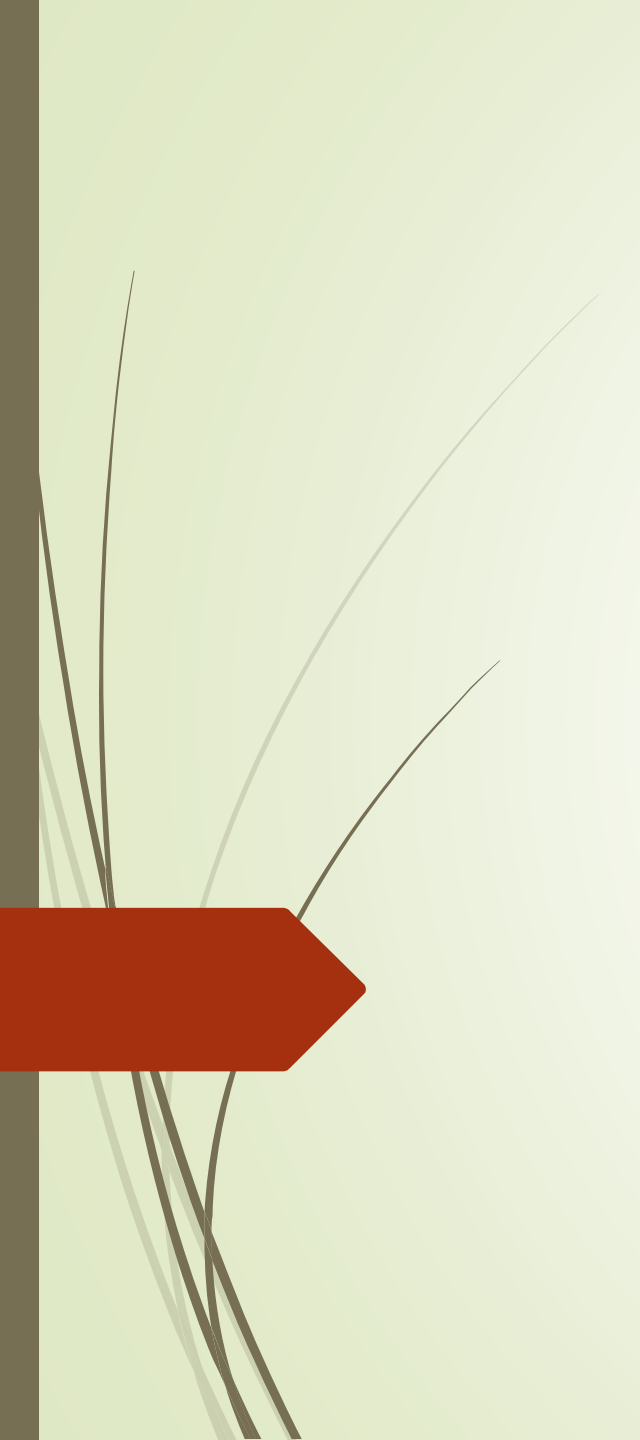




Does our inability to
control absolutely what
kind of person we are
mean we lack free will?

The idea of “Free Will”

The Cambridge dictionary’s definition of Free Will goes: “the ability to decide what to do independently of any outside influences”.

There are three main stances on the idea of Free Will and whether we actually possess it:

- Hard Determinism
- Compatibilism/Soft Determinism
- Indeterminism/Libertarianism

Each of the three stances vary from each other in their beliefs on whether there is such a thing as free will, or whether every action we undertake throughout our lifetimes was an inevitability.

