

Free Will

Basic Sketch of the Positions

Sketch of the Freedom-Determinism Problem: The following claims are jointly inconsistent

1. Determinism is true
2. If determinism is true, no-one could have done otherwise than they actually did
3. One acts freely if they could have done otherwise
4. Some actions are free

We have free will

1. Libertarianism: Deny that determinism is compatible with free will + deny that determinism is true
2. Forking-paths compatibilism: Determinism is compatible with free will + free will requires us to have the ability to do otherwise
3. Actual-sequence compatibilism: Determinism is compatible with free will + free will does not require us to have the ability to do otherwise

We do not have free will

1. Hard determinism: Deny that determinism is compatible with free will + determinism is completely true

Concepts

- Determinism
- Compatibilism and incompatibilism which clearly depends on our statements of free will
 - Given that free will is seen as necessary for moral responsibility, the notions of compatibilism and incompatibilism have also taken the thesis of whether moral responsibility is compatible with determinism or not

Category 1: Is Determinism true?

Determinism

- The thesis that it is true at every moment that the way things then are determines a unique future, that only one of the alternative futures that may exist relative to a given moment is a physically possible continuation of the state of things at that moment
 - Determinism is the thesis that only one continuation of the state of things at a given moment is consistent with the laws of nature, for it is the laws of nature that determines what is physically possible
 - For all times t_1 and t_2 , the laws of nature and the fundamental state of the universe at t_1 jointly necessitate the fundamental state of the universe at t_2

- The intuition that there are more than one possible futures to us is merely due to our limited knowledge of the underlying causes of the universe in any situation
 - Determinism may be true despite the fact that it sometimes seems to us human beings that there is more than one possible future → my facing more than one possible future is a delusion
- Laplace's Demon: Suppose there was a great intellect that knew every single formula of how the tiniest quark moved, how the tiniest boson spun, and could submit all these data to analysis. On the assumption that the human mind is part of the physical world or in some way depends on the physical world, the intellect could know everything with certainty – past, present and future.
- van Inwagen's Thought-Experiment: Determinism is true if we were to roll back history to some arbitrary point A, and all of the continuations of that point in time would play out exactly as it is now
- Determinism need not be entirely physical in nature
 - Wolf's psychological determinism thesis: An agent's action is psychologically determined if his action is determined by his interests – values or desires – and his interests are determined by his heredity or environment
 - Physiological/Physical determinism thesis: Because there is only one physically possible future, and human motion, thoughts etc are produced by biochemical processes which in turn are physically explained

Quantum indeterminacy and falsity of determinism

- Quantum Physics as an objection towards determinism: because subatomic particles act randomly (consider Brownian motion, electron clouds as a probability density of where the electrons are located etc), van Inwagen's Thought-Experiment would fail
 - If we roll back history to some arbitrary point A, then history could play out differently due to the random movements of particles
 - Quantum physics supports the indeterminacy thesis
- Quantum indeterminacy does not support the thesis of free will
 - H. Stewart: quantum indeterminacy reassures us that more than one path in the future is physically possible from the present state of the world at t1. But it does not show how we, as the agent, can have a role in determining which of those multiple futures come about. In fact, quantum physics says the exact opposite – the mechanism which determines which future comes about is stochastic in nature and thus out of human control
 - Suppose quantum indeterminacy shows that the impulses in my brain actually follow a random walk: if it moves left, my left hand moves; if it moves right, my right hand moves. Either left or right is possible. But realise that there is no place for the agent to have a proper role in making his left or right hand move

- To have free will is to understand how an agent, as a *person*, can have a role in bringing about a future
- Basically, Quantum indeterminacy only shows that there are multiple possible futures, but this is insufficient to show that an agent is free. They must also account for the role in which an agent plays in making a specific future come about → but often, free will is incompatible with indeterminism precisely because the process is stochastic and therefore cannot be up to the agent what the outcome is
- Further, there are multiple interpretations of quantum physics, some of which are to suppose that quantum physics is actually deterministic
 - But minority view and controversial → still cannot be ruled out
 - Also the possibility that quantum physics may be replaced by a paradigm that is deterministic
- Quantum physics also says that complex physical systems involving many particles and higher energies tend to be regular and predictable in their behaviour
 - So modern determinists such as Honderich argue that we can continue to regard human behaviour as determined “for all practical purposes” + this is all that matters for free will debates

