which will make it go better, namely oil in the works. The punishment for the man, the fertilizer for the plant, and the oil for the car, are all justified by the same principle and in the same way. The only difference is that different kinds of things require different kinds of causes to make them do what they should. Pain may be the appropriate remedy to apply, in certain cases, to human beings, and oil to the machine. It is, of course, of no use to inject motor oil into the boy or to beat the machine.

Thus we see that moral responsibility is not only consistent with determinism, but requires it. The assumption on which punishment is based is that human behavior is causally determined. If pain could not be a cause of truth-telling, there would be no justification at all for punishing lies. If human actions and volitions were uncaused, it would be useless either to punish or reward, or indeed to do anything else to correct people’s bad behavior. For nothing that you could do would in any way influence them. Thus moral responsibility would entirely disappear. If there were no determinism of human beings at all, their actions would be completely unpredictable and capricious, and therefore irresponsible. And this is in itself a strong argument against the common view of philosophers that free will means being undetermined by causes.

NOTES

2. Mohandas (later called Mahatma) Gandhi (1869–1948) was an Indian nationalist leader. He sometimes fasted as a way to help achieve his objectives. [D. C. Abel]

READING 33

Firming Up Soft Determinism
Nancy Holmstrom

Nancy Holmstrom was born in 1943 in New York City. She received her bachelor’s degree in philosophy from City College of the City University of New York in 1964 and her doctorate in philosophy from the University of Michigan in 1970. She then accepted a position at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. In 1977 she joined the faculty at Rutgers State University in Newark, New Jersey, where she is Associate Professor of Philosophy. Holmstrom has held visiting professorships at the University of Illinois at Chicago (formerly called University of Illinois at Chicago Circle), the University of Hawaii at Hilo, and other schools. Since the 1960s Holmstrom has been active in radical movements and committed to social justice. She was a founding member of the Society for Women in Philosophy and of the Radical Philosophical Association.

Holmstrom’s involvement in political activity led to a gradual shift in her philosophical work from topics in the philosophy of mind and metaphysics to issues in political and
philosophy, especially feminist and Marxist theory. In addition to publishing a variety of articles on these topics, Holmstrom is coeditor (with Anatole Anton and Milton Fisk) of *Sale: In Defense of Public Goods* (2000) and editor of *Socialist Feminism: A Contrary Reader in Theory and Politics* (2003).

Her 1977 article, "Firming Up Soft Determinism," Holmstrom discusses soft determinism, the view that determinism is compatible with free will and moral responsibility. Holmstrom denies this compatibility. This theory (also called compatibilism) holds that all actions are determined by the causes, but it also holds that if a particular action is caused by the agent's beliefs and desires, the action is free and the agent is responsible for performing it. Holmstrom finds the determinist thesis that all actions are determined because they result from prior causes, but it also holds that if a particular action is caused by the agent's beliefs and desires, the action is free and the agent is responsible for performing it. Holmstrom finds that determinism as it stands, since it does not consider the sources of the agent's decisions, is inadequate as it stands, since it does not consider the sources of the agent's decisions. For example, an action resulting from desire induced by brainwashing or ifinal advertising is not free.

Holmstrom seeks to remedy this inadequacy in the theory of soft determinism by positing that an action is free only to the extent that the agent has control over the beliefs and desires that cause the performance of the action. Control need not be all or nothing; it is a matter of degree. Since we have at least some control over many of our beliefs and desires, many of our actions are free to some extent. "There is a continuum between free and unfree, with many or most acts lying somewhere in between." The degree of control is determined by the degree to which the source of our desire or belief does not operate against our will, and on the degree of our awareness that the source is operating on us. How and why it does so. After developing her views of freedom and control, Holmstrom reflects on how free most people are today.

