

Free Will and the Way Things Happen to Fall

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Foreword

If you are familiar with the free will debate, you are probably wondering why you are reading a thesis on free will and determinism. What do I, a humble undergraduate, have to contribute to this age-old debate? It may be true that I have nothing to say that has not already been said by a more brilliant thinker. What's more, this is not a new, exciting question. In fact it is the opposite of a new, exciting question. It is an old, metaphysical problem that has never been "solved" and probably never will. So why devote my senior year of college to an in-depth investigation of the free will problem?

I first encountered the question of free will and determinism in my first post-introductory philosophy course. Compatibilism seemed the most ridiculous philosophical position ever held. The fact that compatibilists even *existed* left me bewildered ("maybe philosophy isn't really what I thought it was!"). Like any successful college student I managed to internalize the argument for the final (without actually understanding it). In my next three semesters, I encountered what some would consider much loopier ideas, but somehow that pesky free will problem remained at the forefront of my curiosity.

In my experience talking about this problem with philosophers and non-philosophers alike, I find that most people share my initial reaction. I have found that it is very difficult to convince someone of compatibilism unless you show him or her what is wrong with the incompatibilist alternatives. Furthermore, I strongly believe that anyone who takes a hard look at the issue will come to the conclusion that our intuitive idea of free will is confused.

To turn back to my initial question then, my thesis is aimed at those who remain perplexed about the problem of free will and determinism. This thesis follows the path of my own intellectual curiosity. In sharing this starting point with the reader, I hope the reader can find some clarification and new ideas in viewing the topic through my personal investigation.

“Table Talk” by Wallace Stevens

Granted, we die for good.
Life, then, is largely a thing
Of happens to like, not should.

And that too, granted, why
Do I happen to like red bush,
Gray grass and green-gray sky?

What else remains? But red
Gray, green, why those of all?
That is not what I said:

Not those of all. But those.
One likes what one happens to like.
One likes the way red grows

It cannot matter at all.
Happens to like is one
Of the ways things happen to fall.¹

¹ In *The Norton Anthology of Poetry (5th Edition)*. Ed. Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter and Jon Stallworthy. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 2005) p. 1267

Part One

Introduction

Free will is something we as humans believe in strongly and intuitively. Of course, philosophical reflection is good at making us skeptical about the things we feel most certain about. When we reflect on the consequences of determinism, it is natural to become skeptical of our own free will. We see the importance of our belief in free will in our moral judgments. The assumption that an agent has free will is essential in the act of praising or blaming that agent. Thus for moral reasons it is essential we have free will. But free will is important to us for another reason. It is also psychologically important to us that we have free will, for the alternative is frightening. It is scary to think of ourselves as puppets, controlled by some other person, but the idea that we are controlled by some external force such as determinism is scary too. If everything we think, do, and experience is the result of some outside force, it seems as though all the beautiful (and horrible) things in life are reduced to nothing but cold hard science. We do not create our action; impersonal laws of nature that have nothing to do with our character, motivations, hopes and dreams, create our action. Our relationships, our feelings, and our thoughts do not arise from our selves but from some external cause. Our initial reactions regarding the consequences of determinism are disheartening indeed.

The problem of free will and determinism has, historically, largely boiled down to a choice between two options: compatibilism and incompatibilism. Compatibilists see free will as consistent with determinism; incompatibilists do not. Philosophers often

focus on different parts of our intuitive concept of free will in order to get at what it is we really want out of free will. These include: freedom, desires, our causal power and the sense in which the agent is the source of action. When we say that we have free will, part of that means that we are the authors of our own action. It is us, not others, and not external forces, that have the power to decide which course of action to pursue.

To ask of an action, “where did that action come from?” is to hit at the heart of the free will debate. In what sense I am a source of my action largely influences whether I have free will or not. According to the incompatibilist, if my action is to be free I must be the ultimate source of that action. If we can trace the action to some external ultimate source that means we can also trace responsibility for the action to that external source. A compatibilist provides a slightly looser requirement of an agent: in order to be held morally responsible an agent must merely be the source of an action at some point in the causal chain. Even though the origination of the action is, ultimately, external to the agent, this is not enough to render the agent free of responsibility.

In the following sections I will explore our immediate tendency towards skepticism when presented with the concept of determinism: Is this skepticism warranted? What does acceptance of determinism imply? Can we still maintain that we have free will in a deterministic world? What does it mean to have free will? These questions are at the core of the philosophical debate. After providing a few incompatibilist arguments, I will explain some of the common features of positive incompatibilist accounts. Then I will mention some of the challenges incompatibilist accounts of free will face. Of course, acceptance of compatibilism comes with its price. After explaining the compatibilist requirements of free action, I will also point out the

difficulties with the compatibilist position. Specifically, the compatibilist must be careful in their description of ‘voluntary action’ so as to allow for cases of action out of character and self-alienation. In explicating each position and the criticism of each position, we will better understand the debate as a whole and what each camp is committed to.

The Problem

Most people can initially be persuaded into the incompatibilist position by merely explaining what determinism means. Intuitively, it seems as though we do not have free will if we can only perform but one action in any given situation. If we could not have acted in any other way than the way we did act, how could we be held responsible for that action? Hence, the lack of alternatives in a deterministic world is a major worry. Furthermore, most people believe that we must be the ultimate authors of our actions in order to be held responsible for them. As Leibniz puts it, reasons “incline without necessitating”², which is to say that yes, our environment limits us and yes, we are motivated by factors out of our control, but that ultimately, we are the ones who choose what actions to perform. We want to be initiators of a causal sequence but in a deterministic world we are merely links in the causal chain. The requirement that I am a causal initiator of my actions is left unsatisfied by determinism.

The incompatibilist arguments mentioned above are based on our intuitions. They do not require a great deal of technical thought, relying mostly on the way we feel about free will and determinism. The consequence argument is a technical incompatibilist

² Leibniz, Gottfried. *Discourse on Metaphysics*. Trans. Daniel Garber and Roger Ariew. (Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Co.) 1991

argument: it lays out the premises and conclusions so as to clearly state the reasoning. In this section I will largely refer to the work of Peter van Inwagen³, who so clearly and sympathetically presents the argument. It is based on one assumption and two inference rules. The first rule, Rule Alpha, states that if a proposition 'P' is logically necessarily true, then the weaker claim "no one has, or ever had, any choice about whether p" is true. The second rule, Rule Beta, states that if no one ever has, or ever had any choice about whether 'p', and no one ever has, or ever had any choice about whether if 'p' holds then 'q', then no one ever has, or ever had any choice about 'q'.

If determinism is true, we may correctly state the following: the laws of nature in conjunction with a complete description of the world at some distant point in the past (say, before humans existed) by logical necessity entail some true proposition 'P'. Using some basic logic we can then show that the past state of affairs imply that the laws of nature imply proposition 'P'. By Rule Alpha, no one ever has, or ever had any choice about this. We then assume that no one has, had, or ever had any choice about the state of affairs in the distant past. If so, then by Rule Beta, the laws of nature entail 'P'. By assuming no one has or ever had any choice about the laws of nature, we then easily conclude by Rule Beta that no one ever has or had any choice about whether 'P'. Starting from the assumption that we live in a deterministic world, the argument comes to the conclusion that we do not have any choice about the truth-value of propositions, including propositions that refer to human actions. If we do not have control over whether these propositions obtain, we do not have free will. If we do not have free will on the assumption of a deterministic world, then free will and determinism are

³ Van Inwagen, Peter. "When is the Will Free?" *Philosophical Perspectives*, Vol. 3, *Philosophy of Mind and Action Theory* (1989): 405

incompatible. The truth of the premises and Rule Alpha are generally accepted. The whole argument depends on Rule Beta, and this rule is certainly up for debate⁴. However, if Rule Beta is in fact valid, there are very few instances in which we exercise free will, even in an indeterministic world.