Libertarian's agent-causation

- X acts freely iff X's actions/decisions/volitons were not caused by a prior state of affairs
 - Intuitions: The agent itself (and nothing more) was the cause of the action
- Objection: Challenge from Chance
 - H. Stewart: If there is nothing about Joe's states of mind, mental powers, character or abilities in either world that accounts for the difference, then it seems to boil down to a matter of luck. And if the difference between the two worlds/futures is merely a matter of luck, then it cannot be in any sense up to Joe which the decision was made which is what we need to see to establish any sort of free will
 - But I think this begs the question against the Libertarians → they are claiming precisely that Joe was the cause (in some way) of the difference, and not some property of Joe; Stewart is too quick to presuppose (and thus eliminate the role of Joe) the role of luck as the difference
- Objection: Challenge from Reason
 - Wolf: What the Libertarian seems to imply is that an agent is free iff the agent could act against their interests (otherwise, the agent's actions are determined by their interests)
 - Consider an agent who satisfies such a condition, such as a parent whose child is in the burning house. If the parent acted against her

interest, we would not consider the parent free but instead psychologically insane in order for the agent to actually perform such actions; these actions may not be classified as actions at all but involuntary spasms that the agent cannot control.

- Upshot: to act against one's interests (which determine my actions) does not capture the intuition about what it means to be free at all → a proper action needs to arise from reasons; an irrational action is not a free action
- Possible revision: X acts freely iff X's interests which determine one's actions were not caused by a prior state of affairs i.e. X can control their own interests
 - But this would similarly require us to have an agent who is capable of having clearly terrible interests such as not caring for their child → we would intuitively not consider an agent free

van Inwagen's argument from intuition (assumes incompatibilism is true)

- Suppose you are making an important decision, for instance whether or not to violate your wife's DNR request. van Inwagen asks us to imagine it through our mind's eye, and he argues that there is an extremely strong intuitive force that it seems as if such a decision is made by me and me only, that it was my (in the capacity as an agent) choice that I made.
 - He further argues that to dispose of the deterministic thesis is to accept a smaller mystery than to dispose of the free will thesis because then we cannot account for such extreme intuitions regarding important choices that we feel we made freely
- The more nuanced argument is this: regardless of whether we think that my choice to violate my wife's DNR request is free, it is even more intuitive that either option was a physically possible continuation of the present state of nature, that there exists multiple branches in the road of the future
 - The determinist (due to the consequence argument) seems to suppose that there is only one possible future and this is deeply implausible especially in light of the thought-experiment
- Obviously, since the consequences of accepting determinism does not lead to absurdity or contradiction, there is no good reason to reject either thesis on the negative reason of "greater mysteries"
 - Our thought-experiments may not be reliable especially when they are pertaining to outlandish scenarios

Category 2: Compatibilism and Incompatibilism

Statements of Free Will

1. Classical View: X acts freely iff X could have done otherwise

2. Conditional View (A. J. Ayer): X acts freely only if one would have acted otherwise had X so chosen
3. Desire View: X's doing F is free iff F was caused by X's desire to do F
 - a. Higher-order desire view: X's doing F is free iff F was caused by a desire X desires to have
4. Rational-reason view: X's doing F is free iff F was caused by X having the proper reasons for doing F, where proper reasons is characterised by X undergoing rational reflection

Incompatibilist positions

Consequence Argument

- Let us call a fact Y s.t. 'X is and always unable to do anything about Y and X would never have been able to do anything about Y, no matter what knowledge X might have had and no matter how lucky X might have been' an untouchable fact
- Consequence argument: "Suppose it's an untouchable fact that p. And suppose also that the following conditional expresses an untouchable fact: if p, then q. It follows from these two suppositions that it's an untouchable fact that q"
 - The conditional is plausible because by determinism, every cause has an effect, weakly conceptualise by a 'if-then' statement; it follows that if p always occurs in virtue of being an untouchable fact, then q will always occur
- Equivalent statement: If determinism is true, then our acts are the consequence of laws of nature and events in the remote past. But it's not up to us what went on before we were born, and neither is it up to us what the laws of nature are. Therefore, the consequences of these things (including our present acts) are not up to us
 - No one has power over the facts of the past and the laws of nature
 - No one has power over the fact that the facts of the past and the laws of nature entail every fact of the future (determinism is true)
 - Therefore, no one has power over the facts of the future
- Bridging the consequence argument to the fact that I have no free will: Since events in the remote past are untouchable facts (such as the death of dinosaurs), and such events cause future events until the event that I am writing this essay now, it follows that the event that I am writing this essay now is an untouchable fact
 - I could not have done otherwise because the combination of the existence untouchable facts and laws of nature imply
 - All facts are untouchable facts
- Clearly, this depends on the statement of free will that, at minimum, requires more than one future to be open to an agent and for that agent to be able to make possible some future

