

PHILOSOPHY



*The Quest for Truth*

Tenth Edition

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**A**S THINKING AND CHOOSING BEINGS, we want and demand freedom. We yearn for and expect social or political freedom, the freedom to go where we want, say what we please, and do as we may within broad legal and social limits. But we also want—and usually assume we have—a more profound kind of freedom, what philosophers call *free will*. This type of freedom is the power of self-determination: if we possess it, then at least some of our choices are not decided for us or forced upon us but are *up to us*. If we don't possess it, our social and political freedoms would seem to be considerably less valuable. If our actions are not our own because, say, someone has brainwashed or drugged us to control how we vote, then being free to vote would seem to be an empty liberty. So the central question in free will debates is whether we in fact have this more fundamental form of freedom.

The question arises because, as in many other issues in philosophy, two of our basic beliefs about ourselves and the world seem to conflict. On one hand, we tend to think we have free will in the sense just described. On the other, we also seem to assume that every event has a cause. Or as philosophers would say, we seem to accept **determinism**, the view that events are determined, or necessitated, by preceding physical causes and the laws of nature. If determinism is true, everything that happens must happen in an unalterable, preset fashion. But if determinism is true, how can any choices we make or any actions we perform be up to us? How can we do anything “of our own free will”? If we live in a determined universe, your reading this book right now was inevitable, given the determining conditions beforehand. Given the foregoing determining facts, you could not have done otherwise. How then could your actions be free?

From this conflict comes the **problem of free will**—the challenge of reconciling determinism with our intuitions or ideas about personal freedom. The problem seems all the sharper because both horns of this apparent dilemma are endorsed by common sense. In our lives we recognize the work of deterministic forces: every cause does seem to regularly and lawfully produce an effect, and every effect seems to have a cause. Baseballs obey gravity, bread nourishes, fire burns, electronics work, human bodies are shaped by genetics, and human personalities are molded by experience. All this is reinforced by science, which tirelessly traces the universe's myriad links between cause and effect. Our everyday experience also suggests that sometimes it is indeed up to us how we choose and act, and that we could have chosen and acted otherwise than we did.

But who cares whether all our actions are determined by forces beyond our control? Well, we do. Most of us are unsettled by the thought that our choices and actions may not be our own, that everything we do is inevitable, preset, or necessary. This fear of a predetermined existence is reflected in movies, books, and popular culture. In the films *Gattaca*, *A Clockwork Orange*, and *The Truman Show*, deterministic forces in various guises are part of what makes these movies so disturbing. The novel *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley shows us a futuristic society of contented citizens who are happy with their lot in life—but only because social engineers manipulate and dampen the people's desires with a mind-numbing drug called *soma*. B. F. Skinner's novel *Walden II* depicts another community of happy folk who want only what they can readily acquire or achieve. They are perfectly satisfied with their lives because they have been programmed through lifelong behavioral conditioning (the kind that Skinner himself advocated) to desire only what is attainable. Skinner

portrays his vision as a utopia, but many think it is a dystopia in which social freedom is a reality but free will is nonexistent.

People also care about the issue of free will because upon it hang momentous questions about moral responsibility, legal punishment, praise and blame, and social and political control. If our actions are not free in any important sense, it is difficult to see how we could be held morally responsible for what we do. If our actions are fully determined, how could we be legitimately subjected to punishment, praise, or blame for our actions? Punishing us for something we did would be like penalizing us for having red hair or brown eyes. As you might expect, many who reject the notion of free will think that punishing people for crimes makes no sense. Instead of punishing criminals, they say, we should try to modify their behavior. Instead of imprisoning or executing them, we should train them through behavioral conditioning and other techniques to be law-abiding.

The issues of determinism and free will often come up in court when someone is being tried for serious crimes such as rape or murder. The defense attorney argues that the defendant is not responsible for his actions, for his character was warped by abusive parents, an impoverished or brutal environment, or bad genes. His life was programmed—determined—to turn out a certain way, and he had no say in any of it. The prosecutor insists that despite the influence of these factors, the defendant deserves most of the blame for his crime because ultimately he acted freely. The jury then must decide where determinism ends and free will begins.

Philosophers both ancient and modern have proposed three main solutions to the free will problem. The first is known as **hard determinism**, the view that determinism is true and therefore no one has free will. More precisely, it says that since (1) determinism and free will are incompatible, and (2) determinism is true, (3) free will does not exist (at least not in a way needed for moral responsibility and other moral attitudes). Proposition (1) is a statement of the doctrine of **incompatibilism**: determinism and free will are incompatible doctrines; they both cannot be true. That is, if every event is determined, there can be no free will; if free will exists, determinism cannot be actual. Hard determinists argue that given the truth of determinism and the truth of incompatibilism, the assertion of free will must be false.

To support proposition (2), determinists may appeal to the deliverances of science. They point out that scientific research in many fields, from astrophysics to zoology, is forever uncovering causal connections, seeming to confirm a deterministic picture of the world. Scientists now know that human behavior is shaped to a remarkable degree by heredity, the brain's biochemistry, behavioral conditioning, and evolution. All these facts reinforce the notion that human choices and actions are brought about deterministically.

