

Can free will and determination coexist? Some philosophers, such as Thomas Hobbes have argued that the two can not coexist because of environment in which one lives. However, if one closely examines the arguments for the compatibility of free will and determinism the association is striking. The articles of soft determination lend themselves to the coexistence of free will and determinism in the individual. Therefore, an argument could easily be made that free will and determinism are compatible with each other and can coexist even if the environment the individual is living in does not allow the existence of either.

Free will is the ability to act freely. Put simply, free will is the ability to act as one wishes. In order to perform an action two events have to take place. One of these events is that of freely thinking and deciding of an action to take, without any interference from the external world. The second event that must take place is the actual action itself, again without any interference from the outside world. Interference or external forces would be something like another person or force stopping an action or thought from taking place. Hence, interfering with the free will of the individual.

Determinism has many aspects and theories; however, the theory that relates most to the compatibility of free will is that of soft determinism. Soft determination is “the doctrine that determined actions can nevertheless be free” (Schick, 189). Determinism, consequently, can be stated as the ability to freely determine a given action or choice. In other words, determinism is the ability to make free actions.

While these two concepts may appear to stand alone, the case has not always been so. Traditional compatibilities, like Thomas Hobbes, point to the existence of superseding external pressures or forces that would almost certainly prevent a truly free

thought, which would then negate the compatibility of free will and determinism. The argument made by traditionalist is that if there is no action that could be performed due to some kind of external pressure, such as a law, then the individual that is thinking is not completely free. For example, if one were forced by another person to shoot a rifle and kill another person (as is the example given on page 192), then neither aspect of compatibility is true.

This example might very well be true; yet, it is important for one to remember that events had to transpire for one to be in that situation. What caused those events to transpire? Did the person who was forcing the other person with the rifle to kill the other person in complete control over both individuals lives? Clearly this could not be true, for if this were the case it would be easy for one person to move others around as one wished. Moreover, it is important to remember that there will never be a time when an individual is completely free in any society because the individual gives up certain freedoms to be a part of that society. Even Hobbes would admit to that truth, insofar as logically in a society there would be law and order to protect the members of that society. Thus, total freedom is not possible with the existence of a society of any kind.

Consider the concepts of free will and determinism. Free will is the ability to make an action freely. Determinism is the ability to determine an action and then bring about its cause or act freely upon that desire. To say that they two can not coexist defies logic, in that they are so similar that if there is a free action then both free will and determinism are existent in the action. Even Hobbes would agree that if an action were to be performed freely, without some kind of external pressure or force, then both free will and determinism would have to be existent, hence fulfilling the premises of

traditional compatibility. For example, consider an average citizen in the former Soviet Union, and that this individual is sitting at a table and has a bowl of soup with a slice of bread and a cup of water for dinner. That individual has free will and determination over how to eat that meal. Thus, traditional compatibility would exist because of the free will and determinism of the individual to eat the meal as they please. Whether that person wanted steak instead of soup, or beer instead of water does not matter in that for the premises of traditional compatibility to be met for the actual eating of the meal itself. This example proves the coexistence of free will and determinism.

Traditional compatibility philosophers such as Hobbes assert that one must live in a completely free society in order to experience the coexistence of free will and determinism. Yet, no such society has ever existed. More importantly, free will and determinism do not have to be massive events that take place, such as deciding where to begin eating a meal. Thus, through the doctrine of soft determinism both free will and determinism can coexist.