

# **The Problems of Free Will and Determinism**

# Important Questions

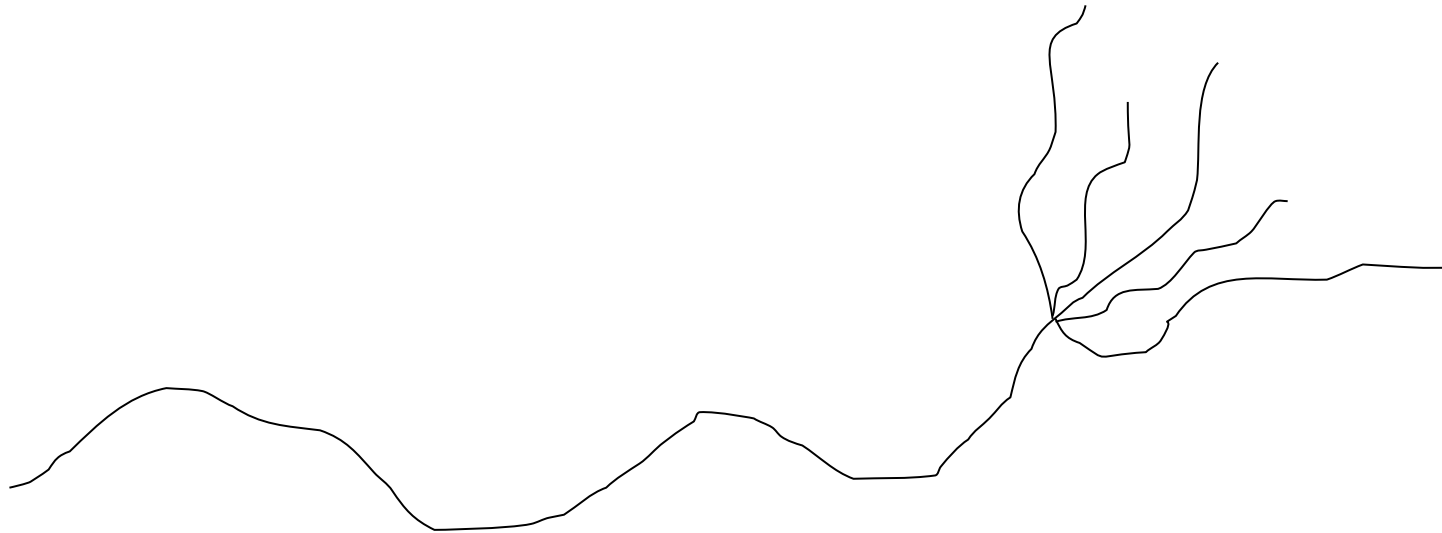
- What is it to be free with respect to some course of action?
- Is our world deterministic?
- Can we have free will in a deterministic world?
- Can we be morally responsible for the things we do in a deterministic world?

- Intuitively, human beings are (at least *quite often*) free with respect to the things they do.
- Each of you came to class today. But you didn't have to. Instead, you could've slept in, or studied for another class, or wasted time on Facebook, or...

- Suppose an election is coming up. I want to vote for the best candidate. So, of the candidates running for office, I must decide who I think is the best. I'll choose which vote to cast on the basis of my decision. It seems that it's *up to me* which vote I'll cast on election day.
- Until I've made my decision, the question of which vote I'll cast on election day is ***open***.

# Open Paths

- **van Inwagen:** Think of the complete timeline of our world as a road that forks.



- “One has free will if sometimes more than one of the forks in the road of time is ‘open’ to one. One lacks free will if on every occasion on which one must make a decision only one of the forks before one... is open...” (p. 429)

- Suppose you're in your room trying to decide whether, tonight, you'll stay in your room or leave the room.
- Now suppose that, *unbeknownst to you*, you're barricaded in your room and can't leave tonight.
- One of the “alternative futures” you're considering is **not** open to you.

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# Determinism

van Inwagen:

“Determinism is the thesis that it is true at every moment that the way things then are determines a unique future, that only *one* of the alternative futures that may exist relative to a given moment is a physically possible continuation of the state of things at that moment” (p. 429)

- What is **physical possibility**?

A future state of affairs is physically possible **if and only if** it is consistent with the laws of nature and the current state of the world.

## For next time:

- Read Harry Frankfurt, “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility”, pp. 464-470.

**Determinism:** the thesis that the current state of the world plus the laws of nature determines a unique future.

- Let  $P_1$  be a proposition that is a complete and true description of the world at some time  $T_1$ , and let  $P_n$  be a complete and true description of the world at some later time  $T_n$ .
- Let LN be the conjunction of all the laws of nature, known and unknown.
- Then DET may be put formally as:  
(DET)  $\Box$ [If (LN &  $P_1$ ), then  $P_n$ ],  
where ' $\Box$ ' simply stands for 'it is necessary that'.

