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Author(s): Phillip Gosselin

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The Principle of Alternate Possibilities

PHILLIP GOSSELIN
Brandon University
Brandon, Manitoba
Canada R7A 6A9

The standard argument for the incompatibility of determinism and moral responsibility employs the following two premises:

1. A person is morally responsible for what he has done only if he could have done otherwise:
2. A person could have done otherwise only if his action was not causally determined.

While premise two has been the focus of an enormous amount of controversy, premise one until recently has remained virtually unchallenged. However, since Harry Frankfurt's provocative paper in 1969, premise one, which he dubbed the principle of alternate possibilities (henceforth referred to as PAP), has begun to attract its share of the debate.¹ Frankfurt argued that PAP is false and that its falsity undermines the position of those who assert the incompatibility of determinism and moral responsibility.² Two previous papers I wrote were

1 Harry Frankfurt, 'Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility,' *Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969) 829-39. The literature which discusses Frankfurt's attack on PAP includes the following: David Blumenfeld, 'The Principle of Alternate Possibilities,' *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1971) 339-45; Peter Van Inwagen, 'Ability and Responsibility,' *Philosophical Review* 87 2(1978) 201-24; Phillip Gosselin, 'Is There a Freedom Requirement for Moral Responsibility?' *Dialogue* 18, 3 (1979) 289-306; Mark Bernstein, 'Moral Responsibility and Free Will,' *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 19 (1981) 1-10; Phillip Gosselin, 'Moral Responsibility and the Possibility of Doing Otherwise,' *Philosophy Research Archives* 8 (1982) 499-512. There are also brief discussions of Frankfurt's position in the following: Donald Davidson, 'Freedom to Act,' in Ted Honderich, ed., *Essays on Freedom of Action* (Boston, MA: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1973) 137-56; Robert Audi, 'Moral Responsibility, Freedom and Compulsion,' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 11, 1(1974) 1-14.

2 In this paper *incompatibilism* will be defined as the view that determinism is incompatible with moral responsibility.

devoted in part to showing that Frankfurt's argument is ineffective; one of those papers also argued that, while PAP is indeed false as it stands (though for reasons entirely different from those advanced by Frankfurt), if it is appropriately supplemented, it can continue to serve its traditional role in the determinism-responsibility debate.³

The purpose of this paper is (a) to offer a clarification and refinement of my supplemented version of PAP (let us call it S-PAP), and (b) to reinforce and supplement my earlier defence of S-PAP. However, before turning to that clarification and defence, let us consider briefly why it is necessary to introduce S-PAP as a surrogate for PAP in the incompatibilist's argument.

I Replacing PAP with S-PAP: Culpable Inability Does Not Excuse

PAP as it stands is false. A drunken driver who can not avoid striking a pedestrian may well be morally responsible for the accident. Because of his reduced reaction time it was impossible for him to avoid striking the man; however, if he had drunk to excess when it was within his power to do otherwise, knowing he would have to drive home shortly, knowing that he would be dangerously incapacitated as a result of his drinking, etc., then he is (to some extent) morally responsible for the pedestrian's injury or death. Consideration of this kind of example shows that, stated roughly, even if one is unable to do other than *a*, if one is morally responsible for that inability, it will not serve to excuse. In short, culpable inability will not serve to excuse. Accordingly, PAP must be supplemented as follows:

S-PAP: a person is morally responsible for what he has done only if (1) he could have done otherwise or (2) he is morally responsible for the fact that he could not.

Again, stated roughly, moral responsibility for the action in question requires ability (to do otherwise) or culpable inability (to do otherwise); that is, nonculpable inability excuses completely.⁴

3 Gosselin, 'Is There a Freedom Requirement for Moral Responsibility?' and Gosselin, 'Moral Responsibility and the Possibility of Doing Otherwise.' The second paper includes some discussion of Blumenfeld, Van Inwagen and Bernstein as well as Frankfurt.

