

## Freewill II: Compatibilism

### STANDARD HARD DETERMINIST ARGUMENT

1. Whatever happens is determined by prior events. (Determinism)
2. I act freely iff I am able to act otherwise. (Avoidability Analysis of Freedom)
3. If my action is determined, I am unable to act otherwise.
4. So, I never act freely.

#### I. Consider (1): Determinism:

- To say that an event  $e$  is determined, is not to say that  $e$  is predictable.
- To say that an event  $e$  is determined, is not to say that it is fated.  
     $e$  is determined iff due to prior events,  $e$  is bound to occur.  
     $e$  is fated iff regardless of prior events,  $e$  is bound to occur.

Consider again the example of my raising my arm. The determinist will say, of course, that my arm was caused to, and so bound to go up due to preceding events. But note that its rising was the effect of, among other things, my decision to raise my arm. So it's not true that my arm was going to go up no matter what: if my decision had been different, my action would have been different. This means that the determinist, unlike the fatalist, can say: what I do depends on what I choose to do.

Seeing this argument, you might argue that the best strategy is simply to deny determinism. But does that solve the problem? Is indeterminism any more compatible with freewill?

#### **Indeterminism: Some events are not determined by prior events.**

Consider the **freewill dilemma** (see also p. 387-8 of *Reason and Responsibility*):

1. If determinism is true, we can never do other than what we do; so we are not free.
2. If indeterminism is true, then some events--possibly some actions--are random; but if they are random, we are not their authors. So we are not free.
3. Either determinism or indeterminism is true.
4. Therefore, we never act freely.

It appears that denying determinism is no help in preserving for us some space for genuine freedom.

#### II. Consider (3): Is choice in conflict with determinism?

##### *Hypothetical Choice Compatibilism*

##### Basic idea:

It seems plausible that freedom is a matter of having been able to act differently than one in fact acts. (This is the core idea of premise (2).) But what does it mean to say that one was "able to act otherwise"? Last time we considered the "choice analysis of ability": I could have acted otherwise iff had I chosen to act otherwise, I would have. If we pursue this notion of "acting otherwise" can we avoid the conflict with Determinism?

I act freely iff  
I am able to act otherwise iff

I would have acted otherwise had I chosen to.

Compatibility: my acts and my choices are caused, and yet a different causal sequence might have caused different choices and acts. So I'm free even if caused to act as I act.

However, note that the definition implies:

IF [had I chosen to act otherwise, I would have acted otherwise], THEN [I act freely].

or

IF [had I chosen to perform action A\* instead of A, I would have performed A\*], THEN I performed A freely.

Are there counter-examples to this conditional?

Problem cases: coercion, kleptomania, i.e., cases in which my choices were in fact constrained to a degree sufficient to undermine my freedom, but in which the counterfactual is true that if I had chosen otherwise, I would have acted otherwise.

Ayer suggests we suppose that:

...another person has obtained an habitual ascendancy over me...I have acquired so strong a habit of obedience that I no longer go through any process of deciding whether or not do what the other person wants...my own deliberations have ceased to be a causal factor in my behavior (484).

This is the picture of a puppet, not a free agent. But notice that it may still be true that if the puppet had chosen to behave differently, he would have; it's just that he's not going to choose differently (or really himself choose at all) because he is being controlled.

- Sometimes my actions are not the result of my choice at all, so aren't free; but it is still true that if I had made a genuine choice, I would have acted otherwise.
- Sometimes my actions are the result of my choice, but my choice was compelled or made under duress, so the action wasn't free; but it is still possible that if I had chosen to act differently, I would have acted differently.

So it appears that two things have to be added for freedom: first, the action needs to be the result of a choice, and second, the choice must not be forced or compelled. Consider some further examples given by Stace in his essay:

<u>Free</u>	<u>Unfree</u>
Fasting because you want to free India.	Fasting because you are lost in the desert without food.
Stealing because you are hungry.	Stealing because someone forces you.
Confessing because you want to tell the truth.	Confessing to avoid further beating.

To find the correct definition of free action we must discover what characteristic is common to the acts on the left but lacking in the acts on the right. Is it that the right-hand acts were caused, and the left-hand not caused? This is what the incompatibilist might say, but it's clearly absurd. All of the acts were caused. Note, however, that both Ayer and Stace suggest that what's

important is whether the source of the action is internal to me. Stace proposes that we should consider the kind of cause:

Acts freely done are those whose immediate causes are psychological states of the agent.  
Acts not freely done are those whose immediate causes are states of affairs external to the agent. (490).

Define freedom like this, and there's no conflict whatsoever with determinism because one's free actions not only can be caused by prior events, but must be, i.e., they must be caused by my desires and choices. Based on Stace's quote we might try the following revision:

*Internal Sources of Action Compatibilism* (See Stace: "Acts freely done are those whose immediate causes are psychological states of the agent.")

I act freely iff

- (i) the way I act is the result of my choice,
- (ii) the immediate causes of my choice are "internal" to me.

This conception of freedom is compatible with determinism because it simply requires that the causes of action are "internal" to me. But it doesn't address the problems of coercion and duress: what if my decisions to act are caused by phobias, addictions, threats?