Important position on the question of freedom and determinism holds that determinism and predictability per se constitute no threat to the freedom and responsibility of an agent. What matters, according to this view, called soft determinism, is the basis on which the prediction is made or the nature of the conditions such that, given those conditions, the agent will do what he/she does. In the agent does what he does because of his beliefs and desires to do it, what the agent does is "up to him"; the causal chain goes through the person, not the self, as it were. In such cases the agent can be said to be the cause of the action. Such actions are free. On the other hand, when the causes of an action, more generally, of what a person does, are not his/her beliefs and desires to do that action, then what happens is not "up to him" and the action is not. However, it may not be compelled either. It is where the action is in contrast to what the agent wants that the act can be said to be compelled. The person is not responsible for the action because the action occurs in spite of his. Among the objections that have been raised to this account of the distinction between free and unfree acts is that it provides an insufficient account of the freedom of one's allegedly free actions, that is, the sources of one's actions and desires. Many philosophers have felt that if an agent's beliefs and desires are them
actions that are not caused by the agent's beliefs and desires. For example, Richard Taylor bids us to suppose that
while my behavior is entirely in accordance with my own volitions, and thus "free" in terms of the conception of freedom we are examining, my volitions themselves are caused. To make this graphic, we can suppose that an ingenious physicist can induce in me any volition he pleases, simply by pushing various buttons on an instrument to which, let us suppose, I am attached by numerous wires. All the volitions I have in that situation are, accordingly, precisely the ones he gives me.

This is the description of a man who is acting in accordance with his inner volitions, a man whose body is unimpeded and unconstrained in its motions, these motions being the effects of those inner states. It is hardly the description of a free and responsible agent. It is the perfect description of a puppet.3

The same point can be made by examples of beliefs and desires acquired by brainwashing, hypnosis, subliminal advertising, and so on. If a person acts because of beliefs and desires acquired in such ways, the action is clearly not free even though the action was done because of the agent's beliefs and desires. This shows that it is not the case that an act is free just because it is caused by the beliefs and desires of the agent to do the act. The standard soft determinist position is inadequate as it stands.

One way of dealing with the objection might be to distinguish freedom of action and freedom of will and to maintain that the act was free but the will was not. However, I think such examples show that these concepts cannot be so easily separated. Because the "will" is unfree in such cases, we would not call the act free. Taylor thinks his point applies much more generally than just to these sorts of examples and concludes that the standard conception of determinism cannot apply to a free act. He introduces, instead, a special notion of "agent causality." I prefer to explore a response to the above objection that remains within the standard compatibilist framework.

I think that the objection I raised to soft determinism shows that soft determinists have too limited a notion of what is required for an agent to be the source of his/her actions. All that they require is that the agent do what he or she pleases. They ignore the question of whether the agent has control over the sources of the actions, his/her desires and beliefs. Taylor inferred that if the desires causing an action are themselves caused then the action is not free. This does not follow. Just because some causes of desires and beliefs, such as brainwashing, make actions resulting from them unfree, it does not follow that any cause of desires and beliefs has the same implications for the freedom of actions resulting from them.

Since the notion of having control is the heart of the notion of freedom for me, let me stop to clarify the concept briefly. If I have control over x then x depends on what I do or do not do. I am an important part of the causal process producing x, such that if I did something different x would be different. Moreover, I must be conscious of x's dependence on me in order for x to be under my control. Whether some insect lives or not depends on whether or not I step on him as I walk down the street. But if I do not know he is there his life is not under my control. So for x to be under my control what I do or do not do must be
an important part of the cause of $x$ and I must know this. $X$ therefore must depend on what I want or on my “will” in order for $x$ to be under my control. Now since one can make more or less of a difference, be more or less important a part of the causal process, it therefore follows that one can have more or less control over something. The more control a person has the freer that person is. Clearly, then, a person is not simply free or unfree. Nor is every action simply free or unfree. Rather, there is a continuum between free and unfree, with many or most acts lying somewhere in between. When I say that an act is free what I mean is that the act falls on the free side of the continuum. Or, since there is no line in the middle of a continuum, it might be clearer to say that a free act falls in the direction of the free end of the continuum. Acts are more or less free according to how close they are to the free end of the continuum.