4 For a fuller statement of this argument see 'Freedom Requirement,' 301-4. Notice that PAP and S-PAP are concerned with moral responsibility *for an action or failure to act*. As I argue in 'Freedom Requirement,' responsibility for action or failure to act is basic in any determination of moral responsibility. One can be morally

It is easy to see that S-PAP can take PAP's place in the standard argument for incompatibilism. It is true that S-PAP does not require that the agent could have done otherwise *at the time* of the act for which he is being censured, but it does require that the agent either could have done otherwise at the time or is to blame for the fact that he could not. And his inability will be blamable only if it is the product of an earlier act which is blamable; that act in turn will be blamable only if the agent either could have done otherwise or is at fault for the fact that he could not. And so on, until we come at last to an act of which it is true to say 'The agent could have done otherwise.' In other words, if one is to be morally responsible for *a* there must have been the possibility of alternate action either at the time of *a* or at some place along the line of *a*'s causal ancestors – and the incompatibilist, of course, argues that if determinism is true such alternate possibilities of action never obtain. S-PAP, then, can function as PAP's surrogate in the standard argument for incompatibilism. However, S-PAP requires some classification and refinement.

II Refining S-PAP: The Ambiguity of Could

S-PAP requires that one could have done otherwise (with the qualification indicated), but *could have done otherwise* has two very different senses (both of which, incidentally, can be accepted by compatibilists and incompatibilists alike). Those senses can be set out best if we begin by considering the statement *P could not have done otherwise*. Compare the following statements: 1. I can't lift the car off him; it's just too heavy! 2. You can't go near that (burning) vehicle; it may explode at any moment! The first statement asserts that for me under the circumstances it is categorically impossible to lift the car. I simply lack the strength necessary to accomplish the feat; no amount of trying will do the trick. The second statement asserts something quite different: it is not categorically impossible to approach the burning vehicle, but it is foolish to do so; prudence forbids such action. The impossibility asserted by the *can't* is, in this case, a conditional impossibility; one cannot approach the car if one is to avoid serious risk to life and limb.

The latter kind of *can't* may be termed '*normative*' for it asserts that the agent cannot perform a certain action *if he is to act in accordance with*

responsible for something other than an action or failure to act, but only if that something is the product of one's earlier action or failure to act. Thus, you may be morally responsible for a state of affairs such as a death, or a character trait such as your child's truculence, but only if the death or the truculence is the product of your own earlier action or inaction.

a certain norm: it says that a certain norm forbids a certain kind of action. The norm in question may be any of several. It may be a norm of prudence as in the preceding example. Or it may be a moral norm as in 'I can't play badminton tonight: I promised my wife we would go out to dinner.' It is not categorically impossible for me to play badminton tonight; but it is impossible if I am to keep my promise. The norm in question may be aesthetic as in 'You can't plant a tree there; it would destroy the symmetry of your landscape.' It may be a legal or a religious norm; it may be a norm of custom or of fashion. But in any of these cases the impossibility expressed is merely conditional; it says that you cannot act in a certain way if you are to satisfy a certain (usually implicit) norm.

The other sense of *can* and *cannot* I shall call the '*power sense*.' It was not within my power to lift the car with my bare hands. It is not that some norm forbade that I lift it (quite the contrary); rather, I simply lacked the physical ability to do it. The lack of some intellectual ability, likewise, may render an act quite impossible: I cannot, for example, memorize the entire *Oxford English Dictionary*. Lack of know-how, also, will render certain actions impossible: someone unacquainted with the inner workings of an automobile cannot (power sense) do a valve job. Finally, circumstances of time or place may render an act impossible: I cannot while in my office help my wife prepare lunch at home; I do not have the opportunity to help her. It seems perfectly clear that the lack of opportunity, the lack of know-how or the lack of the necessary physical or mental abilities will render certain actions categorically impossible. It is less clear, but perhaps true, that the lack of what might be called '*volitional ability*' also renders certain actions categorically impossible.

'Volitional ability' refers to the ability to bring oneself to do something, i.e., the ability to perform an act that is '*volitionally effortful*.' By a '*volitionally effortful*' act, I simply mean an act that is opposed by a desire/fear/aversion that is keenly felt at the moment of action. What is involved, typically, is the sacrifice of some pleasure or the tolerance of some unpleasant experience that is both intense and relatively immediate for the sake of a less immediate good (or the avoidance of a less immediate ill). The desire/fear/aversion in question may be pathological as in phobias, compulsions and addictions; but, it need not be, of course: rational fears and normal desires, if sufficiently acute at the moment of choice, may also result in volitionally effortful action – what we sometimes refer to as '*action requiring an effort of will*.' Now, if the desire/fear/aversion in question were so intense that it was not only difficult but *impossible* for the agent to act contrary to it, then the agent involved would lack the volitional ability to perform the action in question.

