

Aquinas believed the highest end was eternal blessedness, which was achieved by a union with God in the afterlife. It is by living through these cardinal virtues that one moves toward true fulfillment.

Aquinas made a distinction between an eternal happiness that could only be reached in the afterlife, and an imperfect happiness that could be reached in this life. Because eternal happiness is a union with God, there is only an imperfect happiness in this life since we can never know everything there is to know about God in this life.

THE IMPACT OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

Thomas Aquinas had an incredible impact on Western philosophy. During his lifetime, the church was extremely influenced by the works of Plato and had dismissed the importance of Aristotle. Aquinas, however, came to realize just how important Aristotle was and incorporated Aristotle's work into Catholic orthodoxy, forever changing the shape of Western philosophy. In 1879, the teachings of Thomas Aquinas became incorporated into official church doctrine by Pope Leo XIII.

HARD DETERMINISM

There is no free will

Hard determinism is the philosophical theory that, because every event has a cause, all human action is predetermined and therefore choices made by free will do not exist. Though the assertion of the hard determinist that nothing can occur without a cause may seem rational, the conclusion that no one ever acts freely has sparked much debate in the philosophical world.

THE FOUR PRINCIPLES OF FREE WILL AND DETERMINISM

In order to better understand hard determinism, it is necessary to analyze four general principles involved in the discussion of free will and determinism:

1. **The Principle of Universal Causation:** This states that every event has a cause. In other words, if "X causes Y" is true, then X and Y are events; X precedes Y; and if X happens, Y has to happen.
2. **The Free Will Thesis:** This states that sometimes people act freely.
3. **The Principle of Avoidability and Freedom:** If a person acts freely, then he could have done something other than what he in fact did. Yet, if no one could have done anything other than what he in fact did, then no one ever acts freely.
4. **The Auxiliary Principle:** This asserts that if every event has a cause, then no one could have done anything other than what he in fact did.

Therefore, if sometimes a person could have done something other than what he in fact did, then some events are uncaused.

Though all four principles initially appear to be intuitively plausible and a case can be made for believing each, it is ultimately apparent that they are incompatible with one another. In other words, not all principles can be true. Much philosophical debate has subsequently been dedicated to determining which of these principles are true and which are false.

Hard determinism responds to this incompatibility of the principles by accepting the principle of universal causation, the principle of avoidability and freedom, and the auxiliary principle as true and rejecting the free will thesis as false:

- **Premise 1:** Every event has a cause (principle of universal causation).
- **Premise 2:** If every event has a cause, then no one could have done anything other than what he in fact did (auxiliary principle, part one).
- **Premise 3:** If no one could have done anything other than what he in fact did, then no one ever acts freely (principle of avoidability and freedom, part two).
- Therefore, no one ever acts freely (denial of free will theory).

Premise 1 is the thesis of determinism: Every event is subject to the law of causality. The rationale for this premise is its appeal to common sense; it seems impossible to even imagine what it would mean for an event to be "uncaused." Premise 2 defines causality: If an event is caused, then it must happen. If it must happen, then nothing else could have happened instead. Premise 3 simply expresses what

is meant by "free." Surely if an act must occur, the person committing the act has no choice and is thus not acting freely.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST HARD DETERMINISM

Following are several angles used to try to disprove hard determinism.

Argument from Choice

One argument against hard determinism is the "argument from choice." It is stated as such:

- **Premise 1:** Sometimes we do what we choose to do.
- **Premise 2:** If sometimes we do what we choose to do, then sometimes we are acting freely.
- **Premise 3:** If sometimes we are acting freely, then hard determinism is false.
- Therefore, hard determinism is false.

Premise 1 defines choice as a decision or mental event, and its rationale is simple observation; we see people making choices every day. For example, people choose what clothes to wear, what food to eat, what time to wake up, etc. Premise 2 defines "acting freely" as choosing what we do. If someone chooses to do something, the fact that he is making a choice means that he is acting freely. Premise 3 is the negation of hard determinism.

Because the "argument from choice" is a valid argument, it seems at first to be a solid objection to hard determinism. Further analysis of

its definition of acting freely, however, demonstrates the argument to be unsound. Because the "argument from choice" does not deny that events are caused, each assertion that it makes is subject to the laws of causality. With this in mind, it becomes clear that the main problem with the argument is its leap from the first premise to the second.