What I want to argue in this paper is that people can have differing amounts of control over what they desire and what they believe. People can be more or less important a part of the causal process leading to their having the desires and beliefs that they do. Our discussion thus far shows that only if they have control over their beliefs and desires do they really have control over their actions. The key question, then, is whether this idea of having control over one's beliefs and desires makes any sense and whether in fact we do have such control. Many people would probably say that while what we do is often up to us, what we believe and desire depends on factors completely beyond our control. Speaking generally, it depends on the way the world is; more specifically, it depends on our biological and psychological natures, the society in which we live, and our particular portion of it (that is, our class, race, ethnic group, and so on). Others would object that it makes no sense to separate the person or self from his/her desires and beliefs, and hence makes no sense to talk of the person having control over his/her desires and beliefs. My major purpose in this paper will be to give substance to the idea that people can have control over the sources of their actions—that is, have control over their desires and beliefs.

If an agent can be said to be the source of his/her beliefs and desires, then it makes sense to say that the agent is a self-determining being. This is a concept that many have taken to be at the heart of freedom, whether they be determinists, indeterminists, or hold to the idea of “agent causality.” If we can give substance to this notion of a person having control over his desires and beliefs, we will have given substance to the notion of a self-determining being.

II

Before turning directly to the central task, I wish to raise another sort of counterexample to soft determinism. Some acts that are done because of the agent's desires and beliefs do them are nevertheless unfree, but for reasons other than the source of those desires and beliefs. However, we will see that these counterexamples do not challenge the fundamental thrust of soft determinism because the examples are all such that we have reason to say that the actions in the examples are not truly self-determined.
A heroin addict steals some money and uses it to buy heroin, which he then takes. It might be said that all three acts (stealing, buying the drug, and taking it) are done because of the addict’s desire to achieve a certain state and the belief that these are ways of achieving it. If we imagine that this addict does not want to be an addict, as is the case with most addicts, then these acts of his are crucially different from most acts done because of the agent’s beliefs and desires. While the addict wants the heroin he also wants to not take the drug. Moreover, he wants a great number of things which he believes to be incompatible with taking the drug—for example, health, self-respect, an ordinary life, and so on. These contrary desires, values, and beliefs are greater in number and also are part of an integrated whole. The desire to take the drug is not part of such an integrated whole, but nevertheless it outweighs all these contrary desires and beliefs. A kleptomaniac’s desire to steal would probably be similar. Most actions done because of the agent’s desires are not in conflict with a greater number of his/her integrated desires and beliefs. I think it is this factor which leads compatibilists to reject such cases as not really counterexamples to their analysis of a free act as one resulting from the wants of the agent. An act resulting from such a conflict does not seem to proceed from the self as a free act must: It occurs in spite of the person. Moritz Schlick says, “We consider the man to be more or less unfree, and hold him less accountable, because we rightly view the influence of the drug as ‘external,’ even though it is found within the body; it prevents him from making decisions in the manner peculiar to his nature.”

This integrated set of desires, beliefs and values might be said to constitute the person’s nature or self as it is at that time. Acts proceeding from desires that are external to this and yet dominant would seem to be unfree. There are certain exceptions to this, however, which we will discover as we progress.

III

I wish at this point to introduce the notion of a second order volition as discussed by Harry Frankfurt in “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person.” Someone has a volition of the second order when he wants to have a certain desire, and, moreover, wants that desire to be his effective desire—that is, his will, in Frankfurt’s terminology. The addict in our example may simply suffer from a conflict between the desire to take the drug and a number of contradictory or incompatible desires. However, he may, further, want that the latter desires be his effective desires. If so, then the addict’s desire to take the drug is in conflict not only with a greater number of integrated desires and beliefs, but with a second order volition as well. Yet it still determines the addict’s actions. By being in conflict with the will he wants to have, it is in conflict with the want with which he has thereby identified himself. Hence, when this desire determines action, the action is in sharp contrast to most acts done because of the agent’s beliefs and desires. Instead of being an act that depends on the agent, that is “up to him,” it happens against his will. This provides further grounds for saying that the act does not proceed from the self. Quite aside from the
nature of the desire that is in conflict with the second order volition in our example (that is, the desire to take heroin), it would seem plausible to take as a sufficient condition for making an act unfree that it proceed from beliefs and desires that are in conflict with a second order volition. A necessary condition, then, of a free act is that it proceed from desires and beliefs that are consistent with second order volitions. This should be seen as a development of the compatibilist account of a free act as one caused by the self, specifically the agent’s beliefs and desires.