Whether this is ever the case is an interesting question – partly empirical and partly philosophical. It is partly philosophical because a careful analysis of the concept of someone being unable to bring himself to do something is necessary in order to know what conditions would make it true. I shall not offer such an analysis here; however, I will state a necessary condition for volitional inability which will show that it is probably extremely rare. It must surely be conceded that no matter how *difficult* it is for a person to bring himself to perform a certain kind of act, it is not *impossible* for him to do so if there is some incentive that, if operative, would induce him, constituted as he is, deliberately to perform the act in question. If, constituted as he is (with fears, aversions, etc. intact), he *would* deliberately do it for reason *r* then he *can* do it – even though reason *r* is not operative in this situation. Consider, for example, a claustrophobic. There may in fact be no reason for him to enter a certain narrow tunnel, or there may be a reason – say the retrieval of his son's baseball – but none sufficient to move him; nonetheless, while it would be volitionally difficult, perhaps excruciatingly difficult, for him to enter the tunnel, it is not volitionally impossible provided we can say that he would do it if he were given such and such a reason – say the saving of his son's life.⁵ Thus, while there may exist cases of genuine volitional impossibility, such cases are probably very uncommon.

Notice that there is a use of the phrase *P could not bring himself to do x* which seems to conflict with the foregoing. If I say that I could not bring myself to pass up a second piece of fresh apple pie, normally I do not mean that it was categorically impossible for me to do so; I mean something like 'I tried to pass it up and I failed.'⁶ However, it is important to note that this loose and rather misleading sense of

5 Notice, incidentally, that the *difficulty* of doing something is sometimes sufficient to excuse one's failure to do it – impossibility is not required. Whether it is sufficient in any given case will depend on the gravity of the failing in question. To put it another way, the greater the obligation one has to meet, the greater the volitional obstacles one can be expected to overcome in the effort to meet it.

6 Some may be inclined to question the meaningfulness of the phrase *trying to pass up a piece of pie*. How does one go about 'trying' to do such a thing? The answer is that one goes about it in essentially the same way one tries to overcome any temptation: by attempting to put the forbidden object out of one's mind, by rehearsing the good reasons for turning away from it, by reflecting on the consequences of not doing so, etc. One must not suppose that all trying involves physical activity. Of course, a statement such as 'I couldn't bring myself to refuse the pie' may well exaggerate the actual extent of the agent's effort to resist temptation. In fact, there might well be no effort at all – but, if there was capitulation without any resistance, strictly speaking, it is inaccurate to talk of failing to 'bring oneself' to do it.

could not is not the sense that absolves from moral responsibility; and, accordingly, it is not the sense that concerns us in our discussion of PAP and S-PAP.

Thus to say that one could not have done otherwise in the power sense (hereafter referred to as *could not have done otherwise [p]*) is to say that it was categorically impossible to do otherwise due to the lack of opportunity, the lack of know-how, the lack of some physical or intellectual ability or (perhaps, in rare cases) the lack of volitional ability. On the other hand, to say that one could not have done otherwise in the normative sense (hereafter referred to as *could not have done otherwise [n]*) is not to assert a categorical impossibility at all; rather it is to say that one could not do otherwise if one were to do the right thing or the prudent thing, etc. That is, in the normative sense *I could not do x* is always elliptical for *I could not do x if I were to do y – which was required by norm n*.

This distinction explains the hesitation that is sometimes experienced in describing a victim of coercion: could he have done otherwise or not? There is a tendency to say 'Yes' and a tendency to say 'No.' The truth is that in many, probably most, cases of coercion, while the agent cannot do otherwise (n), he can do otherwise (p). Typically cases of coercion (or alleged coercion) involve some kind of threat, explicit or otherwise. However, unless the threat excites a fear so terrible that nothing would induce the coercee to resist it, we must say that he could resist it in the power sense – though he chooses not to. On the other hand, the cost of resistance may be sufficiently great that compliance is justified. In such a case we will say that he cannot do otherwise in the normative sense – meaning that resistance would be foolish.