Though people do, indeed, make what appear to be choices about various aspects of their lives, it does not follow that they are acting freely. A choice is a caused event. Therefore, a person's choice to act in some way is not, itself, the sole or first cause of that action; it is, rather, the last event in a set of conditions that causes the action. A person may choose to wear a red shirt, but his choice to do so is, itself, causally determined. Though the causes for a person's choice are "internal and invisible" and sometimes unknown, they do very much exist. A person's brain had to react in exactly the way it reacted because the choice it made was a determined event. According to philosopher Paul Réé, the person chooses to wear a red shirt because of "causes whose historical development could be traced back ad infinitum." Even if a person thinks he could have done otherwise, it is only under a different, though perhaps very slightly different, set of conditions or causes that he could have acted in a different manner. Therefore, because a choice is a caused event, it is predetermined and must happen. Because the choice must happen, it is not an act of free will.

Argument from Drive Resistance

A second argument against hard determinism is the "argument from drive resistance." It is stated as such:

- **Premise 1:** Sometimes we resist our passions.
- **Premise 2:** If sometimes we resist our passions, then sometimes we are acting freely.

- **Premise 3:** If sometimes we are acting freely, then hard determinism is false.
- Therefore, hard determinism is false.

Premise 1 is a simple observation; people have passions or desires to, for example, commit murder, engage in adultery, or drive recklessly. People, however, are able to prevent themselves from engaging in such activities. Premise 2 gives a definition of "acting freely." A person acts freely if he is able to choose to act in a way that does not yield to passions. This premise suggests that by resisting passions, people are able to avoid the infinite number of historical causes and to ultimately act freely. Premise 3 is the negation of hard determinism.

Like the "argument from choice," the "argument from drive resistance" does not deny that every event has a cause and for this reason is valid but unsound. The strongest objection to this argument is to deny Premise 2; though people are able to resist their passions, it does not follow that they are acting freely. For example, a person may resist the desire to commit murder. However, just as committing a murder has a cause, so too does *not* committing a murder. The person may resist the desire to murder because another desire, such as not wanting to be punished for his actions, pitying the fate of his victim, etc., causes him to do so. A person can never resist all of his drives. By the definition of *free will* given by the "argument from drive resistance," therefore, a person is never acting freely. Additionally, resistance is equally subject to the laws of causality. It is not merely the cause of not murdering; it is an event and thus the effect of some other cause. If a person happens to resist committing murder, he was predetermined to resist committing murder and could not have acted in any other way. Ultimately, resisting one's drives does not free a person from the laws of causality.

Argument from Moral Responsibility

The third argument against hard determinism is the "argument from moral responsibility." It is stated as such:

- **Premise 1:** Sometimes we are morally responsible for our actions.
- **Premise 2:** If sometimes we are morally responsible for our actions, then sometimes we are acting freely.
- **Premise 3:** If sometimes we are acting freely, then hard determinism is false.
- Therefore, hard determinism is false.

The argument defines moral responsibility in this way: X is morally responsible for action A if X deserves praise or blame for doing A. Premise 1 is a simple observation; it appeals to our common sense that if a person commits murder, he should be blamed and punished. If, on the other hand, a person saves another person's life, he should be praised for doing so. Premise 2 defines "acting freely." If people deserve praise or blame for an action, it is only rational that they must have freely chosen to act in the way that they did. For, if they had not acted freely, then they would not be praised or blamed. Premise 3 is a negation of hard determinism.

The "argument from moral responsibility," like the two arguments before it, is valid yet unsound. It presupposes that to "deserve" praise or blame for an action, a person must be the only cause of that action. In other words, a person does not "deserve" praise if he is forced into (by the cause) an act of kindness and does not "deserve" blame if he is forced into an act of cruelty. However, because this argument accepts that events are caused, it must also accept that actions that seem to deserve praise or blame are, themselves, caused events; a person cannot be the sole cause of an event.

The main problem with this argument, therefore, is its first premise; though there are circumstances under which it may seem logical to praise or blame a person, it is actually not the case that a person is ever actually morally responsible for his actions. If a person commits murder, he had no choice but to commit murder. The murder was a caused event and had to happen. If the murderer had to happen, then the murderer does not deserve praise or blame for his action. To argue in favor of moral responsibility, therefore, would be to claim that some events are uncaused, a notion that goes against our common sense.

Many philosophers have responded to the rejection of Premise 1 by highlighting the implications it has for our current justice system. If we are to deny that moral responsibility exists, they say, then we have no justification for punishment and we must, therefore, abolish the use of any prison or detention center. A hard determinist would see this conclusion as rash; though moral responsibility may not exist, there are certainly other deserving justifications for punishment. For instance, the prison system can serve as a safety precaution, a violence deterrent, a center for rehabilitation, or to satisfy victim grievances. The very fact that events are caused allows for the belief that prisons may well be the cause of a reduction in violence. The desire not to be punished could be an event in a set of conditions that prevents a person from killing another person.

Hard determinism asserts that nothing happens without a cause, that no act is free from the law of causality. Though there are many arguments against this theory, they ultimately fail to disprove hard determinism.