But science—specifically quantum physics—has also provided evidence that determinism is false. Or to put it another way, some scientific evidence supports **indeterminism**, the view that not every event is determined by preceding events and the laws of nature. The standard view among quantum physicists is that many events on the quantum level (the domain of subatomic particles) are uncaused. Among philosophers, however, debate still continues over what this quantum indeterminacy means for the problem of free will. And many doubt that indeterminism, even if true, could make free will possible, for uncaused actions would seem to be merely random.

The second proposed solution to the free will problem is **compatibilism**, the doctrine that determinism and free will are compatible, that both can be true. Traditional compatibilists—among them Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), David Hume (1711–1776), John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), and A. J. Ayer (1910–1989)—believe that (1) determinism is true; (2) determinism and free will are compatible; and (3) we sometimes act freely. (Compatibilists who accept determinism are often called *soft determinists*; Hobbes, Hume, and the other traditional compatibilists are soft determinists.) So compatibilists of all stripes say it's possible for every event to be caused by preceding conditions plus the laws of nature—and for us to nevertheless act freely. But how is such a thing possible?

Traditional compatibilism holds that your action is free if (1) it is caused by your own choices or desires and (2) it is not impeded or constrained by anything. You act in complete freedom when you give money to a charity—if you really do want to give your money and *if* nothing prevents you from doing so (for example, no physical obstacles stand in your way, no one is coercing you, and no inner compulsion restrains you). You act freely when you are able to do what you desire to do; you do not act freely when you are not able to do what you desire to do. This would be true, according to traditional compatibilism, even if your desires were themselves determined by forces beyond your control. Your will itself may be determined by preceding events and the laws of nature, but if you are able to do what you will, you act freely. In this way, says the traditional compatibilist, free will is reconciled with determinism.

Traditional compatibilists say their view allows for the kind of freedom that people really want—the “could do otherwise” sort of freedom (the freedom of alternative possibilities). If we are free—if our actions are truly up to us—we must be able to act in one of several different ways, to have more than one option to choose from. We must have the wherewithal to do otherwise than what we actually do. But if we have only one choice open to us, if all other possibilities are closed, then our actions are not up to us. Incompatibilists say this is precisely what would happen if determinism were true. But traditional compatibilists assert that we can still do otherwise even if determinism reigns in the world.

They can make this claim by applying their conditional, or hypothetical, view of freedom to the notion of “could do otherwise.” To them, “could do otherwise” means that you would have been able to do something different *if you had wanted to*. You are free in the sense that if you had desired to do something different than what you actually did, nothing would have prevented you from doing it. Whatever you finally choose is, of course, determined by previous events. But you would have been able to choose differently if history had been different.

Critics, however, reject this kind of compatibilist freedom. They maintain that merely being able to act according to your desires without constraints is not real freedom *if your desires are determined for you in the first place*. And for the same reason, being able to do otherwise if you had wanted to does not offer you any genuine alternatives. Detractors argue that the compatibilist conception of freedom must be mistaken because an agent can do what she wants without external constraints and still not act freely. Real freedom, they contend, is not just the power to act *if we will to act*, but power over the will itself.

Another form of compatibilism, proposed by the philosopher Harry Frankfurt, has a different take on the power to do otherwise. Contrary to traditional compatibilism,

he argues that having alternative possibilities open to you is not necessary for free will and moral responsibility. What is required is for you *to have the desires that you desire to have*. Everyone has what Frankfurt calls *first-order desires*—desires for pleasure, money, food, education, love, and the like. But, he says, most of us also have *second-order desires*—desires about our other desires; specifically, we often have desires about what first-order desires we want to act on. You may have a first-order desire to drink a lot of beer, but because you want to avoid having a hangover tomorrow, you also have a second-order desire that your first-order desire not lead you to drink beer. You want your second-order desire to guide your actions. (Frankfurt calls a second-order desire that you choose to make your will a *second-order volition*.) Rather than giving in to whatever desires you happen to have (as animals, addicts, and people with obsessive-compulsive disorders do), you reflect on your desires and decide how you want your life to go. If your life is ruled by your second-order volitions, you have free will; if not, you don't.

Many philosophers recognize that Frankfurt's compatibilism (called *hierarchical compatibilism*) is more nuanced than the traditional kind but argue that the new theory makes the same mistake as the old one does: a person's desires (whether first-order or second-order) are determined by preceding events, not by the person himself. Compatibilist freedom, they contend, conflicts with our intuitive notion of free will.

The third answer to the problem of free will is **libertarianism** (not to be confused with the political doctrine of the same name). It asserts that (1) determinism and free will are incompatible, and (2) we have free will (so determinism is false). Libertarians hold that indeterminism is necessary for free will, that free actions can occur only in a world where not all events are determined by prior events and natural laws. Note how libertarianism differs from the other two positions on free will. Both libertarians and hard determinists accept incompatibilism, but they take opposing views on determinism and free action. And contrary to traditional compatibilists, libertarians reject determinism and embrace incompatibilism.