## Can we have free will in a deterministic world?

- If you answer “No,” then you’re an *incompatibilist*.
- **Incompatibilism**: the thesis that free will and determinism are incompatible.
- If determinism is true, then no one has free will.
- If anyone has free will, then determinism is not true.

- If you answer “Yes,” then you’re a *compatibilist*.
- **Compatibilism**: the thesis that free will and determinism are compatible.
- There can be free will in a deterministic world.

# The Compatibilist's Burden

- The compatibilist needs to provide an account of *free will* and *openness to alternative futures* that is both (i) independently plausible, and (ii) consistent with determinism.

# The Consequence Argument

- Designed to show that Compatibilism is false:
  - If the Compatibilist grants a certain (at least prima facie plausible) principle is true, then it follows that DET and FW are incompatible.

# The No Choice Principle

- Suppose some proposition, **P**, and some conditional proposition, **If P, then Q** are true.
- Suppose that no one has (or ever had) any choice about whether these propositions are true.
- It follows, then, that **Q** is true and no has (or ever had) any choice about whether **Q** is true.

- **A statement of the No Choice Principle:** Given that **P** is true and the conditional **if P, then Q** is true, then if no one has or ever had any choice about whether **P** or the conditional **if P, then Q** is true, then no one has or ever had any choice about whether **Q** is true.

- The logic behind the No Choice Principle:

1.  $P$ , and if  $P$ , then  $Q$ .

2.  $N(P)$

3.  $N(\text{If } P, \text{ then } Q)$

4. So,  $N(Q)$  [from 1,2,3, NCP]

## An Application of the No Choice Principle

**P**: Plato died long before I was born

**Q**: I have never met Plato

1. **P**, and if **P**, then **Q**
2.  $\neg(\mathbf{P})$
3.  $\neg(\text{If } \mathbf{P}, \text{ then } \mathbf{Q})$
4. So,  $\neg(\mathbf{Q})$  [1,2,3, NCP]

- “...[G]iven the No Choice Principle, determinism implies that there is no free will.”
- “That is why the compatibilist must reject the No Choice Principle” (p. 433)

- The compatibilist says: if determinism is true, I still may be free with respect to the actions I perform.
- van Inwagen: But if I have no choice about whether it is true that I perform some particular action,  $\Phi$ , then I am not free with respect to  $\Phi$ .

- Most people would grant that I have a choice about which vote I cast in the upcoming elections.
- Suppose I cast my vote for candidate X.
- Assume DET is true.

- P: Things were thus-and-so ten million years ago.  
[“thus-and-so”: a true and complete description of the state of the world 10 million years ago]
- LN: A description of the laws of nature.
- Q: I vote for candidate X.
  
- 1. (P & LN), and if (P & LN), then Q
- 2. N(P & LN)
- 3. N[If (P & LN), then Q]
- 4. So, N(Q)

# Sub-argument for Premise 3

- (i)  $\Box$ [If (P & LN), then Q]
- (ii) If  $\Box$ [If (P & LN), then Q], then  $N$ [If (P & LN), then Q]
- Thus, (iii)  $N$ [If (P & LN), then Q].

# Argument Against Compatibilism (AAC)

1. If compatibilism is true, then the No Choice Principle is false.
2. The No Choice Principle is not false.
3. So, compatibilism is not true. [1,2, Modus Tollens]

# A Response to AAC

What exactly does *having a choice* entail?

If having a choice about whether or not  $\Phi$  at some time  $T$  entails that, at a time before  $T$ , it is physically possible that  $\Phi$  *and* physically possible that  $\neg\Phi$ , then of course the compatibilist must reject the NCP (b/c this is inconsistent with determinism).

If, however, having a choice about whether or not I  $\Phi$  entails *only* that if I  $\Phi$  at T, then my  $\Phi$ -ing at T is caused in part by my own naturally-formed mental states (e.g., my intention or desire to  $\Phi$ ), then the compatibilist need *not* reject the NCP, but should instead reject premise 1 of AAC (i.e., that if determinism is true, then the NCP is false).

- The compatibilist will probably want to say something similar about what *having free will* entails.

Roughly that:

Having free will with respect to my  $\Phi$ -ing entails *only* that my  $\Phi$ -ing is caused in part by my naturally-formed mental states (e.g., my intention or desire to  $\Phi$ ).

# Another Mystery

- Suppose that incompatibilism is true *and* that determinism is false.

Suppose, as many people now believe, that our world works in the way that a quantum-mechanical theory has it—not deterministically, but *indeterministically*.

