

FREE WILL

Can we act freely?

When discussing free will, philosophers look at two things:

1. What it means to choose freely
2. What the moral implications are of those decisions

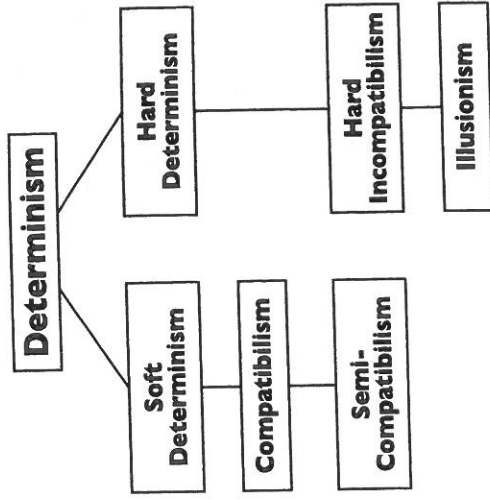
However, upon examining these two notions further, more questions arise. Philosophers take many different approaches in trying to answer these questions.

COMPATIBILISM AND INCOMPATIBILISM

Those who believe in compatibilism (also known as soft determinism) believe that humans do have free will—however, this free will is viewed as being compatible with determinism (which is causal, and as a philosophy states that nothing is by chance; everything that happens is the result of what happened before, and everything about you and everything that you do is inevitable).

According to compatibilism, humans can be free agents (and have free will) when they are free of certain constraints. According to both determinism and compatibilism, peoples' personalities and characteristics are determined in ways that are out of their hands (genetics, upbringing, etc.). However, in compatibilism, the existence of these constraints does not mean one cannot also have free will, because compatibilism works off of those things that are determined.

The definition of free will in compatibilism is that one is free to choose how to act to whatever extent made possible by that person's makeup.



But then, if it is not determinism that is considered to be a constraint in compatibilism, what is the constraint? According to compatibilism, a constraint is any type of external coercion. Free will, therefore, is defined as freedom of action. As long as an individual is able to make his own decisions (even if those decisions are already determined) free of an external force (like imprisonment), then that person has free will.

Alternatively, some people do not believe in compatibilism. Those who believe incompatibilism to be true claim that determinism is simply incompatible with the notion of free will. For example, how can one have free will if every decision is predetermined from birth?

This does not necessarily mean that incompatibilism states free will does or does not exist. In fact, incompatibilism can be broken down into three types:

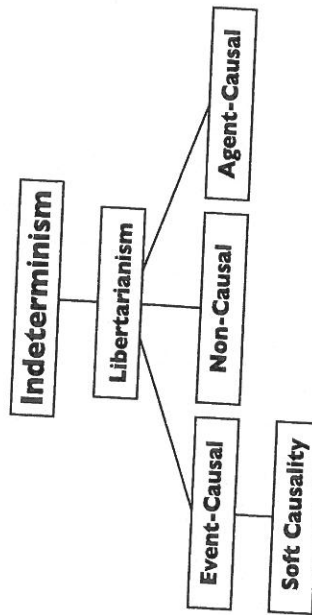
1. **Hard determinism** (which denies the existence of free will)
2. **Metaphysical libertarianism** (which states free will does exist and denies the existence of compatibilism)
3. **Pessimistic incompatibilism** (which states that neither free will nor compatibilism is true)

The previous image shows several offshoots of compatibilism and incompatibilism:

- **Semicompatibilism** is the notion that determinism is compatible with moral responsibility.
- **Hard incompatibilism** is the belief that moral responsibility and free will are not compatible with determinism.
- **Illusionism** is the belief that free will is just an illusion.

Incompatibilists who deny determinism accept that random events must therefore occur in the world (be they mental, biological, physical, etc.), and thus, randomness and accidents do exist. This then creates chains of unpredictable futures (as opposed to the one predestined future in determinism).

Another form of incompatibilism, metaphysical libertarianism, comes in four different branches of causality:



This image shows the following options:

- **Event-causal libertarianism** is the notion that some events are not as predictable from earlier events and are uncaused.
- **Soft causality** is the belief that most events are determined, while some events are not as predictable.
- **Agent-causal libertarianism** is the belief that new causal chains can begin that are not determined by past events or laws of nature.
- **Non-causal libertarianism** is the idea that in order to make decisions, no cause is needed at all. Those who believe in compatibilism believe humans can be free agents (and have free will) when they are free of certain constraints, and that personalities and characteristics are determined in ways that are out of their hands (such as genetics or upbringing), while incompatibilists deny that determinism plays a role in free will and accept that random events and accidents must therefore occur in the world (be they mental, biological, physical, etc.).

RESPONSIBILITY

When discussing free will, one must also discuss the idea of responsibility; particularly the distinction between responsibility and moral responsibility. Responsibility is when one takes on a task or burden and accepts the associated consequences. For example, if you take on the responsibility of organizing a conference for work, then you not only take on the task of organizing the event, but you are also taking on the responsibility of its outcome; be it a success or failure. This is responsibility. Moral responsibility, on the other hand, is responsibility based on one's moral codes. Let's say that on the day of the conference,

a big snowstorm hits and none of the speakers can make the conference. You are responsible for the success or failure of the conference, but are you morally responsible for the conference's failure?

It seems that humans do in fact *feel* responsible for their actions. But why is this the case? If one's actions are determined by events, that is to say, one's actions are the result of events and have been planned since before birth, then libertarians would ask why people feel responsible for their actions. Similarly, if one's actions are totally random and determined entirely by chance, determinists would wonder why people feel responsible for their actions. Together, these questions create the standard argument against free will.

Yet humans *do* feel responsible for their actions. So if a person is responsible for his actions, this must mean that responsibility is caused by something that is within all of us. Therefore, a *prerequisite of responsibility is free will*, and not the other way around. And furthermore, a *prerequisite of moral responsibility is responsibility*, and not the other way around. One does not need moral responsibility to have responsibility, but one certainly needs responsibility to have moral responsibility.

THE REQUIREMENTS OF FREE WILL

Requirements of free will should ideally satisfy both libertarianism (allowing for the unpredictability needed for freedom to occur) and determinism (allowing for the causality needed for moral responsibility to occur). It is here we see how *free* meets *will*.

The Randomness Requirement

The randomness, or freedom, requirement states that indeterminism is true and chance exists. Actions are considered to

be unpredictable and are not caused by external events; rather, they come from us. In order for there to be free will, there must also be alternative possibilities, and after an action has been performed, the notion that it could have been done a different way must be present. Therefore, according to the randomness requirement, people create new causal chains and new information is produced.

The Determinism Requirement

The determinism, or will, requirement states that adequate determinism (determinism that has the ability to allow for statistical predictability) must be true and that our actions cannot be directly caused by chance. Furthermore, a person's will must also be adequately determined, and one's actions have to be causally determined by an individual's will.

The Moral Responsibility Requirement

The moral responsibility requirement is the result of combining the randomness requirement with the determinism requirement. It states that people are morally responsible for their actions because there are alternative possibilities. One could have done things in a different way—actions come from us, and our actions are causally determined by one's will. The issue of free will is one that affects all of us. Are we truly free when we make a decision? What are the implications that come about from our decisions?