To be taken seriously by the free will skeptic, libertarians must argue their case on three fronts. Against the compatibilist, they must show that determinism and free will are incompatible (that incompatibilism is true). Against the determinist, they must show there is good reason to believe that we sometimes act freely. And against all free will skeptics, they must demonstrate that the libertarian concept of free will is coherent and plausible.

Libertarians have argued in favor of all three of these claims. For example, in support of the reality of libertarian free will, they have insisted that the best evidence for it comes from our own experience. When making a choice, we often sense that we have genuine options, that we have the power to choose (or not choose) among alternative courses of action, and that what we finally choose and do is genuinely and ultimately up to us. Libertarians say that this experience is as persistent and reliable as any we could have, and it provides strong evidence for libertarian freedom. Judging from our perceptions, we think we have good evidence for the existence of physical objects. Likewise our experience of choosing and acting seems to give us evidence for free will that is at least as strong as that for physical objects.

Hard determinists and compatibilists typically reply that this experiential sense of freedom is illusory. Our experience is not good evidence for free will, and we believe

in free will only because we are ignorant of all the factors (genes and environment, for example) that determine us. Libertarians respond that we can indeed be mistaken about whether our actions are free, for our experience could mislead us. But we are entitled to trust our experience unless evidence gives us good reasons to doubt it. And so far, they say, there are no good reasons to do so.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for libertarians is demonstrating that the libertarian concept of free will is coherent and plausible. If libertarians cannot meet this challenge, libertarianism will be regarded as a highly problematic theory—even if incompatibilism and the existence of free will are assumed. The main difficulty is explaining how actions can be free if indeterminism is true—that is, if actions are not caused by prior events and the laws of nature. How can an action be uncaused? And if it is uncaused by previous events, wouldn't it be simply random? A random action is not a free action.

Philosophers have responded to these worries by offering several kinds of libertarian theories. For example, some theorists try to render libertarian free actions plausible by appealing to reasons or motives for the actions. Others propose varieties of **agent causation**, the view that a free action is caused by an agent (or person) and is not wholly determined by previous events. Here is Richard Taylor making a case for one version of this theory:

The only conception of action that accords with our data is one according to which people—and perhaps some other things too—are sometimes, but of course not always, self-determining beings; that is, beings that are sometimes the causes of their own behavior. In the case of an action that is free, it must not only be such that it is caused by the agent who performs it, but also such that no antecedent conditions were sufficient for his performing just that action. In the case of an action that is both free and rational, it must be such that the agent who performed it did so for some reason, but this reason cannot have been the cause of it.<sup>1</sup>

Timothy O'Connor also subscribes to a type of agent causation and paints this picture of the causal process: An agent deliberates between several courses of action, each of which has a set of reasons in its favor. The agent chooses an action in light of one of those sets of reasons. The reasons do not cause her decision, and she could have chosen other than she did in the same circumstances. Yet her decision is intelligible, rational, and nonrandom. To say that she chose this particular action in view of this set of reasons is to explain her self-determining choice and to show that it is rational. Libertarians would also argue that we shouldn't assume that her choice is random just because it is undetermined by previous events. It is not random because it is *hers*.

As you might expect, agent causation perspectives are disputed at many points, with opponents contending that the theories are incoherent or otherwise inadequate and proponents denying the charge. But as such debates unfold, libertarians insist that, despite claims to the contrary, plausible theories of libertarian free will are on the table.

<sup>1</sup>Richard Taylor, *Metaphysics* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1992), 51–53.

The Norton Introduction to

# PHILOSOPHY

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# Do We Possess Free Will?

## A Question about Responsibility

In March 2007, New York newspapers reported the brutal mugging of a 101-year-old woman in the lobby of her apartment building. As surveillance tapes show, the mugger held the door open for his victim, followed her inside, then donned a ski mask and beat her mercilessly for several minutes before fleeing with her purse.

This attack was not just a tragedy, as it would have been if the woman had been injured in a fall or mauled by an animal. It was a grotesque moral wrong and we blame the man who did it, which is to say that we hold the man **morally responsible** for his act.

This is not a special case. The conviction that human beings are morally responsible for what they do is deeply rooted in common sense. We take it for granted every day when we praise people for the good they do and blame them for the harm they cause. As a society, we take it for granted when we punish people for their crimes. As we usually think, this is one of the most important differences between human beings and other animals. (It may be perfectly natural to blame your dog for tracking mud all over the house, but in a cool moment you know this makes no sense. He's just a dog, after all.) But if this is right, there must be something about us that explains it. And so we ask—not in a skeptical spirit but in a spirit of open-minded curiosity—Why are we morally responsible for what we do when animals are not? What is it about us that makes us special in this regard?