IV

Consistency with an integrated set of beliefs and desires and with second order volitions is not sufficient for an act to be free. We saw at the outset that the source of the beliefs and desires causing an act is relevant to the freedom of that act. The sorts of examples which first showed us that the soft determinist position was unsatisfactory as thus far presented were examples of acts done because of beliefs and desires that seemed in some way to have been forced upon the agent. Whether the person acquired beliefs and desires (volitions or the reasons for doing what he/she does) by being hooked up to a machine someone else controls, or by being brainwashed or exposed to subliminal advertising, the following is true. The beliefs and desires were acquired by measures taken by others in order to induce them, which measures were taken either explicitly against the person’s will (brainwashing), and/or without his/her knowledge (subliminal advertising). (Taylor’s case could be either.) Being ignorant of the measures taken to induce the beliefs and desires, the person is as much lacking in control over them as if they were taken explicitly against his/her will. In both cases the person, as an active determining being, is irrelevant to what happens. He/she has no control, and — more importantly — no possibility of control over the beliefs and desires he/she acquires. Actions done because of beliefs and desires acquired under such conditions are not free.

Now is it really necessary that a person’s beliefs and desires be caused by other people in order for it to be the case that they were forced upon him/her? Although it was true of our original examples, I do not think it is a necessary condition. While it may sound odd to say they were the result of force or coercion where no persons were the cause, it can certainly be said that the desires were not acquired freely, or even that they were acquired under coercive conditions. The issue about causation of beliefs and desires that is crucial to the freedom of acts resulting from them is whether the person enters into the causal process as an active determinant. If the person does not, then the beliefs and desires were not acquired freely, and acts resulting from them are not free because not self-determined. If, on the contrary, the beliefs and desires are opposed to the person’s desires, first or second order, then acts resulting from them are unfree or compelled. All this can be true even though the causes of the beliefs and desires were not measures taken by others to induce them. Suppose that a person lives under conditions of economic scarcity, which entails that not everyone will get what he/she needs and wants. A consequence of a person getting
Reorder volition in our ex-
visions can seem plausible to take as a
result of desires and actions. A necessary condition, and beliefs that are consistent
with this, is that the desires are caused by
independent events, not by a subliminal
force.

V

Let us examine in some greater detail the conditions I have given under which
his desires could be said to have been acquired unfreely or coercively. It might be
to think that my conditions apply too widely and would make too many desires
unfreely acquired. For example, suppose a person has a
desire to hear Bach because her parents regularly played Bach records in
order to induce that desire. Her desire was acquired because of her parents’
efforts to induce the desire. Their efforts consisted of intensively exposing her to
the object they wished her to desire. If my conditions apply to such cases then
her parents going to a concert as an adult because she wants to hear Bach played would
be unfree — and this is an unattractive conclusion. However, my conditions do
not lead to this conclusion, because the conditions I set are not met in the
element. The child was not unaware of the causes of her later desire, which is what
my condition requires; in fact it was by being aware of the music that was
regularly played that she came to desire to hear it. Conceivably, but improbably, she
was unaware that hearing the music was the cause of her later desire or that her
parents regularly played it in order to produce that desire in her. However,
these are different conditions from the one I gave. In general, where the
measures taken to induce a desire simply amount to exposing a person to the object
in the hoped-for desire, this does not meet my conditions, because the person
cannot be unaware of the causes of the desire (although he/she may be unaware
that they are the causes).

I am inclined to think that my conditions as they stand thus far are in need of
revision in the other direction, that is, to make them apply more widely. Suppose
that what was done to induce the desire was not mere exposure to the object,
but rather conditioning. If they had conditioned her, the parents would
have accompanied the playing of the music with pleasurable stimuli and they
would have negatively reinforced any expressions of negative feeling toward
the music. If this had been done, the desire would be the result of more than the interrelation of the person and the object of the desire, as is the case when the desire for something comes into being because of exposure to it. A desire that is the result of conditioning is the result of pleasures and pains that accompany the object, but are external to the person, the object, and the relation between them. When a person acquires desires and aversions for things because of pleasures and pains that are intrinsic to those things, such as the pleasures of eating good food, the pains of overeating, then those desires and aversions are freely acquired. Where the pleasures and pains are external, the person (that is, his/her personality, reasoning capacities, and so on) is bypassed in the process. This should make the process coercive. However, as my conditions stand they do not give this result. The person could be aware of the elements of the conditioning process (the music, the accompanying pleasures and pains), though unaware of the connections between them, the purposes behind them, and their effect. She was aware of the measures taken and therefore, if it were not explicitly against her will, the conditioning would not be coercive according to what I have said about coercion thus far. I take this to indicate that something more must be said.

