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### An Argument for Moral Nihilism

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## An Argument for Moral Nihilism

What if humans were just mere animals, and that we react to certain stimuli in a certain, lawful manner, and thus change in the appropriate way. It is debatable how much free will the average person would grant to say- a dog, but the average person doesn't doubt that humans exercise free will. What if instead it could be shown that we are no different than a robot? That we are nothing but just an input-output mechanism for our programming to determine how to react to certain stimuli? I don't know how many people who would claim that a robot exercises free will, or could be held morally responsible for their actions.

“Science is more than the mere description of events as they occur. It is an attempt to discover order, to show that certain events stand in lawful relation to other events... If we are to use the methods of science in the field of human affairs, we must assume that behavior is lawful and determined (Skinner, 1953: p. 6).”

After all, it would be hard for someone to give up their belief that they have free will, that they are the end-all be-all in any decision between two free choices. I want to maintain my autonomy, the fact that I am the controller of my actions, and to give this up, would be to perhaps denounce the fact that I am even a person. Perhaps it is entrenched in our

religious belief that perhaps one day we will be judged for our actions, and will be given the rightful punishment, reward for the life that we've lead.

Free will is entwined with moral responsibility.

Moral responsibility is the idea that comes to mind whenever it seem justified to punish a person with eternal torment in the afterlife, or eternal reward in heaven. We have no problem thinking a murderer is acting with free will when he decides to kill, and will rightfully be held responsible for his action, and punished for it both on earth, and perhaps in the afterlife, if such a place exists. However, it is not to be said that one has to believe in heaven or hell to believe in moral responsibility whatsoever, for many atheists will believe in the existence of moral responsibility. It is just a useful example to explain the type of moral responsibility that I am arguing that we want to believe that we have, but upon deeper consideration, maybe we shouldn't so rightfully assign moral responsibility at all (Strawson, 1986).

When considering the moral responsibility a person has for its actions, there is one idea that keeps recurring and that is the idea of being in control over whether to act in one way, or make the choice to act in another way, which would be an exercise of free will. For what if we didn't have free will? How could we ever grant any type of punishment or reward, praise or blame, if it could be shown that we were no more responsible for the choices we make than we are responsible for our hair color? That's what the free in free will means: the will is not constrained,

and thus there is more than one possible outcome, and we're the one making the choice. There could hardly be any discussion about moral responsibility for an action, without entertaining the notion that moral responsibility for an action would require that an agent could control what one does.

For any type of discussion related to moral responsibility it would be a logical starting point. It doesn't go against our intuitions that we couldn't hold someone blameworthy for an action if there was nothing that he or she could have done otherwise to make it so they were absolved of responsibility. We don't automatically delve into the metaphysical implications of what I would say is the most reasonable way to assume the world works, considering what we know about the laws of physics, and causation.

"We ought to regard the present state of the universe as the effect of its antecedent state and as the cause of the state that is to follow. An intelligence knowing all the forces acting in nature at a given instant, as well as the momentary positions of all things in the universe, would be able to comprehend in one single formula the motions of the largest bodies as well as the lightest atoms in the world, provided that its intellect were sufficiently powerful to subject all data to analysis; to it nothing would be uncertain, the future as well as the past would be present to its eyes – Laplace -1820 (Pitowsky, 1996: p. 173)."

To quickly state a common interpretation of determinism, we begin with the entire universe being made up of a few varieties of elementary particles. Each of these particles has a space-time location, and a particular mass, and cannot be created or destroyed. Classical Newtonian physics supports determinism by assuming two things: The first assumption is that each elementary particle has a single valued position and momentum at each instant. The second assumption is that the position and momentum can, at least theoretically, be exactly measured (Workman, 1959: p. 253). According to the fundamental laws of motion, if we were given a particle's initial position, momentum, and all the forces acting on it, its subsequent positions and momentum could be predicted accurately, and if taken further, every particle in the universe could be predicted accurately, resulting in the entire history being able to be traced out backwards and forwards based on mathematical calculations. Determinism would imply that the *only* sense in which we are responsible for our actions is the sense in which a chess-playing computer would be responsible for its moves, just an input-output machine.

A very popular principle has come to be called as the Principle of Alternate Possibilities, or PAP. PAP has been defined by as: "A person is morally responsible for what he has done only if he could have done otherwise (Frankfurt, 1969: p. 167)."

PAP is an intuitively attractive principle, and a very controversial one after one when one considers the implications of *causal determinism*

on moral responsibility and free will. "If we could in no sense do otherwise, then we could never have refrained from the wrongful actions we perform, and thus we cannot be legitimately be held blameworthy for them (Pereboom, 2001: p. 6)."

From this, another logical path one could take towards arguing that determinism would lead to a loss of free will would be Van Inwagen's Consequence Argument.

"If determinism is true, then our acts are the consequences of the laws of nature and events in the remote past. But it is not up to us what went on before we were born, and neither is it up to us what the laws of nature are. Therefore, the consequences of these things (including our present acts) are not up to us." (Van Inwagen, 1983: p. 39)

However, there is another intuition, which in my opinion is much more complete about what it means to be morally responsible which is not rooted in the principle of an alternate possibility, but still very much in line with Van Inwagen's Consequence Argument. "If an agent is morally responsible for her deciding to perform an action, then the production of this decision must be something over which the agent has control, and an agent is not morally responsible for the decisions if it is produced by a source over her control (Pereboom, 2001: p. 126)." This is what Pereboom considers the "*core incompatibilist claim*."

It is one principle that is quite different than the Principle of Alternate Possibilities that some people would use to argue that moral

responsibility is *incompatible* with determinism. These types of people are called “incompatibilists” by definition, yet there are two completely opposing sides under this umbrella term of incompatibilist.

Under the umbrella category of incompatibilism there are actually two opposite sides. On one side of the incompatibilist spectrum there are what are called *libertarians*. Libertarians are incompatibilists who do not grant that causal determinism is true, and that we retain our free will, and thus moral responsibility. In almost every situation I've found myself to be in my life, I still feel like it is in my power to do move in one direction or another, think what I want, even think about thinking. To most people, it is clearer than anything, and that doesn't even need to be proved. But then again, most people haven't really sat and thought through what it really means to truly be morally responsible for something. It is completely in line with intuitions that human beings are the source of their actions in a different way than a robot would be the source of its behavior. Without ever considering the idea of determinism or lack thereof, we've had no problem with holding people responsible for their beliefs, desires and behavior, because we've never doubted that we have free will, and have no doubts that other human are free will. In everyday conversation, how difficult it would be to convince someone who believes that behavior that we engage in is an act of free will would depend on how strongly they believe that human beings are a part of nature, and as parts of nature are governed by natural laws. It could be said that most people in the world

are libertarians, and it is common sense to think that we are free willing agents. To accept strict causal determinism as described above would make it so that a libertarian doesn't have the moral responsibility they want, perhaps invoking the principle of alternate possibilities.

On the other side of the incompatibilist spectrum, which would embrace such a view, would be what is known as "hard determinism." Hard determinists would not deny that the world is governed completely by natural laws, which make it so that there are never any alternate possibilities, nor are agents the sources of their actions.

It is a point of debate as to whether or not determinism is more than just a theory, and wonder if that is how the actual physical world works, and with the introduction of quantum mechanics, it is more controversial than ever as to whether or not there such causal determinism in reality, and whether that even has any impact whatsoever on our moral responsibility as agents. I will return to this point in greater detail later on in the paper.

But what of someone who accepts that there is not causal determinism in the strictest sense, and allows for indeterminacy, yet still maintains that this indeterminacy is incompatible with free will and moral responsibility? These are what are called *hard incompatibilists*. They will also claim that we are not morally responsible, because we are not in control of the source of our actions, regardless of determinism or indeterminism. Opposed to these incompatibilists there exists what are

known as *compatibilists*, who believe that determinism if it were true, it would still be compatible, or consistent, with free will and moral responsibility.

So *if* determinism was true and we could never do otherwise, some incompatibilists may say that we could never be morally responsible.

Frankfurt devises a clever argument that could be used to show that moral responsibility has nothing to do with the ability to do otherwise, which they would use to support compatibilism by challenging PAP.

Consider the following thought experiment:

“Black is a nefarious neurosurgeon. In performing an operation on Jones to remove a brain tumor, Black inserts a mechanism into Jones’s brain which enables Black to monitor and control through a computer which he has programmed so that, among other things, it monitors Jones’s voting behavior. If Jones shows an inclination to decide to vote for Carter, then the computer, through the mechanism in Jones’s brain, intervenes to assure that he actually decides to vote for Reagan and does so vote. But if Jones decides on his own to vote for Regan, the computer does nothing but continue to monitor- without affecting the goings-on in Jones’s head. Suppose Jones decides to vote for Reagan on his own, just as he would have if Black had *not* inserted the mechanism into his head (Fischer, 1986: p. 176).”

