# Determinism: Free Will and Perceived Agency

## Attribution Styles

Attribution style refers to the way in which individuals explain the causes of events, particularly their own successes or failures. It is characterized by three main dimensions: internal-external, stable-unstable, and global-specific.

### 3 Dimensions of Attributional Style

**Internal-External:** The degree to which an individual attributes their circumstances to internal forces, or external ones.

**Stable-Unstable:** The tendency to see attributes as inherent, unchangeable traits that are unaffected by situation or circumstance, or to see them as malleable traits that do change according to situation and circumstance.

**Global-Specific:** The tendency to see generalize events and attribute them to luck or fate, vs. the tendency to consider events isolated from others around them.

Internal-external attribution style refers to the way in which individuals explain the causes of events or outcomes in their lives. Internal attributions refer to causes that are attributed to one's own personal characteristics, such as ability, effort, or personality, while external attributions refer to causes that are attributed to external factors, such as luck, situational factors, or the actions of others.

The concept of locus of control is closely related to internal-external attribution style, as it refers to an individual's beliefs about the extent to which they can control the events and outcomes in their lives. Individuals with an internal locus of control tend to make more internal attributions and believe that their own actions and efforts determine their success or failure, while individuals with an external locus of control tend to make more external attributions and believe that external factors, such as luck or fate, are the main determinants of their success or failure. See the following video explaining in further locus of control:

Self-efficacy is another related concept that refers to an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform a specific task or accomplish a goal. Individuals with high self-efficacy tend to have an internal locus of control and believe that their own efforts and abilities are the main determinants of their success, while individuals with low self-efficacy tend to have an external locus of control and believe that external factors are the main determinants of their success.

Together, these concepts provide insight into how individuals perceive and explain the causes of events and outcomes in their lives, and how their beliefs about their own abilities and control over their lives can impact their motivation, attitude, and overall well-being.

Stable-unstable attribution style refers to the way in which individuals explain the causes of events or outcomes in their lives in terms of stability over time. A stable attribution is one in which the cause is seen as something that is unlikely to change, such as an inherent characteristic of the person or situation. An unstable attribution is one in which the cause is seen as something that is likely to change, such as the specific circumstances of the situation.

The concept of growth and fixed mindsets is closely related to stable-unstable attribution style. A growth mindset is the belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed through effort and learning. Those with a growth mindset tend to make unstable attributions, believing that failure is caused by a lack of effort or lack of understanding and can be improved by putting in more effort and learning from their mistakes. On the other hand, a fixed mindset is the belief that abilities and intelligence are fixed traits that cannot be changed. Those with a fixed mindset tend to make stable attributions, believing that failure is caused by a lack of innate ability and cannot be improved through effort.

An example of one person with an unstable attribution style, or growth mindset is: A student receives a poor grade on a test and attributes the failure to not studying enough and focuses on studying more to improve their grade. On the other hand, a student who has a stable attribution, or fixed mindset, receives a poor grade on a test and attributes the failure to lack of intelligence and does not put in the effort to study more and improve their grade.

See the following video explanation of growth vs. fixed mindset

In summary, stable-unstable attribution style, growth mindset and fixed mindset are closely related concepts that play a role in how individuals perceive and explain the causes of events and outcomes in their lives and how they approach or face adversity. Individuals with a stable attribution style tend to believe that failure is caused by inherent characteristics that cannot be changed, while those with an unstable attribution style tend to believe that failure is caused by factors that can be changed with effort.

Global-specific attribution style refers to the way in which individuals explain the causes of events or outcomes in their lives in terms of the scope of the event. A global attribution is one in which the cause is seen as something that applies to many or most situations, such as a personal characteristic or a general tendency. A specific attribution is one in which the cause is seen as something that is limited to a specific situation.

**Catastrophizing**is a related concept that refers to the tendency to exaggerate the negative consequences of an event or outcome. Those who tend to make global attributions also tend to make catastrophic predictions about the future, believing that their failure will have negative consequences for many areas of their lives and that it is an indication of their overall incompetence.

