

Question: **Is there any sense in which we can argue that we are free because our actions and choices are expressions of our own character?**

1. **Hard determinists:**

a) **All human actions = determined**

- this includes character
- otherwise the world = inexplicable/unpredictable

- (i) **physical** determinism
- (ii) **psychological** determinism
- (iii) **social and economic** determinism
- (iv) **cultural** determinism

b) Therefore, **can't be held responsible for our character** + the acts that develop out of it – shaped by things beyond our choosing:
e.g. Clarence Darrow's summing up in the Leopold and Loeb case

- I. **Heredity** – Hospers
- II. **Early parental environment** – Hospers
- III. **Education**
- IV. **Social class**
- V. **Gender**
- VI. **Childhood experiences**
- VII. **The time in which we were raised**

2. **Indeterminists:**

- a) Accepts free will/rejects determinism
- b) **Inanimate world = mechanistically determined**, but universal causation ≠ apply to human actions
- c) Human actions ≠ predictable because we possess **choice**
- d) **Moral self – feeling of being able to modify our character if we wish** (J.S. Mill):
 - self = distinct from our formed character and its desires and inclinations
- e) **Our characters ≠ the masters of the situation we are:**
 - we can subdue causal factors in character and resist temptation through the force of our will

3. **Soft determinism – compatibilism:**

a) **It is not that things = undetermined:**

- (i) without determinism there can be no causal connections between our actions and consequences, therefore we would not be free to determine anything
- (ii) for us to be responsible for our actions it doesn't make sense for them not to be determined

b) **We are free even though our actions = caused:**

- (i) because it is a certain type of cause – internal – our character
- (ii) determinism in itself doesn't threaten freedom – only a certain type of cause

c) For an action to be something *you* have done it **must be the result of a cause in you** = psychological cause found in our desires, beliefs, fears, intentions

d) Therefore, freedom = compatible with determinism + theory of universal causation because among the factors that determine our actions = **our own choices and desires**

- i.e. Aristotle – person acts freely and responsibly not because their actions = uncaused but because they = not compelled by external causes

e) **Free if decision = caused by the person we are**

- i.e. by our own characters, desires and beliefs ≠ that actions are undetermined, but that we have ability to act on basis of self-chosen ends

f) **Problems:**

- (i) If nothing = undetermined, then **so too is character** – still leaves open whether our actions = caused or compelled
- (ii) **Internal causes may be compulsive** – not just a question of being compelled by external causes
 - e.g.s. brain washing – subliminal advertising – neurosis – clinical depression – stress – emotional provocation

4. Real measure of freedom = that our choice is an expression of our **moral self**:

a) **A new measure of free will**

- (i) ≠ whether our actions are done in response to external forces or internal ones within our character
- (ii) but **whether we have a strong enough moral self to change our character**

b) **But why isn't our moral self determined?**

Because:

- (i) **O/whelming evidence** of having moral choice
- (ii) **We all do make choices** and we wouldn't make such decisions if we believed it's not in our power to do what we're planning to do
 - we still may be mistaken, but
- (iii) In **contingent world error = always possible** – but this doesn't mean I cannot accept the experience of choice as evidence of freedom beyond reasonable doubt – otherwise any evidence based on experience would have to be rejected on the same grounds – we would have to adopt total scepticism

c) But the **will to alter our character is itself given to us**

d) Still there is a **difference between saying**

- (i) we have **no means** of changing our character and
- (ii) that **we will not use our powers** to change unless we have the desire
 - (ii) accepts we can change if we desire to

This feeling of being able to change = the feeling of moral freedom

i.e. only those of confirmed virtue = completely free