

# HARD DETERMINISM

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Intro Metaphysics

Man's life is a line that nature commands him to describe upon the surface of the earth, without his ever being able to swerve from it, even for an instant. He is born without his own consent; his organization does in nowise depend upon himself; his ideas come to him involuntarily; his habits are in the power of those who cause him to contract them; he is unceasingly modified by causes, whether visible or concealed, over which he has no control, which necessarily regulate his mode of existence, give the hue to his way of thinking, and determine his manner of acting... Nevertheless, in spite of the shackles by which he is bound, it is pretended he is a free agent... (Holbach, *MBQ*, p. 414)

The will is necessarily determined by the qualities, good or bad, agreeable or painful, of the object or the motive that acts upon his senses... his action is the result of the impulse he receives either from the motive, from the object, or from the idea which has modified his brain, or disposed his will. When he does not act according to this impulse, it is because there comes some new cause, some new motive, some new idea, which modifies his brain in a different manner... (Holbach, p. 414)

The virtuous Socrates submitted to the laws of his country, although they were unjust; and though the doors of his jail were left open to him, he would not save himself; but in this he did not act as a free agent: the invisible chains of opinion, the secret love of decorum, the inward respect for the laws, even when they were iniquitous, the fear of tarnishing his glory, kept him in his prison; they were motives sufficiently powerful with this enthusiast for virtue, to induce him to wait death with tranquility; it was not in his power to save himself, because he could find no potential motive to bring him to depart, even for an instant, from those principles to which his mind was accustomed. (Holbach, pp. 417–18)

## 1. Argument from choice

But I can, after all, break through the network of thoughts, sensations, and impressions that surrounds me by resolutely saying "I will not commit murder!" (Reé, 1973, p. 16)

If when tormented with violent thirst, he figures to himself in idea, or really perceives, a fountain, whose limpid streams might cool his feverish want, is he sufficient master of himself to desire or not to desire the object competent to satisfy so lively a want? ... it will be said—if at this moment it is announced to him that the water he so ardently desires is poisoned, he will, notwithstanding his vehement thirst, abstain from drinking it... (Holbach, p. 415)

1. Sometimes people make difficult choices
2. When someone makes a difficult choice, that choice is uncaused
3. If someone makes an uncaused choice then determinism is false
4. If determinism is false then hard determinism is false
5. Therefore, hard determinism is false

...his education, the examples set before him, the ideas with which he has been inspired in early life, [have] been suitable to make him contract this habit of repressing his desires... (Holbach, p. 416)

## 2. Argument from indifference

...it will, perhaps be insisted upon with no small feeling of triumph, that if it be proposed to any one, to move or not to move his hand, an action in the number of those called indifferent, he evidently appears to be the master of choosing; from which it is concluded that evidence has been offered of free agency. (Holbach, p. 416)

Call a range of options *indifferent* if they're tied with respect to everything we care about. Here's how we might formulate the argument:

1. Sometimes we choose from indifferent options
2. Any choice from indifferent options would be uncaused
3. If we sometimes make an uncaused choice, then determinism is false
4. If determinism is false then hard determinism is false
5. Therefore, hard determinism is false

### 3. Argument from morality

Suppose, however, that someone's attention is directed to the fact that the will is not free. At first it will be very difficult to make this plausible to him. His volition is suspended from threads that are too nearly invisible, and that is why he comes to think that it is not causally determined at all. At last, however—so we shall assume—he does come to recognize that actions are effects, that their causes are thoughts and impressions, that these must likewise be viewed as effects, and so on. How will he then judge these actions? Will he continue to maintain that murder is to be punished by *reprisal* and that benevolent actions are to be considered *meritorious*? By no means. Rather, the first conclusion that he will—validly—draw from his newly acquired insight is that we cannot hold anyone responsible. (Reé, 1973, pp. 22–3)

1. Sometimes we are morally responsible for what we do.
2. Anyone who is morally responsible for what she does acts freely
3. If we sometimes act freely then the free will thesis is true
4. If the free will thesis is true then hard determinism is false
5. Therefore, hard determinism is false

### References

Reé, Paul (1973). "Determinism and the Illusion of Moral Responsibility." In Paul Edwards and Arthur Pap (eds.), *A Modern Introduction to Philosophy*, 3rd edition, 10–27. New York: The Free Press. Originally published in 1885.