

Free Will

When I decide to do something, such as have a drink of water, a cup of tea or nothing at all - I feel that I am freely choosing how I will act. If I wish to stand up or move my arm, I am free to do so. If someone strapped my arm behind my back very tightly, chances are I would not be able to move it. In this case, there is an obstacle or impediment preventing me from moving my arm. When there are no impediments and my arm is in good health, I can choose to move it and move it when I wish.

If, on the other hand I did not wish to move my arm, but someone held my arm and forcibly moved it, I would have done something I had not chosen. But again, this was a result of an impediment to my wishes. My freedom to keep my arm still was forcibly taken from me and does not negate the fact that I have free will. In fact, by seeing the difference between the actions I choose and those that are forced on me, we can see that freely chosen actions are different from those we did not choose.

What is Free Will?

Free Will is the ability to freely choose my actions and carry them out. Free Will implies that I am responsible for my actions. Because I chose them and carried them out, I am accountable for them. If I had not chosen them and they were forced on me, I would not be responsible for them and could not be held accountable for them. I could not, therefore, be punished or rewarded for them. Whether or not I have free will is thus an important question for both the moral development of human beings and for lawmakers and the justice system.

Free Will includes being free to carry out actions in the absence of impediments. Free Will is a metaphysical concept, as it presupposes certain metaphysical conditions. I am not, for example, free to fly unaided to the moon. The physical nature of my being, and of the conditions in space prevent this. On the other hand, I am metaphysically free to stand on one leg. Having free will does not equate with being free to do anything at all. It means being able to do what is metaphysically possible in the absence of preventative conditions. Free Will is not universally accepted.

Hard Determinism

Hard Determinism holds that human actions are not governed by free will. We are, in fact, determined to do what we do due to prior conditions. Given the circumstances we were in, we could not do otherwise than what we do. The idea that we freely choose an action is an illusion. When I think I act freely, such as by writing this article, I am in fact responding to the prior conditions of my life that have led me to this point, and right now, could not do otherwise than what I am doing. On this view, Free Will is said to be incompatible with Determinism. I am either free to choose my actions or I am determined to do them (i.e. could not do otherwise) but not both.

Soft Determinism

Soft Determinism is the view that I do cause my own actions, but they are nevertheless determined by prior conditions. My behaviour is caused by my internal states. My behaviour is 'free' as long as it is not impeded or prevented by external means. On this view, Free does not mean 'uncaused', but rather, not prevented. Soft Determinism attempts to reconcile **Freedom** and **Determinism**. My behaviour is causally determined but is free because the causes of my behaviour are my internal states and free choices. While what I do is caused by my choices, it is free in that I could have chosen otherwise, but only if my internal states had been otherwise. I am responsible for my behaviour because I have chosen to do it. Rewards and punishments are therefore appropriate. **Soft Determinism** is also called **Compatibilism**. There are also other views on Free Will. What is yours?