In the hopes of working out how conditioning differs from mere exposure, let us go back to the example of the person who acquired a desire to hear the music of Bach because of repeated exposure to his music as a child. Whether the exposure was the deliberate work of others, as in our example, or not, acquisition of a desire through exposure differs from clearly coercive ways of acquiring desires. When people acquire a desire through being acquainted with the object or experience, they have the possibility of coming to have that desire or not. Whether they do or not will depend on facts about them: their aptitudes, beliefs, personality, other desires, and so on. Where this is the case they can be said to have control, or at least the possibility of control, over the desires they acquire. Where, on the other hand, the causes of their beliefs and desires would exist and would effectively operate regardless of the fact that their personality, character, other beliefs and desires are opposed to these causes, then they obviously have no chance of controlling what beliefs and desires they come to have.

We can distinguish, then, between cases where people can have control over their beliefs and desires and those where they cannot. Knowledge is necessary in order that a person have this possibility of control. In the account I gave of when a person could be said to have freely acquired his/her desires, I only required that the person have knowledge of the causes (and also that they not be against the person’s will) in order that the causes not be coercive. Oftentimes, however, one needs to have more than simple knowledge of the causes. Conditioning is a case where the person being conditioned might know the causes, that is, might know the elements of the causal process, but might not know their interconnections or the purposes behind them. The person is acquainted with the causes but unaware that they are the causes or how and why they operate. If conditioning would operate regardless of whether a person knew the latter, then it is a causal process that the person cannot have any control over. Hence it is coercive.

Sometimes the efficacy of causal conditions depends on people’s ignorance of them, that they are or may be causes, and how and why they operate. In such
the result of more than the siren, as is the case when the exposure to it. A desire that is and pains that accompany it, and the relation between is for things because of pleasures as the pleasures of eating and aversions are freely, the person (that is, his/her passed in the process. This conditions stand they do not elements of the conditioning pains), though unaware of them, and their effect. She it were not explicitly against according to what I have said something more must be said. differs from mere exposure, acquired a desire to hear the music as a child. Whether the our example, or not, acquisitely coercive ways of acquiring being acquainted with the coming to have that desire or about them: their aptitudes, re this is the case they can be control, over the desires they their beliefs and desires would the fact that their personality, these causes, then they obviates desires they come to have. people can have control over not. Knowledge is necessary trolley. In the account I gave of red his/her desires, I only exposes (and also that they not be s not be coercive. Oftentimes, owledge of the causes. Conditioned might know the causes, cess, but might not know their. The person is acquainted with or how and why they operate. ther a person knew the latter, save any control over. Hence it depends on people’s ignorance and why they operate. In such
cases, people’s ignorance of these facts would deprive them of whatever control knowledge might give them. People are less free to the extent that they operate on unconscious motives. Successful psychoanalysis can increase the patient’s control and therefore freedom, by making conscious things that had hitherto been unconscious. Sometimes just knowing the purposes behind potential causes (for example, that it is designed to convince you, scare you, buy you off, or get you to buy something) can make a difference to whether those purposes are realized. Without the knowledge, one’s attitudes towards these purposes cannot come into play and one cannot exercise any control over them. If the efficacy of the causes depends on one’s ignorance of such facts about the causes, then the causes are coercive. It is where knowledge about the causes would have made a difference that ignorance makes the causes coercive. Causes of beliefs and desires are coercive where they operate contrary to the person’s other beliefs, desires, character, and personality. This is so when the causes are explicitly against the person’s will, or unknown to the person, or when they depend for their efficacy on the person’s ignorance of certain facts about them. According to these conditions, conditioning would usually be coercive, which, I think, is as it should be.