If, then, there are two very different senses of *he could have done otherwise*, which sense does moral responsibility require? To put it another way, which sense of *he could not have done otherwise* serves to exculpate? Consider first the normative sense. In saying that the agent could not have done otherwise one is saying that some norm required that he do what he did. But, of course, whether that will serve to exculpate will depend on what the norm is. If morality required that he do what he did, then of course the agent is not to blame since he did nothing wrong. What we might call the *normative could not of morality* necessarily exculpates. Of course, some normative *could not*s usually would not be appealed to in the context of moral assessment – for example, those of fashion or aesthetics. However, there is one other normative *could not* that frequently is appealed to when determining moral responsibility and that is the *normative could not of prudence*. ('He could not do otherwise if he was to avoid such and such very serious consequences to himself.') Often it does exculpate, but not necessarily so: prudence may dictate what morality forbids. To have done otherwise might have

resulted in some harm/cost to the agent, but morality might have required that he make the sacrifice; it would depend on the size of the sacrifice as well as the moral gravity of the act being contemplated. Accordingly, the question of whether the *normative could* or of *prudence* exculpates depends on the details of the case.

In any case, when one discusses the question of whether a subject of moral assessment could have done otherwise (n) one is concerned with the question of whether his action was morally *justified*. Did morality require that he do what he did? Did self-interest require it – and, if so, was the cost of alternative action great enough to render alternative action supererogatory? That is, was his action morally permissible?

The inability to do otherwise (p), on the other hand, is concerned not with justification but with excuse. If someone asks why *P* failed to help *Q* in his moment of distress and the reply comes that some physical deficiency rendered it impossible for *P* to do so, the reply serves not to justify *P*'s inaction but to excuse it; the reply does not say that inaction was morally permissible in this situation, but rather that it is excusable in *P*'s case. Furthermore the common sense conviction that nonculpable inability excuses completely seems perfectly acceptable: it does not seem right to hold someone morally responsible for doing something if through no fault of his own it was categorically impossible for him to do anything else. Our moral intuitions are surely very strong on this point and if the Frankfurt counterexamples to it, which we shall consider shortly, are to be effective, they must surely be unequivocal.

One final point before turning to some objections to S-PAP. Both senses of *could have done otherwise* seem to be relevant in assessments of moral responsibility, but are both senses operative in the determinism-responsibility debate? That is, is the *could have done otherwise* that appears in the standard argument for the incompatibility of determinism and moral responsibility (see the first paragraph of this paper) the normative *could* or the power *could*? Clearly it is the power *could* and only the power *could*. If determinism is true, says the incompatibilist, no one could ever have done other than he did and hence no one is ever morally responsible for what he did. Now if *could* were here taken in the normative sense, the incompatibilist would be saying that, if determinism is true, then no one could ever have done otherwise if he was to satisfy certain norms. That is, the incompatibilist would be saying that, if determinism is true, then it is true of absolutely every act that some norm or other required that that act be performed precisely as it was. But that is absurd.

To begin with, it is perfectly clear that many actions we perform are not required by any norms – whether determinism is true or not. But

in any case how would the truth of determinism imply anything about what certain norms required or forbade? Determinism would, of course, imply that what norms are operative among us were completely determined to be what they are; but it would not imply that those norms required this conduct rather than that – for example, that they required the conduct that actually obtained.⁷

It is the power sense of *could*, then, that is operative (or should be operative) in discussions of determinism and moral responsibility. If an action is determined, then under the totality of conditions that obtained at the time, it was categorically impossible for the agent to do anything other than just what he did – or, at least, so says the incompatibilist. Thus, while both the normative and the power *coulds* are relevant in moral assessments, only the power *could* is operative in the determinism-responsibility debate. Failure to recognize this point has led to considerable confusion. For example, in the context of the determinism-responsibility question cases of coercion have frequently been taken as paradigm cases of the inability to do otherwise – yet the inability arising out of coercion is almost invariably a normative inability, hence completely different from the inability supposedly arising from determinism. An example of how failure to appreciate this difference has led to bad arguments will be examined below.

Let us turn now from a clarification of PAP to its defence. We shall examine several arguments that have been brought against it recently – and which with minor modifications might be brought against S-PAP as well.

III Defending S-PAP: Frankfurt's Three Objections

Harry Frankfurt has presented three different kinds of counterexample to PAP each of which requires a separate and quite different defense. Two of those counterexamples were, I think, effectively crippled in a previous paper and I shall provide merely a recap of the arguments with some minor modifications. My earlier reply to the third counterexample was, I think, less effective than it might have been, and I shall offer a substantially different critique based on the distinction set out in the previous part of this paper.

