

Chapter 18, Determinism and Freedom

Determinism:

all consequences have necessary antecedents
but not all antecedents have necessary consequences

Aristotle:

involuntary actions =
either because someone is **ignorant** of what he is doing
or because he acts under compulsion from **external influence**

Hard determinism

1. Accepts determinism/rejects free will

2. All human actions = determined – otherwise the world = inexplicable/unpredictable

– we believe we are free because we are conscious of many of our acts, but **consciousness = irrelevant**
(Spinoza)

- a) **physical** determinism
- b) **psychological** determinism
- c) **freedom – illusion:**

- (i) the result of always **looking forward** to an unknown future v. looking back at a complex pattern of causes that determine each action and decision
- (ii) Compatibilist criticism = **still have to make decisions** (Aristotle's internal influence) – although we can understand life backwards it still has to be lived forwards – we choose which of our motivational factors (hopes, desires, beliefs) will influence us
- (iii) **But aren't our rational processes themselves determined?** When we say we're free are we just saying our actions = determined by particular type of cause – our rational thought processes?

d) **Consciousness:**

– is this **what's left after the physical universe has accounted for** our physical bodies + does this contribute something that allows us to describe ourselves as free?
– or is it just a running commentary with no power to affect anything?

- (i) **HD – appear to succeed both ways:**
either consciousness = part of deterministic scheme which means it cannot be free or it isn't and can't have any possible effect on our actions
- (ii) But **active agency** – cannot know all the laws and antecedent factors causing your decision – but once you know, another factor has been added i.e. you knowing – therefore it = no longer the same situation
- (iii) But it has to be **active consciousness** – 'voluntary, intentional human action' (Searle) – i.e. we experience the possibility of alternative courses of action – when we act intentionally we have the experience of freedom – of the possibility of choosing differently and therefore of making something happen (Searle – 'intention-in-action')
e.g. addict – intention-in-action = totally unconscious

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Indeterminism

1. The argument:

- 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) **Some – experience of choice = immediate** – intuitive certainty that **sets limits to scepticism**
- e) Others – **world = full of novelty, creativity, spontaneity**
e.g. W. James – ‘loose = play’ – not all things causally connected – it’s not that *any* action = possible for *any* person, but among 2 or more mutually exclusive choices more than one = poss – otherwise determinism leads to ethical indifference
- f) **Motives, intentions, desires, etc.** ≠ mental ‘causes’ because not separate states or events at all – they **provide our actions with classifications** – we describe them by giving them a classification – for something to be a cause of something else they have to be 2 separate things – but desires, motives, intentions, etc. ≠ sufficiently independent to be a cause
- g) **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
- h) **Our characters ≠ the masters of the situation – we are:** we can subdue causal factors in character and resist temptation thro the force of our will

2. But why isn't our moral self determined?

Answers:

- a) **O/whelming evidence** of having moral choice
- b) **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
– but we still may be mistaken
- c) 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 wld have to adopt total scepticism

3. Do we only appear to be free because we don't yet know the causes?

- a) **20th. Cent. physics** – threw doubt on traditional mechanistic picture of universe functioning predictably according to natural laws – more ‘loose-play’ (James)
- b) **Quantum Theory** – not every event has sufficient natural causes e.g. subatomic particles
- c) If not caused – not determined – not predictable, **perhaps human action too = undetermined?**

4. Is freedom impossible if indeterminism is true?

- a) If everything = undetermined, **we cannot be free** – everything = unpredictable, random, capricious
- b) **Can't convert our actions into effective, intended results**
– no power to cause actions
– nothing we do has predictable outcome
- c) **For determinism and indeterminism alike we can't be responsible for our actions**
 - (i) if determinism = true – antecedent circumstances = responsible
 - (ii) if untrue – nothing is responsible:
if nothing can cause an event, I cannot cause it therefore I'm not responsible

Chapter 18, Determinism and Freedom continued

Soft determinism (Compatibilism)

1. Determinism in itself doesn't threaten freedom – **only a certain type of cause**
2. 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
3. For us to be **responsible** for our actions, it **doesn't make sense for them not to be determined**
4. **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
5. **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**
6. **Problems:**
 - a) If nothing = undetermined, then **so too is character** – still leaves open whether our actions = caused or compelled
 - b) **Internal causes – that might be compulsive** – not just a question of being compelled by external causes
e.g. brain washing – subliminal advertising – neurosis – addictions
 - c) Addicts, etc. = responsible for getting addicted in the first place
– but what about those who have no choice e.g. clinical depression or stress that is not self-generated (e.g. emotional provocation)?
7. **The 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 the **will to alter our character is itself given to us**
 - c) 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