

# HOBART'S SOFT DETERMINISM

Ted Sider, Metaphysics

... To say that the will is not free means that it is subject to the law of causality. (Rée, p. 10)

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. 345)

## 1. FREE WILL REQUIRES DETERMINISM

How do we reproach ourselves? We say to ourselves, 'How negligent of me!', 'How thoughtless', ... In other words, we are attributing to ourselves at the time of the act, in some respect and measure, a bad character... What the indeterminist prizes ... is precisely what he denies, namely, that I, the concrete and specific moral being, am the author, the source of my acts. For, of course, that is determinism. To say that they come from the self is to say that they are determined by the self... (Hobart, p. 345)

### *Hobart's argument against libertarianism*

- (i) A free action must be caused by its agent's character
- (ii) If a free action must be caused by its agent's character then libertarianism is false
- (iii) Therefore, libertarianism is false

When [the libertarian] maintains that the self at the moment of decision may act to some extent independently of motives, *and is good or bad according as it acts in this direction or that*, he is simply setting up one character within another, he is separating the self from what he understands by the person's character ... If in conceiving the self you detach it from all motives or tendencies, what you have is not a morally admirable or condemnable, not a morally characterizable self at all. Hence it is not subject to reproach. You cannot call a self good because of its courageous free action, and then deny that its action was determined by its character. (Hobart, p. 345)

## 2. SOFT DETERMINISM VS. COMPATIBILISM

**Soft determinism:** Determinism and free will *in fact* coexist

**Compatibilism:** It is *possible* for determinism and free will to coexist

### 3. THE BASIC IDEA OF SOFT DETERMINISM

Examples of conceptual confusion:

- “It’s part of the definition of ‘man’ that men never cry”
- “It’s part of the definition of ‘contact’ that objects in contact have no space between them”

### 4. HOBART’S DEFINITION OF ‘FREEDOM’

A person, S, has the **power** to do F =<sub>df</sub> it is a law of nature that if S definitively desires to do F, S will do F

A person, S, is **free** to do F =<sub>df</sub> S has the power to do F, 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, p. 353)

- (i) Freedom, in the ordinary sense, is significant
- (ii) When a person makes a free choice in Hobart’s sense, the outcome was determined before that person was born
- (iii) If (ii) is true, then freedom, in Hobart’s sense, is insignificant
- (iv) Therefore, freedom, in Hobart’s sense, is not the same as freedom, in the ordinary sense

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. 353)

### 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. 354)

- (i) Freedom, in the ordinary sense, implies responsibility
- (ii) If one thing is a sufficient cause for an outcome, then nothing else can be responsible for that outcome
- (iii) When a person makes a free choice in Hobart's sense, there exists a sufficient cause other than that person — namely, an event in the past — for the outcome
- (iv) If (ii) and (iii) are true, then freedom, in Hobart's sense, does not imply responsibility
- (v) Therefore, freedom, in Hobart's sense, is not the same as freedom, in the ordinary sense

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. 355)

## 7. PROBLEMATIC NOTION OF “INTERFERENCE”

## 8. FREEDOM TO ACT AND FREEDOM TO CHOOSE

- (i) If Hobart's theory is true, then it is possible to be free to do something, F, even if one is not free to desire to do F
- (ii) But this is not possible
- (iii) Therefore, Hobart's theory is not true