

Winter 2-28-2017

A Suspicion about Determinism

John Thorp

University of Western Ontario, jthorp@uwo.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/philosophypres>



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

Citation of this paper:

Thorp, John, "A Suspicion about Determinism" (2017). *Philosophy Presentations*. 13.
<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/philosophypres/13>

A Suspicion about Determinism



Like a chain of volcanoes, the idea of determinism has kept erupting, in different intellectual contexts, over the past two and a half millennia. It threatens our notions of free will and responsibility, and our general idea that the future is open.

Logical fatalism shows that if every proposition is either true or false, then the future is settled. *Theological fatalism* derives the same result from God's foreknowledge. *Physical determinism* argues that the physical world is governed by iron-clad laws of cause and effect. *Psychological determinism* sees every choice we make as the inevitable outcome of the psychic forces at play in our minds. *Neurophysiological determinism* holds that every mental event is a manifestation of a brain event, and, since the brain is part of the physical world, determinism rules the mind as well. *Chronogeometrical fatalism* argues that the Theory of Relativity shows that anything in our future is already in the past from the perspective of some simultaneous point in spacetime. Some of these volcanoes now seem extinct, others dormant, and others very much alive.

In each case, experts have rushed in to try to fix things. Logicians toy with three-valued logics, theologians invoke the a-temporality of God, physicists explore the behaviour of very small particles, and so forth.

I suspect, though, that the real problem lies deeper: there is likely a single conceptual trouble underlying these serial eruptions in diverse terrain: an intellectual 'hotspot'. And I suspect that it has to do with how we think about time.

