



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on March 4, 2011

The Adjustment Bureau Questions Free Will

David Norris (Matt Damon) is a young politician with scores of potential. Seeking election as New York state's youngest Senator, he encounters Elise Sellas (Emily Blunt), a beautiful ballerina on her way to stardom. Norris and Sellas recognize an undeniable chemistry and passion, but soon find out that mysterious forces are trying to keep them apart: members of the adjustment bureau.



Though it is not explicitly stated, the adjustment bureau is carrying out the plan of the Supreme Being (God), referred to only as "the chairman." The bureau sees to it that people stay on the paths that have been outlined for them.

The film adds new meaning to the oft-used phrase, "It's all part of God's plan" — a literal meaning. Norris and Sellas were meant to have a casual encounter, but were never meant to have a relationship beyond that. However, "chance" appears as an intangible character, interfering with the plan outlined by the chairman. Once the two discover their soul mates in one another, they refuse to allow the adjustment bureau to keep them apart.

But the adjustment bureau is not one to be crossed. If in fact the two continue to pursue their love, they will be forced to give up their dreams of successful careers.

The question throughout the film then becomes, how far will two individuals go for true love?

Indeed, how far should they go and how far can they go, since other questions are prevalent as well? Is there truly such thing as free will? Are there limits to the exercise of that will? Is the Supreme Being always in control of their lives, and what are the consequences of rebelling against that control and doing what they want as opposed to doing what God wants?

Naturally, elements of the plot strike spiritual nerves. The film personifies the Christian struggle of confronting the apparent, and difficult, dichotomy between free will and predestination. And how does the movie answer this apparent contradiction? Does it dismiss one while championing the other, or does it argue that the two are compatible after all?

Well, the movie does not answer the question for viewers — at least not fully. As [summarized by MovieGuide](#), which reviews movies from a moral/spiritual as well as artistic perspective, "[The Adjustment Bureau] offers arguments both for and against free will versus predestination that the movie seems to be saying at times BOTH/AND, in a way that seems to support a compatibilist view of Free Will and Destiny. In a compatibilist view, free will is defined in such a way that allows it to co-exist with ideas of predestination, including God's Absolute Sovereignty." Not surprisingly, the MovieGuide review adds: "Needless to say, this is a heavy topic that philosophers and theologians have been debating in various ways for centuries."



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The film's depth alone qualifies it as a must-see. It certainly is not often that a film attempts to grapple with religious questions while remaining relatively unscathed by Hollywood influence.

In addition to the film's thought-provoking elements, both Damon's and Blunt's charismatic performances are not only convincing but enthralling.

For parents, *The Adjustment Bureau* should not be problematic, as the film manages to resist the urge to include unnecessary violence, foul language, or sexual explicitness. Though Sellas and Norris do consummate the relationship early on, the scene is extremely quick and tasteful. The only areas of the film that truly involve "adult themes" pertain to Norris' past secrets, which are exposed on his campaign trail, and they are miniscule at most.

Overall, *The Adjustment Bureau's* handling of difficult themes earns it a worthy reputation as an entertaining thriller.



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