In what I shall call the Evil Overseer counterexample Frankfurt describes a situation in which Jones commits some misdeed, say an

7 Indeed, some argue that the truth of determinism would render all norms meaningless (since ought implies can [p] and determinism is incompatible with can [p]). It is not, of course, necessary for me to rest my case on this controversial point.

embezzlement, unaware that, if he had reneged on his decision to embezzle, Black would have intervened to ensure that he do it (by coercing Jones or by somehow inducing in him an irresistible urge to do it, or by whatever means you please guaranteeing the performance to the act in question). In such a case, says Frankfurt, Jones having done the deed for his own reasons is morally responsible for it; yet because of Black he was bound to perform it, he could not have not performed it.

Two comments are in order. To begin with, the crucial question is whether it is true that Jones could not have done otherwise *at the time he performed the act (t)*: the question is not whether he was bound to perform it sooner or later. When we bear this in mind, we see that Frankfurt's counterexample, as stated, is ineffective. Jones could have changed his mind – even at the last moment. It is true that the Evil Overseer would then have intervened and Jones eventually would have embezzled after all; but in that case Jones would not have been morally responsible for the embezzlement. Now, the counterexample can be modified to meet this problem, but it will fail on another count.

Suppose Black is an evil genius who is able to foresee what Jones will do and who would have intervened if necessary to guarantee that Jones perform the embezzlement at *t*, i.e. at the time he actually performs it (for his own reasons). In that case it may seem that Jones is both morally responsible for the embezzlement at *t* and is bound to embezzle at *t*. However, the problem that still faces Frankfurt is that the sense in which Jones is 'bound' is a problematic one. What 'binds' Jones is neither coercion nor compulsion nor any factor that compatibilists have traditionally admitted as rendering one powerless to do otherwise. What 'binds' Jones is simply the fact that the evil genius's readiness to intervene guaranteed that Jones would embezzle at *t*, that is, the fact that there were conditions antecedent to the embezzlement that guaranteed its occurrence at *t*. But if determinism is true there are conditions antecedent to every act that guarantee its occurrence in a similar sense – yet it is notoriously controversial whether such a guarantee renders the agent powerless to do otherwise.

The point here is that Jones is no more powerless to do otherwise in virtue of the evil genius's resolve to see him embezzle than I would be powerless to do other than write this paper if determinism were true. Whether I would be is a controversial question. Furthermore, it would be no less controversial a question to ask whether I was or was not able to do otherwise in a universe *determined and prearranged by God*. The fact that my act was determined *by God* would not make me any less able to do otherwise than if it was determined by impersonal forces. Compare this now to Jones' case: his embezzlement was not *actually* prearranged by anyone – though it *would* have been if the evil genius had seen the necessity of doing some arranging. Is Jones any more

'bound', is his possibility of alternative action any less than mine would be now if this universe were determined by God? Surely not. Accordingly, if the possibility of alternative action is controversial in the universe-determined-by God case, it must be at least as controversial in the evil-genius case. But Frankfurt needs a noncontroversial case; he needs a case where the impossibility of alternative action is clear. I conclude, then, that even the evil genius version of the Evil Overseer counterexample fails.⁸

The second Frankfurt counterexample I shall consider is that of the Willing Addict. In this argument we are to imagine a case of addiction so extreme that it is not merely difficult but impossible for the agent to refrain from taking the drug to which he is addicted when the opportunity to do so presents itself. (The counterexample can be made to present a challenge to S-PAP as well as to PAP by supposing that the agent has become addicted through no fault of his own.) However, the addict does not perceive his condition as a burden; indeed, he is positively delighted with it. If somehow magically he could remove the addiction, he would not do so. Such a one is morally responsible, says Frankfurt, in spite of the fact that he is unable to do otherwise.

Such a one may indeed be morally responsible – but for what? Is it quite clear he is to blame for an act that at the time he could not avoid performing? Through no fault of his own it is impossible for him to refrain from taking the drug, but is it clear that he is morally responsible for that? I think not. He *is* a legitimate object of contempt, but for what? For his *attitude toward his addiction*. But he could adopt a different attitude: he could *try* to quit, he could take steps to remove the addiction, but he does not. Perhaps he cannot even do that, you say. Furthermore, perhaps his being the kind of person who would revel in such a condition is in no way the result of any previous voluntary choices on his part; it is a condition thrust upon him like a disease. A desert island case surely – but in such a case our attitude must change; it must no longer be one of moral condemnation though it may remain one of distaste. Again, I submit, Frankfurt's counterexample fails.⁹

8 Frankfurt's statement of the Evil Overseer counterexample appears in 'Alternate Possibilities,' 835-6. A fuller statement of my argument against this counterexample is to be found in 'Freedom Requirement,' 290-2. I also consider a modified version of the Evil Overseer argument (advanced by David Blumenfeld) in 'Moral Responsibility and the Possibility of Doing Otherwise,' 500-3.

