

How Dumb is Daniel Dennett?

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It continually amazes me how many otherwise-intelligent people I know claim to be fans of Daniel Dennett, a bitter hack philosopher who spends his days sucking up to scientists and writing personal attacks on other philosophers. As Daniel Davies [put it](#), “I used to be a rabid Dennettite [until] I started reading more widely in the subject, and found that Dennett had been pretty (no, make that very) badly behaved [...] And that’s when the hate developed.”

At some point it feels unfair to keep picking on the guy, but I came across a gem that, even after looking at it for months, still manages to amaze me. Here, in full, is Daniel Dennett’s argument determinism is compatible with free will.

(For context, this comes after pages discussing Conway’s game of life, in which some deterministic animated squiggles don’t bounce into (“avoid”) other animated squiggles.)

It logically follows that:

1. In some deterministic worlds there are avoiders avoiding harms.
2. Therefore, in some deterministic worlds some things are avoided.
3. Whatever is avoided is avoidable, or evitable.
4. Therefore, in some deterministic worlds not everything is inevitable.
5. Therefore, determinism does not imply inevitability.

(Gazzaniga and Steven, p. 65, summarizing Dennett’s *Freedom Evolves*, p. 56)

One just has to marvel at the sheer stupidity it takes to advance such an argument, much less base a 368-page book on it. I mean surely in the course of writing such a book you would come to notice that your core argument is based around a *pun*. (Shame also on Gazzaniga and Steven, who also base their argument on this absurd piece of “logic”.)

Yes, Daniel Dennett is literally arguing that because in some deterministic animations depict things being avoided, determinism does not imply inevitability. (It would seem an obvious corollary that Mickey Mouse has free will.)

Why do people still take this man seriously?