It is important to note the far-reaching consequences of acceptance of Rule Beta. Even assuming we live in an indeterministic world, the acceptance of Rule Beta limits the number of actions that are free. There are many examples of action in our everyday lives in which the action we decide to perform seems such an obvious choice that to not perform that action would render our description of the scenario incoherent. Our habitual actions are good examples of such scenarios. When, for example, we scratch an itch, we really could not do otherwise. Scratching an itch is a habitual action that we do with very little thought. To not scratch the itch would be abnormal. It would be so abnormal that in order to make *not* scratching coherent, there would have to be some unknown fact in the scenario. If the scenario were that John had the chicken pox and the doctor told him “Do not scratch!” it would make sense for John not to scratch. But in a normal, everyday situation we cannot think of a story in which it makes sense that we do not scratch that itch. To do so we would have to add something to the story. We scratch an itch so naturally that in order to create a coherent story about why we would not do we would have to change the scenario.

The above paragraph is aimed at showing that the statement “If I have an itch I will scratch it” is true (unless some extra fact about the situation obtains). Van Inwagen

⁴ For a complete overview of the challenges facing the Consequence Argument, see Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (online). Vihvelin, Kadri. “Arguments for Incompatibilism”. (2007) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/incompatibilism-arguments/>

argues that the modal status of this statement is “something very like a necessary truth”⁵. Suppose I have an itch and that this is a necessary truth. Suppose again, as argued above, that the statement “if I have an itch I will scratch it” is a necessary truth. Then by Rule Beta, I do not have any choice about whether I will scratch the itch. I will, and I have no choice about it⁶. It seems then, that most of the time we have no choice about the every day actions we perform: scratching an itch, answering the telephone when it rings, etc.

Rule Beta also extends to more unusual and more important cases. A second class of actions that we seem to have no control over performing has to do with our moral beliefs. Van Inwagen argues that we cannot act against our fundamental moral beliefs in the same way we cannot refrain from scratching an itch. That is, Rule Beta limits our response to moral issues. If I am faced with the opportunity to cheat on a test, but am morally opposed to doing so, it is impossible to conceive of a coherent case in which I do cheat on a test without adding some extra factor to the story. I have no choice about my beliefs and attitudes, I see no objection to *not* performing the morally indefensible act, no additional information is available to prevent us from performing the act, and moreover, I have no *desire* to cheat on the test. Under these circumstances, there is no coherent story in which I would cheat on the test. My beliefs about the situation are so clear that it would not just be *irrational* not to act upon these reasons, it would be *inconceivable* not do so.

⁵ Van Inwagen, Peter. “When is the Will Free?” Philosophical Perspectives, Vol. 3, Philosophy of Mind and Action Theory (1989): 407

⁶ The logical form of this argument would be:

N(I have an itch)

N(I have an itch → I am going to scratch the itch)

Then, by Rule Beta N(I am going to scratch the itch)

Note that we are not considering examples in which an agent is conflicted because of two competing desires and is considered weak-willed for choosing the more immediate satisfaction over the general rule to which the agent adheres. We may perform a morally reprehensible act if other factors, say, the positive desire to perform the action, get involved. But without adding some additional fact to the story it is impossible that we perform the indefensible act. If we think of a story in which all of these factors hold and yet the agent does perform the indefensible act, the story does not make any sense. The action is not free because we have no choice about whether to perform the action.

Let us briefly review how Rule Beta affects our freedom in the example above. In this instance, it seems to be a necessary truth that I am morally opposed to cheating on exams. I have argued that it is incoherent to perform a morally reprehensible act. So, it is also a necessary truth that given this moral opposition, I will not cheat on an exam. If so, then by Rule Beta I simply have no choice about my action; I will not cheat on the exam.

At this point the reader should recognize the worries determinism poses. Through either an intuitive or a technical argument, we can see how determinism threatens the things we value about agency. In the following sections, I will lay out the way in which incompatibilists and compatibilist respond to these worries, focusing first on the idea of choice.

Choice

In order to get a true examination of the free will debate, it may be useful to focus on the paradigm examples of free will. These are instances of what Robert Kane calls “Self-forming Actions”; instances in which we shape who we are through our character. In such instances our inner guide is in turmoil. We may be faced with a decision between cheating on a test or failing, or between giving up and going on. We see two options ahead of us, both desirable for their own reasons. In order to relieve the cognitive dissonance (which in the end may be the most motivating factor of all), one must make a choice. One must decide between doing something honorable or acting out of self-interest, granting instant gratification or long-term satisfaction. These instances of self-forming action, in which it is difficult to decide what to do, and yet a decision must be made, are the instances in which we truly exercise our free will. It is in these choices that we express who we are and who we want to become. Robert Kane draws an elegant parallel between self-forming actions and the writing of a character in a novel. As Kane writes, “Agents who exercise free will are both authors of, and characters in, their own stories at once. By virtue of “self-forming” judgments of the will...they are “arbiters” of their own lives, taking responsibility for “making themselves” out of past”⁷.

Those persuaded by incompatibilist arguments are generally convinced because they place great importance on *choice*. In instances of self-forming action, I choose what to do and who I want to be in the future. In a deterministic world, the agent’s decision is already determined by antecedent events. So the agent lacks the power to act any

⁷ Kane, “Responsibility, Luck, and Chance: Reflections on Free Will and Indeterminism”. *Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 96 No.5 (1999) p.240

differently. This kind of world picture is in conflict with our everyday experience. In observing my own agency, it seems as though at any given moment a variety of actions or non-actions are available for my choosing. I decide what to do next. Since, in a deterministic world, I have in reality only one option, I do not have free will.

There are a few different ways compatibilist attempt to solve the problem of choice, but none of them prove satisfactory to the incompatibilist. One strategy is to address choice in terms of our desires. Harry Frankfurt expresses this position in his essay “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility”⁸. Frankfurt argues that we already have a precedent for praise and blame that does not include alternate possibilities. One may think that a case of coercion – a case in which an agent was forced to perform one and only one action – would be the opposite of an exercise in free will. Deterministic causation could be seen as a constant coercive force in our lives.

On the other hand, there are instances of coercion in which we do hold the agent responsible for his action. If an agent is prevented from performing any but one action, and yet wanted to perform that very action, he is held responsible for his action. If the agent would have carried out that action even were he completely free to perform other actions, the fact that he is coerced has no bearing on his moral responsibility. If I am forced at gunpoint to drive a getaway car, the fact that I am coerced to do so makes no difference to my moral responsibility assuming I wanted to drive the get-away car anyway. It still that I am still blameworthy.

Our lives in a deterministic world are like those who are coerced and yet would not desire to perform any differently. In other words, our wills are constantly aligned with

⁸ Frankfurt, Harry. “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility” *Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 66 No. 23 (1969)

the actions we ultimately perform. It would be very unusual indeed to feel as though we were coerced by our own will. Though Frankfurt's argument may be true, his argument also leads to one inevitable question: are we in control of our desires? This question motivates the search for a legitimate incompatibilist theory, for the compatibilist has no satisfactory answer to the question.

Most incompatibilists see actions as free when they originate within us. Even our reasons for performing actions should originate within us. Free actions are *not* the result of an antecedent chain of events originating exterior to the agent. Instead, an action is free if it is an instance of non-occurrent causation. Non-occurrent causation means that the cause is not itself caused. It is the initiator of a causal sequence. The agent is then a "prime mover unmoved"⁹, so to speak. Incompatibilist theories that rely on non-occurrent causation by an agent are called Agent Causation theories. As laid out by C.D. Broad¹⁰, Agent Causation theories require three conditions: a) the agent is the sole cause of the free action, b) the agent can cause both action and refraining from action, and c) the free action which is a non-occurrent event caused by the agent cannot be explained as the causation of any other occurrence or event by other occurrences or events.

