

# HOBART'S SOFT DETERMINISM

Ted Sider  
Intro Metaphysics

## 1. Soft Determinism

Soft determinists accept both free will and determinism. Thus they accept:

**Compatibilism** It is possible to have free will even if determinism is true

Compatibilists think that the belief that freedom and determinism are incompatible is based on a misunderstanding of the concept of freedom. But what, then, is the right understanding of that concept?

## 2. The conditional analysis

One compatibilist idea is this:

**The conditional analysis** A person does an act freely if and only if, although she did do the act, if she had chosen not to do it then she wouldn't have done it.

Chisholm's objection: what if I'm not free to choose as I wish?

## 3. Hobart's Soft Determinism

We have here one of the most remarkable and instructive examples of something in which the history of philosophy abounds — of a persistent, an age-long deadlock due solely to the indisposition of the human mind to look closely into the meaning of its terms. (Hobart, p. 422)

## 4. Hobart's definition of 'freedom'

There is a series, wish – will – act. The act follows according to the will (that is a law—I do not mean an underived law) and the will follows according to the wish (that is another law). A man has the power (sometimes) to act as he wishes. (p. 425)

**Definition of ‘power’** A person has the *power* to do something if and only if it is a law of nature that if the person desires to do that thing, she will do it

**Definition of ‘free’** A person is *free* to do something if and only if the person has the power to do it, and nothing interferes with this power

## 5. Eddington’s objection from insignificance

What significance is there in my mental struggle to-night whether I shall or shall not give up smoking, if the laws which govern the matter of the physical universe already pre-ordain for the morrow a configuration of matter consisting of pipe, tobacco, and smoke connected with my lips? (Eddington, quoted in Hobart pp. 429–30)

1. Actions that are free in the ordinary sense are significant.
2. Actions that are free in Hobart’s sense are determined before the person was born.
3. Actions determined before the birth of the person are insignificant.
4. Therefore, actions that are free in Hobart’s sense aren’t free in the ordinary sense.

Hobart’s reply:

Determinism says that my morrow is determined through my struggle. There is this significance in my mental effort, that it is deciding the event. The stream of causation runs through my deliberations and decision, and, if it did not run as it does run, the event would be different. (Hobart, p. 430)

## 6. The objection from no-responsibility

But how, it is asked, can I be responsible for what I will if a long train of past causes has made me will it.... Is it not these causes that are ‘responsible’ for my act...? (Hobart, p. 431)

1. We are responsible for our actions that are free in the ordinary sense
2. If one event is a sufficient cause for an action, then responsibility for that action cannot be located anywhere other than that event
3. Actions that are free in Hobart's sense are caused by events in the distant past
4. If 2 and 3 are true, then we are not responsible for our actions that are free in Hobart's sense
5. Therefore, actions that are free in Hobart's sense aren't free in the ordinary sense

Hobart's reply:

The parent past produced the man, none the less the man is responsible for his acts. We can truly say that the earth bears apples, but quite as truly that trees bear apples. The earth bears the apples by bearing trees....

A man is a being with free will and responsibility; where this being came from, I repeat, is another story. The past finished its functions in the business when it generated him as he is. So far from interfering with him and coercing him the past does not even exist. If we could imagine it as lingering on into the present, standing over against him and stretching out a ghostly hand to stay his arm, then indeed the past would be interfering with his liberty and responsibility. But so long as it and he are never on the scene together they cannot wrestle; the past cannot overpower him. The whole alarm is an evil dream, a nightmare due to the indigestion of words. The past has created, and left extant, a free-willed being. (Hobart, p. 43<sup>1-2</sup>)

## **7. Problematic notion of interference**

## **8. Freedom to act and freedom to choose**

1. If Hobart's theory is true, then one can be free to do something even if one isn't free to desire to do it
2. But this is not possible
3. Therefore, Hobart's theory is not true