

# Human Freedom



*A Problem—a Metaphysical Problem*

# An Inconsistent Triad

1. Every event has a cause.
2. If every event has a cause, we are not free.
3. We are free.

# Causal Determinism (CD)

- ❖ Let causal determinism be the thesis that every event has a cause.
  - ❖ By *cause* let us understand an *antecedent sufficient condition*.
  - ❖ To illustrate: if domino  $D^1$  falls, then domino  $D^2$  will fall; if  $D^2$  then,  $D^3$ ; if,  $D^3$ , then  $D^4$ ; and so on.
  - ❖  $D^1$  falling is sufficient for  $D^2$  falling, which in turn is sufficient for  $D^3$  falling. . .
  - ❖ One thought: if CD, then our universe is a line of dominoes, each event necessitating the one which follows.

# Why suppose CD?

- ❖ Nothing can change or alter unless it's *made* to change or alter.
  - ❖ Nothing, in fact, *simply happens*.
  - ❖ Aristotelian formulation: only something actual can make something potentially F become actually F.
    - ❖ Thus, a grey fence is potentially white. Only something actual—e.g., a painter painting it with white paint—can make it actually white.
- ❖ Further, CD seems to be a presupposition of all scientific and rational inquiry: to understand something is in part just to know what brought it about.
  - ❖ To come to understand, e.g., what illness an afflicted group suffers, one must come to know how it is they came to be ill—to know, that is, what caused their illness.
- ❖ Finally, one might argue: if not CD, then any given event might be uncaused; but that result is intolerable; so, CD must be accepted, at least as a unavoidable hypothesis.

# Why suppose if CD, we are not free?

- ❖ If CD, then every event is necessitated; and if every event is necessitated, then it is made to happen.
  - ❖ Yes, one might say, 'tis I myself who makes certain events happen: that is what happens when I freely choose one alternative among others.
  - ❖ Yet, a choosing is itself an event. So, if CD, that event too is made to happen.
    - ❖ If I choose to go left rather than right, then, if CD, something caused me to choose to go left rather than right. So, going left was necessitated.
      - ❖ If it was necessitated, my choice was not free, but determined.
        - ❖ So, it was a choice in name only.
  - ❖ If CD, in fact, the chain of causes extends back before the time of my birth.
    - ❖ Obviously, I cannot change things that occurred before I was born.

# More Expansively

1. If CD, then every event has a cause.
2. If every event has a cause, then the chain of events in which my actions are implicated is but part of a causal chain extending back to the time before I was born.
3. If so, then I could not have done otherwise than I actually now do.
4. If I cannot do otherwise than I actually now do, then I am not free.
5. So, if CD, I (we) am (are) not free.
  - ❖ In sum, if CD, we are but dominoes falling in a row.

# Why suppose we are free?

- ❖ A special theological reason: the free will defense to the problem of evil obviously presupposes free will.
- ❖ We experience ourselves as free.
  - ❖ Let us call this the *phenomenology of agency*.
- ❖ In general, freedom seems a condition on the ascription of responsibility.
  - ❖ All practices of praise and blame seem to presuppose freedom.
    - ❖ This suggests a simple argument:
      1. We are right to praise/blame S with respect to  $a$  only if S is responsible for  $a$ .
      2. S is responsible for  $a$  only if S could have done otherwise with respect to  $a$ .
      3. S could have done otherwise with respect to  $a$  only if S is free with respect to  $a$ .
      4. We are in fact sometimes right to praise/blame S.
      5. So, for at least some actions  $a$ , S is free with respect to  $a$ .

# Our Problem

- ❖ So, we have a problem: (1), (2), and (3) all seem well-motivated.
- ❖ Yet (evidently) at least one of them must be false.
  - ❖ Our first question: which?

# Maybe (3)?

- ❖ Might we not be free?
- ❖ Consider the Dilemma of Determinism:
  1. Either determinism is true or it is not true.
  2. If determinism is true, then we are not free.
  3. If determinism is not true, then we are not free.
  4. So, we are not free.

# DD 1

- ❖ This is evidently analytic.
- ❖ Either universal causal determinism (CD) obtains or it does not obtain.
  - ❖ That is, either every event is caused or at least one event is uncaused.

# DD 2

1. We could have done otherwise with respect to *a* only if it was in our power to refrain from *a*.
2. If determinism is true, then there are causal chains stretching back to the times before our births which eventuate in our doing *a*.
3. We are powerless to effect changes in events which occurred before we were born.
4. Hence, if determinism is true, we could not have done otherwise with respect to *a*.

# DD 3

1. If determinism is false, then there is at least one uncaused event  $a$ .
2. We are free with respect to  $a$  only if  $a$  is not random.
3. If an event  $a$  is uncaused, then  $a$  is random.
4. Hence, we are free with respect to  $a$  only if  $a$  is caused.
5. Hence, if determinism is false, then we are not free.

# Perhaps (2)?

- ❖ (2) If every event has a cause, we are not free.
- ❖ Compatibilism: CD is correct, but we are none the less free.
- ❖ Free will and universal causal determinism are compatible.
- ❖ How?

# Two Thoughts

- ❖ We should not conflate *determinism* and *fatalism*.
- ❖ We need only reflect cogently on the thought that freedom requires that “S could have done otherwise.”

# Determinism and Fatalism

- ❖ Determinism: every event has a cause (CD)
- ❖ Fatalism: Since whatever is true is necessary (it's *already* true), and since it is pointless to deliberate about what is necessarily already the case, it is pointless to deliberate about the future.

