined by natural causes. We can preserve this insight without resorting to such a grandiose claim.

nature, and laws of its existence. Therefore, creation necessarily involves determinism, and being undetermined necessarily entails being uncreated.¹⁵² For if something is created by some creator X, it is X who has determined the nature and laws of its existence. But there are only two ways that something can be uncreated: either (1) it is eternal and self-existent, or (2) it is self-creating (capable of creating itself from out of nothing). An absolutely self-determining will, therefore, would have to be either eternal and self-existent or self-creating.

The latter is totally nonsensical. The human will cannot plausibly be self-creating. How can something that does not exist (because it begins as nothing) create itself from out of nothing and so begin to exist as a particular something? The former notion—the view that some aspect of the human will exists eternally as self-existent—is not immediately implausible. Maybe our human wills are essentially eternal, self-existent entities. At least, such a view is logically possible. God is eternal and self-existent, so why not us?

But on closer examination this latter suggestion is not plausible either. In the light of experience, it makes no sense to suggest that some aspect of our being is eternal and self-existent. One of the most striking characteristics of an eternal, self-existent being is the *necessity* of his existence. He is not contingent, but necessary. His being is not contingent on the will of a creator or on anything else. He exists because he must exist. He exists out of metaphysical necessity. He exists because—quite simply—he cannot not exist. Does that describe any aspect of human existence? Is my individual human will or any other aspect of my being non-contingent and necessary? It seems apparent from our experience that we are thoroughly contingent beings. We do not exist because we have to exist. Our continued existence is not necessary. It is entirely possible for us to cease to exist. And neither was our existence up to now a matter of metaphysical necessity. It was entirely possible for us never to have existed. Hence, we are not nec-

152. This specific claim is explicitly challenged by some. Some Christian philosophers have attempted to maintain that God creates the existence of an individual's human will but DOES NOT determine the output of that will. As Geisler seems to put it, God determines the "being" or actual existence of a person and his will, but God does not determine the "becoming" or ongoing choices and activities of a person and his will. See Norman L. Geisler, *Philosophy of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), 401. I have already argued that such a view is not tenable. It makes no sense to suggest that God can create the fact of an entity like the human will without determining the nature and structure of its operation—and, hence, ultimately its output, its "becoming." To maintain that God can create the "being" of a human will without thereby determining its "becoming" involves a philosophical confusion; for it would be a philosophical impossibility. See my earlier discussion of this issue in different terms in chapter 6, pp. 131-135.

essary beings. We are radically contingent beings. But if we are not necessary beings, it follows that we are not eternal, self-existent beings either.¹⁵³

To assert that our wills have necessary existence and that they are eternal and self-existent would fly in the face of all human experience. That does not stop people from believing it. People throughout human history have been willing to declare themselves gods, but the better part of reason is against it. Experience teaches us that we are totally contingent beings, dependent for every aspect of our existence upon someone or something else. But, if it makes no sense to believe that we are self-existent, then it makes no sense to believe that we are self-determining.

CONCLUSION: HUMAN CHOICES ARE DETERMINED

As we have seen, it makes no sense to believe that human choices are undetermined and random. Furthermore, it makes no sense to believe that human choices are spontaneously self-determined by the will of the chooser. With the exception of that aspect of ultimate reality that is truly eternal and self-existent (*e.g.*, God), nothing in reality can be self-determining, including the human will.¹⁵⁴ By process of elimination, then, only one option remains: all human choices are ultimately determined by someone or something outside the human chooser himself.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that—whether we focus on impersonal physical events or on freewill choices—we must assume that everything in all of reality is ultimately determined. Under no other theory can we account for these three everyday assumptions: (1) the fact of order in our experience, (2) the possibility of true objective knowledge, and (3) the fact of the radical contingency of human existence. Total determinism is the only view that is compatible with all three of these foundational aspects of human experience. Unless I am prepared to reject these fundamental, foundational

153. Mortimer Adler has a helpful discussion of necessary vs. contingent beings in his book *How To Think About God*.

154. One cannot deny the following claim: whatever serves as the ultimate ground of all existence is self-existent, eternal, and self-determining. But it makes no sense to attribute self-existence, eternity, and self-determination to anything whose existence is derived from this. If God is the ultimate reality, then it makes sense to claim that he is self-existent and self-determining. Likewise, if it makes sense to suggest that the cosmos is the ultimate reality, then it makes sense to claim that it is self-existent and self-determining. But nothing inferior in its being to that which is ultimate reality—because derivative from it—can reasonably be said to be self-existent and self-determining.

beliefs, I am forced to conclude that everything in reality is determined—except, of course, for the ultimate determiner himself (or itself).

