

Watch and take notes on the *Determinism and Free Will* Video from our handouts page.

Terms to Know

Free Will

Fate

Determinism

Precognition

Paradox

Metaphysics

This movie is set in 2054. Tom Cruise's character John Anderton is head of PreCrime—a group that arrests people before they commit the crime. Since the start of this, DC has now become the nation's safest city. When the movie opens, there is a bill in Congress to use this system nationwide to help lower the crime rate. While watching this movie and answering the questions, think about the following: Is it fair to arrest someone before they commit a crime? Applying the philosophy of determinism, are they absolutely going to commit this crime? Does anything change this? Answer the following questions as you watch the movie. You will use them later in the written response.

1. Why have premeditated crimes died out?
2. What is an echo?
3. What is the moral dilemma surrounding Precrime?
4. What example does John use to illustrate why Precrime is necessary and fair?
5. Why are the people at Precrime more like clergy than cops?
6. What is the flaw in the system according to Witwer (Colin Farrell's character)?

7. How can Chief Anderton kill a man he never met according to Dr. Iris Hineman (the creator)?
8. What is a minority report?
9. Why does John have a choice when others did not?
10. Was John set up? How could this be possible?
11. How could someone cheat the system?
12. What did Lamar do to use this system to his advantage?
13. If everything is already set, why would knowing your future mean you have a choice?

Discussion Questions for *Minority Report*

1. Is the world of *Minority Report* a world with or without free will? If there is free will, is it dependent on the existence of a “minority report”? If there is no free will, is the lack of free will due to determinism or fatalism?
2. Are the people from the Precrime Division the only ones who can have free will? Is free will dependent on knowing the future that the Precogs have foreseen, i.e. can you change your future only if you know what your future was supposed have been?
3. The Precogs are described as “pattern recognition filters”. Can the Precogs really see the future?
4. Is it logically possible to both see the future and change the future?
5. Is it logically possible to both see the future and have free will? Does the problem for free will go beyond the normal problem of determinism?

Minority Report Written Response

Answer each question in complete sentences on a separate sheet of paper. Use concrete details from the text to prove your answers.

"In 1999, Spielberg invited fifteen experts convened by the Global Business Network, its chairman, Peter Schwartz, and its co-founder Stewart Brand to a hotel in Santa Monica, California for a three-day "think tank". He also invited journalist Joel Garreau to cover the event. He wanted to consult with the group to create a plausible "future reality" for the year 2054 as opposed to a more traditional "science fiction" setting. Dubbed the "think tank summit",^[28] the experts included architect Peter Calthorpe, Douglas Coupland, computer scientist Neil Gershenfeld, biomedical researcher Shaun Jones, computer scientist Jaron Lanier, and former Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) architecture dean William J. Mitchell. Production designer Alex McDowell kept what was nicknamed the "2054 bible", an 80 page guide created in preproduction which listed all the decided upon aspects of the future world: architectural, socio-economical, political, and technological. While the discussions did not change key elements in the film's action sequences, they were influential in the creation of some of the more utopian aspects of the film, though John Underkoffler, the science and technology advisor for the film, described it as 'much grayer and more ambiguous' than what was envisioned in 1999."

1. In what ways do you see this planning reflected in the movie?
2. Did the ending seem consistent with the rest of the film? Some people have speculated "this ending is the product of John's imagination, caused by hallucinations from his forced coma after he is incarcerated." Is there evidence to support this theory?
3. Setting aside the idea for right now of arresting people for crimes they have not yet committed, if the precogs could predict murders and thereby stop them, would it be worth the sacrifice of keeping them in the pool in order to save so many lives?
4. What message, commentary or warning about our current society is Spielberg giving in this movie?

FYI

Ethical dilemmas, also known as a moral dilemmas, are situations in which there is a choice to be made between two options, neither of which resolves the situation in an ethically acceptable fashion. In such cases, societal and personal ethical guidelines can provide no satisfactory outcome for the chooser.

Ethical dilemmas assume that the chooser will abide by societal norms, such as codes of law or religious teachings, in order to make the choice ethically impossible.

Ethical Dilemma Situations

An article on ListVerse compiled a list of Top 10 moral dilemmas and asked readers to consider what they would do in those situations. Here is an example of one of the Top 10 ethical dilemmas they proposed:

A pregnant woman leading a group of people out of a cave on a coast is stuck in the mouth of that cave. In a short time high tide will be upon them, and unless she is unstuck, they will all be drowned except the woman, whose head is out of the cave. Fortunately, (or unfortunately,) someone has with him a stick of dynamite. There seems no way to get the pregnant woman loose without using the dynamite which will inevitably kill her; but if they do not use it everyone will drown. What should they do?

Branches of Ethics

There are five branches of ethics. Google the phrase, "ethical dilemma questions" and discuss.

- **Normative Ethics** - The largest branch, it deals with how individuals can figure out the correct moral action that they should take. Philosophers such as Socrates and John Stuart Mill are included in this branch of ethics.
- **Meta-Ethics** - This branch seeks to understand the nature of ethical properties and judgments such as if truth values can be found and the theory behind moral principals.
- **Applied Ethics** - This is the study of applying theories from philosophers regarding ethics in everyday life. For example, this area of ethics asks questions such as "Is it right to have an abortion?" and "Should you turn in your friend at your workplace for taking home office supplies?"
- **Moral Ethics** - This branch questions how individuals develop their morality, why certain aspects of morality differ between cultures and why certain aspects of morality are generally universal.
- **Descriptive Ethics** - This branch is more scientific in its approach and focuses on how human beings actually operate in the real world, rather than attempt to theorize about how they should operate.