In the case of Jones, if he had perhaps wanted to vote for Carter, the device would stop him from doing so, and thus there can be no other

outcome, other than Jones voting for Regan. There is no other alternate possibility that could be possible other than voting for Regan because of this potential intervener. What would this mean for moral responsibility for Jones in a case like this?

Was the cause of the act in the cases fundamentally changed at all by the presence of a potential intervener? According to this case, we aren't supposed to think so. This is supposed to be counterintuitive to our acceptance of the principle of alternate possibilities. It shows that regardless of the fact that Regan was going to be voted for in either instance, that Jones is still responsible for the act because Black doesn't need to intervene. Assumedly, regardless of the impossibility of an alternate possibility, it is because Jones is the cause of his action when Black doesn't intervene that we can hold him morally responsible then. I will not disagree with this *at the moment*.

Now if it were the case Black *did* have to intervene, and Jones does vote for Regan, we do *not* hold him responsible for that decision any longer. I don't think that anybody would try to say that Jones would be responsible for voting for Regan in this case, because clearly the mechanism in Jones's brain is what is responsible for the following action.

However, what I do think needs to be pointed out is *why*, when Black doesn't intervene we hold him free and morally responsible. And *why*, when Black does intervene, we do not hold him free or morally responsible any longer. We make these judgments completely

independent of the principle of alternative possibilities, rather we try to assign the responsibility to what we believe is the underlying cause of the action. That judgment of responsibility of Jones if Black does intervene has nothing to do with the principle of alternate possibilities, but rather we identified the source of his action, which was not in his control- Black's mechanism.

Consider the same case, but broken into premises, and looked at in way put forth by Widerker, it is easier to see the objections which can be made:

1. If Jones is blushing at t1, then, provided no one intervenes, he will at t2 decide to vote for vote for Regan.
2. If Jones is not blushing at t1, then, provided no one intervenes, he will not decide at t2 to vote for Regan.
3. If Black sees that Jones shows signs that he will not decide at t2 to vote for Regan – that is, he sees that Jones is *not* blushing at t1 – then Black will force Jones to decide at t2 to vote for Regan; but if he sees that Jones is blushing at t1, then he will do nothing.
4. Jones is blushing at t1, and decides at t2 to vote for Regan for reasons of his own, so Black doesn't have to intervene.

(Widerker, 1995: p. 179)

When examining it in this way, it seems there is a presupposition of some type of determinism when it comes to the first premise. If premise 1

is true, that must follow that Jones blushing is causally sufficient, or it is indicative of a state that is causally sufficient for his decision to vote for Regan.

This example as presented by Widerker seems to implicitly employ a deterministic principle as a component to a proof that opposes the incompatibilist intuition that we can't be morally responsible for choices that we ultimately cannot help but make. In that case, voting for Regan is unavoidable, yet how could Jones be said to morally responsible for voting for Regan, if deterministic factors are at play when it comes to his decision-making?

If it is the case that if Jones is blushing at  $t_1$ , he will *always* vote for Regan at  $t_2$ , then there must be some type of strict relationship between the two events. It would mean that Jones blushing is either causally sufficient for a decision to kill White, or it is indicative of a state that is causally sufficient for that decision, or else it could *not* be the case that he *always* vote for Regan if he blushes. Thus, either there are deterministic factors involved in Jones's decision to vote for Regan, or else Premise 1 would be false.

For all of these hypothetical Frankfurt style cases, if causal determinism is to be presupposed, any type of libertarian could not be expected to believe that an agent is morally responsible for an action even if the intervener doesn't act, because such a presupposition will *always*

result in the lack of an alternate possibility. If you hold determinism to be true, then how could anything ever be a true act of free will?

In Frankfurt style cases like this, would it be a question begging to think that there must be a single point in time where Black must decide whether or not he should intervene?

However, if indeterminism is to be presupposed, there can be no such Frankfurt style example that can ever work. In most of these cases, the situation always entails a prior signal preceding the actual choice that the intervener will recognize as the indicator of which action the agent is going to take, which is the moment that the intervener either changes something, or chooses to merely remain an observer. If the relationship between the signal and the action isn't causally related in a deterministic way, then a libertarian must claim that an agent *could* have done otherwise regardless of the occurrence of the prior sign.

The first premise should be thought of in either of these two ways instead:

1a. If Jones is blushing at t1, then Jones will *probably* decide at t2 to vote for Regan.

1b. If Jones is blushing at t1, then Jones will *freely* decide at t2 to Vote for Regan. (Widerker, 1995: p. 180)

In the case of 1a, there is an implication that there remains the possibility that Jones can be blushing at t1, yet still not vote for Regan, perhaps by acting out of character. So in this case, there remains the

possibility of an alternative possibility, and thus, Jones's moral responsibility should remain intact, correct? Fine, in such a case perhaps it could be said that Jones is morally responsible.

However in what way can this be significant in relation to the principle of alternate possibilities? When the presupposition of indeterminacy *requires* that there is an alternate possibility, how can we draw such a truly profound conclusion that we are morally responsible *despite* the lack of an alternate possibility?

But when it comes to attributing moral responsibility for ones actions, is it not essential for the factors involved for choosing one action over another not be ignored? If Jones will *probably* vote for Regan, there must be some factors which are at play which make it so one act happens instead of another, as a choice is ultimately made. The origin of this probability is crucial when considering if Jones is morally responsible for voting for Regan in situation 1a.

In the case of 1b, the word freely is used in the libertarian sense that the agent could have chosen to do otherwise. The only way a libertarian can claim that the agent could have done otherwise despite the occurrence of the prior sign is if the relationship between the sign and the action is not causally deterministic in such ways. It would make sense that someone who wanted to maintain their sense of freedom wouldn't want to grant that casual determinism plays a role in our decision making processes, and would contest that presupposition of determinism.

Either the agent's decision-making process is indeterministic, which would mean in the agent will still have alternative possibilities, so the case will not be an attack on PAP whatsoever. If the agent's decision-making process is deterministic the example will beg the question against the incompatibilist, who would invoke PAP.

But what if it is shown that it can *never* be the case that the agent was the sole cause, rather just a vessel for the laws of nature to unfold through (not unlike a chess playing computer)? Would then the focus over moral responsibility shift away from the presence of alternate possibilities, but rather on the originating causes for a choice, regardless of the outcome? If an agent is morally responsible for her deciding to perform an action, then the production of this decision must be something over which the agent has control, and an agent is not morally responsible for the decision if it is produced by a source over which she has no control (Pereboom, 2001: p. 4).” A definition like this focuses the idea of *origination* to outline our sense of moral responsibility.

If Jones was going to vote for Carter, and then Black doesn't intervene, and as a result Jones votes for Regan, we would say that Jones could be blamed for voting for Regan. But why can so quickly draw this conclusion? We still don't know the cause as to why Jones votes for Regan, seemingly of his own choice. It makes no mention as to what the causes of the decision for Jones to vote for Regan, rather presupposes a sort of indeterminism that theoretically exists, for there to even be the

chance that Jones would want to vote for Carter. There are other problems with the Frankfurt style arguments which try to argue against incompatibilism by invoking PAP, which would make it the clear case that moral responsibility should be judged based on the causes behind a decision.

This kind of analysis of Frankfurt style cases is meant to dispel what is arguably the common sense, or the libertarian's notion of moral responsibility, the view that being free requires an alternate possibility. Determinism would undermine responsibility for a different reason, not relying on the principle of alternate possibilities. All the Frankfurt case could show is a weaker stance: determinism does not conflict with responsibility simply by virtue of foreclosing alternatives. There still lies what is considered the core hard incompatibilist claim:

“If an agent is morally responsible for her deciding to perform an action, then the production of this decision must be something over which the agent has control, and an agent is not morally responsible for the decisions if it is produced by a source over her control (Pereboom, 2001: p. 126).”

Compatibilists could never challenge the core incompatibilist claim directly. Instead, they consider themselves the source of their actions in a different sense, and take that as a way to maintain that they can still have free will and moral responsibility, while integrating it with the admission of determinism. However, they all seem to create a new definition of what

free will entails, in order to some way successfully conclude that humans maintain the freedom and moral responsibility that the compatibilist desperately wants to hang onto.

Somebody like Hobart would not try to say that determinism was absolutely true, but “only that it is true in so far as we have free will (Hobart, 1934: p. 64).” According to Hobart, we can say that we are the source of our actions, because we, as a person are one with all of our parts, including our characters, and to say that we are not responsible for what our characters do, would be a fallacy. If our characters are the source of an action, then we are the source of an action. “The component parts of a thing, or process, taken together, each in its place, with their relations, are identical with the thing or process itself (Hobart, 1934: p. 65).”

Very similarly, Frankfurt has a more detailed definition as to when it is the case that it is truly our self is causing an action.