9 The case of the Willing Addict was first set out in Frankfurt's 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,' *Journal of Philosophy* 68, 1 (1971) 18-20. My argu-

Frankfurt describes his third counterexample, which I shall call the case of the Willing Coercee, as follows:

Jones decides for reasons of his own to do something, then someone threatens him with a very harsh penalty (so harsh that any reasonable person would submit to the threat) unless he does precisely that, and Jones does it. ... [Suppose now that] Jones was neither stampeded by the threat nor indifferent to it. The threat impressed him, as it would impress any reasonable man, and he would have submitted to it wholeheartedly if he had not already made a decision that coincided with the one demanded of him. In fact, however, he performed the action in question on the basis of the decision he had made before the threat was issued. When he acted, he was not actually motivated by the threat but solely by the considerations that had originally commended the action to him. It was not the threat that led him to act, though it would have done so if he had not already provided himself with a sufficient motive for performing the act in question. ... Then I think we would be justified in regarding his moral responsibility for what he did as unaffected by the threat, even though, since he would in any case have submitted to the threat, he could not have avoided doing what he did.¹⁰

At the time that this argument was advanced Frankfurt was vaguely aware of the ambiguity of the phrase *could have done otherwise* and suspected that this ambiguity might be used to launch an objection to his counterexample; however, he did not attempt to spell out the ambiguity, nor did he attempt to determine whether it could be used to undermine his case.¹¹ I have set out the two senses of *could* in the second part of this paper and I have shown that it is the power sense that is operative in the determinism-responsibility debate. It remains only to point out that when we say the Jones of this counterexample could not have done otherwise we are using the phrase in the normative sense: Jones was a victim of coercion; in face of such a harsh threat it would have been foolish to do otherwise, but there is no reason to suppose it was categorically impossible for him to do otherwise (the way it would have been had he lacked, for example, the physical ability to do so.) Accordingly, as stated, the counterexample has no relevance to the version of PAP (or S-PAP) that figures in the determinism-responsibility debate.

In order to make the counterexample relevant to that debate we must suppose that the threat has the effect, not only of rendering alternative action foolhardy, but of rendering it categorically impossible. Thus, we must suppose (contrary to what Frankfurt supposes in his version

ment against this counterexample is stated more fully in 'Moral Responsibility and the Possibility of Doing Otherwise,' 507-10.

10 Frankfurt, 'Alternate Possibilities,' 831-2

11 Frankfurt, 'Alternate Possibilities,' 834

of this counterexample) that the threat has induced a fear so terrible that at the moment of action it renders defiance not merely volitionally difficult but impossible. It is now true that the agent could not have done otherwise in the relevant sense, but is it quite clear that he is morally responsible for the act? In the original counterexample Frankfurt was at pains to point out that Jones 'was not actually motivated by the threat but solely by the considerations that had originally commended the action to him'; that, Frankfurt believes, made Jones morally responsible for what he did. Two points can be made here. First, it is extremely doubtful that the modified counterexample will allow us to say that Jones was not motivated by the threat: he was, at the moment of action, possessed of an insurmountable fear of the consequences of doing otherwise. But, in any case, given that this fear stood as an insuperable obstacle to alternative action, I submit that it is not at all clear that Jones is morally responsible for what he did. He may be contemptible for his earlier decision to proceed, or for being the kind of person who would have done it even without the threat, but it is far from clear that he is morally responsible for the act itself. In other words we have ample ground for heaping scorn on Jones without having to reject PAP or S-PAP. Notice that Jones' situation *in this modified version* of the counterexample is precisely the same – in all relevant respects – as that of the willing addict. And as in the case of the willing addict we must bear firmly in mind that *ex hypothesi* it was just as impossible for him to do otherwise as it is impossible for me to lift my house with my bare hands.

As was pointed out earlier, S-PAP is a principle that is very firmly entrenched in our moral thinking; if Frankfurt is to prove it false, his counterexamples must be unequivocal. I submit that they are not.