## The Free Will Hypothesis

Think about the mugger in the moments just prior to the attack. There he is, holding the door open for his victim and watching her walk through. As he does this he is buffeted by biological and psychological forces of many kinds, including, we may suppose, a powerful impulse to attack. But if we think he is responsible for

his act, we must think that he is capable of resisting this impulse—of “stepping back” and deciding for himself whether to act on it. This ability is sometimes called **free will**—though this phrase is used in other ways as well. An act is free, on this conception, when the agent *could have done otherwise*. Before he acts, the free agent is in a certain psychological state: he has beliefs about his circumstances; he has desires, feelings, and values; he has various habits and capacities; and so on. In other animals, this prior state *settles* what the animal will do (insofar as anything settles it). Holding all of these factors fixed, an animal has no real options. For human beings as we normally understand them, by contrast, while these factors may strongly incline a person to make one choice rather than another, it is ultimately *up to him* to choose. According to the free will hypothesis, that is why we are normally responsible for what we do while other animals are not.

Let’s put this cluster of commonsensical ideas under the microscope. It has several components.

1. A person is morally responsible for an action only if she performs it freely.
2. A person acts freely only if she could have done otherwise.
3. A person could have done otherwise only if her choice was not determined by prior factors over which she had no control.

Taken together, these entail:

4. A person is morally responsible for an action only if her choice was not determined by prior factors over which she had no control.

But we’ve said repeatedly that as we normally think,

5. People are usually responsible for what they do.<sup>1</sup>

And so we have disclosed what might be called a *presupposition* of ordinary thought. If this commonsensical cluster of ideas is correct, then our practice of holding one another responsible—our practices of praise and blame, punishment and reward—take it for granted that

6. Typical human choices are not determined by factors over which the agent had no control.

And now that we have isolated this presupposition, we must examine it. We may take it for granted as we go about our business. But is there any reason to believe that it is true?

1. Why “usually”? Because we know that human beings are not always responsible for what they do. Someone who has been forced or hypnotized or tricked into acting badly is not responsible for what he does. Proposition 5 makes the commonsensical point that such excuses are not always available.

## Doubts about Free Will

You might think that the claim is supported by introspection. Consider how it feels to make an ordinary choice. There you are, deciding whether to read the rest of this page or to take a break. Even if you're bored and really *want* to take that break, it may seem obvious that nothing literally "forces" you one way or the other. So it's tempting to think that the *experience of conscious choice* confirms that our choices are not determined in advance.

In fact, however, the experience of conscious choice shows no such thing. It may show that we are not normally *aware* of factors that determine our choices. But our choices might still be determined by factors of which we are unaware. (When you see a flash of lightning, you don't see what caused the flash, but that doesn't mean that nothing caused it!) The opponent of (6) suspects that our choices are determined by factors of which we are unaware. Introspection can do nothing to exclude this possibility.

## Free Will and Divine Foreknowledge

Why might someone think that our choices are determined by factors of which we are unaware? One venerable argument comes from theology. If God is eternal and all-knowing, then God always knew—from the beginning of time—that the mugger would attack the woman. So assume there is such a God and focus again on the moment just before the mugger's choice. It may seem to him in that moment that he has two options: to attack or to walk away. But what he does not know is that before he was born, God *predicted* that he would attack. This prediction is settled; it lies in the past and the mugger cannot do anything about it. To say that he is nonetheless capable of doing otherwise is therefore to say that he is capable of falsifying God's prediction. And the trouble is that no one has that power. It is *impossible* for God to be mistaken, and so it is impossible for a person to act in a way that would cause God to have been mistaken.<sup>2</sup> If every human choice is foreseen by an infallible God, it follows that everything we do is settled in advance by a factor—God's prediction—that was in place before we were born. So if a free choice must be an undetermined choice, this theology entails that human freedom is an illusion. (See Nelson Pike, "Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action," *Philosophical Review* 74, 1 [1965]: 27–46.)

## Free Will and Physical Determinism

You can resist this argument by denying the existence of an eternal, all-knowing God. (You should ask whether there are other ways to resist it.) But a very different and wholly secular argument seems to lead to the same conclusion. From its origins in the

2. The view in question holds that it is part of God's **essence** to be infallible, just as it is part of the essence of a triangle to have three sides. No one can draw a four-sided triangle because four-sided triangles are impossible. Likewise, no one can falsify God's prediction because a mistaken God is impossible.

seventeenth century, modern science seemed to confirm the ancient speculation that the universe as a whole is a **deterministic** system in which the state of the cosmos at any one time is determined by its state at any prior time, together with the laws of nature. On this view, the state of the universe at any point in the past—say, exactly 1 billion years ago—and the laws of nature together fix the state of the universe at every future time. If this view is correct, then given the past and the laws, absolutely everything that happens—every supernova, every mugging—is determined to occur just as it does.

It must be stressed that physical determinism of this sort is a scientific hypothesis. The physics of Newton and his successors, including Einstein, was for the most part deterministic. However, contemporary physics leaves open the possibility that the basic laws of nature assign probabilities to future occurrences without determining what will happen. Since physics is a work in progress, *no one knows at present whether physical determinism is true*. And this means that we should not assume determinism (or its opposite) in our philosophy.