Compatibilism

Determinism and free will remain compatible when free will requires us to be able to do otherwise

The conditional view

- One acts freely only if one would have acted otherwise if they had chosen so
 - It is compatible with determinism because the view does not assert that any agent could actually have chosen any other action than what they did. It only asserts that he could have done differently, if he had so chosen
 - Given the falsity of the antecedent (if he had so chosen), the conditional is always true, so one could be said to be free under normal circumstances

Frankfurt cases on the falsity of the view: the ability to do otherwise is not a necessary condition for moral responsibility/free will

- Suppose that White wants Jane to do a certain action F. White will do whatever is in his power to force Jane to do F should Jane not decide to do F. But White does not want to intervene unless Jane does not do F and so watches extremely closely on the sidelines. By coincidence, Jane does do F and even deliberates exactly in the same way that White wanted her to. So, White does not intervene
 - Here, we would think that (1) Jane does not have the ability to do otherwise and (2) Jane is still morally responsible for what she did if F was a bad action
 - Note that Frankfurt thinks that this shows that Jane is still morally responsible, but does not say that she is free
 - But if free will is necessary for moral responsibility, then in virtue of being morally responsible, Jane is free
- Fundamentally, the fact that a person could not have avoided doing something is a sufficient condition of his having done it but **this fact may play no role whatever in the explanation of why he did it**
 - What matters is that he did something *because* he could not have done otherwise
 - If someone had no alternative to performing a certain action but did not perform it because he was unable to do otherwise, then he would have performed exactly the same action even if he could have done otherwise
 - The conditions preventing him from being able to do something else **could be subtracted from the situation without altering what he was to do** → make no difference, so far as concerns his action or how he came to perform it, if the circumstances that made it impossible for him to avoid performing it had not prevailed
 - The basis that he could not have done otherwise is not sufficient to suppose that he might have done otherwise → made the choice → if the fact is irrelevant to his action, seems difficult to assign it any weight in the assessment of his moral responsibility
- This is why the principle of alternate possibilities is mistaken → it asserts that a person bears no moral responsibility or is to be excused for having performed an

action that if there were circumstances that made it impossible for him to avoid performing it

- But there may be circumstances that make it impossible for a person to avoid performing some action without those circumstances in any way bringing it about that he performs that action → if by hypothesis, those circumstances had nothing to do with his having done what he did
- Revising the principle of alternative possibilities to assert that a person is not morally responsible for what he has done if he did it *because* he could not have done otherwise
 - May not affect incompatibilists who suggest that moral responsibility and determinism are incompatible:
 - if it was causally determined that a person perform a certain action, then it will be true that the person performed it because of causal determinants
 - And if the fact that it was causally determined that a person perform a certain action means that the person could not have done otherwise
 - Then the fact that it was causally determined that a person perform a certain action will mean that the person performed it because he could not have done otherwise
 - This revised principle will entail, on this assumption on the meaning of 'could have done otherwise', that a person is not morally responsible for what he has done if it was causally determined that he do it
 - So conflicts with compatibilism
- But Frankfurt rejects this principle
 - Suppose a person tells us that he did what he did because he was unable to do otherwise; or suppose he makes this similar statement that he did what he did because he had to do it
 - We only accept such statements as valid statements because we assume that we are being told more than the statements strictly and literally convey
 - We understand the person who offers the excuse to mean that he did what he did only because he was unable to do otherwise, or only because he had to do it → i.e. it was not what he really wanted to do
- Frankfurt thinks the following is the best revision: a person is not morally responsible for what he has done if he did it **only** because he could not have done otherwise
 - Does not conflict with the view that moral responsibility is compatible with determinism
 - The causal determinants must be the only reason for his action
- This is because we still ascribe moral blame if the following conditions hold
 - There were circumstances that made it impossible for a person to avoid doing something; these circumstances actually played a role in bringing it about

that he did it, so that it is correct to say he did it because he could not have done otherwise AND the person really wanted to do what he did; he did it because it was what he really wanted to do, so that it is not correct to say that he did what he did only because he could not have done otherwise