“It seems to me both natural and useful to construe the question of whether a person’s will is free in close analogy to the question of whether an agent enjoys freedom of action. Now freedom of action is (roughly at least) freedom to do what one wants to do. Analogously, then, the statement that a person enjoys freedom of the will means (also roughly) that he is free to want what he wants to want. More, precisely, it means that he is free to will what he wants to will, or to have the will that he wants. Just as the question about the freedom of an agent’s action has to

do with whether it is the action he wants to perform, so the question about the freedom of the will has to do with whether it is the will that he wants to have. It is in securing the conformity of his will to his second-order volitions, then, that a person exercises freedom of the will (Frankfurt, 1988: p. 331).”

According to Frankfurt:

1. First—order desires are identified by statements of the form “A wants to X,” in which the term “to X” refers to an action.
2. The desire identified by “A wants to X” is (part of) A’s will just in case “A wants to X” is either the desire by which he is motivated in some action he performs or the desire by which he will or would be motivated when or if he acts. The will consists in effective desires, as opposed to, for example, desires that one has that never would result in action.
3. Second-order desires are identified by statements of the form “A wants to X,” in which the term “to X” refers to a first-order desire.
4. A second-order volition is a kind of second-order desire, and is identified by a statement of the form “A wants to X,” when it is used to mean that A wants X to be part of his will – that is, he wants to will X (and not that A wants merely to want X without willing X.)

In Frankfurt’s view, an action is free in the sense required for free will and moral responsibility when the first-order desire which results in the

action is in accordance with the agent's second order desires. He would claim that it is of no matter that our characters are determined. We are our characters, and our actions stem from our characters, and thus if we were determined to act in a way in accordance with our characters, we act with free will. "Free will requires determinism because all free will is the self's causing its action and all that is, is one's character determining one's actions (Heller, 2009)." "My conception of the freedom of the will appears to be neutral with regard to the problem of determinism. It seems conceivable that it should be causally determined that a person is free to want what he wants to want. If this is conceivable, then it might be causally determined that a person enjoys a free will. There is no more than an innocuous appearance of paradox in the proposition that it is determined, ineluctably and by forces beyond their control, that certain people have free wills and that others do not (Frankfurt, 1988: p. 336)."

"They are formulated so as to not exempt agents in all cases of causal determination. These compatibilist conditions tie moral responsibility to actions that are in some way or another causally integrated with features of the agent's psychology (Pereboom, 2001: p. 100)." I feel that there is no need to delve into great detail the numerous cases that Frankfurt would use to distinguish between free willing, morally responsible agents from those agents who do not have free will, or moral responsibility, such as the non-willing addict, or the kleptomaniac, who are constrained in some way. It would just bring the discussion deeper and

deeper into the nuances of compatibilism, a discussion in which I do not feel holds any true weight in respect to ultimate responsibility, and do not need to get into the fine details in order refute. I will grant that any case in which Frankfurt can come up with to prove in deterministic word, an agent is *not* acting with free will, and thus is not morally responsible for I would have already conceded that. I will focus on the paradigm cases in which Frankfurt gives an agent free will, and if that paradigm case of a free willing agent doesn't stand up, I would consider incompatibilism as the stronger of the two who would accept causal determinism.

We want control over the will, and compatibilism doesn't offer that. All compatibilism offers is that our actions are consistent with what our characters have already become, due to determinism. They see no problem with the fact that our characters are determined, and according to someone like Hobart, we would need determinism. According to someone like Frankfurt, even if our selves are determined, we can still count as free, as long as our actions are produced by our deep self (Heller, 2009). I want to know what causes the deep self, and the infinite regress would lead to something outside of your control.

It would seem that to compatibilists, it was never the absence of a causal background that mattered with respect to responsibility but rather it was the ability to have an agent to have *its own* effects on the world (Heller, 2009). According to a compatibilist like Hobart or Frankfurt, "free will is compatible with determinism, and requires it, because without

determinism we wouldn't be able to describe people as the causes of their own actions (Heller, 2009)." I don't disagree that the character (the agent itself) causes the action. But what matters in my eyes is the process that is behind what creates the character, which matters to the free will and moral responsibility that we want a person.

Imagine a deterministic situation involving an agent who meets the conditions put forth by Frankfurt for what free will entails:

"Professor Plum kills Ms. White for the sake of some personal advantage. His act of murder is caused by desires that flow from his 'durable and constant' character, since for him egoistic reasons typically weigh very heavily – much too heavily as judged from the moral point of view. But the desire on which he acts is nevertheless not irresistible for him, and in this sense he is not constrained to act. Moreover, his desire to kill White conforms to his second-order desires in the sense that he wants to kill and wants to will to kill, and he wills to kill because he wants to will to kill...Now given that causal determinism is true, is it plausible that Plum is responsible for his action (Pereboom, 2001: p. 111)?"

A compatibilist would consider this a paradigm case of free will and moral responsibility, but by their own definition. I would argue that even this case might not stand up to what Pereboom offers as a strong argument against such compatibilists, using a generalization strategy. "The best type of challenge to compatibilism is that this sort of causal

determination is in principle as much of a threat to moral responsibility as is covert manipulation (Pereboom, 89).”

Consider the following four examples given by Pereboom:

“Case 1: Professor Plum was created by neuroscientists, who can manipulate him directly through the use of radio-like technology, but he is as much like an ordinary human being as is possible, given this history. Suppose these neuroscientists “locally” manipulate him to undertake the process of reasoning by which his desires are brought about and modified – directly producing his every state from moment to moment. The neuroscientists manipulate him by, among other things, pushing a series of buttons just before he begins to reason about his situation, thereby causing his reasoning process to be rationally egoistic. Plum is not constrained to act in the sense that he does not act because of an irresistible desire – the neuroscientists do not provide him with an irresistible desire – and he does not think and act contrary to character since he is often manipulated to be rationally egoistic. His effective first-order desire to kill Ms. White conforms to his second-order desires (Pereboom, 2001: p. 112).”

This action taken by Plum to kill white satisfies the compatibilist conditions as set out by someone like Hobart of Frankfurt. In this case Plum’s actions are completely in line with his rationally egoistic character, and his first order desire to kill White matches his second-order desire to kill White. It is of no matter, according to the compatibilist requirement for

responsibility, *how* the character and desires come to be formed, so long as it is the character and desires playing the crucial role in the production of an action, which in Case 1, they are. But we would not want to hold him responsible, because he is determined by the intervening of a neuroscientist. How would this be any different than if his first and second order desires were put into place not by a neuroscientist, but causal determinism? Consider the second case that Pereboom offers, which seems to be closer to a normal person:

“Case 2: Plum is like an ordinary human being, except that he was created by neuroscientists, who, although they cannot control him directly, have programmed him to weigh reasons for action so that he is often but not exclusively rationally egoistic, with the result that in the circumstances in which he now finds himself, he is causally determined to undertake the moderately reasons-responsive process and to possess the set of first- and second-order desires that results in his killing Ms. White. He has the general ability to regulate his behavior by moral reasons, but in these circumstances, the egoistic reasons are very powerful, and accordingly he is causally determined to kill for these reasons. Nevertheless, he does not act because of an irresistible desire (Pereboom, 2001: p. 114).”

In this case again, Plum meets the compatibilist conditions for freedom and moral responsibility, but we might not hold him responsible yet again because of the neuroscientist programming his decision-making

processes, which is beyond his control. Now consider the third case, which seems even more like a normal person than in the second case.

“Case 3: Plum is an ordinary human being, except that he was determined by the rigorous training practices of his home and community so that he is often by not exclusively rationally egoistic (exactly as egoistic as in Cases 1 and 2). His training took place at too early an age for him to have had the ability to prevent or alter the practices that determined his character. In his current circumstances, Plum is thereby caused to undertake the moderately reasons-responsible process and to possess the first-and second- order desires that result in his killing White. He has the general ability to grasp, apply, and regulate his behavior by moral reasons, but in these circumstances, the egoistic reasons are very powerful, and hence the rigorous training practices of his upbringing result in his act of murder. Nevertheless, he does not act because of an irresistible desire (Pereboom, 2001: p. 114).”

If a Frankfurt type compatibilist wants to claim that Plum is responsible in Case 3, but not Case 2, they would need to point out a particular feature of the examples which makes them different in any way in respect to moral responsibility. In both cases they both satisfy the conditions set by a compatibilist for moral responsibility, yet in both cases there are factors beyond the agent’s control determining the choice, yet how could anyone grant moral responsibility in Case 2, but not Case 3? They cannot, for there is nothing that makes the cases different in respect

for assigning moral responsibility whatsoever. If you're following this line of reasoning, it should come as no surprise that the next case will be as close to normal as possible.

“Case 4: Physicalist determinism is true, and Plum is an ordinary human being, generated and raised under normal circumstances, who is often, but not exclusively rationally egoistic (exactly as egoistic as in Cases 1-3). Plum's killing of White comes about as a result of his undertaking the moderately reasons-responsible process of deliberation, he exhibits the specified organization of first- and second- order desires, and he does not act because of an irresistible desire. He has the general ability to grasp, apply, and regulate his behavior by moral reasons, but in these circumstances the egoistic reasons are very powerful, and together with background circumstances they deterministically result in his act of murder (Pereboom, 2001: p. 115).”