Some critics dismiss Agent Causation theories at the outset, describing them as metaphysically mysterious. To being with, once one is committed to an Agent Causation theory inevitably one will wonder what exactly this agent that is doing the causation *is*. Is the locus of control a Kantian noumenal soul, transcending time and space? Is it some material substance with both physical and mental properties? Is it actually just an agent

⁹ Chisholm, Roderick. "Freedom and Action" in *Freedom and Determinism*, K. Lehrer (ed.), New York: Random House, p. 23

¹⁰ Broad, C.D. "Determinism, Indeterminism, and Libertarianism" in *Free Will*, ed. S. Morgenbesser and J. Walsh (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962) pp. 115-132

within an agent? The Agent Causation theorist must explain how the agent is involved in the bringing about of an event. Furthermore, a significant portion of philosophers dismisses Agent Causation as employing “panicky metaphysics¹¹”. They argue that the very idea of an agent being a causal initiator is incoherent.

Another question regarding the relationship between character and causation shows up in a different criticism of Agent Causation theories. When it comes to moral responsibility, origination is just one half of the story. Origination alone will not provide an incompatibilist with sufficient grounds to claim moral responsibility. The incompatibilist must also be able to explain the action in terms of the agent’s character traits, desires, goals, etc. We must be able to understand *why* the agent acted as she did. As Kane notes, these two requirements are inherently at odds with one another. Kane writes, “Given the requirement that free choices or actions be undetermined, it becomes difficult to satisfy the other condition for ultimate responsibility, the Explanation Condition”¹².

Under the requirements for the Agent Causation theory described above, the cause of a non-occurrently caused event cannot be in any way determined by anything before it. It cannot be determined by any properties an agent has, including character traits or desires. For given the exact same past, character traits and desires, Agent Causation requires that an agent has the ability to choose one of two possibilities. But if the agent really does have the ability to choose, then the choice must be arbitrary, for there can be no *reason* that he would choose one over the other. In other words, how can the agent act

¹¹ Strawson, P.F., "Freedom and Resentment." Proceedings of the British Academy 48 (1962):1-25. Reprinted in Fischer and Ravizza, 1993.

¹² Kane, “Two Kinds of Incompatibilism”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. Vol. 50 No. 2(1989) p. 227

for reasons if the very same reasons could produce two different outcomes?¹³ The idea of non-occurrent causation is in direct conflict with our notion of acting for a reason. As Ted Honderich writes, “for there to be an answer to the fundamental question of why an event happened is for there to be something of which it was the effect”¹⁴. It seems that the very project of explaining why an event occurred rules out Agent Causation as an explanation of how it occurred.

So far I have attempted to introduce the idea of Agent Causation. Though it is not the only form of incompatibilism, I believe Agent Causation is the closest model of our intuitive view. Even if compatibilism does align with our intuitive view, however, it comes at the high price of intelligibility. Later on I will consider an incompatibilist alternative to Agent Causation, what Kane calls his “Teleological Intelligibility Theory” (see *Event Causation Reconsidered*). This theory attempts to provide a simpler account of our agency, though at the outset it seems difficult to understand how an incompatibilist account could be satisfy our intuitive view without an appeal to Agent Causation. For now, I would like to focus on a different alternative: compatibilism.

Compatibilism

Above I have briefly sketched one incompatibilist position and the problems it faces. Some philosophers believe that the features of the incompatibilist position (specifically Agent Causation) are so absurd that one must consequently accept

¹³ Kane, “Two Kinds of Incompatibilism”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. Vol. 50 No. 2(1989) p. 228

¹⁴ Honderich, Ted. *Determinism as True, Both Compatibilism and Incompatibilism as False, and the Real Problem*.

compatibilism. So what is the alternative compatibilist position? In his essay “Free Will as Involving Determinism and Inconceivable Without It”, R.E. Hobart provides a wonderful account of a familiar compatibilist stance on free will. Hobart sets out to demystify “the will”. He argues that incompatibilists rely on an unexamined view of our will. The imprecision of this view leads to the libertarian standpoint. According to Hobart, when we make the effort to analyze the will, we discover that free will makes sense *only* in a deterministic world.

While incompatibilists seem to separate character from the self in proposing causation that is not necessitated by our character, compatibilists see a connection between the two as necessary and desirable. Furthermore, they see that the connection between character and the self is already present in our everyday language. Compatibilists argue that for our action to be meaningful, it must come from who we are. However we decide, that decision must be made by something that represents our character. So if our action arises from our self, our character (who we are) must be contained in our self.

Consider the alternative; our action comes from nowhere, it arises spontaneously, it is not a reflection of our character (it does not come from who we are). This obviously is not what we hope to discover from a theory of free will. The incompatibilist hopes to show that our action is spontaneous insofar as it arises from an entity that is not determined, but instead shows that our action does not arise from who we are. Not only is this outcome undesirable, it does not adequately reflect the way we speak of free will. For we often attribute an action to a person while also recognizing that that action is just a result of who that person is.

Incompatibilists also separate our desires from the self. Again, a compatibilist sees desires and the self as different parts of the same entity. The incompatibilist worries that in a deterministic world our action is determined completely by our desires. We cannot control our desires, so we cannot control our action. The incompatibilist rhetoric on this point imagines the self as dragged unwillingly about by desires. This is a clear contradiction of our everyday experience. For the compatibilist, when we see our desires as a part of our self, our desires no longer control our actions; they enable us to willingly do as we please.

The compatibilist provides a seemingly simpler account of free will in that it does not employ metaphysically tricky concepts such as Agent Causation. According to the compatibilist, we need not be the ultimate sources (originators) of action in order to be held morally responsible for an action. A less strict requirement suffices. In general, in order for an agent to be responsible for an action, the action must be attributable to the agent. This is not a completely adequate characterization, for agents are not held responsible for actions under coercion, even though in a causal sense the action is attributable to the agent. As Frankfurt points out, compatibilism also requires that free actions be aligned with our character. Actions that we do not perform voluntarily are not free actions. In most cases, we do voluntarily perform our actions, thus most of our actions are free. Further, since all of our actions are effects, it is easy to explain why we should be held responsible for an action, for it is easy to explain why an action occurred. The action is a direct result of the agent's character. While under an account of Agent Causation an agent's action seems arbitrary, under the compatibilist account an agent's free action is the result of the agent's character.

While compatibilism does not have to deal with the problems that come with postulating a new form of causation, the position still faces problems. On the compatibilist's account we are held responsible for an action when that action is aligned with our character. But it is easy to provide examples of actions in which we act out of character and yet are held responsible for our actions. Though a murderer might not kill others on a regular basis, she is still held responsible for her one-time decision to kill (except, of course, in cases of self-defense). A rash action or a temporary lapse in judgment usually will not vindicate the charged (notable exceptions have included Battered Wife Syndrome, "crimes of passion", and pleas to temporary insanity). Whether or not committing murder is a regular attribute of her character, she will still be held responsible for her actions.

A compatibilist must also be able to account for situations in which we are consciously alienated from ourselves. In these cases, it *does* seem as though we are compelled to act against our own will. Examples of self-alienation include obsessive-compulsive disorder and drug addiction. Those who suffer from OCD often feel compelled to do things that interfere with their everyday and long-term projects. Drug addicts feel compelled to use drugs even knowing that using interferes with their other desires. Some external force requires the agent to perform actions although the agent herself feels that these actions are self-destructive.

As mentioned before compatibilists have little to say when it comes to control over one's desires. Compatibilists cannot adequately account for our judgment of those affected by dark personal histories, but we often excuse those who are emotionally scarred from an abusive childhood. It seems a compatibilist must reply that personal

history provides no escape from blame. After all, how can a compatibilist legitimately excuse the actions from such a person when the person wanted to perform the wrong action she performed? Doesn't the compatibilist position merely require that our actions be voluntary? Well, we might think that the agent is excusable because she cannot control what she desires. But is the agent who had a happy childhood any more in control of what she desires than the agent with a troubled past¹⁵?

As always, we cannot accept the compatibilist account without sacrificing something we care about. The compatibilist soothes our qualms about explanation- we can easily argue that agents always act for reasons. They always act according to what compels them. On the other hand the compatibilist account is less persuasive in arguing for why we should hold agents responsible for their actions. So far it seems that in the compatibilist sense an agent is the source of an action if she is involved in the causal chain leading up to the action.