Suppose one came to know that one was being conditioned and the knowledge made no difference to the efficacy of the causes. Is this a coercive way of acquiring desires? The answer depends on whether the conditioning process was against the person’s will. If the causes operate against his/her will then they are coercive. On the other hand, suppose they are not operating against the person’s will; in other words, suppose a person voluntarily chooses to be conditioned. A person might deliberately expose himself to conditions which will cause him to have (or not have) certain desires, for example, not to smoke. Once he puts himself into the situation, the causes operate independent of his other beliefs and desires, personality, and so on. His new effective desire not to smoke will be the result of conditioning, and we have said that conditioning is a form of coercion. However, I think that the circumstances of this kind of case make a significant difference. The person’s self does enter into the causal process as an active determinant, whereas in most cases of conditioning this is not so. The person in our example who voluntarily has himself conditioned has a second order volition not to smoke, which is in conflict with his or her volition to smoke. If the second order volition were sufficiently strong to outweigh the first order volition by itself, then the new effective desire would be acquired in a completely free manner. However, it is not sufficiently strong to do this by itself. Causes that are independent of the person are necessary to change his desire. However, these other causes come into play only because of his second order volition. He had himself conditioned because he has a desire not to desire to smoke. So I think we can say that the cause of his new effective desire not to smoke is his second order volition. The new desire is not the result of coercion; it does spring from the self. However, it does not only spring from the self. It was not acquired in as free a manner as if the second order volition was sufficient by itself to cause it, but I would still put it towards the free end of the continuum.

What we have come up with is what we started with — and that is, to the extent that the causes of one’s actions are themselves caused by things over which
people have no control (even with knowledge of them), to that extent one’s actions are unfree. What I have tried to do is to make sense of the idea of having control over one’s desires. In order to say that one has control over one’s desires it is necessary that what we identify as the self determines what one desires and what desires one acts on. To put together the criteria elaborated thus far: In order for actions caused by desires to be free, these desires must first of all not have been coercively acquired. What this means has been explained. Knowledge was seen to be a key factor. Secondly, they must not be contrary to the person’s second order volitions. This second condition implies that the person has second order volitions. We will not be able to say that these desires are the desires the person wants to have unless (a) he/she has second order volitions and unless (b) these volitions outweigh first order volitions in the case of a conflict. Thirdly, the desire must be in harmony with an integrated set of desires and beliefs — hence one’s self — at that given time. This third requirement must be qualified. A desire causing a free action may be inconsistent with this integrated set if the set does not meet one of the necessary conditions and the desire fulfills both the conditions. If the set was coercively acquired and the conflicting desire was not, or if the conflicting desire is supported by a second order volition and the set is not, then an action caused by the conflicting desire would be free. Any person missing second order volitions is missing an important kind of control over his/her actions, and hence an important dimension of freedom. That is why an action that proceeds from a conflicting desire which is supported by a second order volition is freer than one that proceeded from the integrated set, where there are no effective second order volitions. This sort of situation could lead to a revision of the set — a restructuring of the self. However, lacking an integrated set which is responsible for his/her actions, the person is divided, and it is less possible for that person to be a self-determining being. Therefore, the person is most free when there is an integrated set which is in accordance with his/her second order volitions. Then we can say that this is a self-determining person.

VI

An objection that will almost certainly be raised to what I have said thus far is that I have failed to carry through the logic of my argument. If, in order to have control over one’s actions (that is, for one’s actions to be free), it is necessary to have control over the causes of one’s actions (that is, one’s desires), then in order to have control over them, it is also necessary to have control over their causes, and in order to have control over them, it is necessary . . . In short, we are led to an infinite regress, or at least to a point where the person cannot possibly have any control — namely, a point before they are born. If it leads back to this point, then we can never have control over what we do. And so it seems we are led back to a choice of hard determinism, indeterminism, or a position like Taylor’s.