Instead, we focus on the consequences of determinism. Suppose you wake up tomorrow to this headline:

***SCIENTISTS DISCOVER, BEYOND DOUBT:  
UNIVERSE IS A DETERMINISTIC SYSTEM***

What would this mean? It would mean that the motion of every particle, including the particles in our brains and bodies, was determined by the state of the universe a billion years ago together with the laws of nature. In particular, it would mean that it was settled a billion years ago that the particles in the mugger's brain and body would do just what they did, and hence that he would do just what he did. And, of course, the same would be true of every human action. So if a free act must be an undetermined act, this sort of physics entails that human freedom is an illusion.

This argument should worry anyone who accepts determinism. But it should also worry anyone—and this should be all of us—who is genuinely uncertain about whether the laws of physics will turn out to be deterministic. For if the argument is cogent, it shows that *for all we know at present*, human freedom is an illusion. And that is an unsettling thought. Think of the mugger again—or anyone else whom you regard as obviously responsible for what he's done. If this line of thought is sound, you have no right to this confidence, since for all you know, the whole business was settled eons ago by factors over which the agent had no control.

## Free Will and Indeterminism

All of this may leave you hoping for a different headline. So imagine you wake up tomorrow to find this on the front page of the *New York Times*:

***SCIENTISTS DISCOVER, BEYOND DOUBT:  
PHYSICAL UNIVERSE IS INDETERMINISTIC***

Would this really be any better? Return to the moment just before the mugger's choice. His brain and body are in a certain state. Because the universe is indeterministic, this state does not determine his choice. Rather, the laws of nature assign a certain probability to a decision to attack and a certain (presumably lower) probability to a decision to walk away. Now a moment passes and he decides to attack. Why did he make *that* decision? If the process is genuinely indeterministic, this question may have no answer. When the choice was made, it was as if a coin were flipped in the mugger's head. His decision was a chance occurrence, a random fluctuation. And just as it is hard to see how a person can be responsible for a choice determined by factors beyond his control, it is hard to see how he can be responsible for a choice that simply happens in him as a result of random chance.

## The Dilemma of Determinism

Putting these pieces together, we face what is sometimes called the *dilemma of determinism*:

- A. If determinism is true, we are not responsible, since our choices are determined by factors over which we have no control.
- B. If indeterminism is true, we are not responsible, since our choices are chance occurrences.
- C. But either determinism is true or indeterminism is true.
- D. Therefore, we are not morally responsible for what we do.

This is a profound problem. Common sense assures us that we are responsible because we are free to choose. The dilemma tells us that we cannot be free, and that we are therefore not responsible. The only way to vindicate common sense is to find some flaw in the dilemma. The selections below represent a range of strategies.

A. J. Ayer, Harry Frankfurt, and P. F. Strawson all reject (A). These writers are **compatibilists** who hold in various ways that we can be responsible for a choice even though that choice was determined in advance. Roderick Chisholm rejects (B), distinguishing mere chance occurrences, which have no cause, from genuine free choices, which are caused not by prior events but by "the agent himself."

Against all of this, Galen Strawson defends a version of the dilemma, arguing that there is no credible account of human choice that would vindicate our commonsensical view of ourselves as free and responsible.

Some philosophers have suggested that even if human freedom is ultimately an illusion, the illusion is unshakable in the sense that it is psychologically impossible for us to overcome it. To see what they may be getting at, try an experiment. Next time

someone steals your parking space, try to persuade yourself that even though the act was selfish and obnoxious, it wasn't really the driver's fault, since no one is ever morally responsible for what he does. Next time you read a news story about a lying politician or a vicious murderer, try to tell yourself that your immediate reaction—that these people deserve blame and punishment—assumes an incoherent view of human action. Say to yourself, "For all I know, these acts are mere regrettable occurrences for which no one is responsible." The exercise will give you a vivid sense of what is at stake in this debate.

SIXTEENTH EDITION

# REASON AND RESPONSIBILITY

*Readings in Some Basic Problems of Philosophy*

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**Reason and Responsibility: Readings in Some  
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# Determinism, Free Will, and Responsibility

**W**HAT ARE WE ASKING WHEN we ask *why* something happened? Will an adequate explanation show us that in some sense or other the event to be explained *had* to happen in the way it did? In principle, are voluntary actions subject to the same kinds of explanations as physical events? If, in principle, everything that happens can be explained by science, is there then no such thing in the universe as random chance, genuine contingency, and uncertainty? These questions have great interest to the philosopher in their own right, but they also are of strategic importance to the continuing arguments over the ancient riddle of determinism versus free will.