Hard Determinism (Incompatibilism)

- Hard Determinism is a form of incompatibilism, similar to how Indeterminism is another form of it. Incompatibilism is that the idea of Free Will is false, because it goes against the Hard-Deterministic view that everything is already pre-planned out (which when switched around makes up the Indeterminist view, that Free Will is the true), meaning free will does nothing to affect the choices and actions we undertake. This is the most unhelpful of the three stances because it can be argued as a way of never needing to accept responsibility for the actions which we undertake. By claiming that all actions are planned out ahead of us and that there is no way of diverting from said action, it removes any moral responsibility which a person may have in a situation; it also removes the need or feeling of guilt about a situation because there was no way of avoiding the inevitability of any situation.
- The Hard Determinism idea is flawed because there is no feasible way that every event that happens to and around us throughout our whole life is inevitable. The idea that we are all on a predestined course can't be proven because the consequences of one action can never be known until they are already in motion, as many decisions have the ability to go wrong in different ways because there are factors which are beyond any control which may affect them. For the Hard Determinist view to work, every factor which makes up an event must act perfectly according to the supposed course that it is on, there is no room for any interruptions, otherwise the future would need to be altered to what it once was. If the course were to be altered, it would contradict the idea of a pre-planned course of events.

Compatibilism/Soft Determinism

- Soft Determinism holds the view that, just like with Hard Determinism, all events and actions which individuals undertake are a part of a pre-planned course we are on. However, it differs because of the belief that despite the course being already laid out, humans do still possess free will to some degree, making it a Compatibilism idea because both aspects are believed to be able to be compatible with one another. This theory, however, is inherently flawed as it contradicts itself. The idea that everything can be already laid out for us to follow cannot work alongside the idea that we have free will. The pre-planned aspect of the idea is that we cannot stray from the direct course and that there is only ever going to be one course of action which an individual can take, as Hard Determinism points out; the addition of free will into this does not work, as the actions are meant to be inevitable, so the ability to choose another option does not work. Doing so would alter the course due to the different consequences of a different action, and therefore change the future which was meant to be inevitable and already set out. Soft Determinism is a too flawed of a theory to be taken seriously in the debate over whether we have free will.

Indeterminism/Libertarianism (Incompatibilism)

- Philosopher Peter Van Inwagen follows the belief that “human beings (and possibly other animals), faced with choices between two or more mutually incompatible courses of action, frequently have it in their power (or can) carry out each of them.”
- The idea of Libertarianism holds no similarities to the deterministic views on free will. The Libertarian belief is that we, as humans do possess free will and it is that which helps to shape our lives, as nothing is an inevitability.
- The earliest form of Libertarianism came from Epicurus, who believed that atoms move because of weight and collisions with other atoms, but are capable of spontaneous changes of direction; these unknown changes are what is thought to make world indeterministic.
- This is the most agreeable of the three stances, as it makes clear that actions which are undertaken by an individual are not the product of a predestined event, but are entirely of the individual's choice. This stops the ability for people to place blame for their actions onto anything other than themselves. In Libertarianism, if someone kills another person, they will be given the blame for the action; whereas in Hard Determinism, it would be argued that there could be no blame placed onto that individual, as the action was not one of their own choice, but rather something that they were always going to do. Libertarianism upholds the moral responsibility which the other stances reduces or takes away.

The inability to control who we are

- The choices we make are decided by a combination of the situation and our own personalities. Personalities are made up throughout our whole lives; they can change as we mature and experience different things. We are, in some ways, unable to control who we are as a person because of the external factors which affect us and change our outlooks or opinions on things; however, in other ways we can control who we are as people by picking what external factors we let change us, to what extent they affect us and how they do that.

Conclusion

- The inability to control absolutely who we are as a person does not mean that we lack free will. Our free will is an extension of our minds and the choices we make are a product of who we are as a person. We change and mature with experience, meaning that we will never be able to completely control who we are as a person, because we cannot control everything that we will encounter or how said event will affect us. The changes within ourselves are what help us to make decisions with our free will.
- If we didn't change as people, we could continue to make the same choices over and over again, whether they are good ones or bad. The fact that we are always changing as people helps us, because we can use it the growth and change to make better decisions about situations, more rational ones rather than anything that may be impulsive or affect us negatively. The fact that we are unable to control absolutely what type of person we are does not mean we lack free will.

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