In summary, attributional style is a concept that refers to the way in which individuals explain the causes of events or outcomes in their lives. It encompasses three main domains: internal-external attribution style, stable-unstable attribution style and global-specific attribution style. Internal-external attribution style refers to how individuals attribute the causes of events or outcomes to their own personal characteristics or external factors. Stable-unstable attribution style refers to how individuals explain the causes of events or outcomes in terms of stability over time. Global-specific attribution style refers to how individuals explain the causes of events or outcomes in terms of the scope of the event. These domains of attributional style play a significant role in shaping an individual's mindset, behavior, and overall well-being, as research has found that people with an internal, stable, and specific attributional style tend to have higher levels of self-esteem and are more likely to persevere in the face of failure, while people with an external, unstable, and global attributional style tend to have lower levels of self-esteem and may be more likely to give up in the face of failure.

### Further reading:

[The structure of attributional style: Cognitive styles and optimism-pessimism bias in the Attributional Style Questionnaire](https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/en/publications/the-structure-of-attributional-style-cognitive-styles-and-optimis)

<https://positivepsychology.com/explanatory-styles-optimism/#explanatory-styles>

<https://www.opentextbooks.org.hk/ditatopic/16487>

<https://www.simplypsychology.org/attribution-theory.html>

## Free Will

What is free will?

According to the Oxford Dictionary, free will is "the power of acting without the constraint of necessity or fate; the ability to act at one's own discretion."

For centuries, people have argued either for or against free will. Some say that it is an illusion, while others say that is absolutely not true. Before we dive into the argument, watch this video. You may even want to watch it twice, it's one to think on.

So, did the man have free will? What do you think? What about the people solving the puzzle?

Now for the argument. There are countless arguments on both sides, but in this text, only a couple will be highlighted.

## Free Will is an Illusion

Someone who believes free will is an illusion holds that all human actions and decisions are predetermined by prior causes, whether through natural laws, genetic makeup, or environmental influences. They argue that while we may feel we are making choices freely, our sense of agency is merely a cognitive construct, an after-the-fact rationalization of events already set in motion by unconscious processes.

Determinists say that every event, including human action, is determined by preceding events in accordance with natural laws. Therefore, free will cannot exist if our actions are predetermined. They are merely consequences of the laws of nature and the initial conditions of the universe.

Studies by Benjamin Libet and others have shown that the brain initiates actions before the individual becomes consciously aware of the decision, indicating that conscious will might be a post hoc rationalization rather than the true origin of actions. A significant amount of decision-making occurs at the unconscious level, challenging the notion that we have conscious control over our actions (free will).

## We Have Free Will

Someone who believes that we have free will holds that individuals have genuine autonomy and the capacity to make choices that are not wholly determined by prior causes. They argue that conscious deliberation and intention play a critical role in human decision-making, enabling people to act according to their own motivations and desires.

Our everyday experiences of making choices and deliberating between options provide strong subjective evidence for the existence of free will. This phenomenological perspective emphasizes the lived reality of choice and agency. Even if some decisions are influenced by unconscious processes, the role of conscious deliberation and self-control in complex decision-making supports the idea that we exercise free will.

Compatibilists argue that individuals can be considered free as long as they act according to their own desires and intentions, even if those desires and intentions are determined by prior causes. This perspective redefines free will to mean the absence of external coercion, allowing for personal autonomy within a deterministic framework. Compatibilism maintains that moral responsibility is preserved, as people are still accountable for actions that arise from their own internal motivations, aligning with both our intuitions about freedom and the scientific understanding of causation.

## A Warning

As Daniel Dennett pointed out, it is dangerous to tell people they do not have free will. Free will is foundational to concepts of moral responsibility, accountability, and justice. If free will is an illusion, it undermines the basis for holding people responsible for their actions and for our legal and moral systems. Many argue that regardless of the metaphysical truth, we must operate under the assumption of free will to maintain social order and personal responsibility.

### So, what do you think? Is free will an illusion or not?

#### Some closing remarks from Elder Bednar

Core Content

## References:

Libet, B. (2005). Do we have free will?The Oxford Handbook of Free Will, 550–564.<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195178548.003.0025>

Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford English Dictionary. (n.d.).<https://www.oed.com/>

Russell, P. (2020, May 27).Hume on Free Will. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hume-freewill/>

Weaver, T. (2024, February 18).Free will vs determinism. Orion Philosophy.<https://orionphilosophy.com/free-will-vs-determinism/>

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