In the tradition of compatibilists like R.E. Hobart, in order to hold an agent responsible for an action we must simply be able to attribute the action to the agent, but it seems unfair to attribute an action to an agent if the agent had no control over its role in the causal chain. Thus while in one sense we can attribute an action to an agent, in a more meaningful sense we cannot. In this more meaningful sense we cannot hold the agent *accountable* for her action¹⁶. Susan Wolf examines this problem, concluding that our freedom is asymmetrical. She argues that if somebody is a morally upstanding citizen that we can justifiably praise her for her good actions. On the other hand, we cannot blame an

¹⁵ For an interesting discussion of this topic, see: Buss, Sarah. "Justified Wrongdoing". *Noûs* Vol. 31 No. 2 (1997).

¹⁶ Watson, Gary. "Two Faces of Responsibility" in *Agency and Answerability* ed. Gary Watson (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004)

agent who lacks the capacity to respond to moral requirements as such. When an agent lacks this capacity we are unjustified in blaming the agent¹⁷. The incompatibilist critique again draws attention to our worry about being sources. It just seems wrong to blame someone (and even worse to punish them) for an action that they *had* to perform (that could not have chosen *not* to perform). This is just another expression of the incompatibilist worry that a lack of control leads to a lack of moral responsibility. Ultimately, the compatibilist has not done enough to show why we should punish those who could not have acted otherwise, and this issue is still pressing.

The differences in how philosophers conceive of as one being the source of one's actions reveals important differences among the compatibilist and incompatibilist camps. We can view the incompatibilist's concern about being the ultimate source of one's actions as another way of stating the incompatibilist's concern with control. The incompatibilist wants not only alternate possibilities; he also wants the ultimate source of action to be the agent. With determinism, the locus of control is external to the agent. Thus the incompatibilist requires indeterminism so that origination and Agent Causation are possible (if they are possible at all). I have briefly noted some of the difficulties with Agent Causation theories, but have also noted that a rejection of Agent Causation does not necessitate the rejection of incompatibilism itself.

As Kane notes, a Teleological Intelligibility theory may be an alternative, though at the outset it is difficult to see how an incompatibilist can succeed in securing ultimate responsibility without appealing to Agent Causation. While it would be tempting to accept compatibilism because of the metaphysical difficulty an Agent Causation theory

¹⁷ Wolf, Susan. "Asymmetrical Freedom," *The Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 77 No. 3 (1980)

presents, I have also attempted to explain what would be lost in acceptance of a compatibilist position. The compatibilist position has its own difficulties to contend with. Acting out of character, self-alienation, and agent accountability are all problems that the compatibilist has to deal with in order to maintain a coherent theory.

Part Two

Libertarianism

While compatibilists have presented some persuasive points against the fears associated with determinism, at times these arguments seem too superficial. If compatibilist theories were deeply satisfying there would be no worries about the limits determinism places on our free will to begin with. Someone dipping their first toe into the debate often still desires something more- something that the compatibilist cannot provide. These “Libertarians” assert that free will can only exist in an indeterministic world, for the kind of features that we as humans need in order to have free will require cannot be satisfied given a deterministic world.

The most familiar of libertarian theories are Agent Causation theories, which attempt to flesh out the intuitive Leibnizian view that reasons, “incline without necessitating”. When we think of our experiences as agents, we feel as though we have the power to decide among our desires. While we may not be in control of what we want, we can choose what desires to act upon. We also want to be the ultimate source of our actions, not just another link in the causal chain. Agent Causation theories are interested

in providing an account that both elucidates this intuitive view and is logically coherent. They rely on the postulation that agents possess special causal powers that at times make them causally independent from natural laws.

Alternatively, some libertarian theories avoid these notoriously problematic special features in favor of a different approach. These newer theories have sophisticated answers to many of the problems libertarians face. While a discussion of these “teleological intelligibility” theories will follow, I postpone this discussion until later. First, a good hard look must be taken at agent causation theories. While anyone familiar with the compatibilism/incompatibilism debate will know that major questions surround Agent Causation theories, they deserve close consideration just because they do get close to the intuitive view.

Agent Causation Theories

Agent Causation theories propose that agents have some control over the indeterministic processes of which they are a part. In the past century philosophers such as Roderick Chisholm and Richard Taylor have discussed Agent Causation. Even more recently, Timothy O’Connor and Randolph Clarke have taken upon themselves the task of providing more sophisticated accounts of Agent Causation. In the next section we will examine how these more sophisticated theories describe agency, the criticisms they face, and how they deal with such criticisms.

Agent Causation theories rest on the assumption that causation is a real feature of our world. In other words, any Agent Causation theory must reject Humean and other

anti-realist theories of causation. While this rejection is controversial, it is absolutely essential to Agent Causation theories that causation be more than constant conjunction.

Randolph Clarke characterizes the need for this assumption well, writing,

The most familiar accounts of event causation are reductionist, aiming to analyze causation in terms of such noncausal and nonnomological features as constant conjunction or counterfactual dependence, or in terms of the modalities of necessity and sufficiency. Certainly, if any of this type of account of event causation is correct, then agent causation cannot be the same relation as event causation. For agent causation plainly cannot be either the constant conjunction of an agent and an action type or the counterfactual dependence of an action on an agent, nor can it consist in an agent's being a necessary or sufficient condition for the performance of a particular action¹⁸

The Agent Causation theorist need maintain that in the exact same situation the same agent may act differently. For this reason Agent Causation must be more than just the continual observance of one type A events followed by type B events. If Agent Causation consisted solely in this continual observance, then an agent placed in similar situations would always act similarly. However, it is necessary for Agent Causation that the agent has the ability to act differently given a similar situation. This premise is fundamental to the theory. Additionally, the Agent Causation theorist need maintain that when an agent acts that act is a result of her intentions, (though later we will question whether such a relation between action and intention is possible given indeterminism). If

¹⁸ Clarke, Randolph. *Toward A Credible Agent-Causal Account of Free Will.* ” in *Agents, Causes, and Events*, ed. T. O'Connor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) p. 207

a realist thesis regarding causation is false then the agent's intention is irrelevant, for the intention is not what *caused* the ensuing event to occur. There is nothing more to the relationship between my intention and my action than a correlation. Clearly, for action to have meaning it must not only be correlated with but be caused by my reasons for acting. Neither of these requirements would be fulfilled by an anti-realist concept of causation.

In his article "Agent Causation", O'Connor presents what he sees as a descriptive account of what we already intuitively believe. O'Connor follows in the tradition of Roderick Chisholm, who described agency as follows: "each of us, when we act, is a prime mover unmoved. In doing what we do, we cause certain events to happen, and nothing - or no one - causes us to cause those events to happen"¹⁹. In this framework, agents possess a causal power, or the power of "origination", that is differentiated from the event causation that we are used to observing in the natural world. Unlike the law like event causation that governs relationships in the natural world, the agent has the ability to choose among options. This causal power may seem ad hoc or farfetched, but it is here O'Connor presses the philosopher to think critically about that which he takes for granted. After all, in considering issues of free will we are already doing just that.

How does O'Connor account for the causal power an agent possesses and yet non-self-determining agents do not? O'Connor argues that it has to do with the type of properties an object bears. He writes:

Some properties contribute to the causal powers of the objects that bear them in a very *circumstance C* necessitates or makes probable a certain effect. On this

¹⁹ Chisholm, Roderick. "Freedom and Action" in *Freedom and Determinism*, K. Lehrer (ed.), New York: Random House, p. 23

alternative picture, a property of the right sort can (in conjunction with appropriate circumstances) *make possible* the direct, purposive bringing about of an effect *by an agent* who bears it²⁰

An agent's properties, he argues, are what allow the agent to be a causal producer. The astute reader may be seeing red flags already. After all, if biological creatures are made up of smaller and smaller elements of the physical world, how can they possess a causal power different from the causation observed in the physical elements of which they are constituted? O'Connor concedes that his theory rests upon the controversial assumption of an emergent property; "a macroproperty that is generated by the properties of an object's microstructure, but whose role in the causal process involving that object are not reducible to those of the microproperties"²¹. Though he does not thoroughly argue for why we should expect this emergent property, he contends that whether emergent properties are possible is an empirical question and not something that could be decided a priori. Hence, we cannot outright dismiss the possibility of an emergent property through reason alone.