I do not agree that the logic of my argument has to lead back to this point. In order to take this same analysis further back, one would have to make sense of having control over both (a) the integrated set of beliefs and desires and also
over (b) one's second order volitions. Taking the former first, one way of having control over this integrated act would be to have effective second order volitions with respect to it. This is already part of my account. Aside from having effective second order volitions with respect to the integrated set of beliefs, desires, and so on, is there any other way in which one might be said to have or lack control over it? To give any other sense to how one might have control over this integrated set would require that some person or self be found to have control over it. But in the absence of a higher order volition, where and what is this entity that might but does not control this set? Unless some sense can be made of such an entity the idea remains incoherent, and my account thus far has not been shown to lead too far back.

To turn to (b), having control over one's second order volitions, we can make sense of this if we bring in the idea of third order volitions (wanting to want), and we could bring in volitions of still higher orders. I am not opposed to this but it is an empirical question just how far back we can go in any given case. Frankfurt deals with the point in the following way:

There is no theoretical [my emphasis] limit to the length of the series of desires of higher and higher orders; nothing but common sense and, perhaps, a saving fatigue... The tendency to generate such a series of acts of forming desires... leads to the destruction of a person... It is possible, however, to terminate such a series of acts without cutting it off arbitrarily. When a person identified himself decisively with one of his first order desires, this commitment "resounds" throughout the potentially endless array of higher orders... The decisiveness of the commitment he has made means that he has decided that no further question about his second order volition, at any higher order, remains to be asked. It is relatively unimportant whether we explain this by saying that the commitment implicitly generates an endless series of confirming desires of higher orders, or by saying that the commitment is tantamount to a dissolution of the pointedness of all questions concerning higher orders of desire.

A person does not have an indefinite number of orders of volition with respect to a given desire. Once we have reached the point where a person has identified him/herself with a particular volition, the idea of that person having control over his/her desires of that order through volitions of a higher order seems to make no sense, because that person does not go further back. The person, a discriminating being capable of choice among desires, has committed and identified him/herself with a particular volition. To go further back is to leave the person behind. To speak of identifying oneself with a volition requires the possibility of desires of more than one order, but it does not require an indefinite series.

Let us approach the question from a slightly different angle. A second order volition might be the result of a higher order volition, or of coercion, or of neither of these. If a second order volition results from a volition of a higher order, then the person can be said to have control over that volition. Suppose now that the person's second order volition was not the result of a higher order volition, but neither was it the result of coercion. This would be true where the person had no higher order volitions relevant to the second order volition, but where the causes would not have operated if there had been second order volitions in
conflict. (If they would have operated anyway then they would be coercive.) In such cases, it seems to me that the volitions should be said to have been acquired freely. It certainly was not acquired unfreely. The person did not lack control, and would have had control if there had been higher order volitions. A person can be said to have acquired a second order volition through coercion if the person has conflicting volitions of a still higher order which are ineffective against these causes. The person then lacks control over his/her second order volitions in an obvious way. Where the person has no volitions of a higher order, or where the person has decisively identified him/herself with the volition, Frankfurt and I have argued that something is wrong with saying that the person lacks control, because the person does not go further back. However, suppose that, if there were a conflicting higher order volition (although there isn't one), it would be ineffective. I am inclined to say that in this case as well, the person lacks control over his/her volitions and the causes are coercive. If this is correct, then a person lacks control over second order volitions if conflicting higher order volitions (whether the person has any or not) would be ineffective against them.

One might argue that because a person lacks control over his/her second order volitions it does not follow that he/she lacks control over his/her first order volitions or over his/her actions. I would want to distinguish between two sorts of cases. Recall that I distinguished two kinds of cases of second order volitions acquired through coercion: (a) ones in which there were conflicting volitions of a higher order, and (b) ones in which there were no volitions of a higher order, but if there had been they would have been ineffective. It seems to me that where the second order volitions result from coercion in the latter sort of case, actions proceeding from them are still free. The sense in which the second order volitions were coerced is a more extended hypothetical sense, and I therefore see little need to infer that the person's first order volitions and actions must also have been coerced. On the other hand, if the person's second order volitions are coerced as described in (a), the person lacked control and was coerced in more obvious and direct ways. Although it does not strictly follow, it seems more consistent with what I have been arguing to conclude that in such cases the person should be said to lack control over his/her first order volitions and his/her actions. I have argued that people have control over their actions when they have control over their causes (beliefs and desires), and that they have control over these when they are caused by second order volitions. If there are higher order volitions which are ineffective against the causes of the second order volitions, then the person has no control over these second order volitions. And it seems closer to the general line of argument I have been using, to conclude that in such cases they also have no control over their first order volitions and actions.