We deny moral responsibility in Case 3, because we must deny moral responsibility in Case 2. In these two cases, there can be shown no qualitative differences. They are both humans, who have ended up with a somewhat rationally egoistic character, from which the decision to kill White results. In neither case does Plum have any control over the formation of the character. In Case 2 he is created by neuroscientists, so he had no ability to prevent or alter the practices that determined his character. In Case 3, his character is shaped by the environment, which

he was too young to prevent, or alter. In either case, the formation of the character can be traced to factors beyond Plum's control.

If we can deny moral responsibility in Case 3, we must also deny moral responsibility in Case 4 as well, in order to be consistent. We have no more reason to consider Plum any more responsible in Case 4 than in Case 3. Although I have no trouble granting that Plum is not morally responsible in Case 4, the compatibilist might not be convinced as easily, but could not come up with any one feature of difference between the four cases that would grant Plum responsibility in one case but not the other.

Pereboom considers a weak objection that one may raise, but one that he dismisses easily.

Some may say that the one distinguishing factor between Case 4 and the rest is that in Case 4 do not involve any causation stemming from other agents. Pereboom's response to this would just be to imagine instead that there was a machine that works randomly, rather than an agent. If the compatibilist would have a problem with machine-caused determination, it would be a "patently ad-hoc (Pereboom, 2001: p. 116)" move. The strength from this argument comes from the fact that in moving from Case 1 to Case 4, there is shown to be nothing between the four cases in terms of freedom and moral responsibility. "If an agent is morally responsible for her deciding to perform an action, then the production of this decision must be something over which the agent has control, and an agent is not morally responsible for the decisions if it is produced by a source over her

control (Pereboom, 2001: p. 126).” Quite simply, the core incompatibilist position remains strong, and should be the only measure for freedom, and moral responsibility.

Whether it is an alien that determines the decisions, or a neuroscientist with a radio, or if it’s just the laws of physics, something else beyond the agent’s control, and thus makes it so that they are never the true cause of any decision whatsoever, because of causal determinism. Van Inwagen’s Consequence Argument has yet to be dented, only sidestepped. “An agent’s non-responsibility under covert manipulation generalizes to the ordinary situation (Pereboom, 2001: p. 112).”

Until this point, you may well agree with me that moral responsibility and free will is incompatible with determinism. But of course, most of us do not want to be stripped of our free will, and want to feel responsible for the accomplishments we’ve made in life, and for the people we’ve become. After all, causal determinism isn’t accepted by everyone, with the most recent interpretation of quantum physics, there has been the possibility of true probabilistic causation, rather than strict causation in subatomic particles, which has yet to be proven one way or another can be transferred to indeterminism in the macroscopic world. So let’s assume there was true indeterminacy, for the sake of argument. If there *wasn’t* and either causal determinism was true, we would not be able to call ourselves free, or morally responsible for our actions. If there *was* quantum

indeterminacy in subatomic particles, yet it wasn't enough for it to affect the outcomes in the macroscopic world, including our brain chemistry, we wouldn't be any better off than if determinism were true. "All that is here said is that such absence of determination, if and so far as it exists, is no gain to freedom, but sheer loss of it; no advantage to the moral life, but blank subtraction from it. When I speak below of the "indeterminist" I mean the libertarian indeterminist, that is, him who believes in free will and holds that it involves indetermination (Hobart, 1934: p. 65)."

What we really want in order for free will and moral responsibility to exist beyond all doubt was if there was true indeterminacy in the world, and we were the sole cause of our actions, free of any restrictions from any of the laws of nature which seem to govern other non-human objects.

"Free will...is the power of agents to be the ultimate creators or originators and sustainers of their own ends or purposes...when we trace the causal or explanatory chains of action back to their sources in the purposes of free agents, these causal chains must come to an end or terminate in the willings (choices, decisions, or efforts) of the agents, which cause or bring about their purposes. (Kane, 1996 : p. 4)"

It is argued by Kane, as well as other so called "event-causal" libertarians that the sequence that produces an action begins from the agent's character and motives, and proceeds through the agent's making an effort of will to act, which results in the choice for a particular action. The effort of will is in making the choice to act in one way or another in a

particular situation. It can be said that an agent is morally responsible when the effort of will is explained by the agent's character and motives. This effort of will is undetermined by the character, which is consistent with indeterminism, yet they are still morally responsible for their actions. "One must think of the effort and the indeterminism as fused; the effort is indeterminate and the indeterminism is a property of the effort, not something that occurs before or after the effort (Kane, 1999: p. 232)."

Undetermined *self-forming actions*, or SFAs as Kane calls it, are the reason that we can say that we have free will, and moral responsibility. These are the earlier, undetermined choices a person makes, which shape the character and future reasons, and motives they would have in the future. These SFA's occur when we are torn between competing wills, such as acting on present desires, or long term goals, where we have to make an effort to do something else that we would strongly want, and the result is not determined until the choice is made. "When we decide in such circumstances, and the indeterminate efforts we are making become determinate choices, we make one set of competing reasons or motives prevail over the others then and there by deciding (Kane, 1999: p. 307)."

In these SFA's is where the requirement for indeterminacy in free will lies, for if there were no conflict in our motives, we would never have been able to voluntarily make ourselves any different than we would become, and it would merely be determinism. If an agent has had the

opportunity to make a self-forming decision, it can be said that they can now be held responsible for the actions that are a result of its character.

Kane would admit that *some* of our actions are determined by our existing character and motives. When we act from a will already formed, he feels that this is still an act of free will because that will was formed through our past *self-forming actions*, which were not determined, and were up to us. To do otherwise in the cases where our uncontested will is in line with an already established character would be unexplainable, and irrational (Kane, 1999: p. 305).

We choose our character through our choices, that we essentially “make ourselves,” so that when our present character and motives decides between two choices, it was undetermined up to that point which is chosen, and we are ultimately responsible for the outcome because it stems from our character. “We can be ultimately responsible for our present motives and character by virtue of past choices which helped to form them and for which we were ultimately responsible (Kane, 1995: p. 252)”

Kane’s paradigm cases of free will and indeterminacy will be examples in which a person is stuck between two choices, one of which entails a moral duty and the other one a non-moral desire. He describes a businesswoman, who is on the way to a very important work meeting, when she witnesses an assault in an alleyway. She finally decides to stop, but prior to that choice it was indeterminate at this point whether or not

she will stop and help, or go to that important meeting, because there is an inner struggle between her desire to help which incline her to stop, and career ambitions which incline her to go to work. And thus the choice lied with her, and she was free and morally responsible.

Kane outlines Mele's objection against this kind of libertarianism, an argument which has been come to be known as the "Luck Objection."

Suppose that this businesswoman decides straightaway to stop and help the victim in the alleyway. Now imagine there is another parallel universe in which everything is *exactly* the same, the same laws of nature, and the businesswoman has the *same* physical and psychological history. In this parallel universe, it *must* be a real possibility that the businesswoman doesn't stop, but continues on her way to work, for if there wasn't this possibility, then you would have precluded indeterminism, which is required by Kane for free will and moral responsibility (Kane, 1999).

This is the problem, because this seems to undermine the very control that is required for moral responsibility. It now seems to be only a matter of luck that the businesswomen choose to act in one way over the other. If in the two *identical* parallel universes, the two businesswomen produce a different outcome than the other one, from identical mental states, then there is nothing prior to that choice which is available to explain why she chooses to stay or go. This lack of an explanation seems

to absolve businesswoman of the control that is needed for moral responsibility.

“If the action did have such a sufficient reason for which the agent was not responsible, then the action, or the agent’s will to perform it, would have its source in something that the agent played no role in producing... ultimately responsible agents must not only be the sources of their actions, but also of the will to perform the actions (Kane, 1996: p. 73).” So is the agent the one who’s ultimately responsible? Or is luck ultimately responsible?

Kane provides some response to this by attempts to show that they both still maintain their moral responsibility because their characters, albeit conflicted, are nonetheless still going to be the source of either of the two choices. This is similar to the claim that the compatibilists faultily claim. The only direction that this line of reasoning can take is to show that the character was the sources of their actions, and that is what is required for moral responsibility. That’s all any event-causal libertarian wants to prove, however, that we are free, morally responsible beings. “But if they both succeeded in what they were trying to do (because they were both simultaneously trying to do both things) and then having succeeded, they both *endorsed* the outcomes of their respective efforts (that is their choices) as what they were trying to do, instead of disowning or disassociating from those choices, how can we *not* hold them responsible? (Kane, 1999: p. 316)”

Kane says that when an agent chooses one thing over another indeterminately, it doesn't preclude free will, because at the moment of action, it is the case that it was in line with *some* existing desire, one of which wins out over the other desires, and thus is a free choice, even though it is indeterminate. So if in the first universe the businesswoman deliberated between staying and going, and her desire to help won out over her ambitions, resulting in the will to stop, she can be considered morally responsible. If in the second universe her career ambitions won out, and the businesswoman goes to work, she would be morally responsible for that decision as well. In the two universes, both of them respectively acted on their wills, which were chosen indeterminately, yet both maintain their moral responsibility, because their character is behind the will that is realized, according to Kane. He simply states that both are morally responsible, because they both respectively succeeded in what they were trying to do, after choosing out of those two choices, both of which are equally possible, as shown by the parallel universe. If indeterminacy doesn't equal luck, then what would it mean? It definitely means some loss of control, if not total.