- We will not if he did it **ONLY because** he could not have done otherwise, even if what he did was something he really wanted to do
 - I think the second clause contradicts the “Only because”

Frankfurt does not really show that compatibilism is true

- In his thought experiment, he uses Black as a stand-in for determinism → but determinism is not merely a powerful agent like Black
 - But determinism affects our psychological characteristics → the causes of our psychological characteristics and states of mind come from outside of us
- We can instead generalise the case to a Producer and Victim and the Producer manipulates and designs the Victim to act in a specific way through hypnosis etc
 - We are supposed to agree that the Victim acts unfreely because of the role of the Producer in the causal history of his actions
 - If determinism is true, there is no relevant difference between the case of the Victim and any normal case of apparently free and morally responsible action
 - Therefore, if determinism is true no one ever acts freely or is morally responsible for what he does
- We, like the victim, are only proximate causes of our actions
 - What we do is because of the way we are (our psychological characteristics etc) and the reason for the way we are comes from things external to us

Forking-paths compatibilism

- We can agree that determinism in some way constrains the possible futures available to us, but it need not entail that it only allows for a single possible future
- A restatement of the consequence argument:
 - If determinism is true, then if I had acted otherwise than I otherwise could have, I would have rendered P (the state of the universe in some distant path) and L (the conjunction of all laws of nature) false
 - I could not have rendered P false
 - I could not have rendered L false
 - I could not have rendered P&L false
 - Hence, if determinism is true, I could not have acted otherwise than I actually did
- Takes issue with P1: If determinism is true, then if I had acted otherwise than I otherwise could have, I would have rendered P (the state of the universe in some distant path) and L (the conjunction of all laws of nature) false

- Suppose that if I played the flute before the lecture, it must be the case that there was a flute in the room
 - But it does not follow that if I had played the flute in the room, I would have made it the case that there was a flute in the room. It was because I found a flute in the room and decided to play it
- Doing something having a necessary condition for which p is true is not the same as it making the case that p is true
- The consequence argument claims that if we attribute ordinary abilities to deterministic agents and want them to have free will, then we ought to ascribe them with incredible past changing or law changing abilities. But no such conclusion follows. All we have to accept is that the exercise of our free will or abilities depend on some way, at the cost of our non-godlike nature, on circumstances external to us

Determinism and free will remain compatible because free will does not require us to be able to do otherwise

Actual-Sequence Compatibilism: we have to look at the actual history of the action to determine if it was done freely by X → if F was done as a result of X's desires, then it was free; if F was done as a result of coercive forces, then it was not free

- Hume seems to endorse this stance where he argues that an action is free iff it was done as a result of the "determinations of the will" → essentially, Hume thinks of freedom as the "absence of constraints": to be free is to (i) have the power or ability to do what we want or desire to do, which in turn entails (ii) an absence of constraints or impediments
 - While he follows by saying "If we want to rest, we may rest; if we do not want to rest, we may not" which seems to endorse a doctrine of being able to do otherwise, I suspect Hume's focus consists more on the causal link between our intentions and motives and our actions which he takes to be the effects of our intentions and motives
 - Hume is trying to argue that while the Doctrine of Necessity holds for our actions, because they are caused by such intentions and motives (since we often see the same action from the same motives), this does not eliminate the Doctrine of Liberty
 - It is only when intentions and motives cause our actions that we can consider such actions free; if they were caused by external obstacles or coercive forces, then we are not free. Intuitively this is because our motives and intentions, especially in light of the scientific context in which Hume was situated, were seen as *ours*, while external obstacles and coercive forces were exogenous to us
- Problem with Actual-Sequence Compatibilism