If the laws of nature are quantum-mechanical, then they merely *probilify* a set of outcomes, given certain conditions, rather than determine a unique outcome, given those same conditions.

- This indeterministic view of the world *seems* to make room for free will:

If I am trying to decide between  $\Phi$ -ing or  $\Psi$ -ing, then it is physically possible that I  $\Phi$  and it is physically possible that I  $\Psi$  instead.

This entails that, while I'm trying to decide whether to  $\Phi$  or  $\Psi$ , both a future in which I  $\Phi$  *and* a future in which I  $\Psi$  are *open*.

## The Problem with Indeterminism

- Suppose that after some careful deliberation I decide (and form the intention), at time  $T$ , to  $\Phi$ .

So, if I do  $\Phi$ , then my  $\Phi$ -ing will be *explained* in part by my intention to  $\Phi$ .

Intuitively, in normal cases, my own mental states will, in part, determine what I do.

- Here's the rub:

But if my behavior is *indeterministic*, then my intending, at time T, to  $\Phi$  would not determine, *even in part*, how I behave at a later time (much less that I  $\Phi$ ).

If I do  $\Phi$ , then that "*just happens.*" And if I instead behave in another way, then *that* just happens.

- It seems, then, that if my behavior is indeterministic, then I have *no influence* over whether I behave in a way that would count as  $\Phi$ -ing or behave in some different way.
- It seems, in that case, that I have *no choice* about whether I  $\Phi$ .

# A Frightening Result

1. Either determinism or indeterminism is true.
2. If determinism is true, then no one has free will.
3. If indeterminism is true, then no one has free will.
4. So, no one has free will.

# Moral Responsibility

- Intuitively, if I am morally responsible for my actions, then I have free will with respect to those actions.
- Most philosophers have understood the idea of one's *having free will* with respect to one's  $\Phi$ -ing as implying that one *could have done otherwise*.

- A person who is a *morally responsible agent* is
  - (i) capable of performing actions that are morally *right* and actions that are morally *wrong*, and
  - (ii) may be the subject of moral *praise* or *blame* for her actions

- Suppose Veronica, who is 12 years old, gives half of her weekly allowance (\$10) to a worthy charity. Veronica is not forced to do this by anyone. She could keep the money instead and spend it on toys or whatever.

In this case, it seems that Veronica is deserving of praise for what she does.

- Suppose, however, that Veronica is *not* such a nice girl. Instead of being a caring and generous person, suppose she is a “problem child”: she runs with gangs, she steals from poor people, she beats up toddlers, drinks, does drugs...in short, Veronica *does what she wants*, and what she wants is to do things that are horribly wrong.

- As (an oddly lenient) punishment, V's parents *force* her to give half of her weekly allowance to a worthy charity.
- In this case, is V morally *praiseworthy* for giving money to charity?

- It seems that if someone could *not* have done otherwise that what they did, then that they are *not* morally responsible (i.e., they aren't *accountable* for what they do).

# The Principle of Alternate Possibilities (PAP)

**PAP:** A person, S, is morally responsible for what S has done only if S could have done otherwise.

# Frankfurt on PAP

“...[T]he principle of alternate possibilities is false. A person may well be morally responsible for what he has done even though he could not have done otherwise. The principle’s plausibility is an illusion, which can be made to vanish by bringing the relevant moral phenomena into sharper focus” (p. 464)

- **Cases of coercion:**

If someone is *coerced* into doing something wrong, then they are excused from being morally responsible for what they do.

- **Frankfurt:** We shouldn't confuse PAP with "the very plausible proposition that moral responsibility is excluded by coercion" (p. 465)

# The Case of Jones<sup>4</sup>

- Suppose a person, Jones, is considering doing something wrong (say, shooting the mayor).
- Another person, Black, is aware of what Jones is considering, and Black wants Jones to do it and will take any means necessary to ensure that he does.

- Black implants a chip in Jones's brain that does two things:
  - (i) it provides Black with info about the status of Jones's decision-making process, and
  - (ii) if the information suggests Jones has decided *not* to shoot the mayor, Black can flip a switch and the chip will cause a change in Jones's mind...Jones will decide to shoot the mayor.

Suppose, now, that Jones attends a banquet where the mayor is giving a speech. Jones brings a gun with him, but he hasn't decided what to do yet.

Black is becoming nervous.

Finally, when the mayor begins his speech Jones makes up his mind to shoot the mayor, *w/out Black's intervention*, and shoots the mayor.

- So, it seems that Frankfurt's Jones<sub>4</sub> case is a **counterexample** to PAP:

Jones is morally responsible, but he couldn't have done otherwise.