# The Lazy Student

## ❖ Consider the Lazy Student:

1. Since every event has a cause, it's already causally determined that I will get an A in this seminar or that I won't.
2. If it's already causally determined that I'm going to get an A, then there's no need for me to study.
3. If it's already causally determined that I'm not going to get an A, then there's no point in my studying.
4. If studying is either unnecessary or pointless, then (since studying is otherwise disagreeable to me), I should simply avoid studying.
5. So, I should simply avoid studying.

# Something Amiss

- ❖ The lazy student conflates determinism and fatalism.
  - ❖ Determinism is simply CD.
  - ❖ Fatalism contends that my actions make no causal contribution to the world.
  - ❖ Perhaps the world is such that the lazy student will get an A only if her studying causes her to do well on her final examination.
  - ❖ So, the lazy student should study after all.

# Could have done otherwise?

- ❖ We have been supposing: S is free with respect to action *a* only if S could have done otherwise (e.g. S could have done *b* instead of *a* or simply refrained from doing *a* and done nothing).
- ❖ So, here is an argument:
  1. S is free with respect to *a* only if S could have done otherwise.
  2. If CD, then S can never do other than *a* (for any randomly selected *a*).
  3. So, if CD, then S is not free.

# Challenges to (1) and (2)

- ❖ (1) S is free with respect to  $a$  only if S could have done otherwise.
  - ❖ Perhaps we have been locked in this room for the last thirty minutes without our knowing it.
    - ❖ If so, we could not have left.
    - ❖ Still, that is consistent with our have remained here freely.
- ❖ (2) If CD, then S can never do other than  $a$  (for any randomly selected  $a$ ).
  - ❖ Even if S was caused to do  $a$ , it does not follow that it was necessary that S did  $a$ .
    - ❖ Consider an ancient fortune teller, correctly predicting that you would come to class today. Does it follow from *that fact alone* that you could not have done otherwise?

# On Behalf of Compatibilism

- ❖ It's not really necessary for S's being free that S could have done otherwise.
  - ❖ Recall the locked room case.
- ❖ What really matters is:
  - ❖ . . .that we are not pathologically overwhelmed by an irresistible desire (Hume).
  - ❖ . . .that we have a suitable second-order desire (Frankfurt).
  - ❖ . . .that we are reason-responsive (Fischer).
  - ❖ . . .we can grasp and apply moral reasons in particular (Wallace).

# Against Compatibilism

- ❖ The Consequence Argument:
  - ❖ ‘If determinism is true, then our acts are the consequence of laws of nature and events in the remote past. But it's 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, 56)

# The Consequence Argument

1. We have no control over events that happened before we were born; and we have no control over the laws of nature.
2. If we have no control over  $\sigma$  and  $\sigma$  has consequences  $\tau$ , then we have no control over  $\tau$  either.
3. If CD, then the past, together with the laws of nature, have the present and future as consequences.
4. So, if CD, we have no control over the present or future.
5. We have free will only if we have at least some control over the present and future.
6. So, if CD, we are not free.

# Do these suffice?

❖ Four cases against compatibilism:

1. A team or neuroscientists control Prof. Plum as if she were a puppet, using implanted electrodes and radio technology.
  - ❖ Presumably Prof. Plum, who meets all of the compatibilist's conditions for freedom (suitable second-order desires, stable character, is reason-responsive, etc.), is manifestly not free.
2. A team of neuroscientists program Prof. Plum at birth to act as they wish her to act, again using implants and so forth; she does so.
  - ❖ Presumably Prof. Plum is not free. The same conditions apply, except that they're a bit removed in time.
3. Prof. Plum is conditioned from birth to behave a certain way, without electrodes or technology, but successfully: she behaves as determined.
  - ❖ Not as obvious as (1) and (2), but here's the challenge: the only difference seems a difference of implementation. So, if she not free in scenarios (1) and (2), neither is she free in (3).
4. CD is true of the universe in which Prof. Plum lives.
  - ❖ If (1), (2), and (3) preclude freedom, then so does (4). Why should intelligent agency be a relevant difference?

# Going Around in Circles?

The free will problem is like a carousel. One starts with the Compatibilist position . . . But it cannot satisfy our intuitions about moral responsibility . . . So it seems that an Incompatibilist and indeed Libertarian account of free will is needed, according to which free will requires the falsity of determinism . . . But any such account immediately triggers the Pessimists' objection that indeterministic occurrences cannot possibly contribute to moral responsibility . . . For one can hardly be supposed to be more truly morally responsible for one's choices and actions or character if indeterministic or random occurrences have played a part in their causation than if they have not played such a part . . . But what this shows is that the Incompatibilists' "ultimate" moral responsibility is obviously impossible . . . But that means that we should return to Compatibilism, since it is the best we can do . . . But Compatibilism cannot possibly satisfy our intuitions about moral responsibility . . .

# What should we do?

What should we do? Get off the metaphysical merry-go-round, and take up psychology. The principal positions in the traditional debate are clear. No radically new options are likely to emerge after millennia of debate, and the interesting questions that remain are primarily psychological: Why exactly do we believe we have ultimate responsibility of the kind that can be characterized by reference to the story of heaven and hell? What is it like to live with this belief? What are its varieties? How might we be changed by dwelling intensely on the view that ultimate responsibility is impossible? —Strawson (*TLS*, 1998)