- The drug addict: A drug addict does what she wants when she takes drugs. But intuitively she does not act freely
 - This is because her desire is not within her control
- If we revise it to the higher-order desire view, we consider the willing drug addict: The willing drug addict, who is compelled to take drugs but is perfectly happy with the situation, does what she wants to do, but we still does not want to say that she acts freely
 - Because she cannot do otherwise if she wanted to
 - We would think that the non-addict is free, but the addict is not: The problem is how do we distinguish between the addict and the non-addict without appealing to the fact that the addict couldn't have done otherwise
- If actual-sequence compatibilism appeals to this fact (and Hume's view is perfectly compatible with it by saying the absence of constraints imply that I have the power to avoid doing F if I so chose to do so), then it collapses back into Ayer's conditional view, proven false by Frankfurt cases

Wolf's notion of an agent being morally responsible and free if and only if their actions are determined by their interests, and their interests are determined by the right sorts of reasons (namely, the True and the Good)

- Argues that in cases where we give moral praise, our criterion for one's moral praise is not that they could have done otherwise and thus chose to do the good action, but it is because their actions were determined by the right sort of (moral) reasons → having the right set of reasons should surely not lessen the credit one deserves
 - For instance, consider the statement "He is so gentle he could not hurt a fly" → this is taken to be a moral praise despite the fact that it seems to entail that he could not have done otherwise due to his gentleness (he remains psychologically determined); the reason is that he was psychologically determined by a moral reason (gentleness)
 - If a friend helps you and says "I couldn't resist" → testament to one's friendship than a detraction from their moral goodness
- Development of the rational view of free will: We might start with a man who has a generous mother and starts to develop his generosity out of a desire for her love. But this need not be the reason for his retainment of his generosity as he grows to be more mature. He might notice that his generous acts provide an independent pleasure, connected to the pleasure he gives the person on whom his generosity is bestowed + bestows positive feelings etc. He appreciates being the object of generous acts and is hurt when on the extreme end of ungenerous acts. So, generosity seems to cohere with his other values and with his ideal of how he ought to live

- His generosity is completely determined by causes external to him: his mother, his being the object of generous acts, the independent pleasure forming when he is generous → he decides none of these things
- But it is absurd to say that the man is not free or is not responsible for his being generous → his character is determined on the basis of his reasons which are determined by what reasons there are
 - What is not under control is that generosity is a virtue, and it only because he realises this that he remains a generous man
 - But we cannot claim that just because generosity being a virtue is out of his control that he has no responsibility for being generous → in fact it is the best reason one could have for being generous
- Asymmetry between moral blame and moral praise
 - For an action is morally praiseworthy only if there are no good and sufficient reasons to do something else; so, when an agent performs a good action, the condition of freedom is a counterfactual: **though it is required that the agent would have been able to do otherwise had there been good and sufficient reason to do so, the situation in which the good-acting agent actually found himself is a situation in which there was no such reason**
 - Thus, it is compatible with the satisfaction of the condition of freedom that the agent in this case could not actually have done other than what he actually did
 - When an agent performs a bad action the condition of freedom is not a counterfactual: the bad-acting agent does what he does in the face of good and sufficient reasons to do otherwise. Thus the condition of freedom **requires that the agent in this case could have done otherwise in just the situation he was actually placed**
 - An agent can be determined to perform a good action and still be morally praiseworthy, but if an agent is to be blameworthy, he must unconditionally have been able to do something else
- Realises that if we look at an undetermined agent (in the sense that satisfies the condition of freedom), and that the agent's actions are not determined by interests which are determined by reasons, it seems that the agent's actions are so undetermined such that the agent is free from moral reasons
 - So, if an agent is truly free in satisfying the condition of being undetermined, the agent could not be ascribed moral praise/responsibility
- When we think about who morality applies to, we realise that the compatibilists may be right: that an agent can only be moral insofar as his actions are psychologically determined (by a specific set of moral reasons)
- Victim of a Deprived Childhood: Say a victim of a deprived childhood commits a crime but is not coerced or overcome by an irresistible impulse. He is complete

possession of normal adult faculties of reason and observation and seems to have as much control over his behaviour as we have of ours