Even some compatibilists would agree that there are cases where the causes of my action are "internal", and yet I am not free. These are the cases of internal duress. Consider an addict. If I am a heroin addict and some heroin comes into my possession you can bet I'm going to take it. Am I able to refuse the drug in this case? What would those sympathetic with the choice analysis of ability say? They would say that I am *able* to refuse the drug because if I had chosen to refuse it, I would have. But is that right? Consider another perspective on the case. When Nancy Reagan counseled drug addicts to "just say no," why did this strike people as such superficial advice? Because it seems that at least many drug addicts aren't *able* to say no! Well, why not? The problem is that their desire is so strong, they are unable to choose anything but the drug.

So perhaps we should attempt to capture this sense that "internal" causes are not always compatible with freedom by another revision:

*"No Coercion" + "No-Duress" Compatibilism* (Ayer and Stace)

Ayer and Stace provide examples to suggest that my action is free only if it is under the control of how I choose, and I am being compelled by anyone (by external force or threat) to act as I do. However, external duress is not the only issue, for internal duress is a threat to freedom as well. Consider an addict: when offered the drug, their desire is so strong they are unable to choose anything but the drug. So Stace's idea that the cause must be "internal" is not enough. However, perhaps it is enough to require that the cause be a certain sort of internal event.

Basic idea: My free action is voluntary, i.e., it is caused by my own desire or choice, and the choice in turn has the right sorts of causes (no threats, phobias, addictions, etc.).

I act freely iff

- (i) the way I act is the result of my choice,
- (ii) the immediate causes of my choice are "internal" to me,
- (iii) my choice is not the result of coercion or duress, and
- (iv) I would have acted otherwise had I chosen to.

Compatibility: my acts and choices are caused, but the causal sequence might have been different, and the actual causes are "of the right sort". So they are free even if caused.

Problems: The whole point of our attempt at analyzing freedom is to determine more clearly whether freedom is compatible with determinism. Simply saying that I am free if I am not coerced or under duress is unhelpful because we have no clear way to distinguish coercion and duress from more ordinary cases of being caused to choose and act as one does. What makes addiction a threat to freedom, whereas a passion for learning is not? What makes kleptomania a threat to freedom whereas a deep commitment to be honest in one's dealings with others is not?

Note that it would not help the compatibilist to revise the third condition to read:

(iii\*) nothing compels me to act as I do?

The compatibilist's goal is to find an account of freedom that is compatible with determinism, and a determinist will claim, surely, that prior circumstances do compel me to act as I do. In short, a compatibilist position cannot place the condition on freedom that our choices must be completely unconstrained. So we need a new strategy.

### **III. Consider (2): I act freely iff I am able to act otherwise. (The Avoidability Analysis of Freedom)**

The compatibilisms we've considered so far offer explications of freedom that seem to undermine (3) in the Hard Determinist Argument, i.e., the idea that determinism prevents one from acting other than the way one does. But suppose we challenge (2), viz., the idea that freedom requires avoidability, more fully. Suppose you are in a room with everything you've always wanted (your favorite entertainment, friends, food, etc.); if anyone tried to remove you, you'd fight to stay. Suppose then someone locks the doors and windows. You can't leave, but you also don't want to. Are you unfree? Whether you could have left the room if you wanted seems irrelevant to the issue of whether you stay of your own free will. This suggests that the real issue is not whether one is constrained, but whether one's actions are based on choices that are in some important sense "one's own". Can we make sense of the idea that our free choices are choices we have chosen?

*Deep-Self Compatibilism (Harry Frankfurt and others)*

Basic idea: Freedom is a matter of having an integrated self that governs how one acts.

I act freely iff my actions are in the control of choices endorsed by my "deeper self" -- endorsed that is by higher-order choices I have made, or by my values, or reflection, etc.

Compatibility: As in the previous case: as long as the causes of the action and the choices are of the right sort (in this version, they come from the deep self) the action is free. However there is no suggestion here that avoidability is required for freedom.

Problem cases: early indoctrination, brainwashing, children?

- Insofar as one's "deep self" is still determined, does this account allow us to be genuinely free?
- In some cases one's "deep self" itself issues from "unwholesome" external causes, e.g., problematic upbringing, education, etc.
- Plausibly, children don't have the capacities for reflective desires that adults have, and in some sense lack a "deep self". Does this mean they aren't capable of free action?

Do you see a way to revise or develop this last attempt to avoid the problem cases?

ONGOING QUESTIONS:

- Is there consensus on the cases that count as free actions? Is the addict who succumbs to taking the drug free or unfree? Is the kleptomaniac free or not? Is the person who steals because hungry free or unfree? What further information would we need about such cases to determine whether they are free or not?
- Does one's capacity to reason or deliberate make a difference in determining whether one is free or not? If an action is the result of careful deliberation, does that suggest it is more free than an action that is the result of passion, phobia, or addiction? Why or why not?
- What is at stake for us in calling an action free or unfree? If the action is necessitated by prior events, could it still be free in the sense we need? If not, why not?