IV Michael Zimmerman's Discussion of PAP

In conclusion I wish to comment on a recent discussion of PAP by Michael Zimmerman.¹² Zimmerman describes a counterexample to PAP similar in its essentials to Frankfurt's Evil Overseer argument and raises the question of its effect on the determinism-responsibility debate. He then attempts not to resolve the issue but to clarify it by describing in some detail what he believes are the five main positions that might be taken on it. The emergence of so many alternative positions results mainly from Zimmerman's contention that PAP requires the two following supporting premises:

12 Michael Zimmerman, 'Moral Responsibility, Freedom, and Alternate Possibilities,' *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 63 (1982) 243-54

SP1: A person is morally responsible for what he has done only if he did it freely.

SP2: A person has freely done what he has done only if he could have done otherwise.¹³

Zimmerman explains the need for these two supporting premises as follows:

The dispute between compatibilists and incompatibilists is primarily concerned with the relation between freedom of human action and determinism. Why, then, has [PAP] played such a dominant role in this dispute, given that it mentions neither freedom nor determinism but appears to concern itself, instead, with the matter of moral responsibility? The answer is four-fold. First, the debate between compatibilists and incompatibilists is fueled by a common concern with accounting for the possibility of persons being morally responsible for certain of their actions Second, both parties to the debate assume, roughly, that a person's being morally responsible for an action requires that he acted freely. Third, both parties assume, roughly, that, to act freely, a person must be able to do something other than that which he in fact does. And fourth ... the incompatibilist asserts [and the compatibilist denies], roughly that a person can do something other than that which he in fact does only if determinism is false.¹⁴

Now, if Zimmerman is right about this, not only is the debate made more complex, but PAP is rendered more vulnerable. PAP (and hence S-PAP) could be attacked via an assault on either SP1 or SP2 – and there is reason to suspect the soundness of both these principles.

SP1 says that moral responsibility requires that the agent acted freely. But consider an alcoholic whose incessant drinking wreaks havoc on his family. He may well be morally responsible for continuing to drink, but does he act freely in doing so? Some will say 'No: he is a slave to his passions.' Others will say 'Yes, for it is possible for him to quit, however difficult.' I am not sure a clear answer to this question is possible without stipulating a definition of *acted freely*. It seems that our linguistic conventions do not permit an unequivocal answer here.

SP2 says that acting freely requires being able to do otherwise. Now it seems fairly clear that acting freely does not require that one could have done otherwise in the normative sense; and it is questionable whether it requires that one could have done otherwise in the power sense. Suppose a person breaks an inconsequential engagement in

¹³ Zimmerman, 244

¹⁴ Ibid.

order to help a friend in need. He could not do otherwise in the normative sense for morality required that he act as he did. But if he wanted to help his friend, if he was glad to do so, we may say that he acted freely, that he did it of his own free will. It is even questionable whether one who is unable to do otherwise in the *power* sense necessarily acts unfreely. Does Frankfurt's willing addict act unfreely in taking the drug? Perhaps most addicts do. But this fellow is an unusual case: it is impossible for him to resist his craving, but he is quite happy to have it. In taking the drug he is doing what he wants to do. Is an unambiguous answer possible here?¹⁵

Now it may well be that there is a plausible sense of *free action* in which both SP1 and SP2 (an SP2 using the power sense of *could*) are true; but does the acceptability of PAP (and S-PAP) depend on these problematic premises? Zimmerman *assumes* that it does; he provides no support whatsoever for the claim that it does. Yet this claim requires support – for, *prima facie*, S-PAP stands on its own. Essentially it says that one is not to blame for doing something (or failing to do something) if through no fault of one's own it was impossible to do anything else; it says that it is wrong, not fitting from the moral point of view, to fault someone for failing to do the impossible (unless he is to blame for its being impossible). Do we require a demonstration of the truth of this principle? Must it be derived from premises more evident than itself? I submit that it is more probably true than either SP1 or SP2 taken singly – let alone taken in conjunction. I conclude that by failing to recognize this Zimmerman not only introduces an unnecessary complexity into the debate initiated by Frankfurt, but represents PAP (and hence S-PAP) as vulnerable on fronts that do not exist.¹⁶

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15 A recent discussion which demonstrates once again the difficulty of formulating a reportive definition of *free action* is 'Three Concepts of Free Action' by Don Locke and Harry Frankfurt, *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 49 (1975) 95-125.

16 I wish to thank an anonymous referee for the helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.