Kane acknowledges the strength of the luck problem, and tries to sidestep it, but I don't see the luck problem disappearing at all; it still leaves open the question of what underlying factors exist in relation to *why* one was act was chosen over the other. In what way does the agent

exercise the control needed for moral responsibility? The answer to this question is necessary in satisfying my requirement for moral responsibility.

Why in one universe would the motives related to career ambitions win over the motives for being a Good Samaritan? All he seemed to do was try to retain the moral responsibility by maintaining that the will that *actually* forms stems from one of the character's conflicting wills, which is a result of deliberation, and it is of no matter that there may be different outcomes in parallel universes. All that matters is that the will stems from the character, but he makes no mention as to why one desire would win over the other, only that it is indeterminate. But then is it not luck? "We must be wary of moving too hastily from 'indeterminism is involved in something's happening' to 'it's happening as merely a matter of chance or luck' (Kane, 1999: p. 308)." I have a hard time following this kind of reasoning.

Randomness in the strongest sense would allow for the possibility of a will that is completely unrelated to the circumstances, perhaps resulting in something absurd like the businesswoman instead deciding to cluck like a chicken. This example can be visualized as a metaphysical roulette wheel inside of the brain, with each outcome of the wheel corresponding to an action that a person can take, and what action is realized is merely a spin of the wheel. This is the kind of randomness that Kane seems to hold some weight against, for they would not be the

source of her actions. Would you say that the businesswoman had any choice, or moral responsibility, if such choices were random like this?

I say not in this case, and Kane would probably agree. However, Kane says that our choices aren't random like this, because in the case of torn decisions, the outcome will be due to the character that has two desires, not a random spin of a roulette wheel. What properties does that character have, which would allow for a torn decision to be made?

Kane says we can't equate indeterminacy with randomness. I say that is difficult, because it seems that something's happening either has identifiable causes or it doesn't. How could we explain the indeterminacy that takes place in our brains? It can be argued that when it comes to torn decisions like in the businesswoman example, the tipping factor between which of the two desires win could be due to quantum indeterminacy in the chemicals in the brain, which are part of the chain in the decision making processes. (Kane, 1999: p. 306) What if all actions were due to such undetermined firings in our brain? Is this not just randomness?

Kane would not acknowledge that there still exists randomness in the case of the businesswoman, as the choice is not as random like with the roulette wheel example. The roulette wheel example there could have been an act not stemming from the strongest existing desire. The reason the businesswoman case is not random is that the two strongest desires, are in the character itself, so a choice between the two couldn't be chalked up to luck, because it is not a matter of luck that these two desires *even*

being debated between. The question still remains, why would one desire win over the other? It seems that he denounces the randomness of a roulette wheel with many different possible wills, and he reduced it to a roulette wheel with only two outcomes, or more simply, a coin.

So now suppose that there is again only one universe, and the way in which the businesswoman makes the choice between the same two conflicting desires of staying to help and going to work is related to what can be considered a neurological “coin flip,” for if such a universe was *exactly* duplicated, and a different outcome would have just the same chance of succeeding. Would we hold a decision that rests on something similar to a coin flip to be sufficient for moral responsibility? I think not, and thus the force that the luck argument has in dismissing moral responsibility in event causal libertarians is still so very strong.

Galen Strawson draws another compelling argument against to this type of against event-causal libertarians. There is no more control over the causes of an action in this type of libertarian account than if determinism were true, because the only difference between the two is just the addition of indeterminacy in the causal chain leading up to an action, an indeterminacy which no matter how convoluted an explanation is concocted for it, will ultimately boil down to randomness, or luck. “In the end, whatever we do, we do it either as a result of random influences for which we are not responsible, or as a result of non-random influences for which we are not responsible, or as a result of influences for which we

were proximally responsible, but not ultimately responsible (Strawson, 1986: p. 224)”.

Kane defines ultimate responsibility as:

“An agent is *ultimately responsible* for some (event or state) E’s occurring only if (a) the agent is personally responsible for E’s occurring in a sense which entails that something the agent voluntarily (or willingly) did or omitted, and for which the agent could have voluntarily done otherwise, either was or causally contributed to, E’s occurrence and made a difference to whether or not E occurred; and (u) for every X and Y (where X and Y represent occurrences of events and/or states) if the agent is personally responsible for X, and if Y is an *arche* (or sufficient ground or cause of explanation) for X, then the agent must also be personally responsible for Y (Kane, 1996: p. 35) .”

Kane would stick to his argument of course and disagree with Strawson, because as stated before he believes that we are ultimately responsible for our characters through those torn decisions, which lead to self-forming actions, which are the core of our moral responsibility. Strawson would attack this claim of agents being ultimately responsible for their characters, but in a deeper manner than Mele’s luck objection.

Consider how every single person enters the world: as a newborn baby. Could anyone argue for the position that there exists in a newborn baby the type of character-forming internally directed deliberation going on in that would be sufficient for any type of responsibility? I would say of

course not. I don't believe there is anybody who would deny that the way you are, at least *initially*, stems from influences related to heredity and early experience, both of which are things that you have no control over. I also would argue that because we don't have any control over our initial character, we and should not be held morally responsible for in any way for choices that we make.

What are the factors that will be involved in determining the kind of person this baby will turn out to be? There is always the genetic factor, in which a baby may have a predisposition for certain character traits, whose expression can be said to be dependent on the environment.

Now follow this baby through its life. As every day goes by, new experiences will alter this child in one way or another, resulting in certain character traits developing. We don't ever hear people claim that babies are responsible for their actions, yet we have no trouble positing this type of responsibility as it reaches adulthood, which makes sense according to our intuitions. At what point does moral responsibility come into play? At how many days from birth does a baby develop the correct type of mental mechanisms required to be morally responsible for the changes it undergoes? It isn't so clear because it would be a hard line to draw if it even were the case that such a line even existed.

Say hypothetically, at one point there is something you want to change about yourself. The person you are at this moment can be thought of as the end result of all the previous changes you have made to

your *initial* character. However as previously argued, this *initial* character stems from genetic and environmental factors, which are things which one cannot be held to be in any way morally responsible for. The particular way in which you go about trying to change yourself, as well as the degree of success of that change is going to be determined by the kind of person you have come to be at that moment. “Any further changes that one can bring about only after one has brought about certain initial changes will in turn be determined, via the initial changes, by heredity and previous experience (Strawson, 1986: p. 214).”

In other words, from the moment that you enter into existence, you are working from a set starting point that was essentially “given” to you. One cannot be held morally responsible for both the choices that you make, and ultimately for the end-result person you become as a result of these choices, when even the very *way in which your thought processes function* can be chalked up to another source outside of your control.

An abbreviated version what is called the Basic Argument can go as follows:

1. You do what you do because of the way you are.
2. To be truly morally responsible for your actions in the sense that you want, you must truly responsible for the way you are in the crucial mental respects.

3. You cannot be truly responsible for the way you are, so you cannot be truly responsible for what you do.
4. To be truly responsible for the way you are, you must have intentionally brought it about you that you are the way you are, and this is impossible.
5. If you were to have somehow intentionally brought it about you that you are the way you are, in such a way that you can now be said to be truly responsible for being the way you are now, then you must have already had a certain nature N in the light of which you intentionally brought it about that you are as you now are.
6. For it to be true you and you alone are truly responsible for how you now are, you must be truly responsible for having had the nature N in the light of which you intentionally brought it about that you are the way you now are.
7. You must have intentionally brought it about that you had that nature N, in which case you must have existed already with a prior nature in light of which you intentionally brought it about that you had the nature N in the light of which you intentionally brought it about that you are the way you now are... (Strawson, 1986: p. 219)

Perhaps an example by analogy would help illuminate this point.

Now for simplicity's sake let's say that there is a second baby, who was born with a genetic factor linked to schizophrenia, for it has been shown to

run in families. Let us assume that this baby may be predisposed to having schizophrenia, and having traits related to it, such as paranoia, and distrust. It could be said the predisposition to schizophrenia is embedded in one's genes and that it is either deterministically or indeterministically expressed partly due to influences from the environment. This baby would have had no control over its initial character, or its genes, or its environment. Not only is this the case with just this schizophrenic baby, but no type of baby chooses the type of genetic predispositions it enters the world with, and it doesn't choose how it is treated by the world (though it may partly affect how it is treated), which plays a part in the shaping of the baby's character as the gets older. Let's say that in people where the gene chooses to express itself, there results in what can be called a "crazy" character trait for simplicity's sake.

