Human Freedom

Some Responses to our Problem

On Behalf of Compatibilism

❖ It's not really necessary for S's being free that S could have done otherwise.

❖ What really matters is:

  ❖ . . .that 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 σ and σ has consequences τ, then we have no control over τ 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 control over the present and future.

6. So, if CD, we are not free.

Do these suffice?

- Four cases against compatibilism:
    1. A team of 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).

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)

Looked at Two Ways

- We might look at our own actions in either of two ways:
    - 'When the act is viewed under the aspect of determination by antecedents, its status as an event becomes prominent.
    - But as appears upon further investigation, no account of it as an event is satisfactory from the internal viewpoint of the agent doing it.' —Nagel (1979, 199)

Perhaps the only way out?

Simply accept that (3) is false:

1. Every event has a cause.

2. If every event has a cause, we are not free.

3. We are free.

Two Paths

❖ Simply accept as a consequence of causal determinism that we are not as we seem to ourselves to be: we are not, after all, agents.

   ❖ Call this *Hard Determinism* (HD)

      ❖ This view is evidently *wildly revisionary.*

❖ Or, we may be agnostic about causal determinism and accept that even so we are not as we seem to ourselves to be: we are not after all, agents—at least not in the sense required for moral responsibility (Pereboom).

   ❖ One version of this the Recovered Affective Attitudes View (RAAV)

      ❖ This view is at least *mildly revisionary*.

HD 1

❖ HD: we might simply cede that we are mistaken about ourselves.

   ❖ We might, that is, accept that we are but dominoes in falling in a row.

   ❖ Here, there are two observations:

      ❖ The thought or feeling that we seem to have choices does not show (or, if you like, *prove*) that we in fact have choices:

         ❖ After all, some people have had the strong, honest conviction that we are not descended from primates—but we are.

            ❖ Such people simply need to adjust their self-conceptions—or go on living lives of self-deception.

      ❖ If we are but sophisticated machines, then *of course* we will be governed by the physical laws governing all such machines.

         ❖ If we think otherwise, then, again, we are simply deluded.

HD 2

❖ Perhaps this is even a cause for optimism?

   ❖ Suppose that we are simply deterministic machines:

      ❖ Then in that case we can be *programmed* and *conditioned* to act in non-transgressive ways.

      ❖ We might then strive to organize society in a rationally attractive way—just as we try to organize our cars and computers. . .

Living w/o FW 1

* Suppose we agree first that praise and blame presuppose free will, and further, that we lack free will.
  * Then we will be constrained to conclude that our practices of praise and blame lack foundation and so are irrational.
* Should we then suppose that life would be bereft of meaning or otherwise not worth living?
  * This does not seem to follow directly.
  * Indeed, we might be grateful to be rid of the mainly destructive notion of moral indignation and moral anger.

Living w/o FW 2

* Further, we might yet proceed more or less as we do now, but without the false sanctimony of specious morality.
  * Right now we quarantine people who are sick and dangerous, though it is no fault of their own that they have become sick.
  * So, perhaps by analogy, we might yet still punish the transgressors—though we would not do so because we found anyone morally responsible.
* Moreover, we might yet indulge in the *reactive attitudes*—including love and certain sorts of gratitude.
  * Parents, e.g., seem to be powerless with respect to loving their children—but is their love not yet love?
  * Could we not, in general, engage in a fair range of human practices? Could we not, e.g., be grateful for having been benefited by the actions of another?

Living w/o FW 3

* One hard question: do we have, in these cases, mainly or mostly simulacra of the real human attitudes?
  * Do love and gratitude after all require a presupposition of agency?
* If so, have we really clawed back what we prize in our conception of agency?