O'Connor defends this emergent property from another angle as well. Critics may dismiss Agent Causation theories due to the "mysterious" nature of the postulated causal power. They find it absolutely incomprehensible that an agent would possess the ability to causally produce. But as O'Connor cleverly points out, if we assume a realist theory of causation, event-causation is no less mysterious. At some point we are reduced to

²⁰ O'Connor, Timothy. "Agent Causation" in *Agents, Causes, and Events*, T. O'Connor (ed.), New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 177

²¹ O'Connor, Timothy. "Agent Causation" in *Agents, Causes, and Events*, T. O'Connor, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 179

accepting as fundamental the concept of production that occurs in event causation though we cannot give an informative account of that production. We must grant that concept of production to build any further knowledge. To O'Connor, it seems silly to accept event-causation as a feature of the world while rejecting Agent Causation, for they rest upon the same grounds. If we are to truly explain *anything*, we have to make certain fundamental assumptions.

O'Connor argues that the idea of causal production is that which is "primitive" or "basic" in our notion of event causation. Likewise, causal production is that which is primitive in our notion of Agent Causation. Thus event causation and Agent Causation are two different forms of causation, both possessing the primitive causal production feature. In this view, different forms of causation apply to different entities. Given determinism, when, where, and how causal production occurs is necessitated. In other words, putting substance X in contact with substance Y will always produce effect Z. In Agent Causation, causal production is not necessitated; it is simply made possible by antecedent events. The situation determines any number of possible actions that the agent may choose to perform, without necessitating any one outcome. O'Connor writes that Agent Causation is, "a fundamentally different type of causal power-one that in suitable circumstances is exercised at will by the agent, rather than of necessity, as with objects that are not partly self-determining agents"²².

While O'Connor's above argument hardly erases the problems faced by Agent Causation theories, it does confront a philosophically lazy assumption that can lead us

²² O'Connor, Timothy. "Agent Causation" in *Agents, Causes, and Events*, T. O'Connor (ed.), New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 177

astray: the assumption that Agent Causation is incoherent simply because it endows the agent with an unexplainable production power. O'Connor's point is that the power of production is no less problematic under event causation. Wondering, "how could an agent possibly cause anything to happen?" is not sufficient to derail the hypothesis. The question of how *anything* could possibly cause *anything else* is, in terms of causal production alone, just as metaphysically tricky. If we do accept a realist account of causation it does not seem unreasonable to also accept as metaphysically possible that causal production between an agent and an event is possible.

O'Connor's account does not solve all of the problems that an Agent Causation theory faces. His discussion simply presses the critic to come up with a more persuasive argument. This new criticism reveals the tension between indeterministic causation and the extent to which that causation is attributable to the agent. O'Connor endows the agent with a special causal power. This in itself is a little fishy. Besides seeming completely ad hoc, endowing an agent with the ability to cause events without his decision to do so being necessitated goes against everything we know about the world, including our knowledge of indeterministic processes. For while in indeterministic processes the outcome is not necessitated, neither is the outcome intentional. The intentionality of an agent's action is exactly what we need in order to hold agents responsible for their actions, and yet this feature is what separates Agent Causation from event causation and makes Agent Causation seem so implausible. In proposing this

special form of causation, O'Connor posits some power different from any other power of which we have observational evidence²³.

The truth of the matter is even if the emergent property O'Connor describes is empirically confirmed, this property cannot satisfy the metaphysical conditions we require for free will. Suppose I did possess the properties such that I had it in my power to freely bring about any of a range of effects. Under O'Connor's account, the causal production in my act would be no different than the causal production in any other indeterministic event. There is something "mysterious" involved in both event and Agent Causation. Then it would seem that my act as an agent was no different from any other event in the world.

We could program a computer to randomly select one of three choices given the command to do so. We could also then program the computer to perform a certain action based on the random selection. Say given random selection 1, the computer is appropriately situated so as to push a red button that sets off a bomb. Given random selection 2 the computer is appropriately situated so as to deactivate the bomb. Given random selection 3, the computer does nothing. We can create a parallel situation in which I am faced with the decision between detonating the bomb, deactivating the bomb, or doing nothing. Under O'Connor's framework, these two situations are analogous, for each physical entity possesses a causal power. But this is precisely the conclusion we are hoping to avoid, for we want *my* choice to be a reflection of me beyond what I am insofar as I am a physical object possessing certain causal powers. This conclusion can only be

²³ Note: O'Connor does not necessarily subscribe to this view. He says he is simply doing "descriptive metaphysics", painting a picture of our common sense idea of free will without providing an argument for the truth of it.

avoided if we more clearly address how the “agent” is involved in the process. We can only consider the agent to be involved if the agent is acting for some reason (not arbitrarily). It is hard to identify the agent in the act insofar as she is a person who acts on the basis of her character when she acts arbitrarily.

Whereas acceptance of such production may be warranted in dealing with natural laws, it is unacceptable when talking about free will. In order for the causal power O’Connor describes to have any value, this mysterious production must be tied to the agent as a person; we won’t get the kind of agency we want without it. In the following discussion of reasons explanations, I will show that Agent Causation does not connect an agent’s intentions with her agents in a sufficient way so as to count towards “free will”.

Reasons Explanations

Postulating indeterminism is often claimed to hurt the libertarian’s cause more than it helps. Indeterminism alone does not imply that an agent has free will. Given a deterministic world, it seems impossible to have an action that is not determined, and hence we worry that none of our actions are free. On the other hand, given an indeterministic world, the worry becomes whether action has any *meaning*. Undetermined action quickly becomes arbitrary action. Indeterminism threatens the agent as the *source* of his/her action in a different way. Arbitrary action once again seems to place the meaning of an action on some force outside the agent. When an agent cannot act from a set of character traits, she cannot express herself as an agent. Her free will may

be satisfied in one sense, for she is always able to act otherwise, but her choice to do so is random and arbitrary. She is a mere unit of spontaneity, not a free person. All actions become chance events, flips of a coin. In what sense can this possibly give power to the agent? Instead of asking if free will is compatible with determinism we must ask: is free will compatible with indeterminism? For if indeterminism is true, how can any action have any meaning? If we cannot rationally explain why an action occurred it seems as though that action has no meaning, it is just an arbitrary action.

Given a variety of possible outcomes, an Agent Causation theory cannot explain why an agent chose action A instead of action B or C. In order for the agent to have free will, his or her action cannot be causally determined by the events leading up to the action. How can we explain the outcome without appealing to a deterministic reason? When we realize that the agent could have chosen to perform A B or C given exactly the same background circumstances, how can we explain *why* the agent chose the action she did. We can't; though the agent's choice is open, her choice is also arbitrary. The agent who has the ability to choose between a variety of options is not really a free agent because she lacks the ability to act for a reason.

O'Connor replies to this problem by arguing that we can still explain the resulting outcome in terms of the agent's reasons. Say, for example, that Tom is deciding whether to go to the grocery store or not. He wants to go to the grocery store because he needs some milk. On the other hand, he doesn't want to go to the store because he is sleepy and would like to take a nap. While we cannot explain why Tom decided to go to the grocery store *instead* of not going to the grocery store, we can still explain the motivation behind the end result in terms of his antecedent desires. It begs the question to ask of an

indeterministic process why one outcome had to occur. Indeterministic processes simply cannot be explained deterministically. As Randolph Clarke puts it, “It might be accepted that nondeterministically caused events can be explained but objected that they cannot be *completely* or *fully* or *adequately* explained because it cannot be explained why they had to happen. But the question why such an event had to happen carries a false presupposition; the event did not have to happen”²⁴

A compatibilist account of free will can explain why an agent performed the chosen action for there is always just one action that the agent could have performed, and this is usually understandable in terms of the agent’s character. But it is just this sort of necessitated action that an Agent Causation theory rules out. Should we really expect a theory of action in an indeterministic world to be subject to the same explanatory requirements of an agency theory in a deterministic world?