- Acts of the basis of choice, and he chooses on the basis of his reasons
- But it is not in virtue of his actions being determined that he is not responsible → sharpens into focus when we look at cases for moral praise
- The relevant difference between the victim of a deprived childhood and us is that our childhoods fell within a range of normal decency while his was severely deprived
 - The consequence is that unlike us, he could not have had reasons even though there were reasons around due to selective data of being abused
 - So, he is not morally blamed precisely because he could not access the good reasons for doing something
- Wolf's thesis of freedom: Freedom necessary for moral responsibility is the freedom to be determined by moral reasons (what Wolf terms the "True and the Good")
 - Depends on our capacities for finding them → which is what the deprived childhood prevents them from doing so
 - So if a normal person does a crime in the face of good and sufficient reasons to do otherwise → we would blame him despite his actions being determined by reasons
 - This is because despite his capacity for being able to locate moral reasons, he still did what he did in the face of it
 - So, blameworthiness in effect requires him to have done otherwise

Reason-view of free will

I will now advance a position for compatibilism that rejects the need to appeal to our ability of being able to have done something else, but which also makes proper sense of what it means for a future to be "open" or up to us: that our actions are determined by our interests, which in turn must be determined by reasons in an appropriate way. I will now explicate what I mean by "an appropriate way".

- Let us consider a normal man who has had a normal childhood, presumably like you and me, who has to decide whether or not to bypass his wife's "DNR" order. His actions are determined by his interest in doing what is best for his wife and himself, which are determined by reasons such as his love for his wife and his hope to see her alive again. Suppose he chose to violate his wife's DNR order. Now, we can imagine another man in exactly the same position who does the exact opposite. We may attribute this to the strength of their reasons (the first man had a stronger hope to see her alive again). But I think this analysis gives insufficient credit to the reflective process of individuals. It is this reflective process that, I think, makes proper sense of us being "free".
- In any situation, such as the one proposed, we have our interests (or perhaps we can call this general principles which we live by) on one side, and our reasons arising from the particular situation on the other.

- Naively, we think that there is an asymmetric relation: that only our reasons affect our interests and thereby our actions. But this does not properly characterise how we deliberate on issues. Suppose he has interests in his love for his wife and his hope to see her again, but a new reason particular to the situation – that he ought to respect her decision (independently of his love) – arises. The agent has to deliberate between these 2 sets of considerations. Further, there can be 2 outcomes: either interests change our reasons regarding the situation (that respecting her decision does not really matter) or our reasons change our interests (we now think that, generally, we should respect people's wishes). It is this type of deliberation that captures our notions of being free.
- Perhaps his deliberations are determined by some external causes such as receiving lots of love from his wife.
 - But I think that this does not undermine how this reflective process captures why we think we are free.
 - The reason, I contend, that we think we are free to choose in Inwagen's thought experiment of making important decisions is precisely because we undergo deliberation and reflection (which may be influenced by other factors).
 - In short, we are acting as an autonomous agent – autonomous in the sense that we can use our rational abilities of reflection to deliberate on our reasons and interests.
- This is why, like Wolf, we can preclude the victim of a deprived childhood from being free: because his deprived childhood has warped his ability to reason in an appropriate way through the selective data of constantly being abused and unloved by parents, he cannot truly deliberate in the same way as those whose childhood fall in the "normal range of decency."
 - So, we can be free without appealing to the notion of being able to do otherwise and a future being open to me. This characterisation of the reflective process, because of its similarity with our notions of autonomy, is why it is coherent with our notions of being free even if we cannot break the laws of nature.
- This version of the actual sequence view defuses the willing drug addict problem
 - We need to differentiate the points at which the drug addict is free
 - At $t=1$, when the agent has yet to start taking drugs and decides to take drugs on the basis of some reason having rationally considered it (for instance, coping with the loss of a loved one), then he would be free because he was determined by reasons emerging from a reflective process
 - But at $t=2$, when the addiction sets in, this undermines his capability of rational reflection → the overriding force in his decision making would be something exogenous to rational reflection

- What about actions that do not require rational thought?
 - But these tend to be instinctual → we would not consider them to be free anyway
 - Contrived example: for instance, when we walk on a road and avoid people → we are not free in that case precisely because we do not think about it
 - Follows that babies are not free → we would not think them so either, precisely because of their lack of cognitive capability