

Hard determinism vs. soft determinism essay sample



Determinism is the idea that occurrences in our life have already been determined and are a result of another element in the universe (cause and effect) and every occurrence can be traced back to the original state of the universe therefore nothing is random. Indeterminism, is essentially the opposite of determinism, humans have the free will to do as they please therefore nothing is predetermined. Now assuming one does hold the deterministic approach to their metaphysical beliefs, there are two different beliefs within determinism: hard determinism (HD) and soft determinism (SD). As the name suggests hard determinism is determinism at the literal level. People who are hard determinists believe in determinism (our lives are pre determined, no random events). Initially, soft determinism seemed to be similar to HD, however the difference between the two is relevant when looking into the subject. Soft determinists believe that our actions are both determined and governed by free will, hence the name “ soft” determinists. Many philosophers reject the idea of hard determinism for a variety of reasons: out dated scientific evidence, fallacies within logic, no counter example, leading many to side with the idea of soft determinism. If one believes in determinism, soft determinism is the only logical way to justify determinism.

To have a good grasp of what soft determinism is, it's important to understand what constitutes freedom, or an act of free will. “ Freedom is capability + desire” (Sandra LaFave, 6). Basically freedom is doing what you want, 17th century philosopher David Hume believed in soft determinism and has choice words when it comes to freedom and determinism “ a person's action is free if, and only if, had the person wanted to do otherwise

than the act, the person would have had the power to do otherwise than the act." This statement from Humes conforms to the idea of determinism however touches on what constitutes a free act and an unfree act.

For example, if you are stuck in an elevator it is simply not in your power to leave, therefore you must stay. Applying Hume's theory of freedom to John Locke's locked room theory in which you deliberate whether or not you want to leave the room or not, in the end you decide to stay in the room. Now suppose the room was locked from the outside. Applying Humes view you are not free because you do not have the power to leave. Assuming your intuition was genuine and you wanted to stay in the room, then Hume's condition of freedom is unnecessary because one can be free without "having the power to do otherwise than the act". To satisfy Humes definition of freedom, philosophers use kleptomaniacs as an example. They could possibly steal because they desire to, therefore if a kleptomaniac stopped stealing (was cured), they would refrain from stealing. However, this example is invalid because to assume stealing is a free act to a kleptomaniac is implausible therefore, Humes definition insufficiently explains freedom because it allows unfree actions to count as free actions.

A 19th century philosopher AJ Ayer also shared the same views as Humes about freedom. His definition of freedom was slightly different; he believed freedom is "consciousness of necessity". Ayer states that you could change the definition of "free" to support an otherwise undeterministic world; therefore we need a definition of free that is consistent with determinism.

With this knowledge Ayer then goes on to state this about freedom "someone is free just in case, if they chose to do otherwise, they would have".
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If our actions are dictated by our past and the laws of nature then you will make a particular choice but if you make that choice, it is true if you wanted to make a different choice you would have made that choice.

To put it plainly the hard determinists view is flawed and out dated. Very few philosophers believe in this theory and the ones that do believe it are thought to be ignorant. One of the biggest flaws of HD is the conclusion of the theory " no acts are free". As I stated in my first paragraph this is an unfalsifiable statement, there are no counter examples to this argument. For example, to say a tree is constructed of little pieces of invisible grass is an unfalsifiable statement, the grass is described in a way you cannot refute its existence in a tree, therefore the argument cannot be disproved but if it cannot be disproved why believe it?

Another important argument against HD that was also mentioned in the first paragraph is that HD is supported by out dated misconceptions of casual scientific laws. The 18th century casual laws that HD is supported by do not account for the contrary compared to today's modern scientific laws. Modern scientific laws always account for the contrary and consider probabilities and statistics more compared to the 18th century. In correlation to this, HD does not consider the possibility of a truly chaotic or random event (flipping a coin, natural disaster, etc)

Not everybody may believe in determinism, however if you do the majority of people believe in soft determinism because it is logical and contains virtually no flaws in its arguments besides the idea of intuition and how you perceive a situation. Believing in HD is detrimental to society as you can

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blame your actions on the laws of nature and your past which is invalid. SD considers free will and is the more rational way of thinking about determinism.

“ Free will & Determinism.” Scandalon. 18 Dec. 2012.