**Determinism** is the theory that all events, including human actions and choices, are, without exception, totally determined. What does it mean to say that an event (a past event, E, for instance) is “totally determined”? This question has produced various answers, which for our present purposes we can take to be roughly equivalent.<sup>1</sup>

1. E was completely caused.
2. There were antecedent sufficient conditions for E; that is, conditions such that given their occurrence E *had* to occur.
3. It was causally necessary that E occur.
4. Given what preceded it, it was inevitable that E take place.
5. E is subsumable under a universal law of nature; that is, the occurrence of E was deducible from a description of the conditions that obtained before its occurrence and certain universal laws.
6. The occurrence of E is subject in principle to scientific explanation.
7. The occurrence of E was in principle predictable.
8. There are circumstances and laws which, had they been known, would have made it possible to predict the occurrence and exact nature of E.

**Indeterminism**, the logical contradictory of determinism, is the theory that some events are not determined. Many defenders of indeterminism hold that the events that are not determined are human actions.

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<sup>1</sup>Speaking more strictly, definitions 1–6 are “roughly equivalent” to one another, and definitions 7 and 8 are “roughly equivalent” to one another, although one should be aware of subtle differences even within these classes. Basically, there are two types of definitions: those in terms of prior sufficient conditions and those in terms of predictability.

There are a number of commonsense considerations that should at least incline a reflective person toward determinism. Whenever we plant seeds, or plug in a machine, or prepare for a storm, we act in the expectation that physical events will occur in accordance with known laws of nature. Hardly anyone would deny, moreover, that physical characteristics of human beings—the color of their eyes, the cellular structure of their brains, glands, and other organs—are determined exactly by their genetic inheritance. And pediatricians and parents of large broods have often observed that temperament is determined, at least to a large degree, right from birth. To a large extent our characters, personalities, and intellects are a consequence of our inherited temperaments and physical capacities, and our choices in turn reflect our personality and character. Similarly, our early childhood training, family environment, and education have formative influences on character. We do what we do because we are what we are, and we are what we are—at least to a large extent—because our genes and the influencing conduct of others have formed us that way.

At the same time, common sense recognizes that human beings do some things “of their own free will”—that is, act in circumstances in which they might very well have done something else instead. This commonsense observation is hard to reconcile with determinism, which seems to imply that every event that occurs is the only one that could have occurred in the circumstances. This in turn seems to imply that no matter what I did a moment ago, I *could not* have done otherwise—which, in turn, seems to say that I *had* to do what I did, that I was not a free agent. But, most of us would agree, my ability to do otherwise is a necessary condition of praise or blame, reward or punishment—in short, for my *being responsible*. Therefore, if determinism cannot be reconciled with the ability to do otherwise, it cannot be reconciled with moral responsibility either. But we *do* hold people responsible for what they do (indeed, some say we *must* hold people responsible); therefore (some have argued), so much the worse for determinism. Such is the commonsense case against determinism.

Common sense, however, is no more pleased with indeterminism, which seems to give no satisfactory answer at all to any query of the form “Why did *this* happen rather than some other thing?” The reply “It just happened, that’s all” inevitably leaves us unsatisfied. If we drop a stone and, to our astonishment, it rises straight up in the air instead of falling, we won’t rest content with the “explanation” that “it was just one of those things—a totally random chance occurrence without rhyme or reason.” We are even less likely to accept “chance” as an “explanation” for human actions. Such an explanation, we feel, makes all human actions arbitrary and unintelligible; it also seems to destroy the intimate bond between a person and his actions that is required by judgments of moral responsibility. Yet insofar as a person’s action was uncaused, it does seem to have occurred “without rhyme or reason,” as a “matter of pure chance.” In the words of one determinist, “in proportion as an act of volition starts of itself without cause it is exactly, so far as the freedom of the individual is concerned, as if it had been thrown into his mind from without—‘suggested to him by a freakish demon.’”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>R. E. Hobart, “Free-Will as Involving Determinism and Inconceivable Without It,” *Mind* 43 (1934).

Common sense is thus tied up in knots. It looks with little favor either on determinism or indeterminism in respect to human actions. Yet because these two theories are defined as logical contradictories, one of them *must* be true. The plight of common sense thus takes the form of a **dilemma**—that is, an argument of the form

1. If P is true, then Q is true.
2. If not-P is true, then Q is true.
3. Either P is true or not-P is true.
4. Therefore, Q is true (where Q is something repugnant).

The dilemma of determinism can be stated thus:

1. If determinism is true, we can never do other than we do; hence, we are never responsible for what we do.
2. If indeterminism is true, then some events—namely, human actions—are random, hence not free; hence, we are never responsible for what we do.
3. Either determinism is true or else indeterminism is true.
4. Therefore, we are never responsible for what we do.

There are several ways we might try to escape being gored by the “horns of the dilemma,” but one way is *not* open to us. We may not deny the third premise; for, given our definitions of *determinism* and *indeterminism*, it amounts simply to the statement that either determinism is true or else it is not—surely an innocuous claim! We are, in short, not able in this case to get “between the horns of the dilemma” by denying the third premise.

We are thus left with three possibilities. We can deny the first premise and hold that determinism is, after all, perfectly compatible with free will and responsibility. Or we can deny the second premise and hold that we can act freely, and are responsible for our actions, even though they are uncaused. Or, finally, we can accept the entire argument just as it stands and argue on independent grounds that its conclusion is not so “repugnant” as it seems at first appearance.