Who or What is the Ultimate Determiner?

The only question that remains is the identity of this determiner. The four that have been nominated throughout the history of human thought are these: (1) God—the eternal, self-existent creator of everything *ex nihilo*, (2) the cosmos—the eternal, self-existent complex of material and spiritual realities, including the gods, (3) the physical universe—the eternal, self-existent, intrinsically rational complex of matter and energy, and (4) me—the creator god of my own subjective reality, the only reality that exists for me.

As a Christian, I obviously vote for the first candidate. To spell out all the reasons for my vote would involve a total defense of why I believe in the God of Christianity and the Bible. I will forego that here. For now, what is important is to understand that any valid defense of God's existence will *ipso facto* be a defense of divine determinism—that is, that God is the determiner of all things. For to argue for the existence of God is to argue that a personal, self-existent being is the ultimate determiner of all reality.

As we have seen in this chapter, determinism is the only rationally sound conclusion that one can reach on the basis of human experience. If, similarly, it can be said that biblical theism is the only rationally sound conclusion that one can reach with regard to the nature of ultimate reality (and I think it is), then clearly divine determinism is the only rationally sound conclusion that one can reach on the basis of human experience.

Summary

Whether an event involves a human freewill choice or is an impersonal physical event, three options exhaust the possibilities for its origin: it is either undetermined, self-determined, or determined.

I argued that we cannot reasonably hold any such event to be undetermined. If we do, we are unable to account for: (1) the existence and knowledge of human personality, (2) the existence and knowledge of human nature, (3) the possibility of scientific knowledge, and (4) the pos-

sibility of knowledge in general. No theory of the origin of events that fails to account for these four foundational realities is a philosophically tenable theory. Accordingly, we must reject the view that any event can be undetermined.

Next, I argued that we cannot reasonably hold any such event to be self-determined. With respect to impersonal physical events, the suggestion is patently absurd. With respect to events involving human free will, the suggestion flies in the face of experience. The suggestion that human freewill choice is self-determining involves the suggestion that a human being (or at least his will) is eternal and self-existent. But this is in conflict with what seems apparent from our experience—namely, the radical contingency of human existence.

By process of elimination, then, every event that occurs in reality is best understood as determined, for to understand any event to be undetermined or self-determined—whether it involves free will or not—is problematic.

Philosophically, only some form of determinism can account for the important underlying assumptions that form the foundation of our experience. This is critical. If a philosophical theory cannot account for what I do and must implicitly believe, then that theory is suspect.¹⁵⁵ Determinism can and does account for the ordinary beliefs that I do and must embrace. The alternative theories cannot. This is of no small importance. Determinism of some sort is required in order to make sense out of the assumptions and beliefs that undergird ordinary experience. The only question that remains is what sort of determinism is required. My contention, of course, is that DIVINE determinism is required. To give a philosophical defense of that contention would require me to offer my philosophical defense for the existence of a transcendent creator God. That is outside the scope of this work. Suffice it to say, if the argument of this chapter is sound, then any philosophical defense of the existence of a transcendent creator God is *ipso facto* a philosophical defense of divine determinism.

155. As long as I am engaging in mere speculation (with my feet resting on my desk), I can, of course, embrace virtually any philosophical theory I want. Philosophical speculation can posit the randomness and indeterminacy of events, and it can posit the indeterminacy of human choice. But what merit is there to a philosophical theory that denies the very things which all of us at all times must implicitly believe when our feet are walking the sidewalk? It is ultimately disingenuous to subscribe to a theory of reality that is intrinsically alien to and incompatible with the beliefs that I must implicitly believe in order to conduct my life. A sensible theory of reality will reject the notion that any event in reality (including human choice) is random and undetermined; for to subscribe to such a notion is to presume that no true knowledge of reality is possible, but that is not what we in fact believe. All of us live as if we believe that a knowledge of reality is possible.