VII

As a prelude to concluding, I wish to consider the implications of my general and abstract analysis to the concrete question of just how free most people are today. We shall see that although my view implies that people can be free, though determined, it is also an implication of my view that most people are
quite unfree today. The answer to this question of how free people are is not one that applies to all people just in virtue of their being human, but rather depends on who the people are and where and when they are living. It turns out, then, on my view, that human freedom is closely tied to social and political freedom and is not a distinct metaphysical question. (In considering this part of the philosophical question we are inevitably drawn into empirical issues, including political ones, so my own opinion on these matters will certainly intrude.)

Desires arise in us because of a whole complex set of conditions which affect one another. (Neither they nor their influence can actually be separated, so the following remarks are unavoidably artificial.) These determining conditions include physical and psychological conditions, which to some extent we share with others, but which also differ from person to person. People today are capable of some but not much control over these conditions. Greater knowledge, aided by money, gives a person greater possibilities of control, but there are still very definite limits which no one today is capable of transcending. Greater knowledge will give greater possibilities of human control, but it is probable that there will always be limits that one cannot transcend. What is possible is for a person to exercise some control over the form of the desires these conditions tend to produce, and also over whether and how these desires are acted upon.

How much control a person can exercise over the social and political conditions causing his/her desires depends on the particular social system in which the person lives, and also the place that the person occupies in the system. Some changes are possible in the latter in most societies but usually quite little. In any case, it is only within the framework allowed by that system and it is not possible within the framework of any present society for most people to change their positions within that framework. As for the framework itself, one cannot change the time in which one lives, and since what social systems are possible depends on the time and place, there is a certain inevitable limitation. However, there are many fewer inevitable limitations on the degree of control one can exercise over social causes than over physical causes— in the future, but also in the present. Given the limitations of time and place, there is great potential today for people to collectively control the social conditions under which they live, and hence the beliefs and desires these conditions tend to produce, even if there are some conditions they still would not be able to control. However, with some notable exceptions, the ability to control the social conditions in which one lives is only potential today, not actual. This is partially because people do not realize they have this ability. This lack of realization is strongly supported, of course, by the social system in which they live and by those who do control it. There is, again, the possibility of exercising some control over the form of the desires likely to be produced by these conditions, and also over whether and how these desires are acted upon. However, so long as one does not control the social causes of one's beliefs and desires, one does not have much chance of controlling the actual beliefs and desires one comes to have.

Leaving aside the nature of the influence, what is necessary in order to be able to exercise control over the influences acting upon one, is to be a certain kind of person, as well as to have knowledge and the cooperation of others.
shaping the world, history, and also him/herself, is capable of doing just that—not alone, but in cooperation with others. There are, of course, varying conditions where people may be more or less aware and/or more or less able not to be passive products. However, it seems that most people today are quite uncritical and undiscriminating and lack this self-conception. Many feel themselves to be more like passive products of history and their own particular environment—and their environment makes them feel that way. However, in the course of struggle against the oppressive aspects of their environment, they can come to realize their potential to bring the world under their conscious collective control. The realization of this is a first step towards changing the framework that keeps them without control. This capacity to change the world and consequently their own nature is unique to human beings. It gives them the potential of being free in the fullest sense that is possible in a deterministic world.

NOTES

1. I intend “beliefs” and “desires” to cover all mental sources of action whatever they are. [N. Holmstrom]
3. Ibid., pp. 50–53; pp. 309–310 of this book. [D. C. Abel]
6. In Frankfurt’s terminology, the original desire is a *first order* volition; the desire to have this desire is a *second order* volition. [D. C. Abel]
8. *metaphysical*: relating to *metaphysics*, the study of the nature and kinds of reality. [D. C. Abel]