Those who deny the dilemma’s first premise are nowadays called **compatibilists** (sometimes also **soft determinists**). Their central claim is that we can have free will, and be morally responsible for our choices and actions, even if determinism is true. Most compatibilists have believed that determinism is, in fact, true. Both David Hume and Helen Beebe, two of the compatibilists represented here, take this position.

The key issue that divides compatibilists from their opponents is usually the problem of how we should interpret “free to do otherwise,” “could have done otherwise,” “his act was avoidable,” and similar phrases used in support of our ascriptions of blame and punishment, credit or reward. Most parties to the discussion agree that a person can be held morally responsible for his past action *only if* he was able to do other than he did. Put more tersely: Avoidability is a necessary condition of responsibility.

There are two importantly different senses of *avoidability* in play in these discussions, and we must be careful to distinguish them. In the *categorical sense*, to say that an act is avoidable is to say that there were no prior conditions (causes) sufficient for its occurrence. In the *hypothetical sense*, to say that an act is avoidable is to say that *if* the

actor had chosen (or, perhaps, intended) to do otherwise, he would have done otherwise—nothing would have stopped him. Avoidability in the hypothetical sense is perfectly compatible with determinism. Avoidability in the categorical sense, by definition, is not. Now the question arises: In which of the senses of *avoidable*—the categorical sense, the hypothetical sense, or both—is it true that a person can be held responsible for his action only if it was avoidable?

David Hume (1711–1776), the author of the first compatibilist selection here, analyzes the long-standing debates surrounding free will and determinism as based on misunderstandings. Once we really get clear about the nature of human action, we must see that it follows its own laws of necessity, just as strictly as do those actions of inanimate objects. According to Hume, many have mistakenly thought that determinism is incompatible with human freedom because they have failed to understand that any free choice must be caused. For the absence of cause is pure chance, says Hume, and freedom cannot be based on chance. Free actions and decisions must therefore be caused, and if that is so, then there is no conflict between freedom and determinism.

Helen Beebee, a contemporary compatibilist, has written a new paper especially for this volume. In her piece, she focuses on a classic argument: If determinism is true, then we can't do anything other than what we in fact do. And that inability shows that we are not free to do otherwise. And if we aren't free to do otherwise, then we aren't morally responsible for what we do. Beebee agrees with this last claim—no freedom, no moral responsibility. And she agrees with the one before that—an inability to do otherwise shows that one isn't free to do otherwise. But since she rejects the conclusion of this classic argument, she has to reject its initial assumption. After laying out the problem carefully in the first half of her article, she devotes its second half to arguing that determinism is compatible with our ability to do something different from what we actually do.

Another approach to the dilemma of determinism—one that rejects its second premise—is found in the writings of Thomas Reid and Immanuel Kant, among others, and is represented here by the essays of Roderick Chisholm and Robert Kane. This is the **libertarian**<sup>3</sup> position, which argues that freedom is incompatible with determinism, that determinism is false, and that we do in fact often possess the sort of freedom necessary for moral responsibility. Libertarians remind us that human actions, unlike other events in nature, are subject to a special kind of explanation: the actor's own *reasons* for acting. An uncaused action, done deliberately for some reason, would therefore be a perfectly intelligible one, and adequately explained by an account of its reasons.

Roderick Chisholm's article tackles head-on perhaps the most troubling worry that besets libertarianism: the nature of the person whose choices can determine conduct but which are not themselves determined. Nothing else we know of has this sort of power. Physical things act in predictable ways and are governed by laws of cause and effect. Free human choices aren't like this. But they aren't random or purely matters of chance, either. Persons are controlling the choices they make, without in turn being necessitated to make them. Chisholm forthrightly sees the difficulty of such a position,

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<sup>3</sup>Not to be confused with the political theory of the same name, which advocates a minimal state and argues that all laws, except those necessary to vindicate citizens' moral rights, are unjustified.

and fans of libertarianism would do well to attend carefully to his analysis, one of whose primary virtues is to sketch just how exceptional free choices and persons are in the grand scheme of things. Philosophers and scientists are by nature skeptical of exceptions, constantly on the alert to prevent ad hoc hypotheses from being introduced to save a familiar or comforting idea. Chisholm sets the debate about libertarianism right where it should be, and forces us to ask whether the libertarian is giving us what we want (a robust sense of free will) at the expense of an occult view of the person.

Robert Kane's paper picks up directly on this theme and outlines a new version of libertarianism that takes its indeterminist element very seriously. Kane struggles to preserve a full-blooded conception of freedom compatibly with the latest scientific views of the world. Taking his cue from findings that some events (especially at the microphysical level) are not wholly determined, Kane seeks to locate opportunities for free will and moral responsibility within the indeterministic openings whose existence is ratified by contemporary physics.