As stated before, as the child develops, there is no point in which there is a *choice* by the agent whether or not they become schizophrenic or not. They are simply acting from the point that they have arrived. From its very birth, any decision-making processes are "tainted" by the disease, and as a result the choices that this person made could be said is intertwined with the mental processes related to a schizophrenic. So from the very beginning, although this person makes choices, presumably due to an agent, stemming from its character as Kane says, the intuition is the agent is constrained in some way, most consider this to be different than the case of a normal person.

What if suddenly this schizophrenic baby-turned-adult chooses to murder somebody? Most people intuitively would not consider mentally ill people morally responsible for their actions. However, also in line with our intuitions is the idea that normal people who are considered to be sane should be held morally responsible for their actions. If in the first case the normal baby went through life, and ended up murdering someone as well, we would have a much easier time holding it morally responsible. But why is there this inconsistency in assigning moral responsibility to these two people for the same act?

It is *because* of this “crazy” trait that most people cannot grant moral responsibility to a schizophrenic. Yet, in contrast, it is purely *because* of that “sane” trait that we feel that we can grant moral responsibility to that normal person. Why is it the case that most people cannot hold a schizophrenic morally responsible for its actions? Schizophrenia as a mental disorder affects the way in which someone would think, and thus affect the direction they take when making choices.

If it can be granted that because the schizophrenic’s decision making properties are “tainted” by “craziness” that “inclines” certain actions (including self-forming actions), and by performing these actions, it is not an act of free will, and thus it absolves moral responsibility, then we are left with a huge consistency problem. Could it be argued just the same that a sane person’s decision making properties are “tainted” by “sanity” that “inclines” certain actions, by performing these actions, it is not an act

of free will, and thus, sane as well as insane people should be held equally responsible for their actions?

Some might feel that the reason we can't consider a schizophrenic a responsible agent is because a schizophrenic has a flawed reasoning system. They may argue that responsibility of the schizophrenic does *not* depend on control over the factors that result in the character, but depends on the fact that the schizophrenic cannot reason effectively in the *present*. Perhaps that is why *some* may not hold a schizophrenic, and still hold a normal person responsible.

But to this type of objection, I would argue that it would be inconsistent to hold a "normal" person any *more* responsible because they *happened* to be born with genes that resulted in a reasoning system which allowed them to effectively reason in the present, than it would be to hold a schizophrenic *not* responsible because they *happened* to be born with genes that resulted in a flawed reasoning system which *doesn't* allow them to effectively reason in the present. If a schizophrenic reasoning system can be thought of as restrictive, and thus absolves the schizophrenic of moral responsibility, why can't we argue just the same that the sane person's reasoning system is just as restrictive? In either case, a decision to act at a given time will presumably stem from the character. The type of reasoning that takes place would be dependent on the type of character which has formed, the character which is influenced

by the genes we're born with. We cannot have moral responsibility based on the luck of the genetic draw.

Is the case of the schizophrenic baby any different than the sane person? In these two cases a normal person, and a schizophrenic, could there be shown any difference whatsoever in the processes that took place that resulted in these two people being how they are, which grants one moral responsibility, but not the other? Neither has a choice when to be born, or with what genetic predispositions one has. It seems that the initial starting point was "given" to the schizophrenic baby, and it shouldn't be held morally responsible for such a murder in the future. A person doesn't choose to be schizophrenic, or to have schizophrenic thought patterns; they are a result of genetics, and the environment that determines whether these genes are expressed.

This is a clear contradiction in why people feel the need to grant moral responsibility in some cases, and not others. There is no more "control" in the case of a normal person, than there is in a case of a schizophrenic over the kind of person they are, and thus the kind of choices that result from their character. The question that I want to ask is why can we hold a normal person morally responsible when the decision to murder someone is made, but not when a schizophrenic decides the same thing? I say there is no difference, and it is faulty reasoning to hold one morally responsible and not the other. Every choice that the schizophrenic baby makes is from the starting point of someone with a predisposition for

schizophrenia, and every choice that the sane baby makes is from the starting point of someone with a predisposition for something else which although cannot be as easily labeled, exists nonetheless.

The event-causal libertarianism stance on morality shouldn't change because someone is a schizophrenic. "All free acts do not have to be undetermined on the libertarian view, but only those acts by which we made ourselves into the kinds of persons we are, namely the "will-setting" or "self-forming actions" (SFAs) that are required for ultimate responsibility (Kane, 1996).

The same processes are going on in both: determinism leading up to an undetermined SFA, which in turn results in a character, which can be said to act deterministically up until it reaches another torn decision. If you can say that a sane person has ultimate responsibility, why shouldn't the schizophrenic?

They are both "given" a certain starting point from which all their subsequent decisions stem from, yet it seems that people want to take what the schizophrenic baby was given as a free pass on moral responsibility, and what the normal baby was given as a reason for moral responsibility. "It is exactly as just to punish or reward people for their actions as it is to punish them for the (natural) color of their hair or the (natural) shape of their faces (Strawson, 1986: p. 221.)"

It can be said that there is more at play in the way that a person changes. What would it mean if the method we go about changing

ourselves can't be fully traceable to heredity and previous experiences, but to the influence of indeterministic factors as well? It would be a huge mistake to suppose that random factors can in any way contribute to being morally responsible for the type of person that you are.

In these cases, when logically trying to figure out why one is the way one is, it leads to an infinite regress, an endless spiral in which the only conclusion you can never be the sole cause of the kind of person you are. Or there is randomness, in which case the only conclusion to draw is that you can never be the sole cause of the kind of person you are. One does what one does entirely because of the way one is, and one is in no way ultimately responsible for the way one is. So how can one be justly punished for anything one does?" (Strawson, 1986: p. 222).

Strawson's objection against event-causal libertarianism lies in the fact that we are never "ultimately responsible" for our actions according to Kane's own definition, because our choices stem from a character which is the result of influences out of its control. Pereboom describes different types of events that may be factors that influence the way the choices that an agent would make. On one extreme, there is what he calls "alien-deterministic events." These are factors that would be beyond the agent's control that would determine an action. There is the other extreme that he calls "truly-random events" which are not produced by anything at all. According to the previous principle, if either of these two kinds of events

were the source of a decision, than the agent could not be held morally responsible, for the causes of the decision was out of its control.

There is a range of events that are between complete determinism and complete randomness, which he would call “partially-random events.” Even with these partially random events, regardless of where on the range it falls, there is nothing that supplements the contribution of the deterministic and random factors. “Between these two extremes, one deterministic and the other maximally indeterministic – lie a range of events for which factors beyond the agent’s control contribute to their production but do not determine them, while there is nothing that supplements the causal contribution of these factors to produce the events (Pereboom, 2001: p. 47).” Something other than the agent would be the source of the decision, thus absolving the agent of any moral responsibility.

This goes strongly against our intuitions, and I think that this is the reason that it is so hard to accept by many, yet it is so compelling at the same time. “Even if you believe that determinism is true, and that you will in five minutes time be able to look back and say that what you did was determined, this does not seem to undermine your sense of the absoluteness and inescapability of your freedom, and your moral responsibility for your choice (Strawson, 1986: p. 216).”

We want to maintain that we are the sole cause of our decisions. The event-causal libertarians attempted to show this by saying that our

characters, and desires exist, and our actions follow naturally from this character. However, it will further be shown that our characters will be formed by factors that fall in the spectrum between alien-deterministic causes, and completely random causes.

Could there be an explanation of libertarianism that would allow us to be the sole cause of our actions, which would not be able to be traced back to causes outside of our control, thus leaving us morally responsible for our choices? The agent described by Kane acts in accordance on its character or reasons, and in certain torn decisions (SFA's,) indeterminacy comes into play, resulting in a subsequent character. This indeterminacy has been shown to be reducible to randomness, which would make it so that we are not in control. We want to be able to answer the luck problem, by connecting our choices with a causal-agent which has an enhanced degree of control, rather than just a vessel for which an already established state, or character acts through. We need more than just the character, or desires causing an agent to do something, for it seems that he was unable to do anything else. If there existed a man named Cato who was truly good in the moral sense, it would not make sense to hold him praiseworthy because he could not have done otherwise because as a good person, he would always choose the best choice available to him, in accordance with his goodness. "This saying, if understood literally and strictly, is not the praise of Cato, but of his constitution, which was no more the work of Cato than his existence (Chisholm, 1982: p. 28)."

“If a flood caused the poorly constructed dam to break, we may say, had to occur and nothing could have happened in its place. And if the flood of desire caused the weak willed man to give in, then he too had to do just what it was that he did do and he was no more responsible than the dam was for the results that followed (Chisholm, 1982: p. 27).” For this man to be responsible, it would have to be the case that he could have done otherwise, which event-causal libertarians don’t really allow for, except in the cases of torn decisions, which has no cause behind it.