O’Connor’s argument succeeds in defending indeterministic causation from the idea of necessity—certainly an indeterministically caused event does not have to happen. But in the larger context of the free will debate these arguments miss the point. The Reasons Explanations criticism has to do with control. The freedom an agent has in an indeterministic world actually turns out to be harmful to her agency. We want to know why an agent chose to perform *A rather than B* because we want to understand the agent’s motivation for her decision. The paradigm of what we mean when we think of *choice* is the decision between multiple options that are desirable for different reasons. The conundrum we face when attempting to explain a person’s choice is in finding the agent in the action.

²⁴ Clarke, Randolph. *Libertarian Accounts of Free Will*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) p. 36

Conclusions

In this chapter we have examined a variety of attempts at libertarian accounts of free will. The common thread holding each of these theories together is the requirement of indeterminism. We have also examined in depth the problems that Agent Causation theories face, focusing especially on “reasons explanations”. “Reasons explanations” criticisms question how an agent’s action can be intelligible in terms of the agent’s character if that action was undetermined. It brings to the forefront the general worry that undetermined events and reasons for such events are mutually exclusive. The failure to satisfy the reasons explanations critique is failure to identify the agent in the action she performs.

Where does this place us in terms of the compatibilist/incompatibilist debate? Given some of the criticisms of Agent Causation, it is questionable whether indeterminism provides the agent with more freedom than does determinism. Furthermore, Agent Causation theories often seem too complex and mysterious to be legitimate. In an attempt to avoid the problems Agent Causation faces, some libertarian philosophers take a wholly alternative route. Robert Kane, for example, has questioned whether Agent Causation is a necessary feature of a libertarian account of free will. In the coming sections we will examine an alternative libertarian views, one that does not require Agent Causation.

Event Causation Reconsidered

I have argued above that Agent Causation theories fail to provide an adequate theory of free will. Even if agents could possess the type of causal power O'Connor deems necessary for free will, that causal power means nothing if we cannot connect the action to the agent's character. In Agent Causation theories, to do so seems impossible. Instead of giving up on libertarianism, philosophers such as Robert Kane have attempted to avoid the pitfalls of a theory that requires Agent Causation while still satisfying our intuitive view. This is Kane's goal in his essay "Some Neglected Pathways in the Free Will Labyrinth"²⁵. He describes an "event causal" theory that does not require Agent Causation. Kane believes he can avoid the problems that Agent Causation theories face by approaching the subject purely in terms of event causation. Instead of focusing on alternative possibilities, he argues, we should focus on another problem with compatibilist accounts of free will: the fact that the agent cannot legitimately be called the source of her action when she is not the cause of her desire to perform that action. Kane argues that being the "source" of our actions is required for our concept of free will, yet is often neglected. So, Kane focuses on satisfying the source requirement and argues that he can do so without relying on Agent Causation.

In contrast to AC theories, event causal theories do not postulate what Kane calls "extra factors" which include special forms of causation, non-physical souls, etc. Agent Causation theories require that the agent possess an alternative causal power. In theories such as the O'Connor theory discussed above, such causation endows the agent with the

²⁵ Kane, Robert. "Some Neglected Pathways in the Free Will Labyrinth" in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)

capacity to choose between a variety of open possibilities. This form of causation is clearly differentiated from event causation. Such a view also entails that the agent is at times causally independent from the world around her. As discussed above, Agent Causation theories are problematic because they cannot make the indeterministic action associated with the agent meaningful. A major motivation for event causal libertarian theories is the avoidance of such problems.

On a purely event-causal view, an agent's actions are explained in terms of the agent's antecedent reasons for action; there is no need for the agent to act above the event-causal laws that govern the natural world. Similar to most compatibilist theories, we can give the agent ownership over an action if it resulted from her desire to perform that action. Since we explain ownership in terms of action upon desires, the agent must be responsible for her desires in order to be responsible for her actions. An agent's will is determined by crucial points in her life when she decides what sort of person she is and wants to be in the future. For example, the first time a young person sets out on an endeavor (joins a club, begins a project) it is not unusual to later discover that the endeavor is much more trying than she had imagined. In these instances the agent must choose whether to stay the course or call it quits. Since it is the first time making that kind of choice, there is no past experience to use as guidance. The agent must decide what sort of person she wishes to be.

The importance of this choice is twofold. To begin with, the agent's choice is an expression of who she is as a person. Furthermore, that choice is a reference point for future decision-making (she can use it as a positive or negative reference point, depending on her later feelings about her decision). Her choice is a decision about what

sorts of desires she will have in the future. Thus at some point in her life, a free agent must have had the capacity to decide. Here Kane cannot avoid the importance of alternate possibilities: he must allow the agent to choose among options. It is also here that Kane departs from compatibilists, for they do not believe we are in control of what we are moved by. After these self-forming moments, the agent is responsible for her actions because she acts for reasons and she is in control of these reasons; she is the source of her action.

To claim that an agent is in control of her reasons for action seems immediately dubious based on our exposure to Agent Causation. In our discussion of Agent Causation we had to deal with the problems indeterminism creates for free action. The event-causal view must deal with these objections as well. Since agents are constantly involved in the causal processes of the world, indeterminism is involved in both the self-forming actions and the everyday actions. This indeterminism seriously threatens the agent's freedom because couldn't the deciding factor in an agent's decision be a mere flip of the coin? Remember, in the event-causal view, the agent has no special causal power.

Although it is tempting to associate indeterminism with chance or luck, Kane argues that to use these terms begs the question. The terms "luck" and "chance" carry a connotation of powerlessness. Indeterminism is not, as some would think, the deciding factor that follows the agent's effort to perform a given action. On the contrary, the indeterminism is coincident with the agent's effort to perform a given action. Indeterminism does not undermine the agent's ownership over that effort. Kane puts this response in the context of two scenarios in which indeterminism is involved. The two examples demonstrate how indeterminism occurs in two different links in the causal

chain of an agent's action. The first sort of scenario involves an assassin who intends to kill the prime minister but misses due to some indeterminacy in the causal chain. The second sort of scenario involves a woman deciding between two competing desires: the desire to further her career and the desire to help a stranger in need. Since the decision is up to her, there is some indeterminacy in her decision making process.

While I believe Kane's response to the chance criticism holds up under the first scenario, it fails in the second. It makes sense that in an indeterministic world we would not be able to control whether our actions succeeded in their intended effect. Once our will initiates a casual sequence we normally do not have control over the events that follow. This does not lessen the agent's ownership of the action nor her responsibility for it.

In the second scenario, however, indeterminism is involved in the formation of the will itself. Our will-setting ability is seriously inhibited in the first place by the situation in which we find ourselves. We can only be held responsible for a given action if we are the source of our desire to perform that action, but when do we develop the capacity to set our own desires? As infants we do not have free will-we only have the ability to act as we are genetically determined to do. So when do we transition to the state in which we have the capacity to be able to decide what it is we want? On what basis do we make that decision if not our previous experiences (which were determined by the external world)? Whether or not the world is deterministic, it seems that all of our desires are caused by our experiences - input from the external world. Whether or not the world is deterministic, what we desire is largely out of our control. What we desire is a condition of: 1) the way we were born - our natural preferences, 2) what we have

encountered in our life. Since we cannot control either of these factors, it seems we do not control over what moves us; we cannot self-form our desires.