Libertarians deny the possibility that we can have free will if determinism is true. The incompatibility of free will and determinism is also asserted by those who respond to the dilemma of determinism in the third way (that is, by embracing the conclusion of the dilemma, instead of trying to avoid it). This is the approach of the **hard determinists**; instead of abandoning determinism as the libertarians do, they abandon free will and moral responsibility. Hard determinism was the view of Baruch Spinoza and Paul Holbach, among other philosophers; of Mark Twain and Thomas Hardy, among other literary figures; and of Clarence Darrow, the famous American criminal lawyer. It is represented here by the selections from James Rachels and Derk Pereboom.

Rachels offers, in his characteristically clear and engaging way, a variety of considerations that favor the truth of determinism. He does not argue decisively against the possibility of free will. But he claims that the best evidence tells us that the origins of our behavior lie in influences over which we have no control—primarily our genetic inheritance and our upbringing. Given the extent of these factors in determining our character and outlook, which in turn determine our choices, it is difficult to see how they can leave room for freedom of the will. He illustrates his views with a number of important historical episodes and references to work in psychology.

Derk Pereboom prefers to think of himself as a hard incompatibilist, rather than a hard determinist, since he is unsure whether determinism is true, but convinced nonetheless that determinism is not compatible with genuine freedom, and convinced as well that the sort of freedom worth having does not exist. Pereboom presents clear and accessible arguments against both compatibilism and libertarianism, and then offers an extended discussion of the many ways in which determinism is said to threaten our moral practices and our ability to find meaning in life. Pereboom argues that the common perceptions of determinism's threatening nature are largely unfounded, and that, in some surprising cases, we can vindicate (and even better justify) certain of our moral attitudes and practices by subscribing to hard incompatibilism.

The concluding chapter of Part V, “Freedom and Moral Responsibility,” pursues several of the issues in the free will debate. The chapter opens with a brief piece by Galen Strawson, who presents, in truncated form, an argument that he has long pressed against the possibility of moral responsibility. Such responsibility, he claims, requires that we be ultimately responsible for “the way we are”—that is, for our nature, personality, and character. But we can’t be responsible for this, since the causes of our nature, personality, and character are outside of our control. Therefore, we cannot be morally responsible for our actions.

Strawson’s selection is followed by Harry Frankfurt’s “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility,” which challenges the widely held view that avoidability is a necessary condition of responsibility. He offers cases in which a person cannot avoid doing or choosing as he does, yet is properly held morally responsible for his choices or actions. The piece has become a contemporary classic in the free will discussion and continues to spark vigorous debate among philosophers as to the proper role (if any) of control and avoidability in determinations of freedom and responsibility.

The next selection is Thomas Nagel’s “Moral Luck,” in which Nagel sets out explicitly to challenge the Kantian view of moral responsibility. As Kant saw it, even in a world as dangerous and unpredictable as our own, there is at least one thing that is fully within our control: our moral integrity. Our moral integrity is a matter of intending to do what we believe to be our duty. We may fail to achieve the results we intend—that much may be out of our control. But we do control our intentions, and this control is enough to earn us moral credit or blame. Praise is properly merited for good intentions, and blame deserved for bad, precisely because such intentions are within our control.

Nagel challenges this widely held view in two ways. First, he argues that even if our intentions are fully within our control, our moral responsibility is based on other factors that are matters of luck. Suppose two drivers are speeding recklessly along a narrow road, and one driver hits and kills a pedestrian, while the other driver injures no one. Nagel argues that in such a case, we rightly charge the first driver with a graver wrong than the second, even though this disparity is based on something entirely outside of either driver’s control (namely, the presence or absence of a pedestrian along the road). Nagel also argues that even when we attribute praise and blame on the basis of intentions alone, the intentions one forms and acts on are themselves matters of luck. What we intend to do is partly a function of how we are raised, what circumstances we find ourselves in, and what genetic inheritance we find ourselves with. All of these are in the relevant sense “matters of luck,” since we cannot be said to have controlled or determined their presence. Nagel’s article seems to expose a deep problem for our ordinary notions of how responsibility and control are related. It forces our attention right back to the initial concern that defines the classic debate: how (or whether) it is possible to be a free, morally responsible person while at the same time recognizing the role that genetics, upbringing, circumstance, and socialization have played in making you the person you are.

Our final offering is by Susan Wolf, who, in a highly original paper, methodically presents a theory with two basic parts. First of all, responsibility for one’s actions and their consequences requires that those actions are within the control of one’s will. Second, one’s will must be within the control of one’s “deeper self.” But these two

requirements are not sufficient to produce moral responsibility. One further condition must be met: one must also be *sane*, where insanity, in turn, is analyzed as having *unavoidably mistaken* moral beliefs and values. Wolf's full theory, then, has a "deep self" condition supplemented by a "sanity condition," and the latter incorporates a conception of moral beliefs and their acquisition. The result is a theory that fits more comfortably with determinism, should that theory just happen to be true, and which does not require what is impossible, according to Wolf—namely, that a person, to be responsible for anything, must have created her own "deeper self" from nothing.