Is there a middle ground between determinism, and uncaused events? According to Chisholm, we shouldn’t say that every event in an act is caused by another event, and we also shouldn’t say that it is completely uncaused, for there is a third kind of cause, that should still be considered. We want the causal chain of an act to be able to be traced back, and end with us, rational agents with an ability to freely choose from different outcomes, which intuitively we are. The question of whether such a theory is credible, given our definitions, and the nature of the world we live in can be analyzed further.

In order to explain the type of causation that such agent-causation would require, Chisholm describes between two types of causes. The first type of causation is the one that most people would think of when explaining the reasons that something occurs, which he calls transeunt causation. These are based on the physical laws of nature, which are a relationship between events. In the previous example of the dam breaking,

the event of the dam breaking is caused by other events, which would include the structure of the dam, the strength of the flood, among other factors. It is the type of causation that would explain the behavior of inanimate objects.

However, when it comes to us as agents, Chisholm would not accept that our choices could be explained by such transeunt causation. Our choices as agents are distinct from events, in the sense of transeunt causation. When an agent is the sole cause of an event, rather than a state or an event, Chisholm calls that immanent causation (Chisholm, 1982: p. 31).

In order to illustrate these two types of causation, and how they are related to one another in the production of a free act, consider the following example. Imagine that a man is playing a game of billiards. In this game, a ball is moved by another ball, which is moved by a pool-stick, which is moved by an arm, which is moved by the player. Most of the causes are transeunt, but at least one of them are immanent. It is contended by agency-theorists that the player as an agent is ultimately responsible for this series of events.

What one ball did to the other is an instance of transeunt causation, because it is a relationship between events. The movement of one ball causes the movement of the other one. What the pool-stick did to the cue ball was also a case of transeunt causation, because the movement of the stick causes the movement of the ball. What the arm does to the pool-stick

is a case of transeunt causation also, because the movement of the arm causes the movement of the stick. Now what explains the movement of the arm? What causes the arm to move? Does the transeunt causal chain end here?

We could say simply that the man causes the arm to move. To go deeper into the explanation of this cause, we could say that the motion of the arm is caused by the motion of the muscles, which are caused by events in the brain. Now what happens in the brain is where the agency theorist feels they make their case by claiming that there is an event in the brain that is caused by the agent personally, and not by any other previous transeunt events.

“The point is, in a word, that whenever a man does something A, then (by ‘immanent causation’) he makes a certain cerebral event happen, and this cerebral event (by ‘transeunt causation’) makes A happen (Chisholm, 1982: p. 32).”It is here where the immanent causation lies, resulting in the agent being ultimately responsible.

This seems to be a whole new kind of causation, and it in this the entire case for an agent being morally responsible hinges on, for if this causation were to be able to be reduced to transeunt causation, we would be left with nothing but event-causal libertarianism, which doesn’t give us what we want for freedom and moral responsibility.

“If we are responsible, and if what I have been trying to say is true, then we have a prerogative which some would attribute only to God: 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 (Chisholm, 1982: p. 34).” Chisholm draws a radical conclusion here, and this is where it should begin to question agency theory.

It is here where the great divide between event-causal libertarians and agent-causal libertarians exists. If we are prime movers and are uncaused, the relationship between our desires and our actions is severed. Our characters or our desires would, at most play only a partial role, for there would always be *some* essential additional causal factor that lies outside of our character and desires, since the character and desires alone were not sufficient to determine a choice.

If we *knew* that a certain man had a particular set of beliefs and desires are, and how strong they were in relation to one another, and knew that one set was stronger than the rest, and knew the physical properties that govern his body, and knew the environmental factors which would be in play, an event-causal libertarian would have no problem that we could logically predict which will would arise, or how the man would thus act.

An agency theorist must reject this claim fully, yet I don't see how they could do so, yet maintain their moral responsibility. They would claim that there exists no logical connection between our desires, and the action that we take, and there is most definitely not a causal connection. No

predictions could be made whatsoever as to how someone would act, even if we were to know *all* of the factors that the person finds themselves in, including their character, beliefs and desires. The phrase that he uses to describe the effect of the beliefs and desires is that they “incline without necessitating.” The idea is that when my motives incline, but don’t necessitate, then ultimately it is up to me, an agent, whether or not to follow those inclinations or not, and it has no causal strength. When I, as an agent, choose one way or another, I as an agent imminently cause an event in my brain to occur, which would result in the action being realized through transeunt causal mechanisms. “For at times the agent, if he chooses, may rise above his desires and do something else instead (Chisolm, 1982: p. 35).”

I understand the description of agency theory that Chisholm puts forth, and how such an agent would act, but the question of luck still looms large. What property of the agent could there be which would make it so that it decides to follow its character and beliefs, or inclinations, rather than to act in a manner contrary to them? If there is no relationship between the desires and the choice that an agent ultimately makes, doesn’t this just fall victim again to the problem of randomness? The agent does all of the work in the decision independent of *any other* event, such as our beliefs and desires. We want to be ultimately responsible, and this kind of agent *seems* to provide us with such an account that would make it so that we were ultimately responsible, but I would say that there still are

underlying factors which are ignored by Chisholm. As it stands, he seems happy with the case he presented, because the agent is the initiator of a choice, and claims moral responsibility and free will. However, I don't think he has really proved that agents are morally responsible, because there has been no explanation given as to why it would choose one choice over another, if the character doesn't play any role.

Another old problem for agency theorists is that they have no way of explaining the way in which agents behave is *why* one action would occur, but also why it occurs *when* it does. Since the character and the reason don't play any further causal role in an agent's decision to imminently cause a will to act, and the agent is the sole cause. It could be said that there is no actual time in which there could be identified why such an event would happen now, rather than later, or 5 minutes ago, because the cause of the action, the agent has been there all along (Heller, 2009). For in the spectrum of there to be an explanation as to why something happened, it would make sense that such a immanent cause still have a certain temporal location, for if it didn't it would seem that it would again fall randomness.

Chisholm would disagree, and keep repeating "the agent caused it" and leave it at that, but I feel there needs to be some type of explanation as to why an agent acts in the way it does, in order for there to be a conclusive assignment of ultimate responsibility. "Such accounts have been rejected chiefly for two reasons. First, they failed to provide an

adequate account of the relations between an agent, her reasons for an action, and her action, and hence they failed as accounts of rationally free action. Second, they did not provide an intelligible explication of what agent causation was supposed to be (Clarke, 1993: p. 285).” As it stands agent causation falls on Pereboom’s spectrum as either a partially random or completely random cause, which would preclude free will by incompatibilist standards.

The main problem that Clarke is trying to solve here is to find a way for our actions to be related to our character, or reasons, because Chisholm’s agency theory doesn’t allow for this. However, this is a difficult concept to grasp, because his claim would require that actions are both caused by agents, as well as caused by prior events.

Clarke would agree that all events in the world are caused by earlier events, but that it is not deterministic, rather that there is probabilistic causation. So the events, which lead up to, the present moment, might allow for an event E to occur with a probability between 0 and 1. So depending on whether or not that event E occurs, the future state of the world would be different after that. Suppose an agent now arrives at a point that is undetermined up until that moment due to this probabilistic causation. At this point an agent is in a position to make a decision, and be the imminent cause of a will, based on the situation that it has arrived at which includes its character, and desires.

“It reconciles a traditionally libertarian claim- that freedom consists in being an undetermined determinant of one’s action- with the apparently undeniable fact that human beings are part of the causal order, that all events involving human beings are causally brought about by earlier events (Clarke, 1993: p. 289).”

So according to Clarke, reasons do play a role in leading to an action, but in a different way than is put forth by just event-causal libertarians. It is more complex than the character and reasons already existing from the action, but that there is an agent which imminently cause a certain reason to be the weighted reason which causes the action. Or quite simply, it could be said that the agent’s reasons cause an action by virtue of transeunt causation, but the agent imminently causes one reason to win over the others, and thus has ultimate responsibility.

Clarke would think that the addition of this event-causation component would help to create moral responsibility for an act, but actually, all he did was add another point of attack, by allowing for our beliefs and desires to be a cause of our actions, he leaves himself open to the same objection against event-causal libertarians as previously described by Strawson’s Basic Argument. This agent is no more ultimately responsible for the state that it is in, including its character and desires, because they fall in the spectrum of partially random causes.

The gap left by the indeterminacy between the agent’s existing desires and the action are where the agent’s special causal power is

exercised. The question that will always come to mind when speaking about agents is why the agent would decide to choose one choice over another?

If an agent *always* sides with the stronger desire, and thus decides to go in that direction, how is that any different than the case of event-causal libertarianism without an agent? It would seem as though it were merely flowing along with a character, in which case we could not hold it ultimately responsible, for the character forms through partially random factors, that the agent would not be ultimately responsible for.