Moreover, if indeterminism is involved in our will formation, how can we say that we have control over what we desire? Kane attempts to alleviate this worry by arguing that if an agent's will were determined then there would be no decision to make. True enough, but we are not arguing that her decision must be pre-determined in order to be under her control. We are arguing that she must have the final say in the outcome of her deliberation. Maybe Kane is trying to say that indeterminism is involved in an agent's will formation only in the sense that her will is not determined until she makes that choice. But if this is the case, Kane needs to explain how the agent makes that choice and how she is able to control that decision. Under his view, he has not explicitly granted any such power to the agent. Oftentimes when we have a very difficult decision to make, it seems that the decision we do make happens *to us*. Kane must provide an alternative explanation to this phenomenon.

An agent may deliberate between two options. Until she makes her decision, her choice is indeterminate. But since in an event-causal agency theory the agent can have no overpowering control of events, she cannot control which way the indeterminism will fall. Though having reasons for both actions, the agent does not have the final say in the outcome. Hence we cannot hold the agent responsible for setting her will. This criticism draws attention to an even bigger problem for event-causal theories; they fail to satisfy the need for some sort of control over the world around us. Kane purposely stresses the agent as the *source* of action and deemphasizes the importance of alternate possibilities. But without some feature that allows the agent the capacity to act otherwise the event-

causal theory fails to distinguish itself from most compatibilist positions. And what we are searching for when we add indeterminism to the mix is some extra power for the agent.

Part Three

Why We Don't Have Free Will

The question of whether free will is compatible with a deterministic world is at least as old as the ancients. Philosophers as early as Aristotle and the Epicurus discussed the worry surrounding determinism. Their study of the problem largely consisted in a priori reasoning. In more recent times, scientific knowledge has seemingly affected more and more the study of philosophy. Classical Physics describes a deterministic world; its popularity reintroduced the worry that ancient philosophers had first contemplated. The introduction of quantum mechanics in the twentieth century similarly caused a ripple in the philosophical world. The Copenhagen Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics suggests that the world we live in is indeterministic. This scientific advancement once again sparked a debate about free will. Many believed (and still do) that the Copenhagen Interpretation provided evidence of an indeterministic world, in turn giving libertarian philosophers hope that their theories could be true accounts of the way the world actually is. This hope has proved untenable on three levels. The first two levels undermine libertarianism from an empirical standpoint - they question whether our world actually is indeterministic. The third level undermines libertarianism from a metaphysical standpoint, criticizing libertarianism as flawed regardless of the structure of our world.

On one level, whether our world is indeterministic is still an issue of contention. The Copenhagen Interpretation is just one way of making sense of a set of data; it is not the only interpretation of quantum mechanics. Specifically, some cite the Bohm interpretation as describing a deterministic world²⁶. On the second level, it is questionable whether the indeterministic processes of the smallest known particles result in indeterminism that is recognizable in the world around us. In other words, granting that the microscopic processes of the world are indeterministic it does not follow that the macroscopic processes of the world are indeterministic. When the indeterminacies of the lower levels are combined in huge quantities, they largely cancel each other out leaving us with essentially deterministic macroscopic processes.

In such a world, we would expect one outcome almost all of the time, yet there would still always remain the possibility that an alternative outcome would occur. Indeterminacy would show up in the rare instances in which another possibility emerged as the outcome of the same process. The fact there would exist a miniscule chance that an alternative outcome could occur would not in itself help libertarianism, for the libertarian would still need to explain how an agent could have control over the outcome of her actions. Many argue that agency is a macroscopic process, so that the indeterminacy found at the quantum level does not exist at the level of human agency. It is important to note that any thesis that attempts to give a true account of agency must also take into account the actual structure of the world. As the science stands today we cannot

²⁶ Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (online). Faye, Jan. "Copenhagen Interpretation on Quantum Mechanics". (2002, revised 2008) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/qm-copenhagen/>

conclusively say that our world is indeterministic. Even less conclusively can we state that indeterminism is present in agency.

Finally, even supposing our world is indeterministic and that this indeterminism pervades even the process of human action, it is not obvious that indeterminism allows for a more satisfactory account of free will. After all, indeterminism is only helpful to a libertarian account of free will if it allows the agent greater control over his actions. Many critics argue that instead of granting more freedom to the agent, indeterminism reduces an agent's action to mere chance. And how could an agent be free in that situation? This third issue was the focus of previous chapters, in which we examined the possibility of free will granting an indeterministic world. These criticisms are the strongest, for they show that our pre-philosophical concept of free will is problematic in itself, not just when viewed under the assumption of a certain world view.

The idea of free will is very dear to us. We fight to preserve our pre-philosophical view because we are so invested in it. Yet when one really considers what that view amounts to, acceptance of it actually seems absurd. One could certainly argue (and some philosophers have) that humans are separate or above the natural world around them. O'Connor takes this stance when he proposes the emergent property necessary to his view of free will. I, on the other hand, hold the view that humans are inescapably intertwined with natural processes. We exhibit the very same causal properties as the elements of which we are made up. To assume that agents have some special capacity seems completely ad hoc: why should we assume that we have some special power over the world around us?

Think about it: to propose Agent Causation is not just to propose that we play some role in determining the outcome of a situation, but to say that we can actually interfere with the laws of nature (be they deterministic or not!). By our special power, we can somehow stop the natural world in its course, interject our decision, and continue on as we please. We suppose that while everything outside of us hums along according to its genetics or deterministic laws, humans somehow transcend those laws. Or, we may suppose that though everything outside of us occurs as a mere matter of chance or probability, our actions are not subject to that chance or probability. The point is this: when we view our own action from an external perspective, as members of the natural world, the prospect of the type of agency Agent Causation proposes is dim.

In the previous chapters I presented several arguments that attack incompatibles on the assumption that indeterminism is true. Many of these arguments home in on the tension between two requirements for free will: alternate possibilities and responsibility. Critics believe that Agent Causation requires an impossible situation. The agent must be responsible for her action (in which case some determinism is required to link the agent to her action), and yet her decision cannot be predetermined. She must have had the freedom to act otherwise. I now wish to bring up other considerations against the libertarian account of free will.

The most essential requirement for the intuitive view of free will is, *prima facie*, ultimate control over our decisions. By this I mean two things: 1) in any instant I could perform a variety of different actions, and, 2) that I truly am the one deciding which action to perform. It seems obvious that this is a major part of what incompatibilists search for. Even compatibilists admit this insofar as they must frame their arguments

against the common assumption that control is what is necessary for free will. No compatibilist ever claims that control would be a hindrance to free will. Instead, compatibilists argue that control is not *necessary* for free will. Compatibilists usually argue that something else - one's desire to perform the action- is necessary for free will. This argument avoids the pre-theoretical notion that the fact that an action is voluntary is not sufficient to make the action free: the sufficient condition usually being that the agent could have done otherwise. No matter how we look at the problem, the issue of control is always lurking in the background.

Granting, then, that control is the key to our intuitive view, neither the compatibilist nor the incompatibilist can satisfy the key issue to our view of free will. However, this is not such a bad thing when we come to realize that our intuitive view of free will is confused. When we thoroughly examine our intuitive concept of free will, it becomes clear that whether we have free will is not merely a question of deciding its compatibility with the world we live in. Ultimately, this discussion shows that our pre-philosophical concept of free will consists of many contradictions. The free will we seek at first is, on closer evaluation, a conceptual impossibility. While determinism rules out the kind of alternative possibilities we want in order to have control over our actions, indeterminism rules out the connection between the agent's character and the action. It seems that no matter what type of world we live in, we cannot have both of the features we want in a theory of free will. As my work thus far has shown, once we grant alternate possibilities given the same exact situation, we can no longer see how the agent's character determines the resulting action. The very condition that we have alternate possibilities excludes the other condition that the agent's action is an expression of her

character. So a theory describing our intuitive, pre-reflective, unexamined term “free will” as an actual feature of our world is not a real possibility. To have this kind of free will is to be at the same determined and undetermined by one’s “character”: to have a causal power that reflects none of one’s personal traits.

Throughout this project I have been focusing on the free will debate as someone who still possesses some incompatibilist intuitions while remaining open to the idea that our intuitions may have to be reexamined. This perspective motivated the above study of Agent Causation, for Agent Causation comes closest to what we intuitively believe about agency. The conclusion that Agent Causation theories in particular and libertarian theories in general are untenable might seem a little disappointing to someone searching for free will. That’s because of all the literature examined, Agent Causation is what comes closest to our pre-philosophical discussion. If Agent Causation were successful, it would explain the view that reasons, “incline without necessitating”²⁷. Though we may reject libertarian theories, we do not have to strictly accept compatibilism. This move is motivated from the perspective of our intuitive view. It is misleading to suggest that our pre-philosophical concept of free will is compatible with determinism. What is compatible with determinism is a coherent, tidied-up version of our concept of free will, however unsatisfactory that version may seem at first glance. In the following section, I will show that what we do in fact have is still of great value.

What We Do Have

²⁷ Leibniz, Gottfried. *Discourse on Metaphysics*. Trans. Daniel Garber and Roger Ariew. (Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Co.) 1991

So we may not have free will. What are we left with? This section is aimed at a little reassurance, mostly in the hope of preventing psychologically realistic view from turning into a fatalistic one. There is plenty depending on free will: responsibility, motivation, self-worth, etc. A lack of free will does not, however, negate any meaning that we attribute to our lives. Through fatalistic arguments we can easily trick ourselves into viewing life differently than the way we experience it. My argument is twofold. First, buying into such arguments is silly given the way we experience life. Second, such arguments have little merit to begin with. These arguments function by obscuring the small distinctions that distinguish fatalism from realism. Here I hope to illuminate these distinctions in order to provide a sunnier outlook.

The first point I want to make is this: you do not care about free will as much as you think you do. Focusing on the details of a situation prevents one from seeing the bigger picture. In this case, the bigger picture amounts to the fact that no amount of philosophical argument will ever succeed in persuading us that our actions do not matter. After you read this paper, you will forget these arguments and stop worrying about the whole thing. That is because for all intents and purposes, we do have 'free will'. We have an amazing ability to avoid the consequences of our logical reasoning in the face of experiential evidence. As Nagel points out, from an objective perspective the consequences of determinism seem prevent our having control of our lives. On the other hand, from a subjective standpoint we cannot shake the feeling that we do have free

will²⁸. In this sense, at the very least, the conclusion that we lack free will is practically inconsequential²⁹.

However, this being a very minimal conclusion (for it cannot satisfy us once we return to the rigors of philosophical thought), more is needed to assuage any existential worries. The second discussion I would like to focus on deals with the self: does the elimination of our intuitive concept of free will negate the existence of the self? If we are not the ultimate arbiters of our lives, who are we? If that control is removed from us, how do we define who we are? It may seem that if we are ultimately compelled by forces out of our control we are nothing but response machines. This worry is amplified by the fact that much of our self-worth comes from our decisions. This kind of argument is a fatalistic attack on the self. It is, however, based on a serious error.

Though we may lack ‘free will’, it does not follow that we lack a will in general. It is not as though we are zombies or puppets, mere vehicles of another being or force’s will. Clearly we are able to desire, desire our desires, and so on. We may not have the ultimate say in the direction of our lives, but we are nonetheless there through it all—our “self” remains. A lack of control does not immediately exclude the existence of a soul, for “I” obviously still remain at the very least as an observer of my own life. Our minds are still here to think, comment, and judge the situations of our lives. We still get to experience everything living has to offer.

²⁸ Nagel, Thomas. “The Problem of Autonomy”. In *Agents, Causes and Events*, ed. Timothy O’Connor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 33-41

²⁹ Hume mentions a similar idea when he talks about skepticism. He argues that skeptical arguments cannot affect our practical lives. See Hume, David. *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.

Even more, whether we are the force deciding what to do, we are still the ones carrying out that decision. What I do makes a difference in the world. I can change myself and have an influence on others. I can make a situation better or worse, I can make good and bad decisions. I am more than a mere spectator in my own life, for my actions have a practical impact on the world around me.

Contrary to our intuitions, many compatibilists argue that the very lack of freedom libertarians argue against actually bolsters a sense of self³⁰. This point is very much connected to the Reasons Explanation criticism discussed in the previous chapter. Many of their arguments rely on the fact that without indeterminism, there is an obvious connection between the agent, his desires and his actions. In an indeterministic world that attributability is lessened by the fact that an agent's will to perform an action may or may not come to fruition due to the probabilistic nature of causation. In other words, an agent's decision to perform an action does not come directly from her character because indeterminism is involved in the whole process. In a deterministic world, an agent's action is a direct result of what moves her, her character traits, etc.- who she is as a person. Moreover, even if we live in the type of world that is indeterministic at the microscopic level but largely deterministic at the level of agency, this reassurance still works. The agent's personal attributes still constitute the explanation of her decision so long as she regularly performs the same type of actions given the same sort of situations.

This compatibilist reassurance only works, however, if the agent has a consistent set of character traits. We can easily imagine someone who has no consistent personality traits, and who would react differently to the same situations. In such a case, what sense

³⁰ See Hobart, R.E., "Free Will as Involving Determination and Inconceivable Without It". *Mind*, Vol. 43.169 (1934)

would it make to say that her actions arose as a direct result of who she is as a person? She clearly has no set character. The importance of the compatibilist's argument is lessened as a result. The problem of "fixed character" makes free will seem like a contingent fact. I only have free will if I have the sort of character that consistently performs the same type of actions given the same circumstances. This is a potential problem for the compatibilist, though such a case is rare enough so as to not seriously threaten the account.

All in all, these arguments show that a lack of free will in the pre-philosophical sense is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, I believe we can take comfort in a belief that we do not have to ultimately decide every aspect of our lives. Many psychologists point out that anxiety and stress come from an overwhelming feeling of responsibility on the part of the agent. To use Sartre's example, the man standing at the edge of a cliff not only fears that he may fall off accidentally, but that he could decide to jump off voluntarily³¹. The causal connection between our desires and our actions is reunited when we view ourselves as part of a natural order. To do so, however, requires a delicate balance of ideas.

As I argued above, we need not feel completely out of control, for our actions are a result of our efforts. On the other hand, recognizing that our lives may be ultimately determined not by our own minds but by some other force, we can relax a little bit. Self-acceptance is generally considered a sign of maturity-most of us realize that there is great value in coming to terms with 'who we are'. Supposing we come into this world with a character that is formed by our experiences, we can come to peace with our internal

³¹ Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*, tr. Hazel E. Barnes, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1943)

characteristics just as we do with our physical characteristics. This, of course, does not mean we should stop trying to make ourselves better people. I have also argued above that our actions have practical implications for ourselves and for others. I will never be an Olympian; I realize that I am not talented enough. But that does not mean I stop working to become the best athlete I can be. This is true in all facets of life: realizing our strengths and our limitations does not stop us from cultivating our character.

Moral Responsibility

The results of my argument are obvious: once we argue that humans lack free will, it is easy to argue that they lack the kind of features necessary for moral praise and blame. I think we can live with the reassurances described above on a day-to-day basis, but when it comes to matters of justice free will becomes infinitely more important. Instances of praise and blame can be the most important moments of our lives and can continue to impact us through feelings of regret, shame, and guilt. Hence it is immensely important to figure out the basis of responsibility. The question of whether we ever deserve praise is not as important as the question of whether we ever deserve blame, for we can praise to one another without fear of negative repercussions. On the other hand, the blame we place upon one another results in punishment. As a result, there is serious motivation for figuring out the justification of our justice system.

Though the issue is both interesting and important, I do not have the space to do it justice. Luckily, many philosophers including Gary Watson, Susan Wolf and Sarah Buss deal with the issue of responsibility as it stands without directly invoking the problem of

free will. Some of their works have already been mentioned in this paper³². A look at their work starts us in the direction of understanding responsibility, regardless of whether we have free will.

³² See, for example, Susan Wolf's "Asymmetrical Freedom", Gary Watson's compilation *Agency and Answerability*, and Sarah Buss's "Justified Wrongdoing".

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