Similar to the event-causal libertarian's case of torn decisions between two equally weighted desires, what would incline the agent to pick one desire to win rather than the other? If the agent *just* picks, then Clarke's agent would also fall victim to the same objection raised against Kane's event causal libertarianism, because that would just be randomness yet again. It is of no matter the agent is the one doing the choosing, because there would be no explanation as to why the agent chose in one direction or the other, so such a case would seem very much like luck and randomness again, which detract from freedom and responsibility, not add to it.

If an agent need not *always* side with the strongest desire, and the agent can choose to act contrary to its desires, when would such a situation occur? Why would an agent act contrary to its strongest desires? If it were not due to randomness, would you not say that it would be

irrational? If it was the case that this is explainable due to randomness on the agent's part, then from where do we get freedom and moral responsibility?

As Chisholm would say, the agent's beliefs incline, but do not necessitate an action. When it comes to the relationship between the inclination and the action, it could be thought that the inclination comes in degrees. The higher the degree of inclination, the less freedom the agent would have to in its act of choosing. As the level of the inclination gets closer to 100%, the closer an agent would be to just becoming an event in itself. The lower the degree of inclination, the higher the degree of mere luck, if the act that is realized is in accordance with the strongest desire.

This indeterminacy between the desires and the act seems highlight that it is only luck that an agent would produce an outcome that is in line with our desires, and is a real threat to freedom. The indeterminacy (or determinacy) in the formation of our desires and character can never be due to anything other than factors out of our control, which would fall in the spectrum between alien-deterministic causes, and fully random causes. However, it is the existence of the partially random factors that shapes the desires is where Strawson would again insert his Basic Argument.

Although at first Clarke's agency theory does a better job at making our actions seem less random, and thus in our control than Chisholm's agency theory, there still exists what would ultimately be called luck, which

would undermine *any* moral responsibility you would grant to an agent such as Clark describes.

It has been shown here that any characterization, any possible explanation which tries to prove that we as humans are *completely* free in the sense that is required for true moral responsibility, most importantly libertarianism, falls victim to what we all eventually fall victim to in the end: nature. There are just some things that we cannot change, things that we do not have control over. I don't *feel* any different than the average person that feels repulsion towards calculated violence, or happiness when witnessing an act of pure kindness, but what I do feel different about is how much I hold these people responsible for their actions. There are good people in this world, and there are bad people in this world, in the same way that there are natural disasters. There are good outcomes, and bad outcomes, and yes they affect how we *feel*, and how we would react, but everything is out of our control, so we can't be held ultimately responsible for anything that we do as people, for even our personalities can ultimately be blamed on nature, either purely determined, purely random, or anywhere in-between.

## Project Summary

What if humans were just mere animals, and that we react to certain stimuli in a certain, lawful manner, and thus change in the appropriate way. It is debatable how much free will the average person would grant to say- a dog, but the average person doesn't doubt that humans exercise free will. What if instead it could be shown that we are no different than a robot? That we are nothing but just an input-output mechanism for our programming to determine how to react to certain stimuli? I don't know how many people who would claim that a robot exercises free will, or could be held morally responsible for their actions.

After all, it would be hard for someone to give up their belief that they have free will, that they are the end-all be-all in any decision between two free choices. I want to maintain my autonomy, the fact that I am the controller of my actions, and to give this up, would be to perhaps denounce the fact that I am even a person. Perhaps it is entrenched in our religious belief that perhaps one day we will be judged for our actions, and will be given the rightful punishment, reward for the life that we've lead. Free will is entwined with moral responsibility.

Moral responsibility is the idea that comes to mind whenever it seem justified to punish a person with eternal torment in the afterlife, or

eternal reward in heaven. We have no problem thinking a murderer is acting with free will when he decides to kill, and will rightfully be held responsible for his action, and punished for it both on earth, and perhaps in the afterlife, if such a place exists. However, it is not to be said that one has to believe in heaven or hell to believe in moral responsibility whatsoever, for many atheists will believe in the existence of moral responsibility. It is just a useful example to explain the type of moral responsibility that I am arguing that we want to believe that we have, but upon deeper consideration, maybe we shouldn't so rightfully assign moral responsibility at all (Strawson, 1986).

When considering the moral responsibility a person has for its actions, there is one idea that keeps recurring and that is the idea of being in control over whether to act in one way, or make the choice to act in another way, which would be an exercise of free will. For what if we didn't have free will? How could we ever grant any type of punishment or reward, praise or blame, if it could be shown that we were no more responsible for the choices we make than we are responsible for our hair color?

It doesn't go against our intuitions that we couldn't hold someone blameworthy for an action if there was nothing that he or she could have done otherwise to make it so they were absolved of responsibility. We don't automatically delve into the metaphysical implications of what I

would say is the most reasonable way to assume the world works, considering what we know about the laws of physics, and causation.

To quickly state a common interpretation of determinism, we begin with the entire universe being made up of a few varieties of elementary particles. Each of these particles has a space-time location, and a particular mass, and cannot be created or destroyed. Classical Newtonian physics supports determinism by assuming two things: The first assumption is that each elementary particle has a single valued position and momentum at each instant. The second assumption is that the position and momentum can, at least theoretically, be exactly measured (Workman, 1959: p. 253). According to the fundamental laws of motion, if we were given a particle's initial position, momentum, and all the forces acting on it, its subsequent positions and momentum could be predicted accurately, and if taken further, every particle in the universe could be predicted accurately, resulting in the entire history being able to be traced out backwards and forwards based on mathematical calculations. Determinism would imply that the *only* sense in which we are responsible for our actions is the sense in which a chess-playing computer would be responsible for its moves, just an input-output machine.

The position that determinism is inconsistent with free will and moral responsibility is called *incompatibilism*. The core incompatibilist claim is: "If an agent is morally responsible for her deciding to perform an action, then the production of this decision must be something over which

the agent has control, and an agent is not morally responsible for the decisions if it is produced by a source over her control (Pereboom, 2001: p. 126).” We obviously have no control over the laws of physics, so if we were just puppets for which the laws of nature act upon, we would not have free will.

Under the umbrella category of incompatibilism there are actually two opposite sides. On one side of the incompatibilist spectrum there are what are called *libertarians*. Libertarians are incompatibilists who do not grant that causal determinism is true, and that we retain our free will, and thus moral responsibility. On the other side of the incompatibilist spectrum, which would embrace such a view, would be what is known as “hard determinism.” Hard determinists would not deny that the world is governed completely by natural laws, which make it so that there are never any alternate possibilities, nor are agents the sources of their actions.

But what of someone who accepts that there is not causal determinism in the strictest sense, and allows for indeterminacy, yet still maintains that this indeterminacy is incompatible with free will and moral responsibility? These are what are called *hard incompatibilists*. They will also claim that we are not morally responsible, because we are not in control of the source of our actions, regardless of determinism or indeterminism. Opposed to these incompatibilists there exists what are known as *compatibilists*, who believe that determinism if it were true, it

would still be compatible, or consistent, with free will and moral responsibility.

However, compatibilists could never challenge the core incompatibilist claim directly. Instead, they consider themselves the source of their actions in the different sense that it stems from their determined characters, and take that as a way to maintain that they can still have free will and moral responsibility, while integrating it with the admission of determinism. However, they all seem to create a new definition of what free will entails, in order to some way successfully conclude that humans maintain the freedom and moral responsibility that the compatibilist desperately wants to hang onto. They don't consider what causal factors are in play with the production of the character.

What we really want in order for free will and moral responsibility to exist beyond all doubt was if there was true indeterminacy in the world, and we were the sole cause of our actions, free of any restrictions from any of the laws of nature which seem to govern other non-human objects.

Libertarians believe that we are the cause of our actions, and that there is no determinism. However, this raises another key problem with regard to moral responsibility. If determinism is not true, then there would be more than possible one outcome, *given the same exact starting situation*, which would seem to be the same thing as randomness. There is a range of events that are between complete determinism and complete randomness, which we would call "partially-random events." Even with

these partially random events, regardless of where on the range it falls, there is nothing that supplements the contribution of the deterministic and random factors. When it comes to making decisions, if the decision was causally determined by the character that was determined, we would not be responsible for our actions. If the decision was not causally determined by the character, and there is no other supplement to the decision, it would be chalked up to randomness, and we would be no more responsible for an act of randomness than we would be for an act stemming from pure determinism.

Any possible explanation which tries to prove that we as humans are *completely* free in the sense that is required for true moral responsibility, most importantly libertarianism, falls victim to what we all eventually fall victim to in the end: nature. There are just some things that we cannot change, things that we do not have control over. I don't *feel* any different than the average person that feels repulsion towards calculated violence, or happiness when witnessing an act of pure kindness, but what I do feel different about is how much I hold these people responsible for their actions. There are good people in this world, and there are bad people in this world, in the same way that there are natural disasters. There are good outcomes, and bad outcomes, and yes they affect how we *feel*, and how we would react, but everything is out of our control, so we can't be held ultimately responsible for anything that we do as people, for

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